ARAMCO WORLD
magazine
P.O. BOX 2106
HOUSTON, TEXAS 77252
(PRINTED IN THE NETHERLANDS)
ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

ARAMCO WORLD
magazine
NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 1984

The Orientalists

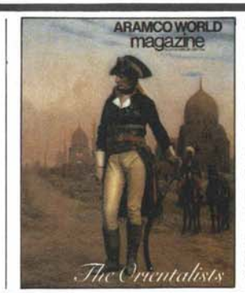
J. L. GEROME

ARAMCO WORLD magazine

VOL. 35 NO. 6 PUBLISHED BI-MONTHLY NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 1984

Published by Aramco, a Corporation, 340 Shoreham Building, 15th and H Street, N.W. Washington, D.C. 20005; John J. Kelberer, Chairman of the Board and Chief Executive Officer; Ali I. Naimi, President; Fahad M. Ghaslaan, Treasurer; Paul F. Hoye, Editor. Designed and produced by Scurr, Barnes & Keenan, Ltd Printed in The Netherlands by Royal Smeets Offset B.V. Distributed without charge to a limited number of readers with an interest in Aramco, the oil industry, or the history, culture, geography and economy of the Middle East. Editorial correspondence concerning **Aramco World Magazine** should be addressed to The Editor, Plesmanlaan 100, 2332 CB Leiden, The Netherlands. Requests for subscriptions and changes of address should be sent to Aramco Services Company, attention S.W. Kombargi, Director, Public Affairs Department, 1800 Augusta Drive, Suite 300, Houston, Texas 77057.

ISSN 0003-7567



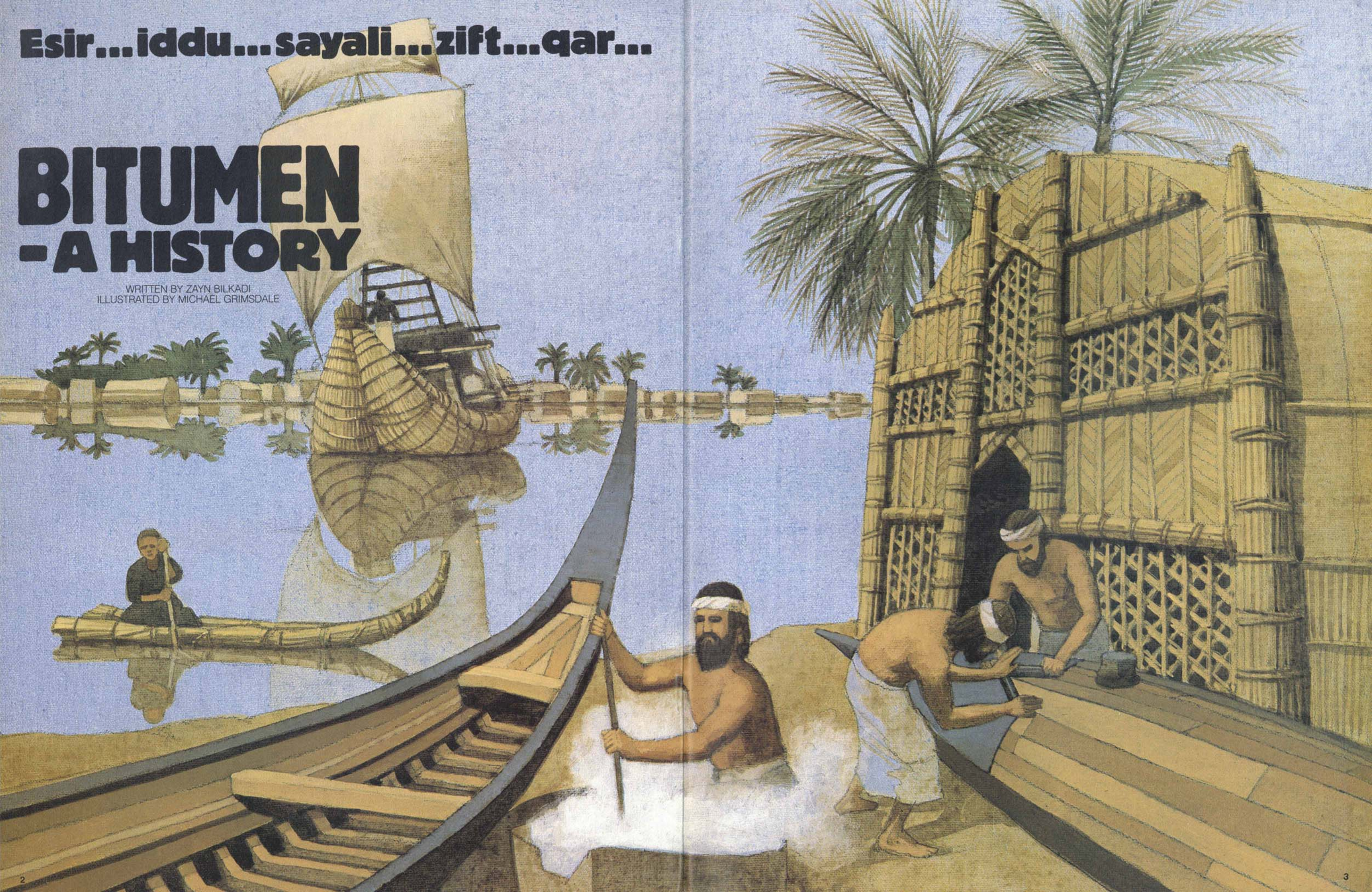
Cover: This painting of General Bonaparte, against a background of the Mamluk Tombs in Cairo, is one of four by Gérôme depicting Napoleon on campaign in the Middle East. Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1798 launched a flow of artists to the Middle East eager to portray its exotic terrain, customs and costumes. Back cover: *The Scribe* by Deutsch, courtesy of the Fine Arts Society, London. Both paintings were featured in an exhibition of "Orientalism" in Washington, D.C. earlier this year.

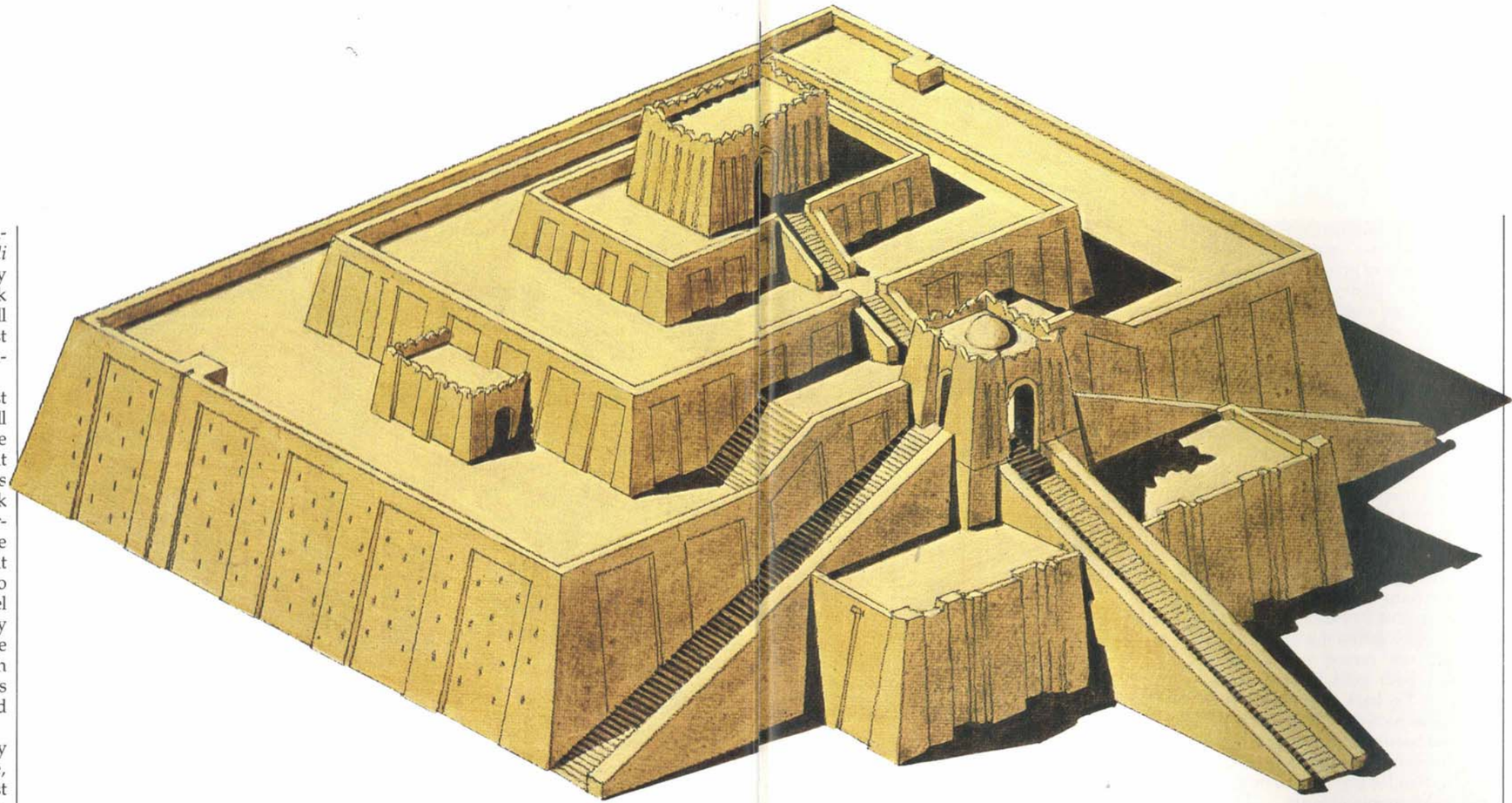
◄ One of the statues at Hatra – a Parthian city protected by its relative inaccessibility and one of the few Mesopotamian relics still intact.

Esir...iddu...sayali...zift...qar...

BITUMEN -A HISTORY

WRITTEN BY ZAYN BILKADI
ILLUSTRATED BY MICHAEL GRIMSDALE





The Sumerians called it *esir*, the Akkadians *iddu*, and the Arabs of Iraq *sayali* or *zift* or *qar*, but in English, it is simply "bitumen" or "asphalt" – that thick dark liquid you instantly associate with the smell of freshly laid pavement, and the first petroleum product ever used by the human race.

For thousands of years before the first civilization in Sumer, the substance we call bitumen was already prized as an adhesive – the result, apparently, of an ancient hunter's discovery that he could attach his flint arrowhead to a shaft with a sticky black substance found in a nearby spring. Several millennia later, that same substance cemented one of the wonders of the ancient world, a man-made mountain built to "rival heaven" – the famous Tower of Babel (See *Aramco World*, January-February 1967). In Egypt, it was used to preserve mummies, and many millennia later, with the coming of Islam, Muslim physicians began to prescribe it for skin ailments and wounds.

In ancient times, bitumen was primarily a Mesopotamian monopoly. To be sure, there were other areas in the Middle East where bitumen deposits had been exploited since early times: along the eastern shores of the Dead Sea and in Persia. But in neither Palestine nor Persia did this exploitation compare with that in Mesopotamia. For one thing, the "land between the rivers" was blessed, like no other land, with all sorts of petroleum deposits. From north to south along the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, the country was littered with bitumen seepages, crude oil springs and even bituminous rock which released crude oil when heated.

This oil, however, was not held in high esteem by the Mesopotamians; they did not know how to handle its flammability nor thicken it with evaporation. This led the Akkadians to invent the word *naptu* (forerunner of *napht* or *naft* in Arabic) to designate the supposedly useless flammable crude oil, as opposed to the highly prized *iddu*.

Later, with the coming of the Greeks and Muslims, *naft* would capture the scientific imaginations of the period; but initially, *iddu* was the only important petroleum substance, especially in the areas surrounding the ancient cities of Hit and al-Ramadi, on the south bank of the Euphrates (See map), where, from several hundred natural springs, pure bitumen oozed to the surface. This was the best bitumen, for it came out softened with occluded water, practically ready for use. The place called Hit, in fact, was synonymous with bitumen; *iddu* literally meant "the product from Id," and "Id" was the Akkadian name for Hit.

So important were the bitumen deposits of Hit to the Babylonian and Assyrian kingdoms that the city itself acquired a sacred character. A passage in the annals of King Tukulti Ninurta II (890-884 B.C.) reads: "In front of Hit, by the bitumen springs, the place of the Usmeta stones, in which the gods speak, I spent the night."

The "Usmeta" stones were gypsum deposits impregnated with bitumen and sulfur from which gases were expelled through crevices. This resulted in a muffled noise – assumed to be the oracular muttering of the underworld gods.

Actually, neither the Babylonians nor even their Sumerian predecessors were the *first* to use bitumen. Prehistoric hunting and farming communities used sickles made of flint arrowheads attached to a shaft with bitumen and made broken ostrich eggs into vases decorated with lapis lazuli and mother-of-pearl set in bitumen. But the people that first used bitumen on a large scale were the early settlers along the river in southern Mesopotamia: the 'Ubaids. At first marsh dwellers living in crude shelters, the 'Ubaids eventually came to be able and enterprising farmers, who prospered and multiplied over the centuries and built the foundations of most of the settlements along the Tigris and Euphrates rivers where the great cities of Sumer were later to grow.

The creative genius of these people emerged early – about 4500 B.C. – as they adapted to their harsh marshy environment. In a land barren of trees and without any stone quarries, they built astounding shelters of the only material available: fragile marsh reeds (See *Aramco World*, November-December 1966, March-April 1982) – bundling the reeds together with bulrush fiber, constructing frameworks of reed columns, roofing the structure with reed matting and, at first, insulating the interiors by plastering the walls with a thick layer of mud.

Since mud, however, could not resist the frequent spring floods, the discovery of bitumen was a distinct advantage: impervious to moisture and maintenance-free, it was a blessing to a community where mere survival was a daily dawn-to-dusk battle.

After that discovery, the 'Ubaids soon made another: how to waterproof their boats. By 4000 B.C., the 'Ubaids were already roaming the marshes of Shatt al-Arab in paddle boats of plaited reed, covered with stretched animal hides. But when they discovered the waterproofing properties of bitumen, they quickly began to coat the boats on the inside and outside, sealing the craft's hulls and reinforcing their fragile reed frames.

This technique was inherited almost unchanged by the Akkadians and Babylonians – as Herodotus, the first historian to visit Babylon, reported in astonishment. They use, he said, "curious small round boats woven together of reeds, like baskets, and waterproofed with a coating of bitumen." To this day, the circular *guffah* constructed of woven reeds caulked with bitumen are used to ferry passengers and merchandise across the Tigris River at Baghdad and the Euphrates River at Babylon.

In such craft the 'Ubaid seamen also ventured into the Arabian Gulf, eventually going as far as "Dilmun" in Bahrain – and the eastern coast of Saudi Arabia – to become the first documented seafarers of history.

In the alluvial plains to the north, meanwhile, ancient builders had reached for another raw material – clay – to mold the first building bricks. Initially, they just left them in the sun to dry – the kiln had not yet been invented – and began to lay the foundations of what were to become, under the Sumerians, mankind's first cities, first temples and first palaces.

After experimenting, however, the builders learned that sun-dried bricks by themselves were not strong enough to support large structures, so they began to add a little chopped straw to the clay before they dried it. These new bricks were a bit stronger, but since they would still collapse in a flood, or under prolonged rain, the builders eventually began to add bitumen too. When this happened is not known with certainty, but a good guess would be in prehistoric times, long before 3000 B.C.

What *is* known is that by the third millennium B.C., the Sumerians had improved the *shape* of the bricks – loaf-shaped at first – by making them flat on one side and convex on the other. More importantly, they also invented the kiln to *harden* the bricks. Now harder and waterproof, the bricks were also porous, and absorbed some of the bitumen used as mortar and became strong as rock. *Esir* was then mixed with straw or clay to make it into a stiff mortar capable of sustaining the heavy load of the superimposed brickwork without sagging. Thus were built, until 2200 B.C., the palaces and temples of distant Sumerian kings in such ancient cities as Kish, Ur and Uruk.

Even the planoconvex bricks, however, were not ideally shaped; their edges, still too irregular, required too much bitumen between the joints – three to six centimeters to be exact (one to two inches) – and bitumen was expensive. Thus came the last breakthrough, molding bricks in wooden frames, and the stage was set for the structures that were to dominate the Mesopotamian landscape: the lofty ziggurats, the dams and the fabulous palaces.

In the beginning, the largest of these structures were the ziggurats, massive stepped structures erected at the center of the city to lure the favors of various deities. With time, every city had its own ziggurat, and many of these grew to colossal sizes requiring millions of bricks and thousands of tons of bitumen.

Among the most famous of these structures was the Tower of Babel, which took hundreds of years to complete. Herodotus, who saw it standing shortly before its destruction, described it as a splendid seven-stage pyramid soaring 90 meters (295 feet) above the roofs of Babylon, each of its facades a different color and its baked bricks cemented with bitumen.

The Tower of Babel was completed by Nebuchadnezzar II, the last great king of Babylon, and one of the most prodigious builders in history. To Nebuchadnezzar, bitumen was a daily symbol of progress

and prosperity, visible not only in the tower that he cherished, but in every paved street, wall, bath, bridge and drain pipe his workers touched. Among his achievements was a bridge over the Euphrates 120 meters long (393 feet), erected on piers of burnt bricks cemented and coated with bitumen. He also constructed large sewers lined with a mixture of bitumen, clay and gravel. He laid down the first paved streets by setting stone slabs in bitumen-mortar.

Nebuchadnezzar then began to build his palace – a symbol of the might and wealth of a city and the subject, on one of his tablets, of an eloquent description:

> In Babel, my favorite city that I love, was the palace, the house, the marvel of mankind, the center of the land, the dwelling of majesty ... In consequence of high waters, its foundation had become weak, and owing to the filling up of the streets of Babel, the gateway to that palace had become too low. I tore down its walls of dried brick, and laid its cornerstone bare, and reached the depth of the waters. Facing the water, I laid its foundation firmly and raised it mountain high with bitumen and burnt brick. Mightly cedars I caused to be laid down at length for its roofing... For protection, I built two massive walls of asphalt and brick, 490 ells [English linear measure equal to 114 centimeters (45 inches)] beyond Nimitti-Bel [the outer wall of Babel]. Between them I erected a structure of bricks on which I built my kingly dwelling of asphalt and bricks. This I surrounded with a massive wall of asphalt and burnt bricks.

North of Babylon, meanwhile, the Assyrians, with access to stone, did not need bricks – but did use bitumen as mortar. One of the inscriptions of the Assyrian King Sennacherib (704-681 B.C.) describes his efforts to reclaim land by damming the river:

> [I] covered the bed of the diverted river Telbiti with rush matting at the bottom and quarried stone on top, cemented together with bitumen. I thus had a stretch of land 454 ells long and 289 ells wide, raised out of the water and changed into dry land.

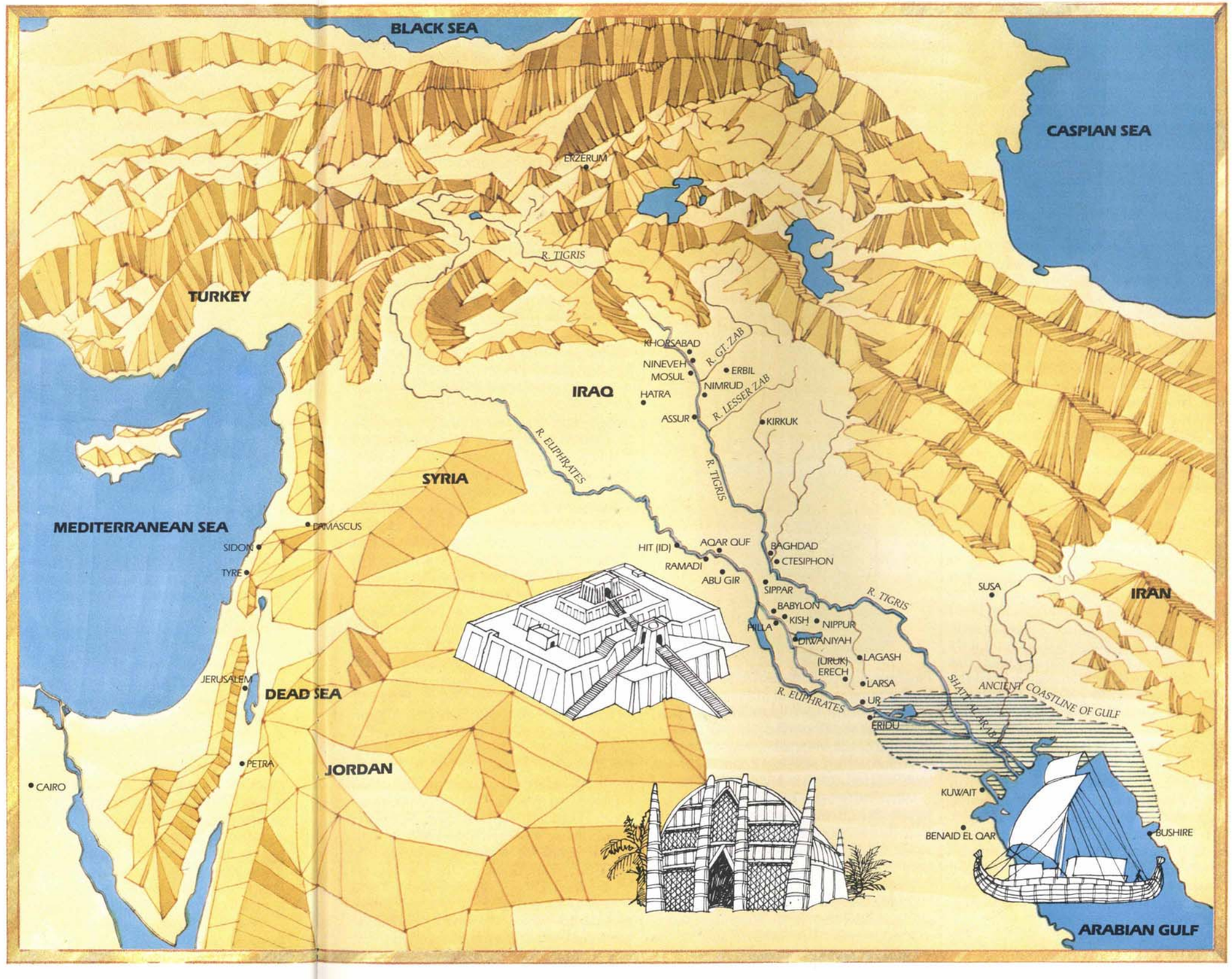
Curiously, bitumen was also important in early artistic expression during the development of civilization in Mesopotamia. In the 'Ubaid period, for example, bitumen was molded into wigs and covered with gold foil or copper to adorn terracotta figurines and larger stone statues. It was also used as a base in which to inlay precious stones for vases. And from the Royal Cemetery at Ur, you can see the extent of Sumerian artistic design and craftsmanship in such treasures as the "Standard," a two-sided panel in which small mother-of-pearl figurines are inlaid in bitumen with a mosaic background of lapis lazuli.

This inlay technique was also used to decorate figures in the round – such as a wooden harp with a gold bull's head and a standing goat; the head and legs of the goat, as well as the thicket on which he is leaning, are carved out of wood and covered with gold foil, cemented with bitumen. The back and flanks of the animal were also coated with bitumen in which hair had been embedded, and hundreds of other objects unearthed by archeologists in recent decades provide examples of bitumen in Mesopotamian art.

In Egypt, meanwhile, *iddu* had been largely ignored – and with good reason; Egyptian pyramids, after all, were built of massive cut stone, not the crumbly mudbricks of the ziggurats, and Egyptian ships were constructed with papyrus, a natural fiber far more buoyant and resistant to salt water than the *burdi* reed of the Mesopotamian *ma-gur* (See *Aramco World*, November-December 1980). The Egyptians, in short, were never as preoccupied with waterproofing as the mudbrick masons, the reed-bundle architects and the curved-reed shipwrights of the Euphrates. Since the raw materials were different, so were the needs.

And yet, sometime around the middle of the fourth century B.C., the Egyptians began to search frantically for a new source of bitumen. They found such a source in the Dead Sea – which the Greek historian Diodorus Siculus described in detail about A.D. 50:

> It is a large sea which yields up much asphalt and from which a by no means negligible revenue is derived. The sea



is about 500 *stadia* (90 kilometers) in length and 60 *stadia* (12 kilometers) wide. The water stinks and is exceedingly bitter so that fish cannot live in it. Every year a large quantity of asphalt in pieces over three *plathrae* (100 meters) float in the middle of the sea. The advent of asphalt is heralded 20 days before its arrival, for all around the sea the stench is wafted by the wind over many *stadia* and all the silver, gold and copper in the neighborhood becomes tarnished.

To collect the floating bitumen from the Dead Sea was by no means difficult; as Diodorus Siculus said, "Those who make it their business to collect bitumen simply draw one end into their boats and the rest of the mass follows." But it was the Nabateans, whose kingdom stretched between the borders of Syria and Arabia, down to the Red Sea, who *owned* the bitumen. Indeed, the Nabatean kingdom, one of the great kingdoms of the ancient world, owed its prosperity to two monopolies: the rich caravan trade that passed from the interior of Arabia to the coast, and the bitumen trade from the Dead Sea. And since the Nabateans charged a hefty price, fully aware that they had a captive market, Egypt had troubles.

The reason for Egypt's sudden need for bitumen was, according to Diodorus Siculus, mummification. "The largest portion of the asphalt derived from the Dead Sea is exported to Egypt, where among other uses, it is employed to mummify dead bodies, for without the mixture of this substance with other aromatics, it would be difficult for them to preserve these for a long time from the corruption to which they are liable."

Mummification had been going on for a long time before 400 B.C., of course, but about 350 B.C., the Egyptians began to run short of the resins they had relied upon in the past to embalm the bodies of their dead. They somehow discovered that bitumen could provide a good substitute, but having no bitumen deposits themselves, had to accept Nabatean terms since to them, embalming, an assurance of eternal life, was vital.

About the same time, unfortunately, the Macedonians, arch-enemies of the

Ptolemaic Egyptians, also needed the Dead Sea bitumen, and about 312 B.C., 10 years after the death of Alexander the Great, Antigonus the One-Eyed, ruler of Phrygia and one of the most ambitious of Alexander's successors, attacked Petra, the Nabatean rock fortress in today's Jordan.

What Antigonus hoped for was to cut Egypt off from the Dead Sea bitumen and thus lure her into a second front. But the attack failed, and the Nabateans resumed their exports to Egypt. Then Egypt, perhaps alerted by the attack to the possibility of losing their supplies of bitumen, also attacked the Nabateans and temporarily won control of the east coast of the Dead Sea, and its bitumen.

Some 240 years later, after the Nabateans had retaken the Dead Sea, the Roman Empire got into the act – when Antony seized the sea and gave it as a gift to Cleopatra. By then, however, mummification was no longer fashionable and both the bitumen and the Dead Sea lost their value for the next 12 centuries.

In the ensuing eras, the use of bitumen was apparently restricted to localities where it was found: Hit, al-Ramadi and Kirkuk in Iraq, Bandar Abbas and Bushir in Iran, Benaid el-Qar in Kuwait and areas on the island of Bahrain. During this time, as in ancient times, the primary use was probably as a mortar in construction and as a waterproofing agent in boats. By the time of the Prophet, however, crude oil was being used as fuel near Susa in Iran and in various scattered localities in the northern mountains of Iraq, and the ninth century Muslim writer al-Jahiz claimed that the Arabs had been familiar with the military uses of petroleum as an incendiary substance since the year 600. This could be true since the inventor of "Greek fire," a highly combustible mixture petroleum, quick lime and sulfur, was from Syria.

It was the Byzantines, however, who first used "Greek fire" in open warfare; at the naval battle of Cyzicus in the year 675, the fleet of Constantine Pogonatus mounted double-action piston pumps in the prows of their warships and squirted the volatile mixture onto Muslim vessels. It was also used against the Arabs during their last siege of Constantinople in 717. The Arabs, however, soon learned the exact composition of the combustible mixture and used it themselves in Asia, where they transmitted it to the Chinese. Indeed, by the year 850 even crew members of Arab trading vessels in the Indian Ocean would use it to protect their ships against pirates, and during the reign of the Abbasid Caliph al-Mutawakkil each corps of archers in the infantry had a special division of naphtha-throwers called *naffatun*, who wore fireproof suits, perhaps of asbestos, and hurled "grenades" at the enemy by hand or with catapults. Some of the "grenades" were astoundingly similar in size and shape to those used in modern times: round iron – or clay – jars which contained the flammable mixture and exploded shortly after the lids were opened.

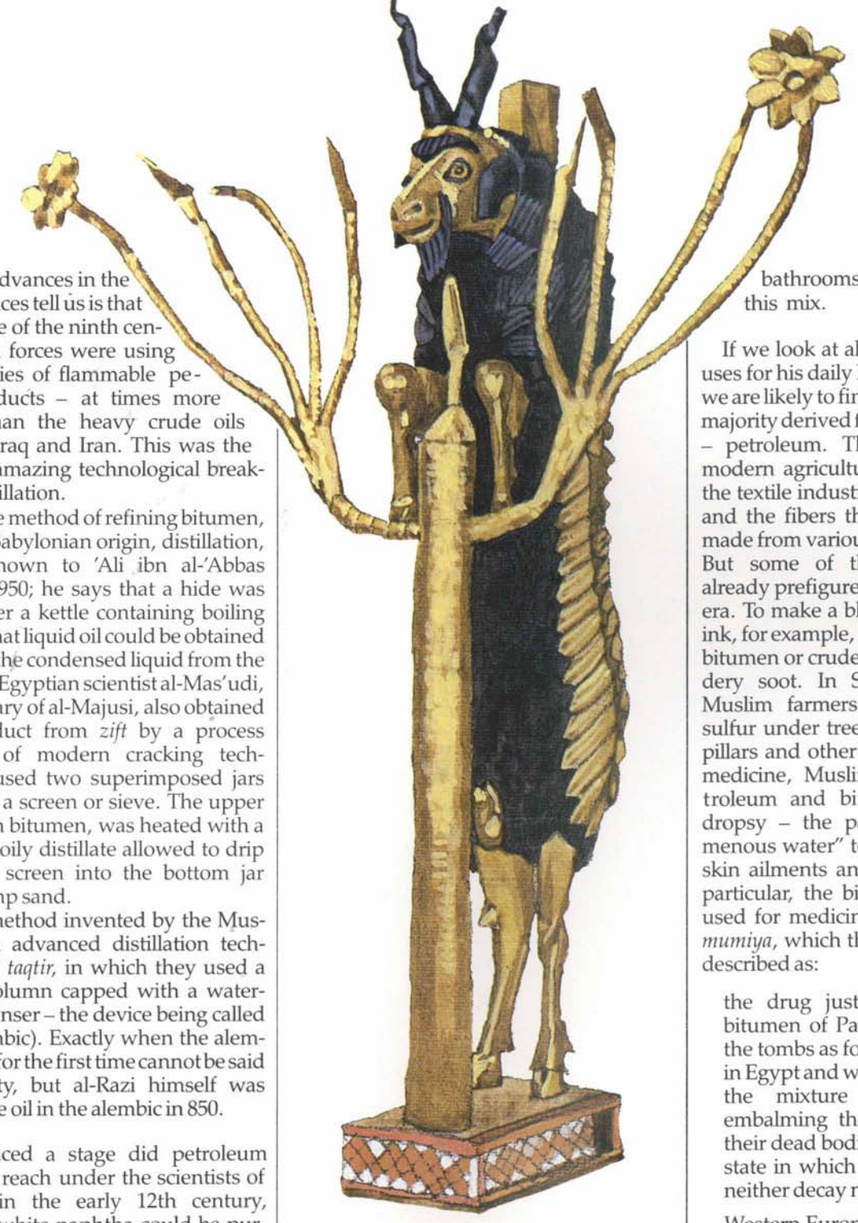
What these advances in the military sciences tell us is that by the middle of the ninth century, Muslim forces were using large quantities of flammable petroleum products – at times more flammable than the heavy crude oils collected in Iraq and Iran. This was the result of an amazing technological breakthrough: distillation.

A primitive method of refining bitumen, probably of Babylonian origin, distillation, was well known to 'Ali ibn al-'Abbas al-Majusi in 950; he says that a hide was stretched over a kettle containing boiling bitumen so that liquid oil could be obtained by wringing the condensed liquid from the hide. But the Egyptian scientist al-Mas'udi, a contemporary of al-Majusi, also obtained an oily product from *zift* by a process reminiscent of modern cracking techniques. He used two superimposed jars separated by a screen or sieve. The upper jar, filled with bitumen, was heated with a fire, and the oily distillate allowed to drip through the screen into the bottom jar buried in damp sand.

Another method invented by the Muslims was an advanced distillation technique, called *taqtir*, in which they used a long glass column capped with a water-cooled condenser – the device being called *al-anbiq* (alembic). Exactly when the alembic was used for the first time cannot be said with certainty, but al-Razi himself was distilling olive oil in the alembic in 850.

So advanced a stage did petroleum refining reach under the scientists of Islam that in the early 12th century, kerosene or white naphtha could be purchased anywhere in the streets of Damascus. Indeed, a considerable distilling industry prospered in Damascus and, apparently, in Egypt too. In one account it was claimed that in one day a fire at the residency of the Fatimid ruler al-Mustansir destroyed 100 *tons* of refined naphtha.

By then, of course, the use of petroleum products was varied. In paving roads, for example, Muslim engineers, like the workers of Nebuchadnezzar, used a mixture of sand and bitumen that they called *ghir* in Iraq. In his book *Aja'ib al-Buldan* ("Wonders of the Lands"), the Arab cosmographer al-Qazwini tells us:



There are two kinds of *ghir*, first the kind that oozes from the mountains, and then the other kind that escapes with water in certain pools, it boils together with the water of the spring. As long as it remains in the water it is soft. If we separate it from the water it cools and dries. It is extracted by means of mats and thrown on the shore. Then it is put in a kettle which is heated, the adhering sand is mixed and more sand is added and stirred to a good mix. Afterwards, when the mix is ready it is poured on the floor and becomes solid and hard. Ships and bathrooms are also painted with this mix.

If we look at all the chemicals that man uses for his daily living in the 20th century, we are likely to find that they are in the vast majority derived from one single substance – petroleum. This is certainly true in modern agriculture, in medicine, and in the textile industry – where both the dyes and the fibers themselves are synthetics made from various treatments of crude oil. But some of these applications were already prefigured in the medieval Islamic era. To make a black dye for clothing and ink, for example, Muslim scientists burned bitumen or crudes, and collected the powdery soot. In Sicily, Spain and Syria, Muslim farmers burned bitumen with sulfur under trees or bushes to kill caterpillars and other harmful insects. And in medicine, Muslim physicians used petroleum and bitumen for pleurisy and dropsy – the patient was given "bituminous water" to drink – and for various skin ailments and wounds. In Egypt, in particular, the bitumen and oil products used for medicinal purposes were called *mumiya*, which the physician Ibn al-Baitar described as:

> the drug just mentioned and the bitumen of Palestine and *mumiya* of the tombs as found in great quantities in Egypt and which is nothing else but the mixture formerly used for embalming the dead, in order that their dead bodies might remain in the state in which they were buried and neither decay nor change.

Western Europe came to know *mumiya*, or bitumen, primarily from descriptions of its healing properties by 12th-century Muslim physicians in Egypt, but with the decline in scientific progress in the Middle East after the 12th century, the marvelous potentials of bitumen and naphtha were once again forgotten and were not to be rediscovered until the middle of the 19th century when the first modern oil well was drilled and petroleum became the very lifeblood of modern society.

Zayn Bilkadi, a chemist, was born in Tunisia, attended the American University of Beirut and earned his Ph.D. at the University of California.

MESOPOTAMIA –SOME NOTES

WRITTEN AND PHOTOGRAPHED BY MICHAEL SPENCER

In Athens, all but five passengers disembarked from the flight to Baghdad, and then we had to wait until nightfall before continuing. Even then the aircraft took a devious, unannounced route across the Middle East. Eventually, though, we began our descent and I could see lights in Baghdad, strung across the city like illuminated strands of beads on the black bosom of the desert.

As we passed through the ultra modern customs hall at the Saddam International Airport, my trip to Iraq seemed extraneous to present realities – since my plan was to focus exclusively on ancient history. Later, however, as I traveled from one ancient ruin to another, I came to appreciate that against the vast panorama of Mesopotamian history, the events of the modern era didn't seem quite so overwhelming. In the ebb and flow of empire, conflicts had come and gone hundreds of times – and would almost certainly come and go again. As a fellow passenger put it: "There is nothing new in Iraq; it has all happened before."

Before setting out to visit the sites of Mesopotamia's past, it seemed wise to review some of its history, if only briefly, so I made Iraq's National Museum my first port of call. Located in downtown Baghdad, the museum houses a stunning collection of artifacts from the mosaic of cultures that make up Mesopotamia's history. I started, for example, with Stone Age flints found in caves in the north, and continued through the civilizations of Sumer, Akkad, Babylon, Assyria and Parthia – all the places I hoped to see and photograph. Soon, however, I staggered out in a state of cultural overload, realizing that to make sense of this astonishing array of information, I would need some professional guidance.

Fortunately, even though it was July, when virtually everyone leaves Baghdad for cooler climes, Dr. Michael Roaf of the British Archeological Expedition to Iraq was still in town. Even more fortunately, he was willing to spare an afternoon to answer my questions and invited me to expedition headquarters in suburban Mansur.

This headquarters, Dr. Roaf said, was furnished largely by British novelist Agatha Christie, who was married to Sir Max Mallowan, the expedition's leader earlier in the century. Dame Agatha, as a result, set at least one of her famous thrillers in Iraq – *They Came to Baghdad*. Dr. Roaf seemed pleased at that.

Modern archeologists, said Dr. Roaf, try to work closely with the government minis-

tries concerned with development, so that they will know in advance when a new dam, road or agricultural project is going to obliterate something of historical value. "What we try and do in such cases," he said, "is salvage what information we can before it goes. The Hamrin Dam project is a case in point."

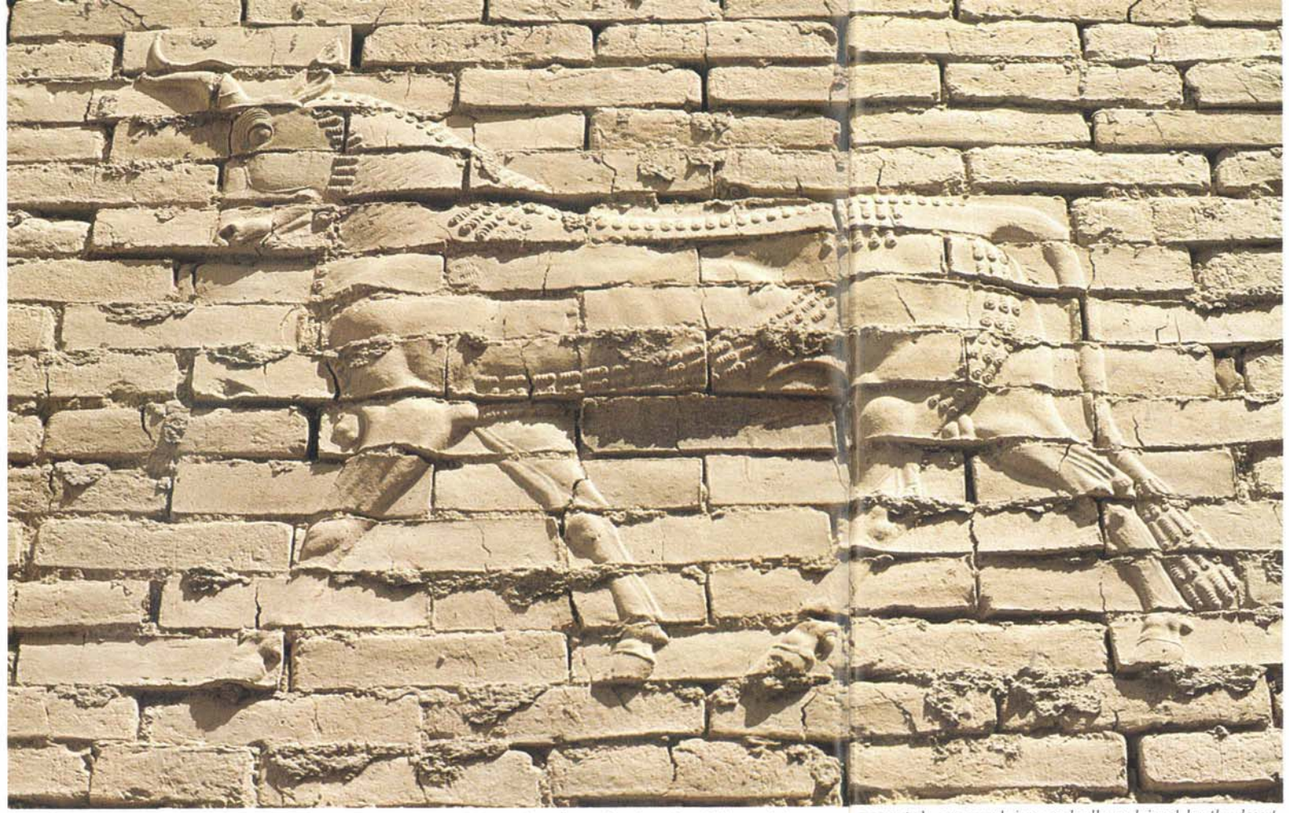
The Hamrin Dam, he explained, was to inundate a huge area, but the expedition, alerted in time, was able to dispatch an international army of archeologists to the area before flooding began. "We didn't have as much time as we would have liked, but we did manage to gain a general idea of the ancient occupation patterns in the affected areas."

This it seems is vital, since "occupation patterns" show the extent of a civilization's influence. These days, in fact, occupation patterns are much more important than the works of art sought by earlier archeologists. Information about the movement of trade goods, artistic styles and technological innovations helps to understand the periods of development of ancient societies and to isolate the influences that shaped them. And in Mesopotamia, Dr. Roaf said, one culture above all exerted an overwhelming influence on all that followed: Sumer.

Sumer flowered in the southern part of Iraq – between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers where they narrow together and finally join before spilling into the waters of the Arabian Gulf. It was here in Mesopotamia – the "land between the rivers" – that man's first cities developed, that organized government was first practiced and, more importantly, where man, about 3000 B.C., learned to write – possibly the most significant element in the advance of mankind. For me, therefore, Sumer seemed the obvious place to begin my travels through ancient Mesopotamia. So the next day I left Baghdad for the south.

Most of southern Iraq is terribly flat and the sky, lacking even a scrap of cloud to soften the hostility of the sun, seems immense and cruel. As I drove – the horizon melting in a shimmer of heat waves – I realized that my eyes were seeking out anything that would relieve the monotonous desolation of the landscape: a hut, the occasional palm grove or donkeys staggering under mountainous bales of brushwood.

It was hard to believe that this was once a fertile land, thick with crops in irrigated fields. There are no hills, no rocks and few trees. There is only the hard-baked earth that modern Iraq's ambitious agricultural projects are trying to revive (See *Aramco World*, September-October 1983). In winter though, when it rains, this baked soil turns



Some reconstruction work is going on at Babylon – such as the wall decoration, above – but the ruins of Nippur, below, once excavated, are now being gradually reclaimed by the desert.

to mud – a substance that, prosaic as it may seem, was vital to Mesopotamia. Mud bricks built the cities and temples of Sumer, and mud tablets were the "books" in which the first writing was scratched. It was fitting, therefore, to find that at Nasiriyah, my destination, a large brick factory produces mud bricks for modern Iraq, much as ancient brickworks did in the area thousands of years ago.

Not far from Nasiriyah is a testament to the durability of those bricks: the imposing ziggurat of Ur. One of the largest and most important of the Sumerian city states, Ur, even now, is dominated by the monolithic bulk of its mud-brick step pyramid. Since the ruins of Ur are now within a military zone the car was stopped at a checkpoint, where I was relieved of my camera and told that from here on I would have to walk. The dune colored ziggurat was a mile down the road, the temperature was well over 50°C (122°F), but I had not come 400 kilometers from Baghdad (240 miles) to give up here.

By the time I reached the site I no longer regretted losing the weight of my camera bag – and when my escort told me it was forbidden to mount the stairs to the top of the ziggurat I could only nod vaguely: such a thought was far from my mind.

At Ur, in any case, probably because of the desolation, I came to appreciate what I can only describe as a sense of antiquity. There was nothing I could see or touch, but I felt as if the air were dense with history. As with the Sumerian cities – Uruk, Kish, Sippar, Eridu and Nippur – Ur was inhabited for thousands of years, repeatedly destroyed and rebuilt. When Sir Leonard Woolley, the excavator of Ur, dug through the different occupation levels, he was able to read the city's history much like the rings of a tree record the lean years and the fat. And at the very lowest levels, Woolley found great deposits of ancient silt, evidence, he said, of the Flood, mentioned in the Koran and the Bible, and in the Gilgamesh epic (See *Aramco World*, July-August 1983).

Woolley's most impressive find at Ur, was the royal hecatombs in which the soldiers and servants of the ruler had committed suicide in their master's grave in order to accompany him to the netherworld. The treasures unearthed in the process can be seen in the British Museum and in Baghdad.

Though the heat at Ur was intense, the interior of my car when I returned was worse. I could only guess at the temperature, because the plastic thermometer had melted and was drooping over the dashboard. I got in, however, and headed for Baghdad.

According to the map, the road back to Baghdad leads past another site of great importance in Sumerian times: the city of Nippur. Formerly a religious center, it was revered as the home of Enlil, the chief deity in the Sumerian pantheon. Although no king is recorded as having made his residence there, Nippur was often the capital of loose confederations of city states; it was accepted that however great the king, it was only with Enlil's favor that he ruled.

In the awful heat of that afternoon near Nippur, however, Enlil did not favor me. At Diwaniyah, closest town to the site, I stopped at a small hotel to ask directions, and though I tried a dozen variations in pronunciation, it was ages before one rang a bell. And then, with vague directions and no signposts, I found myself on a shallow endless track, gray dust blurring the horizon, the land becoming more deserted and barren with each mile.

A detail from the reconstructed Ishtar Gate at Babylon.

Eventually even the track petered out near an abandoned daub-and-wattle farmhouse. A wind had sprung up and veils of sand shrouded the car. All I could see was a low range of hills a few miles distant and I decided I would go at least that far before giving up.

It was a lucky decision. The low hills were in fact the ruins of Nippur, once excavated but now being reclaimed by the desert. The wind was weaker among the ruins and I set out to explore the crumbling, gray remains of a ziggurat. The ground was crunchy underfoot with the thickest litter of pottery shards I have ever seen. There were the rims and bases of jugs and pots from a dozen different cultures, I thought, some incised with patterns, others bare and shiny with rough glaze.

This time, there was no one to prevent me from climbing up the ziggurat; indeed, there wasn't a living soul within miles. And from the summit I was surprised at the extent of the ruins, the distorted humps and ridges of the buildings slowly settling into the suffocating sand.

At Nippur, the ziggurat was honeycombed with passages and I descended into the base by following its tortuous intestinal passages. Somewhere in the dark corridors I disturbed a colony of bats and they fluttered past me squeaking in high pitched tones of outrage.

A colonnaded temple at the Parthian city of Hatra, above, and, below, a detail from an Assyrian frieze.

By now, the sun was sinking, and though I couldn't actually see it through the dust, there was a gradual lessening of illumination. Then, as the wind came up with a sudden chill, the lunar landscape began to take a sinister tone. It was not the place to spend the night. So, this time, thankfully, I stepped into the comforting modernity of the car and left Enlil to his city.

About 2350 B.C. the classical age of Sumer ended abruptly with the advent of King Sargon of Akkad. Legend has it that his mother was a priestess and that he spent his early days as cup bearer to the king of Kish, but in any case, he eventually replaced the king, conquered all the cities of Sumer – and then turned his energies further afield. In time the greater part of the Middle East came under his control as he formed what was the first great empire of ancient times. In contrast to the Sumerian rulers, whose inscriptions emphasize peace and prosperity, Sargon's monuments boast of battles won, cities taken and slaves captured.

The ruins of Kish evoke a different atmosphere from those of Ur and Nippur. Its walls are squat and compact and have a certain bureaucratic orderliness about them. The excavations, below the level of the surrounding land, give the impression of a subterranean maze. The main entrance looks made for pomp and pageantry to flatter the egos of the resident kings.

If Kish is very much down to earth, it also has a mythical connection. Gilgamesh, hero of the epic, did battle with the Aka of Kish and archeologists have now found historical verification of the Aka's father – thus placing the Gilgamesh epic against a background of real events and personages.

Even so, Sargon must have found Kish too limited for his grandiose character; he built himself a new capital called Akkad somewhere on the Euphrates. I must have passed near Akkad on my way back to Baghdad, but I could not be sure, since its precise location remains a mystery – the only major site in Mesopotamia which still defies identification.

Sargon's empire was to shine brightly in ancient history – an example to countless would-be emperors who followed. One lasting effect of his rule in Mesopotamia was establishment of Akkadian as a successor to the Sumerian language. After this, Sumerian was used only for intellectual and religious purposes, much like Latin after the fall of Rome.

After Sargon's death, and a long period of instability, some of the city states rose again to prominence. There was a resurgence of Sumerian culture at Ur–known as the Ur III Dynasty – in which architecture reached high levels of achievement. This renaissance was brief, however, and eventually central Mesopotamia disintegrated into a mosaic of petty kingdoms engaged in constant squabbling and warfare.

Again, though, a giant arose: Hammurabi of Babylon, who changed his minor city state into the capital of a vast empire. Babylon was to remain at center stage in world history until the death of Alexander the Great within its walls nearly 2,000 years later.

With that sort of advance billing, what is left of Babylon cannot but disappoint the visitor – and I was no exception. The "Hanging Gardens," whatever their original size and shape, have long since turned to dust, as have the walls that supported them, and the Tower of Babel lies scattered over the desolate plain, only its base intact. Even that is little more than a heap of mud – like the sad remains of a giant's sand castle (See *Aramco World*, January-February 1967, May-June 1980).

Babylon, which is near the modern town of Hilla, is the most commercialized of Iraq's ancient sites, but even that is minimal. There is a small restaurant, a shop with postcards which infrequently opens, and a nominal entrance fee. Like the ancients, you enter the city today through the Ishtar Gate, an impressive blue-tiled archway with orange heraldic beasts that stalk across the surface. Impressive, but this is a copy; the original is in Berlin.

Babylon is a monument to the transience of human endeavor. You have to stretch your imagination to believe that this was once the greatest city on earth, since it is now a barren wasteland – little more than irregular heaps of rubble and unfinished walls, with a few mud bricks with cuneiform inscriptions dedicating this or that invisible building to a forgotten king.

Here and there are traces of bitumen roadway or the vague shape of construction. The sense of destruction is pervasive. Even the Euphrates has deserted the city. Once it flowed under the ramparts, but silt, accumulating for millennia, has changed its course and now it runs 16 kilometers to the east (10 miles).

Some reconstruction is going on – to give the tourists some idea of what it was once like. The centerpiece of this work is the Processional Way, which leads to a vanished temple complex. The sheer walls are decorated with fine relief work depicting griffons and other beasts in a mythical menagerie. None of this is from Hammurabi's time; his Babylon lies well beneath the water table and can probably never be excavated.

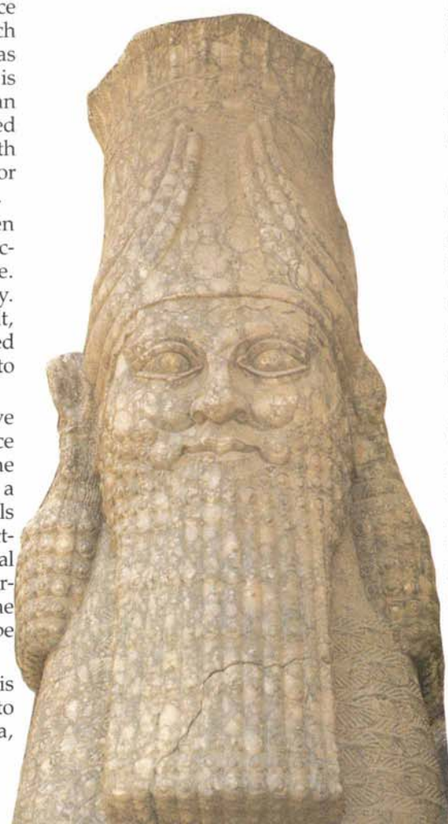
Yet there is still magic here. Maybe it is just in the name and all it has come to signify in the mythology of our own era, but to say, "I have walked in Babylon," still has a very special ring to it.

To return to Baghdad after Babylon was to see it with new eyes. I found myself looking at the bold modern buildings and monuments and imagining them crumbled and time ravaged. I could see the goods in the shops on display in museum shelves. What, I wondered, will the tourists 1,000 years hence make of it all? Will they go back saying, "I have walked in Baghdad?"

Mesopotamian empires followed a pattern. They originated with a period of rapid expansion, followed by internal strife as the area became too unwieldy to govern. A combination of inefficient bureaucracy and external pressures inevitably led to their eventual decline and collapse.

Hammurabi's Babylonian empire is an example. After the great king's death, his heirs struggled to maintain order, but the disintegration was inexorable. A 400-year period followed, which, due to the paucity of historical information, is often referred to as the dark age of Mesopotamia. But then came the Kassites, a tribe of as yet unknown origin, credited with introducing the horse to Mesopotamia, and almost certainly responsible for popularizing its use in warfare.

Reconstructed head of one of the men-bulls of Nineveh.



By this time, warfare was being waged on an international scale, as letters of the time attest. The letters consist of official correspondence – engraved on tablets – between the Egyptian pharaohs Amenophis III and IV and various Near Eastern rulers including Kassite kings. Trade, political alliances and arranged marriages are the usual themes of the letters, but occasionally a hint of the violence of the times creeps in. "Be assured that the king is well," some of the missives end, "and that his chariots are in very, very good condition."

The Kassites themselves left few texts, but there are numerous examples of their industry. They not only rebuilt and embellished the ancient cities of Sumer, but founded a new and important town that is represented today by the massive ruins of Aqar Quf on the outskirts of Baghdad.

At Aqar Quf, again, I had the ruins to myself although a one-eyed attendant followed me around the huge lopsided ziggurat that dominates the site; he wanted to sell me a pigeon he had captured.

There were thousands of birds nesting in the cracks and cornices of the ruins and every now and then they would swarm upwards in a soft gray cloud and swirl aloft in an exultant circuit of the mound.

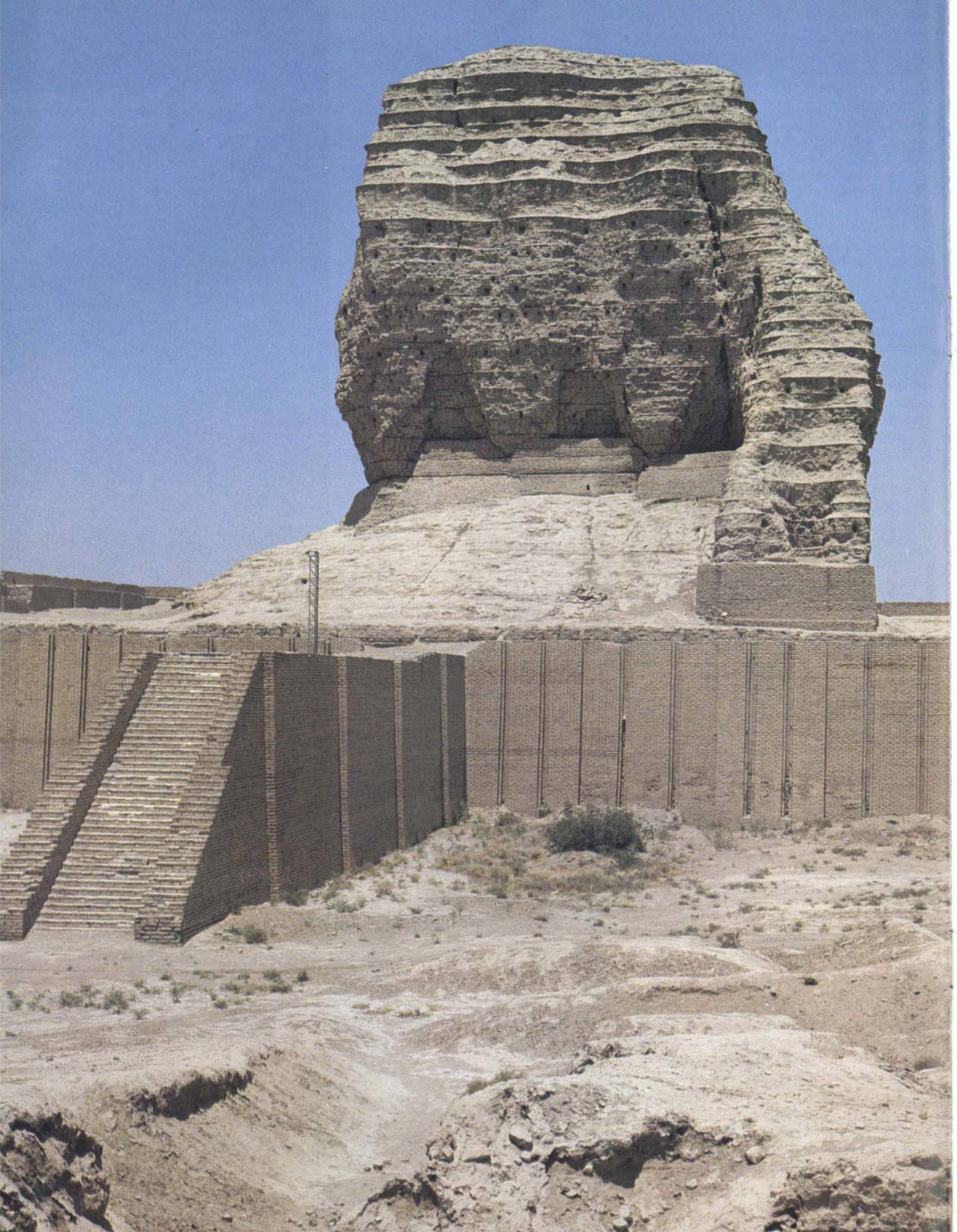
The ziggurat itself is made of millions of small mud bricks and is apparently solid – the huge gashes into its bowels reveal nothing but more hard packed bricks. The partially excavated palace grounds encircle the ziggurat and the attendant warned me that there were wild dogs lurking inside.

The Kassites may have presided over the dark ages of Mesoptamia, but they left their mark – the ziggurat of Aqar Quf is still one of the tallest structures in the Baghdad area.

It is a truism of Near Eastern archeology that the same sites have been occupied continuously by different civilizations over many thousands of years – some until the present day. Mosul, Iraq's second largest city, is such a place. The modern city occupies the same ground as Nineveh, one of the capitals of the Assyrian empire built in the ninth century B.C., and my next destination.

It was another sweltering day as I made my way through Baghdad's Mosul gate for the 400-kilometer journey north to Nineveh (240 miles). July was the season for dust devils and I could see some large and malevolent ones stalking the plain alongside the road. They can be weak and playful too and I often saw village children laughing and running with them as if they were family pets.

Mosul was bathed in the pink warmth of the afternoon sun as I arrived. On the eastern outskirts of the town, the walls of Nineveh glowed in the soft light. The heavy stone is fitted together with delicate



precision and topped with elegantly carved ramparts. The north gate of Nineveh has been reconstructed with original material, two massive men-bulls standing outside the entrance. They are imposing now; they must have been terrifying in their day.

The origins of the Assyrian empire are obscure. It seems they were of Akkadian stock and made their first capital at Ashur with its strategic location on the upper Euphrates. At first vassals of the Mittani, they succeeded in creating an independant Assyria around 1350 B.C. – and soon raised the art of combat to new levels of ruthlessness with their mobile battering rams and vicious war chariots. In fact, the history of Assyria seems to be no more than a bloody recitation of conquests and savagery. Shalmaneser I, for example, founder of the second Assyrian capital of Nimrud, claimed to have blinded 14,400 victims, and although this could be a bit of propagandistic hyperbole, gentle rulers in the Sumerian tradition had no place in Assyrian times. It was an era of imperial expansion that saw strength in combat as the highest of virtues.

Nimrud lies 50 kilometers south of Mosul (31 miles) amid the low rolling plains that peter out from the mountains of Kurdistan. Once again the signposting was haphazard and before long I was lost in the vast plains on a dust road that led nowhere, according to one man I stopped to ask.

It was harvest time and the fields were dotted with the bright clothes of women at work baling hay and loading it onto wooden wagons. The land was pale gold with the stubble of wheat and it shimmered in the heat till it all seemed an abstract smear of color underneath a huge bleached sky.

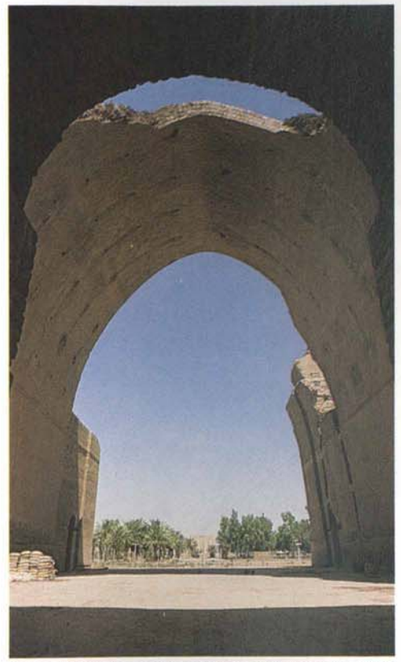
At last I came to a sign: Nimrud 500 meters (0.3 mile) and an arrow. I followed the arrow but it was at least 10 kilometers (6 miles) before the now familiar shape of a ruined ziggurat materialized. A lone guard looked surprised that anyone had found his hideaway, but he let me through the gates and followed me around, obviously entertained by the presence of a visitor.

The magnificent frieze of Nimrud is now on display at the British Museum, but there are enough pieces left on the site to wonder at. The Assyrians elevated the art of frieze story-telling to new heights and the walls are alive with kings, gods, animals and warriors etched in vivid detail.

The palace grounds where Ashurbanipal II played host to nearly 70,000 guests at the opening ceremony are more or less intact, the rooms made cool by the grey stone of the walls. The guard, reluctant to let me leave, invited me to share a pot of sweet tea and some bread. It was just as hospitable a gesture as that offered by the ruler of the palace 2,800 years ago.

Back in Mosul, I met an Irish engineer who had been there for two years installing electrical switching stations on the Mosul grid. I asked him if he knew the way to Khorsabad, the fourth capital of Assyria. He had never heard of it but agreed to join me the next day to try to find it.

We set out early on the road to Erbil and had not gone far before we were stopped at an important looking roadblock. The captain in charge wanted to know our destination. "Dur Sharrukin," I said, using Khorsabad's modern name. "Be back before afternoon," he said as he waved us through, "and don't stop the car off the road."



Ruins at Ctesiphon, above, and, opposite page, Aqar Quf.

Khorsabad was easy to find, but when we drove in through the gates of the barbed wire fence there was nothing. "So where is it?" asked the engineer whom I had regaled with a description of a vast multistoried palace from my guidebook.

There were a few hills that could have covered something, but they looked suspiciously like the ones outside the wire. We left the car and came across a few bits of masonry and the inevitable pottery shards that could have been from anywhere. If there was a palace here once, I certainly could not visualize where it had been. The now skeptical engineer muttered a few disparaging remarks about the Assyrian civilization and we drove back to Mosul in silence.

After Khorsabad I began to despair of finding a ruin in Iraq that did not draw heavily on my powers of imagination and that was more or less intact. But 100 kilometers south of Mosul on the road back to Baghdad (60 miles), I found what I had been looking for at a place called Hatra.

Hatra was a major city of the Parthian empire, one of the few that they built. The Parthians were contemporary with Rome and in the first century B.C., Mesopotamia was a border region between the two competing spheres of influence. Rome eventually prevailed and Hatra was abandoned to the desert, where its relative, inaccessibility has protected it until the present time.

After all the mud bricks I had been seeing, Hatra was a refreshing delight with its crisp walls hewn from soft beige rock, colonnaded temples and lyrical archways. The city is laid out on a grid pattern and the streets are paved with massive flagstones. The Roman influence is apparent, with sculpted eagles nesting in the niches of the buildings and monumental statues standing imperiously in the courtyards.

In time, the Parthians were replaced by the Sasanids who left behind their capital at Ctesiphon, 30 kilometers south of Baghdad (18 miles).

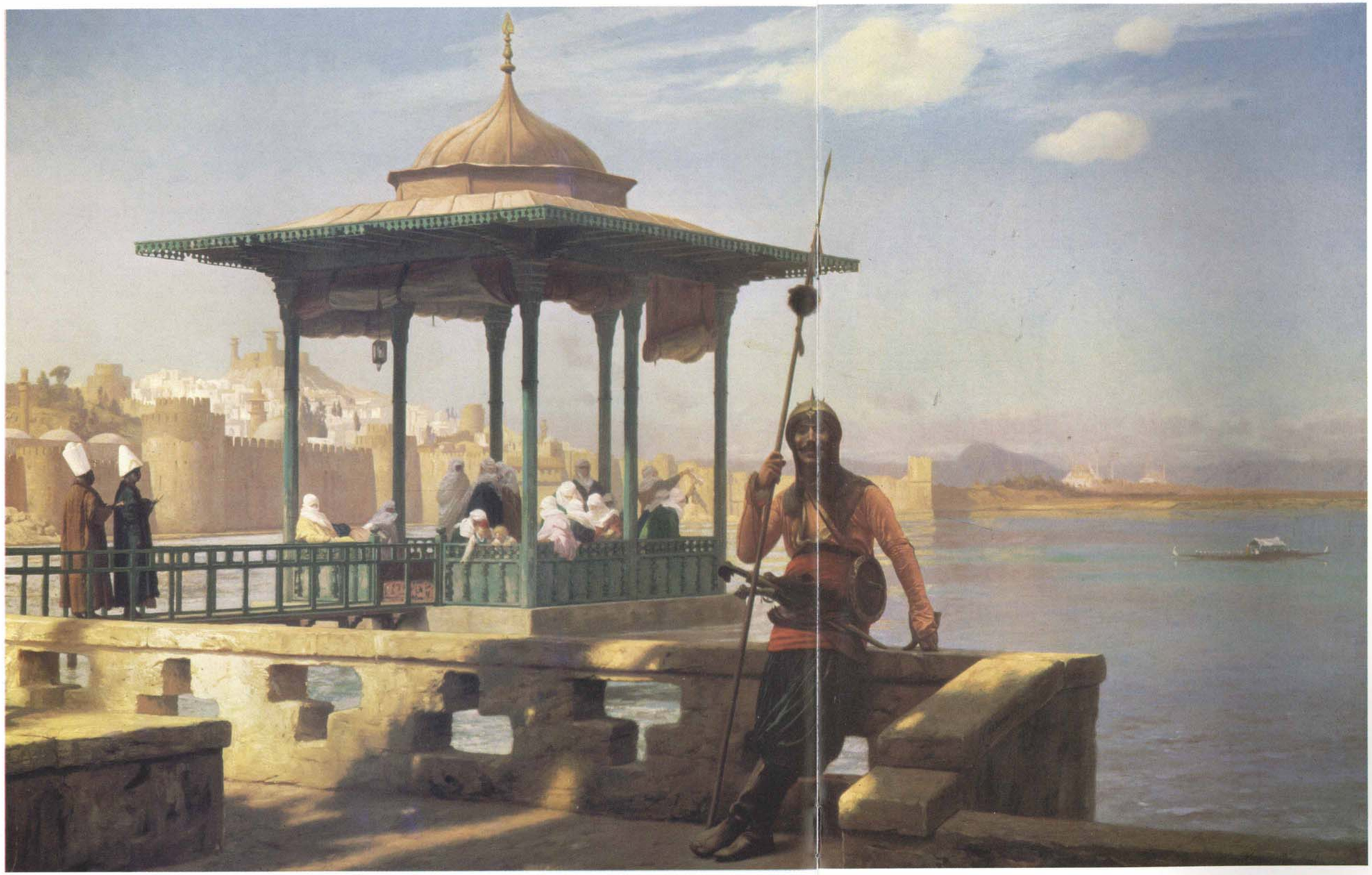
What is referred to as the arch of Ctesiphon is in fact the remnants of the roof of the reception room of a massive palace, which in its day must have been the equivalent of the Houston Astrodome. For the Iraqis, the Sasanid palace is of secondary importance to another monument close by: a monumental diorama depicting the battle of al-Qadisiyah at which the Muslim armies scored a resounding triumph over Sasanid forces in A.D. 637.

The day before I left Iraq, on a return visit to the national museum, I realized that I could never have appreciated the significance of what's there without having visited the sites.

I also realized, with sadness, that it would have meant much more if I could have seen those artifacts on the sites I had just visited. Museums, to be sure, have preserved what might have vanished, but even when beautifully displayed, objects in a museum are essentially like uprooted plants or caged animals.

No museum, certainly, can ever capture the sense of antiquity I found at Ur, the beauty of Nineveh's stones in the soft light of late afternoon, the echoes of civilization I heard in the silence – or the thrill of having walked in Babylon.

Michael Spencer is a free-lance writer-photographer and a regular contributor to Aramco World Magazine *on Iraq.*



Gérôme *Harem in the Kiosk* c.1875-80

The Orientalists

...a dialogue in color between the cultures of East and West...

WRITTEN BY JUNE TABOROFF
PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART
WASHINGTON, D.C.

In Washington, D.C. this summer, the National Gallery of Art opened an extraordinarily colorful exhibition of paintings on the subject of what the West once called the "Orient": the Islamic Near East, North Africa and the Holy Land – an area which enthralled hundreds of artists, writers, poets and scholars. Called "The Orientalists: Delacroix to Matisse, the Allure of North Africa and the Near East," the exhibition drew thousands of enthusiastic visitors.

With more than 90 paintings on canvas covering a period that began with Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1798 and ended with World War I, the exhibition was hung salon style: paintings close together and sometimes one above the other, suggesting a setting in which many Orientalist works were first exhibited. Visually rewarding and often astonishing, the exhibit, which chronicled the responses of painters to the Middle East, reveals a great deal about the area itself – as well as social and religious attitudes.

Since antiquity, the Orient to Europeans was a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and remarkable experiences. And the exhibition showed it in a wide range of subject matter: landscapes of ancient sites, the Holy Land, the River Nile, the desert, caravans and encampments, the vibrant life of cities, baths and odalisques – depicted by late 18th- through 20th-century painters.

The exhibit also confronted the issues raised by the concept of Orientalism as kinds of awareness – esthetic, social, economic, religious and historical – in particular the attempts to evoke an exotic, sensual world and depict unfamiliar terrain, light and color as well as unusual customs and costumes. It explored the relationship between Orientalist painting and the major developments in European art during the 19th century. The shift from Romanticism to Realism, and then to Impressionism and early Modernism, sees its reflections in the works of Eugène Delacroix, then of John Frederick Lewis and Jean-Léon Gérôme, and finally the canvases of Auguste Renoir and Henri Matisse.

Pilgrims going to Mecca c.1861

Napoleon's invasion of Egypt had not only launched European colonization of the Middle East, but also attracted a flow of scientists, scholars, academics and adventurers eager to see for themselves what had previously been largely a subject of speculation, the kind charmingly embodied in Mozart's slightly risqué, picturesque fantasy of 1781, "Il Seraglio." Some European artists – Giovanni Bellini, Rembrandt, Peter Paul Rubens and Antoine Watteau – had depicted Oriental personages, but the Orient as a theme did not emerge until the final years of the 18th century.

At first, in fact, most painters seemed to have preferred to remain in Europe and America. Even Baron Gros, propagandist of Napoleon's military campaigns, painted the French Army's exploits in Egypt and the Holy Land from the comfort of his Parisian studio. Gros, like the majority of his fellow painters of the period, relied on eyewitness accounts for details of battle, local color and setting.

In his dynamic painting, *Battle of Nazareth* of 1801 (Musée des Beaux Arts, Nantes), for example, Gros records the remarkable victory of the 500-strong French Army over thousands of Mamluk troops. In the painting Gros, who never set foot in the Middle East, focuses on the gallantry of its leader, General Junot, whom he portrays in a heroic warrior-like pose amid the battle.

Similarly, Jean-August-Dominique Ingres created such exotic subjects as *Odalisque and Slave* of 1842 (Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore) – even incorporating the colors and textures of Islamic interiors – without moving farther east than Rome. He derived his settings from literary descriptions and illustrations.

Both painters had an impact on Europe's view of the Islamic world. Just as Gros' paintings of tumultuous drama and heightened color shaped the expectations of both artists and the public throughout much of the 19th century, so too did Ingres' magical Oriental interiors become models for future depictions.

As far as painters were concerned, the Orient remained the subject of travelers' reports until the 1830's. Then, suddenly, artistic interest and enthusiasm bloomed as French colonial ambitions in North Africa were renewed and Turkish domination of the Near East declined. With travel now faster, easier and safer, artists could mount expeditions to gather material, without investing excessive

The Temple of Dendereh c. 1841

Roberts

amounts of time or risking any extreme danger. Moreover, they could count on a growing cadre of travelers to provide patronage and support for the work they produced.

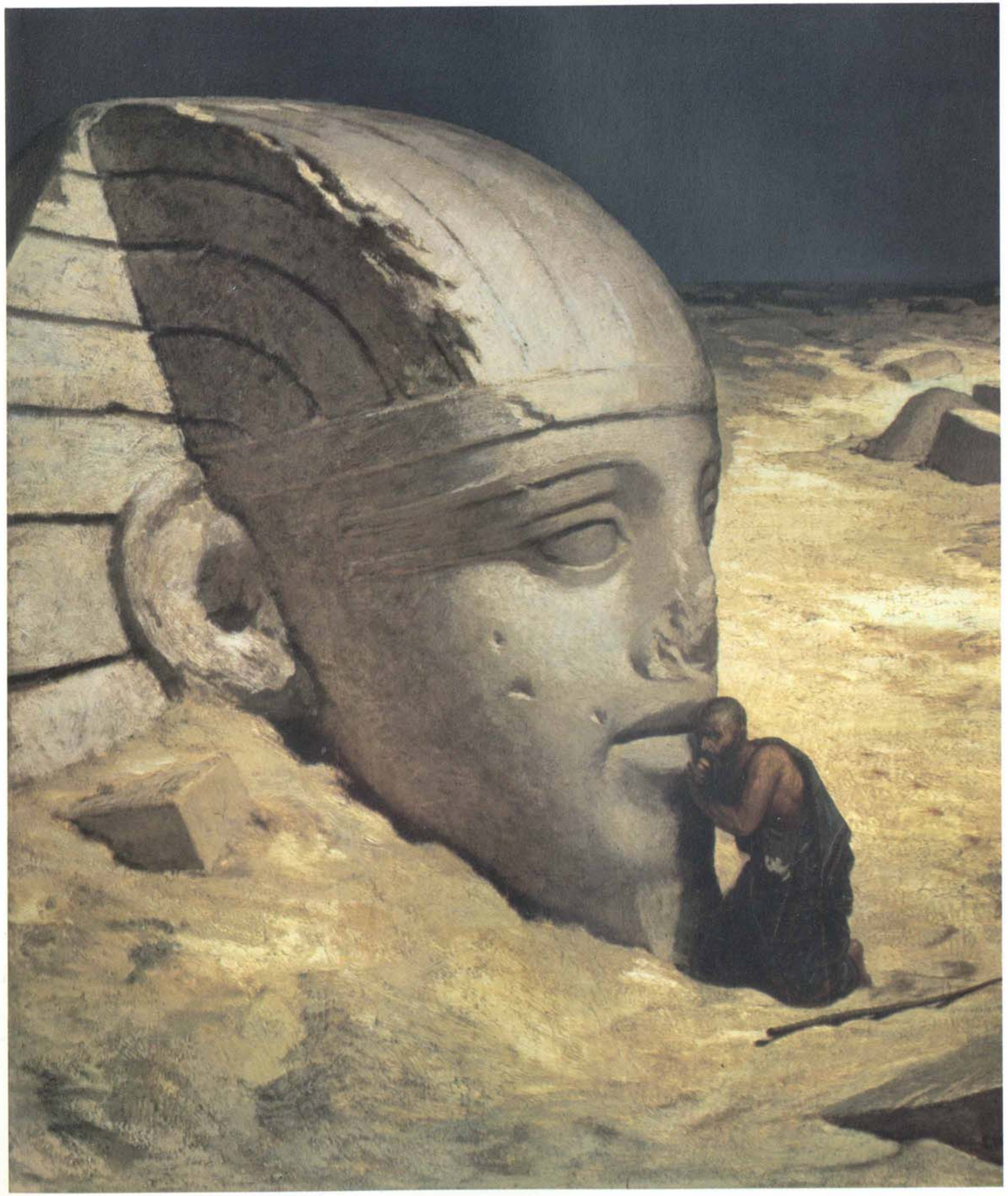
British artists were the leaders in this sort of endeavor. David Roberts, William Muller and J.F. Lewis all made expeditions to the Near East in the 1830's and they were followed by their American counterparts, Sanford Gifford and Frederick Church, in the 1860's. And as physical accessibility to the Orient increased so did the esthetic of realism, based on objective representations of the external world.

In France, the first major artist to go in person to the Orient seems to have been Delacroix (1798-1863) and the results are clear in eight paintings in the Washington exhibition. Although he made only one visit to North Africa – six months in 1832 – his experiences there left indelible marks in theme and technique. And though Delacroix had been drawn to Near Eastern subjects during his adolescence – at 19 he produced two lithographs of the Ambassador of Persia – his *The Collection of Arab Taxes* of 1863 (National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.), exemplifies his later work in which fantasy replaces realism. Here the realistic portrayal of an actual event is not the predominant concern, but the use of incident to meet specific pictorial demands: lighting and color, for example, designed to highlight figures.

Painted in the last year of the artist's life, this canvas is one of a series in which violent clashes between man and nature become a central theme – clouds used to heighten the sense of urgency and bold contrasts of reds and greens stressing the stridency of action. Thus imagination, assuming a dominant role, suggests to the West a turbulent and colorful East.

In contrast to the impassioned vein in Delacroix's Orientalist paintings, there were also the almost documentary compositions of Gérôme on display. His meticulously detailed genre and history paintings – of which 13 were included in the show – record with accuracy the contemporary appearance of scenes and sites. His interest in the Near East, spurred by repeated visits to Egypt and Asia Minor from 1856 to 1875, extends to such subjects as mosques, bazaars, religious rituals, the hunt and bath, and the mysterious, and misunderstood, women's quarters, or harems – a subject that fascinated the West. One example of this is Gérôme's *Harem in the Kiosk*, c. 1874-1880 (Private collection, Houston) which presents an outing by Ottoman women and children with a recognizable silhouette of the Golden Horn in Istanbul, a city that Gérôme was to visit three times.

Although completed several years before Gérôme's "Kiosk", *An Intercepted Correspondence* of 1869 (Private collection, Houston) by the English painter J.F. Lewis (1805-1876) also treats harem life. In this narrative work, Lewis shows a woman of the harem who has just received an illicit bouquet of flowers. But the appeal of the painting has little to do with the harem; its



The Questioner of the Sphinx c. 1863

Vedder

The Collection of Arab Taxes c.1863

Delacroix

The Palm Leaf, Tangier c.1912

Matisse

An Intercepted Correspondence, Cairo c.1869

beauty comes from the magnificent details of rich gowns, sunlight, calligraphy and furniture.

Lewis spent a decade in Cairo, living in great style in a large Mamluk house in the Ezbekiya quarter, and his familiarity with the surroundings of privileged Egyptian society is evident in his details of setting and costume: luminous stained glass, the shadows cast by the *mashrabiya* and the textures of cottons and silks.

The evocative traces of ancient civilization also captured the attention of Orientalist artists – most notably the Scottish painter David Roberts (1796-1864), who saw the Temple of Dendera in 1838 when it was still only partially excavated – with sand reaching to the roof in some places. The original zodiacal ceiling of this Ptolemaic temple had been moved in 1821 and installed in the Louvre. Yet in Roberts' *Temple of Dendereh* (the City of Bristol Museum and Art Gallery), the temple is shown in a relatively good state of preservation.

Roberts' journal entry for October 19, 1838, records his emotions on first seeing Dendera: "I felt sad and solitary... overcome with melancholy reflections on the mutability of human greatness and the perishable nature of even the most enduring works of human genius." None of these gloomy ponderings, however, mar the broad theatrical sweep of the composition or the placement of the stage-like figures. Roberts, one of the first independent British artists to make the journey to the area, spent 11 months in 1838-1839 going up the Nile, seeing Cairo, the Sinai Desert, Syria, Palestine and Lebanon. As he traveled, he sketched nearly every monument of note on the way, many from several viewpoints and from these accomplished sketches created oil paintings and lithographs that today offer an almost archeological record of the state of monuments in the mid-18th century (See *Aramco World*, March-April 1970).

Islam also intrigued Orientalist artists. One of the masterpieces of Orientalist painting, *Pilgrims Going to Mecca*, painted by Léon-Adolphe-August Belly (1827-1877) in 1861, focuses on a central duty of Islam, the Hajj – the pilgrimage to Makkah (Mecca) – and the most characteristic landscape of the Near East – the desert.

In a letter of 1856, Belly recorded his intention to paint a desert scene with Arabs and dromedaries and to reproduce, like the realist painter Courbet, "the truly beautiful and interesting features of the every day life of our fellow men." Taking up to 37 days from Cairo, the caravan to Makkah was a highly organized affair, traveling between carefully placed water stations. In the painting Belly successfully depicts the social cross-section of the procession with a leader and pilgrims, on foot or borne in luxurious *shibriyya* (rounded) or *takhtrawan* (two camel) litters.

Together with the fierce sunlight, the unyielding landscape, and the earthy tonalities, Belly conveys a sense of quiet respect for the pilgrimage and its participants. His handling of the subject is in keeping with the concerns of painters of the latter part of the century in describing not only the picturesque qualities of life, but its realities as well. Belly's knowledge of the Near East was gained on three trips, made between 1851 and 1857.

Many of the painters who came to know the Near East and North Africa were inspired to break away from the conventions they discovered. No more joyous depiction of the lushness of the Oriental garden exists than in the work of Matisse (1869-1954). After first visiting Morocco briefly in 1906, Matisse returned for two further trips in 1912, producing a garden trip-tych. *The Palm Leaf, Tangier* painted in the autumn of 1912 (National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.), portrays, as do *Moroccan Landscape* and *Moroccan Garden*, the garden of the Villa Bronx in Tangier. The paint is sparingly applied and the colors are provocative in their reds, oranges, browns and greens. The bold use of black lines creates an intense pattern across the surface of the landscape and provides a strong tonal contrast. This patterning seems to be a response to the formal qualities of Islamic art. Matisse, enraptured with the light and landscapes of Morocco as well as with the prevailing artistic heritage, determinedly integrated these elements into his work.

As demonstrated by the exhibition, the appeal of the Orient, whether in fantasies or realities, is extremely broad. The European and American vision of North Africa and the Near East, the meeting point of western preconceptions and actual observations, is one aspect of the progress of dialogue between cultures.

June Taboroff, who earned a Ph.D. in art and architectural history at the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, specializes in Islamic art and architecture.

Lewis

From the American prairie to the Syrian desert

THE LITTLE HOUSE ON-THE DESERT

The real story of Rose Wilder

WRITTEN BY WILLIAM HOLTZ ILLUSTRATED BY NORMAN MACDONALD

Most U.S. television viewers are familiar with the series *Little House on the Prairie*, and many readers, brought up on the "Little House" books by Laura Ingalls Wilder, continue even now to read them to their children. And both viewers and readers probably recall that in the TV series, and the books, Laura's daughter Rose enters the story on a cold December night in 1886 in a shanty – the "little house" – on the Dakota prairie. But what few people realize, however, is that long before Laura Ingalls Wilder came to write her popular children's books, that same daughter Rose had herself become an internationally recognized travel writer – and had almost lost her life prematurely in 1923 as she wandered, lost, in the Syrian desert, seeking her way to Baghdad.

By 1923, Rose Wilder Lane had put the little house on the prairie behind her along with an unsuccessful marriage and a successful career as a San Francisco newspaper writer. In 1920, in fact, she had launched herself as a free-lance writer with a trip to Europe in which she had produced a fascinating series of travel articles as she worked her way through France, Germany, Poland, and Italy, along the Mediterranean by way of Albania, Greece, and Turkey and, finally, to Cairo – where she would begin the last episode in her quest for foreign adventure.

In a sense, the Middle East stage of her journeys were retracing her family heritage. Her father bore a name that had been in the family's English ancestry since the Crusades: Almancar, which became Almanzo in English and was then shortened to Manley for everyday use, and for the young hero of Laura's life in his wife's books.

For that reason, from the time that Rose arrived in Europe in 1920 the Islamic world began to loom steadily larger on her horizon. One of her first meetings in Paris was with the noted Armenian dancer Armen Ohanian, whose memoires of her early career in Tehran, Istanbul and Cairo

– *The Dancer of Shamakha* – had been well received in France and translated by Rose from French into English.

At this time too, Rose made the first of several visits to Albania, whose culture, a complex overlay of Islam upon a pre-Hellenic base – continued to fascinate her, and was the subject of *The Peaks of Shala*, published in 1923.

Originally Rose had planned to travel extensively in the Middle East, then go on to San Francisco by way of the Orient. Her immediate goal would be Baghdad, the legendary city that had fascinated her since her first reading of *The Arabian Nights*. In Cairo, however, she began the gradual transition from the European to the Islamic world, and to a historical perspective more ancient than either. At one extreme, she found in her hotel an eastern luxury that Europe could not match: ice water (an American national drink, she called it) served up with promptness by a fez-clad attendant. He arrived, smiling, as promised by the card in her room, at three pulls on the bell-rope.

In Cairo, she met another traveling journalist, B.D. MacDonald, whose destination was also Baghdad. Together, they made their way to Damascus where they planned the next stage of their journey – and made a side-trip to Baalbek in today's Lebanon (See *Aramco World*, March-April 1967).

There, Rose marvelled at the remains of a city apparently raised by giants: building stones so huge as to boggle even her American sense of engineering, and so ancient as to defy her sense of history.

Meanwhile, their continuing inquiries about Baghdad made it clear that any travelers crossing the 1,000 kilometers of Syrian desert (600 miles) would be in danger from bandits, but that if they were determined to go, they could make the crossing by either camel caravan or by car. The caravan would leave at some vaguely specified time in the weeks ahead. By automobile they could leave at once.

Rose and MacDonald paused to consider. The route to Baghdad, of course, was an ancient one, navigated for centuries by trading caravans whose camel-drivers had marked their way by the stars and land-marks on far horizons. But the caravans had left no permanent trace on the rock and shifting sands of the desert.

More recently, the automobile had entered the desert; in fact, the first Damascus-to-Baghdad crossing by motor vehicle had been made just the year before Rose arrived. Now a weekly mail service route, established by Norman Nairn, a British ex-army officer, and his brother, linked the two great cities (See *Aramco World*, July-August 1981). The Nairn drivers were desert veterans who steered by the old landmarks, but whose vehicles left intermittent trails of tire-tracks. For safety from bandits, the Nairns developed an elaborate network of subsidies, amounting to one-third of the mail revenues; the subsidies were paid out to the Bedouin tribes through a well-connected Baghdad merchant.

For Rose, however, this was of no value; ordinary travelers could not count on such protection, and without guides the danger of losing their way was very real. So Rose and MacDonald continued to consider. Then Major A.L. "Desert" Holt appeared on the scene.

Here was a desert traveler with credentials they could trust. For several years, Major Holt had been attached to various British missions in the Middle East, and had served with valor during the 1920 Mesopotamian insurrections against the British. He had driven tens of thousands of miles in Transjordan and Mesopotamia, surviving bandit attacks, and had been held for 17 days by one raiding party.

"Desert" Holt, was the typical British colonial officer: hardy, brave, overwhelmingly self-confident, and, by standards of ordinarily prudent people, a little mad. He was just returning from England with his bride for a new posting in Baghdad and though he had never traveled the Damascus-to-Baghdad route, the fact did not particularly concern him. Major Holt had his own route to Baghdad: the air-furrow – a remarkable trail marked out on the ground to guide the Cairo-to-Baghdad mail-planes.

At the Cairo Conference in 1921, it had been decided that the Royal Air Force (RAF) should open a regular service between Cairo and Baghdad, and Holt was commissioned to make the first ground survey for an air route across the Syrian desert. Since fliers had discovered that automobile tracks on the desert were visible from high in the air the next step, obviously, was to mark such a trail deliberately, and to mark this trail along the line he had surveyed. To do so, Holt and a Major Welch, had, in May 1921, driven between Amman and Ramadani, on the Euphrates, each from the opposite ends of the route, with RAF planes reconnoitering ahead. Though a compass route had been planned, impassable lava beds forced them to make looping detours before the two parties met at Jed.

As they drove along their new trail, Holt and Welch marked out landing fields every 30 to 50 miles. They marked the fields by tying a rope to an automobile, and driving around and around the center, inscribing a huge circle in the desert. Within this circle, trenches were dug in the shape of Roman numerals to designate each field. It was an immense undertaking – and in six months the wind erased all marks and they had to be renewed. On their second try, the RAF team used a tractor and a plow – chugging the whole distance from Amman to Baghdad in 14 days. Behind them they left two wide trenches, easily visible from the air. They also established refueling points – gasoline pumps atop buried storage tanks. The pumps were locked but keys were provided to every pilot who followed the air-furrow to Baghdad.

Although Holt had not crossed by the second route, his first experience made him confident, so on September 27 the party set out in two Model T Fords for Baghdad, Major Holt driving a machine equipped for desert travel – with special springs and hard rubber tires, Rose and MacDonald riding a rented car with a hired driver and his mechanic. Both cars were crammed with extra gasoline and built-in water tanks – from which the travelers drank with individual rubber tubes.

What Major Holt overlooked – and what Rose couldn't know – was that the "trackless desert" sometimes had *too many* tracks. Periodically, the trail would dip down into a meandering wadi, and either lose itself for miles among stones and gravel, or present a branch wadi with the possibility of a dead end. Sometimes it would enter a wide, hard-bottomed depression where no tracks could be made, and leave the other side at some point that could be found only by circling the whole perimeter.

To make it worse, previous travelers had apparently wandered off the main trail, leaving those who followed a choice of several trails. This was a serious problem. At one point, Rose, MacDonald, Holt and his bride chose what seemed to be the most obvious track: a double set of wheel tracks leading them confidently on for miles – and then ending. A wide loop in the desert showed that the previous traveler, as lost as themselves, had lost heart and doubled back on his trail, scoring a double highway to nowhere. They had followed his trail 160 kilometers (100 miles).

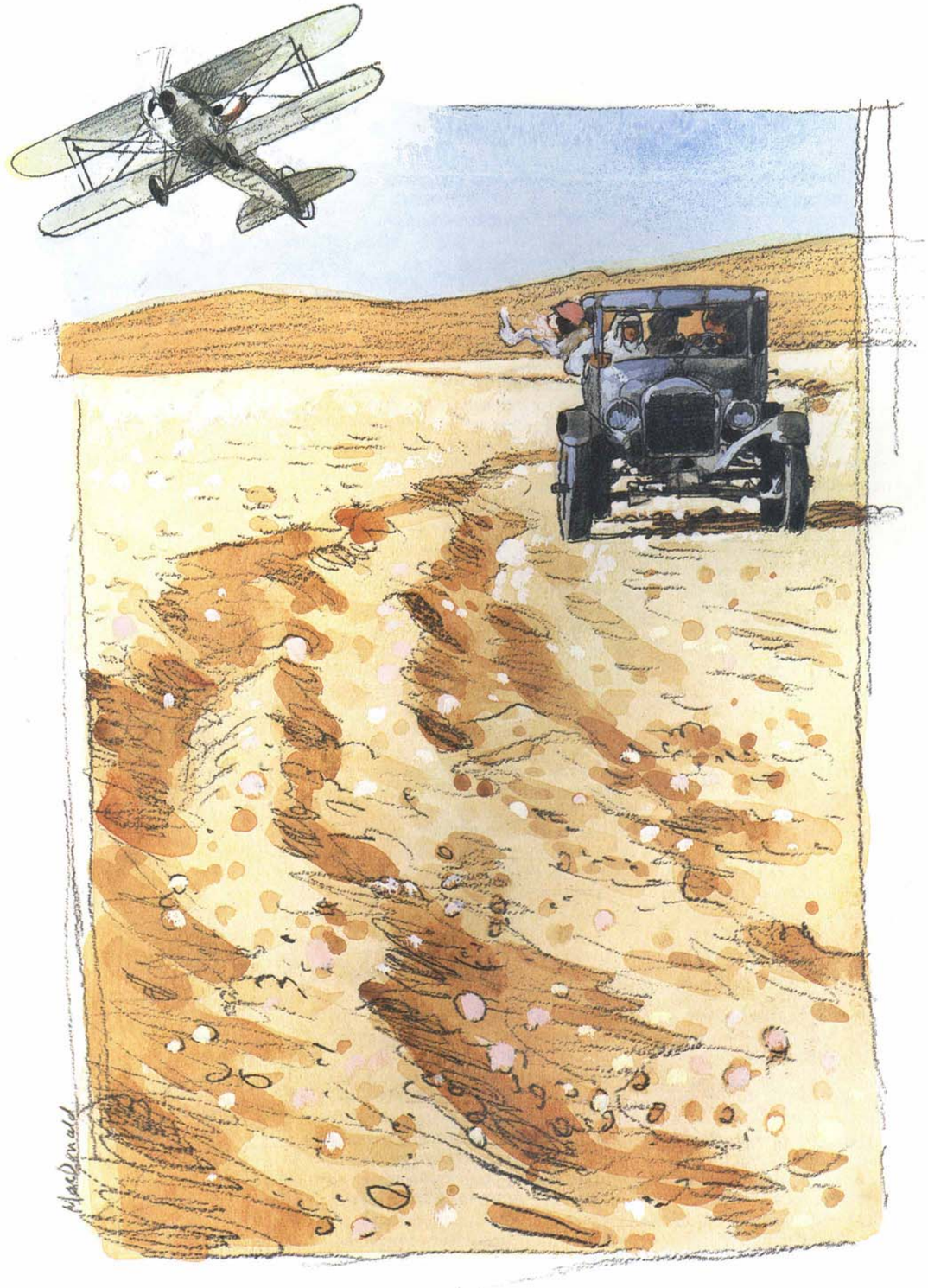
By this time, the situation was dangerous. The Fords required not only gasoline but water regularly, and – still some 320 kilometers from Baghdad (200 miles) – they were down to four quarts for cars and people. Then, incongruously, Mrs Holt lost her wedding ring, and they swept and sifted an acre of sand before pressing on.

One night as they made camp in a ravine, MacDonald thought he heard human voices, so all night, the women alternating with the men, stood watch, rifles at the ready. Rose watched the silent desert shine white in the moonlight. "As the clouds slipped across the moon's face," she wrote, "the rocks seemed to move in the shadows and the horizon to rise and fall" as though she were at sea. Into her consciousness again rose an awareness of something older than her own world, older even than the civilization of Baalbek. No bandits came.

The next day, as Holt surveyed the horizon again, MacDonald posed a blunt question: "Holt, have you any idea where we are?" "My man," he answered, "I haven't the slightest idea."

Holt, however, did spot a distant mountain that reminded him of Tel-el-Eshauer, a peak he had seen when laying the air-furrow, and though he was seeing it from a different angle, it was 16 kilometers from the wells of Rutba (10 miles). As usual, he set off at top speed, leaving Rose and her companion behind. For two hours they jolted on toward the unknown mountain, the driver and mechanic muttering. Far ahead, Holt climbed to the top of a small rise – and paused. As Rose and MacDonald came up to him, they found him gazing down a small *wadi* at foraging camels and two men.

They were no longer lost, but they were not yet saved. Rose and MacDonald



covered Holt with rifles while he slowly approached the two men and spoke to them in Arabic. There was a reply, a closer approach, and then the handshake that meant they had found other human beings who were not enemies. Their strained nerves relaxed with relief as the herdsmen led them to the encampment nearby, and to the wells that would sustain them.

Soon, they found that they had stumbled into the Wadi Hauran, and that the people encamped there were the Saluba, a tribe wretchedly poor even by the severe standards of desert life. These Saluba, as it happens, traced their ancestry not to Semitic origins, but to the European Crusaders, and Rose, as she picked her way through yards of muck and camel dung around the wells and drank eagerly of water the color of tea, must have pondered the ancient connection between her family and her hosts.

As is expected in the deserts, the Saluba killed a sheep in their honor and under a tattered tent the lost travelers ate mutton with their fingers and asked their hosts the road to Baghdad. The Shaikh pointed the way and – in an unusual departure from the desert code – suggested that they leave immediately; not even the obligations of hospitality could blunt the fact that these visitors, dangerously wealthy, were tempting targets for desert bandits who might incidentally plunder the Saluba as well.

Safely withdrawn several miles from the Wadi Hauran, the party spent another cold night alternately sleeping and standing guard, and the next afternoon, finally, they came across the air-furrow, the guiding line they had set out to find five days before, and the next evening drove into Baghdad.

For Rose, arriving in Baghdad was anti-climactic. Since leaving the United States she had encountered successively deeper challenges to her house-on-the-prairie perspective. Though her European experience had been easy to assimilate, her arrival in the Middle East had brought her face to face with the exotic origin of Christian and Islamic traditions, the civilizations that had preceded them – and a desert landscape almost lunar in its barren indifference to the human presence. By the time she reached the Euphrates, therefore, Rose had added a new component to her vision of life: a disquieting sense of human impermanence.

Baghdad, itself, was a disappointment. Here, sadly, was nothing from the Arabian Nights, a city not even to be compared with Damascus, Rose thought.

She did sense, she wrote, an ancient presence beneath the banality of the European foreign-service life, particularly as she rode out on the Tigris and looked back on the city rising out of foundations dating from the time of Nebuchadnezzar. But suddenly, it was time to go home. After four years abroad, a wave of homesickness broke over her. With the determination of a professional journalist she fought against it, but eventually she abandoned the round-the-world trip, and set off northward in the car, heading for Damascus via Palmyra, the home of the fabled Middle Eastern Queen Zenobia (See *Aramco World*, September-October 1981), who had defied her Roman masters and had ruled, briefly, the lands from the Nile to the Tigris. And this, by a time scale Rose was beginning to feel in her bones, so recently, a mere seventeen hundred years ago. Zenobia's tomb was her last visit before she booked her passage home and by Christmas, 1924, she was in her parents' home in the Ozarks of Missouri, where they finally settled when their prairie homestead failed.

Later, Rose would travel again. Soon after she spent almost two years in her beloved Albania, and for another 30 years in the United States she would use those travels as a kind of mental ballast as she turned her writing towards an attempt to understand her own inheritance as an American.

Rose never did complete her round-the-world trip, but in 1965, when she was 78 years old, she went to Vietnam as a magazine correspondent, and the urge for foreign travel seemed to rise in her again. She began to lay plans for the trip she had turned back from in Baghdad and was closing her Connecticut home for that journey when death claimed her in her sleep in the autumn of 1968.

William Holtz, who teaches literature at the University of Missouri, has written several books on American authors and is now writing a biography of Rose Wilder Lane.

WRITTEN BY MALCOLM P. STEVENS WITH MARCIA R. STEVENS
PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF THE IMPERIAL WAR MUSEUM

The Ghosts at GALLIPOLI

I never knew my maternal grandfather and I cannot remember when I heard, for the first time, that he was killed at Gallipoli in the First World War. Nevertheless, it is a memory that has been with me since childhood. Later, I saw a letter in which he told of his imminent embarkation for Gallipoli and said he would not want to be taken prisoner because he had heard the Turks were "a fierce race of men." But that letter, along with old photographs and other mementos, disappeared over the years. All I really had left were his medals.

As it turned out, I eventually went to Turkey myself and spent some enjoyable years there as a professor at Robert College on the campus now occupied by Boğaziçi University (See *Aramco World*, March-April 1984). I even traveled through the Gallipoli area and across the Dardanelles. At that time, however, I was on my way to Troy, Bergama and other archeological sites and did not feel I could afford the time to go searching for ghosts in old battlegrounds and military cemeteries. By then, I guess, I had forgotten grandfather and his medals.

In 1983, however, having come to regret that decision, I set out for Suvla Bay – where my grandfather lies in an unmarked grave – at what the Turks call "Gelibolu," or Gallipoli. On the eve of Gallipoli's 70th anniversary, it was time to go, ghosts or not.

In the company of my wife and younger son, I went first to Istanbul to meet Güniz and Ahmet Büyüktur, chemistry and engineering professors respectively, at Boğaziçi and Istanbul Technical Universities. Like me, Ahmet had a ghost at Gallipoli; he had lost an uncle in its defense.

In preparation for our journey, my family and I had read extensively about the campaign: books, published diaries, even the *History of the South Wales Borderers*, the unit with which Private Charles A. Beresford – my grandfather – had fought. But no reading of military history can prepare you for the contrasting beauty of that strategic corner of Turkey.

Bordered on the west by the Gulf of Saros and on the east by the Dardanelles – the ancient Hellespont – the Gallipoli peninsula extends some 80 kilometers (50 miles) in a southwesterly direction. At its narrowest point in the north it is a mere five kilometers (three miles) wide, broadens to a width of about 20 kilometers (12 miles) then narrows again near Eceabat before tapering down to the southernmost point of Cape Helles.

Viewed at dusk from the waterfront of Çanakkale (Chanak), across the straits, Gallipoli is a succession of purple-brown hills silhouetted against an auburn sky, the deceptively calm waters painted gold by reflected sunset. And from the turquoise Gulf of Saros to the west, the peninsula appears as a land of steep hills interlaced with ravines, and dominated by the Sarı Bayır (Bair) range rising almost 600 meters (1,000 feet). Up close, though, you can see that the peninsula is ideal for defense, with the hills reaching up precipitously from narrow strips of beach and the terrain covered with dense thorny scrub.

In ancient times, Gallipoli and the Dardanelles witnessed Agamemnon's 10-year siege of Troy. In the fifth century B.C., Xerxes built a bridge of boats to let his armies cross the narrows in his war with the Greeks, and nearly two centuries later Alexander the Great led his forces across in pursuit of the Persians. In the 13th century it was the Crusaders who passed through enroute to Jerusalem, and in 1358 the Ottoman Turks enroute to Europe. During the Napoleonic wars the area was again the scene of conflict, and still again when the British Army passed through on its way to the Crimea. Finally, in the early days of the First World War, it became the focus of the Anglo-French operation to open up supply routes to Russia – what Churchill thought would be "the soft underbelly of Europe."

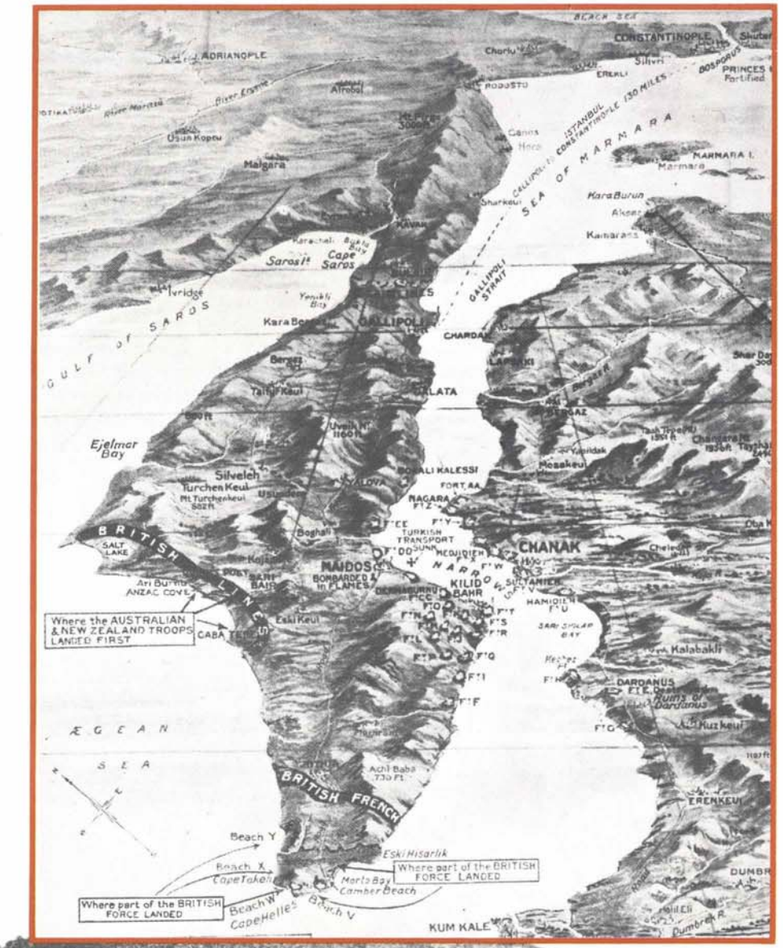
Arif Saltuk, a prominent Istanbul businessman, vividly recalls the opening of that campaign. On December 13, 1914, he saw the Turkish ship *Mes'udiye* torpedoed by a British submarine and still remembers the feverish attempts to save the sailors trapped in the hull. Two months later – in February, 1915 – he heard the roar of guns again as British battleships began bombarding the Turkish forts at the mouth of the Dardanelles, a preliminary to the Allied landings.

On March 18, the Turks turned back a squadron of British and French warships attempting to force the narrows, and the Allies, believing that the Dardanelles could not be breached with ships alone, committed land forces; on April 25, 1915, the British landed at Cape Helles, the French at Kum Kale, and Australians and New Zealanders at a spot that came to be known as "Anzac

Australians at Anzac, December 17, 1915.

GALLIPOLI~A CAMPAIGN

WRITTEN BY MALCOLM P. AND MARCIA R. STEVENS



Historians generally agree that if the Gallipoli campaign of World War I had been an Allied success, it might have changed history.

By late 1914 the Western Front had already settled into the grim stalemate of trench warfare and the Allies' casualties were approaching an unprecedented one million men. Influential voices in the British government and military, notably First Lord of the Admiralty Winston Churchill and First Sea Lord Fisher, were convinced that the appalling loss of life would continue indefinitely unless the Allies undertook a decisive military thrust through Turkey, a German ally, to relieve the pressure, and, above all, open a supply route to Russia so that Russian troops would stay in the war.

It was thus that at 8:00 a.m. on February 19, 1915, British battleships began a long-range bombardment of Turkish forts at the entrance to the Dardanelles – the strait giving access to Istanbul – and sent minesweepers into the strait to clear the way for battleships to shell Chanak (Çanakkale). It soon became obvious, however, that the battle was not going to be won with the fleet alone. Accordingly, a heterogenous expeditionary force of British, Australians, New Zealanders, Indians, French and Senegalese – some 120,000 strong – was assembled to land on both sides of the strait. But the British loaded their transport ships in such a way that guns and munitions, needed immediately upon landing, were buried beneath tents and other supplies, and while the ships were sent back to Egypt for reloading, with a subsequent delay of six weeks, the Turks were able to reorganize their defenses.

Troops were finally committed on April 25: British troops at five places in the Cape Helles area, a French force at Kum Kale, and Australian and New Zealand troops (the Anzacs) – swept off course by uncharted currents – at Arı Burnu where they had to scale steep cliffs to establish a foothold.

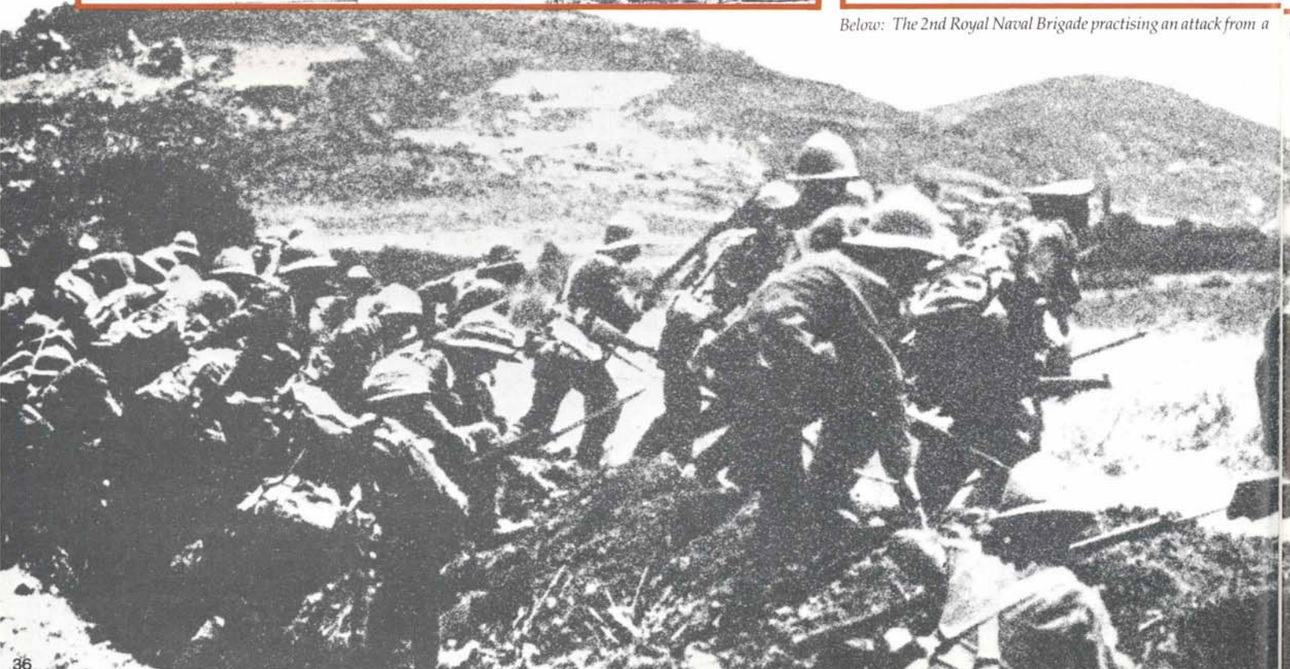
Ironically, General Liman Von Sanders, the German commander in charge of the Turks, had not expected the attacks to come where they did; rather he was convinced the Allies would land at Bolayır at the narrow neck of the peninsula, and he had deployed his forces accordingly. But a relatively obscure Turkish lieutenant-colonel named Mustafa Kemal, correctly predicted the Allies' strategy, and halted the Anzac advance at Arı Burnu.

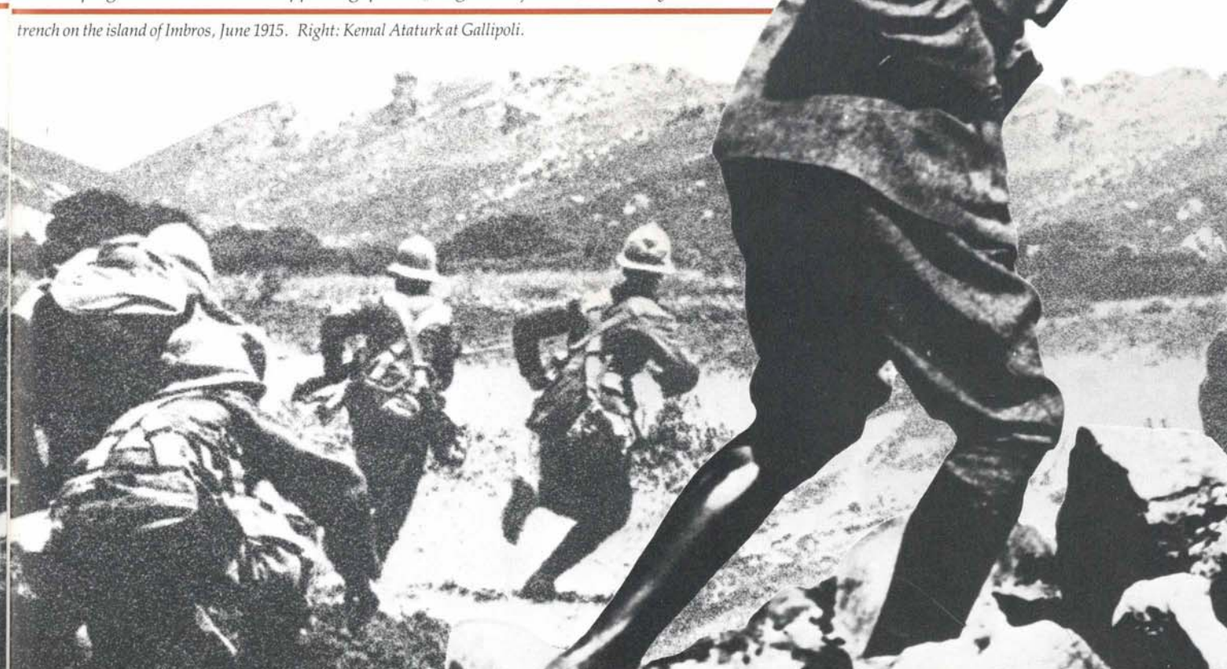
When it became clear they could not take the peninsula with the forces at hand, the British decided on a new assault further north. In August, reinforcements were landed on the Anzac beachhead and fresh landings took place at Suvla Bay. But again the commanders failed to follow up their initial advantage, and Kemal's forces retained control.

Both sides eventually tired of the brutal campaign. Conditions were appalling: poor food, lack of water, plagues of flies, disease, intense heat during day and, as autumn gave way to winter, bitter cold at night; and always the deadly shrapnel from artillery barrages. At last the British did one of the few things in the entire campaign well – they withdrew. In mid-December the Suvla and Anzac beachheads were evacuated under cover of darkness over a period of several days. It was a remarkable accomplishment, thousands evacuated without a single casualty, and without the knowledge of the Turkish defenders. Incredibly, they accomplished the same feat again in early January, 1916, at Cape Helles. After 10 months and 500,000 Allied and Turkish casualties, the campaign was over.

In the west, the inquiries into the disaster tarnished or destroyed reputations. Churchill, for example, went into political obscurity until World War II. And in Russia, anger against the war inflamed by the Gallipoli failure continued to grow, culminating, at last, in the Russian Revolution.

In the Middle East, the Gallipoli campaign raised Mustafa Kemal to a position of prominence and set the stage for his meteoric rise to power. Within a few short years he had cemented the territorial integrity of modern Turkey and, as Kemal Ataturk, became one of the great leaders in the Middle East, and, on the world stage, one of the giants of the 20th century.





Below: The 2nd Royal Naval Brigade practising an attack from a trench on the island of Imbros, June 1915. Right: Kemal Ataturk at Gallipoli.

Cove" on the western side of the peninsula, "Anzac" standing for Australian New Zealand Army Corps.

Our landing was in the Cape Helles area of Gallipoli, specifically at the half-moon curve of Morto Bay, for it was at Eski Hisarlik at the east end of the bay that the main body of South Wales Borderers went ashore. Today, from the vine-covered terrace of the Abide Motel in the central curve of the bay you can clearly see the impressive Turkish monument astride the hill taken by the Borderers in their initial assault. The motel's name "Abide" in fact means "monument." Erected to commemorate the successful defense of the peninsula, the massive stone structure dominates the landscape and is visible for miles; at night it is bathed in the orange glow of sodium floodlights and beneath it is a small military museum, whose guests book lists such visitors as Queen Elizabeth, Prince Philip and Princess Anne.

Beyond the western tip of Morto Bay, is a more modest British memorial: a stone obelisk almost 30 meters (100 feet) tall surrounded by a wall faced with stone tablets bearing the names of the 20,504 British soldiers and sailors who died in the campaign but who have no known graves. Despite the number, I had no difficulty locating my grandfather's name under the heading of the South Wales Borderers, one in a litany of empire: Australian Light Horse, 93rd Burma Infantry, New Zealand Infantry Brigade, 66th Punjabis, Royal Newfoundland Regiment, Assam Military Police and so on.

Below the monument is V Beach, where troops attempting to land were slaughtered by rifle and machine gun fire, their

MALCOLM STEVENS

1984 - Redoubt Cemetery, one of the cemeteries where Allied dead were eventually consolidated, contains 2,000 graves.

blood turning the sea red for a distance of 45 meters (50 yards) out from shore. Nearby too are old bunkers and gun emplacements and the grave of Yahir Chavush (Sergeant Yahir) who died defending the beach – along with 63 of his hopelessly outnumbered Turkish comrades.

This south-western extremity of Gallipoli is much less mountainous than the central part; it is relatively flat from the gently sloping heights of Acı (Achi) Baba overlooking the town of Acıtepe – now the site of an excellent private war museum. There is still the dense thorny underbrush – passable only through a network of goat trails and the ravines to carry off the rains of winter – but there are also orchards and fields of wheat and barley which, in the freshness of spring, might almost be mistaken for the countryside of England. And there are the cemeteries.

The beach cemeteries, and the single French cemetery which overlooks Morto Bay, are the most distinctive reminders of the ferocity of the Gallipoli fighting, an alien presence belying the tranquility of their bucolic surroundings. Under the terms of the armistice following the war, the British army re-entered the peninsula and consolidated the known graves, placing them as closely as possible to the locations where the casualties occurred. There are five British cemeteries near Cape Helles, some named for topographical features – Twelve Tree Copse, Beach, Pink Farm – others for battle areas – Lancashire Landing, Redoubt. Lancashire Landing and Beach are at the tip of the peninsula and contain those who died in the initial landings; the others contain those who died in he fruitless attempts to capture Acı Baba.

In England during the early days of the "Great War," there was a tremendous outpouring of patriotic zeal, and many of those heading for Gallipoli considered themselves embarking on a glorious crusade. No single individual epitomized this feeling more than the handsome young poet Rupert Brooke who wrote the famous lines

V Beach, 1915, where the sea was turned red offshore, as Allied troops were repelled in an attempted landing.

If I should die think only this of me;
That there's some corner of a foreign field
That is forever England.

Unhappily for Brooke, who wanted so desperately to be a part of the campaign, he died of complications arising from sunstroke on the eve of embarkation for the battle and was buried on the island of Sykros; yet nowhere on earth do those words, which inspired the British through two world wars, seem more appropriate than at the Gallipoli cemeteries, where, remote from the homeland that sent them out to die, the British and their Anzac cousins lie row upon row, thousands strong.

Each cemetery is enclosed within stone walls and is entered through a wooden gate which opens silently on well-oiled iron hinges. Polished metal plaques provide data on the numbers buried and the fighting that occurred in the immediate vicinity. Unlike the military cemeteries of western Europe with their upright headstones, these at Gallipoli have recumbent stones as a safeguard against earthquake damage. A team of Turkish gardeners employed by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, which administers the cemeteries from an office in Çanakkale, uses many of the indigenous trees, shrubs and wildflowers in landscaping, and the overall effect is one of tastefulness and peace. The headstones bear the name, age and regiment of the men who are known to lie there and in many cases an inscription, provided by the commission: "Their Glory Shall Not Be Blotted Out"

Further north, the topography changes dramatically – with precipitous crags towering over the beachheads. On the day of the landing the Australian and New Zealand forces fought their way clear to the ridge of Sarı Bayır range, and though unable to hold it established the Anzac reputation for bravery. Here the cemeteries are far more numerous – 22 of them – generally much smaller, with names that bring to mind the campaign's battles : Quinn's Post, Shrapnel Valley, Embarkation Pier.

Most are close to the road but others, like Baby 700, named for a hill, or The Farm, can be reached only by traversing narrow footpaths or steep tracks accessible by four-wheel drive vehicles, where the ubiquitous Gallipoli tortoises move laborious-

Two British "sixty-pounders" in position at Gallipoli, 1915.

ly in search of some tasty weeds. There are also the Australian Memorial at Lone Pine and the New Zealand Memorial at Çunuk Bayırı, the latter being the highest point of advance by New Zealand forces. Also at Çunuk Bayırı are reconstructed Turkish trenches, a small Turkish cemetery and an impressive new victory monument.

Incredibly, the Turkish and Anzac trenches were separated at this point by a distance no more than the width of the narrow asphalt road that now winds across the summit of the Sarı Bayırı range. From Çunuk Bayırı there is a superb view overlooking the Dardanelles on the one side and the Gulf of Saros on the other, including Suvla Bay to the north. Çunuk Bayırı was the key to control of the peninsula, and it was the Turkish stand at this point under the brilliant leadership of Mustafa Kemal – later Ataturk – that sealed the Allies' fate, and, by catapulting Mustafa Kemal into prominence, changed the history of the Ottoman Empire, Turkey and Middle East.

Hiking over the rugged terrain of the Anzac area, I tried to recreate the drama and futility of the fighting, the roar of exploding shells, the whine of bullets and the screams of the wounded, but found it impossible. Although we found vestiges of the battles – overgrown trenches and dugouts, rusty billy cans, bullets and pieces of shrapnel – the abundance of yellow flowers, purple thistles, wild thyme and scarlet poppies, the endless song of the birds, and the transparent blue of the water below made war here seem unthinkable.

We ended our tour at Suvla Bay. It was here on August 6, 1915, that the British opened a new beachhead in an attempt to break the stalemate at Cape Helles. Fresh troops were brought in from England and veterans of the Cape Helles fighting, including the 2nd Battalion, South Wales Borderers, were redeployed here from the south. To divert attention from the Suvla landings, an intense assault was made on the Anzac front (an action dramatized in a recent Australian film entitled *Gallipoli*), but inexplicably the British forces were not ordered immediately to take the surrounding hills before the Turkish defenders had time to regroup. When, under the cover of intense artillery barrages, they finally moved out in force across the dry salt lake just inland from the bay (under water during our visit), they were prevented from advancing far enough to link up with the Anzac front.

The last major battle of the Gallipoli campaign took place on the afternoon of August 21 – an assault on strategic high ground called "Scimitar Hill." Through an unseasonable gray mist that obscured the topographical details of their objective, the British troops advanced, and as darkness settled in, they went charging over the crest of the hill. Before the night was over, however, they had been forced to withdraw with the South Wales Borderers losing a third of their men, among them Private Charles A. Beresford, my grandfather.

Walking over Scimitar Hill, almost 70 years after, I found no ghosts from Gallipoli. But talking to a farmer, whom we drove home when his tractor suffered a flat tire, it occurred to me that my grandfather, a simple coal miner from South Wales, would probably have had much in common with this rugged, friendly villager.

In studying the Gallipoli campaign and subsequently visiting the scenes of battle, we were left with several impressions: the beauty of the countryside and the friendliness of its inhabitants. But the ones standing out have to do with the kinship that grew up between the opposing forces. They suffered equally from the awful flies, the choking dust, the thirst, and the stench of carrion. They became comrades in their shared misery, exchanging gifts during the many cease-fires to bury the dead and dispelling any hatreds and prejudices they might have nurtured at the beginning of the campaign. As the late Lieutenant Colonel R.F.E. Laidlaw, of the Royal Munster Fusiliers, wrote in his diary, "one could almost sense a friendly feeling between the Turks and ourselves and it seemed altogether wrong, as it was, that we should be there simply to kill each other. One could feel that in the enemy trenches there were human beings also and that they, too, had their hopes and feelings, their longing for their quiet homes and families and their wish to be out of it all."

Before leaving Gallipoli we paid one last visit to Çunuk Bayırı and as I looked down through the hazy sunshine at Suvla Bay and the surrounding hills where grandfather spent his final hours, I thought of my friends in Istanbul, and of Ahmet's uncle, sacrificed, like my grandfather, to global politics, and I wondered if there was any significance in the death of a poor Welsh coal miner when measured against the thousands on both sides. Before I could decide, it was time to return to Istanbul so, as I retraced my steps through the Çunuk Bayırı cemetery, I consoled myself with one simple thought: that Private Charles A. Beresford, late of the South Wales Borderers, lives on among these monuments, and that he might take comfort in knowing that his grandson has made peace with the "fierce race of men" that he feared 70 years ago.

Malcolm Stevens taught chemistry in Istanbul and Beirut. He and his wife, Marcia, write works of historical interest.

Men of the King's Own Scottish Borderers go over the top at Cape Helles, June 4, 1915.