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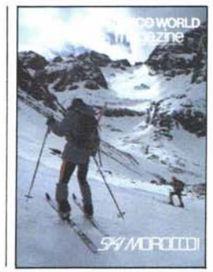


Cover: Silhouetted against a dramatically lit sky in the once fearsome Atlas Mountains in Morocco, two American skiers on cross-country skis – what the Americans call "skinny skis" – ascend Jebel Toubkal, North Africa's highest peak, to see if cross-country skis are suitable for ski mountaineering. Morocco also has normal downhill skiing facilities. Photo by Brian Clark. Back Cover: One of the famous minarets of Cairo – the 13th-century Quluan mosque minaret which survived an earthquake in the 14th century. Photo by John Feeney.

◀ Believed to be the only surviving example of its type, this 10th-century ceramic jar from Egypt was one of 320 Islamic works of art shown recently in Riyadh.

IRELAND'S CLEOPATRA

WRITTEN AND PHOTOGRAPHED BY ARTHUR CLARK

does the blood of Egyptian pharaohs run through Irish veins today? Did an Irish Cleopatra lead a Gaelic army into battle in County Kerry? Is that her tomb over there across the stream? That hoary stone sunk into the ground amid the gorse in Foley's Glen?

To be candid, the answer is: probably not. First of all, the story is fantastic. It says that a woman named Scotia, "daughter of the Pharaoh," led an army into battle in Ireland some 3,600 years ago and was killed there while doing so. Secondly, modern experts – archeologists and historians – are skeptical. Very skeptical. One calls it an "entirely spurious legend . . . very much in the Bermuda Triangle vein of research." Another says it "has little or no historical basis."

Still, all the world loves a legend and since some scholars have left the door open – just a crack, to be sure – I decided to take a trip through Ireland a year or so ago to trace the threads of the story. My journey started in the bookshops in Dublin and ended in a vale in the mountains of Kerry called either "Gleann Scoithin" (Scotia's Glen) or, more prosaically, Foley's Glen. And though I found no proof, I can safely say the story has a certain Irish logic to it and that I came across a few grains of fascinating fact.

According to some sources, the story of Ireland's Egyptian princess dates back to 1700 B.C. when, says T.J. Barrington in Discovering Kerry, *Gaels – "with their iron spears" – invaded Ireland from Spain to avenge the death of a clansman who had gone over from Spain to explore Ireland and had been killed by the inhabitants.*

Those who organized this expedition were from the family of Miles, or Milesius, depending on the source consulted. Miles – a word meaning "soldier" in Latin – was a member of a warlike, aristocratic Gaelic family in Spain, with roots in Scythia, an area northwest of the Black Sea, now in the U.S.S.R. One source says Miles was "supposedly descended from Scythian nobles who had been expelled from Egypt and settled in Iberia [Spain]." Another, The History of Ireland to the Coming of Henry II, *by Arthur Ua Clerigh notes that when Miles grew up "he went on his wanderings (from Spain) first to Scythia . . . and afterwards to Egypt where he married Scota (Scotia) the daughter of the Pharaoh Nectonibus."*

Foley's Glen: the reputed site of Queen Scotia's tomb.

Back in Spain, Scotia bore Miles six sons. But then Miles, on the eve of his invasion of Ireland to avenge his uncle's death, died and his mantle fell on the shoulders of his Egyptian princess. Like Cleopatra, another renowned Egyptian woman, Scotia did not shirk her responsibilities: with her six sons, and two other of Miles' sons from another union, she set out in a fleet of 30 ships some time about 1700 B.C.

Casualties, writes Barrington, were incurred almost immediately. "As they sailed westward, Erannan, the youngest of the sons, climbed the mast first to see Ireland, but fell and was drowned . . . Ir, a third son, was rowing so hard that his oar snapped and he fell back into the boat and died . . ."

The fleet sailed on, however, and three days later landed at Kenmare Bay in County Kerry. The Gaels fought their way to Tara, their enemy's capital and, later, the place where the High Kings of Ireland were crowned.

There, they demanded surrender or battle – but got neither. Somehow, the enemy got the Gaels to withdraw in their fleet and while they were offshore a tempest sank many ships and drowned most of the surviving sons.

Enraged at their losses, the remaining Gaels beached their craft on the north shore of the beautiful Dingle Peninsula and the army began to march through the foothills of the Slieve Mish Mountains, hard by Ireland's Atlantic coast and not far from the present city of Tralee. It was there, in the most ferocious battle with the inhabitants, that the Gaelic invaders lost their Egyptian princess. "In yon cool glen, beside the mount, close by the wave," says one 17th-century poet, "fell Scotia while pursuing the enemy across the hills."

Though Scotia died early in the fray, her forces went on to victory and it is she that is remembered. Says Thomas I. O'Sullivan in his 1931 Romantic Hidden Kerry, *"Though she failed to stay the career of the foe, she died and gave her name to the land, for our island was Scotia long before it was known as Hibernia."*

In tracing the threads of this story, it was much easier to read the poems and histories from Dublin bookshops, than to actually find Gleann Scoithin. Though Scotia may have "given her name to the land," most people were calling it Foley's Glen by the time I got there, and only a handful of people knew where it was. I found it, in fact, only because I had a little paperback called Irish Walk Guides – the Southwest *by Sean O'Suilleabhan. Even then there were problems: a series of small disasters that got us thinking of the awful things that reportedly happened to all the people who participated in the opening of another famous Egyptian's tomb: King Tut's Tomb in 1922. (See* Aramco World, *November-December 1981). First, we simply could not find it, despite the book's directions. Then, when we thought we had found it, I slipped and fell and had to retreat. And when we tried again my wife came down with a sudden and inexplicable illness just as we discovered the Finglas that flows prettily into the glen.*

Finally, though, on our last day in Kerry I worked my way across the Finglas Stream and saw, across the glen, a great stone 10.5 meters long (35 feet) that, legend says, is the tomb of Scotia.

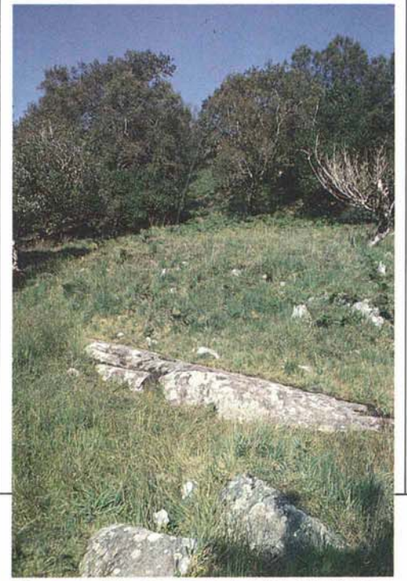
And maybe it is. Propped up on pillars as they say it used to be, and before it was worn smooth by Ireland's endless rain, it might have once looked like a tomb. But now, I have to admit, it's open to debate. True, there was a script in ancient Ogham characters etched into the rock attesting that it was Leacht Scoithin, the "grave-mound of Scotia," and Ogham is the script of Old Irish. But these, it is all but fully proved, are modern forgeries. And were there no fantastic stories attached to the place, one would hardly find the giant stone unusual.

Finglass Stream and what could be the princess' grave.

On the other hand, even modern scholars leave a bit of room for those of us with imagination. Michael Ryan, keeper of Irish antiquities at the National Museum in Dublin, says flatly that the Scotia tale is "spurious legend," but will concede that some parts may not be altogether fictitious.

It is certainly true, moreover, that the Gaels did come to Ireland by the Late Bronze Age, and that they did bring with them the skills of iron-mongering. And some of the dates and names in the legend do accord with some of the accepted history of both Ireland and Egypt.

Though Scotia's father, for instance, is called the "Pharaoh Nectonibus" by Ua Clerigh in his 1910 Irish history, a name not to be found among the lists of ancient Egyptian kings, his name bears a striking resemblance to those of two much later rulers: Nectanebo I and Nectanebo II, described by Martha Ross in Rulers and Governments of the World *as "among the last Egyptian Pharaohs."*



The stone said to cover the tomb of Ireland's Cleopatra.

These rulers, moreover, "made attempts to gain Greek alliances" to stave off invaders from the East. It is not beyond the realm of possibility, therefore, to suggest that they could have also made alliances with the Scythians who, in the preceding centuries, had penetrated the Middle East as far as Palestine, and thus were on Egypt's border.

In A Folk Register, A History of Ireland in Verse, *contemporary historian Patrick J. Twohig moves the legend to about 400 B.C. but still writes:*

The day of poets and iron men
Had dawned, and with a clang . . .
Long had they coursed, the sons of Mil
From Scythia's Black Sea shore,
Goidels (Gaels) who journeyed to fulfill
Their destiny of yore . . .

What emerges from all this is the faint possibility that an Egyptian princess met a Scythian warrior, and became his bride, centuries after the date given in the ancient table. And, since Egypt did fall to invaders in the mid-fourth century B.C., it is possible some Egyptians did flee to Spain and – finally – got to Ireland at about that time.

Scotia's links with reality are, admittedly, quite tenuous. Yet down there in the glen, the legend somehow complements the history and the great stone seems stronger than the "facts" as the Finglas trips by bubbling – almost winking – in the sun.

Arthur Clark, a frequent contributor to Aramco World *magazine, works out of Dhahran, Saudi Arabia. He once lived in Ireland.*

UNITY IN RIYADH

WRITTEN BY ARTHUR CLARK
PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF AHUAN ISLAMIC ART, LONDON

A pair of 14th-century carved doors, above, from Morocco, and right, a ceramic pitcher from Iran, circa 1200.

Art aficionados from Muslim lands could hardly have found themselves better placed than in Riyadh or Jiddah this spring. For at either of those cities from February to May, they could have enjoyed an exhibition of art that was also a special sort of "homecoming" – a millennium or more of Muslim art from lands as far apart as Malaysia and Morocco on show in Saudi Arabia, the birthplace of Islam.

Called "The Unity of Islamic Art," the exhibit, sponsored by the King Faisal Foundation – along with companies and individuals from Saudi Arabia, Europe and the United States – featured 320 works in metal, stone, glass and wood, plus textiles, scientific instruments, jewelry and calligraphy

The first-ever large-scale exhibition of Islamic art to open in Saudi Arabia, the Unity exhibit, appropriately, inaugurated the first of three galleries planned for the King Faisal Center in Riyadh, an autonomous, non-profit agency of the King Faisal Foundation, dedicated to furthering research in Islamic studies. The foundation itself is a philanthropic body set up in 1976 by eight sons of the late Saudi ruler, King Faisal ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz; it funds programs and projects ranging from an annual King Faisal International Prize to the construction of mosques in the kingdom and abroad, and the provision of aid to needy nations.

Aside from being the first of its kind in Saudi Arabia, the Unity exhibition was notable in that the show was financed by donations from the private sector. Furthermore, it was planned, assembled and mounted in just seven and a half months, as compared to the "normal" two years that, show organizers said, often go into getting such an exhibition off the ground. Finally, all but a few of its pieces came from private collections, some never-before-publicly-shown or catalogued works.

Indeed, one of the co-sponsors called the work by the center – which only opened its doors in 1983 – a "brave, courageous" effort. "What gives you so much pleasure in doing something like this is that it's *here* in Saudi Arabia," he said. "It's as good as anywhere. Usually when you see an exhibition of this quality it's in London or New York…"

Others called the exhibition an experiment, and still others said it proved Saudi Arabia's ability to handle the demanding logistics of a major art show; since almost all of the objects came from collections in Europe and the United States, Saudia, the kingdom's national airline, had to fly some three tons of priceless pieces safely into Riyadh. And Center Director General Dr. Zaid Abdul Mohsen al-Husain called the exhibition "a duty" of the institution – to let the Saudi people better know their culture, their civilization.

Al-Husain also said that the exhibition helped to fulfill a major goal of the center: "To expound the role of Islamic civilization and its contributions to humanity in the various fields, and to define the main characteristics which distinguish it from other civilizations throughout history."

Visitors to the exhibition found themselves face to face with some of those characteristics as soon as they stepped into the intimate gallery: a nutshell panorama of the show in the *mashrabiya*-shaded foyer, including huge, delicately carved Atlas pine doors from Fez, Morocco, dating from the 14th or 15th century and a white-marble panel from 13th-century Ayyubid Cairo, sculpted with monumental calligraphy. Not far along, on a wall in the reception hall, was a giant carpet from Iran woven in the 16th century; dominated by red with an island of green in the middle, the great carpet included beasts of prey,

A glazed ceramic mihrab, *or prayer niche, from Iran and dating from the second half of the 15th century.*

songbirds, ducks, bumblebees and dragonflies. A gift of the Safavid Shah Sulaiman to Francesco Morosini when Morosini was elected Doge of Venice, the carpet was a magnificent gesture of good will.

Upstairs, the center's manuscript forum showed exquisite examples of calligraphy on richly decorated pages of copies of the Koran, along with a section devoted to Islamic metalwork collected by the late Palestinian-Lebanese Nuhad es-Said. Both emphasized the broad range of Islamic art gathered for the show – but also its unity. As Esin Atil of the Smithsonian Institution's Center for Asian Art wrote in the catalogue, what links all the pieces is "a veneration for calligraphy... an insistence on investing works of art with meaningful themes and symbols... [and a] persistence of harmonious and refined design."

Those hallmarks of Islamic art did not, certainly, spring fully grown from the Arabian Peninsula, where Islam was revealed, but developed out of contacts the Muslims made with the cultures around the peninsula as Islam expanded. Essentially, the Muslims possessed only the Koran and the Arabic language when they burst from Arabia in the seventh century, yet, writes Atil, "Within the first century following the death of the Prophet, Islam formulated an artistic vocabulary that became the unique and characteristic expression of this civilization and was unanimously accepted from the steppes of Central Asia to the shores of the Atlantic Ocean. No civilization has been able to spread through such a vast region in such a short time, uniting peoples of widely diverse ethnic and linguistic origins under a single language and artistic expression."

In the exhibition, as in the history of Islamic art, calligraphy was a highlight. The best examples in the exhibition, of course, were mostly from copies of the Koran, because, as Atil explains, "To copy the Koran in the most beautiful and elegant hand became a pious act, and calligraphy evolved as the noblest of the arts." Works spanned the Muslim world from Spain to India, and reached from the ninth to the 18th century, presenting a variety of styles. (See *Aramco World*, July-August 1964, 1977; May-June 1976; and September-October 1979.)

In the Unity show, calligraphy touched a decorative peak in the almost voluptuous

A 16th-century ceramic plate from Turkey, utilizing colorless glaze over an elaborate multi-colored floral design.

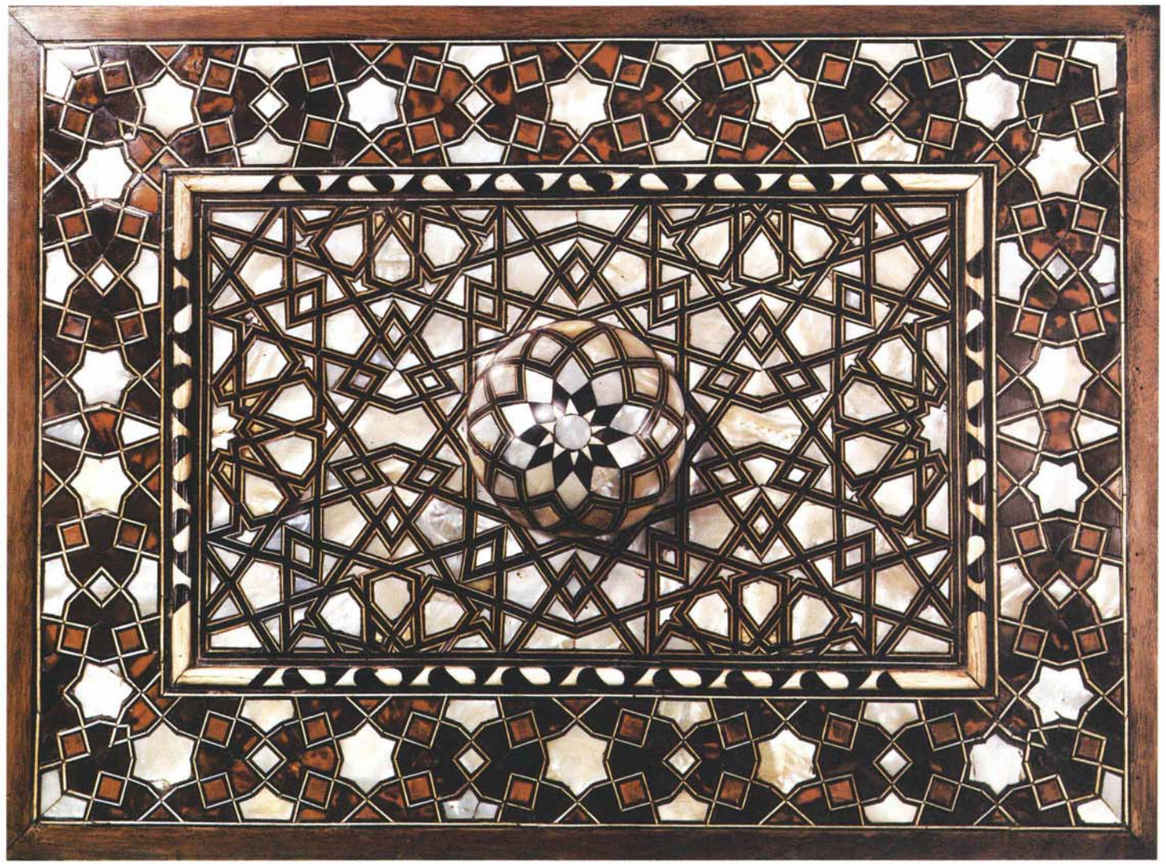
tughras, or monograms,of the Ottoman sultans. One particular example was that of Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent, who ruled in the 16th century; standing 19 centimeters high (7.5 inches), and 33.4 centimeters wide (13 inches), it was done in bold strokes of blue filled with gold or spiraling designs.

Calligraphy, in fact, was one of the most immediately visible elements that unified the exhibition.It figured strongly in metalwork, ceramics, glass and textiles – as well as a calligrapher's inkwell, and an ornate warrior's helmet from 15th-century Turkey.

Other motifs of Islamic art, such as repetitive patterns, were presented through objects emblazoned with flowers and blossoming trees, incredible arabesques with geometrically perfect designs that seemed to continue beyond their physical borders – and, perhaps, to reflect the infinity of the universe. Such patterns were highlighted in the central panel of a 15th-century glazed-ceramic mosaic *mihrab* from the winter-hall of a mosque in Isfahan, Iran; it was saved when the mosque was demolished about 1930.

The "artistry" of Islamic scientists – their translation, absorption and advancement of the bequests of knowledge received from the societies encountered during the growth of Islam – was yet another feature of the exhibition. Splendidly drafted and illustrated works on pharmacology, ophthalmology and human and animal anatomy in the exhibition suggested the spirit that kept learning safe and growing through the so-called Dark Ages in the West. Included, for example, were two pages from the 12th-century "*Khawass al-Ashjar*," depicting in color four plants and

A brass incense burner, above, from Afghanistan, circa 1200, and below a striking 16th-century door from Egypt, inlaid with ivory, ebony, tortoise shell and mother of pearl.



A brass planispheric astrolabe made in 1304 at Granada in Moorish Spain by the famous Arab astronomer Abu Jafer Baso.

describing their medicinal uses. Part of an illustrated text on pharmacology written by the surgeon Dioscorides, who visited a number of Mediterranean countries while serving the troops of the Roman Emperor Nero in the first century, the book was translated into Arabic in Baghdad in the ninth century.

The lengths to which the Muslims went to obtain the works of the scholars of antiquity is reflected in a copy of "The Politics of Aristotle," produced in Syria in the 13th century. The original translator, in the eighth century, was Yuhana bin al-Batriq, who, according to the accompanying text, discovered the work in a temple at Baalbek, in Lebanon "in the possession of a hermit..." He also translated the works of Galen, Hippocrates and Ptolemy into Arabic, part of the eighth-to-tenth century transfer of knowledge described as "probably the most extraordinary example of cultural transmission that has ever been achieved."

In other sections, the Unity exhibit showed how extensive that transfer was; in one was a collection of finely wrought, inscribed astrolabes, with which the Arabs solved astronomical and astrological problems; in another was a collection of colorful, stylized maps of Syria, of the Arabian Peninsula and of the world.

Fully half of the pieces in the show were included as full-color plates in the 200-page catalogue – itself a collector's item. Drafted by show organizers Oliver Hoare and David Sulzberger and published by the Mobil Oil Corporation, one of the sponsors, the handsome volume presented data about the original provenance of the pieces plus tidbits of history. Its front and back covers, for example, feature brilliant color pages from the 16th-century "Guide" to Makkah and Medina, a 43-page document describing the Hajj, or pilgrimage, in verse and depicting important local sites.

Another item with a story behind it was a 13th-century brass incense globe inlaid with silver. Made in Afghanistan and swathed in calligraphy, the globe was technically refined internally: it contained a gimballed interior support system which prevented the incense coals from spilling. Such globes, wrote the medieval Arab traveler al-Biruni, "were rolled between guests after dinner," apparently to distribute the scent of incense equally.

Background stories about collection pieces clearly are fascinating, but stories about how collections were made are even more so, particularly when they touch on pieces one sponsor called "high stakes" art. One example was a suit of armor from India, standing 1.33 meters (4.25 feet) high in the center of the gallery. Dating from around 1700, it was discovered "in an English stately home" just before the show, exhibit organizers said. Another example is an enameled candlestick, made in Syria near the middle of the 13th century; one of only two known to exist, it was uncovered "in somebody's kitchen cupboard."

The Unity exhibit was essentially different from comparable Western exhibits. As one expert said in Riyadh at the opening: "In the West the concept of art is one of self-expression. But in Islam the function of the artist is to perfect himself and his skill to become a channel to express something higher than himself – the principle of God-given unity and balance in the universe."

The exhibit in Riyadh underlines that concept. As Center Director-General al-Husain commented, "One of the most important characteristics of Islamic culture is that it gives and takes. It gives to the others but it takes from them whatever can be accepted. It's a very dynamic civilization... and this is reflected in the arts." It was also reflected in "The Unity of Islamic Art," a graceful statement about Islam and the art it engendered – now brought home to the land where the faith was revealed more than 13 centuries ago.

Arthur Clark covers Saudi Arabia for Aramco World *magazine*

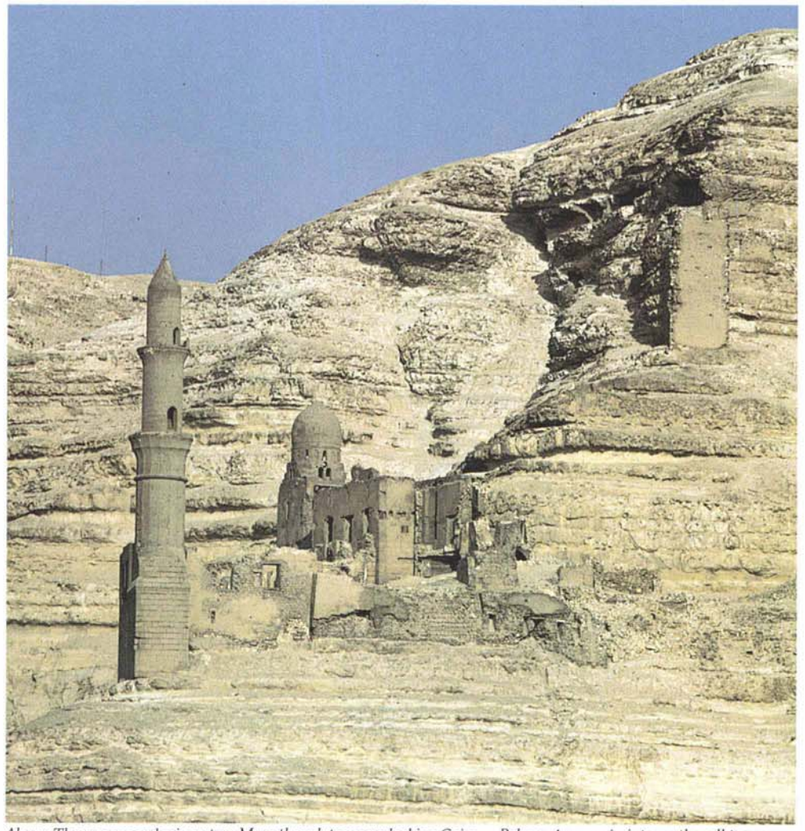
The Minarets of Cairo

WRITTEN AND PHOTOGRAPHED BY JOHN FEENEY

Nowhere in the Muslim world can you find such a profusion of domes and minarets as in Cairo. Rising from the haze of crowded, crumbling streets in the old, chaotic, yet picturesque medieval parts of the city, they dominate the city's skyline. Minarets, indeed, are Cairo's joy and ornament and the source of Cairenes' favorite nickname: "*Madeenet el alf Midhana*," "the city of a thousand minarets."

Not every mosque in Cairo – or elsewhere for that matter – possesses a minaret. Nor do they need to; the *adhan*, or call to prayer, can just as well be intoned at ground level as from a minaret. In the Prophet Muhammad's day, indeed, the call to prayer was first made from a rooftop just a few steps away from the Prophet's house in Medina. As the renowned authority on Islamic architecture, Sir Archibald Creswell, says: "...when Muhammad and his followers first came to Medina they prayed, according to Ibn Hisham, without any preliminary call to prayer."

Later, though, the Prophet sent instructions to an Ethiopian named Bilal, who possessed a clear and piercing voice, to call to the faithful of Medina from a rooftop (See *Aramco World*, July-August, 1983). And on the day the first Muslims captured Makkah (Mecca), Bilal intoned the sacred call to prayer from the top of the Ka'ba – the first time the call to prayer was made in what was to become Islam's holiest city.



Above: The mosque and minaret on Muqatlan plateau overlooking Cairo. Below: A muezzin intones the call to prayer.

In the course of time, different Arabic words have been used for "minarets" – especially *midhana* and *manara*. The word *midhana* is derived from *adhan* ("call to prayer") and means, in effect, "the place where the call to prayer is pronounced." The other term, *manara*, means "candle – stick," or "a place in which to place a light." Since, of course, it can also mean "lighthouse," the Arabs used that term for the great Pharos, or lighthouse of Alexandria, at the top of which a great mirrored lantern was lit at night to signal ships at sea. (See *Aramco World*, May-June, 1980). From that it was a short step from "*manara*" to "*minaret*," for what could look more like "a candle" or a "lighthouse" than a minaret – forever beckoning the faithful.

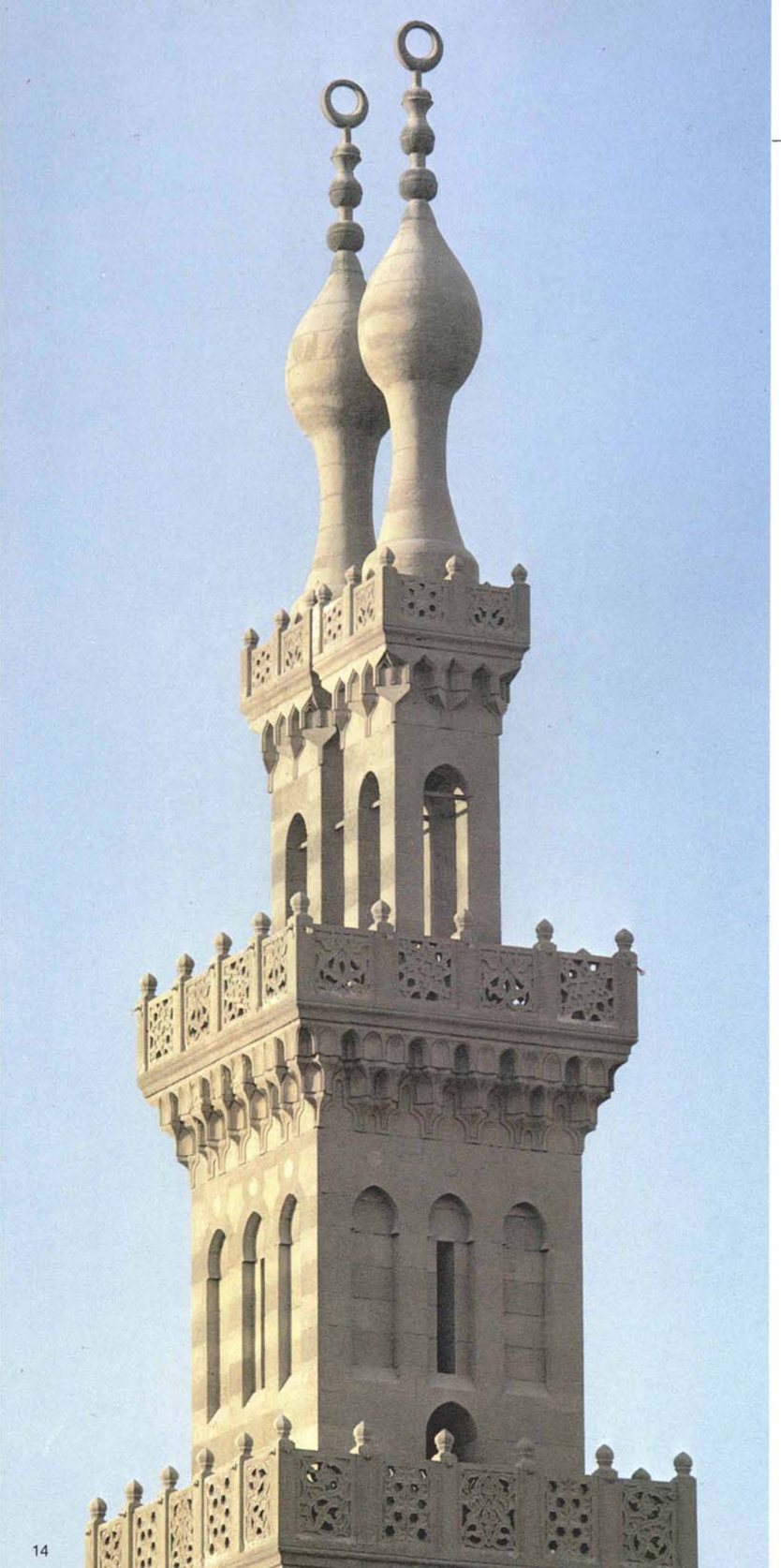
In Egypt, the first minarets date back to the beginnings of Islam when, in A.D. 673, the caliph Mu'awiya ordered the governor of Egypt to build minarets for the call to prayer, and four were built – one at each corner of the mosque of 'Amr, the very first mosque to be built in Egypt.

None of these first minarets exists today, but in succeeding centuries countless more minarets were built – particularly during the reigns of the Fatimids, the Mamluks and the Ottoman governors until, after 1,000 years, Cairo could boast almost as many minarets.

In appearance, the minarets of Cairo vary tremendously. There are short minarets and tall minarets, double-headed minarets and even quadrupled minarets, as well as the plain, lean Turkish minarets, like those soaring above the mosque of Muhammad 'Ali on the heights of the Citadel; these were described by one observer as "tall stone candles." With a few exceptions, most of these Cairo minarets are built of stone cut from quarries in the nearby Muqattam Hills that once supplied the Pyramid builders 4,000 years earlier.

In medieval Cairo, as in all traditional Muslim cities, houses were never built very high and so minarets were always much higher than the surrounding buildings. But there was more to this than first meets the eye. Because the minaret was higher than the surrounding buildings, the voice of the muezzin could float out over the rooftops and reach all believers in the immediate area. In fact, the height of each minaret was usually designed in proportion to the surrounding district, so that it could be easily reached by the power of the vocal cords of the muezzin when calling out from the minaret's balcony.

Right: The twin minarets of the Northern City of the Dead.

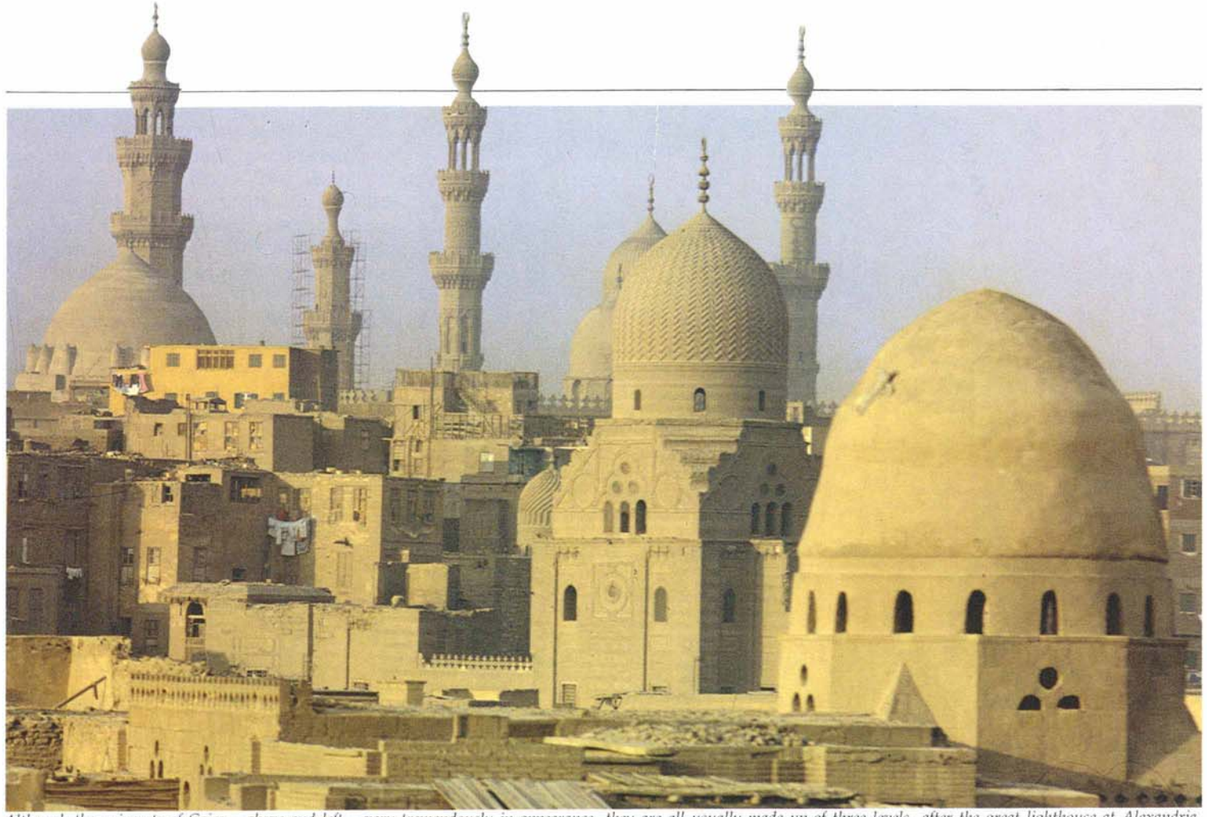


Recent research also shows that after several centuries, the city's medieval masons – there were no architects or town planners in those days – began to take great care in siting a new minaret; by then there were so many minarets that they could no longer be put up haphazardly. Instead, the masons tried to site them in relation to each other so as not to disturb the harmony of the area. Today, as a result, though you often find several minarets on the same street, they never seem to obstruct each other; to the contrary, they seem to come together, providing what seems to be a natural contentment in the eye of the beholder.

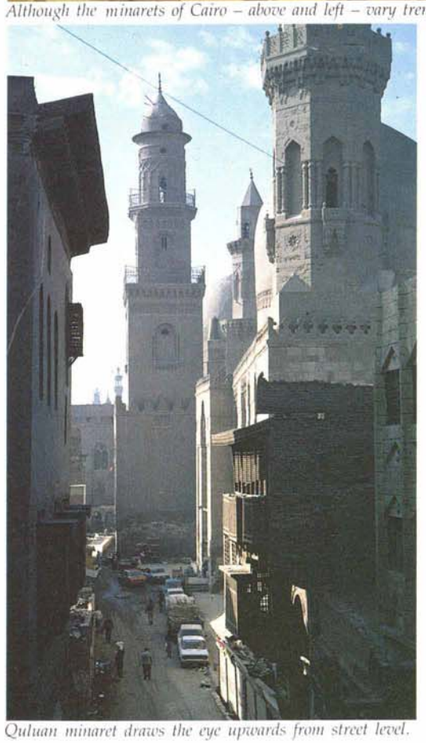
Egypt's internationally renowned architect, Hassan Fathy, now well into his 80's but still working, expresses this very feeling when he looks out at Cairo from his terraced rooftop and tells us: "I am surrounded by five mosques, thanks be to God, with their domes and minarets and so I say I am living in a skyscape, not a landscape. These minarets make you think that the very air around you has been given artistic expression and so the environment in which I am living makes me feel very comfortable – both physically and psychologically..."

The streets in Hassan Fathy's skyscape, it should be said, are narrow and crooked. But they were purposely laid out this way – to provide shade and to trap the cool night air in what by day is a harsh desert city – and as you walk through them you find your eye constantly drawn upward by yet another soaring minaret. It is this that led Fathy to describe Cairo as "a city of the perpendicular." They seem to act, he said, "as links between earth and heaven, set, as they are, against passing dawns, the circling sun, shadows, moon and stars."

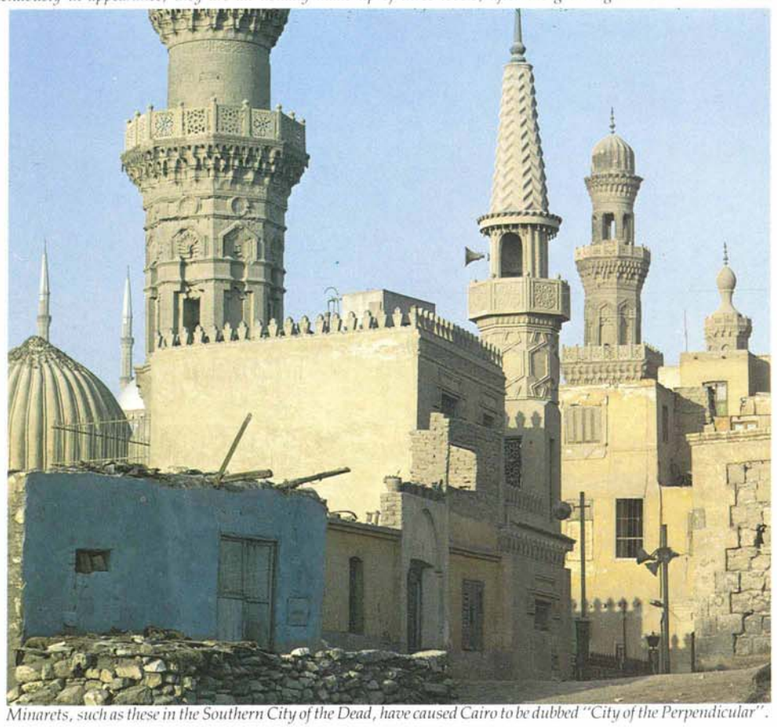
The form of Cairo's minarets has not changed much over the centuries. Invariably, each minaret is made up of three or four levels – patterned, some say, after the various stages or levels of the great lighthouse at Alexandria. The base, or first level, can be either a square or an octagonal tower from which rises a second section, sometimes cylindrical, sometimes octagonal, with an encircling balcony or platform. Then comes the third stage, often a circle of small colonnades with, sometimes, a second gallery for the muezzin. At each stage, the minaret diminishes in girth until it tapers off into a small, ribbed dome, with a small crescent ring at the very tip,



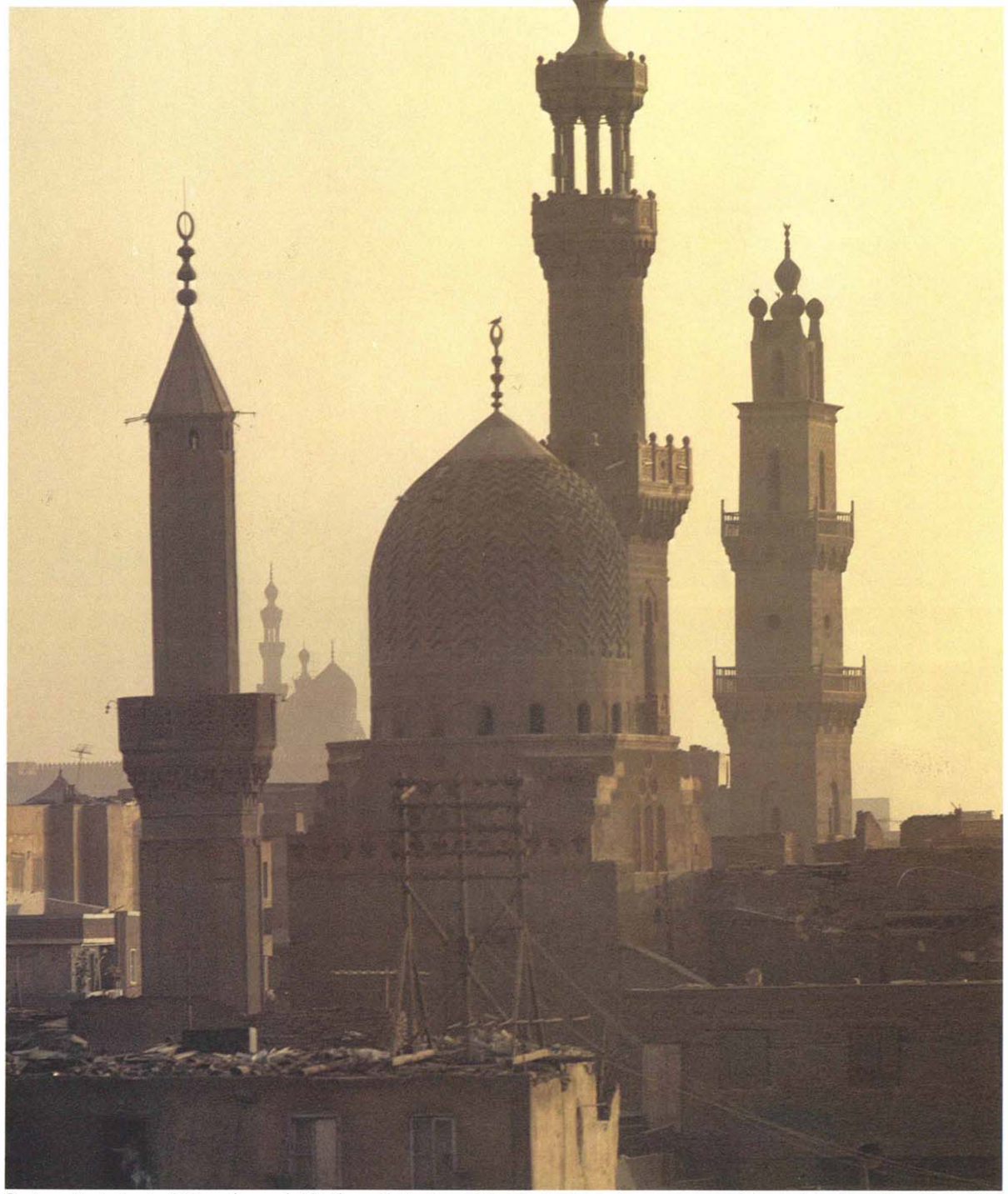
Although the minarets of Cairo – above and left – vary tremendously in appearance, they are all usually made up of three levels, after the great lighthouse at Alexandria.



Quluan minaret draws the eye upwards from street level.



Minarets, such as these in the Southern City of the Dead, have caused Cairo to be dubbed "City of the Perpendicular".



Ornate medieval minarets of Cairo, above, and right, the mud-brick minaret of Ibn Tulun's ninth-century mosque – one of the simplest, yet most beautiful, in Cairo.

where the minaret joins the sky. Inside the minaret, a steep, narrow spiraling stone staircase leads to the galleries above.

At each stage, the exterior walls are usually elaborately decorated; over the centuries Cairo's masons seem to have taken a wild delight in lovingly embellishing these surfaces with intricate arabesque and geometric designs: vines, leaves and sometimes star patterns. And if all this architectural decoration were not enough, some of the minarets still bear a series of ancient wooden rods protruding from the tops. Before the days of electricity, these rods were used to hang oil lanterns during Ramadan – and the sight of these softly burning lamps suspended in the night sky around the tips of hundreds of minarets - must have been a sight to see.

Among Cairo's "thousand" minarets, Ibn Tulun's mud-brick, ninth-century mosque is said to be one of the simplest, yet one of the most beautiful.

Devoid of any surface decoration, it is modeled on the minaret of the great mosque of Samarra, Mesopotamia (Iraq) where Ibn Tulun was born, and features an outer spiral staircase instead of the usual inner one. The idea apparently came from the spiral staircase of a Babylonian *ziggurat* thought to be the Tower of Babel.

Reconstructed in 1296 on the lines of the original edifice, the mosque of Ibn Tulun boasts one of Cairo's oldest minarets. It was built by a man called Lajim who took refuge in the then-derelict mosque while fleeing the authorities, and vowed that if he survived he would restore the mosque. True to his word, Lajim – who not only survived but became the Sultan of Egypt – rebuilt the mosque; he also set aside a sum of money for the purchase and upkeep of a cockerel to wake the muezzin each morning in time for him to climb the minaret and call the sleeping city to prayers.

Other splendid examples of Cairo's minarets are the two soaring towers on the Muayyad mosque near medieval Cairo's massive entrance gate of Bab Zuwaila, the southern boundary of the original Fatimid city walls and once the ceremonial entrance for sultans coming down from their 12th-century fortresses on the Mokhattam hills.

Because these two soaring minarets were mounted on existing 10th-century towers – a daring scheme for the period – one nearly collapsed shortly after it was

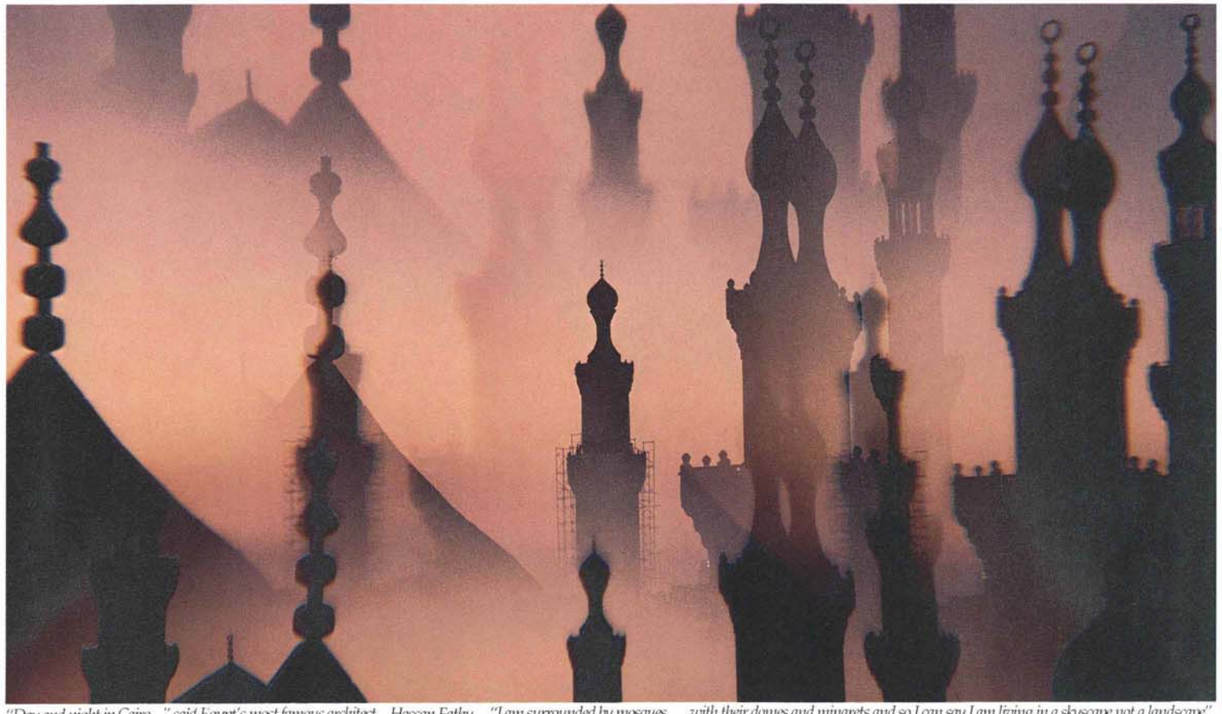
built in 1420, "because the stones used for its construction were too small." But 500 years later these nearly twinned minarets – one is slightly smaller – still soar into Fathy's "skyscape."

Another example is al-Hakim's mosque, one of the biggest in Cairo. Built originally outside the city walls between A.D. 990 and 1013, al-Hakim's mosque was restored only three years ago. Like Ibn Tulun's ninth-century mosque, al-Hakim's is built of brick, but its two enormous minarets are built of stone, some of the blocks bearing pharaonic inscriptions from an earlier structure. These minarets also threatened to collapse, so massive square base-towers were built around them for added support. Even the towers did not prevent the minarets from being badly damaged, however, when a great earthquake struck Cairo in 1303 – a disaster commemorated in Kufic inscriptions on four sides of the nearby 13th-century minaret of Quluan's mosque, which seems to have survived the earthquake. Though Cairo is not prone to earthquakes – indeed they are extremely rare in Egypt – this one wreaked havoc; all the minarets of al-Azhar, the oldest university in the world, were damaged and those of al-Hakim remained unrepaired for another 300 years.

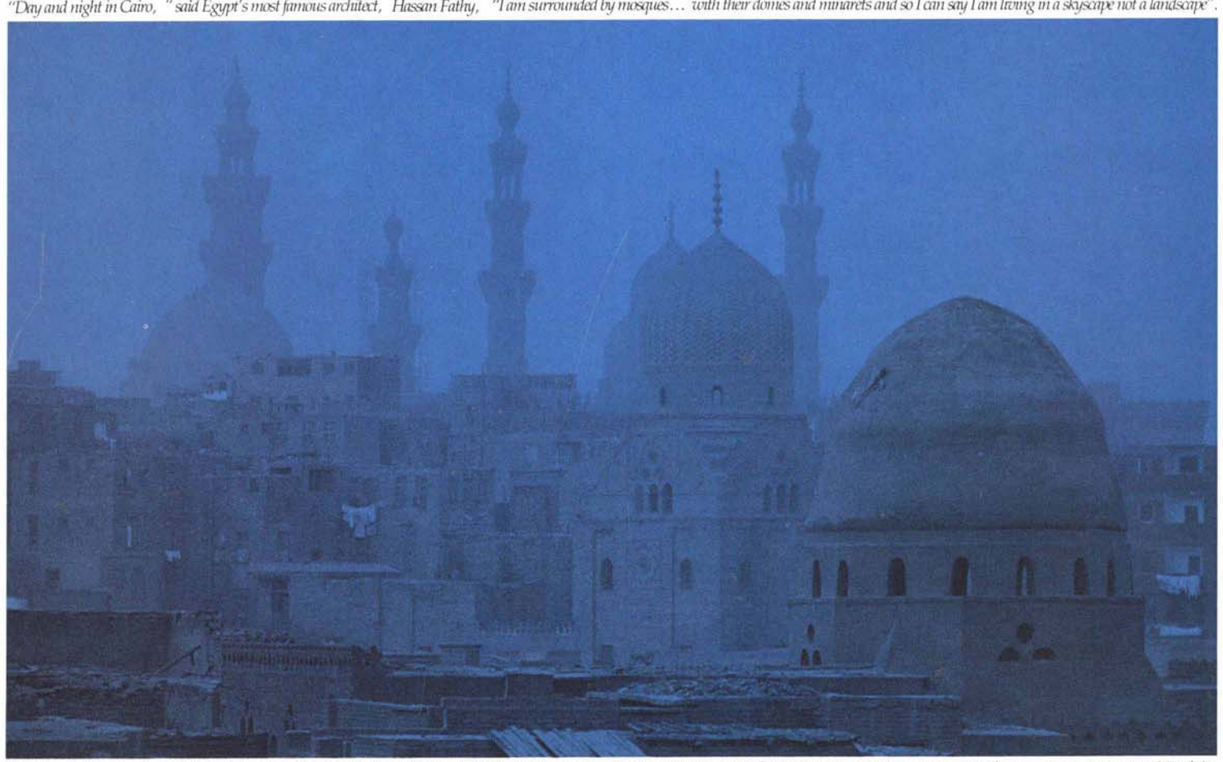
In a sense, the muezzins of Cairo reflect the beauty and variety of the minarets; despite the problems posed by traffic noise, the voices of Cairo's muezzins are renowned throughout the Muslim world. As regularly as the sun and the moon, generations of Cairo muezzins have climbed to the tops of their minarets five times a day – and night – for more than 1,000 years, throughout the ages, winter and summer, through centuries of sunsets and sandstorms, they have ascended the dark spiral staircases to the high calling galleries, to cast their voices upon the wind and issue "the perfect summons" to the city:

> God is most great, God is most great.
> I bear witness that there is no god but God...
> Come to salvation...Come to prayer...

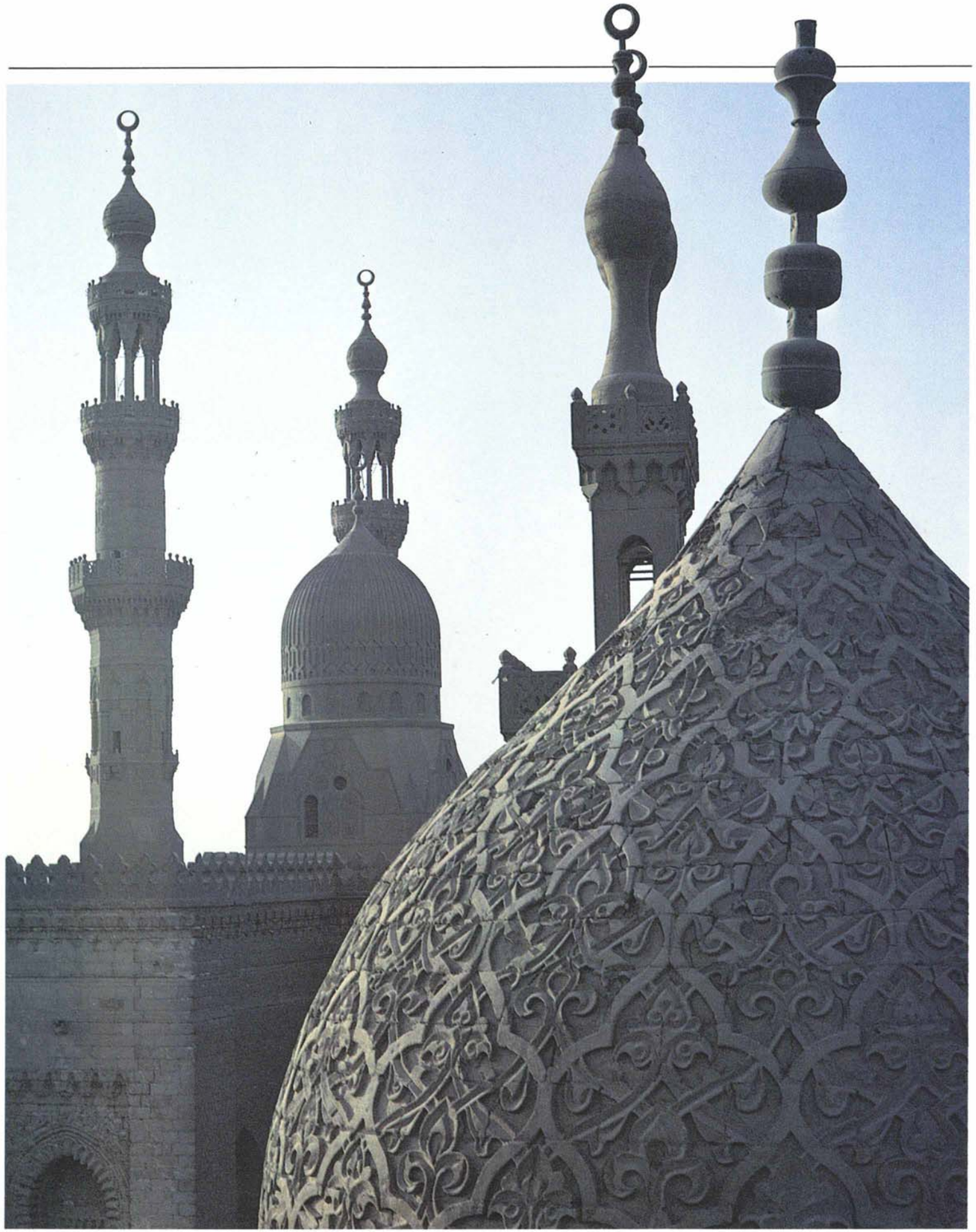
Today, inside the dark confines of Quluan's 13th-century minaret, you can still find traces of their faithful service: in the guide's flickering candlelight you will find the center of each stone step worn down a full half inch from centuries of ascending and descending footsteps.

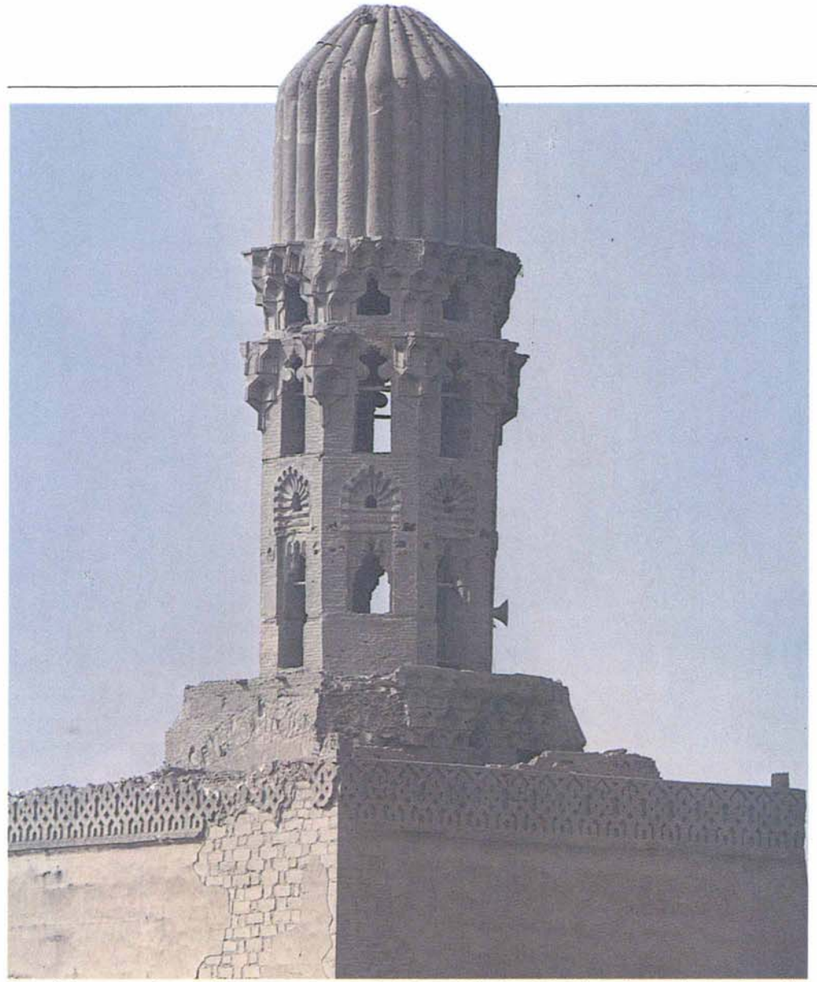


"Day and night in Cairo," said Egypt's most famous architect, Hassan Fathy, "I am surrounded by mosques... with their domes and minarets and so I can say I am living in a skyscape not a landscape".



Even in darkness, above, the minarets of Cairo are beautiful and in the past, when softly burning lanterns hung from protruding roas, left, they were an unforgettable sight.





One of the stone minarets of al-Hakim mosque, originally built in the 10th-11th century and restored recently.

Unknown masons embellished many domes and minarets with elaborate arabesque patterns, left, visible from afar, above.

Time was when the great 14th-century *madrasa* of Sultan Hassan, considered one of the great architectural treasures of all time by UNESCO'S World Heritage organization, was staffed by 30 muezzins, while the nearby Muhammad 'Ali mosque, on the heights of the Citadel, had 20; they worked in shifts morning, afternoon and evening.

Unfortunately, today's muezzins face problems that their predecessors could not have imagined. One is the endless, deafening roar of a modern city that drowns out the unaided voice; the other is frequent electronic distortion from the sound systems now used to overcome the noise. Consequently, the clear and piercing calls once cast "live" upon the winds from the high balconies, have been replaced by recorded calls that are all too often harsh and metallic in contrast to the former resonance of the gifted muezzin.

On the other hand, the timing and meaning of the call remains the same. Each dawn, at midday, in the late afternoon, after sunset and again during the night the muezzins call out that "perfect summons."

It begins, often, with a deep-throated call from the al-Hakim mosque. Then it is joined by a high falsetto from nearby Quluan's and is followed by a distant echo floating down from the heights of the Citadel. Rising and falling, the chant quickly grows in volume until a whole chorus envelops the city. The call can be short or drawn out or embellished and punctuated with abrupt, rhythmical pauses, then taken up again and again. Yet the message is unchanging: a summons to waiting millions to face towards Makkah and begin the prescribed prayers.

It is always beautiful to hear this, but at sunset in Cairo it is magnificent. Unlike the long, drawn-out desert dawns, sunset in Egypt is a brilliant and fleeting vision and it is then, the hour of departing day, that the minarets of Cairo appear at their best: tall and slender silhouettes standing against the flaming western sky. Then, as dusk ushers in the night, the minarets turn into delicate tracery set against the stars, as later, in the deeper darkness as in the light of day, the muezzins prepare to intone one more time the "perfect summons" to the sleeping city: "Allahu Akbar ... Allahu Akbar..."

John Feeney is a film producer, writer and photographer based in Cairo.

The Bedouin from New Zealand

WRITTEN BY ANNE COUNSELL PHOTOGRAPHED BY BILL LYONS

Every year, thousands of tourists visit Jordan's most spectacular archeological treasure – the ancient city of Petra. Multi-colored, mysterious and breathtakingly beautiful, the impressive facades – chiseled from the mountain with a sublime indifference to scale – seldom fail to impress.

Just as interesting, however, are the Bedouins of Petra: 120 families who live in the violet, yellow, terracotta and legendary pink caves or tombs hewn from the rock long ago. Like the tombs, the Bedouins go back a long way. At least most of them do. One who does not is Marguerite van Geldermalsen. Though she is now a Bedouin she once lived in New Zealand.

At Petra, Bedouin women usually are part of the backdrop. They can be seen walking with their children, collecting firewood or chatting in cave entrances with other women; most of them wear traditional, long, black embroidered dresses with plain or colored headscarves. For this reason Marguerite van Geldermalsen is rarely noticed; the only indications that she is not of Bedouin origin are her fair skin and hazel eyes. Sitting with the other women and chatting about the children, her long blonde hair braided and covered with a scarf, Marguerite is very much a member of the group, speaking with the other mothers in the local Arabic dialect while her two children play happily nearby with their friends and relatives. She is at ease. She is relaxed. She is at home.

Almost seven years ago, when Marguerite first came to Petra from New Zealand, she certainly had no idea that she would marry a Bedouin or settle in the ancient city. A tourist traveling around the region with a girlfriend, Marguerite saw Petra as one of the sights of the tour and a handsome young Bedouin's proposal of marriage, an amusing development. "I thought that Muhammad wanted to marry a foreign girl in order to leave the country and travel," explains Marguerite in a distinct New Zealand accent.

Muhammad Menajah, however, was quite serious. Born and brought up in Petra with four brothers and four sisters, he had learned English by speaking to tourists while selling souvenirs at his stall. When Marguerite and her friend arrived in Petra he showed them around the city and asked them if they would like to attend a Bedouin wedding that evening. They accepted the invitation and thoroughly enjoyed the colorful, lively event attended by most of the inhabitants in Petra. Muhammad gave each of the girls an Arabic name for the occasion and today Marguerite is still called "Fatima" – the name she was given for that night.

Marguerite, above, and with her family, right, at Petra.

Unable to obtain visas to visit Syria and Lebanon, Marguerite returned to Petra where Muhammad became increasingly persistent with his proposal. Quite taken with his sincerity and charm, Marguerite finally accepted. They took a shared-taxi to Amman where the required papers were signed and a bride price of five dinars ($12.50) was agreed upon. Laughing, Marguerite explains they had to put down a sum as part of the formalities, but in fact it was never paid. Muhammad got a very good deal, as bride prices, even among relatively poor people, are sometimes quite high.

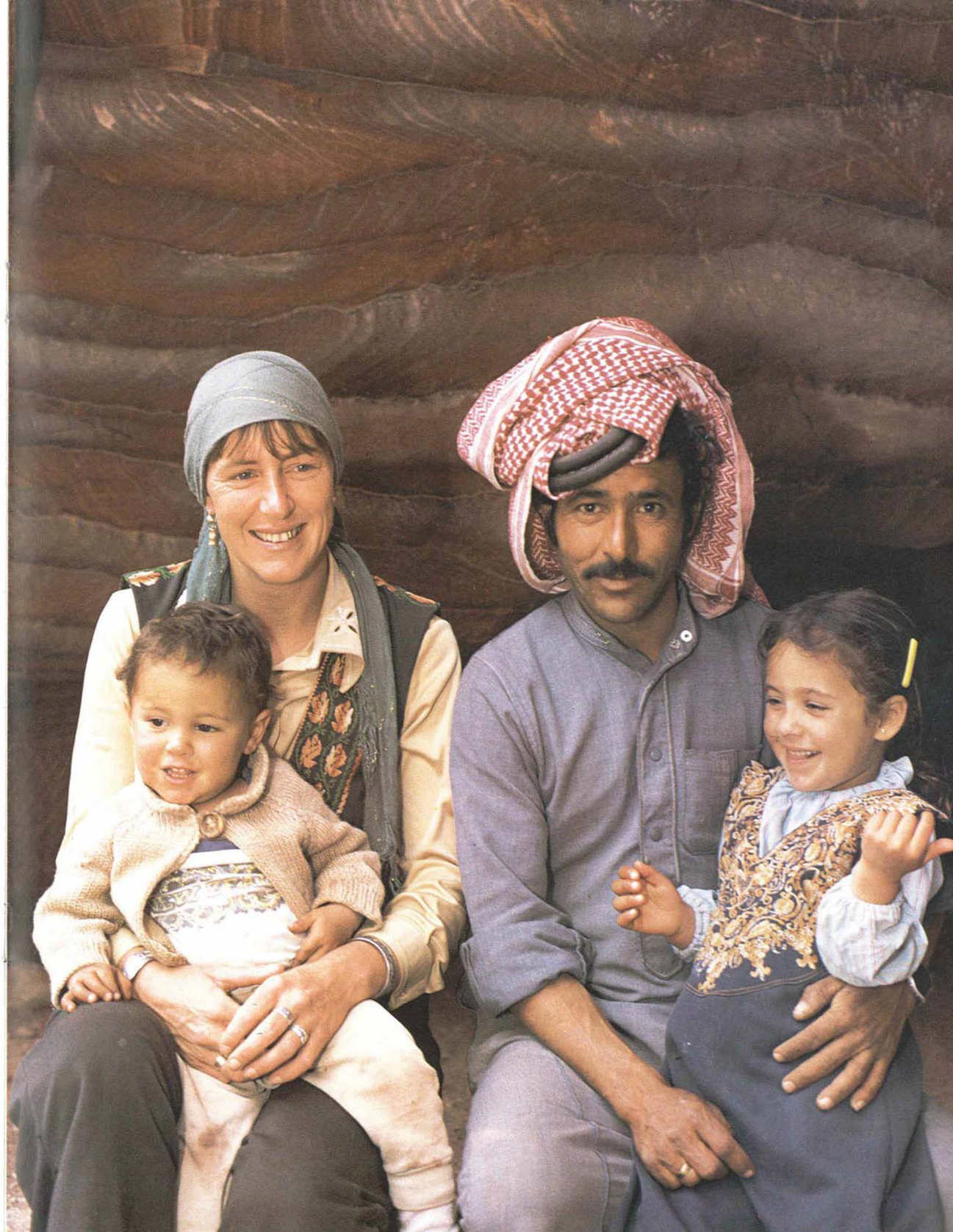
Returning to Petra, Marguerite again attended a Bedouin wedding, this time her own. Sheep were slaughtered, the women spent all day preparing the food and there was dancing, clapping and singing into the night.

Muhammad is now 33 and Marguerite is 29. They have been married for almost seven years and are obviously happy together. Their children, Salwa, five, and Raami, two, with their father's dark eyes and olive skin, understand both English and Arabic and are lively and intelligent.

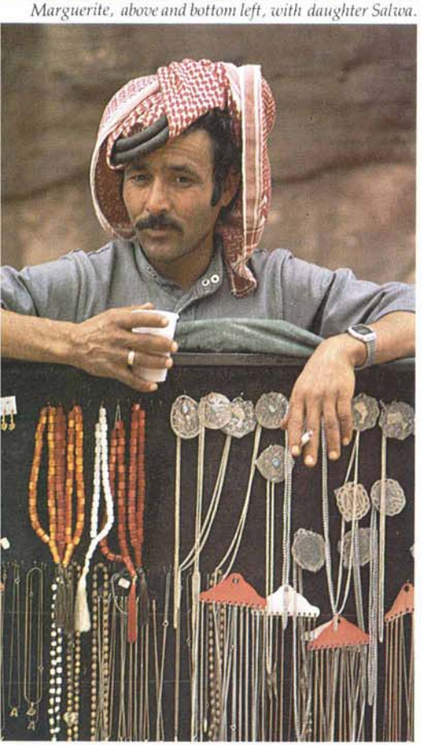
The family's home is situated above Petra's Roman amphitheater and is reached by a rocky climb up a hillside track. The one-room cave, with its wooden door and small window, is clean and comfortable. Dressers along one of the whitewashed walls contain the family's clothes and personal belongings; blankets and mattresses are neatly stacked in one corner, while the children's toy box and Marguerite's treadle sewing machine occupy another.

Muhammad put in a door and window at the entrance to the cave, and also built a room adjoining the cave which is used as a kitchen. Pots and pans are piled on a small work top, a few cans of food and fresh vegetables are in a box under a small table and the crockery and cutlery stand in a plastic draining shelf fixed to the wall. Here the family have a stove fueled by gas cylinders and a refrigerator which uses kerosene as there is no electricity inside Petra. Lighting in the cave and kitchen is provided by gas lamps and flash-lights. There is no piped water to the cave so water is collected from a spring in the valley and stored in a metal tank above the kitchen roof. Clothes are washed by hand in a large bowl which also serves as a basin for washing.

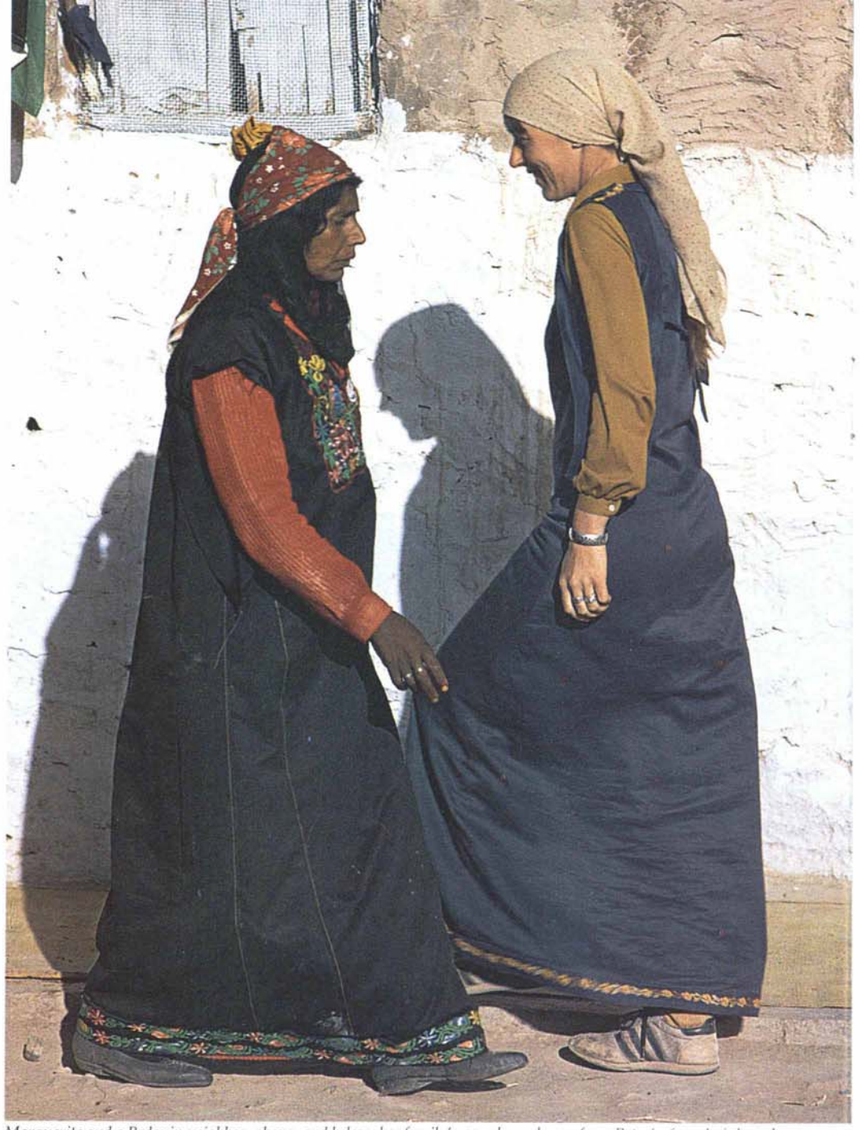
The area around the house is fenced with chicken wire to keep goats and sheep out and to prevent the children



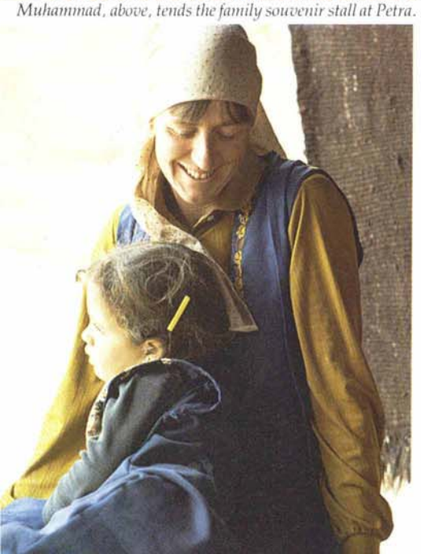
Marguerite, above and bottom left, with daughter Salwa.

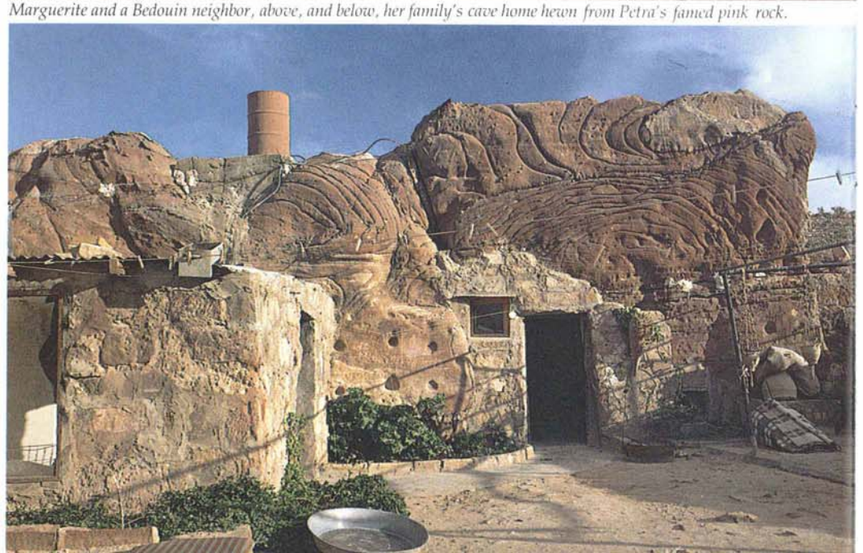


Muhammad, above, tends the family souvenir stall at Petra.



Marguerite and a Bedouin neighbor, above, and below, her family's cave home hewn from Petra's famed pink rock.





from falling over the ledge on which the room stands. In a small garden are two swings for the children, a playing area, clothes line and herbs for cooking.

Although quite basic, the cave is very cosy, especially at night when the gaslight flickers on the walls as Muhammad reads stories to the children and Marguerite mixes dough for the next day's bread. The dwelling is cool in the heat of summer and warm in winter.

When Marguerite first began her new life in Petra, she and Muhammad had no refrigerator or stove. She used to cook over an open fire using wood collected during the day. Although life is now easier with the refrigerator and the stove, Marguerite says she could quite happily do without them. Marguerite considers the family's car an unnecessary nuisance, as there are no proper roads inside Petra and as the village of Wadi Musa is well within walking distance. The vehicle is only used when Muhammad goes to Amman or Aqaba to buy souvenirs for the stall and these journeys could easily be made in shared-taxis.

Apart from keeping the cave clean, looking after the children and cooking, Marguerite helps Muhammad at the small store opposite the amphitheater, chatting to the tourists who are often surprised to see her dressed in her Bedouin clothes but with European features.

Marguerite's main "job," however, is supervising the Petra clinic: a small cave containing a table and a medicine cabinet – and giving out tablets prescribed by the local doctor who visits Petra twice a week. Trained as a nurse in New Zealand specializing in pediatrics, Marguerite acts as a liaison between the male doctor and the Bedouin women who are often uncomfortable about mentioning some ailments. Many women too ask her for advice about their children's ailments. She is also on hand to dress wounds and administer medicine or injections when the doctor is not available.

Working at the clinic has brought Marguerite into close contact with the people at Petra. It enabled her to become fluent in Arabic and at the same time to make lots of friends. "I am much less lonely here than I was in New Zealand," she says. "There are always friends or Muhammad's relatives around and it is so easy to visit people. You don't have to phone and make sure that it is convenient to call. You can walk there and be sure of a welcome."

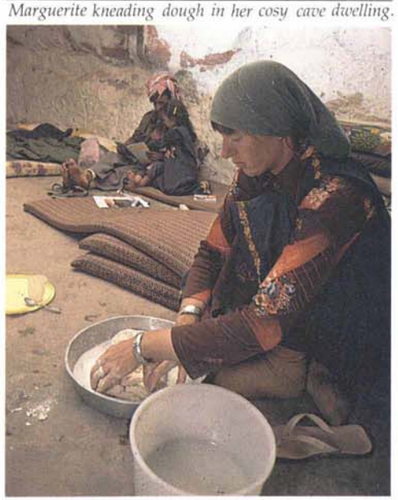
Marguerite and her children, Salwa, five, Raami, two.

Marguerite keeps in touch with her family in New Zealand. Her mother writes regularly and often sends toys or clothes for the children. Her parents came to stay in the cave with Marguerite and her family three years ago and her brother and his wife have also visited Petra. Marguerite says that her family accepts her way of life and would rather she was happy in Jordan than unhappy in New Zealand.

Just over four years ago, Muhammad, Marguerite and Salwa spent nearly a year living in New Zealand, but did not feel really settled. "I missed our home and life in Petra," Marguerite says, "and Muhammad became bored with his job at a sheep slaughterhouse, so we came back here where we are happy."

Marguerite says that she does not miss the theater, social or cultural events nor any of the entertainment and other activities she used to take part in in New Zealand. "I don't feel I'm missing anything at all," she explains.

Marguerite kneading dough in her cosy cave dwelling.



Besides caring for her family and supervising the clinic, Marguerite also makes dresses for the women in Petra and clothes for the children, using material bought in the dress market during visits to Amman. When there is a social event such as a wedding or circumcision, Marguerite helps the other women with the cooking and other preparations – decking the outside of blackcloth wedding tents with brightly colored banners of material fashioned by her for the occasion, from remnants of clothes she had made.

Speaking about the future, Marguerite is uncertain whether the family will be allowed to remain in their cave home. There is a plan by the Jordanian Government to settle Bedouins in houses built outside the ancient city, which officials say is being spoiled by the home extensions built by the Bedouins.

Many Bedouins want to move to modern housing – with such amenities as piped water and electricity – but Marguerite does not. First, she believes that the Bedouin traditions will disappear more rapidly if the resettlement programs are implemented and, second, she is happy with her life in Petra. "If we have to move to those new houses, we might as well go and live in New Zealand," she says sadly. Also, Muhammad would no longer have his stall or an income if they had to leave their cave.

Whatever happens, Marguerite would like both the children to have good educations so that they can choose their futures. Salwa is due to start school this year and is excited about it. Already she can read and write a few words in Arabic and English and is imaginative and keen to learn. Raami, although still small, takes after his sister.

Relaxed, natural and down-to-earth, the Menajah family is not only interesting to be with but also hospitable and generous, sharing their home, food and activities with friends and visitors. When Marguerite tells you she is happy in Petra it is very easy to see why; she has a kind, sincere husband, two lovely children and a satisfying, simple and healthy lifestyle as well as a comfortable home and good friends in one of the most spectacular places in the world.

Anne Counsell is an editor of the Jordan Times.

THE DECAPOLIS OF JORDAN

WRITTEN AND PHOTOGRAPHED
BY RAMI KHOURI

Some 2,000 years ago, a handful of handsome cities flourished on the southeastern flank of the Roman Empire. Known collectively as the Decapolis, or "ten cities," in Greek, they are now emerging from both the earth and the haze of history.

The best preserved Decapolis city is Jerash, 35 kilometers (22 miles) north of the Jordanian capital Amman – itself a Decapolis city known to the Greeks and Romans as Philadelphia. Umm Qais – the Roman Gadara – overlooking the Jordan Rift Valley, the Golan Heights and Lake Tiberias, and Tabaqat Fahl – ancient Pella – in the foothills of the north Jordan Valley, are two other Decapolis cities that are being systematically investigated today in their beautiful natural settings.

But for all the information that has been dug from the ground, gleaned from ancient literary sources and maps, or deciphered from coins and inscription fragments, the Decapolis remains an enigma – its precise nature, role, composition and extent a perplexing riddle. Even the very word Decapolis may be a cruel teaser; several Roman writers have left us slightly conflicting evidence of how many – and which – cities formed the Decapolis.

Nineteenth and early 20th-century scholars viewed the Decapolis as a "confederation" or "league" of free or autonomous Greco-Roman cities, thought to have been formed when Roman General Pompey conquered Syria in 64/63 B.C.

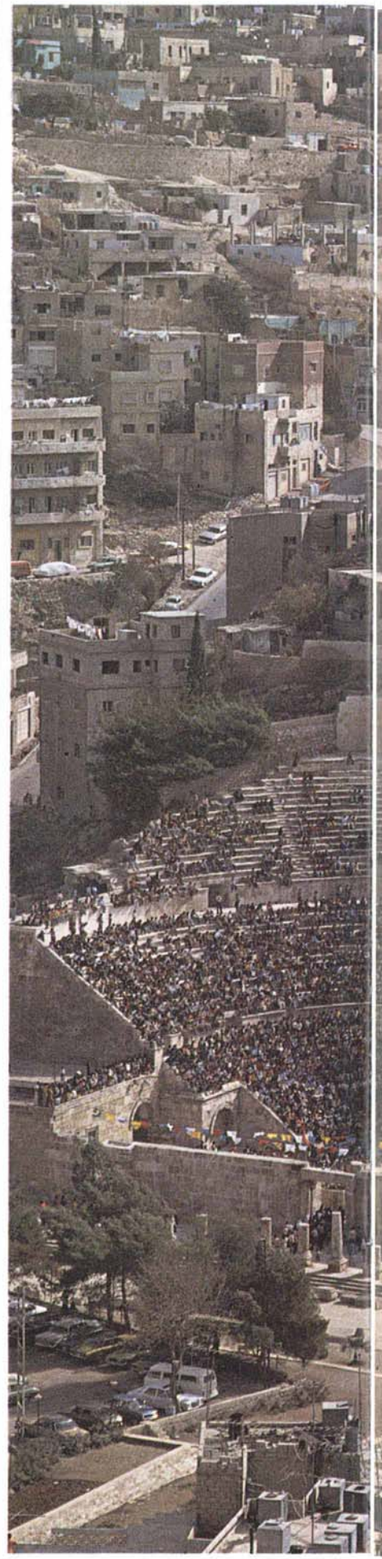
Most of the Decapolis cities were originally established much earlier, however, by the Macedonian settler-soldiers of the Ptolemaic and Seleucid kingdoms – in the third century B.C. following the conquest of the Middle East by Alexander the Great. Pompey's annexation of Syria, following the collapse of the Seleucid kingdom in the first century B.C., brought some of these cities under Roman control. Others Pompey freed from the control of the Hasmoneans in Jerusalem, and coin evidence indicates that most of the cities showed their gratitude by adopting a new calendar that started with the year of their liberation in 64/63 B.C.

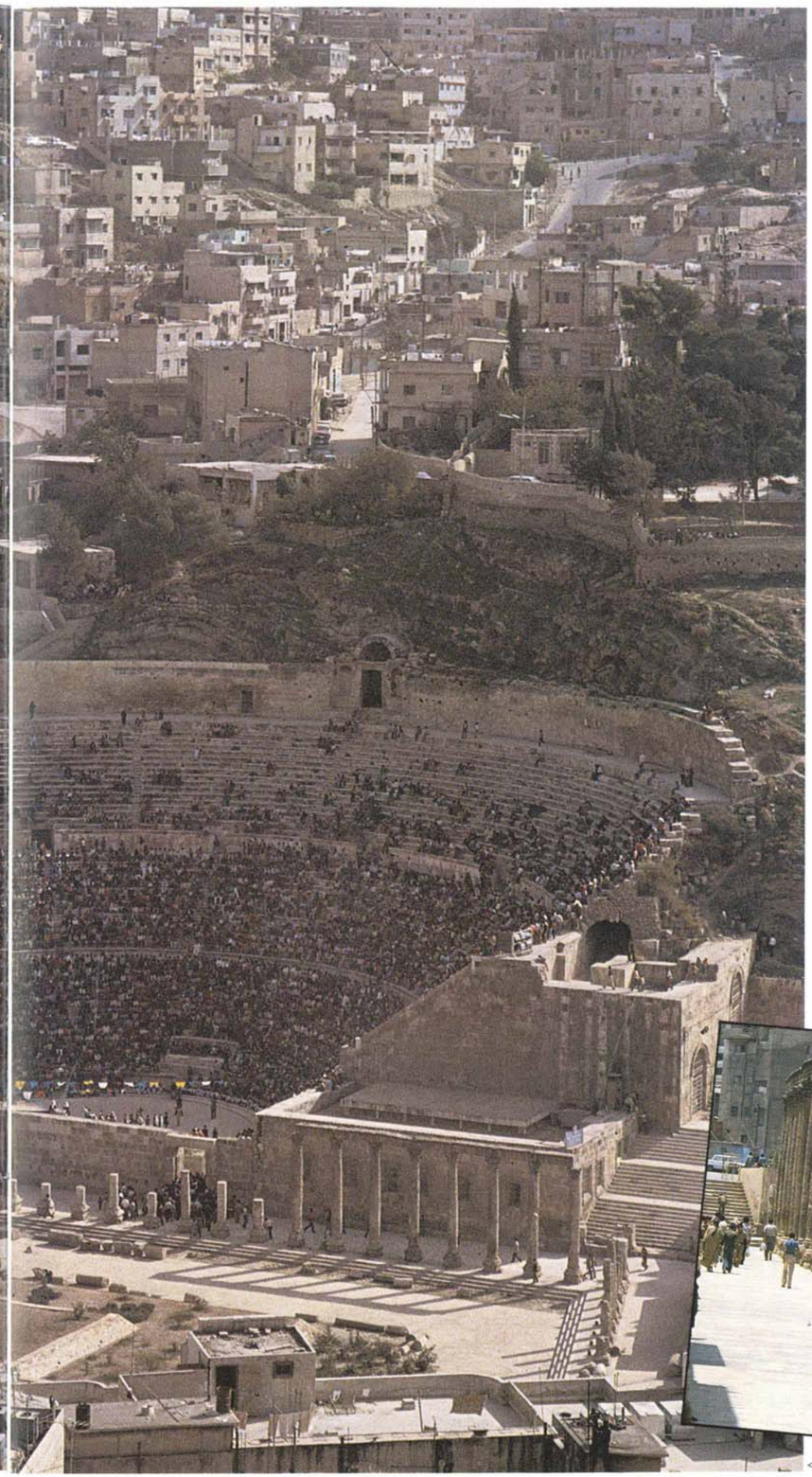
The Decapolis may have existed as a formal unit for 170 years – until the Roman Emperor Trajan annexed Petra and the Nabatean kingdom in south Jordan and northern Arabia in A.D. 106; the cities of the Decapolis were then divided among the newly-created Roman province of Arabia and the province of Syria. And though recent scholarship has tended to see the Decapolis as less of a formal league or confederation and more an arrangement among like-minded, probably autonomous Greco-roman cities – whose contiguous territories formed a single geographic unit – only new evidence can verify what the Decapolis was and why it was formed.

Extremely puzzling is the fact that not a single reference to the Decapolis has come from inscriptions or other historical sources from *within* the area of the Decapolis itself; and though the Decapolis cities all minted their own coins, none mentions the Decapolis.

On the other hand, there are early references to the Decapolis in the Bible and Roman history; Matthew and Mark mention crowds of people "from Galilee and Decapolis and Jerusalem and Judea and from the other side of the Jordan." The first-century Roman historian Josephus mentions the Decapolis four times in his works. He talks about "the inhabitants of the Decapolis," and mentions Scythopolis – modern Beisan – as "the largest city of the Decapolis." In both these early references, the Decapolis has the ring of a purely geographic designation.

A late first-century inscription, found in Turkey a century ago and recently reinter-

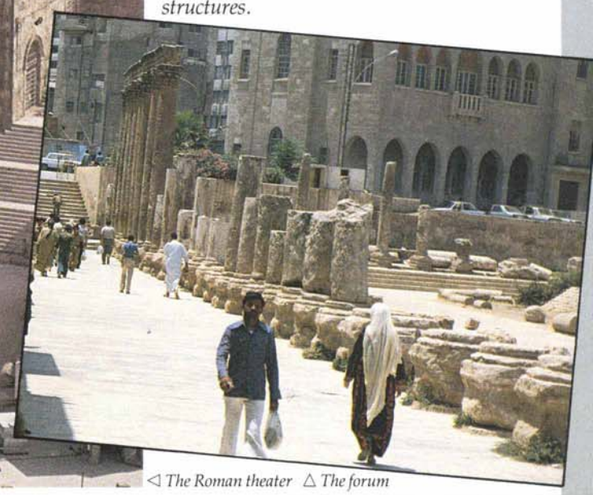




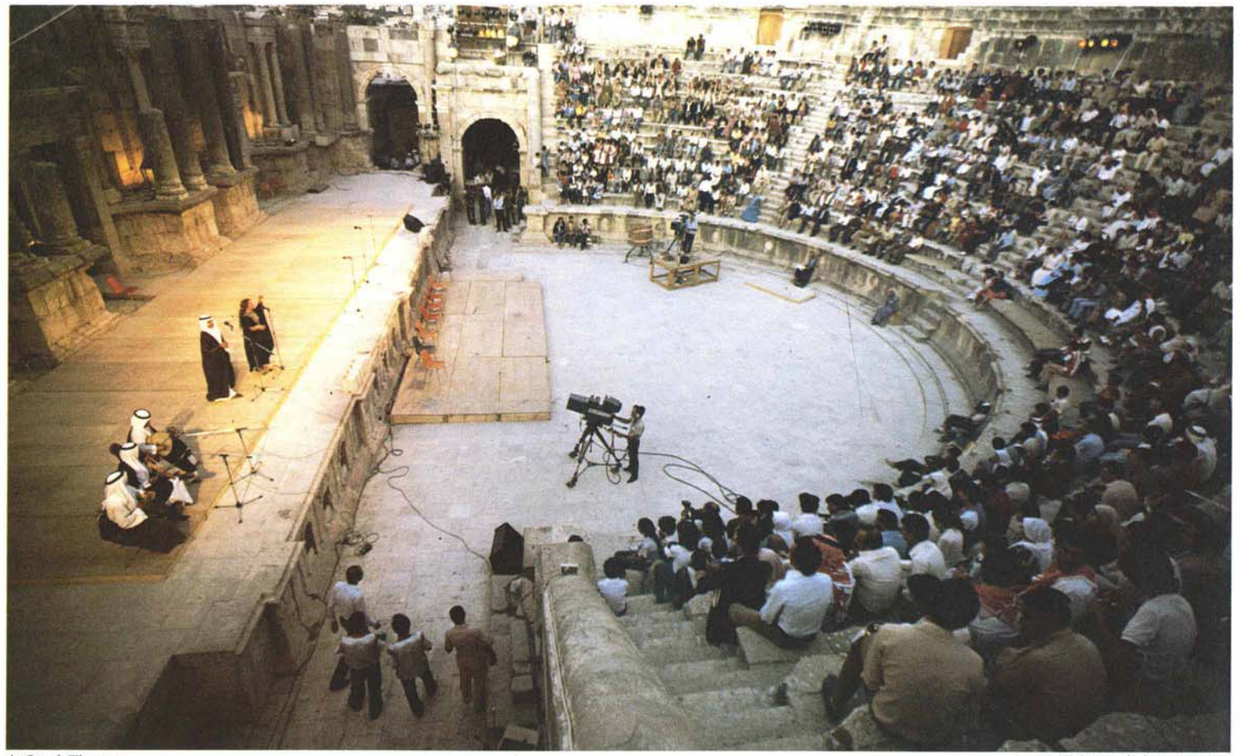
AMMAN

Visitors to Jordan and the Decapolis cities usually start their trip in Amman, Jordan's modern capital and the ancient Rabbath-Ammon, capital city of the Ammonite Kingdom. Traces of the Iron Age city wall still ring Citadel Hill (in Arabic, Al Qal'a) in downtown Amman – the same spot the Greeks, Romans and Umayyad Muslims used for their monumental buildings during the next 1,000 years. But Amman has a much older history. At 'Ain Ghazal, in north Amman, recent excavations by an American team have uncovered a Stone Age (Neolithic era) village from around 6000 B.C., and traces of an Early Bronze Age village from around 3000 B.C.

The Greco-Roman city at Amman, known as Philadelphia, was founded by the Hellenistic Ptolemies, and named after the ruler of Egypt Ptolemy Philadelphos (285-246 B.C.). It became a member city of the Decapolis, and its territory marked the southern limits of the region of the Decapolis. The ruins of the Roman city include the great 5,000-seat theater and its adjacent odeon *(a small, covered theater) in downtown Amman; parts of the* forum, *the* nymphaeum *(public fountain dedicated to the Nymphs) and the colonnaded main street of the city; the temple of Hercules on the summit of* Citadel Hill; *and a large mausoleum some five kilometers east of the modern Sports City towards* Zerqa, *known as* Qasr Nuweijis. *In the first century of the Islamic era, Amman continued to serve as a capital city and seat of the local Umayyad governor. Excavations on* Citadel Hill, *near the archeological museum and Roman ruins, have revealed a large Umayyad complex that includes a governor's palace, residential areas, public buildings and a fortification wall – all built over earlier Roman structures.*

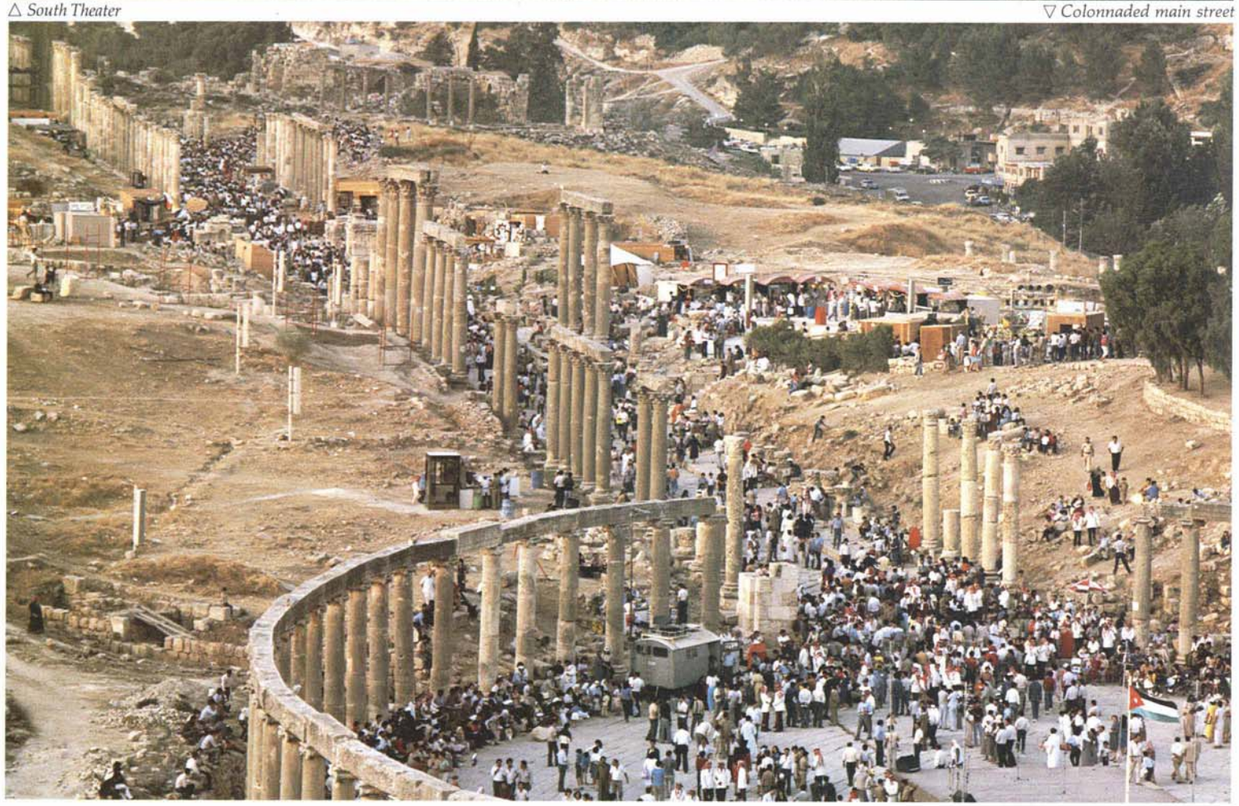


◁ *The Roman theater* △ *The forum*



△ South Theater

▽ Colonnaded main street



△ South Theater

▽ Colonnaded main street

△ North Theater

▽ Roman mosaic floor

JERASH

Jerash, the Roman Gerasa, is one of the best preserved Roman provincial cities in the world. Archeological and literary evidence shows it was founded in the early second century B.C., most likely under the Hellenistic Seleucid kings. It fell under Roman rule when Pompey conquered Syria and created the Decapolis in 63 B.C. Its Roman name, Gerasa, was derived from its earlier Semitic name "Garshu."

Jerash is particularly valuable for both its many splendid monuments and its intact city plan. This is based on an 800-meter-long colonnaded main street (2625 feet) called the cardo, *which is intersected by lateral streets. The Roman ruins include, most notably, three theaters, a hippodrome, two principal temples dedicated to the god Zeus and the goddess Artemis, a triumphal arch built to commemorate the visit of the Emperor Hadrian in A.D. 129/130, an ornate* nymphaeum, *the odd-shaped Oval Plaza, the ruins of three baths, and several tombs/mausolea – all enclosed within the thick town wall with its four gates and dozens of towers.*

Between the fourth and seventh centuries, Gerasha was an important Byzantine religious center too, as evidenced by the discovery of 15 churches to date. Some of these featured magnificent mosaic floors that can still be appreciated. When the forces of Islam defeated the armies of Byzantium in the early seventh century and soon after established the Umayyad caliphate in Damascus, Jerash continued to flourish as an important regional city, based on trading links with other cities in Jordan, Syria and Palestine. Umayyad ruins excavated at Jerash include a mosque, several pottery kilns and an impressive housing quarter.

History buffs will find a visit to Jerash particularly valuable for the opportunity to wander among the ruins of structures that were built by successive Greek, Roman, Byzantine and Islamic civilizations – spanning a period of over 1,000 years.

PELLA

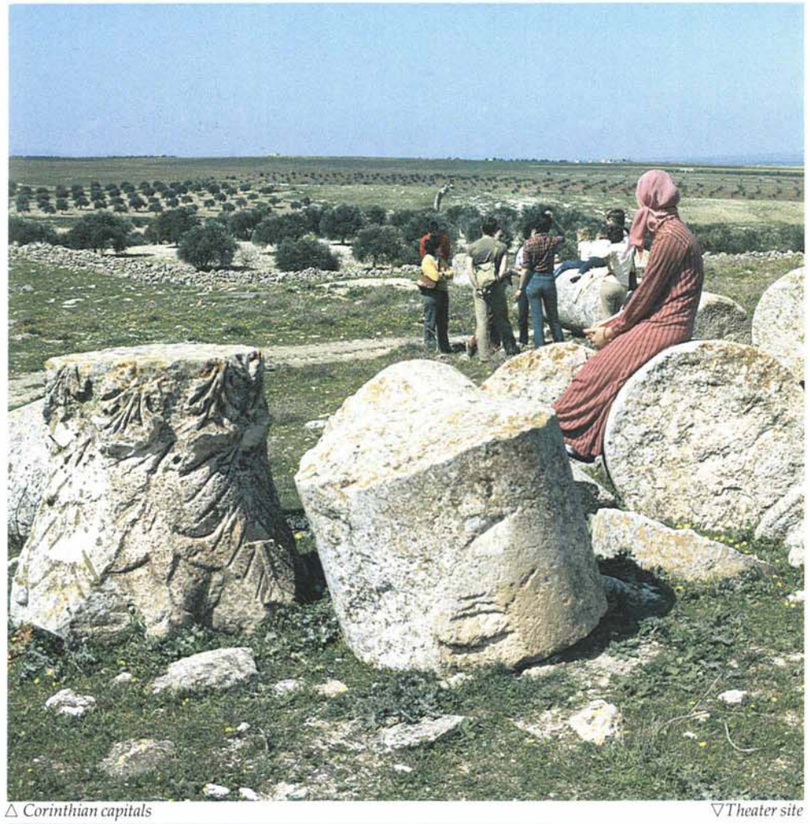
The extensive ruins of Pella lie near the modern village of Tabaqat Fahl in the northern foothills of the Jordan Valley, 85 kilometers (53 miles), or a 90-minute drive, from Amman. Like Amman and Jerash, this site has been occupied for thousands of years, with the earliest evidence of permanent settlement at Pella going back to the Chalcolithic era (4500-3000 B.C.). People were always attracted to the site by the year-round water of the Wadi Jirm, the warm climate and the rich agricultural land. In Roman times, the city also flourished because of its strategic location astride a key road that linked the Via Nova with the Palestinian coastal port-cities.

One of the mysteries of Pella, which has been excavated by American and Australian teams for nearly 20 years, has been the very few Roman structures that have been revealed. It is thought that when the Byzantine inhabitants of Pella rebuilt it, perhaps after serious earthquake damage, they razed the Roman structures and started anew.

Pella, like Jerash and Amman, was a thriving city in the early Islamic Umayyad era. An extensive Umayyad residential area has been unearthed on the summit of the main north mound. The summit of the south mound, Tell el Husn, is thought to have been the site of the main Roman temple of Pella.

△ *Byzantine ruins*

▽ *Roman civic complex*



△ *Corinthian capitals*

▽ *Theater site*

ABILA

Fifteen minutes by car north of Irbid are the scattered and largely buried remains of another Roman city, Abila, which may have formed part of the Decapolis at one time. The ruins of the city are spread over two large hills, with a massive but now hollow semi-circle in a hillside perhaps marking the spot of Abila's ancient theater. An American team excavating the site during the past three years has started to piece together its history, which seems to have started 5,000 years ago with a small, walled Bronze Age town.

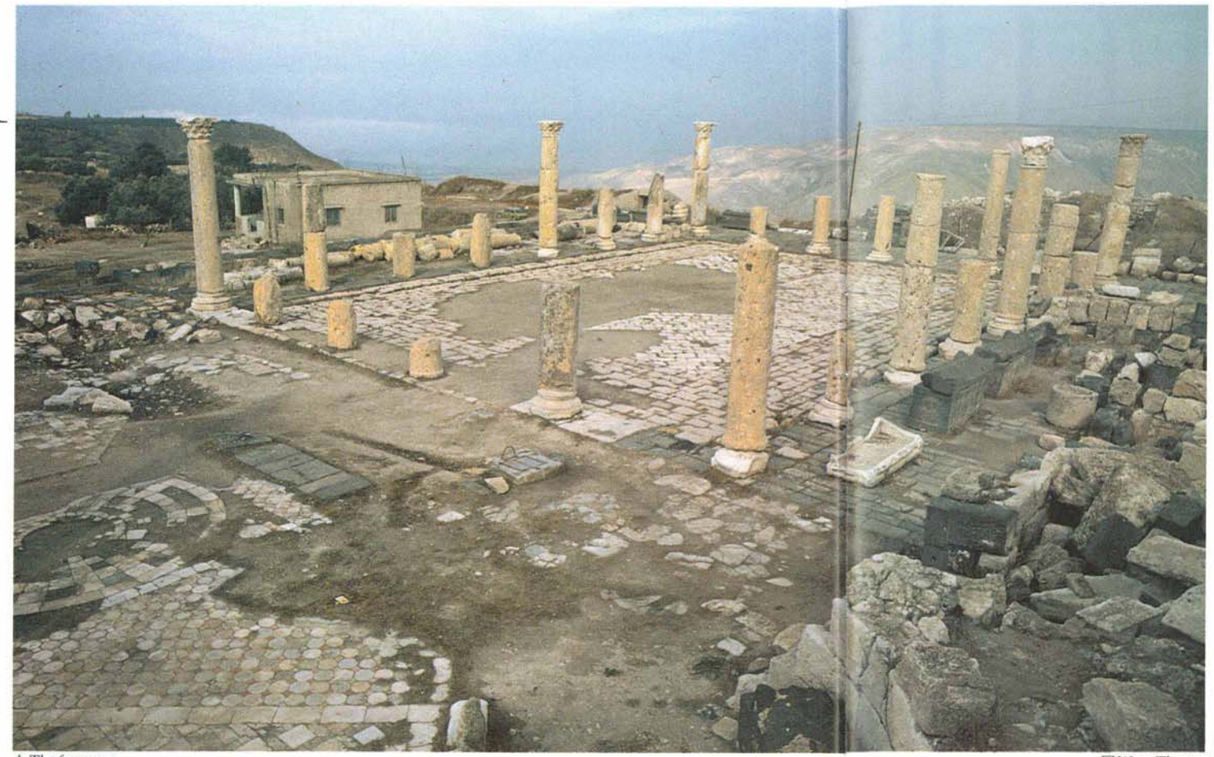
Abila was a splendid Greco-Roman city for at least 300 years, from the first to third centuries, but continued its life as a Byzantine city with several churches. Its ancient necropolis, recently studied in detail by a French team, includes hundreds of beautifully painted Roman and Byzantine tombs.

Large Corinthian capitals and column drums lie on the surface of the ground, alongside stretches of ancient wall lines and roads that pass among the collapsed stones of once monumental buildings. Like so many other ancient cities in Jordan, Abila is well sited on open hilltops surrounded by lush valleys. It makes an ideal picnic spot today, and can be combined with an all-day trip that also takes in Jerash , Umm Qais and Pella.

GADARA

The most dramatically sited Decapolis city is ancient Gadara, at the modern village of Umm Qais, a 90-minute drive from Amman. Perched majestically on a long promontory overlooking the Jordan Valley, the Golan Heights and Lake Tiberias, Gadara was also founded by Hellenistic soldier-settlers and joined the Roman Decapolis after 63 B.C. It was renowned for its artists, poets, philosophers and learned men.

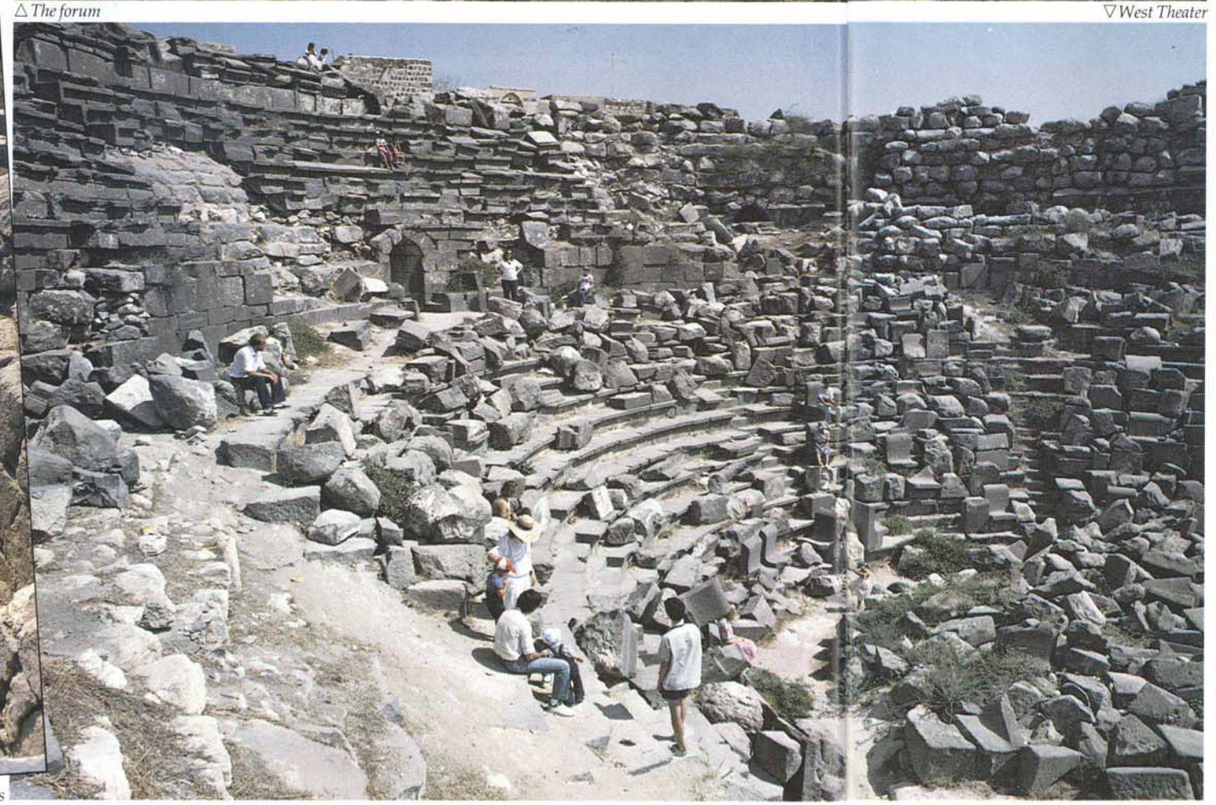
Since part of the modern village has been built over the ancient citadel, Jordanian, German and Danish teams have excavated other parts of the city during the past 20 years. Their discoveries include the ancient forum in front of the North Theater, a colonnaded main street, with chariot wheel marks still visible in its paving stones, and a better preserved West Theater, with its white-marble-goddess statue contrasting vividly with the black basalt stones. Above the North Theater was a major Roman temple, later turned into a Byzantine church. There are also a multi-story baths complex built by the Romans and a fine subterranean mausoleum with a colonnaded forecourt.



△ *The forum*

▽ *West Theater*

△ *The Roman baths*



preted, recounts the career of a Roman equestrian officer who once served in "the Decapolis of Syria." Some scholars interpret this to designate an administrative unit within the province of Syria.

The Roman writer Pliny has left us the longest passage about the Decapolis, in his *Natural History* completed in A.D. 77. He writes: "Adjoining Judea on the side of Syria is the region of the Decapolis, so called from the number of its towns, though not all writers keep to the same list ..." He lists the Decapolis cities as Damascus, Philadelphia, Raphana, Scythopolis, Gadara, Hippos, Dion, Pella, Gerasa (which he misspelled as "Galasa") and Canatha.

The second-century Egyptian-Roman geographer Ptolemy, in his *Geography*, lists 18 cities of the Decapolis and Coele-Syria. Along with Pliny's 10 cities, he adds Abila, Capitolias, Heliopolis, Saana, Ina, Samoulis, Adra and Abila Lysanios, but recent scholarship and excavations identify the 10 Decapolis cities as: *Philadelphia* (modern Amman), *Gerasa* (Jerash), *Pella* (Tabaqat Fahl), *Scythopolis* (Beisan), *Gadara* (Umm Qais), *Damascus*, *Hippos* (Qal'at al-Husn, in the Golan Heights), *Canatha* (Kanawat, in southern Syria), *Dium* and *Raphana*.

Scythopolis is the only Decapolis city west of the Jordan River. The sites of ancient Dium and Raphana have not been conclusively identified. The four leading candidates for Dium are Tell al-Husn and Edun, both near Irbid, in north Jordan, Kufr Abil, near Pella, and Tell al-Ash'ari, near the Syrian border town of Der'a. Raphana may be the same city as Capitolias, modern Beit Ras, just north of Irbid, which may have been rebuilt and renamed Capitolias in A.D. 97/98.

After the Decapolis cities were incorporated into the Roman provinces of Syria and Arabia in the year 106, the term Decapolis continued in use for some time. Seventh-century Byzantine writers, such as Eusebius, Epiphanius and Stephanus of Byzantium, seem to use the term Decapolis purely as a geographical designation for the area of north Jordan and south Syria.

The scattered evidence suggests, therefore, that the Decapolis may have been a first-century administrative unit within the Roman province of Syria. There may well have been formal ties among the 10 like-minded Greco-Roman cities of the Decapolis, and indeed, the number of member cities may have changed over time, as the territory of the Decapolis perhaps contracted and expanded. Another theory suggests the Decapolis was a loose association of city-states, their territories intended to be a buffer zone separating the Roman province of Syria to the north from the Nabatean kingdom and the Arab desert tribes to the south.

What is certain is that the cities of the Decapolis flourished during the first three centuries because of the security provided by the *Pax Romana*, or Roman Peace. Their wealth derived from abundant local agricultural resources and their location astride one of the greatest international trade routes of the ancient world. They were strategically located near or along the Via Nova Traiana, a new road built by the Emperor Trajan in A.D. 111-114 to link the port of Aila, modern Aqaba, with Bosra, capital of the province of Arabia. Extending nearly 500 kilometers (311 miles), the Via Nova Traiana has been called "the greatest piece of Roman road-making in the Orient." Portions of it are still well preserved and can be seen throughout Jordan, particularly at Khirbet Samra, northeast of the city of Zerqa.

The record of peace and prosperity along the southeastern flank of the Roman Empire in that era is preserved today in the stones and stately urbanism of the former Decapolis cities, but recent excavations at several of the cities have further revealed their history well before and after the Roman era. Though most of them were established as Hellenistic cities in the third century B.C., several Decapolis cities, such as Jerash, Pella and Amman, show evidence of human occupation going back to the Stone Age, between 10,000-6000 B.C. All continued as Byzantine cities in the fourth to seventh centuries and excavations at Amman, Jerash and Pella have revealed flourishing early Islamic cities from the Umayyad era, in the seventh and eighth centuries.

Thus a visit to some of the Decapolis cities provides an extraordinarily rich journey back through the past 5,000 years of human urbanism. The same city sites were continually used and reused by successive generations and civilizations for the same reasons: strategic locations astride natural travel and trade routes, mild climates, plentiful water supplies and rich agricultural lands. When political and military circumstances brought security to the land, the cities flourished and expanded, but when regional or international powers clashed there trade dried up, income dropped, and the cities declined. The same development equation still defines the land of Jordan today, as internal security and a dynamic regional aid and trade picture fuel the development of modern towns or large cities at almost all the sites of the former Decapolis cities.

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SKI MOROCCO!

WRITTEN AND PHOTOGRAPHED BY BRIAN CLARK

Muhammad, our Berber guide, threw down his pack outside the stone hut, jammed his ski poles into the snow and stepped free from his skis. "Tomorrow, if the weather is good," he said, "we will go for the summit."

The summit was the top of Jebel Toubkal – at 4,166 meters (13,667 feet), North Africa's highest peak and part of the High Atlas range that rises abruptly from the Moroccan plains and separates the Mediterranean littoral from the Sahara Desert. On a clear winter day, this range of snowy mountains provides a stark and beautiful backdrop for the medieval city of Marrakesh.

Mark Lorenzen, my skiing and kayaking partner from California, and I, had been with Muhammad for three days, first at the nearby ski resort of Oukaimeden – where we had practiced downhill technique on our narrow cross-country skis and acclimated ourselves to the high altitude. Now we were at one of the six sturdy French Alpine Club huts that are scattered throughout the Atlas range.

The French were the pioneers in climbing and skiing in the Atlas; several of the French Alpine Club huts there date back to 1922. In recent years, British skiers and climbers have begun to visit the region too, but among most North Americans the Atlas, and the Rif mountains in the far north of the country, are virtually unknown. Some, in fact, were incredulous when I said I was going to ski in Morocco.

"Skiing in North Africa? Isn't it all just desert?" a skiing friend asked. Actually the Atlas Mountains have a season that usually extends from December through March, with as much as three or more meters (over nine feet) of snow in higher areas – as we learned during our climb of Jebel Toubkal.

We quickly found out that our guide Muhammad Imzilen was a sterling skier, able to climb up steep slopes like a mountain goat and then head back down making short, "windshield wiper" turns that kept him in full control and prevented dangerous falls. He had trained in Switzerland as a climbing and skiing guide and not only spoke Berber, Arabic and French, but also Swiss-German and English.

We immediately took to Muhammad. He had a quick smile and the confident air of mountain men all over the world. And he, as if to show that he had accepted us

too, invited us to join him for mint tea in the guides' cafe at Oukaimeden, a somewhat lopsided building where resort workers and Moroccan ski instructors gather after the lifts close each day.

At Oukaimeden we skied two days and rode most of its five T-bars and poma lifts, as well as the chair that lifts skiers more than 550 vertical meters (1,800 feet) to the top of Oukaimeden peak, from which you can see Marrakesh to the northwest and, more importantly for us, Toubkal to the southeast, the peak we hoped to climb.

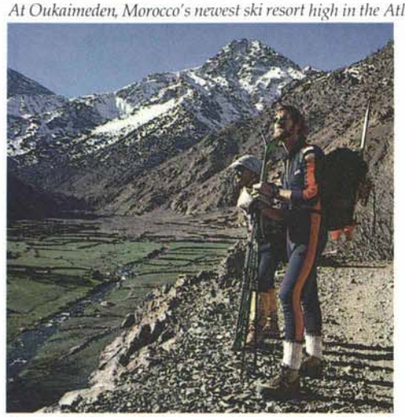
We also got to know Madame Jeane Juvier, or "Madame Juju" at the Hotel de l'Angour. A resident of Morocco for more than 40 years, Madame Juju had come to Morocco from Brittany with her husband, a former army pilot and a member of the French Alpine Club. She helped him build the pleasant 14-room hotel and, after he died several years ago, stayed on to run it. "When I came here, there were only shepherds. We helped build this area, so I think this is my fate," she said with a smile.

At Oukaimeden, the biggest of all Morocco's downhill ski areas, the parking lot often fills with 800 cars and more than 20 large buses for weekend skiing. According to Alain Tassel, another former Brittany resident who serves as assistant manager of the hotel, 95 percent of the skiers are resident foreigners. But the number of Moroccans is beginning to grow.

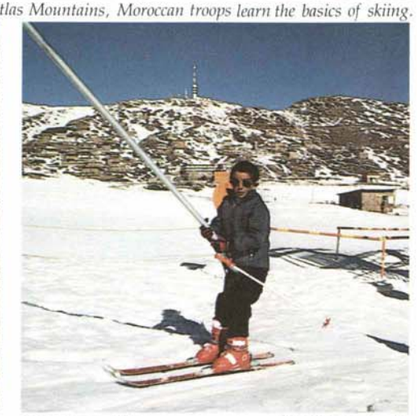
After mastering the techniques of skiing downhill on narrow cross-country skis, Mark, Muhammad and I stuffed our skis, our gear and ourselves into a rented Renault and headed down the twisting road past Berber villages where the brown mud houses seemed to be stacked precariously on top of each other. We crossed over into the Mizane Valley, stopped in Asni to buy oranges and drove on up the road to Imlil, the village where Muhammad was born 27 years before and where his family had lived for many generations. Walnut trees shaded the village square and spread out through orchards that stretched up the valley. The snowy mountains rose thousands of meters above the town, where men played cards in the setting afternoon sun.

We dined that night with Muhammad, his brother and a fellow guide, on couscous, the national dish of Morocco. It was

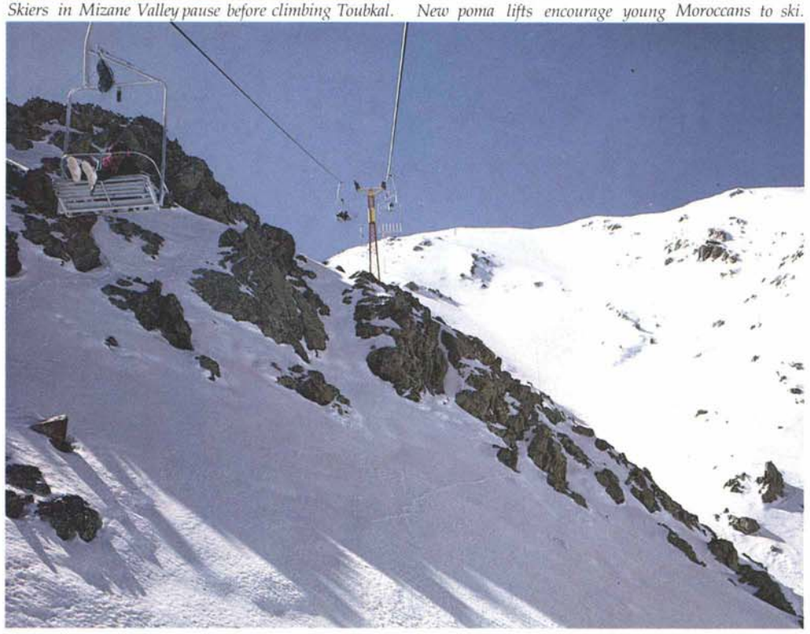
At Oukaimeden, Morocco's newest ski resort high in the Atlas Mountains, Moroccan troops learn the basics of skiing.



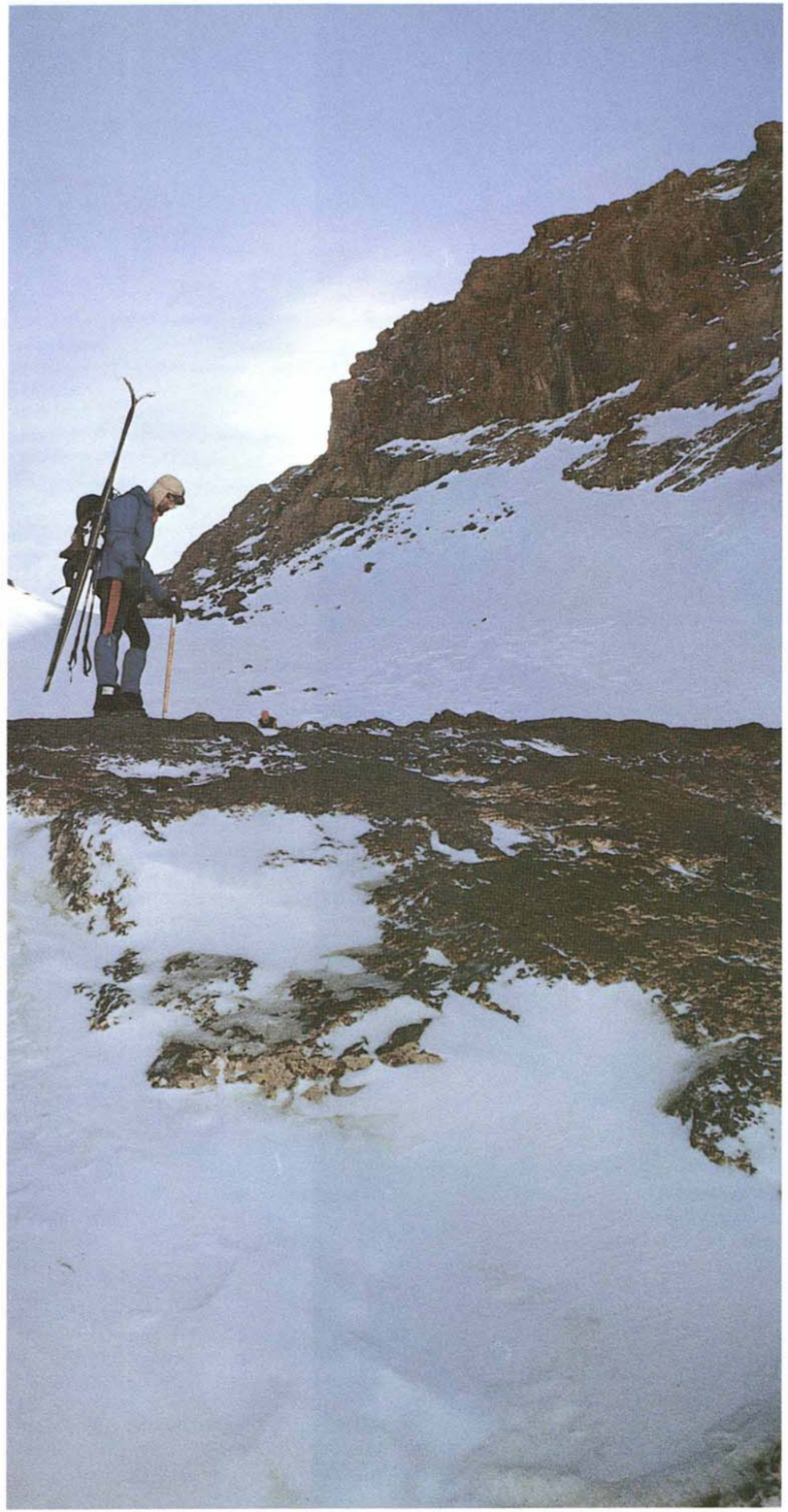
Skiers in Mizane Valley pause before climbing Toubkal.



New poma lifts encourage young Moroccans to ski.



Among the new ski facilities constructed in Morocco in recent years is this fast, modern 500-vertical-meter chair lift.



served by Muhammad's pretty wife on one large round platter that had five spoons set in a pile of cracked wheat heaped on lamb and stewed vegetables that had come from village gardens.

We slept in a guest room in Muhammad's house that night, where he had hung prints of Switzerland's famed Matterhorn and other peaks. A bright moon shone through the window when we went to sleep, but morning greeted us with clouds. As we ate breakfast and made one final check of our equipment, however, blue sky appeared.

Muhammad had warned us that no one had ever tried to climb Toubkal and ski down it with cross-country skis – and that he was dubious. But the fact that we would be the first to take on the mountain on "skinny skis," as they call cross-country skis in the United States, only made us more determined to use the equipment we had brought with us. Muhammad, however, stuck to conventional mountaineering skis, which are much like alpine skis and use heavy boots on a binding that lifts at the heel for going uphill.

Our skis were about half the width of his, longer and more difficult to turn, but much lighter. We had heavy cross-country ski boots, too, though they weighed less than his, and while we knew he would have much more control because his skis were wider and he could fasten his heel to the ski for descents, we were still confident we could handle the mountain.

So off we set, with our skis strapped to the sides of our packs. The Mizane Valley became more beautiful as it narrowed – a small Shangri La with a burbling brook flowing through it. The temperature was cool, the fields were green and the snow high above us a crystal white. Brightly dressed Berber women, working in the fields, looked away shyly as we passed.

On we climbed, finally reaching the tiny village of Siddi Chamarouch where a small white mosque has been carved out of a cave. There we ate our lunch and drank more mint tea, the omnipresent drink throughout our trip.

An hour later, we had reached the snow and were wading through it – sometimes sinking to our knees – to reach the trail that we had apparently lost. After some climb-

ing, we found it again and trudged on for another mile until we reached the point about 2,500 meters (8,000 feet) – where we could safely put on our skis without worrying about damaging them on the rocks.

We slipped them from the straps that held them to our packs and set about putting the adhesive climbing strips on their bottoms to aid our climb up the remaining 366 vertical meters (1,200 feet) to the Neltner hut – named after a famous French skier – that was our goal for the day. The strips, or "skins," which have synthetic hair on them, were once made of seal skin. They provided traction when we moved up hill, yet still allowed us to slide the ski forward without too much resistance.

The valley twisted and turned, each time offering a new vista of jagged peaks and white folds of snow. We found a stride and moved in rhythm with our breathing. Suddenly, up ahead, we heard voices and saw the first hut, and we quickened our pace to get to the refuge and rest.

Inside the stone hut, we were greeted by several French ski-mountaineers. They were skiing from hut to hut on their heavy mountaineering skis and expressed surprise when they saw we were on cross-country skis.

At the hut, which could sleep more than 20 people on its two levels, we found gas stoves and a Berber caretaker who was also named Muhammad.

Morning broke clear but windy, with streamers of snow whipping out from the peaks that surrounded us. Muhammad took stock of the weather and said we could ski to another valley that day if the wind was a problem, but we told him we wanted to go for the top of Toubkal, which loomed some 600 meters (2,000 feet) above us.

Our packs were stripped down for the climb and we had only our lunches, emergency clothing, ice axes, crampons and cameras. We were on the snow before 9:00 a.m., trudging step by step toward the steep 180-meter wall (600 feet) that would be our first obstacle.

Muhammad was right. Our cross-country skis made the going difficult, and we lacked the snow crampons that he had under his bindings allowing him to grip the snow and avoid sliding. But up we moved, trying to reach the first terrace that

Above: climbers on Toubkal slope and, right, on the summit.

would give us some relief from the 45 degree slope.

Mark and Muhammad moved on ahead of me. The steel edges on my skis would not hold their position on the icy patches. I was slipping and didn't like it. As Muhammad reached for a rope to help me, he accidentally dropped his sunglasses, which fell to the snow and tumbled down the slope, picking up speed as they slid more than 120 meters (400 feet) to a small basin below. "No thanks," I told Muhammad, "if I fall I might pull you with me. I'll take my skis off and kick steps or cut them in the snow with my ice axe until we get to the rocks."

The plan worked and 20 minutes later we were off the precarious slope, and headed up another angled valley, but one that seemed flat in comparison to the first. Rainbows appeared where the wind whipped the snow past the sun and we pushed past crumbly black volcanic rock that forms much of the Toubkal Massif.

Another valley and 30 minutes later, we were looking up at another wall of snow, though not as steep as the first one. We climbed part way, putting one ski after another, stopping to eat chocolate and figs to restore our energy. We were doing well, Muhammad said.

Another 150 meters of ski climbing (500 feet) brought us to a barren ridge at an elevation of more than 4,200 meters (13,800 feet). The air was thin, but the two days of skiing at Oukaimeden had done its work. There was no altitude sickness. We felt great.

On we skied, leaving our skis behind some rocks when we came to the last few hundred meters of the mountain, where strong winds had blown away all the snow. We kept our ice axes in hand, using them to steady ourselves from the blasts of polar air.

Finally, four hours after we started, we were on top. It came almost as an anti-climax to the rough going at the start of the morning. We shook hands, clapped each other on the back, ate cheese and bread and took the obligatory photographs.

And then the storm came in, blowing snow vertically and chasing us from the high perch where we could see off to the Sahara in one direction and past Marrakesh in another. A few minutes before, the peaks in the High Atlas had sparkled in the sun. Now, they were disappearing in the blowing snow.

Down we stumbled, finding our skis and beginning a descent that took only a fraction of the time it did to climb Toubkal. Muhammad made his short parallel alpine turns, speeding across the flatter section of the hill and slowing down with short turns where it became steeper. Mark and I traversed the difficult pitches and made telemark turns – that graceful old-fashioned cross-country move in which one ski is pushed ahead of the other and is used to carve the turn.

At the last steep pitch, Mark and I chose to take off our skis and kick steps down the steepest sections. We watched in envy as Muhammad took on one of the more difficult chutes and skied it as if it were a bunny hill. Once past the ice, we put our skis back on and linked a few turns down to the hut, where Muhammad had already begun to brew mint tea. That night, the *tajine* stew tasted especially good. And we celebrated by opening a can of apricots.

"Well," said Muhammad, "I think you are the first people to climb the mountain on those *ski de fond* (cross-country skis). I congratulate you."

The next day, we hitched our packs up on our shoulders and began to ski down to Imlil. The ice and the unwieldy packs took their toll in spills and falls, but three hours later we were back at Siddi Chamarouch, out of the snow.

We collected our gear, bade goodbye to Muhammad and set out on the road back to Marrakesh, driving through lovely almond orchards blossoming in the February sun. But the mountain had the last word: as we glanced back, a great avalanche fell from the face of one of the peaks, sending up a huge cloud of white smoke into the sky.

Brian Clark covers international sports for Aramco World *magazine.*