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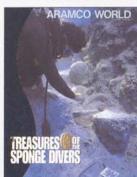
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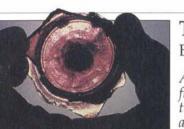
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Cover: Probing with a steel wire, a diver-archeologist feels beneath he sand for the curved outline of a hippopotamus tooth, part of the cargo of a Bronze-Age ship that sank near Ulu Burun, Turkey, in the 14th century BC. Sponge divers have helped archeologists find eight important wrecks so far Photo: Donald Frey. Back Cover: Knotted fringe of a Fez wedding veil woven in 1990 by Abdelkader Ourregli. Photo: Minneapolis

A dizzying density of pattern covers the ceiling of the Mardam-Bey Damascene room.

Institute of Arts/Mortensen



Treasures of the Sponge Divers 2 By Donald A. Frey

A well-preserved shipwreck is a time capsule, full of information about people, countries, trade and culture. In Turkey, where underwater archeology began, sponge divers have pointed the scientists to some great discoveries.





Room for Tradition

By Rami G. Khouri

Once the most important room of a patrician Damascus home, a magnificent traditional madafah was saved from a fire, restored and enlarged. Now a gift to the nation, it serves as a functional part of the National Museum.





An Ashmolean Dream

By Arthur Clark

England's first public museum boasts unmatched collections of Islamic ceramics, metalwork and textiles. Curator of eastern art James Allen dreams of an Islamic art-history study center, with Middle Eastern students.





Fez: Preserving a City By Josh Martin

The world's largest intact medieval city, a sophisticated living treasure, is being restored in a project that encompasses some of its greatest monuments, but also its infrastructure, its institutions and the regional economy.





A Wedding at Fez

By Lotus Stack

Elaborate textiles are woven into the fabric of daily life in Fez, never more than at weddings, important family occasions when new fashions and old traditions combine and craftsmen are called on to produce their finest.





Mural Celebrations

By Ellen Barnett Moinard

Village walls in some parts of Egypt blossom with naïve and colorful paintings that commemorate the homeowners' safe return from the pilgrimage to Makkah - piety and joy combining to create an art form





eter Throckmorton pricked up his ears when Turkish sponge diver Kemal Aras described the slabs of corroded copper he had found on the seabed off Cape Gelidonya in southern Turkey. Aras wanted to blast them free with dynamite, then sell them for scrap. But Throckmorton, an American free-lance journalist, knew that copper did not deteriorate very quickly in the sea. Could Aras's find, he wondered, be the cargo of some ancient sea trader that had foundered off the Turkish coast? A year passed before Throckmorton, then working as a more than 10,000 man-hours searching the seabed.

What started as

sponge divers'

founding of the

Institute.

guide on a diving expedition, was able to find his own way to Cape Gelidonya to search for the site Aras had described. On the last day of diving, he located the mound of copper slabs. They were clearly ancient ingots, with the characteristic "oxhide" shape; in the same area he found the corrod- tales over Turkish ed remnants of what proved to be half a dozen Bronze-Age tools, indicating that a wealth not coffee led to the only of artifacts but of untapped information lay here beneath the sea.

Excited, Throckmorton returned to the United States and told his story to John Houston, then head of the Council of Underwater Archeology.

Houston in turn contacted Professor Rodney Young of the Classics Department at the University of Pennsylvania, vastly experienced in Turkish archeology. Was there anyone there who wanted to investigate this find? Eventually a young archeology student named George Bass offered to take on the task. Bass had no diving experience, and he barely had time for basic training in the local YMCA pool before leaving for Turkey, where he would eventually dive to 35 meters' depth (110 feet). Bass and Throckmorton feared that if they waited too long, the sponge divers would go back and dynamite the ingot mound for the metal.

But Bass did have experience excavating on land, and when he saw the Gelidonya site he knew precisely what he wanted to do. He rejected the idea of simply bringing this unique collection of Bronze Age materials to the surface. Bass, like Throckmorton, wanted to excavate the site to dry-land archeological standards, recording exactly where every artifact was found, even though diving time would be extremely limited. After many hardships and frustrations, he achieved his objectives: For the first time ever, a submerged shipwreck was methodically excavated in its entirety.

Bass did not stop with the Gelidonya excarecords have brought vation. Kemal Aras had told him of another scientific archeology to site, a huge mound of amphoras at Yassiada, near Bodrum, the sponge-diving center on Turkey's western coast, where Aras lived. The results of the archeologists' preliminary survey were startling: They found a seventh-century Byzantine wreck sitting on top of a fourth-century Roman vessel. What had started as sponge divers' stories told over cups of Turkish coffee led to the founding, in 1973, of the Institute of Nautical Archeology (INA) at Texas A&M University, with overseas headquarters at Bodrum, ancient Halicarnassus. Since then, the institute has explored shipwrecks all over the world - eight of them in Turkish waters, all discovered by Turkish sponge divers.

"Long experience has taught us," Bass wrote in 1987, "that the best sources of information about ancient shipwrecks in Turkey are the divers on Turkey's sponge boats. For search purposes the divers are far more valuable than the most sophisticated sonar and magnetometers in existence." In their quest for sponges, Turkish divers have covered the entire length of the Turkish coast. Each year, collectively, they spend

> During the winter, my Turkish colleagues and I give slide-illustrated lectures in the divers' villages to teach them what to look for in the way of ancient wrecks. As a result, we have come to know the sponge divers well, and have close friendships with many of the sponge-boat crews. We share a special communal feeling because we are all divers, sharing the same risks, feeling the same fears and triumphs. They often visit our excavation sites to share a meal - and with it, information about possible wrecks in other areas.

Most of the leads we obtain seem to come sketched on scraps of paper or on the backs of used

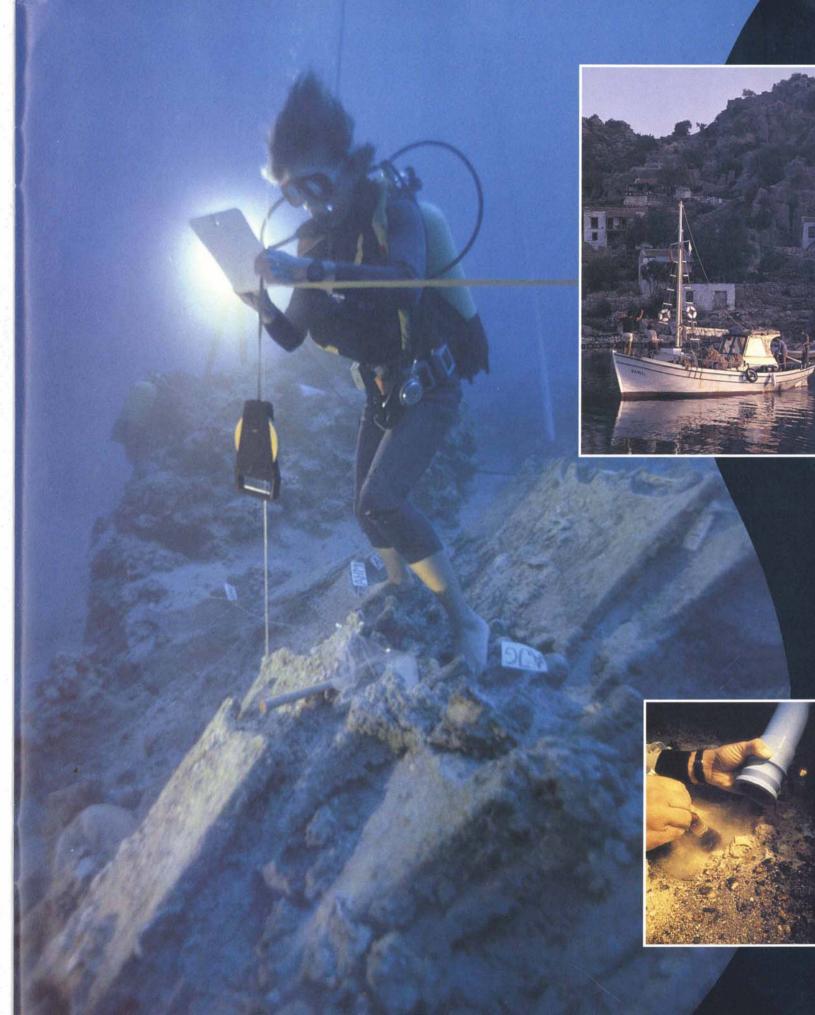
envelopes, but we have learned to check out almost every report, because the odds are far better than diving at random. Our interest peaks if the diver says that, in the fall, he will take us back to the site and dive with us. The Aegean is a small sea only if you're not looking for a few specific square meters of it, and even the best sketch of coastal landmarks is not nearly as good as having at your side the man who's been there, to put you right on the spot where he remembers seeing something. Even so, finding that spot again is another matter. Many are the times we have jumped into the sea and descended to where the rocks meet the sandy bottom, lured by a promise that if we swim about 100 meters we will come upon a wreck. Almost equally many are the times we've found nothing.

Even a month-long survey of an area might not produce one "real wreck" - our term for a site that our Institute might someday want to excavate. The word "wreck," used alone, means a location where a ship and its cargo met their end, but which - because the site is on a rocky slope, or in shallow water where it was broken up by wave action - does not warrant excavation. By contrast, a "real wreck" is buried deep in the sand, with only the top of its cargo visible. If we are lucky, most of the hull is covered, and may have survived the insatiable appetite of the wood-boring toredo worms.

In general, Turkish sponge divers are sincere, hard-working people who give us information out of a genuine desire to be helpful. But they are also practical men, and often have good

reason not to help us. They see broken pottery on almost every dive, but most of them ignore it, since sponges are their livelihood and each minute on the seabed is precious. We have let it be known that we will pay for directions to wrecks which we feel are important, but the money we can afford to lay out is little more than the divers can earn in a few good days of work.





mbat, right, found a

Yalıkavak Bav. Opposite.

Sanlı ('Lucky') in Kekova

ment, carried out here by

Dr. Faith Hentschel (oppo-

inderwater sites. At far

shaped gold pendant

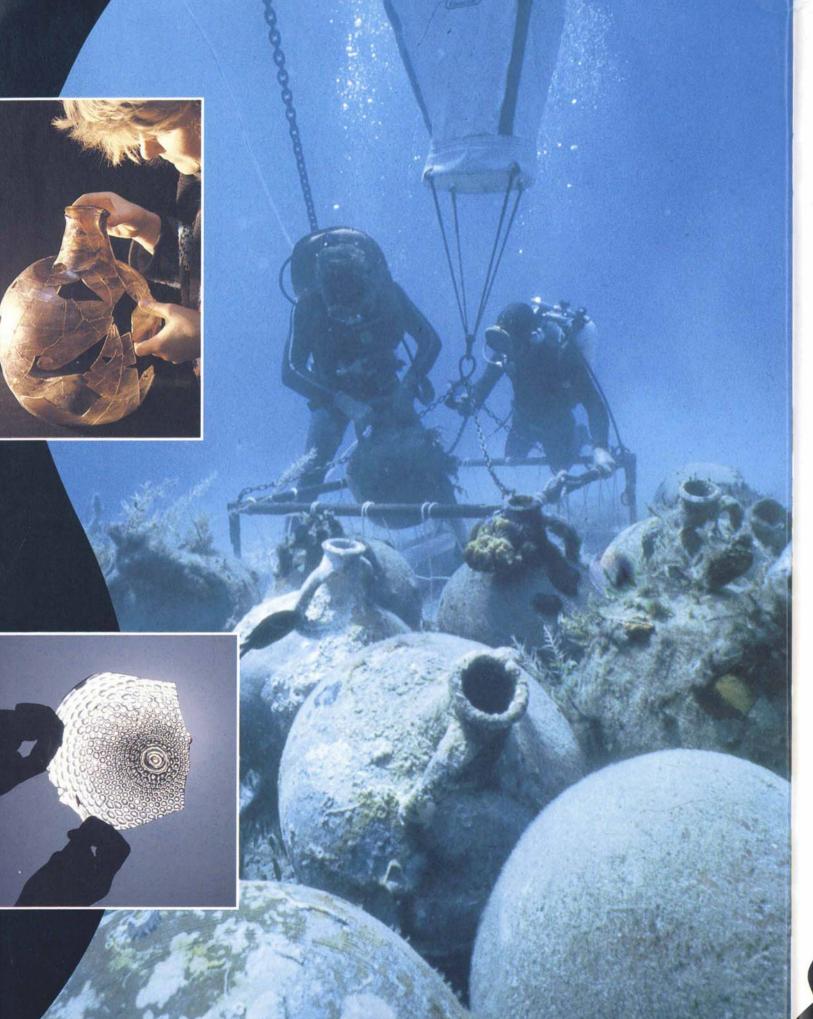
comes to light at

right, a crescent-

top, the sponge boat

statue instead of

sponges outside



Diving twice a day for a total bottom-time of perhaps one hour, a good diver will raise one to two kilograms (two to 4.5 pounds) of sponges, though he must give half of these to the captain of the boat. In recent years, sponges have been at a premium, because a blight has killed most of the crop; the perkilo price is eight dollars (\$3.65 a pound). In a three- to fourmonth season, a good diver will earn about \$3000 - more than he could hope to make in a year as a land laborer.

Many divers with whom we talk have sold the odd amphora - a two-handled clay jar used to carry cargo - to a passing foreign yacht, or, in the words of one sponge diver, "raised 30 amphoras in a single day and sent them off in a truck to Izmir." When lucky enough to come across them, they have melted the lead stocks of Roman anchors to make diving weights. But in the last 20 years, Turkey has taken strong measures to protect its underwater heritage: In most areas, sport diving is forbidden or strictly controlled, and sponge boats are

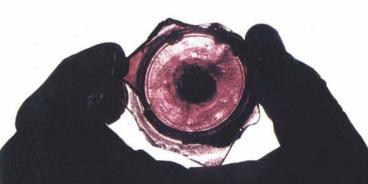
constantly watched by coast-guard patrols. Harsh penalties are imposed if even a single amphora is discovered on board.

with a rainbow The years that followed the founding of the INA saw Bass and his team of marine archeologists, scientists and technicians excavate the Roman and Byzantine shipwrecks at Yassıada, followed by a colored shards Bronze-Age wreck at Seytan Deresi, in the Gulf of Gökova. The INA was led to the Bronze-Age wreck by Cumhur Ilık, another sponge fisherman from Bodrum, who had found two large jars while diving there in 1966. The sponge divers know how to take simple but reliable visual sightings to relocate the chance find of an uncharted reef covered with sponges, so it took Ilik only a few minutes to find

the jars he had seen seven years before. But although the marine archeologists found artifacts dating from 1600 BC, they were unable to find even the smallest fragment of wood from the ship. This suggests that the ship capsized, spilling its cargo, but may not have sunk in that location.

Our next find, however, was a "real wreck" - a nautical time capsule (See Aramco World, July-August 1984). Not only was most of the vessel's cargo of Islamic glass intact, but also galleyware, the crew's personal possessions, tools for repairing the ship, and enough of the ship itself to reconstruct its lines and add to the history of nautical architecture.

The story of the "glass wreck" goes back to 1973, when Mehmet Aşkın, a retired Turkish sponge diver, guided members of the INA to Serce Limani, a remote anchorage on a peninsula in southwest Turkey that juts into the Aegean Sea. Yüksel Eğdemir, the Turkish archeological commissioner assigned to the expedition, went down to see what was there. He surfaced with a rainbow of brightly-colored shards in his hands. "There's glass everywhere," he reported.



The unique cargo of the ship, which sank in Serce Limani around 1025, included 80 whole glass objects and three tons of raw glass and broken vessels destined for a glass factory, probably located somewhere near the Black Sea. During 10 years of painstaking work. researchers assembled more than 300 whole vessels from the ship's million-plus pieces of scrap glass.

In a special exhibit hall built in Bodrum's crusader castle, visitors can now see rare evidence of life aboard ship in the 11th century, including shipwright's tools, tableware, weapons, a grooming kit, fishing equipment and pieces from a chess set.

But the single most important artifact is the ship itself. Pressed into the sand by the cargo, about 17 percent of the ship survived. For six years, timbers of the 15-meter (50-foot) vessel

He surfaced

of brightly-

in his hands.

"There's glass

everywhere!"

were soaked first in fresh water and then in a special water-soluble synthetic wax to preserve them. Six more years were needed to assemble them, but what emerged was the earliest known example of frame-first ship construction techniques - methods still being used in the Bodrum shipyards.

In the early years of the INA's work, the sponge divers knew many wrecks, and their reports were as varied as "a mountain of amphoras," "a huge jar big enough to swim in," and, in 1982, "metal biscuits with ears." The latter report, from

a young diver named Mehmet Cakir, led to INA's most significant discovery so far. Cakir's captain recognized the description as that of a Bronze-Age copper ingot from a drawing I had circulated among the sponge boats. The discovery was reported to Turkey's Museum of Underwater Archeology in Bodrum, and divers from the museum and INA quickly converged on the site. They confirmed the existence of a wreck and estimated its date as the 14th or 13th century BC.

This ship brought Bass full circle, back to the Bronze Age after more than two decades excavating ships from other periods. The site lies in 48 to 61 meters of water (160-200 feet) at Ulu Burun, near the town of Kaş, on Turkey's south coast. With a cargo of over 300 copper ingots, raw glass, ivory, exotic woods and resins, and the chance find of a gold scarab bearing the name of Queen Nefertiti, the Ulu Burun wreck has become one of the most important archeological finds of this century. Yet after nine seasons of excavation, now under the direction of Bass's student, Cemal Pulak, the nationality of the ship remains a mystery.

In recent years, the large fleets of sponge boats operating off the Turkish coast have dwindled, and divers' reports are thinning out, in part due to the blight which attacked the sponges a few years ago. Sponge fishing is rough and hazardous work, and tourism is luring the captains to more lucrative and less dangerous day charters.

When they do go out, typically, five or six divers will live together for up to four months on one eight-meterlong (25-foot) sponge boat, sleeping on deck at night among fuel tanks and the fishy-smelling catch, and

At Yassiada, divers load a cage with seventh-century amphoras (opposite the Serce Limani wreck was

diving three or four times each day to depths and exposures which the rest of the diving world would never consider. Commercial divers, for instance, are not permitted to dive deeper than 50 meters (165 feet) without a diving bell. But the shallower sponge beds have been picked nearly clean, and the Turkish diver must go deeper, often to 60 and even 70 meters (200 or 230 feet), to find enough sponges to make his work worthwhile. Before resurfacing, he takes almost no time for decompression, since another member of his team is waiting to take over his equipment. **Sponge divers'**

The divers do not use scuba tanks. Their equipment consists of flippers, mask and a breathing regulator that's connected to the boat's low-pressure compressor by a long hose. A sponge boat usually has only one regulator. Deep, long dives with little decompression dramatically increase the possibility of the bends, the painful and often crippling sickness which strikes divers who go too deep or stay too long without slowly decompressing in shallow water before resurfacing. No one fully understands the bends, which can strike one diver who rigidly follows the US Navy decompression tables and "forgive" another who routinely exceeds them ... until one day when he too is hit.

Before the sponge blight struck, there were at least 20 boats working the Turkish coast. Of the hundred-odd divers, at least one was usually paralyzed or killed each year. How many more suffered only painful warning symptoms, we do not know. Most of the serious cases would come to our research vessel, Virazon, for treatment, or take an 11-hour taxi ride to the Turkish navy compression chamber in Istanbul. But the others often attempted their own cure by going back underwater to a shallower depth, then slowly resurfacing over a period of many hours. Sometimes they were cured, sometimes they anchor hegins to rise

made their symptoms worse.

Though the sponge divers who remain may be the last of their breed, remote-sensing technology is fortunately offering an increasingly attractive alternative in the search for productive sites. The principles behind this technology are not new. In 1963, a Turkish sponge dragger, Mehmet Imbat, netted a statue of an African youth outside the Bay of Yalıkavak, two hours from Bodrum. Two years later, Bass spent the summer searching the same area with an underwater video camera towed behind a small fishing boat. Finding nothing, he returned with a team of specialists from the Scripps Institute of Technology, who brought with them a side-scanning sonar. The sonar "fish" transmitted high-frequency sound pulses across the seabed and then listened for the echoes from any protruding object. In only two days, they located an acoustic target in 88 meters (288 feet) of water that might be a mound of amphoras. In 1991, we returned to investigate the target with a submarine. Although it is clearly a massive amphora mound, no statues are visible and with-

out a metal-detector survey of this very deep site, the

question of whether other statues lie buried in the mound will remain unanswered.

Earlier, in 1971, with a grant from the US National Science Foundation, Bass had been able to buy a Klein sidescan sonar. At that time I was teaching physics at Robert College in Istanbul, and was excited by his offer to head a "high-tech" search for new wreck sites. But after a month at sea, staring at sonar printouts, I was discouraged at how difficult it was to separate shipwreck anomalies from other background signals - to tell wrecks from rocks. Sometimes a dark spot on the

paper promised a target that we could never relocate, while other times we spent a whole morning homing in on what proved to be a rock. In the meantime, from sponge-diver leads, we located several good wrecks with only a few dives. I was a high-tech man, but I surrendered to common sense. We should gather as much information as possible from the sponge divers, we decided, and inspect everything they could show us. Then, and only then, should we turn back to high-tech remote sensing.

Now we have come full circle: The sponge divers' leads are few, while high-tech remote sensing has made impressive improvements. INA direc-

tor Martin Wilcox, the inventor of the ultrasound medical scanner, recently completed the design of a new sonar which works with a PC computer, providing a multi-colored acoustic map of the seabed. Its higher acoustic frequency also means improved resolution, possibly to the point of being able to distinguish the shapes of individual amphoras. Meanwhile, satellite navigational systems allow us to record the exact location of each anomaly, to within a few meters, and later return precisely to it. And instead of trying to manipulate a video camera hanging at the end of a 45-meter (150-foot) pendulum of cable, expeditions can employ "remote operated vehicles" that can be controlled from the relative comfort of a ship's cabin with a simple joystick, and can carry a color television camera anywhere within the range of the connecting cable.

But once again, still, the most attractive areas for searches come from the sponge divers' reports - wrecks that we could not locate because they were somewhere out in the sand, far from the rock-sand interface, with no trail to lead us back to them. We have heard reports of six huge jars standing proudly

on the bottom, and of yet another mountain of amphoras - "enough to fill two trucks." In the Izmir Museum, there is a wonderful statue of an athlete that sponge draggers raised from just 45 meters (150 feet) of water. Is there an entire cargo of bronze statues out there?

reports include

yet another

mountain of

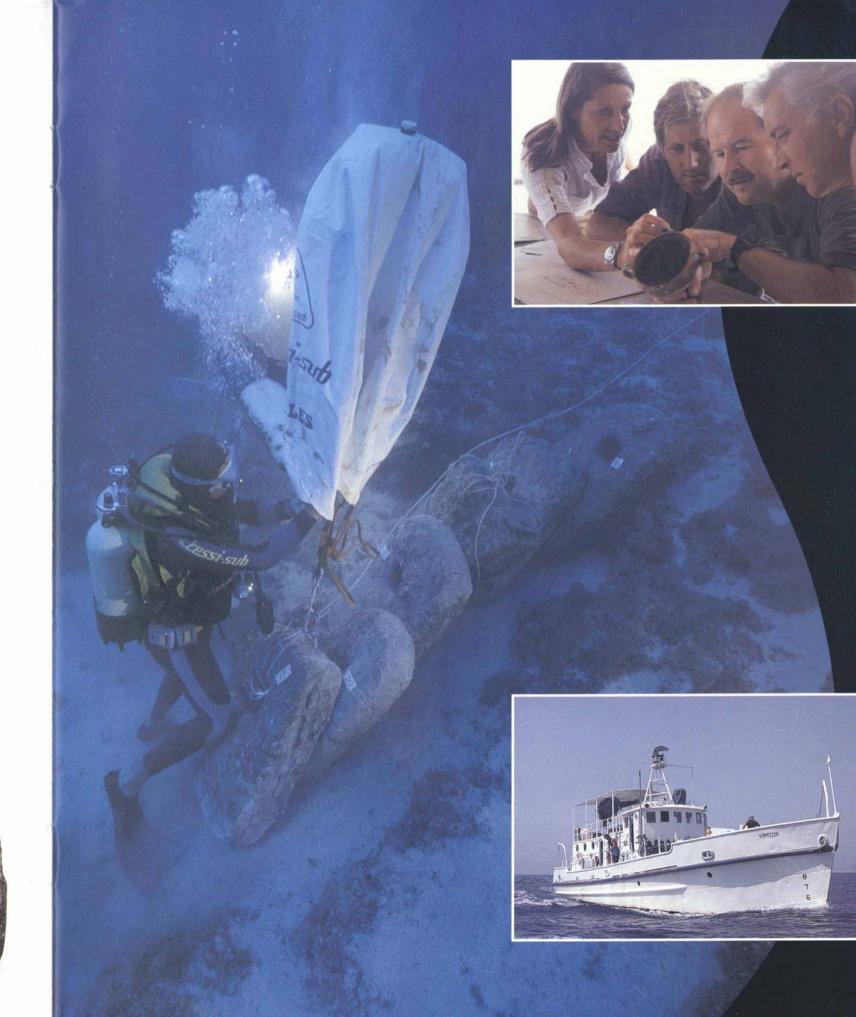
amphoras -

"enough to fill

two trucks."

We won't know until we look. @

Donald A. Frey, vice-president of INA, works to adapt technology to the needs of the Institute's archeologists. He has lived in Bodrum for the last 17 years, with his Danish wife Suzanne and their daughter Kristen.



to the surface at Illu

Burun, opposite page.

(opposite, top) will record

Mycenaean drinking cup, or

kylix, she examines with

and Claude Duthuit.

Robin Piercy, George Bass

lna's 20-meter research

recovered by a

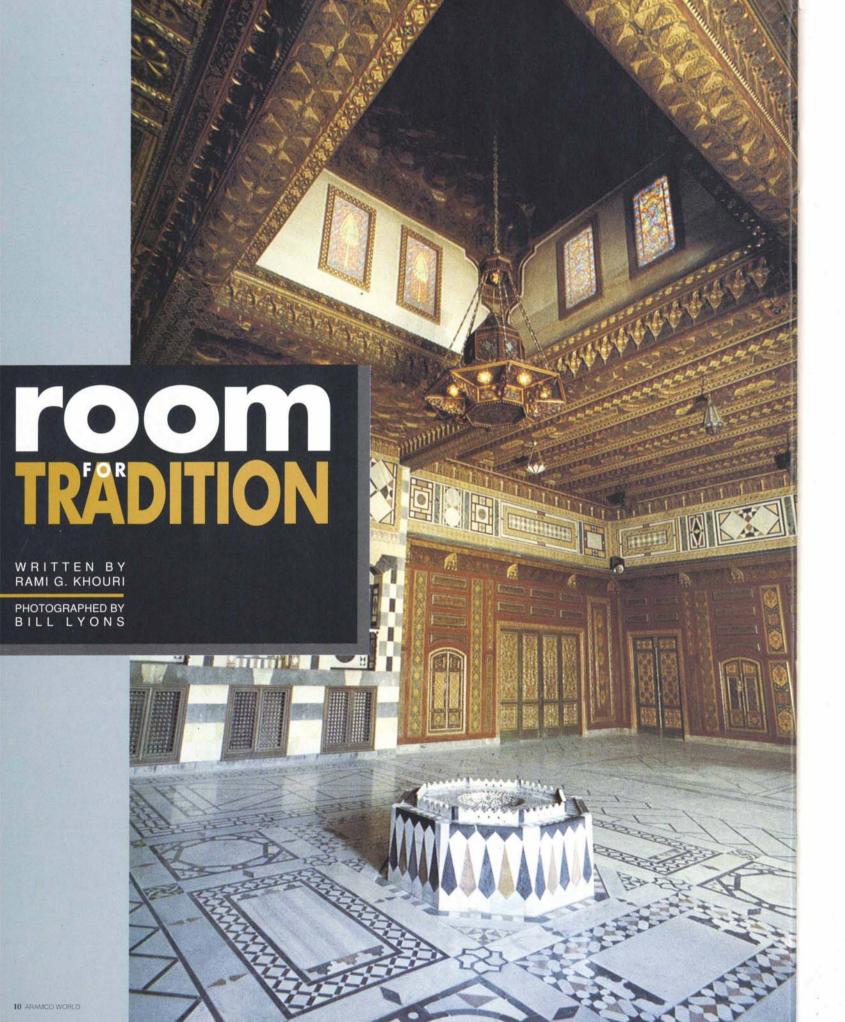
sponge diver.

vessel Virazon (opposite.

statue of an African boy

Artist Netia Piercy

the design on the



he fire that raged through the Sulaymanivyah quarter of old Damascus in the 1920's was so intense that people ever since have called that area of the city Harigah, which means "fire" in colloquial Arabic. Among the many buildings that burned was the 18th-century Mardam-Bey family home.

The house was abandoned, but some parts of its most important room – its magnificent madafah, or reception hall - were only slightly charred, and the family had them dismantled and stored. In 1958, former Syrian Prime Minister Jamil Mardam-Bey donated the remains of the room to the National Museum of Damascus to display as a permanent showcase of an important craft tradition, the Damascene room.

The museum decided to recreate the Mardam-Bey room in its conference hall, at the end of the long main gallery which houses spectacular antiquities from the last 5000 years of civilization. Thus today, after many years, the madafah has been brought back to its original splendor, restored phoenix-like from its own ashes, and given fresh life and form in a new, permanent setting.

However, the conference hall was about three times the size of the original madafah, and only a corner of it would have been covered by the donated pieces. The museum management made an audacious and ambitious decision: The Mardam-Bey wood panels and stonework would be reerected in their original 18th-century configuration, and the entire rest of the conference hall would be decorated anew using the same materials and the same style and quality of craftsmanship. In other words, the mid-18th-century madafah of the Mardam-Bey home would be not only painstakingly and accurately recreated, but enlarged.

The man chosen by the museum to do the work was Muhammad 'Ali al-Khayyat, Syria's most outstanding craftsman in designing and building this kind of Damascene room.

Building a traditional Damascene room (qa'ah shamiyyah, in Arabic) was unlike any other handicraft or artistic tradition because it required a complex combination of skills rather than mastery of just one art form. The few master craftsmen in the field had to work in wood, metal, glass, cloth, marble, stone and several kinds of paint, and needed a certain architectural sense as well for the overall design of the room and the placement of its compoment elements. In the 18th and 19th centuries, several Syrian families specialized in making Damascene rooms, and their skills were avidly sought after throughout the region - usually by public figures or wealthy merchant families, for the construction of a Damascene room was not an inexpensive matter.

Muhammad 'Ali al-Khayyat, known by his teknonym, Abu Sulayman, came from this tradition: His family had specialized in making Damascene rooms for over 150 years. Born in Damascus in 1880, Abu Sulayman started working alongside his father as a teenager, learning the techniques of the trade and slowly mastering every aspect of the art, the craft, and the business. By 1912 he was skilled in most decorative stonework and woodwork, and in 1924 he was asked by the French mandatory rulers of Syria to help restore the 'Azm residence in old Damascus – now a splendid example of the traditional Damascene home, and one that draws hundreds of thousands of visitors a year. Abu Sulayman's skills also took him to Lebanon, where he restored Bayt al-Din Palace in 1930, and from 1947 to 1955 he worked on what was perhaps his masterpiece: the parliament building in Damascus.

It was natural, therefore, that he would be entrusted with the complex task of reconstructing the Mardam-Bey madafah and simultaneously expanding it, in its original style, to cover the entire conference room of the National Museum. He was aided by existing photographs of the Mardam-Bey home before the fire destroyed it, and by his own knowledge of the Arabian, Turkish and Persian traditions that lay behind most of the designs and styles used in the room. These, along with the surviving pieces of the original, allowed him to reconstruct the madafah in his own mind, and then to bring it to reality in the museum.

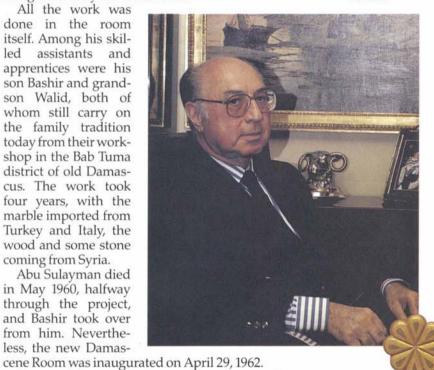
All the work was done in the room itself. Among his skilled assistants and apprentices were his son Bashir and grandson Walid, both of whom still carry on the family tradition today from their workshop in the Bab Tuma district of old Damascus. The work took four years, with the marble imported from Turkey and Italy, the wood and some stone coming from Syria.

Abu Sulayman died in May 1960, halfway through the project, and Bashir took over from him. Nevertheless, the new Damas-

The result is a cultural monument that can be appreciated at several different levels. It is at once a testament to contemporary Syrian craftsmanship, a living example of 18th-century Damascene urban splendor, and a cumulative repository of Islamic decorative art that has developed during the last 14 centuries. The room's location at the end of the main gallery of the National Museum is appropriately symbolic, for it is something of a storehouse of designs, art forms, and cultural traditions that have evolved in Syria and its Arab/Islamic hinterland during the last 10,000 years.

In its present form, the Damascene Room includes several elements from the original madafah of the Mardam-Bev house: the central stone fountain and its surrounding floor tiles, the east wall with its two large lateral niches flanking a

The fountain in the center of the Damascene Room is "an explosion of triangles" centered under a raised ceiling section that accommodates stained-glass windows.



Zuheir Mardam-Bey, present head of the family that gave the room to the National Museum.

doorway (now rebuilt as a marble basin), the stone fireplace in the north wall, the wooden ceiling in the raised central section above the fountain, several wooden panels and marble slabs in the four walls, and the painted wooden double-panel on the south wall. The rest of the room comprises modern reconstructions that faithfully reflect the style and craftsmanship of the original work.

The dazzling and majestic new room is an almost timeless celebration of the two forces that have defined Syrian Arab culture for well over a millennium: a penchant to dazzle, born of the world's oldest urban cultural legacy, and a firm foundation in the rich geometric and decorative traditions of Arab and Islamic art.

Visitors to the room immediately feel this sense of timelessness, which can be slightly disorienting at first. Is this an old or a new place, the visitor wonders? Are these the works of artists who have died and left us their masterpieces, or of craftsmen who still live among us and create their marvels today?

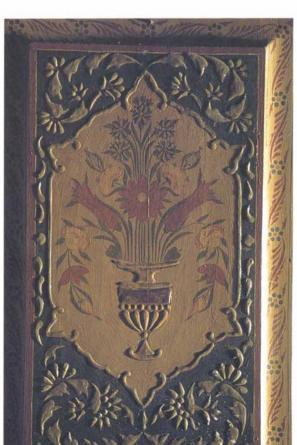
These questions are all the more perplexing to those visitors to the Damascene Room who have seen some of Damascus's other great architectural monuments, such as the Umayyad Mosque or the 'Azm Palace in the heart of the old city. They have encountered the same architectural language and enjoyed the same artistic flourishes that they see again here; they have seen these orderly patterns and shapes, walked through this landscape of bursting stars, multi-colored octagons, and neatly interlaced floral scrolls.

After a few moments, the full meaning and value of the Damascene Room become clearer: This is not a cultural statement about achievements of the past; rather, it is about the continuity of art, creativity, and faith in an Arab/Islamic culture that has been perpetually inspired by its own gregarious humanity. It is also about the interplay between utility and beauty that has always defined the great urban achievements of Arab/Islamic culture.

For despite its splendor, this room was designed to express and serve certain Arab values that center on the importance of human contact, companionship and camaraderie. The original Mardam-Bey madafah was the family meeting place and reception hall, open all day and all night to family, friends, neighbors, official guests or visitors from farther afield. As the conference hall of the museum, it continues to carry out its traditional cultural mandate: It remains a gathering place whose material splendor is matched by its aura of hospitality and warmth – a room where people meet, talk, exchange ideas and depart slightly wiser, perhaps also slightly more awed by human-kind's ability to create and enjoy beauty.

Upon entering the Damascene Room through a small door in its south-east corner, visitors are instantly struck by the enveloping, even overwhelming, totality of the decorative work that surrounds them: The four walls, ceiling, floor, doors, windows and light fixtures are all completely covered with fine decorative work in a variety of media. Stone and wood are the two dominant materials, interspersed with some smaller items of copper, brass, and glass.







The current configuration of the Damascene Room and its location in the museum do not fully reflect the intimacy of the original Mardam-Bey madafah, which would have been enlivened by the chatter of friends and associates for much of the day. The Damascene Room in the museum is not always well lit, and usually has only few visitors at a time. The original madafah, in contrast, had benchlike seats, called tawatah, on three of its sides, on which people sat for hours, talking business or politics, chatting about friends and family, negotiating business deals and partnerships, or simply enjoying the quiet, cool shade, running water and perpetual coffee that were mainstays of madafah culture. Indeed, the word madafah derives from a root meaning "to serve a guest" or "to be hospitable." It was considered a matter of honor that a family madafah would be open at any time for any visitor, whether friend or stranger. Family ceremonies also took place here, including the gathering of the men for important meals and the famous Damascene sweets and Arab coffee that followed them. When it was originally built, the women of the household did not use the madafah, but today men and women alike use these rooms.

The fireplace, or *muqedi* in colloquial Syrian Arabic, accommodated a small charcoal fire all day, perpetually ready to brew a cup of coffee for whoever might drop into the *madafah*. The carved wooden walls featured small shelves on which the family displayed some of its best porcelain and vases. Most *madafah*s included a small fountain, or *bahrah*, in the middle to provide a cooling effect in summer, and the soothing sound of running water throughout the year.

Most Syrian family homes had a *madafah* of some sort, though not all were as ornate or as large as this one. Some were ordinary rooms furnished with cushions or seats and set aside as reception halls, while others were decorated with traditional Syrian workmanship, but less elaborately than this room. The Mardam-Bey *madafah* was large and lavishly decorated, in keeping with the wealth and the political and social stature of the family, and also with the traditional role of leading Syrian families as patrons of the arts and guardians of the highest cultural traditions of the land.

After a few moments of wandering through the room looking up, down and in all directions, the visitor begins to sort out the separate strands of decorative work that are so neatly woven into this often dazzling architectural tapestry. The eye settles on one section of the room, and then on a single panel of woodwork or colored stonework, and finally on a solitary geometric shape – but that soon weaves its way into an adjoining panel, and from there to adjacent sections of the room, until the eye once more moves back and forth throughout the whole room, trying to take in a totality that is both difficult to grasp as a single work of art and impossible to isolate into its separate strands of craftsmanship.

One soon recognizes, however, that this is not the way to appreciate this room. It was not conceived or designed to be stared at by strangers, or to be analyzed like an alien object. Rather, it was the



Gesso-painted floral ornaments surround a formal yet naïve vase of flowers (far left); flowers in a different style twist down the panel's frame. Carving, flat painting and raised gesso painting decorate a pair of cupboard doors (left).

Shutters drawn back

into window

embrasures are

decorated with

geometric woodwork

and small painted

panels.

most welcoming room in a family home, and as such its aim was not to awe the visitor, but to make him comfortable and let him feel at home.

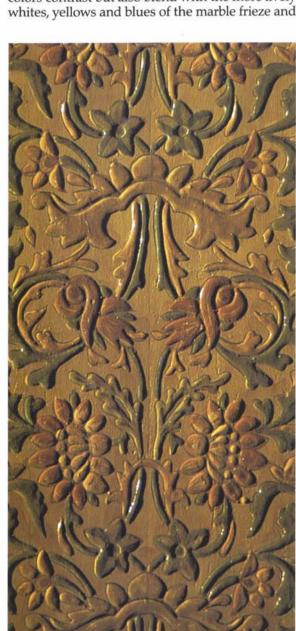
Nevertheless, the visitor today cannot help but look at the room as a piece of art, and at this level the Damascene Room becomes a living testament to a tradition of Syrian craftsmanship that can be measured in thousands of years. This tradition is most evident in the stone and wood that dominate the room. The two blend together throughout the room, particularly in the wide, brightly colored stone frieze that runs all along the top of the finely worked wooden walls. The central section of the room is almost totally done in marble and stone, including the central water fountain and the stone wall with two large niches facing it from the east.

The rest of the room is dominated by the slightly darker earth colors of the four walls and ceiling, mostly browns, yellows, tans and reds that temper the impact of an opulent decorative style that would be flashy were it brighter. The subdued colors contrast but also blend with the more lively whites, yellows and blues of the marble frieze and

Floral and geometric decorations cover ceiling beams (right, above) and wall panels (right, lower),



and frames frame successive secondary frames (opposite) in an embarrassment of riches.





the central stone section. The result is a little like being immersed in a vat of dark and white chocolate – hard to take in all at once, but equally hard to resist.

The woodwork includes a variety of carved and inlaid wood pieces, but the dominant decorative technique is called khatt 'arabi, or Arabic script. This is a traditional Damascene method that involves a series of separate steps. First come perforation and pouncing: The decorative pattern is drawn on paper, and a pin is used to make small perforations along the drawn lines. The perforated paper is placed on the wood like a stencil, and a piece of charcoal is passed over the paper, leaving a dotted outline of the design on the wood. The design can then be carved out or painted straight onto the wooden surface, or - as is more common in the Damascene Room - a layer of near-liquid gesso is painted onto the lines or into the areas of the design, leaving them raised above the surrounding wood surface. Once it is dry, this raised gesso is painted. The result is a relief look made all the more striking by the variety of colors and designs used. Different kinds of paint are made from mixtures of ground stone - such as blue lapis lazuli - with pistachio oil, glue and varnish, depending on whether a shiny or dull finish is required.

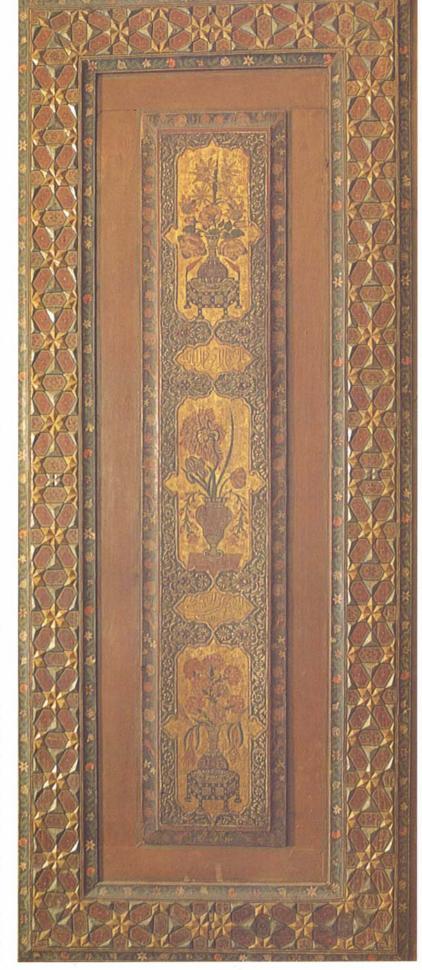
The many different designs and patterns that make the room such a challenge to take in all at once reflect the rich legacy of geometric and floral shapes so characteristic of Islamic culture, which traditionally shunned human or animal depictions. Here, individual artists and craftsmen did not vie for recognition for their own creativity; rather, successive generations built up a cumulative tradition of patterns and designs in an evolutionary way, using an array of basic shapes – hexagons, octagons, stars, leaf scrolls and florets, rosettes, squares, circles, rectangles, and interlocking variations of all of these – as well as such processes as repetition, rotation and reflection.

The variety of geometric patterns is visible anywhere in the Damascene Room, but is perhaps easiest to decipher in the stone water fountain and floor in the center. Here, a patient eye can pick out octagons, triangles, rectangles, squares, six-sided stars, diamonds, spades, interlocking elongated hexagons, and probably a few other shapes. The fountain basin itself is a veritable explosion of stars: Viewed from close-up, it reveals itself to be composed of three triangles within a six-sided star within a hexagon, within a double star, within another hexagon, within a six-sided star — and between the points of the last star are shapes composed of three triangles within a hexagon within another elongated hexagon.

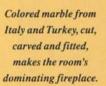
The wooden panels that line the walls mirror many of these geometric patterns, but tend more toward floral designs that include a few fruits, flowers and rosettes, and some short inscriptions that are mostly Qur'anic verses. One lighthearted inscription in the north part of the east wall reads hadiyyah jamilah, ahdaha jamil - "a beautiful gift given by Jamil" - referring to the gift of the room to the museum by Jamil Mardam-Bey; his picture and that of Muhammad 'Ali al-Khayyat both hang in the room. The decoration of the ceiling includes more octagons, stars and swirling floral patterns; the section in the center above the water fountain is the original ceiling from the 18th-century madafah, and is considered by many to be the finest part of the whole room.

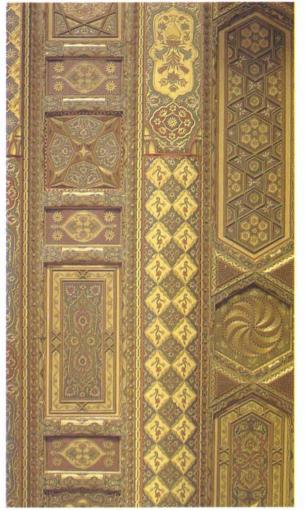
On the south wall is a small panel with two drawings depicting a country scene of houses and trees; this work from the 18th-century *madafah* represents Qasr Shadirwan, a resort outside the city where wealthy Damascenes spent summer weekends enjoying an *argilah*, a water-pipe, along the shores of the Barada River (See *Aramco World*, March-April 1991). The large fireplace in the north wall is one of the most intriguing elements in the room; nearly four meters (13 feet) high, it boasts fine white marble carvings, gold-colored outlines, a conical canopy of red, black and white stone and a row of tiny triple-keystone crenellations.

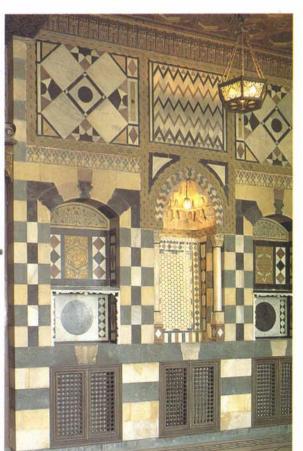
The ancient design traditions encapsulated in this room are best seen in comparison with the decoration of the eighth-century Umayyad Mosque in old Damascus. The swirling rosettes in the central ceiling of the room, for example, are virtually identical to the decorative metal of the mosque's western door. The three marble lozenges in the east wall of the room recall the marble panels











of the mosque's east gate, while the alternating large and small hexagons on the marble cornice above the door of the room are almost identical to the design on the *minbar* door in the mosque. But similar parallels can be picked out with almost any other Islamic-era monument in Damascus, and most other parts of the Islamic world. Because of its location on the silk, spice and frankincense routes – the greatest trading and communication highways of the ancient world – Damascus interacted with every other Islamic city, and art and ideas were certainly among the trade goods exchanged.

The Khayyat family is among the few left in Syria whose members master the full range of crafts skills required to make a traditional Damascene room, which can be built and decorated by a team of 10 workers in four to five years. Bashir Khayyat started working with his father, Abu Sulayman, at the age of 12. Now 73 and in good health, he stands at his large wooden workbench six days a week, painstakingly drawing patterns on wood and carving them out with a chisel and awl. To his masterly eye, every slight variation in technique has its own name and appropriate use. Lines carved close to one another are called hafr 'abbasi (Abbasid engraving), while hafr fatimi (Fatimid engraving) leaves wider spaces. A ceiling design arranged in long columns, like the north and south sections of the Damascene Room, is known as saqf 'ajami (Persian ceiling); a ceiling without columns, like the central section of the Damascene Room above the fountain, is known as saqf'arabi (Arabian ceiling).

As the demand for traditional Damascene rooms has declined in recent years, Bashir Khayyat and his family have tended to do more furniture pieces, decorative wall panels and other such work. Today, the government is the most frequent client for entire rooms, which are usually used as ceremonial meeting rooms or parts of major public buildings. Until just a few years ago, there was a demand for craftsmen who could dismantle an entire room, pack it for shipping, and reassemble it in another country, but this export of Damascene rooms has now been banned.

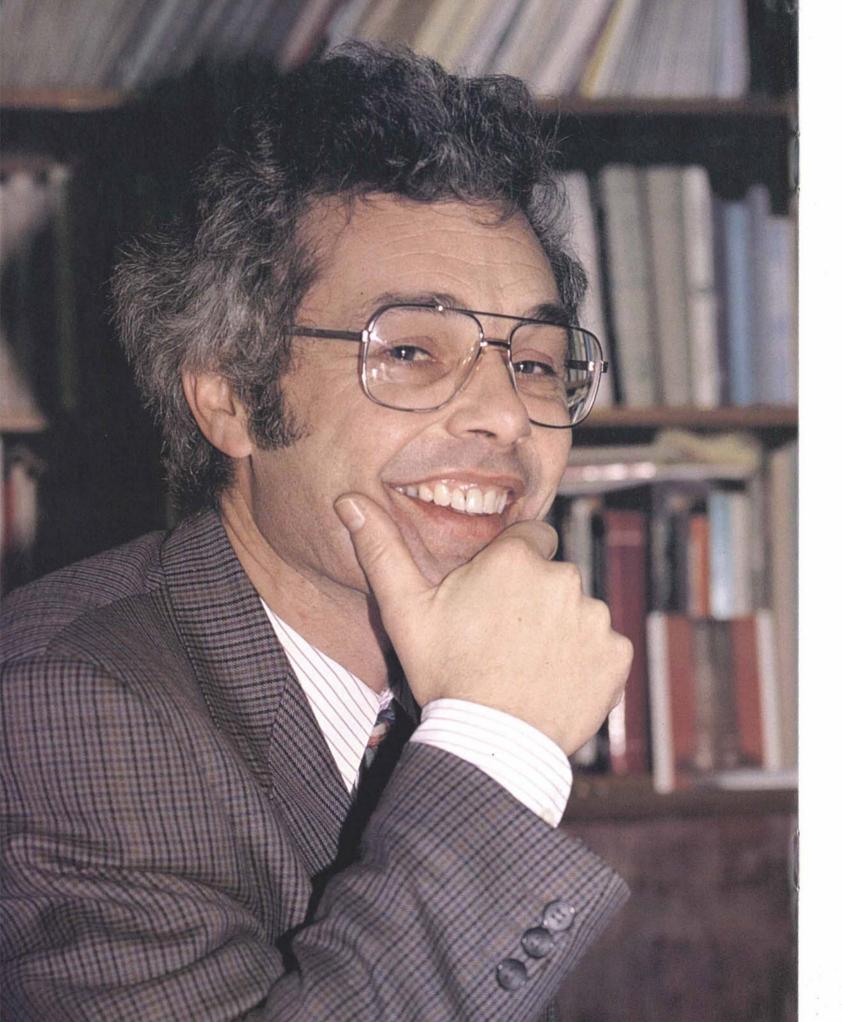
Bashir's son Walid, now 52, started working in the family business as a teenager, and spent two years as a painter in the museum's Damascene Room. He now supervises the young apprentices who work with him and his father, but fears nonetheless that the traditional skills required to build a Damascene Room may not survive his generation. Few young men today seem interested in putting in the long hours – and the years – required to learn the skills, even as demand declines.

Should the worst happen, however, and Syria one day lose the skilled craftsmen who have maintained these traditions for thousands of years, future generations will still be able to enjoy this part of their national heritage by visiting the Damascene Room of the National Museum of Damascus, and perhaps even, by studying its wonders carefully, rediscover those skills.

Author and publisher Rami G. Khouri writes frequently for Aramco World on the history, archeology and culture of the Arab World. His book on modern Middle Eastern history and Arab relations with the West will be published next year by Lawrence Hill Books, New York.



No surface of wooden ceiling or marble wall goes unpatterned.



ASHMOLEAN DREAM

ave a cup of coffee with Dr. James Allan, curator of eastern art at the Ashmolean Museum at Oxford University, and you'll hear about a dream.

In the mid-1970's, Allan – then assistant curator – pioneered Oxford's master of philosophy course in Islamic art and architecture. Today, he's after even bigger game: He

wants to establish a center for the study of Islamic art and art history to capitalize on the Ashmolean's treasures, and recruit and train students from the Middle East, to broaden a field long dominated by the West.

"I'd love to see the Middle East, with its own scholars, curators, researchers and students, taking the study of Islamic art forward," says Allan, who is himself an expert on Islamic ceramics and metalwork. "They need to come to the West and see what we have to offer, then go back to their own countries and develop in their own directions, with a new dynamic they can provide."

The author and editor of a number of books on his specialties, Allan says a feel for the "geography" of the Middle East gives an added dimension to his work. Last June, he journeyed to Iran to research steelmaking there from the 14th century to today.

The Ashmolean, England's first public museum, was founded in 1683 and houses Oxford's art and archeological collections. Just one of its many galleries – the Reitlinger – shows off Islamic artifacts. But what's there, and what's stored on the floor above, makes the museum a wonderful resource for scholars.

Its 1200-piece Islamic ceramics collection is unrivaled in depth, says Allan. "If you want to study one type of object, we have 20 to 30 examples of the type, to enable you to see the differences, the variations and

the artistic possibilities of it. That's very important when you compare the Ashmolean with museums in other countries."

The Ashmolean also boasts an outstanding collection of Islamic metalwork. At its heart are pieces lent by the family of the late Palestinian-Lebanese Nuhad es-Said (See *Aramco World*, November-December 1985), which came to the

museum after Allan catalogued them in 1982.

Other prizes include textile fragments from medieval Cairo and fine examples of carved and inlaid wood. The Heberden Coin Room, under another curator, has a strong line of Islamic coins.

Despite these assets, just three Middle Eastern students – two Palestinians and a Libyan – have earned degrees in Islamic art and architecture at Oxford. Partly in a bid to attract students from the Mideast, a new bachelor's degree course that would pave the way for advanced studies is starting this autumn.

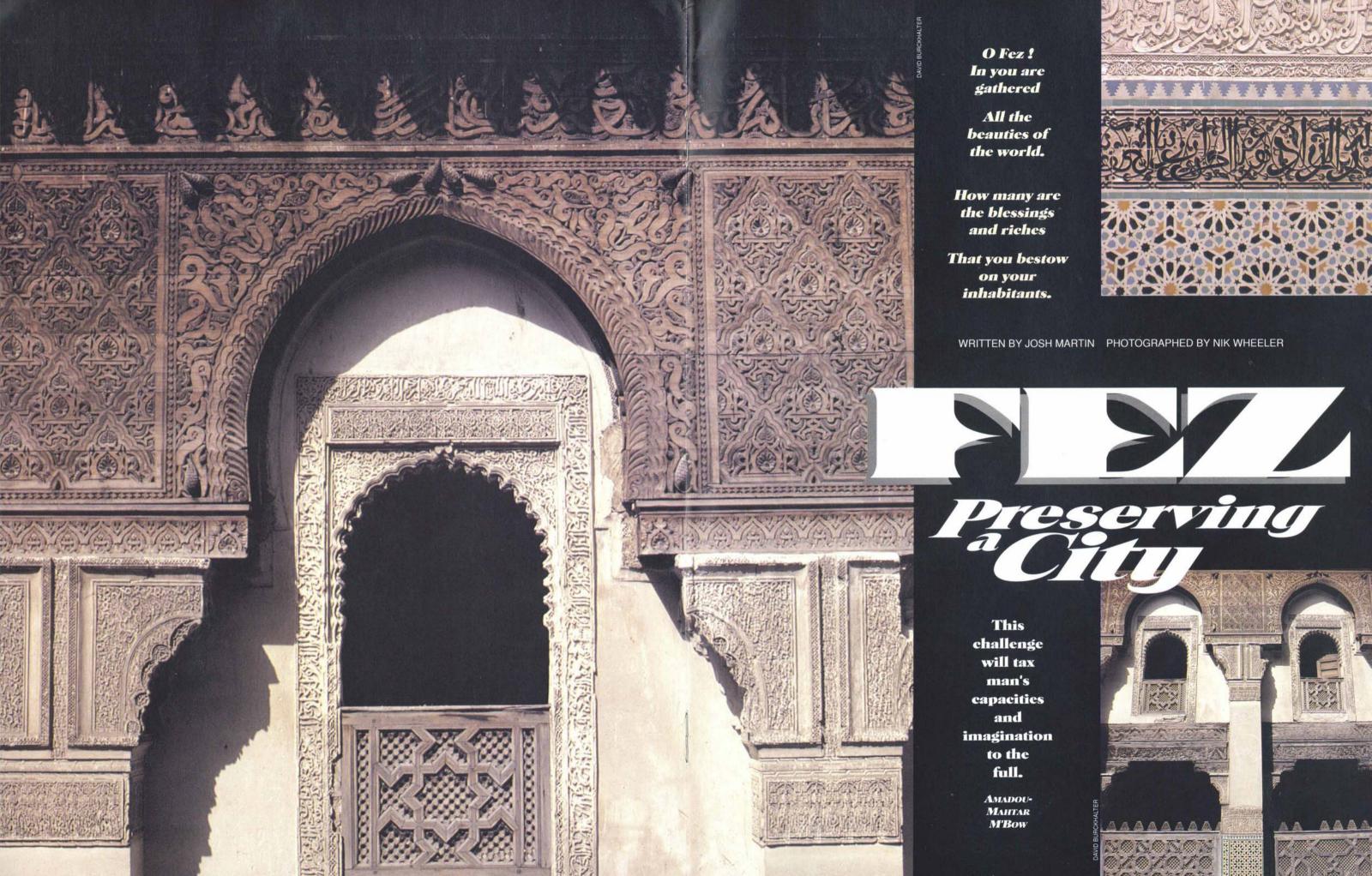
Meanwhile, endowments from the Arab world have recently enabled Oxford to bolster the staff that works with Islamic material culture, and provided a scholarship for its one-year master of studies degree in Islamic art. Allan hopes to raise more scholarship money for students from the Muslim world.

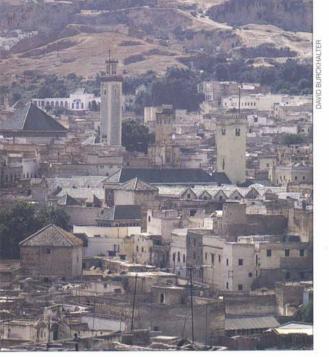
Finally, Oxford is considering a plan to establish an Islamic Center as part of a university-wide program grouping facilities to focus on the origins of civilizations. That could dovetail with Allan's own ideas.

So the dream is very much alive. It would make the Ashmolean a "staging post" on the road to strengthening the study of Islamic art in its own homeland, says Allan, "and thus enrich us all."

Arthur Clark, museum-goer and Saudi Aramco staff writer, lives in Dhahran.

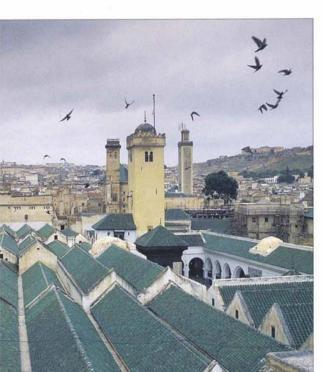
WRITTEN AND PHOTOGRAPHED BY ARTHUR CLARK





ez, Morocco's ancient center of learning and the arts, is now the focus of one of the world's most ambitious preservation and restoration efforts. It is a project which has been marked by sometimes stormy debate, for there are few cities which evoke as much passion as this one.

The restoration is at once a matter of local pride, national prestige and global concern, for the city represents more than an important collection of monuments. It is the world's largest intact medieval city, preserving traditional artistic skills still visible in the leather, clothing, wood and metal goods produced and sold there. It is also the home of renowned institutions for the study of Arabic and of Islamic theology. And it is a political center, one of the five imperial cities in which the king of Morocco, Hassan II, maintains a residence.



To enter Fez is to be taken by surprise. The city emerges from the matte, earth-toned foothills of Morocco's Middle Atlas Mountains, surrounded by countryside that, in the cold of mid-winter, seems devoid of life: There are few trees, grass is close-cropped by herds of sheep, and even the occasional farm house or rural mosque seems plain and uninviting. Then, at a bend in the road, past low hills on either side, the city emerges, flowing along a crest and into a valley where two small rivers meet and then join the Oued Fez. It looks medieval because it is: Ancient forts guard the old city, in which the square towers of great mosques pierce the sky, and the green roofs of palaces glisten under the North African sun amid an undulating sea of white and yellow-brown buildings. Buses, trucks and pack animals surge in and out of gates in a wall whose ramparts have stood intact for centuries. Within, women in fine silk and men in woolen jellabas - the hooded robe that is the national costume - jostle for space on the narrow streets, competing with pack animals piled high and wide with goods of every description.

Fez means different things to different people. To some, it is the site of the Karaouine Mosque, the second-largest in North Africa and neighbor of the oldest university in the world. To others, it is a center of the decorative arts, world-famous for its leather and metal work. Fez conjures up another image for travelers, defining and preserving the essence of a fabled Arab city, where hundreds of minarets testify to the city's religious fervor, and dozens of ancient portals beckon, leading to *funduqs* (hotels) or *madrasahs* (schools) or palatial merchants' homes.

All of this was threatened with decay and collapse in this century thanks to the pressures of a soaring urban population and to simple neglect. An official of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) recently observed that, by the early 1980's, Fez was "in danger of losing the profoundly original quality which makes it one of the purest jewels of Islamic civilization." Careless repair work, declining standards and the ravages of time had marred many of the city's most famous buildings.

The restoration now underway comprises 43 separate projects dealing not only with the preservation of monuments but also with the revitalization of the regional economy, upgrading of infrastructure and the development of institutions to foster and preserve the city's cultural and intellectual life. The scale of the restoration is large by any standards, involving nothing less than the complete rehabilitation and redesign of a city of 700,000 inhabitants; it is expected to cost more than \$600 million and require another 20 years to complete. And at the heart of all this activity is a short, 40-year-old bearded man with a quick smile, a sense of urgency, and vision.

Abdellatif El Hajjami is director general of the restoration project, known officially as the Agence pour la Dédensification et la Réhabilitation de la

Previous spread:
Attarine madrasah's
magnificent though
delicate decoration,
shown from three
perspectives, poses
special problems for
restorers.

Left: Old Fez nestles in the foothills of the Middle Atlas.

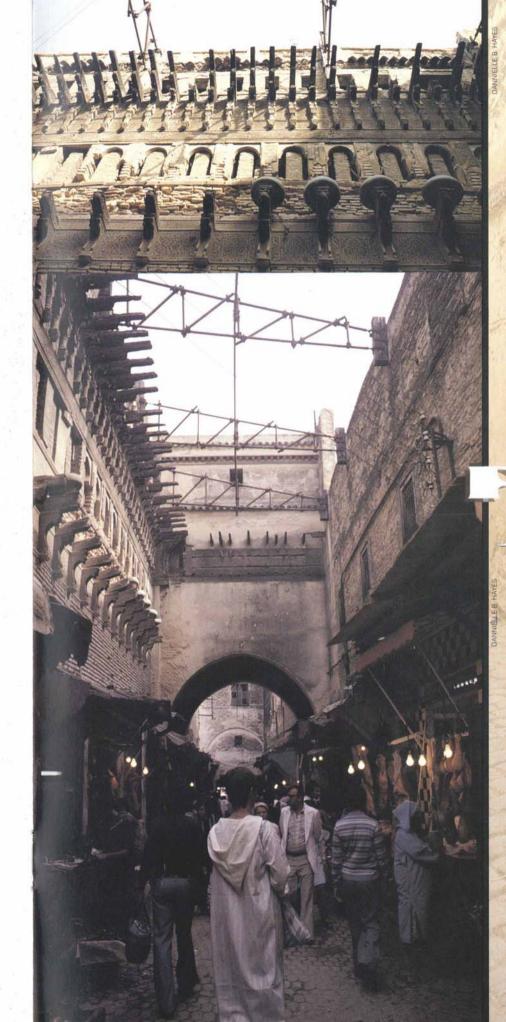
Lower left: The rooftops belong to Karaouine University, the world's oldest.

We must rebuild Fez. It is a universal city.

Nourredine Ayouche

Rows of old corbels, some with green bowl-shaped gongs, upper right, are all that remain of an ingenious water clock under restoration near Bou Anania madrasalı, right.

Far right box: Above, the tiled Nejjarine Fountain, and below, restoration work at the Funduq Nejjarine.



eep in the heart of Fez El Bali, a small square attracts a steady stream of tourists and townspeople. On one side is a café and a bookstall, on another a shop selling the sweets so beloved by all Moroceans. But what attracts most visitors is the large building on the third side of the triangular space.

Scaffolding now covers the facade like a web, yet one can still clearly see the outline of the Funduq Nejjarine, the Inn of the Carpenters. When it first opened its doors in the 12th century, the funduq was one of the largest hotels in

the world, comparable to the palaces being raised in Europe at the same time, and capable of housing 100 or more merchants. It was designed to meet the needs of a thriving commercial center. The massive double door that marks the hotel's entrance can be opened to admit a traveler on camel- or horseback, but includes two smaller panels that swing open to admit persons on foot.

The focal point of area restoration efforts, the site currently employs 21 workers and technicians, including three stone-carvers.

As restoration continues, those workers will train

workers and technicians, including three stone-carvers. As restoration continues, those workers will train others, and some already travel to other sites to provide lessons. Ultimately, Ahmed El Hajjami, chef de chantier or chief engineer at the site, expects this work force to serve as the nucleus of a cadre of restoration workers and

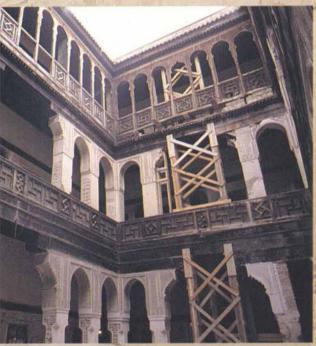
artisans. He hopes the experience will rekindle lost skills - delicate plaster or cedarwood carving, wood inlay work, intricate zellij tilework - as well as the esthetic sensibilities that informed them in the past.

Inside, there is a tiled courtyard which all the rooms face, now piled with sand, tiles, scaffolding and tools. Originally, there was a fountain in the middle, where guests could make their ablutions or get a drink of water. An archeologist and a geologist have done some excavation here, but the main purpose is not to find artifacts.

Rather, it is to study the foundations of the hotel, and the condition of the subsoil, to make sure that the basic structure is sound and that renovation work will not be endangered.

The Funduq Nejjarine sits on a square which marks the boundary between the earpenters' suq (or market) and the henna suq; nearby are the Attarine (perfumers') and Kissarine (shoemakers') suqs as well. The square also contains the Nejjarine Fountain, one of several exquisitely tiled, freestanding water fountains that grace the streets and squares of Fez El Bali. Like the funduq, it is being lovingly restored.

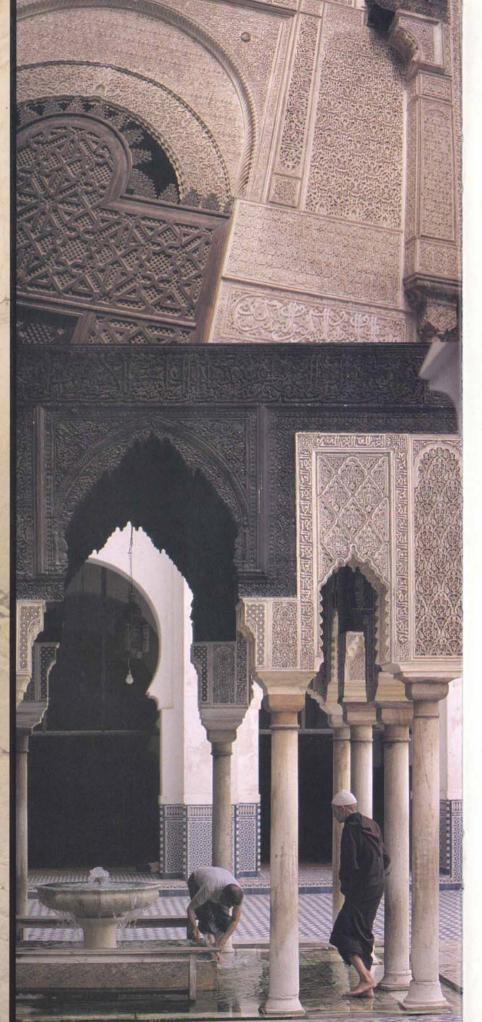
Not surprisingly, the funduq was a popular merchant's haunt in its heyday, comparable to a five-star hotel today. Inside, the four-story structure is a marvel of pure geometry. Each floor has three or four rooms to a side, each opening onto an internal veranda that overlooks the central courtyard. The ground floor and the "first" floor



are graced by heavy cedar beams, the third-floor veranda boasts a geometric latticework railing, while the top-floor veranda is shaded by delicately columned wood screens hinting at the Andalusian influences that played such a key role in the cultural evolution of Fez itself.

The rooms themselves are plain: There is no hint that they may have been more sumptuous during the golden age of Fez. Perhaps this is because much decoration was removed later, reflecting the decline of the city in the 17th and 18th centuries, and the hotel was used to house pack animals. In our own century, it housed students and suffered from a poorly conceived redecoration and renovation effort in 1944. Fortunately, however, the essential structure has survived.

Like many of the other sites being renovated in Fez, the Funduq Nejjarine is expected to have a new function. Planners say it will become a museum and an exhibition space for the works of local artisans, thus welcoming the artisan-descendants of guests long departed.



Far left box: Funduq Nejjarine's top veranda, overlooking an inner courtyard, is shaded by Andalusian-style wooden screens.

Left: Decorative detail surrounds an arch in the Attarine madrasah.



It is a social as well as a restoration project.

> ABDELLATIF EL HAJJAMI

A view inside the ninth-century Karaouine Mosque, left, the best known of the 320 houses of worship in Fez deemed worthy of preservation. Another is Zawiyat Ahmed Tijani Mosque, at right. Médina de Fès and more practically as ADER-FES. An architect by profession and a native of Fez, El Hajjami has served in his post since it was created almost 10 years ago.

Using two main offices, one in a restored merchant's home near the Palais Jamaï in Fez El Bali Old Fez - and the other in a discreet villa in the French-built Ville Nouvelle, El Hajjami frequently works 18-hour days. "To know something like this, you must live with it," he says. His duties go far beyond those of an architect: He directs a staff of 160 workers and artisans, including an engineer, three architects, an archeologist, a geologist, a lawyer and various computer and documentation specialists.

The restoration project has already identified 11 madrasahs, 320 mosques, 270 funduqs and over 200 hammams (public baths), houses or public ovens worthy of preservation. Some structures are famous: The Karaouine Mosque, the Bou Anania madrasah, the Horlogerie (a clepsydra, or water clock), the Nejjarine Fountain and the Funduq Nejjarine are but a few. Others are only known to locals, who feel they nonetheless represent key aspects of the city's cultural heritage.

"We have identified all structures, not just the monuments," says El Hajjami.

Part of what makes this restoration project unique is broad range of artistic styles and epochs represented by the various monuments, structures and even entire quarters being preserved. But then, Fez today isn't just one city; it is three. There is Fez El Bali, the ancient heart, founded almost 1200 years ago. Then there is Fez El Jdid (New Fez), a mere 700 years old. And finally, there is the Ville Nouvelle, built as an administrative center by the French at the beginning of this century.

Although most attention is being paid to the restoration of Fez El Bali, site of the city's most famous monuments, care is being given to the city's two other principal districts. Restorers say they want to preserve the best of each age - and that involves more than physical repairs, for many see the restoration as an opportunity to revitalize a key center of Islamic culture.

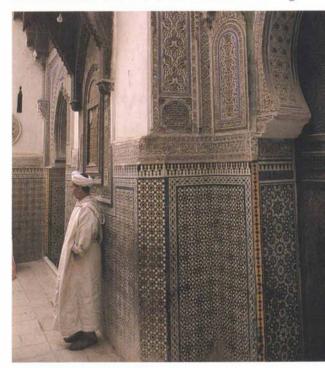
"We now have a new enterprising spirit, but what should we do with it?" asks Nourredine Ayouche, a Fez-born merchant based in Casablanca. "We must rebuild the image of Fez. It is a universal city. We must foster anew the creative spirit in a city that has already produced great philosophers, poets, artists and builders."

When defining Fez, Ayouche uses the French idiom: "It is *une ville authentique* – a real city," he says. "One finds things there which exist nowhere else."

This fact helps explain why the citizens of Fez-Fassis - are so proud of their city. It is a pride that rests on the knowledge that theirs is a unique center of arts, learning and religion. Fassis go about their lives much as they always have, despite the large numbers of tourists and students who come from all over the world to visit and study. They wear their jellabas and sip endless glasses of sweet

mint tea as part of their birthright, and until recently were content to smile benignly at the world around them. But by the early 1970's, civic leaders in Fez knew something was wrong. Many cherished monuments were falling apart, and the influx of rural workers - familiar in every developing country - threatened to overwhelm the city's infrastructure. Gradually, with help at the national and international level, they developed a plan that could give Fez a unique facelift, to make up for the neglect of earlier centuries and restore its architectural glories – while enabling its communities of craftsmen to flourish in centuries to come.

Their efforts got a boost in 1976, when UNESCO declared safeguarding the city of Fez to be "a duty of all mankind." In 1980, UNESCO declared Fez a "world heritage city," and the organization's director-general at the time, Amadou-Mahtar M'Bow, called it "a signal example of what men, moved by the same faith and the same ideal, and coming



together from different horizons – from Kairouan or from Córdoba, from east or north or south have been able to achieve in common."

Fez is the first Islamic and Arab city to be designated a World Heritage Site, joining Venice and Havana among others. But, as M'Bow pointed out, the restoration of Fez "is by its nature a campaign without precedent in the activities of UNESCO."

The restoration effort has drawn on the efforts of all levels of Moroccan society, rich and poor, private and public.

Morocco's King Hassan and other members of the royal family have played active roles in promoting it. Not long ago, the king declared that "the historic role of Fez in the consolidation of civilization in Morocco and in spreading the light of faith and knowledge [make] its restoration one of the missions which it is incumbent on us to accomplish.... Our duty is to instill new life into it

and to renovate it so that it may find its ancient traditions once again."

Ironically, says Sylvio Mutal, an urban specialist with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the city's present problems may in part be a result of its past success. "The ancient city was not abandoned," he says. "Far from that, it remains an essential center of production; some two-thirds of the inhabitants of the metropolis live there. Rather, what happened could be seen as the overactivation of the center of a fragile city that, in many ways, remains an exemplary model."

The result, says Mutal, is that pressures mounted with which the city could not cope, to the point that precious architectural ensembles became dilapidated, the ecological balance broke down and water supply systems became saturated, and the city's traditional craft industries were threatened.

The restoration plan calls for depopulating the old city – Fez El Bali – by shifting most of the current inhabitants to new satellite cities and indus-

trial parks. This process has already begun.

When the city was declared a World Heritage Site in 1980, it had 600,000 inhabitants, of whom 300,000 lived in the old quarter. Since then, through various inducements, the population of Fez El Bali has been reduced to a more manageable 200,000, while the total urban area has grown to 700,000. Yet the ancient heart remains densely populated, and at times that density threatens to destroy it. Planners would ultimately like to expand the satellite cities and see the com-

bined population of Fez El Bali and Fez El Jdid reduced to about 100,000.

Planning along these lines began more than 20 years ago, and has involved input from local citizens, national agencies and the international community. In 1972, the Moroccan government turned to UNESCO and UNDP for assistance in preparing an inventory of Fez's buildings; later it turned to those same agencies for assistance in preparing a master plan for the restoration. Key planning sessions took place in 1976, 1982 and 1988, in addition to several public hearings held in Fez and in Casablanca.

When restoration plans were unveiled at a symposium in Casablanca in January of last year, they showed just how complete the thinking has been: There were panel discussions on culture and civilization, to be sure. But projects dealing with the urban environment, health and sports, and development of the regional economy were also

displayed. Planners showed how they are seeking to preserve the appearance of ancient buildings, while installing high-tech cable lines and other necessities of modern life. Several architects displayed renditions of vast proposed housing and industrial projects for the Ville Nouvelle and satellite cities. Discussions ranged from the preservation of a 1000-year-old mosque to the building of a new soccer stadium.

As the restoration project moves from planning to execution, it is expected to have its most dramatic impact on the merchants and artisans of Fez El Bali. Only the ubiquitous pack mules seem unaffected by this, retaining their indifference to tourist and citizen alike, commanding the narrow streets which lead from Bab Bou Jeloud down to the Karaouine Mosque at the center of the oldest part of the city. This may change, as many shops which the pack mules serve have already had to curtail their activities because of the restoration work in their vicinity. But few merchants seem to mind. Raiss Abderrafie, a cloth merchant in Fez El Bali, reflected the attitude of many, noting that "while it is causing some difficulties now, we will have a more beautiful city afterward."

Although the final master plan has yet to be completed, work has already begun on a number of historic sites as well as private facilities. "The major problems of the restoration are now known," says Miloud Glibi, director of the Municipal Agency for the Protection of Fez. "The studies are complete."

Raising the necessary funds to realize the complete project continues to be a major problem; with cuts in UN funding and Morocco itself heavily in debt, much depends on private donors and foreign assistance. Of the \$600 million estimated cost, some \$120 million will be provided by state or local authorities, and another \$190 million by "beneficiaries" – for example, the members of a hammam users association, or those who will inhabit restored or new housing, or the merchants in the immediate vicinity of a given monument. The balance, approximately \$290 million, will come from gifts and subsidies.

While Fassi merchants, both in Fez and elsewhere, are expected to contribute a healthy share of the donations, appeals are being made throughout the Arab world, as well as to international agencies and individuals concerned with preserving this unique cultural landscape.

The restoration of Fez is thus as much an international project as a matter of national pride. While it is a favored charity of King Hassan II, it has also received assistance and funding from UNESCO, UNDP, Arab and European governments and individuals – including a private donation from Queen Margrethe II of Denmark.

Funding is only one of several challenges facing planners. So much groundwork has had to be done. "Everything about this project surprises me," El Hajjami says. First, the city had to be properly mapped, so restorers knew what they would be working with. Laws had to be developed to

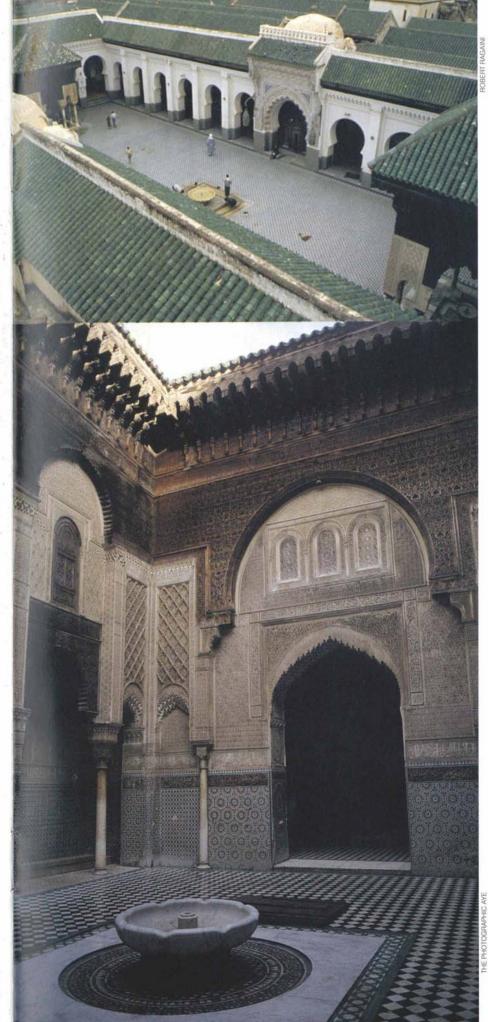
Zellij tile-cutters, left, prepare tiles for Fez restoration work. At right are the main courtyard and ablution fountain of the historic Karaouine Mosque.



We will have a more beautiful city afterward.

RAISS ABDERRAFIE

The courtyard of the Attarine madrasah, right, built in 1346 under the Marinids, is a fine example of the sequential use of zellij, carved plaster and carved cedarwood.



protect sites and to enable restorers to take title. New techniques and technologies had to be developed, and old crafts revived.

The project has already had a significant impact on urban planners and archeologists elsewhere. Special computer software was developed to plot each building, its structural condition, and its age. And the Moroccans have set up an Institute for Traditional Building Skills, which now has 15 students, to help revive such long-lost arts as the carved filigree plasterwork which graces many Fassi monuments.

El Hajjami and others know that appearances are important. Over the past century, many buildings were marred by the impedimenta of modern life - electric wiring, bare lights and television antennae. These things are being removed from public sight, and walls and roofs restored to their original style. Cables are to be laid so that those who live in the old city can nonetheless enjoy modern conveniences, while future growth will be carefully controlled.

"The operation exemplifies, by virtue of its scope, one of the major challenges to which humanity must rise if it is to preserve and enrich its cultural heritage in the face of accelerated modernization and industrialization," said UNESCO'S M'Bow. "This challenge will tax man's capacities and imagination to the full."

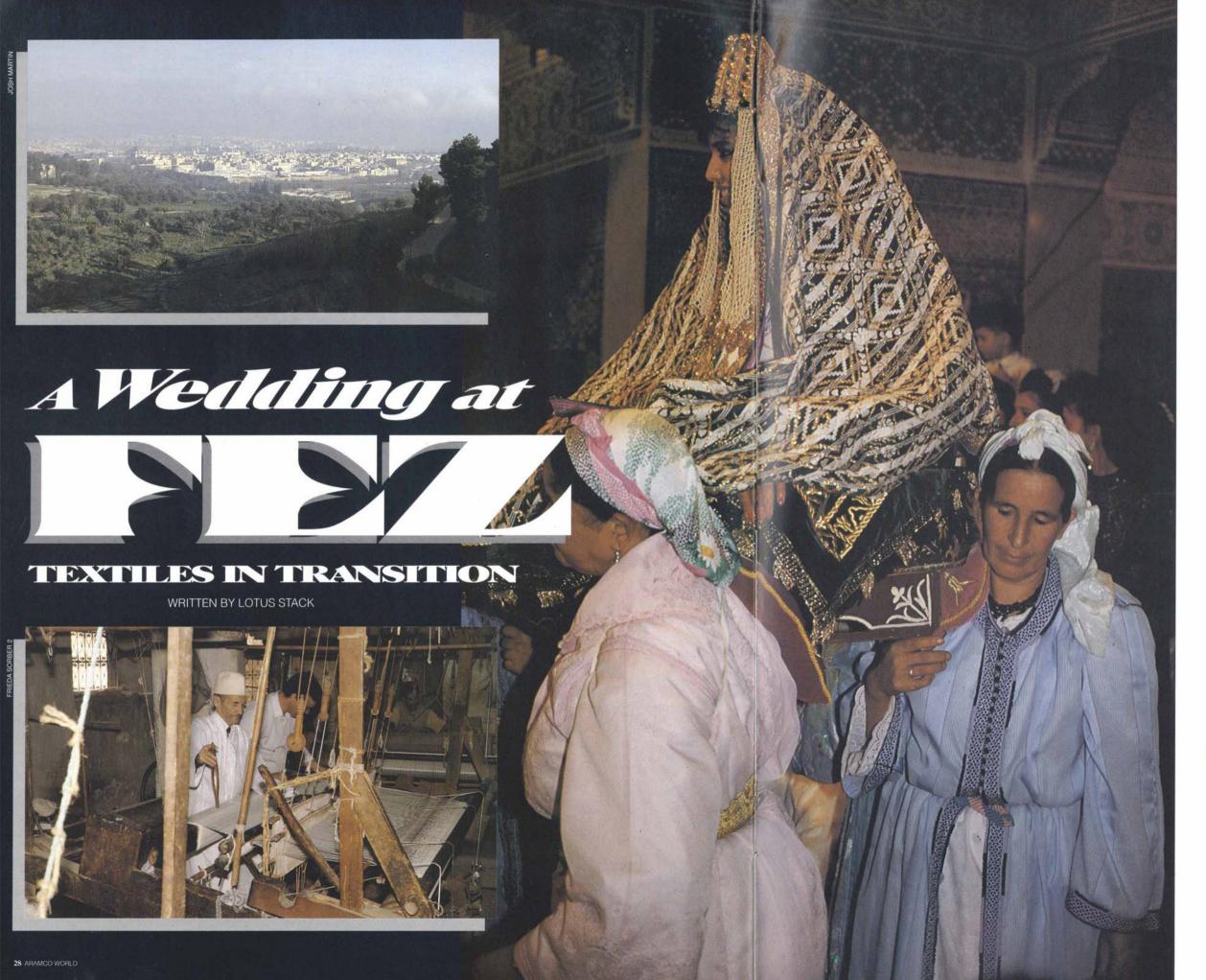
Each ancient site presents unique problems. At the Attarine *madrasah*, for example, there has been concern that the restoration of tile surfaces could weaken the underlying structure by exposing ancient clay to the elements and by causing vibrations which might dislodge ancient mortar. In the Bou Anania madrasah, archeologists needed to take extra time to explore the original substructure and report on the engineering used to support the current structure. At the Funduq Nejjarine, craftsmen had to be taught ancient skills to adequately restore stone, plaster and wood panels without jeopardizing the physical or esthetic qualities of the building (See sidebar, page 23).

"We developed a strategy to identify the risks and effects," says El Hajjami. He adds, "One cannot begin a restoration project like this without considering the total environment. We are working with a living city at the same time as with a monument."

Restoration work has already begun on several of the most famous sites - scaffolding now enshrouds many mosques and *madrasahs* in Fez El Bali, including the Bou Anania *madrasah*, the Horlogerie, the Karaouine Mosque and the Funduq Nejjarine. A dozen historic houses are also being repaired, using traditional material and designs.

El Hajjami, aware of the disruption this can cause, is determined to live up to his responsibilities both as the director of the restoration project and as a Fassi. "This is not just a matter of restoring monuments," he says. "It involves improving life for all the citizens of Fez. It is a social as well as a restoration project."

Josh Martin, a New York-based consultant and journalist, specializes in Middle Eastern cultural and economic developments.



y favorite way of traveling to Fez is to drive down through Spain and take the ferry from Algeciras, near Gibraltar, across the Strait to Ceuta, between Tetouan and Tangier. Fez is a few hours' drive south from Ceuta, and once across the Rif mountains, you can see the picture-book medieval city lying several kilometers off in a fertile valley.

When we arrive in Fez this time, we will be working within the walls of the city's oldest sector, Fez El Bali, sometimes called the medina – enticing and exotic with its narrow streets, closely built houses and beautiful inner courtyards. The purpose of our visit: to attend and videotape the preparations and ceremonies surrounding a traditional Moroccan wedding. Our focus will be the traditional textiles that are so much a part of life in old Fez.

I first visited Morocco in 1987, drawn by a report that two drawlooms were still being used by weavers trained in production work. The drawloom, a traditional weaving apparatus used to make elaborately patterned cloth, was a vital part of the history of textiles for at least a thousand years. For all practical purposes, however, it was replaced by the jacquard loom, developed by the French at the beginning of the 19th century. Today, the drawloom is generally found only in museums or at special demonstration sites in historic weaving centers, such as Lyon, France, and Cheng-du, China.

To hear of a place where the drawloom was still a viable part of the economy was exciting, and I hoped that a visit would give me a better understanding of how the drawloom really worked. A weaver working on a demonstration loom is going to operate somewhat differently from a weaver who makes his living from what he produces, since what is possible and what is practical are quite often two different things.

I went to Morocco that first time with Frieda Sorber, curator of the Vrieselhof Textile Museum in Belgium. In Morocco we met up with Louise Mackie, an Islamic-textile scholar at the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto, who had first told us of the Fez drawlooms. My initial visit showed me how much there was to learn; subsequent fieldwork in 1989 and 1990 taught me much about the cultural complexities of a society that values fine textiles.

Mackie, Sorber and I realized that the textile traditions of Fez were in an important transitional phase. For this brief period in the city's long history, traditional master craftsmen continue to weave their fabrics according to centuries-old techniques, side-by-side with weavers employing modern machines and methods. This rare moment in time had to be documented. Mackie developed the idea of focusing on a wedding – a common cultural experience where textiles played an important role. She would examine embroidery, Sorber the *passementerie*, or decorative trim, and I the handwoven fabrics.

Susan Schaefer Davis, a cultural anthropologist with considerable Moroccan expertise, and Mark Stanley, a video producer with whom I had collaborated on museum projects, joined our working group. We also received help from the Moroccan government, whose

officials were extremely cooperative, introducing us to numerous local officials and craftspersons. It was through exposure to their working lives that we gained an understanding of contemporary, as well as historical, textile production in Fez and of the important role fabrics have played in cultural development.

Moroccan weddings are important social gatherings, and the preparations can become quite complicated. Often a *neggafa*, a highly trained wedding consultant who serves a seven- to 10-year apprenticeship, is hired to organize and manage the entire event. The wedding of Maryam and Hassan, which we have arrived to document, will be handled by *neggafa* Hajja Habiba and consist of four major celebrations in as many days – a swirl of activity involving many changes of clothing. Some of these outfits can be used again after the wedding, but the traditional wedding costume and other specialized items are for one-time use only, and are to be obtained from the *neggafa*.

Today the wedding caftan is sometimes made of machine-woven, traditionally-patterned fabric, but the wedding veil continues to be made by hand on a drawloom. Like most handwoven textiles, the veil is commissioned: Orders are quite specific and the neggafa will indicate color and motif preferences within the traditional design parameters of striped fabric and a pattern woven with metal threads.

It takes about 15 minutes to walk from the neggafa's house, in a residential neighborhood off a main shopping street, to the weaver's workshop, located in a crafts area. Abdelkader Ourregli's workshop is of average size, with four looms: three drawlooms and one flyshuttle loom for simple fabrics. Ourregli owns all the equipment and is the last of the drawloom weavers in the old city; in fact he is the only weaver in Morocco who depends on this specialized type of production for his livelihood. He sometimes hires other weavers when the workload gets too heavy, but it is becoming more difficult to find help, because only older weavers have had the special training needed to operate the complicated drawloom equipment. These days he often keeps one loom set up just for wedding veils. He will prepare the loom with enough white thread for several veils and will dye individual lengths of the warp on the loom as special orders come in - a very efficient way of expediting individual orders.

After the weaver has woven the fabric, the veil is taken to a finisher who will tie all the warp ends, creating elaborate knotted fringes. This job is usually done by women who work in their homes. The completed veil, an important part of the traditional wedding costume, is about 60 centimeters (two feet) wide and some four meters (over four yards) long.

For part of the wedding celebration, the groom will wear the traditional *jellaba*. Unlike the bride's outfit, this robe-like garment is still frequently used as everyday wear. The most eminent *jellaba* weaver in town is Haj Tahar Hajoui, who, by virtue of his reputation and seniority, is the head of the weavers cooperative and thus the prime adjudicator of disputes among the city's weavers. Haj Tahar owns his workshop and hires other weavers to work for him. Now in his late eighties and nearly blind, he no longer weaves him-



Previous spread: The veiled bride is carried in on a platform draped with gold-thread embroidery; inset are a view of Fez, and weaver Haj Tahar Hajoui in his workshop. This spread, clockwise from upper left: Hajoui's son, Dris; one of the Lazrak sisters at work; "behja" fabric woven by Abdelkader Ourregli, with detail; embroidery thread spools in the Kissaria; Azzedine Ziari in his passementerie shop. At right: tailor Lahcen

Barakat and a detail of a

caftan finished by him.

self, but still supervises the workshop's activities. The two weavers he employs regularly have worked for him for many years; like other craft workers in the city, they are paid by the piece.

The workshop specializes in weaving the finest *jellaba* fabric, made of silk and wool threads imported from Italy. The shop also makes a quality *jellaba* fabric from locally spun, textured wool thread called *hubba* – sometimes referred to as *couscous*, because its nubby texture resembles Morocco's national semolina dish of the same name. For handwoven *jellaba* fabrics of rayon and polyester, a flyshuttle loom is often used. This faster means of production can be used because the synthetic thread is stronger and requires less care during the weaving process.

Unlike the vanishing breed of drawloom weavers – "Think of pattern weavers as you think of the dead," laments Ourregli – the *jellaba* fabric weavers are flourishing. Apprentices are many, and young weavers are saving to buy new flyshuttle looms, which they can house in co-op buildings. They can thus work for themselves even if they can't afford their own shop.

Haj Tahar's son Dris owns a shop in the section of the medina where handwoven *jellaba* cloth is sold. When weavers are not busy with commissions, and if capital is available, they will sometimes weave yardage to be sold in these specialized stores. Most of the retail shops have connections with individual workshops; some own the looms and hire weavers.

A customer can commission cloth directly from a weaver or purchase fabric already made. A large percentage of men's *jellaba* fabric is handwoven, while most of the textiles used for women's clothing are industrially manufactured. Most people are particular about their traditional clothing and, regardless of the cloth, they have the garment made by a tailor.

Before visiting the tailor, we stop by Hajja Sa'dia Bennis's house to see an interesting type of machine embroidery becoming popular for one type of wedding outfit. Bennis has become quite famous since making a wedding dress for a daughter of Moroccan king Hassan II. She lives in a typical traditional house, built 30 or 40 years ago, consisting of a number of rooms off a covered central courtyard. In several of these rooms, she has installed sewing machines and hired young women to do various styles of machine embroidery. Bennis herself takes the orders, makes up the designs and supervises the work.

The streets of the medina are like a maze and, until one gets used to the lay of the land, it takes a bit of doing to find one's destination. However, the advantage of this is that one is constantly discovering new things and places. One day, on the way to the tailor's, I took a wrong turn and happened upon a reed-maker at work in a corner shop. (The reed of a loom acts both as a warp spacer and as a beater which aligns the weft threads.) The realization then hit me that there was a whole sub-economy operating here that supports the textile producers. Another time, I found a shuttle-maker in the woodworking area and makers of other weaving tools in the metalworking area of the medina.

Lahcen Barakat, the tailor, is well established and has several apprentices; his shop produces all types of traditional clothing for both men and women. A Moroccan tailor does a good deal more than cut cloth and sew seams. For a wedding caftan ordered by a neggafa, he will work with another specialist such as Azzedine Ziari, who owns a passementerie shop.

Moroccan clothing is ornamented with elaborate braids, woven bands, twisted cords and distinctive buttons. The common element in all of these trimmings is rayon thread, and Moroccans are very particular about color combinations. One area of the Kissaria – an enclosed shopping area in the "downtown" section of the medina – offers a number of passementerie shops that sell small units of thread, often in overwhelming selections. A few shops also sell ready-made trims, but these are often of lesser quality, and a good tailor will usually not waste his time working with them.

Frequently, Barakat will bring a customer's fabric to Ziari, who will offer suggestions of possible color combinations. If a customer has particular ideas, he or she will sometimes purchase the thread from the passementerie shop and give it to the tailor with the



cloth, but it is the *passementerie* maker who usually arranges for making the special braids and trims. Traditionally, nine-strand looped braids are made by women working at home, who are paid by the meter and work on specific commissions in which individual patterns and particular color arrangements are specified. Today, however, a few small workshops have electric braiding machines, which are used to make up bands of a few meters' length to order. In either case, one or more of the colors in the braid will be used for the handmade buttons – and a woman's ensemble may often require more than a hundred buttons.

The best buttons are made in the nearby Berber town of Sefrou. Little girls learn button-making from their mothers, and as young women they often supplement the family's income by filling orders for the Fez marketplace. Sunlight provides the best working conditions and women frequently work on their roofs.

The button loops and other edge trimmings are made by the tailor as he sews the garment. Distinctive seam finishes are made with five warp threads, which

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are manipulated by a young boy, usually six to 10 years old, with the tailor's sewing thread functioning as the weft. This warp-faced edge finish is frequently mistaken for a table-woven structure. Due to the initial length of the warp threads for this trim, it is not unusual to see little boys standing in the middle of the street – automobiles are barred from the medina – manipulating these threads as the tailor works.

Maryam, the bride, has more to prepare than simply her wedding garments. The first of the wedding celebrations, referred to as the "furnishing party," focuses on preparation of her new home. Household belongings are delivered with much fanfare to the couple's new apartment. With the exception of a few male members of the family who help with the heavier items, this is primarily a women's party, with a swirl of activity as they prepare the new residence. One of the first things to come off the truck is a handmade carpet. Maryam's Rabat-style carpet was made in a small local workshop, but she could just as easily have chosen a carpet made in a government co-op or one made by a woman working at home. All carpets are inspected and graded to government standards.



Another important household item is the *frash*, or Moroccan couch, which fits against the walls of the main room of the house. Its wooden base often features carved decoration; large mattress-like base cushions are covered with ornately patterned fabric, as are the side and back cushions. The *frash*, a dowry item, is a major expense for the bride's family: 80 to 100 yards of fabric are frequently required to make the cushions. The finest selection of these upholstery fabrics is that offered by the Ben Cherif weavers.

The Ben Cherif family has distinguished itself in Fez for at least two centuries. Ben Cherif craftsmen took awards for their weaving at the Paris exposition of 1876, and by the 1920's, the family was selling textiles in the United States through a Boston outlet. In the late 1930's, however, the business suffered at the hands of French imports and was reduced to two looms. The tide turned back in the family's favor during World War II due to wartime conditions, including restrictions on imports, and the rise of Moroccan

nationalism, which stressed the importance of native traditions. By the late 1950's, the family owned four large workshops and kept 60 hand-looms in operation.

In the 1960's, the family knew that it must mechanize to keep up with consumer demand. The Ben Cherifs purchased a number of used jacquard looms from France and began the transition. Today they are fully mechanized, with top-of-the-line equipment. Many of the generation just entering the family business are university-trained, and several have specialized in textile engineering.

The managers of the largest Ben Cherif shop, located in the Ville Nouvelle, or "new town," are Othman Ben Cherif and his uncle Abdel Karim. They keep four drawlooms set up an area adjacent to the main showroom, operated by men who were originally employed when all production was by hand. One of the drawlooms is often used to fill special orders from the king, who frequently gives handwoven textiles as diplomatic gifts. Othman Ben Cherif realizes that hand production is seldom practical today, but he too believes that old traditions should not be forgotten.

While in the shop, we meet a young Moroccan woman and her mother. The daughter, a Frenchtrained lab technician, now lives in Casablanca, but she wants the finest traditional fabric for her new *frash*, and so travels to Fez to shop at Ben Cherif's. The family's fabric is so well known that certain textile patterns are now simply called "Ben Cherif."

Another member of the extended family, Mohammed Ben Cherif, owns a separate, smaller fabric store with his sons. In an area off the showroom, he has an unusual three-man drawloom which requires two drawboys, rather than the usual one, to control the pattern. The fabric woven on this loom is a type of imitation embroidery used especially for the lower pillow in the corner areas of the *frash*.

The second event of Maryam's wedding celebration is a "henna party," when the bride's hands, and sometimes her feet, are painted with henna paste in elaborate lace-like designs, a time-consuming process that requires great skill on the part of the painter. The ritual involves use of elaborate gold-embroidered accoutrements, including two pillows upon which the bride's hands rest, and covers for various bowls and containers and for the tray on which they rest. Nowadays, henna-set covers include one for a Kleenex tissue box as well. Usually the embroidered covers are owned by the *neggafa*; she orders them from one of many shops that specialize in gold embroidery.

Mohammed Dabbagh who owns one of these shops, often works with *neggafas* to determine design, number of pieces in the set, color and so on. Dabbagh purchases the ground fabric if the *neggafa* has not already done so, arranges with a template maker to create the design and then hires a woman to embroider the fabrics. Often he will also supply the thread. If time is an issue, several embroiderers will work on the various pieces simultaneously. When Dabbagh is dealing with clothing, however, he will not allow more than one embroiderer to work on a single caftan, because the subtle differences in individual styles are more noticeable on a garment.

The frash or Moroccan couch, left, with its ornate cushions, is an essential part of the traditional Moroccan sitting room. This classic caftan, upper right, with an underlying detail, dates from the 1960's.



Othman Ben Cherif, above, and his uncle Abdel Karim manage the largest of the family textile shops.

Arabic calligraphy in the shape of a caïque, center right, was woven on the drawloom by

Ben Cherif weavers.

A drawloom also produced this brocaded belt, lower right, probably dating from early in this century.



Throughout the medina are a number of buildings that rent workshop space to craftsmen. One tenant is Lahcen Moussaid, template maker, who provides designs to several embroidery-shop owners. He is amazingly creative, has hundreds of design elements from which to choose, and is quite willing to make variations as needed. He usually cuts several design units at one time. The templates for gold-thread embroidery are often cut from yellow paper which covers the color of the ground fabric and enhances the embroidery work. The cloth, with all templates applied, is given to the embroiderer, who generally works at home; she then covers each template with a type of couched gold-work embroidery.

Long before this stage in the wedding preparations, Maryam's mother had to go to yet another embroidery shop to order sheets for the wedding bed, which are to be decorated with the famous Fez embroidery, a type of reversible cross-stitch. A bride has a number of different patterns from which to choose, but the monochromatic, elaborate Fez style is traditional. A bed-sheet can take up to two years to complete.

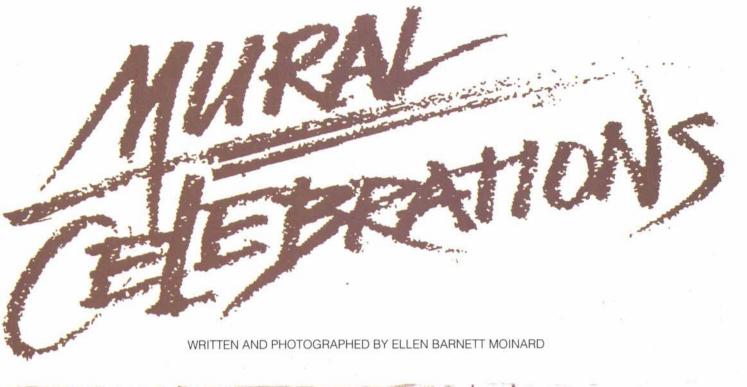
The Lazrak sisters live in a fading but beautiful 18th-century house. They do a little embroidery for shops, but thanks to a word-of-mouth network, they usually work directly with their customers, avoiding the middleman. This also means, however, that they must carry the cost of their materials themselves. Fatiha, the oldest sister, with whom we talked, specializes in Fez-stitch embroidery, often considered the most difficult of the embroidery styles, while her other sisters Asma' and Naima do gold work and machine embroidery. In the summer, when there is more daylight, she can use up two skeins of DMC floss in a day, if she works very diligently, but in winter just a little more than one skein is a day's work.

One of the city's top gold-embroidery artists is Ahmed Ben Yahya, head of the design school in Fez. As an artist, he is very concerned about the fate of the craft traditions that have always been so much a part of Fez life. He is trying to develop a meaningful 20th-century approach to gold embroidery, incorporating Morocco's Islamic heritage as well as traditional skills. At present, he is designing calligraphic images which are then embroidered with gold thread by the finest craftspersons of the city. He works in conjunction with his brother, who runs a gold-thread embroidery workshop catering to well-to-do residents of Fez.

The last two celebrations of a traditional Moroccan wedding are large evening parties, the first hosted by the bride's family and the second by the groom's. The women guests at both are elaborately attired in traditional Moroccan clothing, as are many of the men. These garments, along with the 10 beautiful outfits worn by the bride, call to mind the many specialized craft workers who have employed their skills so artistically in connection with this event. I realize what a special city Fez is: Here is a society where both producers and consumers value tradition highly enough to keep it alive and prospering in their daily lives.

Lotus Stack is a curator and head of the textile department at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, and president of the Textile Society of America. She expects to complete her video on traditional Moroccan textile production in the coming months.

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ibrant, colorful, sometimes naïve, intriguing murals decorate the outside walls of houses in Farafra, an idyllic oasis in Egypt's Western Desert. The paintings are the work of Badr, a local artist, and they commemorate the *hajj*, the pilgrimage to Islam's holy shrines in Saudi Arabia.

Badr, who observes local custom by using only his first name, has been painting pilgrimage murals for Farafra's 200 families for the past 14 years. He is one of a new generation of regional Egyptian folk artists who are continuing the tradition of hajj painting in rural villages throughout Upper Egypt and in the far-flung oases of Egypt's Western Desert.

"The inspiration for my paintings comes from the Qur'an, from the desert, from my love for my village and the people here," Badr says of his work, which combines his poetry and art with decorative script and Qur'anic verses.

His paintings are a lively combination of traditional Islamic themes and local Egyptian folk art, their bold patterns and bright colors based both on regional traditions that originated a few thousand years ago and on newer Islamic motifs in innumerable variations.

Integrating the mystical with the everyday, blending fine art and decorative crafts to express religious beliefs, the paintings are personal celebrations that reflect the local culture of each village and the tastes of each family, portraying the joyful journey of the fortunate houseowner to the holy city of Makkah, a journey all Muslims aspire to make at least once in a lifetime (See *Aramco World*, July-August 1992).

Invariably centered on a depiction of the Ka'bah in Makkah's Sacred Mosque, around which pilgrims make seven circuits as part of the pilgrimage ritual, the paintings often also show the Prophet's Mosque in the holy city of Madinah, its elaborate minarets and green dome flanked by spacious colonnades, or the Quba' mosque, the first of Islam. These structures are portrayed symbolically in the paintings, without reference to their actual geographical locations.

The individual pilgrim's means of transportation is always shown as an ancillary part of the painting. Every type and shape of large or small airplane is carefully illustrated. Smoke-puffing trains may be added; sometimes the trains are simple connected squares poised on a line which represents the rails. Camel caravans – or a pilgrim leading a single camel – cross the desert. Boats resembling floating, multi-tiered wedding cakes and bearing names such as *Makkah* or *Salam* ("Peace") are frequently included in the murals.

فالمن فضل المرك

For the 13 centuries until 1950, the hajj journey from Upper Egypt to Makkah took more than a month; there was no way for the pilgrim to stay in touch with his family during that time. It was a journey into the unknown, with an uncertain conclusion, and the return of the traveler amounted almost to a rebirth. Joyful family members greeted the pilgrim at the boat in Suez or another Egyptian port, or at the hometown train station, or awaited the camel caravan's return to the oasis. Thus the hajj paintings expressed the family's happiness at the pilgrim's safe return, and at the same time provided religious inspiration to anyone viewing the murals.

Painter Mohammed

Ahmed Ibrahim

Murals celebrating the hajj are especially noteworthy in the Luxor area of Upper Egypt, including the west bank village of Gurna; in the small villages between the oases of Kharga and Dakhla, some 320 kilometers (200 miles) west of Luxor; and in Farafra, the most distant of the oases in Egypt's Western Desert. Egyptians in these villages are proud of their murals. Eager to share the significance of the hajj in their lives, they are hospitable to visitors admiring the decorations, offering tea and happy to pose – at times insisting on posing – for a portrait in front of their painting.

While the murals share similar themes, technique varies tremendously. Strict adherence to artistic principles is often less important than enthusiasm in the amateur paintings done by friends or family, with charming primitives often created in which the familiar elements of each work are reduced to simple, straightforward geometric shapes. In Gurna, an elderly *hagga*, or woman pilgrim, Umm Hussein Ibrahim, has painted her own mural, with the declarations "God is most great" and the Qur'anic verse "Now shall We turn thee to a *qiblah* [the direction of Makkah, for prayer] that shall please thee," written over and around the Ka'bah and her self-portrait.

Upper Egypt's heritage of wall murals has an ancient lineage: Witness the pharaonic-era wall paintings still visible, their bright colors intact after more than three millennia, in the west-bank tombs and the temples of the Luxor area along the Nile, and on frescoes preserved in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo, detailing the everyday life and culture of the time. The purpose of these pharaonic wall decorations was religious, showing the earthly accomplishments of those who commissioned the work, in hope that they would merit a happy existence after death.

Excavations at ancient Nishapur, in the mountains of northeastern Iran, have revealed a number of early Islamic ninth- and 10th-century frescoes and wall paintings. The detailing in the murals is

one of the few surviving records of local life and customs in that era. Their aniconic motifs, ingenious geometric patterns and floral decoration form endlessly varied segments that are echoed two centuries later in Fatimid art, which often utilized brilliant, complicated murals on the walls of palaces throughout the Near East.

During the Middle Ages, the Muslim merchant class patronized artists who created frescoes inspired by classic Islamic artistic themes; despite the differences in medium, scale and period, Islamic craftsmanship over the centuries demonstrated a stylistic cohesion based on cultural and religious ideals that continues today wherever Muslims have settled (See *Aramco World*, November-December 1985). Towns as far away as North and West Africa possess wall paintings in this tradition, adapted to local artistic styles.

In the old Nubian villages now inundated by the Aswan High Dam, whitewashed, mud-plastered houses were built by village women, who then

decorated the facades with paintings of traditional tribal designs, combining features and motifs of pharaonic inspiration with local traditional and Islamic patterns. Customarily, young girls created murals as part of their wedding preparations. The Nubian Kushafar people believed that the abstract, stylized trees and animal symbols painted in decorative arches above their windows and doors protected the house from evil spirits. The Kenuz of the north were particularly fond of rich, elaborate designs, based on floral abstracts, applied around windows and entrance doors, a tradition now being revived in some of the new Nubian villages near Aswan in Upper Egypt.

Hajj painting in Upper Egyptian villages was first recorded by anthropologists early in this century. Professor Winifred Blackman noted in 1920 in *The Fellahin of Upper Egypt* that some village houses were "decorated with coloured line-drawings of camels, boats, trains, trees.... Such artistic efforts denote that one or more members of the family inhabiting the house have performed the pilgrimage to Mecca."

Across the Nile from Luxor, the faded yellow walls of the west bank village of Old Gurna still show traces of early hajj murals — weathered, primitive abstracts in blacks and greens, usually painted by family members. Wherever Sa'idis, or Upper Egyptians, have settled in Egypt, they have carried the hajj-painting tradition with them. Among Badr's Berber, Bedouin and Egyptian ancestors was a grandfather from Asyut in Upper

Egypt who emigrated to Farafra – Badr remembers seeing hajj paintings in the oasis dating from his grandfather's time.

Forty years ago, Dr. Jean Michot described pilgrimage murals he had seen in the older sections of Cairo, areas occupied at that time by Sa'idis. Simple home-painted murals honoring the hajj can still be found in Cairo-area villages, such as Abu Sir near Saggara, but aside from these interesting examples, few of the paintings remain in Cairo today. In fact, hajj painting is seldom seen in the north of Egypt; the villagers of the el-Arish region of the north Sinai, for instance, shun such displays. In the north Sinai settlement of Salmana on the Mediterranean coast, school teacher Farid Mansour says the families in the area, most of them of Bedouin origin, have never had a tradition of wall decoration, preferring to honor a returned pilgrim quietly within the family circle.

But in the south of Egypt, hajj painting in all its exuberance continues to flourish; on Luxor's west

bank, the work of one of Gurna's local artisans, Abdul Malek, spills over the entire facade of a house in an elaborate, near-baroque scene filled with flowers, people, buildings and animals in bright greens, blues, pinks and yellows surrounding the basic elements of the pilgrimage scenes.

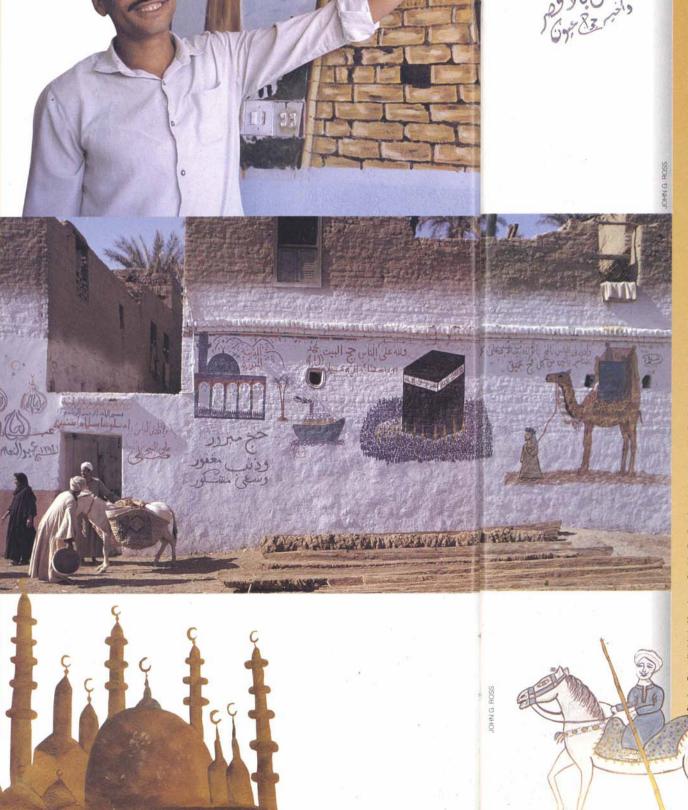
These seemingly unrelated elements, comprising a harmonious whole, are imbued with the same "whimsical creativity" praised by Islamic art historian

Richard Ettinghausen in his survey of medieval Islamic art.

In Farafra, Badr has given his murals a look that reflects the environment of the oasis and the surrounding deserts. Farafra, 515 kilometers (320 miles) from Cairo, was for centuries a vital watering place for camel caravans crossing the desert from North Africa to the Nile. Now, the oasis is reached by a rough desert road which first traverses a flat, barren desert, followed by a black desert whose surface iron deposits were mined in pharaonic times, and finally a white desert of wind-shaped monoliths and chalk inselbergs.

Over a family dinner, shared while sitting on rugs spread on the floor of Badr's desert home, with his parents, siblings and children around him, the artist discusses some of the inspirations for this work: his religion; his love for, and familiarity with, the warm, friendly people of the oasis; and his respect for the unearthly beauty of the surrounding white desert.

"My art, my poetry, just pours out of me," he declares. "I work very fast while I am inspired by





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the scriptures; my brush flies across the surface. Sometimes I can finish an entire mural in one day."

Although he has no formal training, Badr has always been an artist. "I can't remember when I was not drawing. As a very small child, I went with my father when he worked in the fields and I would draw in the sand."

He wants to pass along the artistic traditions of the oasis, and is always alert for local youngsters with talent – the son of the 'umdah, or village mayor, is one of his pupils. Badr has built by hand a small museum to preserve the cultural heritage of the oasis, and atop the museum is his airy, frond-roofed studio overlooking the desert on one side and the oasis, clustered around an ancient qasr, or palace, on the other.

In his studio, Badr explains how he processes the red, yellow and brown oxides – colors of the surrounding earth, which he gathers from springs in the area – mixing them with water to achieve the right consistency. Artists in pharaonic times used the same red, yellow and brown oxides.

Badr has added his own technique of thinning the paint, then blowing it onto the wall through a narrow tube, to give a delicate, airbrushed effect which adds to the mystical aura surrounding the pilgrimage elements in his paintings. The same softly blown finish is also effective with the stencils he uses for borders – he creates

an original stencil pattern each year. Since he must finish eight to 10 houses before the end of Dhu al-Hijjah, the month of the pilgrimage, this technique helps him to create the individual effect he wants for each painting, while still working rapidly. In Farafra, the pilgrim's family often redecorates the entire house while the pilgrim is en route, even adding or renovating rooms, as a surprise to honor the returning *hagg*. As a finishing touch, Badr is asked to paint scenes and Qur'anic quotations, both inside and out.

Like the other artists, Badr has a basic overall design for each of his murals: He includes a rectangle above the front door in which are placed the name of the pilgrim and the date that the hajj took place; adjoining this, he paints the Ka'bah and the Prophet's Mosque, with an airplane to one side, then appropriate Qur'anic verses to enhance the final effect.

"When I paint the hajj paintings, I match verses from the Qur'an to the scenes I paint," he says. When adjoining figural and epigraphic designs are

repeated on a wall, as they are in these murals, the effect is reinforced, encouraging the viewer's imagination to continue beyond the edges of the picture into infinite space.

In Luxor, as elsewhere in the region, Mohammed Ahmed Ibrahim's pilgrimage paintings refer to a well-known story or setting based on Qur'anic tradition. Mohammed, an elementary-school teacher in el-Baghdadi, a village on the Nile's east bank, has been creating hajj paintings for his neighbors for 10 years. A self-taught painter and son of a local farmer, he painted the inspirational murals at Mubarak Elementary School, where he is a faculty member, using the same techniques that he applies to his hajj paintings.

Discussing his pilgrimage murals, which combine aspects of modern urban art with traditional techniques, this pleasant, modest young man explains how he plans and executes the paintings during the busy pilgrimage month. As clients make arrangements for paintings to be completed before the return from Makkah, Mohammed

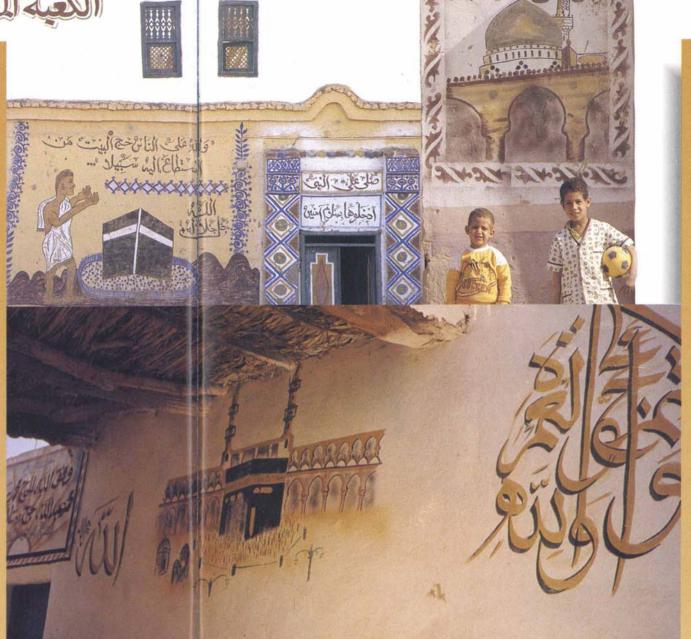
designs each mural, incorporating his interpretations of easily recognized religious themes. He then coordinates the overall finished mural with the wishes of his client, who may bring back snapshots of scenes and events from the journey to be included in the final version.

Mohammed and other hajj painters instinctively struc-

ture their work using what Islamic art expert Lois Lamya' al Faruqi calls "multi-focal organization of modular segments, no module taking precedence over another," a method used "in all places and at all periods of Islamic history."

In each pilgrimage mural, these modules are distinctive: the Ka'bah in black, or covered with the elaborately decorated *kiswah*, along with the Prophet's Mosque with its surrounding arches, dome and minarets. Other segments vary in each painting: a crescent moon and three stars illuminating the holy places; worshipers dressed in the *ihram*, the pilgrim's traditional white clothing, gathered in the *mataf*, the area around the Ka'bah in the Sacred Mosque; a Muslim kneeling on an intricately designed prayer rug.

Some paintings contain camels carrying a *mahmal*, a curtained litter used in caravans traveling overland to the holy sites. In a few murals, al-Buraq, the miraculous winged creature that carried the Prophet Muhammad in his Night Journey to Jerusalem, flies overhead at the top of the painting.





Depending on local custom, there can be vases, garlands and bouquets of flowers flanking doors and windows; roof lines bordered with an ornamental painted frieze; local wildlife – in Farafra, deer and birds – or exotic wildlife, such as lions and gazelles in Luxor.

As with the murals of pharaonic times and of ninth-century Nishapur, 20th-century hajj paintings illustrate everyday life: In village scenes, a woman milks a water buffalo, while another with a water jug on her head, accompanied by a smiling young boy, strolls under the palm trees; men play the flute and dance in a homecoming celebration.

Today's artists feel strongly that they must preserve this heritage for future generations. In Farafra, Badr uses his art to record his impressions of life in the oasis for the children of the village. He knows that their traditional way of life is rapidly disappearing with the advent of modern desert development programs.

Early Islamic art, according to experts Ettinghausen and Oleg Grabar, possessed "a vibrant quality which contributes to the dissolution of the two-dimensional composition by extending it subtly into depth; though the precise range of this spatial addition remains undefined, the artist has actually reached the third dimension."

Nowhere is this phenomenon more evident than in Balat, an Old Kingdom provincial capital, continuously inhabited for more than 2000 years, on the caravan route between the Kharga and Dakhla oases. The hamlet's smoothly rounded, whitewashed, mud-brick houses are adorned with hajj paintings so skillfully adapted to the shape of the walls, using shading and perspective, that the pilgrimage landmarks look three-dimensional and appear to float, weightless, in space.

Quotations from the Qur'an make especially effective wall decorations in Balat and Farafra. Often just one or two evocative words from a Qur'anic verse are enough to remind a Muslim, who learned to recite the Qur'an at an early age, of much longer passages. Modern decorative calligraphic friezes and stenciled designs, recalling the beautifully detailed early Egyptian pharaonic friezes seen in tombs and temples, are applied around doors, windows or an entire building, asking God's blessing on all within.

Enriched by ancient tradition, Egypt's heritage of pilgrimage paintings shows the unity of religion with everyday life, and contributes a vibrant, everchanging aspect to Islamic art.

Ellen Barnett Moinard, architectural librarian, free-lance writer and photographer, divides her time between the Middle East and the Pacific Northwest. Teaching About the Arab World and Islam is the theme of teacher workshops sponsored by the Middle East Policy Council in Washington, D.C., and conducted by AWAIR, Arab World And Islamic Resources and School Services of Berkeley, California. Confirmed sites and dates include: Youngstown [Ohio] State University, May 21; Ohio State University, Columbus, June 24; Texas Wesleyan University, Fort Worth, August 6; Central Missouri State University, Warrensburg, September 30; University of Kentucky, Lexington, October 23. For details, phone (202) 296-6767 or (510) 704-0517.

The Greek Miracle: Classical Sculpture From the Dawn of Democracy – the Fifth Century BC. This major exhibition commemorating 2500 years since the birth of democracy in Athens includes sculpture from Asia Minor as well as the Greek mainland. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, through May 23, 1993.

Current Archeology of the Ancient World. A series of talks on current research and discoveries. Among upcoming Middle Eastern or Islamic topics: The Queens of Egypt in the Ramessid Period (May 28). Musée du Louvre, Paris.

Amenophis III. This pharaoh, also known as Amenhotep III, ruled Egypt during a period of relative peace and prosperity (1417-1379 BC). The exhibit, featuring 150 works from major collections, highlights artistic production during his reign. Galeries nationales du Grand Palais, Paris, through May 31, 1993.

Howard Carter: Before Tutankhamun. The focus of this longawaited exhibition, marking the 70th anniversary of the discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb, is on the 30 years of archeology in Egypt that led up to the discovery. British Museum, London, through May 31, 1993.

Silk Road Coins: The Hirayama Collection. Without coins like these, with their designs, inscriptions and portraits of local rulers, little would be known of the Greek and nomadic kingdoms in Afghanistan and Pakistan from the third century BC to the sixth century of the current era. British Museum, London, through May 31, 1993.

Yemen: A Culture of Builders. This photographic exhibition takes an artistic look at the landscape, built form and ornamentation that characterize Yemeni architecture. Facultad de Arquitectura, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Mexico, Mexico City, May 31 through September 3, 1993; Field Museum, Chicago, September 27, 1993, through January 7, 1994.

The Munayyer Collection of antique Palestinian and Syrian costumes is touring public libraries in New Jersey.
Remaining schedule: Bridgewater public library, lune 1993.

African Themes. This display features photographs and prints of three artists inspired by Africa. British-African Faisal Ammar Abdu allah's photo-based artwork *Thalatha Haqq* (1992) demonstrates the revitalizing power of Islam in Africa. Victoria and Albert Museum, London, through June 6, 1993.

From the Treasuries of Eurasia. This exhibit of some 170 masterpieces of ancient art from 15 museums of the former Soviet Union represents 18 cultures, including the Egyptian, Urartian and others of the Middle East. City Gallery, Kyoto, Japan, from June 6 through July 4, 1993.

The Westward Migration of Chinese Blue and White Porcelain. Some 50 ceramic pieces from China, Iran, Vietnam, Turkey, Europe and America illustrate the spread of underglaze blue and white porcelain from China to the industrialized world. Minneapolis Institute of Arts, through June 6, 1993.

Reckless Peace. This Middle Eastern art exhibit features paintings by Chawky Frenn and an installation by Penny Williams-Yaqub entitled "City of Death Restaurant." Alif Gallery, Washington, D.C., through June 12, 1993.

Indian Paintings From the Jane Greenough Green Collection. Various schools of Indian painting are represented, covering the period from 1500 to 1900. Los Angeles County Museum of Art, through June 13, 1993.

EVENTS20

Freer Gallery of Art Reopening, This acclaimed national museum of Asian art, part of the Smithsonian Institution, reopens to the public on May 9, 1993, after more than four years of renovation. A new underground exhibition area links the Freer with the Smithsonian's other museum of Asian art, the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery. The 70year-old Freer Gallery houses one of the world's finest collections of Japanese, Chinese, Korean, South and Southeast Asian and Near Eastern art. The gallery's Islamic Art collection features three principal media architecture, the arts of the book (such as calligraphy and illumination), and the arts of the object, such as ceramics, metalwork, glass, ivory, woodwork and textiles. Founder Charles Freer was intrigued by the esthetic connections he saw between Chinese and Japanese ceramics and those of the Near East and Egypt - as well as by the historical interactions of these cultures, particularly via the Silk Route. These relationships in the first millennium of our era are highlighted in an opening exhibition in cooperation with the Sackler, "Luxury Arts of the Silk Route Empires." Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.



Freer treasures from Iran: a silver-and-gilt plate of the fourth century (top) and a glazed clay bowl of the 10th.

Images of a Queen's Power. Royal Tapestries of France. Ten tapestries from 17th-century Paris illustrate the life of a famous queen of antiquity, Artemisia of Caria, builder of the Mausoleum at Halicarnassus in Asia Minor. Minneapolis Institute of Arts, through June 20, 1993.

The George Ortiz Collection – Antiquities: Ur to Byzantium. For the first time, the public can view the vast range of this famous private collection. The exhibition features 51 artworks from the Middle East, including 25 from Sumer. Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow, through June 27, 1993

Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen, October 1 through December 31, 1993.

Sifting the Sands of Time: The Oriental Institute and the Ancient Near East. This exhibit traces the history of The Oriental Institute and its achievements in Near Eastern archeology. Oriental Institute Museum, Chicago, through June 30, 1993.

Turkish Traditional Art Today. This display of contemporary Turkish folk art features rugs, embroidery, clothing, ceramics, calligraphy and other media. Museum of International Folk Art, Santa Fe, New Mexico, through June 30, 1993.

Vanished Kingdoms of the Nile: The Rediscovery of Ancient Nubia traces 3500 years of the history and culture of ancient Nubia. Oriental Institute Museum, Chicago, through June 30, 1993.

The Mosaics of Jordan. An exhibition of fine Jordanian mosaic work, as carried on by local artisans long after the Romans left the country. Manchester [England] Museum, through July 3, 1993.

The Waking Dream: Photography's First Century – Photographs From the Gilman Paper Company Collection. Works from one of the world's finest private collections include the earliest photographs ever taken of the monuments along the Nile. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, through July 4, 1993.

L.A. Festival: Home, Place and Memory. Eight weeks of artistic events in the Los Angeles area focus this year on African, African-American and Middle Eastern culture and the arts. For information, phone (213) 240-7600. Various locations, Los Angeles, from mid-August.

Textiles From Byzantine Egypt. Featured are techniques and types of garments used in Egypt from the fourth to the seventh centuries. Ashmolean Museum, Gordon Child Museum, Oxford, England, through August 29, 1993.

Digging in Jordan: British Museum Excavations at Tell es-Sa'idiyeh. This site, thought to be the ancient city of Zaretan, was occupied from the early Bronze Age through about 700 BC. British Museum, London, September 15, 1993, through March 13, 1994.

Ancient Nubia: Egypt's Rival in Africa. Some 300 artifacts are on display from the museum's Nubian collection, including statues, inscriptions, pottery, bronze vessels, inlaid wood and faïence. University of Pennsylvania Museum, Philadelphia, through October 3, 1993.

Bahraini Artifacts. A new section has been added to the Nance Museum, thanks to donated artifacts. Featured are costumes, brassware, pottery, and other traditional items from Bahrain. Nance Museum & Gardens, near Kingsville, Missouri, through October 31, 1993.

The Nehru Gallery of Indian Art at the Victoria and Albert Museum features a new display of paintings and textiles tracing the history of pre-Moghul India, the Moghuls, the Deccan Sultanates, the Rajput Courts and British India. Victoria and Albert Museum, London, indefinitely.

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

Dhahran, Saudi Arabia.

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

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