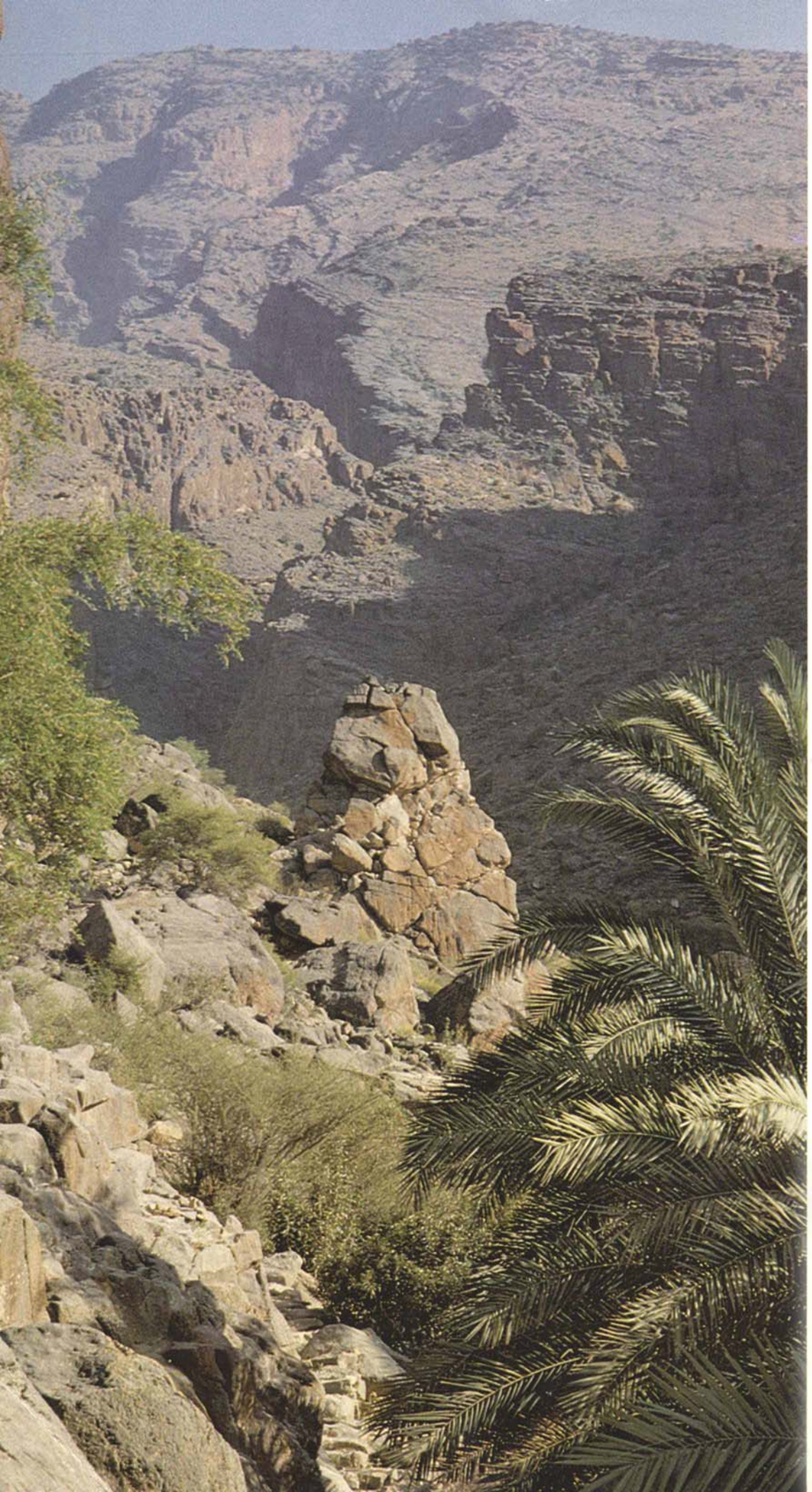

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CHOREOGRAPHY IN CAIRO

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Cover: On a darkened stage in Cairo, dancer Hassan Sheta was captured by photographer John Feeney in a dramatic moment from *Majnoun Laila*, a ballet based on an Arab legend and produced by a dynamic young company dedicated to establishing classical dance in Egypt. Rear cover: In remote Oman, villagers coax fruitful growth from their rugged mountain slopes.

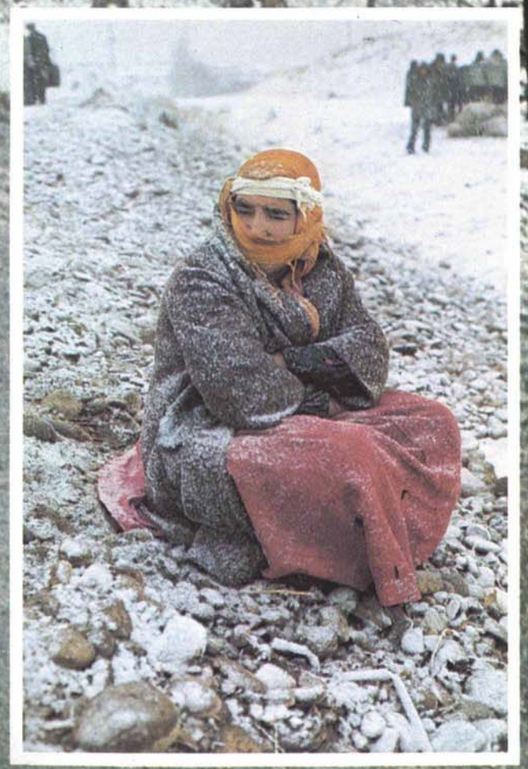
◀ Paris fashion houses have been giving classic Arab forms a French translation, as exemplified here by designer Thea Porter's interpretation of the aba in chiffon. Story and Photos on page 28.

When a devastating earthquake hit eastern Turkey... Red Crescent to the Rescue!

WRITTEN BY JOHN LAWTON
PHOTOGRAPHED BY TÜRK HABELER AJANSI

In a year in which earthquakes in China, India, Italy and Guatemala killed up to 700,000 people, the temblor that rocked eastern Turkey on November 24, 1976, may have seemed to be just one more calamity. But this earthquake—Turkey's fourth in 13 months—was its worst in 37 years. Rescue operations, furthermore, would be hampered by distance, terrain and weather; for Van, a Turkish province close to the border of Iran, is a remote area where a forbidding landscape is swept by icy winds and snow. In Ankara, therefore, 800 miles to the west, there was a note of grim urgency in the air as one of the oldest relief organizations in the world went on full alert. This was Kizilay, as the Red Crescent Society is known in Turkey, which in the days ahead would play a key role in saving the survivors of the disaster.

The earthquake had struck at 2.24 p.m. It was a brief 14-second tremor, but in those few seconds its immense power flattened two towns, scores of farm villages and nearly every building within a 30-mile radius of a place called Caldiran. It also left some 3,800 persons dead and more than 8,000 families homeless on an isolated, wintry plateau.



Red Crescent to the Rescue!

The first alarm had gone out quickly, and, two and a half hours later, as the full extent of the disaster reached Ankara, the Turkish Red Crescent was already gearing up for action.

According to Kizilay's silver-haired president, Professor Recai Ergruder, there are two stages to earthquake relief. One is emergency aid, the other reconstruction, with the first stage largely the responsibility of the Red Crescent. Kizilay, therefore, with an efficiency honed to perfection by the three recent earthquakes in Turkey, quickly marshaled a 75-member relief force of doctors, nurses, drivers and cooks at the 108-year-old organization's headquarters in Ankara's main square. Simultaneously its administrators assembled four ambulances, a mobile surgery, three Land Rovers, four field kitchens, plus tents, blankets and medical supplies, and swiftly loaded them aboard four military aircraft.

Meanwhile another 5,000 tents, 1,700 blankets, 45 tons of food and a 25-bed field hospital were being packed on a special relief train—dubbed the "Earthquake Express"—and immediately dispatched on a 36-hour journey to the temblor's epicenter: a rocky, 5,700-foot plateau between Lake Van and Mount Ararat where, the Bible says, Noah's Ark came to rest (*Aramco World*, March-April, 1973) and where some of Turkey's worst winter weather rages for six months of the year.

Bad weather, however, also closed in on Ankara's Esenboga Airport that day. As a result, the airborne relief force was grounded and it was not until first light the following day, November 25, that the four big-bellied Hercules transports carrying the Red Crescent emergency squad—along with the ambulances, field kitchens, tents and medicines—were cleared for takeoff.

The flight was short. At 7 a.m., less than 17 hours after the earthquake, the four Hercules landed on the eastern shore of Lake Van. There, air force helicopters and government trucks whisked the Red Crescent relief teams to Muradiye and Caldiran, the two towns leveled by the first temblor.

Even for seasoned members of the Red Crescent's emergency squads the first sight of the disaster was appalling: corpses piled up in the open, the injured sprawled on the ground, women and children huddling together for warmth against the icy winds and flurries of snow slashing across the barren plateau and silently sifting onto the wreckage of homes, shops and barns.

By 9 a.m. the Red Crescent team was in action. Quickly sorting out the critical cases, the relief teams airlifted them to hospitals of Ankara while doctors on the

West German Red Cross trucks head for the quake area.

scene taped splints on broken arms, swathed cuts and bruises and, a key step in major disasters, gave inoculations against the epidemics that always stalk the victims of such disasters. Simultaneously they set up the mobile field kitchens and, from steaming cauldrons, began to serve hot food to the dazed and hungry victims. Others from the team set up tents, moved in portable stoves and distributed blankets.

Meanwhile, at Van airport, which normally handles two commercial flights a week, cargo planes—jammed with supplies from the United States and Western Europe, as well as Turkey's Muslim neighbors in the Middle East—began to land at hourly intervals. Included were tents from Iran, food from Pakistan and medicine from Iraq. Saudi Arabia, the heartland of Islam, instantly provided a cash donation of $5 million.

For four days relief personnel in cooperation with government and army officials worked around the clock. Hampered by snowfalls—and aftershocks—they fed, clothed and sheltered the stunned survivors while, throughout Turkey, volunteers from the organization's 654 branches collected blood, money and warm clothes.

Turkish troops unload relief supplies donated by Iraq.

Red Crescent: symbol of mercy

The worldwide relief organization familiar to most Westerners as the International Red Cross actually consists of three parts: the International Committee of the Red Cross (I.C.R.C.), The League of Red Cross Societies and more than 100 independent national societies.

The International Committee, based in Geneva, is a scrupulously neutral institution which acts as the guardian of the organization's basic principle: that its humanitarian work to relieve suffering everywhere and under nearly every circumstance should make no distinctions of nationality, race, religion, social class or political affiliation.

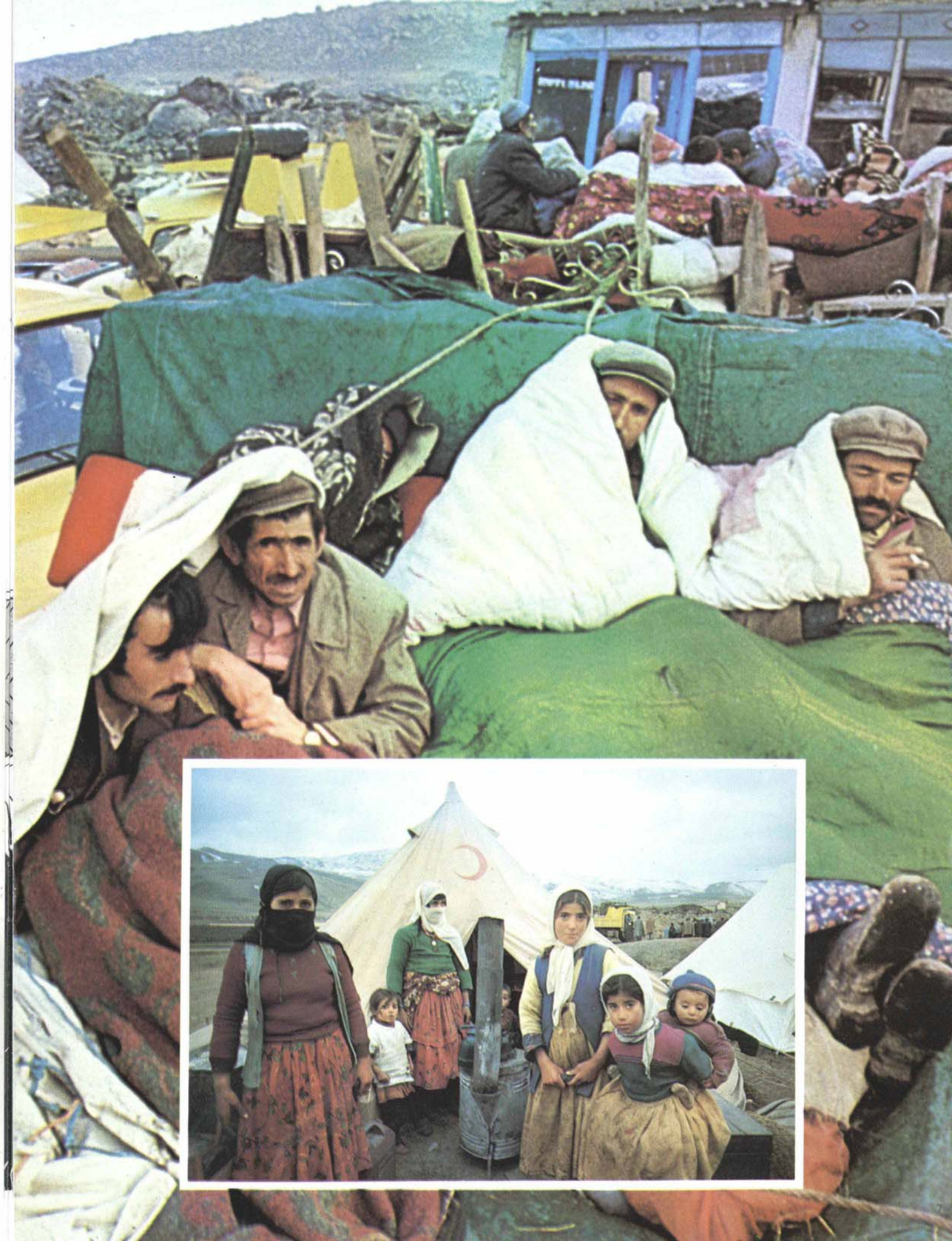
The Turkish Red Crescent Society—like the 17 other national Red Crescent Societies—is an independent member of the League of Red Cross Societies, an international federation, also based in Geneva. The League acts as a liaison between national societies and helps coordinate emergency relief to victims of natural disasters wherever they occur. The League was founded on the initiative of the American Red Cross in 1919. With the admission of societies from the Bahamas and Congo (Brazzaville) in December 1976, its membership reached 123. Of these, 103 are called Red Cross Societies, 18 Red Crescent, one (in the Soviet Union, which uses both symbols), the Alliance of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and another, unique to Iran, the Red Lion and Sun Society.

The cooperative spirit shown by these independent members of the League in times of disaster is exemplified by the way so many rallied to the support of the Turkish Red Crescent in the weeks following last November's tragic earthquake. In addition to the aid given by governments and other relief agencies, 43 national Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies throughout the world sent funds or supplies worth more than $5.5 million.

The history of the International Red Cross begins in 1859, when a young Swiss businessman, J. Henry Dunant, was a chance witness at the Battle of Solferino in northern Italy, where combined French and Sardinian forces routed the Austrian army. Horrified by the suffering of the wounded on both sides, Dunant, soon after returning to Geneva, enlisted the help of four influential friends to campaign for basic reforms in what he felt was the scandalous neglect of battlefield victims by even the most civilized nations. Four years later the five men founded the International Committee for the Relief of the Wounded, forerunner of today's I.C.R.C., and invited representatives of a number of European governments to an assembly in Geneva. There they agreed to encourage national associations of "voluntary relief workers," the germ of today's independent societies. Recognizing the urgent need for a single, universally identifiable symbol to clearly mark ambulances, hospital tents and medical personnel in battle, they chose the flag of Switzerland—a white cross on a red field—but reversed the colors. Thus was born the "red cross."

Within 10 years there were 22 national societies, representing the whole of Europe including Russia and Turkey. But in 1876 a problem arose. Although the red cross symbol had never been intended to have a religious significance, Turkey, in 1876, sent word to Switzerland that out of respect for the religious convictions of its troops—Turkey was then at war with Russia—it had decided to adopt the sign of the red crescent for its ambulances. Most Arab or other Muslim countries also adopted the crescent as they formed their own national relief societies and in 1923 still another sign, the red lion and sun, was adopted by Iran.

The I.C.R.C. soon realized that if medical installations are to be respected by combatants the signs marking them must be instantly recognizable to everyone—and that if new symbols continued to proliferate they would lose all value. Since 1929, therefore, the International Red Cross has restricted its official sanction to just three symbols: the red cross, the red crescent and the red lion and sun.



Red Crescent to the Rescue!

Four days after the earthquake, on November 28, six inches of snow fell on Van, underlining fears that the homeless would freeze to death during the sub-zero Anatolian winter unless quickly rehoused. In response, Osman Altin, governor of Van, declared a state of emergency, commandeered all available vehicles and sent them into the mountains to bring survivors to the towns. And again the Red Crescent was on hand. For those who could not squeeze into schools, warehouses and other municipal buildings, the Red Crescent, aided by American airmen, put up 2,000 heated, heavy-duty U.S. Army tents in Van, Ercis, Muradiye and Caldiran. "We will look after them until the government builds them new homes," said Tayyar Hindistan, chief of Red Crescent Relief operations in Van.

Earthquakes are not new to the Middle East. Time and again, over the centuries, violent shifts in the earth's crust have leveled cities and towns in the Middle East, especially in Turkey, Iran and Syria, killing and injuring hundreds of thousands of people. According to available records, earthquakes have rocked Medina, in Saudi Arabia, Beirut, in Lebanon and Jerash, Nablus and Jerusalem in Palestine.

While villagers (opposite page) bury their dead, Red Crescent medical teams (above) bring help to the living

Red Crescent official checks supplies sent from Iran.

Some areas have been struck repeatedly. Jerusalem, for example, has endured 84 earthquakes. But Turkey, which straddles one of the world's most active seismic zones, has been worst of all. In Eastern Turkey, for example, earthquakes destroyed Antioch in 115 A.D., 458 A.D., 526 A.D., 588 A.D., 1183 and 1972.

In those centuries, of course, there was no Red Crescent in the Middle East. Although its origins are said to date back to the 12th century—when the Caliph Saladin permitted the Knights of St. John to cross Muslim lines to care for wounded Crusaders—it was not formally organized until 1868. Nevertheless it has since played a vital role in relief work. In recent times the Red Crescent has seen service in at least seven wars on four continents, as well as helping relieve the sufferings of victims of great urban fires and epidemics.

Besides doing emergency relief work, the Red Crescent, today, runs seven blood centers, a nursing college, 20 hospitals, six youth camps, research and plasma-processing laboratories, roadside first-aid stations, dispensaries, soup kitchens and student hostels throughout Turkey. The Red Crescent even operates its own tent factory to keep up with the recurring disasters.

The Red Crescent's independence is guaranteed by the Turkish constitution. It receives no direct cash grants from the treasury and government officials and politicians are forbidden to serve on its 1,300-man permanent staff. Its independent $2.5-million annual income comes from such diverse sources as bequests and real estate rents, the sale of hides from sheep sacrificed at a major Muslim religious festival, and from small change deducted from horse-race winnings. It also has a monopoly on sales of X-ray films, drugs, vaccines and serums in Turkey.

The emblem of the Turkish Red Crescent can be seen not only on ambulances and hospitals, but on the tops of soda-water and mineral-water shipped all over Turkey from its own income-earning bottling plant at Afyon. But to the grief-stricken men, injured women and hungry children in tragically devastated towns such as Caldiran, the sight of the red crescent moon of Islam on a white background means much more. It means that help has arrived. And with it, hope.

John Lawton, a veteran UPI correspondent, now free-lances from Istanbul.

Tapline Road, Northern Arabia

Desert Flower, Northern Arabia

Balconies, Jiddah

Bedouins making Coffee, Eastern Arabia

Dunes and Shadows, Eastern Arabia

Juraid Island, Arabian Gulf

KHALIL'S ARABIA

Few photographers covered the Middle East more thororoughly than Khalil Abou el-Nasr. Born in Palestine in 1930, he ranged through most of the Arab world for 20 years, recording on film its people and its deserts, its flowers and wildlife—and, in recent years, its swiftly changing urban and industrial centers. But his first love, photographically, was Saudi Arabia.

Khalil first went to Saudi Arabia in 1950 as a young machinist. But later, under the tutelage of Burnett H. Moody, now Aramco's chief photographer, he began to show the aptitude for photography that would later blossom when, in 1957, he moved to Lebanon, became a full-time free-lance photographer and set up a darkroom.

In that darkroom—a ludicrous cubicle tucked behind a stairwell off Beirut's busy Hamra Street—Khalil ingeniously combined his Dhahran training with his machinist's skills to bring off, time and again, technically challenging feats of reproduction and enlargement and, later, advanced experiments in color printing—all with equipment that was often old and sometimes primitive.

The darkroom, however, was more than a place of business. It was also, Khalil being Khalil, an informal social club where neighbors, businessmen from Hamra, friends and colleagues could gather. And where Khalil could hold court. Lounging at ease in a beach chair—perfect for his afternoon siesta—he would sip coffee, delivered through a window by a smiling coffee boy, and talk endlessly about his favorite subjects: photography, politics, gardening, cooking and, yes, girls. In those days in Beirut, life had a special flavor.

During this period Khalil had also begun to move into the world of photojournalism, first as a photographer and reporter for Aramco publications, later for magazines and newspapers in Beirut and abroad. Then, in 1963, he began to contribute regularly to *Aramco World Magazine* and in spirit, if not in fact, joined the staff. Altogether Khalil, as this small sampling suggests, illustrated 40 articles for *Aramco World*, 10 of them cover stories.

In providing that coverage he zigzagged across the Middle East. Sometimes it would mean trudging through sand to a Bedouin encampment. Sometimes it would mean positioning lights in urban museums or climbing the walls of ancient castles. And once, on the famous Orient Express, it meant crossing Europe. But wherever he was, Khalil, a warm, simple, outgoing man, inevitably enlarged his network of friends until eventually there were few countries where he could not expect an enthusiastic welcome.

They were not always easy assignments. In those days border formalities were long and tedious and officials were often stern. But he always got what he was after. Once, for example, while driving from Lebanon to the Gulf, a rugged desert track poked a hole in his gas tank and, simultaneously, punctured his last spare tire. Khalil, however, plugged the gas tank with a paste of soap and sand—so effectively that he was able to drive another 2,000 miles—and sealed the tire by pushing sheets of plastic into the puncture with a matchstick. He had to replace the plastic—and pump up the tire—every 10 miles. But he completed his assignment.

The days when such ingenuity was needed for desert travel are gone now, of course. But so, sadly, is Khalil. This spring in Beirut, after a long illness, Khalil died, leaving his wife, Awatif, four children, brothers, numerous cousins and countless friends throughout the Middle East. In addition, he left a loyal corps of writers, photographers and editors who admired his work and will miss it—but who, more importantly, will miss his engaging warmth, his contagious enthusiasm, his refreshing cheerfulness and, above all, his friendship.

—The Editors

Mountains, Asir

Grain and Dunes, As-Qasim

Cameo Shell, Red Sea

A photographer hikes to Oman's

Mountain of the Sun

WRITTEN AND PHOTOGRAPHED BY STEPHEN THOMAS

The boom of the cannon echoed off the surrounding mountains and reverberated through the narrow streets between stone houses. The golden light of sunset silhouetted villagers shouting to one another from their rooftops: "Praise be to God!" From somewhere came the soft beat of a drum, then the long note of a single horn. Ramadan, the Muslim month of fasting, was over, and the fanfare announced the beginning of the *'Id al-Fitr* in Misfa, a remote hamlet of some 800 souls perched against steep cliffs halfway up Oman's Jabal al-Shams, the Mountain of the Sun.

Since 1970, Oman's young ruler Sultan Qaboos bin Sa'id has been trying to bring this small country on the southeastern tip of the Arabian Peninsula into the modern world. By the summer of 1975 I had been working in Muscat, the capital city, for less than a year, but the development I had seen—schools, hospitals, cinemas—was already bringing dramatic change to the traditional culture and life of the country. Already, a visitor wishing to see the old customs of the ancient land had to leave the coastal towns and travel into the isolated interior where traditions were more deeply rooted (*Aramco World*, July-August, 1974).

As I was one of those visitors, a friend and I decided to journey to Misfa that year. There, we had heard, once a year on the joyous occasion of the *'Id* feast, townsmen still performed a lively and colorful sword dance.

We left Muscat by Land Rover, one of the few vehicles that could traverse the unpaved tracks and the lunar landscape we encountered barely an hour later. The valley floor was strewn with thorn bushes and jagged walls of bare rock pushed up on both sides in shades of yellow and rusty red. And when we reached al-Hamra, a mud-brick village nestled in a lush green oasis of date palms at the base of the Jabal al-Shams, even the Land Rover wouldn't do. Misfa is accessible only by foot—a three-hour trek, and all uphill. The narrow trail began to climb from a dry wadi at the far edge of the village.

Mountain of the Sun

Soon after we had started to hike up the steep ravine, a young man caught up with us, explaining that he too was traveling to Misfa for the *'Id*, and that he would walk with us and show the way. Like so many Omanis in the interior, he was immediately friendly and seemed pleased that we were going to visit his village. Within a minute of our meeting, it was settled that we would be guests in his house. Hospitality to strangers, we learned, is not just an Arab legend.

Our new host, Ahmad, told us how important the coming three days of celebration were for the people of Misfa, not only because they marked the end of Ramadan, the month-long period of fasting, but because it is one of the few times when young men can come home from jobs in the coastal area to be reunited with their families. He told us the end of Ramadan would be signaled by cannon fire as soon as the new moon was sighted. We listened as we climbed on, too short of breath to do any talking ourselves.

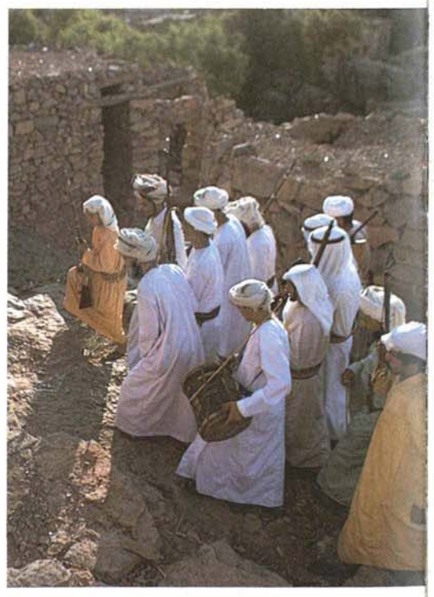
By the time we reached the highest point on the trail, my friend and I were exhausted. I paused to gasp, staring out over the distant ranges, which were absolutely bare of vegetation and seemed to smolder in the glare of the sun. I wondered how people could survive here, let alone fast, in such heat. Ahmad, tireless and indomitable, suggested we rest while he performed his afternoon prayers in a kind of natural amphitheater just off the path.

Soon we pushed on, but now we moved down a ravine into a valley where bits of green forced their way out of rock crevices. Then, almost without warning, we came upon a series of ascending terraces thick with orchards of pomegranates, figs, limes and dates. Ahmad gestured toward a group of stone buildings clustered at the top of the lush terraces and shouted proudly, "There's Misfa!"

As we began to climb again, the village disappeared from view. Soon we had to use the edge of a narrow, fast-running canal, or *falj*, as a path through a dense grove of trees. The *falj* came down from the village through the thick vegetation, zigzagging along the edge of the gardens, clinging to the hillside and giving us a breathtaking view of the valley below as we continued upward.

The *falj* system is the key to life in the interior. It usually consists of a series of covered ditches which channel the water from its source to the gardens, and which is used not only for irrigation, but for cooking and washing in the villages as well. The *falj* of Misfa had been built to cope with steep hillsides and even cliffs. This one cut around thick boulders and bridged ravines in a marvel of folk engineering.

At first Misfa, too, appeared to be carved into the face of the vertical mountain wall, almost suspended in midair, but as it came into view again and we climbed closer, I realized the mountain was actually behind the village. The houses, unlike those in most interior villages, were built of stone, as were the



narrow streets and paths. Large, rectangular rocks formed the foundations of the houses, most of which were perched on and among enormous boulders, close to each other, but on so many different levels that they looked remarkably like the mountain cliffs that nearly surrounded them.

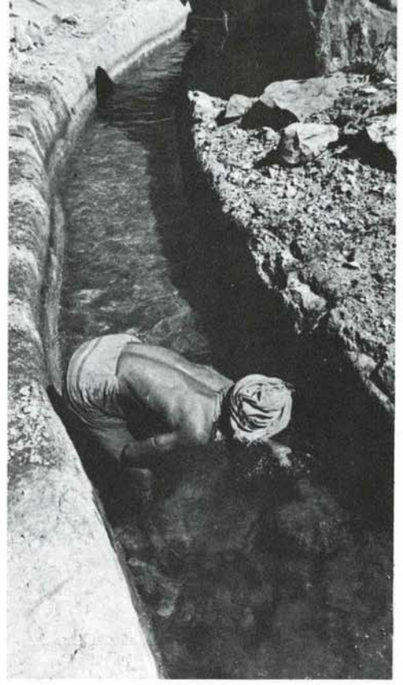
It was a joyous occasion when we reached Ahmad's house, a large dwelling built on several levels. His whole family embraced and kissed him in turn. Then his father led us up to the second level, open to the air, which seemed to be the main center of activity for the household. Piles of lemons and dates—yellow, red and brown—were spread out to dry on the roof. Ahmad's father told us that there were many fit old men like himself in the village because dates were plentiful and they ate them daily.

To this his son jokingly replied, "But they would prefer meat every day if they could have it!" His father laughed and admitted that he was no doubt right. Then, pointing to a large cow tethered outside, he told us the animal would be butchered and distributed among the villagers on the occasion of the *'Id* the next morning. Because there is not yet electricity to preserve perishable food in Misfa, cattle are preserved on the hoof and eaten freshly killed and rapidly cooked.

When sunset came, everyone in the entire village seemed to be on their rooftops, which, although they were on various levels, were nearly touching. We could hear families chatting among themselves. Women were huddled around

pots of boiling rice, preparing the evening meal. Boys and men were pulling out mats to sit on.

Then came the thundering explosion of gunpowder which signaled of the end of Ramadan and the commencement of the festivities of the *'Id*. Almost as one, people on rooftops all around us began to shout with joy and to offer praise to Allah. We heard the beat of drums and joined our neighbors as they poured from their homes to follow a procession of musicians through the village.



On the far side of the settlement we assembled in a large open-air enclosure surrounded by large boulders. Women and children, dressed in vibrant colors, sat on stones in a circle around the natural arena in which the men stood. The sword dance we had come to see was about to begin.

The men formed into two lines, each facing the other. They were in traditional warrior's dress, and hanging at each man's waist was the characteristic Omani carved silver dagger, the *khanjar* (*Aramco World*, January-February, 1967). The men in each line hung together like two opposing forces, sidestepping and chanting. A rhythmic monotone came from the hide-covered drums and wooden flutes. Soon, the beat of the music increased in tempo and a group of women gave the customary shrill cry which encourages the dancers.

One man from each side stepped forward and took up a long ancient sword and small wooden shield. They began to dance, spinning round and round each other, tossing their swords into the air and catching them by the handle as they plummeted downward. They seemed equally skillful, brandishing their sharp weapons as though playing with harmless sticks. I tried to remain calm enough to take a few photographs, but when they began the mock fight in earnest I found I couldn't keep from wincing. When one man lunged forward the other would crouch suddenly and seemingly avoid his opponent's blade by a hair. The object of this swordplay was to nick your opponent's thumb. But it was all in fun, and except for an ego or two no one was injured.

Ahmad explained that this demonstration of combat is a ceremonial reenactment of a style of tribal warfare with roots far in the past, a kind of folkloric performance of tales from remote history, performed just once a year on the *'Id*. I understand that the dance is also still practiced in other parts of Oman, but nowhere, I'm convinced, with the style and grace I witnessed at Misfa.

The next morning Ahmad woke us before sunrise and led us back to the arena where we had witnessed the sword dance. There, everybody in the village had gathered, all dressed in their best attire, and the men formed a large circle and moved around it in turn shaking each other's hands and saying "*'Id sa' id*"—"Good holiday."

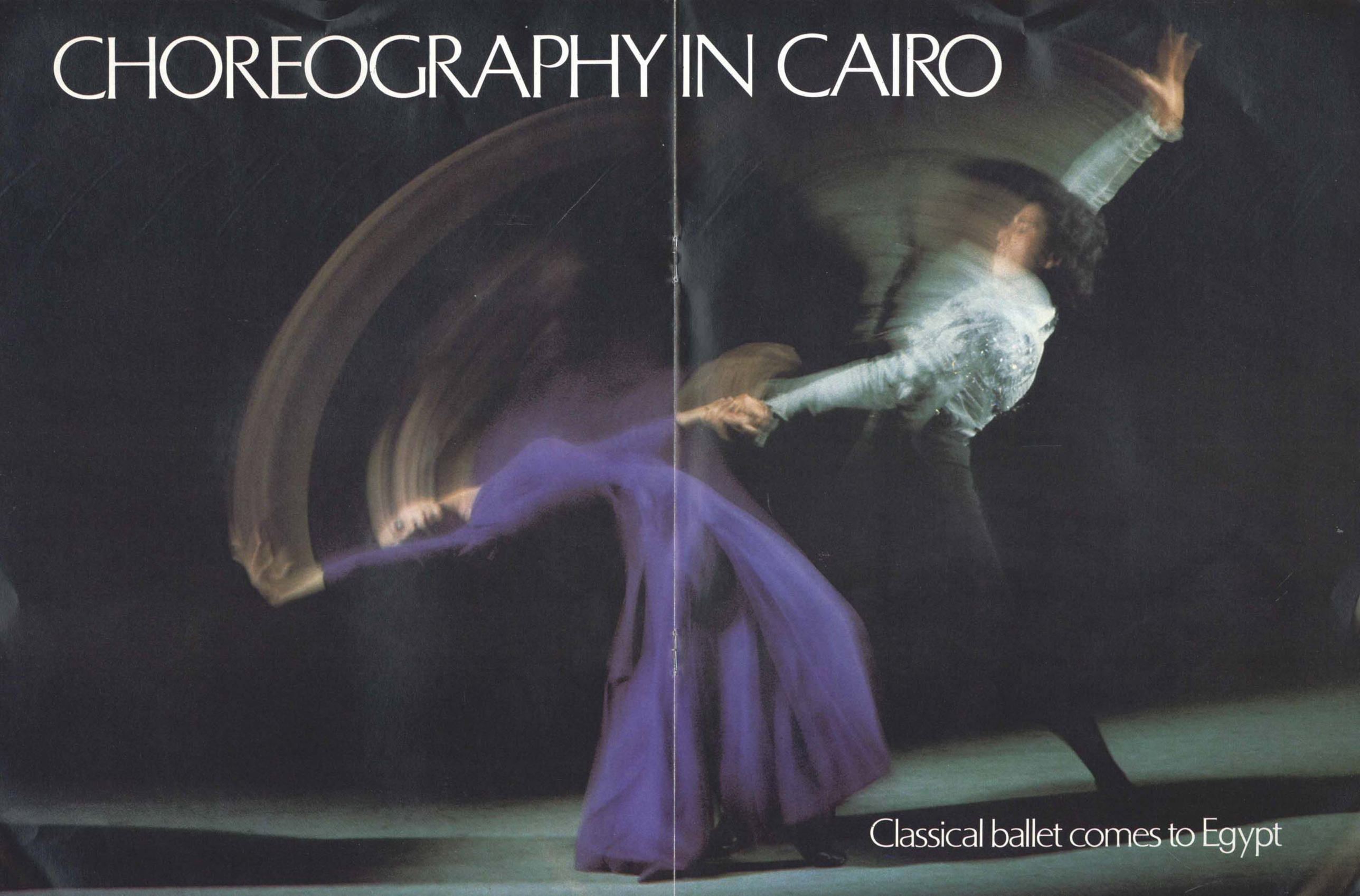
When the first light broke over the mountains, we walked single file toward an outdoor mosque on the outskirts of town. The procession was like a multicolored chain of vibrant red turbans above soft shades of tan and yellow robes and silver jewelry that glistened in the early sun. This handsome parade advanced slowly along a narrow path that wound around huge boulders and up stone alleyways. At the head of the line men were beating drums and singing a religious song which was repeated down the line. I sensed such a strong feeling of togetherness in this community festivity that I found myself singing. The gaiety and goodwill in the air was infectious.

The mood changed to a quieter one when we reached the simple outdoor mosque. The women and girls gathered nearby and the young men and the boys stood around the precincts. In the praying area of the mosque stood the older men and the prayer leader, all facing in the direction of Mecca.

The leader began by reciting passages from the Koran. Then the others joined in prayer. There was no roof or dome over this simple mosque. We were surrounded and humbled by the rugged mass of Oman's mountains. I was touched by the warmth and simplicity of the people I had found in remote Misfa, their lives as joyous as their fresh green terraces carved from the parched, boulder-strewn slopes of the Mountain of the Sun.

Stephen Thomas, now working with an audio-visual production company in Boston, was formerly a photographer for the Department of Antiquities in Oman.

CHOREOGRAPHY IN CAIRO



Classical ballet comes to Egypt

CHOREOGRAPHY IN CAIRO

WRITTEN BY
BARBARA FARRAR KARKABI

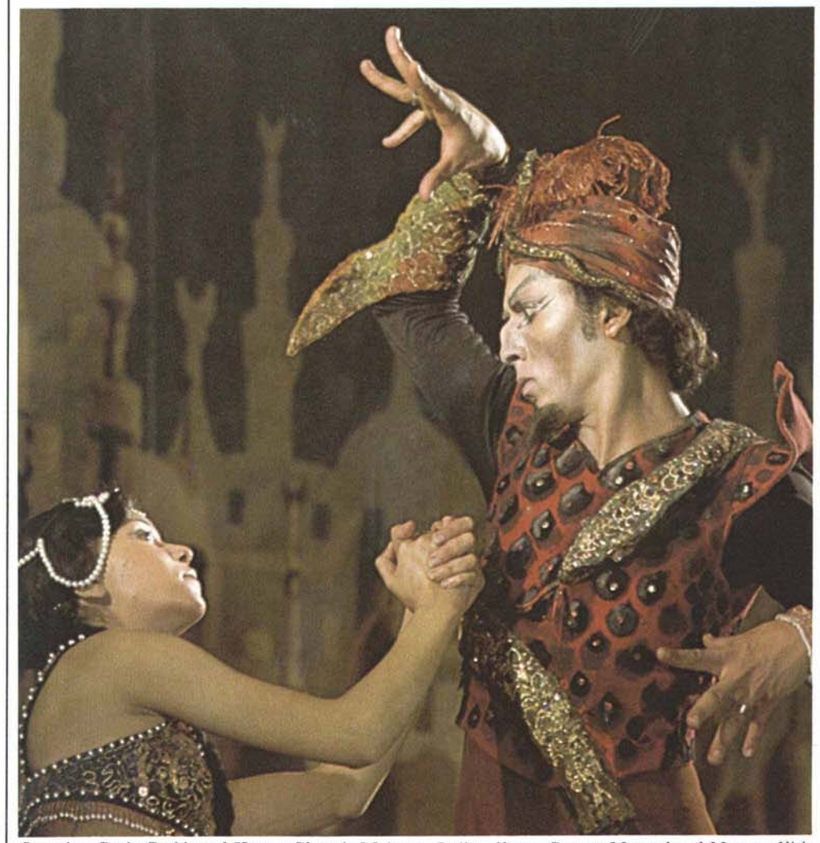
PHOTOGRAPHED BY JOHN FEENEY

Classical ballet is not an art form generally associated with Egypt. Normally most visitors expect to see a belly dancer in action rather than watch a classical pas de deux. But since 1966—when five nervous ballerinas and a cast of young students moved a Cairo audience to tears—classical ballet has been an important, if little known, part of Egyptian cultural life.

Ballet, certainly, is new to Egypt. But to its enthusiastic supporters—whose 18 years of admirable struggle brought ballet to the country—the introduction of ballet is simply another addition to the millennia-long cultural history of that ancient land. Perhaps significantly, its source is a school on the ancient road to the Pyramids of Giza.

Called The Higher Institute of Ballet, the school is part of Egypt's Academy of Arts, a large complex which includes the Conservatory, the Institute of Dramatic Arts and Arab Music and a projected center for folk arts. And, since 1963, the vocational home of a tiny corps of dancers who pioneered Egyptian ballet and eventually won for it a place in the history of Egypt's modern cultural growth.

The idea of starting a national ballet school originated with the Egyptians themselves. In 1958, Dr. Tharwat Okasha, then Minister of Culture, approached the Russians—long renowned as patrons of classical ballet—and asked for assistance. As the response was favorable—the Russians immediately sent an expert from the Bolshoi Ballet to Cairo—the ministry then placed an announcement in the local papers and from the flood of applicants chose 35 children between the ages of eight and 15.



Opposite: Sonia Sarkis and Hassan Sheta in Majnoun Laila. *Above: Sarwat Mourad and Mervat Ali in* Sheherazade *and (opening pages)* Lorciana.

Prior to this time, ballet had been taught in a few private finishing schools, more as a way of trimming the figure than of practicing the art. Now, with the start of the ballet school, the ministry offered classes to anyone at any level of society. Reda Sheta, for example, one of the best male dancers the institute has produced, was the son of Dr. Okasha's chauffeur.

From the original 35 students, there gradually emerged five girls and three boys who showed special potential. These eight were the real "pioneers" of ballet in Egypt, according to Mrs. Enayat Azmi, the current dean of the institute. It was through their energy, dedication and courage that the Cairo Ballet Company was eventually formed, in spite of numerous setbacks. It was also due to their growing skill, for without it dedication alone could not have brought success —or the much-needed government support.

Most of these first eight are still involved with the company in some way. Of the men, Reda Sheta currently dances with the Berlin Opera Ballet, but Ahmed Shukri and Abdel Moneim Kamel remain first dancers with the Cairo group. Of the women, Aleya Abdel el-Razk teaches at the institute and Waddood Faizy directs its Alexandria branch. Two others, Magda Saleh and Maya Selim, are on a leave of absence from the company. Magda is working on her Ph.D in dance at New York University and Maya Selim is studying choreography with the Paris Opera Ballet. Only one woman, Diana Hakak, has actually left the company.

The beginnings of the school were humble; two rooms at the Institute of Physical Training, where the institute held classes three hours each evening. But if humble, Magda Saleh remembers, they were also exciting and demanding. Each evening the young students rushed from their regular school to dance classes and managed, despite tremendous pressure, to keep up standards in both schools. The classrooms were cramped and the students seemed to grow out of practice shoes and leotards as fast as they got them.

Gradually, conditions improved. In 1959, the school moved to the Cinema Institute, where it had the luxury of three rooms for ballet and another three for piano lessons. In 1960, a special teacher was brought for the girls and in 1961 Enayat Azmi was appointed director of the institute, a position she still holds. The same year, the Minister of Culture and Education agreed to organize the school along the lines of those of England's Royal Ballet and the Bolshoi. The plan was to combine academic and dance studies in one building so students could study ballet mornings and attend regular classes in the afternoons. In this way young students could concentrate on their dancing without neglecting their basic education and without being pulled so abruptly from one world to another.

Under Mrs. Azmi's guidance, the primary school opened in 1961, admitting students up to the age of 12. The following year the school added a preparatory section, bringing the age level to 15. In 1963, the building which now houses the school was finished and in short order the second section, ages 15 to 18, and the Higher Institute, equivalent to a university, were organized. In just five years the school had grown from two small rooms with one dance teacher and a pianist to a building of 50 rooms in which were offered ballet classes in the classical tradition and a full academic schedule taught by 12 teachers.

That was also the year that the five leading female students received two-year scholarships to study at the Bolshoi Ballet, one of the world's most difficult ballet schools. They did well–and were, in fact, considered outstanding in character dancing—but remember it today with mixed emotions. "Our technique . . . improved incredibly," says Magda Saleh, "but we suffered tremendously from culture shock. You must remember that none of us had ever been away from home before."

Returning to Egypt, however, was equally difficult. Having seen for themselves the opportunities available to their contemporaries in the Bolshoi, they realized the necessity of forming a company immediately—while they were at their peak. Mrs. Azmi recalls how eager they were. "If the girls had not been able to dance, they would have been like pianos that are never played," she says. Despite opposition, therefore—many thought it was a premature move—the Cairo Ballet Company was formed and began to prepare its first production for presentation.

It was a daring move. In less than a year a relatively new school and infant company were to choose a ballet, mount a professional production and present it to a city that had previously seen only visiting companies. On the other hand they were not without supporters. One was Leonid Lavrovsky, master choreographer of the Bolshoi Ballet for 20 years. Lavrovsky flew to Cairo to stage the production.

The company chose the ballet *The Fountain of Bakhshisarai*, a full-length piece based on a poem by Pushkin, in which a Polish princess, Maria, is kidnapped by a Tartar prince who falls madly in love with her. Maria is eventually killed by Zareema, the prince's wife, who in turn commits suicide. The company picked the ballet because of its Oriental flavor and because they thought the dramatic theme would appeal to Egyptian audiences.

It did. On December 3, 1966, with a nucleus of five ballerinas and a cast made up entirely of students from the school, *The Fountain of Bakhshisarai* premiered in the Cairo Opera House and brought down the house. By the final curtain the audience was in tears and its ovation brought the cast back for curtain calls again and again. Eight years of hard work had paid off: the Cairo Ballet Company was a solid success.

The following evening, Egypt's late President, Gamal Abdel Nasser, came to the performance and afterwards awarded Orders of Merit to the leading dancers and organizers of the show, an unprecedented gesture of support. Lavrovsky was so pleased with the production that he decided to come back to Cairo the following year to stage *Antony and Cleopatra* for the company. Unfortunately, however, the great choreographer died before he was able to return.

After their successful initial season in Cairo, the company went on tour to Aswan in the south of Egypt. As there was no proper theater in that provincial town they danced in a cinema to an audience consisting almost entirely of men dressed in traditional *gallabiyahs* and *kufiyas*. The few women present were the wives of Cairo officials. Although it is safe to assume that the majority of that audience had never seen a ballet in their lives, their reaction was the same as that of the sophisticated Cairo crowd. They loved it. At the end of the performance, an old man went backstage and approached Magda Saleh, who had danced the part of Maria. Tears streaming down his face, he clutched her hands and repeated over and over, "Oh lady, oh lady, how beautiful . . ."

Over the following years, the company extended its repertoire to include such works as *Giselle, The Nutcracker Suite, Don Juan, Paquita, Francesca da Rimini, Don Quixote, The Great Waltz* and, most recently, *Hamlet, Chopiniana* and *Scheherazade*. In 1970, Dr. Okasha invited the great French choreographer Serge Lifar, of the Paris Opera Ballet, to Egypt. He created a special interpretation of *Daphnis and Chloe* for the company in a lovely, neoclassical style. The dancers remember it because it was the first time they had been called on to work with the choreographer in creating their individual roles.

By 1971 the company was dancing fairly regularly and had up to three two-week seasons a year. Nevertheless, the year will probably go down as the blackest in the company's history, for it was that year that Cairo's world-famous Opera House burned to the ground. Built in 1869 to stage Verdi's *Aida* for the opening of the Suez Canal (*Aramco World*, September-October, 1969), the 800-seat Opera House was a small jewel of a building, and its loss was a tragedy, not only for the company, which lost its scenery for seven different ballets, but also for Cairo. Overnight it had lost the only stage to which it could invite international visitors.

Today the institute is housed in a rambling modern building at the Academy of Arts. It is the home of both the company, now numbering over 50 members, and the school, which has nearly 160 students. The staff numbers 24—12 of them Egyptian. The building also houses workshops where all costumes, scenery, makeup and ballet shoes used by the company are made. Staffed entirely by Egyptian artisans. The workshops employ anywhere from 70 to 100 workers. The ballet shoes workshop is important to the company since a dancer can go through a pair of toe shoes in one performance. At the moment, the shop is only able to meet the company's own needs, but as the quality of the shoes is excellent, it is hoped that eventually they will be exported throughout the Middle East.

Students who wish to enter the institute are required to pass a very strict examination. Selwa Gallal is a member of the company and a teacher at the school. She is responsible for selecting and training new students and explains that applicants must be examined by a doctor and tested for a sense of music and rhythm. "Then I personally examine them. I look for a nice arch, long legs and neck, straight back and shoulders. If a child has not got what it takes physically, there is no use accepting him or her; it's just a waste of time on their part and ours."

Once children are accepted, they embark on a nine-year program patterned after that of the Bolshoi school. When they complete the program they are awarded an artistic diploma and allowed to join the company while they continue with a four-year course of higher studies including such subjects as the history of ballet and theater, anatomy and choreography. After graduation, many of the dancers travel overseas for further specialization.

At present, the Cairo Ballet Company and the art of classical ballet in Egypt are at a critical stage in their development. The institute and the company have come a long way in a short time but they have reached the point where the direction for the future must be decided. One problem is isolation from the world of dance. During the '60's, before the destruction of the Opera House, visiting ballet companies were common and students could receive the stimulation and encouragement so necessary for young dancers. Now that visiting groups are less common, the students must settle for watching old film clips.

Top picture: Magda Saleh in her interpretation of ancient Egyptian "stick dance".
Bottom: Student dancers represent "sugar dolls" sold at Egyptian festivals.

Left: Mervat Ali in Lorciana.
Below: Sonia Sarkis and Hassan Sheta in Swan Lake.

On the positive side, the company has made several appearances overseas in recent years, and with a good deal of success. In 1972 Magda Saleh and Abdel Moneim Kamel toured the Soviet Union to critical acclaim. They danced the leading roles in *Giselle* and *Don Quixote* with both the Kirov and Bolshoi companies. The whole company appeared in Moscow and Leningrad later that year, on their first tour outside Egypt, and in 1975, made a 10-day tour in Bulgaria and Yugoslavia.

Members of the company have also participated in two international ballet competitions in Moscow, at four of the world famous competitions in Varna, Bulgaria, and in the first Tokyo International Concorde held last year. Enayat Azmi was invited to be a member of the international jury at the second ballet competition in Moscow and Magda Saleh served on the prestigious jury at Varna in 1974. So far, the company has danced best at the Tokyo Concorde, where two young dancers, Hassan Sheta and Sonia Sarkis appeared. They impressed the jury with a 10-minute piece based on the Arab legend *Majnoun Laila*, with music arranged by the Egyptian composer Halim el-Dabh. As a result, the entire company has been invited to make a tour of Japan this year.

The most pressing need, as far as the dancers are concerned, is to be able to dance more. At the moment, the company's season is extremely brief—approximately 20 performances. A dancer's prime is short and there is always the temptation to leave for the West, where there are opportunities to dance more frequently. "We must be the best-rehearsed company in the world," muses Sonia Sarkis, "as we spend most of the year in rehearsal." A dancer—like any artist—needs challenges; constant rehearsal without the excitement of performance is not enough. When each day is the same, the dancers tend to get discouraged and long for a return to normal life. The members of the company criticize themselves for what they feel is a lack of discipline, attributable to insufficient outside stimulation.

Selwa Gallal, a bright and verbal young woman, has suggested to the government that the company perform at least once a month for the growing number of tourists visiting Egypt. A theater in the center of Cairo would make their performances more accessible to the general public.

The main challenge ahead of the Cairo Ballet Company is that it cannot continue as a mini-Bolshoi in northern Africa. The company must begin to find its own identity. Egyptian dancers feel that although the Russians have given them excellent training and a classical background, they must now begin to develop ballets based on their own rich history and folklore. They must have a style of their own and a resident Egyptian choreographer. As Enayat Azmi says, "Our aim is to have a completely independent Egyptian company as soon as possible."

Several members of the company have already started to choreograph ballets with Egyptian themes. Abdel Moneim Kamel's one-act ballet, *Fortitude*, previewed a few years ago in Cairo. Based on the 1967 War, it was choreographed by Kamel to music arranged by the composer Mukhtar Ashrafi. The school children won a gold medal in Yugoslavia last year for *Oriental Fair*, a charming half-hour ballet choreographed to Arab music by Dr. Magda Izz, a teacher at the school who is also planning a full-length ballet based on the *Majnoun Laila* epic.

Magda Saleh is finishing her Ph D. on Egyptian folk dance tradition and has already choreographed two ballets drawn from this heritage. The first is a modern version of Egyptian "stick dancing" and the second is based on the myth of Isis and Set. Both works have been performed in the United States, and when Miss Saleh returns to Egypt and the Cairo Ballet Company she hopes to add them to the company's repertoire. While no one claims that any of these ballets is great, they are a beginning, and a bold step in the right direction.

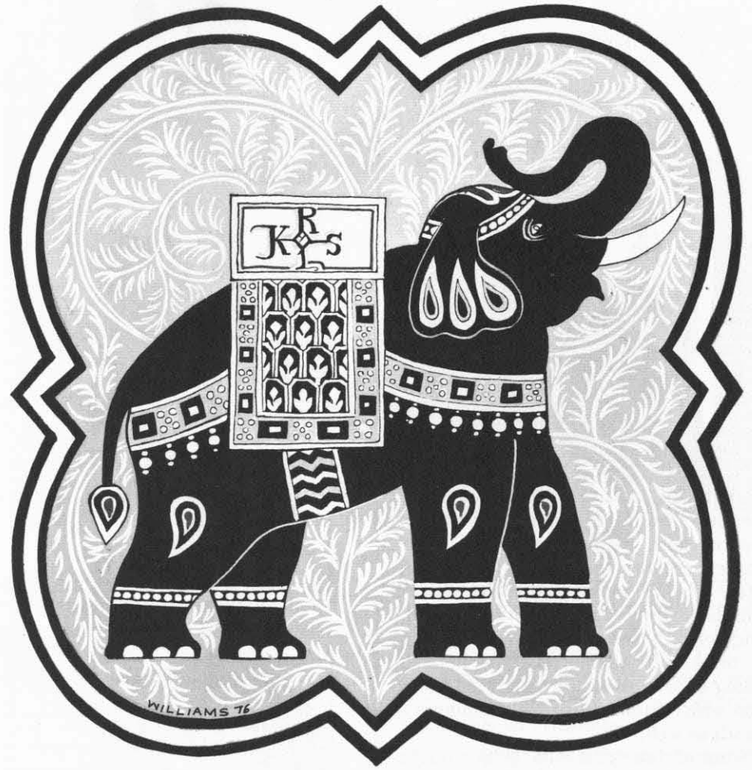
The company is blessed with a number of talented young dancers that any Western group would be proud to have. In particular, there seems to be little trouble recruiting male students and there is no shame attached to a boy choosing a career as a ballet dancer. This reflects, perhaps, the Egyptians' traditional respect for art and beauty. And, considering the country's persistent economic problems, the government has supported the institute generously.

The Cairo Ballet Company is still the only resident classical ballet group in the Middle East. This alone is a tremendous accomplishment. The fact that the school and company were created and supported by their government is something else Egyptians can be proud of. Looking at the eager faces of the young dancers in the company and of the even younger students at the institute, one senses a tremendous potential. With continuing work, support—and luck—they seem likely to succeed in developing a style and an identity of their own which will both contribute something new to the ballet world and make the name of the Cairo Ballet Company known and respected internationally.

Barbara Farrar Karkabi, formerly a reporter for Beirut's Daily Star, *now free-lances from London.*

An Elephant for Charlemagne

WRITTEN BY JON MANDAVILLE ILLUSTRATED BY PENNY WILLIAMS



From the court of Harun al-Rashid...

In the year 798, the Imperial Council of Baghdad, Abbasid capital of the Islamic Empire, received and initialed a personal request from Harun al-Rashid, whom history remembers as the caliph who opened Islam's Golden Age.

Later, after the council had initialed the document and the clerks had distributed copies to the appropriate offices, a clutch of officials fanned out through Baghdad to make purchases or place orders with various artisans, merchants and specialists. One specialist—an animal trainer—was so surprised by the order placed with him that he could not reply. At length, however, he smiled and spoke. "An elephant? An elephant! Maybe. Just maybe."

So, with that episode, Harun al-Rashid obtained an elephant that, three years later, would startle Europe, delight the Holy Roman Emperor and, ever so slightly, affect the diplomacy of the medieval world.

At that time—in 801—there were three major powers in Europe and the Mediterranean, each ruling a portion of what had been the Roman Empire. There was Byzantium, ruling from Constantinople over what it could of the eastern half of the old Roman Empire. There was the Kingdom of the Franks in the west, reaching out from the banks of the Rhine for the scattered pieces of Caesar's Gaul, Rome itself and northern Europe. Finally, stretching along the southern Mediterranean shores, and blanketing the whole of what we know today as the Middle East, as well as Spain, was a gigantic state administered from the new city of Baghdad by the Abbasid Dynasty of the Islamic Empire.

At that time too, historical forces had elevated to the thrones of those empires three rulers whose destinies were already interwoven with past events: Harun al-Rashid, later the fabled caliph of *The Thousand and One Nights*; Irene, Empress of Byzantium, and Charlemagne—Charles the Great—ruler of the kingdom of the people known as Franks.

Nearly 70 years before, Charlemagne's grandfather—Charles Martel—had led the Franks into the Battle of Tours which brought the Muslim thrust into France to a decisive halt. And Charlemagne himself, 20 years before, had crossed the Pyrenees in a futile attempt to secure one of his frontiers with a victory over the Muslim forces in Spain. It was a disastrous campaign, but it did persuade Charlemagne that he would, some day, have to come to terms with the Abbasids in Baghdad.

The Empress Irene, as it happened, was also aware of the importance of the Abbasids; their armies had recently besieged Constantinople, her capital, and to end the siege she had been forced to promise an annual tribute to Baghdad. Irene, therefore, was also interested in an alliance—but with Charlemagne.

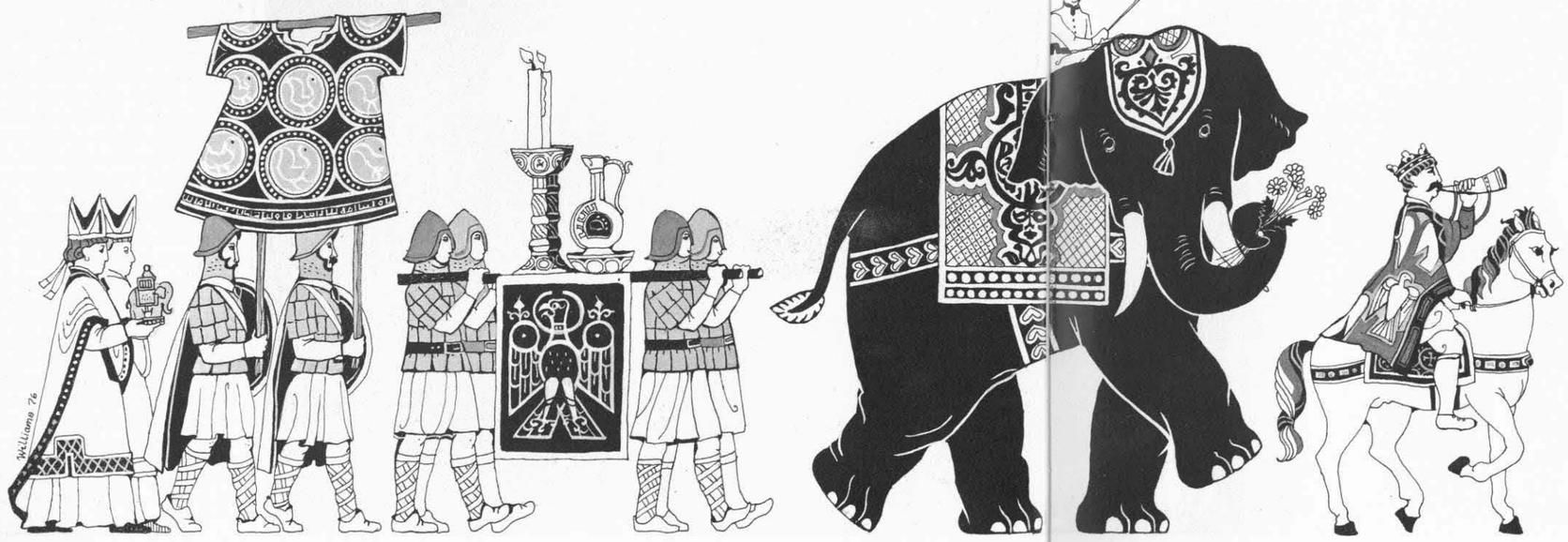
Charlemagne was non-committal. Why not wait, he asked himself, until the threat of Abbasid power forced Irene to offer him more? Why not, in fact, join the Abbasids in filling the vacuum that the weakening Byzantine state would leave? Why not, in sum, negotiate with Harun al-Rashid?

So it was that in 798 Charlemagne dispatched an embassy to Baghdad with orders to seek an alliance with Harun al-Rashid. And so it was that Harun al-Rashid, who was also interested in negotiation, decided to send Charlemagne a very special gift—a gift, he said in his note to the Imperial Council, that few in Europe had seen since Hannibal and his Carthaginians marched across the Alps. The gift, said the Caliph, would be an elephant.

There are no details on where the Caliph's animal trainer found the elephant. Or how he got it to Europe. But find it and get it there he did. In the spring of 801 the huge creature lumbered patiently down the streets of Aachen, an old Roman town in western Germany near today's border between Belgium and Holland—a town newly prosperous since Charlemagne, ruling King of the Franks and recently crowned Holy Roman Emperor, had chosen it as his residence a few years earlier.

To Aachen, the arrival of the elephant was an exciting event. Crowds turned out to meet it. Boys, running and slipping over the cobblestone streets, shouted excitedly to their friends to come see. Adults, gathered in taverns or working in shops, turned out to point and stare at this gray beast with the stubby tail and the long trailing nose.

It was probably exciting for Charlemagne too. For the elephant was only one of many wondrous gifts that Charlemagne received from Harun al-Rashid—either then or later. There was,



for example, a carved horn of ivory, a golden tray and golden pitcher, perfumes, a set of chessmen, bolts of fine cloth, a large tent and a richly woven robe of honor with the phrase "There is but

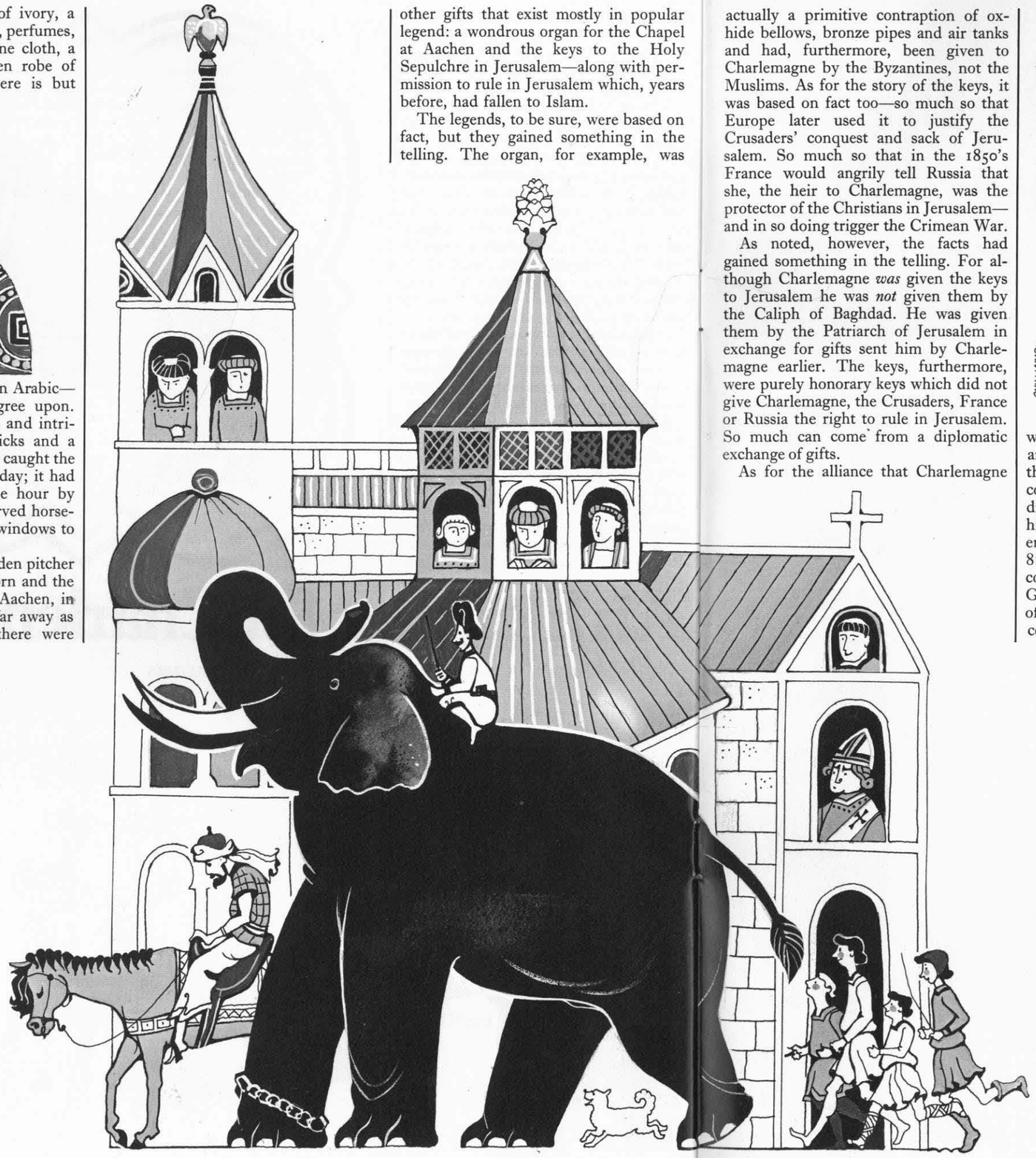
one God" embroidered on it in Arabic—a point both rulers could agree upon. There were also two very tall and intricately worked brass candlesticks and a complicated water clock which caught the fancy of the historians of the day; it had 12 brass balls that struck the hour by falling on a cymbal and 12 carved horsemen which came out of little windows to parade as well.

Some of those gifts—the golden pitcher and tray, the chess set, the horn and the robe—can be found today in Aachen, in Saint-Denis, France, and as far away as Durham, in England. But there were other gifts that exist mostly in popular legend: a wondrous organ for the Chapel at Aachen and the keys to the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem—along with permission to rule in Jerusalem which, years before, had fallen to Islam.

The legends, to be sure, were based on fact, but they gained something in the telling. The organ, for example, was actually a primitive contraption of ox-hide bellows, bronze pipes and air tanks and had, furthermore, been given to Charlemagne by the Byzantines, not the Muslims. As for the story of the keys, it was based on fact too—so much so that Europe later used it to justify the Crusaders' conquest and sack of Jerusalem. So much so that in the 1850's France would angrily tell Russia that she, the heir to Charlemagne, was the protector of the Christians in Jerusalem—and in so doing trigger the Crimean War.

As noted, however, the facts had gained something in the telling. For although Charlemagne *was* given the keys to Jerusalem he was *not* given them by the Caliph of Baghdad. He was given them by the Patriarch of Jerusalem in exchange for gifts sent him by Charlemagne earlier. The keys, furthermore, were purely honorary keys which did not give Charlemagne, the Crusaders, France or Russia the right to rule in Jerusalem. So much can come from a diplomatic exchange of gifts.

As for the alliance that Charlemagne



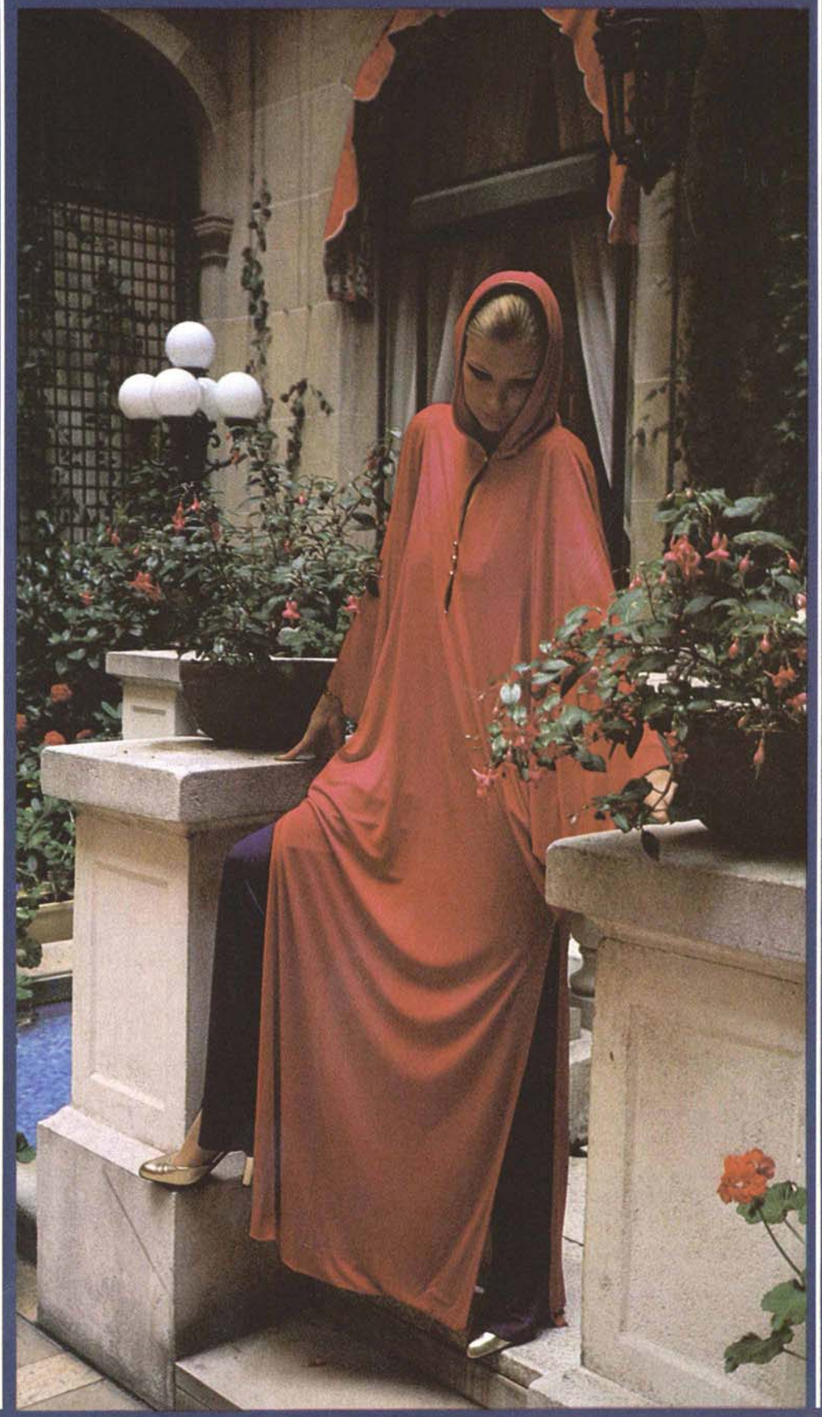
wanted, it never came off. Charlemagne and Harun al-Rashid achieved no more than a vague understanding on trade and communications. Charlemagne, however, did keep the elephant and, later, even took him into battle where he frightened enemy horses. By the time he died in 810, his name—Abul Abbas—had become a household name in France and Germany and even the laconic historian of the Royal Frankish Annals, normally concerned only with kings and wars and eclipses, was sufficiently moved by that event to break into his narrative in 811 and add, ". . . the elephant which Harun, King of the Saracens sent, suddenly died." So passed one of the more curious episodes in the history of European-Middle Eastern relations.

Jon Mandaville is an associate professor of history and Middle East studies at Portland State University and a frequent contributor to Aramco World.

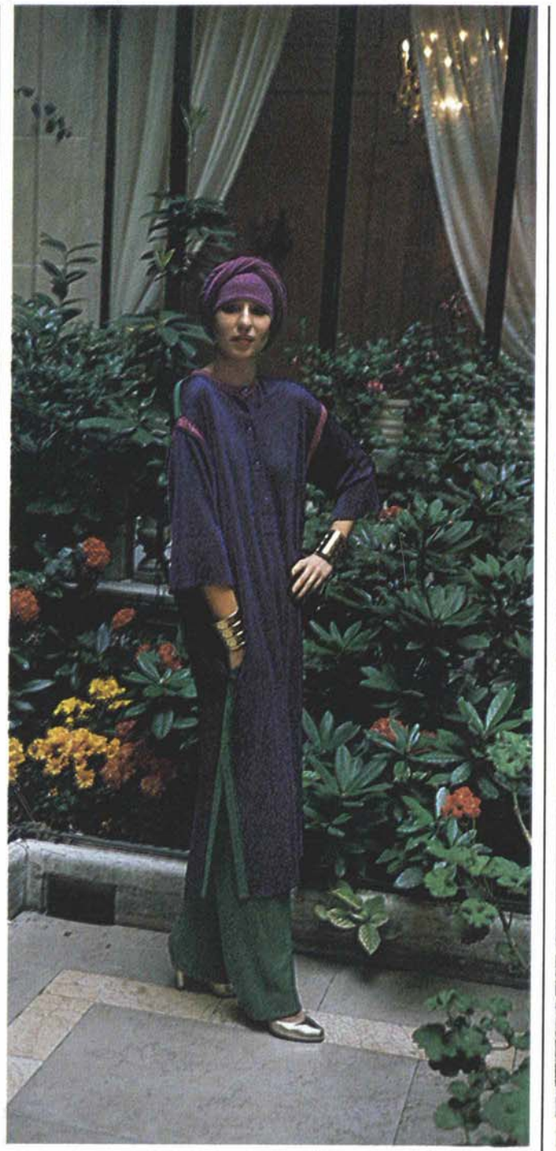
Couture Arabesque

WRITTEN BY PATRICIA McCOLL

PHOTOGRAPHED BY REGINALD GRAY



In fashion-the best of two worlds



Preceding page, left: American-born Ramona wears Georges Rech's sportswear approach to the kaftan. He does it in a desert-sand Irish tweed and pipes it in tobacco suede. Photographed at the Palais Royal, Ramona wears the kaftan with a bulky turtleneck sweater and slim tobacco corduroy pants, but it goes equally well over a skirt or dress. On her head is top French hat designer Jean-Charles Brosseau's version of the agal and kufiya. The agal is a braid of putty and gold wool and is pulled down over a cream plaid wool square. The coat retails in Paris for about $150.

French-born Sylvie (*above*) and Irish-born Ambre (*preceding page, right*) wear Middle-Eastern inspired fashions by Marc Bohan for Christian Dior in the garden of the Plaza Athénee Hotel in Paris.

Sylvie's deep sapphire-blue Lurex tunic banded in emerald and shocking pink and worn with green Lurex trousers is Bohan's sophisticated interpretation of an Egyptian boatman's shirt. The retail price in France is about $280 for the tunic; $100 for the trousers. Ambre's geranium silk jersey, hooded djellaba is piped in gold. Under it she wears side-split Parma violet silk jersey trousers. The djellaba sells for about $260; the trousers for $80.

Chilean-born model Elsa wears one of Saint Laurent's favorites from the Rive Gauche collection: a huge strawberry-wool burnoose with black passementerie trim and a big black tassel to end the pointed hood. Photographed in Paris on the Champ de Mars with the Eiffel Tower in the background. The cape costs about $260.

In Paris fashion, these days, the wind is from the East. Billowing burnooses, drifting djellabas and clinging kaftans are turning up more and more in the top French couture and ready-to-wear collections. But while there is never any doubt as to the origins of these classic Arab-world shapes, the translations are very definitely French.

The French love affair with Arab-inspired fashions is a long one, dating back at least 65 years to Paul Poiret's "1002 Nights" party in Paris in June 1911. Poiret, the most famous couturier of his time, loved the lushness and rich color mixes of fabrics from the Middle East. Inspired by these fabrics, by Islamic miniatures he had seen in London's Victoria and Albert Museum and by the exotica of the Ballet Russe's *Sheherazade*—first performed in Paris in 1909—Poiret decided to launch his version of Middle Eastern fashion.

The couturier received his 300 guests sitting on a green and gold throne, magnificently attired in a fur-trimmed, gray, quilted satin kaftan and a bejeweled turban. Nearby, locked in a golden cage, was "the Sultan's favorite"—Poiret's wife Denise—dressed in a short hoop skirt and harem pantaloons. Two months later Poiret presented a couture collection starring the pantaloons.

The public was scandalized and a rival couturier commented: "No one talks of art, literature or public affairs. All conversation is concentrated on that detestable garment." Poiret, however, persisted and when, a year later, he showed another collection of pantaloon gowns—in both day and evening versions—he received orders worth one million francs in one day. What appealed to Poiret—and to his liberated customers—was the freedom of movement that the softly looped pantaloons permitted.

While in 1911 Paul Poiret found his inspiration in a highly imaginative—even fictionalized—interpretation of Arab women's dress, many of today's designers are inspired by what Arab men wear—designers such as Yves Saint Laurent.

Saint Laurent, who is as influential now as Poiret was in his day, was born in Oran, Algeria. The designer, who opened his own couture house in 1962 when he was only 23 years old, now splits his time between Paris and his house in Marrakesh, Morocco. Whether designing for his couture or his Rive Gauche ready-to-wear collection, he always has an Arabian touch. Some seasons, it's as subtle as soutache braid and ball-button trimmings, but for last summer, his Rive Gauche collection was almost completely built around classic kaftan shapes.

"I love the simple, traditional forms of both Arab men's and women's dress," Saint Laurent said. "To me, nothing in fashion is more beautiful than the hooded burnoose."

For his winter ready-to-wear collection, he turned his imagination loose on Middle Eastern split-level dressing. The starting point was a man's jacket worn over a tunic shirt and trousers. As put back together by Saint Laurent, it's pure fashion fantasy.

Three years ago, Saint Laurent opened a Rive Gauche boutique in Kuwait where, Rive Gauche directrice Clara Saint noted, clients picked almost the same models as Parisian shoppers did. The kaftan dresses from last summer's collection were best-sellers because of their soft, pretty colors and the lightweight Indian cotton fabrics.

And Saint Laurent is not alone. Two years ago Christian Dior designer Marc Bohan fell under the spell of the Middle East when he spent his holidays aboard a boat on the Nile. Since then, his collections have reflected his interest in things Arabian—from jewelry, freely adapted from Egyptian art treasures, to fashion shapes.

When you have Bohan's fashion eye, inspiration can be as simple as an Egyptian boatman's shirt. "It is cut very slim, but with deep armholes and a wide sleeve for ease of movement," Bohan said. He has repeated variations of the shape for coats, dresses and evening tunics

Below: Photographed in front of the Trocadero fountains in Paris: Yves Saint Laurent's split-level dressing—an eggplant velvet, hip-length kaftan with gold braid trim, over a knee-covering rose silk jacquard tunic and slim eggplant velvet pants buttoned up the sides with tiny gold balls. On the head: a Moroccan-inspired velvet skullcap trimmed and tasseled in gold. The kaftan jacket sells in Paris for about $320; the silk tunic at about $250 and the velvet pants at $185.

Right: Photographed in designer Thea Porter's Paris apartment amid furnishings from Syria and Iraq, Danish-born Marianne wears one of Thea's "romantic fantasies"—white chiffon harem bloomers with a white chiffon tunic shirt heavily embroidered in silver. The price in France is about $800.

in both his couture and ready-to-wear collections. He also loved the contrast between these very slim shapes and the voluminous wrappings and folds of *gallabiyahs*—called *djellabas* in North Africa—and abas.

Then there is Damascus-born Thea Porter. Formerly a British Embassy wife in Beirut, Mrs. Porter has had her own boutique in London since 1966 and in 1976 opened a Paris boutique. "I've always felt very envious of Arab women because they can hide behind their clothes," said Mrs. Porter. "It is a very protected and secure way to feel."

In her collections Thea Porter is obviously inspired by the way Arab women dress. "It's important that the end result should never be a costume," she said, although she laughingly admitted that some of her creations are nothing an Arab woman would wear. "They are my own romantic fantasies." Among those who share Thea's fantasies by wearing her clothes are a Jordanian princess and many wealthy French and British women.

Mrs. Porter feels the present interest in Arab-inspired fashion is a fad, inspired by all the talk about petrodollars. "It has led to some awful parodies—exaggerated ideas of what harem dresses are," she said. Her own business, however, totally based on Middle Eastern inspired forms and, wherever possible, Middle Eastern fabrics, prospered before the so-called oil crisis focused interest on that part of the world.

French ready-to-wear manufacturer Georges Rech, whose best-selling coat for winter is a kaftan, disagrees that the current Western interest in Arab-inspired fashion is a fad. "We are just rediscovering classic forms which can be adapted to fit perfectly into our way of life, too," he said.

Patricia McColl, formerly Paris Fashion Editor for Women's Wear Daily, *is a free-lance fashion writer and consultant in Paris.*
