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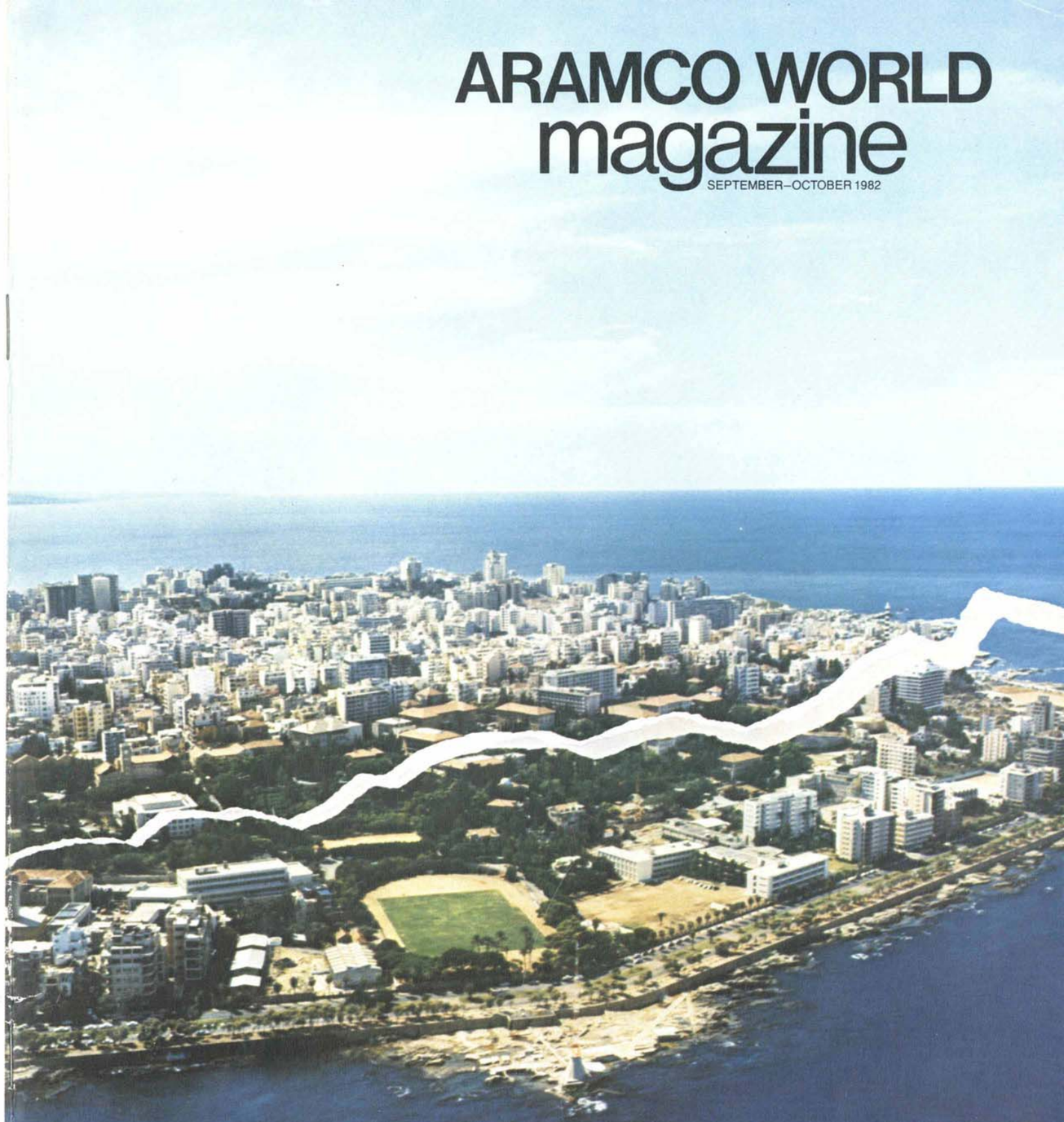

Paradise Lost: a eulogy for Lebanon

ARAMCO WORLD magazine

VOL 33 NO. 5 PUBLISHED BI-MONTHLY SEPTEMBER–OCTOBER 1982

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Lebanon, as the memoirs in this special section suggest, was in many ways unique. To those born there and to those who came to visit it was a special place. This is particularly true for the editors, writers, photographers and designers of *Aramco World Magazine,* which for many years was edited and printed in Beirut. We like to think that we were part of the ferment, growth and excitement that characterized those golden years – that now are gone.

Like Baghdad in the early years of the Abbasid Caliphate, Beirut was a multinational, multiracial, multilinguistic society: Islam and Christianity lived fraternally; and though Arabic was the official language the streets were a babel of tongues – Armenian, Kurdish, Japanese, English, French, German, Greek. Beirut was a center of modern Arabic poetry, a center of education and a center of publishing. Beirut in its heyday was a center of banking, trade, agriculture and industry and from that success came the funds for everything else: the social life, the leisurely manners, the fascination with food, talk, fashion.

To miss what may seem to be superficial pleasures is not, however, to be unfeeling; we know, better than most, the bloody, brutal aspects of the Lebanese tragedy. And though outsiders, we were not unaware that there was also poverty, injustice, cruelty and corruption too. We did know, we did care.

Most of us, though, were not in a position to help much. And most of us, admittedly under the spell of Lebanon, tended to think that somehow it would all work out. We saw it all with hope rather than with despair. After all, we said, food was cheap, the climate soft. Basically, we thought, men were generous and good. Despair hardly existed, except in the camps, and even there one felt that for the young, at least, there was hope too. Our golden age may have been an illusion, but it was, we like to think, an illusion that men could live by.

The Editors

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Inside Front cover : The heart of the commercial center of modern Beirut, Lebanon , in the 1960's and 70's the financial capital of the Middle East.

Paradise Lost: a eulogy

Many times I've soared above your milk-white heights,
Winged far above your fertile plain, your terraced seaward slopes,
Drifted down shafts of sunlight through towering coastal clouds
Until water, wind-flecked, gleamed underneath,
And sparkling city rushed to meet my expectations.

I loved you.
And my eyes, when I looked down on you in overflight,
Could pierce the distant heavy haze of summer heat...

I knew, not from the torrid sky but from my being,
Each glistening snow-crowned peak,
The cool green spread of scented branches over rock-bound ancient roots,
Your stone-cut villages and temples of your every age.

I knew your vine-clad fruited hillsides
Stepping, blossom-strewn, toward an aery blue abyss
Where freshening torrents misted from the precipice to plunge
Through lush and shadowed depths,
To turquoise pools lapping boulders, lizard warm in oleander sunshine,
Then spring to nurse plantations on your citrus shore.

I knew your golden, sea-framed capital,
Your sons and daughters were my friends.

Today, in overflight once more,
I squint through glare of sun and pall of dust and heat and smog
To recognize a landmark from my heart,
Cool peak, sweet plain, sheltered canyon, verdant coast,
But all are shrouded now...
I hurry on across the sea.
I fear to sink into the haze to touch the ground
And learn the clouded view from heaven has become the cursed reality.

Overflight by William Tracy

Paradise Lost: a history of Lebanon

WRITTEN BY PAUL LUNDE

Fifteen kilometers north of Beirut the coast road to Tripoli crosses the Dog River – Nahr al-Kalb. To the left are the waters of the Mediterranean, to the right the summits of Mount Lebanon. Roman paving stones underlie the modern road. The remnants of a Roman bridge can still be seen, and further upstream, the arches of a 14th century Mamluk bridge.

On the sides of the gorge through which the river runs to the sea may be read the history of Lebanon. Here are carved, in Egyptian hieroglyphics, cuneiform, Greek, Latin, Arabic, French and English, the names of conquerors. Some are clear as the day they were carved, others almost effaced by time.

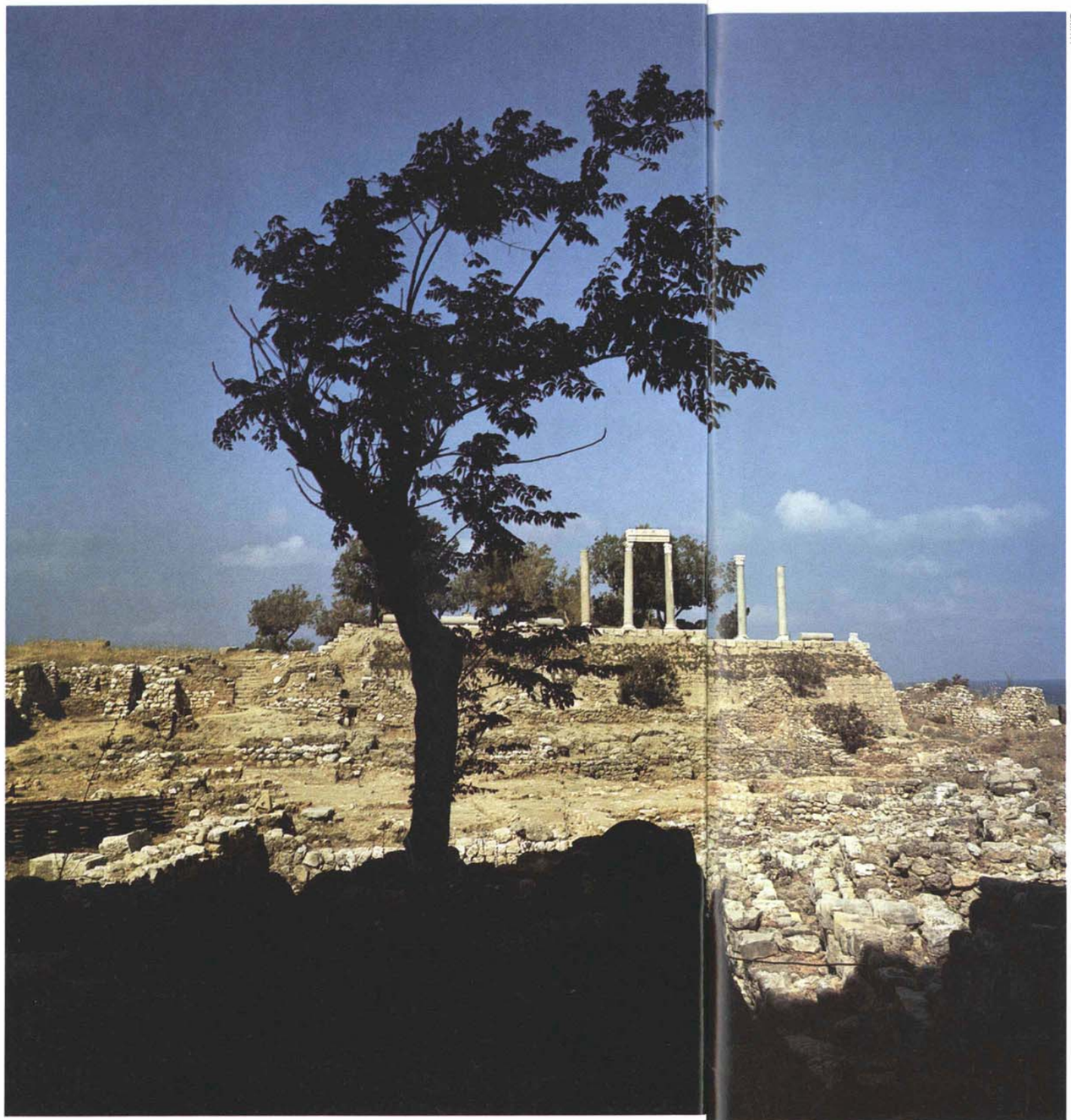
The earliest inscription is by Ramses II, builder of Abu Simbel (1304-1237 B.C.). A more recent inscription records the withdrawal of French troops from the Lebanese Republic in 1946.

As the centuries passed, new conquerors carved their names on the cliffs: Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, who conquered Syria and Palestine – and whose dream was interpreted by Daniel; the tyrant Caracalla, whose inscription was set up in his honor by the IIId Legion of Gaul.

From the 14th century there is a monumental Arabic inscription by the Mamluk Sultan Barquq, who tried belatedly to fortify Syria against the hordes of Tamerlane, and from the 19th there is a record of the French expedition of 1860, the beginning of the French military presence in Lebanon.

As we approach our own time, the inscriptions jostle one another more closely. A plaque in English records the taking of Damascus, Homs and Aleppo by the British Army in 1918. Another stele, again in English, records the liberation of Lebanon and Syria from the Vichy French in 1941. Finally, there is the stele in French commemorating the evacuation of French troops from Lebanon in 1946.

There is more to history than war. Lebanon is also a land of myth and of the origins of civilization. At Byblos, a few miles up the coast, was the city classical authors thought the oldest in the world. It was here that Time (Kronos), child of Heaven (Uranos) and Earth (Gaia) were first worshipped. This is perhaps a way of telling us that here recorded history began.



SMITH

Above: The ruins of an ancient temple at Byblos, the Phoenician city that gave us the word bible, *proudly look out to sea.*

Right: Man's inhumanity to man.

Up the coast from Byblos there is another river running into the Mediterranean. This is the River of Adonis, now called the Nahr Ibrahim, the River of Abraham at whose source classical mythographers placed the grave of Adonis, lover of Aphrodite. Adonis was killed by a wild boar sent by a jealous Mars – the god of War. During the torrential rains of February, iron-bearing clays washed down from the surrounding hills, tinge the river red: the blood of Adonis.

If Time and Love both were born along this coast, so was the means of defeating the first and extolling the second. Here the Phoenicians invented the alphabet, that tremendous advance on the cumbersome hieroglyphic script of ancient Egypt and the baffling cuneiform syllabary, with its more than 500 signs. The first major step towards this most crucial of man's technological advances was taken a mere hour's drive north of the River of Adonis, over the border in Syria, near the town of Latakiya. In 1928 a peasant plowing his fields at Ras Shamra discovered the site later identified as ancient Ugarit, and in the palace archives were found tablets written in a modification of cuneiform, in which 30 signs were chosen from the repetoire of 500 and assigned alphabetic values. Cadmus the Phoenician, whose very name is derived from the semitic root meaning 'ancient', then carried the gift to Thebes, which he founded, along with the Greek word for book.

The Phoenicians had overseas colonies in North Africa, Spain and Southern France; they were the first world power whose economy was based upon trade rather than agriculture. Able seafarers, they built their boats from the cedars of Lebanon, and established a thalassaocracy powerful enough to threaten Rome. The oldest monument of European literature, the Odyssey, has even been said to be structured around a *periplus,* a set of secret Phoenician sailing directions for the Mediterranean.

Alexander and his successors, the Seleucids, ruled Syria and Lebanon. The Romans followed, and built Baalbek, in the fertile valley between the ranges of the Lebanon and the Anti-Lebanon mountains. Then came Christianity, and Lebanon and Syria were soon studded with churches and monastries. During early Byzantine times, when fierce theological controversies raged throughout the Near East, sectaries found safe refuge in Mt Lebanon; even today there are ten recognized Christian sects in these mountains.

Beirut itself has been occupied since prehistoric times; it is first mentioned by name in cuneiform texts dating from the 14th century B.C. It was also a Phoenician port, but first achieved prominence in the second century B.C. as a center of trade and learning. In 14 B.C. the Romans granted the city the coveted title of 'colony' calling it *Colonia Julia Augusta Felix Berytus,* after the wife of Augustus Caesar. Under Roman rule, Beirut became an important administrative center with a university specializing in law, and splendid public buildings. In A.D. 551, however, Beirut was destroyed by an earthquake and tidal wave and when the Muslims arrived – 84 years later, in A.D. 635, little remained of its former magnificence.

SIPA-PRESS

Muslim rule brought new prosperity to the city, and Beirut and other cities of the coast became known for their textiles – the silk for which was grown and woven in the hinterland. Trade flourished, particularly with Egypt, to which Lebanon sent wood, fruit, rice and silk. But then came the Crusaders, who, in between bouts of savage fighting, cultivated their own estates in much the same way as did their Muslim neighbors, gradually adopting local customs. For them, Lebanon was an earthly paradise, and they fought hard to retain it. It was at this time that the first attempts were made to unify the eastern and western churches, which had long since parted

Paradise Lost: a history of Lebanon

company, but the Maronites, who take their name from the fifth century Saint Maron, were the only community to accept the authority of the Pope.

Eventually Saladin drove the Crusaders from the Holy Land and in the 14th and 15th centuries, Syria, Lebanon and Palestine were controlled by the Mamluks, who granted large estates to their officers in return for military service and taxes. In time, these estates became almost hereditary in Lebanon.

In 1516 Syria and Lebanon were absorbed into the Ottoman Empire, when the Ottoman Sultan Selim the Grim defeated a Mamluk army at Marj Dabiq. The Ottomans preserved the social and economic system that had grown up in Lebanon over the years. Each religious community, or *millet,* preserved its autonomy, in return for a tax paid to the Ottoman governors; in a sense this was the foundation of the semi-feudal arrangements of modern political leaders.

It was at this time that the Druze first began to play an important part in the history of Lebanon and Syria. Although only about six percent of the population of Lebanon, their military achievements earned them a historical role out of proportion to their numbers. An extremist Shi'a obscurantist sect, originating in the 11th century, they have diverged so far from orthodox Islam, that some considered them a separate religious community.

The fortunes of the Druze in Lebanon were laid by Fakhr al-Din I who helped the Ottoman forces against the Mamluks at the battle of Marj Dabiq. In return, he was granted the overlordship of the area of Lebanon called the Chouf, between Beirut and Sidon. His grandson, Fakhr al-Din II, by a combination of political intrigue and military daring, succeeded in expanding the borders of this little area until it included most of what is today Lebanon – excluding Tripoli – and extending as far south as Nazareth in Palestine.

The basis of his power was his historic alliance with the Maronite Christians who sought his aid against a Kurdish ruler in Northern Lebanon – an enemy of Fakhr al-Din.

Fakhr al-Din in 1605, succeeded in defeating his rival near the lovely port of Jounieh, and most of the Maronite lands came under his hegemony.

In the late 16th century, the Maronites formally united with Rome; since a Maronite College had been founded in Rome in 1584 to train Maronites in western languages and ideas, Fakhr al-Din, in seeking to preserve his independence from the Ottomans, logically looked to Italy. In 1608 he signed a treaty with the Grand Duke of Tuscany to set up a Medici Kingdom in the Levant. Although this grandiose scheme came to nothing, the connection with Italy reinforced the link between Druze and Maronite in Lebanon, and a Maronite Bishop was even sent to Rome and Florence to represent Fakhr al-Din's interests. It is probably from this period that the legend of Druze descent from the Crusaders dates; it may well have been a story spread by Fakhr al-Din himself to win support in Europe.

The Ottoman Porte was very worried by these developments, and Fakhr al-Din was forced to flee to Tuscany in order to avoid the humiliation of a military defeat at Turkish hands. He returned to Lebanon in 1618 in fighting form and the Ottomans eventually recognized him as an independent ruler. He devoted himself to establishing order in his country, encouraging trade and improving silk production with a view to the insatiable Italian market.

Fakhr al-Din saw that Lebanon could only be ruled by striking a just balance between the religious communities that made it up. This realization of the need for interdenominational harmony was the keystone of his success, and indeed the success of Modern Lebanon.

The European powers had succeeded, in the 16th century, in obtaining permission from the Ottoman Porte to set up trading communities in the cities of the Levant. In the 17th century, Rome sponsored missions in these cities, and modern medical and intellectual advances, among them printing, were introduced. That, and the establishment of schools in Rome to educate members of the various eastern Christian communities, gave Lebanon a new class of western-educated men. As substantial numbers of eastern rite Christians joined the Roman Church, the number of religious communities in Lebanon also proliferated: Lebanon and Syria were thus bound, from the 17th century to the present, to Europe in a way that was not true of other Middle Eastern countries.

During the 18th and 19th centuries, European influence – and interference – in Lebanon became pervasive. The French and British consuls in Beirut had great power, and used it to influence the selection of local officials. The 'modern' period of Middle Eastern history began with Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1798; when Muhammad Ali took power in Egypt in the wake of Napoleon's invasion, he followed the example of Fakhr al-Din and gradually made himself independent of the Ottomans. Hisson Ibrahim, ruled Syria and Lebanon for 10 years, between 1832 and 1842.

Beirut, beginning to be a modern city, saw trade flourish and the first American Protestant missionaries arrive – to lay the foundations for what would eventually become the American University of Beirut.

The impact of trade with Europe was initially disastrous. With the European industrial revolution in full swing, the markets of the East were soon flooded with cheap textiles and other goods. In 1833, only one year after Ibrahim opened the area to trade with Britain and France, 10,000 Syrian textile workers were thrown out of work. The caravan trade came to a halt, destroying the livelihood of many. Small cottage industries, the mainstay of the Lebanese and Syrian economies, were wiped out overnight. By 1838 even the Fez, the mark of the oriental gentleman, was imported from France and the Bedouin of the hinterland was wearing a *kufiya* made in the mills of Birmingham. The silk industry of Syria and Lebanon, so carefully nurtured by Fakhr al-Din, was at an end, as were all the various labor-intensive jobs associated with it. A way of life many centuries old had disappeared within a few short years.

It was also during this period that the European powers, became supporters of the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire. Hence, when war broke out between Muhammad Ali and the Ottomans in 1839, the European Powers intervened on behalf of Turkey. In 1840 a joint British, Austrian and Turkish force landed on the Syrian coast and brought Egyptian rule to an end. Once the traditional balance of power had been broken, civil war ensued.

A 19th-century engraving of the Dog River by William Henry Bartlett captures the mystery of the historic site.

The Maronites of Kisrawan, the area surrounding Jounie, revolted and set up a short-lived peasant commune. The breakdown of traditional landlord-peasant relationships culminated in the terrible massacres of 1860, in Syria and Lebanon. It is pleasant to note that the Amir 'Abd al-Qadr, the heroic enemy of French colonialism in Algeria, then in exile in Damascus, extended his protection to the Christians of that city, and succeeded in saving the lives of some 1500.

The French, historically the protectors of the Maronite community, landed a military force and quelled the rebellion. At their urging, Lebanon was made a separate administrative district from Syria. Although still theoretically a part of the Ottoman Empire, practically it was in the hands of the French, who quickly made their influence felt. In 1864, the position of Lebanon within the Ottoman Empire was formalized. It was to be autonomous, with a Christian governor chosen by the Sultan, but whose appointment was subject to the approval of the European Powers. Western influence accelerated. By the time World War I broke out, there were 300 foreign schools along the Levantine littoral, with a total enrollment of 25,000 students. At the same time, large numbers of Lebanese emigrated to North and South America.

When the Axis was defeated in World War I, Britain and France divided the former provinces of the Ottoman Empire between them. France was granted the Mandate for Syria (including Lebanon) in 1920, but she had to fight to impose her authority. In 1925, the Syrians revolted, defeating a French task force sent against them. In 1927 the French shelled Damascus, and finally brought the rebellion to manageable proportions. They had less trouble in Lebanon, where the Maronites regarded them as a protection against absorbtion into a Muslim controlled Syria. In 1926 Lebanon was made a republic. The constitution provided for the representation of all the various sectors of the population on a proportional basis, in both government and administration. This has been the rule ever since.

In 1943, Lebanon attained full independence. Before the outbreak of the Second World War, in 1937, the pattern had been established of having a Maronite Christian President and a Sunni Muslim Premier. In 1946, the last French troops left the country, and Lebanon was fully independent.

Subsequent events have shown how delicately balanced the Lebanese government had to be to survive. Demographic changes, such as the influx of refugees from Palestine, and political events, such as the rise of Nasser in Egypt, had profound repercussions on political life in Lebanon; the civil war of 1958, and the consequent American intervention, was a mild foretaste of what was to come. To the country's traditional religious mixture of Maronites and other Christian communities, Sunni Muslims, Shia and Druze, have been added inequalities of wealth and new ideological currents.

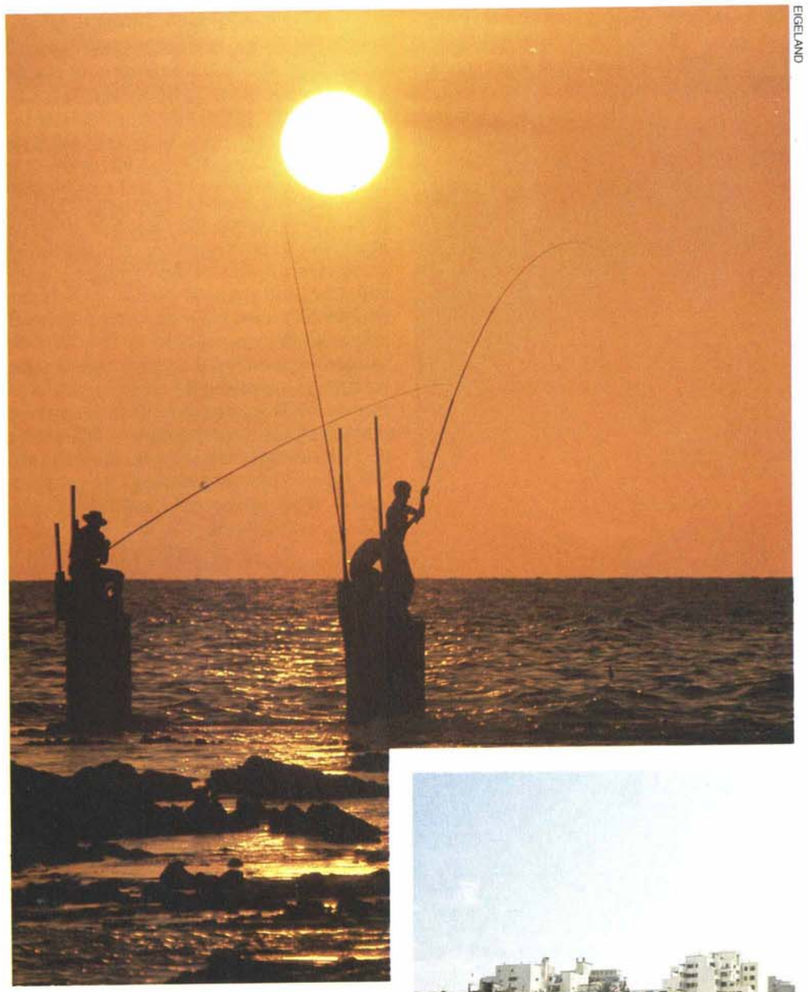
Lebanon, despite its social and religious complexity, has a very definite personality. Until the recent tragic events it would have been difficult to find a more open, tolerant and industrious nation. The philosophy of "live and let live" and the balancing of the aspiration of its many ethnic and religious groups was carried to a high art.

Salih ibn Yahya, the 15th century historian of Beirut, opens his history with a story of Saint George. "The Christians say", says Salih, "that in ancient times a great dragon came to Beirut and demanded a young girl every year, to satisfy his evil desires, and that one year the choice fell upon the King's daughter. She went out at night to the appointed place and began to beseech God. Saint George appeared to her, and when the dragon came, killed it. In that place the King built a church, near the Beirut River. To this day, Christians and Muslims celebrate the festival of this saint together in a wondrous way." In this land where Time and Love were born, war has often raged; Salih ibn Yahya's story gives hope that perhaps some beauty and innocence may yet be snatched from the jaws of Death.

Paul Lunde, who grew up in Saudi Arabia, was a regular visitor to Lebanon as a writer for Aramco World, and as a student in 1965, at the Lebanese University.

Lebanon: memories of a Golden Age

Those who knew Lebanon at peace will remember its sunsets and golden light, the quiet fishermen on the shores of the Mediterranean, the elderly gentlemen still wearing the fez, the ubiquitous *shawarma* vendor. Since remote antiquity the cedars have been the symbol of Lebanon; the great forests are gone but a few stands remain, some with trees more than 1000 years old. The Sabbagh commercial center, on rue Hamra, the Holiday Inn and the Phoenicia Hotel on Saint George's Bay were potent symbols of Lebanese prosperity. In the gold suq, a more traditional commercial sense prevailed; a friendly proprietor gives two tourists a puff on his water pipe.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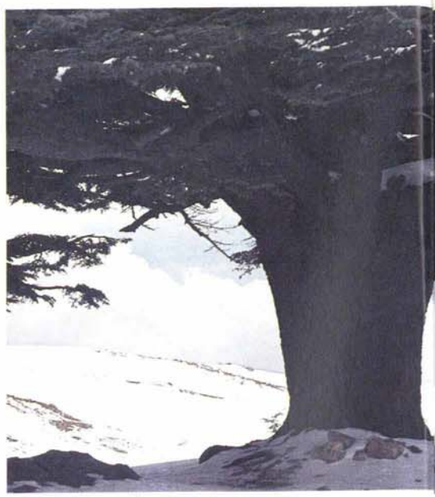
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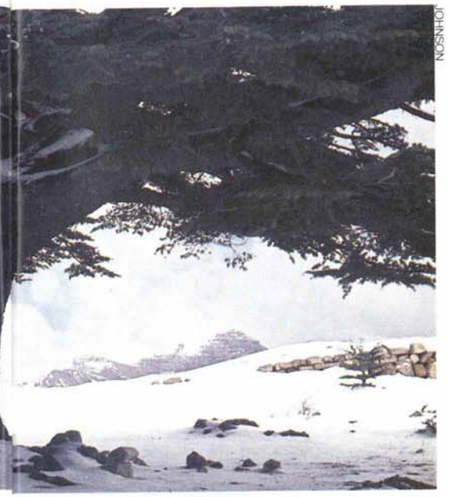
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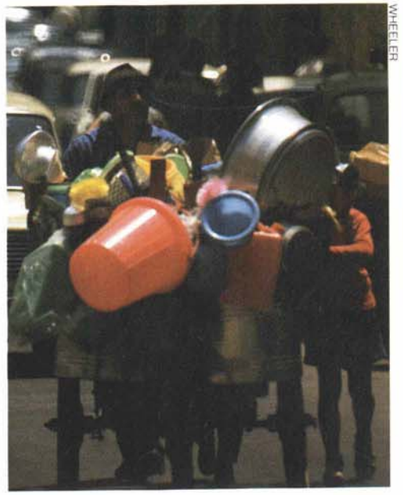
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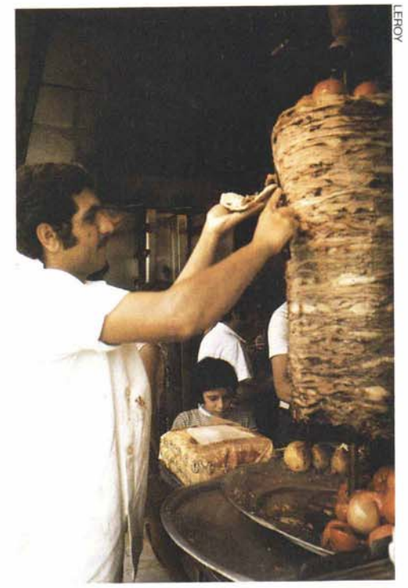
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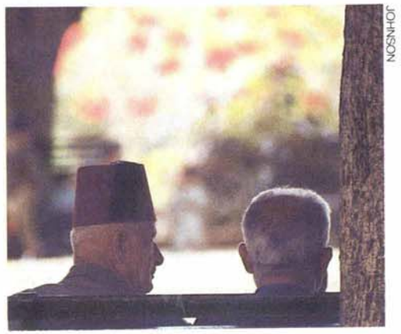
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TCHORBACHI

Paradise Lost: memories of a Golden Age

WRITTEN BY PAUL HOYE WITH JEANNE MULLIN, JOHN COOLEY AND WILLIAM TRACY

To those who were there, Lebanon from the mid 50's to the mid 70's was – and is – unforgettable. As the Arabs said of the Golden Age it was a time "when the world was young."

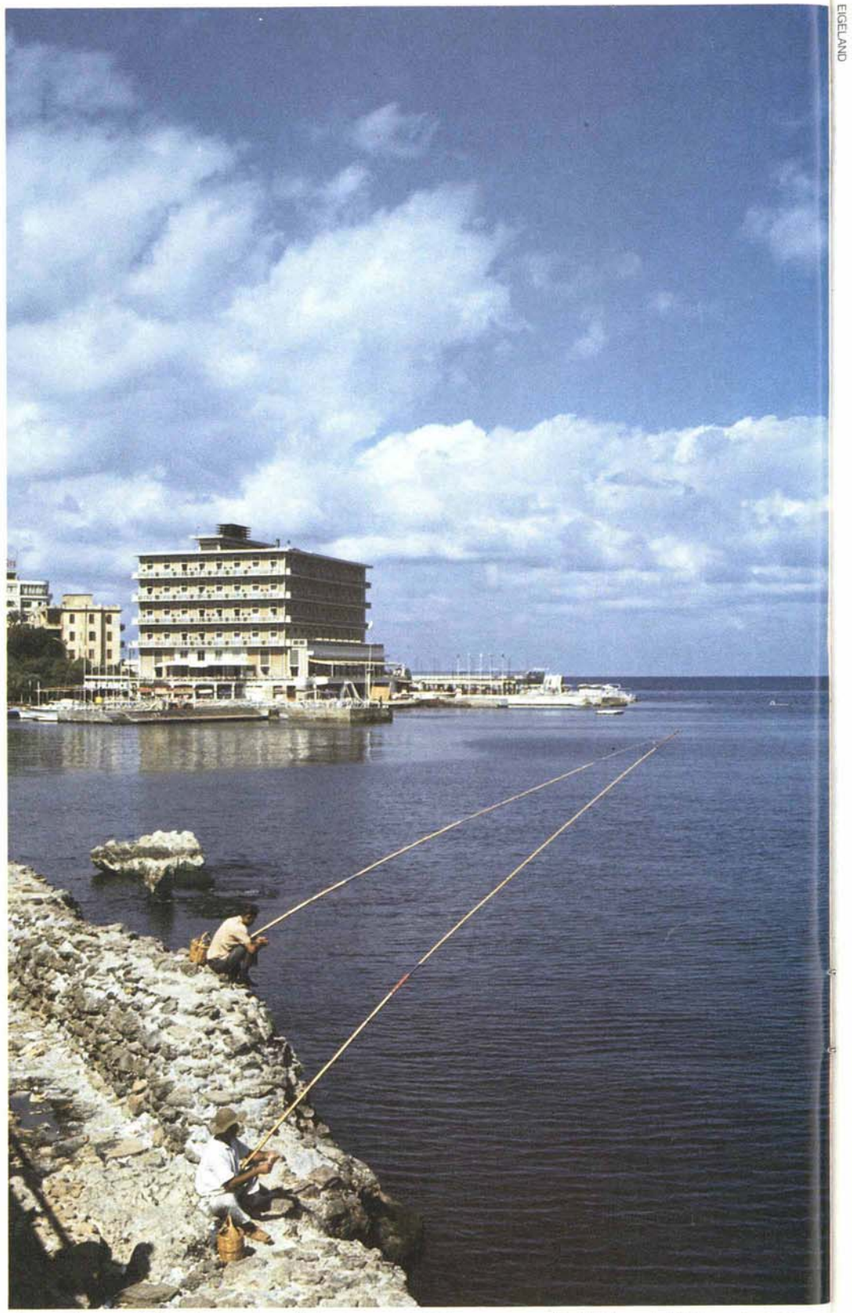
Most visitors to Beirut, and many of the foreign residents tended to think of Lebanon as Beirut and understandably so; it is a memorable city. But there was much more to Lebanon than Beirut. Standing astride the crossroads of Europe, Africa and Asia – its green hills and snowcapped peaks both oasis and barrier between a sea of water and a sea of sand – this small country holds incomparable riches of climate, geography, architecture, and of course, history.

Down by the waterfront, for example, there was an old, quite charming hotel called the Normandy. With its mirrors and staircase, the Normandy looked like something out of an MGM musical, but it's chief claim to fame in the 1960's was Kim Philby, KGB agent and spy. Possibly the most famous traitor since Benedict Arnold, Kim Philby had made the Normandy his headquarters until, on the verge of arrest in 1963, he fled to Moscow. It was a quick departure and in 1965 one reporter chatting with the room clerk learned the results. "You see", the clerk said, holding up a mail order catalog, addressed to Philby, "they still send his mail here."

Further on, but not much further, there was the harbor where in the 60's the U.S. Sixth Fleet would anchor and send its sailors ashore for a week of riotous leave. For a time, Beirut also played host to cruise ships, including, once, the Queen Elizabeth II. A flotilla of Greek, Turkish and Italian vessels almost always seemed to be going to Venice.

Beyond the harbor area was a huge Armenian quarter, reflecting the presence of the 100,000 or so Armenians who escaped to Lebanon to avoid the 1914 massacre that sent 1,750,000 fleeing into "Syria", a region that then included Lebanon. An estimated 600,000 died en route but some of the survivors found refuge in Lebanon – as did the Palestinians in later years.

Past the Armenian section, the coast road widened into a new expressway that swept north toward Tripoli with exits along the way for a series of small, picturesque – and sometimes historic – towns and villages.



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Above: The tranquil Saint-Georges Bay with the famous hotel of the same name. Right: The port of Sidon under seige.

One of the first was Jounieh, now an important center in the Christian dominated area of Lebanon, and once one of the jewels of the Lebanese coast: a village of small stone houses with traditional arched windows and red tile roofs opposite a soaring cliff 610 meters (2,000 feet) high with a great white statue on the summit – Our Lady of Lebanon – and, directly in front of it, a shimmering bay. Jounieh's key attraction was its natural beauty, but astute entrepreneurs had added a *télépherique,* a one-and-a-half-kilometer (one mile) long cable car to the summit, and on a high bluff at the end of the bay, a complex of theaters and restaurants: the famous *Casino du Liban,* modeled, in every way, after the Folies Bérgéres in Paris, and, in that early period, one of the highlights of virtually every tour of the country.

Further north still, there is Byblos, possibly the oldest city in the world, with a Roman port and a castle built by the Crusaders. Turn left on any one of a number of roads in that general area and you would find what in the 1960's was a novel – and tremendously popular – attraction: the ski resort of Faraya which offered above-the-timberline skiing and elegant year round villas with access to a pool. En route, burrowing into the cliffs, were the fairyland wonders of the caves of Jeita – which you could row a boat through. Trips in any direction in Lebanon disclosed a similar mix of modern development and ancient artistry. Toward the east, for instance, climbing the sheer, hairpin highways that lead to Syria , you would see off to the right the tracks of a cog railway that still hauled trains up into the mountains and off to Damascus, and on the left one of the many French *casernes,* or forts, that France put up during the Mandate period. Like the military highways and the fine lycées, these *casernes* suggest why Beirut and Mount Lebanon have had such a distinctly French character.

Toward the summit were orchards that grew, one Lebanese photographer would unfailingly point out, "the finest apples in the world," and a sign pointing toward the Ksara wine cellars, another legacy from the long French presence in Lebanon.

Over the summit, in a purplish haze, was the great fertile plateau between the Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon ranges: the Bekaa Valley, with the incredible ruins of Baalbek at the northern end, and the vital Litani Dam at the other – both symbols of the agricultural riches of this 120 kilometer (75 miles) long valley nearly a kilometer (half a mile) above sea level.

The Bekaa Valley is a wonder in itself. Driving east you used to see, first, the vineyards and then, among the cliffs, the marvellous "casinos" of Zahle – open air restaurants along streams and waterfalls pouring out of the heights. Further on there are the ruins of Anjar, a beautifully preserved Umayyad city, and then north, the experimental farm of the American University of Beirut (AUB) agricultural school and, at the tip of the valley, the ruins of Baalbek.

The construction of Baalbek went on through the reigns of eight emperors – three centuries – and includes one of the largest temples in the world: the Temple of Jupiter whose enormous corinthian columns have become as much a symbol of Lebanon as its cedar trees.

In modern times Baalbek won additional fame as the site of a well-known musical festival; it drew such regional greats as the late Umm Kalthum, the most famous Arab singer of modern times, Lebanon's own Fayrouz (See *Aramco World* January-February 1982) and such international greats as Dame Margot Fonteyn and Nureyev and, on one unforgettable evening, America's Ella Fitzgerald.

Baalbek is only one of the monuments left by the Romans in Lebanon. At almost every point there are traces of the Roman period, as the 1960's construction boom proved: every time the bulldozers bit deep they found another temple. This applies even to the deserted reaches of the mountains where, in the vicinity of Mrouj on the limestone shoulder of Mount Sannin, there are 100 or so Latin inscriptions incised on the cliffs and flat stones. This was the "Boundary of the Forests of Emperor Hadrian Augustus."

Driving south in the Bekaa Valley, it is immediately obvious that this area is dominated by the small but important river called the Litani which ends, abruptly, at the Litani Dam in the shadow of a great peak that straddles the Lebanese border. From there an old, cracked track winds up into the mountains and then down again through places like Jezzine with its umbrella pines and its famous cutlery, to the coast. South there is Tyre where, they say, divers still find coins in the sea from the time of Alexander the Great to that of Napoleon.

As you wind down from Jezzine you can also see on the shore the outskirts of Sidon, with still more traces of outsiders who came to Lebanon. One is the ruins of a Crusader castle; another is the complex of berths and oil tanks that marks the end of the terminal of the Trans-Arabian pipeline, Tapline.

One of the factors in the growth of Lebanon in the 1950's, Tapline was then the largest oil pipeline in the world: 1720 kilometers, in all (1069 miles). At its peak, it was delivering some 465,000 barrels a day from more than 20 storage tanks on the hills above the loading berths and buoys to as many as 900 tankers a year. Reduced in importance by economic and political changes in the area, Tapline, at the time of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, was delivering only 73,000 barrels of crude oil a day to refineries in Jordan and Lebanon, and this summer, because of war damage to the Tapline facilities and the refinery, deliveries to Lebanon stopped.

North of Sidon there were dozens of small charming areas and, as always, points of historical interest. One, little

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known, was the Damour River, where the forces of the Free French and Vichy France fought a battle in World War II.

Not far from Damour there was a curve in the road from which drivers on their way to work could catch a glimpse of Beirut just as

Paradise Lost: memories of a Golden Age

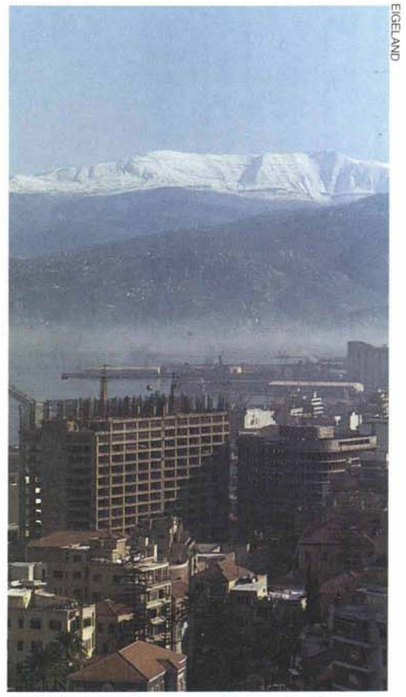
the sun cleared the mountains and touched the towers of the new buildings with the special light of the eastern Mediterranean. It was a fleeting glance, but for one writer it captured what Beirut seemed to be: the heart of what then seemed to be a Golden Age.

Beirut, to be sure, could not really compare with Baghdad in the real Golden Age – the 200 years of brilliant Islamic achievement in science, literature, agriculture and trade. But there were parallels. Like Baghdad, Beirut for 20 years was a hub of international trade and regional finance, a center of education, communication, shipping and transportation, a focus for entertainment, art and fashion, and the home of a special, perhaps unique, multinational society.

As late as 1947, Jeanne Mullin recalls, Beirut was no more than a quiet, picturesque port, known mostly for its American University, which by then sprawled across 75 acres on the slopes above the sea. In the 1950's, however, a series of developments in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Europe and elsewhere began to affect and then transform Lebanon. One such development was the construction of the Trans-Arabian Pipeline and its terminal in Sidon. Another was the overthrow in Egypt of a line of kings going back to Muhammad Ali and the establishment of a new government under Gamal Abdel Nasser. Last there was the beginning of Europe's post war "economic miracle."

Years before, the Arabian American Oil Company (Aramco) had decided to build a long oil pipeline from Saudi Arabia to a port in Palestine. By the time construction got underway, however, war had broken out in that area and the pipeline went to southern Lebanon instead. On December 2, 1950, consequently, the first oil from Saudi Arabia began to flow into the tanks at Sidon, 50 kilometers (30 miles) south of Beirut. For the same reason, the Iraq Petroleum Company, in 1948, chose Tripoli, Lebanon's second city, as a replacement for Haifa and by the early 50s, as a result, Lebanon unexpectedly found itself with two important oil terminals.

Not long after, in 1952, a group of young army officers in Egypt overthrew King Farouk and instituted a form of centralized government that resulted in the exodus of many of the country's foremost businessmen, industrialists and bankers –



EIGELAND

High-rises under construction in modern Beirut.

both Egyptian and foreign. Some went to Athens to relocate, others to Amman, but most chose Beirut because of its potentially fine harbor and airport, its schools and universities, its commercially astute people and – a key factor – a government eager to welcome what turned out to be an extraordinary influx of the world's corporate and financial representatives. Simultaneously, booming economies in Europe and the United States were developing a new interest in Middle East markets. The result, for Lebanon, was still another wave of immigrants added to the already extensive AUB group, the relatively new Tapline crews, the exiles from Egypt and hundreds of surgeons, engineers, accountants, architects, and nurses – from Palestine, Syria, Egypt, Jordan and Iraq. These newcomers from the west – bankers, diplomats, sales representatives, geophysicists, educators, airline captains, photographers, and writers – helped create, for a poignantly short time, a dynamic multinational society. Paths crossed commercially in places like Cairo, Amman, Damascus, Teheran and Dhahran – and socially at the endless circle of business receptions, balcony parties and elegant dinners in Beirut.

To some observers, this unending round of parties, receptions and dances – faithfully, if sometimes haphazardly reported by such indefatigable *Daily Star* social columnists as Genevieve Maxwell and Peggy Johnson – seemed useless, and possibly decadent. In fact, they were usually a quick, efficient way for, say, IBM's new man in Beirut to penetrate necessary commercial and governmental circles, or for a *Time* correspondent to start the network of contacts and sources he needs. "In one night," said a correspondent, after one of *Time's* famous receptions at the Phoenicia, "I met half the people I needed to know in Beirut for the next three years."

Not all correspondents could afford receptions at the Phoenicia Hotel; that was oil company territory, they'd say, a reference to the fact that the Phoenicia was a favorite with Aramco and Tapline. They didn't object, of course, to the lounge downstairs from which, over a cold lemonade, you could observe – while observed – underwater swimmers in the Phoenicia's pool. Mostly though, correspondents while not travelling spent lunchtime across the road at the Hotel Saint-Georges. Famous the world over, the Saint-Georges offered a superb cuisine served on a lovely terrace overlooking Saint-Georges Bay – but was also the journalist's best listening post, as well as his post office and bulletin board.

This apparently posh life style was deceptive. First, it was quite in keeping with the leisurely, open-air way of life that the Lebanese themselves expected and encouraged; foreign expense accounts may have helped, but Lebanon's life style existed long before the expatriates settled in.

Second, it concealed, for the newspaper crowd, demanding jobs; coverage of the shifting patterns of intricate Middle East politics could be one of the hardest newspaper beats in the world.

As a result, Beirut, became the press center; by the 1950's Beirut's press corps had swollen to 124 correspondents and stringers, a total that would wax and wane over the years until, in the late 1970's, the Civil War forced most of the resident reporters to move to places like Athens and Cyprus.

The highly visible life styles of the foreign communities – Asian and Middle Eastern as well as European and American – also tended to obscure another important fact: that to a large extent the economic boom of the late 1950's was stimulated by Lebanon itself – primarily by its people's energy and commercial aptitudes and their ability to take advantage of the events that reshaped the economic patterns of the Eastern Mediterranean in that period – an ability that the Lebanese themselves vaguelly label "the Lebanese mentality."

As Yusuf A Sayigh said in 1978, in *The Economies of the Arab World*, "Lebanon is not a typical Arab economy." By that, he meant that Lebanon's economy was not based on the extraction of petroleum, but on trade and, to a lesser extent, industry and agriculture. But Lebanon was atypical in other ways too. It was committed, to an unusual degree, to a flexible, free wheeling form of *laissez faire* capitalism; its literacy rate was 88 percent, its per capita income was high.

There were other characteristics of a sophisticated economy too. One was, quite simply, prosperity. With the exception, perhaps, of the Palestinian refugee camps and some areas in the south, Lebanon was, at least in regional terms, a prosperous country with a large, relatively successful, socially mobile middle class.

Like Baghdad's success in the Golden Age, this prosperity was based largely on trade and that, in turn, demanded and stimulated dramatic expansions in other sectors of the economy: banking, transportation and shipping.

Banking was particularly important, as development of oil production in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait began to generate the first of the huge oil revenues. By 1974, as a result, there were 38 Lebanese banks of various sizes, 18 jointly owned Lebanese-foreign banks and 18 foreign banks.

This, one banker explained, came about because Lebanese trade began to need financing just at the time that the oil-producing Arab countries began to look for already established banking facilities with which they felt comfortable. The resulting faith in Lebanon as a financial center came to be so strong that, according to an executive in one Beirut company, deposits in Lebanon's banks *doubled* between 1975 and 1980 – the years when the Civil War had not only torn the country apart, but had even triggered raids on such banks as the Bank of America and the British Bank of the Middle East.

Similarly, the 1950's saw an increase in, and improvement of, transport and shipping – partially because trade was increasing, but also because the Arab world, by then, was turning away from Palestinian ports like Haifa and Jaffa which had formerly provided important entry ports and trans-shipment points for the Middle East.

Another factor was newly introduced economic reforms in Egypt which interrupted normal patterns of transport. Benefiting from this Beirut's harbor began to flourish – as did its trucking sector after the 1967 Arab-Israeli War closed the Suez Canal.

The most dramatic change was the transformation of Beirut's airport into a key international crossroad and the growth of two small, heretofore unimportant airlines into international carriers: Middle East Airlines (MEA) and Trans-Mediterranean Airways (TMA).

In 1945, Middle East Airlines owned just three De Havilland bi-planes and its main route ran between Baghdad and Haifa. About the same time, a former Aramco employee named Munir Abu Haidar was converting two World War II bombers into cargo planes to ship vegetables to Dhahran, the headquarters of Aramco. Things were so bad that at one point executives at MEA seriously tried to barter Lebanese apples for British VC-10's.

Later, as a measure of what happened in Lebanon in the golden years, both these operations ballooned into big efficient, profitable industries. By 1974, for example, MEA employed 80 airline captains, 90 first officers and 70 flight engineers – part of MEA's total work force of 5,000 employees.

EIGELAND

The bay of Jounieh by night with the lights of the famous Casino du Liban on the hill above reflected in the water.

TMA also did well. In 1973, TMA was, in route mileage, the biggest air cargo carrier in the world and netted close to $15 million. By then TMA had also expanded its work force – to about 1,800 employees.

Those changes, moreover, were but part of the impact that burgeoning trade was to have on Lebanon. To service the airlines a catering company run by Albert Abela began to grow too; after expanding into catering for schools, hospitals and oil camps, Abela's firm wound up with 11,000 employees in 30 countries. To service MEA itself an adjacent maintenance operation expanded from one engineer and six mechanics into a $5.5 million complex of hangars and shops employing 1,400 or so

Lebanon: on Campus

THOMAS

Beirut, it has been said, educated the Middle East. Students flocked here from around the world to attend schools from kindergartens to universities. Many advanced students attended the American University of Beirut, founded in 1866 by Protestant missionaries. It has one of the most beautiful campuses in the world, with tree-shaded buildings overlooking the blue waters of the Mediterranean. At International College, President Alton Reynolds converses with his colleague Tom Weaver in the photo below.

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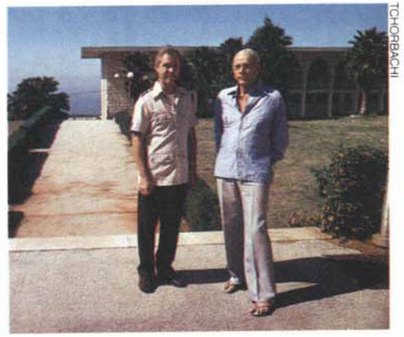


TCHORBACHI

SMITH

Paradise Lost: memories of a Golden Age

skilled craftsmen able to totally renovate a Boeing 707 in six weeks.

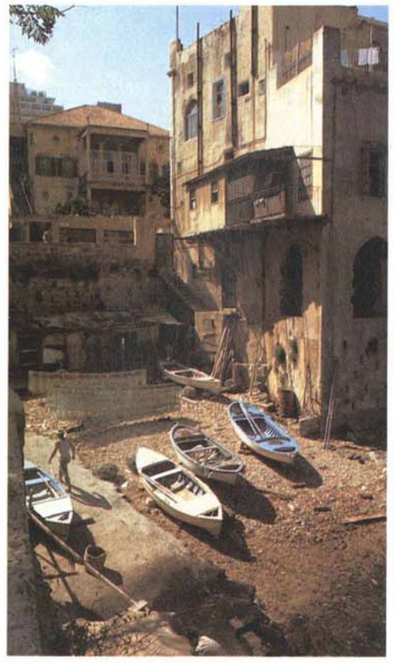
Trade was still only one component in Lebanon's economic achievements. Other key factors were industry and agriculture.

Until the 1950's, agriculture was second in importance, after trade, to Lebanon's economic well being. As part of the famous "Fertile Crescent," and the Bible's "Land of Milk and Honey," Lebanon's coastal plain and terraced hills, along with the fertile Bekaa Valley, have always played a key role in the economy. Palestine, it is true, made contributions to the food supplies of both Romans and Ottomans, but the Bekaa Valley to this day is far more productive and the coastal plains, until the civil war, were rich in oranges, bananas and other fruits. By 1978, Lebanon had in cultivation 106,000 acres of wheat, 19,768 acres of barley and 5,600 acres of corn. In addition, olive groves cover 69,200 acres, vineyards 40,700 acres, apples 34,500 acres, citrus 27,000 acres and tobacco 16,300 acres – a total of 966,000 planted acres.

Industry, began to grow in the 50's and 60's until in 1972, 100,000 workers or 20 percent of the labor force, were listed as industrial workers – a change that one economist called an important economic frontier. Most of it was small industry, but statistics suggest, nonetheless, that the country had made some impressive strides: $8 million worth of copper cable manufactured; 450 workers hired to assemble elevator cabs and controls for Otis Elevator; 14.5 million tons of fuel produced at the two refineries; $16 million worth of pharmaceuticals known to be exported; 1,000 people employed in a teak-furniture factory.

Figures from that period also show that Lebanon had two steel rolling mills, two aluminum extrusion plants and two glass makers, one affiliated with France's famous Saint Gobain. In addition, there were 140 publishing houses listed, and enough presses to put out 40 newspapers a day and 100 periodicals, both monthly and weekly.

That aspect of Lebanese industry also suggests another vital role that Lebanon played in those golden years – the role, in fact, that first turned Beirut into a world press center. Through those newspapers and publications, Arab countries, political parties, movements of every shade of the spectrum found an outlet, a forum, a



EIGELAND

Picturesque old buildings in the 'Ain al-Mraissi quarter.

platform from which countless factions from all corners of the Arab world took part in, and tried to influence, regional and international debates.

The variety of those opinions and the fierce manner in which they were aired suggests, that Lebanon was not a melting pot, but rather, as Daniel Moynihan and Nathan Glazer wrote of New York, "a mosaic," in which each group retained its own distinct coloring – political, religious and social.

To put it another way Lebanon may have declared a truce with history, but could not avoid it altogether: among Lebanon's two million inhabitants, after all, were well over a dozen religious groups: Sunni and Shi'ite Muslims, Greek Orthodox and Maronite Christians and other Christian sects, some dating back to the time of Jesus, small numbers of Protestants, converted by Western missionaries in modern times plus Druze, Kurds and Jews. In addition there were numerous ethnic groups; like the United States, Lebanon is largely a nation of immigrants, many of them exiles. Armenians, for example, and Palestinians, both of whom fled massacres and wars.

Since those communities brought with them all the fears and suspicions of the past, they quite naturally tended to guard their identities closely – maintaining their own hospitals, schools, civil codes and even cemeteries.

Nevertheless, Lebanon of the golden years did exist. Lebanon historically, was a haven for wave upon wave of immigrants who, despite differences, did rock along in friendship and peace for long periods of time. Lebanon was, undeniably, a sanctuary as well as a playground, and far more forum than arena.

Bill Tracy, for instance, lived for seven years in an apartment in a stately old building near the later famous Holiday Inn. It stood on a narrow twisting street in a neighborhood that underlines what Ras Beirut was like. His neighbors included two Armenian families, an elderly Jewish doctor and his wife, a Kurdish family, two Maronite Christian grocers – one with a wife from the Seychelles – an American photographer and an American newscaster from his home state of Illinois . . .all of whom were close friends and neighbors.

Nearby, furthermore, was a walled compound at the end of an alley in which stood six one-story tin-roofed cottages. Obviously the "villagers" who lived in them were of more modest means, but, Tracy once wrote "their solid homes and their fresh fruit trees and flower gardens lent the neighborhood charm without borrowing from its respectability."

This was not unique John Cooley says: In those happy, distant days, there were few, if any, physical barriers between Muslim and Christian areas. In much of Beirut, in fact, there weren't, really, too many clear-cut "areas". Invisible social barriers did separate what the news agencies, in their awkward, often inexact generalizations, called "predominantly Muslim West Beirut" and "mainly Christian East Beirut" – and those barriers grew stronger as tensions arose in the 70's. But the barriers had as much, or more, to do with the growing gap between rich and poor in Lebanon, as with sectarian disagreements. In the charming 'Ain al-Mraissi, for example, George the Maronite Christian grocer–and a member of the Phalange – remained the best of friends with his neighboring shopkeeper Muhammad, almost until the final sectarian division of the city in 1975; because both were modest merchants, George had far more in common with Muhammad than with his Christian cousins, Charles, Maurice or Pierre, in Ashrafiye, Sursock or Sinn al-Fil, the "Christian districts."

Traditional Lebanese house with garden in the shadow of high rise apartment buildings. Drawing by Kathe Tanous.

To an extent, of course, this tolerance was a mask, hiding the stresses. As correspondent Albion Ross once put it, Lebanon was "a cloak of many colours," meaning, as Cooley later wrote, "that every village, every patch, every bend in the road housed another family, another clan, another way of looking at the world."

This is true. Few, if any, Lebanese put country ahead of family or clan – or even neighborhood. As Edouard Saab, editor of Beirut's *l'Orient-Le Jour* put it, "None of us really ever thought he was fighting for a nation called Lebanon. Many of us fought only for selfish interests."

The formal and charming manners of the Lebanese were adopted as a way of easing the inevitable frictions in a crowded, competitive, multi-religious and multinational society. As small-town Americans have long been aware, small talk about the weather or football is a safe way to avoid serious discussion and argument.

As a result, therefore, the cracks in the foundations of Lebanon's unique society were ignored, or at least not detected, until the combination of overcrowding, inflation, urban sprawl and economic inequities –intersecting with the fears and conflicting interests among the different factions – ignited a deep and dangerous anger and triggered the series of tragic events from which came first civil war and, this year, what is not only the latest but the most destructive invasion in the country's long history.

This summer, as nightly television newscasts showed Beirut, Sidon and Tyre being reduced–by Israeli bombs and shells – to rubble, Lebanon's "Golden Age" seemed very remote, and its unique possibilities and pleasures gone forever. But for those who were there during its golden years the memories, at least, remain – to come flooding back with each air raid, artillery bombardment and street battle. Many of these memories are deeply personal. "Long drives in the mountains with my wife," recalls Tracy, "in search of the perfect spot with the perfect view for the house we would someday build (but now never will). Proud fathers, on Sundays, buying icecream on a stick for dark-eyed daughters in bright dresses... masses of dark thunderclouds sweeping suddenly in from the sea, and cloudbursts turning the streets into torrents and washing them clean and, so often, a rainbow..."

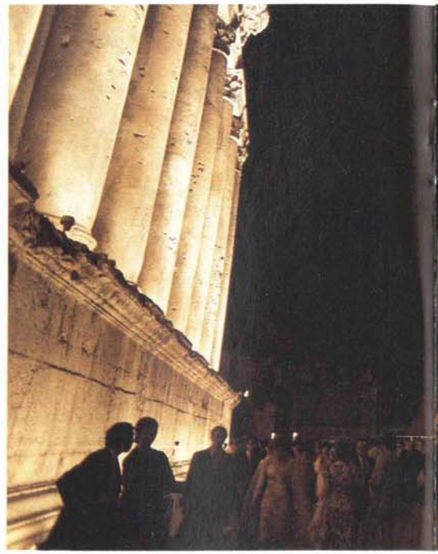
Now, however, as we watch the last throes of invasion by a foreign power the cold reality of the present is superimposed on these warm memories of the past.

Paul Hoye took over as editor of Aramco World Magazine in 1964, when the magazine's editorial offices were moved from New York to Beirut. John Cooley, formerly Middle East correspondent of The Christian Science Monitor, lived in Beirut from November 1965 until March 1976, and has returned regularly to Lebanon since. The author of four books and numerous articles and essays about the Middle East and North Africa, Cooley is now a staff correspondent for ABC News based in London. Jeanne Mullin, who lived in Beirut from 1947 to 1954, subsequently moved to Puerto Rico, then Peru, settling eventually in Garrison, New York, on the Hudson River where she writes, paints and sculpts.

Lebanon: at the Festival

The high point of the cultural year in Lebanon was the Festival of Baalbek, attended by the most consummate artists from all over the world. Here Fayrouz, the great Lebanese singer, stirred crowds of thousands, the Royal Ballet performed. Baalbek was built over a long period of time by a succession of Roman emperors, and its amazingly well-preserved ruins, dramatically highlighted with *son et lumiere*, provided the perfect setting for artists such as Joan Baez and, below, the great Ella Fitgerald, who gave an unforgettable concert in the shadows of Baalbek's gigantic ruins.

TRACY



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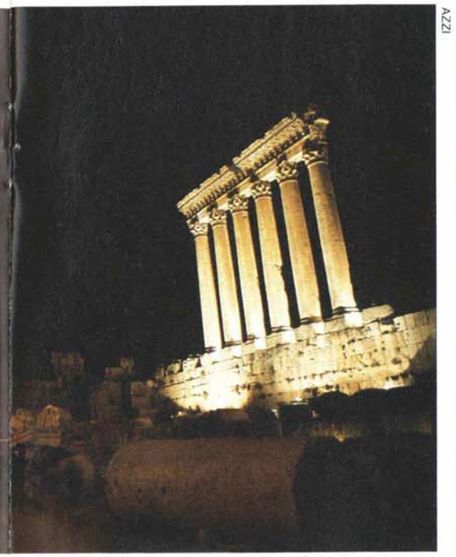

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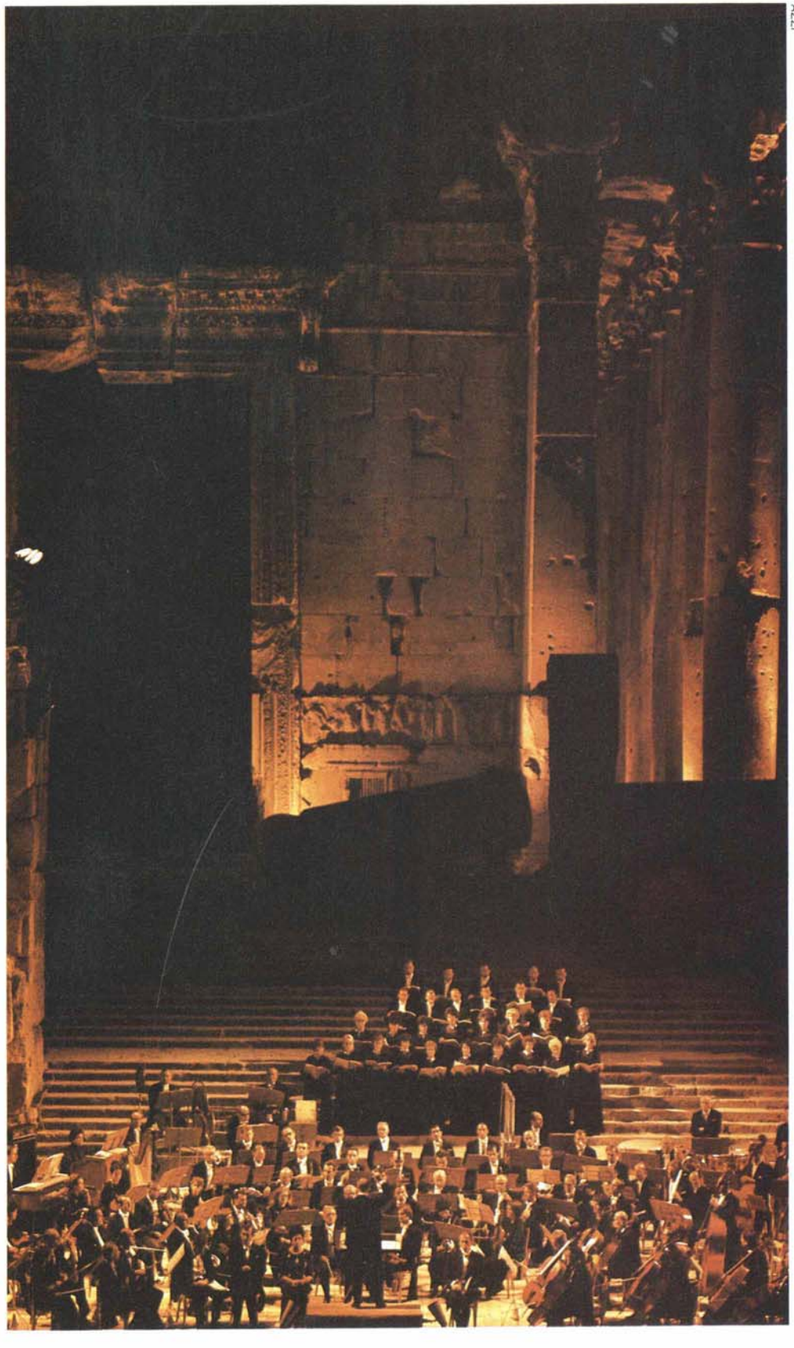

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SMITH

Paradise Lost: memories of a Golden Age

WRITTEN BY WILLIAM TRACY

As a student, a teacher and an editor I lived in Beirut for 18 years. I knew it well, loved it deeply and now, as the seemingly endless cycle of civil strife, war and invasion reaches another tragic climax, I mourn it with a deep sense of loss. Lebanon – at least the Lebanon I knew – is gone, and, I think, is irreplaceable.

I went to Beirut in the early years: in 1950 at the age of 15, when Beirut was little more than a village, and later returned, to teach English to Lebanese students and, later, to become assistant editor of this magazine.

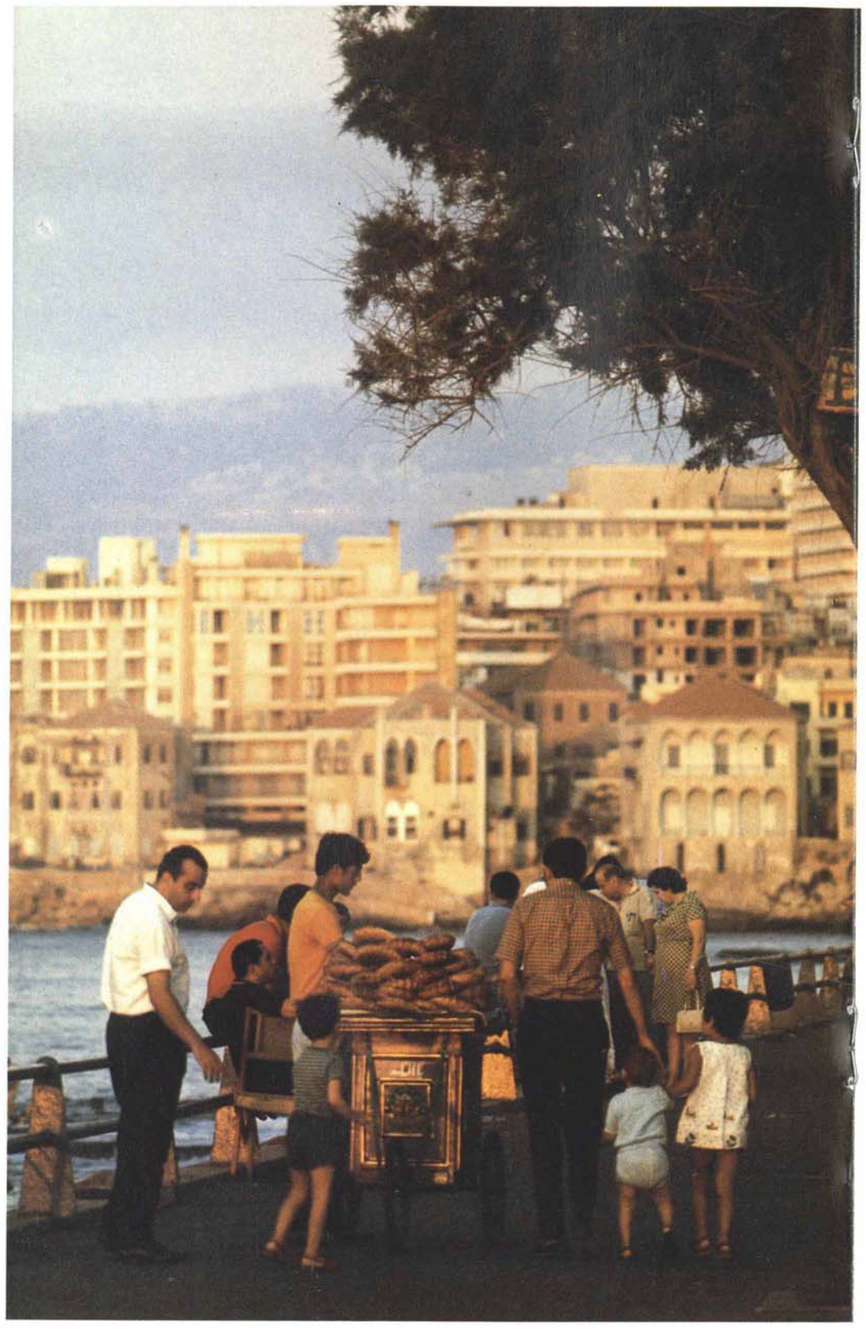
At each stage – and age – I saw Lebanon differently, but always, I'm afraid, romantically, so that today my most vivid memories of Lebanon glow with beauty, with warmth, with abundance…

When I say I lived in Beirut, I mean "Ras" Beirut – a hilly, sun-drenched peninsula embraced by the Mediterranean. On the north was the small picturesque area called 'Ain al-Mraissi and, beyond, the seafront Avenue de Paris, the terraced green slopes of the American University campus and, above that, in several directions, the sprawl of old streets. To the south was the shape of Pigeon Rocks, the glittering new apartment towers, business blocks, hotels and, further out, the broad white beach sands of Ramlet al-Baida.

Ras Beirut was the prosperous, cosmopolitan quarter of the Lebanese capital where diplomats, educators, journalists and businessmen – foreign and Lebanese – enjoyed all the amenities and charms of a sophisticated Mediterranean city: restaurants of every description and price, international films and theater, concerts, lectures, art galeries, discoteques and, above all, the shops, where in an age of mass production and mass consumption, goldsmiths, cabinet makers, photo processors, picture framers, tailors and seamstresses, still offered personalized, customized craftsmanship.

In another sense, though, Ras Beirut was little more than a village. As late as 1975, when the Civil War drove many of us out, you could still find clusters of old stone houses with tiny gardens nestled among the tall concrete buildings – quiet neighborhoods where life continued on a human scale.

In Ras Beirut, in fact, it was hardly possible to venture outside without bumping into handfuls of friends or acquaintances.



WHEELER

Sunday evening in Ras Beirut. A family enjoys the spiced bread called man'usha. *Right: A mother cradles her child.*

Sometimes it even seemed as though there was not a person there – or in all Lebanon – who would not invite me into his home if I met his friendliness and curiosity even halfway. *"Baiti baitak,"* they said, "my house is your house," and meant it.

Beirut was an outdoor city: indeed, nine months of the year most people lived with their windows thrown open and spent hours on the balconies or patios which graced virtually every house or apartment. There they read the morning newspapers over Turkish coffee, grew geraniums and herbs in clay pots or tin cans, loudly beat dust out of Oriental carpets, lowered baskets on long ropes to fruit vendors on the street below, sipped licorice flavored *arak,* nibbling on sunflower seeds at sunset.

The breezy, sunny days following one another with perfect predictability, brought students outdoors to stroll, open books in hand, in the public garden; old men to smoke their waterpipes and click their backgammon pieces solidly on inlaid tables before their doorsteps; merchants to display their wares in the streets and office workers to tan themselves at nearby beaches during lunch breaks which often stretched into the afternoon.

In the evenings, it was much the same: thousands of men and women – or so it seemed – dressed in the latest fashion, crammed the sidewalks or packed the cafés of Hamra Street before and after the movies each night to eat American hamburgers, nibble on French pastries, sip a coffee and, most important, watch people parading past.

This need to be outdoors was particularly obvious in countless restaurants along the shore and in the mountains: at harborfront cafés in Tyre, Sidon, Byblos and Tripoli, or in shaded "casinos" in the mountains beside fountains, springs and cascades in places like Antelias, Jezzine, 'Ain Zhalta, Wadi Zahlé or by the Damour River.

The map of Lebanon, in fact, reads like a menu. On even short drives for example, you simply had to break your journeys in Chtaura for yoghurt, in Batroun for lemonade, and in Jounieh for sherbets. In Sidon you would stop for the delectable *kanafih bil ju'bn,* syrup-soaked layers of shredded wheat with melted goat cheese, served hot, and, in Chemlan you would savor superb *Shish Ta'uk* – grilled chicken – on the terrace of Cliff House.

In the 1960's, before traffic reached paralyzing proportions it was still possible to leave Beirut and within an hour – almost literally – be camped by an icy waterfall in the Damour Valley, stretched out on a secluded beach near Sidon, or, in winter, be skiing down an icy slope above the timber line at a resort called Faraya. Take two hours and you could be hiking under the cedar trees at Barouk, picnicking among the grassed-in ruins of Roman temples or lonely castles without a name, or skiing under the great branches of the famous cedars of Lebanon – some 1,000 years old.

Such excursions showed Lebanon at its best. Depending on the time of year you might find in the same trip oranges and bananas on the coast and peaches and apples on mountain terraces and, in springtime, a dazzling variety of flowers.

In Lebanon, the wild flowers were extraordinary: in the mountains beneath the olive trees and in pine-shaded valleys, we

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hiked on spring carpets of red anemones, violets and dwarf iris. Beside every tumbling stream you could find pink oleanders among the ancient ruins, hollyhocks in the city. Plants like purple bougainvillea and fiery hibiscus seemed able to survive with their roots squeezed into a narrow strip of earth in a paved courtyard – and still cascade gloriously across near-by walls.

This is the sort of beauty that lives in the mind – and the heart – but in the end it is the people you can't forget: the mountain family inviting me to share a meal when I simply paused before their door to ask directions; the farmer who picked a handful of apricots and plums from his trees and offered them to me as I hiked past his tiny orchard; the villager holding out a clay jug of cool water to quench my thirst; the village boys leading me along a riverside trail to their favorite swimming hole.

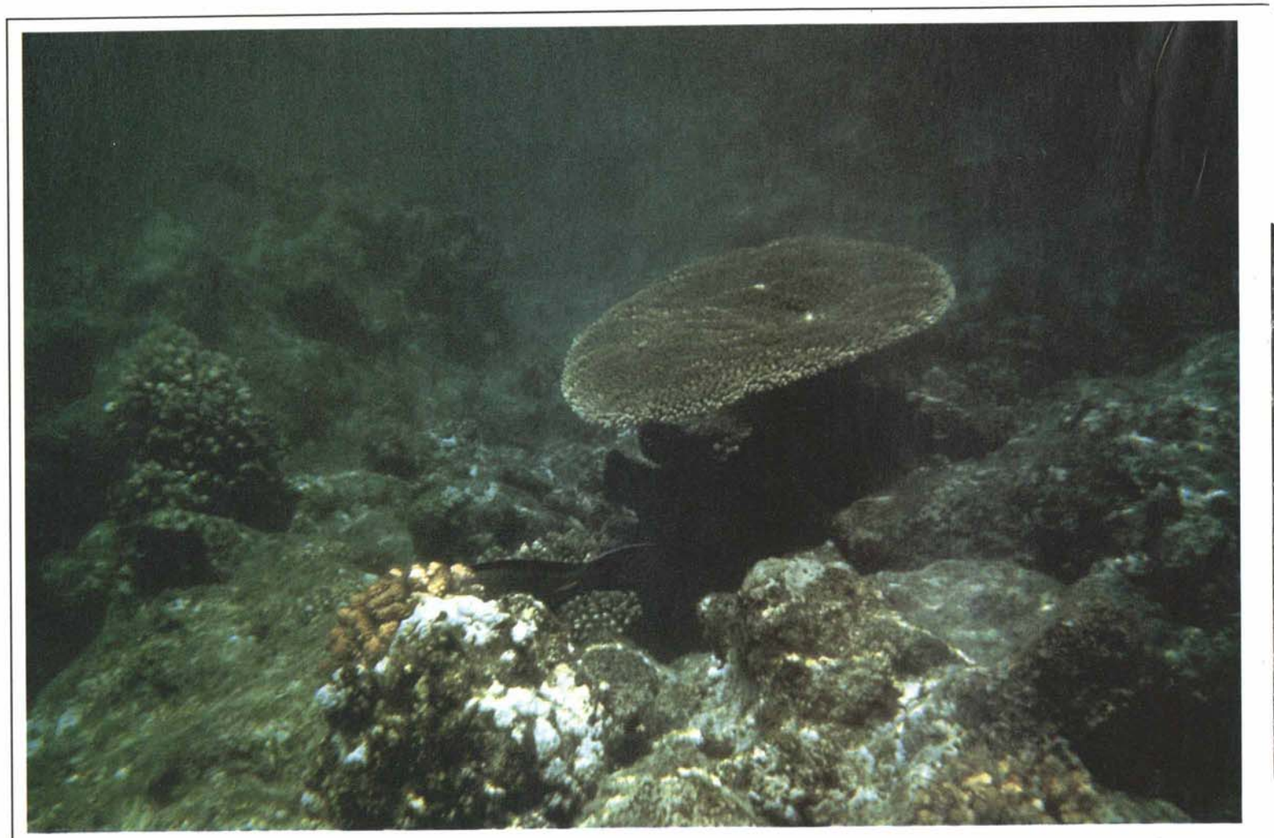
These same smiling, happy people – let's be honest – could enrage you too, of course, with their *"Bukra! Bukra!"* (Tomorrow! Tomorrow!") and their maddening *"Ma'alaish"* ("Never mind) with its infuriating suggestion of indifference to just about everything. And yet, I miss it – as did a German friend, who wrote to me several years after she left Beirut. She sometimes ached to hear those words, she said, in her disciplined, highly structured life.

I used to get annoyed too, at a certain traffic light, when young entrepreneurs hoping to earn a coin gave my windshield a quick swipe with a grimy damp cloth, delaying me and smearing the windshield – but I also remember the same boys, one summer evening, pushing strands of sweet-smelling jasmine through the window with the words: "For your lady, Sir?" It was Lebanon in microcosm: for every grimy rag, a flower.

Sentiments, like these of course, provide endless poignant memories. There is one memory, however, that persists. A vacant lot near my house where, in my final year in Beirut, I used to take my dog Dune, after work. Because of the walls this lot was a secluded spot where I could let Dune run and just sit quietly and smoke in the shadow of an old stone house with arched windows – and the huge skyscraper of the Holiday Inn that had just opened.

After I left Beirut that house, as well as the hotel, were shelled and hit repeatedly and Dune was later killed. So when I think of that lot now, I think of past wars and other ruins: temples and palaces and forts, with time, rain and sunshine leaving a golden patina on the white limestone walls, and green blades of grass edging up through the crevices. Soon, I know, the stones in that lot will begin to weather too and the grass will begin to grow among them. I try, but I can see no dark-eyed children at play there.

William Tracy first went to Lebanon in 1950 to attend high school at the American Community School. He later returned to teach at Beirut's International College, earned an M.A. degree at the American University of Beirut and, in 1965, became assistant editor of this magazine. He now lives in Lawrenceville, Illinois, where he is finishing a novel on the Middle East.



In mud 10,000 years old they're mining...

SILVER FROM THE SEA

WRITTEN BY GLYN FORD AND JONATHAN SIMNETT

In the Red Sea three years ago, Saudi Arabia and The Sudan jointly launched an experiment that, in the Middle Ages, might have been called alchemy: the transmutation of a common, worthless substance – mud – into a rare and valuable substance: silver. In the Red Sea, however, the process depends on technology rather than magic, and is extraction rather than transmutation.

The experiment – carried out by a German mining company on behalf of the Saudi-Sudanese Red Sea Joint Commission – is one of the most exciting projects underway in the world today: undersea mining of metal-rich mud. If it succeeds, the technology involved might provide a way of tapping the mineral resources of the world's oceans. Not insignificantly, it might also point the way toward a more rational form of sharing such wealth among competing regions and countries.

What the commission is investigating are thick layers of mud – up to 30 meters (98 feet) – that have been collecting over the last 10,000 years in the deep depressions along the center of the Red Sea 90 kilometers from land (56 miles). Found beneath pools of dense, extremely hot brines – 60°C (140°F) – that have formed in depressions two kilometers deep, these muds are rich in zinc and copper, smaller amounts of other metals, including gold, and – the main target – silver.

Since the 1880s, oceanographers have suspected that the Red Sea had hidden secrets. It was not until 1948, however, as the post-war boom in ocean research got underway, that the strange, high-temperature brines were found and recorded by the Swedish vessel *Albatross*. And it was not until about 1963 that scientists, in a burst of exploratory activity, obtained samples of the metalliferous muds.

Since then, 18 brine pools and associated mud deposits have been discovered. But from a commercial viewpoint only one of these is important: the *Atlantis II* Deep. The largest found so far, the *Atlantis II* Deep, named after the survey ship which discovered it, has a surface area of 60 square kilometers (23 square miles) and vast deposits of multi-colored muds, the consistency of soft toothpaste, containing, in the southwest basin, six percent zinc, one percent copper and 100 parts per million of silver.

The formation of these deposits came about, partially, as a result of the split in the earth's crust between Africa and Arabia – the continuation of which may eventually turn the Red Sea into a full fledged ocean; it widens at the rate of 10 kilometers (six miles) every million years. When this thin ocean crust cracked, sea water poured onto the molten rocks below and formed salt solutions rich in metallic compounds. Carried upwards by convection currents, these solutions mingled with the colder water closer to the surface, where – since solubility is temperature dependent – the salts with the metallic components were precipitated – i.e. forced out of the solution – within the muds.

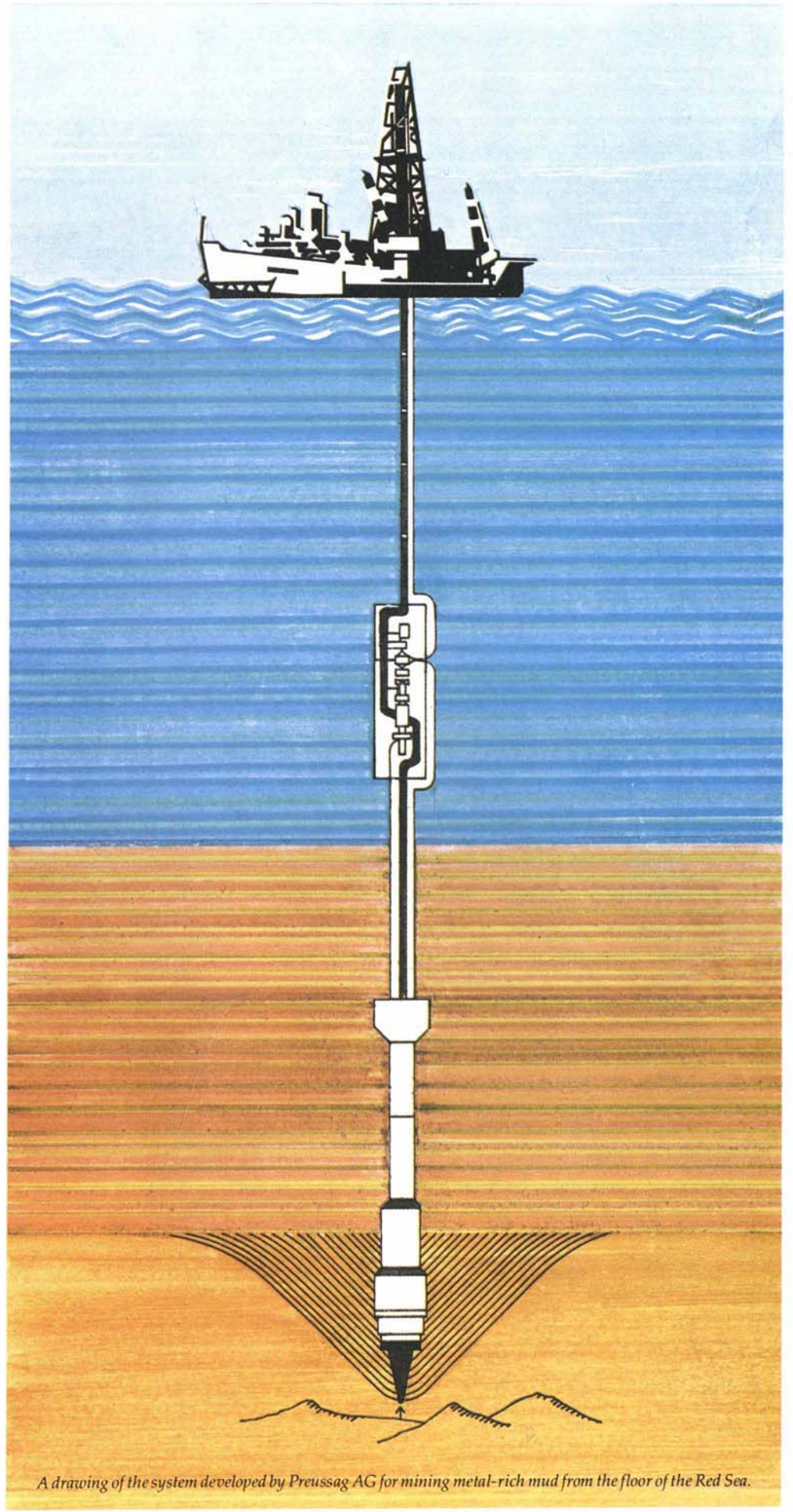
To be of commercial interest these deposits must, of course, be recovered economically. To determine costs, therefore, the governments of Saudi Arabia and The Sudan, in September 1975, established the Saudi-Sudanese Red Sea Commission to sponsor research into, and development of, these resources (See *Aramco World*, July-August 1981), and engaged Preussag to carry out a $28 million, five-year feasibility study.

Preparations for the study took time, of course, but by March, 1979, Preussag had readied the *Sedco 445*, a large mining ship equipped with a 2,200-meter steel drill-string (7,200 foot) with a suction head attached to the end of a standard oil drilling pipe. Lowered into the deeps, the suction head, with a motorized vibrating attachment, broke up the mud and pumped it to the surface; between March and June 1979, 15,000 cubic meters (68,190 cubic feet) of muds and brines were pumped to the surface for processing.

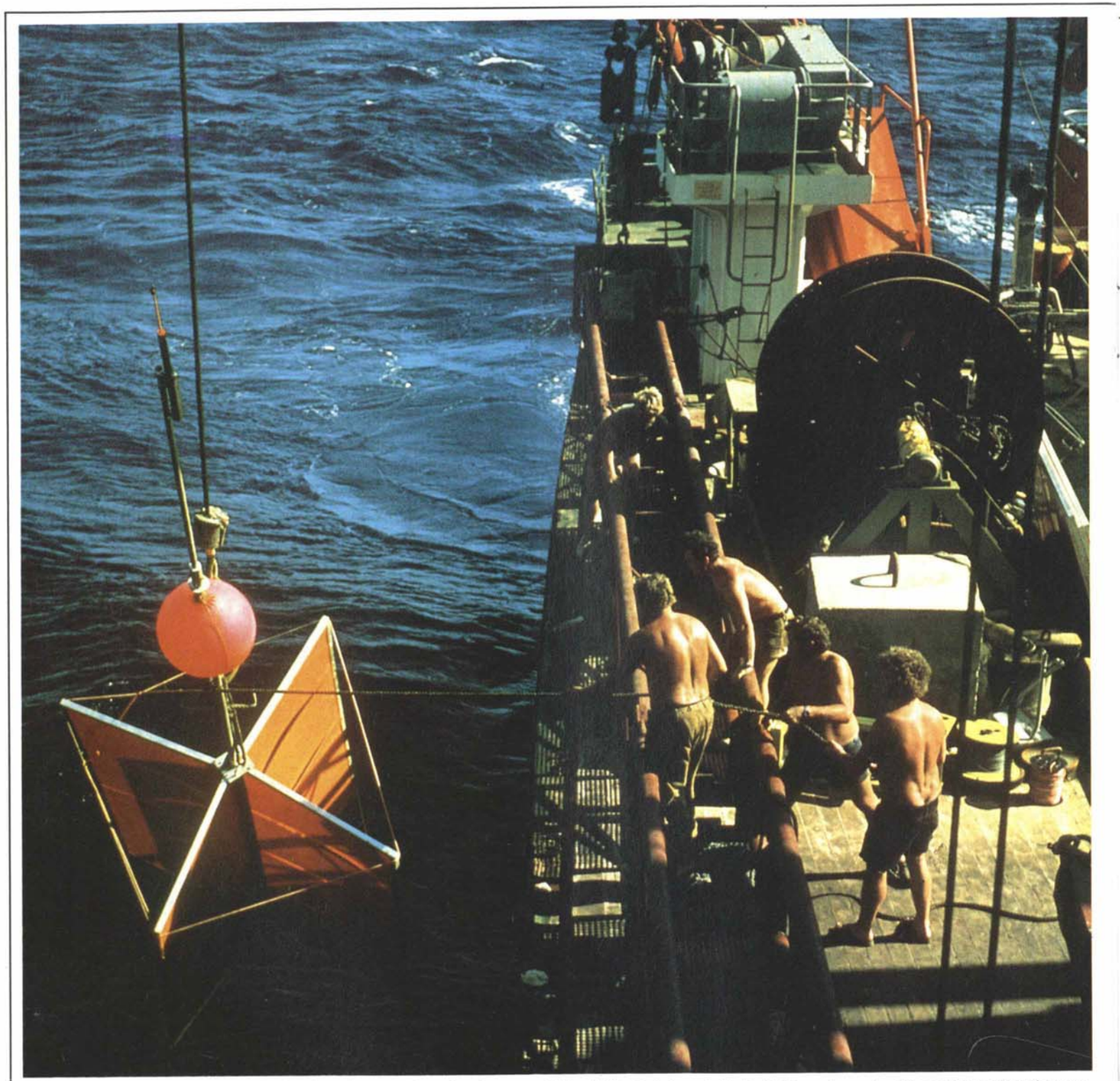
On land, this processing – which extracts a mineral-rich concentrate from the slurry and which is called "froth flotation" – is fairly common. First, the particles of mud are separated from the brine by adding chemicals to the liquefied mixture – causing the particles to repel water. Then the mixture is put into agitation tanks in which air, bubbling through the mixtures, picks up the particles and forms a mineral-rich froth, which is carried to the surface of the tank and scraped off at intervals.

At sea, of course, such processing is more difficult. Preussag engineers estimate that commercially viable recovery of silver and other metals from the mud will require at least 400,000 metric tons of slurry – brine and seawater – per day, no simple task at a minesite 90 kilometers (56 miles) from shore. Because the mud particles are tiny – 80 percent are less than 1/500th of a millimeter in diameter – it is impossible to filter particles out of such massive quantities of brine without froth flotation, or a similar technique.

Engineers, therefore, had to be sure that the process could function in the Red Sea's



A drawing of the system developed by Preussag AG for mining metal-rich mud from the floor of the Red Sea.



The German research vessel Valdivia, which took part in tests to determine the commercial feasibility of mining metal in the Red Sea and ensuring this would not pollute the ocean.

frequently rough weather. This was assured by tests run by the Warren Spring Laboratory in Britain, in which a ship's motion simulator reproduced Red Sea conditions on land – so successfully that the commission's pre-pilot test achieved concentration factors of eight to 10 times, with an overall recovery rate of up to 70 percent and a final product containing 32 percent zinc, 5 percent copper and 0.07 percent silver.

Onshore, still further processing is necessary – to isolate the individual metals by either smelting the concentrate or working it in solution. Smelting, known as pyrometallurgy, is not used, however, because a salt-free feed is essential and that can only be achieved if large quantities of fresh water are available for washing. Instead, Preussag has chosen the hydrometallurgical route, specifically "metal-chloride leaching" and "pressure oxygen leaching," both of which have achieved recovery rates of more than 90 percent in tests. Yanbu', Saudi Arabia's new industrial city on the west coast, may be the site for this operation.

The technology, then, seems promising – though one major problem will be corrosion on a massive scale, the result of hot brines and muds – and the next stage is to run a pilot operation in 1984 which will produce dry, salt-free concentrate at one seventieth the scale of commercial operations.

Technical optimism aside, Saudi Arabia and The Sudan must also consider the economics – and they are as tricky as the technology. To be sure, the latest estimates of *Atlantis II* Deep suggest a tremendous potential: 1.95 million metric tons of zinc, 400,000 metric tons of copper, 4,000 metric tons of silver and 60 tons of gold worth some $4 billion at current prices. But metal markets are highly volatile. At today's prices, for example, almost half the revenue would come from zinc – which has recently been steadily rising in price – while copper revenues would be much smaller.

As for silver, the target metal, commission experts have to keep in mind such upsets as the 1980 fiasco when prices gyrated wildly during an attempt to corner the market – and then crashed. On the other hand, the silver market is usually less vulnerable than other metals and now seems assured of a long-term upward trend.

In addition to the monetary value of silver and other metals, this project could make an important contribution to Saudi-Sudanese development; in the long term, it would provide not only minerals, but jobs – 2,000 skilled and semi-skilled jobs – plus experience that may prove invaluable later. As Zuhair A. Nawwab, Deputy Secretary General of the commission, put it: "In terms of profit, mining the Red Sea cannot, of course, compare with the return from oil, but in relation to land-based mining, it does compare favorably."

"And even if the project does not go all the way to the commercial phase, we will have achieved something. We have, for instance, modified equipment that can be utilized for ocean mining – and are now filing for international patents. We are gaining a huge amount of valuable Red Sea data, both mineralogical and environmental. And we are providing practical training, which would not otherwise be available, to a lot of nationals from Saudi Arabia and The Sudan."

Mining the Red Sea has also produced an interesting side-effect: cooperation between Saudi Arabia and The Sudan – in favorable contrast to the negotiations at the United Nations Law of the Sea Conference, which after eight years, have produced no agreements and which, as a consequence, have delayed investigations into ocean mining. This is particularly interesting because The Sudan has limited financial resources; thus the whole project is funded by Saudi Arabia. Yet, in pursuing their mutual interests, the two countries have avoided all legal disputes over the ownership of the resources.

Early on – in May 1975 – they signed an agreement limiting their respective exclusive economic zones in the Red Sea to the sea bed less than 1,000 meters deep (3,280 feet) measured from their respective coastlines. The remainder of the seabed below this depth was defined as a common economic zone where joint exploration and exploitation would take place. Happily, continued exploration has confirmed that all 18 mud deposits lie in this common zone.

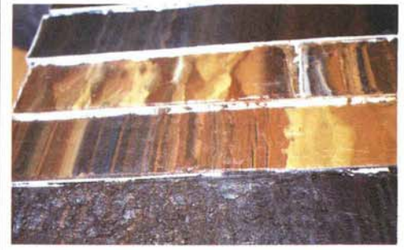
One serious obstacle is the environmental impact of such mining on what is a fragile ecology. Because commercial mining would produce up to 400,000 metric tons of tailings – the waste mud – per day, the Red Sea Commission's Dr. Zaki Mustafa, secretary general, has already gone on record as saying that if the mining activity has any severe adverse impact on marine life, the whole program would be phased out. The commission, in fact, has spent more on environmental studies than on its mining work.

The environmental problem could be serious primarily because the waste mud is

Dr. Nawwab of the Saudi-Sudanese Red Sea Commission.

composed of extremely fine particles – with long settling times – and hot brines contaminated with the chemicals used in froth flotation, and must, logically, be pumped back into the sea since the purpose of "at sea" operations is to avoid the inordinate costs of moving the slurry ashore.

So far, fortunately, detailed environmental monitoring has shown little adverse reaction. During the tests, the German research vessel *Valdivia* tracked the tailings plume as they were pumped down to 400 meters (1,300 feet) through a steel sewage pipe attached to *Sedco 445's*



Samples of multi-colored layers of metal-rich mud.

bow anchor line – to be sure the tailings neither contaminated the water nor reduced light penetration, an important factor in the biology of the sea. In addition, LANDSAT satellite-sensors that have been monitoring the tailings (See *Aramco World*, March-April 1982) and post-test investigations showed that so far neither the coral reefs nor the fauna within the surface layers have been affected. Recently, the commission also received a report – from a Saudi doctoral candidate studying in San Francisco – saying that fine zinc particles discarded in the Red Sea develop a thin layer of oxide that makes them sink faster than originally thought – virtually eliminating danger to marine life from this source.

The way seems clear, therefore, for the pilot phase of the project and there is every possibility that it will go commercial eventually. "On the evidence we have now," Dr. Nawwab said, "we think it will be commercially viable. We hope that pilot mining operation will begin by the end of 1983 and once completed – in about a year – we will have a large amount of data to determine the likely problems and requirements for commercial mining. We hope that by the end of the decade we will be the first to put minerals produced from the sea into the marketplace."

If so, Saudi Arabia and The Sudan, along with participating companies, technical consultants and agencies, will have helped remove the technological and political barriers against well-reasoned exploitation of the world's last great untapped resource – its seas and oceans.

Glyn Ford and Jonathan Simnett are members of a research group at Manchester University in England, now studying the future usages of oceans.

For the Muslims, a 'thunderous triumph'...

The eminent Sinologist L. Carrington Goodrich called it "one of the decisive battles of history," and the great Russian Orientalist and historian *extraordinaire* of Muslim Central Asia, Barthold, declared that "this battle . . . determined the question which of the two civilizations, the Chinese or the Muslim, should predominate in the land (of Turkestan)." Yet few people have heard of the Battle of Talas (A.D. 751), in which Arab and Chinese armies clashed for the first and only time in recorded history, the Arabs scoring a spectacular triumph.

Nor is the engagement simply a landmark in political and military history. It had dramatic repercussions for the history of technology as well, because Chinese prisoners, captured at Talas and subsequently taken to Samarkand, taught the Arabs there how to manufacture paper, thus introducing that revolutionary technique into the Islamic world (see *Aramco World*, September-October 1979).

What led to this military encounter deep in the heart of Asia? How did the armies of a Muslim empire centered in Damascus

The Battle of Talas

WRITTEN BY BARRY HOBERMAN

come to contend with soldiers from as far east as the Pacific? The answer lies in the prior history of Arab and Chinese involvement in Central Asia.

As is well known, the swiftness of the early Arab conquests was nothing short of astonishing; scarcely two decades after the death of the Prophet Muhammad in A.D. 632, the entire Middle East as far as what is today northern Afghanistan had fallen to the Arabs. But Central Asia, then inhabited by such sedentary Iranian peoples as the Sogdians and Khwarizmians, along with a dizzying array of nomadic Turkic tribes, proved militarily a much tougher nut to crack.

Arab soldiers initially crossed the Oxus River (now Amu Darya) into Transoxania (in today's present-day Soviet Uzbekistan) in 654, but it was not until 705, when Qutaiba ibn Muslim became Umayyad governor of Khorasan, that the Arabs achieved real success in Central Asia. And though, in the following decade, Qutaiba subjugated such affluent mercantile cities as Bukhara and Samarkand, as well as the Oxus delta district of Khwarizm, south of the Aral Sea, Asian resistance in Transoxania erupted again after Qutaiba's death in 715. Nevertheless, by the end of the Umayyad period (750), most of Transoxania – one of the wealthiest lands of the medieval world, thanks to its extensive trade with China, largely in silk, and Eastern Europe, in such goods as furs, amber, honey, and walrus ivory – had been incorporated into the Islamic realm.

This conquest, however, put the Muslims on a collision course with China, which had made its presence felt in these areas as early as the second century B.C. and which at times exerted hegemony over small kingdoms in Turkestan – modern Sinkiang – and over such Silk Road oases as Karashahr, Kucha, Aksu, Kashgar, Yarkand, and Khotan – names that conjure up storybook images of slow caravans of Bactrian camels, carrying cargoes of silk and jade and plodding silently across shifting sands and eerie, lifeless wastes.

During the T'ang dynasty (A.D. 618-907), however, the Chinese influence began to reach even further westward, resulting in a tradition of Chinese overlordship crystallizing in such regions as Transoxania. T'ang troops rarely ventured beyond Tokmak, but commercial and diplomatic links between China and Transoxania were, nonetheless, quite strong. Even after the conquests of Qutaiba ibn Muslim, the petty kings and princes of the Central Asia city-states continued to send embassies to China, and to receive in return grandiloquent, if hollow, Chinese titles from the reigning emperor, Hsuan-tsung.

Early in the eighth century, then, we see the Arabs pushing deeper and deeper into Iranian and Turkic lands within China's sphere of influence – two titans, each in the midst of a vigorous period of expansion, on a definite collision course.

Neither of these medieval colossi really wanted war with the other. For one thing, there would have been tremendous logistical problems. Neither army was adequately familiar with the topography of the regions and the job of moving troops, equipment, and provisions over such vast distances presented a formidable challenge. Moreover, what if the Arabs were suddenly faced with a native insurrection in Transoxania, or the Chinese confronted with a similar situation in the Tarim Basin, their area? To restore order, combat units might have to be withdrawn from the front on short notice, and a military disaster could ensue.

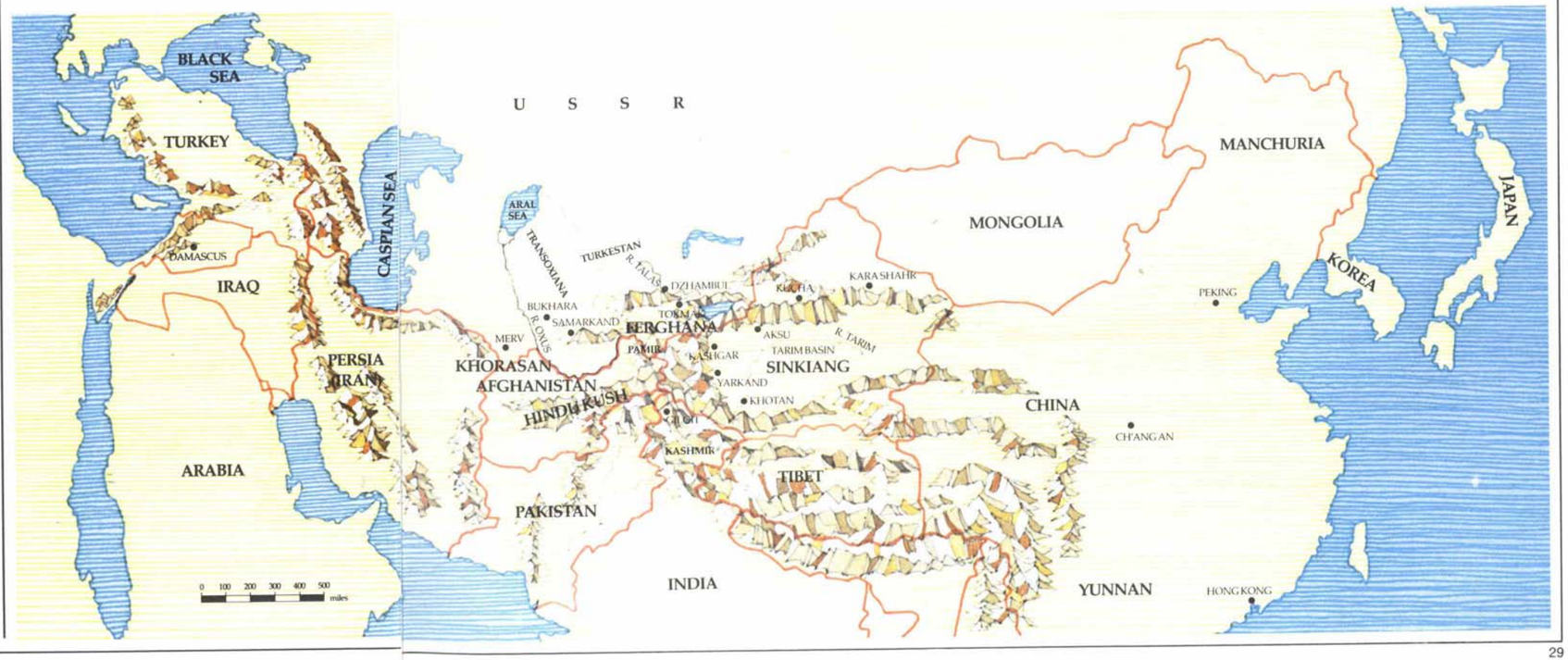
War, moreover, would at least disrupt the phenomenally lucrative transcontinental silk trade and conceivably choke it off altogether – to the detriment of both titans. For that reason, perhaps, various Arab and Iranian embassies were sent, during the Umayyad era, to Ch'ang-an, T'ang China's western capital. And though the historical records of these embassies are often confused and open to divergent interpretations, one Chinese source reveals that "Persia" sent 10 embassies between 713 and 755 – without saying that Persia was then a part of the Umayyad (and after 750, the Abbasid) empire; some of the embassies, therefore, may have actually been sent by Arab governors of Khorasan.

In any case, neither the Arabs nor the Chinese were really preparing for all-out war – and no war would have occurred had the unexpected not happened, as, in history, it so often does. This time it involved a third Asian empire whose fortunes were on the rise towards the middle of the eighth century: Tibet.

Originally, the Tibetans had burst into the arena of international politics under the first king of Tibet, the celebrated Srong-btsan Sgam-po, who died in A.D. 649 or 650. By about 670 they had stunned China by seizing the strategically vital regions in the Tarim Basin – which they held for over 20 years. This enmity continued during the first half of the eighth century as China won a series of hard-fought engagements, and, in an effort to put a permanent damper on the imperial aspirations of the plucky Tibetans, established alliances with tiny kingdoms on Tibet's rear flank: in Kashmir and the Pamir and Hindu Kush mountains.

Eventually, though, a crisis developed when a pro-Tibetan ruler came to power in the kingdom of Gilgit, located in the neighborhood of the modern city of the same name, now in Pakistan. The Chinese, after a number of unsuccessful attempts to rectify this unacceptable situation, finally sent a large army westward in 747 under the command of the famed Korean general Kao Hsien-chih who, in a dramatic campaign, remembered long after in both China and Korea, crossed the Pamirs and swooped down on an unsuspecting Gilgit. Demolishing the bridge across which Tibetan reinforcements would have had to arrive, Kao beheaded selected pro-Tibetan officials, and took the king and his Tibetan wife prisoner – thereby ending Gilgit's flirtation with China's enemy, but failing nonetheless to head off the impending collision with the Arabs at Talas.

On the Arab side, our key informants on the Battle of Talas are the renowned historian Ibn al-Athir (1160-1233) and the comparatively unheralded al-Dhahabi (1274-1348). (Curiously, the most outstanding early Muslim historian, al-Tabari [839-923], has nothing to say about the Battle of Talas – indicating, perhaps, that from the medieval Islamic perspective, the battle



seemed a rather peripheral encounter.) And they, along with Chinese sources, suggest that the clash of empires at Talas had its roots in a purely local quarrel, in the year 750, between the rulers of two petty kingdoms – Ferghana and Chach – that caused Ferghana to seek the military assistance of the Chinese. Kao Hsien-chih, now governor of Kucha, responded by besieging Chach, promising its king safe passage and then treacherously decapitating him. The son of the executed ruler, however, escaped and got word to Abu Muslim, the Abbasid governor of Khorasan. Sensing a golden opportunity to diminish China's political role in Central Asia, Abu Muslim quickly mustered his army at Merv – in today's Soviet Turkmenistan – added reinforcements from Tukharistan, a province in the north of today's Afghanistan, and crossed the Oxus to march to Samarkand. There, he rejoined the army of Transoxania under Ziyad ibn Salih, formerly the Umayyad governor of Kufa in Iraq, and Ziyad took command.

The Chinese had mobilized – in concert with the troops of Ferghana – 30,000 men, according to Chinese accounts, 100,000 according to the Arabs and in July, 751, met the armies of Islam near the town of Talas or Taraz on the Talas River. A modern city of Talas can be found in the Kirghiz S.S.R., but medieval Talas probably lay nearer to present-day Dzhambul.

Chinese annals say the fighting lasted for five days, while Arabic records are inconclusive as to the duration. The end result of this epic encounter, however, is unanimously attested by our sources. The Arabs, aided by the Qarluq Turks, utterly destroyed the Chinese army. In the words of al-Dhahabi, "God cast terror into the hearts of the Chinese. Victory descended, and the unbelievers were put to flight."

To al-Dhahabi, the battle was won by the strategic acumen of Ziyad ibn Salih whose name will forever be remembered in connection with this thunderous Arab triumph beyond the Jaxartes. But the Chinese pin the blame on the Qarluq Turks, who, one account says, were "revolting" or "rebelling" against Kao Hsien-chih. In other words the Qarluqs deserted the Chinese coalition and changed sides in the midst of the action. In fact, the Qarluqs, far from mutinying during the engagement, were allied with the Arabs from the beginning and probably attacked the Chinese from the rear as part of a carefully prearranged battle plan – formulated, we may suppose, by Ziyad ibn Salih.

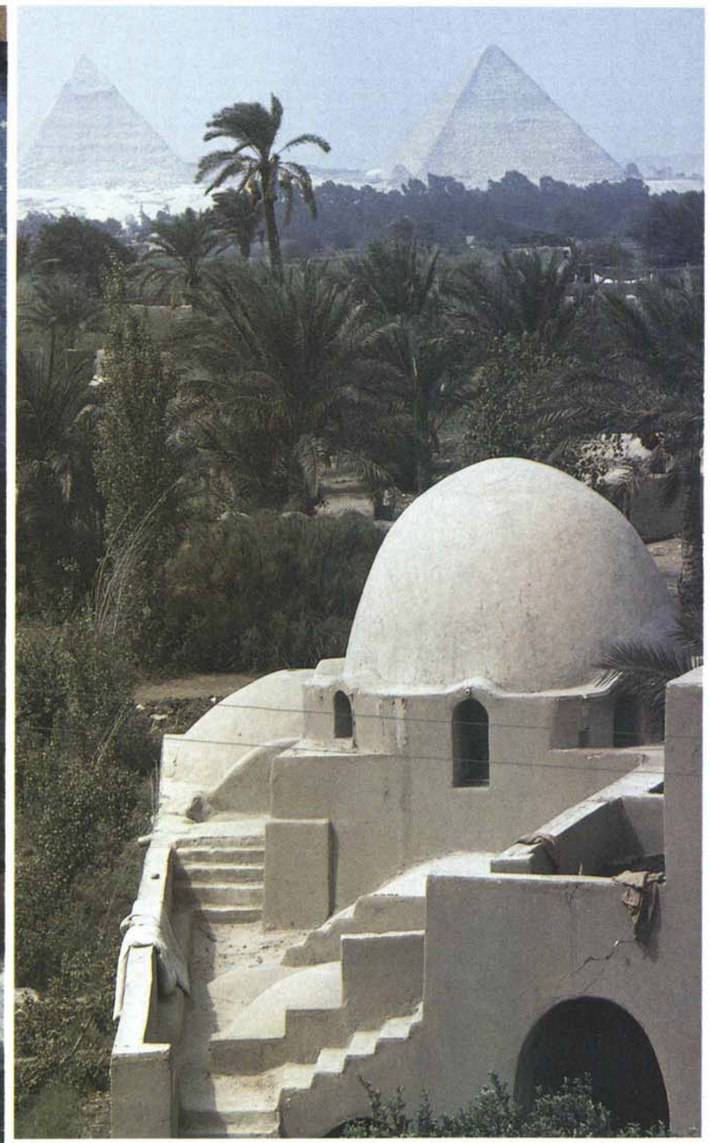
Medievalists, military historians, Arabists, and Sinologists have debated the long-term political ramifications of the Battle of Talas. Never again, it is true, were the Chinese to play a significant role in Central Asia west of the Tarim Basin. Furthermore, this area, in which Buddhist, Zoroastrian, Manichaean, and Nestorian Christian influences had been strong, eventually became almost entirely Muslim. Thus we sometimes read statements to the effect that "those historic days determined the fate of Central Asia," to quote one modern authority.

Nevertheless, it would be an exaggeration to regard the overwhelming Arab victory at Talas as the sole cause of China's withdrawal from the western half of Central Asia, since, about the same time that Kao Hsien-chih's troops were vanquished by those of Ziyad ibn Salih, China was experiencing trouble elsewhere on her borders – with the bothersome Tibetans, the Uygur Turks in Mongolia, and in Manchuria the Khitan people, later to conquer much of North China. Khitan's troops, for example, thrashed a Chinese army near P'ing-lu in 751 and in 754 Chinese forces suffered terrible defeats at the hands of the young kingdom of Nan-chao – today's Yunnan province – whose rulers were of Thai origin. The first of these two setbacks was sustained less than two months before the July debacle at Talas.

Simultaneously, China was being rocked by dissension within. Simmering opposition to the policies of Emperor Hsuan-tsung culminated in the revolt of 755, and the combination of external pressures and internal convulsions left China enervated and in a woeful state of decline. The defeat at Talas, therefore, did not by itself drive China permanently out of West Turkestan; it was a weakened China's manifest inability to bounce back after Talas that proved decisive in the end. In addition, to say that the battle was directly responsible for Central Asia's "turning Muslim" is to ignore the very real spiritual dimension in the region's *gradual* conversion to Islam – to wit, the strong inherent appeal of the Islamic faith, profoundly demonstrated over 13 centuries of world history.

Barry Hoberman, a free-lance writer, has an M.A. in Central Asian history from the University of Indiana.

TAPESTRIES OF HARRANIYA



WRITTEN AND PHOTOGRAPHED BY JOHN FEENEY

Ali Selim, one of the weavers of Harraniya, spent a year on this tapestry. It depicts a full day in an Egyptian village.

In the shadow of the Pyramids, Ramses Wissa Wassif built a studio and a museum for the creation and display of art by Egyptian children.

"...every human being... born an artist..."

Ali Selim took nearly a year to weave his masterpiece – a tapestry three meters long, depicting one full day in the life of an Egyptian village. Its completion, however, represented the culmination of an unusual experiment begun 38 years before by Ramses Wissa Wassif, then a young Cairo architect, his wife Sophie and her father, Habib Gorgi – another man with a theory on the source of artistic gifts.

This experiment was based on a belief of the Austrian expressionist painter, Oskar Kokoschka, that all children are born geniuses, but lose their genius because of life's faulty teaching. "It begins with parents and goes on with teachers and if they don't get him, the other children will," Kokoschka said.

Like Kokoschka, Ramses Wissa Wassif and his family came to believe that very young children the world over are capable of making wondrously beautiful things, if only given the chance. And like Gorgi – who thought ancient Egypt's skill in sculpture still survived in today's children (see *Aramco World*, January-February, 1982) – Ramses Wassif decided to put his theory to the test by getting to children before their God-given talents evaporated.

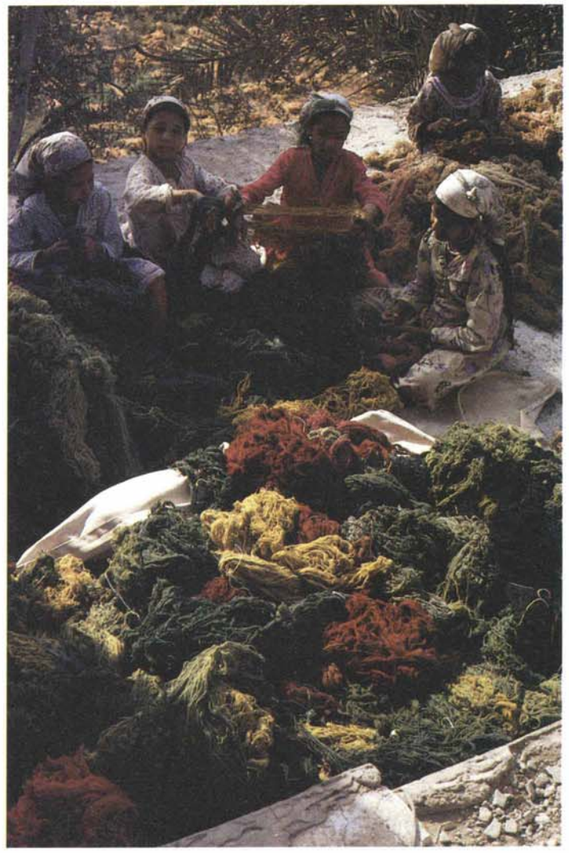
Unlike Kokoschka, Ramses believed that education need not necessarily stifle creativity; indeed, it could be used to liberate it. "I had the conviction," he said, "that every human being was born an artist, but that his gifts could be brought out only if artistic creation was encouraged by the practice of a craft from early childhood."

Initially, Wissa Wassif, who studied architecture in Paris, planned to demonstrate his theory by helping children learn to paint. Later, however, he turned to a craft with a very ancient history in Egypt: weaving.

Egypt has been renowned for fine textiles from remote antiquity; the world's earliest known textiles, in fact, were woven in Egypt – three pieces of linen found in a royal tomb at Thebes. They date from 1412 B.C. and are woven with a pattern of lotus blossoms in red and blue. The high point of Egyptian weaving was reached, however, in the first seven centuries of the Christian era, when the Copts perfected the pictorial woven textiles that were to exert such a profound influence in Europe later.

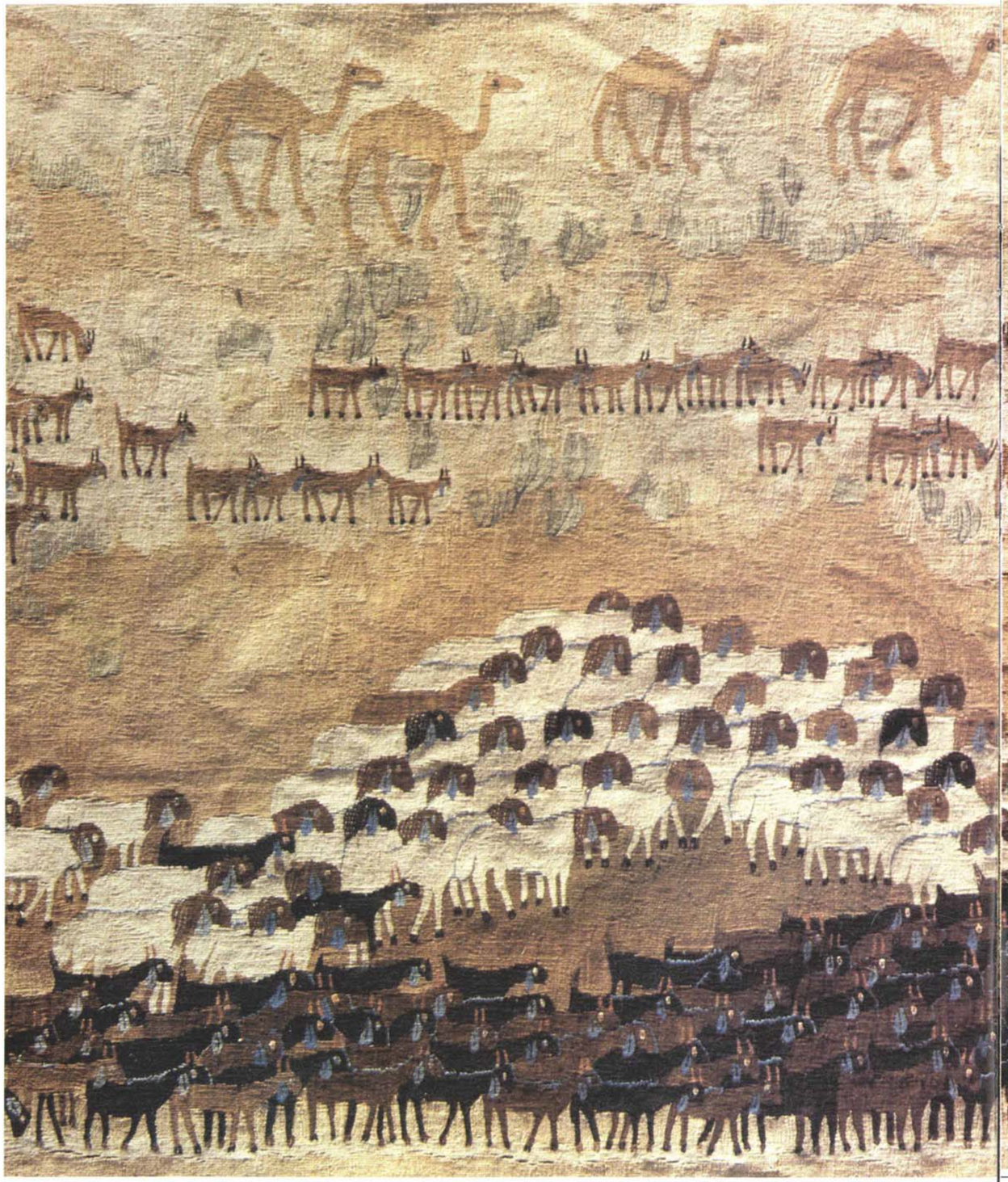
There was another reason why Wassif chose weaving. His close friend Habib Gorgi – soon to be his father-in-law – was achieving a remarkable success in his experiment: teaching children to sculpt in

At looms in the Harraniya studio, two women weave tapestries without any drawing or pattern to guide them.

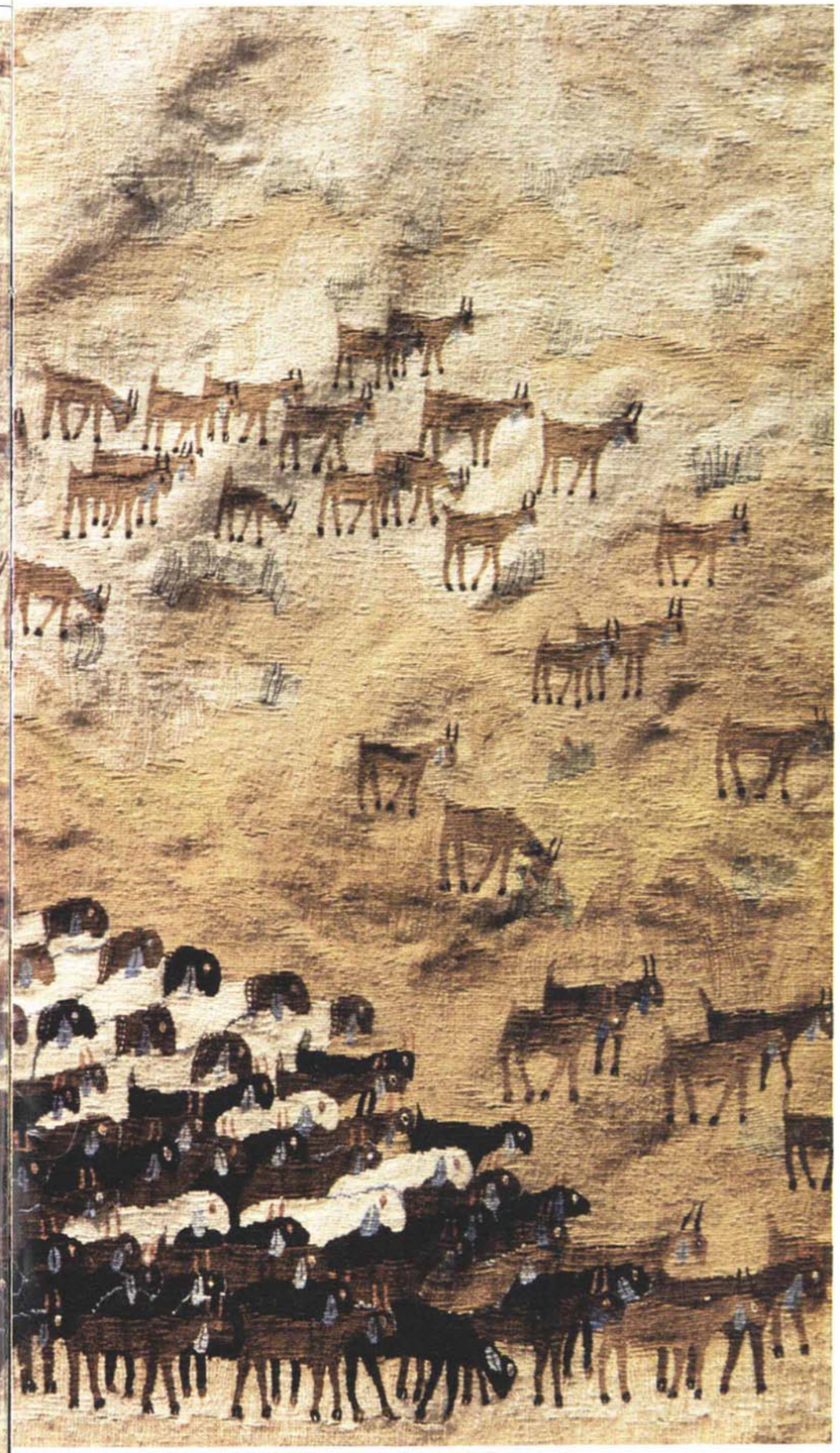


Ghariah Mahmoud, shown here with her two sons, is known as the 'gamousa lady', because she wove this now famous tapestry of Egypt's water buffalo.

As part of the experiment, the children of Harraniya produced their own dye, and dyed their own wool before starting weaving. Here they sort out the dyed yarn.



Like all of Ali Selim's works, this three and a half meter 'Desertscape' has nature and wildlife as its main theme.



mud. So why, Wassif asked himself, could they not be taught to weave too?

In 1952, Ramses, Habib and Sophie bought a small piece of land beside a canal outside the village of Harraniya, not far from the pyramids of Giza, and began an ambitious project to revive the ancient art. In a setting of vegetable gardens and fields of corn, they built a small studio, domed, vaulted and whitewashed in the traditional manner, to which they invited the children of Harraniya to come and play. They then picked 18 children – the eldest 10, the youngest 8 – none of whom had ever had a lesson, or touched a loom, and provided each of them with a small upright loom and supplies of locally grown wool.

At first, the only images to appear on the looms were irregular lines of color – a line of red, a line of yellow or perhaps black. One girl made two "legs" and said it was a bird. Another made four and said it was a cow. They could not, at first, make forms. Then, suddenly, the miracle happened: the children began to create – actually create – what must be called works of art. Madame Sophie Wassif says that, "one child made a complete tree with a bird alongside…the bird…as big as the tree. This was the beginning."

Because Wassif regarded adult criticism as a paralyzing intrusion on the child's imagination, no criticism was allowed. In the closely guarded environment of the studio, each child was free to work at whatever came into his or her mind – and they were thus able to develop confidence in their work, and to depend solely on their own imaginations.

To stimulate the children's imaginations, however, Wassif often took them on outings to the banks of the Nile, or on picnics in the desert, and once to far-off Alexandria – to experience the sight and sound of the sea for the first time in their lives. As a result, in a little more than a year, a profusion of images began to emerge from the children's looms: geese and ducks seen every morning on the nearby irrigation canal, Ahmad's water buffalo coming to drink and Shahira's chickens. But there were also fantasies: pink sheep, purple horses, and birds that fly without opening their wings – all woven with an imaginative power and vision that only children possess.

From the beginning, Wassif forbade the children to make preliminary drawings. The child had to visualize his picture and keep it in mind until the weaving was finished. As each tapestry progressed, the completed portion was rolled up so that the

(Top) Mahbouba Bayoumi's "Tree with pigeons" vividly demonstrates the color and detail that these untrained weavers can achieve.

(Bottom, left) In this close-up of a bird, a few square inches capture the texture and detail of these famous works.

In the studio gardens, appropriately, a weaver named Nadia holds up a tapestry called "House in garden."

child was compelled to retain the initial purity of his conception until it was finished. Then, when the tapestry was completed and unrolled, the children exclaimed: "How did this happen?"... "Did I do this?". A sense of triumph began to possess the children.

As each child explored and mastered weaving techniques, his, or her, expressions became bolder, yet at the same time more subtle – and individual styles began to emerge. Some exaggerated their subjects, as children do, while others delighted in realism. And though the great pyramids of Giza were just across the fields, the children ignored them; their thoughts were focused on the village life around them, never on the past.

As part of the experiment, a section of the garden surrounding the studio was used to grow dye plants – the roots of the madder plant, for example, which produced a red dye – and over wood fires and steaming pots set up in the garden, the children were introduced to the magic of dyeing their own wools, according to the colors they needed for their next tapestry.

At first, more girls than boys were attracted to the craft. Boys didn't seem to have the patience to stay put at the looms. But some years after the experiment began, a 12-year-old boy came to the studio and announced: "I want to work in your place".

Ramses was unsure if he should accept the boy. He told his wife, Sophie, "It's a big responsibility. Soon this boy will be a man and I'm not yet sure of what I am doing." And so the boy went away.

Unknown to anyone, however, the boy began to collect odd pieces of wood to make his very own small loom – a miniature of the ones he had seen at the studio – and to gather scraps of wool thrown out by others. By himself, he began to weave. Later, he came back to Wassif with his little piece of weaving, and defiantly holding it out at arm's length, said: "Do you accept me now?"

The boy was Ali Selim. Now 35, he is one of Harraniya's finest weavers. His very large tapestry woven in 1978 on "the hours of the day" was made after he had listened to Madame Sophie reading the Pharaoh Akhenaton's great hymn to the sun.

Like most of Harraniya's weavers, Ali has always chosen subjects close to nature. "God is so rich," he once said. "I shut my eyes and say, I cannot imitate God. We are children of God and all this nature he is doing for us." He spent a year studying life in the nearby desert before he wove another large "desert" masterpiece, more than three and a half meters long.

Recently, Ali began a study of the date palm, a very difficult tree to weave well. After months of contemplating the palms and trying out small-scale weavings, he announced: "I have not yet arrived. I know it's not right. I am waiting for you to come and we shall discuss it together."

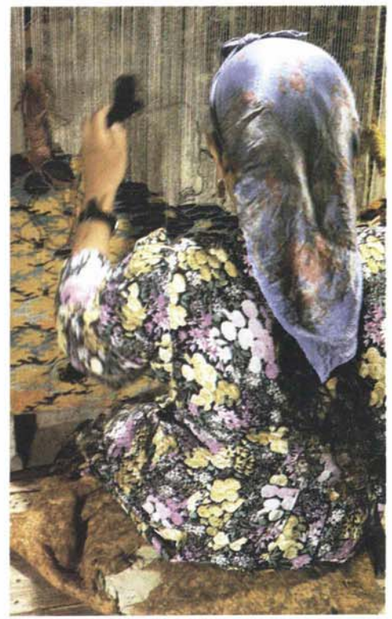
So Madame Sophie and Ali went by car to see the date palms a short distance down the road on the way to Sakkara. It was nearing sundown, and the animals were coming home from the fields. In the background were the dark palms. Ali decided that his new piece "should be about animals going home at dusk. I will make all these animals with a white donkey and a man in colored clothes against the dark palms. This will be something."

The children who began Wassif's experiment nearly 30 years ago, no longer think and weave the way they did then. They have matured into sophisticated artists, capable of subtle color and fine shading. But their childhood themes of nature remain and are present in all their work.

Ghariah Mahmoud, the youngest of the original 12 children, began weaving when she was eight. Now she is 37, and one of her daughters weaves beside her. Her work – like that of Hanem Moussa, Myrian Hermina, Samia Ahmad and Karima Ali – is recognized by collectors all over the world. So far, she has been the only one interested in doing people and faces. Like Ali's, many of her projects are ambitious and she often attempts very large tapestries, such as her "Marriage in the Village," which measures 3 x 2 meters. It shows people coming from far and near in small boats to attend a village wedding.

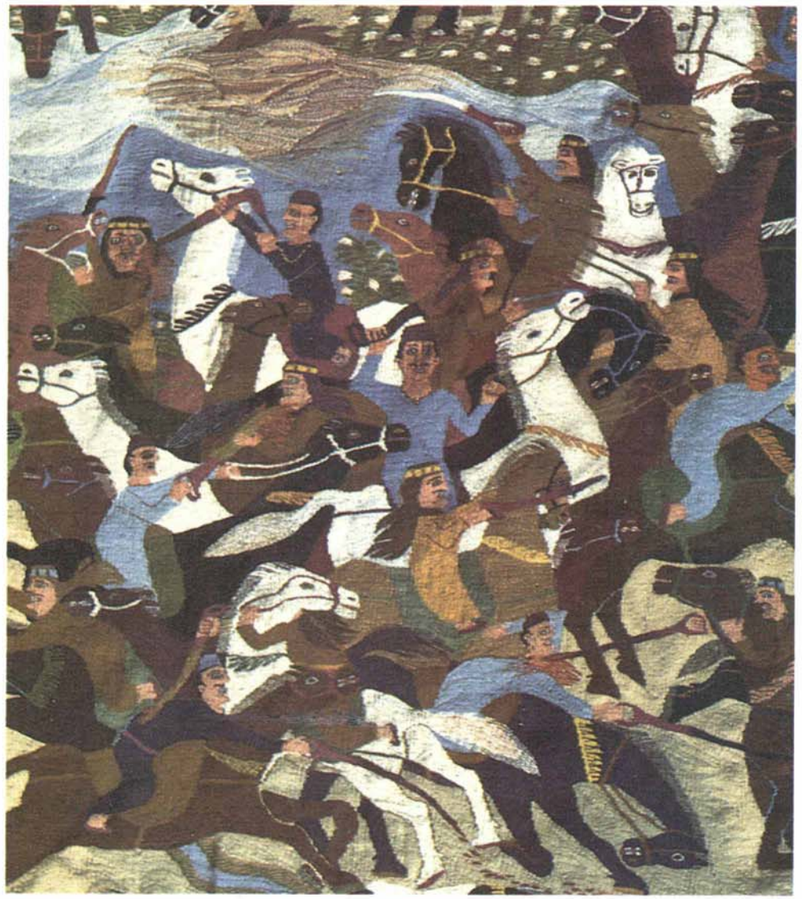
Sometimes Ghariah is known as "the *gamousa* (water-buffalo) lady" because of her famous tapestry of a herd of water-buffalo drinking at a village pond. One day a visitor from Sweden arrived at the studio and asked Ghariah if she would make a large tapestry for his native city. He brought along a short film to show her the city deep under snow. Ghariah had never seen snow, but she gamely tried to weave it. Then, however, she refused to go on. "I would like to give them my country," she said, and wove instead "The Village of Harraniya," which now hangs in the city hall at Hedesunda, Sweden.

After nearly 30 years, there still seems no end to the stream of village fantasies. Yet the weavers never repeat themselves. A recent visitor remarked to one young



(Top) Soraya, 18, displays a tapestry based on a cactus. (Centre) Carpets show how the weavers of Harraniya capture the exact shades and tones of nature.

(Bottom) Hanem Moussa, another of the talented women weavers, almost always focuses on masses of leaves, flowers and birds.



weaver: "This is lovely; why don't you do it again?" and was told: "I had this idea and I said it. Why should I do it again?"

Shehata Hamza, after sleeping outside one hot summer's night, awoke in a state of excitement and asked if he "could do what I have seen in the sky last night." The result was "Egypt, Land of the Nile" – an abstraction of stars, moon, brooding land and water woven in pale and dark blue with areas of black.

There have been a number of important exhibitions of Harraniya tapestries in Cairo, Paris, Zurich, Rome, London and Stockholm. In 1975, for example, the Exxon Corporation sponsored an exhibition of Harraniya tapestries in the United States, and they were received with delight in city after city. Many now grace the walls of galleries and collectors around the world.

Though Ramses Wissa Wassif died in 1974, his wife Sophie still carries on offering encouragement when it is needed. "We never know what is going to come next. Only yesterday one of the new boys was sitting on the grass. He had all his colors spread out in front of him and he called out: 'What will be my next piece?' I said: 'Oh what beautiful colors you have there laid out on the grass. Put these colors onto the loom.' And so he began."

"I sometimes wonder," she said recently, "should I intrude at all? But two years ago I had a meeting with the people. I said: 'I want some time for myself, what about giving you looms at home and I can help

with exhibitions?' But they all shouted together, 'No, we need you with us, we need to ask you more and more.' When I stay away three days, they come and call me: 'Please come.' This means we have not yet completely succeeded. The day they will be independent and continue to grow in their own art, on this day I will say that Ramses' experiment is successful."

John Feeney, a long time resident of Cairo, is a regular contributor to Aramco World.

Details from two of Ghariah Mahmoud's well known works: (Right) "Villagers coming by boat to a village" and (Top, left) his famous "Battle".

(Right) After a drive to Sakkara, Ali decided that this composition on date palms would be "about animals going home at dusk."