Ferash Maloof - doing the
Jar dance. Harrow. 12.12.1875.

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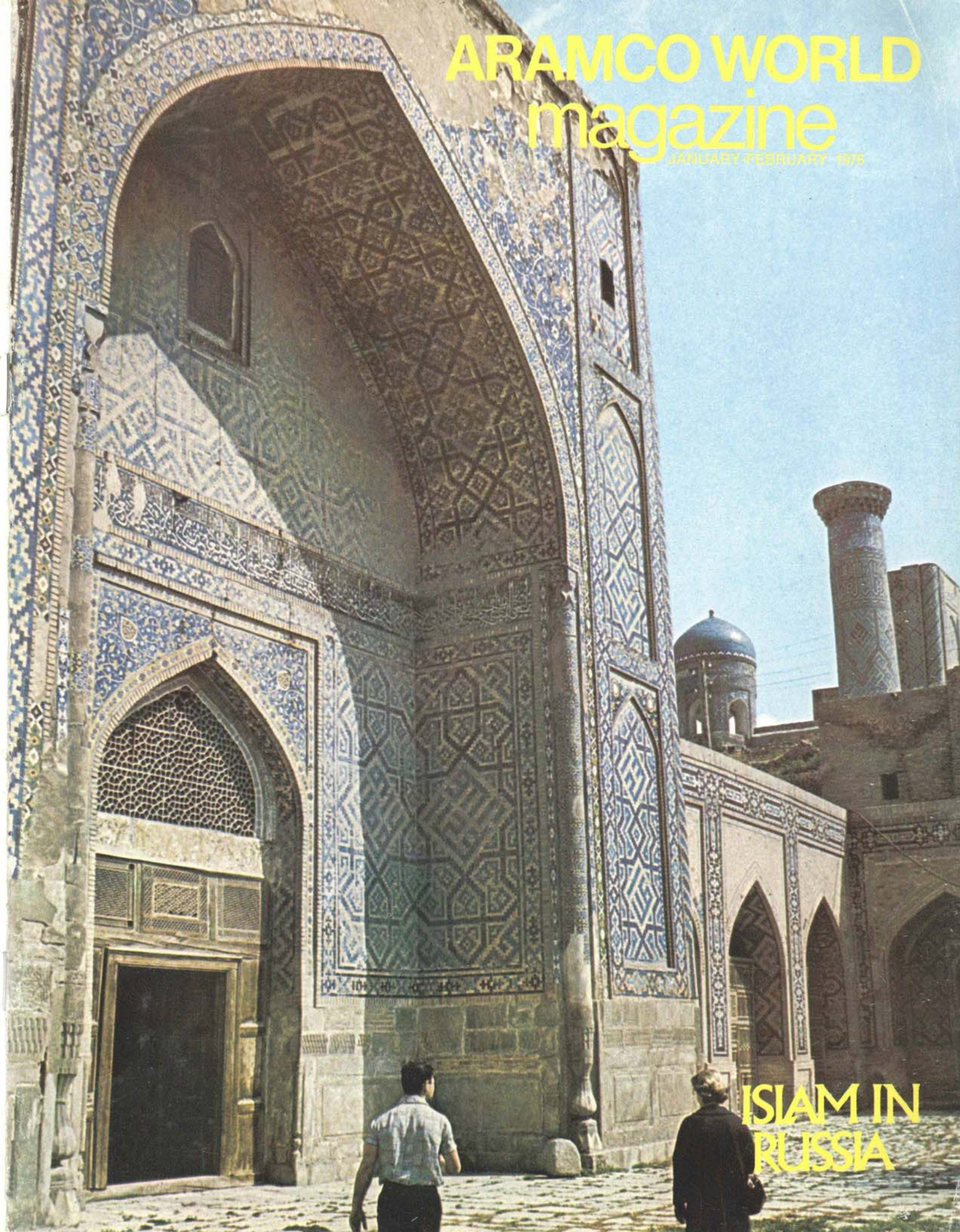

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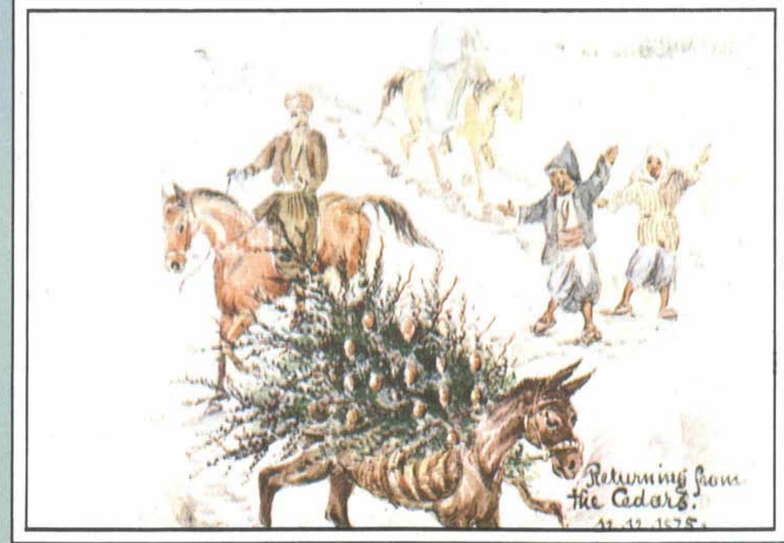
ISLAM IN RUSSIA



Theophilus Waldmeier had a warm affection for people and a sly sense of humor. Story and watercolors begin on page 14.

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BY JOHN BRINTON

He gave America a new view of the Middle East, was the first American in Petra and the discoverer of Yucatan's Mayan ruins.

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BY JOHN MUNRO

The "golden road to Samarkand" is no longer the adventure it once was. But the monuments of Islam to which it led endure to this day.

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Tucked away in a dusty drawer in a mountain school: two small volumes of paintings and sketches of life in Lebanon during the 19th century.

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Everyone has folk heroes. Robin Hood in England. Davy Crockett in America. And Hatim in Arabia –

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BY HELEN GIBSON

At home it was a candy jar. At Christie's it became a rare, 14th-century covered bowl from Syria. In a museum it's now worth $32,500.

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Cover: The 17th-century Tila Kari *madrasah* is one of three monumental schools surrounding the spacious Registan, the former market plaza of Samarkand, in Soviet Central Asia, where Islam still survives. Story and photographs on page 6.
Back cover: a watercolor by Theophilus Waldmeier, a 19th-century Swiss who founded a school and a hospital in Lebanon.

STEPHENS AND THE GENTLE ARABS

WRITTEN BY JOHN BRINTON

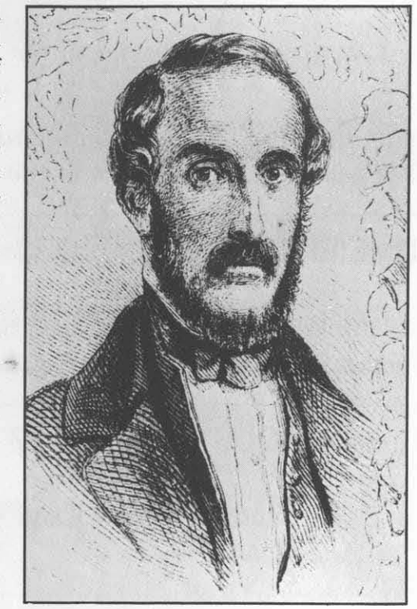
Melville admired him, Poe liked his book and Van Wyck Brooks called him "the greatest of American travel writers."

Like today's itinerant youth, John Lloyd Stephens was a traveler who liked beards and hated baggage. In setting off to explore the Nile, for example, all he could think of was the pleasure of leaving custom behind —"Think of not shaving for two months!"— and the delight of traveling light —"We throw away everything except our pantaloons."

John Lloyd Stephens was one of America's first travel writers. At a time when the U.S. consul in Egypt registered just six visitors to Egypt, John Stephens took a boat up the Nile, recorded his impressions, went on to other parts of the Middle East and produced a travel book that put Egypt on the map for America. Later he led an expedition to Central America which uncovered the fantastic Mayan ruins.

Unlike many travel writers, however, John Lloyd Stephens produced books that were critically as well as commercially successful. Edgar Allan Poe found his *Incidents of Travel in Egypt, Arabia Petraea and the Holy Land* "highly agreeable, interesting and instructive," Van Wyck Brooks called him "the greatest of American travel writers" and Herman Melville thought of him as "that wonderful Arabian traveler."

John Lloyd Stephens was born in 1805, grew up in New York, endured a "birched-in" education in Latin and Greek, became a lawyer and, as a young man, joined a prestigious law firm where he would spend the next six years. During this time he also plunged into local politics. Fortunately, however, he became such an enthusiastic campaigner that his voice and health suffered and his doctor packed him off to Europe for a cure. For Stephens it was the start of an entirely new life. From Europe,



Stephens. By D. H. Finnie.

Stephens went on to the East and then to Egypt where, enchanted by what he found, he embarked on the travels that would make him rich and famous.

Incidents of Travel in Egypt, Arabia Petraea and the Holy Land begins on an eager note: "In December 1835 after a passage of five days from Malta, I was perched up in the rigging of an English schooner, spy-glass in hand, earnestly looking for the Land of Egypt."

He soon found it, but for a time his enthusiasm was quenched. In Alexandria, whose great new harbor was filled with newly built warships, Stephens groped his way through the bazaars to the European quarter of the town amid what he described as an incredible collection of men and beasts, smells and swarms of flies. He was, he said "thinking more of his own movements than the Pyramids."

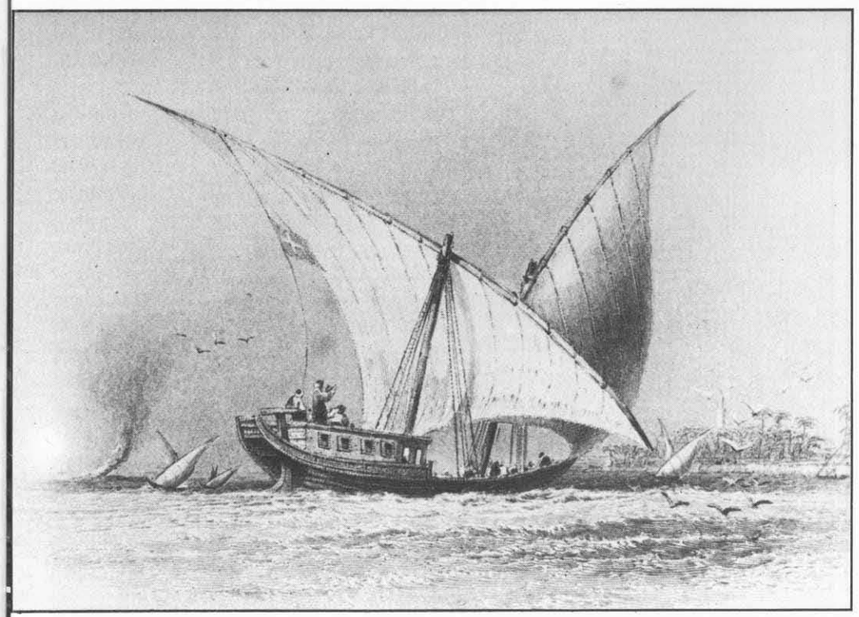
He also found that he was lonely. The only friendly face he could find in Alexandria was that of Mr. Gliddon, an English merchant recently appointed U.S. consul. But his enthusiasm returned after Mr. Gliddon made arrangements for him to go by boat to Cairo via the great new canal which linked Alexandria to the Nile. Stephens shared his canal boat on the five-day journey with Thomas Waghorn, who was then on his way to India and who would later develop a trans-Egyptian short cut to the Red Sea (See *Aramco World*, November-December, 1968).

In Cairo Stephens was met by George Gliddon, son of the U.S. consul and a man who made it his duty to look after Americans. Gliddon, an advocate of keeping Egypt's antiquities in Egypt, promptly arranged an introduction to Muhammad Ali, founder of modern Egypt and then its ruler. Muhammad Ali dispatched a splendid horse for Stephens to ride to the palace and received him in the grand audience chamber, a room 80 feet long, with arabesque paintings on the walls.

At that time Muhammad Ali was 65 years old and had, Stephens wrote, "strong features and uncommonly fine dark eyes." As he also had a shrewd interest in the non-colonial but powerful United States, Muhammad Ali listened patiently as Stephens told him that half the world was curious to see Egypt and suggested that a steamboat service should be set up between Alexandria and Cairo. The meeting went off very well and Muhammad Ali gratiously offered Egypt's hospitality to Stephens.

Some of the sights Stephens saw in Cairo dismayed him. At the *Palais de Justice* he saw a poor wretch having the soles of his feet beaten: the infamous bastinado. He also visited the slave market, where there were "five or six hundred slaves sitting on mats in groups, of ten, twenty or thirty, each belonging to a different proprietor." They were naked, he said, came from the Sudan and Abyssinia and were being sold at prices ranging from $20 to $100.

Nevertheless, his interest in Egypt was fully engaged and after much searching and dickering Stephens found a boat on which



Departure From Old Cairo. By W. H. Bartlett.

he could sail up the Nile. He purposely chose a small, 40-foot boat "for greater convenience in moving and towing," but its arrangements were primitive. He slept on a mattress on the floor of the main cabin and stored his belongings on "a swinging shelf" at the foot of the mattress. His sole companion was his Maltese servant, Paolo Nuzzo, who, Stephens commented, "was faithful as the sun, and one of the greatest cowards that luminary ever shone upon."

He set sail at precisely noon, January 1, 1836, "with a fair wind and the Star Spangled Banner (made by an Arab tailor) floating above us." The flag, Stephens noted, was important, as every stranger in Egypt had to fly the flag of his country lest soldiers commandeer his boat.

On the river Stephens quickly discovered something that few Egyptians will admit even today: Egypt can be very cold in the winter time. On the first morning out of Cairo, Paolo brought him a piece of ice "as thick as a pane of glass." And when they reached Mina ten days later it was still bitterly cold. Mina, however, boasted the luxury of a Turkish bath whose effects, he wrote, were marvelous. "I left the bath a different man; all my moral as well as physical strength was roused."

As traveling by sail was slow, due to adverse winds, Stephens followed a piece of good advice given him in Cairo: "With a fair wind, keep going." But he found time to observe an old man and his wife living in a tomb cut in the high cliffs bordering the Nile. They had been there 50 years, he said, and had kept a light burning perpetually in their tomb-like home. They also let down a basket when any traveler passed and the travelers always filled it with supplies.

When Stephens tied up to the bank at Assiut "a beautiful bright-eyed girl" appeared with her donkey. Stephens' description is typical of the warm interest in people that showed up constantly in his books: "Such a mild, open and engaging expression, and such propriety of behavior." He felt, he said, ashamed to be riding her donkey while she walked.

In Assiut, Stephens visited the famous rock tombs and attended an Egyptian funeral. He declared that his visit was "the most pleasant day he had spent since leaving Cairo on the legitimate business of a tourist."

Back on the river, Stephens was again appalled at seeing boatloads of slaves seized in the Sudan, but, scrupulously fair, noted that in Egypt "the slave is received into the family of the Turk in a relation more confidential and respectable than that of the ordinary domestic; and, when liberated, which often happens, stands upon the same footing as a free man." The Eastern attitude towards slavery, he suggests, certainly was more enlightened at that period than it was back in the U.S.

As he cruised along, Stephens wrote, he noticed that the flat landscape was dotted with whitewashed pigeon cotes, shaped like huge sugar loaves, with numerous pigeons constantly circling in the air. No one shot the pigeons, he said, because "they constitute a great portion of the wealth of the villagers," their manure being a wonderful fertilizer. Besides, there was other game: "hares in abundance and gazelle ... if a man can bring himself to it." On the river banks there were also wild duck and geese, but Stephens discovered that they were not worth shooting. They were so tough that no amount of cooking could make them tender.

Even tougher, however, were the crocodiles. Stephens says he shot at a crocodile, but might as well have thrown a stone at it. The bore of his gun was too small. On the other hand, he also laments that the crocodile "now symbolizes the march of improvements which has degraded him from the deity of a mighty people into a target for strolling tourists."

When they put in at Dendur, Stephens eagerly proposed marching across the desert to visit a nearby oasis and when his crew refused to go, for fear of the Bedouins, he started out alone. He soon returned, explaining that he had encountered three desperate-looking men — a typical 19th-century reaction to the then-unknown desert Arab.

To Stephens, the great temple at Dendur (See *Aramco World*, May-June, 1969) was one of the finest specimens of the arts of Egypt and one of the best preserved. The

bas-reliefs in places were as fresh "as when they were first painted, as if but the work of yesterday." He also mentions his distress at discovering that Muhammad Ali was making use of the stone to build bridges and ports, and calls it "wanton destruction by the barbarous hand of man." A typical tourist, however, he himself proceeded to break off a beautifully chiselled head, thus demolishing in ten minutes the work of years. Obviously aware of his hypocrisy, he offers a flimsy excuse. He was, he wrote, "destroying to preserve."

His next stop was "immortal Thebes," where the French soldiers with Napoleon were reputed to have involuntarily thrown down their arms and stood in silent admiration. Stephens was equally impressed, but not by Thebes. He had spotted a boat flying the British flag and the thought of hearing his own language, after three weeks on the river, overwhelmed him.

There were two Englishmen on the boat when Stephens called, and at the Temple of Luxor Stephens met the rest of the party: three gentlemen and a lady. His first, typically American, impression was that they were putting on "airs," but on returning to his tent found an invitation to dinner. He accepted and later described the event as a "glorious evening ... a bright spot that I love to look back upon, more than compensating me for the weeks of loneliness." When they parted late at night they vowed eternal friendship and planned to meet soon.

Two days later he reached Aswan, the last town in Egypt. It was on the border of what was Ethiopia in those days, at the foot of the Nile cataracts. Ibrahim Pasha had built himself a small palace there where he could shut himself in and escape the plague. Opposite Aswan was Elephantine Island, as beautiful then as it is today, with its green banks sloping down to the river and the rugged mountains projecting in "rude and giant masses into the blue water." Those masses, Stephens said, are the rocks of dark granite "from which the mighty obelisks and monuments which adorn the ancient temples of Egypt were made."

Pushing on, Stephens had to hire some 50 men to haul the boat up through the first cataract, a furious rush of water, strewn with huge boulders and treacherous whirlpools. But to Stephens it was worth it just to observe the man in charge of the operation. Eighty years old, this man had spent most of his youth wandering across the Libyan desert until, for no apparent reason, he settled on a small island in the middle of the Nile cataracts. As he knew every eddy and had mentally marked the location of every stone in the river, he was considered the "most skillful pilot" on the river and, when he came on board, was received as if he had been "the great Pasha himself."

The second cataract was even more difficult, requiring 200 men to pull the boat through. But again it was worth the struggle, for when they were through they hauled up alongside the bank of the island of Philae. Stephens described the temple as "one of the most beautiful pictures I ever saw." He

Stephens in Arab Dress. From his book.

carved his name on the temple, but it was removed later by a French archeologist who was incensed that Stephens should have placed his name under that of the illustrious General Desaix of France.

On returning to his boat, Stephens found that another English boat had arrived. It belonged to the English consul in Alexandria, who was accompanied by his daughter. Stephens, possibly remembering the last "glorious" evening of British company, gave a dinner for them that evening at which he served Irish stew, macaroni pâté and pancakes.

By then, Stephens had gone as far south as he intended. So about turn, and Stephens started back down the river.

On the return trip Stephens made no measurements and drew no classical analogies. Instead he observed the people and, in incident after incident, described them: Arab boys swimming through the rapids, crewmen praying on the boat at sunset and women clad, he says, in little more than strips of leather. Stephens didn't hesitate to buy one of these costumes right off a young girl's person, but confesses that he felt "somewhat delicate in attempting to buy the few inches that constituted the young girl's wardrobe."

He was also fascinated by grafitti on the various ruins, particularly when he chanced on the name of Cornelius Bradford, an old friend from New York who had subsequently died in Jerusalem.

When Stephens became tired of drifting with the current he would go ashore and ride his donkey along the bank. It was, apparently, quite a change. "I was glad to get back to my rascally donkey. If a man were oppressed and borne down with mental anxiety; if he were mourning and melancholy, either from the loss of a friend or an undigested dinner, I would engage to cure him. I would put him on a donkey, without saddle or halter, and if he did not find himself by degrees drawn from the sense of misery, and worked up into a towering passion, getting off and belaboring his brute with his stick and forgetting everything in this world but the obstinacy of the ass, and his own folly in attempting to ride one, man is a more quiet animal than I take him to be."

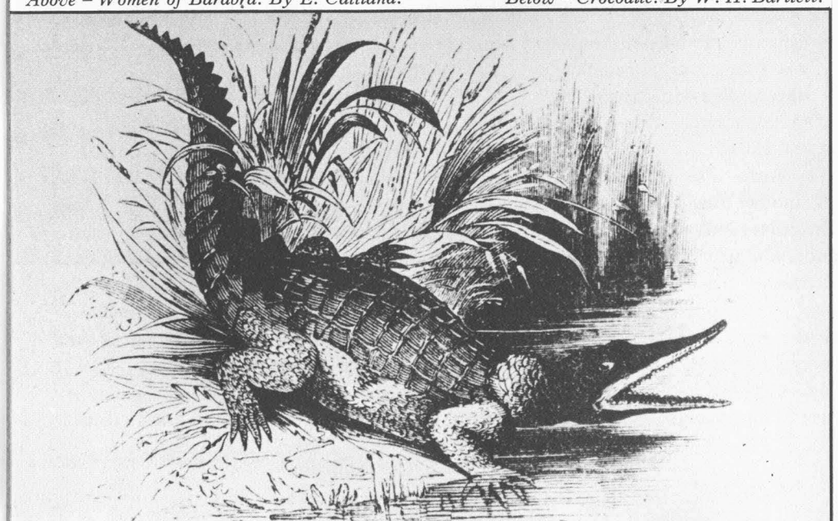
As he drifted down the Nile, Stephens decided to travel inland from Thebes for a while and hired six camels to make the journey. But all his plans collapsed when he fell victim of an intestinal ailment. Fortunately he met still more Englishmen who took him aboard their boat, kept him for a week and nursed him back to health.

One day out of Cairo, Stephens visited Egypt's Memphis—"greatest of its ruined cities"—and at the pyramids of Sakkara crawled down a shaft 40 feet deep from which he had to be dragged out by his heels. The miles and miles of catacombs, containing the remains of the sacred ibises, were amazing to Stephens. Some of the birds were preserved in jars, piled one on top of the other (See *Aramco World*, July-August, 1971). In those days close examination was possible. Some of the Arabs brought several jars above ground and when Stephens broke them open he was moved to comment: "With the pyramids towering above us, it was almost impossible to believe that the men who had raised such mighty structures had fallen down and worshipped the puny birds whose skeletons we were now dashing at our feet."

Luxor. By W. H. Bartlett.

Above – Women of Barabra. By E. Calliand.

Below – Crocodile. By W. H. Bartlett.



Stephens also decided then to ride to Giza, site of the three Great Pyramids. There he met his boat again, went on to Bulak, hired a donkey and galloped all the way to the Italian Hotel, where he was welcomed as an old friend and officially ended his trip up the Nile.

It was not, however, the end of his travels. After Egypt he set off for St. Catherine's Monastery in the Sinai desert. Later he visited Aqaba in today's Jordan, and Petra, where with the unblushing, yet appealing, patriotism of the period, he wrote: "I confess that I felt what I trust was not an inexcusable pride in writing upon the innermost wall of that temple the name of an American citizen."

Stephens also visited the Dead Sea—using a map later given to Lieutenant Lynch, the American naval officer who first charted the Jordan River (*Aramco World*, March–April, 1967). Finally, he visited Jerusalem and then returned to London, where he started work on the book that would make him famous and earn him the then staggering sum of $25,000 in royalties the first year it was in print.

As well as being a commercial and critical success *Incidents of Travel in Egypt, Arabia Petraea and the Holy Land* presented the Arab world in a totally new light at a time when most travelers thought it amusing and clever to see differences as failings. To Stephens, the Arabs were a much abused people whom he found—and described—as kind, honest and faithful, thankful for small favors and never discontented. He felt, on parting, that he was leaving behind trusted friends whom he saw, and wrote about, as the "gentle Arabs of the Nile." Not every traveler has been as perceptive.

John Brinton, now of London, is a bibliophile whose special interest is early American ties with the Middle East.

ISLAM IN RUSSIA

In the heart of Soviet Asia the survival of Islamic culture.

WRITTEN BY JOHN MUNRO
PHOTOGRAPHS BY JOHN M. KESHISHIAN AND I. MUNRO

Taking the "golden road to Samarkand" is not quite the adventure it once was. When James Elroy Flecker, British diplomat and writer, used the phrase in *Hassan* more than half a century ago, a trip through Central Asia was still a novel and highly dangerous experience. Now you can be wafted into Samarkand, Bukhara, Tashkent and Urgensch on the wings of Aeroflot; Intourist hotels have superseded the caravansaries; and instead of fearing danger from marauding brigands, the present day traveler need feel threatened only by the jostling crowds of the souvenir shops. Yet much of the old glamour and mystery remain. Turning a corner in Samarkand and being confronted by the gleaming, blue-tiled remains of the mosque of Bibi Khanum, or emerging from the old bazaar in Bukhara and having one's eyes stretched by the towering Kalan minaret, one is forcibly reminded that five centuries ago this part of Asia was one of the great centers of Islam, the heartland of Tamerlane's mighty empire.

Throughout its history Central Asia has been continually overrun by conquering armies. From the west came Alexander the Great who, in 329 B.C., defeated Spitamenes, leader of the Soghidians, and established a center at Marakands (modern Samarkand), before sweeping on towards India. In the 13th century Genghis Khan came from the east, his powerful Mongol forces crushing everything before them until they reached eastern Europe. It was the Arabs, however, who left the imprint of their culture most heavily upon the region, converting the population to Islam, which many Soviet Central Asians still practice today.

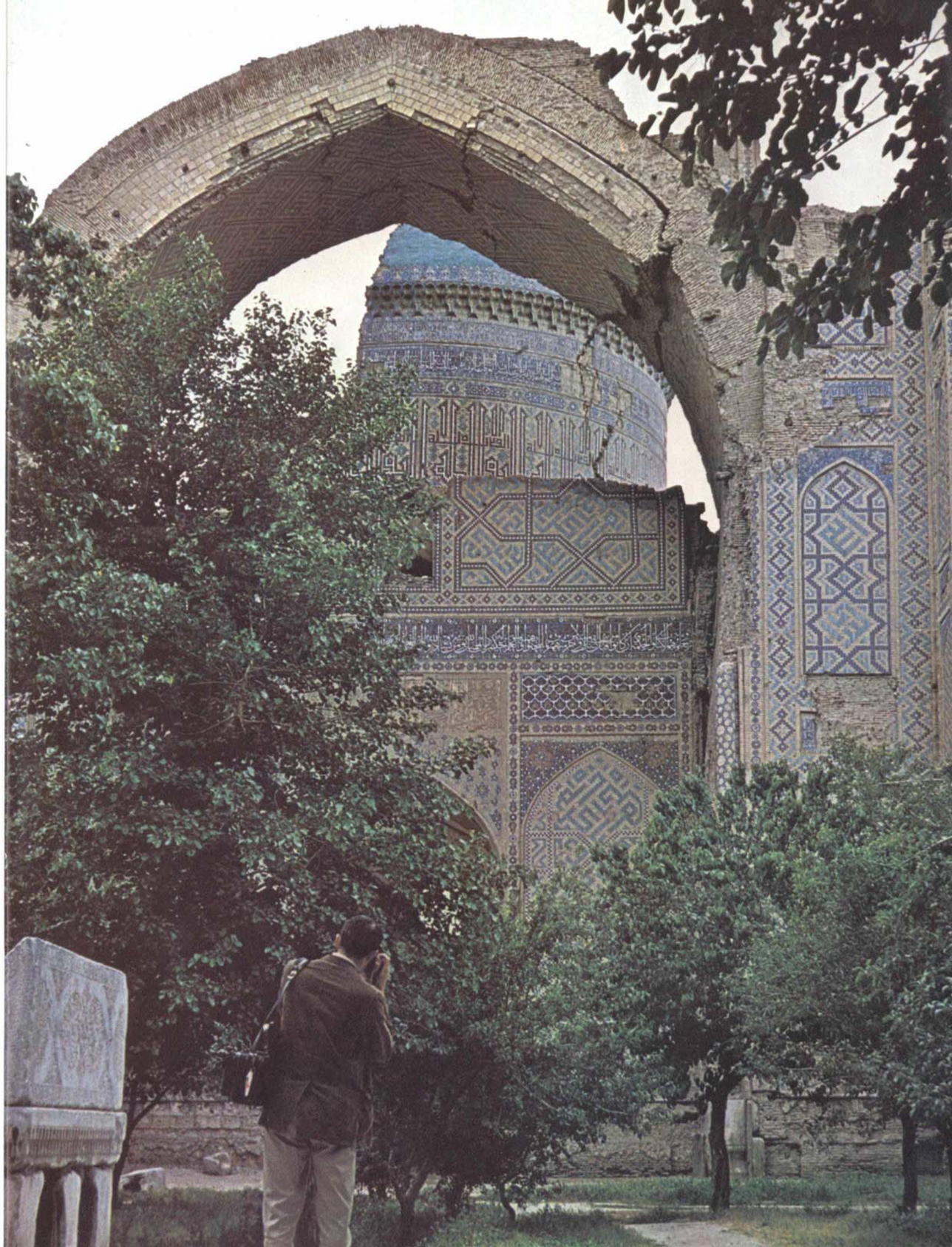
The Arabs first penetrated Central Asia in the seventh century, occupying Termez in 689. In 705, Kutayba ibn Muslim was appointed Viceroy of Khurasan and seven years later led his armies to Khorezem to "help" the Khorezemshah crush a rebellion. The same year, skillfully exploiting local rivalries, he led a campaign against Samarkand, supported by the Khorezemians and the Bukharans and by 708 had reached Tashkent. Kutayba, a formidable and sometimes brilliant leader, was eventually killed in 715, thus bringing Arab expansion to a halt.

There followed a confused period during which Turkic tribes and the Arabs contested the region and during which the local population slowly came over to Islam. The Chinese also began to intervene, invading Ferghana in 745 and remaining there until 751, when the great Arab commander Ziyad ibn Saleh finally defeated them, thus insuring that Muslim rather than Chinese culture would dominate the area.

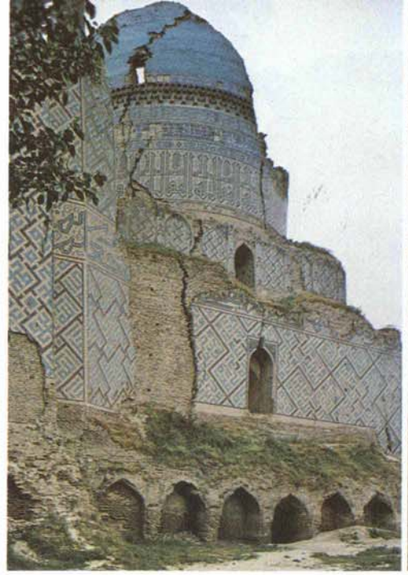
The Arabs then consolidated their position, but in 1220 Genghis Khan and his Mongol invaders captured Bukhara, Samarkand and Urgensch, destroying many of the monuments of Islam, including the mausoleum of Caliph Harun al-Rashid at Tus and the tomb of Sultan Sanjar at Merv. However, in spite of Mongol dominance, Islam survived and—under Tamerlane, a Muslim who claimed direct descent from Genghis Khan and became ruler of the region around Samarkand in 1370—spread west to Moscow and east to the River Ganges with Samarkand the capital.

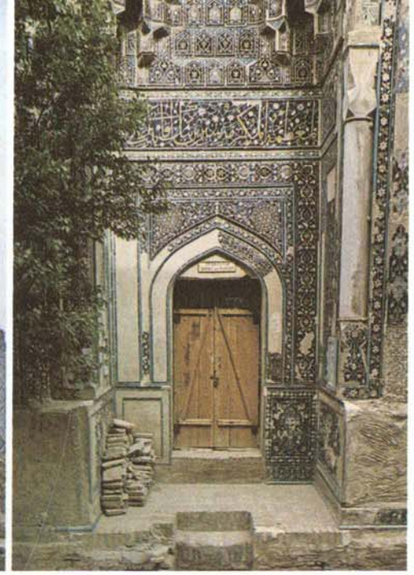
Even after the death of Tamerlane, or Timur as he is known throughout the Arab world, Samarkand, under Ulug Beg, continued to prosper. It eventually became one of the great cultural centers of Islam. But after Ulug Beg died the region broke into warring principalities. A measure of unity was imposed by various members of the Sheybani family, one of whom founded the Khanate of Khiva—a city in Khorezem—which endured until 1920. Meanwhile, however, the Russians had entered the region and by 1881 had extended their hegemony over most of Central Asia. Finally, in 1923 and 1924, the whole area came under Soviet control.

During Central Asia's turbulent and confusing history, Islam remained until comparatively recent times the region's dominant cultural and religious force. Even today the faithful among the U.S.S.R.'s 50 million Muslims still pray in such places as the 17th-century mosque of Haja Ahror, situated on the outskirts of Samarkand, or in the 13 mosques of Tashkent. In Bukhara the *madrasah* (school) of Mir-i-Arab provides a formal Islamic secondary education for the Muslim youth of the region, teaching them the Koran and the *Hadith* (traditions concerning the Prophet), Arabic language and literature, as well as mathematics and science and, curiously enough, communist ideology which, with some ingenuity, has been made



Bibi Khanum mosque in Samarkand.





Left: Samarkand's Bibi Khanum mosque is named for Tamerlane's favorite wife. Right: Tile work on one of the tombs in a complex called Shah-i-Zinda, also in Samarkand.

to appear as a natural development from the wisdom expressed in the sacred writings of Islam. Many of the graduates, however, continue their Islamic education at Cairo's al-Azhar university and some have returned to pursue higher Islamic studies in Tashkent. At the Center of the Muslim Religious Board for Central Asia and Kazakhstan, also in Tashkent, there is an important library of 25,000 volumes and 2,000 manuscripts, mostly written in Arabic, Farsi and Uzbeki. The board also publishes a quarterly journal, *Muslims of the Soviet East*, which appears in Uzbeki, Arabic, English and French. Freedom of religious belief is guaranteed to Uzbekis, both by the constitution of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Uzbekistan and that of the U.S.S.R. According to Mr. Abdul Qahar Ghaffarov, vice-president of the board, the Soviet authorities place no obstacle in the way of Uzbeki Muslims wishing to make the Hajj to Mecca.

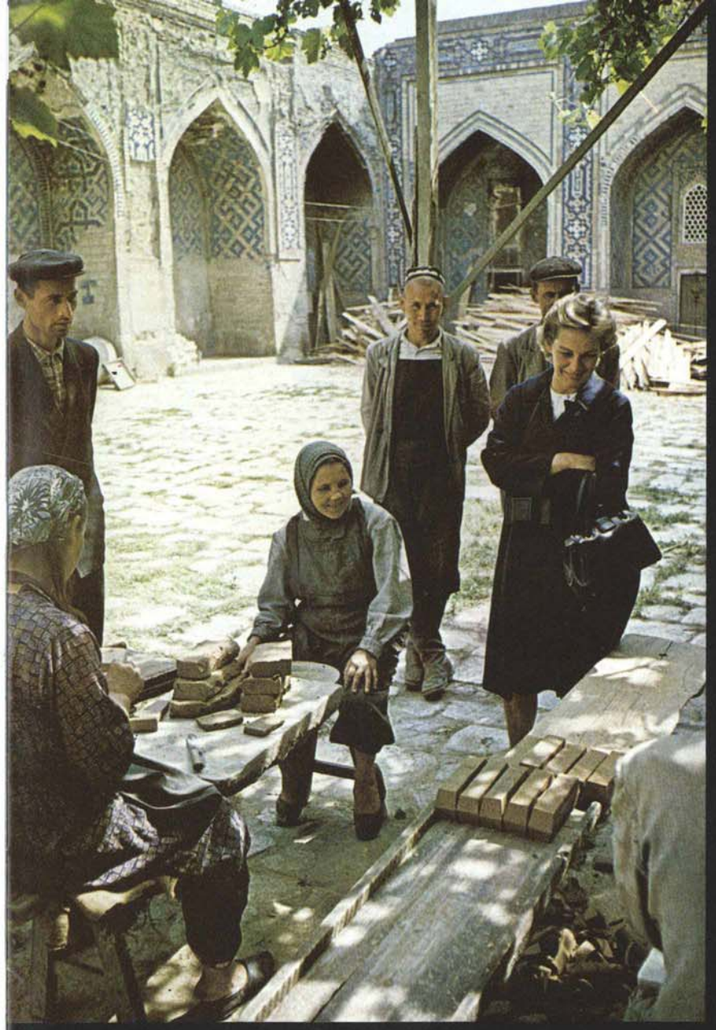
While the Soviets cast an unenthusiastic eye on Islam as a living faith, they are nonetheless actively promoting the restoration of the region's Muslim monuments. In Tashkent, Bukhara, Samarkand and Khiva, angular networks of scaffolding around the walls and domes of mosques and *madrasahs* indicate the authorities' concern to preserve and restore the architectural glory of the Islamic past. Minarets pushed askew by the depredations of time and frequent earthquakes are being systematically straightened; broken tiles are being replaced; and domes are being regilded.

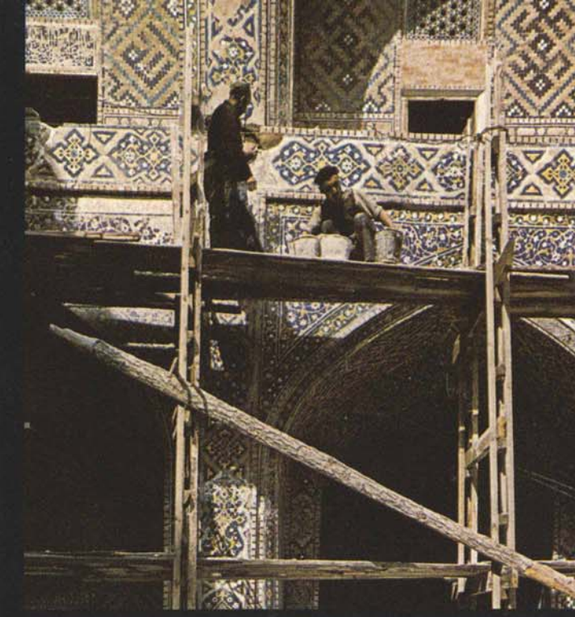
Perhaps more work has been done in Samarkand than elsewhere, much of it being completed before 1970 in time to celebrate the town's 2,500th anniversary. Here, the Gur-i-Mir, the great mausoleum built by Tamerlane at the end of the 14th century to receive the body of his favorite grandson, Muhammad Sultan, has been repaired and the interior completely restored. A massive cantaloupe-shaped dome of turquoise and green dominates the building and, inside, the intricate gold and blue tracery of the roof provides a fittingly sumptuous resting place for Tamerlane himself, whose massive dark-green, jade tomb dwarfs those of other Timurid princes, including his grandson, Ulug Beg.

Not far away there is a complex of buildings called the Registan, once the market-place of old Samarkand. The British Lord Curzon, who visited the town in 1888 and saw it in an even more ruinous state than it is now, nevertheless found it spectacular. "I know of nothing in the East approaching it in massive simplicity and grandeur," he wrote in an account of his travels entitled *Russia in Central Asia*. "There is nothing in Europe like it, save perhaps on a humbler scale the *Piazza di San Marco* in Venice, which can even aspire to enter the competition. No European spectacle indeed can adequately be compared with it, in our inability to point to an open space in any Western city that is commanded on three of its four sides by Gothic cathedrals of the finest order."

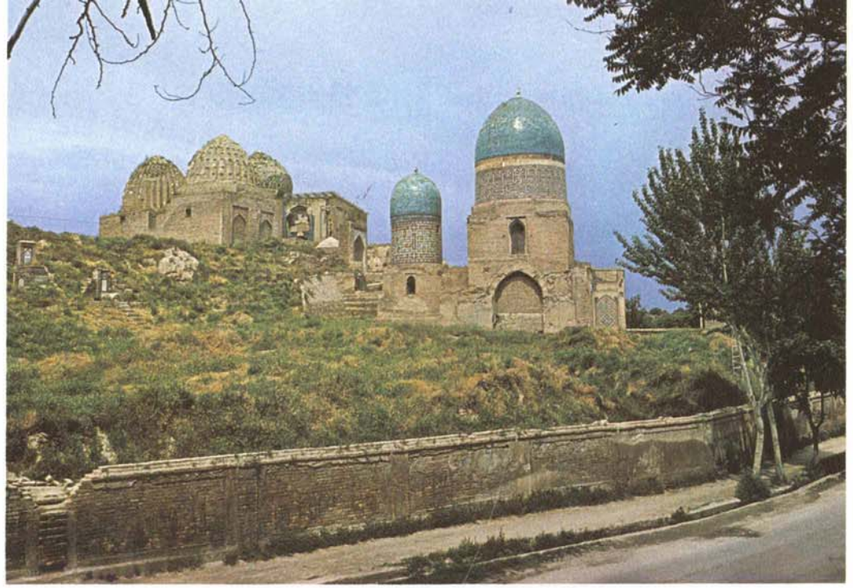
None of the three *madrasahs* which make up the complex was built during Tamerlane's time. The oldest is that of Ulug Beg, which was built around 1420; opposite and evidently inspired by it, is the Shir Dar (Lion-bearing), erected between 1619 and 1636, so named because of the somewhat crude likenesses of the Lion and Sun of Persia, which appear on the tiled facade of the central *iwan;* and the third, on the north side of the square, is the Tila Kari (Gilded) *madrasah*, which was built about the middle of the 17th century.

What must have been the most impressive building of Timurid Samarkand, however, is the mosque of Bibi Khanum. Today it is in ruins, but it takes little effort of the imagination to picture it in its original glory. Bibi Khanum was reputedly the favorite wife of Tamerlane, and it is said that she supervised the mosque's construction while her husband was away on one of his campaigns. It is also said that she fell in love with the young architect who designed it, and who, to avoid the wrath of Tamerlane, climbed to the top of one of the minarets and flew off, never to be heard of again. Actually, it appears that Tamerlane himself supervised construction of the building. Aging rapidly and in poor health, it seems that the once proud ruler of Central Asia was determined to secure a slice of immortality by constructing one of the largest monuments in the Islamic world before his death. Working day and night, craftsmen from all over Tamerlane's empire toiled feverishly to complete the building in record time, assisted, it is said, by "95 mountainous elephants." When the building was finished,





Extensive restoration of Islamic monuments has been carried out in Samarkand. Clockwise from top, left: Making ceramic tiles; restoring a "madrasah" or school; cutting tiles to size; expert Olga Yessipova repairing plaster in the mausoleum Gur-i-Mir, where Tamerlane is buried.



Left and opposite page: Shah-i-Zinda, a complex of 16 tombs in Samarkand.

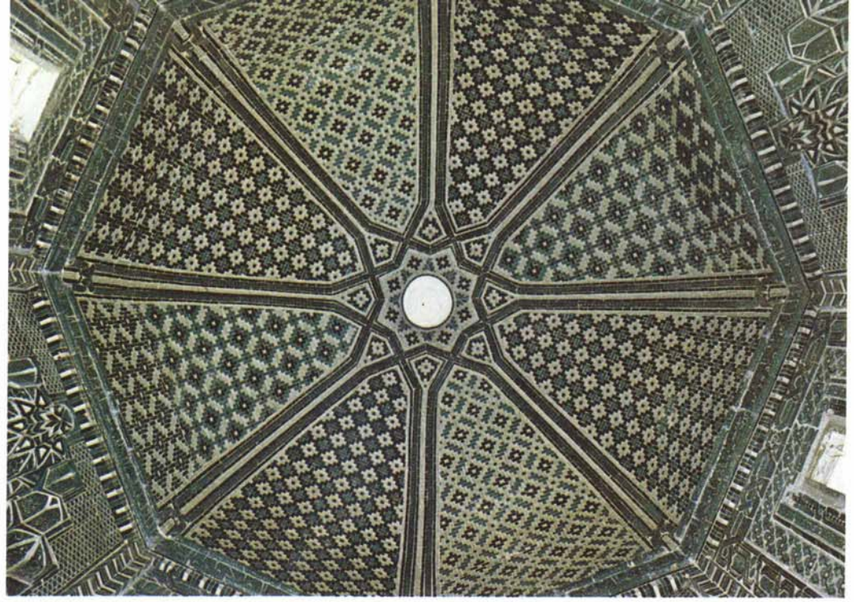
the inner court measured 270 feet by 180 feet, and the entrance rose to a height of 120 feet. Unfortunately, the very size of the building contributed to its relatively rapid disintegration, the structure being insufficiently strong to support the grandiose conceptions of the architect. Earthquakes and 19th-century neglect did the rest.

The other major Islamic monument of Samarkand is a complex of 16 buildings known as Shah-i-Zinda (The Living Prince), which contains some of the finest tile work in Central Asia. The history of Shah-i-Zinda dates back to pre-Mongol times, for Qasim ibn Abbas, reputedly a cousin of the Prophet, is buried there. It is said that he lived in Samarkand around 676; after his death his tomb became a place of pilgrimage. The Arab geographer Ibn Battuta describes it as he saw it in 1333, but this was before the Mongol depredations. What one sees today dates from Timurid times and later. Entry to the complex is through a gateway built by Ulug Beg and up a flight of stairs bordered on each side by a series of mortuary chapels. One belongs to Shad-i-Mulk, another of Tamerlane's wives, and a second to his wife Tuman Aka; the others belong to less illustrious friends and members of Tamerlane's family. The buildings themselves are comparatively modest, but their tiled facades exhibit a delicacy and range of styles which remind us that Tamerlane, in his determination to make Samarkand the noblest and most beautiful of cities, imported an army of craftsmen from as far away as Syria, the Caucasus, India, Iraq and Persia in order to achieve an enduring splendor.

By contrast with Samarkand where, in the words of the English playwright Christopher Marlowe, Tamerlane built a city "whose shining turrets dismayed the heavens and cast the fame of Ilion's tower to hell," Bukhara is someting of an anticlimax. Yet, in its day, this other great center of Islamic Central Asia, rivaled Samarkand. Described by Tha'alibi, a Samanid writer of the 11th century, as the "home of glory, . . . the place of assembly of all eminent people of the age," Bukhara today is more likely to appeal to the historian than to the poet. Samarkand's buildings all date from the 14th to 17th centuries and for all their grace and magnificence, they give a general impression of uniformity. The buildings of Bukhara, on the other hand, exhibit a diversity of styles reflecting more than 1,000 years of history.

The old city is dominated by the Arg, or Citadel where, on the site of a Buddhist temple the Arabs built a mosque in 713, later destroyed by the Mongols. The Mongols devastated most of the town's early Islamic monuments, but respected the tomb of Ismail Samanid, who ruled Bukhara from the end of the ninth century to the beginning of the 10th. This monument, built shortly before Ismail's death in 907, is the oldest surviving building of Central Asia, a solid, dignified structure which counts among the greatest of early Islamic monuments. Built in the shape of a cube, each side being 31 feet, and surmounted by a dome, the intricate brick exterior exerts a quiet harmony in striking contrast to the colorful tiled facades of later buildings.

Among Bukhara's early and most significant Islamic monuments is the 12th-century, 170-foot-tall Kalan (Great) minaret, a massive structure, 40 feet in diameter at the base, and decorated with 14 different baked-brick bands. Another is the Magoki-Attari mosque, also dating from the 12th century. Others include the 14th-century mausoleum of Chashma Ayub (Well of Job), a simple unadorned structure surmounted by a conical cupola on a high drum; and the 16th-century Masjid-i-Baland (High Mosque), whose rather drab exterior gives little indication of the superb decoration within, notably a *mihrab* niche with patterns of incised mosaics and a beautifully carved and painted wooden ceiling. There are many other important and attractive monuments in and around Bukhara, among them the Mir-i-Arab *madrasah* and the Labi-Hauz complex, which includes the Kukeltash *madrasah*, a group of buildings ranged around a water reservoir, whose still waters throw back an image of the buildings and their attendant trees. Another of the great monuments of Bukhara is a structure called the Char Minar (Four Minarets) mosque. Completed in 1807, the Char Minar is a most arresting building, certainly one of the most original structures in Bukhara of the late Muslim period, but still only one of many memorable monuments which the energetic visitor will discover.



Left: The intricate pattern on the interior of a dome at Shah-i-Zinda. Opposite page: stalactite tiling above a doorway.

If Samarkand offers the most striking Islamic monuments of Central Asia, and Bukhara the most varied, Khiva offers the most picturesque. Walking along the narrow, dusty streets of this once thriving town set in an arid, uncompromising landscape, it is easy to imagine an earlier more violent age when, as the Intourist guide is sure to remind visitors, the ears of recalcitrant serfs were nailed to the great wooden doors at the entrance of the bazaar, and the khan sent out into the neighboring countryside for choice young brides. The Uzbek Khanate of Khiva was, until the late 18th century, little more than a refuge for caravan robbers, but after that it gradually became more civilized, the artistic genius of its people blossomed and an attractive, well-built town began to take form. Because of its relative isolation and the legendary violence of its people, Khiva was only slowly drawn into the modern world, and it was not until 1873 that the Khan of Khiva formally accepted the sovereignty of the Czar. The town, unlike many in Central Asia, suffered hardly at all from either armed assault or the good intentions of modern planners, and today it survives as an unspoiled relic of the past, a unique example of Islamic city architecture.

The town has an inner city, Ichan-Kala, which is surrounded by a completely preserved wall of clay and sunbaked brick, intersected by gateways and punctuated by bastions. Outside there are groves of mulberry trees, orchards and tiny vineyards. Beyond these lie the irrigated fields, and still further are the sand dunes of the Kara Kum, dotted with tufts of long dry grass and thorns, upon which the hardy Khiva sheep somehow manage to thrive.

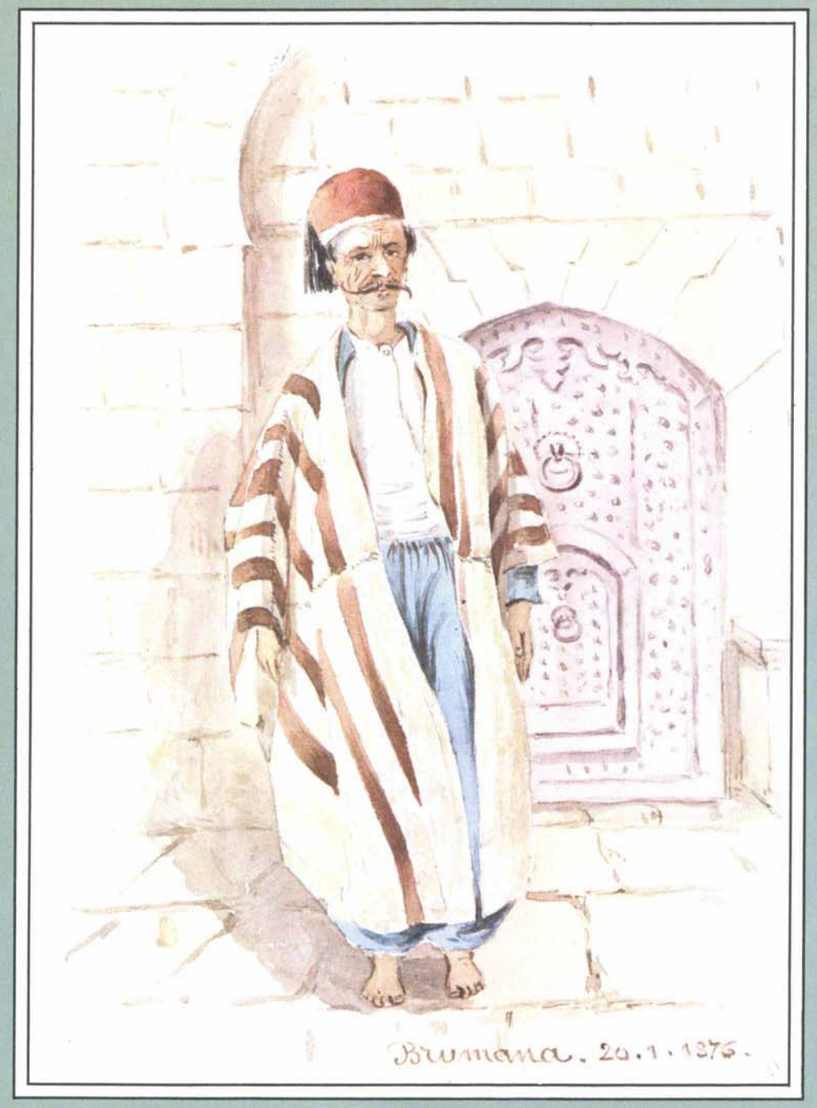
In Ichan-Kala there are two palaces, the Kunya Arg (Old Castle) of the 18th century, and the Tash Hauli (Stone House), built around 1830. Attractive in their simplicity as both these buildings are, more beautiful is the mausoleum of the local hero, the poet and wrestler Pahlovan Mahmud, built in 1835. It has an octagonal dome and inside the blue and white tiled walls and ceilings are completely covered with an elaborate design of interlacing leaves, stems and flowers, gazelles and Arabic calligraphy. The most striking monuments of Khiva are, however, its two minarets, which dominate the skyline: the Kok Minar (Green Minaret), sometimes called the Kalta Minar (Short Minaret), and the Khoja Islam. The former was begun in 1852 but never finished, its unusually large diameter suggesting that it was originally destined to reach a dizzying height; while the latter, built in 1908, may fairly claim to be the last great architectural achievement of Islam in Central Asia.

One of the notable features of Khiva's monuments is their exquisite decoration, the local artisans revealing a delicate command over their craft, whether working on tile, on wood, or in plaster. Particularly noteworthy is the rich variety of their motifs, ranging from the fairly traditional star-shaped figures inscribed within pentagons, to complex vegetal and floral patterns of varying intricacy.

Around old Khiva a new town has arisen, whose modern apartment buildings and spacious public gardens are eloquent testimony to government efforts to create a pleasing environment. Meanwhile, the government of the Uzbeki Soviet Socialist Republic has decreed that the ancient district of Ichan-Kala shall be a museum zone. For over a decade the streets and squares of the old town have been repaired, the buildings restored, and local ceramists are patching up the crumbling tile work of the mausoleum of Pahlovan Mahmud and the palace of Tash-Hauli. The old is being cared for amid the development of the new.

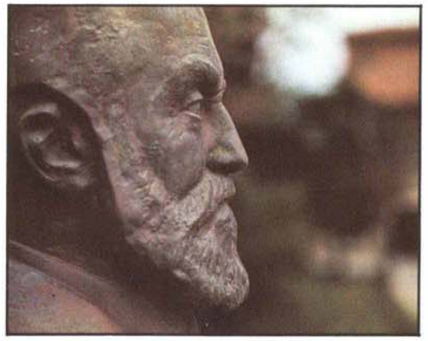
It would be misleading to suggest that Islam is actively flourishing in Central Asia; but, as King Khalid of Saudi Arabia recently suggested in an interview, it would be inaccurate to suggest that it was being crushed. The Muslim faith endures, and while the muezzin's call can no longer be heard ringing out over the towns of Soviet Central Asia, the faithful continue to attend prayers, as they have for the past 1,000 years. Meanwhile, the mosques and *madrasahs* are gradually being restored to their former glory, their presence serving as a reminder of the powerful spiritual force which sustained and animated both the armies of Tamerlane and the intellectual enthusiasm of Ulug Beg, as well as a large percentage of the citizens of Soviet Central Asia today.

John Munro is a professor of English at the American University of Beirut and author of eight books.



WALDMEIER'S WATERCOLORS

A family album, an illustrated diary, one man's book of memories – but more as well.



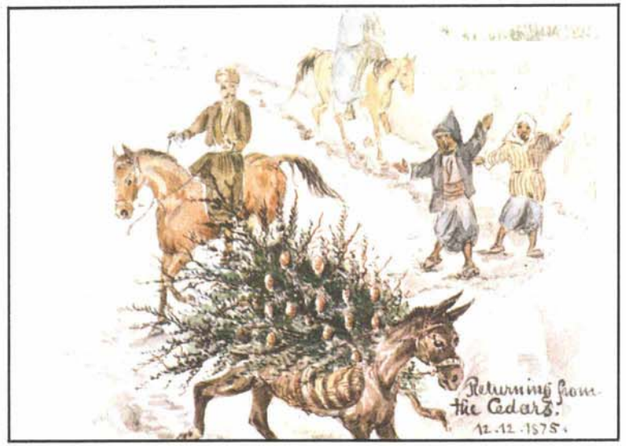
Theophilus Waldmeier, a dedicated Swiss who founded Lebanon's Brummana High School and Asfuriya Mental Hospital, had his lighter side. Having been born before the age of amateur photography, he turned his versatile hand to sketching. When our reporter was researching the article on Waldmeier's weightier accomplishments (**Aramco World,** July-August, 1975), she was shown two sketchbooks, dated 1875 and 1876, containing his impressions in pen and ink and watercolor. They reveal, not a great artist, but a man with a quick eye and hand, a sly sense of humor, and a warm affection for his fellow man and woman. Some of the sketches show the artist himself—riding a horse, having his hair cut, being spoon-fed by his hostess—and these reveal that Waldmeier also possessed the great gift of not taking himself too seriously.

Most of the people who figure in the sketches were Waldmeier's friends, neighbors and co-workers. Their names are written beneath their portraits, often with a short note on the opposite page recording some particulars of the scene. In 1935, a relative of Waldmeier's added to the notes bringing the information up to date—whom the subjects married, the names of their children and grandchildren, and, once, the charming remark, "Mrs. Little remembers the dog." The sketchbooks were a family album, an illustrated diary, one man's book of memories.

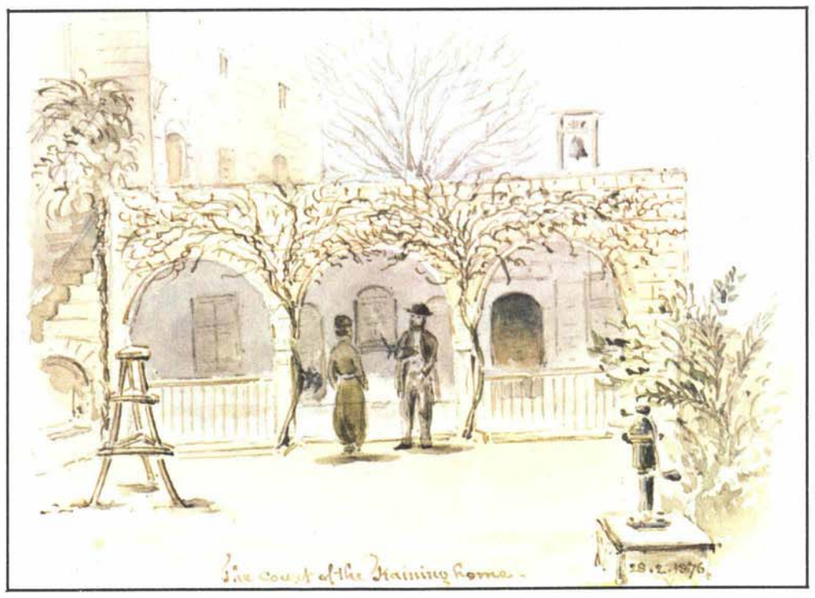
But they are more than that as well. They present a marvelously detailed record of village life in the mountains of Lebanon exactly 100 years ago. Here we see women baking bread in a clay **tannur**, their children hungrily looking on. There is a man dancing with a jar on his head at a village feast. One sketch, entitled "Reciting an English Lesson," shows only three pairs of bare feet, the big toes crossed in embarrassment and effort. Another depicts two women sitting on a rug and smoking a **narghila,** or waterpipe. In still another a man drinks from a clay **ibriq,** holding the jug well away from him so that the water travels in a perfect arc from the spout to his mouth, a feat still practiced today.

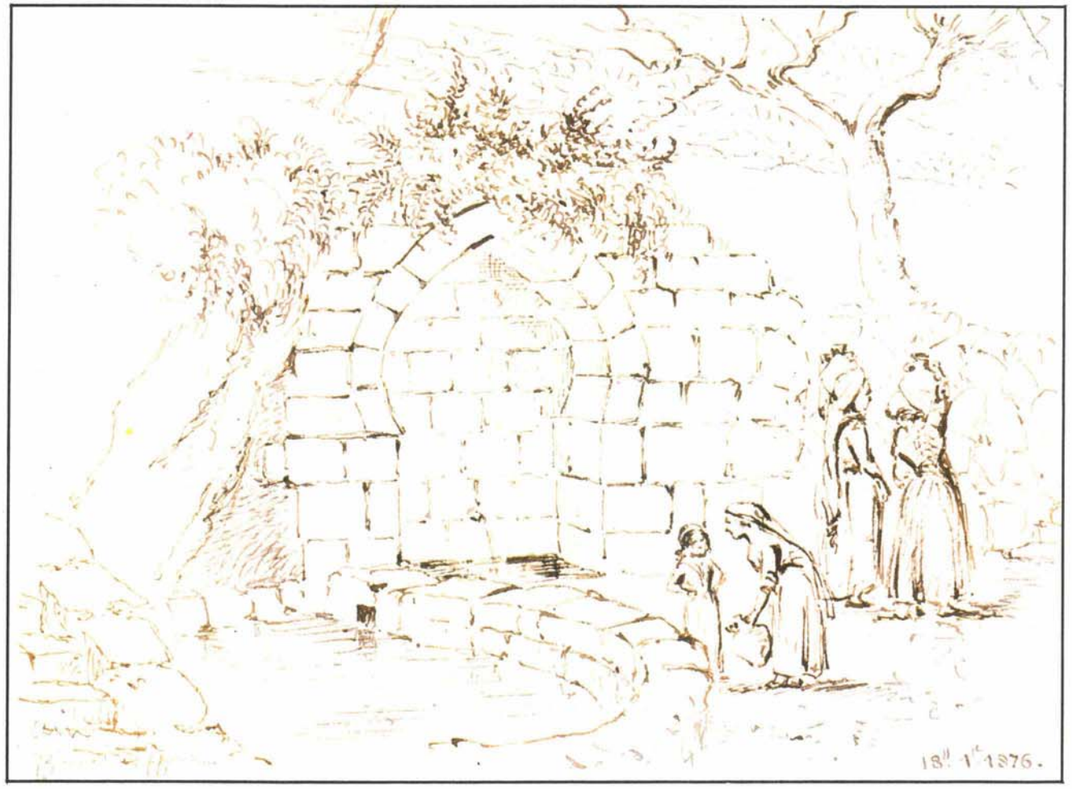
The costumes are resplendent. A young man goes courting in blue pantaloons, a mulberry jacket encrusted with gold braid, a blue-and-white striped shirt with ruffled cuffs, a figured shawl wrapped round his waist. A splendid-bosomed lady stands before a fireplace in a long gown of green stripes with a red figure, a purple sash buckled with gold, a white blouse cross-hatched in red, and a white veil over a rakishly tilted red headband. Another well-dressed lady wears a long snuff-colored dress trimmed with black braid, a black velvet jacket trimmed with gold, a white under-blouse with gold cuffs, a gold stomacher, and a white veil and a flower in her hair. Then there is the gentleman on the opposite page, whose dress is comparatively plain, except for the magnificent **abaya** striped in beige and chocolate brown.

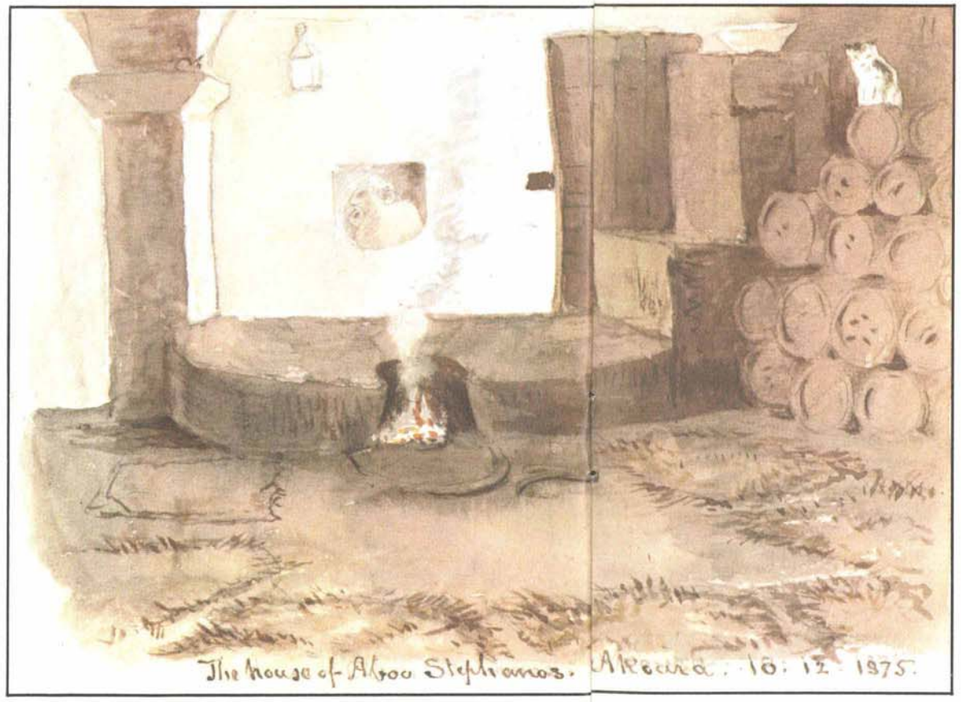
Collectively, the pictures present a warm-hearted appreciation of these mountain villagers and an attractive self-portrait of Theophilus Waldmeier, philantropist, educator, patriarch—and gentle satirist.



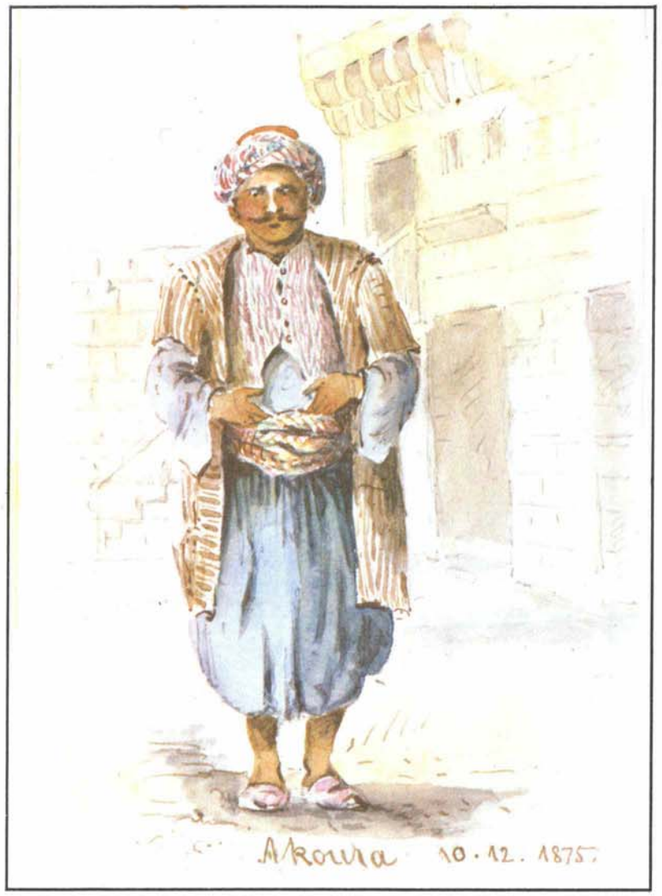
An evocation of Lebanese village life a hundred years ago. A watchdog takes into custody what Waldmeier calls "an agent of the Mendicity Society." Laden with boughs and cones (the date is two weeks before Christmas 1875) a donkey is urged down the snowy mountain slope. A dapper young man does the "jar dance" before his applauding friends without losing one jot of his dignity. Doctor Waldmeier confers with a Lebanese colleague in the courtyard of the Brummana School. Opposite page: Three ladies of the village pose for their portraits, but two of them partly veil their charms. A daily trip to the village fountain took the place of a newspaper.

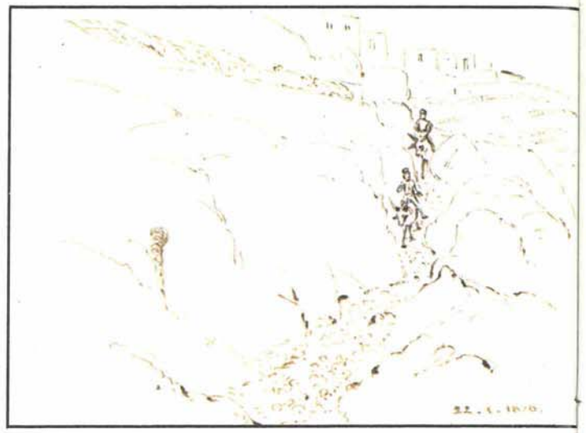


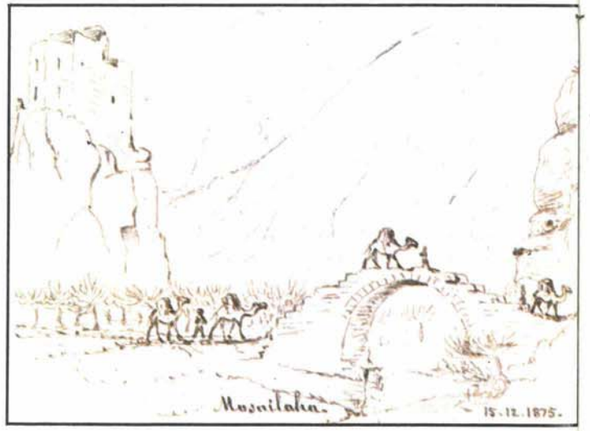




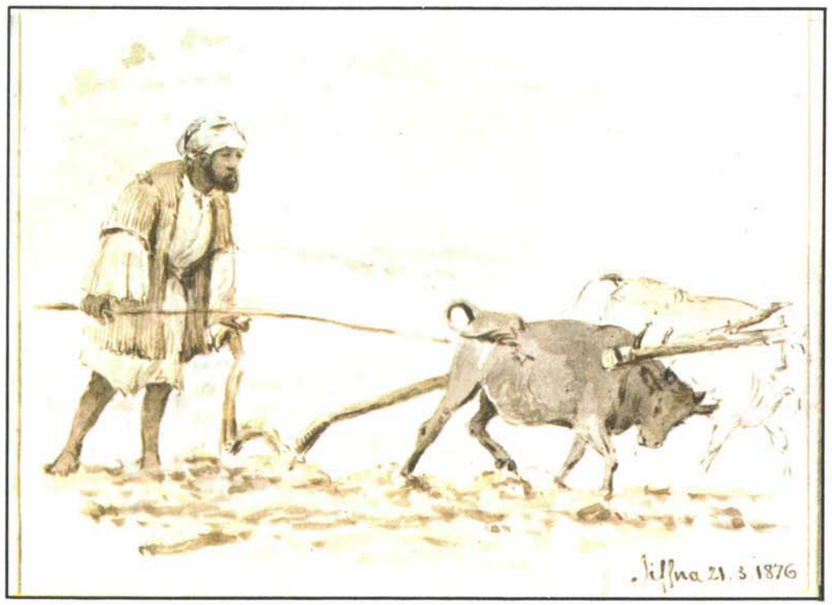
Clockwise from top left: "We make a morning call, I partake of some native confectionary – to do us special honour the lady of the house feeds us with a spoon." A gentleman from Jerusalem visits Brummana. A rather large Waldmeier on a rather small horse crosses the snowcapped Lebanon. Waldmeier and friend dine by candlelight under the eyes of their assembled hosts. "The hawaja (the boss, i.e., Waldmeier himself) has his hair cut by the village barber. Ibrahim Tasso kindly superintends the operation." Caught in a storm, Waldmeier spent two nights and a day in this room in Akoura with 14 to 16 people: with no windows, smoke from the fireplace escaped through the door. What the well-dressed gentleman of Brummana wore in 1876: wine-red tarbush, fur-lined jacket, voluminous Turkish trousers.

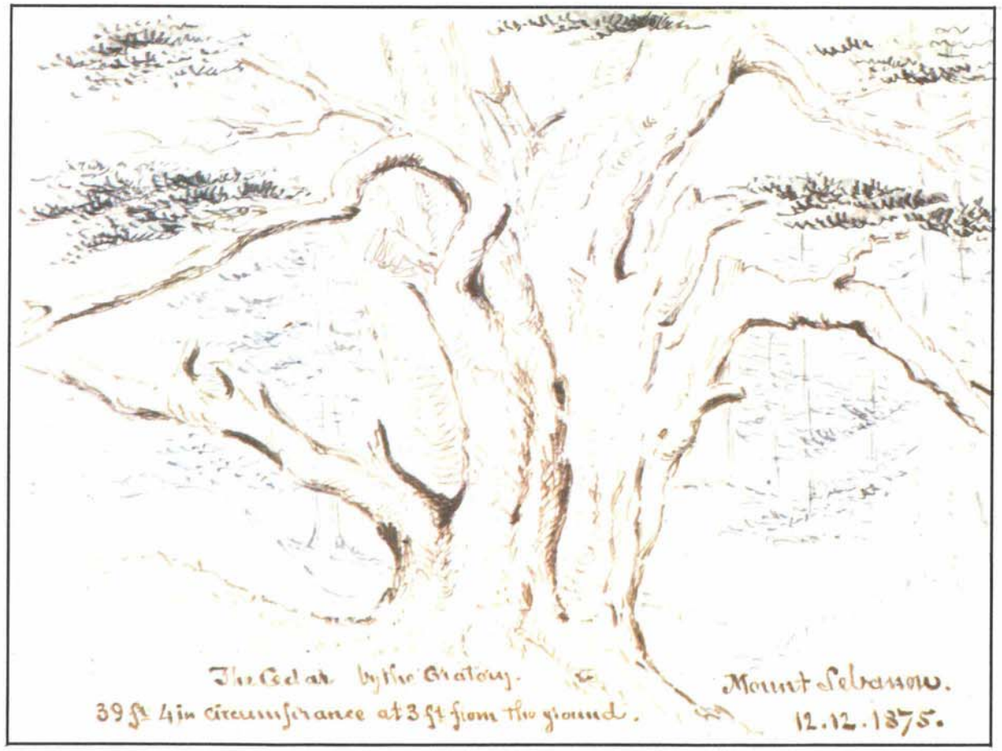






Above: The Layered Look one hundred years ago. Travel in the High Lebanon: by donkey among the rocks, by camel over a stepped bridge under a ruined Turkish castle. Right: Plowing with dwarf oxen, or did Waldmeier get his perspective wrong? Opposite page: Courtyard of the Brummana School. "This is the seventh day (Sunday), when visitors are admitted, the boys have been putting their beds to air on the flat roof, & are descending to dinner, which the cook who is just leaving the kitchen is carrying across the court to the dining room." One of the once-multitudinous, centuries-old Cedars of Lebanon, nearly 40 feet around a century ago.





More Generous Than Hatim

He gave and gave and gave again. . .

WRITTEN BY JON MANDAVILLE
ILLUSTRATED BY BRIAN SMITH

Out on the windswept high plateau in northern Najd, the land turns lush with grass and flowers when spring rains come; there is relief from even the harshest of earth's settings. God is generous.

On a ridge above the plain there is a place where, years ago, passing caravans would slow, their riders picking up with relish a new topic of conversation to carry them the many weary miles beyond. Today even the taxi driver on the new highway to Hayil eases up on the accelerator, waves vaguely toward the ridge and says, "See that dip in the hills over there? They say Hatim al-Tay is buried there."

"Oh?" says the rider politely, glad to break the monotony. "Who's he?"

The driver cranes his head around, looks incredulously at his fare. "You haven't heard of Hatim?!" His eyes back on the road, he settles with obvious satisfaction behind the wheel. "He's one of the most famous of all Arabs. There are many stories about him. They say, for example . . ." and one by one the stories are brought out, carefully measured to fill the hours and miles.

We all have our folk heroes, some of them, like Paul Bunyan, pure fiction, others, like Davy Crockett, once real but painted larger than life for later generations. Fiction or not, their popularity says something about the people who keep the folk tales alive. And for the Arabs there will always be Hatim, a man who gave and gave and gave again, a man who could not give too much of himself and his possessions to any living thing in need. With an Arab the key to manliness and honor is hospitality; Hatim is hospitality epitomized for all time.

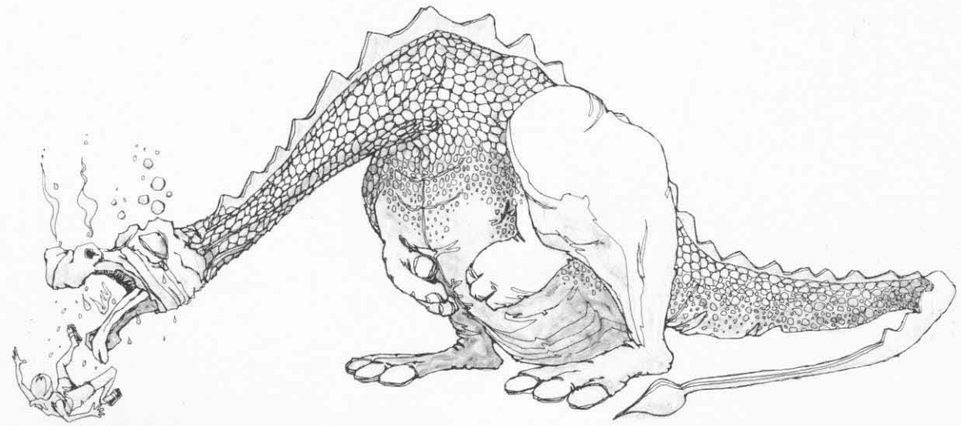
Historians, typically a cautious lot and wary of myth and legend, can't say much about the life of Hatim. Like the epic giants of Homer's Troy he lived in an age when history was recited as poetry around the after-dinner campfire. His home certainly was central Arabia, his time the end of the Days of Ignorance, the label Muslims use for the historical period preceding the Prophethood of Muhammad. This puts him on the scene about A.D. 590, living during the youth of the Prophet.

According to the earliest sources, Hatim lost his father when young and was raised by his grandfather. The raising wasn't easy. His habit of toddling over and giving away whatever happened to be in his hands to friends and strangers alike was a source of pride and even boasting for his family at first; but as the years passed and the habit remained, the indulgent smiles grew fixed and the boasting fell away. Enough was enough.

The last straw came one day, the story goes, when Hatim was out on the plain watching over his grandfather's small but select herd of camels. A group of riders appeared over the hill, heading north for Iraq. Amongst them were Nabigha al-Dhubyani, Ubaid ibn al-Abras, and Bishr ibn Abi Khazim, three famous poets off to trade their verse for gold at the court of the King of Hirah.

It was Hatim's great moment. He proudly demanded they dismount and make camp for the night, a demand they were more than happy to accept. Then, before the bemused gaze of the guests, he set about preparing a lavish feast fit for the would-be poets laureate, its main course consisting of the choicest camels of his grandfather's herd.

That was the end of the family's sponsorship. The next day Hatim began his wanderings, and along with him the stories as well, stories of hospitality grown more formidable with every telling. How far he traveled in real life no one knows, perhaps in fact no farther than the boundaries of the Arabian



Peninsula. But even while he lived his fame passed beyond these limits.

Out in the East, for example, the tales of Hatim reached their most fantastic form in the hands of Indian and Indonesian Muslims, a fair exchange for the Sanskrit fables *Kalila and Dimna* (*Aramco World*, July–August, 1972). There, by the 17th century, a full-length adventure novel was being avidly read and recited, based on the man from Najd. The Indian tales of Hatim still make fascinating reading for today's curious reader.

The theme of the adventures is prosaic enough, the standard Seven Tasks set for a hero, prince to win the hand of a maiden. But the twist is decidedly Hatim's. For the hero is *not* Hatim, but rather a stranger—the prince whom Hatim meets wandering disconsolate on the desert. It is for this prince that Hatim undertakes the Seven Tasks, and all the gold and silver won by performing them he distributes to the poor and needy. The prince in the end, of course, is wed to the princess while Hatim, like the legendary western cowboy, rides off alone into the desert, his only satisfaction the knowledge that he has acted generously.

The setting of the Seven Tasks is a Technicolor fairyland. Caught in a magic mountain, he escapes on a cockleshell bark across a billowing foamy lake surrounded by precipices over which pour torrents of crimson fire. Throughout his trials, as in earlier, simpler versions, Hatim gives freely to animals as well as humans; each and every one, he says, is a creation of the Almighty God. But here in the Indian version he draws the line finally . . . at dragons. The first he meets swallows him alive. Thanks to a talisman given him by a bear, Hatim proves indigestible and the dragon, irritated by the mouthful tramping about in his belly, vomits him forth and, growling, stomps away. The rest of the dragons that Hatim encounters he slays without hesitation.

The stories of Hatim traveled west as well. They dropped, for example, into one of the great classics of European literature, the *Decameron* of Boccacio. There, in the story "Mitridanes and Natan," a great king is described as excessively proud of his reputation for generosity. He grows more and more jealous of a young man called Natan, who is said among the people to be the most generous man alive. Mitridanes in fury commands the execution of Natan. The youth, learning that Mitridanes wants his life, offers it freely as the supreme act of generosity; whereupon Mitridanes backs down, conceding Natan to be the more generous man. As the perceptive French scholar Georges Thouvenin has noted, the story is a nearly exact parallel to one of the most popular of the tales told about Hatim.

How the 14th-century Florentine humanist picked up the Hatim theme is a mystery. It must be relevant that northern Italy was doing brisk business with Syria in Boccacio's day, and that Boccacio himself belonged to a respectable merchant family.

Whatever the source, however, Hatim, barely disguised as the knightly Natan, fit Boccacio's literary needs and those of the Renaissance public exactly. It was Arabic poetry, after all, which helped begin the mode of romantic chivalry in the West centuries earlier; Boccacio, noted for his role in translating that mode into the fresh and lyric humanism of a new Europe, no more than completed the circle in choosing the Arab Hatim as the hero of the story.

Thus, far to the east and well to the west Hatim's stories were kept alive, while generation after generation, century after century, they were told again in the central lands of Islam. Late in the 15th century the Persian man of letters Kashifi wrote a *Tales of Hatim*, then used the stories to exemplify the textbook on ethics he wrote for the Timurid ruler of Persia. This textbook, a great popular success in Persia, in turn was translated into Turkish a generation later; the translation was dedicated to Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent, and from the court in Istanbul the stories spread throughout the Ottoman Empire, enshrining in legend the very real spirit of hospitality and generosity that has always been a hallmark of Arab culture.

Jon Mandaville is Associate Professor of History and Middle East Studies in Portland State University.

A nine-and-a-quarter-inch Syrian bronze figure at Christie's, in London; 18th to 16th century B.C.; recently valued at about $800.

ANTIQUES FROM THE MIDDLE EAST

In London sales of Middle East antiques have been booming.

WRITTEN BY HELEN GIBSON

PHOTOGRAPHED BY PETER KEEN

Several years ago an English North-country woman walked through the venerable gray portals of Christie's art auction house in London and plunked a lidded glass jar down on the reception desk. She had been keeping the children's candies in it until told by a local antique dealer that the bowl could be worth as much as $100.

As she waited for the receptionists to summon the glass expert for the usual free-of-charge valuation, a constant stream of men and women proudly, anxiously or shyly unwrapped their family treasures before the calculating gaze of a band of uniformly young, well-dressed and impressively expert men. Sometimes the owners would sadly repack their heirlooms, having been gently told they might never fetch more than a few dollars. The woman wondered what the verdict on her piece would be.

Today, the "candy jar" sits in a museum in the United States, having been sold for some $32,500 at an auction. It turned out to be a rare, 14th-century covered bowl from Aleppo, Syria—a hot item in what, in the last few years, has been a burgeoning trade in Middle Eastern antiques in London.

Some of those antiques fetched big prices. Not long ago a mid-13th-century flask from Mameluke Egypt brought $17,000. About the same time luxury-class interior decorators could easily get up to $4,000 for a pair of bronze Persian candlesticks and a Kensington dealer unblinkingly asked $500 each for a set of six 17th-century icons from a ruined church in Syria. Business was so good, in fact, that Christie's thought nothing of pinning $2,500 price tags on eyeless alabaster heads from southern Arabia or casually displaying boxes of gold Roman rings from Syria with prices running to $700 each.

Even small dealers reported increased sales. One lady with a stall not much bigger than a refrigerator was displaying such items as a 3,000-year-old Persian soup taster, a wine taster from Cyprus and a Phoenician kitchen weight found near Sidon, in Lebanon. Nearby, the daughter of a former British ambassador said spring and summer crowds were providing brisks sales of silver Bedouin ornaments.

The term "Middle Eastern antiques" is an elastic one, covering anything from Phoenician glass of the fifth century B.C. to Bedouin jewelry made at the turn of the present century, as long as it originated in the Middle East. It includes alabaster heads from south Arabia, Pharaonic funerary equipment, Roman glass made in ancient Palestine, Coptic embroidery from Egypt, 3,000-year-old Syrian bronzes, Persian miniatures and the whole range of the Islamic arts. At the Victoria and Albert Museum there are lustrous brown and yellow ninth-century ware from Mesopotamia, polychrome pottery from 16th-century Iznik, in Turkey, 12th-century bowls from Persia decorated with figures in soft turquoises and rust-reds, mosque lamps with colored glass from 13th-century Syria. Nor does it exclude magnificent carpets produced throughout the Middle East.

Carpets, of course, have always been the most popular of art objects from the Middle East. But in the recent boom they became even more popular. Four major carpet auctions were held weekly in London, Christie's alone was doing an annual $500,000 worth of business in oriental carpets and certain experts in London were writing two and three books at a time to satisfy the rising interest.

According to Stanley Reed, author of three books on carpets, there is special interest in "tribal" carpets. "Twenty years ago, these nomadic people's rugs would hardly have been looked at. But tribal carpets have come up in the world since. I think it had something to do with the fact that a person can recognize the geometric designs, identify them and feel something of a connoisseur.

"These rugs, furthermore, will keep their investment value," he added. "Fewer and fewer rugs are available and there has been intense competition for good pieces."

The competition, of course, pushed up prices. According to Mr. Reed, they will probably continue to go up. "They're still making fine carpets in Persia, but they're terribly expensive. Labor is dearer now—the kids are being sent to school instead of learning to knot carpets. Afghanistan is one of the few places to retain the nomadic carpet industry."

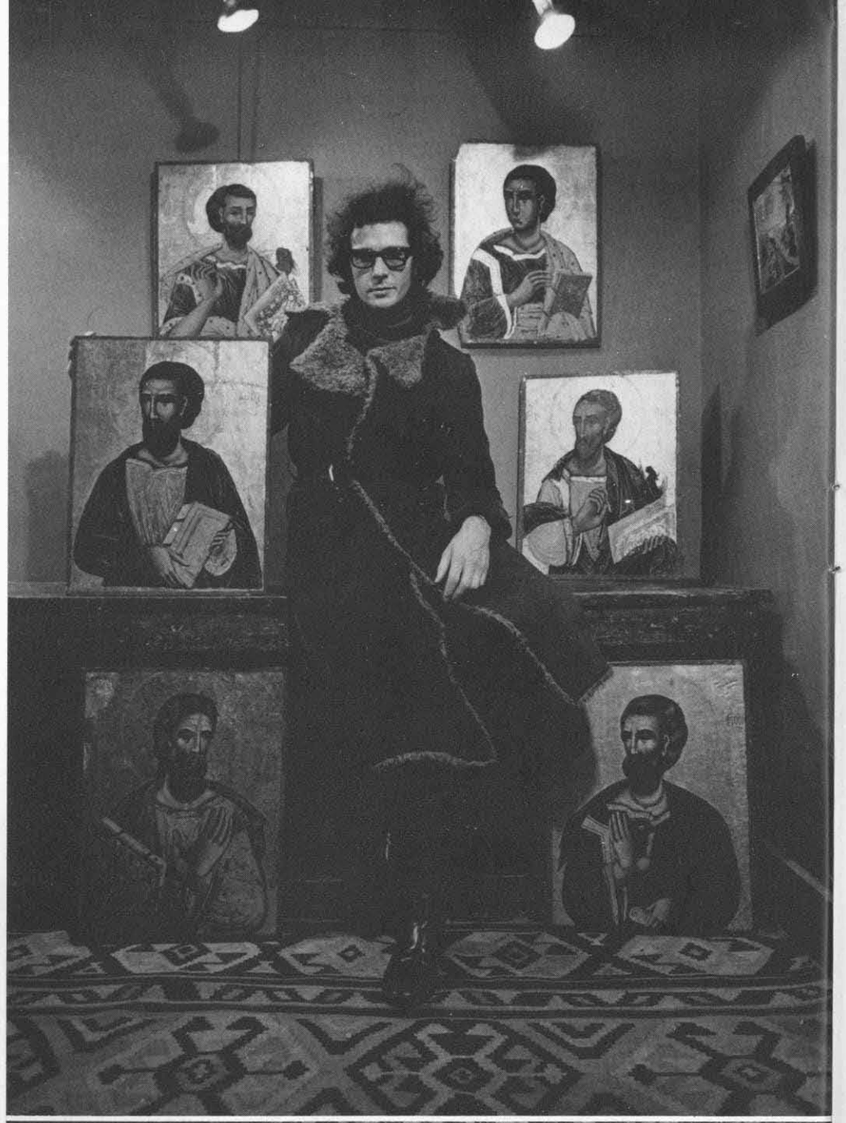
Carpets were not the only items to become scarce. According to dealers, all authentic Middle Eastern antiquities are in short

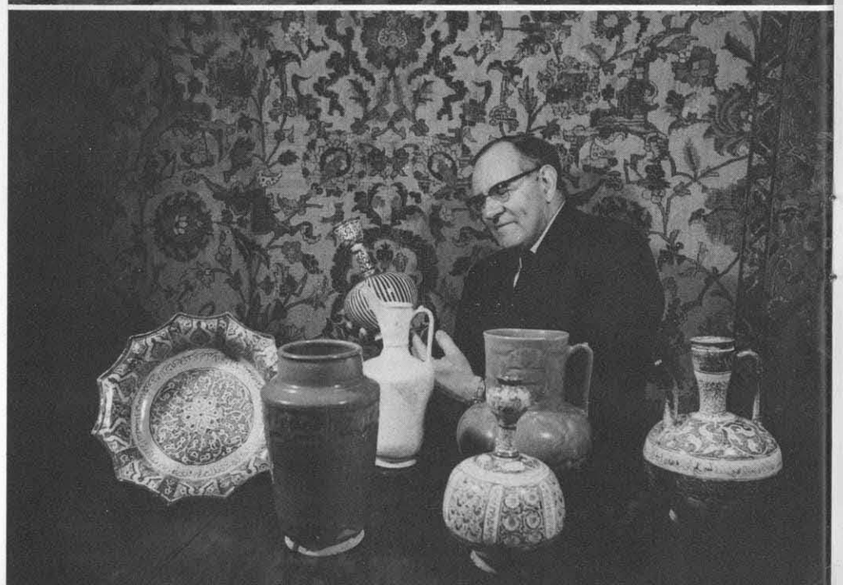
supply throughout the Middle East because governments in the past few years have clamped down on the unregulated export of antiquities that was so common in the 1960's. In Turkey, for example, archeologists are sometimes stationed at main border control points, and in Syria a special police service to keep track of antiquities was established some time ago. A favorite story among London dealers tells of a certain collector in the Middle East who somehow acquired some pieces destined for a Syrian museum. He soon received a note saying that unless these were returned within a few days an unfortunate explosion would accidentally destroy his entire, and highly valuable, collection. The collector did not wait to discover the authenticity of the note.

In the Middle East itself, London dealers used to prefer Beirut. They say the prices were usually fair and that all transactions were made legal by the rule that every antique purchased had to be taken to the Beirut museum. The museum had the option of buying the object—in which case it paid the purchaser the exact amount he had spent—or releasing it for export upon payment of a five-percent tax.

Egypt, which some years ago banned virtually all exports of antiquities, has also worked out a system by which antiques can be shared with those interested. Everything is now categorized under five headings: international treasures for Egyptian museums; objects put aside for scholars to purchase for foreign museums; pieces that are put on view in the Cairo museums but can be released for sale because of sufficient similar examples; a general undecided category of items and, adds one dealer, "quite a lot of rubbish."

As a result of the scarcity, dealers had to be particularly alert to a perennial problem in the world of antiques: forgeries. This problem was not restricted to Middle Eastern antiques. The Chinese have been manufacturing fake antiques since the 14th century and English silver collectors still must check hallmarked silverware closely, as unscrupulous dealers frequently cut hallmarks from one piece and weld them to another. But forgers of Middle Eastern antiques have been exceptionally skillful. Even before the boom, a pre-World-War-II craftsman called the "Berlin Faker" turned out such exquisite Egyptian antiquities that they were bought by international museums. To prevent such





errors, everyone in the business now has a full set of photographs of the fakes. But the "Berlin Faker's" son-in-law is currently said to be in the same Egyptian antiquity business.

Forgery was not unknown within the Middle East either. Islamic glass from Syria and Lebanon kept many a craftsman occupied and Turkey and Egypt have fielded some admirable specimens. London's experts, therefore, devoted a lot of time to culling the false from the true. One test that's hard to beat is the carbon-14 test, which can date organic materials, such as wood and bone, to within 100 years. Another is the thermoluminescence test, which can show whether terra-cotta or pottery has been fired more than 200 years ago.

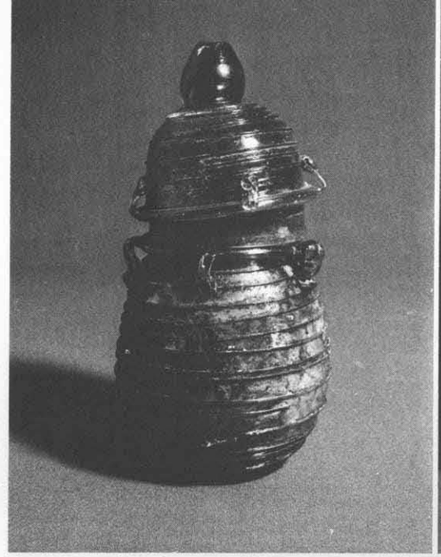
Despite high prices, scarcities and forgeries, the boom continued, particularly at the exclusive establishments of London's dignified St. James area—establishments such as Spink & Son and Christie's.

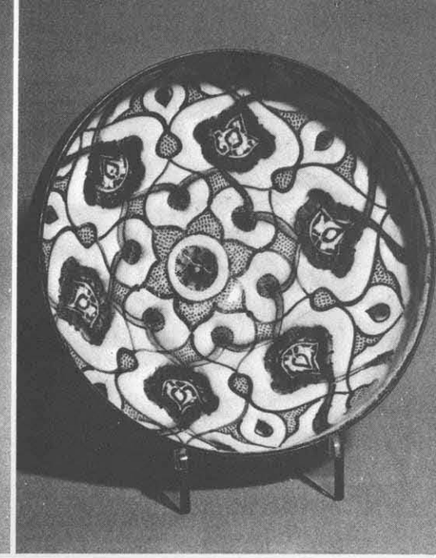
Spink & Son, a hushed, wall-to-wall-carpeted emporium of antiques, was first established as a silversmith in 1666 and by 1772 had set up shop as gunsmiths and jewelry merchants. By 1975 the firm had added Middle Eastern antiques, art from the Far East, coins, stamps, furniture, medals —the list is long—and had become one of the world's major antique dealers.

Behind the soft lighting and spacious, modern museum-like displays lurks a burglary alarm system to rival that of Fort Knox. Here come customers to seek out advice on Islamic ceramics, a manuscript or piece of glass. They spend thousands of dollars on the right Mesopotamian plate or Persian bronze bowl, for Spink's is that sort of place. Then they may go down the block and spend some more—at, for example, Christie, Manson & Woods, the world's oldest firm of art auctioneers and Spink's next-door neighbor.

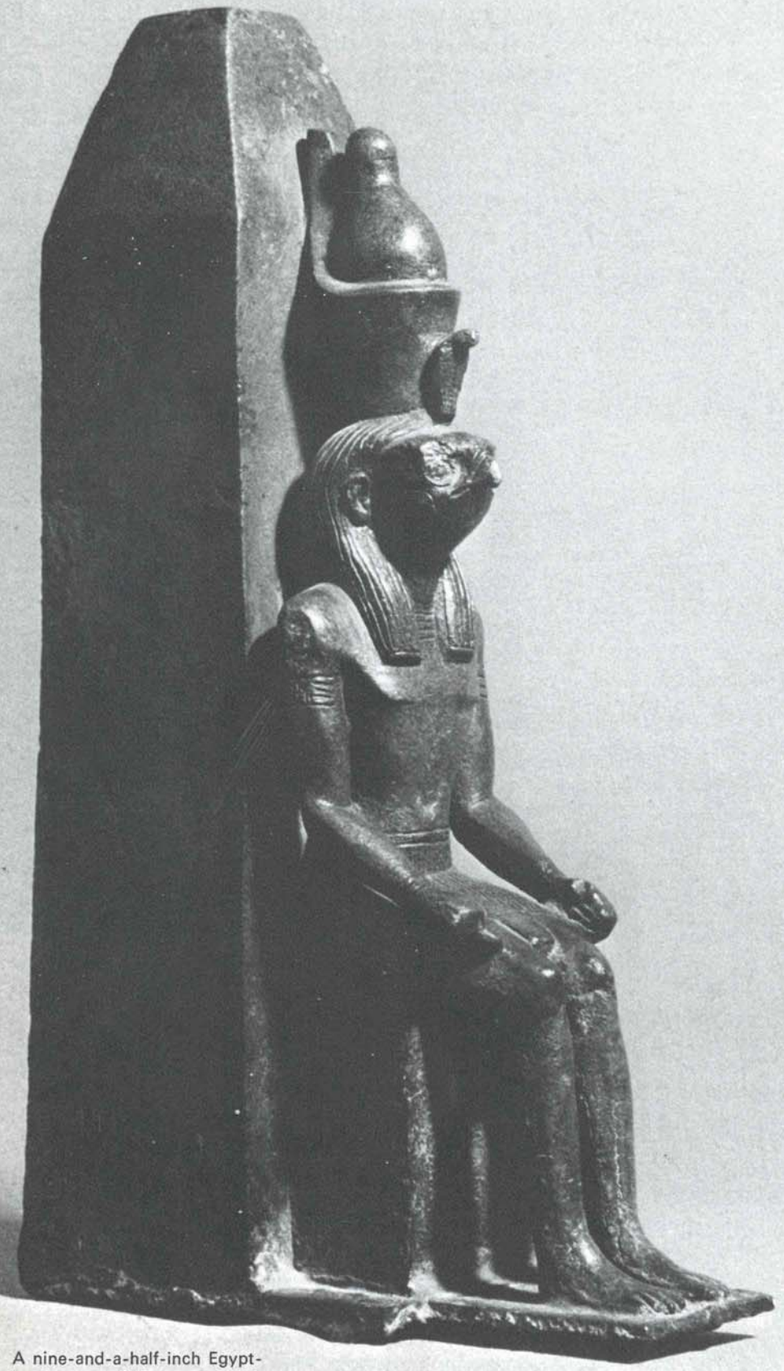
At Christie's, a garage-sized room, on the eve of a sale, can be crammed with an amazing assortment of objects: squares of 1,700-year-old mosaics from Syria valued at $700–1,800 each, a second-century bust from Palmyra wearing a Roman-style tunic, Egyptian funerary pots and statues, Syrian bronzes and some polished white alabaster heads with holes in the eyes and beard showing where glass and shell inlays had been fitted.

These heads come from southern Arabia,





Opposite page, top: Richard Temple, a London gallery owner, with 18th-century Syrian icons of the apostles valued at about $500 each. Bottom: Raymond Ades, a private collector, with examples of his Islamic pottery. This page, top left: A five-inch, third-century, Roman-Syrian glass flask at Spink & Son, valued at about $850. Top right: An eight-inch Persian Kashan bowl from 12th or 13th century from the Raymond Ades collection. Above: Examples of second- to fourth-century Roman-Syrian gold jewelery at Christie's. The earrings might go for as low as $70 the pair.



A nine-and-a-half-inch Egyptian bronze of Horus at Spink & Sons; sixth-century B.C.; valued at $4,500.

north of Aden. They belonged in funerary niches in the first century B.C. or A.D. For a time they were very popular among film producers for their Modigliani look, and recently Saudi Arabians began buying them for their new museum. Some of the heads fetched up to $2,500 in auction.

A handful of banded agate "eye stones" filled a whole box at Christie's. These were votive offerings in 1500–B.C. Babylonia. Intended to represent eyes, they were probably fixed into the eye sockets of statues of divinities. One later stone was inscribed to sixth-century Nebuchadnezzar II, famous for building the Hanging Gardens of Babylon.

Cooperative as they are, most dealers drew the line at discussing the special customers who created the boom: the collectors. Some dealers, in fact, would not even estimate the number of collectors in London, let alone give names, and one collector who agreed to discuss his hobby would only do so under conditions of complete anonymity.

Like many collectors this man drifted into the field naturally: his father had collected carpets and French and Italian paintings. Later, however, he went his own way. "Everything had been said about French and Italian art. I wanted something new."

By "something new," of course, he meant Middle Eastern antiques, which he has since amassed: bronzes, Persian miniatures, glass, manuscripts and oriental carpets. It is an extremely valuable collection—which is one reason why dealers and collectors dislike publicity. Yet price, according to this man, is not the point. "I don't collect for investment, but for pleasure," he said. "When I buy a piece I write the money off. I like to handle my pieces, maybe look at one or two for 10 minutes in the morning, preferably listening to music."

Collectors on that level are, of course, rare. Yet during the boom the same spirit seemed to infect even those who shopped in smaller, less expensive shops. One boy who wouldn't dream of entering the St. James establishments spotted a lovely piece in a stall and spent five weeks paying for it—proof, perhaps, that the beauty of antiquities belongs to all men.

Helen Gibson, formerly with the UPI, writes frequently for Aramco World.

A 10¾-inch Yemenite polished alabaster head at Christie's; first-century B.C./A.D.; valued at about $1,200.