ARAMCO WORLD

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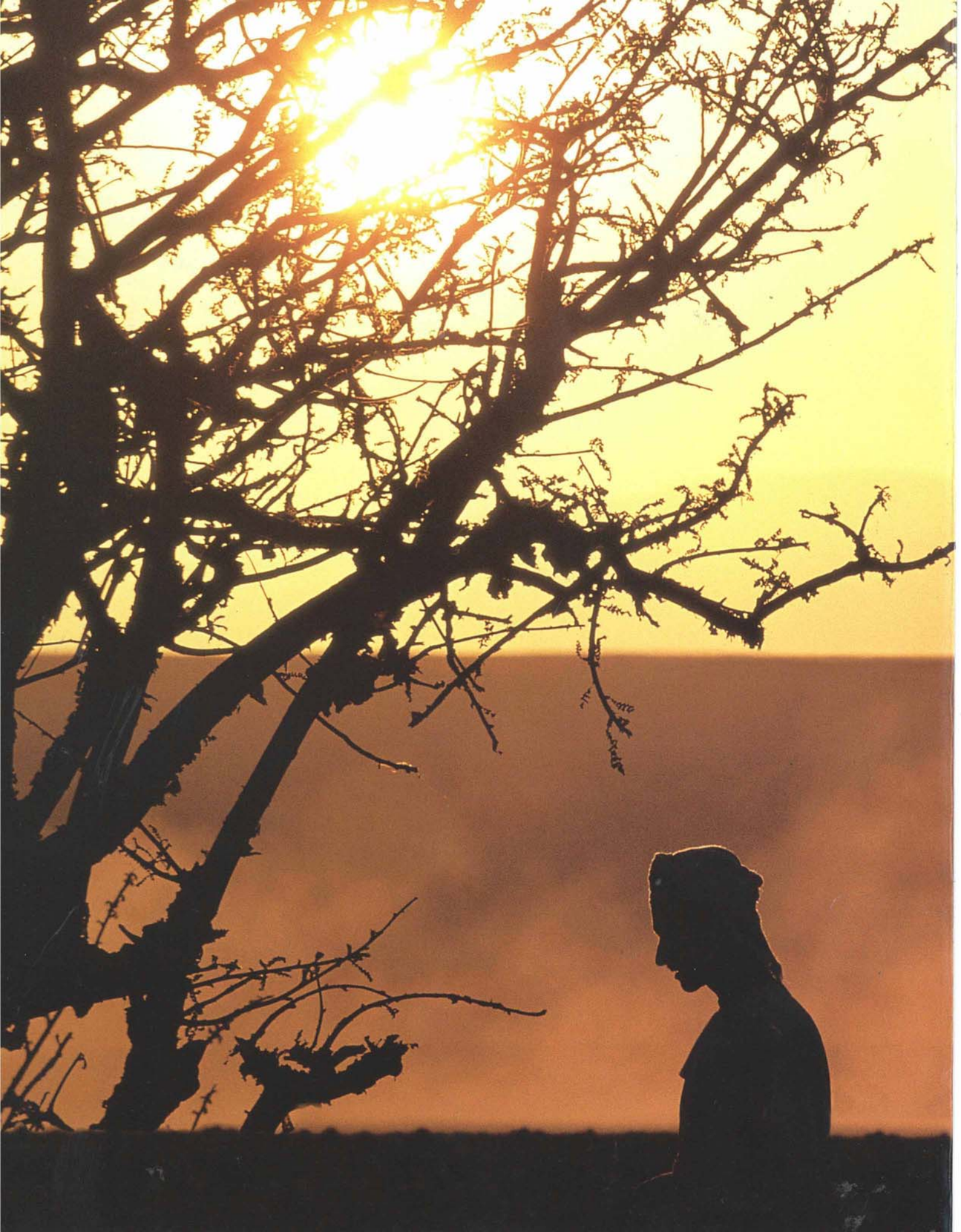
MAY/JUNE 2000

Tripoli

Lebanon's Mamluk Monument



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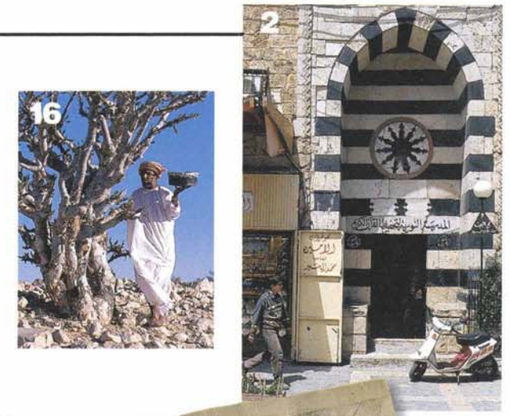
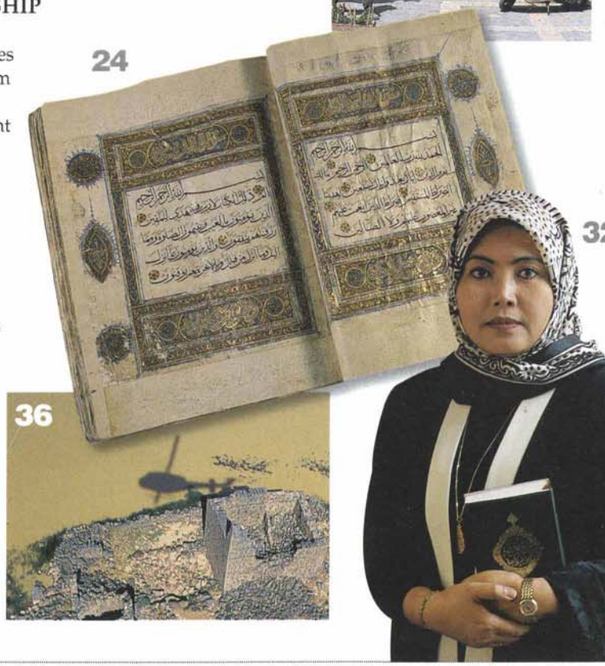
ARAMCO WORLD

Published Bimonthly Vol. 51, No. 3

May/June 2000





COVER:
Sunlight rakes decoration above a window of the madrasa, *or Qur'anic school, finished in 1326 by Qaratay, governor of Tripoli. Stone—finely cut, flawlessly dressed, set by color into patterns and at times inscribed —was the hallmark of Mamluk architecture generally, and the artfulness of Tripoli's masons was exceeded only by their counterparts in the greater cities of Damascus and Cairo. The most distinctive Mamluk motif is known as* ablaq: *alternating courses of black basalt and white marble that often framed windows and doorways. Photo by Dick Doughty.*

OPPOSITE:
The craggy branches of the Boswellia *tree can yield frankincense harvests twice a year. In southwest Oman, altitude and climate produce trees with the sweetest resin. Photo by Thomas Abercrombie/National Geographic Society Image Collection.*

BACK COVER:
Khirbat al-Hari, a stronghold of the Moabites in the first millennium BC, *is now but a faint relief on a hillside in western Jordan. Aerial surveys aid both discovery and understanding of a site's relationships to resources. Photo by David L. Kennedy.*

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

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ISSN
1044-1891

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DESIGN AND PRODUCTION
Herring Design

PRINTED IN THE USA
Wetmore & Company

ADDRESS EDITORIAL CORRESPONDENCE TO:
The Editor, Aramco World
Post Office Box 2106
Houston, Texas 77252-2106

PRINTED ON RECYCLED PAPER

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

Tripoli

Lebanon's Mamluk Monument

Written and Photographed by Dick Doughty

Separated from the rest of Lebanon's second-largest metropolis by the Qadisha River, the madrasa, *or Qur'anic school, of al-Burtasi was in 1310 the first building in Tarabulus al-Mustajadda ("Tripoli the Renewed") to express a Mamluk decorative vocabulary. The 30 major monuments of Mamluk Tripoli, mostly built within a four-decade period, offer what historian Khaled Ziadeh calls "a uniquely narrow slice of architectural history." **Main photo:** Under Mamluk patronage, stonecutters created so-called joggled voussoirs—interlocking stones arranged within arches—with painstaking grace. The white stone is marble; the black is basalt.*

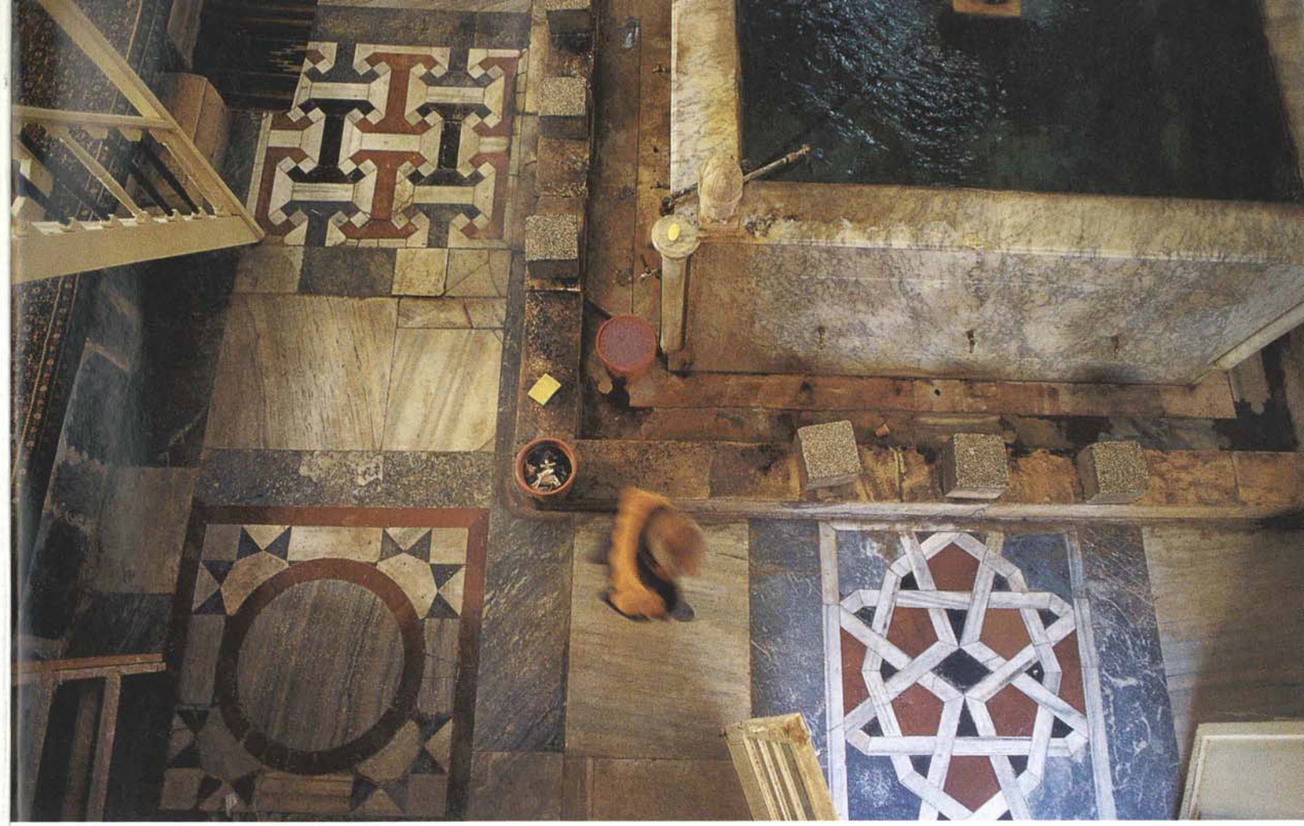
The righteous will be amid gardens and fountains of clear-flowing water.
Their greeting will be: "Enter ye here in peace and security."
And we shall remove from their hearts any lurking sense of injury:
They will be brothers joyfully facing each other on thrones of dignity.

Inscription above the entrance of the Qaratay Madrasa,
from the Qur'an, Sura 15 (*Al-Hijr*, "The Rocky Tract"), verses 45–47.

Using polished lengths of colored marble, artisans crafted polychrome marquetry panels that are among the most striking of the applied decorations in Mamluk Tripoli. ***Above*** *is the central motif of the* qibla *wall of the Mosque of al-Burtasi; the panel measures approximately a meter (3′) square.* ***Opposite, top:*** *Similarly sized panels still wear well after nearly seven centuries of footfalls around the ablution fountain in the central court of the Qaratay Madrasa.* ***Opposite, lower:*** *From the sea and from Tripoli's hilltop citadel—named for St. Gilles, Crusader Count of Toulouse—the Crusaders besieged Tripoli fitfully for a decade until their victory in 1109. Almost two centuries later, Tripoli fell to Sultan Qala'un, who in 1289 began the Mamluk rule under which Tripoli was capital of one of the six provinces of Syria. The Mamluks enlarged the citadel, as did the Ottomans after them, who also added cannons.*

The conventional wisdom of the 13th century held Tripoli under the Crusaders to be unconquerable. Capital of one of the four Frankish states since 1109, it was an Eastern Mediterranean port some 2000 years old, where Venetians, Genoese, Pisans, Arabs, Ottomans and Jews ran shipyards, fisheries, olive-oil presses, textile shops and orange groves. Its sugar traders were famously innovative, and were among the first to arouse Europe's sweet tooth. So well-fortified was the city that in the late 12th century, Saladin, who wrested Jerusalem from the Crusaders, settled for merely worrying the environs of Tripoli.

During the 13th century, Tripoli fended off three sieges. The last two were by the formidable Al-Zahir Baybars, the Mamluk sultan who had become a Muslim hero in 1260, fighting in the vanguard of Sultan Al-Muzzafar Qutuz's victory over the Mongols at 'Ain Jalut. Baybars campaigned almost annually in the Levant, seeking the restoration of the Mamluk state in Egypt and Syria by chipping away at Crusader rule. In the 1280's, Sultan Al-Mansur Sayf al-Din Qala'un carried on that strategy, and by late in the decade, his prospects looked good.

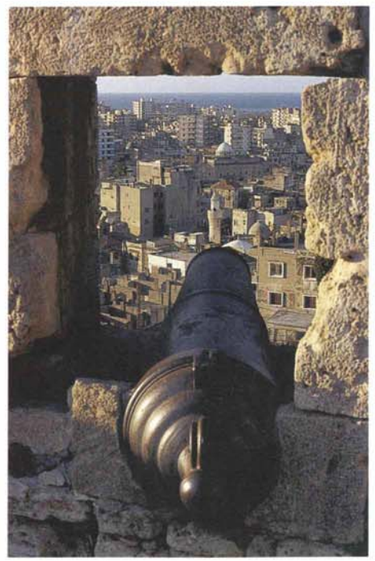


Qala'un took major Frankish strongholds in 1285 and 1287, and when internal rivalries weakened Tripoli's defenses, he saw his chance. In the spring of 1289 he led his army north, stopping to pick up reinforcements in Damascus. About Tripoli's walls he deployed a huge force—sources number the soldiers at between 40,000 and 100,000—along with some 19 mangonels and catapults. Crusader reinforcements never arrived. The Venetians fled the city first, fearing that the Genoese might take all the ships. The siege lasted a day shy of five weeks, and when Qala'un was finished, the only remaining seat of Crusader power was Acre. Two hundred and twenty-seven years of Mamluk rule in Tripoli had begun.

Victorious, Qala'un repaired to Cairo. He left Tripoli under the control of Sayfedeen Balaban Tabbakhi as governor of the *mamlaka*, or state, of Tripoli, which was one of the six political units that made up what the Arabs called *bilad al-sham* ("the north country"). Its territory included roughly what is now the modern nation of Syria along with today's Lebanon and parts of Palestine. Tabbakhi's orders were to oversee the demolition of the Crusader city, and begin its reconstruction as a Mamluk one.

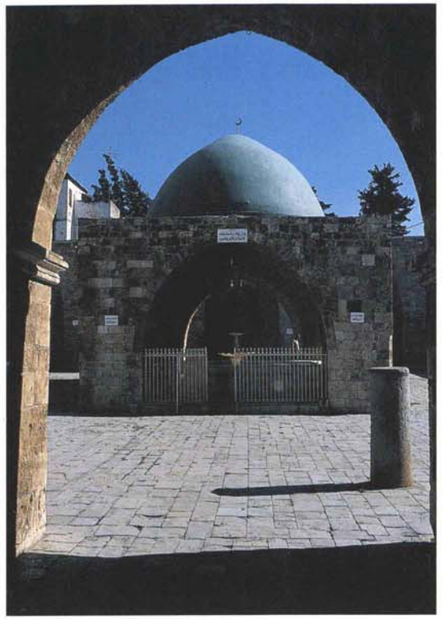
The demolition was not done entirely out of spite. Tripoli, named by the Greeks when it led a consortium of three coastal settlements *(tri-polis)*, was itself something of a double city, as it is today. There was the walled harbor town, called *al-mina*, which is Arabic for "the harbor." It was the center of the city through successive eras until Mamluk times, and lay on a flat promontory that jutted into the sea from the fertile coastal plain, forming a harbor on its northern side.

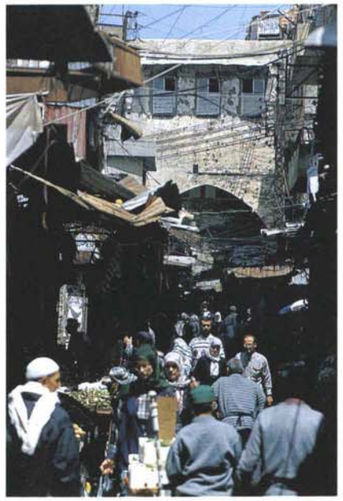
Then there was the citadel, which lay inland some three kilometers (1.9 mi), snug against the foothills of the mountains, capping the hill known as Abu Samra. Just who first built it is uncertain: Some maintain the castle was the construction of Raymond IV of St. Gilles, the Crusader Count of Toulouse; others say St. Gilles enlarged and fortified an existing Fatimid Arab stronghold. But there is no doubt how St. Gilles used it: It was his base during 10 years of on-again, off-again, ultimately successful sieges of *al-mina* that ushered in Tripoli's Crusader era. The castle bears his name today, Qal'at Sinjil, and the solidity of its construction exempted it from Qala'un's demolition orders. Indeed, the Mamluks expanded the fortress further still. (Today, it is the city's most dramatic tourist attraction.)



Qala'un also ordered the Mamluk city to be constructed not at *al-mina*, but instead under the brow

The first major architectural project under the Mamluks in Tripoli was the Great Mosque, ***right****, commissioned before the city had recovered the resources to undertake much decorative craftsmanship. Its central, domed ablution fountain is plain though neatly proportioned and is surrounded by a courtyard rimmed by porticoes and the hall for prayer.*
Far right: *The prosperity that returned to the city under the Mamluks stimulated the crafts, and next door to the Great Mosque rose the* madrasa *commissioned by Qaratay. Above its door is one of the city's most elegant façades, which incorporates Qur'anic inscription, a joggled marble relieving arch, a marquetry panel of dramatic fluidity,* ablaq *(alternating courses of black and white stone) and a* muqarnas *half-dome. (See sidebar, page 10.)*
Below: *Defense-minded Mamluk planners never built a wall around Tripoli. Rather, they laid out market streets in a deliberately confusing fashion, with gates dividing the craft quarters from each other, to confound and confine intruders. Even modern residents find it easy to get lost.*





of the citadel. This, says Khaled Ziadeh of Lebanese University, was both strategy and sensibility. Ziadeh has specialized in Tripoli's social history. "To the Crusaders," he says, "the citadel was a military fortification that they first used to besiege the Arab city and later to guard the coastal center. But to the Mamluks, a citadel was always a social and political unit as well as a military one. The Mamluks were very much afraid the Europeans would return—remember, they had only retreated as far as Cyprus—which gave the Mamluks good reason to build inland rather than right on the coast. But that was not their only reason. It was also their tradition, which they had developed in Cairo."

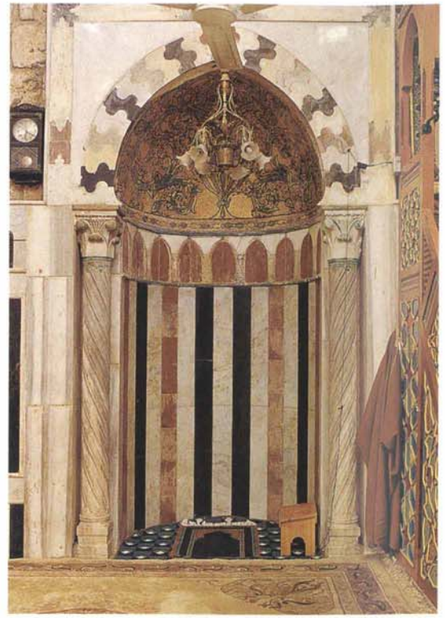
Just who the Mamluks were can be difficult to understand today, for they have no modern analogue. The word *mamluk* means "something that is possessed" in Arabic, and it refers to a caste of elite military slaves. In the central Islamic lands, between the 10th and early 19th centuries, that phrase was not the self-contradiction it seems today. To become a Mamluk, you had to be born a peasant in the Turkic-speaking lands of Central Asia; and you had to be purchased by a patron, a Muslim ruler to whom you would swear fealty for life. In return, you would be schooled—often very well schooled—as an officer or, in the case of the most able, as a cavalryman. You rose through the military ranks on your own merit, for a Mamluk could neither inherit nor bequeath his position. Mamluks spoke Turkic tongues among themselves, which set them apart from local populations, and they took great pride in having been chosen individually to rise out of poverty and become men of achievement, responsibility and refinement. For their patrons, this system enabled them to control their domains using professional guards and armies who had no potentially subversive connections among the subject populations.

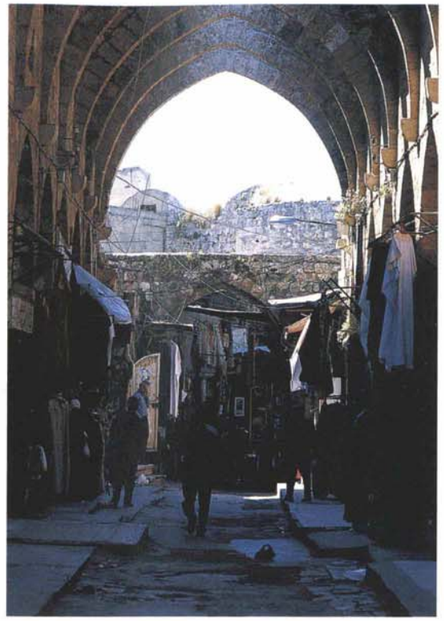
Inevitably, the Mamluks became powerful in their own right. Both in Baghdad and, more dramatically, in 13th-century Cairo they overpowered their patrons and established hereditary dynasties of their own. In Egypt, the Mamluk dynasty ruled for more than 500 years—independently from 1250 to 1517 and effectively, as Ottoman tributaries, until 1811. Supporting the Mamluk sultanate were such social institutions as the fortress, the palace, mosques and religious academies, which were patronized by sultans, princes, governors and other powerful individuals who increasingly, as time went on, were themselves Mamluks.

In Mamluk Tripoli, after securing the seat of government in the citadel, quartering the troops and making basic repairs to the aqueduct, among the first major projects undertaken was the construction of a central congregational mosque. Commissioned five years after the city's capture and dedicated to Al-Mansur Qala'un during the brief reign of his son Al-Ashraf Salah al-Din Khalil, it was this Great Mosque that first stamped the city with its new Islamic, Mamluk identity and offered a new hub for the religious and commercial life of the city. It rose on the site of the Crusader church of St. Mary, and it incorporated a relic gate and, for a minaret, the church's square-plan bell tower, both of which survive to the present day.

Using a nearly square paved courtyard, a central domed ablution fountain and a vaulted prayer hall, the Great Mosque followed architectural design principles common to the region at the time. However, it was built of the same stone as the citadel and other fortifications, and it lacked the ornamentation that is the most recognizable and pleasing feature of the architecture that developed out of those same principles several decades later.

That was because the years of the Great Mosque's construction were lean years, says historian Omar Tadmori of Lebanese University. Security and the restoration of basic services were foremost in the minds of the city's patrons and governors, who oversaw a permanent garrison of about 5000 soldiers. Europeans mounted occasional raids from their bases in Cyprus and beyond, and there was the ever-present fear—albeit never realized—of another all-out Crusade. Tadmori, who has advised on restoration projects throughout the Mamluk city and is modern Tripoli's leading architectural historian, notes that "the Mamluks did not build a wall around the city…; [rather] they constructed the markets, roads, and the narrow streets in a zigzag fashion" to confound and confine intruders—in short, to make the city into a trap. Tall stone houses rose at strategic corners, and each was fitted with slit windows for shooting. Each market and each section of the city could be closed off by its own gate.



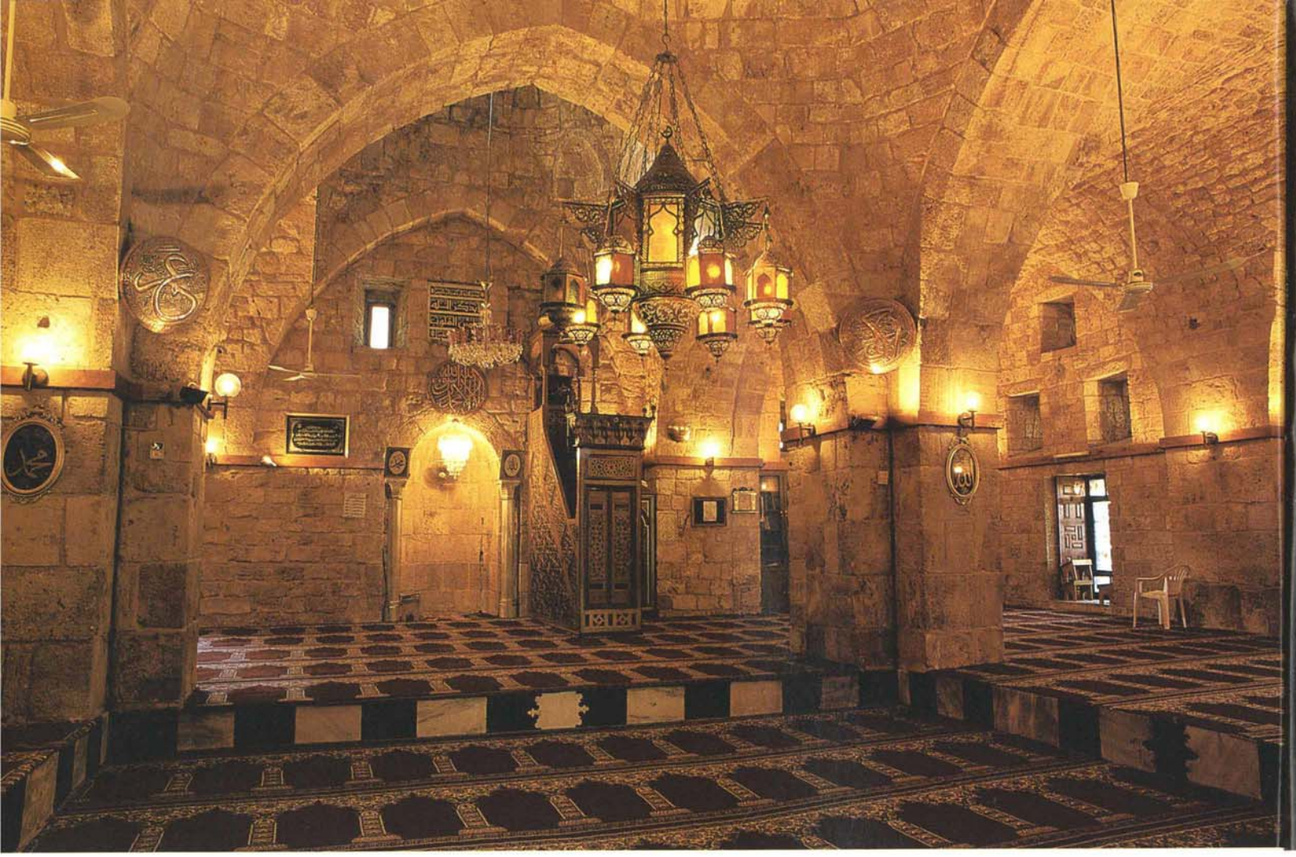


> Who the Mamluks were can be difficult to understand today, for an "elite military slave" has no modern analogue.

Yet defense was hardly the sole consideration in city planning. Tadmori also points out that "the building of mosques, schools, baths and hostelries *(khans)* in the center of the main markets was always considered. They were built next to each other to allow traders, travelers and visitors to go to the mosque together, or attend the nearby school." In addition, the nature of crafts and trades determined assigned locations for each of the more than three dozen specialized markets: The more prestigious and refined ones, such as the cloth, gold, perfume, shoe and confectionery *suq*s, clustered close to the Great Mosque; the loud or smelly ones, such as the coppersmiths' and tanners', were situated where they would be least likely to distract those who gathered for prayer.

One prominent early patron of building was

*Although Mamluk features—*ablaq*, marquetry, a joggled voussoir and mosaic tile—dominate the* mihrab*, or prayer niche, in the Mosque of al-Burtasi,* ***far left****, Corinthian colonnettes testify to the endurance of the esthetic legacy of the Greek successors of Alexander the Great.*
Left: *In addition to sacred architecture, the Mamluks also sponsored construction of civic and commercial works such as industries, farms, craft workshops and markets, among which the best-preserved is the tailors' hostelry and market, or* khan al-khayyatin*, which is still used for its original purpose. Other markets, some of which still stand today, were built for the sale of soap, perfume, wax, silk, wool, hats, boxes, baskets, rope, chains, saddlery and horses; craft districts were built for carpenters, tanners, knitters, weavers, upholsterers and smiths of iron, copper and gold. Provisioners' markets included fishmongers', butchers', bakers' and confectioners' as well as sections for the sale of oil, rice, wheat, melons and milk.*
Below: *Tripoli's trade with Europe in candy, loaf and powdered sugar predates Crusader times, and a sense of proud tradition endures among the city's confectioners—at least one of whom now takes worldwide orders via the Internet.*



The interior of the 1336 mosque of Amir Taynal, a three-term governor of Tripoli, is surprisingly plain and intimate for what was one of the most abundantly endowed mosques in the city, especially when compared to the grandeur of its entrance hall. (See page 13.) Decoration was restricted to the carved wooden minbar *(pulpit) and the marble floors, now damaged and carpeted. In this way, the mosque expresses more dramatically than most the Mamluk tendency to lavish ornamentation on the publicly visible elements of a building: entrances, minarets and windows.*

Prince Sonkor bin 'Abdallah Nuri, whose bath and *madrasa* (Qur'anic school) both bear the name Nuri today, as does the entire district around the Great Mosque. Other princes, governors and even sometimes the wives of such officials underwrote construction of other mosques and of baths, schools, markets, squares, fountains, gates and numerous houses; others sponsored the draining of marshes, the repair and replanting of fragrant groves of oranges, bananas, dates and walnuts and fields of sugarcane, along with irrigation systems; still others helped rebuild and expand industrial workshops for making soap, pressing olive oil, refining sugar, and weaving velvet and other textiles. Such patronage, undertaken out of a combination of *noblesse oblige* and a desire for self-commemoration, increased trade and the local tax base. In a few decades, Tripoli's population climbed from fewer than 20,000 immediately after the Crusader exodus to more than 40,000. (By comparison, some 100,000 people lived in Damascus at the time.)

Prosperity returned. Two decades after the Mamluk conquest, in 1310, Isa ibn 'Umar al-Burtasi commissioned a *madrasa*, the first in the city to make use of what are now regarded as the major elements of Mamluk decorative architecture. The portal and the arched windows of the *madrasa* were framed in alternating courses of black and white stone, a technique called *ablaq*—literally, "piebald." This set the openings off dramatically from the plastered, whitewashed sandstone walls, expressions of a North African influence that came to Tripoli by way of Cairo and has almost entirely disappeared today. *Muqarnas* squinches (see sidebar, page 10) appeared both in the portal and in support of the central dome. Inside, marble marquetry decorated the *qibla* wall, which indicated the direction of prayer, and the floor that surrounded the ablution fountain.

The *madrasa* of al-Burtasi, which today functions as a congregational mosque, was soon one of more than 20 schools in the city. Like their counterparts in Cairo, the Mamluks of Tripoli were not military men in a narrowly soldiering sense: They saw themselves as custodians of the Islamic empire, and their humble origins likely made them sharply aware of the value of the education they had themselves received. As a result, the city blossomed as an academic center as well as a center of commerce and crafts. By encouraging the *madrasas*, "the Mamluks transformed social and religious relationships through architecture," points out Tripoli-born historian Hisham Nashabe. "They created what became a center for the *'ulama*, the intelligentsia of the time, who lived in the al-Burtasi district until the 19th century."

Tripoli's prosperity impressed visitors. In 1326, Moroccan traveler Ibn Battuta remarked on the city's "amazing markets and fruitful plains." In her 1975 survey of the Mamluk city, architectural historian Hayat Salam-Liebich notes that in the early 1300's "travelers mention [Tripoli's] numerous mosques and *madrasas*, its beautiful markets and luxurious baths, and its construction of whitewashed stone, but what most impressed everyone who visited the city…[were] the water channels everywhere and the water piped from the neighboring hills that could reach the tops of houses several stories high."

Mosque between 1316 and 1326 by the governor of Tripoli, makes exquisite use of marble marquetry, especially in the square plaque above the main door, where interlacing bands of polychrome marble form four loops about a central, circular window. Other, square marquetry panels decorate the floor. *Ablaq* appears not only around doors and windows, but is also echoed in relieving arches above each window, in which alternately black and white stones interlock in fluid, elaborately curvilinear patterns.

> By building numerous well-endowed Qur'anic schools, Mamluk patrons created what became a center for the *'ulama*, the intelligentsia of the time.

With wealth came more refined, elaborate architecture, and the most elegant articulations of the Mamluk decorative vocabulary appear in the buildings of this early 14th-century period. It was in those years that the craftsmen of the city, looking mainly to Damascus and Aleppo, were able to carry their skills to sublime heights. Of the several dozen constructions of that time, two stand out.

The Qaratay Madrasa, built next to the Great

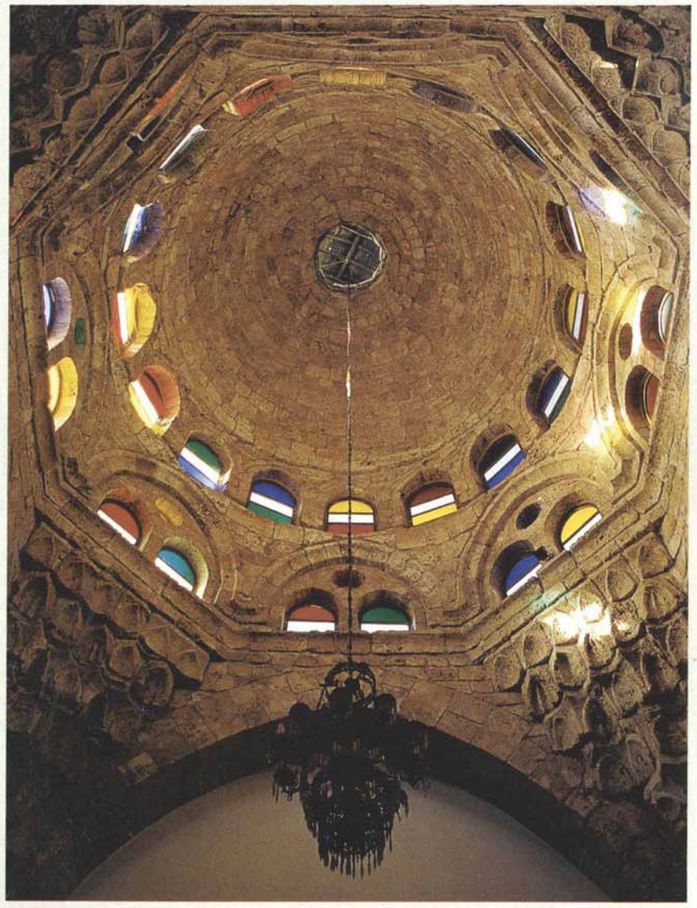
In the 1330's, as the central city became increasingly built up, Vice-Sultan Sayfeddeen Taynal Hajeb Ashrafi commissioned a mosque at the southern edge of the city. Using the site of a former Carmelite church, where several Roman-era Corinthian capitals and columns were lying about, he

In the al-Attaar Mosque, converted from a Crusader church in 1350 by Badr al-Din al-Attaar—perfumer by name as well as by profession—a chandelier hangs from a dome that rises to complete the rectangular vaulting. As in most Mamluk buildings of Tripoli, the interior stone was not dressed smooth, since it was originally plastered and whitewashed. Practically, this made the most of window lighting; architecturally, it showed the influence on the Mamluks of their Fatimid predecessors, whose roots lay in North Africa, where such interior styles remain common to this day.

Muqarnas

THE RHYTHM OF THE HONEYCOMB

Written by Jonathan M. Bloom



When Mamluk patrons and builders wished to show their stuff—whether in provincial capitals such as Tripoli or in the metropolis of Cairo—they often turned to *muqarnas* decoration, a type of ornament wholly an invention of Islamic artists, and one almost never used outside Islamic lands. *Muqarnas* is composed of progressively projecting tiers of niche-like geometric elements, a three-dimensional pattern that in Mamluk buildings often decorated the deep hoods over portals, hid the squinches and pendentives that actually supported domes, and created a visual transition between such elements as the shaft of a minaret and the underside of the minaret balcony.

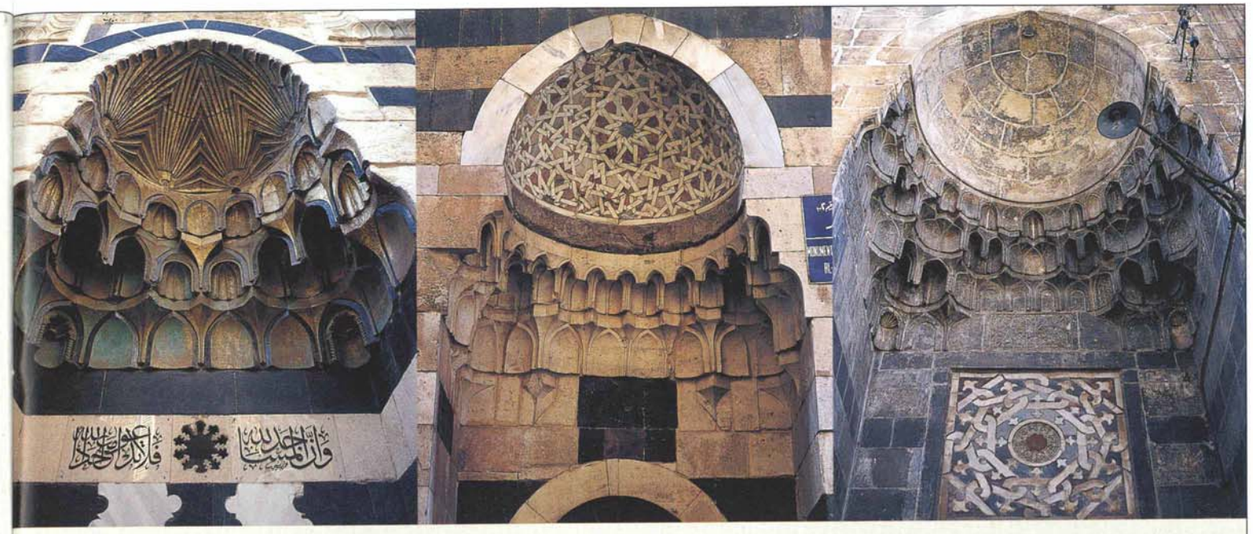
Except for its use to decorate fine *minbar*s, or pulpits, in mosques, *muqarnas* was strictly an architectural technique, and it created a richly sculpted and textured visual effect that Westerners have often likened to honeycomb or crystals. It is probably not much of an exaggeration to say that virtually every medieval Islamic building between the shores of the Atlantic and the Indian Ocean displays at least a bit of *muqarnas* somewhere.

Invented before the year 1000 and largely abandoned by the 17th century, *muqarnas* decoration enjoyed its heyday between the 11th and 16th centuries, when it became a defining feature of both religious and secular Islamic architecture. Unlike the geometricized vegetal ornament known as arabesque, which developed out of late antique and Byzantine decoration into another characteristic form of Islamic decoration, nothing like *muqarnas* was known in any other architectural tradition. One of the very few examples of non-Islamic *muqarnas* was commissioned by the Norman king Roger II, who in the mid-12th century ruled a Sicily only just conquered from the Muslims. His throne hall, now the Cappella Palatina in Palermo, displays a splendid wooden *muqarnas* ceiling.

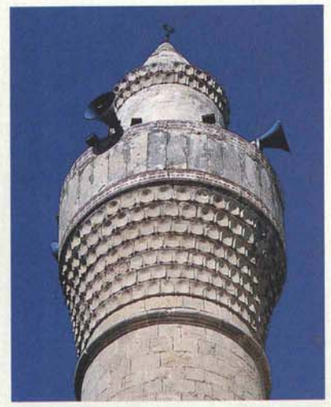
The origins of the *muqarnas* are obscure. The Arabic name, which is not attested before the late medieval period, has been linked to the Greek word *koronis* ("cornice"), but this popular etymology is not confirmed by linguists. The definitions found in the oldest Arabic dictionaries connect the word with the concepts of fragmentation and unsupported projection, both of which indeed characterize the motif. The oldest surviving examples of *muqarnas* are found in Central Asia and the province of Khurasan in northeast Iran and date to the 10th century; there, individual plaster or brick units were assembled to form *muqarnas*, which functioned to define and separate adjoining architectural elements such as walls and ceilings, or shafts and balconies. However, the rapid and wide diffusion of the form to Iraq, Egypt and North Africa has suggested to scholars that *muqarnas* may actually have first developed in 10th-century Iraq, when that region was the homeland of the Abbasid caliphate. From there, the techniques of building with *muqarnas* would have been disseminated along trade and pilgrimage routes to the various provinces, where local traditions of *muqarnas* decoration developed along regional lines.

In time, builders in Iran, Iraq and Syria came to construct entire vaults out of plaster *muqarnas*. While the harsh climate of the Iranian plateau forced builders there to cover these fragile vaults with tile roofs, in other locations the rippling exterior silhouette was left exposed, resulting a distinctive "sugar-loaf" dome. In parts of North Africa, where timber was readily available, *muqarnas* vaults were occasionally carved from wood.

In Syria, Egypt, and Turkey, where stone was the preferred construction material, masons changed the methods of constructing *muqarnas* to achieve similar effects in their more durable but heavier material. Whereas plaster *muqarnas* elements could be quickly cast and "glued" together into modules with more plaster, working in stone meant that each individual element had to be laboriously carved and flawlessly fitted. Plaster *muqarnas* vaults were light enough to be suspended from a hidden structural brick shell, but stone *muqarnas* vaults had to be self-supporting. It was the Mamluks who commissioned some of the most daring examples of carved stone *muqarnas*, refining the motif into elaborate and deep semidomes festooned with stone pendants that hang over the entrances to mosques, *madrasa*s and palaces. These display not only the consummate skill of the builders but also their patrons' commensurate taste.



Opposite: Muqarnas *may have developed first to decorate the squinches that support a dome's transition from a square, such as those below the central dome in the mosque of al-Burtasi.* ***Above, left to right:*** *The* madrasa *of Amir Tuwashi, an anonymous mosque and the al-Attaar Mosque. Above the front doors of each, half-dome hoods with individualized ornamental schemes are a distinctive use of* muqarnas *that appeared from the 11th to 17th centuries throughout the Islamic world.* ***Below:*** *Between the shaft and balcony on the minaret of the mosque of Argun Shah, a fish-scale* muqarnas *creates a transition zone.*



The earliest *muqarnas* were the fanciful products of artisans' familiar manipulation of humble plaster and brick, but as the vaults became increasingly complicated, the skills of *muqarnas* construction came to be entrusted only to specialists. An inscribed plaster plaque discovered in the ruins of the late 13th-century Ilkhanid palace at Takht-i Sulayman in northwest Iran has been interpreted as a template for the workmen who were charged with assembling a plaster *muqarnas* vault from prefabricated elements. Two centuries later, a collection of architectural diagrams known as the Topkapı Scroll details the design and assembly of extraordinarily complicated *muqarnas* vaults. In all cases, the drawings were only templates to help a master already familiar with the process.

Despite the almost universal use of *muqarnas* decoration in the medieval Islamic world, contemporary sources do not reveal a deeper meaning, or a reason for the great attraction that this type of ornament exercised. Modern scholars have speculated, among other things, that the fragmented and ephemeral quality of *muqarnas* vaults may have been an architectural metaphor for the atomistic theology propounded by Baghdad philosophers in the early 11th century, or that their changing repetitiveness and apparent defiance of gravity may have made them a visual metaphor for the infinite wisdom of God. More simply, visitors to the Alhambra in Granada, Spain today marvel at the splendid, 14th-century *muqarnas* vaults composed of thousands of individual plaster elements: When lit by the light filtering through delicate window grilles, they evoke the starry night sky arching over the person of the ruling sultan. In short, it is unlikely that any one meaning can ever adequately explain such a widespread and popular motif. Like other aspects of Islamic art, the broad appeal of the *muqarnas* may lie in its inherent ambiguity, for its geometric underpinnings delight the mind even as its visual characteristics delight the eye and inspire the soul.

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The vestibule of the mosque of Amir Taynal, ***opposite****, is larger both in height and area than the prayer hall that lies on the other side of the most elaborate portal in the city. In the vestibule, the original ablution fountain and its surrounding floor panels of marble marquetry have been removed after being damaged, and the area is now used as a secondary prayer hall. The granite columns date from the Roman era; the mosque's builders recovered them from the ruins of a Crusader-era church that stood on this same ground.* ***Right:*** *The portal's central triptych demonstrates a refinement in marquetry craftsmanship that has much in common with contemporary work in Damascus and Cairo. The mosque's minaret,* ***below****, is thick-shafted because it contains a double spiral staircase that is unique in Tripoli—at the bottom, one staircase opens to the interior, and the other opens to gardens that are surrounded by apartment blocks.*

The portal at the mosque of Amir Taynal is Tripoli's most refined Mamluk expression.

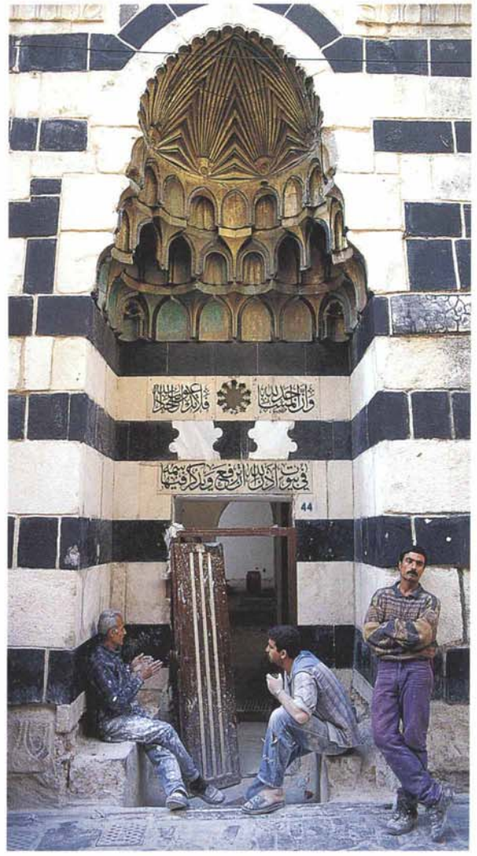
sponsored construction of the city's most spectacular portal. Today it is also the best preserved because, unlike other portals, it stands *inside* the mosque, which is entered through a modest covered portico, or *riwaq*. The *riwaq* opens into a plain but grandly proportioned, domed vestibule that is used as a secondary prayer hall, and which also provides a superb frame for the decorative portal that leads into the main prayer hall. Yet in that main prayer hall, there is relatively little decoration. In this way, the Taynal mosque exemplifies the Mamluk tendency to concentrate decoration on the most noticeable parts of the structure: the portal, the minaret and, to a lesser extent, the windows.

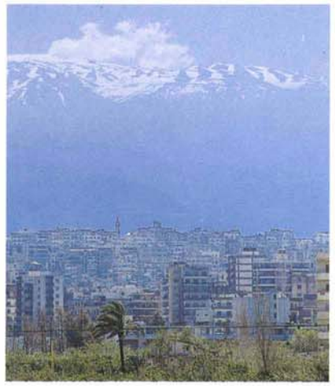
The portal at al-Taynal, among the tallest in the city, is clearly its most refined Mamluk expression. It uses polished *ablaq*, a joggled relieving arch, extensive calligraphic inscriptions, three panels of marble marquetry and a crowning *muqarnas* half-dome. It is a coherent structure, one in which details contribute to what Salam-Liebich describes as the "feeling of freshness and purpose" that characterizes the best of Mamluk craftsmanship.

In the years that followed the 1330's, buildings of all types continued to be erected and decorated—some very well—and some of those still stand today. But by mid-century, the reign of Al-Nasir Qala'un had ended, and his successors proved less adept. Plague devastated the Mamluk world socially, economically and politically no less than it did Turkey; Europe and North Africa. And though Tripoli's sugar trade continued to gain renown in Europe in the late 14th and 15th centuries and the city grew ever more cosmopolitan, yet the building crafts seemed to lose the exuberance that had characterized what the early Tripolitan Mamluks called Tarabulus al-Mustajadda ("Tripoli the Renewed"). In 1517, Tripoli was folded into the Ottoman realm and its administrative status was downgraded. It remained a leading academic city of the Eastern Mediterranean until the mid-19th century, when it was eclipsed by the rise of Beirut. Today, its role is largely commercial.

In recent times, efforts to conserve, restore, catalog and publicize the city's Mamluk heritage have been carried out by a dedicated coterie of local Islamic *waqf* (foundation) trustees and Lebanese historians, among the latter Tadmori and Ziadeh. The Lebanese civil war did not significantly damage the core of Tripoli, and the city retains most of its Mamluk plan despite Ottoman, colonial and modern overlays. Two published architectural surveys, Salam-Liebich's and another carried out

At the Tuwashi Madrasa, plasterers take a break from refinishing the interior walls and vaults. Built in 1471, it is one of the city's later Mamluk buildings, and one of the only ones to maintain the original smooth, white interior finish. Its exterior also has been renovated in recent years. To stimulate further renovations in the Mamluk city, Lebanese architectural conservationists hope to add Tripoli to the United Nations' list of more than 600 World Heritage Sites.
***Below:** East of Tripoli rise the mountains, whose cool, fertile foothills allowed Tripolitan agriculture to diversify beyond coastal crops, increasing the prosperity of the city's farm economy that since the earliest times complemented fisheries and maritime trade. From the mountains flows the Qadisha River, which provided an irrigation resource as well as the drinking water that the Mamluks piped in to most houses. Its often steep course linked Tripoli's traders and travelers with the Beka'a Valley and the Syrian interior. Today, roads follow the river and its tributaries into the mountains, serving farms, suburbs and villages, and metropolitan Tripoli supports some 12 times as many people as it did under the Mamluks.*





by graduate students of the American University in Beirut, have established a basis for conservation. The city has designated 45 buildings as historic landmarks, and it has marked them with trilingual blue signs that identify them and give their construction dates: 30 of them date to the Mamluk era.

However, modern Tripoli may be in a lean time not unlike the early years after the Mamluk conquest. "Right now, there is no money for conservation beyond basic maintenance," says Shawki Fatfat, an architect in his late 20's who spent much of last year unemployed. "There are too many other more pressing problems since the [end of the Lebanese civil] war. This is understandable, but there is so much more that we could be doing—excavations, restorations, even just cleaning things."

Fatfat and others are hopeful that the Mamluk city will become the fifth site in Lebanon to be listed by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as one of its more than 600 World Heritage Sites. The motion is being brought by Nashabe, who also represents Lebanon on UNESCO's executive board.

World Heritage Site status, he says, would "raise the profile of the city in a way we desperately need. It is like a certificate of authenticity, validating it in the eyes of international concerns that could then be in a more confident position to make partnerships with local ones."

Today, the old city is a crowded warren of dilapidated charm and seemingly undiminished utility, one among that handful of very old urban cores, from Fez to Istanbul, that wear well the passage of half a dozen centuries. True to the Mamluks' intentions, the city remains exceptionally difficult to navigate. Even Fatfat gets lost: "I grew up here and have studied and photographed every one of the monuments, but I still get confused sometimes," he confesses. But unlike many other cities, where markets have grown and expanded organically over long periods of time, Tripoli's have remained confined by the original plan, and one can still see where the gates—now removed—would have sealed one trade's area off from another's, leaving intruders at the mercy of archers.

Now, the stems of satellite dishes often poke out of the old slit windows and rooftop crenelations designed for the archers, and while women still negotiate the narrow passages with baskets of vegetables on their heads, some of them pause to take calls on cellular phones. Yet the coppersmiths still bang out tea trays; the Khan al-Khayyatin ("tailors' hostelry") is still stacked with bolts of cloth, and the ramshackle, nearly abandoned Khan al-Saboun yet houses a few makers of multicolored, hand-packed, spherical olive-oil soaps, variously sweet and musky—one even gooey with honey. Along the sea, *al-mina*, which the Mamluks were the first and only occupants of Tripoli to neglect, thrives as an industrial port and fish market, much as it has since Phoenician times nearly 3000 years ago.

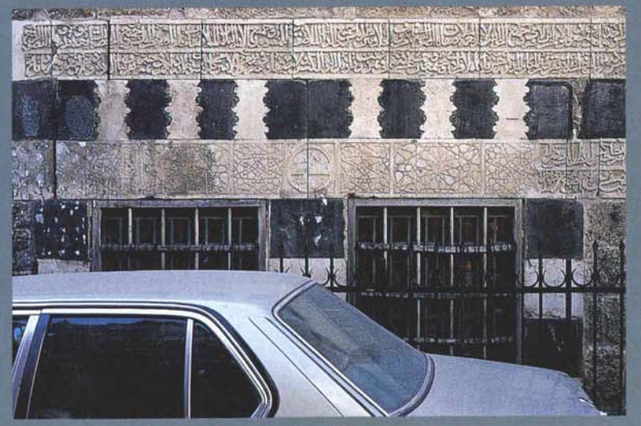
The orange groves and sugarcane fields that lay between *al-mina* and the Mamluk city are increasingly filled with ranks of apartment buildings whose drabness is offset by the vistas they offer their occupants: on one side, the sea, and on the other, the snow-capped mountains. To increasing numbers of middle-class and professional Tripolitans, the old Mamluk city is a place to take pride in—though from a comfortable distance, if only because finding a parking place near it can be so exasperating. That is one development that the Mamluk planners can hardly be blamed for failing to anticipate.

Dick Doughty is the assistant editor of Aramco World. *He visited Tripoli in the spring of 1999.*

The Tripoli Database Project:
www.geocities.com/Baja/1137/

A 14TH-CENTURY TRUST

The following text is inscribed on two marble plaques that flank the entrance of Tripoli's Madrasa al-Saqraqiya, finished in 1359 under the patronage of Sayf al-Din Aqturaq al-Hajib. It is a *waqf* document, which establishes a foundation or trust and makes over certain of the grantor's property to it; income produced by that property maintain the mosque and its staff. (See *Aramco World*, November/December 1973.) As one of the longer such inscriptions in the city, its details illuminate both the nature of a *waqf* grantor's intentions as well as the economy of the era. The translation is from *Tripoli: The Old City Monument Survey—Mosques and Madrasas*, edited by Robert Saliba and published by the American University of Beirut in 1994.



Most founding inscriptions on the Mamluk buildings of Tripoli were integrated into the decorative scheme of the building's exterior.

In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate: His Honorable Excellency Sayf al-Din Aqturaq, the chamberlain, has constituted as *waqf* this blessed place as a mosque for God.... He has provided the following *waqf* for its upkeep, furnishing, and decorations: The whole of the two adjoining farms in the districts of Hisn al-Akradd, known as the field of the Sultan and Qumayra; and the whole of the orchards adjoining the village of Rish in the district of Tripoli, one known as Masud and the other as Bab al-Aframi; and the whole of the four shops set on the eastern side of the Confectioners' Suq in Tripoli; and the whole of the house adjoining the mosque; and all of the three houses in the vicinity of Khan al-Misriyyin in Tripoli; and the whole of the dispersed portion and its value; and the half and the quarter of the entire house to the north of the engineers' hostelry by the old bridge; and the whole of the [bakery] oven known as Kurr Khulid, for the mosque mentioned and legally constituted as *waqf*. As for the use of the revenue, it is to begin with the building and its upkeep, after which the following is to be spent each month: 40 dirhams for the imam of the mosque, 50 dirhams for the two muezzins who take turns [calling to] prayers from the minaret of the said mosque; 30 dirhams for the attendants of the mosque and the mausoleum; 50 dirhams for five people to read prayers in the said mosque together and individually; 15 dirhams for the price of oil, of lamps, of cleaning equipment, and for the bringing of water. And to be spent on the Monday of each week are three dirhams for bread, to be distributed [to the poor] by the door of the mausoleum, and one single dirham for the price of water and ice; and, in the same fashion, to be spent on the Thursday of each week of every month are 11 dirhams for the price of clothing, such as a shirt and fine clothes and other things, for Muslim orphans, widows and poor people. And whatever remains after that is to be spent on whoever is poor or needy among the children of him who provided the *waqf*, or their descendants, or his freed slaves, with no distinctions. And if there be no needy among them, the money is to be distributed to the Muslims among the poor by the door of the mausoleum. For the supervision of the above [the grantor] has designated himself, then the wisest of his children and descendants, and whoever is an important chamberlain in Tripoli. He has also stipulated that the *waqf* is not to be rented for more than three years at a time and that the revenue is to be spent and not subjected to abuse or claimed taxes, as is specified in the written *waqf* [document] dated in the middle of Dhu al-Qa'dah al-Haram in the year 757 [November 9, 1356] and duly registered in the court of justice in Tripoli the Protected. And this [plaque] was inscribed in Rabi' al-Awwal in the year 760 [February 1359]. And the right of water for this mosque, a legal right, is in the amount of three-quarters of an inch [pipe diameter] from the aqueduct of Tripoli.

Scents of Place

Frankincense in Oman

Written by Tim Mackintosh-Smith *Photographed by Ilene Perlman*

What a difference six and a half centuries can make! Writing in 1355, the great Moroccan traveler Ibn Battuta reported that the *suq*, or market, of the southern Arabian city of Zafar smelled so vile, "because of the quantity of fruit and fish sold in it."

Today, Zafar has become Salalah, capital of the Sultanate of Oman's Dhofar Governorate. The suburb of al-Harja', where the market was located, has been supplanted by al-Haffah. And the smells of the *suq* would please Ibn Battuta, just as they please modern-day visitors: The occasional ghostly whiffs of drying sardines are overwhelmed by a voluptuous aura of aromatics. As one Omani said to me, splashing *eau de toilette* on the tassel of his *dishdashah*, and on me, "Scent? We can't live without it!"

Arabia has been famously fragrant since the earliest times. *Kitab al-Tijan*, probably the oldest Arab history book, has Ya'rub, the first speaker of Arabic, following the scent of musk southward from Babel. Greek and Latin authors wrote of an Arabia redolent with spices and aromatics. In Shakespeare's 17th-century view of 11th-century Scotland, Lady Macbeth wailed that all the perfumes of Arabia would not sweeten her blood-stained hand.

A look around the *suq* at al-Haffah proves that all this is no mere literary cliché: There are bottles and flasks of scent by the thousand, ranks of pottery incense burners in primary colors, and jar upon jar of obscure ingredients, waiting to be pounded, compounded and combusted by the ladies of Salalah. Few of the raw materials are local; most come from around—and in—the Indian Ocean, still as generous a sea as it was for the Arab navigators of the Middle Ages.

One product, though, is entirely indigenous to the southern Arabian Peninsula, and among all the sweet and heavy odors it provides an unmistakably clear note: frankincense. The scent of its smoke is everywhere, rich but not cloying, honeyed yet slightly astringent, with hints of lime, vetiver and verbena—the olfactory equivalent of a good sorbet. For thousands of years, this inimitable odor has carried the fame of Arabia across three continents.

Even today, Oman is permeated with frankincense. Government buildings are censed daily, even the elevators. At home, Omanis perform their courtly ceremonies of hospitality—the graceful pouring of coffee, the dates and sweets delicately proffered—in an atmosphere perfumed by frankincense. Outsized incense burners smolder in significant public places: Brazier-sized ones flank the entrance to the sultan's palace outside Muscat. And truly gigantic sculptures of incense burners can be found in urban traffic circles, where, as often as not, they function as fountains.

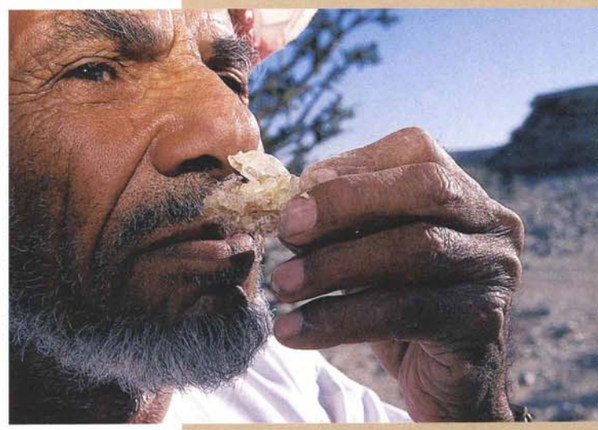
Entering Salalah, I noticed that the gigantic incense burners—this time disguised as planters—had escaped the traffic circles and run riot along the highway. Their square, crenelated form descends from types used more than two millennia ago, when Dhofar, together with the coastal areas across the modern border with Yemen, was known as the Frankincense Land. Later on, Arab writers referred to the area as al-Shihr and eulogized its principal product, in Arabic called *luban*. One poet said,

> Go to al-Shihr and leave Oman;
> You'll not find dates but you'll find *luban*.

The implication, perhaps, is that if dates are the staff of life, frankincense is the equivalent for the soul. Following the poet's advice, I had traveled the nearly 1000 kilometers (600 mi) from Muscat to see, and smell, where the human love-affair with frankincense began.

The tree *Boswellia*, which produces the gum, is found not only in southern Arabia, but also in Somalia and India. But of the 25 or so species of *Boswellia*, the one generally agreed to produce the finest frankincense is *Boswellia sacra*, which grows exclusively in Dhofar and, to a lesser extent, in the al-Mahrah and Hadhramaut regions of Yemen. The earliest reference to a frankincense trade comes in pharaonic records of around 1500 BC, which state that the gum came to Egypt

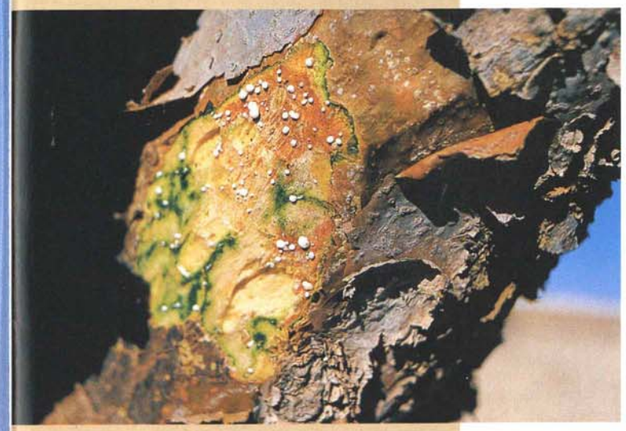
Rich but not cloying, honeyed yet slightly astringent, with hints of lime, vetiver and verbena .... It seemed not to burn, but to sublimate.



Fresh from the tree, the gum resin known as frankincense smells pleasant even before it is burned, thanks to abundant volatile oils. An experienced harvester, such as Musallem Rehaba of Thamarit in Dhofar province, knows well the olfactory subtleties of the world's best. ***Opposite:*** *The popularity since ancient times of frankincense and other aromatics led to the development, in the countries of the Arabian Peninsula, of the common, four-sided incense burner, variations of which are used today. They occasionally appear as icons of cultural identity.*

OPPOSITE: LYNN ABERCROMBIE / NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC SOCIETY IMAGE COLLECTION

If dates are the staff of life, frankincense is the equivalent for the soul.



Frankincense harvesters use a chisel-like manqaf *to make repeated scraping cuts, at intervals of days or weeks, into the papery bark of the* Boswellia *tree. Of the 25 species that grow also in India, Yemen and Somalia,* Boswellia sacra, *found only in southwest Oman and east Yemen, yields the finest frankincense. The harvester's cuts draw out beads of sap, from which frankincense takes its name in Arabic:* luban, *whose root refers to "milky whiteness." Upon contact with air, the sap begins to harden into a semi-translucent, light yellow or green resin that can be scraped off the tree.*

from "the Land of Punt," which was probably located in the Horn of Africa. But by the Græco-Roman period *Boswellia sacra* had captured the markets, and exports from Arabia, mainly destined for the Mediterranean, reached an annual 3000 tons.

The Greek and Latin words for frankincense, *libanos* and *libanus*, come from Arabic *luban*, which, like the South Arabian *libnay*, derives from a root that refers to "milky whiteness." The Arabic scientific name for the gum, *kundur*, seems to derive, possibly via Persian, from a Greek pharmaceutical term, *khondros libanou*—"grain frankincense." On the Greek island of Delos, pre-Islamic Yemeni frankincense traders set up an altar with a South Arabian inscription at about the same time that architecture in the Arabian Peninsula began to sprout Hellenistic acanthus leaves and cornucopiae. Commercial and cultural links suffered a blow when the trade crashed with the rise of Christianity, whose early leaders wrinkled their noses at the vast and conspicuous consumption of Rome. Not until this century did Arabia and the West resume a comparably fruitful commercial intercourse—only, this time, the commodity was oil. Today, little frankincense leaves its homeland.

Even if the fishy smells described by Ibn Battutah have now been relocated, one feature in his account of the Salalah *suq* is still the same, 670 years on: The trade, at least in the perfume department, is run by women. Their stock spills out of their shops and on to the pavement, where they sit among piles of frankincense and other aromatics.

"Why don't you sit inside?" I asked one. Her name was Radiyyah bint al-Da'n 'Ashur, according to the signboard on her shop.

"Oh, I'm too old to be getting in and out of chairs," she said, but with a twinkle of self-parody in her eyes. The twinkle suited her well: Swathed in jazzy prints, she sported a gold rosette in one nostril and a magnificent coral-encrusted gold ring through the other.

"We're all getting older," I replied, looking at the extraordinary array of stock in the shop behind her. "Don't you have anything to restore youth?"

Radiyyah looked me in the eye: "Scents can't make you young. They can only bring back memories of youth."

After discourses on civet and musk, ambergris and aloeswood, I steered her onto the subject of frankincense. She explained how houses are censed daily, in the early morning and at sunset, to make them fragrant and to keep away pests. Water, too, is purified by the addition of a few grains of frankincense. Following a birth, mother and baby are censed. At weddings, ululating women hold smoldering burners high in the air, while the male guests dance around burners at their separate celebration. "And then there are all the other kinds of incense and perfume. At some weddings they spend 600 riyals [about $1600], just on scents!" she said. This time, the twinkle in her eye was a twinkle of business acumen.

Frankincense, then, is used in both celebration and purification, and this latter use is well-founded, for it is known to contain disinfectant phenols. But, I discovered, a savor of yet more ancient beliefs hangs about it. Late one afternoon, under the coconut palms of Salalah, I was enjoying a mug of milk fresh from the udder of a Dhofari cow. Sunset was near, and as the light faded, a herdsman began to cense the byre. "Omani sensitivity to smells," I thought, but my host explained that it was "to keep away germs." As a gum, frankincense has several more mundane uses: Heated with sesame oil and sand, it forms a sealant called *lukk* that is used for gluing Yemeni dagger blades into their hilts, and in the recent past it has served as a general-purpose crack-filler, a tooth-filling, and as the main ingredient in a depilatory wax.

Radiyyah mentioned too that frankincense was "good for stomach disorders." I remembered seeing references to it in medieval medical texts and, curious to learn more, consulted the 13th-century pharmacopeia of al-Malik al-Muzaffar. The author's academic credentials were sound: "I know more of medicine," he said, "than anyone." He writes that *kundur*, in humoral terms, heats and dries. It thus heals deep wounds and stanches fresh ones. Taken internally, it clears "darkness of vision," burns blood and phlegm, dries moisture in the head and chest, strengthens a weak stomach, stops diarrhea and vomiting, digests food and expels wind. It is good for febrile conditions and eases palpitations of the heart. Its smoke is efficacious against plague. (In the West, the makers of up-market cosmetics are beginning to use the gum in their products; perhaps, I thought, pharmacologists should take another look at it, too.) There was more: Chewing frankincense strengthens the teeth and gums. It eases speech

impediments. And it even strengthens the "spirit" in the heart and brain, thus combating laziness and stimulating the memory. Overdosing, al-Muzaffar warns, can cause headaches, melancholy, scabies and, in extreme cases, leprosy. Wider reading revealed that the Yemeni polymath al-Haymi recommended a mixture of frankincense, olive oil and honey be taken in the bath as a remedy for rheumatism. He added that the gum is "an excellent stimulant of appetite in the 100-and-over age group."

I listened as Radiyyah went through the different grades of frankincense in her stock. "Those big yellow lumps aren't so good," she said. "These are better. Look, they're like pearls. But," she opened a small box, "these are the real *fusus*!" Her word "gems" was well chosen: Teardrops the size of fat ringstones, some were silvery, others had opalescent hints of rose, green or topaz. "This is *najdi*," she explained, "from the *najd* [plateau], the high land behind Jabal Qara." She pointed to the range of mountains across the plain from Salalah.

I had already made inquiries about where the best frankincense comes from. My informants, however, could not agree. In Jabal Qara, one had said that the best came from Mughsayl, west of Salalah. A farmer near Mughsayl said that the best came from 'Aydam, nearer the border with Yemen. The literary sources were similarly in disagreement. "The finest *luban* of all you won't find in the *suq*," added Radiyyah, confusing the matter further. "It's called *hawjari* and it comes from around Hasik." I knew of the place, a small town on the coast 130 kilometers (80 mi) east of Salalah that Ibn Battuta, too, had mentioned as an important source of the best *luban*. On the formidable, twin authority of Radiyyah and Ibn Battuta, I felt I might really be on the track of the aristocrat of aromatics.

That evening, I lit some charcoal and placed a "gemstone" of *najdi* on it. It seemed not to burn, but to sublimate. The fumes spooled upward like a thick skein of cobwebs. The scent was heavenly. And this was only the second-best sort! A look at the map, however, went some way to explaining the rarity of Hasik's *luban*: Surrounded on all sides by the Samhan range, the town was entirely cut off from the road network. The only approach was by sea.

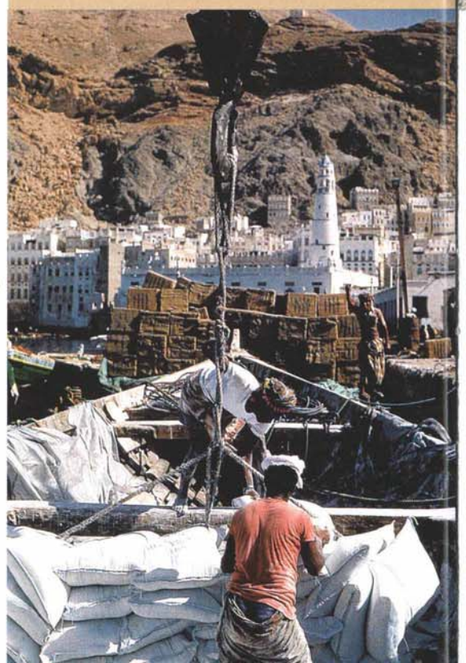
Not long after, I found myself walking down to the harbor at Sad'h, 100 kilometers (62 mi) nearer Hasik. "Sad'h," explained Salim al-'Adli, a native of the town, "was built on the *luban* trade." He pointed out a fine old merchant's house, its lime-plaster facade decorated with two sailing ships in low relief. Down in the cove, small fish skittered across the surface of the water, glinting in the morning sun. I was surprised to see another sailing vessel, not a representation but a real, full-sized *sambuq*, beached on the shore. Her stern was covered by a finely carved inscription: "In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful: O Protector of souls in hulls, O Savior of hulls in the fathomless sea, protect this sambuq whose name is *al-Dhib [The Wolf]*." The prayer continued, giving the date AH 1371 (AD 1951) and asking the Almighty "to bring us bounty whence we know not." *Al-Dhib* was not yet 50 years old, but that final phrase, "whence we know not," took my imagination momentarily across an ocean of time to lands where camphor and aloeswood grew, to islands where the roc was said to have dwelt.

The diesel-engined *Asad al-Bahr (Lion of the Sea)*, bound for Hasik with a cargo of rice, sugar, cooking oil and hay, did not inspire such daydreams. But the monsters of old were still at large: A few meters to starboard, an enormous tail appeared and began slowly thrashing the waves. Both whale and *Lion of the Sea*, though, were dwarfed by the cliffs of Jabal Samhan, beneath which we were passing. Forming a sheer wall, they trailed clouds like the scarves of an exotic dancer. I recalled a Greek description of the Frankincense Land, "mountainous and forbidding, wrapped in thick clouds," and I remembered those other monsters of old, first reported by Herodotus in the fifth century BC: vicious flying snakes that guarded the frankincense groves. Herodotus is often criticized for an over-fertile imagination, but the Dhofari scholar Sa'id al-Ma'shani has noted the existence of a rock drawing from the region which shows a man's leg and a snake. Possibly, he suggests, this is an ancient "No Trespassing" sign.

Five hours out of Sad'h, we arrived at Hasik. Here, where the cliffs retreat a little from the sea, a line of cuboid houses overlooked a placid bay that shimmered with dolphins' backs. As the deputy governor, 'Ali al-Shikayli, turned out to be from an old Sad'h family, I asked him about *al-Dhib*. "She was my grandfather's ship," he said, "and it was my father who did the calligraphy of the inscription you took down!" The unexpected connection set off a flow of reminiscences in which 'Ali explained how *al-Dhib* took frankincense to Aden, Basrah and Bombay. We were joined by some old Hasik frankincense hands, and the conversation began swerving between Arabic and Mahri. The Mahri tribesmen, traditional guardians and harvesters of the crop here, speak a

A look at the map went some way to explaining the rarity of Hasik's *luban*: The town was approachable only by sea.

*The coast of southwest Oman, **opposite**, is sparsely populated, and yet from this region some 3000 tons of frankincense were exported annually to Greece and Rome. **Below:** Longshoremen unload a dhow docked in Mukalla, Yemen, one of the towns lining the southern coast of the Arabian Peninsula. Despite the mythic stature of frankincense, maritime trade and agriculture have been more consistent sources of regional prosperity.*



THOMAS ABERCROMBIE / NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC SOCIETY IMAGE COLLECTION; OPPOSITE: LYNN ABERCROMBIE

derivative of the ancient South Arabian languages. Some of their current terminology can be found in inscriptions going back to the heyday of the trade with Rome.

The *luban* trees, I learned, grow in and above the three main wadis, or valleys, around Hasik. The *hawjari* type favored by Radiyyah comes from beyond the watershed, but the present panel of experts was unanimous that *luban* from the seaward side of the mountains, called simply *hasiki*, was even better. "Its scent is the strongest. And it is the only sort that improves with keeping."

Harvesting is carried out mainly between spring and early autumn. First, the outer layer of bark is removed, in half a dozen places on a medium-sized tree. The operation, known as *tawqi'*, needs a careful hand: If cut to the "quick," a tree will become barren. This first *tawqi'* does not produce marketable frankincense, but it opens the "pores" of the tree. Subsequent *tawqi'*s, made in the same spots at intervals of 10 days or more, allow the gum to exude. The third *tawqi'* produces the most, "like a cow milking better the more calves she has," they said. When the gum has hardened, it is scraped off and stored in the shade, preferably in a cave, until the end of the season. Then it is taken down-wadi to the sea.

This, at least, was what happened from well before the time of Herodotus until a scant half-generation ago. Now, Hasik has entered the Ice Age: An ice-making plant in town means that frozen fish can be exported to distant—and lucrative—markets. These commercial links have fueled demand for another product of the sea: abalone. With the shellfish selling to Far Eastern buyers for $200 a kilo ($90/lb), frankincense cannot compete. Although the women of Hasik collect a little for use at home, commercial frankincense harvesting has ceased. I now knew why the finest *luban* was also the rarest.

Next morning, Shaykh Musallam bin Sa'id al-Naqsh Thaw'ar al-Mahri, though he had long since retired from frankincense harvesting, agreed to give me a demonstration. Crossing the narrow plain behind Hasik, we entered Wadi Hadbaram. Cave-riddled cliffs, again topped with cloud, rose above a stream that meandered fitfully through reedbeds. The place was full of birdsong, and crumbling rock galleries above echoed with the beat of pigeons' wings. Not far into the wadi, Shaykh Musallam headed for the steep side of the gorge and started climbing. He was not a young man, and I hoped he would not regret this adventure. Yet in less than a minute, he was far above me. By the time I caught up with him, panting, he was looking at me pityingly through kohl-rimmed eyes.

We traversed a scree slope to a small

As the smoke is released, so is a stream of recollections: early-morning frankincense meeting the iodine tang of low tide, rustlings in the reedbeds of Wadi Hadbaram and finally, of course, the Salalah *suq*.

*Rehaba, **above**, holds a pan of harvested* luban *that, after it is completely dry, will be sold in the* suq *in Salalah. **Opposite:** The domestication of the camel, probably accomplished during the second millennium* BC*, enabled the transport of frankincense and other aromatics and spices from the southern Arabian Peninsula to Egypt, Greece, Syria and beyond. An alabaster frieze evokes what was once a trek of some 80 days.*

OPPOSITE: LYNN ABERCROMBIE

outcrop, and found our goal—a group of three *luban* trees. Each about three meters (10') tall, or a bit less, they had several main trunks and a confusion of thin branches that had lately put out small, crinkly leaves. The trunks were silvery white and scarred, like the shins of an old warrior. With both hands, Musallam gripped his *manqaf*, a sort of chisel with a handle of *luban* wood, and with a few practiced downward strokes sliced off a patch of papery bark to reveal a pistachio-green layer beneath. More strokes removed the green layer, leaving a wound the color of raw steak. Slowly, beads of white liquid began to appear on the wound, like pus. (The word *tawqi'* is appropriate, for among its meanings in classical Arabic is "to gall a camel's back.")

As we slipped and stumbled down the cliffside in the hot sun, I reflected that a professional harvester would have to make this trip four times or more. Multiply that by the hundreds of trees scattered around the gorge and on the high tops, and the result was a lot of hard work for comparatively little gain: Frankincense sells for around $2.50 a kilo ($1.15/lb) wholesale, and most trees produce only a few kilos. I could understand the attraction of abalone, which can net a top diver $50,000 dollars in a two-month season.

Musallam was ready to go back to Hasik. I said that I would explore further.

"Watch out for snakes," he warned.

I remembered Herodotus. "Not flying ones...?"

"Yes. They jump out of the *samur* trees."

Herodotus, I thought, I shall always give you the benefit of the doubt.

For good measure, there were supposed to be leopards too. In the event, I saw nothing more alarming than the back end of a small rodent, disappearing into its hole. But I admit I gave every *samur* tree I saw the widest possible berth.

Back home, I lit some Hasiki frankincense, a going-away present from Shaykh Musallam. Whatever the substance of their other claims, the old pharmacists were right on one point: Frankincense stimulates the memory. For, as the smoke is released, so too is a stream of recollections: early-morning frankincense meeting the iodine tang of low tide, rustlings in the reedbeds of Wadi Hadbaram, a cow-byre at twilight; and older recollections, of censers in childhood churches and, finally of course, the Salalah *suq*, where Radiyyah sits among her stock, a benign commingler of smells.

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Beit Al Qur'an

Religion, Art, Scholarship

WRITTEN BY NI'MAH ISMA'IL NAWWAB

PHOTOGRAPHED BY HUSSAIN A. AL-RAMADAN

*Founded in 1990, Beit Al Qur'an is a museum, a scholarly institution and a cultural treasure all in one. Its logo, **opposite, top**, is written in a restrained contemporary version of intertwined kufic script, with typically minimal variation in the width of the strokes.*

Its lustrous natural pearls, important archeological sites and intricate handicrafts have long attracted visitors from around the world to Bahrain. But this small island in the Arabian Gulf is also the home of Beit Al Qur'an—the House of the Qur'an—a world-class museum of rare manuscripts of Islam's holy book and of other Islamic artifacts.

The museum was founded by Dr. Abdul Latif Jassim Kanoo, a member of a Bahraini merchant family whose written history goes back more than a century. But part of the money to build it also came from donations collected in a public fund drive, the first attempted in an Arabian Gulf country. It was "an undertaking fraught with uncertainty," says Kanoo, but successful. Beit Al Qur'an carries out all the functions of a modern museum: presentation of permanent and visiting exhibitions, conservation and restoration of manuscripts, publication of books, research, and sponsorship of cultural activities, lectures and seminars.

It also has a group of "friends of the museum" with unique motivation. "People, young and old, feel that they have a stake in our institute through their personal funding, which helped start this venture," Kanoo says. "But what made it possible is the immense desire of all Muslims to serve the Holy Qur'an and its message." And since that message is universal, he adds, "we welcome international visitors of all faiths."

The core of the museum's holdings is Kanoo's own collection of Qur'anic manuscripts and other Islamic art, one that he began after years of studying public and museum collections during his trips and studies abroad. As his collection grew, he came to feel a strong sense of responsibility toward the rare manuscripts he had acquired. Moving beyond ownership to the concept of custodianship, he donated his collection to a foundation he established in 1990 to operate a first-of-its-kind institution dedicated to the service of the Qur'an and the preservation of historic manuscripts.

"The institute serves as a custodian of Islamic traditions for future generations," comments Kanoo. "Especially when taking into consideration the importance of the Qur'an not simply as a manuscript to be displayed at a museum but as a living document by which Muslims live their lives."

Situated in the business district of Manama, the capital of Bahrain, Beit Al Qur'an is modeled conceptually on the traditional *madrasas*, or religious schools, that were attached to mosques in the Islamic world. They provided fertile ground for those who sought to cultivate Islamic knowledge and, like them, this institute combines religion, culture and learning under one roof.

It is housed in a building that itself combines Islamic and modern elements. A massive but understated textured-concrete exterior, fronted with a frieze of Qur'anic verses, gives no hint of riches within. But inside, sunlight streams through a score of small stained-glass domes, bathing the closed central courtyard in light. Intricately carved *mashrabiyyas*, or latticed windows, and panels of tiny, colorful tiles decorate this three-story space, from which entrances lead visitors to the five parts of the building.

Many visitors begin with a visit to Mathaf al-Hayat, the Museum of Life, whose ten rooms on two floors, interconnected by ramps and half-height walls, take up the largest part of the Beit Al Qur'an's space and contain some of the art treasures collected by Kanoo: armor, ceramics, glass, textiles, scientific instruments, manuscripts, clothing and ornaments from different periods and from countries as diverse as China, Tunisia, Morocco, Iran and India.

Some of the splendid examples of ceramics date from as far back as the ninth century; many come from such traditional centers of Islamic craftsmanship as Bukhara, Raqqah, Tehran and Iznik in today's Uzbekistan, Iraq, Iran and Turkey. There is a handsome 12th-century Persian jug made in Kashan and decorated with bold underglaze black and cobalt-blue motifs applied on a cream background, with bands of calligraphy around the middle and on the lip. Spectacular glass objects illustrate glassmaking techniques of various Islamic eras, including drawing, cutting, tinting, coloring and enameling.

Among the metal objects are a ceremonial Moghul damascened steel helmet decorated with arabesque designs, made in the 18th century, and a beautiful 23-centimeter (9") brass celestial globe decorated with bosses that represent stars and with images of humans and animals representing zodiacal signs. Objects from Safavid Persia, Mamluk Syria, Ottoman Turkey and

This Qur'an manuscript was written and illuminated in 1425 in Egypt or Syria under Mamluk patronage. The text is written in a clear and elegant muhaqqaq *script, with its distinctive sweeping leftward and downward strokes.*

Top left: *The deep, round descenders on this 10th-century parchment manuscript from North Africa mark the evolution of the early, austere kufic script into Western Kufic, one of five later kufic styles. The pyramid of six dots at the lower right is an early example of the use of an ornamental marker to signal the end of a verse.* ***Right:*** *By the 11th century, kufic calligraphy had developed further. In this piece from Iran, the shoulder-to-shoulder density of the written line is abruptly interrupted by strong ascenders and descenders. Gold tendrils surround the white lettering of the chapter heading, and the name of God, which appears twice on this spread, is written in red-outlined gold.* ***Lower left:*** *Gold ink was used exclusively on one of the rarest pages in the Beit Al Qur'an collection, penned in Kairouan, Tunisia on colored vellum. It is from a copy of the Qur'an said to have been commissioned by the 'Abbasid caliph al-Ma'mun to honor his father, Harun al-Rashid. Only three or four Qur'an manuscripts are known to have been written in this manner.*

Moghul India typify the wide range of metalwork shown.

Manuscripts in this part of the collection include a Moghul copy of the *Shahnamah*, or *Book of Kings*, Persia's national epic, in which the 60,000 verses by the poet Mansur Abu Kasim Firdawsi are illustrated with 79 miniature paintings that include court and battle scenes. Nearby is a magnificently illustrated 258-page copy of the *Diwan* of the great 14th-century Persian poet Hafiz.

Then comes the heart of Beit Al Qur'an: the collection of more than 5000 partial and complete Qur'anic manuscripts, displayed in specially designed cabinets with the sophisticated environmental controls and fiber-optic lighting essential for the proper display of rare and delicate old manuscripts. Within this setting, each piece can be viewed from various angles, and is displayed to highlight its prominent characteristics.

"Some of the manuscripts are unique masterpieces that relate to specific instances of Islamic history or to key developments in the art of Qur'anic calligraphy, illumination and printing," says Samar Al-Gailani, the museum director. "The collection is important on a worldwide scale, for rarely in modern times has such a range and variety of Qur'anic manuscripts and printings been assembled and made available to scholars and the public to study and appreciate." The collection contains manuscripts spanning all of Islamic history, and was gathered from locales as near as Makkah and as far as China.

> The desire to write the Qur'an in a form worthy of its sacred message established the art of Arabic calligraphy.

In addition to the historical and spiritual value of the collection, the beautiful examples of Arabic script provide insight into the history and development of the language in its written form. The Qur'an was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad in Arabic, in the classical dialect spoken by the Quraysh, his tribe, which was preeminent in sixth-century western Arabia. The revelation eventually made Arabic the *lingua franca* of many nations, the sacred language of one-sixth of humankind, and the language of most Muslim scholarship.

Moreover, the Qur'an both drove the development of Arabic script and preserved it, for the rise and evolution of Arabic writing in its varied forms went hand in hand with the spread of Islam. New responsibilities and demands on the language accelerated the development of Arabic scripts and calligraphy, which were first called upon to meet the urgent need to record the Qur'an accurately as it had been revealed, then of coping with the administration of what rapidly became a vast multinational, multilingual empire.

To this day the survival and evolution of written Arabic is a source of wonder to scholars, particularly when viewed in light of the purely oral traditions of the early peninsular Arabs. The pre-Islamic people of Arabia, despite their passionate love affair with their language and their particular fondness for poetry, had disdained the written word, and relied mostly on the memories of members of their tribes to pass on to succeeding generations their renowned oral traditions.

But the Qur'an had to be recorded for posterity in a clear and tangible form that left no margin for doubt, amendment or error: It had to be written. And the desire to write it in a form worthy of its sacred message established the art of Arabic calligraphy—and the arts of the book in general—as enduring legacies of Islamic civilization. The Beit Al Qur'an collection attests to the development of Arabic scripts, the emergence of an annotation system to distinguish similar letters and indicate short vowels, the use of various writing materials and the rise of the art of manuscript illumination to unprecedented heights.

The collection includes some of the earliest Qur'anic manuscripts in the world, from Madinah, Iraq, North Africa and Spain. All of these are written in the stiff and angular kufic script, named after the Iraqi town of Kufa, where it was first formalized and popularized. (It was also used earlier in several variant forms in Makkah and Madinah.) It is appropriate for this script to be associated with Kufa, the stronghold of the fourth caliph, 'Ali, because he was a master calligrapher in his own right and among the first to transcribe the holy book.

These early Qur'an manuscripts are devoid of decoration and, like the script they are written in, are simple and austere, reflecting the harsh moral and physical environment in which they were created. Frugality is evident, too, in the use of space and material—understandably, in view of the dearth of media on which the Qur'an could be recorded. The earliest recording of parts of the Qur'an was done on such materials as leather, palm fronds, flat pieces of stone or bone, and wood. When parchment came into use, the skins of a large number of animals were required to complete one Qur'an, which was thus as expensive a process as it was laborious. As a result, the early Qur'ans are simple manuscripts, though many of them are extremely beautiful. An example is a parchment piece from the Hijaz, written in the seventh or eighth century in dark brown early kufic script, that is considered one of the oldest surviving Qur'anic manuscripts.

As the kufic script evolved, it developed a rationalized system of dots, strokes and sub- and superscript vowels, visible in eighth- and ninth-century manuscripts from Yemen, Spain, and North Africa, as well as Iraq and Iran—and indeed in all written and printed Qur'ans today. The annotation played a vital role in making the texts easy to read, but it also introduced a new dynamism to the esthetics of the Arabic script. A prime example at Beit Al Qur'an is a 10th-century parchment from North Africa that shows not only diacritical and vocalization marks but also a triangular arrangement of six gold dots that indicates the end of a verse, a convention which spread through much of the Islamic world.

By the end of the seventh century, with the growth of available resources, decorative elements began to appear in Qur'an manuscripts, initially consisting of simple colored rules at the beginning of each *sura*, or chapter, with the name of the chapter occupying a whole line. Later, by the end of the Umayyad period (661–750), these elements became more elaborate in composition and use of color. Earth tones and greens appeared, representing vegetal and architectural forms, as embellishments for chapter title designs. In fact, the colors help experts date manuscripts: Red and green, for example, were used during the eighth century.

The colored inks were derived from vegetable sources, such as henna, coffee, flower petals or saffron; from different types of earth or sand; from precious or semiprecious stones such as turquoise and lapis lazuli; and from silver and gold. One item that exemplifies the use of *ma' al-dhahab*, or "gold water," is the pride of the Kanoo collection. Rendered on beautifully wrought deep-blue parchment and written in gold in Kairouan, in Tunisia, this rare piece of Islamic calligraphy—a page from Sura 29 of the Qur'an—is said to have been commissioned by the Abbasid caliph al-Ma'mun for the tomb of his legendary father, Harun al-Rashid. It is indeed a special piece, as no more than three or four Qur'an manuscripts are known to have been written on colored vellum.

By the end of the 11th century, manuscripts began to include elaborate designs in

VERBATIM

The Qur'an, Islam's holy book, is the essence of Islam. It shapes all aspects of the daily life—both spiritual and temporal—of the world's billion-plus Muslims. For more than 1400 years it has been the single most important force binding Muslims to a system of belief and law which inspires them by its principles of social justice, honest living, human dignity, and individual responsibility.

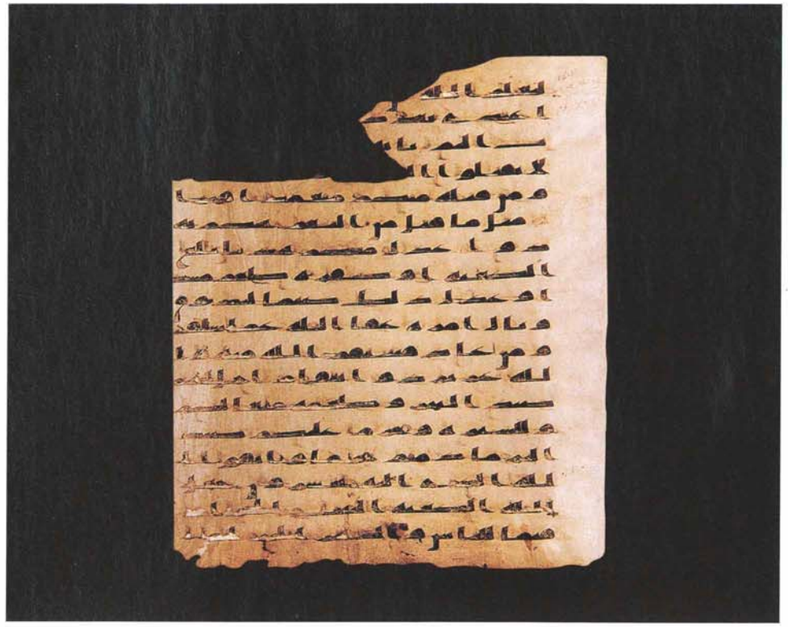
Muslims believe the Qur'an to be God's message—His final revelation and the culmination of all earlier divine messages—transmitted to the Prophet Muhammad through the Archangel Gabriel. At its heart is monotheism, which is the foundation of Islam, and it summons its followers to believe in and honor all earlier prophets and to believe in all earlier divine scriptures.

The Prophet Muhammad received the divine revelation of the Qur'an over a span of some 23 years, one verse (*aya*) or several verses at a time, until his death in the year 632, by which time the Holy Book—114 *sura*s or chapters in all—was complete. Believers in the emerging religion of Islam and the followers of the Prophet at first committed the Qur'anic text to memory and later, as he had instructed in his lifetime, wrote it down. The entire contents of the Qur'an therefore date back to the Prophet, and the placement of its verses and the arrangement of its chapters are according to his instructions.

It was realized soon after the Prophet's death that transmission of the written text of the Qur'an could not rely solely on the memories of the Prophet's Companions. The word of God Almighty had to be passed on with utter precision, in the form in which it had been revealed, without change or variation. The momentous task of collating and arranging the text into a single volume was eventually concluded in 651, under the orders of the third caliph, 'Uthman ibn 'Affan.

This collated volume was minutely checked by Companions of the Prophet and arranged according to his strict instructions. Later, four—some references say seven—identical copies were made. One of these master copies, or "Imams," was retained in Makkah while the others were sent to Iraq and Syria, where they. were kept in principal mosques to be used as references from which all subsequent volumes were to be reproduced and against which all copies would be checked. Thus, the Qur'an was recorded for posterity with exactitude, in a hard and tangible format, leaving no room for doubt, emendation, or error.

From that period to this day, as the copies on display in Beit Al Qur'an testify, fidelity to those volumes of the Qur'anic text has been so strict and so complete that no textual variants exist, nor can any copy be made, anywhere in Muslim world, except in full and absolute conformity with those authenticated copies.



One of the earliest pieces in the collection is a manuscript on parchment dating to the seventh or eighth century and written in the Hijaz, in western Arabia. Its venerable Early Kufic is the simple script in which the Qur'an was first written down in the mid-seventh century. ***Opposite:*** *Although the greater part of the museum is devoted to manuscripts of the Qur'an, 10 galleries display the secular arts of Islam: Here, one of 79 pages from a Mughal copy of the* Shahnamah, *or* Book of Kings, *Persia's 60,000-verse national epic.*

complex cursive scripts executed against highly decorative backgrounds of foliated arabesque scrolls in gold and color. The palette for these designs is predominantly blue. Regional preferences for specific colors also appeared, such as the gold, reds and greens used in North Africa and Andalusia. These decorative motifs developed, particularly under the Mamluks and Timurids (1370–1506), into a highly complex art. A copy of the Qur'an dated 1425 illustrates the intricately designed chapter headings and the colors that were typical of the Mamluk period.

The decorative traditions and styles used for the opening spread of the Qur'an—Surat al-Fatiha and the first page of the second chapter, Surat al-Baqara—were further developed and perfected under the Safavid (1501–1732) and later the Qajar (1779–1924) dynasties in Iran, as well as in Ottoman Turkey, particularly during the 19th century. The page frames assumed elaborate patterns of arabesque, floral and geometric motifs in a variety of bright colors and gold. The last three very short chapters of the holy book were also often decorated and set in highly colored and gilt frames, occasionally in combination with a decorated colophon. The colophon gave the date the manuscript

> Decorative styles of calligraphy began to emerge in the 11th century.

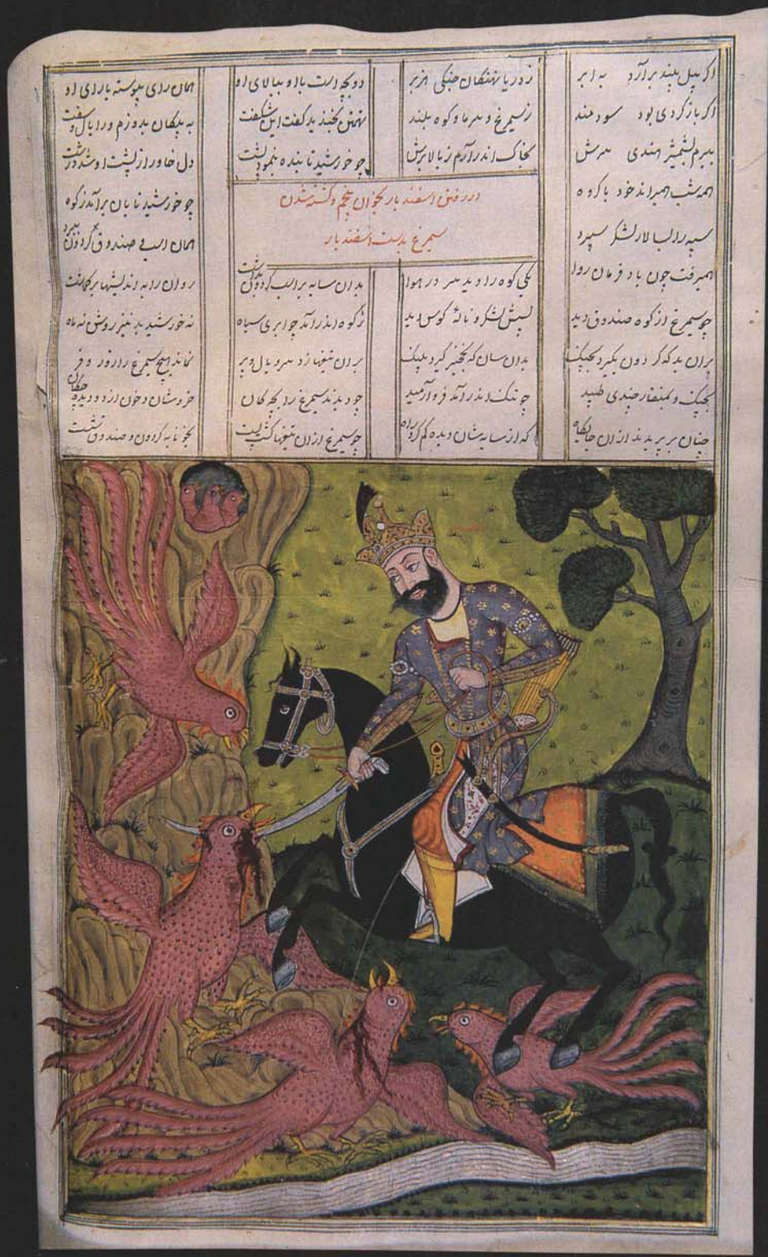
was completed and the place where it had been written, and ended with a personal prayer specific to the successful completion of the reading of the entire Qur'an *(du'a khatm al-Qur'an)*. Sometimes the name of the calligrapher also appeared, though invariably in extremely humble and self-effacing terms, and he usually asked God's forgiveness for transgressions and sought His blessing first for his parents and teachers, only then for himself.

Beit Al Qur'an also houses manuscripts that are unusual in their origin, their materials, or their shape or size. One, produced for the Safavid shah Husayn I, is written on veneer-thin slices of sandalwood; another is a prime example of 11th century calligraphy on paper from Iran. It is penned in a highly developed kufic style and uses white lettering surrounded with gold tendrils for the chapter heading; bold gold strokes, outlined in red, spell out the name of God. Yet another is an octagonal Qur'an manuscript measuring only 43 millimeters (1 11/16") across. Such tiny but complete pocket copies of the Qur'an were prized by travelers, and a special script style, called *ghubari*, meaning "minuscule" or "miniature," evolved for use in their production. Their size posed a formidable challenge to scribes, for writing the Book in *ghubari* was an even more exacting labor of love than writing a full-size version. But since penning the Qur'an was itself an act of worship, many a scribe bore this burden happily.

Qur'ans at the other end of the size spectrum include a 50 by 70 centimeter (20 x 27") Moghul Qur'an in Indian script with an interlinear translation in Persian, each chapter rendered on a different color of paper. Such extra-large manuscripts, often commissioned for mosques, took much time—and fabulous large-muscle control—to complete. The most elaborate of them, reportedly from the Mamluk period (1250–1517), measured 75 by 50 centimeters (30 x 20"). Some were 350-page single volumes, others were produced in 30 volumes, each containing one *juz'*, a standard 30th part of the Qur'an.

The Qur'an translations in the collection shed light on an interesting aspect of Islam. In many areas of the Muslim world where Arabic is not the first language, the Qur'an is either written or printed in an interlinear version, with the local language between the lines of Arabic to assist the reader in locating and comprehending the verses. Muslims—scholars and laymen alike—believe that attempts at translation and interpretation of the Qur'an fail to convey the full meaning, power and beauty of the holy book, because of the extraordinarily concise and allusive nature of the Arabic in which it was revealed. Indeed, even the word *translation* is somewhat suspect, and existing translations of the Qur'an into various languages are traditionally regarded as only interpretations of its meaning, and imperfect ones at that. Since understanding the Qur'an is a matter of faith and reading it a spiritual act, Muslims, no matter what their native tongue, learn Arabic to recite the original, untranslatable Word of God in their prayers and other devotions.

Beit Al Qur'an also helps explain the importance of calligraphy in the Islamic world, where Arabic script has long been the principal mode of artistic expression. While manuscripts were the primary form of this art, a remarkable variety of objects was adorned with lettering: Marble façades,



The compositions of modern artists who use phrases or verses from the Qur'an testify to the continued vitality of the tradition of Qur'anic calligraphy. (See Aramco World, *March/April 1997.) In a 1984 stained-glass composition, Egyptian calligrapher Ahmad Mustafa rendered verses that refer to the bounty of the sea, made available by God for humankind.* ***Opposite:*** *Two copies of the Qur'an dating from the Safavid era in Iran (the 16th and 17th centuries) demonstrate the arts of the book during one of Islam's artistically richest periods. The manuscript at top is executed on veneer-thin slices of sandalwood; the lower one exemplifies the certainty that no amount of illumination can outshine the few precious words of the holy text that appear on each page.*

doors, arches, plates, lanterns, tiles, rings, banners, axes and almost any other object of art or utility might be so decorated. But though Arabic calligraphy is a product of human skill and ingenuity and is widely used in everyday life, its origins have always been closely entwined with the sacred, because writing is the form in which the last divine revelation to humankind was recorded.

Because writing the Book was a pious act, the numen of the Qur'an extended to calligraphy. Besides professional scribes, many famous judges, political figures and ordinary devout Muslims enjoyed and practiced the art form, and more than 24 caliphs and sultans, from the Abbasid to the Ottoman period, had the honor of penning Qur'anic manuscripts. One of the most talented of these royal calligraphers was said to be the Ottoman sultan 'Abd al-Majid I. There were also several prominent women known for their beautiful script, including the Prophet Muhammad's wife Hafsah. Among the female scribes who produced Qur'anic manuscripts were Fatimah al-Baghdadiyah, who died in 691; Badshah Khatun, who wrote several Qur'an manuscripts around 1296; and Durrah Hanim, whose work dates to 1759.

The output of some professional scribes is astonishing. While some produced three

> Writing the text of the Book was—and is—a pious act and a labor of love.

manuscripts of the Qur'an in the course of their careers, others contributed up to a thousand. One 14th-century scribe recorded in a colophon that the present manuscript was his 69th, and that he hoped, God willing, to pen 100 or more before his death.

Calligraphy has also gained favor as a medium for modern artistic expression, particularly for religious texts. Present-day artists in the Arab and Islamic worlds are producing lively and interesting calligraphic compositions using Qur'anic verses or phrases. Several such modern pieces are showcased in the Beit Al Qur'an, done by world-famous calligraphers from countries such as Lebanon, Egypt, Indonesia, Pakistan and the United States. The work of American Mohamed Zakariya (see *Aramco World*, January/February 1992) is displayed next to that of renowned Egyptian calligrapher Ahmad Mustafa, who contributed a stained-glass work in the shape of a fish, formed of appropriate verses that refer to the bounty of the sea. Works by Lebanese calligrapher Wajeeh Nahlah and Bahrainis Rashid al-Uraifi and Abd Allah al-Muharraqi attest to the prominent role calligraphy continues to play in modern times.

After a tour of Beit Al Qur'an, many visitors head for one of its most tranquil areas: the mosque. Daily prayers are held within its premises, which accommodate up to 150 worshipers. A specially commissioned stained glass dome 16 meters (52½') in diameter—one of the largest of its type in the world—covers an eye-catching circular prayer area. The dome, adorned with geometric patterns, features Verse 18 of Surat al-Tawbah ("Repentance"), also in the hand of Ahmad Mustafa.

The mosque's niche, or *mihrab*, which indicates the direction of Makkah and before which the imam leads prayer, is adorned with blue ceramic tiles designed and produced by Turkish craftsmen. Around its perimeter is written the famous Qur'anic Throne Verse, which movingly describes the power and glory of God. The mosque is a hub of activity, particularly during Ramadan, when every night *tarawih*, supplementary prayers, are held after the regular evening *salah*. The *tarawih* are followed by readings from the Qur'an by readers from across the Arab and Islamic worlds.

The House of the Qur'an is an unforgettable place, unique in its combination of fascination, appeal and instructive power. As Margaret Thatcher, former British prime minister, wrote in its guest book: "I have learned even more on this second visit. The treasures are exquisite and tell us so much about the past that we need to know. I shall hope to come a third time."

Ni'mah Isma'il Nawwab contributes articles on Arabian and Islamic history, customs and traditional arts to Aramco World *and other publications from Dhahran, Saudi Arabia.*

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Recited
from the Heart

WRITTEN BY NOURA DURKEE | PHOTOGRAPHED BY ERIC HAASE

"So when We recite it, follow thou its recitation!"

—THE QUR'AN, 75: 18 (QIYAMAT, "THE RESURRECTION")

"Iqra'"—"Recite!"—is the first revealed word of the Qur'an. Through more than 1400 years of history this command has moved countless souls not only to study and memorize the holy book but also to read aloud its verses, first passed by the angel Gabriel to the Prophet Muhammad. In the bustle of *madrasa*s (Qur'anic schools), in the intimacy of homes and in the grand public spaces of mosques around the world, the Qur'an is proclaimed, recited, chanted and sung. Such recitation is so much a part of Muslims' lives—an act of worship, a ritual necessity—that it is seldom regarded as an art form. Yet from time to time, great reciters arise. Although they are worshipers like all others, their recitation moves their listeners to a depth that indeed is characteristic of art. Such reciters are a handful in a generation; one in a million, perhaps one in ten million, or more.

Hajjah Maria 'Ulfah is one of these. Since the mid-1980's, she has been one of the most influential and popular Qur'an reciters in all Southeast Asia. She is a scholar of the history of Qur'anic recitation in the Indonesian archipelago and a lecturer and teacher at the Institute for Qur'an Study in Jakarta, as well as a member of the board of several institutions concerned with Islamic and Qur'anic education. She gave her first recitals in the United States this past November, and in Washington, D.C. she was honored at the annual conference of the Middle East Studies Association.

She recited in the ballroom of the conference's hotel—a dauntingly impersonal setting. Some of her listeners chose to sit on the floor, which relieved the cool banality of the architecture. Hajjah Maria entered quietly and sat on the floor as well. She placed a Qur'an in front of her, and straightforwardly described the five styles of recitation that she would demonstrate.

When she began, the sound came out of silence on a note so low it was hard to believe it was a woman's voice. It grew to fill the room so completely that suddenly the ballroom seemed small. Its authority was complete. By perfect breath control and the subtle modulation of tongue and lips that formed letters and syllables, she controlled the volume and the timbre of the words. When she stopped and began matter-of-factly to discuss again the styles of reading she had demonstrated, the effect was jarring.

This simple quality of deftly moving between the exalted world of the Qur'an and the everyday world of teaching, organizing and running a college seems to characterize Hajjah Maria. The intensive training which she has undergone since she was very young has nurtured a character at once joyful and intensely focused. She began reciting at home, she says, where her father recognized her talent when she was in the first grade. He encouraged her to memorize the Qur'an, which she began to do, like many other children, before she actually studied Arabic. By the time she was 18, she had attained a high degree of technical excellence in reciting the Qur'an. Age and experience soon carried her art well beyond technique.

"As a child, I didn't like to study Qur'an because my parents forced me to. Every evening when it was time for me to study, I would run away to my friend's house and hope nobody noticed. After a week my parents ceased to mention it. Only after that did the desire arise in me to study it," she says.

Although Islam came to Indonesia in the 15th century, Qur'an recitation followed a single, simple style there until six Egyptians—among them Abdul Basit Abdus Samad, one of the greatest modern reciters—came to teach after Indonesia became independent after World War II. The Egyptian reciters introduced Indonesians to the seven *qira'at* (recitations), which have been passed down since the time of the Prophet

"I heard the Prophet recite [a chapter of the Qur'an] during evening prayers, and I never heard anyone recite in a more beautiful voice than his."

—AL-BARA' IBN 'AZIB, RECORDED BY AL-BUKHARI AND MUSLIM

Muhammad and his Companions. Like the styles of calligraphy, which always adhere to a canon, a perfect form, each of these modes of recitation follows the exact text of the Qur'an and the *tajwid*, or rules of recitation—but each has its unique mood, flourishes, tempo, pitch, vocal "color" and durations of certain notes and pauses. The reciter, Hajjah Maria explains, must understand the meaning of what is being said and match the style to it. For example, one might use a regal mode for passages that reveal God's laws, and a more sensitive or quiet mode for passages that relate to personal spirituality. One mode might suit public competitions, weddings or other celebrations—such as *mujawwad*, the most melodic and popular style—while another would better suit recitation at home.

Hajjah Maria has been a popularizer of what in Indonesia is now called "Egyptian style" both in her own recitations and as director of the women's department of the Institute for Qur'an Study, where she oversees some 800 women who aspire to become teachers of Qur'an. From their first day, her students must memorize, and the Qur'an is traditionally divided into 30 parts for this purpose.

"The students already read Arabic, as that is one of the conditions for entering the institute. Then they have to use a certain *mushaf* [written copy of the Qur'an] in order to remember. Usually every *juz'* [30th part] has 20 pages. The way it is laid out is easy to memorize. Every day the student must memorize four pages. If you don't do it that way, you can't finish, and you want to be able to memorize it in four years. Four pages every day: four years. But it depends on the talent of a particular student: Some can do it faster."

They walk up and down, back and forth, and repeat, repeat, repeat. Then they sit, two students with a teacher, for correction. The student recites, and the teacher guides her according to *tajwid*. In another class, students learn melodic recitation, and in others, meaning. They earn the title of *hafiz*, or memorizer of the Qur'an. After graduation, they go back to their villages to teach, become judges, or take on other functions.

"Of course, many of the students know quite a lot when they arrive," Hajjah Maria adds with a smile, referring to the study of Qur'an which is nowadays enormously popular in Indonesia. On busy streets, shops sell cassette and compact-disc recordings of the Qur'an by famous reciters—including Hajjah Maria—and these are played frequently, in all kinds of places, at all sorts of times. Among young people, Qur'an reciters enjoy the kind of celebrity status that is elsewhere the domain of pop-music and sports stars, and they are encouraged in this by families, the government and businesses, all of which sponsor Qur'an recitation competitions throughout the archipelago, from the village to the national and even international levels. Boys and girls from schools, clubs, and islands compete in displays of talent that take on a festival aura: colorful parades, marching bands, vast floral decorations and judging by prominent local and national officials. The competitions, Hajjah Maria says, are a cultural phenomenon that unites the diverse people of Indonesia. And the girls and boys, she says, participate in roughly equal numbers. "Qur'an is Qur'an," she says, "and whether you are male or female makes no difference" in Indonesia or in other Islamic countries.

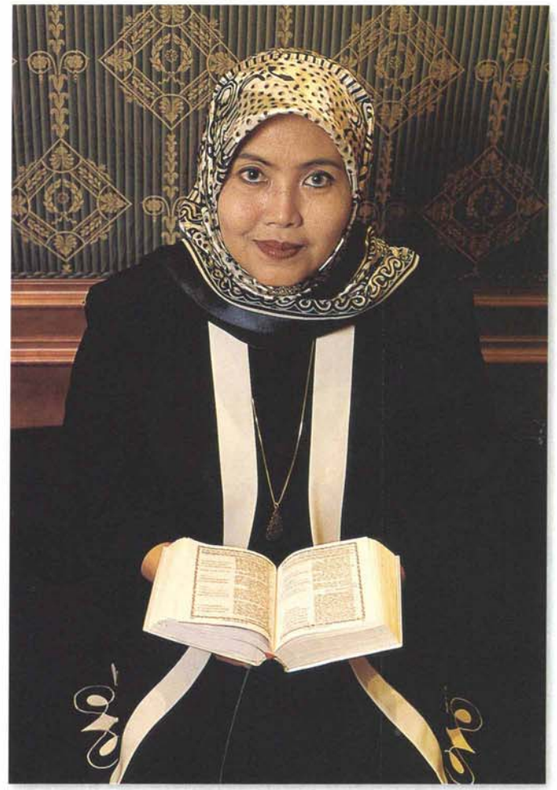
Part of the reason for the flourishing of Qur'an recitation, says Hajjah Maria, may be the *pesantren* school system. (See *Aramco World*, November/December 1990.) The word comes from *santri*, itself a derivative of the Sanskrit *shastri*, "a man learned in the scriptures." Now private Islamic schools that teach from kindergarten through the university level, the *pesantren* schools are an adaptation of the Buddhist monastery system that existed in Indonesia before the coming of Islam. Since the 19th century in particular, they have provided a strong foundation for Indonesia's religious and national life.

The *pesantren*, Hajjah Maria explains, is spartan and rigorously communal. Fifty students may sleep in one large room, taking their bedrolls out of a cabinet at night and returning them in the morning. The food is the simplest, and all the work is shared. Traditional Qur'anic knowledge is taught all day. In times past, upon completion of training, the student was expected to return to his or her home village and set up a new

"O you who are devoted to the Qur'an! Do not use it as a pillow, but read it properly [by] day and night, as it ought to be read. Propagate the Qur'an, read it in a good voice, ponder over its contents that you may succeed."

—THE PROPHET MUHAMMAD, RECORDED BY BAYHAQI

school; today, however, with the wide popularity of *pesantren* schools, graduates in fact serve in all walks of life, including government. As Hajjah Maria describes the regimen, noting that she too attended a *pesantren* school, I begin to understand something of her focus and humility.



There are several techniques for learning the melodic lines of Qur'an recitation, and each teacher develops his or her own way of passing them on. Because it is inappropriate to experiment with the Qur'an or to take liberties with its punctuation, students begin with poems from classical Arab literature that demonstrate certain rhythms and runs of sound. By playing and practicing with these, the students gain the skills to tackle the Qur'an itself.

Does public competition in reciting the Qur'an interfere with religious understanding? Hajjah Maria says it does not: "The tradition of *musabaqat tilawat al-Qur'an* [Qur'an recitation contests] arises genuinely from the teachings of Islam, which urge Muslims to read and learn the Qur'an in order to be able to understand and practice their religion properly. Every Muslim is expected to be able to read the Qur'an, at least in a simple manner for the purpose of performing prayers.

"There are, however, children and young people who are blessed with good voices," she adds in her own clear, soft tones. "They understandably pursue further the study of the techniques of recitation of the Qur'an."

Abdul Basit Abdus Samad, one of the great reciters who brought Egyptian traditions of recitation to Indonesia, said that "the Qur'an, when recited from the heart, reaches the heart." Hajjah Maria's voice does just that.

Noura Durkee is a writer and illustrator who specializes in children's stories drawn from the Qur'an. She lives with her family in rural Virginia. Eric Haase is a free-lance photographer living in the Washington, D.C. area.

ANCIENT JORDAN FROM THE AIR

ALONG WITH BRITAIN, THE MIDDLE EAST IS ONE OF THE TWO PARTS OF THE WORLD WHERE AERIAL ARCHEOLOGY WAS PIONEERED IN THE EARLY 20TH CENTURY.

During World War I, British, French and especially German pilots took hundreds of photographs of the region from the air; many were of archeological sites. Over the next two decades, Syria was extensively photographed from above, thanks to the efforts of Père Antoine Poidebard. In the adjacent British mandates of Iraq and Transjordan, Poidebard's counterpart was Sir Aurel Stein, whom the Royal Air Force flew there in 1938 and 1939. But since that time, there has been no systematic aerial archaeology in the region.

Had it been otherwise, what might have been achieved by now can be inferred both from the hundreds of thousands of sites discovered from the air in northwestern Europe in this century, and by the brilliantly evocative images in Poidebard's 1934 book, *La trace de Rome dans le désert de Syrie*. As the early fliers knew well, it is discovery that is the first and often most thrilling goal of aerial archeology: Subtle features that might or might not be noticeable on the ground, or that might not be recognized as archeological, often stand out clearly when viewed from the air. In certain conditions, even features totally buried may be revealed by the different color or density of the vegetation above them.

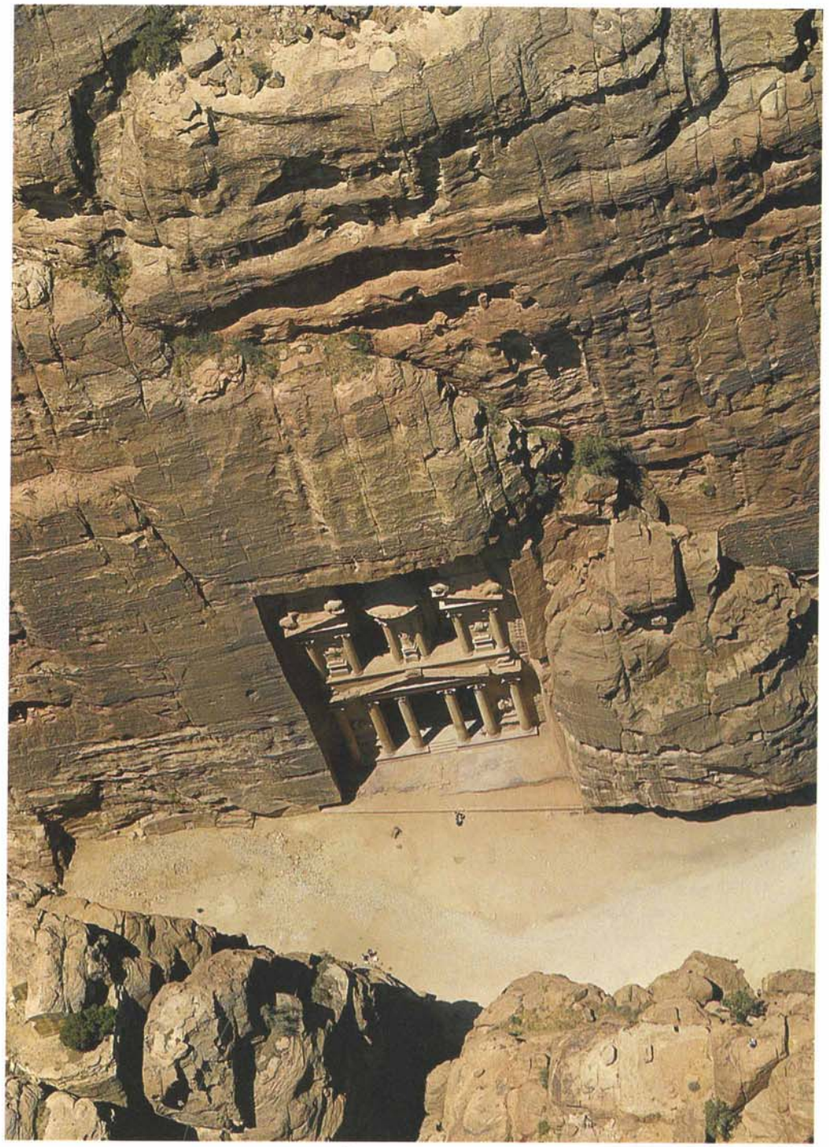
The potential for aerial archeological discovery in the Middle East is at least as great as it is in Europe. For example, a set of photographs of western Jordan, taken for mapping purposes in 1953 at the rather unsuitable scale of 1 to 25,000, have through careful recent interpretation nevertheless revealed no fewer than 25,000 sites in that region alone—almost three times the number listed in Jordan's present archeological database.

But discovery is only the beginning. Aerial views provide a simple method of mapping both individual sites and the ancient features in an entire landscape. They also invite interpretation, for structures can be understood within the layout of whole sites, and those sites within their larger contexts of landscape and resources.

Since 1978, with the establishment of the Aerial Photographic Archive for Archeology in the Middle East, under royal patronage, and with additional support from the British Academy, the Society of Antiquaries of London and the Australian Research Council, Jordan has revived aerial archeology, and the expected exciting results are beginning to emerge. Over two decades, some 8000 photographs, and several hundred maps, have been compiled. Since 1998, the Royal Jordanian Air Force has supported explicitly archeological flying, which has added several thousand more photographs.

Illustrated here are a few highlights, from the famous and well-preserved to the relatively obscure, of what is becoming a major resource for tapping Jordan's vast archeological heritage. This portfolio could be multiplied several times over with ease, and of course the same process could be repeated fruitfully in every country of the region.

Written and Photographed by David L. Kennedy



PETRA

***Petra** is one of the best-known archeological sites in the world, and images of the tombs of the Nabataean builders of the first centuries BC and of our era have been widely reproduced. The setting of these structures inevitably means that they are seen as monuments that soar up and away from the viewer, but the aerial view offers a different perspective. Here, the Khazneh or "Treasury," the first tomb the ground-level visitor encounters after passing through the narrow gorge known as the Siq (in deep shadow at the bottom center), is built in an embayment that restricts ground views. In the aerial view, the tomb seems small, almost hidden in a rocky cavern. The tiny human figures in front of it reveal the reality of an immense structure cut out of a still more immense rock formation, which continues to rise high above the architecture.* 1

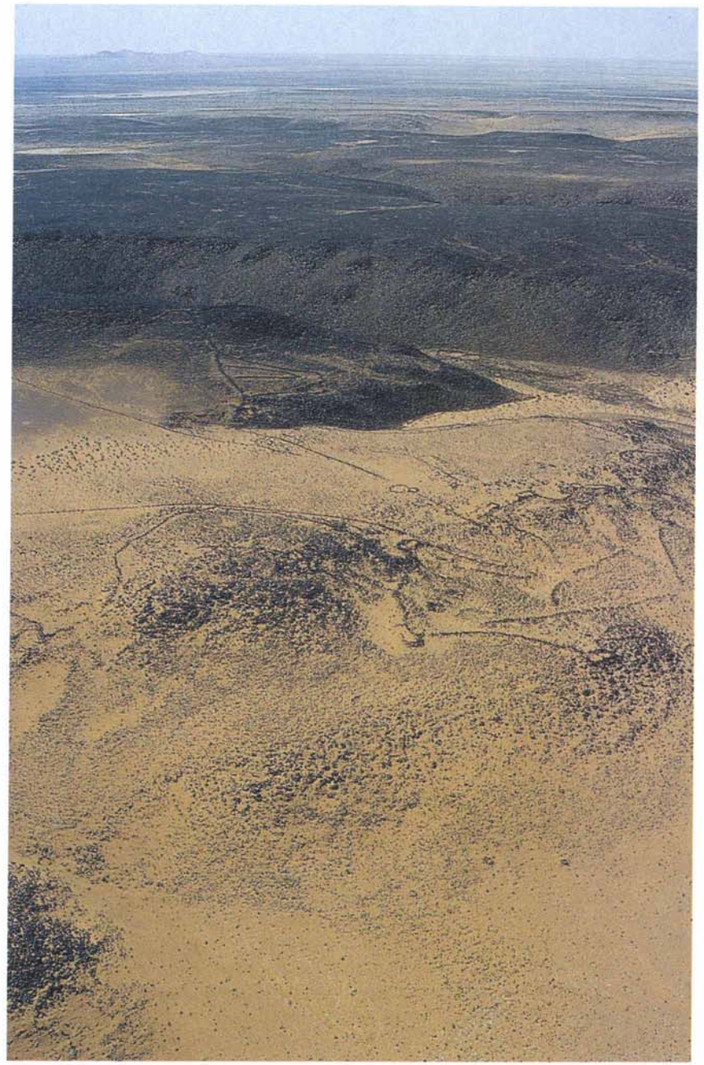
BETWEEN DAMIEH AND AL-SALT

On the plateau above the Jordan Valley is a useful reminder of the agricultural basis of ancient societies. The village on the hilltop is farming the easily accessible land, some of which shows lush green crops. All around it, on the slopes where farming would have been difficult, are traces of old terraces and earthworks. Although the rapid rise in population this century has resulted in the utilization of almost every patch of arable land, places such as this serve as reminders of former high tides of population. At some time in the past, the people of this area were sufficiently numerous to have found the laborious terracing of hillsides to be worth the effort. These terraces now appear like rounded earthworks, as opposed to the sharp lines of modern terrace walls. Indeed, they are visible around the flanks of successive hillsides in the background as well. Also visible in the foreground, however, are the traces of short lines of banks and circular hummocks suggesting something else: Only ground excavation work will reveal whether these are the buried remains of the ancient village, burial mounds cut across abandoned terraces, or yet something else. Thus the aerial view "discovers" remains and their extent, but it is only the starting point for interpretation. 2

"KITE" IN JABAL QATTAFI

Among the most ancient structures is this ***"kite"*** *in the Jabal Qattafi region. One of thousands of such formations strewn across the forbidding black basalt desert of northeast Jordan and adjacent parts of Syria, Iraq and Saudi Arabia, "kites" were virtually unknown until they were seen from the air, first by Royal Air Force pilots in the 1920's. The name "kite" was suggested by the enclosure, or "kite body," from which two (or, in some cases, more) walls, or "tails," appear to stream out, for approximately a kilometer (1100 yds). Ethnographic accounts of the 19th century suggest that these may have been used for hunting the gazelles that were once common in the region: Herds could be driven between the widely spaced tails which would guide them toward the kite body, at this site about 200 meters (660') across. There, concealed by the brow of the hill and the walls, hunters could spear their prey at short range.*

This kite does not appear on any modern maps, and passersby are few. Part of the reason kites are little understood is that they are often faint, remote and huge: Even when their low walls are recognizable at ground level, mapping and diagramming them is laborious. Aerial archeology, however, offers a simple and far more effective method of surveying. 3

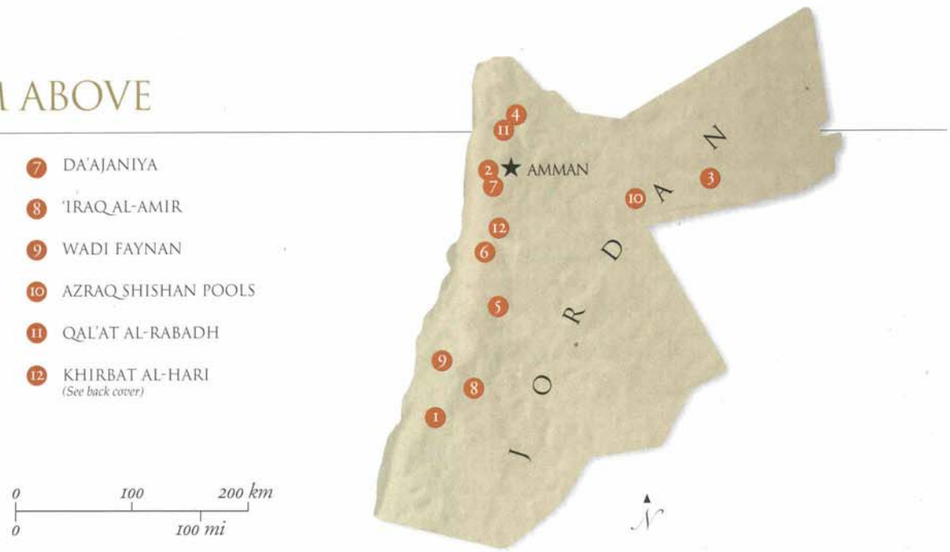


TELL AL-HUSN

Tell al-Husn *was described half a century ago by the American archeologist Nelson Glueck as lifting itself "commandingly and ponderously above the surrounding plain." Despite the growth of the modern town, the tell, or mound, is still prominent. Settlement has probably been continuous here for almost four millennia. The mound certainly goes back to at least the Bronze Age, but there are also significant traces of occupation from the Iron Age, Roman, Early Islamic and Medieval Arab periods. Among the modern houses below the mound are remains of Roman occupation, including graves and tombs. This is one of the more plausible locations for the Roman town of Dium, which lay somewhere in this part of northwestern Jordan but whose location has never been fixed. On the summit of the mound are remains of ruined buildings and the outline of two sides of a fortification wall. The photo shows the attraction of the site for the settlers whose successive layers of occupation debris created the mound: the fertile plain that surrounds it, which was—and is—ideal for the cultivation of cereal crops.* 4

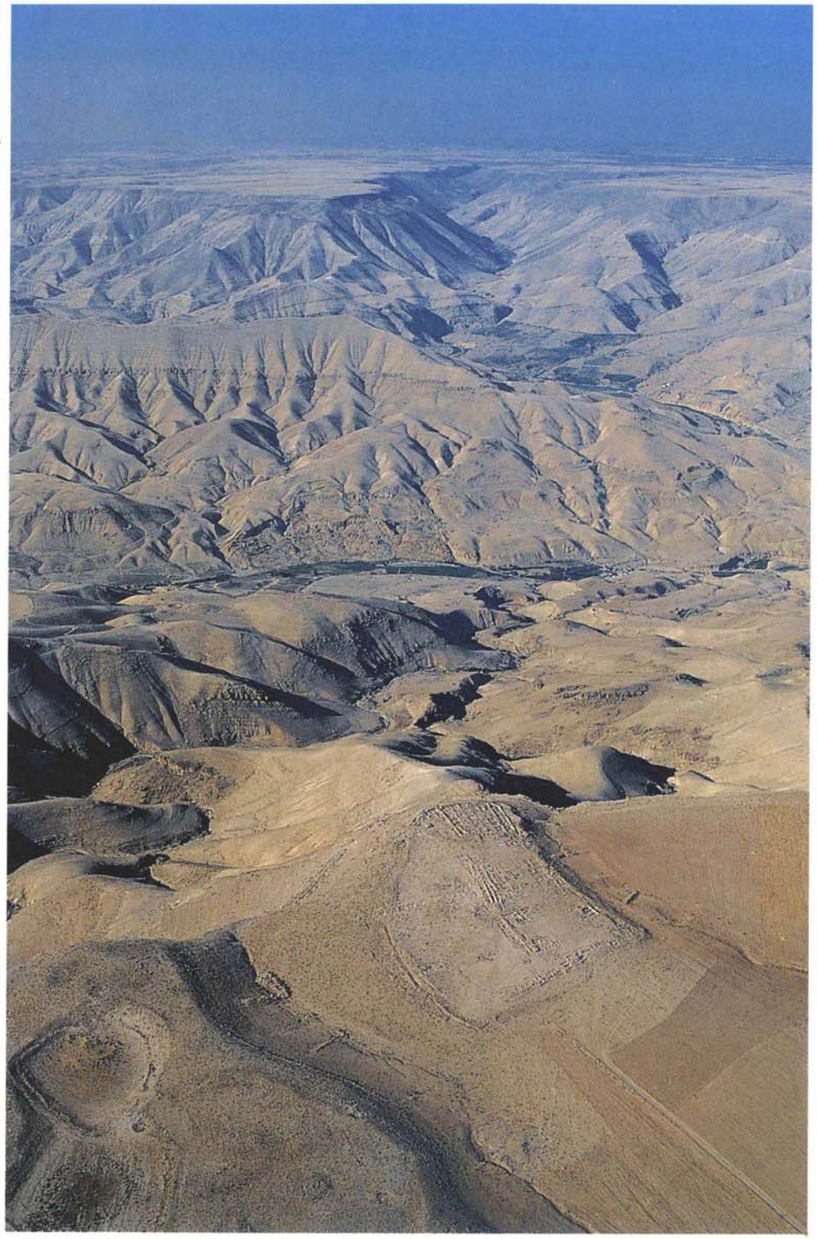
SITES FROM ABOVE

1. PETRA
2. BETWEEN DAMIEH AND AL-SALT
3. "KITE" IN JABAL QATTAFI
4. TELL AL-HUSN
5. KHIRBAT MUDAYBI
6. LEHUN
7. DA'AJANIYA
8. 'IRAQ AL-AMIR
9. WADI FAYNAN
10. AZRAQ SHISHAN POOLS
11. QAL'AT AL-RABADH
12. KHIRBAT AL-HARI
(See back cover)



KHIRBAT MUDAYBI

Khirbat Mudaybi *is a fort that has been used over several periods. Originally it seems to date from the Iron Age (1200–300 BC), but pottery shards that date continuously through to the Islamic period point to later use, too. From the ground, the remains are visible and impressive, although the looping lines of animal "corrals" made by modern Bedouins confuse interpretation, and it is not possible to view the entire site from any direction. In this steeply oblique aerial view, however, the lines of collapsed masonry immediately reveal an almost square fort, which measures 83 by 88 meters (265' x 282'). The thick outer wall is clear, and we can see gate towers as well as square towers at the corners and others in between. The monumental remains excavated at the east gate imply that this was an important local center. The confusing wall lines inside the fort resolve themselves in this photograph into a large rectangular building with a central courtyard surrounded by rooms; its construction may be Nabataean (ca. 300 BC to AD 106). The trenches of recent excavation can be seen inside the east gate and across the north wall of the inner building. Outside the fort, the ancient dam across the wadi has been repaired to create the water supply that is vital in this arid region. The rectangular hole just beyond the top right corner of the fort may have been a cistern.* 5



LEHUN

Lehun *is a remarkable site both for its location and its settlement in successive periods. Excavation by a Belgian team has found and distinguished an extensive Early Bronze Age settlement dating from the third millennium* BC*; an Iron Age fort; a Nabataean temple; and a medieval mosque.*

Lehun stretches back from the north rim of the great slash of the Wadi Mujib running down to the Dead Sea. This shallow, oblique view illustrates the location with the site itself in a context unavailable at ground level. Nearest the rim is the Iron Age fort. Stretching back toward the viewer, enclosed within a lozenge-shaped circuit wall, is the Bronze Age village. Traces of other remains in the bottom left are part of a wider scatter of ruins. 6

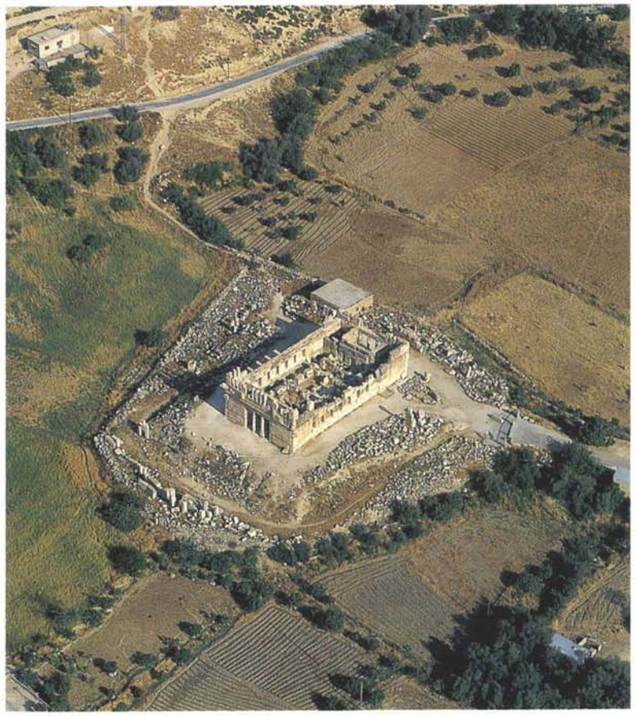
DA'AJANIYA

The Roman fort of ***Da'ajaniya*** *lies on the edge of the steppe some 40 kilometers (25 mi) northeast of Petra. The black of the basalt building material stands out starkly against the yellow-orange surroundings. Walls still stand three and four meters (10 to 13') high. Test excavation has dated construction to about* AD *300.*

This vertical view readily shows the entire plan in detail. It is almost a perfect square, and the size—100 by 100 meters (320' x 320')—is comparable to that of several other Roman forts of this era in Jordan. Large square towers straddle each corner, with others set at intervals along the walls and flanking the gate in the middle of the east wall. All around the inner face of the curtain wall are rooms that are conventionally shown as long rectangles, perhaps stables for horses. However, the photograph shows that those on the north side, at least, are divided into pairs of square rooms. In the middle, suites of square rooms are grouped in short barracks blocks, enough for some 200 to 300 soldiers. In the middle of the north range, a different layout of rooms suggests that this is the headquarters building. Just beyond the east gate are the outlines of two or three other small rectangular buildings.

Some water was stored in the cistern visible at the western end of the main east-west street. More important, however, was the rectangular reservoir, now brought back into use for Bedouins and filled by a channel off the wadi visible between the fort and the reservoir. 7

'IRAQ AL-AMIR



The site of ***'Iraq al-Amir*** *("Caves of the Prince") lies in the rich and well-watered Wadi al-Sir, an attractive day trip for the people of Amman. As one would expect in a lush valley, there has been extensive occupation in successive periods from prehistory onward. However, the most notable remains were left by the aristocratic Jewish Tobiad family, which took up residence at the place they called Tyros in 177* BC*. The historian Josephus, writing in the late first century of our era, described a fortified residence, villas and parks there; we now know there was also a village. Excavation has been extensive at the site, but the best-known part is the Qasr al-'Abd, shown here. Extensive reconstruction has produced an impressive, though roofless, gleaming white building on a slight rise. There are columns on the facade and parts of the upper story, and lions and eagles in relief decorate the exterior. From the air this rare example of an aristocratic manor house is the striking feature of the valley, and it dominates the landscape of agricultural lands.* 8

Wadi Faynan *is illuminated by a glaring, late-morning sun, which rakes light along parts of the complex of ancient structures. Called Phaino by the fourth-century historian Eusebius, it was then a Byzantine settlement and a copper-working site to which Christians were condemned to labor. And yet like so many sites in Jordan, it has been occupied from at least the Pre-Pottery Neolithic era (8500–6000 BC). In the 19th century, German scholars identified it as the center of an area of several hundred copper mines, and it is currently under survey and excavation by British archeologists.*

It is a large and multifaceted site, stretching some five kilometers (3 mi) along the wadi. Several components are picked up in this low oblique view looking east: In the foreground is the end of the area of ancient fields that runs for almost five kilometers in a strip up to a kilometer wide back along the wadi beneath and behind the camera. The small, irregularly shaped fields were irrigated by water channeled off the neighboring slopes. There is also a small area of settlement and, beyond that, there are dark heaps of copper slag. Beyond the tributary, on the right, are a second large area of settlement and ancient cemeteries. The principal settlement of Khirbat Faynan sits on a rise on the north bank (at left), and there one can see the outlines of dozens of buildings. Vertical views of the settlement would certainly allow much of the plan to be drawn with ease. 9

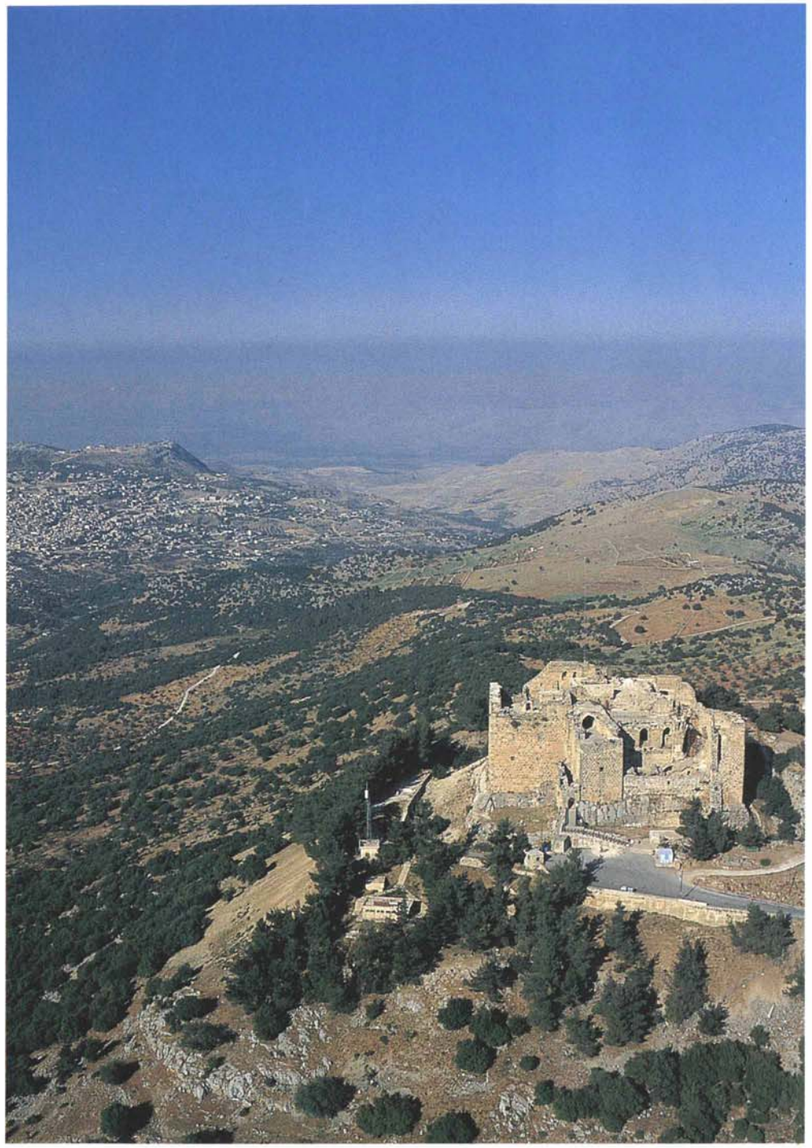
WADI FAYNAN

AZRAQ SHISHAN POOLS

After Palmyra, the oasis at al-Azraq ("The Blue") is the largest in the desert region now shared by Syria and eastern Jordan. Beside the pools there is a large Roman fort with outposts. The Muslim rulers who followed the Romans remodeled the fort as a desert castle, and they turned their attention to the pools as well.

The photograph illustrates the most visible reminder of that episode. On the western edge of the ***Azraq Shishan pools****, the partly silted irregular outline of a large reservoir can still be seen, its massive walls strengthened by semi-circular buttresses. Beyond the top left corner, a circular structure, linked to the reservoir, has been exposed by excavation. Hidden under the silt and among the marshland reeds are two other walls which run out from the northwestern and southwestern corners of the reservoir and extend in great loops around the north and south of the marsh. They seem to have been intended to enclose the whole marsh in a circuit of about 2.5 to four kilometers (1.5 to 2.5 mi), but were not completed. An aerial photograph from 1936 reveals a large rectangular structure buried just west of the reservoir, but this is now overlain by the modern village. Column capitals were found near this building in the 1930's, and dredging of the reservoir in the 1980's brought out numerous stone blocks carved in relief with stylized figures of birds and animals. Although the site was doubtless of importance in the Roman period, the principal features most closely parallel the irrigated gardens of early Islamic "desert castles" like that at Qasr al-Hayr al-Gharbi northeast of Palmyra. (See Aramco World, September/October 1990.)* 10

QAL'AT AL-RABADH



Jordan is well-known for its great medieval castles, many the work of 12th-century Frankish Crusaders. (See Aramco World, *November/December 1993.) The castle of* ***Qal'at al-Rabadh****, just west of Ajlun, however, is the work of their Arab opponents. A 13th-century Arab writer reported that it was built in 1184–1185 by 'Azz al-Din Ausama during the rule of Salah al-Din (Saladin). Thirty years later, it was extended to strengthen the gateway. The castle was located on the heights overlooking the Jordan Valley at a point where it could command the approach to the fertile plateau, thus thwarting further expansion of the Frankish kingdom.*

Today, the castle is still visible for kilometers around. In this view looking west, one sees the wide views open to the garrison and the commanding position of the castle on a steep-sided outcrop above a valley. Closer inspection underscores the massive bulk and great strength of the castle itself. The tall walls of fine masonry tower above the landscape, and the partial collapse on one side allows a glimpse down into an interior of courtyard, stairs, windows and exposed corridors. Even today, in the unthreatening modern landscape of villages and fields, the place carries an aura of power, and it is a notable example of Arab architecture of the time.

David L. Kennedy is professor of ancient history and classical archeology at the University of Western Australia in Perth. He has been involved in aerial archeology in the Middle East for over 20 years, having learned the techniques at the side of one of the pioneers, Derrick Riley, flying over the rather different landscape of Yorkshire.

www.arts.uwa.edu.au/classics/archeology/rsame.html

Events & Exhibitions

Pharaonic Music is an exploration of what the celebrations and rituals of ancient Egypt may have sounded like, under the guidance of musicologist Martin Paquette. Specialists have constructed theories on the basis of paintings and the few instruments that have come down to us from pharaonic times, and it is thus possible to speculate about the aural milieu of the time. Information: 514-866-0239. Bureau Égyptien des Affaires Culturelles, **Montreal**, 7:30 p.m. May 17.

Artists from Mesopotamia samples Iraqi work for the third of six exhibitions surveying contemporary art, with an emphasis on painting, throughout the Arab world. From May 17 through July 7. **Artists from Greater Syria, Part 1**, focusing on Jordanian artists, will follow from July 12 through September 15. Information: www.daratalfunun.org/. Darat al Funun, **Amman, Jordan**.

Exotica: *The Age of Portuguese Discoveries: Exotic Worlds and their Impact* 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 as objects of astonishment. Kunsthistorisches Museum, **Vienna**, through May 21.

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**, through May 22.

Art Contemporary Kilim presents Belkıs Acar's reinterpretations of a long-established weaving tradition. Her abstract-design flat-weave carpets are created on the firm basis of her profound curatorial knowledge of traditional Anatolian kilims, but they depart from that foundation in strongly modern forms of artistic expression. Nilufar Gallery, **Milan**, through May 25.

The Art and Tradition of the Zuloagas: *Spanish Damascene from the Khalili Collection* features some of the finest work of Plácido Zuloaga, a late 19th-century Spanish master of the art of damascening, the process of decorating iron, steel or bronze surfaces with gold or silver "onlays." The process took its name from Damascus, from where it spread to Italy and Spain, although it may have originated in China. Museo de Bellas Artes de **Bilbao [Spain]**, from May 25 through August 31.

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. That period was a high point of Sumerian culture. Catalogue $50/$35. Pierpont Morgan Library, **New York**, May 25 through September 10.

Traces of Paradise: *The Archaeology of Bahrain 2500 BC–300 AD* presents nearly 600 objects outlining the history of this past and present center of trade in the Arabian Gulf. As the bronze-age link among the civilizations of the Indus, Oman and Mesopotamia, Bahrain was the home of the rich and sophisticated Dilmun civilization (2100–1700 BC), whose most important trading commodity was copper. To the Sumerians, Dilmun was also a prelapsarian paradise that figured in numerous stories, including the Epic of Gilgamesh. Bahrain enjoyed another, less well-known florescence at the intersection of Hellenic and Parthian culture (300 BC–600). Sites from that period, when Bahrain was known as Tylos, have yielded carved stelai, glass from as far away as Egypt, and jewelry of gold, precious stones and the famous Gulf pearls. British scholars have been involved in the archeology of Bahrain since the mid-19th century, and the exhibit features binational excavations at Saar, a town site in the north of the island that dates from ca. 2000 BC. Seminar July 24. Information: +44-20-7898-4020, www.soas.ac.uk/Brunei/home.html. Brunei Gallery, SOAS, **London**, July 12 through September 15.

MINISTRY OF CABINET AFFAIRS & INFORMATION, BAHRAIN

Pearls of the Near East features photographs of the ancient architecture of Syria, Lebanon and Jordan by Bożena Roguska-Trabulsje. Sponsored by the Asia and Pacific Museum. Dong Nam Oriental Art Gallery, **Warsaw**, through May 25.

The Eternal Image: *Egyptian Art from the British Museum* is the first loan ever of some 150 pieces that span 3000 years of Egyptian history, from a tiny royal portrait of carved ivory to the colossal granite statue of Seti II. Included also are rare wooden sculptures and papyrus paintings, neither of which survived the passage of years in great numbers. Information: 419-225-8000, www.toledomuseum.org/. **Toledo [Ohio]** Museum of Art, through May 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.

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. The Walters Gallery, **Baltimore, Maryland**, through May 28; **Los Angeles** County Museum of Art, July 2 through September 25.

Ottoman Calligraphies: *The Collection from the Sakıp Sabancı Museum, Istanbul* draws upon one of Turkey's leading private collections to display 70 exceptional examples of Ottoman-era calligraphy 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**, through May 29.

Transatlantic Dialogue: *Contemporary Art In and Out of Africa* charts the interrelationship between African artists with experience in the West and African-American artists who have traveled in Africa. The 40 works in varied media by 16 artists—including Jean-Michel Basquiat, John Biggers, Rashid Diab and Amir Nour—constitute esthetic reports from a quest by artists on two continents to reconcile questions of identity and heritage. "It is telling that the works cannot easily be identified as either African or African-American," says show curator Michael Harris. Information: 202-357-2700, www.si.edu/nmafa/. National Museum of African Art, **Washington, D.C.**, from June 1 through August 31.

Cairo and the Mamluks displays black-and-white photographs by Christian Langtvet of six Bahari Mamluk mosques, all dating from the first half of the 14th century, in the context of their present-day urban settings. Sony Gallery, American University in **Cairo**, through June 1.

La Cava is a new West End musical based on the historical events that triggered the Arab conquest of Spain beginning in 711. Count Julian, the Visigothic exarch of Ceuta, had left his daughter in the keeping of Roderic, the king of Spain, who ravished the girl. Julian's revenge was to provide four ships, maps, military intelligence and Visigothic co-conspirators within Spain to assist the Arab invasion. Victoria Palace Theatre, London, opens June 1.

(continued from previous page)

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. **Los Angeles** County Museum of Art, through June 4.

Shahnama is the first exhibition to look at the historical figures who became legendary in the great Persian epic *Shahnama*, composed in 1010 by the poet Firdawsi. Coins, paintings, metalwork and ceramics are on display. Sackler Gallery, **Washington, D.C.**, June 4 through October 29.

John Singer Sargent: *Beyond the Portrait Studio: Paintings and Drawings From the Collection* includes works reflecting Sargent's influential travels in North Africa and the Middle East among the 100 paintings and drawings on display. Metropolitan Museum of Art, **New York**, June 6 through September 10.

Recent Acquisitions: *Islamic and Later Indian* is one of a year-long, multigallery series of exhibitions showcasing recent acquisitions and revealing a glimpse of the collecting practices of an important teaching and research museum. Sackler Museum, **Cambridge, Massachusetts**, June 8 through September 13.

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**, through June 11.

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 Gérome, 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**, June 11 through September 4.

Emperors of the Nile: *Roman Egypt* features more than 250 objects from several European museums. Musée des Beaux-Arts, **Valenciennes, France**, through June 12.

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. Information: 202-296-6767, 510-704-0517, awair@igc. apc.org. Sites and dates include: **Raleigh, North Carolina**, June 12–13.

Earthly Beauty, Heavenly Art: *The Art of Islam* shows some 300 works of supreme beauty that date from between the seventh and the 19th century, Islamic art treasures from distinguished international public and private collections. The exhibition is organized by notional locales, such as "the palace," "the mosque," and "Paradise," and visitors will be led through these past jeweled objects, splendid ceramics and glassware, elegant Qur'an manuscripts, textiles and prayer rugs. Elements from the natural world—water, birds and flowers—are pointers to Paradise, according to Mikhail Piotrovsky, Arabic scholar and director of the museum, so the exhibition includes fountains and ponds, and the rustling and fluttering of birds in an aviary. Catalogue by Piotrovsky. State Hermitage Museum, **St. Petersburg, Russia**, June 13 through September 9.

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.**, through June 15.

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 from Neolithic times to 960 of our era. 500-page catalog. Asian Art Museum of **San Francisco**, June 17 through September 11.

Pakistan: *Another Vision—Fifty Years of Painting and Sculpture from Pakistan* surveys three generations of artists who have faced the dilemma of forging identity in a modern nation with millennia-old cultural traditions, framed by the increasing internationalism of art. Information: +44-20-7898-4020, www.soas.ac.uk/Brunei/home.html. Brunei Gallery, SOAS, **London**, through June 18.

Pilgrims pray at the Ka'bah in the Grand Mosque at Makkah.

In the Shade of the Tree is the first large-scale retrospective exhibition of more than three decades of photography by London-based Peter Sanders, one of the leading photographers of the Islamic world. Included are images from Saudi Arabia, where Sanders photographed the 1990's expansions of the Grand Mosque in Makkah and the Prophet's Mosque in Madinah; images from Africa, Central Asia, other Arab countries and the Indian subcontinent are also shown. Sanders's work has been widely published in both the western and Arab press—and in *Aramco World*. "He is the only photographer working today who has systematically covered vast areas of the Islamic world as an insider," says US writer Michael Sugich. "Because of his deep understanding of the culture and his impeccable spiritual courtesy, he has been able to photograph places and people that virtually no Western photographer would be able to otherwise access." Information: +44-20-7898-4020, http://www.soas.ac.uk/Brunei/home.html. Brunei Gallery, SOAS, London, through June 18; reopens July 12 through September 15.

Yemen: *In the Land of the Queen of Sheba* is a comprehensive exhibition of the south Arabian nation's 7000-year artistic heritage, showing incense burners, stelai, inscribed tablets and statuary that appear in the West, on loan from Yemeni museums, for the first time. The show affords glimpses into kingdoms that built their wealth on the far-reaching incense trade, and whose art—though it shows Greek and Persian influences—remains mysterious, hermetic and different from any other on the Peninsula. Fondazione Memmo, Palazzo Ruspoli, **Rome**, through June 30.

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**, through July 9.

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.

Exploring Muslim Cultures is a series of exhibits, university courses, forums, lectures and teacher workshops aimed primarily at helping non-Muslims learn about the diversity of the Islamic world and its interactions, past and present, with the West. Exhibits focus on Moroccan textiles; a history of incense; world mosque architecture and Persian painting. Forums cover a wide range of subjects, including cuisine, film, music, health care, history, geography and contemporary issues. All events are free. Information: 773-325-7863, www.depaul.edu/~islam. DePaul University, **Chicago**, through July 15.

Common Threads: *Samplers from Around the Globe* shows 65 masterpiece samplers from the museum's own collection that span 300 years and four continents. Samplers originated as pattern and stitch reference guides, and they have frequently been integral to the passing on of textile traditions, particularly among women. Museum of Fine Arts **Boston**, through July 23.

Hassan Fathy: *A Centennial Celebration.* The Rare Books and Special Collections Library of the American University in Cairo exhibits sketches, annotated volumes and memorabilia representing more than 60 years of the life and work of the famous Egyptian architect. In **Desert Architecture:** *Baris and Sidi Kreir*, the Sony Gallery at AUC presents previously unexhibited photographs of two of his most important projects. American University in **Cairo**, through July 27.

Empire of the Sultans: *Ottoman Art from the Khalili Collection* explores the influence of the Ottoman sultans over affairs of state and religion with displays of calligraphy, copies of the Qur'an, manuscripts, arms and armor, metalwork, ceramics, textiles and scientific instruments from the Nasser D. Khalili Collection of Islamic Art. Catalogue. **Detroit** Institute of the Arts, July 30 to October 8.

PETER SANDERS

Scholars, Scoundrels, And The Sphinx: *A Photographic and Archaeological Adventure Up the Nile* takes the visitor on an exploration of the Nile Valley between 1850 and 1930, a time that saw the first flowering of both Egyptology and photography. The archaeologists and photographers featured were pioneers in their respective fields and opened the way to a deeper understanding of a remarkable ancient civilization. The exhibition also touches on travelers, collectors, explorers, and dealers in and fakers of antiquities. Over 80 original photographic images, including albumen and silver prints, stereoviews and postcards, of more than 35 sites along the Nile River are exhibited, by such photographers as Felix Teynard, Francis Frith, Antonio Beato, the Bonfils family and J. Pascal Sebah. Catalogue. McClung Museum, **Knoxville, Ohio**, through July 30.

Flowers of Silk and Gold: *Four Centuries of Ottoman Embroidery* offers a unique window onto 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. A "virtual exhibition," including images, activities and lesson plans, is available at www.textilemuseum.org/fsg. The exhibition also marks the museum's 75th anniversary. Catalog $45/$30. Textile Museum, **Washington, D.C.**, through July 30.

A Bold Aesthetic: *Textile Arts of Central Asia* highlights 60 examples of apparel, decorative fabrics and jewelry from the early 1800's to the early 1900's. The show emphasizes work from Samarkand and Bukhara, urban centers where Silk Road trade stimulated the textile arts for more than a millennium. Among the finest objects are Bukharan robes that turned their wearers into living feasts of color, texture and intricate pattern. Period photographs enlarge visitors' understanding of Central Asia of the times. The **Los Angeles** County Museum of Art, through July 31.

Burned Books And Blasted Shrines: *Cultural Heritage Under Fire In Kosovo* features photographs and other materials documenting the destruction of cultural heritage during the 1998–1999 conflict in Kosovo. The photographs, by András Riedlmayer, bibliographer at the Harvard Fine Arts Library, and Andrew Herscher, a practicing architect and Ph.D. candidate at Harvard's Graduate School of Design, were taken as part of a post-war survey in October 1999. Harvard Fine Arts Library, **Cambridge, Massachusetts** through July 31

Paid in Burnt Silver: *Wealth and Power in the Viking Age* explores the concept of wealth that underlay Viking raiding and trading, looks at different ways of measuring wealth, and traces the development of a monetary economy in the light of social, political, economic and religious change. British Museum, **London**, through August 13.

Vikings: *The North Atlantic Saga* commemorates the millennial of the Viking landfall in North America, which marked the furthest reach of a westward expansion that was financed in part by wealth accumulated in trade with the East. The displays contain some 200 artifacts, many the results of recent archeology in Scandinavia. Smithsonian Institution, **Washington, D.C.**, through August 13.

Life and Death Under the Pharaohs: *Egyptian Art from the National Museum of Antiquities in Leiden, The Netherlands* spans the history of pre-Islamic Egypt, from the earliest settlements to the Byzantine period. The treasures on display are from one of the world's leading collections. Information: www.fernbank.edu/museum. Fernbank Museum of Natural History, **Atlanta**, through September 4.

Searching for Eternity: *Life and Death in Ancient Egypt* displays more than 300 objects and photographs of monuments and tomb paintings to tell the story behind ancient Egyptian beliefs about death and life. Highlighting the exhibit is the mummy and coffin of Ankh-hap, an individual who lived about 2000 years ago. **Houston** Museum of Natural Science, through September 4.

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**, through September 17.

Threads of Tradition shows 19th- and early 20th-century Palestinian dresses, jackets, shawls and other craftwork from the Munayyer Collection. Information: 202-338-1290; http://www.palestinecenter.org/default.htm. Jerusalem Fund, **Washington D.C.**, through September.

The Egyptian Disease presents drawings, engraving, sculpture and other objects to demonstrate that the Empire style was born of the 19th century's fascination with Egyptian art. Napoleonic Museums, **Portoferraio, Elba, Italy**, through October 31.

New Galleries for Ancient Near Eastern Art set the artifacts of one of the world's most far-reaching, extensive collections into new contexts that illuminate their use and significance in antiquity as well as their connections to the art of neighboring cultures. The spectacular Assyrian reliefs are now illuminated by natural light. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, **New York**, through December 31.

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.

Whem Ankh: *The Cycle of Life in Ancient Egypt* explores daily life in Ptolemaic Egypt (323–330 BC), a time when the great classical civilizations of the Mediterranean, North Africa and South Asia came together and eventually clashed in the aftermath of the conquests of Alexander the Great. The exhibition follows the life, death and afterlife of a known individual, Nes-Hor, one of two mummies in the exhibit. Examination of his mummy and detailed readings of the icons and text on his coffin have provided a great deal of information on Nes-Hor's life history, family relationships and his place in society as a priest in the Temple of Min in Akhmim. More than 200 artifacts illuminate the domestic life, economy, religion, politics and preparations for the afterlife of a "middle-class" Egyptian family of about 2200 years ago. **Buffalo [New York]** Museum of Science, through September 2003.

The Saudi Aramco Exhibit, newly renovated, relates the heritage of Arab-Islamic scientists and scholars of the past to the technology of today's petroleum exploration, production and transportation, set against the background of the natural history of Saudi Arabia. **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.

50 Years of *Aramco World* is a traveling exhibit of 76 of the best color photographs from the magazine's archive, some of which were published in the November/December 1999 issue. Suitable for schools, universities and special events, each photograph was selected for both artistic and educational merits. Captions link photographs to historical patterns of communication about the Middle East. For specifications and availability, please write to Dick Doughty, Assistant Editor, *Aramco World*, P.O. Box 2106, Houston TX 77252.

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

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