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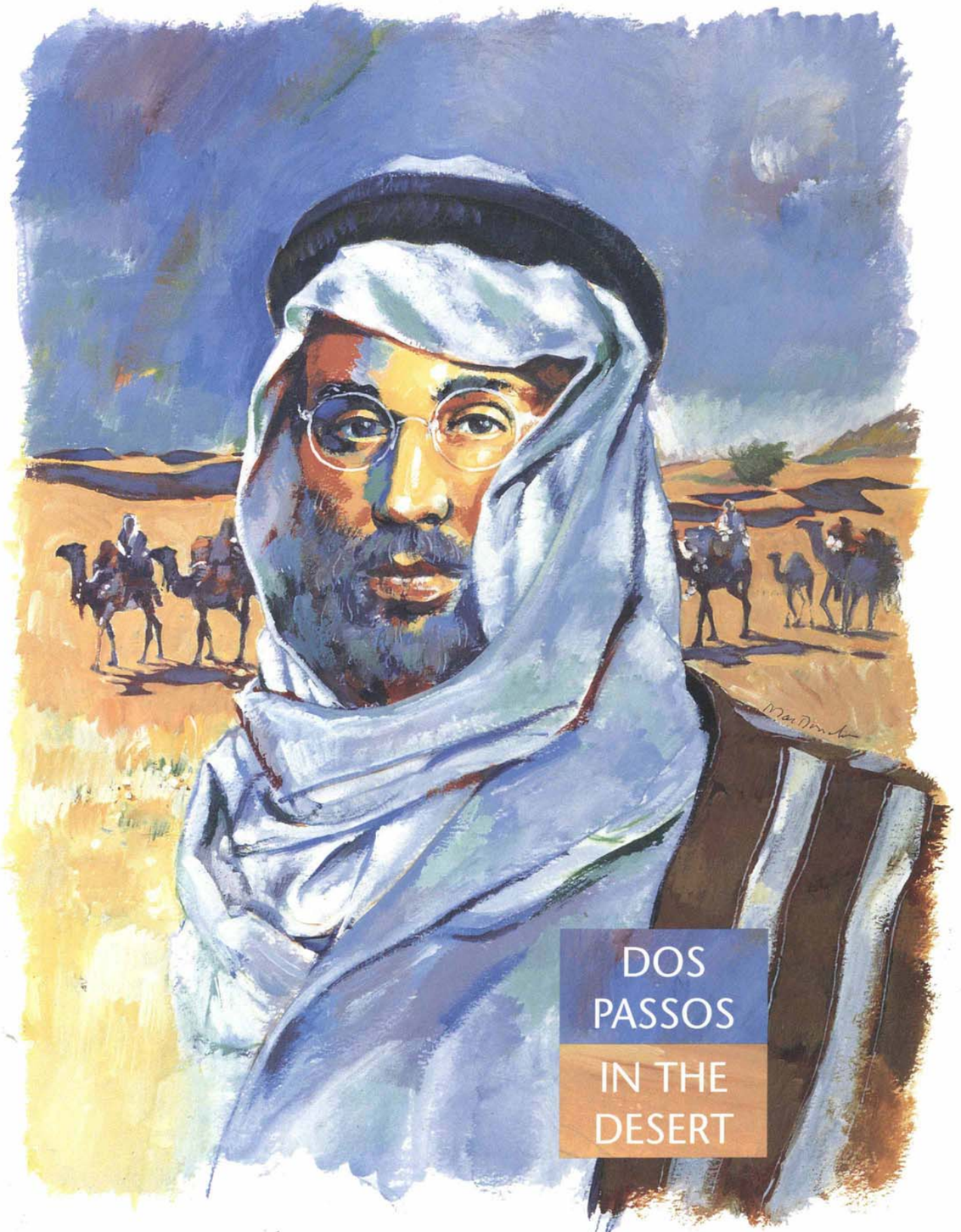
JULY/AUGUST 1997



DOS PASSOS IN THE DESERT

24: MENA HOUSE OBEROI

Contents

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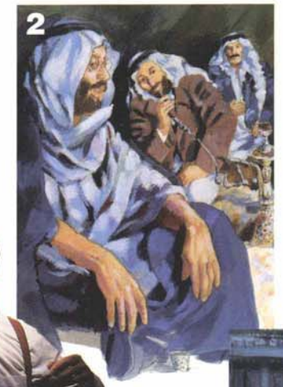

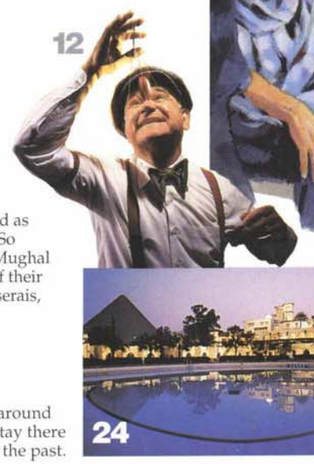

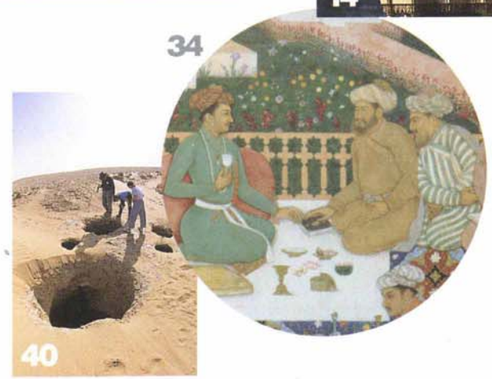

COVER:
To American novelist John Dos Passos, materialism and hypocrisy were the great faults of his own society, and honesty, freedom and self-reliance the great virtues of desert life. When he joined a camel caravan to cross the Syrian desert in 1921, Dos Passos found his traveling companions "the finest people I had ever met," and the desert itself he found harsh, cleansing, invigorating and inspiring. Portrait by Norman MacDonald.

OPPOSITE:
The carving of its sandstone planes still crisp, Ahmadabad's Sidi Sayyid mosque is a tranquil island in a noisy city. Photograph: David H. Wells.

BACK COVER:
Layered carpets, inlaid mirrors and a potted palm contributed to the comfort of Istanbul's Pera Palace Hotel.

INSIDE BACK COVER:
A diver strides down the steep throat of Dahl Hit. Photograph: Erik Bjurström.

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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DOS PASSOS IN THE DESERT

WRITTEN BY ROBERT W. LEBLING, Jr. • ILLUSTRATED BY NORMAN MacDONALD

On a cold December morning in 1921, a battered Model-T Ford chugged into Ramadi, a town on the west bank of the Euphrates in British-mandate Iraq. Ramadi, on the eastern edge of the Syrian Desert, was the staging point for camel caravans carrying goods from Baghdad across the desert to Damascus. The car pulled up to the edge of a caravan encampment. Great bales of tobacco, rolled Persian carpets and boxes of other goods were stacked in mounds, ready for the pack camels.

Four bearded men in Arab dress stepped out of the car and headed toward the caravan master's tent. The youngest of the four, about 25 years old, wore a brown robe with a broad white stripe, and a black-and-white checked headcloth held in place with a black cord. His beard was about three weeks old. If it weren't for the steel-rimmed spectacles he wore, he might have been taken for an Arab.

He was in fact American: a young novelist named John Dos Passos. Months earlier, he had left his old college friend, poet E.E. Cummings, in Paris, boarded the Orient Express and headed alone to the Middle East, in part to escape the literary swirl of Paris and New York on the eve of the publication of his second novel, but also to satisfy a long-standing fascination with the region, its history and its peoples. After an eventful personal odyssey through Turkey, Iran and Iraq, he was now on his way back to the United States—the hard way.

John Dos Passos is recognized today as one of America's great writers. In his day, he was also one of its most controversial. Dos Passos gained fame as a writer of "proletarian literature"—books like *Manhattan Transfer* (1925) and the *U.S.A.* trilogy (1938), which attacked the materialism and hypocrisy of the United States between the World Wars and exposed the stark realities of life in the American working class. He was influenced by the innovative James Joyce and by Swiss anti-literary writer Blaise Cendrars, but he developed a distinctive style of his own, which in turn had its impact on writers like Alfred Döblin and Jean-Paul Sartre. His novels were impressionistic and often sharply satirical. He interspersed fictional narratives with actual fragments of popular culture—songs, news headlines, advertisements, slogans—in ways that captured the flavor, and often the essence, of the world surrounding his characters.

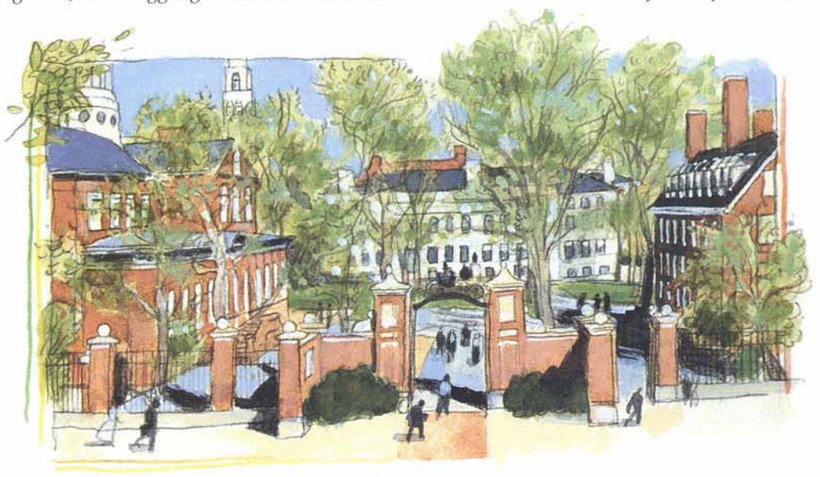
While 20th-century America was the subject matter of his novels, Dos Passos early developed a personal interest in the Middle East that was to stay with him his entire life. It led to three major trips to the region, each at a turning point in his life. He wrote of his Middle Eastern exploits in three nonfiction works, *Orient Express* (1927), *Journeys Between Wars* (1938) and *The Best Times: An Informal Memoir* (1966). For Dos Passos, the region was a repository of images, lifestyles and values that he drew comfort from in difficult times. Early in his career, when the intense literary world of New York began to close in on him, inducing a kind of professional claustrophobia, he would escape to the Middle East. There he found a uniquely personal kind of freedom that reinvigorated him and restored his perspective.

Above all else, Dos Passos's novels are permeated with a passionate attachment to the American working class, the struggling men, women and children, without money, power or special privilege, who are often victimized by the powerful currents of economy and politics. In 1937, disillusioned with the Communists' role in Spain's civil war, he began a gradual swing from left to right in his political orientation, a change that cost him friendships in New York's literary world, including Ernest Hemingway's. But Dos Passos, for all the apparent conservatism of his later years, never lost his fundamental faith in the American worker.

The Middle East of John Dos Passos echoed his America. He was most attracted to those without power or privilege: the villagers, the Bedouin, the craftspeople of the towns. He found the palaces and monuments of the region interesting—after all, the ebb and flow of history gave context to his own writings—but personally he did not feel the resonance of the great artifacts. He loved nothing more than traveling on his own, often on foot, from village to village, or sharing the simple life of desert travelers. Here he found basic human values most sharply delineated, without the softening filter of the sophisticated urban world he had left behind.

John Roderigo Dos Passos Jr. was born in Chicago in 1896, the son of a prominent attorney and the grandson of a Portuguese immigrant. Born out of wedlock but later legitimized, he was a bright boy who showed promise. His strong-willed father saw that he received a classical education, and his high-school years were spent at the exclusive Choate School in Connecticut. At 15, he passed the entrance examinations for Harvard University.

Dos Passos's interest in the Middle East can be traced back to his youth. A voracious reader, he was aware of the region's connections with Western civilization, and was intrigued by its differences. As a teenager, he once said, he was a romantic who dreamed of running off to sea and visiting foreign cities like Carcassonne, Marrakesh and Isfahan.



Dos Passos's first encounter with the Middle East occurred when he was 15. Before starting college at Harvard, his father thought, he should spend some months traveling in Europe and the Near East, to give context to his education and teach him something about the world. In November 1911, Dos Passos was sent abroad in the company of a tutor on what he called "the Grand Tour": England, France, Italy, Greece and Egypt. "Having already traveled extensively throughout Europe, which held little sense of mystery for him, Jack longed for the exotic sounds, sights, and culture of northern Africa and the Middle East," wrote biographer Virginia Spencer Carr. "He wanted to view ancient Islamic civilizations, Egypt and the Nile Valley...." A four-day visit to Istanbul, capital of the Ottoman Empire, was added to the tour at Dos Passos's request: He was eager to sample life in the fabled city of the Ottomans, a centuries-old dynasty that would soon fall victim to the relentless forces of modernization and the Great War.

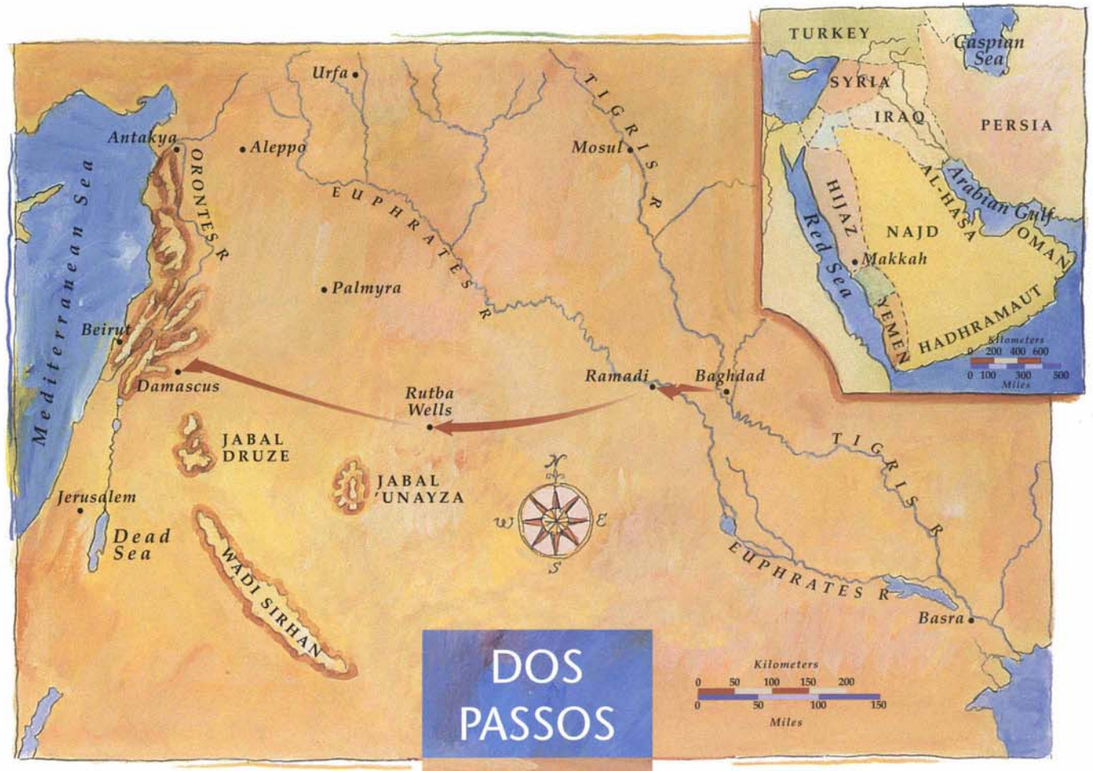
A decade later, Dos Passos began dreaming again of journeying to the Middle East. Behind him were his Harvard years, and harrowing experiences as a ambulance driver on the battlefronts of France in World War I. "Dos," as he was known to his friends, was now living in New York City. He had just sold his second book—an antiwar novel called *Three Soldiers*, based on his wartime experiences—and was impatiently awaiting publication. In those days he spent many hours with E.E. Cummings, who was the center of a literary circle in Greenwich Village.

Cummings and Dos Passos went to Paris in the spring of 1921. But Dos Passos stayed only a short while. He had received a cash advance on *Three Soldiers* and was eager to travel on. "My preoccupation was finding ways and means of getting to the Near East," he wrote forty years later in *The Best Times*. "It was the only region still highly colored enough to suit my craving for new sights."

He boarded the Orient Express for Istanbul, where he hoped to find work with the Red Cross that would enable him to travel as far as Persia. The job fell through, but he pressed on by Black Sea freighter to the new Soviet republic of Georgia, then inland by train to its capital, Tiflis, and by a succession of boxcars across a grim postwar landscape — through Armenia, "where everyone was dying of cholera and typhus and starvation," to Tabriz and Tehran. In the Persian capital, he contracted malaria.

He took massive doses of quinine to bring the disease under control. "Dos Passos was glad he had traveled into Persia, he reminded himself when he was not miserable with malaria, but he discovered that he was not a journalist at heart," wrote another of his biographers, Townsend Ludington. "Journalism was not his forte, and the sooner he got home and settled down to writing, the better."

DOS PASSOS IN THE DESERT



The Iraq that Dos Passos entered in the fall of 1921 had recently been subjected to a British mandate, just as Syria had fallen under French control. The Arabs of both countries regarded the foreign rule as a betrayal of their revolt against the Turks, which had helped speed Allied victory in the Great War.

When Dos Passos reached Baghdad, "the great goggle-eyed banshee of malaria" flared again. He spent three weeks recovering at the Hotel Maude, a shabby inn that housed British junior officers.

Although his family had deep pockets, Dos Passos was traveling on limited funds. He couldn't afford a steamship ticket from Basra to Marseilles. The British were willing to fly him by military plane to Damascus, but the young writer decided to cross the Syrian Desert by camel caravan—a journey few Westerners, and apparently no Americans, had ever attempted.

The US consul in Baghdad introduced Dos Passos to Gertrude Bell, the celebrated archeologist, Arabist and now chief of British intelligence for Mesopotamia. This small, plain Englishwoman was "incredibly learned in the languages of the middle Orient," Dos Passos said. "She knew all the dialects. She had the tribal histories and the family histories of the Bedawi at the tip of her tongue."

When the young writer explained his plans, a British officer on Bell's staff told him he was crazy. The Arab tribes were angry with Britain and France, and any European who tried to cross the desert would be in grave danger.

"Fiddlesticks," Bell retorted. "They won't hurt an American." She knew some Arabs who would take him across the desert. "They aren't all quite on our side," she said, "but they are quite reliable."

The next morning, Dos found himself seated on a richly decorated carpet in a diwan in old Baghdad, sipping tiny cups of Arab coffee and discussing his travel plans with a white-bearded shaykh of the 'Agail people and with Jassem al-Rawwaf, an 'Agail caravan master.

The 'Agail had originated in the towns of the Najd, in present-day Saudi Arabia. A tribe or

confederation of tribes in antiquity, they were no longer organized along tribal lines and had no blood enemies. Though townsmen, they knew camels better than most, and were expert camel breeders and traders. They were skilled fighters, and often worked as bodyguards and camel cavalrymen. With the consent of the tribes, they controlled the caravan trade across the Syrian Desert.

Dos Passos described al-Rawwaf as "a pale darkbearded man with a higharched nose and a high forehead under his heavy headband." They negotiated in Arabic with the help of one of Gertrude Bell's military interpreters. The caravan master agreed to transport Dos Passos across the desert to the Hotel Victoria in Damascus, on several conditions: He must let his beard grow, wear Arab dress and bring two weeks' supply of food. Al-Rawwaf would furnish a camel and a tent. The cost of the journey would be 20 gold pounds Turkish.

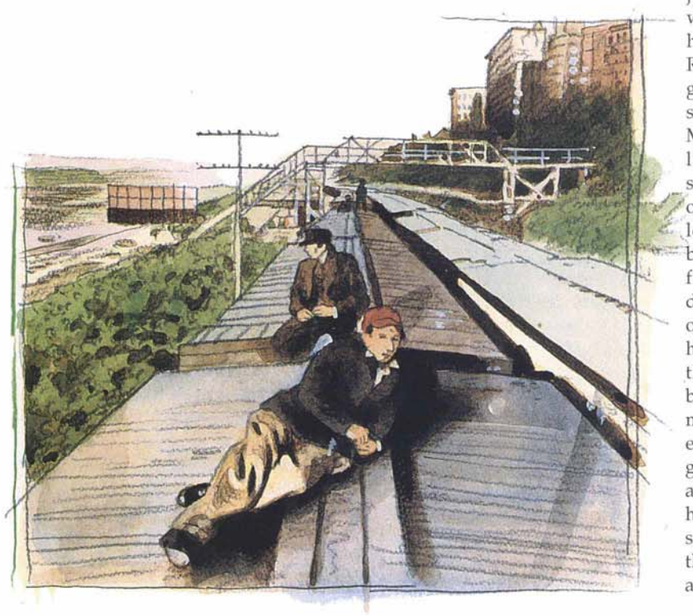
Three weeks passed as the caravan was being organized. Dos Passos waited "on pins and needles" at the Hotel Maude. He had spent the rest of his money on two saddlebags of canned goods and his traveling garb. He began studying Arabic, "the most difficult language I ever came up against."

In early December, the caravan was ready to depart. Dos Passos, al-Rawwaf and several Arab travelers boarded the ailing Model T and headed for the staging point at Ramadi.

Al-Rawwaf had provided Dos Passos with "a magnificent conical tent, striped with crimson like a fuchsia flower and ornamented with pink and blue diamond shapes." Dos Passos was introduced to a man named Fahad, who would be his helper, and to a youth named Saleh, who had worked for the British and would act as his interpreter.

They spent four days at Ramadi, waiting out a driving winter rainstorm. Finally, at dawn on the fifth day, Dos Passos and Fahad packed up his tent and belongings in huge tasseled saddlebags, and the American writer was helped onto the back of his riding camel, Rima.

"The 'Agail all stood around anxiously waiting to see if I would fall off when she jerked to her feet," he wrote. "The hobble round her knees was unloosed. Rima grunted and groaned and opened herself up like a jackknife. My head poked above the low clinging mist into sunlight. She pirouetted on her soft pads and followed the long string of baggage camels away from the flat roofs and date palms of Ramadi over the bare crumbly hills to the westward; and there I sat, jouncing and bouncing to the camel's mincing gait, wearing an embroidered Baghdad gown over my khaki shirt and pants, with a huge headcloth draped over my steelrimmed spectacles, the funniest-looking Arab anybody ever saw."



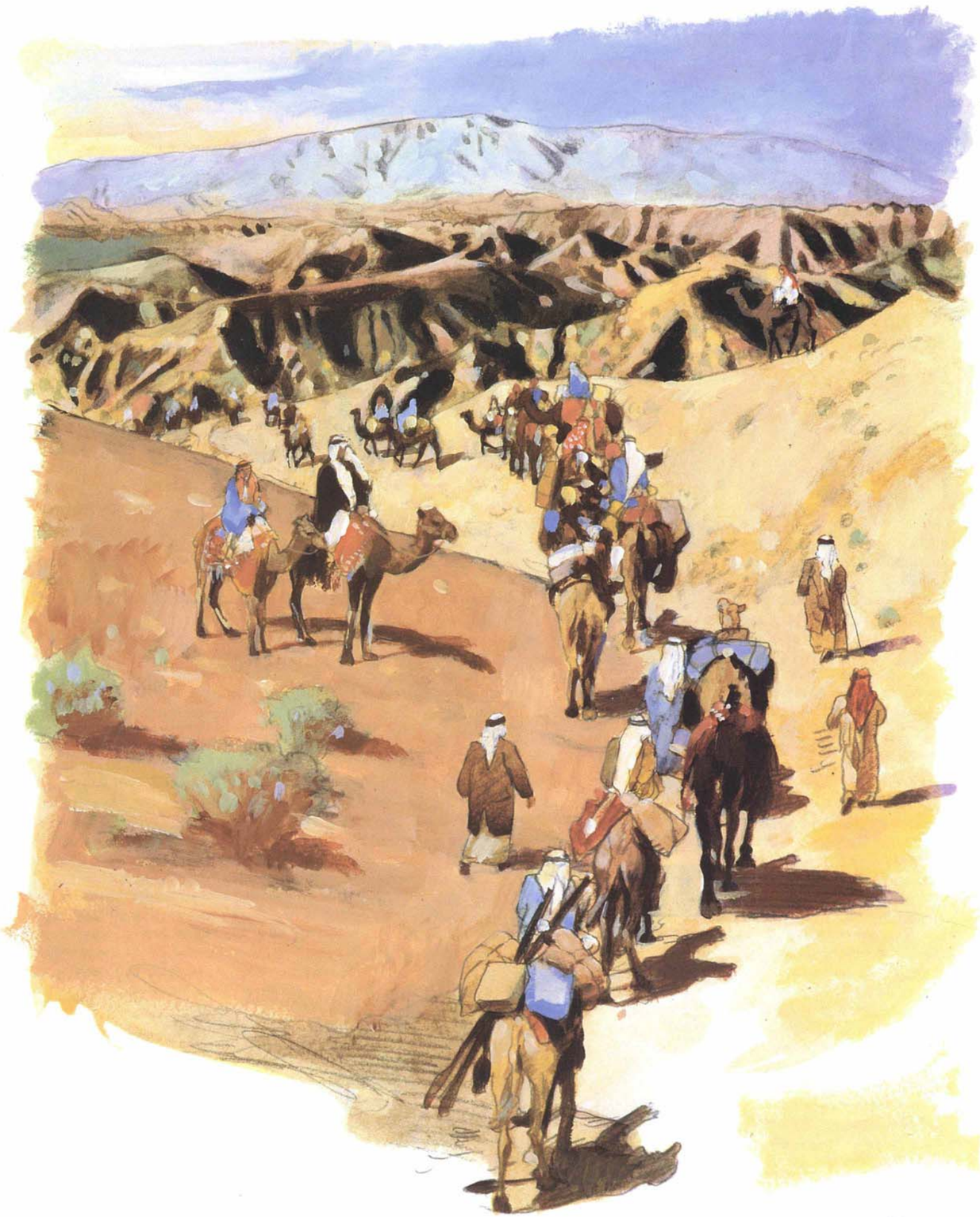
The caravan was setting out at a time of great regional tension. Tribal discontent was mounting over the imposition of British and French rule. To the south, just weeks earlier, 'Abd al-'Aziz Al Sa'ud, founder of the modern Saudi state, had declared victory over the forces of the al-Rashid in Hail. Scattered remnants of the defeated al-Rashid army had fled north from the Najd into the Syrian Desert, where they resorted to raiding to sustain themselves. The desert was under the control of no central government. Security became the 'Agail camel master's top priority.

Al-Rawwaf's caravan, which consisted of more than 500 camels, was protected at the front by 'Agail outriders on fast mounts, who often scouted ahead of the main party to assure safe passage. The caravan master and other 'Agail leaders headed the caravan, followed by strings of baggage camels loaded with carpets, tobacco and other goods. Then came a handful of "passengers"—among them Dos Passos; a Syrian merchant and his wife in a litter; "Sayid Mahomet," nephew of the *naqib* (leader) of Madinah; an old man in a green turban setting out on his second pilgrimage to Makkah; and "a hearty man named Abdullah who herded twenty skittish mules." There followed a great herd of brood camels and their young, grazing as they traveled. Bringing up the rear was "a straggle of weak camels and solitary riders who attached themselves to Jassem's outfit for protection." Finally, on the flanks were some "hardboiled" riflemen on ponies, guards for the early portion of the journey, furnished by the head shaykh of the local Dulaym tribe.

The weather turned cold and rainy. Whenever the caravan stopped for the night, Dos Passos would sit warming his hands and feet by al-Rawwaf's campfire, protected from the biting winds by a great half-circle of cargo bales. He drank "endless tiny cups of the most delicious coffee ... coalblack and almost as bitter as quinine." Each night, he shivered in his crimson-striped tent. But in the daily journal he kept, he declared he was "as jolly as a lark." He wrote to one friend: "There was never a pleasanter method of traveling." To another: "This caravan across the desert is the finest thing I ever did in my life."

Word had spread across the desert that an American was traveling with the caravan. More than once, armed detachments from rival tribes confronted the travelers. At night, the 'Agail and representatives of the desert tribes would sip coffee and negotiate for long hours over the terms of continued safe passage. "Not understanding yet how careful the Arabs were with firearms I kept wondering when the shooting would begin," the writer said. "Guns were brandished but not a trigger was pulled."

Before the journey had reached the halfway point, Dos Passos ran out of food. He had expected the trip to last two weeks;



in fact, it would be 39 days before he saw the outskirts of Damascus. Al-Rawwaf came to the writer's rescue, inviting him to eat with him and his men for the rest of the trip. "The trouble was that the 'Agail ate so very little. A handful of dates and rice was a day's ration for a desert Arab. And it was bad manners to eat more than the next man. Night after night, I dreamed of roast goose."

The caravan continued at breakneck speed through a region that reminded Dos Passos of the Old West—"a badlands country of eroded mesas and stony gulches." One day, al-Rawwaf allowed the caravan to encamp early, so the travelers could rest and bathe at a waterhole in a nearby wadi. "Each man retired modestly behind his own separate rock to wash himself," Dos Passos said.

That night, as the American and the 'Agail caravaners sat around the campfire, sipping fragrant coffee and talking about their countries, Dos Passos felt a "special sense of wellbeing." A few of the 'Agail had traveled to America, and had returned with tales of great cities and fabulous wealth. These men of the desert found it hard to believe that huge ships made of iron could float upon the ocean.

"Jassem, pronouncing his words very carefully, as for a child, tried to tell me about the Najd, his country in the dry south of Arabia. All their eyes fastened on my face when I tried to explain how much I liked their life in the desert. Hadn't I better give up the stinking cities, said Jassem, and come to live with them where the air was fit for a man to breathe."

It seemed to Dos Passos that al-Rawwaf and his men were "the finest people I had ever met. These desert people, more than any people I had ever known, seemed to take a man for what he was. Each man stood up by himself, in the fearful wind, under the enormous sky. What did I care how long it took to get to Damascus? I had more than half a mind to take up Jassem's offer."

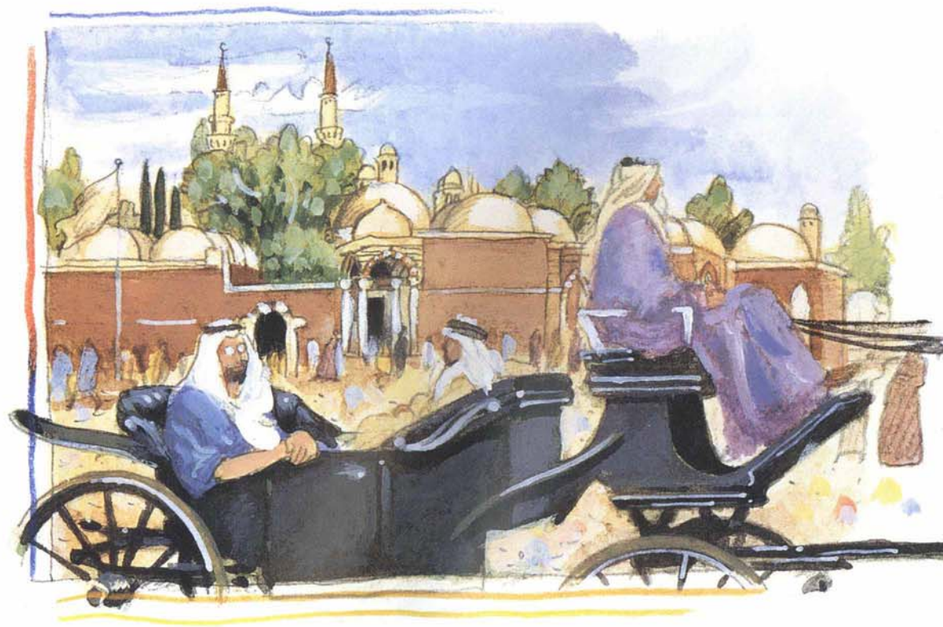
The caravan, as it neared Syria proper, had several more encounters with armed men, one involving a band on horseback that rode in circles around the drawn-up camels "like the Indians in 'Custer's Last Stand,' which used to be the climax of Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show." Dos Passos and the other passengers huddled together, fearing they had finally been pinned down by robbers. But the "attackers" turned out to be friends—kin of tribesmen who had protected them earlier in their journey—and the men on horseback became their guardians in the western reaches of the desert.

Cold January rains slowed them down. The camels showed signs of exhaustion. Dos Passos recorded that his shoes had split open and his feet were suffering from chilblains. Their food had been cut to half rations: They sat about the campfire eating "a tiny bit of rice and a concoction of fried dates known as *khastawi* that I found increasingly delicious."

Dos found he was surviving quite well on a "starvation diet." He wrote: "Let them take a thousand years to reach Esch Scham [Damascus]. I don't care. I never sat at such fragrant fires with such fine people as the 'Agail.... I feel hearty, bearded, Whitmanic. All the bile out of my belly—all the wrinkles planed out of my mind by the great cold purple flint flatiron of the desert."

Once they had crossed the border of mandatory Syria, the caravan master's chief concern was to avoid the French camel corps and customs officials. The 'Agail did not recognize French authority in the region, and were not about to pay customs duties to an imposed regime. Late one night, as they camped not far from a village, al-Rawwaf oversaw the quiet transfer of camels and goods to local merchants and middlemen. Dos Passos recalled: "The last thing I heard before I went to sleep was the clink of coins being counted from palm to palm. When I awoke before day the caravan had vanished. Camels, bales of tobacco and rugs ... all the goods had vanished into the blue haze."

Al-Rawwaf was sitting by the campfire, grinding coffee. Dos Passos sipped the last three tiny cups of coffee with him. Al-Rawwaf "gently insinuated" that when Dos Passos was questioned by French officials in Damascus, he should plead ignorance of how many camels there had had been, and which route they had taken. The writer assured the caravan master he had "a very bad head for figures."



Dos Passos approached Damascus on a jaunty white stallion, then switched to a more comfortable dromedary in the company of Sayid Mahomet of Madinah, his cook and one of the 'Agail. They stopped at an inn, drawn by smell of roasting meat. "After six weeks without a green thing to eat a plate of green beans was a marvel. There was curd cheese and kebab. It was hard for me to mind my manners and eat no more than the sayid ate."

They hired a horse-drawn carriage and, as Dos Passos put it, "entered the oldest city in the world lolling in a landau." Dos Passos could think of nothing but a hot bath. But before heading to the Hotel Victoria, he made a round of visits with his companions, stopping to see relatives of Sayid Mahomet, as well as bearded old men in the Scribes' Bazaar, and "mysterious people in courtyards who seemed to be plotting against the French."

In time, he was safely tucked away at the hotel, in a "fine oldfashioned high-ceilinged European bedroom" with a bath and hot and cold running water. He slept for more than 12 hours.

The next day, shaved and refreshed, he faced the world. A packet of mail was waiting for him. His new book, *Three Soldiers*, was selling quite well, and he would have money in the bank. He spent long hours with French officials, explaining—and ultimately justifying—his presence in Syria. He wrote letters to his friends, toured the city, and then headed to Beirut by train. From a luxurious Beirut hotel room, on January 10, he wrote to an American friend about his friends, the 'Agail:

"I felt like kissing their feet I was so fussy and gawky beside them. I've never known people so intense, so well balanced, so gentle. I actually found myself crying after I said goodbye to them."

The parting in Damascus had not been easy. Dos Passos had shaved off his beard and resumed Western clothing. Wearing a "freshpressed civilian suit," he went out to tour the city and its famous bazaars. By coincidence, he encountered the caravan master, Jassem al-Rawwaf, at the entrance to the Umayyad Mosque. Al-Rawwaf was wearing a new headcloth and a new Baghdad robe.

"When I walked up to Jassem with my hand outstretched he looked at me with an expression of incredulous horror on his face. Where was my beard? his hands said. I fingered my smooth chin. Tears came to his eyes as he saluted me gravely. Then with a gesture of utter repudiation he turned his back and, picking up his slippers, walked off across the ... carpet of the mosque."

Dos Passos's crossing of the Syrian Desert was a unique opportunity for an American, never to be repeated. In a few short years, motorized transportation would spell the end of the caravan era in the Syrian Desert. By the fall of 1923, the Nairn brothers, Gerald and Norman, would be making their first exploratory automobile crossings of the desert—in three days, as opposed to a month or more for a caravan—and three years later they would start their celebrated bus service between Damascus and Baghdad. (See *Aramco World*, July/August 1981.)

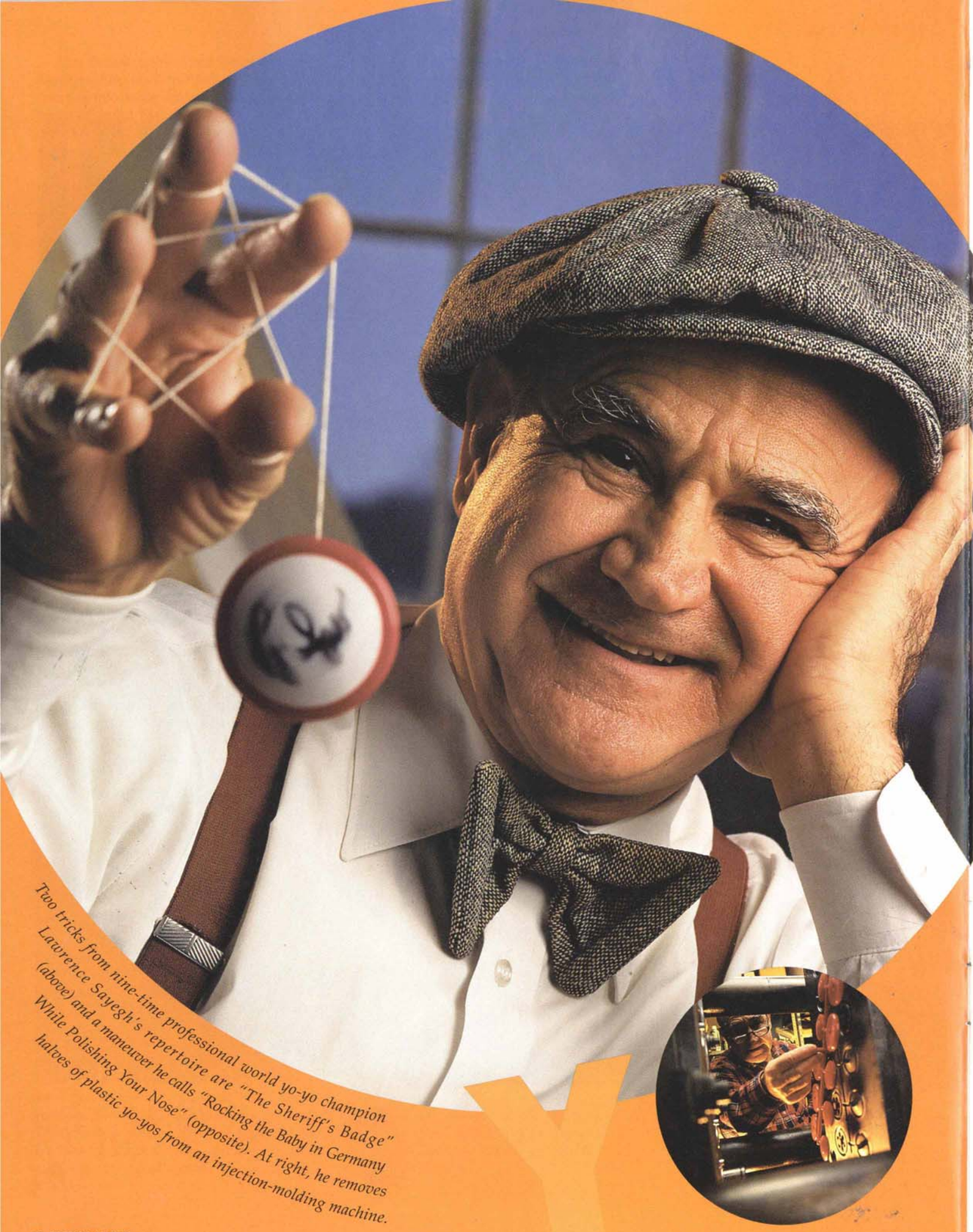
The crossing was not Dos Passos's last adventure in the Arab world. In 1925, while nervously awaiting publication of *Manhattan Transfer*, he set off for North Africa alone, and wandered through Algeria and Morocco. He spent the winter holiday season "absolutely alone roaming around the mud villages of Beni Ounif and watching caravans come in from the Tuareg country." The desert once more revived him. He began studying Arabic again. He wrote impulsively to a friend, "I might embrace Islam," but then, suspecting that the notion was only his romantic streak at work, rather than a true calling, he just as quickly retreated from the idea.

Once he told a friend that when "the final disgust" with Western materialism eventually seized him, he would "retire to the Najd." But as he well knew, that day would never come. Twentieth-century America was in his blood; here lay his social concerns, his passions. He continued writing novels and histories about the American experience until he died in 1970 in Baltimore, Maryland, at the age of 74.

But throughout his life, John Dos Passos's Middle Eastern experiences were never far from the surface of his memory. They emerged occasionally as echoes in his writings. More importantly, they served as personal reminders, keeping him focused on essential human values, shared by prince and beggar alike and easily forgotten in the tumult of everyday life.

Robert Lebling, formerly assistant editor of Aramco World, *writes about Middle-Eastern topics from Dhahran, Saudi Arabia. He thanks his wife Linda for her Internet research in support of this article.*

Free-lance artist Norman MacDonald lives in Amsterdam and on his farm near Toronto.



Two tricks from nine-time professional world yo-yo champion Lawrence Sayegh's repertoire are "The Sheriff's Badge" (above) and a maneuver he calls "Rocking the Baby in Germany While Polishing Your Nose" (opposite). At right, he removes halves of plastic yo-yos from an injection-molding machine.

Spin Doctor

Written by **Penny Parsekian** Photographed by **Paul Horton**

In his youth, Lawrence Sayegh dreamed of performing in vaudeville, but his career took a different spin. He became nine-time world champion and international master trickster of...the yo-yo. He has wowed audiences in 26 countries, most states of the US and on countless film and television screens. Today, at 64, he is still spinning, much to the delight of everyone from kids at birthday parties to executives at corporate events.

"I used to do record pantomime," he says, reflecting on growing up in Central Falls, Rhode Island, in the home of a large, close-knit family of first-generation Arab-Americans. "Today they call it karaoke. I did Al Jolson, Jimmy Durante, Spike Jones.... Muhammad Abdel Wahab, I loved him. He was bigger than Frank Sinatra. Men would swoon listening to him. And Umm Kalthum, she was the nightingale of the Middle East. As a kid, I would play the records over and over again."

Sayegh says he was searching for a sport when he found the yo-yo. "I was too short for basketball, too light for football, too nervous for baseball," he says. But from the beginning, he seemed to have a special knack for the spinning toy on a string. When the Duncan Yo-Yo Company began holding neighborhood competitions in the 1940's, he won every contest within biking distance of his home. He became so good—and so well known—that Duncan eventually barred him from the contests.

His parents, however, were skeptical of their son's peculiar talent.

"They were both born in Damascus," he says. "They had a mom-and-pop grocery store and were very much of the old school: work, work, work; make something of yourself." The yo-yo didn't seem to offer a career path for young Larry. But after he graduated from high school, the president of Duncan Yo-Yo personally contacted Sayegh and offered him a job. The family agreed he should take it.

Duncan sent its new recruit off to demonstrate the company's product in the South and Southwest of the United States, and ultimately in Europe. In 1952, the company showed Sayegh off at a press conference at the Hotel Ritz in Paris. At the time, Sayegh says, the yo-yo was even more popular in Europe—where it had been known since the 17th century—than in the US. There, he demonstrated tricks of his own devising, with such names as "Pistol Pete"

and "Overhand Crossfire," both of which involved two yo-yos and multiple crossings of the strings.

He was a hit. *Actualités*, the French newsreel played in movie houses before the feature, filmed Sayegh and his yo-yo tricks in settings all around Paris, and put him on-screen all over the country.

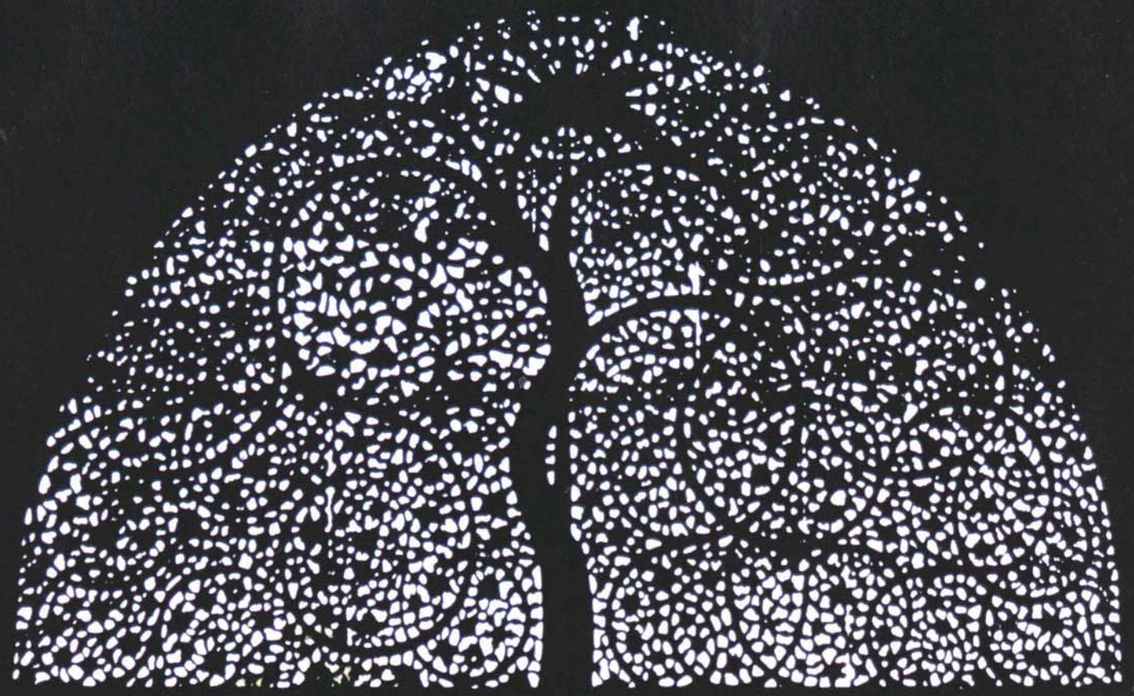
Two years later, Sayegh won his first world championship in another competition sponsored by Duncan. Over the next eight years, until Duncan went out of business and the contest folded with the company, he won every year. In 1958, Ford Motor Company demonstrated its product's unbeatably smooth ride to prospective buyers in Australia by filming Sayegh, yo-yos spinning, atop the roof of a moving car in Tasmania. Today, he can still carry on a conversation while tossing yo-yos with both hands in elaborate configurations—and he can nestle a yo-yo into your shirt pocket from across the room with a flick of his wrist. He may be the only person in the world who can send two yo-yos flying off in different directions while doing the limbo.

When Duncan Yo-Yo went out of business, Sayegh began manufacturing yo-yos of his own patented design. He embeds six weights on each side to give them balanced mass for good momentum, and links the halves with a maple-wood axle. His assembly line, a mesmerizing contraption of bicycle parts, sewing-machine parts and industrial castoffs, allows him to single-handedly turn out one brightly colored plastic yo-yo every 45 seconds. He runs the shop alone, and has produced more than a million yo-yos, all of which he has sold through private shows and television appearances that over the years have included the Mike Douglas Show and the Tonight Show.

These days, the yo-yo is enjoying a resurgence in popularity, and children are showing off their spinning skills in malls from Seattle to Saudi Arabia. Sayegh finds himself living in what he calls the best of both worlds: "Fifty percent in my shop and 50 percent doing shows. This is nice, quiet solitude," he says, surveying his factory domain. "On the other side, it's hectic all over the place."

Free-lance writer Penny Parsekian is author of a forthcoming schoolchildren's guide to the USS Constitution, *which is berthed near her home in New London, Connecticut.*

Paul Horton is a free-lance photographer based in Middletown, Connecticut.



CITY of THE SULTAN

AHMADABAD'S ISLAMIC ARCHITECTURE

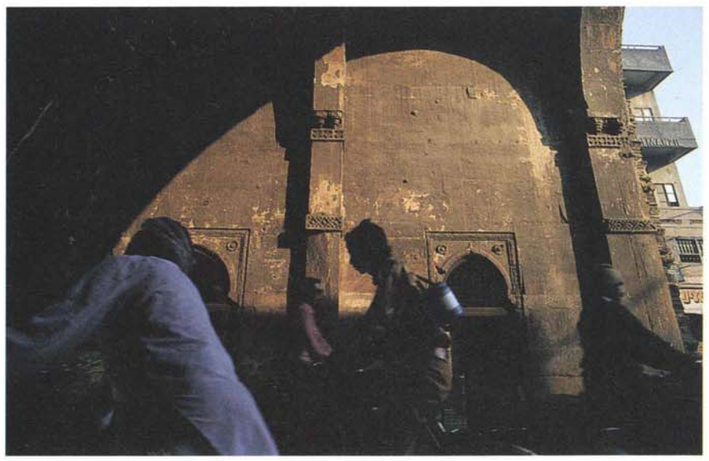
WRITTEN BY CAROLINE STONE
PHOTOGRAPHED BY DAVID H. WELLS

"The greatest town in Hindustan, perhaps the world," wrote a 17th-century traveler to Ahmadabad. The British ambassador, Sir Thomas Roe, compared the city favorably with London when he visited at about the same time, in 1615.

Capital of Gujarat from about 1411 until 1970, Ahmadabad was built on the Sabarmati River. For some 350 years, craftsmen commissioned by members of the rulers' court wrought beauty from the soft local honey-colored sandstone. Below: Tin Darwaza, best-known of the city's original 14 gates. Opposite: Wedding-cake layers corbel up the minaret of the 16th-century mosque of Shah Alam Roza. Previous spread: Sunlight filters through a stone screen carved with a "tree of life" design, illuminating the prayer hall of the Sidi Sayyid mosque; an arch beckons onto a causeway and an island in the Kankariya, a 15th-century artificial reservoir; and a minaret rises at the Rani Rupavati mosque, built by the consort of one of the sultans.

The Ahmadabad they were admiring was a relatively new city then, founded and named only two centuries earlier by Ahmad Shah I, sultan of Gujarat. His city displaced the town called Ashaval that had long stood on the banks of the Sabarmati River where Ahmadabad now stands. Ashaval was a prosperous and lively town, well known for its textiles, when it came under the rule of the Muslim sultan of Delhi in 1298—and Ahmadabad remains famous for textile crafts in its own right today.

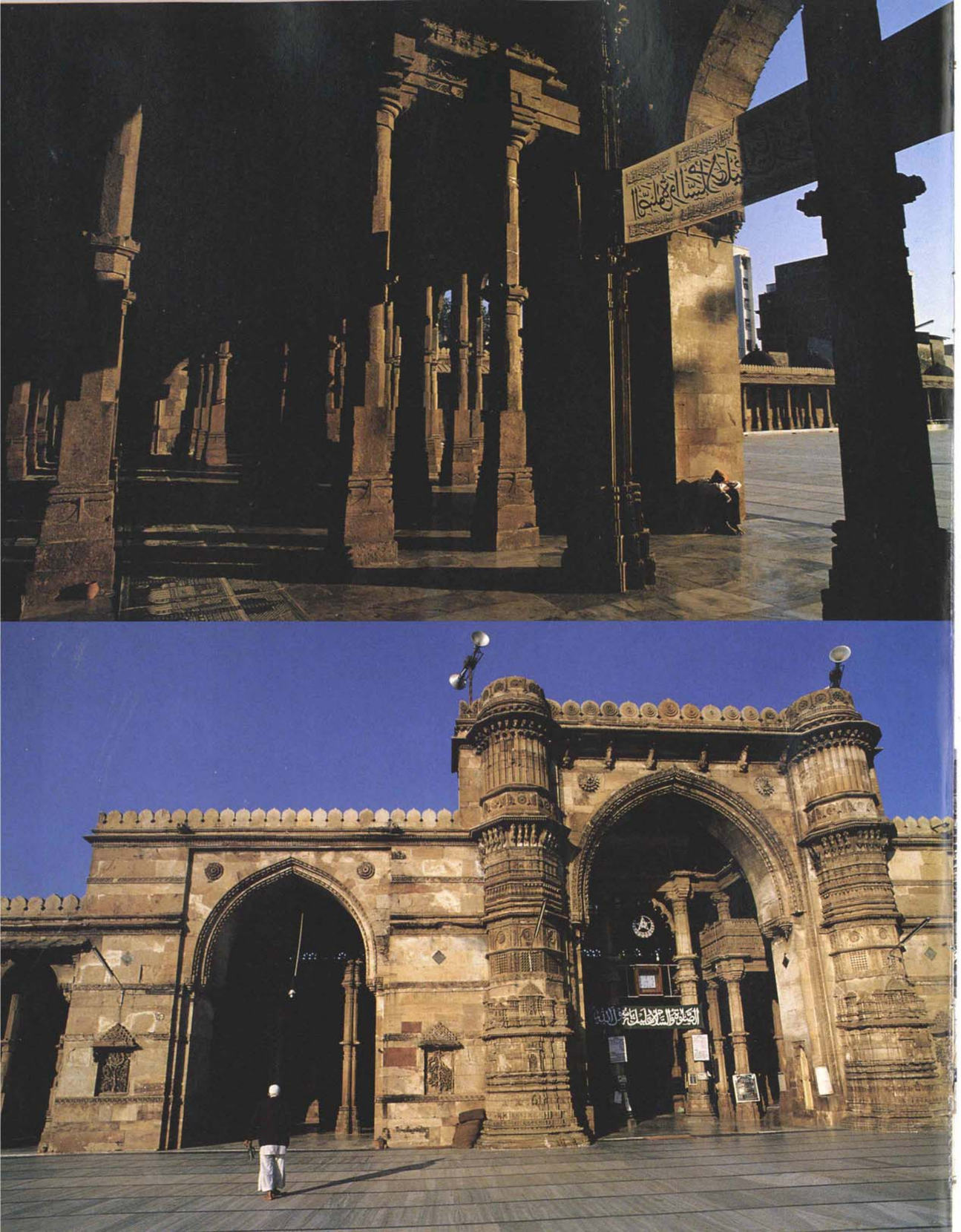
Even at the end of the 13th century, Islam was not new in Gujarat. Traders had crossed the Arabian Sea for centuries, landing at Diu, Surat, Cambay—"The Arabian Gates"—and settling in small communities all over the area, often earning their livings as merchants and skilled craftsmen. There had also been waves of invaders, mostly of Turkic Central-Asian origin. But it was not until Ahmad Shah's accession in 1411 as the first independent sultan of Gujarat that the region acquired a capital of a strongly Muslim character.



The earliest surviving mosque in Ahmadabad seems to have been built in 1414 by Ahmad Shah himself, for his private use. The outside is very plain and—perhaps not surprisingly—very Turkish-looking, reminiscent of the Seljuk mosques of central Anatolia. It is almost a copy of the mosque at Cambay that was dedicated in 1325—one of the oldest in India. The inner columns are heavy and splendidly carved in a very Indian style, though entirely lacking in figurative elements.

It is probably true that Ahmad Shah began construction of Ahmadabad's congregational mosque, the Jami Masjid, at about the same time, for although it was not completed until 1424, it must have taken a number of years to build. It is among the loveliest mosques in the entire subcontinent, and for a couple of centuries was also the largest, although it was subsequently surpassed by Lahore and, more recently, by Bhopal and Islamabad. (See *Aramco World*, January/February 1992.) Today, the Jami Masjid is no longer in its original form: Its famous "shaking minarets" were toppled by the great earthquake of 1819, which damaged so many of Gujarat's monuments, and were never replaced. A drawing by a British army captain done 10 years before that disaster shows them very well: solid, as one might expect from examining the bases surviving on either side of the main portal, but with something almost pagoda-like about the top. Like many of the city's mosques, the Jami Masjid is a particularly beautiful golden color; presumably the vast slabs of sandstone were brought into the city by caravans of ox-carts, just as they are today.

The Jami Masjid was part of a whole plan for the center of Ahmadabad. The Hindu Bhadrakali Temple gave way to the Badr Qil'a, the Castle of the Full Moon, the citadel that housed the royal palaces. In front stood



the Maidan-i Shah, or King's Square, a large open space used, among other things, as a parade ground. This has vanished today, taken over by the busy small streets of the Manek Chowk, one of the main market areas, but its triple-arched entrance, the Tin Darawasa, still stands, the finest of Ahmadabad's surviving gates. There were originally 14 of them. The Islamic rulers of Gujarat seem to have been especially active in sponsoring hydraulic projects, and there is archeological evidence that underneath the Maidan-i Shah ran a complicated system of pipes intended to supply the royal enclave and the mosques with pure water, and perhaps also for use in case of siege.

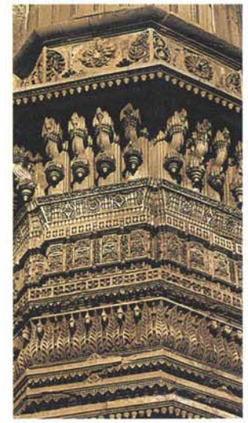
Two other buildings begun at the same time are Ahmad Shah's own tomb and the Rani-ka Hazira, or Tombs of the Queens. The former is next to the Jami Masjid and is interesting because of its plan, which was to become typical of Gujarati Muslim structures: a cloister built around a domed central chamber, from which it is separated by elaborately carved screens.

In the Rani-ka Hazira, on the other hand, the tombs are in the open air, allegedly in conformity with the wishes of Ahmad Shah's queen. The enclosure stands high above the surrounding streets and once again the galleries are screened by beautifully wrought stone *jali*s, reminiscent of the wooden *mashrabiyyah*s of the Middle East. The tombs themselves are exquisitely carved, and covered, most appropriately, by brilliantly colored pieces of the brocade for which the city was famous and which lent it much of its prosperity. On top of the graves are scattered fresh flowers, renewed daily by the old lady who cares for the building and by the market women from the shops all around.

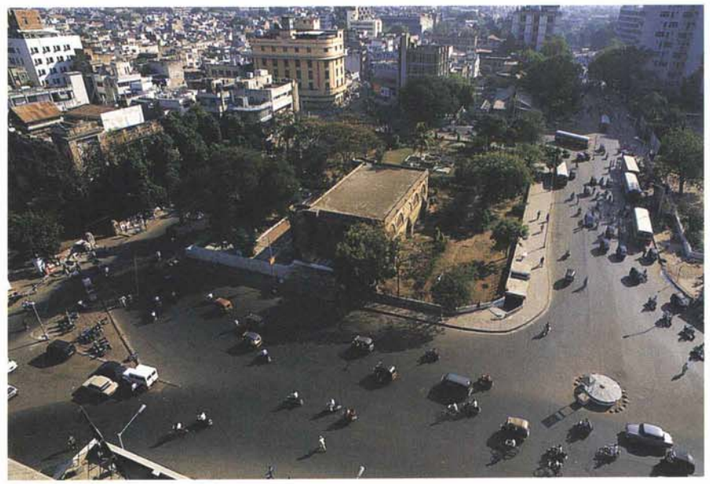
Ahmad Shah's descendants all shared his taste for architecture. His son, Qutb al-Din Ahmad Shah, built a handsome mosque with lovely bases to the minarets—the pinnacles probably shared the fate of those of the Jami Masjid—and his mother, Bibiji, also built one, much prettier and lighter in design, on the outskirts of the town.

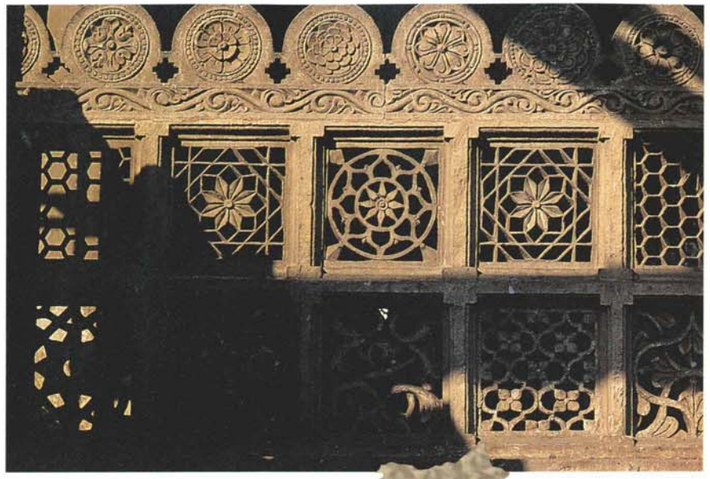
It was during Qutb al-Din's brief seven-year reign that the great Kankariya reservoir was excavated—yet another example of the Muslim rulers' awareness of the importance of good water supplies. Kankariya, roughly 1600 meters (one mile) around, is an irregular shape with 34 sides. It has stone steps that lead down to the water, and the sluices are elegantly carved. Although intended primarily as a reservoir, the place was so agreeable that it has generally been used as a pleasure garden as well. When it was commandeered as a camping ground under the Mughals, it is said that the locals resented being deprived of the amenity and petitioned for its return. It is not certain if the little island in the reservoir, with its pavilion reached by a causeway, was actually built by the Mughal emperor Nur al-Din Jahangir, but tradition associates it with him and his beloved wife, Nur Jahan, and it is locally claimed that they spent part of their honeymoon there. Today, Kankariya is still much appreciated by the Ahmadabadis, who go there to walk, picnic, enjoy the breeze and visit the zoo—an addition of which the Mughals would surely have approved.

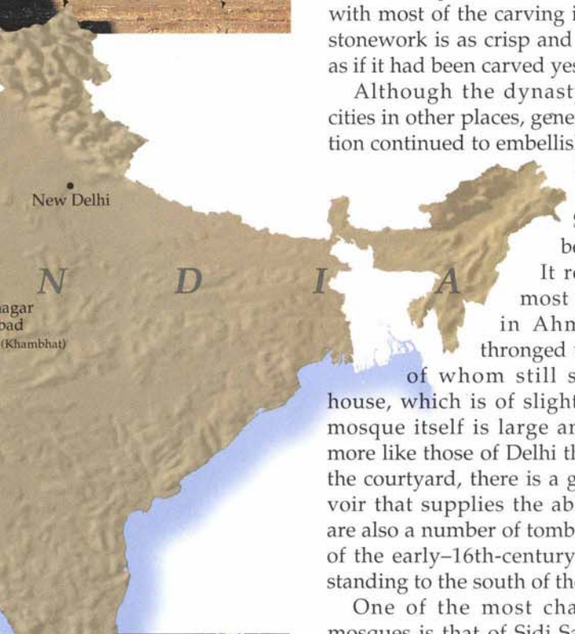
The queens of Ahmad Shah's dynasty were also not slow to endow their city with fine buildings. Two of the loveliest and most peaceful mosques in Ahmadabad are those of Rani Rupavati and of Rani Sabrai, Mahmud Shah's senior wife. Both are small mosques with fine carving. Rani Sabrai's, which is raised above street level, also has a



Completed in 1423, Ahmad Shah's Jami Masjid, opposite, was part of his founding plan for the city. The mosque's famous twin "shaking minarets" were toppled by an earthquake in 1819, leaving only their elaborate bases flanking the mosque's main portal. Detail of the base of one minaret appears above. Left: columns create rhythm in the ornamentation of the Rani Rupavati mosque. Below: "A learned man with a valuable library," reads the sign at the entrance of the mosque built by Sidi Sayyid in 1572. Now surrounded by a swirl of traffic, the mosque's original ablution tank and garden have been preserved, along with the delicate window tracery.







At the Shah-ka Hariza, or Kings' Tombs, above, a lavish variety of differing motifs appear in the segments of a stone jali, *or screen. A similar generosity of pattern appears at the Rani-ka Hariza, or Queens' Tombs. Below: Tradition associates the Kankariya reservoir and its central island with the honeymoon of Mughal emperor Nur al-Din Jahangir and his wife Nur Jahan. Today its 1600-meter perimeter walkway, zoo and picnic grounds make it one of Ahmadabad's most popular parks. Opposite: The crisp commingling of arabesque and vegetal motifs at Rani Rupavati mosque mark the zenith of Ahmadabad's pre-Mughal architecture.*

garden, an ablution tank and her tomb, all perfectly harmonious.

Also dating from the early 16th century is the Bai Harir complex, again built by one of the ladies of Mahmud Shah's court—some say by the official nurse of his children. The complex consists of a small, eye-pleasing mosque, the tomb of Dada Harir. Once again the tops of its minarets have been lost in an earthquake. It is adorned with attractive calligraphy and is also one of the finest *baolis*, or step-wells, in all of Gujarat. (See *Aramco World*, September/October 1993.) Originally, the whole mosque would have stood surrounded by a garden, but that has now vanished. The complex was dedicated, according to an inscription, in 1500 and, as is the case with most of the carving in Ahmadabad, the stonework is as crisp and the detail as sharp as if it had been carved yesterday.

Although the dynasty founded newer cities in other places, generation after generation continued to embellish Ahmadabad. The last great complex of buildings is the Shah Alam Roza, begun in the 1530's. It remains one of the most popular mosques in Ahmadabad, always thronged with visitors, some of whom still stay in the guest house, which is of slightly later date. The mosque itself is large and handsome, but more like those of Delhi than Gujarat. Under the courtyard, there is a great vaulted reservoir that supplies the ablution tank. There are also a number of tombs, in particular that of the early–16th-century ruler Shah Alam, standing to the south of the mosque.

One of the most charming of all the mosques is that of Sidi Sayyid. Although at first glance it appears to be little more than a traffic island with a used-clothes market along the back, this mosque has preserved its ablution tank and garden as well as the atmosphere of tranquillity so remarkable in the mosques of this extraordinarily busy and noisy city. Sidi Sayyid was a descendant of one of Ahmad Shah's *habashi*, or Abyssinian, retainers, who became very powerful. The mosque has great arched windows all around, filled with the most delicate stone tracery. Some is purely geometric, but looking into the prayer chamber from outside, what strikes the attention most, glowing in the darkness, are the splendid, soaring "trees of life."

The arrival of Vasco da Gama at Calicut in 1498 began a century of decline for Ahmad

Shah's line. The Portuguese diverted into their own hands much of the Indian Ocean commerce that had passed through Gujarat, and commercial and military conflict fractured the unity of the sultanate. Toward the end of the 16th century, the Mughal emperor Akbar was called in, and at the death of the last Gujarati sultan in 1593, Gujarat became part of the Mughal empire.

With the new rulers came new ideas, including new concepts in architecture. Mosques were built in the Mughal manner, as were palaces and pleasure buildings. The future Shah Jahan began his architectural career here, while viceroy of Gujarat, by building a palace and laying out a garden much admired by Western travelers, the Shahi Bagh, which still survives in a reduced form. There, it is said, his young wife, Mumtaz Mahal, bore the first of her 10 children. The last of them caused her death, thus leading Shah Jahan to his greatest architectural achievement, the Taj Mahal.

Another Mughal viceroy of Gujarat, Azam Khan, was known not for his romanticism but for his industry—his nickname was "The White Ant." He spent his years in Ahmadabad, from 1636 to 1642, building and improving the city. He built a caravanserai next to the citadel as well as a handsome market, or *qaysariyyah*. The caravanserai, an attractive building strongly suggestive of a Mughal palace, originally had a water wheel in the courtyard that drew water from an underground cistern, as well as ornamental cisterns and a fountain. Many of its beauties were destroyed when the British turned it into a jail, but it is still possible to appreciate how attractive it must have been. Probably Azam Khan would not have been displeased by its present use as the public records office, with rows of scribes and official letter writers sitting on the raised platforms outside.

In 1757 the Hindu Maratha confederacy took the city. They raised the basic tax from the 2.5 percent *zakat* (religious tax) that Muslims had paid and the five percent *jiziyah* (personal tax) that non-Muslims had paid to 25 percent for everyone. Within a decade, Ahmadabad became a ghost town. The city that had survived flood, earthquake, famine and invasion was finally abandoned and left to ruin. Quoting another source, the author of the *Mir'at-i Ahmadi*, one of the main chronicles of Ahmadabad, writes:

"Here there were at least one thousand shops, and in all of these were traders, artisans, craftsmen, government servants and military people, both Hindu and Muslim, until quarrels and mismanagement ruined them. The present author has observed these quarters in flourishing condition, and stately buildings in them, but now they are in ruins; perhaps they will soon be forgotten, save for a few mosques and gates."

Fortunately, this gloomy prediction was not fulfilled. In 1817 the British seized the city. They restored prosperity by guaranteeing law and order and reducing taxes to the levels that had prevailed under Mughal rule. The skilled population, the merchants and the bankers returned. Once again Ahmadabad became one of the liveliest places in India—and the first to industrialize. Architecture continued to be patronized and now, across the Sabarmati River, Le Corbusier's Villa Shodan can be compared with the works of the nameless architects of Ahmad Shah and his descendants.

In the 1530's, the last sultans of Ahmad Shah's line began construction of the mosque, guest house, courtyard and reservoir of Shah Alam Roza, above. The sultanate fell to the Mughal Empire in 1593, a century after Portuguese traders, seizing the advantage of the new-found route around Cape Horn, took over much of the trade upon which Ahmadabad's economy had depended. Below: Detail of the Tin Darwaza city gate. Opposite: The step-well of Dada Harir Wav, a donation of the noblewoman in charge of Mahmud Shah's children, is part of the larger Bai Harir complex.

Historian and writer Caroline Stone lives in Seville where she teaches for the University of Wisconsin. Her latest book is Mantónes de Manila (Manila Shawls).

Free-lance photographer David H. Wells works with the Matrix agency in New York. He is teaching photojournalism this fall at Syracuse University's London center.

ISTANBUL'S PERA PALACE HOTEL, BUILT FOR PASSENGERS OF THE LUXURIOUS ORIENT EXPRESS, HAD SADLY FADED BY MID-CENTURY. NOW REFURBISHED AND WELL-POLISHED, IT SHOWS OFF MUCH OF ITS ORIGINAL DECOR.

PERA PELAS OTELI (2)

Statesmen, Stars and Spies

Hotels *with a* History

WRITTEN AND PHOTOGRAPHED BY ARTHUR CLARK

Looking for legends—along with bed and board? Across the Middle East, a handful of exceptional hotels has retained the magic of a bygone era while still offering the care and comforts that attract experienced travelers. Some of the best of them can boast histories going back 100 years or more.

These hostelries have cosseted the likes of Agatha Christie, T.E. Lawrence and Winston Churchill. Presidents and potentates stay there still, but so do ordinary travelers with a taste for peace and patina. From Morocco in the west to Turkey, the Levant and Egypt, many of these hotels have undertaken renovations and additions that demonstrate their owners' confidence in the future of tourism and business travel throughout the region. Indeed, properties in the region are "fighting for market share with highly customized design and services," notes the trade magazine *Hotels*, "and the 'historical' hotels are holding their own against stiff competition from newer, often larger, properties."

The Middle East's early luxury hotels grew up in the second half of the 1800's along routes opened by railroads and steamships. Focusing first on Palestine and Egypt, tourism pioneers such as Thomas Cook both stimulated and satisfied European fascination with the region. Often, world politics and economics combined to cement the importance of the hotels, which served tourists and statesmen alike.

Some guests, like Churchill, left behind objects that are now treasured mementos. Of others, all that remains is a signature in a dusty guest book, and sometimes a hint of intrigue or mystery.

Lawrence, for example, sojourned at the then-stately Baron's Hotel in Aleppo, in northern Syria, in April 1914. He said he was studying the ruins at Carchemish, about 100 kilometers (60 miles) away, but some believe he was already spying for Britain, before moving on to help raise the Arab revolt against the Turks in the Arabian Peninsula during World War I.

Christie began traveling to the Middle East in the late 1920's. (See *Aramco World*, July/August 1990.) She wrote part of *Murder on the Orient Express* at Istanbul's Pera Palace Hotel. In Syria, she stayed at Baron's, as well as at the Reine Zenobia Hotel in Palmyra. In Egypt, she visited the Winter Palace in Luxor and the Cataract Hotel in Aswan, incorporating what she saw at the Cataract in *Death on the Nile*.

Churchill checked into the Cataract for the inauguration of the first Aswan Dam in 1902. But the Mamounia Hotel in Marrakech, Morocco, where he painted scenes of the Atlas Mountains from his balcony, was his favorite, and he returned there frequently until the 1950's. He even brought Franklin Roosevelt to the hotel after the Casablanca Conference early in 1943, both of them mud-splattered after their car broke down en route. Today, Churchill's homburg and umbrella hang in a luxurious suite that bears his name, and the hotel displays in the lobby the silver tea service he used.

Opened in 1922 by the Moroccan national railroad company, the Mamounia was renovated and redecorated in 1986 with a daring mix of twenties Art Déco and such traditional Moroccan features as intricately carved plaster and *zillij* tilework. The hotel is just a 10-minute walk from the city's bustling ancient markets and Djemaa el-Fna, Marrakech's raucous main square (See *Aramco World*, July/August 1993), but inside the Mamounia's rose-colored walls, the watchword is "peace," says Najib Mountasir, assistant hotel director.

The hotel's 13 hectares (32 acres) of gardens give substance to his words and link the hotel to the city's past. In the 18th century, Sultan Sidi Muhammad gave these gardens to his son Mamoun as a wedding gift. The ruler's three other sons were also given gardens in the city, but today only Mamoun's gardens remain, generously planted with palms, olives, Seville oranges and flowering plants.

The hotel, where heavy-scented damask roses are scattered in the fountains every morning, has long been a favorite of artists as well as politicians. Maurice Ravel, whose piano still graces the

lobby, found inspiration in the music of a Gnaoua troupe at Djemaa el-Fna when he stayed here in 1935. Some six decades later, members of the rock group Led Zeppelin signed the register while in town to mix their rhythms with the Gnaoua's for an "MTV Unplugged" concert. When Ronald Reagan stayed in 1991, the hotel arranged an expert briefing on Arabian horses. Yasser Arafat praised the "warm welcome" he received when he signed the guest book in 1992.

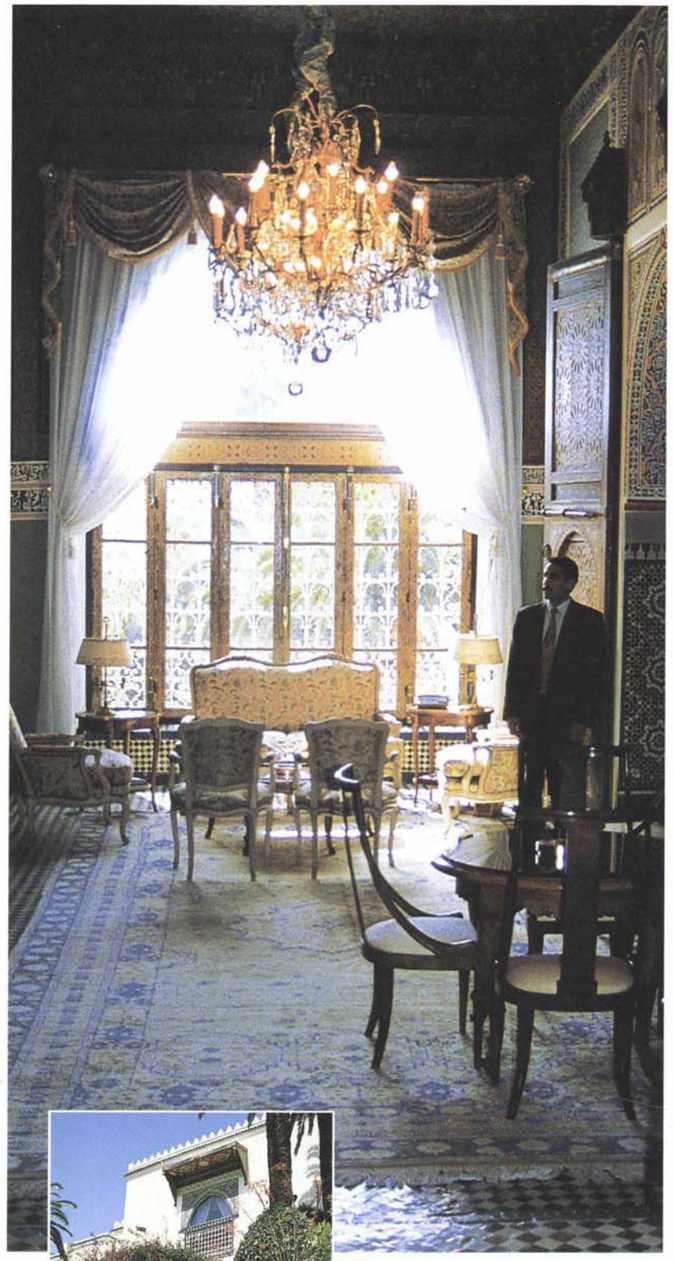
The welcome is also warm—even resonant—at the Palais Jamaï Hotel, some 280 kilometers (175 miles) to the north, in Fez. Now a sister hotel of the Mamounia, the Palais Jamaï is perched on the rim of the bowl-shaped valley that contains the *madinah*, or old city. Besides this world-class historic panorama, the hotel also has one of the most thrilling of all wake-up calls: The dawn call to prayer gathers volume from one after another of the mosques of the city below, floats up to the hotel—"Prayer is better than sleep!"—and draws guests to their balconies to watch the millennial *madinah* stirring from its slumbers.

The Palais Jamaï opened in 1933 in what had been the palatial residence of two wealthy brothers of the Ouled Jamaï family. Government ministers during the reign of Sultan Moulay Hassan, they lost their opulent estate—and one lost his life—after falling from favor after the death of the sultan early this century.

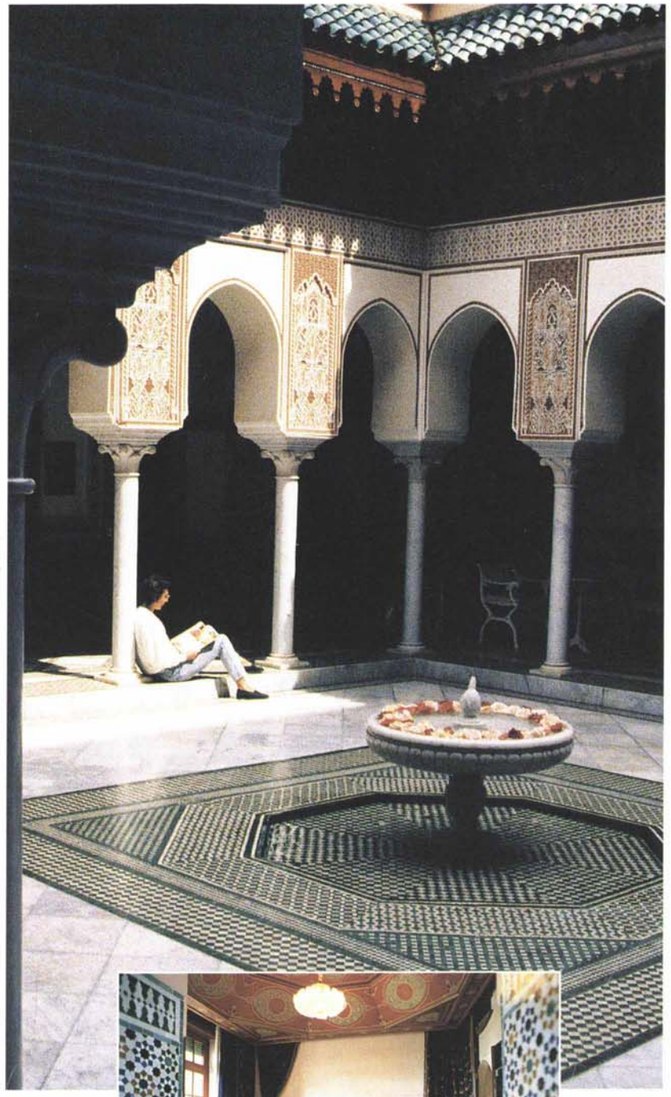
Built in 1879, the palace was "the gem of the quarter," says a hotel history. Its architectural legacy includes two high-ceilinged suites with intricate, hand-crafted woodwork, elaborately carved plaster and glazed tiles. Along with a similarly decorated restaurant, they form the heart of today's 119-room hotel and set the theme for the decor of a six-story addition that opened in 1970.

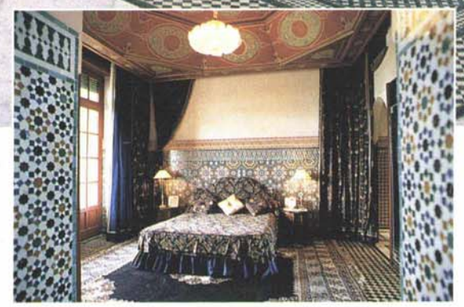
The hotel is preserving its own and the country's heritage by using local craftsmen for the renovation scheduled to be completed this fall, explains spokesman Abdelkader Chattabi. "In Fez, with just a little difficulty, we can still find people who are qualified to build in the old style," he says. "The hotel is a living symbol of the continuity of our history and culture."

Guest Gottfreid Zantke, chief architect of the city of Bremen, Germany, agrees. "Craftsmanship hasn't been replaced by kitsch," he says. "Here you see handicrafts, with all their irregularities, rather than the mindless reproduction of earlier models."



IN THE VIZIER'S SUITE AT THE PALAIS JAMAÏ HOTEL IN FEZ, THE RECEPTION ROOM OPENS INTO A *ZILLIJ*-TILED BEDROOM LIT BY A DECORATED WINDOW (INSET).





INSET: ALAIN GERARD/MAMOUNIA HOTEL

ROSE-FILLED FOUNTAINS, CARVED CEDARWOOD AND TRADITIONAL TILEWORK MAKE THE MAMOUNIA HOTEL, JUST A FEW MINUTES FROM MARRAKECH'S DJEMAA EL-FNA SQUARE, AN ISLAND OF TRANQUILLITY. FROM HIS ROOM HERE WINSTON CHURCHILL PAINTED SCENES OF THE ATLAS MOUNTAINS. INSET: THE MOROCCAN SUITE.

In Istanbul, too, it's a railroad—or at least a rail travel company—that created the city's noblest old hotel. The Pera Palace opened in 1892 specifically to serve passengers of the deluxe Paris-to-Istanbul Orient Express. The firm that ran the trains also owned the hotel, and so the old lion-and-laurel logo of the Compagnie des Wagons-Lits et des Grands Express Européens is preserved today.

In those early days, porters carried pampered guests on cushioned chairs from the train station at Sirkeci, in Istanbul's old city, to the rowboat landing on the Golden Horn. On the other side of the inlet, in the "European" quarter, Pera, guests caught an electric underground funicular train for a 70-second ride to the hotel.

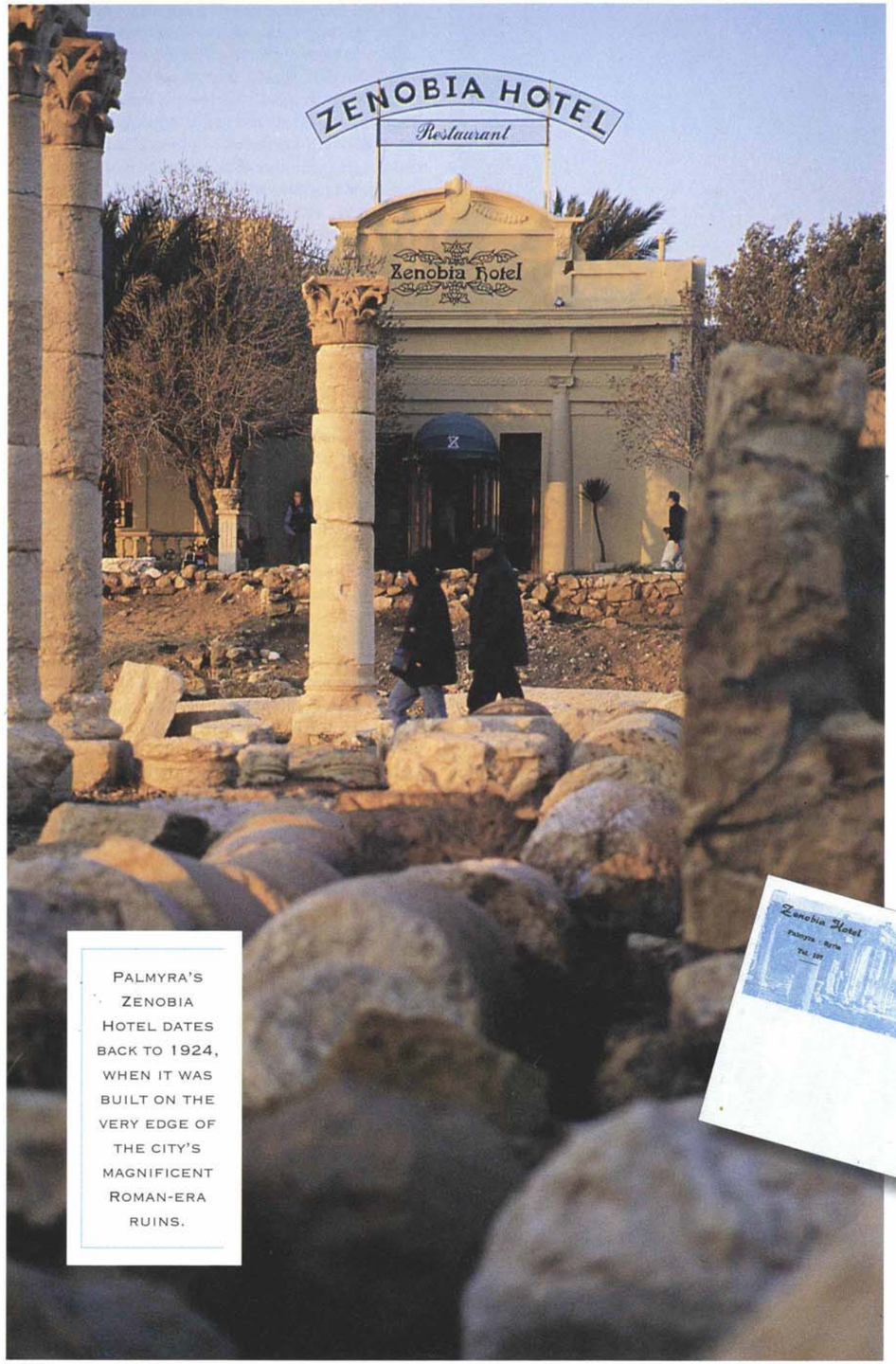
Today's Pera Palace Hotel exists thanks to the efforts of one man, Hasan Süzer, who came to its rescue in 1977. "It was in very bad condition when I took over," he says. "It was not even listed as a hotel in the documents of the Ministry of Tourism."

Süzer says his company, the Istanbul Hotel and Tourism Association, has spent some $2.5 million on renovations. He's promoted the hotel by publicizing its well-known guests: 27 of its 145 rooms bear bronze plaques with the names of famous visitors, including the father of the Turkish Republic, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, Agatha Christie, the glamorous spy Mata Hari and Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis. After losing money for five years, Süzer says, the hotel is now turning a profit and is full in the spring and summer.

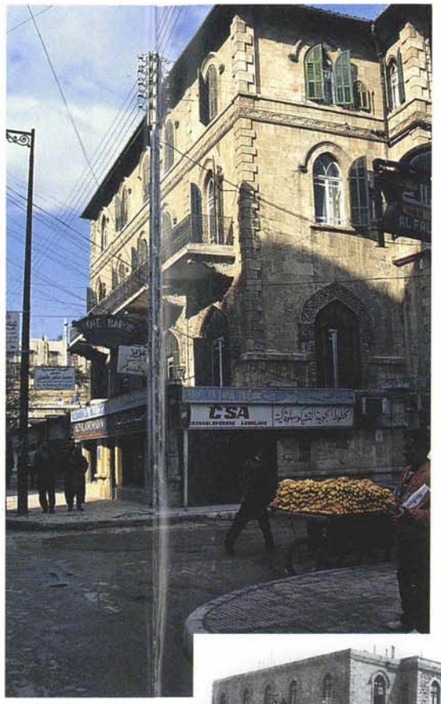
Süzer's company leases the property from three *vakıf*s, or charitable foundations, which were willed the hotel's income by its Lebanese previous owner, Misbah Muhayyes. Süzer's motivation was to save the hotel as a living monument. "The Pera Palace was a link between Europe and Asia," he explains. "The people who stayed here were traveling from one continent to the other, and Istanbul was the edge of Europe for all of them."

To keep the flavor of the original hotel, Süzer's company purchased its old furnishings from the Muhayyes family. While the rooms have been modernized, their hardwood floors, brass beds, hand-woven carpets and vast bathrooms reflect a more expansive past, and that reflection, Süzer says, is what the Pera Palace has to offer that its modern, five-star competitors do not. "The parents or grandparents of some of our clients stayed here," he points out, "and that's why they continue to come."

Agatha Christie's Room 404 is a mini-museum, but Atatürk's, No. 101, is the biggest drawing card for local visitors. The chamber features original furniture and such memorabilia as the revered Turkish president's driving goggles and his Panama hat. Busloads of wide-eyed schoolchildren are often among the visitors.



PALMYRA'S ZENOBIA HOTEL DATES BACK TO 1924, WHEN IT WAS BUILT ON THE VERY EDGE OF THE CITY'S MAGNIFICENT ROMAN-ERA RUINS.



AT THE BARON'S HOTEL IN ALEPPO, A SIGNED HOTEL BILL OF T.E. LAWRENCE, FROM HIS ARCHEOLOGICAL DAYS AT CARCHEMISH, IS PRESERVED. INSET: THE 40-ROOM HOTEL IN 1911.

INSET: BARON'S HOTEL

Christie also turns up in Aleppo, a stop on another important luxury rail service—Wagons-Lits' Taurus Express. There, she frequented the Baron's Hotel. Perhaps she found it fascinating because an earlier guest, T.E. Lawrence, might have been leading a double life there. Was Lawrence, the archeologist and scholar, in fact engaged in espionage?

"Spying was the fashion then. Everyone was sort of mixing archeology and espionage, and public relations and diplomacy, all at the same time," says Armen Mazloumian, the Baron's manager, whose grandfather and great-uncle founded the hotel in 1909. Regardless of what Lawrence was really up to, he's held in high esteem at the hotel, where a copy of his signed bill is preserved in a glass case in the faded lounge.

No one alive at the Baron's today remembers Lawrence. But that's not true of Christie, who signed the guest book in 1934. (See *Aramco World*, May/June 1997.) The register is kept by Mazloumian's mother, Sally, a Briton who married Baron's owner Krikor Mazloumian after World War II. "[Christie] came back to the hotel constantly, and my husband knew her very well. He often found her sitting on the terrace, bundled up against the cold, scribbling away," says Mrs. Mazloumian, who also became friends with the author.

The three-story, 40-room hotel once lay in the midst of gardens, with a view of the city's old markets and its ancient citadel. Along with Lawrence and Christie, guests included writer and traveler Freya Stark, King Faysal of Syria, Charles Lindbergh, British spy Kim Philby and financier David Rockefeller. Now, the gardens have been replaced by ordinary commercial buildings, and the disappearance of luxury trains and the advent of bigger, newer hotels have cut into the number of guests. Despite these harder times, however, the hotel is renovating several of its huge, old-fashioned rooms, and the Mazloumians have rejected offers to sell it. "Nightclubs and discos would ruin it," says Armen Mazloumian.

Nostalgia and character are the Baron's two key attractions today, Sally Mazloumian says. Elizabeth Todd, a guest from Cambridge, England, concurred. "I like it here," she said. "It's a little like staying in the British Museum."

One of the suitors of Baron's Hotel has been the Damascus-based Orient Travel and Tours Company, which in 1991 bought the rundown Reine Zenobia Hotel in Palmyra, in central Syria, renovated it and shortened its name to plain "Zenobia."

Built on the edge of the Palmyra's Roman-era ruins, the Zenobia was established in 1924 as a rest house for oil workers traveling to Baghdad by bus, says hotel manager Hani Malek. Five years later, the French baroness d'Andurin acquired the property and transformed it into the Reine Zenobia, after the Palmyran queen who challenged the rule of the Roman Empire—and was finally crushed in the year 274.

"The hotel has a very, very good position," says Malek, gesturing through new glass lobby doors to the stone skeleton of the ancient city that begins just a few meters away. "The government no longer allows construction so close to the ruins."

In 1936, the hotel passed into the hands of a local family named Essad. But Baroness d'Andurin left her own idiosyncratic legacy. "She liked to dress up as Queen Zenobia herself, and she liked to watch hotel guests in the lobby from a small window in her room," says Malek. Today, her old room is a bi-level suite and the hotel, which declined rapidly after she left, bustles again with busloads of guests from Damascus.

Among European travelers to the Middle East, Palestine has long been a focus, since Jerusalem is sacred to Christians as well as to Muslims and Jews. The 95-room American Colony Hotel in East Jerusalem, just a few hundred meters north of the Old City, started life early this century.

The hotel got its name from a small group of Americans from Chicago who put down roots in Jerusalem's Old City in the late 1800's. Led by members of the wealthy Spafford family, who came to seek solace in good works after several personal tragedies, the group had not intended to run a hotel. But the "American colony" rented as a residence the mansion of an Arab landowner named Rabbah al-Husseini, who died without male heirs in the 1890's. And in 1902, a Jaffa hotelier named Ustinov asked them to put up guests of his hotel who were visiting Jerusalem. Over time, the residence evolved into a wintertime hostel for tourists and Christian pilgrims who traveled inland from the coastal ports, and then into the American Colony Hotel, one of the city's most sophisticated, with a mix of guests from throughout the region and around the world.

Since 1980, a Swiss company has managed the hotel—now known locally as "The Colony"—although it is still owned by descendants of the colonists. The pasha's original large bedroom is, appropriately, Room One, and the domed "court room" opposite is used for concerts, parties and conferences.

The Colony reestablished a tie with the past when British actor and writer Sir Peter Ustinov visited in 1995 and planted a palm tree to replace one of two that his grandfather, the Jaffa hotel owner, had originally provided for the courtyard. "I think this hotel is remarkable," Ustinov was quoted as saying, adding that people of diverse backgrounds "have always been able to come here and discuss whatever

they wished. It's an extraordinary place...even at the height of the most difficult situations."

Egypt's oldest top-notch hotel, the Mena House Oberoi in Giza, also has roots in the 1800's. Built in the shadow of the Great Pyramids as a hunting lodge for Egypt's ruler, Khedive Ismail, it was enlarged to house Princess Eugénie of France when she visited Egypt to open the Suez Canal in 1869. (See *Aramco World*, September/October 1975.) In the 1880's, English owners dubbed it the Mena House, after the pharaoh who first united Egypt. New owners turned it into a hotel in the 1890's, installing mosaics and *mashrabiyyah* (traditional wooden window grilles) and outfitting the rooms with balconies and other luxuries.

At first, horse-drawn coaches linked the hotel to Cairo, which lay some 15 kilometers (nine miles) away across open farmland. When Cairo laid the tracks for its electric streetcars in the early part of this century, one line ran west from the Nile to the Mena House. In World War I, the hotel became a military hospital, and its extensive grounds hosted an Australian cavalry unit.

Wealthy travelers flocked back to the Mena House in the 1920's and 1930's. Even Prince (later King) Farouk liked to drop by. Once, says the hotel history, the manager discovered the prince in the kitchen "enjoying a beef sandwich which he had just made himself" after a late-night drive.

The Oberoi hotel group of India took over management of Mena House in the early 1970's. In the extensive renovations that followed, workers discovered a room piled high with original 19th-century furnishings. These were restored and placed in the lavishly decorated suites.

Over the years, metropolitan Cairo has steadily crept toward the Mena House's gates. But the 520-room hotel, which boasts a golf course and gardens, remains a restful outpost. In 1990, it completed a new business and conference center. "We're not old in quality or service, but old in history," says spokesman Atef Goubran, adding that the hotel is especially popular among families from the Arabian Gulf.

Also in Cairo—but quite different from the resort-like Mena House—is the Nile Hilton. The hotel has hosted stars like Jane Russell and Frank Sinatra, but key clients today are waves of buttoned-down business travelers attracted by its central location and commercial services, says manager Armin Schröcker.

That location—in the heart of modern Cairo, next door to the Egyptian Museum—makes it a gateway into Egypt's business and cultural heart. But Schröcker adds that the hotel is also "a door to the world for people in Cairo." And Cairenes have adopted the hotel with gusto. It hosts a remarkable 300 weddings a year, says public-relations manager Hoda El Maghraby, some of them "second-generation" weddings, as children follow in their parents' footsteps.

Built on the east bank of the Nile where an English army barracks once stood, the 433-room hotel has an unusual pedigree: The brainchild of Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser, it was inaugurated in 1959 by Nasser and president Josif Broz Tito of Yugoslavia—at the time both leaders of the generally socialist non-aligned nations movement—and by Conrad Hilton, pillar and epitome of American capitalism. The property is a landmark because of its "strong affinity with local people" and because it was the first hotel in Egypt built "by a public-sector company in a management agreement with a foreign company," says Schröcker. Since then, numerous deluxe hotels have risen in Egypt and elsewhere that are operated on the same pattern: some form of government ownership, management by a private, foreign corporation, and locally-hired staff.

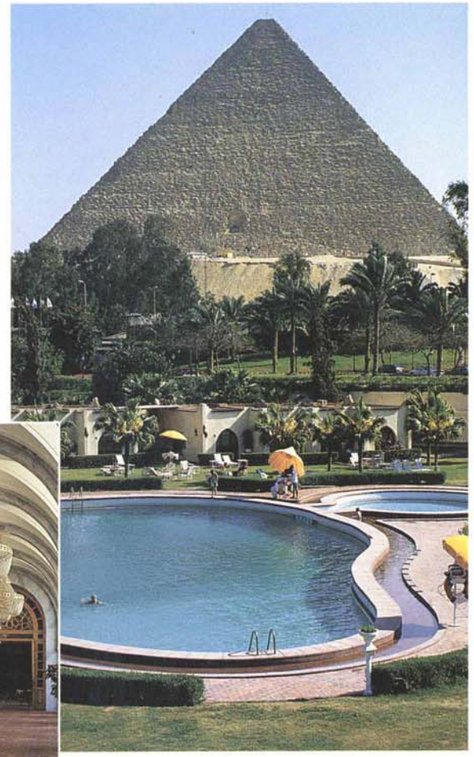
"Nasser wanted the hotel to be a showcase, something to show off to foreign visitors," Schröcker says. But despite its spacious rooms, each with a balcony, the Nile Hilton hasn't been able to rest on its laurels. A sharp business downturn in the early 1990's left many rooms empty and sparked fierce competition. The hotel replied with a renovation program that included the creation of executive floors and new decor for suites. One, the Thomas Cook Suite, complements such late–20th-century comforts as a Jacuzzi with accouterments of the 19th-century Grand Tour traveler—including high-top boots and leather toiletry kit—and rents for a cool $1,400 a night.

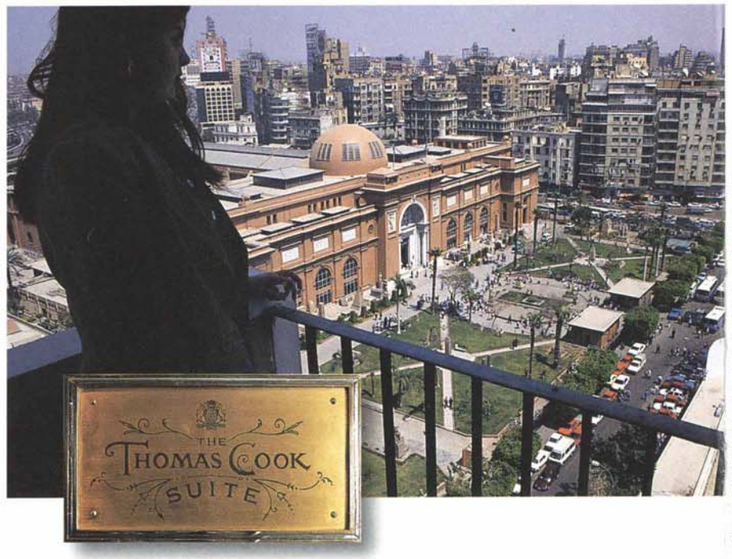
The hotel has also been a leader in training its Egyptian staff. A number of local employees have risen through the ranks to become Hilton executives. Ahmed el-Nahas, for example, was hired as a headwaiter at the Nile Hilton in 1962, and became Hilton International's vice-president for the Middle East and Africa. Other former Hilton employees play significant roles in the hospitality industry in Egypt, Syria and Lebanon.

Tami Daoud of the Egyptian Hotel Association calls the Nile Hilton "a pride and a treasure for Egypt, along with our monuments and museums." It ranks, she says, "among the special hotels that speak, 'I am Egypt!'"

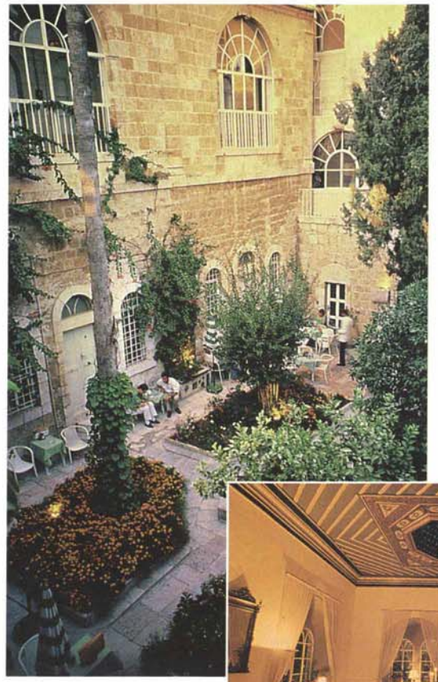
At the 136-room Old Cataract in Aswan, guests can still find their way around using Agatha Christie's thriller *Death on the Nile* as a guide. Only the name has been slightly changed—it was "The Cataract" in her day—to distinguish the original building from a 1963 addition. Like the Winter Palace in Luxor, the Old Cataract has adopted the strategy of physically separating its more modern facilities, such as 24-hour coffee shops, from its his-

A POOL WITH A VIEW AT CAIRO'S MENA HOUSE (BUILT APPROXIMATELY AD 1870) LIES IN THE SHADOW OF THE GREAT PYRAMID (BUILT APPROXIMATELY 2600 BC). NINETEENTH-CENTURY CHANDELIERS LINE THE HOTEL'S ARCADE.

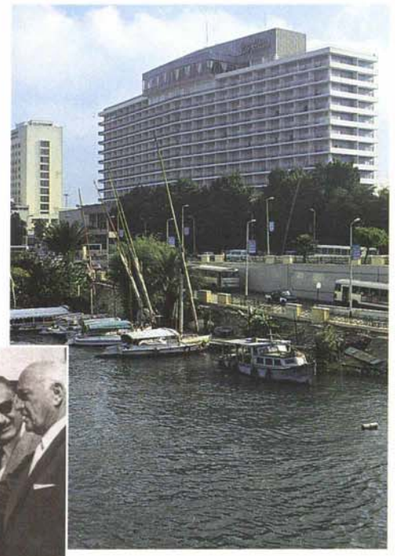




JERUSALEM'S AMERICAN COLONY HOTEL, BUILT OF MELLOW GOLDEN STONE, WAS AN UNPLANNED OFFSHOOT OF A CHARITABLE HOSPITAL FOUNDED BY A CHICAGO FAMILY, AND HAS A HISTORY OF HOSPITALITY TO ALL EVEN IN POLITICALLY DIFFICULT TIMES. INSET: THE DOMED "COURT ROOM."



OVERLOOKING THE EGYPTIAN MUSEUM ON ONE SIDE AND THE RIVER ON THE OTHER, THE NILE HILTON HAS BECOME A CAIRO LANDMARK. INSET: CONRAD HILTON AND EGYPTIAN PRESIDENT GAMAL ABDEL NASSER AT OPENING CEREMONIES IN 1959.



TOP: AMERICAN COLONY HOTEL (2); INSETS, RIGHT AND OPPOSITE: NILE HILTON

torical heart; also like the Winter Palace, it is managed by Sofitel, the hospitality arm of the Paris-based Accor group. The original part of the hotel underwent major renovations in 1986.

The Cataract opened in 1899 on the site of a British military training mission, overlooking the southernmost section of the beautiful, boulder-strewn Nile rapids just north of the Sudanese border. Although the first Aswan Dam, just upstream from the hotel, tamed the rapids, the hotel lost none of its charm.

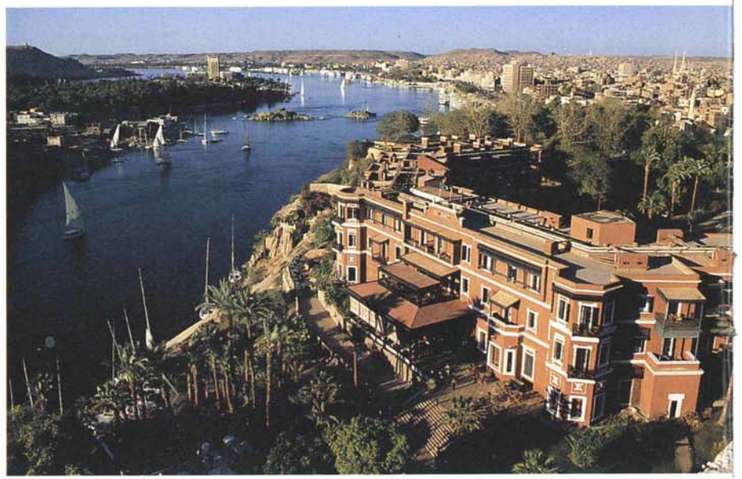
"The Old Cataract has a unique historical background as well as a historic view," says hotel manager Hesham Youssef. "The rooms on the river side aren't just facing the Nile, they're practically *in* the Nile." The secluded, club-like atmosphere adds to the hostelry's intimacy with the river.

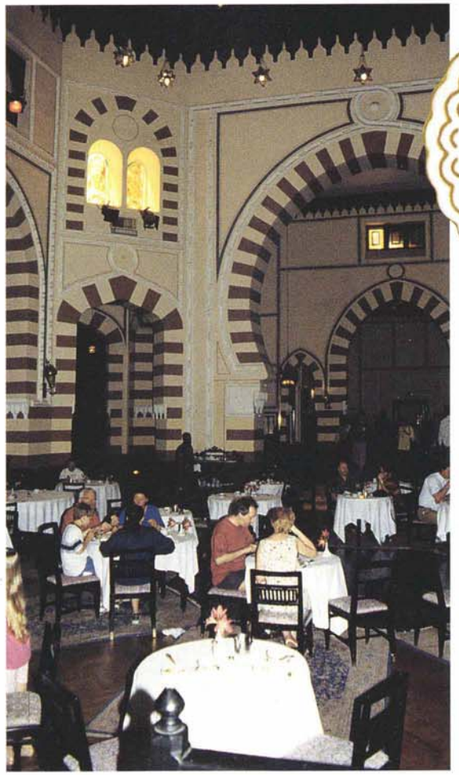
The Old Cataract has hosted "most of the world's presidents," adds Youssef. French President François Mittérand was a regular winter guest; though very ill, he returned to the hotel in December 1995, just a few days before his death.

The Winter Palace, some 160 kilometers (100 miles) to the north in Luxor, opened in 1886. It was built under the supervision of Thomas Cook for the exclusive use of Egypt's royalty and nobility. Later opened to the public, it still attracted royalty—King Farouk kept a permanent suite there—and the yachting classes. Today, the hotel is the gateway to the trove of pharaonic monuments clustered at Thebes, once the capital of ancient Egypt. Its Nile-side rooms and broad first-floor terrace offer splendid views of the river and its west bank—pharaonic Egypt's most important burial ground. When a frequent guest at the hotel, archeologist Howard Carter, discovered the tomb of Tutankhamen in 1922, it was on the Winter Palace's bulletin board that the first notice of his discovery appeared.

In 1994, the Winter Palace completed an $11 million renovation of the original 102-room building "to return the atmosphere and reputation of the hotel," says manager Denis de Schrevel. Not every old touch was kept, however. The old ballroom, with its spring-supported floor, was transformed into a spacious lounge. After a hard day's sightseeing among the ruins and tombs, explains de Schrevel, "there just isn't much demand for dancing." Rooms, however, remain in demand: A 125-room addition to the modern wing opened early this year.

Investing in tradition has proved good business for the Winter Palace, as it has for other classic Middle Eastern hotels. A key reason for success, says de Schrevel, is that "I'm running a hotel with a history." That description—and that success—is equally true of the hotel's mellowed and comfortable counterparts elsewhere across the Middle East.

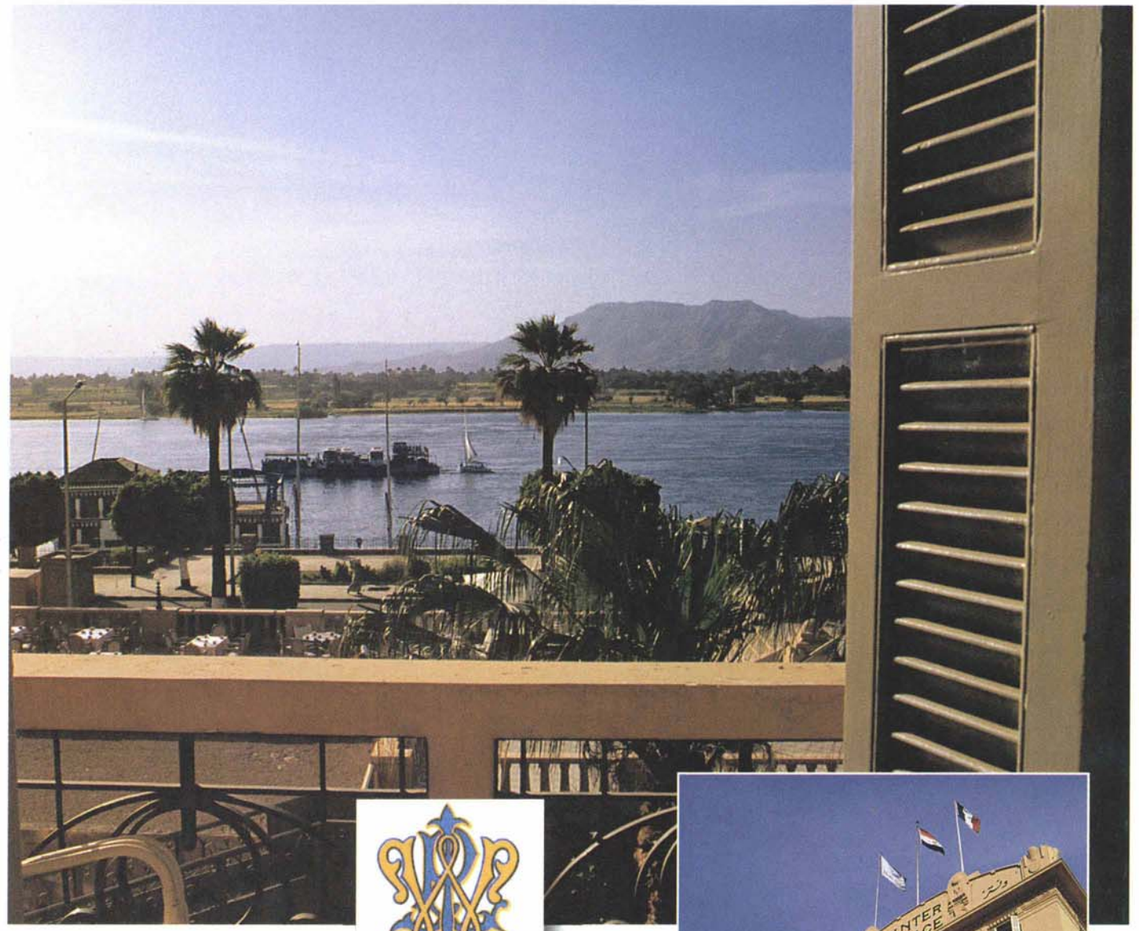




OLD CATARACT
Aswan

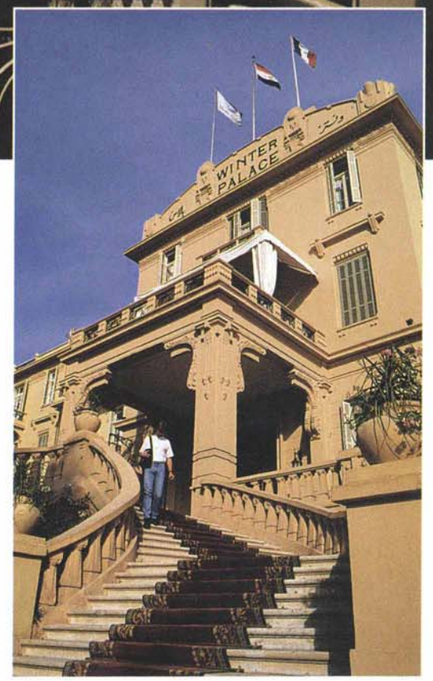
PALM TREES AND *FELUCCA* MASTS ARE ALL THAT SEPARATE GUESTS AT THE OLD CATARACT IN ASWAN FROM THE NILE. THE HOTEL WAS A PARTICULAR FAVORITE OF FRENCH PRESIDENT FRANÇOIS MITTÉRAND.

Arthur Clark is a Saudi Aramco staff writer based in Dhahran. His fondness for hotels and foreign lands dates back to childhood trips to Chicago, where his family stayed in stately old hotels that served guests from around the world.



WINTER PALACE
Luxor

HOWARD CARTER'S FIRST ANNOUNCEMENT OF HIS 1922 DISCOVERY OF THE TOMB OF KING TUTANKHAMEN WAS A POSTING ON THE GUESTS' BULLETIN BOARD AT THE WINTER PALACE, ACROSS THE NILE FROM LUXOR'S VALLEY OF THE KINGS. THE HOTEL, ORIGINALLY BUILT FOR EGYPT'S ROYALTY AND NOBILITY, IS A FAVORITE OF VISITORS TO THE ANTIQUITIES OF THEBES.



Seeing Deeper

Reappreciating Miniatures

Written by Lee Lawrence

If you look closely enough, you can see *into* a painting, and enter the world that created it.

Some years before "virtual reality" became a buzzword, a handful of scholars of the Islamic arts of the book were building their own visual pathways into distant times and places.

Painstakingly reassembling centuries-old illustrated books from their long-scattered pages, or folios, these scholars began examining not only the books' exquisite Ottoman, Persian and Mughal miniature illustrations, but also such less commonly noted features as calligraphic style, layout, border decoration and textual content. Though their insights first yielded only academic treatises, they are now are revolutionizing the kinds of exhibitions museums assemble and the way Islamic manuscripts and miniature albums are displayed and appreciated. This "virtual reality" approach has even made its mark in the no-nonsense world of the commercial art market, influencing the prices that Islamic manuscripts command at auction.

This new "contextual" or "holistic" approach demands sophistication and subtlety not only in the scholars doing the work but in the field of Islamic art history itself. As Robert Hillenbrand of the University of Edinburgh explains, scholars from the 1930's through the 1960's "had the task of clearing the ground. As a result, the major aspects of the field began to stand out. You worked out basic chronology, basic schools of art, who the patrons might be. What you didn't do," he adds, "was write a 300-page book about one manuscript."

That kind of specialization is the hallmark of later scholars such as Stuart Cary Welch, curator emeritus of Islamic art at Harvard University. In the late 1960's, Welch collaborated with historian Martin Dickson to produce *A King's Book of Kings: The Shahnameh of Shah Tahmasp.* Published in 1972 by the Metropolitan Museum of Art, it is a landmark study of one sumptuously illustrated 16th-century copy of Firdawsi's 60,000-verse poem. The text is Persia's national epic; the manuscript has made international headlines twice this century. In 1970, its owner, Arthur Houghton, shocked the art world when he disassembled the book, donating 78 illustrated folios to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and selling off 62 others. In 1994, Houghton's heirs returned the remaining 118 miniatures and all of the text to Iran in exchange for a painting by Willem de Kooning. (See *Aramco World*, May/June 1995.)

Poetry and music, with paan and mulberry juice, create a cultivated entertainment in this 17th-century miniature by the Persian artist Bichitr. Such an event was recreated in 1985 at Harvard's Fogg Museum. For Stuart Cary Welch (inset), deep familiarity with the Houghton Shahnama led to insights into the book's creation.

In the years before Houghton broke up the *shahnamah*—the word means "book of kings"—Welch spent countless hours examining its miniatures. He recalls staggering upstairs at 4:00 one morning after staring at color slides all night to discover, as he looked in the mirror, that "one of my eyes was literally bleeding."

Welch's intense study of the manuscript allowed him to suggest attributions for individual paintings, determine dates of creation and identify the styles of particular workshops—all the stuff of traditional art history. But beyond that, he became so intimately familiar with this *shahnamah* that he gleaned insights into a new realm: the book's social and cultural context. He even caught glimpses of individual character and history. "In a moment of poetic enthusiasm and insight," he says, "I wrote that I could see [in one painting] that its author had been to India, and that I could also see from the despair of the composition and the heaviness of it all that he was a very troubled spirit, and I speculated that he was either a drug addict or an alcoholic." "What hogwash," he chided himself later, but he nonetheless related his insight to Dickson, adding that he had identified the artist as the 16th-century painter and calligrapher Dust Muhammad.

A week later, Dickson telephoned. "He had just unearthed a letter from Dust Muhammad," Welch recounts, "in which he said not only that he had gone to India, but that he had gone because [Persia had introduced] a prohibition against wine, to which he was addicted!" The eye-strain had paid off; the insight was real.

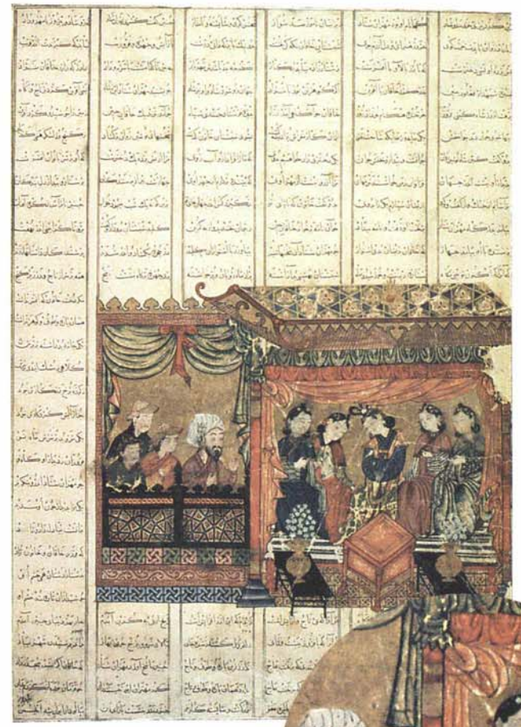
Now, museum curators are looking for creative ways to get the public to peer at manuscript illustrations equally closely—though less painfully. At the Metropolitan Museum of Art, visitors to the permanent Islamic collection are invited to sit as though before a slanted bookstand and study the folios. London's Victoria and Albert Museum takes a similar tack, placing folios in hip-high standing cases. For temporary shows, the Smithsonian's Sackler Gallery of Art now provides visitors with magnifying glasses and what Massumeh Farhad, curator for Islamic art, dubs "leaning rails," mounted underneath the framed folios. "The whole idea," Farhad says, "is to bring people closer to the works. When you have a magnifying glass in your hand, it forces you to lean in." Looking closely makes it possible for visitors to appreciate the individual whiskers of a sultan's beard or the intricate, overlapping patterns that fill the border, and possibly to understand the nature of the time and place that the miniature depicts.

The Sackler introduced the leaning rails and magnifying glasses with its 1996 show "The Art of the Persian Court," and the technique was so successful and cost-effective that the Sackler is using it again for "The King of the World: A Mughal Manuscript from the Royal Library, Windsor Castle." That show, which opened in Delhi in January and traveled to Buckingham Palace before coming to Washington, centers on 44 paintings and two illuminations of the *Padshahnamah*, a 17th-century Indian imperial manuscript.

The problem with this text, a chronicle of 10 years of the Emperor Shah Jahan's reign, is that it includes flashbacks that complicate the chronology. Moreover, the miniatures were not commissioned for this manuscript, but were cut from existing works and inserted after the completion of the text. So while the paintings, at first glance, seem to illustrate the events described in the adjacent text, closer inspection reveals that they actually depict similar events from a different time, and show different personages.

In putting this show together, the director of the Smithsonian's Freer and Sackler galleries, Milo Beach, had to choose between giving visitors either a sense of the period illustrated or an understanding of how the *Padshahnamah* was assembled. In the end, he made "a slight adjustment" to the order of the illustrations in order to present a chronological visual account of the period. But he also took steps to impart a sense of the manuscript as an integral whole: At the entrance to the show, a low case contains the manuscript's text-only pages, as a visual reminder that the miniatures are part of a larger whole that has been disassembled only for conservation purposes and which, at tours' end, will be rebound into a book. As for the illustrated pages, they hang on the wall like paintings, but facing folios are mounted side-by-side in double frames, to suggest an open book.

This suggestion was carried further with inventive displays by the curators of "Pages of Perfection—Islamic Paintings and Calligraphy from the Russian Academy of Sciences, St. Petersburg," an exhibition that opened in Paris in the fall of 1994 and traveled to Lugano and New York. (See *Aramco World*, November/December 1995.) The show featured what is now called the St. Petersburg Album, its folios mounted in free-standing, double-sided cases that allowed visitors to get almost as close as if they were holding up the open manuscript. The exhibition also featured a 17th-century *muraqqa'*—a scrapbook of selected texts and illustrations, decorated and bound by or for a particular reader—whose 45 folios are bound in accordion pleats. Curators extended the album like a folding screen so that visitors could view it from beginning to end.



A television production about Marco Polo led collector Abolala Soudavar (inset) to realize that the miniature "Mehran Setad Selecting a Chinese Princess" in the Great Mongol Shahnamah depicted a historical—not a fictional—event, and to conclude that this "Book of Kings" was not simply art for art's sake, but a partial recasting of the Persian national epic, intended to legitimize the Mongol Ilkhanids' occupation of the Persian throne.

Scholars feel that the holistic viewing experience is more than the sum of its parts. Hillenbrand refers to the placement of illustrations within the body of a text as an example: By highlighting certain passages, the illustrations point out subtle parallels, or drive home particular points, that someone involved in the manuscript's creation probably wanted made. "When you have a manuscript with a large number of paintings, your eyes tell you something when suddenly the illustrations begin to bunch," Hillenbrand says. The effect starts at the subliminal level, and then the parallel or theme "stops being in the outer reaches of the psyche, and comes to the front of your mind."

That delicious moment of insight may happen in the presence of the manuscript or it can take one completely by surprise. Either way, among scholars, it usually marks the birth of a theory.

Collector and historian Abolalla Soudavar was sitting in his home in Houston, Texas when his latest theory was born. He was already intimately familiar with an early–14th-century *shahnamah* produced for an Ilkhanid Mongol ruler of Persia; its pages had been dispersed—and possibly mutilated—in 1909 by the Belgian-born art dealer G.J. Demotte. Soudavar knew each of its 58 surviving paintings, from the first one, showing Zahhak enthroned, to the last, which illustrated the story of Mehran Setad, King of Persia, sending an envoy to China to select a princess to be his bride.

This manuscript—known as the Great Mongol Shahnamah, or the Demotte Shahnamah—could not have been further from Soudavar's mind as he sat with his son one evening watching a television serial on

UPPER AND PREVIOUS SPREAD: CHESTER BEATTY LIBRARY; LOWER: ILENE PERLMAN
UPPER: BOSTON MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS/ABOLALA SOUDAVAR; LOWER: DICK DOUGHTY

Marco Polo. At the mention of Persia, however, his ears pricked up, and he listened with mounting interest as the narrator told of the Mongol emperor Kublai Khan sending the Chinese princess Cocachin to the Ilkhanid court.

Soudavar immediately checked to see whether the incident appeared in the Persian 14th-century *Jami' al-Tawarikh*, known as *The Universal History*. It did. And that sparked his theory that the Great Mongol Shahnamah had been created as a deliberate attempt by the Ilkhanid rulers—invaders and conquerors of Persia less than a century before—to legitimize their regime by assimilating Mongol history into the epic Persian legend. Over the next five years, Soudavar traveled to examine the now-scattered folios in person. At home, he pored over facsimiles and photographs, and he combed texts of the *Shahnamah* and the *Jami' al-Tawarikh* and scoured other accounts from the period.

In the end, he emerged convinced that the Great Mongol Shahnamah had indeed been conceived as a propaganda tool for the last great Ilkhanid ruler, Abu-Sa'id. "Intended for the enjoyment of a sophisticated patron," Soudavar writes, this *shahnamah* "constituted a political manifesto in support of the legitimacy of the Mongols, as well as self-justification for the vizier ... to serve a foreign conqueror."

Art historian Sheila Blair, who did seminal work on the manuscript with Harvard's Oleg Grabar, agrees that the irregular rate at which the illustrations appear throughout the text indicate that the work had a specific purpose. She also agrees that the creators of this *shahnamah* "were certainly trying to make this point about the legitimacy of the Mongols at the time when the Mongols were ruling Iran." But where Soudavar sees a manuscript designed to set a new standard of quality for future *shahnamah*s, Blair holds to the conclusions she and Grabar published in 1980: that this monumental work was a one-off literary experiment that was never completed. According to this hypothesis, gaps in the manuscript do not necessarily indicate that certain folios have been lost, but rather that they never existed in the first place.

In speculating on the way the *shahnamah* was used (or wasn't), Soudavar and Blair touch on what Woodman Taylor dubs the "post-production life of art, where meanings are generated by the audiences who use the work of art." A professor of South Asian and Islamic Arts at the University of Illinois at Chicago, Taylor believes that exhibitions should aim to explore how a work of art "lived" after its publication. This may mean simply mounting folios in double frames that expose both front and back—"to get visitors to think about the fact that this was read," Taylor explains—or staging a "multi-media" exhibition, as he did in 1985 with Hussein Ziai at Harvard University's Fogg Museum. Surrounded by folios from illustrated manuscripts and albums, visitors listened to a musician and a scholar reciting poetry, first in Persian then in English.

A double-sided display case, magnifying glasses, and wall mountings that juxtapose facing folios all help visitors to the Sackler Gallery view the 17th-century Mughal Padshahnamah *as a whole book, rather than as discrete paintings. Inset: Milo Beach is director of the Smithsonian's Freer and Sackler Galleries.*

In that exhibition, Taylor was bringing together elements of traditional Persian poetry gatherings of centuries past, when poets took turns reading verses, book in hand. "What really got me going was that there are some *paan* stains [on the manuscript]," he said, referring to the betel-nut concoction commonly chewed in India. For him, the stains illuminated a whole scene: the book read at a poetry gathering, as actually depicted in at least one Mughal miniature, where the poet chews *paan* while reading poetry, a spittoon standing ready at his side. Each stain was a clue to that manuscript's "post-production life."

Taylor looks at other marks of use, too. Nicked corners imply multiple readings, while a torn corner, meticulously repaired, bespeaks an owner's love for a particular miniature, poem, or passage. Similarly, when Taylor detects overpainting in an illustration, he cares less about the *who* and *when* than the *why*. Had the original been damaged? Did a later user not like something in the original and decide to paint over it? If so, what did he dislike, and why was replacing it worth the trouble?

In this respect, Taylor falls squarely into the camp of the holistic scholars, who look at a work and ask not "who," "where" and "when" but rather "why," "how" and "to what effect"–questions whose answers require, as Welch puts it, "a fanatical devotion over time."

Charyar Adle, an Iranian-born scholar based in Paris, knows it will take even more than that to complete the task he has taken on: To reconstruct a 16th- to 17th-century Mughal album known as the Muraqqa' Gulshan will require not only devotion, but a broad base of knowledge, the resources to travel, the collaboration of fellow experts, and access to private and state collections.

Considered one of the finest Mughal albums ever made, the Gulshan was commissioned by the emperor Jahangir. Its surviving folios are scattered among three museums in the United States, one in Europe, several private collections and the former imperial palace in Tehran. Identifying its various parts is easy, according to Adle: They are just as distinctive in size, style and quality as the folios of the Great Mongol Shahnamah that Grabar and Blair reconstructed. Restoring their original order, however, is another matter.

In the case of the Great Mongol Shahnamah, restoring the original sequence was not merely a matter of shuffling the folios until the text of Firdawsi's poetry read correctly. Not only were some pages missing, but in three places the text skipped from the illustrated front of one folio to the illustrated front of the next, leaving the text on the reverse sides in no relationship to that on the fronts. Out came the magnifying glass, then the microscope—and then Blair saw it. Originally, both front and back of these folios had sported miniatures. Someone had meticulously split each page and pasted the illustrated face onto an unrelated page of text.

"That was a real 'aha' experience," Blair says more than 15 years later. It was also the key to repaginating the manuscript, which laid the foundation for Grabar's and her analysis, as well as that of Soudavar and others.

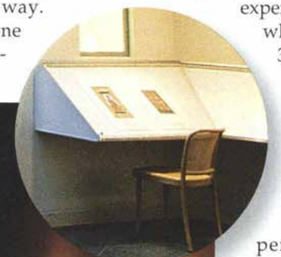
For Adle and his collaborators, Welch and Beach, repagination of the Muraqqa' Gulshan will prove more difficult. As scrapbook-like compilations of hand-picked paintings, poetry and prose, *muraqqa'*s include no reliable, original page numbers, and the sequence of folios can't be inferred from a continuous text. But there is good news, too. "The more complicated the album," Adle maintains, "the easier it is to reconstitute." This is because it was more thoroughly thought out, enabling Adle and his collaborators to look at such elements as width of the margins, border decorations, composition of paintings, and subject matter to come up with likely matches and sequences.

Even though they can never be entirely sure of faithfully recreating the original, they feel it is worth all the necessary travel, politicking, research, and sheer hard looking to try. "One needs to try to see the art not the way we see it today," Adle believes, "but the way art critics, patrons, and artists of the time understood it." If we succeed in doing that, the works act as windows on the past.

The holistic approach has also had repercussions in the art market. Marcus Fraser, in the Oriental books and manuscripts division of Sotheby's in London, notes that "over the last few decades, there has been a growing attitude that the breaking of manuscripts is not necessary." Furthermore, the price structure has shifted. "From 1979 until recently," Fraser says, "individual miniatures were easier to sell, and they fetched higher prices, than manuscripts of equal importance. Today a manuscript stands a good chance of fetching the same amount, if not more."

Although Fraser attributes the increase in sale prices primarily to the "re-emergence of Persian buyers," there is also a more fundamental reason. To some extent, the market is reflecting what Sheila Canby, an Oriental specialist at the British Museum, describes as a growing awareness "that these [manuscripts] are finite resources and that there is a need to preserve them."

But just as the contextual approach is not universal among scholars, the trend in the art market is neither consistent nor irreversible. London art dealer Oliver Hoare, who brokered the de Kooning deal with Iran, wryly points out that sellers might indeed be inclined to keep manuscripts intact—until they fail to sell that way. After all, he says, "money is the one thing that shifts people's perceptions." He reports that lesser-quality manuscripts are still being split and sold folio by folio, and he sees no evidence of collectors trying to assemble the missing folios of partial manuscripts in their possession.



"The whole idea," says Sackler Gallery curator Massumeh Farhad, "is to bring people closer to the works." At the Sackler, "leaning rails" invited close scrutiny of "The Art of the Persian Courts," while the Metropolitan Museum of Art (inset) has placed chairs in front of its table-like displays.

SACKLER GALLERY (2); SACKLER GALLERY; INSET: METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

This is a reminder that, for good or ill, illustrated folios have carved out for themselves a "post-production life" that is independent of the manuscripts they were once part of. And this is not likely to change, for most manuscripts cannot be reconstituted: Their pages are now too widely scattered, and many of them are lost or badly damaged. Even when it is possible, not all art historians agree that physically reconstructing a book or album is the right thing to do, among other reasons because it places the folios out of the view of all but a select few. That is what will happen with the St. Petersburg Album: Beach has been working on determining the original sequence of pages, and when the job is complete, conservators will reassemble the folios and return them to their leather binding.

The *muraqqa'* from St. Petersburg, however, will remain publicly accessible, in a sense, through a high-quality printed facsimile. "We wanted it to be an *exact* replica," says Francesca von Habsburg, founder and chairman of Art Restoration for Cultural Heritage, which is organizing the project. "But this proved too expensive." The 98 folios, which measure 44.7 by 33 centimeters (17.5 by 13 inches), will be reproduced at two-thirds of their original size and printed in four colors plus gold.

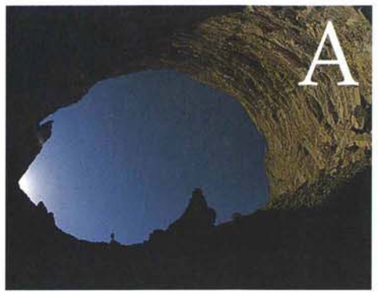
Although an expensive proposition, facsimiles are nevertheless a compromise that might become more popular, particularly for famous works. Part of Adle's project, too, would be to produce a facsimile of the Muraqqa' Gulshan.

Another way to retain both the wholeness of a work and its accessibility to the general public are exhibitions in which all the surviving folios of a work are temporarily reunited in a single place. This would be the ideal way to communicate to the public the richness and import of a manuscript like the Great Mongol Shahnameh. Scholars might not agree on how to interpret the manuscript, but they would all love to see its folios reunited, even briefly. Since the Smithsonian's Sackler and Freer galleries own more pages than anybody else, Washington would seem the logical venue.

"Someday it will happen," says Beach. "And it will be a very exciting exhibition."

A free-lance journalist based in Washington, D.C., Lee Lawrence frequently writes about non-Western art and culture for publications in the US and abroad.

DIVING IN THE DESERT



As a diver and adventurer, I had been fascinated with these holes for years. I had fantasized that a complex underwater cave system might lie here, waiting to be discovered.

As you drive south from Riyadh, the capital of Saudi Arabia, toward al-Kharj, the rocky desert is dotted with large circular areas of lush green grass. Pivot-point irrigation makes it possible to grow fodder here, in the middle of the desert, for some of the world's largest dairy farms nearby. The water is "fossil water," pumped from vast natural underground reservoirs filled more than 7000 years ago, when Arabia's climate was wet and verdant. (See *Aramco World*, March/April 1980.) In some places near al-Kharj, this water comes close to the surface, and sinkholes (*dahl* in Arabic) measuring some 20 meters (65') in diameter have opened in the ground.

As a diver and adventurer, I had been fascinated with these holes for years. I had fantasized that a complex underwater cave system might lie here, waiting to be discovered. But the several sinkholes I had seen all had steep 60-meter (200') walls dropping down to the water—an impossible descent with SCUBA equipment.

In 1994 I was invited to visit some caves "discovered" almost 15 years ago by two American cavers, John Pint and Dave Peters. (In Saudi Arabia, every natural feature, even those that may seem quite insignificant to Westerners, has long been named by local bedouins.) Pint and Peters, then teachers in Dammam, had seen an aerial navigation map showing many holes near the little town of Ma'aqala, 75 kilometers northeast of Riyadh. Considering that very few limestone caves had been found in Saudi Arabia, they became very excited at the prospect that these holes might be the entrances of unexplored caves.

When they investigated on the ground in 1983, they found an area like Swiss cheese, with holes everywhere leading down to caves. Pint stumbled on the biggest cave—literally—when he tripped and fell on a tiny hole and felt a damp wind blowing in his face. The extent of that cave is still not known, though several kilometers of it have been explored, and Pint has named it Dahl Sultan, in view of its size. My interest in these caves, of course, was to find out if there was diving to be done there.

Pint and some of his friends and I located the caves again in 1994, and found in one of them camel bones, gazelle horns and ostrich feathers, indicating that ancient hunters might have lived or sheltered there.

The entrance to Dahl Sultan itself was only big enough for one person to squeeze through at a time, but it opened into a magnificent room with beautiful stalactites. Tunnels led on through a succession of rooms for as far as we dared to walk. This cave, created by running-water erosion of the limestone rock, did not extend very far below ground level. It apparently is regularly flooded in the winter, and its sandy floor was damp, but it was not deep enough to reach levels that might contain standing water. Diving would have to await the discovery of other caves.

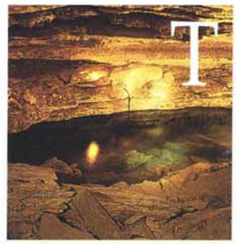
Unfortunately, it was through a tragic accident that I learned at last of a cave that contained water and was also accessible to divers. At Ain Hit, the limestone wall of the Sulaiy Escarpment is punctuated by a huge hole known as Dahl Hit. This cave leads down to an underground lake 100 meters (330') below the ground. I read about it in a SCUBA club newsletter after a diver equipped only with mask and flippers lost his way in the underwater cavern and drowned. As far as I could find out, however, nobody had tried to explore Dahl Hit using breathing equipment, so I began planning an expedition. Little did I know that it was the start of two years of incredibly hard, fascinating work.

Cavediving has grown, over the last 20 years, into a specialized sport in its own right. The cavediver's need for extended time underwater has spurred the use of techniques previously restricted to a small group of professionals. In particular, the use of mixed gases—various proportions of nitrogen and oxygen, or nitrogen-oxygen-helium "trimix"—with regular amateur diving equipment has considerably extended the time a cavediver can stay underwater. In the West, cavediving groups have probed several kilometers into underwater cave systems in Florida, the Bahamas and Puerto Rico, leading to fantastic discoveries. Unfortunately, however, some divers have been killed because of a lack of proper planning and equipment, and those unnecessary deaths have given the sport a bad reputation.

I gathered a group of six divers together and we set out to Ain Hit. The cave begins with a round opening some 15 meters (50') across beneath the porous limestone that makes up the Sulaiy Escarpment. At the base of the escarpment, the cave entrance penetrates a stratum of the blue-gray, veined Hit Anhydrite Formation—an important layer of rock both for cavedivers and for the oil business in Saudi Arabia. It was laid down on top of limestone beds by the evaporation of mineral-rich ocean brines during the end of the Jurassic Period 140 million years ago.

Anhydrite, a form of calcium sulfate, is a soluble mineral when near the surface, and water has been infiltrating here for many thousands of years, dissolving deep chimneys in it. Along joints or fractures, groundwater flow has dissolved horizontal expanses of the rock, creating, in some areas, dense networks of caves, caverns and tunnels. But deep underground the anhydrite is impermeable, and much less soluble. It thus forms a cap atop the limestone that oil cannot penetrate. Without this impermeable cap of anhydrite, it is almost certain that little of the oil now found so abundantly in Saudi Arabia would still have been there in our time.

The anhydrite formation was named after Ain Hit, where the oil explorers supposedly found the first surface outcrop of anhydrite in the kingdom when King 'Abd al-'Aziz Al Saud invited them to a picnic at the Hit spring. In fact, the discovery at Dahl Hit came in 1938, after oil in commercial quantities had been found in the Eastern Province, and what was discovered was a tar seep and an outcrop of the same anhydrite cap rock that covered the main oil-bearing sedimentary formation beneath the Eastern Province. This spurred the oil explorers to extend their search of these formations, and resulted in a considerable upward revision of the possible extent of Saudi Arabia's oil deposits.



The cave system, down to water level, is divided into three separate chambers. (See next spread.) The floor of the first cave, sunlit, descends at about a 45-degree angle for some 75 meters (250'). It is not really a difficult climb, but hard enough with diving equipment on your back! The floor is covered with sharp limestone boulders: These are pieces of the roof that collapsed into the original cave, which was formed as the anhydrite dissolved out from under overlying limestone.

To reach the second chamber we had to crawl through a small opening, and the diving equipment had to be lowered on ropes from a shelf hanging out over the chamber. Here the last sunlight disappeared, and we had to turn on the lights we had brought. This chamber, about 25 by 10 meters (80 by 32') and with a ceiling 10 meters high, led through a larger, steeply sloping opening into the third and last chamber, about three times as big the second one, where we found the water.

We rigged gas lamps to illuminate the cave. In my 30 years of diving, I had never seen such clear water. That clarity, and the utter stillness of its surface, made it hard to see where the water actually began, and refraction made it look far shallower than it actually was. The bottom shimmered light green, and we could see a black hole, the entrance to an underwater cave.

We put on our diving equipment. We would dive in pairs, with one diver connected to the shore by a lifeline; the other divers, the land team, would tend the line. We brought neutral-bouyancy chemical lightsticks to leave behind us as we swam; they would mark the way back in case we lost the lifeline. Both divers carried powerful flashlights and smaller extra lights.

We had no idea what lay before us. I thought about the powerful currents I had seen in the waterholes at al-Kharj and wondered if we would encounter a similar flow here, and perhaps be swept into the unknown depths. I instructed the line tender to keep the rope taut at all times, so we could signal by tugging on it. With my heavy diving gear and photographic equipment it was tricky to walk the few steps down to the water, but soon we were in it.

We went over a ledge and down into a house-sized underwater cave. The water was so clear that our flashlights could illuminate the entire room. The floor was covered with a silt of anhydrite, as fine as flour. When stirred by the gentle currents we created, it made the water as white and opaque as milk. We had to be very careful not to ruin our visibility.

Down in the silt I could see the glitter of beautiful gypsum crystals large enough to hang on a chandelier. We left lightsticks in our wake as we swam on to where the cave forked into two passages. One, straight ahead, narrowed into a black tunnel; the other, below, fell away in a narrowing canyon. We could see a black hole where it disappeared from sight. Fortunately, we could not detect any current.

We decided to explore the forward route first. My partner led with the lifeline while I followed, keeping one hand on the rope. The shapes of the walls were surreal, seamed with shelves of anhydrite and limestone strata that were covered with white silt, as if it had been snowing. Where our exhalation bubbles struck the roof, flakes of loose rock came down like fatter snowflakes, but they did not affect our visibility. The silt was a different matter, though. We had to move very carefully, gliding through the water with almost no movement. The tunnel narrowed more and more. Finally, after swimming about 150 meters (500'), we came to a dead end and turned back. The line tender was doing his job well, and we had no problem following the rope as we retreated.

Its clarity, and the utter stillness of its surface, made it hard to see where the water actually began. The bottom shimmered light green, and we could see a black hole, the entrance to an underwater cave.

WRITTEN AND PHOTOGRAPHED BY ERIK BJURSTRÖM

ILLUSTRATION BY TOM MCNEFF

***Previous spread**, left: Floating as if in midair in the crystal-clear water of Dahl Hit. Right: Sinkholes near al-Kharj long supplied the town with water.*

DIVING IN THE DESERT

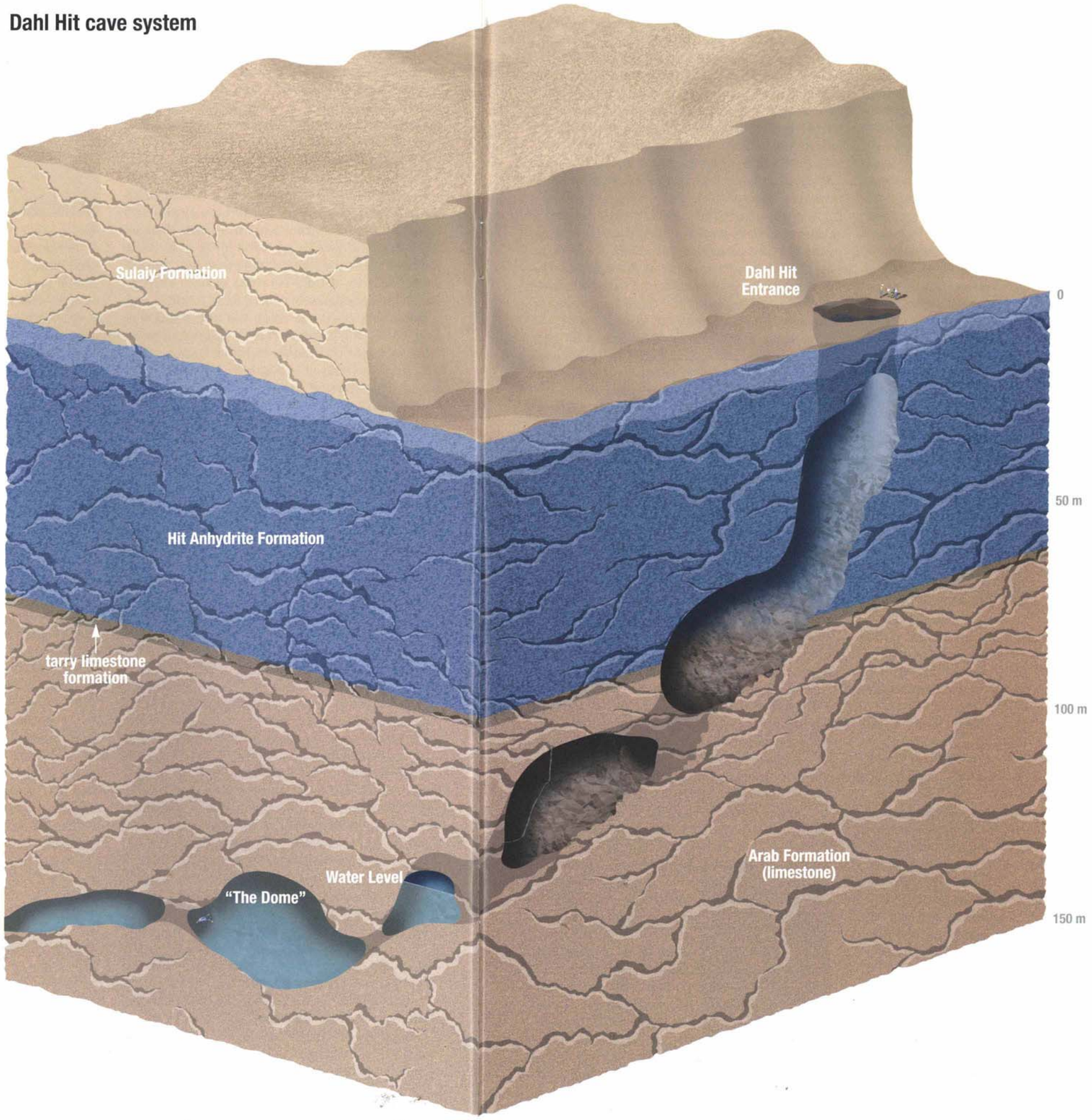
A tiny surface hole near al-Kharj leads into Dahl Sultan, the largest cave in the area. Exploration showed it to be dry.

At Dahl Hit, we lowered diving equipment on ropes into the second chamber, where we had to turn on our lights.

We dived in pairs for safety's sake, with one diver always connected to the land team by a hand-held lifeline.

Entering the first underwater chamber, we dived over a ledge and found ourselves in a house-sized cave full of the clearest water I've ever seen.

Dahl Hit cave system

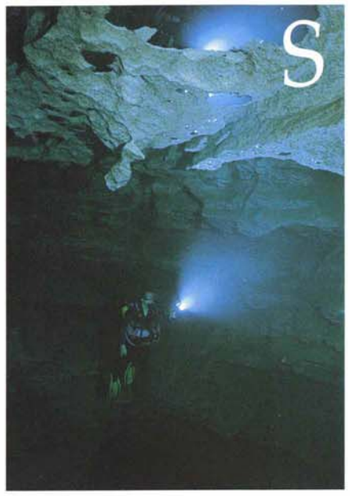


The walls were seamed with strata in the limestone. Every horizontal surface was covered with fine white silt.

The opening into the second chamber would admit only one person at a time. Underwater depth: 17 meters.

The third chamber was very large but low-ceilinged, indicating it had been formed by slow dissolution of the rock.

The only life we found in Dahl Hit was a tiny shrimp-like amphipod, so far unidentified. Its red hemoglobin was visible through its transparent body.



Since the straight-ahead route was blocked, we decided to see if the descending canyon would lead us further. We swam down in a zigzag course that avoided the silt-covered shelves. We saw several side tunnels, but stuck to the main shaft as it became narrower and narrower, finally stopping at an opening only big enough to let one person through. I looked at my depth-gauge—it showed 17 meters (55')—then glanced back the way we had come.

What I saw made me uneasy: The lifeline had snagged on the rock in several places. That meant that we no longer had signal contact with the land team. And a cloud of white silt that we had kicked up now came rolling down toward us like a fog. If we lost visibility, our situation could become quite dangerous.

In an instant all visibility was gone, and we were groping in a milky soup. Weightless, we had no way of judging direction. Only the rope leading upward offered a chance of returning safely.

It did. Before I could signal my partner to turn back, he started to wriggle through the tiny opening, kicking violently. In an instant all visibility was gone, and we were groping in a milky soup. Weightless in the water, we had no way of judging direction. Only the rope leading upward offered a chance of returning safely—and we could see less than an arm's length of that, a whiter white in the flashlight's beam. Desperately signaling, I began a slow ascent, following the rope hand over hand. I saw the gleam of my partner's torch, and knew that he was following.

Fear, more dangerous than the loss of visibility, started to slow my thinking. I knew I had plenty of air left in my tanks, but I felt I was not getting enough with each breath, and I began to breathe heavily. I had to regain control of myself before I did something irrational and potentially fatal, like leaving the lifeline for an uncontrolled ascent. Without letting go of the rope, I sat down on the floor of the tunnel and concentrated on calming down.

Then I went on, hand over hand along the rope, until I came to the first point where it had snagged. I needed both hands to free it, and I had to put the light aside. In total darkness I loosened the rope by touch and went on. After several similar stops, the rope was finally free, we were back in touch with the line tender, and my feeling of security returned. Soon we found the lightsticks that we had left to mark the tunnel entrance.

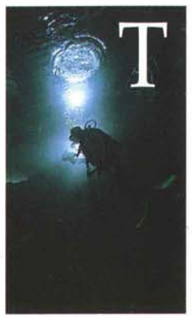
When we climbed out of the water, we found that our land team had been very worried ever since losing contact with us. We were all shaken by the danger we had been in. After an exhausting climb back up to the main entrance, I was glad to see the sun again.

But my partner told me that, before we had turned back, he had peered through the hole he was trying to squeeze through and had seen the tunnel continue at least as far as the light beam reached. That hole presented an irresistible challenge to find out what was on the other side—but I had learned that we required better safety precautions. To push onward in this cave, I needed more expertise, as well as backup equipment. I was taking my first steps into serious cave diving.

It was a stroke of luck that I got a telephone call just a few weeks later that made those steps possible. The caller was Mike Gibson, an experienced cavediver who had explored the famous caves in Florida and Puerto Rico. He had just arrived in Saudi Arabia, and, on the remote chance there would be cavediving opportunities in the kingdom, he had brought all his advanced equipment. Mike was delighted to find a fellow cavediver, and I found his experience gave my confidence a big boost. Together we planned further exploration of Ain Hit.

I went back to the cave two months later with Mike and with Arlene Foss, an experienced diver who had been with me on my shark expeditions. (See *Aramco World*, March/April 1996.) Mike went down first, alone, to secure a permanent lead rope through the small passage where we had turned back. The cavediver's rule is to use one third of the available air swimming in and one third coming back, and to keep the last third in reserve; Mike planned to follow that rule, but he carried two independent breathing systems with a regulator on each tank. He had a hand-carried halogen light, two additional lights fixed to his helmet and two reels of rope, one of which would serve as the main-shaft guideline and the other to explore detours from the main passage.

Mike came back less than an hour later with an exciting report: There was indeed a continuation, and it looked big! But Arlene's and my exploration would have to wait until the following week, to allow the silt to settle and visibility to return.



The next week, Arlene led as we went down. We headed straight for the entrance to the second underwater chamber. Mike had done an excellent job with the rope, securing it to rocks so it passed half a meter or so (1½') above the silt. Even so, Arlene could not avoid stirring up a white cloud in the narrowest part of the four-meter-long (13') tunnel, so I had to pass through blind. Carefully, I pulled myself through, my tanks scraping the roof.

When I emerged, my light revealed a magnificent dome-shaped cave 10 meters (32') high. The water was flawlessly transparent and our light spread through the whole cave, which measured about 25 by 10 meters (80 by 32'). Arlene was hovering under the ceiling, as one might float weightless in a dream. The white silt layer gave the floor soft, rounded contours, whereas the walls and roof had shelves with sharp edges. There were no stalactites or stalagmites to indicate that this cave had once been dry. When I looked into a small hole in the wall, it was filled with the most beautiful small gypsum crystals, not unlike what might be found in an ice cave. We came to call this chamber "the Dome."

From our entrance hole the slope went on, and I could see another tunnel opening at the far side of the room. Near it I spotted tiny tracks in the silt, like the insect tracks you see in desert sand—evidence that there had been life in this eternally dark place! Like the footprint of an astronaut on the moon, however, the tracks might have been made long ago; it was impossible to guess how quickly the cave's slow siltfall would finally cover them. But in fact I soon found the maker of the tracks alive: a tiny, transparent, shrimp-like crustacean called an amphipod. Our lights made his red hemoglobin visible through his transparent shell.

So far, this species does not fit any of the descriptions we have found, and considering the awful isolation of the place, it may well have evolved here and remained unknown to science. As there is no light in the caves, it is presumably blind. There is a minimal current in the water, and perhaps that flow carries in nutrients from areas exposed to sunlight. Or maybe these creatures are at the top of a food chain which starts with bacteria that draw energy not from sunlight but from chemicals such as sulfur and hydrogen, like the bacteria that are the base of the midocean hot-vent ecosystems.

I continued down the slope, following Arlene and the rope, and went through the next opening at a depth of 26 meters (85'). After a 90-degree bend and a smaller chamber with a choice of exits, we came upon yet another "cavescape."

The roof was lower here, but the cave extended horizontally in all directions, shaped like a big bubble in the limestone. This chamber was therefore probably not the work of running water, but had been formed instead by slow dissolution of the rock. It looked like the prayer hall of a mosque, with pillars and arches. Here the rope ended, but I explored around the perimeter of the chamber and found a narrow tunnel leading to the right. It was tempting to continue, but we were far inside the cave system, under 30 meters (100') of water. It was just too risky to penetrate this very narrow tunnel, at this depth, without a guide rope. We started our return.

On my way back I suddenly heard an eerie rumbling, echoing sound that made my blood freeze: It sounded like falling rocks. For a moment I expected the ceiling to collapse. I looked upward, and saw that the roof of the chamber was dotted with bubbles of our exhaled air that had filled small pits and irregularities in the rock surface. When we swam through the chamber on our return, the added bubbles started to run along the roof to higher points, and it was the movement of the bubbles that was making this otherworldly sound.

We continue to explore the Ain Hit cave system. After our first five trips, I set up a "permanent" camp at the site, so all we had to carry in was tanks of air. Nonetheless, it remains a difficult, lengthy task, since we can dive only once at each visit, because of the silt. To climb down to the water and, hours later, back up again, carrying a full load of diving gear, in temperatures that sometimes reach 45 degrees (113°F), is a real test of our endurance and enthusiasm, but both have yet to flag.

People often ask me about the fear that must accompany diving in narrow tunnels, in total darkness, in deep water, where there is no sunlit surface—and no air!—overhead. I usually answer that it is healthy to be a little bit afraid in such a place: I find that fear, kept in check, sharpens my instinct for self-preservation. People also ask why I like to dive in a black hole where there are no colorful fish or beautiful corals to see. The answer is, curiosity: to find out what is around the corner. When I pass through the small entrance of the inner cave at Dahl Hit, it is like stepping down from a spacecraft onto the moon. I hover in weightlessness in a surreal, silent place, a landscape that reveals shapes and spaces and colors to my lights, a place where nobody has been before. This delight is always coupled with anxiety about what could happen, but the sirens of the desert caves are singing their song to draw us in, ever farther.

You hover in a surreal, silent place, a landscape that reveals shapes and colors to your lights, a place where nobody has been before. It is beautiful there, but the delight is always coupled with anxiety.

Erik Bjurström, a consultant at the King Faisal Specialist Hospital and Research Center in Riyadh, has lived in Saudi Arabia for 13 years, and has made more than 40 dives into Ain Hit so far. *He extends special thanks to all his divebuddies and "sherpas" who made this article possible, especially Arlene Foss, Mike Gibson, and Alex at Sea and Sun dive shop in Riyadh.*

Events & Exhibitions

Middle Eastern Music and Dance Camp features *maqam* theory, *'ud* instruction and much more. **Mendocino [California]** Woodlands Campground, August 17 to 23. For details, phone (310) 838-5471.

Teaching About the Arab World and Islam is the theme of teacher workshops co-sponsored by the Middle East Policy Council in Washington, D.C., and conducted by Arab World And Islamic Resources and School Services (AWAIR) of Berkeley, California. Sites and dates include: **Texas** Council for the Social Studies, September 18; **De Pere, Wisconsin**, September 27; **Humbolt, California**, October 11; **Albuquerque, New Mexico**, October 29-31; **California** Reading Association, November 4-6; **Texas** Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, November 9-11. For details, phone (202) 296-6767 or (510) 704-0517.

Ikat: *Splendid Silks from Central Asia from the Guido Goldman Collection* highlights the colorful Central Asian textiles made by repeated binding and dyeing of unwoven threads. **Boston** Museum of Fine Arts, through August 24.

From Palace to Parlor: *Islamic Textiles Inspire Avant Garde Design* shows the Turkish, Indian, Persian and Spanish antecedents of the work of 19th-century Western artisans who sought a renewal of the union between art and craft. Textile Museum, **Washington, D.C.**, through September 2.

Eggi's Village: *Life Among the Minangkabau of Indonesia* explores the world's largest and most modern matrilineal society with 45 photographs and anthropological commentary. The exhibit runs through December 7, and opens September 13, which is **World Culture Day:** *Indonesia!*, a day of folk dances, puppet shows and music; both are at the University of **Pennsylvania** Museum, **Philadelphia**.

Coin Jewellery: *Ancient, Medieval and Modern* surveys the historical uses of coins for decorative and ritual purposes in the West, the Middle East and Far East. British Museum, **London**, through September 14.

Current Archeological Research. Most of the 34 lectures in this series, which runs through June 1998, concern Middle Eastern discoveries and scholarship. Each is presented at noon by a speaker intimately involved in the work under discussion. Musée du Louvre, **Paris.** For details, visit www.louvre.fr.

East Meets West uses examples from the Munayyer collection of Palestinian textiles to highlight Eastern influence on Western costume in the late 19th century. Hermitage, **Ho-Ho-Kus, New Jersey**, through September 28.

A Mission to Persia (1897–1912) displays archeological finds, paintings and drawings, photographs and archival material to create a "dossier" of the French Scientific Delegation in Persia, established 100 years ago. Musée du Louvre, **Paris,** October 3 through January 5.

King of the World: *A Mughal Manuscript from the Royal Library, Windsor Castle* exhibits 44 pages from the *Padshahnama*, or "History of the Emperor," the illustrated manuscript chronicling a decade in the reign of 17th-century Mughal emperor Shah Jahan. Sackler Gallery, **Washington, D.C.**, through October 13.

Traditional Saudi Arabian Artifacts and Graphics: *A Loan from the Nance Museum* surveys costumes, crafts, a coffee ceremony and the role of Islam. **Raytown [Missouri]** Historical Society, through October 15.

From an Antique Land: *Watercolours of the Nile by Alexander Creswell* will show 50 works from the artist's recent travels in Egypt. Spink & Son, **London**, October 27 through November 7.

Gods, Kings and Tigers: *The Art of Kotah* is devoted to the production of a single Rajput court. From the 17th to the 19th century, the former state of Kotah was one of the most artistically prolific in northern India. Sackler Museum, **Boston**, through November 2.

The Face of Sabina presents the history of a remarkable second-century sculpture that was looted from Carthage and sunk off Toulon in 1875. The statue's beautiful face was only retrieved in 1995. Musée du Louvre, **Paris**, from November 7.

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

Pottery in the Making: *World Ceramic Traditions* compares the methods by which pottery has been manufactured from the first prehistoric clay vessels to modern industrial mass production. Museum of Mankind, **London**, through December 31.

Striking Tents: *Central Asian Nomad Felts from Kyrgyzstan* concentrates on the boldly colored and patterned floor covers that insulate the traditional *yurt*. Museum of Mankind, **London**, through December 31.

At the Margins features 15 works with border embellishment from 16th- to 19th-century Mughal India, where such decoration was painted by specialized margin painters. Freer Gallery, **Washington, D.C.**, through December.

Splendors of Ancient Egypt displays 200 pieces on loan from the Pelizaeus Museum to give a panoramic view of 4500 years of pharaonic history. **Detroit** Institute of Arts, through January 4.

When Silk Was Gold: *Central Asian and Chinese Textiles from the Cleveland and Metropolitan Museums of Art* displays masterpieces dating from the eighth to the 15th century. **Cleveland** Museum of Art, through January 4.

In the Presence of the Gods: *Art from Ancient Sumer* displays 43 objects—including statues, vessels, tablets and reliefs—dedicated to gods and goddesses of ancient Iraq. Smart Museum of Art, **Chicago**, through March 8.

Pulling the Thread: *1,000 Years of Knitting Design* reflects the belief that knitting found its way to Europe in the Middle Ages through the Arab textile industries of southern Spain. Exhibits detail process and history. Textile Museum, **Terrassa (Barcelona), Spain**, through March.

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

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

Pakistani artist Afshan Abid spent a month decorating a bus and a van together with Glasgow artist Nicola Atkinson Griffith in the Salaam festival's Truck Art Project.

Salaam is a half-year festival of exhibitions, film, folklore and community projects throughout **Glasgow, Scotland** aimed at helping the entire city celebrate and learn about Islamic cultures. It is sponsored by the Glasgow City Council in collaboration with local artists and community leaders. Highlights include scenes of Middle Eastern life and an introduction to Islam (through April) and work by calligrapher Ghani Al-Ani (through September 5) at the **Art Gallery and Museum**; art and all-ages community workshops by three British Muslim artists-in-residence at the **Gallery of Modern Art** (through September 21); an exploration of Western misunderstanding of the *hijab*, or veil, at the **St. Mungo Museum of Religious Life** (through January 31), and open houses and community discussions during Islam Awareness Week, sponsored by Glasgow's chapter of the Islamic Society of Great Britain, from September 14 to 21. Transportation for groups to all exhibits is free via the colorful Truck Art Project. For a complete schedule of events, phone (44-141) 331-1854 or fax (44-141) 332-9957.

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