

Israeli farmer remixes ancient scents near Dead Sea

Author:

Fri, 2019-08-23 22:03

ALMOG, Palestinian Territories: At his farm near the Dead Sea in occupied Palestinian territory, Israeli Guy Erlich remixes blends of perfume and incense that he believes were used by royalty in the biblical era.

He claims to have re-created a scent that Cleopatra may have dabbed on her skin and oils that anointed ancient Jewish kings.

With a passion for ancient plants, Erlich set out in 2008 to try to grow them himself to turn into fragrances and other products, on a small hill in the West Bank, near the Israeli settlement of Almog.

He now cultivates around 60 biblical plants, from which he creates creams, perfumes, soap and honey, and attracts tourists who come to learn about the rare plants and take in their scents.

Erlich, 48, dreams of bringing back into widespread circulation the balm of Gilead, used medicinally during the ancient Roman era and referenced in the Bible.

He's even named his farm after it.

The balm is thought to have been used by the ancient Greek physician, Galen, to heal infections and wounds, he says.

He mentions Jewish teachings from the Talmud and Christian sources that name it.

A farmer before making a job out of his fascination for biblical agriculture – some of which has long disappeared – Erlich says he has read everything he can find on the subject.

Elaine Solowey, a desert agriculture specialist at Israel's Arava Institute for Environmental Studies, helped him to identify some of his plants.

Speaking to AFP, she said that she could not say for sure if Erlich's plants were those found in biblical times since more research was necessary.

"The species produced by Mr. Erlich are probably those cultivated in the region during antiquity, but we can't be certain," Solowey said.

"Many plant species mentioned in the Bible have disappeared and it is vital that we figure out how to study the subject," she said, adding that more funding was needed.

Erlich makes honey with the flowers of Boswellia trees that yield frankincense – one of the offerings to the baby Jesus in the Bible's New Testament.

The trees grow in places like Somalia, Yemen, Ethiopia and Oman but Erlich has planted them at his Balm of Gilead Farm.

For now, the small leafed species takes up only a limited part of his farm, but the honey he produces sells at a premium price: \$1,000 (900 euros) per kilogram.

The farm is currently quite spartan and he hopes in time to be able to develop his tourist center, a simple, wooden structure that shields visitors from the sun next to his fields.

Wearing boots and a large hat, he explains to visitors the story behind each

plant and its name.

Erlich is seeking to attract investors but says it is difficult since his farm is in occupied territory.

For Palestinians, his work has more than a whiff of controversy, given the location of the farm.

Abdallah Abu Rahma, a Palestinian Authority official who monitors Israeli settlements, was unequivocal when asked about the project.

"Everything produced in the settlements is illegal," he said. "That's why we call for a boycott of such products."

Settlement expansion has accelerated under Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, a policy that detractors say reduces the chances of a two-state solution to the Jewish nation's conflict with the Palestinians.

But Erlich is undeterred.

Noting the ancient Egyptians' use of fragrances and the possibility that several of the plants he grows were used at that time, he advertises his perfume as a type used by Cleopatra.

"Offer your wife Cleopatra's perfume, the fragrances of antiquity, the scents of Rome," he tells visitors.

Erlich also claims to have re-created fragrances used at the time of the two biblical-era Jewish temples, the first destroyed by the Babylonians in 587 BC and the second by the Romans in 70 AD.

"On your right hand, you have the scent of the first temple, on the left hand the second temple, and if you rub them against each other, you will smell the incense that will be burned in the third temple," Erlich said.

According to Jewish tradition, the third temple will be built when the Messiah comes.

Erlich sells his products from his farm.

He has so far sold four kilos (8.8 pounds) of his frankincense honey in 30-gram (one-ounce) bottles and hopes to increase production.

Visitors can also buy a five-milliliter (0.2 ounce) bottle of fragrance for 100 shekels (\$29, 26 euros).

"These products have a history, a specificity," he said. "They are unique."



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Israel](#)

[Palestine](#)

International community must help stop Israeli aggression against Al-Aqsa:
Arab LeagueIsrael shoots grenade-throwing Gazan on border

[Six EU nations agree to take 356 Ocean Viking migrants](#)

Author:

Fri, 2019-08-23 21:58

ON BOARD THE OCEAN VIKING: Six EU countries Friday agreed to take in 356 migrants stranded on a rescue ship in the Mediterranean after a two-week standoff again exposed the failure of European leaders to deal quickly with desperate people fleeing conflict and poverty in Africa.

The Norwegian-flagged Ocean Viking, run by charities MSF and SOS Mediterranee, had been seeking a port after rescuing four boats of migrants off the Libyan coast between August 9 and 12.

The migrants screamed with joy as the news broke, the adults sweeping their children into their arms and dancing and singing.

After talks with the European Commission, Malta agreed its navy would transfer the migrants to the island but they would not be allowed to stay.

The transfer to navy boats was completed in just under three hours, after which the Ocean Viking set sail for Marseille for a crew change. The migrants will be relocated to other member states, Maltese Prime Minister Joseph Muscat tweeted, listing destination countries as France, Germany, Ireland, Luxembourg, Portugal and Romania. Charities had warned that food supplies on the 69-meter (220-foot) boat were running out and the migrants and staff were jubilant as the deal was announced.

"Thank you, Mama," the youngsters rescued said, kissing MSF nurse Mary Jo, who has taken care of them. They hugged their saviors – Tanguy, Clement, Antonin, Basile, Eric and Alessandro.

The agreement was made as another rescue boat, the Mare Jonio, set off for Libyan waters, the Italian left-wing collective Mediterranea which runs the ship said in a tweet.

Rescue charities have been scathing about the lack of coordination and solidarity among EU member states in dealing with migration standoffs in recent years, with tens of thousands making the perilous trip across the Mediterranean.

"We are relieved this long ordeal for the 356 people we have on board is finally over. Was it necessary to impose two weeks of excruciating wait for rescued people to be disembarked?" said Jay Berger, MSF's project coordinator onboard the Ocean Viking.

"This 14-day standoff of the Viking Ocean was shocking," Frederic Penard, director of operations at SOS Mediterranee, said in a statement.

"We hope that the ad hoc solution implemented today will transform into the predictable and sustainable disembarkation mechanism promised many times by several European Union member states," he said.

The charity said the Ocean Viking would now change crews, refuel and be resupplied before heading back to Libyan waters. The boat had been denied entry to dock by both Malta and Italy and is just the latest in a string of migrant ship standoffs.

Italy's far-right Interior Minister Matteo Salvini has repeatedly insisted that rescued migrants can only land in Italy if other EU countries take them in. He has been accused of demonizing migrants and leaving them to drown in the sea.

As a political crisis plays out in Rome following the break up of the coalition government, Salvini tweeted that he had been vindicated. "As promised, we did not give the 356 migrants on the Ocean Viking permission to disembark in Italy. The safety of Italians comes first!" he wrote. Most of the migrants on the Ocean Viking are adult men. About two-thirds come from Sudan, with others from Ivory Coast, Mali and Senegal.

Four women and five young children, aged one to six, are also aboard. Almost 100 are under the age of 18. The French government said it would take in 150 of those aboard. Many were rescued from Libyan waters suffering from severe dehydration and sometimes borderline malnutrition, the boat's medical team has said. They tell stories of fleeing conflict-torn Libya to escape ill treatment, arbitrary detention and sometimes torture.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Ocean Viking](#)

Migrants in limbo again after landing in Italy
Desperate migrants jump off rescue ship, seeking Italy

[Cairo turns to Tokyo for a lesson on education](#)

Author:

Thu, 2019-08-22 23:48

CAIRO: Egypt is seeking Japan's help to improve its education system, which has fallen to 130th place in international rankings.

The Japanese education system is recognized as one of the top five worldwide, and Cairo is hoping to apply key aspects of Japan's approach to the Egyptian curriculum.

Education has played a major role in transforming Japan from a feudal state receiving aid following World War II to a modern economic powerhouse.

During a visit to Japan in 2016, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi discussed political and economic development with Japanese officials,

and was also briefed on the Japanese education system.

The Egyptian leader visited Japanese schools and called on Japan to help Egypt introduce a similar system in its schools.

As part of Egyptian-Japanese cooperation, Japan's embassy established cultural cooperation as well as technical and professional education links between the two countries. Collaboration has been strengthened from kindergarten to post-university, with Japanese experts contributing in various education fields.

Japanese experts have held seminars in schools across the country, focusing on basic education.

During one seminar, Japan highlighted the importance of enhancing education by playing games during kindergarten and primary school, encouraging children's ability and desire to explore.

Education expert Ola El-Hazeq told Arab News that the Japanese system focuses on developing students' sense of collective worth and responsibility toward society. This starts with their surrounding environment by taking care of school buildings, educational equipment and school furniture, for example.

"Japanese schools are known for being clean," El-Hazeq said. "The first thing that surprises a school visitor is finding sneakers placed neatly in a locker or on wooden shelves at the school entrance. Each sneaker has its owner's name on it. This is a habit picked up at most primary and intermediate schools as well as in many high schools."

Japanese students also clean their classrooms, collect leaves that have fallen in the playground and take out the garbage. In many cases, teachers join students to clean up schools and also public gardens and beaches during the summer holidays.

El-Hazeq added that neither the teachers nor the students find it beneath their dignity to carry out such chores.

The academic year in Japan continues for almost 11 months, different from most other countries, with the Japanese academic year starting on April 1 and ending on March 31 the following year.

Japan's school days and hours are relatively longer in comparison with other countries. Usually the school day is from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Teachers normally work until 5 p.m. but sometimes up to 7 p.m. Holidays are shorter than in other countries. Spring and winter holidays are no longer than 10 days, and the summer holiday ranges from 40 to 45 days.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Egypt](#)

[Japan](#)

[Cairo](#)

[Tokyo](#)

[Education](#)

Egypt raises Sinai investment by 75% in 2019-20
Egypt's iconic Tahrir Square to be renovated

[Assad forces threaten Turkish observation posts in Idlib](#)

Author:

Thu, 2019-08-22 23:26

ANKARA: Syrian regime forces opened fire on a Turkish observation post No. 8 eight – in Sirman, Maarat Al-Numan in southeastern Idlib – on Thursday morning. Observation post No. 9, in the town of Morek, is reportedly surrounded as well.

The observation post in Sirman is of strategic importance due to its location in the north of Khan Sheikhoun – an area which regime forces, supported by Iranian-backed foreign militia and Russian forces, have targeted in recent

days.

Khan Sheikhoun is the fourth-largest town in Idlib and has been under the control of opposition forces for five years. It is situated on the M5 highway, which connects Aleppo to Damascus and is an important supply route for the rebels.

Although all Turkey's observation posts in Syria are manned, experts have warned of a looming security threat as Syrian regime forces have intensified their military operations in the area despite the presence of the posts.

FASTFACT

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Russian President Vladimir Putin and Iranian President Hassan Rouhani are expected to discuss Idlib at next month's meeting in Ankara.

Two Turkish soldiers have been killed by mortar strikes on observation posts in recent months, with 12 military staff wounded. On Monday, an airstrike on a Turkish military convoy killed three civilians who were heading toward observation post number eight.

The Russian Foreign Ministry's most-recent statement on the matter – saying that Turkey has to honor the Idlib agreement – could be seen as another faultline opening up between the two partners on their Syria policy. Ankara and Moscow agreed last September to create a de-escalation zone in Idlib to prohibit acts of aggression.

Navvar Saban, a military analyst at the Omran Center for Strategic Studies in Istanbul, told Arab News that Turkey should not retreat from the Morek observation post, adding that there is no obvious escape route from the area.

"Turkey committed in the last few days to hold its observation post. If they retreat from the area, they will break their commitments and it will make them look very bad in front of the international community and even the opposition they support," he said. "Northern Hama is empty now, in terms of civilians. Turkey is conducting negotiations to control this area."



Civilians flee a conflict zone in Syria's northwestern region of Idlib, where regime attacks have killed hundreds since late April. (AFP)

Saban said Turkey "will not withdraw from its observation posts before the next Astana meeting with Russia and Iran in September."

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan is set to host Russian President Vladimir Putin and Iranian President Hassan Rouhani for a summit in Ankara on Sept. 16.

They will discuss Idlib as well as the establishment of a constitution commission and how the political process should continue, said Erdogan's spokesman Ibrahim Kalin.

Ammar Hamou, a Jordan-based Syrian journalist, said that all indications suggest the regime has no intention of halting its military action, and that its intention is to seize control of the M5 highway.

Hamou said that there is a feeling among Syrians that Turkey is the "silent guarantor," because it did not react strongly to the regime's violations on the borders of the de-escalation zone four months ago.

He said he did not expect that Turkey would move its observation posts unless the regime exceeds the limits of the Turkish-Russian agreement. "The silence of Russia on the regime's excesses in terms of the Astana agreement is not strange."

Hamou told Arab News: "The Turkish-Russian-Iranian agreement (based on) the Astana talks provides for the protection of safe areas like Eastern Ghouta,

southern Syria, Homs, and Idlib. Today, three of them are, with Russian support, under the regime's control."

Hamou believes that Ankara is extremely dissatisfied by Russia's silence on the Syrian regime's violations of the agreement, but that the Turkish government is unwilling to risk the deterioration of its relationship with Moscow.

Under the de-escalation zone deal of last year, Turkey was required to ensure the withdrawal of extremist groups and heavy weaponry from that zone.

With Syrian militants withdrawing from several positions in the region, Ankara is also concerned that the fighting may cause a further influx of displaced people into Turkey, which already hosts 3.6 million Syrian refugees.

The Syrian regime has opened a corridor in the village of Soran, on the southern part of the opposition-held area, to allow civilians to escape.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Syrian War](#)

[Idlib](#)

Damascus to let civilians flee rebel-held Idlib Assad regime warplanes strike Turkish armored convoy in Idlib

Tel Aviv beaches fall foul in Israel's passion for plastic

Thu, 2019-08-22 22:10

TEL AVIV: In the early morning, when the only sound on Tel Aviv beach is the waves, Yosef Salman and his team pick up plastic debris left by bathers or cast up by the sea.

Working in heat and humidity with large rakes, they scoop plastic cups, cigarette ends, empty sunscreen tubes and soiled babies' nappies.

Also present, but impossible to separate from the sand, are microplastics, tiny particles of plastic debris that have been broken down by sun and salt. "When it rains... you can see tons of plastic in the sand," says Ariel Shay, of the Plastic Free Israel movement, which organizes volunteer beach cleanups. Despite the activities of environmental groups, Israel remains hooked on plastic.

A June report by the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) ranked Tel Aviv's coastline as the third most polluted by plastic waste in the Mediterranean, behind Barcelona and southern Turkey.

Valencia, Alexandria, Algiers and Marseille were listed in fourth to seventh places.

With around four million inhabitants, Tel Aviv is Israel's most populous metropolitan area.

"Every time I go to the beach now, I spend my time cleaning – it's horrible!" complains Shani Zylbersztejn, with an eye on her nine-month-old daughter, who plays with a plastic fork freshly dug from the sand.

In the upper-crust town of Herzliya, just north of Tel Aviv, Limor Gorelik, of the environmental protection NGO Zalul, patrols the sands, offering beachgoers bamboo cups and reusable bags in a bid to wean them from single-use plastics.

Gorelik blames Israel's passion for plastic on a lack of education and on deeply ingrained habits, such as using disposable tableware for family picnics.

Observant Jews who want a beachfront lunch on Saturdays are forbidden from washing the dishes afterwards, because their faith bans them from working on the Sabbath.

"They're not permitted to wash dishes so they use disposable plastic," Gorelik says.

Even plastic waste dumped in the bins that dot the beaches can end up in the sea, carried by the wind or by birds which rip open garbage bags in search of food.

Independent researcher Galia Pasternak has analyzed coastal plastic pollution in Israel.

According to her data, 60 percent of the waste on the beach comes from the bathers themselves.

Some is also borne by currents from Gaza and Egypt in the south or from Lebanon further north.

In 2005, Israel's environmental protection ministry launched a program offering local councils incentives for proven results in cleaning their beaches.

Subject to regular inspection, councils that meet requirements get funding, while failing authorities face cuts or even court, says Ran Amir, head of the environment ministry's marine division.

Amir cites the case of the popular Palmahim beach, south of Tel Aviv. Palmahim municipal council was taken to court and fined over the state of the beach – which has since become “one of the cleanest beaches in Israel today,” he says.

The ministry's strategy in recent years has also included public service messages on radio and online, along with fines, recycling facilities and education, according to Amir.

“It think it has partially worked,” says Pasternak, who helped set up some of those programs.

Zalul's Gorelik, however, says Israel is still trailing behind other countries.

She says charges introduced in supermarkets in 2017 for plastic bags – previously given away free – are too low, at just 0.10 Israeli shekels (0.02 euros/ \$0.03) each.

“It's not enough,” Gorelik says, adding that even this modest measure does not apply to small grocery stores.

She points to new European Union restrictions on single-use plastics.

“Europeans are the leaders on the subject,” she says.

“Here, we are very far away.”



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Israel](#)

[Tel Aviv](#)

Two Israeli Arabs charged over alleged Daesh support
Feminist icon blasts Israel PM over travel ban