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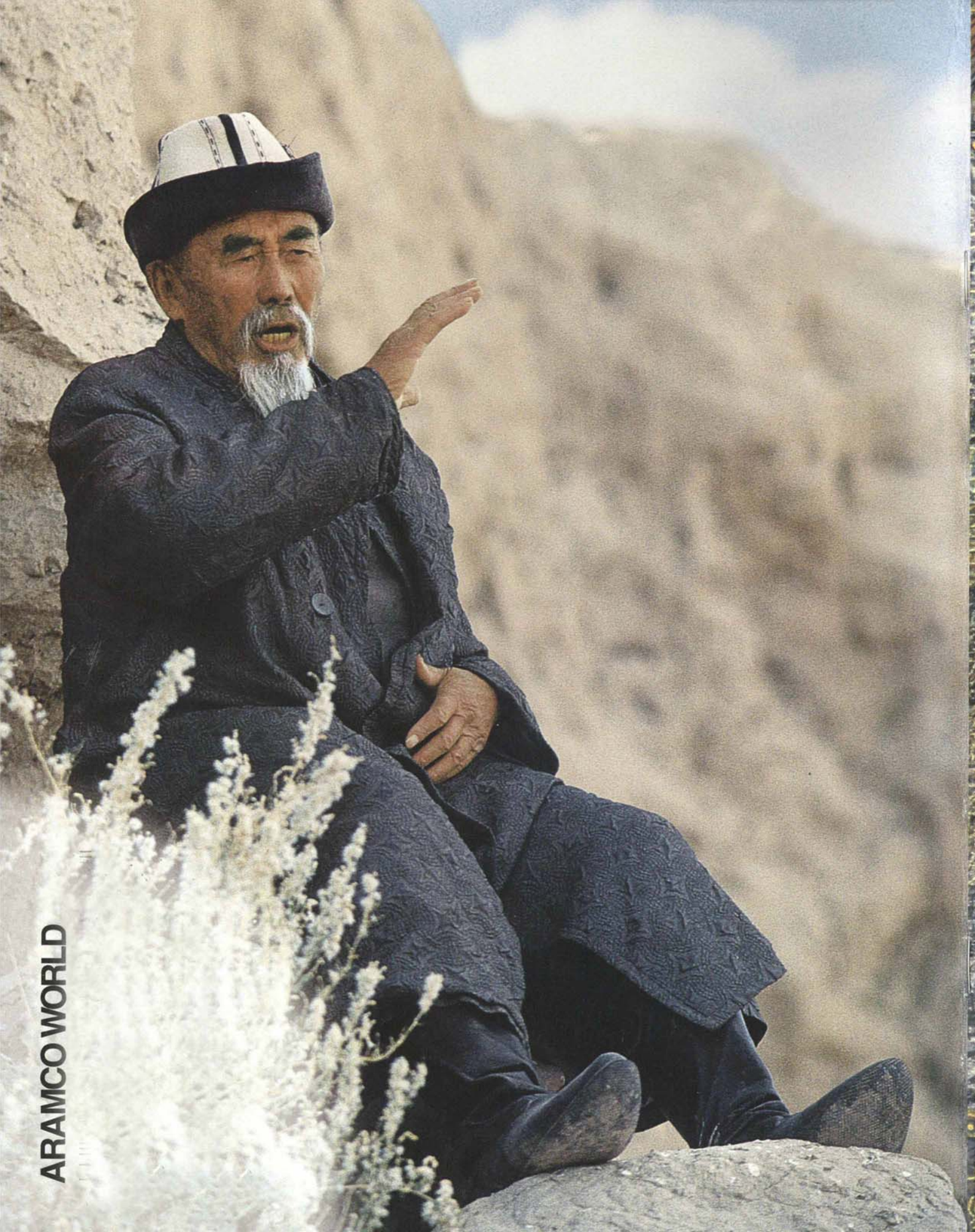

Zeman's Gilgamesh

ARAMCO WORLD

Contents

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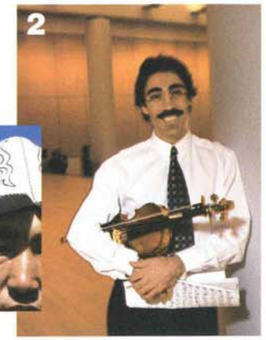

COVER:
The brooding face of Gilgamesh, king of Uruk, looms over his endlessly laboring subjects in one of the opening illustrations of Ludmila Zeman's three-volume retelling of the 5000-year-old epic. Zeman combined precise renditions of specific Mesopotamian artifacts with her own warmhearted recreation of Sumeria to produce a winning children's version of the great tale of friendship and loss.

OPPOSITE:
Dresses from the Munayyer Collection highlight a show at last fall's Mahrajan Al Fan. Photo by David H. Wells.

BACK COVER:
In the foothills of the Tien Shan, a master manaschi *recounts part of* The Epic of Manas, *one of the world's great works of oral literature. The million-line epic is the touchstone of Kyrgyz culture. Photo by Hermine Dreyfuss.*

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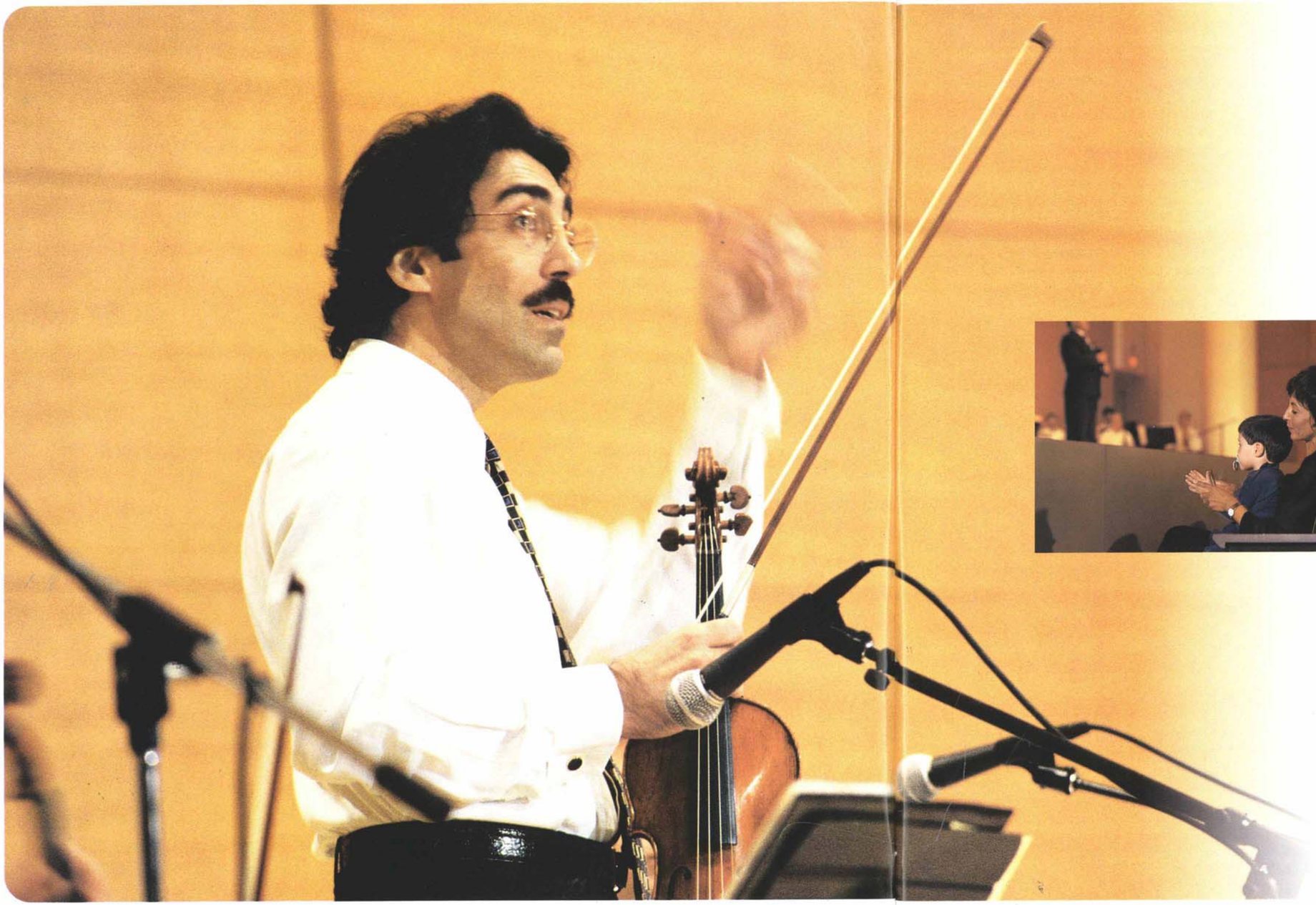


A Heritage Without Boundaries

Simon Shaheen: Tradition and Creativity

WRITTEN BY KAY HARDY CAMPBELL | PHOTOGRAPHED BY DAVID H. WELLS

ALL DAY THE BROOKLYN Museum had rung with the rhythms of Arab musicians, the verses of poets and the background buzz of crowds in conversation. So when Simon Shaheen appeared on stage late in the afternoon, the quiet that settled about him was his audience's way of acknowledging a special maestro. Shaheen ran his fingers through his dark wavy hair, lifted his violin and bow and locked eyes with each of the 16 musicians in his Near Eastern Music Ensemble.

Inspired by the Arab-American music and dance festivals that flourished from the 1930's to the 1950's, Shaheen organized last fall's Mahrajan al-Fan, or festival of art, a weekend extravaganza of Arab-American culture. Booths from Arab restaurants, henna-painting lessons, folk dance and a show of traditional Arab costumes framed performances by Arab-American musicians, poets, authors, filmmakers and scholars. They came to Brooklyn from around the country to give visitors—and each other—an exciting vision of the Arab cultures of their homelands, from Morocco to the Arabian Peninsula.

But as Simon Shaheen drew his bow into the haunting measures of his best-known composition, "Sama'i Kurd Shaheen," his role as festival organizer and fundraiser fell away, and the hall was filled with the musical gifts that have made 40-year-old Shaheen one of the brightest, fastest-rising stars in Arab music.

"He has so much love for Arab music that you cannot escape it," says vocalist Ghada Ghanim. "Even if you are just passing by, his enthusiasm will grab you!" As composer, conducter and virtuoso on both the Western violin and the Arab *'ud*, Shaheen embodies a unique confluence of music from East and West, past and present.

SHAHEEN'S MUSICAL JOURNEY began, in a sense, even before he was born in Tarshiha, in the Galilee. His family was full of instrumentalists and singers.

"My grandfather was the principal singer in the church, and he also sang the classical Arab musical repertoire," he says. Shaheen's father, Hikmat Shaheen, was a well-known player of the *'ud*—the pear-shaped, short-necked, fretless forerunner of the European lute—as well as a composer, educator and founder of two regional orchestras.

At seven, Shaheen began eight years of study of western classical music in Haifa; by age 12 his father had him help run the orchestra. "I did all the rehearsals and arranged everything, while he supervised," Shaheen says.

Shaheen went on to earn his bachelor's degree in literature and music from the Academy of Music in Jerusalem, where he later taught. Yet "my real education," he says, "was working with my father."

SINCE HE CAME TO THE UNITED STATES in 1980 to pursue graduate studies—in music, of course—Simon Shaheen has made New York City his base for both the preservation of traditional Arab music and the exploration of artistic frontiers. Now, he is increasingly regarded as one of the most dynamic musical links between the Arab world and the West.

A fast-paced concert schedule brings him and the Near Eastern Music Ensemble to stages throughout North America and Europe. He is a master teacher of the *'ud* and violin as well as a popular lecturer. He composes both alone and in collaboration with others. But most important, Shaheen is increasingly looked upon as an inspiration.

"He has so much love for Arab music that you cannot escape it," says ensemble soloist Ghada Ghanim. "Even if you are in the audience or just passing by, his enthusiasm will grab you!"

As a performer on both violin and *'ud*, Shaheen conquers complex phrases with mesmerizing frenzy and caresses others with quiet tenderness. He draws from a deep well of technique, applies it creatively, and metes out expression in deliberately tantalizing measure.

In 1994 Shaheen was awarded one of 11 National Heritage Fellowship Awards for outstanding contributions to traditional music. The *New York Daily News* has called his interpretations "some of the most sublime Arab music to be heard this side of the Dead Sea." In February, he played a concert of traditional and original music as part of Lincoln Center's Great Performers series.

Shaheen "combines technique with feeling," says ethnomusicologist, composer and performer Ali Jihad Racy (See *Aramco World*, September/October 1995). "He is the product of two traditions. Conservatory-trained, he has one foot in western classical music, the other at the center of the Arab musical tradition. This is very unusual."

Shaheen is also a master of *taqasim*, or improvisations. Arab instrumentalists use *taqasim* to explore a *maqam*, a scale or mode, within a series of musical phrases that the performer strings like pearls on a strand of pauses. *Taqasim* may be woven into existing compositions or played as an art in themselves. Shaheen's improvisations "invoke all the possible wealth of the *maqam* and rhythm," says poet and musician Mansour Ajami. In a collaborative 1983 recording titled "Taqasim," Shaheen playfully traded improvisation on the *'ud* with Racy on the *buzuq*, the *'ud*'s long-necked cousin.

Likewise, modal shifts and unexpected rhythmic phrases fill his popular compositions, such as "Sama'i Kurd Shaheen." The resulting level of invention within traditional form is unrivalled today's among composers of Arab music. In its third verse he changes the *maqam* an astonishing six times, and only at the very last moment does he bring the melody back to *kurd*, the "home" *maqam* for which the piece is named. In the last verse, he bursts out of the base 10/8 rhythm not into the *sama'i*'s traditional 3/4 or 6/8 closing rhythm, but into what proves to be a thrilling, unconventional 7/8.

Shaheen's traditional arrangements and compositions appear on two recordings. "The Music of Mohamed Abdel Wahhab" is Shaheen's tribute to the late Egyptian composer and consists largely of Shaheen's orchestrations of Abdel Wahhab's music. "Turath" ("Heritage") is Shaheen's compilation of classical Arab ensemble music; the Library of Congress named it one of the outstanding traditional recordings of 1992. By late 1995, Shaheen had three further recordings in progress.

EVER SINCE HE WAS A BOY, Shaheen's artistic openness and gregarious personality have propelled him across cultural boundaries, and in New York he has delighted in the city's trove of artistic possibilities. "I have preserved my artistry, the traditional Arab and western classical repertoire, in New York," he says. "At the same time, I've been exposed to many ideas. I have met many musicians in New York who have widened my perspective."

He is one of several jazz artists who make up the experimental fusion group Material, which appears on the Axiom label. *Rolling Stone* called Material's 1994 "Hallucination Engine" "one groovy *om* of exhilaration and release." Shaheen left a strong imprint on the group's "The Hidden Garden/Naima," and "Ruins," both of which blended Arabic vocals and instrumentals with western rock, jazz and classical elements. Another fusion recording, with Indian slide guitarist Vishwa Bhatt and titled *Saltanah*, is forthcoming on the Water Lily Acoustics label.

AS A TEACHER OF STUDENTS of both Arab and non-Arab backgrounds, Shaheen reaches out to help them grasp the sensibility and structure of Arab music. William Nakhly, the Galilee-born conductor of Boston's Middle East Orchestra and Chorus, pursuing a doctorate in music in the United States, says that he and many other young Palestinian musicians emulate Shaheen's ensemble concepts. They collect tapes of his rehearsals and his live performances, he says, to study his work more closely.

"I think Simon is having a great impact," says Racy. "The culture needs a role model who combines tradition, authenticity and creativity, someone who combines roots with innovation. Simon thinks deeply about his music. He has true sensitivity to it as a culture, as a legacy, as a message, and he is conscious of the importance of this musical message."

The coming years will no doubt see Shaheen's work bear further fruit as his global audience widens. Two sold-out concerts in January in Haifa, played in honor of his father, featured his recent compositions, "Longa Kurd Shaheen" and "Al Cantra." His debut in Lebanon, scheduled for this year, will mark the fulfillment of his personal dream to perform, at last, in Beirut.

Beyond recording and composing, Shaheen is exploring the possible foundation of an Arab arts institute in New York. But his greatest hope, he says, is to make music "that people will view as sincere and without boundaries." Music "should become the heritage, the *turath*, of whatever community you belong to. For music to be truly successful, it has to be within the realm of *turath*."

As Shaheen carries his reinvigorated legacy to a new generation, it is easy to imagine he will reach his goal. ⊕

As one of dozens of events, an embroidery class at Mahrajan al-Fan, left, taught visitors about the varied history of Arab textile design, while a fast-paced *dabkih*, right, displayed the most famous traditional Palestinian dance. Opposite: Shaheen practices on the *'ud* (top), and takes time between performances to join a children's workshop (bottom).

And at night, he says, the family would listen to the radio, where the airwaves were full of great Arab music, for those were the days of the famous Thursday-night broadcasts on Egyptian Radio's "Voice of the Arabs." The whole Arab world came to a halt to hear Umm Kalthum sing live full-length concerts to the big orchestral compositions of Riyad al-Sunbati, Mohamed Abdel Wahhab and others.

Umm Kalthum "used to come on the air on the first Thursday of each month," Shaheen recalls with a smile. "I always remembered much of any new song she sang. The next morning I would hum the introduction and different parts for my father, and he would notate them."

What to Listen For

Simon Shaheen has some advice for those listening to Arab music for the first time. "Think with your voice when you listen to Arab music. It has a linear quality like the voice. Concentrate on its melodies, and listen to how they interact with the rhythm. Arab music is characterized by the use of quarter-tones, which lie between the half-steps of western music. They have a quality that you may not be able to hear at first. Don't think of them as out-of-tune notes. They are deliberate. The more you listen, the more you will begin to hear them and come to love them, for it is the quarter-tones which distinguish many beautiful *maqams* in Arabic music."

What to Listen To

- ***Taqasim: Improvisation in Arabic Music***; Lyrichord, 1983, LYRCD 7374
- ***The Music of Mohamed Abdel Wahhab***; Axiom/Island Records, 1990, 846754
- ***Turath (Heritage)***; CMP Records, 1992, CMP 3006
- ***Hallucination Engine***, by Material; Axiom/Island Records, 1994, 314518-3512
- ***Saltanah***; Water Lily Acoustics, 1996.

While a seven-year resident in Saudi Arabia, Kay Hardy Campbell wrote for the Arab News *and the* Saudi Gazette. *She lives near Boston, where she plays the* 'ud *with the Middle East Orchestra and Chorus.*

The work of photojournalist David H. Wells appears frequently in Inquirer, *the award-winning magazine of* The Philadelphia Inquirer. *He recently covered the Palestinian elections for JB Pictures of New York.*

WRITTEN BY EWA WASILEWSKA PHOTOGRAPHED BY HERMINE DREYFUSS

MANAS AT 1000

THE REBIRTH OF KYRGYZSTAN

I know who Manas is. My mom and my grandparents tell me his stories.
He is the hero of Kyrgyzstan. He fought against bad people.
He lived in a yurt. It had to be hard, because I've stayed in yurts too.
In my school they don't tell us anything about him. But I know.

RUTA, AGE 9,
DAUGHTER OF A KYRGYZ MOTHER
LIVING IN MOSCOW

To the many peoples of Central Asia's five newly independent states, the 1991 breakup of the Soviet Union was one of the great historical events in generations. But citizens of one of those five countries—the remote, landlocked Kyrgyz Republic—will probably remember even more fondly the reassertion of their national identity in an international festival held last August, four years after independence.

Invoking the unity of the past to guide a wobbly-legged future, the young nation staged "Manas 1000," a week-long international fair that commemorated the millennial of the semi-legendary founder-hero of Kyrgyzstan—who is also the protagonist of one of the world's great pieces of oral literature, *The Epic of Manas*.

The 4.5 million people of Kyrgyzstan live in the crisp-air valleys and on the high steppes of the western ranges of the Tien Shan, the "Heavenly Mountains." They were spared the worst of the ecological devastation that the drive to establish heavy industry in the former Soviet Union brought to other areas, but they face considerable economic problems—many of them related to the painful uncoupling of their new national economy from that of Russia (See *Aramco World*, July/August 1995). But Kyrgyzstan has preserved its unique spirit and the ideals of its past, and now it is earnestly going about the creation—or re-creation—of the democratic, multi-ethnic Kyrgyz state that is a central feature of *The Epic of Manas*.

Communist ideology abhorred nationalism as a divisive force, and the Soviet government did its best to expunge ethnic traditions and native languages from schools and public life throughout the USSR. In Kyrgyzstan, especially in the 1930's, 40's and 50's, most of *The Epic of Manas* was eliminated from school curricula, and certain "official" parts of it were reinterpreted to undermine Kyrgyz nationalism: Manas's unification of diverse tribes was compared to the unification of different nations under communism, for example. References to Manas, or to the epic itself, as symbols of the Kyrgyz nation were forbidden. Several times in those decades, Kyrgyz authorities proposed a celebration in honor of Manas; each time the Soviets turned down the "nationalistic" request.

But people cling to their history all the more strongly when it is threatened. Among the Kyrgyz, *The Epic of Manas* and its professional recounters, the *manaschi*s, still found devoted listeners as they always had, but now mainly in informal settings. The Kyrgyz dreamt that one day their hero would prevail again.

Professor Omuraliyev Dyuyshek, the architect and director of Manas Ayil, the "Manas village" that last year recreated a nomad *yurt* encampment on the Manas 1000 fairgrounds, says he had actually been working on the celebration for 10 years. "I knew that during the Soviet period I had no chance of seeing it accepted," he says, "but I kept working. Then, after independence, suddenly I realized that I could do it.... All those years of dreaming and working paid off. I won. I got my dream."

For the Kyrgyz people had kept theirs. Throughout the Soviet period, each Kyrgyz considered it a matter of national responsibility to tell the Manas story to his or her children, and the epic survived that era just as it survived the Mongol invasion of the 12th to 14th centuries. Ashenbekov Mamatkari, a construction worker at Manas Ayil, demonstrated that, like many Kyrgyz, he could recite verses from the epic. Those who gathered around him to hear his impromptu performance were visibly moved and proud that one of their own, with otherwise little education, could represent the country so eloquently.

Away from the festival crowds, a Kyrgyz girl strums her three-stringed komuz. *The instrument often accompanies Kyrgyz songs, many of which are based on* The Epic of Manas. *Opposite: Dressed in the armor of the steppe raiders of old, Kyrgyz horsemen re-enact one of the hundreds of scenes that make up the Manas epic. Previous spread: In the Talas River valley, where Manas is said to have been born, a week of high emotion began with dances, races and a pageantry of flags flown from a* tunduk, *the Kyrgyz national symbol of hearth and home: the open circle of wood, triple-braced, that tops the nomad's traditional dwelling, the yurt.*

The decision to hold an elaborate international festival in a young and cash-strapped nation is not one to be made lightly. When the government was forced to choose between the $5-million tab for Manas 1000 and the wages of its employees—and chose to suspend the paychecks and pay for the festival—Manas 1000 lost some of its glitter, particularly among the Kyrgyz Republic's 22-percent Russian minority population.

For Pavel, a Russian taxi driver working the route between Bishkek, the capital, and the fairgrounds, "Manas is not a hero [for us Russians]. He is a legend."

But Aleksander, a teacher from Russia who plans to remain in the Kyrgyz Republic "because of the landscape and the people, who are calm and helpful," says, "I read the whole *Epic [of Manas]* because I wanted to learn about this Kyrgyz hero. Now I can see that these celebrations, although very costly, are of the utmost importance for the country...[to] unify the people and bring the different ethnic groups together."

Although *The Epic of Manas* is the most celebrated narrative of Turkic cultures, few people outside academia have heard of it. While *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, *The Iliad*, *The Odyssey* and *The Mahabharata* have all been studied and read around the world, the Kyrgyz epic has been almost entirely overlooked. Yet *The Epic of Manas*, whose longest single version consists of more than half a million lines of verse—and whose total length is estimated at over one million lines—is by far the most elaborate epic known in literature, and the most extensive. *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* together contain only 28,000 lines; the *Mahabharata* comprises about 100,000 couplets.

Furthermore, *The Epic of Manas* seems to be the only epic to have survived for as long as a millennium in oral form before its first significant fragments were put down on paper, in the 19th century. Now there are roughly 65 recorded versions of the

three main parts of the epic, known respectively as "Manas," "Semetey" (the name of Manas's son) and "Seytek" (his grandson). Other fragments and episodes, recorded from the recitations of 47 different narrators, are considered complementary works.

To the people of Kyrgyzstan and those of Turkic origin throughout Eurasia, *The Epic of Manas* represents a revered narrative of a people that, in spite of hardships, survived, preserved its identity and unified in the name of a great leader. In his opening address at Manas 1000, the Kyrgyz Republic's president, physicist Askar Akayev, called the epic "our historical chronicle, spiritual foundation, cultural reality and scientific background." For many centuries, he said, "it has been our pride, our strength and our hope. The spirit of our nation is forever encoded in this epic.... Every one of us carries a piece of it in his or her heart."

Vasily Radlov, the 19th-century founder of Central Asian ethnography, wrote that "the Kyrgyz...sing about their emotions and dreams, about those ideals which are of the highest value for every member of their society." Over the centuries, those ideals have adapted to a variety of political, economic and social orders. Thus, the Kyrgyz reader of the epic can always find passages in it whose contents lie close to his heart, and reflect the spirit of the times.

For the majority Muslims of Kyrgyzstan, the epic's link to the heart may be the knowledge that Manas was born into their faith, and that it was through him that Islam was disseminated. For women, it may be the epic's depiction of the wise, brave and independent women of the steppe, such as Kanikey, the hero's best-loved wife. For others, Manas is a symbol of love of the land, of freedom, national independence and interethnic unity. Finally, for scholars and lovers of world literature, *The Epic of Manas* is a unique "encyclopedia of the steppe," filled with the customs, traditions, facts and dreams of a region whose claim to historical attention has long been overshadowed by the Chinese and Mediterranean civilizations that it bridged.

As with other great epics, there is much dispute and conjecture about whether the events in the tale actually happened, and whether Manas himself was a historical character.

Scholars agree that *The Epic of Manas* combines fact with legend, but there is disagreement about when the epic was composed and just what actual events it reflects. The majority of researchers agree that there are three historical "layers": one represents traditions of the 9th and 10th centuries, a time following the overthrow of the Uygur state; one reflects the 15th to 17th centuries, dominated by the Kyrgyz's battles with the Mongol Kalmyks; and the third dates from the 19th century.

Some Turkic scholars, however, suggest that the origin of the epic lies as far back as the first millennium BC. They hold that *The Epic of Manas* is a local version of an Indo-Aryan creation myth, in which the first human is known, in Sanskrit, as Manu. According to these scholars, a later historical "layer" of the epic, from sometime at the end of the first millennium of our era, echoes the Indo-Aryan metaphori-

Sporting a traditional kalpak, *Kyrgyzstan's first democratically elected president, Askar Akayev, and the first lady greet a visitor to the celebrations. "The spirit of our nation is forever encoded in this epic," the president said.*

cal struggle between good and evil in its accounts of Muslims fighting polytheists—fire-worshipers, adherents of local shamanistic traditions, and others.

A fragment of support for the Indo-Aryan origins of the epic lies in ninth-century Chinese sources which describe the Kyrgyz as people with red hair, fair skin and blue-green eyes—not Turkic characteristics. However, the epic itself describes Manas as having "eyelashes smooth and star-like eyes," in Walter Mays's translation—terms that could refer to Asian features.

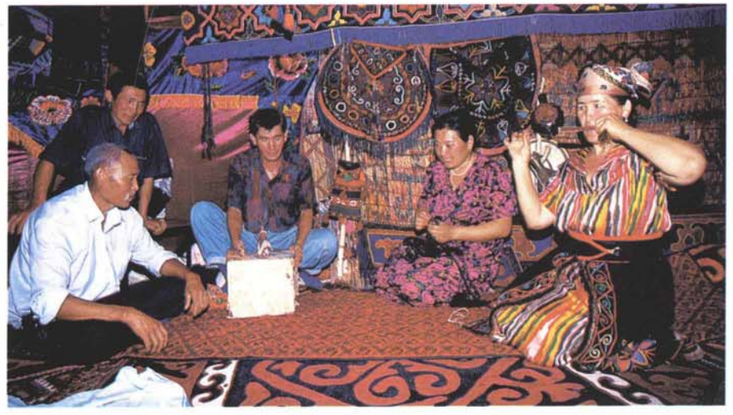
These metaphors, typical of those that recur throughout the epic, are strengthened by the supposed origin of Manas's name. In some Altaic tribes, tradition stipulated that an individual's name should be chosen by the tribe as a whole, because his fate was in some way encoded in it. Underlining the enormous importance of Manas's destiny and mission, the epic tells that a wise old man, the dervish Berdike, selected Manas' name with these words (again in Mays's translation):

> At its beginning stands letter "M"
> As in Mohammed's most blessed name!
> In the middle stands letter "N,"
> That means *Nabi* [prophet]—prophetic men.
> Then at its end stands the letter "S"
> This is the tail of a Lion, no less!
> What name do these three consonants make?
> From these three letters the sounds we take,
> Reading them out we get "MaNaS."

In other parts of the epic, however, it is said that "manas" had been used as a battle-cry at some time before the hero himself was born. Nonetheless, Manas is the only person among the Kyrgyz who has ever carried the name—according to Kyrgyz tradition, the greatest tribute his people could pay.

For the Kyrgyz people, then, Manas is more than a legend: He is a historical ruler who put the Kyrgyz tribes on the map. Standing at her vegetable stall in a Bishkek market, a vendor says, "I learned about Manas from my grandfather. In school [in the Soviet period], they told us he was just a legend. Now I know that he was real, because only a real leader could bring all of us together after one thousand years." Yet another vendor, Suyumkan Bayasheva, comments that "both before and now, Manas has unified his people so the rest of the world would know that [Kyrgyzstan] exists."

The largest number of places associated with *The Epic of Manas* are in the Talas River valley, in northwest Kyrgyzstan, where Manas was born and where his power centered. Here is what the Kyrgyz regard as Manas's mausoleum—though an inscription appears to dedicate the carved-stone tomb to a Chagatay princess of the early 14th century. Not far away stands a pillar to which Ak-kula, Manas's beloved horse, is said to have been tethered; nearby is the Manas spring and the black stone Manas used to strike sparks to light his campfire.



Celebrating the telling of the tale that was banned under Soviet rule, manaschis *young and old, amateur and professional, all performed episodes from the estimated one million lines that comprise* The Epic of Manas. *The youngest children (top) learn simple verses in unison, the first generation since the 19th century to learn the text openly. Above, left to right: A* chon, *or master,* manaschi, *Urkash Mebetalyev knows the tale well enough to embellish it and create his own style; a 12-year-old boy recites to music; one of Kyrgyzstan's female* manaschis *performs at the festival. At right: Surrounded by appliquéd and embroidered traditional fabrics, a man operates a horse puppet while a woman, right, provides music on the* temir komuz, *or mouth harp.*

Manas Ayil, the yurt village at the fairgrounds, brought together people from all over Kyrgyzstan's mountains and steppes to exhibit local traditions. Below, an actor who will play in an upcoming film adaptation of Manas *displays an* elechek, *the traditional headdress of a married Kyrgyz woman. Below right, an ensemble performs in front of an abstract sculpture that acknowledges the role of the horse in Kyrgyz culture. Opposite: One of the many works of art that portrayed Manas, this sculpture of the semi-legendary hero includes his horse, Ak-kula. So great is respect for Manas among the Kyrgyz that, to this day, no one else has borne his name.*

Although its historicity may be disputed, *The Epic of Manas* itself is a cultural treasure, and we owe its preservation primarily to generations of tellers of the tale, the *manaschi*s. The first of them was one of the 40 companions of Manas, a warrior named Yrchy, who mourned the death of his hero in songs of lamentation. These songs were sung by various Kyrgyz singers until the 15th century, when a legendary singer named Toktogul collected many of them into the first of the numerous versions of *The Epic of Manas* which exist today. The Kyrgyz believe that the content of the epic was expanded in the 18th century by yet another legendary figure, Nouruz. Many other *manaschi*s contributed to the creative process, each in his own time, and their names have been preserved in association with the various versions of the tale.

A master *manaschi*, however, is more than a reciter of memorized verse. He or she is expected to follow the main plot and retain the epic's literary forms but, beyond that, is free to embellish. Thus a good *manaschi* adds details, explains phenomena in the story and responds to listeners' comments—much as do other tellers of traditional oral epics in the Middle East and Turkic lands (See *Aramco World*, January/February 1996).

As a *chala*, or apprentice, a student *manaschi* observes his mentor, memorizes passages that are the mentor's specialties, and tries to mimic his expressions and styles of relating particularly spectacular episodes. The *chala* may then perform from memory, though without much creative interpretation. Young performers at this level contribute a great deal to the popularization of the epic.

More respected, however, are the *chinigi*, or master *manaschi*s. It is they who draw crowds for performances that bring out their beginning-to-end knowledge of the epic, and that offer individual interpretations.

The highest class of Manas narrators is the *chon manaschi*, the great artist-storyteller, the one who creates new versions of many events in the epic while still reciting and singing an enormous number of lines from numerous traditional renditions. Among those who hold this rare title, Sagymbai Orozbakov and Sayakbay Karalayev are regarded as Kyrgyzstan's most famous *manaschi*s, and it is from their mouths that the greatest number of lines of the epic have been recorded, in the finest and most poetic style.

The time, dedication, work and understanding required to become a *chon manaschi* are willing undertaken, for the work is a spiritual calling. One modern *manaschi*, Seydena Moldoke Kizi, says she was called to the profession in a dream; she eventually left her village to travel to the places made famous by Manas to "feel" them.

Today, some of the most popular *manaschi*s, such as Jusup Mamai and Urkash Mambetaliyev, are often called to perform not in the villages—where traditionally they have had their most dedicated audiences—but in the cities, where they share their talents with urbanites and scholars. Many others, however, continue to breathe life into the epic in camps, settlements and villages in Kyrgyzstan's broad steppe and high mountains. Wherever they go, they are met with the utmost respect and even love as living repositories of the memory of Kyrgyzstan.

At the fairgrounds of Manas 1000 in August, it was obvious that Kyrgyzstan and Manas are inseparable. One cannot be understood without the other.

Until the very last minute before opening, workers and artisans were putting finishing touches on the fair's monuments and structures. The arrival on August 25 of international delegations began a week of high emotion. Theaters opened shows glorifying Manas and his contemporaries. Flowers surrounded new monuments ready for dedication ceremonies. Exhibits about Manas and the preservation of the epic welcomed visitors in several languages. A concurrent symposium on *The Epic of Manas* brought specialists from more than 20 countries to Bishkek's Great Symphony Hall. In one unforgettable moment, President Akayev formally thanked the great *chon manaschi* Jusup Mamai for preserving the spirit of the Kyrgyz past for the country's future.

Other ceremonies involved the heads of all six Turkic states—Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan and Turkey—and official representatives from dozens of other foreign countries. For a few hours, the beautiful pavements of the Manas village, patterned after Kyrgyz weavings, were crowded with people intoxicated by the heady mix of history, independence and hope.

In Talas, 400 kilometers (250 miles) west, hundreds of costumed performers reenacted *The Epic of Manas*, complete with trick-riding horsemen and dancers in breathtakingly elaborate costumes. At the climax of the performance, when Manas's victory over the forces of evil was complete, many in the audience wept. The moment was truly the spiritual rebirth of a nation, after a millennium of foreign influence and occupation.

Kenesh Osmanova, a woman in that emotional audience, described Manas's values this way. "Manas's purpose was to stop people from fighting and to make them work together in order to establish a better future for all. He wanted to unite people and build a world in which disputes among various tribes would become a memory of the past." That is the message that the Kyrgyz want to send the world through *The Epic of Manas*. They hope that the traditional date of Manas's birth, August 28, will become a special day in the world calendar, a day of peace among the united tribes of all the earth.

Dr. Ewa Wasilewska teaches at the University of Utah, and has carried out anthropological or archeological fieldwork in the Middle East, Central Asia and her native Poland. This article was researched with the help of an IREX *travel grant.*

Hermine Dreyfuss has photographed extensively in Kyrgyzstan and other parts of Central Asia. She has curated a traveling exhibit of Kyrgyz art, artifacts and photographs that will open in Colorado Springs in early 1997.

RADIO FOR RAMADAN

Written by Cathy Aitchison *Photographed by Melanie Friend*

At Bradford's FAST-FM, Farah Sheikh selects a cassette while taking a listener's call; at Leeds's Radio Ramadan, below, young presenters broadcast "Islamic Vibes."

It's midday on Saturday—lunchtime if it weren't Ramadan—and Farah Sheikh is on the air in a tiny studio decorated with religious posters and taped-up reminders to her and other announcers. She is hosting a phone-in discussion on religion and what it means to be a good Muslim—in Urdu, the mother tongue of many of her listeners. One caller asks whether it's right for him to go to Pakistan on vacation instead of accompanying the rest of his family on the pilgrimage to Makkah. No, says another caller, go on the Hajj. In a break in the discussion, Sheikh adjusts her headphones, then speaks into the microphone. "You're listening to FAST-FM on 105.8 FM, Ramadan radio service for Bradford."

FAST-FM is no ordinary radio station. Since 1992 it has been bringing its special Ramadan radio service to Muslims in the Yorkshire town of Bradford, in the north of England, and it was the first in Britain to do so. Under British law, almost anyone can apply for a "restricted service license" to broadcast on the public airwaves, usually for up to a month, as long as there is no station in the area already serving the same audience. Often such licenses are granted to groups from the local community that are sponsored by local businesses, and the temporary stations are run by a mixture of amateur and professional broadcasters.

"I went 'round Bradford asking businesses if they would sponsor us," says Yaqoob Ali, one of the founders of FAST-FM. There was strong support for the idea among both Muslim and non-Muslim entrepreneurs, he found, and people donated money or equipment, or provided premises for the studio—housed this year above a travel agency run by Arshad Mahmood.

The station broadcasts around the clock in Urdu and English from the beginning of Ramadan until the 'Id, the festival which follows the month of daytime fasting. "Basically, we discuss Islam," says program editor Qasim Khan, also one of the station's founders. "We broadcast the prayer call five times a day, devotional programs and recitals of the Qur'an."

FAST-FM also features guests who provide community information on social services, education, health or immigration issues—all matters of interest to a

Veteran radio journalist Masood Sadiq, who helps volunteers at Radio Ramadan, also goes on the air himself; below, six-year-old Irsalahn Shehzad puts in a call to a children's quiz show at FAST-FM.

large minority community embedded in a culture very different from its own. But the main aim of the station, Khan says, is to bring people together to dicuss their common faith. "All the presenters talk about religion and the significance of Ramadan."

Ramadan is a time of heightened spirituality, awareness and community feeling for Muslims around the world. For a month, they refrain from eating, drinking and smoking during daylight hours. Because the Muslim calendar is a lunar one (See *Aramco World*, July/August 1979), the holy month begins 11 days earlier each year than the year before; this year it began on January 21 of the western Gregorian calendar.

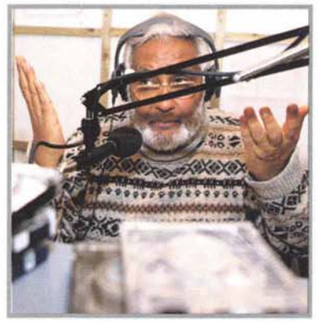
When Ramadan falls in winter and daylight hours are short, as now, it is in some ways easier to keep the fast—but northern England's bitter winter weather is hard to endure on an empty stomach. And most Muslims find that keeping Ramadan is more difficult in non-Muslim countries like Britain, where most people's routines carry on as normal, and where non-Muslim co-workers or friends do not observe—or perhaps even notice—the fast.

No one knows exactly how many Muslims there are in Britain, but estimates cluster around the figure one million. The country's total population is almost 57 million. In Bradford, however, around one in 10 of the town's residents is Muslim, many of them originally from Pakistan, India or Bangladesh.

Just 15 kilometers (10 miles) to the east, the city of Leeds also has a thriving Muslim community, and here too a radio station is on the air during the month of Ramadan. "We have a whole range of people involved in it," says Arshed Javed, one of the organizers of Ramadan Radio. "Pakistanis, Indians, Bangladeshis, Arabs, Malays and Iranians—all living in Leeds."

This is the second year that Ramadan Radio has been broadcasting. During the rest of the year, when they are not actually on the air, the group runs training courses in radio production for unemployed people in the area, with funding from the local Training and Enterprise Council.

The station's trainer is Masood Sadiq, who lectures in radio journalism. During Ramadan, he is on hand to help the less experienced announcers like Nadim Tahir, Yasrab Shah and Omar Mian, whose program for younger listeners, "Islamic Vibes," goes



Suhail Anjum Ali, 12, broadcasts an Islamic quiz in Bradford; Hussein Nazim Iqbal explains Qur'anic principles in Leeds where (below) the daytime fast is broken with traditional fare.

out each weekday afternoon. Masood advises them on how to structure and present their show, and gives them support. "We do need the guidance," says Nadim. "And he'll be quite frank with you: He says things like 'You're sounding boring! Lighten up a bit,' or 'That conversation was too long.' I think it makes for a better show."

Ramadan Radio's programs are organized so that the announcers can carry out their religious duties and still keep the station running smoothly. "All of us observe the prayers and the fasting, but we don't go off to pray all at once; we go in groups," says Tayyeb Shah, who hosts a call-in show on weekday afternoons.

In his program, Tayyeb aims for an international flavor, with phone calls from Muslims around the world, including from Istanbul, Toronto or Rome. "I want people to realize that Muslims come in all colors, all nationalities," he says.

As the time to break the fast approaches, the family of one of the station's announcers brings bowls of food into the studio. Everyone there first eats a date, following the practice of the Prophet Muhammad when he observed Ramadan. Then they share traditional dishes such as *bhajis*, curry, rice and *chappatis*.

Outside the studio as well, there is a good atmosphere during Ramadan, as people meet at sunset to break their fast together and to pray; Muslims living in non-Muslim countries often feel drawn more closely to their worldwide community and to their faith. "For that particular month, you're transformed," explains Qasim Khan.

Radio stations like FAST-FM and Ramadan Radio play their part in bringing the local Muslim communities together in Britain. Radio reminds individuals that they are not alone. "A lot of people cried when we went off the air last year," says Ishtiaq Mir of Ramadan Radio. "For the older people especially, who may feel isolated, listening to the youngsters on the radio, in their own language, speaking of their own religion, is something very special."

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Melanie Friend is represented in London by Format Partners and Panos Pictures.

Zeman's Gilgamesh

Written by Jane Waldron Grutz
Illustrated by Ludmila Zeman

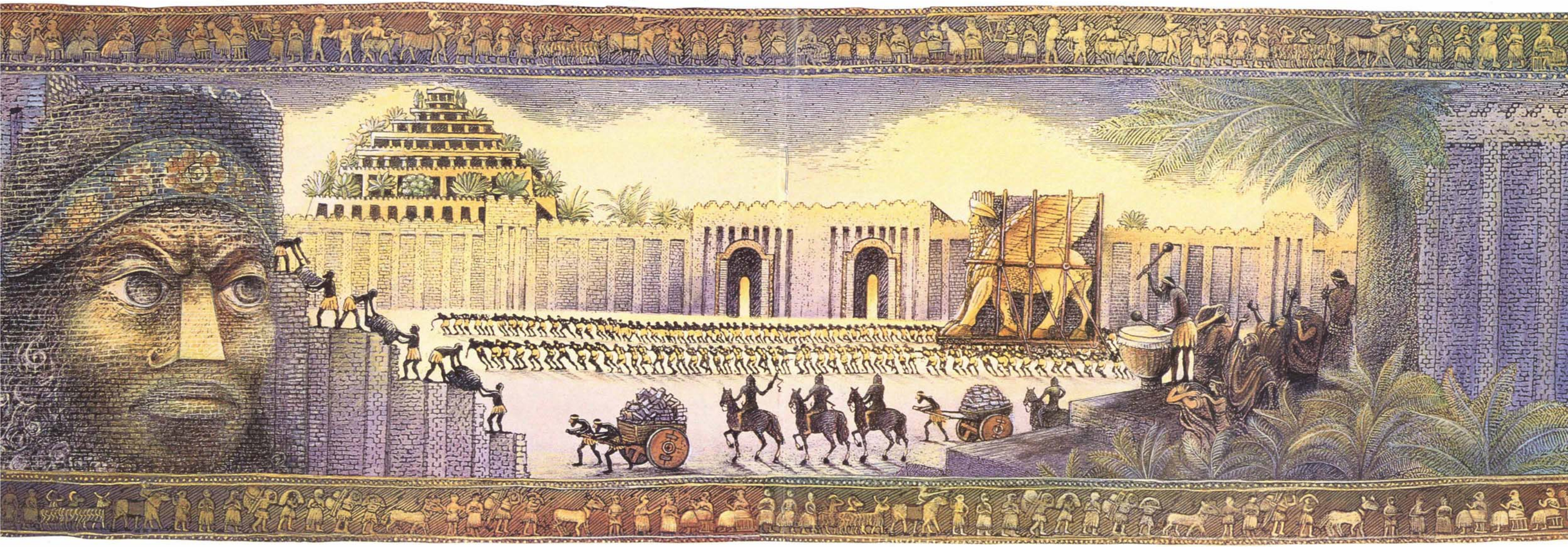
Zeman based her imagery on the rich archeological record of the ancient Mesopotamian river civilizations. Her depiction of Gilgamesh in his chariot, below, draws on this ninth-century BC relief of Assyrian king Ashurnasirpal II, found at Nimrud in present-day Iraq.

On the wall of Ludmila Zeman's studio in Montreal hangs the cover illustration for her book *Gilgamesh the King*. Worked in soft greens and golds, it shows Gilgamesh standing resplendent in his chariot, his faithful dog beside him and two ladies of the court riding behind them. Each lady carries a parasol; one shades Gilgamesh, the other, with a smaller parasol, shades his dog.

"Children see everything. Children always see the parasol over the dog," says Zeman, her smile bright, her blue eyes twinkling.

A frequent guest at schools throughout Canada, Zeman is delighted with the reception

In Gilgamesh the King, *the reader sees the dark face of Gilgamesh glaring out from the great wall*



children have given her Gilgamesh trilogy —three beautifully illustrated volumes retelling one of humankind's oldest stories.

Since the books were published—*Gilgamesh the King* in 1991, *The Revenge of Ishtar* in 1993 and *The Last Quest of Gilgamesh* in 1995—they have been translated into French and Japanese, have won numerous honors—including Canada's Governor General's Literary Award for *The Last Quest*—and have been lauded in quality literary magazines in the U.S. and Canada.

But it is the enthusiasm of the children that Zeman treasures most.

"Children understand this story, and they like it because it teaches us the value of life," she says. "It makes us realize that the greatest gift we have is life itself."

Only 11 when she was introduced to the Gilgamesh epic, Zeman associates the story with her father, noted Czech film maker Karel Zeman, best remembered for his animated films *Tales of One Thousand and One Nights*, *The Fabulous World of Jules Verne* and *Baron Münchhausen*.

BRITISH MUSEUM

One of the two sides of the "Royal Standard of Ur" that inspired the border of the scene above from *Gilgamesh the King*. The "Royal Standard" dates from about 2600 BC and depicts a military victory, in a mosaic of shell and lapis lazuli. The winged, human-headed lion (opposite) appears at several sites in Assyria, and is believed to represent a protective spirit.

"My father loved all fairy tales and legends," explains Zeman. "And especially he loved Gilgamesh, because it contains a judgment," an important moral truth.

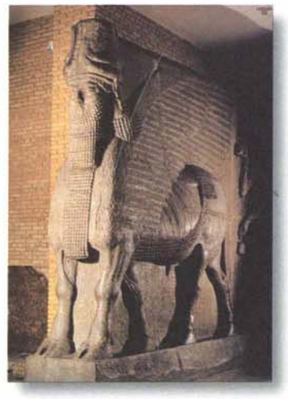
At least 5000 years old, the Epic of Gilgamesh was only rediscovered in the 19th century, when cuneiform tablets on which it was written—some dating back to the third millennium BC—were unearthed at sites in Mesopotamia, at the Hittite capital at Boğazköy in Anatolia (See *Aramco World*, September/October 1994) and at Megiddo in Palestine.

Inscribed in ancient languages of the Near East, these tablets might have remained unknown to all but scholars had not the translators discovered that the epic included the story of a serpent who steals the secret of eternal youth, and the story of a great flood—both tales bearing a striking resemblance to aspects of the creation and flood stories of the Bible and the Qur'an.

Even today, most people associate the Epic of Gilgamesh with these stories, which predate both the Biblical text and the revelation of the Qur'an. But as Zeman and her father knew well, there is more to Gilgamesh than this. The epic stands alone as a story of high adventure, great victory, grievous loss and, finally, wisdom gained.

No two versions of the epic are quite the same, but all tell of Gilgamesh, the more-than-human king of Uruk, who inherited the beauty and strength of the gods, but the mortality of humans.

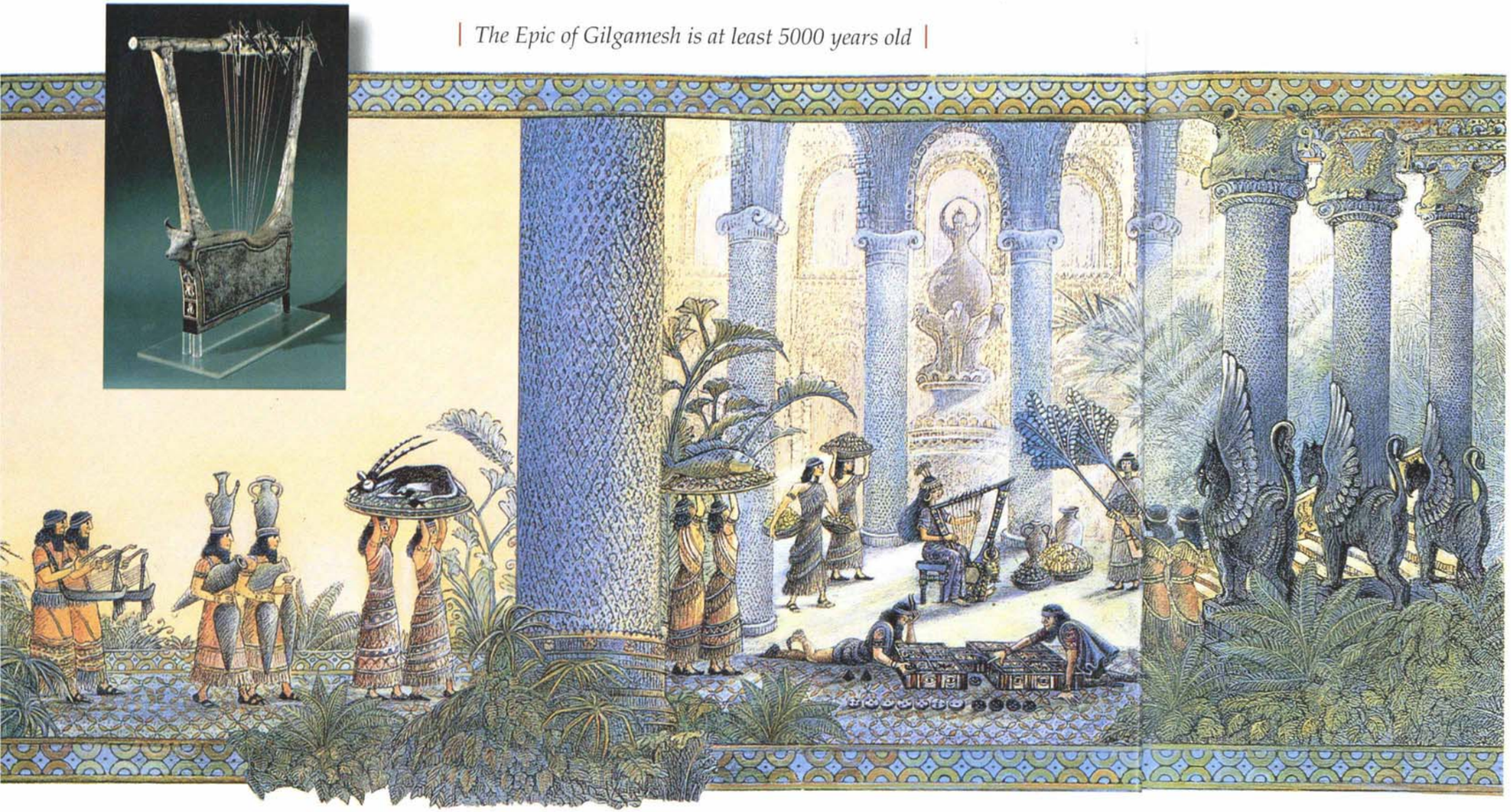
In Zeman's retelling, the story begins



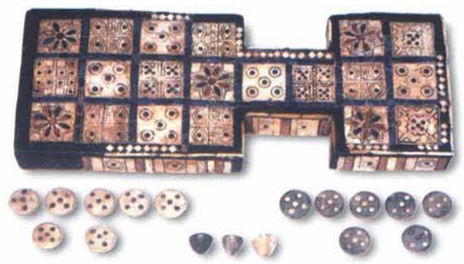
when Gilgamesh requires his people to build a great wall around his city to proclaim his power. Ground down by the endless task and in despair, the people pray to the gods for help. Their deliverance comes in the form of the wild man of the forest, Enkidu, who is brought to Uruk by the temple courtesan—or, in Zeman's version, the temple singer Shamhat.

The two heroes battle, then, somewhat puzzlingly, become fast friends. They set out together to track and kill the monster Humbaba, and later, the Bull of Heaven—but tragedy strikes. Because they have defied the gods, Enkidu is stricken with an illness and dies. Overcome by grief, and by the knowledge that he too will die, Gilgamesh crosses the Waters of Death to reach the one man who has achieved immortality, Utnapishtim.

Utnapishtim survived the Great Flood, and he tells Gilgamesh that if he can stay awake the six days and seven nights it will take Utnapishtim to tell the tale of the Flood, he will give Gilgamesh the secret of immortality. But Gilgamesh falls asleep and fails the test. In pity, Utnapishtim tells Gilgamesh where to find the plant of eternal youth.



In the opening scene of *The Revenge of Ishtar*, the second volume of her trilogy, Zeman includes a lyre and a board game with counters and ivory-inlaid squares among the palace amusements. Both items have actually been found in the palaces of ancient Sumeria. At the eighth-century BC palace in Khorsabad, in northern Assyria, the columns were decorated with colorful glazed tiles, and throughout most Assyrian palaces, stonework was brightly painted.



PREVIOUS PAGE AND THIS PAGE (2): BRITISH MUSEUM

Gilgamesh dives to the bottom of the sea to retrieve the plant, only to have it stolen by the serpent when he falls asleep. It is then that Gilgamesh realizes that, like all mortals, he must inevitably die. Yet the story ends on a redeeming note: When Gilgamesh returns to Uruk, he reflects on the good works he and Enkidu accomplished, and realizes that immortality comes from the good a person achieves in life.

Though literally as old as the Sumerians, the Gilgamesh epic remains surprisingly poignant. In a poetic translation, such as the one John Gardner and John Maier completed just before Gardner died (See *Aramco World*, July/August 1983), the death of Enkidu remains as heart-wrenching to modern readers as it must have been to the Sumerians and Babylonians of long ago. Yet, like any good story, Gilgamesh also has its share of romance, adventure and suspense—qualities, Zeman believes, that make the epic as appealing today as it was 5000 years ago.

"It is one of the great wisdom stories of the world," she asserts.

But how to present this ancient poem in a way that the children of today—raised on television and computers—will understand?

Zeman's great gift is that she has been able to take the events of the story and recreate them in a series of beautifully realized vignettes, set in a Sumeria that, while historically accurate, would visually be the envy of any animation studio.

"Sumeria is buried under the sand. No one really knows what Sumeria looks like," says her husband, Eugen Spaleny. "What Ludmila has done is to take artifacts from the great museums of the world and, with them, create her own Sumeria."

Her sources fill the Spaleny bookshelves. Books from the Louvre, the British Museum and other museums and universities share shelf space with translations of the epic itself, including the one by Gardner and Maier.

"I looked at these books over and over as I worked," says Zeman, spreading them out on the table to reveal illustrations of an ancient Sumerian lyre, the mosaic-covered columns of Uruk and the Standard of Ur, all of which are illustrated in her trilogy.

An early indication that Zeman had succeeded in combining charm and authenticity in her settings came from the British Museum, where she had sent the book before publication to be checked for accuracy. It was returned along with an order for 1000 copies, to be sold in the museum shop!

Yet even more than her settings, it is the way Zeman handles her characters that makes her books come alive. Arrogant Gilgamesh, fair-minded Enkidu, beautiful Shamhat—all are presented in ways designed to convey the maximum amount of conflict and emotion, just as they would be in a film version of the Gilgamesh epic—which is what Zeman intended to make in the first place.

"It was something we had been thinking about," says Zeman, explaining that when she and her husband emigrated to Canada in 1984 the only world they knew was the world of film.

Since childhood, Zeman had worked as her father's assistant. For many of those years Eugen had been the Zeman studio's chief animator. But when Emily Carr College in Vancouver invited the couple to teach film technique to their students in 1983, things began to change. Not only did Czechoslovakia's then-communist regime refuse the couple permission to go but, accusing them of pro-Western sentiments, it asked Ludmila to leave the studio, conscripted Eugen for construction work and even made life difficult for their school-age daughters, Linda and Malvina.

For Zeman and Spaleny, there seemed no other choice. In the summer of 1984 the family left behind all they had and made their way through Yugoslavia to a refugee camp in Austria, and finally to Canada and the teaching assignment they had hoped for. For the next year, the couple devoted their days to teaching film design and animation technique; during their nights, working on their kitchen table, they managed to produce a short animated film, *The Cedar Tree of Life*, which appeared on Canadian *Sesame Street*.

Only 30 seconds long, it nevertheless attracted the attention of the Canadian National Film Board, which invited them to Montreal to make a 10-minute film—on their choice of subject. The result was *Lord of the Skies*, a paper-cutout animation film that, within a year, won 11 international awards, including a blue ribbon at the 1993 American Film Festival. In 1994 it was shown at the Sundance Festival and was short-listed for an Oscar nomination.

The huge success reawakened the Spalenys' interest in a Gilgamesh film, to be more ambitiously conceived. Harking back to the halcyon days of the Karel Zeman studios, they decided it would be a feature-length animated film, 80 minutes long. That would take money—a great deal of money.

While Spaleny began to search for backing, Zeman returned to her second career, book illustration. Armed with books she had illustrated in Czechoslovakia, a promising story idea and her film storyboard of Gilgamesh, she approached Tundra Books in Montreal, noted for its excellent children's books. The meeting was all that Zeman had hoped for: When Tundra president May Cutler saw the Gilgamesh storyboard, she had only one thing to say. "Can you do a book like this?"

"At first I didn't know if I could," remembers Zeman. "In a film, you have close-ups and long shots to build emotion and show action. In a book, you have to

LINDA SPALENY

Zeman—shown here in her Montreal studio—dreams of turning the success of the illustrated trilogy into an animated, feature-length film. "With film, I can show so much more," she says.

Gilgamesh reaches down to save a lion cub from falling, much as Enkidu saved him from falling off the city wall

include all these things in just one picture."

Which, it turns out, is exactly what Zeman did.

In the opening pages of *Gilgamesh the King*, the reader sees the dark face of Gilgamesh glaring out from the great wall, almost as if in close-up. In the middle distance, hundreds of men pull a giant Assyrian sphinx. At right, a drummer beats the time. In another part of the illustration, women wail in despair and, in the far distance, a Babylonian hanging garden rises behind the great wall.

Scale and colors combine to tie these different elements into a single picture. The detail is remarkable, as is Zeman's graphic style.

"My father always taught me that the style of presentation should fit the story," says Zeman, who, by shading her drawings with stippling and tiny broken lines, has recreated the look of an old-fashioned steel engraving. "It is a style of long ago," she explains, "to show that this is a story that happened long ago."

Like many of the illustrations in her books, the opening scene of *Gilgamesh the King* is rendered in hues of blue and gold. But here the colors are dark, the shading heavy, the atmosphere foreboding.

"Color conveys emotion," explains Zeman, who tints her drawings with clear watercolors imported especially from Czechoslovakia—reds for drama, grays for sorrow, yellows for contentment.

In the scene that introduces Enkidu—in contrast to the scene that introduces Gilgamesh—Zeman places the wild man of the forest under a golden sky, lit by a terra-cotta sun. Around him are the animals he loves: resting sheep, wide-eyed gazelles, a sleepy lion. As Zeman's sunny palette implies, this is a place of peace and contentment.

At least until the next page, when vibrant greens and yellows introduce another element in Zeman's arsenal: action.

At the top of the page, the gazelles are seen flying in one direction as a hunter turns in his chariot to target Enkidu's friendly lion. But at the bottom of the page, the hunter is haplessly chasing his own chariot as Enkidu rides off with it, the gazelles and the lion tucked safely in the chariot itself.

Horse, hunter, gazelles and lion seem infused with movement. Before Zeman ever puts pen to paper, she works out the characters' actions by means of paper cutout "puppets."

"When I do an illustration," says Zeman, "I build a scene, just as I would for a film."

There is the setting, often filled with wonderful artifacts. There is the sky, which is always drawn separately. And then there are the characters.

Designing the characters takes time. In the case of Gilgamesh and Enkidu, Zeman drew on Assyrian prototypes, giving her heros the same curled hair and beards, and in the case of Enkidu, a set of horns, to differentiate him from his alter ego, Gilgamesh.

But these characters are static.

To make them life-like, Zeman cuts them out of the paper on which they are drawn, joints their arms and legs, and moves them across her drawing of the setting, just as she would for an animated film. When she has found exactly the movement she wants, she stops the action and photocopies the scene. This is the basis for her drawing.

Then come the refinements. Often, to achieve the right effect, she exaggerates the length of limbs. In Zeman's illustrations, arms stretch out in anger, necks bend forward in anticipation, legs leap high to cover distances.

Movement indicates emotion as well. When Enkidu falls in love with Shamhat, two birds kiss in mid-air. When he challenges Gilgamesh, jagged cuneiform flies from his mouth like spear-points.

"The original poem," says Zeman, "barely describes the battle." But in *Gilgamesh the King* it rages back and forth atop the city wall until Gilgamesh slips and begins to fall—saved only when Enkidu reaches out his hand to rescue him.

In this single scene Zeman solves a serious creative problem—why the two adversaries become friends—and at the same time paves the way for the adventures that follow in her next book, *The Revenge of Ishtar*.

The Revenge of Ishtar opens when an earthquake shatters the palace at Uruk, killing the beautiful Shamhat. The monster Humbaba is blamed, and Gilgamesh and Enkidu set out to destroy the fire-breathing demon.

Here, red skies predominate as a giant Humbaba sits menacingly atop his volcano, threatening a tiny Gilgamesh and an equally tiny Enkidu.

Then, in a sudden reversal of fortune, a still-tiny Gilgamesh jams his spear into Humbaba's open jaws, enabling the two heros to decapitate the creature with their axe and impress the watching goddess Ishtar.

But there is more trouble to come. When Gilgamesh rejects Ishtar's proposal of marriage, the vengeful goddess storms the city atop her malevolent Bull of Heaven, a winged creature that literally fills the sky. In a daring attack, the heros capture and kill the bull. Then Enkidu adds a fatal insult by throwing the bull's tail in Ishtar's face.

Silhouetted before a dramatic red sky, Ishtar cries out that Enkidu must die. Her terrible decree paves the way for the final scene in the book, the death of Enkidu.

"It took me such a long time to do this scene," says Zeman. "In the poem it is so powerful," she says, reading from the Gardner-Maier translation.

> "Now what is this sleep that has taken hold of you?
> You've become dark. You can't hear me."
> And he—he does not lift his head.
> "I touched his heart. It does not beat."
> He covered the friend's face like a bride's.
> "Like an eagle I circled over him."
> Like a lioness whose whelps are lost, he paces back and forth.
> He tears and messes his rolls of hair.
> He tears off and throws down his fine clothes like things unclean.

"But how to show this? I took the puppet, and moved it and moved it. Even so, I must have drawn it 20 different times."

Zeman's text, in contrast, is brief: "'Do not leave me now, dear friend,' [Gilgamesh] begged, weeping. 'Together we fought monsters and won. There is more for us to do.' But Enkidu did not wake."

"All through the text, my daughter Linda helped me. Emotionally, she is like me. My English is not good," says Zeman, who learned the language only after coming to Canada. "But when I told her what I wanted to say, she made it sound right."

The death of Enkidu leads logically to the final book in the trilogy, *The Last Quest of Gilgamesh*.

As described in the ancient tablets, the quest is a terrifying one. Half-mad with grief, Gilgamesh sets out to find the secret of immortality, a journey beset with dangers: giant scorpions, burning sands, even the Sea of Death.

But not all is darkness.

In one of the first scenes of the book, Gilgamesh reaches down to save a lion cub from falling from a cliff, much as Enkidu saved him from falling off the city wall. It is this delightful cub, inspired by the lion cub Gilgamesh carries in the famous Assyrian statue in the Louvre, that prevents *The Last Quest* from being a tale of unremitting woe.

"When Gilgamesh lost his companion, I gave him a new companion," explains Zeman—a companion who provides a lighthearted counterpoint to the troubles that beset the hero.

When Gilgamesh navigates the Sea of Death, the lion cub sinks deep into the boat, its tail wrapped pragmatically around the stern. When Utnapishtim points to the flower of eternal youth, the cub looks

Don't leave me now, dear friend, [Gilgamesh] begged, weeping. Together we fought monsters and won

Like all good stories, the Gilgamesh epic ends with understanding, if not triumph

doubtful. And when Enkidu reappears briefly at the end to show Gilgamesh the glory of their city, the lion joins Gilgamesh astride the powerful bird that Enkidu has become, entranced by the scene below.

Like all good stories, the Gilgamesh epic ends with understanding, if not triumph. Gilgamesh has failed to gain the secret of immortality. He has lost the flower of eternal youth. But in the end he accepts his responsibilities and resumes his role as king. He has completed his journey of enlightenment.

For Zeman, the completion of *The Last Quest* marked the end of her own journey of self-discovery.

The years she spent working on the books were not easy. Her father died shortly after she began *Gilgamesh the King*. Soon after that, Zeman and Spaleny's daughter Linda was struck by a car and badly injured. She recovered completely, but "the pain I felt then made me see Gilgamesh in a new way," says Zeman. "Always, I had been so happy. I had such a happy childhood. Then all these troubles. But in Gilgamesh I saw that this happens to everyone. This is what it means to be human."

Zeman worked on. For three full years, she reports, "all I cared about was Gilgamesh. I didn't care about time. I didn't care about money. I only cared about the books." The effort was intense, but the rewards have been great.

Barely had the first book been published when the letters began to pour in. One of her favorites came from John Maier, who praised *Gilgamesh the King* and asked for a copy of her forthcoming film to use in his seminars. Another was from Walt Disney Studios, which offered to buy the rights for a film of Gilgamesh.

A kind-hearted giant—generally believed to represent Gilgamesh himself—holds the lion cub that inspired Zeman's creation of the hero's companion in *The Last Quest of Gilgamesh*. This 4.5-meter (14-foot) relief is from the palace of Sargon II in Khorsabad.

"It was tempting," admits Zeman. But for her and for Spaleny, the film is a special commitment: to themselves, to her father, to their daughters and, most of all, to the children who have grown to love Gilgamesh and Enkidu.

"Whenever I visit the schools, children ask me what I will do next," she says. Now, she believes, it will be the film. Since the first book was published, her father's former studio has offered to come up with part of the funding, and plans are being made to begin work in the Czech Republic as soon as possible.

"With film, I can show so much more," says Zeman, the bright smile back on her face. "Gilgamesh is a story that lends itself to film. It has action...adventure...wisdom. It is a story all children should know.

"It is a story," she adds, "that everyone should know." ⊕

Jane Waldron Grutz dates her interest in Gilgamesh to a 1973 trip to Bahrain, the island thought to be the "Land of Dilmun," where Gilgamesh found Utnapishtim and searched for the flower of eternal youth.

MUSEE DU LOUVRE; OPPOSITE: BRITISH MUSEUM (2)

The DISCOVERY *of* GILGAMESH

Austin Henry Layard

Although the Epic of Gilgamesh is one of the oldest stories ever recorded, it remained hidden to the modern world until the 19th century, when archeological expeditions were undertaken to several sites in the Near East.

In 1843 Paul-Émile Botta began to excavate at the ancient Assyrian site at Khorsabad, in today's Iraq, and in 1845 Austin Henry Layard began excavations at Nimrud (See *Aramco World*, May/June 1994). Constructed by Sargon II and Ashurnasirpal II, respectively, these well-preserved eighth-century BC sites soon began to yield huge limestone slabs and giant stone panels depicting horses with riders, archers on chariots, sieges and captives—even lion hunts. Many of these enormous artifacts were inscribed with the wedge-shaped characters we now call cuneiform script.

While still working at Nimrud, Layard began another excavation at ancient Nineveh, where he and his assistant, Hormuzd Rassam, were independently to discover the royal libraries of Sennacherib and Ashurbanipal. Altogether, some 25,000 fragments of tablets were unearthed from these libraries, all inscribed with the same cuneiform writing.

Over the next several years similar tablets were found at other sites in Mesopotamia and Syria.

The discovery of the artifacts prompted a strong interest in ancient Assyria, an interest intensified when, in 1857, Edward Hincks and Henry Rawlinson confirmed that they had found the key to the Akkadian language, also written in cuneiform script. Yet it took another 15 years before George Smith, an unschooled engraver who had been swept up in the universal enthusiasm, succeeded in translating a collection of Akkadian tablets from the Ashurbanipal library—and discovered the story of Gilgamesh and its references to the Great Flood (See *Aramco World*, January/February 1971).

The news of his discovery created a sensation. Almost immediately, the owner of the London *Daily Telegraph*, Sir Edwin Arnold, offered the British Museum, where Smith had become a staff member, a thousand guineas to allow him to go to Nineveh and see what more he could find. With uncanny luck, Smith picked up a tablet on his fifth day at the site that contained 17 missing lines from the first column of the Flood tablet. The tablet, he wrote, fitted "into the only place where there was a blank" in the story of Gilgamesh.

The tablets found at Nineveh were not the only ones to tell the story of Gilgamesh. Other copies of the epic were found at Nippur in Mesopotamia as well as at Boğazköy in Anatolia, at Megiddo in Palestine, at Ugarit in Syria and at Elam in present-day Iran.

Most of the tablets found in ancient Babylon and Assyria, in central and northern Mesopotamia, were written in Akkadian: Both Babylonian and Assyrian are forms of the Akkadian language. The tablets found at Nippur, however, were inscribed in the earlier Sumerian language, which was also written in cuneiform script. The tablets found at Boğazköy had been translated into Hittite and Hurrian, and those at Elam into Elamite.

None of the collections is complete: In all cases some tablets are broken or missing. The most famous and most complete collection remains the one found at Nineveh and translated by Smith, which had been copied, and very probably edited, by a scribe named Sin-leqi-unnini. His version is the one on which John Gardner and John Maier based their translation, and it is primarily on their translation that Ludmila Zeman based her Gilgamesh trilogy.

***Gilgamesh* was written on a series of 12 tablets, all of which were found in fragments. But because there were several copies of each tablet, archeologists were able to use fragments from different sites, such as this from Tablet VI found at Nineveh, to reconstruct the tale. At top, the excavator of Nineveh in his later years.**

ROOMS of THEIR OWN

Written by
Elizabeth Warnock Fernea

Photographed by
Thomas Hartwell

Is it news when an Egyptian trilogy, an Algerian love story and a short-story collection by an Iraqi win prizes in Cairo?

After all, the Arab world is full of literary competitions: Literature holds a central place in Arab culture, and poets and writers have enjoyed high status in the Arab world since pre-Islamic times. So why the fuss?

In fact, the prizes awarded in Cairo last November had a special significance: They were awarded to three women, in a moving ceremony that concluded the first Arab Women's Book Fair.

There have always been women writers in Arabic literature, fewer in number than men, but in many cases much respected and admired. Tumadir bint 'Amr, called al-Khansa', was born in Najd, in the center of today's Saudi Arabia, at about the time of the Prophet Muhammad; she was celebrated not only for the intensity and tenderness of her elegies, but also for the new directions she gave that long-established form of verse.

The Andalusian poet-princess Walladah bint al-Mustakfi wrote spirited and classical verse of her own, maintained a literary salon in the waning days of Muslim Cordoba and inspired at least one of the era's greatest male poets. And in our own day, Nazik al-Mala'ika is often credited with founding the free-verse movement in Arabic in the 1950's.

For this first women's book fair, 26 publishers from 10 countries brought 1500 titles—fiction and non-fiction—to exhibit in the Hanager Center, the cultural complex that also houses Cairo's opera house and the Museum of Modern Egyptian Art. Arabic books were shown from Syria, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, the United Arab Emirates and Egypt; Dar el Fennec of Morocco exhibited works in French as well as Arabic; Arabic and English-language books were offered by Al-Saqi Press of London and Palestinian women's studies centers in Jerusalem and at Bir Zeit University. The presses of the University of Texas and the American University in Cairo showed English-language titles.

"Not bad for a first effort," commented Hesna Makdashi, executive director of Cairo's El Nour publishing house and head of a committee of independent writers, editors and social activists who spent two years putting the fair together. They raised funds from local businesses as well as international agencies to finance installation, publicity and the three prizes.

Radwa Ashour of Egypt took first prize with her Andalusian trilogy, whose component novels are named after a place, a person and an event: *Granada, Mariama* and *Al-Rahil (The Departure)*. All are set around 1492, when the fall of Granada marked the end of Arab hegemony in Spain (See *Aramco World*, January/February 1993). Ashour was cited for her lyrical approach to the lives of ordinary people during a turbulent century that,

RADWA ASHOUR
EGYPT

AHLAM MOUSTAGANAMI
ALGERIA

BOUTHAINA AL-NASSERI
IRAQ

As keynote speaker, Palestinian poet and critic Salma Khadra Al-Jayyusi—who has coordinated the translation of more than two dozen works from Arabic into English—hailed the literary accomplishments of Arab women before a full house at Cairo's Hanager Center.

Among the organizers of the landmark fair were Hesna Makdashi, director of El Nour Publishing House, Adly Rizkalla, art director, and Ferial Ghazoul, who served as a judge for the literary prizes.

said the judges, "also evokes present events." The work was published by Dar al-Hilal, Cairo.

Second prize went to the Algerian novelist Ahlam Moustaghanami for *Dhakira al-Jasad (Memory of the Body)*, published in Beirut by Dar al-Adab. The first novel written in Arabic by an Algerian woman, the work is a love story set in the context of political struggle and painful exile.

Bouthaina al-Nassiri, who lives in Baghdad and Cairo, won third prize for her short-story collection *Watan Akhar (Another Homeland)*, published by Dar Sina of Cairo. The judges, Ferial Ghazoul, Edward Kharrat and Latifa Zayyad, noted al-Nassiri's ability to engage readers in the difficulties of everyday life. And in the closing ceremony, they paid tribute to the quantities of excellent work submitted to the milestone competition.

"This is a way to showcase women's writing," publisher Makdashi explained. "We knew that a lot of first-rate work was being produced by women, but it never seemed to show up at the big book fairs." She paused, smiled, then added, "It's true that once in a while you might find a little booth off in one corner. We decided to try and change that."

The fair clearly made the point that Arab women's writing, no longer produced just for a private audience, has become competitive in the literary marketplace. But it also raised other questions about the marginalization or "ghettoization" of women's work, and the neglect of other writing.

"No, no," protested Makdashi. "None of us is interested in segmenting society, separating one sector from the others. Women's work should be judged like all literary work, in terms of its quality. But," she added, "one must remember that women's work is often not taken seriously, either in the West or in the Arab world. It needs a bit of a public push, I think, and our fair is an effort in that direction."

Four hundred guests showed up for the gala opening, to hear the keynote address by Dr. Salma Khadra al-Jayyusi, Palestinian poet and critic (See *Aramco World*, January/February 1991). Jayyusi cited the emergence of Arab women in the last half of the 20th century and "their achievements in education, science and politics as well as in arts and literature."

All the Egyptian media, along with journalists from Italy, Germany, Spain, Morocco and the Netherlands, covered the book fair, which included daily seminars and panel discussions. Students flocked to the evening sessions, when visiting women writers discussed their work and talked about the difficulties of balancing the demands of family with those of art.

And there were dramatic moments, when poets and novelists from different countries, who knew each other's work but had never met in person, were introduced and spontaneously embraced.

Practical sessions on the problems of writing, editing, publishing and distribution were also included. Having difficulty getting your work published because mainstream houses insist there is no market for women's writing? Start your own press, advised Mai Ghoussoub of Al-Saqi, Laila Chaouni of Dar el Fennec and Hesna Makdashi, whose publishing house produces the magazine *Nour* as well as specialized books on women. All agreed that the route is not an easy one, but, said Chaouni, "We're still in business and making ends meet, at least."

Mai Ghoussoub concurred, but pointed out, "I don't just publish books by women. I bring out books about the Arab world in general as well as books by Arab writers, often in translation." The award of the 1988 Nobel Prize in Literature to Egyptian novelist Naguib Mahfouz, Ghoussoub said, and the increasing availability of his work in other languages, has stimulated the market for good translations of other works of Arabic literature.

El Nour hopes to sponsor a women's book fair every two years as part of a broader marketing strategy of highlighting women's work and making it generally available to the public, Makdashi said. "We want to reach into the schools, too," she added, "so that children growing up in the Arab world today can understand women's growing contribution to their literary heritage." To this end, the book fair committee budgeted funds to distribute copies of the prizewinning books to high schools and high-school libraries.

The fair also dramatized the continuing need for translation of new Arabic work for the world's reading public. Is translation a part of El Nour's long-range program? "Oh, yes," said Makdashi. "We've already begun, but as you know from Dr. Jayyusi's example, it is not easy. Dedication is needed, and funds, and literary judgment. We continue to work, one step at a time."

Elizabeth Warnock Fernea is professor of English and Middle Eastern studies at the University of Texas at Austin. She recently edited Children in the Muslim Middle East, *published by the University of Texas Press.*

Thomas Hartwell has covered the Middle East for Time *and other publications for more than a decade from Cairo. He recently photographed* Nile: Passage to Egypt, *a CD-ROM for children published by Discovery Channel Multimedia.*

RADWA ASHOUR:

Choosing a Turbulent Century

"I started writing fiction rather late in life," says Radwa Ashour, the Egyptian novelist, critic and teacher whose Andalusian trilogy won first prize at the Arab Women's Book Fair. "Like many people who have read the great classics, I suppose, I doubted I was capable of producing anything of real literary value."

Instead, she began with criticism and, in Beirut in the 1970's, published a study of the work of Palestinian writer and journalist Ghassan Kanafani and a treatise on the novel in West Africa. But it was the fallout from her residence in the United States that propelled her into another kind of writing. At the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, she received a Ph.D in comparative literature and specialized in African-American literature. On her return to Egypt she wrote *Al-Rihlah: Ayyam Talibah Misriyyah fi Amrikah (The Journey: An Egyptian Student's Days in America)*.

"That was the beginning," she recounts, "and whether I gained confidence then, or whether the time was simply right, I don't know, but suddenly I began to write fiction—and then publish."

Ashour's first novel, *Hajar Difah (Warm Stone)*, appeared in 1985 and her second, *Khadijah wa Sawsan*, in 1989. A collection of stories followed, and in 1994 *Granada*, the first volume of her prizewinning trilogy, was acclaimed best book of the year by the General Egyptian Book Organization and the Cairo Book Fair.

Why Granada as a subject for an Egyptian writer? "I was drawn to it," replies Ashour. "All the historical accounts talk of Andalusia as a civilization of the senses but without mind, without intellect. How could that be? Clearly something was wrong in that presentation. And then the tragedy of that terrible moment, 1492, when Muslims and Jews were expelled from Spain."

"No one," she continued, sitting forward in her chair, "no one had written about how people's lives must have been devastated by the defeat. And I suppose I was drawn to this period because I, too, know what it means to be defeated, to lose hope. It was my generation in Egypt, after all, that came of age in 1967."

The prize citation praises her for combining history and fiction in a down-to-earth, believable way. Ashour smiles. "Well, that was a turbulent century for the Arab world, and so is this one," she says. "I wanted to write about people who would look and sound familiar to the reader."

What about future projects? Ashour hesitates, considers. "Well, I'm thinking about an autobiographical novel, but that's down the road a bit." Translation into English? "Two stories of mine are already in a volume called *Stories by Egyptian Women: My Grandmother's Cactus* [published by Al-Saqi in Britain and by the University of Texas Press in the United States]. But the novels have not yet been considered."

Ashour is currently professor and chairwoman of the English department at Cairo's Ain Shams University, where she teaches comparative literature, literary theory and her specialty, African-American literature. She is married to the Palestinian poet Murid Barghouti, and their 18-year-old son is at Cairo University.

Arabs, Almonds, Sugar and Toledo

To all Spaniards and many foreigners, Toledo equals history, monuments and marzipan—not necessarily in that order.

Pan de Cadiz, *or Cadiz bread, at left, is marzipan rich with layers of sweetened egg yolk and sweetened yams;* pasteles de yema, *or yolk cakes, at right, are filled with the egg-yolk mixture. Below, a wooden marzipan mold speaks clearly of the confection's Andalusian traditions.*

WRITTEN AND PHOTOGRAPHED BY TOR EIGELAND

Set in a bend of the Tagus River, Toledo is so filled with history that all of the central city has been declared a national monument. Below, an artisan begins to shape a marzipan bird, much as da Vinci may have done for his patrons.

Leonardo da Vinci was angry.

"I have observed with pain," he wrote, "that my signor Ludovico and his court gobble up all the sculptures I give them, right to the last morsel, and now I am determined to find other means that do not taste as good, so that my works may survive."

His problem was that his sculptures were made of marzipan, which da Vinci valued for its malleability, but which his patrons admired for its edibility. In the service of Prince Ludovico Sforza of Milan, at Europe's most splendid court, da Vinci used to create all kinds of marzipan figures that were meant to be permanent—but turned out not to be. The quotation above is from his *Notes on Cuisine*, written about 1470. Later, when da Vinci sculpted marzipan models of military fortifications at the behest of Lorenzo de' Medici of Florence, the same thing happened: Teeth, not troops, overran his escarps and parapets.

Da Vinci would have been angry with me, too. I find marzipan irresistible in any form: marzipan figurines, marzipan molded and painted to look like fruits and animals, chocolate-covered marzipan, marzipan filled with sweetened egg yolk and marzipan just about any way at all, at any time of year, morning, noon or night. This passion of mine started when I was a child in Norway and continued when I was a student in Mexico City. There, when I could afford it, I used to frequent the venerable shop of Mazapanes Toledo, named for the Spanish province and city where marzipan was invented. Thirty years later, my affections undimmed, I set out for Toledo, to see where it all began.

Seventy kilometers (43 miles) south of Madrid on the Tagus River, Toledo's past reads like a résumé of the history of Spain itself. First settled by Celtiberians, it was conquered by the Romans, then the Visigoths. The Arabs disembarked on the southern coast of Spain in 711 and arrived in Toledo the following year, beginning their long and tolerant rule of the city they called Tulaytilah (See *Aramco World*, January/February 1993). Their tolerance was repaid, for when King Alfonso VI of Castile reconquered Toledo in 1085, he offered generous conditions to its citizens, thus continuing a highly civilized period of *convivencia*, when Arabs, Christians and Jews lived prosperously and harmoniously in the city. Today, Toledo is the home of magnificent historical monuments—and the world's most expertly prepared, tastiest marzipan.

Other places claim to be the homeland of marzipan: Venice, Lübeck, Cyprus, Sicily and Baghdad. Most likely marzipan was not born in any of these places—although Baghdad may be the closest.

A clue to the origin of marzipan lies in its list of ingredients, which is short and simple: almonds and sugar.

Almonds, which originated in Central Asia, have been enjoyed for thousands of years. Through Persia, the Arab countries and North Africa, almonds arrived in Greece, Cyprus and Spain. In Greece, by the fourth century BC, ground almonds were mixed with honey to make a sort of precursor of marzipan, but this was not the real thing.

Traces of almonds have been found in Tutankhamen's tomb, and in tombs at Baza, in the Spanish province of Granada, that date back to the fourth century BC.

Sugarcane originated on the Malay Peninsula and traveled to India sometime before the fifth century of our era, when we find the first description of sugar manufacture in the writings of the Buddhist scholar Buddhaghosa. The Persians had brought sugarcane to the valleys of the Euphrates and Tigris somewhat earlier, in the fourth century, and there produced and even refined sugar. The Arabs, after they conquered Persia in 640, gradually introduced the sweet reed to North Africa, Syria and Spain while perfecting the process of making sugar. And Christian Europe was introduced to sugar in Palestine in the 12th century, during the crusades.

By 760—only 50 years after the Arabs arrived—tall, green sugarcane was swaying in the gentle Mediterranean breezes of the Motril and Málaga regions of Spain. The Arab settlers who planted it were expert farmers who developed sophisticated irrigation systems, some of which are still in use. In 1150, 30,000 hectares (74,000 acres) were dedicated to cane, and there were 14 sugar mills in the region of Granada alone. Wherever they went, in fact, the Arabs brought sugar.

Almond trees, first planted in Spain by colonizing Greeks, then by Phoenicians, were

To make pan de Cadiz, *an artisan lines the mold with marzipan paste, adds a layer of sweet-potato "jam," a rectangle of marzipan and a layer of* yema de huevo con azucar, *then finishes the loaf with more marzipan. This mold imprints a hallmark of quality: "Mazapan Toledo."*

almonds. So where do quality differences come from? First, from the almonds: There are some 50 varieties of almonds in Spain alone, some more aromatic, others more flavorful. Next, from the trouble the maker takes, the degree of handwork he requires, and the extent to which he uses—or rather, avoids—preservatives. Almonds may be used raw by some makers, roasted, at various temperatures, by others; the almonds and sugar may be ground up to three times to make the fine, compact, dough-like mass desired. If the ingredients are ground too little, the marzipan will be coarse; too much, and the almond oil may separate out from the dough. Different kinds of sugar produce different results, and some makers soak the almonds in sugar syrup. There are infinite variations.

After the dough has been molded into a shape, perhaps filled with sweetened egg-yolk or other substances—sweetened yams (*batata confitada*) or a preserve made from pumpkin (*cabello de angel*) are traditional—it is baked in an oven at 220 to 230 degrees centigrade (425°–450°F), and then brushed with syrup to glaze it. A 24-hour cooling period at room temperature follows. Then, say the experts, the marzipan takes three days to reach its peak, and it remains at its best

Though ingredients, baking times and temperatures are firmly established, a good oven-tender keeps an eye on each emerging tray of pastas de almendra, *or almond cakes, another form of marzipan. Below, an antique wooden mold showing Toledo's historic Bisagra Gate and the city's coat of arms.*

well established by the time the Arabs arrived. The Arabs brought many more, and when the trees blossomed each February, whole valleys looked as though they were covered in snow—an image Andalusian poets loved.

Spain was thus stocked with sugar and almonds, and with Arabs, who love good food and sweets. Knowledge wasn't lacking either. The first references to marzipan in the Arab world date back to 700, and we can be sure that almond-based sweets such as marzipan arrived in Toledo with the Arabs at the beginning of the eighth century. By the 11th century, the *mozarabes*—Christians living under Muslim rule—wrote of getting together at Christmas to eat marzipan, apparently an established custom then and one that is very much alive today.

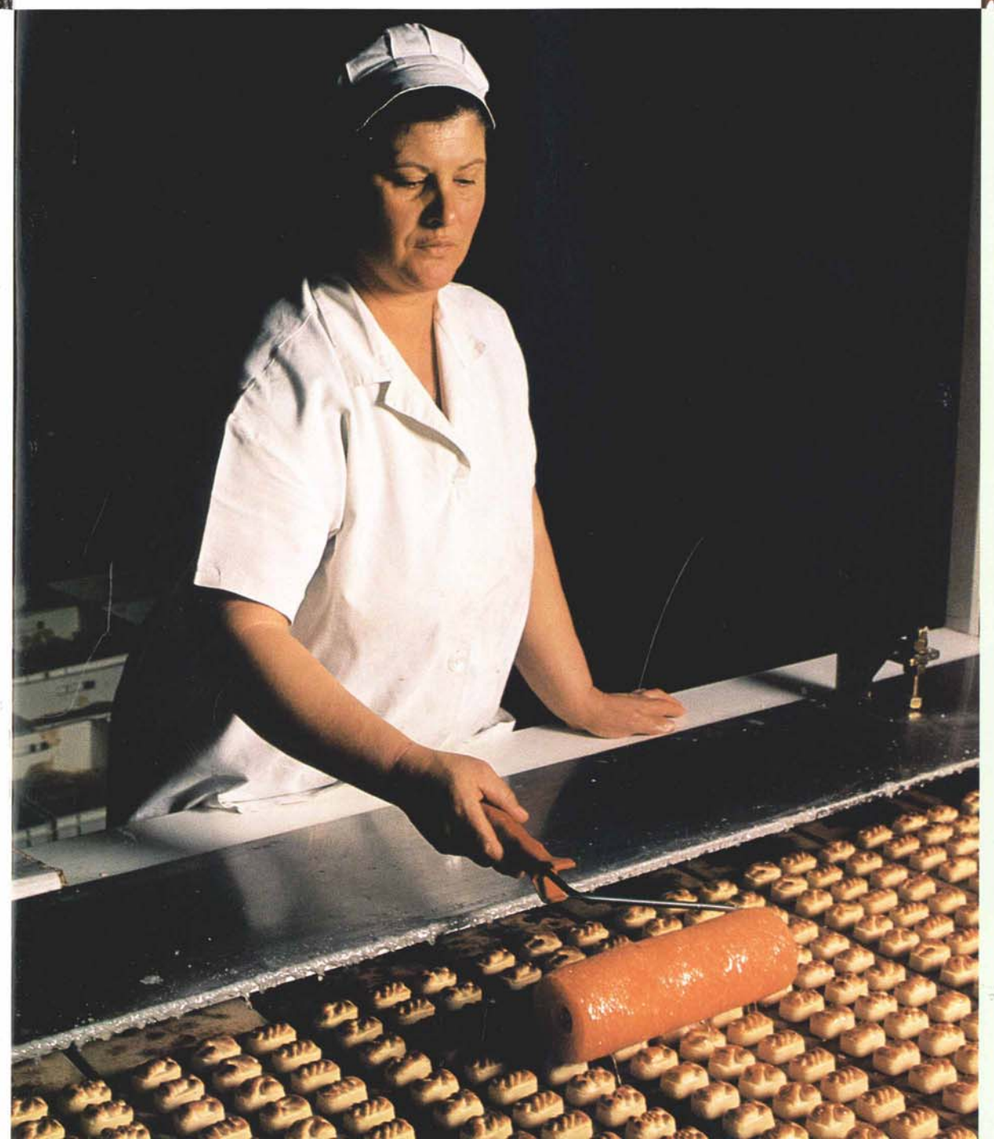
Some Spanish convents have claimed the invention of marzipan, but this overstates their role. What is true, as the learned Spaniard Gregorio Marañon (1887-1960) said, is that the closed religious orders preserved the craft of making marzipan through the thick and thin of history. Convents took up making sweets as a source of income, to survive, and continued using and perfecting their antique recipes through the centuries. Indeed, Marañon points out, sweets such as marzipan have become symbols of the complex heritage of the Spanish people.

There are dozens of theories about where we get the word *marzipan*. A traditional one, certainly erroneous, reaches back to the Latin *marci panis*, St. Mark's bread, but in fact the word, like the product itself, is of Arab origin. My favorite derivation, and the one I find most likely, is explained by José Carlos Cabel in a book called *Historia y Leyenda del Mazapan*. The Arabs of Toledo, he says, called their paste of sweet almonds and sugar *mawthaban*, which supposedly means 'seated king,' for, before they were baked, the pieces of marzipan were stamped with a coin that showed a king seated on his throne. There was in fact a Byzantine coin, widely circulated in the Middle East by the year 1000, that showed a seated figure on the reverse, and which the Arabs called *mawthaban*.

Another theory holds that the name comes from the Persian *marzupan*, which means "leader" or "chief," or by extension "a person of quality." The word was Arabized in Iraq, and today the famous sweet is known in Arabic as *halwa al-marzuban*, or—approximately—"the elite sweet."

But did we get Spanish *mazapan* and German *marzipan* directly from the Arabic? Possibly not. The Venetians struck coins like the Byzantine ones about 1200 and called them *mataban*. And Sicilian and Neapolitan trading documents use the words *martzapane* and *marzapane* to refer to small, lightly built wooden boxes—like the ones in which such precious commodities as spices and confectionery were imported from the East. The word may have stretched to cover the contents of the boxes as well, giving rise to French *massepain*, English *marchpane* and Italian *marzapane*.

Marzipan consists simply of a half-and-half mixture of almonds and sugar, with slight variations. In fact, Spanish law requires that the "supreme quality" marzipan must contain at least 50 percent



As they come from the oven, Eusebia Gallego Lumbreras, left, finishes almond cakes with a sugar-and-water glaze called jarabe—*another word borrowed from Arabic. At Mazapanes Peces in Consuegra, 55 kilometers from Toledo, Carmen Casas, above, pipes intricate decorations of sweetened egg white onto an* anguila, *or eel, one of Toledo's most elaborate traditional marzipan shapes.*

Chocolate-covered discs of marzipan topped with fruit preserves, above, are a modern invention. Using traditional artisanal methods, marzipan master José Carlos Muñoz, below, makes his yolk-filled delicias *from specific varieties of almonds.*

until the fifteenth day. From then on there is a slow deterioration in quality, although preservatives can keep a stale-almond flavor at bay for up to a month.

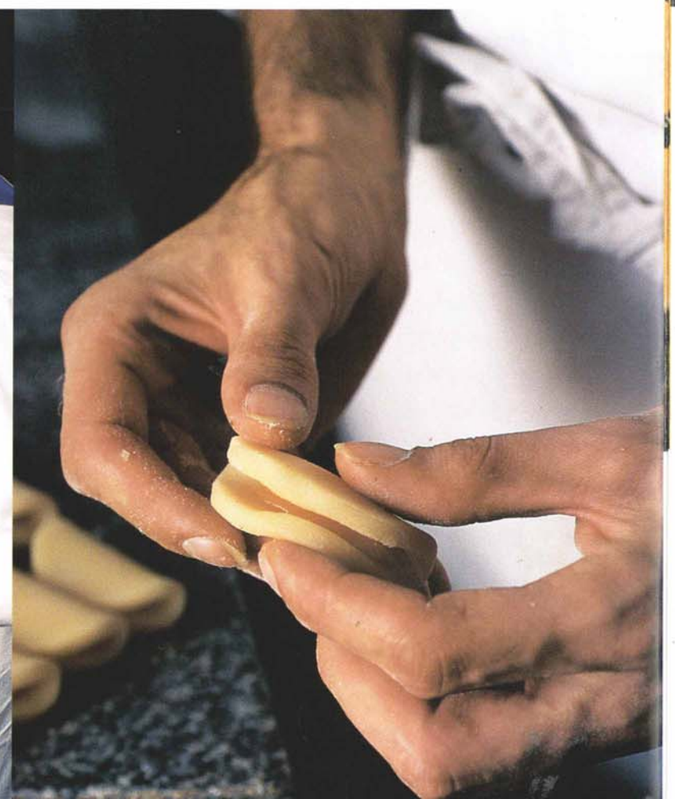
Highly mechanized operations work differently: Everything is faster, and quantities are vast. On the loading dock at the Delaviuda company in Sonseca, in Toledo province, about 25 tons of top-quality almonds, worth about $200,000, arrived in white sacks while I was standing there, just one of many deliveries. In 1994 Delaviuda produced 1077 tons of marzipan.

María Antonia Olivares, in charge of quality control at Delaviuda, showed me around their spotless plant. Despite all the machinery, it smelled deliciously of almonds, chocolate, and the other ingredients used to make different varieties of marzipan. Most of their products, she explained, are made according to traditional recipes, but some preservatives are added to extend shelf life. In spite of my prejudice against machine versus artisanal methods, I have to say that the Delaviuda products were absolutely exquisite—fit for kings.

Delaviuda, besides being the largest of the many producers in Toledo province, has created a unique marzipan museum at the plant. Old prints and traditional implements show how Toledo marzipan was made through the centuries. There are wooden mallets for cracking almond shells, a granite mortar and a curved granite slab with a rolling pin for grinding the almonds, a hemispherical Moorish oven, and other tools of the trade so beautiful that they resemble sculptures.

Later, I set out looking for the finest handmade marzipan and, after some disappointments, found marzipan heaven. At Toledo's famous Adolfo restaurant I sampled the handmade *delicias* of chef José Carlos Muñoz. Each day, Muñoz turns out about 100 of these delights—thick disks of wonderful marzipan buttered with blobs of sweetened egg yolk and folded into moist, soft half-moons that fairly explode with flavor. Of all the hundreds of varieties of marzipan, this is the best.

Muñoz starts his *delicias* with half *marquona* and half *largueta* almonds—the first for aroma and the second for flavor. Then he adds sugar weight for weight to the ground almonds. The shapes are baked on a wooden board, which helps retain their moisture. He uses no additives, so this marzipan remains in its optimum state for only four or five days.



I have eaten marzipan around the world for half a century, and to my taste, Toledo's is by far the best. Most connoisseurs agree that Toledo is to marzipan what Gascony is to *foie gras*. And the few times that, on a missionary impulse, I have brought Toledo marzipan to northern Europeans—even to some from the German "marzipan capital," Lübeck—they have regarded it as a culinary revelation. So what is the secret behind this unbeatable quality?

Even the city's most famous confectioners do not seem to know. In fact, I found that most know very little about the long history of the product they make. Says Luis Moreno Nieto, chronicler of Toledo, "Is it the water? The air? The proportion of almonds and sugar? The purity of these products? The way of baking them? Nobody knows. Father Tagus, old and crafty, keeps the secret...as he runs and runs to the sea."

But this is too poetic, contributing much to the city's romance but little to knowledge. Yes, Toledo is beautiful, but the water is entirely ordinary, and the air is not special. The proportions of marzipan ingredients are fixed by law. Neither sugarcane nor almonds grow in this region of olives and grapes. And anyone can set a timer and the temperature of an oven!

What happened, I believe, was that the people of Toledo created a highly sophisticated and cultured—in fact, multicultured—city where people liked to eat well. Thus they started to bring in raw materials of quality, from other parts of Spain or farther still. They liked the marzipan they made so well that it became a point of civic pride among manufacturers to strive for nothing less than perfection.

By now they've been striving for more than a millennium. No wonder they're the best.

Photographer and writer Tor Eigeland has contributed to Aramco World *for nearly 30 years, and has apparently passed on his fondness for marzipan to his daughter Natalie, right.*

Mazapanes Santo Tomé, above, has been a favorite of Toledo's marzipan consumers since 1856. Inside back cover: A pair of elaborate anguilas.

Events & Exhibitions

Alexander the Great: *History and Myth.* More than 140 pieces and artifacts explore the broad influence of the conqueror's image. Palazzo Ruspoli, **Rome,** through May 21.

Empires of the Sultans: *Ottoman Art from the Khalili Collection* opens the new Brunei Gallery at the School of Oriental and African Studies. More than 200 works illuminate the structure of the Ottoman empire and examine the influences of the sultans who ruled with both sword and pen. Brunei Gallery, **London,** from May 23 through August 31 (revised dates).

Thundering Hooves: *Five Centuries of Horse Power in the American West* highlights the role of the horse and rider in the Hispanic Southwest, a tradition that drew much from the horsemanship of al-Andalus, or Muslim Spain. Glenbow Museum, **Calgary, Alberta,** from June 1 through September 2.

Elihu Vedder's Drawings for the Rubáiyát. The American expatriate artist's original drawings for the celebrated 1884 edition of the *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám.* National Museum of American Art, **Washington, D.C.,** through June 9.

Splendors of Ancient Egypt surveys 4500 years of religious and art history. **Florida** International Museum, **St. Petersburg,** through June 9.

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, California. Confirmed sites and dates include: Columbus, Ohio, June 19; San Francisco, July 16; Corpus Christi, Texas, July 24; Fullerton, California, July 26. For details, call (202) 296-6767 or (510) 704-0517.

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,** from June 20 through September 1.

Ebla: *The Origins of Urban Civilization in Syria* displays treasures from excavations that reconstruct early culture. Espace Trieste, **Brussels,** through June 23.

Greek Icons After the Fall of Constantinople: *The Roger Cabal Collection* displays 25 post-Byzantine icons painted over three centuries. Menil Collection, **Houston,** through June 30.

Preserving Ancient Statues from Jordan displays eight plaster statues dating from the seventh millennium BC—possibly the oldest known sculptures from the Middle East—along with documentation of the conservation process. Sackler Gallery, **Washington, D.C.,** June 30 through April 6, 1997.

Mongolia: *The Legacy of Chinggis Khan* highlights the Mongolian renaissance that began with attempts in the 16th century to re-create the Mongolian empire. National Geographic Society, **Washington, D.C.,** through July 7.

The Eye and the Hand: *Arts and Crafts of Morocco* showcases 125 works of weaving, embroidery, woodwork, ceramics and other media from Morocco. Craft Art and Folk Museum, **Los Angeles,** through July 14.

Seydou Keita, Photographer: *Portraits from Bamako, Mali* presents 24 uniquely evocative portraits by the self-taught photographer, all taken since 1945. National Museum of African Art, **Washington D.C.,** through July 28.

Ancient Nubia: *Egypt's Rival in Africa.* More than 200 artifacts from the museum's celebrated Nubian collection help trace the little-known history of Nubia over a 3500-year period. **Minneapolis [Minnesota]** Institute of Arts, through August 18.

Traders and Raiders on China's Northern Frontier. Contacts among urban Chinese and nomads in the first millennium BC produced unique variations in the arts of war and commerce: harness fittings, weapons and vessels of precious metals. Sackler Gallery, **Washington, D.C.,** through August 18.

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

Portraits Without Names: *Palestinian Costume* includes more than 100 items from the Tareq Rajab Museum, Kuwait, and the Palestine Costume Archive, Canberra. The Powerhouse Museum, **Sydney, Australia,** through August.

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

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

Greece in the West uses archeological finds and artworks to chronicle the spread of Greek culture in the Mediterranean between the 2nd and 1st millennia BC. Plazzo Grassi, **Venice,** through December 8.

Ancient Mesopotamia: *The Royal Tombs of Ur* tells the story of the excavations at Ur and displays artifacts from the Royal Cemetery collection. University of **Pennsylvania** Museum, **Philadelphia,** through Fall 1997.

The African Gallery reopens after renovations that now permit the display of more than 400 objects from nearly all regions of sub-Saharan Africa in one of the largest permanent displays of African art in the world. Metropolitan Museum of Art, **New York,** indefinitely.

The Saudi Aramco Exhibit. Centered on the Arab-Islamic technical heritage, this permanent interactive, 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.

ARAMCO WORLD INDEX

Copies of the most recent *Aramco World* cumulative index, covering issues through 1994, are available on request.

ARAMCO WORLD BINDERS

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Beirut: *Uncovering the Past*
The reconstruction of Beirut is giving archeologists a unique opportunity to further explore the city's 5000 years of history. "Rescue archeology" is being carried out under the auspices of Lebanese authorities to discover as much as possible before architecture and artifacts are reburied or destroyed by new construction. Several significant architectural finds are being integrated into new buildings, and numerous objects have been recovered. Some of the best of these are now on display. Each major era of Beirut's history is represented: The exhibit includes a Canaanite burial jar; Phoenician terracotta figures; Hellenistic gold earrings; and Roman statuary, all accompanied by photographs and text. British Museum, **London,** through August 18.

Roman terracotta head, second century BC.

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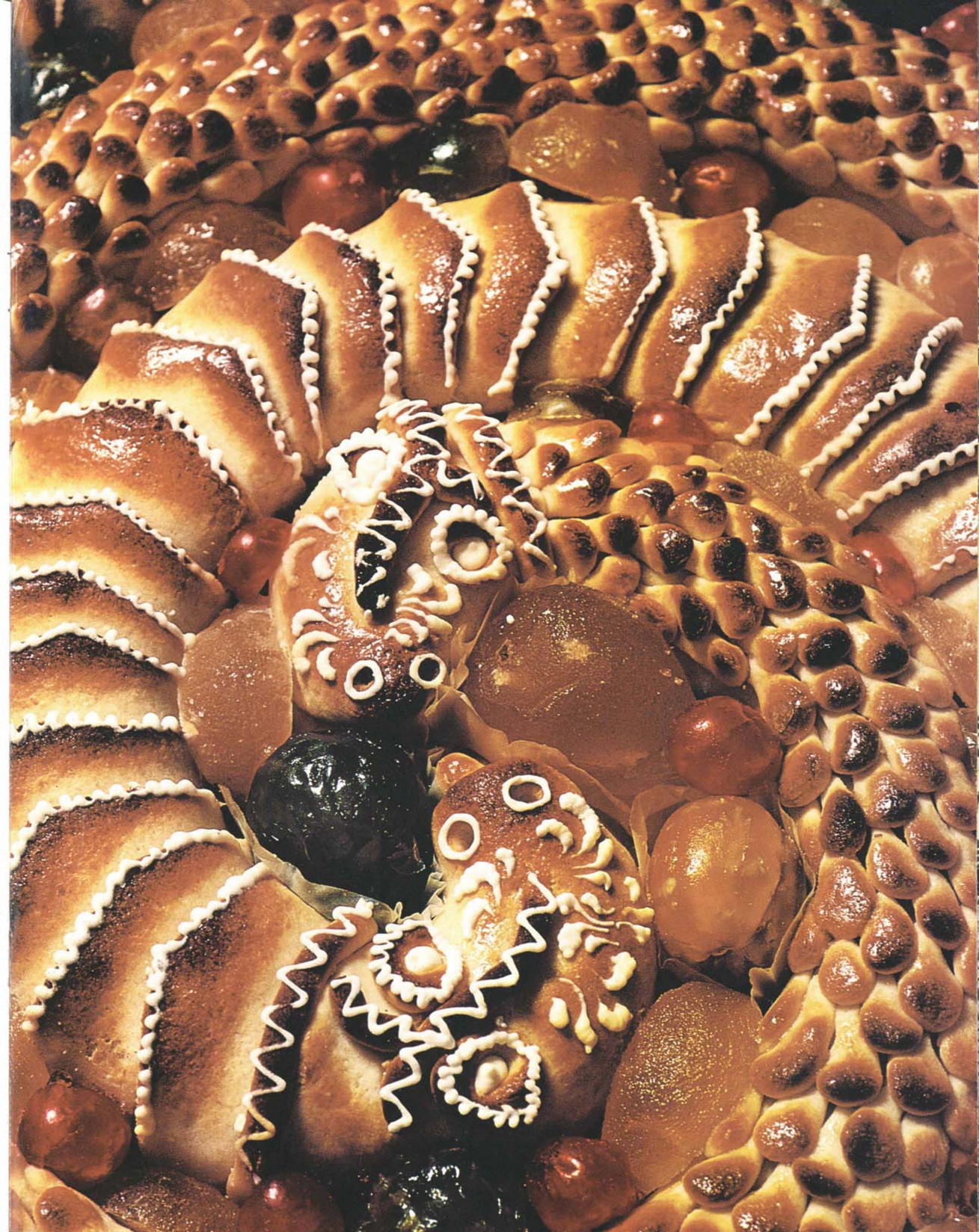

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