

# Spreading the words

The 27th biennial Jerusalem International Book Fair will break new ground by relocating to a vibrant new hub, The First Station. Organizers hope the move will revitalize the literary event and help it reach out to younger readers

Some constants have come to be expected in Jerusalem. Summers will be dry and hot, winters wet and cold, and the Jerusalem International Book Fair (JIBF) will set up shop at the International Convention Center every two years.

Except, as with any good book, there's an unexpected twist this time around.

This year, the fair is leaving the only home it has had since first being held in 1963. It's moving to The First Station, an entertainment complex that opened less than two years ago on the renovated grounds of Jerusalem's first train station, which served the city between 1892 and 1998. The unprecedented move to a very different part of the city is a statement of what the fair wants to be.

"There are a lot of young people who love books but avoid the book fair," says Yoel Makov, the director of the JIBF,

which runs from February 8-12. "We want to attract them to the book fair – in particular these people in their 20s and 30s – and to bring others back to the fair. So we decided to move to the train station, which is a popular location in Jerusalem, in order to change the book fair to something young and vivid."

It's not easy to leave home and abandon the familiar, even if it is no longer ideal. The cavernous ICC always gave this fairgoer the feeling of being trapped in a casino – many attractions but little sunlight, as if to purposefully make you lose track of time and crave fresh air. But there was nowhere to go for a nice stroll or a decent meal beyond walking across the road to the unappealing food court of Jerusalem's Central Bus Station.

This lack of pleasant venues, joined by the startling absence of Internet service, hardly put on Jerusalem's best face



Ismail Kadare, Jerusalem Prize laureate for 2015; (right) The First Station.



Reuters





Shiree Granot

for international writers and publishers, some visiting Israel for the first time. And many Israelis, die-hard bibliophiles aside, began to dismiss the fair as more of a professional event with a big book market attached – though everyone knows you can buy it all online at better prices.

"I'm sure they're disappointed," Makov says, wincing gently when asked about leaving the convention center, "but what was in front of us was really the future of the book fair. And if it demands a kind of openness to young people, that's what we will do."

By moving to the First Station, the fair's organizers hope to enhance their profile both as an international trade fair as well as a public celebration of literature. In all, there are some 300 different programs for the week, and, save a few professional networking meet-ups and workshops, most events are open to the public and free of charge.

Of course, the 3,000-square-meter deck at the station makes for a great place to host a dance party on the opening night, and other nightly cultural events. But this, along with the busy restaurants and shops in the train station complex, can hardly house the vast range of activities that go on during the book fair. The rows upon rows of publishers' stalls, offering Israeli and international books, will be in a tented area in the open space next door.

The nearby Khan Theatre, Cinematheque and Mishkenot Sha'ananim will all be used daily as meeting and performance spaces. In short, this is a fair that will not only let its participants breathe, but will get them out walking between venues, across a kind of cultural kilometer that has been flourishing since The First Station's launch.

"Essentially, for the first time the fair is in different locations," says Makov. "But the distance between them is very short, and we hope the weather will be with us."

### 'Bringing together everything that can't be'

One of the fair's highlights is the awarding of the Jerusalem Prize to an author whose writing promotes "the freedom of the individual in society." This year, the award is going to Albanian author Ismail Kadare, the first

time a writer of Muslim background will receive the honor. The Jerusalem Prize jury, led by prominent Israeli novelist Dorit Rabinyan, praised Kadare for writing "about collective guilt and the impenetrable nature of truth."

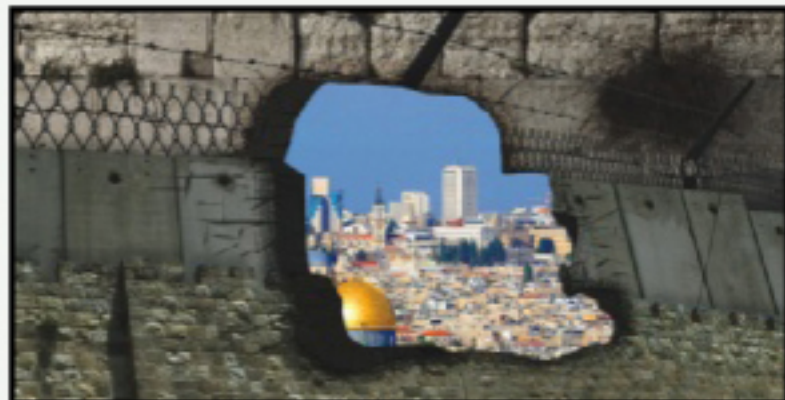
The jury said upon its announcement in January that Kadare, also winner of the inaugural Man Booker International Prize in 2005, "seeks to expose, while concealing layers of myth and metaphor, unanswerable questions and crimes for which there is no atonement.

While his subjects and protagonists are largely local, their significance and importance are universal."

Kadare has authored dozens of books, including "The General of the Dead Army" (1963) – probably his best-known work – "Chronicle in Stone" (1978) and "The Pyramid" (1992).

In total, some 25 foreign writers will be attending the fair. Beyond Kadare, one of the most remarkable of these is Salah

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IR AMIM WELCOMES VISITORS TO THE 2015 INTERNATIONAL BOOK FAIR & INVITES YOU TO AN

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al-Hamdani, an acclaimed Iraqi poet who has been living in France for the past three decades. He joins Ronny Someck, a leading Israeli poet who was born in Iraq and immigrated to Israel at age 2.

The two men knew of each other's work for many years, as Someck has the unusual distinction of being the only Hebrew writer who is regularly included in collections of contemporary Iraqi poetry. Someck is sometimes described, he explains in an interview, "as a native son of Iraq who is currently living in Israel."

Hamdani and Someck met a few years ago at a poetry reading at a Parisian club, and by the end of the evening had become fast friends. They soon realized that not only were they both born in Baghdad, but both in 1951. Other poet friends began to muse about this serendipity and wondered if they had been pushed past each other as babies in their prams. Then, a few months later, at a poetry festival in the southern French city of Sète, Hamdani came to Someck with a proposal to publish a joint book of poetry.

"We sat in a café and discussed it, and by the end of that meeting we signed a contract on a napkin – even the napkin had coffee stains on it," says Someck. In mid-2012, their joint collection, "Baghdad-Jerusalem," was published to an enthusiastic audience in France. Hamdani's poems appear in Arabic, Someck's in Hebrew, with both translated into French as well.

Since then, they've appeared together at joint readings and events many times in France, as well as at a poetry festival in Haifa two years ago. It was a bold step for Hamdani: Though he was a dissident writer in Iraq who had been imprisoned during Saddam Hussein's reign before escaping to France, he did face criticism from other Arab writers for breaking ranks and "normalizing" ties with Israel.

"We're bringing together everything that can't be: It can't be today that a Jew and a Muslim work together. We're doing it and proving that you can," says Someck. The event featuring the two poets will include the accompaniment of Israeli-Arab musician Luna Abu Nasser and be held at the Cinematheque on Monday February 9.

"This not just some Mizrahi evening when we sing nostalgic songs of life along the Euphrates and the wonderful dates and great beauties we miss from there," adds Someck. "We've both been gone a long time. We both have writing that's very Arabesque. But he writes with an Eastern aesthetic and an awareness that his outlook has been filtered through many years in the West – like hummus along with a good



Ronny Someck

Alon Ben



Nira Harel

Nir Kafir

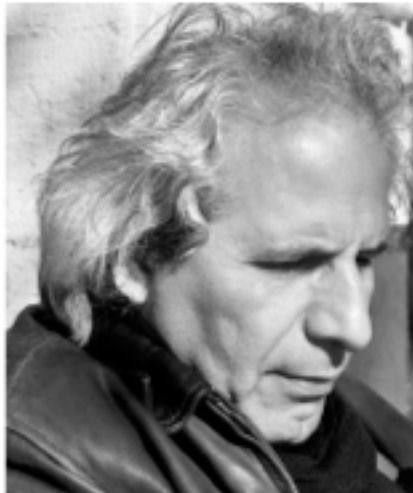
French wine." Someck, on the other hand, speaks of his "secondhand" Iraqi memories and language inherited from his parents. It was this Iraqi-Jewish Arabic he learned at home and almost lost – and then had to resurrect to communicate with Hamdani.

The story of the two men's literary and personal connection has so captivated many in French literary circles that writer Gilles Rozier has written a forthcoming book about them titled "Sur les rives de Babylone," and he will be attending the fair as well.

There are also several other events in the festival lineup celebrating the places where Hebrew and Arabic intersect and interact. These include the launch of "Shtayim-Ithneen," a new anthology of young writers in both Hebrew and Arabic, a collection edited by writers Tamer Massalha, Tamar Weiss-Gabai and Almog Behar. Another event will examine the role of Arabic culture in Hebrew literature, and vice versa.

## Art breaks down walls

Other events focusing on international authors in conversation with home-grown ones abound. "The Jewish Tale" will feature a discussion between Eva Menasse (Austria), Elena Loewenthal (Italy) and Geneviève Brisac (France), hosted by Shiri Lev-Ari. Dror Mishani, one of Israel's up-and-coming crime writers, will meet with Bogdan Hrib (Romania) to discuss "Tension in the



Salah al-Hamdani

Isabelle Lagay



Dorit Rabinoyan

David Bachar

'Hamdani writes with an Eastern aesthetic and an awareness that his outlook has been filtered through many years in the West – like hummus along with a good French wine,' says Someck.

Air – World Crime Literature, Origins and Future."

Israel's celebrated author Aharon Appelfeld will meet with the abovementioned Brisac, who also edits children's books for the popular French publisher L'École des Loisirs. In "Good Night, Dzerzi," Polish-American author and screenwriter Janusz Glowacki will discuss his work with Haaretz book critic Maya Sela.

Best-selling U.S. author Ann Hood, whose novels include "The Knitting Circle" (2007) and "The Obituary Writer" (2013), will speak with Haaretz's Ofer Aderet. Mark Russ Federman, of New York's famed appetizing shop Russ & Daughters, will discuss the "Jewish Kitchen" with Israeli food writer Janna Gur, in an event hosted by Daniella Cheslow.

Other notable events pairing high-profile foreign writers with local ones include Italy's Paolo Giordano discuss-

ing his book "The Solitude of Prime Numbers" with Eshkol Nevo. Following the talk, held at the Cinematheque, there will be a screening of the eponymous film adaptation. Several other films based on books written by the fair's authors will also be screened.

In an event exploring the Israel-Germany relationship, writers from both countries will talk about how the other is perceived, in literature and real life. "We Don't Forget, We Go Dancing: Israeli and German Authors About the Other Country," is a literary event featuring Israeli writers Amichai Shalev, Yiftach Ashkenazy, Iftach Alony and Haaretz's Liat Elkayam; writers Norbert Kron and Sarah Stricker will represent Germany.

This connects to an interesting exhibit at the center of the event, "The Disappearing Screen." In honor of the jubilee year of Israeli-German diplomatic relations, a two-meter-high-wall will be constructed, using over 5,000 wooden blocks, with quotes written on them from leading German philosophers, musicians, politicians and academics. Visitors will be encouraged to take their favorite quotes with them as a memento.

The idea behind the wall, designed by German architect Werner Sobek, is to create a bicultural dialogue between Israeli and Germans, a relationship still haunted by memories of the Holocaust.

The fair has always had separate, closed-door programs for publishers, editors, writers and agents, such as professional workshops, seminars and a mentoring program. This year, this section of the program is expanding to include a book pitching event, allowing emerging Israeli authors to present their work to hundreds of international publishers, distributors and literary experts. Each writer gets five minutes in which a favorite passage from their book, translated into English, is read. The event is a joint project of the Foreign Ministry and Penguin Random House, whose CEO, Markus Dohle, will be attending the festival.

For the first time, the fair will also include daily literature events geared toward children, including respected author Nira Harel. And in the Department of Jewish Thought, there will be an event focusing on the legacy of Hebrew University professor Yeshayahu Leibowitz, to mark the 20th anniversary of his death.

"It's a very varied program, not just a highbrow literature program," says Markov, the director. "We have events focusing on children, cookbooks, detective stories and science fiction – along with high-canon fiction as well. It's the biggest literature festival we've ever had in Israel, and anyone who likes books will find their way there."