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SAUDI ARABIA'S CENTENNIAL

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K.S.A. 100 YEARS

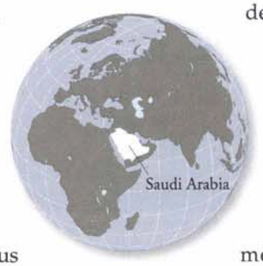
SAUDI ARABIA'S CENTENNIAL

January 15, 1902

‘Abd al-‘Aziz ibn ‘Abd al-Rahman Al Sa‘ud

One hundred years ago by the lunar Islamic calendar, on 5 Shawwal, 1319 (January 15, 1902) a small band of men from the House of Sa‘ud—lightly armed and heavily outnumbered—stole into the Arabian city of Riyadh by night. At dawn, they recaptured Riyadh’s citadel, a mud-brick fortress called al-Masmak.

Although the House of Sa‘ud had ruled great expanses of the Arabian Peninsula for much of the preceding century, a rival had deposed the family a decade earlier and driven it into exile. The leader of the victorious return, a son of the reigning head of the House of Sa‘ud, was only in his early twenties. He was ‘Abd al-‘Aziz ibn ‘Abd al-Rahman Al Sa‘ud, known to his subjects as ‘Abd al-‘Aziz, and to be known in the West as Ibn Sa‘ud.



On that historic day, ‘Abd al-‘Aziz took an important step toward becoming ruler of Najd, the Peninsula’s central region. From there he led the difficult campaigns that gradually unified the tribes, and there carried out the careful international diplomacy that—some three decades later—led to the proclamation of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. ‘Abd al-‘Aziz ruled that kingdom until his death in 1953, and his heirs today carry on his legacy.

This special issue of *Aramco World* commemorates that legacy, which has inspired both the leaders who followed King ‘Abd al-‘Aziz and the ordinary men and women of Saudi Arabia, who together, over the century following the recapture of Riyadh, have raised up a modern nation.

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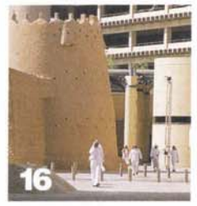

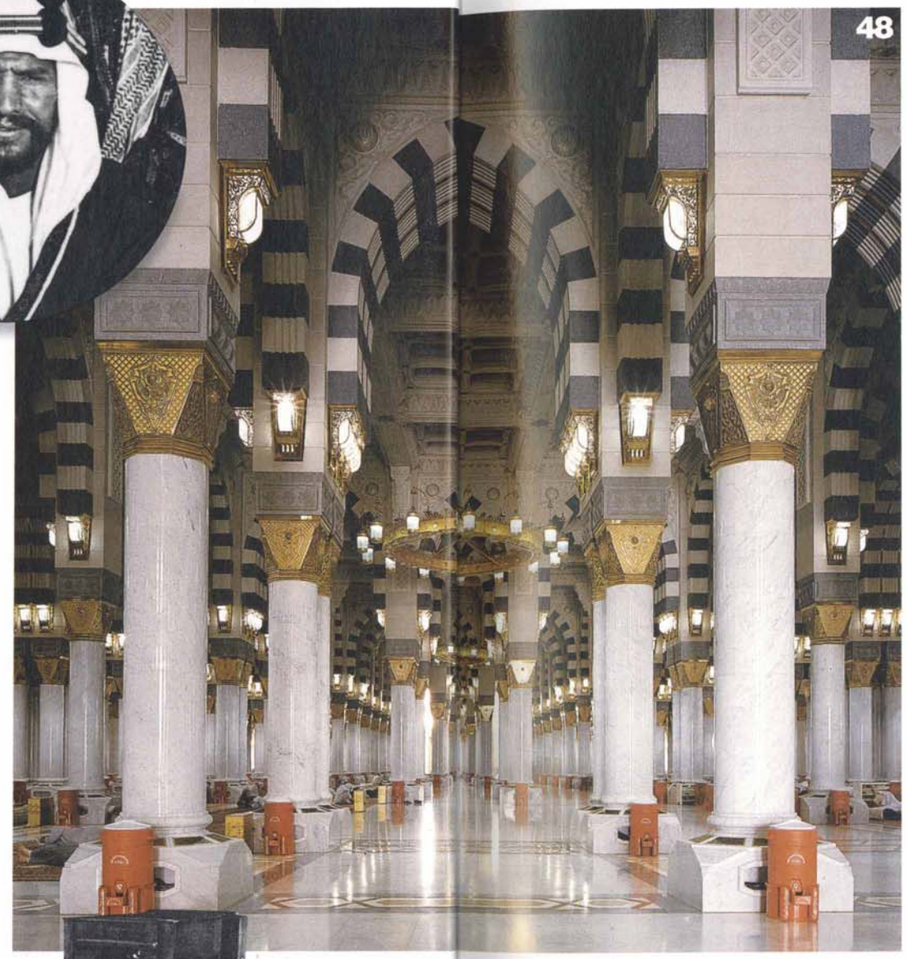

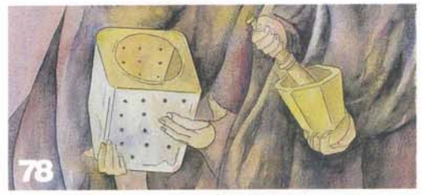

COVER:
In his early twenties when he led the recapture of Riyadh, 'Abd al-'Aziz was a tall man, standing nearly a head above most of his peers. As leader of the Al Sa'ud, later Sultan of Najd and its Dependencies, and finally the first king of Saudi Arabia, he wore a distinctive double 'agal wrapped in gold thread, a variation of the usual men's accessory that holds the ghutra, *or headscarf, in place. Illustration by Norman MacDonald.*

INSIDE FRONT COVER:
Dancers from Bishah, on the eastern flanks of the 'Asir highlands, dance on a Riyadh stage during the women's days of Janadriyah, the national celebration of culture that attracts more than a million visitors annually. Illustration by Judy Laertini.

BACK COVER:
It was through this postern gate, set into the lower right of the heavy main door, that 'Abd al-'Aziz and his men won their entrance into Masmak fort. Today, it is a national treasure, the doorway to a new era. Photograph by Haajar Gouverneur.

PHOTO CREDITS:
4: Capt. William Shakespear/Royal Geographical Society; 16: Arthur Clark; 48: M.S. Al-Shabeeb; 68: Haajar Gouverneur; 78: Judy Laertini; 98: Abdullah Y. Al-Dobais

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A Man for Our Century

'Abd al-'Aziz ibn 'Abd al-Rahman Al Sa'ud

By James Parry

GERTRUDE BELL PHOTOGRAPHIC ARCHIVE / UNIVERSITY OF NEWCASTLE; OPPOSITE: CAPT. WILLIAM SHAKESPEAR / ROYAL GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY

"We had an extraordinarily interesting day with Ibn Saud, who is one of the most striking personalities I have encountered. He is splendid to look at, well over 6'3", with an immense amount of dignity and self-possession.... As a leader of irregular forces he is of proved daring and he combines with his qualities as a soldier that grasp of statecraft which is yet more highly prized."

These remarks were written by the British traveler Gertrude Bell in a letter she wrote following a meeting at Basra (now in southern Iraq) in 1916. Never easy to impress, Bell was nonetheless clearly awestruck by her first encounter with a man who at that time was already shaping the history of Arabia and was later to become a significant player on the world stage. Although the meeting was essentially a political affair, it revealed much about the personalities involved, in particular the startling impact 'Abd al-'Aziz had on his British hosts. It worked both ways: In later years, he would amuse friends and relatives by recounting how the bossy and indomitable Bell had bustled about him in Basra, asking his opinion on every subject under the sun and prefacing her questions with a shrill "Ya 'Abd al-'Aziz!"

At the time, the British were intrigued by this man who was emerging as a potential leader from the turmoil and hardships of inner Arabia. Desperate to court him once war with the Turks became a reality in 1914, the British Government engaged in a long-term strategic relationship that benefited both sides: British support aided the Saudis in their efforts to reunify the country, which meant driving the Turks from the region, and the rising Arabian polity that resulted meant that Britain could look upon a friendly government in a part of the world that the British regarded as essential to the defense of the centerpiece of their empire —India. Yet throughout the years, 'Abd al-'Aziz ibn 'Abd al-Rahman Al Sa'ud, commonly known to Westerners as Ibn Sa'ud, remained something of an enigma to the British. To this day, his personality and achievements are surprisingly little known outside the region in which he played such an instrumental role.

'Abd al-'Aziz's roots ran deep in the heart of Arabia. His family, the Al Sa'ud, traces its origins back more than 500 years. Traditionally, it has been associated with the central Arabian province of Najd, most particularly with the cities of al-Dir'iyah and, later, Riyadh. The family history is one of the most distinguished in Arabia, but like all noble lines, it was subject to the political inconstancies of the day. At the time of 'Abd al-'Aziz's birth in 1880 or thereabouts, central Arabia had fallen into political fragmentation, and the Al Sa'ud in Riyadh were engaged in a power struggle with the rulers of the city of Hayil, the al-Rashids. This conflict led 'Abd al-'Aziz's father, 'Abd al-Rahman, to evacuate his family from Riyadh in 1891.

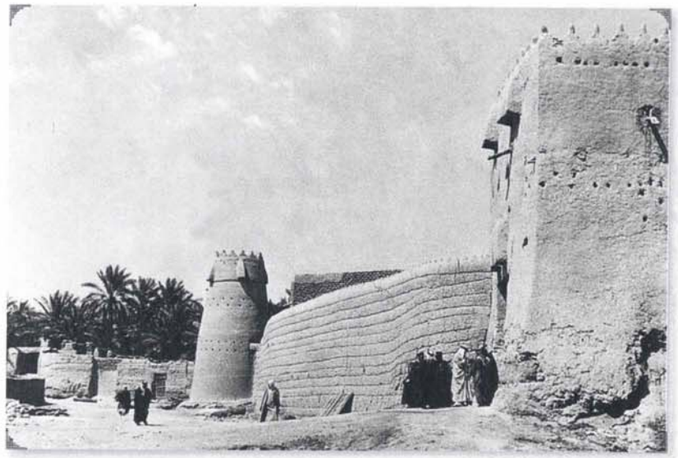
By today's standards, conditions throughout Arabia were unimaginably hard. Life was often short and brutal. A forbidding climate and exceedingly inhospitable terrain meant that the area was virtually closed to all but the most intrepid of outsiders. Little had changed for centuries.

From his early years, 'Abd al-'Aziz had been exposed to the power politics and warfare of Arabia's ruling families. However, despite (or perhaps because of) the uncertain and lawless nature of the political context in which he grew up, he found enduring security and comfort in the Qur'an and in the discipline of regular prayer. This highly developed sense of faith, order and personal duty characterized his life, and it played more than an incidental role in his political success.

Opposite: *Photographed approximately 11 years after his recapture of Riyadh, 'Abd al-'Aziz ibn 'Abd al-Rahman Al Sa'ud was in the sixth generation in direct descent from Sa'ud ibn Muhammad ibn Muqrin, who died in 1725 and from whom the Al Sa'ud and Saudi Arabia take their names.*
Above: *In 1916, three years after 'Abd al-'Aziz won control of the Arabian Gulf coast, he met with British political officers Sir Percy Cox and Gertrude Bell to strengthen the Saudi–British ties that had been formalized by treaty the year before.*

The Al Sa'ud initially took refuge with the al-Murra, a Bedouin tribe living in a remote and inaccessible area on the edge of the Rub' al-Khali, the Empty Quarter, to the south of al-Hasa, an oasis in eastern Arabia. This experience of living among the al-Murra had a profound impact on 'Abd al-'Aziz. It was from them, he would say in later years, that he derived his deep love of the desert, of horsemanship and of the simple values that sustained the Bedouin both physically and spiritually. Indeed, 'Abd al-'Aziz retained elements of the Murra dialect in his speech for the rest of his life, and he often turned to the desert for inspiration and solace.

In 1893, the Al Sa'ud were invited to Kuwait by its ruler, Shaykh Muhammad Al-Sabah. By now 'Abd al-'Aziz was a young man, conspicuously tall and strong, and he soon became great friends with Shaykh Muhammad's half-brother, Mubarak. After Mubarak seized power from his brother, 'Abd al-'Aziz was invited to attend the daily *majlis*, or royal audience, at which petitions were presented and grievances heard. At these frequently acrimonious, politically charged sessions, 'Abd al-'Aziz saw at first hand the daily practices of government and international politics, and as he observed he had ample opportunity to reflect upon his own family's situation. The seizure of Najd by the al-Rashids was a perpetual source of pain to him and his father, to whom he was very close. Najd had been central to the first and second Saudi states, and its loss engendered a deep sense of resolve in 'Abd al-'Aziz to act to recover his patrimony, to restore the Al Sa'ud to the leadership of central Arabia.



This 1937 photograph of part of the walls of Riyadh shows a few of the vast groves of date-palms outside the city that were vital to its agricultural economy. ***Below:*** *Bearing an early version of Saudi Arabia's national flag, a contingent of 'Abd al-'Aziz's troops rides across the scrub desert near Thaj, in today's Eastern Province, in March 1911. The flags carry the Islamic* shahadah, *or creed: "There is no God but God and Muhammad is the Messenger of God."*

In early 1901, 'Abd al-'Aziz saw an opportunity. Joining a raid led by Shaykh Mubarak from Kuwait into al-Rashid territory, he seized Riyadh from the al-Rashids and besieged its fortress, al-Masmak. He held the city for three months before he was forced to withdraw. He immediately began to plan a new offensive, which was to lead to the event that has defined Arabia's history ever since.

Taking advantage of the fact that most of the al-Rashid forces were deployed in a counter-attack against Kuwait, 'Abd al-'Aziz correctly judged that this would be the most effective time to try and seize Riyadh permanently. In a daring raid, 'Abd al-'Aziz and 40 men stormed the al-Rashids' garrison at Masmak fort early on January 15, 1902. (See page 12.) Overpowering those inside, the Saudis seized control of the city and, welcomed as a liberator, 'Abd al-'Aziz later that day led Riyadh's inhabitants in prayer. Still only in his early twenties, he was now at the forefront of contemporary politics, and he had brought his family to the threshold of renewal.

Acutely aware that his family's hold on Riyadh must not be allowed to slip again, 'Abd al-'Aziz immediately ordered the city walls repaired. He also set about gaining the allegiance of the local people, without which he knew he could not hope to stay in power. He understood that long-term political survival was based essentially on a delicate balance of force and persuasion: Force had been used to take Riyadh, and now persuasion would be required to hold it. He therefore set about forging alliances with local tribes in hopes of undermining the al-Rashids' political power base.

TOP: MAX STEINEKE / SAUDI ARAMCO; BOTTOM: CAPT. WILLIAM SHAKESPEAR / ROYAL GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY

The First and Second Saudi States

In the early 18th century, north of Riyadh, a religious leader was born who, in alliance with the House of Sa'ud, would pave the way for the establishment of the modern Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. His name was Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab. The son of a *qadi*, a religious judge, he studied in Makkah, Madinah, Basra and al-Hasa before returning to Najd. By the time he returned, Shaykh Muhammad, as he was thereafter known, had become familiar with the currents of religious thought and the great political and social problems of his time. By then, too, he had concluded from his observation of the world and his wide reading that reforms were imperative. He began to call for a return to basic principles of Islam as contained in the Qur'an and the *sunnah*, or example of the Prophet.

Like most reformers, Shaykh Muhammad ran into opposition. He was driven from his home town, al-'Uyaynah, and forced to take refuge in the town of al-Dir'iyah, very close to present-day Riyadh. The ruler there was Muhammad ibn Sa'ud, who met Shaykh Muhammad and welcomed him. The year was 1745, and this meeting marked the beginning of the first Saudi state.

The two men—one an idealistic reformer and the other an astute chieftain from among the many tribes of Najd—formed an immediate warm regard for one another's qualities, and established a relationship that links their descendants to the present day.

As Shaykh Muhammad was an eloquent and sincere preacher, his uncompromising reaffirmation of the basic beliefs of Islam soon won many followers. It also alarmed many leaders in Najd, especially those in independent Riyadh, so near al-Dir'iyah. The nascent movement, whose followers called themselves *al-Muwahhidun*, "those who affirm the Unity of god," or "Unitarians," was seen as a threat to established patterns of authority.

Muhammad ibn Sa'ud died in 1765, but under his very able son and successor, 'Abd al-'Aziz, the Muwahhidun movement continued. In 1773, 'Abd al-'Aziz—brother of King 'Abd al-'Aziz's (Ibn Sa'ud's) great-great-grandfather—captured Riyadh, and within 15 years controlled all of Najd. Then, in the winter of 1789-90, the Muwahhidun crushed the paramount tribe of al-Hasa, today's Eastern Province.

In 1803 'Abd al-'Aziz was succeeded by his son Sa'ud, and within a few years the territory controlled by the House of Sa'ud, or Al Sa'ud, as it is known in Arabic, extended over most of the Arabian Peninsula, including much of what is today Oman, parts of Yemen, and the holy cities of Makkah and Madinah. To administer this territory, the peninsula was divided into 20 districts, with a loyal member of the reform movement as governor of each, and a *qadi* in charge of religious matters and public education.

In Constantinople, meanwhile, the Ottoman sultan had been alarmed by these incursions in what were, nominally, territories of the Ottoman Empire. He therefore ordered Muhammad 'Ali, governor of the Ottoman province of Egypt, to undertake a punitive expedition against the Saudis and to reestablish Ottoman authority over the holy cities.

Although his first forces, commanded by his son Tusun Pasha, were badly defeated, they did take Makkah. In 1818, his second son, Ibrahim Pasha, arrived in Najd with the full power of the Egyptian army behind him. Besieging the Saudi ruler 'Abd Allah, who had succeeded Sa'ud, Ibrahim captured al-Dir'iyah, sent 'Abd Allah a prisoner to Constantinople, and leveled al-Dir'iyah. He destroyed forts and other defense works, encouraged local rivalries and, thinking he had destroyed Al Sa'ud forever, returned to Egypt a year later.

In the following years, a number of mutually antagonistic local amirs in Najd tried to profit

from the disruption of the Saudi state. These ambitions, however, were thwarted by Turki ibn 'Abd Allah, a close relative (though not the son) of the dead 'Abd Allah.

During the siege of al-Dir'iyah, Turki had taken refuge in a nearby town, but in 1823 he felt the time was ripe for a counterattack. Entering al-Dir'iyah without a fight, he immediately moved against Riyadh, which he took as well, founding at that time the second Saudi state. He was also the first member of the House of Sa'ud to make Riyadh his capital.

Turki ruled for 11 years. By the time of his death in 1834, he had largely restored the boundaries of the Saudi state to what they had been before the Egyptian invasions, though he did not recover the holy cities. He was succeeded by his son Faysal, who previously had been captured and then had escaped from the Egyptians. Faysal was faced with yet another Egyptian attempt to establish control over Najd. In 1838 he was captured once again, bravely giving himself up to the enemy rather than see his loyal followers slaughtered. For the second time, he was taken to Egypt and imprisoned.

For the second time too, he escaped, and he made his way back to Najd in 1843 in an exploit that added to his popularity among the tribes and also marked the end, for a while, of Ottoman efforts to quell the House of Sa'ud. Muhammad 'Ali was growing old, and the Ottomans, distracted by wars in Moldavia and Walachia, eventually had to content themselves with exercising only titular control of the Hijaz.

With the death of Faysal in 1865, this relatively brief period of peace and prosperity came to an end. First, rivalry over the succession weakened Saudi unity. Then, taking advantage of the Saudis' internal conflict, the Ottomans occupied much of the eastern seaboard and the oasis of al-Hasa. Landing in 1871 at Ras Tanura, the present site of a Saudi Aramco oil refinery and shipping terminal, the Turks took Qatif, then marched 160 kilometers to Hofuf, the main town of al-Hasa, where they overcame stubborn resistance put up by the Saudi governor and occupied the fortress.

Two other events, however, overshadow this invasion, which had ambitions to carry on to Najd but in fact went no further. One was the birth of a son to 'Abd al-Rahman ibn Faysal, the man who had emerged as the reigning head of the House of Sa'ud. The son—who would later create the modern-day Kingdom of Saudi Arabia—was 'Abd al-'Aziz ibn 'Abd al-Rahman Al Sa'ud. The other event was the rise to power of a rival dynasty, al-Rashid, which led to a conflict that would occupy the Saudis, and young 'Abd al-'Aziz, for decades.

Based in north-central Arabia, the al-Rashids had taken advantage of the uncertainties over the Saudi succession to install a deputy governor in Riyadh, in Saudi territory. In response, 'Abd al-Rahman attacked Riyadh and recaptured it in 1890. His rival, Muhammad ibn Rashid, in turn marched on Riyadh and, finding the defense too strong for a direct assault, besieged it. During the siege he cut down a large number of date palms on which the townspeople depended for sustenance, a common practice in Arabian warfare in that period. After 40 days of this harsh but indecisive activity, Ibn Rashid proposed negotiations with the defenders. In the Saudi delegation was a young boy making his debut on the stage of history—'Abd al-'Aziz.

The truce that was arranged as a consequence of these negotiations was short-lived. Muhammad ibn Rashid soon led his men to the area of the Qasim, in northern Najd, where he attacked and routed the Saudis at the battle of al-Mulayda on January 21, 1891. Isolated and bereft of allies, 'Abd al-Rahman sent his women and children to the protection of the ruler of Bahrain, who was a friend, while he himself, with ho hope of returning to Riyadh, took to the desert south of the city, where he had friends among the tribes. For a time, 'Abd al-Rahman and a handful of loyal followers roamed the fringes of the Rub' al-Khali, but later they moved on to Qatar and then to Bahrain. Finally, they took refuge in Kuwait, where they spent the better part of a decade.

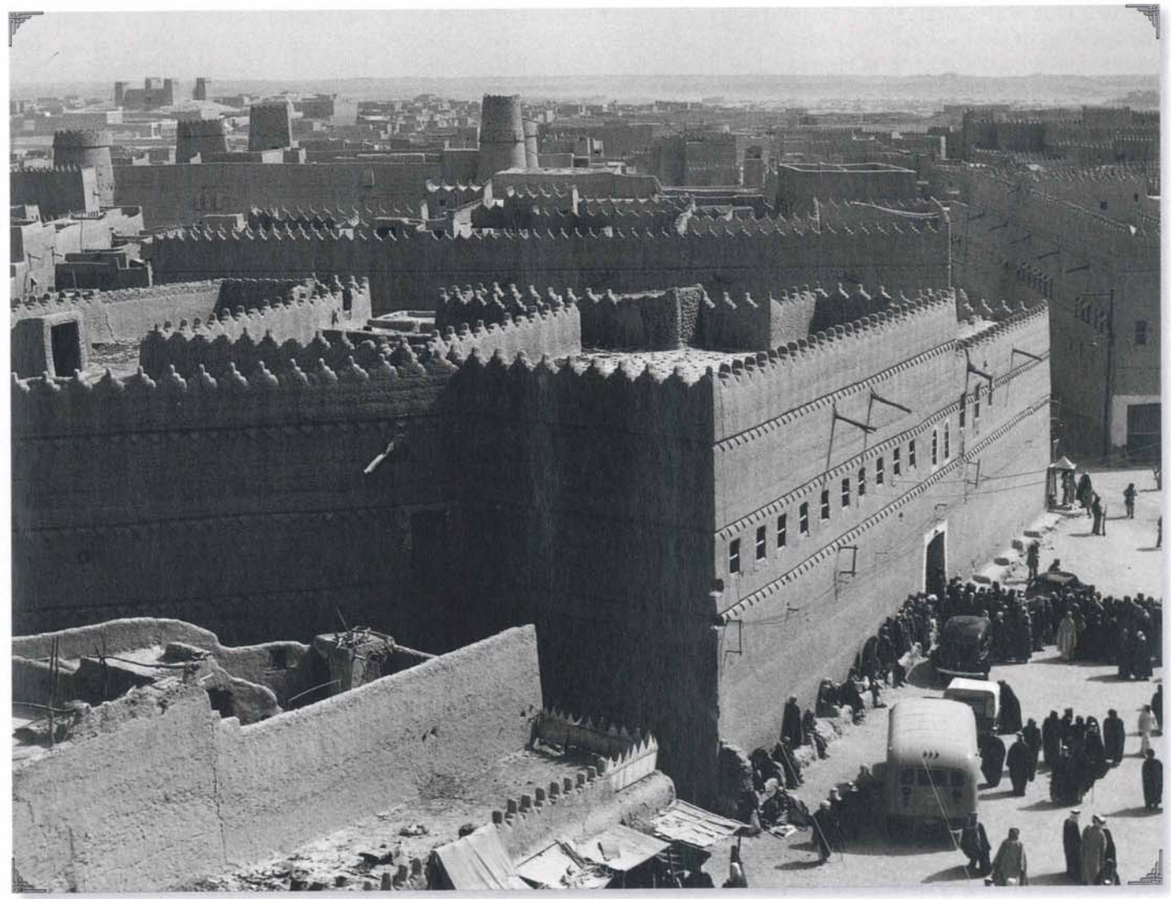
For young 'Abd al-'Aziz, the years he and his father spent in Kuwait as guests of the ruler, Mubarak Al-Sabah, provided valuable insights into international politics. Mubarak was an able politician and Kuwait, strategically placed at the head of the Arabian Gulf, was then the focus of Western activity in the area. The British had special treaty relations with Kuwait, Bahrain, Oman and the shaykhdoms on the Trucial Coast (now the United Arab Emirates); the Russians, as part of their centuries-old search for a warm-water port, were probing for outlets in the Arabian Gulf; and both the Germans and the Turks, in an attempt to challenge Britain's hegemony in the Gulf, were looking toward Kuwait as the possible terminus of the Berlin-to-Baghdad railway.

As he observed the international negotiations of Mubarak Al-Sabah, however, 'Abd al-'Aziz also kept an intent eye on the al-Rashids, now allied with the Turks, who still occupied al-Hasa.

In 1901, 'Abd al-'Aziz, then in his early twenties, decided that it was time for the House of Sa'ud to win back the lands wrested from it by Ibn Rashid and the Turks. As the entire force the Saudis could muster at this time consisted of only 40 men, 'Abd al-Rahman, his father, tried to dissuade him. But 'Abd al-'Aziz persisted, and toward the end of the year he set off for Najd. Within two months he would be victorious.

—*Adapted from* Saudi Aramco and Its World (*1995*)

T.F. WALTERS / SAUDI ARAMCO; OPPOSITE: CAPT. WILLIAM SHAKESPEAR / ROYAL GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY



This 1949 view of Riyadh shows Masmak fort in the middle background, at left. ***Opposite:*** *Troops on the move near Thaj, March 1911.*

Success at diplomacy was backed up by arms, and bloody battles continued between the two warring families. Open conflict between Al Sa'ud and the al-Rashids ended with the death in battle of Ibn Rashid in 1906, and the al-Rashids withdrew to their power base in Hayil, in northwestern Arabia. 'Abd al-'Aziz then turned his attention to other centers of opposition, and over the next few years, he personally led his men to victory on many occasions.

His behavior in conquest was notable for its magnanimity: Reprisals were rarely allowed, and generally the vanquished were welcomed back as brothers. Often, 'Abd al-'Aziz took wives from the ranks of those he had defeated. Such actions were primarily political, part of 'Abd al-'Aziz's overall strategy of inclusion rather than division. This even extended to the al-Rashids, who continued to skirmish with 'Abd al-'Aziz through the early 1920's. Ever mindful of the need to keep an eye on one's potential foes, 'Abd al-'Aziz later welcomed the surviving members of the al-Rashids into his court, where they remained and were treated well, as befitted their noble status.

Feeling adequately secure at home in Najd, in 1913 'Abd al-'Aziz marched dramatically onto the international stage, seizing first the Turkish garrison at Hofuf and then the coastal towns of al-'Uqayr and Qatif, thus winning control of the Gulf coast. With this campaign, he brought into the Saudi remit an area that was, by virtue of its oil reserves, to provide unparalleled wealth for his nation in later years. 'Abd al-'Aziz's more immediate success, however, centered around his astute calculation that on the one hand, the Turks were so weakened as to be incapable of resisting his advance and, on the other, the British would be sufficiently concerned to start taking him seriously. This they did, as is clear from a report made to the India Office in 1914: "The Arabs have now found a leader who stands head and shoulders above any other chief and in whose star all have implicit faith."

Turkey's defeat in World War I left a political vacuum that 'Abd al-'Aziz had been readying himself to fill for some time. By 1920 he had assumed control over 'Asir in the southwest and over the al-Rashid stronghold of Hayil in the north. He was then able to turn his attention to the Hijaz, in which were located the holy cities of Makkah and Madinah and the major port of Jiddah. The weakened Hashimite regime that governed the region was eventually forced to concede to the more organized Saudi forces, and in 1927 'Abd al-'Aziz was recognized as King of the Hijaz and Najd and its Dependencies, with Riyadh and Makkah as his two capitals.

These years also marked the beginnings of modern Arabia. 'Abd al-'Aziz understood the potential advantages Western technology offered; the importa-

tion of a fleet of automobiles and, later, the building of airstrips gave him the means of reaching distant parts of his territory in a fraction of the time required previously. He also ordered the creation of an extensive information network based on the wireless telegraph, through which he was able to extend his "eyes and ears" across the country. However, some of his followers were less than enthusiastic, and their leader spent much time and effort explaining personally the value of the telephone in particular. 'Abd al-'Aziz finally overcame their opposition by inviting skeptics to listen to recitations from the Qur'an being read down the phone line.

The creation of a formal, modern system of government also dates from this time, with the establishment of the first ministries, although 'Abd al-'Aziz continued to exercise a high level of personal control over the activities of the state for the rest of his life. He was by now ruler of a dominion three times the size of France and, in 1932, proclaimed the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. It marked the culmination of a process started more than three decades earlier, and as King 'Abd al-'Aziz ibn 'Abd al-Rahman Al Sa'ud, he reigned over his people for an additional 21 years before his death in 1953. Since then, his heirs have continued to rule the country he established.

By any standards 'Abd al-'Aziz's achievements are astonishing. He rose from leader of an exiled clan to participant on the post-World War II international stage, which saw him meeting with both British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and US President Franklin D. Roosevelt to exchange views on issues of common interest, including the subject of Palestine. Inheritor of a fragmented and impoverished land, he welded the tribes into an incipient nation, imposing both central authority and, eventually, the rule of law. At the time of his death, Saudi Arabia enjoyed both unparalleled wealth and security, a situation directly attributable to 'Abd al-'Aziz.

Today, the scale and significance of 'Abd al-'Aziz's impact is even clearer than in 1953. Not only did he establish a new state, but he structured it to give it room for continued strength and development. Aware that the fledgling nation would be ill-equipped to function in the 20th century without industrial modernization, he was eager to embrace technology; however, he was no less aware that change had to be selective and gradual if it was to be accepted by the citizenry and be of lasting benefit. The well-known Arabist and historian Leslie McLoughlin pointed out that "it was the insight of Ibn Sa'ud that slow change without disabling disputes was better than speed of change with great disruption." Central to this process was the long search to expand the Kingdom's sources of revenue, and to this end, 'Abd al-'Aziz granted the first oil concession as early as 1923. (See page 30.) Although this venture bore no fruit, it was the first step in an endeavor of lasting significance.

'Abd al-'Aziz's casual smile in this snapshot, made in 1922 by Harry St. John ('Abd Allah) Philby, is one of few extant photographs that hint at the late king's lighter side, which often impressed both subjects and visitors almost as much as his courage and religious discipline.
Opposite: *The earliest known photographs of 'Abd al-'Aziz (seated, far left) date from his 1910 visit to Kuwait, where he met with its ruler, Mubarak Al-Sabah, whose family had hosted the Al Sa'ud during their decade of exile. It was here that 'Abd al-'Aziz first met the camera-carrying British political officer, Captain William Shakespear.*

Paramount in his success were 'Abd al-'Aziz's personal qualities. He was a complex character, and something of a paradox in the sense that he exhibited wide-ranging, often contradictory attributes. These frequently showed themselves in rapid succession, with fierce bursts of temper followed almost immediately by acts of great tenderness and compassion. But he commanded respect at all times, and by a combination of charm and authority secured the personal and political commitment of his people. The writer Amin al-Rihani noted how 'Abd al-'Aziz always found time to speak to those around him and was never at a loss for words on any subject at any occasion.

'Abd al-'Aziz was both a brave and a cautious man. His personal courage when leading his troops into battle is legendary, but it is equally well-established that he sought to avoid excessive bloodshed wherever possible. By breaking the historical pattern of strife and conflict, he was able to set his people on a new path of peace and prosperity, and his statesmanship set new standards for political behavior, ones that placed him apart from most of his contemporaries. His actions and personality ensured the long-term stability and prosperity that are hallmarks of modern Saudi Arabia.

'Abd al-'Aziz's profound religious faith gave him a conviction and a self-confidence that propelled him toward what he considered the just destiny of his family and country. Yet he was aware of the diversity of the nation he was bringing together, and he repeatedly warned followers he considered overzealous that they must not replace dissent with division and retribution. The long-term impact of this notion of nation-building is only now becoming clear, as the world witnesses the disintegration of states in other parts of the world within which a sense of inclusion has broken down.

We cannot know for sure the direction Arabia's destiny would have taken had 'Abd al-'Aziz not risen to such prominence. It is quite likely that the political divisions he inherited would have continued unabated under anyone of less forceful character and drive, and that Arabia would have remained a warring collection of disparate factions, spiraling into chaos and, perhaps, colonial domination. With such acute political insecurity, the economic gains made possible by the discovery of oil well might have been squandered and a unique opportunity for national advancement lost. Equally clear is the fact that the circumstances of the day called for leadership of singular ability. In 'Abd al-'Aziz, personal stature married with circumstance to produce a man who led his people from a fractious poverty into secure prosperity.

Free-lance writer James Parry served several years with the British Council in East Africa and Oman. He writes on the history and cultures of the Arabian Peninsula from his home in Norfolk, England.

By breaking the historical pattern of strife and conflict, 'Abd al-'Aziz was able to set his people on a new path of peace and prosperity, and his statesmanship set new standards for political behavior.

Illustration by Norman MacDonald

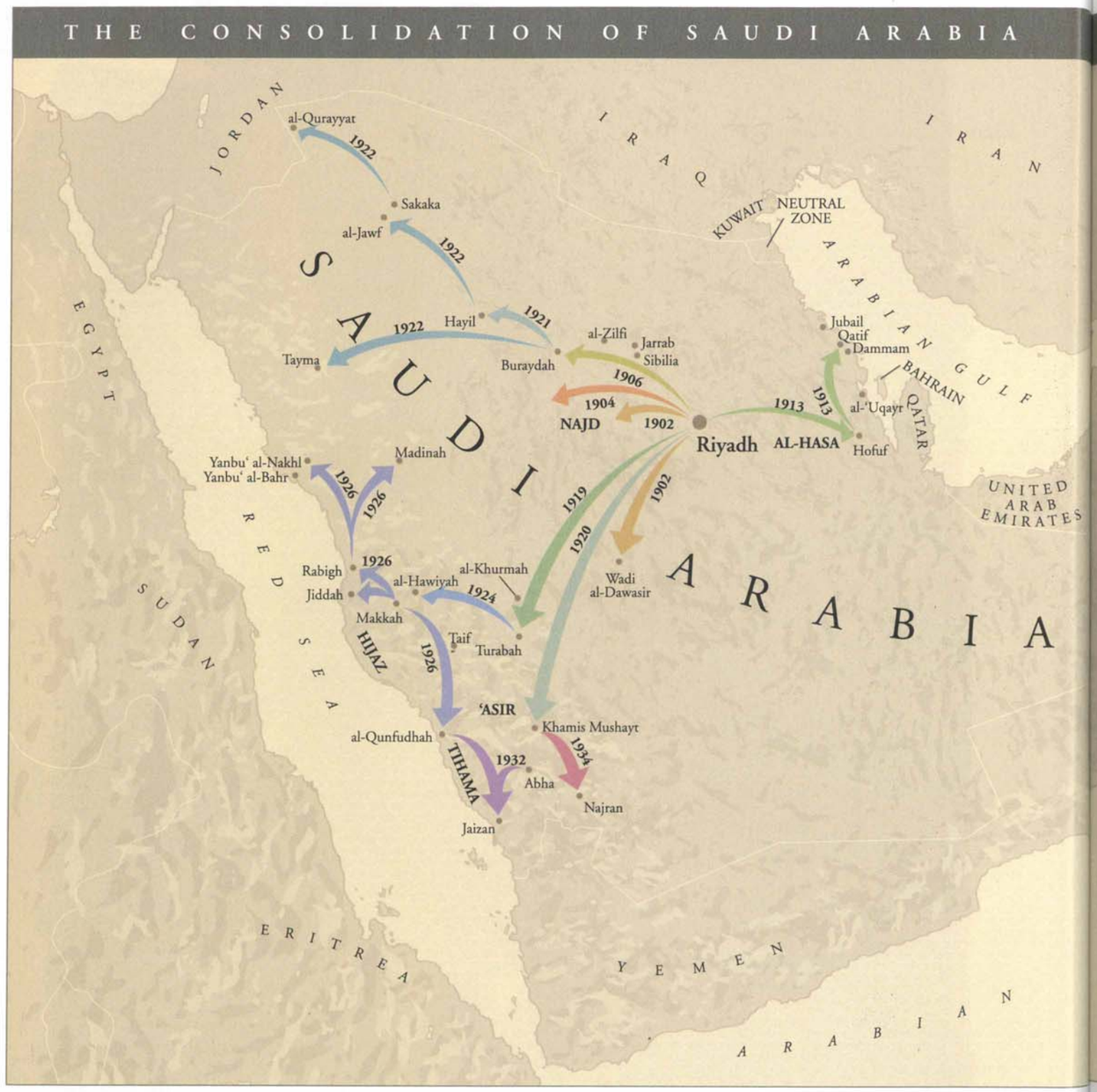
"There were 40 of us..."

5 Shawwal, 1319

The small force that 'Abd al-'Aziz Al Sa'ud led south from Kuwait to recapture Riyadh did not attack immediately. Instead, the group spent several months south of its target, on the northern fringes of the Rub' al-Khali, hoping to win reinforcements from the tribes camped near the wells of Yabrin and Haradh, the latter of which is now one of the kingdom's largest agricultural projects. 'Abd al-'Aziz was able to recruit only 20 more warriors but, reluctant to wait any longer, he decided to attack Riyadh anyway, and with only 60 men behind him he set off.

At a distance of one and a half hour's march from Riyadh, 'Abd al-'Aziz left one-third of his forces with the camels, instructing them to return to Kuwait if no message was received from him within 24 hours. Then, with the rest of his men, he advanced on foot—to be less conspicuous—until he reached the outskirts of the city. There 'Abd al-'Aziz waited for night to fall.

January 15, 1902



The coalescence of peoples and territories into modern Saudi Arabia was a complex process that occupied 'Abd al-'Aziz and the Saudis for three decades as he deflected threats and gradually extended control. In the first few years, he won the allegiance of desert tribes to the south, and, through bitter contests with the al-Rashids, won towns to the north and west as well. But to secure the Najd, which he quickly recognized was essential to maintaining his power, 'Abd al-'Aziz set about helping Bedouin tribes develop supplementary agricultural bases, and in 1912 he founded the first of several communities whose men grew to be the core of 'Abd al-'Aziz's forces in later campaigns. By 1913, the Saudis were strong enough to break the Turkish hold on the Arabian Gulf coast. After World War I, they came into conflict with the Hashimites, who had ruled the Hijaz under the Ottomans, and from which they challenged 'Abd al-'Aziz for the rule of Najd. In the mid-1920's, Saudi campaigns gradually defeated them, taking Makkah, Madinah and Jiddah. Over the following decade, the Saudis moved into the southern highlands, and secured their power in mountainous 'Asir. On September 22, 1932 King 'Abd al-'Aziz proclaimed the state of Saudi Arabia.

At last it was time. 'Abd al-'Aziz stationed his brother Muhammad in the palm groves with 33 men to act as a backup force and quietly scaled the wall with the others. Inside the walls, they knocked on the door of the house of a cattle dealer, who fled. His daughters, recognizing 'Abd al-'Aziz, were gagged and locked up. Next, 'Abd al-'Aziz sent a messenger back to tell Muhammad, waiting outside the walls, to advance with all possible stealth into the city. Finally, by standing on one another's shoulders, 'Abd al-'Aziz and his men entered the house of 'Ajlan, Ibn Rashid's governor, silenced the servants, and searched the house. Learning that 'Ajlan was in the custom of spending his nights in Masmak fort in the city, they decided to wait for morning when the gates of the fort would be opened.

It was difficult to wait. As 'Abd al-'Aziz recalled in later years, they "slept a little while, ... prayed the morning prayer and sat thinking about what we should do." But at last the dark desert sky lightened and they prepared for action. Originally they had planned to take 'Ajlan prisoner as soon as he left the fort and entered the house. But as the sun rose and the gates of the fort opened, they saw that 'Ajlan was not alone; he walked out of the gate accompanied by 10 bodyguards. Instantly 'Abd al-'Aziz and his followers sprang to the attack, leaving four men in the house to cover them with rifles.

At the sudden appearance of 'Abd al-'Aziz, 'Ajlan's bodyguards bolted, leaving 'Ajlan facing the Saudi onslaught alone, with only a sword for defense. Darting forward, 'Abd Allah ibn Jiluwi, a cousin of 'Abd al-'Aziz who later became governor of the Eastern Province, threw a spear at 'Ajlan but missed; the spear went into the gate of the fort where the steel point, embedded in the wood, remained until its removal in the 1970's.

No coward, 'Ajlan lunged at 'Abd al-'Aziz, who later reminisced: "He made at me with his sword, but its edge was not good. I covered my face and shot at him with my gun. I heard the crash of the sword upon the ground and knew that the shot had hit 'Ajlan, but had not killed him. He started to go through the postern gate, but I caught hold of his legs. Then men inside caught hold of his arms while I still held his legs. His company was shooting their firearms at us and throwing stones upon us. 'Ajlan gave me a powerful kick in the side so that I was about to faint. I let go of his legs and he got inside. I wished to enter, but my men would not let me. Then 'Abd Allah ibn Jiluwi entered with the bullets falling about him. After him 10 others entered. We flung the gates wide open, and our company ran up to reinforce us. We were 40 and there before us were 80. We killed half of them. Then four fell from the wall and were crushed. The rest were trapped in a tower; we granted safe-conduct to them and they descended. As for 'Ajlan, Ibn Jiluwi slew him."

Such is the epic story, as related by King 'Abd al-'Aziz, of how Riyadh was taken on January 15, 1902 as the sun was rising over the desert and the city was just coming to life. The recapture of Riyadh marked the dawn of a new era in the history of Arabia and a turning point in the fortunes of the House of Sa'ud.

In Riyadh, as the news swiftly spread, the people welcomed the new ruler joyfully, for they had suffered under the rule of Ibn Rashid. 'Abd al-'Aziz, knowing his small band could never hold the city if the al-Rashids were to counterattack, immediately set about repairing the defenses of Riyadh. The al-Rashids did not attack, however, and during the next six months 'Abd al-'Aziz completed his defenses, sent to Kuwait for his father, 'Abd al-Rahman, and handed over the city to him while he took the field. This close relationship between father and son was to last until the death of 'Abd al-Rahman nearly 30 years later. It was a relationship of mutual respect, of profitable consultation on all important matters, and of willingness on the part of the son to cede to his father the place of highest honor on every public occasion.

Meanwhile, the inhabitants of the area south of Riyadh, learning that the House of Sa'ud had retaken the city, hastened to acknowledge the suzerainty of 'Abd al-'Aziz. His exploit in capturing Riyadh with so small a force won the admiration of the Bedouins, who rode into Riyadh from the desert to join him.

Simultaneously 'Abd al-'Aziz began to prepare for a large-scale offensive against the al-Rashids. For although the taking of Riyadh was a master stroke, he knew that his situation was still precarious and that he still faced a long, arduous campaign against them and their Turkish allies. 'Abd al-'Aziz had demonstrated his daring with the capture of Riyadh. Now, as he would for the next quarter of a century, he would demonstrate the rarer qualities of knowing when to advance and when to retreat, when to conciliate and when to punish.

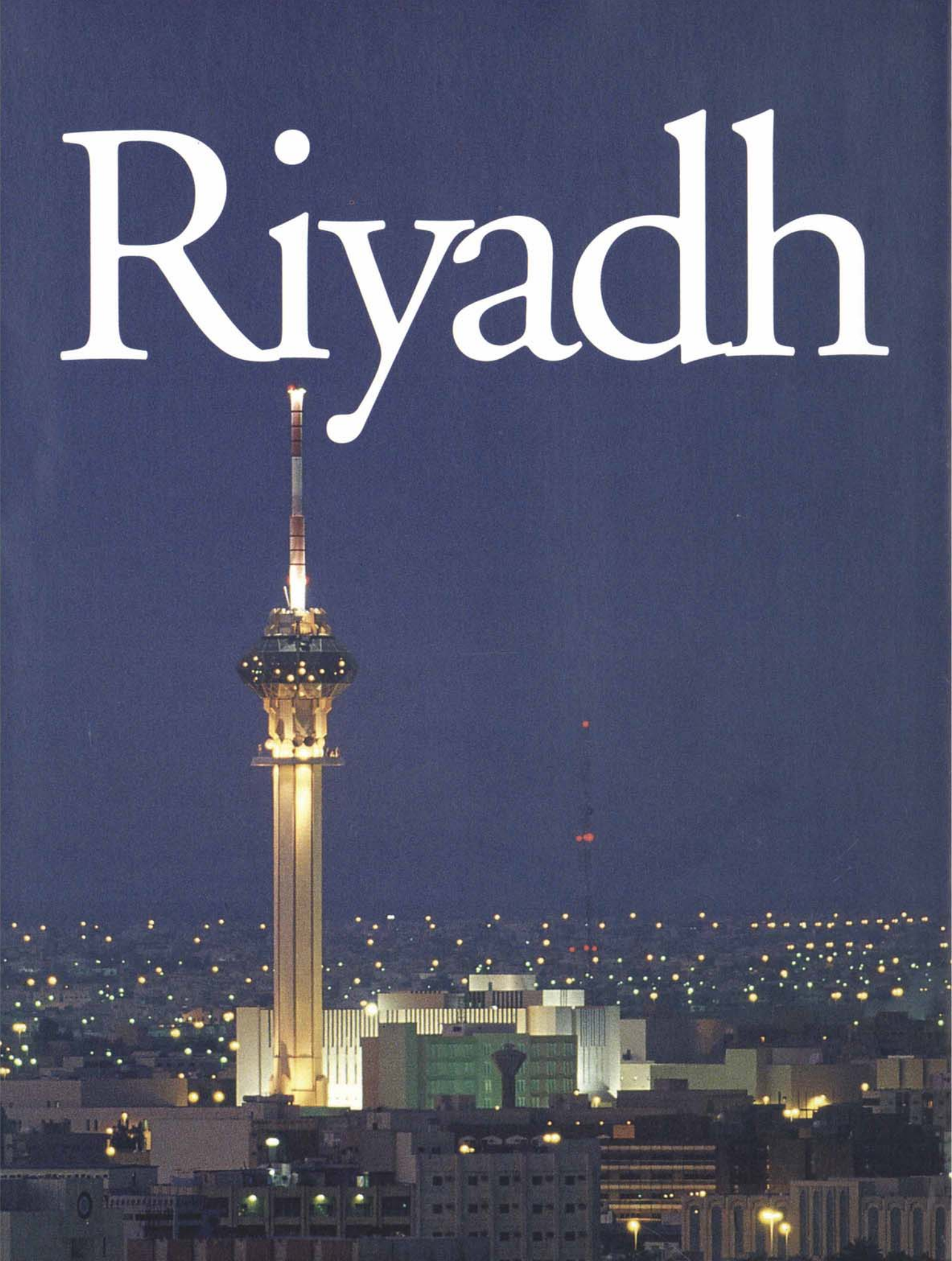
—*Adapted from* Saudi Aramco and Its World *(1995)*

The recapture of Riyadh marked the dawn of a new era in the history of Arabia and a turning point in the fortunes of the House of Sa'ud.

The Centennial's Jewel:

When British Political Agent Captain William Shakespear made the first known photographs of Riyadh in 1911, the oasis city of 8000 people looked much as it had when 'Abd al-'Aziz recaptured it nine years earlier: Built almost entirely of mud brick, it was surrounded by 7.5-meter (25') walls that enclosed about 100 hectares (250 acres), outside which were abundant date groves.

Riyadh

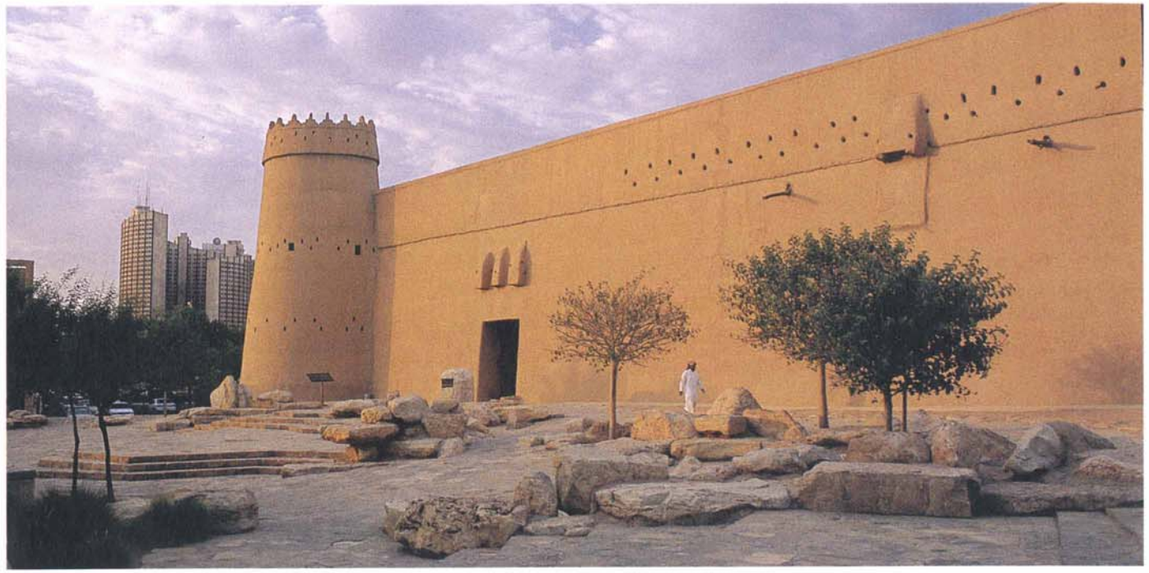


First bursting its old walls in the 1930's, Riyadh's most rapid growth has taken place largely since the 1970's, when it became one of the world's fastest-growing capital cities. Today, its television tower punctuates the downtown area, and the city whose name means "gardens" in Arabic is home to 3.5 million people.

A courtyard outside the walls of 'Abd al-'Aziz's palace bustles with activity in 1937, one year before oil was found in commercial quantities near the Arabian Gulf. ***Opposite, top:*** *Masmak fort, newly restored, is now open as a museum.* ***Opposite, lower:*** *The main door to the fort, with the postern gate through which 'Abd al-'Aziz and his company gained entrance on January 15, 1902, is a national treasure of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.*

Riyadh, an important oasis in the Najd, Arabia's arid central region, was the gateway to the country's unification.

LOWER: ARTHUR CLARK; OPPOSITE: MAX STEINEKE / SAUDI ARAMCO; PREVIOUS SPREAD, LEFT: DENNIS BRACK / BLACK STAR; RIGHT: SALEH AL-AZZAZ / A.K. INTERNATIONAL; OPENING SPREAD: CAPT. WILLIAM SHAKESPEAR / ROYAL GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY



Written by Arthur Clark

Photographed by Abdullah Y. Al-Dobais

The men who stormed Masmak fort in the heart of Riyadh on January 15, 1902 would be bedazzled by today's capital city, the centerpiece of this year's centennial celebrations. Since that daring raid 100 *hijri* years ago, Riyadh has grown almost beyond description. Then, visitors arrived on camelback at one of nine gates and, once inside, threaded their way along narrow, sandy streets shadowed by crenellated, mud-brick houses. In this century, Riyadh has changed dramatically—perhaps more radically and rapidly than any other modern city.

"One hundred years means a big change in any city, and Riyadh needs only 10 years to change totally," says 'Abd al-'Aziz Al ash-Shaykh, director of research and studies at the Riyadh Development Authority (RDA), which oversees city planning. "The city would be unrecognizable to King 'Abd al-'Aziz from the 1950's [when he died] ... or even to King Faysal from the 1970's," he adds, noting that Riyadh's recent annual growth rate of 8.1 percent makes it "one of the fastest-growing cities in the world."

Riyadh long ago burst out of the mud-brick walls that 'Abd al-'Aziz refortified within 40 days of seizing Masmak fort. Today the capital hums with activity, broken five times a day by the call to prayer. Heavy traffic flows through a steel-and-glass landscape, illuminated at night by neon and sodium streetlights, into ever-expanding suburbs and to towns and cities beyond.

As late as 1917 the heavy wooden gates of the city still swung shut during the weekly congregational prayers at noon Friday. But those portals—like the city's 7.5-meter-high (25') earthen walls—have long since disappeared. The population of the capital, just 8000 people in 1902, has rocketed to some 3.5 million, say city planners, and the "old city" of about one square kilometer (0.4 sq mi) that 'Abd al-'Aziz captured is now only a minuscule part of a metropolis that has grown to nearly 400 times that size.

Changes came slowly at first. 'Abd al-'Aziz had "to establish the basic elements of the kingdom," explains Al ash-Shaykh, which culminated in the creation of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 1932. By then, despite the worldwide economic depression, Riyadh's population had climbed to around 30,000, but the city still stood within its old walls.

Major developments were in the wind, however: In 1933 the king approved an oil concession agreement with the Standard Oil Company of California (SOCAL). That resulted, in 1938, in the discovery of the kingdom's first oil field at Dhahran on the east coast, and immediately after World War II important new income began flowing into a country whose economy had been precariously dependent on minor commercial, agricultural and fishing activities and uncertain revenues from the Hajj. Changes came increasingly quickly to Riyadh beginning in the 1950's as the widespread use of the automobile, the advent of rail and air traffic, and the introduction of steel-and-concrete construction all impacted the capital.

By mid-century Riyadh had pushed well outside its original boundaries, and was on the verge of momentous new growth. The king's construction of Murabba' Palace north of the walls in the late 1930's was the initial step, and it was quickly followed by more new construction. Soon after King 'Abd al-'Aziz died in November 1953, "the last of the walls and gates finally succumbed to the relentless pressure of

modernization," writes William Facey in *Riyadh, The Old City*, "and the major mud buildings of the city center—the old palace and the Great Mosque—were demolished," to be replaced by buildings of concrete and stone.

Today, Riyadh is striving to preserve the few structures that remain from 'Abd al-'Aziz's era, or to reconstruct them using traditional styles.

Even in today's Riyadh, however, King 'Abd al-'Aziz would still recognize old friends from the places and palaces where he worked, lived and mingled with his countrymen for more than 50 years. Indeed, the city is striving to preserve and protect the few structures that remain from his era and, when that's impossible, to reconstruct them using traditional styles or building techniques.

Two major projects worth a total of about 1.6 billion Saudi riyals ($425 million) are the centerpieces of this effort: the Qasr al-Hokm project in the old city center, and the King 'Abd al-'Aziz Historical Center at the Murabba' Palace complex about a kilometer (half a mile) to the north.

The Qasr al-Hokm project, which began in 1976, set in motion the rehabilitation of old Riyadh. Of most interest to historians, the RDA has preserved Masmak fort within a wide square, and rebuilt the city's main Imam Turki Bin Abdullah Mosque at its original location to accommodate 17,000 worshipers. In another key development, city planners have rebuilt the Qasr al-Hokm or "Justice Palace"—King 'Abd al-'Aziz's headquarters after retaking Riyadh—on its original site in traditional architectural style. Two covered passageways between Qasr al-Hokm and the mosque recall the bridges originally built to allow the king to cross above the traditional market area, "and invoke the strong traditional links between the seat of government ... and the religion of Islam," says an RDA report.

The project has also reconstructed two city gates, a small part of its wall and a watchtower, all at their original sites, and built several public squares and a big new *suq*, or traditional marketplace. Visitors today can retrace the path of early 20th-century guests arriving to meet the king. Walking from the eastern, al-Thumairi Gate a couple of hundred meters down to al-Masmak Square, they will find Masmak fort on their right and Qasr al-Hokm straight ahead.

In *Kuwait and Her Neighbors*, Dame Violet Dickson described the scene at the square in front of the sprawling *qasr* when she arrived via al-Thumairi Gate with her husband in 1937: "Suddenly we were in front of the King's palace in the great market square. The open space was crowded with Bedu and camels, and seated in a long row on a *datcha* [earthen bench] were those awaiting audience with His Majesty."

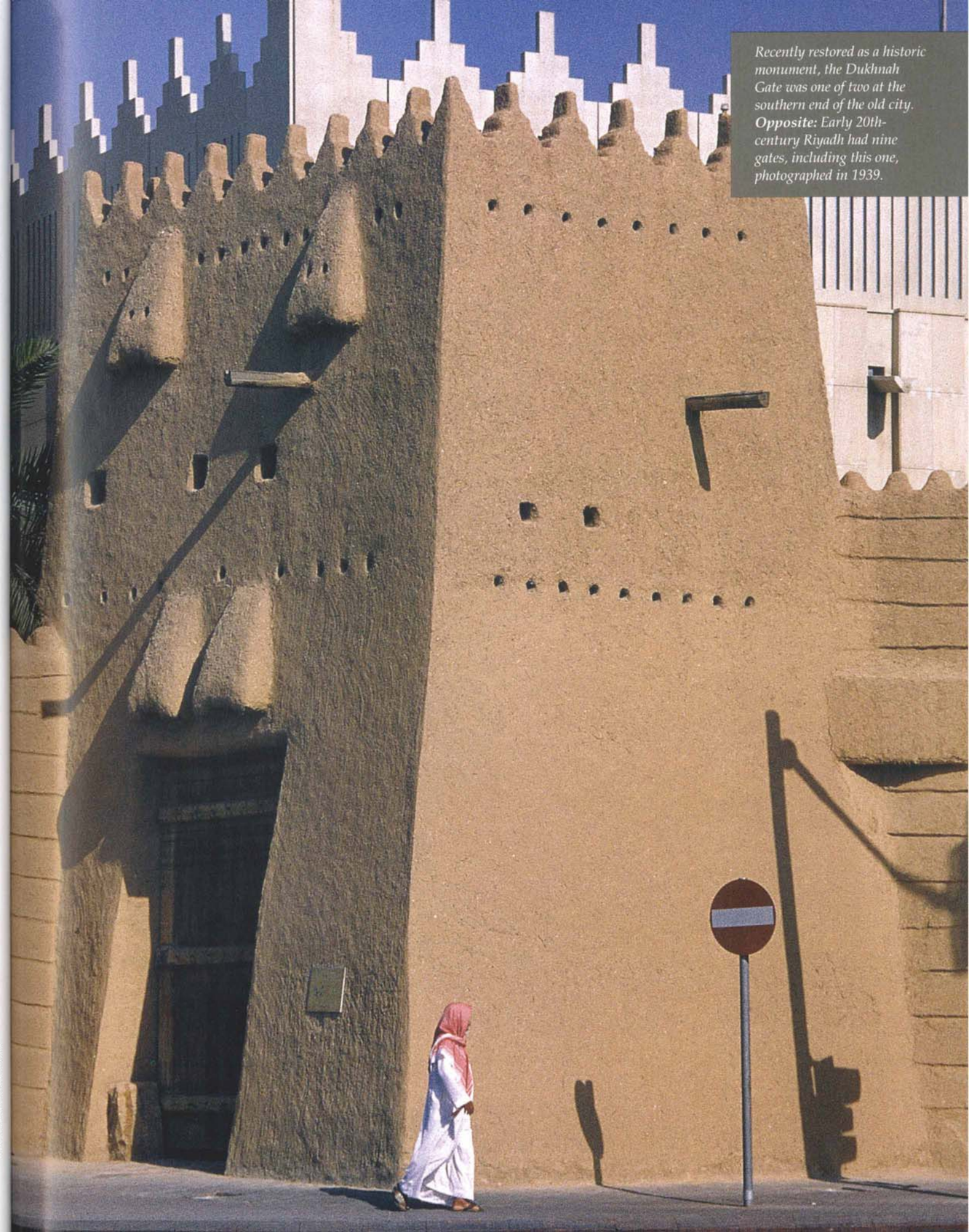
Later, she watched the *'ardha*, or sword dance, from a window in the palace: "It was now about eight o'clock. Down in the court, drums were beating, and men dancing with swords in upraised hands, while lines of others were swaying to and fro with linked arms and chanting some sort of war song, telling of love and courage.... Slowly the dancers moved toward the king, who then joined in and there in the distance, sword in hand and towering above the multitude, he danced with them for what must have been 20 minutes."

Masmak fort, the redoubt to which 'Abd al-'Aziz first laid siege in 1901 and which he retook in 1902, fell on harder times than the palace. "It is used only as an arsenal, jail and storehouse by Ibn Sa'ud," wrote British explorer-diplomat Harry St. John ('Abd Allah) Philby, who first visited Riyadh in the winter of 1917–18, in *The Heart of Arabia*. Today, the fortress has been born anew as a museum operated by the Department of Antiquities and Museums. Resplendent with traditional wooden doors and other accouterments of yesteryear, its high-ceilinged rooms are devoted to exhibits about the unification of the kingdom.

The final stage of the Qasr al-Hokm development plan is being carried out in tandem with private enterprise to improve the wider area's appearance and encourage investment. The district encompasses a number of old mud-brick houses dating back to 'Abd al-'Aziz's time and before. The RDA's Heritage Program study has suggested that owners convert these buildings from residential to commercial use to make them viable economic units.

The goal of the Qasr al-Hokm project is "to keep the heart of the city alive," says Abdulrahman al-Sari, director of urban and cultural development for the RDA. Riyadh's main business district has moved to the north, Al-Sari points out, but by providing a core of public buildings, infrastructure and services the RDA hopes "to convince the people to come back and invest their money in the old city."

Considerable spending has been directed recently to the King 'Abd al-'Aziz Historical Center, which includes educational, cultural, historical and religious facilities in the vicinity of the Murabba' Palace, which the king used as his *majlis*, or reception rooms, from the late 1930's

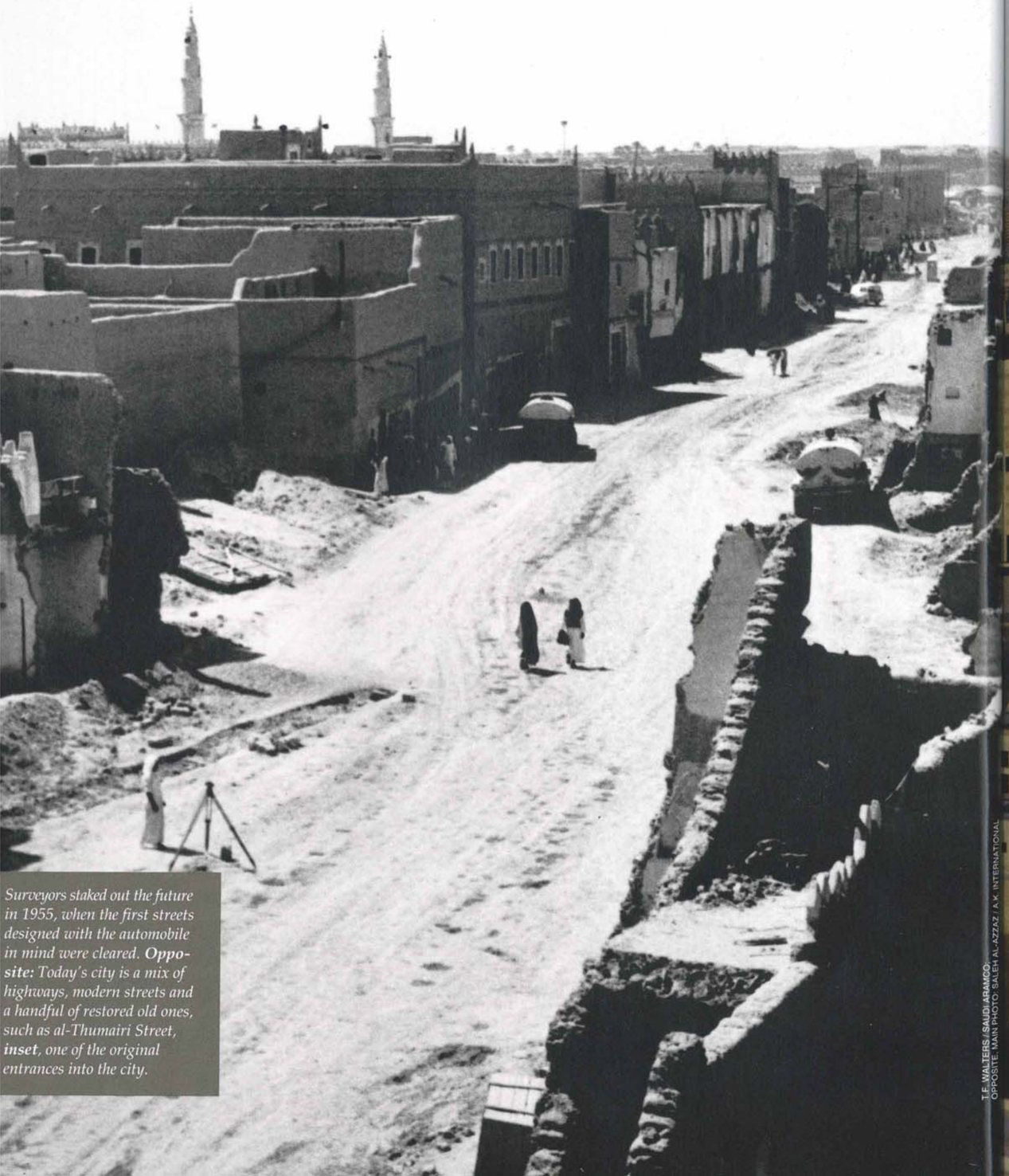


Recently restored as a historic monument, the Dukhnah Gate was one of two at the southern end of the old city. ***Opposite:*** *Early 20th-century Riyadh had nine gates, including this one, photographed in 1939.*

T.L. LENSEN / SAUDI ARAMCO

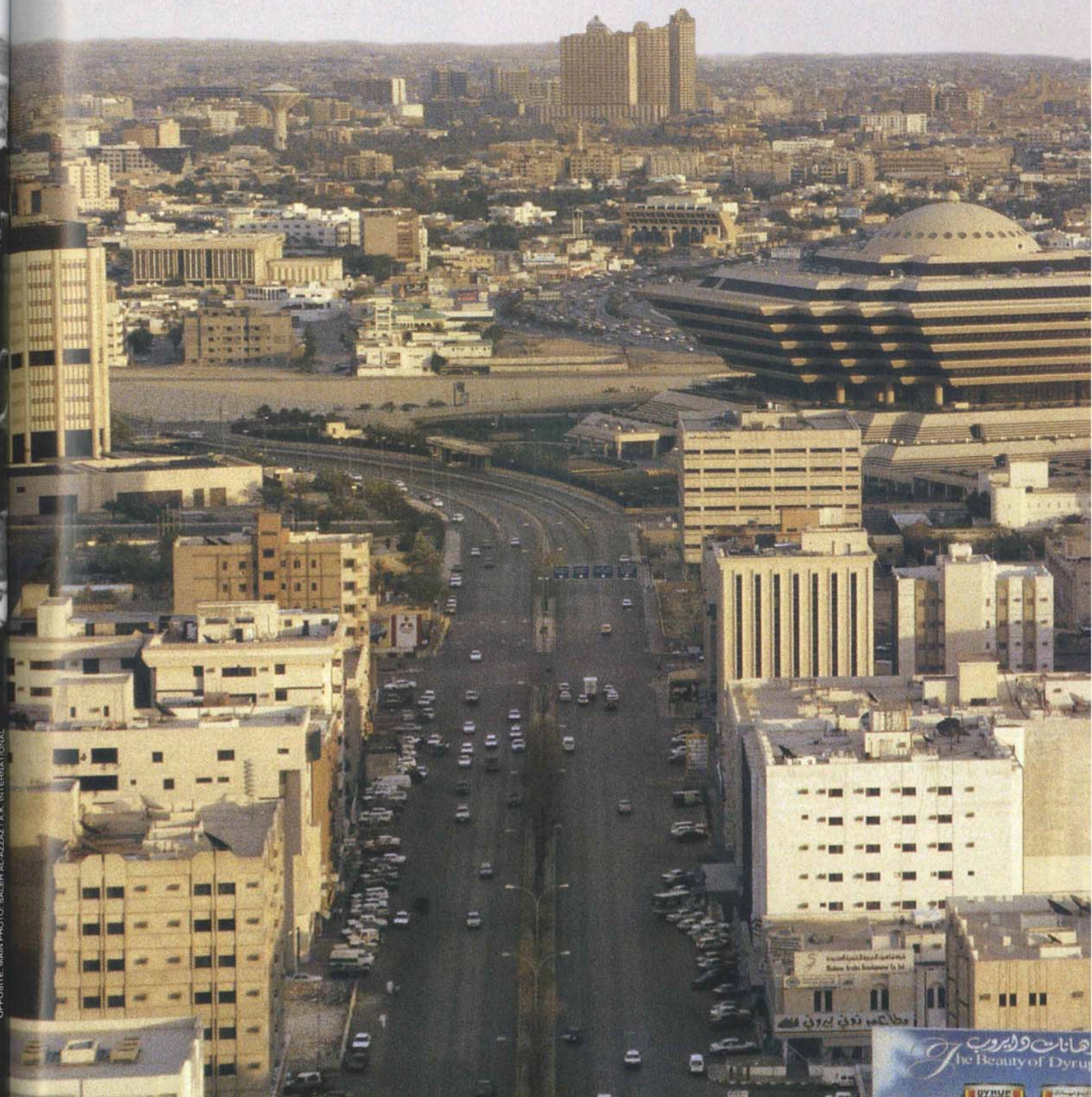
By the 1950's, Riyadh was 10 times larger than its original, walled enclosure.

Today, its core is surrounded by nearly two dozen suburban municipalities.

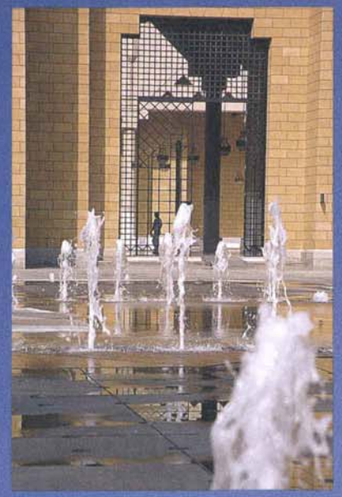


Surveyors staked out the future in 1955, when the first streets designed with the automobile in mind were cleared. ***Opposite:*** *Today's city is a mix of highways, modern streets and a handful of restored old ones, such as al-Thumairi Street,* ***inset****, one of the original entrances into the city.*

T.F. WALTERS / SAUDI ARAMCO;
OPPOSITE: MAIN PHOTO: SALEH AL-AZZAZ / A.K. INTERNATIONAL



One of the centerpieces of the project that set in motion the rehabilitation of old Riyadh is the mosque named after Imam Turki ibn 'Abd Allah, who in 1823 was the first member of the House of Sa'ud to make Riyadh his capital. ***Inset:*** *A courtyard of the new mosque.* ***Opposite, bottom:*** *A street scene from 1937.*



MAX STEINEKE / SAUDI ARAMCO; OPPOSITE, INSET: ARTHUR CLARK

until his death. "Qasr al-Hokm is the administrative part of the city center, and we hope the Historical Center will become the northern node and the cultural part of the city center," explains Tariq al-Faris, director of the RDA's project management unit.

The original Murabba' Palace complex was so grand that new arrivals sometimes mistook it for the capital city itself. "Away in the distance was what I thought must be the city of Riyadh: a great fortress with many towers rising above the walls and tops of many buildings," wrote Dickson in *Kuwait and her Neighbors*. Only when Riyadh itself suddenly appeared amid the palm groves to the left did she realize that "what we now saw was no city ... but the King's new palace, ... then in the course of erection."

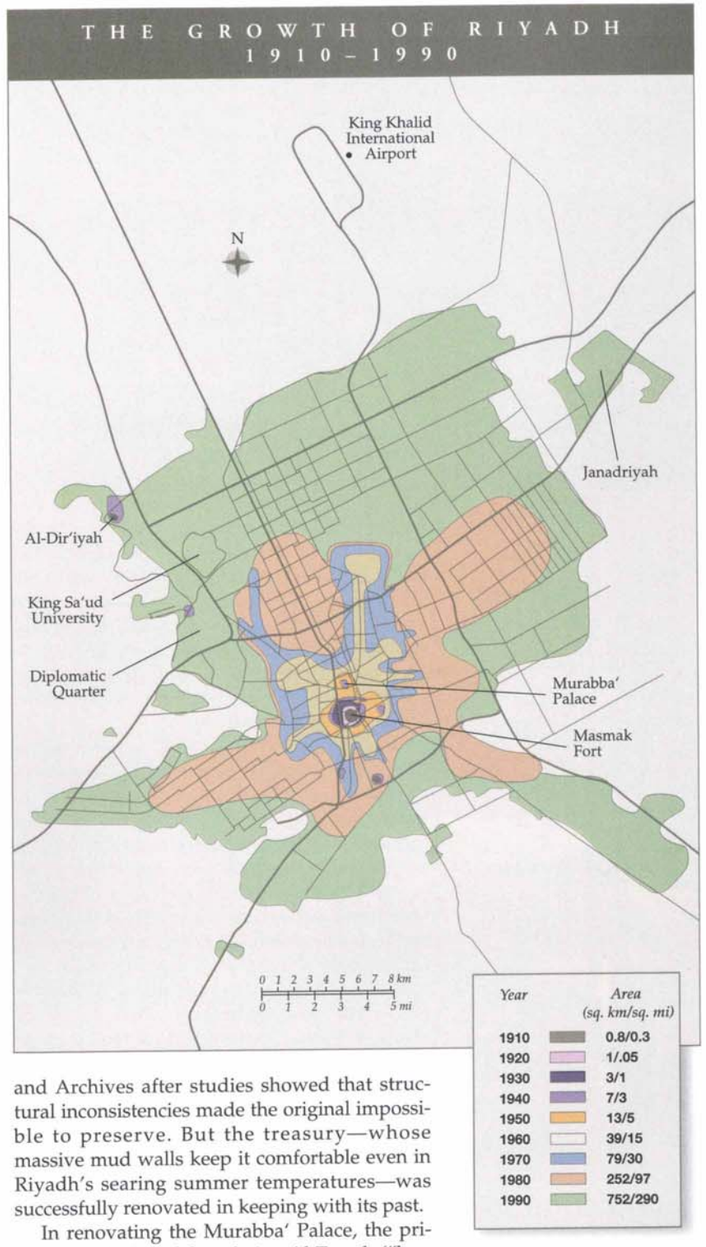
The challenging King 'Abd al-'Aziz Historical Center project, for which ground was broken only 19 months ago, covers some 360,000 square meters (3,000,000 sq ft). It includes not only the Murabba' Palace and associated mud-brick palaces, which have been renovated using traditional Najdi materials under the eye of a Saudi master builder, but also a number of brand-new facilities built using traditional Najdi architectural elements.

The Historical Center includes the Riyadh Water Tower, another city landmark. Nearby stands al-Hamra Palace, named after its distinctive red color and built by Crown Prince Sa'ud, who became king in 1953 after his father's death. The palace later became the chambers of the kingdom's first Council of Ministers.

The Center is located in a large public park set with gardens and pathways, and is reached easily by automobile. A separate special park planted with 100 date palms symbolizes the centennial, and a major Riyadh avenue, King Sa'ud Street, runs through the complex. The objective, explains al-Sari, is to make the Historical Center so accessible that it becomes "part of the daily memory of the city."

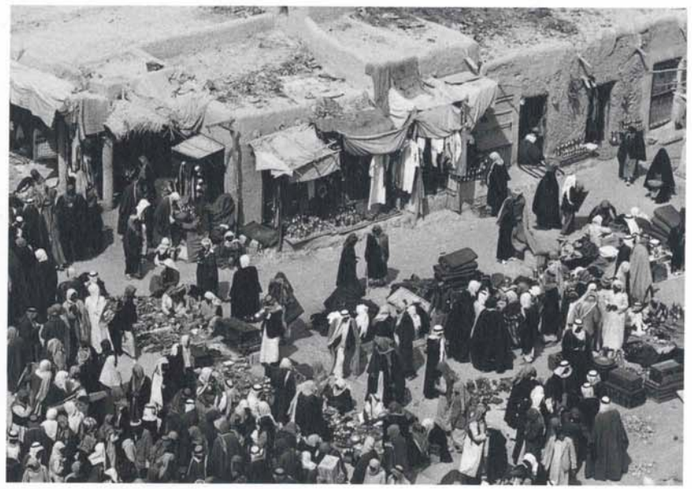
A world-class national museum, covering 29,000 square meters (312,000 sq ft), lies immediately east of the main square, fronted by a sweeping wall of yellow Riyadh limestone. The museum features comprehensive cultural, scientific, religious and historical sections, and the unification of the kingdom is the subject of a major, two-story gallery. West of the square are the restored Murabba' Palace, the King 'Abd al-'Aziz Foundation for Research and Archives, and the King 'Abd al-'Aziz Mosque. A large library and an auditorium to the south round out the development.

King 'Abd al-'Aziz would certainly recognize the Murabba' Palace and other original structures: two towers and a section of the north wall, and the mud-brick "treasury" building in the courtyard of a second palace where he lived. That palace was torn down and a new building constructed in its footprint to house the King 'Abd al-'Aziz Foundation for Research and Archives after studies showed that structural inconsistencies made the original impossible to preserve. But the treasury—whose massive mud walls keep it comfortable even in Riyadh's searing summer temperatures—was successfully renovated in keeping with its past.



In renovating the Murabba' Palace, the private, Riyadh-based foundation Al-Turath ("heritage") relied on the knowledge and skills of Abdulla Bin Hamid, a Saudi master craftsman who grew up near the site. Bin Hamid is one of the few men remaining with firsthand knowledge not only of traditional Najdi construction skills, but also of King 'Abd al-'Aziz himself.

"Abdulla is well-versed in Najdi architecture and has special expertise in *juss*, or gypsum plaster," which covered palace pillars and walls and served as a canvas for palace decoration, says Zahir Othman, Al-Turath's director general. "We totally renovated the Murabba' Palace, ...



putting the building back as it was in the last days of King 'Abd al-'Aziz." Work included replacing steel beams that had been added in later years with traditional *athl* (tamarisk) wood supports, restoring old columns, doors and shutters, and replacing damaged decorative tiles with tiles manufactured in Egypt—the only place where work similar to that of the originals is still being done.

The 65-year-old Bin Hamjd recalls much of the original interior of Murabba' Palace because he was involved in "continuous building" in the complex beginning half a century ago. That included neighboring princes' palaces, four of which have been rebuilt using mud brick.

Bin Hamid notes with a twinkle in his eye that when he was young and in a hurry he used to slide down the courtyard columns in Murabba' Palace to get to the ground floor fast. Surveying the palace today, he says he's happy with what has been accomplished. "It's for a very good cause, the memory of the king," he says. "As much as the newspapers and television talk about King 'Abd al-'Aziz, they cannot give him his due. He was a gentle, faithful, respectful, strong man."

Documenting what was inside the palace in King 'Abd al-'Aziz's time proved quite difficult. "There are a lot of photos of the external building but very few internal ones," explains Othman. Two of the most valuable references were *Kuwait and Its Neighbors* and *Life* magazine, he says, opening a copy of *Life* dated May 31, 1943 to a picture showing the building's central courtyard. "This photograph convinced our client [the RDA] to go with the original, *sharaf* plaster design" on the balcony balustrade, he says.

The design consists of mud bricks stacked in pyramids, in rows of 2½ bricks, 1½ bricks and a single brick, and then plastered. The style can still be seen in the courtyards and atop the walls of the remaining old mud-brick houses of the city.

Paradoxically, some of the best photographic records of old Riyadh were the work of the very men who, ultimately, helped pave the way for its transformation into a modern city. They included Philby, who served as an intermediary between King 'Abd al-'Aziz and SOCAL in the early 1930's, and who also opened the first automobile dealership in the kingdom; Karl Twitchell, who carried out the first survey of geological resources in the country and was another SOCAL intermediary; and Max Steineke, the indefatigable geologist whose pioneering work led to the discovery of Saudi Arabian oil.

While photos from the early 1950's still show a maze of traditional, flat-topped mud-brick buildings bordered by palmeries, a 1955 picture of road-work in the city center clearly tells the story of the future—one in which the car, not the camel, would rule the streets. "New streets superimposed upon the ancient city will be straight and 16 meters (52 ft) wide in contrast to the winding three-meter (10-ft) streets of earlier days," reads the caption.

"We've lost a lot," says Othman, former director of planning and architecture for the RDA. "But I think it doesn't matter what we've lost. What we might lose is the question. There are still a good number of buildings that have to be restored in different parts of the city."

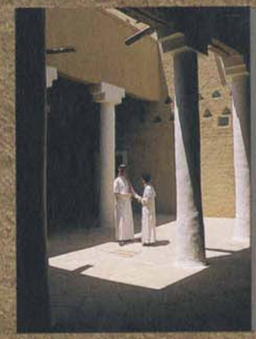
Dr. Fahd al-Semmari, deputy secretary of the kingdom's 100th Anniversary Committee and general director of the King 'Abd al-'Aziz Foundation for Research and Archives, will occupy one of the new offices at the King 'Abd al-'Aziz Historical Center. He says he's proud that "pivotal parts" of the kingdom's history have been saved in Riyadh. "I feel that what's been done in the al-Hokm area and at the King 'Abd al-'Aziz Historical Center is something pleasing to every historian. We have preserved history there."

The protected and restored monuments in the modern city illustrate a special marriage of past and present, he notes. "The kingdom of Saudi Arabia has witnessed astounding and unique development in the last hundred years," he says. "This is what we are celebrating in the centennial."

Al-Semmari emphasizes that the centennial is being marked in cities kingdom-wide. But he calls Riyadh "the jewel of the celebration" because it was the "gateway" for the country's unification, and because today the city's architectural heritage reflects Riyadh's central place in the kingdom's history. "Riyadh witnessed the beginning of the establishment of the state," he says, "and we call her 'the Queen of Saudi Arabia.'" ⊕

"The kingdom has witnessed astounding, unique development," says Fahd al-Semmari of the King 'Abd al-'Aziz Foundation for Research and Archives, "and this is what we are celebrating."

Arthur Clark is a staff writer for Saudi Aramco in Dhahran. He is the author of numerous articles for Aramco World.

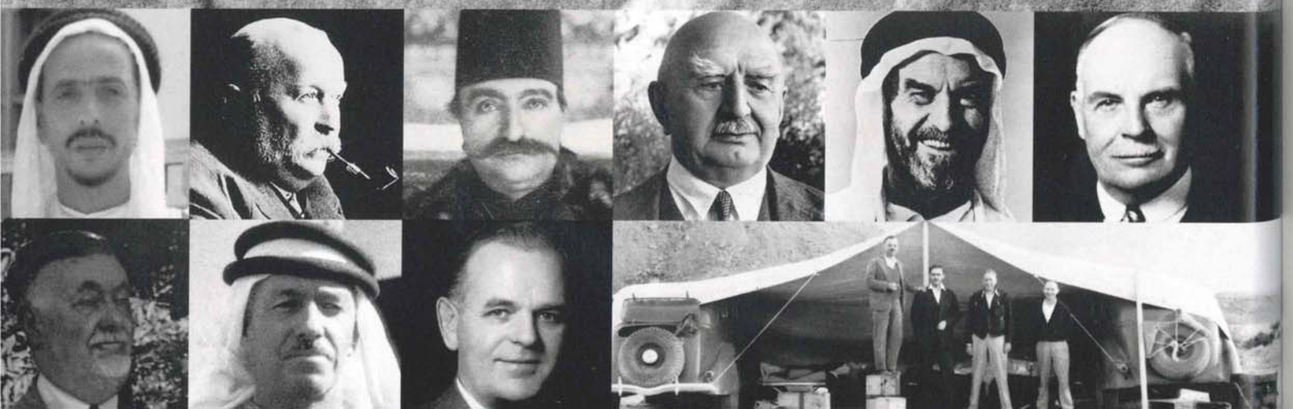


Young visitors to Masmak fort play and reflect in the courtyards after touring the displays that chronicle their nation's history. ***Opposite:*** *An outdoor* suq, *or market, in Riyadh, circa 1949.*

T.F. WALTERS / SAUDI ARAMCO

PRELUDE TO DISCOVERY

Written by Jane Waldron Grutz
Photographs courtesy of Saudi Aramco



MAIN PHOTO: CAPT. WILLIAM SHAKESPEAR / ROYAL GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY; PORTRAITS FROM LEFT, UPPER REGISTER: 2 AND 3, THE BRITISH PETROLEUM COMPANY; 4, CALOUSTE GULBENKIAN FOUNDATION, LISBON

It is impossible to say exactly when the search for oil in Arabia began. But if one date had to be chosen, it might well be January 15, 1902, the day that 'Abd al-'Aziz ibn 'Abd al-Rahman Al Sa'ud recaptured Riyadh and began the march to Arabian statehood.

Without the stability King 'Abd al-'Aziz assured by consolidating nine-tenths of the Arabian Peninsula into a single polity, a search for oil would likely not have begun under auspicious circumstances, nor would it have yielded the prosperity that characterizes Saudi Arabia today. Yet it was hardly the consolidation of the kingdom alone that was responsible. Three other world-shaping events—the discovery of oil elsewhere in the Middle East, the First World War, and the Great Depression—each also drove and shaped Arabia's search for oil.

The discovery of oil in the Middle East occurred some six years after 'Abd al-'Aziz's victory at Riyadh when, on May 25, 1908, a self-made British millionaire named William Knox D'Arcy struck oil at Masjid-i-Sulaiman, the site of a natural oil seep in the Zagros Mountains of western Persia.

It had long been thought that oil would be found in this region. Ancient oil seeps had been discovered at several sites, including Masjid-i-Sulaiman itself. (See *Aramco World*, July/August 1994.) But getting it out was another matter. When D'Arcy signed a concession agreement with Shah Muzzafar al-Din Kadjar in 1901, he had been advised that the search might cost some £10,000.

By the time Masjid-i-Sulaiman came in, D'Arcy and his partner, Burmah Oil, had spent hundreds of thousands of pounds sterling, and they realized that millions more would be required to develop the roads, refineries and ports necessary to bring the oil to market.

To generate these vast new funds, in 1909 D'Arcy and Burmah Oil offered to the public shares in the newly formed Anglo-Persian Oil Company. But by the end of 1912, the company's capital was exhausted and no bank was willing to back the fledgling enterprise any further. Anglo-Persian then turned to the British Admiralty, which had just converted its ships from coal-fired to oil-fired engines. As war jitters reverberated throughout Europe, Britain was eager to secure a reliable source of fuel oil, and that, it turned out, was Anglo-Persian.

On June 17, 1914 First Lord of the Admiralty Winston Churchill presented a bill to Parliament authorizing the Admiralty to purchase 51 percent of Anglo-Persian's stock for £2.2 million. In a surprising victory, the bill passed 254 to 18. It was an astoundingly astute move.

Just 11 days later, Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria was assassinated at Sarajevo, and Europe devolved into the chaos that became World War I. By the time of the armistice four years later, there was no doubt of the role that oil had played.

Before the advent of the internal combustion engine, troops had to be mustered at a railhead or port and marched to battle, with equipment, guns and supplies on horse-drawn wagons. Horses were costly: They ate 10 times as much as a man. When oil arrived, however, transport vehicles were limited only by the terrain, and airplanes, it was soon discovered, could surmount even that obstacle.

The decisive difference between the allied forces of England, France and the United States and those of Germany, Austria-Hungary and Ottoman Turkey was thus not so much tactics or even leadership but oil supply. In addition to Anglo-Persian—which by 1916 was supplying one-fifth of the British Navy's needs—the Allies had at their disposal the giant networks of Royal Dutch/Shell and Standard Oil of New Jersey. The Germans were less fortunate. When the Allies destroyed the oil facilities in Romania in November 1916, and then prevented Russia's Baku fields from falling into German hands in August 1918, the war was unsustainable.

The lesson was clear: No longer could a nation be secure without a steady supply of oil. And, as a huge new discovery in 1927 at Baba Gurgur in Iraq demonstrated, nowhere was that oil more apt to be found than in the Middle East. But barely had British, French, Dutch and Americans formed the Turkish Oil Company, largely operating in Iraq, when the 1929 stock market crash undermined the world economy.

When 'Abd al-'Aziz took control of the Hijaz in 1926, he was delighted to find that the taxes paid by pilgrims to visit the holy cities were enough to administer not only the Hijaz, but the rest of his domain besides. By 1931, however, the number of pilgrims had fallen from an annual average of more than 100,000 to fewer than 40,000. Foreign debt repayments and administrative salaries began to fall badly into arrears.

With this in mind, 'Abd al-'Aziz began to reconsider an idea he had explored some 10 years earlier when he first met an enterprising New Zealander named Frank Holmes.

Holmes was something of an adventurer. Before the war he had traveled the world as an itinerant mining engineer, moving from Mexico to Russia to Nigeria. The war took him to Gallipoli and then Ethiopia, where he first learned of the oil seeps of the Arabian Gulf region. Convinced that oil would be found in the area, he set himself up in Bahrain as agent of a brokerage house called the Eastern and General Syndicate. Its business was arranging concessions in the region for business development ventures of all sorts, but its first and foremost interest was oil.

In 1925 Holmes signed a concession with the island state of Bahrain. But he believed that oil could be found in even greater quantities a short distance away on the Arabian mainland, along the Arabian Gulf coast.

After meeting with 'Abd al-'Aziz in al-Hasa in 1922, Holmes returned the following year to al-'Uqayr, where he once again saw the ruler. In May 1923 King 'Abd al-'Aziz signed an agreement with Holmes which entitled the Eastern and General Syndicate to find a company to search for oil in eastern Saudi Arabia.

*Six years after 'Abd al-'Aziz's recapture of Riyadh, the first commercial oil well in the Middle East began to flow in Iran. In 1923, 'Abd al-'Aziz, **opposite**, sanctioned the first exploration for oil in the Arabian Peninsula, but the concession-holder failed. **Portraits:** See following pages. **Opposite, lower right:** An early exploration camp near Abu Jifan in the Eastern Province.*

But there was trouble from the beginning. It began when Eastern and General invited a Swiss geologist to survey al-Hasa. Apparently oblivious to the signs that later oil men would herald as excellent, the Swiss insisted that exploration in eastern Arabia "would have to be classified as a pure gamble." Thereupon, London banks refused to lend Eastern and General the money needed to renew the lease for a third year.

Unable to generate interest from Anglo-Persian, which then had more oil flowing than it knew what to do with, Holmes headed for New York, where he looked up Gulf Oil, one of the few US companies committed to developing foreign oil at that time. In November 1927 Gulf took over all rights to the Eastern and General concessions, which included Bahrain, al-Hasa and Kuwait. In 1928, however, Gulf joined the Turkish Petroleum Company, then jointly owned by US, British, French and Dutch interests, and thereby became a party to the so-called Red Line Agreement, which effectively blocked Gulf from undertaking exploration anywhere in the region, except Kuwait, without the backing of all the partners of Turkish Petroleum. With the oil market glutted and little geological confidence that there would be oil in Arabia at all, that backing was not forthcoming. Within the year, the concession lapsed.

In 1931, Standard Oil of California (SOCAL)—which was not a partner in Turkish Petroleum and therefore free to act within the former Ottoman Empire—agreed to take over the Bahrain portion of the concession from Gulf. On May 31, 1932 SOCAL's newly formed Bahrain Petroleum Company struck oil there, and SOCAL's eyes turned toward al-Hasa.

In his book, *Arabian Oil Ventures*, Harry St. John ('Abd Allah) Philby, who was 'Abd al-'Aziz's confidant on Western affairs, tells how, in response to 'Abd al-'Aziz's concerns about his Depression-wracked financial situation, Philby remarked that the king and his government seemed "like folk asleep on buried treasure."

When 'Abd al-'Aziz replied that he might consider granting a new concession, Philby suggested that he talk to Charles Crane, an American plumbing tycoon and philanthropist who was then sponsoring development projects in neighboring Yemen. As Crane happened to be in Cairo, it was easy enough to invite him for a visit. On February 25, 1931 'Abd al-'Aziz greeted him in Jiddah with a banquet, and presented him with a bundle of carpets and swords as well as two Arabian horses. In return, Crane offered to send, at his own expense, one of his mining engineers, Karl Twitchell, then working in Yemen, to search for artesian wells for the king.

King 'Abd al-'Aziz ibn 'Abd al-Rahman Al Sa'ud

Following his conquest of the Hijaz in the mid-1920's, 'Abd al-'Aziz's primary source of income became pilgrim receipts, fees charged as pilgrims traveled from the port of Jiddah to the holy cities of Makkah and Madinah. In the late 1920's, the number of pilgrims averaged between 100,000 and 130,000 annually. But by 1931, the year this photograph was taken, the Great Depression had reduced those numbers to below 40,000, and national income had fallen proportionately.

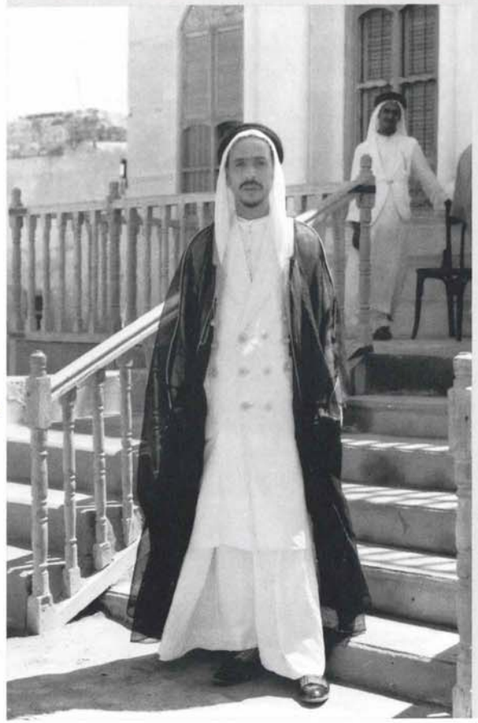
As the worldwide depression deepened, 'Abd al-'Aziz began to look with more interest toward mineral-resource development. But Twitchell's survey turned up little—even oil was then only a hope, not at all a proven resource. Foreign oil ventures had already disappointed 'Abd al-'Aziz once, when Major Holmes's 1923 venture collapsed for lack of financial backing. In March 1932 the king confided to Shaykh Ahmad Al-Sabah of Kuwait that he remained skeptical of the region's oil potential and was furthermore "not eager in the least to grant concessions to foreigners."

Yet when the SOCAL subsidiary Bahrain Petroleum struck oil in neighboring Bahrain in May 1932, 'Abd al-'Aziz began to accept cautiously that another oil concession might be worth the risks.

IN 1931, AFTER BAHRAIN'S FIRST WELL CAME IN, 'ABD AL-'AZIZ DISPATCHED TWITCHELL TO THE UNITED STATES TO FIND AN OIL COMPANY TO SEARCH FOR OIL IN EASTERN ARABIA.

'Abd Allah al-Sulayman

Originally from the heartland of Arabia, 'Abd Allah al-Sulayman studied trade and bookkeeping in Bombay before he was named finance minister by King 'Abd al-'Aziz in 1932. He was a man who could make a little go a long way, and he proved a shrewd manager for the kingdom's Depression-era economy. Generally regarded as one of the king's most able ministers, he was responsible also for defense and oversight of the Hajj.



Yet even though al-Sulayman was unable to convince SOCAL to provide the immediate £100,000 loan he regarded as vital to pay off the kingdom's debts, he did succeed in securing more than that amount contingent upon the discovery of commercially useful oil resources. But his far more lasting legacy is that he ensured in the 1933 SOCAL concession that Arabia would continue to receive substantial proportions of all future oil revenues. It was this framework that in time brought his nation unprecedented prosperity, and laid the groundwork for the establishment in 1988 of Saudi Arabia's nationally owned oil company, Saudi Aramco.

It took Twitchell some time to make the 2400-kilometer (1500-mi) journey north, complete the surveys—which encompassed much of the Peninsula—and prepare a report. The news, he noted, was mixed: There was no water, but there might be oil.

Twitchell noted the similarity between the geology of eastern Arabia and that of Bahrain. Should SOCAL find oil in Bahrain, he reasoned, the likelihood was great that oil would be found in al-Hasa, too, and possibly in much greater quantities, owing to al-Hasa's greater area. When Bahrain 1 came in, it confirmed Twitchell's expectations—and those of 'Abd al-'Aziz. The king quickly dispatched Twitchell to the United States to find an oil company willing to invest in a search for oil in eastern Arabia.

Within weeks, Twitchell was referred to SOCAL in San Francisco, the same company that had been hoping to approach the king ever since it had begun its exploration in Bahrain.

With both SOCAL and 'Abd al-'Aziz now pursuing the same objective, events began to move quickly. Following a flurry of letters between Riyadh and San Francisco, Twitchell returned to Jiddah in February 1933 accompanied by Lloyd Hamilton, a lawyer representing SOCAL, who had been instructed to sign a concession agreement if the two parties could agree on terms.

However, Philby, aware that the king might achieve better terms if there were two bidders instead of one, had written to his friends at Anglo-Persian. Although the amply supplied British were not much interested in more oil from the Middle East, they were adamant about not letting anyone else into the region in which they enjoyed hegemony. The news of SOCAL's Bahrain strike had them worried. Through the Iraq Petroleum Company (IPC), which had grown out of the Turkish Petroleum Company, they sent a representative, Stephen Longrigg, to enter the bidding.

Since IPC was acting defensively, and had no intention of developing any oil resources that might prove to exist in Saudi Arabia, Longrigg was instructed to offer only a tiny fraction of what the Saudis were asking. When Longrigg explained his situation to Philby, he received little sympathy.

"You might as well pack up," said Philby. "The Americans are far and away higher than that." Longrigg took the next plane back to Basra.

SOCAL, for its part, was not prepared to pay the fees demanded by Saudi Minister of Finance 'Abd Allah al-Sulayman. From the start, he had asked £100,000 as an immediate loan, and had made rental and royalty payments secondary. Saudi Arabia had bills it needed to pay immediately, he explained. Furthermore, maintained al-Sulayman, the concession was well worth this amount of money, and likely a great deal more. After all, excellent terms had been offered for concessions in Iran and Iraq, where the geology was similar.

To the businessmen at SOCAL, al-Hasa was a pure calculated risk. It took three and a half months of wrangling before SOCAL came up with its final offer: An initial loan of £35,000 in gold and a second loan of £20,000 after 18 months, and a rental of £5,000 per year for the concession area, beginning in the second year. Then, if oil should be discovered in commercial quantities, SOCAL would provide a £50,000 loan in gold and a second loan of £50,000 a year later.

On May 8, 1933 al-Sulayman asked the king for his decision. 'Abd al-'Aziz's answer was simple and direct. "Put your trust in God and sign," said the king.

On May 29, 1933 'Abd Allah al-Sulayman and Lloyd Hamilton signed the agreement. Under it, SOCAL received exploration rights to some 930,000 square kilometers (360,000 sq mi) of land for 60 years.

Four months later, SOCAL geologists Robert P. "Bert" Miller and Schuyler B. "Krug" Henry landed at the Arabian Gulf port of Jubail.

The search for oil in Saudi Arabia had begun.

Jane Waldron Grutz is a former staff writer for Saudi Aramco who now lives in Houston.

William Knox D'Arcy signed one of the earliest oil concessions, first offered by the Persian shah in 1900, but it took seven often discouraging years before his exploration crew brought in the region's first modern, commercial oil well some 200 kilometers (125 mi) north of the Arabian Gulf coast.

Shah Muzzaffar al-Din Kadjar, eager to shore up his country's economy during the hard times he inherited upon his coronation in 1896, began selling a variety of industrial concessions to international investors—among them one granted on May 28, 1901 to D'Arcy.

Calouste Gulbenkian in 1912 helped form the Turkish Petroleum Company (TPC) with British, Dutch, German and, later, US interests. After World War I, he was the architect of the "Red Line Agreement," which barred TPC partners from independent exploration inside the former Ottoman Empire, including all of Arabia except Kuwait.

Harry St. John ('Abd Allah) Philby, remembered best today as an early Western explorer of Arabia, met 'Abd al-'Aziz in 1917 while Philby was a British political officer. In 1925, Philby gave up his post, settled in Jiddah, and soon afterward embraced Islam and took the Muslim name 'Abd Allah. By the early 1930's he was a confidant of the king, who frequently included him in afternoon driving tours of the Hijaz.

Major Frank Holmes was an avuncular optimist from New Zealand who believed so strongly that oil could be found beyond the natural seeps of Persia that he earned the nickname "Abu al-Naft," or "Mr. Oil." Although his Arabian concession, granted to him by 'Abd al-'Aziz in 1923, lapsed unprofitably five years later, he was successful in later oil developments in Bahrain and Kuwait.

Charles Crane, heir to a US plumbing fortune, was impressed by 'Abd al-'Aziz's leadership long before the king invited him to Jiddah in 1931. Later, when Crane's engineer, Karl Twitchell, reported a dearth of water but a possible abundance of oil, Crane reportedly turned down the king's offer of a concession, saying that he did not wish to profit from a gesture he had viewed as a favor to a man he admired.

Karl S. Twitchell, a mining and civil engineer, arrived in 1931 with the assignment to search for artesian wells, primarily in the Hijaz. Although Twitchell found no underground water supplies, he noted the geological similarity between al-Hasa in eastern Arabia and Bahrain, and helped convince both SOCAL and 'Abd al-'Aziz that a second concession might be worth pursuing.

Lloyd Hamilton was only 40 when he arrived in Jiddah in February 1933 as SOCAL's concession lease negotiator. As the three months of difficult parlays went on, he and Finance Minister 'Abd Allah al-Sulayman appeared to gain great respect for each other.

TOP 2: THE BRITISH PETROLEUM COMPANY; GULBENKIAN: CALOUSTE GULBENKIAN FOUNDATION, LISBON; OPPOSITE, TOP: HUSSAIN A. AL-RAMADAN

1999: The dispatch area of the Operations Coordination Center at Saudi Aramco headquarters in Dhahran is the heart of the round-the-clock work that supplies oil and gas to customers in the kingdom and around the globe.

...66 Years Later

Number of round-trips between the Earth and Mars that a car getting 25 miles per gallon could make using the gasoline refined from a single day's Saudi Aramco crude-oil production: **48**

Number of round-trips the same car could make using the daily output of Alaskan oil fields: **9.1***

Number of times the Great Pyramid of Giza—if it were hollow—could be filled by Saudi Aramco's cumulative production of crude oil since 1938: **5,075**

Percentage of the world's crude-oil reserves located in Saudi Arabia: **25**

Saudi Aramco's rank among the world's companies producing crude oil and holding crude oil reserves: **1**

Approximate number of weeks crude oil from a Saudi Aramco field takes to get from wellhead, through refining and distribution, to a gas station: **2**

Number of quality-control laboratory tests performed each month at Saudi Aramco's Ras Tanura Laboratory: **36,000**

Approximate number of customers' ships per month that offload Saudi Aramco crude oil at US lightering stations in the Gulf of Mexico: **35**

Chances that a supertanker loaded with Saudi Aramco crude oil in 1997 offloaded in the US: **1 in 5**

Chances it offloaded in Asia: **2 in 5**

Chances that a tanker loaded with Saudi Aramco refined products in 1997 offloaded in the US: **1 in 10**

Chances it offloaded in Asia: **1 in 2**

Approximate number of houses built since 1951 by Saudi employees of Saudi Aramco using company-provided home loans: **41,400**

Number of Saudi Government boys' and girls' schools built and maintained by Saudi Aramco since 1953: **113**

Current enrollment in those schools: **65,000**

Chances that an employee of Saudi Aramco lives in Dhahran: **1 in 10**

Number of nations from which Saudi Aramco's international employees are drawn: **51**

Rank of the US among these: **2**

Rank of the Philippines: **1**

Square meters of Dhahran's 27-hole golf course that are covered in grass: **0**

Average number of days each year since 1993 that the daily high temperature at Saudi Aramco's Abqaiq Plants, the world's largest crude oil stabilization center, exceeded 45 degrees Centigrade (113°F): **55**

Number of years that oil exploration field teams in Saudi Arabia had no access to air conditioning: **22**

Current average price of a US gallon of gasoline at a gas station in Saudi Arabia: **61¢**

Number of oil and gas fields discovered by Saudi Aramco between 1989 and 1998: **25**

Percentage of all of Saudi Aramco's oil and gas fields that this represents: **30**

SOURCES:

*State of Alaska, Department of Natural Resources, Division of Oil and Gas; all others: Saudi Aramco

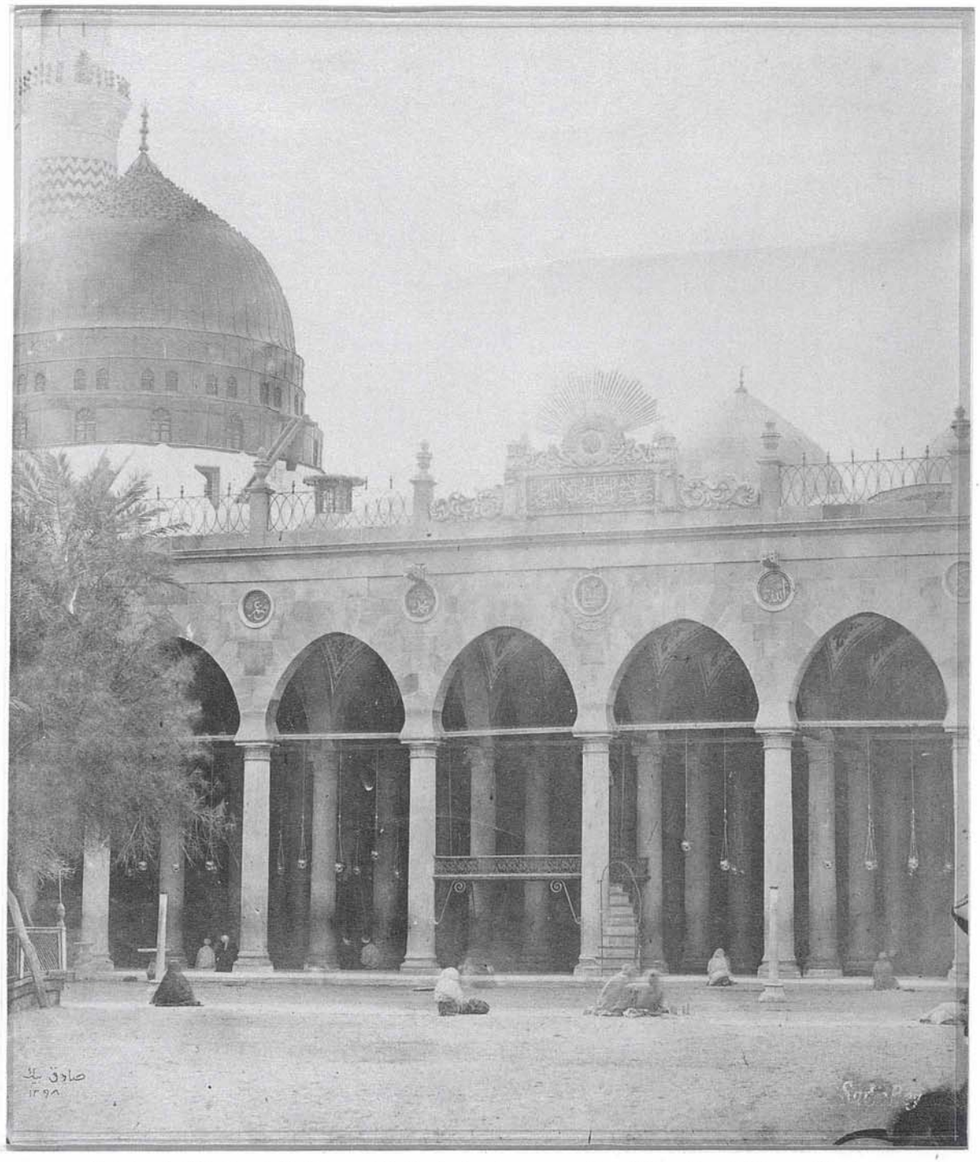
1933: Having agreed on a specific schedule of remuneration to the national treasury, 'Abd Allah al-Sulayman and Lloyd Hamilton signed the concession agreement that gave SOCAL the right to search for oil in Saudi Arabia.

Pioneer Photographer of the Holy Cities

Muhammad Sadiq

Written by John de St. Jorre

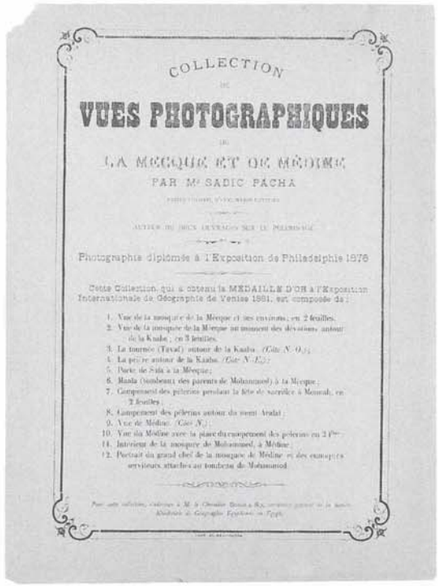
Photographs courtesy of Farid Kioumgi / Egyptophilia



Courtyard of the Prophet's Mosque, Madinah. ***Previous spread:*** *Inside the Sacred Mosque, Makkah.*

(نبذة)
في استكشاف طريق الارض الحجازية
من الوجه وينبع البحر الى المدينة النبوية
وبيان تربتها العسكريه
(لحضرة محمد صادق بك ناظم أركان حرب)
وقد أدرجت في شهر جمادا آخر سنة ٩٤ بخرطة ٤ و٥ و٦ من الجريدة العسكريه
مطبعة عموم أركان حرب بديوان الجهاديه
سنة ١٢٩٤
هجريه

The title page of Sadiq's first account of his journeys, dated AH 1294 (1877). Later, he wrote three more books based on his travels in the Hijaz.



COLLECTION
DE
VUES PHOTOGRAPHIQUES
DE
LA MECQUE ET DE MÉDINE
PAR Mr SADIC PACHA
Photographie diplômée à l'Exposition de Philadelphie 1876
Cette Collection, qui a obtenu la MEDAILLE D'OR à l'Exposition Internationale de Géographie de Venise 1881, est composée de :
1. Vue de la mosquée de la Mecque et des environs, en 2 feuilles.
2. Vue de la mosquée de la Mecque au moment des dévotions autour de la Kaaba ; en 3 feuilles.
3. La tournée (Tawaf) autour de la Kaaba. *(Côté N.-O.)*;
4. La prière autour de la Kaaba. *(Côté N.-E.)*;
5. Porte de Salâ à la Mosquée ;
6. Maala (tombeau des parents de Mohammed) à la Mecque ;
7. Campement des pèlerins pendant la fête de sacrifice à Mennah, en 2 feuilles ;
8. Campement des pèlerins autour du mont Arafat ;
9. Vue de Médine. *(Côté N.)* ;
10. Vue de Médine avec la place du campement des pèlerins en 2 f^les ;
11. Intérieur de la mosquée de Mohammed, à Médine ;
12. Portrait du grand chef de la mosquée de Médine et des employés serviteurs attachés au tombeau de Mohammed.

This handbill offered Sadiq's 12-photograph portfolio for sale.

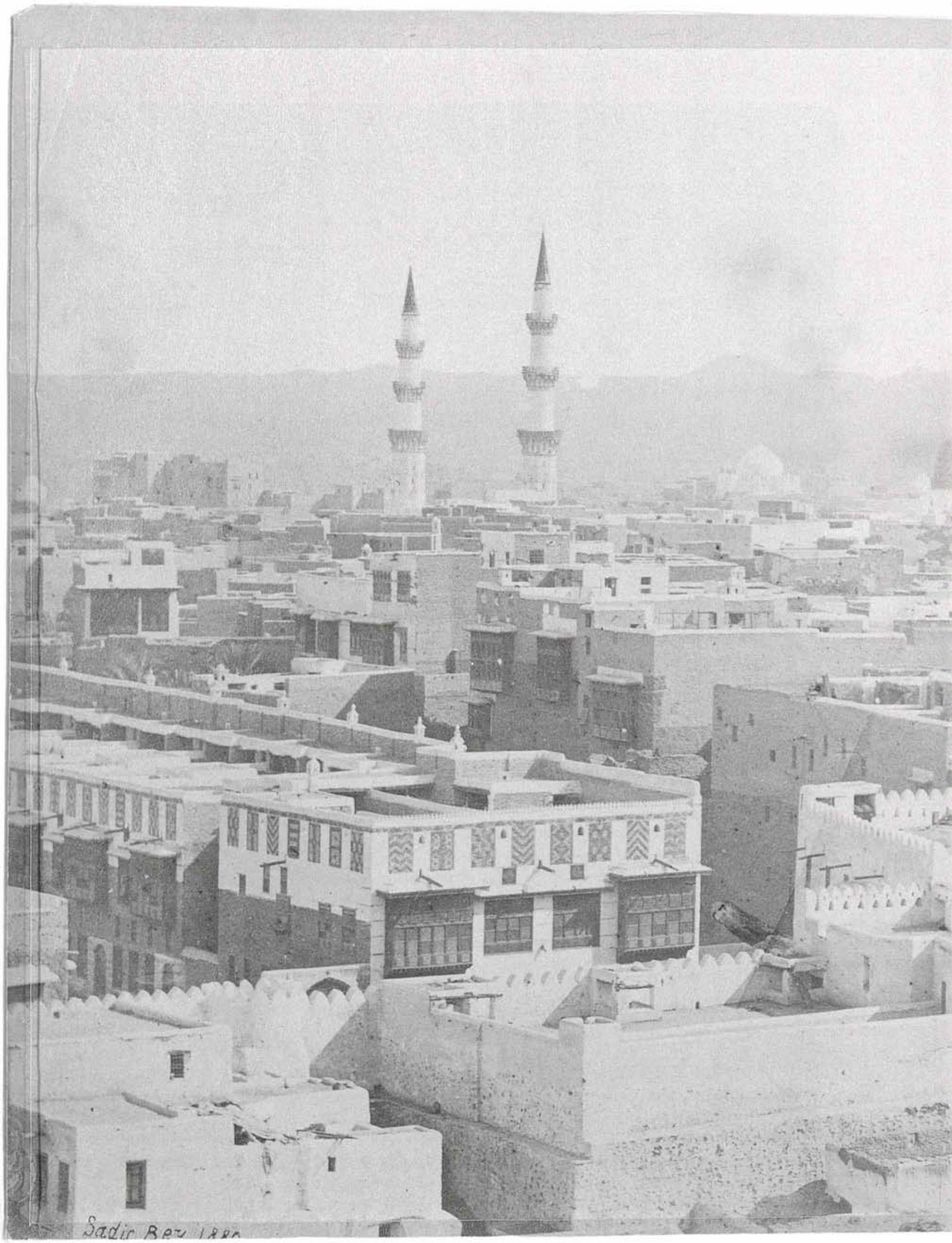
In late January 1861, as Americans were preparing for civil war, an Egyptian colonel in Cairo was boarding an east-bound train for Suez on a mission of a more peaceful kind. Muhammad Sadiq, an officer of the general staff and an engineer, had packed a large assortment of surveying instruments in his luggage, including a "hectometre," a wheel-like device for measuring distance. He had also carefully stowed away another relatively new invention: a large, unwieldy wet-plate camera.

Sadiq's destination was Arabia. His military mission was to explore the area between the Red Sea port of Wajh and the holy city of Madinah and report on the topography, climate, routes, and human settlements of the region. Photography, it seems, was not an official part of the plan, merely a hobby that the colonel had taken up and hoped to pursue on his travels. After a short stay in Suez, Sadiq took ship and reached Wajh two days later. Wajh was then a busy, medium-sized port on the Egyptian pilgrim route that ran southward from Aqaba along the Red Sea coast.

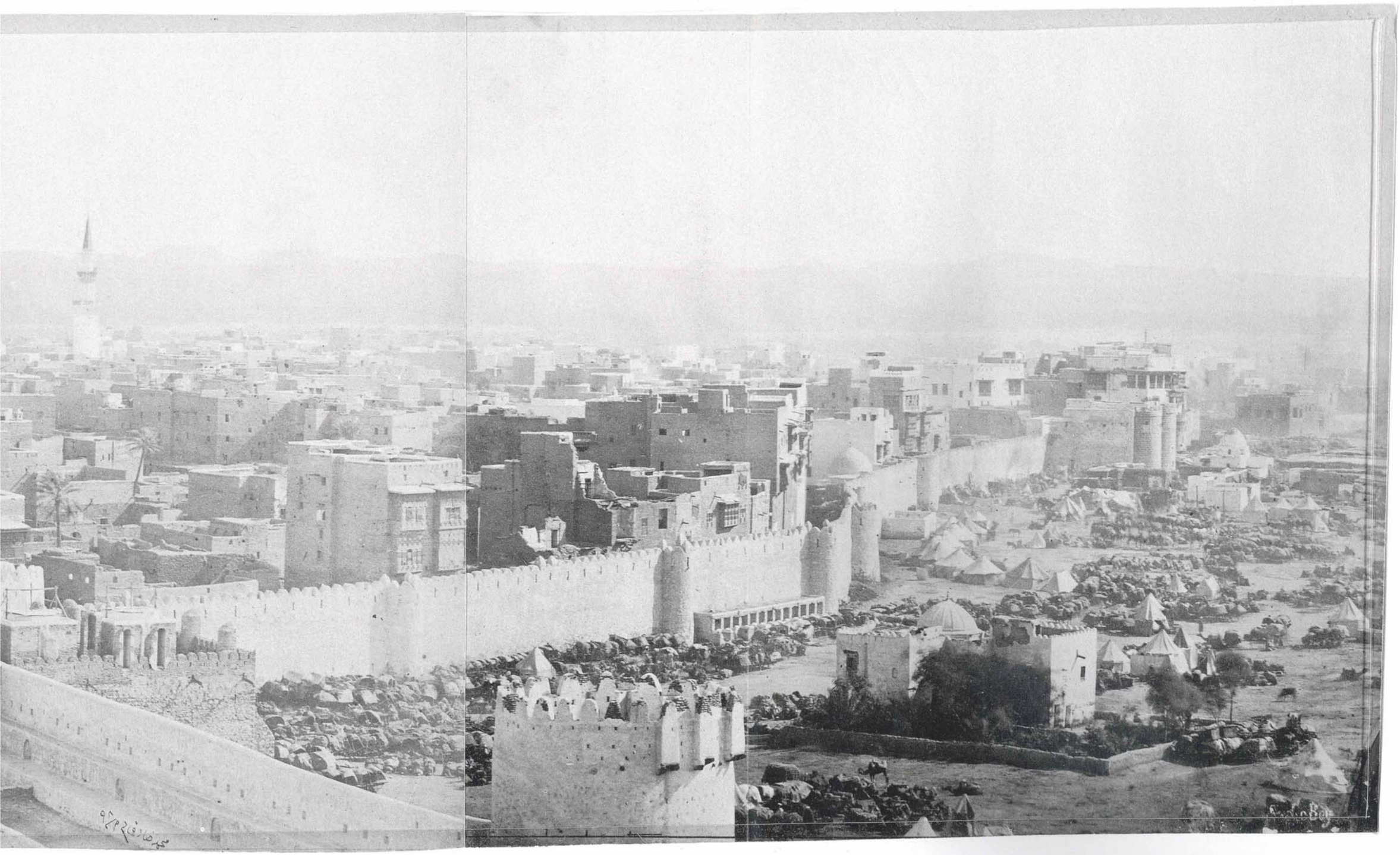
In an account of his travels published later in Cairo, Sadiq's observant, meticulous reporting style was immediately apparent. Nine kilometers (5½ mi) inland from Wajh, he reported, there was "a fort ... built amidst the mountains, which are composed of red sandstone. It is well-armed with guns, and is a proper store for the supplies of the pilgrims. ... The place is strewn with pebbles and stones, and is the point where three routes meet, the first leading to Suez and known as the al-'Ula Route, the second is called El-Sitar, and the third leads to the Holy City of Madinah." Sadiq went on to record the nature of the terrain around the fort, the district's water supply, the relations between the Ottoman governor and the Arabs, and the differences between the local camels and those of Egypt and Syria.

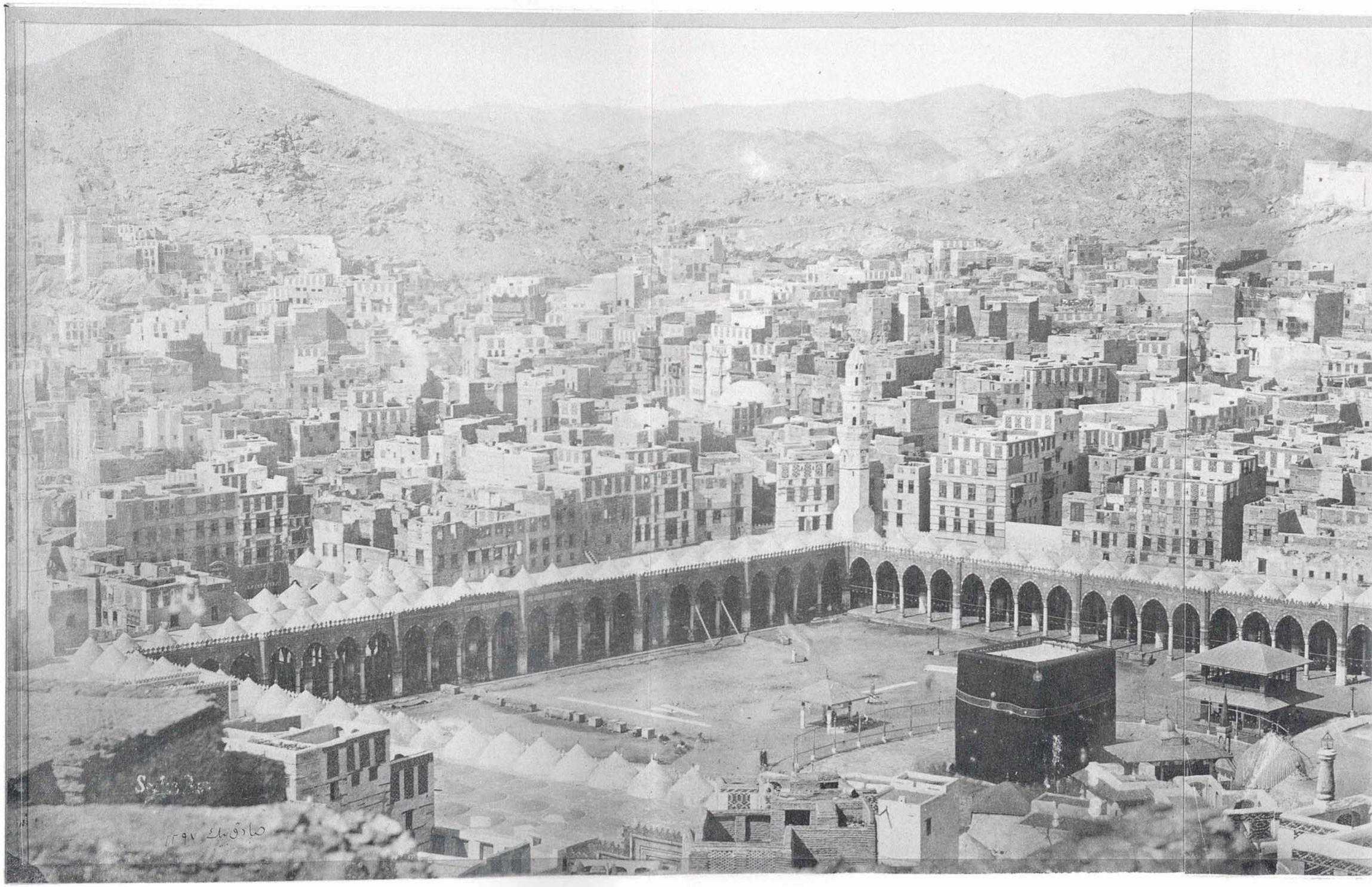
Sadiq and his small group then headed south, and they took 12 days—a leisurely pace for the time—to cover the 418 kilometers (259 mi) to Madinah, following the Wadi al-Hamd for much of the way. As they moved, Sadiq measured, mapped and recorded the barren, mountainous route, noting fortifications and areas where fresh water and provisions could be obtained. It was hard going. Temperatures exceeded 38 degrees Centigrade (100° F) during the day and plummeted to near freezing at night. But finally, the great walled city of Madinah, with its slender minarets rising against the surrounding hills, came into view. The party halted and the colonel, for the first time since he left Cairo, unpacked his precious camera.

The Hijaz, a scarred landscape of eroded hills, dry wadis and drifting sands comprising the coastal plain and mountains of northwest Arabia, had long been familiar to pilgrims

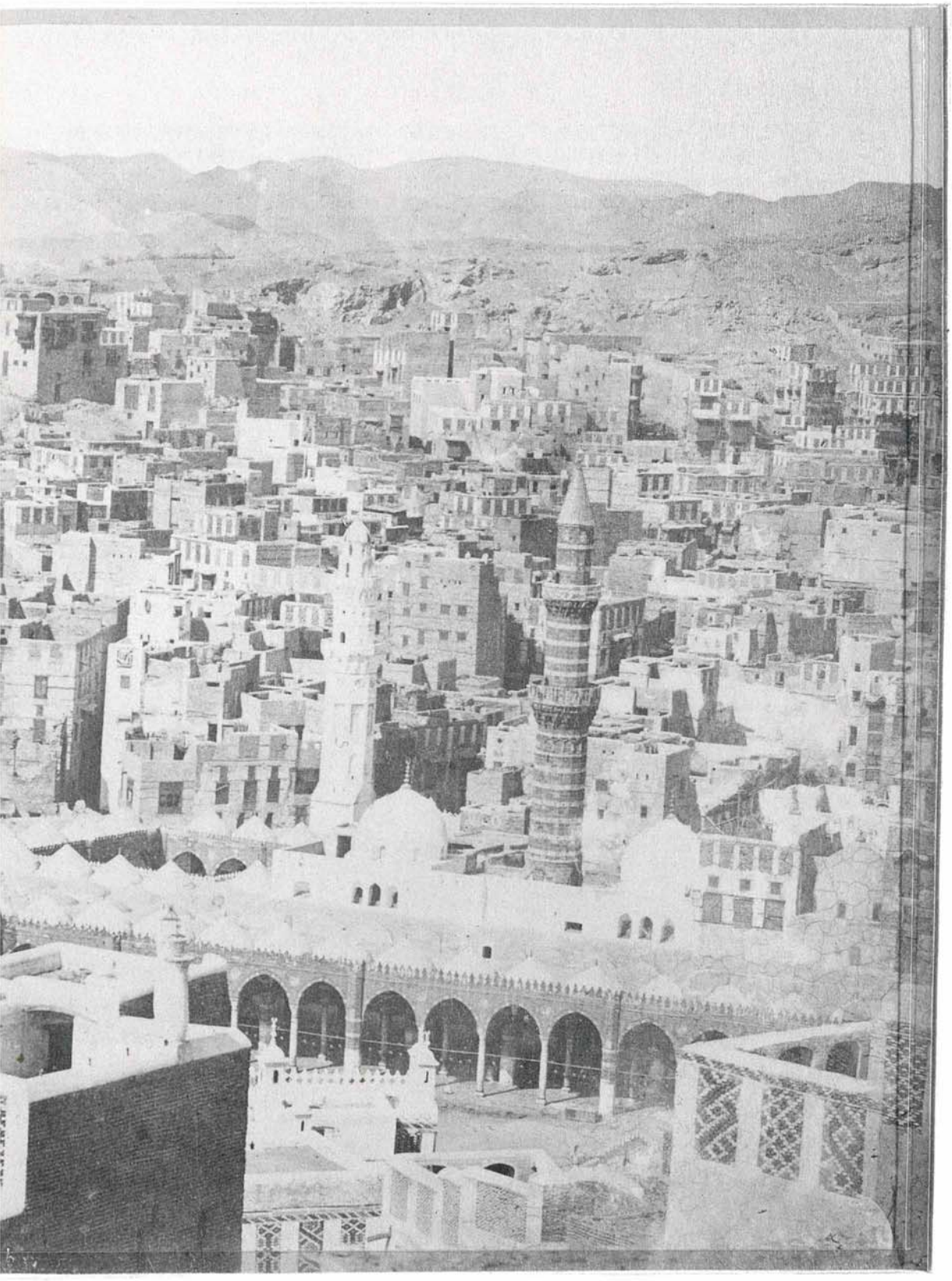


This panoramic view of Madinah made in 1861 is the first known photograph taken inside what is today Saudi Arabia. Sadiq did not carry his camera to Makkah until 1880.





Panorama of the Sacred Mosque, Makkah, 1880.



from all over the Islamic world as the cradle of the holy cities of Makkah and Madinah. The Hijaz coast, particularly the ports of Jiddah and Yanbu', received visits from Western explorers, merchants and other travelers, but penetration of the hinterland was much rarer, especially for travelers with scientific or military purposes in mind.

Before the 19th century, the accounts of Westerners who had been to the holy cities could be counted on the fingers of one hand. (See *Aramco World*, November/December 1974.) A Bolognese traveler, Ludovico di Varthema, accompanied Syrian pilgrims to Makkah and Madinah in 1503 and wrote informatively about his travels. During the 17th century, Johann Wild, an Austrian soldier taken prisoner by local tribes, and Joseph Pitts, a British sailor who was captured by Barbary pirates, spent some time in the two cities with their respective captors. Both eventually escaped and wrote books about their experiences. In the middle of the 18th century, Carsten Niebuhr, a Dane who, like Sadiq, was a military engineer, wrote about the discoveries his expedition made in Arabia, notably Yemen. The sole survivor of the group, he did not visit the holy cities but wrote about them and the Hajj from material he gathered during a visit to Jiddah.

In the early 1800's a Spaniard, Domingo Badia y Leblich, who called himself Aly Bey and who later turned out to be a spy working for the French, made the pilgrimage to Makkah and wrote extensively about his time in Arabia. He was followed a few years later by Giovanni Finati, an Italian soldier of fortune, who produced a sketchy account of his travels. Then came Ulrich Jaspar Seetzen, a German botanist and Arabist in the service of the czar of Russia; he was later murdered in Yemen.

The next Western visitor was the Swiss orientalist, Johann Ludwig Burckhardt, who had already made his name as the discoverer of Petra. Burckhardt's conversion to Islam was as genuine as his predecessors' were suspect, and he spent three months in each of the holy cities. With the passion of the dedicated scholar, he described Makkah and, to a lesser extent, Madinah in encyclopedic detail and documented the rites of the Hajj with unprecedented thoroughness and authority.

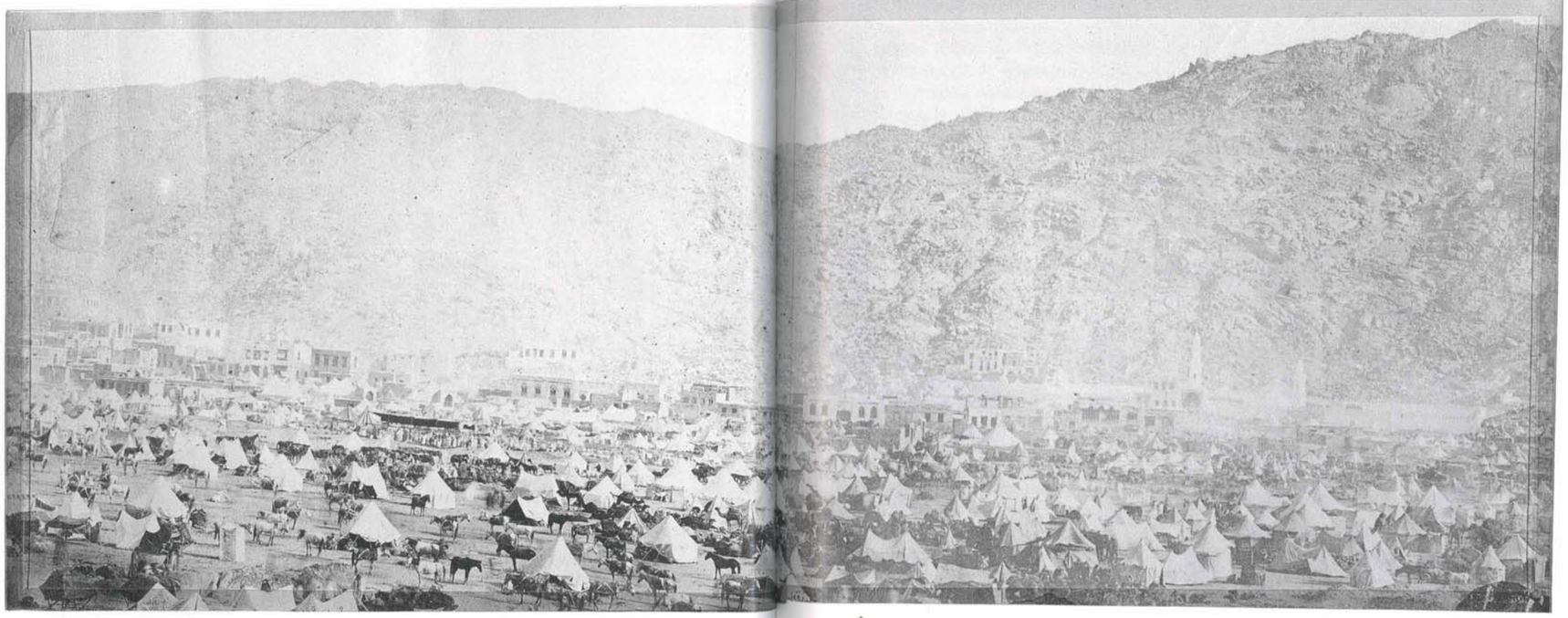
It was around this time that Egyptian interest in the region grew, provoked by the seizure of Makkah, Madinah and Jiddah by purist reformers from central Arabia. Muhammad Ali's first military intervention in the Hijaz in 1811 opened the door for Egyptian and Western explorers who were keen to record their experiences. The most famous of these was Richard Burton, who, disguised as an Afghan holy man, visited Makkah and Madinah for the first time in 1853. Building on Burckhardt's scholarly work, he later published his findings in a seminal three-volume travel book, *A Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to Al-Madinah and Makkah*.

Sadiq was among the first photographers to create panoramic images. He did so by joining two separate photographs in such a fashion that it looked as though the image had come from one plate. "No one before me," Sadiq noted factually in his diary, "has ever taken such photographs."

In the late afternoon of February 12, 1861, as Muhammad Sadiq stood gazing at Madinah with his camera at his side, he seemed aware of the historic nature of the moment. He set to work immediately, measuring, drawing, interviewing and photographing. He took photographs of the Prophet's Mosque and its dome, and then went outside the city to capture a marvelous panoramic view of Madinah that also managed to include a section of neighboring Manakhah. This was achieved by taking two separate photographs and joining them in such a fashion that it looked as though the image had come from one plate. "No one before me," Sadiq noted factually in his diary, "has ever taken such photographs."

Sadiq then proceeded to measure and draw a detailed plan of the site, another "first" for the Egyptian colonel. Richard Burton had produced sketches in 1853 but they were very different from Sadiq's careful architectural-style drawings. Sadiq also described Madinah and its inhabitants. The Prophet's Mosque, he reported, was "overwhelming, ... decorated and lit with radiant lights." The people of Madinah were "a dark, almost black complexion," although some were "light-skinned, almost white." Being an Arab and a Muslim obviously helped Sadiq, and no one seems to have taken exception to his busy camera on this occasion, or indeed on any of his trips to the holy cities. The citizens, he noted, were "nice and civilized, and welcoming to traveling strangers."

After leaving Madinah, Sadiq and his party traveled westward to the Red Sea port of Yanbu', where they arrived a week later. Back in Cairo, Sadiq presented a report to his military superiors, but he did not publish anything until 1877, when his account appeared initially in *The Egyptian Military Gazette* and shortly afterward in a book called *Summary of the Exploration of the Wajh–Madinah Hijaz Route and its Military Cadastral Map*. The book contained the details of the journey, a long description of Madinah and the pilgrimage, four photographs, a map of the route, the plan of the Prophet's Mosque, and an illustration of the hectometre that he had used to measure distances on his travels.



The pilgrims' camp at Mina, 1880.

Little is known of Muhammad Sadiq's background except that he was born in Cairo in 1832, educated there and at the École Polytechnique in Paris, trained as an engineer and joined the Egyptian army. His interest in photography and the art's evolving techniques (see next page) may have begun during his time in France, or possibly later through the influence of Armenian photographers who established themselves in Cairo in the latter part of the 19th century. What is less speculative is his undoubted skill in framing, taking and developing photographic images, as his later career reveals.

Sadiq's reward for his Madinah journey was an assignment in 1880 to the convoy that took the Egyptian pilgrims to Makkah every year by the land route across Sinai and down the Red Sea coast. Sadiq's job was treasurer of the expedition, but once again he took his camera and photographic equipment along. On his arrival in Makkah, he photographed the Sacred Mosque, the Ka'ba as a multitude of pilgrims circled it, the al-Safa Gate, the tomb of the Prophet's parents in Ma'ala, and pilgrims camped at Mina and on the Plain of Arafat.

Sadiq also photographed Shaykh 'Umar al-Shaibi, the guardian of the key of the Ka'ba, and sent him the pictures. With the photographs he enclosed a poem which seemed to reflect the ambivalence that photographers sometimes feel about their art, and perhaps also to foreshadow the fate that many people would wish upon modern-day paparazzi.

My heart has captured your presence
In Ka'ba's grace and radiance,
Your parting burns my heart,
Yet aren't photographers destined to
burn in fire?
Thee have I drawn on paper
In friendship and recollection.

Sadiq visited Madinah again and this time photographed Sharif Shawkat Pasha, the guardian of the Prophet's Mosque, surrounded by his eunuch assistants. He also took some more panoramic photographs of the city. On his return to Cairo he wrote up his material and published the photographs and his impressions in a second book.

Sadiq's reputation as a photographer, geographer and explorer was growing. Four years prior to this expedition, his earlier photographs of Madinah had been displayed in the Egypt-

The Colonel's Camera and Photography in His Time

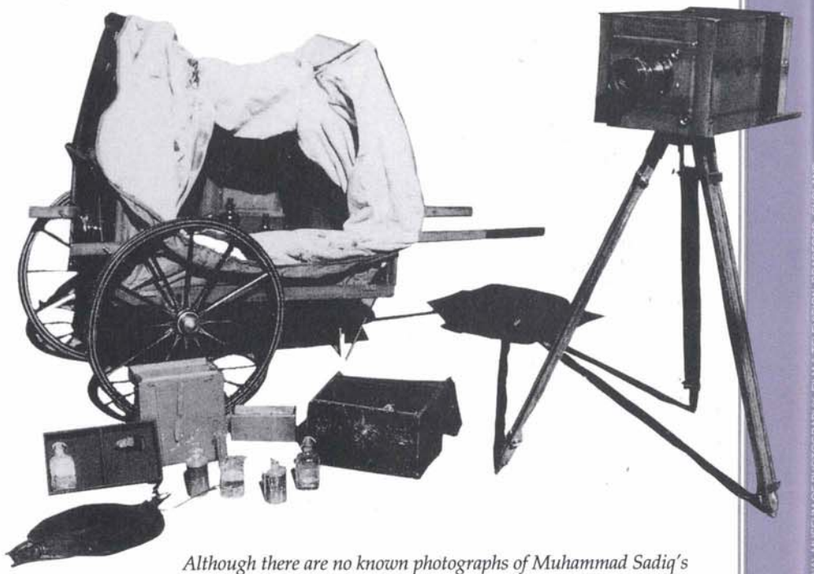
When Colonel Muhammad Sadiq decided to take a camera with him on his first trip to Madinah in 1861, he had no alternative but to pack a large, cumbersome device known as a wet-plate collodion camera. Photography was barely 20 years old and the collodion method, which used a glass plate rather than paper as a support for the light-sensitive salts, had only been invented a decade earlier by Frederick Scott-Archer. Collodion was a light-sensitive emulsion composed of nitro-cellulose and ether which, together with silver salts, was coated on a sheet of glass.

Glass negatives were more durable than the earlier paper negatives, produced clearer photographic images, and could be used to make a large number of prints using albumen-coated paper, on which Sadiq's photographs accompanying this article are printed. The disadvantage, apart from the camera's size, was that the collodion negative had to be sensitized immediately before use and exposed in the camera while still wet, otherwise it lost its sensitivity. The traveling photographer thus had to carry with him a portable darkroom, and this is what Sadiq was obliged to do on his first expedition in 1861.

The technology had improved by the time he returned to the Hijaz in 1880. Collodion plates could then be used dry, without any loss of sensitivity, although their over-sensitivity to blue light meant that the sea and the sky lost definition. In the late 1870's, a new method using a gelatin plate was invented. This meant that cameras became smaller and lighter and the photographer had less paraphernalia to carry with him. But it is not known whether Sadiq was able to take advantage of those advances.

Sadiq was meticulous in documenting his photographs. Descriptive titles were written in Arabic and he signed each plate "Sadic Bey," using the French spelling of his name, and also in Arabic. After his photographic exhibitions in Philadelphia in 1876 and Venice in 1881, he had a circular stamp made which read: "Sadic Bey, Colonel d'Etat-Major Egyptien. Photographe Diplomé a L'Exp. de Philie 1876 Medaille d'Or a L'Exp. de Venise 1881."

Sadiq's photographic achievements in the 19th century picked up a thread of Middle Eastern history spun some 900 years earlier when an Arab physicist, Abu Ali al-Hasan ibn al-Haytham, wrote a treatise describing how an inverted image could be made on the wall of a darkened chamber—*camera obscura* in Latin—by using a small aperture whose size also governed the clarity of the image. Italian Renaissance architects used a device based on Ibn al-Haytham's idea to help them with their drawings. By the 19th century, the *camera obscura* was well established, and it was upon its principles that Jacques Daguerre and W. H. Fox-Talbot began experimenting with focus, control of the light entering the apparatus and, ultimately, the fixing of the images on paper.



Although there are no known photographs of Muhammad Sadiq's own camera, it would have resembled this collodion wet-plate field kit.

THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF PHOTOGRAPHY, FILM & TELEVISION, BRADFORD, ENGLAND

In 1876, Sadiq exhibited his photographs from the holy cities at the Philadelphia Exhibition; in 1881 his portfolio won a gold medal at the Third International Congress of Geographers in Venice.

ian pavilion at the Philadelphia Exhibition of 1876. He had also been elected to the Khedival Geographic Society in Cairo, and had acquired the honorific "bey." And then, in 1881, came international recognition in the form of an invitation to show his work at the Third International Congress of Geographers in Venice. Sadiq prepared a portfolio of his pictures of the holy cities with a written commentary and was rewarded by winning a gold medal at the exhibition. His own photographic portrait may have been taken around this time. The picture that has survived shows a strong face adorned with a full and fashionably waxed mustache.

Three years later, Sadiq set out on another pilgrimage, again as the treasurer of the convoy escorting Egypt's pilgrims. This journey, Sadiq's last to the Hijaz, was marked by personal tragedy when his wife, who had come with him from Cairo, died in Makkah, on the women's side of the Sacred Mosque. Sadiq had a coffin made and arranged for the body to be buried in Madinah. The loss was exceedingly painful, for the couple had been married 34 years, and Sadiq was devoted to his wife. Finally back in Cairo, Sadiq began work on another illustrated book of his travels. When it was published, the passage describing the death of his beloved wife was bordered in heavy black ink.

Sadiq ended his military career as *liwa* (lieutenant general) and became president of the Khedival Geographic Society. He published a fourth book on the Hajj in 1896, *The Guide to the Hajj for Its Universal Arriving Visitors*, which summarized the findings of his three journeys and offered practical advice to pilgrims. By this time his honorific had expanded and he was known as Muhammad Sadiq Pasha—a contemporary photographic portrait shows him wearing the gold-embroidered frock coat reserved for men of that rank—and he was a respected figure in Cairo's intellectual circles. In 1902 he was appointed governor of El Arish in the Sinai but is believed to have spent only two months there before succumbing to sunstroke. He returned to Cairo and died later the same year at the age of 70.

The al-Safa Gate at the Sacred Mosque, Makkah, 1880.

Muhammad Sadiq is one of the forgotten pioneers, both of photography and of exploration in Arabia. His photographs of Makkah and Madinah were not only the first recorded of the holy cities themselves, but also the first pictures ever taken inside what is now Saudi Arabia. Sadiq combined his professional technical skills with a fine visual sense. He was also a serious and curious-minded scholar. It is interesting that a devout Muslim should have been the first person to produce photographic images of Islam's holy places. But at least there could be no doubt of Sadiq's motives, which were scholarly, religious and altruistic rather than mercenary or sensational.

There is perhaps no better epitaph for Sadiq than the phrase that D. G. Hogarth used about his illustrious predecessor, the Swiss explorer, Johann Ludwig Burckhardt. Praising Burckhardt's descriptions of Jiddah and Makkah, Hogarth wrote that they were "the patient harvest of an observant, leisurely eye, for which nothing lacked interest."

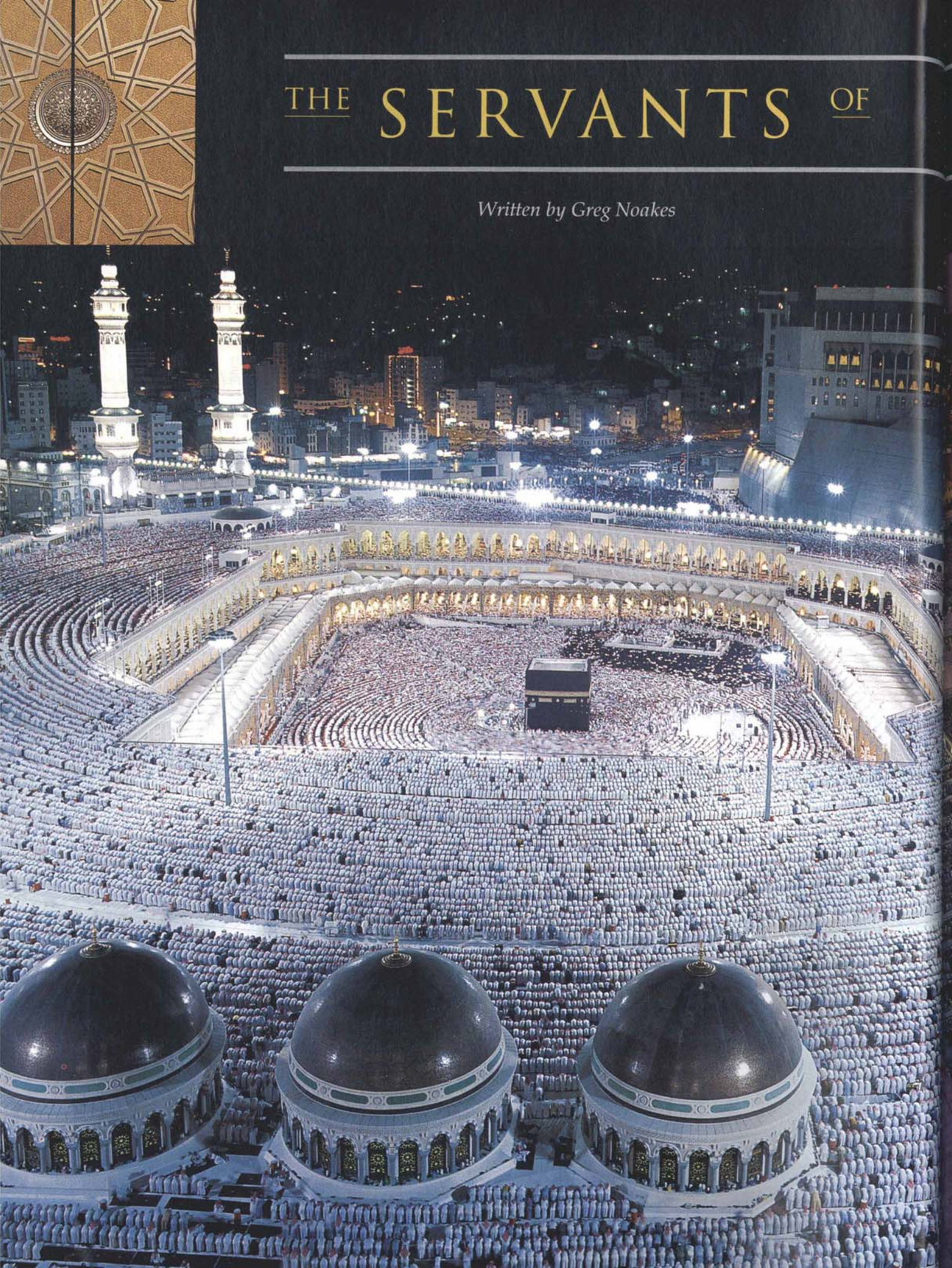
Sadiq, of course, was able to go one better and produce photographic images of his own rich harvest, images that still convey something of the original clarity, technical skill, and sense of wonder that animated their author every time he released the shutter in the holy cities of Arabia well more than a century ago.

Rhode Island-based John de St. Jorre was the London Observer's *Middle East correspondent in the early 1970's. He is the author of seven books, most recently* Venus Bound *(Random House, 1996).*

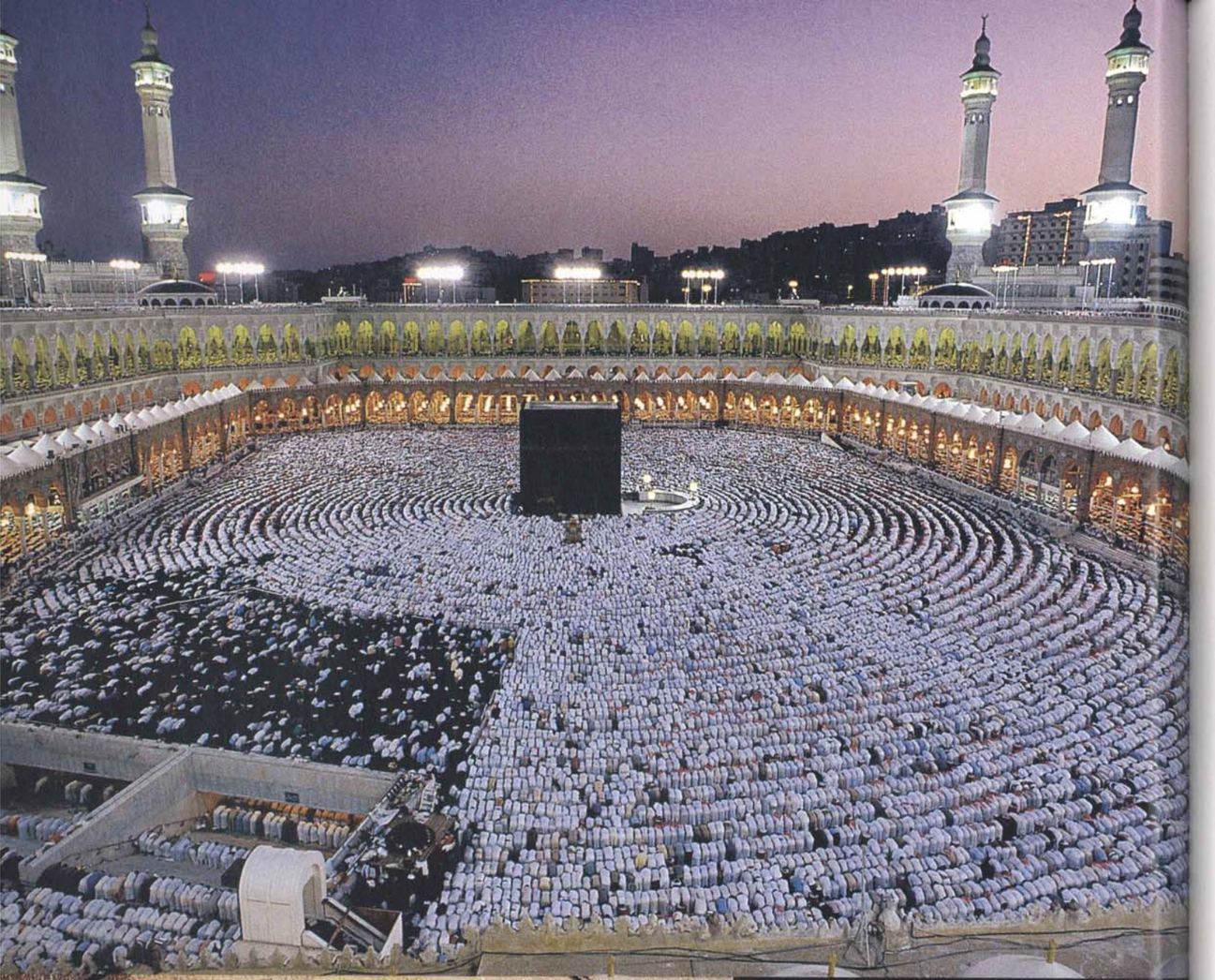
THE SERVANTS OF GOD'S HOUSE

Written by Greg Noakes

Photographed by Peter Sanders



Makkah al-Mukarramah—"Makkah the Honored"—was the birthplace of the Prophet Muhammad in 570. Within today's city, at the center of the Sacred Mosque, is the focal point of Islamic prayer worldwide—the Ka'ba. The 15-meter-high (48'), roughly cubical structure was first built as a place for the worship of the one God by Ibrahim (Abraham) and Isma'il (Ishmael), and it is thus a physical reminder of the links between Islam and the dawn of monotheism, between the Qur'an and previous revelations, and between the Prophet Muhammad and earlier Messengers of God. **Previous spread:** During Ramadan, the month of fasting from sunrise to sunset, prayers called *tarawih* are performed each evening, and they often draw even more worshipers—as many as three million in Makkah alone—than the Hajj, the annual pilgrimage. At left, *tarawih* in the Sacred Mosque in Makkah; at right, the same prayers at the Mosque of the Prophet in Madinah.



The very success of King 'Abd al-'Aziz's efforts, from 1924 till his death in 1953, to ease the rigors of the Hajj meant that Makkah's Sacred Mosque soon became unable to accommodate the numbers of pilgrims, which have increased more than 20-fold since his era. **Left:** A calligraphic carving on an Ottoman-built façade in the Sacred Mosque commemorates the leadership of Abu Bakr, the first *khalifah* (caliph) of Islam following the death of the Prophet Muhammad in 632, who demonstrated the viability of an Islamic state to the empires of the Persians and Byzantines.

Its strategic position and vast hydrocarbon resources make Saudi Arabia an important player on the world's political and economic stages. But among the world's billion Muslims, the kingdom holds a deeper significance, for it is the home of Islam's two holiest cities: Makkah and Madinah, both located in the western region of the country, the Hijaz. But being the birthplace of Islam is not just a matter of prestige. It is a status that brings with it the responsibility for maintaining the cities' ability to accommodate pilgrims and, in particular, Makkah's Sacred Mosque and Madinah's Prophet's Mosque. As the number of pilgrims each year has now risen to more than two million, the task of providing simple hospitality for such numbers, as well as enhancing their comfort and safety, is an enormous one.

Since 'Abd al-'Aziz took control of the Hijaz in the mid-1920's, the kingdom has regarded stewardship of the two holy mosques as among its highest priorities. This is reflected in the official title adopted by today's King Fahd ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz, who dropped the traditional "His Majesty" for *Khadim al-Haramayn al-Sharifayn* ("Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques").

The kingdom's commitment goes far beyond rhetoric. In the decade between 1986 and 1996, Saudi Arabia spent more than 70 billion riyals ($18.66 billion) on the development of the two holy mosques and their environs. "When the kingdom allocates part of its national income for expenditure on the two holy mosques," King Fahd said, "it feels that it is investing its money in the service of Islam and Muslims."

From the time of King 'Abd al-'Aziz Al Sa'ud through the reigns of Kings Sa'ud, Faisal, Khalid and now King Fahd, the holy places have undergone massive restoration and expansion projects that have transformed them more extensively than at any time in the preceding 13 centuries.

Makkah al-Mukarramah—"Makkah the Honored"—was the birthplace of the Prophet Muhammad in 570, and it was here the Qur'an was first revealed to him 40 years later. Since then it has been the place toward which Muslims turn to pray five times every day. Makkah's Sacred Mosque surrounds the Ka'ba, a cubical structure some 15 meters (48') tall, draped in a gold-embroidered black silk cover that is sewn anew each year. Its interior is empty, and its door is opened only twice a year for ritual interior cleaning. According to the Qur'an, the first Ka'ba was built by the Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) and his son Isma'il (Ishmael) as a place for the worship of the one God. This history makes it a physical reminder of the links between Islam and the dawn of monotheism; among the Qur'an and previous revelations, and between the Prophet Muhammad himself and the earlier prophets of God.

The mosque about the Ka'ba now encompasses the small hills of al-Safa and al-Marwa, between which Ibrahim's wife Hajar (Hagar) ran in her frantic search for water for her ailing infant Isma'il. In a miraculous confirmation that Hajar's trust in the one God was not misplaced, an angel appeared and brought forth what is today known as the Well of Zamzam, which is also located within the Sacred Mosque.

In addition to the annual Hajj, or pilgrimage, Makkah is also host throughout the year to hundreds of thousands of Muslims performing *'umra*, or the lesser pilgrimage, which involves several of the same rituals as the Hajj, as well as another million or more worshipers who arrive to perform supplemental *tarawih* prayers every night during the month of Ramadan. Because of Makkah's centrality in Islamic ritual and history, it is likewise the center of the Muslim world.

Development of the area surrounding the Ka'ba and the Well of Zamzam dates from within a decade of the Prophet's death. The tremendous early growth in the number of Muslims, and thus in the number of pilgrims, led the second caliph, 'Umar ibn al-Khattab, and his successor, 'Uthman ibn 'Affan, to clear away a number of houses around the Ka'ba and to erect the first wall to enclose the site. During the Umayyad and Abbasid caliphates, the mosque was enlarged further and roofs, columns and minarets were added. The *mataaf*, the open area in which pilgrims circumambulate the Ka'ba, was later paved with marble, and the *masaa*, the path between al-Safa and al-Marwa where pilgrims re-enact Hajar's panicked search, was incorporated into the mosque.

By the 10th century, the Sacred Mosque covered an area of some 27,000 square meters (6¾ acres). Throughout the Fatimid, Ayyubid, Mamluk and Ottoman periods until the early years of our century, work on the mosque was limited to renovation and restoration of this existing structure.

Upon gaining control of Makkah and the surrounding region in 1925, King 'Abd al-'Aziz set about making the Hajj safer for pilgrims. This was both a matter of religious duty and of pragmatism, because previously the pilgrims—who paid taxes for their visits—had had to brave poor sanitary conditions, inadequate accommodations and even highwaymen to fulfill their religious obligations. By the mid-1930's, British Muslim Harry St. John ('Abd Allah) Philby observed that the pilgrims were "safe, comfortable, contented, well-provided with water and medical attention, free from exacting attentions and attentive exactions, while a Government that sincerely believes that no man dies except of God's will has done more, far more than any of its predecessors to reduce the death rate of the pilgrimage."

Yet the very success of King 'Abd al-'Aziz's efforts meant that by the time World War II was over, the existing mosque was soon unable to accommodate the rising numbers of pilgrims. Congestion was compounded by the fact that the Hajj rites must each be performed in certain locations within a certain period of time by all of the pilgrims. For example, it is not possible to reduce crowding by letting half the pilgrims go to the Plain of Arafat one day while the other half waits in Makkah, and then the next day have them switch places.

In 1955, King Sa'ud, son and successor of King 'Abd al-'Aziz, ordered the first expansion of the Sacred Mosque in more than a thousand years. The mosque's area was increased five-fold, to 152,000 square meters (37½ acres), which gave it a capacity of half a million worshipers. Seven 89-meter (285') minarets replaced shorter minarets, and the *masaa* was developed to better accommodate and regulate the flow of pilgrims between al-Safa and al-Marwa. Provisions for draining floodwaters—which have always plagued the low-lying areas of Makkah—were also implemented. This expansion gave the mosque its current unique architectural character, a synthesis of Islamic styles, as well as its configuration: It is the only mosque in the world in which the direction of prayer is inward, for this mosque is the physical center point of Islam, and all others are like points on the circumference of a wheel, each oriented toward this one.

Subsequent projects in 1959 and 1981 brought further improvements to the mosque's structure and ornamentation, a network of basements and service tunnels, a vast cooling and ventilation system and further improvements to drainage.

In 1988, the largest expansion in the history of Sacred Mosque was begun under the leadership of King Fahd ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz, who adopted the title *Khadim al-Haramayn ash-Sharifayn*, or "Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques." Finished in the 1990's, this most recent expansion added a western gallery that roughly doubled the mosque's area; updated numerous older sections; and added heat-resistant tiles to the vast plazas and air conditioning throughout. **Opposite:** Two of the seven 89-meter (285') minarets that replaced shorter ones in 1955. This was done under the direction of King Sa'ud, the first of 'Abd al-'Aziz's sons to succeed him. Although the area of the Sacred Mosque was expanded five-fold in the 1950's, within a few decades the numbers of worshipers became large enough to warrant the greater expansions of the 1980's and 1990's.

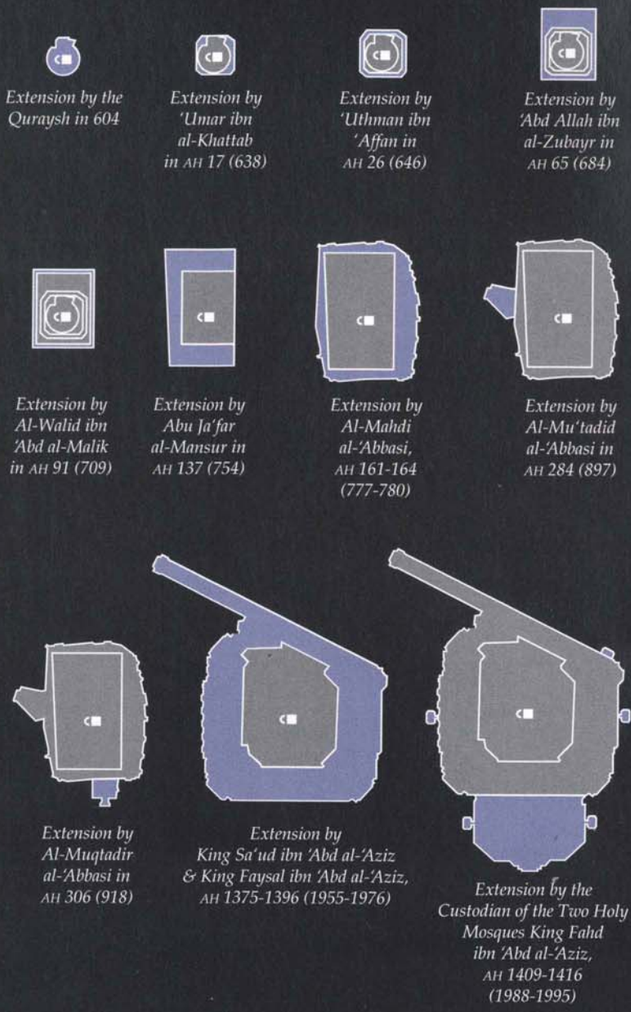
Until the middle of this century, most foreign pilgrims arrived in Makkah overland or by sea, after journeys that lasted weeks or even months. But the advent of widespread air travel has made the holy places more accessible than ever. This, combined with rapid demographic growth in much of the Muslim world, has led to an exponential growth in the numbers coming for Hajj. In King 'Abd al-'Aziz's time, 100,000 pilgrims might perform Hajj in a given year, but fewer than 60 years later, the number had surpassed 20 times that.

In 1988, King Fahd laid the cornerstone for the largest expansion project in the history of the Sacred Mosque. Now complete, the project's most visible feature is the extension of the mosque's western gallery into an area that had previously been an open esplanade. The extension is marked by a monumental entranceway framed by two new minarets, giving the Sacred Mosque a total of nine. A line of three new domes is set parallel to this entrance, while the extension also incorporates 18 smaller entranceways and some 500 new marble columns within the mosque itself. The Sacred Mosque now encompasses fully 356,000 square meters (88 acres), including the rooftop prayer areas and the open plazas surrounding the mosque. Although it comfortably holds a million worshipers, during Hajj and Ramadan more than twice as many pack into it and fill its adjoining plazas.

This latest expansion project not only allowed for more worshipers but also made them more comfortable. Specially developed heat-resistant marble tiles now cover the floor—an important consideration when daytime temperatures in the summer consistently top 40° (104°F). The complex also now boasts one of the world's largest air-conditioning plants. A new sound system and an internal radio network enable worshipers in all parts of the mosque to participate in the congregational prayers. Zamzam water is cooled and sterilized for drinking with ultraviolet light. Escalators whisk 15,000 people an hour to the rooftop prayer areas, while tunnels for pedestrians and vehicles ease the omnipresent Hajj gridlock in the streets around the mosque.

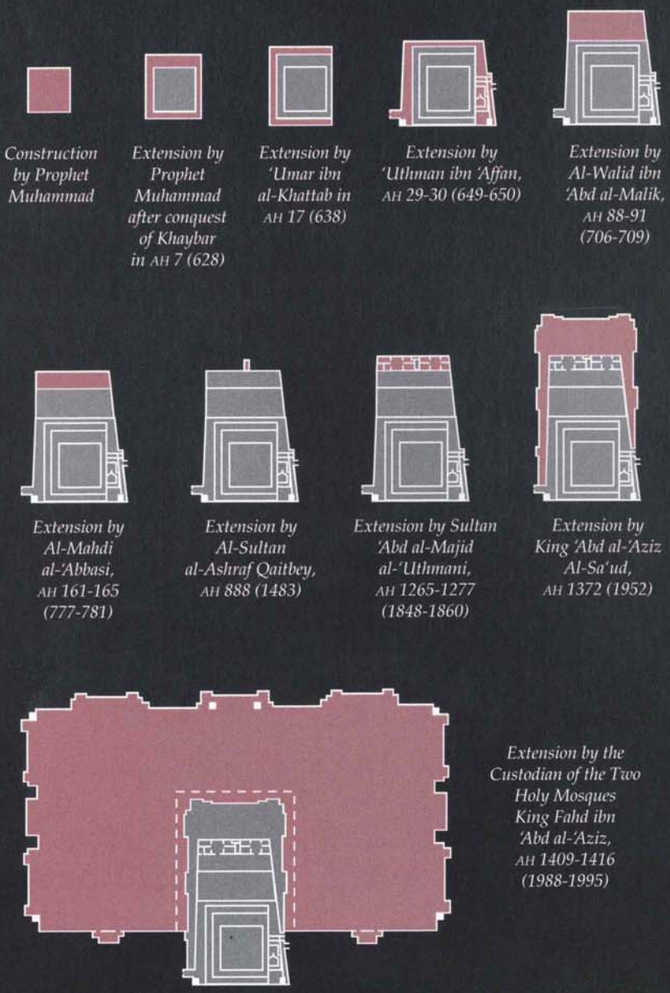
In the city itself, medical services, sanitary facilities and housing have been improved, and other sites of Hajj rites, including Mina, Muzdalifah and Arafat, have been upgraded. With 90 percent of foreign pilgrims arriving by air, a dedicated Hajj terminal at Jiddah's King 'Abd

EXPANSION OF THE SACRED MOSQUE OF MAKKAH



MADINAH: ALI KAZUYOSHI NOMACHI; GRAPHICS ADAPTED FROM MECCA THE BLESSED, MEDINA THE RADIANT (APERTURE, 1997; ISBN 0-89381-752-X)

EXPANSION OF THE PROPHET'S MOSQUE OF MADINAH



al-'Aziz International Airport handles immigration and customs processing for pilgrims. (See *Aramco World*, July/August 1981.) The terminal's innovative open design and distinctive roof line, composed of a series of tent-like canopies, have won international architectural recognition and can handle the stream of airliners—one every two minutes—that arrives in the days preceding the Hajj.

A meat-packing facility, completed in 1982, ensures there is no waste of the approximately 500,000 sheep and 20,000 camels sacrificed each year as part of the Hajj. Previously, many carcasses had to be discarded. Now, the meat is canned and distributed as part of the kingdom's international emergency relief programs. Makkah's new King Fahd Cooled Water Charity Factory produces some 40 million one-liter plastic bags of drinking water given to pilgrims during Hajj.

Despite these improvements, the pilgrimage remains the largest regular human migration on earth, and accidents —even tragedies—do occur. There have been fatal airliner crashes, stampedes and, in 1997, a devastating fire in the tent city at Mina—which led to the introduction of fire proof tents and a ban on open cook-stoves in favor of centralized kitchens. Saudi government ministries, as well as institutions such as the Hajj Research Center at Umm al-Qura University in Makkah, continue to investigate ways to improve Hajj facilities and further ensure pilgrims' safety and comfort. Beginning in 1999, the government hopes to reduce crowding by implementing a regulation under which Saudi nationals—some of whom devoutly perform Hajj each year—may attend only once every five years. (Non-Saudi pilgrims are limited by visa quotas agreed upon by Saudi Arabia and the pilgrim's country of origin.) Over the next decade, there are plans to further expand and upgrade the facilities at Mina, Muzdalifah and the Plain of Arafat.

Less well known outside the Islamic world than Makkah, "The City of the Prophet," or al-Madinah al-Munawwarah ("Madinah the Radiant"), some 450 kilometers (280 miles) north of Makkah, is Islam's second most important site, and it is here that the historic Muslim community first came of age. Originally called Yathrib, it is here that the Prophet Muhammad and his small band of believers were welcomed when they fled mounting persecution in their

Over the last decade, the Prophet's Mosque in Madinah, too, has been greatly expanded. Today the mosque and its plazas are roughly as large as the entire pre-Islamic city of Yathrib, which was renamed Madinah following the Prophet Muhammad's flight from persecutors in Makkah in 622. That *hijrah* ("migration") marks the beginning of both the Islamic calendar and the Islamic state.

native Makkah in 622. This flight, known as the *hijrah*, marks the beginning of the Muslim calendar.

In Madinah, the long process of institution-building within the Muslim community had its roots, and this is reflected in the shift in both the character of the Prophet's mission and the revelations he received there. As Marmaduke (Muhammad) Pickthall noted in the introduction to his pioneering English translation of the Qur'an,

> The Hijrah makes a clear division in the story of the Prophet's Mission, which is evident in the Koran. Till then he had been a preacher only. Thenceforth he was the ruler of a State.... The kind of guidance which he and his people needed after the Hijrah was not the same as that which they had before needed. The Madinah surahs [chapters of the Qur'an] differ, therefore, from the Meccan surahs. The latter give guidance to the individual soul and to the Prophet as a warner; the former give guidance to a growing social and political community and to the Prophet as example, lawgiver and reformer.

The verses of the Qur'an revealed during the decade Muhammad spent in Madinah, and the accounts of his actions and decisions during that time, remain the principal reference points for Muslims in their social, economic and political affairs. Even after Muhammad's conquest of Makkah in 630, and following his death in 632, Madinah remained for several decades the capital of the rapidly expanding Muslim state. The *hadith*, or traditions of the Prophet, record the affection he felt for Madinah. Abu Hurayrah, one of the Prophet's companions, relates that Muhammad asked God to bless the city:

> O Lord! Ibrahim who was Your Servant and Friend and Prophet prayed for Makkah, and I pray to you for Madinah. I am your Servant and Prophet, and as Ibrahim prayed for Makkah, so do I pray with him and pray for Madinah.

Upon the Prophet's arrival in Madinah, his first act was to select a place to build a mosque and his house. To avoid any hint of favoritism toward any of the tribes in Madinah, Muhammad left the choice of the site to his mount. Charles (Hassan) LeGai Eaton tells the story in his *Islam and the Destiny of Man*:

> One after another the people grasped the halter of his camel, Qaswa. "Let her go her way," [Muhammad] said, "for she is under the command of Allah." After wandering for some distance, seeming ready to settle (amidst growing excitement), then ambling forward again, taking her time and fulfilling her destiny, Qaswa at last halted and sank to the ground, with all the groaning and grumbling of which a noble and self-important camel is capable. Here was built, in due course, the first mosque of Islam, together with the Prophet's house and the apartments of his wives.

When the Prophet died a decade later, he was buried within the building, and his successors, Abu Bakr al-Siddiq and 'Umar, were later entombed beside him.

That first mosque was made of palm logs and bricks, and it was large for its time: some 1,050 square meters (11,300 sq ft). Today, the Prophet's Mosque is the product of an expansion project every bit as vigorous as that in Makkah, and it can hold up to a million worshipers.

Like Makkah's Sacred Mosque, the Prophet's Mosque also has a long history of expansion and renovation. The caliphs 'Umar and 'Uthman both extended the mosque, and the Umayyad ruler Al-Walid built minarets, a *mihrab* (a prayer niche for the *imam*) and additional prayer halls. Further improvements were made under the Abbasids. The mosque's distinctive green dome, which rises above the Prophet's tomb proper, was built in the 15th century while Madinah was under the control of the Cairo-based Mamluks. In 1849, the Ottoman sultan 'Abd al-Majid carried out the last expansion effort prior to the founding of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Two years before his death, King 'Abd al-'Aziz initiated a building program to increase the mosque area by some 60 percent. Later, King Faisal built some 35,000 square meters (nearly nine acres) of open plazas around the mosque, and this area was later doubled by his successor, King Khalid.

In 1985, King Fahd launched the most extensive expansion in the mosque's history, which enlarged the mosque itself by a factor of 10. As the King himself noted, the present mosque is "equal [to] the area of the city of Madinah in ancient times." Six new 105-meter (336') minarets brought the mosque's total to 10; seven new entrances were added and a series of 27 domes, each 15 meters (48') in diameter and capable of being electronically slid open or closed, were incorporated into the new roof. A dozen awnings, which resemble giant umbrellas, open automatically to shade the building's courtyards and shield worshipers from sun. The mosque is air-conditioned by a massive system that produces 54,500 liters (14,400 gal) of cold water every minute. Additional escalators, new lighting and an internal radio network were also included in the project. The extension was even designed to allow for the future addition of yet another level. Service and transport tunnels, as well as extensive drainage facilities and parking garages, have been built underground.

Although this work on the two holy mosques is without historical precedent, it is being carried out in the context of a wider amplification of the centrality of Makkah and Madinah in the global Muslim community. In the past, these were cities that seemed impossibly distant, almost mythical to many, especially those who were poor and lived in remote lands. Now, not only can the Sacred Mosque accommodate two million worshipers, allowing many more Muslims to perform the Hajj and thus fulfill one of the obligations of Islam, but as a result of the kingdom's global outreach efforts, millions of Muslims from Dhaka to Dallas now watch the Hajj on television. While this hardly substitutes for making the pilgrimage oneself, the immediacy of such broadcasts serves to bind Muslims more tightly through a ritual that is now shared more broadly than ever.

The situation is similar as the month of Ramadan draws to a close, when Muslims mark the anniversary of the first revelation of the Qur'an. On this *lailat al-qadir*, or "night of power," some three million people perform *tarawih* prayers in the Sacred Mosque—a greater crowd than during the Hajj—and millions more watch the same ritual on television or listen to it via radio, each experiencing a depth of emotion in which tears are common as the imam, or prayer leader, of the Sacred Mosque recites the Word of God on this holy night. Throughout the year, videotapes, audio cassettes and compact discs of these prayers can be found for sale in mosques and stores throughout the Muslim world, and the weekly Friday congregational prayers from both holy mosques are broadcast via satellite around the globe as well. All of these Makkah- and Madinah-based media offer believers yet more unprecendented links to the birthplace of their faith.

PREVIOUS SPREAD: ABDULLAH Y. AL-DOBAIS / SAUDI ARAMCO

In a more traditional medium, Madinah's King Fahd Holy Qur'an Printing Complex publishes some 10 million copies of the Qur'an annually, both in Arabic and in translation, which are distributed free both in the city and throughout the world. Each of the 117 million copies that the house has produced has been stamped "al-Madinah al-Munawwarah" on the frontispiece. This is consistent with the holy cities' traditions of generosity and scholarship, for it was in Makkah and Madinah that for centuries many of the Islamic world's great minds naturally met, and many stayed on to study or teach for varying lengths of time.

This legacy is preserved in Makkah at Umm al-Qura University, which takes its name from one of the holy city's appellations, "the mother of villages." In Madinah, too, as in the past, students from throughout the Muslim world come to study: Some 85 percent of the students at that city's Islamic University, founded in the 1960's, are non-Saudis who receive tuition-free religious education. When they return to their home countries, they take with them deeper knowledge of the Qur'an, *hadith* and the Arabic language—as well as vivid memories of the Prophet's city.

Speaking to a gathering of pilgrims some three decades ago, the late King Faisal said,

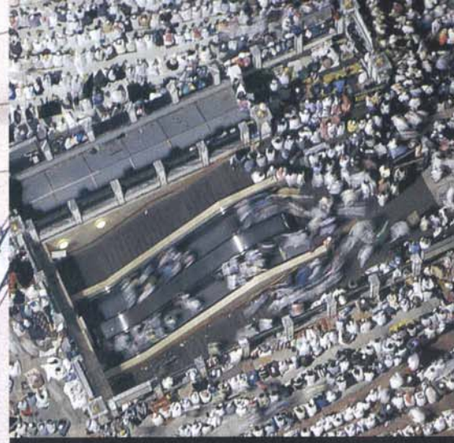
> When God bestowed on us the honor of being the servants of His House and of looking after His Pilgrims, He enabled us to say with pride that we are meeting brothers in our religion who have come to perform one of the basic duties of Islam.... Islam, my friends, is a message to all the world and not a special privilege of a specific country or a specific people. So let all unite and cooperate for the good of their world and their religion.

As the kingdom celebrates the conquest 100 *hijri* years ago that brought unity to Arabia, the Islamic commitment to a far greater unity, and to stewardship, finds two of its most inspiring expressions in the very places where the faith was born 14 centuries ago.

Greg Noakes is a staff writer for Saudi Aramco in Dhahran.

Twenty-seven sliding domes, each some 15 meters (48') in diameter, were installed at the Prophet's Mosque in the early 1990's. They allow natural ventilation to complement one of the world's largest air-conditioning systems.

Along the central arcade of the Prophet's Mosque, the rectilinear grid of the coffered ceiling is broken by the radial geometry of the chandeliers. **Left:** A workman inspects the skeletal structures of concrete forms during renovations authorized in 1985 by King Fahd, which increased the mosque's size 10-fold. **Opposite:** In the expanded mosque, daily lessons in the study of the Qur'an are offered to students of all ages, who come to Madinah from around the world, just as they have since the earliest days of Islam.



One of the most remarkable engineering feats in the renovated Prophet's Mosque is the two courtyards shaded by square, umbrella-like awnings that "blossom" automatically in sunlight. **Below:** With the umbrellas in the retracted position, the 15th-century green dome that rises above the tomb of the Prophet can be seen from the courtyard. **Above:** Fast, wide escalators whisk worshipers from one level to another.

LEFT: ABDULLAH Y. AL-DOBAIS / SAUDI ARAMCO; BOTTOM RIGHT: M.S. AL-SHABEEB

Its new doors aglow with reflections from a sunset sky, the marble plaza of the Mosque of the Prophet is dotted with worshipers from around the world. **Above:** The tomb of the Prophet is lavishly decorated, but like other tombs in Islam, it is not itself a place of veneration. **Below:** An internal video system helps officials maintain an orderly flow of the sometimes more than a million worshipers, and it proves especially useful in spotting situations that require assistance, such as the medical emergencies that inevitably occur in huge crowds.

MAIN PHOTO: ALI KAZUYOSHI NOMACHI

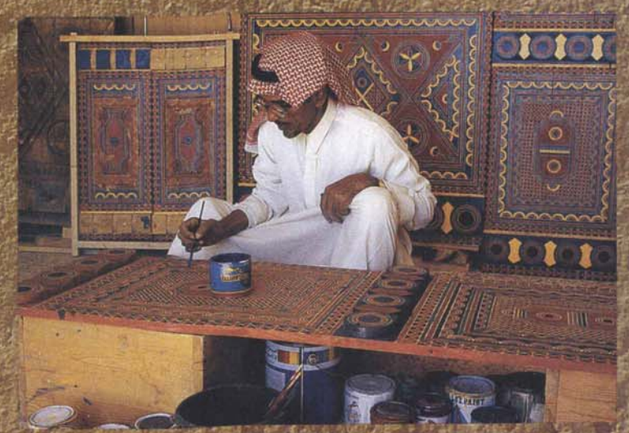
Doors of the Kingdom

Photographed by Haajar Gouverneur

Text adapted from *Doors of the Kingdom: Photographs by Haajar Gouverneur* (Aperture/Dar Nun, 1998, ISBN 0-89381-817-8)

Sometimes there is nothing more pleasant or arresting than a door. The intriguing possibilities that lie beyond or behind it have inspired many Arab poets to use the door as a metaphor for both hope and denial. Islamic scholars also use the word *bab* (door) to distinguish the various chapters of their books—for the door is, after all, the threshold between ignorance and enlightenment.

In a land known for its tents and its nomadic past, the 1996 Door Exhibit at the Heritage Center of the Nahda Philanthropic Society for Women in Riyadh allowed us to stand before an array of entrances of such variety and beauty as to make us wonder why we nowadays have such dull doors. For this article, as with the book from which it is drawn, we chose to show not the Nahda collection of some 72 doors, but rather doors where doors actually should be—as part of an edifice. In doing so, we sought the full range of doors, from the elegant to the most common, recognizing that perfect workmanship cannot be easily found, since perfection demands discernment and therefore a complete vision. Thus it is not a search for such perfection, but rather for the soul behind the craft—the dignity and truthfulness in representation—that moves us. Ultimately, since technology often only replaces inspiration with a tool and does not itself move us closer to perfection, all we can do with it is imitate and draw upon that which is already ours. Perhaps, looking at these doors, we will understand the limitations of our cluttered minds, hoping never to lose the soul that inspired and the vision that guided their form and color beyond chaos, toward infinity.



Maha Al Faisal, Director of the Heritage Center of the Nahda Philanthropic Society for Women

Architectural Styles in the Four Major Regions of Saudi Arabia

By Sultan Ghalib bin 'Awadh Al-Qu'ati and Gray Henry

Differences in climate, topography, vegetation and social conditions throughout what is today Saudi Arabia have produced regional approaches to architecture that can be grouped loosely according to the four major regions of the country: the central region, or Najd; the Eastern Province and Arabian Gulf coast; the western region, or Hijaz, and the southern mountain region, 'Asir. (See *Aramco World*, July/August 1998.)

Najd

This region is characterized by both fortress and residential architecture. One of the best examples of the fortress style is Masmak fort, built in the late 1860's, captured by 'Abd al-'Aziz in 1902 and fully restored in the 1990's. In it as well as in Najdi homes, one of the most distinctive features is the use of triangular perforations on both inner and outer walls, which serve not only as decoration, but also for ventilation, light, and the deflection of rainwater. (See previous spread.) The traditional decorative patterns were composed of rows of such triangular as well as rounded fruit designs; they adorned front doors, lintels, structural beams and occasionally the lower portions of the wall of the *majlis* (a reception and conference salon). The fortresses were decorated predominantly in blues, reds and yellows derived from gum, gypsum, powdered rock and charcoal.

Najdi houses were often built around a central courtyard, with only a few openings to the street, thus ensuring privacy for the family. Entrances to the houses were closed by large rectangular wooden doors, geometrically decorated by varied combinations of burning, carving and painting. For the sake of privacy, front doors were never directly opposite one another. The inner vertical slats of a door were of palm wood; the outer ones were of hardwood. Early 20th-century doors were sometimes made from imported tea chests and packing cases. Large doors had a diagonal hardwood brace across the back.

Saudi Door Design in Islamic Art

By Khalid Azzam

Many works within the architecture of Islam are designed to lead a person from the distractions of the outside world to the peace of an internal space. It is an architecture which establishes a hierarchy of spaces, and which distinguishes each one from the others with a series of transitional zones. In Islamic architecture, the door of a house marks the transition from community space—city, town or village—to family space, the home. It is one of the most important thresholds in the daily life of the Muslim.

Doors are often the only form of artistic expression that the private life of the family projects to the outside world. The outer walls of these building are usually blank, with very few openings and with little sense of formal composition. The bright colors and bold patterns on the front door emphasize the point of entrance to the private world of the family and provide a glimpse of the richness that lies behind the uninviting elevations and thick walls.

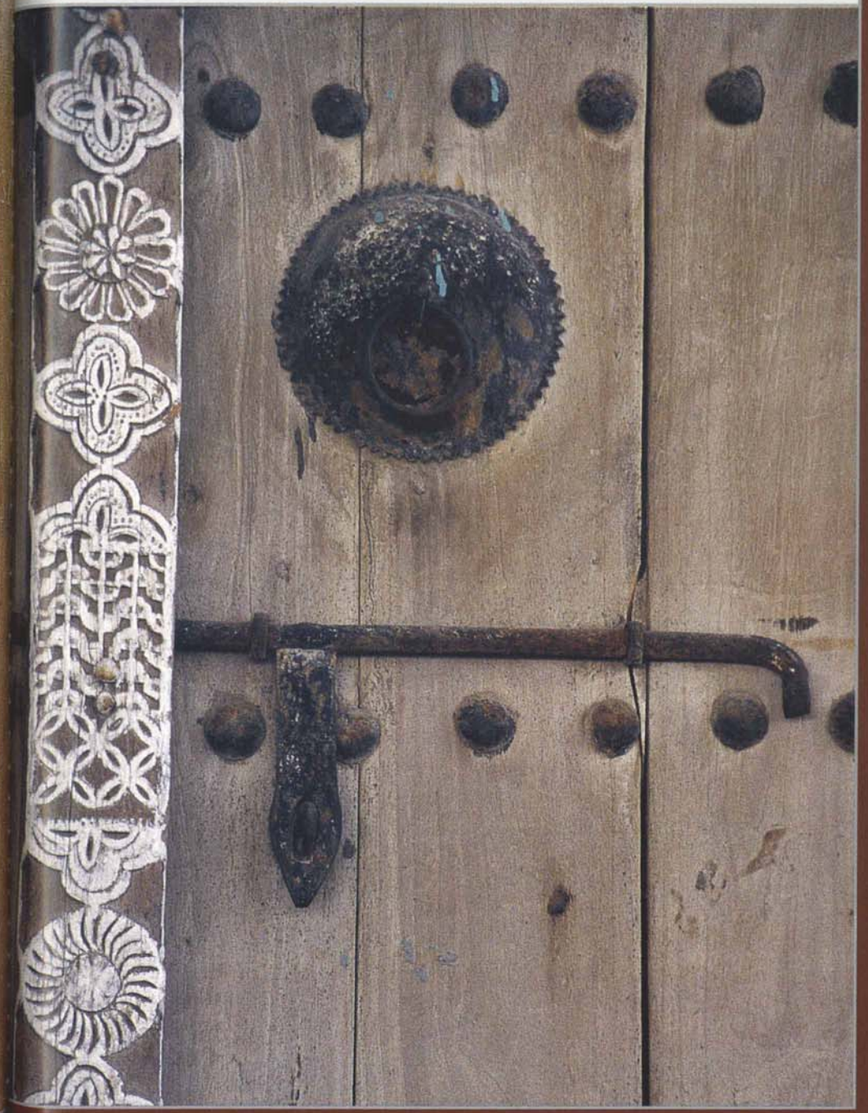
Traditional Islamic architecture has always sought the integration of the constructed environment with its natural surroundings, and that of Saudi Arabia is a good example. From the smooth curves of mud-brick construction to the massive solidity of stone architecture, and from the crenellation of the skylines to the recesses and protrusions of the walls, we see varied traditional buildings that blend gracefully with their surroundings. Even the internal space of a building, the courtyard—which is metaphorically the heart of the building—is open to the sky.

The traditional architect's aspiration to reflect laws of nature is also seen in his use of decorative techniques that deflect attention from physical mass and draw it instead to a plane of color, geometric design, or biomorphic form. This decoration is not mere adornment but an essential element in the overall

Eastern Province

The doors of this region were often decorated with a delicate white lacy pattern on a black background. Sometimes doors were decorated with round metal studs set in simple patterns and had a carved central jamb, referred to as "the nose of the door." This jamb often had marvelous designs. Metal studs set in similar patterns are also found on large chests formerly in use in this region and other areas of the Gulf.

A number of designs that one meets a little inland from the Gulf coast—right up to the edge of the Najd plateau—have roots in the Sumerian, Akkadian and Babylonian cultures, and they have survived relatively unchanged in the isolated desert region. Along the coast, refined post-Islamic Persian and Indian influences have been superimposed on these earlier Mesopotamian traditions. Indian influences appear to have been strongest from the 18th to the mid-20th centuries, whereas Persian and other neighboring Islamic regions have had a longer, more ongoing effect that is still perceptible today.



composition of the architecture. The architect, or the craftsman, consciously reproduces the forms, patterns, and rhythms he sees around him in nature to show that his work does not stand apart from, but rather with God's creation on Earth.

One of the most commonly discussed features of Islamic art has always been the prohibition of the portrayal of human figures. Some have suggested that this prohibition created a void which had to be filled and thereby caused the development of a more abstract art, in particular, geometric patterns and arabesque forms. However, these forms are not a compensation for the lack of images, but a positive contribution toward a perception of reality higher than material form, one in which the world is not a series of discrete images, objects or forms but one in which the disappearance of the human figure does not leave a void. In his *Mirror of the Intellect*, Titus Burkhardt wrote:

> By transforming a surface into a tissue of colors or into a vibration of light and shadows, the ornament prevents the mind from fixing itself on any form that says "I," as an image says "I." The center of an arabesque is everywhere and nowhere, each "affirmation" being followed by its "negation" and vice versa.

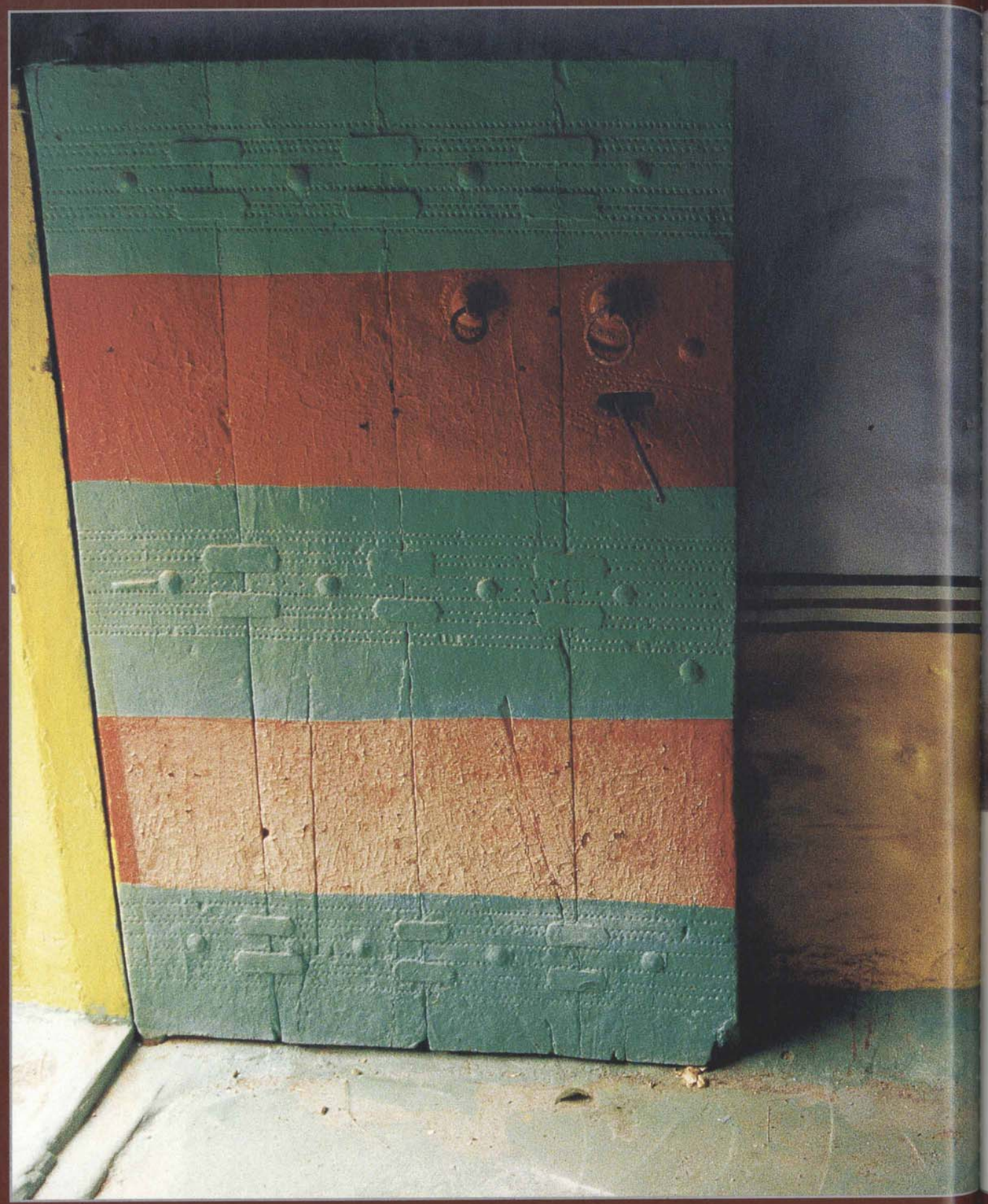
The designs employed by the artisans of these doors convey concepts that cannot be expressed through mere physical form, while at the same time they understand and fulfill the meaning of form. Form that exists on the physical level has limits of time and space. The "abstract" interpretation of form in Islamic art raises one's perception of reality from the physical realm. It encourages a contemplative state of mind and a perception, through beauty, of the manifest unity in this world. An understanding of the meaning of traditional artistic form overwhelms the individuality of the artist without suppressing his creative instinct: It stretches his mode of expression beyond the realm of the individual, into the realm of timeless art.

Khalid Azzam practices architecture in Cairo and London, where he also teaches at the Prince of Wales's Institute of Architecture.

Hijaz

The Hijaz region includes the holy cities of Makkah and Madinah, which have been pilgrim destinations for centuries. Pilgrims traveling to these sites, especially those who afterward settled in the Hijaz, brought with them aspects of their craft and culture from their countries of origin.

Doors with floral, ornate, and elliptical patterns are generally from the Indian subcontinent—especially those which are set with or framed by Moghul, Gujarati (Pathan), or Rajasthani arches (with the exception of the horseshoe type that reveals North African–Andalusian influences). Geometric motifs tend to originate in Syria, Egypt and North Africa. Strong European influences from Ottoman and other Islamic lands under European rule are also found. Some affluent houseowners imported carved doors and wooden pillars from Egypt, India, Java, East Africa and other regions.



'Asir In contrast with the sobriety of architecture and decoration in the rest of Arabia, exuberant color and ornamentation characterize those of 'Asir. The painting extends into the house over the walls and doors, up the staircases, and onto the furniture itself. When a house is being painted, women from the community help each other finish the job. The building then displays their shared taste and knowledge. Mothers pass these on to their daughters.

This artwork is based on a geometry of straight lines and suggests the patterns common to textile weaving, with solid bands of different colors. Certain motifs reappear, such as the triangular *mihrab* (or niche) and the palmette. In the past, paint was produced from mineral and vegetable pigments. Cloves and alfalfa yielded green. Blue came from the indigo plant. Red came from pomegranates and a certain mud. Paintbrushes were created from the tough hair found in a goat's tail. Today, however, women use modern manufactured paint to create new looks, which have become an indicator of social and economic change.

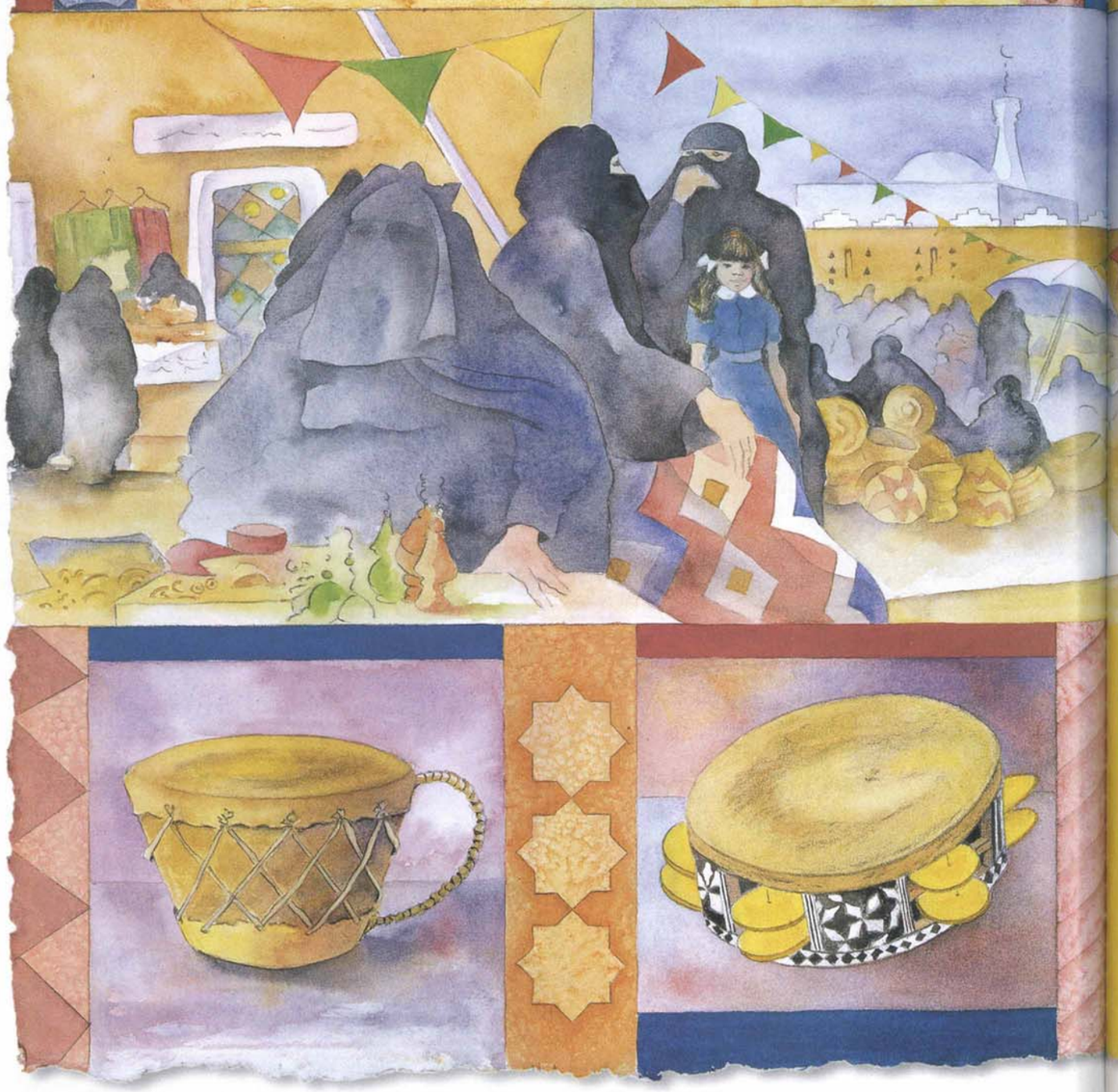
Sultan Ghalib bin 'Awadh Al-Qu'ati is a scholar of Islamic history and Arabian studies. He has written a history of the Hadhramawt region of Yemen, as well as essays on poetry, literature and commerce.

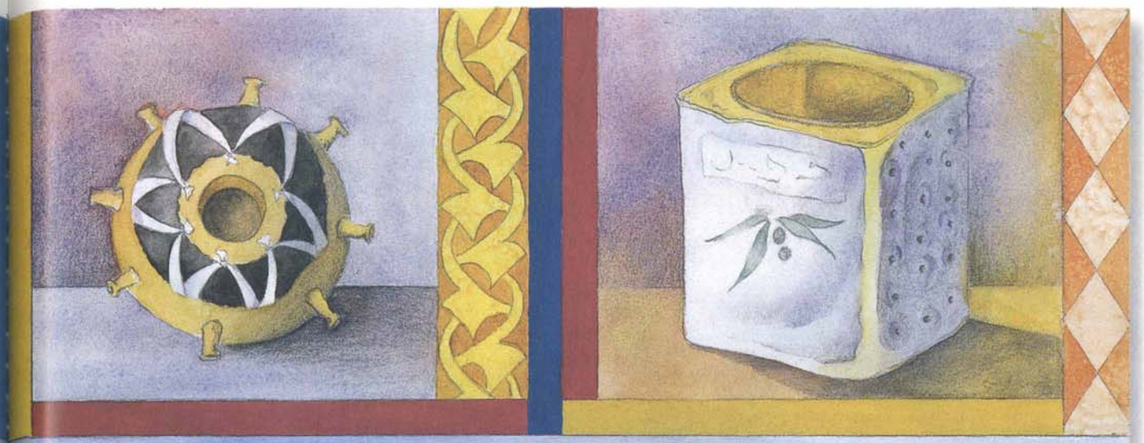
Gray Henry directs the US branch of Dar Nun, a Riyadh-based publishing house dedicated to transmitting and preserving Islamic heritage and culture through books for children.

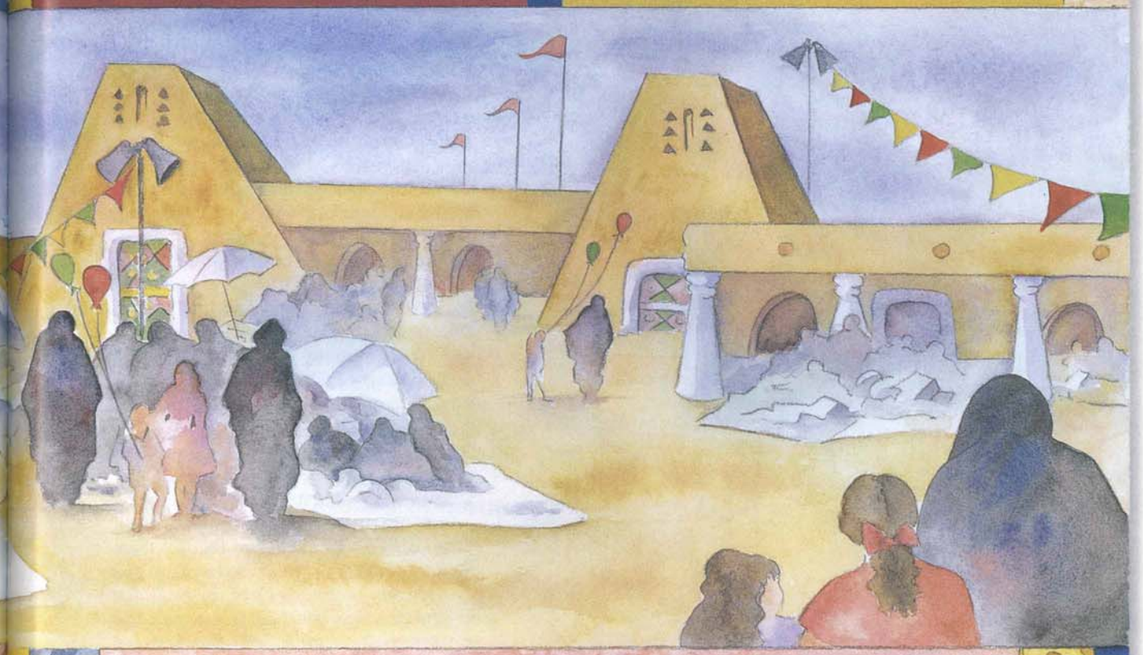
Haajar Gouverneur holds a degree in journalism from the American University in Cairo. She has worked at Arab Radio and Television in Italy, and is presently photographing the treasures of Egypt's National Library in Cairo.

Days of Song and Dance

Written by Kay Hardy Campbell ◎ *Illustrations by Judy Laertini*

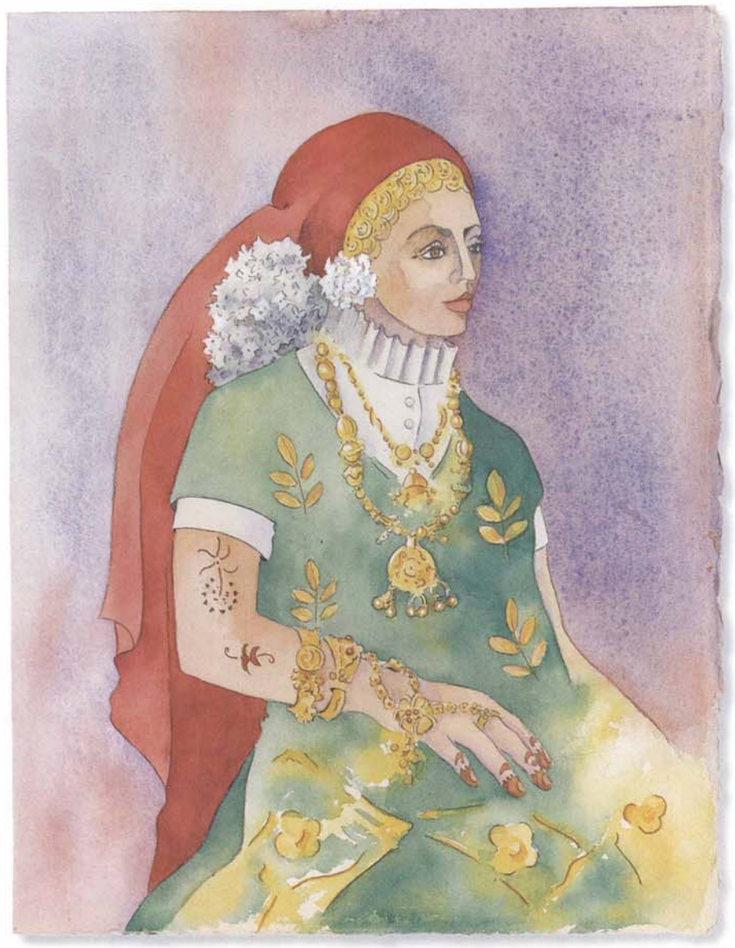






Her dark, kohl-rimmed eyes sparkled as she stepped forward and turned slowly in place, showing off a gold-embroidered green silk bride's costume from Jaizan, her home town on Saudi Arabia's southwestern coastal plain of Tihama. A row of gold coins decorated her forehead below a jasmine-covered headdress whose scent enveloped her like a mist. Floral designs traced in henna danced on her forearms. Finishing her turn, she gazed out at the audience of women that filled the festival hall outside Riyadh during the first of three women's days at Janadriyah, Saudi Arabia's national festival of traditional culture.

The young woman from Jaizan was one of many who modeled traditional bridal costumes at the opening. Other women presented centuries-old folk songs and dances.



Stepping off the stage, she presented herself first to the event's patron, HRH Nawf bint 'Abd al-'Aziz, to give her a close look at her headdress, and then paraded through the crowd of students, homemakers, professors, writers, artists, journalists and international guests. As she approached, conversations stopped, and the only sound was the jingling of her ankle bracelets.

The young woman from Jaizan was one of many who modeled traditional bridal costumes that evening, when women from eight southwestern districts presented not only their wedding traditions, but also their centuries-old folk songs and dances, all of which are rarely heard or seen outside their home region.

Since 1985, the annual festival of Janadriyah, named for the plain where it is held some 30 kilometers (19 mi) northeast of Riyadh, has become the annual focal point of Saudi Arabia's cultural life. It attracts an estimated 1.5 million visitors, and discussions of its events appear for weeks in magazines and newspapers and on live call-in television shows. Its opening night features the "Operette," a performance of music, folk dance, poetry and narrative recitation that involves a cast of hundreds; poets, writers and intellectuals illuminate nightly literary sessions; falconers, potters, weavers, traditional tailors, woodworkers and perfumers all participate in an artisan's village, and there are horse and camel races, too.

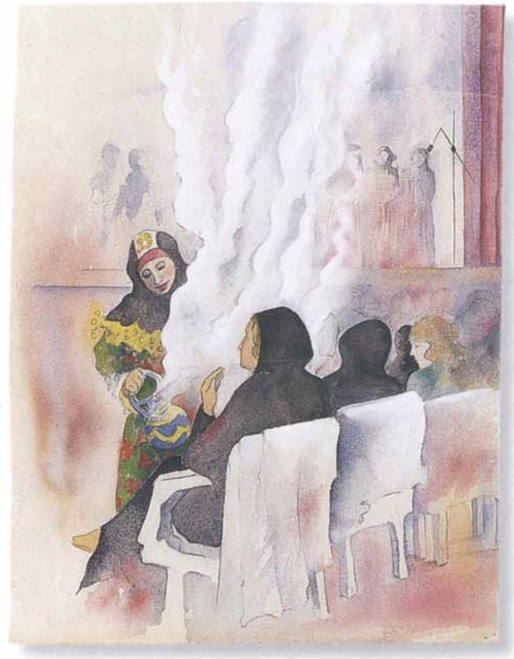
In 1998, for the 10th year in a row, the festival was given over to the arts of Saudi women—this time for three days—during which programs were presented to audiences of women only. Over the last three years, the women's programs have focused respectively on traditions of the Najd, the central province; the Hijaz, in the west; and the Eastern Province. In 1998, they honored the women artists, poets, singers and folk dancers of 'Asir, in the southwest.

Women's songs, which are generally accompanied by multilayered drumming, are an ancient tradition of the Arabian Peninsula that continues to this day in all regions. Until now largely unknown to the outside world, this music is becoming available to a global audience, thanks in no small part to the recording and video-production industries in the Arabian Gulf countries. In Saudi Arabia, women's folk songs are most frequently heard at women's wedding parties, and thus remain an art by and for women. At Janadriyah's women's days, folk groups from the south sang wedding songs that had rarely, if ever, been heard outside their home region. The singers were mountain shepherdesses, farm women of the terraced hills, and homemakers of the coastal towns. Women radio reporters taped some of their singing for broadcast on Radio Riyadh, and so, for the first time, the whole kingdom heard their voices.

Women's folk dances, too, are an age-old celebratory tradition. Like their male counterparts, Arabian women dance in groups, with occasional brief solos. The dances are performed in the context of family celebrations like weddings, religious holidays, national holidays and—more recently—school graduations. Each region, and each town within each region, has its unique dance customs, though they share other, broader traditions. For example, *al-khatwah* is a line dance popular throughout 'Asir in which the women link arms and bob to the music while shifting their weight in tiny steps, sometimes adding slight bows forward and little kicks. This dance is also performed by men, but the women's version is softer and more graceful. But not all women's dances are so: The troupe from the upland town of Mahayil, whose members donned white cotton dresses reminiscent of costumes of Sudan and Ethiopia, took the audience by storm when they began a stamping dance holding small daggers, their ankle bracelets sounding out the feverish rhythm. This dance featuring a men's weapon has its parallels in Egyptian women's cane dances and Syrian women's sword dances.

"The geography of the southern region has great variety, with its mountains, its plains, its desert, and its green-ness," said HRH Nura bint Muhammad, one of the organizers and a former director of a women's charity in 'Asir. "These different terrains result in a variety of cultural traditions—clothing, cuisine and the folk arts. We consider it a really rich region." It was during her visits to villages, she adds, that her appreciation for this richness blossomed. "Our first goal at the charity is to help the handicapped, the poor and the orphans. But during visits to the villages, I learned of these customs. So we worked to gather the traditions to present them here, as they are. This is really an invitation to the specialists to look at this region more closely."

The towns and districts of Rijaal al-Ma', Mahayil, Shahran, Bani Shahr, Bisha, al-Qahtan, Najran and Jaizan all sent women's dance troupes to Janadriyah. As they reflected influences from contacts with Africa, India, the deserts to the north and Yemen to the south, each troupe became a living example of the cultural interchange that through the centuries has shaped Arabia. During performances, the women of 'Asir passed through the audience carrying traditional aloeswood incense, known as *'ud*. Others offered delicate nosegays of jasmine and sage, as well as dates and juicy raisins, fresh from farms and oases.



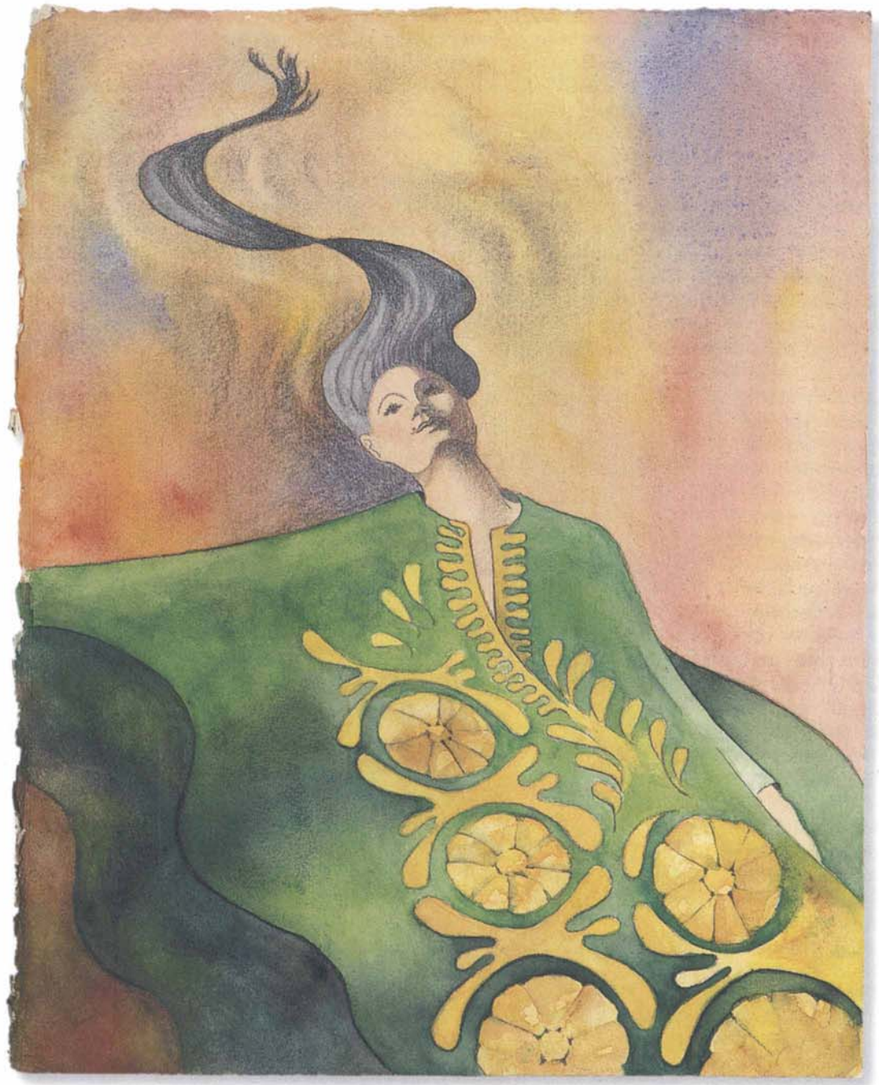
To Laila Bassam, an expert on traditional costume and a professor of home economics at Riyadh Women's College, one of the most surprising performances came from a troupe from the southern Saudi coastal town of Jaizan. "I think their costumes are so different because of the sea," she said. "You see how much the sea affects people who live near it, because it gives them contact with other places? Oman and India affected us all here in Najd too, even in the names we give material." She gives the word for Indonesian cotton, *jawa*—derived from "Java"—and that for wool: *kashmir* (from which English also takes its "cashmere").

Even some visitors from 'Asir itself were surprised at what they saw. "You know I'm 32 years old, and this is the first time I've seen these old customs and this traditional clothing!" exclaimed a woman who waited backstage for the group from her hometown of Bishah to finish performing.

Radio Riyadh reporter Ghada Muhammad said that although her maternal grandmother came from Tuhamat 'Asir, between Abha and Jaizan, "I never learned these traditions, because she passed away long ago. I knew some things, because when her family visited us, they always brought jasmine, jewelry, and some of the costumes as gifts. But I never really knew these traditions exactly. Now I've learned."

In few places do these traditions have more sway than in marriages. Today, even if both bride and groom have college degrees and shop in air-conditioned malls more often than open-air *suqs*, for their wedding the bride's family almost always hires a women's folk band to entertain the female wedding guests. It's an old custom, for since the early days of Islam and before, Arabian women have been celebrating weddings with song and the simple accompaniment of the frame drum (*tar*) and tambourine (*daff*). Modern wedding musicians make a good living on the wedding-party circuit, and although most are known only locally, some will venture out of town to play for brides who marry into a family from another province.

Other formal performances of women's music occur at the request of a patron who hires a folk band for a private party in her home to entertain her family and women friends. This too is an old custom that has been chronicled by Arab music historians such as 'Abu al-Faraj al-Asfahani, author of the 10th-century, 20-volume *Kitab al-Aghani* (*Book of Songs*). The book describes the musical life of the two preceding centuries, including performances for well-to-do women of the Hijaz by formally trained women singers and instrumentalists. While the culture of high art singing ultimately moved eastward to Baghdad, then to the other capitals of the Islamic and Arab nation, both male and female musicians of the Arabian Peninsula inherited the practices of those early years.



In Saudi Arabia, women's folk songs and dances are most frequently performed at women's wedding parties, and thus remain arts by and for women.

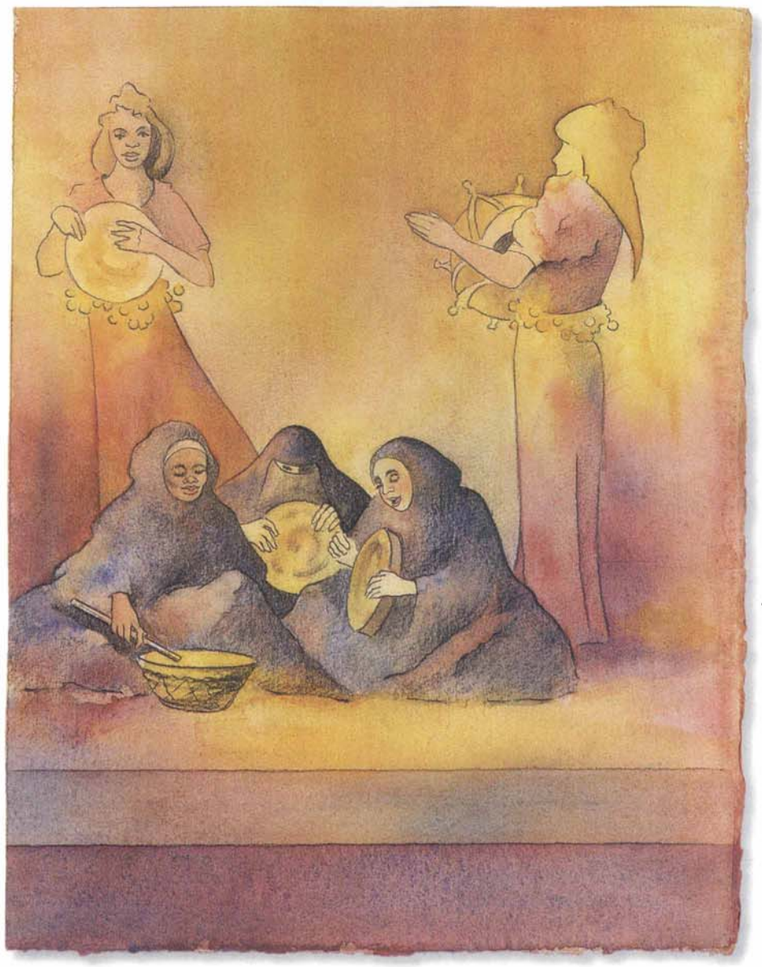
In some ways, the basic structure of the musical performance remains little changed. A lead singer, or *mutriba*, heads a group that usually has between 10 and 15 players as chorus and drummers, many of whom are friends and family. In addition to the *tar* in various sizes, in 'Asir both men's and women's folk bands use the *zir ardhi*, a shallow clay drum played on the ground with a stick; the *zalafa*, a multihandled drum that looks like a spoked wheel; and the *tanaka*, an instrument fashioned from a large rectangular date or olive tin and played as a hand drum. At Janadriyah, a group from the village of Rijal al-Ma' added three women playing the mortar and pestle to accent the end of each rhythmic phrase.

Throughout the Peninsula, women's folk songs consist of simple repeated melodies overlying complex repeated polyrhythms that pulse steadily through songs lasting up to 15 minutes. The

The singers were mountain shepherdesses, farm women of the terraced hills, and homemakers of the coastal towns. Women radio reporters taped some of their singing, and so, for the first time, the whole kingdom heard their voices.

melody usually stays in a single *maqam* (mode or scale) and is repeated throughout a series of verses, sung in colloquial Arabic, as well as both choral and instrumental refrains. The singer embellishes the melody with modest ornamentation, if any at all. While the structure is simple, the interplay between the melody and the layers of percussion is hypnotic. This simplicity of structure and style is in direct contrast to the highly ornamented Arab art singing that developed over centuries in the Islamic and Arab courts. The latter tradition employs literary Arabic and transitions among multiple rhythms and *maqams*—and in this century gave rise to artists such as Egypt's Umm Kulthum and Syria's Sabah Fakhri.

In Saudi towns and big cities, some *mutribat* play the *'ud*, the fretless precursor of the Western guitar, with an occasional accompanist on violin. Today's popular wedding singers, such as Riyadh's Nura al-Jassas and Mary Said



and Jiddah's Sarah Musaifir, favor electronic keyboards specially designed for Arab music's quarter tones—and which often come with a special key to replicate *zagharid*, or ululation, the traditional women's trilling cry of celebration.

Other Gulf-region songstresses such as Rabab and Fattoumah record with large orchestras, release compact discs and appear in music videos produced mostly in Dubai and Kuwait. Yet for all their international exposure, these singers too stay close to their musical roots: simple melodies with modest ornamentation that overlie complex rhythms. The visuals of their music videos also often reflect their musical heritage: They are often shot in traditional music-performance settings such as a women's *majlis* (reception room) or *diwan* (salon). But at Janadriyah, the audience heard only the centuries-old women's folk singing that is difficult to buy in recorded form, since it is still for women only.

"We sing this when we go out with the herds in the early morning," said a shepherd from the mountainous region of Qahtan, as she sat straight-backed in her chair backstage before her performance. Her hair was tied in a braid that fell down her back, and she casually passed around her black-and-silver face mask. Then she took a deep breath and began a melody as long as a line of poetry. It skipped up by thirds to a high point, then back down to the low end of her vocal range before ending on the base note, or tonic. Each time she repeated it, the tune seemed to explore the levels of the terraced hills she saw when she sang it at dawn, its notes echoing across the valley.

The musicians learn from each other or are self-taught. As among folk musicians everywhere, the skills tend to run in families. "I'm the leader of the troupe from Shahran and I'm from Shahran myself," explained Ji'shah 'Abdallah, a mother of five. "This is the first time I have taken part in the festival. It's a spectacular event. I've been playing music for 20 years. I learned *dugg* (percussion) and the *tar* (frame drum) from the others in the group. I taught myself how to sing."

"This is the most requested instrument of the south, the *tanaka*," said a young drummer from Qahtan, Nuha 'Abd al-Rahman, as she held up a rectangular date tin, open at one end, its sides perforated. She was wearing the traditional black, fitted dress of embroidered cotton worn by the entire group from Qahtan. "Few people play this. A lot of drummers play the *tar*, and *tubul* (cylindrical clay drums), but this is rare. You take a date or olive tin and put holes in it like this." When she started to strike it with her hand, playing its snare-

drum like tones in the *khatwah's* catchy 4/4 rhythm, four ladies stood up, joined arms and began to dance. "And I don't just play this," she remarked as she stopped, disappointing the dancers. "I also play the *zir ardhi*, the *tabl* and the *zalafa*. I play all types of percussion instruments," she pointed out. Like most folk musicians at the festival, she learned her art from her mother, also a wedding musician.

A few minutes later when the Qahtani shepherd sang on stage, without a microphone, there was no doubt her full voice would easily carry across a *wadi* or two, as she held the high notes in suspension to maximize the distance the notes could echo.

Meanwhile, the troupe from Bishah, a town on the edge of the desert that stretches northeastward to Riyadh, sat patiently outside in the spring sunshine listening, waiting to go on next. Their brilliant red dresses and black headscarves were reminiscent of the Bedouin. "Every year during the holiday in [the month of] Rabi' al-Awwal, we have huge celebrations in Khamis Mushayt. We perform everything there," explained Umm Fahad, leader of the group. Her troupe of a dozen members occasionally travels as far as Jiddah for parties. She laughed when I asked how she learned her art, her gold-and-turquoise nose post gleaming against her dark skin. "I learned the old songs, *al-turath al-awwal* ["the old traditions"], from my mother and aunts and I prefer them. My girls here in the group," she said, calling over her teenaged daughter Salwa and a niece, "they like the new songs."

At last the women from Bishah danced onto the stage in a tight-knit group to a pounding 6/8 rhythm, carrying the town flag. Some of them loosened their long hair and swung it from side to side as they hopped. This distinctive women's dance movement, found in many parts of the Arabian Peninsula, is known as *al-na'ish*, or "the hair toss." It is seen as far north as Kuwait and is believed to have originated among the Bedouin. The audience cheered loudest for dancers with waist-length tresses that flew out in a spectacular arc around their heads, pulsing with the rhythm. The Bishah dancers so stirred the audience that many stood up to clap, whistle and encourage them, sometimes waving the edges of their *abaya*s in time to the drumming.

Most listeners to Saudi women's folk music don't judge the groups on any critical criteria other than their power to move the audience. Fatimah from Bishah said that in her home town there are "about 10 folk groups like this one, but this group is the best."

After the traditional folk groups finished their presentations, a group of girls from Riyadh, some as young as five years old, performed modern interpretations of 'Asiri dances, choreographed by a young secondary-school administrator. The formal choreography blended traditional movements with modern dance, and they even included dancing with swords to mimic the men's sword dance, *al-ardha*, and a few moments of especially difficult "hair tosses" executed in figure-eight patterns.

Meanwhile, outside the performance hall on the festival grounds, hundreds of women streamed in and out through the gates. "Fresh dates, fresh dates here!" called out women staffing the stall of the Nadheed factory, where they also gave away t-shirts. Another booth sold fresh *falafil* (fried bean patties). Women by the hundreds visited the stalls of the traditional craftsmen in the artisan's village, for in such places it is traditional that men and women can mix. Under a full-sized replica of an 'Asiri stone fort, dozens of other women set up shop to sell their craft goods, just as they do on market days in towns and villages all over the country. Ali Alaayim, an embroidery and clothing artisan from 'Asir, smiled as he estimated he had sold 100 machine- and three hand-embroidered dresses. Nearby, Umm 'Abd Allah and her two daughters from Abha sold traditional silver jewelry as they had for the past four years at Janadriyah.

Throughout the Peninsula, women's folk songs consist of simple repeated melodies overlying complex repeated polyrhythms that pulse steadily through songs lasting up to 15 minutes.

The women's festival also included evening events in Riyadh. Princess Nawf was the patron of an evening of poetry at King 'Abd al-'Aziz Library that featured Saudi women poets reading their work—poems dealing both with social issues and with the same inner reflection that poets engage in worldwide.

At the campus of Riyadh's King Sa'ud University, women also ran evening panel discussions about social issues.

One concerning changes in the family drew an especially large crowd. Najaat (her first name), a teacher from Riyadh, said that Janadriyah "is the greatest opportunity during the year to meet so many women writers, intellectuals, journalists and visitors. It's like a wedding. It is an opportunity to exchange ideas, to understand the problems of others. Of all of Janadriyah, I love the open debate the most, because it is a dialogue that we think about a lot. Saudi women are gaining skills, experiences and superior qualifications, and society cannot do without them. Society should know about them."

"The attendance at the cultural evenings is really amazing," pointed out poet Huda al-Daghfag, who also writes for national and international magazines. "You'll notice there's not an empty chair. It shows that Saudi women are very thirsty for ideas," she said. "Most of the women attending are housewives. Often you see mothers with their daughters next to them. They want their daughters to hear about these issues."

"Janadriyah has generated much interest on the popular and the official level. It crystallizes the rising interest among Saudis in all aspects of folk culture and traditional life," said folklore expert Sa'ad Sowayan, who wrote his doctoral thesis on Arabia's folk *nabati* poetry and is considered its leading proponent in Saudi Arabia today. He is also heading the compilation of a 15-volume encyclopedia of traditional Saudi culture. "We want to maintain a continuity between the past and the present," he said.

"I think there is no pleasure equal to that of seeing traditional performances, for example of seeing people in traditional costumes, even their traditional way of sitting and walking, body language and gestures. All these things are very interesting to watch and study. Yet how do we open our eyes and minds and try to draw meaning from all this? You can get all sorts of meanings and explanations from these things. If we are interested in studying the moon and the stars, maybe it is even more important to study ourselves, to study our planet, and to study what is on earth. Those things are more immediate, relevant and important for our survival and well-being," he adds.

"Janadriyah helps the new generations to understand cultural heritage, how our society was in the past for our fathers and grandfathers," said writer Jahayir al-Masayid during one of the festival's evening discussions. She spoke quietly, occasionally running her fingers along the long scarf at her neck that matched her long white gown. "We are a developing society, and we are still advancing one step at a time. In recent years we have been able to take giant leaps. These leaps need a generation that understands what we were in the recent past. Janadriyah responds to the questions, 'What were we in the recent past?' 'How did our fathers and grandfathers live?' And 'How can we benefit from the future, and meet it?'

"The importance of Janadriyah is two-fold, both domestic and international," she continued. "First, it allows us to display our heritage on the national stage. Then the cultural and intellectual discussions allow us to shed light on the most important issues that we want to discuss, whether they be social, intellectual or humanitarian issues. On the international level, Janadriyah has enabled us to build a bridge between our society and other societies. Our visitors from abroad see the progress we have made. At Janadriyah they also see that there are people who think, speak and discuss and have their own independent opinions, and who can study, become doctors, intellectuals or writers. And women too can become writers, and teachers. This is important, because people outside don't know what is happening here at all. We can build a bridge between our country and the rest of the world.

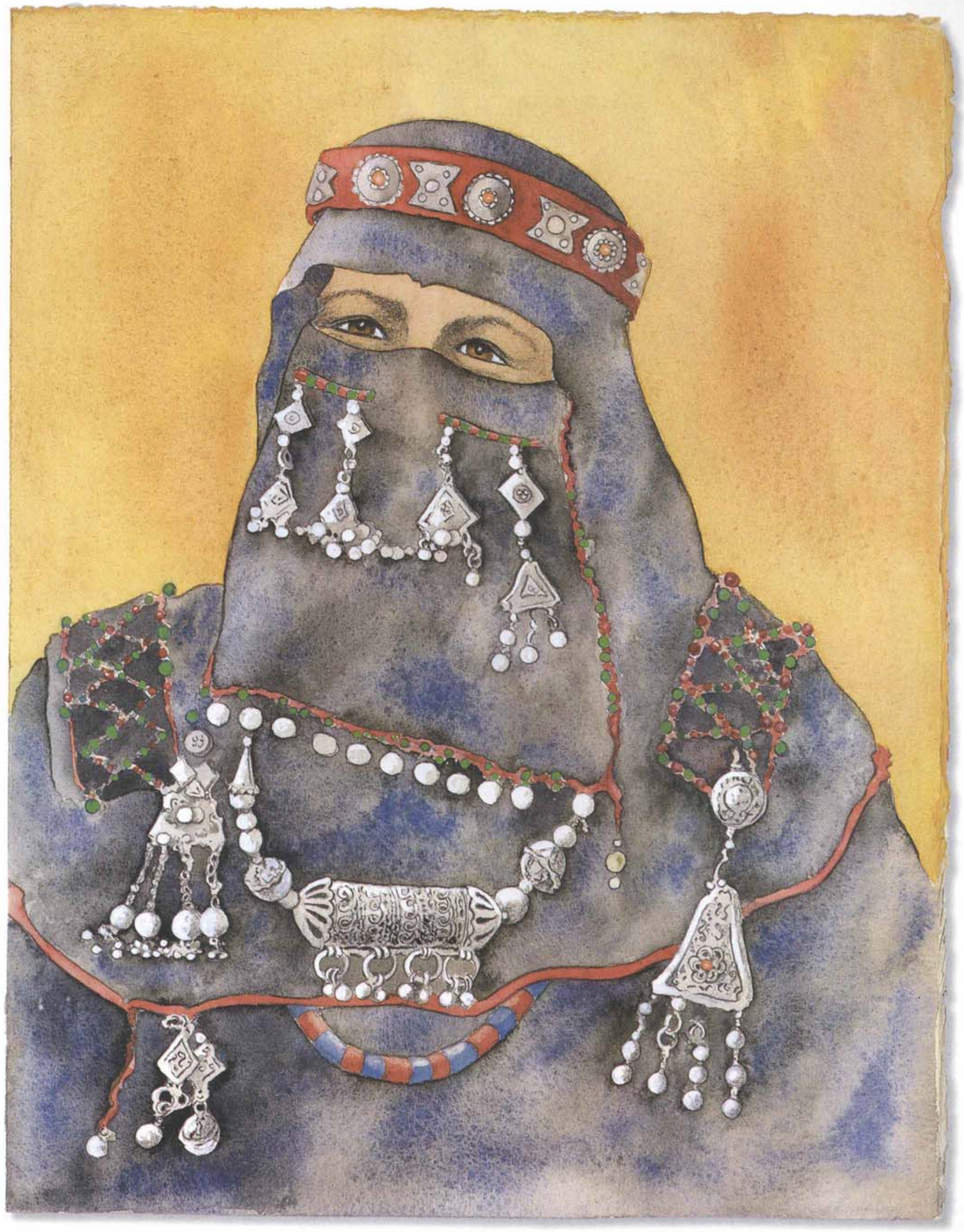
"Another point," she continued, "is that it has helped us here to be open to other cultures, and this is important. Not only do people learn about us, we also get to know others' ideas. Our ideas, methods and points of view might differ, but this does not destroy the nature of friendship. On the contrary, it helps our society develop and flourish."

Two days after the festival closed, Janadriyah's executive committee chair HRH Mut'ib ibn 'Abd Allah took a nonstop stream of calls about the festival on *"Wahlan li Wajh"* ("Face to Face"), a live call-in television show. The audience appeared to be discussing the festival as if it had been a World Cup soccer match and this were the post-game wrap-up. Fatimah, calling from Makkah, suggested they send honor students to the festival as a reward for their studies. A correspondent from the Eastern Province daily *Al-Yom* suggested the government increase its support for the teaching and preservation of the folk arts.

As for the next Janadriyah, which will commemorate the *hijri* centennial of the beginning of the Saudi state, there will be special programs from all four major regions of the country. The women organizers hope that once again the festival hall will fill for several days with women and their traditions, with the scents of incense and jasmine, with the sounds of multilayered drumming and of women's voices raised in song and *zagharid*, all in loving recreation and living invitation to the world of their grandmothers and great-grandmothers.

Former Saudi Gazette *and* Arab News *writer Kay Hardy Campbell lives near Boston, where she studies classical Arab music and helps direct the annual Arabic Music Retreat. She recently wrote the script for* Shoma, *a dance-theater production based on a Bedouin folktale.*

Watercolor artist Judy Laertini attended the Alberta [Canada] College of Art. She lives in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, where she teaches drawing and watercolor through the Dhahran Art Group.



Janadriyah responds to the questions, "What were we in the recent past?" "How did our fathers and grandfathers live?" "How can we benefit from the future, and meet it?"

The Culinary Kingdom

With a name meaning "at the bottom of the pot," fi qa'atuh is an Eastern Province dish of rice and shrimp layered with peppers, tomatoes and potatoes and spiced with dried limes, cloves, cinnamon sticks, saffron and rose water—a combination of Indian and Saudi influences.

FAISAL I. AL-DOSSARY

Written by Ni'mah I. Nawwab
Photographed by Kristie Burns

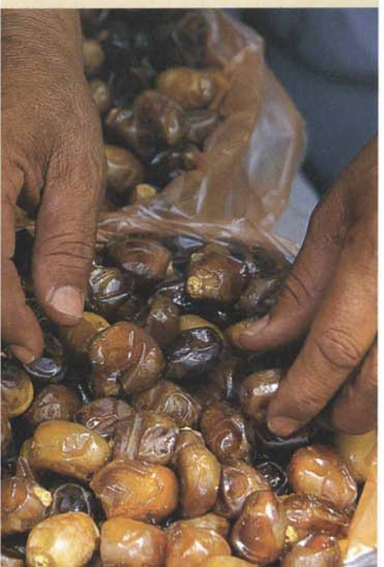
Saudi Arabia's food is a reflection of the country's history and its people's customs, religion and ways of life. For centuries, Arabs of the Peninsula have traded with—and beyond—India, Africa, Central Asia and the Levant, and that trade has brought Arabia not only wealth but also cultural and especially culinary influences. In urban centers, the simple Bedouin diet of dates and milk yielded to dishes made with a steadily growing repertory of ingredients, including spices, and soon a flavorful and varied Saudi cuisine emerged.

Perhaps nowhere in the Peninsula is the cuisine more varied, rich and cosmopolitan than in the western province of Hijaz. From the earliest times, caravans laden with frankincense and myrrh, spices and other goods propelled the growth of the region, which lay athwart important trade routes of the ancient world. Makkah, Madinah, Jiddah and Taif became thriving business comunities.

The emergence of Islam in the seventh century, however, had a marked effect on the foodways of the region. Not only were some foods and drinks prohibited, but pilgrims flocked to Makkah and Madinah for the Hajj from greater distances and in greater numbers than had attended the annual pagan festival of pre-Islamic times. Every year, some stayed behind and wove themselves into the fabric of Hijazi society. Others came to the holy cities to escape religious persecution elsewhere. All these immigrants were ultimately fully assimilated, but they collectively left a deep impact on the customs and dress of the main population centers of the Hijaz, and their distinct cooking traditions enriched Hijazi cuisine. In modern times, with increasing mobility within Saudi Arabia, the influence of the Hijaz has reached all regions of the kingdom.

The sophisticated Hijazi urban merchant class has adapted and adopted many exotic dishes from Egypt, Syria, Turkey, India, Indonesia and Central Asia—but has assimilated them so

Produce in Saudi Arabia, as in much of the world, is both domestic and imported. Bananas may come from Lebanon, mangoes from India, apples from the United States and tangerines from Morocco—all on sale next to Saudi melons, carrots and cucumbers. ***Below:*** *Though they have been a staple for millennia, fresh dates still make a welcome gift even on elegant social occasions. They are sold in more than 70—some say more than 100—stages and varieties.* ***Opposite:*** *Generosity in both variety and quantity are important to hospitality. Here rice is prepared for a wedding party.*



completely that today it is difficult to think of those dishes as foreign. They are now almost indistinguishable from the indigenous Hijazi cuisine, as represented by *harisah*, a dish of meat with crushed wheat, served with sugar; *'aysh abu laham*, a pizza-like dish topped with meat, leeks and tahinah; *jubniyyah*, a dessert made with goat's cheese; *ma'sub*, bananas mashed with sweetened homemade whole-wheat Arab bread; *lahuh*, crepes with meat and yoghurt; and *mutabbaq*, pastry with minced meat or cheese, bananas or cream.

As a child in the early 1970's, visiting my Aunt Maymunah in Makkah, I remember passing through the dimly lit alleyways of Ajyad—a 1500-year-old quarter in the heart of Makkah—in my rush to attend sunset prayers at the Holy Mosque. On my return, the area would be completely unrecognizable. Lanterns hung at the ends of stalls, merchants uncovered their wares and passersby feasted their eyes on the treasures revealed. Within minutes the alleys were transformed into »a bustling market.

People lined up in front of bakers selling huge rounds of sesame-garnished *tamis* bread, originally from Central Asia. Then they moved on to vendors preparing Egyptian-style *ful mudammas*. This stewed fava-bean dish is now an integral part of Hijazi meals, both as a breakfast staple and as a dinner entrée. Other shoppers waited patiently for a portion of *ruzz Bukhari*, a rice dish synonymous with Hijazi cuisine all over the kingdom—though as its name indicates, it too came from Central Asia. Yet other people bought *sambusak*, a light Indo-Iranian fried pastry stuffed with meat or vegetables, an item that would have been familiar to the citizens of Harun al-Rashid's Baghdad. These and many other dishes with foreign pedigrees are now as Hijazi as the Madinan *'asidah*, made of mashed dates mixed with whole-wheat flour, or the Makkan *lahuh*.

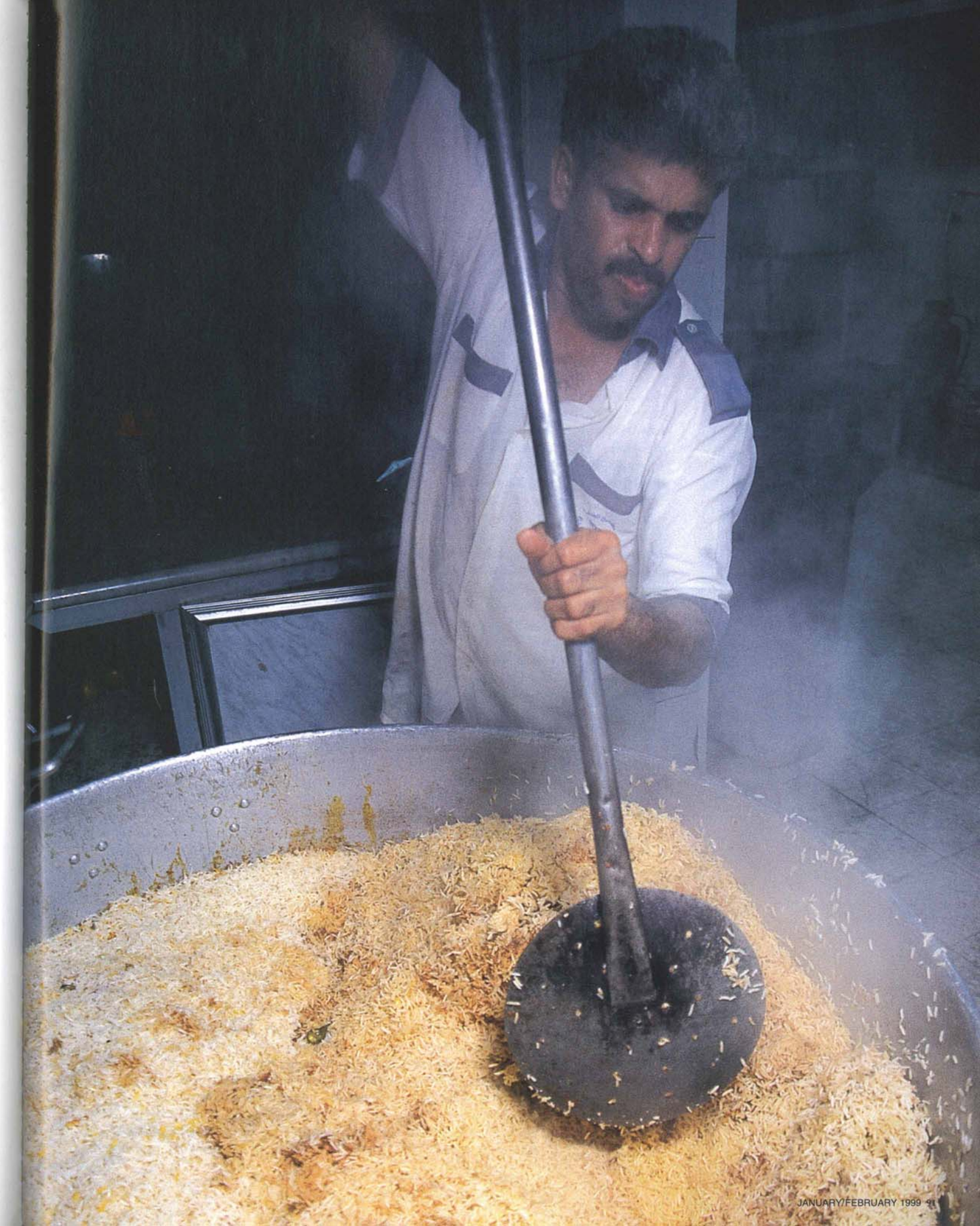
Naturally, I was drawn to the vendors selling snacks. I would stop one who was balancing on his head a tray filled with such goodies as *tirmis*—fresh, salted, crunchy lupine beans—and *hulbah*, fenugreek sprouts. Another hawker sold dinner-plate-sized, multicolored rice crackers known as *manfush*, as well as Indonesian shrimp crackers. My favorite was the seller of boiled chickpeas, who cried, "Warm *balilah*, warm *balilah*, come and get it," as he deftly mixed pickles, spices, vinegar and, on request, hot-pepper sauce into the chickpeas. I would often hear a few attention-getting hand-claps from a grilled window in one of the multi-story houses nearby. Glancing up, I would see a feminine hand lowering a basket to a vendor. The vendor would pluck the money from the basket, replace it with the requested bit of food and the basket would ascend. Many housewives bought snack foods in this modest and expeditious manner.

Today when I visit Makkah and Jiddah, I turn at the slightest sound, hoping to see a vendor. Instead, I see restaurants—including fast-food restaurants—on most corners, and opt instead for a home-cooked meal. So, again, I head for my aunt's house, where I can enjoy a typical smorgasbord of Hijazi cooking, some of its dishes of pre-Islamic provenance, others as modern as American apple pie. At my aunt's home, breakfast often starts with *harisah*, *ma'sub*, *ful mudammas*, Nabulsi cheese, Syrian olives and local eggs, along with *tamis* bread and Arab bread—the kind called "pita" in the United States.

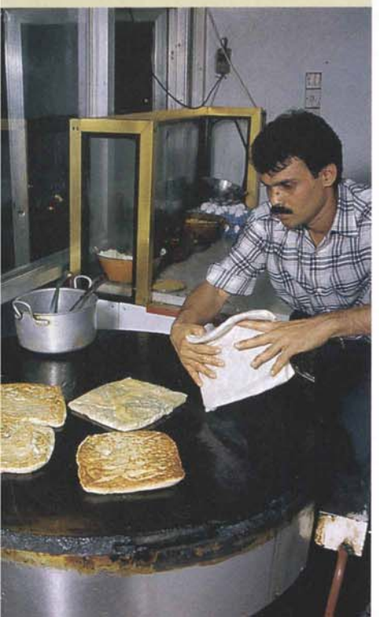
As more and more families with two working parents find they cannot easily get together for lunch, dinner has become the main meal in most homes, except on weekends. That meal typically begins with soup and a green salad. These are usually followed by rice, two vegetable dishes, a meat dish and fruit or various types of dessert. The rice dish may be plain white, or saffron-tinted *biryani*, red-hued *ruzz Bukhari* or brown-tinged *sayyadiyyah*. The last is an unusual rice-and-fish dish that Makkans learned from the Jiddawis—the people of Jiddah. Traditionally, Makkans did not eat fish because of their inland location, but as travel between the two cities became easier, fish dishes became more common.

Jiddawis' love affair with seafood has deep historical roots. To honor a special guest, they often lay out course after course of fish specialties, beginning with a fish soup and fish salad, followed by fish patties, fish cooked in coconut milk Indonesian-style and fish baked with tamarind sauce, *tahinah* or coriander leaf (cilantro), and ending with *sayyadiyyah* or *biryani* with fish or shrimp.

Makkans, meanwhile, have long favored vegetable and meat dishes. Okra (ladyfingers), white beans, cubed potatoes, peas or other available vegetables are prepared with meat and a variety of spices and sauces. One dish in which dill is used—generally rare in Saudi cooking—is *dubbah 'arabi:* squash, yellow lentils and lamb, heavily flavored with dill and cooked in a tomato-based sauce. Sorrel, spinach or green haricot beans are often combined with meat, or sautéed in oil without meat. Lentils are sometimes cooked with spinach, purslane, sorrel or other leafy greens that have a high iron content to mitigate some of the metallic taste of the iron.



Little girls learn to roll and fill sambusak, *a dough-wrapped mixture of ground meat and spices that may be either baked or deep-fried.* **Below:** *A popular griddle-fried dish—also in the category of dough-wrapped spiced-meat dishes—is* mutabbaq, *a "fast food" whose popularity has spread from the Hijaz to the entire kingdom. Its name comes from the word* tabbaq, *which means "to fold."*



Another favorite dish is the well-known Egyptian *mulukhiyyah*, mallow cooked with chicken or meat in a soup-like mixture, garnished with garlic fried in oil and served with either bread or rice. Stuffed vegetables, Mediterranean or Turkish in origin, are also popular. Known as *mahshi*, these may be tomatoes, grape leaves, cabbage leaves, green peppers, potatoes, carrots or zucchini—or a combination of these—stuffed with rice and meat. They are cooked in a spiced tomato-based sauce.

Makkans have long been acclaimed for their meat recipes. Lamb shanks, chicken cooked in gravy, or *kuftah* (ground-meat patties) are served with lemon wedges and Arab bread, or often with rice. A typical Makkan dish for special occasions—prepared by professional cooks who come to the home with their grills, skewers and ingredients—is *mabshur*, very lean, finely ground lamb that is pressed by hand onto skewers and grilled. It is served on a bed of rice along with a thick yoghurt salad prepared only with this dish, in which the yoghurt is enriched with a mixture of clarified lamb fat and butter, known as *samn baladi*.

Special occasions such as religious holidays, weddings, funerals and the nighttime meals eaten during the month of Ramadan are times when traditional rice dishes are served to guests. *Ruzz bi hummus* is often served to family members and mourners at funerals. This specialty dish of chickpeas, meat and rice is usually cooked in the meat broth and served with a tahinah-and-cucumber salad spiced with a dash of cumin, salt and pepper. *Saliq* is popular at weddings, a rice-and-lamb (or nowadays also rice-and-chicken) dish originally from Taif, also prepared by professional cooks. They build fire pits and fill pots big enough to accommodate a whole lamb. They boil the meat for several hours to make a rich broth and add rice, then milk. When the rice is a smooth consistency and almost flows, it is poured into trays that can serve up to 20 people, and topped with pieces of lamb.

A green salad and a hot sauce, *duqqus*, are served with this dish. *Duqqus*—typically Hijazi but now gaining fame in other parts of the kingdom—is made of fresh coriander, hot chile peppers, garlic, tomatoes and lemon juice.

A Hijazi meal is rounded out with fresh fruits and desserts. The Hijaz is rich in regional desserts such as *labaniyyah*, a sweet made with milk; *jubniyyah*, a delicacy made with Taif goat cheese; and *ridha al-walidayn*, a milk pudding whose name means "parental approval," perhaps because it is so sweet and nourishing. Due to the once-powerful Ottoman presence in the area, Turkish desserts also abound, as do desserts of Syrian, Egyptian, Indian and Euro-American origins. *Umm 'Ali* and *'aysh al-saraya*, both made with bread, baklava, rice puddings and many other desserts are the crowning touch of a meal, often followed by mint or green tea or Turkish coffee.

The Najd, or "highland," is located in the central region of the kingdom, between the mountains of the Hijaz and the flat coastal plain of the Arabian Gulf. Isolated by its red-sand deserts, it retained its local characteristics until the coming of Islam, when many Najdis traveled as far as China in the task of propagating the faith. Their resourcefulness and adaptability served them well in the societies they found in a world beyond their own.

Those characteristics have been called on by several other factors since the early days of Islam. Trade took Najdi merchants to Syria, India and other countries. Difficult economic conditions sometimes drove Najdis to migrate temporarily to neighboring countries. The Saudis' extensive mobility among the country's regions has also made an impact. The oil boom and the accelerated pace of change that accompanied it opened new vistas. Modern transportation, communication and other technologies added another element of change. As a result, the simplicity of the Najdis' ancestral cuisine, which earlier had been based mainly on wheat, rice, milk, dates and a few vegetables grown in the oases—precious islands of green in the desert—has given way to a rich medley of dishes.

Many Najdi dishes combine whole-wheat or rye bread with vegetables and meat to make a nutritious meal. *Tharid*, for example, known from pre-Islamic times, is prepared with layered wafer-thin wheat-dough rounds saturated with broth and topped with meat and vegetables. *Marquq* differs only in that the dough sheets are cooked with the meat and vegetables and then layered into a serving dish.

Modern Najdis, unlike their forefathers, have a wide variety of vegetables available, grown in the kingdom or imported. With the introduction of green beans, eggplants, zucchini, squash and mushrooms, their menu has become more elaborate.

Preparation of most of their dishes is time-consuming, however. *Haris*, for example, is prepared throughout the Arabian Gulf countries, but Najdis have made it an art, creating variations for all palates. This wheat-and-meat dish requires the cook to pound the wheat—which has been soaked overnight—till it turns mushy. Red meat or chicken is cleaned of all fat and deboned, and boiled with the wheat until the ingredients are indistinguishable. Rice is sometimes added to give the dish a smooth consistency. *Haris* is garnished with a flavorful mixture called *hashwah*—browned onions, ground dried limes, black pepper and cardamom—and topped with either *samn* (clarified butter) or ordinary butter.

In the past, when extended families lived together, women used to take turns pounding the wheat, a long, arduous, arm-tiring job. Nowadays *haris* is often ground in food processors, but many women still prefer to prepare it in the traditional way, believing that the desired consistency can only be achieved by hand.

A similar dish, *jarish*, made with cracked whole wheat, has two Najdi variants. One is creamy-hued, prepared with yoghurt. Another, *jarish nathri* or *mufallaq*, contains tomatoes and also has a different consistency, as the wheat is sautéed in oil instead of boiled.

Desert truffles, *faq'*, have their aficionados in Najd, as elsewhere, and during the spring, especially after it rains, families often go truffle hunting. According to a Najdi lady from 'Unayzah, "it requires extremely good eyesight as well as experience to spot the slightly raised and cracked spots that indicate that truffles are growing underneath." When the expedition returns loaded down with truffles, women get the job of cleaning them, "a very tiring job." The truffles are often "*very* sandy, and removing their outer skin is a long job," she adds. However, truffle-lovers say it's worth it, particularly when they taste them in soups, gravies and rice. Truffles continue to be included in traditional dishes such as *tharid* and *ruzz mutabbaq*, a layered rice dish in which they are prepared with meat or chicken and vegetables.

Guests are often impressed with Najdi meals made up of multiple dishes turned into one dish. *Al-badiyah* is one, specially prepared during 'Id al-Adha, the Festival of Sacrifice, which Muslims celebrate worldwide following the pilgrimage to Makkah. After early-morning prayers on the first day of the 'Id, whole Najdi neighborhoods share this multi-layered dish. Wheat cooked in lamb broth and garnished with onions is covered with a layer of round sheets of dough that have been cooked with vegetables and tomato sauce, then garnished with more onions. The final layer is saffron-flavored rice sprinkled with rose water and topped with meat. Then the dish as a whole is garnished with sliced boiled eggs, dried limes, tomatoes and peppers to make a meal that sticks to your ribs for hours.

Spit-roasted lamb, *kuzi*, is usually the main dish at gatherings that celebrate a birth, marriage or promotion, or honor a special guest. It is served with great ceremony, often presented on huge trays set on the ground on colorful carpets. Saudi hospitality is exemplified by this dish, particularly when we take its preparation into consideration. Chickens are stuffed with cooked macaroni and are used in turn, along with hard-boiled eggs, to stuff a whole lamb. Aromatic rice, flavored with saffron and cooked with nuts, raisins and caramelized onions, is added until the lamb is fully stuffed. It is then sewn up and roasted till the meat is butter-soft. When it is done, the lamb is carved to reveal the various stuffings, and served on a bed of the rice that filled it, with a green salad on the side.

In Najd, as in the rest of Arabia, hospitality is a very important cultural trait, and the hallmark of the people. Many hosts eat only after their guests have finished, devoting themselves to serving the guests throughout the meal: They stand in waiting, checking whether the guests need water, juice, salad or any other item while the meal is in progress. From the poorest to the wealthiest, generosity to a guest or visitor is expected, and practiced.

Though Najdis have adopted various international desserts, many still prefer their own, which make good use of dates. These include *qishdah*, made of whole dates cooked with butter, flour and yoghurt and served warm—and often served in winter for breakfast. Date bars, balls and puddings are dishes that illustrate the importance of this ingredient.

Arab cardamom-flavored coffee served with dates is an integral part of meals in Najd, as indeed throughout Arabia. This coffee both greets a guest and later ends his meal. A few more sips accompany the farewells, along with the passing of a frankincense censer or a sprinkle of cologne on the guests' hands and clothing.

In the dynamic Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia, people enjoy spicy food, a side-effect of the area's long-standing trade ties with neighbors famed for their spices, such as Iran, India, Pakistan and Afghanistan. Along this flat littoral, people fished, dived for pearls, cultivated the land where that was possible, or roamed the desert; those with initiative often voyaged to far-off lands.

For centuries, the inhabitants of the area, especially the fishermen and pearl divers, relied heavily on the bounty of the sea.

There are more than 15 popular styles of rice cookery in Saudi Arabia, and one of the favorites is ruz bukhari *("Bukhara rice"), which is cooked with tomatoes, nuts and raisins in a style that came to the Hijaz with pilgrims from Central Asia.* **Below:** *Also from Central Asia is* tamis *bread, which is stamped before it is baked in an Afghan baker's stone oven. The pattern of holes left by the stamp keeps the bread from puffing during baking, and helps trap the sprinkled topping of sesame seeds. Baked* tamis *is crisper than the universally popular* khubz, *and it is most often served with* ful madammas *or white cheese and olives.*

Waraq 'unab, *or grape leaves wrapped around a variety of stuffings, are as popular in Saudi Arabia as they are throughout the eastern Mediterranean and Middle East.* **Below:** Jarish *is a dish of Najdi origin made of cooked, pounded wheat and meat. In the past, women would spell each other at the arm-tiring task; today some use food processors and others prefer the texture that the muscle-power method produces.* Jarish *is often garnished with* hashwah, *a fragrant mixture of carmelized onions, ground dried limes, black pepper and cardamom.*

Other parts of the population lived in and on the oases of the region, and the nomadic elements were also dependent on oasis villages and towns for necessities: dates, a staple, as well as manufactured goods. (See *Aramco World*, March/April 1995.) As in other parts of the kingdom, enterprising individuals in the Eastern Province formed commercial and social ties with their neighbors in their own country, in the Gulf countries and across the oceans.

With the discovery of oil in eastern Saudi Arabia in the late 1930's, a social, economic and demographic transformation on an unprecedented scale began. The old towns and villages of the al-Hasa Oasis, Tarut Island and Qatif grew in importance. The small fishing villages of al-Khobar, Jubail and Dammam mushroomed into modern cities. Other centers of population or industry, such as Dhahran, Ras Tanura and Abqaiq, further changed the landscape. With the internal migration of many Saudis and the influx of large numbers of expatriates, the composition of the Eastern Province's population changed—and so did its cuisine.

Even though Saudis generally use a wide range of spices, Eastern Province cooks reign supreme in that field. Muhammad Tahlawi, an ebullient local connoisseur whose father owned a spice business, recalls that in the early 1960's his family imported spices through the seaport city of Jiddah. "Mounds of whole spices were washed and dried in shady areas of the courtyard of our home," he says. "Some were sold whole, and large burlap bags and bales of cinnamon, cloves, cardamom, turmeric and others were also taken to a mill in al-Khobar to be ground. We made up the mixtures by hand in large vats and bagged them to be sold by weight."

Today specific blends of spices for meat, fish and vegetable dishes are often mixed at home after being cleaned, sifted and toasted. But many busy housewives purchase them ready-mixed from spice merchants. Saffron, cumin, cloves, coriander, *shaybah* (a lichen) and a variety of artemisia (*A. arborescens*) are among the spices used. So are whole or ground dried limes, black and pungent, originally brought from Oman.

In addition to its abundant use of spices, the Eastern Province is known as the home of some of the best fresh seafood to be had in the kingdom. Grouper, mackerel, red snapper and other species of fish—including parrotfish and other reef-dwellers—are often caught, bought and cooked the same day, which makes for exceptional fare.

Tahlawi mentions two traditional fish dishes. "*Hubul*, fried mackerel roe, served with rice or salad, is one," he says. "Another is *muhashsha*, an elaborate rice and fish dish preferably prepared with fried *kan'ad*, mackerel, or another meaty fish. Onions are browned and home-mixed spices are added to make the *hashwah* from which the dish derives its name. The fried fish is laid atop the *hashwah* in a pot. White rice, prepared separately, is heaped on the fish and gently pressed down, and the pot is turned out onto a serving dish so that the fish and *hashwah* form the top and the rice the bottom of the molded shape."

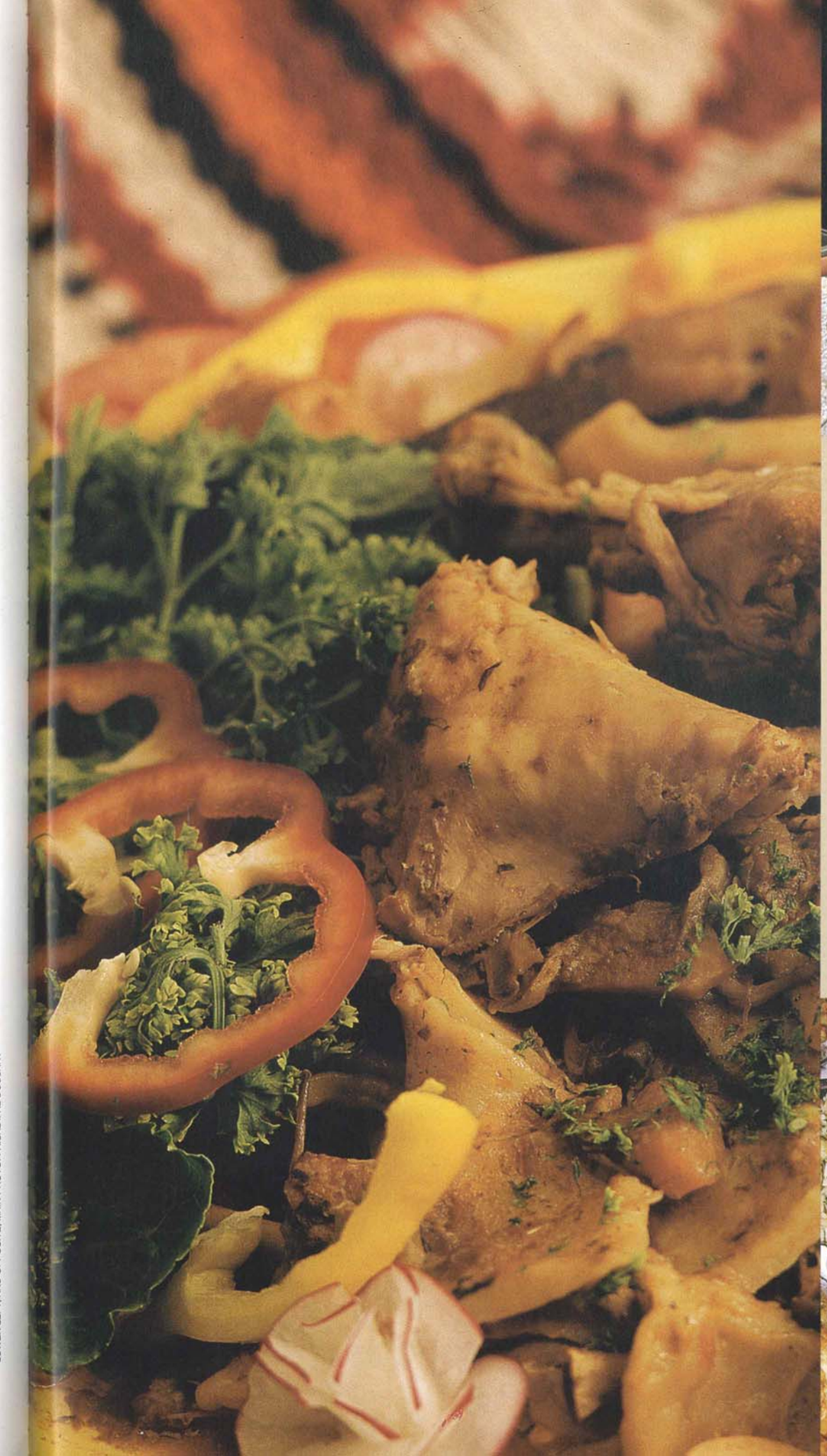
Visitors find the open-air fish markets to be the area's most fetching feature. Markets teem with seafood all year round. Shrimp, crab, squid, crayfish and even shark are available in both the traditional markets and in the modern, air-conditioned retail stores that have replaced the fish stalls of earlier days. Jaber Saleh Jum'ah, a gentle expert on local cultural and literary history and descendant of one of the first families to settle al-Khobar, recalls the fish stalls of old. "When I was a young child," he says "King Sa'ud Street, the only street in town, was the site for fish merchants. They displayed their wares on mats or in baskets, and would make a handle by looping a palm-frond rib through a fish's gills so the customer could carry it home.

"Two types of rice accompanied grilled or fried fish," Jum'ah continues. "One was *shilani*, white rice sautéed in oil with cloves, cardamom pods and whole black pepper, and the other, served with grilled fish, was *muhammar*, rice cooked in date molasses. We had *muhammar* once a week, but the strange thing is that the younger generation always preferred the plain rice. They did acquire a taste for the sweet dish as they grew older, though; it happened in my case, and I now consider *muhammar* one of my favorites."

Nowadays Saudis and expatriates flock to fish markets at villages such as Saihat and Safwa, and the one at Qatif is visited by buyers not only from other parts of Saudi Arabia but from other Gulf countries as well, making it one of the largest and busiest in the Gulf region. Late each afternoon, boats deposit tons of seafood for vendors to auction off by the *mann*, a unit of weight equal to nearly 16 kilos (about 35 lb). Buyers are particularly eager in shrimp season, which usually starts in August, for shrimp is much in demand by restaurant owners, wholesalers and individual buyers.

Rice dishes, widely considered the supreme test of culinary skill, are another specialty of the Eastern Province, and the richest array of rice specialties is found here. Flavored with rose water or saffron, garnished with raisins, onions, dried limes and various mixed spices, rice can be the product

LOWER LEFT, AND OPPOSITE: MAIN PHOTO: FAISAL I. AL-DOSSARY



A sweet-shop assortment such as this might grace an elegant dinner party. Many Saudi sweets resemble those of other areas around the Mediterranean and the Arab world, in that a pastry is mixed, layered or wrapped around fillings of sugar, honey, lemon and nuts. Other desserts are based on dates, and puddings are made of rice and milk. **Below:** *A wedding buffet is often where national cuisines meet. Here,* kubbah *and* sambusak, *both fried, dough-wrapped meat* hors d'oeuvres, *share a table with small pizzas.* **Left:** Najdi mataziz *is made of vegetables and meat first cooked in a tomato-based sauce, then layered with thin, small rounds of rye-flour dough, and topped with vegetables.*

Hostesses typically serve several rounds of two different drinks on social occasions. The most popular are sweet black tea, mint tea, American coffee, Arab coffee, fruit juices and soft drinks. Cakes, pizzas or sambusak *are also often served.* ***Below:*** *International chain restaurants do not much alter their menus for Saudi tastes, but they do buy meat slaughtered according to Islamic* halal *standards.* ***Opposite:*** *Although most urban families eat Western-style, a meal served traditional-style is regarded as a compliment to guests or visiting family.*

of a master cook, fit for celebrations of all kinds. It can also be an everyday dish, cooked plain and served with other dishes. Here, as all over the kingdom, the long-grained, delicately fragrant basmati rice, mostly imported from India, is preferred.

Mashkhul is a popular Arabian Gulf rice dish made with mutton, chicken, fish or shrimp. *Fi qa'atuh*, which means "at the bottom of the pot," is a layered dish made with spiced shrimp, chicken or meat cooked with green peppers and potatoes—a prime example of the area's cuisine. Dried limes, cloves, cinnamon sticks and each household's proprietary spice mixture give this dish its zest, and it is crowned with saffron- or rose water-flavored rice. New rice recipes have appeared as Eastern Province housewives change the spicing and the ingredients of Indian *biryani*—and these dishes continue to evolve. *Ruzz Bukhari* is one of various originally foreign rice dishes known in the province: Restaurants advertise *mandi*, a western-region rice dish cooked in a clay oven with lamb or chicken, and rice dishes from the south such as *madhbi*, which has a zesty smoked flavor. In this manner many Eastern Province families have acquired new tastes and preferences.

Jum'ah recalls the Eastern Province diet of 40 or 50 years ago. "At breakfast we youngsters enjoyed *halawah tahiniyyah* [sesame halvah]—known in the Eastern Province as *rahash*—jams and butter and imported hard yellow Kraft Danish cheese, along with such things as eggs and olives. Bread and tea with milk accompanied these staples. A favorite was a boiled, cumin-spiced broad-bean dish known as *bajillah*. We bought it from the baker, who sold it just as is done now with *ful mudammas*. The older generation had dates and preferred to eat a lighter breakfast.

"But the major difference between the way we ate in the 50's and 60's and the way we eat now is that it was a real must to have a lunch after *dhuhr* or noon prayers, and dinner after *maghrib* or sunset prayers. Housewives *had* to prepare two main meals. Both were often centered on fish dishes; my favorite was *muhashsha*." Fish dishes, as now, were typically accompanied by radishes, rocket (arugula), rounds of raw onion and green salad, Jum'ah says.

Beef, chicken, pasta, casseroles and many other foods have become integral parts of the cuisine of the Eastern Province and compete with fish and rice, though the latter are still popular. And, Jum'ah says, the ubiquitous "Arab bread" (pita) was introduced to the area by incoming Hijazis.

"The Hijazis living in al-Khobar were used to eating their food with bread, which they called *'aysh*—a word that means 'rice' in eastern Arabian dialects. We would often see Hijazi boys carrying homemade bread dough to the bakery and returning with the puffed rounds of baked bread balanced on their heads. Each boy got a *hinnanah*, a specially prepared piece of bread smaller than the regular loaf, as a reward for carrying out this task."

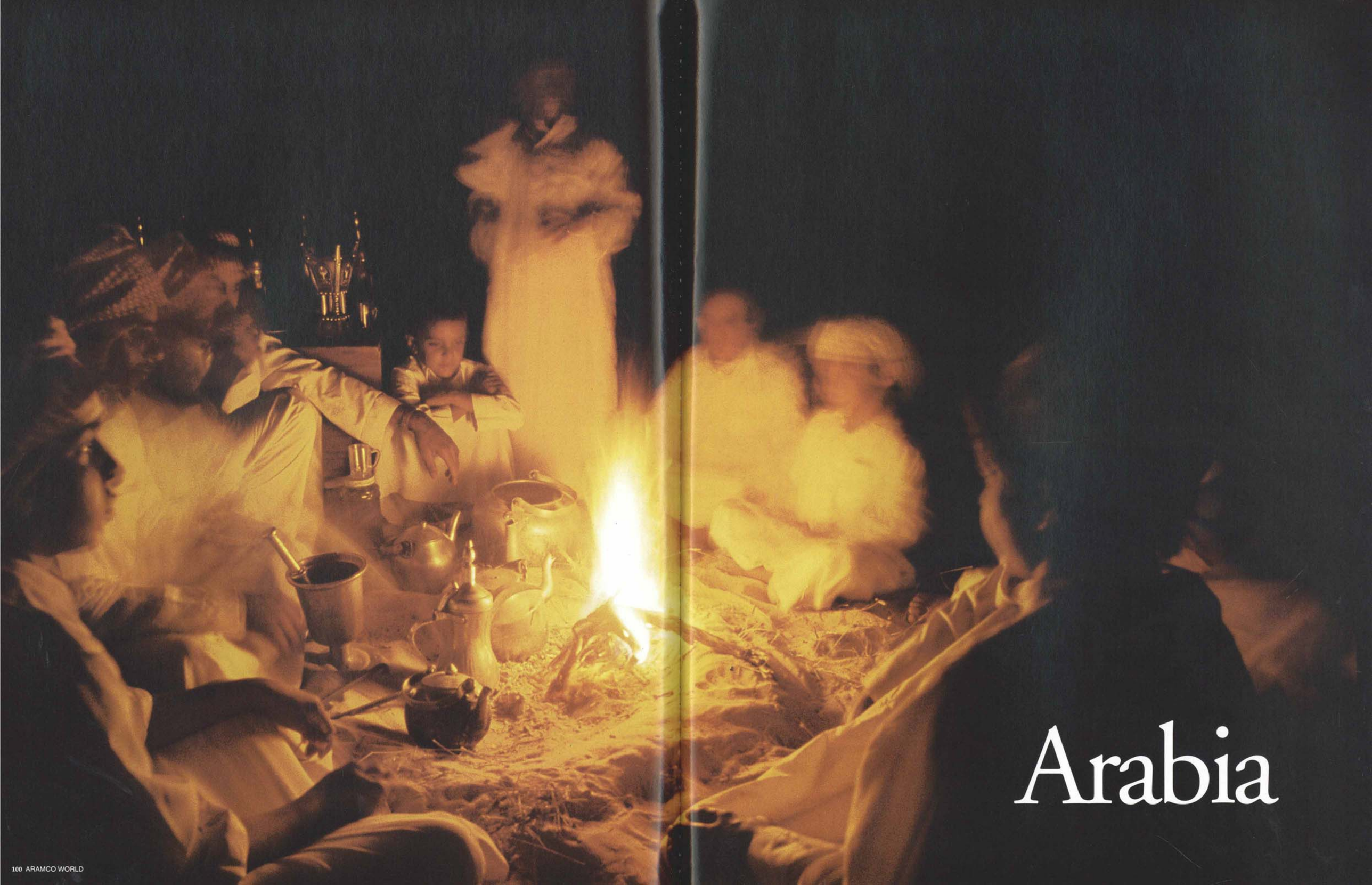
Till the end of the 1960's and throughout the early 70's people ended their meals with dates or watermelons grown in Qatif and neighboring towns. Sugar was added to the watermelons if they were not sweet enough, a practice that has disappeared with the prevalence of sweeter melon varieties. But fruit was not actually considered a dessert. Jum'ah notes that "the only time of the year when our family had desserts was during Ramadan. We were then treated to *muhallabiyyah*, a rice pudding; crème caramel; *luqaymat*, like hushpuppies dipped in sugar syrup or date molasses; sago pudding, a tapioca-like dish flavored with saffron; or *tatli*, a custard served either plain or topped with shredded coconut."

The art of Saudi cooking is still passed on from mother to daughter as it has always been. But an interesting phenomenon is appearing in Saudi foodways: With the recent spread of cookbooks about Saudi food, in Arabic and even in English, many more Saudi women have begun to prepare dishes from other regions of the kingdom than their own. Dishes from northern towns as far off as 'Ar'ar and Tabuk, or far southern ones like Abha and Najran, are gaining recognition and fame all over the kingdom. Traditional dishes are thus preserved, but are also giving rise to new variations and new possibilities. These changes strengthen the local component of Saudi cuisine, as distinct from the influences from the Arabian Gulf, Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, India, Italy, the United States and elsewhere that arrive with trade, pilgrims, international cookbooks, fast-food chains and even television cooking shows.

Certainly, Saudi cuisine will continue to enrich and renew itself in future. But one most important thing will remain "as constant as the North Star" and as warm as a desert campfire: the legendary, proverbial, all-embracing hospitality of the Saudi people.

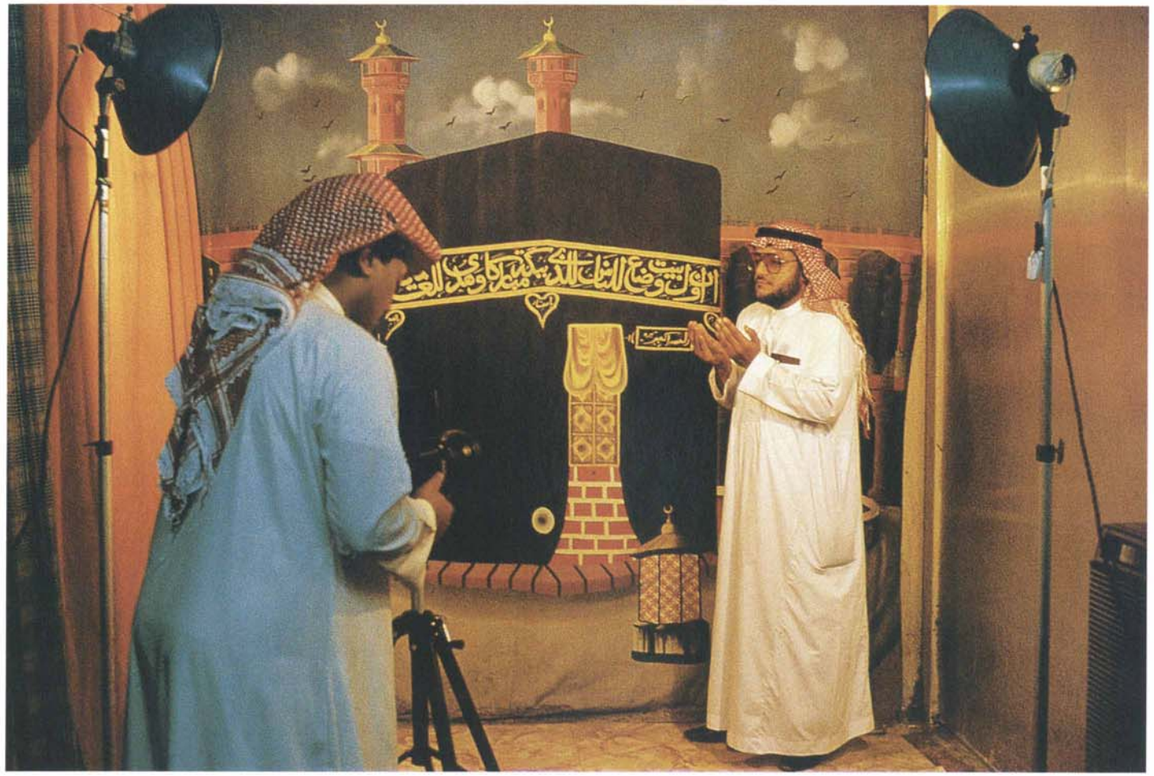
Ni'mah Isma'il Nawwab writes on Islam and on Saudi culture and history from Dhahran, Saudi Arabia.

Saudi

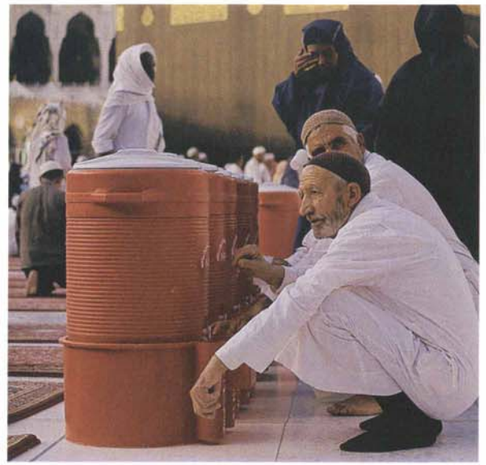


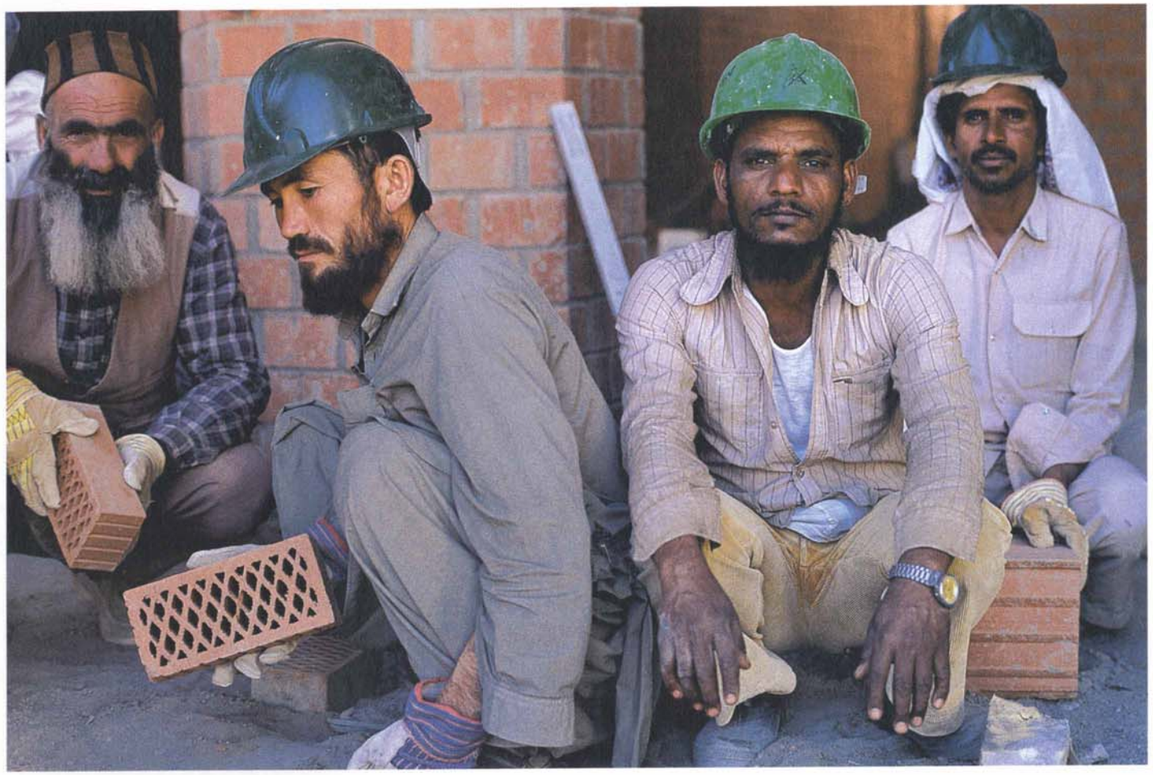
Arabia

at 100

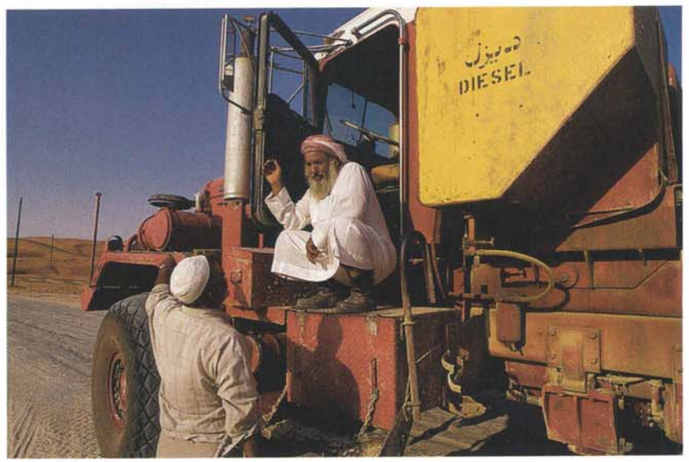


In a Makkah photo studio, a pilgrim poses for his portrait against a painted backdrop showing the Ka'ba, which stands at the center of the Sacred Mosque. (Photo by Abbas/Magnum) **Below:** A pilgrim inside Makkah's Sacred Mosque drinks from a cooler filled at Zamzam, the well about which part of the mosque is built. **Opposite:** Pilgrims from Africa pray at the Prophet's Mosque in Madinah. (Peter Sanders [2]) **Previous spreads:** Dawn in the heartland of Saudi Arabia, the Najd. (Wayne Eastep) Among the al-Hajri camel-herders in the Eastern Province, a campfire lights the faces of young and old. (Abdullah Y. Al-Dobais / Saudi Aramco) Terraces, stairs, mirrors and glass swirl in Jiddah's Al-Hamra shopping mall. (Sanders)

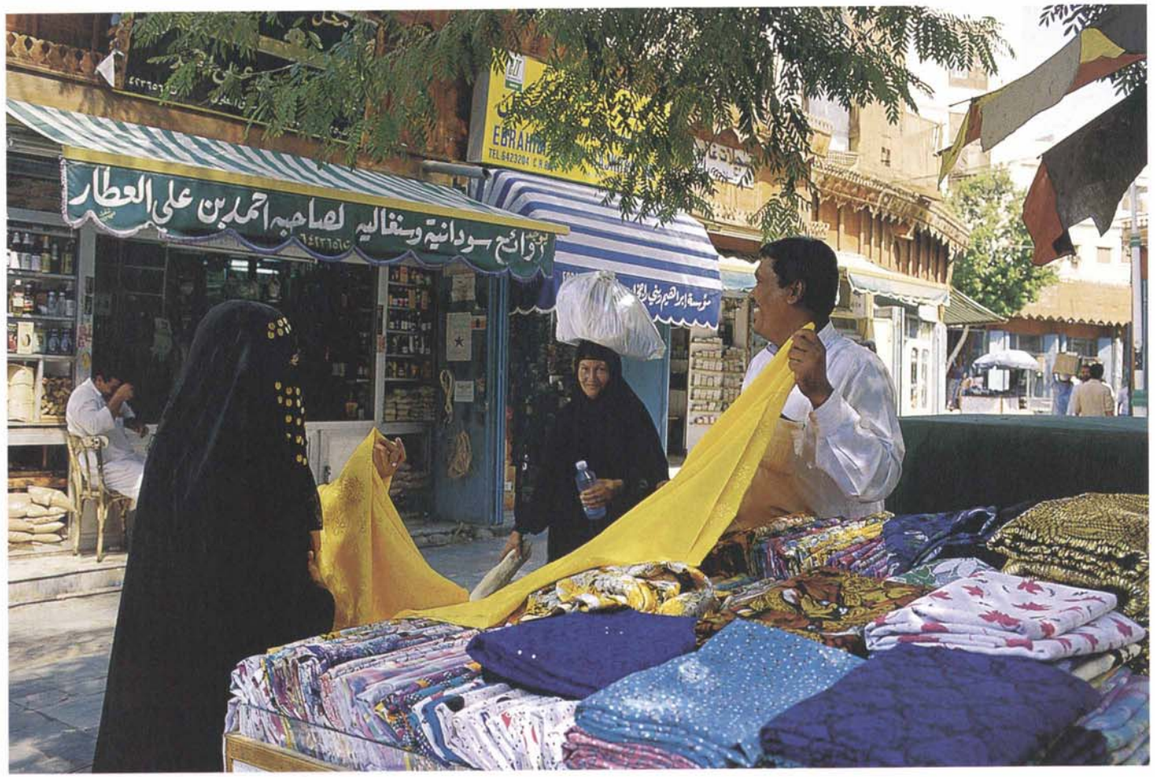




Each of these laborers may call a different country home, but in Madinah they are united by craft and religion, and by Arabic, the language of the Qur'an. (Sanders) **Below:** Saudi Aramco deep-desert driver Salah Al-Suba'i pauses for discussion with a co-worker along the 800-kilometer (500-mi) route between Dhahran and Shaybah, one of Saudi Aramco's most remote oil fields, which lies in the Rub' al-Khali, the Empty Quarter. (Al-Dobais)

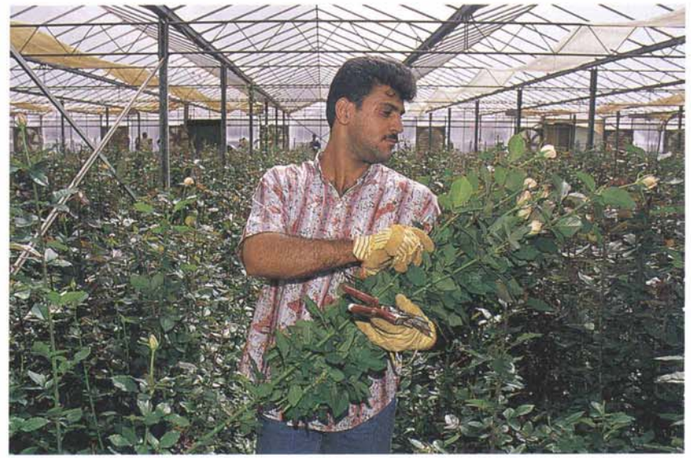


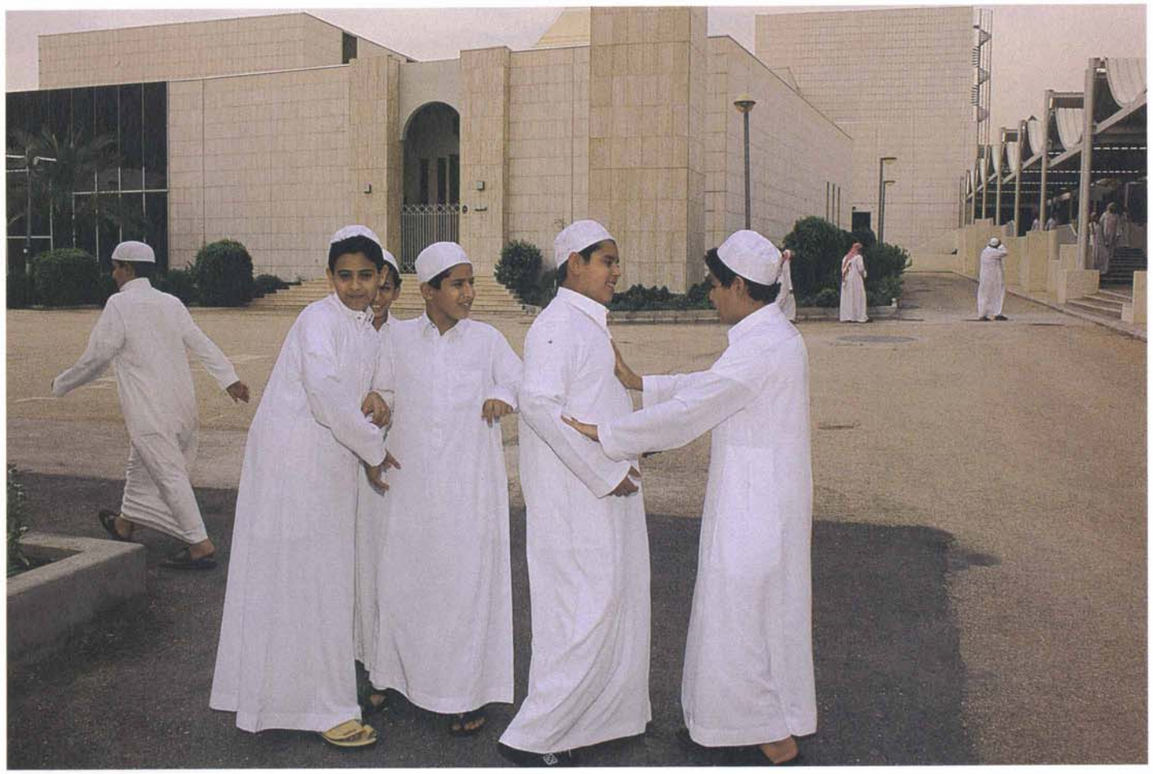
Producers and technicians oversee the broadcast of "Good Morning Saudi Arabia," a talk show hosted by Wafa'a Younis, from one of the control rooms of Riyadh Television. (Al-Dobais) **Below:** In Dhahran, Dr. Hanan Ali Al-Subeai, who earned her degree at King Faisal University in the neighboring city of Dammam, examines a young patient. (Jodi Cobb/National Geographic Society)



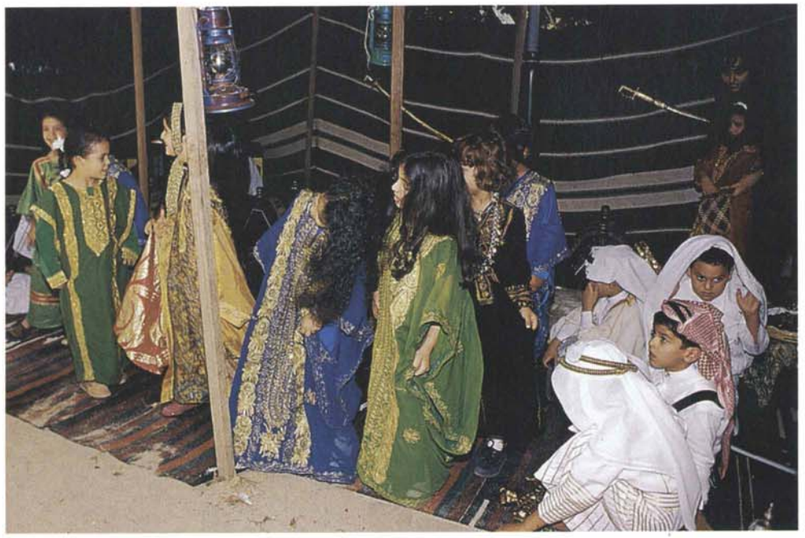
Business is personal in Jiddah's older shopping areas, where merchants sit outside their doors or stand by their wares, ready to display them to customers and discuss their merits. (Susan Baaghil) **Below:** As the nation built modern highways, such as this one that links Riyadh and Dhahran, engineers designed overpasses not only for motorized traffic, but also for the livestock that many Saudis still keep, either as a traditional way of life or out of nostalgia. (Wendy Cocker)

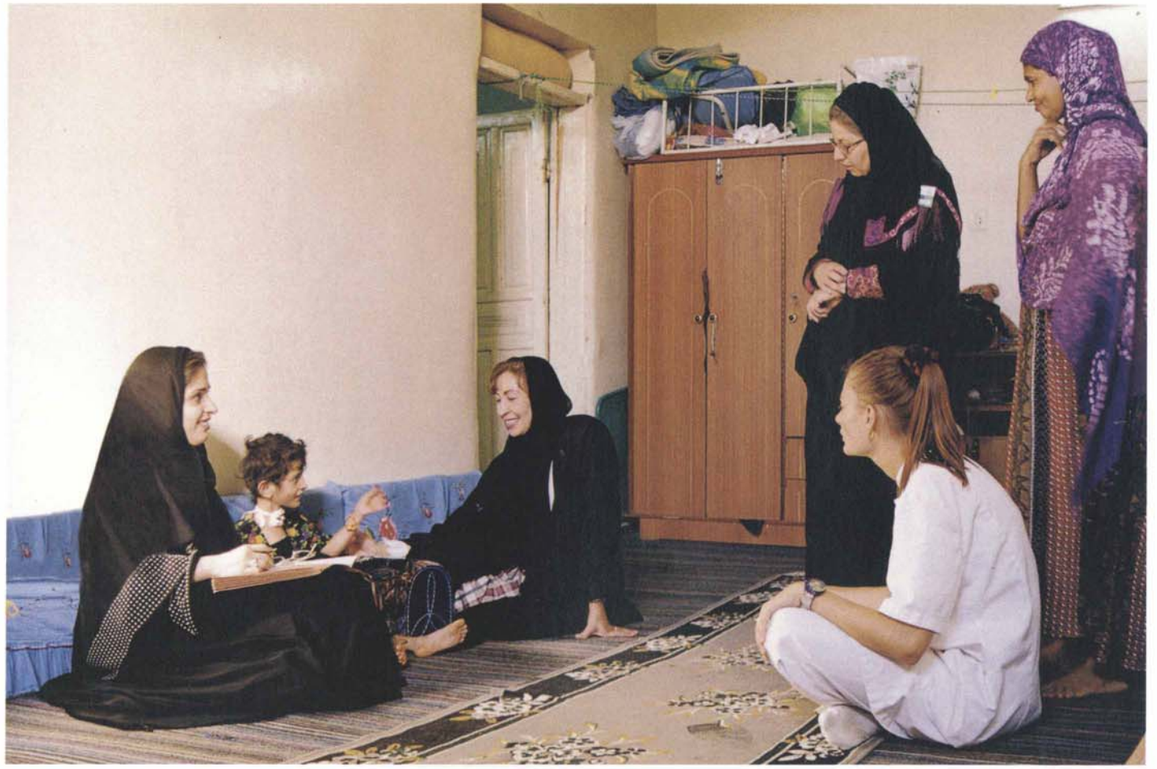
International styles—from Moghul India, Mamluk Egypt or 20th-century Europe—have long added flair to the culturally hybrid architecture of Jiddah, the port through which millions of pilgrims from around the world have passed for 1400 years. (Abbas/Magnum) **Below:** Most of the flowers grown in the greenhouses of Astra Farms in Tabuk, in the northwest, are exported to Europe for sale. (Al-Dobais)





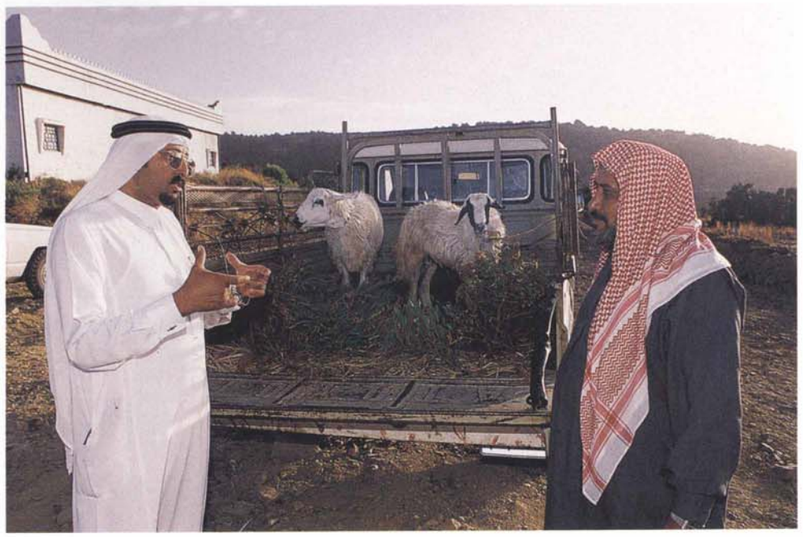
Boys banter outside Riyadh Schools, a leading educational institution in the capital. (Al-Dobais) **Below:** Children who might otherwise wear western or modern Saudi clothing don traditional finery for a lesson in folklore. (Baaghil)



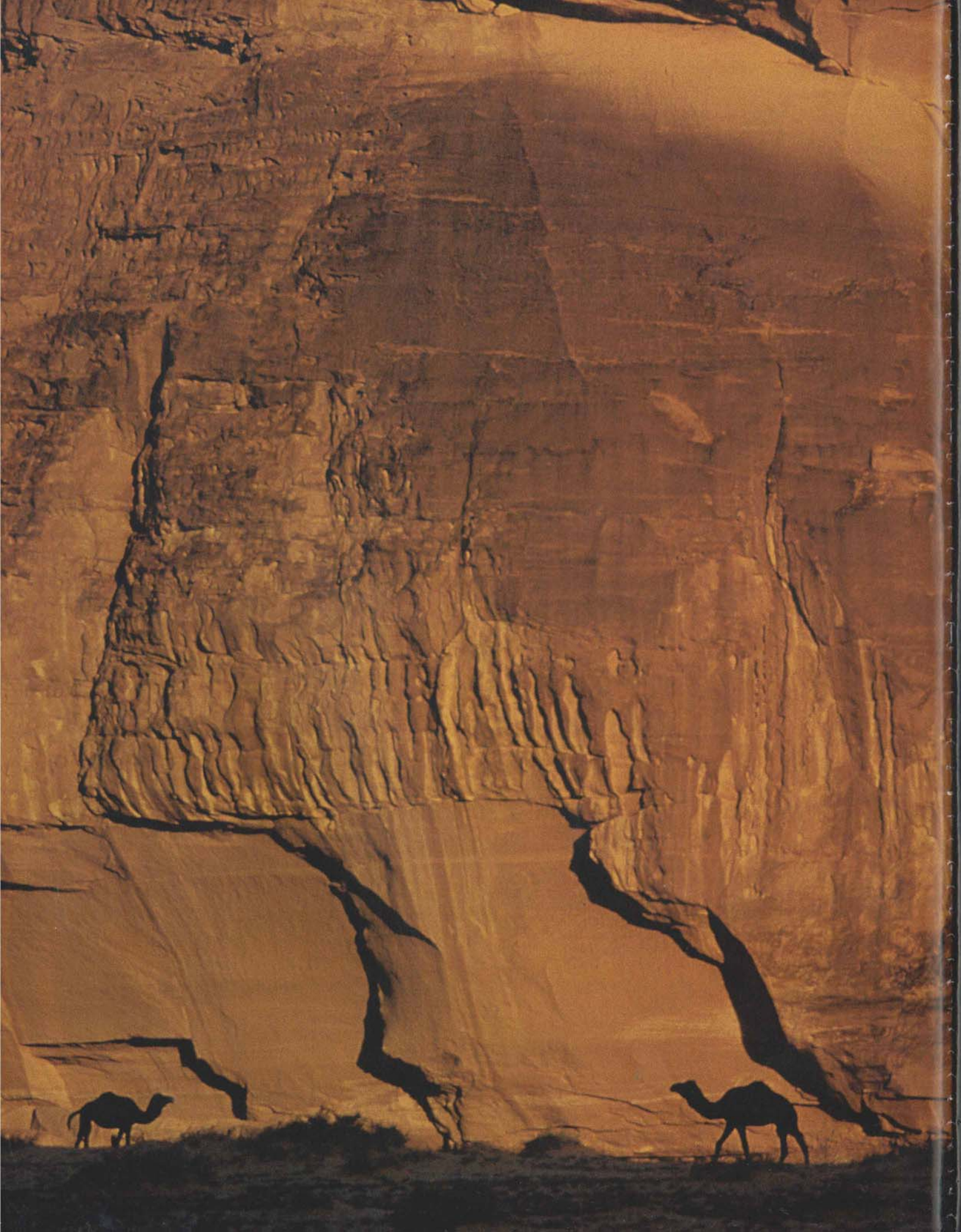


Social workers and medical staff of the Jiddah Home Health Care Center, one of hundreds of private charitable organizations throughout the kingdom, use home visits to assess a family's needs. (Noha Al-Ghalib) **Below:** Tea and talk burnish the bonds of friendship. (Kristie Burns)

Folk musicians prepare to perform in Abha, capital of 'Asir, Saudi Arabia's top tourism region. **Below:** A visitor from town discusses the price of sheep with a herder in the highlands near Abha. (Al-Dobais [2])



Braving a Najd sandstorm, 'Ayda and Hala Greyyit of the al-Shammar fight their way upwind to care for their sheep. (Eastep) **Following pages:** Camels graze near Madain Salih, an ancient Nabatean trading center in the northwest. (Ali Kazuyoshi Nomachi) A 35,000-barrel ethane storage tank at Yanbu' on the Red Sea is part of Saudi Aramco's Master Gas System, which has added natural gas to the hydrocarbon exports that provide an important part of Saudi Arabia's income. (S.M. Amin/Saudi Aramco) Departing worshipers trace liquid paths during a time exposure made at the Prophet's Mosque in Madinah. (Nomachi) **Inside back cover:** Afternoon shadows play across that same mosque's vast new plaza. (Sanders)



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