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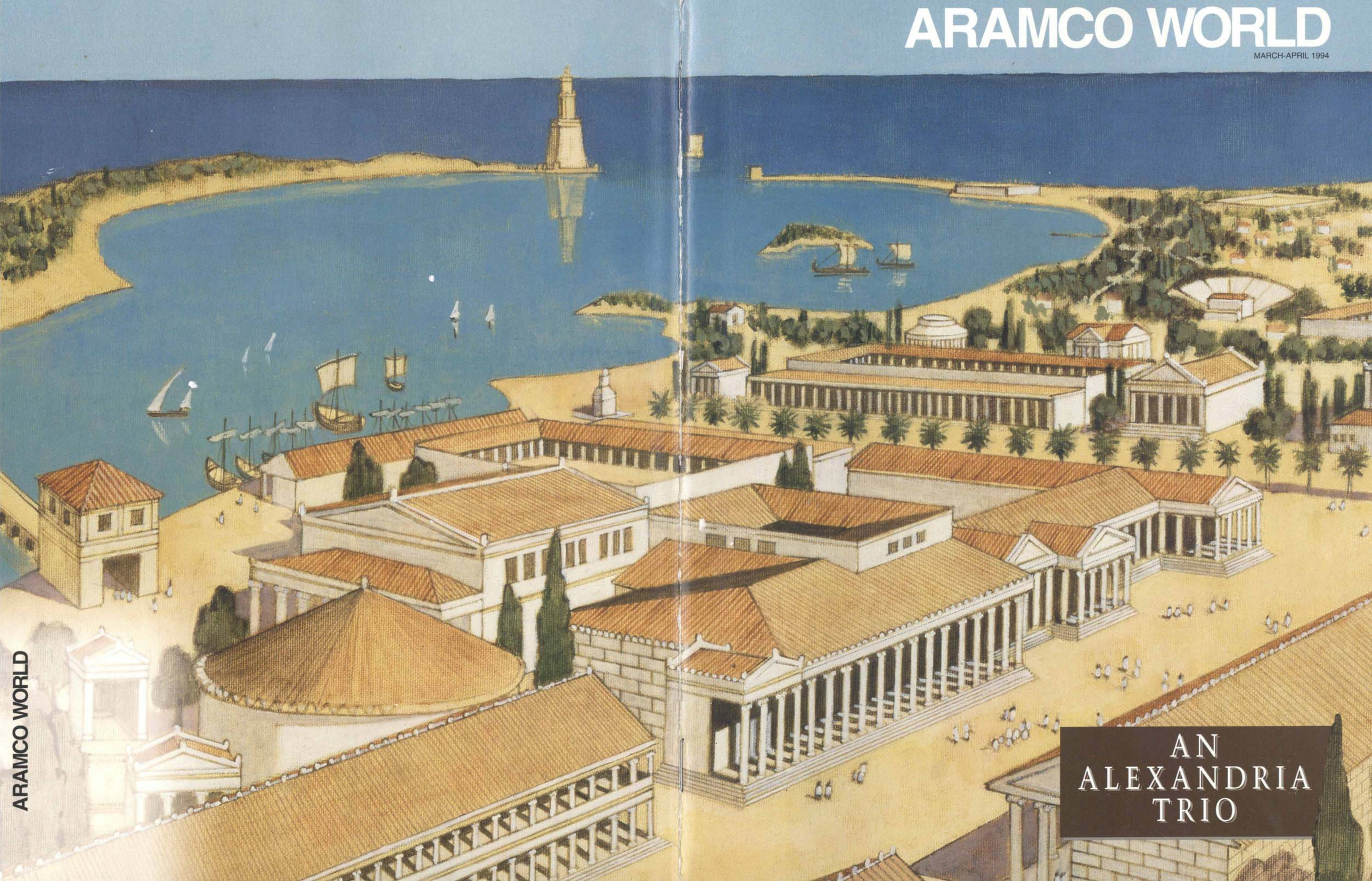
MARCH-APRIL 1994



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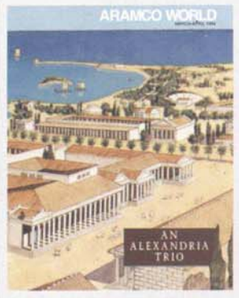

Cover: At the start of the first millennium, Alexandria was the home of two institutions that illuminated the world: the Pharos, the first and tallest lighthouse ever built, and the library, antiquity's greatest collection of books. The Pharos (back cover) guided trade in and out of grain-growing Egypt's busiest port; to the library (front cover) and the scholars who worked there we owe the preservation of many classical texts and the knowledge to understand them. Illustration: Michael Grimsdale. Work will begin this year on the new Alexandria Library (inside front cover). Photo: Snøhetta.

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THE CRADLE OF THE TURKS

WRITTEN BY JOHN LAWTON
PHOTOGRAPHED BY NIK WHEELER

For three days we had driven across the stark landscape of southwest Mongolia, where the Gobi Desert and the Altay Mountains intersect. Now our four-wheel-drive convoy was beginning its climb through the Alp-like Altay range that divides Asia's eastern and western steppes. Suddenly, on the edge of a grassy plateau—their backs to the valley below, their faces to the mountains above—appeared five weathered stone statues.

Three were eroded beyond recognition by centuries of wind and rain, but the features of the other two were clearly visible: the almond-shaped eyes and curled moustaches of ancient Turks.

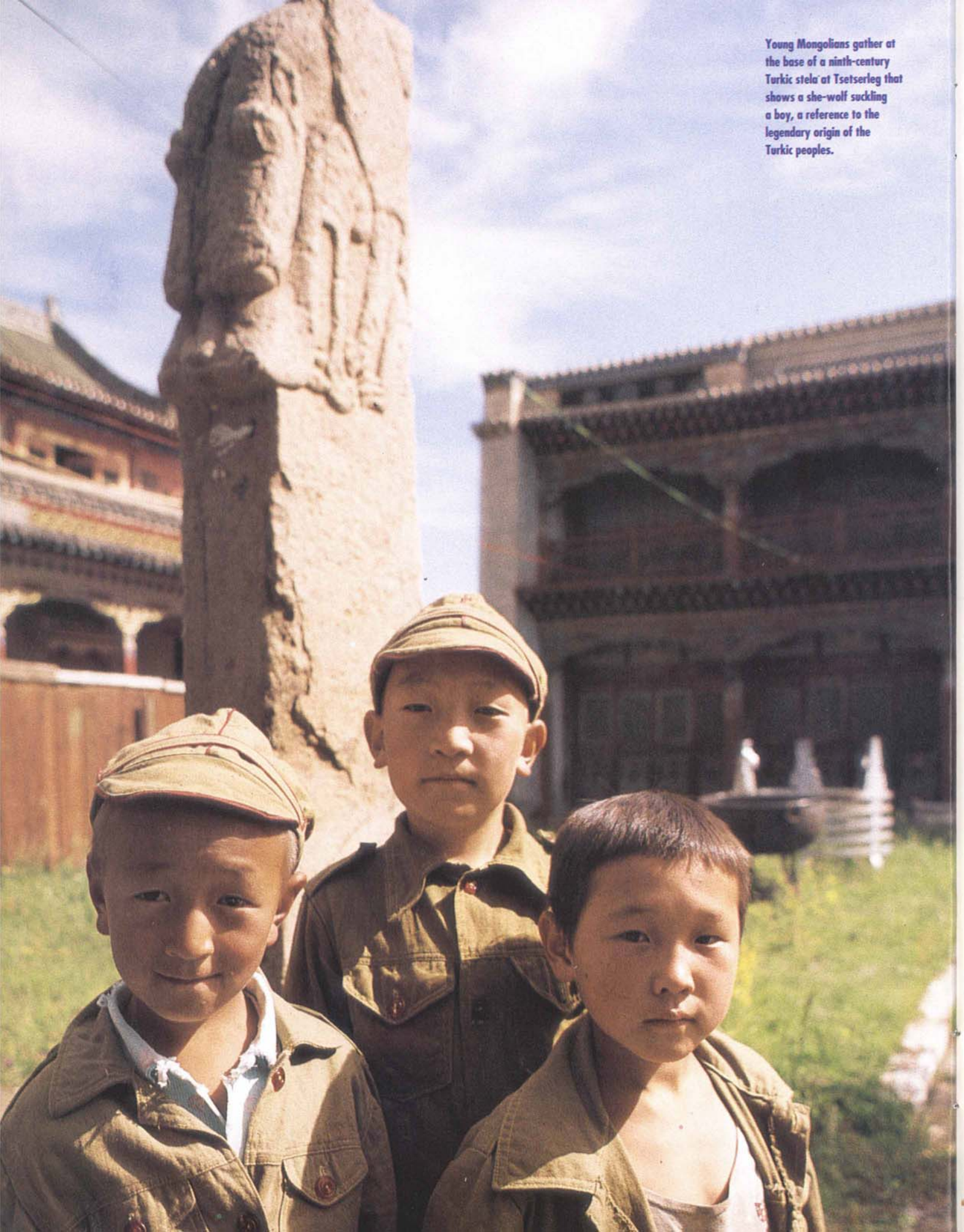
Although only five per cent of Mongolia's present population is Turkic, the ancient Altay Turks once ruled not only Mongolia but the entire Eurasian steppe. Stone statues, such as these at Jargalant, were erected as memorials to Turkic noblemen all over Mongolia, in southern Siberia and Kazakstan. Most were cut to portray a man's head and trunk. They wear earrings, carry a sword or dagger in their belt, and clasp a chalice.

Despite the statues' static pose, the Turks they portrayed were fierce, martial nomads who won a series of decisive victories over their powerful neighbors in 552 and created an enormous steppe empire that lasted almost 200 years. Despite their relative obscurity today, the historical role of the Altay Turks was considerable. They gave their name to all the Turkic-speaking peoples of Eurasia, and forged a solidarity among them that persists to this day.

To most people, the term "Turk" denotes simply an inhabitant of Turkey. Few realize that as many as 60 percent of the world's 90 million Turks—defined as anyone who speaks a Turkic language as a native tongue—live outside the Republic of Turkey. In Central Asia, for example, where they recently re-emerged as independent nations from a century of repression, Turkic Azeris, Kazaks, Kirgiz, Turkomans and Uzbeks roughly equal the number of Turks in Turkey itself. There are sizable Turkic minorities too in Afghanistan, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Georgia, Greece, Iran, Mongolia, Russia and Ukraine. In northwest China, Uighur Turks outnumber Han Chinese, and give the country's largest administrative unit its name.

Turkic peoples, in fact, are one of the most widespread ethnic groups in the world, inhabiting a vast region from the Great Wall of China in the east to the Balkans in the west, and from Siberia in

Silent sentinels of the steppes, weathered stone figures with Turkic features overlook the grasslands that were the original home of the Altay Turks. Statues with more feminine features (left) have also been found; the purpose of both varieties is unknown.



Young Mongolians gather at the base of a ninth-century Turkic stela at Tsetserleg that shows a she-wolf suckling a boy, a reference to the legendary origin of the Turkic peoples.

the north to Afghanistan in the south. Although Ottoman Turkey, at the beginning of this century, was dubbed the "Sick Man of Europe," the Turks have for 1500 years lived up to their name, which, in Turkic, means "forceful" or "strong."

In the sixth century of our era, the Turks swept across Central Asia to found an empire extending as far west as the Black Sea. In the 11th century—under the banner of Islam—they conquered most of India and the Middle East (See *Aramco World*, November-December 1991). Advancing into Europe and Africa in the 15th century, they built one of the largest empires the world has known.

It was from Istanbul, once capital of this great Ottoman empire, that I set off to investigate one of the unresolved conundrums of Central Asia: the origin of the Turks. I had been getting closer geographically—if not factually—for more than a decade, following the Turks' lines of march and paths of migration across Central Asia, India and the Middle East, even visiting in 1984 their ancient cities in northwest China, close to the Mongolian border (See *Aramco World*, July-August 1985). Now, with the collapse of communism in the former Soviet satellite, it is possible to travel to Mongolia itself, homeland—according to Chinese records—of the ancient Turks.

The origin of the Turks, like that of nearly all Central Asian peoples, is shrouded in mystery and legend. The story preserved in Chinese annals—the only early written history of the steppe—is that they are the offspring of wolves.

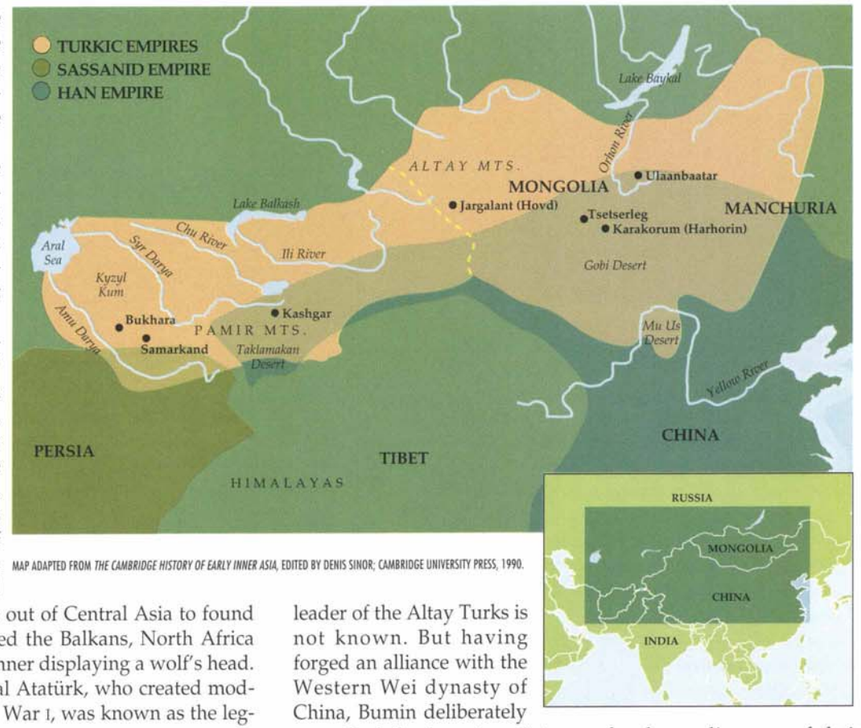
The ancient Turks clearly subscribed to this legend, for five days' drive from Jargalant, over rough mountain tracks and steppe trails, we saw atop a large ninth-century Turkic stela at Tsetserleg a stone carving of a wolf suckling a boy. Throughout history, the wolf has remained an evocative symbol of renewal for the Turks. In the 13th century, when Süleyman Shah led the drought-stricken Osmanlı Turks out of Central Asia to found an empire which ultimately included the Balkans, North Africa and the Middle East, he carried a banner displaying a wolf's head. Seven centuries later, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, who created modern Turkey from the ashes of World War I, was known as the legendary "Boz Kurt," or Gray Wolf.

Factual evidence of the origin of the Turks is, however, limited, and opinions of contemporary researchers about their possible ancestry differ. Professor Necat Diyarbekirli, a specialist in early Turkic culture at Istanbul's Mimar Sinan University, states categorically that "the oldest Turkic people were those the Chinese knew as *Hsiung-nu*, whom Westerners call Huns." But Sev'yan Vainshtein, a Russian who has written over 200 works on the peoples of Central Asia, maintains that although "Chinese historians have posited that the origin of the Turks was connected with the late Huns, there is no real evidence .... of [this]."

For me, however, tracing the origins of the Turks was more of a personal pilgrimage than an academic exercise: My wife of 25 years is a Turk, and I have spent much of my life in Turkey. And when I was invited to join a month-long journey across Mongolia sponsored by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), I readily accepted. For—although it meant many uncomfortable days in the back of a Jeep, many cold nights under canvas, and a monotonous diet of mutton stew—the expedition's destination was the Mongolian steppe, traditional cradle of many nomad nations, including the Turks.

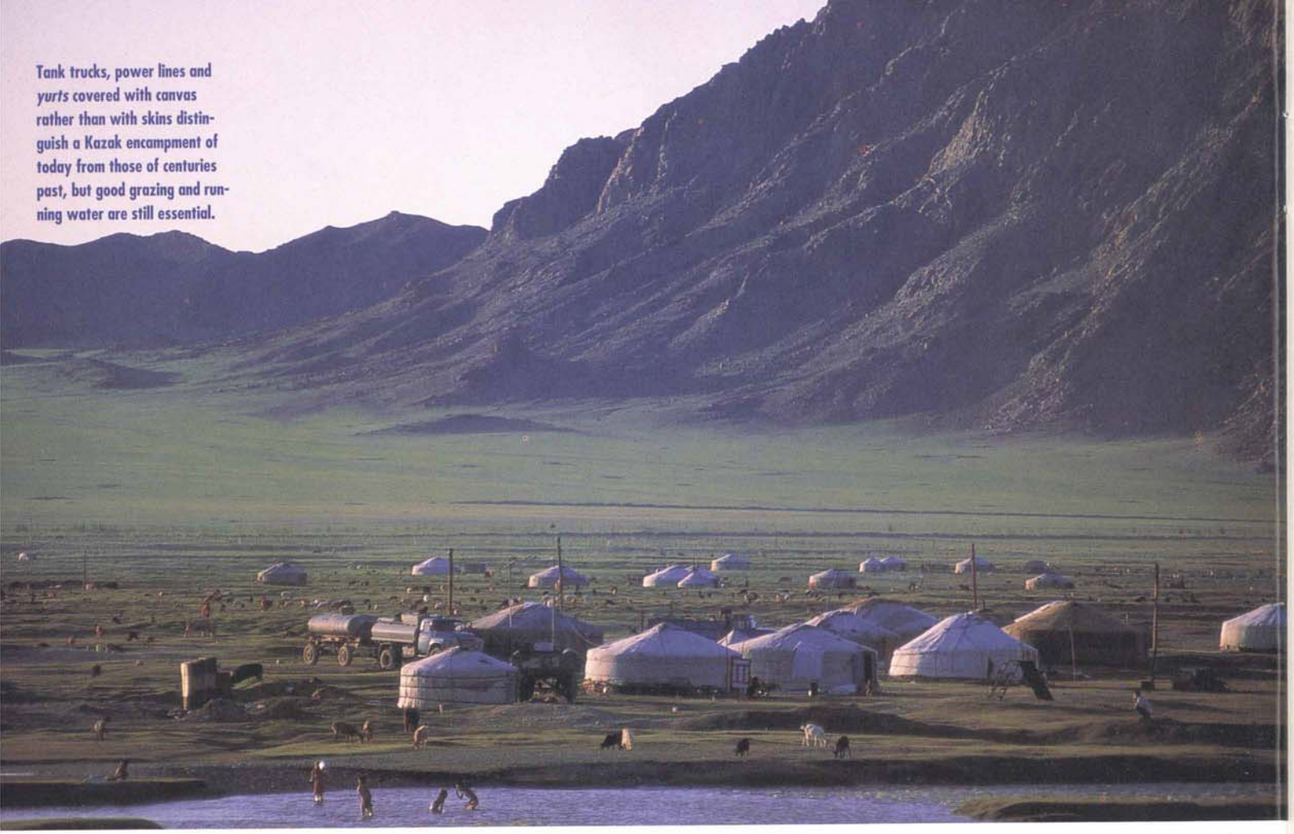
The Turks are first mentioned in Chinese annals of the third century BC, but it was not until the sixth century of our era that they became a force to be reckoned with. Their home, according to the Chinese, was in the Altay mountain range in western Mongolia, where at Jargalant, appropriately, we had first come face to face with stone statues of the ancient Turks. In these mountains, the Turks mined iron and served as blacksmiths to their overlords, a people called the Juan-juan.

The founder of Turkic power was a wily politician named Bumin, who bore the title of *khagan*, or ruler. How he became leader of the Altay Turks is not known. But having forged an alliance with the Western Wei dynasty of China, Bumin deliberately provoked the Juan-juan into war by demanding one of their princesses in marriage. Aided by Chinese forces, the Turks routed the Juan-juan in 552, and then subjugated neighboring nomadic tribes to become uncontested masters of the Mongolian steppe.



MAP ADAPTED FROM *THE CAMBRIDGE HISTORY OF EARLY INNER ASIA*, EDITED BY DENIS SINOR; CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS, 1990.

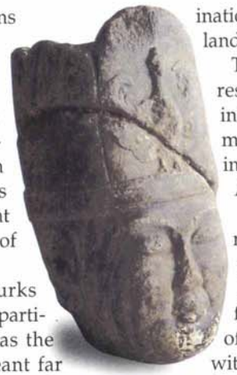
Mounted bowmen were the formidable and very mobile force of the Turkic armies. The middle of the first millennium saw the first widespread use of the rigid saddle with stirrups. Accurate shooting on the run became possible for the first time when a rider could stand in his stirrups, absorbing with his bent knees the jounce of his galloping steed. All later types of saddle can be traced to the ancient Turkic type, while archery—of which we witnessed several impressive displays in Mongolia—remains, after riding and wrestling, one of the most popular sports of the steppe.



Tank trucks, power lines and *yurts* covered with canvas rather than with skins distinguish a Kazak encampment of today from those of centuries past, but good grazing and running water are still essential.

Bumin died soon after his victory and his domains were split into two parts. The eastern part, which had the primacy if not the supremacy of the two halves, was ruled by his son Mu-han (553-572) and the western part by Bumin's brother Ishtemi (553-573)—both aggressive expansionists. Mu-han conquered the Khitans in the east and seized the north Chinese kingdoms. In the west, Ishtemi expanded his territory as far as the rivers Ili and Chu and brought Turkic rule to the frontiers of the Hephtalite empire of Central Asia.

In alliance with the Sassanids of Persia, the Turks attacked and destroyed the Hephtalites in 560, and partitioned their country, which stretched as far west as the River Volga. The addition of Hephtalite lands meant far more to the Turks than just the extension of territory and a corresponding increase in power: It also meant direct contact with Byzantium, and control of the lucrative silk trade between China and the West.



A portrait head of Kul Tegin.

The Turks were the first steppe people to realize the importance of trade. They offered security to caravans and concluded treaties with the Sassanids and Byzantines, protecting commerce along the Silk Roads—the network of caravan trails which linked East and West across Central Asia (See *Aramco World*, July-August 1988).

Though the origins of the Turks themselves remain unresolved, the history of their earliest empire is well-documented, for the Turks left written records—a development without precedent in the history of the Central Asia. Although these records are not numerous, enough have survived to permit a more accurate examination of the harsh and turbulent life of the medieval steppe lands than in any preceding period.

Their script, known as "runic Turkic" because of its resemblance to the script of the Germanic tribes, came into use during the later years of the Turkic empire. The most significant texts to survive are early eighth-century inscriptions on stone stelae in family necropolises of the Altay Turks in the Orhon region of Central Mongolia.

It took two hard days' driving from Tsetserleg to reach this seat of Turkic imperial power. But it was well worthwhile. Although now standing alone on featureless grasslands, these stone slabs are primary sources for the origins of the Turks. Written in honor of the last of the great Turkic khagans, Bilge (pronounced to rhyme with "still day") and his brother and military commander Kul Tegin, they summarize the history of the Turkic empire from its foundation in 552 until shortly before its collapse some 200 years later.

The Orhon inscriptions, deciphered in 1892 by Danish professor Vilhelm Thomsen, also establish beyond doubt that the Turks had a fully developed consciousness of their own history:

Above the sons of men stood our ancestors, the khagans Bumin and Ishtemi.

Having become masters of the Turkic people they established and ruled its empire and fixed the law of the country.

Many were their enemies in the four corners of the world, but, leading campaigns against them, they subjugated and pacified many nations.

These were wise khagans, these were valiant khagans; all their officers were wise and valiant, the nobles, all of them, the entire people, were just.

This was the reason why they were able to rule an empire so great, why, governing the empire, they could uphold the law.

Apart from indigenous material, there is also an abundance of Chinese material on the Turks and very rich documentation in Greek. Zemarkhos, the first Byzantine ambassador to the Western Turkic court, described in detail the state kept by Ishtemi, who received him sitting on a golden throne, equipped with wheels, that could be drawn by horses, and who had a golden bed and whole cartloads of silver dishes.

During the reign of Khagan T'ung Shih-hu (618-630) too, the fortunes of the Western Turks stood high. The eyewitness account of the Buddhist pilgrim Hsüan-tsang describes the khagan as dressed in a green satin robe, surrounded by 200 officers all clad in costly brocade. But Chinese sources reveal that, "trusting his power and prosperity, he was not good to his people, and the tribes hated him." Indeed, he was murdered shortly after Hsüan-tsang's visit.

Meanwhile the Eastern Turkic khaganate, weakened by a long period of decadence and internecine wars, came under the dominance of the Chinese Sui dynasty and from 630 to 682 lost its independence.

Writing more than a century after the events, the unknown author of the Orhon inscriptions gave a moving and perceptive account of the times of decadence and servitude:

Weeping and lamenting came from where the sun rises; the strong peoples of the desert came, lamenting and weeping, for these had really been valiant khagans.

After that their younger brothers became khagans, their sons became khagans. But the younger brothers were unlike their elder brothers, the sons were unlike their fathers.

Unwise khagans, weak khagans ascended the throne, and their officers were also unwise and weak.

And because of the iniquity of the nobility and of the people, because of Chinese guile, because the elder brothers and the younger brothers were plotting against each other, because of the quarrel of those who favored the nobles and those who favored the people, the Turkic people brought about the dissolution of the empire that had been its empire, and ruined the khagan who had been its khagan.

The sons of the nobles became the slaves of the Chinese people, their pure daughters became its servants. The noble Turks abandoned their Turkic titles and, assuming Chinese titles, they submitted to the Chinese khagan.

But the small people, in its entirety, thus said, "We were a people that had its own empire. Where is now our empire? We were a people that had its own khagan. Where is now our khagan?"

And thus speaking they became the enemy of the Chinese.

No longer menaced by the Eastern Turks, the Tang emperor T'ai-tsung (627-649) and his successor Kao-tsung (650-683) now moved in strength against the Western Turks, who were greatly weakened by internal strife, following the death of T'ing shih-hu. By 659 the Western Turkic khaganate too had ceased to exist, and Chinese forces occupied what used to be Turkic territory as far west as Bukhara and Samarkand.

The Turks, however, did not acquiesce to the inevitability of Chinese rule. The death of Kao-tsung weakened the Chinese grip on Mongolia, and under the leadership of Elterish the Turks revolted in 683. Four years and many battles later, they were free of Chinese domination, and the Eastern Turkic khaganate was restored.

The tasks facing Elterish were complex. He was confronted not only with Chinese forces attempting to maintain control, but also with Turkic tribes, such the Tolos and the Turgash, who were hostile to him. Furthermore, the restored Turkic empire was challenged by a new force: the Arabs, advancing into Central Asia under the banner of Islam. Nevertheless, by the time of Elterish's death in 691, Turkic rule was solidly reestablished on the eastern steppe.

Stela at Bilge Khagan's tomb (above) and stone tortoise at Karakorum commemorate different Turkic states.

In the Orhon inscriptions, Elterish's son speaks glowingly of his father's great deeds:

My father the khagan set out with 27 men, and as the word spread that he was advancing, those who were in the towns and those who were in the mountains gathered, and there were 77 men.

...The army of my father resembled wolves and his enemies resembled sheep. Leading campaigns to the east as to the west, he gathered the people and made them rise. And all together they numbered 700.

He led 47 campaigns and fought in 20 battles. And...he deprived of their empire those who had an empire, he deprived of their khagan those who had a khagan: He pacified his enemies and made them bend their knees and bow their heads.

Elterish was followed by his brother Qapaghan (692-716), who gained even greater glory: Around 710 he was able to force the Western Turks—as well as his own Eastern Turks—to recognize him as khagan. Thus the original Turkic empire was restored. Qapaghan, however, made numerous enemies in the process, and in 716 he was lured into a trap by a minor Turkic group and decapitated. His sudden and brutal death created a serious succession crisis that nearly wrecked the renascent Turkic empire. It was saved by the sons of Elterish, in particular by Kul Tegin, who staged a coup and appointed his elder brother Bilge as the new khagan.

Bilge's reign (716-734) was, according to the Orhon inscriptions, beset by economic problems:

I [Bilge] did not reign over a people that was rich; I reigned over a people weak and frightened, a people that had no food in their bellies and no clothes on their backs.

LIFE AMONG THE ANCIENT TURKS

The Turks' physical appearance combined Caucasoid and Mongoloid traits. Both men and women braided their hair. Chinese sources and archeological finds indicate they wore long garments made from the skins of wild and domestic animals, including sheepskin, from felt and coarse wool cloth, and from silk they obtained from China.

Warriors wore mail armor and helmets, and some khagans even had gold mail. The aristocracy wore belts with lavishly ornamented gold plaques; common warriors' belts were decorated with more modest bronze plaques.

The Turks were skilled at many crafts, particularly metalworking. Magnificent artifacts made from iron—swords and sabers, lance tips and arrowheads, pieces of harness—have been preserved in Turkic graves. The Turks manufactured decorated metal dishes, including some from silver, and various leather utensils; they were adept at woodwork and made saddles, frames for *yurts*, carts and other artifacts out of wood. Felt-making and weaving were also practiced. The collapsible felt *yurt*, widespread in the ancient Turkic environment and possibly even invented there, was the usual dwelling; many nomadic peoples of the Eurasian steppes adopted it.

Turkic society was not purely nomadic, and included farmers, miners and blacksmiths. Greek and Chinese travel accounts stress the importance of the metal industry among the Turks, and the abundance of iron among them. The first Turks encountered by Byzantine envoy Zemarkhos in 568 offered him iron for sale, and the Chinese Buddhist pilgrim Hsüan-tsang noted that among the Turks he had an iron bed instead of the usual wooden one. The "Iron Gates" that marked the frontiers of the Turkic empire were not one of the many Central Asian mountain passes bearing that name, but—according to some travelers—were real structures decorated with iron bells.

There is evidence the Turks also practiced agriculture, with millet as their chief crop; archeologists have found millet seeds and stone grinders in Turkic graves. Nomadic animal herding was, however, the basis of the Turkic economy. A Chinese annalist notes: "The fate of the Turk depends utterly and completely on sheep and horses." Hunting, in particular the technique of the drive, also played an important role in the Turkic economy. Their main prey were mountain goats and roe deer.

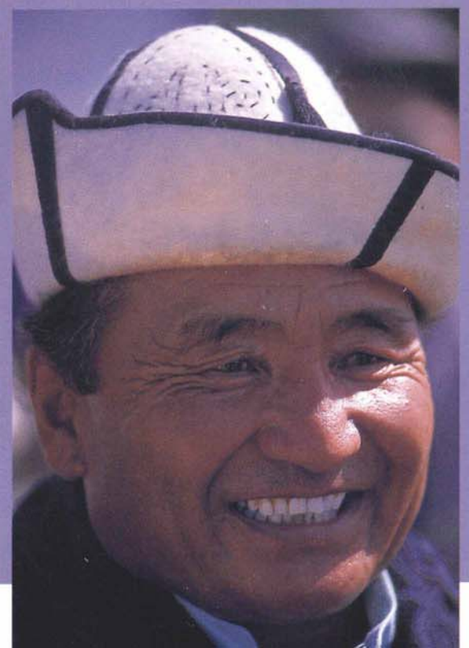
The Altay Turks began to establish an urban base, the first in steppe history, and functioned around these settlements. There are even indications in the Orhon inscriptions that Bilge Khagan's plans for his people included the gradual abandonment of nomadism and construction of a walled city.

What little is known about the pre-Islamic religious beliefs of the ancient Turks comes from early Turkic inscriptions and Chinese annals. One of the inscriptions at Orhon touches on a Turkic creation myth:

When the sky above was blue and the earth below was dark, the son of man appeared between them.

Other inscriptions indicate a concept of three worlds: upper, middle and lower. The highest deity of the Upper World was Tengri, who governed the fate of all living things. The fertility goddess, Umai, and deities of earth and water, inhabited the Middle World, while the deity of hell, Erlik-khan, ruled the Lower World.

The Turks honored the spirits of their ancestors, and the bond between man and horse was reflected in the Turkic burial cult: Among many of the ancient Turkic tribes, a man could be buried together with his fully harnessed steed.



To preserve the reputation achieved by our father, for the sake of the Turkic people, I spent the nights without sleep and the days without rest.

When I became khagan, the people who had dispersed in different countries returned, at the point of death, on foot and naked.

To re-establish the nation I led 22 campaigns. And because of good fortune and propitious circumstances, I brought back to life the dying people, the naked people I clothed and the few I made numerous.

Thus, in simple but poetic language, do the inscriptions at Orhon give a telling insight into the internal stresses and external threats plaguing the Turkic empire, and the eternal economic problems that beset its population.

After Kul Tegin died in 731, his brother erected a memorial complex in the Orhon Valley, in the present-day province of Arhangay. When Bilge died three years later, a similar complex was erected 500 meters (1640 feet) south. Little is left of Bilge's complex save a large inscribed stela. The Kul Tegin complex, however, contains, in addition to a stela, the remains of a sacrificial altar. The stela stands on a plinth in the form of a tortoise and is covered on three sides by runic inscriptions, and on the fourth by Chinese.

The complex measures 67 by 28 meters (220 by 92 feet); its entrance is flanked by two headless stone statues of roe deer. A ceremonial path, once lined by life-sized statues of Turkic noblemen, leads to the remains of a small tomb temple. Excavations have revealed the foundations of meter-thick walls which once surrounded the complex, and a 13-meter-square (43-foot-square) elevated earthen platform, believed to be a sacrificial altar. Blue floor tiles, red wall bricks and roof tiles carved with floral designs and with human and animal figures were also found during the excavation, as were pottery, iron artifacts and more stone sculptures.

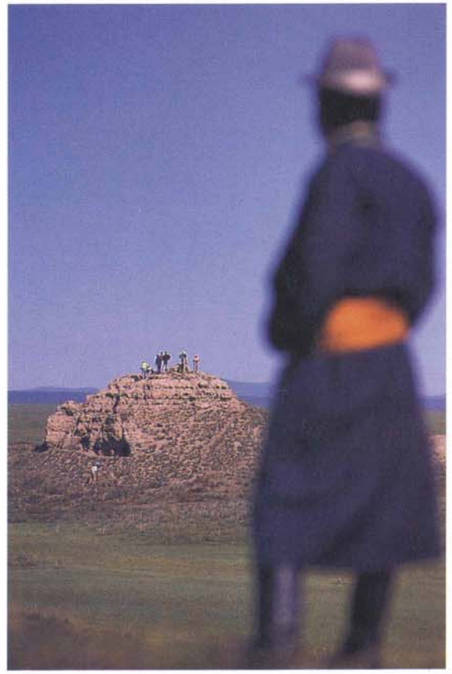
Bilge Khagan's control of the western region appears to have been more nominal than real. Dissension among the Turks had not ceased, and latent resentment against the khagan, and opposition to his hostility toward China, precipitated a final crisis.

Three years after Kul Tegin's death, Bilge Khagan was poisoned by one of his own officials. Although the poison eventually killed him, Bilge survived long enough to execute the official and his entire family and to appoint his own son as his successor. In reality, however, his death marked the end of the Turkic empire.

Three Turkic tribes—the Basmil, the Karluk and the Uighur—now vied with one another and with the Altay Turks for supremacy of the steppe. In 745 the Uighurs emerged victorious from the power struggle, overthrew the existing leadership and established a state of their own.

At its zenith, the Uighur khaganate stretched from the Altay Mountains to Lake Baykal, and was governed from the city of Karabalghaun in the Orhon Valley. Tamim ibn Bahr, a Muslim traveler who visited the city around 821, speaks in admiring terms of this fortified town in a cultivated country. Today, although the surrounding land has reverted to pasture, the ruins of the massive mud walls of Karabalghaun still dominate the landscape—a lasting tribute to the first walled city of Mongolia.

The Uighur Turks left their mark too at Harhorin, formerly known as Karakorum, the 13th-century capital of the Mongol Empire, 400 kilometers (almost 250 miles) southwest of Ulaanbaatar, capital of modern Mongolia. Here, on a hillock overlooking the immense walled compound of the Erdene Zuu Buddhist monastery, we were shown a large stone tortoise, which archeologists said was left by the Uighurs. Although the tortoise symbolizes long life, the Uighur's Mongolian state lasted less than 100 years. In 840, another Turkic people, the Kirgiz, put an abrupt end to Uighur rule in Mongolia, and fleeing Uighurs settled in what is now northwest China, where they still live today (See *Aramco World*, July-August 1985).



As scientists inspect the remains of Karabalghaun's great walls, a horseman watches.

The Uighur rising marked the end of unity among the Turkic tribes of Central Asia. From that point on, the larger tribal coalitions either created kingdoms of their own in Central Asia or migrated to the Russian steppe and the Middle East.

The collapse of the Turkic empire marked the beginning of a long period of instability on the steppe that did not end until the rise of the Mongol Empire in the 12th century. The principal Turkic states created in Central Asia during this period were those of the Qarakhanids, the Khwarizm-Shahs and the Seljuqs. All abandoned the nomadic life and adopted Islam.

Even today, the Turks' most important cultural link, along with history and language, is Islam. With the exception of the Yakut of eastern Siberia and the Chuvash of the Volga region of Russia, the Turks are all Muslim.

Not only did the Turks of Central Asia embrace Islam, they became its new cutting edge. By the end of the first millennium, the military manpower and fighting skills of the steppe nomads played much the same role as those of the desert Bedouin during Islam's first extraordinary period of expansion throughout the Middle East.

Turkic raids into India, beginning in the year 1000, led within two centuries to the establishment of Muslim control over the northern plains. Expansion continued off and on until, by the end of the 17th century, the whole of India was ruled by Muslims.

Meanwhile, on the western flank of Islam, the Seljuq Turks scored a landmark victory over the Byzantines at Malazgirt in 1071, confirming their occupation of the grasslands of Anatolia. Thus, modern Turkey became Turkish for the first time.

Which brings us geographically full-circle, and to the conclusion that the similarities that exist among the various Turkic peoples today go back to the Altay Turks—whose weathered stone statues still stand vigil over the land of their origin in the Mongolian mountains and steppes.

John Lawton is a contributing editor of Aramco World.

By Pullman to Alexandria

The smell of the sea, the taste of the *fresca*, the sound of the pianola — all these meant Alexandria to me. But none was as exciting as the melon-yellow, air-conditioned motor coach that carried my parents and me to "Skendereyya" from Cairo.

WRITTEN BY HASSAN ELTAHER
ILLUSTRATED BY NORMAN MACDONALD

The luxurious Pullman motor coach linking Cairo and Alexandria in the 1940's and 1950's was equivalent in style to the New York-Chicago express of the same era. We called it "al-Otobees al-Sahrawi"—the desert bus—or "al-Pullman."

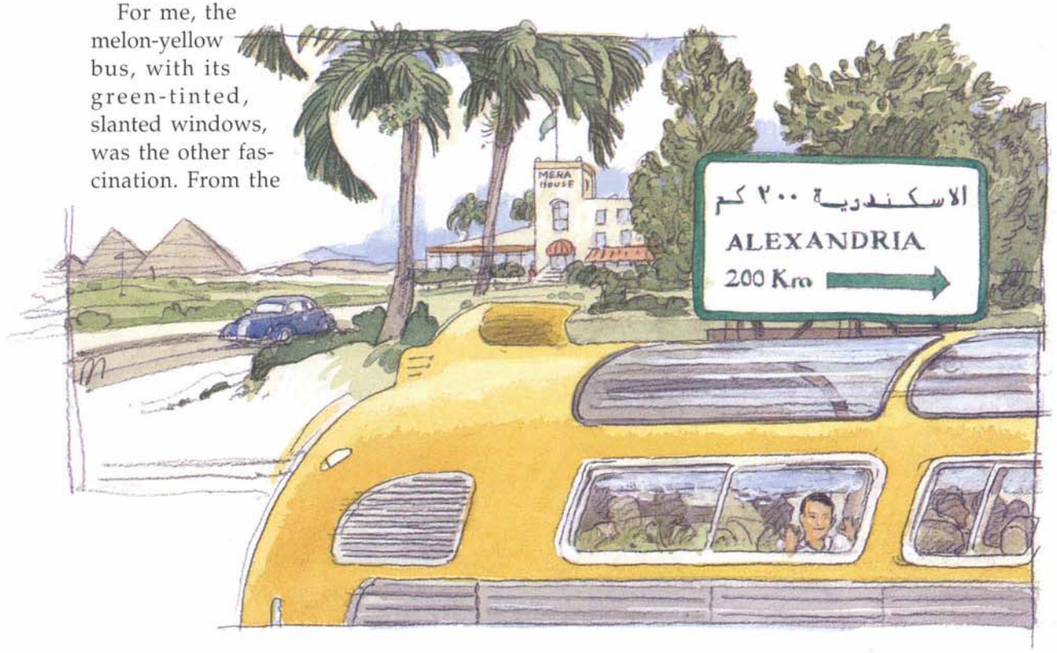
You had to be well-off to afford the price of a ticket: two Egyptian *guinehs* or pounds—roughly equal to 20 of today's pounds. Those two *guinehs* bought the traveler style, comfort, and a touch of snobbery, but above all, they bought air-conditioning. In 1949, air-conditioning was a rare luxury in Egypt, generally found only at grand movie theaters such as the Cairo Palace, Cinema Metro or Rivoli, or the Ciné Amir in Alexandria.

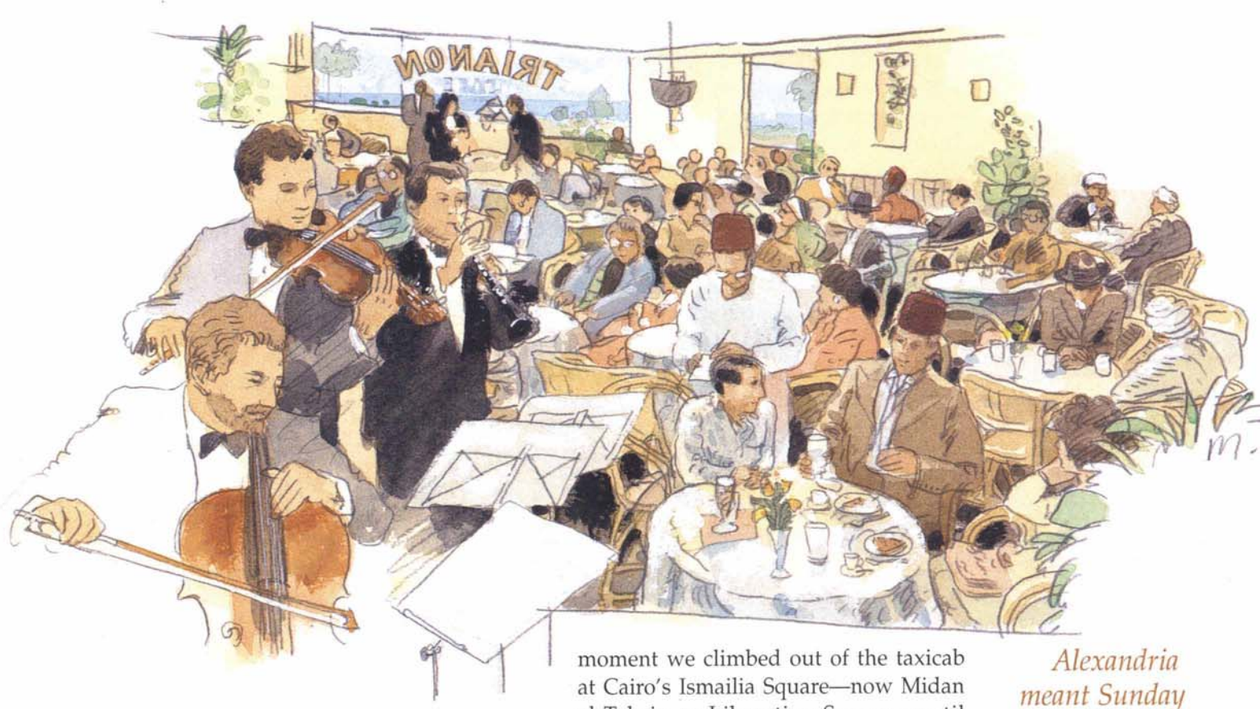
The buses that crisscrossed Egypt in those days were just like all buses everywhere—except for the Cairo-Alexandria Pullman. This motor coach was quite futuristic for the times, and not only was it air-conditioned, but it also was specially imported from the United States. No one operated a bus like it anywhere in the country or in the wider Middle East; even the famous Nairn trailer bus that linked Beirut to Baghdad via Damascus was no match (See *Aramco World*, July-August 1981).

I was eight or nine years old when I accompanied my parents to Alexandria on this bus. For a little boy growing up in the then truly cosmopolitan city of Cairo, going to "Skendereyya," as Alexandria is called in colloquial Egyptian Arabic, was in itself a treat that surpassed all treats. Alexandria meant Mediterranean beaches, the Corniche, double-decker streetcars, and Sunday tea and gateaux, accompanied by chamber music, at the Trianon or at Atheneo's café at Mahattet el-Raml Square in the heart of downtown.

For a little boy growing up in the cosmopolitan city of Cairo, going to "Skendereyya" was in itself a treat that surpassed all treats.

For me, the melon-yellow bus, with its green-tinted, slanted windows, was the other fascination. From the moment we climbed out of the taxicab at Cairo's Ismailia Square—now Midan el-Tahrir, or Liberation Square—until the motor coach finally pulled up at its stop, the excitement mounted.





Alexandria meant Sunday tea and gateaux, accompanied by chamber music, at the Trianon or at Atheneo's café.

I don't recall whether the coach's seats were the reclining type; I'm fairly certain that, given my young age, I couldn't see out the windows unless I stood up.

One image comes to mind that has always remained tattooed in my memory: the chrome logo FLXIBLE, mounted on the front of the bus's distinctive prow. At the time, I couldn't understand why they had left the letter *e* out of *flexible*. (It took me 40 years to learn the answer, after an inquiry to the bus manufacturer, Flxible Corporation: *Flexible*, by law, could not be protected as a brand name because it was an ordinary word in common use, so the Ohio-based company simply dropped the *e*.)

Heading out of Cairo, the Pullman crossed the Qasr el-Nil bridge, passed the zoo in Giza, and drove west toward the Pyramids, where it turned right at the Mena House to chart its way northward through the desert to Alexandria.

The two-lane "highway" cut the yellow sands of the Western Desert like a thin black hair. It was almost like penciling the line where the Mashreq and Maghreb—the Arab East and Arab West—met, because west of the roadway lay the Libyan desert and the countries of North Africa, while its eastern shoulder marked the beginning of the Levant.

The major attraction along this desolate road—not only for an eight-year-old boy, but also for the grown-ups—was a stopover about halfway between the two metropolises: the Rest House.

Even today, travelers on the desert highway stop at the Rest House. Topping up their fuel tanks and letting their car engines cool down under the 42-degree (108°F) sun was one reason. But there was a more hedonistic motive: to indulge in a local delicacy, desert-grown *batteekh*, or watermelon—crimson red, sweet and ice-cold. Today, 45

years later, I can still taste the delicious *batteekh* melting in my mouth.

Salty breezes from the Mediterranean greeted the traveler as far out as Amreyya, some 20 kilometers (12 miles) south of Alexandria. This was the signal to get ready for the metamorphosis that all Cairenes experience, even today, when they travel to Alexandria. They become altogether different people. Perhaps the best way to describe this phenomenon is to compare it to a New Yorker's vacation at a Club Med paradise. But to understand the transformation fully, you'd have to accompany an Egyptian family on its summer pilgrimage to "Skendereyya."

The waterline was also a favorite place for photographers, whose equipment bore witness to the evolution of photography.

Lawrence Durrell was perhaps the best-known Westerner to write about Alexandria, but he depicted only one face of the city, chiefly a European face. Egyptian color was not evident in Durrell's four-part mosaic, the Alexandria Quartet: *Justine*, *Balthazar*, *Mountolive* and *Clea*.

The main ingredient in an Alexandrian vacation is of course the beach. The myriads of multicolored umbrellas, from Chatby Beach to Sidi Bishr Beach, through San Stefano and Stanley Beach, resembled a field of gaily colored mushrooms. The waterline was the site of an age-old promenade: Groups of teen-aged boys and girls would stroll past each other, heading in opposite directions, attempting their first shy flirtations, far from the watchful gaze of their parents—who would no doubt be sitting somewhere in the shade of a beach umbrella, absorbed in a game of backgammon.

The waterline was also a favorite place for photographers, whose equipment bore witness through the years to the evolution of photography. Tripod-mounted square wooden boxes with attached black cloth sleeves that made them into portable developing chambers as well as cameras gave way to the smaller and more sophisticated Rolleiflex twin-lens reflex cameras and the rangefinder Leicas.

Then there were the *fresca* peddlers. *Fresca* in Italian means "fresh." The thin, round biscuit, about the size of a saucer, resembling thinly-sliced but crunchy pancakes, was a relic of days past, when the city nurtured sprawling Italian and Greek communities. In those days, peddlers must have used the word *fresca* to advertise the freshness of their product. Now the attribute had become the name for a treat that could be found only along the beaches of Alexandria.

The famous Corniche, like the Promenade des Anglais in Nice, was another crucial aspect of Alexandria—especially the picturesque half-moon portion of it extending from the historic Sidi Aboul Abbas el-Morsi mosque, past the elegant architecture of the Ibrahim Pasha mosque up to Silsilah.

In Cairo, the coffee house is not the domain of women. But in Alexandria, the sidewalk cafés along the Corniche were patronized by a mixed clientele, sipping Turkish coffee, tea or "Blue Cross"—a soft drink similar to 7-Up. Peddlers passed by with roasted peanuts or *simeet*, a ring-shaped galette sprinkled with sesame seeds—particularly delicious when eaten with *dokka* (mixed spices) or *gebna roomi* (Kashkaval cheese).

Here comes another typical Alexandrian entertainer, the pianola player. The man carried an impressive black wooden music box, which he set up on collapsible legs and played by turning a crank handle. The pianola produced melodies that would conjure up memories of Alexandria even if one were in the middle of an oompah band.

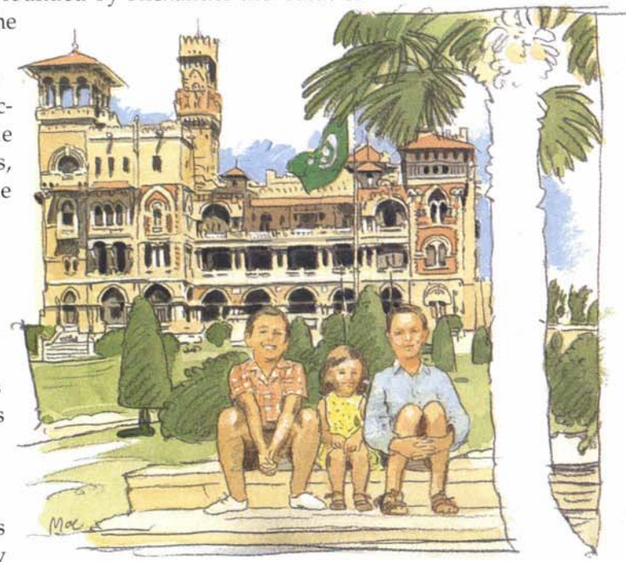
The pianola produced melodies that would conjure up memories of Alexandria even in the middle of an oompah band.

Alexandria was also unique for its double-decker, royal-blue streetcars linking Mahattet el-Raml in downtown Alexandria with Victoria, where the famous Victoria College, now El-Nasr College, is located. The line was dismantled recently, I've heard, and all the beautiful streetcars scrapped, to the chagrin of those who grew up with them.

Every summer, the Egyptian cabinet moved lock, stock, and barrel to Alexandria and set up shop at the Bolkley government house. Naturally, the Who's Who of Cairo had to follow suit. Even the Egyptian royal family spent its summers in Alexandria. The ceremonial palace was the imposing Ras el-Tin Palace by the harbor, and the summer residence was the magnificent Montazah Palace, a few miles east of the city, perched on a small hill amid well-manicured gardens overlooking the incomparable blue waters of the Mediterranean. Montazah Palace was built in an exquisite Venetian architectural style and has been open to the public off and on since the end of the monarchy in 1952.

Every summer, the Egyptian cabinet moved lock, stock, and barrel to Alexandria. Even the Egyptian royal family spent its summers in Alexandria at the magnificant Montazah Palace.

Alexandria has never really been given the same attention as Cairo, even though this was the city founded by Alexander the Great of Macedonia. It boasted one of the Seven Wonders of the World—the famed Pharos lighthouse (See page 18)—as well as the second largest harbor in the Mediterranean after Marseilles, and had been in antiquity the home of the famous Library of Alexandria (See page 24).

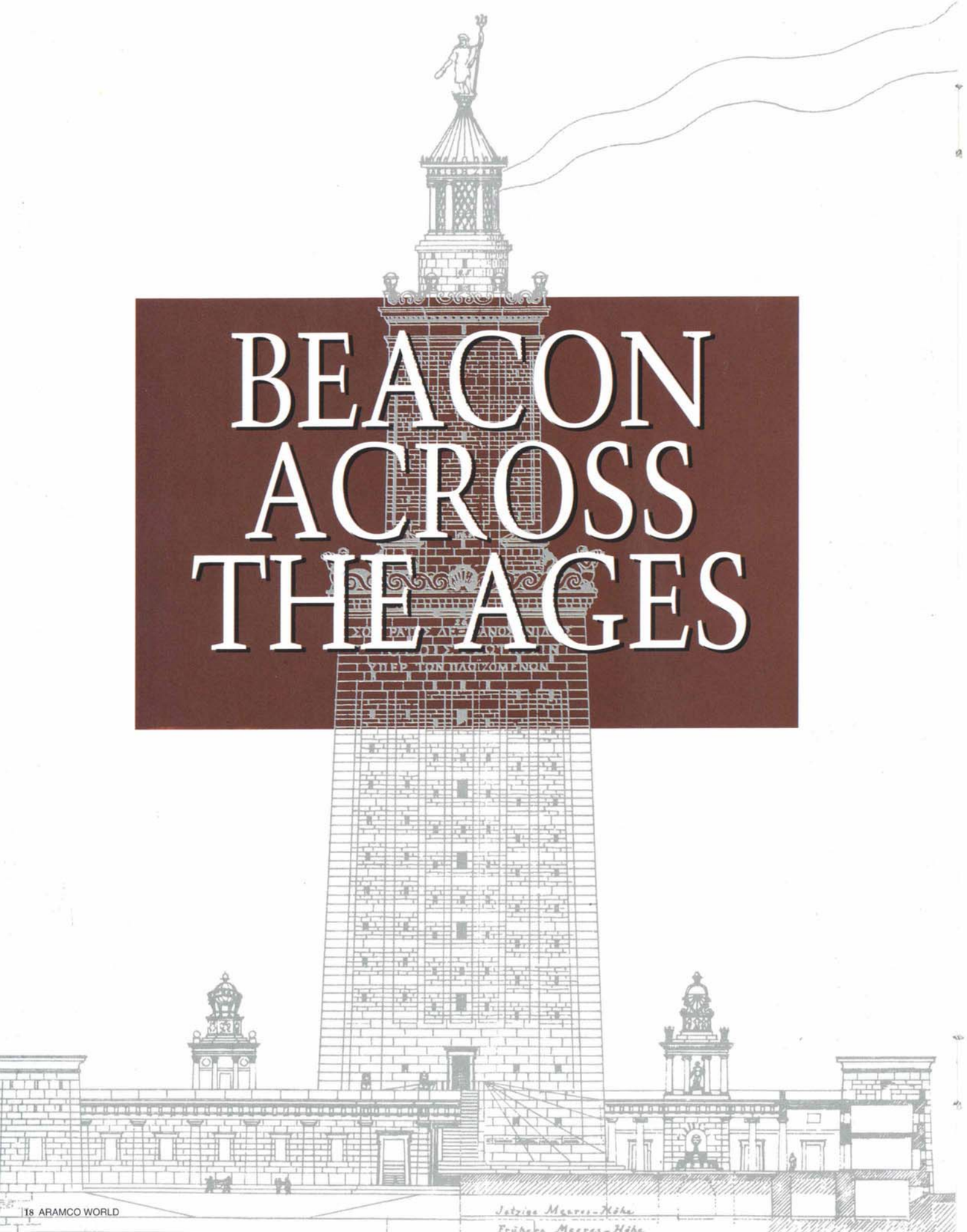


When the Fatimid caliph al-Mu'izz left Tunisia in 969 to claim his new conquest, Egypt, he stopped first in Alexandria, where he was greeted by the city's dignitaries and religious scholars, before moving on to his newly built capital, Cairo.

Alexandria today can seem as congested as Cairo, especially during summer, when Cairenes and others descend on the city. But the old grandeur can still be detected by those who care to seek it; the perfume of nostalgia is ever-present and as fragrant as the breeze flirting with the waves of the Mediterranean.

Modern times have caught up with this once-romantic lady, but the special dreams it has always conjured in the imagination of the people of Egypt are still there. After all, for me and many others, "Skendereyya" has always been more than a city: It was, and remains, a symbol and a memory of freedom, youth, happiness and love.

Hassan Eltaher is an aviation management consultant and free-lance writer in Ottawa, Ontario. He lived in Egypt, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, Morocco and the United States before moving to Canada in 1980.



BEACON ACROSS THE AGES

WRITTEN AND PHOTOGRAPHED BY PETER LIMBER

We arrived at the city of al-Iskandariyah, may God protect her!
She is a well-guarded frontier citadel and a friendly and hospitable region, remarkable in appearance and solid of construction, furnished with all that one could wish for in the way of embellishment and embattlement, and in remarkable edifices both secular and religious.
Noble are her dwellings, graceful her qualities, and with imposing size her buildings unite architectural perfection.... Every fresh marvel has there its unveiling, every novelty finds its way thither....

So the world-traveler-to-be Ibn Battuta was to write in his journal when he reached Alexandria, Egypt, on April 5, 1326, having begun his remarkable journey from his birthplace, Tangier, the year before.

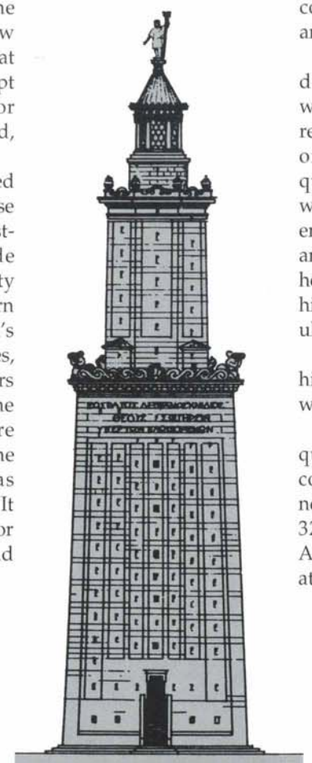
One of the most impressive sights he saw in Alexandria was the Pharos lighthouse, even though it had been damaged by earthquakes and stood partly in ruins. He saw it again in 1349, on his return from a 24-year odyssey that took him as far as China, and wrote that it was then in "so ruinous a condition that it was impossible to enter it or to climb up to the doorway." Between his two visits, another earthquake had nearly finished the lighthouse.

In Ibn Battuta's time, the lighthouse was nearing the end of an existence that had begun more than 15 centuries earlier, when it was erected in 279 BC. Alexandria had been founded in 332 BC by Alexander the Great, who had arrived in Egypt in the course of his conquests and driven out the Persian occupiers. He selected this site for a new capital city, to be named after himself, realizing that a port here could control commerce between Egypt and the eastern Mediterranean. Al-Qahirah, or Cairo, would not be built until the Arab period, nearly 13 centuries later.

There is no record of who originally conceived the idea of constructing the world's first lighthouse at this location, but the featureless, low-lying coastline needed a prominent landmark to guide mariners. A good idea became awesome reality when the lighthouse was constructed on the eastern tip of Pharos Island, at the mouth of Alexandria's Great Harbor. It towered to a height of 40 stories, and could be seen by ships as far as 40 kilometers (25 miles) out to sea. Even more marvelous, the lighthouse could be seen at night: A large fire burned at its top, with a reflector mirroring the light seaward. "The sensation it caused was tremendous," wrote British author E.M. Forster. "It appealed to the sense of beauty and to the taste for science—an appeal typical of the age. Poets and engineers combined to praise it."

For 1500 years, the Pharos, the first and tallest lighthouse ever built, guided seafarers to the harbor of Alexandria.

Alexandria's municipal flag shows the Pharos as the symbol of the city.



No lighthouse has ever been built as tall as the Pharos, even in modern times. Adding to its majesty was its gleaming white marble exterior, beautifully carved. It came to be considered one of the seven wonders of the ancient world (See *Aramco World*, May-June 1980).

In those times, cities were rarely planned. Typically, an adventurous group of people would settle in a new location and, over many generations, their small settlement might develop into a town or city of some size. But Alexandria was designed from the outset to be a major city.

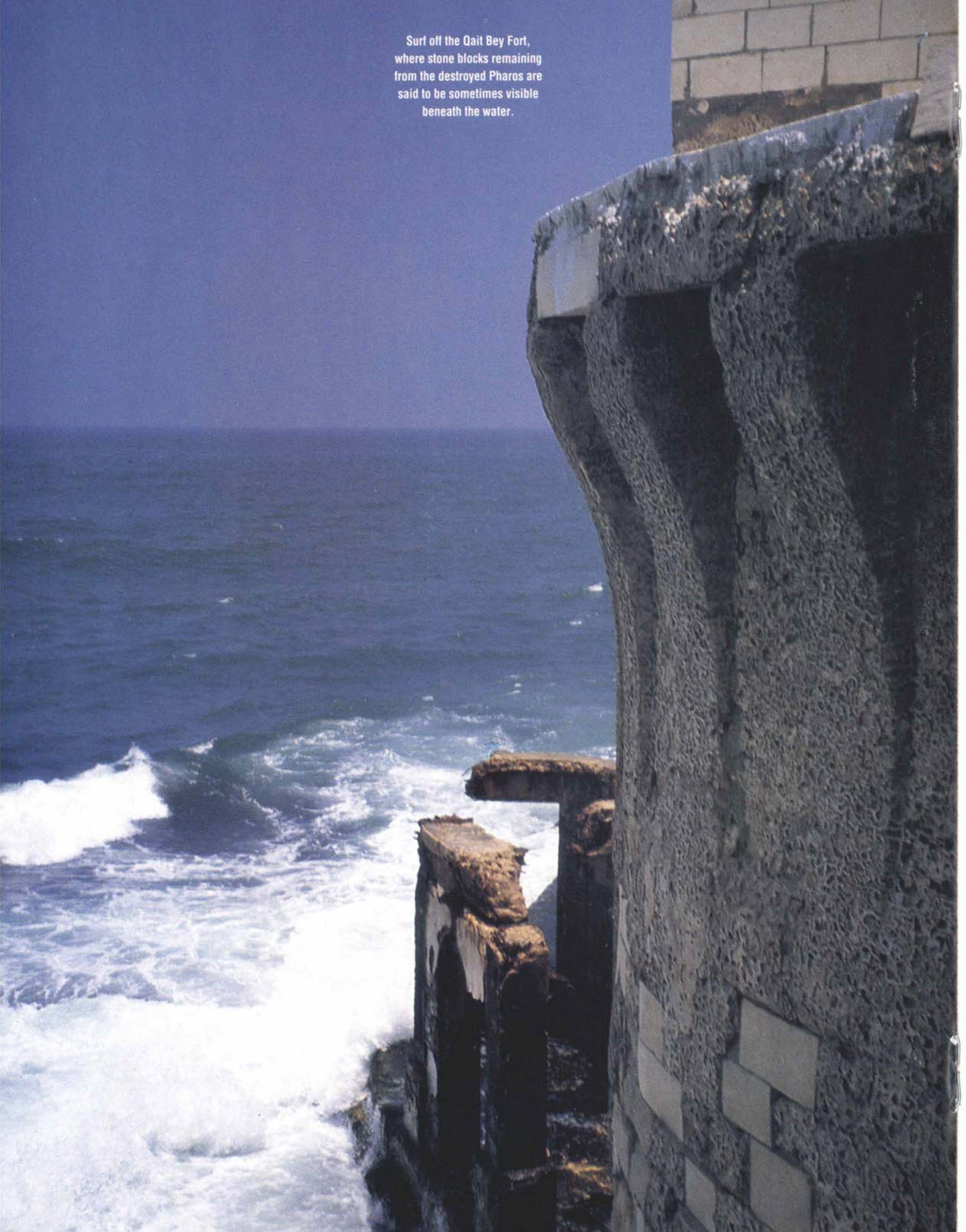
Earlier, Alexander and his army had arrived at the port city of Tyre on the Phoenician coast, an important Persian naval base, which chose to resist its attackers. The result was a seven-month siege, whose outcome was predictable: Tyre, at that time the only large port in the eastern Mediterranean, was destroyed.

Alexander's expedition continued to Egypt; that country's Persian occupiers surrendered to him, and the Egyptians welcomed him.

The conqueror knew that Egypt was a major producer of grain and other goods for which there were ready markets throughout the Mediterranean region. No port existed on the Mediterranean coast or on the navigable Nile River, so Alexander quickly chose a site where these two bodies of water met that suited the commercial needs of his empire as he foresaw them. He named Dinocrates, an experienced Greek city planner from Rhodes, to head up the development of Alexandria, and gave him detailed instructions on what religious and secular facilities and monuments the city would need.

Alexander then marched on eastward, continuing his campaign of revenge against the Persians. He was never to return to the city that bore his name.

In the 12 years that followed, his army conquered a territory that stretched from the west coast of Asia Minor to the Indian subcontinent; nothing, it seemed, could stop its advance. But in 323 BC, wounded many times and exhausted, Alexander succumbed to fever at Babylon and died at the age of 32. His generals divided up the con-



Surf off the Qait Bey Fort, where stone blocks remaining from the destroyed Pharos are said to be sometimes visible beneath the water.

quered lands among themselves, governing at first on behalf of Macedonia, but eventually declaring themselves kings of the areas they controlled.

On Alexander's death, one of his generals, named Ptolemy, was given the governorship of Egypt and Libya. As he departed to take up his duties, he asserted his independence by having his troops ambush Alexander's funeral cortege, bound for Macedonia, and divert it to Egypt. There, the conqueror's body was placed in a gold sarcophagus and buried in an ornate tomb at the center of Alexandria. Ptolemy thus established his intention to found a dynasty of Greek rulers over Egypt who could trace their line back to Alexander the Great, spiritually if not biologically.

Alexandria had been carefully planned and built, and contained many fine monuments, landmarks and facilities. Its commercial foundation proved to be sound, and the city grew rapidly.

From the Greek city of Cnidus on the southwestern coast of Asia Minor, Ptolemy brought Sostratus, a famous architect and builder, to direct construction of the Pharos lighthouse. The structure took 12 years to complete—finally becoming operational during the reign of Ptolemy's son, Ptolemy Philadelphus—and cost 800 talents of silver, equivalent to 742,400 ounces, or some four million dollars' worth—a large sum at the time.

Pharos was the name of the island that protected the Great Harbor; in time that word was applied to the lighthouse itself—and eventually, *pharos* came to mean "lighthouse" in many languages. The 122-meter (400-foot) marvel quickly became a symbol of Alexandria, just as the Eiffel Tower today symbolizes Paris.

The lighthouse consisted of three tiers—with square, octagonal and circular cross-sections, successively—and rested upon a square foundation structure that rose six meters (20 feet) above the ground, extended more than 100 meters (350 feet) on each side and contained many rooms. This foundation building was made of limestone blocks covered with carved white marble.

Above this stood the first tier of the lighthouse itself, with a square cross-section, about 30 meters (100 feet) on a side, rising 60 to 70 meters (200 to 235 feet) to a terrace about 24 meters (80 feet) square. This tier contained as many as 300 rooms—presumably housing workers and attendants—and many windows pierced the white marble exterior. Andalusian traveler Ibn Jubair, who toured the lighthouse in 1183, described the first level as maze-like, filled with "stairways and entrances and numerous apartments, so that he who penetrates and wanders through its passages may be lost." A parapet wall surrounded the terrace at the top of the tier, and marble tritons were located at each of the four corners. Inside, a wide ramp spiraled upward to the terrace.

The main entrance to the Qait Bey Fort, on the former site of the Pharos.

Near the top of the tier's eastern face, positioned so that it could be seen from ships sailing into and out of the Great Harbor, was the following inscription in large Greek letters:

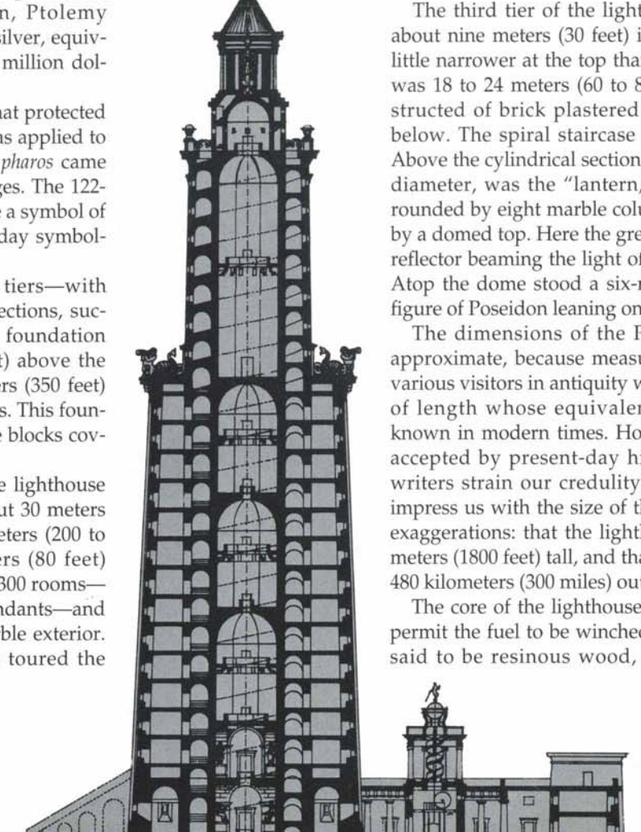
SOSTRATUS THE CNIDIAN, SON OF DEXIFANOS
DEDICATES THIS TO THE SAVIOR GODS
ON BEHALF OF THOSE WHO SAIL THE SEAS

The second tier of the Pharos, about 35 meters (115 feet) high, was octagonal in cross-section, about 17 meters (55 feet) across and slightly narrower at the top than the bottom. This tier too was faced with white marble and furnished with windows to light the interior. What had begun as a ramp on the first level was transformed into a spiral staircase on the second, ending at another walled terrace.

The third tier of the lighthouse was a cylinder about nine meters (30 feet) in diameter and also a little narrower at the top than the bottom. This tier was 18 to 24 meters (60 to 80 feet) high, and constructed of brick plastered to match the marble below. The spiral staircase continued to the top. Above the cylindrical section, and sharing the same diameter, was the "lantern," an open space surrounded by eight marble columns and surmounted by a domed top. Here the great fire burned, with its reflector beaming the light of the flames out to sea. Atop the dome stood a six-meter (20-foot) bronze figure of Poseidon leaning on his trident.

The dimensions of the Pharos cited here are approximate, because measurements recorded by various visitors in antiquity were expressed in units of length whose equivalents are not precisely known in modern times. However, the figures are accepted by present-day historians. Some early writers strain our credulity in their eagerness to impress us with the size of the Pharos. Among the exaggerations: that the lighthouse was almost 550 meters (1800 feet) tall, and that its fire could be seen 480 kilometers (300 miles) out to sea!

The core of the lighthouse tower was hollow, to permit the fuel to be winched up to the top. It was said to be resinous wood, probably acacia and



A possible cross-section of the Pharos as it was originally built.

tamarisk. The fire enabled mariners to pinpoint the location of Alexandria at night, while its smoke served the same purpose during the day, being visible long before the lighthouse itself came into view over the horizon.

Some ancient writers doubted that enough fuel could be raised to the top of the tower to keep a bonfire blazing day and night. Surely the task must have been formidable, whatever the means. Forster suggests some sort of hydraulic mechanism was used; otherwise, he says, "we must imagine a procession of donkeys who cease not night and day to go up and down the spirals with loads of wood on their backs." Some writers in antiquity preferred to suppose that the fire was kept burning at the bottom of the lighthouse and that the light was caught with mirrors and reflected up through the hollow interior of the tower and out to sea. It is more likely that the fire was at the top, as most believe, and that a single reflector was located behind it.

Precise details about the reflector are unknown—of what material it was made, its dimensions, whether it was convex, concave, or flat, and exactly how it functioned. Forster, in his celebrated guide to Alexandria (See *Aramco World*, January-February 1988), wrote: "Visitors speak of a mysterious 'mirror' on the summit, which was more wonderful than the building itself.... Some accounts describe it as made of finely wrought glass or transparent stone, and declare that a man sitting under it could see ships at sea that were invisible to the naked eye. A telescope?" In fact, lenses were not invented for another 15 centuries, as far as anyone knows, to say nothing of telescopes.

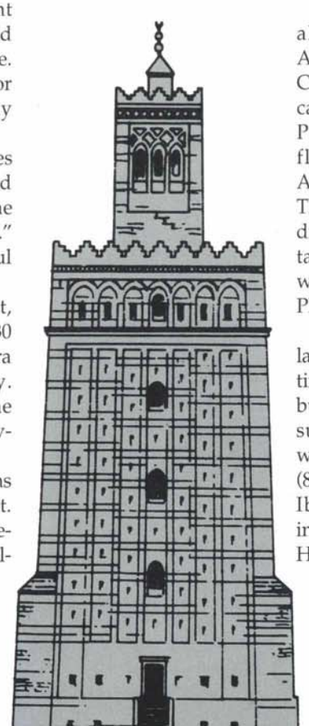
Another British writer, Michael Ashley, argues that the lighthouse had more than one mirror, and "some maintained these mirrors could focus the sun's rays on enemy ships and set them on fire." He adds: "This would be possible and was a useful rumor to be employed in the defense of a city."

Alexandria, as the Ptolemaic capital of Egypt, passed from Greek to Roman administration in 30 BC with the deaths of its last Greek ruler, Cleopatra VII, and her Roman husband, Mark Antony. Government by the Romans continued into the city's Christian period, which lasted until the seventh century.

The Islamic conquests, spreading in all directions from the Arabian heartland, soon included Egypt. In the year 641, Alexandria capitulated after a one-year siege by the forces of Arab general 'Amr ibn al-'As, who spared the city and its predominantly Greek population. When the general was called away from Alexandria on other duties, the Greeks rose up and recaptured the city. Furious at this revolt, 'Amr returned in 646 and retook Alexandria; again he spared the population, but he had the defensive walls of the city pulled down to prevent any future resistance. Alexandria was now on its way to becoming an Arab city, though its substantial non-Arab community continued lively and influential into modern times.

Small boats still find Alexandria's harbor a safe anchorage.

No monument in Alexandria was better known than the Pharos. Over its long life—the lighthouse functioned for nearly a thousand years—its uniqueness combined with the reputation of Alexandria's scholars, gathered in the great library (See page 24), to furnish material for numerous legends. Well after the lighthouse had passed its prime, stories continued to circulate about its mythical features. Forster writes, "Though unable to preserve the Pharos the Arabs admired it, and speak, with their love of the marvelous, of a statue on it whose finger followed the diurnal course of the sun, of a second statue who gave out with varying and melodious voices the various hours of the day, and of a third who shouted an alarm as soon as a hostile flotilla set sail." He goes on, "The first two statues may have existed; the Alexandrians loved such toys."



The Pharos as rebuilt in the 13th and 14th centuries.

Another legend is cited by a number of writers, all possibly drawing on one dubious source. According to the story, the Byzantine emperor at Constantinople, in order to harm the Abbasid caliph's trade, or, in other versions, because the Pharos "mirror" had detected or destroyed his fleet, sent word that a treasure—perhaps Alexander's—was hidden in or under the Pharos. The caliph is supposed to have ordered his men to dismantle the Pharos, and the first two tiers were taken down before it was realized that the story was a trick. Reliable reports on the condition of the Pharos during its lifetime show this tale to be false.

Around the year 700, an earthquake toppled the lantern with its Poseidon statue. But the Arabs continued to operate the Pharos as before, with a fire burning at the top, undomed. The structure had suffered other damage as well, but few repairs were made until the reign of Ahmad ibn Tulun (868-905), Turkish founder of the Tulunid dynasty. Ibn Tulun had a taste for public works and installed many parks and buildings in Alexandria. He also undertook the first major restoration of the damaged Pharos in 880, and in place of the former lantern and the fire at the top, erected a small mosque crowned with the Islamic crescent.

Eyewitness accounts tell us of the condition of the Pharos as it neared the last two centuries of its long existence. Another earthquake in 956 was followed by restorations in 980, but details are unknown. In 1115, Hispano-Arab geographer al-Idrisi wrote admiringly about the height and solidity of the Pharos. Yusuf ibn al-Shaykh, an architect and builder, took measurements of the lighthouse in 1165, confirming that Pharos was still intact—apart from the dome and statue. Even more careful measurements were recorded in 1166 by Abu Hajjaj Yusuf ibn Muhammad al-Balawi al-Andalusi, another Spanish Muslim who visited Alexandria. These measurements seem to be the best of those times, but there are some obvious errors, perhaps due to faulty conversion.

In 1303, an earthquake is believed to have destroyed the top two sections, leaving only the first tier. For a while, a fire was kept burning at its top, to guide ships as before. Several years afterward, the fire was extinguished for the last time, and another small mosque was built atop the tier. More earthquakes followed a few years later, destroying the Pharos beyond restoration, as Ibn Battuta was to report.

Finally, in 1480, the Mamluk sultan Qait Bey used blocks from the ruined Pharos to build the fort that now stands on the same spot and bears his name. Other blocks and detritus from the lighthouse may be seen under water nearby. The Pharos was no more.

But the grandeur of the original Pharos was never forgotten by the Arabs. They called it al-Manarah, the place of fire, and therefore of light. From this, we derive our word *minaret*. A call to prayer that comes from a tower of light is an inspired symbol.

An executive engineer turned historian, Peter Limber lived in the Middle East for several years and researched this article in Alexandria.

The quotation from Ibn Battuta is from *The Travels of Ibn Battuta*, translated by H.A.R. Gibb, Vol. I, published for the Hakluyt Society by Cambridge University Press, 1958. Quotations from E.M. Forster are from his *Alexandria: A History and a Guide*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1986. Line drawings of the Pharos are from Hermann Thiersch's *Pharos: Antike Islam und Occident: Ein Beitrag zur Architekurgeschichte*, Leipzig and Berlin, Tuebner, 1909.

RECONSTRUCTING PHAROS

Dr. Omar El Hadidi is an Egyptian with a mission: Since 1978, this Alexandrian has dreamed of reconstructing the Pharos. This time, the tower would be part of a hotel, yacht basin and marine-science complex, rather than serving as an aid to shipping.

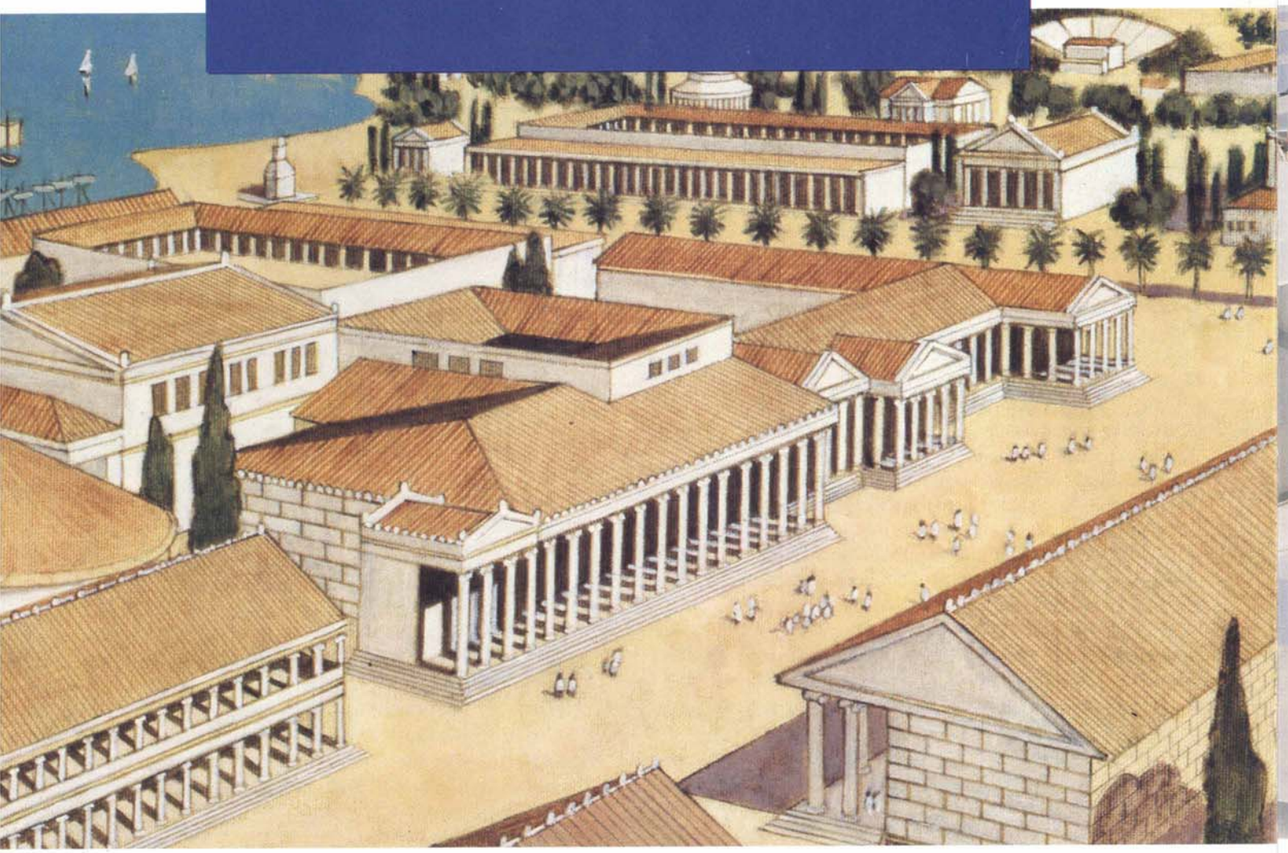
"I would have liked it to be located exactly on the same site, as well," says El Hadidi, "but this is now occupied by the historic Fort Qait Bey."

The energetic El Hadidi, Finland's honorary consul general in Alexandria, first managed to get the Pharos project moving in 1980, when he convinced the Yacht Club of Alexandria to take an active interest in the enterprise. The club's location, just a short distance west of the Qait Bey Fort on Pharos Island, was seen as a potential building site. Today, however, the focus is on the Greek Club, not far from the Yacht Club. The Greek Club, originally established by Egyptian-Greek cotton merchants, has agreed to make its property available for the project, El Hadidi says, calling this an appropriate move, given the Ptolemaic origins of the Pharos.

El Hadidi now sees the project as an opportunity to replan all of the existing facilities on the eastern end of Pharos Island, apart from Fort Qait Bey. The broad base of the reconstructed Pharos would house not only a five-star hotel but also new Greek Club facilities, an aquarium, a marine-sciences institute, a university marine-research section and a marina for yachts. Atop the lighthouse itself would be a panoramic viewing area.

Back in 1981, a Finnish-Swiss consortium of technical firms and hotel operators put forth a detailed proposal for carrying out the Pharos reconstruction project. The proposal, which won out over 31 international competitors, has not moved beyond the planning stage, due to what El Hadidi calls "bureaucratic difficulties." But Egyptian tourism officials are enthusiastic about the project, he says, international support is growing, and he feels it won't be long before the plan is finally "put into action."

REBUILDING AN ANCIENT GLORY



Where antiquity's greatest library once stood,
a new world center
of scholarship and research is rising,
round as the moon...

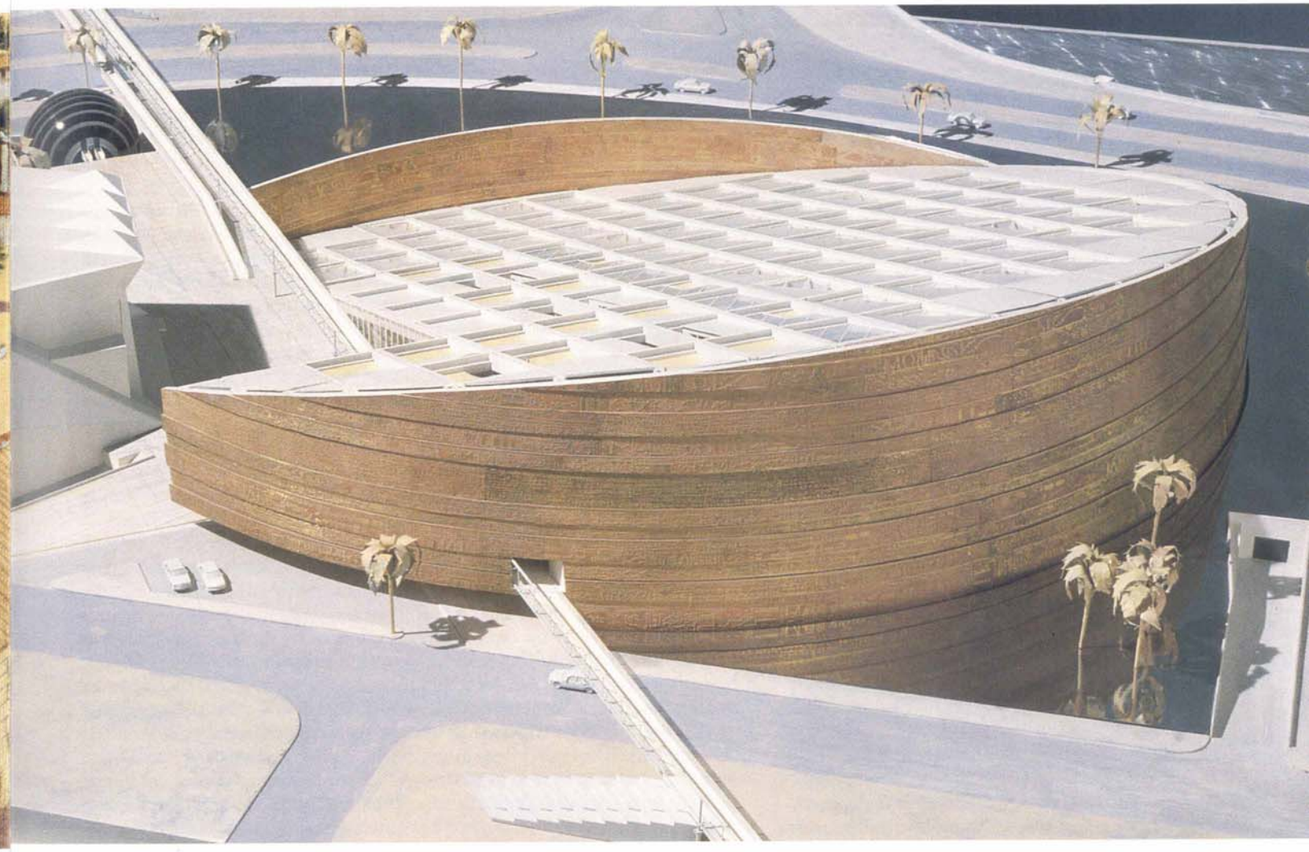
WRITTEN BY JO NEWSON AND LARRY LUXNER
ILLUSTRATED BY MICHAEL GRIMSDALE
PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF SNØHETTA

Later this year, hard-hatted construction workers at a four-hectare (10-acre) site on Alexandria's hotel-studded Mediterranean coast will begin restoring the ancient world's greatest center of knowledge to its former glory.

For the workers themselves and for millions of Egyptians, the recreation of the 2300-year-old Alexandria Library has become a great source of national pride. It has been hailed by Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak as "a monument to civilization" which, like its ancient model, will "help strengthen the foundations of peace and promote friendship among peoples." It is the first large library to be designed and constructed with the help of the international community, the object of a massive fund-raising effort spearheaded by political and intellectual leaders, including Mubarak, King Hassan II of Morocco, Shaykh Zayed bin Sultan al-Nahyan, president of the United Arab Emirates, French President François Mittérand, Queen Sofia of Spain and Queen Noor of Jordan, former Greek Minister of Culture Melina Mercouri, Nobel laureates Naguib Mahfouz, Octavio Paz and Wole Soyinka, and former Librarian of Congress Daniel Boorstin.

Their goal: nothing less than the construction of a $171.5-million, fully computerized library and conference center near the site of its ancient counterpart, stocked with at least four million volumes and equipped with the latest in information technology and library science.

On its completion by the end of 1997, the Bibliotheca Alexandrina, as it is being called, will become one of the world's 20 biggest national repositories of books — along with the Moscow Library, the British Library and the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. Its ultimate capacity is eight million volumes, and it will include science and calligraphy museums and a music library as well.

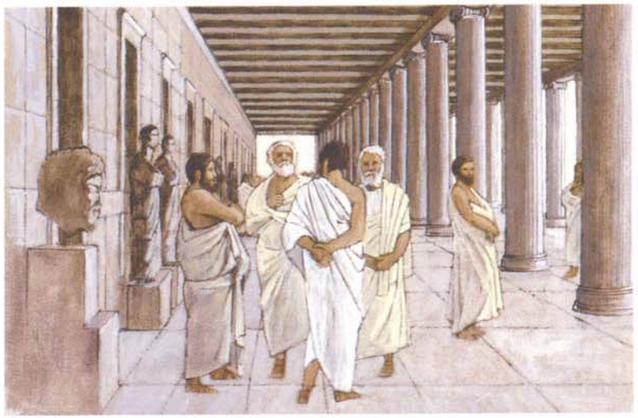


The new Bibliotheca Alexandrina, shown above as an architect's model, will occupy roughly the same site on Alexandria's waterfront as the original library did (opposite page) near the turn of the millennium.

The whole complex was organized into faculties, whose scholars were paid from the royal purse.

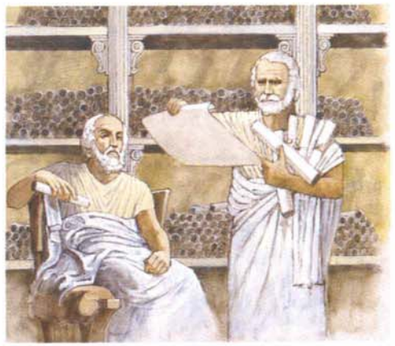
"The great response of the community of nations in support of the Alexandria Library project has been overwhelming," said Mubarak, whose government signed an agreement in 1990 with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to raise funds for the library, in much the same way that UNESCO helped to save Egypt's Abu Simbel and Philae monuments in the 1960's and 70's (See *Aramco World*, July-August 1976).

The library project is especially important to Dr. Mohsen Zahran, a professor of literature at Alexandria University and executive director of the General Organization for the Alexandria Library (GOAL). In his office in the sprawling Mediterranean port city of four million, Zahran underlined that the Alexandria Library project is significant not just for Egypt or the Middle East, but for the entire world.



"Having this beacon of culture here will bring a great deal of attention and many visitors to Alexandria, but this is not the intent," Zahran said. "We have no alternative in this region but to develop the mind. Thus Egypt has been training and graduating teachers, engineers, architects and sending them to work throughout the Arab world. Yet, we do not want this new library to be in the service of Arabs only. We must rally all countries."

Historians generally agree that the ancient library was founded by Aristotle's pupil, Demetrius of Phalerum, in the fourth century BC. Demetrius, expelled from Athens, sought refuge in Alexandria, where he suggested to king Ptolemy I Soter that "he should assemble and study a collection of books on royalty and the exercise of high command," and should launch the project with volumes from Aristotle's personal library. Ptolemy went further, and ordered the establishment of a library to contain "all the books of the world" and "the writings of all the nations."



Scholars converse at the entrance of the ancient library, at top, whose goal was to assemble and preserve the knowledge of all nations. The library's collection was catalogued, above, with a summary of each work attached, and the scrolls shelved alphabetically by author.

No one knows with certainty what the great institution looked like, but the Greek geographer Strabo described it as part of a richly decorated complex of buildings and gardens. The whole complex was a center for learning and research, organized into faculties, whose salaried scholars were paid from the royal purse.

The library's broader mission was to rescue Greek literature from decay — almost literally, for conservation involved a perpetual battle against the disintegration of papyrus, cloth and leather scrolls, and, in its most rudimentary form, consisted simply of recopying texts. As Peter Green points out in his 1990 book *Alexander to Actium: The Historical Evolution of the Hellenistic Age*, there was some justification for the fear that the literary heritage of classical Greece was threatened: In that era, after all, survival of texts was a matter of supply and demand, and unpopular writers attracted neither scribes nor booksellers.

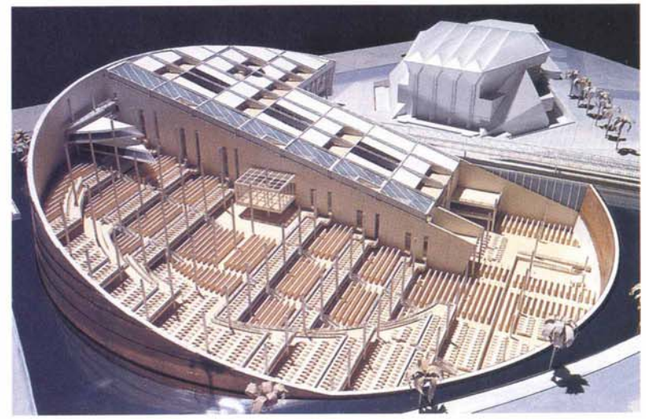
By the middle of the first century BC, the Alexandria Library contained perhaps as many as 700,000 manuscripts on papyrus, all fully catalogued with a summary of their content and shelved alphabetically by author. It was the largest collection of books the world had ever seen, writes Egyptian historian Mostafa El-Abbadi. Legend has it that every boat passing Alexandria's busy port had to make available any scrolls that might be of interest to the library.

As its fame spread, many noted scholars took up residence in the library, among them Herophilus, the father of anatomy (340-300 BC); Euclid, the great geometer (330-280 BC); Eratosthenes, who calculated the circumference of the Earth (284-192 BC); the grammarian and poet Callimachus (died 240 BC); Aristarchus of Samothrace, the foremost critical scholar of antiquity (died 180 BC); and Claudius Ptolemy (AD 90-168), the father of cartography (See *Aramco World*, May-June 1992).

The library stood for at least 300 years after its foundation, but strangely, there are few facts and many theories about the causes of its destruction and disappearance, and no certainty even about the century in which its demise took place.

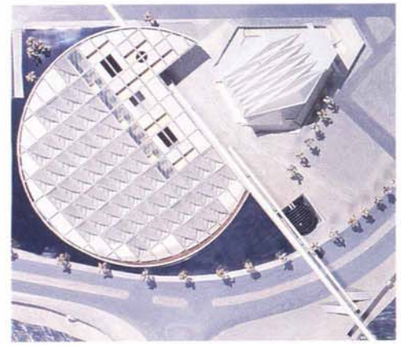
Some historians believe that in AD 30 the library was partly lost to fire and finally destroyed by earthquake; others that it burned to the ground in 48 BC, when Egyptian ships attacking Julius Caesar's troops were set on fire, and the flames were carried to the library by a north wind. Another story is that, with a decline of interest in the library, manuscripts were gradually used as fuel for heating the city; another, that fanatical Christians, worried by the pagan writings stored in the library, spread a rumor that gold was buried on the site; the library would thus have been gutted by searches for the treasure. The Encyclopaedia Britannica says the library's buildings were "probably" destroyed in AD 270 by Zenobia, queen of Palmyra.

At any rate, it wasn't until 1974 that the idea of reviving the old library was taken up again. For Dr. Lotfy Dowidar, former president of the University of Alexandria, the project was a personal dream. His vision was not of a physical reconstruction of what the great library might have been; instead, he saw a modern building which would capture the spirit of the ancient institution and, in that building, a "new public research library which can play a comparable or even better role than the old one." University officials, realizing that neither they nor the Egyptian government could finance such an ambitious project, approached the United Nations for help.



The university formed a committee which decided to locate the reborn library on a plot of land along the Corniche, Alexandria's seaside boulevard on the Mediterranean — a site near the probable location of the original library and just around the harbor from the Mamluk citadel of Qait Bey, once the location of Alexandria's famous lighthouse (See page 18). "By the grace of God," Zahran said, "the land had stayed vacant since the British occupation."

In September 1988 an international competition was launched by UNESCO and the International Union of Architects, funded with of $600,000 from the United Nations Development Program, to find a design that would rise to the architectural challenge of providing in one structure a functional library, an inviting public building and a monument to civilization. The international jury of architects and librarians was looking for a design that symbolized "a meeting of past and present, of the local and the universal."



Two views of the planned library show it with its slanting roof removed, at top, to reveal the stepping of the floor plan, and with pedestrian bridges in place, above, that will link it to the harbor and to the University of Alexandria. The neighboring building is the associated conference center.

The winner — chosen from more than 500 entries from 77 countries — was Snøhetta, an Oslo architecture and landscape firm. Named after a rugged mountain in central Norway, Snøhetta is a young architectural practice which prides itself on its recognition of the power of the landscape and which works "by discussion and interaction rather than dictates and manifestoes."

Seven architects — including Norwegians, two Americans, an Austrian and a Czech — two landscape architects and several consultants worked on the project. Their prize-winning design features a cylindrical building, set in a pool, with an L-shape cut out of its plan; the cylinder's gridded glass roof slants downward until part of it disappears below ground level.

The architects were concerned that the new building should be a part of the site, "growing from the ground it rests in and upon." At the same time, they wanted it to be distinguished from the skyline around the harbor and create a strong new image. "The new library had to be monumental, because of the power of the ideas represented by its history," said Craig Dykers, one of the American architects who helped design the 10-story structure for Snøhetta. Per Morten Josefson, one of the team's Norwegian architects, called the massive scale and simplicity of the building, which evoke Egypt's great monuments, the most important feature of the design.

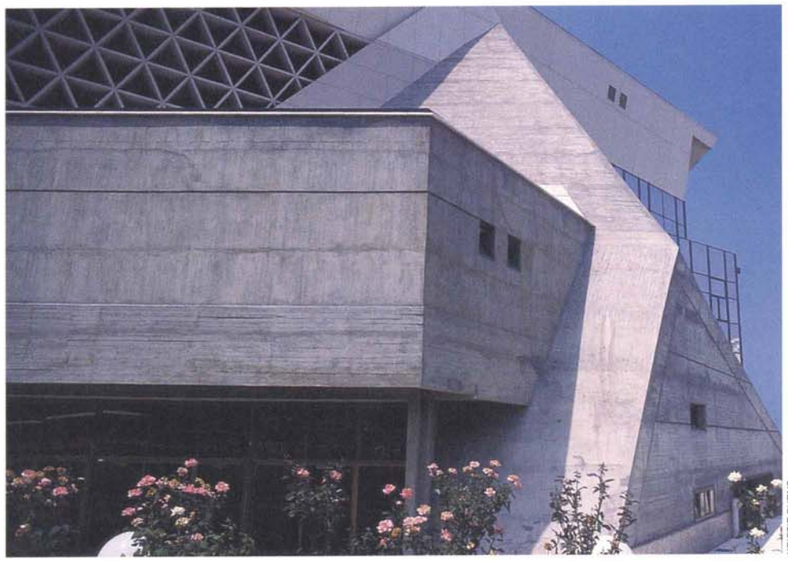
The design alludes to the past by symbolism rather than by borrowed elements of previous styles, but Snøhetta is reluctant to place its design into any of the pigeonholes of modernism; rather, it is "deliberately timeless." Dykers feels most content with the category "associative modernism" — since the building "can contain associations from different cultures during different periods of time."

The cylinder that comprises the main building is 160 meters (525 feet) in diameter. Its circular plan, which echoes the hieroglyph meaning "sun,"

Like the past, it is rooted in the geology of the earth; like the future, it rises toward space.

could be taken as a symbol of the sun or, as originally envisaged by the architects, the moon. "We went into the desert and spent some time observing the shapes there," said Dykers. "Two of the most striking images in the desert are the sun and moon as they emerge from the horizon. Our building tries to reflect that sensation." But Josefson stresses that the symbolism is deliberately open to different associations, "depending on the viewer's cultural background and personality".

The possible imagery of the sun and moon is reinforced by the dramatic rise and fall of the building above and below ground. The highest point of its tilting roof is 32 meters (105 feet) above ground, and the building descends to 12 meters (40 feet) below ground level. Burying part of the building counteracts the high humidity of the area and helps to provide secure and controlled storage for precious manuscripts. It also gives unparalleled insulation against noise — and meets the requirement that over 50 percent of the building be windowless. In symbolic terms, however, the half-buried cylinder can also evoke the past, rooted in the geology of the earth, and the future, rising toward the weightlessness of space. Another symbolic interpretation suggested by the architects is that the tilting of the roof opens out to the Mediterranean, Europe and the West, a gesture intended to enhance the relationship among the cultures of the area.



KRISTIE BURNS

The recently completed Alexandria Conference Center, with halls for lectures, theater and opera, is an integral part of the library project.

The interior of the building will consist of seven primary and 14 secondary levels in the form of terraces, all within one great cylindrical volume. The "stepping" of the floor plan avoids the claustrophobic effect common to many libraries. The views within the interior are not obscured by the height of the book stacks; each terrace will have viewing platforms to allow for unobstructed visibility.

Natural light, admitted by the dramatic angled glass roof, will be diffused and controlled by a complex system of baffles like upside-down umbrellas, which will protect manuscripts from the harsh direct sun. Balconies will allow access to the outside within the security of the library building.

The massive curving outer wall of the library, built of concrete with a reddish stone finish, will be covered in calligraphic carvings of varying depths, evoking the rugged appearance of cliffs along the Nile. The design, by the Norwegian artist Jorunn Sannes, is an abstract composition of letters from different ancient and modern languages; the architects initially thought of using a piece of text, but, said Dykers, "whatever statement we tried to apply wasn't important enough for this context."

About two-thirds of the building will be surrounded by water. The level surface of the pool will emphasize the tilting motion of the structure and provide dramatic reflections of the walls. The water will also serve as a cooling device. The pool will contain plants, carefully chosen to make it self-cleaning, and small spotlights arranged in the shapes of the constellations at the time of the ancient library.

Pedestrian bridges will pierce the great cylinder of the main building to link the library to the bay and to the university nearby. In front of the cylinder will be a spherical science museum and planetarium, clad in glass and stone, set within a pyramid-shaped excavation, like a scoop of ice cream in an ice-cream cone. A ramp will allow visitors to descend into the "cone" below the sphere, so that, like Atlas, they can almost hold it in their hands. Much of the site will be hard-surfaced landscape set with palm trees, to stand up to the impact of crowds of visitors.

In more ways than one, the new library will be far more public than the ancient one can ever have been. Electronic systems and scientific databases will allow researchers all over the world access to the library's wealth of material. While the original library's intention — to collect the writings of all nations — is now an impossibility, the storage of titles on various electronic media will give vast potential capacity to an international library with ambition to become, like its predecessor, universal. And the transfer of manuscripts onto optical disks will guarantee a more lasting conservation than scores of scribes, recopying works onto papyrus, leather and cloth, could have done in the past.

To make this design come true, Italian information consultant Giovanni Romerio was appointed project manager of the Alexandria Library and head of its executive secretariat in February 1992.

Romerio, who has worked with UNESCO since 1974, said his agency signed two contracts last October with Snøhetta and its Egyptian engineering partner Hamza Associates. The design phase of the project started on December 21, 1993, and should be completed by August 1995.

The remainder of the project is divided into three packages, Romerio said: excavation and foundation work, construction, and final-phase work such as air-conditioning, painting and furnishing. About 10 companies will be selected as subcontractors in a prequalification bidding on May 16 of this year, with actual work to begin in October and to finish by December 1997. "We plan to open in 1998, with a minimum of 50 employees, and then go up to 500 people," Romerio said.

As of January of this year, GOAL had raised some $65 million in contributions from the Arab world — including $23 million from Saudi Arabia, $21 million from Iraq, $20 million from the UAE, and $1 million from Oman. Egypt's own contribution comprises the valuable site itself, and the $20 million conference center, already completed, to be associated with the new library. At the other end of the scale, a $1000 check recently arrived from tiny Mauritius in the Indian Ocean.

The library's massive outer wall will be patterned with calligraphic carvings in many languages living and dead, producing a texture resembling Egypt's striated Nileside cliffs.

"The situation has changed a lot just since the signing of the two contracts," Romerio said. "There is deepening Egyptian involvement in the project, and I think Western nations would like to participate as well, but they want to see a good start."

In fact, the Italian government has pledged $500,000 to fund the International School for Information Studies that will be a component of the new library. Both Belgium and the United Kingdom have also promised to support the Alexandria Library through scholarships and educational and scientific cooperation. And that's not all.

"Turkey has signed a protocol to give us copies of manuscripts and documents that date back to the Ottoman Empire and its relationship with Egypt," Mohsen Zahran said. "Greece will support the Hall of Fame at the library's entrance, where you will see busts of great scholars of the ancient library, primarily from Greece. Queen Sofia of Spain has promised to donate copies of books, documents and manuscripts that pertain to Arab culture in Spain. And President Mittérand has said he would instruct the French Ministry of Culture to support the project with equipment and manuscripts.

"Our hopes are very high."

Jo Newson is a free-lance writer and editor specializing in architecture and design. She was formerly editor of Mimar *magazine. Larry Luxner is a free-lance journalist based in San Juan, Puerto Rico, and a frequent contributor to* Aramco World.

BALANCING ON THE HYPHEN

WRITTEN BY CHAR SIMONS PHOTOGRAPHED BY GEORGE BARAMKI AZAR

Her grandmother Anissa ran Jordan's first public library from the family home. Her Bedouin grandfather Salih was offered a movie role by Cecil B. De Mille; he laughed and gave De Mille a goat.

The richness of such family tales is one source of the energy Arab-American author Diana Abu-Jaber exhibits in her eclectic writings. Her first novel, *Arabian Jazz*, was published last summer by Harcourt Brace, and will be issued in paperback this spring. Along with authors like Oscar Hijuelos and Bharati Mukherjee, Abu-Jaber belongs to what the *Christian Science Monitor* calls the hottest literary trend around — world literature. It is the phenomenon of "hyphenated people," be they Arab-American or Pakistani-British, exploring what it means to be society's "others."

Arabian Jazz is the culmination of Abu-Jaber's coming to terms with her Palestinian and Jordanian roots. "Like many first-generation writers," she says, "I'm trying to find cultural balance between ancestry and America." The book's main characters, sisters Melvina and Jemorah Ramoud, are incarnations of herself. Their father, Matussem, began as a portrait of Abu-Jaber's father, but evolved into an idealized father, dreamer and jazz drummer, loving and forbearing, articulate in pell-mell monologues of Arabized English.

Though she has been writing since middle school, Abu-Jaber's early short stories lacked the mixture of intensity, passion and light-heartedness of *Arabian Jazz*. It wasn't until a college professor encouraged her to write from her own experience as an Arab-American that Abu-Jaber found a voice of her own. Without losing its Arab flavor, her 374-page novel, set in upstate New York, transcends ethnic boundaries, delving into family and cross-cultural conflicts familiar to any immigrants and their somewhat Americanized children. *Arabian Jazz* has been called the first genuinely American novel set in an Arab-American context.

Arab-American writer Diana Abu-Jaber's new novel mines both the comedy and the conflict of life with two cultures.

"I was trying to construct myself," explains Abu-Jaber, 34, curled up on a couch in the high-rise apartment in Eugene, Oregon, that she shares with her husband, Michael Clark. "My relationship with the Middle East is one of return. When I was younger, I had a very fragmented sense of self. I couldn't find a role model for a first-generation anything.

"For years and years I thought of my heritage as a nuisance," Abu-Jaber says, speaking of her childhood in Euclid, New York. "It meant we were different and the objects of ridicule."

Although Abu-Jaber lived in Jordan only briefly in the late 1960's, when her father tried to return to the Middle East, that visit left an indelible mark on her. "I didn't feel nearly as much like an outsider in Jordan as I did in this country," she says. After a year, Abu-Jaber, her two younger sisters and her parents left her father's ancestral town of Yehdouda and returned to upstate New York.

Since then, Abu-Jaber has explored the role of the outsider in teaching as well as writing. The creative writing course she taught this fall at the University of Oregon, "First Generation American Writers," included works by several hyphenated people like herself.

"You can't be a speaker for your people," she says. "But *Arabian Jazz* is in part my attempt to celebrate and honor Arab-Americans."

Char Simons is a free-lance writer based in Olympia, Washington. She has lived and traveled in Turkey and Egypt.

LEBANON

A HERITAGE TO RESTORE

WRITTEN BY KERRY ABBOTT PHOTOGRAPHED BY GEORGE BARAMKI AZAR

A monumental Roman archway stands in Tyre as a powerful reminder of the history of conquest upon conquest endured by this Lebanese coastal city.

In the Place des Canons, the center of town that for years served as a dividing line between East and West Beirut, two large, shallow rectangles have been carved into the soil at either end of this now barren patch of ground. It is hard to imagine that a five-lane road, clogged with cars and buses, once surrounded this square and served as the main thoroughfare between the capital and the countryside. In fact, the square is again serving as a link, this time between Beirut's past and present – a link in the search for precise clues to the city's Phoenician, Roman and Arab past.

The holes, archeological soundings in the *centre-ville*, are the first of several assays into the realm of urban archeology. They mark but one phase in the restoration of Lebanon's more than 5000 years of cultural heritage.Those millennia have been so full of history that the entire country is dotted with landmarks that tell of intrigue and intervention, from the pharaohs of Egypt to Alexander the Great, onward to the Franks and Amir Fakhr al-Din II, and onward still. As civilizations everywhere build on their predecessors' ruins, reusing the stones of destroyed castles, temples and cities to build new ones, so has modern Lebanon been constructed on, and of, the layers of bygone eras.

Most cities never have the opportunity to discover what clues to their past lie buried beneath their skyscrapers. But Lebanon's post-war reconstruction program (See *Aramco World*, January-February 1994) involves razing entire quarters of the war-torn capital, giving archeologists and historians a unique opportunity to search for answers to questions long pondered.

Foremost among those campaigning to include cultural preservation on the agenda of the developers redesigning Beirut's central district is Dr. Helga Seeden, professor of archeology at the American University of Beirut and one of the few Westerners who stayed in Lebanon throughout the years of war. With the assistance of UNESCO specialists in urban archeology, she will supervise whatever excavations take place, relying largely on volunteer labor by her students. The extent of the surveys depends both on construction schedules and on the availability of funds.

Eager to erase the memories of war, many developers are pressing to rebuild Beirut as a new and glittering modern metropolis. Older residents, warmed by their memories of the city's past glory, want simply to restore the downtown area to its prewar state. But Beirut's heart and soul lie deeper than either glass skyscrapers or mellow limestone and red tile roofs: When the Place des Canons was first modernized in the 1950's, a bulldozer uncovered a sphinx – the first of countless treasures discovered during that phase of construction. In fact, more than half of Beirut's residents today were born after the war began in 1975, and thus have no emotional attachment to the city that haunts the memories of their parents. Thus Seeden plans instead to establish a museum of the city and a series of "memory trails," illustrated pathways that will let visitors journey back to the Beirut of generations past.

As they dig, Helga Seeden and her team could unearth traces of the law school that made ancient Berytus a famous Roman colony until an earthquake leveled the city in 551. Or they might find

A leader of efforts to preserve the cultural heritage of Lebanon and its capital is Helga Seeden, archeology professor at the American University of Beirut.

Sidon's modern face—that of a sleepy seaport town—belies its vibrant history. Beyond the harbor stands the famed sea castle, built as a crusader fortress by King Louis IX and reconstructed by the Mamluks.

Pottery urns and engraved stelae from the first Phoenician children's cemetery ever found in Lebanon were rescued in Tyre by archeology students and faculty of AUB.

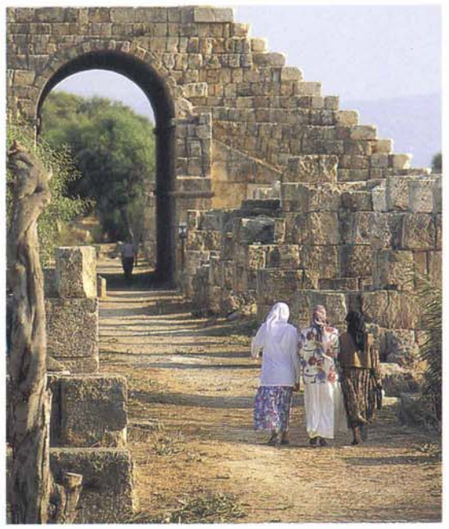
the Roman baths or hippodrome: Clues to their location exist in the scattering of columns on view near Parliament Square. A wealth of Phoenician items was recently uncovered in the southern coastal city of Tyre, which boasts a luminous record as a principal trading center of antiquity. While much of interest to archeologists has been salvaged from the sea off Tyre, the recent finds have been on land: cinerary urns from a *tophet*, or cemetery for children, just on the edge of one of Tyre's major excavations of Roman ruins. Seeden recovered the pottery urns and engraved stelae after a student alerted her to their presence on the local illegal-antiquities market. The artifacts are now on display at the Bank of Lebanon in Beirut, along with a narrative text about the Phoenician letters found carved into some of the stones, and an explanation of why infants may have been cremated and their remains preserved in this way.

Just how many other unique discoveries of this kind find overseas buyers before they are noticed remains a matter of speculation. It is certain, though, that the loss of Lebanon's archeological heritage by illegal excavations has far exceeded the damage caused that heritage by war. Nearly every corner of the country shows signs of treasure hunters, most of whom have no other source of income, and know that they can uncover artifacts almost anywhere they sink a shovel into the earth. Their choicest finds are quickly snatched up by profiteers who resell them for sizable sums to collectors abroad. Although all licenses for dealing in antiquities have been revoked, the trade continues, and untold treasures slip away from the country that needs them most.

The discovery and preservation of Lebanon's cultural heritage offer a way of teaching its people about the series of past civilizations that make the country the extraordinary and vigorous hybrid it is today. Suzy Hakimian, curator of the National Museum, believes that this cultural awareness must be taught in the schools, now that students are able to travel throughout their country and see sites that were inaccessible during the war. In the past, many people cited the country's history in defense of their own politics. Archeological evidence confirms that Lebanon's history is too rich to be interpreted in only one way, and that the Lebanese, in their experience and their genes, are the product of a many-peopled past.

While the civil war spared few areas of Lebanon, only the south of the country faced the waves of devastation so well known in Beirut. That region's two principal cities, Sidon (Sayda in Arabic) and Tyre (Sur), were important in the days of the Phoenicians, and have on view many more relics of previous eras than does Beirut.

The journey from the capital to Sidon takes less than an hour, but the short distance takes the traveler into another way of life. Despite widespread construction, this seaport city retains the two-lane, dusty roads of a small town. Little recalls the famed Phoenician trade center of the Mediterranean that existed under the pharaohs. Defeated first by the Cretans, and later by the Philistines, Sidon was eventually surpassed by



Visitors tour the ruins of the Tyre's Roman Hippodrome, above. Below, a stone lion, its sunlit mouth agape, guards the 20-meter-high columns of the Temple of Jupiter Heliopolitan at Baalbek.

Tyre as Queen of the Seas. But the rivalry among the Ptolemies, the Assyrians and others for control of the coastal towns continued. Sacked and burned by the Persians after its residents revolted, Sidon thereafter submitted to its invaders: first Alexander the Great, then alternate Seleucid and Ptolemaic rulers. Roman republic, Byzantine bishopric, Sayda of the Arab conquest – this patchwork of identities in one place typifies the influences that molded Lebanon's coastal cities. One of four baronies of the Frankish kingdom of Jerusalem, Sidon's ramparts were razed by Saladin in 1187 to forestall the crusaders' return. But they did return, twice, and the land and sea fortifications of French king Louis IX remain as a token of all the invasions endured.

At the end of Sidon's promenade lies the sea castle, so often captured in silhouette in Orientalists' engravings over the centuries. Built by Louis IX as a crusader fortress in the winter of 1228, only its original foundations remain. Most of what now stands was reconstructed by the Arabs after 1291, when the crusaders abandoned Sidon for good. The gray cylinders in the facade are granite columns from the Roman period, engaged here as binders. Today, fishermen cast their lines into the sea from the castle's walls, and young boys ride their bicycles over its rugged ocher stones.

Across from the castle, at the entrance to the suq, lies the Khan el-Franji, under reconstruction as a cultural center with funds donated by Sidon's most famous citizen, Prime Minister Rafic Hariri. This most captivating of all the khans, or caravanserais, constructed by Fakhr al-Din II was home to the French consul in the 17th century, at a time when good relations between France and Syria brought the city the honor and wealth of being the port that served Damascus.

Farther along the harbor road, a massive retaining wall encircles the old town. Behind it lies the Great Mosque, built on the site of the 13th-century crusader church of the Hospitalers of St. John, the walls of which remain. Next to the mosque stood Fakhr al-Din's palace. Further inland lies the castle of Louis IX, once his residence but today a stone palimpsest of the civilizations that passed across this coastal plain. It was built with stones from Greco-Roman times, and refortified and altered by successive waves of invaders who used its hilltop promontory and towers as a defensive position; excavations indicate that the site was a Phoenician necropolis in the 17th century BC. According to Homer, the Sidonian craftsmen were "skilled in all things," which made their city a coveted jewel throughout ancient history.

Tyre, also once a famed Phoenician trading center, lies further south on the same coastal road from Beirut. Like Sidon, it had a fortified harbor, most of which has crumbled into the sea or been buried under accretions of sand. It too began as an islet, upon which its religious and administrative center was located. For centuries protected by the Egyptians, Tyre – like Sidon and like Byblos in the north – prospered as a commercial center. The city was famed for its shipments of cedarwood, as well as of dye from the murex shell, which produced the renowned Tyrian purple. Its traders traveled throughout the Mediterranean; its fallen aristocracy followed Dido to found Qart Hadasht – the city of Carthage.

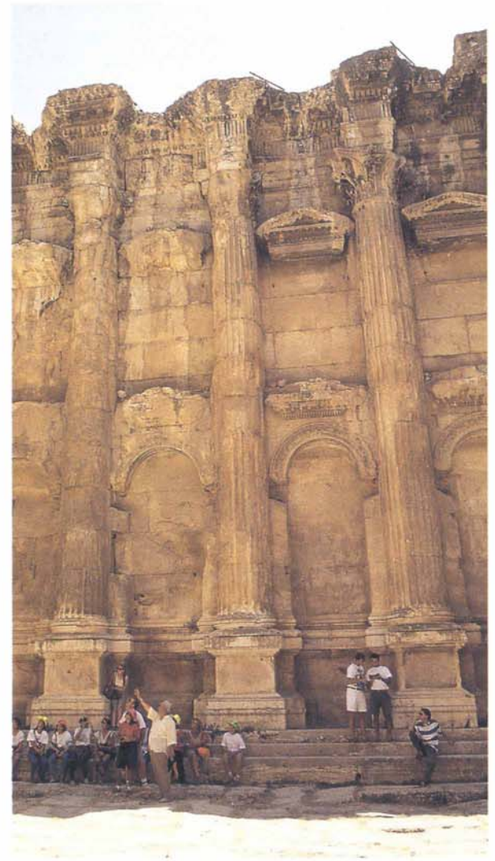
Successive battles, invasions, defeats and reconstruction mark the history of Tyre. Since Phoenician king Hiram first joined two rocky isles by a causeway to the shore, its residents resisted sieges and blockades by rulers from Nebuchadnezzar to Alexander the Great. The original peninsula of some 16 hectares (40 acres) is today more than three times that size, as layers of sand have been deposited on the shore over the centuries. Untold riches, from the gold and emerald columns of Hiram's temple to treasures of every subsequent era, remain buried under the modern city.

Two comprehensive excavations have uncovered much from Tyre's Roman and Byzantine periods as well as evidence of the Phoenician layer underneath. The city excavation, initiated by Amir Maurice Shihab in the 1940's, when he was director of antiquities, now sits on the edge of a bustling neighborhood. Still guarded by government employees, the site is surrounded by flowers and lush foliage and dotted with pieces of column, rows of cisterns, bath-house tiles and scarred mosaics. Signs posted by UNESCO remind us this is cultural property, to be protected, in the event of armed conflict, under the Hague Convention of 1954.

Pierre and Patricia Bikai, who for years conducted excavations in Tyre (See *Aramco World*, November-December 1972), once calculated that the whole city could have been bought in 1984 for $160 million and preserved as a national heritage site. Today, as directors of the American Center for Oriental Research in Amman, the Bikais concede that is no longer a possibility. Pierre, who is Lebanese, supervised construction of a museum for documenting and preserving archeological finds in the Tyre area. It remains closed; the finest of Tyre's treasures, including its sarcophagi, are hidden in the National Museum in Beirut. But much remains to be seen. The magnificent colonnade to the sea, the monumental arch and countless other ruins and relics discovered at every turn make Tyre one of the region's foremost archeological sites.

Lebanon's largest and most famous temple preserved from the Roman period dominates the city of Baalbek, about a two-hour drive east of Beirut into the Bekaa Valley. Once the site of a Phoenician temple dedicated to the sun god Baal, it was renamed Heliopolis by the Greeks in honor of the triad Jupiter, Venus and Mercury. Julius and Augustus Caesar planned it to its current scale, and while subsequent Syrian emperors added embellishments, the Byzantines attacked the temples as idolatrous. Fortified for warfare and crumbled by earthquakes, the complex was reconstructed in this century, including temples to Jupiter, Mercury and Venus. One temple, commonly attributed to Bacchus, served as the backdrop for the annual Baalbek Festival (See *Aramco World*, May-June 1972), which was halted by the civil war.

Once visible from afar, the Roman ruins are now obscured by the expansion of the modern town, which boasts a variety of small temples and shrines and an old suq. Current construction to meet the housing and social needs of the city's inhabitants means that more artifacts are being uncovered, and a museum is being established in the Mamluk tower at the corner of the Temple of Bacchus where some of these discoveries can be preserved and displayed. This step is part of a movement to create regional museums in Lebanon that will encourage local residents to take pride in and preserve the cultural heritage that has been and is being unearthed. Baalbek remains Lebanon's most popular tourist site, and its citizens have come to realize that an item sold has limited value, whereas an item displayed reaps continuing benefits.



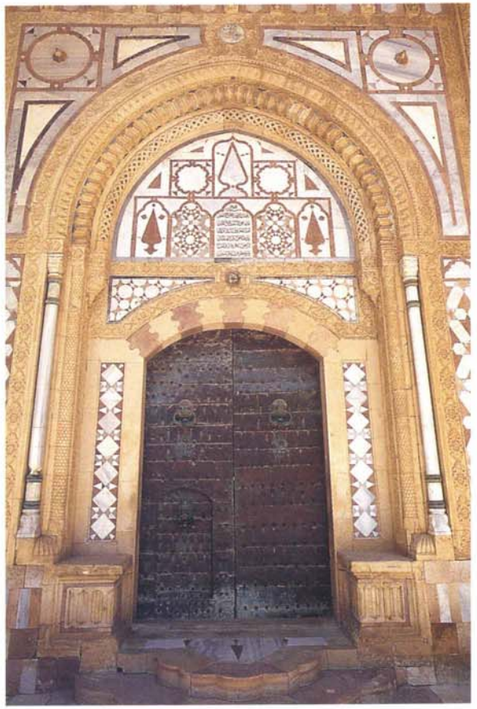
In Baalbek's Temple of Bacchus, fluted columns tower over visitors, dividing the wall vertically with two niches and arched and triangular pediments in each division. This site remains Lebanon's most popular tourist attraction.

Not far away, at the foot of the Anti-Lebanon mountain range, lies the Umayyad palace of Anjar. Probably founded in the late seventh century, it was built with elements taken from Roman and Byzantine buildings – creating confusion for some time as to the palace's origins and purpose. It is now believed to have been constructed by Mu'awiyah, appointed governor of Syria by the second caliph 'Umar, near an *'ain jariyah*, or flowing spring, which gave the palace its name. Not only does the site hold a princely palace whose arches still dramatize the horizon at sunset; it once held over 600 shops, making it a major caravanserai on the route between Tyre and Damascus. Pieced together from an assortment of columns, bases and capitals from other ruins in the region, the buildings were assembled with alternate layers of brick and stone, a Byzantine technique that rendered them more resistant to earthquakes. Anjar was laid out in quarters on typically Roman ninety-degree axes, and had broad avenues, covered arcades and a tunnel that functioned as a sewer. Well-preserved as an archeological site, Anjar is uniquely Arab in a

The historic sites of Byblos, like the 12th-century crusader castle at right, escaped the ravages of recent warfare. Careful planning and oversight have made Byblos a model of cultural preservation.

uniquely Lebanese way – built with materials and techniques from three earlier civilizations.

Another palace that combines styles, in this case from Italian rococo to the Oriental motifs of Constantinople and Damascus, is the former residence of the Druze amir Bashir al-Shihabi II at Beiteddine. The amir's reign did more to unify the country than that of his famous predecessor, Fakhr al-Din II, whose capital at Deir el-Qamar had been the traditional home of the amirs from the 16th to the 18th centuries. Nonetheless, Amir Bashir moved on up the mountain, building and embellishing his palace at Beiteddine over three decades, until he was deposed in 1840. Thereafter, the palace served as the Seraglio Beiteddine, inhabited by Druze rulers, until 1918, when Allied forces occupied it. The French high commissioner made it the "Caza of the Chouf." Upon independence, it was handed over to the government to serve as the summer residence of the president of Lebanon.

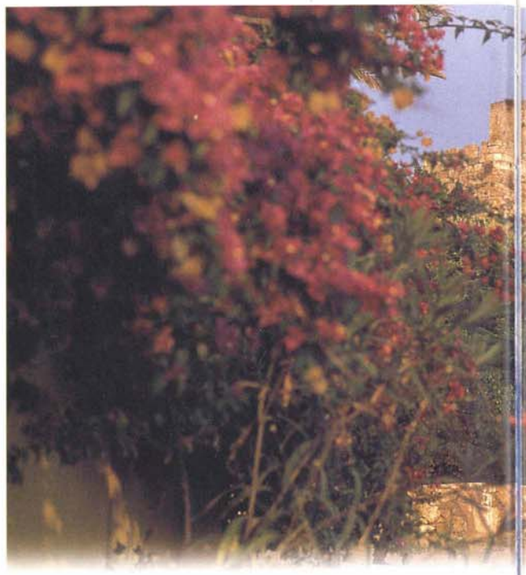


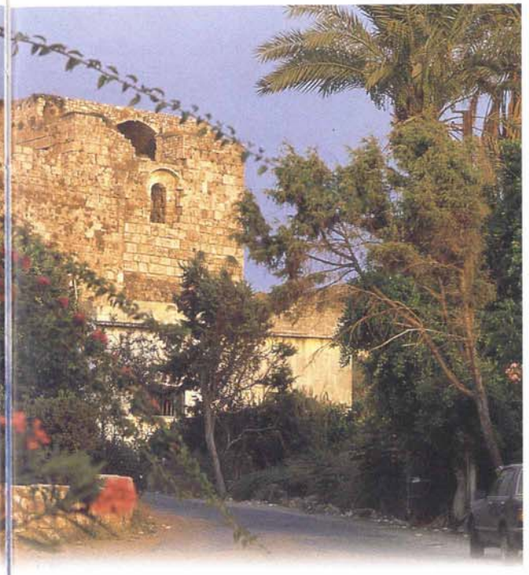
The ornately decorated *haremlek* entrance of Beiteddine Palace, above, leads to private apartments used by the family of Bashir al-Shihabi II in the early 19th century.

Today, the network of buildings has been opened to the public as a museum, dubbed the "Palace of the People." Outside the palace itself, with its ogival colonnades, wooden ceilings elaborately painted by Syrian artists and a variety of calligraphic designs, the former stables now house a rich collection of Byzantine mosaics, salvaged from churches at Jiyeh. Indeed, one richly ornamental pattern has been relaid on the lawn, looking deceptively like an oriental carpet.

The two most spectacular parts of the Beiteddine palace are the oldest: the reception hall of the *salamlek* ("men's side" or "official side" of the palace) and the *haremlek* ("ladies' side" or "residential side"), whose entrance is a masterpiece of engraving and mosaic inlay. The Turkish bath inside has colored-glass cabochons fitted into the cupola. This traditional area helps to recreate life as it was in Lebanon's Ottoman past. Nearby, on the same mountaintop, are the palatial residences Amir Bashir gave to his sons. One of them, restored as a hotel named the Mir Amin Palace, is today a favorite retreat from the summer heat and a luxurious location for celebrations of all sorts.

If Tyre can be considered as evidence of the parade of Lebanon's history in the south, Byblos (or Jbail) holds this honor for the countryside north of Beirut. Unlike the coastal towns of the south, Byblos escaped the destruction of war and today sits as a perfectly picturesque town, a model of urban archeological planning. Camille Asmar, director of Lebanon's Department of Antiquities, is credited with the careful regulation and oversight that made the town a beautiful blend of ornamental and functional, of monument and modern city.





The golden sandstone buildings of the suqs, with their heavy, dark wooden doors and ironwork grilles, the cobblestone streets, the cascades of grapevines and bougainvillea that drape over every wall and descend from unseen crevices – all this, surrounded by carefully outlined historic landscapes that reach to the sea, makes Jbail the ideal of what cultural preservation can contribute to the restoration of national pride and the reconstruction of the country.

Byblos is said to be the oldest inhabited city in the world, the source of the first Phoenician letters that gave us our alphabet. From the Amorites of the Syrian desert and their haunting obelisk temple, to the Egyptians, whose hieroglyphs were later transformed into letters, to the Greeks, whose corruption of the word "papyrus" gave Byblos its classical name, to the crusader castle and church – all influences have been carefully preserved in a harmonious integration of the legends and traditions that make Lebanon the eclectic blend it is today.

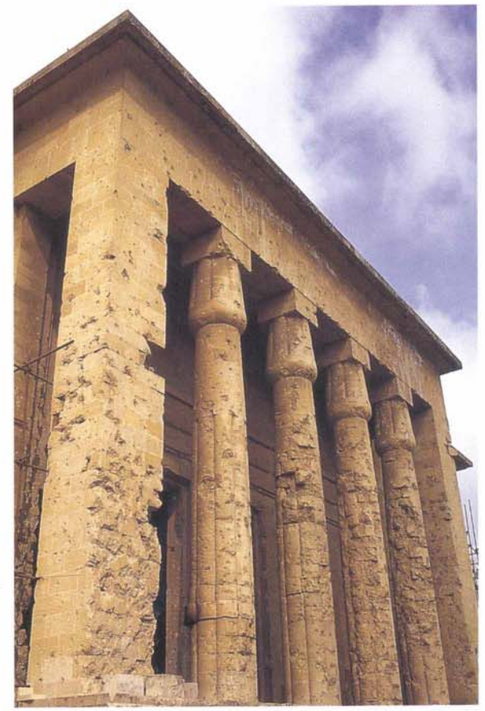
If Byblos has the feel of a town frozen in time, Tripoli, farther north, has the bustle of a city that never stops. It must be at the top of the list for renovation and cultural preservation, because Tripoli – in antiquity the seat of the Phoenician confederation of Tyre, Sidon and Aradus – is today the repository of the country's best Mamluk monuments. Still designated by the dark blue French Mandate plaques that identify them as historic sites, the various *madrasahs* (schools) and *hammams* (baths) are easily singled out by their distinctive black-and-white patterned arches and stonework. This city's skyline is marked by the domes and minarets of baths, suqs and mosques still in use. The crusader castle of Saint Gilles, on the highest hilltop, was rebuilt centuries ago by the Arabs, who have repeatedly manned it as a defensive position in various wars. Today, it is occupied by Lebanese soldiers who, along with visiting schoolchildren, gaze down at the harbor, el-Mina, the reason why the city was first established.

Tripoli's old city has several khans that served soap merchants and soldiers and tailors; the best of them, the Khan Khayyatine, or Caravanserai of the Tailors, was recently reconstructed by a German foundation. Tailors still occupy its shops, displaying their *abayas*, *sirwals* and even cabaret dance costumes. But everywhere one turns in this city, there lies a monument from the past. Two-toned Mamluk towers stand guard at the port; a dervish chapterhouse skirts the river's edge; parks and arcades, shops and mosques all crowd together to give Tripoli a visual splendor that Beirut long ago forfeited in its rush to build high-rise apartment blocks. If the same judicious planning evident in Byblos is applied to Tripoli, it can be revived to a level of grandeur befitting the capital of Lebanon's north.

Thus, the restoration of Lebanon's cultural heritage is a project that touches every corner of the country. Many sites, such as Tyre, Baalbek and the National Museum, are the focus of a group of patrons, who try to raise funds to pay for their protection and preservation. A most urgent case is the National Museum, which throughout the war straddled the main crossing point of divided Beirut and was repeatedly in the line of fire. As curator Hakimian points out, many Lebanese know the *mathaf*, or museum, only as the place where the shelling started, or as the only open passage between the eastern and western sectors of the city. A whole generation has not been inside the museum, and has never seen the internationally renowned Phoenician, Greek, and Roman sarcophagi, the obelisk statues from Jbail, or the world's richest collection of Phoenician and Arab jewelry.

Before they can do so, the gaping holes in the museum's facade need to be repaired to assure that the collection can be securely displayed. Water in the basement storerooms poses a threat to items deposited there; many of the museum's large pieces were simply sealed in massive blocks of concrete for safekeeping, or hidden away until their safety and security can be guaranteed. To retrieve the more delicate pieces may require prohibitively expensive laser technology. And as the building, a strategic site, was continually occupied by soldiers during the war, the interior is in need of renovation. In any event, over the past 20 years the techniques of museum design have changed. The restored structure will have research and documentation facilities necessary to process and log all new finds, will coordinate its work with regional museums, and will actively work to educate the public about the role of archeology in the life of a young nation.

Inside back cover: Anjar's arches are Roman in flavor but Arab in origin. The city, built by the Umayyads near the end of the seventh century, featured elements of both Roman and Byzantine architecture.



Another museum housing part of Lebanon's cultural wealth, the Sursock Museum of Art in the Ashrafieh section of Beirut, has just completed its renovation and is again a proud white palace, with its ornate stained-glass windows shining in their elegant arched frames.

Despite the grass sprouting in the cracked mosaics of Tyre, or the chipped marble columns in the yard of the National Museum, or the illegal trafficking in antiquities, most of the country's cultural wealth has survived the ravages of war. With a bit of cleaning and polishing, it can be restored to much of its former glory. From Tyre, the Queen of the Seas, to Beirut, the Lady of the World, from the Phoenicians to the Franks to the amirs, Lebanon has been a witness to history, with the scars as proof – and the heritage as reward.

The National Museum, at the crossing point between East and West Beirut, wears the scars of vicious warfare. Though the building was damaged by bullets, its priceless treasures, some encased in concrete, have survived.

Kerry Abbott is a development strategist specializing in conflict regions, and has been based in East Jerusalem since 1982.

EVENTS & EXHIBITIONS

Teaching About the Arab World and Islam is the theme of teacher workshops cosponsored by the Middle East Policy Council in Washington, D.C., and conducted by AWAIR, Arab World And Islamic Resources and School Services in Berkeley, California. Confirmed sites and dates include: Ottawa University, **San Francisco,** March 15 and 29; Arcadia Unified School District, **Glendora, California,** March 19; Lenoir-Rhyne College, **Hickory, North Carolina,** March 23; West Virginia University, **Morgantown,** March 26; Coppin State College, **Baltimore,** April 13; Belmont Abbey College, **Belmont, North Carolina,** April 16; Ohio State University, **Columbus,** June 23. For details, call (202) 296-6767 or (510) 704-0517.

Tulips by Mary Grierson. This exhibit of watercolors celebrates the 400th anniversary of the arrival of the tulip in Holland from Turkey. Spink & Son Ltd., **London,** March 16 through 31, 1994.

The Maritime Silk Route. The ocean trade routes between East and West, and the Arab, European and Asian views of the world and their trading partners, are the subjects of this exhibition, part of the UNESCO Festival of the Silk Roads. Musée de la Marine, **Paris,** March 18 through June 15, 1994.

Current Archeology of the Ancient World. A series of talks on current research and discoveries. Among upcoming Middle Eastern or Islamic topics: History of Assur, March 18; Temple of el-Qal'ah, March 25; French Activities in Sumer, May 27; Current Coptic Archeology in Egypt, June 10; New Excavations on the Turkish Euphrates, June 17; Occupation of the Syrian Euphrates and Khabur Valleys to the Uruk Period, Fourth Millennium BC, June 20; Monastery of Baouit (Middle Egypt), June 24. Musée du Louvre, **Paris.**

Traditional Artifacts of Saudi Arabia. Featured is an extensive sampling of artifacts from the Nance Collection. Central Missouri State University Museum, **Warrensburg, Missouri,** March 25 through May 15, 1994.

Farewell to Bosnia: *New Photographs by Gilles Peress* focuses on the social landscape of a country at war, and poses moral questions about the future of a multicultural society in Europe. Fotomuseum **Winterthur, Switzerland,** through March 27, 1994; Corcoran Gallery of Art, **Washington, D.C.,** through May 2, 1994.

Reflections: *Line, Word and Color* features the diverse works of four Arab women artists who are painters, writers and teachers: Etel Adnan, Samia Halaby, Helen Khal and Afaf Zurayk. Alif Gallery, **Washington, D.C.,** through March 27, 1994.

Gold of Africa. About a hundred antique gold objects used for religious rituals and other ceremonies are on display from the West African states of Ghana, Mali and Côte d'Ivoire. Musée Barbier-Müller, **Geneva, Switzerland,** through March 31, 1994.

Anthony Khawam: *Recent Landscape Paintings.* This Syrian-American artist displays his latest work. Wall Street Journal Gallery, **Princeton, New Jersey,** April 1 through 29, 1994.

The Orientalists, An Extended View. Traditional Middle Eastern artifacts of the 19th century are linked to four dozen prints of Orientalist paintings of the period. Nance Museum, **Kingsville, Missouri,** April 1 through October 31, 1994.

Syria: *From the Apostles to the Caliphs.* Artifacts, ancient papyri and other documents trace the history and culture of this pivotal Arab country. More than 400 works were borrowed from Syrian and European museums. Stadtmuseum Nordico, **Linz, Austria,** through April 1, 1994.

The Gold of Meroë. Some of the finest jewelry created in antiquity appears in this collection from the Pyramid of Nubian Queen Amanishakheto. Metropolitan Museum of Art, **New York,** through April 3, 1994; Royal Ontario Museum, **Toronto,** April 29 through September 5, 1994.

TEXTILE MUSEUM

From Kuba to Kars: *Flat-Woven Textiles From the Caucasus.* The turbulent history of Caucasia has produced a colorful ethnic mosaic and numerous artistic traditions. Historically, the major powers of western Asia dominated Caucasia until it was conquered by Russia in the 19th century. The collapse of the Soviet Union has heightened Western interest in the traditional arts of this region, which includes the new Georgian, Armenian and Azerbaijani republics. Featured in the exhibition are some 50 woven saddle-bags, curtains, covers and animal trappings of the 19th and early 20th centuries. Just as beautiful as the better-known Caucasian pile rugs, these flat-woven fabrics bear traces of the arts of Byzantium and Sasanian Persia, of Arabia and Islam and of the Central Asian Turks, as well as the Ottoman, Safavid and Russian empires. Textile Museum, **Washington, D.C.,** March 25 through September 4, 1994.

Wool, cotton and metallic threads are used in this divided curtain, woven 80 to 100 years ago in Karbagh in Caucasia.

To Ravish Human Sense. Palestinian *'ud*-player Adel Salamah and British lutanist Stephen Wheeler, brought together by the Arab Club of Britain and their instrument-maker Joseph O'Kelly, create a musical bridge uniting two instruments of common heritage. Purcell Room, South Bank, **London,** April 4, 1994. For details, call 44/81/997-0541.

Art in the Ancient World: *The George Ortiz Collection.* Representing 30 cultures from the Neolithic age to Byzantium, the exhibition features many objects from the Middle East. Royal Academy of Arts, **London,** through April 6, 1994.

The Scythians Are Coming. The artistic skills of the nomadic Scythians of West-Central Asia, between 700 and 300 BC, are highlighted in this display of some 200 gold objects from St. Petersburg's Hermitage Museum. Nieuwe Kerk, **Amsterdam,** through April 10, 1994.

Yemen: *A Culture of Builders.* This exhibition looks at Yemeni architecture. Miami University Art Museum, **Oxford, Ohio,** April 11 through May 13, 1994.

The Heritage of Islam: *Islamic Art in Italy.* Pottery, crystal, brass and bronze artifacts, carpets, silk and wool fabrics—all bear witness to centuries of contact between the Muslim East and Italy. Ducal Palace, **Venice,** through April 30, 1994.

Textiles of Egypt: *Witnesses of the Arab World, Eighth to 15th Centuries.* The Maurice and Jean-François Bouvier Collection of Egyptian textiles is a particularly impressive example of Arab art over an 800-year span. Musée d'Art et d'Histoire, **Geneva,** through May 1, 1994.

A Stitch Through Time: *The Journey of an Islamic Embroidery Technique to Europe and the New World.* The double running stitch is followed on its 700-year journey from the Mediterranean world to Northern Europe, and from there to the New World. Textile Museum, **Washington, D.C.,** May 27 through October 16, 1994.

Mediated Images: *Asian Identity in Contemporary Art.* This major show explores the visual art of 15 immigrant and expatriate Asians "whose work actively mediates their joint identities as Asians and Americans." The Asia Society, **New York**, through June 30, 1994.

The Grace of White. The color white—the sum of all other colors—was explored boldly and inventively by Persian and Indian artists of almost all periods and schools. Harvard University's Arthur M. Sackler Museum, **Cambridge, Massachusetts,** July 16 through September 25, 1994.

Islam: *The Qur'an and Hadith As Texts for Understanding Islamic Tenets, Civilization and World View.* Secondary school social-studies teachers are invited to take part in this four-week summer institute to study Islam, funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities and directed by AWAIR: Arab World And Islamic Resources and School Services. Dar al-Islam, **Abiquiu, New Mexico,** July 18 through August 12, 1994. For details, call (510) 704-0517.

Treasures in Heaven: *Armenian Illuminated Manuscripts.* The exhibition explores one of the Armenian people's principal artistic legacies. Walters Art Gallery, **Baltimore, Maryland,** August 28 through October 23, 1994.

Camel Farm. This center seeks to conserve and propagate the wildlife of the Arabian desert. Open to the public twice a day by guided tour only, the facility features the oryx, Arabian wild cat, fennec fox, Nubian ibex, sand cat and many other animals, plus one of the largest camel herds in North America. Saihati Camel Farm and Desert Animal Breeding Center, **Yuma, Arizona,** year-round.

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

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

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