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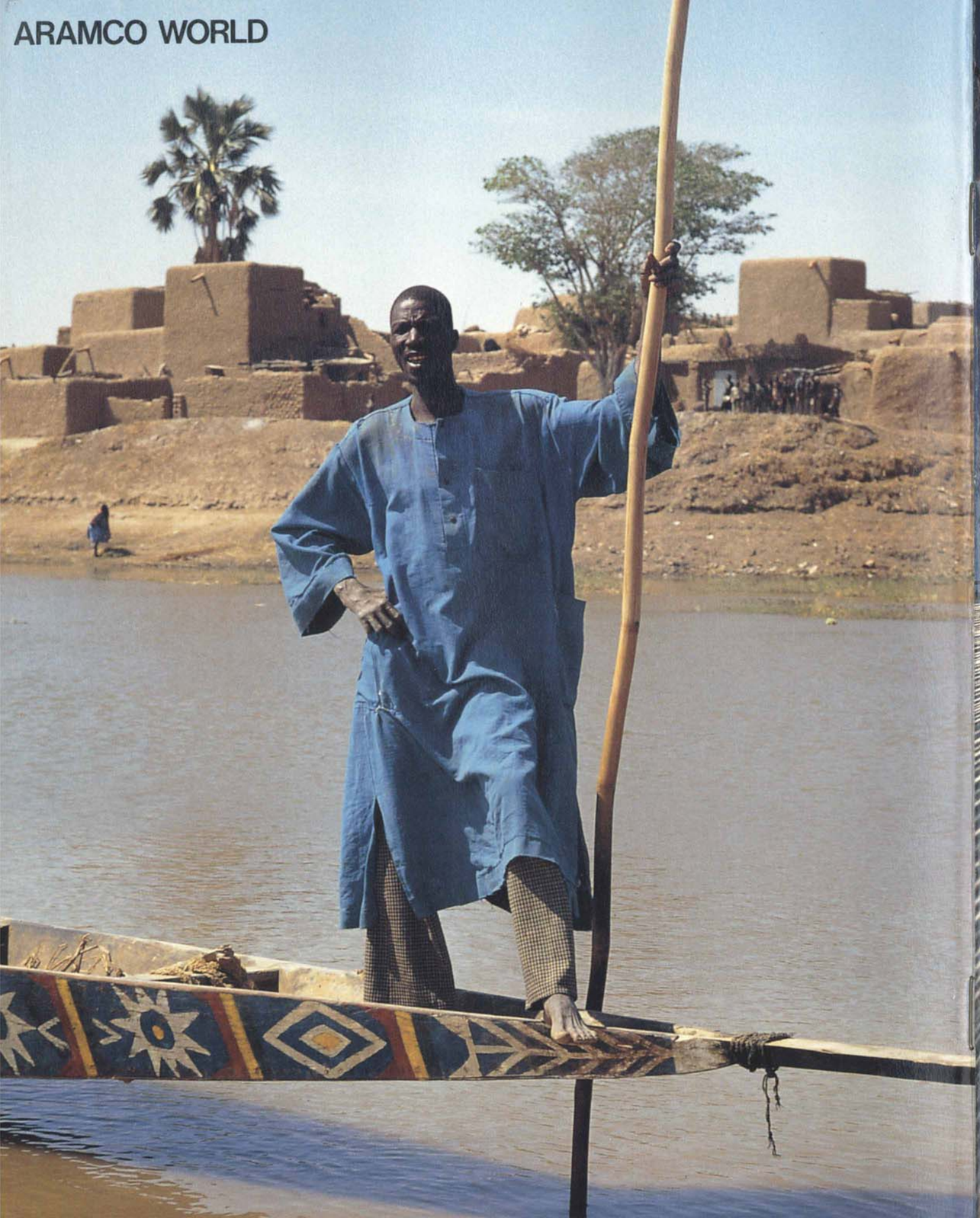

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JULY-AUGUST 1990

# Remaking ISTANBUL

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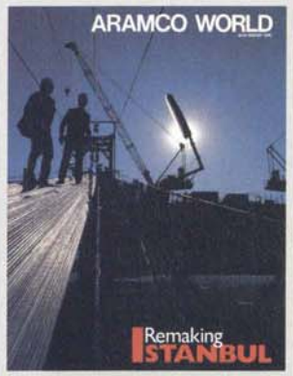


Cover: Turkish workmen bestride the bunched steel strands that support Istanbul's second Bosporus bridge, opened in 1988 as part of a sweeping reconstruction of the ancient city's water, sewer and transport networks. New highways, bridges, parks, and even hydrofoil ferries save Stambulus time and frustration – but also cost them some of the city's unmatched charm and beauty. Photo: Ergun Çağatay. Back cover: Proud of his craft, a Bozo boatman offers a ride across the Niger. Photo: Brynn Bruijn.

◄ Artist Jumana El Husseini in her Paris studio. Photo: Nik Wheeler.


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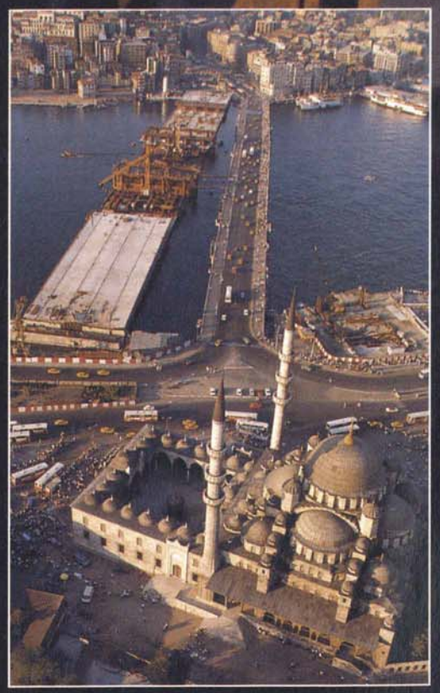


# Remaking ISTANBUL

WRITTEN BY JOHN ROBERTS PHOTOGRAPHED BY ERGUN ÇAĞATAY

The Golden Horn is green, but the sky is grey. Children play in the new parks as, on the new throughway, traffic rolls by. The children have color in their cheeks and a cough in their lungs. On the new road, traffic lights, caution signs, pedestrian crossings and yellow taxis show the healthy colors of the city's improved circulation; the children's wheezing shows that Istanbul's smoky air has yet to be cleaned up.

This is Istanbul in winter: a city of jackhammers and urban redevelopment, of heavy pile drivers pushing the foundations of new buildings deep into the waters which gave the city birth. This is a city striving to regain its ancient place as a world metropolis; a city where new roads and bridges, subways and ferryboats will serve the working man and woman, where fresh-laid parks will serve the child at play.

The roads, parks and other improvements were certainly needed: Stambulus say they have seen their city grow ten-fold in just a generation. The graceful Lady on the Golden Horn, and her daughters in old and new and ever newer suburbs on the European and Asian sides of the Bosporus, are now home to more than 6.6 million people. Her face has changed, and, necessarily, her way of life as well.

The best way to approach Istanbul is still by boat from the Sea of Marmara. The historic skyline of the old city still draws the eye and dominates all else. The seven hills of the city, rolling in a fluent line from the Ottoman Topkapı Palace to the Roman city walls, are yet punctuated by the slim minarets of some of the most beautiful mosques ever built. But on the foreshore, swathes of raw open space mark the construction sites of roads, sewage tunnels, and subway systems. And across the Golden Horn, new skyscrapers are changing the character of Galata and the western suburbs, while office buildings transform the once-remote suburbs of the Asian shore.

Istanbul is a city defined as much by water as by land. Founded on a roughly triangular point of land protruding west and north into the Bosporus like the toe of a Turkish slipper, its function was to control the passage of vessels through that strait, and its harbor on the Golden Horn – the narrow inlet that defines the slipper's northern edge – was world-renowned. Today the Horn may not be golden – nor has it been for 500 years – but it is not as black and foul as it once was. The warren of old *hans* and warehouses, their walls and woodwork blackened by man and time, is vanishing. And in a city sadly short of parks and greenery, there is fresh grass growing close by the water's edge.

The need to balance development and conservation, commercial needs against public aspirations, exists in all historic cities, and particularly in Istanbul. But finding the exact balance is not easy. The pressures of rapid population growth, of transport dislocation and other problems associated with runaway urban expansion, are such that conservation must sometimes appear very much a secondary consideration. Indeed, the Istanbul municipality's general secretary only cited conservation as a priority when he was reminded, at the end of a 45-minute interview, that he had not used the word once in discussing the extensive works in progress for the redevelopment of the city.

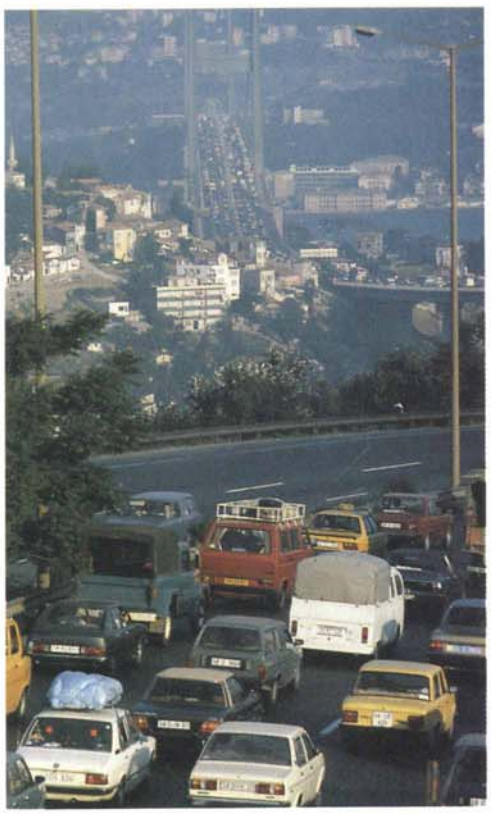
The city's renovation is certainly overdue. Political uncertainties and Turkey's economic weakness combined to frustrate local authorities' efforts to revitalize the city in the generations following the proclamation of the modern Turkish republic in 1923. Progress and change were intermittent: In 1980 the heart of Istanbul looked much the same as it had a generation earlier. No matter how magnificent its architectural heritage, the city that was once the capital of intercontinental empires now looked shabby, the soot and smoke of its industry clinging to its millennial monuments like widow's weeds.

Urban sprawl, inner-city overcrowding and the desperate need to overhaul or replace the city's infrastructure became key issues. In the years following the 1980 military coup, Turkey liberalized first its economy, then its political institutions. Political, economic and social conditions proved ripe for a concentrated effort to transform the city again into an attractive global center.

Although many specific programs, and much of the master plan, were in place before his arrival as mayor, Istanbul's dramatic revitalization is commonly associated with one man: Bedrettin Dalan. Elected in 1984 as a youthful symbol of Turkey's drive for modernization and liberalization, Dalan welcomed the chance to transform the city he loved. Istanbul, he said, was "a beautiful diamond in need of polishing," and in his five years in office he set out to do just that. The Stambulus loved him, and his defeat in the 1989 elections is conceded to be not so much a rejection of the mayor himself as of the party he was associated with at the time, the governing Motherland Party. Since 1989, Dalan has left the party, formed his own, and is now debating whether to run for mayor again or make his entrance on Turkey's national politcal stage.

**The new Galata Bridge across the Golden Horn (opposite) 15 months and (inset) 22 months into construction. On skyline in large photo, Beyazıt Fire Tower and Süleymaniye Mosque; Yeni Camı (New Mosque) is at foot of bridge.**

**Below, rush hour on the first Bosporus bridge and its approach roads.**



**667 BC** Byzas the Megarian founds city

**AD 196** Septimus Severus razes city, later builds new walls and doubles its size

**November 4, 326** Emperor Constantine quintuples city's size

**366** Aqueduct of Valens completed

**413** Theodosius II builds new walls enclosing seven hills

**447** New walls leveled by earthquake, rebuilt to resist Atilla the Hun

During his term, however, Dalan's diamond-polishing metaphor rankled with his critics, who pointed out that it may have been more apposite than he had intended – since, for a diamond to sparkle magnificently, it must first be cut.

Indeed, Istanbul today has been, and is being, recut, as enormous projects begun under Dalan are continued by his successor, Nurettin Sözen. Between Dolapdere and the Golden Horn a great trench has been rammed through Tarlabaşi, a district thick with traditional 19th-century Ottoman houses. Dilapidated yet elegant, they stood in the way of progress, represented by new buildings and a new road which has much improved the flow of traffic around the core of the modern city in Beyoğlu.

Few dispute the necessity of new roads, but some of Dalan's critics felt he put construction ahead of consequences. Yet, defenders replied, Istanbul had been strapped for cash for decades, until the arrival of the free-market-oriented government after 1980. Since then, and particularly after Dalan became mayor in 1984, money was available for redevelopment. And if it was there, then was it not wise to put it to work immediately, and continue the projects while one could? After all, who knows when the next round of national belt-tightening might begin?

Even after Dalan, Istanbul's is perhaps the most ambitious urban renewal program in the developing world. The city budget exceeds $1.2 billion, of which no less than one-third is required for the massive and long overdue overhaul of the city's water and sewer networks. The first person in four centuries to wield direct authority over the city – the result of political reforms which made the mayoralty an elective office rather than a central-government appointment – Dalan was perforce the heir to Justinian the Great, Mehmet the Conqueror and Süleyman the Magnificent, each of whom refashioned the city in his lifetime. But while the city's Roman,Byzantine and Ottoman rulers left palaces, churches, mosques and fortifications as their most obvious legacies, Dalan's chief bequest to his citizens – along with the much-needed sewers – is a road network that has subordinated almost everything in its path to its extensive requirements.

Spinning suspension cables on the second Bosporus bridge (bottom and right) in 1987, and the finished span (below) in 1989, directly behind the towers of Rumeli Hisarı.

"Today we have 500,000 cars in the city – every twelfth person has a car or truck," says Atanur Oğuz, a general secretary at the Istanbul Municipality and once Dalan's right-hand man. "But the world average is one vehicle to every four people. That means Istanbul can expect 1.5 million vehicles to cope with. We must prepare the city for this."

The needed road system is well on the way to completion. A new one-way traffic pattern, its roads built in part on reclaimed shoreland, has eased congestion in the heart of the old city. Between 1984 and 1988, says Oğuz, some 347 kilometers (216 miles) of main roads were both planned and constructed – "50 per cent of our new road requirements."

Nor is it just in the heart of the city that the local road crews are busy. Just north of the waterside Dolmabahçe Palace, the pile drivers and paving machines are completing one of Dalan's most ambitious projects, a new superhighway along the western edge of the Bosporus.

This remains the mayor's most controversial project, as well. Originally, the road was to have been right on the shore, its way cleared by the destruction of wooden water's-edge row houses and some of the elegant *yalıs*, or waterfront villas, where Istanbul's gentry were wont to retreat in summer. There were protests, however, and Dalan quickly relented: The buildings were historic; they would be saved. And they were: The road was built on an elevated platform over the Bosporus, parallel to the shore and in front of the *yalıs*. It was an elegant piece of engineering but a rather literal-minded solution to the problem, ignoring the point of the protests. Conservationists were outraged.

What point was there in preserving the *yalıs* if they were to be separated from the water by a roaring superhighway directly in front of them, asked Çelik Gülersoy, the head of the Turkish Touring and Automobile Club (TTOK). Gülersoy's own conservation and restoration efforts have made him a figure of both renown and controversy in Turkey. The shore road would destroy the harmony linking the Bosporus parkland, the *yalıs* and the swirling currents of the waterway itself. A similar road built a little inland, with feeders down to the water, would have served the same functional purpose without increasing traffic in an area known for tranquility.

Such issues are the very essence of modern urban planning. But the roads are already under construction – some stretches are already in use – and they reach around and through the city, reducing delays, congestion and lost time as well as charm, character and historical values. What was, in the early 1970's, a ring road around the outer limits of the city is now an inner-urban highway. The first Bosporus bridge (See *Aramco World*, September-October 1973), an exceedingly elegant structure with a single span suspended over the channel from graceful towers anchored in Europe and Asia, is one of the city's few modern constructions of real architectural merit. The new second bridge, a copy of the first, opened in 1989 and is just as elegant. But it literally casts a shadow on one of Istanbul's most famous sights, Rumeli Hisarı, the fortress built by Sultan Mehmet to pave the way for his conquest of Byzantium in 1453. Threatened Yıldız Sarayı, a late-Ottoman palace set in one of the loveliest parks in the city, has been temporarily reprieved: Construction of the third Bosporus bridge, which would have overshadowed the palace and destroyed the calm of its placid parklands, has been postponed by budget cuts in Ankara.

Istanbul's planners are sensitive to criticism. The city, they say, may have pushed ahead before the final details of the master plan were in hand, but the individual project studies were complete. Criticisms that new and planned roads do not mesh well with existing ones are dismissed politely: "The critics are not always objective; there are political reasons for criticism," said one senior planner.

**527** Population 500,000

**532** Nika Revolt. Justinian the Great immediately begins reconstruction

**December 26, 537** Hagia Sophia dedicated

**1081** St. Savior in Chora (Kariye Camii) completed

**1349** Galata Tower completed

**1395** Anadolu Hisarı completed

**Summer, 1452** Rumeli Hisarı built

**May 29, 1453** Ottomans conquer city

**1458** Eyüp Mosque completed

**1465** Most of Topkapı Palace completed

**1470** Fatih Mosque completed

**1480** Population 60,000-70,000

Dalan's vision of Istanbul was, and remains, popular as well as populist, and it reaches well into the future. He initiated a plan, not discarded by his successors, intended to show the city how it will be in 2020, by which year the authorities hope Istanbul will be again a world center for business, trade, tourism, sports, culture and the arts.

The plan is founded firmly on infrastructure. In parts of the city, giant sections of sewer pipe two meters (79 inches) in diameter lie by the roadside waiting for the trenches in which they will be sunk – part of the more than 18 kilometers (11.2 miles) of new mains being laid, serving districts as varied as Fatih, in the heart of the imperial city of Stambul, and Eyüp, to the northeast, beyond the city's walls. Paralleling this work is a project designed to bring more than 7,500,000 cubic meters of water – some two billion US gallons – into the city each day, enough to provide about 300 gallons for every man, woman and child. About half of this quantity will come from Lake Sapanca, 100 kilometers (62 miles) east of the city, and a cluster of small rivers beyond the lake. The work is the 20th-century equivalent of the fourth-century Aqueduct of Valens – still in use today – whose columns stride along the spine of Istanbul just past city hall.

Last May, Nurettin Sözen also unveiled a new gas-supply scheme of a similar scale, and, along with roads, the city is giving priority to the creation of new central business districts. "Before Dalan, there was planning only for one downtown core," said Oğuz. "Everybody came to Eminönü, Karaköy.... There were two million coming in the morning, two million leaving in the evening."

Indeed, the crowds of suburban workers still pour into these choked-up entry points every day, arriving by ferryboat, hydrofoil, and bridge from the Asian suburbs, and by bus, train and subway from the European ones. These are the new Stambulus, arrivals one or five or 10 years ago from the Anatolian countryside who emigrated to seek work in the fabled city during Turkey's long and difficult progress toward development. Their loyalties, necessarily, are to their jobs, their livelihoods, but it is such people that Dalan and Sözen strive to serve, for the more they find the city livable, the more they will find it lovable, until their feelings for this great and ancient capital are as strong as those of its long-time residents – as strong as those of Dalan and Sözen themselves.

It is the immigrants' children, not they themselves, who have begun to appreciate the necessity for conservation of Istanbul's unique amenities and to feel their positive impact. On the Asian shore, on one of the few hills to survive the ravages of urban sprawl, pine trees surround the 18th-century pavilions of Çamlıca. Here the young Stambulus come for quiet recreation, gazing over the Bosporus toward the gilded palaces, sipping tea or eating elegant sweetmeats at the coffee houses restored – or designed – by Çelik Gülersoy.

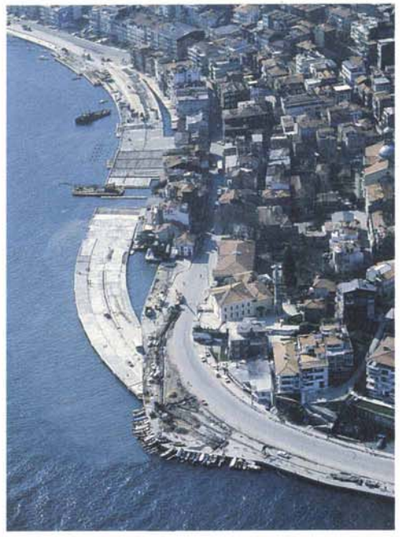
Gülersoy is known for the speed of his conservation and restoration efforts. In 10 years he has restored more than 50 historic buildings, often converting them into profitable restaurants, cafés or small hotels. He is his own interior decorator, ransacking the antique shops of the world for the right furniture to put in the right buildings – and if the furniture is not available, he hires Istanbul's skilled artisans to make him duplicates. From the art nouveau of the summer lodge of Abbas Hilmi Paşa, the last khedive of Egypt, to the quiet simplicity of the wooden houses around the Kariye Camii (St. Savior in Chora), Gülersoy has left his mark. Where once there was a ragtag row of rundown wooden houses clustering along the wall of Topkapı Palace, behind the great church and mosque of Hagia Sofia, today there is a neat hotel, tricked out in fresh pastel colors and with tiny, daintily paved courtyards. Yet the buildings are in fact the same ones, and the colors added to them, says Gülersoy, are merely the shades in which they once were painted.

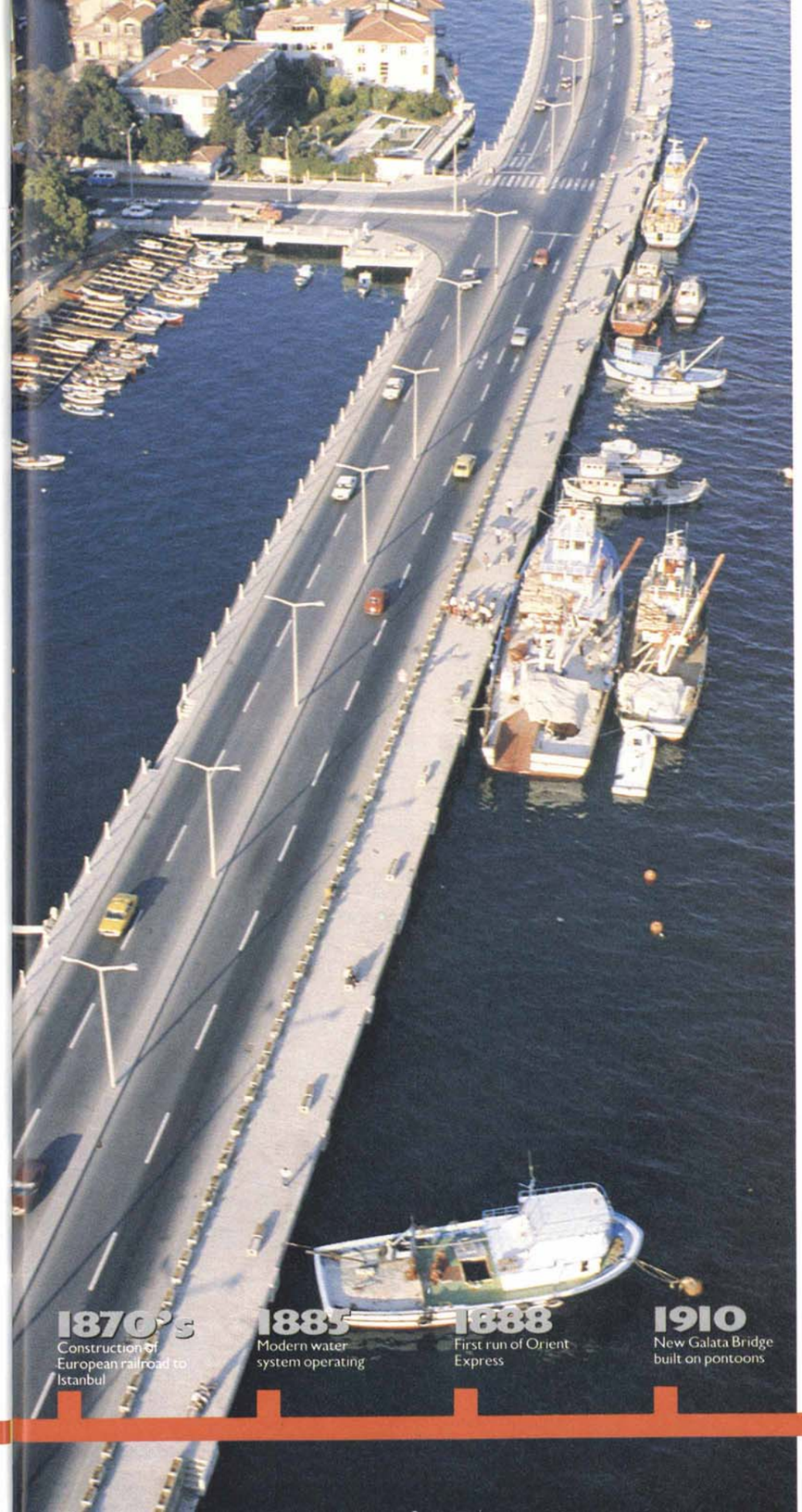
Gülersoy holds strong views on what is happening to the city. He bemoans a lack of respect for tradition, while acknowledging that that tradition ensured Istanbul's physical decline for more than four centuries until the elections of 1984. "The municipality was given enormous financial possibilities – but they didn't consider the cultural costs," he argues. The destruction of the Tarlabaşi site is a particularly painful example to him: Not only were 400 19th-century houses destroyed, he says, but 25-story buildings are going up in the area. "That will mean the total end of the character of that part of the city."

Gülersoy is worried lest the greening of the Golden Horn result in further destruction of the communities along its shores. He is particularly concerned for the character of two districts, the traditionally Greek district of Fener, situated just inside the old Roman walls, and the Turkish "village" of Eyüp, situated just outside the walls and made famous to Westerners by Pierre Loti. The small, two-story houses so characteristic of both districts face possible elimination, or at least the loss of their views of the Horn, since new high-rise apartment blocks are planned at the edge of the newly-created waterfront parks and playgrounds. Gülersoy terms such development "a ridiculous copy of the French and Italian rivieras."

Yet change is needed. A city which aspires to be both a contemporary world center for business and a living monument to almost 16 centuries of imperial Roman, Byzantine and Ottoman rule desperately needs to shed some of its grimier aspects. Heavy industry is being moved out wherever possible. The dockyards estab-

Shoreline demolition of old buildings (below) along Golden Horn below Galata Tower, and seafront highway construction along the Bosporus at Arnavutköy (below) and Büyükdere (right).





**1557** Süleymaniye Mosque completed

**1616** Sultan Ahmet (Blue) Mosque completed

**1663** Yeni Cami (New Mosque) completed

**1830's** Steamship service to Istanbul inaugurated

**1838** First Galata Bridge built across Golden Horn

**1853** Dolmabahçe Palace completed

**1870's** Construction of European railroad to Istanbul

**1885** Modern water system operating

**1888** First run of Orient Express

**1910** New Galata Bridge built on pontoons

**1912** Electric light introduced

**1960** Population 700,000

lished on the Golden Horn in the 1950's are being moved to new centers, one near Haydarpaşa, on the Asian side, the other 50 kilometers (30 miles) away, on the Sea of Marmara. Bit by bit, the new parks are growing. When Dalan took office, the city had just over four square meters (43 square feet) of greenery for every person. Some five years later the figure was nearly seven square meters, or 75 square feet. The target is ten meters – 107 square feet.

"Until yesterday, Istanbul was a green city," recalls Professor Metin Soysen, who advises the Turkish parliament on cultural and historical issues. "In the heart of the city there were actual forests. Some are still there, but the dense construction close to the forest has meant that the city has lost its dominating color. You can feel this especially along the Bosporus," he adds.

Soysen is working with the city authorities to rectify the situation. His work involves the renovation of the 19th-century palaces from which the later Ottoman sultans ran an empire stretching from the Arabian Gulf to the Adriatic Sea. "Once the insides of the palaces were renovated, the Istanbul municipality cooperated in renovating their surroundings, in resettling the grounds. Now we are preparing environmental plans for the area and giving them to the municipality."

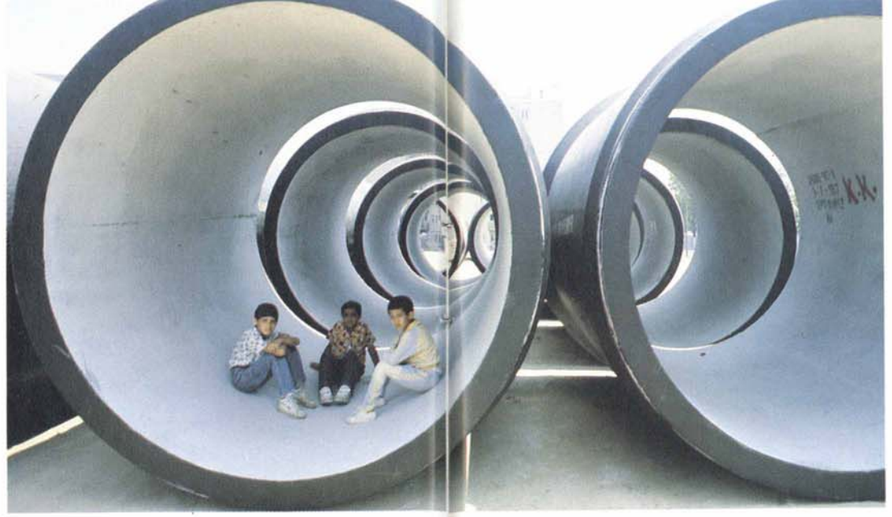
Soysen is also trying to convince the city to do more to preserve its historic buildings. Dalan was particularly proud of the restoration work being carried out on the city walls, one of the great symbols of the city. The massive towers of the Belgrade Gate are still being rebuilt, and it may well be that the project will not be finished until the walls are as complete and pristine as they were when the emperor Theodosius had them built 1500 years ago. But the walls are not the most difficult restoration. At root, the problem is that almost every square meter of the imperial city, and large sections of the major European and Asian suburbs as well, are potential architectural and archeological treasure-troves. The character of Istanbul has largely been determined by the splendor of its imperial monuments, religious and secular. Unless they are restored, the city's character will be determined in future by these massive infrastucture projects instead, carried out on a scale not seen since the great Ottoman architect Mimar Sinan was in charge of public works four centuries ago.

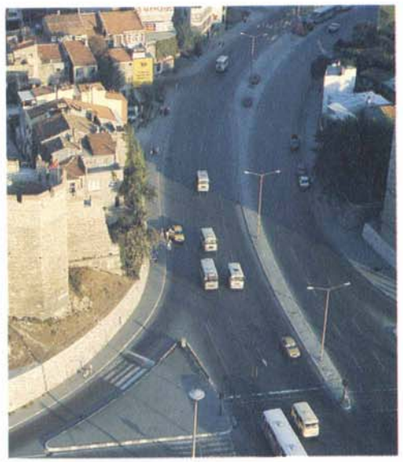
Somewhat unusually, at least one of the major contractors has considerable experience of conservation work. The Yapı Merkezi company is the Turkish partner in the extremely complex project to build a 23-kilometer (14.3-mile) rapid-transit system from the heart of the old city to the newer northern suburbs near the city's Atatürk Airport. Work on the "steel necklace," as the company terms the project, began in 1986 and the aim is to have it in operation by the end of 1991, along with a new railway tunnel under the Bosporus to Asia. In the past, the company has worked on such delicate projects as the restoration of the Galata Tower, one of the great landmarks of the city's former Genoese quarter, the reconstruction of Atatürk's boyhood home in Salonika, and the preservation of a medieval bastion in Algiers.

Yapı Merkezi's chief executive, Ersin Arıoğlu, politely contrasts the "more mechanized and engineering viewpoint of Mayor Dalan" with the "more humanistic approach" of Çelik Gülersoy. As the city's first elected mayor, Dalan had to prove his ability to get things done. In consequence, says Arıoğlu, municipal officials sometimes leapt before they looked. "In a very short time they must do a lot of things. Sometimes they acted too fast, but this was because the people are pushing them," he adds.

Nonetheless, Arıoğlu is convinced that Istanbul is broadly on the right course. "The face of Istanbul will be changed after a few years. It will be a pleasant place to live in 10 years' time," he affirms.

Clockwise from right: Pipe sections for a new sewage system; renovated Edirne Gate in city walls; new metro in use above ground; shoreline highway under construction along Sea of Marmara; and hydrofoil ferryboats to Princes' Islands.






This may well be true in some parts of the imperial city where proper water supplies, drainage and transport networks will all work to benefit ordinary people. But it will not resolve the question of the Bosporus. "There are some things that are very important examples – symbols – of history," says Professor Soysen. "The Bosporus is one of them. In my opinion, none of us should try to change the Bosporus. On the other hand, 6.6 million people living in Istanbul have to use it. In my opinion, we need very detailed and long studies of projects which involve the Bosporus. Water traffic should be encouraged and highways should be on the hills. Further construction on the Bosporus should be stopped, so that it is not such a concentrated area in terms of population."

Dalan's legacy – including his impact on the Bosporus – is considerable. The new highways, the sewers, the metro system are major accomplishments and, because of the force of his personality and his personal central role in implementing so many projects prepared by his predecessors, the city's transformation will be indelibly associated with him. His successor, Sözen, is far less charismatic, and far less controversial. More important, he must run the city not in a period of economic expansion but in a more straitened era, with the government in Ankara ordering public-sector spending cuts.

Yet the controversies over the relative merits of construction, restoration, conservation and development go on, running as deep as ever. The conversion this year of Hagia Eirene, one of the loveliest of early Byzantine churches, into a concert hall has evoked strong emotions in those who treasured its sense of solitude.

One city planner summed up the effects of the changes in the city this way. "This is a historical city," he said. "The city planner must be careful; he must consider the beauty, the esthetic aspect. I believe Dalan was an Istanbul lover – he was *the* Istanbul lover. I believe he felt for Istanbul. But sometimes lovers can be dangerous: They can love too much."

*Veteran business journalist John Roberts has had a lifelong interest in the Middle East and its trade. He is now senior editor with the* Oil Daily Energy Compass *in London.*

**1970** Population 2,300,000

**October 29, 1973** First Bosporus Bridge opened

**1981–1984** Negotiations for financing water and sewer projects

**1984** Dalan elected mayor

**1986** Construction of light rail system begins

**1988** Second Bosporus Bridge opened

**1989** Sözen elected mayor

**1990** Population 6,600,000

**1991** Light rail system to be completed

**1993** Water supply project to be completed

**1996** Metro and Bosporus train tunnel to be completed

# FINDING THE RANGE

DUKE UNIVERSITY

It was an odd sort of college cheer: All the students in Duke University's basketball arena were bowing in unison.

But that was their way of celebrating their Egyptian-born star, Alaa Abdelnaby, during his undergraduate years – years in which he grew to be one of the nation's best amateur basketball players. On June 27 Abdelnaby is expected to take the first step toward turning professional: He will be one of 54 college players selected in the National Basketball Association draft.

Power forward Abdelnaby, who spreads 109 kilograms (240 pounds) nicely over his 208-centimeter-tall (six-foot 10-inch) frame, is one of the better prospects, and a career in the NBA would fulfill the same kind of dream for him that his father dreamed – and fulfilled – 20 years ago, when he left Egypt bound for opportunity in the United States.

"Just imagine yourself in that situation," Alaa says as he marvels at his father, Abdelhamid. "Not being familiar with anything around you in a big city like New York. Not knowing what to do in the next five minutes – let alone for the rest of your life."

When Abdelhamid Abdelnaby left Alexandria for New York, his assets were an engineering degree, his Muslim religion, and very little English. He left behind his bride, Ferial, and their baby son, Alaa. For six months, he worked in a factory, struggling to make ends meet. Finally, he landed an engineering job and sent for his family. Young Alaa was just 2½.

"My father has a lot of pride and fire," Alaa says. "Everything he does is for the sake of his family. I wish I had some of that fire."

For three years, Duke's basketball coaches and players wished the same. When head coach Mike Krzyzewski recruited Abdelnaby from his Bloomfield, New Jersey, high school, he thought he was getting a top-level player: The boy had been state athlete of the year, and he had uncanny shooting ability.

But the young prospect did not deal well with high expectations. He worried about mistakes. He sulked. He pouted. "I think it hurt him when he didn't have the impact everyone thought he would," says Duke assistant coach Tommy Amaker. "It took him some time to accept that he would have to work a lot harder than he had expected."

For three seasons Abdelnaby floundered. For a time, he was suspended from the team for academic reasons. He averaged only 5.9 points and 2.5 rebounds a game, and played little part in Duke's successes in the national college tournaments in 1988 and 1989.

Abdelnaby now admits that what held him back was heart. "A person is judged by his actions and deeds," he says. "Until a year ago, I was the guy bouncing checks and being suspended. Then I decided to show myself that I had another side that could concentrate and get the job done on the court."

In his final college season, Abdelnaby was instrumental in Duke's advance to the NCAA Tournament's championship match. He played with enough confidence to score 15.1 points a game, and enough muscle to average 6.6 rebounds. And he shot so well that he brought his career field-goal average up to a remarkable 59.9 percent, a Duke record.

Playing basketball with discipline and heart, Abdelnaby earned a chance to play professionally, and will likely sign a contract later this summer with an NBA team. Unlike his father's, the obstacles Alaa overcame were internal, not external – but both men found their way to opportunity at last.

*Ron Morris is sports editor of the* Durham Morning Herald *in North Carolina.*

WRITTEN BY RON MORRIS
PHOTOGRAPHED BY DAVID KLUTHO/SPORTS ILLUSTRATED

"Lam Alif" by Kamal Boullata

# FROM JERUSALEM

WRITTEN BY ANNE MULLIN BURNHAM

PHOTOGRAPHED BY NIK WHEELER, CHAD EVANS WYATT AND KAZUO MURATA

Art comes from the roots. Every artist begins, as poet Philip Booth tells us, when he or she "climbs up Eden's hill in his own back yard." Yet exile from that back yard, from its rich inspiration, can be valuable as well as painful: Exile can help an artist to see more clearly in memory what was too close for clarity in actual experience. Exile, and the lens of new surroundings, allows for the re-interpretation of the images of childhood and homeland. And exile can make new departures possible.

In exile in Paris, Marc Chagall recreated the rich tapestry of his Russian childhood in the expressive colors of the fauves. Picasso, years away from his Spanish birthplace, returned again and again to the theme of the bullfight and made the bull one of the most powerful images in 20th-century art. James Joyce had to leave the stultifying atmosphere of turn-of-the-century Dublin before he could immortalize it in *Ulysses* and begin a new literary era. Joseph Conrad and Vladimir Nabokov, in the acquired language of their exile, each wrote new pages in the story of English literature.

Even more than the rest of us, it seems, exile profoundly affects artists. How differently and how distinctly they can respond to its challenges is demonstrated by three painters, all of whom were born in Jerusalem, each of whom has resettled in a very different part of the world.

In a serene, light-filled apartment just off one of the busiest thoroughfares of the 16th arrondissement of Paris, Jumana El Husseini recreates in her paintings the images of the Palestine of her girlhood. Paint brushes and palette knives are arranged like a still-life in a copper bowl on a contempoarary table, but large wooden mirrors inlaid with shell and delicate pieces of pink Syrian glass echo her Middle Eastern origins. In the courtyard outside, the sound of chirping Parisian birds triggers her memories of summers in Jericho and walks on the Mount of Olives.

El Husseini was reared in her grandfather's home, in the first house to be built outside the old walls of Jerusalem. For her, exile began unexpectedly: A 1947 Christmas visit to a married sister in Beirut was protracted by the outbreak of war, and her stay there lengthened until she married and had a family of her own. Separated from Jerusalem, she accepted Beirut as her home away from home.

A few chance art courses opened a new world for El Husseini. In art, she explains, she discovered a salve for the loss of her homeland. "I found Palestine again on canvas. I live my youth, my early days there – all the memories, the birds, the flowers, the butterflies, the greenery, the Dead Sea, the windows, the doors, the skies of Palestine. This is where I found myself."

Painting for herself initially, and then exhibiting in Beirut, El Husseini had her first international exhibition in London in 1965. Since then, her work has been shown throughout the Arab world, in Europe, the United States, and in Japan. Today, she is a well-established and successful professional whose paintings are in collections around the world.

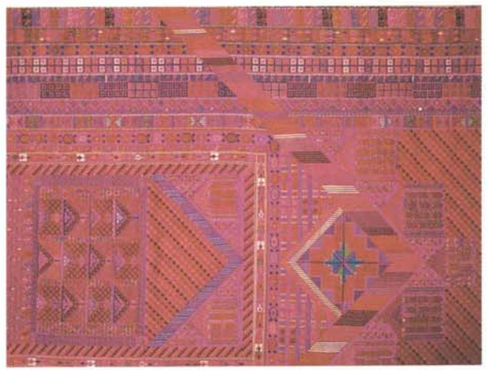
Like turning the pages of an autobiography, El Husseini shows a visitor painting after painting, each one representing a step in her artistic and emotional odyssey, each one capturing aspects of the Palestine she still misses daily, still returns to daily in her imagination. "Palestine is my inspiration," she says, "whatever the happiness, the sadness, the strength, or the misery."

Her first paintings were in squares with wide, frame-like borders – "frames for memories," she called them. Inside the borders, like scenes glimpsed through a window, El Husseini, working directly on the surface, captured her personal memories: architectural elements from the house of Jerusalem, flowers, trees, minarets, and faces. Each element is realized with icon-like reverence; simplified forms combine with bright colors frozen in timeless, stylized settings. Traditional motifs assume a lyricism that evokes a mystical, almost mythical past.

A return trip to Jerusalem in 1967 prompted El Husseini to begin sketching the city directly, rather than relying for inspiration on her storehouse of memories. From that time on she took a sketch pad along wherever she went on her visits, recording old architectural details as new construction began to change the face of the cities, documenting the customs and the folklore. "I felt I was preserving a way of life that was threatened," she says.

From these sketches, her distinctive paintings of cities emerged: Jerusalem with its towering domes and minarets, Jericho with its mixture of wooden and mud houses and tropical vegetation, Jaffa's domes in a symbolic orange hue, Haifa's unique windows, the colored tiles of Madina or the old wood houses of Makkah.

Using palette knives and other implements, or applying paint directly from the tube and mixing in sand or other material, El Husseini developed textured surfaces in her paintings, the impasto creating three-dimensional effects often highlighted with gold leaf or silver. Sometimes, textured passages are juxtaposed with smooth, brushless areas for greater effect.



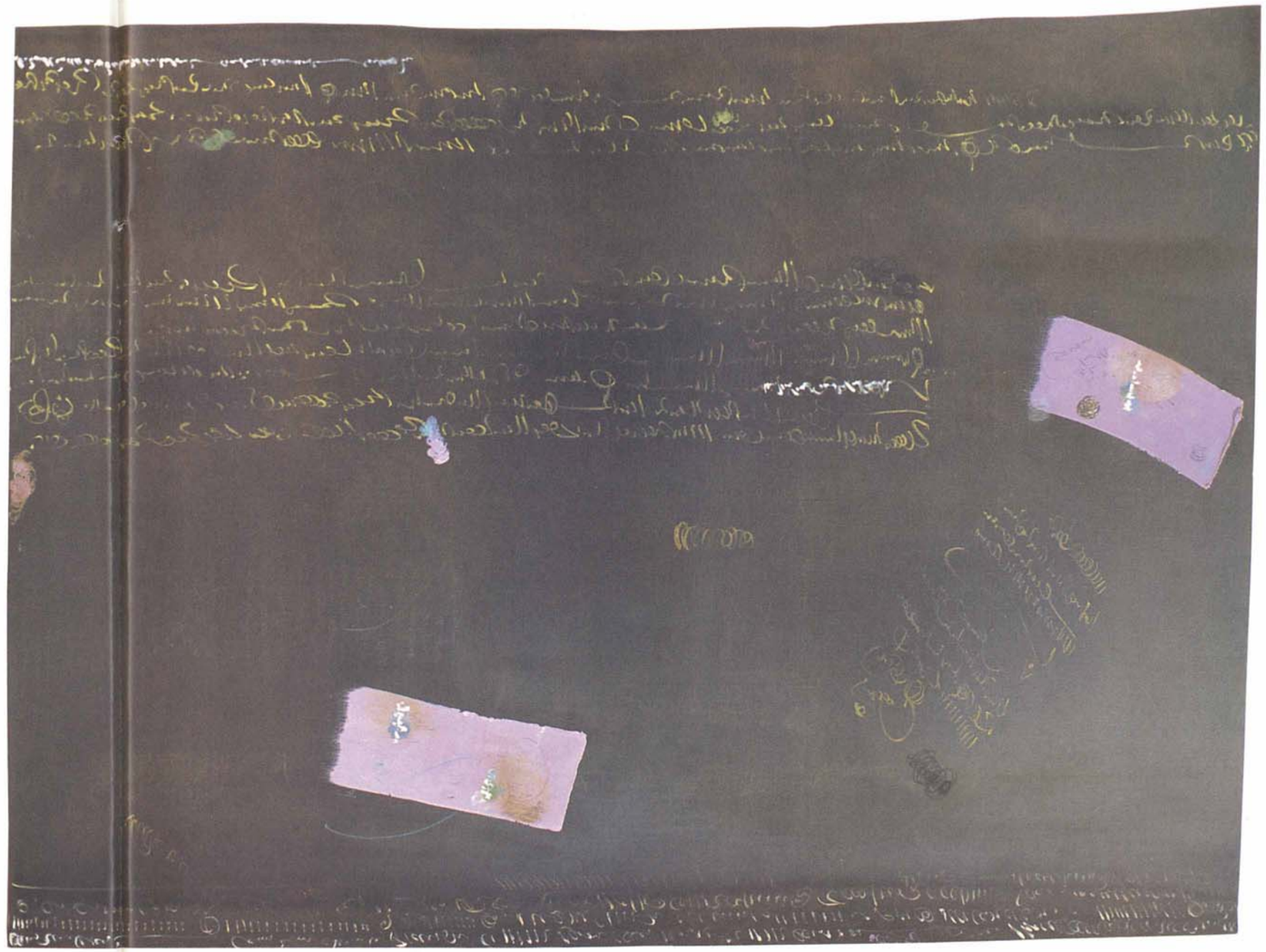
Too distressed to paint when civil war broke out in Lebanon, Jumana El Husseini (above) took up embroidery (right) in traditional Palestinian designs.

Some of the most beautiful and evocative city paintings are symphonies of white on white, where the texture and the gold leaf create subtle interplays of light and shadow. "Jerusalem" (1980) and other paintings in this series show her evolution from a busy, detailed style to simpler, more painterly renditions. The effect is to imbue the subjects with a serene, spiritual quality that brings to mind Wordsworth's description of his poetry as "emotion recollected in tranquility."

Although she says her code of symbolism is a personal one, El Husseini's iconography is never didactic and always subordinated to her painterly concerns. Horses, with their strength and homing instincts, are especially symbolic: "Wherever you put him, he goes back home; he smells the land." Butterflies are uncaged and free, like the birds of Jericho; a tiger in a cactus corral – the traditional way of containing Palestinian livestock – symbolizes proud spirits trapped and constrained; pomegranates are the wedding symbol of good luck and fertility.

Deeply sensitive to her environment and to political events in the Middle East, El Husseini has found that the quantum changes in her style are often triggered by current events. When the civil war broke out in Beirut in 1975, she was too upset to paint. For months, she embroidered instead, weaving family history and symbols into shawls in the rich jewel tones of traditional Palestinian costumes. The oak tree from her home in Jerusalem is there, almost 2000 years old, alongside cypresses, wheat, butterflies, flowers and traditional geometric designs. The embroideries, with their exquisitely rendered scripts of names and events in the borders, are portable, wearable records of a way of life that is gone.





El Husseini's untitled interpretation of her Palestinian roots (above right ) features historical "strata," while "Jerusalem" (right) helps to preserve, she says, "a threatened way of life."

When canvas and oil paint became hard to get, she switched to watercolors. Accidentally tearing the paper on which she was working one day, she repaired it with glue and in the process began to experiment with the use of both watercolor and oil – separated by a layer of glue – in the one painting. The glue gives the effect of a way of life preserved, museum-like, under glass.

In all El Husseini's paintings, color expresses a wide emotional range. Ironically, though, her newest work, in which she is exploring the possibilities of abstraction for the first time, is predominantly black. On closer inspection, however, variations of tone and amoebic shapes in different colors are visible.

Again, the change of style was prompted by political events. "The revolt of the children made me drop everything and become completely abstract," she says. "The paintings are black, but I am in my happiest period. I feel there is a resurgence in everything I am doing now."

In the maelstrom of the Parisian art world, with its numerous galleries and blockbuster exhibitions, Jumana El Husseini charts a quiet, dedicated path in her commitment to her memories and her art. Like the small voices of the birds above the din of the traffic, she makes a strong, distinctive statement that reaches beyond personal emblems to a shared visual language.

In Washington, D.C., no one appears foreign or out of place. With well over 100 embassies and international organizations there, staffed by professionals from all over the world, it is easy to blend into the international community that gives the city a certain non-American air. And perhaps because Washington doesn't project an overwhelming character of its own, it is an easier place in which, as Kamal Boullata says, "to re-invent oneself."

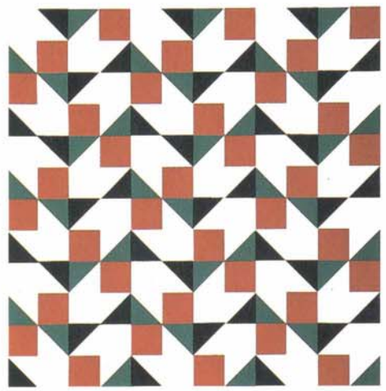
"What brought me to Washington was my attachment to individual Americans whom I had met overseas, at a time when I was left without a country," Boullata explains. What keeps him in D.C. is that the city allows him "to be in it without expecting me to be of it, as I have stumbled to learn how to re-invent myself through my work, and as my work has continued to draw its inspiration, not from my immediate surroundings but from the language and culture I was born to."

As a young man and fledgling artist growing up in Jerusalem, Boullata says he was constantly looking westward, to the artistic traditions and heritage of Europe. Away from Jerusalem, he discovered Islamic art, much as Joyce discovered Dublin after he left the city. "This is something that comes with the realization of one's cultural roots," he says. "In a place like America, one is almost forced to look to one's roots in order to stand where one stands."

Kamal Boullata at Washington's Lincoln Memorial.

Boullata's look backward has led him to an ongoing quest to create for the word – the most powerful Arabic art form and the repository of Arabic consciousness – a visual idiom that fuses content and form.

"Arab culture has always been related to words," he explains. "The word is the only portable tool of expression; nomadic people always express themselves best orally." In dealing with words, Boullata continues, "I am looking into how sound can be translated into sight, how words can be interpreted in visual form. For instance, there are sounds in holy words that are not found in other words – what are the possibilities of putting these sounds into forms?" Or of creating an "iconography which can overlap sound and color, with the purpose of making the function of art a contemplative process?"



Boullata's "Homage to Four Colors" is based on the abstract forms that make up the Palestinian flag.

While, for Boullata, this search developed in the West, its roots are in Islamic, Judaic and Christian sources: in the idea of divine revelation in words, and in the search to make the divine immanent. Viewed this way, the purpose of art assumes an almost sacred role. "I look on art as a monk would look on scripture," he says.

In silkscreened works like "Allah, al-Wahid, al-Majid, al-Wajid, al-Wadud" (God, the Unique, the Noble, the Finder, the Loving), "La Ana, Illa Ana," (There Is No 'I' But 'I'), or "Fil Bid Kan al-Kalima," (In the Beginning was the Word), the point of inspiration is the text with its meaning and its outward, calligraphic form. Boullata conceptualizes the meaning and expresses it by taking elements of the script and abstracting them into flattened complex patterns, using a limited number of colors with wide tonal variations.

For a Westerner, even one with no knowledge of classical Arabic, these images go beyond graphic design or the pleasure derived from color and form. For Arabs, they have a deeper resonance, suggesting in the same color and form the meaning and spirit of the original text. At once ancient and modern, they acknowledge the heritage of Islamic geometric surface design while at the same time suggesting artistic renderings of a computer microchip. The subtle gradations of color and the complexities of the composition in these silkscreens require much time and skill, the same kind of dedication and reverence for the text that inspired ancient Islamic miniatures or medieval European illuminated manuscripts.

Boullata's illustrations of books and poems are another example of how he interprets verbal imagery: not in pictures of particular incidents or characters but in figurative, visual metaphors. In "Al-Buraq," drawn for the poem "Ahmad Zaatar" by Mahmoud Darwish, the winged horse, traditionally represented with a human face, becomes a symbol of the Palestinian people, its body fragmented around the city of Jerusalem, its mane shattered into flames.



Text and calligraphic form are the inspiration for Boullata's silkscreened work "God, the Unique, the Noble, the Finder, the Loving."

Increasingly, Boullata is spending more of his time writing and editing, expanding his bilateral relationship with text and drawing, with content and form. Lately he has been combining his talents in a series of posters for, and introductions to, exhibitions; last year he compiled and wrote the introduction of a book of children's paintings from the West Bank and Gaza, and assembled an exhibition called "It's Possible: 24 Israeli and Palestinian Artists Unite for Peace." He edited a book of Arabic poetry, his writings and translations were published in numerous periodicals, while his paintings and drawings have been exhibited in the Arab countries, in Europe, in Russia and in Japan.

Boullata does not find the tension between writing and painting an impediment to his creativity: As long as a project offers him the chance to "overlap meaning and intuition," he is where he wants to be. Arabs traditionally have two languages, he points out, and "I feel that writing is my written language and painting is my spoken language."

Boullata's current work is a series of serigraphs based on the abstract forms that make up the Palestinian flag. "It will be called 'Homage to Four Colors,'" he says. "I want to explore the different tones of color to express the variability of specific forms, and communicate a new flourishing of a traditional form."

Once again, Boullata is re-inventing himself as he works to bring into being, in his art and writing, what Joyce called "the uncreated conscience of his race."

It is a long way, geographically and psychologically, from Vladimir Tamari's birthplace to his current home, from growing up in the hills of Ramallah to living amid the crowds of Tokyo, where he has been since 1970.

As an Arab and an artist, as well as inventor and scientist, Tamari makes his life, as he says, "on the edges of Japanese society, dreaming of Jerusalem while living in Tokyo." The separation from his homeland is compounded by living in an industrialized, Westernized city within an ancient Eastern culture, a dichotomy which makes him feel like "an exile within exile."

Japanese culture, however, is an ongoing lesson for Tamari in reconciling these opposites, in learning how to bring into harmony his inner life and the outside world – and how to express that fusion in his art. The serene gardens of Kyoto, for instance, are at once material and abstract and are, as he says, "at the borderline between art and reality."

Inventor, optical physicist and artist, Tamari straddles that border himself. Since childhood, he has used watercolors to capture the images of his homeland, imbued with the emotional richness of his life there. At the same time he has continuously experimented with the technical problems of representing the three dimensions of reality on the two-dimensional surface of paper.

Inventor, optical physicist and artist Vladimir Tamari.

His studies in physics at the American University in Beirut and at art school in London combined in attempts to invent a drawing instrument that would allow him to "draw in space."

Although his initial prototype was destroyed in the war in 1967, he began the project anew after he had settled in Japan. Eventually he perfected the 3DD ("three-dimensional drawing instrument"), which, with inexpensive and simple technology, produces the same kind of three-dimensional drawings that expensive computer-aided design programs do. With the 3DD, Tamari did many drawings of Japan and of Palestine, recreating, in effect, the spaces of his memories and his surroundings, bringing both into a new kind of reality.

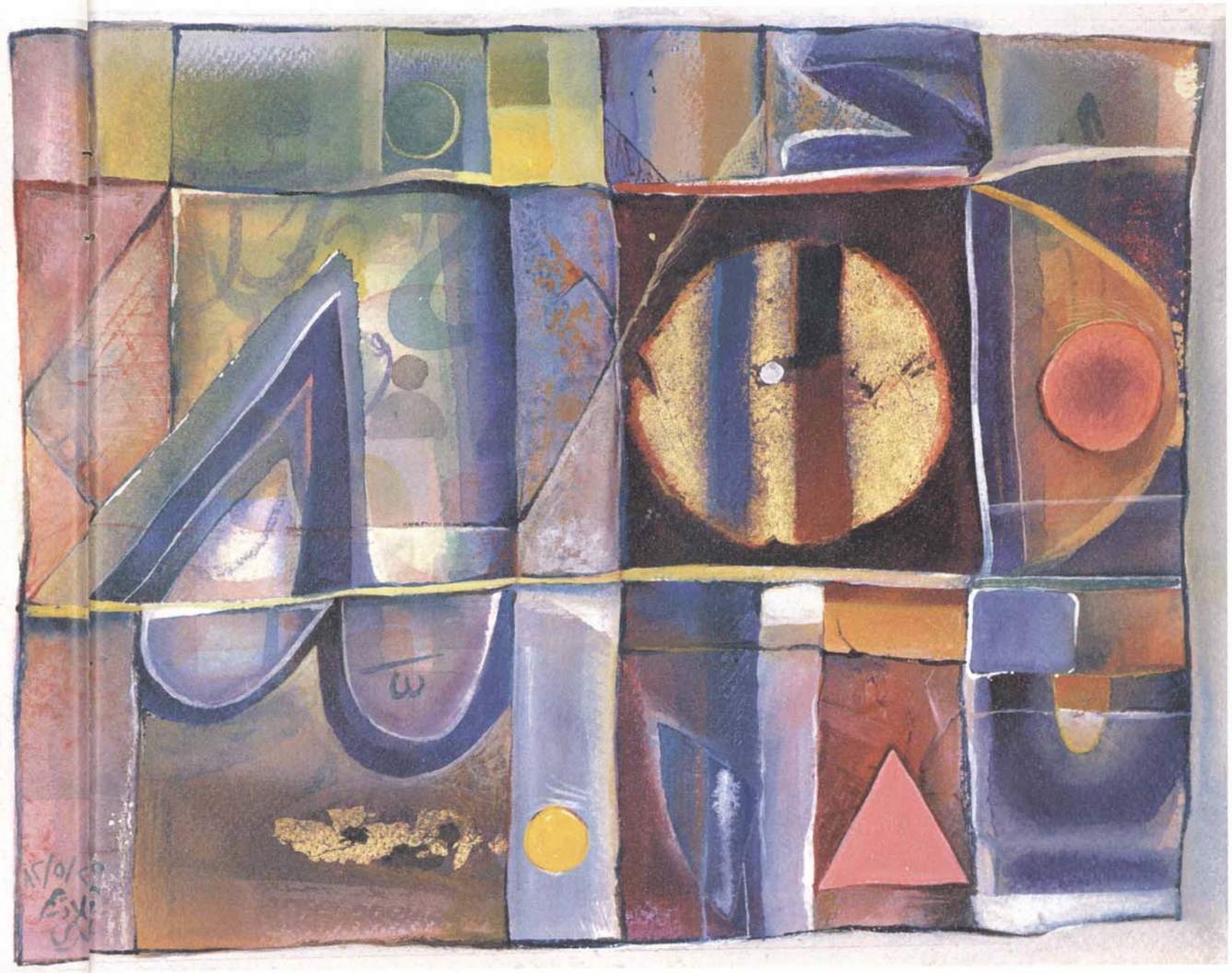
Another of Tamari's inventions, the Perspector, makes accurate perspective drawings easy, without computers and without paper-size limitations. His optical investigations, including the problem of cancellation of diffraction in light waves, are in the tradition of Ibn al-Haytham, the medieval Arab scientist whose treatise *Optics* laid the groundwork for advances in the field made by Renaissance scientists in Europe.

Living suspended between two cultures, away from the artistic and academic mainstreams, allows Tamari an uncontaminated originality of thought and expression that he might not have had in the thick of a particular art movement or scientific group.

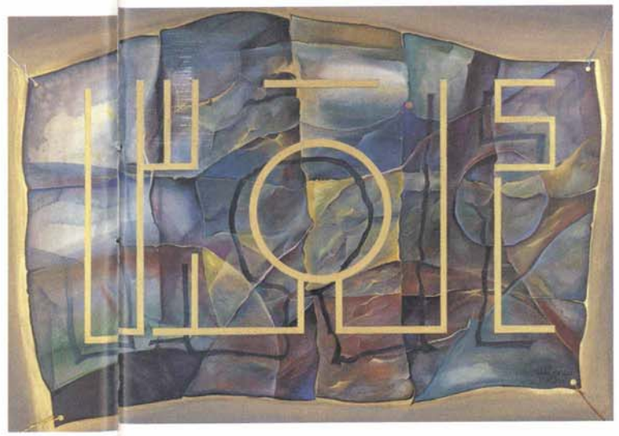
"In Japan I am living in isolation in an over-organized, almost aseptic, society, but somehow this works for me as an artist," he says. Although he worries that his remembered images of Jerusalem and Ramallah will fade with time and distance, time and distance have a salutary effect on them also. "In a way, I experience them anew," he continues. "They become cleansed, crystallized and idealized, and lose anything extraneous."

"Hidden Treasure" shows how Tamari in his paintings unconsciously transmutes images of Jerusalem. The soft, muted colors of the abstract forms are bordered by passages of white and centered by a patch of gold. The effect is reminiscent, he says, "of what one feels to see the glorious Dome of the Rock after walking in the shaded small streets of the Old City." Perhaps unconsciously too, the very composition of the painting suggests a map of the old city and its various quarters, all enclosed by the wall.

Jerusalem, however, is often an overt subject too. "Jerusalem Seen From the Far East" is based on a clear memory of the lights of the city, seen one evening on his way back from Jericho. "Here, the very distant twinkling city is perched on top of the brooding and voluptuous hills of the desert between Jerusalem and the river," he explains. "The hills and the sky are visible, and the miniature city is centered in the golden circle of the letter Q of al-Quds, which means 'The Holy One,' and is the Arabic name for Jerusalem." And of course, Tamari points out, the "Far East" of the title can be interpreted not only as Jericho, but also as Japan. The luminous, symphonic color scheme of paintings like this is, Tamari asserts, quite unconscious. Color is something he has never studied;



Tamari's abstract "Ya Allah" characterizes the unity of the old city of Jerusalem.



"Jerusalem Seen From the Far East" is based on Tamari's memory of its twinkling lights – now viewed from Japan.

for him it is primitive and instinctive and, he feels, must come from his childhood, from the bright colors and clear light of Palestine.

"Ya Allah," while divided into grids and circles and geometric forms, has through its color harmonies and infusion of light an overall unity with a patina-like atmosphere that Tamari feels is characteristic of the old city of Jerusalem. These abstracted and sublimated images, their forms defined by light and their airy sense of space, represent Tamari's love for a city that for him, growing up, encapsulated "a model of the world in all its humanity, sanity, beauty and suffering and joy.... I am," he says, "a living time capsule of Palestine."

This sense of containing memory may be why Tamari chooses to work in watercolor, a medium that leaves its imprint on the paper and can't be painted over as oils or acrylics can.

And while Tamari has found ways to wash papers to remove the outward signs of earlier work, watercolors, he says, like the human mind, "keep the memory of what you first put on – and whatever that is, you work with it."

*Dublin-born Anne Mullin Burnham is special projects director of the International Poetry Forum and a free-lance writer specializing in the arts, travel and food.*

# FISHING IN THE PONDO

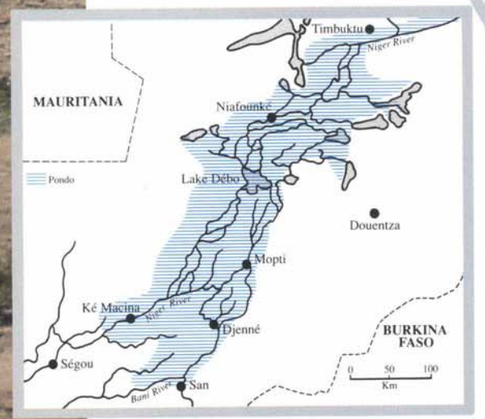
WRITTEN BY PIERRE MAAS AND GEERT MOMMERSTEEG
PHOTOGRAPHED BY BRYNN BRUIJN

Like all the great rivers of Africa, the Niger passes through several countries before flowing home to the ocean. Though its delta, in Nigeria, is less than 2000 kilometers (1200 miles) from its source, the river curves in a huge arc through four countries and forms the border of a fifth in its 4200-kilometer (2600-mile) journey.

Rising in the Fouta Djallon highlands on the border of Sierra Leone and Guinea, the river first flows northeast to reach Mali. In this landlocked country of the Sahel, the Niger, grandly flowing through the dry and dusty savannah landscape, is a critically important source of water. In a good year, only 20 to 50 centimeters (eight to 20 inches) of rain falls here, and not all years are good ones.


Between two of the major cities of Mali, Ségou and Timbuktu, the terrain falls hardly at all, and the river divides into multiple braided branches, a network of interconnected watercourses that includes some large lakes. Here – if the rains do not fail – the river overflows its banks every year, and during the rainy season the bush changes into swampland traversed by many streams and creeks. This is the Inner Niger Delta, or, as the local people call it, the Pondo.

For many centuries, people have lived in this potentially rich and prosperous region. As early as the third century BC small Iron-Age settlements existed here, and some of the villages developed into wealthy cities around the end of the first millennium. The best known of these are Djenné and Timbuktu.




The florescence of these commercial towns was related to the Islamization of the Pondo. Berber merchants and Moroccan traders from the north had brought the Qur'an with them well before the 13th century, and spread its message among the inhabitants of the cities. In the late 14th century, traders of the Mali Empire opened up routes to the Begho gold fields, on the borders of modern-day Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire, and both Djenné and Timbuktu became important centers of the gold and salt trade between that area and North Africa. Prosperous Timbuktu, especially, was able to support a population of Muslim scholars and theologians that gave it a great reputation as a center of Islamic learning in the 15th and 16th centuries.

Nonetheless, traditional beliefs held out much longer in the surrounding countryside. Not until the 19th century, when a local leader of the Peul herdsmen proclaimed a religious campaign against paganism, did the majority of the Pondo peoples embrace Islam. Today between 70 and 90 percent of Mali's population as a whole is Muslim.

Because of the annual inundation of the Pondo from June until October, every village and town in the area is situated on a small hill, an island in a flat landscape. From a distance, the settlements all look alike: a mound on which the mud buildings form a skyline that is dominated by the towers of the mosque, pointing into the air like fingers. The origin of one such island, a small one near the village of Gomitogo, is explained this way by local legend.

During the construction of the Great Mosque of Djenné, they say, a *jinni*, or supernatural being, was on its way to the town, carrying mud for the new building. But another *jinni*, returning from the site, reported that the mosque was already finished. Since the mud was not needed anymore, the first *jinni* tossed it out of the basket he had been carrying on his head. Fallen to the ground, the mud formed the Gomitogo island.

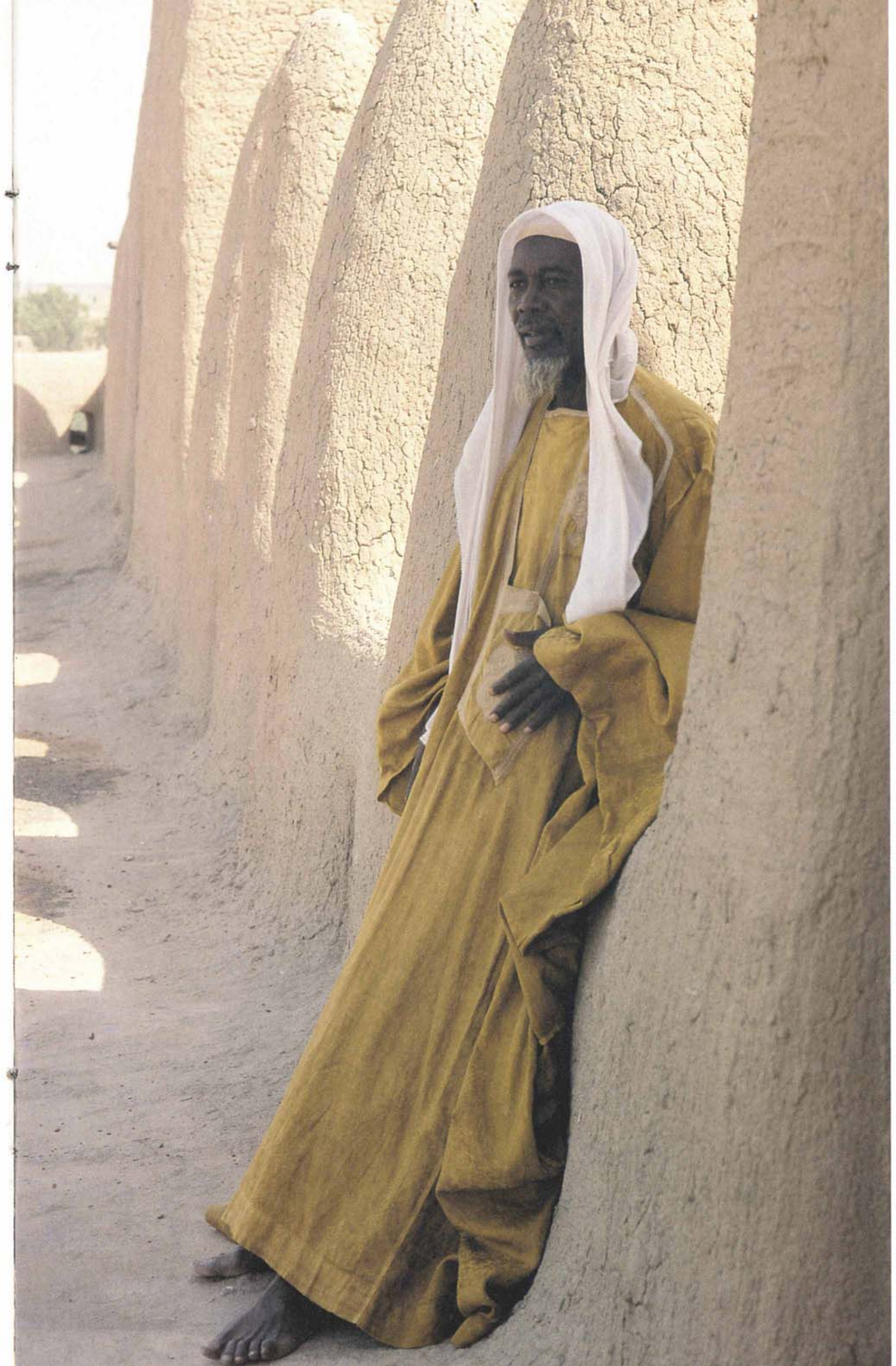
The smaller villages in the Pondo are mainly inhabited by farmers, herdsmen and fishermen. Each of these professions is more or less the exclusive domain of one particular ethnic group.

For the Peul, or Fulani, herdsmen, the Pondo is the pasture where, for part of the year, they graze their herds of cows and flocks of goats. During the growing season, however, they must leave the Inner Delta and are forbidden to return until the cultivators, mostly Bambara, have safely harvested their crops of millet and rice. The fishermen, the Bozo, are the oldest inhabitants of the Pondo – indeed, the word *pondo* derives from their language. Like the Bambara, they rely on the river, for the annual Niger flood not only brings in fertile soil for the farmers but also carries large quantities of fish.

Sirimou is a fine example of a Bozo fishing village. Located six kilometers (nearly four miles) northwest of Djenné, it has about 800 inhabitants and, according to oral tradition, is one of the oldest villages in the Pondo. Though the Bozo of Sirimou are outnumbered by another ethnic group – the Nono, who are farmers like the Bambara – Sirimou is nonetheless considered a Bozo village, because fishing is an essential means of subsistence for the whole population of the place.

From the south, Sirimou looks like a fortress. The mosque, whose architecture is clearly inspired by that of the Great Mosque of Djenné, strengthens this impression with its high, crenelated walls. Because it is built on a small hill, the village is very compact: Small houses, built of loam, abut each other and border the narrow streets, which open into three small squares. Each square has its own function: One is the market place, another serves as the forecourt of the mosque, and the third is the social center of the village, where meetings and festivals take place.





Farming, fishing and herding in the Pondo are each the exclusive preserve of different ethnic groups.

Crenelated walls provide convenient resting places, and make the villages of the Pondo look like fortresses.

Following page: In the Pondo, compact villages rest on island-like mounds, each crowned by the towers of distinctive mud-built mosques.

A typical house here consists of several adjoining rooms clustered around a small courtyard that is separated from the street by a man-high wall. A doorway in the wall, often closed by a hanging mat, connects the courtyard to the street. Each bedroom is accessible only from its adjoining living room, which in turn opens on the courtyard. One room, smaller and blackened by the smoke of cooking fires, is the kitchen – but only the actual cooking of meals is done here. All food preparation, such as the pounding of rice and millet, takes place in the courtyard or in public places: in the streets or under a large tree on the edge of the village. The courtyard also contains the staircase to the flat roof of the house, where laundry is dried and millet stalks – fodder for the dry season – are stored. For this latter purpose, the narrow streets are sometimes spanned by beams to increase the storage area.

As everywhere in the Pondo, Sirimou's mosque dominates the village. It was built about 30 years ago on the site of the former mosque, and it is completely integrated into Sirimou's compact mass of buildings.

After each year of exposure to the elements, the rain-washed, sun-cracked building needs replastering. Near the end of the cold season, in February or March, its mud walls are given a fresh coating of loam. This is a festive occasion for the entire community, and everyone is present when the masons of the village do the work, spreading the mud with their hands.

In the hot season, the Pondo looks dry, dusty and desolate. There is no water in the river beds. For a few months, the sun beats down on the arid fields, where sheep and goats eat the left-over stubble of the last harvest.

But when – or if – the first rains come in June or July, the yellowish-brown vegetation turns green and crops start to grow in the sown fields. Near the end of July, the water in the Niger begins to rise and the dry watercourses fill up. Along with the water, fish come to the Pondo.



Standing in the bow of his narrow pirogue, a Bozo fisherman expertly casts his net for sardine-like *tineni*, which migrate in large schools through the Pondo.

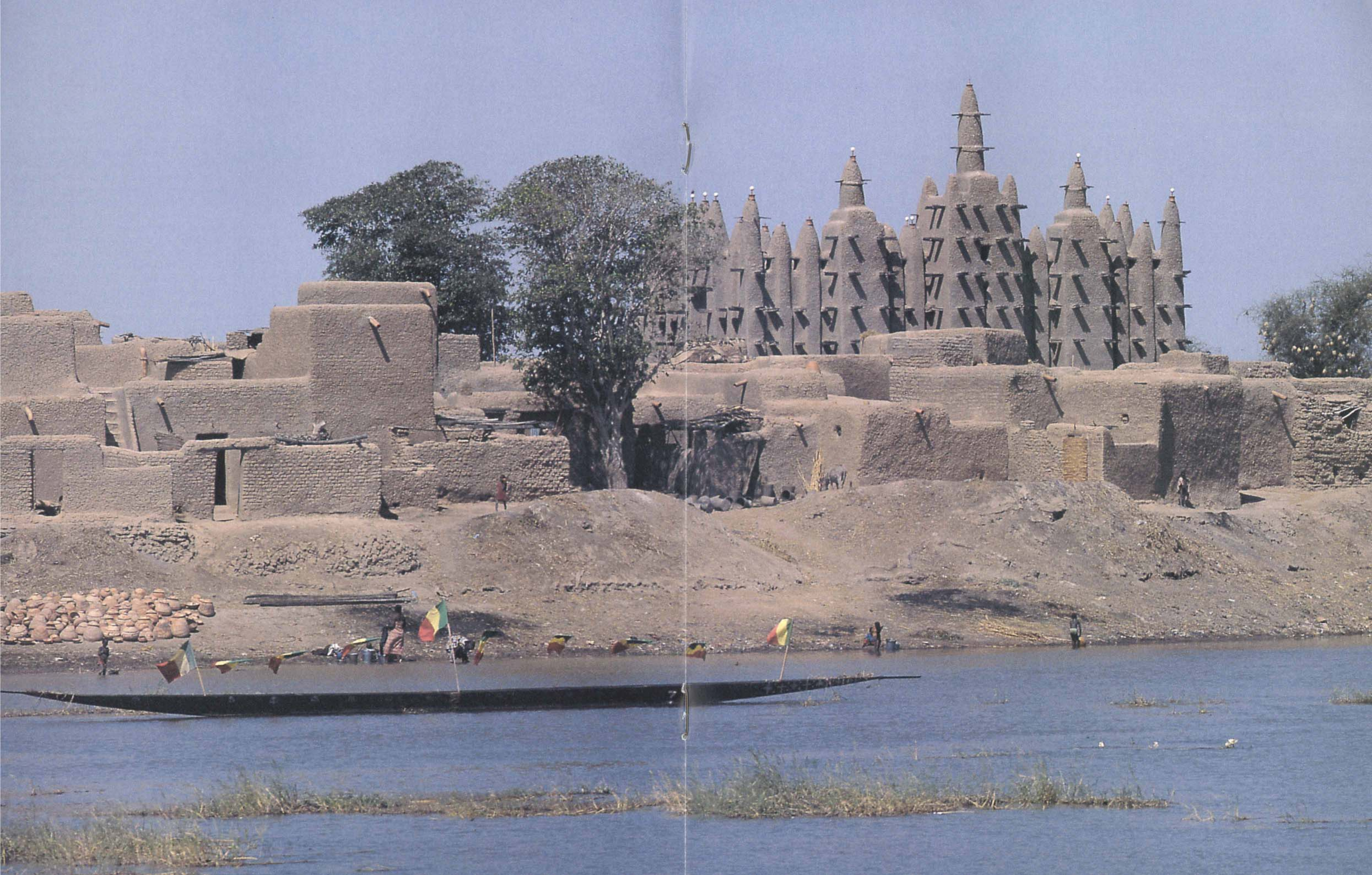
When the water level in the Inner Niger Delta has reached its highest, most fish have reached their greatest weight and are ready to spawn, turning the inundated area into rich fishing grounds. At the end of November, when the water begins to retreat, the actual fishing season starts.

The Bozo fishermen of the Pondo are very skilled. Specialized in their trade, they know the secrets of the water and its creatures. Almost every species of fish, of the rich variety found there, has its own characteristics, exhibits its own behavior and occupies its own biotope; the fishermen's knowledge of where to find which fish and how to catch it is equally various. This knowledge has been controlled by the Bozo since the Pondo was first settled and, within their ethnic group, is handed down from one generation to the next.

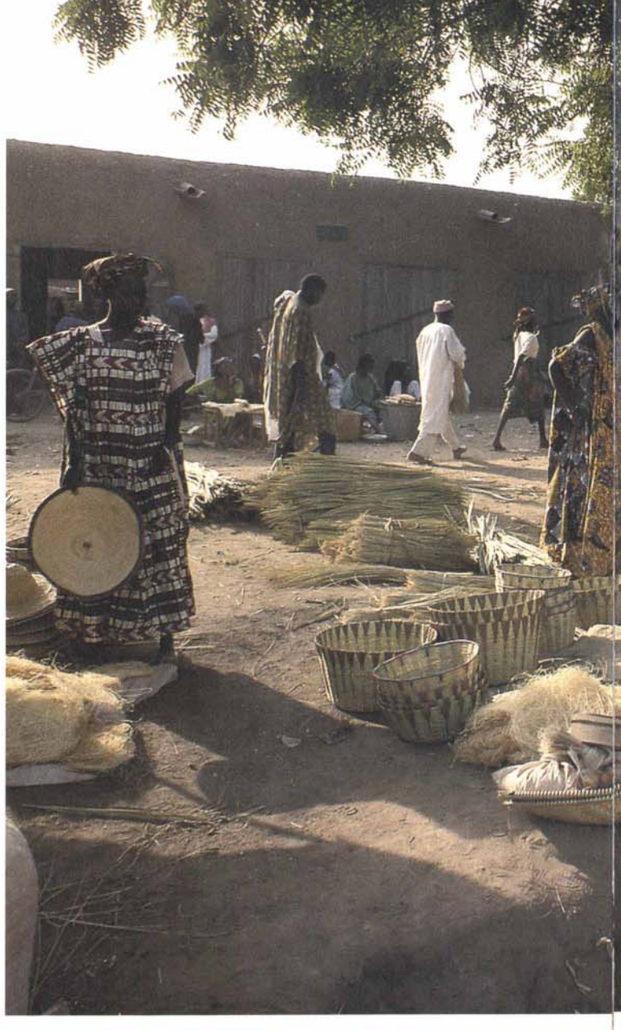
Sardine-like *tineni* (*Alestes leuciscus*) are an important species to Bozo fishermen because of the excellent oil they contain, but considerable skill is needed to catch them. *Tineni* migrate in large schools through the Pondo during the fall and winter, but live in the flooded rice fields during the high-water season. When the water starts to retreat, the farmers enclose their fields in small dikes to hold back the water for their growing rice plants. Before the harvest, though, they break openings in the dikes to let the water stream out, and it is there that the fishermen wait with their nets to catch the small silvery fish.

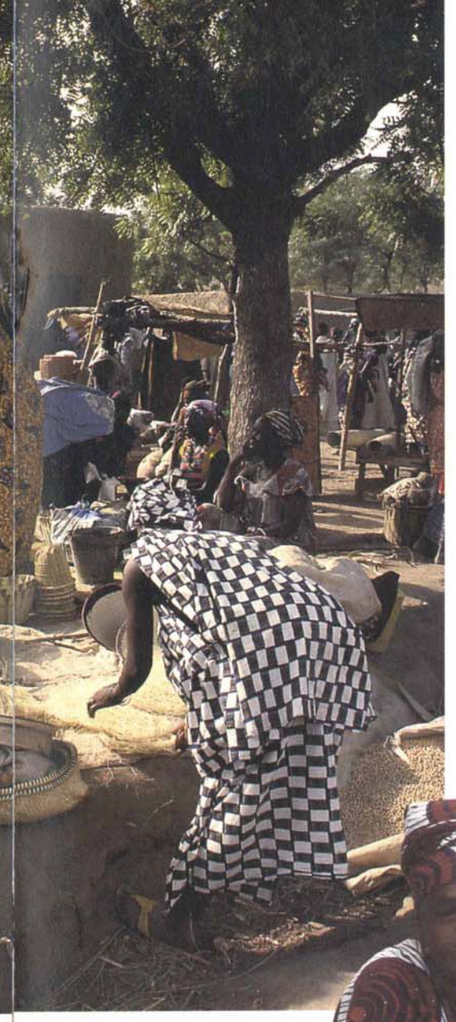
Others, meanwhile, start to fish on the rivers and creeks. Standing in their narrow pirogues, they punt to the places where they know they can expect the best haul. Slowly, they maneuver to certain spots. To the untrained eye, nothing indicates the presence of fish there: All that can be seen is water, the surface of the river flat as a mirror. Then suddenly, a fisherman casts his net. A few seconds later, as it is drawn in, thrashing and sparkling fish roil the water. The fisherman shakes out his net above the boat, and a cascade of wriggling silver covers his feet ankle-deep.

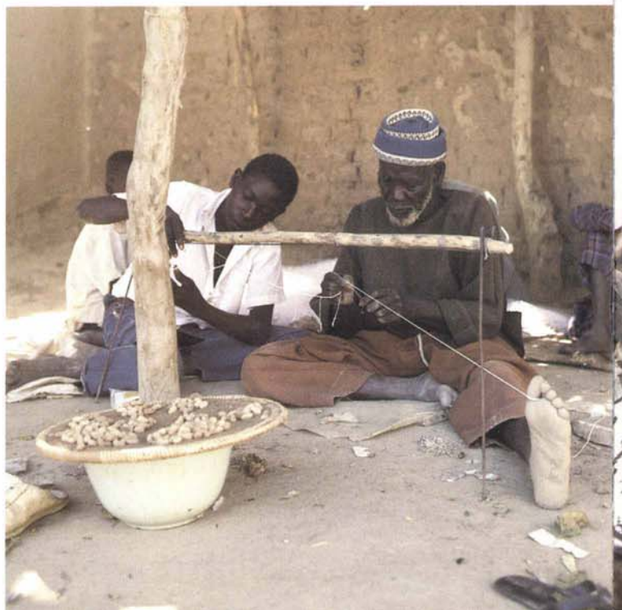
Later in the year, the *tineni* gather in the rivers of the Pondo to form dense schools. Now is the time to make large catches. But since the fish are migratory, the Bozo fishermen must migrate too. Camping beside the river in temporary brush huts thatched with straw mats, the fishermen and part of their families spend months at

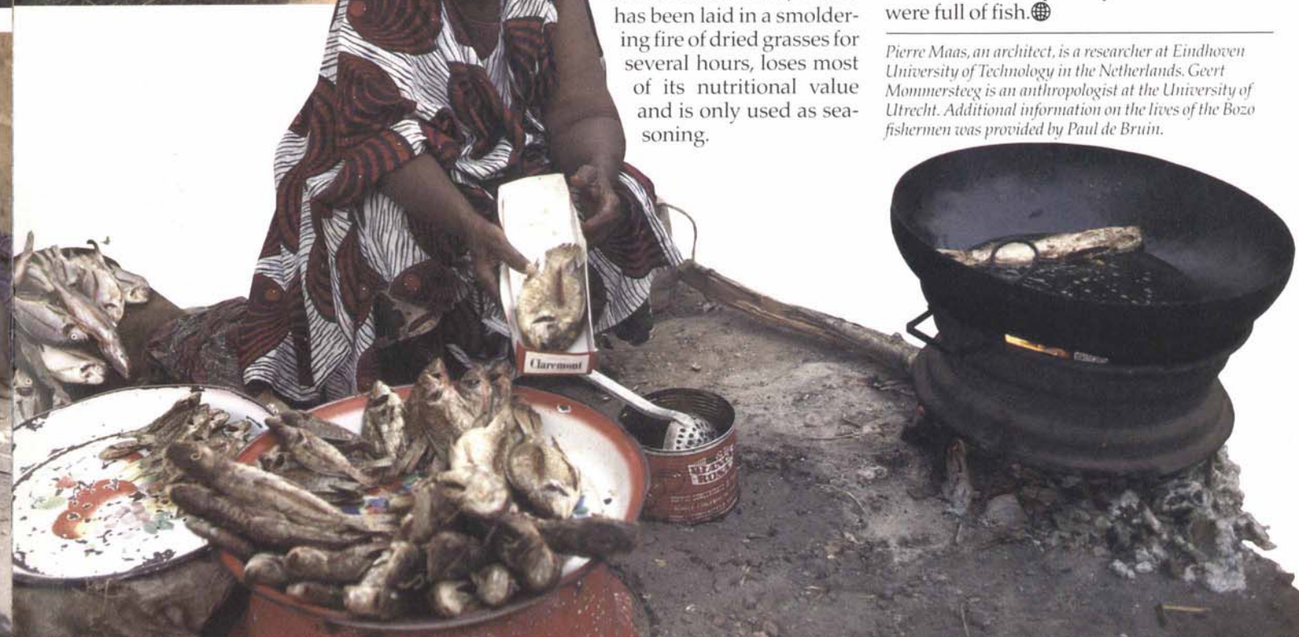


Left, a fisherman empties a mass of wriggling silver into his pirogue, while at a riverside camp, lower right, others prepare long lines. In a typical Pondo village narrow streets open onto small squares, each with its own function. One, above, is the market place, where a fisherman's wife, right, sells her husband's catch.










a time away from the villages. As the fish move, the fishermen follow in boats equipped with outboard motors. Carrying a few belongings with them, they move along the river to pitch another camp and continue to fish the schools of *tineni*.

The catch can be sold either fresh or dried, and since it coincides with the harvest time of most crops, the fish are an excellent means of exchange for the staple foods of the region: rice and millet. However, a fisherman does not trade his *tineni* with just any farmer: The barter in fish and fish-oil is subject to certain rules and traditions, and is carried out with regard to trade relationships consolidated long ago between a fisherman's family and a particular farmer's family or village.

Naturally, the fish must be preserved, since a catch spoils within a day and becomes valueless. While the Bozo men do the fishing, the women preserve the catches ashore, either by drying, smoking or scorching the fish. Dried in the sun, after having been salted, or smoked over a fire under thick layers of straw mats, the fish retain their size and taste and may be kept for approximately six months; dried or smoked fish is an important ingredient in local dishes. Scorched fish, on the other hand, which has been laid in a smoldering fire of dried grasses for several hours, loses most of its nutritional value and is only used as seasoning.

Near the end of the fishing season, about the month of April, the river near the village of Sirimou has shrunk to a stream. Large areas of the Pondo are dried up, and the professional fishermen, their year's work done, have brought home their catches. Now it is time to find the last few fish still in the river – a cooperative project that many of the villagers take part in. Like beaters in a game drive, men, women and children wade through the water with triangular nets in their hands. The small fish are caught in the hand nets, and the big ones are driven upstream into a large net spread across the river.

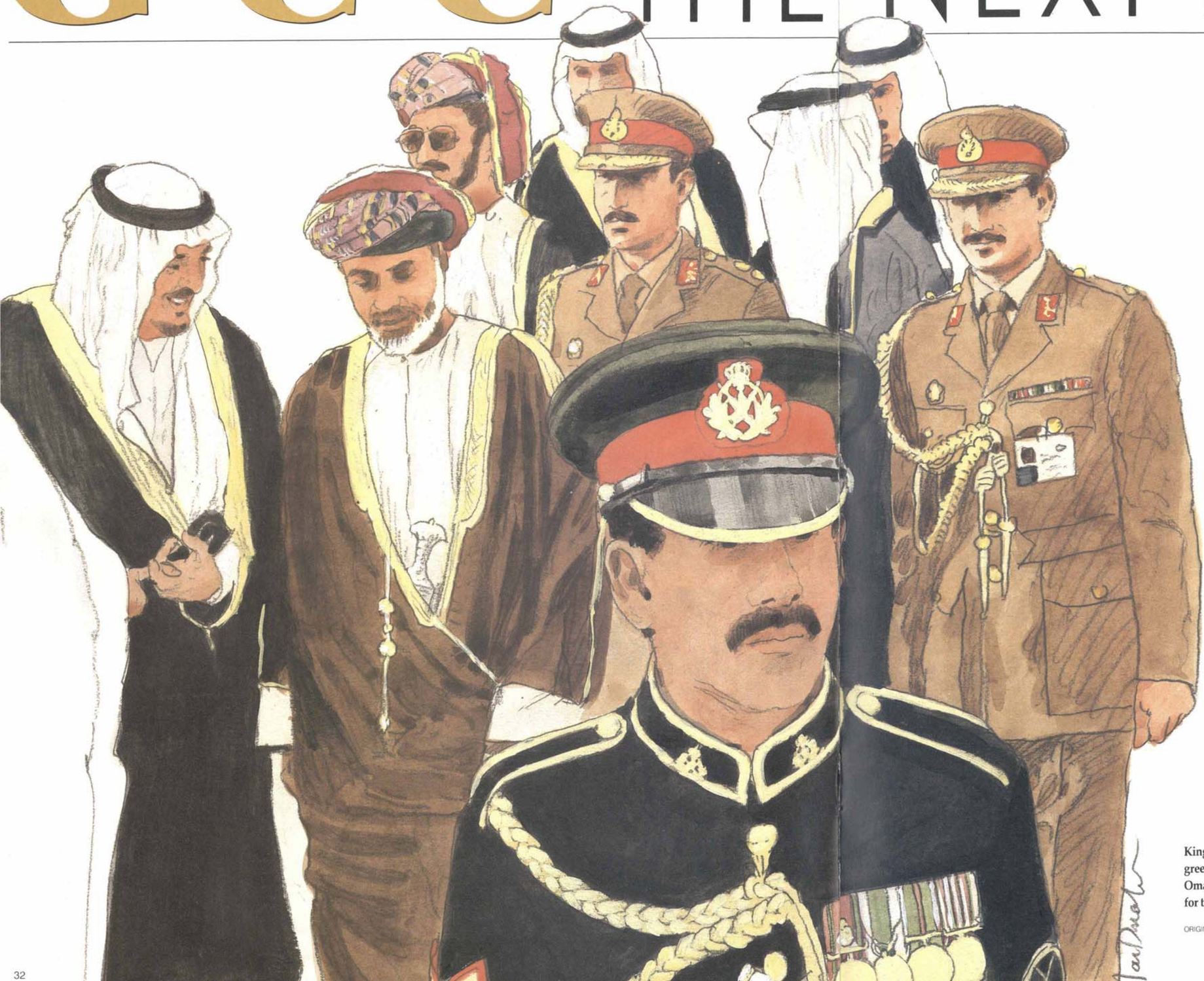
Soon, no fish are left in this part of the Inner Niger Delta and, as everywhere in the Pondo, the Bozo fishermen of Sirimou must wait about four months until their river rises again and brings a new supply of fish – if the river does rise.

After all, this is the Sahel, and the rains are ever uncertain. And even when they do fall, say the old people of Sirimou, and the Niger floods its Inner Delta, it will never be as it was during the first decades of this century. The days before the great droughts of the early 1970's and mid-1980's are gone forever.

Those were the times, they say, when the Pondo was the granary of a large part of West Africa, when the harvests were abundant and, especially, when the waters were full of fish.

*Pierre Maas, an architect, is a researcher at Eindhoven University of Technology in the Netherlands. Geert Mommersteeg is an anthropologist at the University of Utrecht. Additional information on the lives of the Bozo fishermen was provided by Paul de Bruin.*

# G·C·C· THE NEXT DECADE



King Fahd of Saudi Arabia (far left) is greeted by his host, Sultan Qaboos of Oman (on his left), on arrival in Muscat for the 10th summit meeting of the GCC.

ORIGINAL PHOTOGRAPH BY MICHAEL ISAAC

**In 1984, writer John Christie and illustrator Norman MacDonald surveyed for *Aramco World* the early years of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). Now, as the GCC moves towards its second decade, they review the organization's progress so far and its prospects for the future.**

Late last year the expressways of Muscat, the capital city of the Sultanate of Oman, were decked with the national flags of five of the country's Arab neighbors, and with portraits of the sultan and the leaders of the countries of the Arabian Gulf. At night strings of colored lights outlined major buildings along the city's thoroughfares, and floodlighting of Muscat's historic forts and modern public buildings emphasized the festive appearance.

There were good reasons for the city's hospitable and decorative aspect. Oman was playing host to the 10th summit meeting of the heads of state of the Gulf Cooperation Council, the six-nation organization which groups Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

As well as celebrating 10 years of successful existence, this GCC summit was the second to be held under the aegis of the 1988 ceasefire in the Iran-Iraq war. In previous years, the search for a peaceful end to the conflict had been a major preoccupation of the GCC. But now, with that threat to regional security much diminished and the international political climate greatly improved, the GCC leaders were able to focus their attention more closely on the promotion of the organization's long-term aims and objectives.

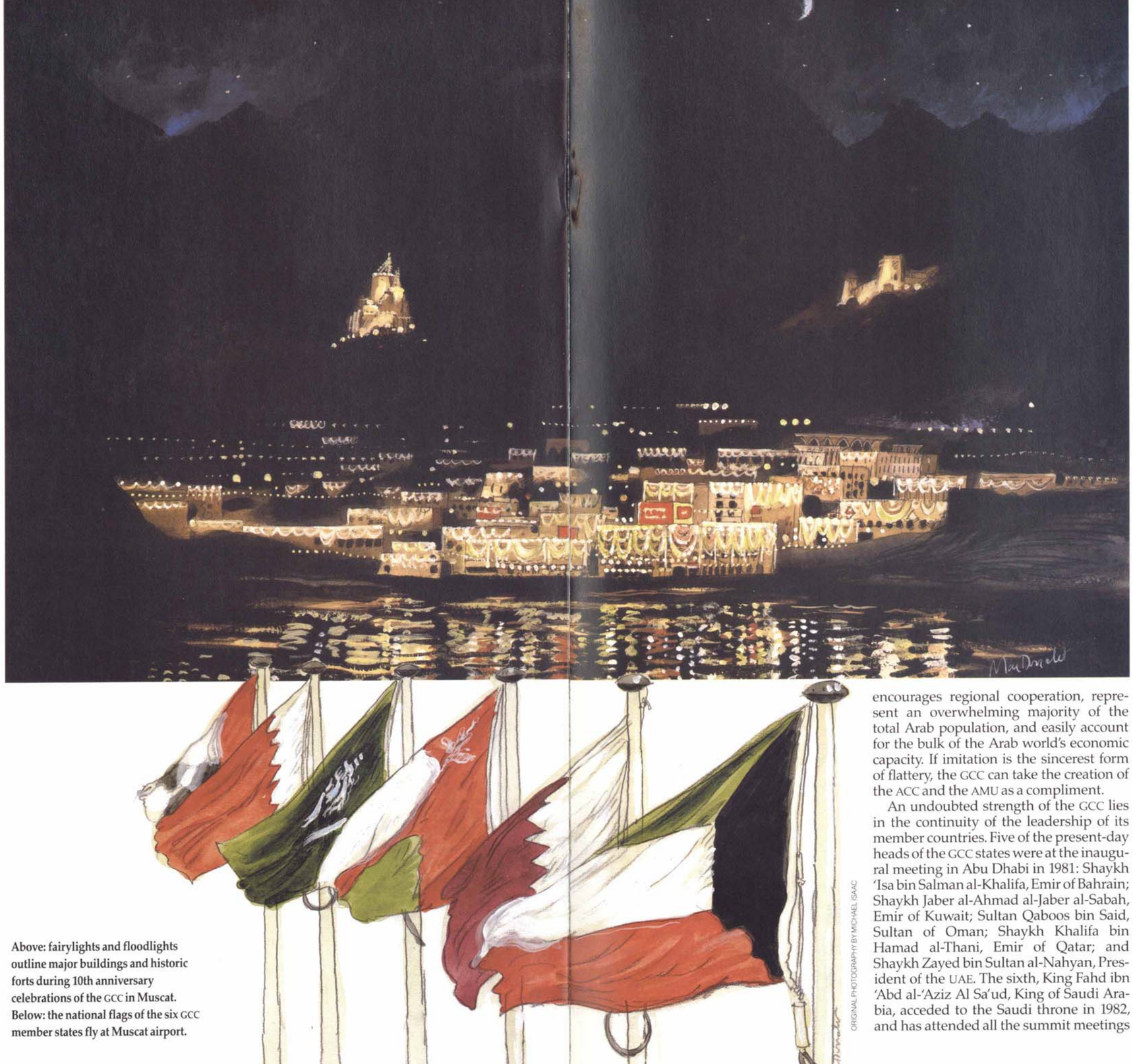
In his welcoming address at the opening session of the summit, Oman's Sultan Qaboos spoke of the rapid and fundamental changes taking place in the international arena. The GCC, the Sultan said, is "acutely aware of the new era which the world is witnessing at this time,

and the momentous political and economic developments which are taking place." He continued, "Our council must have a progressive role and an effective presence in this changing world". The summit's final communiqué reiterated the point, stating that the GCC "follows with profound interest the developments and events taking place in the world" and expressing the hope that such developments will lead to better international understanding and to just solutions to regional conflicts, especially Middle Eastern issues.

As it moves into its second decade, the fundamental concepts of the GCC remain the same as at the organization's beginnings (See *Aramco World*, January-February 1984): the strengthening of close cooperation between the six states in social, economic and political affairs and the reinforcement of the common cultural, religious and social links they already enjoy. The GCC charter does not define the organization's ultimate goal, nor does it lay down any limits to the kinds or degrees of cooperation that may be reached. Senior GCC officials have talked of the grouping adopting a confederal status of some kind, but there is neither urgency nor compulsion to reach that objective.

In April 1985, Prince Sa'ud Al Faisal, the Saudi Arabian foreign minister, said in an address to a meeting of the Arab Thought Forum in Riyadh that if the GCC had a role to play in the achievement of Arab unity, then the essence of that role would be to provide a model for imitation. Since Prince Sa'ud delivered that speech, two new Arab groupings, both patterned on the GCC, have come into being. A four-country ministerial meeting in Baghdad, Iraq, in February 1990 signed a treaty forming the Arab Cooperation Council (ACC), an association linking Egypt, Iraq, Jordan and North Yemen. Since the unification of North and South Yemen shortly thereafter, the ACC has announced that the new Yemeni Republic will take North Yemen's seat in the organization. The aims of the ACC are largely economic, looking to establish a common market among its members.

At almost the same time, a meeting in Marrakesh, Morocco, created a third Arab cooperative grouping in the shape of the Arab Maghrib Union (AMU). This brought together the North African states of Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia. The GCC warmly welcomed the formation of both organizations. Among them, the GCC, the ACC and the AMU comprise 15 of the 21 member countries of the Arab League, whose charter specifically





**Above: fairylights and floodlights outline major buildings and historic forts during 10th anniversary celebrations of the GCC in Muscat. Below: the national flags of the six GCC member states fly at Muscat airport.**

ORIGINAL PHOTOGRAPHY BY MICHAEL ISAAC

encourages regional cooperation, represent an overwhelming majority of the total Arab population, and easily account for the bulk of the Arab world's economic capacity. If imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, the GCC can take the creation of the ACC and the AMU as a compliment.

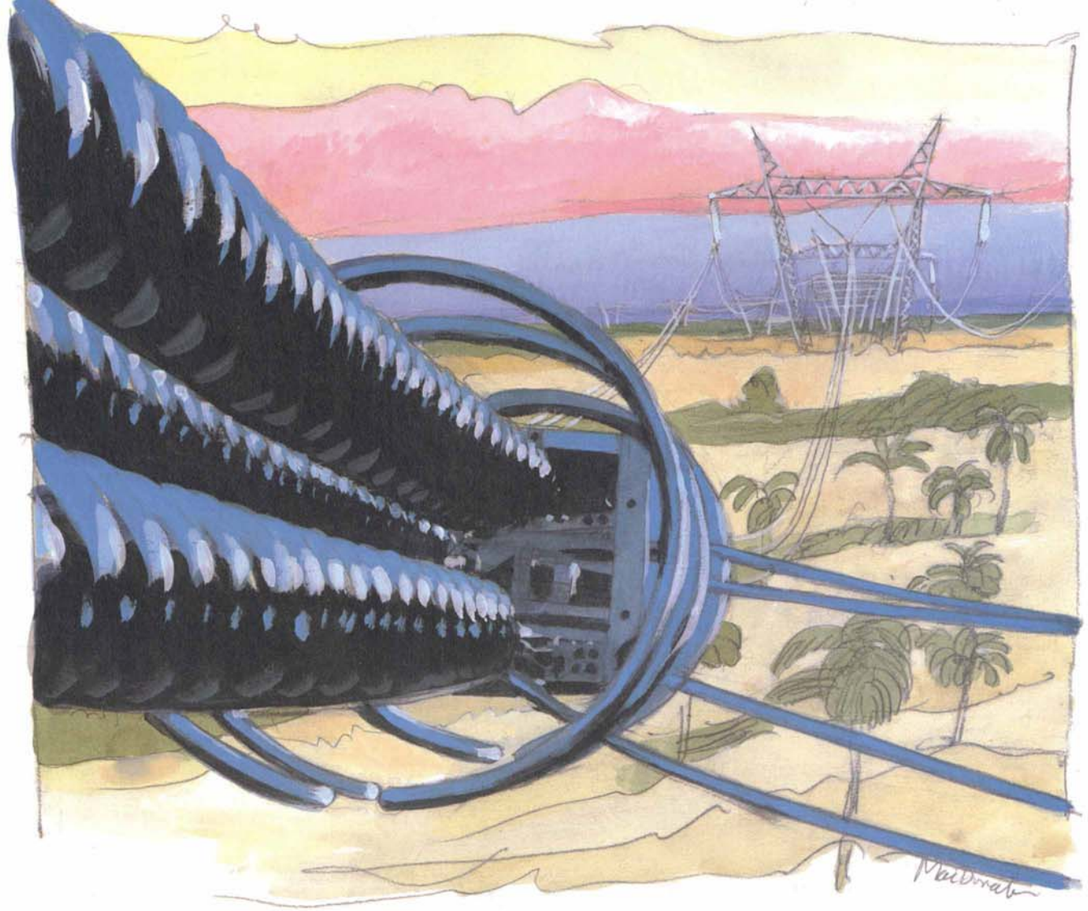
An undoubted strength of the GCC lies in the continuity of the leadership of its member countries. Five of the present-day heads of the GCC states were at the inaugural meeting in Abu Dhabi in 1981: Shaykh 'Isa bin Salman al-Khalifa, Emir of Bahrain; Shaykh Jaber al-Ahmad al-Jaber al-Sabah, Emir of Kuwait; Sultan Qaboos bin Said, Sultan of Oman; Shaykh Khalifa bin Hamad al-Thani, Emir of Qatar; and Shaykh Zayed bin Sultan al-Nahyan, President of the UAE. The sixth, King Fahd ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz Al Sa'ud, King of Saudi Arabia, acceded to the Saudi throne in 1982, and has attended all the summit meetings since that year. The same kind of continuity in office applies to the GCC foreign ministers, who form the organization's ministerial council.

An agreeable touch at the 10th summit was the first award of honors to GCC citizens who have made outstanding contributions to their countries. At a ceremony at al-Bustan Palace, all six heads of state took part in presenting the medals to 80 personalities from all walks of life – among them rally driver Said Rashid al-Hajry from Qatar, Dr. Ridha Obaid of Saudi Arabia for services to science, Yusuf bin Issa al-Falaij of Kuwait for charitable work, Bahrain's Ibrahim al-Urayidh for poetry, Dr. Mohammad Hadi Amiri of the UAE for his contribution to industry and Olympic sportsman Mohammad bin Amor from Oman.

The common heritage and the shared culture of the people of the region is basic to the cooperative thrust of the GCC. A Saudi Arabian visitor to Kuwait, for example, would feel far less of a foreigner than a German in France or some other country of the European Comunity. Equally significant is the similarity of the systems and forms of government in the six GCC countries, a characteristic unique to the group.

The Secretariat General is the engine room of the GCC ship. From its newly-built headquarters in Riyadh, it has much the style and scope, on a smaller scale, of the United Nations Secretariat General. With a staff of less than 300, the secretariat is responsible for drafting legislation and regulations to implement the measures agreed by the Supreme Council. It initiates studies of projects and produces reviews and reports on actual and potential areas of cooperation. The GCC's many committees, which meet at regular intervals to consider new fields of coordination and make recommendations for action, are served by the Secretariat, which also produces a steady flow of reports and information for consumption outside the GCC, in Arabic and other languages. Its budget, remarkably modest for an international organization, is 78 million Saudi Riyals ($20.2 million), with costs shared equally by the member states.

The first, and so far the only, holder of the office of GCC Secretary General is Abdullah Yacoub Bishara, an ebullient and articulate former diplomat who was Kuwait's ambassador to the United Nations. His two assistant secretaries, responsible, respectively, for political affairs and economic matters, are Saif bin Hashil al-Maskari, an Omani, and Saudi Dr. Abdullah Ibrahim al-Kuwaiz.



Six years ago, most of the GCC's projects and planned developments were, as Bishara said at the time, "still on the drawing board". Some still are; but the GCC's progress in implementing its policies has been consistent and steady. The notices saying "GCC Nationals" above immigration desks at the international airports of the six member countries are one small indication of new intra-GCC laws and regulations which give GCC citizens complete freedom of movement, without need for visas or permits, among the six countries.

The ministers of industry form the Industrial Cooperation Committee, which drew up the principles of a long-term strategy for uniform industrial development in the region. In meetings since 1984, the ministers have formulated a strategy to optimize the competitiveness of existing local industries and drawn up plans for the establishment of viable new and jointly-integrated industries which avoid regional duplication.

The GCC agricultural sector has a similar strategic plan for a joint agriculture policy, which the six agriculture ministers administer. The region is now self-sufficient in wheat and even exports the grain outside the Middle East, due to huge increases in wheat production by Saudi Arabia in recent years

The GCC's regional planning also covers more visible infrastructure schemes, including road and rail networks and public utilities. The Gulf Highway, running along the eastern length of the Arabian Peninsula, is already a reality, as was demonstrated by Shaykh Jaber al-Ahmad when he traveled to the 10th summit by automobile. His journey from Kuwait to Muscat covered more than 1,000 kilometers (620 miles) and took him down the east coast of Saudi Arabia, past Bahrain and Qatar; his motorcade then traversed the United Arab Emirates and entered Oman via the historic Arabian crossroads of the Buraimi Oasis.

A priority objective for the GCC is the establishment of an economic common market among its member states, similar in many ways to the European Economic Community. Its keystone is the Unified Economic Agreement, first approved by the six heads of state in 1981, many of whose articles have been implemented. The Gulf Investment Corporation (GIC), the GCC's $1.2-billion industrial-financing institution, has evaluated some 72 regional projects, of which 19 are under development, five are about to be implemented and 14 others are under active consideration. GIC investments include major dairy projects in Qatar and the UAE, a steel-wire products plant in Jubail, Saudi Arabia, and a sophisticated factory in Bahrain to produce 45,000 tons a year of titanium dioxide, a pigment used in the manufacture of paint, plastics, paper and textiles. The GIC is also actively involved in a $1.6-billion project to link the six member countries in an integrated electric-power grid.



**An integrated electric-power grid and a joint agricultural policy are among the long-term goals that the GCC can expect to meet in its second decade.**

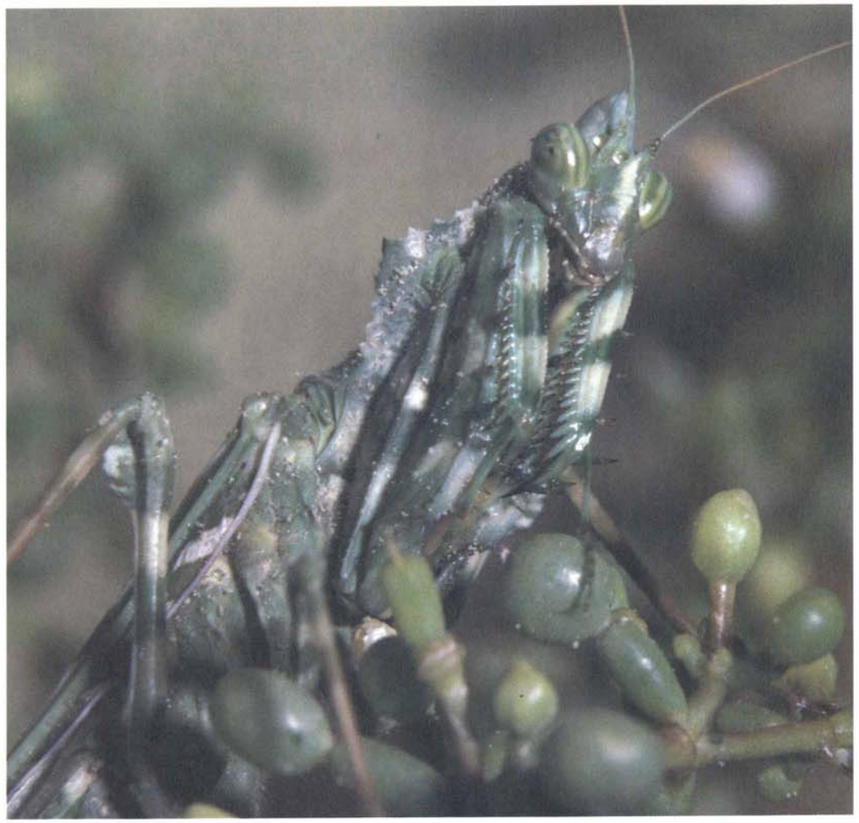
Although the final communiqué of the Muscat summit noted the considerable progress made by the GCC over the past 10 years, the emphasis was on the future. The references to the GCC's progressive role in a changing world were firm pointers to the direction of the organization in its second decade. The visions espoused give first priority to the continued development of the GCC countries and confirm that, as Secretary General Abdullah Bishara once said in a speech to the American-Arab Affairs Council, what the GCC has achieved so far "is an indication of our determination, but it is not an illustration of our ambition."

Those words still hold good today. The 1990s will show how the GCC will utilize its past achievements to meet the challenge of its ambitions.

*John Christie, OBE, has retired from the British diplomatic service and is the editor of* Gulf States Newsletter, *which covers Arabian Gulf affairs.*

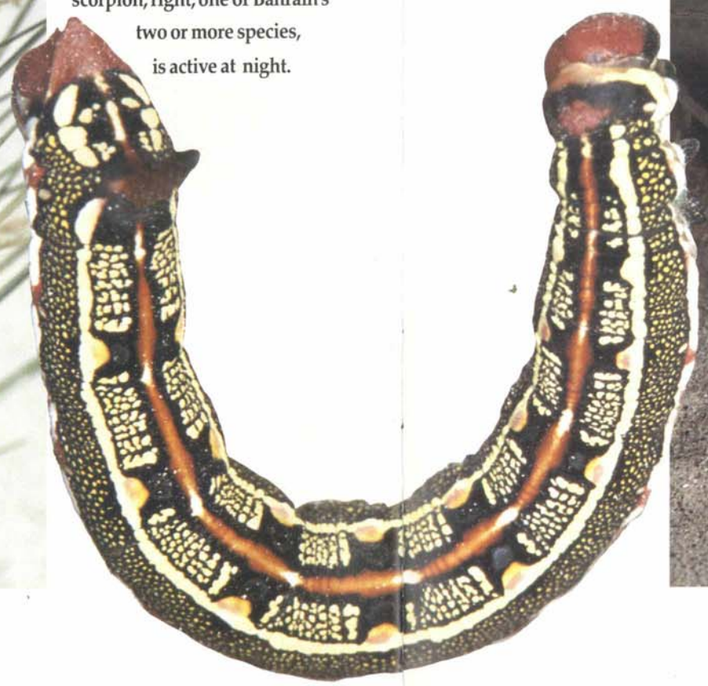
# SMALL CREATURES OF BAHRAIN

PHOTOGRAPHED BY MIKE HILL AND MICHAEL HILL, JR.



Bahrain is a small island without large wild animals, but its natural history is still rich and interesting – especially if one looks closely at creatures like the lime swallowtail butterfly (previous page) or the striped mantis, left, a spectacular ambush predator that relies on cryptic coloration and a lightning-fast "arm" strike to catch its prey. The keen-sighted jumping spider, right, one of 4000 species worldwide, slowly stalks its prey before leaping on it from several spider-lengths away. The sand snake, below left, is Bahrain's only poisonous land snake, but its fangs are in the back of its mouth and it does not seem to be very aggressive.

The striped hawkmoth caterpillar, below, can be found by the thousands in Bahrain's desert after heavy rains, feeding on *Asphodelus* plants. The yellow scorpion, right, one of Bahrain's two or more species, is active at night.



Gregarious greater flamingos, top left, visit Bahrain in winter, forming flocks ranging up to 700 birds. They feed with heads inverted and bills submerged, using their tongues to pump water through fine ridges on their bills that filter out food particles. Froggy features and a long tail identify Javakar's agama lizard, center left, as one of the world's 300 agamid species. Normally mottled green, this insect-eater turns bright blue, except for an orange tail, when displaying or threatened. The beautiful white barn owl, bottom left, is the most common in Arabia, and a breeding resident in most countries of the Gulf. It glides ghost-like over cultivated areas in search of small mammals to eat – but occasionally falls victim to a speeding car. The black-winged stilt, opposite, stalks Bahrain's freshwater pools and ditches in search of insects as it travels between breeding and wintering grounds – but it may also sometimes breed on the island when local conditions are right.

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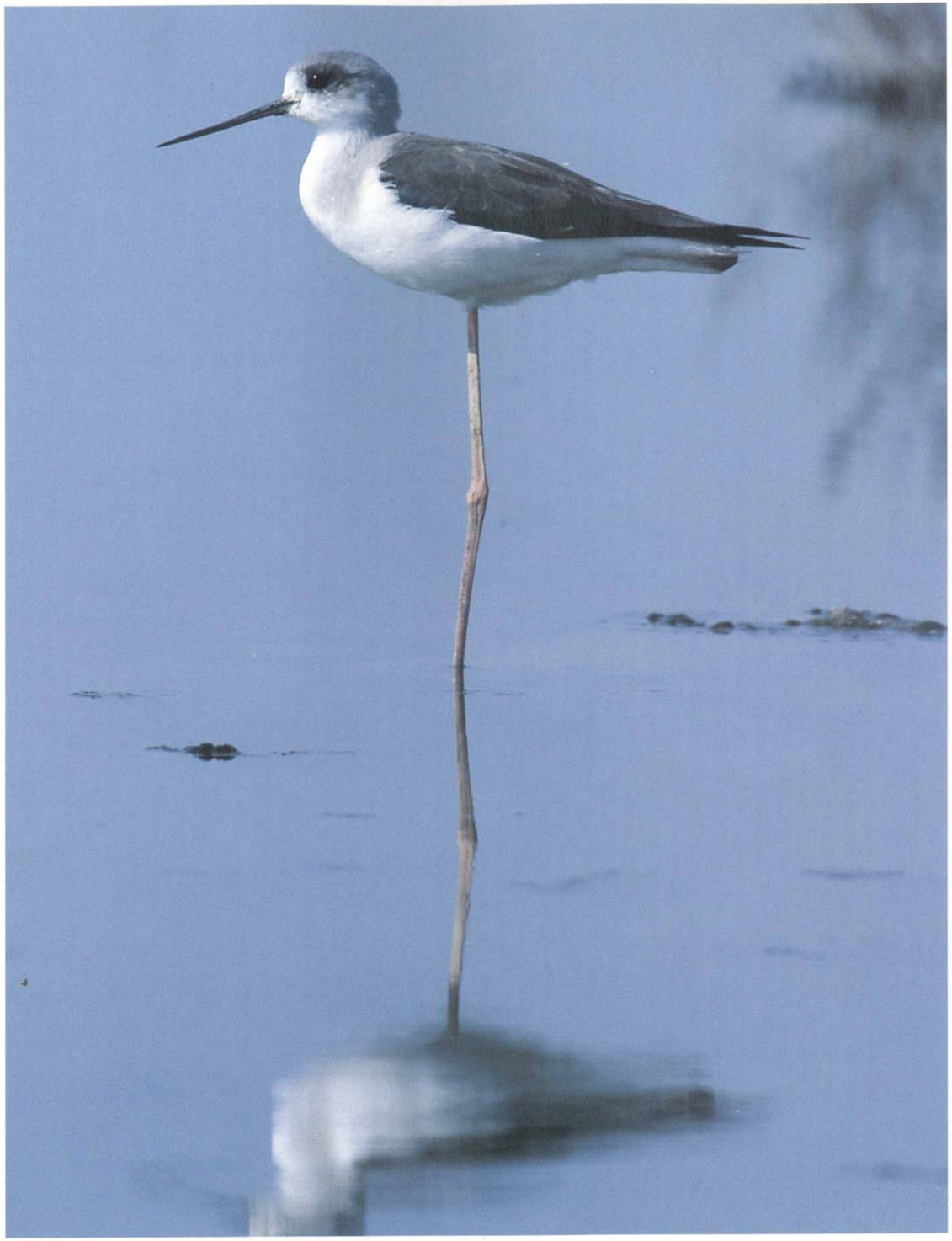
*Dr. Mike Hill works in Bahrain as a consulting physician and pursues his long-time avocation of natural-history photography. His 11-year-old son, Michael Hill, Jr., won his first photography prize at age five.*

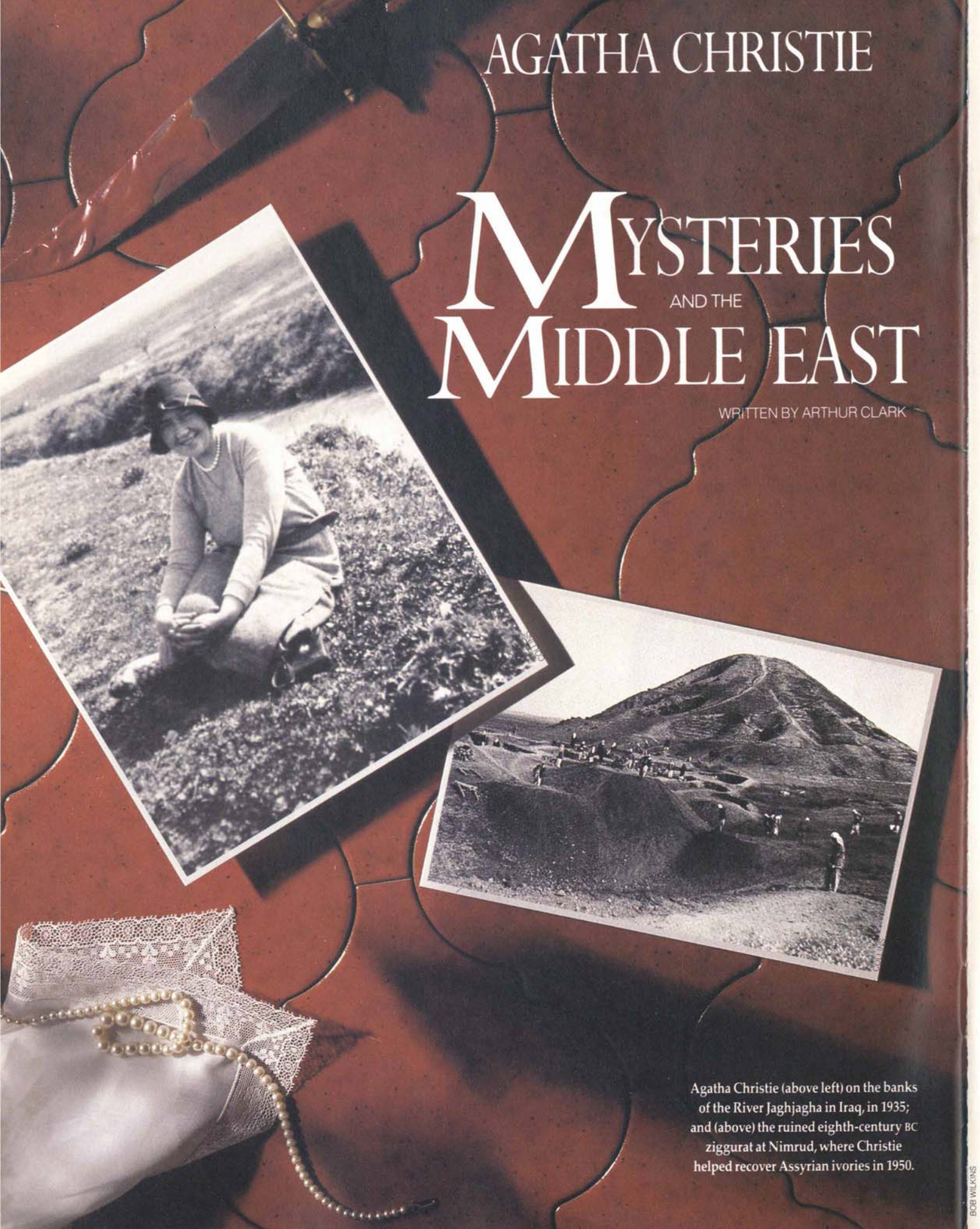




# AGATHA CHRISTIE

# MYSTERIES AND THE MIDDLE EAST

WRITTEN BY ARTHUR CLARK



Agatha Christie (above left) on the banks of the River Jaghjagha in Iraq, in 1935; and (above) the ruined eighth-century BC ziggurat at Nimrud, where Christie helped recover Assyrian ivories in 1950.

BOB WILKINS

**The assistant at the British Museum was incredulous when I told her about the recovery of the intricately carved Assyrian ivory plaques at Nimrud in northern Iraq. "Really!" she said, "Agatha Christie did that?"**

Agatha Christie fans who travel to London today are much more likely to attend a performance of *The Mousetrap* than to visit the British Museum to see the ancient ivories she helped bring to light at digs in the 1950's. Certainly, the world knows Christie best as an author and playwright: *The Mousetrap* has been staged continuously in London since 1952, and her 94 books have been translated into 103 languages – 14 more than Shakespeare. Indeed, you'll find few booksellers today who don't stock a full shelf of Christie murder mysteries.

What's less well known is that a good deal of the author's immense output – she produced well over 100 works, including 21 plays – grew out of her close and affectionate links with the Middle East. In fact, she put together some of her most popular whodunits while assisting at digs in Iraq and Syria.

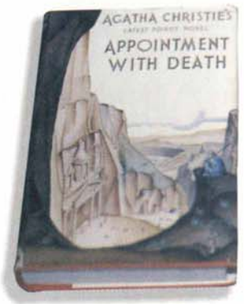
To do that, she had to cope with conditions that would have sent many women scurrying home. Roads in Iraq in the 1950's "were terribly bad, but Agatha never grumbled once with all of the bumps," recalled Robert Hamilton, an expedition surveyor at Nimrud. "She put up with any discomfort. Her endurance for physical exhaustion was incredible."

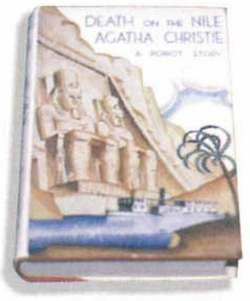
Hamilton, now in his 80's, reminisced about Christie when I visited him at his home in Suffolk, England. "You are wrong to think that [Christie] can't live in a tent," he read from a letter that he'd written home from Nimrud in 1950. "Indeed, she has traveled much, in the most varied circumstances, and stayed in places much queerer than tents, many times before."

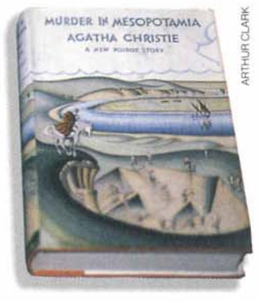
Christie's daughter, Rosalind Christie Hicks, provided more insights about the author's Middle Eastern experiences at Greenway House, the family home in Devon, England. "She was very sympathetic to the Arabs and the people she was dealing with," recalled Rosalind, who spent a season with Christie and her archeologist husband, Max Mallowan, at a dig in Syria in the 1930's. "She understood how they lived. She didn't try to interfere in their life in any way."

Nimrud in the 1950's was Christie's last stop in a Middle Eastern journey that started several hundred kilometers to the south, at the site of the ancient Sumerian capital of Ur, in 1928. During the 1930's, 1940's and 1950's, she lived in or visited Syria, Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt and Iran, and most of these countries provided venues for her crime stories.

In *Murder in Mesopotamia*, super-sleuth Hercule Poirot solves homicides at a dig in Iraq. In *Death on the Nile*, he catches a killer aboard a Nile cruise ship. In *Appointment with Death*, he uncloaks a murderer who committed the crime at Petra in Jordan. Those books were published in 1937, 1938 and 1939, respectively.




ARTHUR CLARK

Christie also set many of her short stories in the Middle East. In *Parker Pyne Investigates*, published in 1934, another detective unravels mysteries in Baghdad, on the Nile, in Shiraz in Iran, and at Petra.

The author dramatized at least one of her Middle Eastern mysteries, *Death on the Nile*; it was staged in London and New York in 1946. The film version, starring Peter Ustinov as Poirot, was shot in Egypt in 1978, reopening that country to foreign filmmaking after a long drought. The film's New York release that year coincided with the opening of the King Tutankhamen exhibit (See *Aramco World*, May-June 1977).

Born Agatha Mary Clarissa Miller to an American father and an English mother in Devon 100 years ago this September, the author was actually slow to establish ties with the Middle East. She missed a golden opportunity at age 20, when she was in Cairo for her formal "coming-out" into society in the winter of 1910-11. Invited to sample Egypt's historical riches, she declined, preferring dances and picnics.

"Mother tried to broaden my mind by taking me to the Egyptian Museum, and also suggested we should go up the Nile to see the glories of Luxor," she wrote in her autobiography, *Agatha Christie*, published in 1976, a year after her death. "I protested passionately with tears in my eyes.... The wonders of antiquity were the last thing I cared to see."

Cairo did make an impression, however. Shortly after returning to England, she drafted her first novel in a Cairo setting. She called it *Snow Upon the Desert* and modeled its characters on people she'd seen in a hotel dining room. But she was unable to market the manuscript.

Christie's circumstances were greatly changed by 1928, when she returned to the Middle East, this time to Iraq. She was by then a successful crime writer, with nine books to her credit. But she was also lonely, her daughter Rosalind said.

The authors' world had been shattered in 1926 when, first, her mother died and she then lost her husband, Archie Christie, to another woman. In December 1926, overwrought and probably ill, she vanished for 10 days. The curiosity of the press and the public was only whetted when she turned up under an assumed name in a Yorkshire hotel, claiming to have no memory of the days of her disappearance. Her marriage to Christie ended in divorce in April 1928.

Agatha Christie's trip to Baghdad, undertaken the following fall, wasn't planned until the last moment. In fact, Christie already had tickets in hand to sail to the Caribbean when she changed directions after dining with a couple just back from Iraq. She was especially intrigued when she discovered she could go part of the way on the Orient Express.

"My mother was lonely at the time; she didn't know where she was going for her holiday," said Rosalind. "I think it was a pretty bold step to go to the Middle East, traveling on her own."

Christie journeyed by train from London to Damascus and then rode 48 hours on a six-wheeler bus across the desert to Baghdad (See *Aramco World*, July-August 1981). The trip introduced her to the settings for several later crime stories, including *Murder on the Orient Express*, published in 1934, and "The Gate of Baghdad," a Parker Pyne short story in which a man is done in on a bus bound for Damascus.

The trip entranced Christie. The dawn painted "lovely colors all over the desert – pale pink, apricots and blues," she wrote. "This is what I longed for. This was getting away from everything. What more could one ask of life?"

The answer to her question awaited her at Ur, where archeologist Leonard Woolley was uncovering evidence of the long-buried Sumerian civilization.

The dig, in southern Iraq, gave Christie the setting and several characters for *Murder in Mesopotamia*. Even more important, it was the site – in 1929 – for the opening chapter of a personal love story as fascinating as any of her works of fiction. In the few days she was at Ur, in 1928, Christie struck up a strong friendship with Woolley and his wife, Katherine. They stayed at her house in London in the summer of 1929, and invited her back to Iraq.

On her return trip the author met Max Mallowan, the expedition assistant at Ur. As she put it in verse 16 years later, in the introduction to *Come Tell Me How You Live*, she found Mallowan "a-sitting on a tell" – the mound of earth and rubble that overlies an ancient site of human habitation. She was fascinated by what he told her about his work.

*... "Who are you, sir?" to him I said,*
*"For what is it you look?"*
*His answer trickled through my head*
*Like bloodstains in a book...*

Mallowan, then 26, was bright, quiet and adept at dealing with the dig's Iraqi workmen. He'd been absent with appendicitis the previous season.

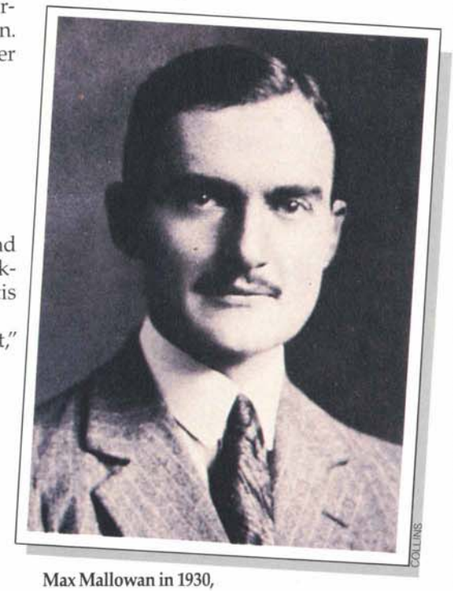
"His accents mild were full of wit," wrote Christie. He told her:

*"Five thousand years ago*
*Is really, when I think of it,*
*The choicest age I know.*
*And once you learn to scorn A.D.*
*And you have got the knack,*
*Then you could come and dig with me*
*And never wander back."*

Continued the author:

*But I was thinking how to thrust*
*Some arsenic into tea,*
*And could not all at once adjust*
*My mind so far B.C.*
*I looked at him and softly sighed,*
*His face was pleasant too...*
*"Come tell me how you live?" I cried,*
*"And what it is you do?"*

Again Christie stayed at Ur just a few days. Then Katherine Woolley assigned Mallowan to accompany her back as far as Baghdad. Along the way, they discovered a lake and went for a swim; afterward, their car bogged down in the soft sand some 65 kilometers (40 miles) from the nearest town. They escaped a few hours later with the help of a carload of locals, but Mallowan was so impressed by Christe's uncomplaining behavior – she even fell alseep in the shade of the trapped auto – that he later wrote, "I then decided she must be a remarkable woman." He accompanied her most of the way home, proposed, and they were married soon after. The author kept her original married name for professional reasons, but when *Come Tell Me How You Live* came out in 1946, it was under the name Agatha Christie Mallowan.


COLLINS

**Max Mallowan in 1930, the year after he met Agatha Christie at Ur.**

She rejoined Mallowan at Ur early in 1931. He'd resigned his job, and the two took another route home to Britain, flying first to Iran. The author called Isfahan "the *most* beautiful city in the world," but she chose another Iranian city for her Parker Pyne short story "The House in Shiraz."

Mallowan quickly got a posting on a British dig at Nineveh in northern Iraq, and Christie joined him late in 1931. She started a new life in rhythm with his: traveling annually to digs, pitching in on expedition jobs, and – always – writing. The couple spent the summers in England, and Christie came home for Christmas every year.

She made an issue of her profession early on at Nineveh, where workers were digging a 30-meter (90-foot) pit to get to the level of the huge tell's earliest inhabitants. Overriding the wishes of the expedition's parsimonious director, she spent her own funds for a sturdy writing table in the bazaar in nearby Mosul, but her "extravagance" was quickly forgotten: On the table she typed *Lord Edgware Dies*, to be published in 1933, and then read the manuscript to the director and his wife. When workers unearthed a skeleton, it was promptly dubbed "Lord Edgware."

Mallowan's influence stimulated Christie's work. She wrote 15 well-received mysteries between 1930 and 1938 – what one biographer called "the single most productive nine-year period of her career."

By 1938, Mallowan had also made a name for himself as the leader of successful digs in Iraq and Syria. But Christie still got top billing with the public. In 1933, for example, when Mallowan embarked on his first independent expedition at the small mound of Arpachiyah, near Nineveh, a London newspaper headlined "Novelist on Thrilling Trip; Agatha Christie in Search of a Lost People."

Christie herself called the 1930's "particularly satisfying." The digs, far from the concerns of modern life, provided the peace she needed to work. "I enjoy writing books while I am in the desert. There are no distractions such as telephones, theaters, operas, houses and gardens," she's quoted as saying in *The Agatha Christie Companion*.

The digs themselves were also often good fun – even when she had to battle invasions of mice, fleas and more.

By the mid-1930's, Mallowan had moved to new ground in north-eastern Syria, with his wife beside him. There, the living conditions at the expedition's initial lodgings tried even Christie, as she admitted in *Come Tell Me How You Live*.

"No sooner have the lamps been extinguished than mice in their scores – I really believe in their hundreds – emerge from the holes in the walls and the floor. They gaily run over our bed, squeaking as they run. Mice across one's face, mice tweaking your hair...."

After Christie threatened to flee to Aleppo on the first train, Mallowan had their beds moved outdoors, and a suitable cat was found. In five days the mouse crisis was over – but the fleas proved more intractable. Most annoying, Christie wrote, was their "tireless energy, their never-ending hopping races round and round one's middle that wears one out. Impossible to drop off to sleep...."

Christie normally accompanied her husband to the mound at dawn, she wrote, "though occasionally I stay at home to deal with other things – e.g. mending of pottery and objects, labeling, and sometimes to ply my own trade on the typewriter."

She also worked in a rudimentary darkroom where she said she was "practically asphxiated." And she was medical adviser for the expedition's 140-man force of Arab, Kurdish and Turkish workers. She'd served as a nursing and pharmacy aide in Britain during World War I, training that was invaluable when a doctor was a day or more away.


BRITISH MUSEUM

**Aerial view of excavations at Arpachiyah, Mallowan's first independent dig.**

**One of the Assyrian ivories Agatha Christie helped preserve as a member of her husband's expedition to Nimrud.**


BRITISH MUSEUM

**The workforce at Arpachiyah with Christie and Mallowan at center of the front row.**

Christie also launched cooking classes, with only partially positive results: "Lemon curd is a great success; shortbread is so uneatable that we secretly bury it; a vanilla soufflé, for a wonder, goes right; whereas a Chicken Maryland (owing, as I realized later, to the extreme freshness and incredible age of the chicken) is so tough one cannot get one's teeth through it!"

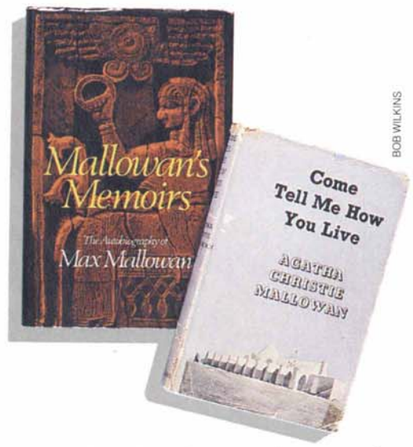
World War II brought Chrstie home to England. Mallowan joined the Royal Air Force, and was sent to North Africa. In London, where Christie's war work was at a dispensary, she wrote *Come Tell Me How You Live* as a way of keeping in touch with her life in Syria before the war. And she produced more mysteries, including *Death Comes in the End*, a tale of intrigue and murder within the family of a minor official in Egypt almost 4000 years ago. To achieve historical accuracy in her characters, she peppered a family friend, Egyptologist Stephen Glanville, with questions about the daily lives of the people of the period.

The work, her only whodunit set in ancient times, was a critical success when it came out in 1945. "Besides giving us a mystery story quite up to her own high standard," wrote a reviewer in *The New York Times*, "Agatha Christie has succeeded admirably in picturing the people of ancient Egypt as living persons and not as resurrected mummies."

COLLINS

Iraqi musician

Christie was no stranger to ancient Egypt. In 1937, she'd written a play called *Akhnaton*, about the heretic pharaoh of the 14th century BC. An ambitious effort, with 11 scenes and 22 characters, the play didn't satisfy Christie, who tucked it away and forgot about it. It wasn't published until




BOB WILKINS

1973, when she rediscovered it among her papers. In his memoirs, Mallowan said *Akhnaton* "comes as near to historical plausibility as any play about the past can be." He said the play offered a way "to learn painlessly about Ancient Egypt...."

When World war II ended, Mallowan secured – in 1947 – the new Chair of Western Asiatic History at the University of London, and he and his wife got set to return to the Middle East. By 1949, arrangements had been made to work again in Iraq. But now they flew: It was cheaper and faster. "No more Orient Express this time, alas," wrote Christie. "You flew from London to Baghdad and that was that."

Mallowan returned to Baghdad as director of the British School of Archaeology in Iraq. Robert Hamilton, the former director of antiquities for Palestine and now the secretary of the school, met him and Christie there in January 1949. He'd rented a house for the school in Baghdad, and purchased a four-wheel-drive Dodge for the expedition. In February, Hamilton wrote to his wife that the explorers had taken the newly painted car out "to try out the springs, me driving, and Agatha got a good shaking in the front seat – which she bore nobly with complete fortitude."

The dig got under way shortly after that. The staff consisted of Mallowan, Hamilton, Christie and a representative of the Iraq Antiquities Department. For the author, life picked up where it had left off: She was initially responsible for photography; she carefully cleaned the ivory artifacts uncovered by the expedition; and she helped out with culinary tasks. Within a year a mud-brick expedition house was built on the tell, and a few years later Christie got her own attached room, which she paid for herself and where she wrote. The room still survives as a storehouse – and so, at least as late as 1986, do fond memories of the author. Early that year, an elderly watchman at the site told me with a broad smile how well he remembered "Lady Mallowan."

"Agatha had a typewriter and she typed away. She wrote most days, and did a certain amount of work ..." noted Hamilton, who himself was pressed into the service of literature in 1951, carrying the corrected galleys of two books from Christie's publisher in London to her at the dig.

Though in her 60's, heavy and troubled by arthritis, Christie kept pace with her much younger colleagues at the dig, and provided some spice as well. She liked to joke, recalled Hamilton, and she wrote humorous poems about her colleagues. She also paid for some trips into the surrounding countryside, and chipped generously into the kitty so that team members always dined well.

"Agatha's always good-tempered and surprisingly sympathtic and nice," Hamilton wrote home early in 1950. "She takes a lot of time to organize her own physical comfort and enjoyment, but at the same time is almost equally concerned with other people's well-being – not the least bit selfish."

And she still enjoyed swimming whenever she could. In 1955, Christie and two other women from the then-expanded dig stopped for a dip on an outing to the River Zab. They changed into their suits on the shore and jumped in "watched by a fascinated crowd of children," Hamilton wrote in May.

Five years later, in 1960, the archeologist and the author left Nimrud for the last time. For his work, Mallowan was knighted in 1968. For hers, Christie became a Dame of the British Empire in 1971. Though their careers were dissimilar in many ways, the couple found common ground in the joy of making discoveries in a land they came to appreciate.

As Christie herself put it, writing of a picnic in the Syrian countryside in 1938, "the utter peace is wondeful. A great wave of happiness surges over me, and I realize how much I love this country and how complete and satisfying this life is...." 🌐

*Aramco writer Arthur Clark is a long-time fan of Agatha Christie's novels.*



# EVENTS & EXHIBITIONS

**The Artistry of Arabic Script.** Through the work of contemporary Arab artist Ahmed Moustafa, this exhibition of paintings and tapestries throws new light on the traditional Islamic art of calligraphy (See *Aramco World*, September-October 1989). An Egyptian living in London, Moustafa uses Arabic script as a creative medium for expressing secular and spiritual subjects, as did master calligraphers of old, except that he marries the timeless with the time, to express contemporary preoccupations with space, energy and vitality. Thus, his Arabic characters, while adhering to the discipline of Islamic calligraphy, become pouncing falcons and prancing steeds. Although purely abstract in appearance, Moustafa's enormous paintings still serve as powerful reminders of Islam. His first one-man show in the West is at the Royal College of Art, **London**, August 1 through October 6, 1990.

*"Falconry" by Ahmed Moustafa.*

**Tipu Sultan, Tiger of Mysore** is centered on the tiger motifs that identify the personal possessions of the 18th-century ruler of Mysore, and includes textiles, manuscripts, jewels and arms. Zamana Gallery, **London**, July 19 through September 23, 1990.

**First Encounters:** ***Spanish Exploration in the Caribbean and the United States, 1492-1570.*** Important elements of culture and technology used were of Arab origin. South Carolina State Museum, **Columbia**, through July 26, 1990; Witte Museum, **San Antonio, Texas**, August 31 through November 4, 1990; The **Albuquerque [New Mexico]** Museum, November 1990 through February 1991.

**Faces and Places Along the Nile.** Color photographs of Luxor, Egypt, and its people, by Patricia and Wilfred Gallinek. Georgetown University Hospital, **Washington, D.C.**, August 1 through 31, 1990.

**Elements of Design:** ***The Influence of Oriental Rugs on Navajo Weaving*** explores the assimilation of Oriental rug designs into the Navajo design vocabulary. Millicent Rogers Museum, **Taos, New Mexico**, through August 12, 1990; Cowboy Hall of Fame, **Oklahoma City, Oklahoma**, August 31 through October 21, 1990; Lowie Museum of Anthropology, **Berkeley, California**, November 9 through December 30, 1990.

**Contemporary African Artists:** ***Changing Traditions.*** Includes prints, painting, collage and sculpture by nine artists from six sub-Saharan countries who negotiate betwen Western and indigenous artistic modes. Afro-American Historical and Cultural Museum, **Philadelphia**, August 15 through October 31, 1990.

**Looking at Islam:** ***Contemporary Devotional Posters from Pakistan*** reflects a wide range of Islamic traditions with images from calligraphic to allegorical. City Museum and Art Gallery, **Stoke on Trent, Staffordshire**, through August 19, 1990.

**Visions of Infinity:** ***Design and Pattern in Oriental Carpets.*** Classical carpets of the 15th through 19th centuries from the museum's collections, presented in the context of Islamic art. The Textile Museum, **Washington, D.C.**, August 19, 1990 through February 24, 1991.

**Romance of the Taj Mahal.** Shah Jahan's eye for beauty and his collector's instincts are demonstrated by 200 objects from European and American collections. Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, **Richmond**, August 23 through November 25, 1990; The Asia Society, **New York**, January 10 through March 17, 1991.

**Architecture in Gujarat:** ***Farmhouse, Townhouse, Palace*** uses plans, photographs and models to detail the history of architecture in this Indian state. Museum Rietberg, Haus zum Kiel, **Zurich**, through August 31, 1990.

**Maurice Prendergast** documents his stylistic evolution, including the influences he absorbed from North Africa and the Middle East. Whitney Museum of American Art, **New York**, through September 2, 1990; Williams College Museum of Art, **Williamstown, Massachusetts**, October 6 through December 16, 1990.

**Matisse in Morocco:** ***The Paintings and Drawings, 1912-1913*** Illuminates the effects of Moroccan space and light on an artist trying to balance intellect and emotion. Museum of Modern Art, **New York**, through September 4, 1990; The State Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts, **Moscow**, September 28 through November 20, 1990; The State Hermitage Museum, **Leningrad**, December 15, 1990 through February 15, 1991.

**Variations on a Script:** ***Islamic Calligraphy from the Vever Collection*** highlights a variety of calligraphic styles in objects dating from the 15th to the 19th century. Sackler Gallery, **Washington, D.C.**, through September 6, 1990.

**Touat, City of Oases.** A multimedia production depicts the miracle of water in the desert and the rhythm of life in a string of fortified Algerian villages. Arab World Institute, **Paris**, through September 30, 1990.

**Antoine Sevruguin:** ***Selected Photographs.*** Images of rulers and mendicants in the Iran of 1880 to the 1920's; juxtaposed with earlier Persian drawings from the Vever Collection. Sackler Gallery, **Washington, D.C.**, September 1990 through Spring 1991.

**Seeing Double.** The San Francisco Mime Troupe's much-acclaimed outspoken comedy about cultural differences and similarities. Tour of some 30 college venues in eastern and central U.S., September through November 1990.

**Another Egypt:** ***Coptic Christians at Thebes.*** Objects from the daily lives of 7th- and 8th-century Egyptians who lived in the shadow of pharaonic temples and ruins on the west bank of Thebes (modern Luxor). The Oriental Institute Museum, **Chicago**, October 3, 1990 through June 30, 1991.

**Memories of Egypt** is a salute to Jean-François Champollion, founder of scientific Egyptology. Manuscripts and artifacts are displayed in a temple and burial labyrinth. Eglise Saint-Paul, **Strasbourg**, through October 8, 1990.

**Gold of Africa:** ***Jewelry and Ornaments from Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, and Senegal.*** More than 150 spectacular objects are evidence of highly developed skills and tastes in the West Africa of the 19th and 20th centuries. **Birmingham [Alabama]** Museum of Art, October 21, 1990 through January 2, 1991.

**Beyond the Pyramids:** ***Egyptian Regional Art from the Museo Egizio, Turin.*** A selection of objects from one of the world's largest museums of Egyptian art outside Cairo. Emory University Museum of Art and Archaeology, **Atlanta**, October 24, 1990 through March 10, 1991.

**Contemporary Art from Uzbekistan** reveals a dynamic and productive art community in one of the Soviet Union's most important Muslim republics. Zamana Gallery, **London**, October 25 through December 21, 1990.

**Four Contemporary Calligraphers.** English, Chinese, Arabic and Hebrew manuscripts. Renwick Gallery, **Washington, D.C.**, through October 28, 1990.

**The Book in the Islamic world.** An international conference focusing on the history, art, production, and impact of the book on the Islamic world. The Library of Congress, **Washington, D.C.**, November 7 through 9, 1990.

**Traditional Crafts of Saudi Arabia.** The John Topham collection of weavings, jewelry, a Bedouin tent, and metal, wooden and leather handicraft objects. Maxwell Museum of Anthropology, **Albuquerque, New Mexico**, through November 26, 1990.

**Islamic Art and Patronage:** ***Selections from Kuwait.*** More than 100 masterworks of Islamic art of the 8th to 18th centuries – ceramics, glass, metalwork, stonework, wood, illuminated manuscripts, textiles, and rugs – drawn from one of the world's foremost private collections. Walters Art Gallery, **Baltimore, Maryland**, December 9, 1990 through February 17, 1991.

**Homage to Champollion.** Lectures and films on the bicentennial of the birth of the first conservator of the Louvre's Department of Egyptian Antiquities. Musée du Louvre, **Paris**, December 12 through 17, 1990.

**Chess and Art.** Nearly 100 exotic and historic chess sets and artifacts, including sets from India and Egypt and a black stone elephant from 6th– or 7th-century Iraq, believed to be the oldest known chess piece. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, **New York**, through January 6, 1991.

**Glass Gatherers.** Fifty objects trace five techniques of glass decoration from pre-Islamic through Islamic cultures to Renaissance Europe and the new world. Metropolitan Museum of Art, **New York**, through January 6, 1991.

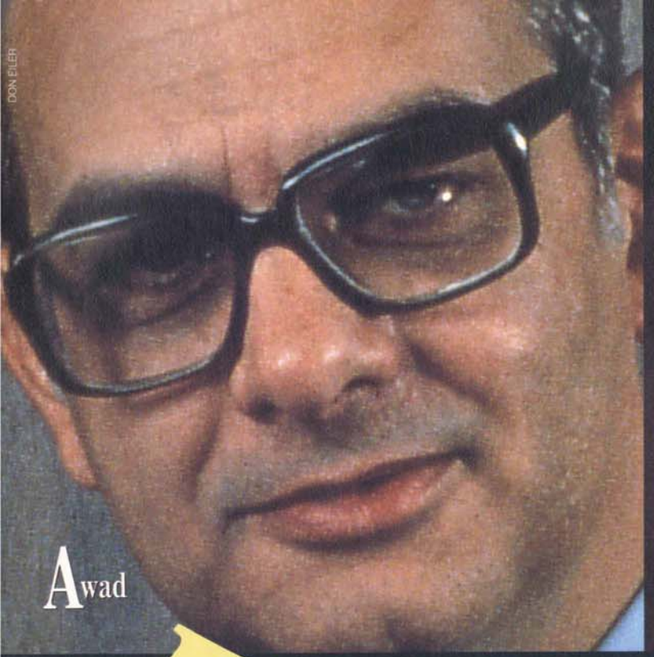
**Carthage:** ***A Mosaic of Ancient Tunisia.*** Pictorial mosaics, Punic jewelry, Roman bronzes and 300 other pieces from 800 BC to the coming of Islam show ancient Tunisia as a center of culture and art. Musée de la civilisation, **Quebec City, Quebec**, through March 5, 1991.

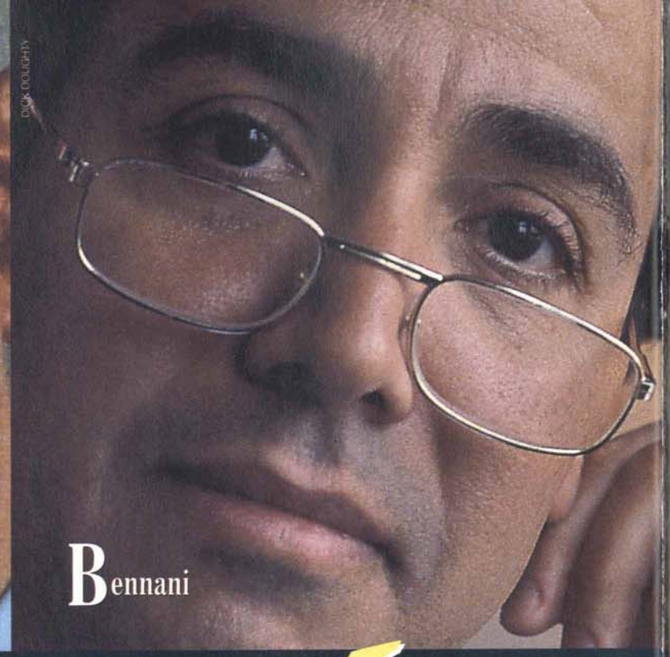
**Palestinian Costume.** Richly ornamented traditional costumes, headdresses and jewelry of Palestinian villagers and Bedouins are revealed as expressions of social status and regional identity. Archival and contemporary photographs provide context. Museum of Mankind, **London**, until November 1991.

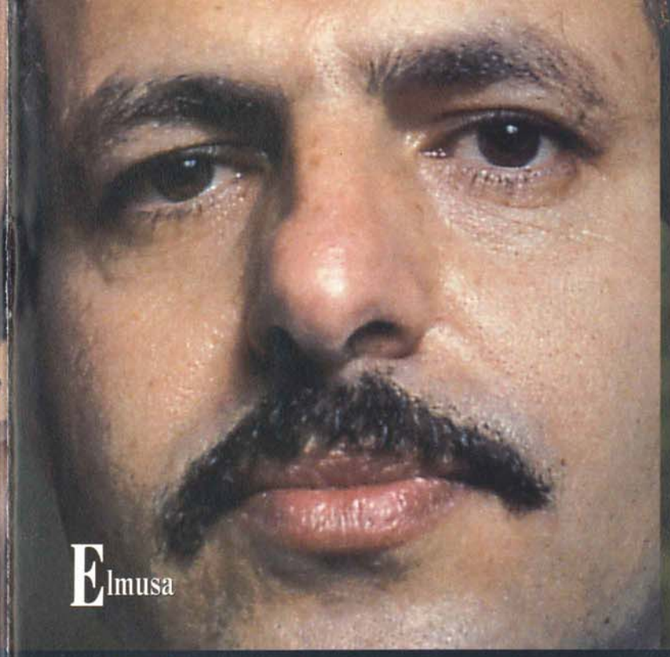
**Pre-Islamic Arabia.** Pre-Islamic antiquities – inscriptions, pottery and architectural elements – from the Arabian Peninsula. Arab World Institute, **Paris**, until 1993.

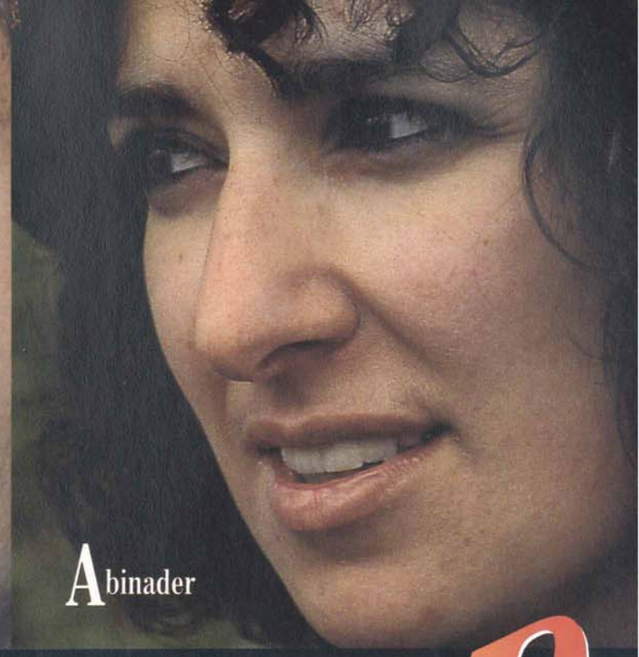
**The Aramco Exhibit.** Centered on the Arab-Islamic technical heritage, this permanent interactive, "learn-by-doing" scientific exhibit relates the historical background to today's petroleum exploration, production and transportation. **Dhahran, Saudi Arabia.**

*Information is correct at press time, but please reconfirm dates and times before traveling. Readers are welcome to submit information for possible inclusion in this listing.*



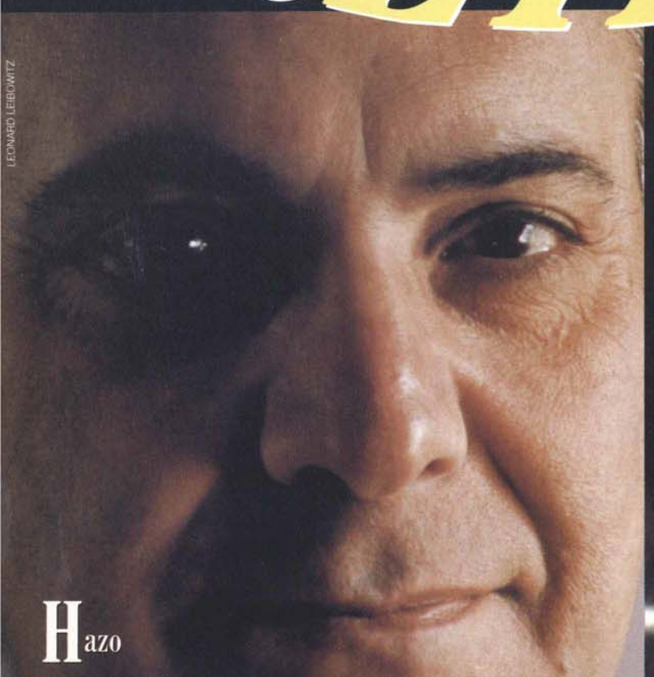



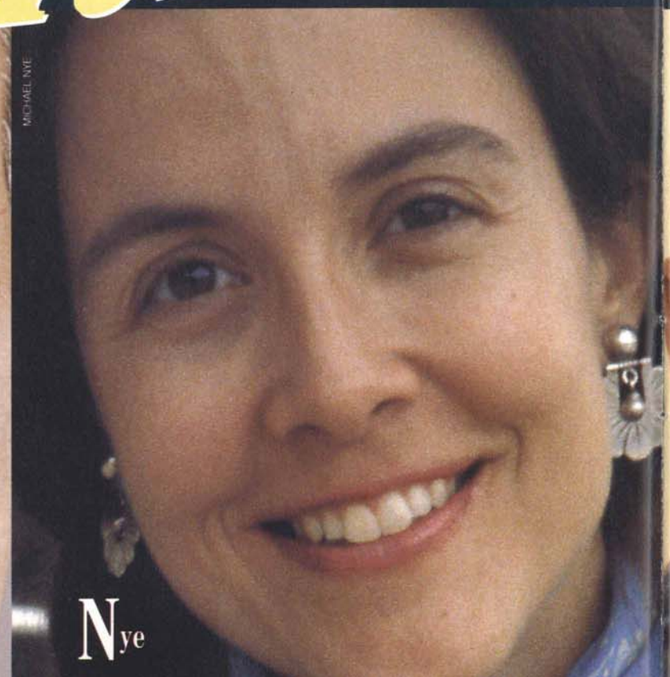



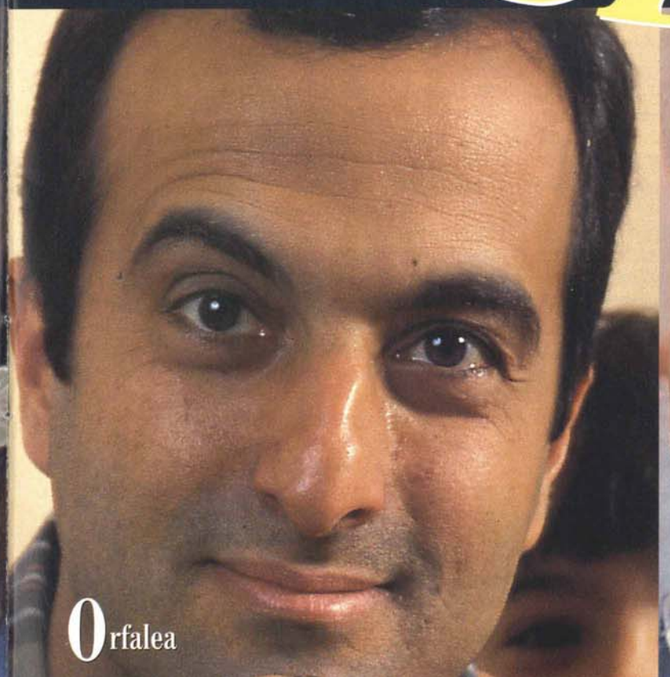

# POETRY IN THE BLOOD

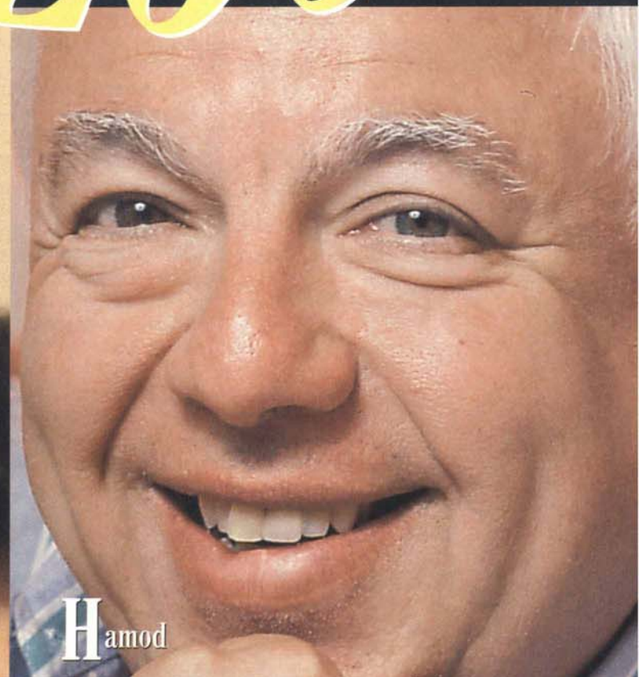
WRITTEN BY LYNN TEO SIMARSKI

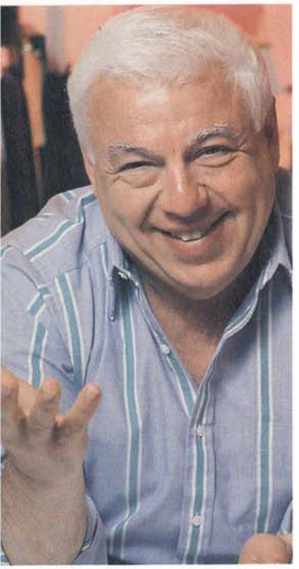
PHOTOGRAPHED BY CHAD EVANS WYATT





Sam Hamod

In 1911, the pioneering Arab literary figure in America, Amin Rihani, wrote of hearing Arabs describe America the way their ancestors had once described Andalusia: "A most beautiful country with one single vice – it makes the foreigners forget their native land." Though nearly a century has passed since Rihani heard those words, succeeding generations of Arab-American poets have not yet fulfilled the prophecy and forgotten their homelands. Even now, poets of Arab-American heritage, including many born in this country, often express a powerful longing for the land of their forebears.

Today's poets, along with the earlier generation of emigrés, are gathered in *Grape Leaves: A Century of Arab-American Poetry*, a collection of works by 20 writers edited by Gregory Orfalea and Sharif Elmusa and published in 1988 by the University of Utah Press. These poets use the literary vernacular of the West to ponder the meaning of being Arab, and a poet, in America.

Only one of the early emigrés – Kahlil Gibran – is well known in America today (See *Aramco World*, March-April 1990). His fame, admittedly as a popular rather than a serious poet, rests almost completely on his best-selling book, *The Prophet*, and most Americans, notes Arabic scholar Irfan Shahid of Georgetown University, view Gibran as an isolated phenomenon, a quasi-religious figure who brought to America some vague distillation of the wisdom of the East. Few know of Gibran's guiding presence in establishing a distinct school of Romantic poetry in Arabic – one that actually brought about a fundamental transformation in the literary tastes of the Arab homeland.

In 1920, 10 emigré, or *mahjar*, writers established the Pen League (*Al-Rabitah al-Qalamiya*) in New York. Geographically distant from the mainstream of Arabic literary currents and free to explore new waters, they revolted against the scholasticism in which much Arabic poetry had become mired. They experimented with new forms and pruned their poetry of extravagant verbiage. Influenced by the Romantic poets of Western literature and the American transcendentalists, they also addressed new themes: humanism, mysticism, and a yearning for freedom, both in poetry and in the world at large. They launched what Salma Khadra Jayyusi, the noted scholar of Arabic literature, calls "a movement of innovation and literary adventure, unequaled in the rest of the Arab world."

I smell them,
and the tears flow down my cheeks;
I can not even like the noon-day bulbul
Whisper with my wings, salaam!
I sit me on a bench and weep.
And in my heart I sing
O, let me be a burro-boy again
O let me sleep among the cyclamens
Of my own land.

From "I Dreamt I Was A Donkey Boy Again"
By Amin Rihani.
USED BY PERMISSION.

It fell to the charismatic personality of Gibran – "the greatest literary figure in Arab letters during the first three decades of this century," Jayyusi judges – to galvanize Arabic's Romantic school. Also an accomplished painter, Gibran wrote prolifically in both English and Arabic, producing novels, short stories, essays and poetry. Like many of his compatriots, he struggled with the apposition of Eastern spirituality and Western worldliness. "And you, the real poets, forgive us," he wrote. "We belong in the New World where men run after worldly goods; and poetry, too, is a commodity today, and not a breath of immortality."

Rihani was the first *mahjar* writer to come to America. Influenced by Walt Whitman, he was the earliest to deliberately undertake prose poetry – prose in the pattern of a poem, but freer and less bound by the constraints of meter. He also wrote the first novel in English about Syrian immigration to the United States, *The Book of Khaled*. That book's Whitmanesque poem, "I Dreamt I Was A Donkey Boy Again," poignantly evokes the immigrant caught between two worlds. His sentimental vision of the orange trees, anemones and cyclamens on the "sun-swept roads of Baalbek" in his beloved Lebanon meets and founders upon the equally dream-like flowers and women of New York's Central Park, to whom he is unable to speak.

Another important member of the Pen League, Mikhail Naimy, wrote mainly in classical Arabic forms. A Nobel Prize candidate, Naimy actually wrote more prose than poetry, serving as the critic and programmatist of the Pen League's tenets. His aim, he said, was "to insist above all on honesty and sincerity in all our verse and prose, before metrical resonance or brilliance of diction or succinctness of expression."

The living generation of *Grape Leaves* poets, however, owes little allegiance, if any, to the *mahjar* school. Dispersed across the United States, these poets in no sense comprise a literary movement like the Pen League; indeed, many had not known each others' work prior to coming together in the anthology. They are men and women, of Muslim, Christian and Jewish heritage, some born in the Arab world, others born American, although all write in English. Some are established poets, while others are relative newcomers to the poetry scene.

"Ultimately these are American voices, and 20th-century voices," says Robert Hedin, poet-in-residence at Wake Forest University. Their work joins similar anthologies of other American ethnic groups such as Afro-Americans and Native Americans who have taken literary stock of their communities' souls. By virtue of growing up in a particular milieu, the Arab-American poets strike some similar chords; they help to compose, in the words of one of them, Joseph Awad, "the music of the melting pot of America." Awad believes that while the poets are quintessentially American in their use of language and in their viewpoints on life, their Arab heritage helps them celebrate life, harkening back to a time where "people lived much more fully and felt much more strongly."

Many *Grape Leaves* selections, in the vein of other ethnic poetry, lament the passing of an old order. "For us it is a lost myth," says Lebanese-born poet Ben Bennani. "Our poetry shows a strong sense of loss, a sense of displacement, betrayal." In Hedin's view, "many are trying to write their way back to a sense of homeland, of community, of family. They offer us a vision of a world quite contrary to the one we have now." In this, he feels, the poems reach beyond ethnic or national boundaries to broader human experience.

The anthology's editors believe that the poets of both eras, although stylistically distinct, focus on some common themes. "It was fascinating," they write, "to discover elements more vital than ethnicity and U.S. citizenship that these writers share: family; internationalism; metaphysical questioning; homesickness; a marked concern for injustice, violence and international conflict; a love of gardens and the dance."

The contemporary poets, reflecting diverse lives, weave Arab themes into their work to a lesser or greater degree. Poet Naomi Shihab Nye discerns a shared "sense of image" in the poetry. Those poets born in the Arab world allude more often to the landscapes and life of their homeland – such as Etil Adnan's allusions to gazelles, Babylon and Queen Zenobia. But the American-born poets also draw metaphors from the Middle East, says Elmaz Abinadir, who is one of them. "These are images that are natural, references to places we don't necessarily belong to," she says, "as if these images are still so much a part of our lives." The poetry of American-born Orfalea, for example, speaks of fields and rivers near Damascus, pistachios, sugared almonds, and apricots: "*Mishmoosh*; the mother tongue knows the sound of apricots squashed in the mouth! *Mishmoosh*!"

Poetry in exile from a world where it was the earliest art, transported from a place where it was once so powerful that the Qur'an warned against confusing poetry with the eloquence of prophets, has necessarily become something new. The old society marked important occasions with both popular and exalted verse, and tested its verbal mettle in spontaneous poetry contests (See *Aramco World*, March-April 1980). "Arab culture lives on poetry," says Bennani. "You read it daily, you quote it daily, it happens daily." American culture, more often than not, educates poets to their specialized trade, and defines poetry as a domain best left to formal readings.

Orfalea believes that the Arab-American community itself could do substantially more to encourage its children to go into the arts. He discerns a "striving, Horatio-Alger, get-ahead ethic that doesn't reflect the community or its place in society. There's no doubt that the great ability of Arab-Americans just to disappear into the culture has helped them as Americans – and hindered them in terms of their own cultural and political achievements." Many of the immigrants' children failed to learn their parents' language, adds Elmusa, yet have not absorbed the literary riches of the new culture. "There's a generation that loses both ways, it seems," he says.

Today's Arab-American poets, writing in a society less sympathetic to their calling and in a different language from their ancestors', may have nonetheless retained the Arab belief about the centrality of poetry to human life. Perhaps this heritage helps to account for their poems' openness and lack of cerebrality. "All of their work is very accessible," points out Awad, "as opposed to so much contemporary poetry that's like verbal algebra. If more American poets were like that, I think poetry would be more widely enjoyed."

A tongue inside the facts
announces to the wind
what every poet knows.
The rest
is history,
is prose.

From "Smithereens"
By Samuel Hazo.
USED BY PERMISSION

A poet with 14 published books of poetry to his name, SAMUEL HAZO founded the now-renowned International Poetry Forum in Pittsburgh, which presents readings to the public. He has also published novels, criticism, translations and essays. Born in Pittsburgh of Lebanese and Assyrian immigrant parents, Hazo holds that "poetry is as indispensable to life as bread. Like bread it is daily and shareable. It roots us to the only permanence we have, which is the eternal human person we each bear within us." Hazo believes that poems should speak "to everybody at all times," transcending a given poet's particular frame of reference. "Being an American of Arab origin has nothing to do with it and shouldn't and can't have. One writes out of what one is, and that is best done without self-consciousness," he believes.

Born in Pennsylvania of Lebanese and Irish parents, JOSEPH AWAD works as a corporate public-relations professional and has spent "many a long night" writing poetry. "I must confess I find it irritating that, today, 'serious poetry' is deemed almost the exclusive preserve of academicians," he comments. His first book of poems, *The Neon Distances*, was published in 1980. "I feel poetry should be written as much for the ear as for the eye," he says. He enjoys working within the discipline of a set form, and his carefully crafted poems speak of America and of his family, including his 10 children, as well as of urban loneliness and his religious faith. He acknowledges that being grouped in an anthology with others of his heritage made him think, for the first time, beyond a concept of himself as Lebanese-American to that of Arab-American.

Poetry with horizons wide enough to embrace both the Middle East and the Middle West is SAM HAMOD'S realm. Born in Gary, Indiana, where his father built a mosque, Hamod writes expansive, free-wheeling verse more akin to the Beat poets of the 1950's and 1960's than to the Arab emigré poets of New York. Still, Hamod says, "There's always an old Arab in my mind" – an amalgam of his father, his grandfather and others. "I've always mixed Arabic with English in my poems," he says. "Certain things have more power in other languages." Hamod's moving poem "After the Funeral of Assam Hamady" illustrates the clash of cultures in the poet's youth. In it, an embarrassed young Hamod watches his father and grandfather pray on a Navajo blanket by a South Dakota

Naomi Shihab Nye with her son Madison

Opposite, Sharif Elmusa with daughter Karmah and son Layth

roadside while passers-by gawk from cars:

*the Hajj spreads the blanket*
*blessing it as a prayer rug*
*they discuss which direction is East*
*after a few minutes it's decided*
*it must be that way*
*they face what must surely be South.*

From "After the Funeral of Assam Hamady" By Sam Hamod. USED BY PERMISSION

Whimsical images flit through **BEN BENNANI'S** poetry, curiously light for the meaning they carry. His poem "Camel's Bite" reminds us that poets in the pre-modern Arab world were thought to possess a supernatural gift, and dressed in a distinctive manner. It uses the title's metaphor to express the effects of art – occasional, lethal, and final. Many references – carnations growing in the yard, cardamom, a saffron sun – suggest his Moroccan parents and his upbringing in Lebanon. "I love English as much as I love Arabic," Bennani says. "I can do things with it that native speakers can't do." Echoing Gibran, Bennani believes that America "produces" poets, whereas in the Arab world they are born. In the United States, he laughs, "only 'real poets' read poetry." Bennani is a "real" poet, with two books to his credit; he is also a founder and editor of literary journals and a translator of Arab poets.

*Like an ancient Arab poet*
*Half oracle, half ogre, I annoint*
*My hair on one side of my head,*
*Let my mantle hang down loosely*
*And wear only one sandal. I start*
*An oasis in the sun's deep belly.*

From "Camel's Bite" By Ben Bennani. USED BY PERMISSION

Born in British-Mandated Palestine and raised in a refugee camp in Jericho, **SHARIF ELMUSA** writes gently humorous, imaginative poems that mature into truths rather than proclaiming them. His themes, although often taken from the Arab world, stretch across a more universal canvas. A co-editor of *Grape Leaves*, Elmusa was drawn to both poetry and mathematics in school, and he studied engineering and planning in the United States. More recently, when poetry "welled again," he recalls, "I felt as if a missing leg was restored." Elmusa's poetry illustrates how Arab heritage can be incorporated into the American idiom. The opening line of one poem, "A Monologue of an Arab Man in Love," alludes to a song by Egyptian singer Farid al-Atrash, says Elmusa, and another line derives from mystical poet Jalal al-Din al-Rumi, who wrote of his love as one "who looks out with my eyes." The poem also contains Qur'anic and Biblical references. The line, "Is this the woman I love?" comes from the archetypal Arab love legend of Qays and Layla.

Gregory Orfalea with his son Matthew

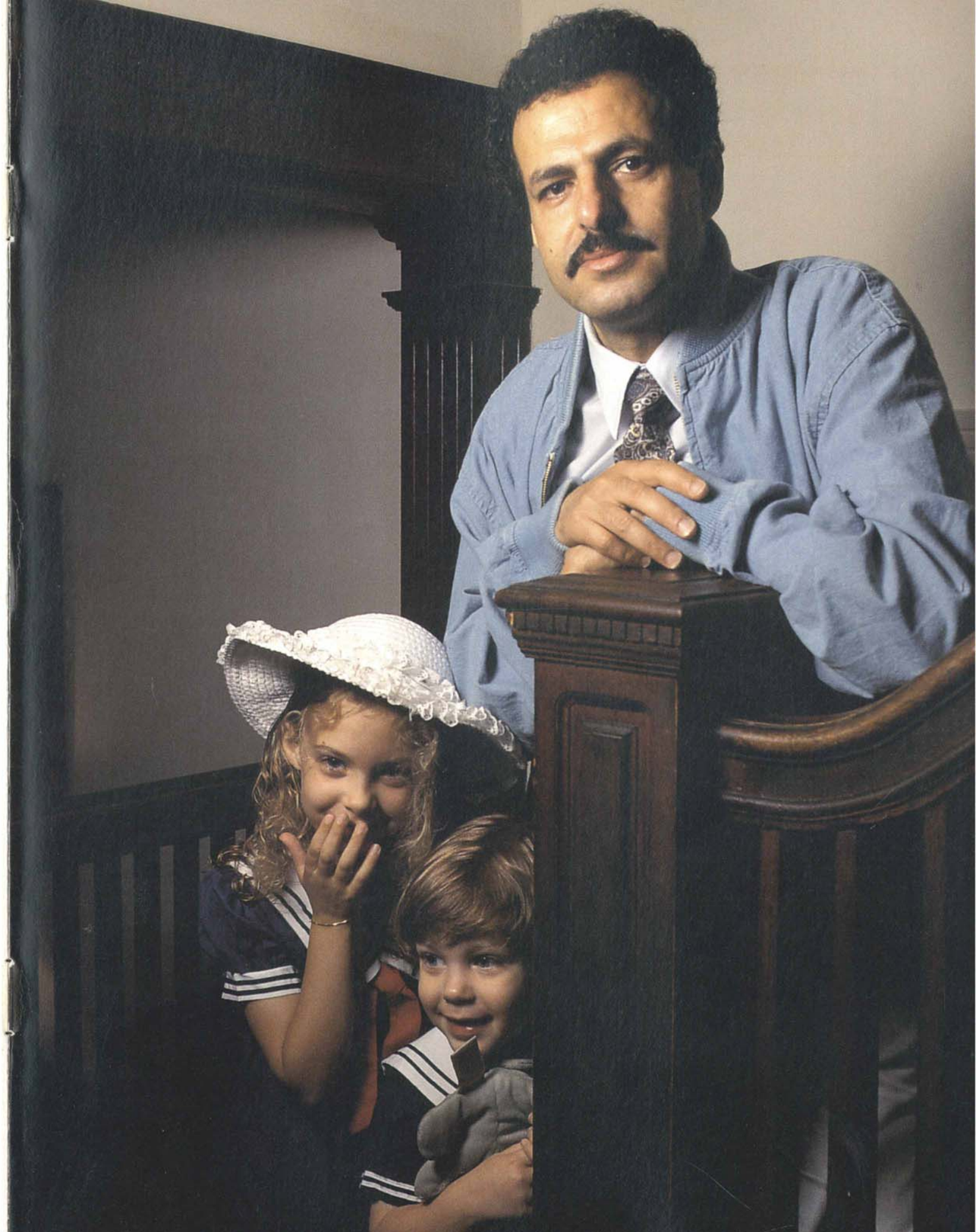
The other co-editor of *Grape Leaves*, **GREGORY ORFALEA** was born in Los Angeles of Syrian-Lebanese immigrants. He has published a book of his own poetry and a history of Arab-Americans. When visiting his family's village near Damascus, Orfalea was struck by the ubiquity of poetry in daily life. Reading "everything Kahlil Gibran ever published" while working on *Grape Leaves* was another revelation for Orfalea, who emerged with far greater respect for the breadth of the pioneering poet's work. He sees his own work now "telescoping down" from political and social subjects to a concern for relationships between men and women and between parents and children. Both realms merge in his poem "The Sunken Road, Antietam, 1980," which captures the unrest between a man and a woman picnicking on a Civil War battlefield. "To me, wars are personal grievances writ large," he says. "They're disputes within a family, taken too far."

Strong, clear poetry rooted in the folk tradition of America speaks of **NAOMI SHIHAB NYE'S** father, mother, and uncle, and of her brothers and children. Of Palestinian and American heritage, Nye grew up in Texas, where she has worked in the state's poetry-in-the-schools program. She has published three books of poetry and is also a folksinger. Even as a small child, Nye recalls, she embraced the richness of her two cultures. Her poem "Blood" celebrates the moment when a little girl knocked at the family's door and asked to see "the Arab" – the first time "my father told me who he was." The presentation of her work in *Grape Leaves* alongside Gibran's "made me smile – we're both in the same century." Nye has read her poems around the world, but it was during poetry-reading trips to Arab countries in the early 1980's, she says, that "I had the eerie feeling that for the first time, people could laugh at the right places in my poems" – almost as if the humor was "in the blood." Yet, she muses, "I don't know if I could live in a culture in which I was acclaimed as a poet. I like the back-streets venue, myself."

Diaries of her Lebanese immigrant family's lives in the Amazon and America provided **ELMAZ ABINADIR** with a rich mine of experiences for a doctoral dissertation and a novel as well as for poetry. "Fighting the two cultures that were controlling my life," as she puts it, has inspired much of her work. Born in Pennsylvania, she believes she shares with a number of other *Grape Leaves* authors "a conflict about who we are and how we fit into this society." As an example of this, Abinadir recalls being called "Elma" during 12 years of Catholic school, "because they decided that 'Elmaz' wasn't a saint's name." On her first visit to Lebanon at age 19, she discovered a fundamental kinship with the land. "Walking through the hills, the paths felt familiar, as if I'd been on them before," she recalls. Her own family integrated poetry into daily life, with spontaneous poetry contests at the end of the day in which each person vied to create more beautiful images than the last. "I live with a kind of reverence for poetry," she says.

The new generation of Arab-American poets has begun to enrich American literature with compelling voices in a way that Amin Rihani could not have foretold, and as his pioneering generation was unable to do. But in the final analysis, as Joseph Awad judges, they "all have to stand or fall on their merits as poets – not as Arab-American poets."

*Lynn Teo Symarski is a Washington-based free-lance writer specializing in the culture and politics of the Middle East.*



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