ARAMCO WORLD

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Djenné

LIVING TRADITION

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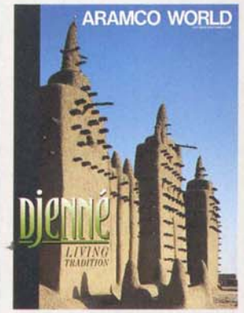

Cover: The imposing eastern wall of the Great Mosque in Djenné, Mali, with its massive conical towers and a central niche directed toward Makkah. The mosque, built in 1907 on the ruins of an earlier one, is Djenné's most important structure and focal point of community pride. Each year townsfolk stage a festival and replaster the mud walls. Photo: Brynn Bruijn. Back cover: Last page of a Qur'an from the Sultan Barquq Mosque, Cairo, in Prisse's *L'Art Arabe*. Photo: John Feeney.

◀ The Nasif House in Jiddah, part of Saudi Arabia's cultural heritage. Photo: Ali Mubarak.

ARAMCO WORLD

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WRITTEN BY PINEY KESTING

An international group of archeologists, diplomats, architects and preservationists gathered in New York last year for a unique forum on cultural preservation in Saudi Arabia. Experts with widely diverse backgrounds came from various corners of the United States to meet with their Saudi counterparts during the two-day Saudi-U.S. Cultural Heritage Conference. Co-sponsored by the U.S. Committee for Saudi Arabian Cultural Heritage and New York University's Hagop Kevorkian Center for Near Eastern Studies, the conference was the first of its kind to be held in the United States.

Tending THEIR ROOTS

"This conference is a big event for us," said Saad Nazer, Saudi Arabia's New York consul-general. "Ten years ago, preservation efforts in Saudi Arabia had not yet developed fully. Today you will learn that we have made great progress. We in Saudi Arabia," he added, "also have learned that our experience in preserving cultural heritage closely parallels yours. You in the United States have preserved places uniquely associated with the founding of your nation. We too have now preserved the sites at Riyadh and Dir'iyah where Saudis can learn how King 'Abd al-'Aziz formed our modern kingdom."

John R. Hayes, vice president of Mobil Middle East Development Corporation, commented that during Saudi Arabia's early years of rapid modernization, "the people who were making that happen were much too busy to pay attention to the effects on the fabric of traditional culture." Then, in the 1970's, he noted, "things started to change."

That was when Saudi Arabia's preservationists stepped in. As Dr. Abdullah Masry, assistant deputy to the minister of education for antiquities and museum affairs, explained, "development was a catalyst for the consciousness of the nation." Decades of change and successful modernization had catapulted the kingdom into the forefront of the 20th century technologically, but to some extent technology had left tradition in its dust. A need for modern cities and highways, for example, had led to the inadvertent destruction of some sites of historic value. Thus, in 1970, the government issued a comprehensive set of antiquities regulations which recognized officially the need to temper development with conservation.

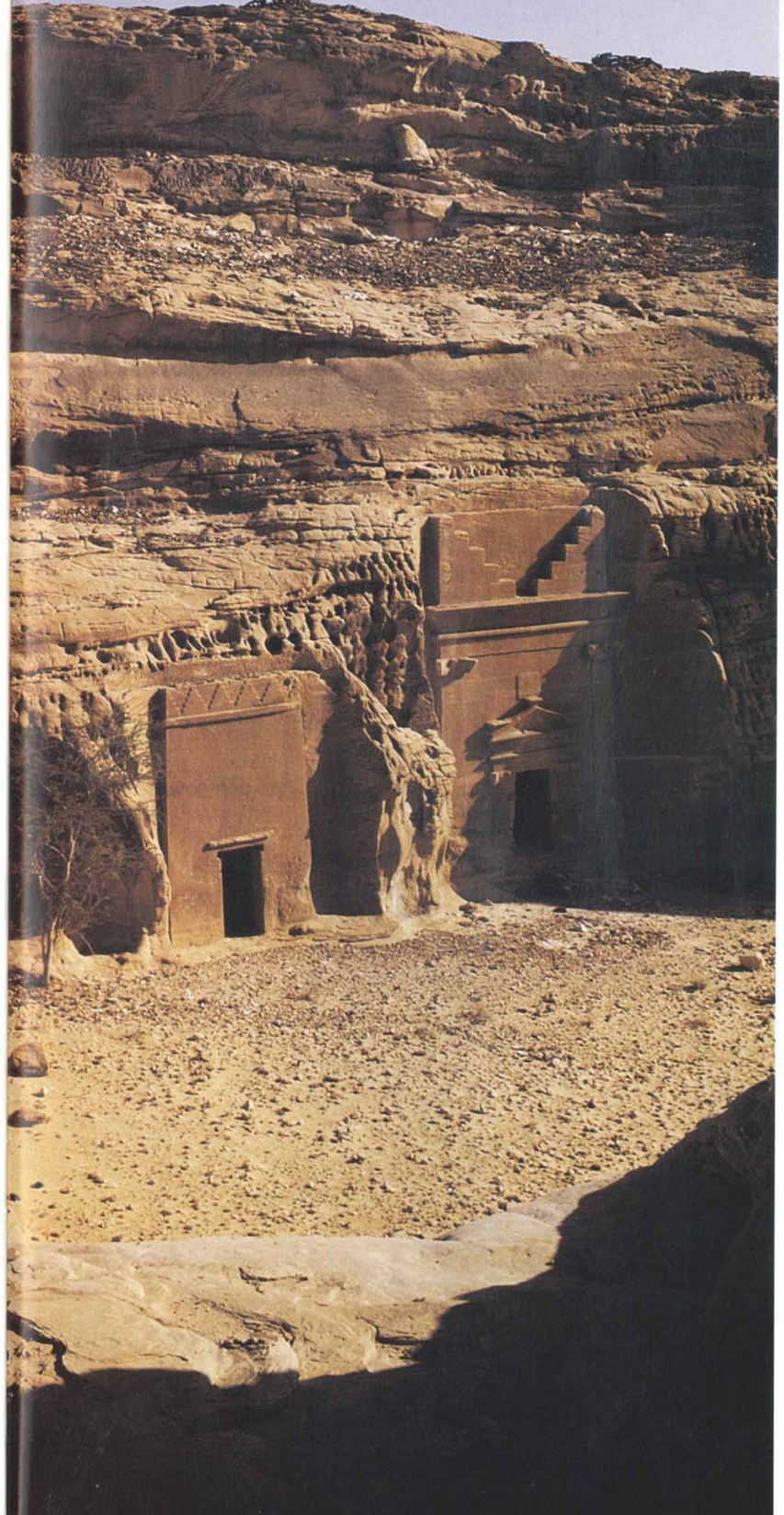
Preservation efforts took hold and public awareness grew within Saudi Arabia. Historic buildings in Jiddah were saved from demolition, traditional dance troupes sprouted up in cities and villages around the country and the first National Festival for Heritage and Culture was held at Janadriyah in 1985 (See *Aramco World*, September-October 1987, November-December 1989, September-October 1985). Major historic and prehistoric sites were identified and excavated. Saudi archeologists, often aided by foreign teams, began to unearth thousands of years of history long hidden beneath the sands. Today, Masry explained, "historic preservation is a very important aspect of Saudi culture."

Preservation has often been an afterthought of development in the United States as well, the conference revealed. J. Jackson Walter, president of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, explained that America recognized the value of preservation in the aftermath of World War II. "After rebuilding the face of America, the realization dawned on this country that, while the future clearly would replace the past, it was also destroying much of the physical evidence of our past." For every country, Walter stressed, "cultural preservation must be a national priority. The past teaches us about who we are and where we come from and what our values are. Through historic preservation, we can manage change in our culture."

Preservation as a national priority was the first of many topics discussed at the conference. During five sessions, American and Saudi preservationists and archeologists were also able to compare notes, often for the first time, on the role of museums in preservation, maintaining traditions, preserving natural habitats and the preservation of historic sites.

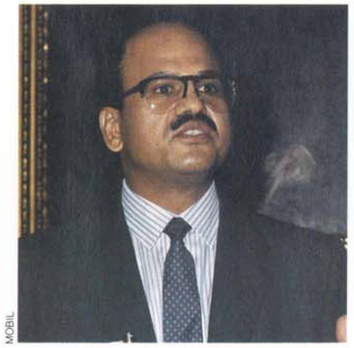
Former ambassador Lucius Battle was vice president of Colonial Williamsburg and Williamsburg Restoration Inc. in the late 1950's. As he noted during the conference session on preservation and restoration of historic sites, the success of Colonial Williamsburg, restored according to the original 1699 plans, not only make the past a living part of contemporary American life, but – by demonstrating the economic value of such projects – encouraged the restoration of other historic sites around the country. It also influenced preservationists thousands of miles away in Saudi Arabia.

The pictographs above and on the following pages decorate the Visitors' Center for Environmental Awareness at the Riyadh headquarters of Saudi Arabia's National Commission for Wildlife Conservation and Development.



BURNETT MOODY

MOBIL



MOBIL

MOBIL

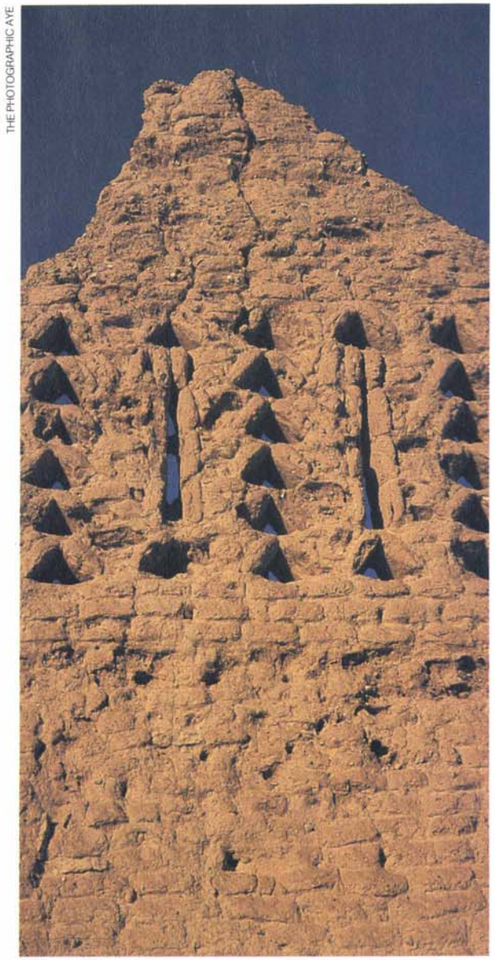
The rock-cut Nabataean tombs of Madain Salih (left) are among the Saudi antiquities to be protected. Above, Saudi speakers at the cultural heritage conference included (from top) Abdulaziz H. Abu-Zinada, Ziyad Ahmed Zaidan and Abdullah Masry.

The John Crump House of Colonial Williamsburg, Virginia, built in 1719, abandoned in 1892 (right) and reconstructed a half-century later (far right). The example of Williamsburg proved inspirational in Saudi Arabia and other countries.

COLONIAL WILLIAMSBURG FOUNDATION

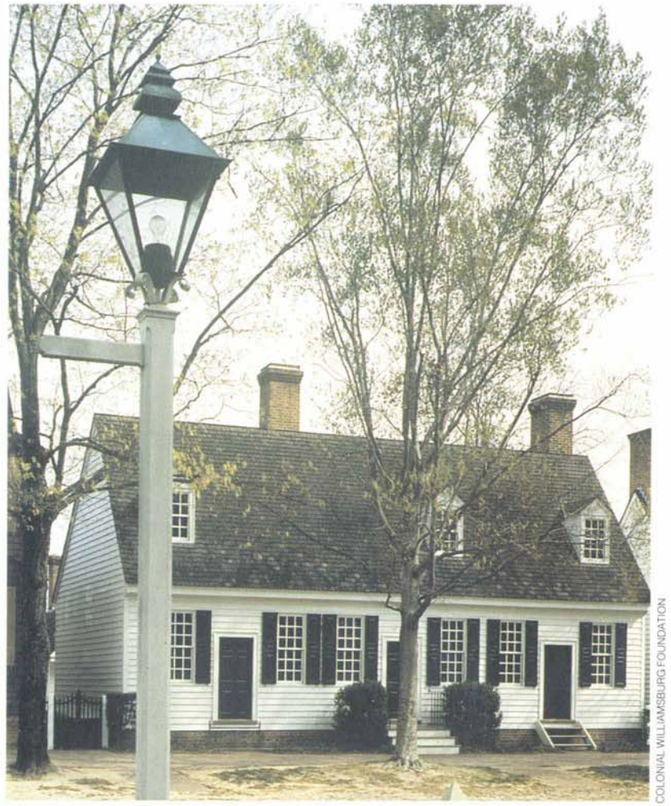
THE PHOTOGRAPHIC AYE

The restored facade of the palace of Sa'ad ibn Sa'ud at Dir'iyah, Saudi Arabia, the ancestral home of the Al Saud family (above). Protruding wooden spouts keep rare rainwater from eroding the palace walls. At right, the mud-brick walls of a Dir'iyah building before restoration.



THE PHOTOGRAPHIC AYE

Foreign workers share tea and a letter from home in front of the al-Turki House in Jiddah, far right. Saving historic buildings in Jiddah and other Saudi cities is part of the kingdom's new outlook on preservation, developed since the 1970's.



COLONIAL WILLIAMSBURG FOUNDATION

ALI MUBARAK

Colonial Williamsburg "was an inspiration to Saudi Arabia's heritage preservation," according to Masry, and served, in a sense, as a model for the restoration of Dir'iyah, the ancestral home of the Al Sa'ud and first capital of the Saudi state. Like their American colleagues, Saudi preservationists discovered that "the more you concentrate on restoring and preserving relatively recent urban settings, the more you will be able to draw on the sympathy of the wider public." Due to the important role Dir'iyah played in Saudi Arabia's history in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, it became the country's first major restoration project. Other sites have been excavated as well, such as al-'Ula, a pre-Nabataean town near Madain Salih; Tayma, which connected Saudi Arabia and Egypt in biblical times; Duma, site of a 2400-year-old citadel captured by the armies of the Prophet Muhammad; and some on the Darb Zubaydah, the pilgrims' road from Baghdad to Makkah.

Carl Meinhardt, an American architect, was involved in the Dir'iyah project and in the restoration of several 16th-century forts in the Hofuf area. When he first went to Saudi Arabia, he noted that architectural students were not always aware of the role they could play in preservation projects. Today, he said, "The interest in older buildings and the building heritage … has become much more a part of the understanding of the architects working today. The indigenous buildings provide a very rich source of materials and ideas."

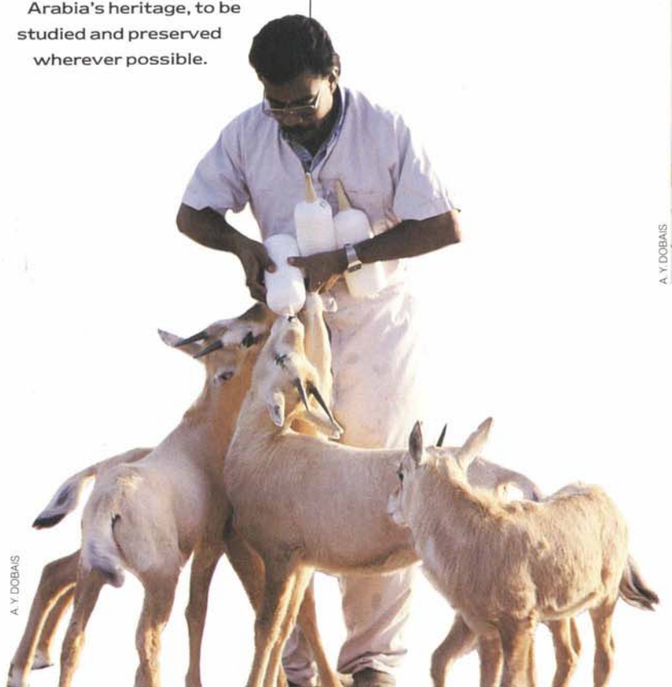
One Saudi architect who has made it a practice to understand and incorporate traditional Islamic and Arab architectural concepts into his work is Ziyad Ahmed Zaidan. In 1974, Zaidan established the IDEA Network for Development in Jiddah, an architectural firm that researches and catalogues the diversity of traditional Saudi architecture. At the New York conference, Zaidan noted that Saudi Arabia "has acquired a new outlook on preservation" during the last decade. As a result, he believes the country has been able to develop a modern infrastructure which maintains a careful balance between tradition and technology. "We realize that this continuity is essential for our human identity," he added.

During the course of the two-day conference, the lively exchange of information resulted in an unraveling of the history of Saudi Arabia's intense preservation efforts since the 1970's (See *Aramco World*, March-April 1980). Many of the recent findings indicate that the "identity" of the Arabian Peninsula was more closely linked with ancient cultures than originally believed.

A.Y. DOBAIS

Riyadh youngsters approach the Visitors' Center at the headquarters of the National Commission for Wildlife Conservation and Development. Teaching Saudi adults and children to respect, enjoy and help protect wildlife is an important part of the Commission's work.

A.Y. DOBAIS



A.Y. DOBAIS

Four young oryxes, part of the kingdom's natural heritage, battle for a morning bottle at the National Wildlife Research Center near Taif, below. Plants (right) are also considered part of Saudi Arabia's heritage, to be studied and preserved wherever possible.

Historians had viewed the Arabian Gulf region primarily as a seafaring artery between Mesopotamia and lands to the south and east. However, discoveries made in the last decade by scientific and archeological teams working with Saudi Arabia's Department of Antiquities have revealed prehistoric sites dating back over 60,000 years. Other digs unearthed artifacts similar to those used by early man in East Africa. A four-year, comprehensive archeological survey of the country, begun in 1976 and conducted under Masry's direction, had documented more than 1500 prehistoric and historic sites – 267 of them paleolithic, 107 of those dating back between 50,000 and 60,000 years, and one more than a million years old. As a result, the preliminary survey report in *Atlal*, the journal of Saudi Arabian archeology, pointed out that "to some degree … the ancient role of the Peninsula must be viewed not as if it were surrounded by a curtain of ignorance … but as a commercial nexus whose caravan routes sustained an important and continuing flow of long-distance communication."

Excavations and analyses at the oldest site, unearthed in 1977 near the village of Shuwayhitiyah in the Northern Province, linked it to discoveries made in Tanzania's Olduvai Gorge by Louis and Mary Leakey. Professor Norman Whalen of Southwest Texas State University, who specializes in the paleolithic period and who surveyed the site, says that, to date, it is not only the oldest site in Saudi Arabia but also one of the oldest prehistoric sites in western Asia. Discussing these findings at the conference, Whalen commented that "Saudi Arabia is in a unique geographical position for early-man discoveries. I think it is on the threshold of a golden age of archeological findings dealing with early man. The presence of several sites," he added, "both in Saudi Arabia and North Yemen, indicate that when early man left Africa … the first stop was the Arabian Peninsula."

Over years of exploration, excavation and restoration, the quantities of data and artifacts accumulated grew by leaps and bounds. New museums were needed, not only as storage and research facilities but as interactive, community . institutions. "Museums are powerful tools," Masry explained. In addition to the national museum in Riyadh, now under construction, five regional museums have opened in Jiddah, Dammam, Hail, Tabuk and Abha. Six local museums are functioning at al-'Ula, Jizan, Tayma, Najran, al-Jawf and Hofuf. "In each [local] museum," Masry says, "we have an archeologist's paradise": 40 percent of the space is devoted to research, and each has facilities for visiting scholars. Archeological finds made in the area will be shared by the local museum and the national one in Riyadh.

Another important aspect of Saudi Arabia's cultural preservation efforts is wildlife conservation. Dr. Abdulaziz Abu-Zinada, secretary-general of the National Commission for Wildlife Conservation and Development, participated in the New York conference, as did Richard Sellars from the United States' National Park Service. The conference, Abu-Zinada noted, was a "great opportunity to meet with historians and archeologists. These people are conserving areas in which we also have interests. It is good to have a dialogue to see how we can collaborate."

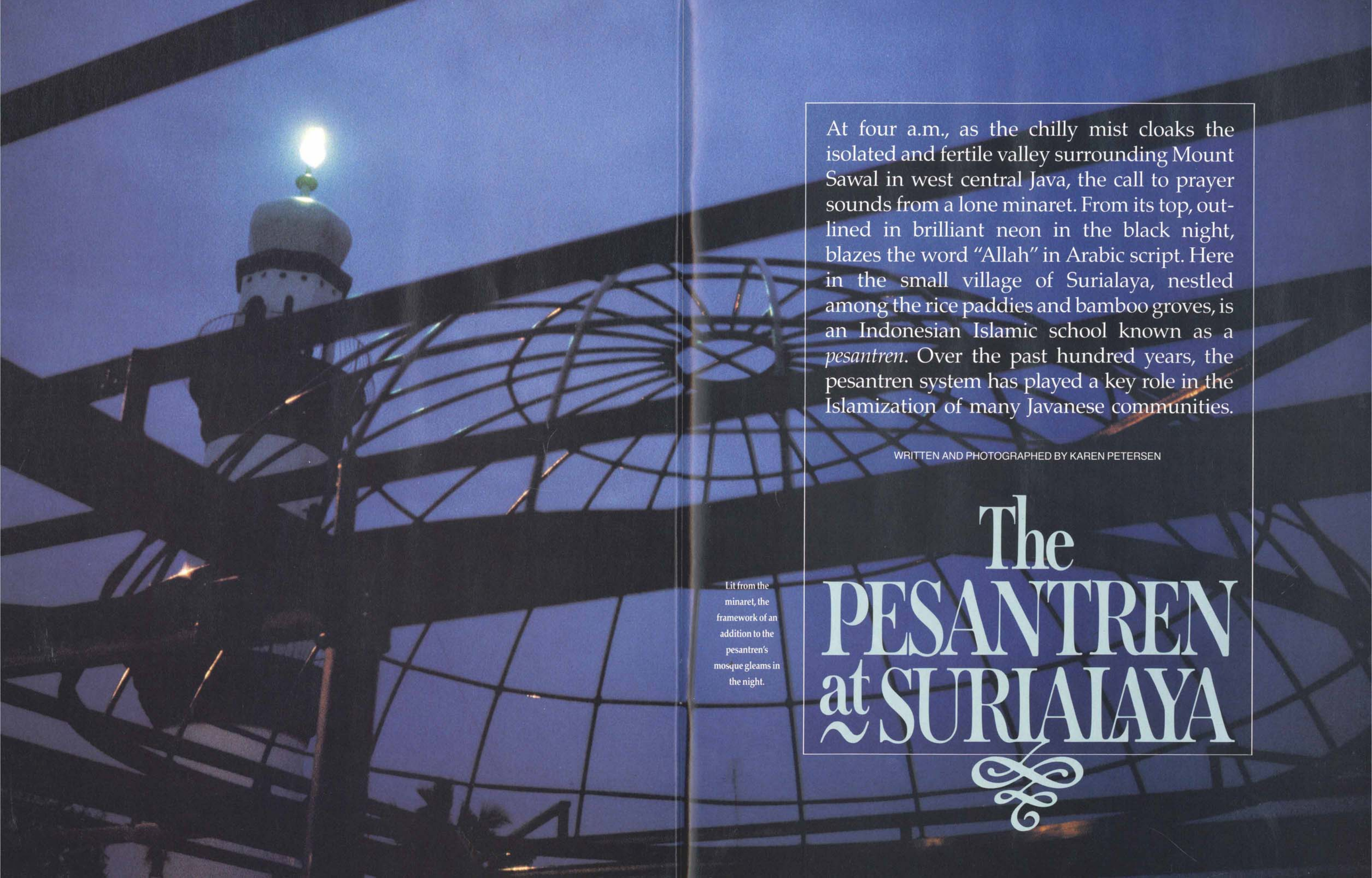
Established in 1986, the commission has already set aside eight reserves for wildlife and plants around the country. Harrat al-Harrah, a 13,775-square-kilometer (5237-square-mile) reserve in the region of Taif and the first to be established, is a haven for endangered Arabian and sand gazelles and for reintroduced oryx, as well as a breeding area for the houbara bustard. Two wildlife centers, near Riyadh and Taif respectively, focus on the captive breeding of endangered species.

From paleolithic archeological sites to modern bedouin weavings, from restoration projects to protecting endangered species, the conference revealed Saudi Arabia's commitment to preserving the physical traces of its heritage and history. Dr. Peter Chelkowski, director of the Kevorkian Center, noted that the conference also "brought together people from two completely different political, economic and cultural landscapes on a subject of increasingly compelling interest."

John Hayes of Mobil was also "very pleased with the way it went. We wanted to put people from Saudi Arabia who have been participating in the tremendous cultural explosion there in touch with people in the U.S. who have had similar experiences, who share the same kind of values and interests. The conference proved there is a great deal they can do for each other."

New York University President John Brademas commented that the conference focused attention on "the extraordinary cultural heritage of [the United States and Saudi Arabia] and the shared interest in preserving and restoring both the natural and manmade wonders of the Arabian Peninsula." For Abdullah Masry, any forum which presents Saudi Arabia's preservation efforts to a Western audience helps combat a misperception that Islamic culture "is averse to the idea of preservation." On the contrary, he pointed out, "human culture is basically the same anywhere: If you don't respect the past, you don't have roots."

Piney Kesting is a Boston-based free-lance writer who specializes in Middle Eastern affairs.



At four a.m., as the chilly mist cloaks the isolated and fertile valley surrounding Mount Sawal in west central Java, the call to prayer sounds from a lone minaret. From its top, outlined in brilliant neon in the black night, blazes the word "Allah" in Arabic script. Here in the small village of Surialaya, nestled among the rice paddies and bamboo groves, is an Indonesian Islamic school known as a *pesantren*. Over the past hundred years, the pesantren system has played a key role in the Islamization of many Javanese communities.

WRITTEN AND PHOTOGRAPHED BY KAREN PETERSEN

The PESANTREN at SURIALAYA

Lit from the minaret, the framework of an addition to the pesantren's mosque gleams in the night.

لا إله إلا الله
محمد رسول الله

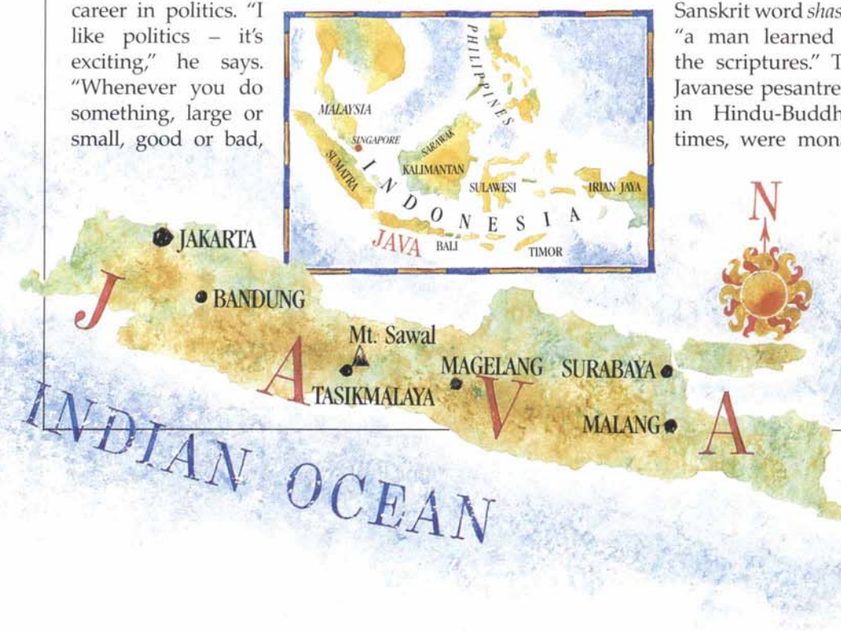
Above, an 18-year-old student from Jakarta studies in his dormitory room. Opposite, teachers' homes and dormitories line a pesantren lane.

The Surialaya pesantren is located just off a small country road, its entrance framed by an arching ironwork sign. The natural surroundings are rustic and peaceful; it is an ideal place for study and contemplation. At the center of a group of brick houses is a large mosque surmounted by a 25-meter-high (82-foot) minaret, built in 1970 at a cost of 2.5 million rupiahs – then equivalent to $7350, a large sum in Indonesia. There is also a spacious hall where the *kyahi*, or leader, receives his guests each day; nearby are basic dormitories and dining rooms for both girls and boys. The style of the place encourages a simple, frugal way of living.

The pesantren of Surialaya is one of the few religious schools in Indonesia – the world's most populous Muslim country – that draws many of its followers from different social strata, occupations and regions. Its members are an important social force, in that they have developed there a spirit of cooperation aimed at improving the spiritual lot of the less fortunate. One 23-year-old student, Muhammad Norman Zaidi, is attending the school in order to learn Arabic. But he is no ordinary student: He is the son of the governor of Sarawak, and intends to pursue a career in politics. "I like politics – it's exciting," he says. "Whenever you do something, large or small, good or bad, it's noticed. To be a politician is not only to be an administrator but to involve yourself with the people." Zaidi is particularly impressed by the school's ruling principle of *ijtihad*, an Arabic word translated as a positive struggle to become better, without fatalism.

The Islamic pesantren system ranges from small local kindergartens to boarding schools at the junior and senior high school and academy levels. Supplementary Islamic instruction is given in the evening to students from local elementary schools. Pesantrens are funded privately, with occasional assistance from the Indonesian government, and tuition varies according to the student's ability to pay. One could conceivably spend 20 years of one's life at a pesantren – from age four (kindergarten) to graduation at age 24 from the academy. The curriculum is largely Islamic, although the school is also required by the state to teach secular courses.

The Indonesian word pesantren, or *per-santri-en*, means "the place where the wise men are," *santri* being a derivative of the Sanskrit word *shastri*, "a man learned in the scriptures." The Javanese pesantrens, in Hindu-Buddhist times, were monas-



teries, the centers of spiritual life and guidance in the villages. Islam took root on a large scale in the 15th and 16th centuries, brought by Muslim traders from the Arabian Peninsula. Buddhism and its predecessor on the island, Hinduism, were gradually displaced. In the 17th century, as Muslim influences of different kinds increased, the monasteries underwent a gradual transition to become what we would now call village counseling centers. Cross-pollinated by the disciplines of the monk and the mystic, this function remained basically intact for two centuries. A man could go to the kyahi, the cultural and political leader, for religious instruction or for personal help.

In the latter part of the 19th century, in the last century of Indonesia's 350 years of Dutch colonial rule, the economies of the villages began to change. Java was no longer the remote eastern boundary of Islam, thanks to the steamship and the Suez Canal. The pilgrimage to Makkah now took less than a month and was possible for more people. As the pilgrims returned, a purer, less mystical Islam came to Java, and with it the desire for more rigorous religious education. The wealthier village members began to turn the centers into schools for their children – boarding schools that provided Islamic education while still maintaining their role as the spiritual nuclei of the villages. At the turn of this century, the first modern pesantrens emerged from this complex balance among family duties and education, community and school.

Shaykh Abdullah Mubarak, better known as Abah Sepuh, "the old kyahi," founded one of the most significant of these pesantrens in Surialaya in 1905, with a starting enrollment of ten students. Today, under the charismatic Abah Anom, Mubarak's son, the school boasts an average yearly enrollment of 1200, with students and faculty coming from Bandung, Jakarta, Palembang and as far away as Malaysia. The Surialaya pesantren also has branches on other Indonesian islands, and centers throughout Southeast Asia.

Now in his early 70's, Abah Anom is an expert in Islamic law and theology; he speaks fluent Arabic in addition to his national language, Bahasa Indonesia, and one of Indonesia's 300 regional tongues, Sundanese. He has organized a training

School activities take place against a background of humid beauty. Far left, an evening Qur'an study group in a boys' dormitory, and a 19-year-old academy student. Below, martial-arts exercises at dawn. Above, house-mother of a girl's dormitory.

course for preachers who, once their training is complete, become his deputies in various districts of Indonesia. Abah Anom's teaching emphasizes observance of the law (*shari'ah*) as revealed in the Qur'an and amplified by the sayings and the practices of the Prophet Muhammad. Although his deputies are not linked by formal ties, they, and the various regions where they preach, are held together by respect for his learning and authority as well as by their common devotions and their shared enthusiasm.

Today's Indonesian society is rapidly changing. Though four out of five Indonesians still make their living on the land, poverty and riches, traditional ways and modern technology rub shoulders in teeming cities like Jakarta. Java, with 100 million inhabitants, is twice as densely populated as Japan; Indonesia's 13,667 islands altogether have a population of more than 188 million, of whom 92 percent are Muslim. These circumstances place ever-renewed demands on religion to remain relevant to human needs as these needs change with the times. The harmony that prevails in the Surialaya pesantren today is largely due to Abah Anom's skill at looking beyond apparent conflicts to the lasting relevance of the Islamic revelation, which has permitted, even encouraged, good relations with both civil and military authorities. During the Dutch colonial period and during Japanese occupation of Indonesia in World War II, many pesantrens were hotbeds of rural protest or political resistance – indeed, during the Surialaya pesantren's first 30 years, until the departure of the Dutch, it was constantly regarded as suspect by the government of the day, and at one time was ordered to close down. Even since Indonesia won its independence in 1949, both local and national government officials have followed all pesantrens closely, aware of their political potential.

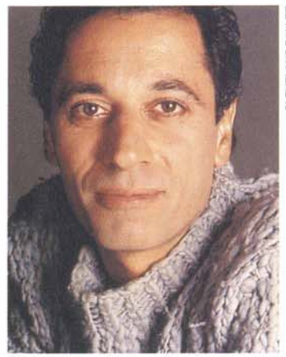
One of the pesantren teachers, a young man named Basyar, is heading toward the graveyard where the tomb of the school's founder, Abah Sepuh, is located. Basyar, himself a product of the pesantren system, is dressed traditionally in dark trousers and an elaborate batik *kemeja* shirt; on his head sits a snug-fitting, woven black hat called a *pichi*. As he climbs down the winding stone stairway, Basyar suddenly stops and turns toward the courtyard below with an expansive gesture. He seems filled with the power and promise of all youth. "Islam is my life," he says quietly. "I have never even considered another way. I believe that Islam is the right religion for Indonesia today."

Free-lance writer and photographer Karen Petersen is based in New York; her work has appeared in German Geo *and* National Geographic.

Teenage students, left, in white *mukenah* covering worn at prayer, look out of mosque window after morning prayers. Right, 73-year-old Abah Anom, head of the pesantren since 1956.

Above, women students pray behind a screen in the pesantren's mosque. Top of page: The Muslim creed, "There is no god but God; Muhammad is the prophet of God," in gilt wrought iron, adorns a door in the pesantren.

STEPPING OUT



CLEVELAND BALLET

Dennis Nahat was raised in a suburban Detroit home filled with music and dance. He took off from there, and he hasn't stopped since.

His resumé includes New York's Juilliard School, the Joffrey Ballet and the American Ballet Theater. He's also danced in and choreographed Broadway shows and acted in movies. Clearly a major player on the American ballet scene, Nahat, now 44, heads the Cleveland/San Jose Ballet, the nation's fourth largest ballet company. As artistic director, he is in charge of 45 dancers and a $9.5-million budget.

When he was a youngster, Nahat's Syrian-born mother took him and his older sister to Saturday ballet lessons in downtown Detroit. Though his sister later dropped out, Dennis was hooked. All through his youth he performed traditional dances for Detroit's Arab community – at weddings, birthdays and other celebrations. Two cousins were members of a professional dance team – ballroom and Arab dancing – and they inspired him. But it was in his musical home, he says, that it all began.

"Music was a big part of my family's life. We all played instruments and sang. In the Syrian culture, it seems everyone plays the *'ud* or the drum. There was always the Arab beat around my house," Nahat chuckles.

Though ostracized as a youngster because of his love of dance, Nahat persevered, and it wasn't long before he was a member of the Detroit City Ballet – and studying piano, oboe, viola and violin as well. Eventually, Nahat left Detroit to study music at Juilliard, but when he saw the dance classes led by ballet legends like Martha Graham and José Limon, he switched his major to dance.

A few years later, Nahat was lured away to the Joffrey Ballet, where a broken toe led him to switch to a choreographic career. He garnered Broadway choreography credits for Tom Stoppard's "Jumpers" and "Two Gentlemen of Verona," which earned him a Tony nomination.

When his toe was fully healed, Nahat danced on Broadway himself, most notably with Gwen Verdon in "Sweet Charity." In 1968, he joined the American Ballet Theater, where he would spend the next decade as a principal dancer and choreographer.

After four years with the ABT, Nahat and a colleague opened a small ballet studio in Cleveland. In 1976 the studio became a professional company, which expanded in 1985 to San José, California for 12 weeks of performance a year. The dancers perform 28 weeks in Cleveland.

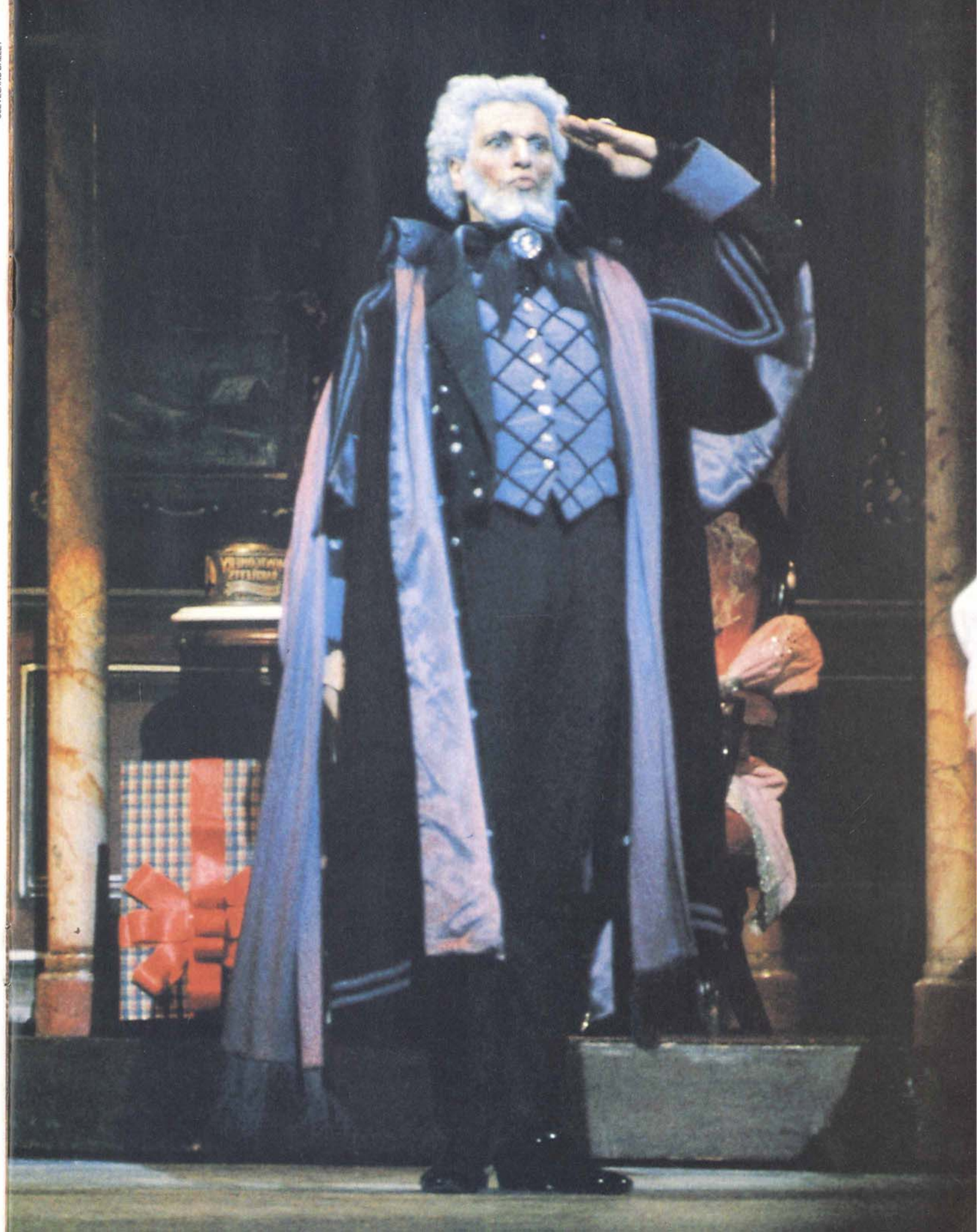
Nahat, tall and athletic, often works 15 hours a day on ballet company affairs, and still dances character roles in some performances. This fall his company is producing a new ballet for Rudolf Nureyev, and Nahat is serving as Nureyev's understudy.

Few ballets deal with the Middle East – Nahat could only think of a 19th-century Danish ballet called *Abdullah* – but he noted there are Middle Eastern motifs in ballets such as *Sheherazade* and *Prince Igor*. "And of course in *The Nutcracker*, there is the Arabic dance that Tchaikovsky wrote and which I've embellished to create a more substantial statement. I've used my ethnic background there," he says.

"It hasn't always been easy being an Arab in ballet, but I'm proud of my heritage. It's a big part of me, and when it's appropriate to use it in my work, why, that's all for the better."

Brian Clark, a regular contributor to Aramco World, *free-lances from Olympia, Washington.*

WRITTEN BY BRIAN CLARK



CLEVELAND BALLET

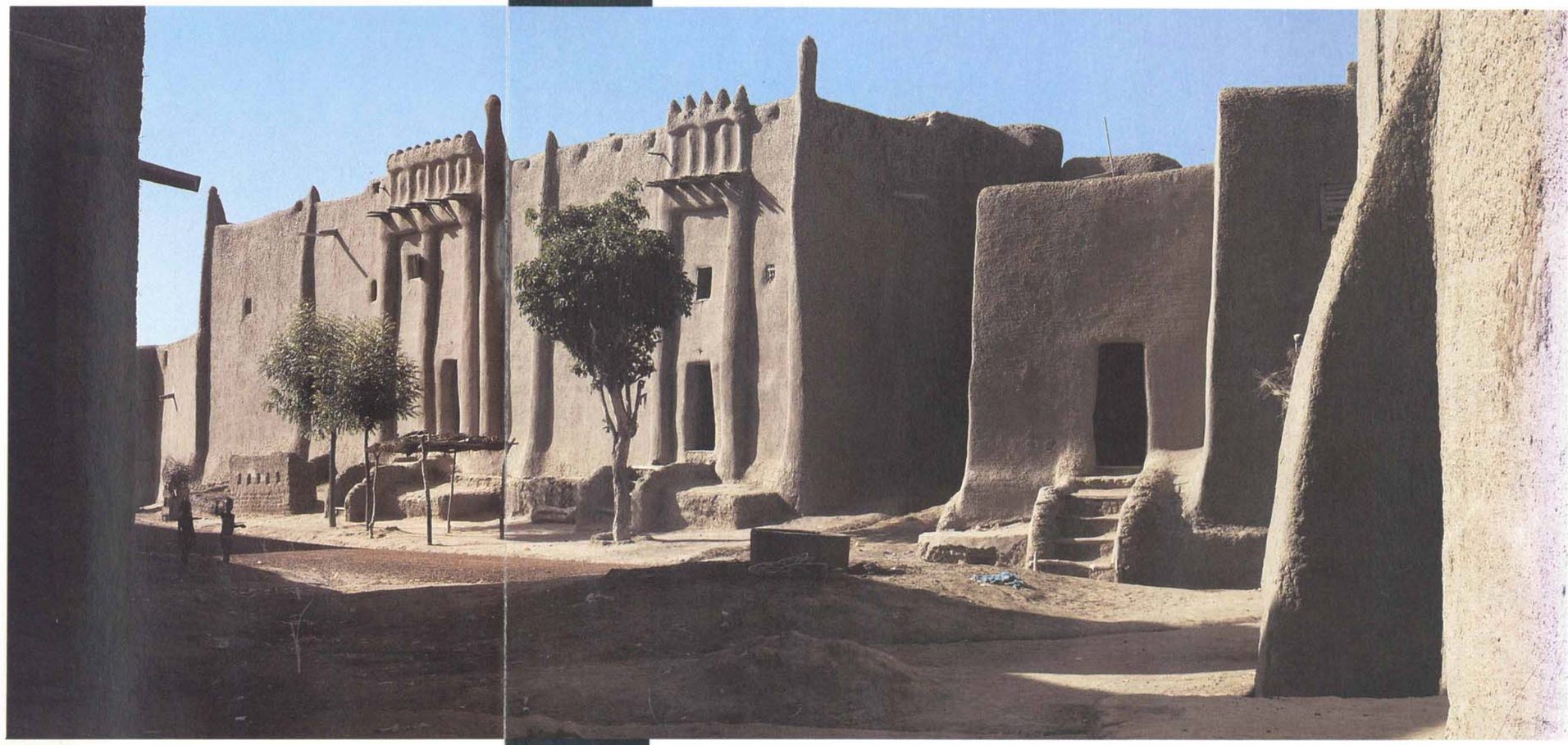
Djenné

LIVING TRADITION

WRITTEN AND ILLUSTRATED BY PIERRE MAAS
PHOTOGRAPHED BY BRYNN BRUIJN

At left, worshipers descend the main steps of Djenné's Great Mosque after Friday prayers. Above, a Djenné resident reads the Qur'an in the mosque's pillared prayer hall.

Djenné is a border city, though no national frontier runs anywhere nearby. It stands, instead, in central Mali, where the Sahara meets the savannah and, like most cities that link disparate cultures and climates, it has a rich history and an intriguing present.



An old-style monumental house in Djenné, where African and Muslim styles merged hundreds of years ago. Its typical Sudan facade features pillars and decorated entrances.

"Developing at the junction of a trans-Sudanic and trans-Saharan [trade] route," writes the American Africanist Labelle Prussin, "the city looks out, Janus-like, on both savannah and desert. [It] projects like a peninsula into the Sahel, subject to periodic... waves of northern influence. [Its] roots, however, are in the south. Thus [its] architecture consists of an indigenous savannah fabric into which salient features of North African Islam are woven like gold or colored threads."

After Djenné's occupation by the Mali and Songhay Empires, the city was conquered by the Moroccans in 1591. By then, it had been a Muslim city for more than 300 years. The famous *Tarikh al-Sudan*, a chronicle of West African history written by a 17th-century imam of Djenné, tells about the conversion to Islam of Koy Kunboro, the 26th chief of the city.

"Sultan Kunboro was the first to adopt the Muslim faith and the inhabitants of the town followed his example .... The Sultan replaced his palace with a temple designated for the worship of the Most High God; that temple is the Great Mosque of today."

After the Moroccan occupation, which lasted until 1780, the city of Djenné remained independent until the religious campaign of the Peul leader Cheikou Amadou against paganism; he incorporated Djenné into the theocratic state of Macina in the 19th century. The colonists who made Djenné a part of French West Africa in 1898 introduced a new era in which the city no longer took a leading role in trading and religious affairs.

Today, nonetheless, the old glory of the town is reflected in its majestic architecture; tomorrow, who knows? The economic and ecological crises of the Sahel countries have left their mark on Djenné, and the question is whether this once vital city will survive, let alone maintain its status as one of Africa's most important monuments.

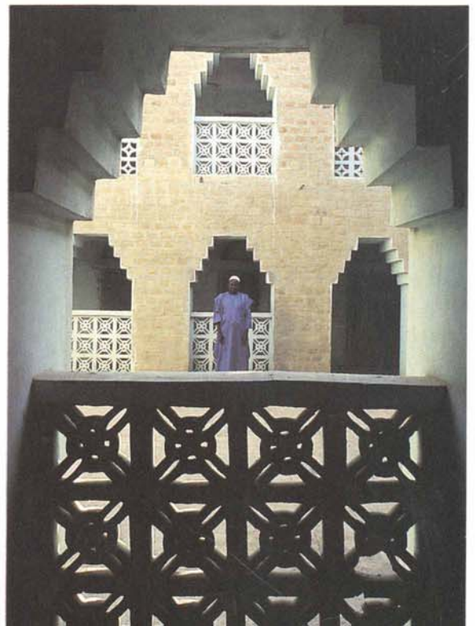
Until the end of the last century, Djenné was a flourishing and wealthy trade center, thanks to its position on the long-distance trade routes through the Sahara. Like most pre-industrial cities, its structure was partly defensive. The city was built on a small hill, surrounded by a wall and accessible by 11 gates. Within these walls, the separate residential quarters were inhabited by the different tribes that made up Djenné's population (See *Aramco World*, July-August 1990).

The open areas in the city were bordered by religious buildings and monumental houses built of mud, which was abundant around the town along the creeks. The houses, owned by rich merchants who headed extended families, were a type of traditional courtyard house whose plan is characterized by a strict separation between the male and female areas. The male rooms were at the front of the house on the first floor, so that a direct view on the street was afforded. The females' area was behind the male rooms at the end of the courtyard, on the ground floor.

Most of the traditional courtyard houses had a decorated facade that specialists call the Sudan facade; it included pillars and decorated entrances among its characteristic elements, and indicated the status and wealth of the merchant who lived there.

Each house was constructed like a closed box whose thick mud walls, without large windows, created a cool and relatively dustfree inner sanctum. Until 1930, the Djenné *ferey*, a traditional,

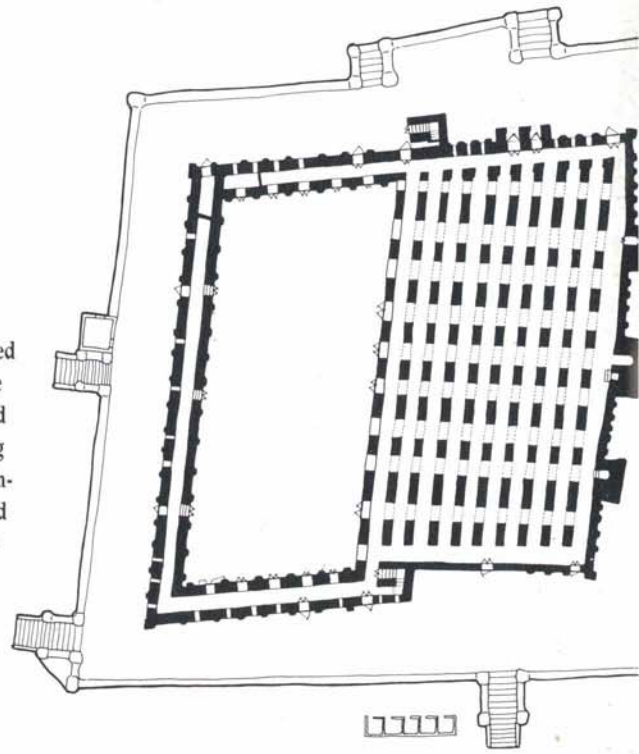
Women gather to buy and sell goods at the bustling daily market, above. A modern brick building (right) suggests a new synthesis of Western and African-Muslim architecture.



roughly cylindrical brick about the size of a soft-drink can, was the common construction element for such houses. Its use took a relatively long time and a lot of effort, but the walls that resulted are stronger than those made today with rectangular bricks. That is why many of these houses can still be found standing in Djenné today.

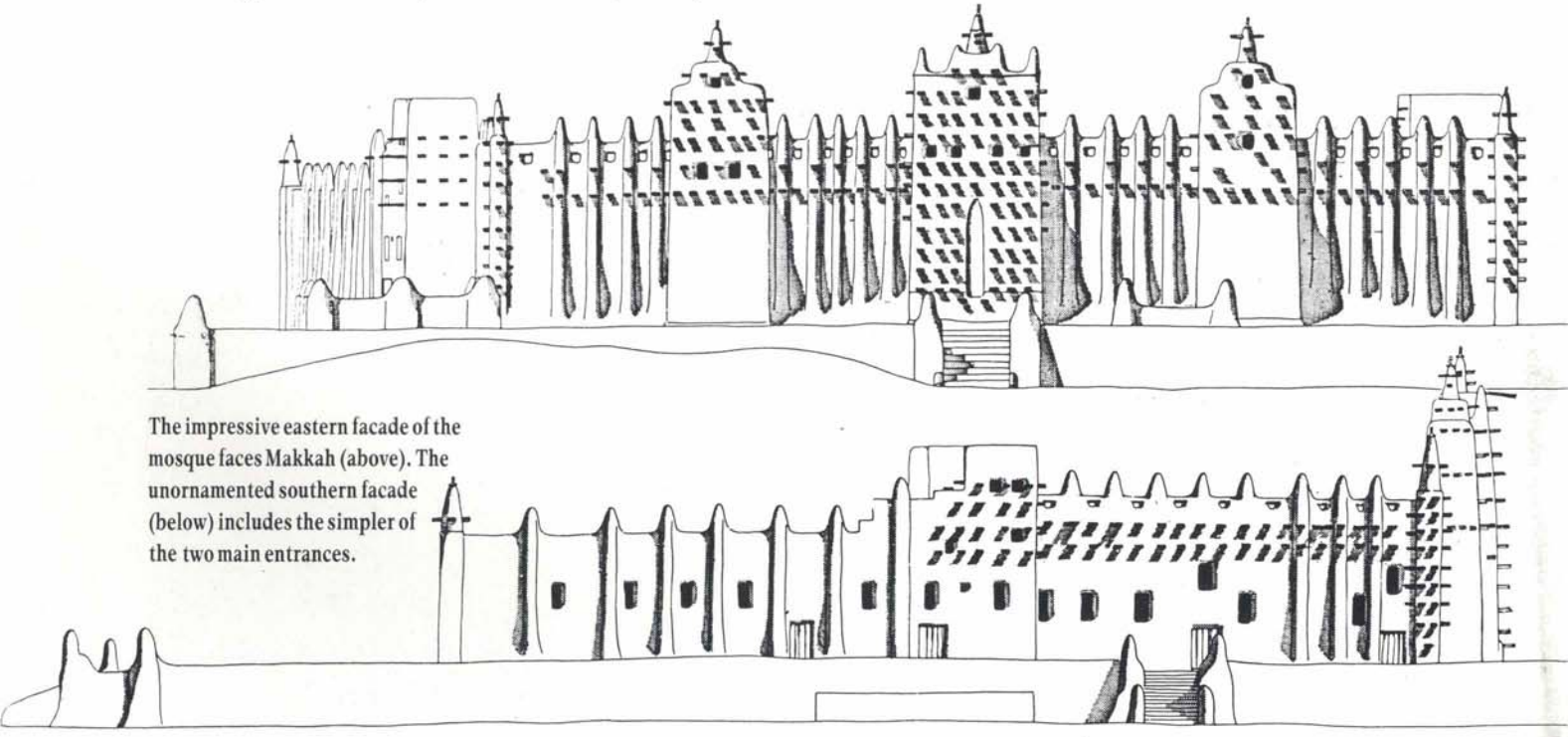
In more recent times, new urban patterns have developed alongside – but completely different from – Djenné's pre-industrial ones. Around the central marketplace and the mosque, new commercial buildings have been built in whose shops and boutiques the inhabitants of Djenné can buy imported luxury goods. The daily market is now held in a specially constructed building whose courtyard is lined with small shelters. Women gather here to buy and sell goods, particularly spices and other ingredients for everyday meals.

The old districts of the town, with their traditional architecture, are no longer separated from each other by open areas; in the former empty spaces of the city, and around its edges, the new urban patterns include a rectangular grid that organizes new buildings and roads. But though these modern areas can look rather desolate and shabby at times, the old urban areas are rapidly declining, with many ruins and partially demolished houses. On one hand, this decline is due to the fact that the traditional extended families these houses were built for no longer exist; the houses have thus become too expensive to maintain. On the other hand, the growing interest in modern materials and ways of building, as well as other inroads of Western culture, make the replacement of old housing by new-style structures quite common. The use of new building materials today appears to confer the same kind of social status that the Sudan facade used to.

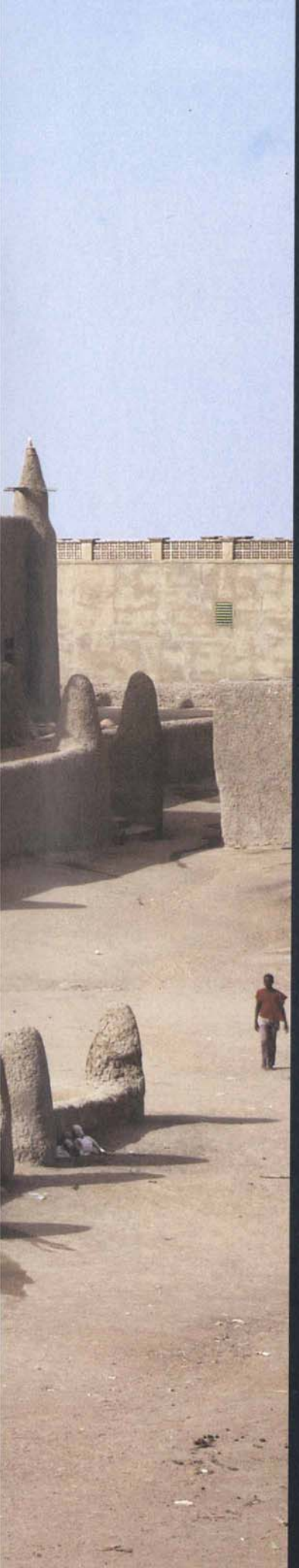


Plan of the Great Mosque and its raised plaza, showing the prayer hall studded with 90 supporting columns and the sun-drenched courtyard with its sheltered arcade.

The expanse of vacant terrain alongside the Great Mosque (right) is transformed dramatically by the tents, stalls and human activity of Djenné's weekly market (fold-out).



The impressive eastern facade of the mosque faces Makkah (above). The unornamented southern facade (below) includes the simpler of the two main entrances.



Members of the congregation shake hands and chat near the northern entrance of the mosque, with its monumental Sudan facade.

Of all of Djenné's buildings, the Great Mosque is the most important. It is the townspeople's pride and an important symbol of their community as Muslims. Since it is built of mud, good maintenance is essential, and the whole town comes together every year to replaster the rain-eroded, sun-cracked walls – the occasion for a true festival for the community.

The mosque has its own unique history and has served, probably for centuries, as the model for new mosques built in the region – a fact that becomes obvious when traveling overland to Djenné. On the ruins of the first mosque, built by Koy Kunboro, the present Great Mosque of Djenné was constructed in 1907. It stands on a raised plinth measuring 75 meters (250 feet) on a side; its massive shape dominates the surroundings and dwarfs the neighboring buildings.

The difference in height between the platform on which the mosque stands and the market square below is emphasized by six staircases decorated with pinnacles. These stairs, and the change of height, symbolize the transition from the region of everyday life to a sacred area. The mosque's ground plan is orthodox, but the *qibla* wall, the wall with a niche that indicates the direction of Makkah – here the eastern facade – is decorated with three massive tapering towers which culminate in pinnacle ornaments. Bundles of palmwood sticks built into the towers are both decorative and useful as scaffolding for maintenance purposes. Tapering pillars, crowned by rounded, miter-like forms, are engaged in this wall, similar to those of the old Djennenké houses.

Inside the prayer hall each of the three towers has a niche built into it from floor level upward; the imam leads the prayers from the middle one, the *mihrab*. A small opening high in this alcove connects the *mihrab* with a little room on the roof at the rear of the middle tower. In former days, a crier (*muraddid*) would stand here and repeat the words spoken by the imam for the benefit of the whole town.

The prayer hall measures about 26 by 50 meters (85 by 165 feet). A forest of 90 massive columns forms an arcade-like structure which carries the mud-covered wooden roof. From the inside, the hall's true dimensions are hard to judge, both because the columns obstruct an overall view and because the light is rather poor. On the north and south sides, however, dim light enters through high narrow windows; on the west side, the courtyard is bathed in dazzling sunshine.

The main entrances of the mosque are on its south and north sides, but these two facades differ remarkably. Unlike the plain and sober south elevation of the mosque, the north one is monumental and shows the same structure as the traditional Djennenké house: a Sudan facade. This difference reflects the visible distinctions between the richer eastern district of the city and the poorer western district: One has a very dense urban structure with prestigious houses, while the other is relatively open, and its houses are more modest.

The courtyard of the mosque is extensive – 20 by 46 meters, or 65 by 150 feet – and it is surrounded on three sides by galleries which are about four meters (13 feet) wide. Long, high and narrow, they are very impressive.

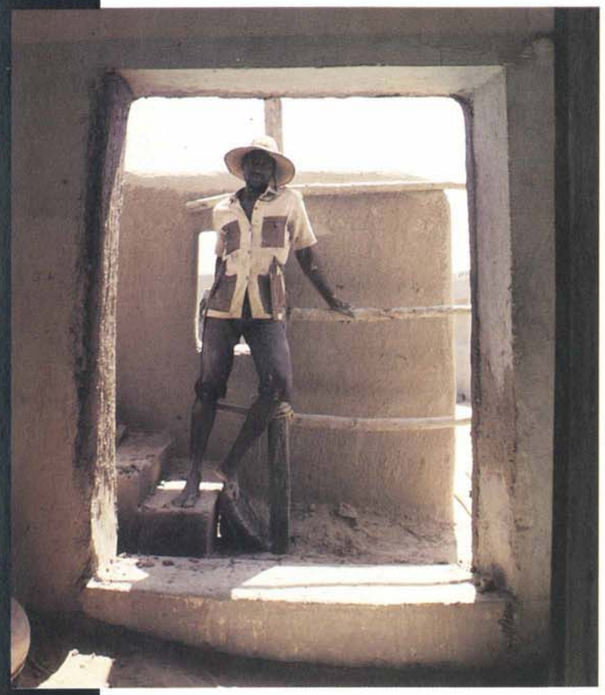
In the change and development of the city of Djenné the mason, or *barey*, holds a central position. He is both a designer and a builder. By long tradition, still in force today, there is a mutual bond between a mason's family and other families in the town for whom he works: A client with construction work to be done will first turn to the "official" mason of his family; the mason, in turn, will defer all other work in order to help the family with whom he has ties.

Most of the masons in Djenné are members of the *barey ton*, or masons' guild, which maintains professional standards and regulations, fixes building prices and wages and organizes the annual maintenance of the mosque. The meetings of the *barey ton* are characteristically African. The elders and the younger members sit apart, and the two chairmen are seated midway between the two groups. So that everyone understands clearly what is being said, one individual is appointed to repeat the words of the chairmen, or other speakers, loudly and clearly to the assembly; anyone who wants to ask or say something must address the meeting through this person. In former days, this was a slave's job, since slaves had no position or status in the society and therefore could neither insult anyone nor be insulted. Although slavery has been abolished, nowadays the intermediary is usually a descendant of a former slave family.

This post-colonial public building is built of mud, but with square bricks. Since 1930, square or rectangular bricks have replaced the traditional – and sturdier – cylindrical ones.

The training of a mason in the specific Djennenké masonic skills takes place through a master-apprentice system – but that too has changed over the years. Under the old system, a boy – called *male bania*, literally "the slave of the master" – was apprenticed at a very young age and the master mason had full paternal authority over him, as well as such parental responsibilities as providing money for presents for the apprentice's girlfriend and, later, arranging his marriage.

Today, an apprentice is referred to as *dyente idye*, which means pupil; he is an employee of the master mason and earns a small wage. A boy usually starts his training when he begins his first lessons at a Qur'an school, at the age of seven. Typically, he attends Qur'an lessons from seven in the morning to 9:30. After breakfast, he works at the building site until three in the afternoon. Then Qur'an lessons occupy him again until dinnertime. The training itself begins with the introduction to the tools of the profession and to building materials; then come the construction techniques. When all this has been absorbed, the mason begins to learn how to design and plan a building. Finally, the master mason, formally and before the apprentice's family, declares his pupil to be a full-fledged mason.



A Djenné mason, with a mud basket at his feet, replasters a house. On the roof of the Great Mosque, below, inverted fired-clay bowls protect and mark the location of each supporting pillar.

Djenné

In the architecture of Djenné today, old styles coexist with new ones. The organization, materials and techniques of new buildings are all based on Western examples, but the various traditional styles are still clearly visible. Centuries ago, traditional African architecture met at Djenné with Muslim architecture from the north, and their synthesis shaped the city as it was before colonial times. Today, we can wonder whether a new process of synthesis has begun: a synthesis combining new Western patterns with the African-Islamic ones. Such a development would not necessarily be deplorable.

Despite present economic difficulties, there is hope that Djenné and its magnificent mud architecture will be preserved for the future, so that the city will stand, as it has for centuries in its changing forms, as a monument and an exceptionally fine example of the cultural heritage of Islamic Africa.

Architect Pierre Maas is a researcher in the Department of Architecture of Eindhoven University of Technology in the Netherlands.

WRITTEN AND PHOTOGRAPHED BY RAMI G. KHOURI

KUWAIT'S HERITAGE HOUSE

Fifteen years ago, it was a gleam in one man's eye. Seven years ago, the Nasser Al Sabah collection was unveiled as an outstanding, nearly comprehensive collection of Islamic art, and placed on permanent display at the Kuwait National Museum's Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah – the Islamic Antiquities Collection.

Today, thanks to a year-round program of local and international activities built around the collection, Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah (DAI) has firmly established Kuwait on the international map of art and scholarship and rekindled, in its corner of the modern Arab world, a spark of the intellectual, creative and scholarly interaction which once lit the great Muslim centers of learning of the past.

The gleam, in the beginning, was in the eye of Shaykh Nasser al-Sabah al-Ahmad Al Sabah, a Kuwaiti infatuated with the beauty of Islamic art since his school days in Jerusalem. In the mid-1970's, he began to collect, traveling widely to buy Islamic art objects on the international market, relying largely on his personal taste and that of his wife, Shaykha Hussah al-Salem Al Sabah. They bought their first piece – a 14th-century Mamluk enamel-worked glass bottle – in London in 1975.

Within eight years, the couple assembled what is now widely acclaimed as one of the finest contemporary collections of Islamic art in the world, described by art scholar and critic Sheila Canby as "a collection which is both comprehensive in terms of periods and schools represented, and which contains works that any major museum would be proud to own."

Shaykh Nasser's initial impetus was the sheer beauty of the individual pieces, and the collection reflects his own sense of art and esthetics. By the early 1980's, however, he started filling gaps in the collection with the advice of internationally renowned scholars.

DAR AL-ATHAR AL-ISLAMIYYAH

EPILOGUE

One of the bitter costs of war, after the loss of life and livelihood, the moral damage to participants, and the long-term economic harm suffered by both belligerents and bystanders, is the disappearance of irreplaceable works of art and the loss of valuable elements of the world's cultural and esthetic heritage.

A recent sad example of such loss is that suffered by Kuwait's National Museum and its Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah collection after the Iraqi invasion of that country on August 2. A former researcher at the museum has reported seeing military trucks there being loaded with display cases, and a press representative at Kuwait's embassy in Washington says that "everything valuable has been taken from the museum."

Ironically, however, a small fraction of the museum's finest objects – just over 100 pieces – was outside Kuwait at the time of the invasion. Selected by guest curator Esin Atıl (See *Aramco World*, July August 1987), they were on loan to the Hermitage in Leningrad, and were then intended to go on tour in the United States in 1990 and 1991. "Some of the items I would have liked to include were just too fragile," Atıl is quoted as saying regretfully. "There were others that would have been wonderful to include, but I did not think it was right to take all the best objects from the museum for that length of time." Yet the objects she did select – with six others traveling in the "Romance of the Taj Mahal" exhibition – are the only elements of the DAI collection known to have survived the invasion.

The United States exhibition of those objects, called "Islamic Art and Partronage: Selections from Kuwait" and organized by The Trust for Museum Exhibitions, will take place as scheduled, collection director Shaykha Hussan al-Salem Al Sabah announced last month. "The excitement with which we organized the tour has been replaced by a resolve that it continue as planned," she said. "And our objectives for touring have grown from exposing the pleasures of Islamic art – to revealing the peril of a young country with an ancient heritage.... Like all civilized people, Kuwaitis believe that a civilization will be remembered not for its conquests, but for its culture."

RUTH FREMSON/WASHINGTON TIMES

The tour of "Islamic Arts and Patronage" begins at the Walters Art Gallery in Baltimore in December and continues to Fort Worth, Atlanta, Richmond and St. Louis in 1991. Partly to provide background for the exhibition, and partly to let our readers know what plans and projects – besides the artifacts – have been lost, this article, assigned more than a year ago, is printed here as scheduled. But we also publish it in hope: hope that the objects now in the United States will not remain the only part of the Kuwait National Museum's collection to be accessible to the public; hope that the Museum's well-planned programs can someday be resumed for the benefit of its visitors; hope that the entire collection – lovingly built, carefully studied, rich in beauty and in the cultural understanding it offers – may somehow soon be rescued from the uncaring fist of war and be reassembled for the amazement, instruction and delight of Arabs and non-Arabs alike.

—The Editors

A once-derelict pair of 14th-century wooden doors, rescued by Shaykh Nasser from a poor district of Fez, Morocco, and their color and carving restored.

Yet his discerning eye remained an important attribute, especially in spotting pieces that others might miss or pass up. On a visit to the second-hand market of New Delhi, for example, he spotted a badly corroded metal box. After cleaning it in his hotel room, he found he had bought a fine example of a Mamluk-period inscribed pen box. In a poor district of Fez, Shaykh Nasser spotted a derelict pair of carved doors more than four meters (13 feet) tall. They turned out to date from the 14th century and now, their color and carving restored, are displayed with appropriate dignity.

"When our house was full of carpets and objects nearly piled one over the other," Shaykha Hussah recalls, "we started thinking of a museum to house and display our growing collection. That was when we realized the need to acquire works of art according to criteria other than intrinsic beauty and personal taste, so that our collection would be widely representative of techniques, artistic styles, geographical regions and historical eras."

When he decided to place the collection on permanent display, Shaykh Nasser commissioned the professional assistance of a team from the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art, headed by associate curator of Islamic art Marilyn Jenkins.

The particular strengths of the collection, in the view of Shaykh Nasser, his wife and the international experts alike, are its comprehensive nature and its richness in individual masterpieces – reflecting the personal eye and taste of a collector, rather than the results of narrowly focused excavations or acquisitions from a single region or period. Ceramic objects are the highlight of the collection, in terms of range and quality, and the variety of calligraphy is also very strong. However, visitors and scholars are intially impressed by the scope of the display – including metal, stone, glass, wood, carpets, calligraphy, miniatures, jewelry, coins and textiles.

A few objects stand out for their particular beauty and craftsmanship, such as an early 11th-century (Fatimid-era) carved rock-crystal bottle; a 10th-century set of rock-crystal chessmen from Egypt; a carved and painted wooden box from 14th-century Iran, constructed to hold multiple copies of the Qur'an; a 10th-century bronze astrolabe, one of the earliest dated examples of this type of navigational aid; a deep blue lusterware jar from 13th-century Damascus, inscribed with the names of the potter and the owner; a 17th-century portrait of a Persian painter painting a portrait, from Moghul India; the carved and painted wooden doors from Fez; and an 11th- or 12th-century carved ivory hunting horn from Sicily.

Several of the finest pieces, including the rock-crystal bottle and chessmen, were purchased from the collection of the late Marquis de Ganay of Paris. They are thus on public display again for the first time in half a century – and, appropriately, closer to their respective places of origin in the heartland of Islam.

Shaykh Nasser has written that in collecting, his emphasis has been "first of all on the spiritual bonds which unite the Muslim peoples and the artifacts which express them – manuscripts of the Qur'an, inscriptions in mosques, *mihrabs* and *qiblas* – and second, the common factors which form their culture."

In bringing priceless aspects of Arab and Muslim culture back to the Muslim world, the Al Sabahs – members of Kuwait's ruling family – are conscious of the tradition of princely families of the past, under whose patronage great works of art were created or collected. As Shaykha Hussah told a recent UNESCO conference, "patronage and conscious choice have always been paramount in the formation of Islamic collections in the Muslim world" – just as they were in Renaissance Europe or, more recently, in 19th- and 20th-century Europe, North America and Japan.

Marilyn Jenkins, who worked closely with Shaykh Nasser for many years, described him in the museum's inaugural catalogue as "an inveterate collector and an intuitive connoisseur with a highly refined taste, trained eye and photographic memory. He has a boundless enthusiasm which sustains him during the sometimes long pursuit of an object, a coolness which stands him in very good stead during its capture, and a genuine love for beautiful things in general – and Islamic art in particular – which is reflected in the manner in which he cares for and lavishes attention on an object once it is his."

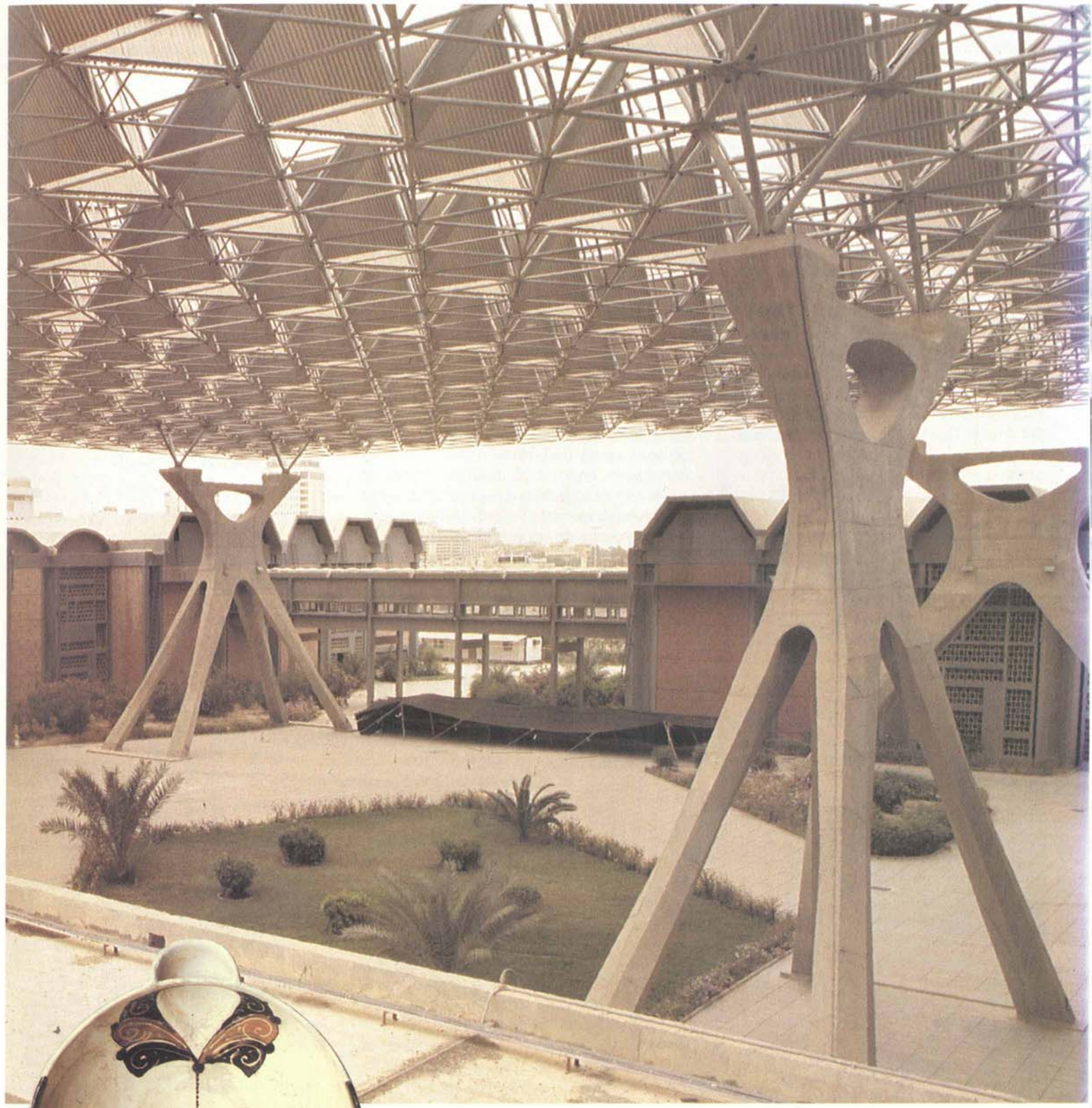
Since its opening in February 1983, the DAI collection has grown to over 7000 items besides its 13,000-piece coin collection. At any one time, however, only about 1200 objects are on display, with the rest stored in the museum vaults but accessible to scholars upon request.

Appreciation of the collection is enhanced by the wide-open, airy layout of the pavilion, one of four that comprise the Kuwait National Museum. Objects are displayed on four different levels, in galleries connected by ramps and bridges so that, walking through the museum, the visitor

The parasol-covered central courtyard of the Kuwait National Museum complex.

A bronze astrolabe, signed "work of Bastulus, 315 AH" – one of the earliest dated examples of this type of navigational aid.

DAR AL-ATHAR AL-ISLAMIYYAH



DAR AL-ATHAR AL-ISLAMIYYAH

A 10th-century bowl with spout from Iran, slip-painted and incised.

is surrounded by masterpieces of Islamic art – hanging on walls, set on the floor, out in display cases. Because the galleries are separated by low walls, and individual objects are often isolated by space and judicious lighting, the visitor is constantly catching glimpses of the surrounding galleries; he is reminded of the periods he has already visited and drawn into those that lie ahead. And the museum's design allows visitors to walk around many of the objects and view them from different perspectives – including from above, which is particularly appropriate for large carpets.

The galleries are arranged in chronological order, starting with the early Islamic periods in the Levant, Syria, Egypt and Spain, passing through the medieval art of Fatimid Egypt, Syria, Sicily, the Ayyubid-Mamluk era and Iran, and finishing with the art of the Ottomans, later Iran and Moghul India. Maps, panels and large color photographs provide useful information on the periods and places from which the objects come.

Asked which parts of the collections he is most proud of, Shaykh Nasser replies, "I don't think 'proud' is the word I would use, but if you ask which aspects have given me the most pleasure, I would make my selection by decorative technique, and name the wide range of objects in which carving is the principal ornament. These objects include stone architectural elements, wooden boxes and decorative friezes, as well as objects made of carved jade, marble, ivory, rock crystal and, of course, gemstones, which have always been one of my great loves. We are lucky to have a considerable number of very fine carved pieces dating from the earliest days of Islam to the 18th century, and from areas stretching from the far west of North Africa and Spain to India in the east."

Yet Shaykh Nasser recognizes that DAI's collection, like that of every other museum, has weaker areas that need to be strengthened. "A personal collection like ours is bound to reflect the individual esthetic inclinations of the collector," he says, "even though my tastes may have developed and shifted during the 15 years since I acquired my first pieces." So DAI is filling in a few weak spots – early Islamic objects, Persian miniatures, and Ottoman period pieces – enriching the collection with objects from museum-supported excavations and, in the words of Shaykha Hussah, "developing new ways to share with others around the world the pleasures of our collection of art."

Although DAI does not have a particular acquisitions policy, Shaykh Nasser says, "I may develop new areas in the future, or it may well be left to later generations to broaden the scope of the collection, perhaps in pursuit of their own interests."

DAI's curator, Ghada Qaddoumi, is reflecting the attitude of all the museum's staff when she says that "we have always aimed to create a live, active and dynamic museum, based on constant interaction with people who visit the premises, or others around the world who visit special exhibitions or read our publications. We don't want only to acquire and display objects of beauty and ancient art, but also to put life into the objects."

Shaykha Hussah, who has been DAI's director since its opening, notes that "the collection's objects speak for themselves – they tell a story about the time and place they came from, for whom they were made, the production and decorative techniques used and how these spread throughout the world, and the cultural, social, technological and economic context in which Islamic art evolved and matured. Some pieces are documents that help establish benchmarks by which we can date other pieces, such as the 13th-century inscribed lusterware jar made in Damascus for someone called Asad al-Iskandarani – probably from Alexandria."

As the collection's reputation has spread in the international art community, DAI has become more active in lending objects for major international exhibitions, as well as exhibiting visiting shows from abroad. This year, the museum lent more than 100 of its finest pieces for an exhibition of Islamic art that will travel around the United States for two years – including stops in Baltimore, Fort Worth, Atlanta, Richmond and St. Louis – and will then go on to Canada, Paris and Japan. A unique collection of 120 Islamic pieces from the Hermitage Museum of Leningrad was on display at DAI in May – the first time that pieces from the renowned Hermitage collection have traveled outside the Soviet Union – while a smaller collection from DAI has been exhibited in Leningrad.

DAI also lent pieces for the "Treasures of Islam" exhibition in 1985, the "Süleyman the Magnificent" exhibition in 1987 (See *Aramco World*, July-August 1987), and the exhibitions "Timur and the Princely Vision" and "The Romance of The Taj Mahal" in 1989, as well as to smaller exhibitions. In return, the museum exhibited a newly-discovered cache of Qur'ans from Sanaa in 1985, Qur'anic manuscripts from Bahrain's Bayt al-Qur'an collection in 1987, calligraphy from Turkey in 1988, Islamic coins from Sweden in 1989, and Daghestani nomad art this year.

This 8th-century engraved bronze ewer from Iran stands out among objects in the collection for its particular beauty and craftsmanship.

Qaddoumi notes that the aim of most exhibitions, whether they come from the museum's own collection or from international sources, is "to bring together objects that are separated in their usual display venues, and to relate the objects to one another. This permits visitors to appreciate the artistic influences in the pieces, and to trace the changes and interrelationships in the development of decorative techniques and motifs." In addition, she says, "our aim is to please through a display of art, but also to produce catalogues with technical information that can help to educate people about the achievements of Islamic civilization and the pluralism of Islamic art."

The museum's book-publishing program has kept pace with its participation in international exhibitions. Along with its inaugural catalogue, *Islamic Art in the Kuwait National Museum*, DAI has published a smaller catalogue of recent acquisitions (1984), the volume for the "Variety in Unity" exhibition in 1987, a catalogue on science in Islam, a book on swords, the catalogue of the Sanaa Qur'ans, and a book on the manuscripts from the Bayt al-Qur'an in Bahrain.

In addition, scholars who have studied parts of the collection have produced books of their own on the museum's tombstones and ceramic water filters; other works are in progress on coins, jewelry, Kaba keys and the al-Bahnasa archeological excavations in southern Egypt, which the museum has supported for four seasons.

Another DAI publishing project under study is to reissue in new or facsimile editions rare books from the museum library, which contains among its more than 10,000 volumes such examples as the early 14th-century *Automata* of al-Jazari, the first edition of Sale's first translation of the Qur'an into English, published in 1734, and the 1809 edition of *Description de l'Egypte*. The library was painstakingly assembled through the efforts of self-styled "bibliomaniac" Ibrahim Kamel, who visited numerous Middle Eastern and Western capitals to acquire the rare volumes that Shaykh Nasser explains are "essential for the study of Islamic art." About 60 percent of the books are in Arabic, and the entire collection is available for use by students and scholars.

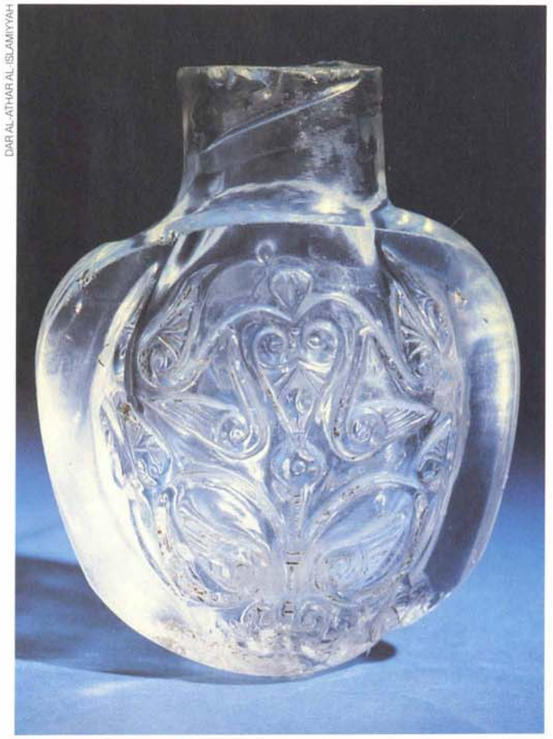
Referring to the oldest Arabic volumes and the culture they describe, Shaykha Hussah points out that, unlike classical Rome or Greece, "we [Arabs] are not a dead civilization, and Islam is not an antique culture. We're alive. We speak the same Arabic language that was used in inscriptions on seventh-century objects of art. Europeans find it difficult to communicate with the old languages of the medieval period, but we maintain a dynamic, living link with our Islamic and Arab heritage. We are involved in a process of national revival and development that is a continuation of the achievements of our ancestors throughout the Arab and Muslim world, and we can relate closely to the esthetics and sentiments which pertained when the Arabs and Muslims made significant – often leading – contributions to world civilization."

Now, Shaykh Nasser feels, "there is far too little relationship between these great works of art and our modern world. We have acquired all the everyday technology of the 20th century to make our lives comfortable, but we may be in danger of losing our cultural identity as Arabs. I hope our collection will inspire and encourage the present generation of artists, craftsmen, architects and young people in general to seek, through the study of the past, a means of expression more appropriate to our Arab and Muslim culture."

One of DAI's most noteworthy achievements has been its ability to forge just such transgenerational links. From its inception, the museum included a variety of community-oriented activities such as lectures, exhibitions, library facilities, calendars, a conservation lab, museum tours, a bilingual newsletter, a museum-supporters' society, art-history courses, workshops and publications. Activities aimed at the young include guided tours for children, a children's museum guide and activity book, and exhibitions of children's art. The museum also includes a small bookshop stocking DAI publications and other relevant books and magazines, and it publishes an annual calendar.

The museum has funded archeological excavations in Egypt, in cooperation with the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Science and London's School of Oriental and African Studies, providing training for Kuwaiti archeologists and other technical scholars who will be able to investigate Kuwait's own antiquities sites in the future.

DAI has also worked closely with the Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research on technical studies like analyses of the content of ancient gold pieces in the Al Sabahs' collection. The long-term aim of such activities is to develop in-house technical and training capacities – and proficient Kuwaiti staff – in fields such as conservation, restoration, cataloguing and library science.



DAR AL-ATHAR AL-ISLAMIYYAH

An early 11th-century carved rock-crystal bottle from Egypt, purchased by Shaykh Nasser from the collection of the late Marquis de Ganay of Paris and returned to Islamic lands.

During the museum's annual season from October through April, lectures and short courses are offered in a variety of subjects, taught by museum staff, visiting scholars or experts resident in Kuwait. In 1984, the museum started offering 10-week art-appreciation courses in Arabic and English, which included lecture tours of the exhibition. Courses attract an average of 100 participants, and some enroll as many as 140. Occasionally, they also include field trips around Kuwait and even to other Arab capitals. DAI is exploring the possibility of linking its lecture series with Kuwait University diploma courses.

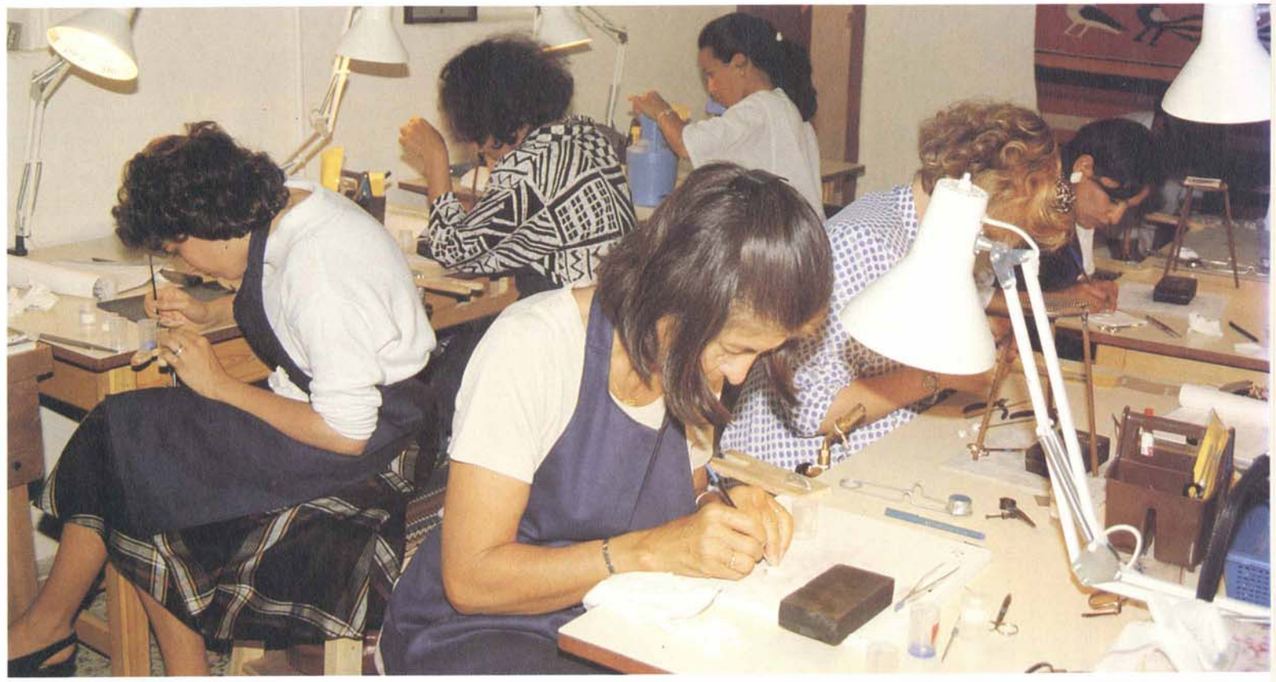
A year later, in 1985, DAI launched an ongoing slide lecture series on the background and historical aspects of Islamic art and architecture. In recent years, the lecturers have come from a wide variety of institutions outside DAI – Kuwait University, the Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research and the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Science – and even from beyond the borders of the country, such as the Ashmolean Museum, the American Numismatic Society, the Walters Art Gallery, the Smithsonian Institution, and the universities of Chicago, Istanbul, Riyadh, Sanaa, Cairo, Khartoum, Frankfurt, and Munich, as well as Harvard.

But along with scholarship, an equally important focus for DAI is children, Shaykha Hussah explains. "We are assessing our children's program to see how we can get the children to come closer to the objects in our collection – to arouse their curiosity, to stimulate their creativity and to help teach them more about the history, geography, heritage and culture of their world. Because if we do not appreciate and make use of our heritage in our life today, that heritage loses a large part of its meaning."

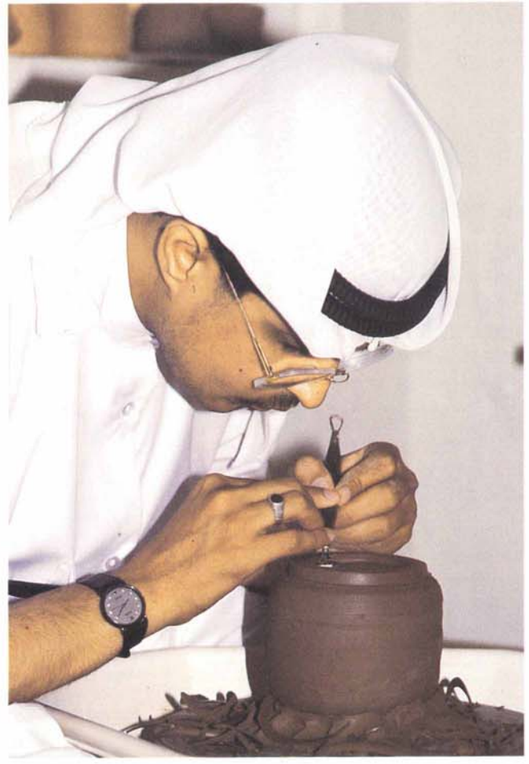
Children who visit the museum often return to their schools to make drawings or carry out art projects inspired by the forms and decorative motifs they saw in the museum. Some of these works are exhibited in the museum from time to time. The museum is also working with the Ministry of Education to strengthen the Islamic art and heritage curriculum in Kuwait's schools, training teachers and sponsoring lectures and symposia on art education. The children's museum guidebook and activity book, aimed at eight- to 11-year-olds, was tested in local schools and is now being revised in light of the experience of the last several years.

The renovated Badr House, a 150-year-old traditional Kuwaiti seafront house, built of adobe and comprising several groups of rooms surrounding a common courtyard, is central to the effort to reach out to children with the gifts of the past. It is, in Shaykha Hussah's words, "a living entity; not a locked-up traditional museum, but a functional and creative place, a place where people learn and work and grow." The museum's popular hands-on workshops in arts and crafts were moved there from temporary quarters in 1988. There, both children and adults – 80 percent of them Kuwaitis – study and practice textiles and weaving, calligraphy, metalwork, painting and drawing, bookbinding, woodwork, plaster and ceramics. Abdul Kareem al-Ghadban, DAI assistant curator for special projects and public relations, combines hands-on workshop activities with tours of the adjacent museum and appreciation of objects on display. "The workshops heighten people's understanding of how the ancient objects were made, which in turn increases their appreciation of what they see in the museum," he says. A sense of continuity between the past and the present is the result – a human link between the crafts in the museum and the crafts the workshop participants produce.

Popular hands-on experience in traditional arts and crafts at Badr House include jewelry workshops for students (right) and ceramic painting classes for children (below).



A Kuwaiti student at work during a ceramics course at Badr House.



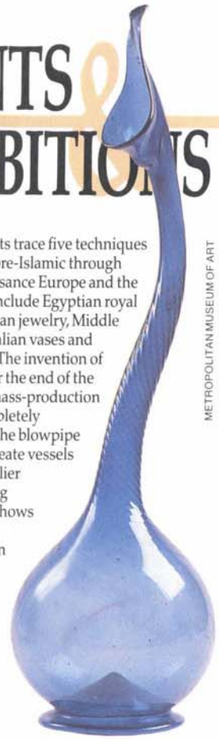
"We hope that our special children's program will bear fruit," Shaykh Nasser adds, underlining his concern "that the collection be accessible to even the smallest children with an immediate relevance to their own experience. But only the future will tell."

Reflecting on the experience of the past decade and the links that DAI has been able to establish between past and present, Shaykh Nasser summarizes. "I am delighted that, under the guidance of Shaykha Hussah, Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah has become a meeting point for Arab and foreign scholars, educators, craftsmen and ordinary members of the public. The craftsman's skills are absolutely fundamental to the creation of works of art. Let us hope that the students of our craft courses will begin to understand the superb mastery of the generations of potters, masons, metalworkers, jewelers, painters, calligraphers and weavers whose works can be studied so close at hand."

Shaykha Hussah adds, "we have sought not only to make beautiful objects from our past easily accessible to public viewing, but also to educate people, to stimulate them, and to exchange thoughts and ideas with the public and with scholars from the region and the world at large."

Publisher, author and television host Rami Khouri is the head of Jordan's private Friends of Archeology society.

EVENTS & EXHIBITIONS



METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

Glass Gathers. Sixty objects trace five techniques of glass decoration from pre-Islamic through Islamic cultures to Renaissance Europe and the New World. The objects include Egyptian royal furniture inlays, Mycenaean jewelry, Middle Eastern gaming pieces, Italian vases and American paperweights. The invention of the blowpipe in Syria near the end of the first millenium BC made mass-production of glass possible and completely revolutionized the craft. The blowpipe allowed glassmakers to create vessels in just minutes, unlike earlier extremely time-consuming methods. The exhibition shows how Islamic glassmaking served as a bridge between glass manufactured in antiquity and glass later produced in the West. Metropolitan Museum of Art, **New York**, through January 6, 1991.

Blown glass bottle from 19th-century Iran.

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. The Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts, **Moscow**, through November 20, 1990; The Hermitage Museum, **Leningrad**, December 15, 1990 through February 15, 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**, through November 25, 1990; The Asia Society, **New York**, January 10 through March 17, 1991.

Traditional Crafts of Saudi Arabia. The John Topham collection of weavings, jewelry, a Bedouin tent, and metal, wooden and leather handicraft objects. University of New Mexico's Maxwell Museum of Anthropology, **Albuquerque**, through November 26, 1990; Texas Memorial Museum, **Austin**, January 25 through May 12, 1991.

Science and Knowledge from Andalusia to Europe. A lecture series by renowned Arabist Jean Vernet. Institut du Monde Arabe, **Paris**, Tuesdays from November 27 through December 18, 1990.

Siyah Kalam: *Contemporary Indian Miniatures* by artists from the Indian state of Rajasthan, heirs to an art brought from Persia by the Moghul rulers in the 15th century. Commonwealth Institute, **London**, December 7, 1990 through January 27, 1991.

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; Kimbell Art Museum, **Fort Worth, Texas**, March 16 through May 12, 1991.

Contemporary Moroccan Art. On display are the works of six painters who exemplify the current burst of artistic creativity in Morocco. Galéries Nationales du Grand Palais, **Paris**, until mid-December, 1990.

The Sculpture of Indonesia opens the Festival of Indonesia in the United States with 135 masterpieces from the classical 8th to 15th centuries of the world's most populous Muslim country. Museum of Fine Arts, **Houston**, December 9, 1990 through March 17, 1991; Metropolitan Museum of Art, **New York**, April 27 through August 18, 1991.

Court Arts of Indonesia. Some 160 works of art dating from the 8th to the 20th century reflect the 1000-year traditions of the royal courts of Indonesia. Sculpture, court regalia, manuscripts, shadow puppets, dance masks, musical instruments, textiles, and precious objects are included. Asia Society Galleries, **New York**, through December 16, 1990; **Dallas** Museum of Art, February 10 through April 7, 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**, through December 17, 1990.

Elements of Design: *The Influence of Oriental Rugs on Navajo Weaving* explores how turn-of-the-century reservation traders encouraged Navajo weavers to assimilate Oriental rug designs. Lowie Museum of Anthropology, **Berkeley, California**, through December 30, 1990.

Oriental Carpets and Kilims. This exhibition features classical, silk polonaise, Caucasian dragon and sunburst carpets from the 17th and 18th centuries. The Museum of Fine Arts, **Boston**, to January 1991.

In Our Time: *The World as Seen by Magnum Photographers.* From the Middle East and elsewhere and arranged by themes, 300 images by 60 first-rate photojournalists. **Fort Worth [Texas]** Museum of Science and History, through January 6, 1991; Friends of Photography, **San Francisco**, January 15 through April 7, 1991.

Ivory: *A Symbol of Excellence* includes carvings from Africa, the Middle East, Asia, Europe and the New World. De Young Memorial Museum, **San Francisco**, through January 6, 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**, through January 13, 1991.

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The Lion of Venice. The great bronze Lion of St. Mark is on display at the British Museum in an exhibition organized by Italy. The statue may have been carried off from the Near East as booty by the Venetians in the 12th century, according to exhibit organizers. The British Museum, **London**, through January 13, 1991.

Visions of Infinity: *Design and Pattern in Oriental Carpets.* Classical carpets of the 15th through 19th centuries from the museum's collections, presented as "an intellectual exploration of pattern" that offers a path to understanding spiritual aspects of Islamic art. The Textile Museum, **Washington, D.C.**, through February 24, 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.

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**, through March 10, 1991.

Archeology and the Bible. Covers 150 years of archeology focused on the periods of the biblical narratives. The exhibit includes a Dead Sea scroll and two 'Ain Ghazal statues, extraordinary lime-plaster figures with uncanny, staring eyes, found at a Neolithic site near Amman, Jordan, in 1983. The British Museum, **London**, through March 24, 1991.

Museum of Asian Art. The Walters Art Gallery announced a May 5, 1991 opening date for Hackerman House, the new permanent home of some 1000 pieces from the gallery's outstanding collection of Chinese, Japanese, Indian and Southeast Asian art. Most pieces have never been displayed. The museum will feature one of the best U.S. collections of Islamic and Indian illuminated manuscripts and miniatures. Hackerman House, The Walters Museum of Asian Art, **Baltimore, Maryland**.

Antoin Sevrugin: *Photographs of Iran.* Portraits of rulers, citizens, tourists and mendicants in Iran between the 1880's and the 1920's, made by the country's top commercial photographer of the time. Sackler Gallery, **Washington, D.C.**, through May 26, 1991.

Trailing the Tiger – *To Golden Cloths of Sumatra's Minangkabau*. The first U.S. exhibition of the fabled "cloth of gold" woven in West Sumatra by the Minangkabau, who embraced Islam in the 15th century. Featured are 49 ceremonial textiles, jewelry and photographs. The Textile Museum, **Washington, D.C.**, through June 9, 1991.

Current Archeology in the Ancient World. A series of lectures on current research and discoveries in the Middle East, from Cyprus to Pakistan. Musée du Louvre, **Paris**, through July 10, 1991.

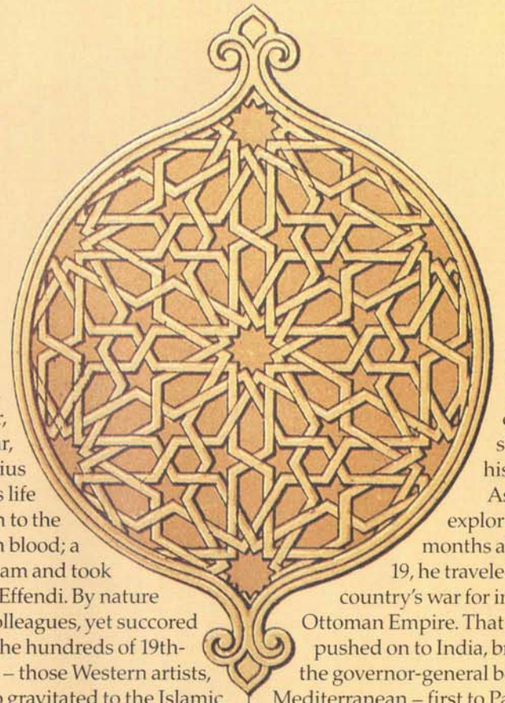
Palestinian Costume. Richly ornamented traditional costumes, head-dresses and jewelry of Palestinian villagers and Bedouins. Photographs provide context. Museum of Mankind, **London**, until November 1991.

Pre-Islamic Arabia. A preview of pre-Islamic antiquities – inscriptions, sculpture, pottery and architectural elements from the Arabian Peninsula – which will be exhibited later at the Louvre. Institut du Monde Arabe, **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.

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.

PRISSE



He was, in many ways, a paradox. An artist of consummate skill, he was also a writer, scientist, scholar, engineer and linguist, a genius who spent much of his life among the illiterate. French to the bone, he was of British blood; a European, he embraced Islam and took the name Edris-Effendi. By nature contentious, he alienated colleagues, yet succored the sick and the poor. Of the hundreds of 19th-century Orientalists – those Western artists, scholars and writers who gravitated to the Islamic world following Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1798 – few possessed so prodigious an intellect, such a trove of talents, so insatiable a curiosity or so passionate a commitment to record the historical and artistic patrimony of ancient Egypt and medieval Islam. He succeeded brilliantly, yet he failed to achieve the stature to which his successes entitled him, both during his lifetime and in the 111 years since his death. He remains, as arts writer Briony Llewellyn calls him, "a shadowy figure in the history both of Egyptology and of European response to Islamic art."

Achille-Constant-Théodore Emile Prisse d'Avennes was born in Avesnes-sur-Helpe, France, on January 27, 1807, descendant of a noble English family, Price of Aven, a branch of which had emigrated to France and gallicized its name to Prisse d'Avennes. With a family tradition of excellence in administrative affairs, the boy was marked for a legal career, but his talents and interests soon dictated otherwise and he transferred to the Ecole des arts et métiers at Châlons, where he acquired drafting and engineering skills that were to be vital in his life's work.

As a youth, Prisse dreamed of exploring the Orient, and several months after graduation, while yet 19, he traveled to Greece to join that country's war for independence from the Ottoman Empire. That expedition completed, he pushed on to India, briefly becoming secretary to the governor-general before returning to the Mediterranean – first to Palestine, and then to Egypt.

There he entered the service of Viceroy Muhammad 'Ali Pasha to work on civil and hydrological projects. Over time, his exposure to ancient Egypt awakened him to the perishability of human inventions and led him to a more profound purpose, later extended to Islamic culture: to reproduce the finest examples of arts and architecture and to set them, through the study of original documents, in their historical, social and religious context.

With the science of Egyptology still in its infancy and much of Arab or Islamic art history still hidden, these were formidable tasks. For more than 40 years, Prisse's mission – indeed, his obsession – would drain his resources, discomfit his family and inflict on him a restless and impatient search for the means to simultaneously meet his goals, earn a living and answer the demands arising from his growing authority in ever-broader fields.

During his early years in Egypt, wherever his work took him, the

Top, detail of dome decoration in the 14th-century Takiyah al-Shaykh Husain Sadaqah.
Above, 14th-century wash basin made for Sultan Muhammad ibn Ala'un, featured in Prisse's *L'Art Arabe*.

A large 18th-century carpet, pictured in Prisse's *L'Art Arabe*.

A copy of a pharaonic painting showing Ramses in combat, from Prisse's *L'Histoire de l'Art Egyptien*, which underscored the close correlation between the arts and the history of ancient Egypt.

insatiably curious young man eagerly tramped through ruins, drew maps and plans, sketched and wrote descriptive accounts of ancient cities and modern villages. For a time, he taught topography at the Djihâd-Abâd Military Academy; when it closed, he became a lecturer in fortifications at the School of Infantry at Damietta. His ingenious proposals for managing Egypt's water resources – dikes in place of a dam, a canal from Cairo to Alexandria, drainage and cultivation techniques for the lakes of northern Egypt – were met by bureacratic indifference or, worse, the view that he was simply too young to design and implement such projects.

By 1836, frustrated by futile efforts and following a quarrel with the commanding general of the School of Infantry, he resigned to devote himself entirely to archeological research.

With Luxor as his base, Prisse embarked on grueling travels for the next seven years, encompassing Nubia and Abyssinia, Syria, Palestine, Persia, Turkey and Arabia, where he visited the holy cities of Makkah and Madina. Stoic in privation, fluent in local dialects, dressed in local clothing and Muslim in his manner, he was able to move unobtrusively, studying and recording the archeology and sketching from life the astonishing sights that swirled around him.

In Egypt, between journeys, he earned a reputation for erudition enhanced by his detailed explorations throughout Lower and Upper Egypt and by his acquisition of tongues that ultimately included Arabic, Turkish, Greek, Coptic, Amharic, Latin, English, Italian and Spanish. His study of hieroglyphics was hampered by the limited knowledge then extant in Egypt, but later, in France, he became, according to his biographer-son, Emile, the equal of Jean-François Champollion, a central figure in the decipherment of the Rosetta Stone's hieroglyphic text some two decades earlier.

Prisse was a member of numerous learned societies and co-founded, with Dr. Henry Abbott of New York, the Literary Society of Cairo. Nominated as the person best qualified for the proposed post of curator of ancient monuments in the viceregal government, he saw the honor slip away as Ibrahim Pasha, the son of Muhammad 'Ali, lost interest in the idea.

In 1843, Prisse settled down among the ruins of Karnak at ancient Thebes, and began to sketch and take papier-mâché impressions from the thousands of

inscriptions and bas-reliefs adorning some half-million square meters (140 acres) of temples, palaces and tombs. Although steeped in Arab life, Prisse sprang to action whenever he felt the honor of France was at risk.

On one occasion, as a construction crew attempted to remove a mound sheltering the remains of eight Napoleonic soldiers, Prisse angrily protested and, when his demands failed, he chased the men away, planted the tricolor, and threatened to shoot any who returned. That incident was witnessed by British travelers who apparently interpreted it as pro-Western rather than pro-French, for it soon produced an invitation to Prisse from Her Britannic Majesty's government to become consular representative at Thebes, a post his patriotism and other commitments ruled out.

In the course of his excavations, Prisse grew increasingly indignant at the demolition of precious monuments, by government order, to obtain stone for the building of factories. In 1941, George Glidden, the former United States consul at Cairo, had published an urgent appeal to antiquarians abroad to help halt the wanton destruction that was rapidly transforming the magnificent tombs and temples into shapeless ruins. "One solitary consolation," he wrote, "may be derived from the overthrow of these Propyleia, which is…the opportunity afforded to Monsieur E. Prisse, a gentleman in every way qualified to take advantage of the sculptures that previously lay hidden…to record names and legends that, but for him, would have been lost to history and science."

Glidden was referring to a particular temple in Thebes, but Prisse justifiably feared that a similar fate might await the Hall of Ancestors of Thutmose III (1479-1425 BC) in the Temple of Amon at Karnak; it contained an incomparable historical and genealogical table of that ruler's principal predecessors, ranked in dynastic order. Despite the severe penalties attached to such an illegal action, Prisse resolved to remove and transport to France some 60 sculptured portraits from what came to be known in the West as the Chamber of the Kings.

Through superhuman exertions, with virtually no resources save a few men and fewer tools, and working mainly under cover of darkness, Prisse succeeded in extracting not only the bas-reliefs but several stelae, one with domestic scenes dating from 4000 BC. Also included were several papyri; one, discovered in the necropolis at Thebes and dating from 3300 BC, came to be known as the "Prisse Papyrus." Later, Prisse made a facsimile of the original, said by Egyptologists to be the oldest manuscript or book in the world.

Ingenuity, audacity, subterfuge, bribery – all played a part in making way for the 27 large packing boxes which finally set sail downstream for Cairo. Prisse implored the French vice-consul to place the cargo under his diplomatic protection but the official instead admonished him – then added, "You have succeeded so well up to the present in an operation I would have considered impossible that you cannot fail at the port." Following further vicissitudes, the crates were finally secured aboard ship at Alexandria and on May 15, 1844, a full year after first setting to work, Prisse embarked to escort the priceless cargo to France.

Later that year, the *Révue Archéologique* took note of his gift to the nation. "We are indebted to M. E. Prisse for having saved the Chamber of the Kings from vandalism…and from being removed by the Prussian Commission, which is exploring Egypt at the present time, and, above all, for having refused to sell it to England, where the famous Table of Abydos has unfortunately gone."

For this service among others, Prisse was awarded the Légion d'Honneur in 1845, but when asked at the presentation ceremony to swear obedience and loyalty to King Louis-Philippe, he replied, "I will keep my liberty; I will not swear an oath to any man. If I deserve the distinction, give it to me; if not, keep it." The award was granted, but Prisse never rose above the order's lowest rank.

That same year, he published a detailed account of the Chamber of the Kings in *Révue Archéologique* and later wrote on the Egyptian antiquities in the Cairo and British Museums, while simultaneously working on *Les Monuments Egyptiens*, published in Paris in 1847 under the auspices of the Minister of Public Instruction, and on *Oriental Album*, published in London by James Madden and Co. in 1848.

With *Monuments Egyptiens*, Prisse hoped to supplement Champollion's *Monuments de l'Egypte et de la Nubie (1835-1845)* by presenting 100 chromolithographs of drawings he had made during his last years in Egypt. But his plan for the arrangement of plates and descriptive notes was ruined by the drastic cuts imposed by his sponsors, causing him, in his introduction, to apologize to readers for the "mutilation" of the work they were about to take up, and to promise that, one day, the record would be complete. Thirty years later, with the appearance in final form of *L'Histoire de l'Art Egyptien* – its full title continued *d'après les monuments depuis les temps les plus réculés jusqu'à la domination romaine* – the promise was kept.

PRISSE

Oriental Album, a collection of chromolithographs and woodcuts "From designs taken on the spot by E. Prisse," illustrated the people, costumes and way of life of the Nile Valley, with a commentary in English by the noted Orientalist James Augustus St. John. It was dedicated to the memory of botanist George Lloyd, who had excavated with Prisse and who died at Thebes when his rifle accidentally discharged.

The Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris was selected to house the Chamber of the Kings, to be reconstructed according to plans drawn up by Prisse. The work met with obstacles but was nearing completion when disaster struck. Prisse had prepared a colorless shellac to revive the colors on the bas-reliefs and combat the effects of the damp climate of Paris – he had even left instructions for its use – but in his absence a hot, bituminous varnish had been applied, effacing the paint which adorned the sculptures. His biographer would later lament, "An object which 35 centuries had left unharmed has been destroyed by indifference and ignorance."

Insult followed injury as Prisse was nominated to become conservator of Egyptian antiquities at the Louvre and was then passed over in favor of a man who considered Champollion a charlatan. When the chair of Egyptian archeology became vacant at the Collège de France, Prisse, weary of intrigues, asked not to be considered.

An ardent admirer of the superb technical skills of ancient Egyptian artisans, Prisse nonetheless fell lyrically in love with Arab art, the brilliant offspring of a Hellenistic West and Sassanian East united under Islam. Dazzled by its symmetry, its complex, exquisitely-wrought patterns, its unity within diversity and its opulence, he longed to initiate his compatriots in the West. To that end, he sought to launch *Miroir de l'Orient*, a compendium of arts to be issued in installments, by subscription, and with distinguished Orientalists as contributors. "It is almost a new world we are going to present," he wrote. "We shall discuss all arts, all the industries cultivated by Orientals with so much taste, brilliancy and fantasy.... We will give splendid reproductions of the monuments, objects of art and of luxury which give evidence of an advanced civilization, the influence of which has been felt even in Europe." Unfortunately, disagreements among the contributors led to the publication's early demise, but the concept flowered again years later in Prisse's *L'Art Arabe d'après les monuments du Kaire depuis le VIIe siècle jusqu'à la fin du XVIIIe.*

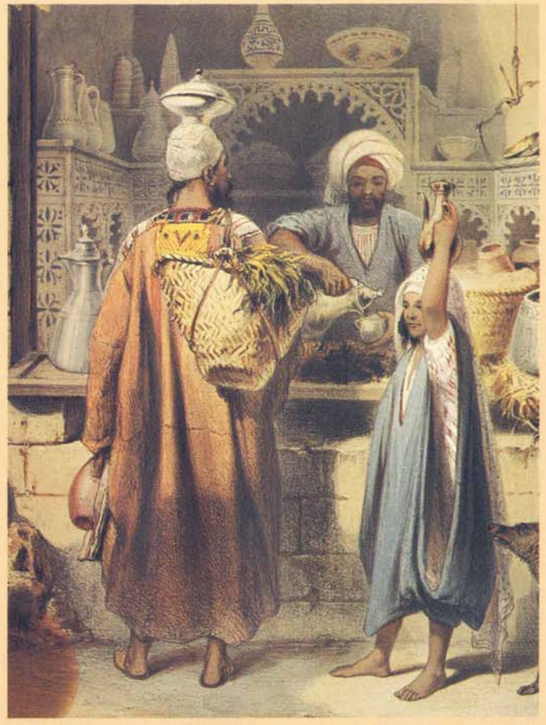
Other projects loomed and lapsed. When a series of missions abroad failed to materialize, including one to buy for France the finest Arabian horses from Central Najd, Prisse took up engineering work again, leaving Paris to oversee the operation of marble quarries in Algeria. Two years later, however, in 1852, he founded, edited and wrote for *Révue Orientale et Algérienne*, a journal similarly dedicated to introducing aspects of Oriental culture to France.

In 1858, Prisse returned to Egypt to conduct scientific, fine arts and commercial missions for France, a stroke that enabled him to study in depth the country's unbroken line of Arab monuments dating from the seventh to the 18th centuries – a series attributable in part to the Mamluks' defeat of Mongol invaders at 'Ain Jalut in 1260. As enthusiastic patrons of art, the Mamluks had excelled in the building of resplendent mosques and palaces, hospitals and mausoleums, and had also presided over one of the finest flowerings of Islamic decorative arts, especially in metalwork, glasswork, woodwork and manuscripts. By the mid-19th century, however, many mosques and other edifices were in varying states of decay, while others were threatened by the forces of change. With passionate intensity, Prisse gathered relevant historical documents, while his piercing eye and perfect hand sketched the architectural and ornamental detail of the fine old buildings and the sumptuous furnishings that lay hidden within them.

His assignments concluded, Prisse then covered the ground again, traveling extensively in Egypt and Lower Nubia, conducting research and copying exteriors and interiors of Pharaonic tombs and temples he had earlier missed.

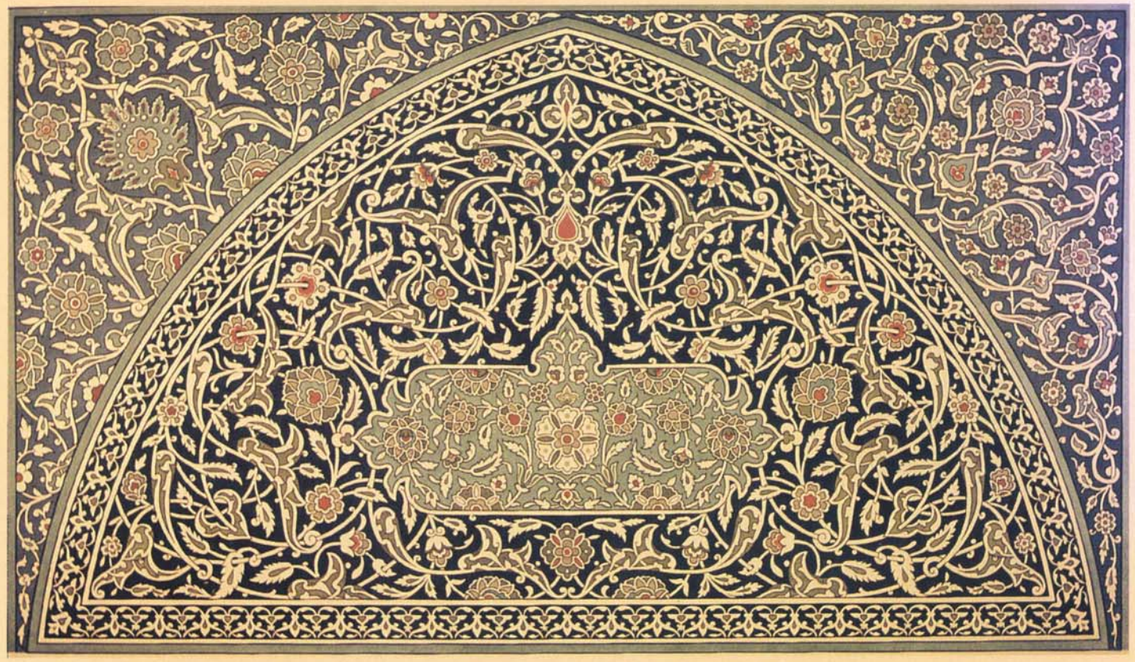
When he returned to Paris in 1860, Prisse brought 300 folio drawings of paintings of various epochs, each up to seven or eight meters (23 to 26 feet) long; 400 meters (1300 feet) of paper impressions of bas-reliefs; 150 photographs of architectural and ornamental details, plans, sections and elevations; and 150 stereoscopic photographs, together with his enormous collection of drawings and notes. He also brought back, and later donated to the Louvre, the skulls of 29 mummies which he had identified by era, position and individual name.

During much of the next decade, while Americans were engaged in the Civil War and its aftermath, Prisse wrote for scientific journals, published treatises and kept active in learned societies, while working on *L'Histoire de l'Art Egyptien* and *L'Art Arabe*. He made excursions to Egypt, worked on the Egyptian exhibit for the World Exposition of 1867 and was director and chief hydrographic engineer for the French company charged by Isma'il Pasha to produce a plan for the



Right: An olive-oil merchant and his customers in the Cairo bazaar, from *L'Art Arabe*.

Below: A 16th-century tiled tympanum at Qous Mosque, Cairo, from *L'Art Arabe*.



exploitation of the lakes of northern Egypt. When the pasha canceled the project at the last moment, Prisse resigned the post and, for the next 10 years, devoted himself exclusively to his masterworks, the astounding energies of his youth clearly intact.

Apart from the rigorous literary demands, Prisse trained teams of artists especially to prepare the plates for his book, monitoring their work relentlessly, until each plate precisely replicated the original drawing. *L'Histoire de l'Art Egyptien*, published in its entirety in 1877 by Librairie Scientifique of Paris, consisted of two volumes containing 160 plates and a separate volume of text written by P. Marchandon de la Faye on the basis of notes by Prisse, who was forced by circumstances to accept this arrangement. Illustrated sections on architecture, sculpture, paintings and industrial arts underscored the close correlation between the arts and the history of ancient Egypt – arts which, Prisse noted, revealed the course and progress of Egypt's civilization, its surprising customs and its religious thought.

Shown "with excellent splendor" at the World Exposition of 1878, *L'Histoire de l'Art Egyptien* became an important part of the body of Egyptology and, in that sense, Prisse's hopes were fulfilled.

But for *L'Art Arabe*, he wanted more. He wanted to inspire the artists and architects of his time with fresh ideas to counter "the poverty of invention that so justly inflames those…who profess to worship beauty." Above all, he wanted to stir the public to understand and appreciate the epoch whose art had graced a millennium and inspired the Renaissance. "We… affirm," he wrote, "that not since the fall of the Roman Empire has there been a people more worthy of acquaintance, whether we direct our attention to the great men it has produced or contemplate the prodigious advances of the arts and sciences among the Arabs across several centuries."

The three atlas volumes of *L'Art Arabe*, published in parts by V.A. Morel et Cie. from 1869 to 1877, contained 200 plates, 137 of them chromolithographs, mainly by Prisse. Most of the remaining plates were tinted lithographs, several by Girault de Prangey, whose scenes of Cairo had earlier been published in his *Monuments arabes d'Egypte, de Syrie et d'Asie Mineure*. A quarto volume of text by Prisse, embellished with dozens of illustrations, offered essays on the caliphs, the Mamluks and the Ottomans to the time of Bonaparte; on religious, civil and military architecture; on arts related to and independent of architecture; on the origin, development and decay of Arab art; and, finally, on the plates themselves.

Despite the auspicious reception given to *L'Art Arabe*, Prisse's aspirations were not met. In the last quarter of the 19th century, with the proliferation of photographs, illustrations and paintings of the East, the European passion for things Oriental, so intense in mid-century, was fading as other styles emerged. Then, in January, 1879, less than two years after publication was completed, Prisse died. Deprived of its most commanding publicist, *L'Art Arabe* was soon tucked away in national libraries and private collections, remaining largely inaccessible, and little known even to art historians, architects and Islamic scholars.

Apart from an abbreviated version, *La Décoration Arabe*, which appeared in 1887, and a facsimile edition, without text, issued by Khayat Publishers of Beirut several years ago, *L'Art Arabe* has now languished for a century – to bud again, if not blossom, in our own time with the resurgence of interest in Islamic art.

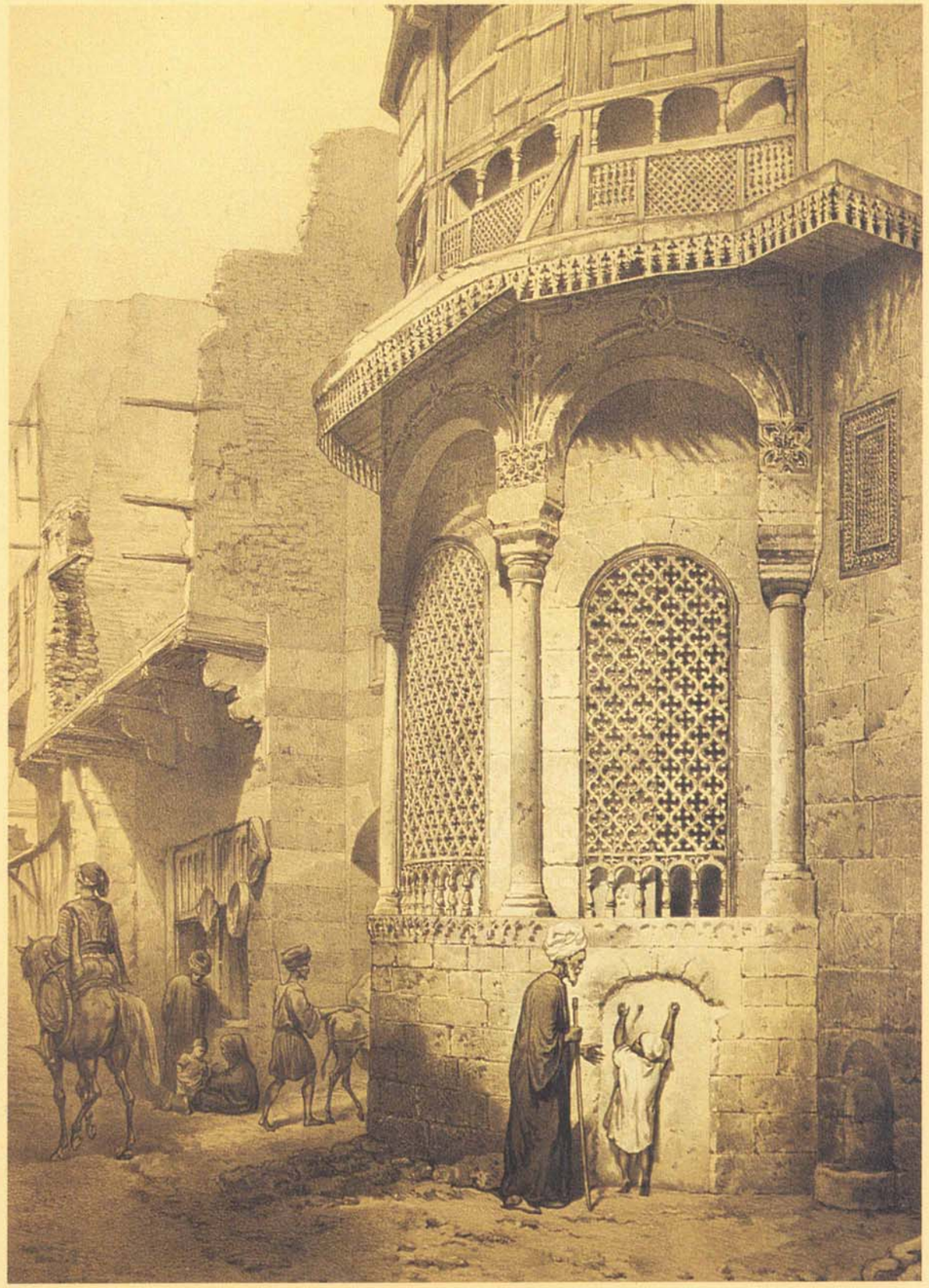
In 1983, a display of chromolithographs from *L'Art Arabe* at Hobhouse Gallery in London followed the Brighton Museum's exhibit "Inspiration of Egypt," which included scenes from *Oriental Album* and one Prisse watercolor, all from the Rodney Searight Collection now in the Victoria and Albert Museum. *Art and Artist* published the watercolor "J.P.'s Boat at Luqsor" in May 1983, and the winter issue that year of *Arts and the Islamic World* featured an article on Prisse by Briony Llewellyn.

Images from *L'Art Arabe* have turned up on notecards printed in Paris. Pages from original volumes have found their way to at least one London bookseller, who took to framing handcolored reproductions of selected views to satisfy the demand from interior designers. An antiques dealer in Istanbul, offered a handsome price for his set of original volumes, seems to be in no hurry to sell.

Perhaps the most significant development in the modest resurgence of interest in Prisse's works was the simultaneous publication in 1983 of *L'Art Arabe* in French by Le Sycomore of Paris and *Arab Art* in English – for the first time – by Al Saqi Books of London, each in a single volume with all the plates and text from the original editions.

Whether the audience – and the appreciation – Prisse envisioned will materialize, only time will tell. In the new millennium, however, his meticulous and exquisite records will remain to delight the eye and nourish the spirit, a fitting salute to Arab art and the glorious epoch that inspired it.

A former Aramco writer and an occasional contributor to Aramco World, *Mary Norton recently retired with her husband to Austin, Texas, after 30 years in Saudi Arabia.*



Opposite page: The Ahmad Husain Marjust Fountain in Cairo, from Prisse's *L'Art Arabe*, published in the late 19th century.

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