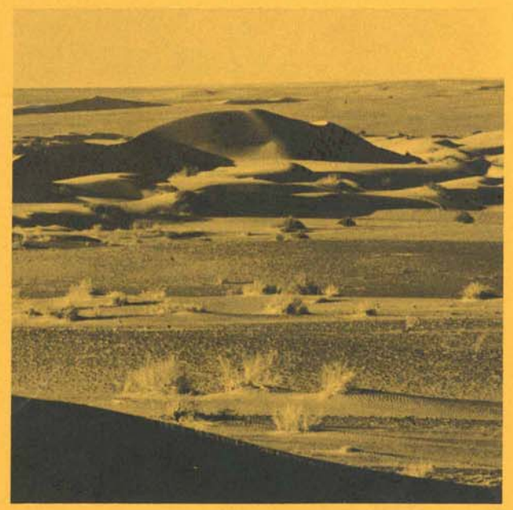

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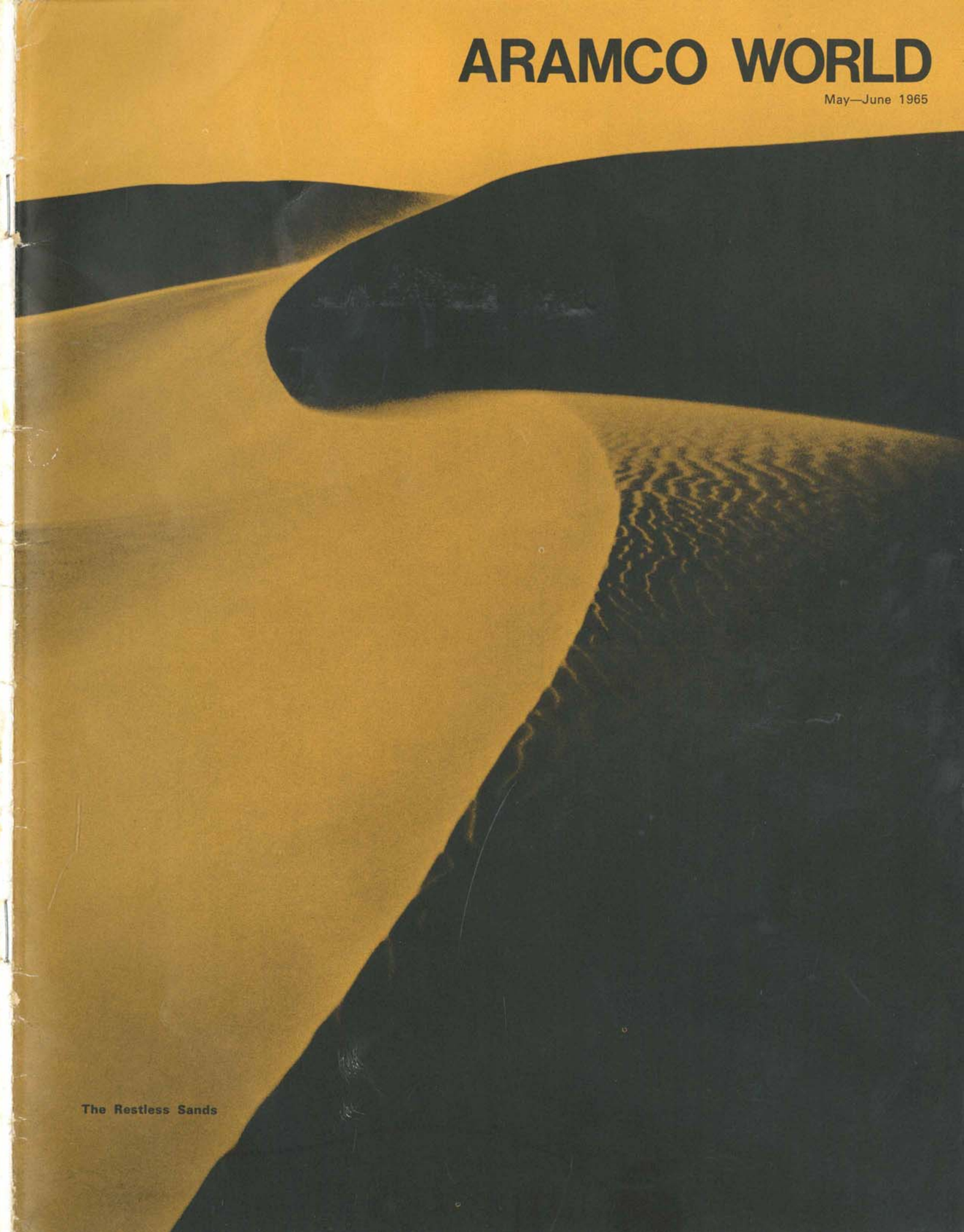
May—June 1965



The Restless Sands

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Illustrations: The Restless Sands — photographs by Khalil Abou El-Nasr, V. K. Antony and William Tracy. Hollywood-on-the-Nile — photographs by Abou El-Nasr; movie stills courtesy of Studio Misr. The Mosque on Massachusetts Avenue — photographs by United Press International. Where Honor Dwells — drawings by Rosemarie de Goede. Silks and Seeds and Silver Swords — photographs by Larry Sherman and Harry Koundakjian.

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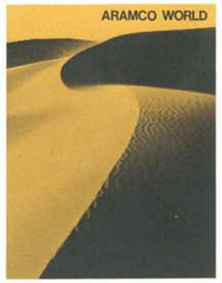


Cover: As the wind ruffles the surface of the sea, or shapes it into breakers that crash upon the land, so it also molds the sand of the desert, piling it up in enormous hills and mountains, like this great dune caught by photographer Khalil Abou El-Nasr, working and smoothing it into strange and lovely shapes, and moving it forward in a relentless advance upon the nearly helpless outposts of civilization.

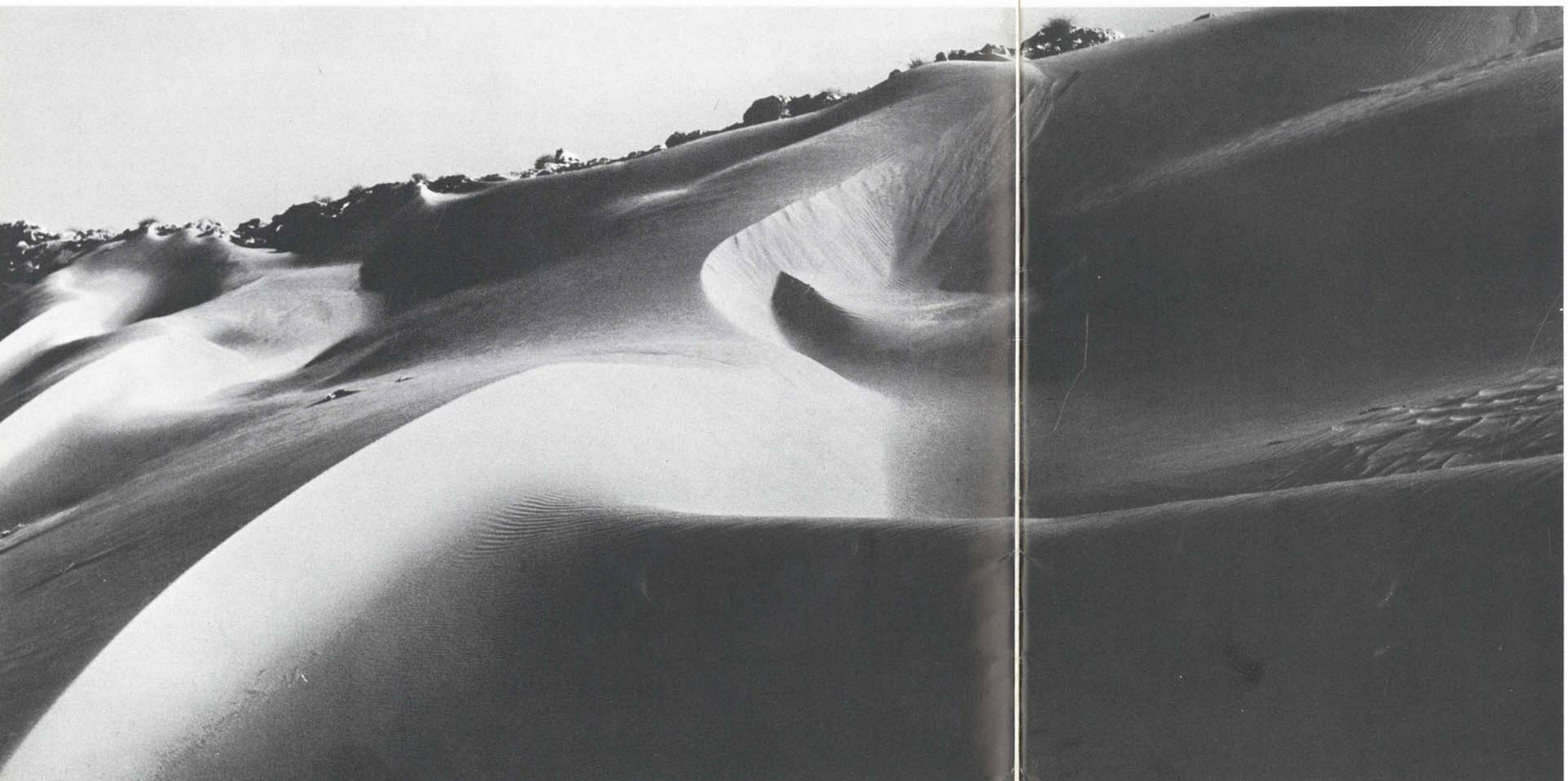
At the base of the great sand dune, at the exact point where the sloping wall of white sand shoulders its way into the oasis, an old man, his white robe tucked up around his waist, bends ankle-deep in water and thumbs fresh, lime-green rice shoots into the black earth of a small garden. In the narrow lane adjoining the garden a white, orange-flanked donkey plods by a slow-moving automobile. A frog, startled, leaps into an irrigation ditch and splashes away beneath the swaying water grass. And a boy, schoolbooks in hand, backs through a gate in the frond fence.

He pauses for a moment, looking up toward the top of the dune where a hot wind off the desert ceaselessly piles its millions of tiny pin-sharp specks of sand upon the crest. With a wave of his hand at the old man he slips out of his sandals and lunges exuberantly up the steep bank. Halfway to the crest he passes what was once a palm tree, but is now a black skeleton protruding from the dune like a single burnt piling from the waters of the sea. As he climbs, his feet scrabbling for purchase, the sand yields and, grain by grain, rolls down the shimmering flank to the base and there trickles forward into the oasis a fractional part of an inch. So, imperceptibly but relentlessly, the desert invades al-Hasa..

THE RESTLESS SANDS

BY WILLIAM TRACY

Air-borne sand, piling up in the lee of a bush or similar obstacle, (above) creates the nucleus from which enormous mountains of sand (opposite page) develop.



In 1961 in Saudi Arabia, villagers in an oasis called al-Hasa dispatched to the central government's Ministry of Agriculture an urgent appeal for help. The desert, they said, is upon us.

It was indeed. Along a nine-mile front, nearly the entire eastern wing of the oasis, a great mass of sand was advancing on the oasis at an estimated average rate of 30 feet annually. Each year some 230,000 cubic yards of sand were ebbing into the oasis, and near 14 villages in the al-'Umran section, the dunes were looming over the very roofs of the houses. Investigators assigned by the ministry reported after an aerial survey that the active dune field —the dunes that were moving—measured five and a half miles by 100 miles and that it was advancing so fast that it would bury the village of al-'Umran ash-Shimaliyah within seven years if immediate action were not taken. Furthermore, they added ominously, huge sections of the whole oasis would vanish beneath the sand within the lifetimes of youngsters living there now.

For the farmers of al-Hasa's 50 villages, it was a catastrophe and it was obvious that something had to be done. But what? The encroachment of dunes is no new problem in Saudi Arabia; excavations have shown that the dunes near al-Hasa had been moving toward the oasis since the time of the Prophet Muhammad. Yet it is only in comparatively recent times that science and industry have begun to seek answers to the basic questions affecting the movement of dunes: What causes the dunes to move? What can be done to control or halt them?

To the first question the answer is obvious: wind. Be it the *monsoon* of the Indian Ocean, the *simoon* of Syria, the *sirocco* of North Africa, the *khamsin* of Egypt or the *shamal* of Saudi Arabia, it is wind, fundamentally, that makes the desert move, sometimes lifting the sand and carrying it along suspended above the ground; sometimes rolling it along the ground; or, most commonly, bouncing it forward in an erratic hop, skip and jump called "saltation." It is wind too that shapes and molds the sand into streamlined domes, stars, pinwheels and tear drops and

Choking or smothering whatever lay in their path, the dunes crept into the oasis.

Swamps, high in destructive salts, also posed problems for al-Hasa's farmers.

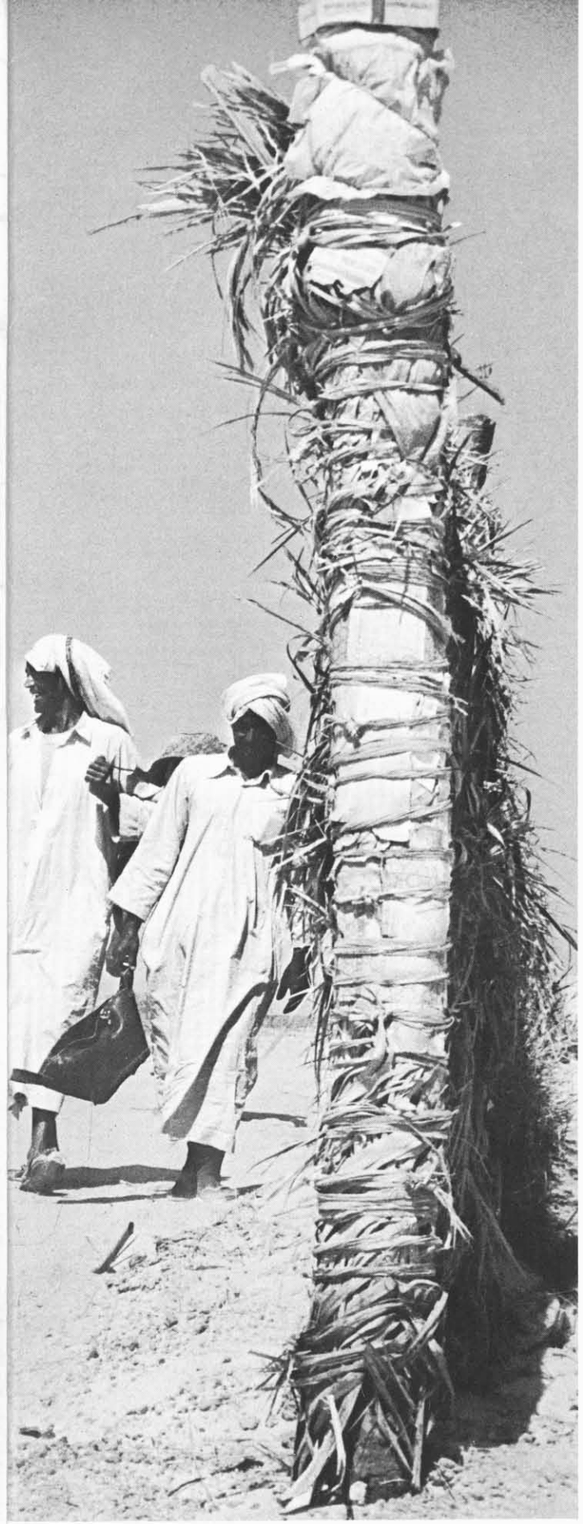
into the most familiar shape—the *barchan*, a high-crested quarter moon with the two horns sloping down to ground level.

Whenever the stream of wind is broken, however, or when it slows or twists into turbulence and so can no longer support the sand, the "saltation" process stops. Thus in the lee of any object imposed in the windstream —a tree, a fence, a bush or a rail, no matter how small— the sand begins to accumulate as though the object is casting a downwind shadow of sand. This is the core of a dune and around it forms the mass of sand which slowly assumes the characteristics of dunes.

Those characteristics, noted by R.A. Bagnold, the British authority on sand movement, involve differing steepnesses between the windward side and the lee side of a dune. The angle on the windward side, Mr. Bagnold reported, is less steep—generally a 22-degree slope as compared to 32 to 33 degrees on the lee side. Because the windward angle is shallow, oncoming winds can sweep easily up the slope, driving grains of sand to the crest, where they spill over into the lee of the dune and roll to the bottom. The dune, in effect, moves much like a wave breaking on shore, the base moving to the crest and tumbling over itself.

Wind, then, is the essential force in the creation and movement of dunes, and nowhere in the world does it have more freedom to mold and move mountains of sand than it does on the Arabian Peninsula. More than 1,000,000 square miles in area, the peninsula contains many great deserts, one of which, the Rub' al-Khali (The Empty Quarter), a basin some 400 by 700 miles in area, contains approximately 250,000 square miles of sand, the largest continuous body of sand in the world. In the Rub' al-Khali, dunes form parallel ridges 125 miles long, a mile wide and up to 300 feet high. These sinuous *'uruq* (veins) or *suyuf* (swords) streaming away from the prevailing wind are so mighty that smaller, transverse dunes 100 feet high march along their backs. In other parts of the desert, shifting winds from all points of the compass beat upon the sands from all directions and pile up great pyramidal massifs 700 to 1,000 feet high.

The smothering advance on al-Hasa, however, was caused not by the Rub' al-Khali, but by the Great Nefud, a desert roughly the size of West Virginia (26,500 square miles) stretching over the northwestern part of the peninsula. In the Great Nefud the prevailing winds blow in from the Mediterranean, scouring upland sandstone outcrops and winnowing sand and dust from the ancient alluvial deltas where the great dry *wadis* once poured their spring floods onto the plain. Scooping up the crumbled grains of quartz and basalt, the winds swing east and south in a great crescent and then west, connecting the Great Nefud and the Rub' al-Khali with several arching sand "rivers," a particularly appropriate term which describes their ability to literally inundate anything that stands in their path—roads, pipelines, gardens and whole villages.



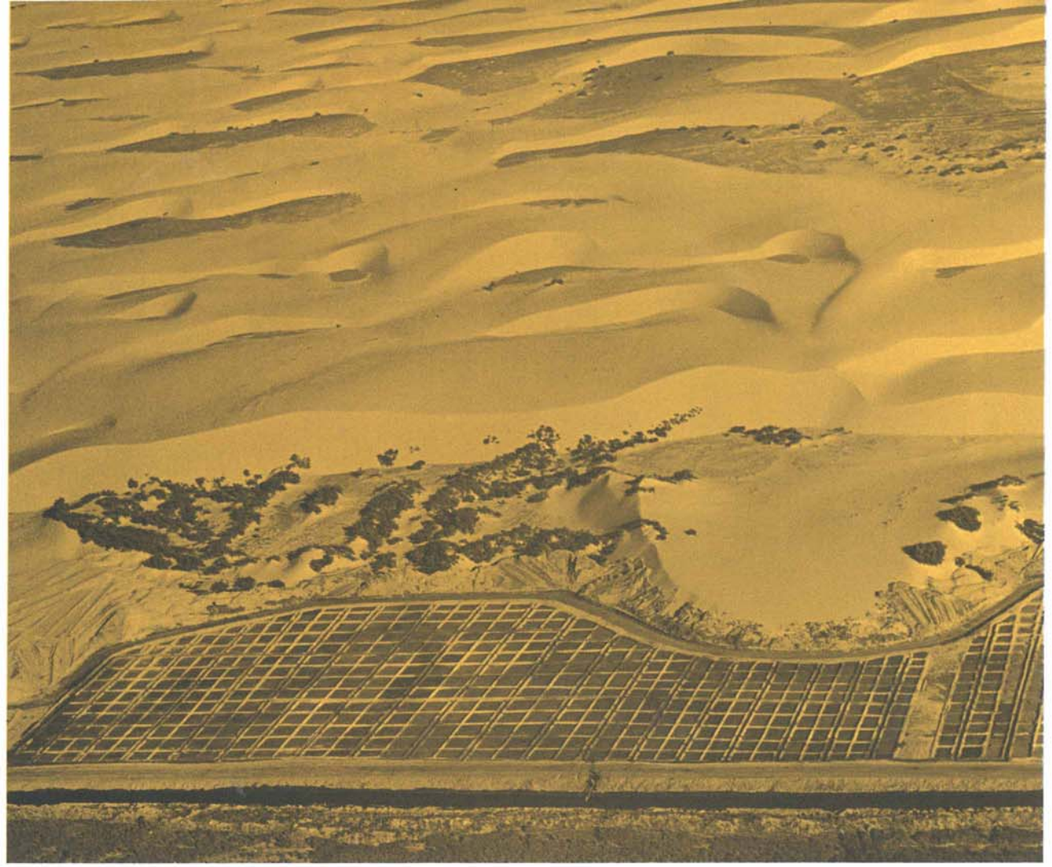
Among the barriers erected to fend off the sand are these huge palm frond fences.

The longest of these "rivers," the Dahna, famed for its red sand (due to a high iron oxide content), "flows" 60 miles east of the capital city of Riyadh. Further east, another, the Jafura, picks up the white coral sand of the Arabian Gulf beaches and also advances south and southeast to the storehouse of the Empty Quarter. It was an arm of the Jafura field which threatened al-Hasa.

The threat of moving dunes is not, of course, limited to Saudi Arabia. Dunes have wiped out many communities in the Sahara and Libyan deserts. In the United States, dunes along the Atlantic seaboard and the Gulf of Mexico are constantly pushing inland. On the south shore of Lake Michigan they have marched across entire forests. In the Bay of Biscay, coastal winds press dunes forward up to 100 feet a year and have buried French vineyards, villages and even church steeples.

In such humid coastal areas, however, control is relatively easier because there is usually sufficient moisture to nourish the grass and shrubs that can slow the movement of sand. Near Lebanon's Beirut International Airport, for example, creeping beach grass from the United States and young pine trees were planted and because of Lebanon's ample rainfall not only survived, but flourished, and are turning the dunes into green parklands. At al-Hasa where the *annual* precipitation is rarely more than two

The pressure of sand against the fences is so strong that they must be replaced periodically.



At the edge of al-Hasa, trees were planted atop the dunes to slow their advance and, eventually, to transform the sands into green and fertile parklands.

and a half inches, the same approach would not, without modifications, have been feasible. The magnitude of the problem, furthermore, wasn't comparable, simply because of the sheer size of the mass which threatened al-Hasa. There was, moreover, a particular problem in al-Hasa that was of much more immediate concern: the effect of the sand on drainage.

Al-Hasa has an abundance of ground water, and much of the excess must be drained away. Ditches to carry part of it off crisscross the oasis and lead eastward into a chain of shallow depressions or salt flats (*sabkhah*) called Birkat al-Asfar. The shallows, in turn, empty through a narrow neck about six miles north of the plantations. With the advance of the dunes, drifting sand had slowly choked off the narrow outlet in two places. Water backed up, creating an artificial lake which at times was two miles square and six feet deep. The lake quickly turned into a malodorous and unsanitary swamp which, in the hot sun of Saudi Arabia, began to evaporate. The evaporation soon began to raise the salinity of the water to levels fatal to nearby plant life. Drifting sand also posed a distinct threat to the vital springs on which not only the crops, but the people themselves, depended for life.

Thus in al-Hasa the answer to the second question —what can be done to control or halt the movement of dunes?—had to be found immediately. With the sources of drinking water threatened, it was clear that al-Hasa could not wait. In 1961 the Ministry of Agriculture began to assess the weapons available for a counterattack, many of which were originated by the Arabian American Oil Company (Aramco) in 25 years of experiments with ways of protecting oil installations from the onslaughts of sand.

According to Aramco's experience there are many ways to cope with dunes, each with multiple techniques, particular advantages and definite drawbacks. There is channeling or diverting the dunes by fencing, much as a jetty deflects wave action on a sea coast. There is trenching or oiling in strips, which can deflate or flatten a dune by destroying its symmetry. There is the transposing of sand physically. There is asphalting which so smooths a surface that the wind-borne grains skid across and beyond an area, rather than pile up around it. There is designing which might, for example, tilt the downwind edge of a road six inches upward so that grains of sand would skid over the traveled surface and land on the lee side. There is also solid oiling of whole dunes. And there is the planting of trees.

Although each of those techniques had been used successfully in other areas, they had limitations with regard to al-Hasa. Channeling, in the face of the sheer mass of dunes, was inadequate. So were trenching and oiling in strips. Moving the sand by conveyor belt, bulldozer, or other earth-moving equipment, is prohibitively expensive and could be used in al-Hasa only on the fringe of villages, near roads and buildings, where the cost could be justified. Stabilizing by applying a solid coat of oil is unsightly and can be technically difficult. To be effective, the coating must be applied and maintained in a carefully controlled way. A high-gravity, waxy, penetrating oil must be sprayed from heavy-duty trucks. Using a low-flying plane to spray oil is unsatisfactory because the crust—which must sink in three or four inches—would be too thin and could be torn up by a heavy wind. On the other hand, a heavy truck can tear up a dune surface and destroy the streamlined form which is easiest to stabilize. And even though Saudi Arabia is an oil-producing country, solid oiling is expensive. To achieve an effective coating requires three gallons of crude oil per square yard, a ratio that would, along a nine-mile front, add up to an estimated 600,000 barrels.

The final alternative—trees—seemed, in al-Hasa, to offer the most advantages. To begin with, the large number of laborers which would be needed (500 in the first year the program got started) could be drawn right from the villages of the oasis. These men would only need a minimum of training—agriculture, after all, was their business—and they would be more likely to work in earnest since it was their own homes and those of their friends that they would be striving to save (which was, one man reported later, exactly what happened. "I've never seen people more interested in doing a job.")

The most important advantage, however, was that it worked efficiently. Past experience had shown that with the right approach, tree-planting could provide an effective barricade against encroaching sand swiftly and could fix the sand in place. On the Libyan coast on the southern Mediterranean, where there are but five to six inches of rainfall every year, a new technique developed by Standard Oil Company (N.J.) made possible a vast forestation project on top of the dunes. That technique was to plant seedlings immediately after a shower and then spray the surface with a special formulated petroleum product that would hold the sand down, yet admit moisture.

Even with this plan, however, al-Hasa presented special problems. If planting were to work at al-Hasa, a species of tree would have to be found which would require a minimum of water and care, which could reach deep into the sand for water, yet stand tall enough to fend off sand, which had horizontal branches for maximum wind resistance, and which could thrive in an arid, salty environment. To find such a tree the Ministry of Agriculture sought the advice of Aramco's agricultural specialist, Dr. Grover Brown.

Workmen unload dirt to surface a road on the face of a dune that once threatened al-Hasa.

Hardy tamarisk trees are raised in nurseries and replanted on the dunes.

Dr. Brown, a blunt man with a gift for exact expression, immediately dismissed the idea that any tree "thrived" in such an environment.

"Plants are like people," he said. "Some require more or less water and heat than others. But that doesn't mean that they *thrive* under poor conditions. For example, date palms have the happy faculty of tolerating rather wet land, but they can suffocate if stagnant water covers their roots. At the same time they can tolerate fairly dry conditions, their roots reaching down maybe 40 feet to search for water. But the palm still grows better under ideal conditions of air, moisture and fertility.

"Now the same thing applies to this question of salt," he went on. "People can drink water with up to 3,000 parts of mineral salts per 1,000,000. Some plants are like camels and can tolerate up to 4,000 or more parts per 1,000,000 —the approximate level of salinity in the drainage ditches at al-'Umran—so it was not a question of finding a tree that *thrives*, but one that has a high level of toleration." The tree that met those requirements, he said, turned out to be the tamarisk—five varieties of the tamarisk tree, actually—which, depending on the variety, covers the ground densely, grows quickly, can send its roots down for water a distance equivalent to its own height and holds onto moisture greedily.

Before deciding how to tackle the problem, the Ministry of Agriculture weighed many proposals, including a plan offered by an Egyptian agriculturist, Ezz ed-Din Rashad, that was built around proposals from Aramco and based to a large extent on data supplied by Aramco's original surveys of the problem.

According to Mr. Bagnold's formula, it was calculated that if the great sand mass looming over al-Hasa were impounded in a single mighty dune by constructing a nine-mile barrier and raising it over the years, eventually a linear ridge roughly five miles long, 600 feet high and half a mile wide at the base would be built up. It was calculated too that it would take 2,700 years, long-range planning in the extreme. Furthermore most of the sand mass—61 per cent—would be upwind of the crest and the rest—39 per cent—would be downwind. That would mean that if the barrier were built on the present front, another 670 acres of farmland and several villages would still be buried.

To avoid further loss of land, yet still block the whole dune field's advance, Ezz ed-Din Rashad offered a plan which, he said, could be completed economically in a year and a half plus three years of maintenance. The logical solution, he said, consists of a multiple system of barriers: one on the front for immediate relief, one about five miles upwind to impound the mass of the field, and one in between for support and in case of a break in the barrier upwind. If the front were completely stabilized within five years and the rest of the program were faithfully carried out, only an additional 50 acres would succumb.

With a speed rare in governments, the Supreme Planning Board of Saudi Arabia gave its approval and the mechanics of the plan were set in motion. So rapidly did it progress that although actual work did not begin until the summer of 1963 the initial effects are already visible: a barrier, nine miles long and 150 feet wide, studded with some 3,000,000 seedlings, some nearly six feet high already; a canal along the base, to supply water for tree nurseries and for terraces on what was formerly the face of the dune; a road on the barrier, shielded by palm fences, running along the dune as much as 50 feet above the gardens.

At the top of the dunes on the windward side is the second barrier, also nine miles long but 300 feet wide. The third line, five miles to the rear, will be the most important eventually but has had to wait until the immediate encroachment has been blocked.

As do most projects that fire man's imagination, the al-Hasa project brought forth unexpected benefits. To meet the demand for approximately 1,000,000 pots to transplant young seedlings from the nursery to the dunes, a small factory was established at the project side to turn out 3,000 concrete pots daily. Surplus coarse gravel, produced by a stone crusher bought to help in making the concrete, was employed to make bricks to line the small reservoirs and to build sluice gates on the canal. To enrich the soil Mr. Rashad mixed loam, mud and waste oil, added chemicals available locally, and threw in nitrogen-rich algae from irrigation ditches. The result was a product so rich in chemical value and so cheap to produce that its commercial prospects are being studied.

Since 1961, when the government and Aramco answered the villagers' call for help, there has been a dramatic change in al-Hasa, not only in the movement of the desert, but in the minds of the people. Despair has given way to hope, weakness to strength.

For al-Hasa is not only being saved from extinction; it is looking forward to a much more promising future than it had before. A 1962 survey showed that enough water is available to increase total cultivation by 15 to 20 per cent. The artificial lake in the salt flats to the north will be drained and a huge conduit will be constructed so that shifting sand can move across the narrow neck without plugging it. Even longer-range plans call for the establishment of a sand control board with complete authority in al-Hasa to take steps to control the restless sands, to conduct research programs and to pass laws to safeguard trees and other barriers.

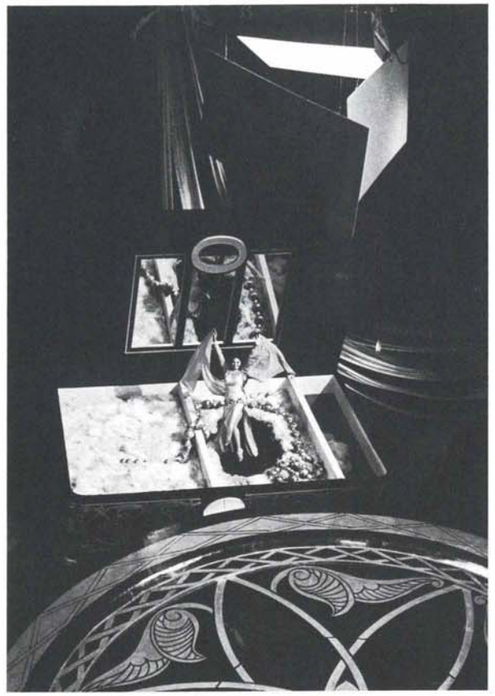
For villagers who faced destruction just four years ago this is a startling change, and they are as grateful as they are hopeful. "They know how close they came," explained Dr. Brown. "The village would certainly have been destroyed. It was only a matter of time. Once that drain was plugged they would have been finished. Now they have a future."

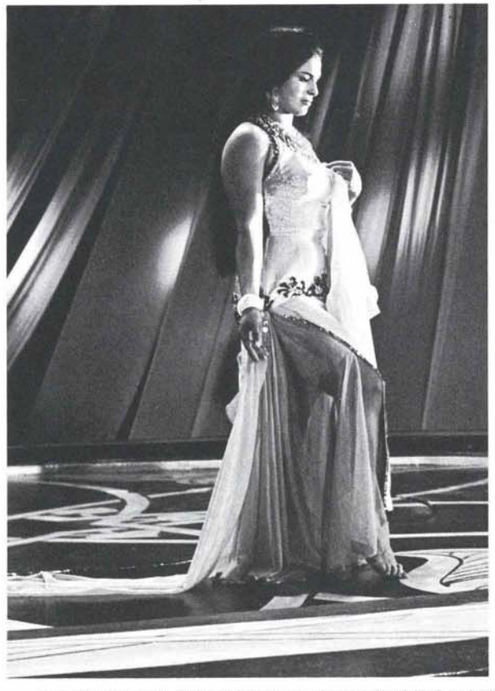
In describing that future Mr. Rashad's eyes sparkled as he pointed upward to the crests of the dunes. "That's where they'll live, up there," he said, "and around the new village lemons and oranges and mangoes will grow, and there will be a mosque with a little public garden, and a hospital and a school and houses ... Oh, it will be a wonderful thing to see."

"In fact," he added, "it already is," and he pointed upward where the ranks of tough, green trees stood like sentinels against the sky, their roots deep in a mountain of sand that will move no more.

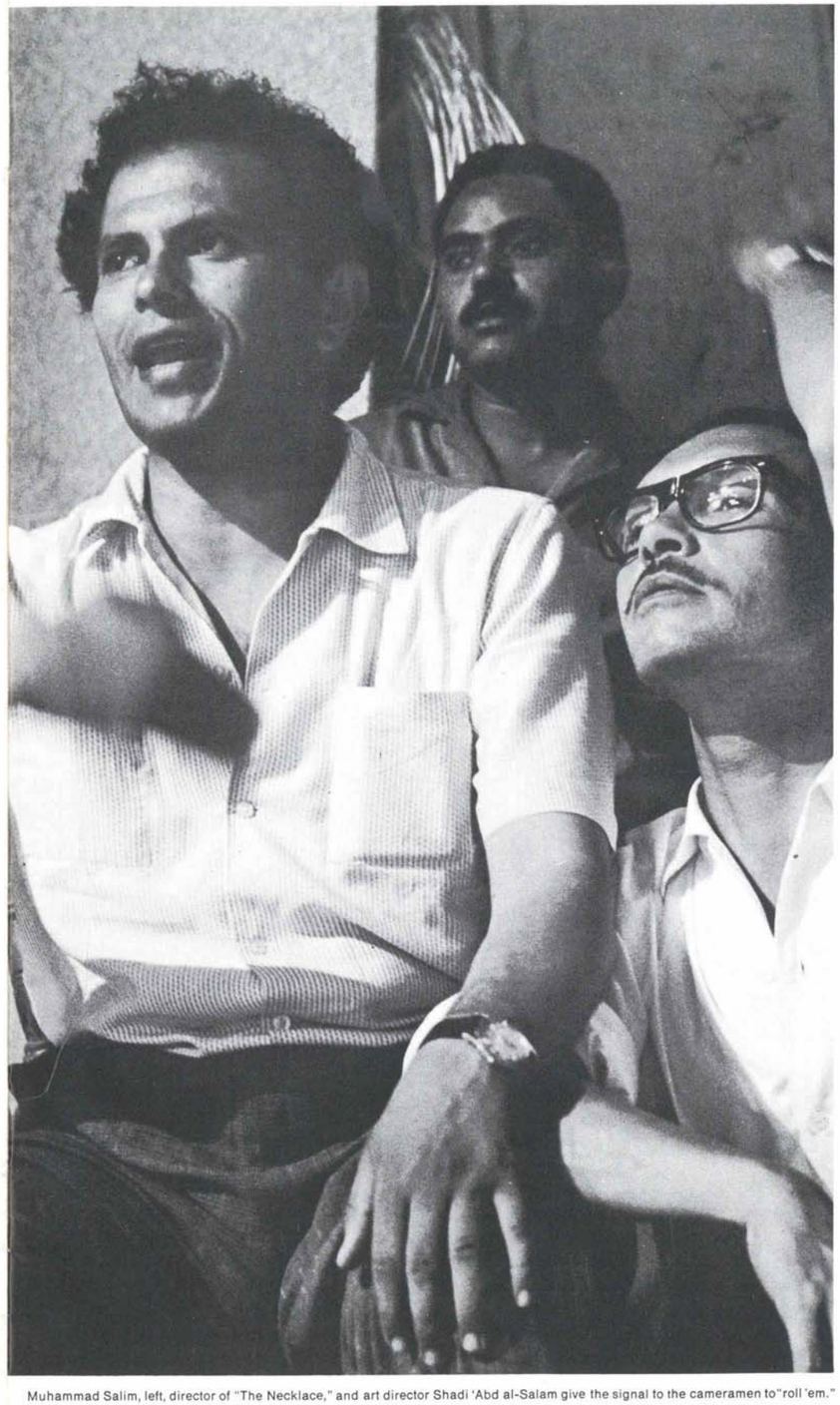
William Tracy, who lives in Beirut, is a free lance writer who contributes regularly to Aramco World.

HOLLYWOOD-ON-THE-NILE





As the cameras roll, Nahid Sabri emerges from a "jewel box" and whirls into a colorful dance sequence for the al-Ahram Studios production, "The Necklace."



Muhammad Salim, left, director of "The Necklace," and art director Shadi 'Abd al-Salam give the signal to the cameramen to "roll 'em."

From nine new sound stages in its gleaming "Cinema City," Egypt's film industry reaches out for a larger share of the world's movie fans...

BY SAAD ED-DIN TEWFIC

Just after World War II, Hollywood's top stars came up with what they thought was a highly original scheme to lower their taxes and raise their incomes: they incorporated themselves, made their own pictures, pocketed the lion's share of the profits, and congratulated themselves on their astute maneuver. They would undoubtedly be chagrined to learn that in the United Arab Republic, Egyptian actors had perfected that money-making technique nearly 20 years before. They might be even more vexed to discover that the pioneers in the fang-and-claw field of do-it-yourself film financing were the supposedly weaker sex. The first serious motion picture made anywhere in the Arab world, in fact, was the silent film "Leila," produced by Egyptian actress 'Aziza Amir and released to a skeptical public in 1927. Its immediate success spurred Mrs. Asia Dagher to found the still-flourishing Lotus Films and Mrs. Bahiga Hafiz to follow suit with the Fanar Film Corporation.

The feminine influence that has pervaded Egyptian films ever since possibly accounts for the content of the average successful Egyptian film, a 100-minute mixture of sweetness, song and Victorian melodrama seemingly compounded of equal parts of "Little Women," "Wuthering Heights" and "The Big Broadcast of 1933," but with a flavor that is unmistakably, if naturally, Egyptian.

The Arab film industry has traditionally been synonymous with the Egyptian film industry, and the themes favored by Egyptian producers have overwhelmingly been related to that country's city and countryside. Arab countries, with the one exception of Lebanon, produce few films of their own and have had to rely almost entirely on the U.A.R. to supply their Arabic-language film requirements, and in so doing have become accustomed

Zizi al-Badrawi, star of "Stillness of the Storm," rehearses a scene while a director checks the lighting of the set.

to both the somewhat foreign subject matter and to the Egyptian dialect. Those themes, of course, have limited appeal and although Egyptian films have found audiences in Greece, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Malaya, Somalia, Ghana, Nigeria, Iran, Brazil, Venezuela and Brooklyn, New York, they were made up mostly of nostalgic expatriates aching for a reminder of home. The limitations of content and language have had a restrictive effect and Arab films have yet to seize any noticeable proportion of the world's film markets. Consequently, the main market for Egyptian films remains the U.A.R. itself.

Egyptians have been avid moviegoers ever since the first film was shown in their country. That was in 1896 when all movies were silent and dialogue was flashed on the screen between scenes. By 1905 there were 12 theaters and by the end of World War I the total had increased to 80, all of which were showing pictures imported from France and Italy. In those early days translation of the dialogue was not superimposed on the bottom of the film, so the management thoughtfully provided a translator or *explicateur* who stood beside the screen and gave a blow-by-blow account of the action, booming out in Arabic a running commentary as the sentences appeared on the screen. Cairo's Olympia Cinema improved on the system by installing near the picture screen a smaller screen, on which was flashed an Arabic translation of the subtitles. Though it gave viewers a slight case of tennis neck, it was probably better than the system used in some places in Iran today, where at two-minute intervals the screen goes blank and a handwritten synopsis of the preceding action is projected in two or three successive frames. In 1940, the Egyptian Government issued an order forbidding the projection of any foreign film not superimposed with Arabic translations of the dialogue; fast readers are thus now able to get the drift of the plot.

The early popularity of films found the owners of movie houses already exercising their ingenuity to lure customers away from the competition. The following advertisement is typical of the means they employed: "The Pathé Cinéma shows only decent social films—all being shown for the first time. The projector in operation does not vibrate as in other cinemas. Save your eyes and avoid headaches by seeing our films projected on our firm and steady screen."

To provide films for those "firm and steady" screens and to get a share of the film markets then monopolized by foreign producers, a Mr. A. Orfanelli established

Cameramen, on the set, study camera angles before filming of a scene starts.

the nation's first studio in Alexandria. Unfortunately the two-reel comedies he and his imitators cranked out were not sufficiently popular to establish a foothold for the industry in that city and, with the appearance of "Leila," the center of gravity of the motion picture industry shifted to Cairo—where it has remained ever since. At that point of course, Egyptian bankers, like American bankers before them, awoke to the profits to be made from movies and began to invest in what had previously been almost the private preserve of the star producers. Bank Misr, for example, formed the Société Misr pour le Théâtre et le Cinéma and built the Misr Studio, still considered the largest and best-equipped studio in the Middle East. The new entrepreneurs also sought to improve the indifferent technical quality of Egyptian films by sending promising young men to study film-making in France and Germany.

The increasingly professional approach to film production resulted in the release in 1930 of "Zaynab," a new departure in Egyptian films in that the locale was, for the first time, the Egyptian countryside and all the characters peasants. Based on a story by the famed Egyptian author Dr. Muhammad Hussayn Haykal and directed by Muhammad Karim, a student and collaborator of the eminent German director Fritz Lang, "Zaynab" featured peasants in the roles of peasants, and focused on the authentic landscape and daily life of the Nile. It was without question the best film made in Egypt up to that time, and it was a sensation.

The same year—1930—saw the first Egyptian "talking picture," called "In the Moonlight." The sound was on records synchronized with the film, and included both voice and music. The first sound track film in Arabic was produced, however, not in Egypt but in Paris. Titled "Fils à Papa," the film was produced by Muhammad Karim in 1932, and featured the great Egyptian actor Yusif Wahbi. The bemused first-night Parisian audience didn't understand a single word of the Arabic dialogue, but the novelty of the Oriental tongue in a French theater brought down the house, and the film netted a record income.

With the introduction of the sound track it was inevitable that the much-loved Egyptian love ballads, so popular in cabarets and on the stage, would be transplanted to the screen, and so they were. The popular singers of the time were among the first to realize how liberally the new medium could line their pockets and one after another they plunged into movie production, with themselves, naturally, as stars. Munira al-Mahdiyah, Fatmah Rushdi, Muhammad 'Abd al-Wahab and the great Umm Kulthum —all appeared in a succession of pictures that made their names household words throughout the Arab countries.

Balancing the diet of full-length musical features produced by independents, Studio Misr turned out large numbers of one and two-reel shorts. Another development was the establishment of the first Arabic newsreel, called "Egypt's Talking Newspaper." It has never ceased to be a regular feature of Egyptian film fare, although now it is being released as the "Arab Motion Picture Newsreel."

In 1927-28, the total production of the Egyptian film industry was a modest five full-length features. By 1936-37, this had nearly tripled and in 1952 the production reached 70 films annually. Today the output averages 40 to 50 features per year.

The considerable expansion of the Egyptian film industry over the years has been paralleled by a commensurate increase in the number of movie outlets in Egypt itself. The nation now has some 400 movie houses, of which 76 are in Cairo and 45 in Alexandria. A project is underway to construct 4,000 additional houses, a large number of which will be for the projection of 16-mm films in Egyptian villages. This project is part of a large plan of the Ministry of Education to revitalize the entire Egyptian film industry. Already, under the plan, the ministry has inaugurated a Motion Picture Institute (at university level) offering a four-year curriculum which includes courses in acting, production, cinematography, sound, set-design and scenario-writing. Since the government has nationalized film production, the ministry in charge has broken ground for an ultra-modern "Cinema City," which will eventually house nine huge sound stages, laboratories for processing both black-and-white and color film, as well as a host of auxiliary buildings.

The fruit of this activity—hopefully, films of vastly superior quality—is designed to give the U.A.R. a larger share of the international market. The tricky business of feeling the pulse of this lucrative market goes on, in a test tube atmosphere, at the various film festivals to many of which the U.A.R. has sent entrants: Cannes, Venice, Berlin, Moscow and Prague, and once, in an optimistic moment, even to the Academy Award contest in Hollywood. But so far, kudos have been few: prizes for best film (*al-Bab al-Maftuh*—"The Open Door") and best actress (Fatin Hamamah) at an Indonesian film festival. Having learned the hard way that most of their films are not yet up to the artistic standards of American and European movie-makers, the Egyptians have nevertheless worked toward maximum exposure of their products by organizing festivals of U.A.R. pictures abroad. Within the past two years, such exhibitions have been held in Moscow, Belgrade, Peking, Prague, Warsaw, Rome and Madrid.

Part of the problem of standards is, naturally, related to the amount of money spent on films. Currently movie budgets average 20,000 to 30,000 Egyptian pounds (roughly $40,000-$60,000), as compared to Hollywood's budgets of $300,000 and up for the cheapest productions. Screenplays are depressingly low-priced by American standards, too, the very highest selling for $8,000 to $10,000—even such top-flight novels as those of Ihsan Abd al-Quddoos. And ordinarily script-writers can hope for no more than about $3,000 for first-class scenarios adapted from stories or novels, or possibly $4,000 if the script is an original screenplay.

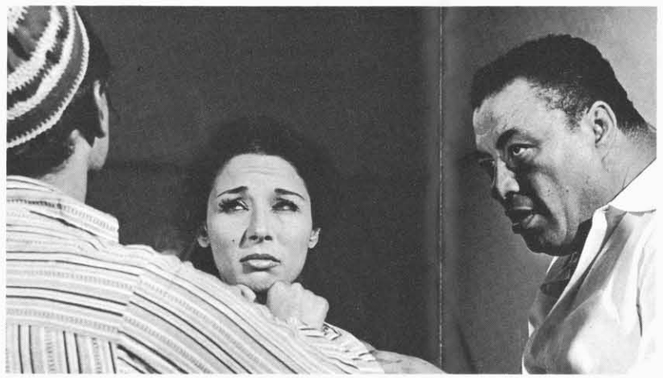
As in Hollywood, actors' salaries take the biggest bite out of the budget and at the top of the celluloid heap is the singing actor, who may make as much as $30,000 per picture; in this category belong Sabah, Abd al-Halim Hafiz, Farid al-Atrash and Muhammad Abd al-Wahab. Nonsinging actors receive about half the pay made by the singers, providing a good rule of thumb of the popularity of the two categories of actors among ticket buyers. Far and away the most popular nonsinging actress in Egypt is Fatin Hamamah, who gets a flat $14,000 per picture and is unique among Egyptian stars in that she

Shams al-Baroody relaxes between scenes as a make-up man touches up her eyelashes during the filming of "Diary of a Maid."

Fatin Hamamah, a top star in Egypt, in a scene from "The Open Door."

"Saladin," the Egyptian film industry's first attempt at making "spectaculars," ran more than three hours.

Omar Sharif, right, in his first film, "Madam Gossip," with Su'ad Husni, left, and Yusif Wahbi.



Director Hasan al-Imam, right, rehearses a scene in a new film featuring Lubna 'Abd al-'Aziz, center.

David Niven, in light jacket, in "Passport to Oblivion," filmed on location in Lebanon.

Actor-singer 'Abd al-Halim Hafiz with, background, the lovely Shadyah.

can demand and get the right to choose script, producer and, sometimes, even the male lead in films in which she appears. (Her husband, incidentally, known as Omar Sharif in the West, is the first Egyptian star to graduate to Hollywood. He was an instant success in "Lawrence of Arabia," receiving a nomination for an "Oscar" as Best Supporting Actor, and went on to repeat his triumph with major roles in last year's "Behold a Pale Horse" and "The Fall of the Roman Empire." With the title role in "Dr. Zhivago" Sharif is expected to establish himself as a major star.)

France and Italy have exerted a steady influence on Egyptian pictures from the beginning and the United States has had an impact since World War II. From France, through the French-speaking Egyptians who once formed the higher strata of society and commerce, came the taste for melodrama and the derivitive dramatic themes which dominate the Egyptian screen. From Italy came the enthusiastically embraced techniques of inexpensive film making—developed and polished during Italy's impoverished postwar years. From the United States has come many techniques and most recently, the trend toward color extravaganzas, with casts of thousands, based loosely on historical incidents, and incorporating into single films, scenes that are often dramatically illogical, but financially profitable. As Cecil B. De Mille demonstrated, such films are inclined to be longish and "Saladin," the U.A.R.'s first step in this direction, ran a muscle-cramping three hours and 15 minutes. If successful, "Saladin," produced by U.S.-trained Yusif Shaheen, may open a new chapter in Egyptian film-making and lead to more emphasis on historical or truly dramatic themes. Up to now, it cannot be said that the subject matter of Egyptian films is fraught with significance for, as a thoughtful Arab critic has pointed out, "The themes of Egyptian pictures are invariably 'safe' themes. Most producers try to stick to the same old, tired but profitable, formula, which combines a lukewarm melodrama—liberally interlarded with long and doleful songs—about such unarguable propositions as, for example, landlords have stony hearts and young women fall in love with heels."

High on everyone's list of top Egyptian actresses is Lubna 'Abd al-'Aziz shown, here in a pensive mood as she rests between takes on the set of "Diary of a Maid."

The same critic went on to say that after melodrama, the best box office films are comedies, generally broad, pratfall, custard-pie humor, and what might be termed the "Eastern-Western," in which heroes dispatch their enemies and win their heroines at a fast gallop and with fists, agility and convenient coincidence, after doling out satisfying rations of mayhem throughout the picture.

The challenge of outside competition will probably do much to bring about revolutionary changes in Egyptian pictures. Although only Lebanon and Iraq, of all the Middle East nations, have ever made movies—and Iraq's ambitions in that direction are now dormant—Lebanon is beginning to emerge as a competitor. With variety of landscape for the location-shooting of any type of picture, plus the financing provided by a free-wheeling, free-enterprising economy, Lebanon has begun to produce feature-length films at the rate of 8 to 12 annually, 80 per cent of them in color (U.A.R. produces about 10 per cent of its films in color), and is going after the markets with its traditional aggressiveness. The physical beauty of Lebanon is even drawing film makers from abroad. Last year, for example, David Niven, Mickey Rooney and Lex Barker were all in Beirut working on films. Thus a competitor for the U.A.R.'s major market has arisen even while foreign films, mostly American and French, continue to dominate the market and walk off with pictures grosses with which the earnings of Arabic-language films simply can't compare.

The U.A.R., however, is making a vigorous effort. Its gleaming new studios in "Cinema City," which in technical equipment rank with world's best, can be the springboard. Its plan to introduce international stars such as Audrey Hepburn, William Holden, Trevor Howard, Charlton Heston and Gregory Peck in Egyptian-made joint productions, is an example of the audacious kind of thinking that might recapture former markets and even penetrate as yet virgin territory. And if it takes imagination to conceive of an Arabic-language film, even beautifully subtitled or dubbed into English, playing at New York's Radio City Music Hall, who ever heard of a movie producer who didn't have a stupendous, earthshaking, supercolossal imagination?

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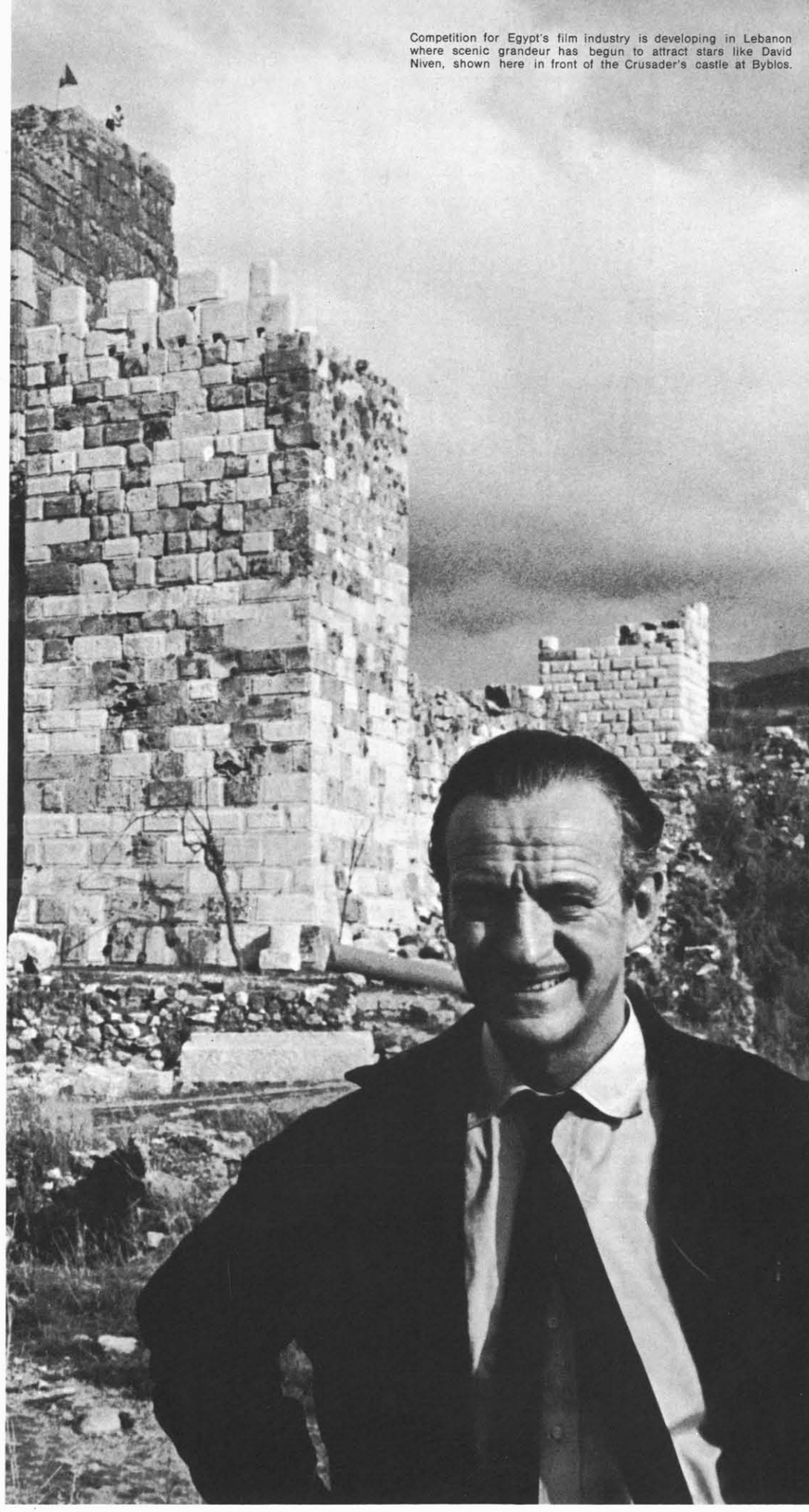

Competition for Egypt's film industry is developing in Lebanon where scenic grandeur has begun to attract stars like David Niven, shown here in front of the Crusader's castle at Byblos.

A house of worship, a center of study, a symbol of faith...

In Washington about now the visitors are beginning to arrive. Spring has come, soft and green, and with it the first of the season's tourists. By road, rail and air, they're pouring into the city, now by the thousands, later by the tens of thousands, all intent on seeing this, the capital of the United States.

Some will head quickly for the famous monuments and buildings that commemorate so much of American history—the White House, the Washington Monument, the Lincoln Memorial. Some will go immediately to the grave of John F. Kennedy, where a flame flickers in the wind. Others will stroll leisurely through the center of the capital, savoring the flavor that is Washington's own, the flavor of wide, shady avenues, open vistas of green lawn near great marble buildings and tiny, unexpected parks, each with its statue in bronze to some fragment of history. And still others will look for places that are unusual or piquant—places like the mosque on Massachusetts Avenue.

It is surprising, somehow, to find a mosque in Washington. It's as if the arched façade by the wide sidewalk, and the single minaret pointing upward from the flank of that broad and busy boulevard, belong somewhere else, back in time, perhaps, when pennants flew over the golden domes and slim spires of a Baghdad, an Istanbul or a Cordova. Which might be precisely why the mosque on Massachusetts Avenue is such an irresistible attraction to visitors—it draws up to 1,000 individuals a day in the spring and summer months—and why it remains high on the list of memorable places seen by those who come to the capital.

The novel aspect of the mosque, of course, is irrelevant. Its significance to Washington is much deeper than that. It is a house of worship for some 3,000 Muslims in Washington. It is a center of study and scholarship for those who seek to know more about the East. It is a religious fountainhead for all of North America and its approximately 32,600 Muslims. Above all, it is a symbol of the universality of Islam, a statement in stone of the strong faith of the Muslims who, 20 years ago, began to lay plans for its construction.

At that time—1945—there was no mosque in Washington. Muslims assigned to the capital—indeed, to almost anywhere in the United States—were forced to either rent halls or to use embassies and consulates for religious observances. But that year the Ambassador from Turkey died unexpectedly and the Muslim community was mortified at the lack of suitable quarters to mourn the death of this important man and to receive the representatives of the world's diplomatic corps who came to pay their respects. Because of that embarrassment two men—Mahmud Hassan, then an Egyptian envoy to the United States, and A. Joseph Howar, a Muslim contractor in Washington—were encouraged to revive a proposal that they had put forward previously with little success: construction of a great center of culture and religion for all of North America. This time the Muslim world was ready.

In some ways the planning and construction of the mosque was a formidable undertaking. It meant that 21 nations, many linked by ties of language and religion, but divided by disagreements, would have to put aside their differences and pool their ideas, skills and funds in the common cause. That many did so is a measure of the spirit of reverence and cooperation that infused the project.

Thorough planning, of course, was essential to success and it took four years before those charged with designing the mosque could come up with blueprints architecturally faithful to the spirit of Islam and comparable in grace and beauty to other great mosques of the world. Proper workmanship was also essential, to insure that all decorative and religious motifs would be authentic in every detail, and the contractors actually brought craftsmen from the Middle East to Washington to make such things as the intricate molds for the ornamental plaster art of the large arches over the columns. Other craftsmen went off to quarries to supervise the selection and cutting of the Alabama white stone from which the mosque was to be constructed. In the Middle East itself patient hands were at work in many regions and in time the products of their skilled labors took shape and went off to Washington: tiles from Turkey, in basic tones of blue and white, to enrich the walls, and the columns beneath the arches; several huge and colorful rugs from Iran, each measuring about 20 by 40 feet, to swathe the floors and corridors in

THE MOSQUE ON MASSACHUSETTS AVENUE

BY WILLIAM GEERHOLD

soft textures and rich colors; a brilliant two-ton copper and bronze chandelier from Egypt, to hang from the central dome and throw light throughout the mosque from its 80 bulbs; some 12,000 tiny slivers of ebony and other precious woods, also from Egypt, to adorn the *minbar* (pulpit). Other countries, like Saudi Arabia, helped finance the project.

Nor were contributions restricted to the Muslim world. The Arabian American Oil Company (Aramco) and other oil companies made contributions of money and Mr. Howar gave numerous gifts, including the fountains in the courtyard. A particularly important contribution was made by an American named Wellman Chamberlin. Mr. Chamberlin, a cartographer for the National Geographic Society, was asked to ascertain the exact direction of the site on Massachusetts Avenue with respect to Mecca, the holy city of Islam and the place toward which Muslims face when they pray. After painstaking calculations Mr. Chamberlin announced that to face Mecca the mosque would have to point 56 degrees 35 minutes and 15 seconds east of true north, an angle that was not at all in accordance with the building line of Massachusetts Avenue. That led to a feature that has, for visitors, a particular charm. The frontal arcade of the mosque and the two wings of the Islamic Center are parallel to the street, but the main body slants off at a slight angle so that worshippers, when they kneel or stand within the mosque to recite their prayers, are facing exactly toward the holy city, 8,000 miles away in Saudi Arabia.

To organize such a variety of contributions required many years of patient effort and negotiation. And adding to the difficulties was the need to raise money for construction—which alone cost $1,250,000—and commitments for future maintenance, from among the nations and rulers of the Muslim world. In time, however, after four years of preparation and seven years of construction, the slim silhouette of a minaret pushed up into the Washington skyline and on June 28, 1957, with President Dwight D. Eisenhower on hand to preside at the ceremonies, it was dedicated and opened.

Since then the mosque and the attached Islamic Center have begun to play an important role in the lives of Muslims everywhere and in the cultural life of Washington. The mosque, of course, is what the inscription over the door calls it, a house of worship, "... which God has allowed to be raised up and His name to be commemorated therein." Its central function is the worship of God. And so, five times a day, each day, its doors swing open to admit the faithful to prayer. So too, each Friday —the Muslim equivalent of the Western Sunday—the crowds come to *Jum'ah*, the "Friday Prayer," as, overhead, the recorded voice of a *muezzin* cries out, across the roar of traffic, "this perfect summons" to the faithful. Yet, important as the mosque is, it is the Islamic Center that has had the wider impact. With its library of 5,000 volumes of history, religion, philosophy, and modern writing, and a dedicated staff of teachers, librarians and guides, able and eager to explain, to teach, to convince, the center has taken important steps toward achieving its purposes. Those purposes are summed up by Acting Director Hassan Hosny this way: "...to make known the principles of Islam, its culture, philosophy and the universality of the message of the Prophet Muhammad."

This aspect, of course, is not apparent to all visitors who come to the mosque. To many it is merely a strikingly different building that excites curiosity and passing interest, a somewhat unusual temple where one must remove one's shoes and walk in silence across layers of rich Eastern carpets, a place where the daily register lists the names of American Boy Scouts and Sunday School pupils on the same pages with leaders of the Muslim world. But there are also some who see the mosque and the center in a more appreciative light, who realize that here, on Massachusetts Avenue, in the midst of the modern Western world, is a statement of belief in an ancient Eastern faith, a statement at once proud and firm. For those who built the mosque and those who worship there, this is enough.

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BY ROSALIND MAZZAWI

WHERE HONOR DWELLS

Legend has it that Ishmael ibn Ibrahim, the progenitor of the Arab people, was the possessor of a fine horse named *Ahwaj*. Like the Old Testament patriarchs who rode him and his offspring, the tribe of *Ahwaj* in time increased mightily, and after five generations Ishmael's descendant Salman was entrusted with the awesome task of breeding them. After much deliberation, Salman found an ingenious solution: he withheld water from the herd until the horses were mad with thirst; then, just as they were taking their first deep draught, he had the war trumpet sounded, and the five mares who instantly sprang from the stream to answer the call to arms became the ancestors of the Arabian horse of today.

Fantasy or fact, this engaging story illustrates the importance which the *Badu* of the Arabian Peninsula attach to the bloodlines of their mounts, to seek their origins some 4,000 years in the past. Even the alternative version of the story, that the *al-khamsa* ("The Five") were the favorite mares of the Prophet Muhammad, makes up in pious tradition what it lacks in antiquity. What sort of animal is this, that inspires such legends and those proverbs attributed to the Prophet himself, that "Noble and fierce breeds of horses are true riches," and "Honor dwells in the manes of horses"?

The Arabian horse is small, averaging 14 to 15 hands (a hand is four inches) in height and weighing from 800 to 1,000 pounds. The Arabian is beautiful, sure-footed and intelligent, combines docility with spirit and has tremendous endurance: in 1840 an Arabian was ridden 400 miles in India in four successive days; another made a 90-mile run across the desert to Cairo in 7 hours, 52 minutes. For sheer, all-out speed, however, the Arabian, contrary to common belief, does not approach certain other breeds. The quarter horse can beat him in the $\frac{1}{8}$ and $\frac{1}{4}$-mile distances, the thoroughbred can beat him at seven furlongs and up (partly, it must be noted, because of a great advantage in size), and the trotting horse is superior in harness. The American saddle horse is better at five gaits, for the Arabian is accustomed to walk or to gallop at top speed. But for a combination of the best traits found in horses, the Arabian has no peer.

In the horse fancier, the Arabian excites an almost mystical admiration, evident in the description given by William Gifford Palgrave, a visitor to the Najd (Central Arabia) in 1863: "The stature of the horses was indeed somewhat low, but they were so exquisitely shaped that want of greater size seemed hardly a defect. Remarkably full in the haunches, with a shoulder of (an elegant) slope; a very little saddle-backed, just the curve which indicates springiness without any weakness, a head broad above, and tapering down to a (fine) nose; a most intelligent and yet a singularly gentle look, full eye, sharp thorn-like

"The air of Heaven is that which blows between the ears of a horse."

little ear, leg fore and hind that seemed as if made of hammered iron, a neat round hoof, the mane long but not overgrown or heavy..."

Overblown as this fond picture may appear, it is not far from the simple truth. Yet perhaps more significant to the owner of an Arabian than his physical beauty is a gentle, even disposition, cultivated from infancy by treating the horse as a family pet rather than a beast of burden. The Arabian of the desert wears a halter instead of a bit, responds to leg pressure and vocal signals, and has given abundant proof through the ages of an intelligent loyalty to his master. Arabians have been observed retrieving lost articles of apparel belonging to their owners, awakening them at the approach of strangers and beasts of prey, or standing motionless in the midday sun while their owners slept in their shade. In battle, some Arabians kicked or bit enemy horses and horsemen, and, if their riders fell, were known to stand guard over them until help came.

The noble qualities that distinguish the Arabian horses did not develop by accident. They were carefully cultivated by selective breeding of the 20 varieties or strains that emerged from the wild *kuhaylan*, or *asil*, which roamed the South Arabian desert at least 3,000 years ago. Twelve of these lines have been kept pure, while the other eight have been mixed with Turkoman, Turkish, Persian and other breeds. Ancient rock carvings in Arabia and Egypt depict horses of Arab *kuhaylan* type, and the Mitanni, a nomad people who settled in Northern Syria about 1500 B.C., were renowned horse breeders and charioteers. They left a recently-discovered treatise on the training and breeding of horses, at which they were so expert that with their chariots they were able to subjugate most of their neighbors. The learning was passed on, through the Hittites to the Egyptians, thence to the nomadic Arabs of the Arabian Peninsula.

The true Arabian horse has no foreign blood, having been bred from time beyond memory in Najd and more recently in the Jazira area of Syria and Iraq. These semi-desertic plains of the upper Tigris and Euphrates provide better forage than Najd, for they are exceedingly fertile for a few months of the year after the winter rains fall. In a book published in 1829 the Swiss traveler Burckhardt estimated that there were about 50,000 Arabian horses in Arabia and the Jazira, a number that certainly decreased with the advent of the high-powered rifle, the automobile, the airplane and the pacification of the peninsular tribes, but is again on the rise as Arab interest in the breeding of horses revives.

Horse breeding is without doubt the oldest form of husbandry on the Arabian Peninsula, even predating that of the camel. Mares mature at five years, and stallions at six; their best reproductive years last from these ages until

they are 15, although mares sometime foal up to the age of 25 (and Arabians as a breed frequently live and work well into their thirties).

According to some authorities, the best horses combine the features of endurance and strength from the *kuhaylan* strain, beauty from the *saqlawi* strain, and speed from the *mu'niqi* strain. Horses so bred are versatile enough to be used for polo, racing, show jumping, or hunting, and were the preferred breed in the bygone days of horse cavalry. The notable breeds of Poland, Germany and Hungary were developed with the strong admixture of Arabian blood, and the authority Charles du Huijs even attributes to the Arabian the best qualities of the immense Percheron draft horse.

One of the more unusual features of the Arabian horse is his Spartan ability to live on a frugal and uncertain supply of food. When available, barley and dry dates, locusts, straw, beans or seeds of wild herbs satisfy the horse's wants. Should these be lacking, as they usually are on long desert marches, the horse is fed camel's milk exclusively. A nursing camel, in fact, is made a foal's

foster mother a few weeks after his birth, and treats him with all the tenderness she bestows on her own young. Camel's milk constitutes the bulk of the Arabians' fluid intake, however, for their owners water them sparingly, not only because the desert affords little water, but in the conviction that too much water adversely affects their mounts' wind.

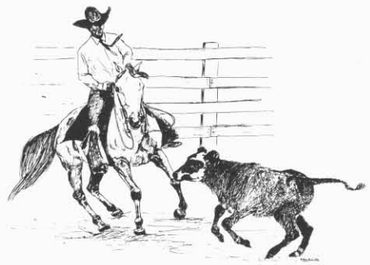
Arab horses are remarkably friendly and docile, for after weaning they are reared by women and children who lavish truly maternal affection upon them, and gently teach them obedience. Even stallions respond so well to this loving kindness that in Saudi Arabia they are not gelded. They come when called and learn to carry a saddle and answer the rein at just over a year. Saddlery is sketchy —a pad of camel's hair, upholstered to form pommel and cantle, with a heavy saddlecloth and no stirrups. Arabians require little breaking, and lightweight riders may begin to mount them when they are barely two years old. Palgrave notes that in his day it was "common to ride them without bit or bridle, (as they responded) to the knee and thigh, to the slightest check of the halter and the voice of the rider. I often mounted them at the invitation of their owners, and without saddle, rein, or stirrup set them off at full gallop, wheeled them round, brought them up in mid-career at a dead halt, and that without the least difficulty. The rider on their back really feels himself the man-half of a centaur."

The horse-half of the centaur was often divided among several owners and the ownership of a noble mare has always been a complicated affair. Usually several warriors would possess shares in her, with the right to acquire the foals born to her in a determined order of precedence, with the original owner having rights to the first filly foal. Mares, it should be noted, have always been far more prized than stallions, and pedigrees are always traced through the female line. They were formerly always ridden in war and regarded as a fighter's most treasured possession. As a result, stallions became so rare that Doughty in his classic *Travels in Arabia Deserta*, recounts that mares sometimes had to travel hundreds of miles to a stallion, who was thus obliged to serve as many as 200 mares in a single season. Stallion owners, incidentally, have not customarily been accorded payment for the services of their horses.

In Arabia horses are sold, not on appearance or performance, but on their lineage, for bloodlines are rightly considered the best indication of a horse's potential. Times, nevertheless, have changed since Palgrave's day when, having asked how he might acquire a particularly fine specimen, was told, "By war, by legacy, or by free gift." Though it is still a time-consuming and expensive process to purchase the best horses from the desert, it can be done, and with perfect assurance that there will be no misrepresentation about the horse's pedigree, for a true Bedouin will never dissimulate about this most important of matters. His sworn word about the ancestry of the animal is enough; he scorns paper pedigrees as townsmen's documents designed to conceal a carefully-prepared swindle.

So fundamental and universal among the *Badu* was the desire to maintain the purity of *kuhaylan*, that it was a matter of honor among the tribes to receive an emissary of an enemy who had captured their horses and supply him with the complete pedigree of each before assuring his safe return. The names of men, incidentally, since they may have been borne by holy men, are never given to horses, for that would be sacrilege. Instead, foals are named according to some outstanding quality either demonstrated or hoped for: *Ghazala*, the gazelle; *Mansour*, the victorious; *al-Aroussa*, the bride; *Sabbak*, the front runner; or *Sa'ad*, good omen.

Distinctive names go far toward simplifying an animal's pedigree, but centuries of inbreeding have produced snarls in bloodlines that only a genealogist could unravel. A student of the subject, for example, once pointed out to the bemused owner of the New Mexico-bred mare *Razima*, that the mare was a sister of her own father, a



granddaughter of her mother, and had an uncle for a brother. To keep the respective strains untangled, Bedouin shaikhs maintained each pedigree with the meticulous care of a maiden aunt. The birth of foals was a signal for rejoicing, the death of dams an occasion for mourning, while the mating of a prized mare was as carefully arranged as a princely alliance. Among the archives of the Lebanese palace of Beiteddine are preserved several letters written to the ruling amir, congratulating him upon the birth of a filly to his favorite mare, or condoling him upon the death of another.

The preservation of such precious animals was naturally a matter of jealous concern to the desert chieftains who owned them. Camped among friendly neighbors, the owners of horses hobbled them with strips of wool, which allowed them to graze while keeping them from straying. When enemies were abroad, however, steel shackles were locked around the mares' pasterns so that they could not be led off at a run by a raiding party. The usual practice of raiders was to approach a likely target— generally a camp at sleep—on camelback, leading their horses. At the distance of a mile or two they could switch to their Arabians and charge at top speed, hoping to take off horses and other booty by surprise and with a minimum of bloodshed. Outdistancing pursuit and regaining their camels, they would remount them and ride for hours until the chase was abandoned. In most cases it was futile for the outraged victims to pursue beyond a few miles, where the endurance of the camel began to outstrip the speed of the horse (a good camel has been known, under test conditions, to keep pace with four fine Arabians, one after another, and run each of them to exhaustion.)

The high-powered rifle and the consolidation of British power in India were, strangely enough, important factors in the gradual decline of the Arabian horse in Arabia at the turn of this century. The modern rifle, with its long range, leveled the advantage of the saber-wielding horseman who formerly had descended upon a camp, cutting and slashing, then used his superior speed to get away. Raiders found it less easy to outrun a lead slug accurately aimed, and suddenly raiding lost much of its old appeal. In India, after the days of Clive, the dragoons and lancers of the British cavalry had provided a steady market for Arabian horses. But once they had pacified the subcontinent, their need for good mounts declined, and Arabia's largest overseas outlet disappeared. In Saudi Arabia itself the advent of motor vehicles and the ban on tribal raiding imposed by the late King 'Abd al-'Aziz also contributed to the decline of demands.

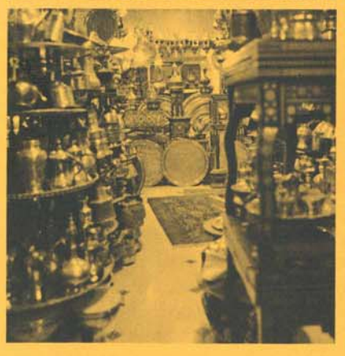
Fortunately, the situation was mitigated by a growing interest in the West in Arabian horses. As early as 1121 there is a record of the export of an Arabian to England, and by 1653 Arabians had so proliferated that Oliver Cromwell was able to mount his men on Arabian mares for today's equivalent of $30. Across the sea in America, *Monkey*, a part-bred Arabian-Barb-Turkish horse, was imported in 1747 by one Nathaniel Harrison and in seven years sired 300 foals that were soon scattered around the country. The U.S. Department of Agriculture, in 1908, approved the first studbook of the Arabian Club of horse-owners as the only National Registry of Arabians in the United States, with a listing of 71 Arabians owned by 12 breeders. Interest quickened when both Rudolph Valentino (in "The Son of the Sheik") and Will Rogers rode Arabians in their movies. In 1930 there were 710 horses of Arabian blood owned by 86 Americans, and by mid-century there were more than 10,000 Arabians in the United States—more than there are in Arabia itself.

The passionate attachment of owners to their horses led, perhaps inevitably, to the establishment of the Arabian Horse Club of America, a monthly magazine (the *Arabian Horse News*, issued in Boulder, Colorado, with a circulation of 7,200) and a very respectable literature in hard covers. In the United States there are currently eight books in print about Arabians. In England there are easily double that number. The publication most precisely indicative of the devotion of masters to their mounts is probably a book by Ursula Gutmann printed in Switzerland: *Liebesbriefe um Arabische Pferde* (Love Letters about Arabian Horses).

Considering the profound emotions which Arabians arouse in those of the West who have discovered them, it is no wonder that the Arabs themselves can think of them only in superlatives or the headiest of proverbs, such as "The air of heaven is that which blows between the ears of a horse," and "Paradise is only to be found on the back of a horse or in the arms of one's beloved."

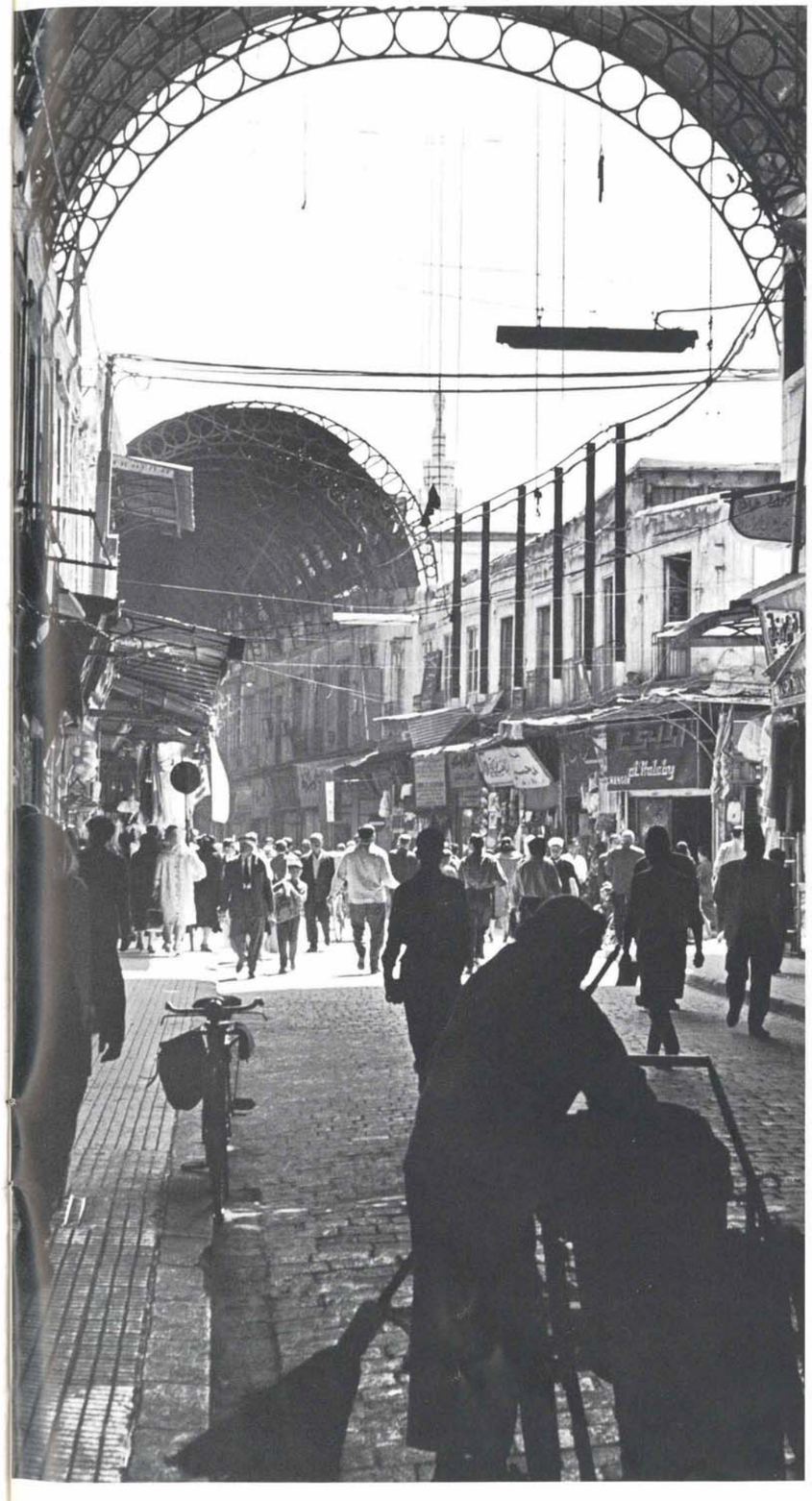
Rosalind Mazzawi, a former teacher in Lebanon, who has written for Middle East Forum *and other English-language publications, has ridden horses since she was a child and owns a well-known Arabian stallion* Suhab, *bred in the Jazira.*

SILKS and SEEDS and SILVER SWORDS



Artificial legs for the handicapped, soccer balls, fine metal work for the collector, candies, candles to brighten a home in times of joy and reverence — these are among the millions of things on sale in the numerous shops grouped in or near the famous "Street called Straight," the ancient and colorful market place in Damascus.

BY DANIEL DA CRUZ



Camel saddles, Sir? An amulet, Madame? Or a hat, perhaps? We've jugs, and javelins, brushes and beads...

If you happen to be in the market for a dog muzzle, a canvas belt, a Thermos jug, a horse bridle, an artificial leg, a bandoleer, a cow bell, a football, a clothes line, an amulet against the evil eye, a racing saddle, a shopping bag, a padlock, a fiber inner sole, a canteen, a laundry brush, a swagger stick, a string of worry beads, or a leather fly swatter, Sa'id Tughli's six-by-nine-foot shop in Damascus' Suq al-Hamidiyah, which he shares with his abundance of merchandise, two sewing machines, two sons and a welcoming smile that embraces all humanity, is unquestionably the place for you.

If, on the other hand, your tastes run to javelins, razor blades, panama hats, chewing gum, French perfume, dart boards, pith helmets, dark glasses, police whistles, sport shirts, hammocks, baby blankets, table tennis paddles, silk neckties, hot water bottles, boxers' mouthpieces, brass polish, key chains, spiked soccer shoes, watchbands, paisley scarves, chess sets, coat hangers, woolen underwear, toothpaste, compasses, skin divers' snorkels, cuff links or switchblade knives, the shop you're looking for is Silo's, which is roughly half the size of Tughli's and just around the corner.

Buried deep amid the labyrinthine passageways of the sprawling, ancient suqs—markets or bazaars—of Damascus, Tughli's and Silo's are in microcosm the great bazaar itself—a marriage of convenience between modern merchandise and stubbornly traditional merchandising methods, a total incapacity for haste, a finely-developed instinct for plucking the potential buyer from among the horde of window shoppers, and a lofty indifference toward the fast lira, for, in the suqs of Damascus, what still matters is not the bargain, but the bargaining.

A single step takes you from the hot asphalt streets of downtown Damascus into the cool interior of the roofed-over "Street called Straight"—and right out of the 20th century. The Acts of the New Testament record that down this very thoroughfare, perhaps upon these same worn cobblestones, walked Ananias to whom the Lord said: "Arise, and go into the Street which is called Straight, and inquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus..."

The pressure of centuries has squeezed the Street called Straight—in Roman times a proud avenue 100 feet wide stretching an arrow-straight mile from the Bab al-Jabiyah to the East Gate—into a narrow and twisted thoroughfare only a third its former width.

Today some 500 shops crowd the western end of the street, those of the textile merchants and the food sellers, the copper and brass dealers, the mosaic makers and the brocade weavers—each in turn occupying what is by tradition long established, their section of the street. Parallel to the Street called Straight is the Suq al-Hamidiyah (named for Turkish Sultan 'Abd al-Hamid), only a third the length of its neighbor but lined with more than 700 shops. Clustered around these two main streets, and hemmed in by the ancient walls of the Old City, are a dozen or so other suqs, each with its specialty.

The Saddlers' Suq deals in spurs, bridles, buggy whips, cartridge belts, and the hundreds of other leather and metal items associated with horses and the hunt. The Fez Suq sells fewer tarbooshes (the brimless hat usually called the 'fez' in the West) than it did in the days of Turkish occupation, but compensates by providing headgear of all descriptions, from the kafiyyah headcloth and black camel-hair agal, or headrope, of the tribes, to the latest in snapbrims and Texas Stetsons. The Greek Suq has traditionally catered to tourists who crave camel saddles, curved daggers, antique jewelry and Arab coffee sets, with egg-shell cups so tiny that five can fit into an American teacup. The Tobacco Suq sells ripely yellow, exquisitely carved meerschaum pipes, blends of tobacco made on the spot to the customer's order, and decorative stems for the narghilah (what the West calls the hubble-bubble or waterpipe) which, when encrusted with gold and semiprecious stones, cost in the hundreds of dollars.

The Booksellers' Suq and the Boot-and-Shoe Suq deal, unremarkably enough, with books and boots, respectively. The Old Clothes Suq is perhaps the answer to what ever became of your old tweed suit coat. It may well have wound up here, to be bought for the equivalent of a dollar or two and worn for another dozen years by some poor Syrian workman. A major source of the merchandise for this suq is the wholesale dealers in used clothing in the United States and Europe, who bale suits and dresses like plantation cotton and ship them to the East, where anyone from peasants and longshoremen can be seen sporting Hart, Schaffner & Marx and I. Magnin labels.

The Spice Suq sells the multitude of aromatic flavoring and preserving spices—cardamom, clove, sage, basil, thyme, bay leaf, marjoram, curry, dill, rosemary and dozens of others—many of them native to the Middle East where they give taste and variety to local diets. Then there is the Seed Suq, which supplies cashews, pistachios, pecans, pine seeds, peanuts and almonds, as well as roasted chickpeas and salted watermelon seeds—the latter the Arab equivalent of popcorn.

Doubtless the most colorful marketplace, and magnetically irresistible to women, is the Silk Suq, whose dozens of shops display their goods in tiers of bolts stretching from floor to ceiling, and fastooning the storefronts to invite the appraising touch. Here have been sold for centuries the world's richest cloths, the names of many of them revealing their Middle Eastern origin: muslin from Mosul, Iraq; damask linen from Damascus; baldachin, originally a silk fabric from Baghdad; gauze from Gaza.

Though it never fails to excite the wonder of foreign visitors, who cannot understand how a hundred shops, every one of them selling virtually identical merchandise at closely competitive prices, can survive side by side, this peculiarly Eastern practice has endured with surprisingly little modification at least since the days of the ancient Greeks. In those early times, when government was still a matter of personal leadership rather than bureaucratic organization, such modern commonplaces as fire and police protection, standards of weights and measures, building codes, product quality control, labor legislation and the enforcement of fair prices simply didn't exist. In self-defense against a community of customers who had little sympathy for their problems, dealers in like commodities banded together to bring order to their trade. They fixed minimum standards of quality for their goods, maintained warehouse facilities, participated jointly in wholesale buying and selling, set up rules for the training of apprentices, fixed prices and working hours, agreed on uniform weights and measures, and ruthlessly fought unscrupulous traders. Men in the same line of work regarded themselves as a brotherhood, not as competitors, and the system took root in medieval Europe to become the guilds—ancestors both of modern labor unions and the learned societies in which physicians, chemists, engineers and other professionals seek the understanding and protection of their own kind.

Other survivals of ancient practices persist in the Middle Eastern Suq. No clear-cut distinction is made, for instance, between the makers and vendors of a particular product. The same men (and in the suqs there are rarely female workers or salesgirls) frequently produce and sell, with an appreciation of the true value of their merchandise rarely found among salesmen in the West. That, in turn, may account for the persistence of the most famous of all Middle East customs—the immemorial process of bargaining which, in the suqs, has been brought to a delicate perfection. Bargaining in the suqs combines a commercial transaction with a test of wit, manners, skill in acting and the pleasures of a purely social visit; it usually proceeds something like this:

The sky is high but the overhead's low when a man can do his work on the sidewalk in the warm sunshine.

"Oriental perfumes" come most often from the West, but customers rarely complain.

All sorts of seeds, nuts and peas are sorted, packed and sold in the Seed Suq.

Stiff bargaining precedes the sale of any article — such as a narghilah, or waterpipe as it is known in the West.

"That's an interesting-looking manuscript —there, next to that engraved dagger. May I have a look at it?"

"By all means! Which one do you wish to see—the 18th-century firman (scroll) of Mustafa III on the left, or the 15th-century illuminated copy of the al-Mutanabbi poem on the right?"

"The firman, of course. I'm not interested in copies. How much are you asking?"

The proprietor dusts off a chair with a great show of deliberation, and places it a fraction of an inch closer to his desk.

"Terribly hot day, isn't it? Would you like a cold drink before your coffee?"

"Pray do not disturb yourself, for I really can't stay," says the patron earnestly, sitting down. "But if you mean to insist, I'd prefer coffee alone—mazbuta."

"Two coffees, little sugar," the shopkeeper says, snapping his fingers at a passing boy who balances a tray of empty cups as he threads through the crowd. "Now, sir, as to the price of the firman, I will tell you frankly that, although it is indisputably a masterpiece of the calligrapher's art and quite unique, I am weary of seeing it in the shop, where until today no one took the slightest notice of it. Therefore, to a discriminating gentleman like yourself—may God preserve you—I could be persuaded to part with it for the ridiculous sum of—shall we say—250 Syrian pounds."

The customer laughs softly. "As you say—ridiculous. My cousin 'Abd al-'Aziz Khurshid, who happens to be a good friend of your nephew Abu Talib, warned me that you have a sly sense of humor. For a moment I thought you were speaking of the firman, when it is obvious that your quotation refers to the illuminated copy."

"Ah, would that it were so cheap," the proprietor says apologetically, "but still it is exceedingly reasonable at 475 pounds—450 for a family friend of my sister's second son."

The coffee comes, and the discussion slips imperceptibly from the subject of manuscripts to family and friends, politics, school days, the changes in the city since their childhood, the terrible inflation of prices since the war. And just as imperceptibly, the discussion comes full circle.

"And speaking of prices," the customer is saying, having put down an empty cup with the traditional salutation dayme, "would you believe that I bought a similar firman in Aleppo not ten years ago, for barely half the price? Not a single water stain on it, either."

"A slight yellowing merely proves the document authentic ... Very well," the dealer says resignedly, "I will sacrifice my profit, though my heirs will curse me for it. Two hundred pounds. My last, absolute, final word."

The customer rises slowly to his feet, the hand that hovered near his inside breast pocket falling to his side. "Your coffee was excellent, your shop fascinating, your views on the current state of affairs most absorbing. All the same, I'm afraid I couldn't distress your heirs for the sake of a second-class antiquity, which in any case is not worth above 150 pounds. Thank you very much for a pleasant half-hour, and good day." He shakes hands warmly with the proprietor and starts to leave the shop. A hesitant cough behind him brings him up sharply.

"Yes?"

"I'd be disgraced if you went away empty-handed. You may have the firman for 180 pounds, provided you never breathe a word of my foolishness to my colleagues—they'd laugh me out of business."

"I would be the worst kind of ingrate to ignore such a kind offer," the customer says, "and to show you my appreciation I am going to relieve you of that inferior copy —which I strongly suspect to be a forgery, by the way—as well." He reaches for his notecase. "Five hundred pounds for the pair—agreed?"

The proprietor calls upon heaven to witness his soft heart and even softer head, meanwhile reaching for the wrapping paper. That night he tells his wife, "Remember that Mutanabbi poem we've never been able to move? Well, today," he says, rubbing his hands briskly, "this distinguished but, alas, uninformed gentleman came in and ..."

The customer is also relating his day: "I finally got it, and the old pirate never suspected a thing! As for that firman—we can always give it to your father on his next birthday. He values such trifles."

All the world loves a bargain.

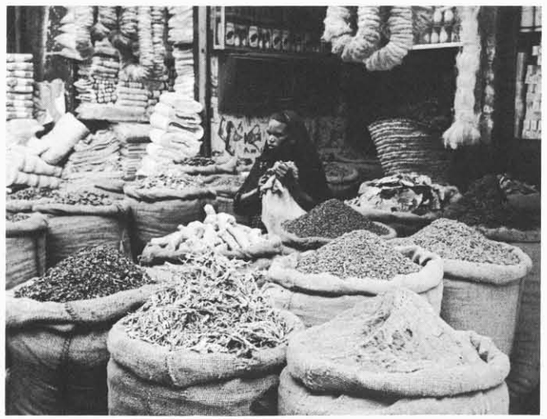
But not everybody comes to the suqs of Damascus to buy or sell. As it is in life, so too in the suqs the best things—the sights, the sounds, the smells—are free. From the moment you pass through Jabiyah Gate onto the Street called Straight, you are witness to a pageant which has been played out daily here for uncounted centuries. The setting is properly ageless: the darkened street is a great long cavern, walled here by 17 feet of

In the Copper Suq, copperware at its finest is made and sold.

Despite its great display of riches, the Gold Suq seldom tempts thieves and robberies are virtually unknown.

He hasn't extra arms but his feet will do just as well.

Handmade sandals can be carved while you wait.



Rare spices, standing in great burlap bags, add their fragrance to the suq.

3rd-century Roman stones, there by massive blocks of rock hewn during the days of Saladin (whose tomb, incidentally, lies within a modest garden in this same bazaar area), and covering all is a roof of galvanized iron, leaking sunlight to the cobbled street below through countless holes made by stray bullets during the 1926 revolt against the French occupier.

The actors, too, have an oriental diversity. Hawk-nosed, eagle-eyed patriarchs just hours off the desert sweep along in long robes, followed at a discreet distance by their black-veiled women; German tourists in lederhosen, peeling noses and serious mien, guidebook in one hand and camera in the other, stride purposefully along, missing nothing; pilgrims from Persia in white skullcaps and pointed shoes stare in wonder at the goods on display; ebon-skinned Sudanese, wrapped in layers of clothes and an imperturbable dignity, peddle hot peanuts to the passers-by; a smudge-nosed, barefoot gamin races laughing through the crowd, depending on youthful speed to escape the wrathful shopkeeper from whom he has just borrowed a juicy pomegranate; a covey of white-topped nuns, all starch and rustle, whispers along, oblivious of the hurley-burley about them; a pair of middle-aged Syrian gentlemen, immaculately clad in white linen and red tarbooshes, stroll arm-in-arm discussing world problems in flawless French; a porter with bulging muscles and horny feet half-trots under the weight of 20-odd five-gallon tins, while the crowd parts, like the water under a ship's prow.

A little beyond the Silk Suq, vivid with rainbow colors, lies the Suq of the Coppersmiths, whose wares glint in sunbursts of gold from the faint light above and where the tinkling beat of their hammers joins the clangor from the blacksmiths' anvils, where bare-chested vulcans beat white-hot metal into sickles, shovels and plowshares. Over all can be heard the sputtery backfire of motorbikes threading between the pedestrians —for street and sidewalk are all one in an Eastern bazaar—the strident braying of a donkey protesting his heavy load, a fragment of mournful song from behind a workshop wall, and the clash of brass cups by which the vendors of lemonade, raisin water, licorice water and orange juice announce their approach. "O, cheer thine heart," one cries, while another choruses, "Drink, O thirsty ones." And five times each day is heard the sacred chant of the muezzin calling the faithful to prayer at the great Umayyad Mosque, a calm island in a boisterous sea of people.

Near the Great Mosque you spot a shop-window crowded with daggers, steel armor, maces and swords and all the paraphernalia for personal combat, for in the East the ideal in window display is to place one's entire stock, if possible, on public view. You ask to see the bright-bladed sword with the gold-encrusted hilt. It is handed to you carefully and then snatched away, as you start to flex the blade in the bravura manner of the Hollywood Saracen. Then you learn with surprise that only in the movies is the famed Damascus blade bent point to hilt; actually its virtue is a razor-sharpness that can cleave armor, but it is very brittle. How old is this sword? Eight hundred years, at the very least. And what is its price? This particular one, sir, is $890—but for you ... Thank you very much, you say, moving off.

Amid the vagrant odors of baked bread, scorching mahogany from a woodworker's lathe, and roasting coffee, the fragrance of a tiny shop attracts you, and you pause before its open shelves and rank on rank of little glass vials. Oriental perfumes, the owner explains, and only when pressed does he tell you that the principal suppliers are factories in Grasse, France, up in the hills beyond Nice, and other firms in Switzerland, the Netherlands and Germany. The huge carboys, though, are filled with Syrian rosewater and the essence of orange blossom, much valued locally as medicinal drinks.

Down the street you come to a shop from Lilliput: a diminutive workbench over which two watchmakers bend, foreheads an inch apart, their bald heads reflecting light from the single bulb between them. You mentally measure the shop, then do it again with the same result: two yards frontage by something less than a yard deep. Why such microscopic shops,-you finally ask, and the explanation is quickly forthcoming: typical "key money" —the price you must pay an occupant to relinquish his tenancy—for a shop of 50 square feet (slightly larger than a Hollywood bed), is $16,500.

Scarcely more spacious are the shops of the Gold Suq, though here every shop must sacrifice some of its precious space for a glass window, to separate its displayed stock from the temptations of the light-fingered. The complete furnishings usually consist of a desk, two or three chairs, a heavy iron safe of vintage design, and a set of jeweler's scales. The Gold Suq is always crowded, and never more so than when times are uncertain and people rush to convert immovable property into something small, portable and unlikely to depreciate—like the gold, pearls and precious stones which are the lifeblood of this suq. In the Orient, banks have never had the appeal they enjoy in the Western world, and a woman's dowry and lifelong savings are customarily worn on the arms in the form of thin gold bracelets complemented, when means allow, by solid gold rings set with precious stones.

Nor are the prices arbitrary in the Gold Suq. Eighteen-karat gold sells currently for 375 piasters (3.75 Syrian pounds, or approximately one U.S. dollar) a gram, while 21-karat gold costs 430 piasters; no other quality of gold is traded here. Bracelets bought mainly for investment range in price from 20 to 60 pounds each, while a more decorative piece, a 21-karat bracelet weighing 129 grams will cost 590 pounds, including about 35 pounds for the workmanship. The purity of each piece of gold sold in the suq is attested by the goldsmiths' guild, which laboratory-tests each piece offered for sale and imprints its tiny stamp thereon if the gold is of the requisite fineness; if not, the piece is confiscated and the maker fined. The abundance of precious metal, pearls, sapphires and diamonds in the space of less than a city block would seem an irresistible lure to thieves, yet a leading gold merchant cannot recall the last robbery—and he has been in business at the same shop for the past 45 years.

Still, by the standards of the Damascus bazaar, this is but yesterday. Merchants whose families have been in the same line of work since before the American Revolution are commonplace, and more than a few proudly claim direct descent from merchant moguls of the Middle Ages. It may well be true, for it is in the continuity of the traditions of unhurried hospitality and exquisite craftsmanship, as much as in the richness of its merchandise, that the enduring spirit of the great suq resides.

Daniel da Cruz, a free lance writer and correspondent, writes regularly for Aramco World.

These pleasant little stools, simple in design, reasonable in price and strong enough to last for years, are not only a specialty of the Damascus suq but of the entire Middle East.