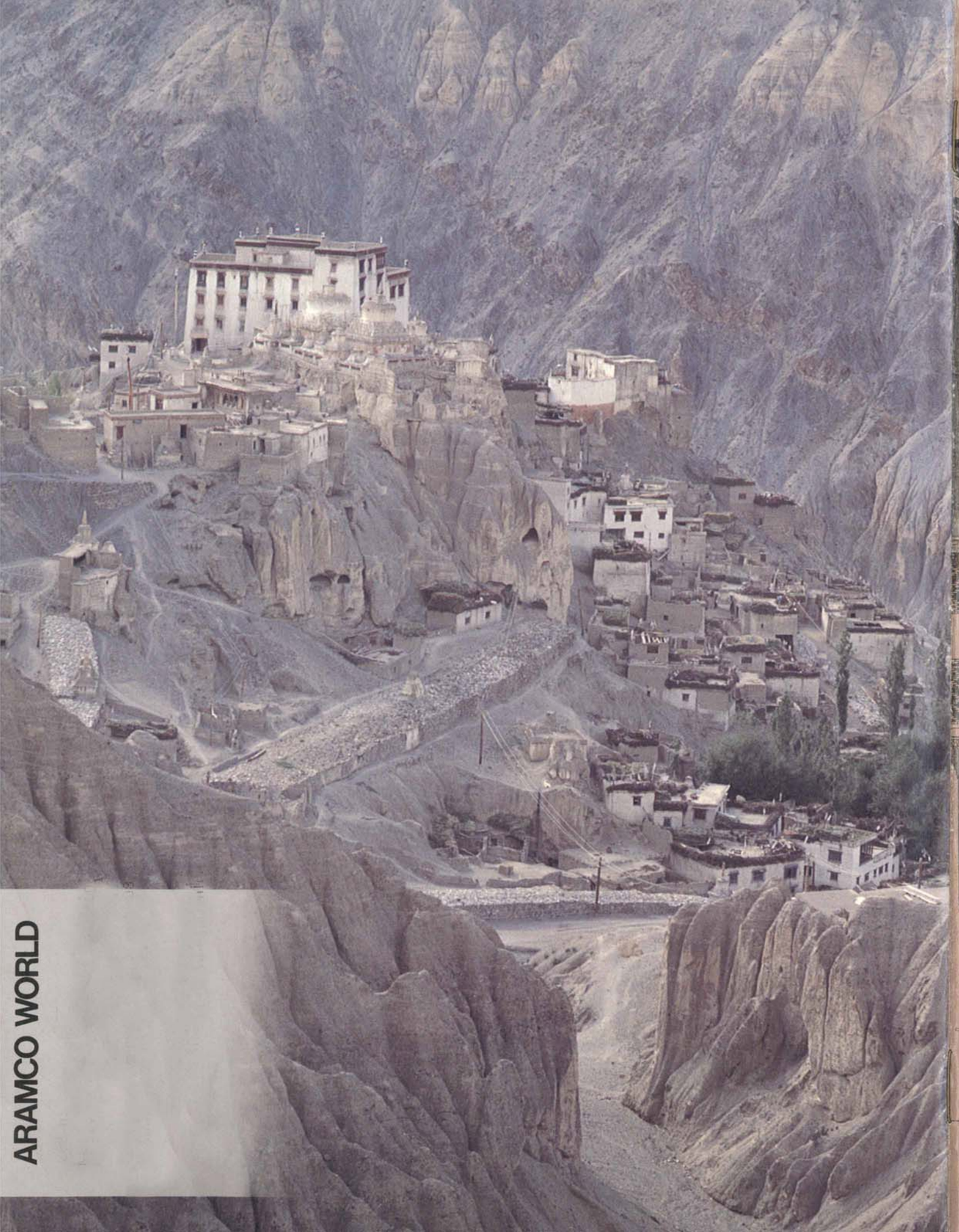
ARAMCO WORLD
JULY-AUGUST 1993



ARAMCO WORLD

# Homes of Old MAKKAH



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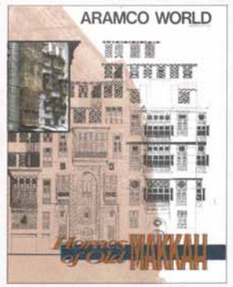



Front cover: Architect's drawing of the classic facade of traditional Makkan houses, with an inset photo of an actual building, shows characteristic patterned brickwork screening on the upper terrace levels and jutting *mashrabiyyah* windows on the intermediate levels. Photograph and drawing: Nihal and Bülent Uluengin. Back cover: Houses and other buildings cling precariously to the mountainside along the road to Leh, near Khalatse in Ladakh. Photograph: Brynn Bruijn.

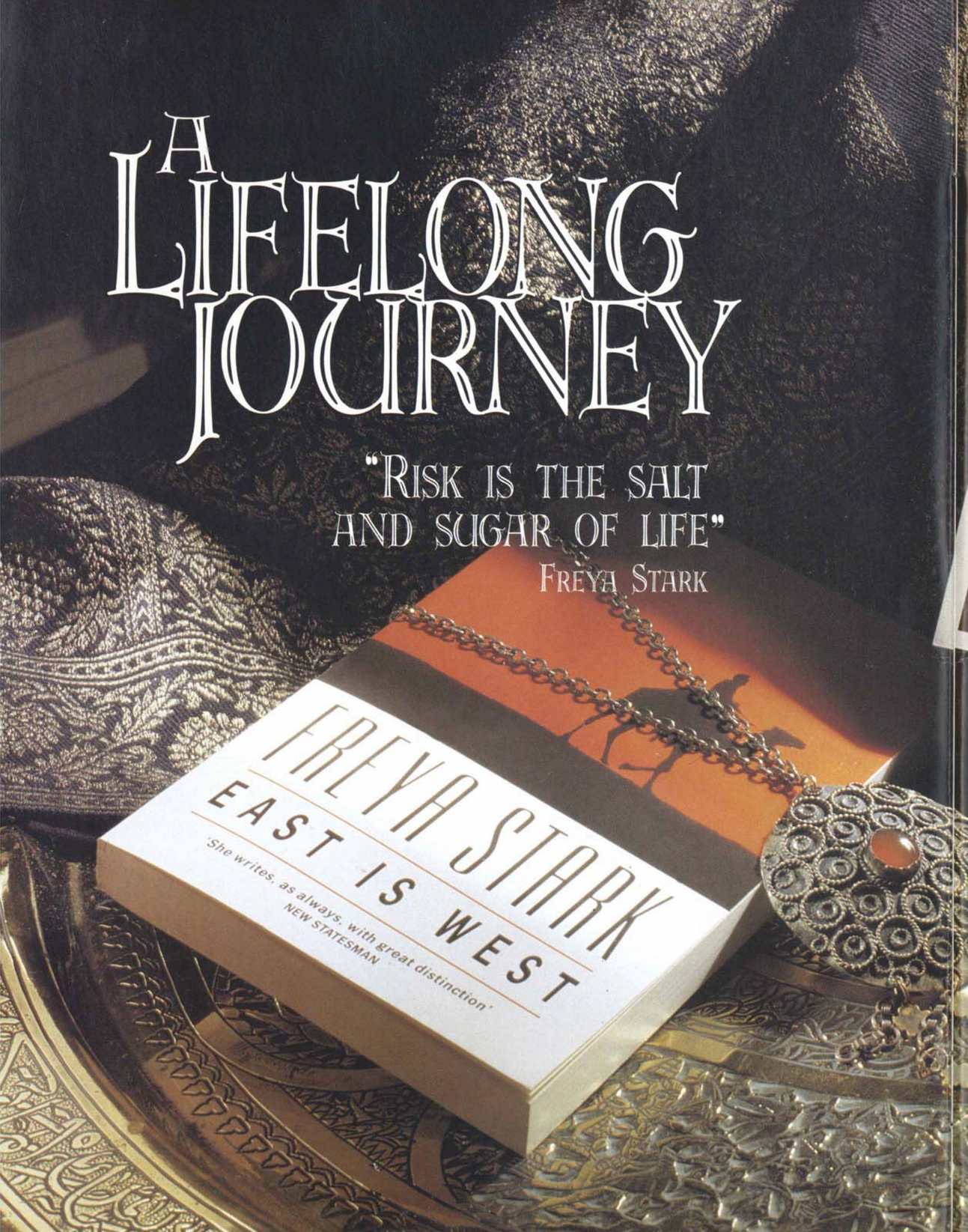
◄ Traveler Freya Stark relaxing at her home in Asolo, Italy.

# ARAMCO WORLD

VOL. 44 NO. 4 PUBLISHED BI-MONTHLY JULY-AUGUST 1993

# A LIFELONG JOURNEY

"RISK IS THE SALT AND SUGAR OF LIFE"
FREYA STARK




HULTON DEUTSCH COLLECTION

COURTESY OF JOHN MURRAY

WRITTEN BY JOHN LAWTON

In the week last May when the first British woman conquered Everest, the death of an English woman adventurer of a vanished age might well have been eclipsed. But not that of Dame Freya Stark, who died May ninth at the age of 100 after a lifelong journey through Arabia and the Middle East.

*The Times* of London devoted a three-column news story, a half-page obituary, four photographs and an editorial to this remarkable lady, whom Britain's Independent Television Network, in an hour-long tribute, described as "one of the greatest travelers of the century."

For although "Dame Freya never got around to making an attempt on Everest," said *The Times*, "she spent half of her life penetrating to places that few European men had ever seen." She also wrote distinguished books, some of which are deservedly popular even half a century after publication.

Stark followed in the tradition of such figures as Lady Hester Stanhope (See *Aramco World*, September-October 1970) and Gertrude Bell – intrepid solitary English women exploring the far corners of the East. These pioneer woman travelers crossed conventions as well as frontiers. And because most had little money – grants for exploration were usually reserved for the more conventional sex – they wrote for their livings.

What was rare about Stark, said historian John Julius Norwich, was that she would have probably been a writer even if she had never traveled farther than her front door. For although travel provided her with material for most of her books, she wrote more when she grew older and traveled less, finding memory to be an even more productive vein than novelty.

A woman who traveled the hard way in male lands, Stark wrote some 30 books, including four volumes of autobiography and six of letters. At least two of her pre-war books – *The Valleys of the Assassins* (1934) and *The Southern Gates of Arabia* (1936) – are acknowledged classics. "They are not so much chronicles of explorations," wrote Malise Ruthven, "as highly readable and engaging accounts of encounters with people and places."

A specialist on the Middle East, Stark began writing in the 1930's with *Baghdad Sketches* and her much acclaimed *The Valleys of the Assassins*. Her last pure travel book was *The Minaret of Djam*, on a journey into Afghanistan, published in 1970. In old age she achieved celebrity through television, which showed her undertaking a three-week pony trek through the Nepalese Himalayas, and another trip down the Euphrates by raft.

Her explorations were less significant and her excursions into archeology less professional than those of Gertrude Bell, her distinguished female predecessor in Arabia and Iraq. But as an ethnographer she was brilliant.

Freya Stark defined her craft of travel and observation thus: "To travel properly you have to ignore external inconvenience and surrender yourself entirely to the


Italy for peace, England for business, and the Middle East – and beyond – for adventure: Those were the cardinal points of Freya Stark's compass throughout her long and active life. Opening spread: Stark and Stewart Perowne at a London reception, and Stark traveling with guides and protectors in Arabia. These pages: Stark in Arabia and trekking in Nepal, and in her beloved home in Asolo. Next spread: Some of the editions of Stark's books currently in print.

experience. You must blend into your surroundings and accept what comes. In this way, you become part of the land, and that is where the reward comes."

Stark had no money or worldly advantages; she had a constitution which, although fundamentally tough, was continually letting her down at critical moments, so that on more than one of her journeys she very nearly died. But a will of iron, infinite patience and remarkable powers of persuasion overcame all obstacles. Once, within 26 kilometers (16 miles) of the River Oxus,then off-limits, she so impressed an obstructive Russian official by quoting Matthew Arnold that he bundled her into his car and drove her to the riverbank himself.

Stark was born in Paris, where her parents – both artists – were briefly resident. Her cradle was highly mobile: At the age of three she was carried across the Dolomites in a basket. "My parents," she wrote later, "treated Europe as a place to run around in." She grew up multi-lingual, exposed to all sorts of people and to a life close to nature. Her childhood years were divided between the hill towns of northern Italy and the moors of southwest England. And although her roots remained in England, it was Italy that was to become her home.

When Stark was eight, her half-Genoese mother took a house at Asolo, a small fortress town some 65 kilometers (40 miles) north-west of Venice. This lovely little town in the foothills of the Dolomites remained her home, in the intervals between her wanderings, for the rest of her life. She never tired of explaining how it had also been the last retreat of Caterina Cornaro, queen of Cyprus, whose friend Cardinal Bembo had invented the verb "asolare" to describe "the purposeless, leisurely, agreeable passing of time" – a concept dear to Stark's own heart. "It doesn't matter if you arrive today or tomorrow," she once told an interviewer.

Stark had no regular schooling, but haphazard early learning was put right by a gifted governess, and by the age of 10 she spoke English, Italian, German and French. It was not until she was 19 and entered Bedford College, London, that her formal education began, and two years later the outbreak of war brought it to an end. During the First World War, Stark trained as a nurse and served with a hospital unit on the Italian front.

Peace brought years of poverty, family problems and increasing ill-health. After the war, Robert Stark emigrated to Canada, and her parents' eventual separation was desperately hard on Stark. Yet it was apparently the need to communicate with them that led her to write. In a series of remarkable early travel letters, it is easy to trace the outlines of the many books she later produced.

In Italy, Freya built up a modestly profitable market garden business. Some of the hard-earned money went to Arabic lessons that she took from an Italian monk. And by 1927, a course in Arabic and Persian at the London School of Oriental Studies behind her, her "traveler's prelude," as she called it, was complete.

In a sort of chain reaction, the new languages she learned sent her off on her explorations, the explorations in turn resulted in her first books, and publication of her first writings brought grants from the Royal Geographical Society and, eventually, such honors as the title of dame, the equivalent of a knighthood for a woman.

Freya Stark first set foot in Asia in November 1927. She settled for the winter at Brummana in Lebanon, spent some time in Damascus and, with a friend, completed her first proper expedition, through the then unsettled Jabal Druze country. However, the literary product of this period – *Letters from Syria* – was not published until 1942.

In 1929 she was in Lebanon again, on her way to Baghdad. There she established herself in the house of a shoemaker overlooking the Tigris, much to the disgust of the British community, which considered such behavior "a flouting of national prestige." Her spell in Baghdad resulted in her first book, *Baghdad Sketches* (1933).

Stark used Baghdad as a base for three tough solo journeys into Iran between 1929 and 1931: two in Luristan and one in the mountains of Mazanderan, south of the Caspian Sea. Out of these journeys came *The Valleys of the Assassins*, the book which made her name as a writer.

The first truly Arabian journey, though, came in the winter of 1934-35. Stark was only the third European woman to travel into the Arabian interior, and the first to go there alone – an eccentricity which caused the government of the time such concern that it provided her with a male servant as a protector. Her goal was to be the first European to reach Shabwa, the abandoned site of the original capital city of the kingdom of Hadramaut.

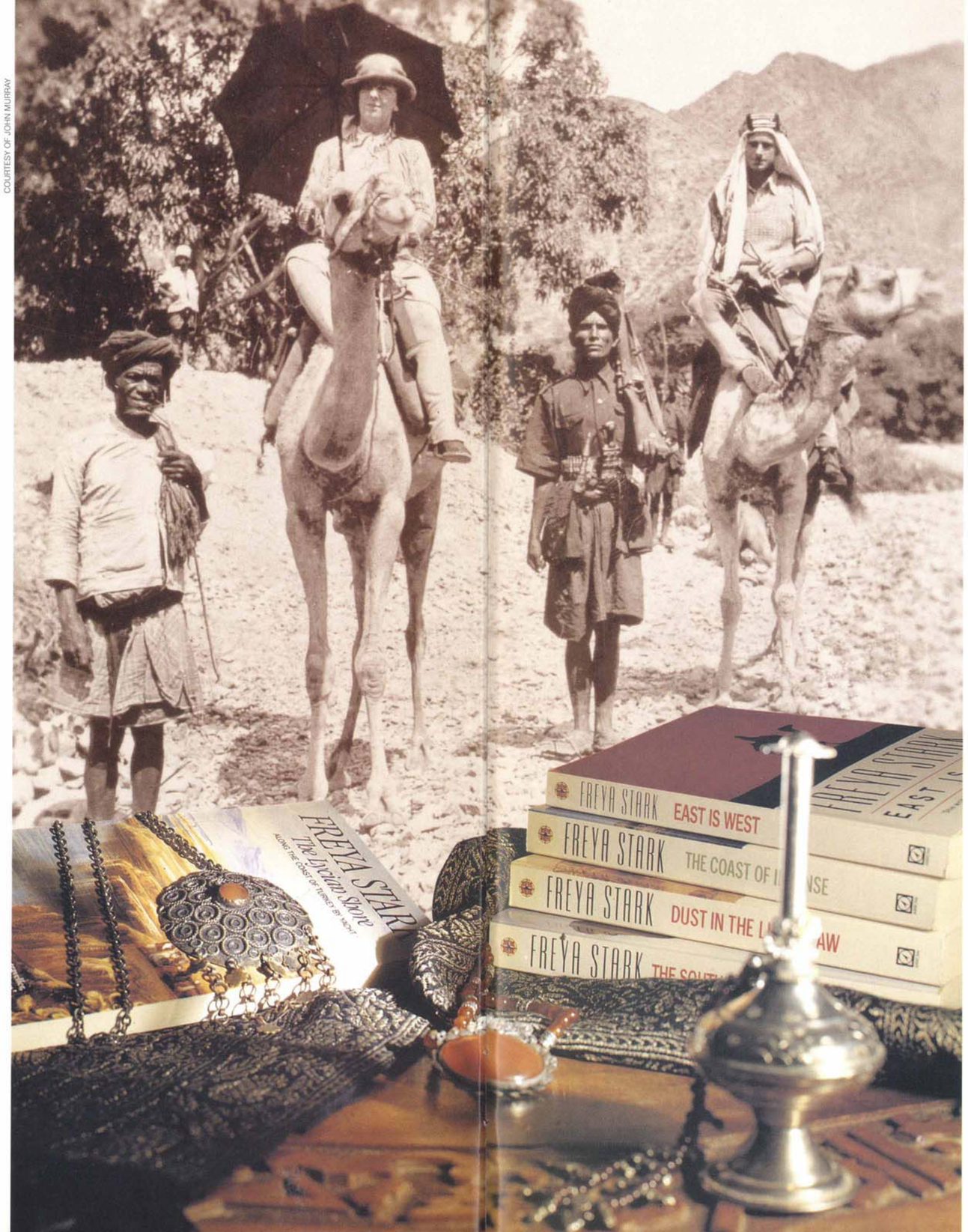
She traveled from Mukalla on the coast, northward to Shibam and Sayun, with their elaborate decorated multi-storied mud houses that tower over the plains like primitive skyscrapers (See *Aramco World*, May-June 1986). But the episode ended with her rescue by the Royal Air Force, operating from Aden, after she contracted measles en route and carried on before she was properly recovered. Her heart was strained – and very nearly stopped altogether.

Stark's disappointment at the aborted venture must have been rendered less bitter by the testimonial given her by friends in the Hadramaut: "This is a certificate to Miss Freya Stark, English traveler, that she is conversant with laws and guided by religion, and of an honorable house, and is the first woman to travel from England to Hadramaut alone – and is mistress of endurance and fortitude in travel and the suffering of terrors and danger."

After a long recovery, she took on Arabia once more, again starting from Mukalla, in winter 1937-38, this time ending in dengue fever but no RAF rescue. These journeys were recorded in *The Southern Gates of Arabia* (1936), *Seen in the Hadramaut* (1938) and *A Winter in Arabia* (1940).

Asked later by an interviewer if she experienced any difficulties traveling as a single woman in Arabia, Stark replied, "No. I was sincerely out for knowledge and that is a

COURTESY OF JOHN MURRAY




respected thing in the East." Of her conversations with Arab women she said, "They were very interested in clothes, and very anxious to have news of the affairs of Prince Edward and Mrs. Simpson."

During the Second World War Stark was commissioned by the British Government to help counteract German influence among the Arabs. She went on a diplomatic mission to the Yemen, and in Cairo helped to found the Arab Brotherhood of Freedom – a network of Allied sympathizers aimed at convincing the Egyptian people that they were better off with the British devil they knew than with the Axis monster they did not. Later, she was also sent on missions to Canada and India.

Toward the end of the war Stark was also sent to the United States to counter Zionist propaganda against the British government in Palestine. Although her task was a hopeless one, she performed it with characteristic panache and good humor.

In 1947 Freya Stark contracted a short-lived marriage to Stewart Perowne, a distinguished Orientalist and British colonial administrator, whom she accompanied to posts in Barbados and Cyrenaica. The marriage was dissolved in 1952.

She was now writing her autobiography, three volumes of which appeared in swift succession: *Traveler's Prelude* (1950), *Beyond the Euphrates* (1951) and *The Coast of Incense* (1953). A fourth volume, *Dust in the Lion's Paw*, dealing with the war years, came out in 1961.

Now 60, she looked for new worlds to conquer, and found them in Anatolia and its history. She learned Turkish with the aid of Turkish detective stories and made several arduous journeys, often on horseback, in the remoter parts of Turkey. Out of these came *Ionia: A Quest* (1954), *The Lycian Shore* (1956), *Alexander's Path* (1958), *Riding to the Tigris* (1959) and finally, the product of three years' concentrated labor, *Rome on the Euphrates* (1966), a scholarly study of Rome's eastern limits.

There was more traveling, well on into her late 80's – on horseback in Nepal and the Pamirs, down the Euphrates on a raft. Later in the 1980's, for the first time in her life, she traveled as a tourist, to the legendary caravan cities of Bukhara, Samarkand and Tashkent, and at the age of 89 she returned to the Middle East to visit Jerusalem.

Stark was created a Dame of the British Empire in 1972. Her many geographical awards included the Burton Medal from the Royal Asiatic Society in 1933, the Founder's Medal from the Royal Geographical Society in 1942, and the Percy Sykes Memorial Medal from the Royal Central Asian Society in 1951.

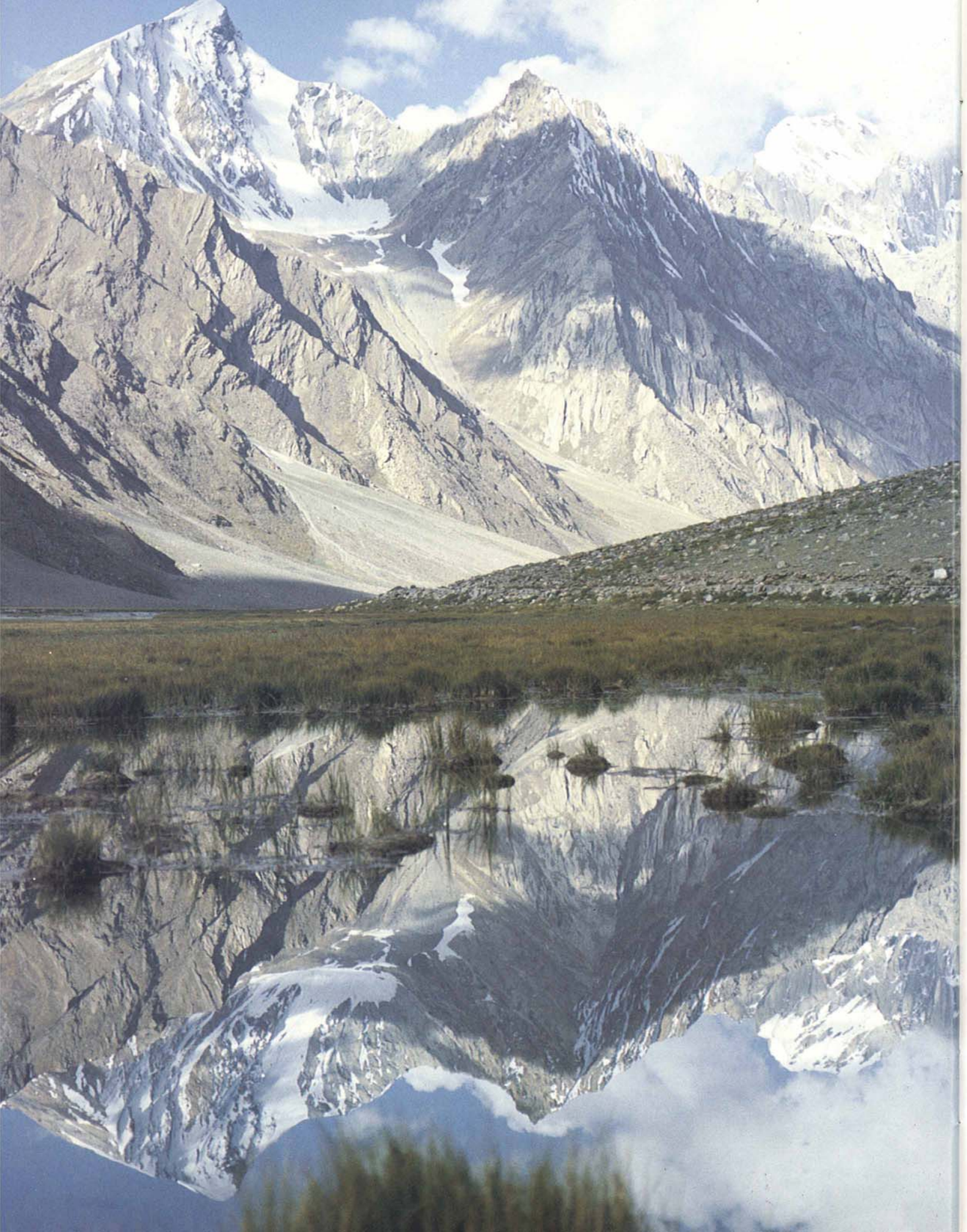
"But it is... as the writer of beautiful, measured prose," wrote the British newspaper *The Independent*, "rather than as a traveler or as an exotic 'character' who wore Dior in the wilder reaches of Asia and Arabian dress in London, that Freya Stark will ultimately be remembered."

*Contributing editor John Lawton is working on reports from Mongolia and Africa for future issues of* Aramco World.

CHANGE IS PART OF THE CARGO ON

# THE ROAD TO LEH

WRITTEN BY HILARY KEATINGE PHOTOGRAPHED BY BRYNN BRUIJN



**Previous spread: A panoramic view of the Ladakh Range greets travelers on the road to Leh.**

**Left: Amid the Zaskar Mountains, each hairpin turn reveals dramatic new scenery.**

Turning eastward from Srinagar and leaving the lush fields of rice and wheat, the traveler moves ever upward: Up the gentle slopes covered with tall alpine firs, and on eastward toward a wall of mountains, the massive Himalaya Range. This is a border more successful than either politician or geographer could devise, and one must cross it to enter the land that is Ladakh.

Ladakh is part of the state of Jammu and Kashmir, one of the component states of India. For many, it is the Kashmir name which sparks recognition: One thinks of fine carpets, prized cashmere shawls and the fertile green of the Kashmir Valley. What is forgotten, even unknown, is that this state has three very different and distinct districts: Jammu in the plains above the Punjab, with its main city of the same name serving as winter capital of the state; Kashmir to the north, with the summer capital at Srinagar; and to the east, hidden behind the Himalaya Range, Ladakh.

With an area of about 100,000 square kilometers (almost 40,000 square miles), Ladakh is geographically the largest district in India. However, it is so lightly populated – just 100,000 people – and for much of the year so inaccessible, that it has remained a remote and little-known district, in terms not only of its geography, but also of its people and culture. Yet sadly, not even the high mountain ranges that surround Ladakh can protect it today from the changes moving in from all sides.

Over the years, cartographers have had problems keeping up with the international border lines in this area. Part of Kashmir has been under Pakistani control since 1949. By 1956-57, the Chinese had quietly built a military road deep across the northeastern corner of Ladakh, linking Xinjiang and western Tibet; when the road was discovered by the Indians, it was too late to counter the incursion. Now there are nervous cease-fire lines, established by the United Nations; an increasingly heavy military presence in the whole area; and occasional exchanges of fire, particularly between Indian and Pakistani troops along the Siachen Glacier of the Karakoram Range.

"India Gate," at 3500 meters (11,500 feet), lies just before the Zoji La, or Zoji Pass; it is the only route into Ladakh from the west. Here the road cuts through the Himalayas. It is open only about four months of the year; with the first snows, it becomes impassable to all traffic. Those first snows – up to 15 meters (50 feet) deep and accompanied by intense cold – can fall anytime from mid-September on. Usually, they arrive in early November.

As recently as 1987, a convoy was caught here in an early blizzard. Of those stranded in the trucks and buses, there were many who did not survive the three-day wait for help.

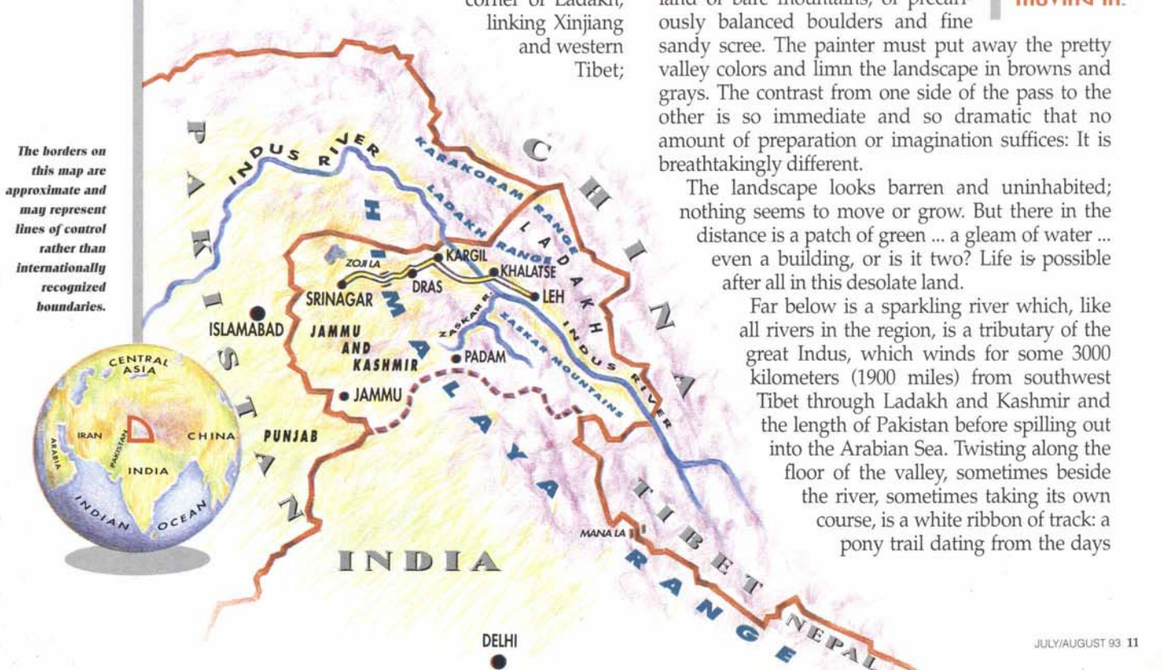
> NOT EVEN THE HIGH MOUNTAIN RANGES THAT SURROUND LADAKH CAN PROTECT IT FROM THE CHANGES MOVING IN.

About mid-June each year, the road crews clear their way through the winter debris and open up the region to general transportation. There is talk of building an even higher road that would bypass the Zoji La altogether, and thus reduce the havoc that avalanche and landslide play with this all-important route; but that is still a long way off.

Once through the pass, one enters a new world. The high mountains block the life-giving moisture that the wind could bring from the Kashmir Valley. Gone are the trees and the rolling grasslands: This is a land of bare mountains, of precariously balanced boulders and fine sandy scree. The painter must put away the pretty valley colors and limn the landscape in browns and grays. The contrast from one side of the pass to the other is so immediate and so dramatic that no amount of preparation or imagination suffices: It is breathtakingly different.

The landscape looks barren and uninhabited; nothing seems to move or grow. But there in the distance is a patch of green ... a gleam of water ... even a building, or is it two? Life is possible after all in this desolate land.

Far below is a sparkling river which, like all rivers in the region, is a tributary of the great Indus, which winds for some 3000 kilometers (1900 miles) from southwest Tibet through Ladakh and Kashmir and the length of Pakistan before spilling out into the Arabian Sea. Twisting along the floor of the valley, sometimes beside the river, sometimes taking its own course, is a white ribbon of track: a pony trail dating from the days




***The borders on this map are approximate and may represent lines of control rather than internationally recognized boundaries.***

before motorized transport, and still used by nomads and their flocks of mountain sheep.

The earliest records about the region refer to a transit route through the northern reaches of Ladakh. Merchants of old, some from Persia and places farther west, moved east and then north over the Karakoram mountains into China to join the great Silk Road at Yarkand. Others were anxious to trade somewhat closer to home for the prized pashm, a fine goat-hair from the underfleece of herds that graze on Tibetan slopes. In demand for centuries, pashm, or pashmina "wool," was traditionally used by Kashmiri weavers to make the soft shawls and other garments that even today fetch high prices in Paris, London and New York.

Wars were fought in the name of this wool, and of the treaties recorded, the Treaty of Tingmosgand in 1684 was the most important. This was an agreement between the king of Ladakh and the regent of Tibet by which territory was ceded to Tibet and gifts were to be delivered to certain Tibetan monasteries every three years. In return, Kashmiri merchants would control all trade in pashmina wool from Tibet, as well as the access to the Ladakhi grazing grounds in Qiang-Tang, the high plateau of northern Tibet. Transporting and collecting duties for the wool would be the task of merchants from the town of Leh. This was the seat of the Ladakhi kings; their palace, now a ruin, still dominates the town.

In the 17th and 18th centuries, the road to Leh was no more than a precarious track that not even mountain ponies could manage. In those days, thousands of porters dug and cut, climbed and died on their way to the looms of Kashmir with their heavy loads of wool. Later, the route was improved sufficiently for laden pony caravans and 19th-century armies. Today, back-packing trekkers and sight-seeing tourists share it with the merchants and the fighting men, but still only when that age-old enemy of all, the weather, allows.

Along the way, small villages were established centuries ago to cater to travelers; one such settlement is Dras, just 170 kilometers (106 miles) from Srinagar, and 3249 meters (10,660 feet) above sea level. Dras is the second-coldest inhabited place in the world, after Siberia: The temperature can drop to minus 45 degrees Celsius (-50°F). Its hardy inhabitants are Muslims of Balti origin.

Most accounts of Ladakh describe its people as Buddhists, but in fact the population is split almost 50-50 between Buddhists and Muslims. The western sector, with Kargil at its center, is 90 percent Muslim, while the eastern half, near the Tibetan border, is 85 percent Buddhist. The people from the Kargil area have closer ties with the state government; for its part, Leh has always had close ties with neighboring Tibet, and its Buddhist community has for centuries looked for spiritual guidance to the leadership in Lhasa.

Dras is fairly typical of the villages along the road to Leh. The people farm the nearby hillsides and graze their cattle and ponies, for which they are famous, high in the mountains during the brief summer. The village seems almost green with its plantations of willow trees on the slopes; its houses lie along the rushing Dras River, which forms an intergral part of the town's main street.

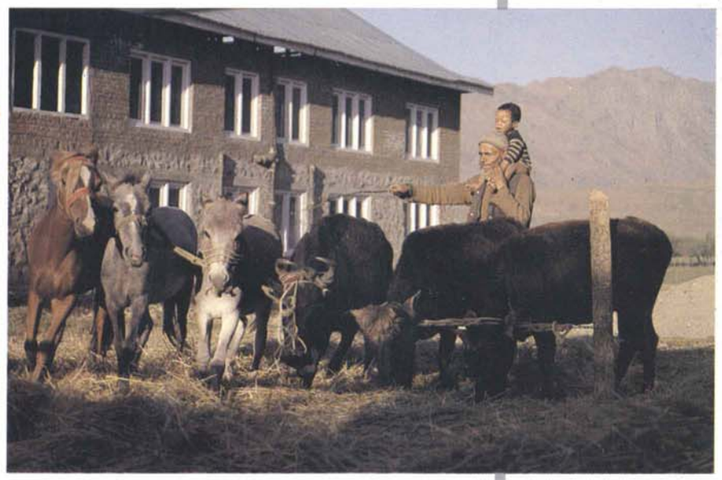
The people of Dras build their houses with the ground floor dug well into the earth, almost underground. The first few feet of a house's walls are constructed of stone and the rest of the two-story structure is of mud brick – which provides much better insulation against variations in temperature than modern concrete. The flat roof is made of these bricks on a base of willow beams, held together with a thick layer of twigs, and the whole covered with a mud wash. In winter, the roof provides storage space for precious supplies of firewood and fodder, usually in a neat band round the edge. The natural enemy isn't so much the snow, though clearing heavy falls from the roof is a routine part of winter life; more damage is inflicted by driving rains that erode the mud on roof and walls and eat into the bricks.

As the first snows blow through the valley, the livestock, herded close to the houses after harvest, is moved inside and tethered in one area of the ground floor, while several generations of the family all move into the adjoining room. Humans and beasts thus save precious warmth as the temperature drops and life outside hibernates. Though ventilation is limited, it is not unusual for some 20 people to live crowded into one small room for a week or more as a blizzard rages outside.

During this enforced isolation, the men of the family will tend the livestock, clear snow when they can and teach their sons chapters of the Qur'an and the rituals of Islam. For the women, it is a confined round of household activities: They may spin or knit small woolen items for their children or for sale to the passing tourists the next season. But the light inside is poor, even during the brief hours of daylight, and after dark there is only the flickering light of an open dung fire or perhaps the luxury of a candle.

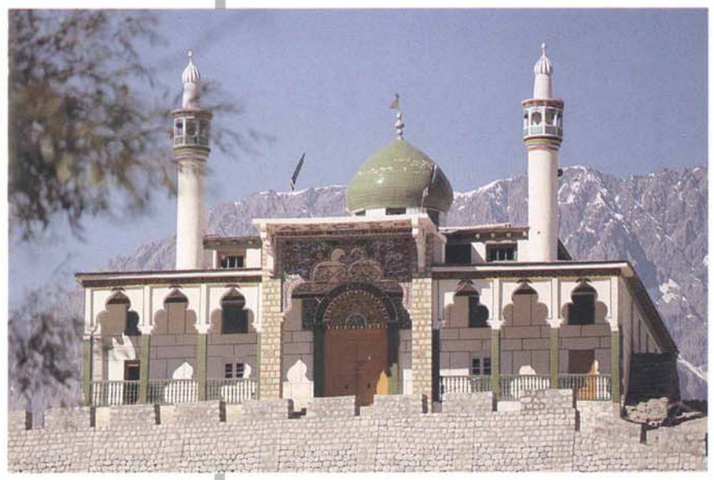
The staple food is barley, augmented by potatoes and beef. One or two of the cattle, depending on the size of the family group, will be slaughtered during the winter, and what is not immediately required keeps well outside in nature's Deepfreeze.

**Farmers of Dras, below, raise livestock in one of the world's coldest inhabited locales. At bottom, a son follows in his father's footsteps as a prayer-leader at the Sankoo mosque near Kargil.**



TODAY, BACK-PACKING TREKKERS AND SIGHT-SEEING TOURISTS SHARE THE ROAD, BUT STILL ONLY WHEN THE AGE-OLD ENEMY ALLOWS.

**A mosque south of Kargil, below, stands as a visible reminder of Islam's predominance in western Ladakh. The eastern half of Ladakh, near the Tibetan border, is mostly Buddhist.**



THE MEN OF THE FAMILY WILL TEND THE LIVESTOCK, CLEAR SNOW WHEN THEY CAN, AND TEACH THEIR SONS THE RITUALS OF ISLAM.

The people have learned to be largely self-sufficient, and require few imported goods. As trucks replace animal transport, those few items – tea, salt, kerosene – are more readily available in the village; it is no longer necessary to make the hazardous pony trek down to Srinagar for supplies. Local produce is sold or exchanged in the village market. It is foreign travelers, for the most part, who visit the store to buy such items as biscuits and bottled water, toothpaste and batteries. On most days, a group of elderly men sits at tables in the store, watching all coming and going with interest, passing the time with cups of the sweet, milky tea on the boil in the kitchen.

Farther along the road is Kargil, the district headquarters, and its rising minarets at once proclaim it a Muslim center. Much of the population tends to be traditionalist, insisting not only on a disciplined life of work and worship, but also resisting opening up the region with roads and trucks and unfamiliar ideas. Other Muslims in Kargil see change as inevitable and want their people to be prepared for it: They see no need to abandon old beliefs in order to meet the new demands being put on a community untouched, until very recently, by the modern world.

The town of Kargil has always been a staging post. Today its role has not changed much: It remains a transit stop for all those traveling east and west. Where once pony caravans rested and regrouped along the main thoroughfare, today the narrow road is congested with long convoys of trucks and buses.

"Before the road...." This phrase begins many an explanation of the recent changes in Ladakh, and in Kargil it has special significance. There was enormous excitement in the mid-1950's when a jeep made the first trial run over the Zoji La from Srinagar to Kargil. For most of the local people, this was the first motorized vehicle they had ever seen. "It's a house on wheels!" cried the children in amazement. Their wiser parents wondered, "Will it change our lives?"

But the trial run was an army project, and it took some years and a conflict with China before the first road was built. In 1962, construction began in earnest; the Indian army was suddenly on the defensive, and needed to get men and supplies to the border area.

The road reached Kargil two years later, built by a brave band of workers, not a few of whom perished in the undertaking and are honored by memorials all along the way. They had the unenviable task of building a road on a seemingly impossible mountainside with nothing but the most basic equipment. Since then, they have had the equally dangerous task of maintaining it.

When the road opened, the first small commercial bus followed, forging the first permanent link with the outside world. Many of the changes that have occurred in Ladakh over the last 30 years have been the result of that link.

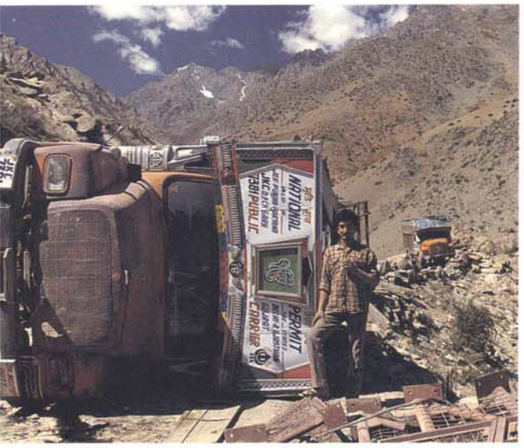
Health care has come to a people who had little before; nevertheless, tuberculosis and eye problems remain the most common illnesses, and it is not unusual to see children with various skin complaints caused by poor hygiene.

Education has become the norm rather than the exception; Muslim girls, too, are attending school in increasing numbers. Motivation is strong and these children are well aware that class work and book learning are the way to a better life.

But on the negative side, the road has put a strain on the fabric of society. The arrival of foreign tourists has brought new demands and influences. Hotels and rest houses are mushrooming, and refreshments for Western tastes are imported and prepared.

Sneakers, fizzy drinks and pop music threaten traditional customs: A different world is on display. Yet with only a six-month working year at most – even less for those who live on the short summer tourist season – there is little extra cash for residents to purchase these goods.

The region's only export is the apricot. Extensive orchards surround Kargil and lie farther east along the road, at Khalatse and Nyemo. Apricots have always been an important part of the local diet, fresh in the summer and dried for winter. But to be really marketable outside Ladakh, far more need to be grown. That would require irrigated land, which is in short supply. To process and dry the fruit, a regular supply of electricity is also essential, but generator power is available now for only a few hours a day. Authorities have yet to open a hydroelectric plant anywhere in Ladakh that can cope with river silt in summer and frozen waterways in winter.



Two high passes accommodate the road between Kargil and Leh. The first, Namika La (Pillar of the Sky Pass), cuts through the Zaskar Mountains at 3700 meters (12,100 feet). Looking down from its dizzying heights to a landscape of brown desolation, it is hard to believe that this was once a land of lakes and roaring torrents, surrounded by thick forest and abundant vegetation. All was changed by a geological upheaval long ago – at least, long ago in human terms, for these mountains are still being uplifted as India crunches on toward Mongolia.

Habitation is scarce: One cluster of houses is carved into the crumbling hillside, and down deep in the valley, by a patch of green, lies another. Muslim and Buddhist villages seem to alternate along the way, very similar in design but distinguishable by the color of their flags: black for Muslims and white for Buddhists. They have lived in peace for decades.

On either side, spectacular rock faces seem solid. But the truth is terrifyingly different: One tremor, one hour of rain, and the whole hillside could come tumbling down. The year 1988 saw an unprecedented three days of rain; whole villages were washed away, rivers changed their courses and gloomy forecasters feared that weather patterns were changing and that worse would follow.

Some 80 kilometers (50 miles) from Kargil, hidden high on a craggy skyline, is the Heniskot fort, guarding the gateway to central Ladakh. Here, in the early 1600's, armies from Baltistan and later from Kashmir met the kings of Ladakh and fought for control of the region. To them, the importance of Ladakh was its strategic position controlling the movements of traders and of troops. Today, the ancient fort lies in ruins, but battles are still being waged for the same reasons along these high mountain passes, on the roofpeaks of the world.

Next on the road comes an even higher pass, the Fatu La, where the road climbs to 4100 meters (13,500 feet). Looking backward, there is a dramatic view of the Zaskar Mountains and the spiraling ribbon of road just passed, which gives shape to the contours of these mountain slopes. One looks across, even down, at high peaks, and the sky is an unbelievably deep, rich blue found in few other places in the world.

Each hairpin turn opens up a new and different scene. Occasional tufts of green dot a background of brown and gray, and for more dramatic effect, great slashes of purple stone cut through the craggy rock face. A group of houses left in ruins in a corner of green begs the question: Did life here become too difficult even for these hardy mountain folk?

A government checkpoint is stationed in the village of Khalatse, just as there was in the ninth century. Today's travelers, like those of old, refresh themselves in the shade of the brightly painted tea stalls.

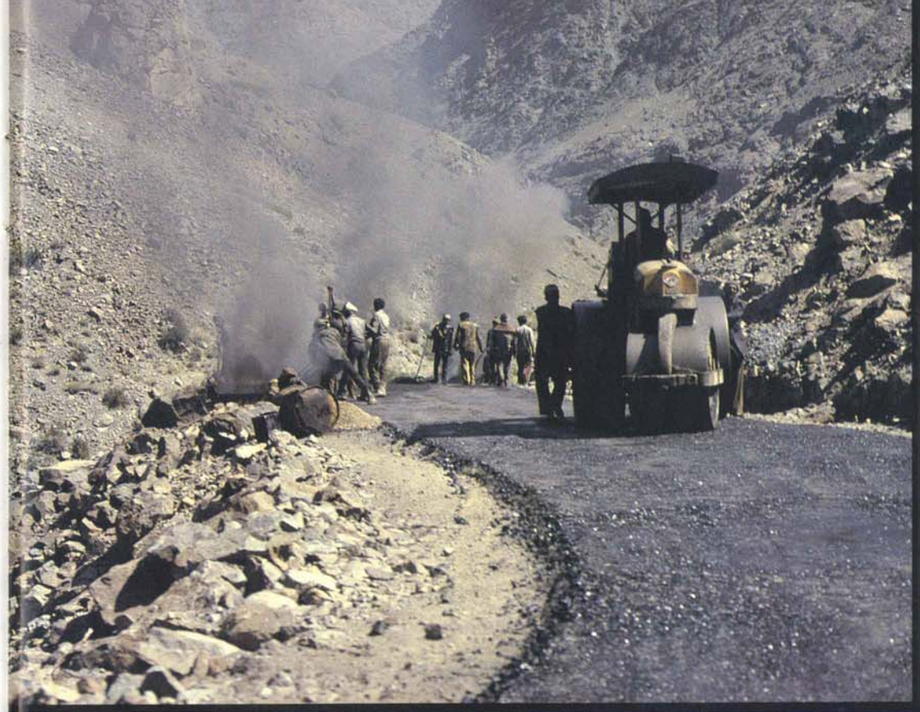
After Khalatse, more historic architecture marks the route: impressive forts and ancient Buddhist monasteries. The landscape is still one of stark, bare beauty. The mighty Indus flows through the steep gorges, gray with the heavy load of summer silt it carries, and then is joined by another river, the strikingly different, emerald-green Zaskar.

The road, as it approaches Leh, opens out onto a wide, undulating plain; in the distance, foothills lead up to the white-capped peaks of the Ladakh Range, with the great palace of the kings of Leh perched over the town itself. The Indian army is much in evidence here, but, surveying the strange landscape, it is hard to imagine from where any enemy could approach – or even why they would want to come.

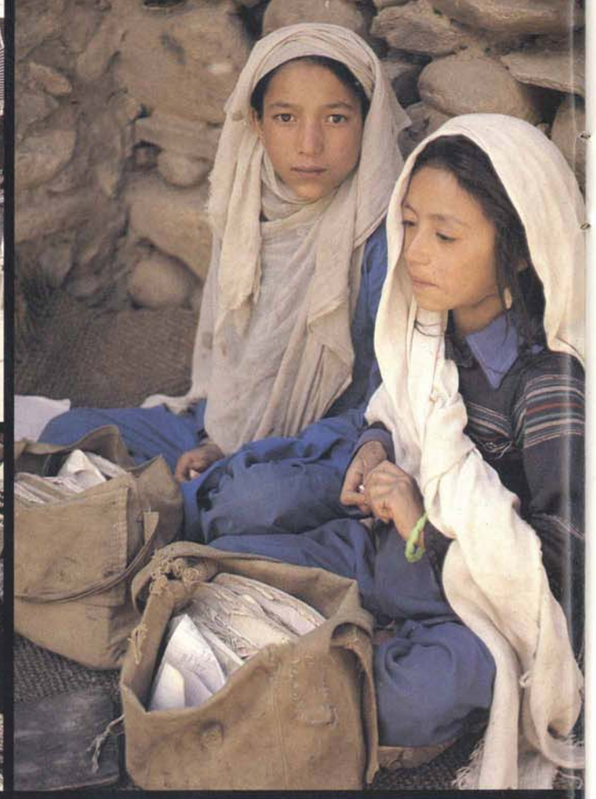
Today, Leh is the end of the modern road. Alternative access is either by air from Srinagar or Delhi, or up from the south on an even rougher land route from Mana La. Movement into and around the area is strictly regulated by the military and, of course, by the weather.

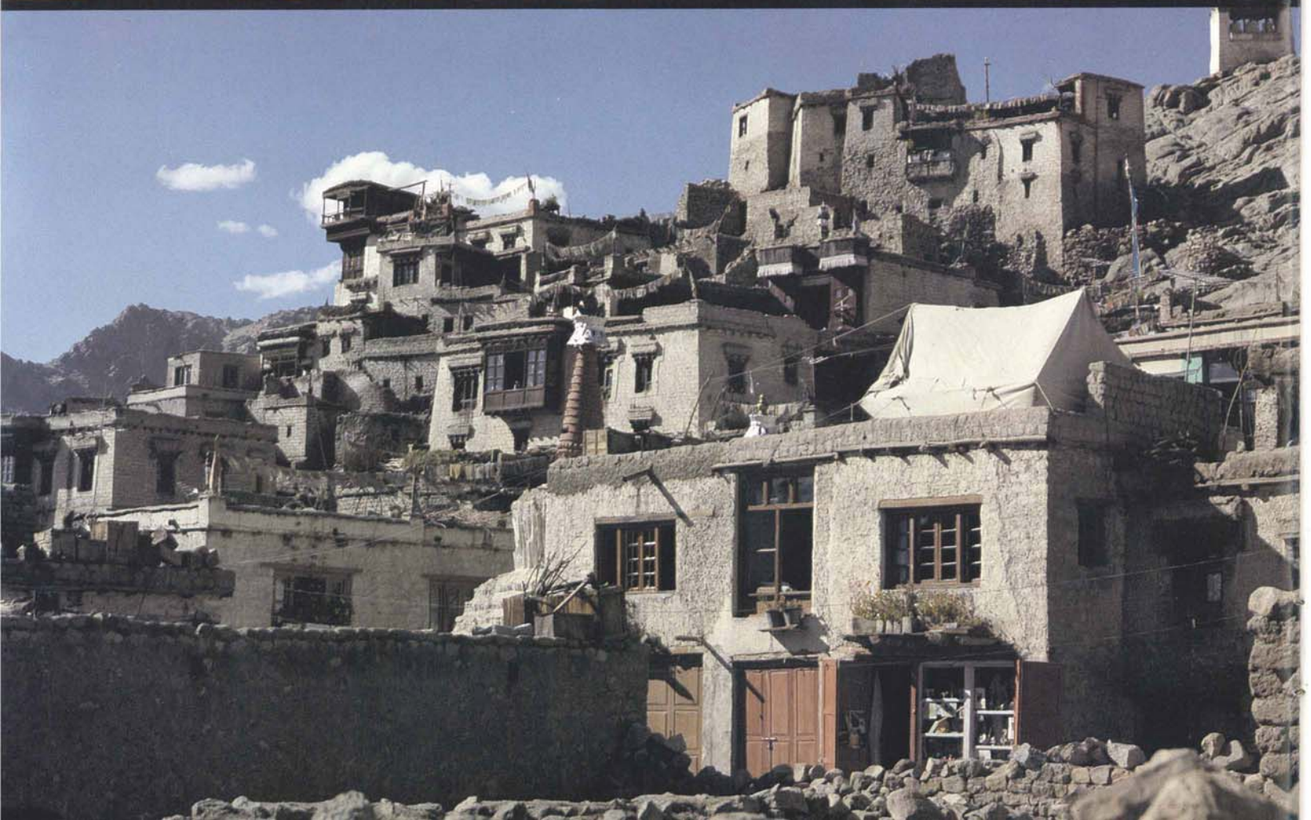
**A driver stands by his overturned truck on the shoulder of the road to Kargil, left.**

THE ANCIENT FORT LIES IN RUINS, BUT BATTLES ARE BEING STILL BEING WAGED FOR THE SAME REASONS ALONG THESE HIGH MOUNTAIN PASSES, ON THE ROOFPEAKS OF THE WORLD.



**Facing page (clockwise from upper left): A roller flattening asphalt on the road between Dras and Kargil; a child from Padam; and a glacier snaking down from the mountains at the southern end of the Zaskar Valley.**





**Far right:**
**A citizen of Leh.**

**Clockwise, spiraling from upper left: Townsfolk shop at the Leh bazaar; girls are among the students at Panikhar's Muslim school; some of Leh's houses are perched on hillsides; a woman of Leh bakes bread; and a boy studies Arabic in the Panikhar school.**

The stretch between Kargil and Leh, along the rim of the Zaskar Valley, has relatively light snowfall and, unlike the rest of the area, is usually passable, barring landslides. For those coming from the south, the most direct, if precarious, winter route to Leh is along the frozen Zaskar River.

Each year, small groups make the week-long journey along the river from near Padam at the southern end of the Zaskar Valley, each man carrying up to 20 kilos (44 pounds) of yak butter, to be sold or exchanged for clothes in the Leh bazaar.

For half a millennium, Leh has been a regional capital and one of the world's highest commercial crossroads. In days of old, long pony caravans worked their way up from the plains of India, carrying spices and cottons, honey and shoes, moving northward to western China. On the return journey, the pack animals were loaded with carpets and silver.

**THE CLICK OF PRYING TOURIST CAMERAS HAS FORCED SOCIAL ACTIVITIES INDOORS, AND HAS MADE THE BIG RELIGIOUS FESTIVALS SUCH SPECTACLES THAT THEY ARE NO LONGER TRULY LOCAL.**

The westward caravans carried wool, and from the west came saffron and other textiles. Leh was a strategic depot between Kashmir and India and the Chinese provinces of Yarkand, Kotan and Kashgar.

This trading past is reflected in the cosmopolitan population of the town. Some of the families are descended from the early Yarkand merchants, others came originally from Kashmir or from farther south in the Punjab. Then there are Tibetans, recently forced out of their own country.

In Leh today, the old people remember – some even traveled in – the heavily laden caravans of ponies and mules which set off from the bazaar each year after the harvest had been brought in. They often trekked along trails signposted by the remains of earlier travelers who had succumbed to the altitude and the cold. The risks were great; the rewards, they say, more than justified them.

Today, the wealthy trading families no longer have agents in entrepôts across the borders, and their trade has had to change direction to survive. Now they supply the ever-expanding Indian army presence and have adapted to meet the demands of backpacking Western visitors.

With the latter came modern-day traders from Kashmir, ready with curios and "antiques," most said to be Tibetan. Some may come from Tibetan refugee camps in India, but the greater number are mass-produced farther south. Some 80 percent of tourist business came into the hands of these outside entrepreneurs, so local tradesmen watched with some satisfaction on 1989 as the traders, intimidated by growing religious and political tensions, moved back to Kashmir, taking their showcases with them. The shuttered stalls remain an uneasy presence along Leh's main bazaar.

Every aspect of life in Ladakh, and in Leh in particular, has changed visibly in recent years. These changes have been wrought by outside influences, most dating from the arrival of the road in 1962, and from the lifting of restrictions on non-military travelers in 1974.

The family unit has held strong in Ladakh for centuries, bolstered by the people's religious principles, but traditional roles are changing. Men now leave home during the summer months to guide recreational trekkers, and inevitably this puts a strain on families during the busiest agricultural time. The women thus work harder than ever before, and day-laborers are now being hired for what were once totally self-sufficient farms. Young girls want education and office jobs, and their untraditional behavior dismays their elderly relatives.

Patterns of dress have also changed rapidly; the shops in Leh bulge with ready-made clothes. No longer does one wait for the traveling weaver to come knocking on the door, and then virtually adopt him into the family for two or three months as he weaves woolen cloth and fashions it into robes and cloaks. It may be a relief to wear just one warm layer against the winter cold, in place of two or three, but more basic values are fading with the change from pattu – homespun wool – to polyester. Jeans and jackets are the anonymous uniform of a youth that, their elders fear, is fast forgetting the traditions of loyalty and conformity.

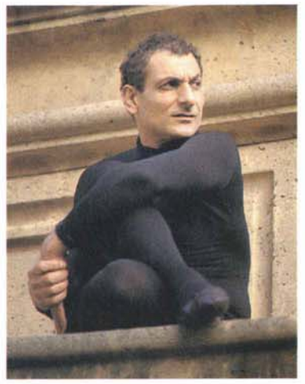
Another pattern being cut differently these days is that of social interaction in Leh. Gone is the welcoming spaciousness of the town and its surroundings: Houses and properties are now being hidden behind dividing walls, since land is scarce in town, and every vacant plot is being snapped up for construction of hotels and guest houses. The click of prying tourist cameras has forced social activities indoors, and has made the big religious festivals such spectacles that they are no longer truly local.

Religious groups used to live harmoniously side by side, often cooperating to solve problems and attending each other's festivities. Muslim would greet Buddhist and all might meet at a Christian reception. Teams from each community would meet on the polo grounds or compete for archery prizes.

For the present, however, tensions and uncertainties have pushed these noble sports and activities from the calendar. Where a short while ago Leh was one interactive community, barriers are now being erected along religious and political lines, and these more leisurely events must wait for another turn of the wheel of life. ⊕

*Hilary Keatinge, an Irish writer who lives in The Netherlands, is the author of a book on sailing in the IJsselmeer.*

# MASTER OF 20 SEASONS



"I feel like I'm at the top of the Ferris wheel. You know the Ferris wheel: At the top, the best. But the future," Lebanese-born dancer Elie Chaib laughs, "is obviously, clearly, downhill."

Critics disagree. Last winter, Chaib was hailed by *The New York Times* as "Dancer of the Year" for his "astonishing focus and control" in his solo performance "Epic." The same year, the 43-year-old avant-garde artist was featured in the Emmy Award-winning PBS film "Speaking in Tongues."

This year, Chaib performs for an unprecedented 20th season with the legendary Paul Taylor Company.

Chaib's renown stems from what dance writer Lillie F. Rosen described as "the rugged irregularity of his features, his handsome, hawk-like austerity" and his "hair-trigger, disciplined virtuosity."

"Charisma..." wrote *The New York Times* critic Anna Kisselgoff. "Mr. Chaib's stage presence is as formidable as his sense of acute timing."

Elie Chaib is a quiet man whose solitary nature contrasts with the boisterousness of younger dancers. Before each performance he methodically works through a two-hour ritual of stretching and mental preparation with an acolyte's devotion. He is a seasoned master.

"I have wanted to cultivate a cat-like quality, the way big cats move in their stillness, with flowing muscles. When the cat is stalking, and then stands still, its energy is still moving. Its body is charged with controlled tension. The cat is in touch with every muscle."

Elie Khalil Chaib was born in July 1950 to a family from the Chouf mountain town of Deir al-Qamar. Growing up in Beirut, he went to see American dance movies at the cinemas along Hamra Street. "West Side Story" profoundly moved him. At night, he danced in Beirut's discos. At age 17, Chaib began studying under Annie Dabat and Gail Waterman, and soon became principal dancer in Dabat's Beirut Dance Ensemble.

Because Lebanon lacked schools for advanced dance training, Chaib decided to leave Beirut and study abroad. He felt that, to achieve the focus required of a world-class performer, he needed to separate himself physically from his family and its expectations.

Chaib found the inspiration to take that huge leap at the Baalbek Festival. Among its Roman columns, he saw a performance of the Alwin Nikolais Dance Theatre and later met the ensemble members, who encouraged him to pursue his career abroad.

In 1970, at 20, he left Beirut for New York. His parents believed he went there to study electrical engineering.

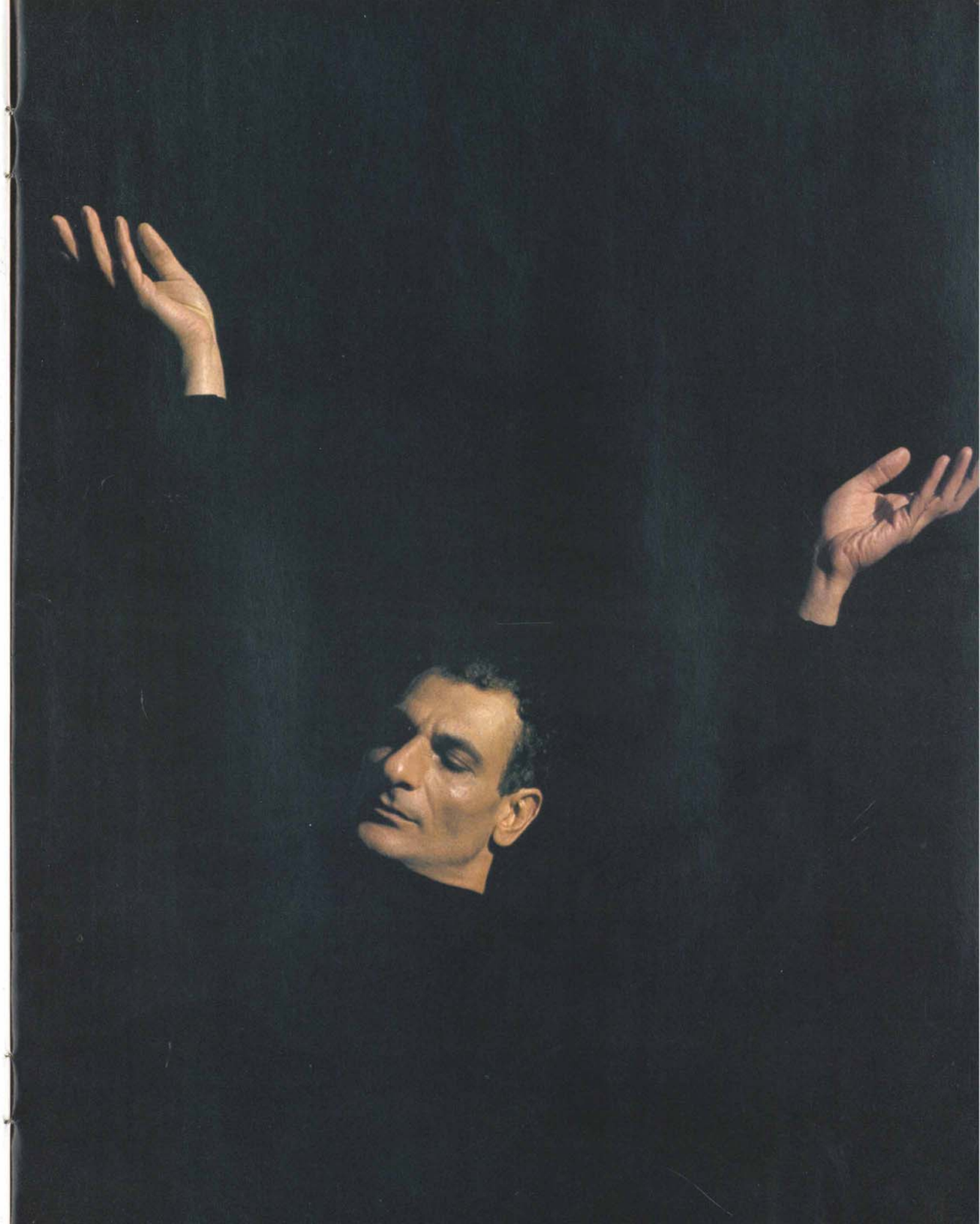
In the daytime, he studied at the Martha Graham and Merce Cunningham schools. At night, he worked in a New York bakery. Three years later, he spotted an announcement that Paul Taylor was selecting male dancers for his company. Chaib auditioned for the job and was picked over a hundred other, more technically accomplished dancers.

Then 23, he was the youngest dancer ever selected for membership in Taylor's legendary company. Now, two decades later, he is the company's oldest dancer and its longest-performing member.

Asked about unfulfilled dreams, Chaib, the first Lebanese to make a distinguished mark in the international dance world, looks away, nods and says simply, "To dance at Baalbek."

*Photojournalist George Baramki Azar is the author of* Palestine, A Photographic Journey, *published by University of California Press.*

WRITTEN AND PHOTOGRAPHED BY GEORGE BARAMKI AZAR



# Homes of Old

# MAKKAH

WRITTEN, PHOTOGRAPHED AND DRAWN BY
NIHAL AND BÜLENT ULUENGIN

Opposite: an example of recent Makkan *mashrabiyyah* work. These projecting windows assure privacy for the family while allowing cool breezes to circulate.

According to Islamic tradition, Ishmael, infant son of the Prophet Abraham (known to the Arabs as Ibrahim), and his mother Hagar were left in a desolate valley in western Arabia. When their water supply was gone, tradition relates that a fresh-water spring miraculously burst forth at the feet of baby Ishmael (called Isma'il in Arabic). Hagar (or Hajar) enclosed the spring, which later became a well. As word of the water source spread, Arab tribes began to settle in the area, and so was born the city of Makkah, destined to become one of the most important oases on the spice and incense routes, at the meeting point of the great south-north and east-west caravan trails.

The water of the well, called Zamzam, supplied the tribes that settled there; in due course, it became known for its health-giving powers. The Ka'bah, the sacred house of God – and Makkah's first stone building – was built near the well as a place of worship; it came to be revered by all the tribes and eventually became the center of pilgrimage.

Makkah's first settlers were nomadic tribes who lived in tents dispersed around the well of Zamzam and throughout the valley. Eventually, however, to accommodate the growing number of pilgrims, the first permanent houses were built around the Ka'bah; these structures were doorless, to welcome the pilgrims.

With the birth of Islam in the seventh century, the pilgrimage, or *hajj*, took on an entirely new meaning, and the flow of pilgrims to Makkah expanded. Some pilgrims decided to settle permanently in the Holy City, building their houses in the valley surrounding the Ka'bah. The residential area of Makkah continued to grow, fueled by newcomers every year. Later immigrants built their houses on slopes and hilltops, due to a shortage of land in the valley and the problem of seasonal flooding. In those days, the height of buildings did not exceed two stories.

During the Ottoman period (1517-1924), housing and other construction in Makkah came under the influence of Turkish architecture. Palaces, forts and large houses were built on the hills and in the valleys of the Makkah area. Buildings gradually grew taller, due to advances in construction technology and the land shortage around the Ka'bah, and in time reached seven stories. After 1924, the traditional Makkan house was somewhat influenced by Western architecture, but remained relatively unchanged until the appearance of reinforced concrete as a construction material.

Generally speaking, Muslim architectural style in the Middle East – North Africa, Syria, central Arabia and central Turkey – was characterized by one- or two-story houses built around a central courtyard. But this is not true for the cities of Saudi Arabia's Hijaz region; it is unusual to see a courtyard house in Jiddah, Yanbu', Madinah, Tayif or Makkah.

In Makkah, a variety of factors combined to give the Makkan house its own distinctive character. The city's strong ties to other Red Sea countries, through the nearby port of Jiddah, was one important factor; others were the functional requirements of the inhabitants, their desire to be close to the Ka'bah, the extreme heat of the "uncultivable valley," sometimes reaching 50 degrees Celsius (122°F), and the local topography of valleys between steep and rocky mountains. The Makkan house came to be distinguished by its large volume, compact floor plan and extroverted appearance. The jutting latticework windows called *mashrabiyyahs* (the Arabic plural is *mashrabiyyat*), whether small or large, simple or ornate, gave a certain depth and relief to the facades of the houses.

The old houses we surveyed in Makkah in 1982 looked very much like the structures described by travelers who have visited the Holy City over the centuries.

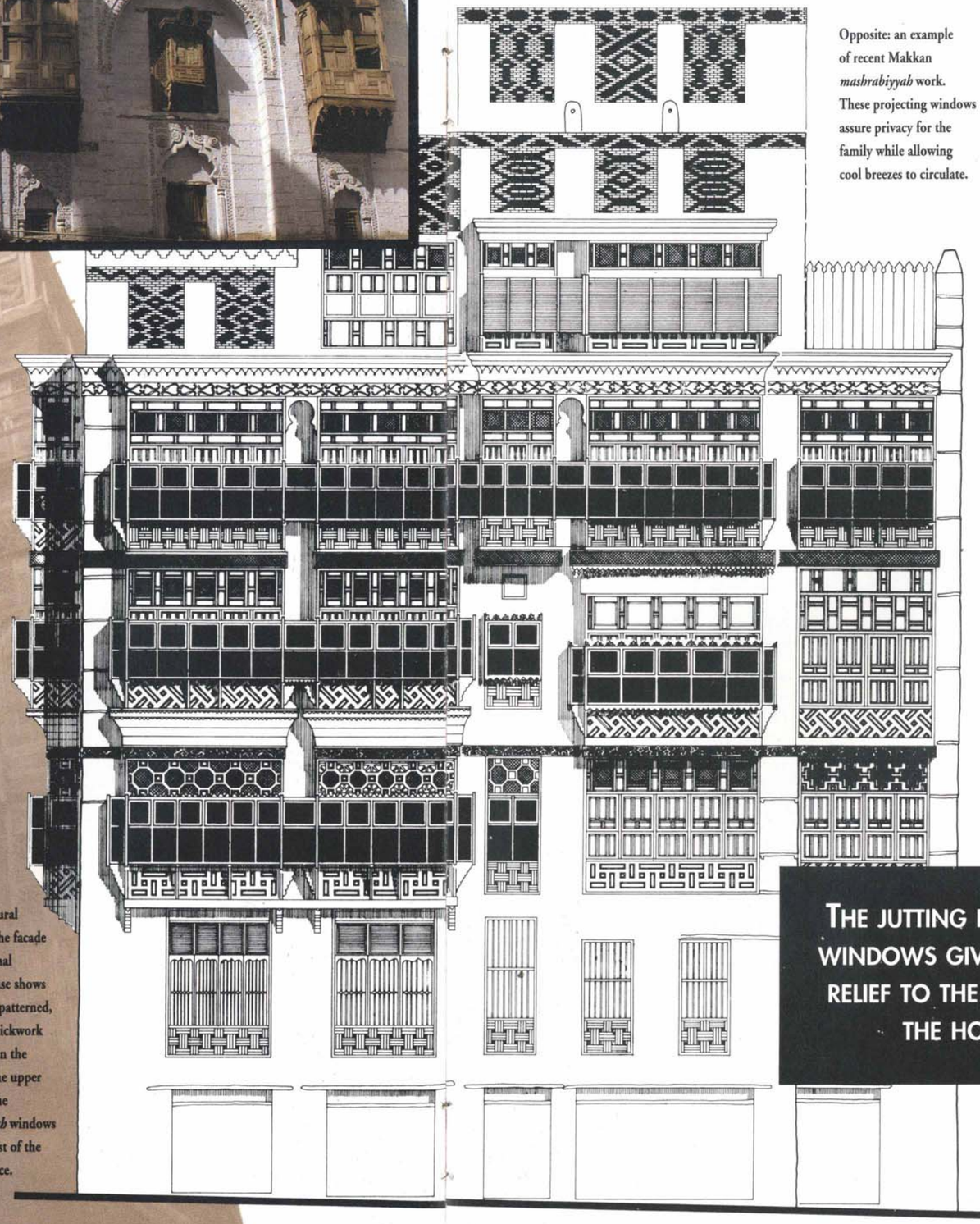
In the 10th century, Shams al-Din Abu 'Abd Allah al-Muqaddisi described Makkan houses as "built of black, smooth stones and also of white stones, but the upper parts are of teakwood and are several stories high, whitewashed and clean."

In the 12th century, Andalusian geographer Ibn Jubayr commented on the flat roofs of Makkah's houses: "We passed the nights on the roof of the place where we stayed and sometimes the cold of the night air would fall on us and [we] would need a blanket to protect us from it."

Joseph Pitts, an English convert who performed the pilgrimage in about 1684, wrote in an account of Makkah, "The inhabitants, especially men, do usually sleep on the tops of houses for the air or in the street before their doors.... As for my part, I usually lay open, without any bed covering, on the top of the house...."

Spanish traveler 'Ali Bey al-'Abbasi, who visited Makkah in 1807, wrote that "the houses are solidly built with stone, they are three and four stories high, and sometimes even more. The fronts are ornamented with bases, moldings and paintings which give them a very graceful appearance.... The blinds of the balconies are not very close, and holes are cut besides in different parts of them. The roofs form terraces, surrounded with a wall about two meters [seven feet] high, open at certain spaces, which are occupied by a railing of red and white bricks placed symmetrically, leaving holes for the circulation of the air. All the staircases are narrow, dark and steep. The rooms are well-proportioned, long, broad and lofty and have beside the large windows and balconies, a second row of smaller windows."

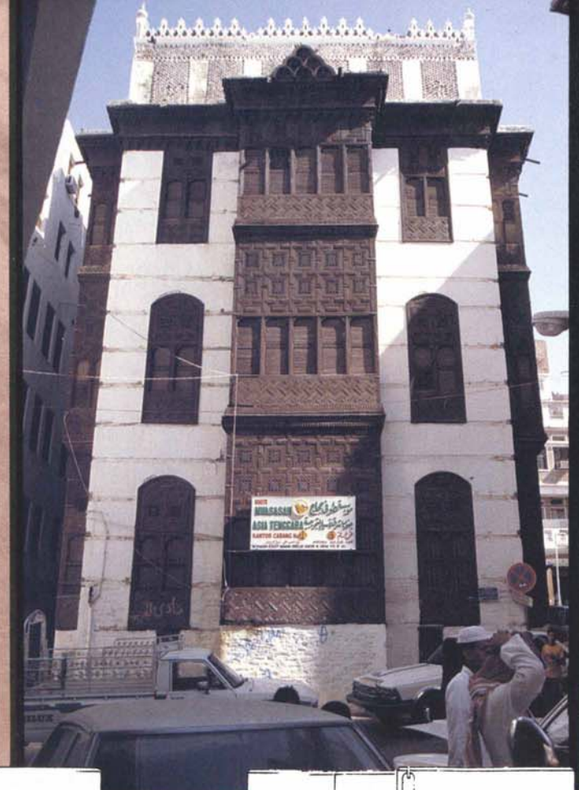
John Fryer Keane, who visited Makkah in 1877, found that many of the houses "are of great height, large and factory-like, full of little windows, seldom two adjacent houses face the same way or are the same height.... There was also a six-feet by four-feet [1.8- by 1.2-meter] window, with open teakwood shutters, roughly carved in an elaborate pattern, of very unfinished but substantial joinery."



An architectural drawing of the facade of a traditional Makkan house shows the brightly patterned, ventilated brickwork used to screen the terraces of the upper levels, and the *mashrabiyyah* windows covering most of the building's face.

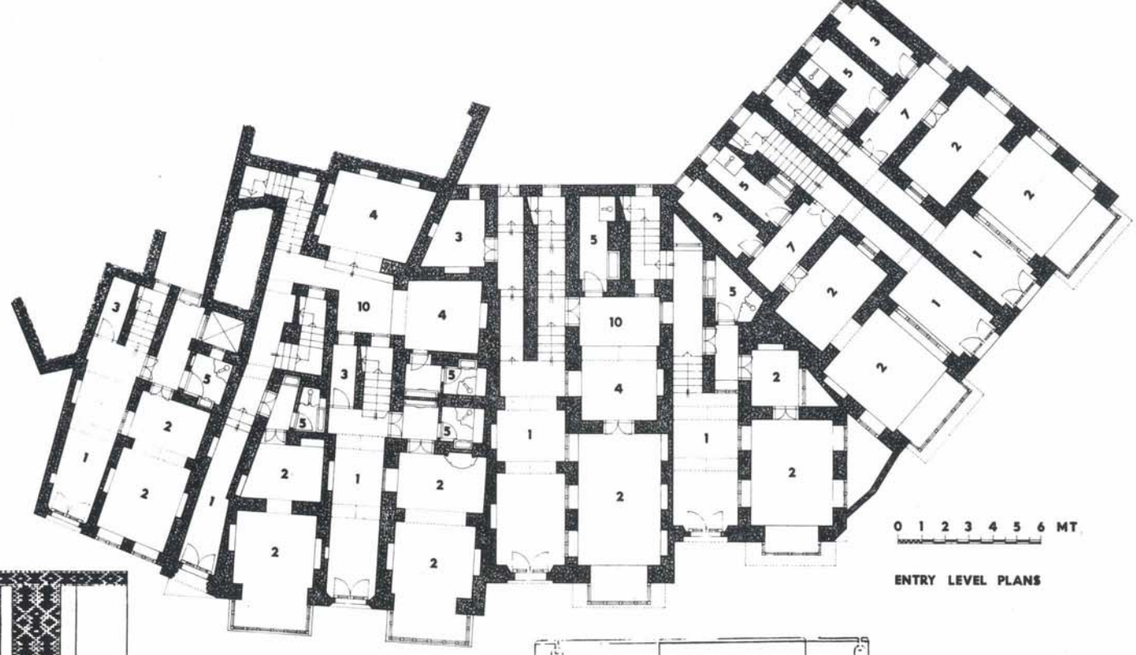
ELEVATION

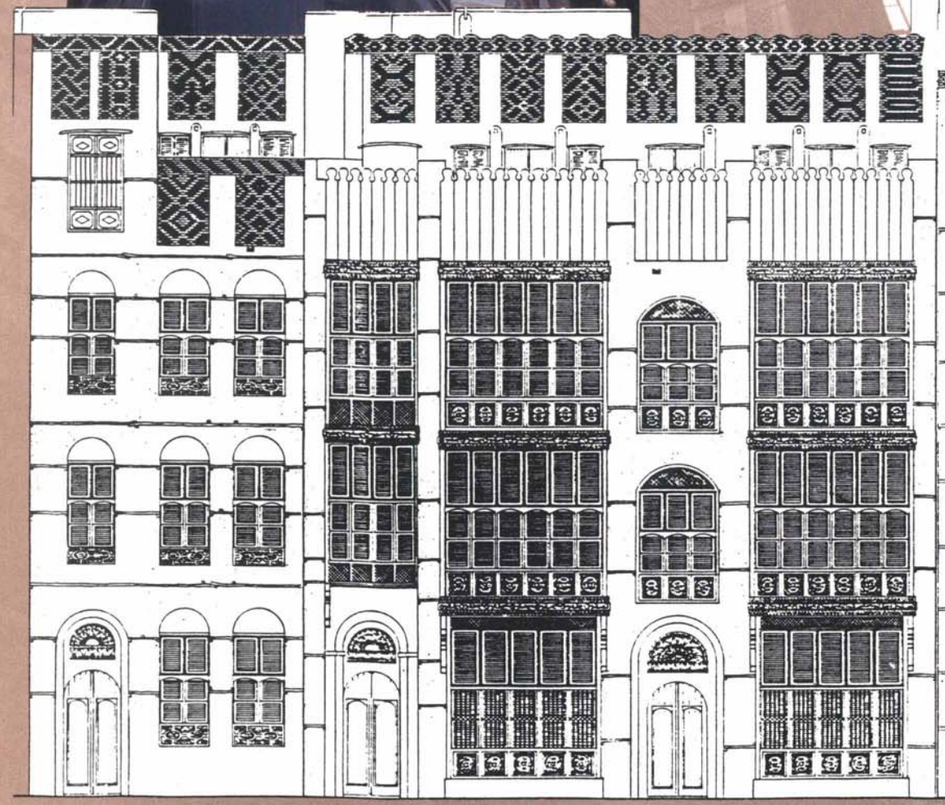
**THE JUTTING LATTICEWORK WINDOWS GIVE DEPTH AND RELIEF TO THE FACADES OF THE HOUSES.**

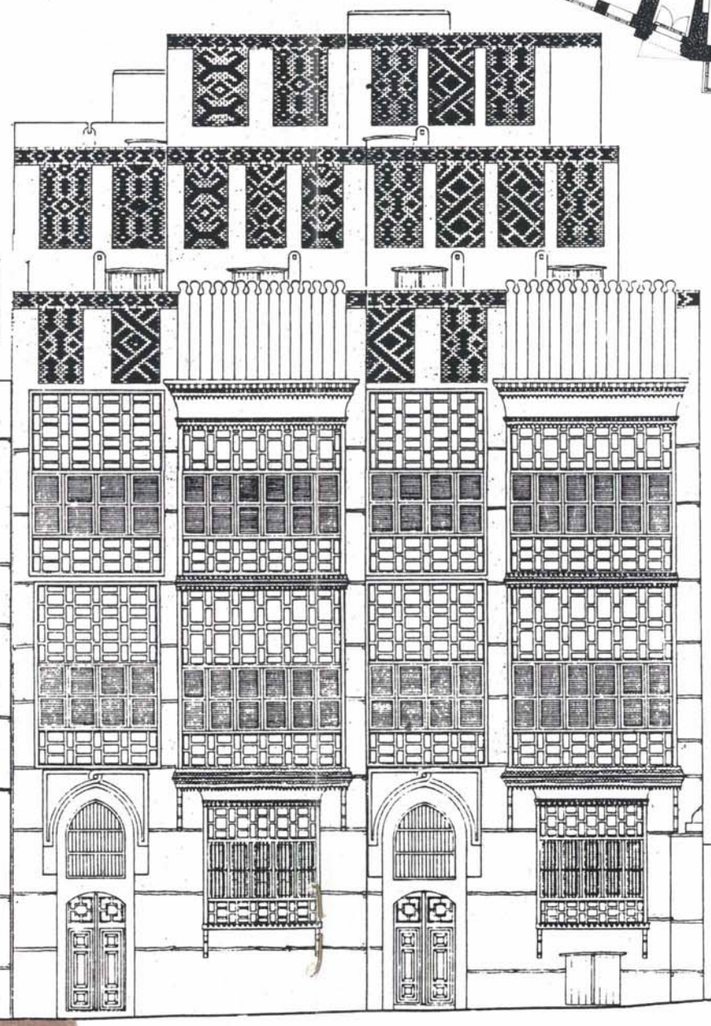


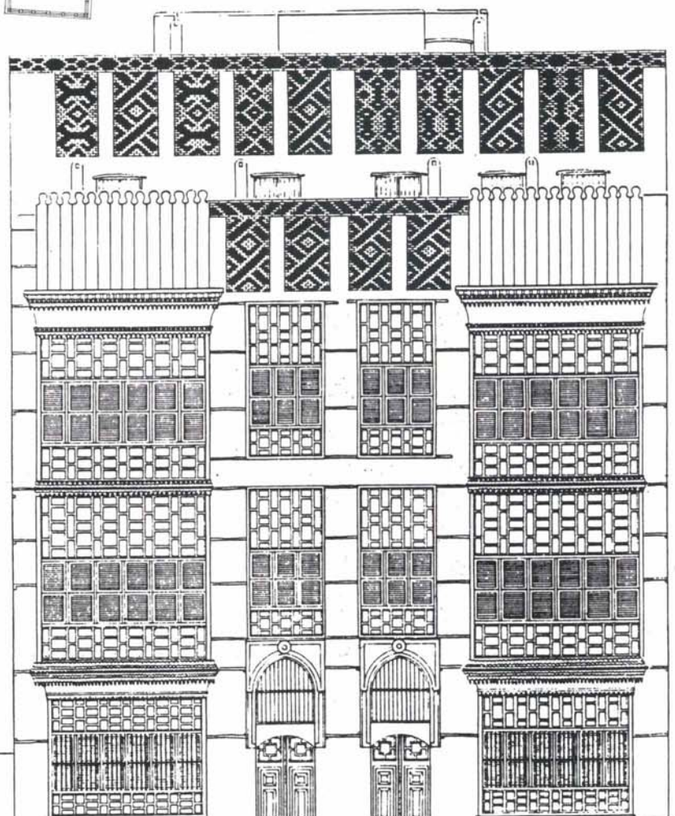
THE OLD HOUSES WE SURVEYED LOOKED VERY MUCH LIKE THE HOMES TRAVELERS DESCRIBED CENTURIES AGO.

Left: A Makkan house surveyed in 1982. Right and below: entry-level floor plans and front elevations of a group of eight row houses. Floor plan numbers refer to: (1) entrance hall or *dihliz*, (2) office/reception room or *maq'ad*, (3) storage area or *qabw*, (4) reception room or *diwan*, (5) toilet or *bayt al-ma'*, (7) anteroom or *suffah* and (10) airshaft or *minwar*.







Many other visitors described similar structures. Actually, not a single house survives from al-Muqaddisi's or Ibn Jubayr's time – and there are very few from Pitts's time – but the descriptions still apply to the existing traditional houses in Makkah. Clearly, the internal configuration of the traditional Makkan house has suited the long-term requirements of the city and its inhabitants.

Serving the pilgrims' needs for lodging, guides, food and transportation has always been Makkah's chief local industry. In pre-modern times, Makkah had no hotels; many Makkans provided accommodations for pilgrims during the hajj season, renting out a room, a floor or even an entire house. Therefore, when building a house, Makkans generally thought in terms of a bi-functional structure, serving as both home and hotel.

**BECAUSE OF MAKKAH'S PILGRIMS, A HOUSE MAY FREQUENTLY SERVE AS BOTH HOME AND HOTEL.**

Typically, traditional Makkan homes are seven stories high, with wooden latticework on their facades and colored brickwork around the terraces of the upper stories. Privacy is the main factor determining use of space.

From the street, one enters the house through an elaborate doorway and steps into an entrance hall known as a *dihliz*. The ground or entrance floor is reserved for men, and one never risks meeting an unveiled woman there. The upper floors belong to the women, and a visitor cannot go upstairs without an escort. The entrance hall floor is covered with sand or a kind of mortar called *tubtab*. On one or both sides of the entrance hall are raised benches where the master of the house sits and receives casual visitors, drinks tea with them and smokes his water pipe, or *shishah*.

On either side of the entrance hall – sometimes on both sides – and raised above floor level, is an important sitting room called the *maq'ad*, which serves as a business office, or reception room for intimate friends. It may also function as a sleeping room during hot summer afternoons, or as a storeroom for merchandise or luggage during the pilgrimage season. Even in the most modest of houses, social activities play an important role; therefore the *maq'ad* is usually spacious, high-ceilinged and well-decorated.

In older, wealthier houses, the *maq'ad* is replaced by an even more luxurious room known as the *diwan*, with carpets on the floor and cushions for sitting or reclining along the walls, where the men meet for receptions, take their dinner and talk business.

In addition to these rooms, a water closet, called *bayt al-ma'* or *taharah*, is also found on the entrance floor.

From a corner of the ground floor opening on a vertical air-shaft, a staircase with four landings leads to upper floors. The staircase winds around a central pier and is enclosed all the way up with solid walls. This is one of the reasons for the strength of Makkan buildings:

In a Makkan house, the supporting base of a *mashrabiyyah* window is sometimes decorated with floral carvings, as above. At left, another traditional home in the Holy City.

The staircase acts as a kind of massive, hollow column supporting the entire building.

The layout of rooms on the next two floors is similar: A carved door on each floor's landing opens onto an entrance hall around which the rooms are grouped.

The main sitting room, or *majlis*, overlooks the street. Its floors are covered with carpets; along the walls are low, firm cushions to sit on and recline against, like couches without legs or frames. Cupboards with ornamented wooden doors adorn the walls. Windows with decorated wooden shutters – *mashrabiyyahs* or *rawashin* – project out over the street. To enter the main sitting room, one must pass through a smaller room called the *suffah*. Another room, a storage chamber known as the *khizanah*, adjoins the majlis as well.

The majlis is a multi-purpose room, according to the changing needs of the family: a sitting room during the daytime, a place where women gather when men guests are downstairs in the *maq'ad* or *diwan*, a bedroom at night or a rented room for pilgrims during the pilgrimage season. The adjoining *khizanah* is used either as a storeroom for extra mattresses, pillows and blankets, or as a kitchen when rented out to pilgrims. Large houses have another small sitting room known as the *mu'akhkhar*, which overlooks the back street or opens onto a *minwar*, an air shaft that admits sunlight. Finally, there is a toilet on every floor, either on the staircase landing or opening off the living quarters.

As one goes upstairs, some of the spaces that were rooms on lower floors become expansive open-air terraces. Generally, three terrace floors provide living space for the women and children of the family. Even during the hajj season, these floors are not rented to pilgrims, so the main kitchen and family bathroom are found on these levels. The terraces are used for hanging out laundry, for simply enjoying the cool of the evening, or for sleeping under the stars on hot summer nights.

For these reasons and for privacy, the terraces are surrounded by brick walls about man-high, with spaces between the bricks to let the air through. The outside faces of the bricks are painted white, red, yellow and blue, and present an attractive view from a distance – one of the special features of houses in the city of Makkah. On the first terrace floor is a small living room known as the *mabit*, used by the family for eating, living and sleeping purposes during the pilgrimage, when other floors are rented to pilgrims.

Three types of materials were used in the traditional houses of Makkah: stone, brick and wood.

The stone was quarried locally or from nearby areas and was used in foundations and in load-bearing walls, both inside and out. The stone walls, some 60 to 75 centimeters thick (24 to 30") on the basement level and about 35 centimeters thick (14") on upper floors, were

constructed with a mud-based mortar, plastered on both sides and then painted with a lime wash.

The brick, also locally produced, was used only on the upper levels of the house, including the terrace levels where the walls needed to be lighter and thinner.

Two kinds of wood were used in Makkan houses. Locally produced lumber, from palm and other trees, was used for ceilings and floors, as framing for windows and doors, or as reinforcement in stone walls. Imported hardwood – teak from India or Java – was used for the inner and outer doors themselves, and for the windows, especially *mashrabiyyahs*.

Traditional Makkan homes are deep row houses, sharing their longer walls with adjoining units. The foundations were laid on solid rock and the bearing external walls, up to the terrace level, are of stone. The internal walls are also of stone, but are thinner than the external ones.

The floors were made of wooden logs laid about 30 to 40 centimeters (12 to 16") apart soon after the lintels of the *mashrabiyyahs* were set in place. Palm-frond ribs were laid diagonally across the beams, in two layers, and tied to the beams. A layer of closely woven palm-matting was then laid over the ribs and covered with a layer of sand and loam, on top of which was applied a flooring cement about 15 centimeters (six inches) thick. Terrace floors were constructed the same way, with a thicker layer of plaster cement and a slight outward slope to drain away rainwater. Wooden waterspouts, often hollowed out of palm trunk, kept the rainwater away from the walls. Terrace walls were made of decorative brick, as described earlier.

Despite the scarcity of good timber in the area, the traditional houses of Makkah are noted for their beautifully decorated woodwork. Imported teakwood was used mainly for *mashrabiyyah* or *rawshan* windows – recent examples of which may cover the whole facade of a building – as well as for elaborately carved exterior doors and for latticework called *shish*, found in window openings or as internal partitions.

The oldest type of *mashrabiyyah* is a large window that projects out over the street and consists of a base, a central section and an upper section. The supporting base projects from the wall onto which the actual *mashrabiyyah* is built. It is supported by wooden brackets and is sometimes decorated with beautiful floral paintings and carvings.

The central section – the true *mashrabiyyah* – bears the shutters and is the most heavily decorated. The shutters and the fixed parts have beautifully carved panels of wood with geometric or floral patterns. The upper section projects out even farther than the central part, to provide shade, and bears floral patterns or inscriptions.

In later examples of *mashrabiyyah* covering entire facades, the base of each segment, corresponding to one story of the building, is ornamented with floral or geometric carvings and the shutters are louvered to provide air circulation.

Windows – *shubbak* in Arabic – are related to *mashrabiyyah* in design, but are less complex. The base paneling bears geometric or floral patterns, the shutters are blinds in older types and made with louvers in more recent versions, and the top portion features latticework grilles to ventilate the room.

The street doors of Makkan houses are made of plain teakwood paneling with beautiful geometric or floral carvings. The right-hand door panel has a smaller door set into it for the daily use of the inhabitants, since the main doors, generally surmounted by arches in the wall, are opened only to admit large loads. Internal doors and cupboard doors are of lighter construction and sometimes carved or decorated.

*Shish* latticework grilles served to circulate cool air and at the same time ensure privacy. Normally employing crisscross, notched or slatted patterns, the grilles were often simply small rectangular insets in a larger pattern of panels, but were sometimes large enough to cover a whole window or the top of a *mashrabiyyah*.

Woodwork was also used on the frames of doors and windows, on internal archways, ceiling bosses, ceilings, external *mashrabiyyah* cornices and base-brackets.

Ambitious renovation and extension projects have been implemented and great changes have occurred in traditional Makkah in the last decade. No doubt the city's architecture will continue to evolve, creating new styles that seek to harmonize old and new.

The traditional architecture of Makkah – an important strand of Saudi Arabian culture and tradition – deserves to be reevaluated, rediscovered and protected, rather than demolished. Its outstanding qualities can inspire new designs for contemporary construction. A few of the city's buildings are being preserved as historical monuments, and more should be; they can either be adapted to today's comfort requirements or converted to new uses. The transmission of this unique architectural heritage to future generations would be a valuable victory for Saudi Arabia's cultural preservation efforts.

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Windows carved with geometric patterns, left, are related to *mashrabiyyahs* but less elaborate in their design. A house in cross-section, right, shows the structurally important rear stairwell. The house below – photographed from the side on page 24 – sacrifices depth for more frontage.

**TRADITIONAL HOMES ARE NOTED FOR THEIR BEAUTIFULLY DECORATED WOODWORK, INCLUDING *MASHRABIYYAH* WINDOWS.**

# CULTURES AND COCKROACHES

WRITTEN BY PAT McDONNELL TWAIR PHOTOGRAPHED BY SAMIR TWAIR

"The East is no more mysterious than the West," Egyptian playwright Tawfiq al-Hakim once said. "We all face very much the same problems and react to them in very similar ways."

His point was well demonstrated this year at the Freud Playhouse of the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA), as sophisticated West-Coast audiences laughed exuberantly at the humor of one of al-Hakim's own works, a three-act satirical comedy called *Fate of a Cockroach*.

Renowned as one of the foremost Egyptian and Arabic writers of this century, al-Hakim is credited with developing an Egyptian theatrical identity through the content, regional color and language of his drama.

*Cockroach* was al-Hakim's 79th play; he died in 1987 at the age of 89. He first gained international recognition in 1933 for a play entitled *The Cave Dwellers*, and many critics feel *Fate of a Cockroach*, written in 1966 and translated into English by Denys Johnson-Davies, is equally good.

The performance of *Fate of a Cockroach*, one of eight productions by UCLA's School of Theater, Film and Television in the 1992-93 season, was directed by Professor Beverly J. Robinson, who worked for more than a decade to bring the play to the American stage. In 1983, while on leave from UCLA, Robinson visited al-Hakim in Cairo, meeting with him at least three or four times a week over two months.

"I'll never forget the sparkle in his eyes whenever we discussed producing *Fate of a Cockroach* in the United States," she recalled. "Tawfiq afforded me the opportunity to talk about theater in Cairo; he'd listen to me and then he'd tell me how his plays related to a larger world. He was talking multi-culturalism before the phrase was coined."

"Most Americans are naïve about Arab writers and about the fact that some of the finest pieces of world literature come from the Middle East," Robinson said. The ideal way to expose Americans to the Arab world, and to another level of consciousness, she decided, was to stage *Fate of a Cockroach*.

The UCLA production marked the first time that the play had been staged in its entirety, and its costumes and sets were worthy of any Broadway show. More than two months were invested in sewing costumes designed by student Roz Moore. Far and away the most striking were the amber- and cinnamon-hued cockroach ensembles, combining sequins, feathers, shells and mirrors with chiffon, velvet and quilted fabrics. Masks, face-paint and long red antennae enhanced the cockroach look, perfected by the actors' jerky head and leg movements.

Moore also designed ingenious ant costumes, in black and dappled gray, complete with antennaed heads and insect tails. The ants brought a "Soul Train" flavor to the production as they stamped in rhythmic unison up a ladder and across the stage.

Another unique Robinson touch was the use of traditional shadow puppets in the shape of ants that moved across a giant screen.

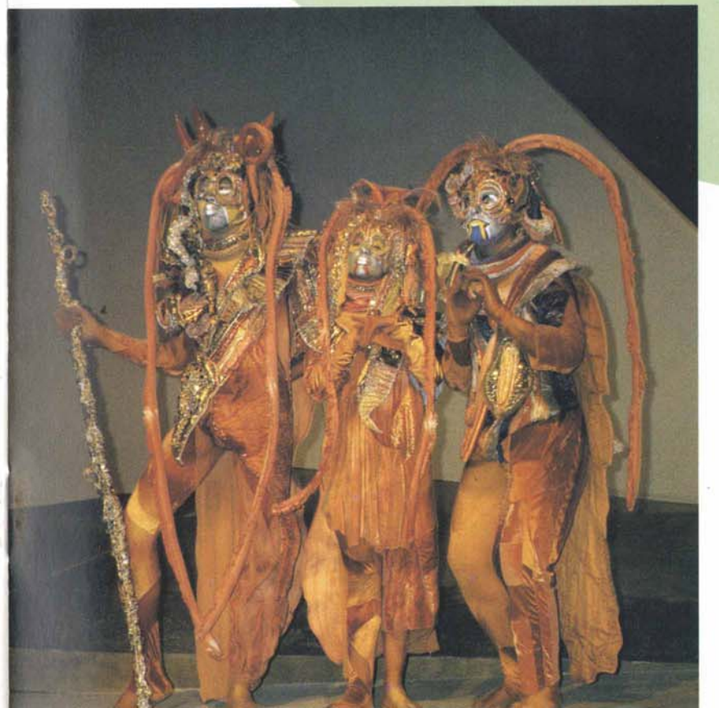
Al-Hakim's script called for only one "subject cockroach," who is ruled by others. When four woman students applied for the single role, Robinson gave them al-Hakim's lines and challenged them to come up with a solution.

The aspiring actresses innovated one of the hits of the show. Their costumes were simpler than those of the courtly cockroaches, but their headdresses had a distinctly pharaonic flair, and the four danced to a doo-wop beat, singing:

*Oh Night, oh lovely Night,*
*During which our eyes be closed*
*On things both dear and dread;*
*Oh Night, oh lovely Night,*
*With one eye we go to sleep,*
*With the other we await*
*The breaking of the lucid dawn.*

**The ants, highly disciplined warriors, are mortal enemies of the cockroaches in Tawfiq al-Hakim's *Fate of a Cockroach*, performed at UCLA.**

**The cockroaches, below, lament their disorganized response to ant attacks, in this first-ever complete performance of al-Hakim's play.**



The set for the play's first act consisted of a two- by four-meter (roughly 7- by 13-foot) bar of Egyptian soap, complete with an Arabic brand name and an impression of the Sphinx molded in, along with the massive leg of an antique bathtub and the ends of open pipes from which the cockroaches crawled onstage.

The tall, self-appointed cockroach leader, played by Cress Williams, spoke in bass tones as he thumped his jeweled scepter and fretted over the danger posed by his age-old enemies, the ants. His consort, the cowardly minister, the priest and the savant all bemoan the loss of the minister's son, who has been murdered and carried off by the ants. One character suggests that if 20 cockroaches were to assemble in a column, they could destroy an entire battalion of ants.

"How many generations would it take before we cockroaches could be trained to walk in columns?" sighs the ruler. Furthermore, he notes, ants have ministers of war to organize them.

"Ants are concerned only with the storage of food," another cockroach comments in justification. "We are curious creatures. We test things with our whiskers."

Acts II and III focus on the failure of humans not only to understand the language of insects, but even to communicate with one another. Al-Hakim also strikes a universal chord in his treatment of the battle between the sexes – one that can be understood by Cairene or Angeleno audiences alike.

Once again designer Moore excelled, this time with color-coordinated costumes for actors playing human parts: apricot-hued *jallabiyyahs* and persimmon and gold caftans.

The star of Acts II and III is Jezabel Montero, cast as the domineering housewife, Samia. The fun begins when she catches sight of the cockroach leader trapped in her bathtub. Samia is certain that her hen-pecked husband, Adil, has finally lost his wits when he becomes preoccupied with the determination of the little insect, who repeatedly climbs up the side of the tub in an attempt to escape, only to fall back each time.

American audiences quickly catch the humor of the situation as Adil's boss phones, and the wife tries to cover up for her husband's preoccupation with the indomitable cockroach. The ultimate fate of the cockroach rates a collective gasp, then laughter, as the audience expresses its concern for the insect's destiny.

*Fate of a Cockroach* ran for 10 performances over two weekends at UCLA. One special matinee performance was given for 500 inner-city school children, who ooohed and ahhhed in admiration of the insect costumes and spent nearly 30 minutes talking to the actors after the performance. Encore performances in Los Angeles or other US cities would depend upon funding, Robinson noted.

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Present-day Suakin at sunset, left. For many years, this island town served as a nexus for the great trade routes linking Europe, Africa and the Orient.

# Suakin and time tide

WRITTEN BY ROBERT BERG
ILLUSTRATED BY LORRAINE BERG

At dusk, in the lapping of the wavelets at the old sea wall, one can almost hear the voices of Suakin's past: the Egyptian of Pharaoh's officers, the classical Greek of Ptolemy's seafarers, the Arabic and Hindi of the Red Sea merchants, the tribal tongues of West African pilgrims bound for Makkah, the Portuguese of European explorers, the To Bedawie of Osman Digna's dervishes, and the English of Kitchener's embattled soldiers.

Those are only some of the languages that once rose above the sounds of loading and unloading at the wharves of this island town. Today, few voices mention this remote Red Sea port whose name, Suakin, nonetheless hints at the mystery of its past.

Suakin is first mentioned in the early 10th century by the South Arabian scholar al-Hamdani, who describes the port as an ancient location. Sawakin, the town's name in Arabic, literally means "dwellers" or "stillnesses," and suggests haunting by jinn. According to one legend, Suakin served as a prison to which the prophet Sulayman ibn Daud – known in the Old Testament as King Solomon – banished demons, and the town's name derives from *sawajin*, a fanciful plural of the Arabic *sijn*, or prison. Another possible origin of the name points to the Arabic word *suq*, or market. Borrowed by the Beja nomads, whose name for Suakin was U Suk, *suq* reappeared in the To Bedawie locative case as *isukib*, from which the name Suakin may have evolved.

Whatever the origin, it is certain that Suakin is truly a *mina min zaman*, a port of old, whose beginnings lie far back in time. Its sheltered harbor, connected to the Red Sea by a long, narrow channel, was the finest anchorage on the African Red Sea coast between present-day Quseir in Egypt and Massawa in Eritrea, both ancient moorings themselves. Only with the advent of the modern freighter, too large to maneuver in the close confines of Suakin's harbor, did the port slip out of use and into quiet decay.

Given their commercial expeditions to the land of Punt – which lay somewhere near the Horn of Africa – the ancient Egyptians undoubtedly knew this fine harbor and its lucrative trade in aromatics, ivory and gold. By the time Queen Hatshepsut of the XVIIIth Dynasty dispatched the most famous of these ventures, trade with Punt was well over a millennium old. Suakin's own hinterland once contained rich gold deposits, with remains of ancient workings in the Red Sea hills reaching to just north of the port; pharaonic attempts to exploit these deposits may have begun as early as the Vth Dynasty (2745-2625 BC). The Egyptians also looked to the Red Sea for other luxury items: peridot, chrysolite and tortoise-shell.

Coming from the other direction, seafaring peoples of Yemen and Hadramawt reached across the Red Sea to the African shore from their kingdoms of Saba' – better known as Sheba – and Himyar. While their most important colonies were established farther south near Massawa, known to the ancients as Adulis, these early Arabians too must have been familiar with Suakin.

The history of trade in the Red Sea area is a story of peaks and valleys: Activity increased when the power of dynastic Egypt waxed, and shrank as that central power waned. The region was sometimes a crossroads, sometimes a backwater, but after 1085 BC and the end of the XXth Dynasty, Suakin's fortunes entered a long decline as commercial activity in the region ebbed.

After the conquest of Egypt by Alexander the Great in 332 BC, the port's fortunes began to rise again. When Alexander died, his empire was divided up among his generals, with Egypt going to Ptolemy. The Greeks were a maritime people; under Ptolemy and his successors they devoted themselves to establishing commercial entrepôts south along the Red Sea coast to revive the already ancient, still unbelievably rich, Indian and Arabian trade with its myriad of luxuries: frankincense, myrrh, gold, ivory and spices.

Despite Suakin's oppressively hot and humid weather – Greek chronicler Diodorus Siculus recorded that the midday heat was so intense that two men standing side by side could not see each other because of the air's density – 300 years of adventurous Ptolemaic exploration and exploitation certainly left an imprint along the coast, where folk legends about the energy and ability of these intruders circulate to this day.

In this period, Suakin has been identified with Limen Evangelis, Ptolemy's Port of Good Hope. The port is described as lying partly on a circular island, roughly a kilometer and a half (one mile) in circumference, at the end of a long inlet. The countryside supported substantial numbers of wild animals including elephants, which were captured by the Ptolemies for military use. The sight of these behemoths being loaded on board ships at Suakin must have prompted much excitement and apprehension among the townspeople.

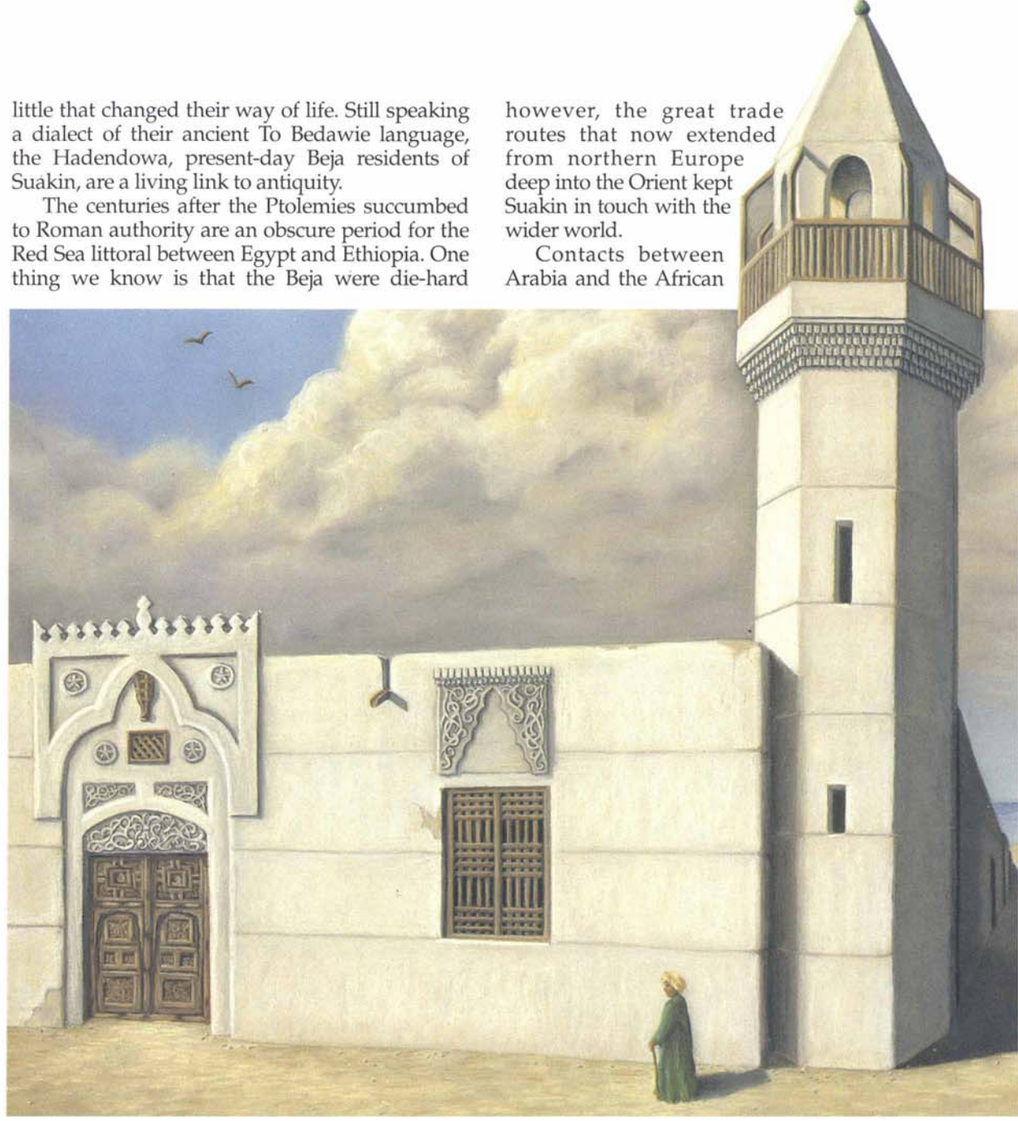
The diversity of the merchants and seafarers arriving at Suakin was already extensive in ancient times and would only grow as years marched by. But the coastal plain surrounding the port belonged, and still belongs, to a Hamitic people known as the Beja, among the oldest pastoralists on the African continent. Through the ages, they have absorbed successive waves of Semitic immigrants from Arabia, and also confronted waves of intruders intent on exploiting or seizing their lands. They have always outlasted their opponents, incorporating little that changed their way of life. Still speaking a dialect of their ancient To Bedawie language, the Hadendowa, present-day Beja residents of Suakin, are a living link to antiquity.

The centuries after the Ptolemies succumbed to Roman authority are an obscure period for the Red Sea littoral between Egypt and Ethiopia. One thing we know is that the Beja were die-hard enemies of Roman authority for much of that time. We also know that to the west, along the Nile, lay the Nubian kingdom of Kush (See *Aramco World*, July-August 1981). To the south rose the Ethiopian kingdom of Axum, with its extensive ties to South Arabia – possibly an outgrowth of Sabaean power based along the frankincense trail in Yemen. In this period also is a legendary invasion of the Atbai region, north of Suakin, by the Yemeni Abu al-Malik ibn Shamnar-Yerash, whose armies perished in their attempt to seize the emerald mines of the Eastern Desert.

Surrounded by shifting balances of power, this must have been a time of great upheavals, perhaps disaster, for Suakin – mixed with periods of flowing riches. Except in the direst of times, however, the great trade routes that now extended from northern Europe deep into the Orient kept Suakin in touch with the wider world.

Contacts between Arabia and the African Red Sea coast rose to a new level with the advent of Islam in the early seventh century. After the death of the Prophet Muhammad in AD 632, Muslim power expanded from the Arabian Peninsula north and east into Asia (See *Aramco World*, November-December 1991), and west into Africa. The Arab penetration of the Sudan followed two main routes: overland via the Sinai, and across the Red Sea to ports on the African shore. This influx led to the creation of the port of Badi' and brought the ports of 'Aydhab and Suakin into roles of prominence; they were the major points of contact with Arabia over the next several centuries.

For a time, both Badi' to the south and 'Aydhab to the north eclipsed Suakin, but Suakin's geographical location was better than

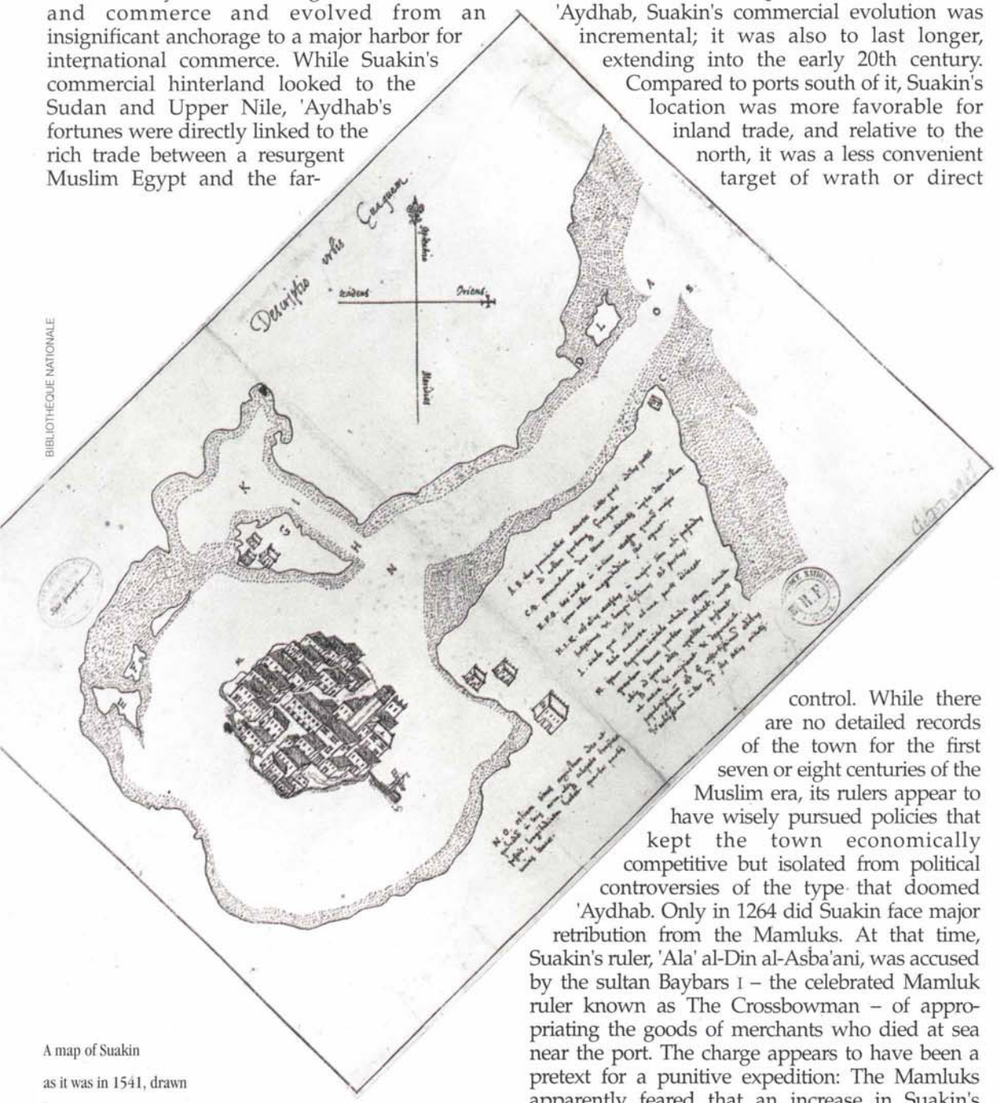


Behind text at far left: A pargeting design from Suakin. Immediate left: A band motif carved in stone. Right: Suakin's Shafai Mosque, as seen today.

Badi''s, both in relation to the Sudanic and Nilotic commercial centers and to Jiddah, Makkah's port and the major arrival point for Muslim pilgrims. Badi' declined.

'Aydhab, near the present-day village of Halaib on the Sudanese-Egyptian border, was stimulated by the flourishing of Muslim culture and commerce and evolved from an insignificant anchorage to a major harbor for international commerce. While Suakin's commercial hinterland looked to the Sudan and Upper Nile, 'Aydhab's fortunes were directly linked to the rich trade between a resurgent Muslim Egypt and the far-flung lands of the Orient. Disruptions caused by the Crusades and Mongol onslaughts increased the importance of the Red Sea as a commercial avenue for trade with the East. By the end of the 12th century, 'Aydhab was one of the busiest ports in the entire Muslim world.

Unlike the swift expansion of Badi' and 'Aydhab, Suakin's commercial evolution was incremental; it was also to last longer, extending into the early 20th century. Compared to ports south of it, Suakin's location was more favorable for inland trade, and relative to the north, it was a less convenient target of wrath or direct control. While there are no detailed records of the town for the first seven or eight centuries of the Muslim era, its rulers appear to have wisely pursued policies that kept the town economically competitive but isolated from political controversies of the type that doomed 'Aydhab. Only in 1264 did Suakin face major retribution from the Mamluks. At that time, Suakin's ruler, 'Ala' al-Din al-Asba'ani, was accused by the sultan Baybars I – the celebrated Mamluk ruler known as The Crossbowman – of appropriating the goods of merchants who died at sea near the port. The charge appears to have been a pretext for a punitive expedition: The Mamluks apparently feared that an increase in Suakin's wealth would pose a competitive threat to 'Aydhab, whose position they were bent on maintaining. The attack was led by the governor of Qus in Egypt and his general, Ikhmin 'Ala' al-Din, and was supported by 50 ships from 'Aydhab. Al-Asba'ani fled in defeat.




BIBLIOTHÈQUE NATIONALE

A map of Suakin as it was in 1541, drawn by Portugese navigator João de Castro for his *Red Sea Pilot*, and now in the French *Fonds d'Anville* cartographic collection.

Immediate right: A Suakini stone band motif.

Far right: A Hadendowa nomad from the Suakin area. His people traditionally herd cattle, and are an important division of the Muslim Beja nation.

A Mamluk agent was installed to oversee the port and a garrison was left behind. Shortly after 'Ala' al-Din's departure, however, al-Asba'ani returned to attack the town, but was again soundly defeated. Baybars eventually decided that a local chief would be better suited to look after Egyptian interests in such a remote location, and he accepted al-Asba'ani's request to rule the port in Baybars's name. For the first time, Suakin came under direct Egyptian control.

Al-Asba'ani was descended from a long line of merchants who had migrated to Suakin from the Hijaz in Arabia. This ongoing migration insured the development of strong commercial ties linking Suakin with Jiddah and Makkah. Many of those whose businesses flourished settled in the port and married local Beja women, and the Beja tradition of matrilineal inheritance allowed some of the immigrant Arabs to attain prominent tribal positions. In 1332, the renowned traveler Ibn Battuta visited Suakin, and found the port ruled by al-Sharif Zaid ibn Abi Numayy ibn 'Ajlan, son of the *amir* or prince of Makkah: He had inherited the post by way of his Bejawi maternal uncles.

As with so many other situations throughout its history, Suakin's connections with the Hijaz proved a mixed blessing: While assured a prominent role as a departure point for African pilgrims, as well as a stable trading relationship with the Hijaz, Suakin had to stand by quietly while Jiddah took the lion's share of trade with the Orient.

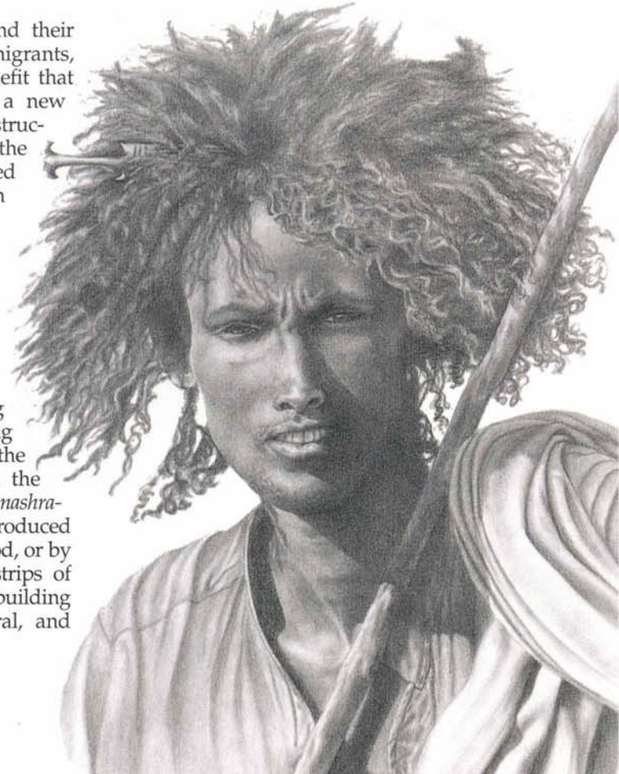
In addition to their Islamic faith and their commercial enterprises, the Jiddah emigrants, called Jiddawis, introduced another benefit that would give Suakin a distinctive face: a new building technique. Unlike the adobe structures of the Sudan, designed to keep the desert heat at bay, the Jiddawis introduced coastal architecture that strove to catch the cooling breezes of the sea while excluding hot desert winds from the west and the stark glare of the sun above (See *Aramco World*, September-October 1987).

The new, Jiddah-style buildings were usually two or three stories high, with walls punctuated by shuttered windows, some of them very large and projecting outward. The interior walls held ventilating grilles that allowed breezes to penetrate the entire home. To protect against glare, the windows were covered with distinctive *mashrabiyyahs*, screens with geometric patterns produced by interlocking lathe-turned pieces of wood, or by *shish*, made from notched or tongued strips of wood joined at right angles. The basic building blocks in Suakin were local white coral, and exteriors were covered with white stucco.

The early 16th century saw another major power shift in the Red Sea region: In 1517, the Ottoman Turks conquered Mamluk Egypt, and for a time Suakin fell under the sway of the Funj, a Muslim people based at Sennar on the Blue Nile, who took advantage of the disruption to annex the port. But the Funj grasp was fleeting. Soon their role became one of making whatever commercial arrangements they could with the emergent Turks, who rapidly extended their authority down the Red Sea coast. From this time until the rise of the Mahdi in the late 19th century, Suakin was almost continuously under Turkish rule.

In 1540, a Portuguese fleet bound for an attack on Suez anchored at Suakin. A drawing of the port made by a member of this expedition has survived: It shows an island port in which "there is not a foot of ground but what is taken up with houses; so that all the island is a city, and all the city an island." The Portuguese commander, Stefano da Gama, provoked a dispute with the governor of Suakin and sacked the town. This act alerted the Turks to the Portuguese presence and, forewarned, they defeated the invaders at Suez. Portugal never seriously threatened the Red Sea again.

Early on, the Turkish presence signaled a time of prosperity, and some of the larger Suakini homes date from this period. But increasingly harsh rule, and the discovery of the sea route around Africa to the Orient, soon led to a sharp



decline in the town's fortunes. From the mid-17th century onward, local merchants emigrated, abandoning lavish homes that fell slowly into ruin. Nonetheless, Suakin continued to provide a vital outlet for its hinterland, although the scope of its trade was narrowed considerably.

At the close of the 17th century, the French pharmacist-traveler Charles-Jacques Poncet reported that the Funj capital of Sennar did a great volume of trade with the East through Suakin. With the onset of the monsoon, Sennari merchants embarked upon their trading journeys from Suakin with stocks of gold and ivory, returning with silks and spices. Poncet also mentioned that "fishing for pearls" was one of Suakin's industries.

The town's low ebb was perhaps reached in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. The great Swiss traveler Jean Louis Burckhardt visited Suakin in 1814 on his way to Jiddah. He found two-thirds of the homes in ruin; el-Geyf on the mainland was populated mainly by Beja, while Suakin's population was principally descended from Egyptians, Hijazis, Hadramawtis and Turks.

With the Funj empire on its deathbed, Suakin's international trade had virtually ceased. Gone were the days when luxury goods from the African interior and exotica from the Orient crowded the Suakini piers. Most of the trade, with Jiddah and to some extent with Yemen, was in stock, cloth, hides and butter. Turkish authority was represented by a customs officer who, along with his five or six bodyguards, feared the Beja too much ever to venture onto the mainland.

One last attempt was made to revive Suakin's commercial role. In 1865, the Khedive Isma'il of Egypt was granted title to Suakin by the Ottomans. Suakin, along with Massawa, was to play an important role in Egypt's bid for an African empire. Egyptian authorities made a serious effort to revitalize the port and equip it for modern commerce. Housing was repaired and new dwellings were built. Mills were imported for grinding local grain. A new mosque, secondary school, hospital and *wakalah*, or inn, were all erected. When the upswing in commerce attracted Coptic Christian merchants from Ethiopia, orders were given for construction of a church so the Copts would have a place to worship.

The Egyptians introduced participatory government modeled on their own system at home. Schemes for agricultural development were launched; Manchester cloth and Birmingham cutlery changed hands for gum, sesame oil, ostrich feathers and coffee. A brighter day seemed to be dawning. But then came defeat in the 1876 Egyptian-Ethiopian War and looming financial disaster at home; the curtain came down on Egypt's dreams of empire. Only a few years remained before the call to *jihad* was pronounced by Muhammad Ahmad ibn al-Sayyid 'Abd Allah, the Sudanese tribal leader who proclaimed himself the Mahdi.

The Mahdist revolt reached Suakin when the famous Turkish-Sudanese trader Osman Digna donned the dervishes' patched *jubbah*, or coat, and rallied the Hadendowa for the Mahdi.

Suakin was the only point to weather the storm. Lord Kitchener, commanding Anglo-Egyptian forces, set up headquarters in the town and used it as a base of operations for sorties into the Red Sea hills. The Beja forces of Osman Digna threatened Suakin and in 1888 invested the port, and in one of his ballads, Rudyard Kipling related how Digna's dervishes "cut up our sentries" there. Egyptian troops were shipped in to relieve the port. In December of that year, the Mahdist forces were defeated in a bitter clash at Gemmeiza, just outside the city walls.

With the final military defeat of the Mahdists 10 years later, Britain moved forward rapidly with plans for economic development of the region from Kordofan to the Red Sea. A coastal emporium would be required to handle the expected increase in trade. But Suakin, which had played that role in the past, was handicapped by the need for extensive rebuilding, the tightness of its harbor and its limited – and barely drinkable – water supply.

In 1904, the site for a new port, to be called Port Sudan, was chosen at the harbor of Mersa Barghout, some 64 kilometers (40 miles) to the north. A railway connecting Port Sudan to Atbara, on the Nile, was completed in 1905. In 1910, provincial headquarters were transferred from Suakin to Port Sudan. The greater volume of trade continued to flow through Suakin for a number of years but, by 1922, the last of the big companies had departed.

Today, Suakin's piers are empty. Gone are the burly Greek sailor and the Mamluk officer in bright silks. The town's once-fine homes are crumbling, and a few dwellings of grass and matting house the handful of inhabitants. The modest tea shops and market of el-Geyf bear witness to a quiet day-to-day life, and a handful of fishing dhows plies the waters of the harbor at dawn.

Yet Suakin still holds treasure for the world at large. A unique blend of Africa and Asia, it is the only important relic of its kind on the African Red Sea coast, and few ports can boast a longer or more varied mix of arrivals and departures. What remains of its distinctive architecture, with its stuccoed tracery and grayed teak, could be preserved and restored to provide future generations with a window through which to look back in time. *Inshallah* – God willing – there is still one more chapter of Suakin's history to write.

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The bustling market of the port of Suakin as it might have looked in its heyday, between the 15th and 17th centuries.

A surviving example of traditional floral pargeting, above left, from an old building in the town.

# THE MAGIC CIRCLES OF DJEMAA EL-FNA

WRITTEN BY LOUIS WERNER
PHOTOGRAPHED BY DAVID MELODY

When world travelers think of Morocco, it's often the historical splendors of Fez, Rabat and Meknès that come first to mind. But it is the everyday mystery and magic of Marrakech that most intrigue the first-time visitor, that inhabit his dreams and beckon him to return.

Marrakech certainly has its own imperial highlights – the Almoravid Qubbah, Morocco's only intact architectural treasure from its first Berber dynasty; the Koutoubia minaret, an unrivaled Almohad construction towering nearly 70 meters (230 feet) over the city; and the Saadian tombs and the Ben Youssef *madrasah* or school, both covered in stunning *zellij* mosaic, carved plaster and white marble.

But Marrakech also feels like a world apart, a gathering place of disparate centuries, cultures and races. While the traditions and values of Morocco's northern cities might resemble those of the eastern Arab capitals, Marrakech is different.

Indeed, upon crossing the threshold of its Bab Agnaou, or Gate of the Blacks, visitors feel they are leaving behind the Arab world and entering a different – perhaps the real – Morocco. It is not surprising that Marrakech was long known to English travelers simply as "Morocco City."

Robert Cunninghame-Graham visited all of Morocco's main cities in 1897, "but none of them," he wrote enthusiastically in his classic account *Maghreb el-Aksa*, "enter into your soul as does this heap of ruins, this sand heap desert town metropolis of the fantastic world which stretches from its walls across the mountains through the oases of the Sahara."

And nowhere is Marrakech's otherworldly nature revealed in more telling detail than in the old city's main square, the Djemaa el-Fna – serving day and night as marketplace, outdoor eatery and musical fun fair all in one. Today, just as centuries ago, it is here that Marrakshis and their country cousins, be they Berber, Arab, Tuareg or black African, congregate to be awed, amazed, entertained and, very likely, parted from some, or all, of their money.

The square's name is often mistranslated as "gathering place of the dead," but this reflects as much its eerie power of suggestion as it does deliberate error. In fact, the Moroccan colloquial word *fna* can be derived from either of two classical Arabic words: *fana'*, signifying annihilation and extinction, or *fina'*, with the more prosaic meanings of courtyard and open space.

Djemaa is related to the Arabic *jami'*, or mosque, and indeed the Saadian dynasty had once planned to build a great mosque here, on what is still the old city's last remaining expanse of open land. But instead they made it a place of execution, and subsequently permitted the area's use for public oration and display. Thus the square's literal meaning is perhaps best left to the imagination. It has, after all, more mysterious ways of communicating with outsiders.

There is no better way of making sense of the Djemaa el-Fna, of stopping its kaleidoscopic swirl and seeing instead the parade of human faces, than to remain in the square uninterruptedly from dawn until late at night.

Viewed from its most accessible vantage point, on the roof terrace of the Café de France, the square begins to take on a new shape as a complex of circles of people. Each circle is tightly bound, its components standing shoulder to shoulder. The perimeter of each pulsates with anticipation, its liquid outlines occasionally breaking and reforming. From here, the square is a living, throbbing carpet, patterned not by knots in woolen pile but by knots of human beings.

Each circle – or *halqah*, in Moroccan Arabic – is formed by tens or scores or hundreds of individual onlookers, their attention fixed on whichever snail-seller, storyteller, or snake charmer has been lucky enough to catch their eye and draw them inward.

As more people join the ring, it expands; as more of the crowd moves along, it contracts. And there is much jumping back and forth from *halqah* to *halqah* as spectators' attention falters at one ring and is teased away to another.

Maintaining the *halqah*'s integrity is so important that even solo performers designate an assistant to exercise crowd control at its perimeter. Like dressing a stage to suit the act, an assistant might tighten the ring for a magician's trick and then expand it for an acrobat's vault. When the time comes to collect contributions, he walks the circumference, hat in hand.

But in the early morning, just after dawn and well before the rings form, the square is quiet – free of the entertainers' cries and empty of the pressing crowds. Solitary sweepers brush and scrape away last night's debris, while people hurry past on their way to work in nearby *suqs* (markets) or in the distant *ville nouvelle* (new town). Shoeshine boys set their kits in a neat row; orange vendors untie the tarps that covered their stands.

Khalifah Salami has been at his juice stand since five o'clock this morning, when he came to replace his partner on the overnight shift. "Something is always for sale in the Djemaa el-Fna," Khalifah says with a toothy grin. "Day or night, you find what you want." But his many customers undoubtedly come to savor the hour's peace as much as their drink.

The crowd has already begun to swell by the time the sun has peeked above the High Atlas's snow-capped range. Earlier, most people passed through the square on their way somewhere else; now they enter to stay. Men waiting for their morning tea huddle tightly around bucket braziers. Boys bearing charcoal, mint and sugar push their way through to resupply.

Among the first to arrive in the square are tarot card readers and amulet writers, each with an open black umbrella to protect the paying customer's privacy from the merely curious. They establish a characteristic kind of order here, sitting cross-legged with their backs to the sun in a perfectly straight line. Later, when the square is choked with scurrying spectators and the sun is high, their strange geometry still holds firm.

Ghareeb Ahmad has been writing customized amulets in the Djemaa el-Fna for nearly 10 years. He also reads the Qur'an in a mosque and takes legal dictation outside the courthouse. But today he is busy with his bamboo pen and brown india ink, asking a superstitious petitioner to specify his particular problem.

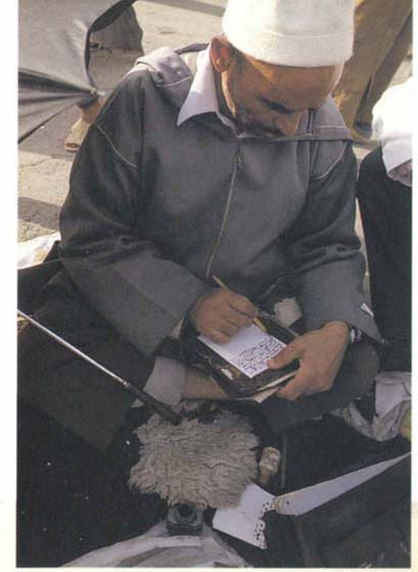
A folk apothecary, his sales pitch as loudly colored as his potions, has installed himself nearby and is already doing brisk business. Tins of dried leaf, twig, nut and bud are set at the mat's outer edge. Roots and rose hips, carob pods and persimmon, a whale's bone and a snake skin are among his many other, less identifiable charms.

His patter is nonstop and lightning fast, accompanied by the rhythm of two spoons clattering back to back. In his palm he mixes blue, yellow, and red powders with attestations of each one's pharmaceutical credentials and claims. One for virility, another for longevity, a third for levity – all man's bodily needs are herewith catered for. Opening the way for others, he swallows a gulp and calls out for a buyer. His pet iguana hungrily eyes the crowd.

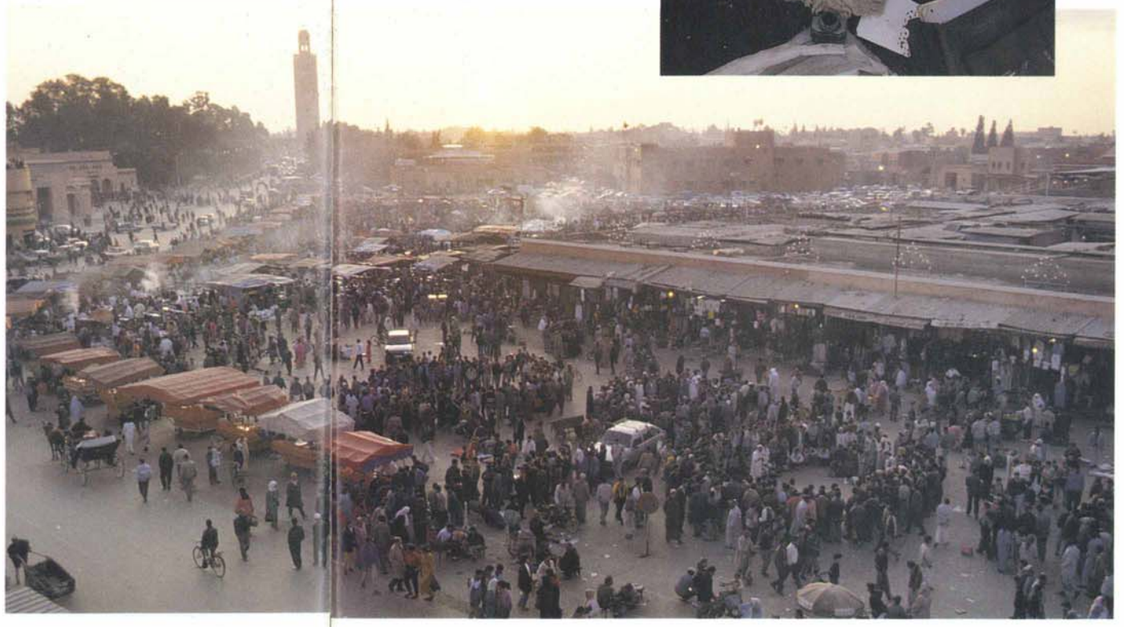
What the apothecary's secret dosages will not cure, a turbaned dentist wielding mean-looking pliers promises he can. Standing beside a work table piled high with molars and incisors, Al-A'aouni Aït al-Muqaddam waits patiently for a walking toothache to pass his way. He averages ten public extractions a day, he says, adding bit by bit to his mountain of human enamel.

By noon the first entertainers begin to gather, but these are the less polished, afraid perhaps of going against the finer talent that will appear in the late afternoon. But the crowds are nearly the same and a midday dirham, they need not be told, gleams like any other. Their main game here

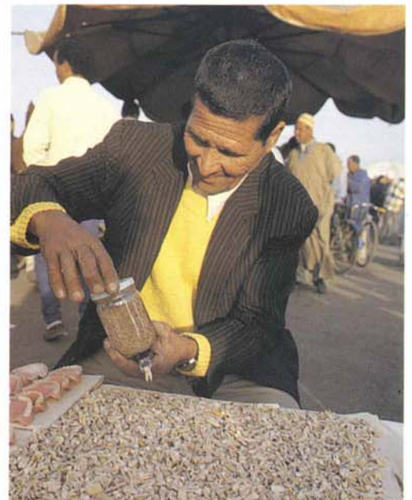
*Previous spread: An illuminated circle of rapt onlookers surrounds a storyteller performing at night in the Djemaa el-Fna.*



*Ghareeb Ahmad, right, has been penning customized amulets for the superstitious in the Djemaa el-Fna for almost a decade.*



*At midday in Marrakech's famous square, above, the entertainers begin to gather and human circles form around them. Among the performers are nimble acrobats, left, from the village of Tazeroualt.*



*A street dentist offers a quick, though perhaps not painless, solution to toothaches. Before him lies a mountain of dental enamel.*

is more improvisatory than practiced, a kind of street theater cast from ready onlookers and unwitting passersby.

An early afternoon staple in the Djemaa el-Fna are the children's boxing matches arranged and refereed by M'barek Muhammad. Everyone loves to watch a good fight, and he has simply found a way to make them pay, without anyone actually being hurt. M'barek is in fact more monologue artist than match promoter, and between his long-winded bouts of gab few boxers have time to throw even a single punch.

Asking for two young volunteers, M'barek has them step forward for introductions and straps on their gloves. He asks why they want to fight. Before they can answer he interrupts to say that boys shouldn't fight; if they insist, however, they must box cleanly and fairly. From this lead-in he recounts, blow by blow, classic world heavyweight matches of the past.

The boys meanwhile are left waiting. Once scared and nervous, their faces grow bored as M'barek's story grows longer. The crowd first hangs on every word, then it too begins to lose patience. Sensing this, M'barek finally signals the boys to fight, then immediately waves them off again. Now he discourses on glove position and footwork. The boxing lesson momentarily recaptures his audience.

And on this goes – a whistle to box, a whistle to break, and more on the theory and practice of pugilism. The gloves are only props for the boys, who in turn are only props for M'barek. Each missed swing brings to his mind another story. Like a lion tamer in a one-ring circus, who makes his tired cats claw and snarl, M'barek promises blood sport but delivers only a children's ragtag game. And, brilliantly, he earns a living at it.

The sun is high enough overhead now to call up a strong thirst, which the square's red-smocked, tassel-hatted water carriers stand ever ready to slake. More buffoons than businessmen, Abid ben Khalifah and his grizzled sidekick Boujamaa el-Fakaak stride through the crowd ringing handbells and clacking brass cups. Snowmelt from the High Atlas, which in truth pours from every spigot in Marrakech, is their special claim.

But drinking from a goatskin is not a city person's everyday experience, and thus the price seems fair to many customers. Abid's leather gear bag is studded with silver coins from around the world – "the payment of foreign tourists," he assures, "who lacked exact change." The Yemeni dinars, American quarters, French francs, and English pence seem to bear him out.

Suddenly the double-reeded shrill of a *ghaita*, or Moroccan folk oboe, pierces sharply through the background hubbub. Another *ghaita* joins, the steady beat of a drum orchestra comes in, and soon everyone's attention turns to the snake charmers.

Morocco's snake charmers and scorpion eaters all belong to the 'Isawi brotherhood, founded by Sidi Muhammad bin 'Isa in the 15th century. The Djemaa el-Fna's 'Isawi are led by Idris Hawishaan, who was taught to handle cobras, pythons and diamond-back rattlers as a child in his home village near Meknès. It is Idris, sitting crosslegged on a carpet, who conducts his musicians and musters his snakes here today.

Two wooden boxes hold Idris's serpents while his *ghaitas* and drums play an introduction. The performance begins with a lithe black cobra slithering from the box and coiling neatly before him. With head and both hands dancing, fingers extended and palms turning alternately up and down, Idris catches the snake's eye and induces its heavy hood to dip and bob in rhythm. A shaking tambourine makes it sit up straighter. To end the dance quickly, he caps the cobra with the same tambourine and turns now to a rattler.

The fat rattler apparently needs a more aggressive touch, so Idris must snap his fingers, tease with his tongue, and drape the snake over his head. But it still declines to dance and is popped back in the box. Showmen, it seems, have no patience with stage fright.

Finally only pythons remain, which despite their name and their angry, gaping mouths look more like harmless green garter snakes. Idris takes one in each of his hands, their necks outstretched and tongues like spitting darts, and bumps their heads together, which puts them in a fighting mood. Held high over his lap, the snakes weave to and fro in mock aerial combat, one lunging forward as the other recoils.

Tiring of the duet, he loops the larger of the two around his neck and treats the smaller as a plaything. But this toy bites, its teeth sinking deep and holding onto Idris's left hand. Slowly, carefully, lest it rip the flesh, Idris

*Above: Veteran snake charmer Idris Hawishaan manipulates an angry python, to the accompaniment of folk oboes and drums. Immediate right: Costumed to catch the eye in tasseled hats, water sellers offer "snowmelt from the High Atlas" to the thirsty of the Djemaa el-Fna.*


*The city of Marrakech licences the water vendors, who wear shiny brass tags confirming their status, left.*

*In leather harness and draped with brass cups, a water carrier, right, offers a drink to a visitor.*

backs the snake's teeth out and, still keeping time to the *ghaitas*' circular seven-note melody, raises his palm for all to see two drops of blood trickle from the twin puncture.

Idris's hand needs a bandage and this no doubt will close the show. The musicians too are tired, the *ghaita* players' eyes bloodshot and bulging. With the air now cleared of the insistent tune, spectators shuffle their feet and begin to wander, as if the spell that had first drawn them near could be broken by one bite.

The hour is nearing four-thirty, which, in the Djemaa el-Fna's own time zone, is time to eat. Disassembled food stalls have just been carted in and re-erected along the last remaining empty reach of the square. Each stall has a posted license number and each has a specialty that will be served by the light of gas lanterns until late tonight.

Sharif Ben Aissa sells grilled kidney and sausage to a hungry few. Next to him people gather around a conical pile of boiled land snails flavored with hot sauce. But most are lining up for *shibakiyyah*, a traditional Moroccan street sweet made of sugar, flour, cocoa and egg topped with walnut, coconut and jasmine.

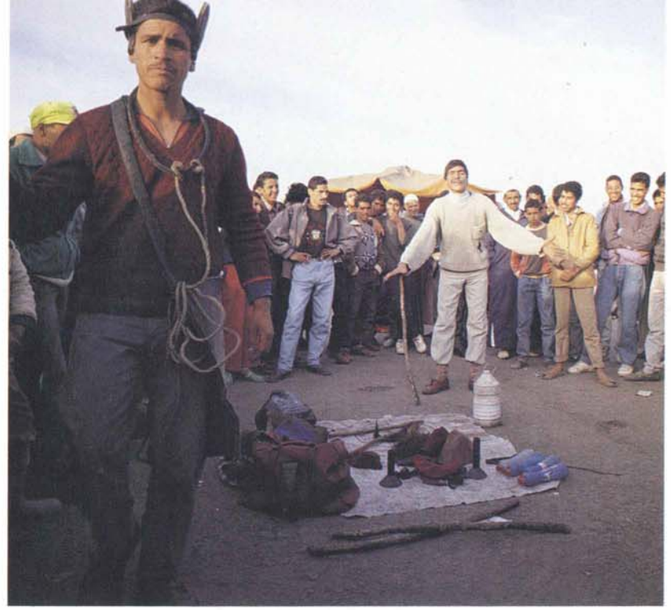
Thus revived, it seems less daring to press oneself into the outer edge of yet another *halqah*. With a bit more burrowing, a front-row view is within easy reach for more street theater in the round. Here two actors play a comic, epic struggle between country Arab and country Berber. Each speaks only his own language, but both are perfectly understood by this bilingual crowd.

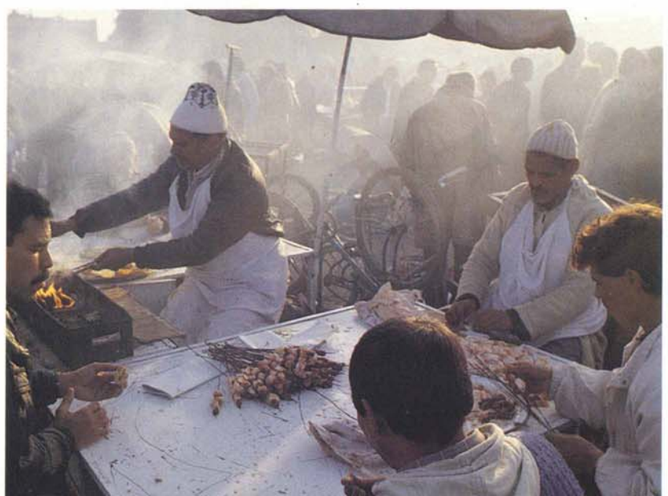
The characters seem inspired by Juha, the clever peasant of Arab folklore (See *Aramco World*, May-June 1971). One plays the donkey, with flip-flop sandals for ears and a rope around his neck; the other plays the donkey driver, wearing a wig and holding a paper whip and squirt bottle.

Their acting is pure slapstick, making full use of the clowning behavior known as *mashkhara*, meaning – appropriately – a donkey's bray. They prattle back and forth in endless variations on the time-tested routines of the *commedia dell' arte*. But their play's scenario rings with the genius of insightful social commentary.

The donkey, staying always close to character, begs the crowd to buy his freedom for one dirham. With acts of feigned cruelty – quirts, squirts and slaps – the donkey driver uses all his might to obstruct these pleas. Only by pleasing this tough audience with the most imaginative improvisation at his command can the donkey earn his dirham and with it, his liberty.

Roles and props are then reversed: Donkey becomes donkey driver and vice versa. Thus Arab and Berber compete ceaselessly for the upper hand which, once decided, is always





*Street theater rivets the crowd as actors – one speaking Arabic, the other Berber – portray a donkey and its master, top left. A storyteller captivates his audience, drawn round him in a circle, center left. For the hungry, grilled meats, traditional sweets and other specialties await.*



*Specifically Moroccan names and terms in this article are spelled according to local preference, rather than with our standard Arabic orthography.*

soon to change. The contest's absurdities point a moral lesson while the incentive to overact becomes a plot device; Shakespearean comedy meets Marrakshi *mise-en-scène*.

Still pondering the act's simple truth, one must be careful not to back out of the *halqah* straight into the outstretched arms of an ape. Monkey trainers work this corner of the square, and often, just to enliven a slow day, they turn their charges loose upon the crowd. Any one of them is apt to jump up and run a quick and larcenous little hand through an open pocket.

Card sharps, storytellers and acrobats also ply their trades on this corner. It is an overused spot, near the Bank al-Maghrib and the Pharmacie de la Place, but it is where tour buses unload. Money here has a way of changing hands more freely, and some of it even has a good chance of dropping to the ground, where it is scooped up by the legions of small boys underfoot.

Now taking shape is a large *halqah* around the square's acknowledged masters of *al-'aitah*, the sung Arabic music of Marrakech's Hauza plain. The 'Abidat el-Rma were the first to play in the Djemaa el-Fna and have since become the city's most popular wedding musicians.

The orchestra consists of an electrified *`ud*, or lute, two viols, two *darabukkahs*, a tambourine and an oil-barrel lid used as a foot drum. Its sound is loud and boisterous as the musicians take the stage, and the group leader uses his tambourine freely to beat the heads of passersby who transgress the still unclosed ring.

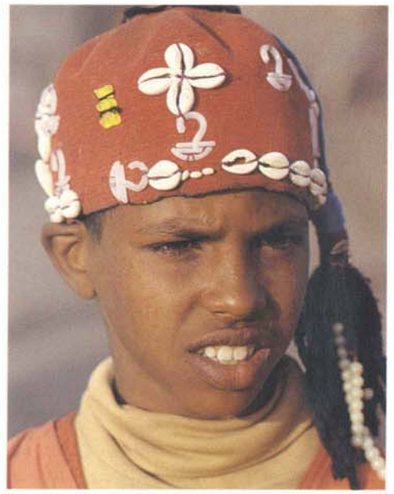
Ethnomusicologist Philip Schuyler, an authority on the music of the Djemaa el-Fna, has pointed out that a *halqah* must be formed rapidly but with precision – fast enough to steal spectators from rival entertainers, but with an expert eye for filling in each arc of a well-drawn circle. In this case it is done in a matter of minutes and the singing soon begins.

The leader assumes an eerie falsetto voice for the popular praise song "Muhammad, al-Nur al-Hadi." A seasoned showman, he patrols the *halqah*'s perimeter so that his listeners – many indeed seem to be enraptured fans – can touch his hand. Passing the tambourine after finishing the last verse, he exhorts both crowd and orchestra to open wider their hearts.

After such a stately act, it comes as something of a surprise to run headlong into two high-hopping, drum-beating, head-twirling Gnaoua. The earliest Gnaoua were members of a brotherhood transplanted from the sub-Sahara – "Gnaoua" is a Berber corruption of the country name Guinea – that claimed descent from the Prophet Muhammad's first muezzin, Bilal ibn Rabah (See *Aramco World*, July-August 1983).

In recent years in the square, however, they have become known more as entertainers than as members of a religious order. The crux of Gnaoua ritual is its up-and-down dancing and percussive rhythm, beaten out with metal castanets, *qaraqeb*, and oversized side drums, *tbel*.

Abdul Latif el-Dhahabi and his 12-year-old son Tayyib dance and drum with all the fervor they can summon after a long day in the square. Little Tayyib has been a regular here for nearly 10 years, so he knows well how to play an audience. Spinning his head to make fly the long tail of his *sha'shiyyah*, a red cloth cap embroidered with cowrie shells, he smiles broadly and clangs his *qaraqeba* for all he is worth.



*Despite his youth, 12-year-old Tayyib, right, is an accomplished Gnaoua performer.*

When night finally settles over the Djemaa el-Fna, the big musical shows pack up and leave. An impending chill pushes spectators into ever-closer circles around solo storytellers. Few of these rings have kerosene lanterns: Near-total darkness covers a hushed and spellbound crowd, undistracted even by the loud slurps and the din of spoons from nearby soup stalls selling spicy bean *harirah*.

"The month of Ramadan will soon be upon us," intones a wizened *faqih*, or religious scholar. "Come learn how to properly perform your ablutions." With this he begins his lecture, prepared no doubt after years of teaching in villages far and wide. His talk blends pantomimed gestures with gentle words of persuasion.

Lessons follow on the principles of prayer and fasting. His low voice trails on. His attentive listeners edge forward, learning at this late hour, now well past 10 o'clock, something new in the Djemaa el-Fna. It is time to put aside the pleasures of the day and seek the higher aims of religious instruction. Whatever the reasons for coming to the square in the first place, such are the rewards with which people finally go home at night.

*Author and filmmaker Louis Werner studied at Princeton and Johns Hopkins SAIS and lives in New York.*

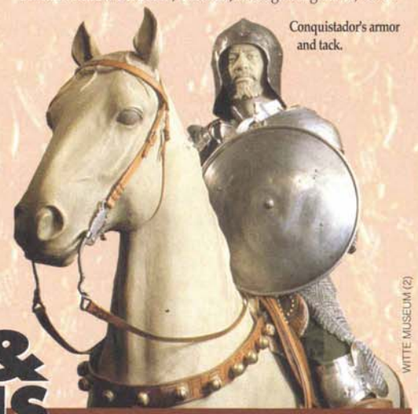
**Neo Geo:** *A Vision of the Future*. Miniature clay sculptures by Tanzanian-born artist Lubna Chowdhary, who is of Pakistani Muslim background, reflect the contrasts of East and West, old and new, spiritual and rational, rural and urban. Commonwealth Institute, **London**, July 16 through September 5, 1993.

**Petal Wreaths of the Pharaohs.** This special exhibition focuses on ancient Egyptian plants, featuring originals and reproductions of garlands and wreaths from pharaonic times. Botanisches Museum **Berlin-Dahlem, Germany,** through August 1, 1993.

**Scrolls From the Dead Sea:** *The Ancient Library of Qumran and Modern Scholarship*. Twelve fragmentary scrolls and various related artifacts from Qumran are used to tell the story of the scrolls' discovery and the current controversy over their study and translation. Library of Congress, **Washington, D.C.,** through August 1, 1993.

**Window to Our World.** This photographic art exhibition, with its powerful compositions, offers a unique, personal perspective on Saudi Arabia, seen through the lens of Saudi woman photographer Madeha Al-Ajroush. Alif Gallery, **Washington, D.C.,** August 5 through September 10, 1993.

**Textiles From the East.** This colorful display of contemporary votive and decorative hangings from China, South and Southeast Asia illustrates the traditions of form and iconography in various religions, including Islam. The South and Southeast Asian textiles come from India, Java, Bali and Bhutan. British Museum, **London,** through August 30, 1993.



Conquistador's armor and tack.

WITTE MUSEUM (2)

# EVENTS & EXHIBITIONS

**Thundering Hooves:** *Five Centuries of Horse Power in the American West*. This major Columbus Quincentenary exhibition highlights the vital role of the horse and rider in the settlement of the Hispanic Southwest. Much was derived from the horsemanship traditions of al-Andalus, or Muslim Spain, including the American western and Mexican *charro* saddles, the short *jineta* stirrup and bridle ornamentation. The horses themselves were of Arab (Andalusian Arabian) and North African Berber (Barb) stock. The exhibition focuses on four major horse-related cultures: the Spanish conquistadors, Mexican vaqueros, Comanche Indians and North American cowboys. Some 400 objects are featured, many never before on display, including riding gear and dress, artifacts, paintings, prints, life-size models and videos. The show also examines the history of horse trading and the ecological impact of wild horse herds and cattle ranching. The exhibition will eventually travel to museums across the United States and Canada. Witte Museum, **San Antonio, Texas**, through August 15, 1993; National Cowboy Hall of Fame, **Oklahoma City**, September 13, 1993, through January 2, 1994; other venues.

**Teaching About the Arab World and Islam** is the theme of teacher workshops cosponsored by the Middle East Policy Council in Washington, D.C., and conducted by AWAIR, Arab World And Islamic Resources and School Services in Berkeley, California. Confirmed sites and dates include: Texas Wesleyan University, **Fort Worth,** August 6; California State University, **Dominguez Hills,** August 12; Harding University, **Searcy, Arkansas,** August 13; Utah State Office of Education, **Salt Lake City,** August 24; Lake Ridge High School, **Portland, Oregon,** September 25; Central Missouri State University, **Warrensburg,** October 1; **Midland [Texas]** Independent School District, October 2; University of **Kentucky, Lexington,** October 23; Fayetteville-Manlius High School, **Fayetteville, New York,** October 30; Kenmoor Middle School, **Landover, Maryland,** December 2. For details, call (202) 296-6767 or (510) 704-0517.

**L.A. Festival:** *Home, Place and Memory*. The triennial festival focuses this time on African, African-American and Middle Eastern culture and the arts. Included will be work by Arab and Arab-American artists, in such areas as music, theater, puppetry, film, video and poetry. For information, phone (213) 240-7600. **Los Angeles,** from mid-August through mid-October 1993.

**Earthly Paradise:** *Gardens in Islamic Art*. The earthly garden, symbol of heavenly paradise, is the most ephemeral of Islamic architectural forms, but its essence has been captured many times in many different art forms. This exhibition displays carpets, ceramics, metalwork and paintings. Harvard University's Arthur M. Sackler Museum, **Cambridge, Massachusetts,** through August 22, 1993.

**Middle Eastern Music and Dance Camp.** This week-long workshop at a redwood-forest camp features performances and classes by experts on the music, instruments and dance of Asia Minor, North Africa and the Middle East. For information, call (310) 390-1934. **Mendocino Woodlands, California,** August 22 through 29, 1993.

**The Euphrates and Time.** Featured are some 500 works of art from Syrian museums in Damascus, Aleppo, Raqqa, Dayr al-Zawr and al-Hasakah ranging from prehistoric times to the 12th century of our era. Sala dell'Arengo, **Rimini, Italy,** through August 31, 1993.

**Yemen:** *A Culture of Builders*. This exhibition, being circulated by the University of Arizona College of Architecture, takes an artistic look at Yemeni architecture. Facultad de Arquitectura, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Mexico, **Mexico City,** through September 3, 1993; Field Museum, **Chicago,** September 27,1993, through January 7, 1994.

**From India's Hills and Plains:** *Rajput Paintings from the Punjab and Rajasthan*. Some 30 pictures painted for Rajput princes depict courtly activities and religious themes in brilliant, sometimes smoldering, colors. Harvard University's Arthur M. Sackler Museum, **Cambridge, Massachusetts,** September 4 through November 7, 1993.

**Ancient Egypt:** *A Moment of Eternity*. Some 400 objects and artworks have been assembled in what is billed as the most important exhibition of ancient Egyptian art to be held in Scandinavia. **Tampere [Finland]** Art Museum, September 30, 1993, through January 2, 1994.

**Contemporary Tradition:** *The Studio of Asha Sarabhai*. The craft, textures and techniques of the well-known Indian textile designer are examined. Victoria and Albert Museum, **London,** through September 30, 1993.

**Ancient Nubia:** *Egypt's Rival in Africa*. Less well-known than ancient Egypt, the Nubian kingdoms (3100 BC to AD 500) competed with Egypt for regional political and economic dominance. University of Pennsylvania Museum, **Philadelphia,** through October 3, 1993.

**Liquid Refreshment:** *2000 Years of Drinks and Drinking Glasses*. This show looks at the design and use of glass vessels for drinking from the first century through the present. Featured are objects from the Arab and Islamic worlds, including a drinking horn. Corning Museum of Glass, **Corning, New York,** through October 17, 1993.

**Persian Tiles.** The 13th and 14th centuries are highlighted in this show of some 40 superior decorated tiles from Persia. Metropolitan Museum of Art, **New York,** May 4 through October 31, 1993.

**Brooklyn Museum's Egyptian Reinstallation.** One of the world's finest collections of Egyptian artifacts will be reinstalled as the third floor of the museum's West Wing reopens. The permanent exhibition will consist of two components: a chronological presentation of more than 300 of the best works, ranging from about 1350 BC through the end of the Ptolemaic period; and an innovative presentation of some 270 objects organized around the central themes of temples, tombs and the Egyptian universe. **Brooklyn [New York]** Museum, November 19, 1993.

**The Arts of the Book.** Specimens of fine Arabic calligraphy ranging from Spain to India and dating from the ninth through the 19th centuries, reveal the development of such scripts as Kufic, *naskh*, *nasta'liq* and *shikastah*. Harvard University's Arthur M. Sackler Museum, **Cambridge, Massachusetts,** November 27, 1993, through February 6, 1994.

**Mediated Images:** *Asian Identity in Contemporary Art*. This major exhibition explores the visual art of 15 immigrant and expatriate Asians "whose work actively mediates their joint identities as Asians and Americans." The artists are from diverse backgrounds Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Filipino, Southeast Asian and Indian. The Asia Society, **New York,** January through June 1994.

**The Divine Word of Islam.** Bound manuscripts of the Qur'an, books of prayer, folios from dispersed volumes and a ceramic tombstone are the key elements of this exhibition. Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, **Washington, D.C.,** through January 2, 1994.

**The World of Islam.** This major exhibition features Islamic works of art from various Dutch collections. Museum voor Volkenkunde, **Rotterdam, The Netherlands,** through December 31, 1996.

**Artifacts From Ancient Iberia.** Stone and bronze implements and weapons from the Upper Paleolithic through the Phoenician to the Roman period, including Iberian bronze ex-votos and Roman medical instruments. Hispanic Society of America, **New York,** indefinitely.

**Commonwealth Institute Centenary.** The educational and cultural center for the 50 countries of the British Commonwealth, many with significant Muslim populations, celebrates its 100th anniversary through special exhibitions, some of them permanent. Commonwealth Institute, **London,** indefinitely.

**Luxury Arts of the Silk Route Empires.** Metalwork and ceramics from the Sackler and Freer collections illustrate multicultural interaction along the Silk Route in China, Iran, Afghanistan, Syria and elsewhere and its impact on the arts in the first millennium of our era. Arthur M. Sackler Gallery and Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, **Washington, D.C.,** indefinitely.

**Hall of African Wildlife.** Savanna, rain forest, mountain and desert: These four environments and their ecological communities are explored in new displays of the continent's rich fauna. An interactive alcove provides insights with photo murals, specimens and videos. Carnegie Museum of Natural History, **Pittsburgh,** permanent.

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

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

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