

# Bagpiper graffiti celebrates Jordan's 'Scottish connection'

Thu, 2020-02-06 23:01

AMMAN: For almost a century now, Jordanians have had a special affinity with the bagpipe, a musical wind instrument with roots in the Scottish Highlands.

That historic bond is now being commemorated with stunning graffiti in an Amman neighborhood.

The colorful artwork, for which the capital's western Khalda district has been in the limelight of late, shows a Jordanian soldier in a checked red keffiyeh (headdress) blowing air into his bagpipe.

Local residents know the bagpiper with the chubby face as Habes, whose portrait has become one of the most visited and photographed sites in the entire capital.

How young Jordanians have come to identify with a musical instrument with checked red bags that resembles the Scottish kilt is a fascinating story steeped in history.

## **FASTFACTS**

- A sculpture of bagpipers has reportedly been found on a Hittite slab from 1,000 B.C.
- Images are known to have been found of ancient Greeks playing piped instruments.
- Many foreign militaries patterned after the British Army as well as police and fire services have adopted the tradition.

The bagpipe is a windblown device that can produce a wide range of musical tunes. For centuries, pipe bands have been a reassuring presence at parades, weddings, festivals and funerals throughout the world.

During the expansion of British colonial rule, spearheaded by military forces that included Scottish Highland regiments, the bagpipe became a familiar sight across the empire.

The instrument's popularity received a further boost in the 20th century when large numbers of bagpipers were trained for military service during the two world wars.

In Britain as also in Commonwealth countries such as Canada, New Zealand and Australia, the Great Highland bagpipe became a favored musical instrument of military bands, often played during formal ceremonies.

In the Middle East, the British began fielding bagpipe bands during the days

of the Transjordan Mandate in the early 1920s, when they were helping set up and train the protectorate's army.

Despite the passage of decades and the termination of the Mandate, the instrument became a fixture of military bands and popular culture in Jordan and Oman.

In 1996, Ahmad Khatabeh, a member of the Jordanian armed forces, decided to join the army's musical band. This meant he had to learn how to play the bagpipe.

It took Khatabeh two years to master the instrument. "The first year was totally theoretical," he told Arab News, referring to the physics of the bagpipe, which uses enclosed reeds that are fed from a constant reservoir of air in the form of a bag.

"We learned how to read and understand notes. I began practicing on the instrument only in the second year."

Khatabeh said a player must have powerful teeth that can clutch the wooden portion of the bagpipe as well as strong and wide fingers that can cover its eight holes.

"The eight holes reflect a musical scale much like the piano, beginning and ending with (the fifth note) sol."

In addition to the over-500 individuals that Khatabeh has trained in Jordan's armed forces, he has mentored young aspiring bagpipe players in six public schools with the support of the American aid agency USAID.

Khatabeh's remarkable career mirrors the history of the bagpipe itself in Jordan. In addition to its popularity with upcoming musical groups, the instrument has gained wide currency in the country's Christian community.

Bashar Muasher, director of the Latin Patriarchate scouts in the Amman

neighborhood of Masdar, said the bagpipe was extremely popular with church-based scouts, both male and female.

“The melancholy funeral song ‘Amazing Grace,’ the song praising the army ‘Jeshan Jesh Al-Watan’ and the wedding song ‘Mubarak Mubarak’ are always on demand and appreciated,” he added.



The bagpiper has gained a following among young Jordanians. (Supplied)

Hanna Ismair, another church scout leader, said the bagpipe enabled young people to play both local and foreign tunes.

"The kids love the fact that they can play popular national songs, well-known international tunes as well as spiritual religious hymns," he told Arab News.

Noting that the audiences sometimes dictated the songs played at weddings, he said: "Whenever it is a Palestinian audience, people are excited when we play popular songs like 'Wen a Ramallah' (Going to Ramallah), while rural audiences love the folkloric Dahia tunes."

One thing common to Jordan's bagpipers, whether from the army or church scout groups, is that they entertain people for no apparent pecuniary purpose. But the instrument does not come cheap.

Rakah Fakhoury, who hails from the industrial Jordanian city of Zarqa and heads the Latin Church scout band, said a hybrid version put together in Jordan can be bought for about \$500, though "Chinese bagpipes can be cheaper."

By contrast, Khatabeh said, the cost of a genuine, high-quality instrument can exceed \$1,000.

"A Chinese bagpipe can come as cheap as \$500 but if you go for an original instrument from Scotland, you have to pay anything up to \$1,500," he added.

Khatabeh should know. Since becoming a skilled bagpipe player, he has traveled four times to Scotland.

After a distinguished career in the Jordanian army band, he became a trainer, a career that has taken him to Lebanon, Syria, Bahrain, Kuwait and Egypt.

Beyond the military, Khatabeh has been asked to train scout groups in 20 churches in different parts of Jordan. He has participated in festivals, including ones with religious or political themes, both in Jordan and abroad, including once in Moscow.

For Jordanians, uniformed bagpipers like Khatabeh are no longer a faceless band of musicians who entertain for free. They are a national treasure, fit to be celebrated with the finest street art.









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[Ahmad Khatabeh](#)

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Pakistani bagpipe business a throwback to colonial times

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## [UN envoy says push continues toward cease-fire deal in Libya](#)

Author:

Associated Press

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Thu, 2020-02-06 16:46

CAIRO: The UN's special representative for Libya said Thursday the country's warring sides are working to turn a provisional cease-fire into a formal agreement as they emerged from four days of talks.

Ghassan Salame, head of the United Nations support mission in Libya, said rival military leaders are negotiating the remaining sticking points in a cease-fire deal. Those include the return of internally displaced people, the disarmament of armed groups and ways to monitor the truce.

"The cease-fire agreement is made of a number of issues, and there have been points of convergence on many points. And there are points of divergence," Salame told reporters in Geneva.

The latest round of fighting in oil-rich Libya erupted last April when eastern-based forces under the command of Khalifa Haftar laid siege to Tripoli in a bid to wrest power from the Government of National Accord (GNA) led by Prime Minister Fayez Al-Sarraj.

Al-Sarraj and Haftar both sent delegations of military officials to represent them at the Geneva talks.

The cease-fire talks come amid intensified diplomacy among world powers seeking to end the conflict that has ravaged Libya for nine years.

World powers have deplored the reality on the ground and pledged to uphold a widely flouted UN arms embargo at a peace summit last month in Berlin. But continued violations of the ban have dimmed hopes that international players in Libya can resolve the crisis.



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## [Algeria president pardons thousands but not protesters](#)

Author:

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Thu, 2020-02-06 16:16

ALGIERS: Algeria's president pardoned almost 6,300 prisoners on Thursday, but scores detained as part of an anti-government protest movement will not benefit from the move, a support group said. The pardon came two days after the president issued a similar pardon for almost 3,500 other prisoners.

Abdelmadjid Tebboune signed a decree Thursday pardoning “a second group of prisoners (6,294 detainees) ... whose remaining sentence is 18 months or less,” a statement from the presidency carried by official press agency APS said. The measure does not apply to those imprisoned for crimes including terrorism, treason, espionage and corruption, it added.

On Tuesday, Tebboune pardoned 3,471 people who had six months or less remaining of their sentence.

The Hirak movement was launched in February 2019 to demand that longtime President Abdelaziz Bouteflika resign instead of running for a fifth term. The CNLD prisoners’ rights group, which identifies and supports detainees, said the pardons did not affect 142 Hirak members who are still in preventive detention.

Tebboune was elected president on December 12 in a poll marred by an official turnout of less than 40 percent.

Nearly a year after the movement began, Hirak protesters continue to demand systemic reform and the resignation of government officials.



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# Syrian government forces enter Saraqeb, east of Idlib city

Author:

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Wed, 2020-02-05 18:31

BEIRUT: Syrian government forces entered Saraqeb in northwestern Idlib province, a war monitor and eye witnesses said on Wednesday, in a renewed push by President Bashar Assad to recapture the last rebel stronghold. Saraqeb, a town 15 km (9 miles) to the east of Idlib city, lies at the junction of two main roads that Damascus seeks to fully control. Syrian state TV said on Wednesday that the roads were now within firing range of government forces.

The United States is "very very worried" about the escalation in Syria's northwestern province of Idlib, led by an assault by Syrian government forces and supported by Russians, and was also seeing active support of Iranian militia and Hezbollah on the ground, the top US envoy for Syria said on Wednesday.

"This is a dangerous conflict. It needs to be brought to an end. Russia needs to change its policies," James Jeffrey, US Special Representative for Syria Engagement and fight against Daesh told reporters in a briefing.

The Idlib violence has accelerated in recent months despite several cease-fire efforts, including as recently as January.

"We're seeing not just the Russians but Iranians and Hezbollah actively involved in supporting the Syrian offensive. We don't know whether the offensive is just to get to the M4-M5 road, or it may continue further," Jeffrey said, in reference to the strategic highways connecting Syria's Aleppo to Hama and Latakia on the Mediterranean coast.

Jeffrey also said there have been more incidents of Russia violating the terms of the mutual de-confliction agreement in northeastern Syria, in what appeared to be an attempt to challenge the US presence in the region.



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Turkey won't allow Syrian forces to gain ground in Idlib, says Erdogan

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## [Clashes in Iraq's Najaf kill 7 after cleric's followers storm protest camp](#)

Author:

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1580927291493471300

Wed, 2020-02-05 18:25

BAGHDAD: At least seven people were killed in clashes in Iraq's southern city of Najaf on Wednesday after supporters of populist cleric Moqtada al-Sadr stormed an anti-government protest camp, medical and security sources said.

The medical sources said at least 20 more were wounded in the violence but did not provide further details.

The security sources said that supporters of Sadr, known as blue hats for the blue caps they often wear, had tried to clear the area of anti-government protesters, who in turn tried to stop them.

Fights broke out between both groups, the blue hats threw petrol bombs at protester tents and live gunfire rang out shortly afterwards, wounding and killing six people, they said.

Sadr has at different times both supported and abandoned Iraqi protesters who demand a removal of the entire ruling elite.

He urged followers last week to help authorities bring “day to day life” back to Iraq’s streets by clearing roads blocked by sit-ins and ensuring businesses and schools can reopen after months of protests in which nearly 500 people have been killed in clashes between protesters and security forces.

Sadr has also urged the blue hats to allow protests to continue.



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