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Azerbaijan:

ROOTS

DEEPER THAN OIL

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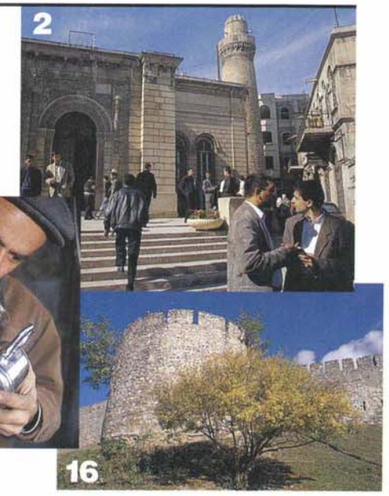

COVER:
Now the historic center of a city of two million, the portal of the 15th-century palace of the Shirvanshahs rises at the heart of the "inner town" of Baku, capital of the Azerbaijani Republic. The calligraphy across its top is Arabic, which came to the southern Caucasus in the seventh century and became a lingua franca*—a role played also at times by Persian, Turkish, Russian and Azeri. Together with dozens of local languages, they are part of what makes Azerbaijan a dense, vibrant cultural palimpsest. Photo by Kevin Bubriski.*

OPPOSITE:
Swirling about a coral protrusion, a school of yellow sweepers (Parapriacanthus ransonneti) *shimmers in the light of the photographer's flash. Sweepers inhabit coral crevices throughout the Red Sea, including all along the 800-kilometer Farasan Bank. Photo by Erik Bjurström.*

BACK COVER:
Actors in traditional Azerbaijani costumes make frequent appearances on Baku's stages, where the performing arts often creatively blend themes that reach from today back to the Middle Ages. Photo by Kevin Bubriski.

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ROOTS

DEEPER THAN OIL

WRITTEN BY LOUIS WERNER ✦ PHOTOGRAPHED BY KEVIN BUBRISKI

THE NOISY CROWD WHO COME LOOKING FOR OIL, FIND IT, GET RICH AND LEAVE AGAIN ARE NOT THE REAL PEOPLE OF BAKU.

—FROM *ALI AND NINO*

In 1971, an epic love story set on the shores of the Caspian Sea appeared on American bestseller lists, seemingly out of nowhere. Authored in 1937 by Kurban Said, a pseudonymous Azerbaijani exile writing in German in Vienna, *Ali and Nino* is the semi-fictional story of a Muslim man and a Christian woman in turn-of-the-century Baku, capital of the short-lived first Azerbaijani republic, torn by the forces of both Bolshevism and nationalism. Then as now, it was a setting with a rich and complex ethnic background, a place whose economic fortunes rose and fell with oil, and a territory which has long been viewed as a prize by neighboring countries.

Rereading that book today—it was reprinted last year by Overlook Press—alongside news reports from the Caspian region teaches a good lesson: Too much concentration on energy reserves and hypothetical pipeline routes can lead one to the impression that petroleum-based riches trump a nation's cultural treasures—but in Azerbaijan, the opposite is true.

Like many parts of Central Asia, Azerbaijan is a dense palimpsest of the cultures of invading and migrating peoples—a fact that the Gobustan petroglyphs, south of Baku, demonstrate dramatically. The drawings are approximately 10,000 years old, and they are among the world's most impressive prehistoric records. They include a Roman graffito: "Livius Julius Maximus, centurion of the XII Legion, came with the speed of heaven." And from that same rock, one can stand and look out toward derelict, Soviet-era drilling platforms rising hodgepodge from the Caspian shore.

To the ancient Babylonians, the Caucasus Range, whose highest peaks top 4750 meters (15,580'), was part of a great mountain chain that separated the world into lands of light and lands of dark. Bernd Geiger, a contemporary scholar of the region, calls the Caucasus "unique as both a divide and a refuge," hindering invaders such as Byzantines, Persians, Arabs, Turks and Slavs and sheltering such minorities as Talysh, Tats, Lesghis, Avars and Kurds. So effective were those refuges that the princely 14th-century historian Abu al-Fida called the Caucasus region *jabal al-alsun*, "The Mountain of Tongues," for there he counted more than 300 languages.

The 10,000-year-old Gobustan petroglyphs—some 3500 inscriptions on 750 rocks south of Baku—are one of the oldest surviving human records in the Caspian region. ***Opposite:*** *One of the country's leading museums is the National Museum of Azerbaijan Literature, originally dedicated solely to the legacy of the 12th-century poet Nizami.*

Today the southeastern portion of the Caucasus region is the Azerbaijani Republic, whose official language is Azeri, a Turkic language that in the 20th century alone has been written variously in the Arabic, Cyrillic and Latin alphabets. It is related to Anatolian Turkish, the language of modern Turkey, but the Azeri vocabulary is heavier with loan words from Arabic and Persian, and includes Russian loan words unknown to Turkish. Besides Azeri, however, some 20 percent of Azerbaijan's population speaks other languages, among them Indo-European, Turkic and Caucasian tongues.

Historically, the name "Azerbaijan" leads to some confusion about just what geographical territory is

referred to. "Greater Azerbaijan," as defined by the reach of the Azeri language, covers both the modern state of some seven million people, called the Azerbaijani Republic, and a two-province chunk of Azeri-speaking northwestern Iran that is roughly equally populous. This division between northern and southern territories dates from 1922, when the Soviet Union reasserted control over the region's oil resources by crushing nationalist movements and absorbing Azerbaijan south to the Araks River, the classical Araxes, which defines today's border between Azerbaijan and Iran. In 1990, the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic rose up against the USSR, then endured a bloody war with Armenia over the Karabakh region, and became independent in 1991. Azerbaijanis today often refer to the Azerbaijani Republic as "north Azerbaijan" and the Azeri-speaking Iranian provinces as "south Azerbaijan."

Baku's cultural wealth is quickly apparent in the city's circles of artists, writers and scholars. One social evening included a poet, a translator of the Qur'an and a professor of linguistics, and was hosted by Mazahir and Lala Avshar, a ceramist and embroidery artist respectively. They welcomed their visitors by burning sprigs of *yuvshan*, a pasture grass from the Central Asian steppe that fueled the migrations of the Oghuz Turk people, and that today is a symbol of Turkic identity. "What was good for our horses is good for us," explains Mazahir.

After voicing concerns that a new oil boom that would usher in an era of Western-oriented oil wealth might smother some of their country's local arts, Mazahir asks each guest to tell a story about their favorite Azerbaijani hero. As his guests nibble from a seven-sectioned platter of nuts and dried fruit—another Turkic symbol—he leads off with the tale of Hajji Zeynal Abdin Taghiyev, the son of a cobbler who became an oil baron and 19th-century Baku's leading philanthropist, one who is said to have never forgotten his humble roots.

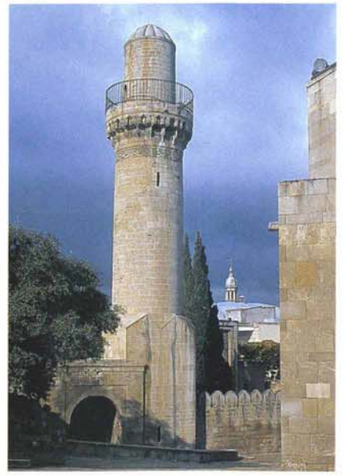
"Once there was a terrible food shortage," recounts Mazahir. "Prices were going higher and higher. So Taghiyev took action. He took a fish from Baku harbor, forced his gold ring down its throat, and threw it back into the water. With that, of course, every fisherman in the city tried to catch the golden fish, and each fish whose stomach did not contain the ring was taken to market, where prices again started to drop." Today, Taghiyev is remembered affectionately—he also founded the region's first secular school for girls—and his portrait can be found hanging in many shops, always sporting a gold ring.

Lala's story is darkly modern. She speaks in hushed tones as she remembers the courage of three friends killed in the recent Karabakh war. Her words cast a shadow on the lively party: Between 1988 and 1994, more than 25,000 people died on both sides, and more than a million people—including some 700,000 Azerbaijanis—were made refugees. The status of the region, now controlled by Armenia, is still in bitter dispute. Azerbaijani families post plaques on their doors recognizing those they lost in battle, and on weekends, mourners fill a new, Ottoman-style mosque in Baku's Martyrs' Cemetery, overlooking the harbor.

While Baku is home to many nationalist intellectuals like the Avshars, it is also true that other Bakuvites anticipate a far brighter future fueled by oil. They recall the 19th-century oil rush here, led by Rockefellers, Rothschilds, Nobels and the Siemens brothers. But these Western tycoons were by no means the first outsiders to come here in search of fortune.

Greek adventurers of antiquity knew this land as Caucasian Albania, bounded by the Caspian, the Caucasus, Georgia and Armenia to the west and the Araxes to the south. Here was the land in which were set Odysseus's battle with the Cyclops and Prometheus's lonely fate, and it was both the land of the Golden Fleece and the

In a society that is more than four-fifths Muslim, the freedom to practice religion that came with Azerbaijan's independence in 1991 has brought new life to mosques throughout the country, including Baku's Blue Mosque. ***left. Opposite, top left:*** *The Shirvanshah palace dominates Baku's* icheri sheher, *or "inner town"; its minaret dates from 845 AH (1441 or 1442). The palace baths,* ***top right****, were heated with underfloor steam channels.* ***Opposite, lower:*** *The 12th-century Qiz Qalasi, or "Maiden's Tower," is the popular symbol of Baku. Its original function is unknown, as is the veracity of the legend that a young woman once leapt from its ramparts to avoid an unwanted marriage.*



Greek adventurers of antiquity knew this land as Caucasian Albania, where were set Odysseus's battle with the Cyclops and Prometheus's lonely fate. It was both the land of the Golden Fleece and the home of the women warriors known as Amazons.

BAKU'S CULTURAL WEALTH IS QUICKLY APPARENT IN THE CITY'S CIRCLES OF ARTISTS, WRITERS AND SCHOLARS. MANY ARE CONCERNED THAT A NEW OIL BOOM MIGHT SMOTHER LOCAL ARTS.

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The Roman geographer Strabo praised Azerbaijan's bounteous central valley, today the country's leading breadbasket, noting that "the plain as a whole is better watered by its rivers than Babylonia and Egypt." He also spun his own legend: "The country produces deadly reptiles and scorpions and spiders. Some spider bites cause people to die laughing while others cause people to die weeping over the loss of their deceased kindred."

Although Alexander the Great never crossed into the region himself, he appointed Atropates, satrap of Media (in what is now northwestern Iran), to rule the land, which thereafter went by the name of Atropatania. The Roman historian and eulogist Flavius Arrianus, writing some 500 years after the conqueror's death, recounted that Atropates introduced Alexander to a troop of Amazons, and that Alexander made a promise to return and visit their queen. Strabo had been quite specific as to the Amazons' home territory: It lay "in the northerly foothills of those parts of the Caucasus which are called Ceraunian."

As we know, Alexander never kept his promise—if one was indeed made. But the memory of Alexander remained in Azerbaijan, kept alive in written and oral forms and reinforced by a popular interpretation of part of Sura 18 of the Qur'an ("The Cave"). Verses 82 to 97 tell of *dhu al-qarnain*, a "two-horned one," who came "between the two barriers" to erect an iron wall to keep Gog and Magog—Yajuj and Majuj in Arabic—at bay. The wall was built and the day was saved, but the Sura foretells a day when God will level it. Some interpreters have read this as a reference to Alexander, who was known as "the two-horned one" because he ruled the "horns" of the world (east and west); the "two barriers" may have been the two major ranges of the Caucasus, and Yajuj and Majuj may have been raiding tribes of the region.

A unique tradition, including Western and Persian as well as local elements, guides much of the best of Azerbaijan's classical performing arts. ***Above:*** *The orchestra prepares for a new opera, titled "The Maiden's Tower."* ***Opposite, top:*** *Actors rehearse amid the ruins of the Shirvanshah palace.* ***Lower:*** *At the Baku conservatory, musicians learn* mugham, *an Azerbaijani 12-tone system for voice and stringed instruments that dates from the 13th and 14th centuries.*

Perhaps the most elaborate treatment of the Alexander legend was the *Iskandar Nameh (Epic of Alexander)* by Jamal al-Din Nizami Ganjavi, a 12th-century Persian-language poet who was a native of Ganja, in today's Azerbaijani Republic. He conflated the tale of the Amazons with the story of Queen Nushaba of Barda, a city not far from Ganja, in which the hero visits the queen at her court, falls in love and promises to return after his conquest of China. He does so, just in time to save her from the "Rus" invading from the north. (See *Aramco World*, November/December 1999.) Yet in all of his verses that are preserved today, only in these few lines most did Nizami write what we know to be an eyewitness account of his homeland:

O blessed country within which
Neither spring nor winter is without bloom.
Summer blesses the mountain with the rose
And winter crowns it with the balmy breeze,
And all around, the woods, a paradise.

To Arab writers and geographers, however, including al-Mas'udi, Yaqut al-Rumi and Abu Dulaf, it was not so much Azerbaijan's flowers that made it interesting, but rather its abundant naphtha wells spouting bitumen, oil and sometimes fire, a phenomenon first seen by Arab eyes during their conquest of the region in the seventh century. (See *Aramco World*, September/October 1995.) Moses Dasxuranci, a 10th-century Christian monk, described the Arabs' arrival in his *History of Caucasian Albania*: "The race of Hagar grew powerful and approached from a distant clime in a bold and terrifying mass like a tempest blowing over the desert."

The anonymous geography *Hudud al-Alam* (*The Limits of the World*), written in Persian in the 10th century for the amir of the Farighunid dynasty in Khorasan, had nothing but praise for the region: "[It is] the most pleasant among the Islamic lands, the region being prosperous with running water and good fruit. It is the abode of merchants, fighters for the faith, and strangers coming from all parts." But it also had strategic significance.

The 11th-century geographer al-Qazwini wrote at length about the pass north of Baku known as Bab al-Abwab ("the Gate of Gates"), which gave access beyond the Caucasus barrier into the territory of the Khazars, a Turkic people of the Russian steppe who had checked the northward expansion of Arab power and frequently assaulted Arab strongholds. The Caspian Sea, which in some early Arab writings is called "the Sea of Yajuj and Majuj," is still known as Bahr al-Khazar, "the Khazar Sea."

Today, however, Mufti Allahshukur Pashazade, who oversees the religious welfare of Muslims throughout Azerbaijan, Georgia, Chechnya and Daghestan, maintains that the north-south religious conflicts of the Caucasus are over. Speaking from his office in Baku's 19th-century Taze Pir Mosque, he notes that, before the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, only 17 mosques, and no *madrasa*s, or Islamic schools, had been permitted in Azerbaijan. But since independence, he says, there are no more restrictions on religious expression: An Islamic university with three satellite campuses has opened, Baku State University has created a department of Islamic studies, and "new mosques and *madrasa*s are operating everywhere."

"I just organized a conference here on Islamic civilization in Transcaucasia, with scholars from Western Europe, Central Asia and North Africa," he says. "We heard about Arabic poetry, Qur'an recitation, and linguistics and history." None of this, he explains, could have happened under Soviet rule.

One of the first historical descriptions of the city of Baku was written in 1402, shortly after the invasion of Timur (Tamerlane), by the local historian 'Abd al-Rashid ibn Salih al-Bakuwi. He described it as a town of stone with "healthy airs"—but to a fault, as winter winds occasionally blew men and animals into the sea. These winds are indeed fierce, and the name Baku comes from the Persian for "windy place." Bakuvites bundle up tightly in winter and call the north winds "*khazari*," after their old enemies.

Baku is today a city of about two million people, of whom some 300,000 are new arrivals who fled the Karabakh war. At its center, down near the water, stands the old *icheri sheher*, the "inner town." It once rose up from the water's edge, but the Caspian's waterline has dropped throughout the 20th century to its present height, some 92 feet below sea level, due to dams and irrigation projects built all along the Volga River, its sole important source. As a result, Baku's old city now stands some 100 meters from the shore. Its stepped and winding streets and alleyways were once surrounded by double walls, and a third wall girded the citadel. Only one remains today, but when French novelist Alexandre Dumas visited in 1858, they were all standing:

"Entering Baku is like penetrating one of the strongest fortresses of the Middle Ages. There are three encircling walls with gateways so narrow that our horses could not pass abreast."

At the highest point of the old city's center stands the 15th-century palace of the Shirvanshahs, who ruled over Shirvan (mostly northern Azerbaijan) from pre-Islamic times until 1501, when they were overpowered by the founder of the Safavid dynasty, Shah Ismail I. The Shirvanshahs ruled from Shemakha, in the country's central valley, until an earthquake in the early 15th century prompted construction of their palace in Baku.

The stone palace is modest in size, and it consists of a judicial courtyard, domestic quarters and a *haram*, or sacred enclosure, with a small mosque. The palace's builder, the penultimate Shirvanshah ruler, Khalil Allah I, is buried here.

Standing at the seaward-looking Gate of Murad, one of Baku's four surviving gates, with its elaborate, inset half-dome *muquarnas*, the old city's other points of historic note are within sight. Several are named after foreign patrons, attesting to Baku's place on the Silk Road, which made it a cosmopolitan center: the 14th-century *chin* (Chinese) mosque; the 12th-century Lesghi Mosque; two double-storied caravanserais, known as Bukhara and Multan, the names of the home towns of frequent 15th-century travelers; and the 18th-century bath of Hajji Bani, which is attached to an arcade that now shelters statues and richly incised tombstones carved in the form of standing rams, a symbol of the Shirvanshah dynasty. The city's earliest building is nearby, too: the Muhammad mosque, which dates to 1057 and whose original minaret was destroyed by the artillery of Peter the Great in 1722.

But the iconic symbol of old Baku, the place that appears first on the tourist brochures and that is the favorite downtown meeting place for the young, is the 12th-century Qiz Qalasi, the Maiden's Tower. Its nine cylindrical stories, supported by a spur-like buttress, rise almost 30 meters (98') in alternating courses of indented, honey-colored stonework. Inside, there are the remains of a well. No one is sure what the tower was built to be: A lighthouse? A fortified keep? An armory? Nor can anyone ascertain the truth of the legend that gives it its name, in which a young woman leapt to her death from its ramparts rather than accept an unwelcome arranged marriage. All that is certain about the Maiden's Tower is the builder's name, Massud bin Da'ud, carved in stone, midway up.

Top: Women gather at Baku's Blue Mosque to commemorate a death. ***Above:*** *Specializing in national cuisine, the Caravansari serves diners in a market and hostelry that once hosted Silk Road traders.* ***Opposite, top:*** *Emin Hashimov restores Azerbaijani textiles, among which one scholar has catalogued 144 distinct styles of weaving, each with innumerable pattern variations.* ***Lower left and right:*** *A downtown antique shop offers fragments of Azerbaijan's richly mixed heritage, while, on a nearby street corner near a butcher shop, romanticized paintings of that same heritage are offered to passers-by.*

Not far from the Maiden's Tower is the National Carpet Museum, created in the early 1950's from the private collection of the late Latif Kermov, whose three-volume encyclopedia of textile motifs helped to systematize the fractious field of Azerbaijani carpet studies, and which still stimulates the contemporary revival of the art.

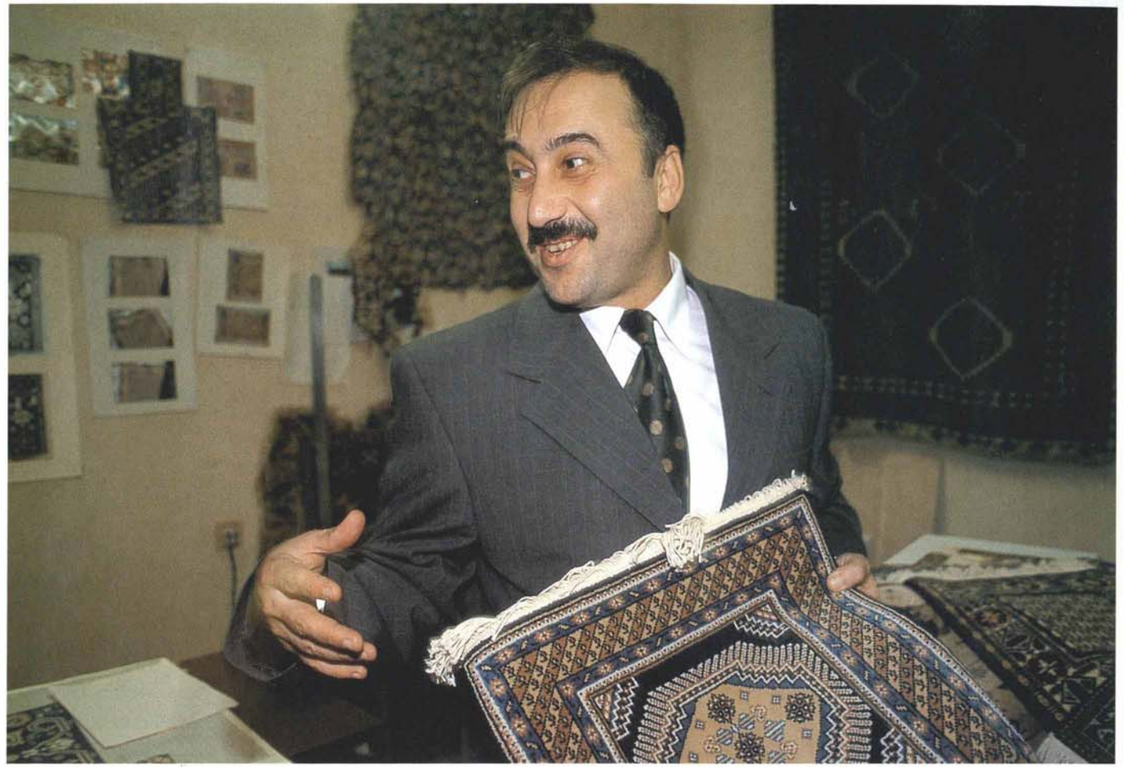
Kerimov's work, in which he counted some 144 different weaving styles, provides a mere outline of the problems of identifying and classifying what scholar Carol Bier of the Textile Museum in Washington, D.C. called "the amalgamation of more distinct regional designs than those from any of the world's other rug-producing areas."

A brief museum tour runs through seven major styles of flat-weaves, seven types of embroidery and Kerimov's four regional groupings of pile carpets: Quba-Shirvan, Ganja-Kazakh, Tabriz and Karabakh. The weaver's art touches not just carpets but also saddlebags, camel cloths, tent nettings, cummerbunds and more.

Sabiha Ali is a young artist whose flat-woven hangings and miniature tapestries were recently shown in a Baku gallery. "Art students in this country take up weaving as naturally as in other countries they work with paints and clay," she says. "I didn't grow up on the loom like many village girls do, but in art school I quickly saw its potential. And now I'm teaching five-year-olds to be creative on the loom. It's fun to break all the rules using ancient tools."

The textile arts were so common, and so well developed, that for long periods carpets were an art form and, in the largely barter-oriented economies of the Caucasus, virtually a form of currency, explains Emin Hashimov, director of a textile restoration lab in Baku's old city. "Carpets could be instantly monetized if need be. When you made a carpet, you were weaving meaning and sowing value that might pass from hand to hand."

Carpets and other textiles also functioned as a medium for the written word, with their knots and patterns much like the calligraphy and marginal ornamentation that might adorn a manuscript. Baku's Institute of Manuscripts holds 40,000 items, most of them



THE TEXTILE ARTS WERE SO COMMON, AND SO WELL DEVELOPED, THAT FOR LONG PERIODS CARPETS WERE BOTH AN ART FORM AND, IN THE LARGELY BARTER-ORIENTED ECONOMIES OF THE CAUCASUS, VIRTUALLY A FORM OF CURRENCY.

*A bust of Jamal al-Din Nizami, one of the greatest Persian-language poets and thinkers, dominates a corridor in the National Museum of Azerbaijan Literature, **above**. His face also graces Azerbaijani currency, and nearly every town has a street named for him, explains Muhammad Adilov, **left**, director of Baku's Institute of Manuscripts. Equally famous is Muhammad ibn Süleyman Fuzuli, the 15th-century poet whose verse is the basis for much of Azerbaijan's music, and whose own retelling of the "Layla and Majnun" legend, shown **below** in a 16th-century manuscript, was adapted into the first* mugham *opera in the early 20th century. **Opposite:** The Muhammad mosque is Baku's oldest, dating to 1057.*

of local production, starting with a 13th-century work in Azeri Turkish, one of the earliest known to exist. There is also a 19th-century silk tunic covered with inked verses from the Qur'an; it was worn in battle as a talisman by the ruler of Karabakh.

Baku's other treasures include the literary collections, or "divans," of the two writers who compete unofficially for the title of Azerbaijan's national poet: Nizami, whose lifelong residence in the town whose name he bears earned him the sobriquet "Prisoner of Ganja," and Fuzuli, a 15th-century poet whose love lyrics seem to trip daily from the tongues of Azeris young and old.

As a result, most towns in Azerbaijan seem to have both a Nizami and a Fuzuli Street. Nizami's face adorns the currency, and his name is attached to Baku's Museum of Literature. Fuzuli's verse is the basis of much of Azerbaijan's music. The modal art-song tradition known as *mugham* is filled by Fuzuli's *ghazal*s, a short form of lyric verse that originated in 10th-century Persia. In the early 20th century, his epic poem "Layla and Majnun" formed the libretto of the first *mugham* opera.

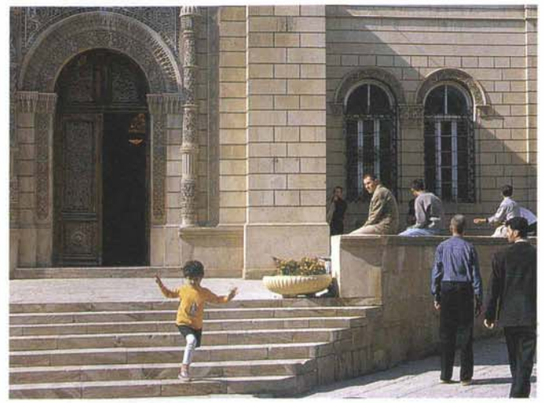
Muhammad Adilov, director of the Institute of Manuscripts, is initially reluctant to choose a favorite between the two. "Nizami was our Shakespeare—or maybe I should say that Shakespeare was your Nizami," he says. Nizami wrote in Persian, a universal language at the time, because he wanted to be known around the world. Fuzuli, however, was much the opposite: He lived and died in Iraq, never having visited the heartland of the Turks. Azerbaijanis nevertheless claim him as theirs, finding evidence that his father was a native of Shemakha. He wrote his most famous work in classical Turkish, but in a style that was Azeri rather than Ottoman and that showed much influence from Arabic and Persian.

"Nizami is known to us in translation," continues Adilov, with passion in his voice, "but Fuzuli is our most recited poet. *Mugham* singers all invoke his name—"O Fuzuli," they say whenever they end their songs. For this he seems always present." To Adilov, it is their languages, and not their birthplaces, that distinguish the nation's leading literati.

There is no doubt, however, about who carries the mantle of national composer. Uzeyir Hajibeyov, born in 1885 in Karabakh, was a St. Petersburg-educated prodigy who is credited with adapting *mugham* to staged drama and native instruments, including the spike-fiddle *kemenche* and the lute-like *tar*, and integrating them into a Western orchestral tradition. He created Azerbaijan's uniquely hybrid genre of opera, and his greatest operas, including "Mashade Ibad," "Koroghlu" and "Layla and Majnun," were based on history, folklore and Fuzuli's famous love epic.

On the other hand, Hajibeyov's comic operetta "Arshin Mal Alhan" ("The 19th-Century Peddler"), satirizes the conflict between new and old traditions. An hour before its first new production in two decades at Baku's State Theater, director Hafiz Guliev is hurrying from the costume department down to the stage. His crew is still moving props, hanging backdrops and setting up lights. Guliev urges them on and then sets off to the makeup room. There he finds his top singer, Azer Zeynatov, who plays Asker, a young, Westernized oil baron of turn-of-the-century Baku who rejects the customary prohibition on seeing the face of his bride before marriage. To circumvent the rule, he disguises himself as a cloth peddler to gain entry to the house of Sultan Bey, the widowed father of the beautiful maiden Gulchora. Through a series of mistaken identities, Asker and Gulchora almost miss marrying, but in the end everyone finds happiness with an appropriate mate, including Gulchora's and Asker's respective servants, her father and his aunt, and his friend and her cousin.

"NIZAMI WAS OUR SHAKESPEARE—OR MAYBE I SHOULD SAY THAT SHAKESPEARE WAS YOUR NIZAMI."



"Azerbaijanis love this opera because they all see a little bit of themselves in both sides of the story," says Guliev. The alternating scenery seems to say it all—a café table, rocking chair and door bell in Asker's house; fountains, carpets and pointed arches in the home of Sultan Bey.

Guliev finds Azer putting the finishing touches on the two costumes he will wear tonight: a waistcoat and cravat for Asker, and a high-buttoned tunic and cummerbund for his peddler's disguise. In both roles, he wears the same Persian lamb hat.

As curtain time approaches, Azer warms up the strong tenor voice he trained in Venice. His second language is Italian, which accents his voice as he runs up and down a western scale. Next to him, Gulyaz Mamedova runs through the very different notes of a *mugham* scale, which she will sing in a *tar*-accompanied solo in the role of the servant Telli. A troupe of young dancers and choristers chatters away in Russian, waiting for their cue in the overture.

The painted backdrop for all of this is the skyline of old Baku, clearly showing the Maiden's Tower and the Shirvanshah palace. There are no oil derricks visible, even though in 1913, the year the opera was first performed in Baku, oil was flowing and making people rich. But for every oil well flaring today offshore, Azerbaijanis promise to burn a sprig of *yuvshan* grass as a way of recalling origins whose roots lie even deeper than oil.

Louis Werner (left) is a New York freelance writer and filmmaker. Kevin Bubriski's photographs have been widely published, exhibited and collected. He lives in Vermont.

NO BETTER JOB

WRITTEN BY LOUIS WERNER ✦ PHOTOGRAPHED BY KEVIN BUBRISKI

The unpaved road to the village of Lahic winds up the narrowing Girdimanchai river gorge from the sunny vineyards of Shemakha, crossing the torrent on a flimsy bridge and skirting the sheer walls on narrow, roughly hewn ledges. Ice and snow cut Lahic off from the valley for weeks at a time in winter, but this early December visit coincides with an unseasonable warm spell in the Caucasus.

From the window of the rickety Russian-built bus groaning its way up the mountain, the narrow path of the *charvadars*, or horsepackers, cut into the opposite bank, almost seems a safer bet. Until 30 years ago, the *charvadars'* horse trains offered Lahic's only connection to the larger world.

This isolation allowed Tat, a dialect of an old Persian tongue, to remain the primary language in Lahic and a few surrounding villages. For centuries, the valley people have spoken, at various times, Azeri, Russian, Farsi and Arabic, but here in this mountain village of about 2000 people, Tat remains.

Lahic's isolation was notorious and the quality of its crafts was known as early as the 10th century, as recorded in the *Hudud al-Alam (The Limits of the World):* "The Shah of the Shirvans lives at an army camp at a distance from Shemakha.... In the region he possesses a mountain with a high summit which is broad and smooth. It is accessible only from one side by a road which is very difficult. All the treasure and wealth of the king are kept there, and all his tributaries live there, where they sow and eat what they produce."

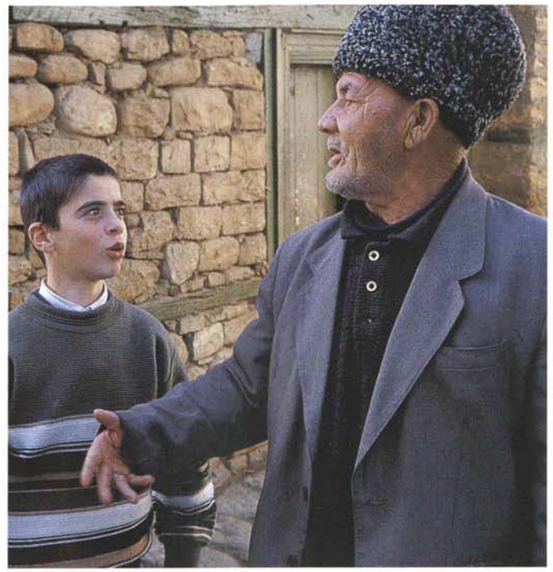
This last statement is misleading. The mountain terrain above Shemakha is ill-suited to agriculture, and it is for this reason that Lahic developed into a craft center. According to Gamal Shaikh Javadov, a scholar at the Institute of Ethnography in Baku, there were once some 120 crafts represented in Lahic, "from beekeeping to hatmaking, from leatherworking to charcoal burning. And please do not forget gunsmithing, swordsmithing and tool forging. But none of the village's products were finer than its copperwork."

A student of Middle Eastern metalware would be well advised to make the trek up to Lahic, amid high foothills shadowed by the peaks of Babadagh ("Grandfather"), Niyaldaqh ("Nine Summits") and Galagimish ("Brass and Silver"). From the bus turnaround, pass through the market square known as Gapandibe ("Under the Scales"), and walk down the cobbled main street known as Aghale. Not far along, knock on the door of Hajj Nagi Aliyev, a 68-year-old coppersmith whom his neighbors respectfully call *ustan* ("master").

Wearing a gray Persian lamb hat typical of the region, Hajj Nagi sits among the clutter of his workshop, hemmed in by anvils round, square, horned and double-spiked; by shelves lined with samovars, braziers, water buckets, ewers, covered pilaf dishes and sets of nested bowls for making the richly garnished rice-and-meat dish known in the Eastern Caucasus as *aash*.

"It would take more than a year to tell you about my work," he says. "I've spent my whole life at it. At one time there were 200 coppersmiths here alone, my father Mashade Saif Ali and my grandfather Mashade Ebali among them. Now there are fewer, but we are still busy."

LAHIC'S ISOLATION WAS NOTORIOUS AND THE QUALITY OF ITS CRAFTS WAS KNOWN AS EARLY AS THE 10TH CENTURY, AS RECORDED IN THE *HUDUD AL-ALAM*.



Coppersmith Hajj Nagi recites poetry and the Qur'an to one of his grandsons; his neighbors respectfully call the 68-year-old ustan, *"master."* **Opposite, top:** *Nestled in the shadows of high peaks, Lahic has been isolated enough to preserve a regional language called Tat.* **Lower:** *An engraved copper tray receives its final touches at the hand of Nazar Aliyev.*

Hajj Nagi goes to his hammer drawer and pulls out seven tools, all with well-worn shafts and heads and peens variously round, square, elongated, blunt and sharply chisel-like. He hands over two that look identical. "No, there is a great difference between them," he protests. "This one is for beating out flat platters, and that is for rounding the insides of bowls."

"When I went to Makkah in 1986, I was one of the first in the Soviet period to go from my district," he digresses with a note of pride. "I stopped in Damascus, where I taught them my craft. It's different there, but here it's 100 points better than anywhere. Even though we use the same metals, in Lahic we do better work."

To prove his point, Hajj Nagi reaches for a drawer of rod-like steel punches, called *qalam*, "pencil" in Turkic languages, used for stamping such figures as full and half moons, five- and seven-pointed stars, wedges, triangles, fish scales and animal hair into metal, creating the figures that adorn most Lahic ware. "For example, samovars. The Russians made them first, but we make them much better. Take this one," he says, reaching for a gleaming piece on the shelf. "Embossed and etched by my son using these simple tools, when he was just a 10th-grader! My sons can even make a man's shape. They can't give it breath, but they give it perfect form."

A pack horse clip-clops over the cobblestones past Hajj Nagi's open shop. Next door, a mechanic tunes the smoking engine of an antique Volga automobile whose pristine, baby-blue paint seems to mock the gray face of Lahic's fast-approaching winter. Up and down the street, women draw water from fountains that carry Azeri inscriptions in Cyrillic letters; one is inscribed with a prayer in Arabic. Most of the women carry the large, one-eared copper water jugs that are designed for hoisting over a shoulder.

Hajj Nagi recaptures the moment with a poem that sounds as if it had sprung from his own lips.

No man is happier
than a master smith

Who earns everything
by his hand.

Even the Khan needs
his work.

His shop is his realm
and he a king,

No better job
there is to be had.

He stirs raspberry jam into his tea, Russian style. "I did my military service near Vladivostok. You know the proverb is true, 'He who travels more, knows more'—just look at me! In the Great Patriotic War [World War II], when our fathers put down their hammers and picked up their rifles, I [was young and] kept the workshop open, but it was not easy. We sent all our blankets to the soldiers, and those winters were hard. Some of us died here, and some of us died in battle, but Lahic managed to survive. I know cold and hunger. That is why I always give coal and wood and bread and salt to anyone in need. I have chosen my place in the cemetery because no one lives forever, not Churchill, not Stalin, not Marx. The world is but a window and we live our lives looking out at Paradise. At the end, we hope to pass through."

A carpet made by Hajj Nagi's daughter in the *qullacheche* ("flowered arms") pattern hangs in his bedroom. By flickering candlelight, its intricate red medallion might indeed be mistaken for a window overlooking paradise. "The electricity always fails when the wind is high," says Hajj Nagi, with one last sip of tea before bedtime. "I like it that way."

The next morning, a few doors down from Hajj Nagi's shop, 30-year-old Agha Mashade Husseinov, a leathercrafter already in the trade half his life, is awake early to work on a pair of *charig*, the thick-soled, lace-up moccasins worn by the mountain people. His grandfather's awl and lasts are within easy reach. From the rafters hang finished sets of reins and whips. "My customers all know what they can buy here," he says. "What they can't get from me,

they can get from Azade."

Azade is Azade Manafov, blind and nearly deaf, 76 years old and Lahic's senior saddlemaker. "I can tan any leather and make any saddlery you want. Since childhood I've been working. Why do I need my eyes now?" he says.

He shows off a handsome set of horse tack he once made from double-stitched leather and flat-woven carpet fragments. "My customer asked, 'Why did you cut up a perfectly good carpet for my horse? I could have sold it for money!' He shouted at me in anger, but you see, horse trappings must be beautiful too."

Azade picks up a pair of *čharig* made from water-buffalo hide fully four millimeters (5/16") thick. "If you work in them, you'll never be tired and you'll never slip, no matter how steep the mountain," he promises.

"Once I received an order from the communist officials," he recalls. "They needed many pairs of *charig*, only made from fine leather and for small feet, for a ballet company they were sending on tour to Italy. I didn't have much time, but I made them all and shipped them out with the *charvadars*."

It must have been a remarkable moment in the annals of trade: Footwear for Russian ballerinas, made in an all-but-isolated mountain village in a style designed for rough crossings of the High Caucasus, traveling by horse-train to a stage in Rome. But many items of Lahic craftsmanship traveled far: a Lahic copper set won a gold medal in the Paris World Exposition of 1878, and masterpieces of Lahic metalwork are on display today in the Louvre and the Victoria and Albert Museum.

Elsewhere in the town, blacksmith and farrier Zeynal Zeynalov is cold-forging and fitting cleated winter shoes for a horse while its owner, a mustachioed *charvadar*, waits. He can size the shoes, Zeynalov explains, without a hot forge, and "neither ice nor snow will stop this *churan* on a high pass." *Churan* is Tat for a bay horse.

Although *charvadars* are no longer needed for the 40-kilometer (25-mi) trip down to the valley, Lahic continues to serve as a supply center for some 35 otherwise isolated mountain villages. Among the older *charvadars*, Mashade Yusuf Charmilov remembers when their main traffic was to the valley and the city of Shemakha.

"We each had only two or three horses on a string, but often a hundred of us traveled together," he says, "bringing up the mountain grain and tobacco and metal—65 different alloys, from as far away as Omsk and Donetsk—and taking back down all the finished goods Lahic could make."

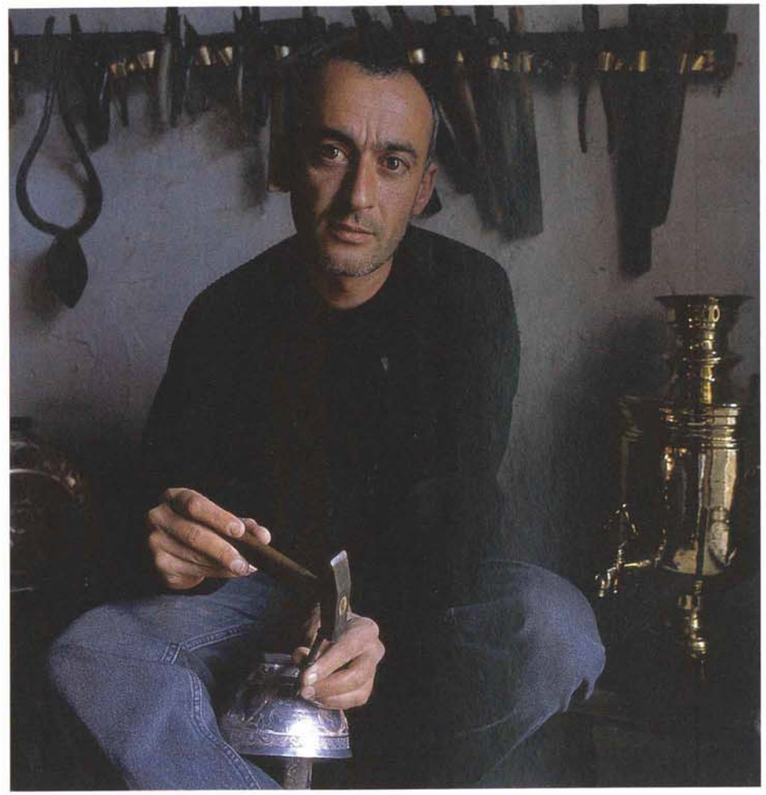
All—except carpets. Weaving came to Lahic only in the years before World War II, but the town's 80-loom cooperative carpet workshop is today a well-established part of the craft economy, busiest when winter curtails women's outside chores.

Forewoman Fatima Ahmadova is working on a new carpet in the Quba design, named after its village of origin. She explains that weavers earn their wages from the co-op according to the carpet's size, the complexity of the pattern and the speed of completion. The wool comes from Australia, the colors are dyed in Baku, and the patterns are borrowed from other villages: Only the weavers' hands are entirely native to Lahic.

Hajj Nagi's shelves are lined with old and new copperware in traditional shapes. ***Left:*** *Leather crafter Agha Mashade Husseinov makes horse tack as well as* charig, *the traditional footwear of the region.* ***Opposite:*** *Nazar Aliyev divides his time between coppersmithing and directing Lahic's Cultural Preservation Society.*

Fatima Bachishova and her 18-year-old daughter Rudabah sit side-by-side on a loom bench working on a *gulistan* pattern. "I know this design by heart," says Fatima. Even so, a hand-colored pattern guide on graph paper is posted on the loom, next to a cup of tea and balls of woolen yarn to be knotted into the pile.

"Yes, I have to count the knots in the beginning, but once the pattern begins to emerge, I work by sight alone," says Fatima. On a bench nearby, a seven-year-old girl named Vusala is watching her mother work on a Shirvan-design carpet, listening to her call out knot counts and colors as she pulls lengths of carnelian, black and turquoise wool from balls of yarn hanging from the loom, tying each knot of the medallion's complex pattern. Beside each weaver are the tools of her trade, all forged in Lahic: a 12-tined comb for tamping knots into the weft; a marlinspike for equalizing the warp; a hook-tipped knife; scissors for trimming the pile, and a whetstone for keeping everything sharp.



The deft, multi-stroke action of a carpet weaver's knife is hard to see, as each knot, though tied to two warp threads, takes only about a second to complete. With her right hand, the weaver uses the hooked knife, called *buchag* in Tat, to pull a taut warp thread toward her far enough to start tying a knot around it with her left hand. The knife next pulls the adjacent warp thread forward to allow the weaver to complete tying the knot. A short sweep of the *buchag*'s cutting edge slices the completed knot from the ball of yarn. The untiring rhythm—pluck, pluck, slice; pluck, pluck, slice—produces a row of knots in surprisingly short order. After a few rows are tied, the comb is used to pound the knots down onto previous rows to make the pile dense, and a warp thread is passed through the weft to lock the knots in place. The gauged pile-trimming scissors, whose invention dates from the Middle Ages and which make carpets with an even pile depth possible, are held in both hands, and they give the pile a final, perfectly even shave.

In 19th-century England, William Morris, whose arts and crafts movement espoused the social value of crafts in the industrializing world, greatly admired the Ardabil carpet, one of a pair of Azerbaijani carpets commissioned by the Safavid shah Tahmasp I that hangs in the Victoria and Albert Museum. "The carpet has no counterpart," he wrote. "Its design is of singular perfection, logically and consistently beautiful, with no oddities or grotesqueries which might need an apology."

> "ONLY COPPERWORK IS FOREVER. THOSE SMITHS WHO LEFT LAHIC ALL EVENTUALLY TURNED BACK TO THEIR CRAFT. EVEN OUR CHILDREN KNOW THAT SMITHING WILL NEVER DIE."

It is a pity Morris never visited Lahic. Here, he might have seen the living proof of his idea that crafts contribute to a culture that is woven no less tightly and attractively than that carpet. Hajj Nagi's nephew Nazar Aliyev is both a craftsman and director of Lahic's Cultural Preservation Society. He takes both jobs seriously: Visitors to the market square are met by his severely worded Azeri signboard that translates, "Warning! It is forbidden to remove the historic stones of Lahic. It is forbidden to build here without permission."

The society's most practical rule restricts the village's building style to a traditional stone-and-wood cross-tie technique known in Tat as *divarchu* ("wood wall"). This is more than esthetics, for the blue-painted crosspieces set into all outer and inner walls every 65 centimeters (25½") dampen the seismic tremors that frequently rumble through Lahic and indeed gave the town its name. Before living memory, when the town was named La, an earthquake flattened it. The syllable *hic*, a Tat word meaning "destroyed" or "non-existent," was added to the name. The last major quake in the region, in 1902, left the town unscathed, although it ruined Shemakha, a much larger town that has no such building code.

Nazar explains that such rules help to keep Lahic whole not just physically, but also socially and architecturally. A visit to the bathhouse of Hajj Jahan Bakhish shows how. Here, a 200-year-old underground steam vault, a beehive-shaped boiler and a labyrinth of changing and cooling rooms sit beside the owner's new house that was built, according to the law, in a matching style. Had it been constructed of incongruous materials, Nazar asserts, the new house would have greatly reduced the public bath's implicit function as a repository of communal values and tradition.

Nazar goes back to tapping out the dents in an old brass samovar. "This piece is local, but we used to repair samovars from as far away as Baku and beyond. They were brought here because our people were the best. Now many of us have moved elsewhere, so you can find Lahic work all over Azerbaijan."

"No matter what kind of salaried job I might get, it could end at any time. Only copperwork is forever. Those smiths who left Lahic to search for other work all eventually turned back to their craft. Even our children know, and my uncle still teaches us, that smithing will never die."

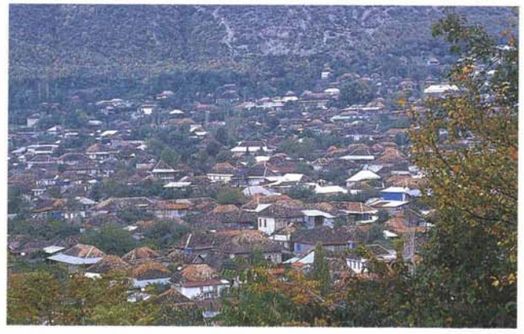
SHEKKI

COME AND SEE

WRITTEN BY LOUIS WERNER ◆ PHOTOGRAPHED BY KEVIN BUBRISKI

It takes most of a day to drive west from Baku to Shekki, in the northwest corner of Azerbaijan, although the odometer measures the trip at only some 250 kilometers (155 mi) long. After the pastoral expanses of the central valley, and long after the road north to Lahic branches off (see p. 12), the Shekki road rises and begins to trace the southern brow of the high Caucasus. Here samovars steam at roadside cafés, tobacco leaves dry in open-air sheds, and children mind flocks of turkeys and herds of water buffalo. United Nations–sponsored camps for refugees from Nagorno Karabakh, which lies some 150 kilometers (90 mi) to the south, crowd the outskirts of towns and villages.

The road skirts the hilly spurs and crosses boulder-strewn rivers that tumble from the mountain ridges. The valleys formed by these steep drainages are warm, microclimatic refuges for cultivating pomegranates, custard apples, bananas and cornel cherry, whose white variety, of legendary sweetness, is unique to the district. Tea is served Russian-style, sweetened with fruit preserves.



Topping a hill overlooking Shekki, what is immediately remarkable is that it is almost entirely a town of red tile roofs and stone walls. A flood in the year 1772, when Shekki's wealth was at its height, destroyed the old town and permitted its reconstruction in a unified style.

Shekki's fame came from its silk industry and the vibrant foreign trade that followed it. French novelist Alexandre Dumas, familiar with France's greatest silk-producing center, visited here in the early 19th century and called Shekki "the Lyon of the Caucasus," a city of horse-powered looms and mulberry plantations. Two vast, 300-room caravanserais, each sprawling over some 4½ hectares (11 acres), still stand, abandoned, on the bank of the Gurjanachai. Silk from Shekki, it seems, was not part of Soviet economic plans for the region.

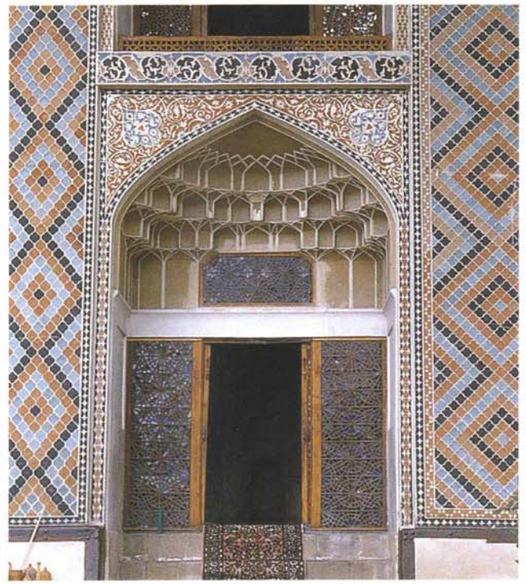
But among Caucasian nationalists, Shekki is remembered for another reason: It was here that Hajji Murad, a 19th-century Tartar fighter, died in heroic defiance of the forces of Czar Nicholas I. Leo Tolstoy's eponymous 1904 novella chronicled the tale of Hajji Murad's last days, and ever since, Shekki has been a popular destination for nationalists and Tolstoy aficionados alike.

In Shekki's streets, rows of massive plane trees run uphill to the Khans' palace. Built in 1761 by Hussein Khan, who ruled one of several princely domains of the south Caucasus, the rectangular building has a long facade whose every surface is either pigmented or pierced. Fields of painted, mosaic-like patterns and bands of grilled windows with Venetian glass are interrupted only by a twin set of half-domed entryways with mirrored stalactites.

The Shekki Khans were not known for beneficence. Hussein Khan is said to have executed the palace architect, Abbas Quli, simply so he could never again design such a magnificent building. Hussein's own fate was similar, and it came at the hands of his uncle, Abdel Qadir Khan, who poisoned him. Hussein Khan's victory frieze, painted on the walls of the reception room, seems designed to intimidate visitors: It depicts the khan, on horseback and carrying a scepter, surrounded by allied and opposing troops hoisting battle standards and pikes bearing skewered heads. The flags are emblazoned with the crescents, lions, sunbursts and scimitars that identify the soldiers as Turks, Shirvanshahs, Mongols and Persians, respectively. More severed heads are stacked on all sides like cannonballs, each one detailed with a neatly wrapped turban and a well-combed mustache.

In contrast, the Khans' private sitting room was decorated as a floor-to-ceiling paradise by the noted 19th-century painter Qubar Ali Karabakhi. Irises, pomegranates, roses and intertwining tendrils provide a magical garden in which peacocks and flower-breathing dragons play. Yet even here, the iconography of raw power is not absent: In the lush verdure, lions rip the heads from deer and gorge on their entrails.

"THE CAUCASUS WAS LIKE NOTHING AT ALL THAT HAD EVER BEEN DREAMT OF, OR WRITTEN DOWN, OR TALKED ABOUT."



Top: Tile mosaics, geometrical arabesques and shabakya *(wood and cut-glass) windows decorate the façade of the 1761 palace of the Shekki khans, which looks out on a reflecting pool,* ***opposite top. Above:*** *One of Shekki's craftsmen, musical instrument maker Farukh Abdul Rahimov, strums a lute-like* tar. ***Opposite, lower:*** *An earthquake destroyed much of the town in 1772, though not the khans' palace, and permitted its reconstruction in a unified style that lends it special charm today.*

Downhill from the palace, 78-year-old Farukh Abdul Rahimov is expertly ripping the membrane from a bull's heart. "Wet it, look how strong it is," he says. "A perfect piece for the *tar*." Abdul Rahimov is Shekki's foremost maker of musical instruments, and his shop is crowded with spike-fiddles, lutes, tambourines and drums that all use animal skin as sounding boards.

The lute-like *tar* is his specialty. It can take weeks for woodcutters to bring him just the right branch of a knotted mulberry tree for him to carve into the *tar*'s hourglass body. When asked from whom he learned his craft, he points to a framed picture of his teacher, Ahmad Bey Tahirov. "He who has died, has died," he says sadly. "Very few still do this work well."

Hajji Salim Efendi, prayer leader (imam) of the recently reroofed Jum'ah Masjid (Friday Mosque), tells a different kind of story of Shekki, one of rebirth and revival. He points out that the 18th-century mosque, with its distinctive brick minaret, burned in 1990, at the start of the Karabakh war, but that it is now open again. "We rebuilt it quickly, and the *madrasa* [school] is full," he says with satisfaction. Upstairs, 12-year-old Musa Iskandar steps forward from a row of boys to sit cross-legged and recite the first Sura, or chapter, of the Qur'an. His voice is melodic, but firm. His teacher nods approval.

On a high crag overlooking the town and the valley sit the ruins of "Gelesen-Geresen," the Shekki citadel. The story of how it got its name is a proud chapter in the town's history. In 1744, Nadir Shah Afshar, usurper of the last Safavid ruler's throne, wrote to Shekki's Hajji Chelebi Khan with the demand that he submit. By way of refusal, Hajji Chelebi replied from his stronghold with an enigmatic and adamantine response: "*Gelesen, geresen*"—if you come, you will see. The shah, too curious, attacked, and met defeat.

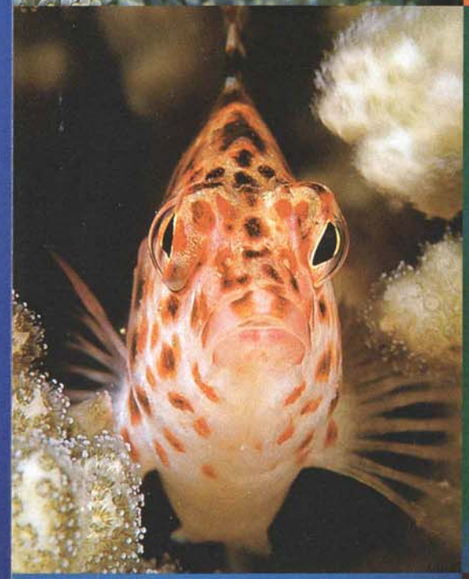
That two-word reply might be the best response to any number of questions posed to the people of Shekki by curious outsiders. Why are Shekki's sweet cherries white? Why does a Shekki bull's heart make such a fine soundboard? "The Caucasus," Tolstoy wrote, "was like nothing at all that had ever been dreamt of, or written down, or talked about."

Gelesen, geresen.....

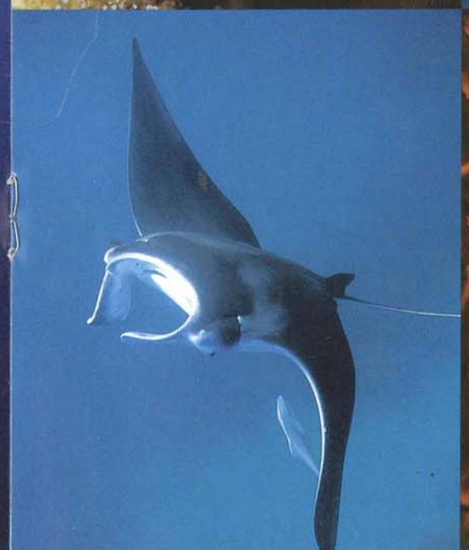
Dreaming of Farasan

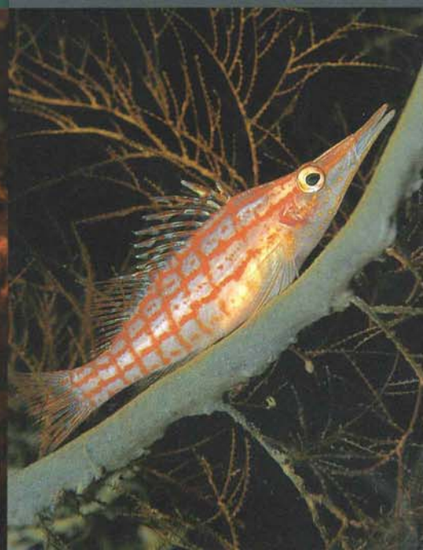
WRITTEN AND PHOTOGRAPHED BY ERIK BJURSTRÖM

Descent was like slow-motion skydiving...



Clockwise from top left: *Protected by the mucus coating its sides, a clownfish takes refuge amid the stinging tentacles of its sea anemone. A cleaner shrimp waits at its habitual "service station," ready to nibble ectoparasites and dead skin from fish that visit for this purpose. The lionfish's gape is the last thing small prey fish see; divers see dangerously venomous spines. A long-nose hawkfish lurks among the branches of a Gorgonia coral. The feathery white tentacles of a* Xenia *soft coral continuously open and close like fingers. Manta rays' "wings" are actually pectoral fins fused into their bodies; their size gives them an effortless grace. A pixy hawkfish lies in wait in a reef crevice, watching for a small crustacean. A night dive yielded this close-up of the eye of a sleeping parrotfish.*





From the age of 15, I regarded the Farasan Bank as a diver's ultimate goal.

With slow, graceful wing movements, the black-backed ray flew through the water like a giant bird. Its mouth, gaping to sieve the plankton-laden water, was so big I could have swum into it. In front of it, a school of pilotfish kept formation, and from its white belly hung two suckerfish. The ray turned and stopped in front of me. It was some five meters (16') across. Its big eye gazed at me for a moment and then, with an elegant flip of its wings, it banked away. I had met one of the gentler monsters of the deep—a manta ray—on my first plunge into a coral reef in the Farasan Bank, off the southwestern coast of Saudi Arabia.

In his 1963 classic *The Living Sea*, Jacques Cousteau noted the "overwhelming underwater life" of the Farasan Bank, and called it "one of the most fascinating areas [explored] during our first Red Sea expedition. Only a few Westerners have seen it and even fewer have dived there. To learn about the Farasan's reef structures and marine biological richness would take a lifetime."

I was 15 when I first read that passage, and I was just learning to dive. With Cousteau's words, the Farasan Bank began to shimmer like a mirage at the horizon of my most adventurous dreams. Over the years, as I dived on many of Europe's coasts and a few in Sri Lanka, I always regarded the Farasan Bank as my ultimate diver's goal.

The Farasan Bank is a shoal 100 kilometers (62 mi) wide that stretches 800 kilometers (500 mi) down Saudi Arabia's Red Sea coast from the latitude of the town of al-Lith to Karamaran Island in the south. It is part of the Arabian Peninsula's continental shelf, which drops from an average depth of roughly 40 meters (130') down to some 600 meters (2000') at its outer edge. The Bank includes more than 100 coral islets of widely varying size and some 20 large islands; among them, those of the Farasan Island archipelago, off the port of Jaizan, are the largest. (See *Aramco World*, November/December 1994.) They are limestone islands, built up of coral created some 8000 years ago, as sea levels rose with the ending of the last ice age. Because of the extensive areas of shallow water, which gives the corals good access to the light that is essential for the growth of reefs, coral "gardens" have spread over vast areas, creating a rich and beautiful ecosystem still unaffected by tourism, industry or large-scale fishing, and one still virtually unknown outside the Arabian Peninsula.

For nearly two decades I kept my boyhood dream alive. Then, in 1981, I had an opportunity to join a dental clinic in Khamis Mushayt, a city in southern Saudi Arabia about 20 kilometers (13 mi) from Abha, the largest city close to the Farasan Bank. I packed my cases with diving equipment and an old but available 1918 British Admiralty chart, determined to explore the underwater world of the Farasan Bank.

Getting permission to dive on the Farasan Bank took time. We made several practice dives along the inshore reefs. It was July when we were finally able to set out, into a calm sea, with the 50-degree (122°F) heat burning on our shoulders. But I was ecstatic, and I regarded the school of dolphins that escorted us out as a good omen. An hour later we noticed a line of what looked like bushes on the horizon. It turned out not to be a mirage, but materialized into an island surrounded by a reef. Within the reef, the shallow water shone a luminous green; when we dived, we found a fairytale landscape of coral and soft coral fans in glowing colors.

In the distance I saw something big moving. At first I thought it was a whale shark, the world's largest fish, but then it began to resemble a compact swarm of bees. It turned out to be a school of striated fusiliers, an anchovy-like fish. In all my years of diving I had never seen such a tightly packed school of fish: It was like a moving wall. When I approached, a tunnel opened up in the wall and I was engulfed, swimming in a cave with moving walls as the uncountable fusiliers moved as one all around me, as if guided by a single brain. Then a group of fast jacks approached the fusiliers. The school moved away from me and packed itself into a giant ball of fish. When the jacks hit the ball, it exploded in all directions like fireworks, confusing the attackers just long enough to allow the fusiliers to escape. Exhilarated, I returned to the surface. My efforts to come here had been justified.

The largest island in the Farasan Bank, after the Farasan Islands themselves, is Jabal Sabaya, 338 kilometers (208 mi) south of Jiddah and 19 kilometers (12 mi) from the coast. It rises more than nine meters (30') above sea level, and the water around the island is deep, as the coral walls fall precipitously to the bottom. When we dived there, descent was like slow-motion skydiving; in moments like this, diving becomes not a sport, but a sublime philosophical experience.

At 45 meters (150'), I pushed off horizontally from the reef wall and hovered in a blue nothing where I could see neither surface nor bottom. A strange well-being

Most of the 100 islets of the Farasan Bank are made of coral limestone, and all but a handful are too small to be inhabited. ***Opposite:*** *A school of fusiliers relies on speed and density to visually confuse its predators, which cannot fix on any individual fish and must strike at random. The school apparently recognizes that the human diver is not a predator, perhaps from the style of his movements.*

ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

- **Manta rays** (*Manta birostris*) reach a "wingspan" of six meters (19') and a weight of up to two tons. Their specific name, meaning "two-beaked," comes from the two highly mobile projecting lobes on either side of the mouth that help funnel plankton in. Like some other rays, they often leap a meter or two out of the water and "bellyflop" onto the surface, making a loud noise and a tremendous splash.

- **Whale sharks** (*Rhincodon typus*) often surpass 12 meters (40') in length and have been reported at 18 meters (60'). Though they have been sighted in the Red Sea and the Arabian Gulf, they are an oceanic species distantly related to nurse sharks. Found worldwide, mostly in the tropics, they eat plankton and small fishes, which they engulf as they swim slowly near the water's surface.

- **Striated fusiliers** (*Caesio striatus*) are one species of a family of beautifully streamlined, fast-swimming mid-depth fish that feed on zooplankton during the day and shelter in coral reefs at night. They grow to 18 centimeters (7") in length and depend on their agility and schooling behavior to elude predators.

- **Jacks** (family Carangidae) are strong-swimming open-water fish, usually silvery, with widely forked or crescent-shaped tails that are very narrow where they join the body. They eat other fish. The orange-spotted jacks (*Carangoides bajad*) that attacked the fusiliers can change their color to become almost entirely orange-yellow.

- **Gorgonians, or sea-fans or fan corals** (family Gorgoniidae), are related to the reef-forming corals, but have a skeleton made of horn-like protein rather than calcium carbonate. The skeleton may branch in a single plane, forming a lacy fan, feather or lattice, or branch in all directions like a shrub. Gorgonians are orange, red or yellow, and particularly beautiful when their tiny, white, eight-tentacled polyps are visible.

- **Hawkfishes** (family Cirrhitidae) like to wedge themselves in place on the reef with their thickened pectoral fins, darting out to snatch up passing prey, typically crustaceans. There are four species in the Red Sea; the long-nose (*Oxycirrhites typus*) has a snout that makes up a fifth of its 13-centimeter (5") length.

- **Lionfish or turkeyfish or zebrafish** (*Pterois volitans*) are one of the most dangerous of 35 species of venomous scorpionfishes (family Scorpaenidae) found in the Red Sea. Grooves on the sides of their dorsal, anal and pelvic spines are lined with glandular tissue that produces a powerful poison, but this equipment is defensive: Lionfish are slow-swimming, lie-in-wait predators of small fishes and crustaceans. They grow to be 35 centimeters (14") long.

- **Flashlight fishes**—there are four species—are in the appropriately named Anomalopidae family. The one species found in the Red Sea grows to about 11 centimeters (4¼") length. It is sometimes found at depths of only a few meters, especially on moonless nights, but is more common at 30 meters (100') or below. How newly hatched flashlight fish acquire their colonies of light-emitting bacteria is a puzzle still unsolved.

- **Gobies** are the largest family of fishes in tropical waters, with more than 500 species, and include some of the smallest individuals: Mature gobies of one species are 8 millimeters (less than ⅓") long. *Ctenogobiops maculosus* reaches seven centimeters (2¾") and is common in the Red Sea on sandy bottom between one and 15 meters down. The males protect the eggs laid by the females, and have been known to bite the fingers of intruding divers.

- **Moray eels** (family Muraenidae) have thick, muscular bodies without scales or pectoral fins. They live in reef crevices and are not as aggressive as they are portrayed to be; nonetheless, divers are sometimes bitten, perhaps when the eel mistakes their hands for prey. Most morays have long, sharp teeth and eat fish and octopus; those with low, rounded teeth are crab-eaters.

began to fill my body—a warning signal, in fact, that the increased pressure in my breathing air was making the nitrogen it contained act like a narcotic. I lit my light and revealed an explosion of color from the gorgonia fan coral (*Gorgonella maris-rubi*) that was growing out from the wall. The gorgonia species host numerous life-forms, such as shrimp and bright-colored nudibranchs, that shelter in its branches and take advantage of its habit of growing out into the edges of the nutrient-bearing currents that flow along the reef.

The small white soft coral that I saw nearby, a species in the Xeniidae family, is a particularly sophisticated example of symbiosis. The coral polyps, which are animals, harbor large numbers of individual algal cells within their own tissues that benefit from the waste products of the polyps' metabolism; the algae, which are plants, for their part carry out photosynthesis whose products nourish the coral. The beautiful feathery tentacles of the coral polyps are constantly performing a rhythmic dance, opening and closing in unison like hands, perhaps to keep their symbionts supplied with fresh, oxygen-rich water.

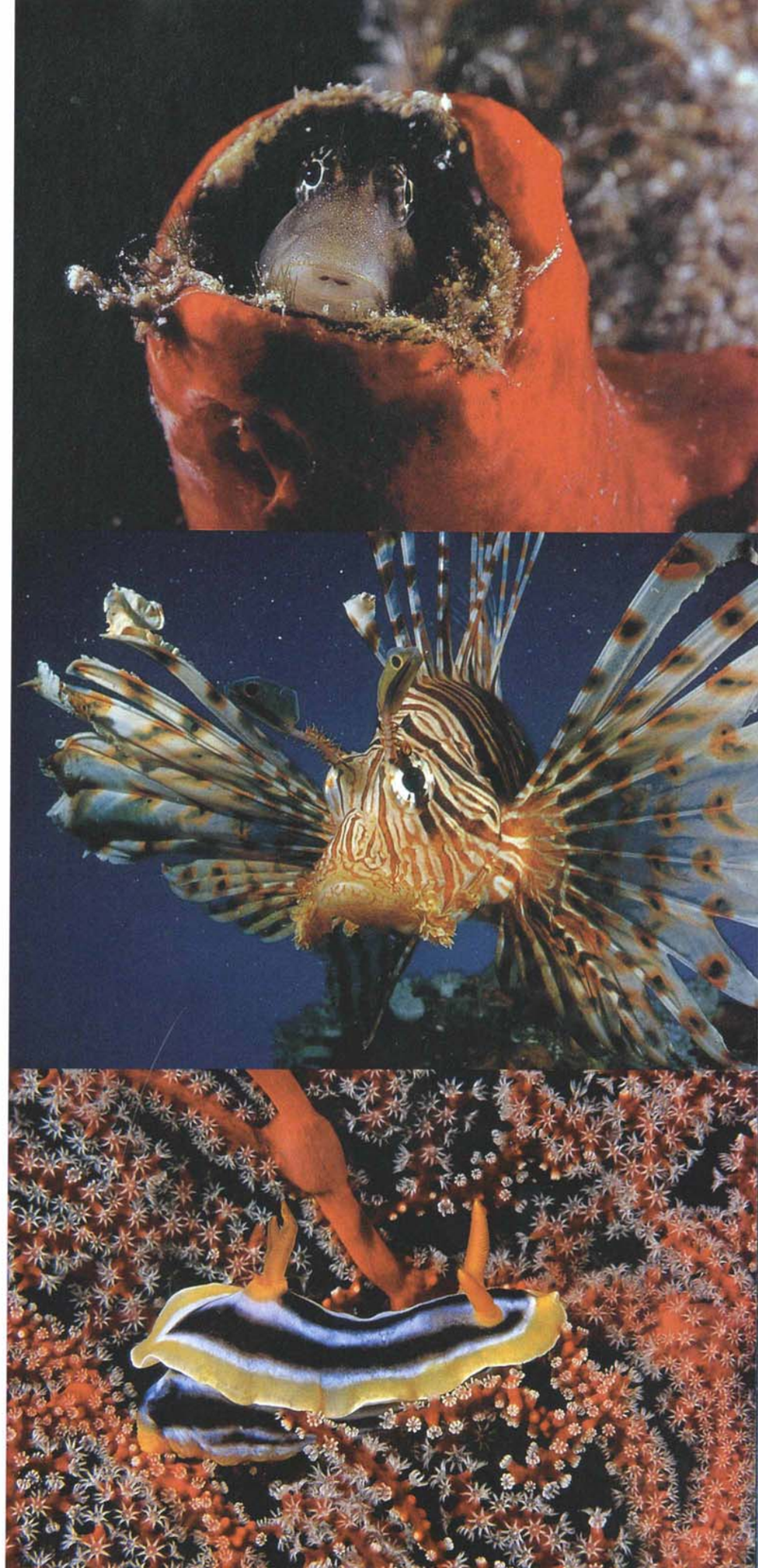
Several long-nose hawkfish, with neat red gridlines marking their silver sides, were lying among the branches of a gorgonian. One of them held a small jewelfish in its long beak, looking very like a seabird with its catch. With trembling fingers I moved quickly to try and make the photograph of my life—but the hawkfish swallowed his prey. In nitrogen narcosis, I couldn't feel much disappointment, and I actually began to giggle into my regulator. It was all like floating in a dream.

At the same time, several lionfish were hovering along the vertical wall, armed with what are generally regarded as lethally poisonous dorsal spines. Local fishermen had told me that the only salve for a lionfish sting is a red-hot iron, whose heat apparently destroys the protein-based poison, and consequently I had great respect for lionfish. But as anything beautiful *and* poisonous or dangerous is an underwater photographer's ultimate subject, I went in close with my macro lens—apparently too close. At lightning speed the fish shot forward, and, bending its back like a snake, buried a spine in my finger. Pain shot through my hand as though I had put my finger in an open flame. For a moment I panicked, but to my surprise, the pain subsided after about five minutes without any more damage done. I had been lucky: The sting was a shallow one. A deeper sting that penetrated a larger blood vessel would have resulted in excruciating, lasting pain.

I continued my descent. At 66 meters (216') we reached the bottom, in light that was faint and gray, like the time just before dawn in the world above. Before us lay what looked like a moonscape of dead coral. Several sharks patrolled in front of us (see *Aramco World*, March/April 1996), and strangely shaped sponges hung like stalactites. At this depth, the sound of our breathing seemed distorted and echoed through the water. Our time was running out, so without lingering long, we turned upward, back toward light and life.

When I get a fish in my viewfinder I often find myself wondering why it looks the way it does, why it behaves the way it does; I'm struck by the wonderful solutions nature has found for each creature's needs. Farasan, for us, was a miracle of biological diversity. Every little fish occupied its own niche in the ecological system and showed its own particular behavior. At night we saw swarms of lights moving through the water like fireflies—the astonishing little flashlight fish (*Photoblepharon palpebratus*). Under each eye, this fish has an elliptical, sac-like organ full of light-producing bacteria; the organ is sizeable—about 17 millimeters (11/16") long, and thus larger than the fish's eye—and is equipped with an "eyelid" that allows the fish to turn the light on and off at will. Apparently, the light attracts the zooplankton the flashlight fish eats and enables it to see its prey, and also helps it both to signal other flashlight fish and confuse predators.

We saw many examples of symbiosis, or cooperation between species, besides the algae-coral relationship. On the bottom, we saw small holes in the sand, each guarded by a goby fish (*Ctenogobiops maculosus*) and maintained by a snapping shrimp: We often saw the shrimp come out of the hole shoving a pile of sand in front of it. The shrimp digs the hole and maintains it; both the shrimp and the goby live in it. The shrimp rarely leaves the hole unless the goby is on guard, and usually keeps one of its antennae in contact with the fish, for, of the two creatures, the goby has better vision and a greater sensitivity to low-frequency vibration. If danger approaches, the goby somehow signals, and both creatures immediately



Top: A tubeworm shell, now overgrown by red sponge, makes a safe refuge for a blenny, among the smallest of reef fish. ***Center:*** *A lionfish's poisonous spines are defensive; it uses its fan-like pectoral fins to corner its prey.* ***Bottom:*** *Nudibranchs, so named for their horn-like external gill, feed on sponges, anemones and hydroids. The bright colors of* Chromodoris quadricolor *warn potential predators that this defenseless, snack-sized sea-slug is actually poisonous.*

The Farasan Bank is a miracle of biological diversity.

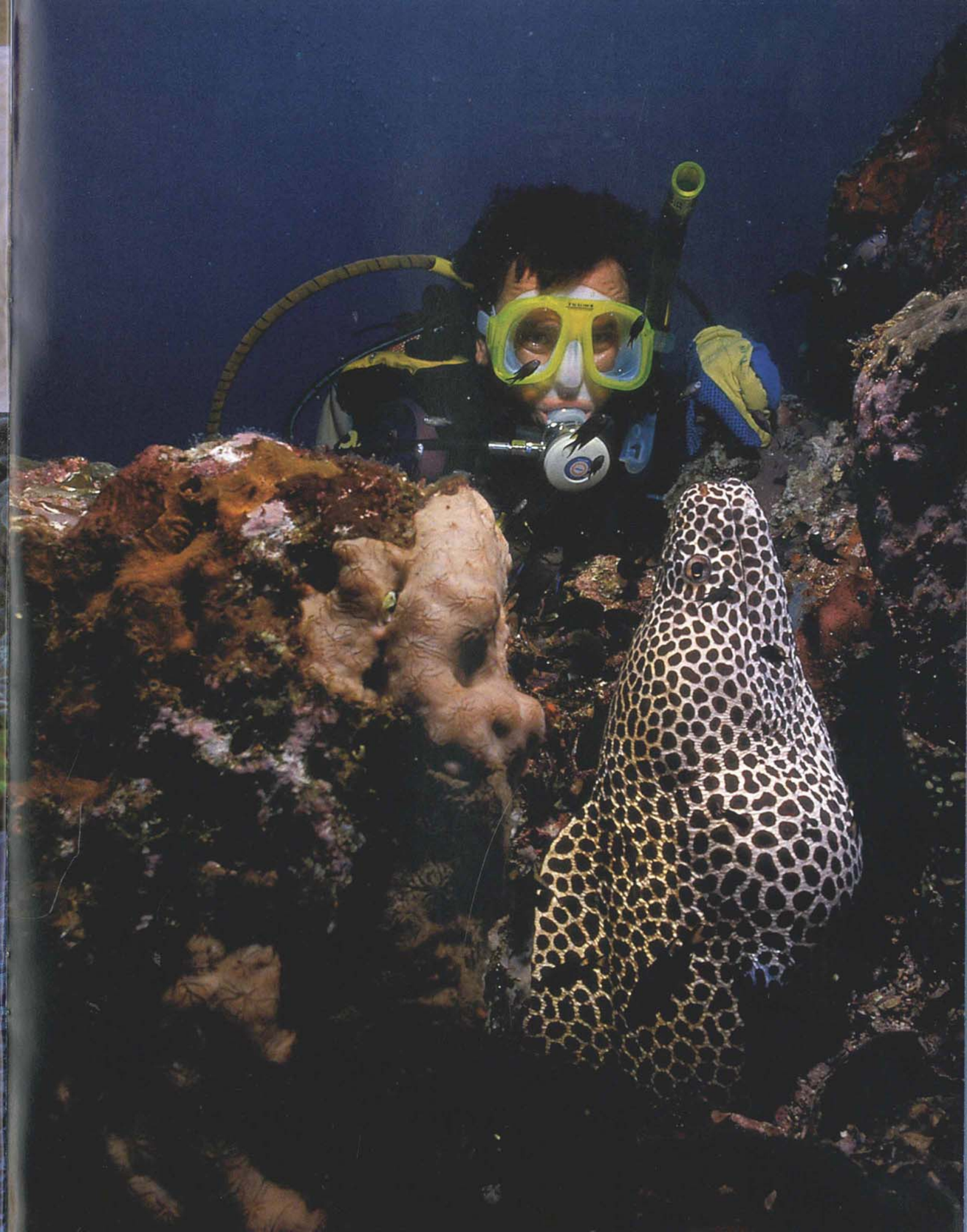
withdraw into the hole. Over the course of some 200 dives in the Farasans, I watched this duo many times, and I noticed that if danger approached when the shrimp had wandered away from the fish, the goby made a motion that resembled coughing, apparently sending a vibration through the water, which prompted the shrimp to pop back into the hole.

We had the time, too, to see unexpected behavior. On one dive, a companion was kneeling on the bottom taking pictures when a 150-centimeter (5') yellow-margin moray eel (*Gymnothorax flavimarginatus*) left its hole and began to examine the diver who was photographing it, sniffing all over his body while twining around him like a snake. It looked my companion straight in the eyes, and he held the eel in his arms and was able to stroke it—which the big eel seemed to enjoy.

With several companions I spent every weekend for nearly three years diving on the Farasan Bank, getting to know every detail of many reefs and feeling like an astronaut who can make his visits to another planet whenever he wishes. The names of Hadara, Jabal Sabaya, Abu Latt and other islands, which had once so captivated Cousteau, became synonyms for adventure. But to me, in addition, the Farasan Bank meant something few are fortunate enough to experience: The realization of a boyhood dream.

An award-winning underwater photographer, Erik Bjurström is working on a book about his adventures diving throughout the Red Sea and among deep wrecks in the Baltic. He lived in Saudi Arabia for 16 years.

Top: *A* Periclimenes *cleaner shrimp scavenges amid the vesicles of* Plerogyra *bubble coral.* ***Center:*** *The intricate shapes of hard coral provide a nursery for the reef's small fry.* ***Bottom:*** *Sea turtles nest on the sandy cays of the Farasan Bank, and can feed along the edges of the reefs.* ***Opposite:*** *Curiosity is characteristic of both humans and moray eels.*



THE ROMAN MILLENNIUM

WRITTEN BY FRANK L. HOLT

COINS FROM THE FRANK L. HOLT COLLECTION

Obverse: Philip, r. 997 to 1002 AUC (AD 244 to 249). Reverse: Temple of Eternal Rome with six columns and statue personifying Rome. SAECVLVM NOVVM ("The New Age"). Silver.

Obverse: Gordian III, predecessor of Philip. Reverse: Goddess holding a globe. PROVIDENTIA AVG ("The Providence of the Ruler"). Silver.

Obverse: Philip. Reverse: Elephant and driver. AETERNITAS AVGG ("The Eternity of the Rulers"). Silver.

Obverse: Philip. Reverse: Temple with statue, courtyard and river creature below. ZEYΓΜΑΤΕΩΝ ("Zeugma," in Greek), mint city now in southern Turkey. Bronze.

THE EARNEST CROWDS THAT GATHERED ACROSS CHRISTIAN EUROPE 1000 YEARS AGO FOR "YIK" WERE NOT THE FIRST TO MARK SUCH AN OCCASION; NOR WERE WE THE SECOND TO DO SO ON JANUARY 1, 2000. THE ORIGINAL MILLENNIAL CELEBRATION IN WESTERN CALENDRICAL HISTORY REVERBERATED ACROSS THE ROMAN EMPIRE IN "ANNO MI AUC"—OTHERWISE KNOWN AS THE YEAR AD 248, ACCORDING TO THE LATER GREGORIAN CALENDAR, WHICH CALCULATED FROM THE BIRTH OF JESUS RATHER THAN THE FOUNDING OF ROME.

Like "Y2K" today, the Roman millennium celebration in 248 was extensive and bureaucratic, laden with official messages of inspiration and private hopes for human progress, but it took place in a world that, to its inhabitants, was far more insecure than ours, and it was masterminded by an emperor of unlikely heritage.

Marcus Julius Philippus, who was known as "Philip the Arab," hailed from Arabia Trachonitis, now part of Syria. This, and the fact of his humble birth, brought him scorn from Roman aristocrats who believed, however illogically, that such provinces were inhabited solely by bandits.

In fact, we know that Philip and his brother, Caius Julius Priscus, were sons of one Julius Marinus, and they were born in Shahba, a town that still exists today 100 kilometers (62 mi) east of the Sea of Galilee, and which, after Philip's accession, was renamed Philippopolis. Philip was born about 204, in the years of the Severan emperors, and both boys witnessed the growing autocracy and militarism of the Roman Empire as its rulers struggled to meet new dangers. To the north, Germanic tribes challenged Rome's once-legendary legions all along the Rhine and Danube frontiers. In the east, the aggressive Sassanid Persians, led by the remarkably able Ardashir, threatened to overrun several provinces. These crises were severe and persistent enough to cause major disruptions in trade, force higher taxes and spur the gradual debasement of the imperial currency. Moreover, the frontier wars began to expose Roman soldiers to new diseases that later spread to civilians. It was an age increasingly fraught with battle, pestilence and economic decline. The resulting instability, however, opened cracks in the political establishment that allowed for the rise of young provincials such as Philip and Priscus.

Then, politics was a game played more brutally than now, and in the early third century, the leading cause of death among Roman emperors was assassination. Every failure of leadership, real or imagined, brought swift retribution: Between April and July 238, five ill-starred emperors died violently in what some interpreted as the final death-throes of the Roman Empire. Citizens lost all confidence in their leaders and became desperate, and in the military each legion was like a law unto itself. Yet the troops united later that year sufficiently to hail as Rome's latest ruler a pliant lad of 13 years named Gordian III. (Gordian I and Gordian II had already been killed.)

In 243, Gordian's father-in-law Timesitheus, who was both his most faithful supporter and his Praetorian Prefect, or commander of the imperial guard, died under mysterious circumstances. It was immediately rumored that Timesitheus's successor in that post—"Philip the Arab"—had poisoned him, although he may well have died of intestinal disorders brought on by poor hygiene. Thus did Philip emerge from relative obscurity at a critical moment in Roman history. The anonymous, occasionally chauvinistic, *Historia Augusta*, a collection of biographies of the later emperors, notes that "*Philippus Arabs, humili genere natus sed superbus*," ("Philip the Arab, arrogant in spite of his humble birth,") dared next to replace the emperor himself by contriving local shortages of food and supplies that served to undermine the army's confidence in young Gordian. Soon, nervous legions were demanding that Gordian share his crown as co-ruler with the mature Philip. But Gordian, who regarded himself as "noble-blooded," could not endure this, and so he attempted to sway the legionnaires with a direct appeal.

Gordian's oration on this occasion ranks among the great failures in the history of rhetoric. First, Gordian accused Philip of not keeping his proper place in Roman society, and he demanded that the army choose between the two. The troops voted for Philip. Gordian immediately back-pedaled, and stated that he would, after all, accept a co-regency with Philip. But, responded the army, this was no longer possible in light of the ballot he himself had just demanded. Gordian lowered the bar again: He would serve as Philip's "Caesar"—his deputy and heir. Again, the legions declined. Gordian then requested that he switch positions with Philip and become Praetorian Prefect in Philip's place. Again, the legions declined. Gordian then asked simply to serve as a general, and finally merely to be allowed to live. He was executed nonetheless, ending a reign of only six years, and in March 244, "Philip the Arab" acceded to sole power over the Roman world.

While this appears to be the most plausible account—others record Gordian succumbing to disease or falling in battle against the Persians—Rome needed an emperor with knowledge of eastern languages, geography and peoples. Philip's background, though scorned by Roman blue-bloods, was one of the reasons he inspired confidence among soldiers who were locked in a discouraging, seemingly endless, struggle with the Sassanids. Ardashir's successor, Shapur I, had launched his 30-year reign in 240 by defeating Gordian at

PHILIP'S IMPERIAL COINAGE WAS UNUSUALLY VOLUMINOUS AND DIVERSE. NEVER BEFORE HAD THE WORLD WITNESSED SUCH A WELL-COORDINATED SHOW OF POMP, POWER AND MONETARY PATRONAGE.

Obverse: Philip. Reverse: Goddess holding legionary standards. FIDES MILITVM ("Trust of the Soldiers"); SC stands for "[With the] Senate's consent" and indicates the coin was minted in Rome. Bronze.

Obverse: Philip. Reverse: Antelope. SAECVLARES AVGG ("The New Age of the Rulers"); VI indicates mint number six. Silver.

Misiche, in Mesopotamia. (He would eventually hand Rome its ultimate humiliation in 260 by capturing a Roman emperor named Valerian and using him as a footstool. The complete disappearance of an emperor into the disgrace of foreign captivity left no doubt among Romans of the immediacy of the Sassanid threat.)

Philip, however, staved off that fate for a generation by negotiating a monetary settlement with the Persians shortly after his accession. His critics condemned the deal, but even now many scholars consider the 10,000 pounds of gold paid to Shapur to have been a statesman-like bargain for peace under the conditions of the time. That done, Philip wisely hurried west to Rome, where he dutifully honored the memory of Gordian and quickly humored the wary senate. He soon waged successful campaigns along the Danube frontier. He secured imperial titles for his wife, Otacilia Severa, and his son, Philip II, thus laying the foundation for a new dynasty and giving the Roman people the hope of future stability. But most popular of all was Philip's decision to hold a lavish millennial celebration in order to kindle hope in an anxious age.

Although Philip reigned from 244 to 249 according to the Christian system developed several centuries after his death, according to Roman practice he came to power in 997 AUC (*ab urbe condita*, "from the founding of the city"). The starting date in the Roman calendar was the legendary raising of the "eternal city" of Rome, by the hands of the hero Romulus, from the banks of the Tiber River on April 21 in the year that today would be referred to as 753 BC.

Thus, the Roman millennium happened to fall during the reign of Philip, and in a state that zealously observed anniversaries of every kind, from military victories to Nero's first shave, this escaped no one's attention. To mark the occasion, Philip staged *Ludi Saeculares* (Centennial Games) in April, 1001 AUC (AD 248), when Rome had actually completed its first millennium and embarked upon its second. Of all the many series of games that were staged in Rome, these *Ludi* were the greatest. Originally conceived to be held only once a century, they were in fact held to mark great occasions whenever imperial power was able to arrange them on a suitable pretext. (Claudius had sponsored them for Rome's 800th anniversary.) In addition, however, Philip also sponsored some earlier celebrations to hasten the euphoria that many people wanted to feel—and that fueled his popularity.

Much of the Roman hoopla outside the games would appear perfectly in tune with the western world's Y2K celebrations: prayers, hymns, theatrical performances, banquets, contests, and the minting of commemorative coin-ages. But the *Ludi Saeculares* were different, for, in the Circus Maximus, according to the *Historia Augusta*, there were "exhibited or slain" a rhinoceros, six hippos, 10 each of giraffes, hyenas, tigers and elk; 20 wild asses, 30 leopards, 32 elephants, 40 wild horses, 70 lions and "innumerable" other animals, all in addition to some 2000 gladiators.

Some of the more exotic members of this doomed millennial menagerie can be seen today on Philip's imperial coinage, which was unusually voluminous and diverse. The issues spilled into

THE EMPEROR WHO SO ENTHUSIASTICALLY OBSERVED ROME'S MILLENNIUM DID NOT BENEFIT FROM THE SENTIMENTS OF PEACE AND GOOD WILL THAT THE OCCASION HAD INSPIRED.

Obverse: Marcia Otacilia Severa Augusta, wife of Philip. Reverse: PIETAS AVGVSTAE ("The Piety of the Empress"); SC ("Senate's consent"). Bronze.

Obverse: Decius, successor of Philip. Reverse: Goddess holding a cornucopia. LIBERALITAS AVG ("The Generosity of the Ruler"); SC ("Senate's consent"). Bronze.

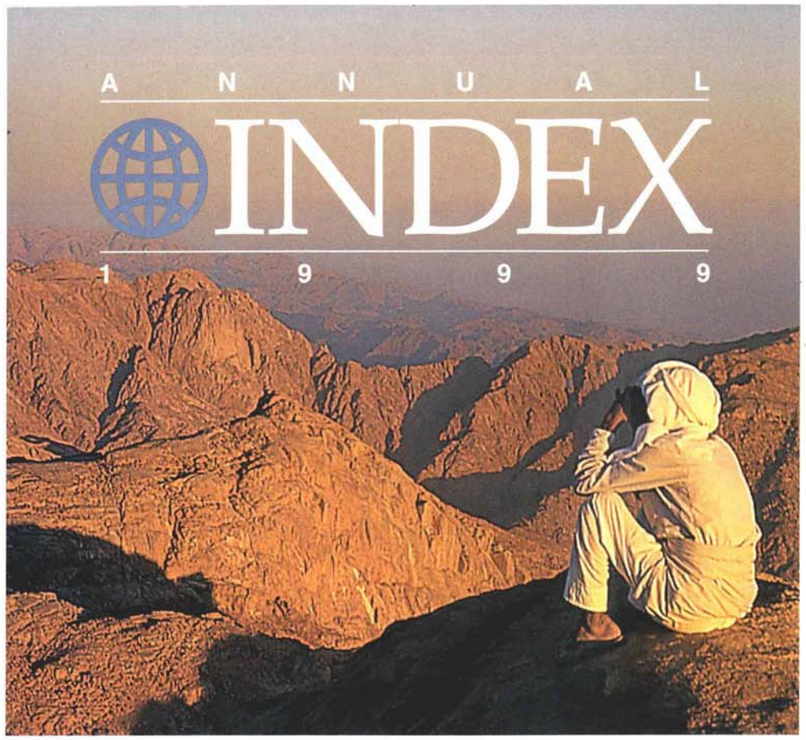
eager hands from six busy workshops of the Roman mint, and Philip kept track of each operation by a notable innovation: Every workshop had its identifying number (I through VI) stamped on the coins it produced. Never had the world witnessed such a well-coordinated show of pomp, power and monetary patronage.

Many coins declared *SAECVLVM NOVVM* ("The New Age") and *MILIARIVM SAECVLVM* ("The Millennial Age"). Some mintages projected the hope of better things to come with inspiring slogans: *PAX AETERNA* ("Eternal Peace"); *LIBERALITAS* ("Generosity"); *LAETITIA* ("Joy"); *FECVNDITAS TEMPORVM* ("Prosperity of the Times"); *FELICITAS* ("Success"); *SALVS* ("Health"); *FORTVNA* ("Luck"); *CONCORDIA* ("Harmony"); *PVDICITIA* ("Modesty"); *SECVRITAS ORBIS* ("Security on Earth"); *FIDES* ("Trust"); *PIETAS* ("Piety"), and *AEQVITAS PVBLICA* ("Public Justice"). Viewed together, such optimistic birthday wishes might easily have been splashed across our own billboards and television screens.

In Philip's case, however, these noble sentiments could neither erase the past, repair the present nor guarantee the future. The moment of imperial calm was shattered later that same year with news of fresh frontier misfortunes. Gothic raiders crossed the Danube, and revolts erupted in both Cappadocia (in today's Turkey) and Egypt in protest of everything from taxes to the toleration of Christians. Philip's brother Priscus, prefect (governor) of the east, had to face the growing power of a usurper named Jotapian. In the north, dissident troops hailed as emperor another general, Pacatian. Following Philip, he too tried to cash in on Rome's millennial euphoria, but he was late, and so he issued coins from a site near modern Belgrade, celebrating *ROMAE AETERNAE AN MILL ET PRIMO* ("The Thousand-and-First Anniversary of Eternal Rome"). But both frontier insurrections failed when the legionnaires assassinated their new leaders and looked for another. They chose Trajan Decius, an energetic general, and in 1002 AUC (AD 249), Philip and his loyal forces met him at Verona. There Philip the Arab was killed, and the rest of his family was slain shortly afterward.

Thus, the emperor who so enthusiastically observed Rome's millennium did not benefit from the sentiments of peace and good will that the occasion had inspired. Rather, matters quickly deteriorated once again, and in the years that followed, emperors rose and fell at alarming rates that reflected the vicissitudes of power among Rome's far-flung legions. Enemies watched, and took advantage of the continual crises. The empire struggled for several more centuries, besieged by forces that no emperor could wish away with slogans and celebrations.

Frank L. Holt is professor of ancient history at the University of Houston. His most recent book is Thundering Zeus: The Making of Hellenistic Bactria *(University of California Press, 1999).*



SUBJECTS

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TITLES

DICK DOUGHTY, M/A 99

AUTHORS

PHOTOGRAPHERS

ILLUSTRATORS

INSTITUTIONS

JUDY LAERTINI, J/F 99

Events & Exhibitions

PRINCESS HAIFA FAISAL COLLECTION

An early 20th-century incense burner made of wood with lead plugs from Najd, central Saudi Arabia is part of ***The Role of Perfume and Incense in the Islamic World****, one of 10 exhibits in* ***Exploring Muslim Cultures****.*

Exploring Muslim Cultures is a kaleidoscopic 11-week program aimed at helping non-Muslims and Muslims alike appreciate the global significance of Islamic cultures. The Richardson Library will host exhibits of incense and perfume vessels (from the Chicago-based Haifa Faisal Collection); traditional and modern Persian tile; photographs of world Muslim communities; mosque architecture; and calligraphy. Moroccan textiles will be on display at the DePaul Art Gallery. Forums will discuss Islamic perspectives on medicine, education and social services. Local and national experts will lecture on cuisine, cinema, demographics, sociology, history, and contemporary issues; performances include recitations from the Qur'an and music and dance. Culinary events explore diverse coffee- and tea-drinking customs and samplings of food from around the Islamic world. "By bringing all five senses to the campus and the city, we are trying to educate in the broadest sense and make our commitment to diversity live," says Aminah McCloud, associate professor of Islamic Studies and the event's organizer. All events are free and open to the public. Information: 773-325-7863, www.depaul.edu/~islam. DePaul University, **Chicago**, March 31 through July 15.

Teaching About the Arab World and Islam is the theme of teacher workshops co-sponsored by the Middle East Policy Council in Washington, D.C., and conducted by Arab World And Islamic Resources and School Services (AWAIR) of Berkeley, California. Sites and dates include: **Columbus, Ohio**, January 22; **San Bernardino, California**, February 16; **Los Angeles**, February 17; **Washington, D.C.**, March 11; **Amherst, Massachusetts**, March 18; **Wilkesboro, North Carolina**, March 21; **Pleasant Hill, California**, March 31; **Casper, Wyoming**, April 4; **Raleigh, North Carolina**, June 12–13; **Louisville, Kentucky**, October 14. Information: 202-296-6767, 510-704-0517, awair@igc.apc.org.

Secret Gardens: *Paisley and Kashmir Shawls* traces the history of the paisley motif from 17th-century Indian stonework to 20th-century European shawls. Museum of Fine Arts, **Boston**, through January 23.

Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art: *Beyond the Future* exhibits work by 75 artists from 20 countries and regions in media including photography, video, CD-ROM, Internet, painting, sculpture, textiles and ceramics, installation and performance. Catalogue. Information: www.apt3.net. Queensland Art Gallery, **South Brisbane, Australia**, through January 26.

Current Archeological Research. The lectures in this series, which runs through June, concern discoveries and scholarship in the Middle East and western Asia. Each is presented at noon by a speaker intimately involved in the work under discussion. Alexandria, January 24; Hierakonpolis, January 27; Bactria, January 28; Alexander the Great, February 7; Ugarit, February 11 and 18; Abu Mina, February 17; Alassa, Cyprus, February 25; Tanis, March 2; Arslantepe, March 10; Tell Shuera, May 3; Tashkent, May 5; Temple of Merenptah, May 11; Ja'lan, Oman, May 12; Kech Makran, Pakistan, June 28. Information: 33-1-4020-5317, www.louvre.fr. Musée du Louvre, **Paris**.

Adobe Dome Building Workshop will allow participants to help build a semi-spherical domed roof without forms using Nubian techniques revived this century by the late architect Hassan Fathy. Instruction in both English and Spanish. Information: 915-229-3199, www.brooksdata.net/personal/adobesim. **Presidio, Texas**, January 28–30.

Life and Ceremony in Urban Algeria focuses on three key celebrations in Algerian life: birth, circumcision and marriage. Each is marked by the preparation, exchange and display of costume, jewelry, domestic utensils and furnishings to establish family wealth and prestige and mark individuals' transition from one stage of life to another. Embroidery, metalwork, ceramics, chests and tables, costumes and gold and silver jewelry are on display. British Museum, **London**, through January 30.

Matisse in Morocco substantiates the painter's statement that "revelation came to me in the East." During his two journeys to Morocco in 1912 and 1913, Matisse discovered the plasticity of Arab and Islamic architecture and acquired a new understanding of light and its intensity that informed all his subsequent work. Institut du Monde Arabe, **Paris**, through January 30.

Paper: *Trivia and Treasure* focuses on the 1900-year history of paper and how it has influenced life and design through the ages. The paper-making process began its westward spread from China when the Arabs captured Chinese papermakers near Samarkand in the early eighth century. Goldstein Gallery, University of **Minnesota, St. Paul**, January 30 through April 8.

Scythian Gold From the Steppes of Ukraine presents 165 of the finest gold objects from Scythian graves and burial mounds, many in the "animal style" associated with the Central Asian steppes, and many excavated since 1975 and thus never before exhibited in the United States. The Scythians were a nomadic people who originated in Central Asia in the early first millennium BC and flourished in what is now Ukraine from the fifth to the third century BC through trade with the Greek cities of the Black Sea coast. Their arms, horse trappings and other artifacts show Near Eastern and Greek influence, and the recently excavated items are causing a reevaluation of the interrelationships among the Aegean world, the Near East, and Central Asia as far east as Mongolia. **San Antonio [Texas]** Museum of Art, through January 30; Walters Gallery, **Baltimore**, March 5 through May 28.

Moroccan Textiles: *Teresa Lanceta* is a two-part exhibition presenting, first, traditional Moroccan fabrics, rooted in Mediterranean and African sources and selected for their plasticity, originality and imagination and, second, works by a young Spanish textile artist whose output is entirely in harmony with the traditional textiles which inspire her. Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, **Madrid**, February 1 through May 3.

Golden Pages: *Qur'ans and Prayer Books From the HE Shaik Ghasan I. Shaker Collection* includes Ottoman and Qajar manuscripts as well as others from China, Southeast Asia and West and East Africa, along with an instructive group of pieces displayed because of their bindings, marbling or other technical aspects. A copy of the Qur'an by the great Yaqut al-Musta'simi is also featured. Ashmolean Museum, **Oxford**, February 3 through April 2.

Pharaohs of the Sun: *Akhenaten, Nefertiti, and Tutankhamen* focuses on the cultural flowering of the Amarna period—a brief two decades in the mid-14th century BC—that centered on the revolutionary pharaoh Akhenaten, sometimes called the first monotheist. His capital, Amarna, was a city of 20,000 to 30,000 people; with his wife, Nefertiti, he engineered a wholesale reorganization of Egyptian religion, art and politics. The exhibition presents more than 300 objects from 37 museums and private lenders. Museum of Fine Arts, **Boston**, through February 6; **Los Angeles** County Museum of Art, March 19 through June 4.

Gülsün Karamustafa: *Installations* evokes the nomadic tradition of the Istanbul-born artist's heritage. Musée d'art et d'histoire, **Geneva**, February 8 through 13.

The Architecture of Mud documents traditional building crafts in the Hadhramaut region of southern Yemen, where mud-brick buildings can reach seven stories. Information: caterina@escape.com. United Nations, New York, February 9; Columbia University, **New York**, February 14; University of **Texas** at **Austin**, March 3; National Building Museum, **Washington, D.C.**, March 24.

Gods and Heroes of Bronze Age Europe: *The Roots of Ulysses* brings to life one of the most important prehistoric epochs, whose traces are widely visible from England to the Middle East. The 237 objects on display, from more than 80 European museums, manifest the spread of bronze metallurgy in the third millennium BC, the concurrent development of new levels of craftsmanship, and the great increase that resulted in long-distance trade in raw materials and luxury goods. Catalogue $75. National Archaeological Museum, **Athens**, February 11 through May 7.

The Enlightened Eye: *Gifts from John Goelet* includes Islamic artworks among the 40 years of donations to the Sackler Museum, **Cambridge, Massachusetts**, February 12 through May 7.

Egyptian Art in the Age of the Pyramids. This large exhibition spans the third through the sixth dynasties, and is the first to focus on the art of the Old Kingdom (2650–2150 BC), the first truly great era of Egyptian art. More than 250 works, ranging from portraits, luxury vessels, reliefs and unpainted limestone heads to furniture, monumental sculpture and tools used in the building of the pyramids, have been assembled from more than 30 museums in the US and 10 other countries. Catalogue. Last venue: Royal Ontario Museum, **Toronto**, February 13 through May 22.

The Golden Age of Chinese Archaeology: *Celebrated Discoveries from the People's Republic of China* focuses on discoveries made over the last 20 years, and includes some 200 objects in widely diverse media dating

(continued from previous page)

from Neolithic times to 960 of our era. 500-page catalog. Museum of Fine Arts, **Houston**, February 13 through May 7.

Ancient Faces: *Mummy Portraits from Roman Egypt*. During the first to third century in Egypt, painted panel portraits—so-called "Fayum portraits"—were often placed on the heads of mummies. Their direct, full gaze, realism and strong presence bring the inhabitants of Roman Egypt before us with compelling immediacy. Some 70 portraits, along with mummy coverings, masks, jewelry, funerary stelae and related works, are on display. Catalogue. Metropolitan Museum of Art, **New York**, February 15 through May 7.

Porcelain Stories: *From China to Europe* explores the history of porcelain from its origins in China to its travels via the Silk Roads and other traders to independent European production. **Seattle** Art Museum, February 17 through May 7.

Flowers of Silk and Gold: *Four Centuries of Ottoman Embroidery* offers a unique window on urban Ottoman society, for embroideries played a role in most aspects of domestic and public life. A woman's trousseau was begun when she was born, and as soon as she could hold a needle she joined in embroidering napkins, towels, wrapping cloths, quilt covers, coverings for walls, floors and furniture, sashes, scarves and other items of clothing, which were used throughout her life. Men and women also embroidered commercial items, men specializing in heavier materials and producing tents, boots, saddles, quivers and cuirasses. Presented in their historical context, the more than 50 textiles displayed reveal changing social and economic aspects of Ottoman culture. Beginning in February, a "virtual exhibition" will be available at www.textilemuseum.org. Catalog $45/$30. Textile Museum, **Washington, D.C.**, February 18 through July 30.

Treasures from the Royal Tombs of Ur presents 150 extraordinary objects revealing traditions of royal life and death, excavated in the 1920's by Sir Leonard Woolley. They include the famous "Ram in the Thicket"—a statuette of a goat nibbling the leaves of a tree—jewelry, a comb, a wooden lyre decorated with a gold-and-lapis bull's head, games, furniture, seals and vessels of gold, silver and alabaster, many found in the intact tomb of a woman—a queen or high priestess—named Pu-abi who died between 2600 and 2500 BC, a high point of Sumerian culture. Catalogue $50/$35. **Cleveland [Ohio]** Museum of Art, February 20 through April 23.

Henning Larsen: *The Architect's Studio*. One of the most important architects of his generation, Dane Henning Larsen's works include the Foreign Ministry building in Riyadh. The exhibition focuses on his formal concepts and his working processes. Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, **Humlebæk, Denmark**, through February 27.

Also among the exhibits in ***Exploring Muslim Cultures is Weaving Culture:*** Textiles and Jewelry of Morocco, *among whose displays is this 19th-century, drawloom-woven, brocade wedding belt from Fez, Morocco.*

"Only the Best": *Masterpieces of the Calouste Gulbenkian Museum, Lisbon* demonstrates the extraordinary range and quality of the 5000-item art collection assembled by Istanbul-born oil magnate and philanthropist Gulbenkian (1869–1955), including spectacular Islamic ceramics and glass, Egyptian sculpture, Armenian illuminated manuscripts and Persian and Turkish textiles—as well as extraordinary European and Asian pieces. Catalogue. Metropolitan Museum of Art, **New York**, through February 27.

Princes, Poets and Paladins: *Islamic and Indian Miniatures From the Collection of Prince and Princess Sadruddin Aga Khan* brings together masterpieces from Iran, Turkey and India dating from the 14th to the 19th century. Musée d'art et d'histoire, **Geneva**, through February 27.

Textiles and Fashions of Sassanid Persia presents objects found in the necropolis of Arsinoë, Egypt, a century ago and dating from the Sassanid occupation of Egypt between 619 and 629. They include cashmere cloaks, silks and tapestries. Musée d'art et d'histoire, **Geneva**, through February 27.

Constructing Identities: *Recent Work by Jananne al-Ani* addresses the issue of Orientalism, in particular the representation of women, through two pairs of large-format photographs, five transparencies and a slide show. Sackler Gallery, **Washington, D.C.**, through February 28.

Islamic Origins is a five-week summer teachers' institute, sponsored by the National Endowment for the Humanities, designed mainly for undergraduate instructors with little or no training in Islamic, Arabic or Middle Eastern studies but who nevertheless teach these subjects as part of a broad survey course. Diverse perspectives will be offered, some of which are not yet well-represented in recent textbooks. Stipends. Apply by March 1. Institute faculty are also faculty of the University of **Chicago**. Information: 773-702-1234, http://humanities.uchicago.edu/islamic-origins/. June 19 through July 21.

Palace of Gold and Light: *Treasures from the Topkapı, Istanbul*. Showcasing the splendor of Turkey's rich history and cultural heritage, this exhibition features more than 200 works of art and artifacts from the Topkapı Palace collections. The heart of the Ottoman dynasty for 400 years, Topkapı houses an extraordinary range of objects, including silk and satin costumes, carpets from imperial looms, military trappings, calligraphic works, ceramics and porcelains. The exhibition is divided into thematic sections that focus on the palace as the center of dynastic power, military administration and religious leadership as well as a domestic residence. Corcoran Gallery of Art, **Washington, D.C.**, March 1 through June 15; **San Diego** Museum of Art, opens July 14.

Andalusian Aesthetics: *The Artistic Legacy of Islamic Spain* brings together a group of experts to examine the ways that art and architecture were shaped and experienced in al-Andalus. Symposium participants include Oleg Grabar, Jerrilynn D. Dodds, D. Fairchild Ruggles, Cynthia Robinson and José Miguel Puerta Vílchez. 2:00–6:15 p.m., Kevorkian Center, **New York** University, March 3.

Exotica: *Portugal's Discoveries Reflected in Renaissance Chambers of Wonders* brings the age of discovery to life, displaying 200 objects from Austrian, Portuguese and Spanish collections that once found their places in the "chambers of wonders" of European merchant houses and rulers. Ostrich eggs, *cocos-de-mer*, narwhale horns and similar oddities, often in precious settings, were collected along with exotica made of mother-of-pearl, ivory, and jade and presented as objects of astonishment. Kunsthistorisches Museum, **Vienna**, March 4 through May 21.

The Dead Sea Scrolls will explore the historic context of the scrolls' discovery and their authorship more than 2000 years ago. Parts of 15 of the parchment scrolls are on display, along with 80 artifacts—a storage jar, coins and leather sandals—from the area where they were discovered in 1947. Field Museum, **Chicago**, March 10 through June 11.

Recent Acquisitions: *Asian* is one of a year-long, multi-gallery series of exhibitions revealing the collecting practices of an important teaching and research museum. Sackler Museum, **Cambridge, Massachusetts**. Opens March 11.

Faces of Morocco is the result of Gérard Rondeau's assignment to photograph "personalities of Moroccan culture": writers, painters, historians, sculptors, musicians, architects, actors and film-makers. Musée Eugène Delacroix, Paris, through March 15.

Understanding and Teaching About Islam is a pair of teachers' institutes covering Islamic faith, practice, history, art and culture. Instructors are university professors from the US and elsewhere. Format involves lecture, group study and personal study. Tuition free. Apply by March 15. Information: 505-685-4584, www.daralislam.org. Dar al Islam, **Abiquiu, New Mexico**, July 9–22 and July 30–August 12.

Ottoman Calligraphies: *Collections of the Sakıp Sabancı Museum, Istanbul* draws on one of Turkey's leading private collections to display 70 exceptional examples of Ottoman-era calligraphy, dating from the 15th to the beginning of the 20th century, from the pens of such masters as Şeyh Hamdullah, Ahmed Karahısarı, Hafiz Osman and Sami Efendi. The exhibition opens with information on the practical requirements of calligraphy—preparation of the paper, design of the page, manufacture of inks and paints—then presents examples of different calligraphic objects: copies of the Qur'an, albums, display pages, and *firmans*. Catalogue. Musée du Louvre, **Paris**, March 17 through May 29.

Iran and the Persians: *A Lecture-Tour* provides an overall view of the museum's collection in this area. Musée du Louvre, **Paris**, 11:30 a.m March 18 and 25.

Art Worlds in Dialogue is a comprehensive exhibition of 20th-century works presented in the context of a global dialogue among cultures. Artists represented include Gaugin, Matisse, Picasso, Klee and Noguchi but also Anish Kapoor, Nam June Paik and Jean-Michel Basquiat. Museum Ludwig, **Cologne**, through March 19.

Bead Expo 2000: *Sacred and Secular Uses of Beads* is a symposium that investigates the use and influence of beads in culture, art and history over some 40,000 years of human creativity. Workshops and research sessions and a new designer showcase are other features of the biennial expo. Information: 800-732-6881, www.beadexpo.com. Sweeney Convention Center and La Fonda Hotel, **Santa Fe, New Mexico**, March 22–27.

Hassan Fathy: *A Centennial Celebration*. This joint exhibition by the Rare Books and Special Collections Library and the Sony Gallery at the American University in Cairo presents photographs, sketches, annotated volumes and memorabilia representing more than 60 years of the life and work of the famous Egyptian architect. American University in **Cairo**, March 23 through April 27.

Mona Hatoum is a Lebanese-born Palestinian British sculptor who focuses on confrontational themes such as violence and oppression and the vulnerability and resilience of the human body. For this first large solo show in London, she has created large-scale works that reflect her interest in everyday objects, which she infuses with a sinister or even malevolent quality. Tate's Duveen Galleries, **London**, March 24 through July 9.

A Bold Aesthetic: *Textile Arts of Central Asia* features 60 outstanding examples of the dress, textiles and jewelry of the peoples of western Central Asia from the early 19th to the early 20th century, revealing a surprising diversity of materials and a startlingly bold sense of abstraction. The exhibition presents extraordinary examples of what is perhaps the greatest artistic achievement of 19th-century Bukhara: intricately patterned silk and velvet textiles fashioned into robes and hangings that turned both wearer and environment into a visual feast of bright colors and striking patterns. Status and power were expressed through dress and lavish textile display, epitomized by a robe entirely encrusted in geometric gold and silver embroidery and lined with a boldly patterned ikat silk. Archival photographs add context for the exhibits. Related lectures March 28, April 16, May 11. **Los Angeles** County Museum of Art, March 30 through July 31.

Treasures of Egyptian Hermits: *Monuments of Coptic Art and Written Language* presents 300 objects from the museum's unparalleled 5500-item Coptic collection, including icons, textiles, stone and wooden sculpture, carved bone and metal, ceramics, leather and papyrus that outline Egypt's Coptic culture of the third through the 12th century. Hermitage, **St. Petersburg, Russia**, through March.

Crucifixion 2000: *In the Name of God*. Well-known Palestinian Muslim artist Leila al-Shawa explores the political and social aspects of the Christian theme. Ashmolean Museum, **Oxford**, April 4 through May 14.

Miniature Paintings from India is a display of fifty 16th- to 18th-century Mughal works from the museum's own collection, with an emphasis on those produced during the reign of Akbar at the end of the 16th century and those produced for the Dutch market in the 17th century. Information: www.rijksmuseum.nl. Rijksmuseum, **Amsterdam**, through April 11.

Ebrû: *Contemporary Marbling by Feridun Özgören* presents a new form of a centuries-old art: marbled paper incorporating stenciled Turkish, Arabic or Persian calligraphy. Museum of Fine Arts, **Boston**, through April 12.

In the Shade of the Tree exhibits 35 photographs by Peter Sanders, who has been photographing Islamic cultures around the world for more than three decades. Information: +44-20-7898-4020, www.soas.ac.uk/Brunei/exhibitions.html. Brunei Gallery, **London**, April 13 through June 17; July 10 through September 16.

Agatha Christie and the East: *Criminology and Archeology* traces those two strands in the life of the "Queen of Crime," displaying diaries; hitherto unpublished photographs of Christie and her husband, archeologist Max Mallowan; more than 200 artifacts from his excavations in Iraq and Syria; and a compartment from the Orient Express. The exhibition emphasizes Christie's participation in the digs as restorer and photographer. Museum für Völkerkunde, **Vienna**, April 13 through September 17.

Cultural Portraits of India features 70 photographs made over a decade by Lindsay Hebberd, producer of educational photographic exhibits. Book of the same title, $75. Information: 626-449-2742, www.pacasiamuseum.org. Pacific Asia Museum, **Pasadena, California**, through April 16.

The Travels of Evliya Çelebi, written in 1640 by an otherwise unknown Istanbulu scholar, provides precious "inside" information, anecdote and myth about the Ottoman Empire of the 17th century. A reading, Musée du Louvre, **Paris**, 8:00 p.m., April 17.

The Nabob's Sweet Dream centers on a single object, now lost: a more than merely elaborate bed manufactured in 1883 for the ruler of Bahawalpur by Christofle silversmiths. The gold and silver bed featured four automatons in female form which fanned the occupant of the bed to the sound of a music box. Christofle, **Saint-Denis, France**, through April 21.

Projects 70: *Banners 1* is the first in a cycle of three exhibitions that feature artist-designed banners displayed on the Museum's 53rd Street façade. Each artist tests the ramifications of the written word, shifting the information and twisting our habits of perception. Artist Shirin Neshat's banner features quotations of Persian poetry. Museum of Modern Art, **New York**, through May 1.

Imaging the Word: *New Selections of Calligraphy From the Islamic World* includes works on paper that date from the ninth to the 20th century, shown with inscribed textiles, coins, architectural fragments and other objects to highlight the spiritual and esthetic dimension of the art of writing. Sackler Gallery, **Washington, D.C.**, through May 7.

Echoes of Eternity: *The Egyptian Mummy and the Afterlife* helps explain Egyptian beliefs about the life after death on which their civilization focused. The exhibition includes statues, jewelry and images of gods and goddesses, as well as CAT scans of a mummy on display. Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, **Kansas City, Missouri**, through May 7.

The Second International Congress on the Archaeology of the Ancient Near East deals with the environment of the ancient Near East; images of humans and gods; the tell; and Islamic archaeology. In addition there are hands-on sessions at the National Museum in Copenhagen and the Moesgaard Museum Aarhus, as well as poster and book exhibitions. Information: www.hum.ku.dk./2icaane/. Carsten Niebuhr Institute, University of **Copenhagen**, May 22 through 27.

Antoin Sevruguin and the Persian Image offers an important pictorial record of the social history and visual culture of Iran, displaying 50 photographs grouped in themes: everyday life, ethnography, the royal court, antiquities, Western fantasy, religious architecture, and women. Sevruguin, considered one of the great 19th-century photographers and a visual interpreter between East and West, operated a successful commercial studio in Tehran from the late 1850's until 1934. Sackler Gallery, **Washington, D.C.**, through May 28.

The Empire of Time: *Myths and Creations* draws from the museum's own collections to explore the legends of time, from primordial chaos to the great creation myths of antiquity and their evolution in eastern and western imagery, drawing connections among different early civilizations and with our own era as well. Musée du Louvre, **Paris**, through July 10.

Noble Dreams, Wicked Pleasures: *Orientalism in America 1870–1930* From oil paintings and photographs to films and cigarette packages, some 90 objects illustrate the images and associations conjured up by the word "Orient" in the popular imagination of turn-of-the-century America. This exhibition will survey the character and evolution of American representations of the "Orient" during a formative phase in US history (1870–1930), when America was emerging on the world stage and mass culture was first coalescing. Painters represented include Jean-Léon Gérôme, Frederic Edwin Church, John Singer Sargent, and William Merrit Chase; decorative arts by Louis Comfort Tiffany and associated artists are also included, as are advertising and entertainment-industry objects such as candy boxes, sheet music, stereographs, and movie posters. Catalogue. Clark Art Institute, **Williamstown, Massachusetts**, opens June 11.

Nuzi and the Hurrians: *Fragments From a Forgotten Past* opens a window on the little-known world of the Hurrians, displaying objects excavated at Nuzi, now Yorghan Tepe, in northeastern Iraq. Nuzi was only a provincial agricultural town, but yielded finds—including nearly 5000 cuneiform tablets—that illuminate everyday life in the 14th century BC. Very early glass, pottery and figurines, jewelry, tools and weapons are among the 150 objects on display, part of the largest Nuzi collection outside Iraq. So are texts of depositions taken in a lurid case of malfeasance brought against a town mayor. Harvard Semitic Museum, **Cambridge, Massachusetts**, through April 2001.

The Saudi Aramco Exhibit, which relates the heritage of Arab-Islamic scientists and scholars of the past to the technology of today's petroleum exploration, production and transportation, has been extensively renovated and updated, and will reopen soon. **Dhahran, Saudi Arabia**.

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

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