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ON CAMPUS IN SAUDI ARABIA

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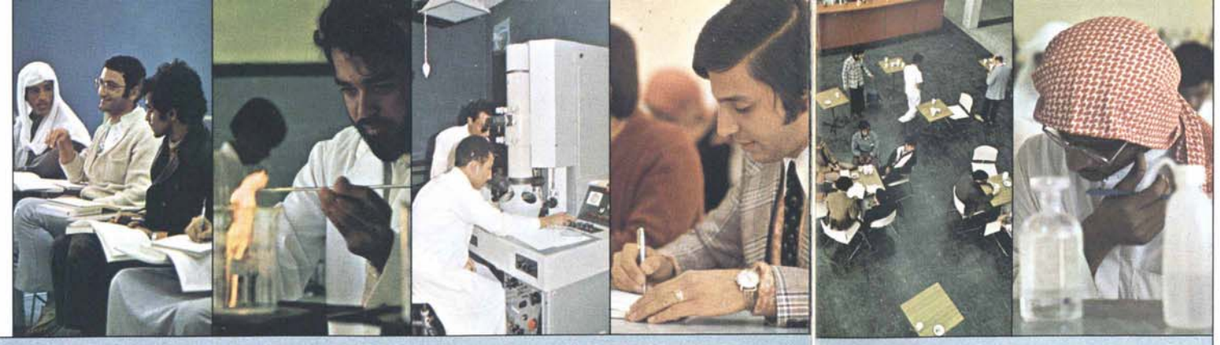
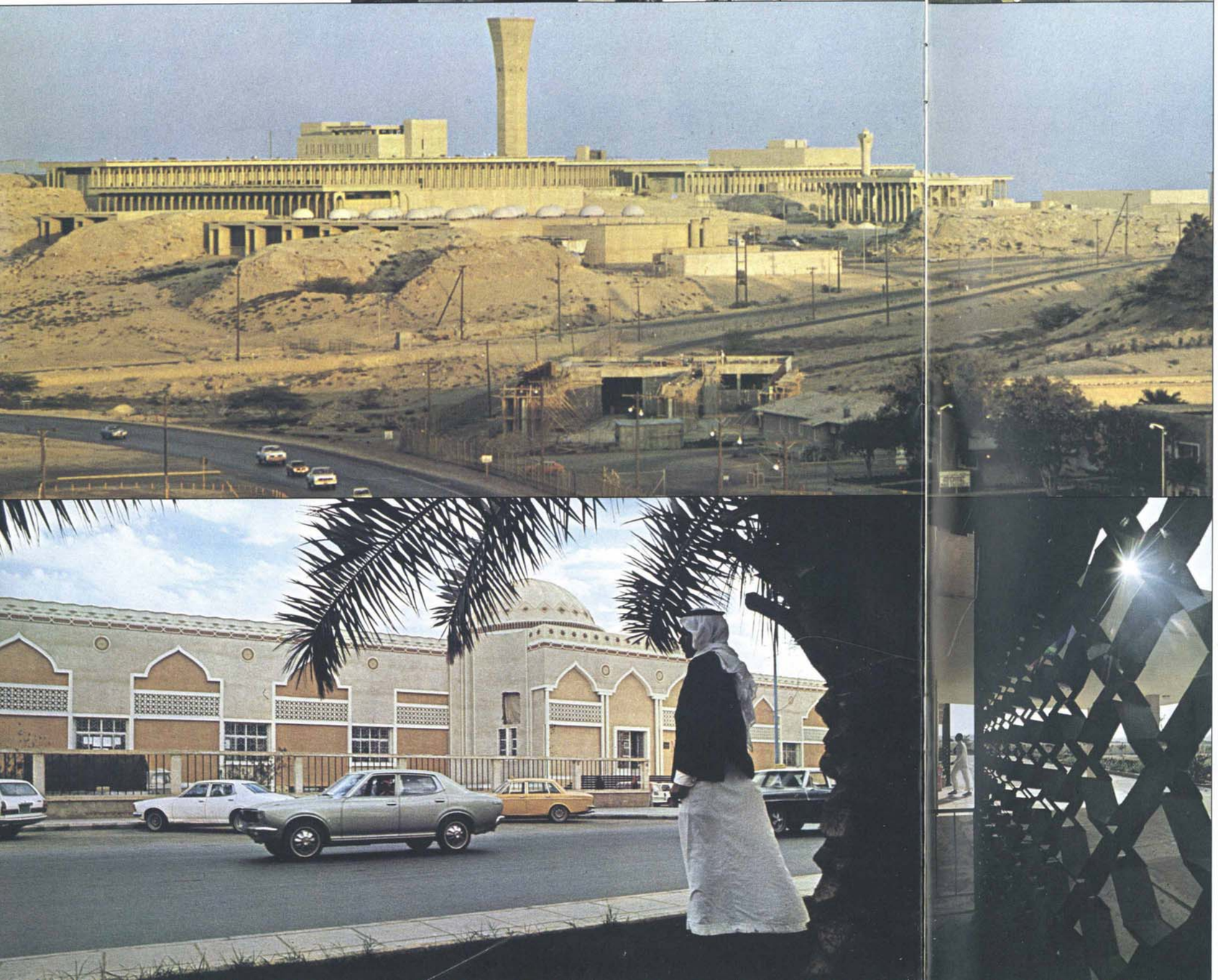
Cover: To Aramco photographer Burnett H. Moody, this earnest Saudi Arab student with his pocket calculator symbolized the remarkable change in higher education in the kingdom as told in the story beginning on page two. Back Cover: Students at Jiddah's King 'Abd al-'Aziz University.

← The Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem is a symbol of more than 1300 years of Muslim historical and religious ties with the Holy City. Story and photographs on page 24.



Young Saudi Arabs can now study in such fields as medicine, engineering, education, commerce and agriculture in the kingdom's three universities: the College of Petroleum and Minerals in Dhahran (top), the University of Riyadh (bottom, left) and King 'Abd al-'Aziz University in Jiddah.



ON CAMPUS IN SAUDI ARABIA

BY JOHN MUNRO / PHOTOGRAPHED BY BURNETT H. MOODY

You'd never mistake the campus of the University of Riyadh for that of Harvard. Its buildings are drab and colorless in the blaze of the Saudi Arabian sun, and though there is a dash of green in a dusty park opposite the main library, it does little to soften the hard, angular contours of the monolithic concrete structures close by. Students wearing dark glasses and dressed in long white robes pad quietly across the sizzling tarmac, their voices drifting and lilting in the windless air. There is a distinct absence of pert, earnest, mini-skirted girls. There is no ivy, only a handful of trees, and few if any of the traditions of leisurely, liberal learning, free inquiry and academic independence so dear to the hearts and minds of Western educators. Nevertheless, Riyadh, as well as Saudi Arabia's two other new secular institutions of higher learning, represents a formidable change in the educational values of this ancient land, and is a portent of things to come.

As the heartland of Islam, Saudi Arabia naturally, and until very recently, saw no need for any change in the centuries-old concentration of its educational institutions on the study of the Koran to the exclusion of virtually everything else. In the mosques and *madrasahs* of Mecca, Medina and elsewhere, the life, sayings and actions of the Prophet, as revealed in the Koran and the *Hadith* and transmitted by his Companions *(as-Sahaba)* and their successors, were endlessly and lovingly told and retold for the benefit of those who sought a deeper understanding of Islamic belief. Instructors prescribed certain texts by famous authors and gave detailed expositions of their meaning. A student was expected to learn these texts and the instructor's commentary and if he were able to recite them to his teacher's satisfaction he was awarded a diploma, or *ijazah*, which entitled *him* to teach the text and the instructor's commentary to others. Thus, traditional Islamic instruction rested firmly on memorization rather than intellectual inquiry, respect for the past rather than a search for the new.

An example of this approach is still found in Saudi Arabia. The University of Medina, founded in 1961, is acknowledged throughout the Muslim world as an important center of Islamic scholarship and learning. Its 1,500 students are drawn everywhere from West Africa to Malaysia. Yet there is little doubt that it is highly conservative in approach. Even Muslim scholars have noted that few teachers there know any language other than Arabic, and that little attention is paid to recent Islamic scholarship in other parts of the Arab world, let alone in the West.

When, therefore, Saudi Arabia entered the world of economic and political activity, and saw the need for an educational system capable of preparing young Saudis for new responsibilities, government officials were concerned. They knew there was a pressing need to educate its own people to master the staggering complexities of the international petroleum industry and even prepare for a future when petroleum will play a lesser role in the nation. But could they, in providing that manpower, also avoid the disruptive effects which a rapid and massive infusion of modern Western-style education would most likely have in a state where traditional Islamic beliefs and practices remain strong? To put it another way, could they provide fit subjects for the kingdom of God as well as for the kingdom of man?

To a remarkable degree, the answer is yes, particularly in the new secular universities in Riyadh, Jiddah and Dhahran where the winds of change, if still gentle, are quickening into a stiff breeze.

Take the University of Riyadh. Founded in 1957 as a single Faculty of Arts with only nine teachers and 21 students, the University of Riyadh has since added Faculties of Science, Commerce, Pharmacy, Agriculture, Engineering, Education and most recently Medicine, to become the largest university in the kingdom, with 300 teachers and an

enrollment of approximately 6,000 students. The vast majority of students are Saudi, while the staff is an international mix of Saudis, other Arab nationals, Pakistanis, British and American, more than half of whom have earned doctorates from Western universities.

Of the new departments, Engineering and Medicine are generally regarded as the most up-to-date, in terms of both the quality of the teaching staff and the educational achievement of the students. Engineering offers specializations in civil, mechanical, electrical and architectural engineering and, additionally, a small research center. Medicine has a special agreement with the University of London, under which London has undertaken to provide Riyadh with professors, technical advice and external examiners during the next 10 to 15 years. Beginning with 35 students in 1969, the medical school enrollment has risen to 60 at present, and plans to double that figure in the future.

The university also has a main central library, which has 187,000 volumes, including 2,500 rare books and some 800 or so rare manuscripts. Additionally, each faculty has its own library, whose individual acquisition budgets hover around $282,000, well in excess of actual need. Admittedly, as a casual stroll through the stacks in the library of the Faculty of Arts will reveal, there are, for a university, a few anomalies. Many of the books are still in mint condition, suggesting that unassigned books are rarely read, and books on art are kept in a section marked "Restricted Access."

The Faculty of Arts also has two museums, one for folklore and the other for archeology. The latter, especially, though still in the process of renovation, gives great promise of developing an excellent collection of artifacts recording the history of Arabia from its prehistoric beginnings to the rise of Islam. Many of the artifacts have been donated, others have been acquired. Still more have come from the university's own archeological dig at Al Faw, under the direction of Professor A.R. Al-Ansary, a Leeds University-trained archeologist.

One of the major problems besetting the University of Riyadh is the fact that it has no single, unified campus, at present faculties being scattered about the suburbs. Having no common campus, the individual faculties have become virtually autonomous and self-supporting, providing facilities and staff to satisfy their separate needs rather than looking to other faculties to support them. Thus, medical school students receive instruction in chemistry, physics, biology and even English from teachers of their own faculty rather than from the Faculties of Science and Arts.

Looking to the future, however, in about 10 years time, when student enrollment will have risen to 15,000, a huge, new complex will have emerged out of the desert on the edge of the capital. Work begins next year, and in 1978 it is expected that the Faculty of Medicine will be the first to move in, the whole project costing a staggering $423 million, not including the cost of furnishings and equipment.

Furthermore, the University of Riyadh, the first of the new Saudi universities, is fully conscious of its important role and is determined to provide quality education suited to the kingdom's needs. In the professional faculties, especially, one experiences a sense of urgency. Meetings with the Faculties of Engineering and Medicine were brief and businesslike, the Technicolored tea kettle deemed so essential to Saudi social occasions, circulated but once, and senior administrators everywhere gave the impression that they were interested in administrating rather than merely sitting behind their desks.

True, much needs to be done, particularly with regard to structure and approach, which until very recently scrupulously imitated the dated Egyptian lecture system. But the Riyadh administrators, already aware that the Egyptian style of education is perhaps not particularly well suited to the Saudi experience, are considering changes.

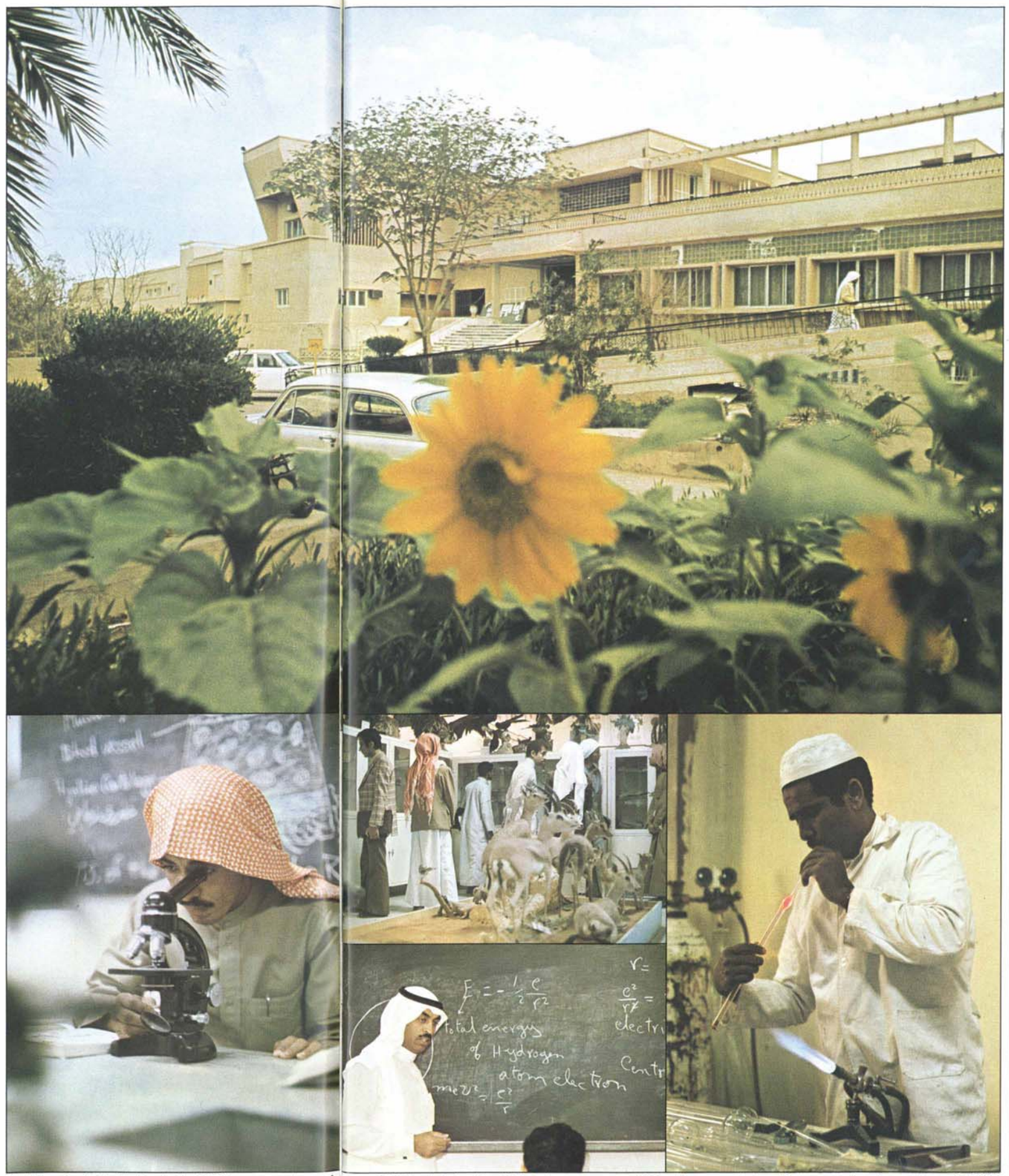
As Dr. Abdullah An-Nafi', an American-trained educational psychologist, now secretary general of the university, pointed out, "Egyptian universities are obliged to cope with large numbers, not all of whom are capable of benefiting from their higher educational experience. Confronted with classes of hundreds of students, professors are obliged to lecture impersonally on their material. At Riyadh, however, the situation is different. Admission to the university is more selective, especially in the Faculties of Engineering and Medicine, where a grade of 75 percent in the science *tawjihiyyah*, or school-leaving examination, is regarded as a minimum requirement. Therefore classes at Riyadh are small, enabling instructors to offer more individualized instruction. This means that a more flexible semester type of program can be introduced, closer supervision is feasible, and instead of students being judged in terms of their success on traumatic yearly examinations, they may be evaluated continuously, as is common in colleges and universities in the United States. Thus several faculties at Riyadh are considering the possibility of following the Faculty of Education, which has recently switched from the Egyptian plan to the American semester-credit system.

On the western side of the Arabian Peninsula, administrators at King 'Abd al-'Aziz University are also debating the relative merits of the Egyptian and American systems with regard to the needs of Saudi Arabia.

Founded in 1967 in the thriving Red Sea port of Jiddah, 'Abd al-'Aziz University began as a private institution. A group of wealthy businessmen, recognizing the need to provide educated manpower to run the local economy, banded together, took over a vacant house and recruited staff to teach students in Arts, Science, Commerce and Administration. Beginning with a handful of students, the university now has an enrollment of 2,500, a rate of growth so dramatic that the institution was inevitably drawn into the state higher educational system, recognizing as its ultimate authority, as does Riyadh, the Ministry of Education.

In the meantime, 'Abd al-'Aziz University had also been given administrative jurisdiction over the Shari'ah and Islamic Studies Faculty in Mecca, which was founded in 1947. The institution at Mecca, as would be expected, stresses the Islamic educational tradition, while the 'Abd al-'Aziz University approach reflects Western models—primarily the British university system. The result has been an interesting cross-cultural exchange, the results of which still cannot be predicted.

At present a new campus is being planned, or rather two new campuses within close proximity, one for men and the other for women, for in accordance with religious preferences, men and women still may not mix after the elementary educational level. This is not a serious problem with regard to pre-university education, but the chronic shortage of women university teachers



The University of Riyadh, founded in 1957, has an enrollment of some 6,000 in eight faculties. Work begins next year on a $423-million campus designed for an eventual student population of 15,000.

means that higher education for women, which is itself a recent innovation, often lags behind that provided for men. At the University of Riyadh, for example, women are external students, attending lectures by way of closed-circuit TV in a room some distance away from the other buildings. By their side are telephones, which they may use to ask the lecturer questions, and in addition they may confer directly with specially appointed women tutors. They are not allowed direct access to the libraries, which means that there is no possibility for browsing and that they must call upon male relations for the borrowing of books or consulting reference works. At King 'Abd al-'Aziz, women's educational needs are perhaps more adequately satisfied; there are more women tutors and recent donations, including one from Aramco, have helped finance a new library especially for the women's campus.

At present there is no indication that Saudi Arabia's segregated educational policy is likely to change, but this does not mean that women are doomed to take second place in the kingdom's educational system. On the contrary, future development calls for the establishment of equal but separate facilities, as evidenced by King 'Abd al-'Aziz's plan to construct two contiguous campuses of almost identical design.

While King 'Abd al-'Aziz and Riyadh are still in the process of establishing their educational identities, the College of Petroleum and Minerals at Dhahran in the Eastern Province has reached a level of self-confident maturity which sets it apart from the kingdom's other higher educational institutions. Founded in 1963 with less than 100 students, the CPM is an autonomous institution, under the influential Ministry of Petroleum and Minerals, headed by now well known Shaikh Ahmed Zaki Yamani, who also serves as CPM's Chairman of the Board of Trustees. It offers programs in three general areas: Science, Engineering Science and Applied Engineering. The language of instruction is English, and while most of the students are Saudis, 50 come from other Arab countries, a larger proportion than at either King 'Abd al-'Aziz University or Riyadh, while the faculty is drawn from all over the world.

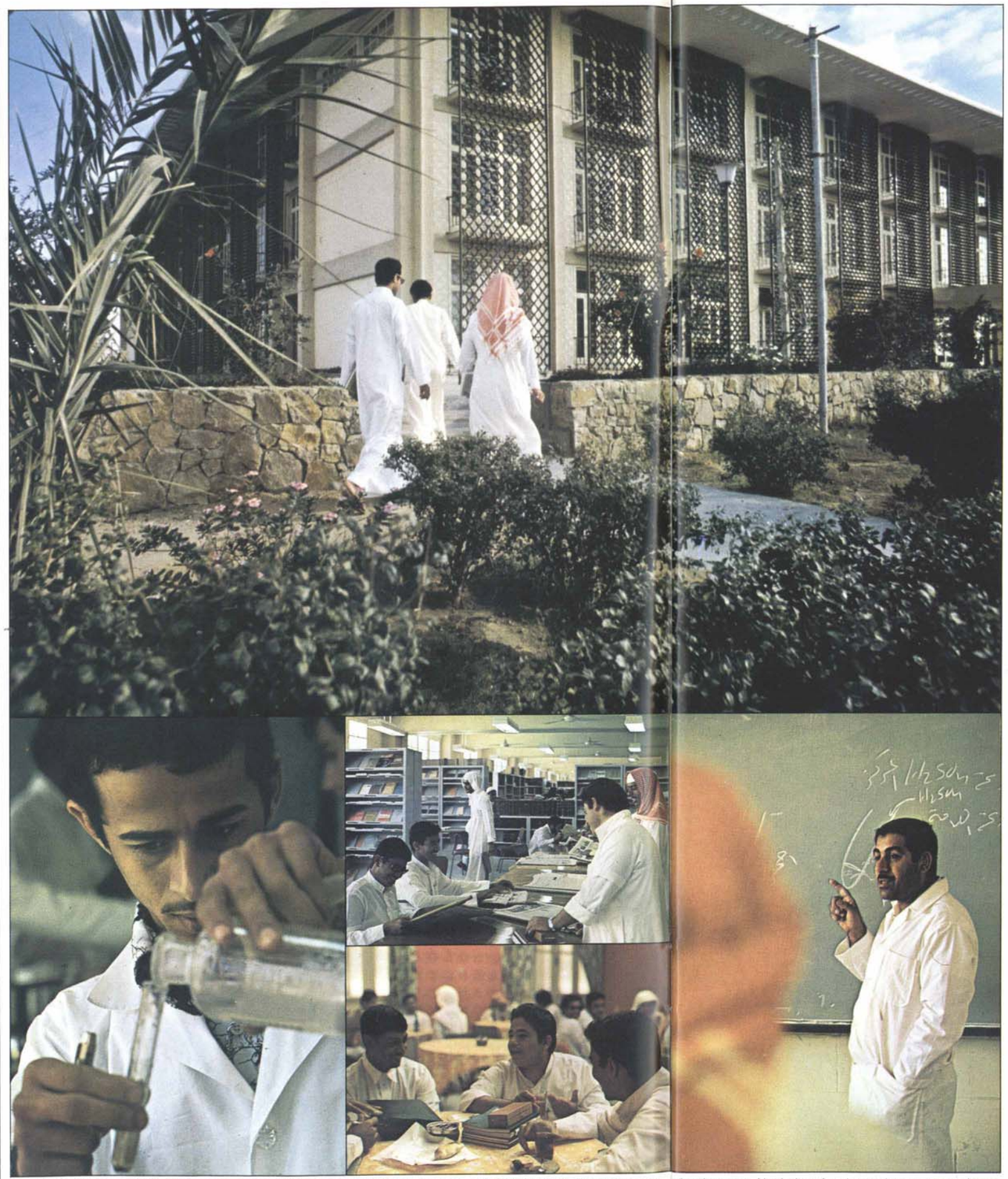
Indeed a glance down the 106 names on the list of its highly paid faculty, 46 of whom have earned doctorates, reveals how determinedly international CPM actually is. There are representatives from Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, Syria, Canada, Pakistan, Morocco, France, Holland, Saudi Arabia, Great Britain and the United States, with degrees from such prestigious institutions as Imperial College in the University of London, M.I.T., Johns Hopkins, Texas A. and M., Harvard, Oxford, the University of California at Berkeley, Cambridge (England), Colorado School of Mines, Loughborough, Leiden, Munich, and Carnegie-Mellon. All the teaching assistants except one are Saudis, most of whom are expected to continue their studies for the doctorate at overseas universities, and many will no doubt return to join the CPM faculty. However, future planning calls for no more than 50 percent Saudi professors, the rest foreign nationals, half being appointed on a more or less permanent basis, the remainder on short-term contracts.

As might be expected in an institution which was aided during its early years by the Arabian American Oil Company—its compound is only a walk away—the dominant influence on the college is American. The majority of the professors hold their degrees from American universities and the semester-credit system, introduced into the college at the very beginning, is still in operation. The American concept of self-help is also more in evidence at CPM than at other Saudi universities, the students being encouraged to show as much independence and initiative as is compatible with the constraints imposed by the overriding paternalism of Saudi Arabian society. Sports are actively encouraged, CPM teams competing against other universities in the kingdom as well as in Kuwait, Lebanon, Egypt and Great Britain, and the Student Union, to which all CPM students automatically belong, is a self-governing organization (under the guidance of the college administration), which is designed to encourage individual and group responsibility. Students live in blocks of 20 furnished, air-conditioned rooms enclosing gardens.

At present a magnificent, tastefully designed complex of classrooms, workshops, auditoriums (with facilities for simultaneous three-language translation), offices, an Olympic-size swimming pool, air-conditioned gymnasium, cafeteria, dining hall, medical center, outside amphitheater and mosque, is growing up on a site opposite the present campus. Designed by CPS, a Houston-based firm of American architects, the new facilities are functional without being austere, the architecture suggesting a delicate and meaningful balance between space-age technology and the Islamic traditions of the kingdom itself. Long, gracefully vaulted colonnades link the various facilities, and the landscaping, not yet completed, will feature large expanses of still water echoing the clean spaciousness of the interiors.

The lavishness of CPM's facilities is fortunately matched by the quality of education offered to its 1,000 students. Admission to the college is highly selective, being based on the college's own entrance examination, and after enrollment students are expected to meet educational standards similar to those of any good Western technical college or university. Regular attendance at class and laboratory sessions is required, and assignments necessitate extensive use of the library, whose 40,000 scientific and technical books and over 1,000 major technical journals make it one of the best equipped technical libraries in the Middle East. Additionally, students are taught to make use of the Data Processing Center, whose IBM 370/145 computer is the most sophisticated in the kingdom. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that CPM graduates have little difficulty in coping with advanced study in Great Britain or the United States, and it is especially gratifying to the college that two of its recent graduates are among the best-prepared doctoral candidates at M.I.T.

The CPM is undoubtedly the most modern of Saudi Arabia's higher educational institutions. Compared to King 'Abd al-'Aziz and Riyadh, the atmosphere is more informal and relaxed, almost trendy, and Western visitors would likely find themselves more at home in Dhahran than at any other university in the Arab world, with the possible and natural exceptions of the American University in Cairo and the American University of Beirut (*Aramco World*, Mar.-Apr., 1972, and Mar.-Apr., 1966). Alone among Saudi male institutions the CPM employs women, faculty wives, who supervise the catering staff, work in the library and undertake various secretarial duties, clad in ankle-length maxi-dresses, their arms chastely covered with long sleeves. Walking across the campus, one



King 'Abd al-'Aziz University in Jiddah was founded in 1967 as a private institution, but today, with 2,500 students is part of the state education system. Identical men's and women's campuses are planned.

may see as many students in hip-hugging, bell-bottom slacks and sports shirts as in the traditional Saudi *thobe;* in the cafeteria the radio is as likely to be tuned in to the Top Twenty on Radio Bahrain as Oum Koulsoum.

Yet, in spite of these signs of Western influence, the CPM is far from being an Arabian outpost of the permissive society. On the contrary, the college administration keeps a watchful, fatherly eye on the students' activities, not unlike that familiar to students at private and religious colleges and universities in Britain and America up until the 1960's. Students are allowed to visit neighboring towns only on weekends, and are required to sign in by 11 p.m. Nor are students allowed to backslide in their religious observances, being formally encouraged, in the words of the catalogue, "to avail themselves of the mosques on the campus for prayer, of the monthy lectures delivered in the college auditorium by reputable religious scholars, and of the large collection of books on Muslim thought available in the college library."

Indeed, by Western standards higher education in Saudi Arabia is determinedly paternalistic at all levels. Not only do administrators keep a careful watch on the students, and the political and religious authorities keep an eye on the universities; the government also provides generous financial aid for students, and finds them employment after graduation. For all Saudi nationals, who constitute over 95 percent of the students enrolled in the universities, tuition and books are free, and in addition there are heavily subsidized housing and meals, plus a generous allowance for living expenses. The latter varies, depending upon the institution and the discipline in which the student is enrolled, but generally runs to about $85 per month. After graduating, students are directed into suitable positions by an employment agency in Riyadh, run by the government. Those who do well are encouraged to take higher degrees in either the United States or Great Britain, the cost of their stay overseas being borne by the Saudi treasury.

In sum, Saudi Arabia has made an impressive start toward meeting the pressing technological needs of the future. But what of the equally pressing needs of Islam? Has the introduction of Western style education been disruptive? Or to put it another way, has the cybernetics manual subsumed the Holy Koran?

In a word, no. Although Saudi higher education is definitely geared to satisfy the needs of the developing economy, the moral and spiritual imperatives of Islam are also kept firmly in mind. At CPM, for example, administrators insist that while endeavoring to train students in engineering and science, the college also "derives a distinctive character from its being a technological university in the land of Islam," and feels "unreservedly committed to deepening and broadening the faith of its Muslim students, and to instilling in them an appreciation for the major contributions of their people to the world of mathematics and science."

Such a close relation between education and religion will strike many Western observers as an unworkable alliance—and some Westernized Saudis might cautiously wonder too. But this, in a nation such as Saudi Arabia, is not necessarily as unfortunate as it might seem. For although custom and authority undoubtedly impose restraints, respect for learning and scholarship, as long as it does not conflict with Koranic lore, is an essential feature of Islamic belief, and educators have always been held in high esteem throughout the Muslim world. Therefore, as long as Saudi higher education does not threaten traditional values, its present high rate of growth is likely to be sustained. Admittedly, the high priority placed by Western educators on free thought and individual intellectual development is unlikely to find widespread acceptance in Saudi Arabia in the foreseeable future, but professional education, for example, may be expected to continue to develop, reaching a fairly high level of sophistication in a very short time.

There is, moreover, a positive value in the approach. CPM students are continuously reminded by a plaque on the wall of the administration building that the Prophet said: "God loves those who do their work properly;" and walking about the campuses of the three secular universities, one realizes how seriously this rather simplistic piece of Koranic wisdom is taken. Grave-faced young men pace slowly up and down in quiet areas, lips moving, committing to memory awesome stretches of textbook information; there is very little of the noisy, good-natured pushing and shoving one finds at other universities, or indeed anywhere else where young people congregate. There are no strikes, sit-ins, occupation of buildings or other manifestations of student power. There are no pantie-raids, no telephone-booth packing, no streaking. Higher education in Saudi Arabia is taken very seriously indeed.

The highly respected College of Petroleum and Minerals was founded in 1963. At the handsome new campus in Dhahran the college offers programs in science and engineering, with instruction given in English.

This is in sharp contrast to other universities in the Arab world. In Lebanon students at both the National University and the American University are more frequently on strike than they are in class, and are showing an increasing inclination to take to the streets on behalf of various political causes. In Syria the ruling Baath party calls upon students to demonstrate in support of any issue which it feels needs a good show of public enthusiasm, while in Egypt students have assumed the self-appointed role of watchdog, emitting occasional growls whenever they believe the nation's only recognized political party is behaving in ways contrary to the public interest.

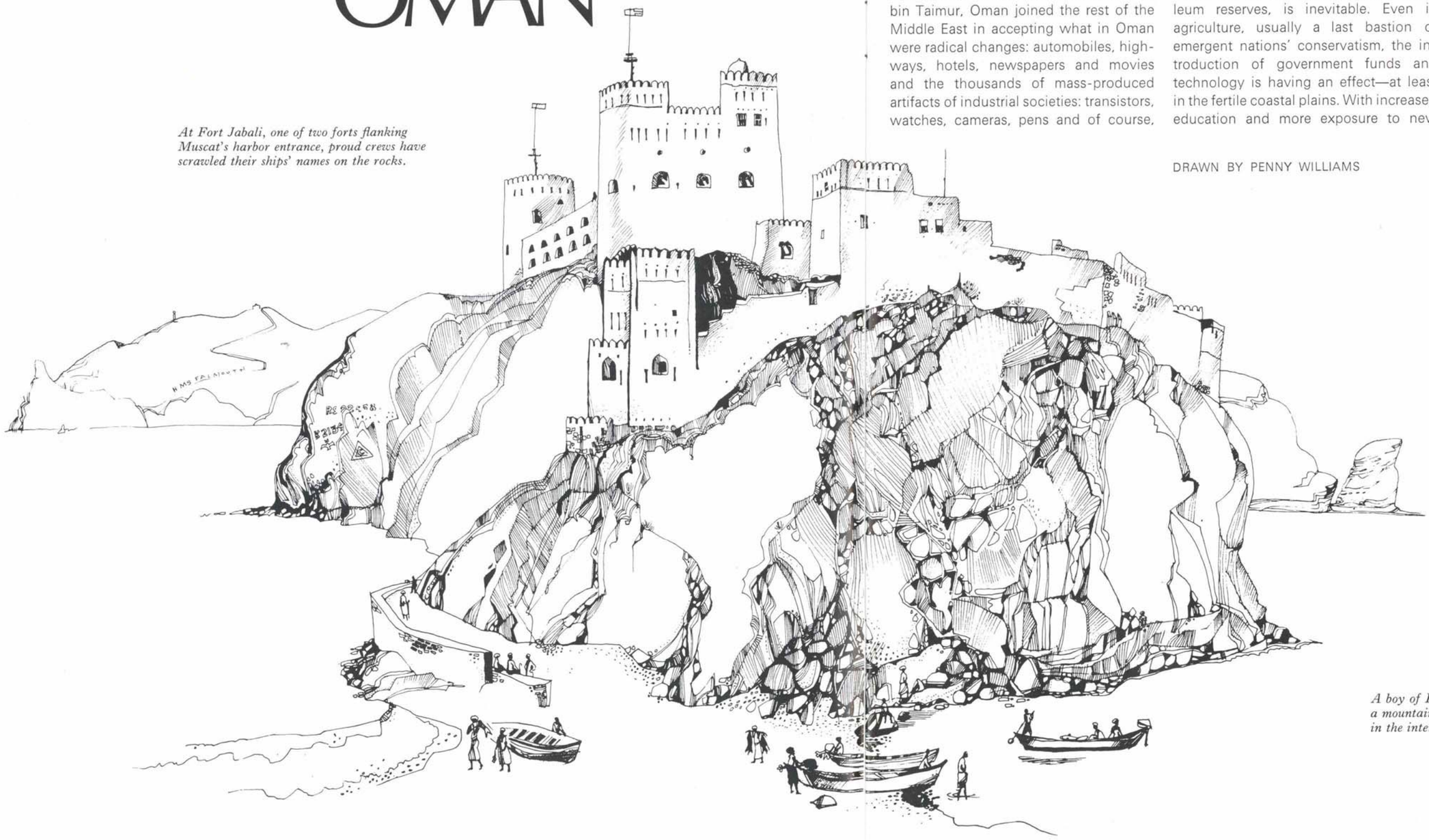
In short, thanks to almost limitless financial resources, enlightened educational leadership in government and in the universities themselves, and backed by the religious authorities, Saudi Arabia's institutions are rapidly becoming recognized as among the best in the Arab world, at least as far as professional education is concerned.

True, there is nothing in Saudi Arabia yet to match the American University of Beirut, nor is it likely that the spirit of free inquiry will extend to such texts of the intellectual left as Frantz Fanon, Mao Tse Tung and Herbert Marcuse. As for Kate Millett and Germaine Greer, their women's lib manifestoes are unlikely to be openly discussed, or even taken seriously, by either sex during the next decade. Nevertheless, Saudi Arabia's conservative, authoritarian higher educational system has already produced a technical university of international standing, and few doubt that within the next 10 to 15 years Saudi Arabia will have other institutions of equal quality, eloquent symbols of this ancient land's emergence into the forefront of international affairs.

John Munro, former associate Dean of Arts and Sciences in the American University of Beirut, and author of eight books, writes regularly on university education for the Times, *in London.*

IMPRESSIONS OF OMAN

At Fort Jabali, one of two forts flanking Muscat's harbor entrance, proud crews have scrawled their ships' names on the rocks.



Until a few years ago Oman was one of the isolated lands. Although its Arabian Sea coastline had exposed some areas to developments from the outside world, its hinterlands—a mix of deserts and rugged mountains running back into the interior—were locked out of the 20th century.

With the 1970 change in rulers—from crusty, old Sultan Said bin Taimur to his more up-to-date son Kabus bin Said bin Taimur, Oman joined the rest of the Middle East in accepting what in Oman were radical changes: automobiles, highways, hotels, newspapers and movies and the thousands of mass-produced artifacts of industrial societies: transistors, watches, cameras, pens and of course, hundreds of articles in gaudy, indestructible plastics.

Such change, in only four years, is astonishing. For despite close ties with Great Britain since the 19th century, Omani rulers had clung tenaciously to cultural and economic traditions of another age.

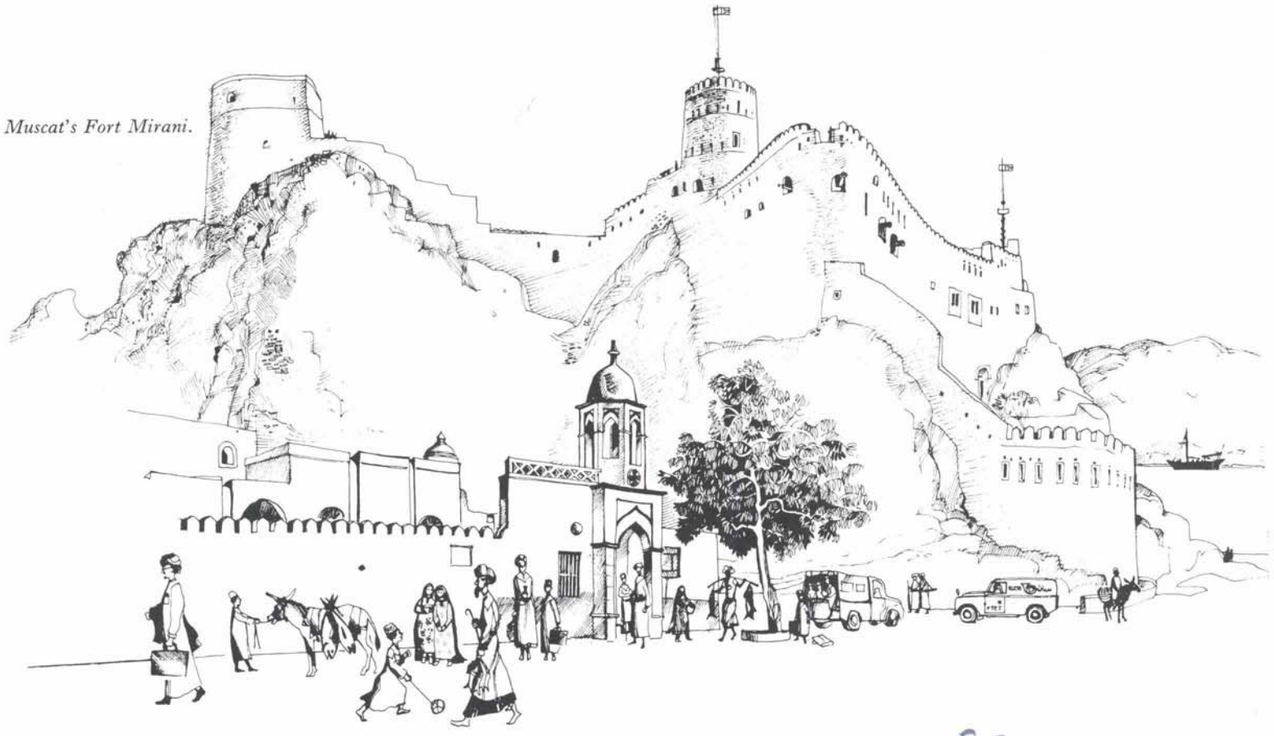
In the interior, of course, such traditions are still deeply rooted. But change, stimulated by Oman's substantial petroleum reserves, is inevitable. Even in agriculture, usually a last bastion of emergent nations' conservatism, the introduction of government funds and technology is having an effect—at least in the fertile coastal plains. With increased education and more exposure to new methods it is inevitable that modern methods will seep into the mountains and deserts and have their usual dramatic impact. Already, an artificial lake near the western oilfields has changed the life of Bedouins and desert wild life.

Among the influx of visitors who flocked into Oman after its ancient doors creaked open was Penny Williams, a regular contributor to **Aramco World Magazine.** Miss Williams went to Oman to capture on her sketch pads the simple beauty of ancient buildings, clothing and jewelry before they are swept away in a torrent of glass, steel and plastic. Some of those sketches are reproduced here.

DRAWN BY PENNY WILLIAMS

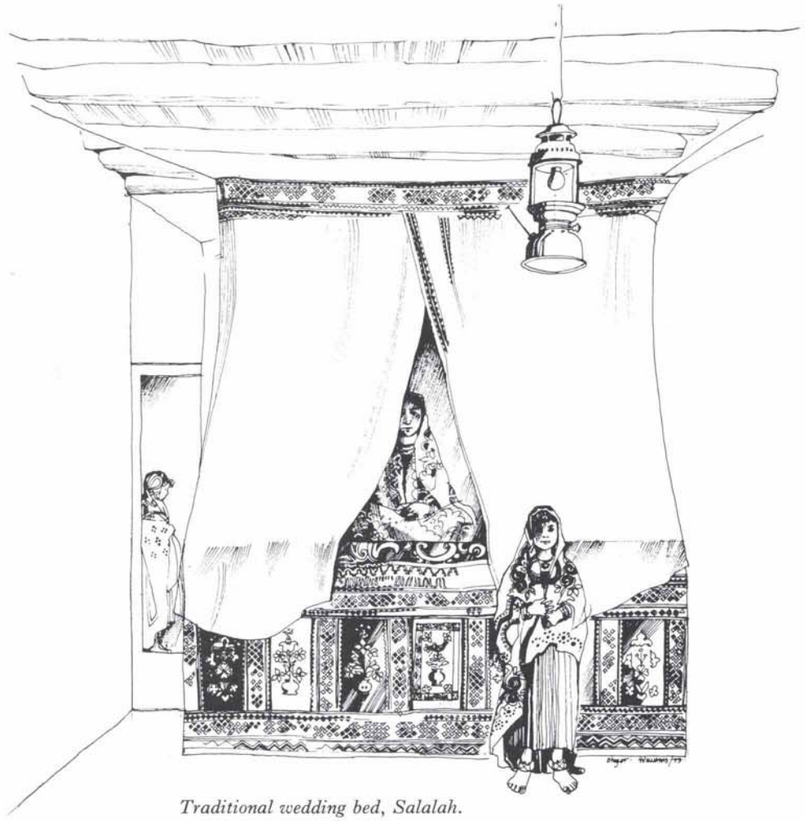
A boy of Rostaq, a mountain town in the interior.

Muscat's Fort Mirani.

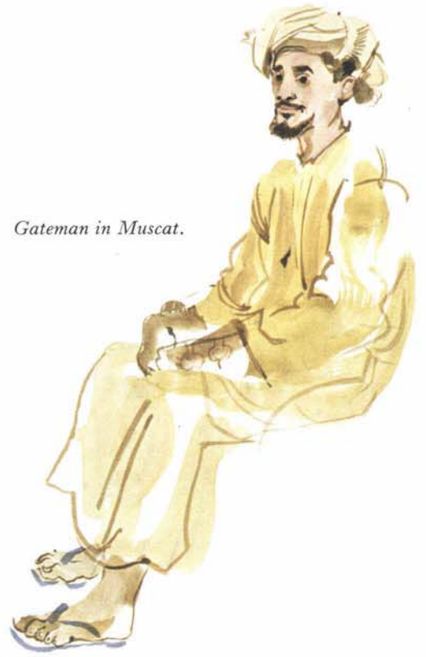


School girls in Salalah, Dhufar.

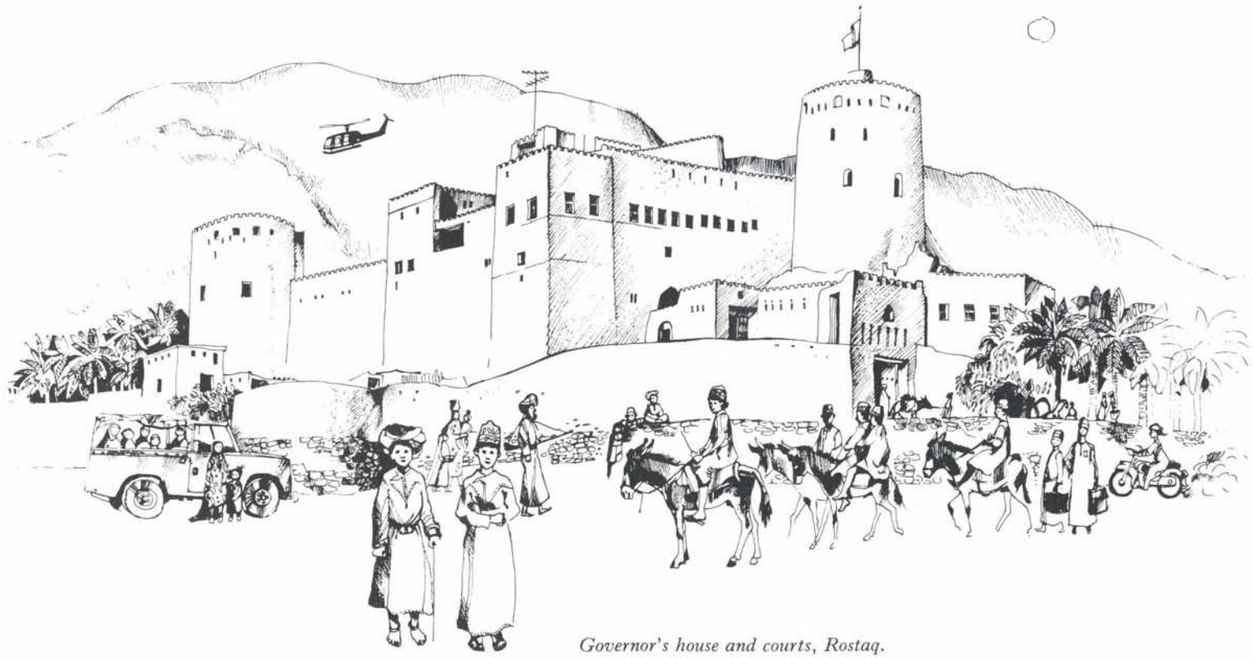
A Baluchi girl.



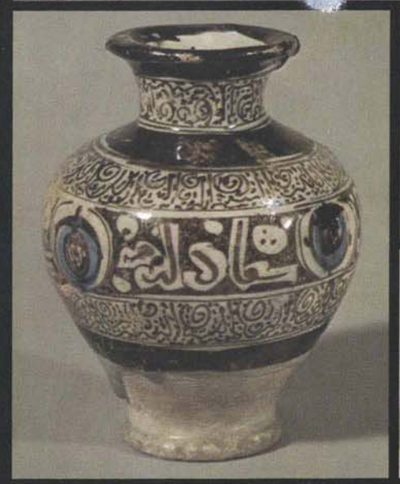
Traditional wedding bed, Salalah.



Gateman in Muscat.



Governor's house and courts, Rostaq.



SYRIA: **Ayyubid, 12th-13th century**; top and left, lustreware basin and vase; right, glazed molded lamp and incised bowl.

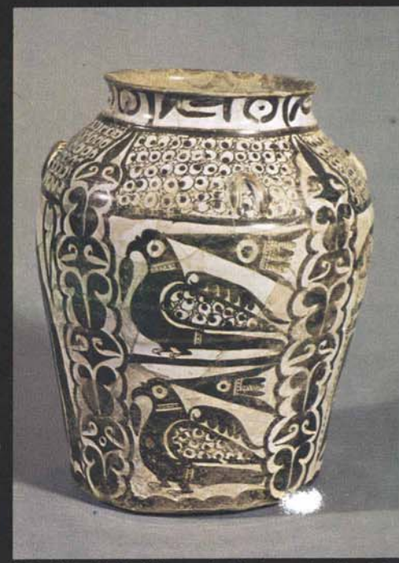
"The brilliance of their work reflects the richness of their civilization"

THE POTTERS OF ISLAM

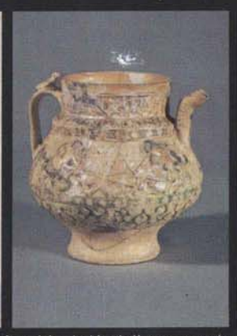
WRITTEN BY JOHN LUTER

PHOTOGRAPHS BY
THE FREER GALLERY OF ART ©

EGYPT: **Fatimid Dynasty, 12th century**; pieces of lustreware, bowls and a plate.



IRAQ: **Abbasid, 9th-10th century**; left, lustre painted jar; right, from top, overglazed bowl, lustre plate and bowl.



IRAN: **Seljuk, 12th-13th century**; left to right, double-shell ewer, carved overglazed ewer and lustre painted jug.

The Islamic potters of the Middle Ages created a glorious new world of earthware. From the ninth century onward, their once humble craft flourished as an art remarkable for its vitality and variety of styles. First around the seat of the Abbasid caliphate in Iraq and in the northeastern provinces of Khorasan and Transoxiana, then in Egypt, Syria, Iran and centers scattered across the vast Muslim lands, master artisans turned the local clays into objects of spectacular beauty unlike any that had been known before, or that were to be produced in Christian Europe until many centuries later.

Their preoccupation was with techniques of surface decoration. Although impressed by the fine porcelain and stoneware that began to be imported from China in early medieval times, the Islamic potters lacked the hard-firing clays necessary to duplicate their massive hardness and smooth glazes. Resourcefully, they soon adopted a different artistic approach. To the bowls, pitchers and other objects they fashioned and fired, they brought a new wealth of color, and an unequaled range of graceful and intricate decorative motifs.

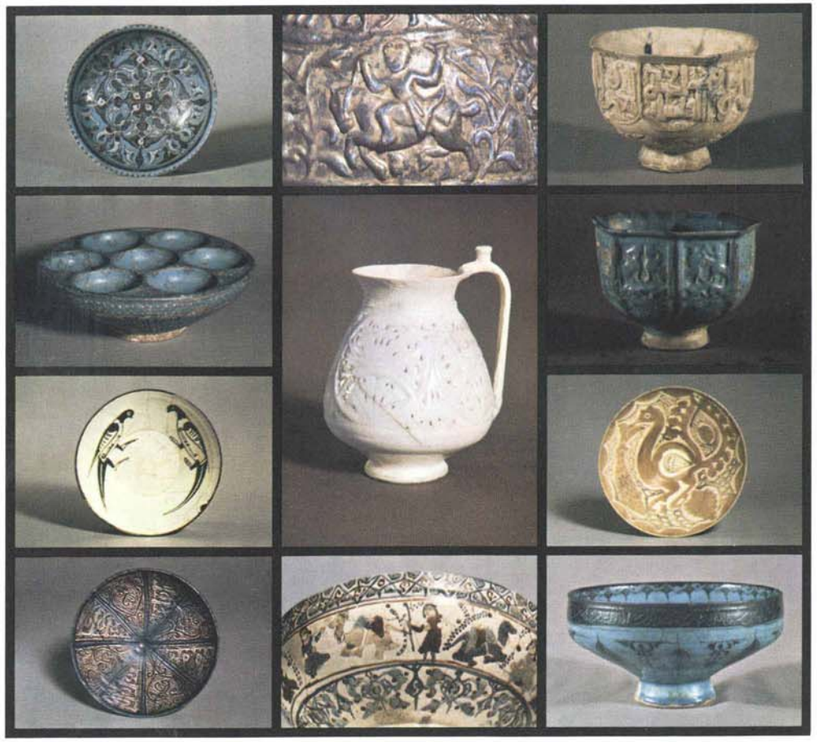
Before the ninth century ended, Islam's artisans had established a tradition of aesthetic and technical brilliance, which was to endure dynastic upheavals and foreign invasions. When political changes interrupted their work, master potters often moved on with their secrets to new centers of power and patronage, and their art flowered repeatedly throughout the Middle Ages. Styles and techniques changed over the years, and frequently differed from one region to another. But essentially, the Islamic potters followed common paths that set their work apart and made it one of the great creative movements in the potter's art. They served all levels of society, but the finest of their glazed ceramics were designed for people of the middle classes, who delighted in owning objects of beauty. And in the colorful, elaborately decorated wares they created, Islam's medieval artisans left a heritage of cultural treasures.

Some of the finest examples of Islamic pottery that have survived the ages were on display last winter at the Freer Gallery of Art, in Washington, D.C., one of the most distinguished of all American galleries. Part of the Smithsonian Institution, the national museum that houses the treasures of United States history, the Freer, now 50 years old, arranged three special exhibitions to celebrate its half-century anniversary. The first two highlighted the arts of China and Japan. The third, which opened in mid-January and continued through May, was devoted to ceramics from the world of Islam.

The Freer is a unique institution. It was established by Charles Lang Freer, an American businessman who made a fortune in the manufacture of railway cars in Detroit and early in his career became a close personal friend of the celebrated American painter, James McNeill Whistler. Whistler developed a deep interest in ancient Oriental art, and this led Freer in the 1890's to begin a collection of Asian art objects that soon expanded to include many examples of the artistry of the Near East. In 1900, at the age of 44, Freer retired from business to devote full time to his hobby, and a few years later, he arranged that, on his death, his important collection would be given to the nation. He constructed a building to house the gallery that now bears his name, and when he died in 1919 his will provided funds to help maintain the collection and to increase it with a view of encouraging study of Asian civilizations and promoting high ideals of beauty. To assure that the collection would remain highly selective, Freer forbade the gallery to accept gifts of art works. He also specified that it could neither loan items for exhibition elsewhere nor display objects it did not own.

The Freer Gallery since has increased its select collection of art objects from 9,500 items to more than 12,000, of which one third represent the art of the Near East. It has nearly doubled its store of Islamic pottery, and it also contains fine examples of Islamic glassware and manuscripts, as well as an extensive library of books and slides on Near Eastern art.

For its jubilee exhibition, the Freer assembled 101 of the best and most representative Islamic ceramic objects from among some 400 that it owns. The choice was made by the gallery's associate curator of Near Eastern art, Dr. Esin Atil, a petite, attractive lady from Istanbul, who was educated in Turkish schools and in 1969 earned a doctorate in Near Eastern Art History at the University of Michigan. To Dr. Atil, one of the Smithsonian's few woman curators, the selection was a labor of love. One of the foremost experts in America on Islamic art, she believes that outside the Islamic lands themselves the magnificence of Islam's artistic tradition is probably best represented by its ceramics.



IRAN: center, 12th-century Seljuk carved jug; clockwise from top left, 13th-century bowl, Seljuk molded jar, two octagonal bowls; 10th-century Samanid underglazed bowl, two Seljuk bowls, 13th-century Ilkhanid lustreware bowl, Samanid bowl and Ilkhanid dish.

The exhibition traces the work of Islamic potters from the ninth century to the 19th. More than 40 of the items on display were fashioned in Iran in the late 12th and early 13th centuries, the golden age of Islamic ceramics. Persia then led the Islamic world in the production of fine pottery, and for more than 50 years during the two centuries following the arrival of the Seljuk Turks from Central Asia and before invading Mongols destroyed many of the important kiln sites, its potters were noted for their creative genius.

From earlier centuries, relatively few of Islam's ceramic wares have survived. But the Freer exhibit includes two bowls and a plate produced in Iraq in the ninth century, when pottery making first flourished as an art in the Islamic world. It was then that the importation of fine porcelain and stoneware from China convinced the rulers of Islam that pottery making was an art worth encouraging. As a result, ingenious craftsmen from all over the Islamic areas flocked to the capital of the caliphate at Baghdad. Their earliest works were often clearly experimental. But gathering up the threads of ancient experience, they soon introduced techniques that set the pattern for later development and made Islamic ceramics renowned.

One of the first and great innovations of Islam's early potters was lustre painting. The origins of the lustreware technique are disputed. Some say it derived from Egypt, where it was probably used to decorate glass during the first two centuries of Islam, and influenced the work of local potters in the ninth century. Others contend that the first significant employment of the technique was by the potters who centered around the Abbasid court in Baghdad and created lustreware that was exported to all corners of the Islamic domain.

Wherever it originated, the technique was valued by many generations of Islamic potters. The Abbasid artisans used it to make prosaic earthenware glisten like yellow gold, and also to give lustre to ceramic articles with designs often painted in blue, green or purple. The method involved the use of sulphur compounded with metallic oxides and then mixed with an earthy material such as red or yellow ochre. With this mixture, decoration was painted on the surface of a glazed pottery object already once fired. The vessel was then lightly fired for a second time in a reducing kiln, with little air, much smoke and no clear flame. When the surface residue formed during firing was rubbed away, the metallic elements remained on the surface of the glaze in a glittering film not perceptible to the touch.

In the ninth and 10th centuries also, potters became the first among many Islamic artisans to employ the decorative concept known as arabesque, later used as ornament in architecture, on textiles and in countless other ways. Totally covering the surface of ceramic objects, it combined geometric shapes, floral and vegetal motifs, and even stylistic human and animal figures to create a sense of infinite growth through the flow and interrelation of its parts.

The grace of the Arabic script also inspired the early potters. In various parts of the Islamic world, and especially in the semi-independent regions of Khorasan and Transoxiana during the Samanid rule (819-1005), they often used calligraphy for elegant inscriptions. These not only decorated the pottery, but frequently conveyed messages—usually good wishes, popular sayings or proverbs—that reflected a society in which virtuous behavior was stressed.

Persian potters of the Samanid period, in what came to be known as the Samarkand school, made the important discovery that painted decoration, which was likely to "run" when fluid lead glaze was applied over it, would stay fixed if the coloring agents were mixed with a paste of fine clay. Until the 11th century, when their wares slowly declined to the status of peasant pottery, they produced fine ceramic objects in which the basic red or pink clay was entirely covered by a coat of white, and a red or purplish-black "slip" was used for painting.

The Samarkand school remained largely apart from the main development of pottery making in Islam. But when Egypt in turn broke away from the power of the caliphs, the mainstream of Islamic art passed from Baghdad to Cairo.

Compared to the finely sifted pink or yellowish clays of Baghdad, the Egyptian materials were sandy and coarse, with the result that Egyptian pottery often lacked the refinement of earlier Baghdad wares. But Egypt had long been a melting pot of cultures, and under the art-loving Fatimids, who ruled Egypt and Syria for two centuries (969-1171), Cairo blossomed as a vigorous center of ceramic production. The potters who gathered around the court of the Fatimids continued to create fine lustreware such as that popularized earlier in Baghdad. Other works were notable for decoration carved or incised in the body of the object, and covered with colored glaze that formed dark pools in the hollows.

With the overthrow of the Fatimids, the lead in pottery making moved again, this time to Persia where the Seljuk Turks were in ascendancy. There, groups of potters set up kilns in growing urban centers along the major trade routes, and through their work the 12th century, like the ninth, became a turning point in ceramic history. Syria continued to produce a wealth of molded, carved and painted wares until its most prolific pottery center, Rakka, was sacked by the Mongols in 1259. But it was under the Seljuks in Persia that the ceramic art of Islam achieved its greatest development.

An important technical advance contributed to the brilliance of their artistry. Since the ninth century, Islamic potters had neglected the alkaline glazes known in ancient Egypt in favor of glazes fluxed with lead, which would adhere to any ordinary potter's clay but tended to smudge painting not done in earthy pigments. But the Persian potters of the 12th century sought better methods. Turning back in time, they rediscovered and improved the old alkaline glaze and the artificially composed body material related to it. These newly developed materials fused inseparably together. The body was a whiteness that made it an ideal base for painted, carved or molded decoration. This could be covered with a stained or colorless glaze, and the glaze could be made opaque by adding tin-oxide.

The white composite paste, made largely of powdered quartz and potash, became the standard material used throughout the Near East in later centuries for all fine ceramics. With it, Persian potters of the "golden age" were able to produce white wares that were solid, transclucent and agreeable to handle. Offering new opportunities for decoration, it also led the potters to create ceramic wares in an almost endless range of colors, shapes and decorative styles. Their creativity was at its height when the Mongol invasion paralyzed the cultural life of Persia, and dealt pottery making in all Islam a blow from which it never fully recovered.

At the end of the 13th century, the Mongols adopted the religion of their Persian subjects, and sponsored a revival of the arts. But the new pottery, in styles that soon spread from Persia to other parts of the Islamic world, was more somber and restrained in spirit. There were lingering flashes of brilliance, and between the 14th century and the 19th, the last period covered in the Freer exhibit, Islamic artisans produced many magnificent ceramic objects. But their work as a whole lacked the force and originality, as well as the distinctive character, of the medieval wares.

After the 14th century, the costly processes of overglaze painting in gold lustre or enamel colors were virtually abandoned, in favor of the cheaper method of underglaze painting, which required only a single firing. The arabesque on pottery tended to become overelaborate or tamely academic. And the decorative inscriptions lost their vitality until, on later pottery, they were rarely used.

Lustre painting was revived on some 17th-century Persian wares. And the Turkish and Persian ceramics of the 16th century —some of which were included in the Freer exhibit—were painted in underglaze fashion in a wide range of colors. The decoration was often admirable. But the artificial materials from which the pottery was fashioned tended to be less sensitively handled than in earlier times, and the variations in technique were fewer. In these later times also, the potters found it difficult to maintain the integrity of an Islamic style. The Chinese at last had begun to cover their wares with painted decoration, influenced by the Islamic styles and often using the cobalt blue ores from the Near East. The Persian shahs and Ottoman sultans in particular were avid collectors of Far Eastern wares. And some of the local potters found it far easier to imitate the mannered Chinese designs than to devise their own.

In their earlier period of glory, however, the Islamic potters were far more creative than their contemporaries. The Baghdad potters could make good tin-glazed ware by the ninth century, but not until the 15th century was a comparable ware produced in Christian Europe where, under the names of majolica, delft or faience, it remained the finest form of pottery for another two centuries. The translucent Persian wares of the 12th century anticipated the soft-paste porcelain of France. The overglaze colors of the minai technique preceded the enamel colors that appeared in China during the 15th century and in Europe during the 18th. And lustre painting, though imitated a little in Renaissance Italy, long remained a special glory of Islam.

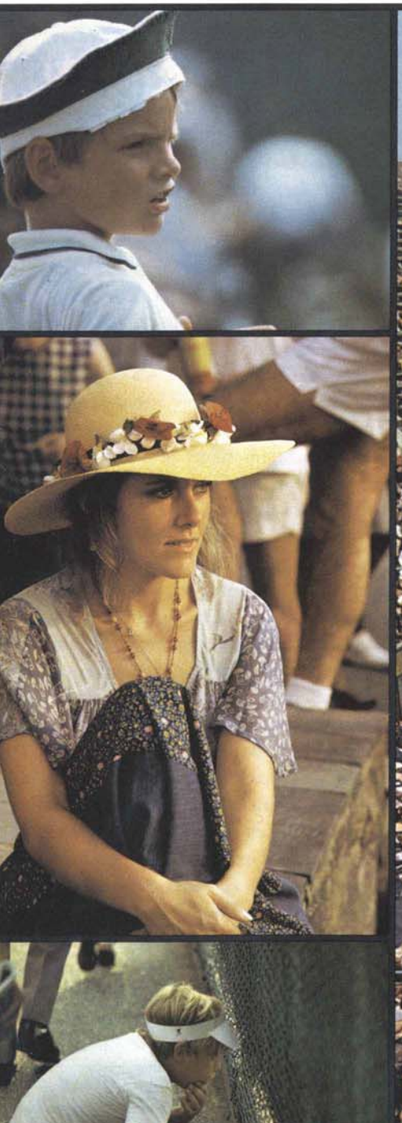
Great gaps still exist in the knowledge of Islamic pottery. But knowledge is constantly increasing with the aid of new methods of scientific analysis, excavation reports and scholarly research. And as understanding grows, there is increasing appreciation of the special qualities of the wares created in the Middle Ages. Unlike the artisans who illuminated manuscripts or fashioned articles of gold and silver, the medieval potters sought to appeal to the tastes of the middle classes, and the brilliance of their work reflects the richness of their civilization.

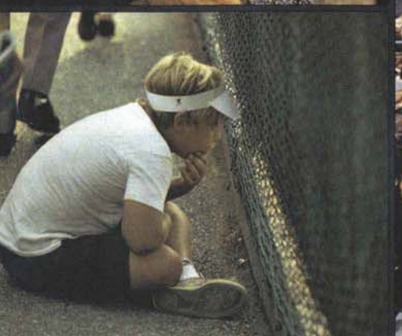
John Luter, former Time *correspondent and former Director of the Columbia Journalism School's Advanced International Reporting Program, now free-lances in New York.*

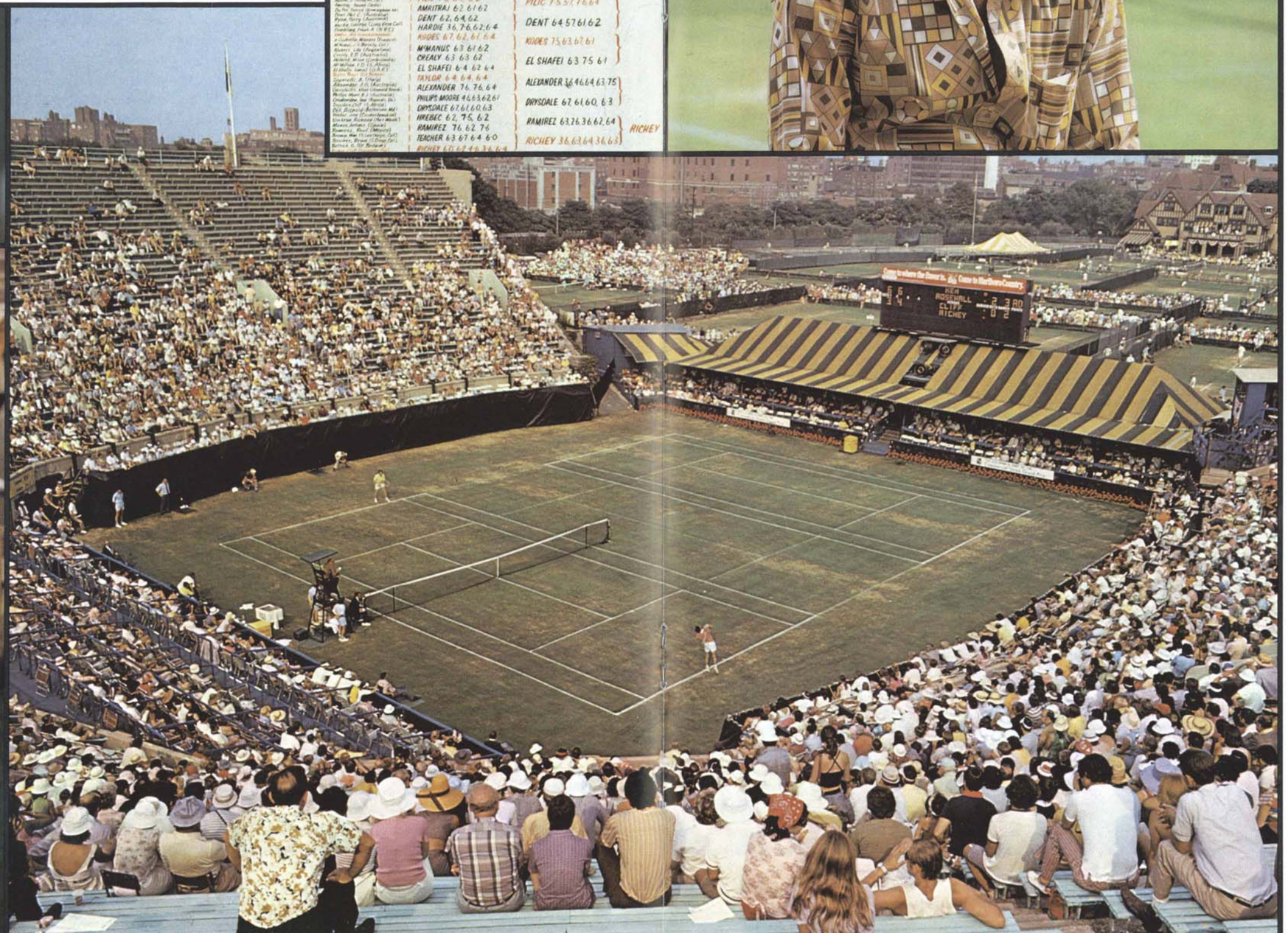
"You see, I'm not yet Number One."

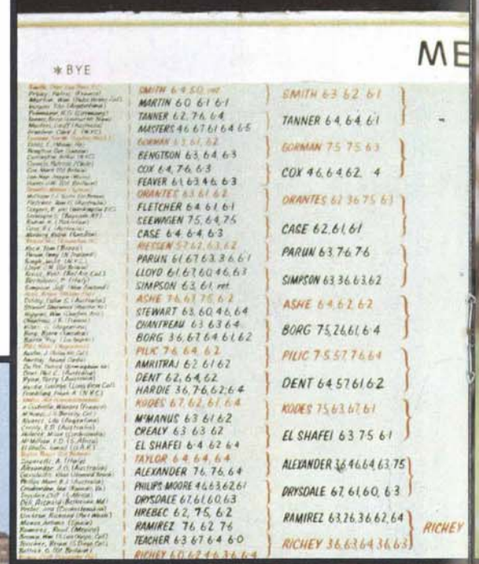
SHAF

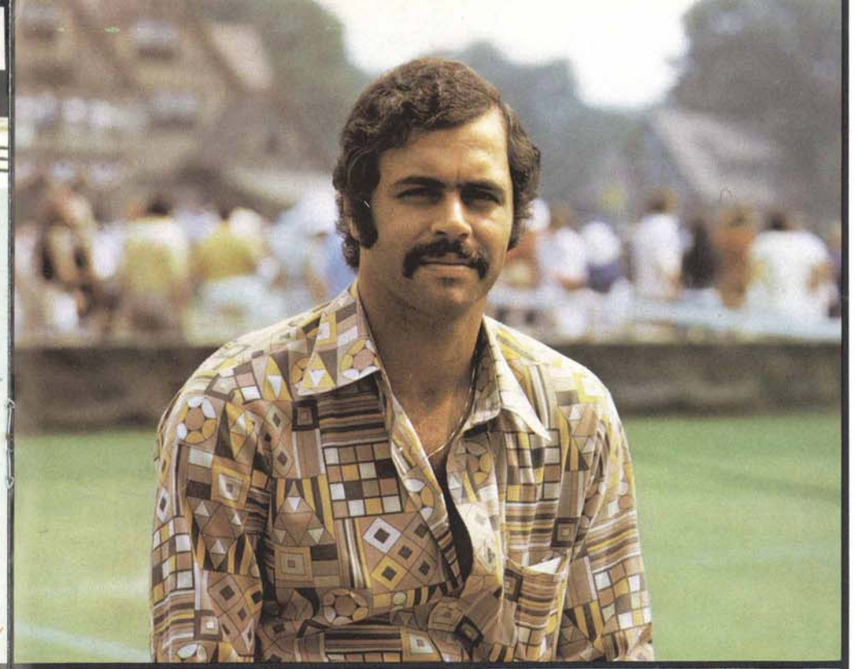
WRITTEN BY HELEN GIBSON
PHOTOGRAPHED BY NICHOLAS KOURIDES



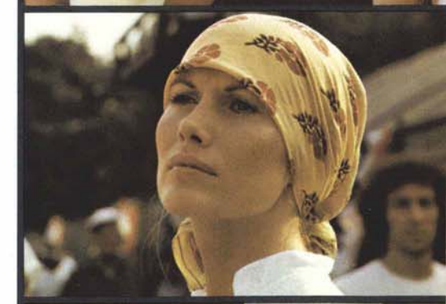


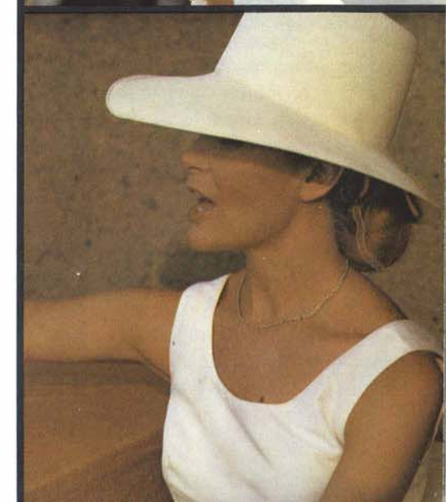


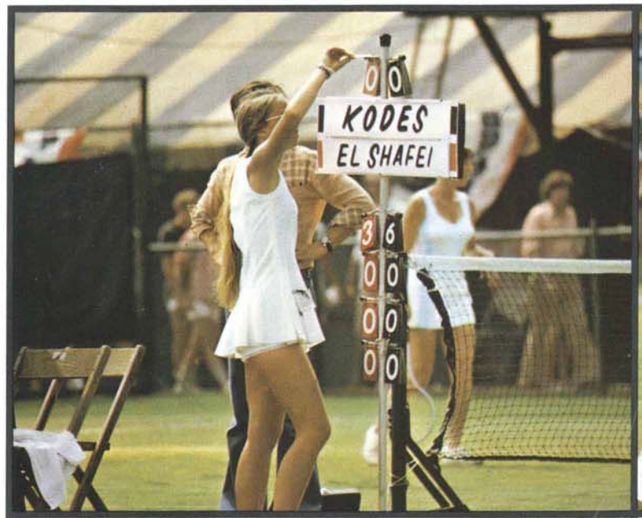


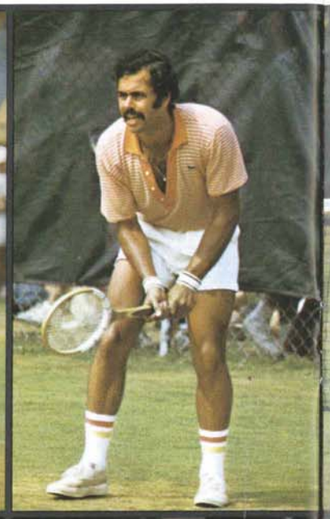


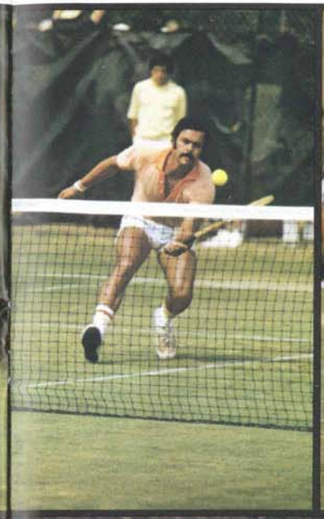
Egypt's top tennis pro, Ismael El-Shafei, a regular on the World Championship Tennis circuit, at prestigious Forest Hills in New York.

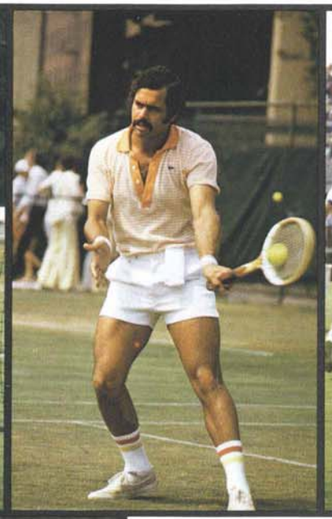


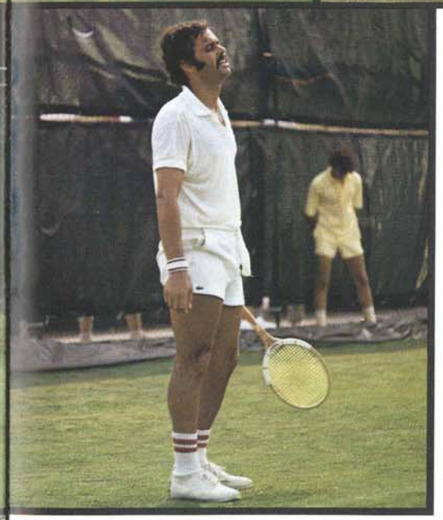


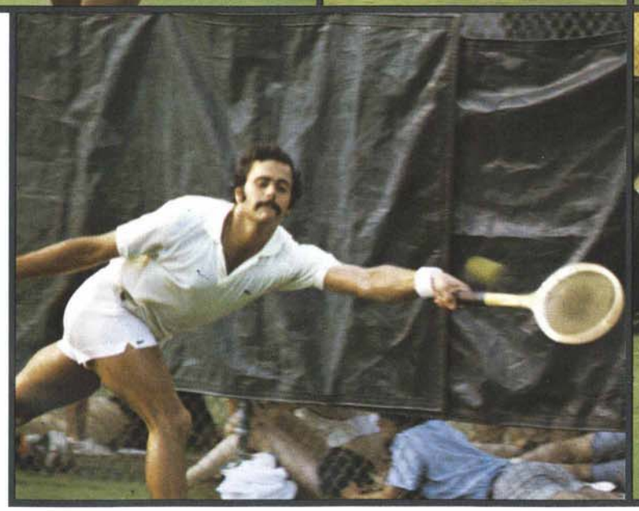


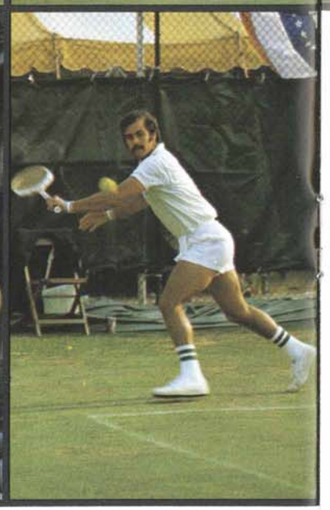












At the U. S. Open in Forest Hills last fall, Shaf first defeated South Africa's Frew McMillan (center row), then took Australia's Dick Crealy (bottom), but finally went down to Czechoslovakia's Jan Kodes (top row), one of the two finalists.

Absentmindedly, Ismael El-Shafei bounced his daughter on his knee, suspending thought as two white-clad tennis pros volleyed for the match point on the TV screen. Engrossed in the game, he fell silent as a forehand smash ended the set. Then, as the camera panned across the applauding audience and zoomed in on the two players shaking hands across the net, he looked up and gave a quick summary of professional tennis fame: "When you play well, you're a hero and you're cheered. When you play badly, you're booed and no one wants to know you."

Ismael El-Shafei—"Shaf" to colleagues—should know. As the Arab world's first professional tennis star he has had his share of applause and boos. Starting at the age of six, when his father first led him onto a baking baseline in Heliopolis, he fought his way up to a national championship in Egypt, moved into professional tennis and last year was a strong contender at prestigious Wimbledon and Forest Hills. En route he became Wimbledon junior champion in 1964, winner at the Orange Bowl in 1965, German Indoors Champion in 1968 and runner-up in the United States in 1969.

In reviewing those triumphs some months ago in London Shaf made it plain that he was by no means satisfied yet. "Sure, I've beaten all the top players at one time or another—Laver, Newcombe, Ashe—but that is just not enough. I have to *stay* up there, and until I do, I cannot feel I have really done anything."

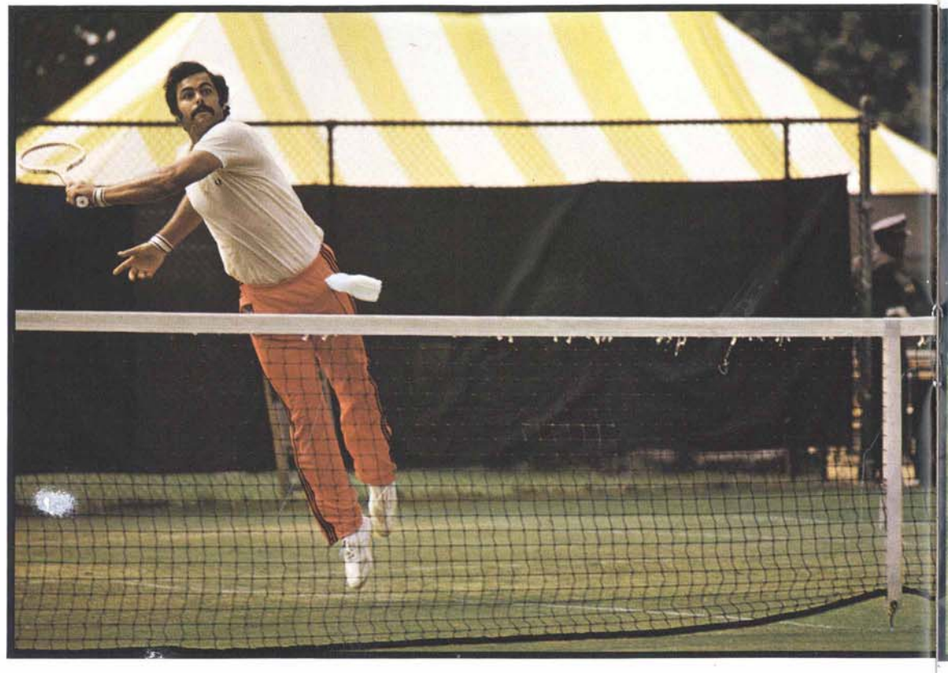
They certainly wouldn't say that in Egypt. There, on home courts, Shaf has dazzled tennis fans with his prowess, won two national Medals of Sport and, in 1969, the coveted title of Sportsman of the Year, no mean feat in a country where fanatical soccer fans scorn such lowly pastimes as tennis.

In return for such tributes—which he mentions with open pride—Shaf has tried hard to promote tennis in Egypt by participating as often as possible in home events and by encouraging other international stars to accompany him. In the 1973 International Championships at the Gezira Club he was rewarded by a turn-out of 7,500 spectators, an all-time high for audience figures in Egyptian tennis. In 1973, too, El-Shafei for the first time joined Egypt's Davis Cup team—and helped win a resounding victory over Turkey (5-0) and Poland (4-1) to reach the zone quarter finals.

Still, it was on the international circuit that Shaf's fast, aggressive game and spectacular double-handed backhand began to win him the reputation he now has as a potential great on the World Championship Tennis (WCT) circuit. Despite the burden of being secretary of the Association of Tennis Professionals during the controversial 1973 season, Shaf faced and beat such top seeded pros as Arthur Ashe in Essen and Cleveland, Marty Riessen in Montreal and Essen and Tom Okker in Washington. With his doubles partner of three years, New Zealand's Brian Fairlie, he also reached the WCT finals in San Francisco and upset Okker and John Newcombe in Miami. He tied Roy Emerson and Tony Roche in one six-month bout of WCT championships and eventually carried home more than $25,600 in prize money for the season, up $500 from the previous year's earnings.

Even those victories, according to John MacDonald, playing director of WCT, are more indications of better things to come than high points in Shaf's career. MacDonald is convinced that the Egyptian star has still not developed his full potential and predicts that Shaf could soar to the very top within the next few years.

Such praise evokes little more than a pleased shrug from Shaf, who, colleagues report, is a modest man still unspoiled by the glamour surrounding a jet-age international sports star. This is particularly striking



Colleagues acknowledge that Shaf is one of the hardest workers on the pro-circuit. Addicted to practice, he is an agressive player with a spectacular double-handed backhand.

considering that he is also endowed with the dark, virile good looks that Omar Sharif has made famous and the classical athlete's body (168 pounds, 5'11") that ancient Greek sculptors immortalized and that sends girls screaming for coat buttons. As one of Shaf's sponsors says, "He not only plays good, he also *looks* good."

When he can, Shaf also tries to keep the pro-circuit glamour from interfering with his life with wife Nouha, whom he courted and married between practice sessions at the Cairo Tennis Club, and daughter Dina, a brisk two-year-old. Both travel with him three months out of the eight months he's on the road and enjoy it. Nouha, in fact, enjoys it immensely even when tight schedules restrict them to hotels and the dreary restaurant diets that Shaf loathes.

On the whole, however, life on the professional tennis circuit leaves little time to think about home, or anything else but practicing, playing and traveling. Glamourous it may be, but, molded by tournaments that follow dizzily behind one another in cities scattered sometimes thousands of miles apart, it is also a tough and exhausting way to earn a living. In El-Shafei's 1972 schedule, there was only one day between the end of a tournament in Essen, Germany, and the opening of one in Goteburg, Sweden. And players reaching the finals at Houston, Texas, had less than a day to reach the opening of the championships in Quebec City, Canada.

Shaf's schedule is often tighter than other players' because of an addiction to practice which, says MacDonald, makes him one of the hardest workers on the circuit. If defeated in one tournament, he leaves on the first plane for wherever the next matches are to be played to gain an edge by extra practice on the new courts.

"The pressure is enormous," said Shaf, "but you can't let up. Any sign of weakness and the newer, younger players will be snapping at your heels. I know because I've done it myself."

Concern about "younger" players may sound odd in a man not yet 27, but in fact Shaf is already a veteran in WCT terms. In 1969 when Texan oil millionnaire Lamar Hunt sponsored the WCT to give tennis the same standing and commercial success enjoyed by sports like golf, Shaf was among the first 18 players to sign up.

Even then, said friends, WCT scouts realized he was a natural for the circuit. He had personality, a finely tuned sense of public relations, good looks and most of all a hard, fast game involving a formidable serve, a tricky top spin lob, a dangerous smash and a taste for action at the net.

His off-court activities drew almost as much appreciation. A lover of the sport for its own sake, Shaf is noted for his efforts to promote tennis with laymen, a chore that draws grumbles from some players. As one of his colleagues put it, "He's the one who visits the orphanages."

But not, Shaf says, at the expense of his game. That comes first and always has since his father first introduced him to tennis back in 1954.

His father, Adly El-Shafei, a former pilot with the Egyptian Air Force, had won the Egyptian amateur championships 13 times and wanted his son to share his enthusiasm for the sport. To foster it he practiced almost every night with the boy at the Heliopolis Club, only 300 yards from their home, and wound up giving him a deadline: win a national championship before you turn 18.

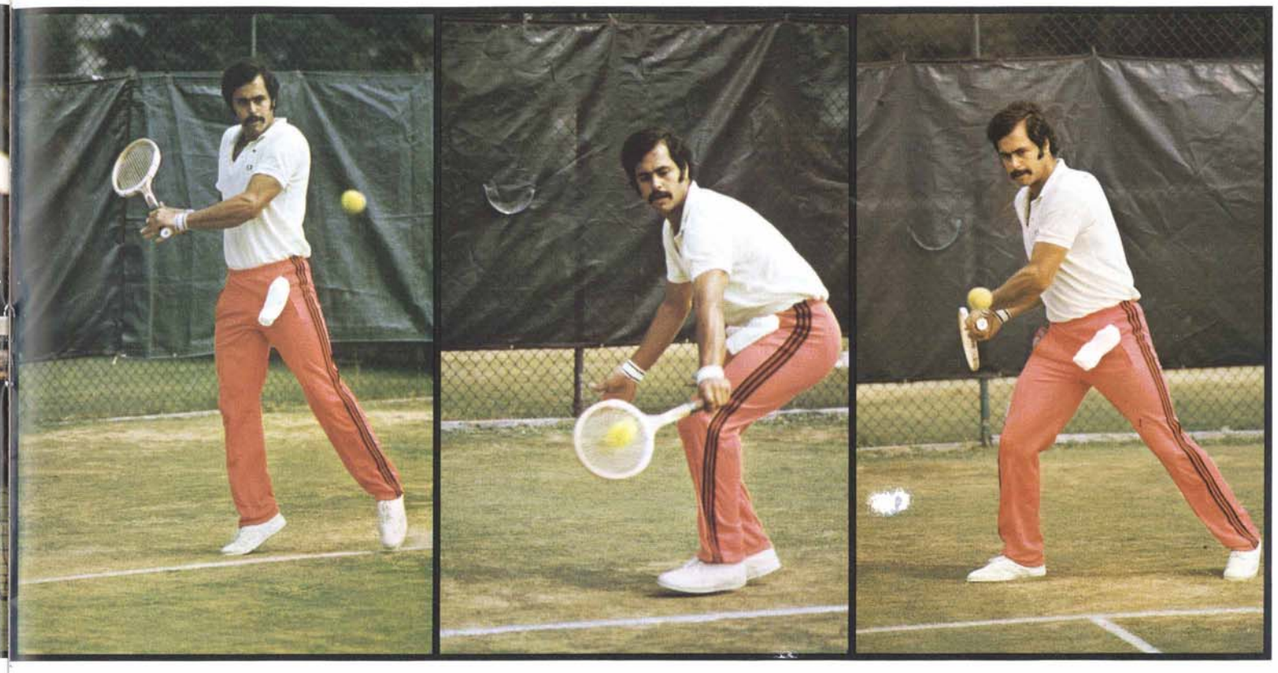
As it turned out, Shaf didn't need that long. At 15, still a student at the French Lycée, he battled his way into the national championship finals and took on the reigning Egyptian of the time. Shaf says he was not worried because although the champion was experienced, he was also 35. As Shaf recalled it the first two sets proved that he had underestimated the value of experience. "He beat the hell out of me." Fortunately for Shaf —and the WCT—Shaf pulled a breakthrough in the third set, as the older player tired, and after that the game was his all the way.

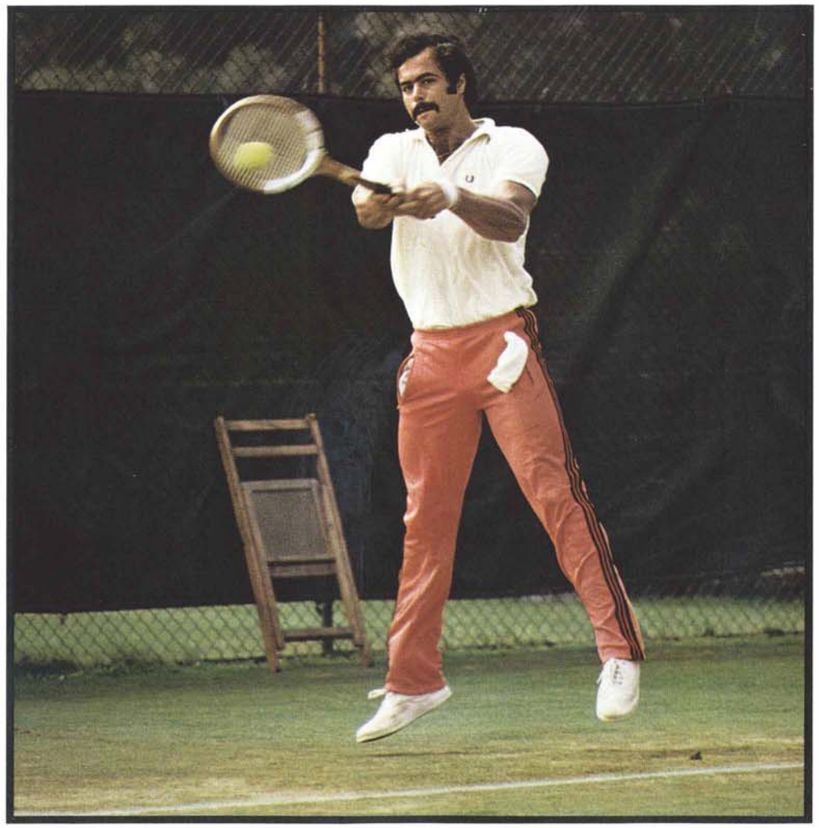
Completing secondary school, Shaf moved to Cairo University where he mixed economics with his tennis—but not too heavily. While still a student he won the coveted Wimbledon and Orange Bowl Championships.

The crunch came when he graduated, began working in public relations for Egypt Air and found his game faltering. So, seven months later he decided to sink everything into tennis and turn professional. It was a hard decision, but within months the WCT stepped in and he was on his way.

With three years still remaining before he reaches what experts consider a tennis player's prime, no one can say how far he will go. But in explaining why he practices so much Shaf left no doubts as to how far he wants to go. "You see," he said quietly, "I'm not yet Number One."

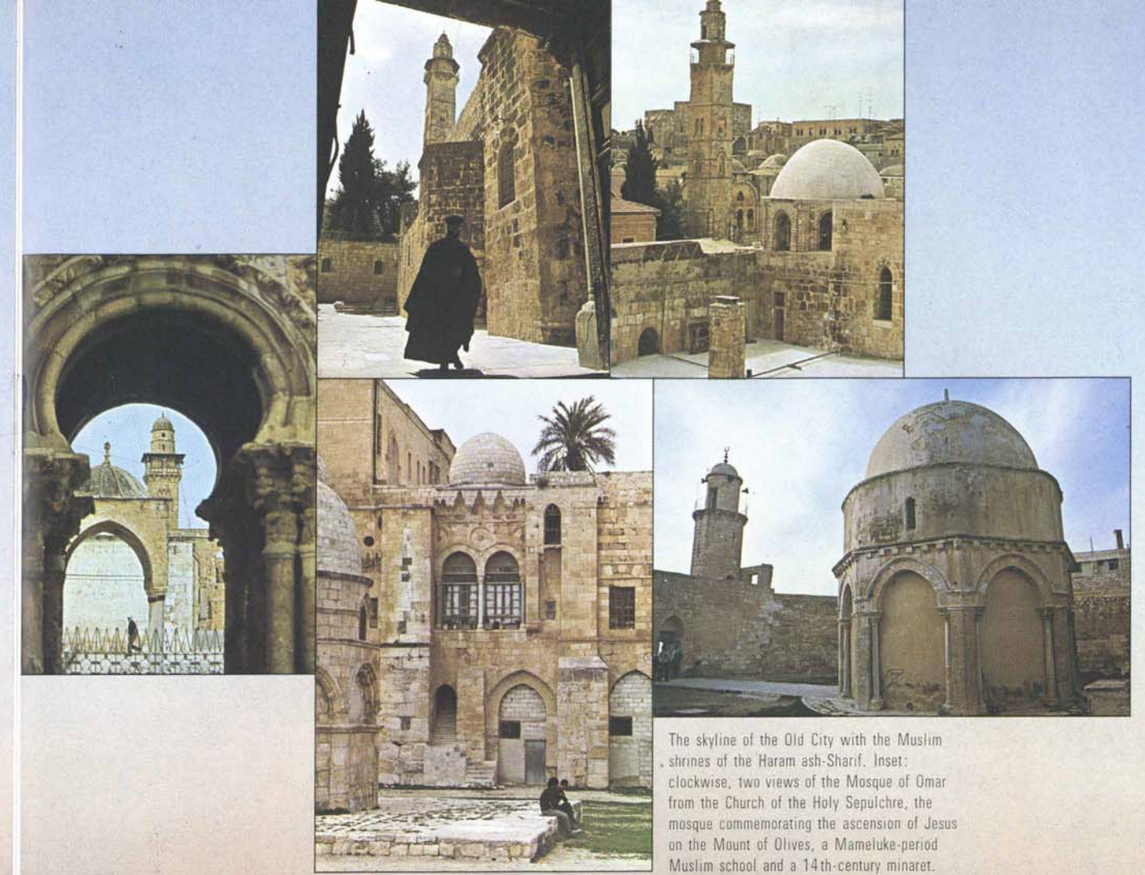
Helen Gibson, formerly with UPI, now freelances from London.



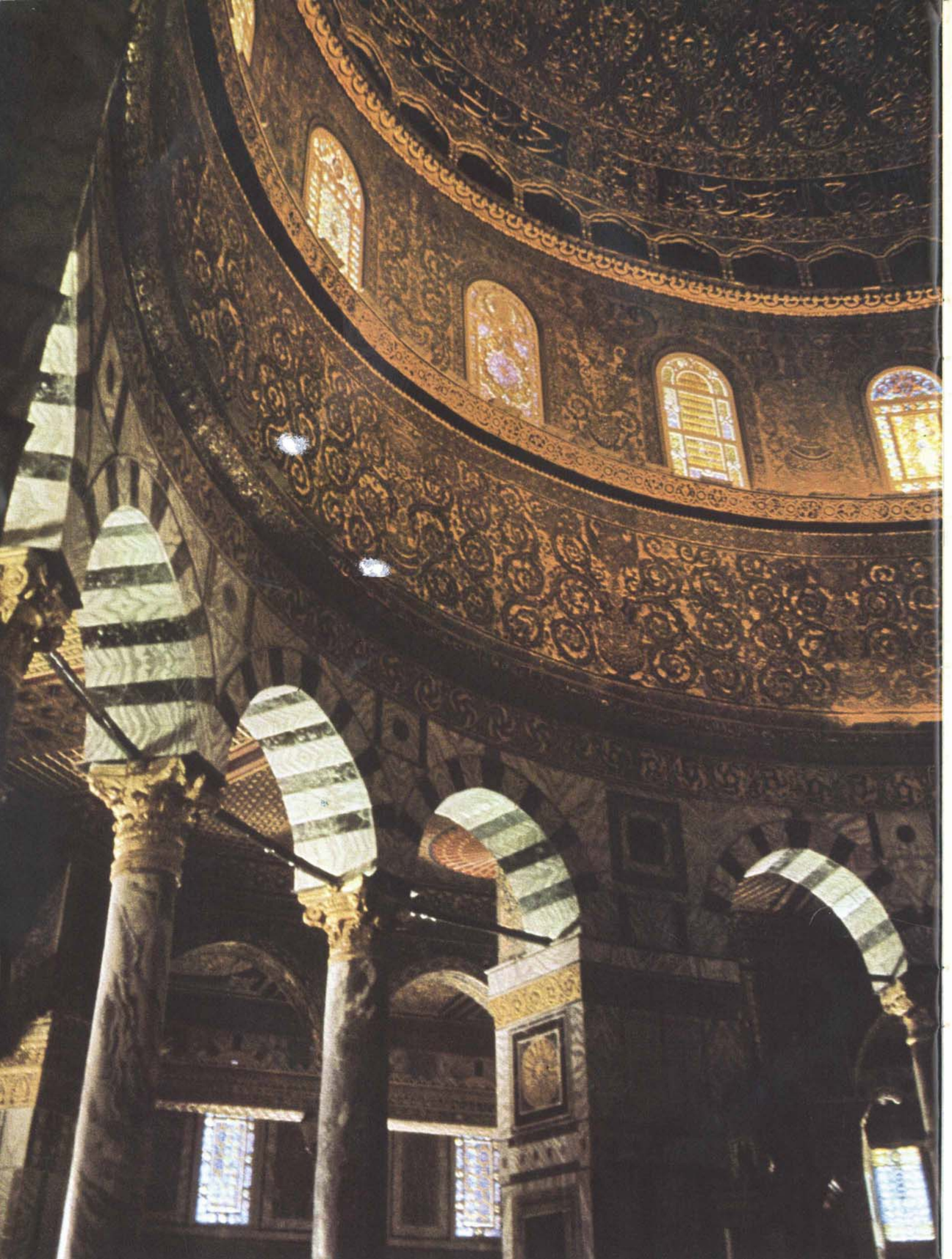


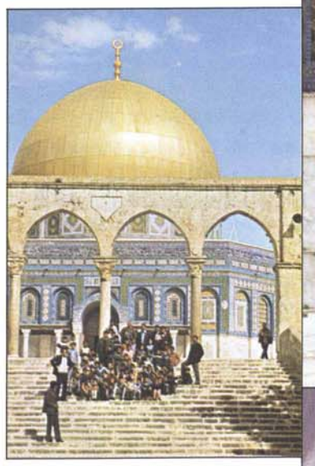
TO PRAY IN JERUSALEM

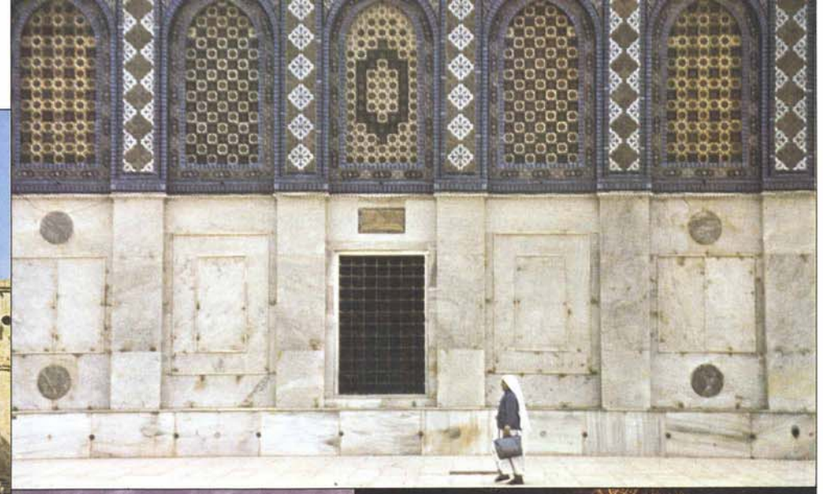
WRITTEN AND PHOTOGRAPHED BY WILLIAM TRACY

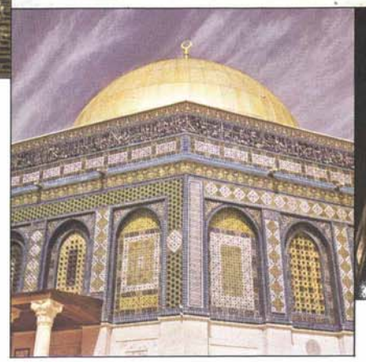


The skyline of the Old City with the Muslim shrines of the Haram ash-Sharif. Inset: clockwise, two views of the Mosque of Omar from the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the mosque commemorating the ascension of Jesus on the Mount of Olives, a Mameluke-period Muslim school and a 14th-century minaret.









The Dome of the Rock, completed in 691, is one of Islam's oldest and holiest shrines. It stands above the rocky summit of Mount Moriah, from which the Prophet Muhammad ascended to Heaven.

Earlier this year King Faisal of Saudi Arabia, a devout Muslim, protector of the Holy Cities of Mecca and Medina, and the leading proponent of Islamic unity, made a significant remark that was widely quoted in the world press. "My greatest wish before I die," said the 70-year-old King, "is to pray in Jerusalem."

Muslims everywhere immediately understood and sympathized with King Faisal's wish, but to Westerners unfamiliar with the Middle East the King's statement came as something of a surprise. Undoubtedly, many persons today know that Muslims consider Mecca and Medina, both in Saudi Arabia, as Holy Cities and that the *Ka'bah*, in Mecca's Sacred Mosque, is the point toward which, five times each day, the world's 600 million Muslims face in prayer. But Jerusalem? From both the Bible's Old and New Testaments Westerners know Jerusalem's deep associations with Judaism and Christianity. But what has Jerusalem to do with Islam?

The answer is: a great deal. Jerusalem is as holy a city to Muslims—and for many of the same reasons—as it is to Jews and Christians, and it also figures importantly in religious traditions particular to Islam. There are also for Muslims some 1,300 years of historical ties.

The historical ties are not completely unknown in the West. Even those with a limited exposure to Middle East history probably know that in the year 637—13 centuries ago—crusading Muslims from Arabia besieged Jerusalem, accepted the surrender of its Byzantine overlords and ruled there almost continually until the Christian Crusaders from Europe came in 1099. They probably recall too that less than a century later Saladin, the gallant Muslim leader famous for his encounters with Richard the Lion Hearted, recaptured Jerusalem from the Europeans and that the subsequent Arab dynasties and later the Ottoman Turks, who controlled the Holy City up to World War I, were Muslim.

What has escaped the casual reader, however, is that Islam's religious ties with the Holy City are equally long and much deeper. How many Western pundits now puzzling over King Faisal's statement realize that the large rock atop Mount Moriah in Jerusalem, where tradition says Abraham prepared to sacrifice his son, is also holy to Muslims because they believe it is the place from which Muhammad began his ascent to Heaven? Or that Arabs too believe they are descended from Abraham, prophet and father of the Jews, that they too revere him as a prophet and that he is mentioned in the Holy Koran as being a Muslim? And how many realize that John the Baptist and Jesus are also both accepted and revered by Muslims as prophets?

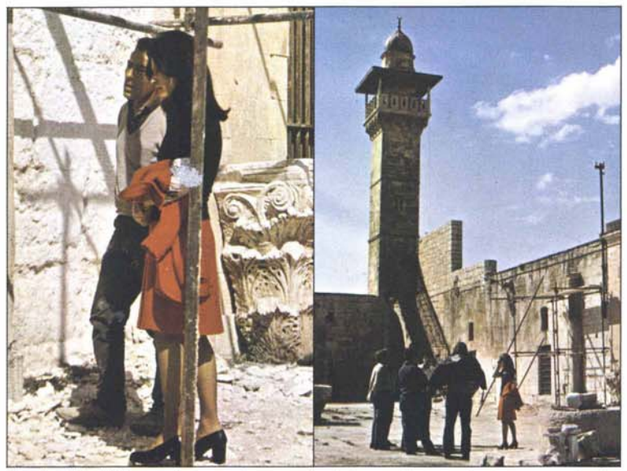
This lack of understanding, widespread and of long duration, is due in part to the historic hostility of Western nations toward Islam, a hostility probably originally engendered by Islam's attempts in distant centuries to conquer Europe. As one result, Western religious history rarely mentions that Muslims, Christians and Jews share many nearly identical beliefs—such as the oneness of God, the need for total submission to His will and the clash of good and evil—and that in Islam, the last of the three great monotheistic religions, many of the individuals, events and places sacred to Jews and Christians are equally sacred to Muslims.

The Prophet Muhammad, to whom God revealed His truths, grew up in Mecca, then

a center of pagan idolatry although both Judaism and Christianity, being Semitic religions, were known in Arabia. Muhammad was a ready instrument when God, in the year 610, spoke to him through the Archangel Gabriel—himself familiar to many Christians—and entrusted to Muhammad His *final* revelations, a confirmation of the Abrahamic line of revelations, the message of Islam.

This aspect of Muslim belief is crucial to any understanding of a Muslim presence in Jerusalem. For Muhammad, from the beginning, emphasized that he was only the *last* in a long line of prophets through whom God has spoken to mankind, and that he was only completing and fulfilling God's often-revealed message. Thus he taught reverence for the prophets of the Old and New Testaments and respect for Jews and Christians as fellow monotheists and "People of the Book." In the Holy Koran, which is God's word as He revealed it to Muhammad, Biblical figures such as Adam, Noah, David and Solomon, and prophets such as Elijah, Moses, John the Baptist and Jesus, with his mother Mary, all have their place. To put it another way, their ties to Jerusalem are also Islam's ties.

Above all, Muhammad stressed reverence toward Abraham, father of the Jews *and* Arabs.



Miss Amal Abul-Hajj, one of a team of young archeologists, architects and engineers reconstructing sections of al-Aqsa Mosque, damaged by arson in 1969, and restoring adjoining historic buildings.

According to Muslim belief, Arabs are descendants of Abraham through his son Ishmael, as Jews are descendants of Abraham through Isaac. Indeed, Abraham, according to the Koran, was a Muslim himself. When, on God's command, Abraham took his son to a rocky summit and prepared unflinchingly to sacrifice him to the one God, it could be considered, as the first example of complete *submission* to God's will—the essence of Muslim belief—a starting point of Islam. As Sura 16, verse 120 of the Koran says, "Abraham was indeed a model, devoutly obedient to God, true in faith, and he joined not gods with God."

Later, as God continued to reveal the message of Islam to Muhammad, the ties to Jerusalem became more direct. One night God, through the Archangel Gabriel, summoned Muhammad from Mecca to Jerusalem on a Nocturnal Journey (*Isra'*). According to Muslim belief, Muhammad was carried aloft on the back of a winged mare named *al-Buraq* to Mount Moriah and the Holy Rock. From its summit he ascended (*Mi'raj*) through the stages of Heaven, meeting and praying with the previous prophets including Abraham, Moses and Jesus. In the Seventh Heaven Muhammad appeared before the throne of God, Who spoke to him. The Prophet then returned to the Holy Rock and, mounting al-Buraq, was back in Mecca by dawn.

As the embarkation point for this journey to God, Jerusalem thus became even more established as a Holy City. As Sura 17, verse 1 of the Koran says, "Glory be to Him, who carried His servant by night from the Sacred Mosque (Mecca) to the Farthest Mosque (Jerusalem), the precincts of which We have blessed, that We might show him some of Our signs . . ." Indeed, for a short time early in their history Muslims prayed toward Jerusalem, and it is called in Arabic *Ula al-Qiblatain*, "First of the two *Qiblas*,"—"directions"—the second being Mecca. It is also called *al-Quds ash-Sharif*, "the Holy and Noble City," or simply, *al-Quds*, "the Holy." In addition to the Koranic blessing, there is a *Hadith*, or saying attributed to the Prophet, that Mecca, Medina and Jerusalem are *equally* deserving of pilgrimage.

For all those reasons, it was inevitable that the Muslims would want to implement their spiritual rights to Jerusalem. In 637 they did. By that time, the empires of Persia and Byzantium, successor to Rome, were deadlocked after years of exhausting struggle to control what is now the Middle East. And although Muhammad had died, the faith of his followers was such that they had routed the Byzantine forces from every major city between the Tigris and the Mediterranean except Jerusalem. Now, in 637, they approached the city, pitched their tents on the Mount of Olives and prepared to take it.

Inside the walls of Jerusalem, then called by its Roman name, Aelia Capitolina, the Byzantines, nearly defenseless, debated whether to surrender or fight—as they had 20 years before when the Persians were at the gates, resulting in ruthless and indiscriminate slaughter. Those arguing for surrender pointed out that when Damascus fell to the Muslim armies two years before, there had been no slaughter. Furthermore the terms of surrender had been extremely lenient, with Christians being allowed to continue praying in their churches upon the payment of a poll tax which guaranteed for them as well as Muslim citizens, the "Security of Islam."

As news of this had leaked into besieged Jerusalem, the Greek Patriarch, Sophronius, sent word out that he would surrender the city without a struggle, but only to the Caliph Omar personally. Omar, then in Damascus, agreed and in one of the great scenes of Muslim history entered Jerusalem alone, except for a servant. Because his clothes were torn and dusty from the ride from Damascus, and because his manner to his servant was so courteous, the Byzantines, arrayed in pompous splendor to meet him, assumed the servant was Omar and greeted him effusively—to the quiet amusement of the Caliph. Thus did Islam come to Jerusalem.

Omar's behavior on that occasion was symbolic of his later approach to the Christians and to Jerusalem. Once his identity was clarified, Omar asked Sophronius to show him the city's holy places, and Sophronius led him first to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. As it was prayer time the Patriarch invited the Caliph to pray there with him. Omar declined, saying that to do so might later encourage his followers to convert the church into a mosque. Instead he prayed outside a little to the south, a place commemorated today by a 10th-century mosque called the Mosque of Omar and built in a small garden across the courtyard from the entrance of the Holy Sepulchre. (*Aramco World*, March-April, 1965).

As the Caliph Omar was especially eager to see the site of the Prophet's ascendance to Heaven, the Patriarch led him to an ancient, crumbling platform on the eastern edge of the city. Seeing that it was piled with the debris of the Persian destruction and more recent accumulations of municipal refuge, Omar personally began the task of clearing the rocky summit so that the site could be reconsecrated. This area today is in the center of a 34-acre compound in the southeast corner of the Old City called *al-Haram ash-Sharif*, "the Noble Sanctuary." The whole area in Omar's time was known as *al-Aqsa*, "the Furthermost," a reference to Muhammad's ultimate journey. The Caliph ordered that a simple wooden mosque be built on the southwestern corner of the platform near the great wall where, tradition held, the Prophet had tethered his mare *al-Buraq*.

Traveling with the Muslim army was a man named Bilal, who had been the Prophet's own muezzin, or prayer caller. On the first Friday after the discovery of the sacred rock, Omar went to the enclosure to worship and there Bilal himself, for the first time since Muhammad's death six years previously, called the faithful to prayer. *Al-Quds*, Holy Jerusalem, was in Muslim hands.

Omar's covenant with the Byzantines of Jerusalem followed the pattern of Damascus. With the payment of the poll tax and the acceptance of the "Security of Islam," Christians were given self-government under their ecclesiastical leaders and Christian pilgrimages from the West were permitted. This is part of the text of Omar's treaty:

"In the name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate. This is the covenant which Omar Ibn al-Khattab, the servant of Allah, the Commander of the Faithful, grants to the people of Aelia, the Holy House. He grants them security of their lives, their possessions, their churches and crosses . . . they shall have freedom of religion and none shall be molested unless they rise up in a body . . . They shall pay a tax instead of military service . . . and those who leave the city shall be safeguarded until they reach their destination . . ."

As John Gray, an English historian, puts it, Omar's decree was "less of a treaty imposed by a conqueror than a guarantee by a victorious faith confident in its inherent strength and conscious of its responsibilities."

In the years that followed, Omar's successors set to work on what is possibly Islam's most beautiful shrine: the Dome of the Rock, so called because it encloses the rock from which Muhammad ascended. Built during the reign of the Caliph 'Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan, it was finished in 691, and is one of Islam's oldest existing monuments. Despite extensive modifications and repairs throughout the centuries it is today essentially the same: a magnificent structure with a great golden dome that, until the present government began to build high-rise apartment houses on surrounding hilltops, dominated the city's skyline.

In the Aqsa Mosque fire Saladin's cedarwood pulpit (left, at bottom) was burned. Right: Historic Muslim waqf buildings are threatened by excavations along the Noble Sanctuary's western wall.

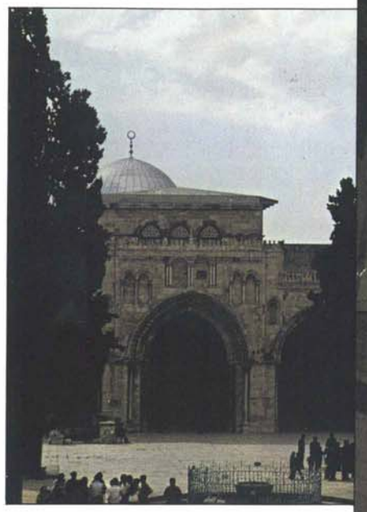
Close by the Dome of the Rock is the also famous Aqsa Mosque. Built near the site of Omar's wooden mosque in 715, al-Aqsa has a special place in Muslim affections, because by unspoken tradition it is more a house of prayer than a monument. Five thousand worshipers can pray inside.

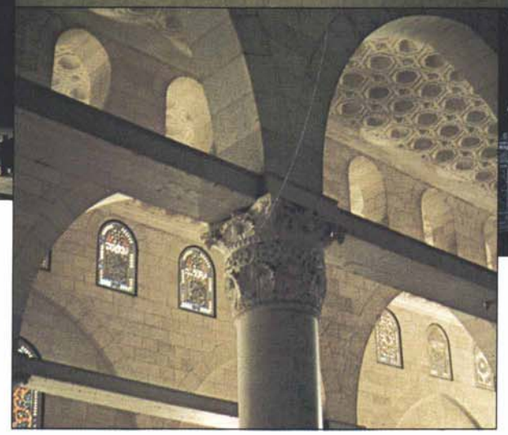
Remarkably, these two edifices, the main symbols of the Muslim presence in Jerusalem, have survived all the difficult centuries that followed.

The pattern of religious tolerance established in Jerusalem by Omar and maintained by the Umayyad caliphs became uncertain under their Abbasid successors, deteriorated further under the Fatimids and vanished in 1099, when the Crusaders captured the Holy City (*Aramco World*, May-June, 1970). Not only did the European conquerors massacre all but a handful of Jerusalem's Muslim defenders, but also burned the small Jewish community in its synagogue and slaughtered great numbers of Arab and Orthodox Christians. The Crusaders also converted the Muslim shrines to churches. A gold cross was raised on top of the Dome of the Rock, which the Crusaders then named the Templum Domini. Another was placed on the dome of al-Aqsa Mosque, which was named the Templum Solomonis and became the headquarters of the militant religious order, the Knights Templar.

But if defeated, the Muslims were not conquered. In 1187 under the great Saladin, they decisively defeated the Crusaders at Hattin near Galilee and, on October 2, the anniversary of the Prophet's Nocturnal Journey, rode back into Jerusalem. Then, fulfilling the vow of his predecessor Nur ad-Din, who had dedicated a magnificent cedarwood *minbar*, or pulpit, made in Aleppo to the capture of the city, Saladin installed the pulpit in al-Aqsa Mosque. Though isolated coastal outposts remained in Christian control up to 1291, *al-Quds*, the Holy, was again part of the Muslim empire.

Under Saladin, whose chivalry was a legend even among his enemies, the tolerance of Omar was restored. His merciful occupation of the city was in glaring contrast to the policies of the Crusader conquest. He spared all lives, offered the "Security of Islam" to those who sought it and, although removing the crosses and altars from the Dome of the Rock and al-Aqsa, left all other Christian shrines intact.





Every devout Muslim hopes to pray in al-Aqsa Mosque, built in 715 in memory of the Prophet Muhammad's Nocturnal Journey from Mecca to Jerusalem.

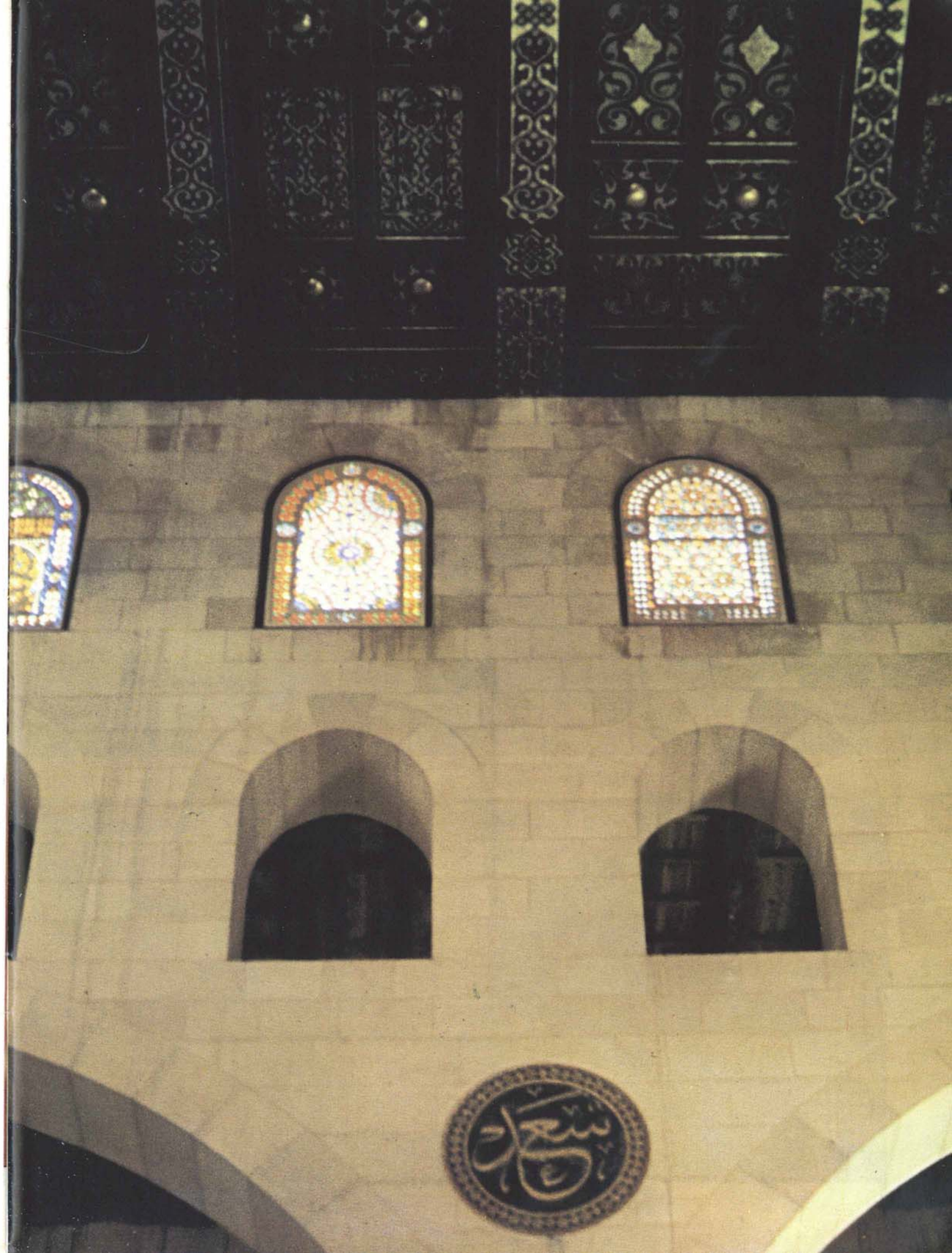
During the Ayyubid dynasty, which came next, it became traditional that at times the various sultans would clean al-Aqsa with their own hands before dispensing alms. The sultans of the Mameluke dynasty, which came to power in the 13th century, assumed the title "Servants and Guardians" of the holy places in Mecca, Medina and Jerusalem. They were notable not only for the substantial restorations and redecorations they carried out in both of Jerusalem's two major shrines, but also for the steps they took to provide for their future. The Mamelukes purchased substantial properties in Jerusalem, especially in the Magharibah quarter just west of the Noble Sanctuary, and through the establishment of *waqfs*, or perpetual sacred trusts (*Aramco World*, Nov.-Dec., 1973), dedicated their income to finance the upkeep of the holy places and establish, maintain and operate Muslim schools, religious institutes, pilgrim hospices and kitchens for the poor. Those institutions, plus the homes and neighborhood mosques of the devout who settled close to the two great mosques, made up an intimate, if humble, part of the Muslim presence for five centuries.

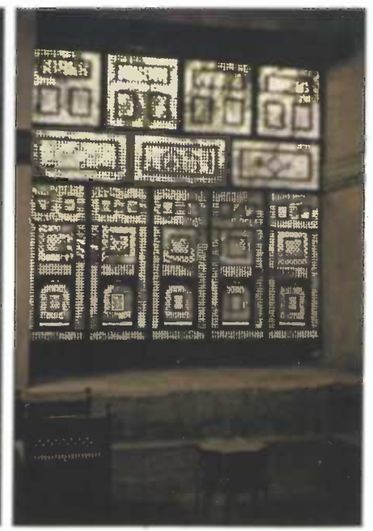
Today this presence, if weakened, is still obvious, particularly in *al-Haram ash-Sharif*, "the Noble Sanctuary." On or near this site, to be sure, there occurred some of the great events of Biblical history. It was here that tradition says King Solomon built the Temple. It was here, Christians believe, that the boy Jesus was found by Mary and Joseph preaching to the elders and that he later chased the money changers from the Temple. But it should be remembered that it is a central site for Muslims too, being the holy spot from which Muhammad ascended to Heaven to pray with former prophets and appear before the throne of God.

Within the Dome of the Rock, in a small cave beneath the rocky summit of Mount Moriah are Muslim shrines to Abraham and Elijah. Here, tradition says, is the site of the Last Judgment. Beneath it is the Well of Souls, where spirits await the Day of Judgment in prayer and apprehension. And scattered about the Sanctuary are other shrines which, with quiet eloquence, remind Western visitors of how many more of their own traditions are shared by Muslims: the Dome of Moses, the Dome of Solomon, the Dome of Gabriel—all built by Muslim caliphs through the centuries. In the far corner is a small dome to mark the spot where, Muslim tradition says, Mary and the infant Jesus rested before starting down to Egypt. Across the valley on the Mount of Olives, a small mosque commemorates the site of *his* ascension to Heaven. Around the edge of the platform are a series of graceful arches, the *mawazeen*, from which, according to tradition, the balance scales will be hung on the Day of Judgment. Toward the south is the silver dome of al-Aqsa, "the Furthermost," the blessed mosque, now being patiently restored after it was severely damaged by arson in 1969, in which every devout Muslim hopes to pray.

And in the center, towering above all, is the Dome of the Rock, Islam's holy shrine built on a rocky mountain top above which Abraham, Jesus and Muhammad worshiped together and where, before he dies, an aging King hopes some day to pray.

William Tracy is Assistant Editor of Aramco World.





The Magic of the Mashrabiyas

WRITTEN AND PHOTOGRAPHED BY JOHN FEENEY

"... in its beauty is the reason why the magic ... has outlived the reality."

The mashrabiya was an eminently practical architectural feature that for centuries served as window, curtain, air conditioner and refrigerator. It not only subdued the strong desert sunlight, but also cooled houses, water and people.

To Western eyes there was always a magic to the *mashrabiyas*, those handsome wooden screens that once masked the exteriors of buildings throughout the Arab East. Delicate and beautiful, like silken masks drawn discreetly across the faces of comely maidens, they came to symbolize the legendary mystery of the Orient.

In a sense this is not an altogether incorrect impression. Mashrabiyas were veils drawn against the outside world and behind their cool shield of latticework those inside did recline in shaded privacy while gazing out at the tumult of the streets below. And yes, they were also a haven for women whose need for privacy in older cultures did give rise to the exotic, if exaggerated, legends of the hidden harem.

Yet the origins and functions of the mashrabiya are far more prosaic—as their Egyptian name suggests. The word "mashrabiya" comes from an Arabic root meaning the "place of drinking," which was adapted to accommodate the first function of the screen: "the place to cool the drinking water."

As indeed it was. The shade and open lattice of a mashrabiya provided a constant current of air which, as the sweating surfaces of porous clay pots evaporated, cooled the water inside. This was such an important function that sometimes a small screened platform large enough to accommodate two or three pots of water was built out from the main screen to catch additional air and cool more water. From this beginning the mashrabiya developed into an eminently practical architectural feature that for centuries served, at one and the same time, as window, curtain, air conditioner and refrigerator. Shrewdly designed, it not only subdued the strong desert sunlight but also cooled houses, water and people in lands from India to Spain where, at certain times of the year, people hide from the sun as others seek shelter from rain.

In Egypt, however, and especially in Cairo itself, mashrabiyas began, in the 14th century, to evolve into something more. In the skilled hands of craftsmen to whom wood was a treasure to be imported from Lebanon and Asia Minor, and lovingly handled, the screens gradually came to encompass balconies to cool people as well as pots. Later, as they were fitted with cushioned beds running the length and breadth of the screen, they became comfortable havens in which the occupants could recline in cool privacy while gazing down at the streets or courtyards below and, unseen and unheard, share in the life of the outside world. Because they were expensive they were at first limited to the palaces of rulers and the homes of the wealthier merchants as an outward sign of success.

In the hands of Cairo's craftsmen the techniques improved. Over the centuries the craftsmen had developed special skills with wood. They knew, for example, that in intense summer heat even the best wood would shrink, warp and split when exposed to sun and air. But they also knew that very small pieces of wood dovetailed one into the other without the use of glue or nails allowed wood to expand, shrink and adjust itself without upsetting the overall assembly. From earliest times, and especially in the era of Coptic Egypt, this was how wood had come to be used, and it suited the mashrabiya beautifully. Carved screens could be divided and subdivided into smaller and still smaller pieces of wood, each piece fitting into the next, the whole screen, sometimes of huge proportions, being held together without the use of a single nail. Later, as techniques were perfected, as many as two thousand individual pieces of wood—including tiny, perfect wooden balls and links—would go into the making of a single square yard of finely made mashrabiya, each piece turned and smoothed by hand and then assembled like masses of interlaced strings of beads into ever varying patterns.

Such fine work demanded immense toil and patience, particularly since the craftsmen worked within the strict limits imposed not only by the difficulties of the art itself but also by the prohibitions of Islam against representations of any living being. Yet the artists of the mashrabiya continued to search and find new patterns. They were certainly simple patterns—sometimes calligraphy from the Koran, sometimes merely a water ewer or a hanging lamp—but so painstakingly worked into the screen that they appeared against the light as exquisite designs in silhouette.

As the art improved the mashrabiya became fairly common in Arab cities (*Aramco World*, September-October 1971). But in Cairo they were everywhere. As recently as the late 1900's, entire Cairo street fronts were still embellished with row upon row, level upon level of mashrabiyas. Splendid examples were also to be found in houses surrounding Ezbekiya Lake, one of a chain of lakes left by the receding Nile. Others graced great houses lining the old Khalig Canal, part of an ancient waterway linking the Nile to the Red Sea. Engravings made in the last century show the "Khalig" to have been something of a Venetian waterway served by poled barges and lined by fine Cairene houses with vine-covered pavilions overhanging the water.

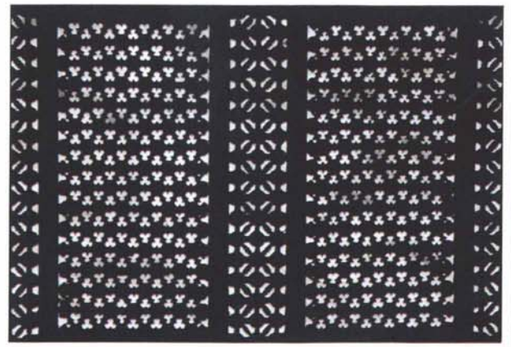
Mashrabiyas were introduced into mosques too, often on a much larger scale, but serving the same purpose: filtering the intense sunlight flooding into the traditional courtyard and providing a cool shaded interior conducive to prayer and meditation. Others were created for large semi-public buildings like the *wakalah*, or caravansary, of el-Ghori, built in the 16th century to accommodate merchants coming into Cairo with caravans from the Red Sea. But the best examples were found in the great homes of Cairo, homes like el-Kretiliya, hard against the ninth-century walls of Ibn Tulun's great mosque, and el-Seheimy house, built in 1645.

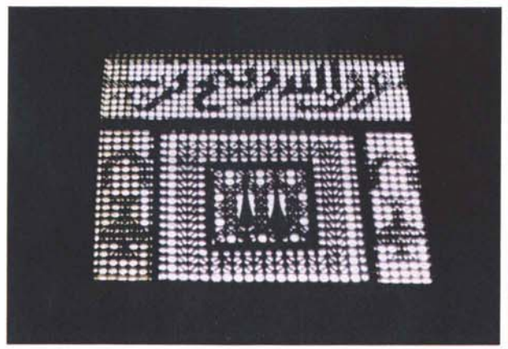
El-Seheimy's was probably typical of the great homes: drab outside—often with flat, windowless walls that provided a defense against attacks as well as against the noise, dust and heat of the streets—but opulent inside, with marble floors, splashing fountains and hanging lanterns.

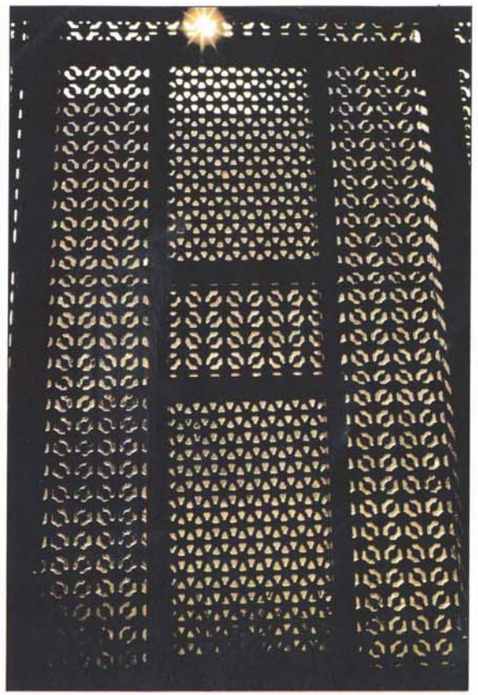
To reach the interior of el-Kretiliya house—which exists to this day—visitors in those times had to follow a narrow medieval lane to a heavy wooden door that opened onto a passageway which, deliberately, twisted away from the door to prevent the passerby from seeing into an inner courtyard. The courtyard, green with trees and vines, was dominated by three levels of mashrabiyas, beneath which was a *takhtabush*, a loggia lined with cushioned seats. There the master of the house received tradesmen, members of his staff and others whose rank or errand did not merit an invitation into the house itself, but whose visits, nevertheless, were a delight to the ladies of the house who, behind the screens, could see and hear the visitors without being seen themselves.

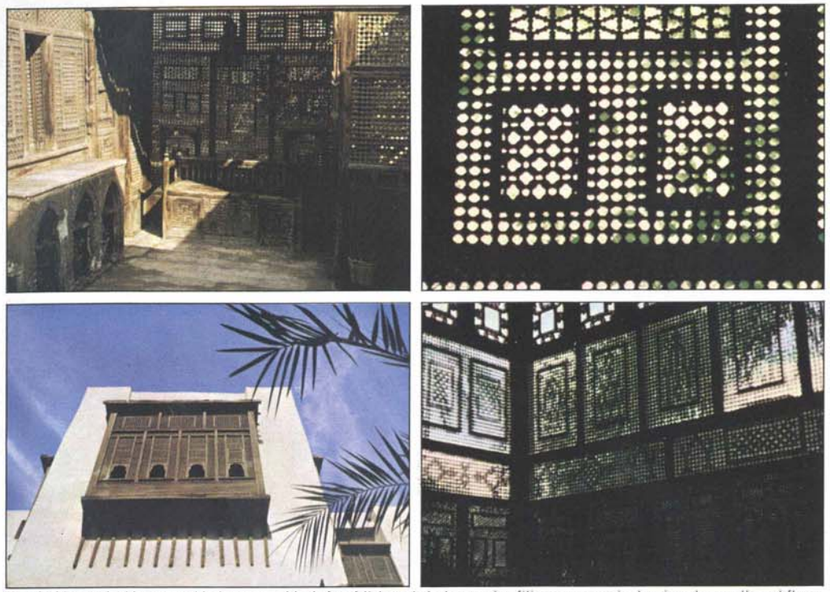
Inside, el-Seheimy house was even more

Simple geometric patterns, calligraphy from the Koran, and sometimes a water ewer or a hanging lamp were painstakingly worked into the screens so that they appeared against the light as exquisite designs.









From inside, mashrabiyas resemble lanterns, with shafts of light and shadow tracing filigree patterns in the air and on walls and floors.

beautiful. There was a great *mandara*—a ground floor reception hall—an inner courtyard luxuriant with palms and trellised pavilions, halls lined with blue Damascus tiles and, in discreet privacy above, the *bab al-hareem*, beloved of legend but actually little more than a private sanctuary to which the master and his family could retire in closely guarded peace and quiet.

Not much is left today of el-Seheimy's interior furnishing, yet at the far end of the mandara is one of the most visually exciting mashrabiyas in Cairo. Reaching from wall to wall and nearly from floor to ceiling, it is an immense carved screen that looks out on an inner garden. From inside it resembles a giant lantern with shafts of sunlight and shadow tracing filigree patterns on the floors and walls and evoking silent echoes of slippered feet brushing the mosaics with its pattern of shadows and light. It is a vision really of another age and in its beauty is the reason why the magic of the mashrabiya has long outlived the reality.

There are remnants of the vision, certainly. In the el-Seheimy house and in el-Kretiliya, and—a magnificent example—in the early 15th-century mosque tomb of Sultan Baruk, a triumph of Mameluke craftsmanship. But the great days are over. As the centuries passed, Lake Ezbekiya was filled in—it's now the site of Ezbekiya Gardens and Midan Opera. So, because it bred insects and smelled appallingly, was the Khalig Canal. In the meantime the mashrabiyas lining the streets had become a dreaded fire hazard. Tinder dry, and in some very narrow streets nearly touching, like balconies in medieval Europe, they caught fire easily. There are terrible accounts of fires leaping from window to window at frightening speed. As a result many were removed, the art swiftly began to decline and, a few years ago, with the death of Hassan Abu Said, all but expired.

Hassan Abu Said was probably the last of the great mashrabiya craftsmen. In a small shop in a narrow lane he continued his work up until just a few years ago. His reputation was such that when Islamic architects ordered thousands of intricately carved pieces of wood for the *minbar*, or pulpit, of a mosque in Washington, D.C. (*Aramco World*, May-June, 1965), they not only commissioned him to carve them but also flew him to Washington to assemble them. No one else knew how to put together the hundreds of interlocking pieces.

But even then the end was near and Hassan knew it. He took me one day to the roof of his shop and sadly waved at me to look around. On the roof was a mountain of mashrabiyas. Large ones, small ones, crude ones and beautiful ones. Leading me around Hassan proudly pointed out that although many of them were centuries old and had been lying on the roof in the full heat of the Cairo sun none had warped, shrunk or split. He had collected them, he said, from the scores of old buildings being torn down all over Cairo. He wanted, he said, to preserve them just a little longer. Which he did. But a few years later he died and the screens disappeared—along with the traditions of beauty and mystery that they represented.

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