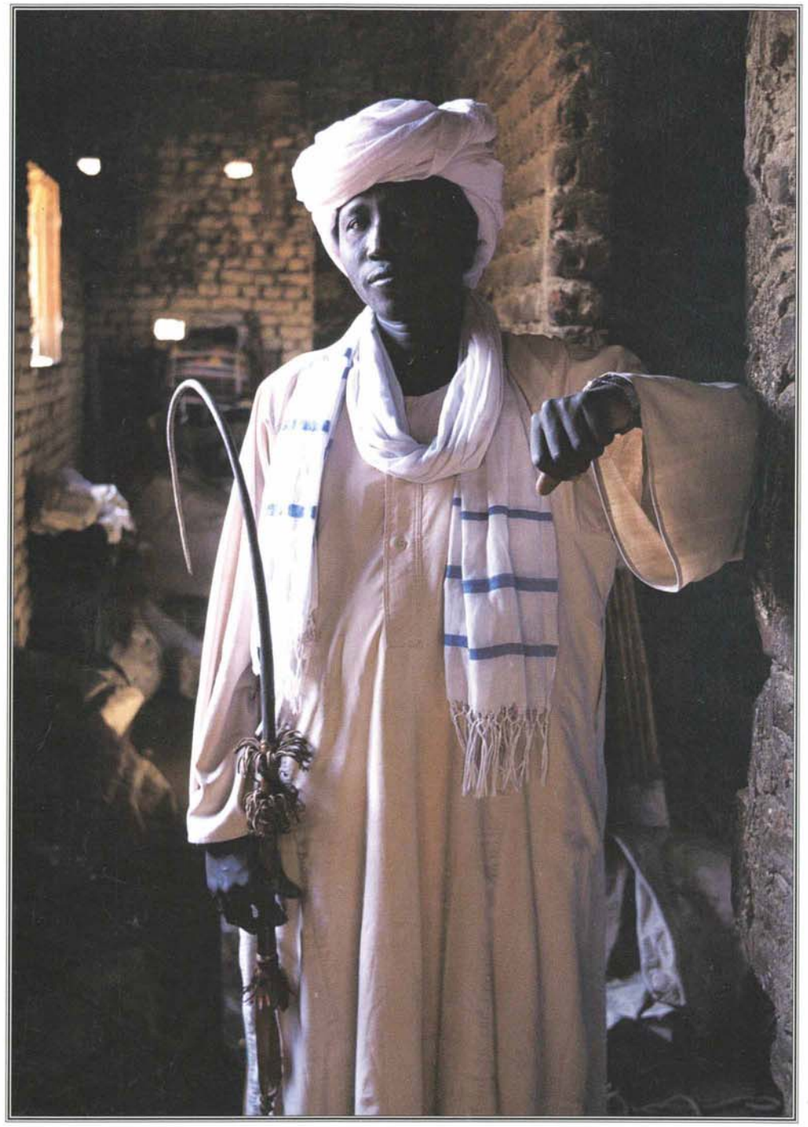

ARAMCO WORLD

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SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 1997

Riding the Forty Days' Road

OPPOSITE: TRUSTEES OF THE CHESTER BEATTY LIBRARY

Contents

ARAMCO WORLD

Published Bimonthly Vol. 48, No. 5

September/October 1997

COVER:
The Forty Days' Road, once a great trade route linking Sudan and Egypt, got its name from the time required to traverse its 2000-kilometer length. Caravans carried ivory, camels, gum and ostrich feathers north and returned with metal manufactured goods and textiles; today, on an abbreviated route, camels are the only commodity, destined to be sold in Egypt as draft animals or for slaughter. Photo by Lorraine Chittock.

OPPOSITE:
A 16th-century Ottoman miniature from the Chester Beatty Library shows the literary and social activity typical of coffeehouses then and now: The patrons are reading, writing, declaiming and conversing as well as drinking the kahveji's *brew.*

BACK COVER:
All the strength, competence and self-assurance that radiate from the face of this Sudanese camel-driver will be needed on the Forty Days' Road. Photo by Lorraine Chittock.

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

PUBLISHER
Aramco Services Company
9009 West Loop South
Houston, Texas 77096, USA

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Houston, Texas 77252-2106
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DESIGN AND PRODUCTION
Herring Design

PRINTED IN THE USA
Wetmore & Company

PRINTED ON RECYCLED PAPER

ISSN
1044-1891

SEND SUBSCRIPTION REQUESTS AND CHANGES OF ADDRESS TO:
Aramco World, Box 469008
Escondido, California
92046-9008

Yemen's Well-Traveled Bean

Written and Photographed by Eric Hansen

Every morning at first light, Sa'id Ahmad Wardah makes his way along the winding, cobblestone streets of the Old City in Sanaa, the ancient capital of Yemen. He opens the heavy steel doors to his coffee shop, and then takes up position behind a waist-high, tiled countertop. He sets the kettles boiling and lays out a tray of clean glasses; within half an hour, the customers start to arrive from the nearby mosque. On a recent morning I found myself surrounded by a talkative crowd of coffee drinkers who were bundled up against the mid-winter chill. I was in Sanaa to investigate the unique qualities of Yemeni coffee, which is not only the world's oldest and most famous, but also one of the most expensive and sought-after of coffees. Sa'id's shop on the edge of the *Suq al-Baqr*, in the Old City's market district, seemed like a good place to start.

"Bunn halib!" ("Milk coffee!") I shouted my order above the roar of Sa'id's pressure kerosene burners. He poured hot, sugared water into a long-handled, wide-bottomed container called a *jazwah*, spooned in a tablespoon or so of medium-roasted, fine-ground coffee and added some five tablespoons of evaporated milk. He allowed the mixture to boil up to the rim a couple of times before pouring out a frothy glassful. I took a sip and the hot, fragrant drink soon filled my mouth with rich and pleasantly pungent flavors: smooth, earthy and mellow with just the right touch of acidity to give it some bite. This was followed by the distinct bittersweet, chocolate-like aftertaste that distinguishes Yemeni coffee from all others. When properly made from high-quality beans, there is no other coffee quite like it.

"Water can be drunk in gulps, but not coffee," advised Mohammed Saleh Hussein, an elderly man who was sitting next to me. "Small sips with lots of air. And don't wait for the grounds to settle, because that is where you will find the flavor."

In Yemen, men often drink their early-morning coffee at shops before breakfast; women often drink it at home, where many also do their own roasting. But from midmorning on, the drink of choice among all Yemenis becomes *qishr*, a delicately flavored, tea-like infusion made from the dried husks of the coffee cherry. Unless one stays in a family home or arrives in a coffee shop sufficiently early, a traveler might see only *qishr* served, and this has led to the false impression that Yemenis no longer drink their own coffee. Yet the truth is that Yemenis not only drink the best of what they grow, but also on occasion spice it with cinnamon, ginger, nutmeg, cardamom or cloves.

"Small sips with lots of air," advised Mohammed Saleh Hussein on a morning in Sanaa "and don't wait for the grounds to settle." Opposite: When fully ripe, bunn*—the coffee cherry—turns red. Insets, from top: Freshly picked coffee cherries are sun-dried for two to four weeks, after which they turn brown and become ready for husking. The husked beans, which are yellow prior to roasting, grow darker the longer they are roasted.*

Holding the hot glass of *bunn halib* with both hands to warm my fingers, I thought about the discovery of coffee and how it first came to be cultivated in Yemen. *Coffea arabica*, classified by Linnaeus in 1737, is indigenous to the highland mountain forests of southwestern Ethiopia, especially the districts of Gamo-Gofa, Sidarno and Kefa, or Kaffa—whose name sounds intriguingly close to the common Arabic word for coffee, *qahwah*, though most scholars agree there is no documented connection between the two. In those regions, coffee can still be found growing wild beneath forest shade trees.

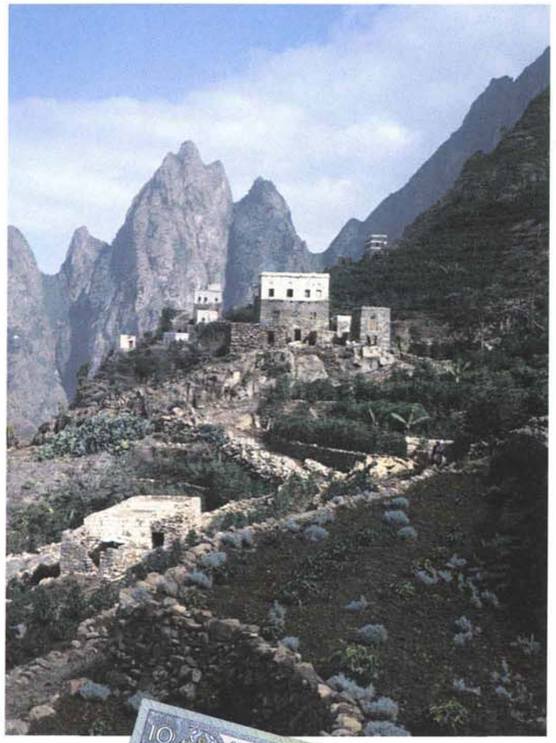
It is this wild coffee that has been harvested since ancient times, but it is generally agreed that formal cultivation of coffee in terraced fields started in Yemen in the 1300's. There is a surplus of colorful anecdotes and legends regarding the discovery of coffee as a food and beverage. One fable credits the angel Gabriel with showing King Solomon how to brew a decent cup. Another account tells how, in 850, an Abyssinian goatherd by the name of Khaldi found his goats dancing wildly after eating ripe coffee berries. (See *Aramco World*, September/October 1973.)

Having tasted ripe coffee fruit myself, I think the most plausible explanation is that people originally ate the sweet white flesh of the berry and then discarded the hard, bitter green bean. Like other hard beans, nuts and grains, however, people eventually learned to roast coffee beans to make them palatable. As everyone knows, fresh roasted coffee gives off a wonderful aroma, and when chewed, the beans create a flavorful liqueur in the mouth. Dancing goat theories notwithstanding, I suspect the fragrance, the unique taste and the caffeine jolt are what finally led to the practice of pounding the roasted beans into a powder, mixing that with hot water, and preparing an infusion. No one is quite certain when this event first took place.

Trade routes across the Red Sea have linked East Africa and the Arabian Peninsula since the early first millennium BC, and it has been suggested by William H. Ukers, in his definitive 1922 work *All About Coffee*, that sometime around the Abyssinian invasion of Southern Arabia in 525, coffee was introduced to the area that is now Yemen. Shaykh Abu Hasan al-Shadhili, the legendary founder of the south Arabian export city of al-Mukha, discovered coffee growing on the terraced slopes of the emerald-green mountains of Osab around the middle of the 13th century. It was villagers, the story goes, who introduced al-Shadhili to coffee as a beverage. The new drink stimulated his thoughts and kept him awake. As a result of his discovery, al-Shadhili began promoting coffee as the perfect drink to help focus one's thoughts and engage in religious contemplation. Coffee also became a common aid to producing a state of *kayf*, which may be described as a condition of dreamy mindfulness and euphoric well-being.

The English word "coffee," however, comes from the Turkish *kahveh*, which in turn stems from the Arabic *qahwah*, a word that originally referred to wine. But in Yemen, coffee is called *bunn* (pronounced halfway between "bun" and "boon"), a word which in other Arabic-speaking countries refers only to the bean itself. This is the term used by 10th-century Arab physician al-Razi (See *Aramco World*, May/June 1997), who is credited with the first written description of the medicinal properties of coffee. He refers to the bean and the tree as *bunn* and to the drink as *bunchum*—which, he adds, is good for the stomach. Shortly after him, around 1000, the scholar and physician Ibn Sina (Avicenna) also mentioned the value of *bunchum*, claiming that coffee "fortifies the members, cleans the skin...and gives an excellent smell to all the body."

Though the originals of these writings have been lost, the quotations survive in the *Argument in Favor of the Legitimate Use of Coffee*, a manuscript produced sometime before 1587 by Abd al-Qadir ibn Muhammad al-Ansari al-Jazari, an adherent of the Hanbali school of jurisprudence. Written in response to a religious debate over the merits and legality, under Islamic law, of the beverage that was sweeping Ottoman society, the Abd al-Qadir manuscript is the oldest existing document about the history, preparation, use, virtues, and benefits of coffee drinking. Once coffee had become established in Makkah and Madinah, it wasn't long before pilgrims and traders disseminated it to the far corners of the Islamic world. From there, coffee also came to Europe in the 17th century through Venice, Marseilles, Amsterdam, London and Vienna.



Coffea arabica, *native to Ethiopia, was first domesticated on terraced farms like these near Jabal Milhan, west of Sanaa. The historic importance of coffee in Yemeni culture is acknowledged on this banknote. Opposite: An Ottoman-era coffee pot from Shibam, in Wadi Hadhramaut, rests on a fitted brazier. Insets, from top: Not all coffee cherries ripen at once, and thus each tree must be visited several times over months for the best harvest. In the market of al-'Udayn, coffee is inspected and then husked using a hand-powered quern. As in much of the Middle East, Yemeni coffee is prepared by boiling it quickly to a froth two or three times.*

As a result, Yemen's coffee export business boomed during the first Ottoman occupation, which lasted from 1536 to 1636. As the beverage gained popularity, the port of al-Mukha enjoyed an increasingly powerful monopoly as the world's only source of *bunn* until the 18th century.

It was a pilgrim, Baba Budan, who, on his way home from Makkah to southern India, around 1600, took with him *Coffea arabica* seeds from Yemen. Almost a century later, the Dutch carried the plant from southern India to their colonies in Java. Commercial coffee cultivation soon spread throughout the Netherlands East Indies (now Indonesia). The French took a single *Coffea arabica* tree and transplanted it to Martinique in the Caribbean. From that tree, Yemeni coffee traveled to the highlands of Mexico and Central and South America. By the 19th century, Yemen's coffee exports had dwindled to a mere one percent of world demand. In 1893, coffee beans were transported from Brazil to the British colonies of Kenya and Uganda, not far from the bean's ancient roots in southwest Ethiopia.

Since its discovery, the drinking of coffee has been a social matter, in Yemen as elsewhere. Carsten Niebuhr, the intrepid Danish explorer who visited Yemen from 1761 to 1763, had this to say about the coffeehouse culture he found:

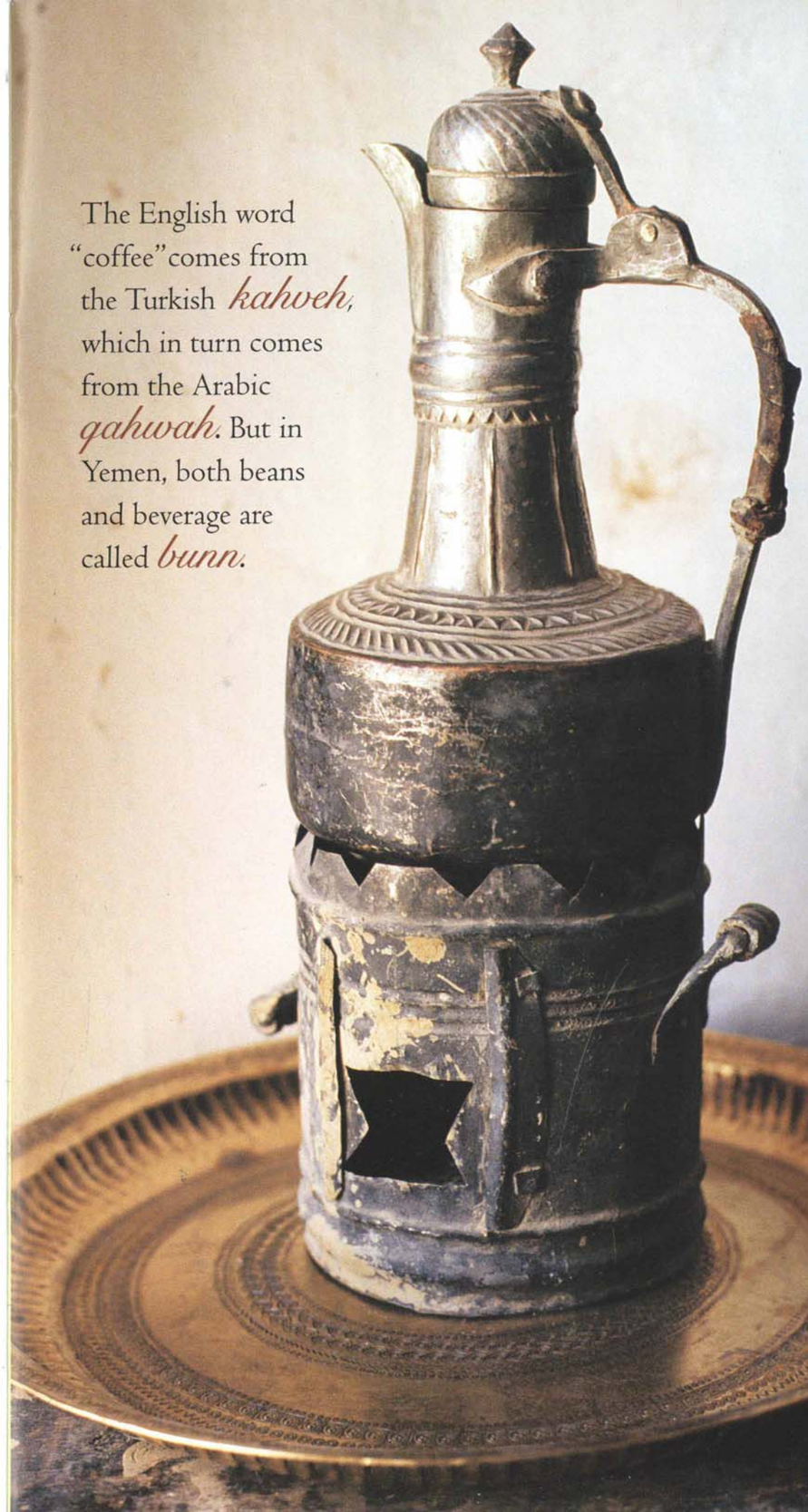
"These are the only theatres for the exercise of [non-religious] eloquence.... The Arabs would find their evenings extremely irksome if readers and orators, mainly poor scholars, were not there to entertain them. These young scholars walk about and recite or deliver discourses upon all subjects. They make up the most wonderful tales, inventing, singing, making tales and fables."

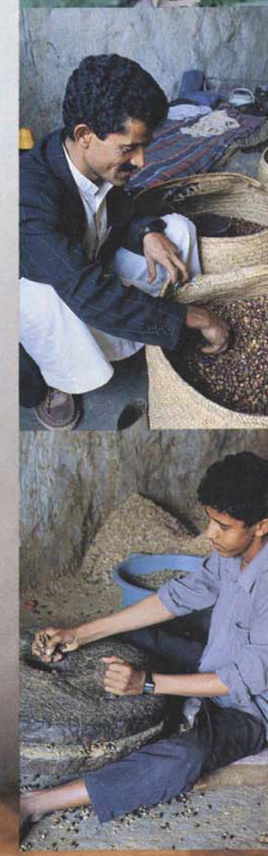
Sitting in the Sanaa coffeehouse of Sa'id Ahmad Wardah, I asked my fellow drinkers if they knew any verses or songs commemorating coffee. One man from Osab sang me a coffee farmer's song:

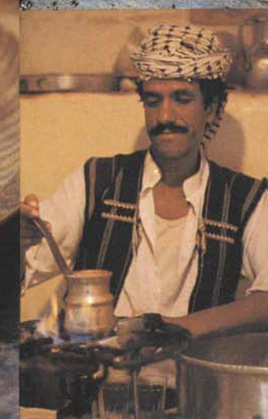
Coffee of Yemen, oh pearls!
Oh treasure on the tree!
He who grows you will not be poor,
Nor will he suffer from scorn.

Another man offered a local expression: "If a member of the al-Kibsi family faints, give him the *lifah* to sniff to revive him." The al-Kibsis are renowned for their love of good coffee, and the *lifah* is the palm-fiber filter and stopper used in a terra-cotta coffee pot known as *jamanah*.

The English word "coffee" comes from the Turkish *kahveh*, which in turn comes from the Arabic *qahwah*. But in Yemen, both beans and beverage are called *bunn*.







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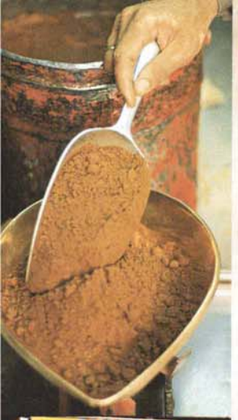
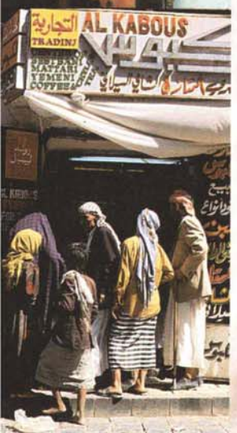
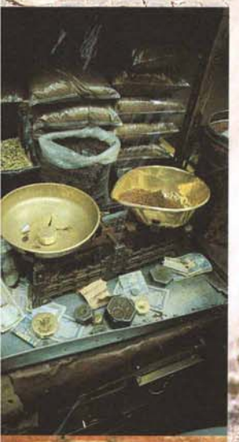
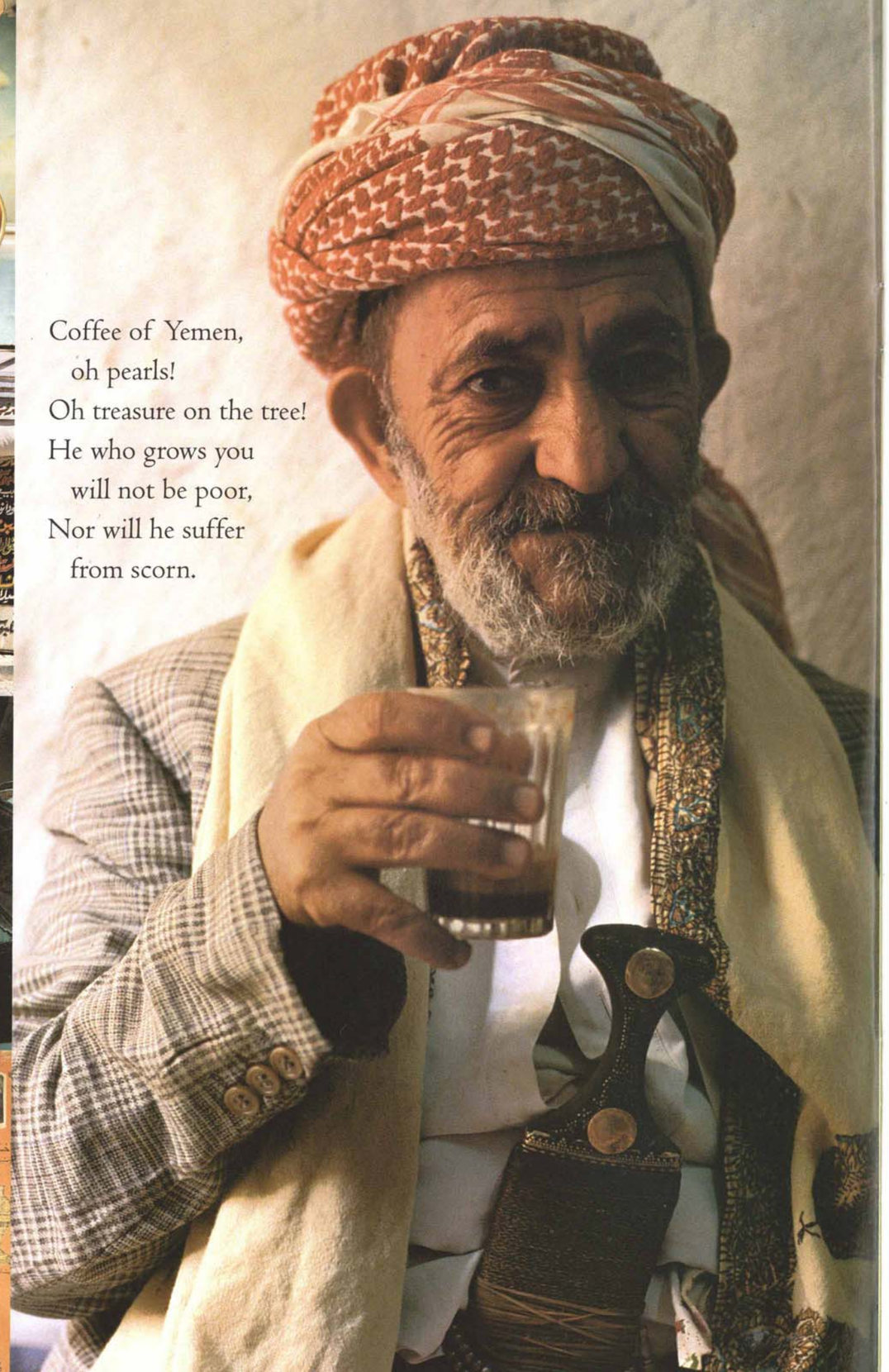








Coffee of Yemen,
oh pearls!
Oh treasure on the tree!
He who grows you
will not be poor,
Nor will he suffer
from scorn.

As the morning coffee crowd began to thin, I paid a visit to Amin Muhammad al-Kabous, a third-generation coffee roaster and exporter who buys his coffee from farmers he knows and trusts. Amin separates the husk from the bean using a mechanized stone mill, though many coffee merchants still grind by hand in Yemen. He sends the husks to the *qishr* merchants and then inspects the green beans and smells them to determine their quality. This is followed by a careful sample roast to confirm his selection.

Throughout this process, he takes an artisan's approach to his work, and this attitude is reflected in the excellence of his coffee. Amin looks for large, well-formed beans for the export market, and Japanese coffee buyers, in particular, have developed a long-term working relationship with the al-Kabous family. There are larger and more modern coffee businesses in Yemen, but the al-Kabous operation is the most highly regarded of them all. I asked Amin the secret of running a successful business in such a competitive market.

"There is no secret," he told me. "This coffee is the bounty of God. We protect the quality and we guard our reputation."

As we spoke, poor and elderly men and women came to the shop. They waited quietly at the side of the front door where they were handed small packets of ground coffee by one of Amin's assistants. "The poor?" he said, anticipating my question. "They are known and they don't have to ask. No one should be without coffee."

Hamid al-'Awadi is another successful Sanaa coffee roaster. He carries several different types, but specializes in the coffee from Wadi al-'Udayn. He offers three roasts: a light yellow, usually prepared with ginger and cardamom (and sometimes with sesame or sorghum) that is popular among the tribesmen of the eastern desert; a medium roast to suit the typical Yemeni palate, and a dark roast for export that he calls *bunn al-Nasraniyyiin*, "coffee for the followers of the Nazarene,"—that is, Christians. He also sells several different grades of husks for *qishr*. When I asked Hamid about the popular misconception that Yemenis drink *qishr* because they can no longer afford their own coffee, he laughed. "The truth is that we save the best beans for ourselves," he said. "The early harvest produces the sweetest coffee. It is roasted in small batches, and this is what is served at home. A farmer sells his surplus, but keeps the very best for his family."

Coffee-growing, long a noble and honorable occupation in Yemen, remains widespread, so, following Hamid's suggestion, I drove into the countryside to talk with the farmers who grow the best coffee. I traveled for five days, during which time I made a loop that included the coffee regions of Bani Matar (near al-Mahwit), Wadi al-'Udayn, Yafi' (near Ta'izz) and the region of Osab. In a remote village, near the upper reaches of Wadi Surdud, I was invited to lunch in a private house where young men recited poetry praising coffee. I interviewed farmers, middlemen, and exporters. In each province I bought different types of green *bunn* to take back to the United States for roasting and tasting. I was curious to know how these samples would compare to each other, and how they might stack up against what is presently available at the top of the coffee market in the United States.

Coastal regions Coffee-growing regions Highlands

Rains come to Yemen from the southwest and fall almost entirely on the western slopes of the highlands, whose peaks exceed 3000 meters (nearly 10,000'). Northeast of the highlands lies a rainshadow of dry hills and, beyond them, the vast Empty Quarter of Saudi Arabia. Opposite, insets, from top: In Sanaa a medium roast ground powder-fine is popular. Customers gather outside one of the city's famous shops. Though not as lucrative as in the centuries when Yemen held the world monopoly on coffee production, bunn *is still among Yemen's cultural symbols, as shown by this Sanaa advertisement.*

High-quality Yemeni coffee is cultivated on the narrow mountain terraces and in the fertile wadis of the western escarpment roughly between 1000 and 2000 meters' height (3250–6500'). It is produced by small-scale farmers, and one reason for the complex flavor of Yemeni coffee is that coffee is grown in a variety of places with a variety of exposures. Within the same valley or on the same mountain, Yemenis can distinguish different varietal characteristics. They have named the different types of coffee according to the areas in which they grow. Throughout the country, the beans are small and irregular due to the dry conditions, and the color varies from light green to yellow.

Among the coffee regions, Wadi al-'Udayn is among the most renowned—and mangos, bananas, sugar cane and papayas also grow superbly here. Throughout the wadi a beautiful canopy of fig (*Ficus vasta*) and tamarind (*Tamarindus indica*) trees provides shade for both the fruit crops and the coffee trees that are interplanted with them. I arrived in Wadi al-'Udayn just as the autumn coffee harvest was beginning. Yemeni coffee is picked by hand, and the best comes when only the fully ripened cherries are harvested. Because not all the cherries on a tree ripen at the same time, each tree must be revisited repeatedly, as the fruit ripens, which extends the picking season over several months.

The coffee cherries are then dried in the sun for two weeks to a month, depending on weather conditions. If the coffee gets wet during this time, it may ferment and develop a sour flavor. Coffee needs even drying conditions, and unpredictable weather can adversely affect the end result. According to a Ministry of Agriculture booklet on coffee-growing in al-Mahwit Province, the moisture content in well-dried coffee cherries varies from 9.5 to 13 percent. The coffee should be hulled within three to six weeks of drying. All coffee in Yemen is carefully hand-sorted to remove stones and unripe or broken beans. The green beans are then stored in a dry place to even out the moisture content prior to roasting.

Because I had read that Yemeni coffee was a natural, organic product, I asked a farmer from Wadi al-'Udayn if he ever used chemical fertilizers or pesticides.

"Who can afford fertilizers?" he replied. "We use dried animal dung, and the irrigation water brings minerals and nutrients. Pesticides?" he laughed. "We tried them on a caterpillar [of the coffee-cherry moth, *Pro-*

phantis smaragdina] that gets into the green fruit. The government distributed and encouraged the use of this pesticide. It worked for a few years, but the worms came back and then nothing would kill them!"

Following that experience, the farmers of Wadi al-'Udayn went back to their traditional technique of lighting smoldering fires around the trees to smoke out most of the caterpillars. It doesn't kill them all, but it is an effective and time-tested method of pest control. It is just as well that the farmers don't spray pesticides on the coffee fruit because, unlike other coffee-producing countries where coffee husks are discarded, Yemen uses the husks to make *qishr*.

I returned home with about 20 kilos (nearly 45 pounds) of carefully bagged and labeled green coffee beans. Each sample was roasted and evaluated at several formal tastings that I arranged with coffee roasters near San Francisco. It was at this point I began to appreciate why Yemeni coffee is—with the single exception of Jamaican Blue Mountain—the world's most expensive, commanding a price that can be 30 to 50 percent higher than that of more common specialty coffees.

Coffee buyers in the United States judge green beans first by appearance, and then by roasting and "cupping," which involves brewing individual cups, smelling and tasting. With a surprisingly loud, even aggressive, slurping sound, professional tasters sip lukewarm coffee from soup spoons. The idea is to spray the inside of the mouth with fine particles of coffee and plenty of air without actually swallowing any. The coffee is then spat out, and the taster moves on to the next sample.

Jim Reynolds, coffee buyer and taster at Peet's Coffee & Tea in Berkeley, California was enthusiastic in his praise of Yemeni coffee. "It is very provincial..., a treasure from the earth. Rich, full-bodied, green, nutty, woody, yet inconsistent and unpredictable. Very pronounced tastes: fruity, chocolatey, winey, exotic and complex. Subtleties of flavor are often on a subconscious level—not quite there, if you know what I mean. As in a good friendship, a bit of mystery remains, and this is what makes Yemeni coffee so great." In the blind sampling, Jim was partial to the Matari and Ahjeri beans.

Importers and roasters Bob Fulmer and Helen Nicholas from Royal Coffee in Emeryville, California explained that "in the specialty coffee trade, Yemeni is as special as it can get. Yemeni coffee is the wild card of the coffee business. It has a lot of varietal character and this makes it difficult to maintain consistency, but it is well worth the effort."

This 1716 French engraving of a young coffee tree was produced near the time the European powers broke the Yemeni monopoly by transplanting Coffea arabica *to their far-flung colonies. Opposite: a traditional home serving of Yemeni coffee. Insets, from top: "The truth is," said Sanaa roaster Hamid al-'Awadi, "we save the best beans for ourselves." At Sanaa's old* samsara al-bunn, *a counting house that also served as a hostelry for coffee traders, dried beans are still prepared for sale. A state-of-the-art roaster treats the author's Yemeni samples at Peet's in San Francisco, where taste-tester Jim Reynolds sips his way through dozens of varieties. "As in a good friendship, a bit of mystery remains, and this is what makes Yemeni coffee so great," he said.*

While the samples were being roasted, I asked Bob what he looked for in a good Yemeni coffee. He explained that the first step involves detecting any problems or faults. A faintly metallic smell, or a musty, vinegary ferment is the tell-tale aroma of a coffee packed wet or dried improperly. Then he looks for "fruitiness."

"A good Yemeni coffee has a soft blueberry back-taste or flavor," Bob told me. "It is not in the first taste of the coffee, but the second or aftertaste. Deep, thick, rich and full of fruit." With your mouth full of coffee, it helps to exhale through your nose to pick up this subtle but unmistakable blueberry quality. Bob and Helen thought the 'Udayni variety had great body and excellent blueberry notes.

At the Universal Café in San Francisco, owner and coffee roaster Bob Voorhees transformed the last lot of my green beans into the finished product. These beans were special to me because they came from the emerald mountains of Osab, where Shaykh Abu Hasan al-Shadhili was said to have first learned the secret of drinking coffee. Bob, however, was unaware of the centuries of lore embodied in the beans he was about to commit to the flames.

"Yemeni coffee doesn't roast evenly because of the irregular bean size," Bob said as he pre-heated the roaster. "The coffee loses about 20 percent of bean weight during the roasting, and I like to maintain the temperature at around 400 degrees [200°C]." Bob poured the beans into the roaster, and soon they began to give off a fresh, woody aroma. The beans start off with an 11-percent moisture content, he explained, and after about nine minutes they begin to pop, as the expansion of internal gases puffs each bean to nearly twice its original size. When the time arrived, I could hardly detect the soft sound of the popping above the roar of the roasting machine and the sound of cascading beans.

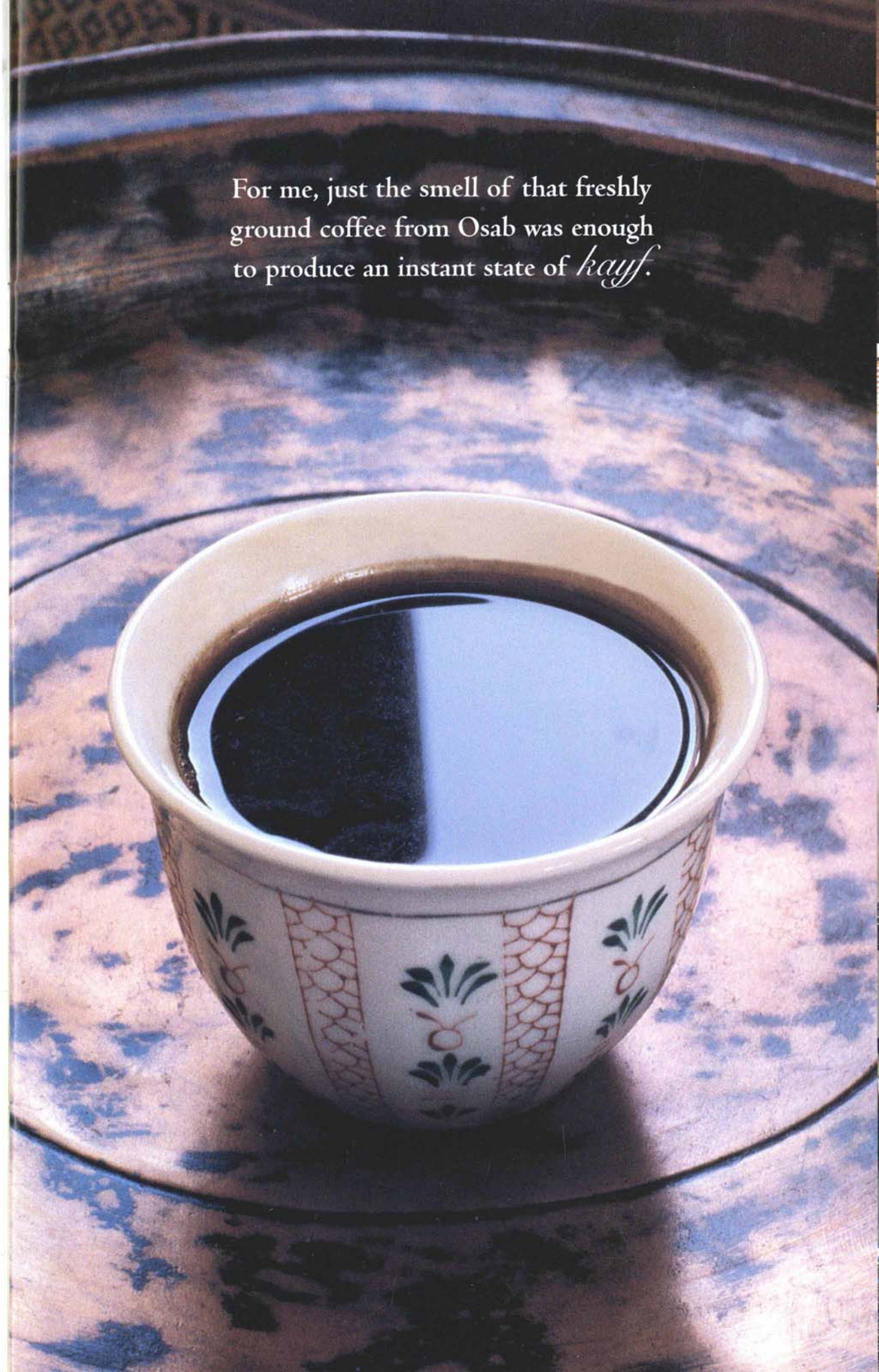
"This is where it gets tricky," Bob said as he raised the temperature to 450 degrees (233°C) in order to make the beans, in his word, "sizzle." With great dexterity he sniffed at small samples and adjusted the heat while closely examining the color of the beans. At the decisive moment he threw back a lever. Nine kilos of perfectly roasted *bunn Osabi* Yemeni coffee spilled out onto a revolving cooling tray and we were enveloped in a wonderful cloud of fragrant steam. The air was filled with the rich, oily smell of coffee, pungent, sweet and smoky. Once the beans had cooled slightly, Bob ground up a handful of them and produced two espressos. For me, just the smell of that freshly ground coffee from Osab was enough to produce an instant state of *kayf*.

"To the memory of Shaykh Abu Hasan al-Shadhili," I said, lifting my cup.

Bob took a sip, paused, and then took another sip. He was quiet for a few moments before confessing that he was devoted to a particular type of aged coffee from the west coast of Sumatra. But those fabled beans from Osab were starting to work their magic and, with each small sip, I could see his loyalty crumbling.

"Not bad.... Not bad at all," he finally concluded. "You know, I think I really can taste those blueberries."

Eric Hansen is the author of Motoring with Mohammed: Journeys to Yemen and the Red Sea *(Houghton Mifflin, 1991). He lives in Sacramento, California.*



The Autobiography of a Coin

Written by
Frank L. Holt

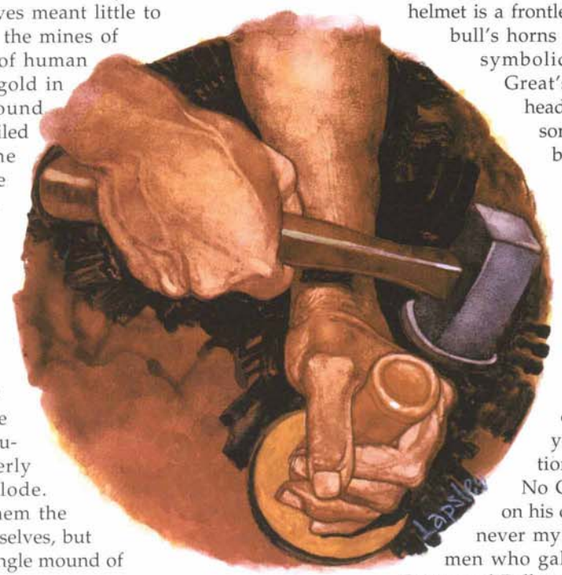
Illustrated by
Bob Lapsley

I was born in the fires of an ancient forge in the hills of the Hindu Kush. Amid the clatter of hammers and the chatter of Greek, I paused on a battered anvil for the final pangs of my creation. Beneath me lay a hardened die bearing the image of my king; atop me pressed another, etched with horsemen and some mirror-image words. Then the hammer struck, hard and heavy, ringing out the news of my nativity. With each blow the dies dug deeper into my flesh, stamping their images as father and mother of a freshly minted coin.

OPPOSITE: AMERICAN NUMISMATIC SOCIETY

As I look back across two millennia for these earliest memories, I marvel at my long, now legendary, journey from mine to mint to market to museum. I remember Rome as a rising power, a century before the first Caesars; I recall the early days of Emperor Asoka's moral conquests and the building of China's Great Wall. I have outlived six of the seven wonders of the ancient world. (I am told the Great Pyramid still stands.) Yet I am no mute ruin: Money talks. Mine is the voice of history, recorded by numismatists trained to hear my ancient stories of art, industry, worship, and war. My eloquence can turn back time, and carry us all to the golden age of my youth, when legends traced my origins to a colony of giant ants.

Most gold in ancient times was mined by condemned criminals and slaves whose lives meant little to their taskmasters. In my day, the mines of Egypt were legendary hives of human misery. But it was said that gold in great abundance could be found near India, where giant ants piled gold-bearing dust at the entrances of their tunnels. These ants—nearly the size of dogs, the legend said—defended their burrows fiercely against men who dared to steal the spoils of their digging. But such danger was trivial given the normal costs of ancient mining, and so the legend spread as far as Greece. When Alexander the Great invaded the Indus Valley in the fourth century BC, his Greek soldiers eagerly searched for this legendary lode. Local guides displayed for them the dappled skins of the ants themselves, but the invaders could not find a single mound of precious gold.



Only a few generations later, however, Greek settlers were gathering large quantities of gold in this very region. These descendants of Alexander's warriors created a wealthy kingdom called Bactria, famous for its beautiful silver and gold coins like me. (See *Aramco World*, May/June 1994.) Where, scholars have long wondered, did the Greek kings of Bactria find so much precious metal? International trade constitutes one obvious source, but giant "ants" might be another. Two thousand years after I was born, explorers discovered that burrowing marmots on the remote Dansar Plateau, near the borders of India, Pakistan, Afghanistan and China, do indeed heap mounds of gold-bearing earth at the mouths of their burrows. (See page 13.) These stocky rodents, called "mountain ants" by the Persians who passed the legend on to the Greeks, grow to the size of small dogs and pitch up meter-high hills of auriferous subsoil. Even in modern times, local tribes harvest this gold in an age-old tradition that recalls the legends of my youth. It is possible, after all, that inhuman marmots, rather than inhuman misery, brought my gold to the forges of man.

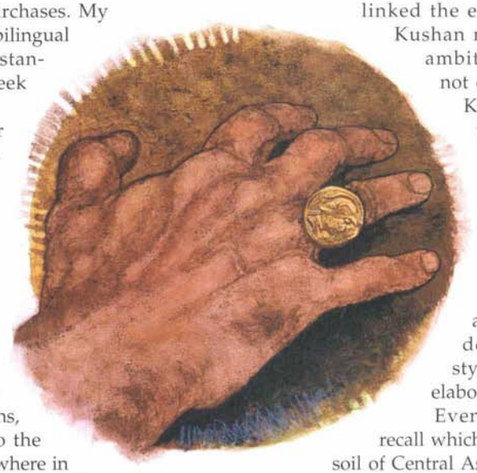
From the moment I left the royal mint of my king Eucratides, eager hands grasped for me. I was a beauty then, the envy of every monarch and merchant from the Indus to the Euphrates. Great artists had carved my parent dies in mirror-image, etching tiny Greek words and figures backward so that these negative forms would produce positive impressions on my two faces. The result, when smashed into 8.5 grams (0.3 oz) of gold, is a splendid coin called a stater—a treasure of art as well as riches. My obverse (the "heads" face produced by the lower, anvil die) boasts a once-brilliant portrait of King Eucratides, framed in a circle of small dots. Behind the king's neck trails the royal diadem, a ribbon tied around his head as the unmistakable emblem of his office. His cloak, engraved in high relief, is that of a cavalry commander, and his great crested helmet resembles a Boeotian design lauded by the historian Xenophon as the best headgear for cavalrymen. Attached to my king's helmet is a frontlet that sweeps back and ends in bull's horns and ears. Some consider this a symbolic evocation of Alexander the Great's war-horse Bucephalus ("Ox-head"), who had horns according to some accounts, and who had been buried by Alexander near my own birthplace. Like Alexander, my king rode with valor at the head of his elite cavalry and conquered with an aggressive Greek spirit.

In fact, Eucratides called himself "the Great" long before that title was given to Alexander by the Romans. On my reverse (the "tails" side produced by the upper, punch die), you can still read the exalted caption "King Eucratides the Great." No Greek had ever put such words on his coinage before, but modesty was never my king's style. The armed horsemen who gallop within the inscription are Castor and Pollux. In Greek mythology, they were the sons of Zeus who would suddenly appear in a crisis to save the day, much like Eucratides himself, who wrestled the Bactrian throne from a faltering dynasty. These twins carry palms, brandish spears, and wear felt caps topped with stars.

Behind the rear legs of the trailing horse, you can discern a Greek monogram, W. This mark identifies either the mint or the magistrate responsible for my creation. Nearly every gold and silver coin minted in Bactria carries such a birthmark, but the exact meaning of the many symbols has long been lost. For example, some scholars think that my monogram indicates the city of Balkh or Aornus; others see only the initials of some unknown Greek official who served a few months as midwife in the delivery of my king's new money.

I was a beauty then, the envy of every monarch and merchant from the Indus to the Euphrates.

If you look past the scars of my long life, I am as beautifully Greek as the Parthenon itself, though I was born 5000 kilometers (3000 mi) east of Athens. I am the mind of the West imprinted on the precious metal of the East. The implications haunt me. Am I propaganda etched on plunder, or the product of a peaceful integration? Do I personify apartheid or a partnership? The design and distribution of currency are deliberate, official acts, so money can never be neutral in the struggles of any society. Look at a nation's coins and you will see the scatter-shot of its cultural canon: Even a melting-pot like America has a partisan coinage, its message overwhelmingly white, male, European, and Christian. In ancient Bactria, I was no less biased. My milieu is entirely Mediterranean, and my intrinsic value kept me beyond reach of the marginalized poor of the non-Greek population. Gold circulated over the heads of these farmers and servants, who relied upon small denominations of bronze or silver for their meager purchases. My king minted for them some square, bilingual issues struck on an Indian weight standard, but I belonged to colonial Greek aristocrats, the ruling elite of Bactria.



Unlike small bronze and silver coins which travel swiftly but never far, my gold brothers and I ranged into territories quite distant from our monarch's own marketplaces. Throughout the Middle East, Hellenistic states were quick to accept gold coins struck on a common Greek standard with recognizable types. I, for example, would be recognized in any market from the Balkans to Bactria. I had no restrictive local features, as did my square bilingual cousins, and my denomination conformed to the Attic Greek system used nearly everywhere in Alexander's old empire. The range of my travels can be easily documented: In Mesopotamia, for example, another Greek king so admired my design that he shamelessly stole every detail for his own coinage.

But globe-trotting gold cannot be too careful, for everywhere, insatiable melting pots stand ready. My parent dies produced as many as 20,000 siblings identical to me; now, of them all, only I have survived the gauntlet that gold runs. The most critical moment in any money's life is the day it ceases to be currency. Once a coin can no longer circulate in a given place or time, human hands are quick to convert it into some more useful form. Most of my brothers became bullion again, their identities soon lost in the issues of other, less ancient kings. Some may exist still as a statue's thumb or a goblet's lip, but I would not recognize them. I carry the last known imprint of our shared dies because an unusual circumstance spared my life.

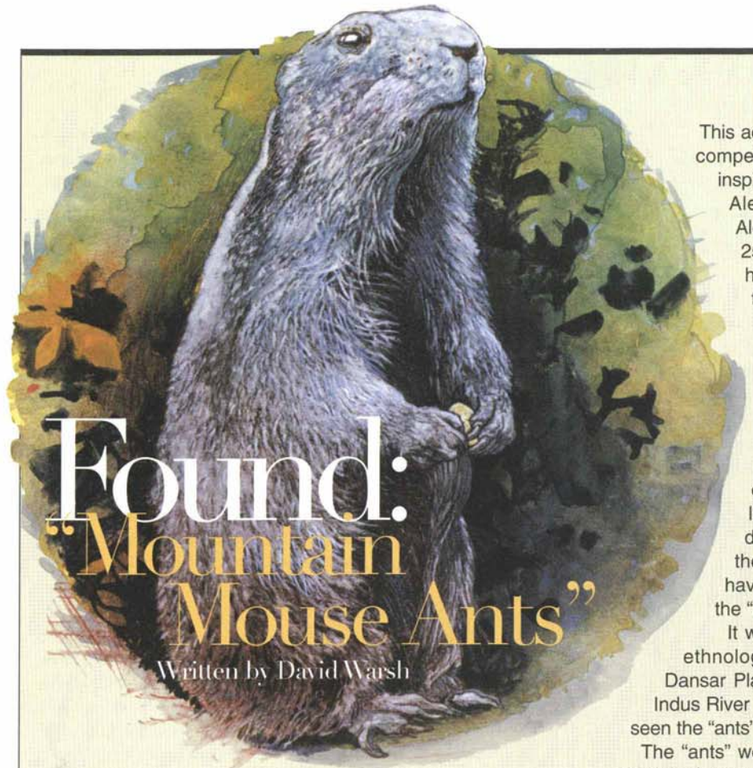
I carried the last known imprint of our shared dies because an unusual circumstance spared my life.

Painful and defacing though it was, that occasion added 2000 years to my story and gave me an unexpected career. A sturdy loop of metal was fused to my reverse side, right across my galloping horsemen. The attachment was sized to fit a finger, and I became a signet ring. This ancient operation changed the whole pattern of my life. My surfaces no longer wore evenly; instead, my obverse suffered horribly as it rode that band exposed to daily bumps and bruises, while my reverse design was now shielded from the world. I lived a strange new life on the wrong side of the human hand, banished from the palm where coins enjoy the camaraderie of active currency. Who had done this to me?

The Greeks, as far as I could determine, were gone. Shortly after my king's reign, Bactria fell to successive waves of nomadic invaders. Some of them later settled in the region and created the Kushan empire, astride the famous Silk Roads that linked the empires of Rome and China. One Kushan ruler so exceeded my own king's ambitions that he proclaimed himself not only "the Great," but also "King of Kings, Son of Heaven, Caesar"—a title that is simultaneously Iranian, Indian, Chinese, and Roman. Although I finally found myself outside the closed world of my Greek makers, I felt welcome among these eclectic Kushans. They borrowed freely from my past. One of their graves contained a magnificent cameo imitating my design, and signet rings of Greek style were common elements in their elaborate gold-spangled costumes.

Eventually lost or interred—I cannot recall which—I reluctantly returned beneath the soil of Central Asia. For twenty centuries I slept; you cannot imagine the burden of time. My gold kept its luster while all around me the corrosive poisons of earth ate away the baser metals. Above me, kings gave way to caliphs and khans as new realms dawned and died. Other gold shone for the civilizations of Muslims, Mongols, and Mughals while I lay undiscovered, underground, my fame forgotten. Neither man nor marmot rescued me—until modern times.

Then, I suddenly awoke and saw myself reflected in the wide dark eyes of a jubilant discoverer. My new guardian considered the expedient of the melting pot, but my unusual appearance gave him pause. Not just another antique coin, I was a warrior's signet, well-suited to his own station. He was an Afghan officer, and I found a new home on his hand. There I was schooled in the long history I had missed. I learned that Bactria had become Afghanistan, where the weapons were new but the wars unchanged. Great powers still converged upon this rugged and remote bastion in order to control the gateways between Europe, Asia, and India. Now, however, this struggle was called "the Great Game." Intrepid spies from czarist Russia and imperial Britain crept along the snow-filled passes of Central Asia, and tired armies clashed in places called Kabul, Kandahar and the Khyber Pass. Rudyard Kipling and others romanticized the struggle, but brave men did not bleed the less for all this talk of games. I saw the fight firsthand.



Found: "Mountain Mouse Ants"

Written by David Warsh

One of the happiest stories of last year had to do with Herodotus and the ants.

Herodotus, you might recall, was the great Greek historian of the fifth century BC. A wide traveler of the ancient world, possessor of a good eye for detail, demanding with sources, he possessed a highly developed sense of what constituted an explanation. He was a gifted storyteller as well, accustomed to weaving quotations and point-making anecdotes into his narratives—even the occasional story which he noted he didn't quite believe, but which was too good not to pass along. Just as Hippocrates is the patron of doctors, Herodotus is the patron of newspaper reporters.

It was he who wrote up one of the most intriguing get-rich-quick stories of all time.

It appears in the section of his *History* of the Persian wars devoted to describing the extent and the organization of the Persian empire.

"In India there is a sandy desert where there are ants smaller than dogs but bigger than foxes. And these ants make their dwelling underneath the earth and they bring up the sand when they are tunnelling, just as ants in Greece do, and the sand which is brought up is of gold.

"The Indians go after this gold, each of them yoking together three camels.... The Indians have little sacks which they fill with sand as quickly as they can. They have to do it quickly because, as soon as the ants smell them, they chase after them...so if the Indians didn't manage to get a head start there is no way any of them would get out alive."

This account of animals bringing gold to humans had a compelling, dreamlike quality in the ancient world. It inspired an enduring quest among adventurers—from Alexander the Great in the fourth century BC to Alexander von Humboldt in the 19th century, nearly 2500 years later. Pliny the Elder claimed that ant's horns rested in the Temple of Hercules; Süleyman the Magnificent is said to have been given ants' "pelts" by the emperor of Persia.

Scholars agree that Herodotus placed the home of the ants north of Kasapatyros, the ancient capital of Kashmir—near the Karakorum Mountains where present-day Pakistan, India and China intersect. But otherwise there has been no consensus about the significance of his account. The plentiful presence of stories like this one in the *History* has inspired a certain division of opinion among historians. To most of them, Herodotus is "the father of history"; a few have insisted he was a gullible yarn-spinner, even the "king of liars." Until last year.

It was in the autumn that a French adventurer and ethnologist named Michel Peissel returned from the Dansar Plain, a high plateau on the upper reaches of the Indus River in northernmost Pakistan. He announced he had seen the "ants" and met the tribe that mined their burrowings.

The "ants" were marmots, furry groundhog-like rodents possessing sharp teeth and long claws. Living in colonies, they burrowed deep in gold-bearing soil beneath the sand, then threw up their burrowings on the surface in mounds.

Minaro tribesmen, isolated Tibetan-speakers who inhabited the plain, collected the soil because it contained much gold dust, Peissel reported. Recently the bottom has dropped out of the business, as the price of gold sagged and rival soldiers used the marmots for target practice. (The Dansar Plain is claimed by both India and Pakistan.)

Much of the background is related in Peissel's 1982 book *The Ants' Gold: The Discovery of the Greek El Dorado in the Himalayas*. He relates other stories of his wanderings in the Himalayas as well: How he discovered what he believes is the source of the Mekong River; how he identified a breed of ponies unchanged since the Stone Age. What was news last year—as reported by Marlise Simons in *The New York Times* and Dana Thomas in *The Washington Post*—was that Peissel had finally located the marmots themselves.

So what accounts for the confusion over the centuries? Peissel says that the word for marmot in ancient Persian is "mountain mouse ant." Herodotus himself traveled as far east as Babylon, but he never made it to India. He isn't thought to have spoken Persian. Perhaps he was simply the victim of a bad translation.

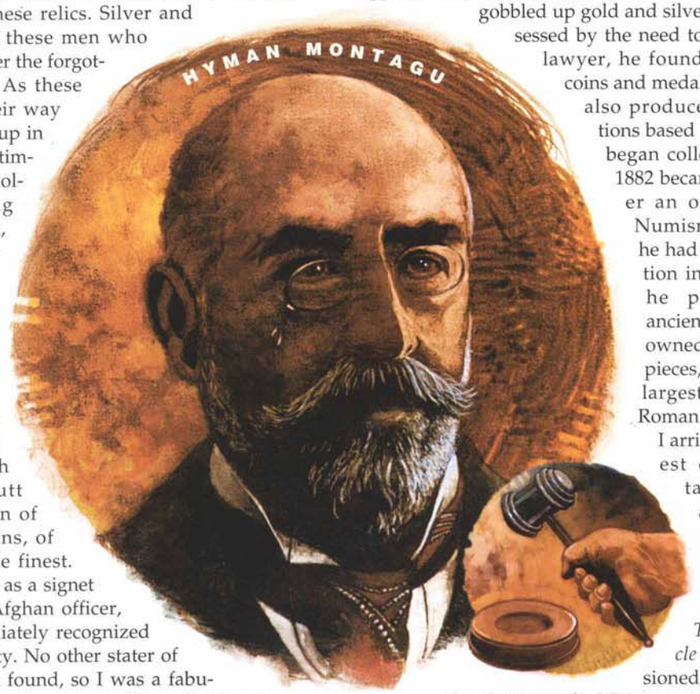
A good deal of testing of Peissel's discovery remains to be done. Specialists of all sorts will have their say. But in the meantime, it is hard not to cheer the French ethnologist. "I think this confirms the legend," he says. "I think it vindicates Herodotus, who often has been called a liar."

David Warsh is a business and financial columnist for The Boston Globe.

My reward

for this suffering was the pampered world of the collectible coin.

This conflict had at least one happy consequence. British officers sent to India and serving in the Afghan campaigns soon began to collect the coins of ancient Bactria. While some melted down the bronzes in order to make cannon, most realized the historical value of these relics. Silver and gold were the prizes of these men who avidly sought to rediscover the forgotten kings of my youth. As these beautiful coins made their way to England, many ended up in the British Museum and stimulated generations of scholarly research. Lacking much else to guide them, historians and numismatists found in us a mine of fresh information about such monarchs as my own Eucratides.



One of the British officers who brought back gold from India was Major Charles H. Strutt. In the middle of the 19th century, Major Strutt amassed a fair collection of Bactrian and Indian coins, of which I was certainly the finest. Although he first saw me as a signet ring on the hand of an Afghan officer, the learned major immediately recognized me as a coin of great rarity. No other stater of Eucratides had ever been found, so I was a fabulous prize to be procured as the crown of his collection. I had no idea what this would mean for my career.

When I passed into Strutt's possession, he decided that I should become a coin again. In a determined operation to remove the ring, my reverse caught up with the 2000 years of scarring that my obverse had already suffered. The stubborn weld would not come free of my prancing horses. Like a wad of chewing gum, it sits there still. Worst of all, in a desperate attempt to cut the blemish away, my new owner chiseled deep into it and inadvertently sawed clear across my design. His effort to pry loose the offending lump peeled up the edges of the wound, and let his long blade bite painfully into my soft metal. Tiny striations on my edge, just in front of my king's face, betray the grip of the pliers which held me hard during the terrible ordeal.

My reward for this suffering was the pampered world of the collectible coin. My numismatic rarity more than compensated for my battered condition, so humans henceforth cared for me more than in any age since my birth. That esteem conveyed me more than once to 13 Wellington Street in London, the distinguished home of Sotheby's, the art auctioneers. My first trip there came in 1874, when Major Strutt's entire collection ("featuring a unique stater of Eucratides") was exhibited for sale. On the afternoon of January 26, I was promoted from the collection of Major Strutt to that of a Colonel Strutt. I am the only specimen the colonel bought at the auction, perhaps bidding high for sentimental reasons. Colonel Strutt, perhaps a relative of the seller's, knew my colorful story and won me with a bid of £25, far more than I would ever fetch again.

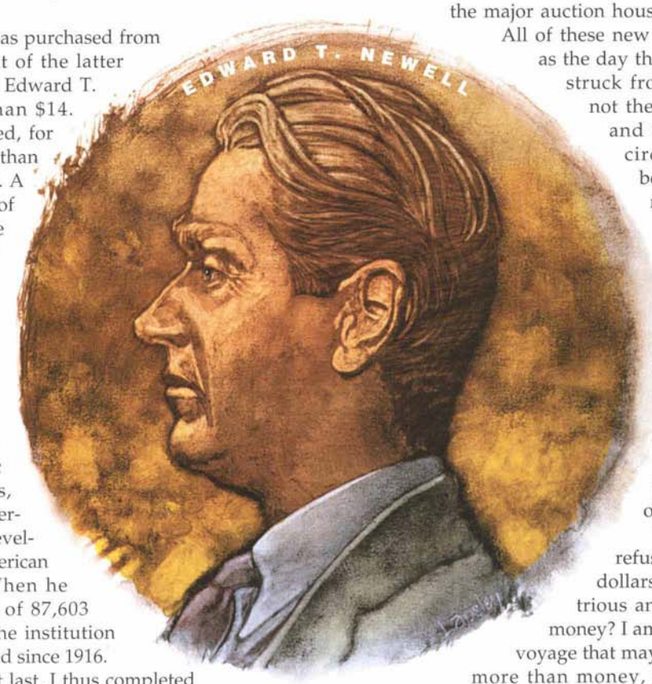
Many years later, Colonel Strutt sold me to a collector whose appetite for precious metal knew no bounds. Hyman Montagu gobbled up gold and silver coins like a man possessed by the need to possess. A successful lawyer, he found leisure in collecting coins and medals by the thousands; he also produced scholarly publications based on his acquisitions. He began collecting in 1878, and in 1882 became a member (and later an officer) of the Royal Numismatic Society. In fact, he had a considerable reputation in the field long before he purchased his first ancient coin in 1889. He soon owned many Greek masterpieces, as well as the world's largest private collection of Roman gold.

I arrived as one of the earliest ornaments of Montagu's collection of ancient coins. In 1892, I figured among his 29 "Unpublished and Rare Greek Coins" in an article he wrote for *The Numismatic Chronicle* in London; this occasioned the first publication of my photograph. Montagu mentioned my former career as a signet ring, and the damage done by my conversion back to coin. He must have gotten the story from Colonel Strutt himself as part of my noteworthy pedigree.

Hyman Montagu died a few years later, on February 18, 1895; his huge collection was hauled to Sotheby's for a series of memorable sales. I was the 774th specimen listed in one of the many auctions needed to disperse his accumulation of coins. It took six days to sell off the Greek coins alone, for a total yield of nearly £9000. I was one of six Bactrian coins auctioned on the sixth day, at a price of six pounds. Thus, on March 28, 1896, I left Sotheby's for the distinguished collection of Henry Osborne O'Hagan. Like Montagu, my new master was a determined buyer; he bought 49 of Montagu's Greek coins. I found in my new home the happy company of childhood friends, the coins of other Bactrian kings. Eventually I settled alongside four silver issues of Eucratides, lucky survivors of the ages. After a dozen years, however, O'Hagan chose to "relinquish the pursuit" of numismatics. Back to Wellington Street I went, my cousins and I, to the auction block again.

On May 9, 1908, my future was determined by a disappointing bid of little more than two pounds, the victorious offer of Charles Theodore Seltman. His father had been present in 1896 when O'Hagan paid three times that amount for me. My injured pride now matched my injured appearance, but at least I was in the possession of an illustrious scholar. Destined to become an expert in classics and archaeology, curator of the Fitzwilliam Museum and an accomplished author, the younger Seltman carried me off to Cambridge University. His academic acumen later earned him medals from the Royal Numismatic Society, the Royal Society of Arts, and the American Numismatic Society in New York.

In November, 1921 I was purchased from Seltman by the president of the latter society, the incomparable Edward T. Newell; he paid less than $14. I should have felt flattered, for Newell never paid more than a few dollars for any coin. A Yale graduate and scion of a wealthy family whose fortune had been made selling wagons to American pioneers, Newell amassed an incredible coin collection and also wrote a small library of numismatic books and articles. His reputation placed the United States in the forefront of scientific research on ancient coins, and he devoted untold energy and resources to the development of his beloved American Numismatic Society. When he died in 1941, I was one of 87,603 coins he bequeathed to the institution over which he had presided since 1916.



Safely off the market at last, I thus completed my odyssey from ancient mine to modern museum. Wars might ravage the lands through which I had passed most of my life, but Manhattan offered permanence, peace, and protection. In a stately building on Audubon Terrace, overlooking the Hudson River, I still reside in a tiny box in the sliding drawer of a locked cabinet in a guarded vault. I have been watched over by some of the great names in Greek numismatic science, and visited by experts on Bactrian history intent on the stories I can tell. But—unless there is another reversal of fortune in my future, like the many in my past—my traveling days are done, and I have bid good-bye to the busy world beyond these sheltering walls. The myriad acts of kings, Caesars, and gold-giving lords have brought me here to rest.

Nearly two hundred coins of Eucratides surround me now, but none of them is gold. I am still quite exceptional and am often mentioned in publications; in 1968, however, I ceased to be unique. After all those centuries, another stater of Eucratides finally surfaced in eastern Iran. It is a little lighter in weight and has a different monogram, and it has none of my scars, nor my romantic history. It lives with the huge 20-stater medallion of Eucratides in the Bibliothèque Nationale of Paris. More surprising still, since 1993 a stunning "crowd" of about 10 more Eucratides staters has been parading through the major auction houses of Europe and America. All of these new specimens appear as fresh as the day they were minted; most were struck from the same dies—though not the dies that gave me birth—and were never scattered into circulation. They must have been buried before they had much chance to live. Perhaps part of a lost military payroll, or of an emergency hoard hidden during the wars of my king's reign, these examples show how beautiful I once was. I marvel that my brothers can bring nearly 4000 times my last purchase price, not adjusting for inflation—or for the value of my adventures.

What are dollars or dinars to me, the illustrious ancestor of so much modern money?

What am I then worth? I refuse to name a price. What are dollars or dinars to me, the illustrious ancestor of so much modern money? I am the golden voice of a great voyage that may only have just begun. I am more than money, and these memoirs serve notice that I am not yet spent.

Dr. Frank L. Holt is a professor of history at the University of Houston. He has contributed to The Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology *and other reference works, and his third book on Bactrian history,* Thundering Zeus, *will be published next year by the University of California Press. He thanks the American Numismatic Society for assistance in preparing this article.*

Bob Lapsley is a free-lance illustrator living in Houston, Texas.

Riding the Forty Days' Road

WRITTEN BY ANGELA STEPHENS PHOTOGRAPHED BY LORRAINE CHITTOCK

One exhausted camel lags behind 199 others. Its belly expands and contracts like a balloon as it pants and gasps, struggling to keep up. Al-Nazif, one of the Sudanese herders, his hair unkempt from weeks in the desert, rides behind the faltering animal and patiently coaxes it along. He stays with it as it falls farther and farther behind, until our group can no longer see him on the flat expanse of the desert.

The rest of us—eight other herders, photographer Lorraine Chittock and I—dismount for our usual midday break, though no meal is prepared and no drink taken, because we are in the holy month of Ramadan. Though Islam exempts travelers from the Ramadan fast, the herders choose to fast nonetheless.

Only at *al-maghrib*, or sundown, will they eat and drink. Then it will be a simple meal of millet porridge with a sauce made from powdered okra and tomatoes, washed down with sweet tea served in plain glass cups. The youngest of the group—the men range in age from 20 to 50—does the cooking, reflecting the Sudanese custom that the junior family member serves the elders. Yet this youngest also has the honor of leading the men in prayer, because, of them all, he is the best at reciting the Qur'an.

The men carry little: just a change of clothes, an extra pair of shoes, shaving equipment, a long whip made of rhinoceros hide and the camel herder's trademark knife—a wooden-handled, double-edged blade held in a leather sheath strapped to the upper arm. Their lean bodies move with the grace of dancers. Some wear traditional thick-soled Sudanese loafers made of leather or snakeskin and called *markub*, from the word for "boat"; others are shod only in cheap rubber thong sandals.

At night they sleep under threadbare blankets, shivering in the desert cold. They admired the sleeping bags Lorraine and I carried. "Do men use these, or only women?" one asked me.

Though sleeping bags may be novel to them, these men have honed their skill at handling animals and their intimate knowledge of the natural world. For example, they know that the fat of a slaughtered goat makes a healing lip balm as they ride under the scorching sun. And though most of them cannot read a book, they do read camel footprints in the sand, and can determine how long ago a herd passed, whether a print was made by a male or a female, and whether the animal carried a rider. They know how to tend sick camels, administering medicine when necessary, and they know how to use a giant needle and leather string to patch camel footpads that have grown sore from trekking over stony ground.

"A camel has no real price. The buying and selling of camels merely represents a rough equivalent of their value, and it goes on because people need things, not because it represents the true value of camels. One can drink camel's milk, use its hair, make it carry a load and even eat it, and with the blessing of God it multiplies under your hands."

SHAYKH OF THE KABABISH TRIBE, NORTHWEST SUDAN

In search of a risalah, *or camel caravan, to travel with, Angela and I frequented markets like the one in el-Obeid for weeks. Shoppers and traders journey to such markets from homes that may be hours or days away, and the market tea-women prepare their stands to be ready at daybreak to provide refreshment and sustenance to the travelers. Men also come from nearby offices, vegetable markets, kitchen-ware bazaars, spice* suqs, *tanneries and livestock yards to gather for tea and conversation. Often the tea-hut is a semi-permanent structure, made of reeds, rattan matting or burlap bags covering a frame of branches. Customers linger here with relief, enjoying the respite from the sand, grit and wind-blown dust outside. "Tea, please," they ask in a multitude of dialects. There is time for many cups, poured individually and with care.* ***Previous spread:*** *Boys in el-Obeid, a city known for its red sands, watch as herders take unsold camels back out into scrubland to graze after a day at the market. They will return on the next market day. Depending on the location—el-Fasher, el-Nahud, el-Hages or other smaller markets—that could be as soon as the next morning, or not until the following week.* ***Insets:*** *Four herders: Al-Nazif, Hamzah, Isma'il and Muhammad.*

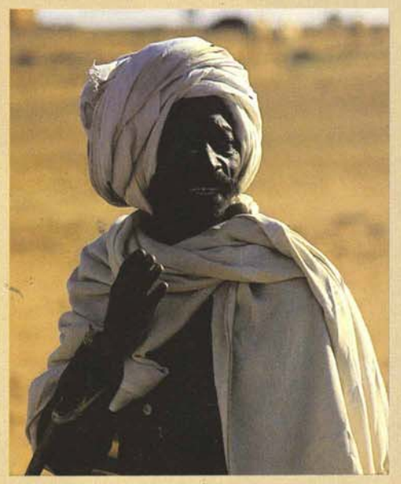
As we approach the Egyptian border, we are 20 days' ride from our starting point west of Omdurman, across the Nile from Sudan's capital, Khartoum. We're bound for the place all camel herds go from Western Sudan, the camel market in Daraw, north of Aswan, Egypt, a journey of 1250 kilometers (775 miles). From there, the camels will be loaded onto trucks and shipped to Cairo, home of the largest camel market in the Middle East.

The trail arcs gently northwest through Sudan and then curves northeast into Egypt, along the palm-lined Nile. Starting in savanna covered with dry grass and acacia trees on which the camels feed, the trail reaches pure sand desert in the northernmost third of the country. The traveler does not see vegetation again until the trail joins the Nile.

Sudan has nearly three million camels, the second-largest national herd in the world, after Somalia's. Nearly one and a half million square kilometers (580,000 sq mi) of territory is suitable for their grazing—an area more than twice the size of Texas and three times as large as Spain. Approximately a third the size of the United States, Sudan is the largest country in Africa, sparsely populated with 27 million people.

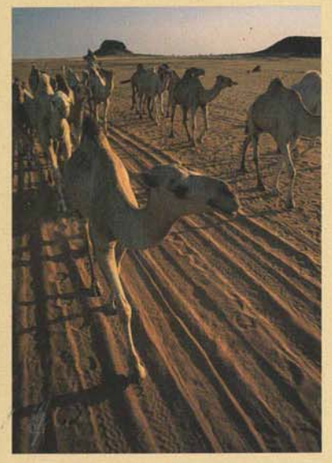
The journey from Omdurman to Daraw takes approximately 30 days, yet herders still refer to this route as *Darb al-Arba'in*,

Before a herd can be sent north, deals of great financial import must be struck, usually in free-floating, open-air discussion circles. We join the unemployed herders who move from one trader to another; they hope to be hired to travel the Forty Days' Road, and we hope to be allowed to go along. As we move, I wonder how Americans would react to a Sudanese woman in her native dress going from truck stop to truck stop saying she wanted to study the trade routes that truckers travel? With suspicion? Yes. With mistrust of her real intentions? Most assuredly. Yet no one offers us the slightest offense. ***Below left:*** *Whenever we encounter a* khabir, *a trail boss, we measure him against the standards we have set. He has to speak a dialect we can understand; the price he asks for taking us along must be reasonable; and he must be photogenic. Most important, though, is that we feel we can trust him with our lives, for, in the middle of the desert, we will certainly be doing just that. Noor Hishaba meets those criteria. He commands respect from humans and animals alike—I especially admire his ability to make even the most contrary camel do his bidding without using a whip or a harsh word. He becomes our protector and guide in our trek through the desert.* ***Below right:*** *The Abu Jeib family of el-Obeid has been running caravans to Egypt ever since the turn of the century.*



After the men had prepared the saddles, stocked up on food, collected water from a nearby bir*—one of the many wells we would pass—gathered wood for fuel and counted the camels, we were on our way.*

My first camel didn't immediately know I'd never really ridden a camel before, much less herded a hundred in front of me. But I felt I could fake it with the best of them, so I felt exhilarated and confident the first morning as I imitated the herders exactly, and for the next few hours I fooled the camel with my clicking tongue and cracking whip.



Gradually my camel realized I did not know what I was doing. We moved from last position in the caravan to an aggravating 100 meters behind everyone else. Only after using the whip more than I would have liked to did he finally acquiesce in catching up with the herd, having firmly established who was really in control. It clearly was not I.

Grazing becomes scarcer now with every step, and flat plains give way to sharp mountains flanked by glaciers of sand. The mid-day sun tears at me. I shout to a vulture circling overhead, "Yes, I'm still alive!"

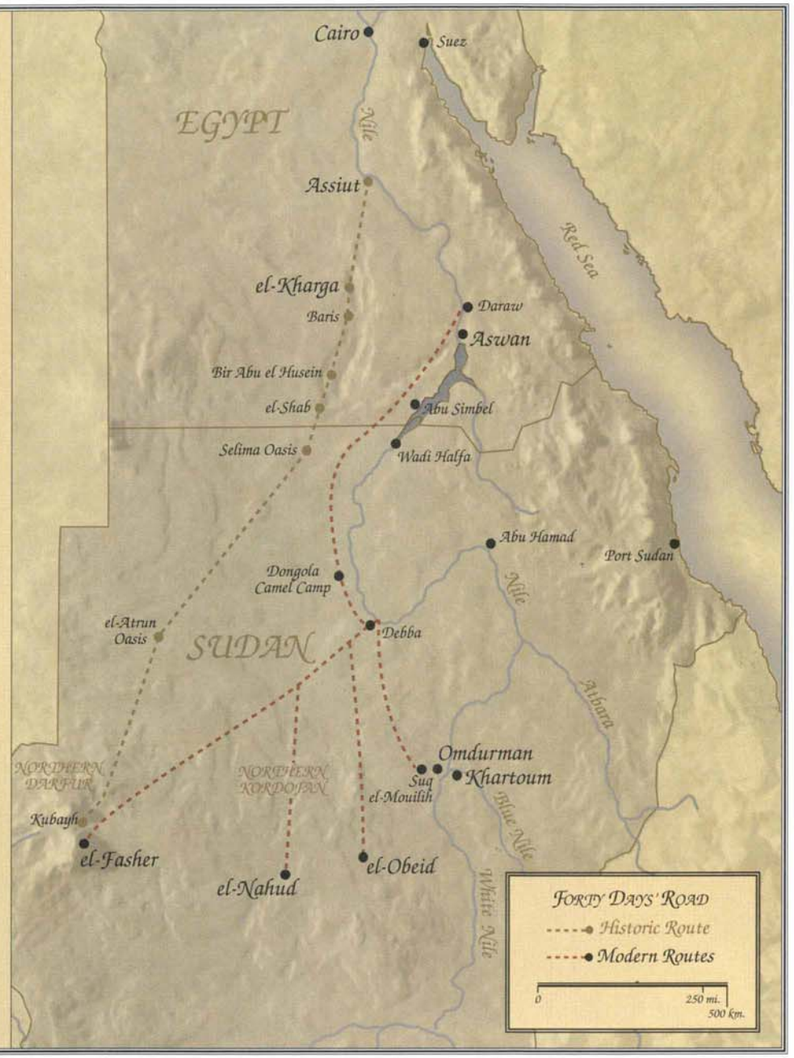
***Inset:** Elongated legs—one hundred camels, four hundred legs—slowly cross and uncross each other's shadows in the sand, swaying across the ripples created by the unceasing north wind. A shimmering mirage of pattern upon pattern, a criss-cross image of icing on a cake, ripples of water on a lake. There are some scenes that cameras and film cannot fully capture.*

Among the worst-watered of Africa's historic caravan trade routes, the Darb al-Arba'in, *the Forty Days' Road, got its name from the time it took to travel from Darfur province in western Sudan to Assiut in southern Egypt—although a good rider on a fast camel could make the journey in as few as 18 days.*

Until modern times, trade on this route did not flow only in a northerly direction. On reaching Cairo, some three-quarters of the camels were sold for meat and as pack and draft animals, but the remainder returned south carrying goods that were desirable in Sudan and the surrounding region: European-made paper, balsam oil, textiles, metals, beads, whalebone, scents, dyes and small amounts of military supplies.

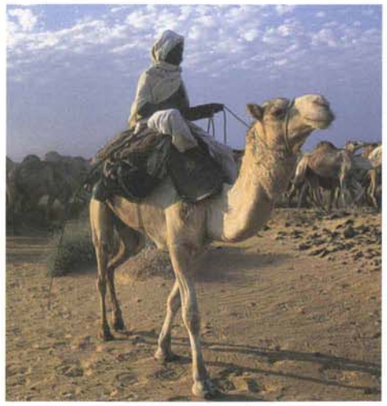
In 1897, however, the British built a railroad from Wadi Halfa to Abu Hamad as part of their military action against the Mahdi in Sudan, and Sudan today has 5500 kilometers (3400 miles) of track. After the completion of the Aswan Dam in 1972, a ferry service was opened across Lake Nasser between Sudan and Egypt. The increased use of air travel, too, greatly diminished the need to transport goods on treacherous overland routes. But Cairo's population was rapidly expanding, and camels have always been a healthy source of protein. Renewed life came to the Forty Days' Road and the caravans thrived once more—only now the camels carried no loads but their own meat.

Below: *Noor rides in the* khabir's *position to the right of the herd, because camels are known to drift to the right as they walk. The headrope of a riding camel is positioned on the left to counteract this tendency. Noor turns here and there, but more often just makes clicking noises with his tongue to encourage the animals to make their own way north.*



the Forty Days' Road. The historic Forty Days' Road connected the el-Fasher area of Sudan with Assiut in Egypt, via the Selima and Kharga Oases. This was the path followed by the great ancient camel caravans of old, a trade route dating back at least 700 years.

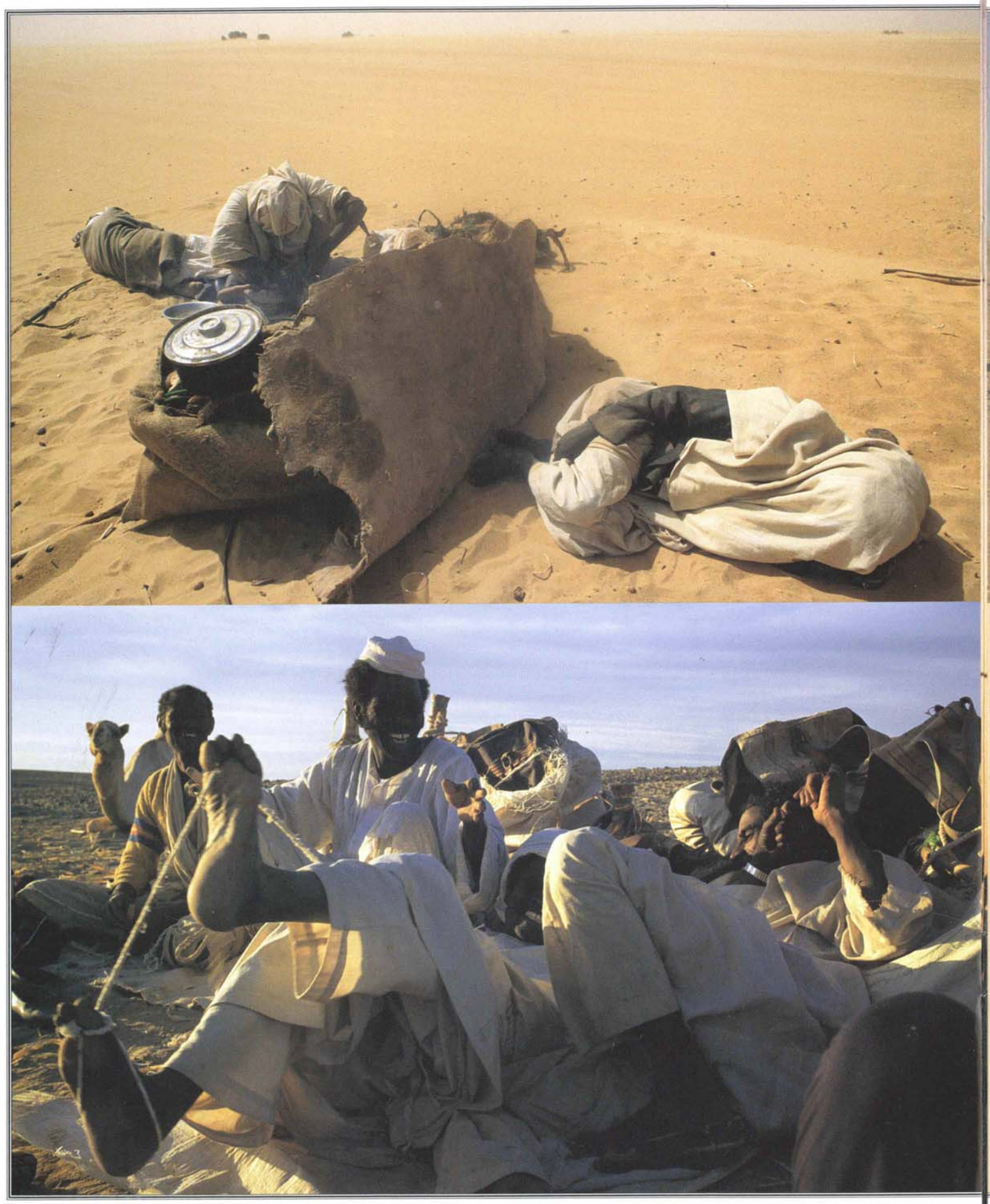
Unlike the historic route, the route of contemporary camel caravans hugs the Nile, sticking close to the main source of water as much as possible. In areas where they cannot travel along the Nile, herders rely on wells, so the *khabir*, the trail boss, must have perfect knowledge of well sites. Although herders today may begin their journey in el-Fasher, el-Obeid, el-Nahud or—most likely—in Omdurman, as we did,



all still refer to any of these several routes to Egypt as *Darb al-Arba'in*.

The ancient caravans were like armies crossing the desert, their numbers far greater than anything seen today and their route more difficult, for, according to Sudanese historian Yusuf Fadl Hasan, they avoided the trail along the Nile for fear of robbery and official extortion. Ibn Khaldun, the 14th-century historian, recorded caravans of 12,000 camels on the Forty Days' Road. Then, too, caravans moved in both directions, as Sudan exported ivory, ebony, gold, ostrich feathers, cowry shells and slaves to Egypt, and received in return textiles, metals and firearms. Since trains and trucks now carry

For the three months or more that it takes to complete the round trip, the camaraderie of the trail replaces the close family ties that herders cherish during the rest of the year. And so they adopt roles, like characters in a drama, with the desert their vast stage—Noor the mentor, El-Haj the mimic, Muhammad the clown, Ibrahim the vain one, El-Noor the man-child. And we are supporting players: Angela the socialite and I the musician with my Irish whistle.



Opposite, top: *Though the desert days are blindingly hot, you can always count on the nights being bitterly cold. I wear all my clothes then, huddled in my sleeping bag, lying on a thick wool carpet that serves as a groundsheet against the cold night sand, and which, folded four times, cushions my* hawiya *(saddle) during the day. The herders shiver wearing a sweater or coat over their thin cotton tunics, with a thin blanket wrapped tightly around them, and burlap bags providing a ground covering.*

Opposite, lower: *Noor's team erupts in laughter while unraveling rope to be fashioned into hobbles, which are applied to one foreleg of each camel each night. Despite the hardships of the monotonous journey, the herders take everything in stride, even when fasting during daylight hours throughout the month of Ramadan. Every evening at sundown, they break their fast by eating dates, and El-Noor, the only literate member of the group, leads the men in prayer.*

Top: *On the road to Abu Simbel, tour buses came and went. The tourists who stopped to look at the herd felt no qualms about invading "our" space, as I now saw it, and asking the traders to pose with the camels. The herders' demands for* bakhshish*—a tip—sounded crass to the tourists, and the tourists' unwillingness to give anything in return for the herders' time seemed equally so. I became aware that I really belonged to neither group: I was a dust-covered oddity.*

Left: *Rocky terrain plays havoc with the camels' feet, leaving cuts that will become infected unless the herders protect them. First they cut round or oblong shapes out of leather, then long strips which are threaded through the eye of a huge needle. The patches are simply sewn onto the camel's foot-pads.*

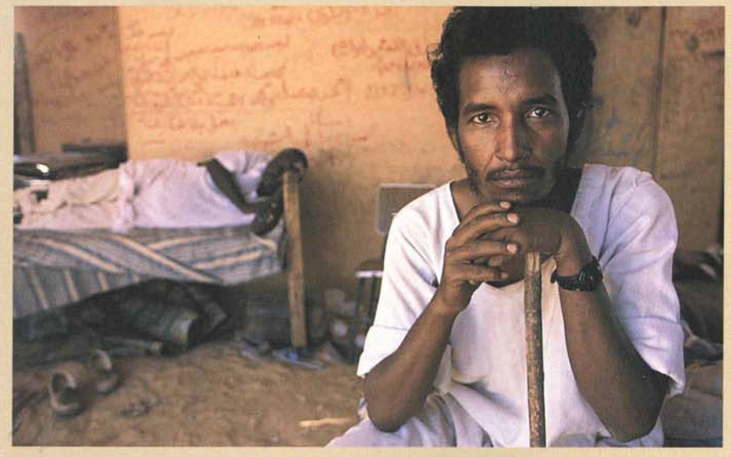
Inset: *We eat in traditional style. The men form a circle around one bowl, and all two of us women around the other. '*Asidah *is the staple food—breakfast, lunch and dinner. It is made from durra, a variety of millet, that has been ground into flour, then cooked in a bubbling cauldron. In another pot, onions, oil, salt, pepper and* bamiyah*—dried, powdered okra—are mixed, then poured atop the hot, mud-like millet concoction. I'm forced to find ways to make it palatable: Eat it when very hungry; eat it fast.*

the vast majority of trade, it is the pack animal of the past that has become is the commodity today. Camel traffic goes in only one direction now: from the breeding grounds in Sudan to the farms and butcher shops of Egypt.

The modern Sudan–Egypt camel trade began around the turn of the century, and has remaineds virtually unchanged since then. Business is still done on a handshake and a promise, and animals are released on a man's word, with payment made in cash some days later. Sales are recorded by hand in big, hardbound ledgers.

alent of $300 per journey; as the leader, the *khabir* earns double that. The round trip keeps the men away from their villages for three months or more at a time. Many spend their wages in Cairo to purchase housewares, fabrics and clothing that they can sell in Sudan after they return home by ship via Suez and Port Sudan.

Today's herds usually comprise 100 camels led by five men. Sometimes a trader gathers enough camels to make up a herd of 200, like ours. But at $500 a head, the cost can be prohibitive. We're traveling amid $100,000 worth of livestock.



When we first began researching the camel trade in 1991, the caravans usually rested at a tabbanah*—a feeding station—near Abu Simbel. This small cluster of huts, run by ex-herders and refugees, provided sustenance before the final six-day trek to the crossing of the Nile and the Daraw camel market. On our first visit to the* tabbanah*, we found drawings of the camel trade on the wall and an inscription from the Qur'an: "It is He who has made the earth subservient to you. Walk about its regions and eat of His provisions. To Him all shall return at the Resurrection." Nowadays, the* tabbanah *is deserted; its small population of entrepreneurs gone and the companionship and hospitality they provided left in the dust of modern motorized transport.*

Records from Sudan's Ministry of Animal Resources show that the first official export of camels to Egypt took place in 1904, when 10 animals were sent north. Today, Sudan officially exports some 50,000 camels to Egypt annually, but the border between the two countries is long and difficult to monitor, and thus the real numbers are generally agreed to be higher. In recent years, camels have comprised as much as half of Sudan's exports to Egypt, resulting in a post at the Sudanese embassy in Cairo for an envoy specialized in camel commerce.

For their work, herders earn the equiv-

My own camel is a strong, white bull with a gentle hump and a surly disposition. When I approach to mount him, he breathes like a dragon—a low roar, subtly threatening. Four days into our ride, he terrifies me by snatching the straps of a canvas backpack I carry slung over my shoulder, and yanking on it with his powerful teeth; I dub him Abul al-Hol, "father of terror," which is also the name of the Sphinx. He later bites me outright, then bites Lorraine. Neither bite is serious, but the name sticks. Among the herders, "Abu al-Hol" becomes a running joke.

Despite our daily battle of wits, I learn how to put his headrope on by placing the slipknot around his neck, winding it over the bridge of his nose and finally tucking it under the chin in a loose hitch. Abul al-Hol's teeth flash around my fingers all the while, his jaws snapping at the air in mock threat, reminding me which of us is really in charge. I ask one of the herders to stand next to me every time I try it, because I know Abu al-Hol won't dare bite me if one of them is near.

As Lorraine and I plop onto the sand, grateful for a break after four hours in the saddle, two of the herders fish knives out of their hand-stitched nylon saddlebags and head back to Al-Nazif and the faltering camel. From their urgent movements, I understand what is about to happen.

The haggard camel couches docilely, too exhausted to resist, and Al-Nazif mutters "Bismillah"—"In the name of God"—and plunges his dagger into the base of the animal's neck. Blood flows and foams into a bright-red, soapy pool on the sand. The other herders rush up to help with the mercy killing. They would not abandon the creature alive, for it would slowly starve if they did.

After removing the hump—no more than a clump of hair on a tiny ridge of fat—they deftly fill two burlap sacks with meat that later provides our only dietary relief from the daily millet porridge. By the time we walk away, vultures have already descended. The animal's skeleton, picked clean, will lie as a reminder that not all who attempt the *Darb al-Arba'in* succeed.

Other sun-bleached camel skeletons litter the desert route, more and more the further north we go. When we arrive in Cairo, the Khartoum trader who owned the unfortunate camel will be informed of his loss, and he will accept it as one of the risks of sending livestock on such an arduous journey.

"Hut! Hut!" the herders bark after remounting, urging the herd northward like drill sergeants rousing sleepy infantry. "Hut...Ha! Ho...Ha! Hey...Ha!" Whips slap sand in threatening arcs. We move on. One is lost, but 199 camels must still be delivered to market.

Captions adapted from *Shadows in the Sand: Following the Forty Days Road*, by Lorraine Chittock, Camel Caravan Press (Cairo), 1996, ISBN 977-5762-00-6, $45.00 (hb; include $6.00 shipping), fax 20-2-378-2331, e-mail gecko26@ie-eg.com, or www.angelfire.com/ca/camels.

Angela Stephens, formerly a senior writer with Egypt Today *in Cairo, now lives in California, where she is writing a book about her experiences in Sudan and Egypt.*

Lorraine Chittock, formerly a staff photographer for Egypt Today*, is a free-lance writer and photographer living in Cairo.*

The centuries-old trade route is still changing. Under the dual influence of modern politics and transportation, the Forty Days' Road now stops at the border between Egypt and Sudan. Trucks arrive from the Egyptian village of Daraw, a four-hour drive away, to pick up the drive's camels and its khabir*; the remaining herders must arrange their own transportation to Wadi Halfa, a Sudanese border town where there are buses, trucks and a train that runs every two weeks to take them back to their homes and families. So it was here that we bade farewell to our traveling companions. As for the camels, from Daraw, along the Nile, they ride to Cairo on trains and trucks.*

Written by Louis Werner
Photographed by Peter Essick

A Fresh Approach

OPPOSITE, TOP: RAINBOW ROOM

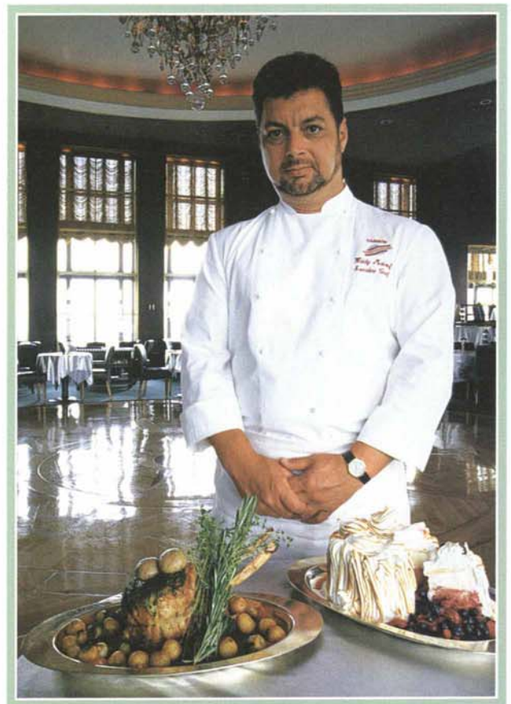
FROM HIS 64TH-FLOOR OFFICE, WALDY MALOUF IS LOOKING DOWN ON MIDTOWN NEW YORK WHEN THE UNMISTAKABLE ODOR OF FRESH RAW FISH WAFTS THROUGH HIS OPEN DOOR. AS THE NEW HEAD CHEF OF THE RAINBOW ROOM, THE CITY'S MOST VENERABLE RESTAURANT HIGH ATOP ROCKEFELLER CENTER, THIS IS JUST WHAT HE EXPECTS TO SMELL AT THIS MOMENT. "SHRIMP, ACTUALLY. TO BE SERVED TONIGHT WITH A TOMATO-HORSERADISH SORBET."

A leading light among the young chefs who have put their mark on American cuisine by using fresh, in-season "native" American ingredients, Malouf has accepted the challenge laid down by the Rainbow Room's owners: to bring the restaurant's food up to the level of its world-class view, decor, and music. "They wanted their restaurant run by a culinarian first, someone unafraid to polish the old classics and to invent the new. I can do both."

Malouf's menu redesign best tells the story of how he plans to mesh the traditional with the seasonal. The first page presents his kitchen's permanent offerings, each listed with the date it first appeared on the menu. Diners can turn the calendar back to 1934, the year the restaurant opened, with "Lobster Thermidor Rainbow," or turn forward to 1996 for Malouf's own "Mint-Cured & Apple-Smoked Salmon Napoleon."

The menu's second page is dedicated to foods of the season at hand: Rabbit, venison, squash, and apples for the fall; trout, lamb, and asparagus for the spring. Summer will bring vegetables whose seeds Malouf has hand-selected and contracted out for growing. "Farmers upstate are used to seeing me rooting around in their gardens," he says. "Most don't mind a bit."

Malouf previously helped found the brash Hudson River Club restaurant, making his name as an advocate of the freshest regional ingredients and as author of the acclaimed *Hudson River Valley Cookbook* (Addison-Wesley, 1995). "The zeal for freshness must have come from my Lebanese heritage," he says. On a 1975 food tour of the Middle East, won as a prize in a cooking contest at the 21 Club, Malouf remembers "the cheese made overnight, milk milked that morning, greens picked from the kitchen garden, and lamb butchered before my eyes."



Culinary leader of what **The New York Times** *named as one of the two top restaurants of 1997, Chef Waldy Malouf displays roast rack of veal with mushrooms, tomato and chives—carved at tableside—and baked Alaska, whose flames have illuminated the Rainbow Room since its opening in 1934. Opposite page, top: Tournedos Rossini, served with truffle and foie gras, is named for the 19th-century Italian composer. Lower: During each 14-hour workday, Malouf directs 35 "prep cooks," saucing veal (left), sprinkling pepper on lobster tartare with Beluga caviar (right), and keeping pace with a menu that changes with the seasons.*

Malouf's grandfather Shibly came to the United States in 1910 and became a professor of theology at Harvard University. Raised by a lawyer father and a librarian mother, Waldy—"as the eldest son of an Arab family," he shrugs sheepishly—was expected to enter a traditional profession. "But I was a child of the '60's, and everything then seemed so political. Cooking for me was enjoyable, creative and, at the same time, disciplined."

It was also something that connected him to his memories of eating at his grandmother's table. "I still recall the food, the expectations of different tastes that were supposed to be there: The pungency of spices, the crispness of vegetables—only the things that it made sense to be eating at the time." Just as *tabbuli* combines greens, grains, and oil into the same dish, so too Malouf has learned to mix different food groups into one neat recipe to produce a virtually complete meal.

With 30 years of kitchen experience under his belt, Malouf has for some time been receiving the individual attention that his profession as a whole has only grudgingly earned in the postwar years. The great chef Paul Bocuse was already an old man when he made the cover of *Time*, but Malouf was barely in his 30's when he was featured by a major weekly. And that was even before he made it to the culinary aerie that is the Rainbow Room.

Writer and filmmaker Louis Werner lives in New York. His most recent film, A Sheepherder's Homecoming, *will have its New York premier at the 1997 Margaret Mead Film Festival.*

New York-based free-lancer Peter Essick frequently photographs for National Geographic.

TALES OF THE HOJA

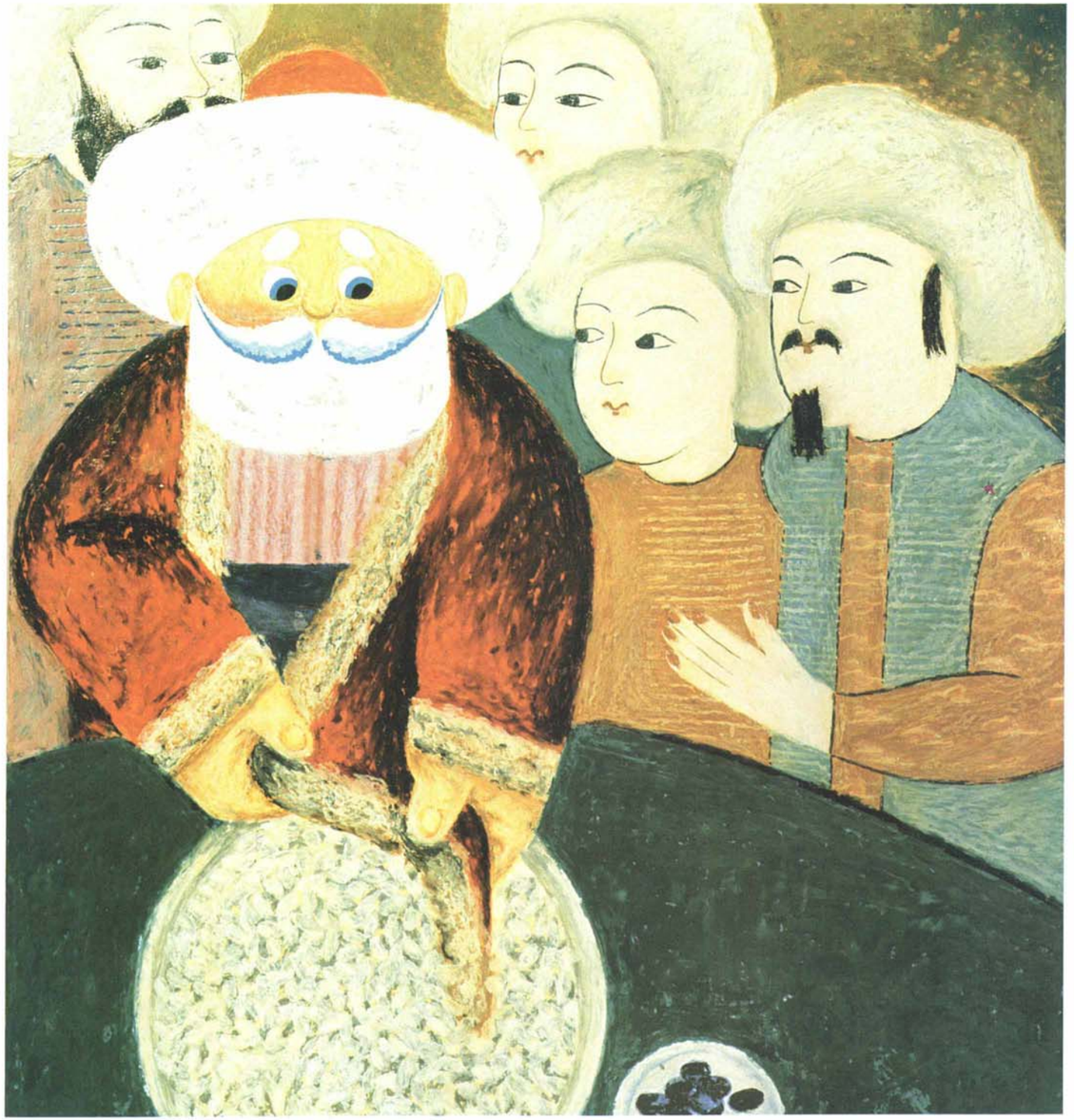
Written by John Noonan ◆ *Illustrated by Yurdaer Altıntaş*

A roly-poly, turbaned figure mounted on a donkey rides through six centuries of Turkish folk tales. He is Nasreddin Hoja, the Anatolian preacher, teacher and farmer whose mythical adventures puncture pomposity, give grounds for hope, and recognize the realities of daily life not only of 13th-century Anatolia but of every place and age. Nasreddin Hoja (*hoca* means "teacher" in Turkish) is both crafty and naive, wise and foolish, a trickster and the butt of tricks. He is devout, but has human failings; is happy, but has his share of troubles; sweet-tempered, but capable of testiness and even rage. Every Turk can tell stories—often dozens of stories—about this invincible victim of life's ironies. And not only Turks. In coffeehouses and caravanserais throughout the Ottoman Empire, and from there along the Silk Roads to China and India, stories about him were told; they spread among the Turkic tribes and into Persian and Arabian cultures, and across North Africa from Egypt to Algeria. The stories—mostly invented, though the person himself probably did exist—were loved and retold and expanded because they embodied peasant craft, village wit and the wisdom of the powerless in dealing with life's vagaries and setbacks. They were certainly also revised and adapted to apply to the struggles and circumstances of the tellers. Thus Nasreddin Hoja had to deal not only with Timur, the terrifying Mongol conqueror of Anatolia, but also with nagging wives, thoughtless sons, intrusive neighbors, bungling bureaucrats and assorted animals. He emerged from these collisions with his gentle nature dented but unbroken. He rebuked rudeness or greed with a deft phrase that rings down the centuries. He coped with frustration and outrage to win the smiles that made humdrum life endurable—and sometimes even instructive. Many of the Nasreddin Hoja stories were adopted into the folk-tale repertoires of other cultures. The Arabian tales of Juha, for example, tell of jokes and pranks almost interchangeable with the Hoja's, and he was also assimilated into the characters of Bahlul,

the wise fool of the Middle East, the German peasant character Till Eulenspiegel, the Finnish Antti Puuhaara, Birbal in India and Bertholdi of Serbo-Croatian humor. Family squabbles, human weaknesses and foibles, the differences between the great and the humble—all were the objects of Nasreddin Hoja's way of dealing with life as he found it, with a heart-winning, rueful smile and recognition of fellowship. Concluding a description of how his donkey had strayed and been lost for two days, the Hoja adds, "Thank goodness I wasn't on it at the time, or I'd have been lost too!" Nasreddin Hoca stories do not tell of blood, battle and martial glory except to deflate them. "Why," the Hoja boasts, "I went forth onto the battlefield and, with one terrible swift stroke of my sword, I cut the hand right off one of the enemy!" Asked if he had then cut off the wounded soldier's head, Nasreddin confesses, "As a matter of fact, no. Somebody else had done that an hour earlier." A large number of the Nasreddin Hoja tales tell of his dealings with Timur (Tamerlane), who defeated the Ottomans at the Battle of Ankara in 1402. Innocent, unintimidated and sly, the Hoja provided laughter at the presumptions of the great.

"What is my true worth, my value?" demanded Timur of Nasreddin Hoja. "You see before you a man who has conquered the whole world, who has slain armies and makes the mountains tremble! Look carefully and tell me what you think is my real worth." The Hoja peered at the emperor, stroked his chin and replied, "About 20 gold pieces." "What? Idiot!" raged Timur. "Just this belt alone is worth 20 gold pieces!" Nasreddin Hoja nodded. "I included that when I gave you my estimate," he said. Tales like that one were banned during the reign of Sultan Abdulhamid II, who was not a humorous man. Franklin Delano Roosevelt, on the other hand, was an avid fan of Nasreddin Hoja stories. And their nose-tweaking quality may also have appealed to another great deflator of the mighty: There are scholars who suggest that Miguel de Cervantes, author of *Don Quixote*, may have heard Nasreddin Hoja stories after his capture by the Turks off Algiers, during his imprisonment from 1575 to 1581. One can see some of the lineaments of the Hoja in Don Quixote's sidekick, the bungling but unsinkable Sancho Panza.

The following stories are some that I have heard in the course of four happy decades in Turkey.



Nasreddin Hoja had journeyed long on his donkey to reach the town where an Ottoman official had invited him to dinner. Stiffly, he dismounted and knocked on the imposing front door. When it was opened, he saw that the feast was already in progress. But before he could introduce himself, his host, looking at his travel-stained clothes, told him curtly that beggars were not welcome—and shut the door in the startled Hoja's face.

Undismayed, Nasreddin Hoja went to the saddlebag on his donkey and unhurriedly changed into his finest attire: a magnificent silk robe trimmed with fur, and a vast silk turban. Thus arrayed, he returned to the front door and knocked again.

This time, his host welcomed him warmly and with many courtesies, and conducted him to the main table. Servants placed dishes of delicacies before him. Nasreddin Hoja poured a bowl of soup into one pocket of his robe. To the astonishment of the other guests, he tucked pieces of roast meat into the folds of his turban. Then, before his horrified host, he pushed the fur facing of his robe into a plate of pilav, *murmuring "Eat, fur, eat!"*

"What's the meaning of this?" demanded the host.

"My dear sir," replied the Hoja, "I am feeding my clothes. To judge by your treatment of me half an hour ago, it is clearly they, and not myself, which are the objects of your hospitality!"

A group of villagers came upon Nasreddin Hoja one day at the edge of the lake. To their surprise, they saw he was kneeling by the water, carefully spooning creamy yoghurt from a wooden bowl into the ripples.

"Hoja, for heaven's sake!" they shouted in astonishment. "What are you doing with the yoghurt?"

"I'm putting starter into the lake," he replied calmly. "There'll be enough yoghurt for everybody."

"You're crazy!" the villagers told him. "This lake will never turn into yoghurt!"

"Well, I know, I know," Nasreddin Hoja admitted. "But just imagine: How wonderful if it did!"

One morning when Nasreddin Hoja went to fetch his donkey, he found it missing. The old rope that had tied the animal up was pulled apart, and the donkey was gone. When his neighbors heard of their Hoja's loss, they came to help find the beast. They knew that, like their own, Nasreddin Hoja's livelihood depended on the donkey's work. Some searched in nearby fields, while others checked empty buildings and other places the donkey might have strayed.

When it became apparent that the animal was nowhere in or around the village, some of the younger neighbors took it on themselves to search the nearby hills in their quest.

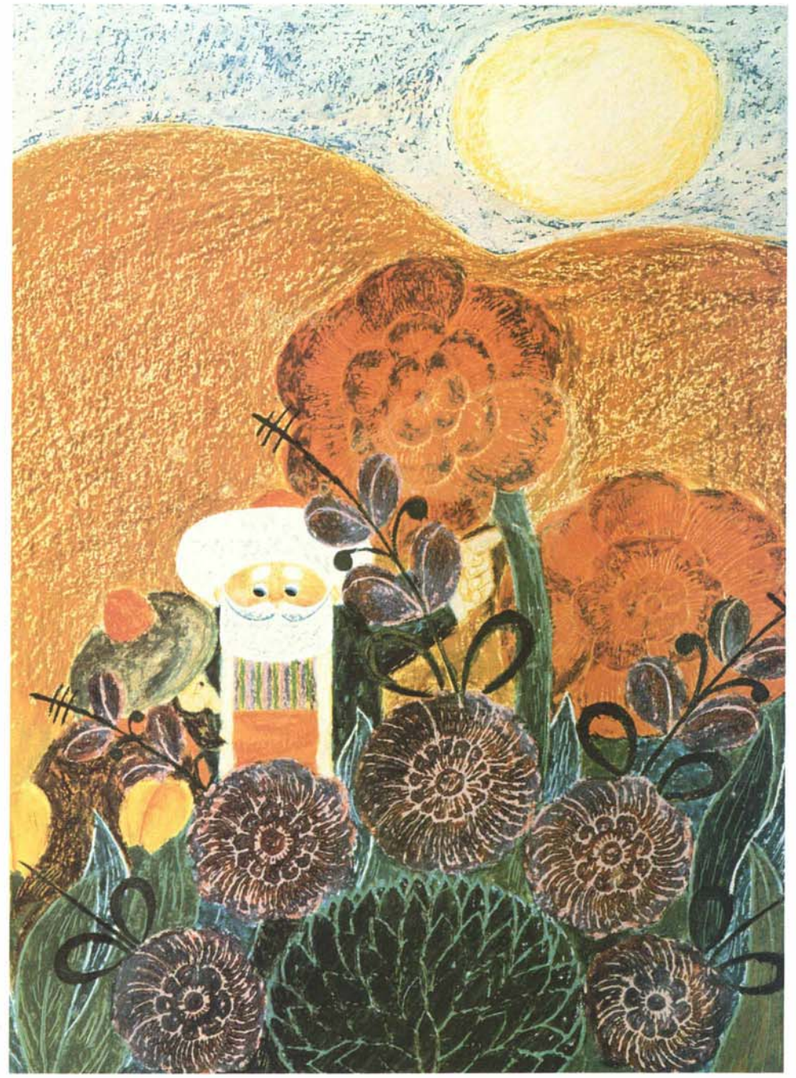
Toward sunset, the exhausted searchers returned to the village. To their surprise, they found Nasreddin Hoja sitting in the coffee-house, sipping a glass of tea and smiling benignly.

"Have you found your donkey, Hoja?" one of them asked.

"As a matter of fact, no," replied Nasreddin Hoja.

One man, more outspoken or perhaps more tired than the others, snapped at the Hoja. "Then why the devil are you smiling? It's your donkey, and how are you going to make your living without it?"

Still smiling, Nasreddin Hoja placed the tulip-shaped glass on its saucer, and replied, "My boy, all places where the donkey could possibly be have been searched, without success—except that high hill to the west. Now, let me assure you, if that hill is also found to be without my donkey, then you'll hear some real moaning!"



NASREDDIN HOJA STORIES

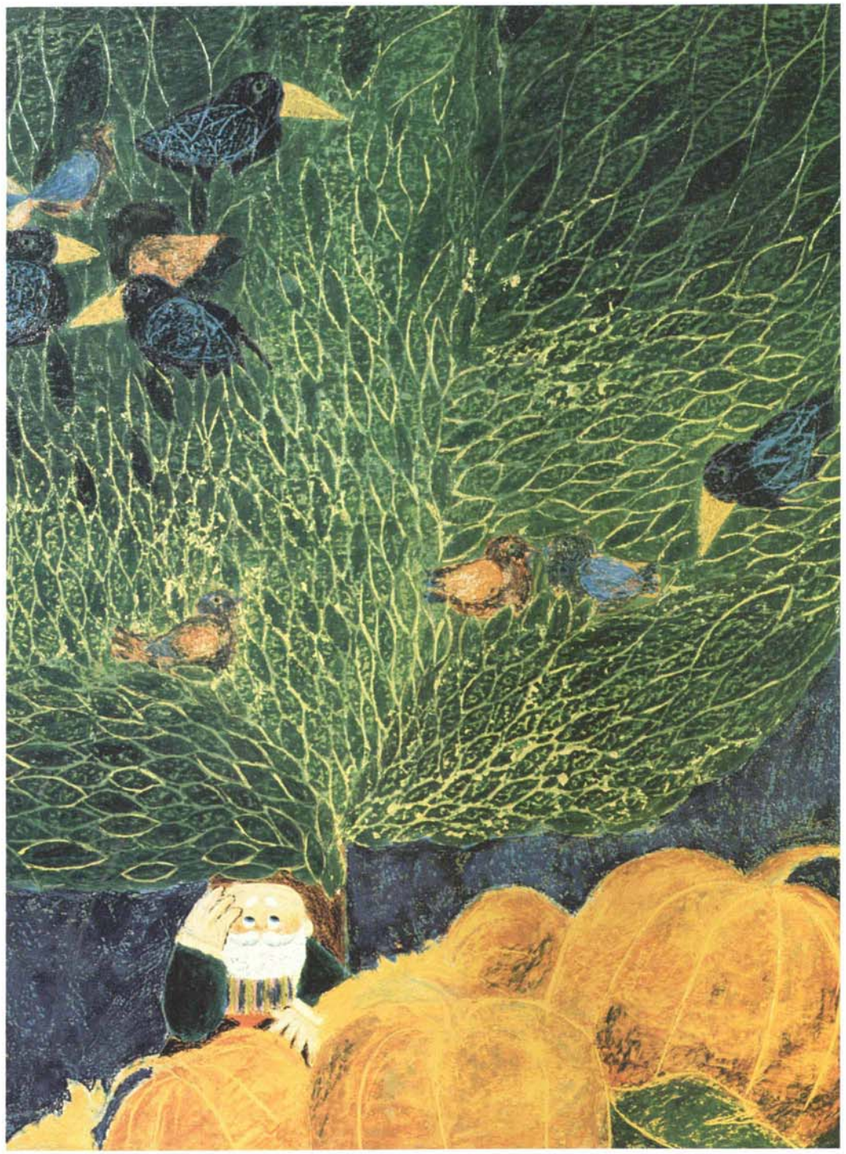
DO NOT TELL OF BLOOD,

BATTLE AND MARTIAL GLORY

EXECPT TO DEFLATE THEM.

Nasreddin Hoja was very fond of liver, and he was very pleased when a friend sent him a wonderful new recipe for preparing it. He hurried to the market and bought each of the ingredients his wife would need to follow the recipe, including a kilo of fresh liver.

As he was crossing the village square, however, getting hungrier with each step, a hawk swooped down, snatched the liver from his hand and flew away. Nasreddin Hoja ran after the bird for a few steps, but it was useless, of course. Through his anger and his disappointment, the Hoja nonetheless saw a silver lining. Waving the letter from his friend, he shouted after the hawk, "Go ahead and take the liver, then—you can have it! But I've still got the recipe!"



One summer's day in Turkey, Nasreddin Hoja and his faithful old donkey were plowing in the fields. It was a hot day and they had been plowing since early morning.

"Let's rest awhile, my friend," the old man said to the donkey.

They walked over to the shade of a large walnut tree. Near it was a pumpkin field, and a deep well. Nasreddin Hoja drank some of the cool well water and gave a bucketful to the donkey. Then with an "aah!" he sat down slowly on the ground and leaned his back against the trunk of the walnut tree.

It was such a hot day! He still felt warm, even in the cool shade. So he took off the big white turban that he always wore on his bald head. Then he rested his head against the tree, and felt better. He looked up at the big strong branches full of leaves and ripe walnuts. Then he closed his eyes and slept awhile.

Suddenly he woke and sat up, looking at the huge pumpkins around the well. They looked like big warm orangy-brown stones, surrounded by leaves and the thin twisting vines they grew on.

Then he looked again at the walnuts hanging from the tree's thick branches, and he thought about the pumpkins and the walnuts in the slow, careful way he always thought about things.

After a while, he spoke aloud. "Oh God, you are great and wise, and I am only a farmer and the preacher in our village mosque. But some people say I'm the wisest man in the village, God, and I was just wondering....

"Shouldn't the walnuts and the pumpkins be changed around? I mean, shouldn't the big heavy pumpkins grow on the thick branches of a strong tree like this one? And shouldn't the little walnuts grow on the ground on thin spindly vines like those over there? Surely that would make more sense—and think how beautiful a green tree full of big orange pumpkins would look!"

Just then, there was a zipping sound in the tree above Nasreddin Hoja, and a ripe walnut fell from a high branch and—ouch!—hit the old man right on the top of his bare bald head. "Ay!" he said, and rubbed the spot. He could already feel a lump growing, and he looked angrily up at the tree.

Then another thought crept slowly into Nasreddin Hoja's mind, and he stopped being angry. "Forgive me, God," he said quietly. "You are great and wise, and I am only a foolish old man. Now I understand. What if this tree had been a pumpkin tree, and what if it had been a big ripe pumpkin that hit me on the head, instead of a little walnut!"

He called to his donkey. "We're better off with the pumpkins on the ground, aren't we?" he said. "Come on, let's go and do the work we were meant to do, and leave the running of the world to God." And Nasreddin Hoja and his donkey went back to their plowing.

[RETOLD BY KARI ÇAĞATAY AND ALICE ARNDT]

As he was returning home late and tired one night, Nasreddin Hoja stopped at the village well to draw a drink for himself. He was horrified to see the full moon reflected in the dark water at the bottom of the well.

"Good Lord, the moon's fallen down the well!" he muttered to himself. "I've got to rescue it! What would we do without the beautiful moon?"

He grabbed the bucket and rope that lay beside the well and tossed the bucket in. Then he maneuvered it with the rope until he saw the moon reflecting safely from the water in the bucket. Bending over the well, he tried to raise the bucket. But its lip was stuck on a stone, and the more Nasreddin Hoja pulled, the less successful he was at raising the bucket and rescuing the moon. Finally he braced his foot on the edge of the well and heaved. Suddenly the bucket broke loose and the Hoja tumbled onto his back beside the well. Above him, he saw the lovely full moon floating serenely in the sky.

"Well, that's a good job done," he said to himself as he got to his feet. "Praise God, the moon is back where it belongs!" And he went home to bed.

Nasreddin Hoja and his traveling companion were destitute. Pooling their last paras, they had just enough money to buy a single glass of milk at an inn.

"You drink your half first, Hoja," said the friend. "I have a little sugar in my pocket, and I want to stir it into my half of the milk."

"Well, stir it in now," said the Hoja. "Sweetened milk would be a grand treat!"

"No, you drink your half first," the friend insisted. "I only have enough sugar for my half."

"Well, in that case," grumbled Nasreddin Hoja, reaching for the salt-cellar, "I think I'll drink my half salty."

Some neighbors asked Nasreddin Hoja, "What was that loud crash we heard from your house last night?"

"Nothing much," he replied. "My wife was angry, and she threw some clothes down the stairs."

"What a loud noise, just for clothes!" they pried.

"Well, if you must know," said the Hoja, "I was in them at the time."

Nasreddin Hoja was standing in a field when a passer-by quizzed him, asking what the people in the next village down the road were like.

"Well, what did you think of the people in our village?" he asked the stranger.

"Block-headed, lazy, stupid and rude, if you must know," replied the traveler.

"That's probably how you'll find them in the next village, too," said the Hoja.

A little later, another passing stranger struck up a conversation with Nasreddin Hoja. He too asked what the people in the next village were like.

"How did you find the people in this village?" countered the Hoja again.

"Warm-hearted, smiling, gentle and hospitable," answered the stranger.

"Then that's how you'll find them in the next village, too."

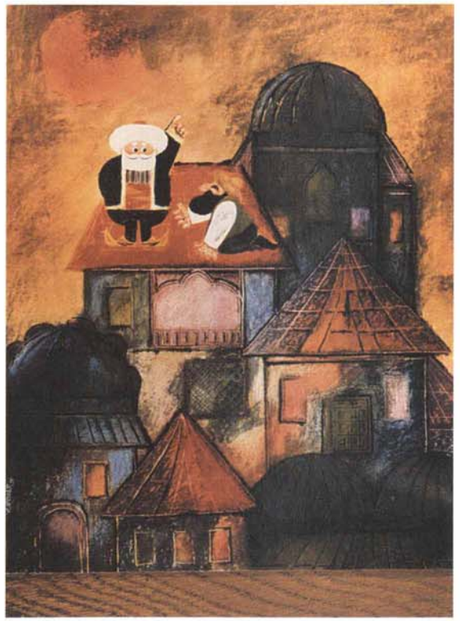
Nasreddin Hoja was afflicted with a bothersome, pesky neighbor who abused whatever he borrowed. If he asked for a saw, it would be returned unsharpened; if he borrowed an axe, it would be returned damaged, if it was returned at all; and money lent to him was repaid only after many reminders.

On this particular morning, the neighbor asked if he could use Nasreddin Hoja's donkey, explaining that he wanted to fetch bundles of firewood from the mountain, and his own donkey had a limp.

Knowing the animal would be returned beaten and unfed, Nasreddin Hoja replied, "Oh, what a pity I don't have him to lend! Just yesterday I lent him to my wife's cousin in the next village."

Just then Nasreddin Hoja's donkey brayed loudly from the shed behind the house. Hearing, it, the neighbor huffed and indignantly accused Nasreddin Hoja of lying.

Unperturbed, the Hoja wrapped himself in his dignity, stuck out his chin and demanded, "Whom are you going to believe? Me, or that stupid animal?



Misfortune befell Nasreddin Hoja. Returning from a wedding party one night, he and his wife found their home had been burglarized. Awakened by the lamentations of the Hoja's wife, neighbors rushed to offer commiserations.

But soon the clucking of tongues and the soulful sighs changed to criticism of Nasreddin Hoja.

"You should have left a lamp burning in your house, to make the thieves think someone was there," said one.

"I always urged you to get a dog," said another.

"You kept putting off repairing the lock on that door," chided his wife.

"Enough!" cried the exasperated Hoja. "You are all blaming me for this and blaming me for that. Don't you think the thieves deserve a little bit of the blame?"

THERE ARE SCHOLARS WHO SUGGEST THAT MIGUEL DE CERVANTES, AUTHOR OF *DON QUIXOTE*, MAY HAVE HEARD NASREDDIN HOJA STORIES AFTER HIS CAPTURE BY THE TURKS OFF ALGIERS, DURING HIS IMPRISONMENT FROM 1575 TO 1581.

As a young airman in the early 1950's, Boston-born John Noonan became enamored of Turkey's folklore and history; much of his poetry and writing in the subsequent four decades has dealt with those subjects. He lives in Bodrum, in southwestern Turkey.

Yurdaer Altıntaş, one of Turkey's best-known graphic artists, is a founder of the Turkish Society of Graphic Designers and was its president for seven years. His theater posters in particular have been exhibited around the world.

Events & Exhibitions

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

1952, The Last Protocol: *Official Coverage of Egypt's Royal Family at Work and Play* uses work by court photographers to Kings Farouk and Fouad to help the viewer understand the rules that applied to royal events. Sony Gallery, American University in **Cairo**, from October 7 through 23.

Teaching About the Arab World and Islam is the theme of teacher workshops cosponsored by the Middle East Policy Council in Washington, D.C., and conducted by Arab World And Islamic Resources and School Services (AWAIR) of Berkeley, California. Sites and dates include: **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; **Maryland** Association of Independent Schools, December 3. For details, call (202) 296-6767 or (510) 704-0517.

Miniature Marvels is a small showing of 15 Indian paintings from the 16th to 19th centuries. Spink & Son, **London**, from October 13 through November 14.

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.

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, **Cambridge, Massachusetts**, through November 2.

Six by Six features six artists from six different countries, all working in Saudi Arabia, who selected six everyday objects—including a Pepsi can, a mirror and fishbones—and painted one or more of them. Rosenthal-Herendt Art Gallery, **Jiddah**, from November 23 through 30.

The Gods of War: *Sacred Imagery and the Decoration of Arms and Armor* includes artifacts from the Middle East to India and Japan. Metropolitan Museum of Art, **New York**, through November.

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. University of **Pennsylvania** Museum, **Philadelphia**, through December 7.

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 coverings that insulate the traditional *yurta*. 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.

The Bathhouse: *The Culture of the Bath in East and West* tells the history of the public bathhouse in both the Islamic Middle East and the Netherlands. Museum voor Volkenkunde, **Rotterdam**, through January 4.

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

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**, through January 5.

Near Eastern Archaeology into the 21st Century will feature eight leading archeologists from the Middle East speaking about developments over the last decade and the prospects of the coming one. Loyola Marymount University, **Los Angeles**, January 9 through 12. For information phone (310) 338-1971.

The Seven Thrones of Jami: *A Princely Manuscript from Iran* shows, unbound, all 28 of the exquisite illustrations of the 16th-century *Haft Awrang*, or *Seven Thrones* by Jami. Freer Gallery, **Washington, D.C.**, through January.

Searching for Ancient Egypt: *Art, Architecture and Artifacts* surveys the magnificence of the Nile civilizations. **Dallas** Museum of Art, through February 1.

The Jewel and the Rose: *Art for Shah-Jahan* complements the larger exhibit, "King of the World" (see right), with 23 paintings, textiles and objects that sample the blossoming that occurred under India's fifth Mughal emperor. Sackler Gallery, **Washington, D.C.**, through February.

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

Dyeing to Please celebrates the creative genius of the world's greatest thread and textile dyers from Central Asia to Indonesia, Europe and more. **Minneapolis** Institute of the Arts, through April.

Current Archeological Research. Most of the 34 lectures in this series, which runs through June, 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.

Permanent Collection of Contemporary Art displays artworks by Arab-world painters. Institut du Monde Arabe, **Paris**, indefinitely.

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.

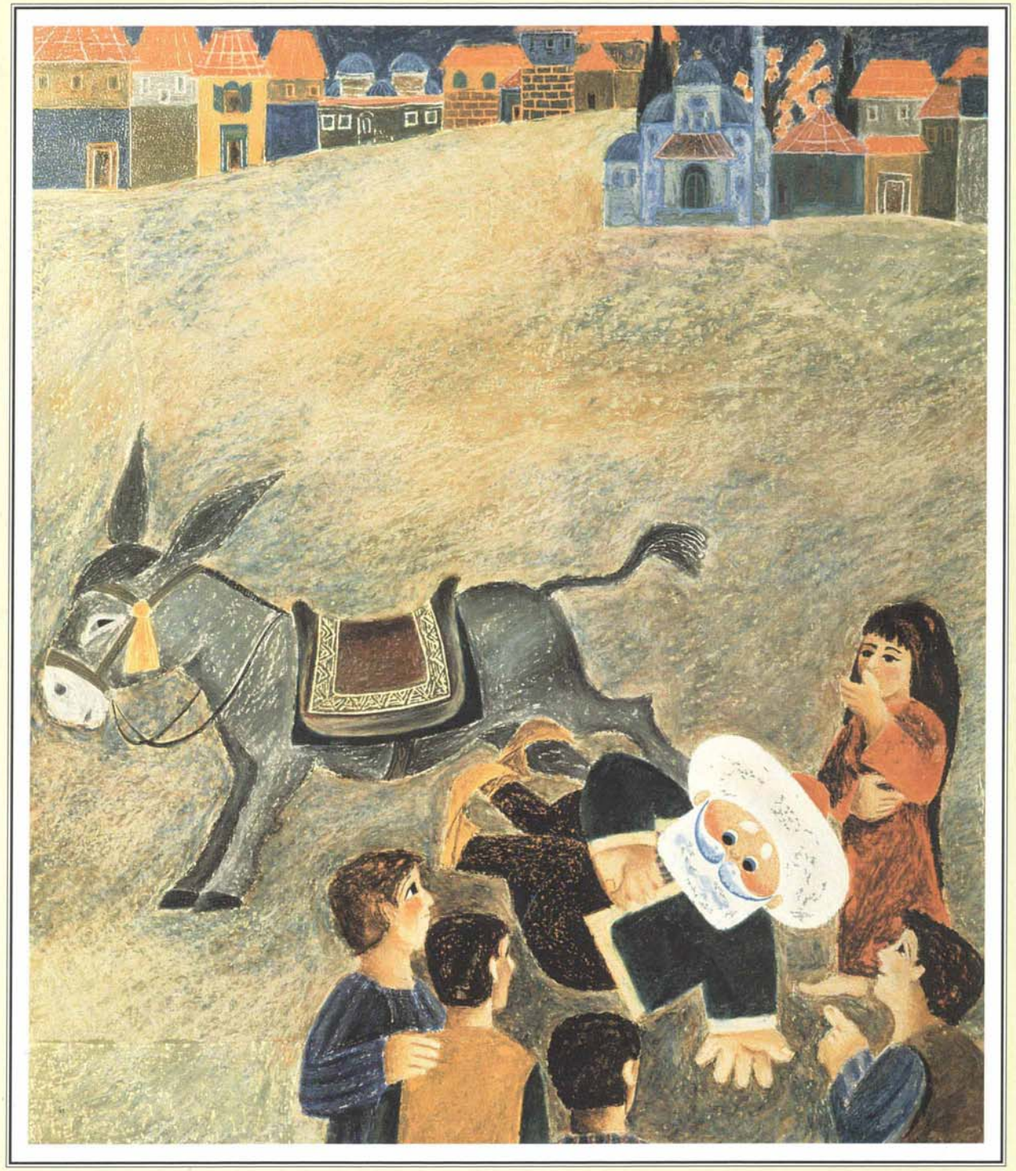
Detail of Prince Dara-Shikoh's wedding procession, February 12, 1633, by Bishandas.

King of the World: *A Mughal Manuscript from the Royal Library, Windsor Castle* records, in 44 of the finest of miniatures, the official court history of the first decade of the reign of Shah Jahan, best known as the builder of the Taj Mahal. Shah Jahan ascended to the throne in 1628, 102 years after the founding of the Mughal dynasty (the name, like the rulers, derives from "Mongol"), and he presided over a zenith of dynastic power that patronized a corresponding flowering of the arts in the empire. The *Padshahnama* ("Chronicle,of the King of the World") was a pictorial history—accurate down to the portraits of ministers in each painting—aimed at solidifying and immortalizing Shah Jahan's rule over an expanding and heterogeneous empire. The manuscript was given to Britain's royal family in 1799; it has never before been unbound and displayed in its entirety. Sackler Gallery, **Washington, D.C.**, through October 13; Metropolitan Museum of Art, **New York**, from November 20 through February 8.

Aramco World (ISSN 1044-1891) is published bimonthly by Aramco Services Company, 9009 West Loop South, Houston, Texas 77096-1799.

Volume 48, Number 5. Periodicals postage paid at Houston, Texas and at additional mailing offices.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *Aramco World*, Box 469008, Escondido, CA 92046.



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