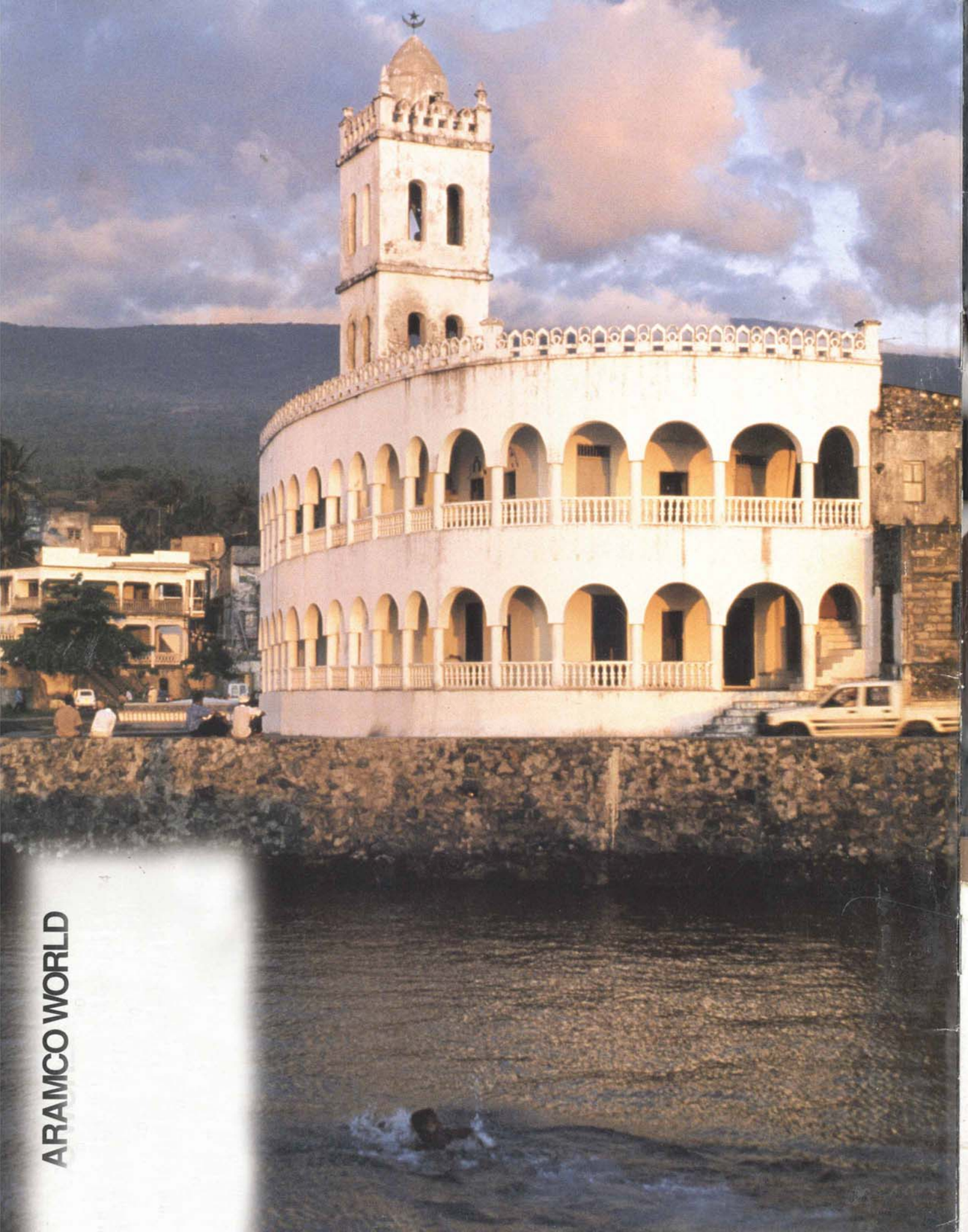
ARAMCO WORLD
JULY/AUGUST 1996



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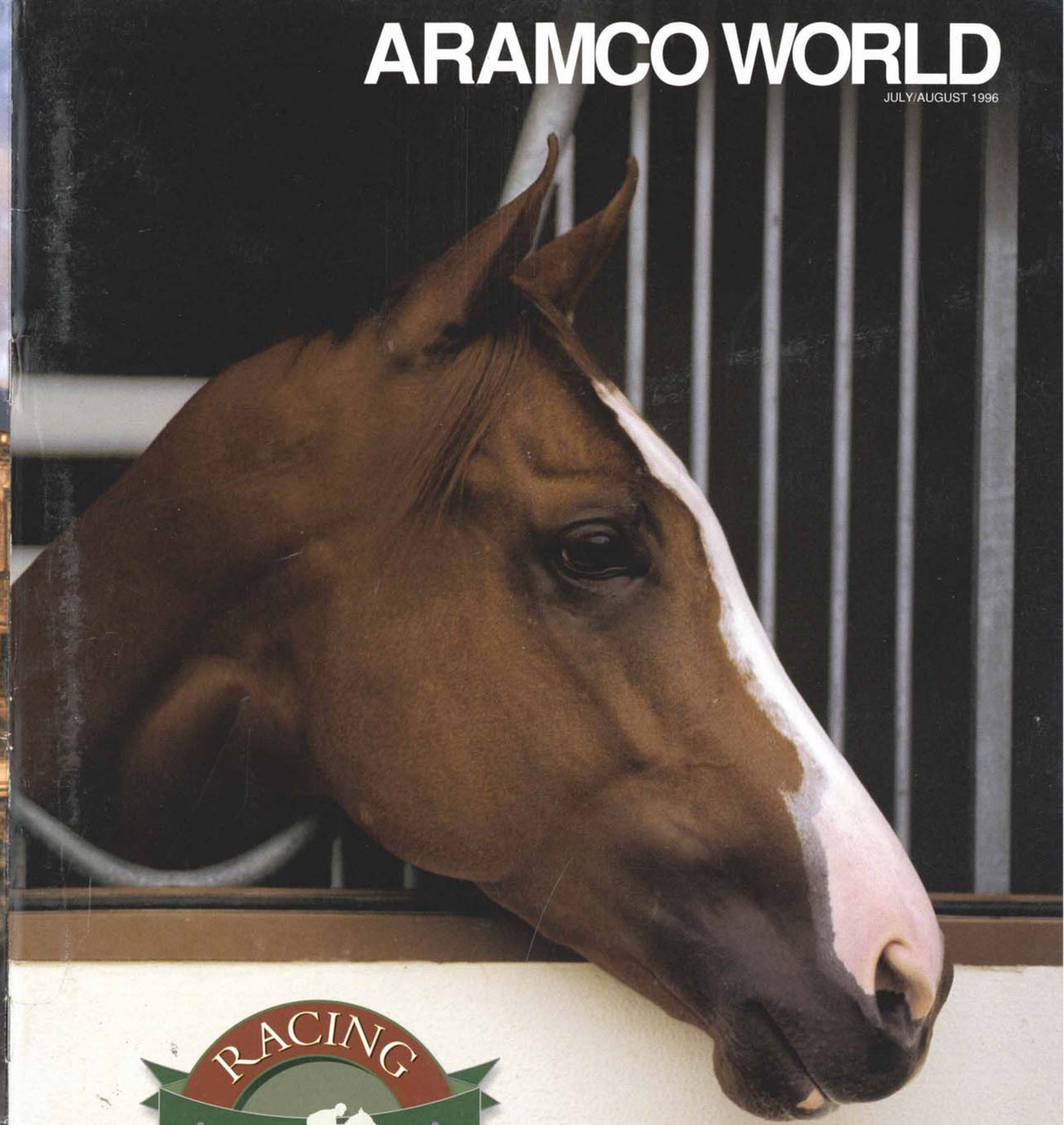

RACING FULL CIRCLE

TOP RIGHT: SAMIA HALABY, "POSITION INTERPLAY: NOON"

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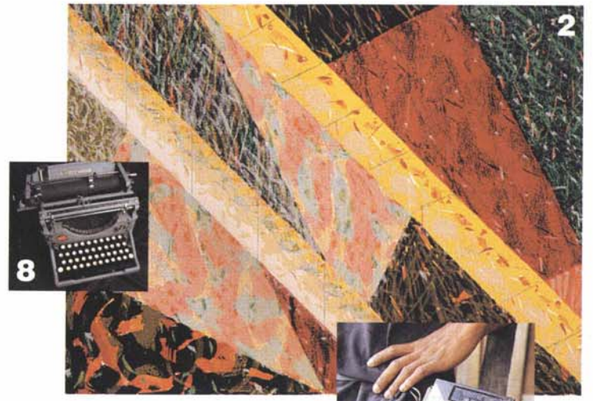

COVER:
Calm alertness and the finest bloodlines mark a racing thoroughbred in the stables of a Dubai breeder of champions. The ancestry of all thoroughbreds can be traced back to two Arabian horses and a barb brought to England some 250 years ago. In recent years, Arab enthusiasts rejuvenated international thoroughbred racing, and now have brought the excitement—and the industry—of racing back to Arabia. Photo by Henry Horenstein.

OPPOSITE:
For contemporary Arab artists such as Fahrelnissa Zeid, Darat al-Funun in Amman bridges the art worlds of East and West.

BACK COVER:
The Friday Mosque in Moroni, capital of the Comoro Islands, rises at the city's waterfront, recalling that Islam was first brought to the "perfume islands" by Arab traders who criss-crossed the Indian Ocean. Photo by Ilene Perlman.

Saudi Aramco, the oil company born as a bold international enterprise more than half a century ago, distributes Aramco World *to increase cross-cultural understanding. The magazine's goal is to broaden knowledge of the culture of the Arab and Muslim worlds and the history, geography and economy of Saudi Arabia.* Aramco World *is distributed without charge, upon request, to a limited number of interested readers.*

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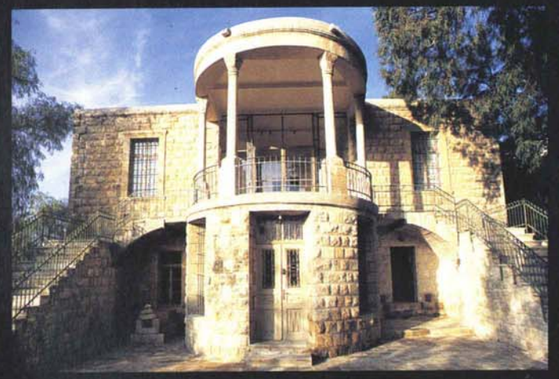
Jordan's House of the Arts

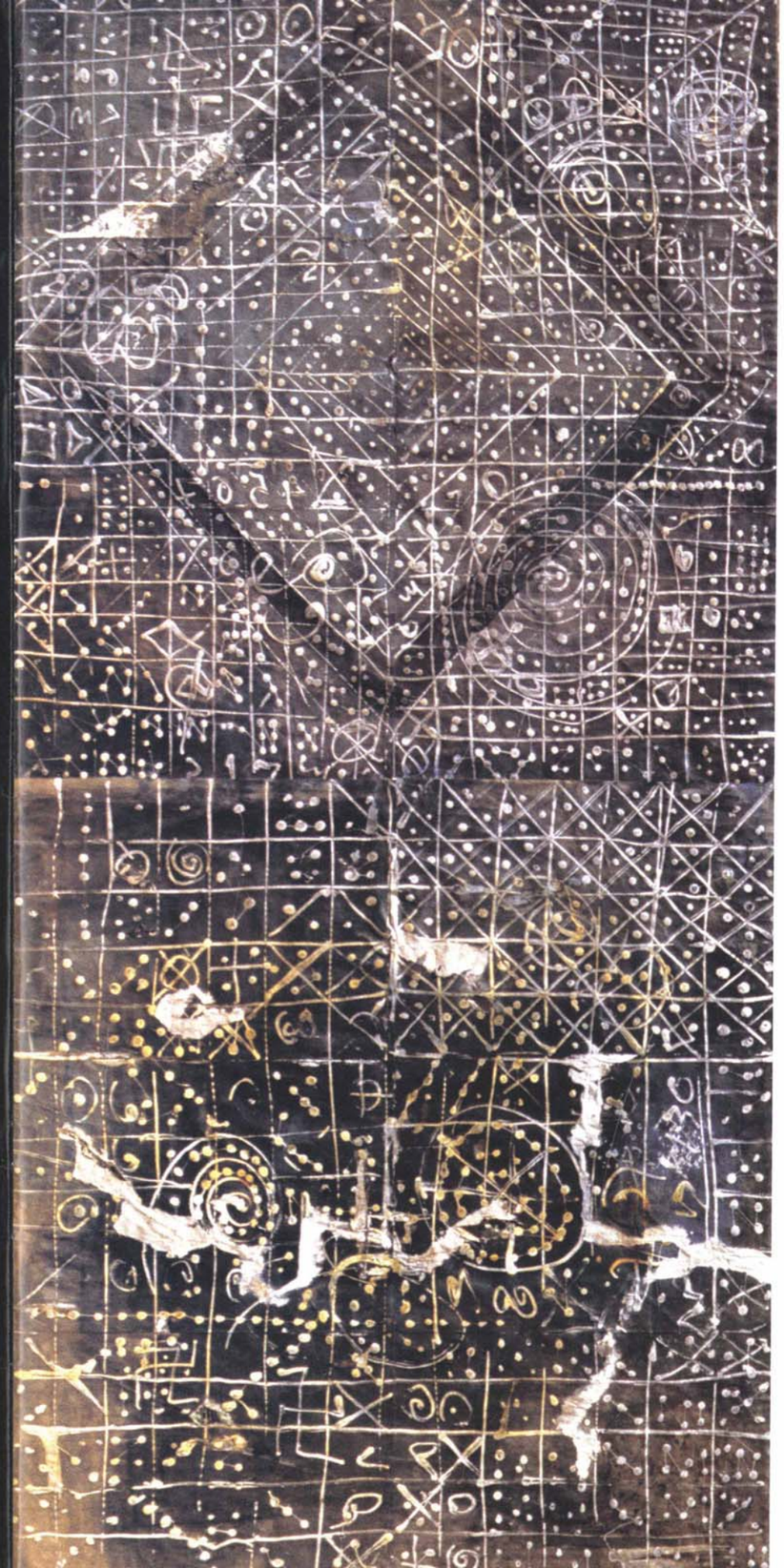


Written by Jocelyn M. Ajami
Photographed by Bill Lyons

On a hill overlooking Jordan's capital city, within sight of the ancient Roman temple of Philadelphia, stands what looks like an attractive, stone-built private home, with two curving staircases leading to its second-floor entrance. In fact, this is "Darat al-Funun," or "The House of the Arts," Amman's new center for contemporary art and one of the most innovative meeting grounds for East and West today.

With its three galleries, library and studio, the center has promoted the work of contemporary artists from Jordan and elsewhere in the Arab world since 1993. For some of these artists, it has provided a stepping-stone to greater exposure in the West; for others, living in the West, it has been their link back to the East. And to the neighborhood in which it stands, Darat al-Funun has brought exposure to a world of creativity.

In the field of "modern" or "contemporary" art, the Arab world has long been an unfamiliar and somewhat inaccessible voice, little heard in the West. But a new generation of Arab artists is beginning to change that.



Eric Gibson, executive director of the New York-based magazine *Art News*, explains that the term "contemporary art" can be used as a chronological marker to set off art from after 1945—or after 1960, depending on one's point of view—from that which went before. But, he says, contemporary art can also be loosely defined as "a constellation of ideas that represents a perception of the world in which people can see something they can identify and explore."

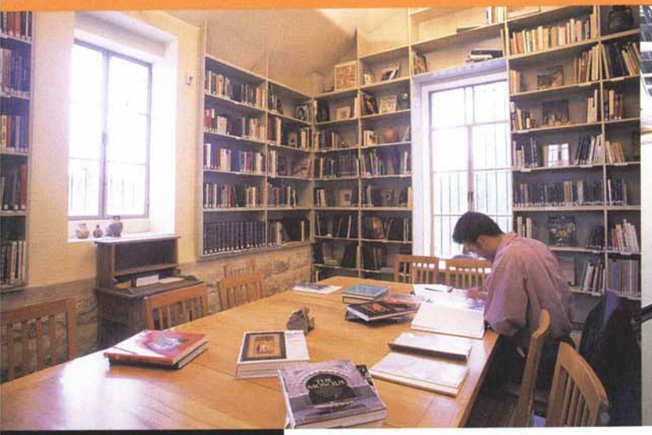
In order to share their perceptions with the public, artists require venues: galleries, museums and the art-world publications that let viewers know they are there. And therein lies Darat al-Funun's role as a launching pad for Arab artists and as a gateway for exchange within the international art arena.

Darat al-Funun's vision is sustained by Jordan's multicultural history. Located in one of the oldest of Amman's residential quarters, the site itself epitomizes the Jordanian talent for linking new and old with thoughtful grace.

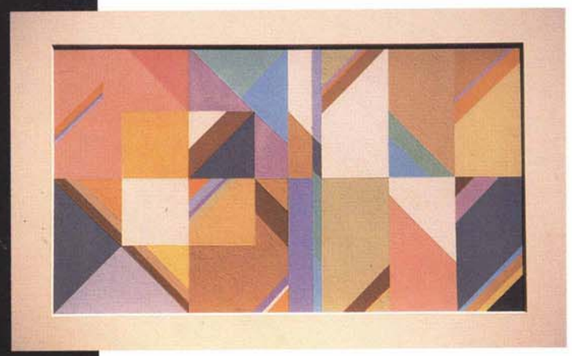
Built shortly after the turn of the century, the original building was a private home next to the ruins of a Byzantine church. The garden and the fragmentary columns of this church now serve as the dramatic setting of Darat al-Funun's candlelight poetry readings and performances.

During excavations at the site early this century, archeologists found five inscriptions on stone slabs. Two are in Safaitic, a pre-Islamic Arabic script; another is in Kufic, the script commonly used to write Arabic in the early years of Islam in the seventh century. A third indicates that a structure beneath the Byzantine church may have been a Greek temple dedicated to Hercules. And a Byzantine tablet dedicates the church itself to Saint George.

Shaker Hassan Al-Said's watercolor implies vertical and horizontal axes, respectively symbolizing a Muslim's obligations to God and to his community, set amid his complex individual "calligraphy." "Through searching for the meaning of the eternal," he writes, "I attempt to capture the temporal." Opposite, the entrance of Darat al-Funun leads to studios at ground level and to the main gallery upstairs.



Stocked with works in Arabic and English, Darat al-Funun's library is open to the public. At right, Director Ali Maher (left) reviews an artist's submission for exhibition. Below, "Jacob's Ladder," by Palestinian painter Kamal Boullata. Abstraction, Boulatta writes, is "the bridge between the two visual sensibilities" of Western and Muslim traditions.



Now administered by the Abdul Hameed Shoman Foundation, the house has been fully restored and renovated. Three bays open off the central hall, and twin staircases rise from the garden to an open, breezy semi-circular portico. The windows in the high-ceilinged central gallery allow soft light into the interior and warm the decorative tiles on the floor. A library was added above the old roofline. From there down to the studios on the lower floors, a sense of air and light prevails. With this graceful interior and its elegant limestone exterior, the house provides an appropriate environment for the display of art.

The renovations have added momentum to revitalization efforts in the community surrounding Darat al-Funun, says Ali Maher, the center's director. Darat al-Funun, he says, "made available a world of art and culture" to a neighborhood of Amman where such resources are scarce. The musical, theatrical and poetry programs, held monthly, reach beyond the professional arts community into the community at large, slowly adding, Maher says, to "a sense of pride in [Jordan's] architectural and cultural heritage."

Darat al-Funun was "the realization of a long-cherished dream," says artist Suha Shoman, whose family foundation—created in 1978 with a mandate to "promote knowledge in the sciences and humanities"—had originally established a simple gallery for exhibitions from Jordan and the Arab world. It was not long, however, before the foundation's directors recognized the need for "a more comprehensive center," says Maher. Darat al-Funun was opened in 1993.

In addition to showcasing artists and providing community-oriented programs, Darat al-Funun is also "a haven for study and research," says Shoman. The library, open to the public, contains books in Arabic and English, the latest periodicals and art journals and a comprehensive video collection from the Museum of Modern Art in New York and the Institut du Monde Arabe in Paris. It is building a computer database on contemporary Arab artists.

It is the more than 50 artists, all from the Arab world, who give daily vitality to Darat al-Funun. Paying careful attention to installation details, the curatorial staff mounts monthly solo and group shows of work by artists from Jordan, Palestine, Morocco, Tunisia, Iraq, Lebanon, Syria and Sudan. The work is for sale but, unlike other galleries, Darat al-Funun takes no commission. The shows present as wide a range of themes, styles, media and experience as possible, and films, demonstrations or seminars—often led by the artists whose work is being shown—sometimes accompany the exhibitions.

In much of the work they exhibit, the Arab artists reflect their different connections with the West—most often residence, education or travel there—including Western methods and motifs to which they have brought their own cultural idiom. It is abstraction that emerges as the theme that cuts across styles and genres, and because Islamic abstraction and Western abstraction have different roots, many viewers, critics and buyers see an exciting and noteworthy confluence of the two traditions.

Western abstraction derives from the embrace of individualism, and is produced in a secular cultural context. Islamic abstraction, on the other hand, is a cultural, intellectual and communal expression of faith.

The beginning of Western modern art, from which abstraction emerged as a dominant movement, is generally traced to the Salon des Refusés in Paris in 1863, an exhibition by artists whose work had been refused by the official Salon exhibition. There, Édouard Manet exhibited work that crystallized two ideas that still guide Western artists today: first, that the artist is free to pursue an individual vision that reflects or anticipates the inquiries of the day; and second, that the artist alone can determine subject matter, and the arrangement of color and form need not depict real objects or stories. Thus the artist is freed from the requirement of literal representation.

The roots of Western modernism run back to the Italian Renaissance. Combining the classicism of the Greek and Roman eras with new humanist values—embodied in the credo "Man is the measure of all things"—the artists of the Renaissance believed they reflected artistic aspects of divine creativity. They looked at themselves as "creators," as masters of their own destiny. This view laid the foundation for the individualism that ultimately led to modernism and abstraction.

In stark contrast, the Muslim aesthetic tradition is based on the fundamental belief that only God is worthy of worship; from that, Muslims derived the ideas that only His word is to be embellished, and that His magnificent living creations should not be imitated. Particularly with respect to sacred art, Islam adopted abstraction as the pictorial solution to the complicated issue of expressing oneself in concrete works without thereby running the risk of violating the prohibition against the creation of objects that could be worshiped like idols. Abstraction thus serves the purity of Islamic monotheism.

As a result, a highly intellectual, collective, abstract visual vocabulary evolved in Islamic art that is dominated by two elements: Arabic calligraphy, the merging of meaning and form through the writing of God's revelation; and architecture, the geometric embodiment of nature, time and space.

Western art has embraced diversification and segregation through a multiplicity of styles, artists, regions and generations, as well as by the separation of media and motives: Painting is not sculpture, fine art is not decorative art, and so on. Islamic art, however, seeks a harmony of expression through a collective language symbolic of unity. In calligraphy, sound, words, meaning and form are united. In architecture, geometry unifies the arts, from painting to carving to decoration, into a single experience.

The search for unity suffuses the work of Arab contemporary artists such as Shaker Hassan Al-Said and Kamal Boullata (See *Aramco World*, July/August 1990), each of whose work is part of Darat al-Funun's collection.

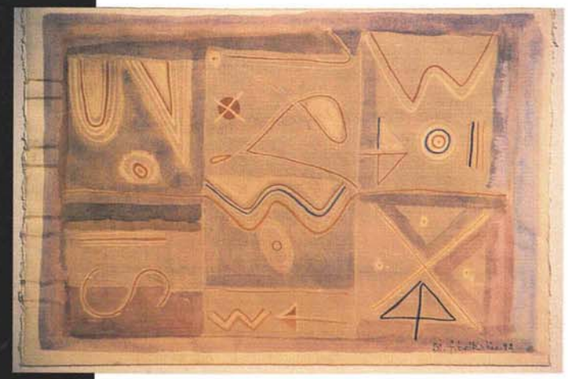
Al-Said, who was born in 1925 in Al-Samawah, Iraq, writes that "through searching for the meaning of the eternal, I attempt to capture the temporal."

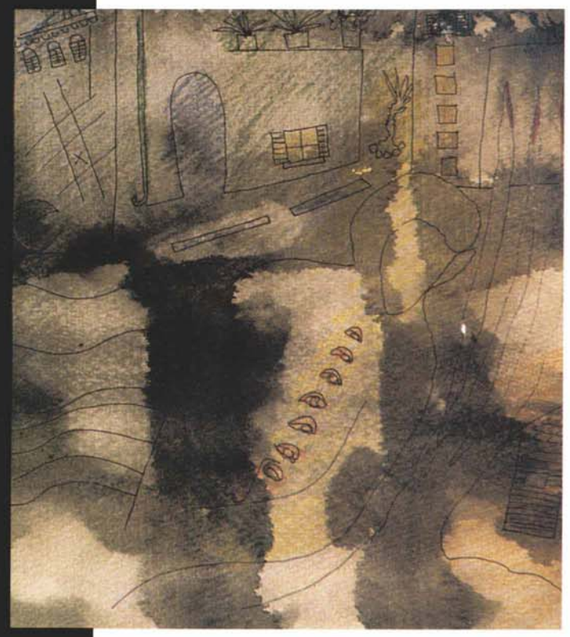
In one of his abstract watercolors, Al-Said uses a sketchy square rotated 45 degrees. Running through the corners of the square, he has drawn lines that follow the vertical and horizontal axes of the canvas. A vertical axis is used here to represent one's obligations to God, and a horizontal axis to represent one's obligations to fellow Muslims or the *ummah*, the community of the faithful. Surrounding the square are code-like scratchings, a kind of personal, implied calligraphy.

Another of Al-Said's works is less experimental, but equally revealing of his search. This is a watercolor whose paper is broken by a large, rough-edged elliptical hole. The painting is hung outdoors, and placed so that the torn opening incorporates the landscape behind it in the composition of the picture. We need look only as far as the Alhambra Palace in Grenada to see the same phenomenon. There, each window embrasure incorporates the view of the landscape beyond into a single tapestry of stone, tile and nature (See *Aramco World*, January/February 1993). By doing the same thing with paper, Al-Said locates himself firmly within the Islamic artistic tradition.

For Palestinian painter, printmaker and writer Kamal Boullata, however, geometric abstraction is his link between Western and Islamic traditions. "The neutral language of geometry

Each month Darat al-Funun features the work of different contemporary artists. Because Muslim and Western abstraction have different roots, many artists and critics see the confluence of the two in contemporary Arab art as a profound intellectual development.





Watercolors on paper by Farid Belkahia of Morocco (upper), and Afaf Zureiq of Lebanon.

which seeks to bridge the gulf between cultures and times: "Connections emerged between the presence of contemporary works I saw in the Western metropolis and the memory of the geometric art I have seen within the walls of Jerusalem. Centuries ago the same language of geometry was employed in my culture of origin."

In a brightly colored acrylic work titled "Jacob's Ladder," Boullata uses color and geometry to reflect the architecture, tilework and light of Palestine, and uses the title of the piece to evoke the three monotheistic religions. In using the title as part of the work, Boullata does homage to the "word" and its content, thus connecting the verbal imagery of Islamic tradition with the visual tradition of the West.

Not all of Darat al-Funun's artists, of course, are painters. Sculptor Samer Tabbaa has had numerous exhibitions in Jordan and abroad. Born in 1945 in Taif, Saudi Arabia, and educated in the US, Tabbaa now lives and works in Amman. One of his best-known works dominates the Second Circle of the city. There he has positioned a large stone wheel across rough stone supports, with a waterfall cascading over it, so that nature and invention seem to be exchanging energy. Tabbaa is consistent in his choice of an abstract, even archetypal vocabulary. Yet some of his works are highly refined, even painterly, while others are totemic and monolithic.

Moroccan artist Farid Belkahia, who was educated in Paris, Prague and Milan and now lives in Marrakech, incorporates a roughly drawn *X* as a dominant sign in several of his watercolors. He compartmentalizes the picture plane to accommodate other signs and gestures. With chalky pastels that suggest the fresh plaster of fresco painting, and an economy of line that evokes the primordial quality of cave drawings, the artist seems to recall a mythology that has not yet been articulated.

In contrast to Belkahia's pastels are Afaf Zureiq's moody charcoal and watercolor washes. Educated at the American University of Beirut and Harvard University, this Lebanese artist brings a dark vibrancy to her images. Working in a difficult medium, Zureiq creates a forest of vertical scratchings and strokes interrupted by interplay of darks and lights, transparencies and masses.

An influential artist who does not shy from socio-political messages is Laila Al-Shawa, born in Gaza and educated in Cairo and Rome. She is best-known for "Wall Of Gaza," which was featured in the traveling exhibit "Forces of Change" (See *Aramco World*, January/February 1994). Here, through photographs and painting, she documents the urgency of a people's struggle. Sometimes printing her photographs on canvas, Al-Shawa too incorporates geometry in her images, providing, she says, "a sense of order in a chaotic, torn and divided existence."

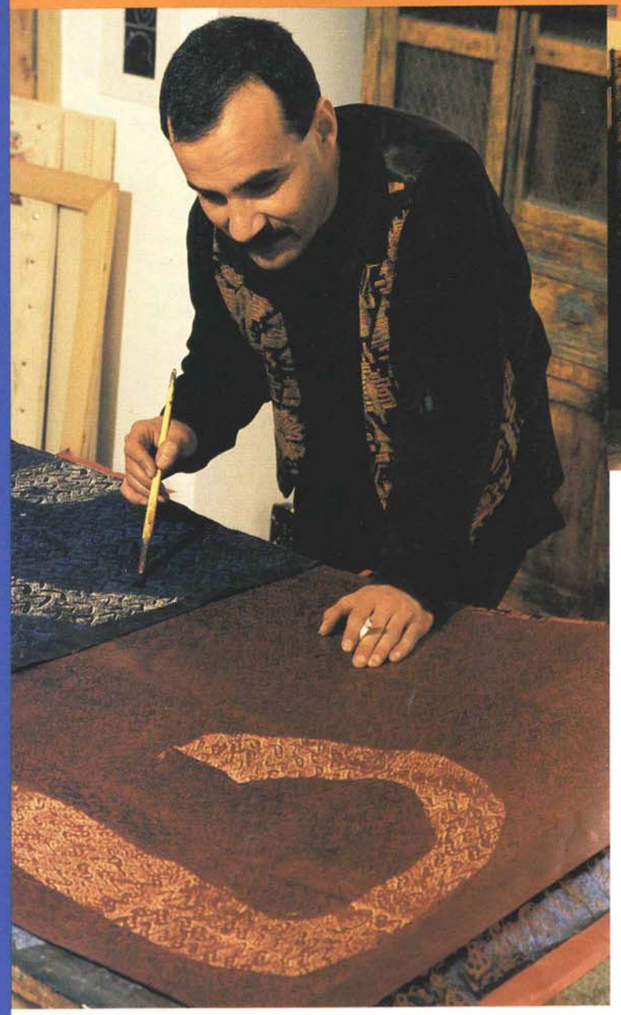
Among the younger artists nurtured in part by Darat al-Funun is Halim Mahdi Hadi, born in Najaf, Iraq, and educated in Baghdad. In Ali Maher's office at Darat al-Funun hangs an oversized, vertical canvas by Hadi that exhibits great simplicity and great magnetic presence.

becomes the bridge between the two visual sensibilities of my world," he writes, "...two modes of expression which historically developed in opposite directions."

Boullata recently exhibited "Duets, Quartets and a Triangle" at Darat al-Funun, work that drew upon two years of Fulbright-sponsored research in Islamic geometric art in Morocco.

Born in Jerusalem and educated at the Academy of Rome and the Corcoran School of Art in Washington, Boullata has shown throughout Europe, the United States and the Middle East. Although he has lived in Washington for the past 25 years, his ties to the Islamic world and to his place of birth are strong. "All my work," he writes, "seems to have been done with Jerusalem seen through the mind's eye."

This memory of Jerusalem is constantly renewed through Boullata's geometric precision,



Visiting artist-in-residence Himat M. Ali, left, works on a piece in one of Darat al-Funun's studios. Above, monthly exhibition openings let artists and visitors mingle.

This monochromatic acrylic is rich both in earth tones, as if Hadi had made the paint himself from fertile soil, and in chunky textures that give his surfaces an uncommon physicality. Hadi was trained as a ceramist, which may account for the thick paint and the furrows of tracings that sometimes appear in his work. The vast spaces of his canvases and their tactile presence have a powerful effect.

Since the opening of Darat al-Funun, Hadi has been in effect an artist-in-residence, using a room near the building's entrance as shop and studio. This has given him exposure to collectors, buyers and visitors that might not have been available otherwise. He has since exhibited his work in France and in Lebanon. "We would like to think that we have contributed to establishing him," says Maher.

Also receiving direct support from Darat al-Funun is acrylic artist Khaled Khreis of Kerak, Jordan. Educated in Cairo and a frequent visitor to Spain, he received his doctorate at the University of Barcelona in 1993. At Darat al-Funun, Khreis serves as a lecturer and researcher.

Claiming the influence of past civilizations from Egypt to Central America to al-Andalus, his delicately powerful paintings straddle the edge between cultures. Using a variety of media from cardboard to plastics to paper, Khreis creates a vocabulary of strokes, scratches and blotches that allows images to emerge through an improvisational, "accidental" process. With counterpoints of warm yellows and cool aquas in the background, his calligraphy of gestures goes beyond cognitive allusion to enter a more subtle realm. "Art is not in the head," he writes. "It must be felt in your heart and deeply rooted in your soul."

As the artists of Darat al-Funun create visual languages of both West and East, the world of contemporary art is enriched. And as a generous advocate for them, Darat al-Funun is an open window for new visions, and an important bridge across cultures.

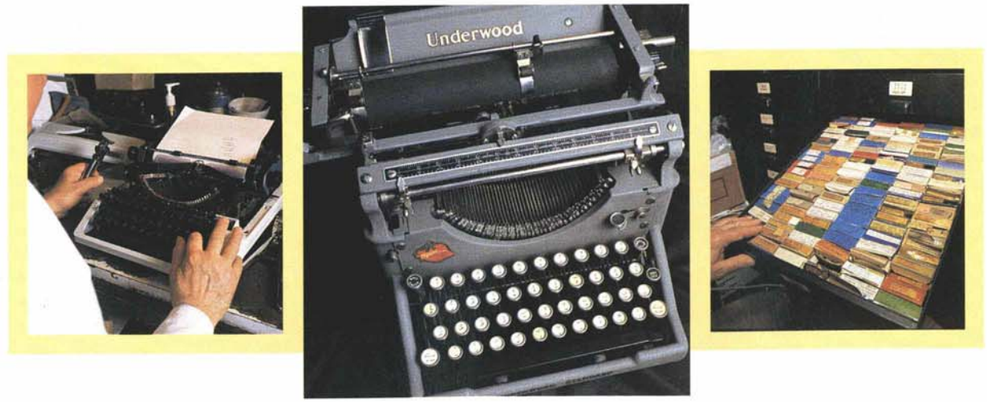
Jocelyn M. Ajami is a painter and filmmaker living in Boston. She most recently produced Oasis of Peace, *a documentary on a Palestinian-Israeli community.*

Bill Lyons does editorial and commercial photography from his base in Amman, where he has lived since 1975. This is his 10th appearance in Aramco World.

Mr. Typewriter

Written by Susan Ludmer-Gliebe

Photographed by T.L. Litt/Impact Visuals



Martin Tytell was among the first craftsmen in the US to adapt Western left-to-right typewriters for use with right-to-left languages, including Arabic (above and above left). Today, Tytell can customize a typewriter in any of 142 languages, using the world's largest collection of typewriter keys (right).

Martin Tytell stands amid shelves sagging with the weight of hundreds of typewriters. "These machines keep me alive," he says fondly—and he isn't just talking about his income. Following a recent heart operation, the 82-year-old maestro of the manuals found a suitable thank-you gift for his Iranian-American surgeon on one of those shelves: a lightweight, reverse-carriage Olivetti with Farsi script, once—he was told—the property of the Shah of Iran.

Dressed in his signature white lab coat and his proper bow tie, grandfatherly Martin Tytell has been, since 1930, the quiet king of the international manual typewriter. His workshop in lower Manhattan is a dim and cluttered shrine to the pre-microchip age. Nearly 500 mostly whole machines—now including a dozen reconditioned Arabic Underwoods surplussed by the US State Department—sit amid bins of rods, feed rollers, return-carriage bells, key caps, springs, screws and scraps of machinery related to any typewriter that ever existed anywhere.

"These machines speak to me," he says, "and sometimes I talk back."

But now Tytell is speaking figuratively, because when his typewriters talk, he can't always understand the language. With an inventory above two million individual pieces, the Tytell Typewriter Company is also the repository of the world's most linguistically diverse collection of type. There are special letters or whole alphabets for writing Malayalam, Farsi, Turkish, Ottoman, Syriac, Urdu, Bengali and no fewer than 137 other languages and dialects—most living, some not—as well as five different Arabic typefaces. With his cornucopia of parts and his engraving machine ready to customize and fill gaps in obscure collections, Tytell handles requests from all over the world, including many from the Middle East and from Arabic-speakers in North America.

His Arabic connection, Tytell says, began more than 50 years ago. "My great discovery was to put an idle gear—which I had picked up on Canal Street for 45 cents—into an American typewriter to make it go from right to left," he says. "I became a specialist overnight."

Now, Tytell knows of only two companies—one in India, the other in Mexico—that still make reverse-carriage, manual typewriters in Arabic.

"There are 21 [Arab] countries with more than 183 million people who all use Arabic, and there's almost nobody around to serve this market," he observes. As a result, Tytell's clients have been, over the past five decades, a virtual *Who's Who*, from corporations, universities and governments to antique dealers, film studios and individuals, many of them from the Arab world.

Tytell's craftsmanship is time-consuming, and the machines are priced accordingly. Looking for a new, correcting electric typewriter adapted to Farsi? That will be $2400. Or a portable in Ottoman? That's $450. Need to rent a simple Arabic manual machine? That will cost you $350, monthly.

Not everyone treats his machines with the respect Tytell accords them. When a group of filmmakers needed an antique typewriter for a scene not long ago, he sold them a 1915 Oliver. And how did they use it?

"They threw it off a cliff!" says Tytell. Then his tone rises as he adds, "And then they called me back to say the scene hadn't worked out right, so they needed to buy another for a retake!" Mr. Typewriter refused to sell them one.

Free-lancer Susan Ludmer-Gliebe lives in New York and southern France.

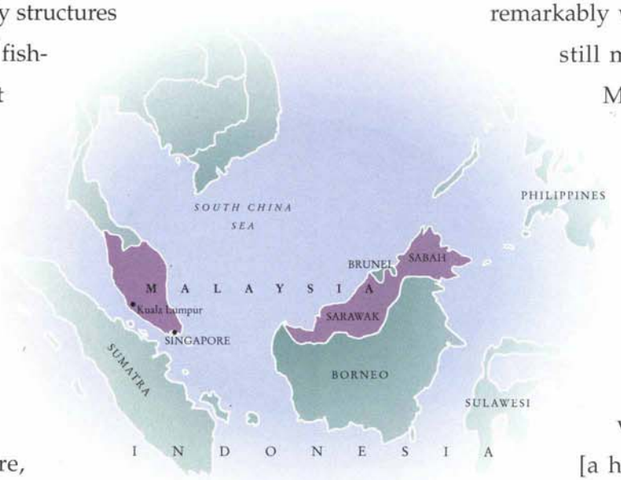
Photojournalist T.L. Litt is photo editor of American Lawyer.

PULLING TOGETHER

WRITTEN AND PHOTOGRAPHED BY ERIC HANSEN

Islam came peacefully to the people of the Malay Peninsula through the trading port of Malacca, now a minor city but, in the early 15th century, a thriving commercial entrepot.

The first mosques there were probably built on a modest scale, using whatever materials were easily available to small traders, subsistence fisherfolk and farmers. None of those early structures remain, but in the remote fishing villages on the east coast of the Malay Peninsula, and in places like the logging camps of East Malaysia, we can find structures not unlike the first mosques. These buildings represent a universal style of village architecture, and they are often built using a Malaysian cooperative work ethic known as *gotong royong*.



Distinguished by ingenuity amid limited resources, they differ from the mosques in Malaysian cities, which may be built with Carrara marble in sophisticated architectural designs. In the countryside, however, design is dictated mostly by what materials are available and affordable, and by the level of local ingenuity. Often this means coral blocks, rough-sawn boards and corrugated metal roofing.

When Islam arrived, Malay villagers were already following a highly developed social code and system of customary law known as *adat*, which means "custom" or "tradition." This aspect of Malay culture worked remarkably well with Islam, and it is still much a part of everyday Malaysian life, particularly in rural areas.

Among *adat*'s principles, *gotong royong* is one of the most important. It means "mutual assistance" and is related to the verb *menggotong*, "to carry [a heavy burden] together." The purpose of *gotong royong* is to bring people together to work on projects that benefit the community. Footpaths, roads, bridges, irrigation systems—and mosques—are still built and maintained using *gotong royong*, which in practice corresponds roughly to the traditions of community barn-raisings in Amish, Mennonite and other rural communities in the United States.

Guided by the tradition of **gotong royong**, *or community effort, Abdul Halil bin Aranil, Imam Haji Ibrahim, Zakaraia Haji Ali and nearly 20 other villagers of Kampong Papan Besar, "The Village of the Big Boards," in the eastern Malaysian state of Sabah, have shared their tools and hundreds of hours of labor since beginning to build their mosque, Masjid Alhamdi, four years ago.*

On a recent morning I found myself seated in a roadside coffee shop on the northern edge of Kuala Lumpur, the capital of Malaysia. The place was called Kedai Menanti, or "the shop where people wait." Across the table from me sat Wan Haji Ali bin Tunku Abdul, who, on hearing of my interest in rural mosques, told me that he was something of an expert on the subject.

As we sipped black coffee and shared a plate of crispy, deep-fried bananas, I explained that I was looking for mosques that typified the *gotong royong* tradition. Pausing briefly to reflect on my plan, Wan Ali suggested that I drive to the east coast of Malaysia and visit the fishing villages in the state of Kelantan. This sounded smart enough: From a visit to the area 20 years earlier, I remembered that traditional culture is strong in Kelantan because the state government adheres to Islamic *shari'a* law.

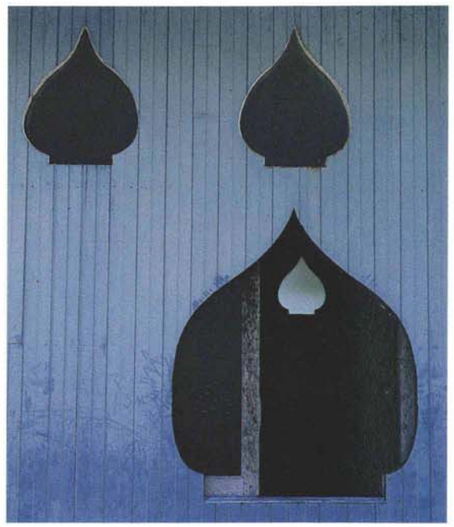
With Wan Ali's suggestion in mind, I got up before first light the next morning and drove northeast along winding country roads that led through an expanse of gentle hills. The slopes were planted in magnificent green corridors of rubber trees. Rubber tappers' headlamps flickered like fireflies in this leafy underworld and illuminated delicate knife cuts and thin rivulets of white latex flowing into coconut-shell cups. The road climbed into the cool mountain air where a tropical forest was cloaked in predawn mist.

The sun came up as I crossed the watershed and, as the road began its long descent, the air warmed and birds began their morning chorus. Flights of butterflies took to the air and became so thick that I had to use my windshield wipers. Spectacular blooms of red hibiscus dotted the roadside villages, and kapok trees were hung with giant seed pods bursting with tufts of what looked like—and once was—mattress stuffing.

I soon crossed the Lebir River and entered the emerald-green ricelands of Kelantan State. Here, groups of women walked along the shaded road dressed in head scarves and bright satin. The men wore checked sarongs with a length of *kain songket*, a locally produced brocade woven with fine metallic thread, tied around their waists. Their heads were covered with the white skullcaps called *kopiah*.

Stopping my car in the shade of a coconut palm, I could hear the sound of drumming. I got out and followed the sound on foot. There must be some sort of local ceremony in progress, I thought, as I joined a stream of pedestrians, bicyclists and motor-scooter riders. So there was, but it was a ceremony both less unusual and more important than I expected: These people were on their way to the mosque for prayers. I fell into step with Mohammed bin Ismail, who kindly offered to show me the mosque. On our way through the rice fields he told me about the local custom of calling the people to prayer by beating on a drum—in this case one made from an old oil barrel.

At the entrance, I left the crowd and sat down to admire the metal drum that had originally caught my ear. It was suspended from the eaves with loops of rattan and an old bicycle tire. Its head was covered with leather, and the drumstick was made from a length of wood that had an old fishing float fastened to one end.



The wooden mosque was finely made, with a tall ceiling supported by green-painted columns. It had been built, I was told, just prior to World War II, and it was beautiful, full of light and air. But I was looking for something less refined, less established and perhaps more improvised. I was looking for a mosque that could embody the hope, vitality, cooperative spirit and rough edges of a new community—like those that may have arisen near 15th-century Malacca. I was looking for a building that was visually unsophisticated, that might in time be replaced by something "better," yet that still provided the architectural and spiritual focus of the community.

I continued to the east coast, and then turned south. At dawn the next day, the seaside coconut palms and the village signs rolled by, and as I read the names I realized that I had finally entered a more isolated, entirely rural Malaysia—or so it seemed. There was Kampong Semut Api, "Fire Ant Village," Kampong Kayu Besar, "Big Wood Village" and Kampong Durian Tikus, "The Village of the Durian-Fruit Mouse." Before long, the road was flanked with illustrated signs that showed the way to nearby mosques—one every few kilometers, it seemed.

But after stopping to investigate half a dozen modern mosques built of poured concrete, I realized that the recent discovery of offshore oil had brought new prosperity to these once-remote communities, and had led to mosque-renovation projects on a grander scale than what I was seeking. The labor of erecting the mosques may have been provided using *gotong royong*, but the building materials, design, and craftsmanship all appeared to be the products of skilled workers from outside Kelantan State, probably supported by the contributions of wealthy local patrons.

In a grassy field, next to a roadside wedding ceremony, I spotted a handmade metal dome, topped with a crescent moon and a star—symbols of enlightenment. The blue dome turned out to be the top of a small, portable pavilion no larger than a small living room.

Mohammed bin Ali, the father of the bride, poured me a glass of fresh starfruit juice and explained that the villagers had built the tiny structure for evening Qur'an readings during the recent feast that marked the end of Ramadan.

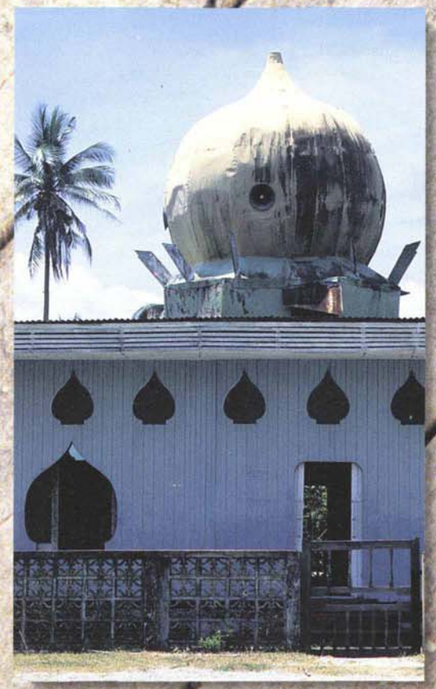
Yes, he said, the pavilion was the result of a *gotong royong* village project. Mohammed himself had supplied the materials, and his friends and neighbors had provided the labor. Recently, the pavilion been moved to the field—it could not have taken more than a few men to carry it—where it now provided a shady spot to park bicycles and motorcycles and served as a convenient place to dry freshly laundered sarongs.

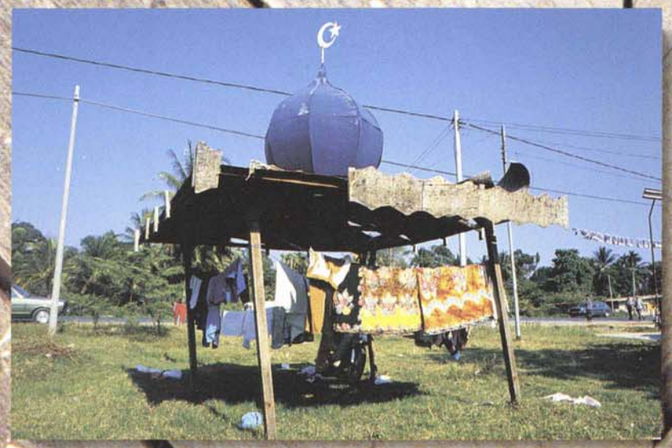
The blue dome was a good example of the sort of homespun village craftsmanship I was searching for, but it was not itself a mosque. When I inquired about mosques in the area, Mohammed bin Ali told me that they had mostly been rebuilt and modernized with concrete.

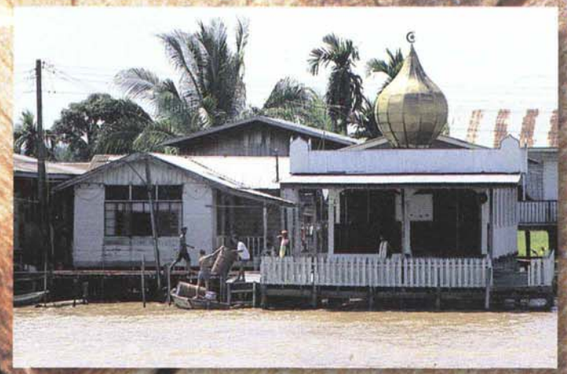
At Kampong Kelulut, "Wasp Village," I pulled over again. Here, the dome of the mosque had been fashioned from squares

A village carpenter shows some of the hand tools the men share in working on Masjid Alhamdi. Opposite: unglazed, cut-out windows provide light, air and interest for the mosque in Kampong Kelulut, "Wasp Village."

"It is not much to look at," says Mohammed Ariffin Hussein of the mosque that was built in the gotong royong *tradition in his village, Kampong Kelulut, right, but "we built it to help plant seeds in the mind of our small community." Below, a small, blue-domed pavilion in Kelantan State is not a mosque, but like many village roads, footpaths and other facilities, it too was built in the* gotong royong *tradition. Below right, along the Limbang River in the state of Sarawak, a waterfront mosque is built of the same materials as surrounding homes. Opposite: In Terengganu State along Malaysia's east coast, a village mosque reflects the architectural influences of East Asian Islam.*







of hammered sheet metal, and four loudspeakers were set into the curved surface. Beneath the eaves, a row of onion-shaped windows provided ventilation and a soft overhead light that illuminated the simple interior. Seated comfortably in the shade of the minaret, I came upon Mohammed Ariffin Hussein, who took a moment from his discussion with two friends to offer his unexpected guest a tour of the building.

He explained how the mosque had been constructed in the early 1960's using *gotong royong*. The yearly maintenance and repairs were taken care of by the local men and women, and, as we spoke, children walked about us carefully picking up wind-blown bits of paper and leaves that had accumulated at the base of the mosque's perimeter fence. The coconut palms swayed in the breeze from the South China Sea less than a kilometer away. In the distance I could see the silhouettes of men with conical hats, standing on the decks of fishing boats that bobbed in the gentle ocean swell.

"It is not much to look at," admitted Mohammed as we looked about the weathered building. "We do not have the resources or the skills to build something more elaborate, but that is not important. The outside of a building is no more important than the type of clothes we wear. Our mosque serves its primary purpose—to provide a place of worship. We built it to help plant seeds in the minds of our small community, and God will judge our success by our ability to nurture those seeds."

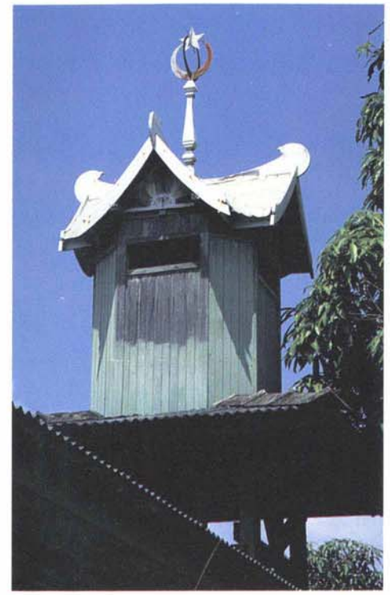
The mosque's interior was painted a light blue, and as we removed our shoes and stepped inside we were bathed in a cool breeze that was gently circulated by overhead fans. Despite the building's rough exterior, I found the prayer hall soothing and peaceful. It was an ideal setting in which to let one's thoughts turn inward.

The mosque of Kampong Kelulut was one example of a well-established *gotong royong* mosque. But I also sought more recent construction. For this, it took a trip across the South China Sea to the East Malaysian State of Sabah, on the island of Borneo.

There, at the end of a dusty road in the remote interior of the state, surrounded by a community of migrant workers, I found Kampong Minsupala, which most people simply call Kampong Papan Besar, or "The Village of the Big Boards." There, I found a little mosque known as Masjid Alhamdi.

This mosque had been built over the course of six months in 1992. It sits on a low hill between a log-loading station and a sawmill, which runs 24 hours a day. Like migrant workers' camps anywhere in the world, Kampong Papan Besar was a lean place where people labored hard. The houses and small shops that made up the community had all been built by the inhabitants themselves. All the wooden beams and planks had been provided by the town sawmill. It was the beginning of a new village, and a sense of pride was evident in the painted balustrades and the window planters that overflowed with blooms of bougainvillea. Families had planted small vegetable plots and fruit trees—evidence that this was no longer entirely a transient community.

But the Masjid Alhamdi was the most interesting structure in the village. There was something about the humble quality of its construction that immediately attracted me. As I wandered down the only pathway through the village, I met Tuan Tabib Haji Rashid bin Kadim. He introduced himself and asked what had brought me to the village. Once he understood my interest in the mosque, he called out to the neighborhood children, who escorted us the rest of the way.



When we arrived, two workmen were finishing a new extension to the mosque that would double its original floor space. Haji Rashid explained that the 20 men who took turns working on the building shared 10 handsaws and five tape measures. Here, I found, was *gotong royong* in practice.

Red, white and blue ribbons fluttered from the main entrance. Inside, I saw high ceilings and soft light, heard the corrugated metal roofing stretching and groaning in the afternoon heat, and smelled the sweet, fresh scent of new-sawn hardwood flooring.

Haji Rashid explained that the loggers and mill workers and their families had come from the Indonesian island of Sulawesi and the southern islands of the Philippines to work as contract laborers. But now they were staying: The workers and their families were the nucleus of a new, permanent community. Looking at the mosque of Kampong Papan Besar, I realized that many of the great mosques of Malaysia must have had similarly humble beginnings.

More than any of the dozens of mosques I had visited in Malaysia, Masjid Alhamdi captured the essence of *gotong royong*. Clearly, it was only a temporary structure, destined to be rebuilt and improved as the community grew and prospered. At the time of my visit, its only source of income was a small wooden box where people left donations that rarely exceeded the equivalent of half a dollar.

The formerly migrant workers took pride in having joined in this *gotong royong* effort. As Haji Rashid described the recent work, I found myself trying to visualize what the mosque would look like in 20 years.

Would it, too, soon be rebuilt in concrete? What process of development, or what economic windfall, might eventually transform Masjid Alhamdi? In time, would the owners of the sawmill become the patrons of the mosque? Would the whimsical gold-painted dome, fashioned from sheet metal and capped with half of an oil drum and the crescent and star, eventually be replaced by something more refined, perhaps something made by city craftsmen? Might the ablution area—now no more than a downspout leading to an oil drum where a plastic dipper dangled from a wooden post—be remodeled into a row of shiny brass faucets protruding from a low wall faced with white tiles?

Or perhaps the building would always be a simple and elegant expression of faith without architectural refinements. I couldn't say for sure, but looking at the people around me, I realized that they had succeeded in their most important task. They had come together in the spirit of *gotong royong* and built their mosque.

Following a year in Borneo, Eric Hansen wrote his first book, Stranger In the Forest, *and after travels to the Middle East later wrote* Motoring With Mohammed: Journeys to Yemen and the Red Sea. *He lives in Sacramento, California.*

RACING FULL CIRCLE

DUBAI WORLD CUP

PHOTOGRAPHED BY HENRY HORENSTEIN

WRITTEN BY CAROL FLAKE

As the first of 11 of the world's fastest thoroughbreds stepped onto Dubai's refurbished Nad Al-Sheba racecourse last March 27th, one of racing's most ambitious dreams came true.

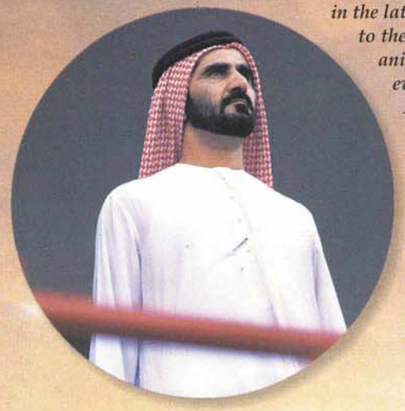
For more than two decades, horse owners and breeders from the Arab world have worked to establish the Arab presence in international thoroughbred racing, not only by winning top trophies in the United States, England, Europe and Japan, but also by bringing world-class racing and breeding back to the Arabian Peninsula, the home of the thoroughbred's renowned ancestor, the Arabian.

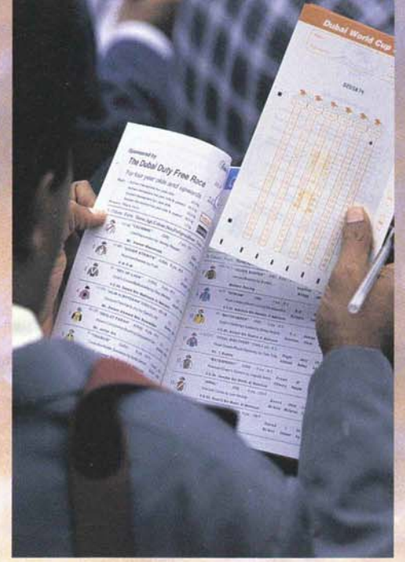
With the establishment of the annual invitation-only Dubai World Cup, the United Arab Emirates became the home of one of the world's top racing challenges, and drew the attention of millions of enthusiasts around the globe. Among the horses entered in the inaugural race were a 13-time winner from Australia, a seven-race winner from Britain, last year's champion "dirt horse" from Japan, and Cigar, North America's horse of the year for 1995.

In the speed, endurance and sheer heart of these competitors was a breathtaking feeling of rightness—a sense of history coming round full circle.

Racing organized along international lines is relatively new in the United Arab Emirates. In 1992, the Emirates Racing Association formed, and a year later it became the governing body of UAE racing, the equivalent of the British and US Jockey Clubs. This year, it is overseeing more than 60 races nationwide, which are drawing interested international crowds and attracting increasing local and regional attention. It also keeps the Emirates Thoroughbred Stud Book, the first in the Middle East to earn approval from the International Stud Book Committee. For the first running of the Dubai World Cup, the decade-old Nad Al-Sheba track, below, one of five in the UAE, was remodeled to accommodate several thousand spectators. The racing surface is soft sand atop hard-packed sand; its unusually high mineral content helps prevent it from being blown away in the wind.

"The horse is in my blood," says H.H. Shaykh Mohammed bin Rashid Al-Maktum, crown prince of Dubai and defense minister of the United Arab Emirates, left, who points out that the lineage of every thoroughbred is rooted in one or more of two Arabian stallions and one barb from North Africa brought to England in the late 17th and early 18th centuries. "It was Arabian blood that brought speed and delicacy to the hearty European war horse," says Al-Maktum. "Mix the two together, and you get an animal that covers a lot of ground—fast." On Race Day, March 27, below, preliminary events such as the Dubai Duty Free Race whetted appetites for the World Cup itself. As in the United States, but not Britain, races in the UAE are run counter-clockwise. By half a length, top-ranked Cigar, an American entry, took first place (far right).



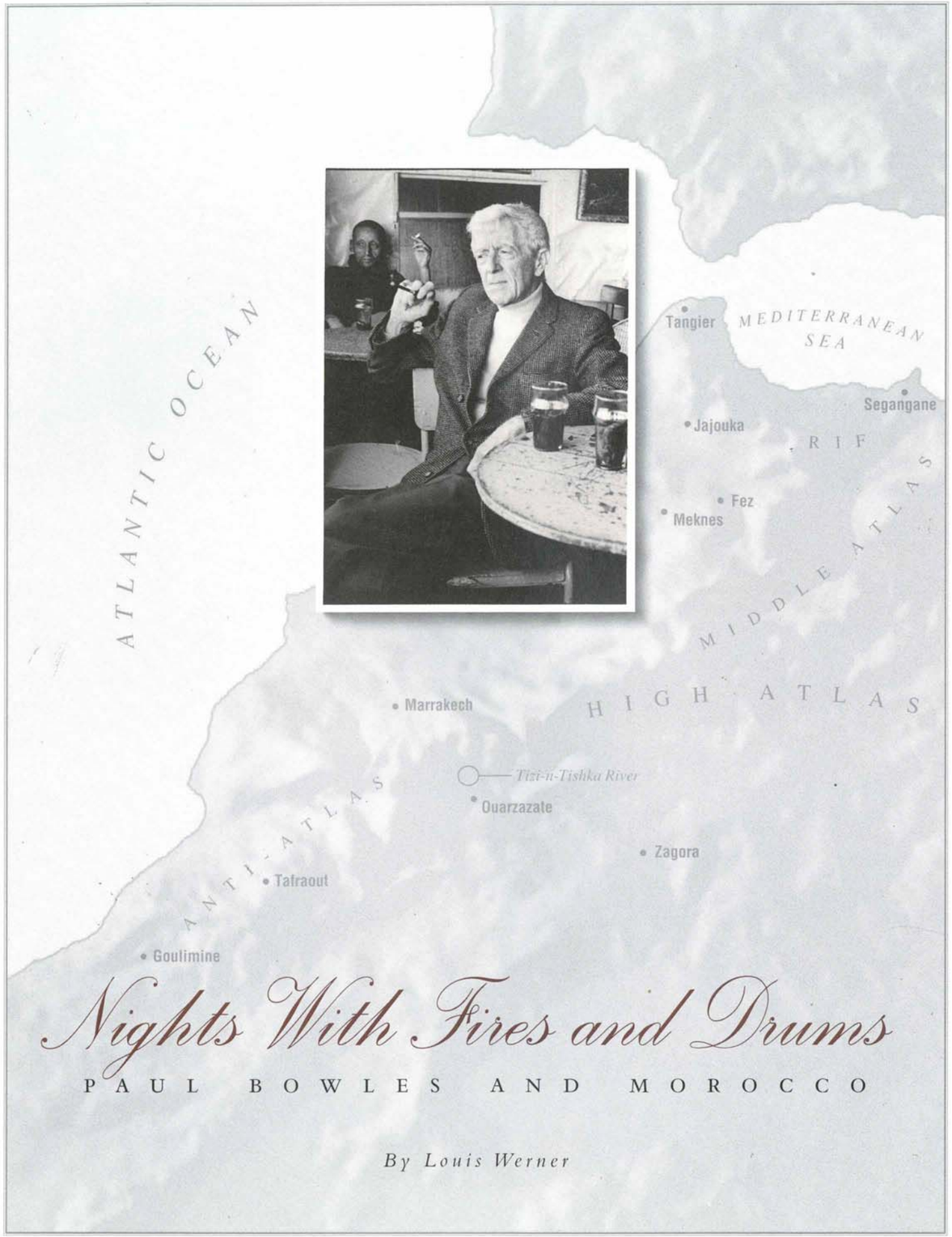


For thoroughbreds, training begins at roughly six months of age and continues in each off-season. Left: A pool at Zabeel Stables in Dubai helps build strength without subjecting the horses' joints to the stress of the hard track. Left lower: One of the country's top trainers, Satish Seemar, directs training at Zabeel. "They've done as professional a job as anyone I've ever seen," comments Will Farish, a leading us breeder, on the Al-Maktums' search, since 1980, for the best in human as well as equine talent for their stables. Below: Galloping up soft sand dunes is a favored form of endurance training for both thoroughbreds and Arabians in Dubai.

The excitement that has come with the rapid growth of thoroughbred racing in the UAE has coincided with a rekindled commitment to the Arabian horse by a number of owners and breeders in the region. H.H. Shaykh Zayed bin Sultan Al-Nahyan, president of the UAE, has established a uniquely ambitious breeding, training and racing program for Arabians. At his farm, opposite, top, owner Khalid Khalifa Al-Naboodah, left, poses with his thoroughbred mare Ghurra and her foal, and with manager Rex Hamey, right; opposite, below, yearlings pound his track. At the Al-Maktum family's Dubai-based operation, farriers can adjust a horse's gait and stance by subtle adjustments to its shoes, above, and grooms cool down exercised thoroughbreds in the shadow of Dubai's highrise buildings.

Photographer Henry Horenstein, author of the best-selling text Black & White Photography *and of other books for children and adults, has a special interest in thoroughbred racing. Carol Flake is the author of two books on thoroughbreds and has written about horses for* The New Yorker, Connoisseur *and* Town & Country. *They are photographer and author, respectively, of*

Thoroughbred Kingdoms: Breeding Farms of the American Racehorse.



Nights With Fires and Drums

PAUL BOWLES AND MOROCCO

By Louis Werner

At age 85, he has been a novelist, a diarist, a prolific writer of letters, a composer, an actor, a photographer—and the catalyst of the popularization of Moroccan music in the West. His drop-in literary salon in Tangier drew the hip and the avant-garde for decades. His talents are no more easily summed up than the man himself: idiosyncratic, flamboyant, shy. A Beat-generation New York expatriate and reluctant celebrity, Paul Bowles never ceases to amaze.

Once recognized solely as a writer of novels and short stories, it is only in this decade that Bowles has begun to be noticed for more than literature. His biggest boost came in 1990, when Italian film director Bernardo Bertolucci gave Bowles's 1949 novel *The Sheltering Sky* a sumptuous production—including a scene-stealing cameo role for Bowles himself. Soon afterwards, Bowles's previously unknown travel photography was published by Scalo. Last year, in conjunction with a two-day festival of Bowles's chamber music at New York's Lincoln Center, independent conductor Jonathan Sheffer published a book of essays titled *Paul Bowles: Music* and organized a symposium on his work. Largo Records has recently released *Migrations*, a compact-disk sampler of Bowles compositions from the 1930's to the 1990's.

But it is Bowles's association with a group of double-reed horn players from Jajouka, a mountain village in the Moroccan Western Rif, that has called attention to another of his pursuits: ethnomusicology. It is largely through Bowles's introductions that Western pop cognoscenti the likes of the late Brian Jones of the Rolling Stones, rocker Peter Gabriel and jazzman Ornette Coleman have visited the Jajouka players. In the past two years, "The Master Musicians of Jajouka" have found a wide audience on the youth-concert circuit of Europe and the United States.

And it was in fact music that first drew Bowles to Morocco—though not Moroccan music. On that brief trip in 1931 Bowles was a student of the Western classical tradition, already regarded as a serious composer. Traveling with his mentor Aaron Copland, Bowles first heard the melodies and rhythms that forever changed the way he listened.

"We landed and Morocco took over," he wrote of the way the country first struck his ear. "Radio had not yet arrived.... One could sit in a cafe in the center of the *madinah* and hear only the sound of many hundreds of voices."

Perhaps there was no radio, but there was the phonograph. Bowles bought records of Berber music and was instantly entranced by its haunting sonorities and unique vocalizing. A practical romantic, he realized that to delay documenting what he had discovered would limit the chances the Western world could ever hear such music again in this form.

Bowles's photographs of Morocco, some of which were published in 1994, are mostly a personal record: casual glimpses of the streets and markets he found in and around his adopted city, Tangier, where he moved permanently in 1947. "Radio had not yet arrived," he wrote in his first years there. "One could sit in a café in the center of the madinah *and hear only the sound of many hundreds of voices."*

"The unfortunate fact," he wrote to a friend, "is that the longer one waits, the less variety and quality one is likely to find in the music itself. The structure is being altered with considerable rapidity. It is heartbreaking to see music and dance forms disintegrating before one's eyes."

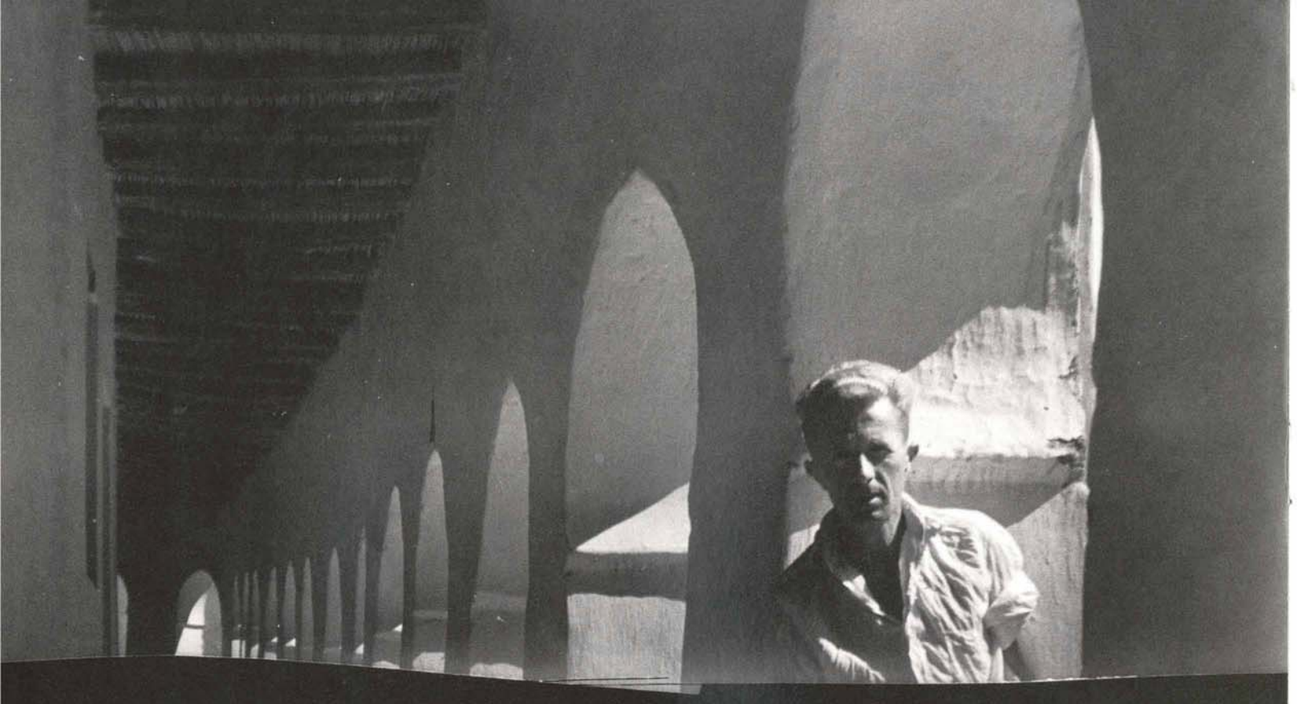
During that summer in Tangier in 1931, Bowles worked, under Copland's guidance, on his *Sonata for Oboe and Clarinet*, experimenting with harmonies on an old Bembaron et Hazan piano delivered to his house by donkey. Then he journeyed to Fez and Marrakech to hear more of Morocco. It was on that trip that the seed of his lifelong drive was planted to seek out, record and champion the country's foremost tribal musicians.

A later trip across the Tizi-n-Tishka to Ouarzazate whetted his appetite for rough, back-country travel in search of music. In 1959 he won a long-awaited grant from the Rockefeller Foundation that financed four six-week recording expeditions.

"In high spirits we set out on our trip through mountains and desert," he wrote. "It was summer—we knew that it would not rain and that there would be many nights with fires and drums under the stars." He took along the newly developed portable tape recorder, plenty of money and an interpreter named Muhammad Larbi Djilali.

The expedition covered nearly 40,000 kilometers (25,000 miles), from Goulimine south in the Anti-Atlas range to Segangane east in the Rif Mountains, and on down to Zagora on the margins of the Sahara. Among many other rarities in the tribal repertoire, Bowles sought out Chleuh (Berber) music of the Haha and Tafraoute regions, Riffian music of the Beni Ouriaghal and Beni Bouifrour, and the begging songs, trance rhythms and classical *qasidah*s played in Marrakech's Djemaa el-Fna (See *Aramco World*, July/August 1993).

ECCO PRESS
HARRY RANSOM HUMANITIES RESEARCH CENTER, THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN



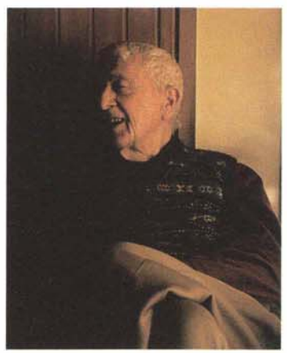
In his pursuit of traditional music, Bowles covered nearly 40,000 kilometers within Morocco. He was one of the first ethnomusicologists to note what effect his own presence—and that of his tape recorder—had on the performance, a practice that has since become a research standard. Now 85 (below), he still lives in his Tangier apartment. Opposite: one of Bowles's undated snapshots of Fez, probably from the early 1950's.

He poked his way into village wedding celebrations, concerts of Andalusian *noubas* and free-style *mawwal* singing, and even into the Meknes synagogue of Benamara to record secular Sephardic songs. He located a virtuoso player of the rare double-reed instrument called the *zamar*, made from twin bull's-horns, and recorded what Bowles called "the forbidden music of the Hamatcha."

Bowles sent his recordings to the US Library of Congress, where today they make up one of the world's most authoritative bodies of Moroccan folk music—outside Bowles's own private library in Tangier. Although the Library of Congress's Archive of Folk Song is almost exclusively devoted to music of the US, Bowles's visionary work has given Morocco a unique pride of place there.

"I'm not a bit surprised the Library wanted my collection," he says. "This is great and important music. What *would* surprise me is if Americans wanted only to listen to all that cowboy singing and yodeling and so forth, and not to the music of the Djebala or the Gnaoua."

But what makes his collection unique is the man who did the collecting. Bowles is a true connoisseur, who simply loves to sit and listen, and a generation of younger ethnomusicologists has followed in his footsteps.



Bowles revealed himself in a letter he sent from the field to Harold Spivacke, then director of the Music Division of the Library of Congress. "Of course I am extremely happy to have been able to make such a collection, because I love the material. My taste may be somewhat special from having lived here so long and listened so much. But I feel certain that some of the pieces will have an appeal to others who are not already prejudiced in favor of Moroccan music."

Bowles has been living in Tangier now for nearly half a century, most of that time in the same comfortable apartment some distance from the center of town. During a recent interview, seated on the floor with a tape of the wailing *rhaita* music of the Jajouka players in the background, he reflected his romantic distress over the changes he has witnessed in Moroccan music.

"The quality of the music that is played is fine," he says. "The problem is with the quantity. Very few people still know how. The performers I recorded for the Library of Congress were mostly old men. I'm sure they're all dead by now. And the young today, they just want to be auto mechanics in some Casablanca garage."

And, he is quick to point out, traditional music cannot be expected to survive in archive form alone. When the people quit playing it, he says, it is gone. Years before, he could have recorded from his open window the wedding drums and the oboe-like *rhaitas* coming from the nearby village of 'Ain Hayani. Now, that village has been swallowed up by "progress," a word Bowles uses with disdain.

"Traditional performances today are truncated to fit some new recipe, whether an audio recording, a stage act, or even a film score. A piece that should take an hour is over in five minutes. Berber *ahouache* and *ahidous* dances used to last all night. Now they're put on for nightclub audiences."

The *ahouache* of the High Atlas and further south, like the *ahidous* of the Middle Atlas, is a formalized sequence of music and dance for mixed chorus performed during feasts. Bowles calls it "a kind of ritualized, dismembered theater, with only certain scenes left."

His recording of a Tafraouti *ahouache* is a rare documentation of a performance under unforced but difficult circumstances. "The dance was strenuous," he wrote, "and although it was 10 o'clock in the evening, the temperature in the compound still stood at 108 degrees. By the time the men finished, they were streaming with sweat."

What some Western listeners perceive as monotony in much wholly percussive Berber music, Bowles explains, is the result not of the music but of listeners' expectations. Berber repetitions are not static but deceptively organic. They capture and hold the imagination. "Since this music's aim is to cause hypnosis, it must be given the opportunity to hypnotize, and this requires listening to it in its entirety. There is no quick way."

Bowles is unyieldingly opinionated when it comes to the newly popular crossover experiments in "so-called world music." "That's nothing but bastardized sound, a foreign culture perverting a local culture—one of my pet hates." Even North African *rai* music, a pop craze among Arab youth that draws heavily on vernacular lyrics and rhythms, does not escape his ire. Though many popular musicologists see *rai* as a true indigenous genre, Bowles dismisses it curtly. "Music invented in France," he says.

Moroccan music specialist Phillip Schuyler thinks that Morocco's traditional music is more vital than Bowles makes it seem. Schuyler is an ethnomusicological consultant to the upcoming reissue, planned for later this year, of Bowles's Library of Congress recordings.

"Just like America in the 1960's, Morocco had its own folk revival in the 1970's," he says. "City-bred musicians learned from villagers to play old songs on old instruments, and in turn found new listeners for themselves. There is probably more ferment in folk music in North Africa today than anywhere in the world."

Bowles's concern about modernizing traditional music also seems contradicted by the case of the Jajouka musicians he knows so well. When rock producer Bill Laswell recently widened the Jajouka players' appeal among Western audiences by making the first high-fidelity recording, he did not resort to state-of-the-art studio tricks. Instead, true to Bowles's own style, he hauled his portable studio up the musicians' mountain and let them play all night in their own setting.

Whatever expectations listeners today bring to a Jajouka concert, the players themselves have not significantly modified their sound to suit their audience. Their US tour last year was praised by Western musicologists and Moroccan fans alike for its authenticity.

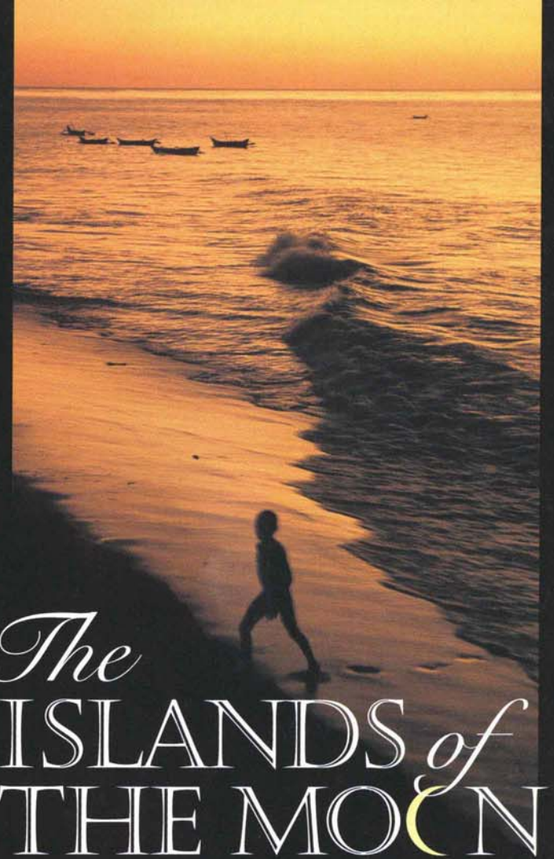
In an ironic parallel, Bowles has kept his own composing largely free of Moroccan influences. Other Western composers who have lived in non-Western countries, such as the late Colin McPhee in Indonesia, either cannot—or do not wish to—remain unaffected by what they hear locally. But even the pieces Bowles has written in recent years are notable for not borrowing from the North African tradition. "I did my best to keep it out," he explains tersely.

Schuyler goes on to appraise Bowles's contributions from an anthropologist's perspective. "First and foremost, Bowles is an artist, and he approaches music as a creative person. If he thought something might sound better played solo or on a modified instrument, he recorded it that way. But he also kept very good field notes. He tells you exactly what impact he himself had on the performance." This groundbreaking revelation of the observer's own role became a model for Western anthropologists and is commonly followed today throughout the social sciences.

From his first days in Morocco, Bowles was smitten by some sounds and left unmoved by others. He had his tastes and opinions, and he was characteristically frank about them. Listening today to the Library of Congress archive allows a glimpse into what captured the imagination of this passionate expatriate before radio and audio cassettes set Moroccan music on its path into the mainstream of world music.

Author and filmmaker Louis Werner lives in New York.

LOWER: DAVID MELODY; UPPER AND AT RIGHT: HARRY RANSOM HUMANITIES RESEARCH CENTER, THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN



The ISLANDS of THE MOON

WRITTEN BY LARK ELLEN GOULD
PHOTOGRAPHED BY ILENE PERLMAN

Omani sailors cross this gulf to the island of Qanbalu [Ngazidja] in the Sea of Zinj.... They call it the Sea of Barbara and the Land of Jafuni. Its waves are..."blind waves," [meaning] that when the waves go high they are as high as the mountains and when they go deep they are like the deepest of valleys.... When they are in the middle of this sea, they recite a few lines of **rajaz** *poetry that say, "Barbara and Jafuni and your insane waves! Jafuni and Barbara, the waves are as you see."*

—**Al-Mas'udi,** *The Meadows of Gold*

Previous spread: *The harbor of Moroni, capital of the Comoros, as well as the islands' perfumed coasts, have seen traders and raiders come and go for more than a millennium; today, a third category of visitor—the tourist—embodies the country's hopes.*

Below: *From these dark cliffs, women of the nearby village of Iconi leapt to their deaths during a 17th-century pirate raid rather than accept enslavement by their Malagasy attackers.*

Inset: *The town of Domoni, on Nzwani, was an important trading center even in the 15th century, and apparently traded with places as distant as Japan.*

The ISLANDS *of* THE MOON

Unlike al-Mas'udi's 10th-century Omani sailors, modern travel brochures call this Indian Ocean archipelago "The Perfume Islands" and sing of waves that break rhythmically along broad, pearl-sand beaches. Those beaches, the light breezes scented with ylang-ylang—until recently a component of many perfumes—and an idyllic, isolated location between Mozambique and Madagascar may in time make the Comoro Islands a stop on the tourist trail, much as they were once a stop on the maritime routes of old.

Perhaps because of their location astride the trade routes, or perhaps because of their diminutive size, the three islands now called the Federal Islamic Republic of the Comoro Islands have lived largely in the shadow of struggles among foreign powers and rival island rulers. Now that can change. Following their first stable, democratic elections in 1990, the unified Comoros were accepted into the League of Arab States in 1993. A country at peace, the republic is searching for a way to earn a living, poised to make its mark in the international arena.

Islamic culture, mixed with East African influences, is as natural to daily life in the Comoros today as the sea breezes that first brought Islam to these shores. Early Arab traders, who by the 10th century regularly plied the waters off Zanj, or East Africa, named the Comoro Islands *qumr*, a name derived from *qamar*, or moon. Initially, this name was applied to Madagascar, then to the four Comoro Islands as a group.

The first Arab settlers, tradition has it, arrived on Qanbalu—today's Ngazidja (called Grande Comore by the French)—shortly after the death of the king and prophet Solomon, probably coming from the Hadhramaut region of southern Arabia. They lived with inhabitants of Malay-Indonesian origin as well as Bantu-speaking and Swahili-speaking East Africans. In 632, upon hearing of Islam, the Arab islanders are said to have dispatched an emissary, the navigator Said Muhammad, to Makkah—but by the time he arrived there, the Prophet Muhammad had died. Nonetheless, after a stay in Makkah, Said Muhammad returned to Qanbalu and led the gradual conversion of his compatriots to Islam.

As trade expanded, sailors used the beautiful and exotic Comoros as a setting for myths and legends. In one of these, Solomon searches the world for his beloved, the Yemeni Queen of Saba. His search is in vain. He finds only her throne, and it is hidden in the hot crater of the Kartala volcano on Ngazidja.

According to another myth, it is Solomon—whom God had given authority over the *jinn*, or spirits—who is responsible for the appearance of the Comoros on earth: *Jinn*, created by God of smokeless flame, are capable of heavy labor, and Solomon had put them to work in his mines. One day, he ordered a *jinni* to carry a precious ring to the Queen of Saba. On his way, the *jinni* dropped the ring, which formed a great circular inferno. This became the Kartala volcano which, in turn, gave fiery birth to Ngazidja.

In 1154, Arab geographer al-Idrisi depicted the Comoros on a map with a text that told of trade with the Indian Ocean islands from as far east as Indonesia, including the Seychelles, the Maldives, Madagascar and the Comoros. In the 15th century, the famous Arab seafarer Ibn Majid drew the individual routes among these islands and the east African coastal ports of Mombasa, Zanzibar, Kilwa and Kitao.

Below: *Usually a three-day celebration, a traditional Comorian* grand mariage *can cost an average family the equivalent of several years' income. But the wedding has important economic and social functions: Goods are redistributed as gifts, services are hired and social obligations are both incurred and returned. "It is a way to secure one's place in society," explains Raghadat Mohamed, a cabinet member who, in 1990, became the first elected woman in Comorian national government.*

Left: *"I remember when the French came," says 102-year-old storyteller Mohammed Adam; he witnessed independence, too, in 1975.*

The ISLANDS *of* THE MOON

Beginning in 933, this sea trade led to one of the most important influences in Comorian history: the migration of the Shirazi Arabs from Persia and western Indian Ocean states. Seeking haven from religious persecution, they landed in Nzwani (called Anjouan by the French), the second-largest island of today's republic. They found its steep mountain terrain thinly inhabited by Africans, only a few of whom were Muslim, living under the authority of Muslim Arab chiefs called *bejas*. The Shirazis appear to have accepted this arrangement until the 12th century, when Shirazi *fanis*, or chiefs, began to grow in influence. In the mid-15th century, a second, greater influx of Shirazi immigrants reinforced the Islamic character of the Comoros.

For the next three centuries, all four islands were ruled mainly by Shirazis, although their rule was anything but unified: On Nzwani alone, at times, as many as 40 *fanis* and other chiefs shared power; Ngazidja's 1148 square kilometers (443 square miles) were for many years divided into 11 sultanates. The assimilation of Shirazi and East African customs led to a political system wherein *fanis* and other leaders could be either men or women.

Meanwhile, Portuguese sailors landed on the Comoros in the early 1500's. The French claimed discovery in 1530, and the British staked their claim in 1554. In the 17th century, pirates from both Madagascar and Europe lurked in the Comoros and preyed on vessels plying the East India routes. Out of this turbulent period emerged more stories that strengthened the identity of the people who had become Comorians.

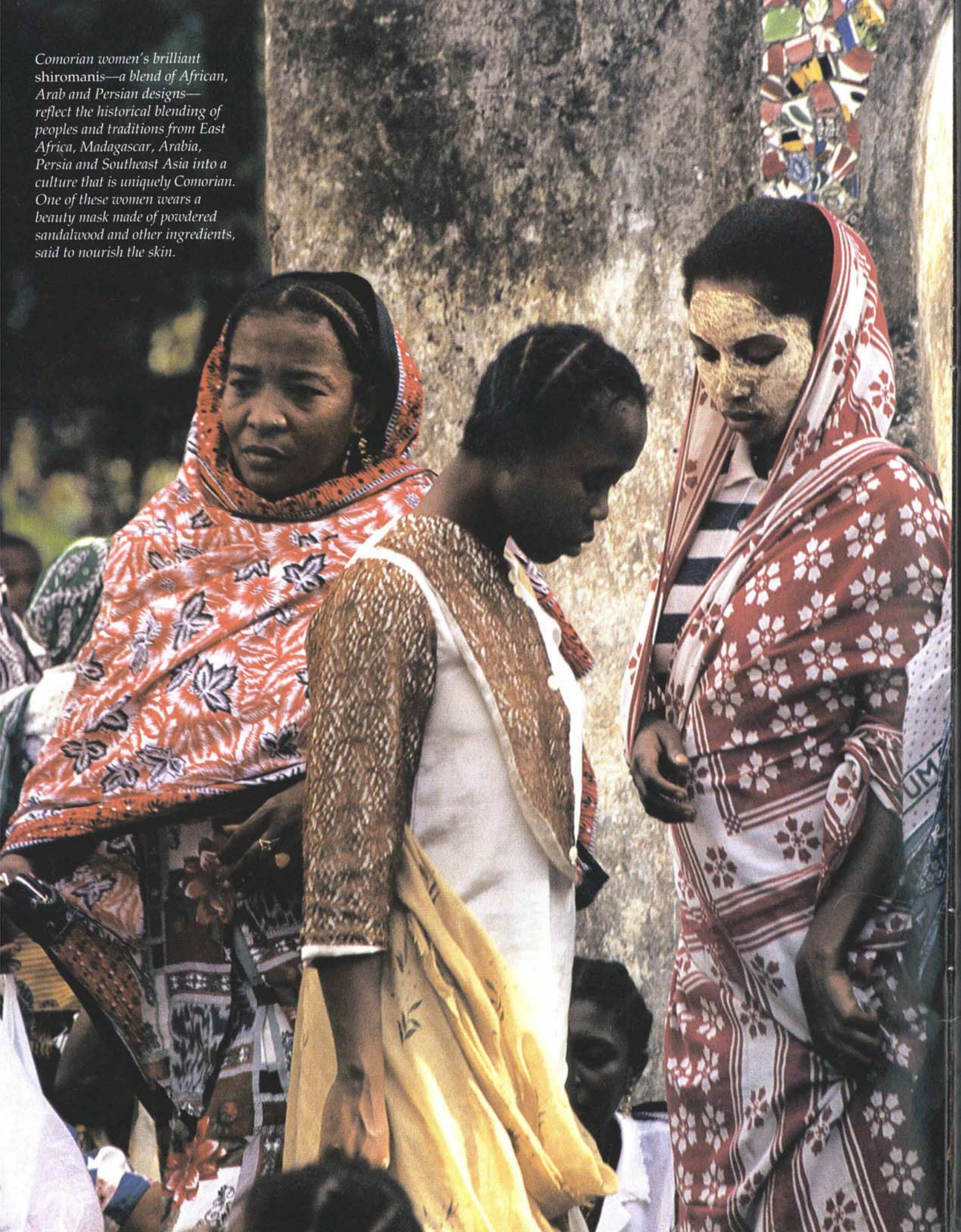
One such tale comes from Iconi, a coastal village of Ngazidja, in the 17th century. There, a powerful sultan continually had to defend his people against Malagasy pirates who raided the village and enslaved its people. In one apocalyptic raid, the pirates massacred the defenders and pursued the women, who hid among the rocks atop a cliff above the sea. As their attackers approached and capture appeared inevitable, the women chose death over slavery and leapt into the sea. Today, the defeated sultan's modest palace—really a large house—stands weather-beaten and crumbling in the center of Iconi, now a quiet fishing hamlet.

By contrast, another Ngazidja village remembers a miracle that arose from those years of strife. In Bangui-Kouni, an outpost on the northern tip of the island, the legend tells of newly arrived Shirazis who landed at this place and who, by their example and teaching, began converting the Bantu-speaking people to Islam. But the newcomers were too poor to build a mosque, and for years there was no formal place to worship. One morning, however, the people awoke to find a mosque near the center of the village. To this day, they say, they do not know who built it or how it got there. It is named the Miraculous Mosque.

Similarly, not far from this village there is a small cave in which Shirazi settlers hid from Portuguese pirates. Despite the inadequacy of their cover, the Portuguese miraculously never found them. Today, the cave is known as *le trou du Prophète*, a reference to a similar miracle that saved the life of the Prophet Muhammad in the mountains of western Arabia.

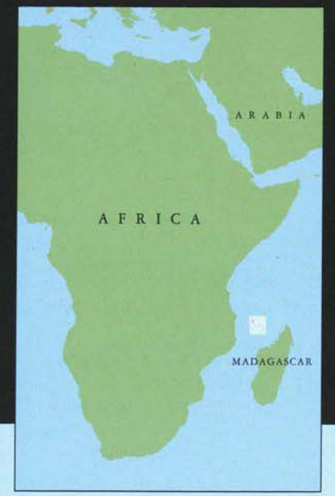
The pirate raids punctuated wars among local rulers. These were increasingly exacerbated by France and England, who backed rival sultans to play out their own contest for domination. In the mid-19th century, Ngazidja was unified by Sultan Said Ali, who in 1886 signed an unpopular pact that declared the island a French protectorate. That same year, Mwali, the smallest island, also fell to the French, who called it Mohéli. The sultans of Nzwani and Maore (French: Mayotte) had ceded their powers several decades earlier. Two years later, in 1888, the Comoros ceded all sovereign rights, and the entire archipelago became a single French colony.

The official French presence meant little to the many Comorians who continued their subsistence routines of farming, gathering fruit, fishing and praying at the islands' more than 1400 mosques. Historically, there was virtually no inter-island economy, as each island, separately ruled, made do with its own farming, village markets and modest overseas trade. Despite the islands' location on the trade routes, Comorians themselves ultimately profited little from the traffic. The islands served as way stations and sources of unprocessed—and thus less profitable—natural products, including wood, vanilla, coffee beans and coconuts.

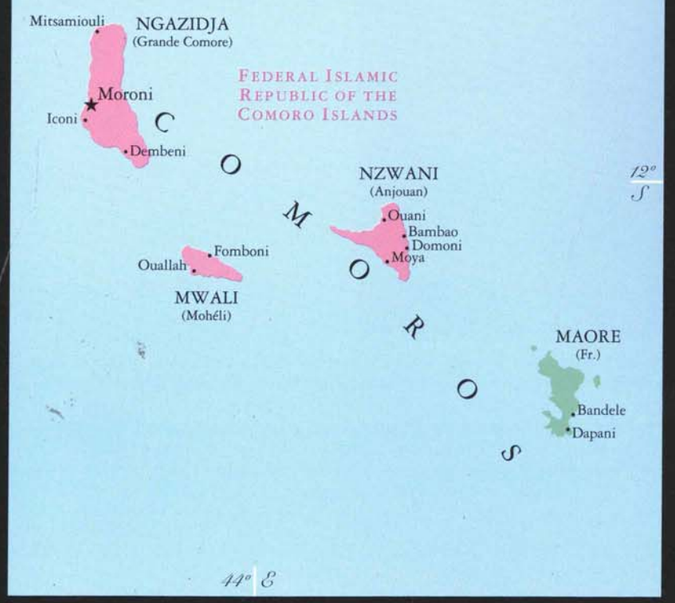


Comorian women's brilliant shiromanis*—a blend of African, Arab and Persian designs—reflect the historical blending of peoples and traditions from East Africa, Madagascar, Arabia, Persia and Southeast Asia into a culture that is uniquely Comorian. One of these women wears a beauty mask made of powdered sandalwood and other ingredients, said to nourish the skin.*

The Federal Islamic Republic of the Comoro Islands



The Federal Islamic Republic of the Comoro Islands, independent of France since 1975 and almost entirely Muslim, is made up of three islands with a total area of 1862 square kilometers (719 square miles): Ngazidja (in·gah·**zee**·jah), location of the national capital, Moroni; Nzwani (in·**zwah**·nee) and Mwali (**mwah**·lee). A fourth island, Maore, voted in 1976 to remain an Overseas Department of France. The republic's population, roughly 500,000, is slightly less than Bahrain's and half that of Rhode Island.



The ISLANDS of THE MOON

Today, much remains the same. Roads connect villages, and many villages have grown into towns, but men and women still frequently walk long distances to market. The French influence endures in Comorian institutions: the mail, the banks, the telephones, the airport and seaport, the electricity, the plumbing and even the framework of the Comorian government all have their origins in French colonial rule.

"I remember when the French came," says Mohammed Adam, a blind 102-year-old villager and storyteller around whose house children throng. "They made the people carry them on their backs. You see, there were no roads as there are now, and it would take a whole day to walk from one village to another. I remember once I was given the task of getting a message to the sultan of a village at the south end of the island, very far away. Well, I was not going to walk all that way. I took the message to a village nearby and gave the message to that sultan instead. If he wanted to pass it along, so be it. That was how we lived with the French."

Adam is still respected by people who come to his one-room house from around the island to hear the history of their great-grandfathers and to resolve their conflicts through the wisdom of someone who has lived nearly two average lifetimes.

"That is how we learned to live with them," he continues. "We did things our own way." He rises, then asks to be helped down to the mosque for sunset prayers.

Adam described the stubborn spirit that led to independence and today's Comorian struggle to find a stable niche in the world economy. In the 1960's, the Comorians formed political parties in opposition to French rule; in 1975, three islands declared their independence. When Comorian independence was recognized by the United Nations, France withdrew its economic support, and the resulting chaos has taken years to resolve.

The country's first democratic elections, in 1975, failed, and two deadly, mercenary-led coups punctuated the following 15 years. The islands again held a democratic vote in 1990, followed by election of a unicameral federal assembly in 1992. An attempted coup was fended off last year, and this year the government of President Said Mohammed Djohar peacefully ceded power to the newly elected Mohamed Taki Abdoulkarim. There are

YLANG-YLANG

Scent of the Past

FLOWER OF FLOWERS

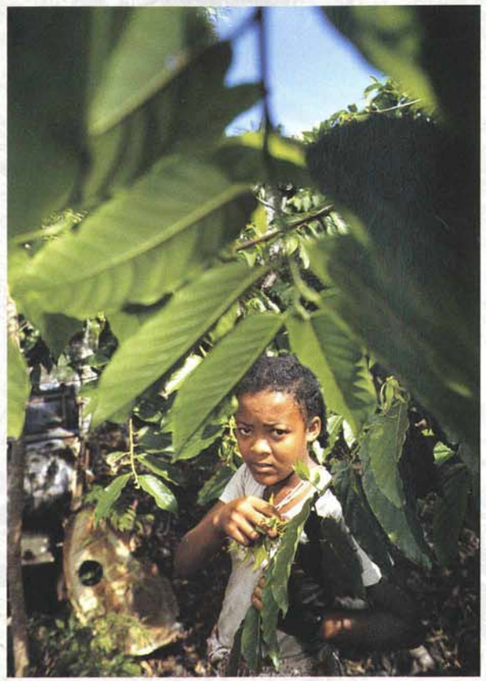
In Tagalog, *ylang-ylang* means "flower of flowers." Carried to the Comoros by the French, the plant spiced both the air and the island economy for a century, its aromatic essential oil important in the French perfume industry. At one time, the Comoros grew an estimated 90 percent of the world's ylang-ylang—most of it shipped to France. Now, synthetic substitutes have eclipsed what was the country's top export, and the fragrant farms that grew 1.2 million flowering trees have become a bittersweet legacy of the departed colonial era.

Ylang-ylang *(Cananga odorata)* plays a role in perfumes not unlike that of pepper in some spice blends: It is the element in the mixture that binds the ingredients and spikes the senses.

Pierre Humblot is a 69-year-old plantation owner whose grandfather, Léon Humblot, pioneered the introduction of ylang-ylang to the islands. Over the expanse of his land, the crooked, smooth-barked evergreen ylang-ylang trees are hung with flowers over-ripe and wilting. A collection of old copper vats sits idle in a shed.

"I used to be a big man," Humblot says. "I had 50 people under me. Now I have nothing." It was about five years ago, he explains, that the market began to dry up, and now he is down to two employees. He has been growing ylang-ylang since 1958, when the colonial government offered loans and incentives to spur production. Now, the essence that once made up 27 percent of the Comoros's total exports is more often than not sold for a dollar a vial to tourists passing through Moroni.

"Even the individuals who used to buy ylang-ylang no longer do, because the farmers and distillers are cutting production," Humblot says. "There is no demand in France, it seems, or no way for us to find markets in France. The government is supposed to help us, but we don't need money. We need buyers!"



About half of the world's floral-scented perfumes include ylang-ylang oil among their ingredients because it diffuses generously and generates an impression of elegance and warmth. The flowers' long, twisted petals, typically gathered by girls and women, yield about two percent of their weight in oil to indirect distillation in simple local stills—but the export market has been virtually ruined by the successful synthesis of the oil's main components.

The making of ylang-ylang distillate begins when the long-stalked green blossoms' five-centimeter (two-inch) petals turn yellow. In the tropical climate, this occurs year-round, but the rains of November and April make those months the favored times for picking. Each blossom is plucked with care by older children and nimble-fingered women, who fan out through the orchards with straw baskets to earn the equivalent of two dollars for the day's work. It takes approximately 45 kilograms (100 pounds) of flowers to produce one liter (about one quart) of essence.

To retain the fullest strength of the blossoms' rich scent, distillation begins promptly after picking. In a copper vat, over a wood fire, roughly 100 kilograms (220 pounds) of blossoms are simmered in about 50 liters (13 US gallons) of water for two to three hours. As the mixture boils, the essential oil is condensed and drawn off through a drip tube. When the water has evaporated, a second quantity is poured in, and the process is repeated twice in distillations that each take six to seven hours.

These first, second and third distillations produce successively weaker grades of the essence, which is then bottled and labeled. At the end of each week, the bottles are taken to town, counted and shipped to the few remaining buyers by local distribution firms. One of the largest, Société Anonyme de la Grande Comore (SAGC), was founded by Léon Humblot in 1885. It was, his grandson explains, a good business: Ylang-ylang used to sell in France for 200 times its price in the Comoros. But now, even SAGC sells little ylang-ylang, preferring the vanilla and clove trades. Some officials insist that it is too early to give up on the ylang-ylang market. "Production has dropped because [perfume] manufacturers in France are using artificial essence," says Mahmoud Aboud, a diplomatic representative of the islands. "But we don't think ylang-ylang is dead. We hope to find new markets." However, the World Bank's efforts to boost Comorian agriculture have focused on foodstuffs, rather than on export crops like ylang-ylang, in order to redress the country's unfavorable balance of food trade.

Because ylang-ylang was introduced by the French as a cash crop intended for French markets, it has no traditional value to the Comorian people. The distilled oil is used, where possible, to soothe tired muscles, soften skin or make a home smell bright, and, in a base of coconut oil, it is worn by women in *le grand mariage*. "It is a good plant; it makes the air smell nice," says another idled ylang-ylang farmer, Marcel Delapeyre, who lives in a village on the southern horn of Ngazidja.

"Perhaps we will make our money from vanilla," ponders Delapeyre. "We have planted many vanilla vines, and vanilla seems to be needed in places." But in the end, he says, "it is for my sons to decide."

24 active political parties, and opposition voices are faint but legal.

Following the 1992 elections, and after six years of lobbying by Comorian officials, the League of Arab States agreed to admit the country into the organization in 1993.

"Comorian society is very old and complex and it seems we have been sleeping for 150 years," says Finance Minister Mohammed M'Chamgama, a serious yet affable politician in his late 40's who earned his doctorate at the London School of Economics. "We have been linked to France by an umbilical cord," he says, "and we have now to find our own way. But it is too easy to blame France. We have to blame ourselves and decide what we want to do."

"We do not have big industries here," says Ahmad Said, a student living in Moroni, the nation's capital. "And at least half of us are out of work. The economic situation is drastic. For now, we cannot do anything without the help of other countries."

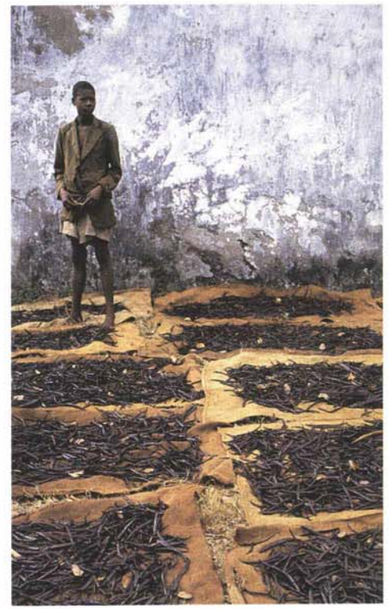
Arabian Gulf countries have promised economic assistance—if planning and implementation can be carried out dependably. But the demands of today's global economy seem daunting in a country that has historically depended on subsistence agriculture carried out in the shadow of opposing political forces, domestic and foreign. So the larger Comorian challenge is to sort out old ways and new to emerge successfully, and quickly, as a unified, sovereign and self-reliant nation.

In a small school in a rocky field by the village of Mitsamiouli, an old Shirazi town of 5000 on the north coast of Ngazidja, children's voices recite in unison at the tops of their lungs: the Arabic alphabet in one room, multiplication tables in another. Thabit Ibrahim, the headmaster, holds out his hands in a gesture that asks, "What can be done?"

The children here—about 200 students up to age 15—are almost entirely without books, paper or pens, Ibrahim points out. Even so, he adds, there is a waiting list of 500 to get into the school.

"We have only 20 books, and they are in French," he explains. Books in Arabic have been ordered from Saudi Arabia, he says, "and next year, God willing, we will teach handicrafts and mechanics."

However spartan the settings, education has spread widely in the independent Comoros. While Qur'anic schools have always been the foundation of learning on the islands, today they are mainly the basis of preschool education. Principles of Islam and the learning of Arabic script account for two years of the public education curriculum, which is structured on the French model, with six years of primary education and three to four years of pre-secondary education, followed by training in a lycée, or secondary school. Comorian lycées offer training in agricultural management, education, mechanics, health and other basic subjects. University education is available only abroad.



A vanilla-grower stands among heaps of fermenting pods, part of the crop that makes the Comoros the world's second-largest producer of vanilla. Cloves and copra—dried coconut meat—and some ylang-ylang are the islands' other important exports.

In 1939, there were 10 primary schools throughout the islands and only five students attended secondary school—and they had to travel to Madagascar. In 1980, nearly 300 schools throughout the Comoro Islands offered basic education to between 50 and 75 percent of Comorian children. Today, nearly all children are literate in the Comorian language, which uses the Arabic script, and most are very familiar with Arabic, French and Swahili.

"Our children are used to ways that are modern," said Sittou Raghadat Mohamed, Minister for Social Affairs, Works and Employment. "They receive news about the world in schools. They hear things on the radio. They see movies. We are not so isolated here as we once were. We women are also feeling a new power. We can form our parties and run for election. But [democracy] is not our tradition, and [our] freedom is very young."

Most Comorians are still employed in subsistence farming, with goods bought and sold at small town markets. In Moroni, colorful stalls selling anything from Madagascar woodcrafts, embroidered cloths and perfume oils cover one official market, while a more casual place near a shuttered post office offers coconuts, bananas, fish, jackfruit and whatever can be grown or slaughtered. All is spread out on *shiromani*s, the black-and-white and red-and-white patterned shawls that are both dress-cover and veil for the modern Comorian woman.

The market, particularly, is a woman's domain: She sells what she catches in the tidepools, picks in her garden or gathers in the surrounding forests. But more generally, it is the women who traditionally own title to family property and pass that property on to their descendants. In one village on Nzwani, women have formed a small orchestra of indigenous instruments to perform at weddings; recently, they funded construction of a much-needed cottage hospital with their earnings. Other women established a farming cooperative.

"It is the way of our mothers," says Mahmoud Ahmed, a student living in Anjouan. "This is their joy, to be independent and do things for the village."

On the porch of Ahmed's aunt's house, women gather in the morning to cut coconuts and weave palm fronds in preparation for a *grand mariage*, a lavish, three-day wedding to be held later that month, in accordance with long-standing Comorian tradition. As they chop and scoop, the women sing songs about their coconuts. On a palm-covered island that imports half of what it consumes, coconuts are a treasured resource, highly regarded

Fish is one of the fresh products offered in the market (inset), *but despite the islands' maritime history, fish is less important in the national economy than agriculture. The only Comorian fish exported, in fact, is the "living fossil" coelacanth* (Latimeria chalumnae), *thought to have been extinct for 70 million years until one was caught in 1938 off Ngazidja. Although Arabic and French are the islands' official languages, in the marketplace most people speak one of four dialects of Comorian, a language closely related to Swahili, but which integrates words from half a dozen other languages.*

Inside Back Cover: *Children play in boats off Moroni's shore.*

for their yields of milk, nut meats, flavorings, oil for making soap and hard shells for building furniture and shelters.

"Our country is in a state of transition," says the director of the Office of Economy and Commerce, Corinne Delapeyre. "We have to attract investment from people here and from foreign companies, and we have to find a way to give something back. In the past, we did not have taxes, nor any way to save and invest money on our own to create factories. People would say, 'The Comorians work the earth.' But we could do more. We could manufacture—but investors want to see what they will get back. Between lack of our own money, expensive [borrowed] money from France and promised [aid] money that never arrives, our hands are tied. We cannot show them."

"The future lies in vanilla," now one of the country's top export crops, says Delapeyre, "and we have fruits, lots of them, and avocados we can export."

Martin Ottenheimer, former professor of anthropology at Kansas State University and the author of two books on the islands, *Marriage in Domoni* and *Historical Dictionary of the Comoro Islands*, observes that the modern Comorian economy was structured by France to serve its own interests. That structure is poorly adapted to the needs of an independent country. In addition, it may also have contributed to a breakdown of the traditional Comorian economy in the early part of this century. For example, Ottenheimer says, women held the family's financial power in Comorian tradition. As soon as a girl was born, her father began to build her marriage house; she owned the house upon marriage and eventually inherited the family's wealth. Since the advent of banks and formal loans, however, women no longer hold the purse strings: French-trained bank officers often restrict loans to men, ignoring women's income-earning capabilities.

In the same vein, Ottenheimer sees *le grand mariage*, which was often criticized for a lavishness that could beggar the sponsoring family, as playing an important role in the traditional economy. It was a way of redistributing goods and services to spread wealth more evenly among the people of the island. "Westernization is changing the whole power and economic structure of the Comoros, and we are just now seeing this play out," says Ottenheimer.

The World Bank, for one, believes the Republic of the Comoros has the necessary resources to move toward relative prosperity in the coming decades. To this end, it is instituting programs to help small farmers diversify. The path is arduous, with Comorian per-capita income standing at $510 and the country heavily reliant on external aid.

"In the past [the Comoros] spent more than they earned, but recently they seem able to control public expenditures," says Pisei Eap, an economist with the World Bank. "The country is capable. Tourism is picking up, with more than 20,000 visitors last year. Hotels are making plans for expansion. If necessary measures are put into place, the islands could see growth of four percent per year."

"The new is always a product of the old. This is what we say," says Finance Minister M'Chamgama. "Now we are being invited to countries like Egypt and Denmark as guests, to talk about development. This whole way we are talking is new. We are waking up, and with democracy, the young have been given a chance to dream."

Whether the Comoro Islands are coming into their own, or whether they can weather the stresses of the modern global economy, are questions not even savvy Comorians can answer. For now, Islam and other Comorian values mix with influences from Europe and North America, and on the islands it is a rare era of peace. Even Kartala, the volcano, has slept since shortly after independence.

Lark Ellen Gould, left, is the west-coast editor of Travel Agent, *a travel industry news magazine. Ilene Perlman, right, a Boston-based photographer, has traveled widely in the Middle East. This is their third collaboration for* Aramco World.

WEBSITES:
http://www.ksu.edu/~omar/comoros.html
http://www.city.net/countries/comoro_islands

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 of Berkeley. Confirmed sites and dates include: **Corpus Christi, Texas**, July 24; **Fullerton, California**, July 26; **Elkhart, Indiana**, August 7; **Helena, Montana**, August 23. For details, call (202) 296-6767 or (510) 704-0517.

Seydou Keita, Photographer: *Portraits from Bamako, Mali* presents 24 evocative portraits by the self-taught photographer. National Museum of African Art, **Washington D.C.**, through July 28; **Minneapolis** Institute of the Arts, October 12 through January 3.

Female Imagery in Indian Painting displays 17 paintings from both Muslim and Hindu courts depicting the roles of women in religion and daily life from the 15th to 19th centuries. Freer Gallery, **Washington, D.C.**, through August 4.

Beirut: *Uncovering the Past* surveys the city's 5000 years of history through new archeological finds encountered during the reconstruction of downtown Beirut. British Museum, **London**, through August 18.

Crowning Achievements: *African Arts of Dressing the Head* displays more than 150 examples of headgear that expresses both craftwork and identity. National Museum of African Art, **Washington D.C.**, through August 18.

Middle Eastern Music and Dance Camp features instruction on numerous traditional Middle Eastern instruments and in traditional dance from half a dozen countries. **Mendocino Woodlands, California**, from August 18 through August 25. For more information call (310) 838-5471.

Art of the Deccani Sultans features 20 pieces, in varying media dating from the 14th to the 18th centuries, from the Deccan region of India, which was tributary to the Mughal courts. Metropolitan Museum of Art, **New York**, through August 25.

Muslims for Peace and Justice: *The Annual Convention of the Islamic Society of North America* will focus on peace as taught by Islam in all aspects of life. Events include workshops, panel discussions and a cultural bazaar. Greater **Columbus [Ohio]** Convention Center, August 30 through September 2. For more information call (317) 839-8157, extension 243.

Ancient Art from the Shumei Family Collection features many Asian and ancient Near Eastern works including Egyptian, Islamic and Roman objects. Metropolitan Museum of Art, **New York**, through September 1.

Traders and Raiders on China's Northern Frontier. Contacts among urban Chinese and pastoral nomads to the north of China in the first millennium BC produced unique variations in the arts associated with war and commerce. Sackler Gallery, **Washington, D.C.**, through September 2.

Pergamon: *The Legend of Telephos on the Great Altar*. Twelve carved blocks and 50 secondary works tell the story of Telephos, mythical hero of Pergamon. The town is now in northwest Turkey but in the second and third centuries BC was the center of one of the richest kingdoms of the Greek-speaking world. California Palace of the Legion of Honor, **San Francisco**, through September 8.

Rhythm and Form: *Reflections in Arabic Poetry* highlights the ways Arab artists have embodied poetic texts within contemporary art. Hallie Brown Ford Gallery, Willamette University, **Salem, Oregon**, from September 8 through October 18.

Armenia: *From Origins to the Fourth Century* presents 300 archeological finds including unique masterpieces. Musée Thomas-Dobrée, **Nantes, France**, through September 15.

Fifty Years in the Middle East: *The 50th Annual Conference of the Middle East Institute* offers expert panels, addresses and a book fair focused on the Middle East. The National Press Club, **Washington, D.C.**, September 27 and 28. For more information call (202) 785-1141.

Sultan, Shah and Great Mughal; The Arabian Journey; and **By the Light of the Cresent Moon** are coordinated exhibitions that explore Islam and the Islamic world from differing perspectives, including those of Danish travelers and writers. They display art and cultural and historical artifacts from Danish museums and private collections. Lectures, films, music and dance performances will be presented in conjunction with the exhibitions. Nationalmuseet, **Copenhagen**, Moesgård Museum, **Århus**, and David Samling, **Copenhagen**, respectively, through September 29.

Africa: *Art of a Continent* explores the historical contexts of a multitude of artistic and cultural achievements in a 700-piece exhibition divided into Africa's major geographical regions. Guggenheim Museum, **New York**, through September 29.

Armenia Between East and West: *3000 Years of Civilization* has gathered illuminated manuscripts, maps and artifacts to trace the cultural policies Armenia has used to preserve its national identity. Bibliothèque nationale de France, **Paris**, through October 22.

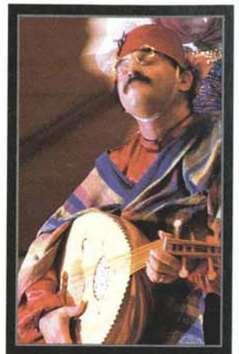
The Arab Woman: drawings and jewelry of Saudi and other Arab women. Nance Museum, **Kingsville, Missouri**, through October.

Crosscurrents in Chinese and Islamic Ceramics explores the varied and mutual influences of broad cultural traditions using objects from the 14th and 15th centuries. Freer Gallery, **Washington, D.C.**; semi-permanent.

Amarna Galleries reopen to display the museum's exceptional collection of Egyptian works dated from 1353 to 1295 BC. Metropolitan Museum of Art, **New York**; permanent.

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

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



New York City's third annual Arab world cultural festival, **Mahrajan al-Fan**, begins Saturday evening September 7 at Manhattan's Merkin Hall with readings by Arab-American poets and a concert of traditional and contemporary music by Simon Shaheen with the Near East Music Ensemble (See *Aramco World*, May/June 1996), with guest artist Marcel Khalife. Sunday, September 8, the festival events will take place at the Brooklyn Museum and will feature Moroccan Gnaoua music by Hassan Hakmoun, fusion music by Indian musician Vishwa Bhatt, with Simon Shaheen, and a performance of the classic Middle Eastern legend *Majnun Layla*. During the day there will be dance performances, Arab food, craft displays and demonstrations. For more information, call (212) 946-5787.

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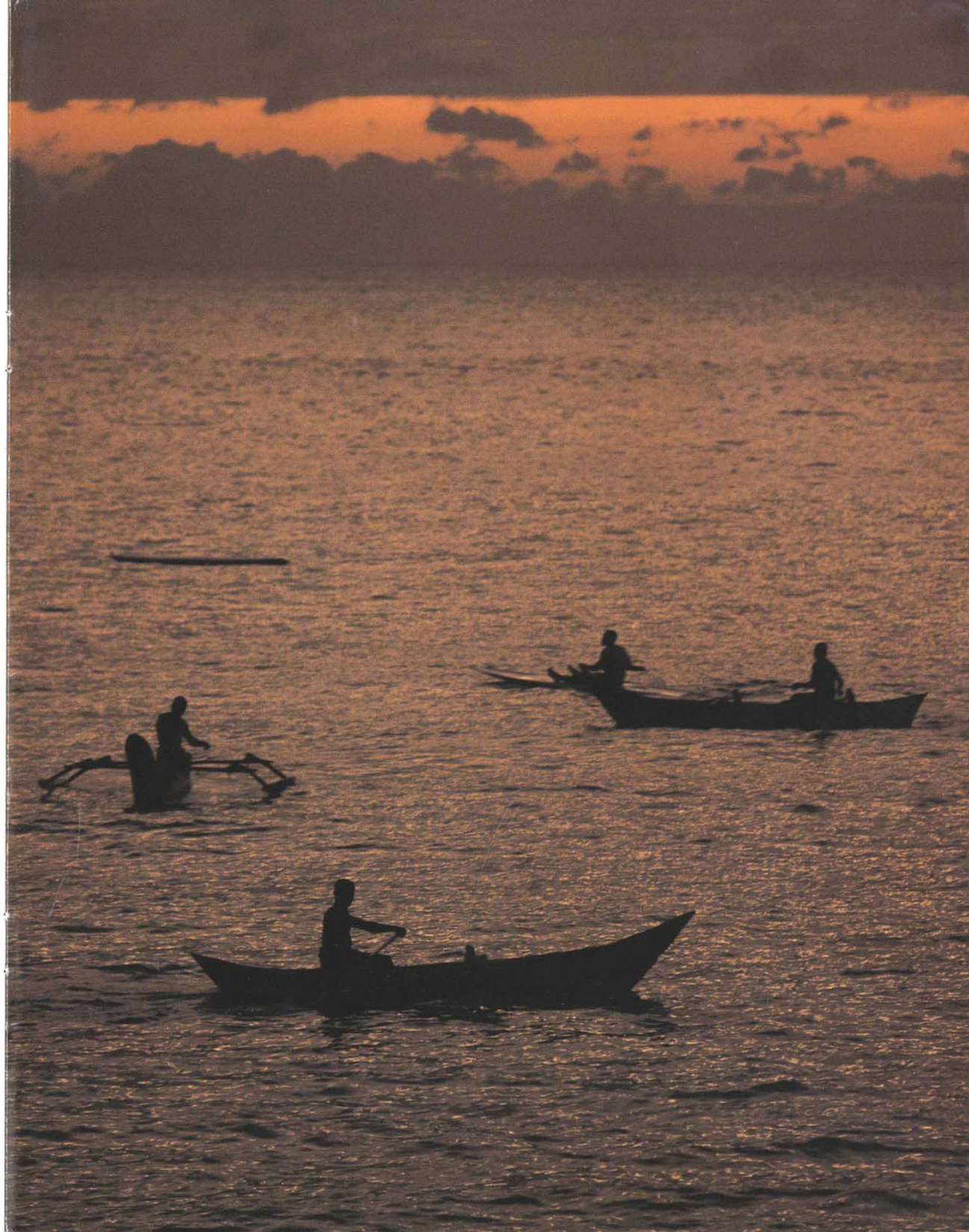

DAVID H. WELLS