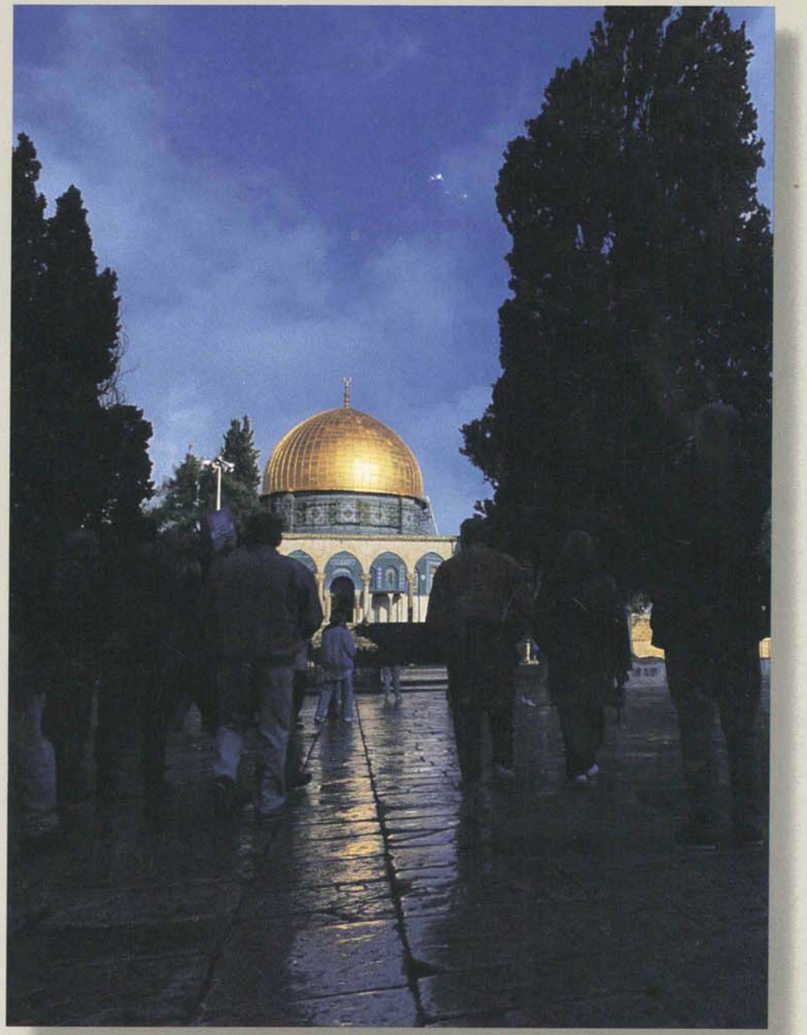

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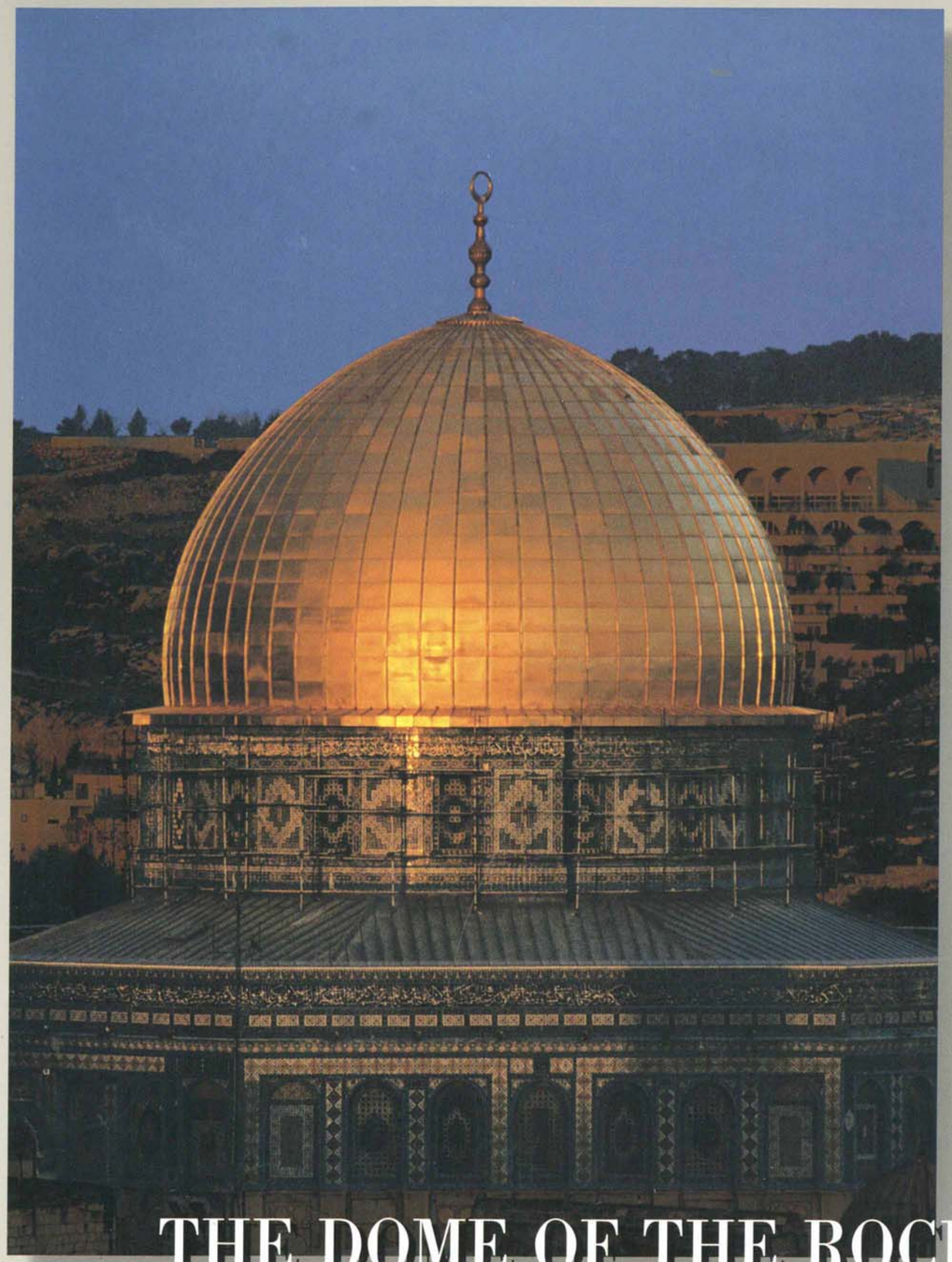

THE DOME OF THE ROCK

DOME OF THE ROCK: BILL LYONS

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COVER:
The golden cupola that dominates the skyline of Jerusalem is that of the Dome of the Rock, built in 691 over the rock from which, Muslims believe, the Prophet Muhammad ascended to heaven during his lifetime. The sanctuary and the nearby al-Aqsa Mosque are the two central features of Mount Moriah, important parts of the intimate historical and religious connections between Islam and the city of Jerusalem.

BACK COVER:
The recent restoration of the Dome of the Rock follows others carried out in the 12th and 16th centuries. The octagonal structure supporting a dome symbolizes the link between earth and heaven. Cover photographs by David H. Wells.

OPPOSITE:
Battered enamel teapots wait at Fishawy's Café. Photograph by Lorraine Chittock.

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

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Fishawy's Café

TWO CENTURIES OF TEA

Written by Mae Ghalwash with Josh Martin
Photographed by Lorraine Chittock

Some 240 years ago, a man named al-Fishawy began serving coffee to his friends in an alley of Cairo's Khan al-Khalili district each evening after prayers. According to his descendants —who have not been able to trace his first name— al-Fishawy's gatherings grew larger and longer, fueled by the talk of the town.

Al-Fishawy, they say, gradually added mint tea and anise tea to his informal menu, as well as *shisha*s, or water pipes. Thus was born *Qahwat al-Fishawi*, Fishawy's Café, now the most renowned café in the Arab world and a monument to the traditional Egyptian social style of relaxing with friends, colleagues and the occasional stranger over coffee, tea and tobacco.

"We are different from the other coffeehouses because we work to preserve the old style," says Akram al-Fishawy, one of the café's seventh-generation owners. "*Qahwat al-Fishawi* really represents Egypt's past."

Fishawy's sits cramped and noisy at the hub of Cairo's richest area of Islamic architecture and historic institutions. Besides the labyrinthine 14th-century Khan al-Khalili market, the popular Sayyidna al-Husayn ibn 'Ali Mosque is nearby, where the head of one of the grandsons of the Prophet Muhammad is said to be buried. And only a few meters across the road is the 1000-year-old al-Azhar, one of the world's oldest universities.

Partly because of this location, Fishawy's became not only a popular neighborhood watering hole, but also a rallying point for more than two centuries of Egyptian writers, artists, musicians, students and intellectuals, all of whom, it seems, harbored warm feelings toward this comfortable café.

"Loving greetings I present to my beloved home, al-Fishawy," reads one entry in the café's multi-volume guest register. The Arabic script is small and clear. "God grant it and its owners long life, fame and happiness. Your loyal son, Naguib Mahfouz. December, 1982."

Akram al-Fishawy explains that Mahfouz was the café's most famous "regular," and that he wrote parts of his Nobel-Prize–winning trilogy in the café's back room. (See *Aramco World*, March/April 1989.) "And why not?" asks Hassan Ibrahim, who has been a waiter at Fishawy's for 51 of his 72 years. "His boyhood home is just down the road."

Other notable patrons have included Ahmad Rami, the poet who wrote songs for the legendary singer Umm Kalthum, and even King Farouk, ruler of Egypt in the years before and after World War II. Good wishes also appear in the guest book from the pen of Alex Haley, author of *Roots*. The television series made from his book, subtitled in Arabic, was one of the greatest hits in recent memory in Egypt.

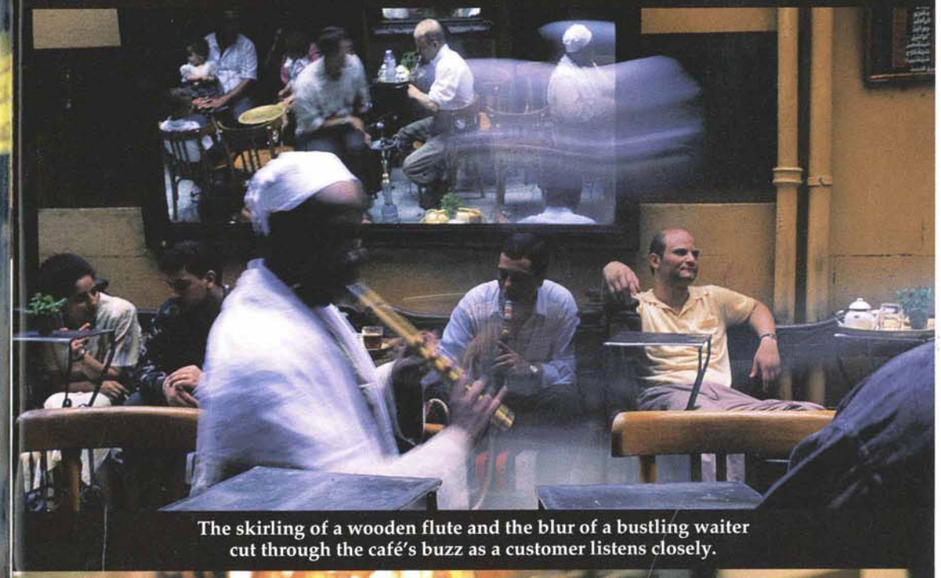
"Everything that has happened in Egypt has passed through Fishawy's," says al-Fishawy with pride.

This is mostly a café for ordinary people, and each day has its rhythm. In the early morning, cabbies, craftsmen and shopkeepers often drop in for a wake-up pot of tea. Noon brings the peak hours, when camera-toting travelers can often be spotted moving in herds among the tables while the café's waiters stride swiftly through their midst, like egrets. Afternoon brings a wave of students and, as the sun drops, groups of worshipers after their prayers at al-Husayn. On weekends, as the lights burn yellow into the cooling night, Fishawy's seems filled with Egyptians from towns and cities outside Cairo. At such a time, someone might tune up an *'ud*, or begin to recite a poem, half-heard amid the nocturnal buzz and bustle.

Fresh-squeezed orange juice refreshes one of Fishawy's younger patrons.

Bottled water and conversation are the ingredients of a pleasant hour.

Jasmine garlands swing from a waiter's tray, and a *shisha*, along with the passing scene, aids contemplation.



The skirling of a wooden flute and the blur of a bustling waiter cut through the café's buzz as a customer listens closely.

Despite the changes that have affected both the café and the country over the years, *Qahwat al-Fishawy* remains a social monument. From the traditional menu to the battered mirror frames and the waiters shouting their orders across the alley to the kitchen, Fishawy's endears itself to all who enter. "We come to al-Fishawy every time we visit Cairo," says Reda Abdel Hakim, who lives in the port city of Ismailia and is visiting Cairo with friends for the weekend. "I like it because people from all classes, Egyptians and tourists, all come here. It has a harmonious feel."

Tea, the most popular drink at Fishawy's—and in much of the Arab world—comes in a battered two-cup enamel teapot with a bowl of sugar, sprigs of fresh *na'na'*, or mint, and a small glass. Coffee is served in the traditional Arab *kanakah*, a fluted, long-handled copper pot, with sugar on the side. Other national favorites include *karkaday*, a tart, deep-red hibiscus tea, anise infusion, fresh lemonade and *sahlab*, a hot, thick drink like thinned Cream of Wheat, especially popular topped with nuts and raisins in winter.

To the habitués, long-handled *shisha*s, the traditional Arab water pipes, are as indispensable as tea. On a typical night, the café's tiny kitchen turns out as many as 400 clay pipe-bowls carefully packed with aromatic tobacco mixtures made sticky with either traditional molasses or a lighter apple flavoring. Women as well as men "drink" smoke, drawing it through a flexible tube and a cylindrical wooden handle.

Most of the tiny, round tables, their marble tops cracked and held together by their aluminum rims, have seen as many years as Fishawy's itself. So too have the large oil paintings, their varnish darkened to deepest brown, and the enormous mirrors, heavy in gilded arabesque frames, some inlaid with mother-of-pearl. Even the

Earnest or lighthearted, conversation is the key at Fishawy's, but there is always room and time for one's own thoughts.

walls, timeworn and covered with a dimmed yellow paint, add character, and contribute to the impression that the café is almost as old as Khan al-Khalili itself.

But Fishawy's inner sanctum is the "closed treasure room," once Naguib Mahfouz's favorite writing spot, now used for private parties. There stands a full-length Spanish mirror with lotus blossoms carved into its ponderous dark frame; it reflects light from an oversized chandelier, some of whose lotus-petal shades have fallen off.

"We can't redecorate," says Akram al-Fishawy. "When we tried to repaint the walls, the customers complained. They said, 'We like it better when they are dirty!'"

Nowadays, Fishawy's is most famous simply for being famous.

"I just heard of it as a place to visit," says Ahmed Mudara, a Syrian engineer working in Cairo, who admits he knows nothing of the café's history. But generations of *shisha* smoke, political discussion, intellectual argument, friendly talk and silent contemplation have given the place a patina that is not to be mistaken. "It's *real*," says Samantha Miller, visiting from England.

That genuineness, al-Fishawy says, is not likely to change. His ancestor started the café for social reasons, for his friends, he points out, and Fishawy's today "is not an investment project. It is something to preserve."

Mae Ghalwash (left) is a journalist who lives in Cairo. Josh Martin, who usually reports on business subjects, free-lances from his base in New York. Photographer Lorraine Chittock (left), who also lives in Cairo, recently completed an Aramco World *assignment in the Horn of Africa.*

THE NOMAD ROUTE

In the Steppes of Genghis Khan

Written by John Lawton
Photographed by Nik Wheeler

It was the Year of the Monkey, by Mongol reckoning, and it was living up to its reputation for meteorological mischief. One minute we were sunning ourselves by Lake Dörgön, in the foothills of the Altay Mountains; the next we were struggling to keep our campsite from being flattened by a sudden storm. Our drivers formed their vehicles into a windbreak, and we held on grimly to our flimsy one-man tents, but one by one they collapsed and scattered their contents across the steppe.

But then, life on the steppe was never easy—one reason it has produced such fierce nomad warriors as Genghis Khan. And for us sedentary types, the journey across Mongolia in his footsteps was a grueling one.

We were retracing the Nomad Route across the Eurasian steppe, along which wave after wave of horse-mounted nomads—Scythians, Huns and Turks as well as Mongols—swept westward to conquer large parts of the known world.

Besides being raiders and rulers, however, nomads also came as traders and travelers, for the steppe served as a vast trade route between East and West, North and South. Within its broad expanses, cross-country movement was easy for anyone with a horse to ride, and the goods a rider might carry were not only merchandise, but also more abstract valuables: religious teachings, artistic styles, technologies. Pilgrims and merchants carried Buddhism across the steppe, for example, and Islamic culture spread along the Nomad Route and played a vital role along much of its length.

The Eurasian steppe is a vast belt of grassland extending some 8000 kilometers (5000 miles) from Hungary in the west, through Ukraine and Central Asia, to Manchuria in the east. It is divided by the Altay Mountains, in present-day Mongolia, into two distinct parts. The western steppe extends from the Altay range west across Kazakhstan and southern Russia, and along the north shore of the Black Sea to the mouth of the Danube River. The eastern steppe, extending east from the Altay Mountains, encompasses most of modern Mongolia and reaches to the Greater Khingan Range, the 1500-meter (5000-foot) north-south mountain range that forbids entrance to Manchuria from the west.

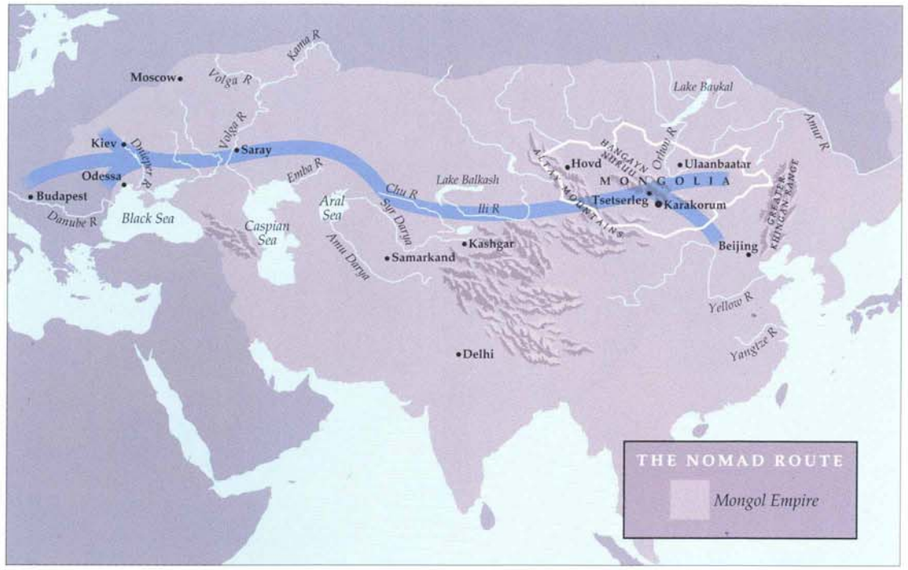
It was at the eastern end of the western steppe—in the Mongolian town of Hovd—that we began our journey. For me, it was the continuation of a quest begun in 1987 to retrace the Silk Roads, the ancient network of caravan trails that once linked Europe and China. (See *Aramco World*, July/August 1988.) The Nomad Route was one of the oldest of the Silk Roads, for nomadic tribes migrating westward as early as the sixth century BC carried silk and other trade goods with them to Europe—and the route was old even then. But only since 1991, when Soviet influence in Mongolia ended—along with 70 years of isolation—could I retrace this portion of the Nomad Route.

Travel within Mongolia, which has few paved roads, little transport and very basic accommodations, is still difficult for the individual. So photographer Nik Wheeler and I joined an expedition sponsored by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), part of its Silk Roads study project called "Roads of Dialogue." (See *Aramco World*, November/December 1991.) Our fellow travelers were geographers, historians, archeologists and

These cast gold plaques, each about 13 centimeters (5") across, may once have been sewn onto a leather belt or other clothing. They were found in tombs of the Hu people, steppe nomads of the fourth and third centuries BC, north of the Great Wall in what is now China's Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region. They show an ox resisting the attack of four tigers (plaque above from the Inner Mongolia Museum, Huhehaote) and a tiger attacking a wild boar (plaque below from the Ordos Museum, Dongsheng).

Opposite: The presence of a Genghis Khan impersonator at the Nadam Festival parade in Ulaanbaatar indicates that the former ruler is reemerging as the great national hero of Mongolia.

This cast gold pendant of a kneeling horse, five centimeters (2") across, was produced by the Xianbei people, a tribal confederation of steppe nomads who, as they built an empire in the late fourth century, also devised systems of military organization later emulated by Genghis Khan. The pendant is from the Zhelimu League Museum.



On a modern political map, the Nomad Route would stretch from Bulgaria to Manchuria, a distance of some 4800 kilometers, with a southward branch to China. Already in use as early as 1000 BC, the trade route facilitated commerce in ideas as well as goods.

anthropologists from 21 nations; Mongolian officials, drivers, cooks and journalists swelled our group to more than 100 people.

We traveled in convoy, camping en route, across 2000 kilometers (1250 miles) of bone-breaking steppe trails and tortuous mountain tracks. For transport, we had 13 four-wheel-drive vehicles and three buses; we carried fuel and water in tank trucks, food in a refrigerated van and baggage and equipment in open trucks. Our column also included an incredible old Red Army hospital sterilization unit that served as a kind of chuck wagon: Stuffed with mutton, stoked with wood and unavoidably self-stirred as it bounced across the steppe, it produced a ready, palatable and soon familiar stew almost every time we stopped.

Cultural artifacts from steppe civilizations show those cultures' sophistication and the range of their trading connections. The artifacts shown on these pages are from the catalogue Empires Beyond the Great Wall: The Heritage of Genghis Khan. *The exhibition of the same name is on view at the Museum of New Zealand, Wellington, through October 6, 1996. The catalogue (ISBN 0-938644-34-3) was published by the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County.*

Landing at Hovd airport to rendezvous with our land transport, we were greeted by a large crowd, by Mongolian standards—for Mongolia is one of the most sparsely populated countries in the world, with only 2.49 million people, according to a 1995 estimate. That's 1.6 people per square kilometer (4 per square mile), compared to 106 per square kilometer for France, or 13 per square kilometer even in Arizona. In fact, there are more Mongolians living outside the country than in it: Some 3.4 million live in China's Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, and a further million live in the Tuva and Buryat regions of Russia.

At Hovd, we watched a performance of music, song and dance that reflected the ethnic mix of Mongolia's western *aymags*, or provinces, which border on China, Russia and Kazakhstan. Besides Mongols, their populations include over 400,000 Muslim Kazakhs, plus other minorities.

What steppe nomads lack in numbers, however, they make up for in hospitality. All along our route we were warmly welcomed, often in traditional Mongolian fashion: presented with platters of white ewes' cheese and bowls of *kumiss*—fermented mares' milk—with which to wash it down.

Mares' milk nurtures a Mongolian cultural legacy that dates back to the days when the nomads first domesticated the horse, some time in the third millennium BC. Not only is it the nomads' staple drink, but it also features in most of their ceremonies. At the horse races staged for our entertainment en route, for example, winning steeds were anointed with *kumiss*, and each time we resumed our travels, *kumiss* was sprinkled in our wake to wish us a safe journey.

In fact, there was little chance of a traffic accident. In three weeks of traveling from Hovd to Karakorum—ancient capital of the Mongol Empire—we passed only six vehicles traveling in the opposite direction. And only on the last leg of our journey, from Karakorum to Ulaanbaatar, capital of today's Mongolia, did we travel on a paved road; because of fuel shortages, there was hardly any traffic on that, either. The horse, which played a leading role

There are no corrals on the steppe, but tying ewes neck-to-neck in long double rows immobilizes them conveniently for milking.

in the nomads' migrations, hunting and war, is still Mongolia's principal means of transport—and will probably remain so until the intensive oil exploration now under way in the Mongolian Plateau begins to bear fruit.

Humans have roamed the steppes since earliest times. We found evidence of that on the very first day of our three-week journey across Mongolia. On a low rocky hill known as Ishgin Tolgoy, near the confluence of the Urd, Dund and Holt Rivers, we counted nearly 150 animal figures carved on rock: horses, bison, deer, elk, antelope, camels, goats, sheep, snakes and lions. The scientists traveling with us attributed this art to the paleolithic period, the early Stone Age. Our Mongolian guides said that many paleolithic tools, such as knives and spear-points knapped from river pebbles, had been found in the adjacent valley too.

In a nearby cave we saw rock paintings depicting other animals, including elephants and ostriches. Large numbers of dots painted over some of the animals—a characteristic feature of paleolithic art thought to indicate animal population sizes—implied that ostriches were once plentiful in Mongolia, and underscored the changes in the environment since then.

It was these environmental changes that prompted the wandering and the warfare of the hunting and herding communities that dominated the steppelands during the second millennium BC. For by then, the increasingly arid terrain could no longer sustain their growing herds, and many clans began to move with the seasons in search of fresh pasture, gradually developing a nomadic way of life.

These horseriding herdsmen punctuated their pastoral life with raids on settled communities and on each other. But although the nomads' view of sedentary society was essentially predatory, the relationship between the steppe and the sown was not one of unbroken hostility. Diffuse cultural contacts linked these two dissimilar worlds, and—especially when settled states were strong and raiding them was risky—so did trade.

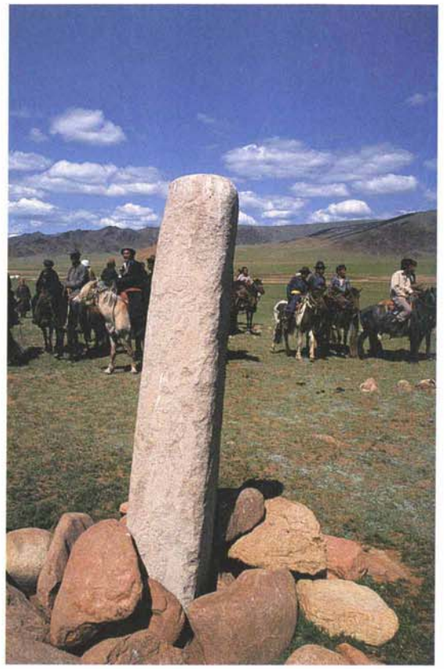
In exchange for livestock, leather and wool, the nomads received tea and grain. Carpets from southwest Asia and ceramics and silk from China also found their way into the steppes and were traded onward to other groups. The nomads were active intermediaries, and caravan routes crossed the steppes in all directions; thus, by way of the nomads, Greek ornaments made their way to the Caucasus and vases from Achaemenid Persia reached the foothills of the Ural Mountains.

IN EXCHANGE FOR LIVESTOCK, LEATHER AND WOOL, THE NOMADS RECEIVED TEA AND GRAIN FROM THE SETTLED REGIONS.

Horse-racing, organized but sometimes carried out under fairly freestyle rules, is a traditional part of any celebration or meeting on the steppe. Children as young as six compete in the races.

The valley of the Urd, Dund and Holt Rivers, where we spent a fitful first night under canvas, is still an important pathway for migrating nomads, and we passed one family as we resumed our journey the next day. First came a small herd of horses driven by two young men; next, the head of the family and his wife, leading camels laden with provisions and possessions, including tents, bedrolls and cooking pots; finally came some cattle and many sheep, herded by young women and children. All were on horseback.

This gilt funerary mask, 26 centimeters (10¼") across, was assembled from separate sheets of bronze. It may have been placed on the face of the deceased as part of a shamanistic ritual intended to ease the journey to the world of the dead, a very ancient cultural tradition in steppe cultures. The mask, a product of the Khitan people, dates from between 907 and 1125 and is in the Zhelimu League Museum.



Deerstones were erected for unknown purposes by Bronze Age or early Iron Age steppe-dwellers. The images are laboriously pecked into the stone, and are consistently stylized, showing curving antlers and circular eyes.

Mongolia is the only steppe nation where large numbers of people still lead a nomadic existence and practice a culture particularly suited to a mobile way of life. Sheep provide most of their needs: skins for clothing; mutton, milk and cheese for food; dung for fuel; and wool for the manufacture of the characteristic felt *ger*s, or yurts, that are the nomads' homes.

Although many ancient movements of peoples took place along the Nomad Route, today's nomads—technically transhumants—travel mainly between summer and winter grazing grounds, and the distances they move are short compared to past migrations. In the middle of the sixth century, for example, a people called the Juan-juan, driven from Mongolia by the Turks, ultimately migrated as far west as today's Hungary.

The Turks too eventually migrated westward, leaving behind in Mongolia the first written record of steppe history and many stone statues—actually anthropomorphic stelae—erected in honor of their leaders. Five of these statues we encountered near Hovd, as our convoy began its climb through the mountains separating the eastern from the western steppes. (See *Aramco World*, March/April 1994.) Our destination that day was Huhner Camp, a primitive mountain resort nestled among pine trees in an alpine valley watered by a foaming stream, high in the Altay Mountains—and very low in temperature. With an average elevation of 1580 meters (5180 feet), Mongolia is one of the highest countries in the world, and Siberian winds make the eastern steppes chilly even in summer.

As the milder temperatures and higher rainfall in the West made for far richer pastureland than in the East, nomads tended to migrate westward. Any greener grass, however, was likely to belong to someone else—for nomads had a strong concept of tribal ownership of land-use rights—and attempts by newcomers to graze others' land often led to war. Typically, then, the movement of one people precipitated a domino series of other migrations. In the second century BC, for example, the Hsiung-nu—known in the West as Huns—expelled the Yüeh-chih from western China. The retreating Yüeh-chih pushed the Sakas into Bactria, where they contributed to the downfall of the Greek kingdom established there by Alexander the Great (See *Aramco World*, May/June 1994), causing much of the Bactrian population to take refuge in India.

Some of the earliest evidence of these westward migrations are so-called deerstones: upright stone slabs engraved with images of the sun; of weapons, including daggers and bows; and of stylized running deer, with bird-like mouths, large round eyes and elegant curving antlers. Common features of the Mongolian landscape, deerstones were erected singly or in groups by Bronze Age and early Iron Age inhabitants of the steppe; they may have been tombstones, boundary stones delineating tribal pasturelands, or hunting signs of some kind. A few stones with similar deer carvings have also been found in Kazakhstan and in the Caucasus and Black Sea regions, indicating that this ancient art form—apparently first created in Mongolia in the second millennium BC—was carried westward by migrating nomads.

We first came across deerstones at Ehbulag, en route from Huhner Camp to the former fortress town of Javhlant, modern Uliastay, one of the most remote *aymag* capitals of Mongolia. Hemmed in on all sides by mountains, set at an altitude of 1750 meters (5740 feet), Uliastay was once the headquarters of the commander-in-chief of the Chinese Manchu forces that occupied Mongolia in the 18th century—an occupation that lasted until the Manchu Dynasty itself fell in 1912.

Mongolia's rocky ribs show through their thin covering of soil and grass. Though poor farmland, the steppe provides excellent pasture—and remarkable scenery.

The hillsides around Uliastay are dotted with *ger* communities, as are the outskirts of most Mongolian cities, for most Mongolians still live at least part of the year in these traditional tent-like structures of felt—or often, nowadays, of canvas laid over felt—stretched over light, collapsible wooden frames. Building materials are scarce on the steppe, and the *ger*, besides being portable, is ideally suited to Mongolia's rigorous climate: Its round, squat shape can withstand strong winds—unlike the "modern" one-man tents we were camping in—and the felt insulates well and is impenetrable by rain or snow.

The next leg of our journey took us over the spectacular Zagastain Pass through the Hangayn Nuruu, the country's second-highest mountain range. Stopping at its crest, our drivers walked three times around a large cairn and added more stones to the pile, which also included rusting tin cans, animal bones, empty bottles and pieces of iron pipe with torn strips of cloth tied to them. This, we were told, was an *ovoo*, a kind of shaman shrine, and this ritual too was meant to ensure us a safe journey.

Shamans once had considerable influence among the nomadic tribes of the steppes, acting as healers, judges and priests, and shamanism remained the main religion of Mongolia until the 16th century. But in their drive for empire, the Mongols came into contact with Islam, which slowly established its spiritual ascendancy over the temporal conquerors. The Golden Horde of the Volga and the Il-Khan Mongols in Persia became Muslims, followed somewhat later by the Chagatai Khans of Central Asia. The Mongol Yuan dynasty of China adopted Buddhism, and in Mongolia itself Lamaism—a strain of Buddhism that incorporates shamanist elements—became dominant. Today shamanism is a marginal cult, though some of the superstitions surrounding it are still widespread.

Descending Zagastain Pass, we drove along the fertile Ider Göl valley, populated by semi-sedentary nomads who, in addition to *ger* encampments, built more permanent structures such as corrals and log cabins in which they kept animal skins and supplies. There were also impressive signs of past habitation: earth and stone mounds, some 10 meters high and 30 meters wide (33 by 100 feet) that had been erected over ancient graves of the nomadic aristocracy.

Excavation of these so-called *kurgan*s in recent

THOUGH INDIVIDUAL LANDOWNING WAS NOT IN THEIR TRADITION, THE NOMADS HAD A STRONG CONCEPT OF TRIBAL OWNERSHIP OF GRAZING RIGHTS.

This heavily glazed ceramic censer may have been offered in tribute to rulers of the Jin dynasty, founded by the nomadic Juchen tribes of Manchuria, by the Northern Song dynasty whom the Jin conquered in 1127. The inscription refers self-deprecatingly to the "Lesser Song" and includes the date 1129. The censer was found outside Huhehaote in 1970, and is now in the Inner Mongolia Museum.

decades has shed new light on the life of the early nomads. The most remarkable find was in a series of *kurgan*s at Pazyryk, in the Altay region of Russia. Although the graves had been robbed long ago of anything of intrinsic value, the permafrost had preserved a large collection of cloth, felt, wooden and leather artifacts that, in a different climate, would have decayed to nothing. Among them were Persian pile carpets and delicate Chinese silks, concrete evidence of long-distance trade as early as the fifth century BC.

Chinese silk was first transported to the Eurasian hinterland by migrating nomadic tribes such as the Yüeh-chih as they retreated westward before the pressure of the Hsiung-nu. From there it spread to Europe by way of the Scythians: Silk fabrics, and silk fringes sewn onto woolen garments, have also been found in sixth- and fifth-century BC graves in what are now Greece, Germany and Luxembourg. And recently, strands of silk thread of Chinese origin have been found dressing the hair of an Egyptian mummy that is dated firmly to about 1000 BC. Evidently, much more remains to be learned about trade on the Silk Roads.

The expansion of the Hsiung-nu empire significantly increased trade and other contacts between East and West. Along the Nomad Route, the artistic and cultural products of the Hellenic Near East were delivered to the Hsiung-nu aristocracy, and wool fabrics, tapestries and embroideries were brought from Sogdiana, Bactria and Syria. Along a southward extension of the route to China, silk cloth, lacquerware and other luxuries from the Han Empire moved in the opposite direction.

Making felt for gers *is in part a horseback activity. After the washed, wet wool is well beaten down into a mat, it is tightly rolled in a stitched-together sheet of leather, tied up, and dragged across the steppe. The pounding compacts the woolen mass into felt.*

We enjoyed comparative luxury ourselves the next two nights, staying at a tourist encampment of traditional Mongolian *ger*s pitched on a picturesque river bank at Ih Uul Sum. Each *ger* contained five beds ranged around the wall, brightly painted wooden tables and stools, bedside cupboards, a washstand and a stove. Young women from the nearby town served us hot meals prepared in an adjacent trailer, including fish fresh from the river for breakfast. Some of us even managed a hot shower, the first and last of our trans-Mongolian journey.

Our stay at Ih Uul Sum was all too brief; soon we were battling sleet and icy winds through the steep Solongat Pass. We spent a cold and hungry night at Terhiin Tsagaan Lake when our valiant mobile kitchen—as well as the baggage truck with our extra clothing—failed to arrive. Their road had been flooded by a swollen stream, and we were forced to light fires to keep warm and break into our emergency supplies of dried fruit and nuts.

Although we had been scheduled to spend another night under canvas by the lake, we decided to compensate ourselves by moving into the nearby town of Horgo. Our enterprising hosts found Wheeler and me a room in a local hotel that possessed two critical virtues: It was warm, and—at the equivalent of 70 US cents a night for the two of us—the price was right.

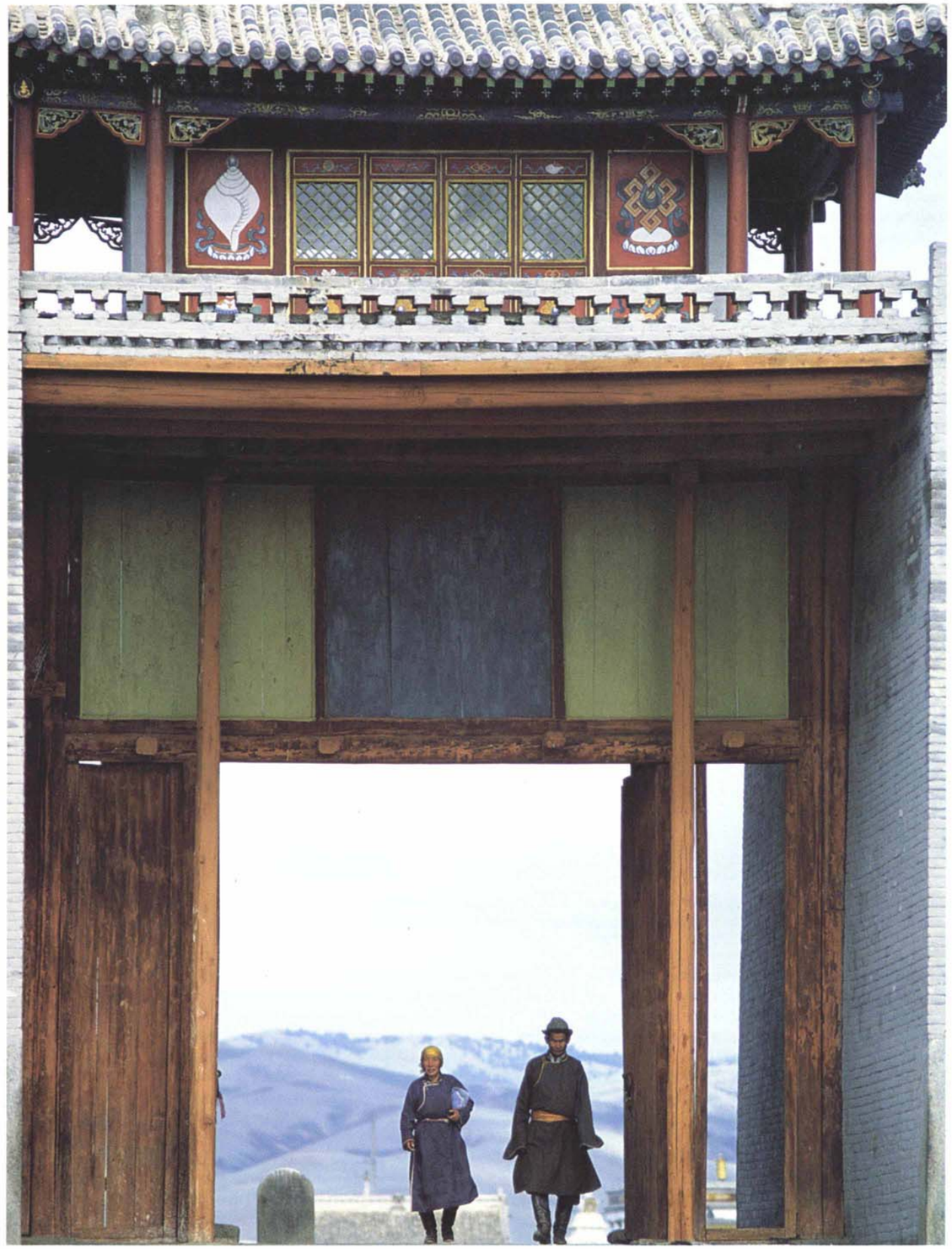
Emerging the next day from the Hangayn Nuruu range, we reached Tsetserleg. Sited picturesquely on a grassy plateau 1700 meters (5600 feet) above sea level, the town grew up around a 16th-century monastery, most of whose buildings serve today as a museum complex. We strolled through Tsetserleg's street market, though there was precious little to buy. From 1921, when the Soviet army helped the Mongolians shake off Chinese control, until 1992, when Mongolia shook off Soviet control, the country had been a client state of the USSR, useful as a military buffer against China. Mongolia's economy was entirely dependent on that of the Soviet Union. With the disintegration of the USSR, however, subsidies ceased and sure markets evaporated; Mongolia found itself obliged to make the difficult transition from an essentially colonial economy to an independent national one in a world without subsidies. It took an important step in that direction in mid-1996, when what had been the democratic opposition won 50 out of 76 parliamentary seats, defeating the communist government elected in 1992.

Tsetserleg's market did yield us a large, handmade metal ladle that I intended to use on the rest of our journey to make bathing in Mongolia's shallow rivers easier, if not warmer. But at Undursant, where we next pitched our tents, it was much too cold to even think about bathing. Instead we watched a dazzling display of horsemanship as local herders rounded up horses scattered across surrounding grasslands.

The ancestors of these men, riding ponies like these, once conquered China, India, Persia and part of Palestine, and the steppelands as far west as Hungary. Padded tunics and boots are still appropriate dress, but only the hat at right is traditional.

Steppe-dwellers are still horse riders *par excellence*, typically starting to ride at the age of four, if not earlier, and taking part in grueling long-distance races from the age of six. The nomads' military strategy of the past was based entirely on equestrian maneuvers; at the same time, they perfected the art of archery, and were in fact sometimes referred to as "the archer tribes." Their national sports today are still war-oriented: wrestling, archery and horse-racing.

This hammered-gold decoration 22 centimeters (8½") high was once fitted to the front of a wooden saddle used by a young Mongol noblewoman of the 13th or 14th century. Instead of a pommel, Mongol saddles have a "front cantle," as in photo at left, which this plaque covered. The decoration, now in the Inner Mongolia Museum, shows a reclining deer and a background of entwined peonies.



By the fifth century, horse-riding Turkic tribes controlled much of the steppe, carving out a huge nomad empire stretching as far west as the Black Sea. Control over the Central Asian trade routes meant control over the lucrative silk trade between China and the West, and the Turks concluded treaties with the Persian and Eastern Roman Empires and provided security for caravans traveling across Central Asia. They made their headquarters in the Orhon River valley—a traditional locus of power in the steppe—along which we now made our way to the ruins of Karabalghaun. This was Mongolia's first walled city, built by the Uighur Turks as their capital after they emerged victorious, in 745, from a three-cornered power struggle among tribes of the Turkic empire.

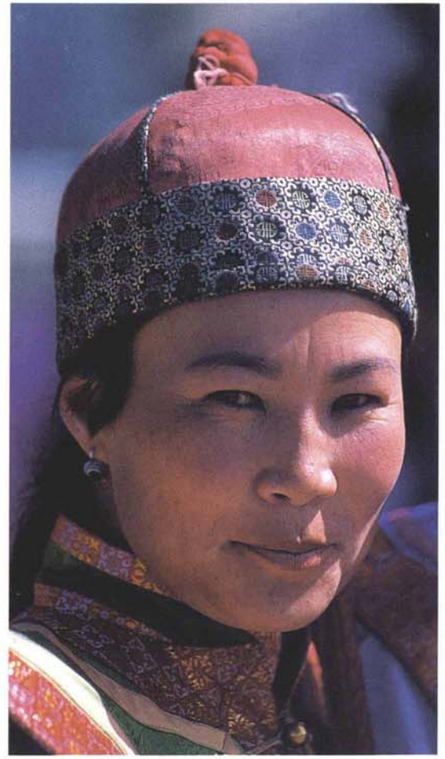
Less than a century later, in 840, Karabalghaun was sacked by another Turkic people, the Kyrgyz (See *Aramco World*, May/June 1996), but its ruined fortifications still rise from the surrounding grasslands, and stone pillars, marble carvings and ceramic artifacts found there indicate that the Uighurs enjoyed a standard of living unparalleled in medieval Central Asia. That sophistication, and the centralized power that made it possible, were not to reappear on the steppes until well after the rise of the Mongols began some two centuries later.

In fact, it was not until after the death of Genghis Khan in 1227, when the Mongol Empire was well on its way to reaching its zenith, that the Mongols began to build their own capital on a site that their great leader had chosen. Like the Uighurs, they too built in the Orhon Valley, about 40 kilometers (25 miles) downriver from Karabalghaun, and they named the city Karakorum. The name lives on in the nearby present-day town of Harhorin, and for a few days we too made our headquarters there.

Construction of Karakorum began during the reign of Genghis Khan's successor and third son, Ögödei, who was named *khagan*, or great khan, by a pan-Mongol assembly, or *kiriltay*, in 1229. But it was not until the reign of Möngke (1251–1259), the son of Genghis Khan's fourth son, Tolui, that Karakorum became the true center of the Mongol Empire. It was a small, cosmopolitan town where one could meet Muslims, Christians and Buddhists, or trade with Arabs, Chinese and Europeans, for besides being an administrative center, Karakorum was also an important intersection on the Silk Roads.

Contemporary travel accounts give lively descriptions of the town. The Franciscan monk William of Rubrouck, ambassador of the French king Louis IX, visited Mongolia in the middle of the 13th century; he found Karakorum "not as large as the village of Saint Denis"—its population in fact never exceeded 10,000—but he was greatly impressed by the khan's palace, which, he wrote, was built with a central nave and two aisles, like a church. In his book *Travel to the East*, Friar William describes a large artificial tree placed at the entrance of the palace. Devised by William Buchier, a Parisian sculptor living in Karakorum, this showpiece was made of silver, and "had at its roots four lions of silver, all belching forth white mares' milk … and gilded serpents, twined round the tree, from which flowed wine; *caracosmos*, or clarified mares' milk; *bal*, a drink made with honey; and rice mead."

The palace of the khan and his entourage was surrounded by a high wall; nearby were the palaces of court officials. The town itself had two mosques, a church and Buddhist temples, and was divided into a quarter for the Muslims, where there were bazaars and many traders, and a quarter for the Chinese, who were mostly



A design of entwined honeysuckle and peonies runs around this flower-shaped gold cup, 12 centimeters (4.75") across, and over its handle. The cup, now in the Inner Mongolia Museum, dates from the 13th or 14th century, and resembles the "ladles with thumb-rests" that Marco Polo described in the courts of Genghis Khan and Kubilai Khan.

Above, traditional costume in Hovd. Opposite: Travelers who reached Karakorum, the Mongol capital and the terminus of the Nomad Route, probably entered the city through an imposing gate like this reconstruction.

KARAKORUM, A SMALL, COSMOPOLITAN TOWN, WAS NOT ONLY AN ADMINISTRATIVE CENTER BUT ALSO AN IMPORTANT INTERSECTION ON THE SILK ROADS.

Curved lotus flowers, blooming Chinese crabapple and peonies decorate this gold cup, 12.5 centimeters (5") tall, also from the 13th or 14th century and now in the Inner Mongolia Museum.

A compound bow, with a pull of some 70 kilograms (160 lb.) and a range of more than 180 meters (600'), was the Mongol warrior's primary weapon, and archery, as a sport, remains important in Mongolia today. Wrestling tournaments, with multiple simultaneous matches, shown at left at the Nadam Festival, also draw enthusiastic crowds.

craftsmen. The town was surrounded by a mud wall with four gates. Grain was sold at the eastern gate, sheep and goats at the western one; at the southern gate, oxen and wagons were sold, and at the northern gate, horses.

Little now remains of Karakorum save scattered stones and a stela, believed to be from one of the town's two mosques, inscribed in Arabic with a verse from the Qur'an.

With the creation of the Mongol Empire, the Eurasian trade routes benefited from the organization of an official road system that linked Mongolia with Europe as efficiently as it interconnected all parts of the empire: the routes of the Mongol *yam*, or mounted courier service, which included traditional Silk Roads trade routes. Possibly based on a Chinese concept, the *yam* was organized by Genghis Khan and improved by Ögödei, and proved to be not only an important tool of control and governance but also a great catalyst of trade. Merchants were allowed to use the facilities of the *yam*, entrepot towns grew up around the post stations, and security along the routes was such that, in an oft-repeated claim, a young woman could walk the nearly 8000 kilometers (5000 miles) from one end of the empire to the other carrying a golden dish on her head without fear of being molested. The system was based on a series of relay stations about a day's journey apart where wells were dug, grain was stored and cattle pastured, and horses were stabled.

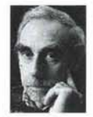
Among the greatest beneficiaries of the *yam* were Muslim merchants from Persia and Central Asia, who were the most active in developing trade throughout the Mongol Empire. The main West-to-East route began in Mongol-ruled territories in Russia and proceeded east across the steppe north of the Aral Sea and south of Lake Balkash. Crossing the Chu and Il Rivers, it then proceeded—as we had done on our journey—through the Altay Mountains and the Hangayn Nuur range to Karakorum, a distance of some 4800 kilometers (3000 miles).

In the 13th century, Kubilai Khan (1260–1294), grandson of Genghis Khan and Möngke's second brother, conquered China. Departing from his ancestors' principle that "the people of the felt-walled tents" should live as nomad warriors, taking tribute from the settled world but never joining it, he moved his capital from Karakorum to Khanbalik, site of present-day Beijing. Though he continued to rule over all the Mongol khanates, most of his revenues came from China, and he used foreigners—including Marco Polo—to counterbalance the pervasive Chinese administrative bureaucracy he inherited. Mongolia itself soon reverted to a collection of feudal fiefdoms, and Karakorum fell into decline. In its ruins today is a circular stone floor 20 meters (65 feet) in diameter, all that is left of a huge *ger* set up in 1658 for a *kiriltay* of the Mongol khans.

In this century, during Mongolia's seven decades of communist rule, all reference to Genghis Khan was outlawed: Communist regimes deeply mistrusted pre-socialist popular heroes. But with the return of democracy the ban was lifted, and today the 13th-century ruler is very much back in vogue, in spirit and in commerce, lending his name, for example, to the nation's first five-star hotel.

We eventually caught up with the spirit of Genghis Khan in Ulaanbaatar—the coldest capital on earth, where temperatures annually plunge to 25 below zero centigrade (–77°F)—at the Nadam Festival, which marks the end of the harsh winter and the onset of spring. A fur-hatted Genghis Khan impersonator, flanked by fierce-looking warriors on stocky steppe ponies, led the national Nadam parade around Ulaanbaatar's main square.

Today, Mongolian scientists are searching for the undiscovered tomb of Genghis Khan using satellite-mounted remote-sensing technology. There is much debate, however, over what they should do if they find it. Some Mongolians want the tomb scientifically excavated, hoping to obtain more detailed knowledge of their country's history; others believe it should remain undisturbed. In the meantime, however, the search is expected to reveal more information about the Nomad Route across Mongolia and beyond, one link in the chain of trade connections that are the heritage of every nation.



John Lawton (left) and Nik Wheeler (right) have traveled across much of Asia on Aramco World *assignments. They respectively wrote and photographed the whole of the magazine's special issues "Islam's Path East" and "Muslims in China," and Wheeler photographed portions of "The Silk Roads," another issue written by Lawton.*

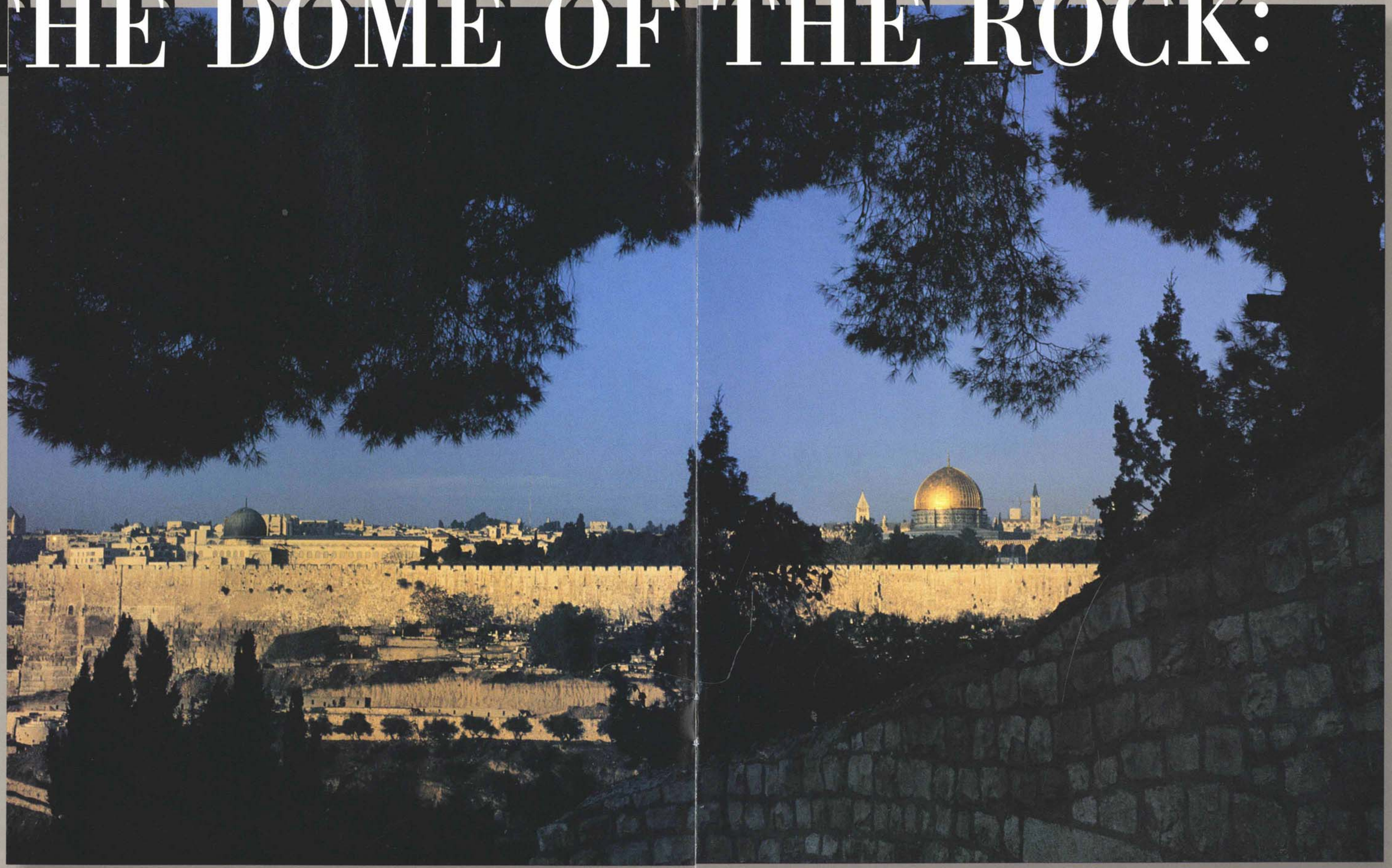
WEBSITES:

www.bluemarble.net/~mitch/monglinks.html
www.sfasian.apple.com/mongolia/

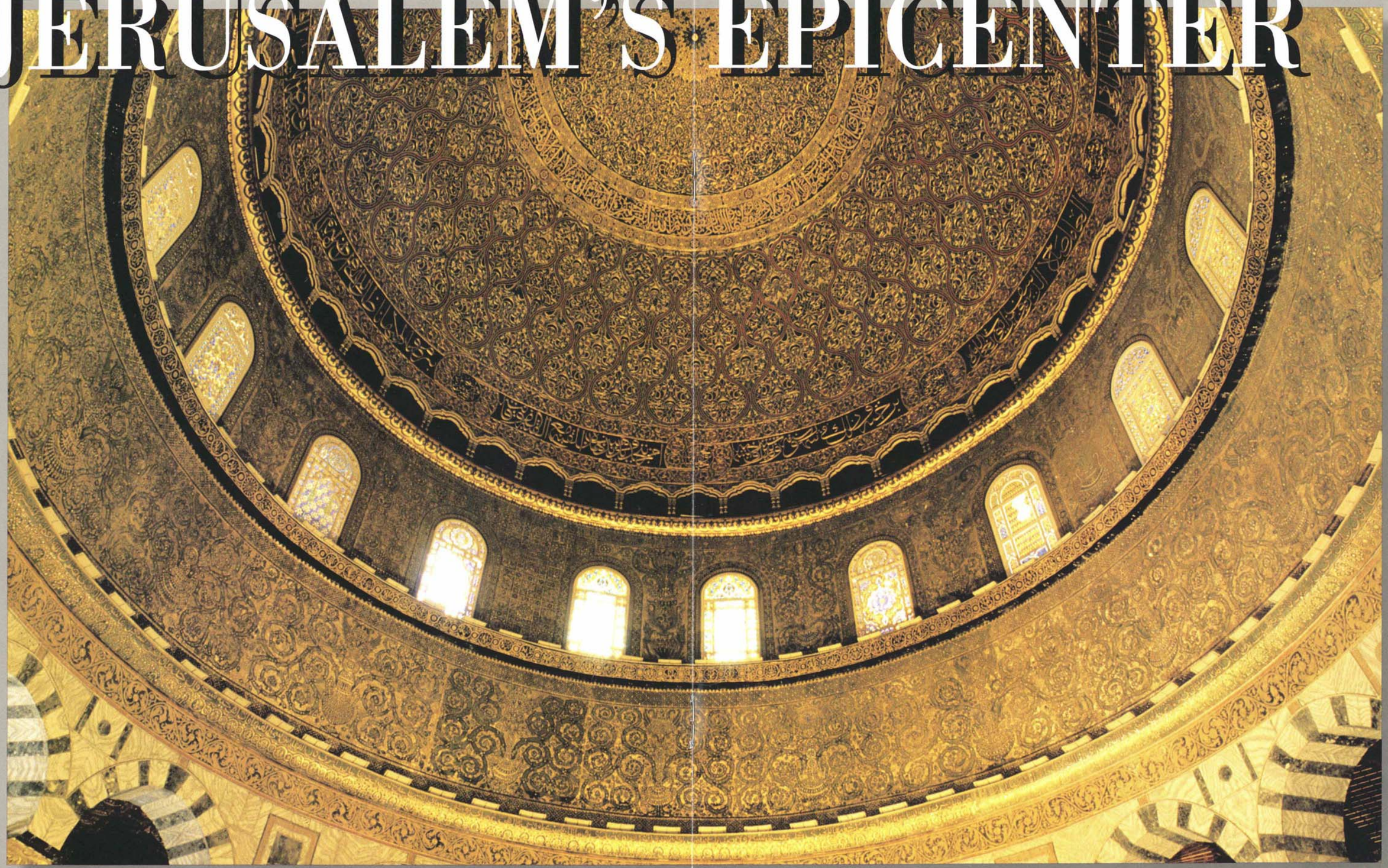
THE MOUNTED COURIER SERVICE WAS DEVISED AS A TOOL OF GOVERNANCE, BUT IT PROVED ALSO TO BE AN IMPORTANT CATALYST OF TRADE.

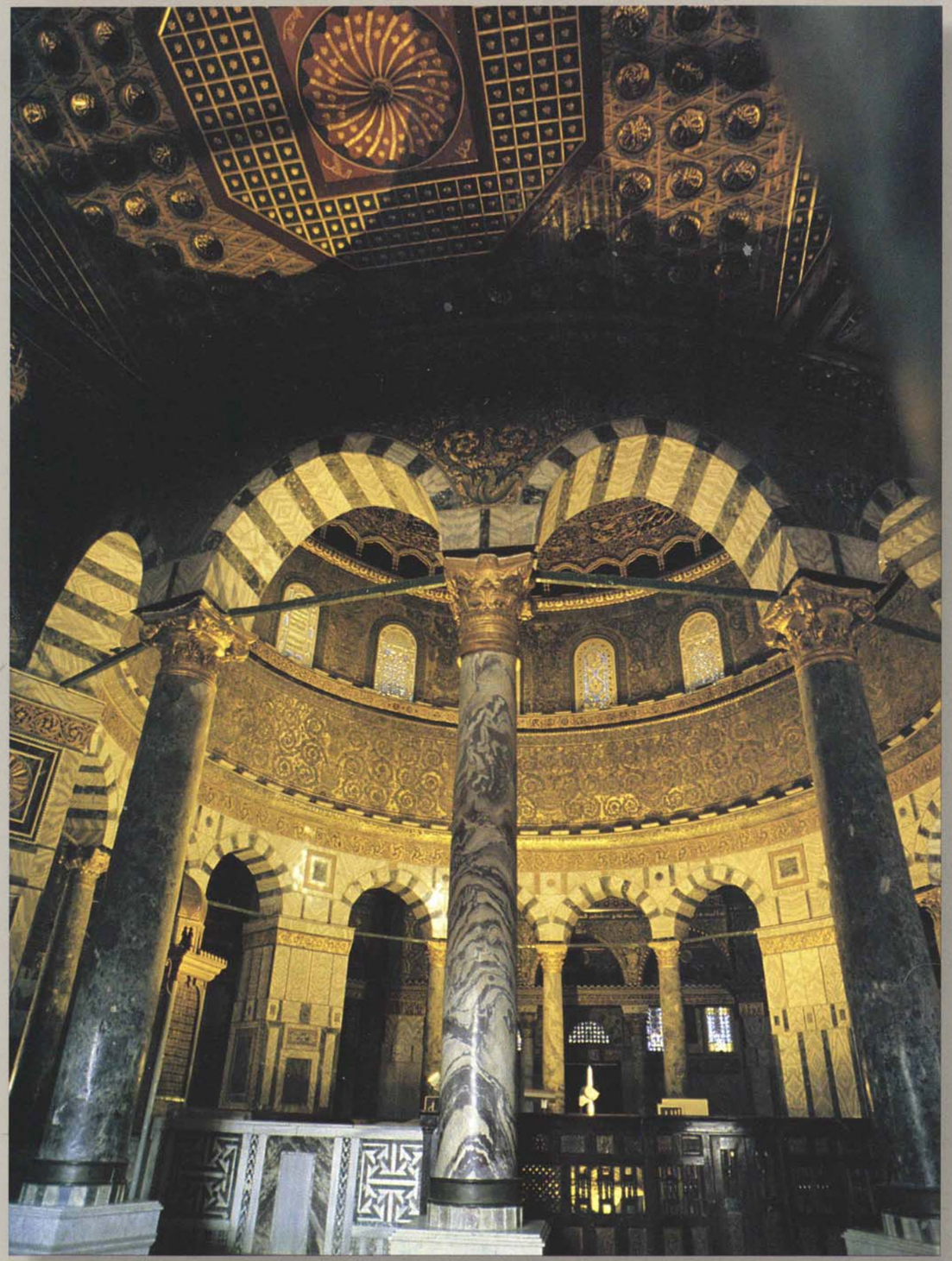
A tank truck of gasoline is a necessity for a motorized convoy of scientists, but the sun has not yet set on the horse as the center of the nomads' life on the steppe.

THE DOME OF THE ROCK:



JERUSALEM'S EPICENTER





Written by Walid Khalidi
Photographed by David H. Wells

Islam is the third great monotheistic religion of the world. Its followers, about a billion people, constitute the majority of the population in some 50 countries. Like Judaism and Christianity, Islam has rich and deep associations with the city of Jerusalem.

Islam is an Arabic word which means "submission"; in its religious context it means submission to the will of God alone. The message of Islam was delivered by the Prophet Muhammad, who was born in Makkah, in present-day Saudi Arabia, in the year 570 and died in 632. Such was the power of the divine message he preached that, within 100 years of his death in Madinah, Islam had spread across North Africa, into Spain and across the borders of France in the West, and to the borders of India and China in the East. (See *Aramco World*, November/December 1991.)

Very early in this period—in 637—the forces of Islam won Jerusalem from the Byzantine Empire, whose capital was in Constantinople, signing a treaty by which the holy city was surrendered to 'Umar ibn al-Khattab, the second caliph, or successor, of Muhammad. For the following 1280 years, except for the period between 1109 and 1187, during the Crusades, Jerusalem remained in Muslim hands. In 1917, during World War I, the British took control of the city Muslims call al-Quds, "The Holy."

To understand Jerusalem's position in Islam, we need to look at how Islam sees itself in relation to Judaism and Christianity, to which of course Jerusalem is also sacred.

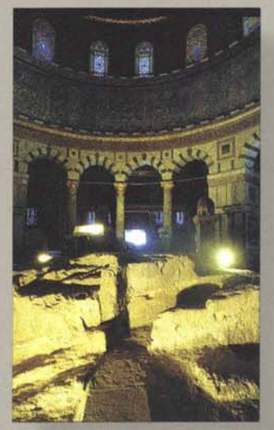
Islamic doctrine states that God has, since creation, revealed His teachings repeatedly to humankind through a succession of prophets and scriptures. The first of this line was the prophet Noah, according to many Muslim scholars; others believe Adam must be considered the first. But in this line of succession, Muhammad is the last, or "seal" of the prophets, and the teachings revealed to him are the culmination of all the previous messages. Muslims believe that the Qur'an, the literal word of God revealed to Muhammad, follows the Torah and the Gospels as God's final revelation. Thus the Qur'an accords great reverence to the Hebrew prophets, patriarchs and kings who received revelations from God and are associated with Jerusalem. Similarly, Jesus Christ is revered as one of God's most dedicated messengers, and Jerusalem, as the locus of much of his teaching, is further blessed by that association.

To Islam, then, Jerusalem is sacred for many of the reasons it is sacred to Judaism and Christianity, but in addition, it is sacred for specifically Muslim reasons. The most important of these is the Prophet Muhammad's miraculous nocturnal journey, or *isra'*, to *Bayt al-Maqdis*, "the house of holiness," in Jerusalem and his ascent from there to heaven—the *mi'raj*. These events are mentioned in a number of verses of the Qur'an, most clearly in the first verse of Chapter 17, titled *Al-Isra'*. Accounts of the Prophet's life supply the details. Led by the angel Gabriel, Muhammad traveled in one night from Makkah to the site of *al-masjid al-aqsa*, "the furthest mosque," on Mount Moriah, called the Temple Mount, in Jerusalem. The site derives its name from the temples and houses of worship built there over the millennia, including the temple of the prophet Solomon, the temple of Jupiter, the Herodian temple and the al-Aqsa Mosque.

There, Muhammad led Abraham, Moses, Jesus and other prophets in prayer. Then, from a rock on the Temple Mount, Muhammad was taken by Gabriel to heaven itself, to "within two bowlengths" of the very throne of God.

The spot from which the Prophet's ascent began was sanctified in

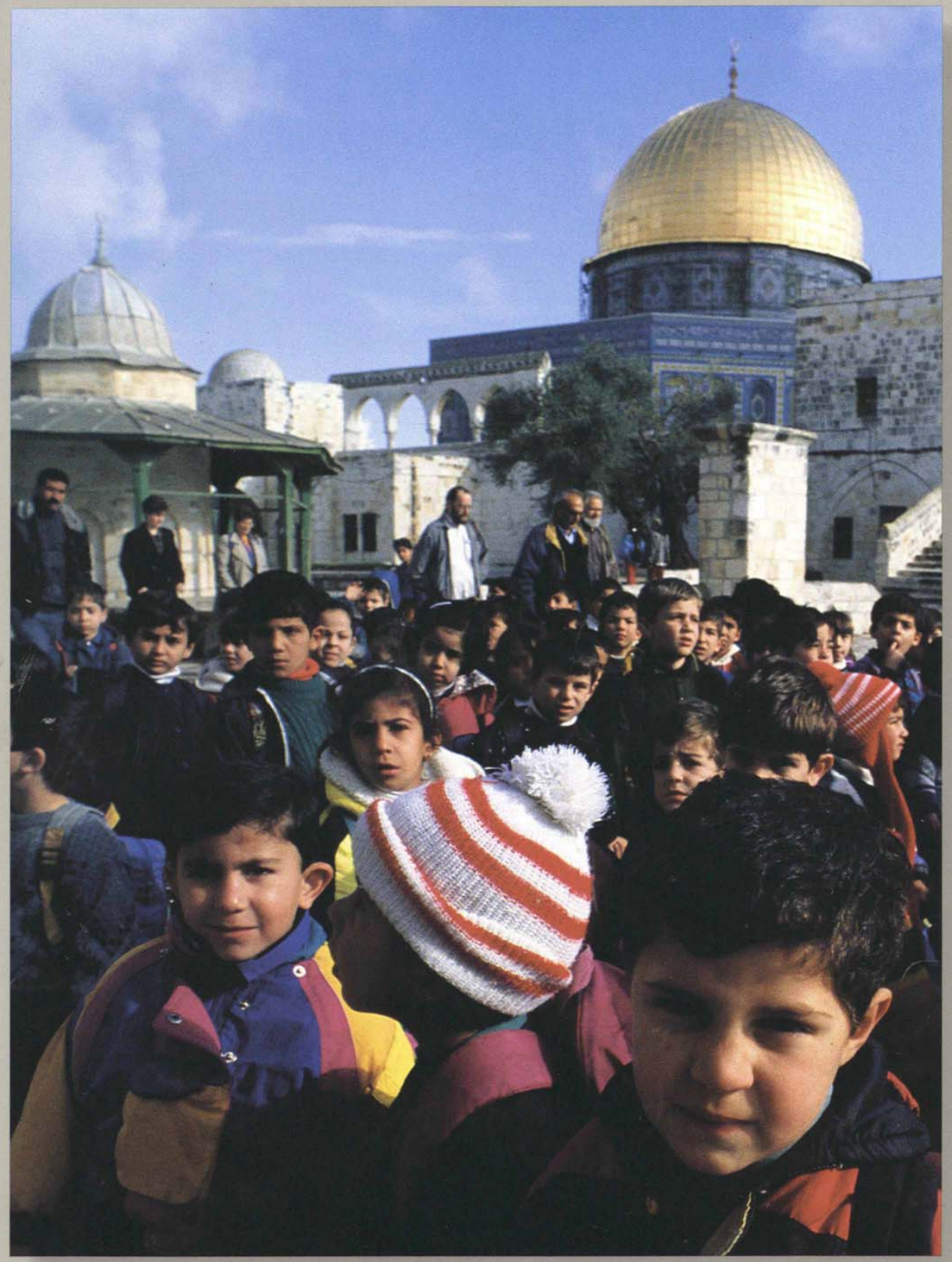
PETER SANDERS



The rock itself (above) is the spot from which the Prophet Muhammad began his ascent to heaven. Islam's second caliph, 'Umar, prayed near this spot after taking Jerusalem from the Byzantines, and Caliph 'Abd al-Malik had the Dome of the Rock built over it in the late seventh century, with four massive piers and 12 columns supporting the dome itself. Those supports define an inner and an outer ambulatory (opposite), each octagonal, that surround the rock. The design gives the structure what architectural historian Oleg Grabar calls "a harmonious airiness" that makes it possible to "perceive the whole building 'at a glance'."

Previous spread: The uppermost inscription in the dome is a Qur'anic verse that begins, "God, there is no god but He, the Living, the Self-Subsisting Eternal...." The lower inscription, above the windows, records the restoration of the building by Saladin in the late 12th century.

First spread: The early-morning sun has just caught the Dome of the Rock in its "noose of light" in this view of the eastern wall of the Old City of Jerusalem. The smaller, lead-colored dome to the left is that of the al-Aqsa Mosque.



Opposite, Palestinian school-children visit *al-Haram al-Sharif*, "the Noble Sanctuary," the name most Muslims use for the entire precinct, a trapezoidal platform on two levels, 491 meters by 310 meters (1610 by 1017 feet) in its longest dimensions. Behind them is the Dome of the Rock. The dome at left is that of the Fountain of Qasim Pasha; built in 1527, it is probably the oldest Ottoman structure in Jerusalem.

the eyes of Muslims by the *mi'raj;* the Qur'an refers to the prayer site as *al-masjid al-aqsa*. From Muhammad's journey evolved a vast body of Muslim devotional literature, some authentic and some uncanonical, that places Jerusalem at the center of Muslim beliefs concerning life beyond the grave. This literature is in circulation in all the diverse languages spoken by the world's one billion Muslims, most of whom to this day celebrate the anniversary of the *mi'raj*.

Jerusalem is also uniquely linked to one of the "pillars" of the Muslim faith, the five daily prayers. The earliest Muslims, for a time, turned toward Jerusalem to pray. A later revelation transferred the *qibla*, the direction of prayer, to Makkah, but to this day Jerusalem is known as "the first of the two *qiblas*." And according to Muhammad's teachings, it was during the *mi'raj* that Muslims were ordered by God to pray, and that the number of the daily prayers was fixed at five.

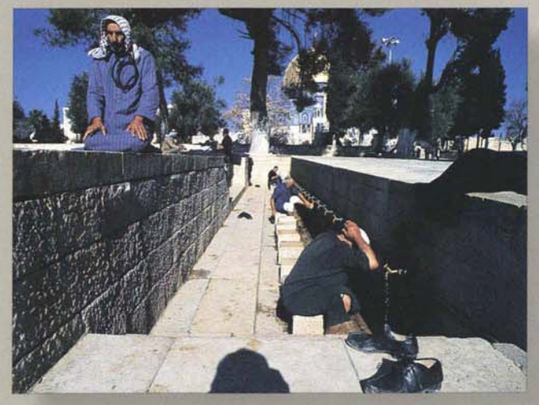
The center of Muslim power shifted, through the centuries, from one great capital to the next: from Madinah to Umayyad Damascus to Abbasid Baghdad to Mamluk Cairo and to Ottoman Constantinople. But after Jerusalem became part of the Muslim state in 637, whichever dynasty was in control of the city lavished it with care and attention in the form of public monuments: mosques, colleges for the study of the Qur'an and the traditions of the Prophet, hospitals, hospices, fountains, orphanages, caravansarais, baths, convents for mystics, pools and mausolea. This is why Jerusalem's Old City, within the 16th-century walls built by the Ottoman sultan Süleyman, strikes the modern-day visitor with its predominantly Muslim character.

Caliph 'Umar personally came to Jerusalem to accept the city's surrender from the Byzantines, and visited the site of *al-masjid al-aqsa*, known to some Muslims today as *al-Haram al-Maqdisi al-Sharif*, "the Noble Sanctuary of Jerusalem," or simply *al-Haram al-Sharif*. The site lay vacant and in ruins; 'Umar ordered it cleaned, and, tradition says, took part in the work himself, carrying dirt in his own robe. When the site had been cleansed and sprinkled with scent, 'Umar and his followers prayed there, near the rough rock from which Muhammad had ascended to heaven.

Two generations later, about 691, the Umayyad caliph 'Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan's Syrian craftsmen built in the same location the earliest masterpiece of Islamic architecture, the Dome of the Rock *(Qubbat al-Sakhra)*—the octagonal sanctuary, centered on the rock, whose golden dome still dominates the skyline of Old Jerusalem. 'Abd al-Malik's son al-Walid, who ruled from 705 to 715, built the second major monument, the al-Aqsa Mosque, also on the Temple Mount.

The octagonal plan of the Dome of the Rock may not have been accidental. Cyril Glassé, in his *Concise Encyclopedia of Islam*, points out that "the octagon is a step in the mathematical series going from square, symbolizing the fixity of earthly manifestation, to circle, the natural symbol for the perfection of heaven.... In traditional Islamic architecture this configuration symbolizes the link between earth...and heaven...." Nor is it coincidence that the elegant calligraphy that encircles the structure inside and out—240 meters, or 785 feet, of it—includes all the Qur'anic verses about the prophet Jesus. "The calligraphic inscriptions," writes Glassé, "recall the relationship between Jerusalem and Jesus...; and the architecture, above all the octagonal form supporting a dome, is symbolic of the...ascent to heaven by the Prophet, and thus by man." Mount Moriah, with the Dome of the Rock at its center, is thus "the place where man, as man, is joined once more to God...."

History, tradition and symbolism intersect in this building, whose presence suffuses Jerusalem.



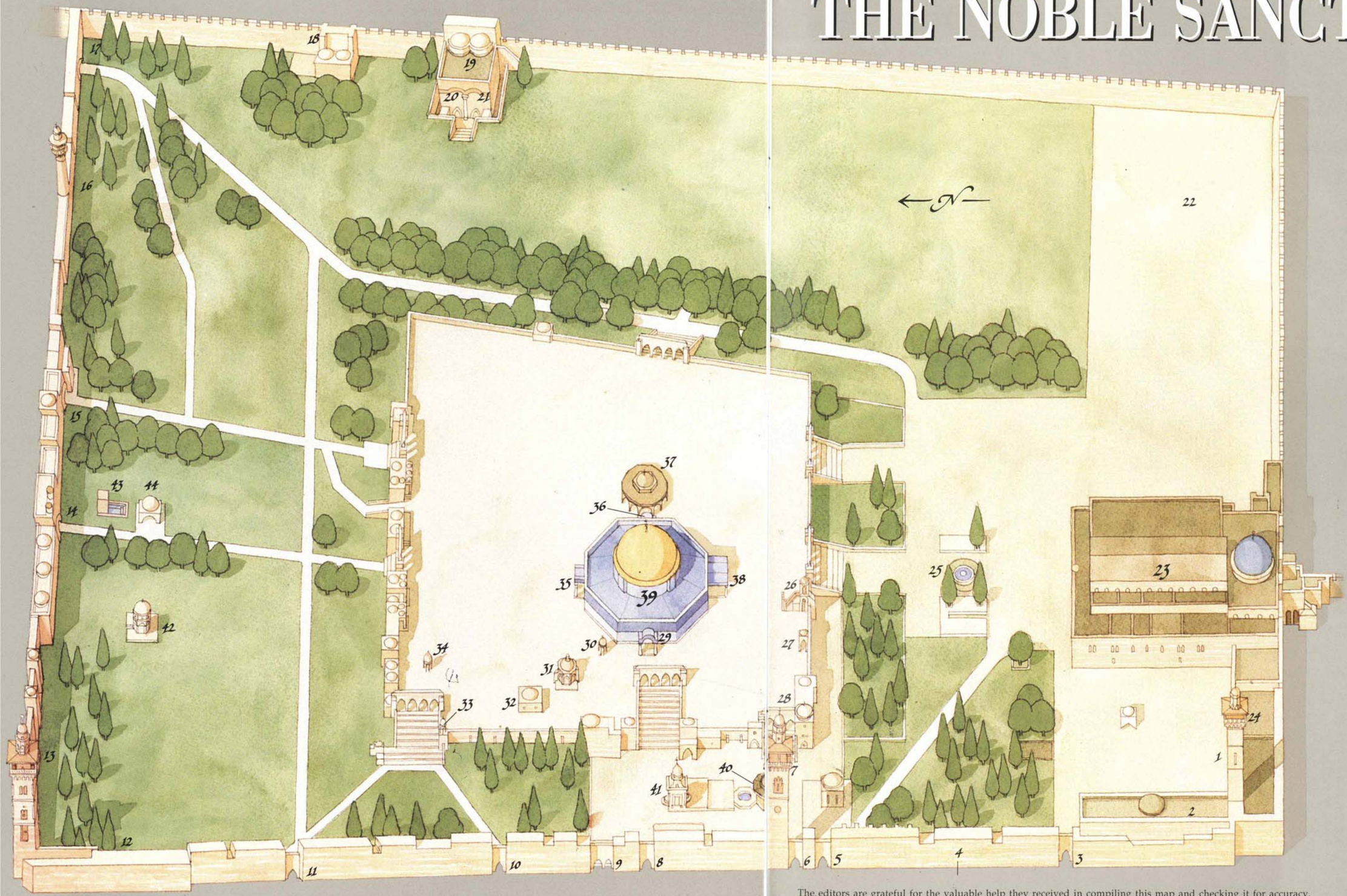
Islam requires physical cleanliness and mental preparation for prayer, and all mosques provide a place where worshipers can wash—here, a row of brass taps in the side of a raised platform between the Dome of the Rock and al-Aqsa Mosque. On special occasions, particularly during the month of Ramadan, the entire upper and lower platforms of *al-Haram al-Sharif* are covered with as many as 250,000 worshipers. The man at left is in the prescribed kneeling prayer position.

Next spread: The portals of al-Aqsa, seen through the archway in front of the south-facing Qibla Gate, one of the Dome of the Rock's four entrances.

Dr. Walid Khalidi was educated in London and Oxford and has taught at Oxford University, the American University of Beirut and Harvard University. Since 1982, he has been a senior research fellow at Harvard's Center for Middle Eastern Studies. Members of his family have served Jerusalem as scholars, judges, diplomats and members of parliament since the late 12th century.

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.*

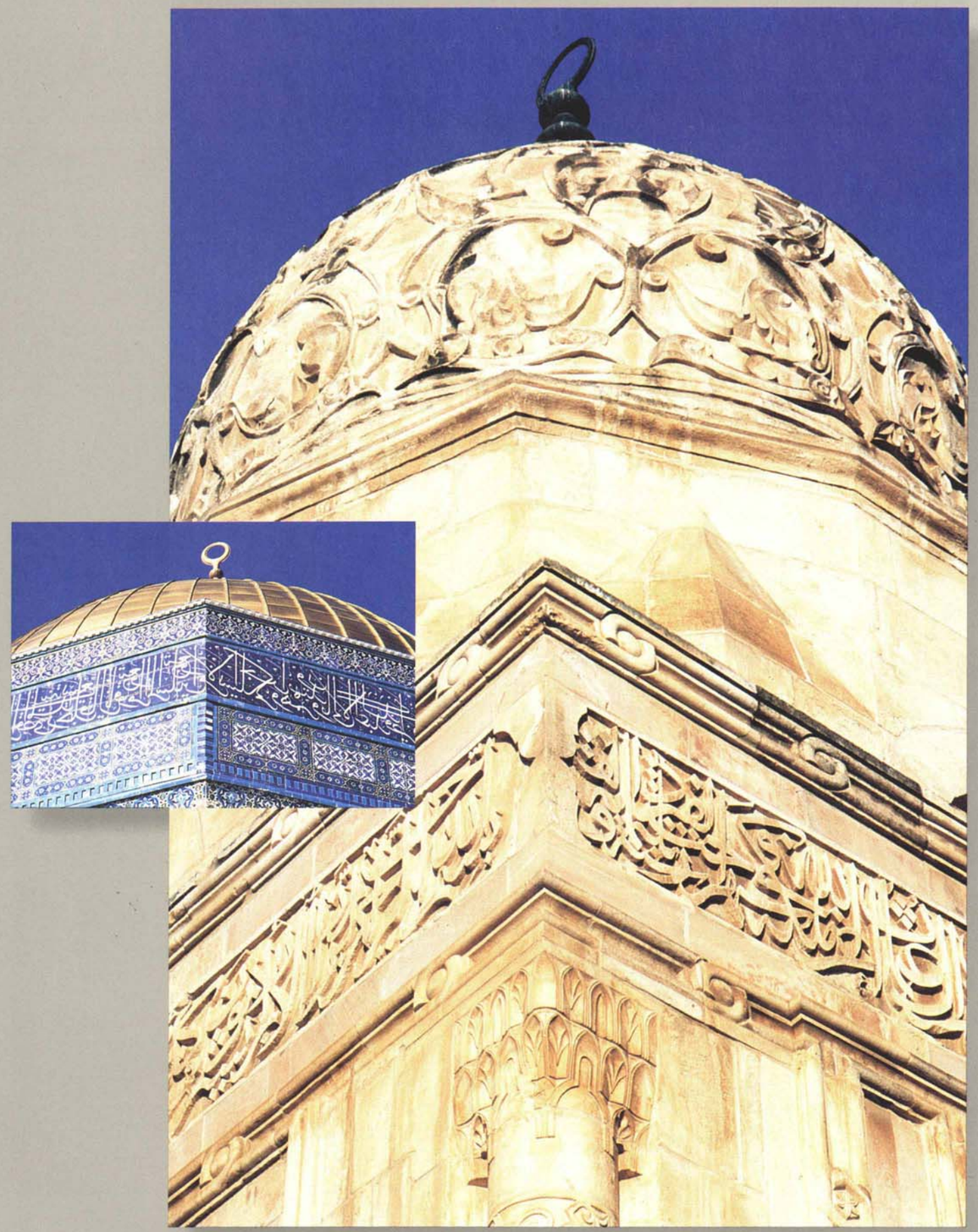
THE NOBLE SANCTUARY

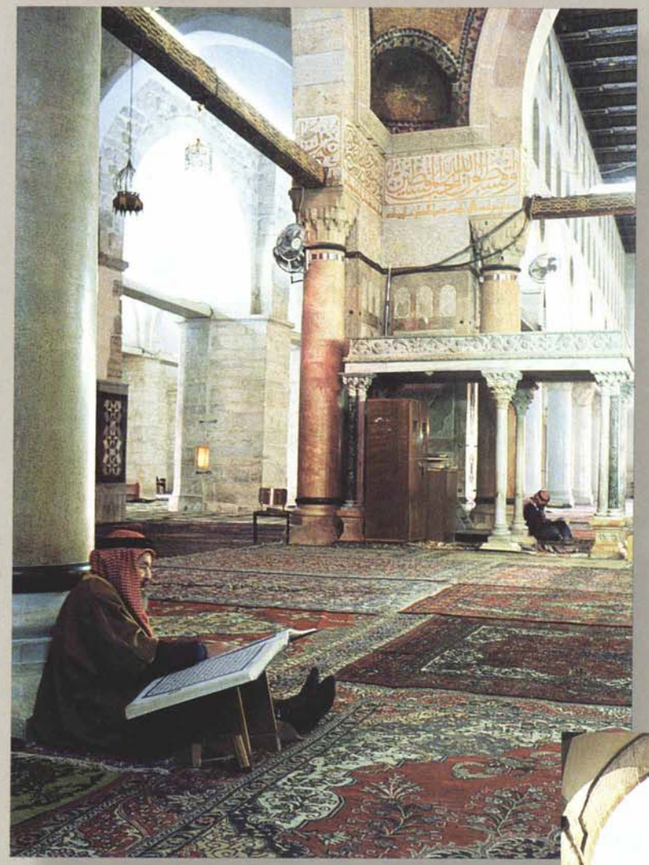


1 Al-fakhriya Minaret
2 Muslim Museum
3 Gate of the North Africans
4 Western ("Wailing") Wall
5 Gate of the Chain
6 Gate of Peace
7 Minaret of the Chain
8 Gate of Ablution
9 Gate of the Cotton-Sellers
10 Gate of Iron
11 Gate of the Watchman
12 Gate of the Ghawanimah
13 Ghawanimah Minaret
14 Gate of Darkness
15 Gate of Remission
16 Minaret of the Tribes
17 Gate of the Tribes
18 "Solomon's Throne"
19 Golden Gate
20 Door of Repentance
21 Door of Mercy
22 "Solomon's Stables" (underground)
23 Al-Aqsa Mosque
24 Women's Mosque
25 Ablution Fountain
26 Pulpit of Burhan al-Din
27 Dome of Yusuf
28 Library
29 Western Door
30 Dome of Gabriel
31 Dome of the *Mi'raj*
32 Dome of the Hebronite
33 Dome of St. George
34 Dome of the Spirits
35 Door of Paradise
36 Door of David
37 Dome of the Chain
38 *Qibla* Door
39 Dome of the Rock
40 Kasim Pasha Fountain
41 Qa'it Bey Fountain
42 Dome of Solomon
43 Sultan Süleyman Fountain
44 Dome of Those Who Love the Prophet

The editors are grateful for the valuable help they received in compiling this map and checking it for accuracy. Thanks to architectural photographer Saïd Nuseibeh, whose book *The Dome of The Rock*, published by Rizzoli, appears in September; to Jeff Spurr of the Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture and the Visual Collections of the Fine Arts Library at Harvard University; to Ahmad Nabal of the Aga Khan Visual Archives, Rotch Visual Collection, Massachusetts Institute of Technology; and to Dr. Walid Khalidi.

Watercolor by Tom McNeff.

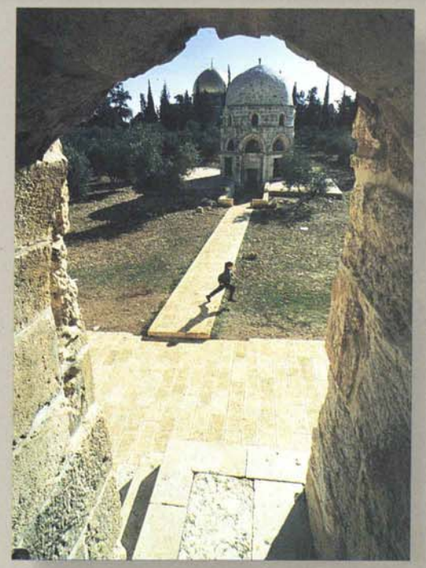




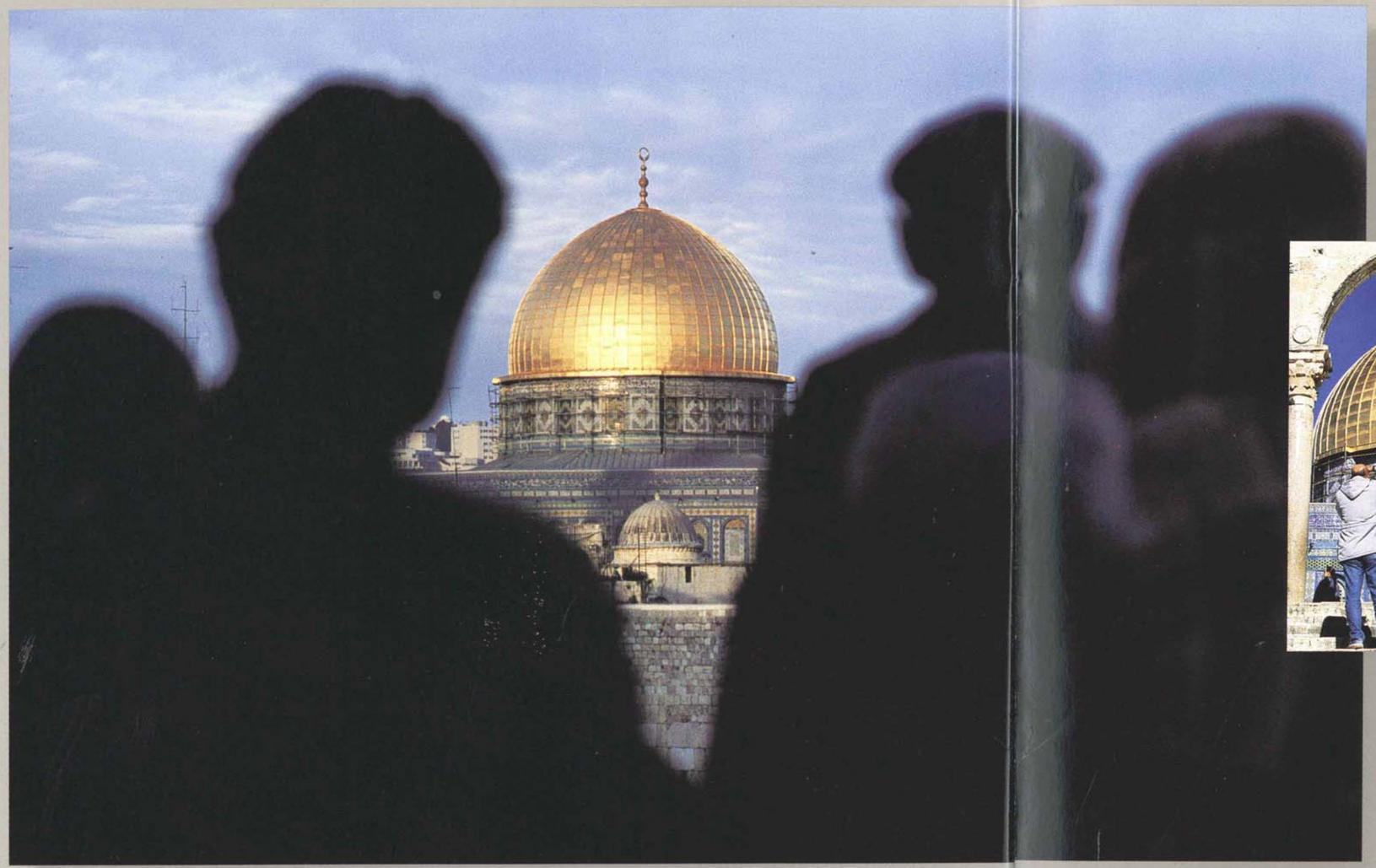
Left: After his recapture of Jerusalem in 1187, Saladin reconsecrated the al-Aqsa Mosque to Islam and redecorated its interior. Affluent Muslims have followed suit through the centuries, and the carpets in the mosque, like the oversize Qur'an being studied by the unshod worshiper at left, are pious donations to al-Aqsa.

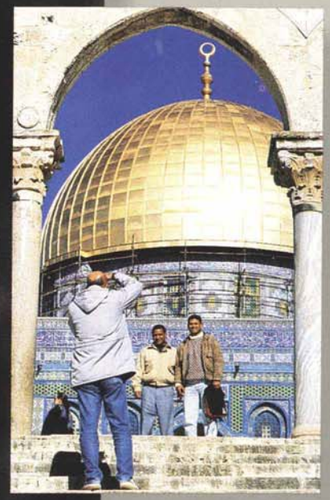
Opposite: Arabesque carving in low relief ornaments the dome of the Fountain of Qa'it Bay, built in 1482 on the *Haram's* lower platform by the next-to-last Mamluk sultan. Inset: It was the Ottomans in the 16th century who, in the course of another renovation of the Dome of the Rock, covered its entire exterior with spectacular ceramic-tile mosaic, including a band of Qur'anic inscriptions that surrounds the entire building.

At left, two women linger in a sunny archway in the west portico of the *Haram*. The stairs behind them are one of the eight flights of steps, each topped by a multiple archway, that lead from the Haram's lower platform to the upper one, on which the Dome of the Rock stands.

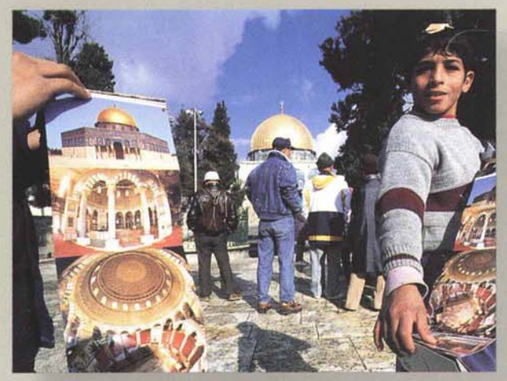


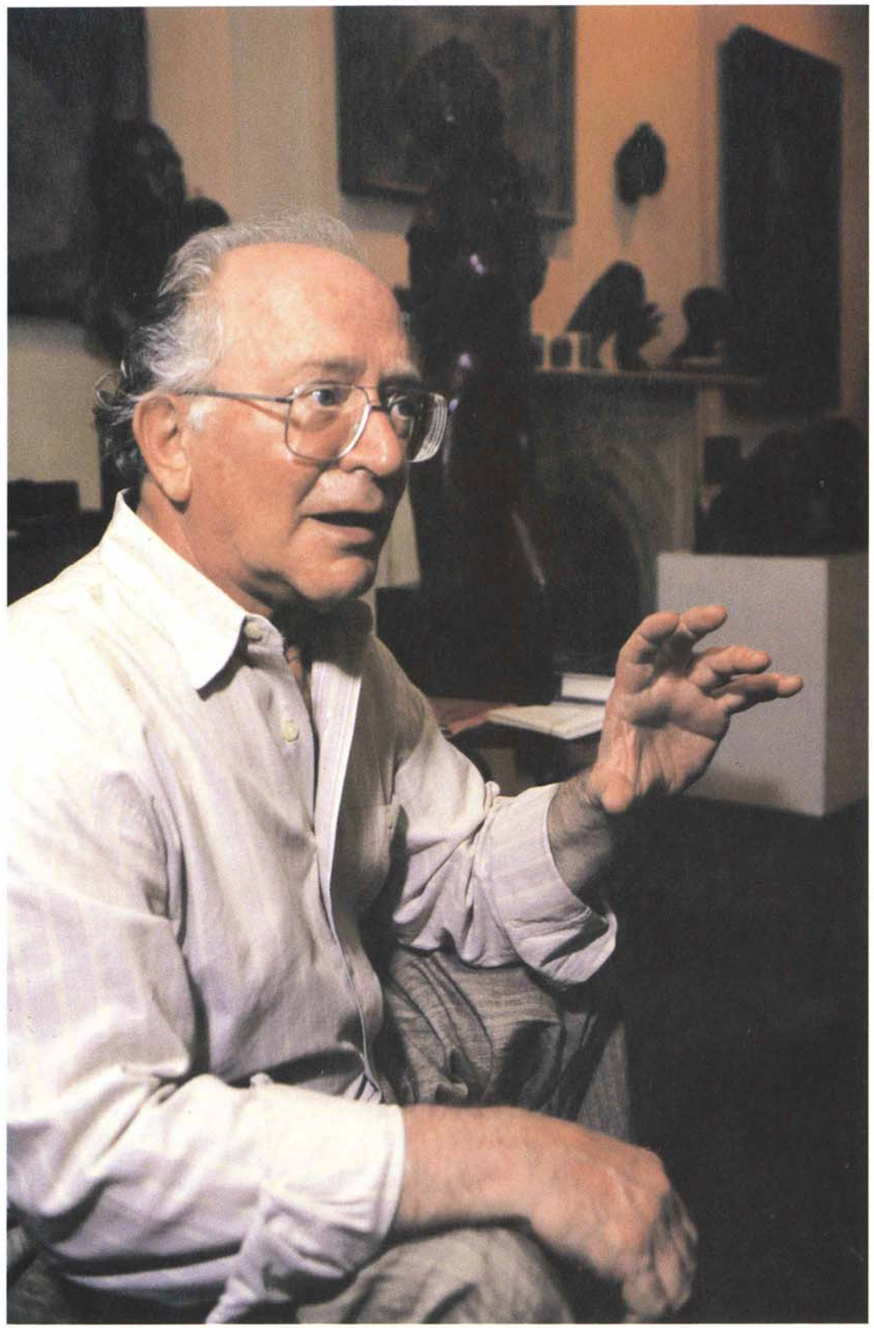
Far left: Late for school and taking a shortcut, a young girl dashes across the *Haram's* lower platform. The sanctuary is surrounded by the Palestinian residential quarters of East Jerusalem, and daily life flows through its venerable precincts today as it has for 13 centuries.





As the visual epicenter of Jerusalem, and because of its deep religious and historical associations, the Dome of the Rock draws Muslims from all over the world. But the building, Islam's first architectural masterpiece, has also become a ubiquitous symbol of the city and, indeed, of Palestinian identity. Visitors have themselves photographed in front of the Dome of the Rock (at left); the building appears, incongruously, on keychains and baseball caps, refrigerator magnets and calendars, and on the postcards young boys offer to tourists (below, far left). Painted plaster plaques of the Dome of the Rock are hung on walls of Muslim homes and businesses throughout the city (below); the shrine appeared on trilingual banknotes issued by the Palestine Currency Board during the British mandate; and it is the centerpiece of the nameplate of the Palestinian Arabic daily *Al-Nahar* (below left).





TALENT TO SPARE

Written by
Laura White
Photographed by
Ilene Perlman

The year was 1922, and in the crowded Syrian-Lebanese immigrant community of Boston's South End, a boy was born who family and neighbors knew would be remarkable. He had been born with a caul—that is, with part of the fetal membrane over his head—and, since at least Roman times, superstition in the Mediterranean world has held that the caul is a sign of special talents.

The baby's cousin, 39-year-old poet Kahlil Gibran (See *Aramco World*, March/April 1983), asked to be the boy's godfather. Thus bonded with his young namesake, Gibran—who would publish *The Prophet*, his most famous work, a year later—began to encourage his godson's talents. It was the beginning of a remarkable life.

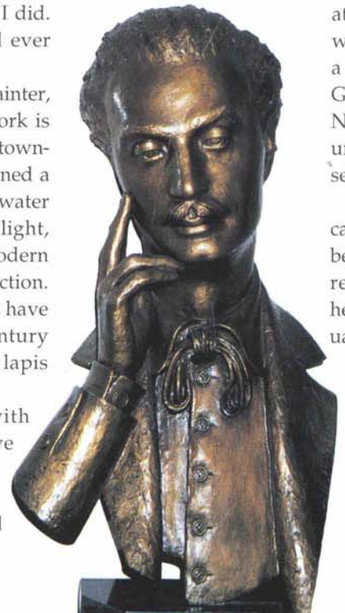
"As a child, I used to crawl around my cousin's studio," says the younger Gibran, now 73. "When I was about seven, he promised me a five-dollar gold piece if I could dismantle a clock and put it back together in working order. I did. That gold piece was the shiniest thing I'd ever seen," he adds with a laugh.

Today, Kahlil Gibran is a wide-ranging painter, sculptor, inventor and craftsman whose work is not easily categorized. Living in a Victorian townhouse in his native South End, he has designed a thermite-fueled furnace that gives off only water and oxygen, and an aluminum tripod so light, sleek and functional that the Museum of Modern Art in New York bought three for its collection. He makes violins that world-class musicians have played, and has built a *vihuela*, a 17th-century Spanish stringed instrument, inlaid with lapis lazuli and mother-of-pearl.

"Everything interests me," he says with enthusiasm, talking with large, expressive hands.

By his mid-20's, Gibran had mounted several one-man shows of his paintings, and had turned down an award that would have given him three years of study in France. Though he was artistically restless—and eager to distinguish his work from that of his famous cousin, who also painted—he wanted to remain part of the town that he feels is a part of him.

"ART IS THE EXPRESSION OF EXPERIENCES," SAYS GIBRAN. "MINE ARE VARIED; SO IS MY ART." ABOVE, FIVE BAS-RELIEF BRONZE PLAQUES BY GIBRAN CALLED "SCULPTURES OF DREAMS AND SHADOWS"; BELOW, HIS PORTRAIT BUST OF HIS COUSIN AND GODFATHER, POET KAHLIL GIBRAN.



He turned to sculpture. When he found he could not afford the thousands of dollars it cost to cast his work in bronze, he took up the welder's torch. One of his most famous sculptures, a gaunt figure of a desert dweller which he titled "John the Baptist," was welded from baling wire Gibran salvaged from a Boston wharf. Like much of his work, Gibran calls that sculpture spiritual rather than religious. "Artists mirror their time. My Pietà isn't a religious theme—it's about a mother losing a son," he explains.

A founding member of the Copley Society, Boston's oldest cooperative gallery, Gibran has donated an annual scholarship for artists affiliated with the Society. He continues to exhibit his work and recently has returned to painting after a long hiatus. Although he has won two Guggenheim Fellowships and has exhibited at New York's Whitney Museum and other museums around the world, he says he works for himself, not for recognition.

"There is such an abundance of art that no one can view it all. It has to be for yourself, or you'd be too depressed about who pays attention, who respects your work," he says. "People say art helps refine humanity. I say it refines the individual in the process." ⊕

Laura White is a free-lance journalist who lives in Boston.

Ilene Perlman, also Boston-based, has photographed for Aramco World *on three continents.*

The Dye That Binds

Written by Caroline Stone
Photographed by Ilene Perlman

Printed cotton bandanna handkerchiefs, with their characteristic white pattern on a red ground, were a sartorial feature dear to my grandfather's generation in England. They used to blossom from the breast pockets of tweed jackets or lurk in the back pockets of flannel trousers, to be hauled forth with sufficient circumstance to impress the young—I was small then and the bandannas were large—and used with a flourish to polish spectacles or wipe moustaches.

Much later I become aware that, in the United States, bandanna handkerchiefs had an even broader and more enduring appeal, thanks in no small part to Hollywood, which helped make the bandanna a symbol of the American West. No cowboy was without a bandanna around his neck; no baddie failed to use his white-on-blue or white-on-red bandanna to mask his identity when doing evil. Even today, shops in the American West sell bandannas, often packaged with instructions for the perplexed suggesting 30 different ways they can be used.

But when I lived in the Middle East, it never occurred to me that the bandanna might be a distant cousin of the red-and-white, black-and-white or green-and-white checked *shmagh*, or head cloth, worn almost universally by the men of the Arabian Peninsula, and widely in much of the Middle East. (The better-known term *ghutra* is reserved for the all-white headcloth.)

It was while visiting India that I realized that these two everyday, practical cloths may both have originated with the often elaborate tie-dyed textiles of Rajasthan and Gujarat, the two states of northwestern India. There, for well over a thousand years, wool and silk, as well as the more conventional cotton, have been dyed in patterns made up of white dots on a colored ground. Scarlet predominates to this day for saris, veils and turbans. Dark blue and green, also common colors in Western bandannas, are the next favorites.

The origins of *bandhani*, as the tie-dye process is called in Sanskrit, are obscure. The earliest written mention in Indian sources is in the *Harshacarita*, "The Deeds of Harsha," a seventh-century Sanskrit text that recounts the life of a king. There, the

Deft hands (top) tightly wrap waxed cotton thread around a pucker of material to protect that spot from the dye. Semitransparent cartoons (above left) are used as guides to keep the patterns regular, and also help to preserve traditional designs that might otherwise be forgotten. Bundles of bandhani *(above right) await a second bath in the dye (below), which will deepen their color to the intensity typical of the process.*

cloth is referred to as *pulaka bandha*, literally "dye-tie." Some scholars believe the technique may have originated in Central Asia and passed from there to India and Japan, the two countries in which the practice achieved both popularity and high levels of craftsmanship. The earliest surviving examples of *bandhani* cloth, however, as opposed to descriptions of it, date back no further than the 18th century; they are from tombs in Central Asia.

Bandhani is used by nearly everyone throughout western India, but its manufacture is primarily a Muslim specialty. Nowhere is this more so than in the Kutch region of northwestern Gujarat. Here, women work in the privacy of their homes.

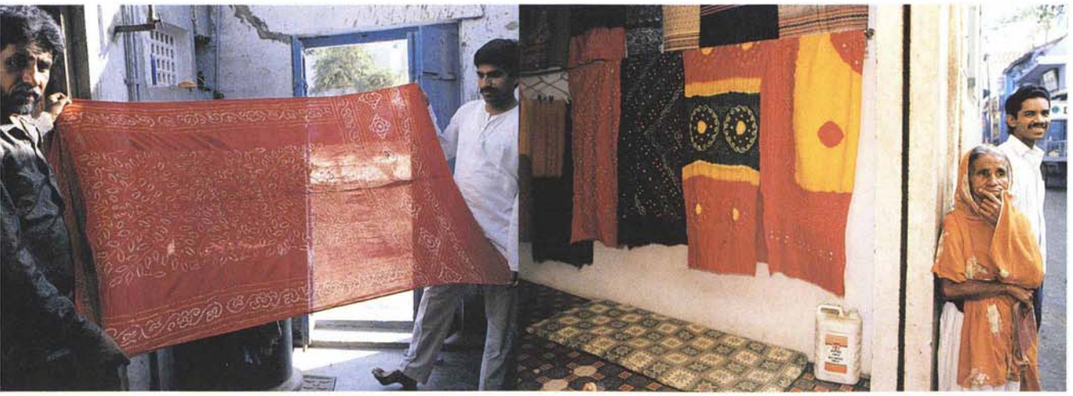
First, they lightly stamp the cloth with the design to be worked. Each traditional pattern has a name: One roundel, for example, is called *indhoni*, "the resting place of the milk pot," another is "five flowers," and a large central circle is called "full moon." A teardrop shape often used at the corners of a piece is known as "mango." Several other patterns are named after jewelry: "Forehead ornament," "drop earring" and so on. Borders may be "hooks," "waves," "flowering vine" or "peacock's feather." The small dots used to fill in spaces may be called "five grains."

The designs on fabrics the Muslim artisans make for their own use are entirely geometric, in spite of the names. Those fabrics made either for non-Muslims communities or for export, however, are often covered with representational figures, such as parrots, peacocks, elephants, lions and dancers. These figures most often appear as repeated motifs in lines or circles, or worked into a checked pattern.

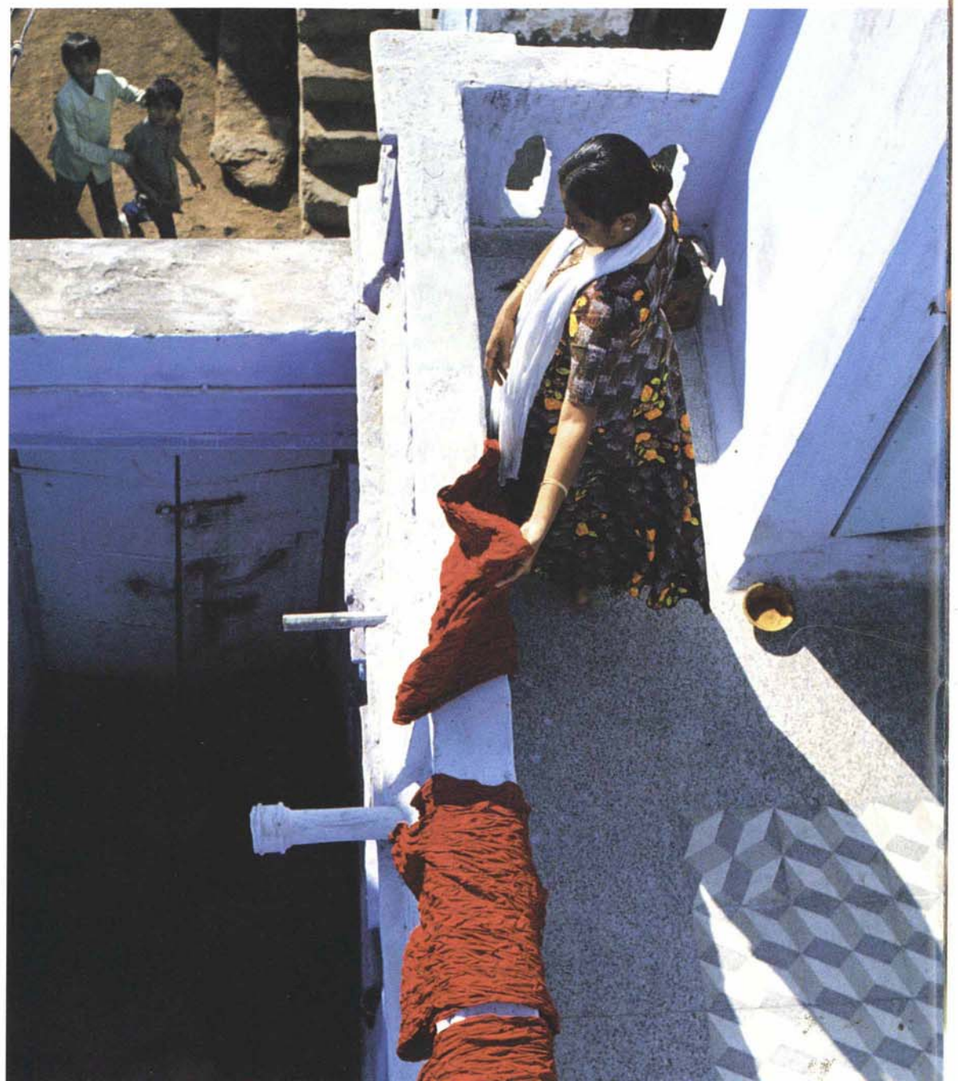
Making a piece of *bandhani* is complex and time-consuming, so its various stages have in some cases become family or individual specialties. It is not unusual for a fine piece to be woven in one home, tied in another, dyed in a third and finished and embroidered in a fourth.

This is frequently the case, for example, with the magnificent *abha* wedding tunics, with their matching *odhni* head veils, made in Kutch. Here a fine silk is completely covered in tie-dye as fine

Bubbling aniline dye (above left) cannot penetrate the tiny thread-wrapped puckers characteristic of bandhani *work. Cumulatively, they look like fine smocking (above), but they will be undone as carefully as they were wrapped, and, if an additional color is planned, they will be replaced by a new, equally elaborate, pattern.*



Draped on clotheslines or balcony railings (below), bandhani *cloth must dry thoroughly before the wrapping is undone. Then, intense colors and complicated patterns of undyed dots emerge (above), very reminiscent of the bright bandannas of the American West.*



as the famous Japanese *higenoko* ("little fawn") work. The colors are generally black and scarlet with touches of yellow. The neck, sleeves and hem are finished with lavish rows of gold braiding, or sometimes with bands of gold brocade, as are the borders of the veil. The effect is extraordinarily rich and striking, and fine pieces, old or new, are understandably valuable.

To produce a complicated piece of *bandhani*, the pattern is laid out, and the woman—who will have grown the nails of her thumb and little finger unusually long to speed her work—bunches minute sections of the material, according to the printed cartoon, and ties each bunch with waxed cotton thread. Differently shaped knots each produce a different effect, and the knots also have their own names, such as "shell," or *jalebi*, after the square sweet.

After tying, the cloth is dyed. Then, as necessary for each additional color, it is retied and redyed. Although red-and-black remains the most traditional combination, red-and-white, dark-green-and-red, indigo-and-red, red-and-yellow and black-and-cream are also great favorites.

The red is supposed to be as brilliant as possible, and some towns are thought to get a better shade than others, perhaps because of differing water supplies. The dyes were, until recently, all natural: madder and cochineal for red, indigo for blue, jasmine and saffron for yellow. Now, chemical dyes are commonly used, sometimes with excellent effect.

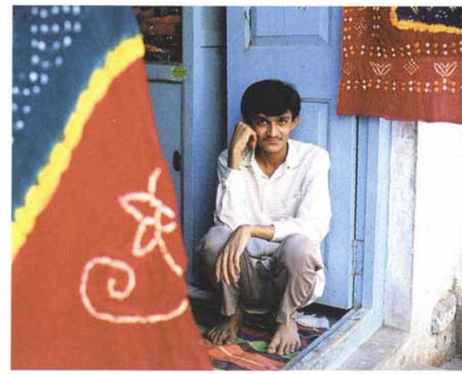
As well as *bandhani*, Kutch produces block-printed fabrics in red and black patterns that appear to imitate the more expensive *bandhani* work. Made principally for the rural market, these block-printed fabrics have been widely exported for centuries. They have been found both in Egypt and in the port towns along the Red Sea dating back as early as the 15th century.

Were these printed materials ordered because they were less expensive than the tie-dyed ones? Or did disingenuous traders try to pass off the cheaper versions in the hope that merchants so far from India might not notice the difference? We will almost certainly never find out, but it is interesting to speculate that this false-*bandhani* cloth may be the origin of the *shmagh*—also called *quffiyyah* in the Levant—so popular to this day among men throughout the Middle East.

Another theory, which seems to have the support of etymology, is that the *shmagh* derived from the veil worn by upper-class Ottoman women, which was called a *yashmak*. But *yashmak*s did not usually have a dyed or woven pattern, and though the word may have moved from Turkish to Arabic, it does not follow that the design of the Arab headcloth followed that path too. The false-*bandhani* origin of the design seems more likely to me.

Should it be true, then the design of the bandanna that symbolizes the American West and that of the *shmagh* that is characteristic of the Middle East may both have come, ultimately, from the homes of the predominantly Muslim artisans of Gujarat and Rajasthan.

Cloth in bandhani *patterns, perhaps made by the ancestors of the Rajasthani and Gujarati Muslims who dye the same designs today, was traded at least as far as the Red Sea at least 400 years ago—and the craft was centuries old then.*



Inside back cover: *The pattern of wrinkles on a piece of* bandhani *cloth shows the tight bunching and puckering that created the design.*

Caroline Stone (left) writes about textiles, deals in them and organizes exhibitions from her home in Seville. Her latest book, Mantónes de Manila, *will appear in 1997. Free-lance photographer Ilene Perlman (right), based in Boston, has photographed for* Aramco World *in India, Somalia and the Comoro Islands.*

Events & Exhibitions

Æthiopia displays the utensils, accessories, clothing, and jewelry of African ethnic groups to give a picture of their history and culture. Royal Museum for Central Africa, **Tervuren, Belgium**, through September 21.

Second Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art highlights contemporary art throughout the region, accompanied by a conference and video festival. Queensland Art Gallery, **Brisbane, Australia**, September 27 through January 19.

Suzani: *Embroideries from the Oases of Central Asia* displays 11 wall hangings and bed covers that exemplify this exquisite tradition from present-day Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. Textile Museum, **Washington, D.C.**, September 27 through February 23.

Gerardo Mercatore: *On the Trail of Geographers and Travelers in the Marches* displays globes, astrolabes and other astronomical instruments to show part of the Arab-inspired scientific and cultural panorama of the 16th to 18th centuries. Palazzo Ducale, **Urbania (Pesaro), Italy,** through September 30.

Symmetry and Pattern: *The Art of Oriental Carpets* examines the conceptual underpinnings of design in Middle Eastern and other Asian carpets. Textile Museum, **Washington, D.C.**, October 4 through February 23.

Thundering Hooves: *Five Centuries of Horse Power in the American West* highlights the role of horse-and-rider in the US, which was influenced by traditions from Muslim Spain. **Kansas City [Missouri]** Museum of Science and History, October 5 through January 5.

The Royal Women of Amarna. Held in conjunction with the opening of the museum's permanent Amarna Galleries, this exhibit reveals the transformation of the Egyptian ideal of beauty during the Amarna period. Metropolitan Museum of Art, **New York**, October 8 through March.

Journey Through India shows 18th- and 19th-century paintings and prints of India by English artists, as well as watercolors by Indian artists commissioned by English patrons. Spink & Son Ltd., **London**, October 9 through November 1.

Seydou Keita, Photographer: *Portraits from Bamako, Mali* presents 24 portraits by the self-taught photographer. **Minneapolis [Minnesota]** Institute of the Arts, October 12 through January 3.

The Right to Write: *Calligraphic Works from the Collection of the Jordan National Gallery of Fine Arts* includes contemporary Arab works in a variety of media on calligraphic themes. Dalton Gallery, Agnes Scott College, **Atlanta**, through October 16. A symposium will be held September 27 and 28; call (404) 638-5090.

Teaching About the Arab World and Islam is the theme of teacher workshops cosponsored by the Middle East Policy Council in Washington, D.C., and conducted by AWAIR, Arab World And Islamic Resources and School Services of Berkeley. Confirmed sites include: **Dayton, Ohio**, October 16; **Clinton Township, Michigan**, October 24; **Tyler, Texas**, October 26; **Washington, D.C.**, November 23. For details, call (202) 296-6767.

Issues in Arab America: *The 29th Annual Convention of the Association of Arab-American University Graduates*. **Anaheim, California**, October 18 through 20. For more information call (913) 532-0444.

Rhythm and Form: *Reflections on Arabic Poetry* examines the ways contemporary Arab artists have incorporated poetic texts into their art. Hallie Brown Ford Gallery, Willamette University, **Salem, Oregon**, through October 18.

Armenia Between East and West displays illuminated manuscripts to present a history of Armenia from the fourth through the 18th century. Bibliothèque nationale de France, **Paris,** through October 20.

Mistress of the House, Mistress of Heaven: *Women in Ancient Egypt* uses more than 250 artifacts and works of art to look at the varied roles of women in ancient Egyptian society. **Cincinnati** Art Museum, October 20 through January 5.

Central Asian Weavings from the Russian Ethnographic Museum features more than 50 examples of renowned Turkmen weavings on view in the US for the first time. University of **Pennsylvania** Museum, **Philadelphia**, October 31 through January 5.

Centennial of Arab Cinema will screen more than 40 films in the most comprehensive presentation of Arab films in the US to date. Three public forums will be included. The Film Society at Lincoln Center, **New York**, November 1 through December 5. For more information call the box office at (212) 875-5601.

Arabic Characters: *Acquisitions of Calligraphic Art* presents the museum's growing contemporary collection. Museum voor Volkenkunde, **Rotterdam**, through November 17.

Islamic Textiles and Carpets shows 12 diverse pieces from the Marshall and Marilyn Wolf Collection. Metropolitan Museum of Art, **New York**, through January 5.

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

Crosscurrents in Chinese and Islamic Ceramics examines the varied and mutual influences of cultural traditions through objects from the 14th and 15th centuries. Freer Gallery, **Washington, D.C.**, through Spring.

The Egyptian Mummy: *Secrets and Science* explains X-ray and autopsy studies of mummies in light of Egyptian ideas of life after death. University of **Pennsylvania** Museum, **Philadelphia**, semi-permanent.

Islamic Art shows 15 rare and exquisite manuscript works. Freer Gallery, **Washington, D.C.**, indefinitely.

The Saudi Aramco Exhibit. Centered on the Arab-Islamic technical heritage, this permanent interactive, "learn-by-doing" scientific exhibit relates 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.

The head of a statue of Pharaoh Ramses II, ca. 1280 BC.

Splendors of Ancient Egypt is an unprecedented loan from the Pelizaeus Museum, one of the leading Western collections of ancient Egyptian art. The 200-piece exhibit offers a panoramic view of 4500 years of pharaonic history. To help visitors grasp these five millennia, displays of sculpture, jewelry, stelae and mummy coffins are complemented by several replicas of temples, tombs and burial chambers as well as extensive texts and graphics. Highlights include a life-size statue of the vizier Hemiunu, who supervised part of the construction of the Great Pyramid; a six-meter (19-foot) papyrus scroll from the Book of the Dead, and stelae that retain some of their original coloring. Museum of Fine Arts, **Houston**, through March 30.

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PELIZAEUS MUSEUM