

A myriad of events
leading up to the
summer of 2017



Laura Secor Book Talk



Lebanese Olive Oil

Postcard from New York

By Lina Beydoun

In collaboration with the Bard Globalization and International Affairs program, LAU's New York Academic Center hosted author Laura Secor, whose new book *Children of Paradise: The Struggle for the Soul of Iran* is an unforgettable portrait of a nation and its people striving for change. Drawing on her extensive experience of reporting on Iran, Secor narrated the extraordinary history of the country since 1979, when it became a revolutionary theocracy. She enthralled the audience with the breathtaking drama that has since unfolded, as religious thinkers, political operatives, poets, journalists and activists have imagined and reimagined what the country should be. "Iranians," she said, "have drawn as deeply on the traditions of the West as of the East and have acted upon their beliefs with urgency and passion."

Filled with rare photographs, LAU alumnus and television celebrity Zaven Kouyoumdjian's book *Lebanon On Screen: The Greatest Moments of Lebanese Television and Pop Culture*

made members of the audience gasp as they recognized famous faces. In partnership with the Consul General of Lebanon Majdi Ramadan, the second literary event of the season featured a lively discussion on the role of television and pop culture in bringing the Lebanese people together. "Television came to tell the Lebanese about the Lebanese," said Kouyoumdjian. Leading the discussion, TV host Rita Zihenni noted that she sought out YouTube clips of Lebanese television to show her children, in the hope that it would "make them more Lebanese." Helping young people reconnect with their parents and their roots is exactly what Kouyoumdjian hoped the book would achieve: "What is a nation? It is a collection of memories."

Olive oil — often known as "liquid or green gold" — was the focus of an April gathering at the center. "The olive trees of the town of Bchaale in Lebanon, estimated to be six thousand years old, are the oldest in the world," said event co-host Consul General Ramadan. The



Zaven Kouyoumdjian Book Talk



Phoenician Expedition



Poetry Reading



Poetry Reading

olive tree is a symbol of abundance and peace, mentioned in heavenly books and immortalized by poets as a tree of blessing, he pointed out. Then, using all five senses, Julie Ann Sageer — a Lebanese-American celebrity chef, author and public television host also known as Julie Taboulie — delved into a full exploration of Lebanon's olive oil landscape. "This event is so special," said Sageer. "It spotlights Lebanese products, bridges the gap between our two countries, and transports the olive oil directly to the U.S." Twelve oil producers and coops participated in the event. LAU graduate Tania Bou Raad, who represented Zejd, stressed that the center "was the ideal setting for raising awareness of Lebanese olive oil among the local community." The center's director, Lina Beydoun echoed Bou Raed's sentiments. "This event brought together community members, not only to celebrate the ancient olive trees that have been cultivated since Phoenician times, but also to honor an identity and cultural heritage."

Another voyage was a focal point of discussion in April, that of the first sailors to cross the Atlantic and discover the Americas. Could it have been the Phoenicians? The British sailor, adventurer, expedition leader and entrepreneur Captain Philip Beale tackled these challenging questions and told a spellbound audience of an expedition to take place on a replica of a Phoenician merchant ship to prove the crossing. Beale explained how the Phoenicians had the navigational capabilities to reach the Americas two thousand years before Christopher Columbus. "They were the masters of the sea, and may have even discovered the pole star and circumnavigated Africa as early as 600 B.C.," he said. "Shipwrecks, books, artefacts and ship models point to their amazing ship building techniques," he continued. "They hold all the ace cards — strong ships, navigational strength and over 200 trading settlements on the eastern Atlantic coast." The Phoenicians Before Columbus Expedition in September will demonstrate

if the crossing was possible.

In May, the center, in partnership with the Consul General of Lebanon and the New Pen League, welcomed literary enthusiasts to an evening of poetry, music and song. The event began with a musical medley of Arabic poems that were turned into songs, featuring oud player Mario Chamoun and vocalist Rita Zihenni. Five accomplished poets — Youssef Abdel Samad, Mansour Ajami, Akram Alkatreb, Fadi Saad and Firas Suleiman — hailing from Lebanon and Syria, took turns reciting their poetry in both Arabic and English. They amused the audience with *ghazal* poetry and moved them with poems of war and human suffering. Alternate laughter and applause reverberated around the room. "In our culture, poetry is the highest of art forms ... we are lucky to be able to keep the Arabic poetic culture alive in New York," said New Pen League member Edgar Choueiri.