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America's Arabia: The Date Industry and the Cultivation of Middle Eastern Fantasies in the Deserts of Southern California

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

History

by

Sarah Anne Seekatz

December 2014

Dissertation Committee:
Dr. Molly McGarry, Chairperson
Dr. Catherine Gudis
Dr. Vicki Ruiz

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The Dissertation of Sarah Anne Seekatz is approved:

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Committee Chairperson

University of California, Riverside

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Good dates do not simply appear. The palms from which they grow are nourished, nurtured, and cultivated by many hands before they reach your plate. So too was this dissertation: nourished, nurtured, and cultivated by many hands along the way. I am grateful to all those who helped me plant, propagate, and harvest this little crop of mine.

I am deeply indebted to the faculty of the University of California, Riverside for their continued support and guidance during my tenure there. My advisor, Professor Molly McGarry, not only asked the important questions that set me on the path of this research but proved a wonderful mentor and guide. I appreciated her good humor, steadfast encouragement, and endless patience, especially when reviewing drafts. Professor Catherine Guids pushed me to explore the role of landscape in ways I had never considered, no small task when one turns to the places of childhood memories. As an undergrad one professor opened up a whole new world for me, encouraging me to connect with my Mexican American roots and introducing me to the phrase "public history." I am honored that Professor Vicki Ruiz at the University of California, Irvine continued to be a part of my graduate experience and am grateful for her editorial hand. I must also thank Professors Devra Weber and Jennifer Doyle who provided early feedback and suggestions as well as Professor Steven Hackel, who I hope by now knows that dates and figs are two very different fruits.

This project would not have been possible without the generous funding I received along the way. I am grateful to the University of California, Riverside for the Dean's Distinguished Fellowship, the Graduate Research Mentorship Fellowship, and the

Dissertation Year Fellowship as well as the UCR's Alumni Association's Neumann Scholarship. My research also benefited from the University of California's California Studies Consortium Research Travel Grant. The Huntington Library and Western History Association's Martin Ridge Fellowship and the Jonathan Club Fellowship from the Autry National Center brought the rich collections of these respected institutions to my fingertips and I am very thankful for these gifts. The feedback from professors and peers alike at the 2010 Huntington-University of Southern California Institute on California and the West Graduate Student Workshop helped shape this work as well.

I am convinced that archivists are proof that the universe loves us historians and wants us to be happy. There are so many archivists, public historians, and librarians who have helped me along the way, but I must thank a few here not only for their assistance but for their friendship. Erica Ward, Janice Woodside, Sue Karr, and Bob Tyler welcomed me back to the Coachella Valley History Museum after a long absence with open arms and lots of work to do. Speaking of the museum I must thank the Mexican American Pioneer Project volunteers who became my dear friends and shared their hearts and their stories with me. Pat Laflin & Louise Neeley also assisted my endless quest for dates and paved the way for me with their histories. The many librarians at the California History Room of the California State Library made me feel right at home; I am thankful for their help but moreover for their smiles. Liza Posas and Manola Madrid truly became friends during my time at the Autry. Not only did they produce a seemingly endless collection of wonderful desert materials, they continued to send gems my way even after my fellowship ended. Thank you also to Laura Sorvetti at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo's

Special Collections, Nancy Korber at the Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden who helped me from afar, and staffs at the Huntington Library and the University of California, Riverside's Special Collections.

Sharing this research with the public has been an incredible experience and I am grateful to those who have helped me share the date's story. Bettye Miller with UCR's Office of Strategic Communications provided much guidance and many connections. Hillary Muskin's invitation to write for *Incendiary Traces* led to a photographic essay on the subjects of dates and Arabian fantasies published on KCET's *Artbound*; it was an honor to participate in this incredible collective of scholars and artists. Lisa Morehouse opened up the door to public radio for me and I am grateful for her continued friendship. The Kitchen Sisters, whom I admired for several years, made my public radio nerd dreams come true by including my research and I in their *Hidden Kitchens* piece.

My colleagues at the University of California, Riverside not only enriched my mind with their own work, but also provided deep friendships. My thanks go especially to Susan Hall Nguyen for leading the way and playing endless round of the word game with me, Emily McEwen for her encouragement and donut runs, and Vanessa Stout for late night milkshakes. Thank you also to Jamie Green, Chelsea Vaughn, Rebecca Wrenn, Michael Cox, and Jason Sampson for their camaraderie. Claire Schulz and Ana Chirino Godoy provided friendship that sustained me through graduate school. The Wales family encouraged me and became my family long ago. I hope they know that watching their two girls grow up is a true joy in my life. Mike always joked that he wanted a dedication in my first book, but I hope this heartfelt thanks will suffice.

More than anything, I am grateful for the support of my amazing family. Nellie Moreno-Carlisle and Lyle and Peggy McCormick were not able to see me finish this dream of mine but I felt them with me along the way. My late grandfather, Richard Ligman, was never far as I uncovered so much about the Coachella Valley's history, a topic dear to his heart. My Aunt Ruth McCormick is the rare breed who is not only friend and family but librarian as well. She has been sending me materials from the start and her help at the Riverside Library was priceless, as was her company. I am thankful for the support of my fantastic in-laws, Peter, Suzanne, and Laura Seekatz and my brother Zach.

Finding a photo of my grandmother, Patricia Salcido Ligman's, dressed as a Date Festival dancer was the highlight of my research, but sharing it with her was even sweeter. I am thankful for her hugs, lunches, calls, love, and of course, bbq sauce. During the course of this work Amanda McCormick has gone from little sister to dear friend; my beautiful AP, many thanks, especially for the waffles. My dad, Patrick McCormick taught me the patience I needed to finish this dissertation and provided me with so many laughs along the way. When I was a child I watched my mother, Margo McCormick, go after her dreams of earning a bachelor's degree and then a master's; she showed me what was possible and reminded me often that I could do this. I am forever grateful to have such wonderful parents who loved me unconditionally and encouraged a passion for learning. My wonderful husband, Scott, is the only reason this dissertation is here. So long ago, when my path was unclear, he took my hands and said, "You're going to be doctor!" And because of that, along with his love, encouragement, and kindness along the way, here it is. You, dear Scott, are my very favorite date.

DEDICATION

For Scott

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

America's Arabia: The Date Industry and the Cultivation of Middle Eastern Fantasies in the Deserts of Southern California

by

Sarah Anne Seekatz

Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Program in History
University of California, Riverside, December 2014
Dr. Molly McGarry, Chairperson

This dissertation explores the creation of "America's Arabia" in the Coachella Valley, California and the date industry that grew there. Importantly, it profiles United States Department of Agriculture agricultural explorers, scientists who traveled the globe looking for new crops at the turn of the twentieth century. When these agricultural explorers ventured to the Greater Middle East to bring back date offshoots, they took with them a popular understanding of the Orient that shaped their views of the date palms and the people who grew them.

Such views of the Orient, as a backwards, dangerous, and yet deeply romantic place, were passed from agricultural explorer to Californian date grower, reinforcing long established American understandings of the region. Date growers and importers, in turn, marketed their dates via this Oriental romance as well as new scientific understandings. Coachella Valley growers highlighted dirt, disease, and unsanitary conditions in foreign date packing while emphasizing the power of American science, particularly pasteurization, a "white" labor force, and fumigation. Despite the perceived benefits, these practices proved dangerous for workers.

Importantly, the romance surrounding the Greater Middle East in Western imagination provided the Coachella Valley with inspiration to create its own fantasies of the Orient, tying the two regions through the renaming of places and Moorish inspired architecture. As the century wore on, the Arabian theme drew in tourists who sought out the exotic date groves and the themed architecture that grew alongside them. Remaking the landscape into America's Arabia also provided a community identity that spilled into celebrations of the date, particularly the annual Date Festival. This event not only featured architecture influenced by the Orient but also an *Arabian Nights* inspired musical pageant, camel races, and, notably, sheik and harem girl costumes. The act of playing Arab, in particular, uncovers the importance of the date and its Orientalist connotations for the region's tourism and internal community. These racial masquerades mirror larger American practices of blackface and playing Indian, though few questioned the custom.

While much of the study ends in 1965, this research also brings up the shifting American pop cultural understanding of the Greater Middle East, which changed drastically towards the end of the century, as new geopolitical realities filtered through film and television. A review of the recent controversy over the Coachella Valley High School's Arab mascot provides crucial questions about what it means to play Arab in the twenty-first century.

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Preface: A Note on Terms of Usage

Throughout this dissertation I refer to the Greater Middle East of imagination, with several terms borrowed from the historiography or used by Coachella Valley residents. The term "Middle East," was only introduced in 1902; even then, the United States continued to refer to the region in a multitude of ways.[1] The "Orient" was among the most popular term used by Americans to signify a large swath of land that spanned from Northern Africa to Japan, though it might also reflect a more specific designation from Morocco to the Arabian Peninsula and up to Turkey. Scholar Edward Said asserts that "the Orient is not an inert fact of nature," but instead a man made designation, just as the West or Occident were as well.[2] When I refer to the Orient I am referencing not only the physical spaces of Northern Africa and the Middle East but also the cultural connotations that belonged to them via centuries of Western fascination with the region, as art historian Holly Edwards put it: "a region of the world and a precinct of the heart."[3]

Thus the Orient is both physical place and imagined space. The physical spaces of the Orient were (and are) vast and varied but many Americans presumed the region was united by language, religion, and "unique modes of government, social structure, architecture, and dress."[4] Thus the borders of actual empires, nations, cultures, and identities were blurred via Orientalism so that the mere use of the term the Orient could

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[1] Michael B. Oren, *Power, Faith, and Fantasy: America in the Middle East 1776 to the Present* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2007), 41.

[2] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 4-5.

[3] Holly Edwards, ed., *Noble Dreams, Wicked Pleasures: Orientalism in America, 1870-1930* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 16.

[4] Oren, *Power, Faith, and Fantasy*, 41.

conjure Egyptian pyramids, ancient Baghdad, or Modern Morocco. As scholar Susan Nance argued, the Orient was a term used "to essentialize the ethnically, geographically, and intellectually varied Muslim world as a monolith that scholars could more easily define."[5] The same is true with my use of Arabia. Assumptions made about Arabia were often extended into Northern Africa, and the term could be used to refer either specifically to the peninsula or more broadly to the Orient of Northern Africa and the Middle East.[6] Most often, when the residents of the Coachella Valley alluded to Arabia they did not refer only to Saudi Arabia, a nation only in 1932, or even to the entire Arabian Peninsula, but rather to the popular culture surrounding the Orient of the time. Thus the term Arabia, though not an appropriate designation of a physical place in our modern world, was widely used as a geographic term in the first half of the twentieth century.[7] Unless specifically noted, I will use Arabia interchangeably with the idea of the Near Eastern Orient, both physical and imagined. The term Arabia, however, was most often used by residents in the Coachella Valley, who sought to differentiate their region by tying it to the Orient. When I refer to the physical spaces abroad, I use specific locations or refer to the region as the Greater Middle East (extending from Northern Africa to Pakistan in the G8 definition).

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[5] Susan Nance, *How the Arabian Nights Inspired the American Dream, 1790-1935* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 3.

[6] The "Levant" was also a term Americans applied to the Middle East; it included areas in today's Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Palestine, Jordan, Cypress and sometimes extended into parts of Iraq, Turkey, and Egypt. I found it used very infrequently in the Coachella Valley during the time period examined here (1900-1965).

[7] For example, when a missionary wrote to the U.S. Census Bureau asking how many Muslims lived in the United States he was told there were "Mohammedans from North India, as well as from Arabia and Turkey." Kambiz GhaneaBassiri, *A History of Islam in America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010). This is just one example (the designation Lawrence of Arabia is another) of the geographical use of the phrase in colloquial English, particularly before World War II.

Introduction: Dating Ourselves: Introducing America's Arabia

When the Riverside County Fair opened its doors in February 1949 in Indio, California it contained typical festival scenes: homemade apple pies with blue ribbons attached, cotton candy, carnival rides, and ring toss games.[1] It even had a beauty pageant, so typical of county fairs around the country, where local youth competed to see who would make the transition from pageant princess to beauty queen. Only here, in addition to revealing swimsuits, the contestants appeared as costumed harem girls in billowing pants, midriff bearing tops, and wispy veils. Before the coronation, someone climbed to the top of the minaret towering over the stage designed to look like Southern California's own Old Baghdad. When the climber reached the appointed designation "a recording brought from Algiers of a muezzin calling Mohammedans to prayer" played over the loudspeakers.[2] The pageant's winner, similar to so many Cotton Queens or Corn Princesses across the nation, answered instead to Queen Scheherazade, named after the fabled story teller from *One Thousand and One Arabian Nights*.[3] After her coronation, the Arabic styled stage hosted a musical pageant based on the *Arabian Nights* with

[1] Portions of this chapter have previously appeared in Sarah McCormick Seekatz, "Harem Girls and Camel Races: Middle Eastern Fantasies in the Deserts of Southern California," KCET *Artbound* Blog, February 5, 2013, http://www.kcet.org/arts/artbound/counties/riverside/coachella-valley-middle-eastern-fantasies-desert.html.

[2] Clark Roberts, "Colorful Midwinter Date Festival Opens," *Los Angeles Times*, February 19, 1949. Papers emphasized the authentic nature of the recording, purchased in the Greater Middle East for the festival by the Thomas Brothers Men's Store of Indio, California. "'Muezzin' Gives Fair Authentic Atmosphere," *Riverside Daily Press*, February 14, 1949.

[3] *One Thousand and One Arabian Nights*, a collection of tales, was shaped by multiple communities in the Greater Middle East and took form over hundreds of years. The tales were told orally at first but eventually came to be translated and written down for a Western Audience. One of the early translations embraced by Americans was Edward William Lane, *The Thousand and One Nights, Commonly Called, In England, the Arabian Nights' Entertainments* (London: Charles Knight and Co., 1839) and its subsequent editions. For more on the *Nights* see Susan Nance, *How the Arabian Nights Inspired the American Dream, 1790-1935* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

costumed genies, sultans, slave girls, grand viziers, snake dancers, and harem girls. The performance itself featured over one hundred locals in Arabian costume; but more area residents attended the festival in similar costumes, championed by local women's clubs, regional boosters, and nearby businesses. To round out the event, in addition to the horse racing so popular at California fairs, the Riverside County Fair featured camel races. The five-day festival also featured a "slave market" and a Baghdad Bazaar.[4]

With its Arabian theme, the 1949 Riverside County Fair serves as a startling example of American perceptions of the Middle East, perceptions that held center stage in the deserts of Southern California throughout much of the twentieth century. How did a small, regional county celebration arrive at such an exotic theme? The answer lies in the fact that the event was not simply the Riverside County Fair; it also served as the National Date Festival. The humble date, a fruit grown primarily in the Greater Middle East, made its way to the deserts of California's Coachella Valley around 1900. Since then, its presence not only shaped the local economy but also the region's identity. As one of the only places where dates could grow in the United States, the Eastern Coachella Valley, in particular, attempted to differentiate itself by transforming into the "Arabia of America" through fantasies of the Greater Middle East that invoked scientific, commercial, and popular cultural understandings of the Orient. Such fantasies ultimately shaped perceptions of the area's agriculture, consumerism, landscapes, and tourism. This dissertation, then, seeks to uncover not only the history of the date industry in the United

[4] My research fails to indicate what this slave market was. My educated guess is that it might have been a campy theatrical skit or an auctioning off of dates (the romantic kind). Boosters emphasized it in their publicity materials but the press did not cover the event after the fact so its meaning is unclear.

States but also the ways in which the fruit's introduction gave birth to Middle Eastern fantasies there.

In a sense I came to this project organically. Born in the Coachella Valley, my first home was the Arabian Gardens Trailer Park in Indio, California, a place that now boasts Bedouin Avenue, Sphinx Drive, and Shalimar Street. Long before my birth, my Mexican American great-grandparents migrated to the Coachella Valley just after World War II where they grew dates among other table crops. I recall vividly the tall date palms of my mother's childhood home and the palmeros who came to care for the trees every season. My grandparents exchanged the dates produced in their yard for the palmeros' maintenance of the trees. I had always assumed that this is why my grandmother never had dates in her house, or really why we did not eat dates in ours. Instead, it turned out that as a child my grandmother ate too many dates, a pattern repeated by my mother in her childhood when she consumed way too many in one sitting. Though there were seldom dates in my childhood home in Indio, California they whizzed by me on the road every day. While many of the date groves of Indio, and La Quinta and Palm Desert for that matter, have been relocated eastward, towards Mecca and Thermal, they stood tall for most of my memories there.

Every year my family and I would go to the date festival. I looked forward to the warm cinnamon buns and the carnival rides but did not even think twice about the looming Old Baghdad Stage or the harem outfits the queen contestants wore. The annual "Blessing of the Dates" began at the parochial school both my mother and later I attended, a Catholic procession from the church to the fairgrounds, invoking prayers for a

good date harvest and the safety of the workers. While Catholic churches around the world decorate with date palm fronds on Palm Sunday, ours was probably one of the few stateside that could collect the palms from trees growing all around it. My family lined up eagerly every Presidents' Day for the Date Festival's parade. I remember waving to genies, princesses, and sultans, though I assumed that the parade's Shriners wore fezzes to fit the parade theme, not because it was their fraternal costume. I had my very first date at the Date Festival, walking around a fairground tinged with Arabian fantasies that decidedly took a back seat to my own teenage awkwardness. Eventually my parents began to work at the festival too as caretakers for the agricultural exhibit building on nights and weekends. The Arabian themed festival holds a large place in my childhood memories, the Middle Eastern flair internalized as nothing out of the ordinary.

My high school football games featured our team, the Blackhawks, competing against the Coachella Valley High School Arabs and the Indio High School Rajahs. I must admit it never occurred to me that the word Rajah existed outside of Indio until I was well into college, though my mom had been an alumni and my aunt had worn the Rajah mascot costume in her youth. In fact, my grandfather had made the giant scimitar that she carried during halftime. As for the Arabs, I encountered them through the letterman's sweater hanging in my grandfather's closet and in the pages of my grandmother's yearbook. They had been Arabs just before they married in 1956.

The first time I ever encountered Mecca was at Mecca Day Camp, long before I had heard of the most holy city of Islam. There is a newspaper photo of me there, about three years old, learning to "Walk Like an Egyptian," the dance fad that swept the nation

in the 1986 and 1987. Not far from Mecca, on days when we really lucked out, my dad took my siblings and I to Valerie Jeans Date Shop, where the date shake was invented, though he convinced us the cactus shakes were better. We visited other date shops too, including Oasis Date Gardens, when it was time to send Christmas dates to relatives outside the state. Growing up, I often passed by the large yellow signs on the border of Indio and La Quinta that advertized "Romance and Sex Life of the Date," the iconic Shield's Date Garden's film that, though the name quite scandalized me as a child, was little more than a roadside attraction recounting the unique pollination process of date agriculture.

As I branched out from the desert, people would ask me where I was from and after explaining I was from Indio, not India (though we did have a Taj Mahal building at our fairgrounds), I learned to say I was from Palm Springs. In fact, when I first fell in love with history, Palm Springs set the trap. In high school I discovered Frank Sinatra, who to my utter delight had strong connections to Palm Springs. That led to a near obsession to discover all of Palm Springs' celebrity history. At the time it all seemed so glamorous and completely different than my agricultural hometown of Indio, where nothing ever seemed to happen.

In college, though, I encountered professors who showed me that, yes Sarah, life existed beyond Palm Springs. I learned that the history of my own Mexican American family was just as interesting as the Rat Pack's swinging appearances in that famous resort town. I spent time collecting the stories of Mexican Americans in a museum in the Coachella Valley after graduation, frequently asking about people's everyday lives. They

told me tales about the time they stepped on a date thorn and limped for a week, the time they were a princess in a harem girl outfit in the fair, their hard work up in the trees as palmeros, the time they sang lead in the *Arabian Nights* Pageant, or the time they dressed up in a fez for their job at the market. It was not at all unusual, in my mind. After all, my own grandmother had danced on the same stage in a similar harem girl outfit.

So in graduate school, when asked to talk about a regional use of romance and fantasy heritage, it suddenly occurred to me, in the middle of a seminar, that getting date shakes outside of a town called Mecca, growing up in a complex called Arabian Gardens, driving down streets named after Damascus, and going to a fair with girls who looked like the blonde, 1960s Jeannie, was in fact a strange childhood. Before that moment, the Arabs, and the Rajahs, and the Old Baghdad stage seemed as natural to me as the desert heat. Suddenly I realized the community I grew up in had long ago *chosen* to shape themselves as a virtual Middle East. Though I had hoped to make it out of grad school without spending too much time in the Coachella Valley, the place called me home, and not just for the date ice cream. No matter what I read or whom I talked to no one could explain to me why the Coachella Valley set out to market themselves as a parallel Orient, a far-away land safely tucked away in the deserts of Southern California. When asked, most people credited the dates, though I would find out it was so much more than that.

And so I returned to my hometown of Indio, California determined to tell a more nuanced story. Others had already recounted why the Coachella Valley, at its height,

produced nearly ninety-five percent of the dates grown in the United States.[5] The United States Department of Agriculture tested different regions, but the area around Indio had the best climate, soil, and water for the crop. There were amateur histories that listed the USDA scientists who went abroad to get date offshoots, the lay entrepreneurs who followed them out there, and the early date growers who attempted cooperative associations to better sell their dates. But, aside from mentioning the Date Festival and date shops, no one had explored the depths that the region went to in order to link themselves to the birthplace of the date: to indicate that they were an exotic place of palms and hot sands where a little imagination could transport you to the Orient of your dreams.

And so this study breathed life. In it I explore the journey of date palms to the United States but more importantly the ways in which the Coachella Valley fashioned Arabian fantasies to market its dates, its deserts, and its dreams. The Arabian fantasies, deeply influenced by American popular culture of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, expanded into a three pronged tactic to create not only a superior commercial date industry in the United States but to highlight the industry and its arid surroundings as a surrogate Orient for tourists and townspeople alike. Early date growers tied themselves to the Orient via science, particularly via the USDA, which brought back one of the few

[5] Paul Popenoe, *The Date Palm*, Henry Field ed. (Miami: Field Research Projects, 1973); Donald R. Hodel and Dennis V. Johnson, *Dates: Imported and American Varieties of Dates in the United States* (Oakland: University of California Agriculture and Natural Resources, 2007); Patricia Laflin, "The Story of Dates Part I and II," *Periscope* (2006,2007); Charles C. Colley, "First Commercial Date Palm Experimentation in California, 1882-1900," *Southern California Quarterly* 55, no. 3 (Fall 1973): 253-260; Charles C. Colley, "The California Date Growing Industry, 1890-1939: Part I," *Southern California Quarterly* 49, no. 1 (March 1967): 47-63; Charles C. Colley, "The California Date Growing Industry, 1890-1939: Part II," *Southern California Quarterly* 49, no. 2 (June1967): 167-191.

tangible ties to the Greater Middle East: the date palm. Their recollections of the Middle East and Northern Africa and their subsequent research into date culture suggested an American superiority in science that rendered the Greater Middle East as backwards, diseased, and lazy. After all, many American boosters hoped that the Coachella Valley could quickly produce better dates than the date's homeland could ever dream. Such science supported the establishment of a commercial industry, which turned to the use of Arabian fantasies: one based in consuming the Orient. Date companies, both importers and those who grew in California, relied heavily on tropes of the Orient. Their advertisements implied that dates contained all the romance of the Near East in a single bite, though Coachella Valley date growers went further to suggest only California grown date were safe for human consumption. After all, growers suggested, the dates would carry the exotic romance no matter their origin; but lest they be imported from the Middle East, they might also bring with them the disease and grime of the "dirty" Arabs. Instead, the USDA offered the sanitized science of America.

But even more notably, the Coachella Valley eventually linked its crop to the Greater Middle East through cultural appropriations of the Orient, particularly via the landscape and through community celebrations and costuming. Date shops fashioned themselves in North African styles, towns became Arabia, Mecca, and Edom, and developers proposed an Algerian resort-entertainment complex that offered not only Moorish design but camel rides directly to and from the train station. These appropriations altered the already similar desert landscape, as did the date palms themselves, recreating an exotic and romantic Orient. Eventually the Riverside County

Fair and National Date Festival would build several Arabian themed sets and exhibit buildings, though their legacy of sheiks and harem girl costumes remains just as important. Performances that allowed Anglos, and in some cases Mexican Americans, to play "Arab," created a visual appeal reproduced in newspapers, magazines, and televisions around the nation. These representations of the exotic at home solidified the region's stance as America's Arabia for years to come. National political and cultural shifts would push these appropriations of the so-called Orient out of favor beginning in the late 1960s and yet, as my childhood experiences suggest, these legacies remained.

American Orientalism

Any study of American Orientalism must of course begin with Edward Said's *Orientalism*, a work that defined the field in 1978. Said identified Orientalism as "a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient."[6] The Orient, then, was a direct result of the Western imagination, shaped as a distinct other in order to help define Europe and America's own identities by contrast of what they were not. For example, if the Orient was backwards or primitive, then the Occident, or the West, could stand as modern and forward thinking. Romanticized visions of the Orient were reproduced in the West through art, literature, and travel narratives. These depictions in turn justified the politics, economic policies, and imperialism of the Occident. Scholar Melani McAlister extends the notion by suggesting the term "has

[6] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 3.

become shorthand for exoticizing and racist representations of 'the East.'"[7] Art historian Holly Edwards reminds us that Orientalism could be employed for "diverse personal, social, and cultural purposes…from imperialism and denigration to celebration and nostalgia."[8] Indeed, in the case of the Coachella Valley nostalgia, celebration, and denigration occasionally went hand in hand. Though Said's framework and terminology sparked the field, it continued to expand, and faced challenges and critique, over the past thirty-five years.

Said argued that America's relationship to the Orient was different than Europe's, suggesting that the work of Orientalism was performed primarily by England and France, who held special colonial relationships with Northern Africa and the Middle East.[9] Certainly scholars of U.S. history have approached the Orient in such a manner, reflecting America's direct engagement with the Pacific via commerce and missionary zeal and expanding upon Said's suggestion that the United States embraced an Orientalism more deeply centered in the Far East. Large migrations from China and Japan brought with them popular discourse that at once embraced all things Asian while rejecting Asian peoples. American intervention and imperialism in the Pacific also influenced popular culture stateside.[10] Though this Orientalism set in the Pacific falls

[7] Melani McAlister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and U.S. Interests in the Middle East since 1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 8.

[8] Holly Edwards, ed., *Noble Dreams, Wicked Pleasures: Orientalism in America, 1870-1930* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 16.

[9] Said, *Orientalism*, 1, 4.

[10] For more on the embrace of Orientalism in the wider history of U.S.-Pacific relations see: John Kuo Wei Tchen, *New York Before Chinatown: Orientalism and the Shaping of American Culture, 1776-1882* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999); Anthony W. Lee, *Picturing Chinatown: Art and*

outside the Arabian themes used by date growers, the othering such Orientalism performed applied widely to Asians, North Africans, and Middle Easterners, who were similarly rendered exotic and mysterious.

Yet, Americans also interacted with an Orientalism centered in the Middle East. Several groundbreaking works have shaped this study by surveying Orientalism in the United States in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, a legacy that directly shaped the Coachella Valley's appropriation of an Arabian Fantasy. *Go East, Young Man: Imagining the American West as the Orient*, Richard Francaviglia's recent work, is particularly useful for my discussion of landscape.[11] Holly Edward's *Noble Dreams, Wicked Pleasures: Orientalism in America, 1870-1930* and Susan Nance's *How the Arabian Nights inspired the American Dream, 1790-1935* trace the major contributions to an Orientalist craze that swept the United States before the Great Depression; their discussion of consumerism and performance thoroughly inspired this research.[12]

Orientalism in San Francisco (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination: 1945-1961* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Mari Yoshihara, *Embracing the East: White Women and American Orientalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); David Brody, *Visualizing American Empire: Orientalism and Imperialism in the Philippines* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010); David Weir, *American Orient: Imagining the East from Colonial Era through the Twentieth Century* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2011). Works in literature, religious, film, or cultural studies include: Karen Leong, *The China Mystique: Pearl S. Buck, Anna May Wong, Mayling Soong, and the Transformation of American Orientalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); Colleen Lye, *America's Asia: Racial Form and American Literature, 1893-1945* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); Jane Iwamura, *Virtual Orientalism: Asian Religions and American Popular Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Sheng-Mei Ma, *The Deathly Embrace: Orientalism and Asian American Identity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000); Robert G. Lee, *Orientals: Asian Americans in Popular Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999).

[11] Richard V. Francaviglia, *Go East, Young Man: Imagining the American West as the Orient* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 2011).

[12] Edwards, *Noble Dreams* and Nance, *How the Arabian Nights*.

Melani McAlister's foundational *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and U.S. Interests in the Middle East since 1945*, also informs this work.[13] McAlister's introduction broadly surveys the historical moments prior to World War II that expanded the popular culture of Orientalism. The heart of her work, however, lays in unraveling the ways in which religious understandings and oil have encouraged Americans to create investments in the Middle East, guided by popular culture, a project she defines as "post-Orientalist." Thus much of her groundbreaking work lies outside the time frame of my own research, in the discussions of terrorism, oil embargos, and hostage crises of the 1970s or the Gulf War of the 1990s. While she does begin with the major foreign policy changes that followed World War II, I found that within this time period the Coachella Valley's Arabian fantasies were mostly based in earlier Orientalist popular culture of the Greater Middle East, gathered especially from literature and films.

American Orientalism impacted the Coachella Valley throughout the twentieth century, as evidenced by the explosion of the Arabian theme at the Date Festival in the 1940s and beyond. The region's Arabian fantasies expanded and continued even into the 1970s when America's relationship to the Greater Middle East refocused pop cultural references to it through terrorism and perceived danger. America's romancing of the Orient was an essential requirement for Southern California's appropriation. As such a brief summary of American Orientalism in the early twentieth century is crucial for any understanding of the Coachella Valley's uniquely appropriated regional identity.

[13] McAlister, *Epic Encounters*.

Americans' first introduction to the Orient was often through the Bible, especially given that, during much of the nineteenth century, the United States was overwhelmingly Christian.[14] The "Holy Land," in particular, proved a subject of eternal interest for Americans, particularly because of Protestant Christianity's heavy influence on American culture. Indeed one scholar of Orientalism suggests that, at least in the nineteenth century, "American's primary interest in the Middle East was the 'Holy Land.'"[15] While Americans perceived the Holy Land as "inferior and backwards," they also saw it as "old, exotic, and connected to the West through Jewish and Christian history."[16] Thus their Anglo-Protestant Judeo-Christianity implied a direct stake in the region.

Americans expressed deep curiosity and engagement with the Holy Land resulting in a "Holy Land Mania."[17] Scholars, including Lester Vogel, Bryan Yothers, John Davis, Burke Long, and Stephanie Stidham Rogers investigate this mania-- from travelogues, novels, biblical archeology, stereographs, photography, landscape art, Holy Land gardens, panoramas, miniatures, and even direct tourism especially between the Civil War and World War II.[18] The Bible itself was a universal read for Americans Protestants

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[14] The majority of Americans identify as Christians even today. A 2012 Gallup Poll found seventy-seven percent of American adults defined themselves as a Christian of some kind. Frank Newport, "In U.S., 77% Identify as Christian," *Gallup Politics*, December 24, 2012, http://www.gallup.com/poll/159548/identify-christian.aspx.

[15] McAlister, *Epic Encounters*, 13.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Hilton Obenzinger, *American Palestine: Melville, Twain, and the Holy Land Mania* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

[18] Lester I Vogel, *To See a Promised Land: Americans and the Holy Land in the Nineteenth Century* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993); Brian Yothers, *The Romance of the Holy Land in American Travel Writing, 1790-1876* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2007); John Davis, *The Landscape of Belief: Encountering the Holy Land in Nineteenth-Century American Art and Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); Burke O Long, *Imagining the Holy Land: Maps,*

who, at least in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, interacted with the imagined Middle East via the landscapes described in the Bible. Many devout Christians felt that those living in the Holy Land itself were "living illustration of biblical customs," virtually unchanged since biblical times.[19] As we shall see, the United States' perceived connections to the Holy Land, through Christianity, appeared in the California deserts too when date orchards became transplanted Gardens of Eden.

Egypt too held special interests for Americans, demonstrated by potent founding symbols borrowed from Egypt, including the pyramid on the one dollar bill, the Washington Monument Obelisk, and even the mummies refashioned as American politicians in Thomas Nast's political cartoons.[20] At times, the connections weaved with Egypt grew out of Judeo Christianity as well, the exodus story blending biblical tales with the gravitas of the classical civilization. Of course these earlier understandings of Egypt carried through even after a new Egyptomania swept the nation following the discovery of King Tutankhamen tomb in 1922. [21] The discovery drew the nation's attention with rumors of curses and tales of riches beyond belief. Companies quickly

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Models, and Fantasy Travels (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003); and Stephanie Stidham Rogers, *Inventing the Holy Land: American Protestant Pilgrimage to Palestine, 1865-1941* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2011). Melani McAlister also addresses the topic of Americans and the Holy Land in *Epic Encounters*.

[19] McAlister, *Epic Encounters*, 14.

[20] For examples of these cartoons see Bob Brier, *Egyptomania: Our Three Thousand Year Obsession with the Land of the Pharaohs* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013). See McAlister, *Epic Encounters*, 27- 29 for more on Egyptomania before World War II as well. These ties to Egypt were both a direct link to Freemasonry as well as references to classical tropes.

[21]For more on the West's propensity for Egyptomania before the twentieth century see Elliott Colla, *Conflicted Antiquities: Egyptology, Egyptomania, Egyptian Modernity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007) and Scott Trafton, *Egypt Land: Race and Nineteenth-Century American Egypotmania* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004). See Sally MacDonald and Michael Rice, eds., *Consuming Ancient Egypt* (London: University College London, 2003) for the phenomenon's presence in Europe.

turned to Egypt to sell their consumer goods, linking King Tutankhamen's riches to a more general stereotype of Oriental excess and luxury.[22] Fashion incorporated vaguely Egyptian styles as well. Hollywood, of course, caught Egyptomania too, producing several blockbuster films and sparking Egyptian styled movie palaces.[23]

In one sense, Egypt remained apart from the general idea of the Middle East; Egypt held unique identifiers- the pyramid, the mummy, hieroglyphics, Kings and Queens (as opposed to Sultans and Caliphs, or Pharaohs in more nuanced phrasing). And yet Egyptomania contributed to generalizations of the larger Orient; the region was consistently portrayed as backwards, ancient, mysterious, and anti-modern. If anything Egypt's physical landscape exacerbated the idea of an ancient Middle East precisely because of its ruins and popular histories. For people in the Coachella Valley the symbols of Egypt blended, often seamlessly, into larger ideas of the Orient. Dates grew here too, and as such the lure of ancient Egypt tied back to the Coachella Valley. William L. Paul, a prominent grower, wrote to authorities following the discovery of King Tutankhamen's tomb inquiring if he could obtain some of the preserved dates found inside to display in his date shop. Indeed, Egypt and its treasures were presumed ripe for the taking. During the 1960s Indio lobbied to import and display an ancient Egyptian temple. America's

[22] For more on Egyptomania in popular culture see Brier, *Egyptomania*; MacDonald and Rice, *Consuming Ancient Egypt;* Margaret Malamud, "Pyramids in Las Vegas and in Outer Space: Ancient Egypt in Twentieth-Century American Architecture and Film," *Journal of Popular Culture* 34, no. 1 (Summer 2000): 31-48; L. Meskell, "Consuming Bodies: Cultural Fantasies of Ancient Egypt," *Body and Society* 4, no. 1 (March 1998): 63-76.

[23]Matthew Bernstein and Gaylyn Studlar, eds., *Visions of the East: Orientalism in Film* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997).

deeply felt connections to Egypt mirrored and blended into their embrace and consumption of the Greater Middle East.

Though biblical understandings and the romance of Egypt shaped perceptions of the Greater Middle East, another book provided additional understanding of the area. *One Thousand and One Arabian Nights*, a collection (rather multiple translations and collections) of stories from the medieval Middle East, became a childhood tradition for Americans who gathered to hear stories of Aladdin, Sinbad, and Ali Baba.[24] The rich fantasies stayed with those who used these stories as the basis for ornate imaginings of the Middle East as a fabled place of luxury, wealth, romance, adventure, a healthy bit of danger, mystery, and magic. Because so many people encountered the *Arabian Nights* in their childhood, interactions with the stories also provided a source of nostalgia. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Americans consumed the Orient as entertainment by reading, novels, travelogues, magazines, serials, newspapers The romance of many of the fictional works (among some of the non-fiction as well) drew in female fans in particular, who would incorporate the desert romance into other aspects of their life like décor, fashion, and film. Literature found fans among men as well, who envisioned adventures in the Sahara as demonstrations of masculinity and survival.

Though travel to the Middle East and Northern Africa, particularly the Holy Land and Egypt, expanded after the American Civil War, the vast majority of Americans would never see the Middle East in person. Those that did, however, contributed to

[24] Of course the tradition of the *Arabian Nights* predates the United States; it was a popular collection in Europe even before 1776. For more on its history see Nance, *How the Arabian Nights*, 19-50. There were multiple translations in the 1800s but many Americans encountered the tales via "arrangements" of stories that did not always acknowledge a specific translator. Edwards, "Armchair Orientalism," *Noble Dreams*, 170-173.

America's love affair with the Orient through travel writings and the visual recreations of these experiences abroad. Armchair travelers experienced the region in popular non-fiction and memoirs of travel abroad, though adventures recounted in magazines like *National Geographic* also brought the Orient home to a popular audience. *National Geographic* also came to include photographic reproductions that reinforced ideas of the Orient as a place of romance, exotic mystery, and colorful, though backwards and commonly dirty. Indeed, the visual was an incredibly important part of American Orientalism particularly as visual mediums expanded from 1870-1930.[25] Paintings and sculpture utilized biblical and other Orientalist themes. Many stereographs in the United States reproduced the Greater Middle East for eager eyes, while other photographs made their way into books, magazines, and eventually newspapers. Rotating panoramas, often paired with lectures on their subjects, transported audiences to the region as well.

These visual Orientalisms were often larger performances that embodied the Middle East as popular entertainment, particularly at world's fairs where Americans devoured the world without ever leaving the nation. As spaces that encouraged consumption and brought the world to the United States' shores, world's fairs became cultural meeting points for Americans and the imagined Orient. Amusements like the Streets of Cairo at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago or the Jerusalem Exhibit at Saint Louis's 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition reproduced the Greater Middle East through architecture and peopled these spaces with real Middle Easterners,

[25] Edwards, *Noble Dreams*, 16.

some of the few that most Americans would ever encounter.[26] Performances reinforced Orientalist stereotypes, particularly the hugely popular "hoochy-coochie" dance (later known as the belly dance) attributed to performer Little Egypt.[27]

Together the reproductions of the Orient told Americans that the region was ancient, unchanging, and sexualized, yet additional exhibits, including the Hills Brother's Coffee exhibit at the 1915 Panama Pacific International Exposition at San Francisco linked the Greater Middle East to luxury and the pleasures of consumption. For many Americans, these amusements and exhibits, a mainstay at world's fairs across the country, remained one of the few tangible links to the Orient, imagined as they may have been, a place for the public to touch, taste, hear, see, and experience the Greater Middle East.[28] Coachella Valley boosters used the idea of the Orient as a space of luxury and consumption for both marketing their dates and celebrating their city to draw in tourists, just as world's fairs had previously done. They too would seek to reproduce a virtual Orient that tourists and locals could see, hear, taste, and otherwise experience.

Circuses and other outdoor shows, similar to and including Buffalo Bill's Wild West shows, incorporated Arab horsemen, Middle Eastern acrobats, Bedouin warriors, camels, and caravans. Such pageantry would inspire other reproductions of the Orient at

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[26] Zeynep Celik, "Speaking Back to Orientalist Discourse at the World's Columbian Exposition," *Noble Dreams, Wicked Pleasures: Orientalism in America, 1870-1930*, Holly Edwards, ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000) and Milette Shamir, "Back to the Future: The Jerusalem Exhibit at the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair," *Journal of Levantine Studies* 2, no. 1 (Summer 2012): 93-113.

[27] For more on Little Egypt and America's relationship to belly dancing see. Amira Jarmakani, *Imagining Arab Womanhood: The Cultural Mythology of Veils, Harems, and Belly Dancers in the U.S.* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

[28] Zeynep Celik, *Displaying the Orient: Architecture of Islam at Nineteenth-Century World's Fairs* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992) and Shamir, "Back to the Future."

world's fairs where concessions promised visitors not only architectural reproductions of Egypt but also camels, belly dancers, exotic costumes, and peoples. Magicians and fortune tellers embraced Eastern stage identities that sometimes blended Indian and Arabian; while the West had religion, they implied the Orient had magic.[29] In the ninetieth and early twentieth centuries, performances of the Orient were a major way Americans engaged in Arabian fantasies. Americans flocked to theatrical renditions of *Salome* and the *Garden of Allah*, among others.[30]

Performances also included lectures about T.E. Lawrence of Arabia, an officer in the British Army whose adventures in the Middle East during World War I drew international attention, a lecture series, films, and several books.[31]. Even the USDA's lead agricultural explorer who brought back some of the first date palms was asked to present to the early National Geographic Society because he was one of very few Americans who had actually visited Baghdad, land of the *Arabian Nights*. Fraternal organizations too embraced a type of performance when they used biblical or Orientalist tropes in their initiation rituals and costuming.[32]Architecture occasionally reflected American interest in the Greater Middle East. Obelisks had long signified an interest in

[29] Nance, "Turbans and Capitalism, 1893-1930," *How the Arabian Nights*, 206-229.

[30] Leach, *Land of Desire*, 106 and Edwards, *Noble Dreams*, 44-46.

[31] While Lawrence wrote bestselling books about his experiences, the lecture series was presented by Lowell Thomas, a U.S. Journalist stationed alongside Lawrence during parts of the war. The lecturers were seen by over four million people worldwide. McAlister, *Epic Encounters*, 24-25.

[32] See Nance, *How the Arabian Nights*, 79-110.

Egypt but Masonic temples, theaters, and even bathhouses also came to reflect influence from the Orient.[33]

Americans interacted with the Orient in their lives as consumers as well, particularly as expanding production set new stages of consumption at the turn of the twentieth century. Scholarship surrounding American Orientalism during this time period traces the consumption of the Orient both via consumer goods as well as entertainment venues; businesses increasingly turned to the Orient to sell items.[34] To encourage shopping in the new department store setting, Oriental scenes were staged. Businesses wanted consumers to embody standard associations of the Orient: "luxury, impulse, desire, primitivism, immediate self-gratification."[35] Orientalist inspired fashion swept through Europe with the United States following suit.[36] More overtly Oriental outfits were worn to balls or costume parties as well.[37] Women decorated their homes with so called Oriental cozy corners that blended luxury goods from China, Japan, and the Middle East into exotic lounging areas.[38] Some wealthy individuals even designed homes with Moorish architectural influences or filled their homes with Orientalist luxury.[39]

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[33] Francaviglia, *Go East.* 119-123, 189-193. For examples see Phil Pasquini, *Domes Arches and Minarets: A History of Islamic-Inspired Buildings in America* (Novato, California: Flypaper Press, 2012).

[34] Kristin L. Hoganson, *Consumers Imperium: The Global Production of American Domesticity, 1865-1920* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007) and William Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1993).

[35] Leach, *Land of Desire*, 107.

[36] Hoganson, *Consumers Imperium.*

[37] Leach, *Land of Desire*, 105.

[38] Hoganson, *Consumers Imperium*.

[39] Merchants, *Land of Desire*, 105. Louis Tiffany, for example.

Within this time frame, from the late 1800s to the 1920s, the pleasures of shopping became linked to ideas about the Orient. They may have also helped Americans navigate a rapidly changing society. As art historian Holly Edwards suggests, people turned to "the traditions and activities of members of other races, ethnic groups, and social classes…for they offered the opportunity to try on surrogate identities and taste illicit pleasures."[40] Scholar Susan Nance suggests that the association of the Greater Middle East with consumerism lay in part with the depictions of luxury and wealth in the *Arabian Nights* and subsequent reproductions of the stories held within. "These tales," she offers, "provided unparalleled depictions of luxury, ease, and magical self transformation in robust language that closely matched the promise of consumer capitalism as it developed."[41] The Orient provided a guide for achieving "personal fulfillment through material goods."[42] The association of the region with decadence, consumption, and pleasure continues even today.

Depictions of the Orient expanded over time.[43] Objects from the Greater Middle East like Persian carpets and fine textiles implied wealth in the early years of the nation, but the proliferation of consumer goods paired with more mundane invocations of the Orient as time wore on. Everyday items included visual symbols of the Middle East in

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[40] Edwards, *Noble Dreams*, 40.

[41] Nance, *How the Arabian Nights*, 12.

[42] Ibid., 13.

[43] Depictions of the Orient expanded over time; in early America they were confined to a few literary works and high art. Eventually, they would find their way into almost every visual medium. Edwards points out that "a larger migration of Orientalist imagery from unique objects to mass-produced materials," occurred by the early twentieth century. Edwards, *Noble Dreams*, 15.

their packaging, particularly coffee, which originated in the Middle East, and tobacco, heavily exported from Egypt and the Ottoman Empire around the turn of the nineteenth century. Advertisements, for these goods and others, also used common associations with the Orient to sell their products. After the discovery of King Tutankhamen's tomb in 1922, for example, Campbell's Soup and Palmolive Soap featured Egyptian symbols in their advertisements. These visual cues, which appeared on billboards, magazines, and stores, highlight one more way in which Americans encountered the Orient daily. In addition, however, new printing technology meant the artwork found in Arabian inspired advertisements could be reproduced in prints and calendars used to decorate the home, expanding the reach of American Orientalism even further.[44]

The consumption of the Orient, indeed many of American's interactions with the region by the 1920s, extended to film as well. Blockbuster films set in the Greater Middle East gained rabid fans, especially *The Sheik, The Son of Sheik*, *Salome*, the *Garden of Allah*. Film was both an extension of earlier performances of the Orient (as they often included belly dance, costuming, and even magic) and an expansion of the visual reproduction of the Orient via an incorporation of landscape and architecture into set design. Films served as virtual travel transporting Americans to the Middle East and directly into desert romances and Saharan adventures. Sometimes even going to the movie palace was travel in itself, especially since so many large theaters during this time period styled themselves as Egyptian or Arabian, with opulent decorations meant to invoke the exotic East. The ephemera of films too was consumed, with film stills

[44] Edwards, *Noble Dreams*, 43.

reproduced in magazines, newspapers, and advertisements sometimes saved by fans in scrapbooks, in frames, or on walls. Scholars have suggested film went a long way to reinforce ideas that the peoples of the Orient were ancient, backward, oversexed, mysterious, wise yet superstitious, barbaric, thieving, wealthy, poor, or despotic. [45] These stereotypes continued not only in film but in other Orientalist appearances like those found in the Coachella Valley, though the landscape there made the region a perfect filming location for such blockbusters as *Salome* and the *Sheik*.

Scholar Melani McAlister argues that the consumption of the Orient, seen in the visual tropes described above, provided the "lure and danger of decadence."[46] More importantly, the meaning of the Orient as a spectacle changed over time, "from its nineteenth- century associations with the religious and scientific knowledge to the turn-of the century links to femininity, consumerism, and loosened sexuality."[47] The Coachella Valley exemplifies these changes over time while also suggesting that the vestiges of religious connotations of the Middle East never truly went away: they existed alongside newer consumption- oriented models. The association with the Greater Middle East provided a powerful touch point for the region when Coachella Valley residents envisioned their date industry as virtual Gardens of Edens blessed by heaven. Indeed, growers announced the birth of their date industry in 1921 with images of the nativity.

[45] For Orientalism in film prior to World War II see Bernstein and Studlar, *Visions of the East* and Jack Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People* (New York: Olive Branch Press, 2001).

[46] McAlister, *Epic Encounters*, 27.

[47] Ibid., 27.

Though multiple scholars have demonstrated how visions of the Orient changed over time, earlier appropriations continued to cast their spell and influence the present.

Collectively, these American pop cultural expressions of the Middle East cast the Orient as an unchanging, united, and singular front in an "unadulterated natural setting."[48] As a whole, the peoples of the Orient have been rendered in contradictory ways. They were ever ancient, un-evolving, and un-modern though these qualities made them occasionally pure and innocent.[49] Their ancient nature made them appear to have the wisdom of the ages, while at the same time popular depictions also rendered the peoples of the Orient as superstitious. Rulers and kingdoms were despotic, which rendered the region a dangerous place, even though Americans sometimes saw these dangers as gateways to adventure, masculinity, and heroism. The landscapes were at once plush and glittering oases and harsh, deadly deserts. As a place of the imagination, the Orient provided an air of mystery and magical romance.

American concerns over gender identities bled into conceptions of the Orient as well. Men in the Middle East and Northern Africa could be simultaneously viewed as courageous, skilled horsemen and warriors: the epitome of masculinity but also effeminate and lazy. Oriental women were seen as beautiful and often veiled, hidden behind the walls of the harem. The harem could be both an institution American men lusted after and also a place demonstrating, in popular representations, despotic, harsh leadership of Arab men, who secluded their women and who engaged in taboo practices

[48] Edwards, *Noble Dreams*, 16.

[49] Of course people from the Greater Middle East were not the only group racialized in these ways. See Philip J. Deloria, *Playing Indian* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998) for more on how Native Americans faced this racialized logic.

like polygamy and sexual slavery. Women in the harem were sometimes seen as sexual victims. The same was not true for the "vamp," Oriental women whose overtly sexual appetites could ruin men with their seduction. In many cases, these stereotypes of the Orient simply reflected American anxieties over changing social norms projected abroad. The appearance of the New Woman found embodiment in the 1920s vamp, while the super masculine horseman could allow American men to go primitive, an act that lay outside the expectations of a proper American man.[50] Indeed the guise of playing other, as Edwards argues, "projected beyond the emasculation wrought by the enervating desk jobs of industrialized America into a guise of romantic virility with reference to the stereotypical primitivism of another culture."[51] Such forms of masquerade were not limited to the Orient, of course, as Americans also had their own homegrown tradition of playing Indian during this time and beyond.[52]

As Edward Said argued, these stereotypes of the Greater Middle East helped define America itself. If the Orient was backwards and unchanging it stood in stark contrast to America's view of itself as a thoroughly modern place. If its people were ancient and childlike, America, then, was evolved and at the top of an ethnic hierarchy. In addition to helping the U.S. define itself, however, these stereotypes also helped American deal with their changing world by providing a form of escape embraced when they watched a film, walked through a Middle Eastern inspired concession at a world's

[50] Edwards, *Noble Dreams*, 47.

[51] Ibid., 50.

[52] Deloria, *Playing Indian*.

fair, donned a costume at an *Arabian Nights* ball, or participated in the rites of a fraternal organization.

The Coachella Valley, its Dates, and the Larger Southland

This study is really about two places: the Middle East and Northern Africa of America's imagination, described above, and the Coachella Valley where such imaginations took physical shape. The Coachella Valley is a region in Southern California roughly forty-five miles long that begins at the base of the San Jacinto Mountains and continues to the shores of the Salton Sea. (Figure 1.1) It rests in Riverside County, roughly one-hundred miles from Los Angeles. Palm Springs is probably its most well known city though Desert Hot Springs, Thousand Palms, Cathedral City, Rancho Mirage, Palm Desert, Indian Wells, Bermuda Dunes, La Quinta, Indio, Coachella, Thermal, Mecca, and Oasis also fall within its boundaries. Nearly all of these cities, including Palm Springs, saw date production in their histories but the majority of my research focuses on the Eastern Coachella Valley, which developed more agriculturally than its resort-centered counterpart of Palm Springs. These Eastern Coachella Valley cities include Indio, Coachella, Thermal, Mecca, and Oasis. This region belongs to the Colorado Desert, a sub-designation of the Sonoran Desert that spans from Southern California into Arizona, northern Mexico, and Baja. Though the area is dry, it held vast underwater aquifers that provided water for early agriculture, while the All American Canal project brought Colorado River water to the region in 1942.

Figure 1.1: Coachella Valley, California. Courtesy Google, 2014.

Relatively few academics have researched the Coachella Valley; the historiography of the region remains mostly pieced together from amateur historical publications. Many of these works, unsurprisingly, focus exclusively on Palm Springs and its celebrity past. Recently a few scholars have enriched the story. Lawrence Culver's *The Frontier of Leisure: Southern California and the Shaping of Modern America*, for example, touches on this celebrity history but delves back even further to trace the origins of Palm Spring's tourism and suggests its role in establishing patterns of relaxation and leisure for the larger nation.[53] Ryan Kray also enlarged the scholarship with her work on race relations in Palm Springs proper.[54] Still fewer scholars have explored the Eastern

[53] Lawrence Culver, *The Frontier of Leisure: Southern California and the Shaping of Modern America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

[54] Ryan M. Kray, "The Path to Paradise: Expropriation, Exodus, and Exclusion in the Making of Palm Springs," *Pacific Historical Review* 73, no. 1 (February 2004): 85-126 and Ryan M. Kray, "Second-Class Citizenship at a First-Class Resort: Race and Public Policy in Palm Springs," (PhD diss., University of California, Irvine, 2009).

Coachella Valley and its agricultural riches, though Matt Garcia has recently explored the history of the United Farm Workers Movement in the area.[55]

The history of deserts in America is helpful too, though woefully understudied as well. Before Palm Springs or Indio, the landscape was perceived as desert, in both senses of the term, a place void of people (deserted) and an arid terrain.[56] Of course the perception of the space as deserted was unfounded; the Cahuilla had made the Coachella Valley their home for centuries and an increasing Anglo and Mexican/ Mexican American population grew steadily after the railroad arrived in the mid 1870s. The idea of the desert was never far from the residents of the Coachella Valley, not only because they lived in one, but also because they sought to connect with far better known deserts in the Orient: the Saharan, Arabian, and Syrian deserts.

The story of the date in the United States could spread even farther, outside of the Coachella Valley. Experimentation with the palm took place in varied landscapes including the American South and Northern California. Though Arizona lay on the forefront of date experimentation, California quickly overcame it as the best growing locale. It is important to note, however, that while Arizona and the other small California regions that produced the crop, they failed to adopt the date as their main distinguishing feature nor did they set out to create an American vision of the Middle East. Additionally,

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[55] Matt Garcia, *From the Jaws of Victory: The Triumph and Tragedy of Cesar Chavez and the Farm Worker Movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012). Christian Paiz is currently conducting research on farm workers in the Coachella Valley as well.

[56] Patricia Nelson Limerick, *Desert Passages: Encounters with the American Deserts* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1985), 5. For more on deserts see Limerick and *Peter Wild, The Opal Desert: Explorations of Fantasy and Reality in the American Southwest* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999).

for the majority of the twentieth century and even today, the Coachella Valley vastly outpaced any other American region with its date growing ability.[57]

Dates in general have received little attention from American historians. Numerous publications recount the science tied to the date industry, and the adventures obtaining date offshoots abroad were recorded first hand, but few have written about the establishment of the date industry in the United States. Scientists at the United States Department of Agriculture were among the firsts to recount the history of the date palm's immigration, in part as a way to recall their own involvement.[58] Much of this discussion took place in regional newspapers and magazines, in scientific publications, and other unpublished or under published sources. Outside of the USDA, Paul Popenoe, who traveled to the Greater Middle East to import date offshoots in the 1910s, in turn wrote extensively on the date palm, including a look at its history as late as the 1970s.[59] Nina Paul Shumway, a local author whose father was a very early investor in the date industry, wrote a memoir, *Your Desert and Mine,* which also served as a partial history of the booster and investor side of the date industry.

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[57] Experts agree that by 1915 California produced more dates than Arizona. After that, "even at its peak Arizona date production was less than one-tenth that of California." Hodel and Johnson, *Dates,* 6.

[58] Like the date industry, the history of the United States Department of Agriculture's agriculture explorer project is understudied. Most of the histories have been written by the USDA's scientists, both in firsthand accounts and as institutional histories written in the 1950s-1970s. There is little scholarship on the impact of these plants' introduction programs or the scientific racism at play within the project. Robert R. Alvarez, "The March of Empire: Mangos, Avocados, and the Politics of Transfer," *Gastronomica: The Journal of Food and Culture* 7, no. 3 (Summer 2007): 28-33 is one exception. To the best of my knowledge, this dissertation is among the first to contextualize the agricultural explorer project and tie America's Orientalism to its agricultural imperialism abroad.

[59] Popenoe, *The Date Palm*. His works are more about the history of the date abroad, rather than in the United States. His writings did include his experiences in this history. Popenoe went on to become a well known eugenicist. See Alexandra Minna Stern, *Eugenic Nation: Faults and Frontiers of Better Breeding in Modern America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

When people sought to recount the actual history of the date in America, not just their own involvement in it, they too did so with their own ties to the fruit. Charles C. Colley, a PhD trained historian and archivist at the Arizona State University, explored the history of the date in both Arizona and California in a series of articles published in academic journals in the 1960s and 1970s. Colley had ties to the Coachella Valley; his great uncle Charley Brown homesteaded land there planting a date garden that Colley's father ran after Brown's passing.[60] Colley's mother Nevada Colley wrote a fictional account of Brown's life. Despite the personal connections, Colley's work is academic, though narrative in nature, and focuses on the scientific introduction of the date and the economic issues faced by early date growers, as well as those growers' attempts to organize co-operative marketing.

Patricia Laflin married into the date industry in 1950; when her husband told her he was from Indio, she thought he meant India. Eventually, with an undergraduate degree in history, Laflin would write several, mostly photo-based books on the history of the Coachella Valley. Notably she wrote two manuscripts about the date industry published by the Coachella Valley Historical Society in their annual journal, *Periscope*, in 2006-2007. Lalfin's work recounts the narrative of how dates came to the United States, though much of the work simply reprints earlier USDA based histories of the date industry. Laflin's insight, however, is important given her own involvement in the date industry: she and her husband hosted international date growers, traveled extensively in the Middle East, and often served as spokes-people for the industry

[60] Bill Jennings, "Book on the Early Days in Desert Gets Praise," *Press Enterprise,* March 19,1967. Charles Colley's mother, Nevada Colley, wrote a fictionalized account of Brown's life: *From Maine to Mecca*.

To my knowledge no scholar has explored the ways in which the Coachella Valley and its date industry sought to market themselves as a virtual Arabia in America, to both draw in tourists and sell their crop. Previous scholarship on the date has focused on the science and agricultural technologies birthed in the date groves both because those equipped to author these histories were date growers or scientists themselves, but also because the narrative style was accessible and popular when previous authors took on the subject. No one has critically explored the cultural impact of these Arabian fantasies or incorporated a broader national narrative of how such Orientalism came to be and changed over time. Thus discussions about scientific breakthroughs, the agricultural experiences of growers, the struggles of laborers, the cooperative growing agreements, the economic and business plans, and the international political negotiations involved with import, export, and tariffs, fall outside this study. Some of these issues have been taken up in the works described above, while others are ripe for attention. Like the other date authors, I too have ties to the date industry. My great grandparent grew a small quantity of dates in the Coachella Valley, and the palm trees peppered my childhood.

The establishment of a date industry was only possible in the deserts of the Southland because of the land, water, and labor conditions needed for its growth. In a sense the same was true for the development of a virtual American Arabia; such an elaborate fantasy landscape was really only possible in the region around Los Angeles. As Hollywood's backyard, California's varied landscape long stood in for foreign nations during filming; the Coachella Valley often served as stand in for Northern Africa and the larger Middle East. Moreover, California experimented with architectural style and

regional identity in surprising ways. Larger community projects sectioned off parts of the Southland by defining them as foreign landscapes at home; from Los Angeles's China City and Olvera Street to Venice Beach's canal reproductions.

And while Southern Californians experimented with different styles and identities, they also produced an incredible example to which the Coachella Valley was no doubt in debt: the so called Spanish Fantasy Past. Coined by Carey McWilliams in 1946, the phrase refers to the romance surrounding the Spanish Colonial history of the Southland that provided a regional identity, drew in tourists and residents, and powerfully shaped the landscape.[61] The Spanish Fantasy Past also brought a stereotyping of the people who inhabited the Golden State. These fantasies suggested that that Spanish Colonialism benefited the Native Americans; their decline came only after the fall of Spanish rule, when the land was subsequently squandered by Mexicans and eventually Americans. While the recent Anglo immigrants viewed ethnic Mexicans as fun, colorful, and lively, they also classified them as lazy (not developing the land fully), fatalistic (destined to be subservient to a white majority), and un-ambitious (choosing fiestas over work). By the same token actual Mexican and Mexican Americans were rendered firmly to history, a move that literally disappeared them from the modern, like the crumbling missions. The stereotypes that fell within this Spanish Fantasy Past worked to reinforce racial hierarchies in the region that placed new white, Protestant immigrants at the top.

[61] Carey McWilliams, "The Growth of a Legend," *Southern California Country: An Island on the Land* (New York: Duell, Sloan & Pearce, 1946), 70-83. Of course the Spanish Fantasy Past owes a debt of gratitude to Helen Hunt Jackson's Ramona, a 1884 novel that swept the nation, leaving a generation of Ramona fans hoping to find the romance described in the novel, once centered on Californios, crumbling missions, and rugged ranchos.

In a sense, these Anglo migrants clung to the Spanish Fantasy Past in an effort to establish their rightful inheritance to the region. By claiming that California was first founded and settled by Spanish priests, they put forth the notion that Europeans brought civilization to the state. As European descendents, they could claim an inheritance in the culture and land, thus justifying the economic and geographic dominance over ethnic Mexicans, Native Americans, and even the natural environment. These fantastical celebrations of an imagined history served to link Anglo immigrants together with a new found sense of community and bound them not only to each other, but to their new homes.[62] Similarly, residents of the Coachella Valley would turn to Arabian fantasies to place their own recent migrations to the region into a historic context, providing themselves an ancient and biblical history to justify their recent conquests.

My work also suggests an extension, of sorts, broadening the definitions of the Spanish Fantasy Past south and east, from Spain to North Africa and the Arabian Peninsula. Because of Spain's history with the Moors, a North African influence can be read throughout the Spanish Fantasy Past, particularly in architecture. But this geographic realignment also pushes south and east of Los Angeles, the epicenter of the Spanish Fantasy Past, to the Coachella Valley, an understudied region of the state. I suggest that

[62] McWilliams,"A Legend."; Phoebe S. Kropp, *California Vieja: Culture and Memory in a Modern American Place* (Berkeley: Uniersity of California Press, 2006); William Deverell, *Whitewashed Adobe: The Rise of Los Angeles and the Remaking of its Mexican Past* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); Dydia DeLyser, *Ramona Memories: Tourism and the Shaping of Southern California* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005); Glen Gendzel, Pioneers and Padres: Competing Mythologies in Northern and Southern California, 1850-1930," *The Western Historical Quarterly* 32, no. 1 (Spring 2001): 55-79). For more scholarship on the Spanish Fantasy Past see Emily McEwen, "'Southern California's Unique Museum-Hotel': Consuming the Past and Preserving Fantasy at Riverside's Mission Inn, 1903-2010," (PhD Diss., University of California, Riverside, 2014) and Chelsea Vaughn "The Joining of Historical Pageantry and the Spanish Fantasy Past: The Meeting of Senora Josefa Yorba and Lucretia del Valle," *Journal of San Diego History* 57, no. 4 (Fall 2011): 213-236.

claiming the Spanish fantasy for all of Southern California negates the alternate possibilities for regional identities that in fact developed, particularly in these spaces that did not see substantial Spanish Colonial projects like the deserts of the Southland. So while this study offers an alternative regional identity, in the form of Arabian fantasies, it also is deeply indebted to the Spanish Fantasy Past's scholarship. When boosters in the Coachella Valley set out to build America's Arabia, they did so with explicit understandings of the Spanish Fantasy Past's success in drawing in tourists' dollars, investment, and even relocations and its use in community formation.

Celebration of Spanish Colonialism took people back to a bygone era but it also transported them to another space- that of the Spanish Empire, distinct from the United States and the Revolutionary or Frontier identities they had previously claimed. Like the Spanish Fantasy Past, the Arabian motifs established in the Coachella Valley worked as a form of space and time travel. Americans long associated the Greater Middle East with grand empires of time gone by- the ancient Babylonians, Mesopotamians, or Egyptians- but also with the peoples of the Bible. The *Arabian Nights'* popular culture, in particular, also set the story in the past, given its origins in the medieval Middle East. Unlike the ethnic Mexicans associated with Spanish Fantasy Past, however, there were very few people descended from the Greater Middle East to populate the Coachella Valley's fantasies. Sometimes, as we shall see, ethnic others served as stand-ins. Or, as was the case at the Date Festival, Anglos costumed themselves as sheiks and harem girls in performances that mirrored cross-cultural dressing common at fiestas, pageants, and

plays celebrating the California missions and ranchos.[63] Additionally the natural desert landscape and man-made alterations to it like Moorish themed date shops, Egyptian theaters, and cities named Mecca encouraged one to imagine foreign travel. Therefore, while I challenge the perception that Southern California's identity is entirely saturated with the Spanish Fantasy Past, I also acknowledge its widespread acceptance that led certain parts of the region to create entirely new ways to identify and market themselves.

Real Middle Easterners?

Though this work explores fantasies of American Orientalism, it does not address how these fantasies were experienced by people of Greater Middle Eastern descent, at home or abroad. During the main historical period of this work, 1900-1965, the United States contained relatively few people from, or descended from, the Greater Middle East. Though poor record keeping and vague geographic terms limit our understanding of migration from the Orient, scholars suggest that the majority of immigrants from the region prior to 1965 were Syrian Christians, though the designation of Syrian at the time included Lebanon, Palestine, and other locations in the Ottoman Empire. [64] In 1924 an estimated 200,000 of these "Syrians" called the United States home.[65] That same year saw the establishment of national quotas for immigration, which resulted in far fewer

[63] "Cross-cultural dressing" is a phrase taken from Reina Lewis, *Rethinking Orientalism: Women, Travel and the Ottoman Harem* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004).

[64] Kambiz GhaneaBassiri, *A History of Islam in America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 137- 150 and McAlister, *Epic Encounters*, 35-37.

[65] GhaneaBassiri, *A History of Islam*, 140.

opportunities for immigration from the Greater Middle East. The quotas existed until 1965's Hart-Celler Act (also known as the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965), which drastically reshaped the ethnic and religious makeup of the United States with increased immigration from Latin America, Asia, and the Greater Middle East.[66]

Prior to 1965, most of the Middle Eastern immigrants and their descendents lived in heavily populated regions, particularly in the Mid-West and Northeast, including Detroit, Chicago, Milwaukee, Pittsburgh, Cleveland, New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Boston though Los Angeles and San Francisco also claimed a limited population.[67] My research indicates that the Coachella Valley did not have a large population of Arabs, Greater Middle Easterners, Muslims, or their descendents at any point during the time in question (1900-1965); indeed their numbers are limited even today.[68] The 1930 census of Indio, for example, listed just twenty people, out of 3,486, who were born, or whose parents were born, in Syria. Nearby Coachella had just one family, five people, who were Syrian/ Syrian American.[69] Newspaper articles briefly mention the "Syrian" population

[66] Ibid., 292-293.

[67] At least according to one American missionary. Unfortunately the data is limited. See GhaneaBassiri, *A History of Islam*, 137.

[68] Exact numbers are hard to pinpoint; many people of Greater Middle Eastern descent are simply classified as "white" in the U.S. Census. However, the U.S. census estimated, in 2008-2012, that there were no people of Arab (Egyptian, Iraqi, Jordanian, Lebanese, Moroccan, Palestinian, Syrian, "other Arab") or Iranian descent in Coachella, Mecca, Thermal, and Oasis. They estimated that less than one half of one percent (0.46%) of Indio's population is of Arab ancestry or roughly 384 of nearly 82,000 residents. They estimate that Indio has 33 people of Iranian ancestry. Of the remaining desert cities only Rancho Mirage has a higher (percentage wise) estimated population of Arab ancestry at a mere 0.69% (or 133 people). Palm Springs, Rancho Mirage, La Quinta, and Palm Desert have an estimated higher number of Iranians and their descendents than Indio but the numbers are still statistically low (Rancho Mirage with the highest at: 0.8%). U.S. Census Bureau, "Total Ancestry Reported," *American Community Survey 2008-2012*, accessed July 11, 2014 http://factfinder2.census.gov/ .

[69] United States Census Bureau, Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930.

before 1950; these references alluded to the same families counted in the 1930 census: particularly the Peters and Abrams families that ran retail dry goods and menswear stores in the region.

While the Arabian fantasies developed in the Coachella Valley relied on real Middle Eastern peoples encountered in the Orient during date collecting trips, most of the stereotypes and imagery utilized did so without direct connection to Arabian immigrants in the United States. Thus, as Melani McAlister beautifully surmises, "the fact that Arab immigration has been historically so small, however (and, outside of Detroit, largely invisible), meant that these immigrations were not a significant factor in how the Middle East has been represented to Americans. Unlike, say, the depictions of Chinese, which frequently have been influenced by the immigrant status of the Chinese in America."[70] Arabian fantasies could and did arise outside of a Greater Middle Eastern population.

Given the incredibly small population of Arab-Americans, Muslims, or immigrants from the Greater Middle East present in the Coachella Valley, this work does not attempt to recount the ways that these people, whose lives were so deeply shaped by this fantasy, felt about the Arabian theme of the Coachella Valley. We know that in some cases those of Middle Eastern descent participated in the Arabian fantasies; Marshal Peters, for example, who emigrated from Syria in 1898 as an infant, used his knowledge of Arabic to paint welcome signs and other phrases onto the architecture of the date festival prior to 1950. Photographs show him wearing a fez as well.[71] And yet, we don't

[70] McAlister, *Epic Encounters*, 38-39.

[71] "Welcome Photo," *Indio News*, January 16, 1950.

know the ways in which the stereotyping of the Greater Middle East affected him. Was he expected to serve as the spokesperson for a vast and diverse group of people embodied in the Orient of the time? Indeed even if we knew how he felt, the diversity of the Greater Middle East means that others of different ethnicities, nationalities, genders, and religions might have read these Arabian stereotypes in vastly different ways.

My research uncovered very few voices from the Greater Middle East. Occasionally date groves or the date festival received visitors from the region, particularly those described as royalty who completed their education in the United States. While their visits gained notoriety, the local press nearly always remarked that these visitors loved the Coachella Valley, which reminded them of their homes. When the Arabian fantasies were displayed, like at the date festival, their "love" of the event implied an overarching approval of the fantasies from all Middle Easterners. We do not know if the comments from these men and women were simply kind words made to a host, a calculated act of diplomacy, authentic amusement, or homesick appreciation. Their words are always filtered through a white, middle-class press and used to support the notion that the Coachella Valley was at least a partially authentic American Arabia.

And yet though the voices of Americans of Middle Eastern or North African descent are not included in this dissertation, the Arabian fantasies explored here directly affected them. These fantasies constructed the peoples of the Greater Middle East as inferior to Anglo Americans. American scientific comparisons of agriculture in the U.S. and the Orient implied a backward, un-modern, diseased, dirty, superstitious Arabia, while also celebrating the adventure American scientists and entrepreneurs abroad

encountered in their search for the date. The use of Orientalism in date marketing stateside continued these notions and added, alongside American popular culture, an aura of romance and a perception of luxury and ancient knowledge to the Middle East. These perceptions, however, went hand in hand with seemingly conflicting stereotypes that highlighted poverty, despotism, danger, and illiteracy of the region. When the Coachella Valley attempted to differentiate itself to tourists by creating a virtual Arabia in the United States, residents also presented the idea, that the Middle East was an unchanging place and a particularly sexualized one. The oversexed Orient remained a constant message of the Riverside County Fair and National Date Festival, which emphasized white women dressed as harem girls throughout the media and events.

The Coachella Valley's ties with the Orient, mainly the shared agriculture, similar climate, and desert landscapes, suggested, alongside the Arabian fantasies developed there, that the region was an authority on all things Middle Eastern. This contributed to misunderstandings of the Greater Middle East, demonstrated by the use of the Muslim call to prayer during a beauty pageant at the 1949 Date Festival. These stereotypes of the Orient, though not invented by the Coachella Valley and its date industry, were certainly reinforced there. Even if participants in these fantasies felt that they celebrated the Orient, their Orientalism reinforced negative perceptions of the Greater Middle East and its peoples.

These Arabia fantasies also obscured the real histories of the date and the racial, economic, and social hierarchies of the Coachella Valley. The stories told by agricultural explorers, who went abroad in search of date offshoots for California, celebrated the

dangers American faced there and their heroic acts of uniting American science with ancient agriculture and bringing new hope for horticulture in the arid West. But this story shrouds the fact that these scientists virtually absconded with a crop that formed an integral part of the Greater Middle East's economy. The U.S. industry they created birthed a competitive market that at once relied on Arab knowledge and rendered it scientifically inferior while also using American perceptions of the region to claim foreign dates were inferior, dirty, and diseased, just like the people who grew them.

The subsequent celebration of these scientific adventure stories as well as the celebrations of the Middle East staged in the Coachella Valley, from proposed North African styled resorts, to Moroccan inspired date shops, and *Arabian Nights* pageants performed on an Old Bagdad stage also mask regional histories. These celebrations highlight the Arabian origin of the date palm rather than the workers who performed the dangerous work in the palms or packing houses at home. Tying the history of the Coachella Valley to the ancient Orient via the date worked to link the white, middle-class date growers to an older history, allowing them to claim a right to a land, their inheritance as Protestants with special ties to the Holy Land, which they only recently occupied. Thus the appropriation of Native Americans' lands as well as the social and economic hierarchies that placed blacks, Indians, Mexicans, and Asians at the bottom were assumed a natural right for a group of people who claimed a holy and ancient history in the Middle East transported to the deserts of Southern California.

An Untold Story: Date Labor

This dissertation, by virtue of focusing on the development of Arabian fantasies in Southern California, only briefly discusses a major component of the date industry: labor. Taking care of the date palms is year round work; laborers go up into the trees several times during the year to de-thorn the palm, hand pollinate the trees, thin the date bunches, wrap the delicate fruit clusters, and pick the fruit that ripens at different times, sometimes multiple times per tree. The labor required is specialized, continuous, and does not fit within California's tradition of migratory agricultural labor; though some additional seasonal workers are needed during harvest and packing. Workers during the first half of the twentieth century were varied. Local Native Americans, of the Cahuilla tribes, may have engaged in wage labor in the date groves from 1900 through the 1930s. My research also indicates that families, most often Anglo, who invested in the date industry during this early time period, from around 1910-1940, conducted much of the date work themselves. Married partners and their children, for example, completed much of the hand pollinating, picking, packing, and mail order business when the trees were still young and low to the ground. Workers of several ethnicities filled in when additional labor was needed before 1940.

Around World War II, however, the palm trees had grown substantially and reaching the dates required tall ladders or climbing equipment. Such new heights were dangerous and growers during and after this time period continuously lamented the difficulty in finding laborers willing and able to perform such dangerous and highly specialized work. By this time women, who had previously worked alongside their

husbands and other family members, were discouraged from working in the date groves, though they continued to make up the majority of those hired in the ever expanding date packing sheds. When the war industries drew Coachella Valley workers away from agriculture and into defense, the international Bracero Program introduced guest workers from Mexico.[72] Increasingly, Mexican and Mexican American labor took over the majority of date industry labor; eventually date laborers were referred to as palmeros. Matt Garcia argues that in 1964, the year the program ended, braceros made up ninety-one percent of date labor in the Coachella Valley.[73] While the percentage of bracero labor varied throughout the state based on location and crops, this number rested well above the seventy-four percent of California lemon laborers and more than forty percent of melon workers in the San Joaquin, Palo Verde, and Imperial valleys who were braceros.[74]

Bracero workers, in particular, proved so crucial to the crop's success, that date growers petitioned for a guest worker extension for their particular crop.[75] Media

[72] For more on the Bracero program see: Deborah Cohen, *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects in the Postwar United States and Mexico* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011). The Bracero program was intended for seasonal, migratory field work. Thus the date industry proved somewhat of a challenge for the program because date labor was specialized, highly trained, and long term. Braceros were required to return to Mexico after a certain amount of time, which disrupted the desires of the date growers.

[73] Garcia, *From the Jaws of Victory*, 16. For more on braceros who served as palmeros see Mireya Loza, "Braceros on the Boundaries: Activism, Race, Masculinity, and the Legacies of the Bracero Program," (PhD diss., Brown University, 2011). Loza suggests indigenous Mexicans, specifically Oaxacans, often served as palmeros; growers even believed they were less afraid of heights, more accustomed to the heat, and "better equipped to physically carry out this work." Loza, "Braceros on the Boundaries," 95.

[74] Ibid.

[75] Ruben Salazar and Harry Bernstein, "Date Harvest May Get Bracero Help," *Los Angeles Times*, January 15, 1965. The Director of the California Department of Employment approved "the recruiting of 300 foreigners," though additional approvals were needed. The director requested the wages for date growers be increased substantially, given their dangerously high working conditions. He also recommended that the growers use Japanese national workers. "The State: Legislature: Budge Requires New Taxes," *Los Angeles*

coverage of this 1965 move suggested that American workers filled the open farmer worker positions in every harvest except for the dates.[76] When the Bracero program ended, growers responded by bringing in roughly one-hundred Japanese national workers who, local tradition holds, refused the dangerous working conditions.[77] Growers also attempted pollination via helicopter, another effort to resolve their so called labor "crisis."[78] The secretary of California's AFL-CIO summarized the issue at hand in 1965, saying "As long as growers can get foreign workers cheaply, they will not have genuine competition for American labor."[79] Indeed, a *Los Angeles Times* reporter continued, "Higher wages may be needed to attract Americans to the date picking jobs, which require climbing up ladders as high as 80 feet."[80] While date growers did received higher wages than most other farm workers, for many the pay failed to offset the danger. At the

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Times, Jan 31, 1965. By March the U.S. Secretary of Labor denied the date growers' request for foreign workers, requiring them to increase wages for date workers before they could apply again and claim labor shortages. Harry Bernstein, "Date Growers in Coachella Agree to Increase Wages, Lure Workers," *Los Angeles Times*, March 23, 1965. Other coverage from this time period suggested farms across the state claimed farm labor shortages, even after unionized Mexican American groups offered 3,000 American farm workers. "Berry Fields Plowed Under; Growers Await Mexican-American Labor Offer," *San Bernardino County Sun*, May 8, 1965. Ruben Salazar, of course, was the Mexican American journalist who often covered the Chicano community for the *Los Angeles Times*. He was fatally wounded by the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department during the Chicano Moratorium March.

[76] Ibid., Salazar and Bernstein, "Date Harvest May Get Bracero Help."

[77] "OK of Japanese Farm Help in Coachella Valley Asked," *San Bernardino County Sun*, May 8, 1965 and California Date Growers Association, "Japanese Workers Coming to Valley; Helicopter Pollinating Test Okayed," *Date Lines* 2, no. 1 (February 1966); 1-4. Other growers in the state also turned to Japanese nationals. Ventura incorporated about 600 Japanese nationals in their spring 1965 harvests. Harry Bernstein, "Date Growers in Coachella Agree."

[78] California Date Growers Association, "Japanese Workers Coming to Valley." Note that both of these labor saving methods occurred within a short time after the dissolution of the Bracero program. Neither was successful but both speak to the perceived labor shortage faced by the date growers: solutions included both a turn to other inexpensive, international labor and an increase in mechanization to save on labor costs.

[79] Salazar and Bernstein, "Date Harvest May Get Bracero Help."

[80] Ibid.

heart of the matter was the hazardous nature of the work. Palmeros reported falls, spider bites, heat-related maladies, cuts from sharp tools, pesticide exposure, and they worked in high winds, high temperatures, and dangerously tall palms. Specific, palmero safety codes did not exist under California's Division of Occupational Safety and Health (Cal-OSHA) until 2003.[81] The complete history of palmeros is a field open for further exploration, but one that I have not had the space to give due justice here.[82]

While the history of palmeros lies beyond the scope of this dissertation, the Arabian fantasies that developed around the fruit they cultivated had a direct effect on the workers. The celebration of the crop's Middle Eastern origin obscured the contributions of these Mexican and Mexican American laborers. Celebrating only the exotic, Middle Eastern romance of the date refocused attention from labor shortages, unfair wages, poor working conditions, and danger faced by these palmeros (and their female counterparts working in date packing sheds), offering instead images of happy harem girls and sleepy camels. Such celebrations excused consumers from considering workers and their conditions at all, be they foreign labor at home, domestic workers, or foreign laborers- including slaves- in the Middle East itself.[83]

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[81] For regulations specific to palmeros see California Code of Regulation Title 8 Section 3458 and Section 3458.1.

[82] During my time at the Coachella Valley History Museum between 2007 and 2009 I did work to collect at least some oral histories of palmeros and their families in the Coachella Valley. These records can be viewed at the archives of the Coachella Valley History Museum in Indio, California as a part of the Mexican American Pioneer Project Archive.

[83] For more on slavery in the Middle Eastern date industry prior to World War II see Mathew Hopper, "The Globalization of Dried Fruit: Transformations in the Eastern Arabian Economy, 1860-1920s," in *Global Muslims in the Age of Steam and Print,* James L. Gelvin and Nile Green, eds. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014).

Arabian Fantasies in an American Desert

This work begins by recalling the journey of the date to the United States, briefly recounting its presence as a consumer good and ornamental plant prior to its formal, agricultural introduction. Importantly Chapter One explores the United State's Department of Agriculture's intervention through their turn-of-the-twentieth-century agricultural explorer program that brought back date palms from the Middle East. I argue that the agricultural explorer program is best contextualized within its specific moment, reflecting changing attitudes about science and American imperialism that resulted in U.S. scientists assuming the world, and especially its plants, were theirs for the taking.

Chapter One continues by examining the interactions USDA scientists (and to a lesser extent the lay entrepreneurs that followed them) had while in the Greater Middle East as some of the few Americans who traveled to the regions of Iraq, Algeria, and Egypt during the time period. The American popular understandings they brought with them shaped the landscapes and peoples they encountered abroad. Because of their status as experts in the date field, they became experts in all things Arabian. Importantly, they continuously implied that while the Orient held magical romance, it also contained dirty, diseased, backwards, dangerous, and superstitious peoples. This worked not only within American Orientalism of the time, but also introduced a scientific backing for it. Their presence abroad, taking palms that would produce economic competition for North African or Middle Eastern date growers, was justified through the idea that American science was superior to anything possible in the Greater Middle East; so only the United States could bring the date industry into the twentieth century. Thus the USDA's views of

the Orient and the people who lived there were passed on to the general public and, consequently, to date growers and Coachella Valley residents as well.

The story of how Americans embraced the notion of American scientific superiority, alongside the romance of the Greater Middle East, in their commercial endeavors is the story of the second chapter. I introduce Hills Brothers, a company that not only imported enormous amounts of dates from the Arabian Peninsula, but also produced the first major national date marketing campaign. This campaign, that took off in the 1910s and continued throughout the 1930s, utilized the romance implicit in the popular culture of the Middle East to market their dates as luxurious, exotic fruits appropriate for the American table. Moreover, they took up the new science of nutrition to reposition the date as the perfect food. Of course, as the California date industry grew they too took up similar marketing strategies embracing the romance alongside the nutritional breakthroughs.

But Coachella Valley Date Growers added additional layers of American science to their marketing strategies, which by virtue of comparison, positioned date growers in the Orient as inferior. The use of pesticides, pasteurization, fumigation, and sanitary packing plants allowed growers to argue, somewhat convincingly, that U.S. grown dates were superior to imports because they were safer to eat. Growing practices developed by the USDA implied an agricultural superiority found only in the United States, knowledge and practices eventually imported to the Middle East. This chapter, however, also explores the underside of American science. Pesticides and fumigants made date labor

dangerous for all workers involved, especially the packing shed workers who, as the chapter explains, faced dire consequences.

In addition to using scientific Orientalism and extending the idea of consuming the Orient, the date industry also sought to reproduce a virtual Orient in the Coachella Valley. Chapter Three explores how the deserts of Southern California used their natural landscape and altered their geographies in order to create an American Arabia. The renaming of places brought with them connotations of the Near East while resort developments promised to recreate North African villages as tourist destinations. Date shops, too, embraced the Moorish architectural while local theaters celebrated Egypt and the Middle East. The repositioning of the landscape as a virtual Orient drew in tourists' attention not only for the date industry but also for a larger region. These landscape alterations suggest that alternate self styling existed beyond Southern California's Spanish Fantasy Past or the commonly assumed modernist designs of Palm Springs.

Community celebrations brought these landscapes to life. Chapter Four explores the Riverside County Fair and National Date Festival's cultural appropriations of the Greater Middle East. In particular, I investigate the use of costume to embody an Arab population mostly missing from the Coachella Valley. Such cross-cultural dressings of course are not new; here I contextualize the phenomenon in a larger scholarship of American blackface and histories of playing Indian. Indeed, by the time these cultural cross dressings occurred, Americans had long seen racial masquerade as a prominent method of engaging with the Orient. The popularity of the harem girl costume, in particular, embodied a long history of seeing the Middle East as oversexed. Participation

in these community celebrations worked to unite migrants to the region through festival and frivolity. Thus their Anglo identities were reinforced as were social, economic, and cultural ethnic hierarchies even as the celebrations expanded after World War II.

For the most part my study ends in 1965, though the Arabian fantasies in the Coachella Valley continue to this day. However by 1965, the easing of immigration restrictions brought more Greater Middle Easterners to the United States, and the civil rights movement called into question the practice of appropriating other cultures for entertainment or consumption, even as those cultural practices remain with us today. As the 1970s and 1980s progressed, the USDA's funding dried up and their active status in the date industry fell away. At the same time international science caught up to and expanded beyond American research in the date groves. As such, the nation could no longer claim a science as evidence of superiority. Most importantly, public perceptions of the Greater Middle East changed as rapidly as the region itself. Conflicts abroad were brought home on nightly news coverage of oil embargos and a hostage crisis stood in stark contrast to the long romanticized nostalgia for the Middle East of the *Arabian Nights*. Moreover an increasing vilification of Arabs in the media rendered playing Arabian far less appealing to average Anglo American, especially after 9/11. The conclusion brings us to our current moment, a point in time where, because of a current controversy of the Coachella Valley High School's "Arab" mascot, Arab-American voices are finally in conversation with a hundred years of history of America's Arabia.

Chapter One: Dates for the States: The United State's Department of Agriculture and the Birth of the Date Industry in America

In the August 1900 edition of *The Land of Sunshine*, a Southern California-based booster magazine with national circulation, George Hamlin Fitch extolled the beauty of date palm groves that surrounded Palm Springs.[1] With environmentalists calling for the preservation of other large California tree groves throughout California, the author sought to draw similar attention to the desert palms. Fitch imagined the trees as older than the pilgrims, groves so stunning they could "make one bend the knee to the majesty of their many-wintered heads."[2] Visiting this natural wonder, according to Fitch, could be a lovely adventure perfumed with the smell of desert flowers or, when sandstorms made it difficult, give the traveler "a vivid idea of some of the hardships endured by Kitchener's army in its chase of the Mahdi to Ombdurman and the walls of Khartoum. For this is the same old Sahara sandstorm that travelers had pictured as the terror of the caravan."[3] After all, the palms appeared more reminiscent of the Greater Middle East than any found elsewhere else in the United States. In fact, Fitch went on; "Travelers who have seen Northern Africa say that in this little Palm Canon [sic] are reproduced all the features of a

[1] According to Jennifer Watts *The Land of Sunshine* appealed to Easterners "who travelled to warmer climes for pleasure and health and who (most of all) might consider taking up residency under Southern California skies." Watts, Jennifer, 'Picture Taking in Paradise: Los Angeles and the Creation of Regional identity, 1880-1920," in *The Nineteenth- Century Visual Culture Reader,* eds., Vanessa r. Schwartz and Jeannene M. Przyblyski, (New York; Routledge, 2004), 220-221. *The Land of Sunshine* claimed to have the largest circulation of any Western Magazine. "Why is it' Ad, *The Land of Sunshine* 14, no.6 (June 1901): 522.

[2] George Hamlin Fitch, "Where the Date Palm Grows," *The Land of Sunshine* 13, no. 3(August 1900): 135.

[3] Ibid.,136. This is not the only reference to the Greater Middle East: he later mentions that the Palm Springs gardens of Dr. Welwood Murray would delight famed Persian mind, Omar Khayyam.

typical scene in Algiers or Tunis."[4] These picturesque oases, Fitch assured the reader, produced "dark brown dates," that local Native Americans prized.[5]

While the work proclaimed the beauty of date palms in local canyon oases, as well as local gardens and nearby mountains, images of the stunning landscape sold the location to readers as well. These images captured stately palm trees growing in isolated canyons, wild with growth. But the photographs also show something else: these palm trees were not date palms at all. They were, in fact, the only palm tree native to California, the *Washingtonia filifera*, which does not produce dates.[6] This glimpse of a turn-of-the-century discussion about date palms tells us a great deal about the origins of the Coachella Valley's date industry. The *Land of Sunshine* article, for example, speaks not only to the lack of public knowledge about the date during this time period, but also hints at the roles regional and agricultural presses held in inducing the federal government to explore the possibility of date growth in the desert Southwest. After all, United States Department of Agriculture officials responded directly to the letter, asking for more information on the region and its date growing potential.[7]

This chapter explores how dates came to the United States prior to the Civil War and their subsequent journey towards a Western agricultural industry, particularly in California. As interest in dates grew, the United States Department of Agriculture began

[4] Ibid., 139.

[5] Ibid., 139.

[6] The author briefly mentioned the scientific name in the article's only footnote, but he described the "dates" importance to the Cahuilla tribes in great detail, thus we may infer readers assumed canyons of luscious dates grew just outside of Los Angeles long before the USDA brought them there.

[7] Walter Swingle, Letter to Charles Lummis, October 1900. Braun Research Library at the Autry National Center.

to explore for crops abroad, a process that involved numerous international political, scientific, and economic factors. After recounting the USDA's expeditions to bring back date offshoots for the American deserts, I will argue that public recitation of the date's immigration stories suggest that the scientific racism and Orientalist beliefs held by these USDA explorers were transferred to the non-governmental Coachella Valley date growers, a history I discuss in depth in the next chapter.

First Dates: Date Palms in the New World

Scholars suggest that the date first arrived in the New World via Spanish ships.[8] By 1513 date palm plantings had taken root in Cuba. Though they may have been planted for food consumption, the Spanish likely grew the palm for religious purposes, fearful that no palm leaves would be available for Easter or Palm Sunday services.[9] By 1550 Cuba, Jamaica, Puerto Rico, Hispaniola (today's Dominican Republic and Haiti), Panama, and mainland Mexico had date seedlings.[10] These plantings, did not result in

[8] The Canary Island Date Palm, *Phoenix canariensis*, was thought to be a type of date palm until 1882 when it was classified as a separate species. It is difficult to determine which date palms were brought to the New World by the Spanish because both the true date palm and the Canary Island Date Palm are common in Spanish colonial territories and both were found on Canary Islands, a crucial stopover from Spain during the time of exploration. The Canary Island Date produces smaller, edible date-like fruit with inferior flavor. Because of this they were not exported for their fruit, thus it is more likely true date palm seeds made their way to the New World. See D.V. Johnson, et al., "Date Palm (Phoenix dactylifera) Dispersal to the Americas: Historical Evidence of the Spanish Introduction," *Proceedings of the First International Symposium on Date Palm*, ed. N. Bouguedoura, M. Bennaceur, J.-C. Pintaud (Leuven, Belgium: International Society for Horticultural Science, 2013), 99-104.

[9] Donald R. Hodel and Dennis V. Johnson, *Dates: Imported and American Varieties of Dates in the United States* (Oakland: University of California Agriculture and Natural Resources, 2007): 2.

[10] Johnson et al, "Date Palm Dispersal," 100.

much, if any, fruit production because the climate of these regions proved poor for growing dates.[11]

Dates were also introduced to California, Baja, and Arizona through Spanish Missionaries, who may have planted date seeds for similar religious desires. Dates near the Baja missions were so successful that they continued to reproduce and produce dates without human intervention, essentially naturalizing themselves to the region.[12] Several locations in Sonora, Mexico also produced enough dates for local consumption and possibly some trade.[13] While the climate of the mostly coastal Alta California missions produced poor quality dates, fruit did appear on these palms, which continued to grow long after the Alta California missions began to crumble.

Though the American colonies did not grow dates, they did have a taste for the fruit. Thomas Jefferson's granddaughter recalled family races on his lawn, with Jefferson handing out figs, prunes, or dates to the winners.[14] However, long distances between the United States and date growing regions meant dates remained a luxury item reserved for the wealthy. That is not to say that Americans did not try their hand at date growing. In 1818, for example, the *American Monthly Magazine and Critical Review* published a letter from Samuel L. Mitchill, a well known scientist and politician, extolling the virtues

[11] Peru and Chile had successful date orchards as early as 1612, though even today they produce only enough fruit to be locally consumed. Ibid. Additionally dates planted by seed, rather than palm offshoots, generally produce poor quality fruit.

[12] Ibid., 101.

[13] J.W. Toumey, *The Date Palm: Agricultural Experiment Station Bulletin No, 29*. (Tucson: University of Arizona, 1898): 105.

[14] "Flowers Fun Fact: Our Earliest Amusements," Jefferson's Monticello, accessed February 19, 2014, http://www.monticello.org/site/jefferson/fun-fact-flowers. Jefferson's tastes for the fruit may have developed during his time in Europe where dates were more readily consumed.

of dates and encouraging the growth of commercial date plantations stateside. Should dates be grown in the American South, he ventured, the fruit would aid the nation by "insuring copious and substantial aliment for the negros," thereby, "exceedingly increase the work of plantations; and at the same time augment the comfort of those who perform the drudgery of tillage."[15] Not only were date palms less expensive to raise than corn, Mitchill reasoned, but since they were used to feed multitudes abroad, including slaves, dates could help the South maintain its system of unpaid agricultural labor.[16] Mitchill's concern over slave diets played into contemporary ideas that "others," from American slaves to their perceived kin in the Middle East, required entirely different diets to sustain life, though targeted diets could increase their productivity.

Mitchill's proposal to plant date palms sparked some debate, at least within the confines of the *American Monthly Magazine and Critical Review.* Scientists and geographers argued back and forth as to whether the date palm could be successfully cultivated in the United States, particularly in the frost prone South.[17] The lack of available information frustrated those investigating this crop at this early time; indeed they had difficulty locating even the basic Latin name for the plant. Ultimately, the public discussions of the date palm expanded only when a scientist fluent in Spanish and Latin responded in the magazine, noting information on the date present in un-translated

[15] Samuel L. Mitchill, "An Encouragement to the Introduction of the Date-Bearing Palm into the United States. " *American Monthly Magazine and Critica*l Review 4 (1818):49.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Charles G. Haines and William Darby, "Original Communication," *American Monthly Magazine and Critical Review* 3 (1819): 217 and C.S. Rafinesque, "Letter to the Editor of the American Monthly Magazine on the Date-Tree, or Palm," *American Monthly Magazine and Critical Review* 4 no. 6 (April 1819): 466.

botanical texts and gathered through his own travels in the Mediterranean.[18] These public writings were among the first of their kind in suggesting the fruit's potential for the nation, yet they demonstrated the void of date knowledge in the United States prior to this moment.[19] Importantly, they imply that Americans were familiar with the date palm fruit as food. America continued to import dates; in 1824, for example, 44,425 pounds of dates were brought into the country.[20]

Reports suggest that Gold Rush immigrants consumed and planted dates in California in the mid nineteenth century on newly conquered land in the United States. Increased nautical activity from around the world may have facilitated the date's journey to the region. Gold Rush immigrants included men from Chile, Peru, and Sonora, Mexico where date palms already grew; their travel supplies could have included date fruit, with viable seed. Others suggest those who planted date seeds took them mostly from fruit sold in the San Francisco markets, dates that likely came from the Persian Gulf, resulting in better seedling date palms than earlier Spanish or Mexican imports.[21] Some reports indicate that date seeds were planted near the Yuma Territorial prison by soldiers

[18] Rafinesque, "Letter to the Editor."

[19] Rafinesque expanded knowledge by describing hand pollination, listed fourteen different uses for the palm including medicinal uses and the production of ropes and cattle-feed, which could be utilized even if the dates failed to ripen.

[20] Charles C. Colley, "Arizona, Cradle of the American Date Growing Industry, 1890-1916," *Southern California Quarterly* 53, no. 1 (March 1971): 55. For more on America's date importation, separate from the growth of date palms in the United States, see Matthew S. Hopper, "The Globalization of Dried Fruit: Transformations in the Eastern Arabian Economy, 1860-1920s," *Global Muslims in the Age of Steam and Print,* James L. Gelvin and Nile Green, eds. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 158-182.

[21] Walter Swingle, "The Date Palm and Its Culture," *The Yearbook of the United States Department of Agriculture 1900* (Washington: United States Department of Agriculture, 1901): 459. Seeds from the Persian Gulf would have resulted in superior fruit than those obtained from Mexico.

stationed there during the Civil War.[22] It remains unclear if these seeds came from locally sourced provisions, from Sonora for example, or if they were part of the international date trade from the Middle East and Northern Africa.

Perhaps the most well-documented palms from this mid-nineteenth-century time period belonged to J.R. Wolfskill and his family. The first commercial orange grower in California, Wolfskill had a keen interest in fruit production, which may have led him to plant seeds from African dates obtained in the port city of San Francisco. Large date trees sprang up on his ranch in Winters, California, though they took several years to bear any fruit and what grew failed to ripen. The Wolfskills continued to purchase dates in San Francisco and propagate their seed. One of these trees was recorded in 1881 as the only palm in California producing quality, ripe dates, due in part to its close placement near a male palm, which provided needed pollen.[23] Though Wolfskill's date had some regional notoriety, the U.S. public as a whole, paid little attention to a crop they thought better suited for the exotic Orient. The federal government, however, would soon unleash investigations into the date palm and its potential in the United States, spurred by reports from California of swaying date palms.

Cultivating California: The Date Palm's Public Image in the Golden State

Soon newspapers began noting fully grown date palms and calling for additional experimentation with the crop, hoping that it would add to the list of successful

[22] Toumey, *The Date Palm*, 105.

[23] Charles C. Colley, "First Commercial Date Experimentation in California, 1882-1900," *Southern California Quarterly* 55, no. 3 (Fall 1973): 254.

California grown produce. Media reports also hinted that the date palm's ornamental presence reflected the romance of the state's tropical climate and wistful past.[24] The public discussions of these date palms spurred the United States Department of Agriculture to investigate the date palm's potential as a commercial venture.

As California grew as an agricultural focal point, the state's horticulturalists experimented with new plants, noting that once foreign species like the navel orange had made their state world famous. Though press coverage remained hopefully for a new commercial crop, Californians stood frustrated and baffled when their palms refused to produced mature fruit, prior to federal intervention around 1900. Instead, they contributed to the "semi-tropical" climate ascribed to California. The fact that so many plant species, including those touted as tropical and semi tropical, like the naval orange, could grow so well in California's climate helped the state appear to the rest of the nation as a climatic anomaly and an exotic location within the borders of the United States. Such plantings, even in the ornamental stages, insinuated a romanticized foreign landscape, either tropical or Mediterranean, that remained a part of California's charm.

The date palm's link to Spanish missions only heighted the romance of California in public imaginations. Accounts of the date palms at the San Gabriel Mission, for example, contributed to descriptions of California's Spanish Fantasy Past. The Spanish, "Brought the date palm, it is said, from the City of Mexico, to whisper at vesper time of the triumphs of the redeemed. How dreamlike and unreal all this seems as the train goes

[24] The failure to produce good quality fruit in the nineteenth century came first from a lack of knowledge about date cultural practices, including hand pollination. All palms came from seeds, which did not produce true to parent, meaning they were often inferior varieties. Further half the seeds would grow to be males and thus not produce fruit at all. Further the coastal regions failed to get hot and dry enough to completely ripen the fruit.

whirling past the lonely palm tree and old sanctuary, and is lost in the distance."[25] Though the Spanish friars were long gone and the missions now crumbled, the remaining date palms could still transport visitors back to the exotic, romantic, mission days.

Years before any real date commercial production was achieved, California sent date palms to the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, representatives of the state's romantic past and sub-tropical, Mediterranean climate. Two forty-foot trees from Santa Barbara, planted on either end of the California building, and a date palm from San Diego were touted as a "great national curiosity."[26] The San Diego palm, stationed in the center of the California Building, stood as a symbol of the state's mild climate and horticultural astonishments. Exhibit designers hung a placard on the palm "where the respective noon temperatures of Coronado and Chicago are recorded daily." [27] These palms reminded fair visitors of the romance attached to the California landscape. Indeed boosters claimed that the the San Diego palm was "planted by Junipero Serra in San Diego County 123 years ago."[28] Though the date was not native to the state it had already begun to symbolize California, an honor it and other palm species hold even today.

Yet, despite its touted success as a symbol of California and a sought after ornamental palm, until potential growers could be assured of success and convinced that dates could produce fruit in California few, if any, horticulturalists attempted to grow the

[25] As evidenced by "San Gabriel," *Pacific Rural Press,* March 12,1881.

[26] "Up and Doing: California Preparing for the World's Fair," *Los Angeles Times,* August 10,1892.

[27] "Orange County: Southern California's Exhibit at the World's Fair," *Los Angeles Times,* September 25,1893.

[28] Ibid. Of course these claims were likely exaggerated.

fruit commercially. Instead date palm seeds were planted for ornamental purposes or to demonstrate that the palms could grow in California's soil, even though they did not produce ripe fruit. California horticulturalists reported their success at growing ornamental palms in the agricultural press and in general newspapers throughout the state, drawing interest and attention to the possibility of a commercial crop, if only the palms could be enticed to produce mature fruit. As the USDA sought new crops for the arid Southwest, it wanted agriculturalists in California to maximize their climate and landscape for crop production. These press reports, then, spurred the federal government to investigate the cultural practices of the palm so that they might guide horticulturalists towards commercial, rather than ornamental, production of dates. The lack of successful attempts to grow the fruit commercially may explain the USDA's involvement who likely took note of the press coverage of this unique plant.

Suitable Climates? The USDA Explores America's Date Growing Potential

Spurred by various reports on date palms in California, early official inquiries set the stage for United States Department of Agriculture agricultural explorers to obtain date palm offshoots from the Middle East and Northern Africa in hopes that a viable commercial date growing industry could be established in the United States. These official inquiries began as early as 1867, when a USDA employee suggested several potential crops for California, noting that "with government encouragement by grants of land, the entire plain of the Colorado Valley could be cultivated with that invaluable

tree," the date palm, a call mirrored in regional press.[29] About a decade later the sentiment was shared by an American general, who had traveled in the deserts of the Southwest and Mexico before relocating for a time to Egypt. "From what I have seen of the date-producing regions in this part of the world, and from what I know of the Desert of the Colorado," he offered, "I am inclined to believe that the greater portion of the later region can be made productive and very valuable by making plantations of the date palm."[30] The general sent date seeds for experimentation which, upon the recommendation of the U.S. Commissioner of Agriculture, were tested in San Diego.[31]

Before investing heavily in research or obtaining date palms abroad, the USDA needed to be sure that the date palm could live in the United States and produce a market quality crop. In 1882 the USDA commissioned a survey of California for established date palms and identification of potential growing locations. A project report, *Culture of the Date*, published by the USDA in 1883, suggested that the fruit might be raised commercial in the West [32] The report's conclusions about California were equally important. It insinuated that given proper care and fertilization, as well as offshoot imports, California could grow dates in part because of its hot, dry summers. Not only

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[29] Alexander S. Taylor, "California Products," reprinted in *Sacramento Daily Union*, May 13, 1867. The Colorado Valley and Desert designations are misleading; they refer to the region obtaining water from the Colorado river and span from Arizona through California into the Coachella Valley.

[30] "General Stone," *Los Angeles Herald*, March 9, 1878. This was also reported in the *Pacific Rural Press*, the *Sacramento Daily Union*, and the *Daily Alta California* as well.

[31] "Agricultural Notes," *Pacific Rural Press*, June 1, 1878. He also suggested hand pollination.

[32] Portions were also reprinted in *The Pacific Rural Press*, a favorite paper for agriculturalists. "Date Growing in California, *Pacific Rural Press*, August 25, 1883 and Klee, *Culture of the Date*. It also included a translation of a German article about date palms, expanding date knowledge immensely. This provided information on the date's origin, history, and optimal climates as well as information on how to plant, propagate, irrigate, harvest, and use the date palm.

was California a match for the date palm, but the date palm could help develop the West, since the plant thrived in regions too hot for grapes, with soil too poor for other fruit, and with water too "alkaline" for other agricultural production.[33] The report recommended date production for "a large part of this western coast in Southern and Central California, as well as parts of Arizona and Colorado wherever water of some kind may be procured."[34] The date, in effect, would "become an important enterprise in many regions now considered comparatively worthless."[35]

Interestingly, though the report pointed to Arizona and to the Tulare Lake Basin of California as potential growing spots, it failed to mention the deserts of Southern California, particularly the Coachella Valley, which would eventually grow over ninety-five percent of all dates in the United States. Several factors may have influenced this exclusion. Though long inhabited by the Cahuilla peoples, the Coachella Valley remained a remote location for other Californians, with little outside settlement or development. The Southern Pacific Railroad finished a line through the valley, connecting Los Angeles to Yuma in 1877, though the Sunset Route linking Los Angeles and New Orleans was not completed until 1883. While the railroad made travel to the region much easier, the lack of water remained an issue even for the trains. Wells were drilled at various locations, but sufficient artesian water was not found until 1894.[36] Both the railroad, which opened

[33] Ibid., 8.

[34] Ibid., 8.

[35] Ibid., 24.

[36] Ole J. Nordland, *Coachella Valley's Golden Years* (Coachella; Coachella Valley Country Water District, 1968): 103.

markets and brought settlers, and the establishment of artesian wells were crucial requirements for desert agriculture.

The 1883 survey called directly for the government to obtain date offshoots from dates in Northern Africa, Persia, and Spain that produced earlier fruit so that they might match the climate conditions of California and Arizona. It also argued for experimentation, with more easily obtained seeds, in areas that had alkaline soil to determine their success. The USDA would take up this join cause- of offshoot importation and crop experimentation- with hopes of creating a profitable new industry in the American Southwest. While the USDA investigated the crop, increasing numbers of civilians experimented with date seed plantings particularly in California and Arizona, confirming that dates palms could thrive and produce mature fruit in these regions.[37] Because this seed did not produce true to the parent plant, variations could lead to poor quality dates. Since fifty percent of all seed planted turned into male palms which did not produce dates, the seedling experimentations were doomed to fail from a commercial standpoint. The experiments however, proved a crucial step in recognizing the region's ability to sustain the industry.

With little exception, date palms in the United States since the time of Spanish colonialism had been cultivated from seed, a large disadvantage to date production. Even the USDA had distributed date seed directly to those interested in growing the palms.[38] Commercial production required offshoots, small, genetically identical palms, that grew

[37] For more information on seed experimentation in Arizona see Colley, "Arizona, Cradle of the American Date," and Toumey, *The Date Palm*.

[38] A. A. Wheeler, "Date Palms and Dates," *Pacific Rural Press,* January 9, 1897.

under a parent tree. To rectify this situation, the USDA turned first to their established network of diplomats and foreign dignitaries whom they relied on to obtain seeds and plant specimens from abroad. In the summers of 1890 and 1891 the USDA obtained, possibly for the first time, date plant offshoots from the Middle East and Northern Africa. Nine palms were sent from Algeria. The U.S. Consul General in Cairo sent more than fifty palms from Egypt, purchasing them for $200 after the Mauritius colony declined them.[39] The Vice- Consul from Muscat, Arabia sent an additional six.

Earlier seed experimentation and surveys done by the USDA suggested that the palms grew best in the American Southwest so the USDA arranged for the palms' transportation to the region. Agricultural experiment stations in Tulare and Pomona, California as well as Phoenix, Arizona received offshoots. Trees were also sent to enterprising individuals who agreed to care for the palms and report back on their welfare. A San Diego railroad man and rancher, Frank Kimball, obtained several palm trees, though the USDA gave specific instructions that he provide five palms to the Southern Pacific Railroad Company for planting in Indio, California. This early link between the USDA and the Southern Pacific in the Coachella Valley continued with the railroad transporting the palms free of charge.

The various experiment stations kept meticulous notes of the date palms over the next several years finding that in some cases where pollination was facilitated, mature fruit ripened on the tree. This small importation of seventy-four palms quickly multiplied

[39] C. H. Shinn, "The African Date Palm," *Report of Work of the Agricultural Experiment Stations of the University of California For the Year 1891-92*, ed E. W. Hilgard (Sacramento: University of California-College of Agriculture, 1893) , 145.

as the replanted offshoots began producing their own suckers, upwards of thirty per tree. While the palms given to the Arizona, Pomona, and Tulare experiment stations thrived, as did offshoots in the Coachella Valley, while palms transported to Yuma were destroyed in a flood in 1891.[40] The imported date palms, however, did not just suffer from climatic extremes, but from human interference as well. Offshoots planted at Frank Kimball's San Diego ranch, for example, were removed and burned by the new owner after Kimball sold the property, despite his warning that the plants were under the protection of the Department of Agriculture. The new owner, who replanted the area with citrus told Kimball, "I know what a naval orange tree is worth. I don't know what a date tree is worth," reflecting the continued lack of certainty surrounding the date's economic future.[41] Without a separate section in charge of plant introduction, the USDA struggled to maintain statistics on the plants introduced from abroad. With a vast array of soil conditions, climatic conditions, and irrigation possibilities systematically experimenting with each introduced crop and variety was essential as was keeping track of the experiments and their outcomes.

Though this first importation of offshoots met with limited success, it provided crucial inroads for the future of the date industry, officially establishing the crop's viability in arid desert regions like Arizona and the Coachella Valley as well as the cooler climates of Southern California and the nearby Central Valley. In another sense, however, the importation was a disaster. As the palms began to grow horticulturalists

[40] Ibid., 118-121. In the Coachella Valley, despite the negligence of the man trusted to care for the palms, three of five survived even with improper care.

[41] Ibid.

found that many supposed female palms turned out to be male. Because males do not produce fruit and fewer are needed for pollination, this limited the amount of potential date producers. When offshoot palms are removed from a parent tree they always remain the same sex as the parent tree. In this case the fact that the offshoot palms were not true to sex disturbed the USDA. This implied that the dates were not offshoot palms, but instead seedling dates whose sex was undeterminable until they blossomed several years after planting. Further evidence of this appeared when the palms produced different varieties of dates then expected; an unwelcomed surprise given that offshoots always produce the same variety as their parent palm. [42]

The possibility that the imported offshoots were actually seedlings pushed the USDA towards more direct methods of obtaining offshoots. They could not trust consular officials abroad to obtain correctly labeled offshoots; there were few other options than to supervise the process in a more hands on fashion. After the seedling swindle, the USDA began to contemplate a wider agricultural explorer service that would gather new crops abroad, including dates. The cost of such an endeavor, however, meant that the USDA needed to have a trustworthy location to send their date offshoots for further experimentation. The University of Arizona and its Arizona Agricultural Experiment Station, which had already proved that earlier imported "offshoots" could thrive in the region, provided a critical base for the USDA's venture to import offshoots: a promise to care for, irrigate, and report on any date palms that the USDA would provide to them.[43]

[42] Toumey, 124.

[43] Swingle, "The Date Palm and Its Culture," 460. College based experiment stations, like this one, were run from land grant universities and the direct result of legislation including the 1887 Hatch Act that aimed

Offshoots obtained via USDA agricultural explorers would be sent to the Arizona experiment station at Tempe, in the Salt River Valley, though eventually date growing activity would move towards California's deserts.[44]

USDA Takes Root: The Federal Government and the Remaking of American Crops

By signing an act of Congress in May 1862, Abraham Lincoln established the United States Department of Agriculture, the organization most responsible for introducing the date palm as a commercial crop in the United States. Though the federal government was involved in introducing and distributing new plant species prior to the USDA establishment, it would be the USDA and their (variously named) Section of Seed and Plant Introduction that successfully provided new crops, varieties, and genetic materials to farmers through America, from the avocado to the date.

Though it had tested the waters of plant introduction prior to the USDA's establishment in 1862, the federal government moved slowly to introduce new varieties and species of crops until the turn of the twentieth century. Exchange of seeds continued to occur between the department and foreign nations, via direct scientific exchange, consulate officials abroad, and the U.S. Navy. The new department also maintained experimental gardens in Washington, DC where caretakers tested, grew, and distributed

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to expand American agriculture and access to information about it. Experiment stations like this one and others run directly by the USDA had long been favored to receive seeds and plants from abroad since they had the expertise to care for them and the ability to maintain records.

[44] Ibid., 463.

various crops including the naval orange that would revolutionize Southern California's agricultural heritage.[45]

The biggest plant introduction projects undertaken at the USDA, however, would not arrive until the Section of Seed and Plant Introduction was established in1898. Changing names often in its tenure, the Section of Seed and Plant Introduction sent agricultural explorers across the globe to "bring into this country for experimental purposes any foreign seeds and plants which might give promise of increasing value and variety of our agricultural resources."[46] The section would come to obtain, through exchange, purchase, or exploration, new crops, varieties, and genetic material; conduct elementary testing on their viability in the United States; distribute the plants to federal or state experiment stations; and select farmers who would participate in early experiments.

The establishment of the section allowed for plant hunting expeditions abroad, a phenomenon that reflected the nation's new geographic, economic, political, and scientific realities. American territory expanded rapidly in the mid-nineteenth century with the conquest of large portions of the West from Mexico, the acquisition of the Oregon Territory, and the purchase of Alaska in 1867. Migrants from the United States began to settle these regions immediately, finding new climates and soils as they went.

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[45] John A. Stevenson, "Plants, Problems, and Personalities: The Genesis of the Bureau of Plant Industry," *Agricultural History* 28, no. 4 (October 1954): 158.

[46] W. H. Hodge and C. O. Erlanson, "Federal Plant Introduction: A Review," *Economic Botany* 10, no. 4 (1956): 302. The office began as the Section of Seed and Plant Introduction (1898) and became The Office of Seed and Plant Introduction (1904), the Office of Foreign Seed and Plant Introduction (1908), The Office of Foreign Plant Introduction (1926), the Division of Foreign Plant Introduction (1931), the Division of Plant Exploration and Introduction (1934), The Plant Introduction Section (1954), the New Crops Research Branch (1958) and the Germplasm Resources Laboratory (1973). Howard Hyland, "History of U.S. Plant Introduction," *Environmental Review* 2, no. 4 (1977): 28. The Section will be referred to as the Section of Seed and Plant Introduction in this dissertation.

By the turn of the twentieth century these lands had become more heavily populated: connected by transcontinental railroads and filled in by homesteaders.[47] Crops that thrived in the East and South did not necessarily make for successful agriculture in further west, especially in more arid regions.[48]

Because America's western frontier was perceived as settled, the United States turned its eyes elsewhere for new lands. The Spanish American War sent Americans abroad, ending with nation's possession of the Philippines, Guam, and Puerto Rico. Hawaii became a U.S. territory in 1898 as well. While American agriculture and commerce had long influenced these regions, their acquisition gave the federal government motive to explore for new tropical plants.[49] Indeed the USDA sent trained tropical botanists to Puerto Rico for an "investigation of its possibilities," during the Spanish American War.[50] Successful introductions of new crops in these territories could allow Americans to import agricultural goods at much lower prices, while diversifying island economies could protect American investments abroad.[51] David Fairchild, leader in the Section of Seed and Plant Introduction, recognized the importance of agriculture to

[47] Of course railroad cars also opened up new markets and refrigeration cars extended the range perishable fruits and vegetables could travel to market. These factors pushed homesteaders into new lands as well.

[48] Knowles A. Ryerson, "History and Significance of the Foreign Plant Introduction Work of the United States Department of Agriculture," *Agricultural History* 7, no. 3 (July 1933): 122 and National Archives, "Finding Aid for Photographs of the Office of Foreign Seeds and Plant Introduction and Successor Offices," accessed February 19, 2014, http://research.archives.gov/description/516515.

[49] Ryerson, "History and Significance," 122.

[50] David Fairchild, "The Date Palm," Unpublished Manuscript from the Archives of the Fairchild Tropical Gardens, 8.

[51] For more see Richard A. Overfield, "Science Follows the Flag: The Office of Experiment Stations and American Expansion," *Agricultural History* 64 no. 2 (Spring 1990): 34-36.

imperialism, linking introduced plants to success in new nations and new colonies. "All colonizing nations," he continued, "established botanic gardens in their new colonies, one important function of which is to secure and distribute exotic economic plants throughout the colony."[52] Research experiment stations, separate from agricultural exploration, were established in many of these territories to provide new scientific understanding and test new products in these tropical regions.[53]

Politics and economics at home influenced plant exploration at the turn of the twentieth century as well. The Civil War and Reconstruction meant new economic and labor realities for the South. In turn, the federal government sought new crops and varieties for former cotton lands.[54] During the second half of the nineteenth century, the United States increasingly turned its attention towards industrialization, leaving agriculturalists hoping for new crops or varieties that could be grown more quickly, with less labor, or in less space. This promise of more efficient productivity also drove agricultural explorers to locate plants that could better serve the growing nation.

As the imperialist tendencies and pursuit of global markets indicate, America at the turn of the century was on a quest of nation building. Part of this nation building was an escalation of government bureaucracy that arose out of the Civil War. More than

[52] Ryerson, "History and Significance," 111.

[53] The USDA oversaw stations in Hawaii, Puerto Rico, Guam, and Alaska with the Philippine station, developed under their territorial government, transferred to the USDA as well. Congress felt that the U.S. "should extend the benefits of agricultural science to the new territories that wherever the American flag was, residents should have the benefits of the experimentation and agriculture develops." Overfield, "Science Follows the Flag," 31.

[54] Ibid., 119.

200,000 new federal employees were hired between 1861-1901.[55] Many of these employees went to new departments, like the Department of Agriculture, whose establishment also signaled bureaucratic expansion. This trend towards bureaucracy allowed for new inroads in agriculture to fall under the purview of the federal government; agricultural success, including the introduction of new varieties and crops, would continue to support nation building efforts to establish the nation as superior economically and scientifically. This period saw an increase in professionalization as well, which meant those filling the bureaucratic roles were more likely to have training and education in their field.[56] These professionals made up the agricultural explorer teams that were sent abroad to expertly locate new crops and varieties for transport.

The nation building quest was also supported by a growing public role of science in the during the time period, one that also found its way into bureaucratic institutions like the USDA. The Morrill Land-Grant College Act of 1862 allowed states to establish colleges focused on agriculture, which not only provided trained bureaucratic scientists for the federal government, but also fostered an environment open to new crop varieties and research. The 1887 Hatch Act provided the land-grant colleges with funds to establish experiment stations. This scientific experimentation in agriculture encouraged the federal government to bring back as many new plant species as possible because homes at well-staffed experiment stations awaited them. The dissemination of

[55] James Q. Wilson, "The Rise of the Bureaucratic State," *The Public Interest*, no. 41, (Fall 1975): 88.

[56] For more on the professionalization and agriculture see David B Danbom, "The Agricultural Experiment Station and Professionalization: Scientists' Goals for Agriculture," *Agricultural History* 60, no. 2 (Spring 1986): 246-255.

agricultural information and extension-learning services were encouraged by later legislation and through the publication of research materials from the USDA.

Though diseases had affected American agriculture for centuries, the second half of the nineteenth century saw increasing attention placed on them and indeed more cause for concern. This stemmed in part from the introduction of crops to new climates and soils, a reliance on monoculture instead of varied crop plantings, and even the more widespread fertilization of fields.[57] While entomologists and mycologists explored methods to eradicate plant diseases and pests, many retained hope of finding new varieties of crops that were more resistant to fungus, bacteria, and insects.[58] The search for these new varieties that could be planted in place of or breed with the susceptible plants also pushed the USDA to devote funding to agricultural exploration.

Farmers themselves focused attention on better plants and new varieties. One scientist suggested that American farmers, well educated and ever open to change, "cannot get the seeds or plants to experiment with nor do the papers tell enough to enable them to judge whether there is any chance of successfully growing these strange crops on their new lands."[59] Farmers then, needed two things: specimens of these new plants and knowledge as to whether (and how) they could thrive in their region. While agricultural

[57] " Paul D. Peterson, Jr., Clay S. Griffith, and C. Lee Campbell, "Frank Lamson-Scribner and American Plant Pathology, 1885-1888," *Agricultural History* 70 no. 1 (Winter 1996): 33.

[58] During the 1870s, study of plant disease often focused on mycology, the study of fungus. The USDA established a section of Mycology in 1885, which remained separate from its Section of Entomology. Eventually the department also established a Section of Plant Pathology.

[59] David Fairchild, "Our Plant Immigrants," *National Geographic* 17, no. 4 (April 1906): 180. Fairchild also argued that unlike the peasants of the rest of the world who simply followed in their father's footsteps, Americans embraced change as pioneers, always seeking the new opportunities to prosper. This vision of American exceptionalism was certainly not a unique view.

explorers went abroad to obtain collections they would also come to produce and circulate agricultural knowledge. While abroad the USDA would gather information about a plant's optimal climate, soil, irrigation, pollination, propagation, fertilization, and picking/packing practices. This information would clue them in as to the best place to experiment with the crops stateside. When the crops viability was verified, specimens would be distributed, along with published scientific information, to interested growers in the region. Thus the USDA's Section of Seed and Plant Introduction filled the farmer's desire for seed and knowledge.

Agricultural exploration became possible at the turn of the twentieth century for a multitude of geographic, economic, political, and scientific reasons. Though most new agricultural material came through international exchange or purchases, the establishment of the USDA's Section of Seed and Plant Introduction, under the leadership of trained scientist David Fairchild, set the stage for journeys around the world in search of new plants and seeds as well as agricultural knowledge. While these journeys took explorers to China, Russia, Europe, South America and beyond, they also took them to the birthplace of the date- the Middle East and Northern Africa. Explorers sought drought-tolerant plants and new varieties of grazing plants, grasses, and cottons there, but they also hoped to bring back not only good date seed but also date offshoots, a crucial step in the development of the commercial date industry in Southern California.

The Quest for the Offshoot: Agricultural Explorers Import Dates

With the Section of Seed and Plant Introduction established, agricultural explorers were sent around the world on official business of the USDA. Because trips were so costly, most expeditions visited multiple locations and sought to collect a wide variety of plants suited to the United State's varied landscapes. Department leaders turned their attention to the date palm very early in these agricultural expeditions, with offshoots collected in the very first voyages. Section founders, David Fairchild and Walter Swingle, and a handful of other botanists would explore Northern Africa, Egypt, the Middle East, and parts of Pakistan for the best date offshoots.[60] This small group of federal employees birthed an industry: the date palms they obtained abroad quickly produced more offshoots and public interest in growing palms for commercial gain.

Agricultural explorer Walter Swingle championed the date early on, scouring libraries for materials related to dates and learning Arabic in the process. His studies identified Algeria's Deglet Noor date as one of the most desirably varieties, particularly because of the high prices it obtained on the European and American market. When Swingle set out on a tour of the Mediterranean around 1898, the Secretary of Agriculture specifically instructed him to visit a date orchard on the Algerian coast and other date

[60] The varied journeys to obtained dates abroad are too numerous to detail here. Swingle championed the date early on and made the first explorations. Indeed Swingle is likely the USDA employee most responsible for its introduction and long-term success in California. For more information on the agricultural explorer's journeys abroad see. Fairchild, "The Date Palm," 1-2; Swingle, "The Date Palm and Its Culture,"; David Fairchild, *The World was my Garden,* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1938); Laflin, "The Story of Dates Part I,"; David G. Fairchild, *Persian Gulf Dates and Their Introduction Into America USDA Bulletin no. 54* (Washington: United States Department of Agriculture, 1903); Thomas H. Kearney, *Date Varieties and Date Culture in Tunis, USDA Bulletin no. 92* (Washington: United States Department of Agriculture, 1906).

gardens near Biskra.[61] While abroad, Swingle relied heavily on French understandings and practices in colonized Algeria.[62] With the help of a French colonial scientist and the largest French date company in Algeria, Swingle arranged for the first significant importation of date offshoots to the United States in May 1900, roughly four hundred palms.[63] While Swingle's early imports were watched over at experimental gardens in Arizona and California, other agricultural explorers continued the search for other date varieties that could be commercially grown in the United States.

David Fairchild, leader of the Section of Seed and Plant Introduction, quickly transitioned to become an agricultural explorer for the section instead, surveying many of the date growing regions of the world, including Egypt.[64] When given the opportunity to explore India or Persia, Fairchild opted for the Middle East. "I did not know of a single soul," he explained, "who had been to Bagdad [sic], and the date plantations of Mesopotamia and the Persian Gulf region had never been explored."[65] With the verdict still out on the best variety of date to grow in the United States, Fairchild hoped the dates

[61] Swingle, "The Date Palm and Its Culture," 459. Swingle prepared for the journey with a stop in France, whose colonial presence in Northern Africa tied the nation to the crop. In France he learned that Algeria proved the easiest accessible place to find dates, especially his preferred Deglet Noor variety. Arriving in Biskra in Spring 1899 Swingle sent twenty offshoots to the United States though the majority died in route. Fairchild, "The Date Palm," 3.

[62] Ibid.

[63] Swingle, "The Date Palm and Its Culture,"460 and Laflin, "The Story of Dates Part I," 23. Agricultural explorers during this time period imported many varieties of dates until experiment stations at home confirmed the best type to grow in their specific region. Swingle correctly identified the Deglet Noor as a good variety to grow in the United States but at this early time he, and other explorers, imported more than just this type.

[64] He would eventually return to head the department, though it appears until he married, he preferred travel and exploration to managing the department. For more on the circumstances of Fairchild's transition see Fairchild, *The World was my Garden*.

[65] Ibid., 222.

grown in the Persian Gulf would better match the climatic conditions. Aided by the American agent for Hills Brothers, the largest American importer of dates, Fairchild connected with their date buyer Haji Abdulla Negem. Negem helped Fairchild obtain offshoots from varieties not yet imported to the United States and varieties that were more familiar to the American consumer.[66] Near Baghdad he obtained additional offshoots, this time of the dry date varieties that would become established in the Coachella Valley.[67]

Fairchild also contracted out with locals to obtain dates from regions he was afraid to visit, especially the Panjgur date growing region in what is now Pakistan. Farichild heard that Europeans refused to enter the region without a guard, because "the inhabitants are quite uncivilized and are continually at war."[68] Fairchild sent "an expedition of natives," to get offshoots..[69] When Farichild returned to the area and "was delighted to find a picturesque group of native Baluchistanese in white turbans and loose white costumes awaiting us on the shore. They had succeeded in securing twenty-four varieties."[70] While their exotic appearance piqued Fairchild's interest, he lamented the fact that in order not to tax their camels they procured tiny offshoots, which did not survive the trip to the United States.[71]

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[66] Ibid., 236.

[67] Ibid., 240.

[68] Fairchild, *Persian Gulf Dates*.

[69] Fairchild, *The World was my Garden*, 227.

[70] Ibid., 242.

[71] Ibid., 242.

Though agricultural explorers relied heavily on assistance from native peoples, they often expressed disappointment in the results of the collaboration, especially when specific guidelines like the size of offshoots were not communicated in advance. Centuries of Orientalism colored agricultural explorers' interactions with peoples they encountered abroad. Fairchild, for example, feared those who lived in the Pakistani date region, a perception likely heightened by understandings of foreign others as potentially dangerous, cruel, and treacherous, with a taste for blood. The territory appeared a virtual no man's land, devoid of civilization, though clearly it was peopled and produced dates "sold in large quantities in India."[72] Even though he perceived the Baluchistanese as friendlier, they appeared childlike and incompetent, unable to complete his requests. Their descriptions as "picturesque" and garbed in white with turbans impart a sense of romance as well, implying a peaceful but simple group. Indeed though native peoples provided incredible services for Fairchild during his voyages, their work is acknowledged entirely differently than the assistance he received from Europeans in the region, who are named and described in detail. The native peoples Fairchild encounters appear as part of the landscape, romanticized as natural and ancient.

The difficulty explorers faced with language hindered their work. Farichild, for example, knew little Arabic and fretted that his interpreters failed him. Indeed with so few English-speaking botanists traveling to Egypt or Persia, or the world for that matter, to talk about plants it is not hard to imagine that interpreters would lack the scientific or agricultural words needed to broker offshoot deals or locate parent palms. Fairchild once

[72] Ibid., 227.

tasted a date in a local market so delicious he set out on a decades long quest to locate the fruit. Ultimately he learned that the type was one already established in the United States. In this case the date's name, "Wahi," translated simply to "oasis." Of course all dates come from an Oasis, but a better understanding of native tongues might have saved Fairchild and his department time and money.[73]

Agricultural explorers continued to search for new varieties of dates well into the twentieth century, with additional expeditions to Tunis, Egypt, and Libya between 1905 and 1920.[74] When laymen (with support from the USDA) began to import date palms for commercial profits in the early 1910s, the USDA focused their attention instead to experimentations with their previously imported date offshoots rather than importing new varieties. Department scientists turned to controlling pests and diseases, fostering offshoot transfer, indentifying proper pollination and irrigation practices, and other tasks needed to support the growing number of citizens attempting to grow dates for sale. By the 1910s interested farmers, with the help of the USDA, were beginning to pick which varieties not only thrived in which regions but which of those varieties worked well in the American market. North African styled Deglet Noor dates matched the Coachella Valley whose landscape, soils, and climate closely mirrored that of their homeland.

European markets, however, valued another variety, one that was so beloved nearly all the fruit was sent to the continent; very little, if any, reached the United States.

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[73] Fairchild, "The Date Palm." Indeed the quest for the Wahi led the USDA to commission an Englishman in Egypt to search for it, the appointment of a Syrian botanist who studied in the United States, and the partnership with a Jewish Palestinian scientist, all of which failed to produce the date. Fairchild *The World Was my Garden*, 188-189, 356-357, 366-367.

[74] Kearney, *Date Varieties;* Fairchild, "The Date Palm," 17; Fairchild, *The World was my Garden*, 404.

This date, grown mostly in Morocco and a few oases Algeria, was the Tafilet date, now widely known as the Medjool. As early as 1904, members of the USDA noted that the Tafilet variety were a superior fruit that sold well in London. They also recorded, however, that "in the present unsettled state of trans-Atlasian Morocco it would be hazardous for Americans or Europeans to venture there."[75]

Tafilet/ Medjool date seeds were imported for planting but, as with other varieties, offshoots were needed to secure the best specimens of fruit.[76] When explorers had been to Northern Africa in search of other dates they could not access Medjool offshoots. In fact a 1912 report suggested "it has been impossible to secure offshoots on a commercial scale because of the state of anarchy and warfare in which Morocco is sunk."[77] Eventually Walter Swingle was invited to Morocco in 1927 to study a disease that was ravaging the variety, traveling with the French army to ensure military protection in the contested colonial country. There he became friendly with a leader in the Bou Denib oasis. At dinner Swingle learned that the locals were grossly underpaid for their dates, which sold at much higher prices at the London market. If the locals would grade their dates and keep the flies away, Swingle reasoned, they obtain much higher prices. The local leader, grateful for this new information, assisted Swingle in learning more about Medjools. When Swingle asked if he could purchase offshoots for the United States the

[75] Walter T. Swingle, *The Date Palm and Its Utilization in the Southwestern States Bulletin no. 53* (Washington: United States Department of Agriculture, 1904), 39.

[76] Hodel and Johnson, *Dates: Imported and American,* 25.

[77] Paul B. Popenoe, *Date Growing in the Old World and the New* (Altadena: West India Gardens, 1913), 262. Walter Swingle may have obtained a few offshoots, though they did not yet result in a Tafilet industry in the United States.

leader obliged. Swingle shipped home eleven Medjool offshoots, which arrived in Washington after a after week journey.[78] Because the disease Swingle set out to study, the Baioudh disease, was slowly killing the entire date industry of Morocco, USDA officials were especially concerned with the quarantine of these plants. Therefore, the USDA quarantined the offshoots for several years in Nevada, a date-palm free state.[79] Their offshoots were eventually distributed to commercial growers. Swingle, then, was responsible for introducing the two most widely grown dates in the United States: the Deglet Noor and the Medjool.

The USDA agricultural explores of the Section of Seed and Plant Introduction brought back over a hundred varieties of date palms from abroad. In doing so, they partnered with USDA and university scientists to test which varieties not only grew best in American soil but also which types of dates could best be marketed and sold. The thousands of palm offshoots they imported produced, in turn, thousands more offshoots, which were eventually distributed to non-governmental land owners who wanted to experiment with growing the crop for commercial use.

Experimental Zone: The USDA Transfers Date Research from Arizona to California

Early USDA scientists put their hope into Arizona's date growing future despite the agricultural press's earlier call to plant dates in California. In fact, Fairchild predicted

[78] Walter . Swingle, "Introduction of the Medjhool Date from Africa Into the United States," *Report of the Twenty-Second Annual Date Grower's Institute* (Indio: The Date Institute, 1945), 15.

[79] Ibid., 15-16.

that date palms "will not, I believe, ever produce good dates in Southern California," as late as 1898.[80] Farichild's view of Southern California, however, was limited to "Santa Barbara and the coastel [sic] region," so often promoted in California's vision of itself.[81] Observing irrigation in Northern Africa and the Middle East, however, actually encouraged agricultural explorers to consider establishing agriculture in untapped desert areas. As one of the first American settlements in the California deserts, the Coachella Valley quickly proved a promising region for date growing. Railroad expansion through the Coachella Valley in the late 1800s not only brought in new residents but also triggered the development of artisanal wells, health camps, and table crop agriculture in the region. University of California scientists identified the Coachella Valley as a place where dates might grow well in an 1893 report. The native *Washingtonia filifera* palm trees, though not date producers, looked similar to the date palm, and those who observed their extensive growth in the Coachella Valley inferred that their success suggested the success of the date palm.[82]

Most notably however, American science and technology began to transform the region. Around 1900 the California Development company turned to the Colorado River as a means to irrigate California's desert southwest.[83] Hoping to arrange a great project of "reclamation," the project brought water to the fertile region of the Coachella and

[80] Fairchild, "The Date Palm," 4.

[81] Ibid.

[82] C. H. Shinn, "The African Date Palm," 147.

[83] The region in question was referred to as the Salton Basin and the Salton Sink. It stretched from Yuma and the Mexico border north west to the Palm Springs region, including much of the Colorado Desert. The region includes both the Imperial and Coachella Valleys.

Imperial Valley known as the Salton Sink, thus allowing widespread irrigation for the first time.[84] This irrigation project eventually flooded the Salton Sink region for nearly two years, 1905-1907, creating the Salton Sea in the process.[85] The addition of artisan water in the northern Salton Basin, in the Indio region, also added the promise of date growing, made more desirable by the established railroad traffic in that region.

An investigation into the soil of the Salton Basin in 1901 suggested that it resembled soil in Northern Africa which, partnered with the advances in irrigation, pushed the region to the forefront of date growing. Between 1900 and 1904, Walter Swingle took samples of soil in date growing regions for the Bureau of Soils while exploring for offshoots. The Bureau tested these samples from the Sahara Desert and compared them to soil in the Salton Basin.[86] The soil types matched surprisingly well. Swingle suggested that date culture "is the only profitable culture that can be followed on

[84] Reclamation was a popular idea of the day, it "reclaimed," land for farm use through the introduction of irrigation. The Bureau of Reclamation was established around this time in 1902.

[85] Prior to this flood the Salton Basin retained the interest of USDA scientists who studied dates. Swingle, *The Date Palm and its Utilization*. See page 104 for a brief history of the irrigation project. In 1903 it had irrigated 100,000 acres in the lower Salton Basin, likely in the Imperial Valley. Swingle concluded Colorado River water was fine irrigation water given its lower alkali content. Though the project at hand ended with the flooding of the Salton Sea, later this Colorado River water would be diverted to the Coachella Valley's date fields with the creation of the All American Canal. To learn more about the story of the Salton Sea see Patricia Laflin, "The Salton Sea: California's overlooked Treasure," *Periscope* (Indio: Coachella Valley Historical Society, 1995).

[86] Swingle, *The Date Palm and its Utilization*,106. The University of California also reviewed the soil around 1901. In addition in 1903, Bernard G. Johnson, a local laborer, left the Coachella Valley bound for Algiers. Once there he purchased 127 date offshoots and shipped them back to the United States, partnering with a land developer from the Coachella Valley to pay for their transportation to the town of Mecca, California. Thus the first non-federally backed, private importation of dates was made to the Coachella Valley, an important step away from scientific research towards commercial growth. By 1904 seedling dates began producing in the Coachella Valley as well. These dates, though not as successful as the offshoots would be, proved again that the area could support a commercial date industry, especially since this fruit was sold for profit even before offshoots began to produce. Laflin, "The Story of Dates Part 1," 35-36; Colley, "Arizona," 63; Charles Colley, "The California Date Growing Industry 1890-1939, Part I," *Southern California Quarterly* 49, no. 1 (March 1967): 50.

a quarter of the irrigable area too alkaline for other crops" in the region, "while the climatic, soil, and water conditions are here also favorable for the date palm."[87] Surveys found roughly fifty-percent of the soil in the Salton Basin could support crops because of the high alkalinity but seventy-five percent of the soil could support date crops.[88] Although the USDA imported multiple varieties of date palms and tested several locations for growth, they had identified a superior date early on. The department sought to grow the Deglet Noor variety precisely because it packed and traveled well and received higher prices on the market. This type of date thrived in the Salton Basin.[89]

Given the new scientific information about soil and climate conditions, developments in irrigation, and proof of date growth, Walter Swingle lobbied for the establishment of an experiment station in the Coachella Valley. He also expressly stated that the Salton Basin was the most suited region for date growing in the United.[90] Arizona experiment station scientists helped establish an additional date experiment station in the Coachella Valley town of Mecca, California in 1904.[91] Imported offshoots quickly produced fruit superior to other regions in the Golden State, refocusing all California based date experiments to the Coachella Valley.[92]

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[87] Ibid., 110.

[88] Ibid.

[89] Ibid.

[90] Swingle, *The Date Palm and Its Utilization*.

[91]Partnering with the California Agricultural Experiment Station, though clearly run by the USDA, the station fell under the care of Bernard Johnson, the civilian who had imported dates from Northern Africa and who was already familiar with their culture. Laflin, "The Story of the Date Part I," 12.

[92] Recall earlier offshoots were planted in experiment stations in Tulare, Berkeley, and Pomona.

However, with the flooding of the Salton Basin and the creation of the Salton Sea threatening the Mecca area, a second experiment station was established in Indio in 1907, known as the U.S. Date Station. Though date work continued at the Mecca station, the new Indio station became the date growing center not only of the Coachella Valley but of the entire United States. With date palms there producing superior fruit to the Arizona gardens and with federal oversight established from the start, the USDA poured their staff and funds into Coachella Valley based research. Walter Swingle directed the Coachella Valley experiment stations from afar until 1934, though the USDA sent trained scientist superintendents to the area.[93] This relocation of federal resources along with an already established regional civilian interest in dates transferred the date industry, even before it began, from Arizona to the Coachella Valley. The experiment stations were responsible for research that "greatly extended our scientific knowledge of the date palm and conditions necessary for optimum date production."[94] Scientific research would continue at the U.S. Date Station until the 1980s when government funding dried up.[95]

Bringing the Orient Home: Scientific Orientalism, Imperialism, Race and Agriculture

The USDA scientists sought not only to introduce dates to the United States but also to encourage their commercial growth. Bulletins, newspaper articles, to explorer

[93]Ibid. , 3.

[94] Ibid., 3.

[95] The incredible research conducted at the U.S. Date Station, along with that conducted at (and in conjunction with) the University of California Experiment Station in Riverside, California is beyond the scope of this paper. To learn more consult Lalfin, "The Story of Dates Part I and Part II."

memoirs reached wide audiences including regional growers. Through these documents we can trace widely held beliefs of American scientific and racial superiority and the way imperialism and agriculture were linked. These beliefs, combined with a long history of American Orientalism, would be transferred to the date growers of the Coachella Valley leading to the development of an Arabian fantasy in the American desert. Because the scientists had direct contact with those from the Greater Middle East their ideas about these people held an aura of infallibility that reinforced American Orientalism. The USDA's writings on "Arabians," colored by Orientalism and scientific racism, suggest the ways views on race, labor, sanitary packing, and sales of the dates ultimately helped to establish an "Arabian" playground in the deserts of Southern California.

In the years prior to the date's importation to California around 1900, the United States had established itself as a scientific powerhouse through nation building quests that lay closely within the imperialistic path the nation embraced. Universities and large museums, like the Smithsonian, sponsored scientific expeditions that endeavored to bring back botanical and zoological specimens as well as scientific knowledge, establishing collections and experts at the top of their fields. American anthropologists and archeologists toured the globe conducting scientific studies of the "other," implying white American superiority as they went, celebrating these findings in world's fairs and scientific papers. The USDA's agricultural explorations fit within this scientific community; Americans went abroad in a quest for scientific knowledge and specimens that could be useful stateside. Instead of the preserved collections that ended up in museums, these specimens were a living, breeding collection that helped American

farmers. Like other scientists, the USDA shared their findings through public documents aimed at farmers and even displayed their new wares at the world's fairs.

The public nature of these scientific expansions reflected long held beliefs about race. Hierarchies of others were reinforced, with whites at the top and blacks on the bottom with Native Americans, Asians, and Arabs classified variously as in between. These "scientific" findings became a justification for American imperialism and intervention abroad; many Americans felt that the global "other" needed intercession to embrace the arriving twentieth century.[96] Anglo-American USDA scientists welcomed this notion. As anthropologist Robert Alvarez explains, they "regarded the people and regions they explored from a hierarchical and often racialized point of views…This was an exotic, impure, chaotic, and uncivilized world, in contrast to America, which they placed at the global apex."[97]

Americans encountered few people of Greater Middle Eastern descent before World War II, so their status in this racialized science seemed more clouded than others. While some viewed "Arabs," a term broadly used to refer to those from Northern Africa and the Middle East, as a separate race they were occasionally classified as white by

[96] This is of course an incredibly brief explanation of scientific study, scientific racism, and American imperialism in the last quarter of the 19th century. For more information see: Paul A. Kramer, *The Blood of Government: Race, Empire, the United States, & the Philippines* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); Laura Briggs, *Reproducing Empire: Race, Sex, Science, and U.S. Imperialism in Puerto Rico* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues: The United States Encounters Foreign Peoples at Home and Abroad*, 1876-1917 (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000). Ann Laura Stoler, ed, *Haunted by Empire: Geographies of Intimacy in North American History* (Durham, Duke University Press, 2006).

[97] Robert R. Alvarez, "The March of Empire: Mangos, Avocados, and the Politics of Transfer," *Gastronomica: The Journal of Food and Culture* 7 no.3 (Summer 2007): 33.

courts.[98] For many Americans in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries racial understandings incorporated racial orders of blacks, whites, and Native Americans. By the late 1800s Asians, especially the Chinese, had become a familiar and distinct people.[99] The conquest of Mexican lands and the subsequent imperial ventures in the Caribbean increased American contact with Latinos, expanding racial understandings yet again, though they were sometimes classified as white in the courts. However Middle Easterners, North Africans, and Arabs were not always seen as a distinct group, especially given their low numbers before 1965. Arabs were classified simply as "non-white," the most important American racial signifier in the nineteenth century.[100]

So few individuals from Northern Africa and the Middle East immigrated to the United States prior to World War II, that Americans most often encountered "Arabs" in another form: popular culture. American Orientalism "generally distinguished [Arabs] from Africans, who were presented as inferior to the exotic peoples of the 'East.'"[101]. General public sentiment embraced a form of Orientalism that allowed Arabs to be seen as exotic, ancient, and romantic peoples; these very attributes also rendered them as

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[98] Melani McAlister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, & U.S. Interests in the Middle East since 1945* (Berkeley: University of California, Press, 2005), 37-38. For more on the complicated legal understandings of race in the twentieth century see Ian Haney Lopez, *White By Law: The Legal Constructions of Race* (New York: New York University Press, 2006).

[99] For more on Asian immigration and classification in the United States see Erika Lee, *At America's Gates: Chinese Immigration during the Exclusion Era, 1882-194*3 (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); Nayan Shah, *Stranger Intimacy: Contesting Race, Sexuality and the Law in the North American West* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011); Erika Lee and Judy Yung, *Angel Island: Immigrant Gateway to America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

[100] McAlister, *Epic Encounters*, 37.

[101] Ibid., 37.

backwards and perpetually living in the past. The Orient was perceived as a place of luxury and excess, yet a locale of extreme danger for Americans and Europeans entering the region. Arabs were, in the minds of many, tricky and deceitful.[102] This view shaped not only American popular culture but the very science that occurred.

When David Fairchild, for example, first arrived in Baghdad to secure date offshoots for the USDA, this American upbringing overtook his senses. He recalled a sense of awe as he prepared to enter "the city of enchantment" first descried to him in his childhood reading of *One Thousand and One Arabian Nights*. "Would I see Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves, the Sultan's eunuchs, and beautiful, veiled ladies," Fairchild pondered.[103] He continued, noting his journey "would be a voyage of adventure, for I was bound for the greatest date gardens in the world. But on this journey I was conscious of more than plants."[104] In fact, he recalled that reading the *Arabian Nights* on winter nights left him imagining Baghdad as "a dream place somewhere in the dim never-never land near Crusoe's tropical island."[105]

Indeed Orientalism present in American popular culture affected his views of those he dealt with in the process of securing date offshoots as well as his views of the cities they inhabited. Though Fairchild traveled the world several times, often as one of the first Americans in a particular place, in his memoir Baghdad was the only one he

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[102] For more on American Orientalism in the 19th century see McAlister, *Epic Encounters* and Susan Nance, *How the Arabian Nights Inspired the American Dream, 1790-1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

[103] Fairchild, *The World was my Garden*, 229.

[104] Ibid., 229.

[105] Ibid., 229.

recalled alongside his preconceived childhood notions.-While other locales disappointed him in various ways, his expectation of them did not include such fantastical, fictional characters like Ali Baba. The journey to Baghdad highlights the effects when childhood imaginations shaped by Orientalism met the reality of these scientists abroad. When Fairchild stumbled upon "whirling dervishes," he recalled thinking that they had been "inventions of Barnum and Bailey," purveyors of many a fantasy.[106] Fairchild, in this case, was oddly aware of the Orientalist tropes; he thought that the whirling dervishes were an American dream of the Middle East, reproduced as a sideshow to invoke the mystery of the Orient rather than an actual religious subset of practitioners in the region. What Fairchild saw mattered in the United States; his voyages were not simply a lone man's adventure recounted several years later; the stories gathered abroad were passed along in *National Geographic* articles and memoirs, widely read by scientific elites and circulated in public libraries across the country.

The images and experiences he took abroad, presented, and published, reflected and continued the Orientalism of the day.[107] At a market in Muscat Fairchild encountered what he thought to be a religious leader. The "haggard, holy marabout," he relayed, watched him "with fantastical eyes gleaming from either side of his big hooked nose," an image Fairchild sought out with his camera and reproduced for his 1904 article.[108] Images

[106] Ibid.

[107] Including Fairchild, *The World was my Garden* and David G. Fairchild, "Travels in Arabia and Along the Persian Gulf," *National Geographic Magazine* 15 no. 4 (April 1904): 139-151, in addition to lectures with the National Geographic Society as well.

[108]Ibid. In the 1904 article it is labeled with "a date merchant at Busra." Yet his 1930s memoir retells this story and reprints the image as from Muscat.

and stories like these, shown to audiences of social and political standing at the 1903 National Geographic Society talk, allowed Fairchild some authority in the recounting of life in Persia, so little explored by Americans of the day. The power of the image to reflect Orientalism tropes continued in his *National Geographic* article, "Travels in Arabia and Along the Persian Gulf." As a groundbreaking form of photojournalism the images he collected abroad and reproduced in print, like the "hooked nosed" Arab, a sheik with his falcon, and women with complete head coverings reinforced American understandings of the Orient as mysterious, dangerous, and romantic. His depictions of Arabian women in prose and photographs further sexualized American views by rendering women and their fashion as fair game for the imperialist gaze.[109]

Placing the Middle East solidly in the past, Fairchild lamented that the splendor described in the *Arabian Nights* was long gone, replaced by "tumble-down houses and narrow streets," though he returns the peoples of the Orient to ancient times. Baghdad, he says, "is so unaffected by the civilization of Europe that it can not fail to appeal to one in search of novel sensations."[110] While describing his overall work in the great date experiment, Fairchild remarked, "It is interesting to work out the horticultural practices of antiquity as they are depicted on drawings and seals in a museum, but it is far more to see them still being carried out by a generation, perhaps 3,000 years removed from the men who carved the seal."[111] The long history of the date palm in antiquity itself paired with the trope of the ancient Arab to wash the Greater Middle East into the past. That Arabs

[109] Fairchild, "Travel in Arabia," 140-141.

[110] Ibid.,145.

[111] Fairchild, "The Date Palm," 9.

still performed these ancient pollination rites was an anomaly akin to stumbling into a living museum for the agricultural explorers of the day.

In addition to expanding Orientalist tropes, Fairchild's writings highlight his imperialist understandings of the time. The world was his for the taking, literally, as he brought back date palms and other species of foreign fauna. As Fairchild recalled, life for Europeans living in Persia was, "made bearable," by a social club, tennis court, and, as he saw it, the most unique golf course in the world.[112] Playing over the ruins of villages, golfers often uncovered human remains and funerary objects. "It is not an uncommon thing for the golf player to strike with his golf club the shin-bone or vertebra of some half-decayed skeleton."[113] Such an occurrence in a white cemetery would have caused outrage in the United States but was another example of how "othering" Arabs allowed for them to be seen as something less than whites, excusing such behavior and the collecting of their existence- from antiquities to plant specimens.

Notions of imperialism, in this case an economic imperialism, reared again when Fairchild suggested crops that could be grown for profit in the Middle East. His clear mission during this expedition to Persia was to collect information and specimens of plants to bring back to the United States so that these species, dates in particular, could be tested for their commercial viability stateside. In his *National Geographic* article, however, he subtlety hinted at the conditions American investors would find in the region. While he mentions Turkish rule as problematic for Americans seeking to make

[112] Fairchild, "Travel in Arabia," 147.

[113] Ibid.,147.

money in the region, he argues passionately that cotton and wheat could be grown for profit if irrigation experiments could be replicated there. These suggestions were of course made in tandem with an evaluation of business forecasts for the "American capitalist."[114] The USDA then, while hoping to develop prospects for the American farmer, embraced their scientific knowledge to encourage the American businessman to involve himself in agricultural ventures abroad.

Indeed in it was American imperialism that allowed the USDA's section of Seed and Plant Introduction to venture abroad in the first place, searching for crops that could be grown in new tropical acquisitions with hopes of obtaining lower prices at the home market and creating "self sufficiency" of sorts. One could argue that American imperialism was tied to agriculture from the start; the quest for expanding agriculture induced Americans westward into Native American and Mexican Territories. Hawaii's annexation was directly linked to sugar prices and unfettered access to the American market.[115] The unequal power relationships established through imperialism, as well as the economic systems stemming from them, pressured foreign colonists and native peoples in the Greater Middle East to relinquish control of date offshoots to US agricultural explores. Imperial attitudes also encouraged agricultural explorers, who honed in on an unequal relationship that simultaneously sought agricultural knowledge from native peoples while rejecting many beliefs as superstitious and insisting upon

[114] Ibid., 148.

[115] Additionally, Americans were able to access in the Greater Middle East through other imperialistic powers in the region; France in Algeria and Northern Africa, England in Egypt, and both Great Britain and Russia in Persia all held direct or some degree of control over regional politics. Agents of these empires came to assist American agricultural explorers abroad.

American scientific superiority. These USDA scientists held "an ideology that defined the world as theirs for the taking, justified by the needs of the American farmer and US agricultural development."[116]

Fairchild's views of the Middle East also made their way into the USDA work product: the bulletins aimed at public distribution. In these documents, so widely embraced by Coachella Valley date growers, the "Arab" grower became a foe, a backward thinking farmer that could be surpassed by Americans who embraced agricultural science and, as we will later see, sanitation. Fairchild's 1903 *Persian Gulf Dates and their Introduction into America*, for example, went beyond the botany of the date to reference their Middle Eastern origin. His overarching opinion indicated that though, "the Arab knows more about dates than he does about any other plant," they did not understand much about the crop and the knowledge varied in location. Describing Arab growers as "ignorant," Fairchild lamented most Middle Eastern date growers' reluctance to re-enrich the soil with inter-planting of alfalfa or with artificial fertilizers.[117] Explorer, Thomas Kearny, repeated the idea by mentioning that while most people in Tunisia were familiar with the date palm, they worked "instinctively rather than intelligently."[118] This refuted the possibility that Tunisians were educated, smart, and talented; instead rendering their date growing success to mere luck or an innate

[116] Alvarez, "March of Empire," 30. Alvarez argues that after these products were established in the U.S., the federal government began to bar their importation. What was once an incredibly sought after commodity- living plants- were now banned due to fear of diseases and pests. The USDA further impacts modern day agricultural across the globe by certifying certain varieties. Since, at least in the case with mangos, the US imports all but one percent of mangos consumed stateside, growing nations' agricultural plans are heavily influenced by these U.S. policies.

[117] Fairchild, *Persian Gulf Dates*, 19.

[118] Kearney, *Date Varieties*, 42.

connection to the natural world, common attributions Americans placed on racialized others of the time.

American economic practices, too, held superiority for Fairchild, who felt that "the Arabs do not keep careful books of their expenses."[119] While he may not have understood their accounting practices, Arab peoples did in fact find wealth in their groves; Fairchild himself encountered successful Arab growers on his journey to Bagdad.[120] Though the USDA called for better oversight of agriculture around the globe as well as at home, this belief that Arabs could not manage money also fell into the long standing Orientalist idea that the luxury embraced by the Orient came at the price of true financial wealth and success. Americans felt their Protestant work ethic far superior to men in the Greater Middle East who they viewed as wasting days in the lounging harems of the region.

While the USDA portrayed Arab as non-scientific, the trope of the tricky Arab also became entrenched in the date's story. Recollections of the 1880s importation of date palms implied a trickery on the part of the Arab "other," who provided U.S. consular officials not with the offshoots they asked for but with inferior seedling dates. When Fairchild visited Baghdad to secure dates there he was astounded to learn that Hill Brothers, the leading importer of dates to the United States at the time, gave money directly to their Arab purchaser. Fairchild remarked that the company found him so reliable they "would hand him ten thousand dollars in gold coin at the beginning of the

[119] Fairchild, *Persian Gulf Dates*, 28.

[120] Fairchild, *World was my Garden*.

buying season."[121] Fairchild's registered shock implied his disbelief that Europeans in the Middle East could trust their wealth and date dealings to a native person, despite the fact that he and other USDA explorers were assisted by native Arabs as well as colonial officials throughout the Greater Middle East.

Walter Swingle too remarked on the notion that Arabs were not to be trusted and were inherently dishonest. In an 1899 letter to Fairchild sent during this time abroad, Swingle reported, "If a trustworthy Mohaumetan [sic] could be found (my God what a task!) who speaks Arabic and Turkish, it would not be difficult to have the best varieties forwarded from Egypt."[122] Locating a bilingual individual who would travel to Egypt to get dates appeared far less a daunting task to Swingle than finding an honest Arab. Indeed rather than obtaining offshoots in this manner, the USDA sent Fairchild to Egypt to obtain dates. Explorers repeatedly contracted out for large numbers of offshoots or to find dates in remote areas, offshoots that have no record of being defective or counterfeit as Fairchild and Swingle's expectations would imply. USDA officials failed to mention any negative financial dealings with Arab date growers and in fact mentioned local leaders who gave them access to date offshoots at fair prices. Thus their perceptions of Arab thievery may have more to do with popular culture than Fairchild or Swingle's real experiences, particularly given the prevalence of Arab thieves in the *Arabian Nights*.

The trope of the tricky Arab blended in well with the notion that the Orient was a dangerous place. Of course agricultural exploring in itself drew its own risks, especially

[121]Fairchild, *The World was my Garden*, 236.

[122] Fairchild, "*The Date Palm,"* 3.

in an era with unchecked tropical disease, like malaria and cholera, a mainstay of global travel. The Middle East, in particular, held a sway of danger in American popular culture as well, appearing as a brutal and backward place full of violence. Yet the threat of violence provided its own romance and sense of adventure. USDA agricultural explorers reiterated this danger, referencing instabilities and violence around them. Fairchild, for example, mentioned the need to hire guards to visit certain date growing regions, as "the inhabitants are quite uncivilized and are continually at war with each other."[123]

Focusing on the danger of the quest to obtain offshoots tinted the date's origin story with shades of romance and adventure, a trope that would be reused when non-governmental explorers traveled abroad in the 1910s to purchase offshoots for commercial resale.[124] With so little information available on dates abroad, these entrepreneurs kept in contact with USDA explorers like Fairchild and Swingle, another example of the USDA's influence on date growing and its far-reaching views of the Orient. For example Paul Popenoe went to Algeria to import offshoots for his father's nursery and then returned to California to find immense interest in dates and investors

[123] Fairchild, *Persian Gulf Dates*.

[124] For more on the various commercial voyages to obtain offshoots see Laflin, "The Story of Dates." As previously mentioned, Bernard Johnson imported the first commercial lot in 1903. He made additional trips for offshoots in 1908 and 1912, 1913, 1914, 1915 some of which were made with the backing of early date grower associations. Johnson's offshoots totaled just over 13,000. H.F. Cole from the American Date Company imported date offshoots in 1911, 1912, and 1913 though all these trips resulted in less than 3,000 offshoots. The Popenoe brothers, working for their father's West India Gardens, imported over 16,000 date offshoots in 1912 and 1913. These importations mostly came from Algeria (where the Deglet Noor grew), though the Popenoes also went to the Persian Gulf to obtain offshoots. These commercial supplies went directly to California, thus completing the re-orientation of the industry away from Arizona. World War I brought an end to these date collecting trips; they were not resumed until 1920, though so many had previously been imported that they quickly produced a domestic supply of offshoots.

clamoring for palms. His father sent Paul Popenoe and his brother Wilson, along with investor Henry Simon, on an additional excursion to obtain additional palms.[125]

In an article that ran in local papers, the *Riverside Daily Press*, and the *Los Angeles Tribune*, journalists positioned this voyage for date offshoots with the telling headline: "Date Trees Come Stained With Blood."[126] Here readers learn about the danger of the Orient, a notion already at play in American popular culture, but one that enriches the heroic appearance of agricultural explorers and the romance of the date. The group was almost "buried alive" under sandstorms, lost the trail, faced a lion and knife brandishing camel driver, and overcame terrible heat in their "tedious and dangerous trip."[127] Importantly however, the article recalls an alarming attack on the explorers. According to the article, the Sultan of Oman, Abdul Alak Mulfid, extended protection over the brothers (Simon was traveling in Algeria and Tunisia at the time) and provided an escort for them. "Unconquered tribesmen with the memory of past wars still fresh," then "made an attempt to capture Popenoe as a hostage," in an effort to gain leverage over the Sultan.[128] Fighting continued between the tribesmen and the Sultan's escort until the Sultan was able to send 3,000 additional troops. The Popenoes and their 9,000 date palms escaped unharmed.

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[125] Paul Popenoe continued to work with dates after his return to the United States though he became interested in genetics and ran the *Journal of Heredity* before becoming an outspoken eugenics advocate and eventually a marriage councilor. Wilson Popenoe's story hints to the commercial date importation's ties to the USDA; he became a USDA agricultural explorer upon his return.

[126] "Date Trees Come Stained with Blood," *Riverside Daily Press*, May 22, 1913.

[127] Ibid.

[128] Ibid.

The story, in which the Popenoe brothers basically instigate a civil war, extends the romance of danger that surrounded the Orient at that moment. The hot summer sands and the hostile landscape challenged these commercial agricultural explorers. More importantly, however, danger played into the notion that the Orient was not only romantic for women, but the romance extended as a form of masculine challenge. The men who ventured abroad confirmed their own ideas of masculinity by facing dangerous deserts and fierce warriors. Of course the story also reflects American egos abroad. While the Popenoes felt their presence created a civil war, in reality these Americans likely understood little about the regional conflicts of the region that certainly pre-dated their visit and continued after they left.[129]

Filthy Arabs, Dirty Dates: Transferring USDA Views of Disease to the United States

Part of the othering of Greater Middle Easterners encountered abroad was linked directly to health. Specifically Arabs, who packed dates for sale abroad, were repeatedly portrayed as unhygienic and unhealthy, implying imported dates were contaminated and potentially teaming with illnesses. Notably, the USDA was the first to bring up this idea in the United States, though it would be date growers, who would utilize the argument to convince consumers that dates packed by "dirty Arabs," were inferior to hygienically picked and packaged California grown dates.

[129] For more on the Popenoe's journey see Hopper, "The Globalization of Dried Fruit."

The association of disease with the tropical acquisitions of imperialism and the Spanish American War in particular, paired well with the scientific racism of the time.[130] Non-whites abroad (and at home) were perceived to be particularly prone to disease because of their inherent inferiority to whites but more so from a lack of hygiene and scientific knowledge. Traditional medical practices, like traditional agricultural practices, were seen as backwards, superstitious, and ineffective. Fear of diseased non-whites was rampant on American soil as well; the federal government closely regulated the health of immigrants and ethnically or racially segregated populations. [131]

USDA agricultural explorers embraced similar stances, shared these beliefs in their published work, and, in all likelihood, their interpersonal dealings with date growers as well. In David Fairchild's memoir, for example, disease is an ever present danger in his journey through the Middle East.[132] Fairchild described Baghdad as "unsanitary as

[130] Of course disease spread by American missionaries wrecked havoc in Hawaii, while Yellow fever and Typhoid killed starling numbers of American soldiers in Cuba during the Spanish American War. Even the imperialist creation of the Panama Canal brought Americans in contact with additional tropical disease.

[131]As scholars have shown, when epidemic diseases erupted, segregated communities were often blamed, from the Chinese during the 1903 bubonic plague outbreak in San Francisco, to ethnic Mexicans in the 1924 plague outbreak in Los Angeles. Fears over disease and health may have had at least an underlying effect on national exclusionist immigration policies and press coverage encouraged widespread popular conceptions that associated non-whites as innately diseased, filthy, and dangerous. For more about local and state regulation of public health and race in California see Deverell, *Whitewashed Adobe*; Natalie Molina, *Fit to be Citizens: Public Health and Race in Los Angeles, 1879-1939* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006); Nayan Shah, *Contagious Divides: Epidemics and Race in San Francisco's Chinatown* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001). For more on medical exams given to American Immigrants see Amy L. Fairchild, *Science at the Borders: Immigrant Medical Inspection and the Shaping of the Modern Industrial Labor Force* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2003).

[132] Fairchild resented having to get a smallpox vaccine from a native health practitioner and worried about catching the plague in his trip from Pakistan to the Persian Gulf. This journey highlighted his preferential medical/ health status as a white man in this colonized region. Fairchild, *World was my Garden*, 228, 230-235.

any place I have ever been," no small remark for a man who had traveled the globe.[133] His *National Geographic* article motioned that nearly every person in the city was scarred by the Baghdad boil, a disease spread by the bite of a fly.[134] Other illnesses, "common to natives of all Arab countries," plagued the city as well.[135] The depictions of Baghdad's dirt and disease contributed to the allure of the Orient by rendering the location even more dangerous. Such depictions made the quest to find date offshoots a far more exciting story and ascribed more credit to those explorers who braved a place few Americans would go just to secure date offshoots.

While disease was heavy on the minds of agricultural explorers they often turned their attention to descriptions of the overall health of the Arab peoples they encountered to imply a generally ill people with poor hygiene. The poverty Fairchild found among the Arabs was implied and yet not discussed, even though his work with the USDA included goals to increase food supply for the American table, if not the international one. Ignoring the poverty and viewing those they encountered as ill, dirty, and weak (which indeed could be effects of poverty itself) excused USDA presence abroad; if the Arabs lacked the strength, motivation, or intelligence to expand the date groves, as popular culture suggested at the time, the department could bring American science to the date groves.

The most important aspect of the USDA's discussion of Arab dirt and disease related directly to the dates imported to the United States. Explorers abroad noted that the dates shipped to Europe and the United States were packed in unsanitary conditions,

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[133] Fairchild, *The World was my Garden*, 238.

[134] Fairchild, "Travel in Arabia," 150.

[135] Fairchild, *The World was my Garden*, 238.

though this perception was likely deepened by the trope of the dirty Arab. The Persian Gulf varieties, because of their moist, sticky flesh were particularly susceptible to these descriptions, especially because the Algerian Deglet Noors reached consumers in neatly packaged boxes instead of massive, sticky bricks of pressed dates. Fairchild contended that "the conditions in the packing sheds and the personal uncleanliness of the men, women, and children who put up the dates are enough to disgust a sensitive person and to prevent his ever eating packed dates again without having them washed."[136] Pitting the dates was often done by mouth, and to press the dates together laborers stood on tops of boxes of dates in bare feet. The packing conditions were unsanitary, but rather than explain these practices, Fairchild could simply invoke the trope of the filthy Arab and let the reader's imagination take over. These labor practices, of course, allowed importers a greater margin of profit and were, until this moment, entirely unseen by the consumer.

Moreover, Fairchild argued that "the sale of dates in America might fall off decidedly were it generally known how intimately the unwashed hands, bodies, and teeth of the notably filthy Arabs often come in contact with the dates."[137] In his preface to Fairchild's USDA Bulletin: *Persian Gulf Dates and Their Introduction into America*, the botanists in charge of the Department of Seed and Plant Introduction mentioned that Fairchild's writing on "the manner in which the Persian dates are packed furnishes an additional incentive for pushing the word of introduction, so that the home market may

[136] Fairchild, *Persian Gulf Dates*, 29.

[137] Ibid., 29.

be supplied with clean, wholesome dates."[138] The poor packing conditions of dates abroad were certainly not the only catalyst for American date growing, but the notion suggested to potential date growers that should they produce fruits at home they could easily be marked by "safer" growing and packing conditions.

Statements like this were the most public declarations of Arab disease and sanitation, especially since they were repeated in nearly all the early USDA date publications, widely circulated and reprinted for potential date growers. As next chapter suggests, these statements about dirty dates would be thoroughly embraced by date growers in the 1910s forward. They would capitalize on the American growing, harvesting, and packing process, publically vetting their sanitation by printing images of white female packers in white pressed aprons or by discussing careful and scientific fumigation processes. Calling consumers to turn away from the potentially disease ridden, dirty date, Coachella Valley date growers sought larger market shares based, in part, by invoking or at least suggesting the dirty Arab stereotype.

Importing Arabs?: The USDA Investigations into Labor in American Date Groves

USDA scientists were also concerned with the idea of labor; if an industry were to develop, who would perform the work, given the general public's complete lack of knowledge about cultivation practices. Though the family farm was a concept embraced by the federal government, when it came to date farming, absentee ownership was an accepted practice as well. The question of who would perform date grove labor drew

[138] Fairchild, *Persian Gulf Dates*, 4.

interest when the crop was first discussed, particularly given the poor living conditions in the Coachella Valley. USDA scientists promoted Native Americans as the answer to the labor question, though white and Mexican labor also played a role until World War II when, Mexican and Mexican American labor would dominate.

Recall George Halmin Fitch's 1900 article about the mislabeled "date" palm that described in detail the Coachella Valley's Native American population's reliance on this palm for food. Like many of the articles in *The Land of Sunshine*, Fitch's focus on Native Peoples was a call to arms of sorts, a forum to describe the poverty and other challenges facing Native Americans in hopes of government intervention. This discussion of local Native American peoples, the Cahuilla, included a description of their employment on fruit ranches beginning in 1895. Fitch noted, however, that when water supplies ran out the ranches were abandoned, and thus not only were the Cahuilla deprived of wage labor, they were also affected by irrigation issues, resulting in starvation and even death. Fitch characterized the Cahuilla as "good workers," an argument that made their sudden peril that much more unjust to turn of the century Progressive readers.[139] Fitch demonstrated an understanding of native peoples colored not only by scientific racism that suggested white superiority but one equally as influenced by popular culture of the time (indeed the two were often entwined). Americans had painted Natives as a long vanishing, noble race at one with nature for some time.[140] True to this genre Fitch described the Cahuilla

[139] Fitch, "Where the Date Palm Grows," 142.

[140] For more on the popular culture view of Native Americans at the turn of the 20th century see: Philip J. Deloria, *Playing Indian* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998); Leah Dilworth, "Tourists and Indians in Fred Harvey's Southwest," *Seeing and Being Seen: Tourism in the American West* ed. David Worbel and

gathering together in the oases to collect "dates," and "mourn over the gradual extinction of their race."[141] Romanticized as cultures squarely in the past, both Native Americans and peoples of the Greater Middle East were positioned as historic in nature.

In response to the article, the USDA's resident date expert, Walter Swingle, wrote to the magazine's editor, Charles Lummis, about his interest in establishing a date industry in the desert Southwest. Swingle offered a solution to the Cahuillas' plight, one that involved them finding "congenial employment in the date palm plantations if the culture of this plant proves profitable."[142] He recounted that, "knowing as they do the value of the wild palm [the Native Americans] ought to learn speedily to care for the date and replace the Arabs who do all the manual labor in the French plantations in the Sahara."[143] He recounted that the French colonial date growers employed Arab peoples in part because the heat of the Sahara meant it was "practically impossible for Europeans to do the manual labor during the summer."[144] Therefore his contacts at these French date plantations suggested that he "bring over several families of the negroid people of the Oued Rihr to take care of dates in this country." [145] Here both Arabs and Native

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Patrick Long (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2001); and Shari M. Huhndorf, *Going Native: Indians in the American Cultural Imagination* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001).

[141] Fitch, "Where the Date Palm Grows," 139.

[142] Walter Swingle, Letter to Charles Lummis, October 1900.

[143] Walter Swingle, Letter to Charles Lummis, November 1901. Braun Research Library at the Autry National Center.

[144] Walter Swingle, Letter to Charles Lummis, October 1900.

[145] Ibid.

Americans were racialized as natural and close to the land, innately good at field labor because they were so ancient, simple, and close to nature.

These discussions, however, speak to the importance of agricultural labor to the date industry and the racialized science that went along with it. Americans, of course, had built their agricultural empire on the backs of African Americans in the South and Native Americans, Chinese, and Mexicans in the West.[146] Swingle saw commercial agricultural labor as a task to be performed by a non-white other, as did many Americans, a view that would increase over time as agricultural practices shifted dramatically in the twentieth century. In this case both Native Americans and peoples of the Sahara were interchangeable; they could provide cheap labor and withstand the heat and poor working conditions of year-round employment in the desert. Hiring Indians, however, gave the region the added benefit of solving its specific Indian "problem."

Swingle's letters to Lummis remained private and unpublished, but he made similar suggestions in his groundbreaking 1904 publication. In, *The Date Palm and its Utilization in the Southwestern*, Swingle wrote, that "Indians will be able to take the place of Arabs" and complete date related work "efficiently."[147] Swingle also suggested, however, that American scientific and technological superiority would quickly outpace the "Arab." Instead of having skilled workers climb trees (without the assistance of rope or other devices) for pollination and picking, Swingle felt that "American ingenuity will

[146] After 1900 this list would expand to Filipino, Japanese, and Mexican immigrants as well.

[147] Swingle, *The Date Palm and its Utilization*, 28.

devise methods of simplifying the work," resulting in the need for less labor.[148] It remains unclear how many Native Americans worked for early date growers or the USDA, though there are record of Cahuilla clearing land for at least one date grower and other indications that some Cahuilla owned their own date palms.[149]

USDA views and interaction with Native Americans were again brought to public light in the recounting of the Medjool story, after its 1927 importation by Walter Swingle. Since the variety was particularly hard hit by an insect pest in its homeland the USDA ordered it quarantined in Nevada. The USDA secured the help of a Chemehuevi farmer, known simply as Johnson, who agreed to care for the dates. A single USDA official from the Indio date station, Frank Thackery, oversaw the offshoots quarantine from the Indio date station, checking in periodically over the next four years, until the offshoots were moved to the U.S. Date Garden at Indio.[150] After the date palms were planted, the USDA discovered that Johnson had no title to the property since it fell outside the reservation. Rather than locate another caregiver or transplant the palms, the USDA had the boundaries of the reservation changed to include the land in question.[151]

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[148]Ibid., 28.

[149] J Smeaton Chase suggests, in 1920, that the Indians of Palm Springs provide labor in the region. He also says, "Old Marcos is even the proud owner of a few of those original epoch-making date palms which have opened a new chapter in American horticulture." J. Smeaton Chase, *Our Araby*: *Palm Springs and the Garden of the Sun* (Pasadena: Star-News Publishing Company, 1920), 23.

[150] Frank A. Thackery, "A Few Notes on the Medjool Date During its Isolation in Nevada," *Report of the Twenty-Ninth Annual Date Grower's Institute* (Indio: The Date Institute, 1952), 15.

[151] Ibid.

When asked why he had chosen to work with an Indian farmer, described as "old," and "crippled," Thackery replied, "because no one else was easily available."[152] Secondly because he was disabled, Johnson was unable to leave his farm for extended periods of time to "attend all sorts of Indian gatherings which have irresistible attraction for practically all Indians."[153] The USDA official made it a point to say that Native Americans of his "type," were generally trustworthy once an agreement was reached, implying the untrustworthiness of other native peoples, or in the USDA's case, Arab "others" as well. Finally, this USDA official mentioned that the small stipend Johnson received was genuinely needed, invoking the same progressive idea to help the Indian. Perhaps it was an added bonus that the "earnest prayers of that old Indian medicine man," helped the offshoots thrive.[154] The scientist said that Johnson had asked the "Great Spirit," to help him, mimicking that if that was the case he must have been a "real 'Medicine Man.'"[155] The othering of non- governmental agents in the origin stories of the date imports crossed ethnicity. Indians and Arabs were portrayed as simplistic, backward, and not particularly hard working, ever in contrast to the American scientist. Their perceived superstitious religious beliefs stood in stark contrast to the power of American science. Because their scientific ignorance endangered the date's potential, both Arabs and Indians had to be closely supervised in their work with date palms.

[152] Ibid.

[153] Ibid.

[154] Ibid.

[155] Ibid.

Because the palm's disease complete devastated the Medjools in Morocco, these date palms came to be the parent plants for the Medjool industry not only in American but abroad. Disease free offshoots were exported to Morocco and other date growing nations. In the public stories of this agricultural triumph, recounted in addresses at the Date Grower's Institute, newspaper articles, and the Coachella Valley History Museum's 2006 journal, the heroes were always the USDA scientists who imported the crop, not the Native American couple who saw the dates through their precarious quarantine.

The USDA also partnered with the Bureau of Indian Affairs in 1938 to conduct a yearlong program centered on date growing on the Mission Indian Agency land, outside of Indio, California. This Martinez Research Station supported USDA research into the feasibility of Indians growing fruit in the Coachella Valley and beyond, particularly in supporting fruit culture in areas with limited access to irrigation.[156] Though the 1938 year proved a poor one for the crop, the Division of Education in the Office of Indian Affairs purchased some dates, the proceeds of which covered the cost of the harvest. The Agency Farmer distributed the rest of the fruit to the Indians of the reservation.[157] The USDA's policy and view towards native peoples combined with the longstanding federal Indian policy that preferred the disruption of reservations in hopes of creating an independent

[156] E. C Auchter, *Subtropical Fruit Research for Indians: Report of the Bureau of Plant Industry Covering the Cooperating Investigations and Demonstrations Carried on in Cooperation with the Office of Indian Affairs, January to December 1938*, Unpublished, Date Industry Collection, Coachella Valley History Museum. The Report suggests a program that would encourage early fruit ripening for "Indians in regions in the Southwest where fruit is injured by early fall rains," a climatic occurrence not common in the Coachella Valley. It appears that this station already held some of the date palms, thought it is unclear why.

[157] Today known as the Torres Martinez Reservation. Ibid., 3.

Native American farmer.[158] That the USDA was involved in testing whether Indians could grow fruit at all marks a continued view that native agriculture was subpar. USDA involvement in the date industry shows not only how scientific racism and Orientalism colored views of date growers abroad but how it also affected people of color at home.

Conclusion

Looking back on the USDA's role in bringing viable dates to the United States, David Fairchild pondered: what would have happened if the federal government had not been involved in their introduction? "I have the impression," he went on, "that chances of… chaos arising in our own desert plantings would have been great, had there been no research and non-commercial experts to guide the beginnings."[159] It seems odd today that the federal government would invest so much capital and manpower into a crop grown in a very small portion of the nation. Yet at the turn of the twentieth century they did just that, not only for dates in the American Southwest, but for countless other crops around the nation. The business of America was business, and yet a large part of this business, then as today, was tied up in agriculture. The federal government's USDA projects supported farmers, ranchers, and growers in the nation so that they could more easily make a profit and make fertile regions previously considered unfit for agriculture. At this moment, there was still hope for the Jeffersonian farmer, hope that the average Anglo-

[158] Janet A. McDonnell, *The Dispossession of the American Indian* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991).

[159] Fairchild, "The Date Palm," 20.

American family could live off of a farm; an idea made sweeter if they could do so on formerly discounted lands like those in the Southwestern deserts.

The federal government embraced early testing to see where and how dates could grow best and, once it was established that a commercial industry could develop, they continued to support the industry by funding research stations and wide access to scientific findings. Importantly, the rows and rows of government palms produced dates that drew attention locally and nationally, bringing investors and farmers to the region. This interest in turn spurred private, for-profit excursions to the date fields of the Greater Middle East to obtain offshoots for commercial sale in America.

Importantly, the agricultural explorers involved in the importation of date offshoots recorded their journeys as a part of the date industry's origin story, a narrative that would be told and retold as the industry became an economic powerhouse in the region's deserts. These stories were rife with the scientific racism and American Orientalism of the day. These views, especially of an inferior, backward, yet romantic Middle East would be transferred and reflected in the new industry, as would the assumptions that Arabs were dirty and produced filthy dates. Ideas of who should best perform labor in the new American date groves were also shaped by this scientific racism shared first by USDA scientists and later expanded to the commercial industry. Because the scientists had direct contact with people from the Greater Middle East their ideas about these people held an aura of infallibility that reinforced American Orientalism.

As David Fairchild suggested, "the idea of planting the Southwestern deserts with date palms appealed to the American imagination," of the time.[160] The wonders of the known world were reproduced within the borders of the United States; Chinatowns in major cities, Spanish Colonial structures throughout the Southland, Mexican pueblos in Los Angeles, Japanese gardens and Filipino villages in world's fairs. These re-imagined foreign spaces allowed Americans to see "the world," without leaving the country. The date palm added agricultural and commercial benefit for the seemingly barren deserts. Thus transporting foreign palms to California not only spurred and industry by reproduced a bit of exotic Arabia in the American desert.

[160] Fairchild, "The Date Palm," 7.

Chapter Two: Creating a Date Consumer: The Power of American Science and Orientalism

At the moment the commercial date industry took off in the United States, Americans regarded the date with little esteem. When the fruit was available, in larger cities, it sat in bulk on grocery shelves, open to the elements and pests: a clumpy, sticky mess. A staple of the holiday season, the dates were often eaten as a confectionary, after-dinner treat; few recipes called for their inclusion. If the California date industry was to be successful, growers would need to convince consumer not only to eat more dates in general but also that American dates were far superior to the fruit encountered in bulk at local grocers.

Fortunately for the California date growers, an American date importer became the first company to advertise dates nationally. Hills Brothers succeeded in increasing consumption of dates in America during the 1910s and 1920s.[1] They worked to convince the public that dates could be consumed year round, that packaged varieties were superior, and that dates should be used not only as an after dinner confection but as a staple in American meals from baked goods to everyday salads. The company differentiated themselves by focusing on cleanliness and sanitation and used American science to prove the nutritional value of the fruit. Hills Brothers hastened to use American Orientalism in marketing campaigns that harnessed the romance of the Orient to seduce consumers to their product.

[1] Douglas Emery, "A Clean-Cut Victory for 'The Package Idea,'" *Printers Ink* 106, no. 5 (January 30,1919): 26.

Though Hills Brothers set out to increase sales, the company actually increased not only sales of their processed dates but also sales of bulk dates through the time period. Nationwide attention to dates and increased consumer demand helped Coachella Valley growers at the moment they entered the commercial industry. It is little wonder, then, that American growers employed similar arguments to convince consumers to buy Californian grown dates. Thus U.S. date producers compared their stateside production and labor to the poor the sanitation of imported dates, arguing that their production was far superior and safer. They harnessed the power of American science by comparing the quick expansion of California date groves to the "backward," Orient and its stagnant production. Like Hills Brothers, they also turned to science to emphasize the nutritional power of the date, evolving with changing understandings of calories, vitamins, and minerals and utilizing scientific experts to speak on behalf of their product. Of course the international appeal of the Orient was brought to the deserts of Southern California in marketing materials published by regional date producers, and in the very construction of an identity of the region itself.

Dromedary Dates: Hills Brothers and the Birth of Date Advertising

By 1890 Americans were importing ten-million pounds of dates annually, a number that steadily increased until 1925 when imports reached seventy-nine-million pounds.[2] The fruit was a popular confection in its own right, especially before mass

[2] Matthew S. Hopper, "The Globalization of Dried Fruit: Transformations in the Eastern Arabian Economy, 1860-1920s" in *Global Muslims in the Age of Steam and Print*, ed. James L. Gelvin and Nile Green (Berkeley: university of California, 2014), 164-165.

produced candy was available. Dates, like all fruit, were seasonal in nature but their long trip across the Atlantic meant they arrived in the United States around Thanksgiving, rendering them a treat associated with the holiday season. So much so that when better quality dates (domestically grown and sometimes imported) became available, they were often purchased in fancy boxes as Christmas gifts, in the same fashion one may gift a box of chocolate candies today.[3] Though dates could keep for long periods of time, these bulk dates often deteriorated quickly, one more reason holidays sales were crucial to grocers and national distributors.[4]

The vast majority of Americans who ate dates purchased varieties from the Persian Gulf, particularly those from Oman and Iraq, which arrived in the United States in large, pressed blocks. The individual fruits were so mashed together that grocers sold them by the pound, taking portions off the large blocks with ice picks.[5] These bulk sales left consumers leery about the product. Prior to packaged sales, dates "had enjoyed a popular reputation for anything but quality," indeed few other items at "market or being kept there," arrived "in less appetizing shape."[6] According historian Matthew Hopper, Americans imported so many dates from the Persian Gulf that local economies were transformed and labor systems disrupted. Expansion of date groves to fulfill American

[3] Before 1910, the majority of all dates sold in the United States were purchased during November and December. Emery, "A Clean-Cut Victory."

[4] J. M. Hills, "How Advertising Helped Lengthen Season and Expand Sales Force," *Printers Ink* 86, no. 9 (November 27,1913): 4.

[5] Hopper, "The Globalization of Dried Fruit," 161.

[6] Hills, "How Advertising Helped," 3. The Fard variety, from Oman cost a bit more than the Golden variety (Halawi) from Iraq because they held their shape better during processing.

demand for the crop led to the introduction of large numbers of African slaves in the region well into the 1930s.[7]

The largest date importer in the United States, Hills Brothers, would become an integral part of Americans interactions with dates particularly because of the ways in which U.S. date growers responded to the company and its sales. Interestingly, the expansion of American agriculture, particularly the growth of fresh fruits in Florida and California, pushed the Hills Brothers away from their original fresh fruit importation business into dried fruits, which had less direct domestic competition. By 1900 the Hills Brothers Company operated out of both New York and Chicago, ensuring Americans in the Northeast and Midwest had access to dates. [8]

Consumers needed to be convinced to purchase more dates in general, given that they ate a paltry one pound per family per year in 1912.[9] To entice consumers to purchase more dates Hills Brothers sought to market their dates directly to the consumer but to do so they needed to brand and package the dates.[10] Hills Brothers began selling its dates in individually packaged boxes in 1910, branding them as Dromedary dates.[11] These

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[7] Hopper, "The Globalization of Dried Fruit," 169-170. Hopper also suggests date work introduced wage labor to many regions: work open, for the first time, to women.

[8] Ibid. They also had a man on the ground in Iraq, a man who not only assisted David Fairchild as he sought offshoots in the region, but eventually came to assist later commercial offshoot importers.

[9]The Middle East, according to one agricultural explorer who traveled there, consumed ten to fifteen pounds of dates per family per day. Paul Popenoe, "Date Growing in California," *Monthly Bulletin State Commission of Horticulture* ,1 no. 10. Reprint found in Date Industry Collection, Coachella Valley History Museum.

[10] "Prior to 1910, dates had been 'merely dates.'" J. M. Hills, "Educating the American Appetite with the Dromedary Line, "*Advertising and Selling*, no. 9 (February 1917): 7.

[11] Hopper, "The Globalization of Dried Fruit, 168. Brandied dates were sold in packages as were some of the damaged imported dates. Hills, "How Advertising Helped," 4.

packaged dates contained the same dates as the bulk varieties, though only the best grades were hand packaged into boxes and layers separated by waxed paper.[12] Packaged dates offered several advantages over bulk dates. First, they made the product available year round and in doing so pushed Americans to consume the date outside of the Thanksgiving and Christmas holiday.[13] This benefited Hills Brothers as well, distributing their resources and costs more evenly across the year instead of a few months of the year.[14] Packaged dates, it seemed, also enjoyed a longer shelf life. While dates remained a holiday treat, their sales increased during the rest of the year.[15]

The Hills Brothers Company contended that in less than ten years their advertising campaign pushed the United States from "second among all the great nations of the world in the consumption of dates, where it as it previously occupied third place."[16] The company also claimed that the United States was "the second largest date-eating country in the World," trailing behind only England, though both these sentiments

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[12] Lower packaged grades and bulk continued to be sold by the company. Hills, "How Advertising Helped," 4. Traditionally, people assumed packaging was a way to "hide defects." Hills Brothers, then, had to convince consumers that their new packaged dates were a superior product. James True, "Principles in the merchandising of Dromedary Food Products," *Printers Ink* 124, no. 3 (July 20, 1922): 41.

[13] Though they remained a holiday favorite, consumption at other times grew. In the mid-twentieth century, for example, California date growers launched a marketing campaign to encourage Catholics to eat dates as a Lenten food.

[14] Emery, "A Clean-Cut Victory," 19.

[15] Chicago, for example, saw an increase in date sales during a hot summer during the early 1910s, despite the abundance of other summer fruits and treats. Hills, "How Advertising Helped," 8.

[16] Emery, "A Clean-Cut Victory," 19. Middle Eastern and Northern African countries and likely India consumed far more dates than anywhere in Europe of the Americas, but were simply not considered "great nations," or countries at all.

ignored the Greater Middle East whose nations consumed far more dates than Europe or America.[17]

When it became widely accepted, standard, sanitary, branded packaging increased the prices of dates, increases that reflected the added cost of grading and packing labor and the packaging itself.[18] Consumers and grocers wondered if the extra cost was worth it, given that bulk dates could be had at lower prices. Hills Brothers argued that because twenty-five percent of bulk dates were somehow unsatisfactory for the consumer, purchasing packaged dates was actually economical because all of the packaged dates would meet or exceed expectation.[19]

To encourage consumers to make the switch from bulk to package goods Hills Brothers launched big budget advertising campaign. During their first year with the campaign they spent over $16,000 dollars ($400,000 in today's dollars) in advertising in order to sell about 12,000 cases of their packaged, branded dates.[20] After the first year, revenues increased and eventually the company extended their Dromedary brand to their other products like shredded coconut, lemon peel, and dried figs. The high stakes that came with brand name recognition, particularly large monetary investments, led the company to produce a reputable, consistent product.

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[17] Hills, "Educating the American Appetite," 7.

[18] Emery, "A Clean-Cut Victory," 18. Conditions in the Middle East also influenced the availability and price of dates. World War I increased the prices of goods across the board; the nation saw higher food prices in general between 1910- 1913. See David Macleod, "Food Prices, Politics, and Policy in the Progressive Era," *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 8, no. 3 (July 2009): 365-406.

[19] Emery, "A Clean-Cut Victory," 20.

[20] True, "Principles in the Merchandising," 41.

Dromedary date advertisements appeared in newspapers, street car billboards, broadsides and in many women's magazines including the popular *Good Housekeeping* and the *Ladies' Home Journal* as well as the *Saturday Evening Post*.[21] The company also made use of product cookbooks, distributing recipes through grocers to customers who wrote in for free recipe books or inexpensive packaged samples.[22] Advertising campaigns aimed at converting the bulk consumer to packaged dates were so successful that they also lifted sales of bulk dates as well, raising bulk date business every year through 1922.[23] The Hills Brothers marketing campaigns also helped booster the California grown date crop with American consumers eating more dates than ever before.

Hills Brothers, so it seemed, embraced a new trend in consumer goods. During the Progressive Era, "advertised, branded, consumer goods triumphed among the middle and upper classes."[24] Advertising led demand for brand names rather than the nameless bulk goods. Hills Brothers, like many other brands of the day, appealed directly to consumers with their campaigns, cookbooks, and sample packs.[25] As new manufactured goods hit the market so did more manufactured versions of seemingly natural food products. Vinegar, for example, had long been purchased by grocers from local farmers and

[21] Hills, "How Advertising Helped," 4. In the 1920s, the Saturday Evening Post alone had a circulation of roughly two million. Jan Cohn, *Creating America: George Horace Lorimer and the Saturday Evening Post* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1989), 165.

[22]The company noted men wrote in for inexpensive samples and women wrote in for free cookbooks. Hills, "How Advertising Helped," 6.

[23] Emery, "A Clean-Cut Victory," 25 and True "Principles in the Merchandising," 41.

[24] Susan Strasser, "Customer to Consumer: The New Consumption in the Progressive Era," OAH *Magazine of History* 13, no. 3 (Spring 1999): 10.

[25] Ibid., 10.

producers and sold regionally. This new consumer market encouraged the consumption of branded vinegar, like Heinz, as a modern, safe, and preferred product.[26] Hills Brothers Dromedary dates fell into a similar form; though not domestically produced, they were now processed with modern manufacturing equipment and labor and packaged in a way that set them apart from bulk products.

Packaged goods also opened up new markets; dates could now be sold at "fruit and candy counter[s]," in work buildings, or even as gifts in general and department stores.[27] As with other manufacturers of the day, Hills Brothers sought to "educate" the public as to how to consume their product, hence their popular cookbooks.[28] Hills Brothers remarked that prior to their 1910 packaging revolution, they could not find "a single recipe for the preparing of dates."[29] To rectify the situation they launched a recipe contest, picked the one-hundred best recipes, and compiled them into a cookbook they distributed for free. This popular book reached countless consumers as did subsequent editions that included recipes for their famous Dromedary brand dates, shredded coconut, figs, and more.[30] These lavishly illustrated cookbooks, like the dates themselves, were marketed directly to women, who not only made the purchasing decisions but had sway

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[26] Ibid.

[27] Quoted in "Ladies! Let Cleopatra Order Your Lunch Today" Ad in True, "Principles in the Merchandising," 36.

[28] Gillette, for example, published how-to booklets for men accustomed to barbers' shaves. Hills Brothers directly conceptualized their work as "education," and described it as such in the advertising press. To learn more about these consumer training projects see Strasser, "Customer to Consumer."

[29] Hills "How Advertising Helped," 6.

[30] The product or corporate cookbook was a facet of the date industry, beginning with Hills Brothers. Indeed it was a staple of the American business as early as 1874. William Woys Weaver, *Culinary Ephemera: An Illustrated History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 175.

over the daily menu and the power to add additional dates to baked goods, breakfasts, and luncheons.

The Hills Brothers' advertising campaign that began in the 1910s and grew stronger through the 1920s, addressed two critical themes that would eventually be replicated by California date growers as well. First the company reassured consumers that their products were sanitary and clean, by championing American technological superiority. Secondly, the company turned to the romance of the Orient to sell their product, phenomena taken to extremes by California date growers in the years that followed.

"Clean, Fresh and Delicious": Hills Brothers Dates in the Era of Pure Food Movements

In the second half of the nineteenth century, urbanization created a growing distance between consumers and their diets. Advancements in technology and science led to a plethora of processed foods that had previously been grown at home or purchased/ bartered for on an intimate regional basis. This shift in established modes of consumption meant that "consumer anxieties about quality- specifically, about food adulteration- were increasingly common."[31] Concerns manifested in increasing consumer outcry over food adulteration and new laws, both state and federal, around pure foods and food safety as early as the 1880s.[32] Progressive reforms peaked with the passage of the 1906 Pure Food

[31] Marc Law, "The Origins of State Pure Food Regulation," *The Journal of Economic History* 63, no. 4 (December 2003): 1005.

[32] Ibid.

and Drug Act. Press coverage, including the serial publication of Upton Sinclar's *The Jungle*, confronted consumers on a daily basis, rendering the American public sensitive to issues of pure food and food safety.

While most consumers purchased the majority of their food in bulk through the 1920s, if not later, bulk wasn't much better in terms of sanitation. Much of the concern over food purity centered not on the farmer or the local grocer but on the distributor or wholesaler; the public held legitimate worries as oils were added to lard, water added to milk, and glucose added to maple syrup.[33] Concern covered imported goods as well; one grocer's manual implied cayenne imports could contain brick dust and lead.[34] Because dates maintained their individual integrity, though sticky and misshapen, adulteration at the wholesale or distribution level, including the packing plant, may have been more difficult, though it is possible some were soaked in sweetening agents like molasses. Items from open bulk containers, of dates and other products, sat open to the elements on the grocer's shelves vulnerable to dust, pests, and grocers' hands. When date cases were opened there, they were "inevitably exposed" to "dirt and flies," which of course "did not seem very appetizing to the consumer."[35] Hills Brother described bulk dates not in terms of their exposure to disease or pests while still abroad; they insisted such sanitation issues were introduced in markets. Doing so insinuated that bulk sale of the fruit, not its Middle Eastern origin, was the leading cause of consumer distrust for the product.

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[33] Ibid., 1115.

[34] Hoganson , *Consumers' Imperium*,129.

[35] Emery, "A Clean-Cut Victory," 19.

The company walked a fine line in order to encourage sales of its packed, "clean" dates while still selling its bulk variety. They could simply not afford to associate their bulk product with an Orient that America already perceived as dirty, especially given the association with disease. If the association with illness from abroad was linked to the fruit then no amount of repackaging could purify the end product. As one 1913 advertisement suggested, the dates "reach you as clean, fresh and delicious as when gathered in far off Arabia."[36] This idea ran counter to USDA and American date grower claims about Arabs de-pitting dates with their mouths and packing the fruit with their bare feet, which was an effective selling point for American grown dates in its own right.

Historian Kristin Hoganson points out that turn-of-the-century popular understandings of foreign food and imports marked them as soiled and impure. Advertisements for Ceylon/Indian tea, for example showed processing in Chinese tea factories complete with half naked laborers working directly above livestock. Thanks to advertisements like this and longstanding stereotypes of various racialized groups, Americans at the time viewed foreign processing under negative light. "A lack of sanitation in foreign food preparation," Hoganson argues, instilled "a sense of national superiority."[37] Reorienting the processing of imported dates to North America solved the problem by asserting the power of American science via mechanical advancements in packaging and, as we shall see, erasing the sanitation threat through American labor.

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[36] "Food Values" Ad Hills, "How Advertising Helped," 4.

[37] Hoganson , *Consumers' Imperium*, 128. Sherrie Inness also makes this argument. Advertisements for Chinese food and foodstuffs, for example, took care to mention clean, U.S. processing conditions as late as the 1930s. Sherrie A. Inness, *Dinner Roles: American Women and Culinary Culture* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2001), 107.

Considering the public interest in pure and safe foods, Hills Brothers wasted little time in reassuring their consumer base that packaged goods added an element of sanitation to their products. To imply cleanliness and freshness the company referred to packaging as "dust proof," and "sanitary" in hopes of convincing buyers that the new, packaged date was a far cry from the familiar bulk variety. Packing the product magically transformed the previously unsanitary dates into a pure food. As company executives suggested, "the package was necessary in order to give the housewife an absolutely clean product in a form which would keep for a long time on the grocer's shelves or in her own pantry."[38] Cleanliness of the product applied in processing extended to the home as well. Packages could keep out dust and insects not just on grocery shelves, but also in home pantries, and extended shelf lives meant less mess from quickly degrading dates.

By emphasizing purity and cleanliness, advertisers also highlighted modern technology and sanitary packing conditions. Hills Brothers "engaged the laboratory to inspect [their] factory once a month" a voluntary move that helped them stress their quality to trade purchasers.[39] By 1919 Hills Brothers claimed to have the world's largest factory for packing dried fruit.[40] Hills Brothers' processing plant adhered, according to the company, to "all the rules of cleanliness that a most scrupulous observer of hygiene could require."[41] While such claims reached more grocers, industry men, and advertisers than consumers, Hills Brothers used other language to link pure food and their factories

[38] Emery, "A Clean-Cut Victory," 19.

[39] Hills, "How Advertising Helped," 8.

[40] Emery, "A Clean-Cut Victory," 25.

[41] Ibid.

in their public advertisements. Their dates, claimed one 1920 advertisement, were processed "in modern sunlit packing rooms," sunshine invoking a sense of fresh air, healthfulness, and purity despite the factory setting.

Labor also played a role in convincing the public and the trade that Hills Brothers packaged dates were pure, fresh, and clean. Hand packing the dates required labor often completed by women and by 1919 the company required their women workers to wear white outfits, uniforms that reinforcing ideas of a modern, clean shop.[42] Given the Brooklyn location, we can assume European immigrant or second generation women worked there, who by all accounts would be considered inferior and dirty in American perceptions of the day. The uniforming of these women represented an act of Americanization, rendering them less ethnic and less impure. These uniformed women, of course, would be preferred in racial hierarchies of the time to "Arabian" women who may have processed the dates abroad. Therefore invoking the uniformed, pseudo-white female worker implied a cleanliness, purity, and healthfulness in its own right that played off racial rankings of the day. Indeed several of the processed food industry's behemoths utilized white-uniformed women to reinforce notions of cleanliness.[43]

Lest the consumer be concerned by their working conditions, *Printers Ink* readers were assured that the nearly 1,000 women who worked for the company in 1922 did so in "pleasant" surroundings for a company that was "continually striving to improve the

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[42]. Emery, "A Clean-Cut Victory," 25.

[43] Both Heinz and Kellogg's opened parts of their factories so that consumers could see clean, attractive women work. For more see Harvey A. Levenstein, *Revolution at the Table: The Transformation of the American Diet*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988) and Nancy F. Koehn, "Henry Heinz and Brand Creation in the Late Nineteenth Century: Making Markets for Processed Food," *The Business History Review* 3 no. 3 (Autumn 1999): 349-393.

conditions under which they work."[44] The descriptions presented implied that, if the company could afford to have pleasant working conditions, it would be less inclined to cut corners around health and safety. Given that the sources for such claims were all produced by the Hills Brothers, we cannot be sure that these assertions were factual, but they were important enough to the company to include them in public interviews and press. Focusing only on the women packing and the labor done in the United States rendered the bodies of agricultural laborers abroad, and their potential association with unfair labor practices and unsanitary conditions, invisible as well.

Whitewashed labor was a crucial strategy in convincing the American consumer to purchase packaged dates. The depictions of the workers who packaged Hills Brothers dates served to reconnect the consumer to pre-industrialized forms of consumption- direct barter and trade with those who produced their foodstuffs. Highlighting labor linked the buyer and the producer again. Female labor in its own right implied a nostalgic form of domesticity via Progressive era uniformity. The clean, well cared for (industrially via good working conditions), uniformed (in white aprons) women identified those who produced the dates for consumers in an effort to move away from the anonymity that produced anxiety over food purity and safety.

"For Your Protection": Hills Brothers Adverting and the Language of Science

The Hills Brothers advertising campaigns also incorporated the latest American science to reinforce their ideas that their packaged dates were not only clean, but also that

[44] True, "Principles in Merchandising," 44.

they provided the benefits of high calories and solid nutrition. By the time Hills Brothers began packaging dates in 1910 American science had already transformed consumption patterns. Refrigeration, breakthroughs in chemistry, and new technology allowed for an extension of food through canning, preservation, and the transportation of goods over long distances.[45] Much of the turn towards American science worked in tandem with claims of better sanitation. In particular, the advent of pasteurization and its use for packaged dates served as a selling point for Hills Brothers.[46] One of the company's cookbooks from the 1930s, for example, defined pasteurization as a "scientific heat process which absolutely destroys all germs capable of producing disease. Dromedary dates are the *only* dates that are pasteurized for your protection."[47] A different cookbook from 1928 asserted that packaged, pasteurized dates did not need to be cleaned or washed prior to consumption.[48] By the 1930s pasteurization was familiar to the average American consumer.[49] In fact Hills Brothers directly linked themselves to the power of

[45] See Law "Origins of Food Regulations," 1105.

[46] Discovered by Louis Pasteur in the mid nineteenth-century, the process of pasteurization heated foods to the point that pathogens were killed or reduced without significantly altering taste or constancy.

[47] The Hills Brothers Co., *Dromedary Dates Wonder Book* (New York: Hills Brothers Company). American growers began pasteurizing well before this but Hills Brothers may have been the only importers to do so. However scientist from the 1930s found fewer microbes on the unprocessed imported bulk pressed dates than they did on processed dates, implying contamination during processing. Experiments went on to implicate pasteurization as a boon to consumer health. Because an outbreak of colitis in England was directly traced to Algerian or Tunisian Deglet Noor dates, bacteria on the imported fruit "constitute[d] a serious public health problem." Carl R. Fellers, "Pasteurized Dried Fruits," *American Journal of Public Health* 20, no. 2 (February 1930): 175- 181.

[48] Home Economics Department of the Hills Brothers Company *Dates in the Healthful Diet* (New York: Hills Brothers Company, 1928).

[49] The consumption of raw milk was linked to bovine tuberculosis, which mimicked human tuberculosis in those who caught it. As a result the pasteurization process was applied widely to milk so much so that, though it had been virtually unheard of in 1900, more than ninety-eight percent of milk sold in major U.S.

pasteurization for milk, then the most well known use for the scientific process. Dromedary dates, the company reasoned, were the only dates that "have been made absolutely safe for your table- pasteurized you call it- just like fine milk."[50] Language reassured consumers that consuming packaged dates was safer than bulk. Pasteurization of the fruit in the United States, therefore, represented a real scientific advancement in the eyes of microbiologist researchers; translated to the consumer via advertisements, the process gave Dromedary brand dates an added sense of safety.[51]

Beyond advancements in sanitation and pasteurization, the discovery and widespread discussion of the calorie at the end of the nineteenth century turned the nation's attention to food in a new way. Its discovery made food measurable, a form of the ever increasing popular statistic which helped Americans establish their superiority of the time period.[52] Because vitamins were not discovered until the 1920s, there was no other means of evaluating nutritional value. While high calories remain taboo in modern America, for much of the twentieth century highly caloric foods were preferred.

Calories, then, became a selling point in the food world; high calories could be touted as an added value. Hills Brothers utilized this public sentiment, by hiring a lab to

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cities had been pasteurized by 1936. Alan L. Olmstead and Paul W. Rhode, "An Impossible Undertaking: The Eradication of Bovine Tuberculosis in the United States," *The Journal of Economic History* 64, no. 3 (September 2004): 1- 39. For a history of raw and pasteurized milk see Anne Mendelson, "In Bacteria Land": The Battle over Raw Milk," *Gastronomica: The Journal of Food and Culture* 11, no. 1 (Spring 2011): 35-43.

[50] Hills Brothers, *Dromedary Date Wonder Book.*

[51] The process of pasteurization was used by California date growers as well. See V. H. W. Dowson and A. Aten, *Dates Handling, Processing, and Packing* (Rome: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 1962), 235-238.

[52] See Nick Cullather, "The Foreign Policy of the Calorie," *The American Historical Review* 112, no. 2 (April 2007): 337-364.

evaluate the nutritional value of the imported dates.[53] This "chemical analyses," phrasing that evoked the power of science in its own right, was prominently featured in their advertisements from the early 1910s. One ad compared calorie counts gathered from government reports, arguing dates had higher calories than round steak, eggs, bread, potatoes, and even honey.[54] The high calories and natural, digestible sugars served as scientific touch stones that made dates, "a most nutritious food." [55] Hills Brothers, of course, was not the first to utilize the calorie as an advertising method; one cereal company told its consumers that "calories measure food energy the same as dollars measure money."[56] The monetary link was an obvious one, higher calories in inexpensive foods proved economical. This remained particularly important with worries over food insecurity mounting in the 1910s and again in the 1930s.[57]

After science broke ground on nutritional understandings of vitamins and minerals, Hills Brothers turned to these notions to sell their product as well. Emphasizing perceived impact on bone growth, one 1930s cookbook read: "Dates are rich in vitamins, in valuable minerals that protect teeth and bones," encouraging a more rounded understanding of nutritional value than the calorie.[58] A focus on the growth of teeth and

[53] Hills, "How Advertising Helped," 8.

[54] "Food Values" Advertisement, reproduced in Hills, "How Advertising Helped," 4.

[55] Ibid., 4.

[56] Cullather, "The Foreign Policy of the Calorie," 347.

[57] For more see "The Great Malnutrition Scare" in Levenstein, *Revolution at the Table*, 109- 120.

[58] Hills Brothers, *Dromedary Date Wonder Book.*

bones appealed directly to mothers and implied dates' benefits to children.[59] Sugars also gained sway in some Hills Brothers advertisements with claims that dates held more "fruit sugar" than "any other food," sugars that were quickly converted into "energy and vigor."[60] Long before the more recent vilification of carbohydrates, sugars were understood to be a crucial nutritional force.

A "scientific demonstration of the food value of the date" allowed Hills Brothers to render one of the world's most ancient foods into a modern product: supported by claims of nutritional needs and high calories and eventually, vitamins and minerals.[61] This information was passed along to consumers in the company's cookbooks; "The dietetic value of such fruits as dates, figs, currants, etc., is a high one and these fruits should appear on our tables at least once a day."[62] In particular the fruit was promoted as a "growth food" for children.[63] The sweet taste appealed to kids and helped reassure mothers that their children were receiving nutritious food, an idea Coachella Valley date growers would pick up on as well. Claims that dates were 'healthful" and "wholesome" not only implied nutritional value but invoked a sense of cleanliness that the company sought to highlight as well. Rendering the date into a health food simultaneously purified it and confirmed its freedom from disease and "dirty" Arab hands.

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[59] Hills Brothers was far from unique in this strategy. For more on American companies' use of vitamins in advertising "The Newer Nutrition" in Levenstein, *Revolution at the Table,* 147- 160.

[60] Hills Brothers, *Dromedary Date Wonder Book.*

[61] Hills, "How Advertising Helped," 8.

[62] The Hills Brothers Company, *Dromedary Cook Book* (New York: Hills Brothers Company, 1910).

[63] "A Gift from the Orient" Hills Brothers Advertisement, *Women's Home Companion* (January 1915): 54.

Interestingly Hills Brothers often acknowledged the widespread consumption of dates by people in the Middle East and Northern Africa. One advertisement mentioned that "the sturdy, active Arabians live largely" on the fruit.[64] Rather than consume the date as a confection, these exotic others utilized dates as "the staff of life," a romantic notion that suggested dates might serve as something beyond an after dinner treat.[65] Indeed a 1930s cookbook went so far as to claim that dates "build vigor for the heroes of the desert- the fierce, brave warriors" of the Middle East.[66] In particular the book again brought up the fondness of Arabs to eat nothing but dates and milk "for months at a time," making them "the healthiest of all men," exaggerating the Arab diet in hopes of improving the Western one, or at least selling more dates.[67] The company walked a fine line while associating the diets of "foreigners," with the date, given American distrust of ethnic cuisine except for its Americanized versions.

One other element of nutrition helped Hills Brothers sell their dates to the public. To demonstrate their wealth, elites at the turn of the century often dined in public on rich foods that left them with digestive problems.[68] The lasting Victorian fad of using baking powder for breads partnered with temperance's aversion to alcohol even in the form of yeast, meant turn of the century eaters also faced an increasing problem with

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[64] "As Dainty as Candy" Advertisement Hills Brothers (1910).

[65] Hills, "How Advertising Helped," 8.

[66] Hills Brothers, *Dromedary Date Wonder Book.*

[67] Ibid.

[68] Andrew P. Haley, "The Nation before Taste: The Challenges of American Culinary History," *The Public Historian* 34, no. 2 (Spring 2012): 68-69.

constipation.[69] Indeed the "preoccupation," of "the regularity of bowel movements appears to be one of the many dietary phobias" that worried Americans.[70] These problems sparked interest in dietary forms of relief. Dates, when taken in substantial quantities, are a natural laxative and their potassium content can aid in digestion. In one 1916 advertisement the company promised they were "most easily digested."[71] They more openly declared that the fiber present in dates "aids in the elimination of waste matter from the intestinal tract" in a 1928 cookbook.[72] Eventually, American date growers would elaborate on the idea of the date as a nutritious health food as well.

"From the Garden of Eden:" Orientalism and Hills Brothers Marketing

As the world came to the shores of America after the Civil War, domestic interest in foreign items expanded as middle-class white women constructed Oriental "cosy corners" with plush fabrics and began to experiment with fashion inspired by the Far East. Part of this experimentation, especially among women, had a culinary nature. "Slumming," through Chinatowns became a popular urban endeavor, inevitably culminating at a Chinese restaurant where diners could both try the exotic food or gawk at foods too foreign for their taste (shark fin soup for example).[73] But the appeal of the exotic also found a place at the American dinner table. Recipes with foreign ingredients,

[69] Weaver, *Culinary Ephemera*, 91-95.

[70] Ibid., 95.

[71] "Everybody Says 'Yes' to Dromedary Dates," Hills Brothers Advertisement (1916).

[72] Hills Brothers, *Dates in the Healthful Diet*.

[73] Hoganson, *Consumers' Imperium*, 116-118. For more on this practice see Chad Heap, *Slumming: Sexual and Racial Encounters in American Night Life, 1885-1940* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

like garlic and chilies, appeared frequently during this time period as they did for foreign dishes themselves from curries to pastas. Experiments into international gastronomy allowed American women to define themselves by what they were not, to render themselves cosmopolitan and worldly, and to display their wealth and privilege.[74] The fascination with foreign foods lasted well beyond the turn of the century; however, the period between the world wars saw American women explore Americanized foreign foods as a taste of "the exotic, the foreign, and the strange."[75]

Dates provided an instant way to connect to exotic food-ways and a safe experiment at that. Since they had long been imported they were exotic without appearing dangerous or frankly that foreign. While Americans worried about the adulteration of food stuff they also feared consuming strange items inadvertently when eating "ethnic food."[76] As an individual fruit little could be hidden within the date, as opposed to curries or other exotic delicacies. Unlike garlic or chilies, which were linked to immigrants who many Americans feared and distrusted, the date remained free from any links to large immigrant communities as immigration from the Greater Middle East was limited.

Historian Kristin Hoganson argues that much of American women's culinary adventures were incorporated with an eye towards European imperialism, hence the popularity of curry, for example, a legacy of Great Britain's colonization of India.[77] Not only were dates exotic in their own right, they innately implied European luxury and

[74] Hoganson, *Consumers' Imperium*, 114-123, 149.

[75] Inness, *Dinner Roles*, 89.

[76] Ibid., 105.

[77] Hoganson, *Consumers' Imperium*, 114-115.

were increasingly tied to European imperialism. By the time Hills Brothers began to market their dates England had a long presence in Persia and Egypt while France, already seen as a culinary powerhouse, had imperialist ties to North Africa.

And yet the date could appeal to those women who favored American food and feared the foreign. Hills Brothers preferred that domestic consumption use the date as a staple at the daily table, not simply at the occasional Oriental themed dinner. Cookbooks reflected these desires with recipes for sandwiches, salads, and baked goods far outnumbering those inspired by the Near East.[78] As scholar Sherrie Inness argues, American culinary culture clearly preferred traditional American foods but deemed other foods acceptable if they were "not too exotic or unusual."[79] Thus dates held all the appeal of the exotic without any really foreign nature attached; they could be eaten in American standard cuisine, or even by themselves.

While connecting foreign foods to the exotic worlds of faraway lands drew attention from middle-class, white consumers, it did so without addressing "the human and environmental toll," such consumption provoked.[80] Though the Middle East sold dates in advertisements featuring camel caravans and swaying palm trees, the realities of the region were obscured. Embracing the romance allowed consumers the privilege of ignorance when it came to the slavery involved in producing Hills Brothers dates. From at least 1870 through to 1930, if not beyond, slavery from East Africa expanded in the

[78] Hoganson argues that while many women sought out some form of foreign goods, many women wanted to Americanize all cuisine and preference New England cooking. Hoganson, *Consumers' Imperium*, 122.

[79] Inness, *Dinner Roles*, 90.

[80] Hoganson, *Consumers' Imperium*, 121.

Middle East, especially in Oman. Increased American consumption of the fruit led directly to the expansion of the slavery system that often "broke," young sub-Saharan boys into a life of slavery first in the date groves and later in the nearby pearl industry.[81]

Early on in their packaged date project Hills Brothers turned to the romance of the Orient to help sell their product. Ads from the 1910s identified the dates' origins, "picked from the palms of Arabia," "selected by our own staff at Bussorah," the "very regions of the Garden of Eden."[82] Indeed the Garden of Eden references appeared directly on Dromedary date boxes by 1920. One advertisement contained not only an illustration of a carton of the dates and dates on a fine silver tray but also a drawing of a building, palms, and river scene in what appeared to be the Middle East. The caption identified the building as their headquarters "in far off Arabia," that allowed them "the choicest crops of the Euphrates River date region," which, they argued, grew the best dates on earth.[83]

This claim no doubt served several functions. First in identifying the date's origin in "Arabia," the advertisement lent an air of authenticity to the crop, despite the fact that Arabia was not quite a precise geographic location. This may have been a direct attack on the growing California date business that claimed to grow the fruit with better methods on better land in the United States. More importantly, however, the image and caption, along with other Orientalist depictions of other ads, serves to invoke the romance and ancient ways associated with the Orient, giving the product a sense of the traditional,

[81] For a discussion of slavery in the date fields see Hopper, "The Globalization of Dried Fruit."

[82]"As Dainty as Candy" Hills Brothers Advertisement (1910). and "Eat Dates Often" Hills Brothers Advertisement (1911).

[83] "Serve Dromedary Dates" Hills Brothers Advertisement (1920).

unchanging pleasures of the past. Similarly the Garden of Eden biblical reference implied goodness instantaneously associated with the Holy Land, a downright divine quality produced when God created the earth.

The luxury and romance of the Orient had long sold products in the states, with tobacco and coffee as perhaps the most notable. Though tobacco's origins lay in North America, by the 1880s it was widely grown in the Ottoman Empire and in Egypt. When widespread manufacturing of cigarettes and cigars took hold after 1900, national advertising for these tobacco products, including the Camel brand, often included Egyptian imagery, sometimes mixed with other Orientalist fantasies.[84] Because coffee drinking originated among Muslims in the Middle East and Northern Africa, American advertisers sought to link their product with the romance of the Orient. Brands like Omar, Baghdad Coffee, Arabian Banquet were well known at the American table by 1900. Several brands included Orientalist images in their packaging often a camel or a turbaned "Arab" man and even Aladdin and Ben Hur.[85]

Most notable for the date industry, was the iconic Hills Brother's "Arab" taster. The Hills Brothers coffee company began selling coffee and spices in San Francisco well before the turn of the century, around the same time the Hills Brothers fruit company opened for business. Though unrelated, the two businesses likely benefited from each other's marketing. The Hills Brothers who sold coffee first used their iconic Arab taster

[84] Bob Brier, *Egyptomania: Our Three Thousand Year Obsession with the Land of the Pharaohs* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 102-107.

[85] Jonathan Friedlander, "America's Arabian 'Cuppa Joe,'" *Saudi Aramco World* 61, no. 5 (September/ October 2010).

on their products in 1906.[86] The image, of a turbaned, bearded man in a long costume was unmistakably associated with the Greater Middle East, which was already linked to coffee in consumer's minds. The identical name and the Arab image may have spurred the fruit producing Hills Brothers Company to adopt a similar Orientalized brand image in 1910, the dromedary camel led by an "Arab" man.

Orientalist imagery had long evoked a sense of luxury goods, given the high cost of imports and a long association with European refinement and imperialism.[87] To get an "Oriental atmosphere into the picture," the company included "scenes of date palms with camels," as to "suggest something of the richness and quality that are associated with the Orient."[88] Such luxury was implied in a 1915 advertisement from *Women's Home Companion*. The "luscious" fruit appeared in an advertisement that read "A Gift from the Orient," a phrase imposed before a camel caravan.[89] The caravan itself implied luxury items traded since antiquity and "gifts" invoked a sense of excitement and quality goods.

Interestingly, by 1919, Hills Brothers claimed that they did not utilize Orientialist images in their advertising, no harem girls for example, even though the American public held onto the romance of the region. "While Americans think of the Orient as romantic," J. H. Hills recounted in Printers' Ink, "they also think of it as dirty. We do not want any

[86]Massimo Zanetti Beverages USA, "History," Hills Brothers, accessed April 14, 2014; available at http://www.hillsbros.com/history.

[87] Hoganson, *Consumers' Imperium*.

[88] Hills, "How Advertising Helped," 6.

[89] "A Gift from the Orient" Advertisement, *Women's Home Companion*.

unfortunate and entirely unwarranted stigma of that sort applied to Dromedary Dates."[90] The company at once tried to distance itself from Orientalist stereotypes that did a disservice to its products and embrace the overall mythos of romance that surrounded the region. While the company claimed not to use "languorous and plump damsels reclining on couches or star-eyed daughters of the desert consuming the dates," they turned to the notion of the very such daughters for an advertisement in 1923.

The advertisement in question featured a small insert illustration of a bearded man in a traditional Arab headdress. (Figure 2.1) Nearby a quote read "'HAST THOU not read, my daughter, of the beauty of the Queen of Sheba? Behold she lunched on dates and milk and was the Mary Pickford of her village.'- The Wise Man of the East."[91] The quote, of course is loaded with American understandings of the Orient. The "wise man" reference invoked the biblical understanding of the term implying an ancient yet timeless people. At the same time, the ad attempts to attract women to the product with the reference to a popular Hollywood star of the day. The advertisement may have conjured images of the 1921 film, *The Queen of Sheba*, as well as the biblical understanding of the character. Regardless, the standard trope of beautiful, yet guarded, Arab women is evoked here, crediting a diet of dates and milk for her fine beauty.

[90] Emery, "A Clean-Cut Vicotry," 25.

[91] "Here it Is! Big Dromedary now has a little brother!," Hills Brothers Advertisement, (1923).

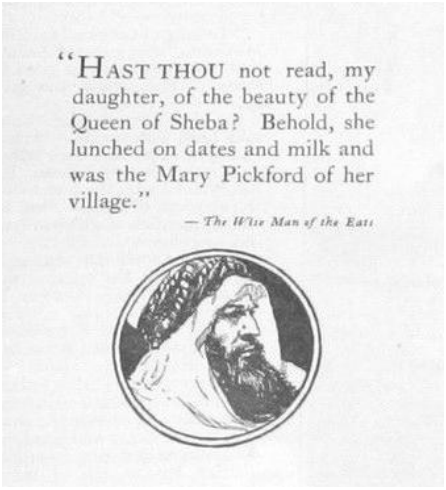

Figure 2.1: "Here it Is! Big Dromedary Now has a Little Brother!" Hills Brothers Advertisement, 1923. Collection of the Author.

A 1922 date advertisement prominently featured Cleopatra, encouraging women to "Let Cleopatra order your lunch today."[92] The use of Cleopatra reflects an increasing American interest in Egypt at the time; while it predated the discovery of King Tutankhamen's tomb by a few months, the renewal of American Egyptomania was well underway and the queen had long been featured in Hollywood films. The advertisement in question urged women to consider small packaged dates for their lunch, calling them to take dates with them to their office to keep in their desk. This new, working woman was also encouraged to purchase dates because, like Cleopatra, the "women of the Orient" kept their teeth white, skin lustrous, and health radiant by eating dates.[93] The Hills Brothers advertisements again targeted women, in this case not just as the primary cook but as a busy, clerical, working woman who could nourish her beauty and health by

[92] True, "Principles in the Merchandising," 1922.

[93] Ibid. For more on the gendered trends and popular themes of American advertising from the 1920s to the 1940s see Roland Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity, 1920-1940* (Berkeley: University of California, Press, 1985).

purchasing a tasty treat long associated with the Orient.[94] In its reference to Middle Eastern women's appearance the ad also tapped into the norm of American Orientalism: the sexualized woman subject to a new imperialist gaze of the consumer.

Placing images of "Arabian" people on their packaging allowed Hills Brothers to do more than just invoke the romance and luxury of the East; it also provided an aura of authenticity. Anglo-Americans often used ethnic others in advertising to apply an aura of authenticity. For example, mammy images on Southern or "home cooking" products invoked nostalgia for not only the cooking of domestic slaves and servants but of uncomplicated race relations.[95] Adding the Arab image to packaging implied authenticity by connecting the product to the birthplace of the date, landscapes with long histories of date consumption. Moreover his presence there infused the product with a sense of purity and wholesomeness, as Arabs had historically been depicted as closely tied to nature, un-modern, and traditional. This implied, therefore, an unadulterated product, eaten the way people had been consuming it in the Middle East since time immemorial. The Arab knew dates innately (hence the numerous mention that he and his kin lived entirely on the fruit) and his presence on Hills Brothers packaging transferred that knowledge and authenticity to the company. Just as the company profited from American science with its modern, clean packing plants and its nutritional understandings, so too could it benefit from an

[94] Indeed Levenstein suggests that by 1929 clerical jobs out paced manufacturing jobs for women. Levenstein, *Revolution at the Table,* 161.

[95] For more on the Mammy figure in advertising see: Alice A. Deck, "'Now Then- Who Said Biscuits?' The Black Woman Cook as Fetish in American Advertising, 1905-1953," *Kitchen Culture in America: Popular Representations of Food, Gender, and Race*, Sherrie A. Inness, ed. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001). Similar images of Chinese, Mexicans, and Native Americans sold products via authenticity as well. Weaver, *Culinary Ephemera*. See also the William Woys Weaver, "The Dark Side of Culinary Ephemera," *Gastronomica: The Journal of Food and Culture* 6, no. 3 (Summer 2006): 76-81.

association (however romanced) with the originators of the fruit itself, producers in the Middle East.

The Hills Brothers date company continued to use the Orient to sell dates. By the early 1930s they sponsored a radio program set in the Near East, one that apparently followed the genre of the desert romance made familiar by the *Sheik* and other works of fiction. The radio program included an Arab storyteller, Abdullah, and two white characters, the desert hero and heroine, who appeared in pith helmets, khakis, and riding booths. The radio advertising spilled into other marketing ploys including a combination cookbook and children's activity book that could be obtained for free in exchange for one company date box top. This so called *Wonder Book* prominently featured Arabian imagery, including a fierce desert warrior and his Arabian horses on the cover. The book also included paper cutouts for children. In addition to the desert hero, heroine , and Abdulla with his camel, children could play with an Arab "Chieftain," who looked similar to the "Desert Outlaws;" a Bedouin tent with two Arabs smoking a hookah; a separate "Turkish Pipe;" monks, who almost appeared to be in front of a Spanish style mission; and "sentinels" with French legion outfits.

In addition, the book relied heavily on Abdullah "the wise," to tell the reader more about dates, from their nutritional density to their delicious flavor as well as the specific benefits of Hills Brothers dates. In doing so, Hills Brothers relied on stereotypes that poised some Arabs as ancient and wise sages, who revealed important secrets to the world while at the same time inviting America's youths to cut out paper dolls and stage battles between more dangerous "Arab Chieftains" and "Desert Outlaws." The heroes and

heroines, however, remained defined by their white skin and European style dress. Regardless, Hills Brothers hoped that if children created Orientalist playscapes with the help of their *Wonder Book* and "Dromedary Caravan" radio show, it wouldn't be long before they asked their mothers to try the company's dates. To ease their conversion, the *Wonder Book* supplied mostly American recipes for Date Ice Box Pudding, Red Riding-Hood Jelly, and Tiny Tim Apples, though more exotic Arabian Caramels and Date Turkish Paste also found their way into the cookbook.

Hills Brothers continued to sell dates well into the twentieth century. They remained the only importers to market nationally for some time. Discussion of cleanliness and American science faded as consumer faith in manufactured goods rose with the years, though advertisements continued to mentioned pasteurization. So too did the advertisements' Orientalist themes; by the 1940s, the company refocused their advertising to include lush color images of their date recipes and sometimes cartoons or photographs of women using their products. These advertisements matched those of other companies of the day who focused on recipes, images of the food, and A women. This sentiment stayed with the company through the 1970s. Health continued to be mentioned in marketing, particularly the fruits benefits for growing children. Eventually purchased by Nabisco, Hills Brothers continued to focus on the Dromedary brand baking mixes instead of dates.[96]

The Hills Brothers' early marketing campaigns were so successful that they increased per capita consumption of the fruit and drove up imports for some time. Their

[96] Boxed dates were sold at least through the 1970s.

aggressive marketing served not just to drive up sales of their packaged dates but, according to the company, the work also increased bulk sales. These campaigns no doubt drew attention to the Coachella Valley's fruit industry, just beginning to blossom. The national advertising scope meant Hills Brothers paid for advertising in markets they did not yet dominate; their focus remained on the Midwest and the East. The West, then, was far more open to the American date market given its proximity to the newly established California date groves.[97]

Creating the California Consumer: Marketing Coachella Valley's Crop.

By the time the Coachella Valley date industry began to produce commercial levels of mature dates, the Hills Brothers Company already spearheaded the quest to push American taste buds towards the fruit. Beginning in the late 1910s and extending through the 1960s, if not beyond, American date growers capitalized on the success of Hills Brothers. Mimicking the call for quality dates, Coachella Valley growers argued that California grown produce was safer, healthier, and generally superior to imported varieties sold by Hills Brothers. Domestic labor, extensive scientific research, the use of fertilizers, pesticides, and fumigants all helped Americans articulate their product's supremacy which, they argued, harnessed the power of American science. In addition California date growers also employed American Orientalism to sell their crop.

[97] In fact in 1925 over 78.7 million pounds of dates were imported but only 5.6 million of them, a paltry seven percent, entered via the Pacific. D. H. Mitchell, "Foreign Date Competition," *Report of the Fourth Annual Date Growers Institute* (Coachella: Coachella Valley Farm Center, 1927), 1-2.

By the 1920s the Coachella Valley date growers expressed an increasing fondness for Deglet Noor dates. While the variety was widely consumed in Europe, few Deglet Noors dates were imported to the United States. Unlike the soft, imported Persian varieties, Deglet Noor dates were a semi-firm variety which held its shape through picking, packing, shipping, and handling. Many of the Deglet Noors grown in the Coachella Valley were bound for wholesale. Some dates (of that variety and others) were sold under individual labels directly to the consumer via mail order or in small date shops in the region. Cooperatives sold dates for certain periods of time under brands available nationwide as well. Given the relatively large number of packing houses and brands, there were numerous marketing strategies. Many of them, however, were marked by similar ideas of cleanliness, purity, science, nutrition, and Arabian fantasies. Though American grown dates cost more, they reached the consumer in better quality and with superior packaging and flavor. Thus, while U.S. consumers were familiar with the date thanks to the successful Hills Brothers advertising campaign, they still needed to be swayed to purchase American grown at higher prices. No small feat, as by the early 1940s, only ten percent of the dates consumed in the United States came from California's Coachella Valley.[98]

The Great White Date: Purity, Cleanliness, Labor, and the American Dates

Boosters for American dates wasted no time emphasizing their unique cleanliness in comparison to the processing of the Middle East varieties. May Sowles Metzler, author

[98] Harry W. vonLoesecke, *Outlines of Food Technology* (New York: Reinhold Publishing Corporation, 1942), 75.

of a date cookbook for American grown dates, declared "now that they are grown commercially in Coachella Valley, California, and packed under cleanly American conditions, there no doubt will be a great future for the industry."[99] For Metzler and many others, cleanliness lay at the heart of the American industry's success; it made California's dates superior to imported varieties. Like Hills Brothers' advertising, this tactic involved separating dates from the stereotype of the "dirty Arab," emphasizing white, female labor, and highlighting scientific advancements not yet present in Greater Middle East.

Connected to the rest of the nation via the railroads, later trucking networks, and even air mail, the dates could reach consumers more quickly than imported varieties. At times the Coachella Valley date industry tried to market their crop as a completely different animal from the Hills Brothers imports. In the 1930s, one cooperative association labeled their dates as "fresh," perishable fruit, one of the few available in winter. They attempted to educate the consumer that this fresh date product was only available in the United States since the fresh fruit would not survive the long journey overseas.[100] Fresh dates lacked the stickiness characterized by imports and by their very nature implied a purity and cleanliness provided by sun ripened fresh fruit from California. As a fresh fruit picked from the trees, the crop wasn't processed, so the consumer understood, and allegedly had the same pureness of an unpeeled orange. Their

[99]May Sowles Metzler, *Date Cook Book: International Festival of Dates Souvenir Edition* (Coachella: Coachella Valley Submarine, 1921).

[100] California Date Growers Association, *How to Serve Fresh Dates* (Indio: California Date Growers Association, 1932).

American origin, also helped imply purity, as they were "grown under sanitary American conditions, they are not treated or changed in anyway."[101]

The cooperative labeled this fresh fruit as Desert Gold, instructing customers that only dates sold under that brand were true fresh dates sold in California. While its perishability put these Desert Gold dates into the realm of produce, few consumers viewed it as a different product. A date was a date- fresh or dried- and the industry had difficulty re-orienting consumers to see dates as perishable, given the nearly identical look of fresh and dried dates. Given that the fresh dates really were perishable, they expired more quickly, surprising consumers and likely pushing the brand out of favor.

The distinctions made between imported dates and American grown, owed quite a bit to the USDA's vocal outcry over packing conditions they encountered while exploring for dates in the Middle East and Northern Africa. Occasionally these works even included photographs of date processing "rooms" in the Middle East open to the elements and packers standing on boxes of dates in their bare feet. The USDA reached large audiences through magazine and newspaper articles but, equally important, were widely read by new date growers learning how to best produce a crop. These growers, in turn, absorbed the idea of the "dirty" Arab, already popular in American culture. Little wonder then, both the USDA scientists and later date growers used the stigma of the unclean Orient to argue that U.S. grown crops were superior to imports. Concern revolved around "infection of the product in passing through the hands of unclean foreign laborers."[102]

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[101] Ibid.

[102] Paul's Pioneer Garden, *Your Heritage of Health: Nature's Perfect Food Direct from the Desert*, Date Industry Collection, Coachella Valley History Museum, 14.

Health officials claimed that a Californian grown date was "far superior to the foreign variety. It is cleaner, better packed, seldom recleaned or resteamed."[103] Others argued that "our poorest dates are far superior to the best that can be bought in the ordinary American markets."[104]

Other growers were more subtle, trying to capitalize on consumer fears over food adulteration. One Coachella Valley grower went so far as to name his dates "Paul's Pure Dates."[105] Advertisements used in conjunction with this brand included letters from scientists who implied that imported dates were not only dirty but adulterated; "Preservatives or molasses," may have adulterated imported dates, despite Hills Brother's claims that they had wholesome dates.[106] American date growers, then, took care to reassure consumers that their dates were "absolutely without adulteration, but properly grown and sun-ripened, cleanly cared for, and kept in prime condition."[107]

Edna Cast, a Mecca date grower active since the early 1920s, volunteered that imported dates "were picked and packed by Orientals, many with skin disease and eye infections and who worked for only a few cents a day, whereas our workers have always been paid good wages and dressed in immaculate white."[108] The clean packinghouse,

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[103] Dr. Phillip Lovell quoted in Paul's Pioneer Garden, *Your Heritage of Health*, 15.

[104] George Wharton James, "Date Growing on the Colorado Desert," *Date Culture in Southern California* eds. George Wharton James, Paul B. Popenoe, Ralph D. Cornell (Los Angeles: Out West), 6.

[105] Nina Paul Shumway, *Your desert and Mine* (Palm Springs: ETC Publications, 1979), 269.

[106] Paul's Pioneer Garden, *Your Heritage of Health* ,14.

[107] Ibid., 16.

[108] John Raymond Gabbert, *History of Riverside City and County* (Phoenix: Record Publishing Company, 1935), 525.

then, became a touchstone of American date growers as they sought to convince consumers that imported dates threatened health. Invoking "Oriental" others in packing ignored the fact that imported dates, like Hills Brothers', were often cleaned and repackaged in the United States, by workers wearing the same white uniforms.[109] Time and again, Edna Cast and other date growers emphasized the unsanitary packing conditions elsewhere while describing their own packing plant as a pure environment. The twofold issue Cast presented-- the unsanitary, potentially hazardous packing conditions and the low wages paid to workers abroad-- helped her advocate for American grown dates. Certainly, she reasoned, this made her dates "readily worth the small difference in price."[110]

Perhaps more directly than in any other phase of the date growing industry, women's labor supported the grading and packing of dates. Early date groves often employed family labor, including wives and daughters, to not only pick the dates and care for palms but also to package the crop on the farm itself. As the 1910s wore on, and certainly by the 1920s, date orchards began to produce larger, commercial level outputs that pushed grading and packing into larger packing plants. Small, off-farm packing sheds emerged at the same time as date grower's associations, the first of which, the Coachella Valley Date Grower's Association, offered date packing to its members in

[109] The Hills Brothers Company, *Dromedary Cook Book* (New York: The Hills Brothers Company, 1914).

[110] *Garden of the Setting Sun Date Recipes*, Date Industry Collection, Coachella Valley History Museum.

1917.[111] Increasing tonnage led to an expansion both in size and number of these packing plants as women continued to fill most labor needs for date processing.

The process of grading ensures that consumers receive a standard quality of the product. Done by hand, grading involves the inspection of quality as well as size. One eyewitness described the process in 1924, stating, "expert women sorters grade the dates by hand into four classes as they pass on the belts after coming through the drier."[112] A skilled worker could, by the late 1940s, grade 400-500 pounds of dates per day.[113] Subsequently packers placed the dates into various carton type packages or, for softer dates, into sealed jars.[114] The delicate job of handling the fruit not only ensured consistency and visual appeal, crucial to a market that often saw dates packaged as gifts, but also prevented the delicate fruit from becoming smashed or damaged. Larger packages were filled by machine as early as the 1950s, though women ensured the boxes were full and adjusted them to the correct weight.[115]

While pay for agricultural workers, even packers and graders, was low, packing provided an opportunity for women to make money for their families or themselves.[116]

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[111]Patricia Laflin, "In the Beginning… The Story of Dates Part I," *Periscope* (2006): 14.

[112]Mary Stagelman, "California Showing Old World How to Pack Dates," *Los Angeles Times*, October 12, 1924. Female labor was preferred for other fruit and vegetable processing during this time period. Americans preferred that women work indoors and not out in the field, at least not for paid wage labor.

[113] The Arizona Date Institute, *Processing Arizona Dates*, (Phoenix: The Arizona Date Institute, 1948).

[114] Stagelman, "California Showing Old World."

[115] Habib W. Sadayah, "Plant Operating and Production for California Date Growers Association, Indio California Season 1952-1954" Unprocessed Date Collection at Special Collections & Archives, UCR Libraries, University of California, Riverside.

[116] Family wage economies were typical for agricultural labor both on the fields and in the packing house. Packing house work was considered a clean job, compared to farm labor, and thus more desirable. For

Francis Swingle, a young, unmarried, high school graduate relocated to the Coachella Valley with her family in 1918. She began working at a date packing plant in Thermal, California in 1919.[117] As many early date investors who moved to live on their homesteads or date groves came from larger cities, their educated daughters likely faced dismal employment opportunities in the rural setting and sometimes turned to packing sheds. In Francis Swingle's case, the money she earned date packing, and taking the 1920 census after the packing shed closed for the season, went towards paying tuition at a San Bernardino business college.[118] One packing plant manager, who began work in Indio in 1924, said that early employees of date packing plants were "the housewives of Indio who appreciated a chance to acquire extra money for their Christmas purchases."[119] He went on, "merchants' wives, railroaders' wives, and the social set of the day were on the payroll."[120] This implies that women who worked in the packing industry in the 1920s were likely middle class and, given the term the "social set," likely white. Of course widows, heads of households, and those who pooled family money needed the income for more than just "Christmas purchases." Such language also implies these women worked seasonally, when in reality, like Francis Swingle who took the census after date packing finished, they may have worked other jobs during the non-date season.

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more see Vicki L. Ruiz, *Cannery Women, Cannery Lives: Mexican Women, Unionization, and the California Food Processing Industry, 1930-1950* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 1987.

[117] Francis Swingle, "David H. Gillan, Preacher and Rancher," *Periscope: A Collection of Stories and Recollections about the Coachella Valley* (1982): 25.

[118] Ibid.

[119] D. H. Mitchell, "Early Date History," undated, unpublished manuscript, Date Industry Collection, Coachella Valley History Museum, 3.

[120] Ibid.

In addition to providing physical labor in grading and packing, women who also served to reinforce the consumers' desires to purchase a clean, safe, and pure product. Thus, to prove the superior nature of their product, California date producers often highlighted their female labor forces, just as Hills Brothers had. Given the indoor nature of the work and the association of women with domesticity, women's labor was popularly understood at the time as inherently cleaner than male labor, which often occurred outdoors in the hot fields or indoors in dirty factories, never-mind that women sometimes shared these working conditions.

One *Los Angeles Times* article from 1924, took readers through a tour of a date packing plant in Monrovia, California. The author first reminded readers of the date packing process in the Arab world. Transported from the date groves via camels, the dates were packed in boxes where someone jumped on top of them in order to smash more dates into the package. After a trip across the seas to New York, large date squares had the sides cut off, for cleanliness sake, and were then repacked. As the author suggests, "What might be imbedded in the layers of the sticky dates may be left to the imagination."[121] Lingering concerns from the pure foods movement left some consumers questioning the safety of their purchases. To reinforce the idea that California dates were "more sanitary," the author describes the quick railroad trip the dates made to the Monrovia packing house and the process of cleaning, fumigating, grading, and

[121] Stagelman, "California Showing Old World."

packing.[122] Details about chemical fumigation and water cleanings again reinforced the idea that unlike imported dates, California dates were pure and safe.

The Monrovia packing plant's manager, R. H. Postlethwaite, proclaimed, "cleanliness is what we stress in our plant."[123] The article went on to point out the "neatly gowned girls and women in white caps and white aprons working over the trays, the modern machinery used for the process and the spotless floors and tables."[124] Like clean floors and new machinery, the physical appearance of women affected the public's view of California dates. Associated with all things domestic, Americans assumed women, particularly white women, were innately clean in their own right. White caps and aprons invoked nostalgia for mothers in the kitchen, a wholesome memory that held no room for dirt or disease. The uniforms themselves rendered all employees the same, covering any style or fashion cues that would have denoted membership in the working class.

White caps and spotless aprons appeared frequently in photographs featured in articles about the early packing industry (1920s-1940s) in Southern California.[125] (Figure 2.2) Including a photograph of packers and graders at work allowed the date industry to highlight their clean and sanitary conditions and reinforce the notion of a healthy, clean labor pool. Photographs often revealed seated women, buttressing the idea that their working conditions were appropriate for their gender and relatively light. Occasionally

[122] Ibid.

[123] Ibid.

[124] Ibid.

[125] Photographic Collection, Coachella Valley History Museum; "Sorting and Packing Dates in the Coachella Valley Photograph," *Rural World,* January 15, 1921;"Picking Dates in an Old Coachella Valley Garden," *Farm and Orchard Magazine of Los Angeles Times,* October 21 1928; "The Thriving Date Industry." *Los Angeles Times*, January 17, 1926.

men stood over the women, reassuring the viewing public that the work was overseen by experienced, date packing managers.[126]

Figure 2.2: Cal-date Grading Room, circa 1932-1943. Courtesy Coachella Valley History Museum.

The clean, attractive photos of white women also reinforced the idea that California dates were worth the higher prices. In 1924, for example, imported date packages retailed for eight to ten cents, though the packages from one California date packing plant sold for twenty-five to forty cents. The price difference was accredited to "the fact that labor is better paid here than in the East and that the dates must be packed more scientifically to keep up the present standard."[127] Readers were reassured that women, who made up only twenty percent of the national workforce at the time, were not only paid relatively well (better than their Arabian counterparts), but also worked in safe

[126] Photographic Collection, Coachella Valley History Museum.

[127] Stagelman, "California Showing Old World."

conditions.[128] When packing sheds expanded, growers took care to highlight better light and ventilation in addition to new machinery and cold storage options, again reinforcing the perception of good working conditions for its female employees.[129]

Public articles also mentioned the fact that women workers' health was closely monitored. By 1937, press coverage about date packing stressed that "medical examinations are required from all who come in contact with the fruit."[130] A certificate of health signed by a physician was required for packing house workers in 1944.[131] By 1955, one large date packing house, run by the California Date Grower's Association required all employees to be checked by a registered industrial nurse, the only one in the Coachella Valley, before they were officially hired.[132]

It is difficult to determine just who worked in the packing sheds; the 1920s census, for example, was compiled after the date harvest no date packing shed workers can be found in Indio's census recordings.[133] The Coachella's 1930 census lists five date

[128] United Sates Department of Labor Women's Bureau, "Our History: An Overview 1920-2012, United States Department of Labor, accessed August 15, 2013, http://www.dol.gov/wb/info_about_wb/interwb.htm.

[129] D. H. Mitchell, "Date Season Opens," *Los Angeles Times*, October, 5 1930.

[130] "Romance of Coachella Valley and Main Revenue Come From Many Date Gardens," *Riverside Daily Press*, February 22, 1937.

[131] "Recruit Women Date Packers" *Indio News*, September 29, 1944.

[132] California Date Growers Association, *Annual Report: May 1,1955- April 30,1956*, 1956, Date Industry Collection, Coachella Valley History Museum. Of course these examinations may have worked to make sure women were not pregnant as well. By the 1950s, the majority of these date packers were likely Mexican and Mexican American.

[133] California Department of Finance, "Historical Census Populations of Counties Incorporated Cities in California, 1850-2010," California State Data Center, http://www.dof.ca.gov/research/demographic/state_census_data_center/historical_census_1850-2010/view.php (accessed June 11, 2014).

packers, all men. In this case the census again occurred in the non-packing season; since women's labor was seasonal it was not recorded in the official record. It appears as though women who worked in commercial-scale date grading and packing were of varied racial backgrounds, depending on the era in which they worked. Photographic evidence suggests that early female employees, particularly of Indio's Deglet Noor Date Growers Association and other local packing plants in the 1920s and 1930s, were mostly European American. However, photographs may have been staged to highlight the purity, cleanliness, and healthfulness of the workers, reinforced by stereotypes of whites as cleaner. Perhaps women of color who worked in these packing sheds were purposefully not included in packing house photos. Also, non-white women may have performed tasks in the packing shed not photographed as often as grading and packing.

Probably, the majority of Coachella Valley packing shed employees prior to World War II were white. While women of Mexican descent often filled the labor roles of canning plants in the greater Lost Angeles area and packing sheds in the Ventura region, they did not appear to pack and grade dates in the Coachella Valley in large numbers until World War II.[134] In fact, 1928 statistics show that although Mexicans made up just over twenty-three percent of the cannery workforce (an industry similar to packing), they made up only four percent of cannery workers in Riverside County.[135] The fact that few Mexican and Mexican American women worked in the date packing industry, at least in public depictions, in the 1920s and 1930 proved a perk for date

[134] Margo McBane, "The Role of Gender in Citrus Employment: A Case Study of Recruitment, Labor and Housing Patterns at the Limoneira Company, 1893-1940," *California History* 74 (Spring 1995): 69-81 and Vicki L. Ruiz, *Cannery Women, Cannery Lives.*

[135] Ruiz, *Cannery Women, Cannery Lives*.

growers who could imply a racial whiteness. An influx of military wives to the region meant graders and packers during World War II remained largely white as well.

Eventually labor in packing sheds would become almost exclusively Mexican and Mexican American. This reflected regional and national changes. First, the Mexican and Mexican American population of the Coachella Valley boomed after World War II. While these new families were from varied economic backgrounds, many worked in agriculture where typically, multiple family members sought employment to contribute to family finances. This factor may have pushed more Mexican and Mexican American women into the date packing industry as opposed to European American migrants to the Coachella Valley. These new migrants, though also economically varied, tended to settle in newly planned, middle-class centers like Palm Desert, California. Their middle-class lifestyles did not require women to work outside the home, while families who had the head of household working in agriculture, struggled to make ends meet without the additional income of wives and children or members of the extended family. As women were pushed back into the home after World War II, not all families had the luxury for this so-called return to domesticity. When women were returned to the workforce, at least in the public eye, in the latter half of the twentieth century, poorer women had already been working in low paying jobs, including agricultural work.[136]

As worry over pure food lessened with increases in food safety and the availability of a wide variety of packaged goods, there were fewer and fewer mentions of

[136] Of course though popular culture rendered the 1950s housewife as non-employed, lower and middle-class women continued to seek, and find, work. For more on women in the workforce after World War II see Julia Kirk Blackwelder, *Now Hiring: The Feminization of Work in the United States, 1900-1995* (College Station: Texas A & M University, 1997).

women laboring in the date industry. Though both Hills Brothers national advertisements and the regionally produced marketing of the Coachella Valley date growers included images of white, uniformed women in the 1910s-1930s, neither embraced any widespread discussion on processing labor after this time period. If anything, American growers pushed the focus away from clean, hand processing and focused on technological developments that emphasized new machinery in the packing plant. This focus too identified domestic date production as clean and done not by hands that could be contaminated, but instead by sterilized machines which the Middle East still lacked.

American Science, Fumigation, & Pesticides: Perceptions and Perils

Southwestern date groves owed their very existence to American science. After all, governmental agricultural exploration brought back the offshoots that proved industry could be possible stateside and research at agricultural experiment stations determined the best varieties. Massive engineering projects brought irrigation to date groves and indeed American irrigation projects delivered water to the date groves of the Coachella Valley. This included the accidental irrigation of the Great Salton Basin, which became the Salton Sea, and which first irrigated date palms in 1905; individual artesian wells; and the massive All American Canal project completed in 1942. While these forms of American science helped make a commercial date industry possible, other scientific advancements were publically championed by date growers. Pasteurization, pesticides, fumigation, and artificial ripening were all highlighted as practices that set American-grown dates apart from farming practices in the Middle East and Northern Africa.

Collectively, the advanced scientific knowledge and practices, though they came at a cost to workers, helped the growing industry distinguish its dates as superior to the imports, from Hills Brothers or others.

American science allowed date growers in California to transform fruit in ways the Middle East had never done. Some date growers in Morocco and Baja California used heat to warm dates during the day; afterward they covered them and let the heat turn to steam. This process was an early form of artificial maturation, ripening dates even when picked before their peak. In some cases, slow ripening occurred naturally; when growers in Algeria and Tunisia packed unripe dates, heat acquired in transportation steamed the fruit ripe. Ripening was particularly important for dates growing in different climatic situations than found in their homelands. The Coachella Valley, for example, was extremely arid during the fall harvest season. This occasionally resulted in over dry, wrinkled Deglet Noor dates. Artificial ripening allowed them to be picked earlier and matured indoors to perfection.[137] American science, however, mastered the art of chemical maturation for the dates. As Paul Popenoe argued, "There is nothing new, then, about the idea of ripening dates artificially, but the attention of science was never turned to the subject until it was taken up by Americans."[138]

Scientists from the University of Arizona perfected a process that ripened the date with nitrous ether or carbon dioxide, after unsuccessful experiments with gasoline,

[137] Paul B. Popenoe, "Date Growing in California and Arizona," in James, *Date Culture in Southern California*, 23. Additional forms of artificial maturation include the Spanish practice of soaking dates in vinegar and the Persian Gulf/ Indian practice of boiling them. Popenoe *Date Growing in the Old World and the New* (Altadena: West India Gardens, 1913), 135, 142-144.

[138] Ibid., 137.

ammonia, and other chemicals.[139] USDA scientists also developed a non-chemical process that used the precise application of heat to dates for a certain time period. Both methods were touted as "America's greatest contribution to the date industry so far," the very thing that made date growing profitable.[140] The chemical process, one scientist argued, lowered labor costs because whole bunches could be picked at once instead of having palmeros climb the trees multiple times per harvest. Importantly, because chemicals or heat sometimes killed pests, "greater cleanliness of the product is possible than with naturally ripened dates," and "the ravages of worms" could be avoided.[141]

Just as Hills Brothers prized descriptions of their plants as sanitary, clean, and pure, so too did Coachella Valley Growers. They utilized similar technology as well, including pasteurization. Major guidebooks to date growing in the United States recommended the practice as early as 1913 and by 1924 several date growers and USDA experts agreed.[142] Some growers even claimed the pasteurization process favorably affected dates taste.[143] While pasteurization was recommended for several varieties of dates, Walter Swingle suggested Deglet Noors lost flavor and became discolored and sticky when pasteurized at high temperatures. Instead he encouraged fumigation for sterilization. Unlike the Hills Brothers varieties which were pasteurized with high heat

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[139] Ibid., 138.

[140]Popenoe, "Date Growing in California and Arizona," 23.

[141] Ibid.

[142] Popenoe, *Date Growing in the Old World, Report of the First Date Growers Institute* (Coachella: Coachella Valley Farm Center, 1924): 129-130; Roland Reed, "Growing and Marketing Dates with Low Overhead Cost," *Report of the First Date Growers Institute* (Coachella: Coachella Valley Farm Center, 1924), 9-10.

[143] vonLoesecke, *Outlines of Food Technology*, 77.

and moisture, many of the Coachella Valley grown dates would instead be sanitized by chemical fumigation, a completely different form of American science.[144]

Though popular conceptions of fumigation today imply a danger to human bodies, for much of the history of their use in American farming, fumigants and pesticides were considered a quite beneficial agricultural technology.[145] Fumigants and pesticides prevented the spread of diseases bearing insects and pests including mosquitoes, lice, and fleas. They also prevented economic loss from agricultural pests and food spoilage. While some in the scientific community recognized fumigants and pesticides' potential danger to the human body, few average Americans knew of their hazards or, frankly, even considered the chemicals at all.[146]

By the time date groves were planted for commercial gain, in the mid 1910s, the United States had already heavily invested in the use of chemical insecticides; it manufactured twenty-three-million dollars worth each year, much of which was used on American crops.[147] Historians have suggested that the prevalence of these fumigants and pesticides were linked, in part, to the increasing professionalization of the scientific field,

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[144] While pasteurization involved heating the food material to kill microorganisms and other pests, fumigation required food products to be placed in a sealed area and subjected to pesticides or other toxic gases. The area remained closed while the gases killed the potential pests; the area was ventilated before workers could enter and proceed with processing.

[145] See Edmund P. Russell, III, "The Strange Career of DDT: Experts Federal Capacity, and Environmentalism in World War II," *Technology and Culture* 40, no. 4 (October 1999): 770-796 and Linda Nash, "The Fruits of Ill-Health: Pesticides and Workers' Bodies in Post-World War II California," *Osiris 2nd Series* 19 (2004): 203-219.

[146] Nash's "Fruits of Ill-Health" argues scientist knew. But even when their dangers were presented to the public, notably through Carson's 1962 *Silent Spring*, they were poised as dangerous to the environment rather than human bodies.

[147] James E. McWilliams, "'The Horizon Opened Up Very Greatly': Leland O. Howard and the Transition to Chemical Insecticides in the United States, 1894-1927," *Agricultural History* 82, no. 4 (Fall 2008).

including chemists and entomologists, as well as the expansion of government science.[148] World War I gave popular support to those who favored chemical applications for pest control; these chemicals aided agricultural production so necessary during wartime but also kept soldiers safe from diseases that were only recently connected to insects, like malaria and typhus. The USDA's entomologists were charged with using fumigation and insecticides to protect the nation's food supplies, its lumber regions, as well as the cattle and other livestock subject to tick borne disease, all framed as part of the war effort.[149] As historian James McWilliams argues, after the war domestic pesticide use "became associated with the word that everyone wanted to hear: victory."[150] Insects had threatened public health and economic growth for some time and Americans swiftly embraced the quick fix solution of chemical fumigants and pesticides.

World War II proved another success for the chemical pesticide manufactures. Chemical weapons, aimed at humans or insects, ushered in American dominance and render citizens across the nation advocates and users of fumigants and pesticides not only in personal use but through the widespread application of their farmland and food.[151] The USDA remained the only regulating agency for pesticides until the 1970s and as such framed discussions of these chemicals not in terms of their impact on human health, but

[148] See McWilliams, "'The Horizon Opened Up.'"

[149] Ibid., 484-486.

[150] Ibid., 487.

[151] For more on military power and its connection to insecticides see Edmund p Russell. "'Speaking of Annihilation': Mobilizing for War against Human and Insect Enemies, 1914-1945." *Journal of America History* 82, no. 4 (March 1996): 1505-1529.

rather of their success bolstering agricultural growth.[152] Public understandings of these chemicals, then, placed them alongside the "hero-scientists," who brought new crops to America and rendered these new industries profitable.[153] Simply put, the power of science was once again used to maximize profits and help the farmer, though not always the farm-worker.

Public understandings of pesticides and their harmful effects took years to reach much of non-farming America, even if reports from the 1940s onward concluded that these chemical products threatened human life and the larger environment.[154] Indeed until the release of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* in 1962, the majority of Americans viewed chemical pesticides as a boon to the United States. Congressional investigations and press coverage of pesticide poisonings in the late 1950s and 1960s paired with concern over military use of defoliants in Vietnam continued to turn public sentiment against fumigants and pesticides.[155] Prior to this moment, however, many Americans viewed the chemicals as proof of American scientific superiority; while other nations battled pest born diseases and lost crops to insects, the United States used fumigants and pesticides in the name of public health and agricultural expansion.

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[152] Nash, "The fruits of Ill-Health," 206.

[153] "Hero- Scientist" is a phrasing used by James McWiliams in "'The Horizon Opened Up,'" 470.

[154] Russell, "The Strange Career of DDT," and Nash ,"The Fruits of Ill-Health." When they did come to the public's attention in the 1960s, the focus was largely on their risk to consumers, not any danger to workers who were exposed to much higher levels. In fact the government did not hold hearings on farm workers health risks linked to pesticides until 1969. Few regulations existed until the 1970s. Nash, "The Fruits of Ill-Health," 213-214.

[155] Nash, "The Fruits of Ill-Health," 216-217.

Pesticides were indeed a blessing to the industry when the Marlatt and Parlatoria scales, small insect pests, were introduced to the country on imported date offshoots near the turn-of-the-twentieth century. Though quarantine regulations were in affect at the USDA, the pests made their way to the Colorado Desert and thus existed within the date industry without any natural enemies.[156] Young date palms were also subjected to a "phenol dip," another chemical treatment to protect the industry from the insects' spread.[157] Government scientist found, instead, that "defoliation and blow-torching" the date palms killed the pests and did little damage to the palm. The industry mounted a campaign to eradicate the pest in the late 1920s though it remained in the Coachella Valley until 1936.[158] It took federal intervention complete with "large crews, systematic inspections and treatment," in order to remove the infestation completely, one of the rare records of total insect irradiation.[159] Thus with the joint power of chemical pesticides, intense heat, American ingenuity, and government support, American date producers could claim to solve a problem that date growers abroad had been facing for millennium. While such discoveries assisted the grower more than they impacted the consumer, they helped contribute to the general sense that date agriculture in the United States was a far superior endeavor than anything found in the Greater Middle East.

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[156] In the early 1910s "the mealy-bug spray based on various phenols, principally cresylic acid" was used by growers to combat the scales. Popenoe, "Date Growing in California and Arizona," 24.

[157] Ibid., 26.

[158] Donald R. Hodel and Dennis V. Johnson, *Dates: Imported and American Varieties of Dates in the United States* (Oakland: University of California Agricultural and Natural Resources, 2007), 5.

[159] Laflin, "In the Beginning," 18.

Agricultural workers were exposed to dangerous chemicals in both the field and the packing shed. The pesticide exposure that led to health concerns depended on type of chemical, length of exposure, the weather, the type of crop (and even the variety), the type of soil, workers' clothing, and many more variables. Health conditions were sometimes immediate but often went silent as exposures built up over time. Additionally after World War II, many agricultural laborers were ethnically Mexican; racial stereotypes of the diseased "other" and assumption of poor hygiene meant that when workers did fall ill from pesticide, they were often blamed for their own diseases, mistaken as the diseases of the poor.[160]

Fumigation, on the other hand, took place in the often enclosed date packing sheds. Unintended exposure occasionally caused dramatic, immediate, and widespread health concerns for packers. Because these fumigation accidents affected so many so quickly, they received media attention and even government intervention. The perceived vulnerability of the victims, women and, at least before World War II, white women at that, made these date packers a more sympathetic victim than, say, a bracero or immigrant farm worker. In some cases, victims of fumigation accidents were prominent; white male date growers with community ties also brought chemical dangers to light when they fell ill.

In some cases, we can recall the types of chemicals used in the date packing sheds, even if we do not know how many workers were affected by the fumigant. In 1923, large packing sheds used carbon bisulphide, though it appears that smaller packing

[160] Nash, "The Fruits of Ill-Health."

houses did not.[161] Carbon bisulphide is also a fire hazard, which may, in part, explain some of the packinghouse fires and explosions that occurred in the Coachella Valley.[162] An explosion triggered by the chemical in 1928 encouraged California date packers to switch to hydrogen cyanide for fumigation.[163] In 1927, Caleb Cook, a date grove owner and operator of a date packing plant, fumigated his dates with a cyanide mix.[164] Cook died as a result of inhaling too much of the fumigant and records of his death noted the danger of fumigation. In 1930, Don Mitchell, Cook's business partner and manager of the Deglet Noor Date Growers Association packing plant, survived a fumigation tank explosion, which threw him twenty feet and shattered the packing plant windows.[165] The health problems produced by these chemicals are often a result of high exposures but can

[161] Also known as carbon disulfide. "George Law "Some Significant Advances in the California Date Industry," *Los Angeles Times*, December 2, 1923, and V.H.W. Dowson and A. Aten, *Dates Handling, Processing, and Packaging* (Rome: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations ,1978), 141. This chemical can cause heart, kidney, and thyroid damage. Limited exposure can affect breathing and cause chest pain, nausea, vomiting, dizziness, fatigue, headaches, and convulsions. Long term exposure can affect the central nervous system, damage vision, and disrupt fertility "Carbon Disulfide: Hazard Summary," United States Environmental Protection Agency, last modified November, 6, 2007, http://www.epa.gov/ttnatw01/hlthef/carbondi.html. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention currently recommends that workers prevent skin contact with the chemical, though photographs of date packers from the 1920s show workers handling dates with bare hands. Skin exposure led to cracking and peeling as well as a redness and possible burning sensation "Carbon Disulfide" *Pocket Guide to Chemical Hazards*, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, last modified November 18, 2010, http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/npg/npgd0104.html; John Farrell Kuhns, "Carbon Disulfide" H.M.S. Beagle, accessed on August 5, 2013, http://www.hms-beagle.com/MSDS/Carbon_Disulfide.pdf; Photographic Collection, Coachella Valley History Museum.

[162] The Cast packing house burned in 1943.

[163] Dowson and Aten, *Dates Handling, Processing, and Packaging*, 141. The CDC suggests that short-term exposure to this chemical can lead to nausea, vomiting, confusion, and anxiety as well as changing in breathing patterns. Long term exposure can lead to cyanide poisoning, which can produce a coma, convulsions, and death. "Hydrogen Cyanide," *Emergency Response Safety and Health Database*, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, last modified June 18, 2013, http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/ershdb/EmergencyResponseCard_29750038.html.

[164] "Palm Desert Recalled by Bill and Carmen Cook" *Desert Rancher* April 1, 1962.

[165] "Narrow Escape in Explosion," *Coachella Valley Submarine*, April 4, 1930.

also come from long term contact. Though there are few records indicating packinghouse workers faced serious health issues from their exposure to these chemical fumigations, laborers tended to work in the same packing house year after year, exposed to potential health risks. Since they were not monitored long term, so we simply do not know how many women saw negative health effects due to their time in the packing sheds.

Eventually, packing houses moved to methyl bromide fumigation, which had documented and direct negative effects on the health of date packers in the Coachella Valley. By 1944, many of the major packing plants in the Coachella Valley, roughly forty in number, were using methyl bromide as a fumigant, overnight, in rooms where the exhaust systems proved inadequate. [166] Workers were exposed to dangerous levels of the chemical over long periods of time, daily during the packing season (which in 1944 ran from July to December).[167] When the temperatures fell in November and December, 1944, local doctors began to see date workers who had fallen ill in some surprising and strange ways, in cases that would later be diagnosed as methyl bromide poisoning.

Neurological issues were among the most disturbing. Eight date packing shed workers had documented bouts of hallucinations in late 1944, including one widow who

[166] Male laborers, who went into the fumigating room to move the dates to the packing area, had high exposures because the area was not properly ventilated after fumigation and because they entered the fumigation room repeatedly to remove lugs (crates) of dates. Graders and packers, however, also faced high exposures because the fumigation room emptied into the processing area and because the fumigation chambers had major leaks. Fred R. Ingram, "Methyl Bromide Fumigation and Control in the Date-Packing Industry," *Archives of Industrial Hygiene and Occupational Medicine* 4, no. 3 (September 1951): 193- 198 and Rutherford T. Johnstone, "Methyl Bromide Intoxication of a Large Group of Workers," *Industrial Medicine* 14, no. 6 (June 1945): 495-497.

[167] Ingram, "Methyl Bromide Fumigation" 195.

hallucinated that someone had murdered her child and was now coming to kill her. [168] Some of the neurological disturbances were so great that "several patients were hospitalized in excited psychotic state, some requiring restraints."[169] Other neurological effects were reported, the most common of which was a disturbance of speech, affecting twenty-three date packing plant workers. Though she had not spoken it in twenty years, one woman also began to speak in her first language, German. Others experienced language difficulties as well, including problems enunciating and finding the correct words and "thick" speech.[170]

For some workers, the methyl bromide poisoning also led to difficulty walking, including balance issues. One male Mexican or Mexican American worker mentioned that "when I want to step forward, I step backward."[171] Initially, the disturbance in his mobility prompted his wife to accuse him of being drunk.[172] Startlingly, before locals knew that workers were experiencing methyl bromide poisoning, two men were jailed by police on suspicion of being marijuana addicts. While their ethnicity probably affected authorities' perception of their illness, the fact that the chemical affected their behavior enough to warrant an arrest, suggests the seriousness of the issue.[173] Mild mental confusion was also classified as a symptom experienced by fifteen workers.

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[168] Johnstone, "Methyl Bromide Intoxication," 496.

[169] Ingram, "Methyl Bromide Fumigation," 198.

[170] Johnstone, "Methyl Bromide Intoxication," 496.

[171] Ingram, "Methyl Bromide Fumigation," 196.

[172] Johnstone, "Methyl Bromide Intoxication," 496.

[173] Ingram, "Methyl Bromide Fumigation," 193.

Thirty-four date packing house workers had documented visual disturbances during the 1944 date season. In fact, the male fumigation room operator not only experienced blurred vision, but also purple vision, and eventually near blindness. When workers first sought medical help in the Coachella Valley two out of three were diagnosed with a stroke because of speech and vision issues. Notably, four workers went into a coma because of their methyl bromide poisoning, while an additional laborer suffered from convulsions. A fumigator room operator, who may have experienced some of the highest exposure to the chemical, fell into a semi-comatose state. Several workers, reported numbness of their extremities lasting several weeks.[174] Relatively mild symptoms were also experienced, including fatigue, buzzing in the ears, insomnia, headaches, melancholia, gastrointestinal disturbances, and nervousness.[175] Some of the workers felt negative health effects for long periods of time: of the documented cases, nine individuals said their afflictions lasted two to five months and another four claimed permanent damage.[176]

Conservative estimates suggested that 200 date packing shed workers fell ill due to methyl bromide poisoning in the 1944 date packing season, though only fifty or so cases were officially documented.[177] The methyl bromide poisoning occurred from July to December of 1944, with the majority of cases in November and December. Until the

[174] Johnstone, "Methyl Bromide Intoxication," 496.

[175] Ibid., 496. Ingram, "Methyl Bromide Fumigation," 198.

[176] Johnstone, "Methyl Bromide Intoxication," 496.

[177] Ingram, "Methyl Bromide Fumigation," 193. Thirty-five individuals saw health care professionals, while fifteen to twenty packers missed work due to their illness (for two to ten days), though they did not see a doctor. Johnstone, "Methyl Bromide Intoxication," 495.

cold weather set in, packing shed doors were left open and this natural ventilation helped dissipate the methyl bromide released from leaks and when the fumigation room doors were open.[178] As methyl bromide poisoning results from "prolonged exposure to small amounts," of the chemical it may also be likely that by the end of the date season in November and December, workers had felt the long-term effects of methyl bromide exposure.[179] Victims were from various packinghouses; subsequent testing found that nearly all of the forty packing plants had un-safe fumigation practices.[180]

Although plants were covered by insurance, compensation proved difficult to obtain. One scientist, studying the poisonings, mentioned that by mid-1945 two plants had received insurance payments. However the plant with the largest amount of methyl bromide poisoning had dual coverage, so both insurance companies withheld payment until they could decide which one held liability. Hearings were held in 1945, but the outcome is unclear.[181] A later report on the poisonings mentioned that compensation was paid "in almost every instance," though one cannot help but wonder about the exceptions.[182] Was the plant paid directly and how was the money distributed, if at all, to the workers? The lengthy process of obtaining payment from insurance companies led investigators in June 1945 to describe the situation as an "unfortunate miscarriage of

[178] Ingram, "Methyl Bromide Fumigation," 198.

[179] Johnstone, "Methyl Bromide Intoxication,", 496.

[180] Ingram, "Methyl Bromide Fumigation,"193-195.

[181] Johnstone, "Methyl Bromide Intoxication," 497.

[182] Ingram, "Methyl Bromide Fumigation," 198.

justice," in which the "unfortunate victims must suffer economic embarrassment."[183] Workers not only suffered illnesses and lasting trauma, they lost out on wages for days they were unable to work as well. Though Coachella Valley growers harnessed the power of science to produce a cheaper, better date, the cost to human health was real and lasting.

The large number of methyl bromide poisonings resulted in investigations by the California State Department of Public Health's Bureau of Adult Health and the California State Department of Health Division of Industrial Hygiene.[184] Officials within these departments went on to point out plant operators' gross misunderstandings of the chemical. In fact, "most of the packers in this area were under the impression that it was practically non-toxic," despite government limits on allowable concentrations of the chemical.[185] Government studies "revealed that the entire industry was lax in its provision of safe fumigation facilities."[186] To educate operators who used the chemical, State investigators called a meeting of date packers in the Coachella Valley. In addition to establishing the dangers and describing medical issues, the Bureau of Adult Health recommended that fumigation chambers be retrofitted with mechanical exhaust and that

[183] Johnstone, "Methyl Bromide Intoxication," 497.

[184] Ingram, "Methyl Bromide Fumigation, 194, and Johnstone, "Methyl Bromide Intoxication," 495.

[185] Johnstone, "Methyl Bromide Intoxication ," 495. Investigators referenced leaking chambers, the lack of effective fans, exhaust that blew directly into packing rooms, and operators who allowed the dates to be brought out of the fumigating room before efficient ventilation had occurred.

[186] Ingram, "Methyl Bromide Fumigation," 195.

fruit stacked in the fumigation rooms be positioned so that air could circulate between and under the fruit which would aid in the methyl bromide removal after fumigation.[187]

These improvements helped stave off methyl bromide poisoning for the rest of the 1940s. However, in late 1950, two to three workers fell ill. Investigators concluded that packing shed operators, who had avoided poisoning for several years, became "careless in the operation of equipment."[188] Despite the risks, methyl bromide remained a major fumigant for date packing operations, though the USDA suggested the carbon-dichloride-carbon tetrachloride mixture for small date sheds in 1959.[189] Because methyl bromide affects the ozone, several countries, including the United States have tried to phase it out of use. The date industry continued to rely on methyl bromide as late as 2005.[190]

As the century wore on, mechanization and new technologies also aided the industry as it continued to express its superiority over the Middle East and Northern Africa. Local growers invented new tools for palmeros, including a safety saddle.[191] Cherry pickers were sometimes introduced and photographed for various newspaper articles, even if they were not used in all palmero labor. Growers experimented with

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[187] Ingram, "Methyl Bromide Fumigation," 195. Larger date packing plants went on to create airtight fumigation rooms with the updated exhaust systems, which not only helped to prevent methyl bromide poisoning but also served as a drying room that helped eradicate mold.

[188] Ibid., 197.

[189] Dowson and Aten, *Dates Handling, Processing, and Packaging*, 141.

[190] M.A. El-Mohndes "Methyl Bromide Alternatives for Date Disinfestations," *Proceedings of the International Date Palm Conference*, eds. A. Zaid and G.A. Alhadrami, (Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates: International Society for Horticultural Science, 2010) 555-562, accessed at http://www.actahort.org/members/showpdf?booknrarnr=882_62 and Adel A. Kader and Awad M. Hussein, *Harvesting and Postharvesting Handling of Dates* (Aleppo, Syria: International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas, 2009) accessed at http://postharvest.ucdavis.edu/files/71533.pdf.

[191] For more on the Laflin Safety Saddle see Laflin, "The Story of Dates Part II," 19. The saddles were approved by OSHA and still in use as of 2007.

helicopter pollination, again to great fanfare but little practical use. Despite these public celebrations of American technological triumph, many palmeros worked in the trees without safety harnesses throughout the twentieth century. Specific safety codes that regulated these new technologies and palmero safety did not exist until after 2000.[192] However items like the "safety saddle," allowed growers to position themselves as the overseers of much more efficient and safer agricultural labor than would be found in the Middle East. One local grower, for example, wrote the history of her father-in-law and his "safety saddle." The harness was invented, she intoned, because "there was no labor force willing to climb the trees barefoot with only a date-fiber roe around the trunk for support" as there would have been in the Middle East.[193] No doubt these tools were improvements, but the focus on new American technologies in the date fields obscured the continued dangers date palm workers faced, including falls, heat-related illnesses, high winds, pesticide exposure, and spider bites.

Dates Better than the "Dozing Orient ever Dreamed": Science and Orientalism

The way science was used by date growers was important as well. The contributions of American science to the worldwide date industry were real, but they were quickly paired with racialized understandings of the Orient that painted the region as backward, anti-modern, and lazy. For example, in 1913 lay agricultural explorer Paul Popenoe, elaborated on the scientists who contributed to the date industry. "To this

[192] Lisa Morehouse, "The History of Coachella's Iconic Dates," *The California Report*, KQED Public Radio (San Francisco: KQED, 25 October 2013).

[193] Lalfin, "The Story of Dates Part II," 19.

experience of native growers is now added the testimony of modern scientists, who are not swayed by theory or misled by incomplete observations in practice. These men had surveyed the entire field, have gathered all the evidence available, sifted it, and weighed it." In this case, Popenoe invoked an idea that growers in the Greater Middle East championed unscientific ideas when they grew dates, unlike the American scientists, who were scientific and exacting in their practices. While foreign growers had centuries of observations on date growing, Popenoe and others implied these observations could only be taken so far; real science could prove the best fertilizers, pollination methods, or irrigation schedule to grow economically efficient and nutritionally superior dates. As he said in a later work, "The methods used by the native cultivators of Oman are the most intelligent and skillful employed by any Arabs with whom I am familiar, but they do not equal those of my own countrymen."[194]

One 1921 article about the growing date industry suggested the United States produced more dates than "the dozing Orient ever dreamed," because of its scientific superiority in agriculture.[195] One 1931 Coachella Valley date cookbook submitted that "experimental plantings under government guidance showed that fresh dates liked their new home better than the old. Hotter temperatures, more water, scientific care resulted in a finer fruit than the Arabs had been able to develop in centuries of experience!"[196] While the American industry was ever in debt to the Middle East for developing the crop, it was

[194] Paul Popenoe, "The Home of the Fardh Date," *The Monthly Bulletin State Commission of Horticulture* 3, no. 1 (January 1914): 9.

[195] "To Revel Date Secrets," *The Los Angeles Times*, 22 October 1921.

[196] California Date Growers Association, *How to Serve Fresh Dates*.

a broad American understanding of science that made it a true gem-- sweeter, richer, and, as demonstrated earlier, cleaner.

The notion of American superiority in agriculture and science, swooping in to save an area from a lazy stereotyped other, was seen in other parts of Southern California's history where Mexicans, stereotyped as lazy, failed to harness the agricultural potential of the Golden State.[197] Indeed popular Anglo understandings positioned the generalized Native American in the same position. Several Americans worked to encourage agriculture on reservations, while at the same time taking native lands for their own agricultural use. Thus scientific ability was central to white America's perception of self, probably much more so for those who saw their experiments in agriculture as key to the economic output of the Coachella Valley and more personal economic enrichments of their families.

Given the USDA's crucial involvement in birthing the date industry, few could argue against the power of science in the Coachella Valley. The vague notion of American science was thrown around frequently in booster materials enticing people to purchase date farms and in materials aimed at enticing consumers to purchase American grown throughout the twentieth century. If growers could focus on high quality fruits they could sell at higher prices and thus hit a different market than those who purchased poor quality bulk imports. To maximize these high quality dates the region turned to American science. [198] Where dates, water, land, and labor were cheap and plentiful in the

[197] William Deverell, *Whitewashed Adobe: The Rise of Los Angeles and the Remaking of its Mexican Past,* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

[198] Mitchell, "Foreign Date Competition," 2.

Middle East, quality came second; the massive amount of exports fed the economy. Where these necessities cost more, science could be utilized to perfect growing conditions to yield larger, sweeter fruit with less crop loss and more efficient labor.

In an effort to help salesmen and grocers sell more dates, the California Date Growers Association (which at the time packed fifty-percent of all regional dates) produced a pamphlet in the 1950s that also championed U.S. science. The publication reproduced images of a mechanized, sanitary, clean packing facility and the processes of fumigation, government inspection, and pasteurization as well as "elevator" picking and "paper umbrellas" for the dates themselves, all of which suggested processes that produced American superiority over imported dates.[199] The document invokes this science by stating: "By adapting the advanced methods of similar agricultural developments and introducing many scientific innovations of its own, date culture has made phenomenal strides since it was pioneer[ed] in this country some five decades ago."[200] The power of American research had revolutionized the industry in the fifty years referenced, setting American dates apart. By the time governmental funding dried up and the industry moved from family farms to big agribusiness, American scientific superiority had already been assumed and research had been transferred to universities that could pass along their knowledge not just to the everyday farmer but to large scale agriculture and corporations.

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[199] *The More you Know about Desert Sweets California Dates the More you Sell*, (Indio: California Date Growers Association, undated after 1951), Date Industry Collection, Coachella Valley History Museum.

[200] Ibid.

American science truly improved the output and cost effectiveness of producing dates at home, important given competition from low cost, imported dates. Federally funded research, distributed via scientists at the USDA Date station and through their writings, unlocked the mysteries of optimal date production practices. It also, however, helped growers convince consumers that their product was safer than imported dates because it had been cleaned by the power of American chemicals via fumigation and pesticide use. These developments came at a cost, however, as workers fell ill from chemicals and dangerous working conditions. Eventually as consumer relationships to pesticides changed, towards the end of the twentieth century, some growers turned to organic certification to ensure their dates were free from "toxic sprays, chemical fertilizers or mold inhibitors."[201]

"Practically a Perfect Nutrient": Nutrition and the California Date[202]

Like Hills Brothers, Coachella Valley date growers also turned to the science of nutrition to sell their crop. Since many date growers in the Coachella Valley relied on date shops and mail-order catalogues, they tried some ingenious ways to set their dates apart, including unique diets that touted medicinal properties or new products made from dates that appealed in other ways. One cookbook produced in the Coachella Valley claimed that the date contained "protein for tissue building, iron for the blood, lime for the bones and vitamine [sic], an important food constituent necessary for nutrition and to

[201] Lee Anderson, "Introducing Bread Dates" Flyer, Date Industry Collection, Coachella Valley History Museum.

[202] Paul's Pioneer Garden, *Your Heritage of Health.*

stimulate development of the young."[203] It went on to claim high caloric value "one and two-thirds that of sirloin steak and nearly five times that of potatoes," two very popular comparison foods already used by Hills Brothers.[204]

Special diets were one way American date growers tried to harness the power of science. These often had to do with scientific understandings of sugar. The Battle Creek Sanitarium's John Harvey Kellogg published a brochure about the very subject prior to 1921. In "Dates vs. Cane Sugar," he lamented America's love of cane sugar because the body could not use that form. Instead, he maintained, humans needed invert sugar, which the body could readily use. Dates, he argued, were high in invert sugar and should be widely substituted in the American diet. He also argued that eating dates reduced harmful bacteria in the gut while encouraging helpful bacteria to grow.[205] At least two Coachella Valley date boosters turned to Kellogg to help them argue that dates were a health food. One, a cookbook author, reproduced portion of his arguments without changing many of the words.[206]

In the 1930s, William Paul, one of the leading boosters of the date industry and of the Coachella Valley, tried to differentiate his dates by introducing a special diet. Paul claimed that when he placed Deglet Noors into cold storage for three years the fruit's natural cane sugar paired with enzymes and became fruit sugar. The resulting sugar was

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[203] Metzler, *Date Cook Book* . Metzler appears to have changed the wording only slightly from John Harvey Kellogg's Battle Creek Sanitarium's brochure "Dates vs. Cane Sugar," reproduced in part in Paul's Pioneer Garden, *Your Heritage of Health*.

[204] Ibid.

[205] Quoted in Paul's Pioneer Garden, *Your Heritage of Health.*

[206]Metzler, *Date Cook Book. 7-8.*

easily digested, Paul claimed, by those experiencing stomach troubles or ulcers. William Paul paired the dates with milk in his diet and suggested those who had ulcers and other digestion issues eat only milk and dates. Anecdotes implied that at the end of a year or two people were completely cured of stomach ulcers and troubles.[207] The idea gained a hold among the American Naturopathic Association (ANA) and allowed Paul to build "a valuable part of his business" through the diet alone.[208] Beyond the medicinal properties for stomach troubles, Paul also claimed his dates made him "feel and look younger at seventy-five years of age than… at sixty."[209] Paul's company went on to advertise almost exclusively through health magazines and by direct mail and he often noted his ties to the Battle Creek Sanitarium.

Feedback from the medical profession also played a role in his advertisements. When his daughter inherited his date operations, she testified that he spent seven months consulting "the highest food and medical authorities he could find in the United States."[210] Paul reprinted notes from these experts and others in his mail orders, noting that he received long letters of thanks from medical doctors "by the hundreds."[211] While stories of miracle healings make for good publicity, Paul and his family believed wholeheartedly that the date diet worked. But it also made good business sense. Happy

[207] Paul's Pioneer Garden, *Your Heritage of Health.* 7. These stories were attributed to grateful customers who wrote in to Paul. Paul even included a printed copy of the unsolicited endorsement of the ANA in his mail orders. Shumway, *Your Desert and Mine,* 269.

[208] Shumway, *Your Desert and Mine,* 269.

[209] Ibid.

[210] Paul's Pioneer Garden, *Your Heritage of Health*.

[211] "Understand I do not Profess," Speech, W.L. Paul Collection Box 1, Folder 7 at Special Collections & Archives, UCR Libraries, University of California, Riverside.

customers testified freely about their experiences and doctors, who had little else to recommend, mentioned the diet to patients as well. Freezing dates changed their internal properties, so Paul argued, and this change rendered American grown dates healthier than imported ones, a claim he strengthened by arguing chemicals and fertilizers he applied enriched the dates as well.[212]

Other growers tried to capitalize on the perceived health benefits of dates. Edna Cast, who ran the Garden of the Setting Sun beginning in the 1920s, marketed directly to the person with the most purchasing power in the home: the wife and mother. Her mail order advertisements asserted that children craved sweets and needed energy that the dates provided. Additionally, dates offered minerals that helped built bones and teeth and vitamins that helped resist diseases. True to her time Cast emphasized the high caloric value of dates, which she placed at twice the value of eggs and more than potatoes or meat.[213] In short, much of her marketing points dealt directly with contemporary understandings of nutrition; the date was not only a sweet treat but a healthy one at that.

William Paul and Edna Cast were just two of the Coachella Valley date growers who emphasized the nutritional properties of California grown dates. Their "pure dates" and "datone" harnessed the power of American science to increase the perception of nutrition, in their product. Later mail order marketing proclaimed the date as rich in minerals, high in fiber, and fat, cholesterol, and sodium free when these nutritional issues

[212] It also distinguished him from his competition. While other growers put their dates into cold storage for limited times prior to shipment, only the Paul family aged their dates there for three years. For the cure to work, Paul argued, one had to use the aged dates and thus his brand.

[213] *Garden of the Setting Sun Date Recipes*, Date Industry Collection, Coachella Valley History Museum.

began to matter to consumers.[214] In fact, some growers who had previously sold only wholesale or via mail order, found new outlets for their dates in health food stores.[215] When high calories fell out of favor for a low calorie diet, in the later part of the twentieth century, Coachella Valley growers changed their pitch as well. "Their calorie count is remarkably low- only twenty-four calories for an average-size date," proclaimed one mail order catalogue.[216] Dates, as previously advertised, were in fact high in calories, especially for a fruit. However, shifting the serving size from the pound advertized by Hills Brothers in the 1910s to the single date in the 1990s reworked the date into the low fat diet. The proliferation of high calorie processed foods, no doubt, helped date growers claim their food to be low calorie in comparison to other desserts. One date informational brochure suggested that a slice of apple pie or a cake donut were not only higher in calories than a few dates but also less nutritionally dense. Hence the fruit fit into a "well-balanced diet plan," no doubt the inspiration for including comic rendition of a date weighing itself on a scale.[217] (Figure 2.3)

[214] *Oasis Date Gardens Gift Catalogue, 1991 -1992*, Date Industry Collection, Coachella Valley History Museum.

[215] "Date Recipes" Flyer, Covalda Date Company, Date Industry Collection, Coachella Valley History Museum.

[216] *Oasis Date Gardens Gift Catalogue*. Calorie counts depended on the type of date as well; Deglet Noor dates do contain twenty-four calories but the larger Medjools, coming into favor after World War II, have a whopping sixty-six calories per date.

[217] California Date Administrative Committee, "Romancing the Date" Handout, Date Industry Collection, Coachella Valley History Museum.

Figure 2.3: California Date Administrative Committee, "Romancing the Date" Handout. Courtesy Coachella Valley History Museum.

Like Hills Brothers, sometimes Coachella Valley date boosters turned to the Middle East to demonstrate their health claims. May Sowles Metzler's *Date Cook Book*, for example invoked the date as a health food by asserting that Mesopotamians, "subsist on nothing but dates and nuts, and live to a healthy, ripe old age, many of them attaining one hundred and twenty-five years."[218] Reports of such old age were greatly exaggerated, but they played into the trope of the wise, old Arab. William Paul also capitalized on the stereotype of healthy Arab teeth, reminding his customers that "The date eating Arabs have the largest and whitest teeth of any nation in the world."[219] Because the special date diet used only dates and milk Paul's Daughter Nina Shumway took care to mention that these "tribe[s] of nomads live on nothing but dates and camels milk…for months at a time."[220] Particularly important to claims about dates' medicinal value, the work

[218] Metzler, *Date Cook Book*.

[219] "W. L. Paul Pioneer Date Grower" Flyer, W.L. Paul Collection Box 2, Folder 2 at Special Collections & Archives, UCR Libraries, University of California, Riverside.

[220] Paul's Pioneer Garden, *Your Heritage of Health*, 2.

explained that "Among these date-eating peoples cases of ulcerated stomach are unknown, and heart failure, which so often comes from digestive ailments, is exceedingly rare."[221] Paul and Shumway were among many different growers and groups, who directly referenced the American stereotype that the people of the Greater Middle East lived off of dates alone and that their health was improved because of this diet, continuing the Hills Brother's tropes.

Paul went on to reproduce the writing of several scientific "experts," from USDA mainstays to John Hopkins professors. One such quote identified Arabs' diets as nearly ideal, given their good health and strong teeth. Shumway continued with the theme by quoting David Fairchild who wrote, "It is doubtful if there can be found a sounder, stronger race, with better digestion and finer, whiter teeth than the date-eating Arabs."[222] Here we see a direct connection between those early agricultural explorer's racialized understandings and later date growers, who capitalized on their scientific "expertise" to convince consumers to eat more dates. The Orientalist gaze, seemingly reinforced by experts, continued to impact these perceptions of the Greater Middle East and its fruit.

Orientalism and the Marketing of the American Date

The Middle Eastern origin of date palms provided date growers with an easy link to the romance and luxury associated with the region. The allusion to the dates' long history of human consumption was a popular means of incorporating "Oriental" romance

[221] Ibid., 4. I was unable to confirm any of these claims were true or even linked to date consumption.

[222] Ibid., 3.

in marketing materials. "Legends and lore that stretch back into antiquity," one date information booklet mentioned, "are part of the California dates' romantic aura."[223] Such stories worked to convince the consumer that the food was wholesome and unchanging. The Shields Date Shop often mentioned that the tree as the "oldest known cultivated tree crop" in its recipe and catalog pamphlets.[224] If it fed ancestors since the beginning of time, certainly it could nourish the people of today. Biblical references implied wholesomeness of a supernatural sort. References to ancient peoples, including "the royal family" in Morocco and ancient Egyptians implied the date's status as a luxury fruit fit for the rich as well.[225]

Indeed the pitch of Egypt and royalty was used far earlier than this example. In the 1930s the Paul family loudly touted that the Egyptian Minister to the United States ordered dates from the family's farm to be sent to the King of Egypt. Given that the nation was "one of the chief date centers of the Old World" the endorsement no doubt implied that Coachella Valley dates surpassed those grown even in their native state. Further, the everyday consumer could obtain the same quality as the King of Egypt; "You may count on the same regal superiority in every richly dressed box."[226] Gifting, of course, meant the luxury was passed to the recipient, elevating the sender's status. The Paul family encouraged consumers to let their dates "express for you the genius of giving

[223] California Date Administrative Committee, "Romancing the Date."

[224] E. F. Shields, *The Romance of the Date*, Date Industry Collection, Coachella Valley History Museum.

[225] Ibid.

[226] Paul's Pure Dates, "A Gift 'Fit for a King,'" W.L. Paul Collection Box 2, Folder 2 at Special Collections & Archives, UCR Libraries, University of California, Riverside.

with a royal distinction 'fit for a king.'"[227] The operation kept and displayed letters like this, from the "King of Egypt" (really his staff) and others who received his dates including Amelia Earhart. The Egyptian letter, however, proved far more effective and marking California's dates as superior to imported varieties.

Because so many date operations in the Coachella Valley dealt in the mail order business, many brochures, pamphlets, price lists, and other mailed, marketing materials included references to the Middle East. In one catalogue pamphlet, the Garden of the Setting Sun incorporated "The Tradition of the Date" among its product selections. In it the owner wrote,

> I pray the prayer that Easterners do… may the peace of Allah abide with you… wherever you stay, wherever you go, may the beautiful palms of Allah grow. The prophet, Mohammed, spoke and said: 'Among the trees there is one tree which is blessed, it is the palm… honor the palm.' The wisdom of Mohammed is reflected in the known fact that avenging armies in oriental countries will not destroy a date palm when they invade an enemy land. They know what dietitians now know… the value of the date as a food. Dates are the oldest cultivated fruit known to man. Arabs on months long journeys across the desert will subsist almost entirely on dates and camel's milk, arriving In their destination in the best of physical conditions.[228]

Here the Garden of the Setting Sun invoked the trope of the wise, old Arab in the form of the holy religious leader Mohammed, without taking the religion seriously. Instead the language of Islam is used to wax poetic about the date; prayers are made to link the romance of the Orient to the date trees grown more locally. The science of dietitians confirms the immortal wisdom of the Oriental other as well. Consumers not only received dates from the shop but also a history lesson, scientific lecture, and a multitude of

[227] Ibid.

[228] *Garden of the Setting Sun Dates*, Date Industry Collection, Coachella Valley History Museum.

romances with their purchase. Lest the talk of Middle Eastern dates encourage consumers to purchase imported dates, the traditions piece ends by calling customers to "Include clean Californian dates in your daily diet."[229]

The names of various date orchards and operations also evoked the mystery and romance of the Orient, lending the aura to the dates they sold. The Garden of the Setting Sun, for example, evoked biblical origins in Eden and encouraged its owners to earn the nicknames of Adam and Eve.[230] Other Orientalist inspired names included Allah Date Gardens, the Black Tent (referencing Bedouin tents), Oasis Gardens, and The Garden of Eden Date Shop. The names of the date varieties, too, evoked foreignness. Though some varieties were renamed, most retained variations on their Arabic names from the Deglet Noor to the Medjool, Zahidi, Khadrawy, Halawy, and Barhi. Translating names occasionally allowed for additional layers of the exotic. The Deglet Noor, for example, was often evoked as the date of light, though at least one grower translated it to the "finger of light."[231]

The date's cultivation required additional connections, in this case a climatic one. Though Hills Brothers often claimed they obtained their imported dates from the best date growing regions in the world, the only ones with enough heat to properly ripen dates, Coachella Valley growers explained they too had enough sunshine to do the job. One 1932 growers' cooperative cookbook explained that dates required a hot climate. "These conditions exist in only a few spots in the entire world," the book continued,

[229] Ibid.

[230] Louisa Ames, "Do You Remember," reprinted in *Periscope* (1993), 11.

[231] Paul's Pioneer Garden, *Your Heritage of Health*.

"And one of them, it was recently discovered, is a small valley in the California desert."[232] Suffice to say, however, that American popular culture had already viewed the Saharan and Middle Eastern deserts with an exotic curiosity; deserts conjured the romance of camels, Bedouin tents, and adventure. Brand names like Desert Sweets and Desert Gold tapped into the same romance of Hills Brothers' Dromedary dates. The Desert Sweets variety even employed the recognizable pith helmet to link the two deserts together. A man wearing a pith helmet, standing in front of large palms, offering dates served as an image for the brand on their packaging, mailing materials, and in store displays throughout the country. Though the brand touted its Californian origins, the pith helmet invoked a distinctly desert tie as well as the exploration and adventure required in bringing an the Arabian and North African date industry to the Southland. (Figure 2.4)

Figure 2.4: Desert Sweets Display from Hearns Department Store in New York City, circa 1947. Courtesy Coachella Valley History Museum.

[232] California Date Growers Association, *How to Serve Fresh Dates*, 3.

To be clear, date growers in the Coachella Valley used many different themes and angles to sell their product, several beyond ties to the Orient. Some capitalized on other American fantasies of the Southland. The Garden of the Setting Sun's packaging referenced the exotic nature of the desert, the dates, and the region, including images of the Spanish Fantasy Past, so widespread in Southern California. Artwork found on packages often included a palm tree, sometimes with a desert background that included a saguaro cactus. Americans likely understood this saguaro as a symbol of the desert- a place romanticized in its own right, despite the fact that these cacti were not native nor widespread in the Coachella Valley.

Packaging and branding from the Garden of the Setting Sun came to include either the image of a dancing senorita or a sleeping, sombreroed Mexican man driving a donkey cart. Customers were able to purchase items with Spanish names, like the "Fiesta Keg" of dates in brandy and were told "Muchas Gracias" in various mailings. Customers also ordered "La Fiesta" redwood boxes. Though these redwood boxes were standard in the date industry, often stamped with images of date palms, the Setting Sun's redwood boxes were hand painted with an image of a Spanish mission and garden, with a senorita centered in the foreground fanning herself.

The packaging tapped into racial stereotypes that emphasized the product's Californian origins, instead of its ties to the desert. Southern California's long history of romancing its Spanish Colonial origins through pageants, parades, costumes, and red-tiled architecture meant that consumers around the nation could see the symbols of this Spanish Fantasy- the senorita, the mission, the friar, the sleeping Mexican- and think of

California. Owners here drew from a long established visual language of the Golden State in order to reinforce their position that California dates were best, while still implying the exotic, romantic associations the fruit also held. Other date shops, like Valerie Jeans, turned to adobe and red brick buildings to reinforce this idea of the date as a thoroughly California product. Still others like the Esperanza Ranch and the San Antonio Date Shop, both Anglo owned, used naming to evoke the same feeling.

The use of romantic image of the Orient was not limited to the recipe booklets, catalogues and price lists, or other marketing materials produced by date growers in the Coachella Valley. The larger region embraced these romantic notions in order to define themselves, market their region, and boost the large agricultural commodity booming in their midst. These fantasies went beyond the ephemera mailed to consumers to include an architecture, pageantry, geography, and language that shaped a regional identity for years to come.

Conclusion

By the time date offshoots started to bear large numbers of dates international date importers had already begun to entice the American public to consume more dates. Hills Brothers, in particular, marketed dates nationally in the first half of the twentieth century. In doing so, they responded to public concerns over food safety, championed new understandings of nutrition, and introduced the fruit to many American staples like sandwiches, salads, and cookies. To do so, the company highlighted its use of science: from pasteurization to laboratory testing for sanitation and nutritional measurements. It

also looked to the Middle East for a unique tie that might bring it new customers seeking the exotic in everyday life.

Noting the success of Hills Brothers on Eastern markets, various date producers in the Coachella Valley also attempted to educate the public on the growing benefits of eating dates. They were able, however, to mark their dates as superior to imported varieties. The nature of the dates involved did some of the work; sticky, old imported dates were no match for fresh grown American varieties. The growers, however, argued that their access to American science, via the USDA's date research, pesticides, fumigants, artificial ripening, and pasteurization made American dates far cleaner than those imported from the Orient. This science also outpaced Middle Eastern traditions and allowed the United States to grow a better food in the first place, so growers maintained. These scientific advancements came at a price to agricultural workers, however, who suffered from falls, exposure to pesticides, and fumigation poisonings in packing plants. American nutritional science provided an additional benefit for American grown dates; in some cases date growers invented date products unavailable in the Greater Middle East. The Orient, however, still held America's lusty gazes as a land of enchantment, luxury, and romance, stereotypes California date growers were quick to incorporate. And as we will see, the marketing materials for their date crops were just the tip of the iceberg.

Chapter Three: "Arabia in America": Oriental Landscapes in the California Desert

In the mid-1950s Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser set out on a quest to build a dam on the Nile River. While the dam became a target of a prolonged "geopolitical tug-of-war" between the Soviets and the West, it also forced an unprecedented global preservation and archeological campaign.[1] The Aswan Dam's construction, eventually funded by the U.S.S.R, would submerge twenty-five major temples in the region historically referred to as Nubia, then a part of Egypt (The United Arab Republic) and Sudan.[2] The Egyptian government appealed to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) for help saving the monuments and other archeological treasures that might be lost with the dam's rising floodwaters.[3]

By then previously colonized nations around the globe embraced independence and argued that their cultural treasures were their own, rather than subject to pilfering by Europe or the United States. This resulted in the widespread "insistence that antiquities should remain in their country of discovery," rather than be removed to museums, universities, or private collections in foreign nations.[4] The dam, however, forced Egypt's hand. The project would literally drown several treasures unless they could obtain the funding and experts to excavate. Further, temples would be completely lost, not only

[1] Lucia Allais, "Integrities: The Salvage of Abu Simbel," *Grey Room* 50 (Winter 2013): 11.

[2] Ibid and John A. Wilson, "The Nubian Campaign: An Exercise in International Archaeology," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 111, no.5 (October 16, 1967); 268-269.

[3] Ed Mullis, "Last of the Temples: A New Setting for Philae- 'The Pearl of Egypt,'" *Saudi Aramco World* (July/ August 1976); 16-23.

[4] Wilson, "The Nubian Campaign," 268.

gone from sight but, given the eroding nature of the sandstone structures, they would eventually face decay underwater. Thus Egypt, Sudan, and UNESCO poised a unique solution. Nations that contributed substantial economic support for a plan to relocate some of the most important temples to higher ground would receive priority for archeological expeditions in the region and a fifty-fifty split of the antiquities unearthed in the process. Incredibly, Egypt, Sudan, and UNESCO also pledged some of the smaller temples, which would have otherwise been submerged, to be given away "in recognition of the… scientific and financial contributions to the Nubian campaign."[5] In asking the world to help, Egypt and Sudan had symbolically transferred ownership of the monuments "to the world at large and not their governments alone."[6]

Archeological explorations were quickly undertaken with twenty countries sending expeditions to the region.[7] The temples, however, proved more challenging, if for no other reason than the enormous cost and difficulty faced in relocating such massive structures. UNESCO launched an international campaign to raise the funds to save several of the threatened temples; the appeal received support and attention from several foreign governments, especially in the West. The United States, in particular, raised over sixteen million dollars for the campaign, mostly through private initiatives, rather than

[5] Ibid., 268-269.

[6] John A. Wilson, "U.S. Aid for the Nubian Monuments- Argument," February 8, 1961, Nubian Monuments File, Papers of John F. Kennedy, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library, accessed at http://www.jfklibrary.org/Asset-Viewer/Archives/JFKPOF-104-006.aspx.

[7] Wilson, "The Nubian Campaign," 268.

governmental funding.[8] A special American committee was formed: The United States National Committee for the Preservation of the Nubian Monuments. UNESCO and the U.S. committee succeeded in raising public awareness of the dam's threat to the temples. As the Aswan Dam crisis mounted, Americans around the nation read about Nubia's plight in *Reader's Digest*, *Life Magazine*, and *Newsweek*.

While the support for the Aswan Dam and the quest to save the threatened treasures played out on a global stage, word of the endangered temples reached the deserts of Southern California. In December 1960 Indio, backed by the Indio Chamber of Commerce and the U.S. National Committee for the Preservation of the Nubian Monuments made a bid to relocate one of the temples, Temple Derr, to the Coachella Valley, gaining addition endorsements from the City Council, the Riverside County Board of Supervisors, the Riverside County Fair Board, several congressional leaders, and, eventually, the State of California.[9] Surprisingly, just a month later Indio learned that UNESCO approved their bid to relocate the temple. If the city wanted the temple they needed to raise about $1.3 million dollars to pay for the relocation as well as a "gift" to the Egyptian government.[10]

Why did the power brokers of Indio want an ancient Nubian temple and what made, according to leaders in the U.S. committee to save the monuments, "bringing one

[8] Ibid., 270.

[9] Dorothy Watson, Indio Bids for a Nubian Temple," *Desert Magazine* 26, No. 3 (March 1963): 50.

[10] Ibid., 50.

of these temples to Indio… more appealing to me than any other site in the country."?[11] In their proposal, area boosters claimed "Indio, known as the Date Capital of the U.S.A, is famous for its National Date Festival, featuring Arabic design…. We would like, if possibly, to have one of the temples taken apart and rebuilt near our Arabic fairgrounds. We would be proud to preserve this treasure for posterity."[12] Here, the striking, desert terrain made the appeal compelling. To boosters, the landscape of the Coachella Valley-both the natural desert and the manmade date groves and Date Festival architecture-produced the perfect setting for an Egyptian treasure. After all, a city council resolution intoned, "The topography and setting of the Coachella Valley…containing myriads of date palms, is in keeping with the present setting of the temples, and this becomes particularly true if its final reconstruction would be within the Riverside County fairgrounds, which features and Arabic motif and setting."[13] Never mind that the "Arabic" architecture of the Date Festival drew inspiration from Bagdad and the Arabian Peninsula rather than from Egypt. To residents of the Coachella Valley, and to many Americans for that matter, the Orient was all connected, from Morocco to the borders of India. Some wanted the temple to be moved to a date grove near the National Date Festival, to enrich this fantasized setting with an authentic Middle Eastern relic. Others opposed placing the "shrine in a 'carnival atmosphere,'" convinced that matching the

[11] Lew Little, "Date Festival Seeking Doomed Egypt Temple," *San Diego Union*, February 3, 1961.

[12] Watson, "Indio Bids," 50.

[13] Little, "Date Festival Seeking."

temple to a more natural (though equally exotic) landscape was the best solution.[14] This group asserted that the hills around Indio "are almost identical with the sandstone banks of the Nile where the temple has rested throughout the centuries."[15]

Indeed even non-locals perceived Indio as a perfect place to house the temple precisely because of its landscape. One University of Colorado professor claimed that Indio's "natural desert environment, date groves, and proximity to major population centers," made it an ideal location for the Egyptian treasure.[16] The temple, the professor argued, might "survive indefinitely only in a climate such as Indio's."[17] The weather that helped the date palm thrive would allow for a long preservation of the temples because the climate of the Coachella Valley was as similarly dry as the temple's home.

Indio even flaunted endorsements from the Greater Middle East. One Baghdad University Professor concluded that "Indio's Date Festival and attempt to obtain one of the Egyptian antiquities should be an international as well as a national inspiration. This is the spot for Temple Derr."[18] Given Americans' understandings of the Orient, an endorsement from Iraq appeared as ideal as one from Egypt itself. Furthermore, Indio also obtained a prominent Egyptian's support. The Chief Inspector of Antiquities in Egypt offered that "it will be a great deed for culture, and Indio will be recorded in

[14] Watson, "Indio Bids," 53.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Abdul Wahab Al Dabbagh quoted in Watson, "Indio Bids," 53.

history if it saves this temple for future generations."[19] These endorsements stood in for, and were read as, widespread approval from the Middle East. Representatives of Temple Derr for Indio, Inc., a grassroots organization charged with raising funding for the project, met with the Egyptian ambassador in Washington, DC who, the press reported, "gave the Temple Derr project a strong endorsement."[20] Shortly after the film epic *Cleopatra* debuted in 1963, supporters even reached out to Elizabeth Taylor, Cleopatra herself, for support.[21] Clearly, Taylor was not Egyptian but her association with ancient Egypt on screen would no doubt have provided an additional layer of support.

Despite the endorsements, accepted bids, and substantial fundraising, the Temple Derr never came to Indio. The Coachella Valley's involvement lapsed after estimates for relocation continued to rise without "definite assurance of getting the temple," thus "interest waned."[22] The United States, however, was still set to receive a temple in thanks for the sixteen million dollars raised to save other temples in Nubia. As such the Egyptian government instead offered Temple Dendur, a smaller structure, to the United States in 1965. Bids from Cairo, Illinois and Memphis, Tennessee argued that their names gave them a leg up for the temple, while Phoenix's bid likely reflected its desert climate connections. Philadelphia, Boston, and Baltimore also requested the temple and for some time Indio left its name in the hat. While the Smithsonian's proposal to place the monument on the Potomac gained popular favor, concern over the sandstone's delicate

[19] Ibid.

[20] "UAR Agrees to Give Nile Temple to Indio," *Los Angeles Times*, 1963.

[21] "Indio Thinks Big," *Desert Magazine* 26, no. 8 (August 1963): 4.

[22] "Indio Hopes to Obtain Egypt Temple Revived," *Los Angeles Times*, April 3, 1965.

nature meant the temple would need to be placed inside. Instead, the presidential commission charged with designating the temple's new home awarded Dendur to New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art. A $9.5 million dollar move brought the treasure to the museum's new Sackler Wing in 1978 where it remains today.[23]

Indio's bid for the Temple Derr was made possible by an earlier creation of an Arabian Fantasy in the Coachella Valley evident since the beginning of the twentieth century. Date growers, boosters, and other residents had used the Greater Middle East to describe their desert landscape and cultural geography to potential visitors, investors, and new residents. American understandings of the Orient were superimposed onto the Coachella Valley. In the case of Temple Derr, this was a literal relocation of the Egyptian landscape to the American desert. As we shall see, other landscape alterations were more metaphorical- from the language used to describe the desert, to the renaming of towns, and the invocation of Moorish inspired architecture. Indeed, the Eastern Coachella Valley, in particular, attempted to position itself as the Arabia of America by carefully creating a cultural geography that invoked the Middle East at every turn.

Desert Dreams: The Making and Meaning of an Arabian Fantasy

The Coachella Valley's appropriation of an Arabian fantasy is not surprising given California's long history of boosterism and inventions of regional identity. As historian Glen Gendzel put it, "new arrivals" in the West "invented founding myths for their communities in order to endow wandering, polyglot populations with unity,

[23] Milton Esterow, "Gift of Egyptian Temple Posing Problems," *The New York Times*, January 26, 1966 and William H. Rockett, "A Temple at the Met," *Saudi Aramco World* (May/ June 1980): 30-38.

stability, and identity." He continued, "These regional myths helped western migrants fasten themselves to the soil and to each other, bestowing a fictive sense of unity and permanence onto fragile outposts in contested terrain."[24] The Coachella Valley turned to would create its own regional identify based on American romancing of the Middle East. Perceptions of climate and landscape paired with new agricultural projects to set the tone for these foundation stories. In the case of the Arabian fantasies the desert itself served as a vital link between the landscape and the romance. Like the myths of miners and missionaries, this Arabian fantasy "justified conquest and displacement of prior occupants" but also went on to justify the transfer of date palms and the markets they served.[25]. Notably these "regional myths" also drew tourists and thus their dollars.

Large parts of Southern California pushed a boosterism based on the Spanish Fantasy Past, one that emphasized a Spanish past (thus European, not Mexican) at the center of the region's history. This celebration, often seen through mission and Spanish revival architecture, preservation of Spanish colonial landmarks, pageantry and performance, costumed play, and a whitewashing of Mexican influence in the area, excused Anglo conquest by linking Midwestern migrants to an older history.[26] In seeing themselves as heirs to white, Spanish fathers and blaming the decline of California on

[24] The "western migrants" mentioned were mostly Anglo immigrants. Glen Gendzel, "Pioneers and Padres: Competition Mythologies in Northern and Southern California, 1850-1930," *Western Historical Quarterly* 32, no. 1 (Spring 2001): 56.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Migration was in part spurred by the popularity of *Ramona* and the large influx of tourists who came to the region seeking the work's romance. For more on the Spanish Fantasy Past see: Carey McWilliams, *Southern California Country: An Island on the Land* (New York: Duell, Sloan & Pearce, 1946); William Deverell, *Whitewashed Adobe* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); Phoebe Kropp, *California Vieja: Culture and Memory in a Modern American Place* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006); and Gendzel, "Pioneers and Padres."

Mexican governments and citizens, Anglo Californians validated social hierarchies that placed them at the top of a skewed regional history thus allowing them to be celebrated even in histories where they were not present.[27]

And yet, as Glen Gendzel has argued, California also turned to the mythos of the rough and tumble pioneer to sell their story and set their landscapes apart.[28] As the Gold Rush remade the nation in the 1850s, its legacy remade regions of the Golden State. Regional identities centered on the Gold Rush developed in Northern California, long before the Spanish Fantasy took over in Southern California. These regional identities preferred the mythos of the pioneer: the lone men who battled the elements and native California to bring civilization, America, and notably- whiteness- to the Wild West.[29]

Largely unsettled by whites until the late 1800s and early 1900s, the Coachella Valley failed to claim either a Spanish colonial presence or a lasting link to the Gold Rush.[30] As the region grew between the world wars it too sought a founding mythos.

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[27] Ibid.

[28] Gendzel "Pioneers and Padres."

[29] See David Glassberg, "Making Places in California," *Sense of History: the Place of the Past in American Life*, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001): 165-202 and Gendzel, "Pioneers and Padres." Gendzel argues that the dividing line between the Spanish Fantasy Past and the mythos of the Gold Rush was a geographic one, at the Tehachapi Mountains. Interestingly, he notes that the Protestant nature of new Midwestern immigrants to the Los Angeles region also played a part; the violence, drinking, and gambling tied to the Gold Rush fell out of their favor. Those who preferred the Spanish Fantasy Past argued that while forty-niners came for wealth, missionaries came to spread religion and society. Those who favored the Gold Rush argued that the missions were barbaric, enslavers of Indians, and failures at bringing civilization to Native California. Of course the story of the lone American man bringing civilization to the wilderness is as misleading as the mission myth.

[30] Direct Spanish colonialism did not reach this desert region though Spanish explorers came through the region in the 1770s. Disease and livestock (which decimated natural ecosystems) reached the Cahuilla Indians of the Coachella Valley as well. The Spanish mission system disrupted other native groups which in turn affected the Cahuilla; some were even baptized at regional missions. Lawrence Culver, *The Frontier*

Indio and the surrounding community, however, had little ties to Spanish colonialism, as harsh climates, complicated water supplies, and relative isolation prevented the establishment of Spanish or Mexican colonial projects.[31] Therefore Spanish Fantasy mythmaking was more difficult, though not an impossible hurdle. Nearby Riverside, for example, lacked a mission, though this did not stop efforts by city boosters centered on the Mission Inn, a creation of the fantasy past in itself. While Riverside, established on the site of a former rancho, shared a climate, landscape, and history with other areas of Southern California, the Coachella Valley did not.

However, some boosters in the Coachella Valley dove head first into the Spanish Fantasy Past, with Spanish inspired architecture taking hold early on. For example, the famous La Quinta Hotel regularly invoked the romance of Spanish haciendas in its name, design, and marketing. So too did the El Mirador in Palm Springs. City names like Rancho Mirage, La Quinta, Coachella, and even Indio linked the region to the greater appeal of Southern California's Spanish Fantasy Past.[32] This regional use of the Spanish

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of Leisure: Southern California and the Shaping of Modern America (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 142-143.

[31] It is important to note, however, that though the area did not have established points of Spanish colonialism, Native American communities were impacted by missions and asistencias and were occasionally relocated. Culver, *The Frontier of Leisure*. Further, though there were no established Spanish colonial projects in the area there has been an established Mexican and Mexican American presence in the area, beginning with railroad workers in the 1870s and continuing to today. Mexican and Mexican Americans often pioneered agricultural techniques key to the area's development.

[32] La Quinta's Spanish name was invented in the 1920s by those creating a hotel there; Rancho Mirage did not receive that name until the mid-twentieth century as well, well into Anglo settlement of the region. These were clearly invented names meant to tap into the romance of the Spanish Fantasy Past. Coachella's origin is difficult to determine; some say that it reflects the Spanish word for little shells, conchitas, or the name of regional Native Americans, "Cahuilla." It was likely a mis-reading on a map that created the name. Indio was the Spanish term applied to the town after the Indian well there. It predates much Anglo settlement and may reflect a Spanish or Mexican naming of the region, though travel through the Coachella Valley was extremely limited prior to the 1880s.

Fantasy past justified white success in the area, long ago transferred from pious padre to Midwestern immigrant; adopting Spanish themes in the Coachella Valley avoided any discussion of more recent acquisition of Native land and the displacement of its peoples.

But then again, given extensive mining that occurred in the mountains surrounding the Coachella Valley, the region could also claim connections to miners and thus link itself to the states' rich Gold Rush mythos.[33] Given the harsh realities of early life in the desert, the mythos of the pioneer was even more tempting.[34] Prominent regional boosters had long seen themselves as pioneers in the area, forging the way in arid agriculture, particularly in developing the date industry, despite their recent, twentieth-century relocations.[35] Local residents may have also viewed their communities as isolated Wild West towns, given the distance from the county seat of Riverside and even further from Los Angeles. Unsurprisingly, celebrations with western themes appeared quite frequently in the area. Rodeos took place in Coachella Valley towns and helped residents identify themselves as citizens of the Wild West, especially given the Western Days that encouraged western dress. From 1934 to1986 Palm Springs held a "Desert Circus," a western themed parade, fundraiser, and community celebration complete with cookouts and cowboy hats. Dude ranches vied for tourist dollars and horse

[33] Some claimed over sixty-two million dollars worth of gold was pulled from the hills. Additionally during the building of the All American Canal, large numbers of men migrated to the deserts around the Coachella Valley. On payday they came into the local cities creating "the appearance of a Wild West town," into the late 1930s. Patricia Baker Laflin, *Images of America: Indio* (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2008), 80-85.

[34] The miner and the pioneer share a similar imagery of independence, isolation, hard work in poor, desolate conditions. Indeed most miners were perceived as pioneers.

[35] For a discussion of the politics of "pioneers" in the Eastern Coachella Valley see Sarah McCormick, "Mexican American Pioneer Project: The Politics of Museum-Community Partnerships and the Inclusion of Latinos in Local and National Historical Narratives" in "Reconstructing Narratives: Redefining Histories of Southern California," (master's thesis, University of California, Riverside, 2009), 12-85.

rides with wagon trail meals became popular attractions. At least one Palm Springs mayor positioned himself so frequently as a cowboy that a large statue of him riding a horse in western garb stands in front of the city hall even today.[36]

Even Indio's date celebrations occasionally gave themselves over to Wild West themes. Some Date Festivals held in the 1930s turned to the cowboy, holding "Wiskerino" competitions where prominent townsmen grew facial hair for charity. Those who failed to participate were rounded up by "vigilantes," thrown in jail, and treated like "outlaws" until they paid a fine for charity. At the fair and its parades, children and adults alike appeared in western-wear. The region's agricultural heritage, tied to the mythos of the frontier farmer, provided an additional link to the Western pioneer identity.

The Wild West theme celebrated in the Coachella Valley helped locals justify their presence in the newly opened region; they saw themselves as pioneers in an area difficult to farm and, particularly in the summer, difficult to inhabit. Just as many Americans perceived the Wild West as devoid of life prior to white settlement, participants imagined that the Coachella Valley was similarly unoccupied.[37] Native Americans in the West, like those in the Coachella Valley, were removed from prime agricultural land in the name of civilization and advancement. Thus imagining the region as the last stronghold of the Wild West encouraged participants to envision themselves as the rightful inheritors of the land. The frontier myth of cowboys and Indians valued

[36] Frank Bogert, of course, was a famous rodeo announcer and an accomplished equestrian. His love of western imagery, however, no doubt influenced his self styling as a hero cowboy.

[37] Areas facing population booms during the Gold Rush were in fact inhabited; large numbers of Native Americans were slaughtered during and after the Gold Rush in these regions, for all intensive purposes an act of genocide. See Brendan C. Lindsay, *Murder State: California's Native American Genocide, 1846-1873* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2012).

whites as heroes, here in a location that saw little white-Indian physical violence. The occurrence of these narratives after Frederick Jackson Turner declared the frontier closed contributed to a sense of nostalgia for the Old West, serving as an access point for those wanting to play cowboy and remember the "simpler" times of the Old West.[38]

While the Spanish Fantasy Past and the Gold Rush mythos drew tourists to their regions based on tenuous historical retellings, so too did California's natural landscapes. The Mediterranean climate and plentiful sunshine paired perfectly with the romance of the missions; tourists also sought out the vast, stunning, and more rugged landscapes of Gold Country, so near to Yosemite and monstrous redwoods. Similarly, the first tourists to the Coachella Valley sought out a natural landscape and warm climate. The arid climate proved an unequaled draw for those suffering from respiratory distress. Desert literature drew its share of readers seeking the romance invoked in its pages as well. John Van Dyke's *The Desert: Further Studies in Natural Appearances*, Mary Austin's *Land of Little Rain*, and George Wharton James' *Wonders of the Colorado Desert* all mapped the desert landscape as a place of uninhabited beauty.[39]

The desert landscape and climate, however, had already been linked to a wider world in American understandings. In his recent work, *Go East Young Man: Imagining the American West as the Orient*, historian and geographer Richard V. Francaviglia convincingly argues that since its inception, the United States invoked the Orient to make sense of the growing wonders of the West, a region not yet defined by the wild,

[38] Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," *Annual Report for the Year 1893* (Washington: American Historical Association, 1894) 199–202.

[39] For more on Van Dyke and James see Culver, *The Frontier of Leisure*, 148-151.

independent, open mythos ascribed to it today. Flat prairie landscapes and sandy, dry deserts shocked Easterners who encountered them. With little reference points available to describe these landscapes to a public used to mountains and tall trees, writers and artists turned to the Middle East which provided them with a language and visualization of these foreign regions for comparison. Though the public had little real interaction with the Near East, they had extensive imagined ties to the region via widely consumed literature like the Bible and *One Thousand and One Arabian Nights* (including illustrated versions of both) and later, via a more visual popular culture like stereoscopes and films. Therefore the Midwestern Prairies became the "Great American Desert" linked to the Sahara, not for extreme temperatures or sand, of course, but for their endless flatness that desert landscapes also shared. Strange rock formations became Egyptian temples, the Great Salt Lake an American Dead Sea, and the native peoples that inhabited the region transformed to American Bedouins.[40]

These links were often Biblical in nature tied closely to a Protestant construction of the Holy Land.[41] Given that before the twentieth century, few Americans had truly encountered a desert, it is little wonder that their strongest connection to it lay in

[40] Richard V. Francaviglia, *Go East, Young Man: Imagining the American West as the Orient* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 2011).

[41] Though the concept of a holy land existed in religions throughout the world, including the three Abraham ones, here the term Holy Land designates the American understanding of the phrase. To American Protestants the Holy Land as a geographic term was used interchangeably with Palestine, though it could be more widely applied to other lands mentioned in the Bible like Egypt or Iraq. Religious scholar Stephanie Stidham Rogers suggests that when Americans traveled to Palestine in the nineteenth century, they expected to see biblical stories manifested and were often disappointed by what they found. Hence they re-created the region to fit their needs and developed a new understanding of the "Holy Land." My use throughout this dissertation reflects this Protestant understanding of the region. Stephanie Stidham Rogers, *Inventing the Holy Land: American Protestant Pilgrimage to Palestine*, 1865-1941 (Maryland: Lexington Books, 2011).

religion.[42] Indeed because of this influence the "Holy Land was primarily a cultural icon to most Americans."[43] Historian and religious studies scholar Burke O. Long argues that given the Holy Land's popularity and the high cost and dangers of travel before World War II, "entrepreneurs of religion and businesses brought the Holy Land to America."[44] Invoking the Holy Land on American soil, from Jerusalem exhibits at the world's fairs to virtual parlor tours of the region, became one of the main forms of Orientalism in the United States prior to World War II.[45] Thus in the claiming of Western places as the Garden of Eden, the Promised Land, or even a new Jerusalem, the Holy Land was brought to the West as manifest destiny manifested.[46]

California, moreover, had long positioned itself as the Garden of Eden. The "garden" itself, both agricultural and aesthetic in nature, remained an important lure for tourists and settlers alike. Scholar Douglas Sackman argues that California sold itself as "the most perfect garden… a simulacrum of Eden, more perfect than the original."[47] After all California's "identity, and economy, became fixed to plants."[48] When Southern California's Orange Empire sent their golden fruit across the nation in the dead of winter,

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[42] Lester I. Vogel, *To See a Promised Land: Americans and the Holy Land in the Nineteenth Century* (University Part: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993), 5.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Burke O. Long, *Imagining the Holy Land: Maps, Models, and Fantasy Travels* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 3. See also R. Laurence Moore, *Selling Good: American Religion in the Marketplace of Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

[45] Ibid.

[46] Francaviglia, *Go East*.

[47] Douglas Cazaux Sackman, *Orange Empire: California and the Fruits of Eden* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 23.

[48] Ibid.

their connections to the garden were sealed, reinforced through imagery of lush garden landscapes in real estate brochures, popular magazines, and even the orange crate labels themselves.[49] The state's subsequent agricultural experiments from almonds to garlic allowed farm communities around California to center their regional identities in the gardens as well. Indeed rendering the landscape fruitful, so crucial to the concept of Manifest Destiny, justified the subsequent waves of migrants to the Golden State.

It is little wonder then that the Coachella Valley also referred to itself as a Garden of Eden.[50] Moreover, date groves became gardens unto themselves. One 1925 article pointed out that "In dateland it is always a 'date garden,' never an orchard or a grove," a phrasing that continues in popularity even today.[51] Many date growing enterprises took the name for their date shops or mail order endeavors: Sun Gold Gardens, The Garden of the Setting Sun, Garden of the Sultan, Oasis Date Gardens, Sniff's Unusual Date Gardens, and Shields Date Gardens all serve as examples.[52] Obviously, the date palms did grow in orchards or groves but the emphasis on the "garden" tied the fruit to the famous gardens of the Holy Land and the Middle East.[53] It also implied an aesthetic beauty not always granted to agricultural projects. Rendering agricultural beautiful

[49] Ibid., 23-24.

[50] Bob Foote, "An American Oasis: National Park on the Fringe of the Colorado Desert," *Los Angeles Times* January 10, 1909.

[51] Guy E. Mitchell "Date Gardens of America," *Nature Magazine* (February 1925): 109.

[52] Sometimes date shops set up public gardens as a means of drawing tourists in. Shield's Date Gardens, for example, had a garden where visitors could see dates in various sizes and learn about their life cycle. However the business also had the largest rose garden in California. Visitors to Shields and other date gardens could also see another Coachella Valley cash crop: citrus.

[53] Exampled by the Garden of Eden, the Garden of Gethsemane, and the Hanging Gardens of Babylon.

opened up the possibility that it may become a tourist draw as well. Indeed, date palms became ingrained into the desert landscape as agricultural tourism but also as a link to the romance of the Middle East.

Coachella Valley boosters began selling the landscape as their own Arabia. In 1920, for example, J. Smeaton Chase published a guidebook to the region titled *Our Araby: Palm Springs and the Garden of the Sun*.[54] Chase's larger work, *California Desert Trails* invoked the Middle East in other ways. When describing a small cluster of palms in the desert he recalled: "Such things are unique in American landscape, and send one's thoughts wandering for comparisons to Ararat, Ruwenzori, or famed Kashmir."[55] Part of this draw to the desert lay in the natural palm oases and canyons. These clusters of *Washingtonia* fan palms, found nowhere else in the United States, drew attention precisely because they looked so remarkably like the oases of Middle Eastern imaginations. Thus a push to incorporate several of the canyon oases in the Palm Springs area into a National Monument occurred in the 1920s. Because these lands belonged to Native American tribes the National Park designation was never granted.[56] That, however, did not stop tourists from visiting and imagining the expanses of canyon, sand, and palm as a virtual Middle East. J. Smeaton Chase, for instance, mused that "as

[54]J. Smeaton Chase, *Our Araby: Palm Springs and the Garden of the Sun* (Pasadena: Star News Publishing, 1920), 12 and Culver. *Frontier of Leisure*, 161-162. The work's title, of course, reflected the earlier Charles Dudley Warner work: *Our Italy*. That book positioned California as the Mediterranean of America, a common association. Chase's work, in turned, marked the Coachella Valley as the desert Arabia of the United States

[55] J. Smeaton Chase, *California Desert Trails* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1919), 35.

[56] For more see Culver, *The Frontier of Leisure*, 162.

facilities for reaching it improve, ever larger numbers of people will come to view this bit of pure Arabia that has somehow fallen within our territory."[57]

One turn of the century booklet explained, the "ancient palms [transport] the beholder to lands of the Orient."[58] The *Los Angeles Times* suggested at length: "Did it ever occur to you- you who delight to read travelers' tales of the great Sahara, and how the camels race, from afar, to the oasis, once the palm trees heave in sight, far off on the sky line- that we, of the States, have an oasis too?"[59] To further their connections they went on: "in place of the dusky Arab, the duskier Indian and his village, which, like the Arab's he may dismantle, should he care silently to steal away."[60] Viewed as similarly dark, sneaky, nomadic, ancient, connected to nature, and childlike the Coachella Valley had its own "Arabs," so the *Times* argued, in Cahuilla tribes. Francaviglia argues that rendering Native Americans as America's Arabs, Turks, or Moors was not new. The Spanish Conquistadores took up the practice and American explorers continued, imbibing the nation's native Americans with an Orientalist romance.[61] Occasionally Indians were perceived as lost tribes of Israel. As disillusionment with modernity grew at the end of the nineteenth century, visual and popular culture began to reshape Oriental fantasies

[57] Chase, *California Desert Trails*, 37.

[58] Welwood and Elizabeth Murray, *Palm Springs Health Resort: The Oasis of the Desert* (Los Angeles: Out West Co. Printers), Braun Research Library at the Autry National Center.. Francaviglia argues that these *Washintonia filifera* did not "have the exotic aura of the date palm." Clearly the immense interest in rendering their oases into a national park suggests otherwise. Francaviglia, *Go East*, 199.

[59] Bob Foote, "American Oasis."

[60] Ibid. The same article went on to name the Palm Springs area the "Garden of Eden."

[61]Francaviglia, "Finding New Eden: The American Southwest," *Go East, 126-154*.

through pueblo Indians.[62] Native and Mexican women were sexualized through the invocation of the biblical jezebel or the Orientalized harem as well.[63]

The desert welcomed other comparisons to the Greater Middle East. George Wharton James, ever the California booster, compiled a pamphlet about the Coachella Valley for the Southern Pacific Land Department. In it he declared the area "as fertile as the historic Valley of the Nile."[64] Wharton was just one of many to link the region's landscape to Egypt. The Imperial Farm Lands Association renamed the Niland, a community an hour southeast of Indio, as a contraction of "Nile Land" in 1916 in their hopes of bringing Colorado River water to the city borders.[65] The Imperial Valley and Coachella Valley looked eerily similar and both were described as the "American Sahara."[66] At this early point, few Americans had ever seen a desert and even fewer had visited these harsh landscapes in Southern California. Given popular culture, however, the American public readily grasped the meaning of the Sahara; its mere mention could quickly communicate the landscape to readers in the rest of the country. One 1921 article in *Overland Monthly* described that the crops grown in the Imperial Valley as "Aladdin-

[62] Jerold S. Auerbach, *Explorers in Eden: Pueblo Indians and the Promised Land* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2006).

[63] Francaviglia, *Go East*.

[64] George Wharton James, *The Coachella Valley* (Los Angeles, Southern Pacific Land Department, 1915), 1, Braun Research Library at the Autry National Center. Indeed, the nearby Colorado River was even deemed "the American Nile." Francaviglia, *Go East*, 198.

[65] Erwin Gustav Gudde, *California Place Names: The Origin and Etymology of Current Geographical Names* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1969), 222.

[66] George Wharton James, *The Wonders of the Colorado Desert: Volume II* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1907), 503.

like crops."[67] The richness and wealth evoked in *Arabian Nights* helped boosters portray what could be seen as a barren wasteland instead as a luxurious, fertile region akin to the settings in the book.

The very presence of a growing date industry made the Coachella Valley appear even more Arabian, with towering date palm groves invoking similar landscapes from afar. These date groves literally re-shaped the natural desert landscape. When guidebooks from the first half of the twentieth century described the region they made sure to mention not only the natural landscape and manmade wonders, like the Salton Sea, but also the magical power of the date groves. A souvenir publication of the Southern Pacific Railroad's Sunset Railroad included luscious images of twenty-five must see sights along the trip. It included the date gardens of the Coachella Valley, "known as the garden of Eden."[68] Later rail guidebooks also made mention of these agricultural turned landscape sights and encouraged visitors to see the date palms as they traveled across an Arabian-like landscape as a form of agricultural tourism.

According to some, the date invoked the presence of the Holy Land in the United States as well. One 1925 article from *Nature Magazine* described the Coachella Valley "Before the first day has passed we catch ourselves wondering if we have not gotten clear away from the United States into some corner of the Biblical Old World. These date palms which have invaded America have brought with them no little of the romance and

[67] Emmy Matt Rush, "Imperial Valley, The Wonderful," *Overland Monthly* 77, no. 6 (December 1921): 54.

[68] *The Sunset Route and Scenic Wonders of Arizona from El Paso, Texas to Los Angeles* (Chicago: Curt Teich &Co., 1921). Braun Research Library at the Autry National Center.

mystery of the ancient lands."[69] For the author the date groves themselves transformed the landscape into a foreign travelscape. "More than once," he recalled, "I looked almost expectantly to see the turbaned head… of some Arab attendant who it seemed to me should surely be present in these Gardens of Allah, so Oriental and so un-American seemed the surroundings."[70] The entire Middle East, landscape and peoples, (in imagination at least) lay within the nation's borders there for tourists' consumption. Such depictions became a frequent occurrence among travel literature about the region.

Agricultural tourism, of course, was not new to California. Beginning in the 1880s, when tourists arrived to the Golden State, they often traveled to ever expanding orange groves below Los Angeles. Seeing the orange groves became one of the many "to dos" for the traveler wintering in the Southland. Of course much of the travel ephemera designed to encourage agricultural tourism did so in hopes of luring these tourists back as horticulturalists themselves or, at the very least, as investors. The Coachella Valley also produced booster ephemera that told potential growers how much income they could expect if they invested. The Southern Pacific Railroad, who had a vested interest in selling their land in the Coachella Valley, mentioned agricultural opportunities in their *Wayside Notes Along the Sunset Route*, a guidebook for the sites along the New Orleans to Los Angeles trip. Mecca, California, they submitted, was a "verdure clad oasis… Bermuda onions are shipped all over the United States. Date Palm flourishes. Cotton Grown…Good land in the Coachella Valley may be bought from Southern Pacific on 10-

[69] Mitchell, "Date Gardens of America."

[70] Ibid., 109-110.

year payments."[71] This was just one of many booklets, pamphlets, and articles that sought to encourage travel and investment in the Coachella Valley.

Tourists often came to California to experience its exoticness as a region. Before the turn of the century some saw their journey as a trip abroad, a small few even wondered if Los Angeles was in a foreign country. Several cities, regions, and specific locales furthered this distance by invoking additional exotic landscapes. The virtual world appeared in California during the 1915 Panama Pacific and Panama International Expositions in San Francisco and San Diego respectively. In addition to experiencing the Panama Canal in miniature, one could see an Aztec, Samoan, Chinese, Japanese, Irish, or Oriental Village, tour "Somaliland," or take in national treasures like Yellowstone and the Grand Canyon all without leaving San Francisco. In San Diego one might explore Spanish colonial revival architecture, enjoy a Japanese teahouse, or visit the Pueblo villages of the American Southwest complete with Native Americans living in situ.

More permanent cultural landscapes were also created so that one could travel the world without leaving the state. California set to replicate Venice, long connected in the imagination with its Mediterranean location. Incorporated in 1905, the city featured canals that mirrored those in the Italian city as well as miniature gondolas that tourists could ride.[72] By the 1930s tourists could travel to "old Mexico" at Olvera Street or see it

[71] Southern Pacific Railroad, *Wayside Notes Along the Sunset Route*, Braun Research Library at the Autry National Center.

[72] Nathan Masters, "The Los Canals of Venice of America" *LA as a Subject* for KCET.org, April 5, 2013, http://www.kcet.org/updaily/socal_focus/history/la-as-subject/the-lost-canals-of-venice-of-america.html.

performed live, in colorful costumes, at the Padua Hills Theater near Los Angeles.[73] China City, built with Hollywood sets, remade Chinatown in Los Angeles into a more marked tourist destination. This extended the long-standing American pastime of "slumming," which involved visiting ethnic portions of urban areas to gawk at "others" and experience the dangers of their mere presence.[74] These seemingly foreign locations were also populated, in this case with people of Mexican or Chinese descent in costumes reminiscent of their native lands, though the opportunity to dress up in these costumes was a draw for tourists as well.[75] Other areas developed later. While Solvang, California began as a colony of Danish immigrants the use of "Danish" architecture largely developed with the hopes of drawing in tourism in the early 1940s.[76] All of these locations offered an alternate to foreign travel, an appealing prospect given the cost, time, and dangers inherent in overseas excursions prior to World War II.[77] They implied a time travel aspect as well. Villages at the world's fairs or even near downtown Los Angeles highlighted cultures often viewed as ancient in their origins. With such wide examples of

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[73] See Kropp, "The Market: Olvera Street and Urban Space," *California Vieja*, 207-260 and Matthew Garcia, "Just Put on that Padua Hills Smile: The Mexican Players and the Padua Hills Theatre, 1931-1974," *A World of its Own: Race, Labor and Citrus in the Making of Greater Los Angeles, 1900-1970* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 121-156.

[74] See Chad Heap, *Slumming: Sexual and Racial Encounters in American Night Life, 1885*-1940 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

[75] Kropp, *California Vieja*. 231-251.

[76]Elverhoj Museum of History and Art, "The History Extraordinary History of Solvang, California" Elverhoj Museum of History and Art Museum Website, accessed May 4, 2014, http://www.elverhoj.org/history.html.

[77] For more on travel at home instead of abroad see: Marquerite S. Shaffer, *See America First: Tourism and National Identity, 1880-1940* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001).

foreign landscapes recreated in the Golden State, it is little wonder the Coachella Valley saw benefits in expanding the idea of the American Arabia.

An Arabian Fantasy theme developed in the Coachella Valley would not only encourage tourism and relocation but, like the Spanish Fantasy Past, also provide the area with a revised history and identity that could justify recent Anglo presence in the Valley and the massive impacts they had on the landscape. In her work, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media and U.S. Interests in the Middle East since 1945,* Melani McAlister suggests that Protestant Christians, saw themselves "not only as the literal inheritors of God's favor but also better versed in the Bible, and thus more intimately connected to its ancient geographies."[78] For those who could not afford to travel to the Holy Land and lay claim to it, these connections were strengthened through travelogues distributed by churches, panoramas of the area, stereoscope images, and even small models of various Holy Land sites at places like world's fairs.[79]

Claiming a past in the ancient Middle East, particularly through the early linkage to the Holy Land, allowed more recent Anglo migrants to the Coachella Valley to justify their own dominance over Mexican, Mexican American, and Cahuilla Indian residents. In identifying the Coachella Valley with the Bible and Christianity, as direct depictions of the desert or virtual travels-capes to biblical lands, Anglo-Protestants put their origins even further back in time than other Southern Californians, as far back as Moses and

[78] Melani McAlister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and U.S. Interests in the Middle East Since 1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 13.

[79] Ibid., 13-18. See also Long, *Imagining the Holy Land,* Vogel, *To See a Promised Land,* and John Davis, *The Landscape of Belief: Encountering the Holy Land in Nineteenth-Century American Art and Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

other biblical figures.[80] An Arabian fantasy could provide a tourist draw for the already large numbers of visitors in nearby Los Angeles, encourage re-location (as date growers, preferably, who were "Sultans" of their own date gardens), and provide these newcomers with a reconstructed historical tie to the land and a sense of belonging.

Given the lack of ruins and Middle Eastern "others," how did the Coachella Valley render their region as a virtual Arabia in California? Boosters employed similar strategies as those who invested in the Spanish Fantasy Past. The changing landscapes contributed to an evolving cultural geography that included the naming of places (towns, streets, developments) after counterparts in the Greater Middle East. Community celebrations, particularly the annual date festival, also embraced the Arabian fantasies. These performances included pageantry, parades, and, especially, cultural cross dressing. Costuming, then, and "playing Arab" also transported the Middle East to the United States. Together these endeavors, championed by date growers turned boosters, created the American Arabia in the Southwestern desert.

Altering the Landscape: New Geographies in the Desert

Coachella Valley's natural oases, vast expanses of open land, and strange rock formations, as well as the climate, allowed for an easy association with the Greater Middle East. But connections were made beyond the natural landscape, into the manmade. The geography of the Coachella Valley developed within the framework of American Orientalism. The process of regional naming, the language used to describe the

[80] Culver, *The Frontier of Leisure*, 148.

region, and eventually even the altering of the landscape via architectural influence all affected this new geographic understanding of the space. Ultimately these landscape modifications allowed Coachella Valley boosters to create a stage for an Arabian fantasy.

Landscapes, historian Richard Francaviglia argues, are a cultural construct. While "seemingly permanent," in actuality they remain "highly malleable" and "physically manipulable."[81] The naming of things, for example can define a region's geography and alter the landscape. Francaviglia, suggests that naming a city after its biblical or Middle Eastern counterpart, for example, permits the public to "subliminally imprint it with associations and memories, some very distant or ancient."[82] He continues: "people experiencing a new landscape may give the new place an older, preconceived identity… and by so doing imposes a series of traditions and expectations."[83] By this token, the places where these names are taken demonstrate their popularity and influence in the renaming of a space. The paring of similar landscapes and "human imagination," permits other worlds and other times to be replicated in newly constructed geographies.[84]

Given the saturation of the Greater Middle East in popular culture in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, numerous cities across America felt this Orientalization.[85] Sometimes these were links to the Protestant touchstones, via biblical naming like Bethlehem or Lebanon. Other times these renaming were based in

[81] Francaviglia, *Go East*, 13.

[82] Ibid.

[83] Ibid.

[84] Ibid., 14.

[85] For more see William Tracy, "Mapping the Middle East in America: From Lebanan, New Hampshire to Bagdad, California," *Saudi Aramco World* (November/ December 1994):16-31.

geographic attributes like Cairo, Illinois unsurprisingly located on the massive Mississippi, often described as America's Nile.[86] Biblical naming also included California cities whose religiously inspired designations embraced Antioch (named in 1851), Cannaan (established prior to 1870), variations of Eden (Eden Landing 1854; Edendale prior to 1917; Mount Eden 1850), Goshen (1850s), Hebron (prior to 1916), Jericho (prior to 1873), and Mount Zion (pre 1873). These were not simply Orientalist imaginings, but rather reflect larger religious desires and understandings of early California immigrants and those of the larger nation. Given the landscape many crossed to get to California, such biblical references are unsurprising. But other Middle Eastern inspired names also populate the Golden State. California has claimed two Bagdads, though both have turned to ghost towns. One was located in Gold Country, perhaps a reference to the popular renditions of Baghdad as a place of wealth in *Arabian Nights*. The other, not far from Barstow, reflects a different inspiration; the similar dry desert climates.[87]

Given the desert landscape and the Protestant upbringing of many migrants to the Coachella Valley, biblical and Middle Eastern naming came naturally. Early on a railroad siding, located about twelve miles from Indio, near today's Thousand Palms, was named

[86] Francaviglia, *Go East*, 49.

[87] Charles Hillinger, "Bagdad Fades into the Desert- in California," *Los Angeles Times*, January 31, 1991. Note that both omit the "h" though with translation at the time there were likely many variant spellings throughout the nineteenth century.

Edom.[88] Recorded in 1876, this christening referenced the Kingdom of Edom condemned in the Bible to become a wasteland.[89] In 1939, so the legend goes, "old-timers prevailed on the postmaster to change the name… which they felt connoted wicked images of Esau selling his birthright for a hot meal, to Thousand Palms as it was already unofficially known."[90] Townspeople retained the Middle Eastern connections, at the very least. The Thousand Palms name, taken from a canyon six miles away, invoked the popular *One Thousand and One Arabian Nights* via both the number and the palms.

The Middle East was also the inspiration for the renaming of another Coachella Valley town, Walters. Walters was christened after a homesteader who had a ranch in the area in the 1890s. The name was changed in 1904 to Mecca to reflect the name of the Mecca Land Company, organized in that same year. Legend contends that the wife of the company head "suggested the name (taken from the Koran) because of the similarity of this area to that of Mecca in Arabia, general topography, the heat, and little rain."[91] The fact that the name change was spearheaded by real estate developers is unsurprising, given Southern California's propensity to rename places to heighten their appeal. The geography of the newly-renamed town reflected other attempts at Orientalizing the landscape. The Mecca Land Company gave the USDA fifteen acres of land to establish a

[88] A railroad siding does not necessarily denote a stop or a depot. It implies a separated track from the main route. Various sources have deemed Edom a stop, a depot, and a siding though there was likely not a depot building.

[89] The earliest reference I found to the Edom siding was from "Crushed by a Train," *Riverside Daily Press*, 14 September 1903. The city of Thousand Palms lists Edom as a "railroad depot" in 1876. Thousand Palms: The Yesteryears," Thousand Palms Chamber of Commerce Website, accessed May 4 2014, http://thousandpalmschamber.com/thousand_palms_history.htm.

[90] "Thousand Palms: The Yesteryears."

[91] Ceclia Foulkes, *Mecca: A California Desert History*, (Cecelia Foulkes, 1985), 2.

date experiment station there.[92] Undoubtedly, profit motives were behind the gift for investment would spur permanent governmental support and investor interest.[93] Developers named the general store the Bazaar and the hotel the Caravansary, both reflecting the rich imagery of wealth, abundance, and hospitality associated with the Orient of American imagination. Apparently one local newspaper offered the slogan: "Allah roads lead to Mecca."[94]

Mecca's very existence, however, was threatened just a year after its name change with the creation of the Salton Sea, which at its peak nearly flooded the date experiment station there, covered railroad tracks, drowned businesses, and pushed farmers to relocate. Around the turn of the twentieth century the California Development Company wanted to bring irrigation water to the dry but fertile lands of the Imperial Valley. They did so by constructing a canal system off of the Colorado River. Silt built up and eventually, with the encouragement of a very wet year, the canals and levees failed and the river redirected to the lowest elevation in the region, then known as the Salton Sink. For sixteen months the entire water volume of the Colorado River ran into the area creating the largest lake in California. The sea's name derived from a key geological feature, the Salton Sink, so named because it was a virtual salt flat.[95] Richard Francaviglia suggests that "this fabricated name has more than a little subliminal

[92] "Government Station," *San Diego Evening Tribune*, August 22 1904, 3.

[93] Additionally the company required that leftover fruit not needed by the USDA as well as twenty percent of the palm offshoots grown there be given to the company, presumably for sale. The company also retained water rights. Ibid.

[94] Foulkes, *Mecca*, 3.

[95] This is the official story. See California State Parks, "Salton Sea: State Recreation Area," accessed May 4, 2014, http://www.parks.ca.gov/pages/639/files/SaltonSeaSRAWebLayout2013.pdf.

resonance as the word *sultan*," though there is little historic evidence regional boosters ever considered the similarities.[96]

But the sea received other comparisons with the Middle East. Though the Salton Sea as we know it appeared in 1905, in 1891 the Colorado River changed course to flood the Salton Sink area, dubbing it the "Salton Sea."[97] One Salton, California resident declared: "With due respect for the pools of Bethesda and Siloam of Sacred Story… we believe the Salton pool will be the greatest known in history."[98] With the permanent 1905 creation of the lake, newspapers began to directly compare the Salton Sea and the Dead Sea.[99] The Salton Sea, wrote the *Riverside Daily Press* in 1920, "has often been termed the Dead Sea of America."[100] Hollywood reinforced the notion of California as a global destination as well. One 1940 *Boston Herald* article, for example, told readers that film studios used cherry blossomed orchards in San Bernardino for Japanese sets, Catalina as a stand in for Tahiti, and the forests of the Southland as counterparts for England. In this case "the Dead sea of Palestine is the orphaned Salton Sea."[101]

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[96] Francaviglia, *Go West,* 199.

[97] "The Salton Sea," *Los Angeles Herald,* July 14, 1891 and "Another Dead Sea," *Riverside Daily Press,* November 15, 1891.

[98] Howard J. Cone, "Another Dead Sea," *Riverside Daily Press,* November 5, 1891. Bethesda and Siloam, both pools near Jerusalem mentioned in the Bible, continue the tradition of linking the California desert to the Holy Land so popular during this time period.

[99] Just as Mormons had positioned the Great Salt Lake. For more on the Great Salt Lake see Francaviglia, *Go West*. The Salton Sea/ Dead Sea comparisons centered on their low elevations (below sea level) and their extreme salinity.

[100] "Mullet Fisheries of the Salton Sea," *Riverside Daily Press,* August 2, 1920.

[101] "West offers Diversification which Will Please the Visitor," *Boston Herald,* April 21, 1940.

As the years went by, the lake's main source of water became agricultural run-off, which increased its salinity levels, leading to massive fish and bird die offs. The associated foul smells, however, also come from algae booms and bacterial overgrowth due to high fertilizer and salt contents in the agricultural runoff. These consequences led to the death of multiple real estate developments on what was once considered a desert playground for water-skiers, fishermen, and swimmers. Thus the Salton Sea then became a metaphorical Dead Sea, given the dead wildlife and dead development dreams.[102]

Launched by the Arabia Land and Water Company, the town of Durbrow was renamed Arabia in 1913. Renaming the town appeared closely tied to the romance of *Arabian Nights*. The town's establishment coincided with the importation of thousands of date trees by the Popenoe party that were to be included in the town's new landscape. Incorporating newly imported date trees also brought forth the romance and adventure publically discussed surrounding the Popenoe party's trip to bring back offshoots.[103] More notably, however, was the desire to directly incorporate a more visual link between the American desert and the mythic Arabia. The noted Mission Inn architect, Arthur B. Benton, took an active role in the town of Arabia's plans noting that "the style of the buildings and the general appearance of the town would be oriental."[104] "Every store and house in Arabia will be Arabic in each detail of construction," the *Riverside Daily Press*

[102] For more on the Salton Sea see Matt Simon, "The Salton Sea: Death and Politics in the Great American Water Wars, *Wired*, September 14, 2012, http://www.wired.com/2012/09/salton-sea-saga/all/ .

[103] W. Moffatt Curry, "New Town Arabia is Launched," *Coachella Valley News and Indio Index*, May 9, 1913. This was no accident as the F.O. Popenoe, owner of West India Gardens and patriarch of the Popenoes served on the board of directors for the Arabia Land and Water Company. The family also owned one of the two major developments in the Arabia area: the West Indian Gardens (an extension of their Altadena business) "Riverside County Future Date Center," *Riverside Daily Press*, October 28, 1913.

[104] Curry, "New Town Arabia is Launched."

declared.[105] The developer noted that rather than make money from promoting the new town his goal was to "hasten and facilitate agricultural development" and "fit in with the great date industry of which this district will be the center."[106]

The town would reflect the date's origins and give its residents a unique experience of living in an exotic, yet thoroughly American city. Although popular understandings of the Middle East implied it was an ancient locale, the new city would be "built new along modern lines," granted by American engineering, science, and technology.[107] Important to this perception of exotic yet firmly American, was the discussion of who could live in the new city. The press took note to define the racial terms of the new settlement; "Americans, many of them Angelenos, will people the town."[108] "American" stood as code for white, given that citizenship was de-factly denied, if not legally denied, to non-whites during this time period. "Angeleno" signified only those Anglo residents of Los Angeles that had the money to winter in the Coachella Valley or invest in its date groves. Though the name and style invoked the Greater Middle East, developers wanted to make clear the town was developed not for Middle Eastern peoples, blacks, Mexicans, Asians, or Native Americans.

In a sense, an investor in Arabia could imagine himself as his own Sultan, the sovereign ruler of his "Arabian" domain; he could live in an Arabic inspired community

[105] "Dates Come Stained in Blood," *Riverside Daily Press*, May 22, 1913.

[106] Curry, "New Town Arabia is Launched."

[107] Ibid. To reinforce this idea Arthur Benton the architect noted his role in creating Chandler, Arizona, with modern touches like a "park for automobiles."

[108] "Dates Come Stained in Blood."

and own his own date garden with the labor of others, in this case Native Americans, Mexicans, and poorer whites performing the work. Women too could participate in this imagining. The Arabia Land and Water Company's attorney, Harry Elliot, "with prophetic eye and eloquent tongue… told of queens in Arabia more beautiful than the celebrated Queen of Sheba."[109] The town's Middle Eastern romance, of course, would be transferred to its residence along gender lines; men involved as investors in date groves and women as the silent beauties of the Orient.

Despite the grand plans, Arabia never materialized. People did live in the area and the town name was kept but by 1920 the region's only cotton gin was relocated to the town of Thermal, and "that was the beginning of the end of Arabia."[110] Adding to Arabia's problems were the roads, which completely bypassed the city. The company may have built in the 1910s, but it was torn down in 1935 along with the town's store.[111] Only date trees near the railroad siding remain. As the the only "ghost" town in the Coachella Valley it bore a historical marker to that effect for some time, linking the Middle East to the American desert if only to the passing automobile.

Regional boosters were aware of the negative connotations of the desert. In 1910 one Coachella Valley resident lamented that the word desert implied an isolated wilderness and dry heat. And yet, he argued, the word "Oasis" brought visions of "a clump of tall palms in the midst of an endless sea of sand, in the shade of which about a

[109] Curry, "New Town Arabia is Launched."

[110]Ole J. Nordland, *Coachella Valley's Golden Years* (Coachella; Coachella Valley Country Water District, 1968), 29.

[111] Ibid.

pool of water, is resting a caravan, while- 'a fertile place in a sandy or barren desert' fits through the mind."[112] The lush imagery of the Arabian oasis brought an additional sense of opportunity. Like those faraway oases, American oases could produce agricultural bounties in their cool, watered, retreats. Thus Oasis became a popular name for places in the Coachella Valley including the city of Oasis, hotels, and date gardens.[113]

The vision of the oasis was also invoked with the proposed Walled Oasis of Biskra, a million dollar real estate and entertainment development set in a natural oasis in the hills near Indio, California in the late 1920s. The development promised a fifty-room hotel, one-hundred bungalows, a rooftop garden, tennis courts, a swimming pool, and Northern African-inspired shopping.[114] Thus the isolated development featured outdoor activities, shopping, and resort amenities, all popular with wealthy tourists of the time. The Walled Oasis of Biskra stands out as one of the most intriguing attempts to turn the Southern California desert into the Sahara of America. Proposed by real estate developers out of Los Angeles, the project was never completed, but its ephemeral trail speaks volumes of the power of American Orientalism in the shaping of the tourist-centered Coachella Valley.

The Coachella Valley developed as a resort region during the 1920s and 1930s, though most of the historical attention has been placed on Palm Springs. Palm Springs' boosters envisioned the city specifically as a tourist paradise, while residents in the

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[112] "Homes on the Desert in Riverside County," *Riverside Daily Press*, April 28, 1910.

[113] The city of Oasis was established sometime before 1914. The Palm Springs Oasis Hotel opened in 1925 while Oasis Date Gardens was renamed that much later.

[114] Pauline Allbright, "Biskra-The Oasis of Coachella Valley," *Indio News*, July 26, 1928 and "Biskra Hotel Projected Near Indio," *Los Angeles Times*, April 15, 1928.

Eastern Coachella Valley imagined their region both as an agricultural community and increasingly as a tourist destination. The area offered seasonal outdoor recreation, leisure, and relaxation particularly at the large resorts, which had separated themselves from earlier sanatoriums.[115] By the time Biskra was proposed in 1928 the Desert Inn, the Oasis Hotel, and the newly constructed El Mirador all catered to seasonal tourists in Palm Springs proper. Both the Desert Inn and the El Mirador invoked the Spanish style romance classic to Southern California, while the Oasis embraced the modern architectural style that, as historian Lawrence Culver argues, incorporated nature, thus the desert, into the design.[116] The La Quinta Inn, in the Eastern Coachella Valley, also embraced a Spanish theme from its naming, its architecture, and even its Mexican mascot with an oversized sombrero. Except for the Desert Inn, which was established in the 1909, all these resorts developed within five years of the Biskra proposal. The success of these establishments demonstrated the power of themed architecture at drawing in tourists, but also the draw of the desert

Biskra differed from these successful themes in its style. The architect was adamant that the design would "bear no resemblance to Mexican adobe construction."[117] Instead the design would reflect "Arabian" architecture and Roman influence, unsurprising given the Algerian Biskra's history as a Roman outpost. The connection to the Greater Middle East was ever on the mind of the architect who said "Thousands of

[115] Culver, *The Frontier of Leisure*.

[116] Ibid., 156-157. Culver describes El Mirador as "Spanish and Moorish revival at its most opulent," 157.

[117] "Employ American Architect to Build Spanish Grandee's Castle Near Madrid, Word," *San Diego Evening Tribune*, March 17, 1928.

American visit the Holy Land each year to see the desert, but we have the same thing in southern [sp] California."[118] By this point Americans had long been encouraged to "See America First" instead of travel abroad, so the proposal to travel to the Coachella Valley as a surrogate for international travel to the Holy Land made pop cultural sense, despite the vast differences between the two locations.[119]

The Biskra developers, argued that the landscape, natural palm oasis setting, and desert climate produced "strikingly similar conditions found in and around the most famous resort of Biskra in the Algerian Sahara, making her in the Coachella Valley a veritable New World Biskra."[120] Their architectural additions exaggerated these natural connections. (See map in Figure 3.1).

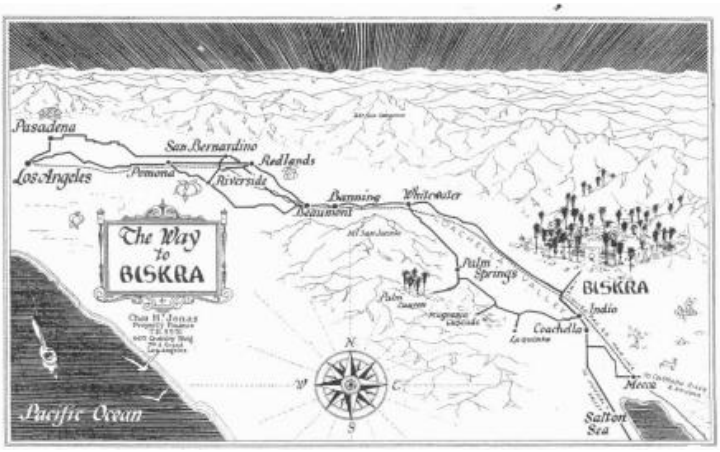

Figure 3.1: Map to Biskra. Charles H. Jonas, *The Walled Oasis of Biskra: An Interpretation of the American Desert in the Algerian Manner* (Hoag and Ford Advertising, circa 1928). From the holdings of Special Collections & University Archives, UCR Library, University of California, Riverside, Riverside City and County Collection.

[118] Ibid.

[119] For more on the movement see. Shaffer, *See America First.*

[120] Charles H. Jonas, *The Walled Oasis of Biskra: An Interpretation of the American Desert in the Algerian Manner* (Hoag and Ford Advertising, circa 1928).

For both Biskras, the draws extended beyond the climate. Indeed part of the lure was in the consumption of both the foreign landscape and the goods deemed North African. Popular culture had long ago incorporated the bazaar into its Orientalist fantasies; the imagery of colorful markets and shops full of exotic smells and sounds, had long lured attention from the West. Developers of the American Biskra placed shopping as one of the key amenities at their resort. Careful to describe the shops to the readers, the main investor pamphlet depicted "a narrow street of shops called 'souks' or 'fonduks' their alluring Oriental and North African wares displayed by swarthy, turbaned merchants seated beneath colorful canopies."[121] This was consumption, then, of an Orientalized other and his goods. Because the items were to be purchased directly from costumed merchants, buyers might assume that they were purchasing the product direct from those who crafted it, as one might purchase Native American goods directly from Native Americans on tours of the greater Southwest. The interaction with the artisan other was part of the allure of such exotic shopping.

Developers imagined the shops would "specialize in hand-wrought metal work, done in Algerian style rare and costly fabrics suggestive of Bedouin sheiks, pottery of native designs and delicacies famous in North Africa."[122] Notably these items were tied to an economy viewed as ancient, created by people who, in the eyes of the consumer, had been making these items in the same manner for centuries. Americans could readily consume foreign peoples and places through the purchase and display of these exotic

[121] Jonas, *The Walled Oasis of Biskra*.

[122] "Bring Algeria to Coachella," *Los Angeles Times*, April 1, 1928.

objects. [123] Thus, by contrast, American or European goods were more technologically advanced, expensive, or in vogue and thus implied a superiority endowed even via consumer goods. The presence of only hand-crafted items (in appearance at least) continued to imply that visitors were transported not only in space but also in time.

One newspaper writer confided that Biskra was "not so much for the tired desert traveler," who would have reached the Algerian Biskra after a trek through the desert, but instead for "the city people who are tired of the increasing noise of the city."[124] Just as the ancient Biskra was an oasis from harsh desert travel, the new Biskra was an oasis from the harsh modern, urban living that plagued the modern American. Part of rendering the space ancient and exotic hinged on removing the very thing that allowed tourism to boom in the Coachella Valley: the automobile. Much of the press coverage of the Biskra proposal mentioned that within the walls of the resort, no automobiles would be permitted. Visitors could make use of an "Algerian tram" though it was never truly described, or built for that matter. Indeed part of the urban, modern world that resort visitors were poised to escape was the noise, work, and danger of the automobile. Ironically the automobile had made travel in the Southern California desert more accessible. While the railroad still brought visitors to the desert, the stops were seldom close to the newer resorts like the La Quinta Resort or the proposed Biskra development. Eventually new roads were opened, notably one from Banning to Palm Springs and

[123] See Kristin L. Hoganson, Consumers' Imperium: The Global Production of American Domesticity, 1865-1920, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

[124] Pauline Albright, "Biskra- The Oasis of the Coachella Valley," *Indio News*, July 26, 1928.

beyond, completed in 1924.[125] The county allocated funds to create a road directly to Biskra, but in the meantime a simpler road was quickly built.[126] Ultimately the growth of the Coachella Valley lay in its proximity to Los Angeles, a region that already received winter tourists by the thousands. The relatively easy travel to the desert, first via railroad and later via highways, helped encourage tourists to take in all the Coachella Valley had to offer. As air travel developed it too would come to the Coachella Valley; even Biskra had plans for a "flying field."[127]

While automobile travel provided one mode of reaching the Oasis, the resort's boosters championed a far more unique form of transportation: the camel. Developers purchased a small herd of camels and used them to transport potential investors from the Indio train station to the Walled Oasis of Biskra site. Some of these tours were pre-arranged yet others, one *Los Angeles Times* article suggests, were engaged by people who could not resist the camels and their drivers they saw waiting by the train station.[128] Importantly these "ships of the desert," were to be guided by "desert sheiks," who donned stereotypical Arab costumes of long, striped fabric and traditional head dressings.[129] (Figure 3.2) A sheik, by American understandings, signified a leader and a person in elevated status. Thus having sheiks serve you would elevate your status by association. Moreover, however, the name immediately evoked the widely popular *The Sheik* (1921)

[125] Culver, *Frontier of Leisure,* 155.

[126] Albright, "Biskra- The Oasis."

[127] Ibid.

[128] "Biskra Road Leads through Orange Groves to Desert Oasis," *Riverside Daily Press*, May 19, 1928.

[129] "Camel Caravan Put into Service between Indio and Biskra Oasis," *Los Angeles Times*, May 9, 1928.

and its sequel *The Son of Sheik* (1926).[130] Naming tapped into the wide popularity of the films, particularly among young women who viewed the films' star, Rudolph Valentino, as a sex symbol.[131] Women, in fact, were most often depicted as the camel riders, implying a trip to the Biskra setting was a highlight among those looking to reenact a desert romance, a genre of films and novels popularized by *The Sheik.* [132]

While images of women appear at the forefront of the Biskra camel shots, one notices quickly that chaperones are present in the forms of older men. (Figure 3.2) One recount of a camel caravan concluded that "with some hesitation three young ladies and a white-haired gentleman, obviously their father or uncle, decided to 'take a chance,' and mount 'the ships of the desert.'"[133] The hesitancy, of course, may have been due to the fact that they essentially agreed to exchange a camel ride for what could be called a real estate pitch, akin to today's time share lectures. However, given the vulnerability one encounters in a desert, the fear could lay in the unknown. But then too, perhaps this danger was part of the appeal. Mounting such large beasts was no doubt frightful and

[130] One or both of these titles were filmed in the nearby desert, as were many other movies set in the Holy Land, Middle East, or Northern Africa. The use of the Coachella Valley as a setting for such films is just one more example of the creation of an Arabian Fantasy. Local newspapers covered these filming and widely discussed the connections that made them the Arabia of America.

[131] See Miriam Hansen, "Pleasure, Ambivalence, Identification: Valentino and Female Spectatorship," *Cinema Journal* 25, no.4 (Summer 1986): 6-32. For more on rape and the rescue fantasy see Ella Shohat, "Gender and Culture of Empire: Towards a Feminist Ethnography of the Cinema," *Visions of the East: Orientalism in Film*, Matthew Bernstein and Gaylyn Studlar, eds. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997).

[132] Startlingly, however, both films imply a kidnapping and rape of white women by these sheiks, before the women inevitably fall in love with their captors. Film Scholar Ella Shohat suggests that "the sexual politics of colonialist discourse," implied that any "sexual interaction of black/Arab men and white women can only involve rape." These imaginations played into fantasies of American men completely controlling the new Western woman, who when placed in the desert lay outside American morals. Shohat, "Gender and Culture of Empire," 42.

[133] "Biskra Road Leads through Orange Groves."

perhaps a bit dangerous and venturing into the hot wilderness with strangers even more so.

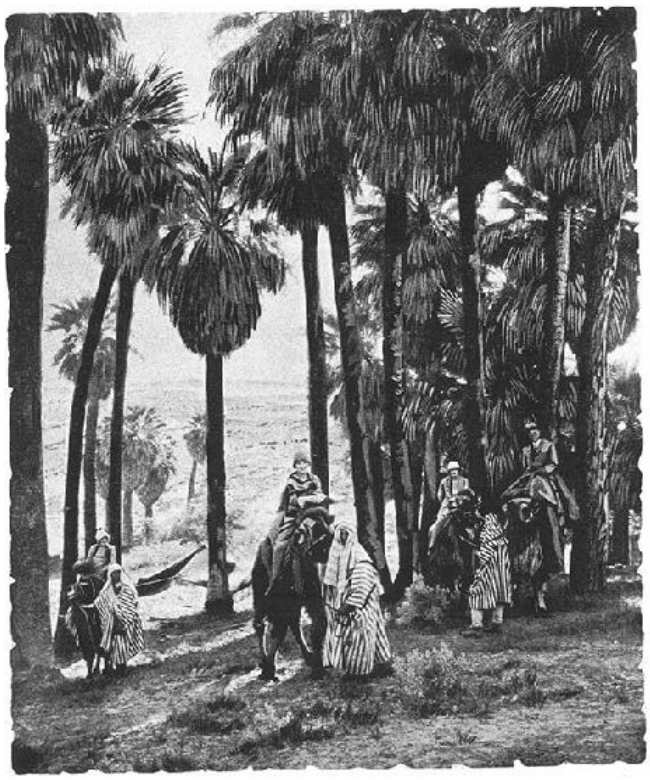

Figure 3.2: Guests at California's Biskra who arrived on Camelback. Charles H. Jonas, *The Walled Oasis of Biskra: An Interpretation of the American Desert in the Algerian Manner* (Hoag and Ford Advertising, circa 1928). From the holdings of Special Collections & University Archives, UCR Library, University of California, Riverside, Riverside City and County Collection.

The developers of the Walled Oasis of Biskra succeeded in marketing their resort but failed to actually produce it. For a brief period of time the desert, at least the Indio railroad station and the Biskra site, were populated by two stereotypes of the East: the camel and the sheik. The developers also erected tents in the oasis. These tents not only housed materials, and possibly people, for the company, but they also invoked the tents of the nomadic people who lived near Biskra and helped give the oasis an Arabian feel

before any buildings were erected. Though construction on the hotel was slated to start in October, it never began, perhaps because of a fire in early September 1928 that damaged the palm oasis and tents erected by the developers.[134] Even if the fire set the project back, the Great Depression likely served as the death knoll for the project. Biskra lived on as the name for the oasis which was often listed among the things to see in the Coachella Valley. Later cities like Indio and Rancho Mirage named streets Biskra as well, but the project has largely faded from memory.

Places like Arabia and Biskra proposed architecture as a means of altering the landscape to give the region an Arabian romance. While these projects failed to create permanent structures, other projects did incorporate both architecture inspired by the Orient and names that invoked the history and popular culture of the Middle East. Architecturally significant properties included Dar Marroc, the Palm Springs home of Scottish painter Gordon Coutts built in 1924, which became a well known salon, for artists and celebrities in the 1920s and 1930s. The Moorish design with arches, domes, and fountains, suggested that "a little bit of Tangier dropped onto the Palm Springs landscape."[135] The former home of Imperial Irrigation, 1684 Ninth Street in Coachella, California also features a Moorish design. (Figure 3.3) A large dome stands at the front façade with two walls sweeping on either side appearing like reinforced wall. The whitewashed color pairs with colorful inlaid tile to invoke a sense of the Middle East that has stood as a landmark in Coachella for decades.

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[134] "Fire at Biskra," *Indio News*, Sept 6, 1928.

[135] Greg Niemann, *Palm Springs Legends: Creation of a Desert Oasis* (San Diego: Sunbelt Publication, Inc, 2006),113-115. Coutts had previously lived and painted in Tangier Morocco; poor health may have influenced his decision to live first in North Africa and then Palm Springs.

Figure 3.3: Former Imperial Irrigation Building in Coachella, California. Courtesy Coachella Valley History Museum.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, some of the architectural additions to the Arabian fantasy were movie theaters. With a prevalence of films about Egypt and the Egyptomania craze that swept the nation in 1922, several movie theaters and larger movie palaces took Egyptian themes in the 1920s.[136] Over a hundred theaters, in fact, maintained an Egyptian decorative or architectural style by the 1930s; Grauman's Egyptian Theater in Hollywood serves as still standing example.[137] Indio, too, gained an Egyptian Theater prior to 1928, though a lack of surviving ephemera makes determining any Egyptian architectural or design influences difficult.[138]

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[136] Bob Brier, "Egyptomania," *Archeology* 57, no. 1 (January/ February 2004): 16-22. See McAlister, *Epic Encounters*, 28 and Antonia Lant "The Curse of the Pharaoh, or How Cinema Contracted Egyptomania" in *Visions of the East: Orientalism in Film*, Edited by Matthew Bernstein and Gayln Studlar (NewBrunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 69-98.

[137]Egyptian Theatre, "History," Egyptian Theater Website, accessed May 4, 2014, http://egyptiantheatre.org/history/ For a depiction of this theater and how its architecture and styling embraced Orientalism see Bridget Elliott, "Art Deco Worlds in a Tomb: Reanimating Egypt in Modern(ist) Visual Culture," *South Central Reviews* 25, no. 1(Spring 2008): 128-129.

[138] The Egyptian theater was run by L.A. ("Judge" LeRoy) Pawley a well known Indio luminary who would expand his business by opening new theaters in Indio following the Egyptian. Pawley also served as the first mayor of Indio.

While Egyptian theaters were a common sight in 1920s and 1930s those designed or named for the Greater Middle East were common even earlier. Moorish inspired theaters, sometimes named Alhambra, arose in Europe but the United States had similarly styled and named theaters in 1914. Throughout the 1920s additional Arabian styled theaters blossomed throughout the United States, including Denver's Aladdin Theater opened in 1926. In June 1948 an Aladdin Theater opened up in Indio, California, a bit late for the Oriental theater craze, but reflecting the increasing importance of Arabian themes to the desert. The building featured a façade with neon lighting and Orientalist-styled writing. The neon lights also outlined a Middle Eastern style building with three domes and similarly styled arched doorways. (Figure 3.4)

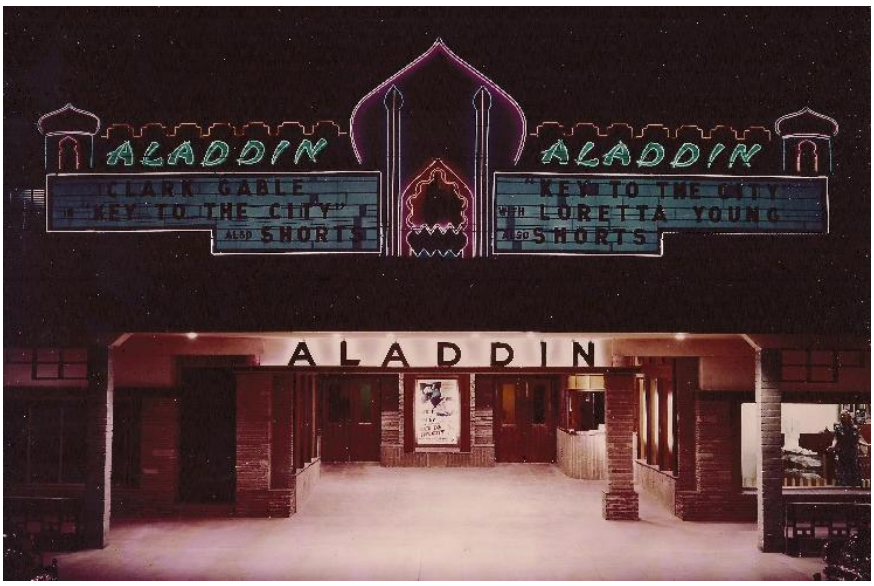

Figure 3.4: Aladdin Theater, circa 1950. Courtesy Coachella Valley History Museum.

Notably the theater's interior featured a stunning, colorful mural with Orientalist themes. In fact, the mural depicted scenes from *Arabian Nights* and included a rendering of Queen Scheherazade, notable not only as the story teller of the *Arabian Nights* but also

as the official title for the queen of the Indio Date Festival. Such a linking to a Middle Eastern storyteller seemed like a natural fit in a place where people came to watch storytelling unfold. To provide additional Arabian ambiance, arched entries were prominently featured, and large columns invoked a sense of grandeur. The columns and other rich details helped to invoke a sense of luxury that many movie theaters sought to replicate.

Often architectural changes to the landscape of the Coachella Valley paired Middle Eastern fantasies directly with the date industry. Date shops stood along the "Date Garden Drive," or Highway 111, which served the increasingly automobile driven tourist. Many tourists who came to lounge in Palm Springs made a drive towards Palm Desert and Indio and their date gardens a part of their itinerary. Date shops, in particular, embraced Arabian inspired architecture to set themselves apart from competitors. By the 1930s, for example, Indio housed The Garden of Eden's Pyramid Date Stand, a roadside attraction where you could purchase fruit out of a miniature pyramid.[139] (Figure 3.5) Palm Spring's Black Tent Date shop was little more than what its name implied: a black tent. However given America's understanding of North Africa and its people, the tent invoked a sense of adventure on the Sahara lived by the Bedouins and tribes of the region depicted in films like *The Sheik*. The shop also invoked the East with a large, wooden cutout of a camel, which again populated the landscape with some of America's most beloved symbols of the Middle East.

[139] Like orange shaped stands popular across the Southland.

Figure 3.5: Garden of Eden Date Shop. Courtesy Coachella Valley History Museum.

Indio's Sun Gold Date Gardens, a date shop and motel, also incorporated nods to the Greater Middle East. Their architecture prominently featured three arched designs on the front façade topped with Arabic tile work. (Figure 3.6) Eventually the owners added a sort of colonnade to the front of the structure, which included additional Moorish inspired archways and more tile-work, which they oddly paired with red tile roofs. Sun Gold became a blending of the popular styles of date shops: influenced by both the Spanish inspired architecture of Southern California and the more regionally specific nod to the date's homeland in the Coachella Valley.

Figure 3.6: Sun Gold Date Gardens. Courtesy Coachella Valley History Museum.

The most notable example of Arabian inspired architecture among the date shops of the Coachella Valley was Sniff's Date Gardens. Their whitewashed building featured a large, golden dome above the entrance as well as tile work and painting embellishments reminiscent of North Africa. (Figure 3.7) Sniff's also drew tourists in with an "Arabian Tent," set up in the garden. The tent included signage about the structure, which was described as having been created by the whole family but used exclusively by the favorite wife. This reference, of course, built upon the popular perceptions of the harem; Americans were endlessly fascinated by the polygamy and sexuality of the Orient. Because the tent featured elaborate designs and Arabic writing, the signage also included translations of the Arabic inscriptions. Thus visitors to Sniffs could literally be transported to the Middle East through the tent; the date shop transplanted the architecture of the Orient not only through the reproduction of the North African styled shop but also through the physical relocation of the tent from the Greater Middle East. Its

presence at Sniff's encouraged a virtual tourism to the homeland of the date, while at the same time the extensive date garden it stood in recalled the perception that Americans could grow the dates better than even the Orient could.

Figure 3.7: Sniff's Date Gardens. Courtesy of Dorothy B Donaldson/Rick Donaldson.

Still other date shops evoked the Orient in their naming or other gimmicks, instead of via architecture. Finding inspiration in the Middle East for place names conveyed not only a sense of history to these date shops and their business but also a sense of authenticity that stemmed directly from the birthplace of the date. Examples in the Coachella Valley include those gardens mentioned above- the Garden of Eden Date Shop, the Black Tent, and even Sniff's Unusual Date Garden as it was commonly referred. Additional shops embraced this heritage as The Garden of the Setting Sun (and its Shalimar Date Shops), the Garden of the Sultan Date Shop, Oasis Date Gardens, and the un-related May's Oasis.

Valerie Jean's Date Shop, whose owner Russ Nicholl invented the date shake, was built in a classic Southern California Spanish-inspired style, featuring not only a red tile roof but also salvaged railroad ties and telegraph poles. Nicholl included both Spanish and Native American imagery in his shop and his business, but on one well known account he turned to the Orient. His shop's garden featured "King Solomon," a date palm tree imported from Arabia in 1912. The palm gained its name because it produced enough pollen every year to pollinate 400 date palms as opposed to the average fifty pollinated by most male palms. King Solomon, of course, was a famed biblical character with over 700 wives plus concubines; no doubt the name was a reference to this. But it is once again an example of the residents of the Coachella Valley turning to the Orient to help understand and contextualize their new crop. The name was included in much of Valerie Jean's advertising and brought many curious tourists given its subtly erotic nature.[140]

Renaming was a powerful tool in invoking the Greater Middle East in the Coachella Valley. It transformed the landscape by imposing historic meanings and understandings onto new places. The cities in the Eastern Coachella Valley named streets after places and things from the Orient. Indio's streets included Deglet Noor, Oasis, Arabia, and Date Streets. Coachella named streets after Tripoli, Damascus, Medina, Baghdad, Cairo, Douma, and Mecca. Sometimes complexes utilized names influenced by

[140] Russ Nicholls was not the only shop owner to turn to sex to sell his dates. Floyd Shields made an even larger connection to the double entendre of the "date." His Shield's Date Shop featured the "Romance and Sex Life of the Date." At first this was a presentation he gave to tourists at set times, telling them about the complicated pollination process of the date palms. Eventually he recorded his voice to be used with a slide show which was later turned into a film. The show was widely advertised on billboards in the Coachella Valley and the Shields' mail order ephemera. It continues to air several times a day at Shields Date Shop, one of the few remaining date shops in the Coachella Valley.

the popular culture of the Middle East. Arabian Garden's Trailer Park, in Indio, for example boasts a retaining wall styled to be North African along with writing in Orientalized font. A clubhouse features outlines of Arabian style domes near its roof as well. The complex street names range from Abdul to Bedouin to Caravan Drive. For a time Indio was also home to the Ref Fez Trailer Park and the El Morocco Inn. More recently Desert Crossings, a Palm Desert shopping complex, featured domes, Arabian inspired tile work, murals of Middle Eastern architecture, and, notably, life-sized statues of camels at an oasis. Many of these examples included date palms in their landscaping to continue the desired effects. This is to say nothing of the numerous date-named businesses that invoked the Middle East by the very nature of the fruit. From the Dateland Super Service Station to the Royal Dateland Hotel these places continued to set apart a regional identity based on the Eastern Coachella Valley's unique fruit.

Conclusion

The landscape then- both the natural desert and the manmade agricultural and architectural alterations to it- imposed the geography of the Middle East onto the Coachella Valley. From the renaming of towns to proposed developments, area boosters and businesses created an Arabian fantasy unmatched in the United States. [141] Indeed, *The*

[141] Opa-Locka, Florida may come close. In the mid 1920s they town developed with Moorish and Arabian influenced architecture, street names, and community celebrations. The development was specifically influenced by Arabian Nights and the related film: *The Thief of Baghdad*. Following World War II the town faced rapid decline and is today among the poorest cities in the Miami area. Opa-locka differs from the Coachella Valley in several important ways. It was a single, short lived, real estate development, as opposed to the many independent examples of Arabian fantasies in the Coachella Valley which spread this theme across towns and throughout the twentieth century. The town's architecture, theme, and celebrations were meant primarily for its residents, whereas the Coachella Valley examples were designed to draw in

Pasadena Star News named the region "Arabia in America" in 1953. [142] *Desert Magazine* recalled that as of 1963 the Coachella Valley was "an amazing blending of Babylonian glamour and Arabian agriculture in a Palestinian setting."[143] This language and phrasing, used in press coverage about the Coachella Valley around the nation, blended American understandings of the Greater Middle East with a growing knowledge of the American deserts. The community celebrations that followed continued to expand these descriptions of the Coachella Valley for years to come.

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tourism as well. Tourism for these Arabian inspired projects and general tourism in nearby Coachella, plus the proximity to Los Angeles, put the Coachella Valley's Arabia on the map in a much larger scale than Opa-locka ever saw. Additionally though Opa-locka featured far more Arabian inspired architecture than the California desert ever saw, it lacked the climate and landscape that drew so much comparison for the Coachella Valley. For more on the history of Opa-locka see Catherine Lynn, "Dream and Substance: Araby and the Planning of Opa-Locka*," The Journal of Decorative and Propaganda Arts* 23 (1998): 162-189, Lauren Kroiz, "Stealing Baghdad: The City of Opa-locka Florida and the *Thief of Bagdad*," *The Journal of Architecture* 11, no. 5 (2006); 585-592, and Larry Luxner, "Opa-Locka Rising," *Saudi Aramco World* (September/ October 1989); 2-7. One might also point to Las Vegas, whose desert climate and landscape also invoked the Middle East. Certainly projects like the Dunes, the Sands, and the Aladdin enticed comparisons between Nevada and the Greater Middle East. But these casinos faded as a wide variety of other themed complexes developed including those set in Venice, Rome, New Orleans, and New York. Certainly some newer developments featured nods to the Orient, not the least of which is the Luxor with its extensive Egyptian features. However this remains just one of the many theme hotels vying for customer dollars. Certainly the city as a whole no longer counts on any association between the Orient and the region.

[142] "'Arabia in America, Goal of Unique Jaunt," *Pasadena Star News*, October 7, 1953.

[143] Eugene L. Controtto, "Desert Special Issue Note: Coachella Valley," *Desert Magazine* 26, no. 3 (March 1963), 4.

Chapter Four: Community, Costume, Celebration: The National Date Festival and its Arabian Fantasies

Visitors who came to Indio during the Date Festival in the 1950s encountered not only streets named Arabia and pyramid shaped date shops. They also encountered a city populated with "Arabs"; rather, a population of Anglos or Mexican and Mexican Americans dressed up in costumes of the Orient. The Aladdin Theater, for example, had ticket takers dressed as harem girls; bank tellers wore fezes and boleros while waitresses embraced billowing pants and sleeves. Women's clubs met in costume and held fashion shows to demonstrate how the average woman could create such exotic costumes easily and cheaply. Costumed children lined the streets for the annual parade where they saw genies, sultans, sheiks, slaves, and queens- all in Hollywood style costumes meant to evoke the Greater Middle East. Those who went to the fair in costume received free admission. The camel drivers wore head-coverings as did several vendors in the fairgrounds. Even the fair's queens wore the mid-drift revealing harem girl outfit with high crowns and low necklines.

The altering of the landscape to create an Arabian fantasy in the Coachella Valley began around the 1900. However in the middle of the twentieth century the focus shifted from landscape and architecture towards community celebrations, particularly through the use of pageantry, festival, and costume. The modernist style that arose in Palm Springs spread towards the newer communities of Palm Desert and Rancho Mirage.[1] These towns often consisted of planned communities, for Anglo families and couples

[1] For more on modern architecture and its meaning see Culver, *The Frontier of Leisure*.

who wanted to experience the desert and the outdoor lifestyle provided in Palm Springs as homeowners, not as vacationers. Because air conditioning allowed these homes to be year-round livable by the late 1940s, real estate developers relied less on quirky architectural themes and instead rendered housing in the style of other American suburbs with ranch-house designs.[2] Of course agricultural remained important, particularly in the Eastern Coachella Valley in places like Indio, Coachella, Mecca, Thermal, and Oasis. But even in Indio new developments shifted away from the Arabian themed architectural plans of Biskra and Arabia to single family suburban-like developments. Of course the landscape's embrace of the Arabian fantasy was enduring as the date palms. As the twentieth century wore on regional boosters increasingly extended the Middle Eastern theme of the region through ephemeral community celebrations more frequently than physical alterations of the landscape.

The region's National Date Festival serves as the best example of these community celebrations; the event had direct influence on the region's self styling and identity as America's Arabia. Of course bolstering the region through agricultural festivals and even world's fairs was an important endeavor for date growers in the 1910s and into the 1920s. In particular the Riverside County Fair, then held in the county seat of Riverside, encouraged date growers to create elaborate agricultural displays that occasionally had an Arabian theme. Participation in the fairs allowed local growers to educate consumers on U.S. grown dates but also to speak directly with potential

[2] Air conditioning was widely embraced during post-war growth, which incidentally paired with an incredible boom in the Coachella Valley's population. For more on the air conditioner see Rebecca J. Rosen, "How the Air Conditioner Made Modern America," *The Atlantic*, July 14, 2011, accessed at http://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2011/07/keepin-it-cool-how-the-air-conditioner-made-modern-america/241892/.

investors. Eventually Coachella Valley residents hosted their own fair, the variously named National Date Festival, beginning in the 1920s and occurring sporadically through the 1930s. Ultimately the National Date Festival became the Riverside County Fair and when it returned from a war hiatus in 1947, it became an annual event thereafter. For the majority of its history then, The Riverside County Fair and National Date Festival held an Arabian theme in its architecture, pageantry, costume, and marketing.

These celebrations, of course, were made possible by uniquely American understandings of the Orient, perceptions that saw "Arabia" as romantic, exotic, sexual, luxurious, and at least a bit dangerous. As reflections of popular culture, the community celebrations in the Coachella Valley would come to reinforce these stereotypes of the Greater Middle East by rendering Middle Eastern women as deeply sexualized and positioning all Arabic peoples as backwards, ancient, and un-modern. Together the altering of the landscape and the community celebrations, and particularly the costuming that accompanied them, drew national attention to "America's Arabia" and the dates that enabled the comparison in the first place

The International Festival of Dates, or the Date Industry's Birth Announcement

Though regional celebrations of the date had occurred previously, the first major "Festival of Dates" to market itself to the outside world occurred in 1921. By this time several of the imported offshoots began to mature and produce fruit. Thus the festival was "an announcement to the world that date culture… is now on a successful

commercial basis" in California.[3] Organizers hoped that such an announcement would draw widespread public attention to their fruit and desert landscape and in turn lure investors and consumers to their product. One hopeful date grower offered, "I think the immediate result of the festival will be an increased demand for date lands…I can see it soar in price."[4]

While earlier date fiestas, fairs, and festivals in Indio catered to locals as community celebrations, this 1921 Festival of Dates courted tourists. Boosters sent information about the event all over the Southland, organizing a "caravan" of produce trucks which traveled from Indio to Los Angeles, stopping at each major town to hand out festival materials and booster for the desert.[5] The Riverside County Supervisors invested heavily in repair work on the highway between Banning and Palm Springs, specifically for festival traffic. Though the drive from Los Angeles took anywhere from four-and-a-half to six hours, the Automobile Club of Southern California claimed "hundreds of requests for information as how to best reach Indio have been received during the past week, indicating large interest in date culture for this section."[6] To accommodate the tourists, Indio arranged a "caravansary," or tent hotel.

As a debut for the blossoming date industry, boosters for the event not only wanted visitors to see the date groves but also to spread the word about their industry as far as possible. Thus organizers paid particular attention to the media during the event.

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[3] "Date Fete Will Open on Friday," *Los Angeles Times*, October 19, 1921.

[4] T.H. Rosenberger quoted in "Gates Swing Open Today," *Coachella Valley Submarine*, October 21, 1921.

[5] "Caravan from Indio," *Los Angeles Times*, April 17, 1921.

[6] "Indio Set for Date Festival," *Los Angeles Times*, October 16, 1921.

They had taken note of the widespread press coverage received by the National Orange Show and other citrus fairs in the Southland.[7] Festival of Dates boosters positioned their fair as even more distinct than the ubiquitous orange. Newspapers, at the urging of organizers, declared the event "one of the most unique agricultural exhibitions" and the "most unusual fairs ever attempted in the United States."[8] As a part of their plan to encourage media attention for the event, fair organizers hosted about ninety editors from the Southern California Editorial Association, several of whom wrote about their experiences.[9] Major papers like the *Los Angeles Times,* the *San Diego Union*, and the *Riverside Daily Press* covered the event thoroughly. Newspapers as far as the *Salt Lake Telegram* and the *San Jose Mercury News* declared that the event was "to be to the date industry in the United States what the national orange show… is to the orange industry."[10] Widespread press coverage suggests the date and its Arabian heritage were unique enough to draw attention outside of Southern California, just as previous orange shows had. Boosters were particularly hopeful that films made during the fair could help spread the word about their communities and the dates they grew. They noted "These animated pictures will be circulated and shown in every theater in the United States,

[7] For more information on the National Orange Show See "Fair History," National Orange Show Fair http://nosevents.com/fair-history accessed May 16, 2004. Boosters from the Coachella Valley discussed the Orange Show with its general manager prior to their event. "National Date Festival Scheduled for Oct. 21-23" *The Date Palm*, March 11, 1921.

[8] "Ready for Opening Big Date Show," *Los Angeles Times*, October 16, 1921and "Date Fete Will Open Friday."

[9] Some of which were re-printed in the November 4, 1921 edition of the *Coachella Valley Submarine*.

[10] "Festival of Dates Planned at Studio," *Salt Lake Telegram*, March 24, 1921 and "Indio Plans Festival of Dates Oct. 21-23," *San Jose Mercury News*, March 27, 1921.

about 20,000 in all, until they are worn out."[11] Though doubtful that many theaters showed the films, the media attention had excellent results in drawing newcomers to the region.

As the debut of the fully fledged date industry, organizers of the 1921 festival took care to involve the United States Department of Agricultural, who they saw as the industry's founding fathers. The USDA sent a large exhibit with photographs of date groves abroad and materials collected overseas.[12] Agricultural explorers, like Walter Swingle, were in attendance as were more local USDA scientists who worked in the date experiment stations. In addition to educating the public on date growing around the world, festival developers sought to host an educational program for growers (and potential growers), inviting the "best informed date growers and specialists in the world" and positioning the event as a sort of date growers institute.[13] Given the long history of displaying and highlighting science and technology at world's fairs and more regional agricultural festivals, the prominence of science at the fair was little surprise and worked to once again emphasized the power of science to utterly transform a foreign fruit into an American industry.

Organizers also emphasized the Festival of Dates as an international event. Boosters invited "all the date growing countries of the world" to participate and send

[11] "The Festival a Pleasant Memory," *The Date Palm*, October 28, 1922.

[12] "Festival of Dates Heralds Triumph of Unique Industry," *Los Angeles Times*, October 30, 1921.

[13] International Festival of Dates Pamphlet, 1921, Date Industry Collection, Coachella Valley History Museum.

exhibits of their dates. [14] Ultimately only two nations accepted. Representatives from Baja California attended to "convey the good wishes of the Mexican republic to the festival."[15] Baja's date industry was far from commercially developed, but they did claim the honor of introducing the first date trees via Catholic missions. In fact, the governor of the northern part of Baja sent correspondence throughout Baja and Sonora, the date growing regions, asking for "samples of dates, photographs of palm groves, and data on the time the trees were planted."[16] The governor received no responses prior to the festival. To Americans, this reinforced the idea that the U.S. date industry was superior and reflected continued notions that their neighbors to the South were far less capable then Valley residents. Without a physical exhibit to serve as proof of modern fruit production, Baja's connection to the fruit lay firmly in the past- with the missionaries. Regional boosters also preferred to imagine that it would take the knowledge gained at the Festival of Dates to create a true industry in Mexico, thus regional papers highlighted Mexican officials' promise to take scientific knowledge of the date back to Baja.

Importantly the other "international" official was Professor Veuillet, "in charge of agricultural work in French Soudan [sic], and an international authority on date culture." In the minds of many Americans, scientific knowledge of the date in Northern Africa and the Middle East, indeed any agricultural knowledge in the region, came from colonial officials rather than native peoples who were perceived as backwards and thoroughly unscientific. Veuillet, then, stood in for the colonial governments that, through self-

[14] Ibid.

[15] "Festival of Dates Heralds."

[16] A. Leon Grajeda, "The Cordial Words Brought from Mexico," *The Date Palm*, November 4, 1921.

styling and popular racial understandings, brought science and agricultural knowledge to the date's homeland, a precursor to the extended scientific findings obtained by the USDA. However, not a single date grower from abroad was represented in this "international event." Though the event would come to celebrate the Greater Middle East, it did not welcome the native peoples who lived there, only colonial scientists in the region.

Despite the limited foreign presence, the mere appearance of the word "international" on marketing materials and press coverage lent an air of the exotic as the 1921 Festival of Dates was laden with references to the Orient. Particularly noteworthy was the official stationary produced by organizers. The stationary image (Figure 4. 1) featured a drawing of a large caravan traveling to a tent under a bright star. It included such Middle Eastern symbols as camels and date palms. The image appeared not only on letterhead and envelopes that business owners were encouraged to use but also on the official pamphlet, which was distributed for free. In fact one newspaper advertisement told people to put the free promotional into each letter they wrote, noting "It is up to YOU to do a little BOOSTING!"[17]

[17] "Are you using 'Festival of Dates' Stationary" Advertisement, *The Date Palm*, July 8, 1921.

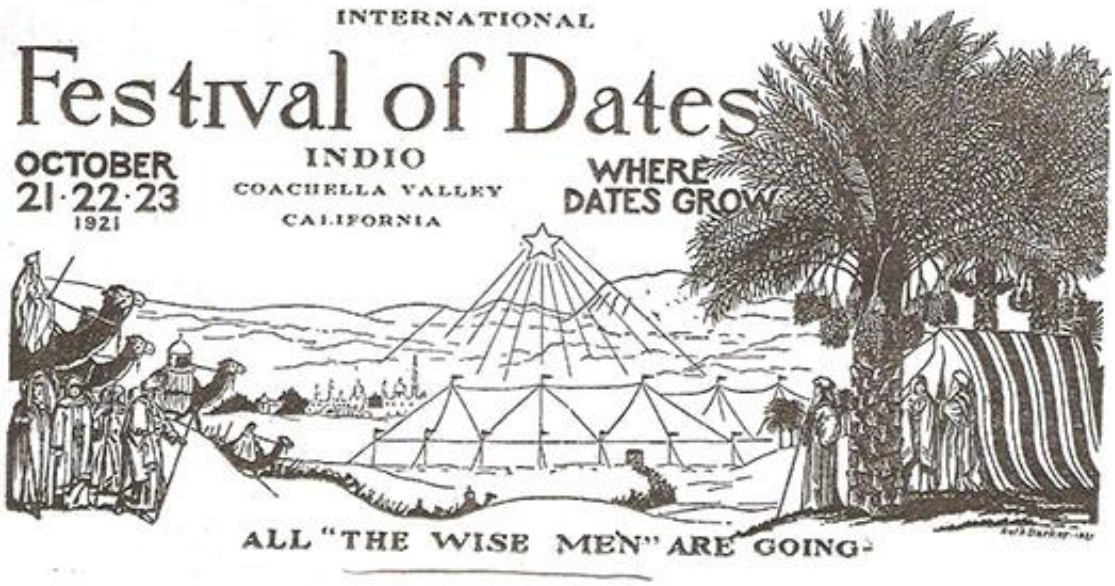

Figure 4.1: First International Festival of Dates Stationary Image. Courtesy of the Coachella Valley History Museum.

The image, in effect, announced the birth of the new date industry by linking it to the birth of Christ. This invocation was far from subtle; it placed the date industry as a savior, the messiah of Southern California, saving the deserts of region. The large star in the image's center represented the star of Bethlehem while an unending caravan of Middle Eastern styled men rode camels to Indio. The star shone over the Coachella Valley, one newspaper offered, "Because, for-sooth, a new thing is being born near unto the town of Indio…a Festival of Dates is coming to make you glad and you will rejoice exceedingly."[18] One rejoiced in the event as one would rejoice in a savior's birth. Of course the prominent wording, "All the Wise Men are Going," again referenced the nativity narrative and additionally implied that smart (and good Christian) men would invest in the industry.

[18]"The Star in the East," *The Date Palm*, September 30, 1921.

While the stationary image circulated connections between the Holy Land and the Coachella Valley before the actual event, the festival itself reproduced the Orient in other ways. Newspapers declared that the fair was "built around an Oriental setting with suggestions of the Far East on every hand."[19] A large sign spelled out "Sahara Trail," over the entrance, invoking the geography of Northern Africa. Several exhibits featured Arabian themes as well. One date company's exhibit featured an Oriental "cozy corner" of sorts with Persian rugs laid out on the floor. Importantly such exhibits also included local boosters donning Middle Eastern inspired costumes. The exhibit above was noted for its "luxuriousness of oriental couches and draperies," though the grower, a "'Sheik'…in costume and the 'Persian' ladies of his court, attractively decked in oriental costume," drew attention as well.[20] Elsewhere a "doorkeeper in Arab costume … and girls garbed in harem costumes" continued the masquerade.[21] Images from the festival (Figure 4.2) suggest that while these "harem" costumes were far more modest than those used in later festivals, they drew attention not only for their exoticness but for their erotic nature as well. Indeed the sexual nature was present in one editor's depiction: "The desert's most winsome lassies all togged out in their gaily bedecked harem costumes and turbaned he-things with flowing garbs of the sheik," a sex symbol in his own right[22] As discussed below, the placing of these costumed participants in a harem allowed men to

[19] Burton L. Smith, "Date Festival at Indio Open," *Los Angeles Times*, October 22, 1923.

[20] Ibid., and "Festival of Dates Heralds."

[21] Smith, "Date Festival at Indio Open."

[22] Ulrich Knoch "Editor's View of the Festival," from the *La Verne Leader* reprinted in the *Coachella Valley Submarine*, November 4, 1921.

view them in the same manner as they saw the harem- a sexualized bevy of women eagerly awaiting male company. Costuming, in particular, would become a crucial part of the region's Arabian fantasy.

Figure 4.2: Festival of Dates Harem Costumes, 1921. Courtesy of the Coachella Valley History Museum.

The reflection of an Arabian theme in marketing images, exhibits, and costumes echoes the fascination American had for the Greater Middle East. The festival's theme seemed particularly relevant, given the introduction of several desert romance films during the same time period. *Cleopatra* films were already popular: a 1912 silent film drew attention to the Nile's queen while the 1917 film starring Theda Bara attainted wide success as well. Bara, known as the Vamp, also appeared in the 1918 film *Salome,* a biblical epic, in the title role as a sexualized, dancing, exotic seductress. Some of its scenes were filmed in the deserts of the Coachella Valley. Notably the film *The Queen of Sheba* debuted earlier in 1921, telling the biblical story of Sheba with skimpy costumes. The Festival of Dates organizers viewed the *Queen of Sheba* as so significant that they

invited its star, Betty Blythe, to "visit the festival in costume."[23] After all, they recalled, the biblical story implied Sheba offered dates to King Solomon.[24] Of course Cleopatra, Salome, and Sheba were not the only Middle Eastern sex symbols in film at the time. The *Sheik* premiered in Los Angeles the same weekend as the Festival of Dates.

These films certainly sexualized both icons (the sheik and the harem) and provided viewers with a visual understanding of the Middle East that involved fashion viewed as immodest by modern standards. Perhaps tourists, so infatuated with these desert romance films, jumped at the opportunity to see the films played out in real life in the desert setting where they were filmed, the local desert re-imagined as a far-away land. The addition of costumed exotics added to the pleasure of the visual spectacle. For example, a fire-eating Cahuilla Indian, "Indian peon games," and "Genuine Southern colored minstrels" no doubt drew attention as performances of otherness. [25] Whether gawking at Indians or pretending to be Arabs, the engagement with the exotic became a crucial component of the fair.

While strong winds kept attendance lower than expected, the Festival of Dates drew attention to the Coachella Valley and its blossoming date industry.[26] Newspapers noted the event "has helped, as nothing else has helped, to draw attention to an industry

[23] "Gates Swing Open Today."

[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid.

[26]In particular, several tourists from Los Angeles had to turn back on Sunday due to the wind. "Date Festival was a Success," *Coachella Valley Submarine*, October 28, 1921.

that is not only new to California but that is a new one to the United States."[27]Though organizers hoped to bring the fair back in 1922, financial difficulties and roadwork on the only highway from Los Angeles to the Coachella Valley, prevented the event. Instead boosters continued to promote their crop at fairs across the state, particularly fairs in Riverside, California, which opened a separate tent for a "date show" and continued Oriental themes.[28] Coachella Valley boosters continued their self styling by including an Egyptian styled entrance, large palms, and interior decorations designed to invoke a feeling of the Orient.[29]

The city of Indio held sporadic local celebrations of date through the 1920s and 1930s. The Coachella Valley continued to highlight their crop at the Southern California Fair in Riverside before it merged with the Los Angeles County Fair in 1931.[30] Even then the Pomona based Los Angeles County Fair held a "Date Show" during their run.[31] Eventually, new funding for fairs in the state, supported by a tax on horseracing, opened the possibility of retuning a county fair to the region.[32] In 1937 the Riverside County Board of Supervisors voted to add the title of Riverside County Fair to the Coachella

[27] "Helping an Infant Industry," from the *Riverside Press* reprinted in *Coachella Valley Submarine*, October 28, 1921.

[28] The Southern California Fair was previously known as the Riverside County Fair.

[29] "Cotton and Dates Featured at Riverside," *Los Angeles Times*, October 19, 1924.

[30] "Agreement Signed With Los Angeles," *Riverside Daily Press*, June 2, 1931. It appeared as though this year found several California fairs in jeopardy; some merged together (The Orange County Fair and Valencia Orange Show) while others canceled fair plans altogether (Ventura County Fair, Kern County Classic). "Pomona Planning for Monster Fair," *Riverside Daily Press*, August 10, 1931.

[31] "All Dated Up For Fair," *Riverside Daily Press*, August 6, 1932.

[32] This constitutional amendment was Proposition 3 on the 1933 ballot which allowed pari-mutuel horse betting with the proceeds used to support fairs in the state. California Proposition 3 (1933), Horse Racing, http://repository.uchastings.edu/ca_ballot_props/306, accessed May 18, 2014.

Valley Date Fiesta, held in Indio in February 1938.[33] By this time roads in and out of the Valley improved drastically and the Indio Civic Club provided additional funding, support, and manpower to produce the event. Of course the move also allowed Indio to go "Arab" once again. The fair's organizers pledged that "lovely valley girls in costumes true to the Nile," would be in attendance as would "sheiks of Araby that will break with you ambrosial bread of Allah and date drinks that are nectar of the Gods."[34] The booths, the paper noted, would "stand like colorful tribesmen's tents," while the market would remind visitors of an ancient bazaar.[35]

Because the 1938 event combined the Riverside County Fair, the Date Fiesta, and, notably, a rodeo ("stampede"), it opened the possibilities of another theme, a Western motif widely embraced between 1938 and 1941. Boosters called for residents to don Western wear that complemented the numerous cowboys and riders that overtook the town during the rodeo event. Organizers also continued a tradition from Indio's 1937 rodeo: a beard and mustache growing contest. This "Whiskerino" contest was a fundraiser of sorts that encouraged the prominent men of the Coachella Valley to grow facial hair. Those who opted out had to pay a fee for a "smooth puss" badge that exempted them from "prosecution of the Vigilantes," who publically arrested the non-

[33] "Coachella Date Fete Supported as County Fair," *Riverside Daily Press*, December 27, 1937. The event also merged with the Indio Stampede, a Western themed rodeo celebration held in Indio in 1937, though that year did not feature a Date Festival. The 1938 event was the first to feature all three- the County Fair, the Stampede/Rodeo, and the Date "Fiesta" at the same time and place.

[34] Isabel M. Hatter, "County Fair and Date Fiesta Will Be Unique Event," *Riverside Daily Press*, February 3, 1938.

[35] Ibid. Though an Arabian motif was foretold, I was unable to find it referenced in press coverage of the actual event.

bearded and fined them for charity.[36] Indeed, Indio boosters felt that this odd ritual was one of the "most effective means of obtaining publicity for the Stampede," as "last year's Whiskerino was talked of throughout Southern California and received considerable publicity in newspapers and magazines."[37] From 1937 to 1941, local stores advertized specials on western clothing and organizers even promised a forty-niner camp for the 1941 fair. When World War II ended all fairs in California, Indio continued to host "Frontier Days" to celebrate the Wild West.

From Western Days to Arabian Nights: The Date Festival Takes Shape

During the war imposed fair hiatus the Date Festival's manager concluded that "A fair should be a mirror reflecting the cultural, agricultural and industrial development of a community."[38] The "Eastern theme," one local newspaper remarked, "blends well with the desert and typifies the area in Arabia and Iraq which is the original home of the date palms."[39] While fair organizers would blend together various locations in the Orient, from Northern Africa to India, the focus here, at least the language used, centered on the Arabian Peninsula. This, despite the fact that the main date grown in the Coachella Valley, the Deglet Noor, originated in Northern Africa. This reflected the nation's more direct pop cultural relationships in the region: mythical ties to the Holy Land and the

[36] "Whiskers to Bloom Again in January," *Indio News*, December 17, 1937.

[37] Ibid.

[38] "Plans for 1947 Fair Progress," *Indio News*, January 24, 1946.

[39] "Fair Shows Progress," *Indio News*, December 12, 1946. Actually fair organizers called for an Arabian theme in 1942 but that year's fair was canceled do to World War II.

spaces of *One Thousand and One Arabian Nights*. Saudi Arabia had only been united into a country in the 1930s but for many Americans the name continued to imply a broader swath of land. Importantly, Arabia, in American popular culture, simply stood in for "Orient."

The Arabian theme held distinct advantages. As far as the fair organizers knew, no festivals had a permanent Arabian theme, thus it promised to draw far more attention than a Western motif ever could. "Every town and crossroads has used western garb until that costume has become so commonplace that it attracts little attention," extolled one newspaper.[40] Even in nearby Palm Springs, the Desert Circus, a weekend of parades, balls, and fundraising with a Western theme, drew attention every February since 1934. More importantly the Desert Circus mixed cowboy flair with Palm Spring's resident celebrities, which made it difficult for less star studded towns to compete on the Western front.[41]

The fair continued to position the region as a unique tourist location where one could, in effect, travel to the Middle East (at least the Middle East of popular culture), without leaving the state. When designing the fairgrounds (previous fairs were held in local parks) Moorish inspired architecture took precedence. While inexpensive Quonset huts were used for exhibit buildings, eventually other permanent structures reflected Middle Eastern, Moorish, and Northern African designs. A wall stylized with domes, arches, and colorful brickwork surrounded the fair, described erroneously as a "front

[40] "Urge Official Valley Costume," *Indio News*, October 10, 1946.

[41] For more on the Desert Circus see Denise Ortuno Neil, "Looking Back at the Desert Circus," *Coachella Valley Weekly*, September 25, 2013, http://coachellavalleyweekly.com/looking-back-at-the-desert-circus.

entrance exterior of authentic Arabian architecture."[42] (Figure 4.3)The brick wall was far from authentic but represented to most visitors the closest they had ever been to structures of the Orient.

Figure 4.3: Date Festival Fairgrounds, 1955. Courtesy of the Coachella Valley History Museum.

During the fair's first decade, other architectural designs were incorporated to enrich the fair's motif. The fairgrounds included a commerce and office building with a Moorish design as well as a "Taj Mahal" building.[43] Permanent vendor booths featured domes and arches as well and even the outdoor signage for the fair featured Arabian overtones. A large sign announced the festival's dates and information, topped by a

[42] "Indio Date Festival Will Open Tomorrow," *The Los Angeles Times*, February 19, 1947.

[43] The Taj Mahal building, a simple Quonset hut named after an iconic Indian building, seems an odd incorporation for the Middle Eastern themed fair. Built in the 1600s by a Mughal ruler as a mausoleum for his Persian wife, the actual Taj Mahal featured distinctive Persian styling as well as decorative passages from the Qur'an. The Mughal dynasty was heavily influenced by Persia and many of its leaders practiced Islam. Thus India when came to Indio, it did so via the renaming of a building after a space that itself blended Persian and Indian cultures.

wooden, painted, cutout of an Arabian city, used to advertise the nightly pageant and "Oriental Beauty." The fairgrounds were also peppered with statues that invoked a sense of the Middle East. A statue of Queen Scheherazade, of *Arabian Nights* fame, took center stage as the focal point of a fountain near the fair's entrance. Beginning in the 1980s the rear entrance showcased a magic lamp statue alongside a larger than life genie statue.

The most iconic agricultural addition to the fairgrounds, however, was the 1948 "Old Baghdad" Stage. (Figures 4.4 and 4.5) Designed by an Academy Award nominated set designer, Harry Oliver, the stage towered over the fairground's center as the visual focal point.[44] The raised stage mimicked a Caliph's home with a towering minarets, colorful domes, and Arabian looking arches. While the front opened to a wide stage, the back also continued the theme with Arabic writing painted on the walls and even some Masyrabias, wooden window coverings found in the Greater Middle East. The name itself implied a setting in the Iraqi city, a city well known for the *Arabian Nights* and the popular *Thief of Baghdad* films (1924 and 1940).[45] Given California's well known connections to the film industry, it is unsurprising that festival organizers would seek out a set designer's help. We might also assume, however, that the popularity of *Arabian Nights* films might have also influenced the decision to create a virtual Baghdad. Because

[44] Oliver, well known regionally as a humorist and desert writer, worked on various films including the 1925 *Ben-Hur: A Tale of Christ*. He was also well known for his fantasy architectural style. By the time he created the Old Baghdad Stage he already received acclaim for well the known Beverly Hills Witch (Spadena) House, the first iconic Van De Kamp Windmill building, and the Gold Gulch concession at the California Pacific International Exposition held in San Diego in the mid 1930s. Thus Oliver brought with him years of experience in fantastical designs; he had mastered not only the art of film set design but was also able to bring that sense of the theatrical into whimsical, three dimensional, self standing structures that were iconic in their own right.

[45] Of course, because Baghdad was the main setting of *Arabian Nights*, other popular films were also set in "old" Baghdad prior to the stage's development, including 1942's *Arabian Nights*, *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves* (1944), *Kismet* (1944), and *A Thousand and One Nights* (1945).

the *Nights* were set in medieval times the phrasing of the stage as "old" is important too. It added an air of mystery and exotic history, and it implied an unchanging landscape assumed to be present in the Arabian Peninsula. The building cost the fair $25,000 but it served as an exotic backdrop for many early publicity photos, including several that were reproduced in the *Los Angeles Times* and other major newspapers (such as Figure 4.5). Such attention likely drew in a tourist hungry for "foreign" travel at home. The stage, and other Arabian architecture at the festival, continued a tradition of reimagining foreign places as tourist entertainments in the United States.

Figure 4.4: Old Baghdad Stage. Courtesy of the Coachella Valley History Museum.

Figure 4.5: Rear of Old Baghdad Stage. Courtesy of the Coachella Valley History Museum.

The stage, though it stood as a meeting point, photo opportunity, and publicity prop, was home to an outdoor pageant, a popular phenomenon in California.[46] Though many such pageants had disappeared during the Great Depression and World War II, California's outdoor climate made such performances popular even when the Date Festival debuted their own post-war version. Established in 1948, the pageant adapted stories from the *Arabian Nights*, as the musical extravaganza drew in enthusiastic crowds

[46] Such outdoor pageants were widespread in California in the 1910s and 1920s; the most iconic, of course, was Hemet's *Ramona* Pageant, first staged in 1923. For more on these Spanish Fantasy Past themed pageants see Dydia DeLyser, *Ramona Memories: Tourism and the Shaping of Southern California* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005) and Chelsea K. Vaughn, "The Joining of Historical Pageantry and the Spanish Fantasy Past: The Meeting of Senora Josefa Yorba and Lucretia del Valle," *The Journal of San Diego History* 57, no. 4 (Fall 2011): 213- 235.

for the nightly performance which featured upwards of 200 local performers.[47] The visual appeal of the pageant was crucial; the audience not only heard the fantastical stories of far off places and exotic people, they saw the tales brought to life on a "Middle Eastern" stage, with people in "Oriental costumes," and experienced the camels walked onstage. The colorful production drew media attention not only for its unique theme but also for its surprising outdoor setting in the middle of February.

The Old Baghdad Stage was also a setting for a local beauty pageant. Though the fair had held beauty pageants before, in 1949 they unveiled a new title for the winner: Queen Scheherazade.[48] Major cities around Riverside County picked a contestant, or princess, who then competed for the title of queen. (Figure 4.5) The title, of course, reflected instant sexualization as part of the mythical harem from which Queen Scheherazade retained her title. The Queen and runner-up princesses served as official representatives of the fair and made appearances at various events, restaurants, and meetings to encourage fair attendance. Their image was reproduced in newspapers around the Southland as a lure to attend the festival. Young women could dream of wearing their glamorous crown and holding royal titles while young men could dream of being the Caliph for such a large, Americanized harem of women. For the first few decades of the competition, the contestants were mostly white, with only the occasional black or Mexican American woman winning title in her hometown to proceed to the

[47] By the 1980s and 1990s the main roles were played by paid actors and hired choreographers set the dance routines. Eventually the event would again become a local endeavor with many younger participants exploring live theater and dance.

[48] According to *One Thousand and One Arabian Nights*, a widely popular collection of Arabian/ Persian tales, Scheherazade was a woman who captured curiosity with her storytelling abilities.

larger pageant, where they seldom won. Scheherazade contestants, like those who were in the theatrical pageant, wore costumes that drew on American understandings of the Middle East, blended with the color and glitz of Hollywood. Such costuming allowed participants to do what historian Susan Nance terms "Playing Eastern."[49]

Camel races, appeared at the 1947 fair, marketed to the public as "Arabian derbies."[50] Eventually the fair purchased their own camels and ran camel rides as well. These exotic animals were a draw in their own right; encounters with these ships of the desert were a rarity before today's modern zoos. The date festival was rare opportunity to see the Middle East's prized animal up close and personal, allowing for more imaginative folks to picture themselves as sheiks, explorers, or warriors riding through the hostile desert. An annual parade displayed the camels as well as elaborate floats of miniature minarets, genie lamps, and pyramids. Those atop the floats described themselves as Sultans, queens, camel drivers, and Caliphs. Dozens participated in the parade route while hundreds more cheered them on. The Baghdad Bazaar staged at the festival tapped into existing understandings of the Middle East as a consumer's paradise, selling luxury goods and snacks.

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[49] Susan Nance, *How the American Nights Inspired the American Dream, 1790-1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009). This is of course in conversation with Philip Deloria's earlier coining of the phrase "Playing Indian," discussed below. Because the Date Festival held the specific theme of Arabia I prefer the term "Playing Arab,""Playing Arabian" or "Going Arabian," even though these masquerades sometimes invoked a broader swath of the Orient than just the Arabian Peninsula and sometimes attempted to mimic people who were not technically Arabs.

[50] "Camel Racing Will be Feature of Date Festival," *The Los Angeles Times*, February 14, 1947.

The festivals occasionally promised "slave markets," thought just what was meant is unclear. [51] "Slave markets," however, reinforced the idea of American, specifically white, Christian, superiority to peoples of the Middle East because the United States had long ago abolished slavery.[52] And yet the pleasure derived from the slave market implied yet another commodification of the Middle East and its people. These slaves, particularly in the *Arabian Nights* pageant, and even the 1957 prize winning Tournament of Roses Parade float, were mostly white women in service of a similarly white Caliph or Sheik. The frequent reference to "slave girls" at the fair, often costumed in harem outfits, once again implied easy access to the sexuality of the harem, as popular culture poised most harem girls as former slaves purchased specifically to fill out the Caliph's harem.[53] Indeed the notion of the slave market as a place where women of the harem were bought was truly a literary imagining.[54] Though Westerners viewed the harem and slave systems as debased and cruel, others imagined that the luxury and sensuality of the harem in effect "compensated for the indignities [a slave] had suffered along the way."[55] When viewed in this manner the difficult realities of such a transaction could be imagined away and the slave market could be seen as a place of anticipation and joy for the young

[51] Neill Beck, "Farmers Market Today," *The Los Angeles Times*, February 17, 1951.

[52] In some placed in the Greater Middle East slavery was practiced well into the twentieth century; Saudi Arabia and Yemen did not ban the practice until 1962 .British Broadcasting Corporation, "Slavery in Islam," BBC Online, http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/islam/history/slavery_1.shtml accessed May 30, 2014.

[53] Joan Del Plato, "Depictions of Slavery and the Making of the Harem," *Multiple Wives, Multiple Pleasures: Representing the Harem, 1800-1875* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2002). 58- 109.

[54] Ibid.

[55] Ibid., 58.

women about to embark on a journey to the Sultan's harem. Or, at least it could be imagined as such at the date festival where the shocking "slave market" could play out to laughs and smiles.

Costuming the Fair: The Importance of Arabian Wear

To show off the Arabian motif, residents of the Coachella Valley were encouraged to dress in Arabian inspired costumes, an act of playing Arab that many locals participated in. Participants in the theatrical pageant, the Scheherazade beauty pageant, and parades described above all donned such costumes to populate the fair with Middle Eastern peoples. Those who first proposed the Arabian theme in the early to mid 1940s envisioned the costumes as a crucial part of the festival and its publicity goals. Such outfits, they argued, "would make that event the most colorful in the nation and would result in untold publicity."[56] Organizers mused that their costume choice would bring magazines and newsreel makers directly to their town, an astute observation that did, in fact, materialize.[57]

The costumes varied but generally reflected broad American understandings of the Orient, already influenced by Hollywood imaginations of the Greater Middle East. Organizers asked, at the very least, all area residents wear a hat or headdress to imply Arabian costume. Pith helmets and fezzes were available for purchase at discounted prices. The pith helmets didn't take off but the more traditional headpieces like the fez,

[56] "Visiting Sheik," *Indio News*, October 17, 1941.

[57] "Urge Official Valley Costume."

the turban, and the ghutrah remained popular through the fair's first few decades. Those inclined to wear more elaborate costumes were encouraged to don long, flowing, cotton robes made from a solid fabric or with vertical stripes.

Organizers asked women to dress in attire that included "skirts, trousers, blouse, or bolero adorned with a scarf, plenty of costumed jewelry and a pill-box or turban style headpiece."[58] The vast majority of women, however, adopted one of two costume options. The first, the harem girl outfit, with Zouave styled pants and a bare midriff, looked similar to the costumes now associated with 1960s television show, *I Dream of Jeannie*. Younger women and girls embraced this harem girl style. The other look for women, especially popular after the 1970s and among older women, consisted of caftans or similarly styled loose-fitting robes. Both costumes embraced the headpiece, often in the form of a pillbox hat with a gauzy draping, a veil worn at the back of the head, or even simple fascinators with dyed ostrich feathers. Large, elaborate crowns were constructed out of what appeared to be silver or gold pipe-cleaners; both men and women sometimes styled their shoes with curled toes.

It appeared as though many in the community embraced the costuming trends, with hopes that the unique outfits might draw attention for the date festival and thus increase tourism. In 1947 local merchants agreed display costume examples in their windows and stock materials for making Arabian styled garbs.[59] In the 1950s retailers

[58] "Costume Campaign Moves on," *Indio News,* February 16, 1950.

[59] "Arab Theme for Festival Costume," *Indio News*, January 16, 1947.

sold costuming related goods "at bare cost."[60] Many of the costumes were created by local women for themselves or their families but area fabric stores also designed and created costumes for those not inclined or unable to sew their own outfits. Local clubs tried to get the word out and encourage members to dress up. Couples, especially those involved in social clubs, attended annual Arabian balls as well, in costume of course.

Those in costume received free entry but boosters preferred residents to wear the costumes during the entire run of the Date Festival, even outside of the fairgrounds. In particular, organizers encouraged businesses to "use some type of costume as an added advertisement to visitors."[61] Many local shops, restaurants, and other businesses requested their employees to do just this. Photographic evidence and oral histories indicate staffs from the Aladdin Theater, various banks, the county building, the local telephone company, grocery stores, and several restaurants all donned the costumes during fair time. (Figure 4.6) Organizers hoped the practice would add "color" to the area and make a deep impact on tourists who would become so enchanted they would return year after year. Businesses likely saw the costumes as a way to demonstrate investment in the community and possibly even increase attention from tourists. This practice was widespread and lasted through the 1970s. Though the community at large embraced the idea of costumes in theory, not everyone dressed up; photographs show that the majority of fairgoers attended without a costume.

[60] "'Jehad' to Crack Down on all Non-Costumed 'Arabs,'" *Indio News,* January 26, 1950.

[61] Ibid.

Figure 4.6: Staff at Coachella First National Bank, circa 1940s-1950s. Courtesy of the Coachella Valley History Museum.

Costuming, then, was incredibly important to the Arabian fantasies that developed in the Coachella Valley. Costuming oneself in another ethnicity was not a new phenomenon, even for Southern California, but technological advances made the Arabian costumes far more visible to an American public that found them enchanting. The expansion of photojournalism by the 1930s partnered with new printing technologies that encouraged newspapers to included halftone photographs among their articles. Wirephoto machines allowed photographs to be transferred around the country over telegraph or telephone lines. By the 1930s these machines were accessible to many newspapers and were widely used by the Associated Press, which also facilitated the rapid and widespread distribution of visual materials. Photographic based magazines expanded in the 1930s as well, including *Life* and *Look*. The expansion of magazines in general meant

that the Arabian costumes of the Coachella Valley found new homes on the pages of popular or niche market periodicals like *Buick Magazine*, *Hot Rod Magazine*, and *Life Magazine*. Thus by the time the Arabian costumes appeared at the 1947 Date Festival, a system was already in place to distribute novel photos of the Coachella Valley's Arab costumes, particularly across the Southland.

Coachella Valley boosters were also hopeful that the costumes would draw the attention of newsreels which aired in movie theaters regularly through the 1950s. Later television would replace these newsreels, bringing the Arabian costumes directly into Southland homes, particularly via Los Angeles based stations. These technological and journalistic developments stood in stark contrast, for example, to those available during the heyday of the Spanish Fantasy Past (1880s-1920). Thus by the time the Coachella Valley's Arabian fantasies developed photographs of the costumes were able to reach far more people through the visual culture than, say, the costumes of the Spanish Fantasy Past. Therefore, I would argue that the costuming associated with the desert's Arabian fantasies was one of the more important, if not the most important, aspects of the fantasy. Even if only a small number of Coachella Valley residents dressed up, photographs of costumed locals widely circulated and implied that the entire area was full of friendly, (and importantly- Anglo) "Arabs." Mexican Americans played a role in organizing the festival and boostering it, particularly in the 1950s and 1960s, but more often than not public images focused on young, Anglo women.

Yearly the *Los Angeles Times* and other regional presses in Southern California reproduced images, particularly of young women in this harem costumes, prior to and

during the fair. Landscape images (natural or manmade) could mislead the reader to think the photograph was of a far-away place. However, the white faces smiling behind the "Oriental" costumes were unmistakable: pure California. Thus the costume was an unspoken and recognizable photographic tool that allowed fair promoters to instantaneously imply the Coachella Valley and their Arabian fantasy without misleading the reader to think the date celebration actually took place in the Middle East. Images also lent a sense of community to the desert; if area residents supported their fair and towns enough to purchase, make, and wear these costumes then they felt pride in their region and were bound in a sense of community. Costumes imparted a sense of small town harmony.

Of course the United States' relationship to fashion had long invoked the Middle East in its own right, thus local residents may have already had elements of their costumes in their closets. Clothing styled after the Orient became increasingly popular in the early twentieth century throughout Europe and the United States.[62] Americans took note of the latest fashions in Paris and London including garments inspired by Chinese, Japanese, and Indian traditional dress. The smoking jackets and even fezzes worn by some American men invoked the Middle Eastern associations alongside tobacco and coffee. [63] "King of Fashion," Paul Poiret introduced "harem" pants and other Middle

[62] Kristin L. Hoganson, "The Fashionable World: Imagined Communities of Dress," *Consumer's Imperium: The Global Production of American Domesticity, 1865-1920,* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 57-104. Often fashion items became popular in France first, where imperialistic ties produced their own Middle Eastern and Northern African fads.

[63] Richard Martin and Harold Koda, *Orientalism: Visions of the East in Western Dress* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1994), 55.

Eastern designs to European couture in the 1910s.[64] Poiret, his so called "Persian silhouette," and the French fashion scene held immense sway over trends in the United States so the Arabian motif made its ways stateside as well.[65] The discovery of King Tutankhamen's tomb in 1922 spurred an Egyptian craze that influenced fashion and jewelry design in the West as well.[66] Scholars have argued that such fashion "deemed 'traditional' and 'backward' when worn on a native body were thus transformed as 'fashion forward' when worn on a Western one."[67] This further distanced non-whites from the fashion world while at the same time appropriating non-western styles of dress.

Historian Kristin Hoganson points out that in America, fashion worked to delineate lines of belonging, particularly along class and ethnicity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[68] Depictions of fashion among non-whites implied that "native dress seemed essentially unchanged and hence located outside the world of fashion."[69] Here fashion served as proof to Americans that Middle Easterners were unchanging, their costuming timeless and historic. Westerners saw their own interest in fashion as a symbol of their creativity and refinement, superior to the rest of the world

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[64] Harold Koda and Andrew Bolton, "Paul Poiret (1879-1944)" *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*, http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/poir/hd_poir.htm accessed May 30, 2014.

[65] Fashion Institute of Design and Merchandising Museum, "Paul Poiret: King of Fashion," *FIDM Museum and Gallery Blog*, August 19, 2009, http://blog.fidmmuseum.org/museum/2009/08/my-entry-1.html.

[66] James Stevens Curl, *The Egyptian Revival: Ancient Egypt as the Inspiration for Design Motifs in the West* (London: Routledge, 2005), 374.

[67] Mimi Thi Nguyen and Minh-Ha T. Pham "History and the Harem Pant," *Threadbare Blog*, May 28 2009 http://threadbared.blogspot.com/2009/05/history-and-harem-pant.html.

[68] Hoganson, *Consumer's Imperium*.

[69] Ibid., 82.

who they felt did not possess the "mental activity," or "spirit of invention" to produce new styles.[70] And yet these ethnic costumes were often seen as picturesque and even reflected nostalgia for a time that was fading away.[71] For many Americans the clothing worn by people in the Greater Middle East demonstrated the superiority of Western minds over the utterly backward and unchanged other. At the same time the U.S. embrace of such fashion hinted at America's desire for such timeless cultures and customs.

In addition, Hoganson convincing argues that wearing Chinese, Japanese, or Middle Eastern inspired garments did not imply that Westerners identified with the residents these far-off places. Instead American women could incorporate these exotic elements to connect "with what they imagined to be Eastern…elegance, grace, sensuousness, and eroticism."[72] I would argue, given America's assumptions about the Greater Middle East, women could incorporate costuming from the region to imply a sense of luxury, wealth, magic, cosmopolitanism, and veiled sexuality. Scholars have implied that such Eastern inspired dress comes "charged with enchantment, with a seemingly sweetness and seduction that allows the East's presence to seem innocuous."[73]This sweet yet seductive spin is particularly important for the harem girl costumes at the date festival. Widely embraced by the community, the harem outfits implied a blatant sexuality in a family setting smoothed over by the acknowledgement that the wearer was just playing the part for the day.

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[70] Frances Falkner quoted in Hoganson, *Consumers Imperium*, 87.

[71] Ibid., 82.

[72] Ibid., 90.

[73] Martin and Koda, *Orientalism: Visions of the East*.

Oriental inspired costumes found their ways into other American rituals as well. The Freemasons had long invoked the mystical power associated with the Orient and weaved tales of the Holy Land into their private initiation rituals. The association of the Greater Middle East with the Freemasons, in particular, spurred the creation of the Shriners as a spoof of the Orientalism.[74] Thus, the Shriners are known for their public appearances in red fezzes, long associated with the Orient: "the fraternity provided the most well-funded public and private opportunities for playing Eastern throughout the nation's history."[75] Indeed by 1947, the year the fair adopted their permanent Arabian theme, over three-million Americans were freemasons.[76] Masonic organizations and their female and youth auxiliaries, like the Order of the Eastern Star, Jobs Daughters, and the Order DeMolay, appeared frequently in Coachella Valley newspapers, suggesting that regional leaders, boosters, and even fair organizers participated in the Orientalized rituals of fraternal organizations.

Hollywood too provided a source of inspiration for the Coachella Valley's Arabian costumes; given their popularity, they likely influenced everyday fashion as well. While film scholar Jack Shaheen argues that nearly all films featuring Arabs and Arab Americans dehumanized and vilified the Greater Middle Eastern other, we must also note that several of these films simultaneously celebrated the wealth, luxury, and

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[74] For a discussion of masonry, the Shriners, and their use of the Orient see "Wise Men of the East and the Market for American Fraternalism, 1850-1892" in Nance, *How the Arabian Nights Inspired the American Dream*, 79-110.

[75] Nance, 102.

[76]Masonic Service Association of North America, "Membership Totals Since 1924" *Masonic Membership Statistics*, http://www.msana.com/msastats.asp, accessed May 30, 2014.

sexual availability attributed to the East in American popular culture.[77] While the Arabs played the villain in increasing numbers, particularly after World War II, they also appealed to Americans in the form of fierce warriors, happy harem girls, and fabulously wealthy sheiks, caliphs, and sultans. All these characters were stereotyped in complicated, sometimes contradicting ways. Their costuming, however, was often luxurious, colorful, and implied wealth. In addition to embodying the characters from *Arabian Nights*, such outfits also let their wearers become virtual movie stars that portrayed Arab characters. Indeed, Hollywood added an additional layer of glamour and fantasy to the act of playing Arabian. The fair paralleled Hollywood in other ways as well. The massive stage designed by a Hollywood set designer created spaces that allowed visitors, benefiting from the economics post-war prosperity, to escape their present and be transported to another place and even time. The opportunity to actively imagine oneself as another was an opportunity glamorized by the Hollywood actors of the day. The costumes provided an experience of becoming another while the Old Baghdad Stage and date palms provided the set.

The idea of donning another ethnicity for entertainment was well established in the United States. The literature of such cultural cross-dressings is lengthy and too nuanced to be recalled here. It includes scholarship on blackface, the form of American theatrical entertainment that developed in the 1830s. White men dressed in torn clothing

[77]Jack G. Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People* (New York: Olive Branch Press, 2001). Shaheen's project is collecting and briefly describing over 900 American films that portrayed Arabs from 1894-2001. The work is a crucial investigation of the increasing negative lens through which Arabs are viewed and an important study as to Hollywood's role in vilifying the Arab as an enemy. However, the falls short in discussing how and why Americans also celebrated, lusted after, or fantasized the Middle East in film outside of these villains.

and blackened their faces to perform as grossly stereotyped black characters for fellow white male audiences.[78] While minstrel shows featuring blackface circulated as the most popular form of entertainment in the nineteenth century their presence continued, expanding the audience throughout the 1900s in live theater, films, radio, and even television. The widespread acceptance of such performances and their inclusion in popular culture normalized the donning of another's ethnicity or race through costume, make-up, and language. Further, the stereotypes appropriated through blackface reinforced social, political, and economic relationships that placed slaves, and later free African Americans, below whites. The performance tradition was so popular and far reaching that it even made appearances in the Coachella Valley. The *Amos and Andy* Radio Show, which used a linguistic rather than visual blackface, broadcast from Palm Springs for several years in the 1930s. In the 1950s the Coachella Valley Lions Club hosted (and its members performed in) blackface minstrel shows to raise money for charity.[79] Thus the national and regional practice of blackface already illuminated how the costumed, ethnic appropriation of another could serve as entertainment, make money, and reinforced racial hierarchies.

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[78] Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993) For more on blackface see Stephen Johnson, ed. *Burnt Cork: Traditions and Legacies of Blackface Minstrelsy* (Amherst; University of Massachusetts Press, 2012); W.T. Lhamon, Jr. *Raising Cain: Blackface Performance from Jim Crow to Hip Hop* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998); John Strausbaugh, *Black Like You: Blackface, Whiteface, Insult & Imitation in American Popular Culture* (New York: Penguin Group, 2006).

[79]They performed to over a thousand people each year. "Lions' Club Will Stage Minstrels On January 16-17," *Indio News,* January 6 1953; "Lion's Club Minstrel Outstanding Success," *Indio News,* January 11, 1951; "Coachella Valley Lions' Club Fifth Annual Black-Face Jubilee Minstrel Show" Advertisement, *Indio News*, January 11, 1955.

Importantly, however, Americans also played Indian throughout the nation's history, an act that was often performed outside the purview of a seated theater audience. Scholar Philip Deloria masterfully recalled America's desire to "play Indian" as far back as the Boston Tea party.[80] Playing Indian, or in this case playing Arab, allowed a person to feel as though they were part of a larger community, alongside others who dressed the part and performed the ritual. As the Coachella Valley grew following World War II, these rituals of community united newcomers with longtime residents and helped forge a communal identity and individual senses of belonging. Playing Arab did not make these individuals feel Middle Eastern, at least not beyond fair-time, but the act of dressing up did allow them to become part of a community that was actively seeking to booster itself. Additional communal ties were strengthened when costumes were used within the confines of a group- like the women's clubs who put on fashion shows or civics clubs who went to the fair together.

The scholarship of playing Indian sheds additional light on playing Arab. As Americans played Indian over the course of the nation's history they most often did so by portraying all Native Americans as a united group.[81] This, for example, lead to a proliferation of Plains Indian headdresses in popular culture, so much so that Indians of California, who did not wear such regalia, were often pictured with the headpieces. In

[80] Before Deloria's 1998 Book, *Playing Indian*, Scholar Rayna Green wrote about the phenomenon in "The Tribe Called Wanabee: Playing Indian in America and Europe," *Folklore* 99 no. 1 (1988): 30-55. Philip J. Deloria, *Playing Indian* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

[81] At first, playing Indian centered on the tribes the nation encountered on the Eastern seaboard, the Algonquin peoples. Eventually, though, as the Indian Wars lived on in popular imagination via Wild West Shows and Western films, the nation came to favor Plains Indians as stand-ins for all others. Green, "A Tribe Called Wannabee," and Deloria, *Playing Indian*.

nearby Palm Springs, for example, an outdoor Desert Play was staged annually in the 1920s and 1930s, in which whites played Indian and even utilized costuming from tribes beyond the local Cahuilla people. Even today Plains representations, and to a smaller extent Algonquin references, form the backbone of playing Indian from the feathered headdresses worn at the Coachella Music Festival to the paper bag costumes donned by children during school Thanksgiving celebrations.

Despite numerous Native American cultures, the traditional wear of just a few tribes was reproduced, marked as "Indian," and applied to all Native peoples. Accuracy, of course, was not necessarily the goal of those who played Indian. Similarly when Coachella Valley residents "played Arab" they paid little attention to authenticity. They also merged a wide of peoples, geographically separated, into their costuming choices. Descriptions of the costumes ranged from "Arabian" to "Oriental," all vague references to the Middle East and Northern Africa. Sometimes, however, they extended beyond. The Indio Public Library's reference file "Costume Prints: Ideas for Date Festival Costumes," for example, included images of India and Turkey in addition to those from Northern Africa and the Middle East. Indeed even the queen's costumes occasionally included elements that were reminiscent of traditional Indian or Thai costumes. The Orient, as we have seen, was defined and redefined in various ways to include the wide ranging groups of people from the shores of Northern Africa to the mountains of China. The *Arabian Nights* theme, in particular, excused this practice further because the tales took place throughout the Greater Middle East and even into China. The Date Festival proved that

even in fantasies tied specifically to the Arabian Peninsula the larger notion of a geographically extended Orient was always present.

In addition to spanning a wide swath of the Near and Far East, the costumes at the date festival also traveled back in time. Seldom did the costumed residents of the Coachella Valley consider the actual wardrobe worn by those in the modern Middle East. Instead they turned to popular culture of the region which, for the most part, offered up all people of the Greater Middle East as stuck in the past. Icons like the sheik, the sultan, and the harem girl became go-to costumes for many area boosters; popular culture had rendered them timeless, unchanging from *Arabian Nights* to the present. Playing Indian, of course, worked in a similar manner; modern day Indians often wore contemporary clothing on everyday basis and yet the Indian costume was always one from an earlier time, as if it was ageless and eternal. Similarly blackface rendered African Americans as slaves and thus distinctly in the past, often ignoring contemporary black culture and dress.

Yet even Southern California had its own unique brand of playing other, one tied distinctly to the Spanish Fantasy Past. After *Ramona's* popularity spread, tourist and new residents in the Southland experimented by donning "Spanish" style garments for parties and gatherings or during pageants and theatrical performances tied to the region's "Spanish" history. Perhaps the most akin to the costuming of the Date Festival were the "Old Spanish Days" in Santa Barbara, a weeklong celebration that included a parade, rodeo, markets, and other performances that continues to this day. Began in 1924 the event was an attempt by local boosters to draw in tourists during the summer months long

after their numerous winter visitors left.[82] The celebration utilized costumes in a similar fashion to the Coachella Valley. Attendees noted "every man, woman, and child who owed any allegiance to Santa Barbara was in costume… Shoe salesmen and grocery clerks served you with a bit of scarlet braid on their trouser seams. Paunchy realtors and insurance solicitors full of mental mastery dashed about town in gaudy sashes…Women wore mantillas." [83] Historian Phoebe Kropp argues such costuming, or even more metaphorical role play, allowed "Anglos to express dissatisfaction with some elements of modernity," expressing "wistful longing for the supposed simplicity of life in the past."[84] Alternatively the process could offer "a vacation from everyday life."[85] The specific costuming attached to these places added an additional layer of travel because the wearer could become another and escape their current realities for a perceived simpler time. These ideas of escape: dissatisfaction with the modern, rapidly changing world, and longing for the past, were no doubt at play in the practice of going Arab at the Date Festival.

Of course the popular culture surrounding the Orient lent an air of the exotic and luxurious to the practice of playing Arab at the Date Festival. Playing Arab often included connotations of royalty. The sultan and sheik identities imparted a sense of royalty; even more biblical associations with dressing up implied the ancient kings of the

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[82] Paul G. Sweetser, "History of Fiesta," Old Spanish Days Website, http://www.oldspanishdays-fiesta.org/new/index.php/history/history_of_fiesta, accessed May 20, 2014.

[83] Duncan Aikman quoted in Carey McWilliams, *Southern California Country: An Island on the Land* (New York: Duell, Sloan & Pearce, 1946), 81.

[84] Kropp, *California Vieja*, 243.

[85] Ibid., 246.

Holy Land. Women became queens and princesses, virtual Scheherazades, a character that held the role of queen and harem girl simultaneously. Those who played harem girls did so understanding that the harem belonged in wealthy or even royal homes. Thus every harem girl was a princess. Though the beggar and thief were popular stereotypes in American Orientalism, few people assumed these roles in costume at the Date Festival. No matter one's current economic or social status playing Arab during the festival allowed them to stylize themselves as at the top of social hierarchies.

And yet in costuming, the act of playing other was as much about escaping one's own identity as it was defining of it. Whether playing Spanish or playing Indian those who donned costumes were using the fashion to masquerade as another, thus reinforcing their identities as not normatively inclusive of the group they were "playing." Because they had to play Arab, residents of the Coachella Valley highlighted their everyday Anglo, Christian, American identities. While Coachella Valley residents celebrated the Orient by dressing up for a few weeks each year, there was little evidence that they truly understood, sympathized, or connected to those people living in the real Greater Middle East.

Orientalism, Gender, and the Harem

The costume most reproduced in publicity photos and media coverage was the harem outfit, worn by contestants in the Queen Scheherazade beauty pageant, dozens of performers from the musical pageant, and even young children enjoying a day at the fair. As on 1951 article points out, "the women- the lovely, lovely women, have turned this

desert community into a harem. The sun peeks through billowing pantaloons and the jeweled boleros glitter in its rays. Every girl, every housewife, every graying matron is a princess."[86] The women in this article, however, although happy princesses, are pictured as a harem around a sheik. (See similar Figure 4.9) The accompanying photograph depicted eleven Queen Scheherazade competitors in costume looking up dolefully as they caressed a man. This image, one grounded in fantasy, reflects an imagined past where sheiks maintained harems of beautiful, young girls, waiting to satisfy all their needs. The imagined Arabia is sexualized, in favor of an older powerful man. Photographs of costumed men in large groups of scantily clad women stood as instantly recognizable symbols of a harem imagined as overtly sexual, available, and yet entirely mysterious and forbidden.

Figure 4.7: Queen Scheherazade Contestants. Courtesy of the Coachella Valley History Museum.

[86] Art Ryon, "Orient Moves to Indio as Date Festival Opens," *The Los Angeles Times,* February 17, 1951.

Such costuming is clearly more reflective of Western imagination than Middle Eastern realities. In her groundbreaking work, *Imagining Arab Womanhood: The Cultural Mythology of Veils, Harems, and Belly Dancers in the U.S*., scholar Amira Jarmakani points out that the costume of "ballooning harem pants, a halter-top, and a transparent veil," first drew attention as the costume of belly dancers in performances staged in "colonial cabarets," eventually reproduced at world's fairs in the United States.[87] Jarmakani argues that the image of the harem girl allowed Americans to "engage with the themes of erotic fantasy, patriarchal domination, and tradition and timelessness," for more than a century.[88] Importantly, she argues, the American image of the harem is separated from its historic and cultural meaning "as the women's section of a middle- or upper –class household" to instead become "a metaphor for absolute male power and sexual fantasy."[89] These popular Western representations were often read as authentic

[87] Amira Jarmakani, *Imagining Arab Womanhood: The Cultural Mythology of Veils, Harems, and Belly Dancers in the U.S.* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 2. Jaramakani's work is ground breaking given the lack of scholarship on America's pop cultural relationship and understanding of the harem. Multiple scholars have investigated the Orientalism of the harem in Europe in the nineteenth and early twentieth century especially as it pertained to Western Women's missionary work and travel to the Greater Middle East. Few have explored the United States, especially in the second half of the twentieth century. For more on the Western World and the Harem see Reina Lewis, *Rethinking Orientalism: Women, Travel and the Ottoman Harem* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004); Ruth Bernard Yeazell, *Harems of the Mind: Passages of Western Art and Literature* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000); Sarah Graham-Brown, *Images of Women: The Portrayal of Women in Photography of the Middle East, 1860-1950* (London: Quartet Books, 1988); Mary Roberts, *Intimate Outsiders: The Harem in Ottoman and Orientalist Art and Travel Literature* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007); and Joan DelPlato, *Multiple Wives, Multiple Pleasures: Representing the Harem, 1800-1875* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2002). The costumes described here differ from the harem outfits worn in the Coachella Valley, which had gradually become more revealing over time.

[88] Jarmakani, *Imagining Arab Womanhood*, 2

[89] Ibid., 5.

truths, meaning some Americans believed that the harem existed in their current cultural moment exactly as they saw it in books or on film.

The United States had long embraced the idea of the harem, especially as a sexualized place. Writings from people who actually traveled to the Middle East in the nineteenth century confirmed with frustration that the harem was a place outside their purview, a place where women were secluded away from the eyes, especially, of men.[90] Though some women proclaimed that they had been inside a real harem, their writings depicted the harem only though their own biases and Western mindsets. Thus for many Westerners the pleasure of the harem lay solely in imagining the unattainable delights that lay there.[91]

Such delights could include unbridled sexuality, luxury, and exotic love. For men power also played into the fantasy while companionship and even fashion may have played a role in women's fantasies of the harem. The harem grew in importance as the Orient transitioned from "its nineteenth-century associations with religious and scientific knowledge to the turn-of-the-century links to femininity, consumerism, and loosened sexuality."[92] Depictions of Greater Middle Eastern women in films also expanded the idea of the harem. Films influenced the widespread depiction of Middle Eastern women

[90] Shirley Foster, "Colonialism and Gender in the East: Representations of the Harem in the Writings of Women Travelers," *The Yearbook of English Studies* 34 (2004), 6-17.

[91] Ruth Bernard Yeazell, for example, argues that "Any study of the West's relations with the harem must be in large part of study of imagination." Yaezell, *Harems of the Mind*, 1.

[92] McAlister, *Epic Encounters*, 27.

as "sexually voracious."[93] The sexually suggestive Middle Eastern woman that arose with films like *Salome* and *Cleopatra* in the 1910s and 1920 continued to expand in the twentieth century.[94] Harems appeared in Technicolor in Elvis's *Harem Scarum* (1965) and the fetishized outfit appeared on television in *I Dream of Jeannie (*1965-1970*),* complete with an anglicized genie who answered her "Master." These depictions imply that the harem was easily read as shorthand for an unbridled sexuality and speak to the continued allure of the harem in popular culture.

That the harem was so frequently reproduced in relationship to the Date Festival is problematic. The costume, which stands in as symbol of the harem, renders all Arab women as overly sexualized and the property of men. And yet the harem girl, because she is both a harem slave and veiled or hidden, is simultaneously "portrayed as helpless, silent, and utterly dominated by an excessive Arab patriarchy."[95] Thus Arab women become sexual objects without agency as Arab men are once again rendered despotic and brutal. Even the Scheherazade story, retold at the beauty pageant and in many of the musical pageants as well, reinforces this notion, especially given the premise of the *Arabian Nights*. The Arab king killed a new woman every night, after he had ravished

[93] Ibid., 23. Such sexual aggressiveness appeared on film around the time of changing sexual morays and the rise of the new woman. These images however, of a sexualized harem and an increasingly sexualized harem costume, remain in the film cannon to this day. For more on the gendered Orientalism of film see Matthew Bernstein and Gaylyn Studlar, *Visions of the East: Orientalism in Film* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997).

[94] Indeed Ella Shohat points out that during the 1930s-1950s, when Hollywood faced production codes that prevented sexual scenes, the harem could stand in for such intimate explorations and the scantily clad women could evade censorship. Ella Shohat, "Gender in Hollywood's Orient," *Middle East Report* 162 (1990), 40-42.

[95] Ibid. She actually argues that the harem girl and the harem slave are on two opposite poles but I contend that the "harem" girl could be seen as both, completely subjective to men and yet sexually aggressive and sexually controlling.

her. The harem of this story is large and unending until Scheherazade herself ends the violence with her nightly tales. Lest this imply agency, the threat of death looms over her head for one thousand and one nights, until the hostile Arab king becomes calmed and takes her as a true bride, but once again a possession. The message- that Arab men were despotic and violent, rang loud and clear in the stories retold on the Date Festival's stage. Only after her tales soothed him, did he embrace Scheherazade, for a few moments at the end of the play.

Because the idea of the harem revolved around its forbiddenness, particularly because despotic Arab men ruled the harem by blocking other male's entrance (save the eunuchs), desire revolved around what could not be had. The overt sexuality of harems in art, literature, and, especially, film, allowed men to easily imagine they could have all the women in the harem as they played caliph or sultan or sheik. Though the harem of popular culture was secluded, at the festival it was public, thus open to all while still holding the mystery of the forbidden.

Moreover the idea of the despotic Arab reigning over a repressed harem also played into what film scholar Ella Shohat calls the "rescue fantasy." Through films, women embraced the role of harem girl or other venerable woman in the Orient, in hopes that she might be rescued, generally by a white man. Thus at the Date Festival women could engage in multiple fantasies including the desire for romance with an exotic other without the fear of miscegenation. Additionally if a woman imagined herself as a harem girl, she might also partake in the rescue fantasy whereby she is saved from the brutal

Arabs by a white man (who had, incidentally, played the Arab as well).[96] The popularity of Rudolph Valentino's iconic Sheik, for example, suggested that the attraction lay not in the Arab, but in the act of playing Arab. After all, the Sheik was not truly Arabian, but rather half English and Spanish, only playing Eastern for a time, saving the female lead from real Arabs.[97] That Valentino invoked "unprecedented expressions of female desire" suggests that we must read costuming at the Date Festival not just through the icon of the sexy harem girl, but the costumed male embodiments as well.[98] But men too may have found pleasure in the rescue fantasy.

Native American Scholar Rayna Green suggests that costuming oneself as another ethnicity allows one to escape, "the conventional and often highly restrictive boundaries of… fixed cultural identities based on gender and race," as well. [99] Thus, the harem girl costume parallels the sexy "Squaw" or sultry senorita of the Spanish Fantasy Past, though one that still felt restrictive gender norms and taboos on outward sexuality. Thus donning an alternate identity via costume, particularly one with the cultural baggage of the harem described in detail below, allowed for the additional expression of dissatisfaction of modern identities and an exploration of alternate possibilities. Indeed scholars have even

[96] This is to say nothing of the gay or lesbian desires that also lay within these festival costumes. Though I was unable to uncover any discussion of non-heterosexual desires at the fair, I would argue that sexualized notions of the harem and the sheik existed in this community as well. An archivists with the ONE Archives at the University of Southern California Libraries, for example, showed me a photograph of a gay motorcycle group (circa 1968-1970, possibly the Blue Max Group) that donned various Arabian costumes, possibly for a run to the Date Festival.

[97] McAlister, *Epic Encounters*, 24-25.

[98] Ibid, 25.

[99] Green, "The Tribe Called Wannabee."

credited the earlier popularity of harem styled clothing with opening these possibilities. For some women, "donning the harem pant… powerfully enacted a series of resonant fantasies about the ostensible transgression of bourgeois domestic life for a more spectacular and sensuous one, defined by shocking indulgence and theatrical intensity."[100] Escape from the self, then, was an important appeal of costuming oneself as another.

The Date Festival was a community approved place to explore other identities and flaunt ones sexuality in a safe setting, much like today's Halloween celebrations. Equally as important was the chance to do one's part for the community, act as an ambassador and a booster underneath the sequins and veils. Dressing in costume at work might increase consumer attention and having one's photograph taken in such outfits helped sell the region. Using sexually suggestive costumes as booster efforts was not unique to the Coachella Valley. The Spanish Fantasy Past long invoked the sultry senorita; whites costumed as these sultry personas helped sell their regions as well.[101]

The bodies of young women, then, came to sell the date festival (and dates) as their costumes became entrenched in the Date Festival's visual imagery. Scantily clad girls took center stage in the nightly pageant performance, waved to crowds in the parade, served meals to customers at local restaurants, and paraded through the fairgrounds as Queen Scheherazade competitors. Importantly, because these women were photographed their images were reproduced in newspapers across Southern California. These publicity

[100] Nguyen and Pham "History and the Harem Pant."

[101] For more on the sexy senorita see Kropp, *California Vieja*, 247-251.

shots were already a part of the visual language of festivals in the region. By the time the Coachella Valley used harem girls to encourage tourism to the fair, other Southern California fairs had sent stills of scantily clad women to newspaper offices around the region. The Orange Show ads featured young women with oranges, the State Fair young women with lambs, Long Beach celebrations with sexy pirates or mermaids, and the Date Festival with camels and harem pants. The festival girls, as I call them, suggest that the use of sex to sell fairs and agriculture tied to them was not new in the Southland.

The introduction of Arabian costume marked a transition that put women's bodies at the forefront of the Arabian Fantasy project. This represented a significant shift from the earlier costuming and imagery of the Western themed celebrations of the late 1930s and early 1940s. During these celebrations, local citizens dressed in western wear, though newspapers often lamented women's lack of participation. For these festivals the focus remained on the costuming of prominent men, particularly thorough their participation in the Whiskerino competitions. Shifting to the Arabian costuming reorganized the focus from the cowboy to the harem girl and thus reoriented the public's gaze to the Orientalized female body. The masculinity associated with the Wild West was dropped for the widely feminized Orient.

Conclusions: Cultural (Mis)appropriations and the Beardarino Jihad

When fair organizers wanted to re-introduce the Whiskerino style competition in 1950 they tried to adapt it from a Wild West event to one with an Arabian theme. They switched from making facial hair compulsive to requiring costumes. A local newspaper

declared a "'Jehad' [sic] to Crack Down on All Non Costumed 'Arabs'." Newspapers defined the "Jehad" as "Arabian police" who promised "Penalties…too dire to be made public" for those "who failed to heed the Caliph's edict and don the colorful costumes of ancient Bagdad [sic]."[102] The *Indio News* even featured a photograph of an uncostumed man, hands tied behind his back, kneeling before a costumed man brandishing an incredibly large scimitar; the scene implied a decapitation. The caption decreed that the "'Jehad' or Arabian police check on non-conformists as depicted above where the High Executioner Ali Hand beams with malicious pleasure as Abu Ben Sikes prepares to 'deal' with an unconsumed customer."[103]

Today, given our collective knowledge of Jihad and the Middle East, this visual tableau is alarming. It illustrates, however, important ways in which the Coachella Valley interacted with the Greater Middle East at the Date Festival and other landscapes of the Arabian Fantasy. This tale reflects continued misunderstandings of the Middle East. The translation of Jihad to "Arabian Police" lies well outside definitions of the term. While a Jihad can reflect a fight against non-believers, it can also refer to a personal, internal struggle against sin. Once again the Date Festival organizers appropriated an Islamic spiritual reference for their campy community celebration, just as they had invoked the Muslim call to prayer during the beauty pageant. The event coverage hints at continued misunderstandings of the Middle East, not just through the misuse of Islamic practices

[102] "'Jehad' to Crack Down on All Non Costumed 'Arabs'," *Indio News* January 26, 1950 and "Jehad Arabian" Photograph, *Indio News*, February 23, 1950.

[103] "Arabian Costumes" Photograph, *Indio News*, February 16, 1950.

but by rendering the Arab as bloodthirsty. Importantly, the Jihad also signifies an increasingly violent view of the Middle East.

The physical manifestations of Arabian Fantasies in the Coachella Valley imply a multitude of misunderstandings "innocently" embraced as a "celebration." Generally locals thought they were celebrating the Arab at the fair but these dark undertones imply the celebration worked more to reinforce stereotypes of the Middle East. For many Coachella Valley residents embracing such fantasies was an honor bestowed on the Orient. The celebration never negates these problematic renderings, especially considering the Coachella Valley, now associated with the Middle East through its date culture, was assumed to be an expert and thus capable of imparting authenticity. Collectively the manifestations of these fantasies and stereotypes created a regional identity that marked the Coachella Valley as an exotic travel destination within the state. But such appropriations were not always grounded in the realities of the Greater Middle East. Instead they were shaped by centuries of American popular culture around the Orient, increasingly visual with the advent on film, television, and print culture. Thus when a visitor came to the Coachella Valley, stopped at the North African styled Sniff's Date Gardens, or saw the *Arabian Nights* pageant on the Old Baghdad Stage, they were seeing hundreds of years of American Orientalism now positioned as authentic and factual based on the area's association with the date and its Middle Eastern birth place. As relationships with the Middle East shifted over the second half of the twentieth century- new popular understandings would find their way to the Coachella Valley as well.

Conclusion: Fading Fantasies and the Fighting Arabs

When the Riverside County Fair and National Date Festival opened its gates on February 15, 1991 it did so without much reference to its continued Arabian theme. The fair's spokesman told newspapers "Baghdad won't be motioned at all."[1] In fact parade floats took a decidedly patriotic turn; some exchanged their Arabian kitsch for red white and blue flags and flowers. Instead of highlighting the fair's unique theme, the organizers emphasized "the carnival rides; home arts and crafts; off-track betting; junior livestock competitions; fine art, photography and agricultural exhibits."[2] In short, organizers sidestepped the very theme earlier desert residents praised; the festival had become just another *American* county fair.

Of course, this shift reflects its immediate moment, the nation's involvement in the Persian Gulf during Operation Desert Storm, just a month before the festival. But in another sense the quieting of the Arabian theme at the Date Festival, indeed everywhere in the Coachella Valley, reflects larger histories at play. Since at least the early1970s the Coachella Valley had slowly moved away from highlighting Middle Eastern connections. Regional media coverage diminished significantly; the articles that covered the region's dates and Date Festivals failed to included photographs of harem girls and camels. Costuming at the fair diminished as well; fewer families donned fezzes, and fewer businesses encouraged the practice at work. New developments chose names unrelated to the Orient, and date sales shied away from using sheiks to sell their products.

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[1] Mike Kataoka, "Festival to Break Tradition: Baghdad Cut from Pageant," *Press Enterprise,* January 26, 1991.

[2] Laurie K. Schenden, "Indio Still Inspired by 'Arabian Nights' Home Front," *Los Angeles Times*, February 14, 1991.

We began the story of the Coachella Valley's Arabian fantasies in the actual Middle East, where USDA agricultural explorers gathered offshoots and knowledge on date culture. After these explorers and their entrepreneurial counterparts brought back enough date offshoots to begin an industry, direct interactions, which had convinced these explorers of the Orient's inferiority, subsided. Perspectives of these Greater Middle Eastern others continued, however, especially as California-based experiments increased commercial output with breakthroughs on pest control, pollination, storage, and processing. Such research allowed Americans to position their scientific knowledge as superior to a region perceived as backwards and ancient. Growers continued to mark their crops as more sanitary than the "dirty" Orient.

And yet, in another sense, the science of the Coachella Valley, which had contributed to the use of Arabian fantasies, experienced rapid transformation in the 1970s. Throughout the Greater Middle East date groves that were once under the purview of colonial governments and foreign companies, like the Hills Brothers, found new ownership. Indeed importation of foreign dates in the United States reached its peak in 1925 with seventy-nine-million pounds of imports.[3] Currently the number of date imports to the United States rests around fifty-five-million pounds; in 2012 imports represented just over fifty percent of domestic date consumption.[4] The USDA's monopoly on date

[3] Matthew S. Hopper, "The Globalization of Dried Fruit," 177.

[4]For the 2012/2013 market year. United States Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service, "Dates," Fruit and Tree Nut Data, http://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/fruit-and-tree-nut-data/data-by-commodity-imports-and-exports.aspx?reportPath=/TradeR3/TradeTables&programArea=fruit&stat_year=2009&top=5&HardCopy=True&RowsPerPage=25&groupName=Noncitrus&commodityName=Dates#P063bf1d602284665838230 4f4c323659_2_292, accessed June 11, 2014. Decline was due in part to increasing US date production. I

based science faded, especially as nations in the Middle East and Northern Africa reorganized their agricultural industries and educational systems. This led to experimentation and advanced scientific research in the homeland of the date that challenged the very idea that American science and technology was superior or that knowledge of date culture was exclusive to American scientists.

Even at home the USDA's status as a scientific powerhouse for the date industry faded. In 1982, The USDA's seventy-four-year-old Indio date station shuttered its doors, falling to massive government cuts during the Regan administration. In a sense, the station was a victim of its own success. The long history of experimentation had eradicated or controlled several palm pests and diseases. The last USDA caretaker of the station confirmed that "Growers may have the know-how to continue producing healthy dates," though he lamented that "some of the creativity and excitement of the business will be gone."[5] But the cutbacks had been a long time coming. The station was a two person operation by 1970, housing just the USDA scientist and a secretary. When the stations closed, its massive research library moved to the University of California, Riverside. Incidentally, date experimentation also relocated there, where funding was more easily accessible. Although a generation of the greatest agricultural and scientific

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would venture to guess consumption declined after World War II as access to inexpensive mass produced snacks and sweets grew in popularity as did premade baking mixes, which did not call for dates. Shifting politics in the Greater Middle East and stateside importation regulations probably also played a role. Percentage of domestic consumption from The United States Department of Agriculture, "Table H-16--Imports as a Share of Domestic Dried Fruit Consumption, 1975/76 to date," *Yearbook Tables* http://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/fruit-and-tree-nut-data/yearbook-tables.aspx#.U86YaTS-2Sp, accessed July 22, 2014.

[5] Ann Japenga, "Research Facility Phased Out: Palms Down on Indio's Date Station," *Los Angeles Times*, August 3, 1982.

minds had turned to the USDA for employment in the first half of the twenty century, they increasingly stayed within the confines of the academy as the years wore on.

The collapse of date research centered in the Coachella Valley lay in part with major changes to the regional industry. By the 1970s big agricultural business had grown. When the date industry began individuals and families joined the mix, hoping to own their piece of the Jeffersonian dream. As such, several mom-and-pop date operations began. As these individuals aged out of farm life, their children often chose to leave the industry all together, a proposition sweetened by the increasing value of land, especially in once date heavy areas like Palm Desert. There, housing demand meant land once used for date palms became worth more as land for homes and country clubs. Palms were removed from these populated regions and placed eastward, in less populated regions of Coachella, Thermal, Mecca, and Oasis. Agri-businesses could, of course, hire scientists and centralized caretakers for the palms, which remapped the grower-USDA relationship that previously kept the date station viable and vital.

But the closing of mom-and-pop date groves in favor of corporate agribusiness also remapped the second theme of this work, the idea of the Orient as a place to consume. Between the 1910s and 1970s many of the date growers sold dates via wholesale outlets; mail order business and small date shops however, increased profits and led many growers to these options. As we have seen, several of these businesses took Hills Brother's lead and incorporated the Orient into these business endeavors. From pyramid shaped date shops to the simultaneous embrace of Oriental romance and positioning of American dates as more sanitary, these small businesses contributed

immensely to the Arabian fantasies and stereotypes of the day. Agribusiness, on the other hand, sold almost exclusively wholesale. Rather than relying on Arabian romance to sell their dates, especially since the allure of the Orient was fading from American popular culture, these large businesses marketed their crop as a health food. When the roadside stands closed, the desert lost several architectural references to the Greater Middle East. These buildings, however, like their owners, were aging out of the date industry. Like most roadside attractions, they were designed and constructed quickly and faded rapidly in the desert heat.

It is easy to attribute the Coachella Valley's shift away from Arabian fantasies in the 1970s and beyond to changing attitudes toward the Middle East. Yet one cannot overlook more local changes. In addition to shifts in the date industry, the Coachella Valley's population expanded drastically in the second-half of the twentieth century, due in no small part to the invention of air conditioning. Only 5,300 residents called the city of Indio home in 1950, just a few years after the Arabian Date Festival theme was embraced. By 1970, however, the number had reached 14,459 residents, increasing to over 21,000 in 1980 and nearly 37,000 in 1990.[6] Many of these residents were newcomers to Indio and the surrounding area, lured in by new jobs, especially in the hospitality and service industries, but many were retirees. As such, few had direct ties to the date industry or direct contact with those that did. As more national chains moved in,

[6]California Department of Finance, "Historical Census Populations of Counties Incorporated Cities in California, 1850-2010," California State Data Center, http://www.dof.ca.gov/research/demographic/state_census_data_center/historical_census_1850-2010/view.php, accessed June 11, 2014. The regional also became increasingly Mexican and Mexican American. One might argue that people of color were less interested in signing onto Oriental fantasies. As this population grew it relied less and less on these fantasies as a form of community development.

fewer small businesses required their staffs dress up during fair time or directly participated in boosterism tied to the Arabian fantasies. When the Date Festival rolled around, many were more interested in the big name entertainment and the fair rides, expressing ambivalence towards the Arabian costumes and pageant.

Long time locals held firmly to the theme and lamented the fading popularity of playing Arab around them. In February of 1985 Frank Adams, a resident of the Coachella Valley, wrote "In more recent years, the closeness between the National Date Festival and the community has diminished. There is little enthusiasm for costuming in the community."[7] The departure from playing Arab was perceived as a break in community relations, I would argue, due in part to the changing community dynamics described above. This departure, however, further reflects changing national views of the Orient and practices of "othering." At this writing, Queen Scheherazade and court still wear harem girl costumes; the pageant cast members dresses as caliphs (though Sinbad was rendered more like a member of Pirates of the Caribbean than his Middle Eastern origins in the 2014 pageant); and ticket takers occasionally don vaguely Middle Easter garb at the fair. For the most part, however, despite the continued offer of free admission, the public does not wear costumes to the festival and no local businesses decorate for the fair. Notably this downplay of costuming also occurred in the media. While the Southland presses continued to cover the Date Festival on a yearly basis, they did so in increasingly small pieces regulated to the calendar section. National attention from *Life* and other

[7] Frank Adams, Unpublished Document, February 1985, Coachella Valley History Museum.

magazines, faded as did the frequency and number of photographs in regional papers like the *Los Angeles Times*.

By the 1970s, the tradition of harnessing popular culture of the Middle East in landscape had faded as well. The closing of small mom-and-pop businesses, meant the loss of Arabian inspired architecture and businesses, including Sniff's Date Gardens, The Garden of Eden Pyramid Date Shop, Sun Gold Date Gardens, and the Aladdin Theater to name a few. The relocation of many date palms to more uninhabited eastern valley locations also rendered the area less like a Middle Eastern oasis. Moreover, the Orient was no longer needed to contextualize the desert. By the 1950s, Palm Springs was well-known throughout the United States. Thus Americans were familiar with the desert, no longer as a foreign setting for the Bible or the *Arabian Nights* but as a place of sunshine, leisure, and luxury accessible in Southern California.

Increasingly Indio and the Eastern Coachella Valley became an extension of Palm Springs, as a place of relaxation with country clubs, polo fields, swimming pools, and golf courses. The agriculture, though still present, was seen as secondary to an increasing leisure market. The region had always tapped the vacation crowd through agriculture, encouraging Palm Springs visitors to take the "Date Palm Highway," visit roadside date stands, and enjoy the Date Festival. But as the century continued, the dates faded in importance. After marketing itself as the Date Capitol of the United States for decades, Indio eventually tried a new motto rendering a "City of Festivals" with a Tamale Festival and the Coachella and Stagecoach Music Festivals alongside the Riverside County Fair and National Date Festival. In the 1950s, for example, the widespread press coverage of

the Date Festival would have rendered Indio instantly recognizable to Southlanders as the American home of the *Arabian Nights*. By the 2000s, it was nationally known as the home of Coachella Music Festival.

While local conditions affected the Arabian theme, more national factors were far more important in quieting the fantasies. By the 1960s, various civil rights groups called attention to the stereotyping involved in Hollywood films, among other visual representations. Fighting for more accurate representations drew attention to the negative ways in which groups like African Americans, Latinos, Asians, Native Americans, and Jews were portrayed in the media, resulting in a slow movement away from the stereotypes.[8] Of course these issues remain a problem today, but the civil rights movements made blackface-type performances unacceptable. These historic movements did not necessarily have a direct effect on the way Arabs were portrayed in the media, especially given the simultaneous re-positioning of Arabs as terrorists and villains in the latter half of the twentieth century. It does however, signify a change in the way minority groups were portrayed in the United States and the beginning of the end of playing other. Although as "ghetto" college sorority parties and fence jumping contests make clear, the disturbing tradition of cultural cross-dressing continues.

More importantly, however, a shift in America's perception of the Middle East directly shaped the abandonment of the Coachella Valley as America's Arabia. The stereotypes at play in the first half of the twentieth century were not always flattering.

[8] Matthew Jaber Stilffler, "Arabs, Muslims and the Legacy of Media Stereotypes," Reclaiming Identity: Dismantling Arab Stereotypes Blog, entry posted July 31, 2013 http://www.arabstereotypes.org/blog/201307/31-419.

Though the Orient appeared as a place of romance, luxury, sensuality, and wealth it was often described in opposite terms, full of poverty, danger, depraved sexuality, and thieving, aggressive peoples. By the 1970s, much of the romance faded away; increasingly Arab peoples found themselves portrayed as terrorists or greedy oil barons. Of course the hyper- sexuality of the Middle East continued while a simultaneous view emerged that rendered Middle Eastern women as oppressed victims. Throughout the century, however, the Greater Middle East was painted as a backwards, un-modern place.

But beginning in the 1970s Anglo-Americans tuning into the news saw a different Arabia, not the fantasy land of Indio but the actual Middle East, ushering out an embrace of Arabian fantasies.[9] Melani McAlister suggests that following World War II, the United States, whose interest in the Greater Middle East lay ever increasingly in the oil fields, worked strategically to "distinguishing the Middle East from the rest of the Orient."[10] As the United States began to "dramatically [expand] its political, economic, and military power in the region," popular culture figured heavily in making the Middle East, as a geographic space, important to Americans. Thus the vague paradigm of the Orient no longer served U.S. foreign relations. In October 1973, for example, the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OAPEC) placed an embargo on oil to the United States as a response to their alliance with Israel against Egypt and Syria's

[9] Of course there was never a monolithic audience, people's engagement with the Middle East varied based on religion, race, economics, exposure to popular culture and so many more variables. For more on African American engagement with the Orient see Nance, *How the Arabian Nights*, and McAlister, *Epic Encounters.*

[10] McAlister, *Epic Encounters*, 40.

attacks. The result included a gas shortage that severely affected the nation and its transportation and leisure habits well into the next year.

Indeed several Southern California newspapers tied the so-called energy crisis to the festival, an important discussion given that many of the annual fairgoers drove to Indio from the Greater Los Angeles region, the Inland Empire, or San Diego County. The *Los Angeles Times* cited the festival as a "test case for fairs this year in California," assuring potential visitors that the fair would remain open alongside local gas stations.[11] The *San Diego Union's* Auto Editor lamented the difficulty of travel with the fuel shortages. The solution, he mused; "your car can be the magic carpet that takes you to Indio this week to attend the 1974 National Date festival," on only half a tank of gas."[12] The oil crisis served as a way in which the real Middle East, as opposed to the pop-cultural, imagined one, appeared in American's everyday lives. That the embargo had negative consequences on the nation contributed to a growing vilification of the larger Arab world. At the Date Festival the mention of closed gas stations and limited travel alongside mentions of the *Arabian Nights* pageant and Queen Scheherazade, linked the authentic Middle East with Indio's long imagined one.

By 1979 the Middle East was yet again in full view of the American public. In response to U.S. support of an overthrown leader, Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, Iranian militants took more than sixty American hostages from the U.S. embassy in Iran. Until their release in January 1981 the hostages, appeared on the nightly news, once again

[11] "Date Festival to go on Despite Gas Shortage," *The Los Angeles Times*, February 13, 1974.

[12] Dick Applegate, "Indio's Got a Date for a Festival," *San Diego Union*, February 17, 19174.

reminding Americans of a Middle East decidedly different than the fun-loving one found in Indio. The hostage crisis remains one of the most widely covered events in the history of television; broadcasters signed off reminding viewers how long the hostages had been held and counting the days proved an American cultural phenomenon.[13] The hostage crisis was never very far away from Indio boosters. As the fair manager wrote in the souvenir 1980 schedule, "Sometimes when we find the world unsettled it is often comforting to find someplace to go where there is joy and entertainment."[14] Indeed the weight of the hostage crisis weighed heavily on the minds of many Americans. As Melani McAlister has argued, the "public consumption" of the conflict reinforced changing perceptions of the Greater Middle East as a place of terrorism.[15]

The Persian Gulf War (1990-1991), of course, also influenced the Date Festival.[16] American newspapers occasionally helped readership contextualize this conflict by drawing parallels between the Arabian Peninsula and the Coachella Valley. The practice was especially well timed; though the physical war lasted less than two months, this time frame overlapped with the Date Festival.[17] The *Los Angeles Times,* for example,

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[13] Melani McAlister, *Epic Encounters,*198-234.

[14] Riverside County Fair and National Date Festival, *Souvenir Pictorial*, 1980.

[15] McAlister, *Epic Encounters*, 200.

[16] The specifics of the conflict are too detailed to include here. The United States entered into war, alongside Allied forces from the West and other Middle Eastern Nations, against Iraq, which had recently invaded Kuwait. For more on the Gulf War see Michael B. Oren, *Power, Faith, and Fantasy: America in the Middle East 1776 to the Present*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2007), 563-571.

[17] While troops were in the region prior, the United States Congress authorized war on January 12, 1991 and major airstrikes began on January 17. Ground attacks began on February 24th and lasted only a few short days. The Date Festival fit within this larger time line, running February 15- 24, 1991.

recounted an exotic setting with desert sands, date palms, oases, and a "marketplace, minarets and stone arches," not to mention Moorish architecture, the town of Mecca, and the Arabic styled script found in surrounding towns.[18] The paper went on, "This could be the Persian Gulf, but there are no troops positioned here, no Scuds or Patriot missiles."[19]

Given such comparisons, the Date Festival's organizers worried over associations between their Arabian themed fair and the active war. Fair leadership worried over attendance and wondered if people would "connect us with Saddam Hussein?"[20] To calm these fears the fair removed references to its Baghdad stage in marketing material. Additionally it reworked its musical pageant, removing "all references to anything that was in Iraq…place names, real place names, in that part of the world were removed," substituted with made up names taken from the Arabic language.[21] The fair manager clearly stated, "We're not involved in the Arab cause, it's just kind of unusual timing."[22] Of course Arabs were actually on both sides of the fighting, as Iraqis and as troops from allied forces from Saudi Arabia, Syria, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Oman, and Egypt; so the language used was misleading to say the least.[23]

[18] Schenden, "Indio Still Inspired."

[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Katoka, "Festival to Break Tradition"

[22] Schenden, "Indio Still Inspired."

[23] Of course not all people from these nations, or even from Iraq, consider themselves Arab, but in most cases a majority does.

Organizers, though worried about the connections, claimed they heard very few, if any, complaints about the theme, precisely because the Southland was so familiar with the festival's forty-three year thematic history. Others, however, expressed discontent. Area resident Ruben Mollinado told the *Press Enterprise*, "I think that [the theme] is kind of a kick in the head (to fighting forces)."[24] The festival walked a fine line. In the eyes of many Americans anything associated with the Middle East was of the enemy, taboo, and dangerous. The fair wanted to appear patriotic given the nation's status at war but they had too much invested, architecturally, communally, and financially to completely divest themselves of the theme. In the end, the camel races went on, the *Arabian Nights* pageant still entertained guests, and Queen Scheherazade retained her title, albeit wearing red, white, and blue costumes.[25] If anything, growers actually hoped that an embargo on Iraqi goods and the war itself might increase domestic sale of their dates, especially given heavy damage to Basra, Iraqi's date growing center.[26]

The events following September 11, 2001 brought drastic changes to the Coachella Valley's Arabian fantasies. Lorraine Ali, writing for *Newsweek* in March 2003, on the brink of the second Gulf War, recalled a visit to the 1973 fair with her father, a native of Baghdad. She recalled that her father, "wasn't offended by the show's imagery of flying carpets and bottled genies: it was too innocent. He called it 'that other

[24] Katoka, "Festival to Break Tradition."

[25] Ibid.

[26] Schenden, "Indio Still Inspired." Indeed there was a downturn in the percentage of imported dates in American date consumption during this time period. In 1989/1990 thirty-seven percent of dates consumed in the United States were imported while the number fell to nineteen percent for the 1990/1991 year. United States Department of Agriculture, "Table H-16."

Baghdad.'"[27] When Ali returned to the fair after 2001, she noticed alarming differences. The fair once again distanced itself from its Arabian theme: the camel drivers stopped wearing Arabian costumes to instead wear military outfits, the pageant again dropped its Baghdad allusions, and patriotic references saturated the fair.[28] The camel races' announcer surmised that the "Arab dress would make [the public] feel uncomfortable. It's a strange time. What is appropriate right now?"[29] While blackface had long been rendered inappropriate in popular culture, the concern over the Arab costumes here wasn't about stereotyping the Middle East; instead the events of 9/11 and the decade long war that followed them repositioned the people of Greater Middle East as enemies, and the use of such costumes made some worry over whether or not they fit in a newly minted form of patriotism. Indeed another Date Festival vendor recalled that despite the free entrance for costumed individuals, fairgoers were saying "To hell with it, I'll pay $7 before I'll put a head scarf on."[30] Here place, religion, and region collapsed together with a simple reference to a "headscarf."

Ali argued that the fair felt as though it was "apologizing for once having promoted a place and people whose very existence is now viewed as anti-American."[31] What a strange road the Date Festival, indeed the entire Coachella Valley, had followed.

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[27] Lorraine Ali, "Strange Days in Indio," *Newsweek*, March 10, 2003, 57.

[28] Ali took in the fair in February of 2003, just before the United States launched Operation Iraqi Freedom in March of that year. Baghdad, as the capitol of Iraq, appeared in media discussions prior to the war in addition to widespread coverage when it was captured in April 2003.

[29] Joe Hendrick, quoted in Ali, "Strange Days in Indio."

[30] Ibid.

[31] Ibid.

When the region began its uses of Arabian fantasy at the turn of the twentieth century, it harnessed a fascination the American public had with the Greater Middle East. As the Arabian fantasy grew in the deserts of Southern California, so too did the nation's embrace, particularly with Hollywood's epic desert romances and Egyptomania following the discovery of King Tutankhamen.

And yet at the turn of the twenty-first century the Arabian Fantasies had failed the Coachella Valley; American popular culture now viewed the entire swath of the Greater Middle East not as a daring adventure but a terrifying enemy, a process put into play in the 1970s. Certainly Arabs had been vilified even with the *Sheik,* but now the romance that followed him had faded. In Ali's lifetime the fair had gone, from an "innocent" festival celebrating an imagined Middle East, to one ever distancing itself from a now stigmatized region. Ali's claim that the Date Festival was, in a sense, apologizing for its Arabian theme was hard to refute, especially given the shooting gallery she found on site, where "teenagers [took] aim at a sketch of a generic Arab."[32] The metaphor is clear. Arabia, and its people – or rather a stereotyped version of a generic figure - were now an enemy, a target for annihilation, not a thing to be celebrated.

Ali's article marks a turning point where more people of North African or Middle Eastern descent encountered the festival and made their voices heard regarding its cultural appropriations. Prior to this moment, reactions from Middle Easterners or Arab Americans were filtered through booster voices. For example, in 1991the fair's executive director recalled "A couple years ago, there were a couple of Middle Eastern gals

[32] Ibid.

here…They were overjoyed that (the fair) showed off a bit of their culture. They'd never seen anything like it here."[33] We do not know who these women were (or if they even existed), where they came from, or if they were really "overjoyed" or simply being polite. But in general this is how boosters portrayed Middle Eastern visitors to their region for nearly a century. The few people of Middle Eastern descent who arrived in time to see any Arabian fantasies at play were integral publicity tools that rendered the Date Festival as authentic and gave the approval of the entire Middle East to the fair, likely based on a few kind words made to a host or colleague.

Lorraine Ali, on the other hand, while invoking earlier festivals as innocent with their flying carpet imagery, clearly states that her family didn't attend the fair "out of a sense of Arab pride."[34] In this case, however, Arab Americans took offense that their heritage was portrayed as something shameful and innately unpatriotic. And yet these two concepts were linked; as a romantic yet backward sheiks or hated enemy, people from the Greater Middle East were rendered inferior through these fantasies. Ali's intercession in this history of America's Arabia is vital. The renderings of a Middle Eastern "other" do not ever simply market the Coachella Valley; they also reinforced larger ideas about the Middle East, Northern Africa, and its peoples, both at home and abroad.

And yet, as I write this final chapter, a new outcry against the Arabian fantasy has emerged. The battle, quite literally, of what it means to be an Arab is focusing attention

[33] Schenden, "Indio Still Inspired."

[34] Ali, "Strange Days in Indio."

on the long history of appropriation in the region. Around 1930, the Eastern Coachella Valley's only high school, Coachella Valley Union, adopted a nickname for their sports team. Though they had been casually called the "date-pickers" and the "farmers," they embraced a new mascot, the Arab.[35] Early renderings of the Arab reflected American imagery of the Middle East. The first mascot depicted a fierce Bedouin tribesman in flowing robes and head coverings, riding a horse and holding a spear. (Figure 5.1) Within the decade the mascot image switched to a man in billowing pants and puffy sleeves wearing a fez and brandishing a large scimitar. (Figure 5.1) By the 1950s a new image had emerged. The cartoonish image, only a face, featured a hook nose, snarled grimace, gold tooth and earring, full beard and mustache, and prominent fez. (Figure 5.1)

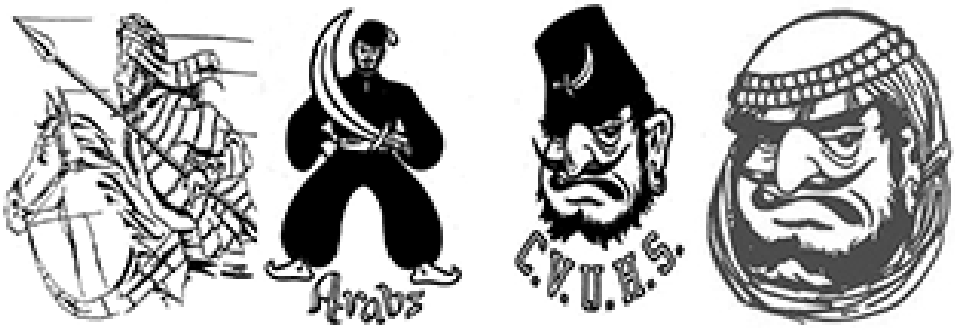

Figure 5.1: Images of Coachella Valley High School's Mascots. Courtesy of the Coachella Valley Alumni Association.

This image seems eerily reminiscent of Jews in German World War II propaganda. Importantly, however, it fell within depictions of Arabs in the United States during this time frame. I uncovered several children's cartoons beginning in the 1930s

[35] Lateef Munigin and Michael Martinez, "Group Demands California High School Change 'Arab Team Name, Mascot," CNN.com, November 7, 2013, http://www.cnn.com/2013/11/07/us/california-arab-team-mascot/.

that universally featured Arabs with hooked noses, similar mustaches and beards, golden earrings, and snarled teeth. These include several Popeye cartoons like *Popeye the Sailor Meets Aladdin and His Wonderful Lamp* (1939); Looney Tunes' Porky Pig's French Legion films *Ali Baba Bound* (1940); and multiple Bugs Bunny shorts including *Hare-Abian Nights* (1959). [36] These Hollywood images clearly influenced the Arabian mascot developed during this time period. To the high school, the new mascot renderings highlighted their fiercely competitive sportsmanship; of course board members and the student body wanted a mascot that could intimidate opponents. Nor were their choices unique; schools around the nation appropriated ethnic others as mascot, particularly Native Americans who were similarly positioned as ferocious, aggressive opponents.[37]

Local tradition holds that when visiting Saudi Arabians saw the mascot in the 1980s they suggested that the fez be replaced by a head scarf, citing that the fez symbolized colonialism that the nation was no longer under. The school voted and a new mascot emerged, this time wearing a kaffiay, a traditional headpiece worn in many Arab nations. (Figure 5.1) This tale, retold often, including on the Coachella Valley High School Alumni Association's website, provides crucial insights into the larger Arabian fantasies at place. First, actual Middle Easterners, rather a few men who stand in for all

[36]Also *Popeye the Sailor Meets Sinbad the Sailor* (1936); *Popeye the Sailor Meets Ali Baba's Forty Thieves* (1937); Chevrolet's *The Princess and the Pauper* (1939); *Little Beau Porky* (1936); *Sahara-Hare* (1955). These images still circulate: many of these films are available to view on you-tube. And they continued: from Rocky and Bullwinkle's the "Ruby Yacht of Omar Khayyam" (1963-1964) to Disney's Aladdin (1992). For a complete listing of films that feature Arab stereotypes, including cartoons, see Jack G. Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People* (New York: Olive Branch Press, 2001).

[37] Local examples of this othering via mascots, include Palm Springs High School's Indians and later, Indio High School's Rajahs and Palm Desert High's Aztecs. Schools around the nation occasionally adopted other mascots from the Orient; the Sultans of Bagdad [sic], Arizona, the Sultan High School Turks in Sultan, Washington, and, more regionally, the Hollywood High Sheiks, the Alhambra High School Moors, The Sultana High School Sultans in Hesperia, and the Imperial Valley College Arabs.

Arabs, give their approval to the Arabian fantasies at play by not challenging the mascot and its disturbing image. Instead, the tale often goes, they delight in it. This adds an air of authenticity, particularly when the headscarf replaces the fez. Unsurprisingly, however, this story also reinforces misunderstandings of the Middle East. Saudi Arabia, for example, was never under French rule, as the Alumni Association's website claims. While the fez did represent colonialism for various peoples at various moments, here it is simply applied to the entire Middle East and its true meanings are lost. The website also calls the head scarf a hijab, which is a head covering worn by women, not by men. Of course this invocation of the hijab likely comes post 9/11 when increasing media coverage of women's rights in the Arab world gained attention during the so-called War on Terror. Though foreigners had suggested a small alteration to the mascot, the high school failed to even get the story right and simply blended misunderstandings and fantasies of the Middle East back into their mascot.

For much of the Arab mascot's long history, however, it simply existed without public discussion of its appropriateness. Recent national dialogue about the Washington Redskin's mascot, however, changed that.[38] On November 1, 2013 the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee sent a letter to Coachella Valley Unified School District's superintendent citing the mascot as an example "of gross stereotyping, which must not be tolerated."[39] The letter maintained that halftime performances of the Arab,

[38] Protests of the Redskins mascots actually began in the 1970s and occurred regularly through the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s. In 2013 the controversy received burst of national attention in the print, television, and online media.

[39] Abed A. Ayoub to Darryl S. Adams, November 1, 2013, http://adc.org/fileadmin/ADC/Pdfs/ADC_CVHS_Letter.PDF.

who often watched a female belly dancer in a harem girl outfit dance for him (Figure 5.2), was "Orientalist stereotyping" that, together with the mascot image, "[commended] and [enforced] the negative stereotypes of an entire ethnic group, millions of whom are citizens of this nation." [40]

Figure 5.2: Arab Mascot and Belly Dancing "Genie" at Football Game in November 2013. Photograph by the Author.

Some Coachella Valley High School alumni and students appeared shocked at the resulting media storm, particularly because rather than directly discuss the issue at hand with the school first, the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, contacted the press. By the end of the week Al Jazeera, CNN, NPR, and ABC's nightly news, among others, had run stories about the mascot. One upset alumnus argued, "The comment they make is that it has a hook-nose Arab. We have been using the snarling face to instill fear

[40] Ibid.

in the opponent."[41] Yet the snarling face was precisely the problem; the mascot invoked U.S. cultural understandings of the Arab as evil, ferocious, hostile, and terror inducing. No matter its use, even as a mascot, the "snarling face" racialized a vast and varied group of peoples. The students, among the poorest in the region and overwhelmingly Mexican and Mexican American, argued that they were fiercely proud of their mascot and meant no disrespect. Long ignored and facing inferior school conditions, some felt frustrated that few cared about their educational opportunities but were angered by their mascot.

Further frustrations stemmed from the media's lack of contextualization and the viral circulation of thirty-second clips that failed to detail the nuanced history of the area. Coachella Valley High School did not simply pick an Arab Mascot in recent years. Their mascot evolved alongside the Arabian fantasies from North African styled date shops to costumed harem girls. Indeed it predated the pop-cultural assumption that erroneously equated Arab identity with terrorism. While a history of the region's Arabian fantasy certain illuminates America's evolving popular understandings of the Greater Middle East, it could not negate the fact that the Arab mascot, alongside these Arabian fantasies, appropriated the region for the Coachella Valley's own desires. The mascot was indeed a prime example of these Arabian fantasies that happened to survive much longer, one that, innocent or not, dehumanized Middle Eastern people.

The alumni association president emphasized, "It wasn't to discriminate. It was to say, thank you, Middle East, Iraq, Algeria, all those areas, we bought [the date] from

[41] Mungin and Martinez, "Group Demands."

them, the date shoots and now the date industry."[42] One alumnus even pointed out that following the events of 9/11, "some people called for the school to drop the 'Arabs' name because they linked it to terrorists, but the school defended the name. [The alumni] said that it showed how the school is honoring Arabs, not degrading them."[43] Given the extreme poverty of the Eastern Coachella Valley as well as the political posturing of the precarious economic situation of local schools throughout the State, the school and its alumni also expressed concern over the cost of changing the mascot, in some cases calling for the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee to foot the bill for any changes that might be made.

Spokesman for the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, Abed Ayoub, did agree that the mascot was likely not originally "intended to offend Arab-Americans."[44] He encouraged mascot supporters to consider, however, that by today's standards the image was outdated and offensive. Ayoub wanted more than just a change in the mascot image, "We have an opportunity to talk about the Arab culture," he said, "to talk about our community and the history of the community here, and how we can incorporate those."[45] For the group, changing the image of the Arab, no matter where it

[42] *Erin Burnett Outfront*, CNN, November 7, 2013.

[43] David Olson, "Coachella Valley: Call to Abandon School's 'Arabs' Mascot," *Press Enterprise*, November 7, 2013.

[44]Olsen, "Coachella Valley."

[45] Brett Kelman, "Arab Anti-discrimination Group Prefers Original Arab Mascot," *Desert Sun*, November 20, 2013.

appeared- from films to regional mascots- was crucial.[46] The school agreed to meetings and as of August 2014 was considering retiring the mascot image in favor of a less cartoonish version. Whether the students, staff, and alumni of the school meant to offend with their mascot was irrelevant; the unchallenged presence of the hooked-nose figure replicated notions of evil, dangerous, and aggressive Middle Easterners, an image that had grown exponentially since the 1970s. The mascots change is long overdue.

The story of the Arab mascot, however, is an important one. We see here, for the first time, a widespread dialogue about the Coachella Valley's use of Arabian fantasies and its direct impact on Arab Americans. The Arab mascot, in short, matters deeply to the self styling of both groups: residents of the Coachella Valley, who styled their regional identity around the date's connections to the Middle East, and actually descendents of Middle Easterners whose history with Orientalism has rendered them and their ancestors backwards, sexualized, and, increasingly, violent. "Celebrations" of the Greater Middle East were never truly innocent in the Coachella Valley, despite whatever intentions locals held. They had long worked to reinforce racial hierarchies, encourage consumption of the Orient, and sell dates and the desert. As the long twentieth century increasingly vilified the region, the stakes grew higher and kitchy costumes and Baghdad sets no longer appear guiltless on the parallel landscapes. Today, naiveté is a poor excuse for the reproduction of such stereotypes which limit real understandings and connections between the deserts of the Greater Middle East and those of Southern California.

[46]The mascot was a way to challenge stereotypes and encourage the nation to see Arab Americans as something beyond "bombers, billionaires or belly dancers." Greg Lee, "National Group Calls for CVHS to Drop Mascot," KESQ News, November 12, 2013, http://www.kesq.com/kesq/national-group-calls-for-cvhs-to-drop-mascot/22836270.

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- Vertical Files

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