

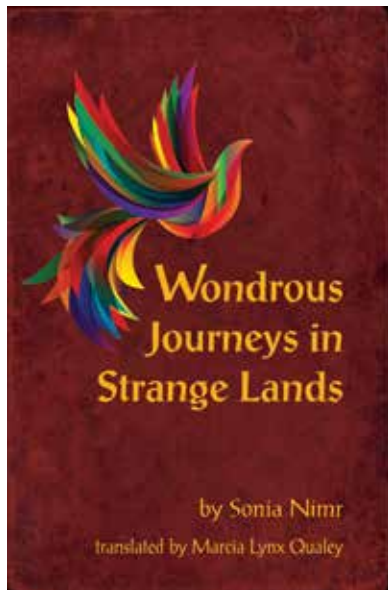
## Wondrous Journeys in Strange Lands

By **Sonia Nimr**

Translated by **Marcia Lynx Qualey**

Interlink Books, 2020, 224 pages,  
paperback, US\$15.

In this book, Sonia Nimr, who in an interview confesses to being a 62-year-old woman who feels as though she is still 16, tells tales of a young woman's travel adventures across perilous deserts, seas, and empires with the intention of letting young (and young-at-heart) Palestinians (and others) who are stuck somewhere travel vicariously. *Wondrous Journeys in Strange Lands* was written before the COVID-19 pandemic confined people all over the world to their homes.



Attracted to reading and storytelling since her mother took her to a bookstore in Nablus as a child, Sonia writes mainly for children and young adults – although a book for adults is in the making. In *Wondrous Journeys*, hundreds of years ago, in a tent at the foot of a mountain in Palestine, our storyteller and her twin sister are born. Her parents name her Qamr (Moon) and her sister Shams (Sun). Their small caravan is journeying from their mother's city back to their father's remote ancestral village atop the mountain.

This village suffers from isolation and a curse, which her young family tries to undo. But when both parents' lives are cut short, Qamr and her sister are left orphaned. Thus, Qamr decides to pursue her mother's and father's dreams of discovering the world, its people, places, and stories. With the red book "*Wondrous Journeys*" in hand that brought her parents together, she sets out on a daring journey, in caravans and on ships, across empires.

Telling tales to survive, Qamr crosses deserts and seas to reach Jerusalem and Gaza, Egypt, Tangier, Andalusia and Genoa, Abyssinia, India, the Maldives, and Yemen. Kidnapped by bandits, sold as a slave to the house of a mad king, engaged in studies with a polymath, disguised as a man to join a pirate ship, and falling in love for the first time – with a pirate: in endless stories within stories, Qamr searches irrepressibly for life.

Sonia Nimr's richly imagined historical fable recalls the famous travel narratives of the fourteenth-century Moroccan traveler Ibn Battuta. But the captivating adventures of our heroine are the wondrous journeys we take when we discover we can do more than we ever dreamed possible, even in strange lands that decree we cannot.

Sonia Nimr is an historian, an academic who specializes in oral history, and a leading Palestinian author and storyteller who weaves together contemporary stories with folklore for readers of all ages. She won the prestigious 2014 Etisalat Award and was shortlisted for the prize for *Thunderbird*, the first title in a fantasy trilogy. She is also the author of two books in English: *Ghaddar the Ghoul and Other Palestinian Stories* and *A Little Piece of Ground* (co-written with Elizabeth Laird). You can hear and see her storytelling on YouTube at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sBYsfwKk8gk&t=200s&ab\\_channel=lbyyUK](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sBYsfwKk8gk&t=200s&ab_channel=lbyyUK) (starting at minute 25).

Marcia Lynx Qualey is a writer and editor who founded ArabLit and ArabLit Quarterly. She co-hosts the BULAQ podcast and has co-translated with Sawad Hussain the novel *Ghady & Rawan* (2019), co-written by Fatima Sharafeddine and Samar Mahfouz Barraaj.