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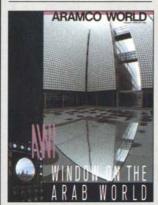
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and aluminum gleams in an interior courtyard of the Arab World Institute in Paris. Sponsored by the Arab countries and France and housed in a striking new building on the Seine, the Institute represents a European window on Arab civilization. Photo Bruno de Hogues/Fovea. Inset: The Paris skyline through one of the

AWI's 25,000 window diaphragms Back cover: Iraqi-American surgeon and sculptor Hussam Fadhli greets one of his models, Kamar El Paso. Photo: Marc St. Gil.

■ Moghul emperor Humayun sits beneath a plane-tree sapling in this miniature, painted about 1650, from the Vever Collection.

# **Images of Oman**

By William Tracy

Once an important seafaring nation, Oman is using its modest oil reserves to revitalize itself as a modern state. Money is being invested in farming, fishing and mining – and above all in education for its young people.





### The Bond in Bronze

By Patti Jones Morgan

A surgeon's skillful hands, a sculptor's eye and a horse-lover's heart work together on a southeast Texas farm to produce stirring works of art – and commemorate the beautiful bond that links Arabian horses with humans.





### The Lost Treasures of Henri Vever

By Aileen Vincent-Barwood Had one of the world's finest collections of Islamic art really perished in World War II? Luck took a hand in the 40-year search for the missing Vever collection.





## Window on the Arab World

By Joseph Fitchett

Paris's most exciting new building in a decade is as ambitious culturally as it is architecturally. The Arab World Institute showcase and resource center - is putting Arab civilization firmly on Europe's cultural map.





## Castles in the Air

By Saffet Dağdeviren

Whimsical miniatures in stone, the dovecotes and "bird castles" of Istanbul are a charming expression of the Islamic attitude toward animals. They may also be valuable documents in the history of the city's architecture.





### **Selling the Ottoman Empire** By Philip Mansel

Sultan Abdulhamid II was a despotic ruler and a great modernizer, who used photography to improve his government's image abroad. The effort failed, but the photographs provide a glimpse of the Ottoman Empire's waning days.





MAGES

WRITTEN AND PHOTOGRAPHED BY WILLIAM TRACY

eography and history have decked

Oman in diversity.
A desert land about the size of Kansas, it has peaks rising to nearly 3,000 meters (10,000 feet), a narrow but fertile coastal belt, lush oases, vast stony plains where rain seldom falls, and grass-covered hills brushed by monsoon showers. It is home to the Arabian tahr, a wary, grey-brown mountain goat, and the Arabian oryx, a large antelope reintroduced to the wild in recent years after facing extinction (See Aramco World, July-August 1982).

Metaphorically, Oman is an island. Its

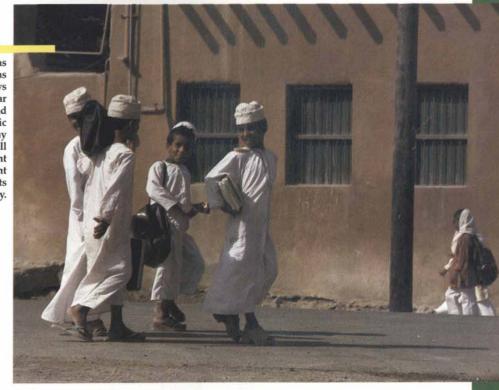
Metaphorically, Oman is an island. Its mountainous spine, which dominates the southeastern tip of the Arabian Peninsula, is bounded on the north, east and south by the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea. To the west lie the treacherous salt flats and towering red dunes of the Rub' al-Khali, or Empty Quarter, as forbidding as any ocean. Together, the mountains and the sand have proved a more formidable barrier against intrusion and influence from outside the country than the seas have, and the self-sufficient villagers and tribesmen of the interior are predictably more insular than the merchants and sailors of the cosmopolitan port towns.

Coconut palms fringe the shores of the Arabian Sea near Salalah, in Dhofar Province. Sugarcane, bananas and cattle also flourish in a fortunate coastal ribbon of land touched by summer monsoon rains.



Omani fishermen use traditional seagoing canoes – fitted with government-subsidized outboard motors – to catch mackerel, tuna and shark. Another catch is sardines, so plentiful they can be dried and ground into fish meal that serves as fertilizer and cattle feed.

Book satchels as big as their dreams burden schoolboys in Sidab, near Mucat. Oman had just one public school in 1970; today it has achieved well over 70-percent primary enrollment and has opened its first university.



Although 85 percent of Oman's estimated 1.25 million citizens are Arabs and virtually all are Muslims, small non-Arabic-speaking Semitic tribes inhabit both the isolated Musandam Peninsula in the far north and the rugged Qara Hills in the far south. There are also minorities of Baluchi, Indian and East-African origin, a reflection of Oman's maritime heritage.

In ancient times Oman enjoyed a passing prosperity from trade in frankincense, harvested in the southern Dhofar region, and in copper mined in the Hajar Mountains of the north. For some 2,000 years her wooden sailing ships were masters of the Indian Ocean's monsoon winds, at various times enabling this fragmented desert land, virtually bereft of natural resources, to control colonial outposts on the coasts of Persia, Pakistan and as far away as Zanzibar. The advent of European steamship lines about a century ago brought a sudden end to Oman's sailing hegemony.

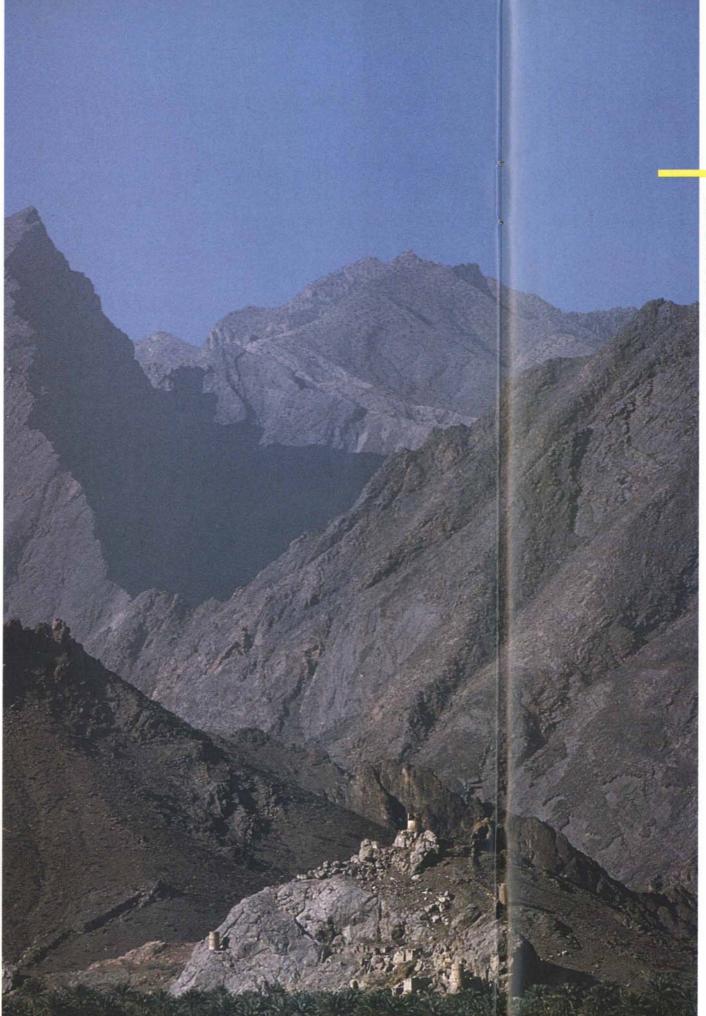
With little to fall back on but traditional agriculture, herding and fishing, Oman endured a period of economic decline, tribal division and what some older Omanis frankly remember as nearmedieval isolation. Change became possible with the discovery of oil in 1964, and it accelerated with the accession of Sultan Qaboos bin Said – the 14th ruler of his line – in 1970 (See *Aramco World*, May-

June 1983). Today Oman is using its modest petroleum reserves - estimated at about 4.5 billion barrels – to dissolve the regionalism imposed by geography and history and to revitalize itself as a modern state. It has built roads, electric power systems, medical clinics, a natural-history museum, and classrooms for a massive adult-literacy campaign. It is immunizing itself against the costs of rapid modernization by preserving its music and dance, and other parts of its cultural heritage. And to prepare for the time when its oil and gas are depleted, Oman is strengthening its agricultural and fishing base; once again it is exploiting the ancient copper mines.

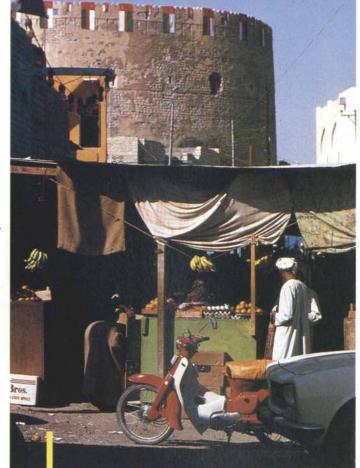
But Oman's leaders perceive its young people to be its most important resource, the key to knitting together the land as Oman's fleets once knit together the rim of the Indian Ocean. In less than 20 years Oman has built a country-wide system of schools, vocational institutes, sports clubs – and the nation's first university.

On these pages are a few of the manyfold faces of this singular land.

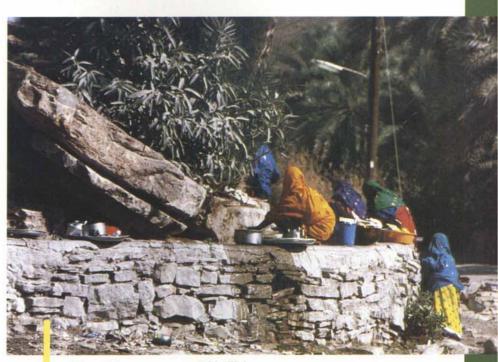
William Tracy, a writer and lecturer on Middle Eastern affairs, is a former assistant editor of Aramco World now based in Austin, Texas.



With knife-sharp mountain ridges at their backs and the hamlets and date gardens they once guarded at their feet, watchtowers bear silent witness to a vanished age in the Wadi Samail, a principal route between the sea and Oman's interior.



The flag-draped ramparts of the imposing circular fort at Nizwa, decorated for Oman's national day, overlook a bustling produce market. The fort was a focus of tribal struggles that were eliminated in the middle of this century.



Although these women near Izki still clean cooking pots in a fast-flowing aqueduct, change – in the form of an asphalt road and electric power – has begun to reach their inland village.

THE BOND INBRONZE

heir hoofbeats echo rhythmically through the centuries, age passing into age on their strong backs. Their wind-whipped manes and flared nostrils promise conquest to the stronghearted. Born 3000 years ago in Middle Eastern deserts and inextricably bound to humankind in war and peace, the legendary Arabian horse, the "drinker of the wind," shares a spiritual bond with humans which continues to fascinate people all over the world.

Dr. Hussam A. Fadhli felt this fascination for the Arabian horse as he grew up in Baghdad, Iraq; years later it surfaced again as a desire to portray the horse in bronze.

"I'd always loved animals, especially the horse, and I loved art," he explains in his husky, distinctive accent. "In museums and galleries all over the world I'd always go straight to the equine sculpture. I'd say to myself, 'I can do that!' – but my career as a surgeon didn't leave me the chance to get involved in it."

Artistic from childhood, and one of Iraq's top students academically, Fadhli turned down an art scholarship in favor of medicine. "From seventh grade, I wanted to be a doctor and help people," he says. Later, after coming to the United States in 1957 to complete his postgraduate work,

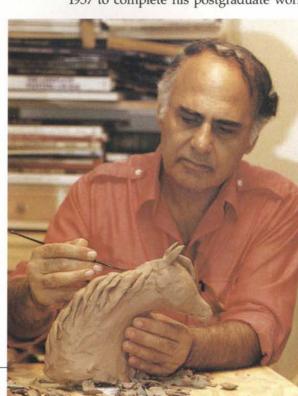
Fadhli opened a Texas practice in thoracic and cardiovascular surgery; his artistic impulse expressed itself only in occasional oil paintings.

It wasn't until 1980, when Fadhli's wife, Brigitte, began raising Arabian horses, that the surgeon's dormant talent was woken, his imagination and his eye were captured by the magnificent, affectionate animals, and the seed of his determination to commemorate them in bronze was planted.

From the outset, Fadhli approached sculpture very methodically. "I am the type of person who tries to be precise. My medical colleagues tell me I am a perfectionist. I'm not successful all the time because I am a human being, but I like to prepare things ahead of time." Accordingly, Fadhli began by learning all he could about sculpture before he started. "I thought, 'I have the talent - maybe, maybe! - and I have the desire, definitely, but I don't know the technical aspect of it," he says. After intensive reading of many books on sculpture, and particularly sculptural technique, he felt confident enough to start.

Finally, in 1986, the surgeon produced his first equine bronze sculpture of an Arabian at full gallop; its title was "Racing the Clouds." It was followed in rapid succession by several other pieces, and Fadhli had plenty more in mind. "The ideas had been bottled up and the moment I opened that cap, everything just exploded!"

The surgeon's sculptural theme, the Arabian horse and the culture and history of the Middle East, has carved him a unique niche in the art world and accounts, he feels, for his success: works sold for large sums in several galleries and displayed in the center arena at major Arabian-horse shows. "An artist has to do what he is familiar with and what he loves to do," Fadhli says. "From childhood, I was fascinated with the elegance and grace of the Arabian horse and the emotions they can create when they move, their expressive faces and their closeness with human beings. And that's what I'm after in my sculpture, the interrelationship between the man or woman and the horse, something that has existed for centuries, especially in the Arab countries."



The bond between his
wife, Brigitte, and her
Arabian horses inspired
Dr. Hussam A. Fadhli
(right) to create the
equine bronze "Magic
Moment" (left).



The accuracy of Fadhli's equine portraits comes from direct contact with his wife's Arabians at their Texas ranch.

comfortable home on a quiet, tree-lined lane a few miles from the Gulf of Mexico is the center of Fadhli's creativity. A dining table is his working surface and shelves bulge with art books. A pot of sculptor's tools includes several retired pieces of surgical equipment – "Sometimes I just go and see what is being thrown out," he chuckles now used for texturing, marking and scraping the Italian clay that Fadhli uses in the first stage of creating a sculpture.

Fadhli always looks forward to making time for what he calls his non-scientific side, when he can relax and refresh his mind after the tension of busy days as a surgeon. It is a time that invigorates him. Since sculpture can be taken up and put aside as his professional schedule demands, yet continually challenges his abilities, he feels it's a perfect medium.

In the evenings, often still dressed in the loose, green surgical scrubs which reveal a small replica of the Qur'an on a chain around his neck, he works while his family gathers in the living room. "I don't like to work in a separate studio," he says, "because I like to be with my family. I don't even mind their criticisms of the sculptures I'm working on. They might say there's something wrong with a piece, and I'll look at it and maybe change something."

Fadhli's creativity is all-consuming once he is working on the clay; he is able to close out everything around him. Music stimulates his thoughts and imagination. "Beethoven makes me feel I am climbing a mountain and reaching the top," he says, while famed Egyptian singer Umm Kalthoom brings his Middle Eastern heritage to the forefront of his mind. "When I'm sculpting an Arabian horse or Arabian subject, Umm Kalthoom's songs affect my mental attitude," Fadhli says. "This transfers into the piece through my hands."

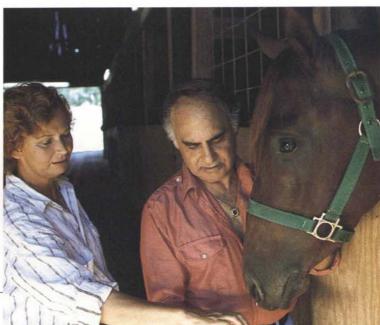
His Arab heritage, never far from his consciousness, is an integral part of his attitude toward his art. Sitting at a delicate, handmade Syrian table in the "Middle East corner" of his living room, Fadhli points to an elegantly written verse from the Our'an. It is from the sura, or chapter, called al-'Adiyat, "Those that Run," and it confirms Fadhli's belief that even the Creator found the Arabian horse admir-

able. "By the war-horses that run swiftly, panting, to the battle," Fadhli interprets, "and by those whose hooves strike fire from the stones, and by those which press home the charge upon the enemy early in the morning, raise clouds of dust, and penetrate into the midst of the foe..."

"The horse is an important part of Arab culture and history," the surgeon explains. "It gave man a chance to broaden his scope of life, and to travel. It has made it easy for the human and that's why I think humans owe the horse a lot. The Bedouins, for example, value their horses so much that they bring them inside the tents when the weather is bad.

the culture of the Middle East," he says. "People are afraid of, or not interested in, things they don't know about. Hollywood projects such a bad image of the Middle East, so with my art, I will show the real heritage and culture."

A prime example of this effort is Fadhli's sculpture "Guarding the Master," which depicts a mare standing quietly on a small hill next to her master, who is at prayer. In consideration of his horse, the rider has removed the tack and placed it on the ground. Kneeling in prayer, he bows his head, while the horse watches the surrounding area, ready to alert him to any danger. "This happens," says Fadhli, "since Muslims are required to pray five times a day." The sculptor points out the details which complete the story: the raised index finger of the man's right hand as he prays to God, the sandals neatly placed by his side. "He is saying the creed, 'There is no "What I try to show in my sculptures is God but God and Muhammad is the prophet of God." And the depiction of a female horse is deliberate, Fadhli adds. "The female is preferred for traveling since she won't whinny and make a lot of noise when she hears another horse, like the male will," Fadhli explains.



Fadhli and his wife feed sugar lumps to one of her Arabians.

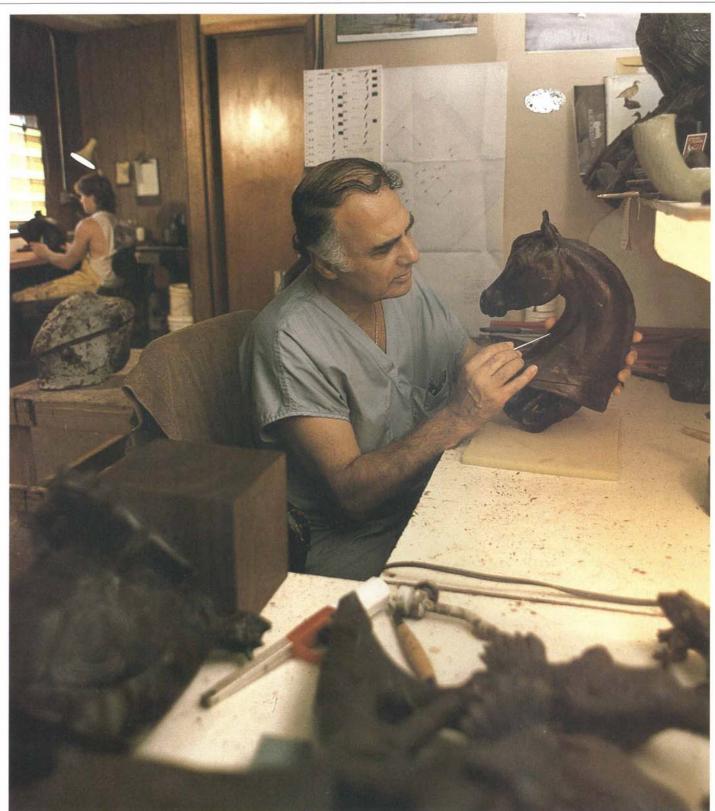
Still wearing his loose

green surgical scrubs,

Fadhli puts the final

details on a wax model

before casting.



concern with authenticity extends to using actual Iraqi saddles and bridles as models for his sculptures. The bridle displays the crescent and star of Islam, he notes, and is set with a "seven-eyed" turquoise jewel. "The saddle and bridle were used by us to show our national champion native horse, Eclipse," he says.

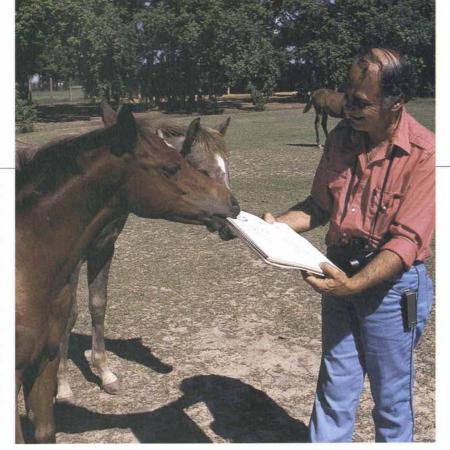
One of Fadhli's bronzes, "The Bonding," is the result of what he saw and felt as one of his wife's mares foaled, and emphasizes the close and complementary partnership between the Fadhlis where their horses are concerned. When it became apparent that the mare was in trouble giving birth to her first foal, Fadhli checked with his wife, then stepped in to help the horse.

"I tell you, when I saw that - the birth and, after that, the care and the attempts of the mother to clean the baby and to make it get up and suck, all this process of caring really affected me," he says. "I thought about my mother and, although I loved her very much, I realized I never had given her enough in return for what she did. When I saw this, and how the mare just has her God-given instinct to try to help her baby, it was such a dramatic experience for me. I already respected life, but this affected me show it in a sculpture."

Visibly touched by the memory of the event, Fadhli steps back from "The Bonding," a piece that subsequently took shape very fast and spontaneously, because his soul was in it. "You can quote me now," he says fervently. "Every child, boy or girl, must show more affection to their mother, because we don't realize what they did to bring us to this world."

The sculptor recalls that a life-sized edition of this piece, entitled "Timeless," stirred the emotions of many at an outdoor art show in Loveland, Colorado. "People liked it and came and looked at it quietly," he recalls. "Some thought it was real, and touched it!"

Part of Fadhli's skill in evocatively his doctor's expertise in anatomy, he feels. But much of the accuracy of his equine portraits comes from his practice of sketching his Arabians in the pasture, where he can touch them, combined with



A foal with a taste for art playfully nibbles Fadhli's sketchpad.

his strict adherence to what he terms "the basics" in art. Fadhli believes that the tendency to produce something that looks pretty and esthetically pleasing cannot be carried to extremes. He is wary of overstylization in his work. "It must not look like a Disney cartoon," he says. "Art must reflect an idea and what the artist wants to say. I want my work to reflect reality, with a little of my feelings."

Thus, if Fadhli chooses to represent a very deeply, and I really knew I wanted to male horse, it is first of all because it is appropriate to the sculpture he has in mind. The stallion's larger head, more abundant mane and tail, flaring nostrils and muscular neck set the mood of the piece. "It will present a more macho image, kind of, 'Here I am.' You know, like men," says Fadhli, comparing the stallion in "Racing The Clouds" with the gentle refinement of the mare in "The Gift." "She will have a smaller head and muzzle, less protruding ears and her neck and head will be in a more relaxed position," he says. "Actually, I do more females, horse and human, I think, because of my deep appreciation of them," he muses, somewhat surprised by his own conclusion.

The tender reality of his wife's love for her horses inspired a Fadhli bronze which depicting horses and humans is a result of he feels symbolizes all he's trying to say about the special relationship between the Arabian and the human. In "Magic Moment," a near life-size work, a woman gently winds her fingers through her horse's mane as the horse nuzzles her.

Foundryman Terry Steely cleaning a newlycast bronze.

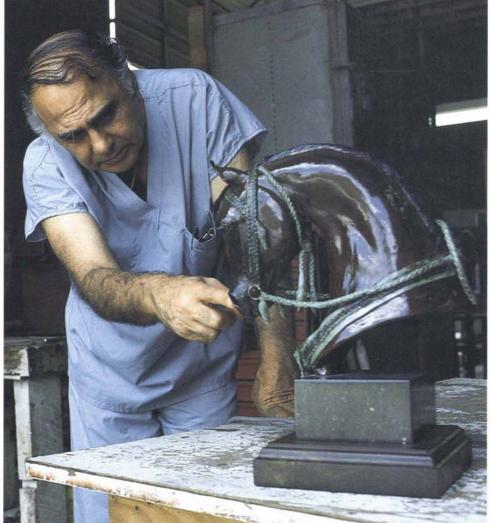


A study of an Arabian

foal (below top) and

Fadhli with another





"This interrelationship is so valuable, sensitive and intimate. And it's so typical of the exchange of love and affection and closeness between two creatures, human and horse," Fadhli says.

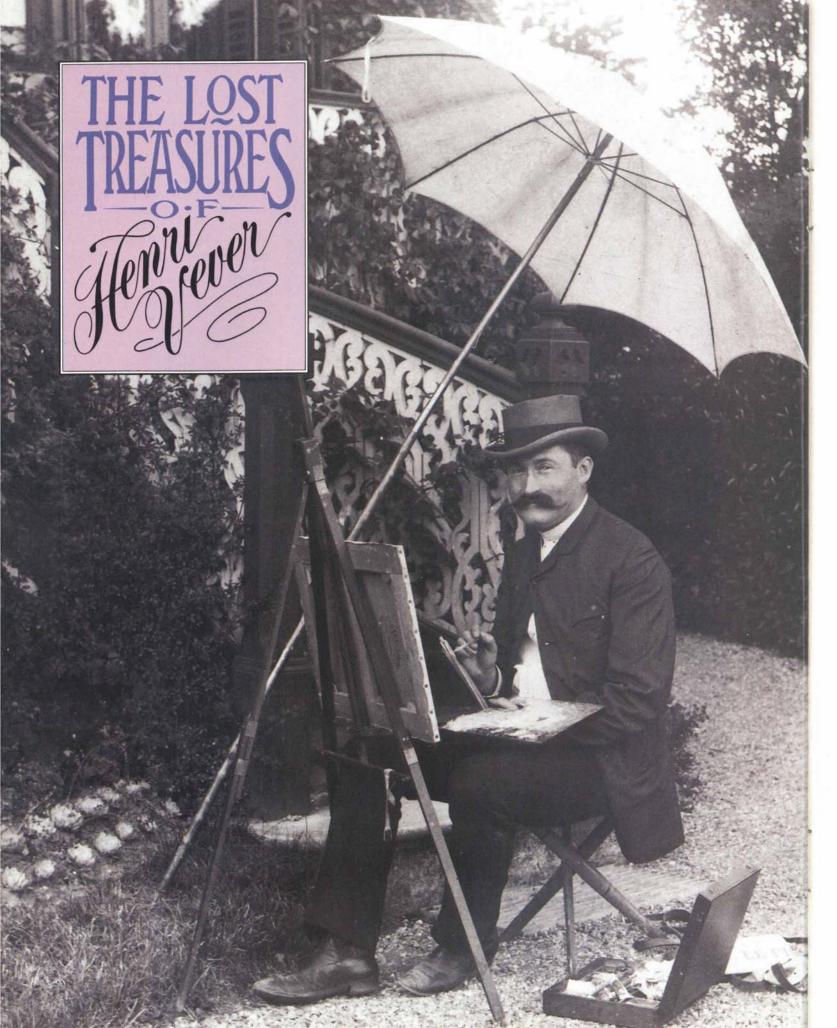
Observing life in its most touching and basic moments, and translating those perceptive glimpses into bronze, makes Fadhli a passionate artist. Yet his instinctive veneration for people and life guides him always to give priority to his career as a doctor over his work as an artist although he enjoys both. "I have a first responsibility as a surgeon, and love what I do, although I wish I had started sculpting many years ago," he admits.

Committed to his adopted country, the United States, Fadhli nevertheless maintains strong ties with his Iraqi homeland. He occasionally ships Fadhli Arabians to Iraqi breeders, and his regular visits there include consultations with medical colleagues and some surgery, balanced by raids on Baghdad music stores for Umm Kalthoom tapes. For the future, Fadhli dreams of one day sculpturing monumental works - perhaps even one to be placed permanently in the land that nurtured him.

"I feel a sense of responsibility to pay back what I have gained," he says, "and I feel you must still communicate with the 'old country' and keep that emotional feeling nourished. This does not detract from loyalty to the new country - but I believe that if a person doesn't have a sense of responsibility to something in the past, to some important part of himself, then he will never have a sense of responsibility in the new country he lives in."

Fadhli's philosophy has found expression in his storytelling bronzes of Arabian horses and other Middle Eastern subjects, and he admits that the desire to share his heritage in this way is a conscious one. "I know people who came to this country who try to ignore their past, and don't even say where they are from. But not me. I am proud of what I am, of my background and where I'm from. I'm always ready to show people, through my sculpture, part of the culture of the Middle East."

Patti Iones Morgan, a freelance writer based in the southwestern United States, frequently writes about art



WRITTEN BY AILEEN VINCENT- BARWOOD PHOTOGRAPHED BY JEFFREY CRESPI

"Art, whether one practices it or likes it, gives gratifications that directly refresh and delight the soul," Vever wrote in his diary. He was a lifelong painter himself. Below, the end of a combat between two heros, from a copy of the Shahnama made in 1493 or 1494.



**Paris, 1943.** The Nazis have a choke hold on France. Brown-shirted Storm Troopers and the dreaded SS patrol the streets, demanding identification, questioning anyone and everyone. They commandeer homes, property, vehicles and valuables.

Seventy-six kilometers (47 miles) outside Paris, at Château Noyers, German officers eat, drink and make merry in the spacious rooms of the chateau they have taken over as living quarters. It is the country home of Parisian jeweler Henri Vever and his wife.

The German officers do not know that there rests in the basement – literally beneath their feet – a fortune in early Islamic art. Since 1900, art lover and connoisseur Henri Vever had been assembling this dazzling collection piece by piece from all over the world. When shown in Paris in 1911 and again in 1931, art critics called it "the most valuable existing collection of the art of the Islamic book."

Vever's trove contains a number of important Arabic works, almost all the great classical Persian texts, and hitherto unknown manuscripts and paintings from the major artistic centers of the Middle Eastern world and Moghul India. In all, there are nearly 500 items: paintings, calligraphy, decorative bookbindings, illuminated pages from ancient Qur'ans, folios and complete texts, and 15 Persian miniatures dating from the 11th to the mid-19th centuries, painted with pigments made from malachite, lapis lazuli, cinnabar, gold and silver.

From the 18th century on, many collectors and dealers who recognized the commercial value of exquisitely executed Islamic manuscripts and books had found it more profitable to disassemble them and sell each page separately than to look for a buyer for an intact work. Because of this, most of the masterpieces on the market at that time had disappeared, or had long been dispersed as individual pages. Only the most dedicated searches by Vever had brought together a collection that contained so many intact works, and so many of quality and importance.

The loss of the priceless Vever collection would be a terrible blow to the world of history, as well as to the world of art and esthetics. Yet if the Nazis discover it, already within their grasp, the collection will be seized, divided up, and shipped off to Germany in secrecy, unlikely to be shared with the world ever again.

Henri Vever himself does not survive the year 1943. He dies at the age of 81 and is buried in the Vever family plot in a Paris cemetery. The fate of his great collection: unknown.

Europe, 1950. Peace has returned to France. In a slowly recovering Europe life has resumed some normalcy, but among the war's sad ravages in the world of art is the baffling disappearance of the fabled Vever collection. Château Novers still stands intact amid its Normandy fields, but the collection is no longer there. Most think it was indeed stolen by the Nazis, and now either rests in some secret underground vault in Germany or has been destroyed somewhere in transit – in a plane crash or a bombed train. Others speculate that it has long since been divided up into small lots and sold piecemeal - a lesser, but not insignificant, tragedy, since much of the collection's art-historical value lay in the relationship of its pieces to each other. Yet not one piece of the collection has surfaced anywhere, or even been rumored.

In the eyes of the far-flung, close-knit international art world, the Vever collection, impossible to duplicate at any price, has become a legendary lost treasure. Connoisseurs and scholars continue to hope and speculate.

London, 1974. At Sotheby's, a number of Japanese prints – known to have been part of the Vever collection – go up for auction. The news is sensational, for everyone thought that Vever's entire collection of Japanese art was sold in the 1920's to a wealthy Japanese businessman, and now forms the core of the Tokyo Museum of Art. Did these pieces come from the Vever collection? Does the Vever collection still exist intact? And if so, where?

Art connoisseurs, dealers, collectors, and museum curators of Middle Eastern art – including those at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. – now believe there is a possibility, almost a likelihood, that the Vever collection survived the second World War. They also know that there will be many seeking to buy it or even portions of it – if the unknown and evidently very secretive owner decides to break up the collection. What a coup to find it, buy it, and keep it intact!

The pace of the search speeds up.

London, 1976. Leading the pack is art dealer Michael Goedhuis, who this year negotiates the sale of the other great 19th century collection of Islamic art – that of Baron Edmund de Rothschild. But despite two years of detective work, it is by chance that Goedhuis discovers the owner of the Vever collection. "A mutual friend, a collector, divulged the name and address to me," Goedhuis told *Aramco World*. Goedhuis is

to buy it, sight unseen.

It is not for sale.

The owner commands Goedhuis's silence; the whereabouts and the state of the Vever collection remain secret.

Washington, Summer, 1984. At the Smithsonian Institution, Dr. Glenn Lowry, art, and Dr. Milo Beach, acting director of the forthcoming Arthur M. Sackler Gallery 1988), wistfully, half-jokingly, put the fabulous "lost" Vever collection at the top of their wish-list of art they would like to acquire for the Sackler Gallery of Asian and Near Eastern Art, scheduled to open seventies, unmarried, who had emigrated in September 1987.

league, "it probably no longer exists intact. And even if it did, we'd have no idea where to search for it." Beach, sighing, agrees, and adds that by now the Vever collection ticular desire to put it on the market. must be worth over \$10 million. Even if it were found, it is unlikely that the Smith- drawing attention to himself by holding a sonian could afford it.

Paris, December, 1984. At a party, Laure Lowry, Glenn Lowry's mother, mentions to a dinner companion that her son is curator of Near Eastern art at the Smithsonian works, and enjoyed the idea that his collec-Institution in Washington. Her fellow tion would help make the United States a guest replies that he owns some Islamic art world center for the study of Islamic art. that her son might find interesting; he describes it.

Recounting the episode to her son a month later at her Long Island home, Laure Lowry can remember the guest's name but not the name of his collection. Vorer," she says. Lowry, staggered, guesses "Vever." In his own words, he "nearly went through the roof."

letter to the owner, recalling his comment to Lowry's mother. He is François Mautin, Vever's grandson, now a naturalized American with a desire for privacy. Although it now seems obvious, "no one had made the connection because of the different name," says Goedhuis. When Mautin replies, Lowry and Beach learn that the collection is closer than they had thought: For the last 40 years - since 1945, when it was secretly shipped out of France - it has been stored in crates in a New York warehouse.

In early 1985 the two Smithsonian experts meet with the reclusive owner. Though he does not intend to sell, he was scraped together.

able to establish that the collection still agrees to have an inventory and appraisal exists intact, but not its location. He offers done at the London Bond Street gallery of Michael Goedhuis, who - in recognition of ten years of faithful discretion - is now Mautin's sole representative. In February 1986, Lowry and Beach fly to London to view the collection - the first scholars to see it whole in more than half a century.

"I was stunned," reminisces Lowry now. "There were piles of paintings stacked around this big room, and about 400 or so the Smithsonian's curator of Near Eastern other pieces, many of which scholars never even knew existed. Very few had been shown publicly. My heart started rac-(See Aramco World, January-February ing and I spent the first couple of hours just buzzing around the room, gazing. I had such a sense of discovery!"

But would Mautin sell?

A wealthy and retiring man in his midto the United States before World War II "But of course," Lowry says to his col- and was not himself an art collector, he had no need of money and had, according to Lowry, been quietly guarding his grandfather's collection for 40 years with no par-

A private man, he abhorred the idea of public auction, but yes, he thought he just might agree to a private sale to the Smithsonian. It seemed a natural choice since, according to Lowry, he was fond of his adopted country, liked the way the Smithsonian cared for and displayed its art

And, since he wanted the collection to remain intact, he agreed to lower the purchase price from \$11 million to seven million dollars.

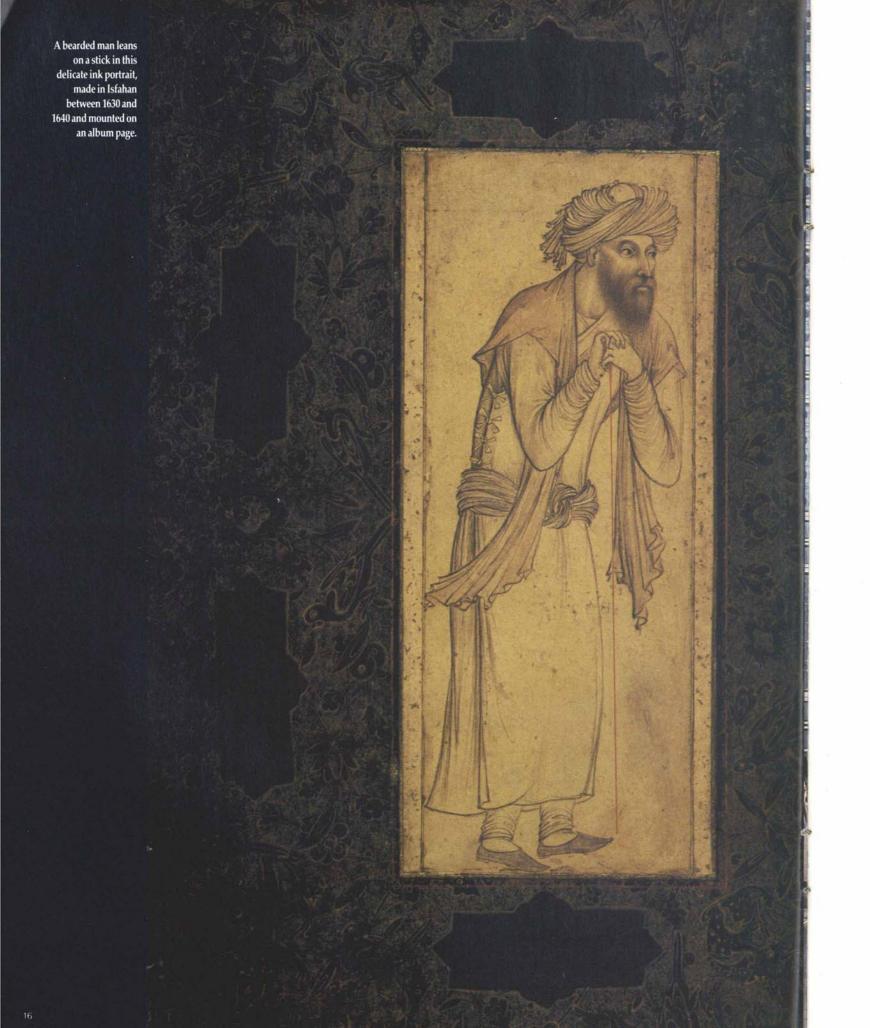
Knowing that word of their find, and of their bidding for it, would soon get out, "Something like Vrambère, or Vrai, or and knowing that they would soon be in competition with other potential buyers, Smithsonian officials began secret negotiations immediately to raise the funds. Lowry and Beach immediately draft a But it soon became apparent that – despite the owner's generous offer to lower the price - it was going to be difficult to come up with the money.

It was here that Dr. Arthur Sackler, the New York psychiatrist and author, himself a noted collector of Asian and Near Eastern art, intervened. Recognizing the worth of the Vever collection, the donor of the Smithsonian's new Sackler Gallery of Asian and Near Eastern art also contributed toward buying the Vever collection. With that contribution, and through a combination of the Regents' Collections Acquisitions Fund, Smithsonian trust funds and other private gifts, the money



Above, a doctor and a patient discuss vitrified lead poisoning on this page from the Materia Medica of Dioscorides. The Greek work, from the first century BC, was translated into Arabic in the ninth century; this is a 13th-century copy made in Iraq. At right, Babur, the first of the great Moghul emperors, receives a courtier in this illustration from a 1589 copy of his autobiography, the Baburnama. Vever bought this miniature in 1913.



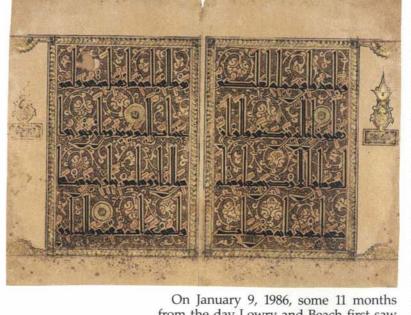




Sweeping lines and finely rendered details make this miniature of a reclining prince extraordinary. It was painted about 1530 in Tabriz by Aqa Mirak, and Vever bought it in 1913 for 2300 francs.



At right, two pages from an 11th-century copy of the Qur'an. At left a school scene painted in Tabriz about 1540. A muezzin calls to prayer from the rooftop while, within, students read, copy manuscripts or are beaten by the master. Other groups prepare a meal, wash before prayers, and, at the bottom, manufacture sheets of colored paper. Some of the trees and flowers are of identifiable species, and the scene is full of such minutely observed details as the shoes in the



On January 9, 1986, some 11 months from the day Lowry and Beach first saw the collection, the contract was signed and Washington became the permanent home of the long-lost Vever collection. It made the Smithsonian, in the words of the institution's Secretary Robert McC. Adams, "an internationally important center for the study, not just the exhibition, of Near Eastern art."

Now, who was this Henri Vever, the collector of the most famous Islamic art collection in history?

Vever was raised in Paris, after his parents fled there from Metz to escape the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-1871. As a youth he studied painting and throughout his life maintained that "all I ever wanted to do was paint." By the time he was 17, Vever had bought his first Rembrandt print, the keystone of what was to become an extensive collection of European prints and paintings, including a significant group of French impressionist works.

But though he painted throughout his life, and counted many famous painters of the day among his friends, Vever continued in the tradition of several generations of his forebears and became a jeweler and head of Maison Vever. He attained recognition as one of those artist-craftsmen in the forefront of the *art nouveau* movement, and, according to his detailed diaries, it was Asian and Islamic art that inspired his jewelry designs.

It may be that Vever's interest in Islamic art was stimulated by a series of exhibitions of Persian arts of the book that took place in Paris starting around 1878. These minutely-detailed works with their jewellike colors may well have seemed to the young Henri like a painted counterpart of the precious gems he worked with.

In any event, Vever traveled to Samarkand, Bukhara and other cities of the region in 1891 and became entranced with the brilliance and richness of Asian and Islamic art – like his friends and colleagues jewelers Louis Cartier, Réné Lalique, and Gustave Boucheron, art dealers Joseph Duveen and Georges Demotte, and the Armenian oil merchant Calouste Gulbenkian. In 1900 Vever began selling off his important collection of European and impressionist art in order to acquire Arabic manuscripts, Persian paintings and other examples of the art of the Islamic book.

These arts are unique. Inspired by Muslim reverence for the written word and the sanctity of the Qur'an as the word of God, driven by the desire of Muslim rulers to possess - and pay for - exquisite works of art of spiritual significance, the Muslim arts of the book reached a zenith of beauty, refinement and luxury in the first half of the 17th century. Calligraphers were joined in royal workshops and studios by master painters, bookbinders, illustrators, paper-makers, leather-workers, illuminators, and artisan specialists who ground pigments from gold, silver and precious minerals. From this body of work, for 40 years, Henri Vever chose the best.

His collection, on display until April 30 at the Smithsonian's Arthur M. Sackler Gallery in Washington, contains 39 full volumes, 291 miniature paintings, 98 calligraphic pieces and illuminations, 29 bookbindings, and four textiles.

Outstanding among them are numerous 10th-through 14th-century Qur'anic texts; several rare Arabic texts never before exhibited; eight illustrated pages from the *Shahnama*, the Persian national epic; an illustration from the history of Shah Jahan, builder of the Taj Mahal; pages from the *Materia Medica* of Dioscorides and the *Automata* of al-Jazari; and a double-page frontispiece from the *Khamsa* of Amir Abu'l Hasan Dihlawi.

"With the purchase of this collection," says Curator Glenn Lowry happily, "the Smithsonian affirms its commitment to the study, display and understanding of the Muslim world. It will attract a new generation of scholars and provide a catalyst to them to study and interpret Islamic Art. It will enhance American interest in the Middle East.

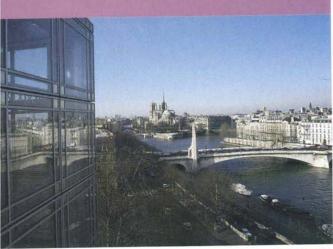
"But, perhaps most important, it will show our audience the richness of the artistic traditions of Islam, and how important they are to our own Western civilization."

Aileen Vincent-Barwood, veteran Middle East correspondent and author of North Country Editor, now freelances from upstate New York.

Henriver

The sophisticated world of turn-of-thecentury Paris, the artistic life of Henri Vever and his circle of wealthy friends, and the story of Vever's fabled art collection are the subjects of a one-hour television documentary to be broadcast on March 1, in the United States, on the Public Broadcasting System.





Situated just up the Seine from Nôtre Dame (above), the Arab World Institute has two wings (right) - one curved to fit the river's bank, the other a rectangular block - and features a lighted and enclosed, sixstory cylindrical stairway (below).

Center: French President François Mitterand at the AWI inauguration in

Next page: AWI's southern facade is comprised of 25,000 metal diaphragms - evoking the intricate wooden screens that may cover traditional Arab windows. Its interior features Europe's largest Arab reference library (left inset), and a popular roof-top restaurant (right inset).

New buildings emerge almost monthly from scaffolding cocoons as the French capital completes its most ambitious cycle this century of monumental public construction. Fresh landmarks include a

new opera house, a gigantic new triumphal arch at La Défense, a glass pyramid added to the Louvre, the brilliant Orsay Museum on the Seine, and a modernistic exposition complex devoted to 20thcentury science and industry and built on the former site of a sprawling stockyard.

Like the Eiffel Tower exactly a century ago, each of these contemporary creations first aroused controversy; some gradually won admiration for their enrichment of the city's cultural heritage. But none of the newcomers has been more controversial, or ultimately more ardently admired, than the Arab World Institute, or AWI - an elegantly glass-walled showcase of Arab civilization that is attracting growing interest because of its novel cultural role and architectural ambitions.

Today, after some teething troubles in its first year of operations, the AWI is flooded with visitors: 5,000 people a week, all the building can handle, visit the Institute's museum exhibits and explore its high-tech facilities for learning about the Arab world. Esthetically, the Institute's daring architecture is recognized in France as the most imaginative new building to rise in Paris in a decade. Increasingly popular with critics and public alike, this crosscultural institution, already a contemporary masterpiece, may well influence the style and orientation of future development of the French capital.

The Institute is a joint venture between France and Arab nations; it reflects the opinion, in all those countries, that the Arab world – its civilization and values, its past and its future - needs to be better known and understood in the West. To meet this need, the Institute supplies cultural information in a wide range of media: from libraries to electronic databanks, from a conventional, glass-case museum to audio-visual displays, and an outreach program of touring exhibits and performances as well.

But the AWI has no political agenda, says an aide to Bassem El-Jisr, the Lebaneseborn director-general. Its aim is to "satisfy

widespread curiosity about the Arab world by correcting the often abysmal factual ignorance about it." Retired diplomat Paul Carton, AWI's first president, says, "We are feeling our way. This is a unique experiment for Arab governments in a Western country." But Carton felt confident enough that AWI was well established to turn over its reins to his successor, Edgard Pisani, a politician who has played prominent roles in French foreign policy since his first cabinet position under President Charles de Gaulle.



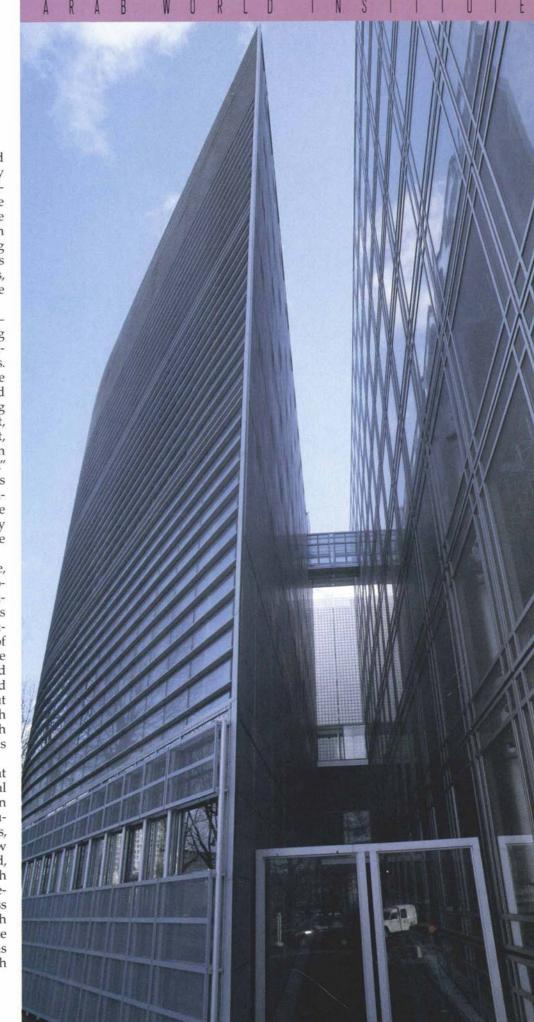
The Institute's objective - to provide a window on the Arab world - is well served by its architecture, whose theme can best be described as transparency. In this building, space is defined by light and shadow, not by solid structure - an idea that French architect Jean Nouvel says he derived from Arab architectural traditions. When its curved glass front wall reflects the Seine in bright daylight, you can still discern jeweled rays of sunlight beaming through the back wall into the building's shadowy inner spaces. These shapes and shafts of sunlight are not the result of a happy accident: They are sculpted into a decorative geometry of light by computer-controlled metallic diaphragms - 25,000 of them that comprise the Institute's southern facade. The deceptively simple-looking glass building is designed to create a mood of give-and-take with its surroundings: At night, the cylindrical six-story library tower, with its lighted spiraling ramp, seems to symbolize the institute's educational vocation in its Latin-Quarter site, the traditional heart of French academia.

The effect of openness continues throughout the building, with a diffuse green aura from the landscaping and painting modulated by the silvery gray tints of the aluminium frame. The Ushaped building has two wings, one curved scythe-like to fit the bend of the Seine, the other the rectangular block with its wall of diaphragms and containing other geometrical structures. The wings are separated by patios at several levels, and the effect is as if layered light were the substance of the structure.

A hall of giant pillars - 125 of them somehow evokes a waterless reflecting pool. Glass-walled elevators enable visitors to see through each floor's activities. From the rooftop terraces, nearby Nôtre Dame Cathedral on its midstream island seems like a ship majestically steaming upstream toward the Institute. The result, said a Parisian decorator on her first visit, is to "make me feel somehow that this is an extended hand from a foreign culture." This inviting, friendly impression seems to be generally shared: On a recent Sunday, many visitors - mainly French - were obviously making repeat visits, proudly pointing out to friends fine points of the building's design.

Success for the AWI, as a large-scale, permanent, cultural bridgehead in a European capital, was not a foregone conclusion. Though French President François Mitterrand personally presided at its inauguration in December 1987, as a mark of the Institute's importance, there were many times in its 15-year gestation period when the Institute nearly strangled in red tape or the snarl of political tensions. But the project's momentum, together with the determination of its Arab and French sponsors, proved irresistible – and holds promise for the Institute's future.

Conceived in 1973 by French President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, the AWI proposal reflected France's heightened interest in the Arab world. This new mood was influenced by several factors: the energy crisis, a new outlook toward the Arabs that grew as France's colonial guilt diminished, heightened competition for trade with those Arab countries that France had previously ignored, and a growing awareness that France needed better relations with the North African countries just across the Mediterranean, whose expatriate citizens in France had become a factor in French culture and society.





pproaching the Arab World Institute, visitors pass through a high, narrow curving marble gateway into a vast open courtyard. Someday this will be a park whose trees and vines provide a backdrop of greenery for the Institute itself, tucked into a bend of the Seine. The building, rising dramatically and floating on a glassed-in ground floor, is a mosaic-patterned block. This visually stunning effect comes from the seemingly countless metal diaphragms of different sizes, set symmetrically in groups of 25 and mounted in the facade in 10,000 identical panels, each centered on a large, eyeshaped iris. In this extraordinary wall, the exposed machinery becomes an intricate geometrical decorative design, enhanced by gleams of outside light and tints of inside illumination on the metal of the diaphragms' irises. The square panels, in 10 tiers and 20 columns, create an effect of stability that resembles arrested movement: energies in some extraordinary equilibrium.

Past the Institute's doors, visitors enjoy facilities that compare favorably with any in the latest museums in Paris. Multi-lingual videotext terminals list the day's events. Parking is automated. Clear directions keep the

crowd flowing cleanly in separate directions some heading up toward the terraces to eat in the popular riverside restaurant and enjoy its spectacular view of the city, others browsing in AWI's ground-floor giftshop and buying maps, catalogues, books, records or videocassettes about the Arab world - or reproductions of Bedouin jewelry, posters of modern Arab art or Islamic devotional materials.

Similarly imaginative technology enlivens the AWI's temporary exhibitions, and public response has grown as the shows become more ambitious. Both in popularity and in quality, the biggest success so far was the exhibit entitled "Holy Places in Saudi Arabia," which provided a vivid impression of the spiritual dimensions and physical scale of the focal points, in Makkah and Medina, of the Hajj. Imposing, exquisitely executed scale models of the mosques provided a bird's-eye view of these vast sanctuaries of Islam, and of King Fahd's plans for embellishment and expansion to add luster and provide room for more pilgrims. The emotion of individuals and the magnitude of the crowds came alive in movies and slide shows, with stereo spectacles provided so that they could be watched in three dimensions. Historical pictures were presented from the



AWI library's collection of rare books; the Louvre lent ancient ceramic tiles; from Saudi Arabia came an exquisitely embroidered panel of the Kiswa, the black draping of the Ka'ba (See Aramco World, September-October 1985).

The show's impact helped put the AWI on the European cultural map, with newspapers in many foreign capitals listing the exhibition as a highlight for visitors to Paris. For non-Muslims, of course, it was a rare opportunity to see places and ceremonies to which they have no access. But Muslims - often whole families were equally numerous among the visitors, frequently waiting until the guides had moved on to add their own commentary for the benefit of their children or their non-Muslim friends. This kind of enthusiasm seemed to vindicate the hopes of AWI's supporters that the Institute, through education and openness, will help the Arab world change for the better the image it has in the world as a whole.

him the darling of international critics and helped him win the 1988 Grand Prix d'Architecture – Jean Nouvel has a practical side. The lengthening list of his buildings attests his ability to adapt his

vision to the constraints of almost any site and need. His work starts from a conviction that architects have exhausted the possibilities of geometrical construction - from pyramids, to temples, to skyscrapers. He is equally appalled by neo-classicism and by post-modern recombinations of disparate elements of different architectural styles.

"What I want is an architecture of sensations, of emotions," he said, pacing through his white-painted studio in a gutted factory. "The Arab project gave us a chance to work with the values of Islamic architecture, which proved to fit strongly with my idea of trying to build with cultural materials instead of simply

with bricks and mortar or steel and rectangular perspectives." Convinced that the 1970's were a period of retreat in all the arts in the West, breeding a nostalgia for the lost energies of modernism, Nouvel found the Arab World Institute the biggest opportunity yet to put into practice his ideas of a more exciting, more popular kind of architecture. Previously, he had been successful with projects like an apartment building in southern France whose railings, companionways and bulkheads gave it a shipboard feeling that proved very popular with its occupants. But the AWI commission gave his

approach unrivaled international exposure.

Despite working on a historic site in Paris, with the risk of an outcry over any apparent breach of time-honored building styles, Nouvel unflinchingly pursued his own vision. He had to cope with the dual demands of a difficult location and the unique nature of the commission. The site stood "at the pivot-point of two sections of the city - historic central Paris and neglected eastern Paris," he said, and the commission required that he develop "a correct attitude toward Arab architecture that prolongs its values into a Western tradition."

The most striking feature of his design is the mosaic wall of diaphragms. Manufactured by the industrial firm that builds the TGV, France's bullet-train, the diaphragms, Nouvel says, are "anti-functional. We could have controlled the light flow by using, for example, blinds."

But in contrast to Paris's last world-class building, the Beaubourg Museum, which exposed pipes to highlight its functional identity, the AWI, Nouvel says, "accumulates technological excess to express the kind of decorative intensity and intricacy of fine Arab buildings." Visitors are mesmerized by the exposed workings of these constantly shifting irises, staring at their precision-made parts and electronic wiring that without explanation or warning adjust the shape and flow of light.

This play of light and shade is pursued throughout the building, with glass skins and translucent marble and criss-crossing open ramps and elevators, creating an effect of hightech wizardry. But Nouvel is categorical: "I use technology for aesthetic ends." The Arab World Institute commission has proved the value of his vision.



AWI architect Jean Nouvel (above right), and the most striking feature of his design: computer-driven irises (opposite page) which vary the flow of light into the building. This play of light and shade is persuaed throughout the glass-walled building (below)



A deceptively simple-looking glass building, the AWI rises dramatically around an inner courtyard (right). Glass-walled elevators and shafts (left) enable visitors to see through to each floor's activities.

Giscard d'Estaing's idea was to offer the Arab countries a Parisian showcase for Arab culture. To give it a pan-Arab dimension, the AWI became a project sponsored primarily by eight Arab nations - Algeria, Bahrain, Djibouti, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates - with participation by all member states of the Arab League. The AWI's High Council would be composed of the founder states' Arab League ambassadors in Paris, and French nominees.

In the first seven years, Arab governments spent \$30 million on the project but got scarcely anything to show for it. This was due mainly to unresponsiveness by the municipal government of Paris, which had fallen into the hands of Giscard d'Estaing's political rivals. Bureaucrats shunted the project from one undesirable site to another, each of which the AWI's Arab sponsors tenaciously resisted. Government legal advisers also ruled against an official - but only oral - French pledge of diplomatic and tax immunity for the proposed Institute.

The outlook for AWI changed overnight in 1981 when Mitterrand, newly elected, decided to include the AWI among his "presidential projects" for major new institutions. His goal was to open French cultural life to new horizons and to a broader public, and he wanted revolutionary architecture to dramatize these new objectives. The AWI project got top priority.

Minister of Culture Jack Lang personally selected the new site, one of the most visible and desirable locations in Paris. And architect Jean Nouvel, then only 36 but already known for his innovative solutions to a wide range of architectural problems, met a three-week deadline with the winning design. "As usual, I started from scratch and immersed myself in the project," he said. Aided by a French scholar of Islamic architecture and city planning, he delved into books, paintings and even movies to select a few basic themes and motifs for the building: "The core values of Arab architecture are impressive: generosity combined with precision, even preciousness - and I tried to translate those into my design," he said.

Handling space at AWI with Arab generosity, Nouvel conceived the astonishing wall of metal diaphragms - a Western reflection of the intricate wooden screens

of mashrabiya windows - to represent precision, demanding that the shutter-like irises form lozenges, squares and bars of light to match mosaic patterns in the Institute's floors. The preciousness, meaning highly detailed, finely wrought decoration, is evoked for Nouvel by the accumulation of visible high-technology machinery. But Nouvel insists that this is a Western building, not a pastiche of an Islamic one. "The building expresses the idea of Arab architecture; it has Arab architectural values without being Arab. It is suggestive, emotional, sensual."

Built in five years at a cost of \$100 million, the Institute is quickly becoming as much a part of the Paris landscape as the Egyptian obelisk erected last century in the Place de la Concorde, at the hub of the city's traffic.

And in future, the Arab World Institute may become a cornerstone of the city's development, thanks to Nouvel's inspiration in handling the site. Many architects were intimidated by the location: On the banks of the Seine, the site exposed any building on it to direct comparison with some of the major landmarks of the city and to rigid building-code restrictions. Worse, the land abuts a university campus whose rough concrete buildings, on pylons, are acknowledged eyesores. But rather than playing it safe by placing his building on the back of the site, where it would hide the campus, Nouvel risked constructing it close to the river.

The result is an urban triumph. The curving glass walls mirror the water and smoothly prolong the line of the Left Bank's major thoroughfare, the historic Boulevard St. Germain. "Some day the Institute will be seen as the building that carried grand architecture eastward into the city's neglected areas," Nouvel said.

By building at the water's edge to achieve dramatic sweep, Nouvel left the university buildings exposed behind the Institute. But he has won official acceptance – though not yet financing – for a master development plan that calls for an avenue of greenery there that would run eastward for nearly a kilometer (.6 mile), connecting with gardens on the city's eastern edge. If this vision materializes, ivy will soften the raw concrete of the campus.



Naturally AWI also offers the more traditional fare of a first-class cultural center: Europe's largest reference library on the Arab world, for example. A spacious, quiet museum, although dependent mainly on gifts from Arab governments, already boasts an impressive permanent collection of artifacts. The superbly equipped theater and auditorium, which seats 500, hosts musical, theatrical and literary troupes and performers from every corner of the Arab world - some of whom go on, as do temporary shows from the museum, to tour the provincial towns of France.

Reflecting this outreach program, the AWI hosts scholarly discussions on Arab civilization and cooperates with French broadcasters and publishers to promote shows and books about the Arab world. "We are a unique resource center, helping ensure that the Arab world is never again absent or misrepresented in Europeans' mental geography of mankind," an AWI researcher said.

Despite its growing success, AWI has not escaped controversy about its work - or questions about its future. "The Institute is Within its walls, the AWI is adjusting to not aggressive enough, and when the meet public demand for its services. Its novelty wears off, it will become

irrelevant," warns an Arab ambassador in Paris. In his view, the AWI should actively engage in consciousness-raising among France's 2.7 million Arab inhabitants. "The Arab immigrants are only five percent of the population in this country, but they can play full roles here only if they know their Arab heritage and are proud of it," the diplomat said.

Other critics say that the AWI's dependence on government funding is a limitation. An Arab journalist in Paris charges that "the natural reflex of any government is to censor anything sensitive, so the Institute can never say anything critical about many crucial aspects of Arab affairs." Indeed, an exhibition of political cartoons from one sponsoring country was withdrawn shortly after it opened because of objections from the embassy. But public vetos of this sort have been rare.

The AWI's officers maintain that the Institute has its hands full of useful work of many sorts that transcends governments' political sensitivities. It properly confines its mission to providing a vision of the Arabs to European publics, they say, without becoming involved in such domestic issues as minorities' rights. Indeed, AWI's president and directorgeneral would like somewhat more attention from some governmental sponsors, rather than less: So far, France, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait have carried most of the financial burden of the Institute's work. But AWI's initial success, officials say, should help accustom other governments to the Institute's need for prompt, steady financing, in order to maintain an undertaking that has given the Arab world such a brilliant presence in Paris.

Joseph Fitchett, chief correspondent of the International Herald Tribune in Paris, writes on geopolitics and the arts. He is co-author of the recent book Great Hotels of the Middle East and Asia.



Do they not observe the birds above them, soaring and beating their wings? None can uphold them except God most gracious: Truly it is He who watches over all things.

The Qur'an, Sura 67 ("Dominion"), Verse 19

From the Turks' caring attitude

towards birds, still apparent

today in grain handouts to the

pigeons that flock around

Istanbul's New Mosque (left), an

extraordinary architectural form

has evolved: delicately carved

stone birdhouses like the one

(above) on the city's Turkology

Institute.



WRITTEN AND PHOTOGRAPHED BY SAFFET DAĞDEVIREN, **IMAGE OF TURKEY** 

Istanbul. Swallows hawk across the parks along the Golden Horn at sunset, and jackdaws tumble in the updrafts against the Byzantine city walls. Every fall there is the spectacular, towering gyre of thousands of white storks that forms over the Bosporus as the birds slowly spiral upward to begin their migration to the south. And there are the pigeons strutting and cooing in front of the Yeni Cami - the New Mosque waiting for handouts of grain from pious

he birds above" are everywhere in

Feeding birds, or freeing caged ones, is a meritorious act, the Turks believe. According to the Qur'an, the righteous "feed, for the love of God, the indigent, the orphan and the captive," and some interpret that verse as calling for

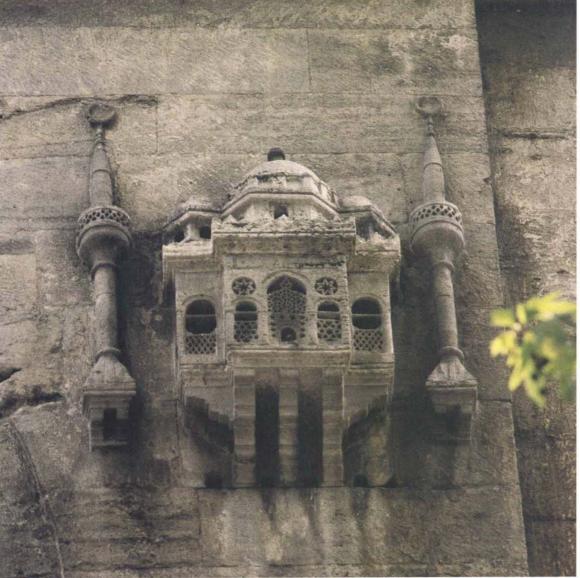
charity to animals as well as to humans.

Thus the birds that share Istanbul with its human population – as they have for more than 2500 years – are rarely harmed and, in times past, were often helped to find food or shelter in the city. And out of this cherishing attitude grew an extraordinary architectural form: the stone birdhouses, dovecotes and "bird castles" that grace several of Turkey's older cities, Istanbul in particular.

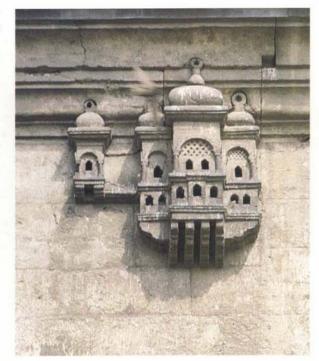
The birdhouses were built on walls that sheltered them from the worst of the sun and from the cutting winter winds that sometimes scour the city. High up under cornices or eaves, well out of reach of meddling hands - or claws they are often built, delightfully, in the architectural style of the building, or the period, they are part of.

passers-by.

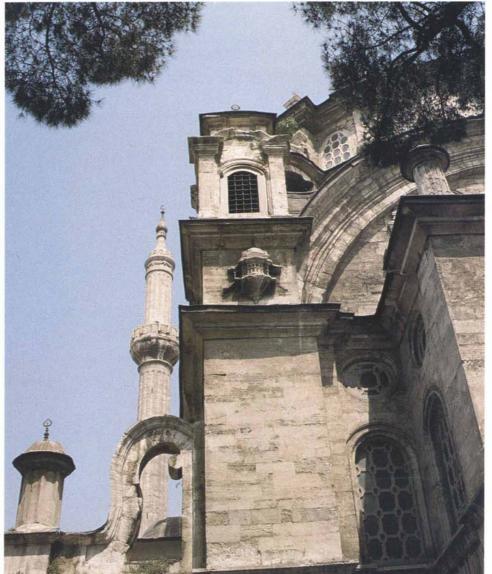


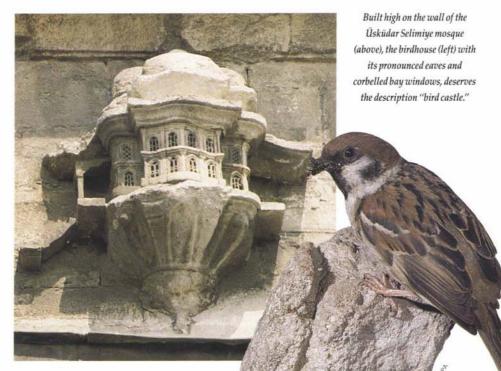


Ottoman birdhouses, such as the mosque-like design (above) on the wall of Yeni Valide mosque, and the pavilions (right) flanking the entrance to the Ayazma mosque, often mirrored architectural styles of the period.









Constructing such birdhouses at various points around homes and other buildings probably came into vogue in the 16th century, with the flowering of classical Ottoman architecture. The practice continued into the latter part of the 19th century, with all the shifts of style and the trends and vagaries of fashion that characterize a true art form.

A pair of birdhouses flanks the entrance of the Ayazma mosque in Üsküdar, in the Asian part of Istanbul. One resembles a little köşk, or garden pavilion, of the kind found in many a park and palace courtyard in the city; the other has similar dimensions but a more mosque-like shape, and both are delicately carved and adorned at each roofpeak with the crescent finials visible all over the city.

On the walls of the nearby Selimiye mosque are tiered birdhouses. With their pronounced eaves, corbelled bay windows and what appear to be the remains of grand staircases, they deserve to be called "bird castles." Elsewhere – on the Yeni Valide mosque, for example, or on the Turkology Institute building – the birdhouses indisputably resemble miniature mosques, complete with arabesque carving, minarets and domes.

The quality of the workmanship varies from one birdhouse to another. At the Selimiye mosque, for example, the holes in the exterior walls where the scaffolding once was anchored were covered with perforated brick or stone to provide a shelter for the birds. At the Seyit Hasan Paşa madrasa, or religious school, on the other hand, the stone of the wall has been carefully plastered to make a smooth, distinct setting for a palatial, mosque-like dovecote.

Such elaborate constructions, even for a good cause, seem whimsical at best. But the true-to-life architecture of the birdhouses, and their locations in relation to other buildings that stand – or stood – nearby, may point to another reason for their existence.

We know from historical records that
Ottoman architects – like their Byzantine
predecessors in this same city – constructed
scale models of the buildings they were
designing to show to their patrons for approval.
Only a very few such models have survived to
our day, and even for those we know neither the
dates of construction nor the names of the
builders. We would love to know more, of course
– and perhaps these wonderful birdhouses,
which document such an attractive aspect of
Islam, also document some lost aspects of the
architectural profession of the past.

Saffet Dağdeviren is on the staff of the Industrial Training Development Center of Turkey's Ministry of Industry and Commerce. His guide-book Central Anatolia is shortly to be published.



bdulhamid II, who reigned from 1876 to 1909, was the most controversial sultan in the history of the Ottoman Empire. His success in keeping the empire independent in the golden age of European imperialism has made some historians call him the last of the great sultans. But he ruled from seclusion in his palace at Yildiz, outside Constantinople, for 40 years in a style historians call paranoid and autocratic.

Although he dissolved parliament and suspended the Ottoman constitution, and forbade unwed men and women to go out together in public, Abdulhamid was dedicated to modernizing his empire. During his reign the postal service was started, city streets were paved and lit with gas, and the army was reorganized. Though he imposed severe censorship on his people and relied heavily on a secret police system, during his reign plagues became a phenomenon of the past, and schools were founded throughout the empire.

Abdulhamid's attitude to photography also reflected his dual personality.

Photography was one of the many European inventions which interested him. Indeed, the sultan loved photographs so much that he had a collection of 30,000 of them at Yildiz Palace. Some were in diamond-studded silver frames, but most were mounted in albums in the library, and he frequently consulted them. Among his favorite photographers were Ali Reza, chief photographer of the Ministry of War and the Academy of Engineering, and Abdullah Frères, an Armenian firm established at 452 Grande Rue de Pera, the main street of the "European" quarter of Constantinople, who had been "photographers to His Imperial Majesty the Sultan" since 1867.

But photographs were not simply an amusement for the sultan. More than any other ruler of his day, he used photography as a tool and a weapon. Photographers were sent around the empire, from Albania to Mesopotamia, so that the sultan – who rarely left his palace, let alone his capital - could see what his empire looked like. He also had photographs taken of government employees, so that he could study a man's features before receiving him in audience.

Some 35,000 of these photographs, in the form of glass plates, are today being catalogued and restored in Istanbul by the Research Center for Islamic History, Arts and Culture - whose offices are in the same Yildiz Palace inhabited by Sultan Abdulhamid a century ago.



Abdulhamid also used photography to sell to the outside world the image of the Ottoman Empire as a modern state. The Ottoman government had long been aware of its unfavorable image in the capitals and newspapers of western Europe. The ancient loathing probably dated back beyond the siege of Vienna in 1683 to the conquest of Constantinople in 1453 - or even to the battle of Malazgirt in 1071; it had increased since the Ottomans' suppression of a revolt in Bulgaria in 1875 and 1876 which came to be known by the empire's critics as "the Bulgarian massacres." Abdulhamid was particularly sensitive to European opinion since, if his empire was to survive, he needed the support – though he detested the interference - of European powers. He frequently entertained visiting Europeans to dinner, person can lift them. and gave them decorations, to win favorable publicity.

In 1893, as part of his publicity campaign, he sent albums of photographs to the British, French, American and German governments. Fifty-one of these albums, with over 1800 photographs, are now in the Oriental Department of the British taken by Abdullah Frères. They are magni-

ficent green, red and gold volumes; some are so large, and burdened with so many thick, gilded pages and such heavily embossed covers that only a very strong

As a curator, Mohammed Isa Waley, writes, "The photographs appear to have been selected partly to illustrate and document the strenuous efforts made by the Sultan and his ministers to reform and modernize the institutions of the empire, and partly to record some of its scenic and architectural glories." Seventeen albums Library; 31 of them contain photographs contain views of Constantinople and the former imperial capitals of Edirne and

Bursa; 17 albums show military and naval establishments, 15 show civilian schools and colleges, and two show horses.

The photographs provide an overwhelmingly evocative picture of Constantinople in its last days of imperial glory, when servants rowed their mistresses by the Sweet Waters of Asia, and in the streets of Pera the latest fashions from Paris and Vienna could be seen beside the traditional costumes of the Balkans and the Caucasus. They reveal a concern for the past, recording architectural details of mosques and the costumes of dead sultans in glass-fronted cupboards in Topkapı Palace. Even Byzantine churches and Roman ruins were photographed for the Caliph of the Muslims.

Some of the most interesting albums show interiors in the palaces of the sultan, filled with elaborate potted plants, massive crystal chandeliers, preposterous pelments, European pictures, and towering porcelain vases given by the Kaiser. As the sultan no doubt intended, the interiors of his palaces are shown to be not very different from those inhabitated by his European fellow-monarchs.

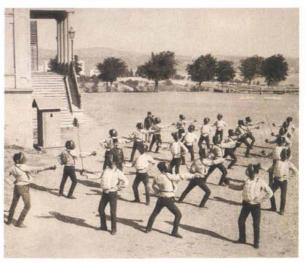
In the other albums, however, we leave the monuments and palaces of Constantinople for a different, more political world. In these albums, instead of the picturesque images beloved of European tourists - traditional costumes, ruins and native women - we see the outward signs of modernization: schools, hospitals and soldiers at drill. The sultan was proud of his army reforms, and of the increase in the size and efficiency of the Ottoman army that was to enable it to defeat Greece with ease in 1897. There are innumerable photographs of regiments on parade, of ships' crews doing exercises, or the great display of the military might of the empire that took place every Friday when the sultan went to prayers at the mosque just outside Yildiz - the selamlik.

The army was so preeminent in the Ottoman Empire that the only factories shown are military factories: The sultan did not encourage the formation of Ottoman private enterprises. He was so frightened of electricity that it was banned except in embassies, hospitals, the Pera Palace Hotel and his own palace. However, there is a photograph of a very modernlooking "naval electricity factory."

The sultan was equally proud of his educational reforms. There are photographs of schools for girls, for the blind, for the Navy, the Army, and for the sons of tribal chiefs, and photographs of the famous Lycée Impérial de Galata-Seraï,









Left: Sultan Abdulhamid II and his entourage attending Friday prayers at Hamidiye Mosque in Istanbul. Above: The interior of Merassim Palace (top); sabre practice at the Imperial Military College (middle); and an Ottoman gun factory (bottom).



Deep-sea divers of the Imperial Navy

the smartest school in the empire, situated on the Grande Rue de Pera. From Janina in the mountains of Greece to Baghdad in Mesopotamia, new schools were founded – and photographed. Although Abdulhamid thought his position as Caliph of the Muslims even more important than that of Sultan of the Ottoman Empire, and constantly reemphasized his religious role, all the schools are built in a variety of European styles, from neoclassical to neo-Gothic: As with his palaces, there is nothing Islamic about their appearance.

After looking at these albums, it is impossible to believe that the Ottoman Empire was completely reactionary, or that it did nothing for its subjects. It may have been "the sick man of Europe" politically, but it was the modernizer of the Middle East. Several future Arab leaders of importance were educated at Ottoman government schools. Indeed, the Ottoman Empire impressed its neighbors so much that when rulers in Bokhara, Yemen or Afghanistan wanted to modernize they turned to Constantinople for advice.

Nevertheless, the sultan's attempts to impress the West had little success. Particularly after the suppression of an Arme-

nian revolt in 1894 and the Greco-Turkish war of 1897, he received increasingly unfavorable publicity. When he was deposed by the Young Turk revolutions of 1908 and 1909, the West rejoiced.

Abdulhamid's photographs provide an unforgettable picture of a half European, half Middle Eastern empire struggling for survival. However, there are surprising omissions. Although the Orient Express connected Constantinople with the other capitals of Europe after 1883, there are no photographs of trains in the albums. Human figures are carefully posed in rows in front of official buildings or in the photographers' studios, but they are absent from the city streets. Above all, there are no photographs of the sultan himself. Either out of fear that a pistol might be hidden in a camera, or because of religious scruples, this imperial devotee of photography excluded his own image from those that comprised his effort to improve the image of his empire.

Philip Mansel is a writer specializing in the history of European and Middle Eastern monarchies. His most recent book is Sultans in Splendor, published by Andre Deutsch in Britain and by the Vendome Press in the U.S.

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