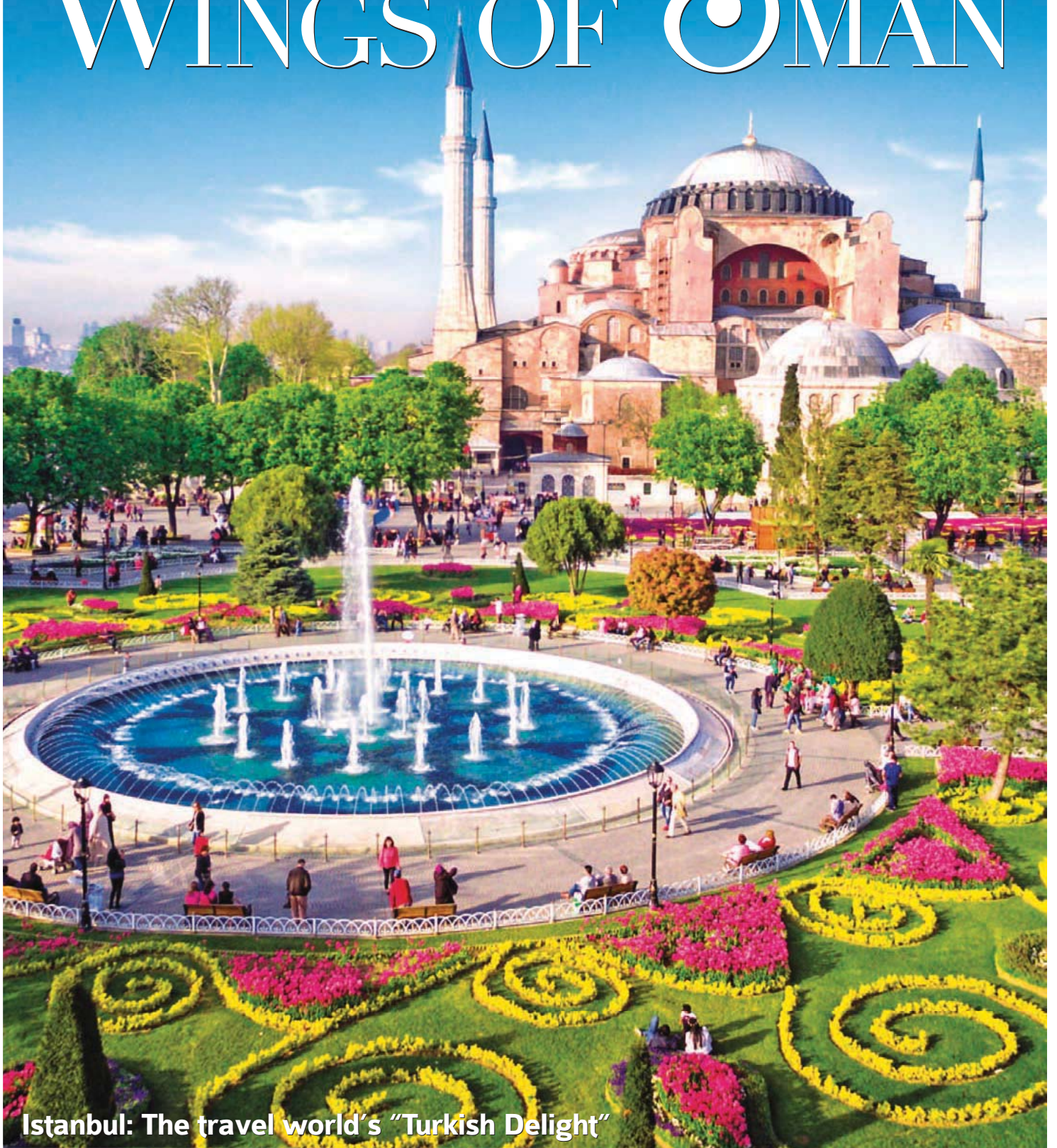


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Treasures from the National Museum: “Belarus at the Crossroad of Civilisations”

The National Museum exhibition, “Belarus at the Crossroad of Civilisations”, which was inaugurated on 8 April, and which will run until 8 July, showcases the historical link between Belarus and the Islamic world. Here, the National Museum’s Director General, Jamal al-Moosawi, and the Head of Curatorial Unit, Moza al-Wardi, give us an overview. (With photography by Saleh al-Ruzaqi/The National Museum).

The peaceful coexistence of Belarusians with people of different Islamic nations, combined with what has been a traditional tolerance to Islam in Belarus – have great value in our turbulent time of political and social conflicts around the world. In addition to this, its peaceful and mutually beneficial contacts with the Islamic world over the years have given Belarus a rich cultural diversity.

All of the above is now being showcased at the National Museum’s exhibition, “Belarus at the Crossroad of Civilisations” – which represents and showcases the historical link between Belarus and the Islamic world.

In Minsk itself (in Belarus), the National Historical Museum of the Republic of Belarus owns in its collection many artefacts connected with the relationship between Belarus and Islamic nations. These historical artefacts – some of which are now on display at National Museum’s “Belarus at the Crossroad of Civilisations” exhibition – tell us about relationships in the Early Middle Age between the eastern Slavs and the mighty Muslim Caliphate, and about ancient trade routes between East and West.

An interesting part of Belarusian history is the relationship between the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Tatars. And one of the most valuable treasures to have emerged from this is the so-called

“Vitaut’s Belt” – a set of waist plates created around the late 14th to early 15th century. This masterpiece of Islamic art was possibly a gift from the Crimean Tatars to the famous Grand Duke Vitaut.

The history of the Belarusian Tatars – with their unique culture – began at the time of Vitaut the Great. These days, photos, postcards,



Belt sets (Vitaūt’s Belt)

Origin: The Grand Duchy of Lithuania

Materials: Silver, coining, gilding, and blackening

Period: 8th – 9th centuries AH/late 14th – first third of the 15th century CE

documents; view of mosques and towns, photo portraits, religious and private documents, all tell us about the Belarusian Tatars. (The National Historical Museum of the Republic of Belarus collection also has materials originating from the modern Tatars community in Belarus).

Relationships with the Islamic world had notable influences in Belarusian culture and gave some new motives to Belarusian art. In the late 16th and early 17th century, traditional fashion of the Polish-Lithuanian-Belarusian nobility (szlachta) was born under the visible influence of Turkish clothing and style, and which was presented in the so-called 'sarmatian portraits'.

Another interesting point about Belarusian culture is that one of its symbols – the 'Slutsk sash' – was created under obvious Islamic influence. Initially, these sashes were imported from Persia and Turkey. But in the 18th century, sash manufacturing was founded



in the Belarusian town of Slutsk, with their style being heavily influenced by the East, and with the first manufacturer originating from the Ottoman Empire. Now, in the modern Republic of Belarus, production of the Slutsk sashes is being revived – and modelled after examples on display at places like the National Historical Museum of the Republic of Belarus.

Historical community of the Belarusian Tatars

The first Tatars were invited to the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in the early 14th century CE as skilled warriors. This was followed by the formation of Tatar communities in the 15th – 16th centuries CE. Belarusian Tatars lived in their own towns and neighborhoods, had their own nobility, and served as warriors, worked as farmers, craftsmen, and scholars. A notable object from this historical community is a manuscript "Kitab" – which was unique due to it being written in Belarusian language using Arabic script.

The National Museum: Visitor Information

Telephone: (+968) 22081500

Facebook: NationalMuseumOman

Twitter: NM_OMAN

Instagram: NM_OMAN

E-mail: booking@nm.gov.om

The National Museum is open daily from 10:00am – 5:00pm (except on Fridays 2:00pm – 6:00pm). The ticket desk closes half an hour before the Museum's closing times. Ramadan timings are from Sunday to Thursday (10:00am – 3:00pm), the Museum will be closed on Fridays and Saturdays.



"Kitab"

Origin: Western Belarus

Materials: Paper, cardboard, textile; manuscript

Period: 13th century AH/first third of the 19th century CE