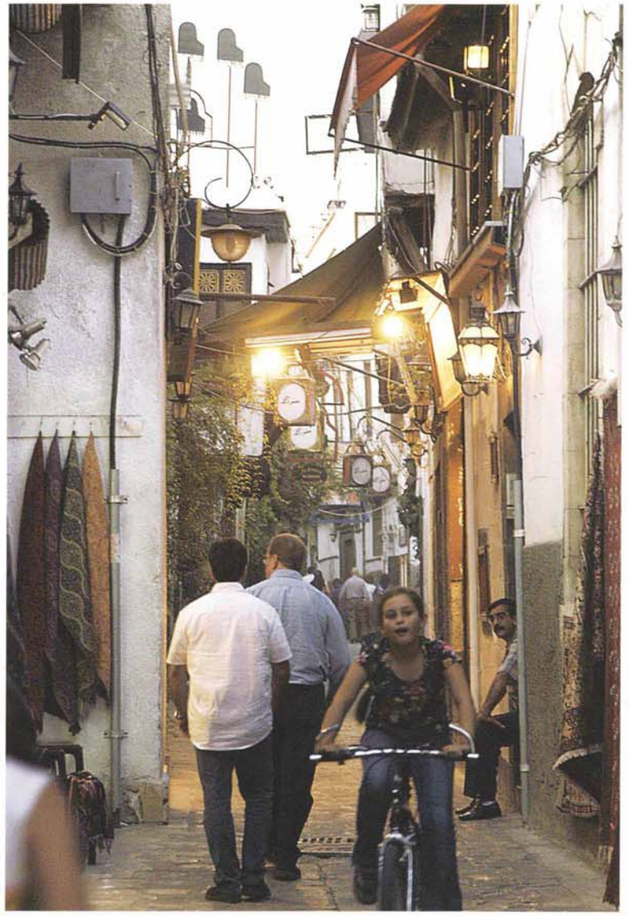
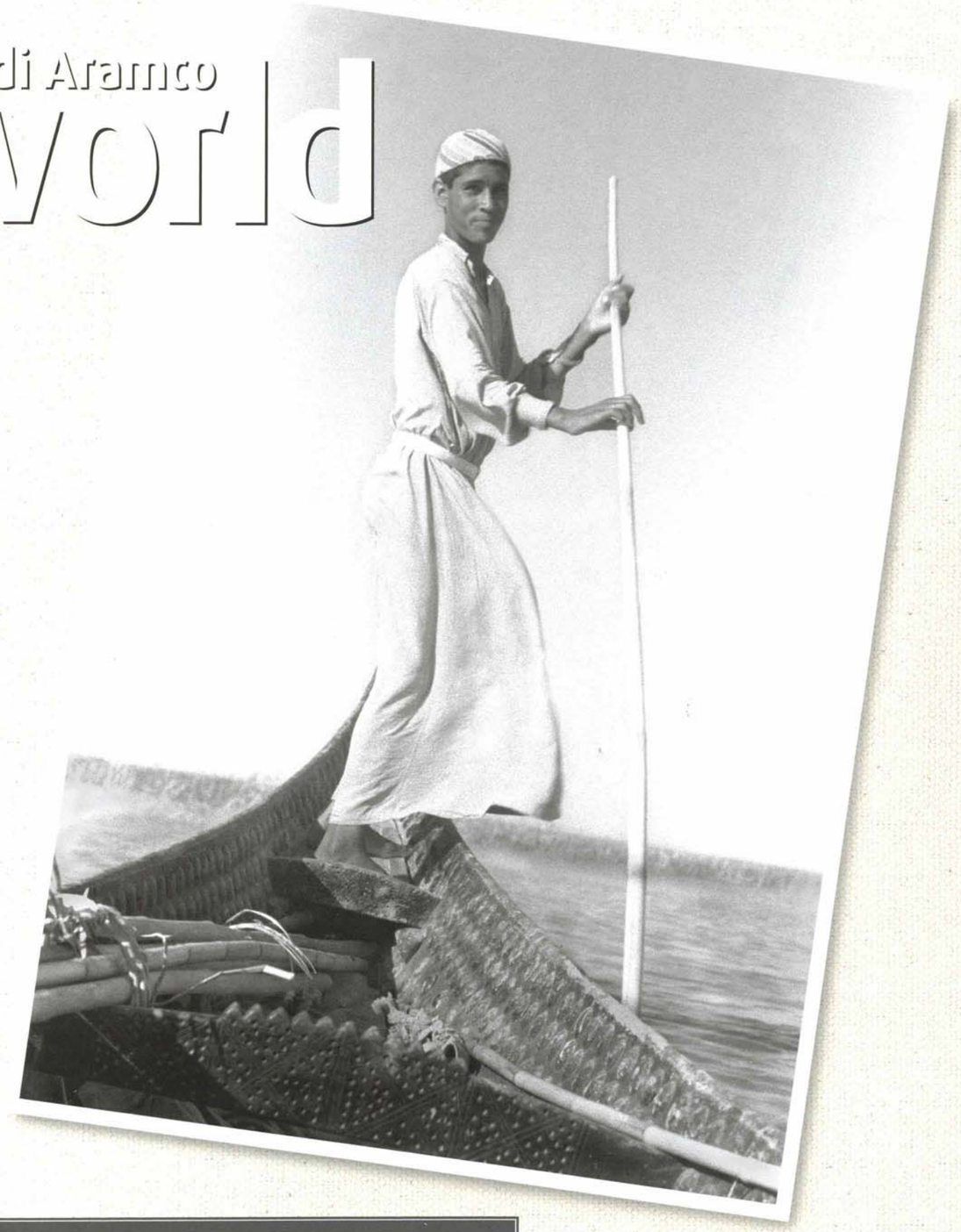
May/June 2005

Saudi Aramco World





WILFRED THESIGER: THE WORLD OF HIS CHOICE

Saudi Aramco World

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May/June 2005

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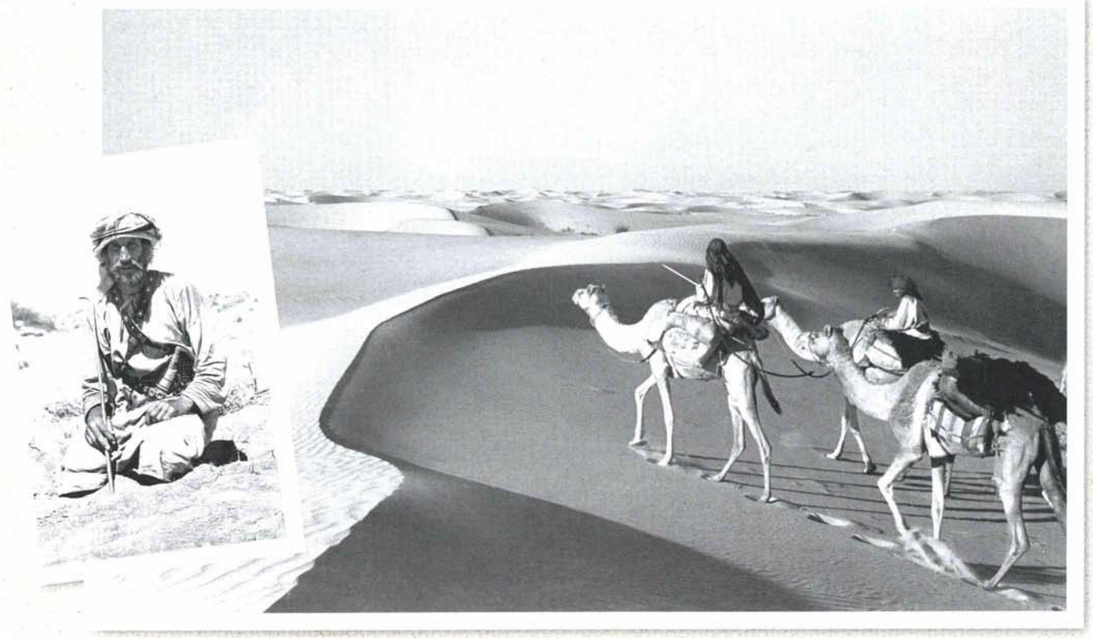
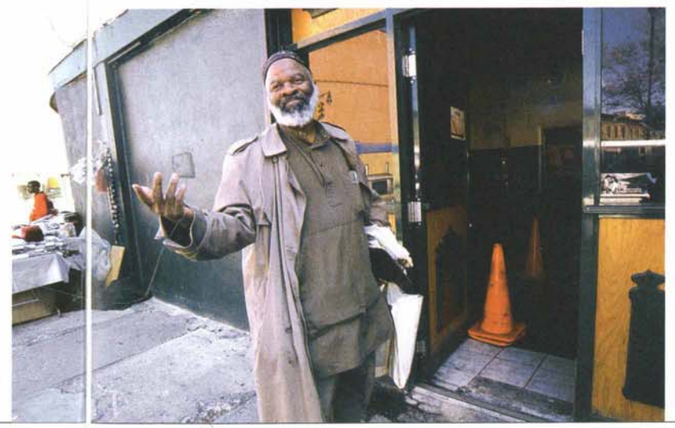
In 326 BC, under the cover of a violent nighttime storm, the army of Alexander the Great slipped across the Hydaspes River and vanquished the forces of the Indian ruler Porus. Despite the victory, the battle forced the end of Alexander's eastward conquests. A series of silver coins that depict this battle have long baffled scholars: If Alexander minted them, why do some depict his rivals? What story can the coins tell us?





Cover:

Guiding a reed *tarada* through the marshes of Hamar, Iraq in 1953, Amara bin Thuqub paused to glance back at Wilfred Thesiger's Leica. Thesiger first traveled to the marshes in 1950, and he spent much of eight years there. "The Marshes delighted me with the timeless, untroubled beauty of an unspoilt land," he wrote in his autobiography, *The Life of My Choice*. Photo by Wilfred Thesiger / Pitt Rivers Museum.

Back Cover:

This street is near Bab Tuma, one of the seven gates in the old city walls of Damascus. I walked through it because today it is a neighborhood known for its peaceful mixture of Muslims and Christians. As I walked, I was keenly aware of all of our similarities and our differences, thoughts and prayers all packed into my mind at that moment as tightly as the people along this narrow, thousand-year-old street. Photo by Karim Shamsi-Basha.

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My sister Mimi reaches to kiss my niece Dana. Aunt Fatma watches from the couch. My nephew's wife, Hala, seems to have something on her mind.

Ten Days in Damascus

Written and photographed by Karim Shamsi-Basha

As I prepared for my first visit in 12 years to my family home in Damascus, I tried to avoid thinking about political tensions in the Middle East, and to think instead about my family and who I'm going to see, what they are going to look like, and how they'll feel to see me again.

I came to America when I was 18. I fell in love with a new country and, soon, a woman to whom I was married for 16 wonderful years. But during our marriage, she had increasing difficulty getting along with my parents, and so I spent years almost in exile from my family. Our divorce, as horrific as it was, did allow me to rebuild my connection to my family.

On this upcoming journey, you will meet my family. I wish I knew what it is going to be like. You will just have to travel with me to Damascus, Syria's capital, and spend 10 days with my family and friends.

A million questions go through my head.

Friday

I slept most of the way across the Atlantic. In Paris, across the departure lounge, an African teenage girl sat with her feet crossed, reading a newspaper; her mom, wearing a traditional headdress, was asleep beside her. Seeing these two, I couldn't wait to see my father. He cried on the phone yesterday and made me cry, too. He is worried sick about my brother Maher, who lives in Baghdad, runs a clothing store and took a bullet in the leg when he was caught in a gun battle between insurgents and Americans. He still refuses to leave. "My business and my whole life are here," he tells my father when he calls.

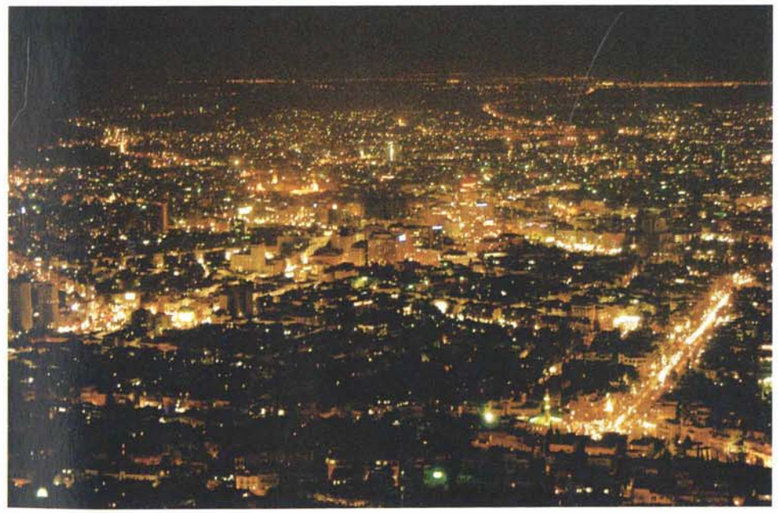
The next 10 days will present a whole new set of challenges. I think I am going to fall in love with my "old" country again. I left two decades ago when I was young and ready to take on the world. Then, as I approached my 30's, I started thinking about what matters most. I love my American friends, co-workers and family. I have the three most beautiful and sweet children, Zade, Dury and Demi.

A million prayers go through my heart.

I arrived in Damascus at night. I spotted my family through the doorway from the baggage-claim area. I went out to see my father for the first time since he visited me in Birmingham, Alabama, six years ago. He hugged me and cried, then had to sit down because of his age. We headed home.

I went to bed that first night in Damascus with a smile on my face.

I left Syria two decades ago when I was young and ready to take on the world. Then, as I approached my 30's, I started thinking about what matters most.



Saturday

I woke up to a full Syrian breakfast prepared by the best chef in Damascus. My fondest memories of my mother, Laila, are the hours she spent in the kitchen. Now 70, she dyes her hair black, and she still has beautiful brown eyes. Goat cheese, yoghurt, *za'tar* (thyme, sumac and sesame), *maqdus* (eggplant stuffed with nuts and aged in olive oil), hot pita bread and hot, sweet black tea. After that I got acquainted with my seven-year-old niece, Dana, whom I had never seen before. She laughed every time I looked at her.

Aunt Fatma and Uncle Ibrahim Zakarea came to visit, still driving the same Volkswagen Beetle I remembered from my youth. After lunch, they dropped me and my 17-year-old nephew, Hamouda, in town. I met my friends Ziad and Sammer, two brothers, from my old Boy Scout troop. Then we surprised my neighbor Ali at his store. We had dinner and reminisced.

By the end of the evening, I felt torn between the freedoms I have in the United States and the feelings of companionship and love, the sense that life is all within one big family, that I had today in my homeland.

Upper: **On a busy downtown street, riding in a taxi, it's time for a self-portrait, a record of my visit.** Left: **Mount Kassioun, a popular area with tourists and locals alike, offers a breathtaking night view of Damascus.**

Sunday

I went to the old city with Hamouda and my other nephew, Hamdi, who is 11. Suq al-Hamidiya is a long market street with tin roofs; it's lined with two rows of shops that sell everything from historical items to swords, prayer beads, furniture and books. I noticed people were staring at me a little. "They love tourists here," said Hamouda. I bought gifts for my kids, eager to show them and my American friends and co-workers our Arab heritage and pride.

We visited the Umayyad Mosque, built in the 10th century, its stunning architecture a testimony to past vision. In the middle of it is a shrine of John the Baptist, whom the Qur'an names as a prophet. Not many people know this. When Pope John Paul II visited Damascus in 2001, his visit to the Umayyad Mosque was the first time a pope had ever set foot in a mosque. This is a story of the tolerance within both Islam and Christianity.

Inside the mosque I laughed as the groundskeeper chased a group of misbehaving boys with a switch. I remembered my own youth in the mosque and the irresistible urge a boy feels to run around when you are barefoot in such a vast carpeted area. As I told my dad about this, he laughed and added that when *he* was little, he and his friends also used to play pranks on their mosque's keeper. It's another one of those generations-old traditions.

The beauty of the historic old city is astounding.

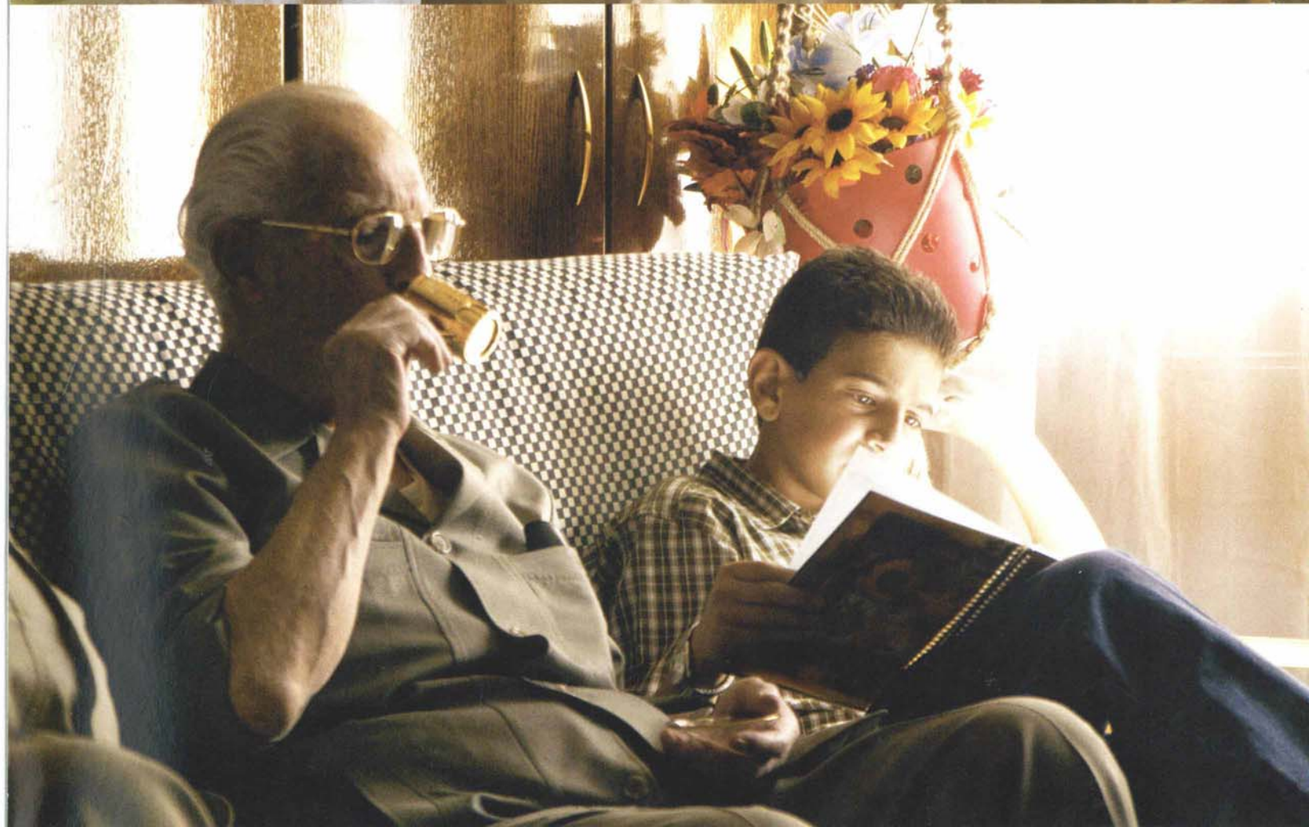
Monday

I spent the morning with my dad, Kherridean Shamsi-Basha, in his library. He can still beat me at arm-wrestling. He has hair as white as snow, and he wears a suit every day, even in the house. Some years ago, my parents moved from the city to a new area called the Assad Villages, which are "out in the country," to my American mind. Dad spends most of his day in his library. He has published reference books on Arabic poetry and literature, lectured countless times and written dozens of articles for major Arab magazines. He read me a poem, ending with his lifelong belief that Arabic poetry is unequaled in the civilized world. I don't know if this is true, as I am not a scholar, but I admire Dad for devoting his life to something so beautiful.

At the *suq*, I noticed people were staring at me a little. "They love tourists here," said my nephew Hamouda.

Maher called us from Baghdad. I haven't seen him in 12 years. He is a small-built man with handsome eyes and a gentle soul. He sounded in good spirits, even though life at that moment was scarier than ever. The war had destroyed his store. Now he was trying

Upper: **At a family lunch, my cousin Siham serves. My family is accustomed to big meals and big crowds. Gaining weight is easy: I have to watch out!** Left: **My friends on their rooftop: my sister Mimi at left, then Amro's wife, Summer, Amro and Ammar. Behind them, green-lit minarets decorate the city's night skyline.** Opposite, upper: **My sister Mimi praying in our house in Damascus. She does this five times a day. I admire her self-discipline.** Opposite, lower: **My father and my nephew Hamdi sit at my sister's house in Jisreen after lunch. After a big meal, I preferred a nap to coffee.**



to start a food-supply business. "People need everything," he said. "I am just glad I can be part of the solution." I think Maher is a better person than I, to live in a country ravaged by war and to still want to help despite having been shot in the leg.

Thursday

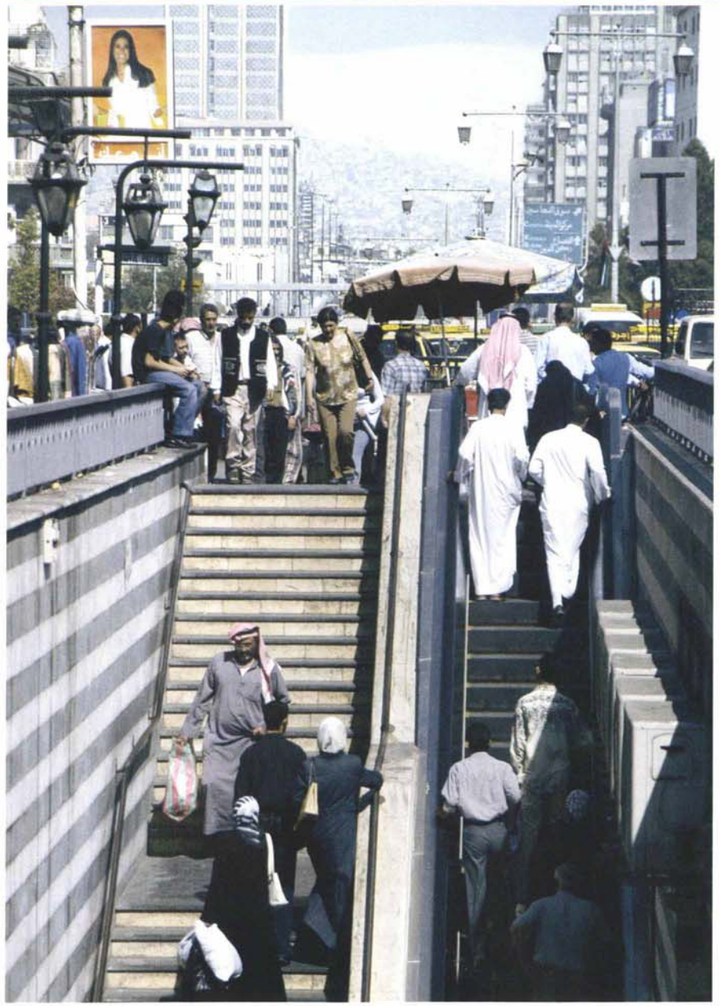
I went with my sister Rowayda to pick up her kids from the Pakistani School, a private school considered one of the best in the country. The principal welcomed me in her British accent. I photographed my niece Dana and her cute little friends in class, all dressed in their white shirts, ties and gray skirts. Then we went to the middle school to pick up Hamdi. There were about 50 students milling around outside. They looked like teenagers in the United States. Most things seem to be the same between the two countries I belong to. But a struggle is erupting in my head. Sometimes I don't know if I belong to the Arab world or the American world.

Tonight my prayer is for peace in our lands, but also in my own mind.

Friday

My dad woke me up today and told me of a dream he had. He was hiking in the desert with a little boy. After days of heat and very little water, the two came upon an oasis with a lake and palm trees. There was one big hut in the middle, and in it was a group of around 20 people. They were all different colors and origins, and they all spoke different languages, but they could always sing together, because their song was written in the universal language of love. Dad was a little shook up as he told me the dream.

We headed to my sister Rowayda's house in Jisreen, about 20 minutes east of Damascus. It's a place of narrow roads; people use three-



Upper: **Shaalan Square in Damascus is a busy nightlife spot, and it was a regular hangout for me during high school.** Right: **In downtown Damascus, there are pedestrian underpasses below major streets. The city now has some three million people, and about one Syrian in five lives in Damascus.** Opposite, upper: **The Umayyad Mosque is one of the city's most historic places. On the site of an earlier pagan temple, a temple to Jupiter was built in the first century and a church in the fourth century. The mosque was founded in the seventh century.** Opposite, lower: **In the center of the old city market, you can buy just about anything, from spices and traditional costumes to antique musical instruments, from beads to swords and, of course, snacks and ice cream.**

wheeled scooters. My brother-in-law, an architect, designed the house. It has a nicely furnished guest room. Many guest rooms in Syria are fitted out with expensive furniture, and children are not allowed to enter them. As a boy, it was a quest for me and my friends to sneak into the guest room and play on the furniture.

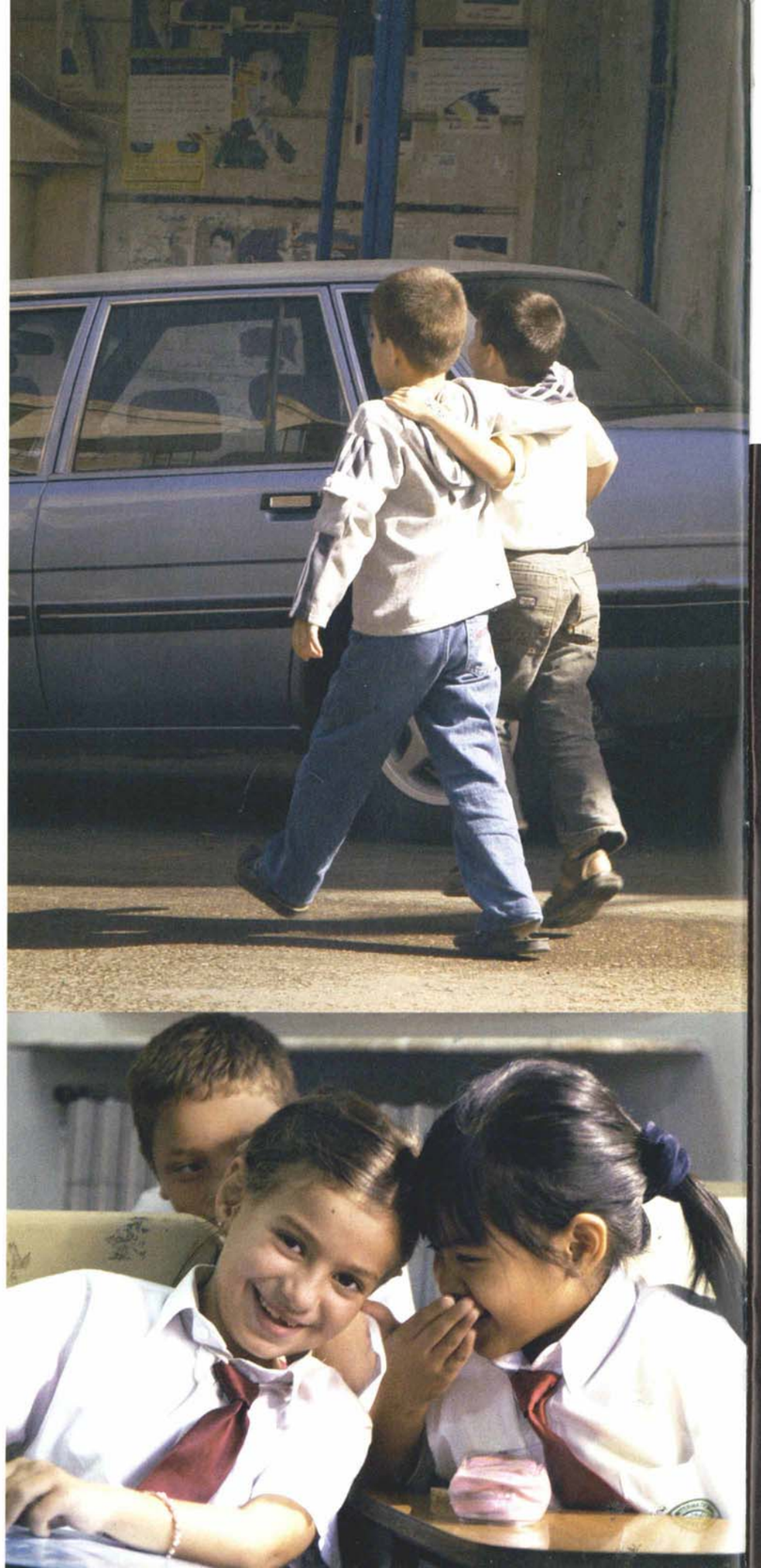
It felt easy on the soul to be in a place where, in some ways, little has changed over the years.

Saturday

I woke up in Jisreen to the noise of the children, the chickens, the scooters and the itinerant fruit salesmen on their donkeys. I've enjoyed seeing so many positive events during every day: normal people doing things to celebrate and just live the positive side of life. I selected a few pictures from my youth today from photo albums. I plan to show them to my children when I get home to Birmingham so they will get the idea that, Syrians or Americans, we are all the same. They are pictures of me and my siblings and our friends playing in the backyard, having a birthday party, going on picnics. Maybe I should show the two sets of pictures during the next session of the United Nations.

Above: **This is my birthday party when I turned three. Behind me is my dad and, on his right, my mom, who went all out with the food. She always made the cake with as many layers as you had years, until you were about eight, when it dropped back down to one.** Right, upper: **Two little friends walk in the village of Jisreen, near Damascus, where my sister Rowayda lives.** Right: **Schoolgirls in Jisreen.**

I enjoyed seeing so many positive events every day: normal people just living the positive side of life.



Sunday

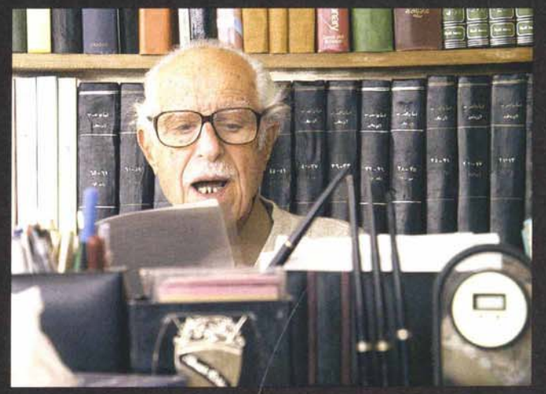
Flying back to America, the Earth seems small. The same clouds cover all these countries. I have spent half my life in the Arab world, the other half in America. I know and like many Arab traditions; at the same time, I like many American customs. Each side of the world has its benefits and disadvantages. These have been 10 days of friends and family—and a few extra pounds. They have been 10 days of struggle with who I was and who I have become.

Now, back in Birmingham, Alabama, when I put my children to bed every night, I sing them "You Are My Sunshine." I love that song. I want all the children of the world to feel the warmth of the sunshine.

Karim Shamsi-Basha (karim@porticomag.com) is a self-taught photojournalist who came to the United States in 1984 and studied mechanical engineering at the University of Tennessee. Beginning at the *Knoxville Journal*, he moved to the *Birmingham Post-Herald* and later shot for *Time*, *Sports Illustrated* and *People*. In 2001, he joined three partners to launch *Portico*, a magazine of the people of Birmingham.

For Kherridean Shamsi-Basha, 1917–2005

The hallway that led to Dad's library in our first-floor flat in Damascus seemed to stretch for miles. I dodged pieces of furniture, dashing into the room lined with books in every direction. Mother was chasing me as fast as her feet could carry her, screaming, "Come here, you misbehaving little troublemaker!" Sitting in the corner of the room was my dad, wearing his *abaya*—his camel-hair house robe—reading. Never slowing down, I continued my run toward him. He opened the abaya, smiling, and I jumped in onto his chest, which seemed to my seven-year-old body the size of a small oasis. He closed the abaya over me and returned to reading. I lay there, still as a rock, listening to the rhythm of his heartbeat. From my dark and cozy cocoon, I heard Mother enter the room and ask Dad where I was. He acted innocent of seeing me at all. Mother sounded doubtful, but he assured her that I must be hiding in another room. I heard her moving a chair, then departing. As her footsteps faded, Dad started laughing, his chest vibrating. He opened the abaya and looked down at me. "We did it again!" he grinned. He kissed me and squeezed me so tight I could hardly breathe.



My father spent most of his time in this library. I remember Mom had to bribe him with his favorite meal sometimes, just to get him to eat. He told me that writing was as good as being in heaven. I admire him for devoting his life to something so beautiful.

This continued much of that year. I would misbehave—a daily occurrence in my youth—and he would hide me from Mother, who was the disciplinarian in the family. But I kept growing, and our cover was finally blown one day when Mother noticed that Dad looked rather too large.

Dad passed away last February 3 after 88 years of protecting me and my three siblings from all threats. Over the course of his career, he wrote more than 15 multivolume books on Arabic literature and poetry, some of which are used in universities throughout the Arab world. He spent 15 years writing the three-volume *Mu'jam al-Amthal al-'Arabiyya* (*Encyclopedia of Arabic Proverbs*), published by the King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies in Saudi Arabia, the most comprehensive book on the subject. In 2004 Syria's Ministry of Culture and Education honored him with the Outstanding Lifetime Achievement Award, the most prestigious literature award in Syria, for his work in preserving the Arabic language.

My one regret is that, because I came to the United States, I missed being with him every second that I could. We had a rare connection. We would talk for hours about anything: school, politics, religion, love and freedom. He wanted me to live life abundantly.

He taught me many lessons, with one resonating the most: "Regardless of any circumstance, always do the right thing." While not the most profound statement, it has been the hardest one to adhere to. "If you keep only one virtue in life, make it integrity. You will never regret it," he would always say.

Dad, you lived and died with integrity, and while knowing my own faults and limitations, I will always do my best to be as pure as you wanted me to be.

I wear your abaya now, and with it I shield my own children, whenever they need a place to hide.

Stealing Zeus's Thunder

WRITTEN BY FRANK L. HOLT ILLUSTRATED BY NORMAN MACDONALD

AFGHANISTAN, 1880

With treasure in their saddlebags, three anxious merchants from Bukhara raced madly for Peshawar.

Wazi ad-Din, Shuker Ali and Ghulan Muhammud had often traversed these dangerous trails across Afghanistan to India. They normally traded in tea and silk, ever mindful that bandits lay in wait for wealthy men to make just one mistake. On this trip, the merchants made two.

The first occurred early in the journey when fortune offered them a rare but risky bargain. Villagers near Kobadian had recently unearthed a vast trove of coins and other antiquities, which they were selling to passersby. The merchants appraised the hoard's value and calculated the risks of smuggling it to Peshawar, underestimating on both counts. Trading all they had for the treasure, they sewed thousands of gold and silver artifacts into their saddlebags and loaded them onto mules. Thus concealed, the treasure passed right through the army of Abdur Rahman—later the Amir of Afghanistan—and safely across the Hindu Kush.

In Kabul, the merchants joined a caravan for added protection as they entered the last perilous passes between Afghanistan and India. Unfortunately, however, the secret of so great a treasure could not be kept in such close company. Once their story leaked, the merchants made their second mistake. Fearful of thieves among their fellow travelers, they and their servant dashed ahead of the caravan and took their chances alone. Ghilzai raiders quickly swooped down from the hills and found they had hit the jackpot.

The merchants sewed thousands of gold and silver artifacts into their saddlebags, loaded them onto mules and set out for Peshawar.

At the top of a remote pass in Kapisa province, the Karkacha caves afforded the raiders a perfect refuge. As the captured merchants watched helplessly, the bandits spread out the saddlebags and began to divide their spoils. To apportion equal shares, they hacked some of the treasure into pieces. Four of the raiders suffered a similar fate when quarrels erupted over the loot. Thus distracted by blood and brawl, the criminals allowed one of the hostages to escape. He fled in darkness and made his way down to a British camp at Seh Baba.

On that May evening, Captain F. C. Burton was serving as regional political officer. He immediately sounded the alarm and led two troopers on a dangerous rescue mission. At midnight, the British burst into the cave and the startled bandits surrendered. Burton grabbed the merchants and their scat-

tered treasure and retreated quickly, before the bandits realized they had surrendered to inferior numbers. Only later, in the light of day, could it be determined that much of the treasure was still missing. Nonetheless, the grateful Bukharans escaped Afghanistan with their lives and at least part of their loot. In India they hawked their diminished wares to British soldiers and civil servants.

The merchants' account of their adventure leaves many questions unanswered. What they carried in their saddlebags was never inventoried before it spilled into the local bazaars. Archeologists naturally cringe at the haphazard ways that such materials typically get mixed together with other objects—some genuine, some fake—and, much later, are all conveniently labeled as a single sensational find, in this case the "Oxus Treasure." Bazaars no less than bandits play havoc with the historical evidence we so desperately need.

In a midnight attack, the outnumbered British freed the merchants and part of their scattered treasures and quickly retreated.

LONDON, 1984

I hold in my hand one of the rarest treasures thought by some to have come from the merchants' saddlebags, donated nearly 100 years ago to the British Museum by Sir Augustus Wollaston Franks. It appears to be an unusually thick silver coin or medallion; it weighs 42.2 grams, or 1⅓ troy ounces. No inscription identifies who made this medallion or why; the only writing stamped upon it is a mysterious monogram, so faint it is unclear whether it reads BAB or BA or AB. The designs on its two faces dazzle the eye with their intricate detail. On one side, a figure stands in full military array, clenching in his fist, as no ordinary human could, a lightning bolt. On the other side, a battle unfolds: A mounted warrior threatens two antagonists riding on a retreating Indian elephant. The picture speaks a thousand words, but refuses to give us names. What war is this? Who are the heroic combatants? Where and why was this medallion commissioned?

Many of the best numismatic minds of the past century have tackled this mystery. The first was Percy Gardner in 1887, whose identification of the standing figure has never since been challenged. Gardner recognized immediately the superhuman figure of Alexander the Great wielding the thunderbolt of his "divine father," Zeus. But the elephant battle proved more baffling. In 1911, Barclay Head suggested that the Indian prince Taxiles, an ally of the Greeks, designed this medal to show his own heroic part in Alexander's Battle of the Hydaspes River.

INDIA, 326 BC

Through the same treacherous mountain trails that would later betray three merchants from Bukhara, young Alexander led an army of Greeks toward the frontiers of India. Behind them lay a staggering record of conquest that changed the course of history; ahead stretched an exotic, unknown world that would test their king's claim to divine invincibility. Not yet 30 years old, Alexander was already hegemon of Greece, king of Macedonia, pharaoh of Egypt and lord of Asia. The huge Achaemenid Empire of Persia had fallen to him in a series of spectacular battles, giving him greater wealth than the Greek world had ever known. He claimed direct descent from Hercules, Achilles and Zeus himself.

Restless, Alexander longed to reach the edge of the inhabited earth, which his tutor Aristotle had told him lay somewhere just beyond India. On his way there, Alexander joined Prince Taxiles, who hoped to enlist the Greeks' aid in his own rivalries. The most formidable of his enemies was Porus, ruler of the neighboring kingdom across the Hydaspes River. When Porus refused to submit to Alexander, Taxiles's hopes were realized—for he was sure the Greeks would cross the Hydaspes and overcome Porus on their way to the world's end.

Alexander had certainly faced larger armies than Porus's, and longer odds, but war in India presented two daunting challenges. First was the weather. The campaign against Porus took place during the monsoon, a demoralizing phenomenon for Mediterranean Greeks. Mere streams became torrents, flooding camps and flushing out poisonous snakes. Worst of all, the Hydaspes River itself roiled from the relentless rains and seemed impossible to cross. Second, there were elephants. Porus's army included a large corps of trained war-elephants whose very appearance alarmed the Greeks. Trumpeting loudly, these mammoth beasts could terrify the cavalry and trample the infantry like no other weapon in the ancient world. They were the panzer divisions of the distant past.

Getting his army across the flooded Hydaspes in the face of this elephant menace has been called Alexander's greatest achievement. Leaving in camp a large reserve as a diversion to hold Porus in place, Alexander marched under cover of rain and darkness to a carefully prepared crossing-point miles upstream. Concealed rafts and boats lay waiting to ferry his select force across the river before the enemy could react. A particularly severe thunderstorm masked the din of embarkation. When he was finally alerted to Alexander's unexpected deployment, Porus sent a son racing to meet the emergency with chariots and cavalry. But, mired in monsoon mud, the Indian chariots failed miserably and Porus's son died on the field. Porus then advanced with his main force of elephants, archers, chariots, and cavalry. Charge and counter-charge churned the sodden battlefield; the Indian archers struggled to steady their long bows against the wet ground. The elephants lost position and their mahouts fell under heavy fire. Wounded and riderless beasts stampeded through their own lines, where thousands of Indians lay dead or dying.

Conspicuous in the melee loomed Porus astride his own enormous elephant. He refused to give ground amid the carnage until he was finally overcome by injuries and the distressing sight of Alexander's fresh reserves crossing the Hydaspes. While retreating, Porus noticed his old adversary, Prince Taxiles, in hot pursuit with a message from Alexander. As Taxiles neared, Porus turned upon him suddenly with a javelin and frightened him away. Alexander then dispatched a better emissary who persuaded Porus to surrender.

Most of the decadrachm Alexander medallions are in private hands, lost to researchers. (This illustration is drawn from several museum specimens.) On one side, a rider chases retreating war elephants. On the other, Alexander, in military dress, clutches a lightning bolt, the symbol of his "divine father," Zeus. Many of the coins have been found near Susa, in modern Iran, where accounts tell of an enraged Alexander throwing silver to his hungry horses. (See page 17.) Actual size of the medallion is 34 millimeters (1⅜") in diameter, comparable to a US half-dollar.

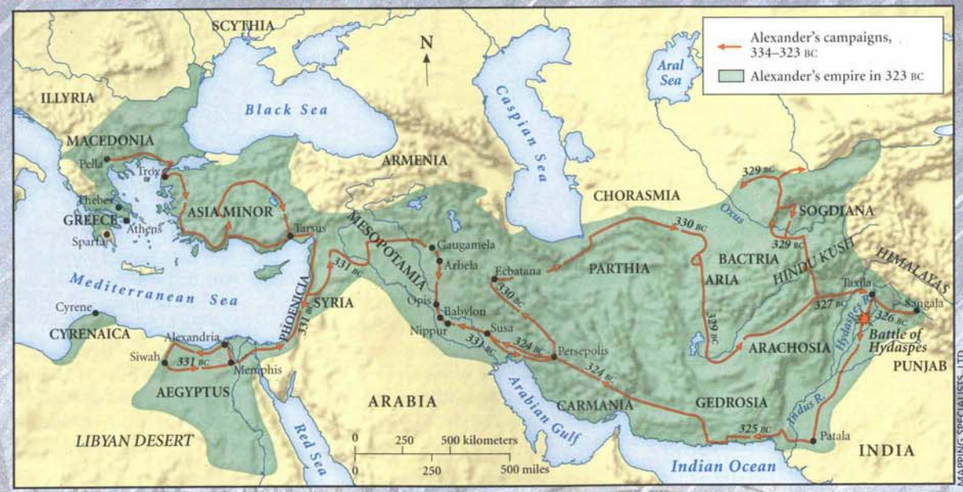
Smaller tetradrachm medallions have been found as well. Some show a riderless elephant on one side and, on the other, an archer whose bow and headdress mark him as part of the Indian forces Alexander defeated at the Hydaspes River. The initials "AB" may stand for Abulites, the Persian guardian of Alexander's royal treasury at Susa. Actual size of this piece is comparable to a US quarter or a two-Euro coin.

Another tetradrachm shows an elephant with two riders and a banner. On the other side rolls an Indian chariot pulled by four horses. Does each medallion tell its own story—or did Alexander intend them to tell a story together?

LONDON, 1984

As I look again at the silver medallion, I cannot understand why Taxiles would commission this beautiful memorial to the most embarrassing moment of his life. Barclay Head had to be mistaken. To prove it, I can now reach into the collections of the British Museum and pull out another, better-preserved specimen of the elephant coin. Acquired in 1926 from Iran, this example shows the elephant's riders more clearly, with the fighter—always the king in ancient India—in front, hoisting one

THE CONQUESTS OF ALEXANDER



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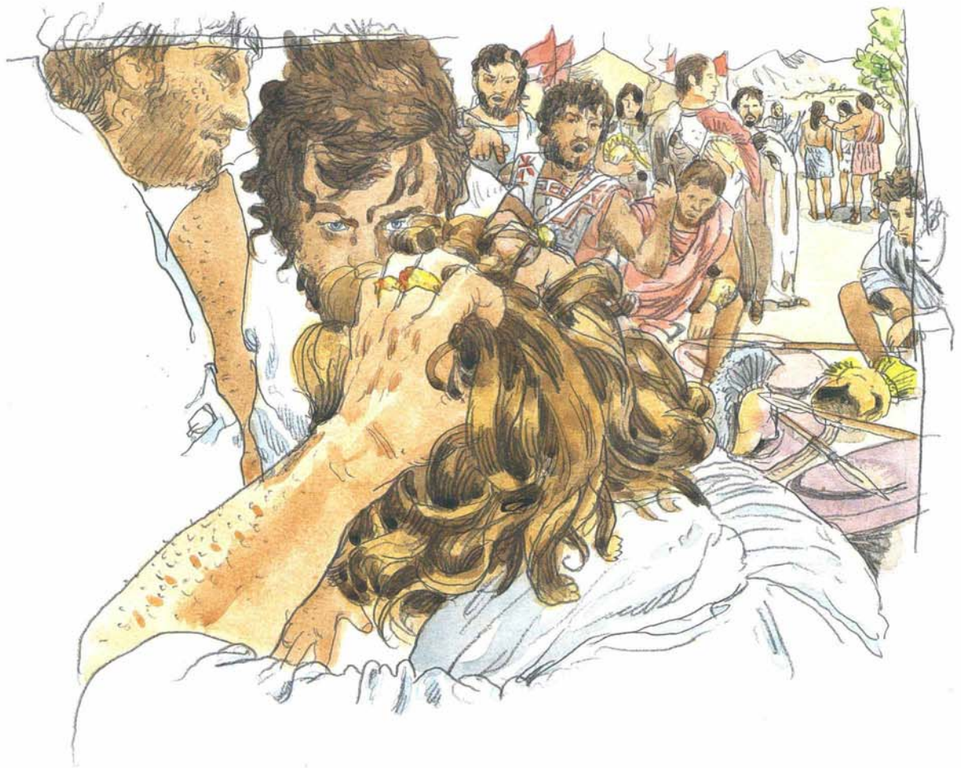
spear and holding others in reserve. Both riders wear their hair tied high in Indian fashion. On the other side, something truly marvelous appears. Alexander stands as on the other specimen, but now I can see a flying Nike, goddess of victory, placing a crown on the king's head. Also, Alexander's plumed helmet stands out boldly and matches that of the cavalryman on the other side of the medallion.

I had recently seen the same details on another example in New York, obtained in 1959 by the American Numismatic Society. These additional coins make it obvious that it is Alexander himself—and not Taxiles—at the heels of Porus's elephant. One ancient source describes such an episode, adding that Alexander's cherished horse died of injuries during the chase. The medallion might therefore depict this "last stand" of the war-horse Bucephalus, as suggested by more than one modern scholar. On the other hand, most accounts of the battle describe Bucephalus's demise under different circumstances, and mention no personal duel between the kings. Clearly, the energy and confusion of war creates many versions of the same event, and the passage of time tends to cloud our vision.



Shortly after the Hydaspes River victory, the exasperated Greek troops threatened mutiny. Alexander's eastward search for the edge of the inhabited world was over.

INDIA, 326 BC

Six months after defeating Porus, Alexander lounged aboard a ship back on the Hydaspes River, listening to the historian Aristobulus describe the great battle. Aristobulus had thought to flatter his king with a fulsome tale of heroic feats. The entire company needed a lift after a long season of discontent. Alexander and his army had won the battle but wrangled over the peace, beginning with the fate of Porus. When Alexander asked his prisoner what should be done with him, the defiant rajah replied, "Treat me like a king!" Respecting the nobility of his foe, Alexander restored his crown and enlarged his kingdom. This gallant action galled the Greeks, who had not risked their lives to leave Porus in power. They resented, too, the march ever eastward, away from home and into the monsoon-soaked unknown. Finally, on the banks of the Beas River, the exasperated Greeks had threatened mutiny. Furious, Alexander sulked like Achilles and stormed like Zeus, but his men would not budge. The search for the world's end was over; it was time to turn westward for home. It was a bitter disappointment which Alexander never forgot.

Lucian tells us that, to cheer his king on the journey home, Aristobulus read from his history a romanticized passage about the rout of Porus's army. Alexander suddenly took offense. He snatched the scroll and tossed it into the very river that had witnessed the battle. The king snorted, "I should throw you overboard as well, Aristobulus, since you dare fight my wars for me and have me killing elephants with a single thrust of my javelin!" Unlike Aristobulus, Alexander understood that history must tell the truth, nothing but the truth and never the whole truth.

To leave out offending facts was possible, but adding outright falsehoods—such as the effortless slaughter of elephants—was not, for lies undermine legends.

We can be sure, therefore, that when Alexander commissioned the elephant medallions, he considered their design an accurate, if incomplete, depiction of the battle. Otherwise, like the manuscript of poor Aristobulus, the medallions would have been tossed aside.

PARIS, 1984

Some experts insist that Alexander did throw at least some of this money away. The reason stares back at me from the coin vaults of the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris. Another medallion lies there, looking just like those in New York and London; beside it rest some stunning examples of smaller coins that add to our mystery. All of these extra elephant coins originated in an Iraqi hoard discovered near Babylon in 1973. They were quickly dispersed onto the antiquities market, fetching as much as $58,000 for a single medallion. A few, like those in front of me, settled into museum collections and set off fresh debates among scholars. The smaller varieties, often called tetradrachms, or two-shekel pieces, based upon their weight, add to the iconography of the larger decadrachms (or five-shekel) medallions. One series features a riderless elephant on one side and an Indian archer on the other. The distinctive Indian bow, so large that it must be anchored against the archer's foot, matches those attested in Porus's army. The other variety shows an elephant with two riders, one of whom looks back as if being pursued. A great banner flutters overhead. The opposite side displays an Indian chariot pulled by four horses. Standing beside the charioteer, an archer fires a smaller bow at the enemy.

Scholars immediately called attention to the monograms on some of these smaller medallions, since they matched those on the decadrachms. These enigmatic Greek letters (BAB or BA or AB, and X) might be the initials of the men responsible for minting these elephant artifacts. Experts searched among the names of all the bureaucrats of Alexander's burgeoning empire for two individuals with the right initials who served together and might have minted coinage. This clever approach turned up "Abulites" and "Xenophilus," men whose mintage was indeed thrown away by Alexander the Great.

SUSA, 324 BC

The Persian nobleman Abulites had served King Darius III as guardian of Susa and its royal treasury. When Alexander defeated Darius at the Battle of Gaugamela in 331 BC, Abulites switched allegiance and surrendered his wealthy city to the Greeks. He thus received Alexander's pardon and was left in charge of Susa, but with the Greek soldier Xenophilus as his military overseer.

Six long years later, Alexander returned to Susa from India. The failure of his troops to follow him to the world's end continued to vex the king, and the march homeward had not gone well. Along the way, Alexander had suffered a near-fatal wound when his soldiers became apathetic in battle. He agonized that the huge fleet he had built in India had been lost on its maiden voyage to Babylon. His land army endured horrendous losses on its march through the Gedrosian Desert. Then, returning to Mesopotamia in a sullen mood, Alexander suddenly discovered gross incompetence—even insurrection—among many high-living government officials who, in his absence, had plundered temples and tombs, abused the population and raised their own private armies. They had convinced themselves, wrote one ancient authority, that Alexander would never survive "the Indians and their elephants."

Some modern scholars describe Alexander's reaction as a "reign of terror." Many generals and bureaucrats were arrested and executed. Alexander allegedly killed Abulites's corrupt son with his own hands. Abulites himself fell victim to a notorious lapse of judgment: When summoned to bring food and forage to Alexander's hungry army, Plutarch tells us, Abulites delivered cash instead—eighty-five tons of silver coins, which the king tossed to his horses in outrage. As the animals sniffed the silver in obvious disappointment, Alexander snarled, "What good are these provisions to us, Abulites?" An execution followed.

NEW YORK, 1998

The more I investigate these elephant medallions, the greater the mystery grows. Is this the mintage Abulites sent in a vain attempt to appease his irate king? Scholars now argue that a city bureaucrat could not have designed these artifacts on his own authority. Whatever the images on the discarded silver—be they elephant types or Alexander's ordinary designs showing Hercules and Zeus—they must have had his royal sanction. Alexander's coins and medallions reflect his own thoughts, not those of an Abulites or a Taxiles. So what message did he intend to convey on them? The large decadrachm medallions proclaim Alexander's victory, with the king chasing down his Indian opponent in a display of Greek superiority. The smaller tetradrachm medallions, on the other hand, appear to showcase the power of Porus's army, with no sign of the Greeks among the Indian archers, elephants and chariots. The contradiction seems obvious as I study more of these artifacts side by side in the vaults of the American Numismatic Society.

Curator Martin Price of the British Museum looked at the antithetic images and decided that the Indian forces being displayed must represent not Alexander's enemies, but his allies. Price saw in them Alexander's dream of world brotherhood on the eve of the bloody battle against Porus. But the retreating elephants make no sense as allies. At the other extreme, Professor Alan Bosworth of the University of Western Australia has recently interpreted these coins as a sinister warning to the Greeks back home who might choose to oppose Alexander's regime: "Beware the consequences of revolt. The army which crushed Porus will easily crush you." But the medallions in question never circulated in Greece. Their message must fall somewhere between brotherhood and brutality.

By depicting himself as wielding his father Zeus's thunderbolt, Alexander took credit for the monsoon storm that had concealed the Greeks' river crossing and brought them victory, symbolically stealing Zeus's thunder.

I offer now a new hypothesis that considers the medallions as parts of a unified narrative. The tetradrachms lead us from the onset of the battle to its aftermath, naturally with the dreaded elephants as the unifying subtext on each medallion: First we witness the chariots of Porus sent to stop Alexander's deployment across the Hydaspes, then the caparisoned elephants starting to retreat with a nervous rider looking back. Next, the Indian archers wrestle with their heavy bows, and we see the stampeding elephants whose riders have all been killed. This story on the smaller medallions culminates in the powerful victory images on the large ones: Porus himself in retreat and Alexander crowned by Nike.

On a deeper level, the medallions also reveal Alexander's revolutionary ideas about how he achieved this victory. As we have noted, Greek historians quickly developed many versions of this great battle, some of which Alexander strongly disapproved. The key was to select only those facts that flattered the king, while avoiding outright lies. Thus, when Alexander himself commissioned these artifacts, probably as rewards for service in the Indian campaign, he had to choose carefully which images to put on them. For the tetradrachms, he picked certain enemy units to illustrate key phases of the battle as he wished it to be remembered. He decided to ignore, for example, the important role of Porus's cavalry. Clearly, in addition to the elephants, the archers and chariots had special relevance to Alexander's own version of the battle. Only one extraordinary circumstance ties together these particular enemy forces—they were overcome because of the heavy rains, which had also "miraculously" concealed the Greeks' crossing of the Hydaspes River. According to written accounts of the battle, Porus's chariots suddenly got stuck and the archers could not shoot effectively in the mire.

On these medallions, therefore, Alexander literally stole Zeus's thunder. By wielding his father's thunderbolt, the king called attention to and took credit for the divine tempest that brought Greek victory. This was no ordinary triumph, and Alexander was likewise no ordinary leader. He had called upon superhuman powers to surprise his enemy, stop the chariots, disable the archers and doom the deeply feared elephants.

Not only did this interpretation of events flatter Alexander without prevarication, it also answered some of the bitterest complaints of his troops. In the months after the Hydaspes battle, Alexander's army grumbled loudly about the monsoon and the misery it caused. These grievances played a part in the army's refusal to follow the king deeper into India, to the end of the world. The elephant medallions offered the malcontents a powerful rebuttal by reminding them of their latest victory under Alexander's divine guidance: The rain itself had been a weapon marshaled on their behalf. Thus, Alexander created this extraordinary message to inspire and reassure his troops in the difficult months and years after the battle. He used these indelible images to explain and exploit his unique place in history. They show, quite simply, Alexander as he saw himself.

BABYLON, 323 BC

Gods die unexpectedly. Not yet 33, Alexander lapsed into a deep coma and perished of uncertain causes on a hot June day in the old city of Babylon. He had pursued by choice a most challenging career, burning brightly but briefly in the tragic manner of Greek heroes.

He wished most of all to be remembered, and more than a hundred subsequent generations have not disappointed him. His deeds have been sculpted, painted, written and romanticized more than those of any other monarch in the history of the world. Libraries and museums overflow with commentaries and canvases devoted to the momentous events of his career. We can read that, 350 years after the Hydaspes battle, the Indians still maintained a shrine to Alexander's victory, complete with a living elephant that was said to have fought in Porus's army. We can find in medieval European manuscripts an allegory casting Alexander as Christ and Porus as Satan. We read in Arab legend about the hero Dhul Karnayn ("The Two-Horned"), a possible reference to Alexander, some of whose coins depicted him with horns as a sign of divinity. We can enjoy imaginative engravings of the Hydaspes battle by Picart, an opera by Handel, and ultra-modern depictions in movies, magazines and comic books. There seems no chance that Alexander's heroism will ever fade from our consciousness.

HOUSTON, 2004

News arrives that more elephant medallions have been found in yet another Afghan treasure. This time, an unexpected gold variety is reported. It may complete the remarkable story stamped by Alexander on the silver series. For this new evidence in our long saga—I don't dare use the words "final chapter"—please stay tuned.

Frank Holt (fholt@uh.edu) is a professor of history at the University of Houston, most recently author of *Alexander the Great and the Mystery of the Elephant Medallions* (2003) and *Into the Land of Bones: Alexander the Great in Afghanistan* (2005), both published by the University of California Press. **Norman MacDonald** (kingmacdonald@wxs.nl) is a Canadian free-lance artist who lives in Amsterdam. His coverage of the trial of Slobodan Milosevic in The Hague can be seen at www.wereldomroep.nl.

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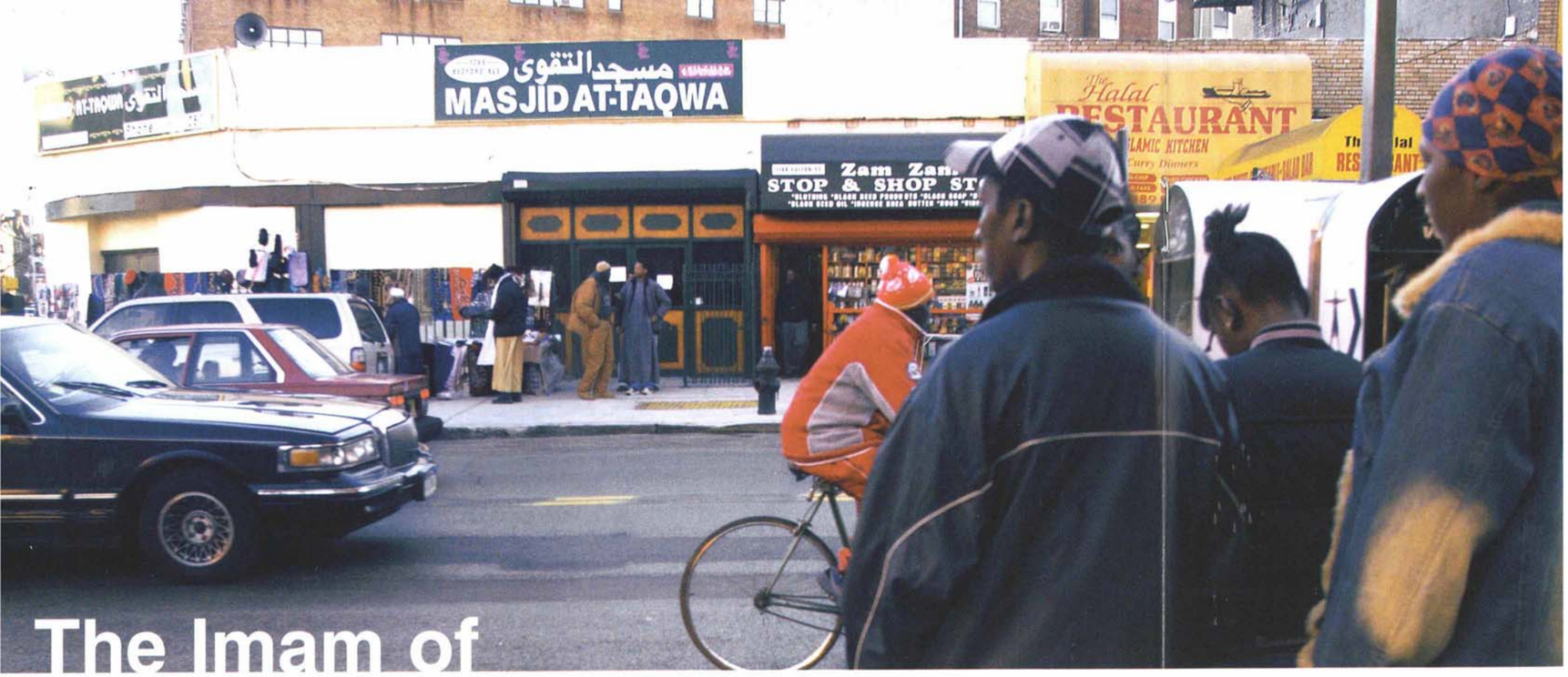
Eucratides stater (coin): S/O 97
Bactrian coins: M/J 94
Alexander's tomb: M/J 01



The Imam of Bedford-Stuyvesant

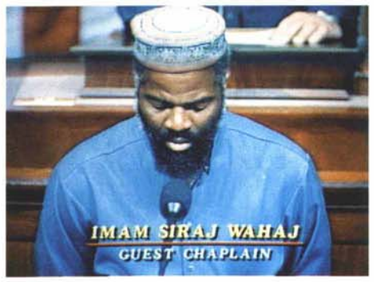
WRITTEN BY JESSICA DULONG

PHOTOGRAPHED BY STEPHANIE KEITH

The summer heat draws people onto the Brooklyn street. Shopkeepers in doorways call to passersby about caps, socks and belts for sale. Young mothers push strollers heavy with plastic shopping bags slung over the handles. Delivery trucks veer around potholes, jockeying for position with chrome-detailed sports cars thumping hip-hop. It's Friday afternoon, and the promise of the weekend lightens the air.

At the corner of Bedford Avenue and Fulton Street sits a freshly painted green and yellow building with a new sign that reads "Masjid at-Taqwa," a transliteration of the Arabic for "mosque of God-consciousness." In an instant, the end of afternoon prayers transforms the streetscape as women in colorful robes and bright headscarves pour from the mosque's back door. The sidewalk is awash in color: An emerald robe with intricately embroidered sleeves; a yellow *shalwar kamees* trouser-and-tunic set peppered with white splotches; candy pink with lime green accents.

Men exit the front of the mosque, several hundred of them, many wearing knit skullcaps, some with only socks on their feet, shoes still in hand. Men in do-rags, sports jerseys and fatigues



linger alongside others in embroidered tunics. A bearded man in cargo blue jeans and a Yankees cap wears a black T-shirt with the word "Muslim" in white letters that form the shape of a city skyline. He greets a friend with a wide-armed embrace and calls him "my brother." Clusters of congregants stand before the Abu Bakers [sic] Bakery, which offers cheesecake below the message: "There is no god except Allah."

There's no trace, these days, of the more than a dozen crack houses whose denizens threatened residents, business owners and worshipers alike on these streets in the 1980's. In those days pedestrians rushed rather than strolled, and shopkeepers either left or took cover behind bulletproof glass.

One man, Siraj Wahhaj, has led this transformation. He is Masjid at-Taqwa's founder and imam, or spiritual leader. Praised as one of the most dynamic and charismatic Muslim leaders in the United States, Wahhaj travels widely, lecturing and preaching at Islamic centers, conventions, fundraisers and universities. In 1991, he became the first Muslim to lead a prayer before the US Congress. But most days, his focus is much closer to home.

Down a long hallway that serves as the hub of mosque administration sits a humble office, its walls virtually tiled with awards, certificates and commendations. (One proclaims August 15, 2003 "Imam Siraj Wahhaj Day" in honor of a "lifetime of outstanding and meaningful achievement," by order of Brooklyn Borough President Marty Markowitz.) A desk stacked high with books seems to reflect Wahhaj's harried schedule. On a Wednesday in August, he's preparing a lecture for the Islamic Society of North America's conference; it's titled "American Muslims: Loving My Country, Living Islam."

His speech shifts seamlessly between English and the Arabic he uses in quoting the Qur'an, but his accent remains distinctly Brooklyn. His gray beard and poised demeanor establish him as a scholar, but when he preaches, the cadences and crescendos recall his Baptist upbringing in New York City public housing and his early admiration for the oratory of Martin Luther King, Jr.

"It's not contradictory for me as an American to be a Muslim. Nor is it for an American to be a Christian or a Jew or a Sikh or a Hindu or even an atheist, for that matter. That's what makes America what it is." The beauty of the country, he argues, is that you get exposed to other people and other religions. "We grew up in an integrated society. We know what it's like to be friends with Christians and Jews and whites and Hispanics and Chinese, because that's what we do in this country."

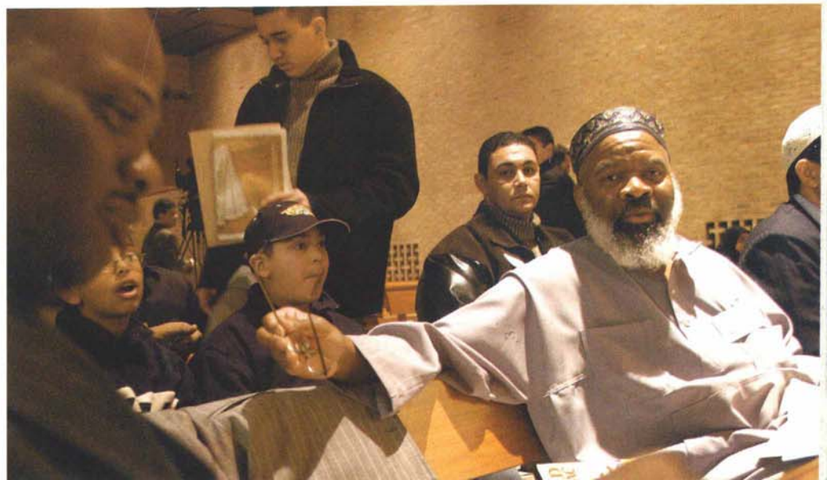
He wistfully reflects on the diverse group of friends he had in high school —evidenced, he says, by a yearbook full of scrawled messages—but Wahhaj has traveled a long road, and it hasn't always been so generously inclusive. He counts himself among the generation of African–Americans who came to Islam in the 1960's and 1970's through the black separatist movement—Wahhaj became a Muslim in 1969—and there was a time, he explains in an even-keeled voice, when he preached that "white people are devils." That was the separatist party line, he says. "I preached it. I taught it."

While Wahhaj credits the Nation of Islam for giving him "black pride," he now says that the pride went too far when it spilled over into denigration of others. "In those few years with the Nation of Islam, I was other than myself," he concedes. But in the late 1970's, as Wallace D. Muhammad led many Nation of Islam followers back toward orthodox Islam, Wahhaj was among them.

"It came very natural to me," he says. "I respect myself, I love myself, but not to the detriment of others. I can respect and love other people. Islam crystallized that." In 1978, Wahhaj traveled to Naperville, Illinois for six weeks of Saudi-sponsored religious training, and he was among five students chosen to receive advanced training in Makkah.

There, he spent four months at Um al-Qura University with teachers and students from all over the globe. "I felt so pure," he recalls. "I didn't watch any TV. It was just pure spiritual." Waking each morning before dawn, he was the first student at the mosque each day, and he often stayed after class with his teachers. "I used to run around the track and say to myself, 'Okay, when I get back to America I'm going to help the Muslims there. I'm going to start training the people, teaching them what I learned.' It was like a boxer preparing for a match."

But when he landed back in New York, he says, the clash between his faith and American life was jarring and discouraging, and he recalls feeling ill with the shock. He nevertheless started a mosque in 1981 in a friend's Brooklyn apartment, where they moved the furniture aside to accommodate a couple dozen worshipers. Soon after, the congregation bought an abandoned clothing store at a city auction for $29,000. The address was 1266 Bedford Avenue. After kicking out the drug addicts, Wahhaj and his congregants set the



Above: **The building at 1266 Bedford Avenue is now the Masjid at-Taqwa—Arabic for "mosque of God-consciousness." When Wahhaj and his colleagues bought it in the early 1980's, it was an abandoned clothing store; their first job was to expel the drug users and dealers. Now police regard the location as one of the safest in the area.** Right: **Imam Siraj Wahhaj speaks with city council candidate Naquan Muhammad (far left).** Opposite: **In 1991, Wahhaj became the first Muslim to offer the invocation before a session of the US House of Representatives.**

SCREEN IMAGE: AP / WIDE WORLD PHOTOS

Two recent immigrants, one now a local shop-owner, walk past the Bedford Avenue corner. The neighborhood's flourishing "Muslim economy" includes a deli, a convenience store, right, and the Halal Restaurant. Joint efforts by police and Muslim civilian patrols organized by Wahhaj reclaimed the area from drugs and crime.

space up as a mosque. Today, that mosque is Masjid at-Taqwa.

Just inside the mosque's front door sits a table that's permanently sticky from the doughnuts, bagels and cookies offered free each day. Above the table is a bulletin board covered with flyers offering everything from summer Arabic classes to *halal* beef jerky to legal help. A large gray trash barrel on wheels filled with black plastic bags occupies the center of the foyer; from it, worshipers snatch up bags to put their shoes in during prayers. Behind clear glass doors, the prayer hall is a simple room, a little dingy despite thick coats of green and yellow paint. The floor is covered in alternating strips of green and gray carpeting laid on a diagonal slant to indicate the *qibla*, the direction of prayer.

In his sermons, Wahhaj urges "complete obedience, complete love and complete compliance with the commandments," but recognizes that heeding that call is a tremendous strain. For many, the conflict begins in adolescence. "What are you going to do now when it's time for prayer?" he prods young Muslims who are making the transition from Muslim schools to public schools. "In Muslim school it's easy. When it's time for prayer, everybody prays." He has witnessed the struggle in teenagers who tell him, "I can't be a Muslim in this society. It's too much. I wanna date. I wanna drink my beer. I want to be like everybody else." When he counsels them, he says, he does it from family experience: He sent his eight surviving children, now aged 13 to 33, to Muslim schools, and today seven are practicing Muslims.

"Wahhaj appeals to youth—not only to the African–American Muslim community, but he also has a huge following among the immigrant communities," says Naeem Baig, secretary general of the New York-based Islamic Circle of North America. "He's a person who offers some solutions to problems. That's what makes him different. He talks about things of concern to everyone." This, says Baig, makes him a "true Islamic leader."

Perhaps nothing proved his leadership more than the clean-up-the-neighborhood campaign Wahhaj began in earnest in 1988. Throughout the 1980's, crack cocaine had been rampant in New York City, and the mosque's neighborhood, Bedford-Stuyvesant, was among the hardest hit. "We had gun traffic and gunplay in the area of the *masjid*," Wahhaj explains. "Oftentimes we could actually hear gunfire and bullets flying on our property. One day we decided to put an end to it."

Eric Bullen recalls that his store, Al's Men Shop at 1140 Fulton, was one of the few functioning businesses on what had become a block of vacant storefronts. "It used to be so bad at times that people didn't want to even be seen out here too late. You could guarantee that, had they come through once it started to get dark, they were going to get mugged," he recalls. The Muslims, he says, were instrumental in changing things.

Wahhaj called the head of the 79th police precinct and told him that "one of the problems when you raid these crack houses is the dealers come back the next day. You can't keep them closed." He offered a deal: The police would raid the crack houses, and then members of his congregation would keep the dealers from returning. The police agreed. For the next 40 days and nights, 24 hours a day, in the cold New York winter, Muslim brothers patrolled the streets on foot and in cars, preventing the dealers and buyers from entering the raided buildings.

Standing outside the mosque in a bright dashiki and matching cap, Farid A. Malik positions himself before a folding table spread with literature, his hand outstretched to passersby offering thick paperback copies of the Qur'an. "Would you like to learn about Islam?" he calls to them. Malik was one of the men who patrolled the streets. "We became a barrier between the drug dealer and the drug user," he says, explaining that after getting off work at midnight, he would patrol from one in the morning until sunrise. "It's your job to make the world better," he says. "Our faith commands us to encourage right and to forbid wrong. You must stop it with your hands, speak out against it, or at least hate it with your heart." He still recalls an elderly Christian woman stopping him on the street to say thank you. "Praise the Lord," she said. "Keep up the good work, son."

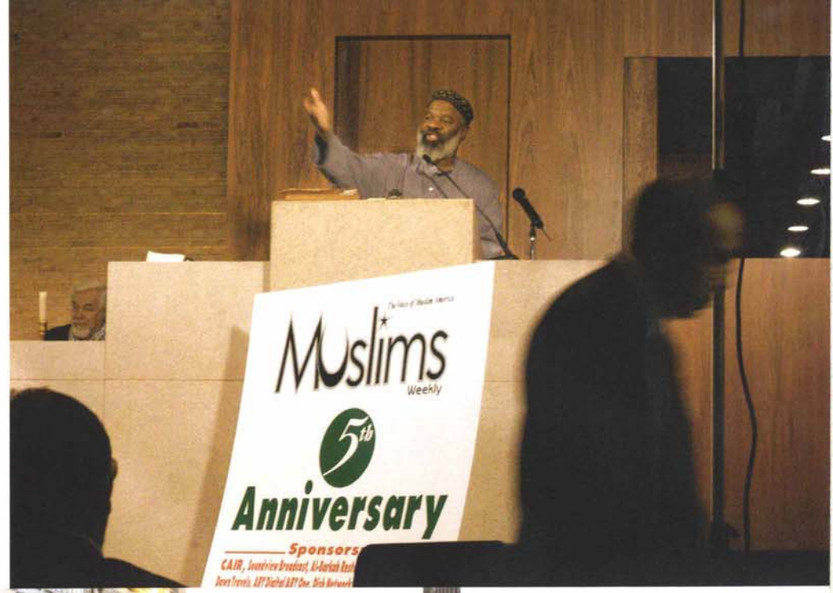
The patrols received international news coverage not only because they were effective, but also because the cooperation between local Muslims and the police was unprecedented. Community Affairs Officer Steven Ruffin was a patrolman in the neighborhood at the time. "When you're on patrol, you know your trouble spots," he recalls. "That area was known as one of our trouble spots." What impressed Ruffin about Wahhaj was his ability to rally support, first among his congregants and later from mosques in other parts of the city. "He was able to galvanize, to get them to do civilian patrol." Since then the neighborhood has changed drastically, says Ruffin. "Being that it's a main thoroughfare, that corner is one of the safest areas." As Muslims are required to pray five times a day, there's a constant influx of people around the mosque, he explains, which lends a sense of security.

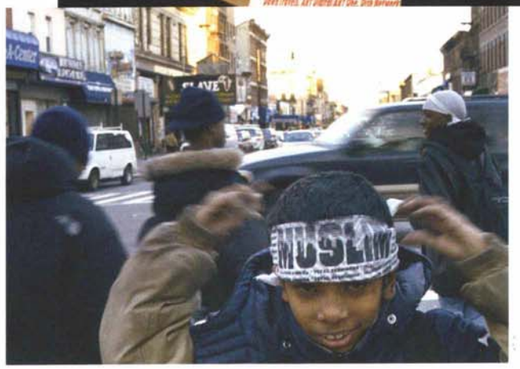
When Wahhaj first scouted out the Bedford Avenue location, the neighborhood had not a single Muslim-owned shop. Now, there is a local "Muslim economy," with clothing, food and book stores as well as vendors who sell prayer rugs, incense and oils, skullcaps and videos and DVD's of Muslim teachings on makeshift display tables outside the mosque. After services, clusters of congregants gather under the awning of the Halal Restaurant, whose sign reads "No More Junk, Eat Healthy."

"There are more Muslims here than ever before, especially Africans and Bangladeshis," Wahhaj explains. Nearly all the mosque's early congregants were African–American, he says, but today, African–Americans, white Americans and Hispanic Americans total just 40 percent of the congregation: The majority are immigrants from Afghanistan, Egypt, Bangladesh, Sudan, Palestine, Pakistan, Guinea, Senegal, Somalia and other places.

Some immigrants find that America's liberties threaten their faith and traditions, Wahhaj explains, and "they fail the test when given that kind of freedom." But others, he adds, devote themselves more fervently to their religion here than they did in their home countries. "Some of them have told us that, ironically, they started really practicing after they came here." As the mosque's spiritual leader—Islam does not have an ordained clergy—Wahhaj strives to keep the faithful in the fold and to offer a communal space that supports them all. "When you come to America with all its freedoms and you still practice Islam, that's the most gratifying thing to me."

These days, Wahhaj sprinkles in more Arabic and uses fewer English idioms in his sermons, which now have a more international focus to match his more international congregation. "I include Muslims around the world in my sermons," he says. "My scope is more universal." ⊕





"When you come to America with all its freedoms and you still practice Islam, that's the most gratifying thing to me," says Wahhaj, whose sermons now address ever-growing numbers of immigrants from Asia and Africa.
Left: Outside the mosque, a boy ties on a headband that reads "Muslim: Total Submission."

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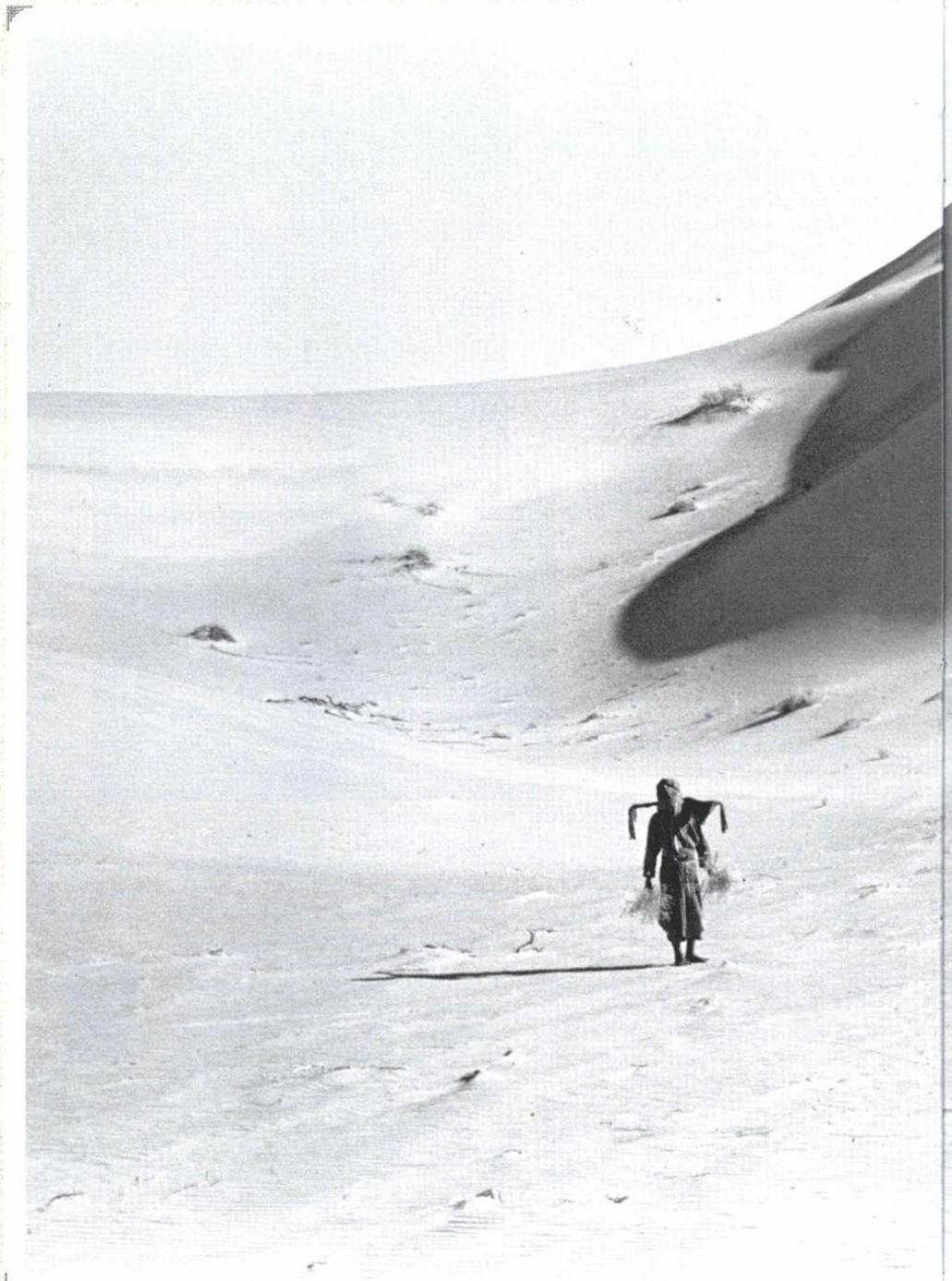
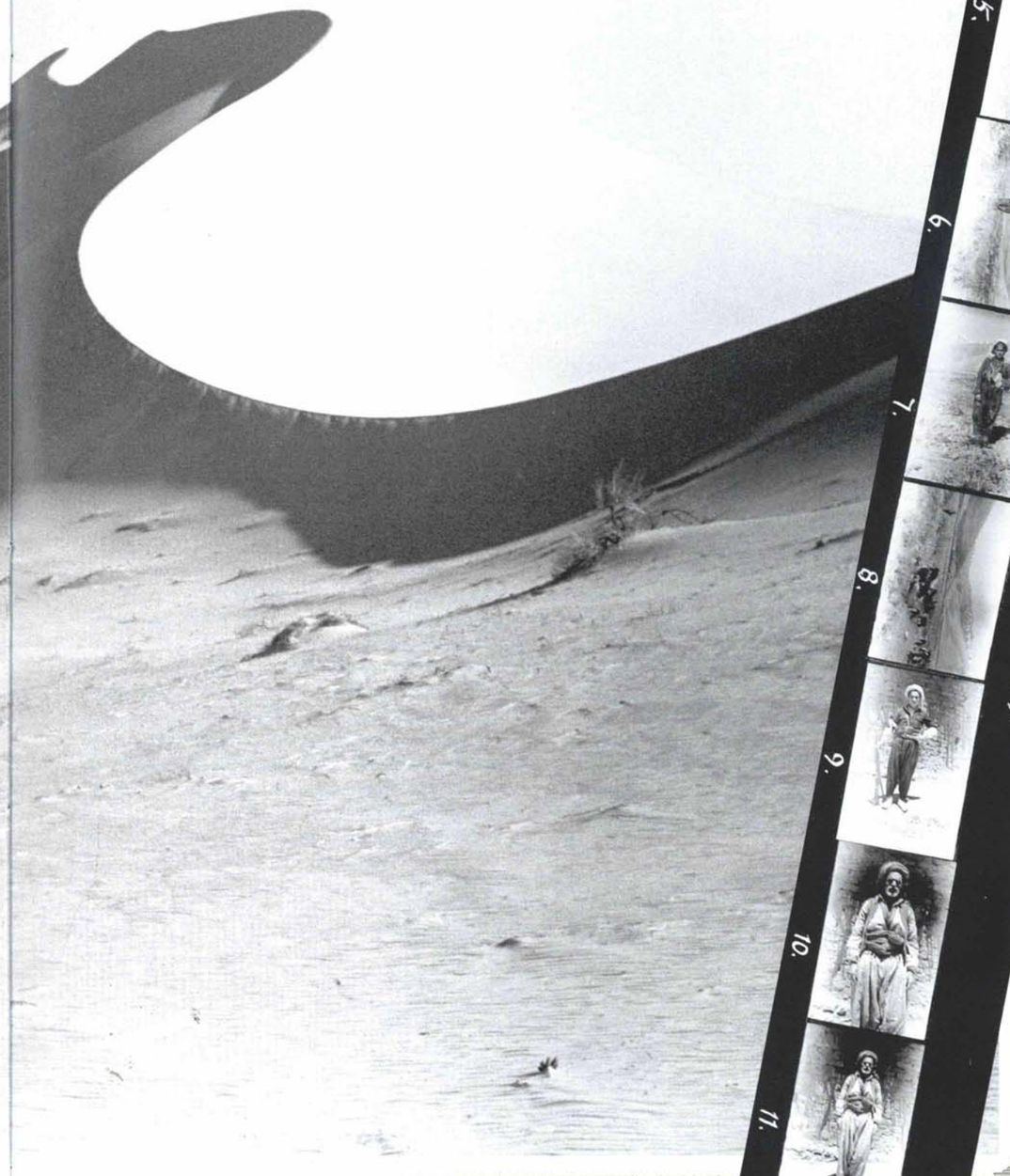
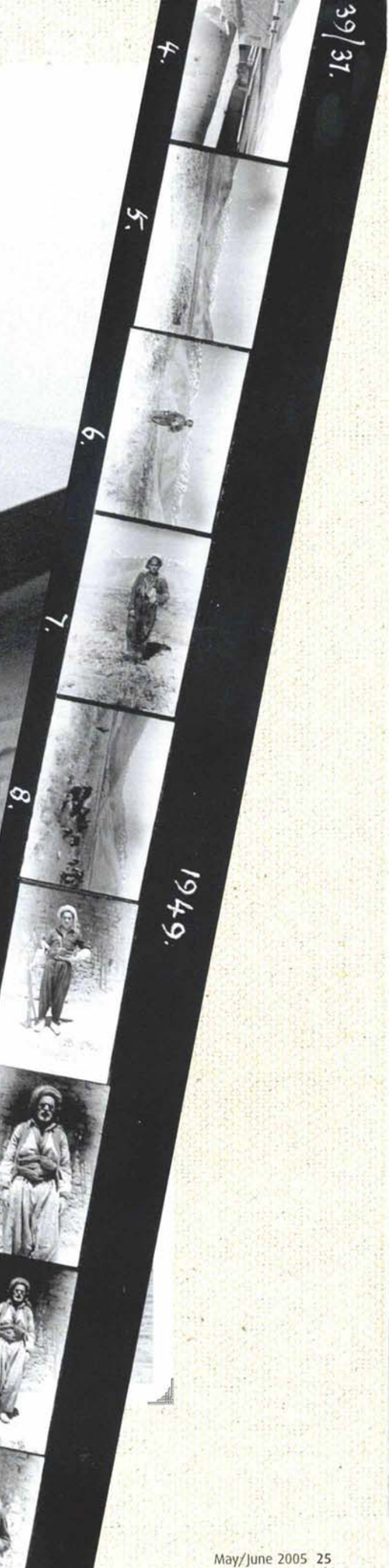
THE WORLD OF HIS CHOICE







WRITTEN BY LEE LAWRENCE

PHOTOGRAPHS BY WILFRED THESIGER, COURTESY OF THE PITT RIVERS MUSEUM

Wilfred Thesiger often said he regretted not having lived 50 years earlier, before planes and cars shrank the globe. As it was, he came into the world in June 1910 in Addis Ababa, where his father was serving as head of the British legation in Abyssinia, today's Ethiopia. To his young eyes, it was a world of big-game hunting, horseback riding and impressive columns of Shoan warriors marching into battle. At the end of World War I, at age nine, he was sent back to Britain for 12 years of schooling, including Eton and Oxford. In those years, Ford began mass-producing automobiles, Lindbergh flew across the Atlantic, and the world of Thesiger's childhood began rapidly to disappear.

In 1930 he took a break from Oxford to return to Addis Ababa for the coronation of an old family friend as the emperor Haile Selassie. There, he snapped photographs of the ceremonies with his father's Kodak Brownie box camera. He chose not to make photographs of the air show that was one feature of the celebrations, though he mentioned it in his diary. With that choice, he gave the first hint of the directions in which he would point both his career and his camera.

Following the coronation, Thesiger undertook his first exploration up the largely uncharted Awash River, accompanied by a retinue of local guides and porters. The trip afforded him a weeklong taste of life in the wild sufficiently thrilling to prompt his return three years later, after he had completed his Oxford exams. This time, he discovered the elusive source of the Awash, high in the country inhabited by the Danakil, who violently resented the intrusions of outsiders. Thesiger apparently impressed them with sincerity and his apolitical purposes, and he passed unharmed.

From 1935 to 1939, Thesiger worked for Britain's Sudan Political Service, where he chose the most remote assignments

Above: **Back in Ethiopia for the first time since he was a boy, 20-year-old Thesiger photographed Emperor Haile Selassie's 1930 coronation parade—but not the celebratory air show.** Right: **After the coronation, a weeklong trip up the Awash River with local guides prompted his return in 1933 to discover the river's then-unknown source.** Previous spread: **Salim bin Kabina, one of Thesiger's closest companions on his Empty Quarter expeditions, carries camel fodder beneath the crest of a dune. In 1948, Thesiger became the first westerner to cross the Empty Quarter of Saudi Arabia twice, and it was at that time, he later wrote, that he "began to consider the composition of each photograph, conscious to achieve the best result."**

IN ABYSSINIA, THESIGER IMPRESSED THE DANAKIL PEOPLE AND WAS ABLE TO PASS THROUGH THEIR TERRITORY UNHARMED. IN THE SUDAN POLITICAL SERVICE, HE CHOSE TWO YEARS OF ASSIGNMENTS IN REMOTE DARFUR.

in order to spend as much time as possible away from a desk and atop a camel. He had recently bought a Leica II, which he carried throughout his subsequent service in Sudan, Abyssinia, Syria and Palestine.

By 1945, Thesiger had read—jealously—the accounts of Bertram Thomas and Harry St. John Philby, the first westerners to cross the Rub' al-Khali, or Empty Quarter, of Saudi Arabia in 1930 and 1932, respectively. He had become fascinated with the Empty Quarter and its inhabitants, and he learned Arabic. When the Locust Research Organisation asked him to discover whether there were breeding grounds for locusts in the Arabian desert, he jumped at the offer. In 1946–1947 and again in 1948, Thesiger assembled groups of Bedouin and, taking new, more difficult routes, became the first European to cross the Empty Quarter twice.

"There was of course," he wrote in his autobiography, *The Life of My Choice*, "the lure of the unknown; there was the constant test of resolution and endurance. Yet those travels in the Empty Quarter would have been for me a pointless penance but for the comradeship of my Bedu companions." For months at a time over a five-year period, Thesiger traveled with Bedouin parties throughout the Arabian Peninsula's deserts, pushing himself to exhaustion, sipping brackish well water and risking attack by rival tribes. When he left, he knew "I should never meet their like again. I had witnessed their loyalty to each other.... I knew their pride in themselves and their tribe; their regard for the dignity of others; their hospitality when they went short to feed chance-met strangers; their generosity...their absolute honesty; their courage, patience and endurance and their thoughtfulness."

In 1951, Thesiger was looking to spend a couple of weeks shooting duck, and he headed into the marshes of southern Iraq, where he was smitten with the life of the Ma'dan people. He spent the next seven winters among them. Unlike his time in Arabia, his life in the marshes had a more settled quality, and his basic knowledge of asepsis and his supply of antibiotics earned him a position in society performing circumcisions. In the summer, Thesiger left the marshes to trek in the mountains of northern Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India, and one year he joined Iran's Bakhtiari tribe for its grueling annual migration across the Zagros Mountains.

Between these ventures, Thesiger would return to England, where he visited family, and in the mid-1950's he began taking yearly summer trips around Europe, North Africa or the Middle East with his mother, Kathleen Mary, traveling by train and automobile and staying in "reasonably priced hotels," as he told biographer Michael Asher. Significantly, these trips are almost entirely absent from his photographic archive.

It was his photographs that, in the mid-1950's, prompted a literary agent to urge Thesiger to write a book, thus echoing Kathleen Mary's own persistent pleas. Finally acquiescing, Thesiger holed up in an apartment in Denmark with copies

Upper: **On the steps of the British legation building in Addis Ababa, young Thesiger (at left) waits while a servant helps his mother, Kathleen Mary Thesiger, to seat his brother Brian in a wicker seat atop a mule. Thesiger's father served as British Minister to Abyssinia from 1909 to 1919.** Above: **Only a handful of photos in the Thesiger Collection are from the frequent summer trips he took with his mother. This photo of the Parthenon, from a 1954 trip to Athens, shows a small, single figure in a landscape in which signs of "modernity" are absent—a favorite compositional device of Thesiger's.**

of his Royal Geographical Society reports, letters home, diaries and boxfuls of photographs. According to Alexander Maitland, now writing Thesiger's authorized biography, the diaries were "massive, but they are very workaday documents." He and others familiar with Thesiger's archives agree that the photographs were essential to his reconstructions of his Empty Quarter and later journeys. "I think the photographs certainly kept the [journey] alive for him," says Maitland. "They were the source for one of the things he did best, which was carefully honed descriptive writing." The result of Thesiger's effort was the first of 10 books Thesiger would author about his travels, the highly acclaimed *Arabian Sands*, published in 1959.

From 1968 onward, Thesiger made his base in Kenya among the Samburu and Turkana tribes. He would have liked to die there, he said, but in the mid-1990's deteriorating health forced him to return to England. A man who had sought to share the rigors of male nomad societies all his adult life, Thesiger lived out his last years in a nursing home in Surrey populated largely by women. He died on August 24, 2003.

He left a photographic legacy of thousands of prints, 75 albums and 38,000 negatives. These photos, Thesiger wrote, were his "most cherished possessions," thanks to which he could "live once more in a vanished world."

What world exactly was this? What are we, today, to make of it?

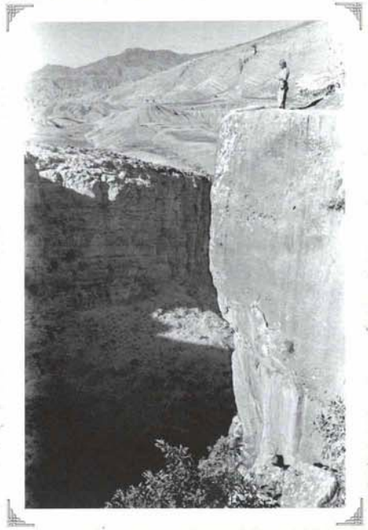
In one photograph, a man, back to the camera, looks out over rocky, rugged terrain that fills the frame of the photograph. In another shot, a Bedouin sits on his haunches, rifle planted by his side. A third image shows a chain of camels cresting a dune. In a fourth, a boy turns back toward the camera as he poles a canoe through tall reeds.

These images are the kind we have come to associate with Wilfred Thesiger, and that define the Thesiger Collection.

The great majority of photos in the archive date from his 1946 journey across the Empty Quarter of Arabia onward, for it was during that first desert crossing that he "began to consider the composition of each photograph, conscious to achieve the best result. From then on," he stated in *Visions of a Nomad*, "photography became a major interest." In his early Royal Geographical Society reports as well as in his later books, he used his photographs as simple illustrations; however, since the late 1980's, many of the photographs have themselves become the subjects of books and exhibitions. By the time he died, he

From top: **Empty Quarter, Saudi Arabia, 1948. Chilinji Pass, India, 1953. Trees in a gale, Hamar, Iraq, 1953.** Right: **Wahiba Sands, Oman, 1949.** Opposite, from top: **Ruwunduz, Kurdish Iraq, 1950. Rabadh Sands, United Arab Emirates, 1950. Chilinji Pass, India, 1953. For all their stark beauty, Thesiger's landscapes tell us more about Thesiger himself than they do about the lives of the few small, isolated human figures in them. The lives of the nomads he traveled with often included rich family connections and contact with towns and cities.**

TO PARAPHRASE THE PHILOSOPHER VILÉM FLUSSER, PHOTOGRAPHS DO NOT PRESENT THE WORLD AS IT IS; RATHER, THEY ENCHANT US INTO BELIEVING THAT THE WORLD IS A CERTAIN WAY.

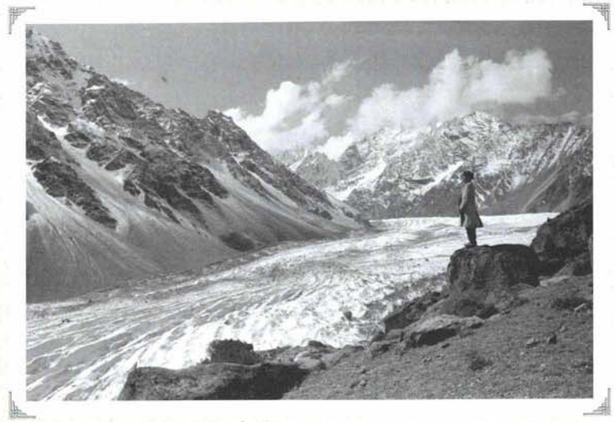


was as well known in Europe for his arresting portraits of Bedouin and Marsh Arabs as he was for his writings. In both, the appeal lay at least in part in the romantic representations of times and places European audiences had never experienced.

Thesiger's albums, prints and negatives were bequeathed to the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford, England. Thanks to a grant from the late President Shaykh Zayed bin Al Nahyan of the United Arab Emirates, a team of three archivists has spent a year identifying, inventorying, cataloging and digitizing Thesiger's 38,000 negatives. To encourage further research, the museum is posting the catalog on its Web site along with a selection of heretofore unpublished images.

Now, for the first time, Thesiger's photographic work can be studied as a whole. Already senior curator Elizabeth Edwards has discovered a wealth of ethnographic material: series documenting the Samburus' body art in Kenya and circumcision rituals in Iraq and Kenya, as well as many shots that contain information about the way people dressed, lived and made everyday objects. "People have made esthetic judgments about his photographs," Edwards says, and now she hopes they will mine them for information, too.

More generally, the archive can reveal how Thesiger felt about the lands and peoples he photographed, and also much about the differences between viewing a single image in isolation and seeing it within the context and discernible patterns of an archive. It is important to remember that photographs are like statistics: By their very selectivity, they have a way of appearing factual even while spinning fictions. Or, to paraphrase the German–Czech–Brazilian philosopher Vilém Flusser, photographs do not present the world as it is; rather, they "enchant" us into



believing that the world is a certain way. Archives, backed as they are by institutions with the power to compile, preserve and index, add a mantle of authority that cuts two ways: Sometimes it magnifies the spell of individual photographs; at other times, the succession of images in an archive helps to dispel the "enchantment" of the single photo with evidence of how it was made.

For example, the Thesiger Collection presents a chronological sequence of negatives spanning decades and continents. Since there are no significant gaps in this sequence, it is easy to assume that the archive chronicles all of Thesiger's travels. From this, it is equally easy to conjure a specific image of a man forever seeking adventure and traveling under difficult conditions in remote places. It is an image that leaves little room for the fact that Thesiger took annual trips with his mother for more than 15 years. Except for a handful of mostly architectural photographs, the Thesiger Collection hardly acknowledges that these trips took place.

Indeed, the archive presents only a world in which camels plod through sand, dhows sail into harbors, and horses clamber up mountain trails. Lone figures look out over untouched landscapes, children live in the villages of their grandfathers, and the faces of individual men and children fill frame after frame, their dark eyes often peering straight at us. On the whole, there is a static quality to the images, as few show a chance or fortuitous event unlikely ever to be repeated; when action shots occur, they portray activities we imagine people have been performing for generations: watering animals at desert wells, circumcision rituals, braiding thatch housing in the marshes, making coffee on a campfire, herding livestock across mountains or converging on a pilgrimage site.

It is a world, moreover, devoid of color. This was not always a deliberate choice on Thesiger's part, since color film was not widely available during most of his active years. Nevertheless, it is telling that, given a choice, even later on Thesiger favored black and white, tracing this to his preference for prints and drawings over paintings. "Colour," he wrote, "aims to reproduce exactly what is seen by the photographer.... With black and white, on the other hand, each subject offers its own variety of possibilities according to the use made by the photographer of light and shade."

Mary Peck, one of America's leading photographers of regional landscapes, has, like Thesiger, traveled in deserts and mountains. She helps clarify what Thesiger may have been getting at in his praise of black and white. "It is a remove from the supposed reality that color gives us," Peck explains, adding that she finds black and white film "a way to try to translate an experience" that gives her "a better chance of guiding a viewer's reaction."

"Those travels in the Empty Quarter would have been for me a pointless penance but for the comradeship of my Bedu companions," Thesiger wrote. "I knew their pride in themselves and their tribe; their regard for the dignity of others; their hospitality when they went short to feed chance-met strangers."

This holds true in the Thesiger Collection. Were we to stand, say, in the desert, we would experience the way in which the reds, tans and oranges of dunes and the blues of the sky intensify and wane over the course of a day. Dunes would be differentiated not only by light and shadow, but also by their hues, and desert shrubs would sometimes sprout green leaves and blooms, indicating a recent rain. While color film chronicles such variations vividly, black and white film does not. The sun's journey across the sky registers only as a deepening of shadows, with the sand appearing somewhat whiter at noon and grayer at dusk. The sky remains a constant, whitish expanse occasionally interrupted by clouds. Shrubs and trees appear uniformly gray, whether they are in leaf or desiccated. The use of black and white suspends time, and it strengthens the impression of changelessness.

Two portraits in full sunlight of Sultan, a *shaykh* of the Bait Kathir tribe and one of Thesiger's companions on his first Empty Quarter expedition.

Moreover, just as black and white photography erases the differences in hue among the dunes, it also creates artificial similarities. The lines in some of Thesiger's mountain views in Kurdistan and Pakistan, for example, echo those in his Arabian landscapes, both favoring converging lines and balanced compositions typical of European landscape painting. In black and white, these compositional similarities become more prominent, causing the scenes to resemble one another more closely than they might in color: The various reddish shades of the dunes would set desert landscapes well apart from mountains covered in white snow. In Thesiger's images, the chromatic similarities reinforce the compositional ones to create the impression that the lands and peoples all belong to the same timeless, changeless pre-modern era—a most romantic notion.

There is yet another way in which the archive magnifies the "enchantment" of individual images. Based on a single black-and-white shot of, say, women at a well or men dressed in traditional garb, we might not assume that their world was completely untouched by modernity. But a steady succession of such scenes is more likely to enchant us into believing that the camera has recorded all there is to see. If there had been signs of modernity, we might think, they would have appeared, and thus we conclude that they were not there.

Yet this was not the case. "There were certainly cars in Salalah, where Wilfred began his journey to cross the Empty Quarter," says Asher, himself the winner of two awards for desert exploration. "Wilfred even mentions—not in his books, but in one of his reports back to the Royal Geographical Society—that they followed a motor track for some way when they got to the other side of the Empty Quarter. And you may remember also that when he and his party were arrested [during his second crossing of the Empty Quarter], they were actually taken off in a truck." It is right there, as he points out, in *Arabian Sands*.

So are references to airplanes: In 1946, following Thesiger's first taste of the Empty Quarter, a member of his Bedouin traveling party, Musallim bin Tafl, became the first in his tribe to board a plane. A year and a half later, a favorite companion, Salim bin Ghabaisha, flew from Salalah to Hadhramawt at Thesiger's insistence in order to join the expedition in time for the second crossing. None of this could have occurred in the world the

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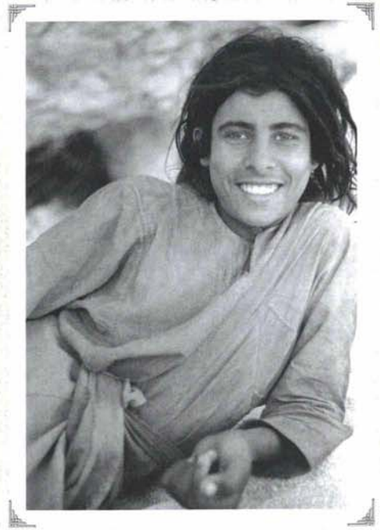
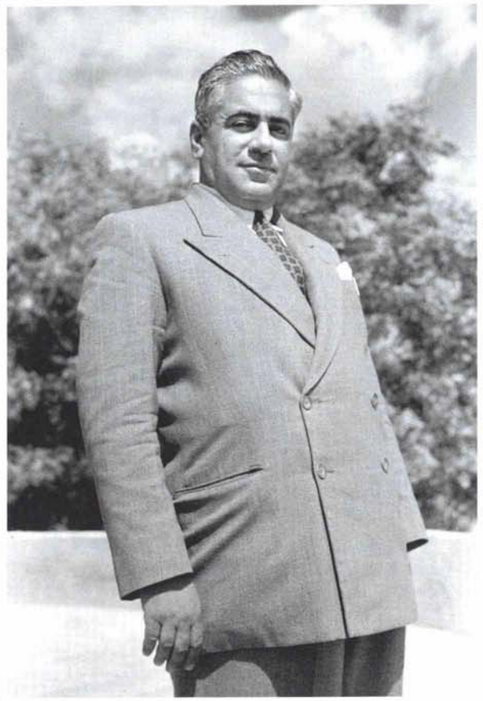
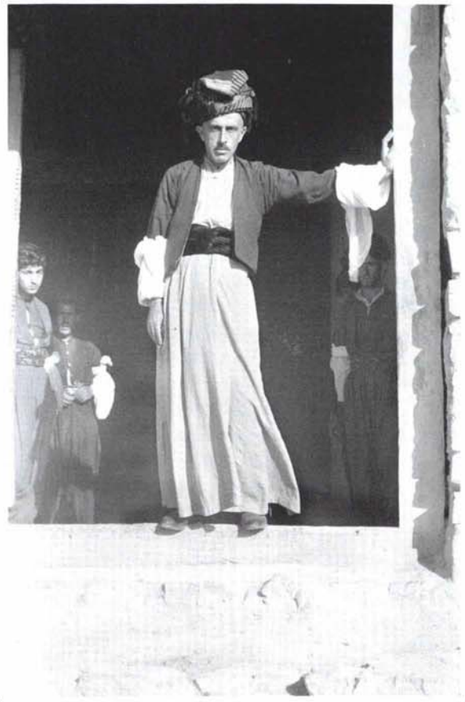


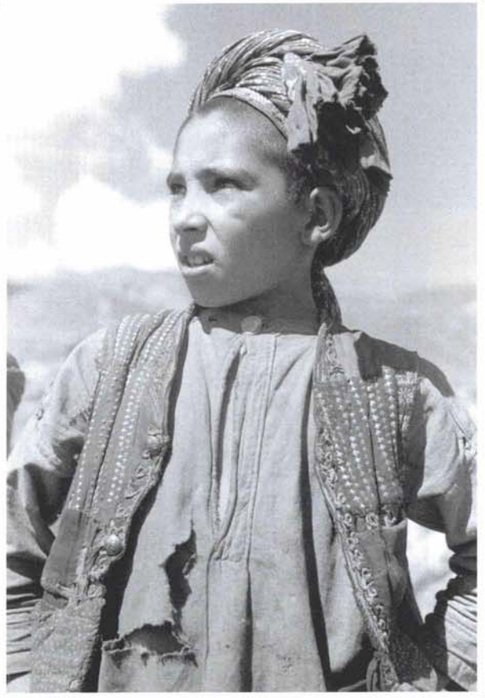
Right: **This portrait of Salim bin Ghabaisha, another of Thesiger's guides in the Empty Quarter, is one of few in those years that Thesiger did not take in bright sunlight, allowing Bin Ghabaisha to open his eyes for a more engaging gaze. This was the same year Bin Ghabaisha flew on an airplane to join Thesiger's expedition.**
Opposite: **Portraits of youths from Omdurman, Sudan, 1939–1940.**





Upper row, from left: **Four portraits from Kurdish Iraq: A man in a double-breasted suit, 1951; Daud Bek of Aba Ubaidha, 1950; a Herki boy, 1950; a man of the Barzan, 1950.**

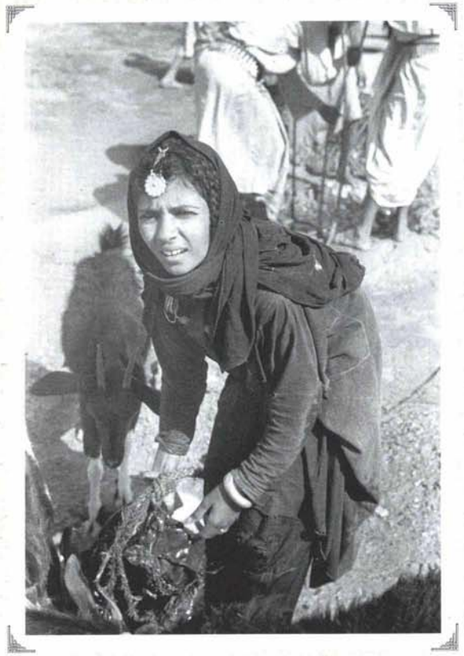
Lower row, from left: **A man of the Junuba, Oman, 1950. Falconer, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, 1950. Samail bin Tahi, Rashid tribe, Oman, 1949. Boy, Pakistan, 1953.**



(cont. from page 31) Thesiger Collection conjures up. "I would say that Wilfred was definitely setting out in his photographs to create a world that no longer existed," Asher says.

This world is one largely populated by men whose faces fill frame after frame in the archive, bearing witness to Thesiger's assertion that it was people, not places, "who offered me the most interesting subjects." In all but a handful of Thesiger's portraits, the subjects are squinting in harsh sunlight, their half-closed eyelids protecting them not only from the sun's rays but perhaps also from our gaze.

At one level, many of Thesiger's portraits follow a convention of his day whereby photographers called forth squints



THE MEN IN THESIGER'S PHOTOGRAPHS LIVE IN THE LANDSCAPE AS INSIDERS, AND THEIR CONTEMPLATION CAN INDUCE VIEWERS TO SEE IT FROM THEIR POINT OF VIEW.

and their radiating wrinkles when they wanted to mark their subject as "an outdoor type" or a member of a pre-modern "primitive society." The squint also speaks of authenticity: It is proof that Thesiger was not photographing people in a studio but in their environment. At another level, the squint prevents us from looking deeply into the subjects' eyes, perhaps marking them as people whose soul a European viewer could not easily know.

At the same time, the light falls at enough of an angle to bring out the texture of skin and cloth. We see the stringy fringe of a headscarf, sand grains in matted hair, the wrinkles in newly washed cotton, the lines on individual faces. Such detail can heighten our empathy with people strong enough to withstand the harsh conditions that etch such deep wrinkles into their skin. The children portrayed may not yet bear the traces of hardship, but their juxtaposition with their elders implies that they will in time.

This is not to suggest that the portraits create a total romantic fiction. Whether in the desert, marshes or mountains, life was and often remains hard by any standard, and the faces of the men and the rugged landscapes were indeed as they appear in the photographs. Yet we know from Thesiger's and others' accounts that the Bedouin, for example, spent part of the year living in cities and with their families, as did many of the men in the Iraqi marshes. To take the archive at face value is to believe that the men portrayed lacked family lives, made their way in small bands across inhospitable lands, gathered in guest houses or stood alone contemplating trackless terrain.

Given Thesiger's admiration for the "comradeship" he found in his travels, it is perhaps surprising that images of lone men in large landscapes are such a recurring, even archetypal pattern. Such an image first appears in a 1946 shot taken in Oman; it then recurs in various settings, even in a shot of the Parthenon that is one of the rare photographs Thesiger took during his travels in Europe with his mother. Such images say more about a 19th-century convention popular with British picturesque photographers (and no less popular today) than it does about nomadic life.

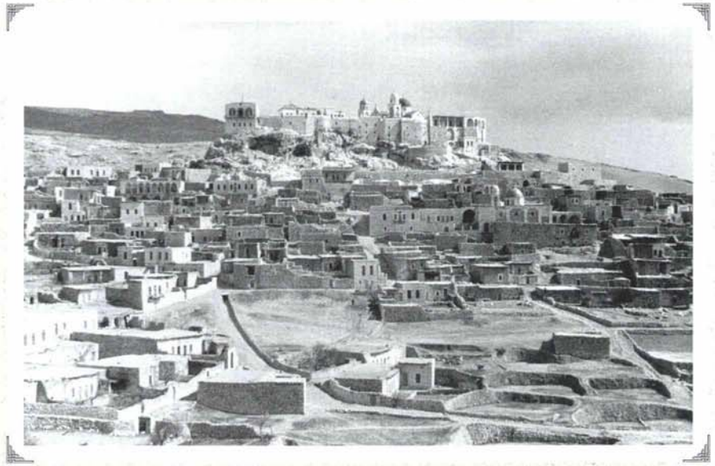
In Britain such scenes were often staged using a man in city clothes who stood in the foreground to illustrate the vastness of nature and to induce viewers to appreciate and contemplate it with him. But there is a salient difference between those photographs and

Top: **This photo of a Wahiba girl at a well in Oman, 1949, is one of few in the archive that show women.** Left: **Four men from the Manasir tribe gather in front of a tent, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, 1948 or 1949.**

Thesiger's. The men in the British prototypes contemplate the landscape as outsiders in the country for a day of reflection; the men in Thesiger's photographs live in the landscape as insiders, and their contemplation can induce viewers to see it from their point of view.

In many of these photos, Thesiger showed a landscape that rose high behind the subjects. Indeed, with the exception of photographs taken in the Iraqi marshes, Thesiger's horizon line tended to remain high throughout much of the archive, so that we come away with a sense that there is no escaping the land. Whether sand, water or rock-strewn mountains, these untamed landscapes define men's lives and require that men adapt to them and not the other way around. As Edwards notes, "there is not that caressing of the landscape you see in, say, pictures of the American West. Thesiger is interested in how people survive in these landscapes."

If the archive strengthens the spell cast by individual photographs of a pre-modern world inhabited by lone men, its succession of images also serves elsewhere to diminish the power of individual images. Viewed singly, a photograph of Bin Ghabaisha might lead us to believe that Thesiger had either happened upon him or asked him to pose for a photograph. But the portrait of Bin Ghabaisha turns out to be one of five successive photographs of the young man, all taken in front of the same rock, and two more portraits follow of two other boys at the same location. Such series of portraits of various people at the same site recur frequently. One series

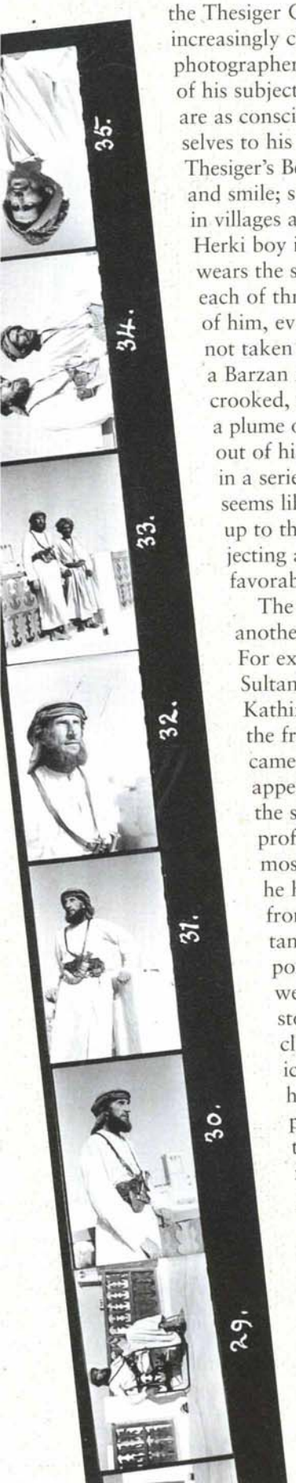


totals 11 portraits of different Kurdish villagers, all taken at the same spot.

We thus can imagine a far different scenario: Thesiger snapping the photograph of one villager, only to find others queuing up for a turn to pose. This raises the question of who is in control of the process of representation. In the one case, the photographer (or editor, publisher or curator) selects which portraits will be published to represent a given people. Within the much broader and less selective archive, on the

Above: **Syria, 1938, where Thesiger sojourned among the Druze.** Below: **Thesiger's traveling party in Jiddat al Harasis, Oman, 1947.**

other hand, the individuals who stepped before the camera uninvited have as much say in who represents their group as the photographer had.

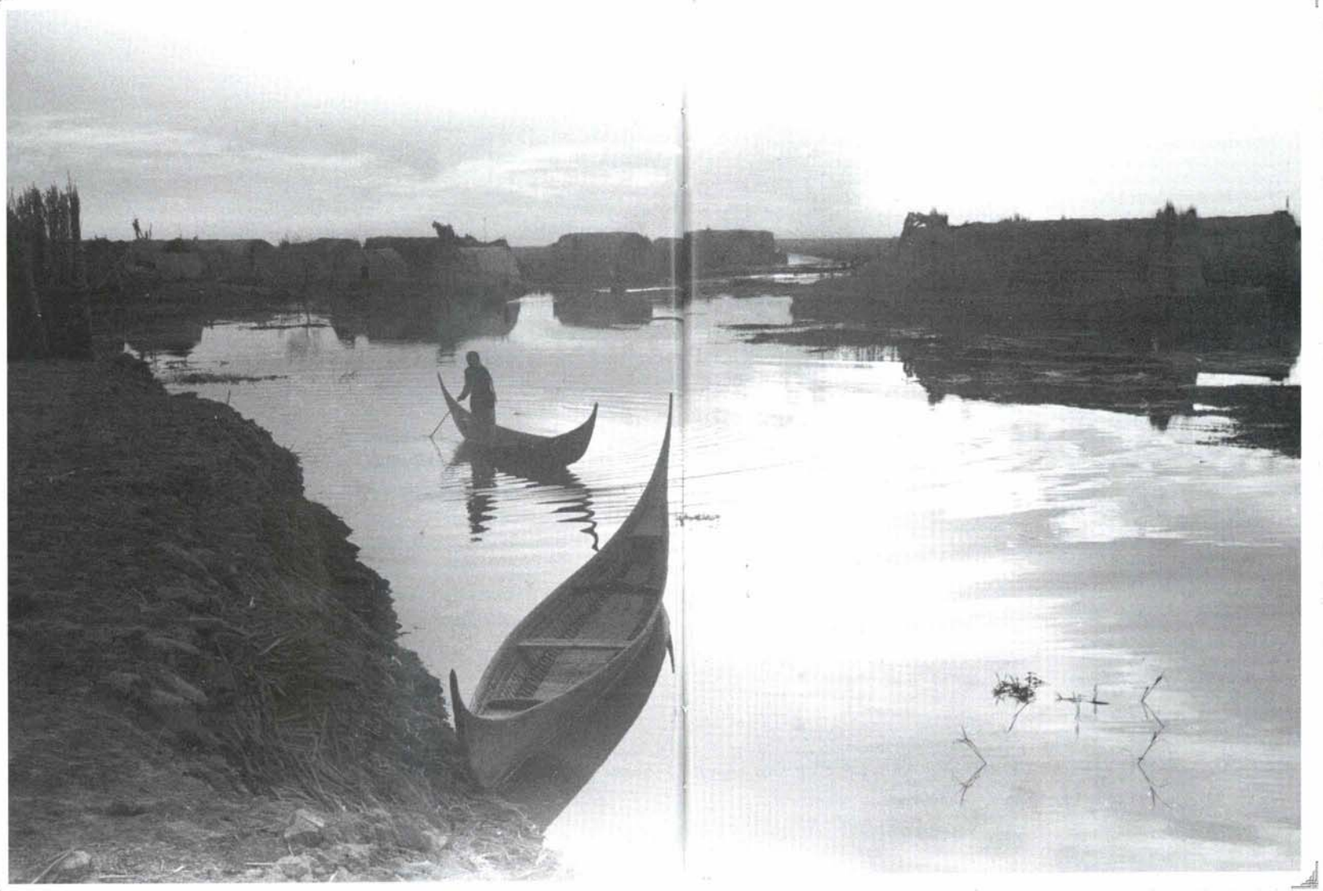


As we move chronologically through the Thesiger Collection, it becomes increasingly clear that, just as the photographer is capturing his vision of his subjects, the people portrayed are as consciously presenting themselves to his camera. Some of Thesiger's Bedouin companions relax and smile; some people he encounters in villages appear to strike poses. A Herki boy in Khazna, for example, wears the same stern expression in each of three shots Thesiger took of him, even though these were not taken in succession. Similarly, a Barzan man poses, one arm crooked, the other holding a pipe, a plume of smoke blowing sideways out of his mouth. Since this is one in a series of same-site portraits, it seems likely that the man stepped up to the camera intent on projecting a particular—presumably favorable—image of himself.

The archive also reveals another type of portrait series. For example, a photograph of Sultan, a Bedouin of the Bayt Kathir tribe, shows him from the front, looking into the camera; in the next frame, he appears in the same pose at the same spot, but this time in profile. Since Thesiger worked mostly with a standard 55mm lens, he had to photograph his subjects from about two meters' (6'6") distance to get a head-and-shoulders portrait. Looking at the archive, we imagine Thesiger, who himself stood almost two meters tall, circling his subject, leaning in periodically to take a reading with his hand-held light meter, then stepping back to take the shot while the subject collaborated by not moving, giving the frontal and profile sequences we see.

Such series are typical, particularly during Thesiger's first two years in Arabia, and even though they occur less frequently after that, the format persists through his time in Kenya in the 1980's. Those frames taken at a level or slightly downward angle recall the way colonial ethnographers documented "Orientals" in the 1800's and the way colonial police in India recorded criminals—the antecedents, in other words, of our frontal-and-profile mug shots. But it is as though Thesiger himself caught this resemblance and fought against it. In the albums, he often chose only one of the pair or, when displaying both, reversed their order so that we first see the profile followed by the frontal view.

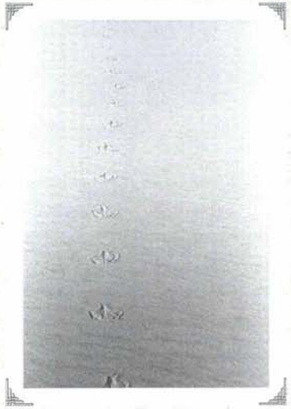
More telling yet is that as time goes on, he varies the angle. Three-quarter views often replace frontal shots, and the angle of the camera changes from slightly downward to upward, so that he captures the subject soaring dramatically against the sky. If the closeness and the detail of the portrait invite our empathy, this dramatic upward angle creates monumentality and elicits our admiration, making us literally "look up to" these men.



Above: **Dusk in Hosni, in the central marshes of Iraq, 1951.** Left: **Portraits of Thesiger by an unnamed companion in the United Arab Emirates, 1949.** Opposite, far right: **Pelican tracks in the Empty Quarter, Saudi Arabia, 1948.**

As with his figures in landscapes, Thesiger's portraits are mainly rooted in colonial and picturesque precedents. Like colonial representations of non-European societies, the Thesiger Collection conjures a world suspended in time in which men live in harsh, primitive conditions. There is more than a touch of the "noble savage" in the way Thesiger eulogizes these men—and some women—who, he contended, "had no concept of any world other than their own" yet were on the verge of seeing modernity alter their way of life.

If such melancholy reeks of latent colonialism, the archive also works against such attitudes. Unlike colonial archives, the Thesiger Collection teems not with "types," but with named individuals, and when the photographer himself appears in this world, it is not as conqueror or outside observer, but as a fellow traveler, respectful of his companions and striving to be accepted as their equal. In portraits taken in Saudi Arabia, Thesiger poses the way his Bedouin subjects pose, and he dresses the way they do. The shots are taken from a similar distance, and at the same variety of angles, so were it not for his European features, there would be no distinguishing Thesiger from the Bedouin. Since Leica only introduced a self-timer in 1950, one of Thesiger's companions must have operated the camera for those shots, even if Thesiger set them up. According to a caption in *Desert, Marsh & Mountain*, in at least one case this job of photographer fell to Bin Kabina, a favorite traveling companion.



The act of handing his camera to the young man so that he, Thesiger, could place himself in Bin Kabina's world contains an obvious irony, and also poignantly highlights the yearning that infuses the Thesiger Collection. While his other portraits and landscapes work together to enchant us into believing in worlds so harsh that they sculpted men into heroes, the self-portraits assert that Thesiger not only witnessed these worlds but lived in them, and can thus claim for himself some of the heroism and admiration he bestowed on the Bedouin, the Kurds and other nomadic peoples.

At the same time, the Thesiger Collection proves by its very existence that modern technology had already encroached upon those worlds. We are thus left between the enchantment and the abolition of the enchantment, in a limbo much like the one that Thesiger himself inhabited as, try as he might to prove otherwise, his ideal pre-modern world slipped into the past.

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Related articles from past issues can be found on our Web site, www.saudiaramcoworld.com. Click on "indexes," then on the cover of the issue indicated below.

Life of Thesiger: J/A 81
Thesiger in Yemen: J/A 80
Marsh Arabs (Ma'dan): N/D 66, M/A 82
Crossing the Rub' al-Khali: M/J 89

By Wilfred Thesiger:
Arabian Sands (1959)
The Marsh Arabs (1964)
Desert, Marsh & Mountain (1979)
The Last Nomad (1980)
The Life of My Choice (1987)
Visions of a Nomad (1987)
My Kenya Days (1995)
Danakil Diary (1996)
Crossing the Sands (2000)
The Desert (2000)
A Vanished World (2001)

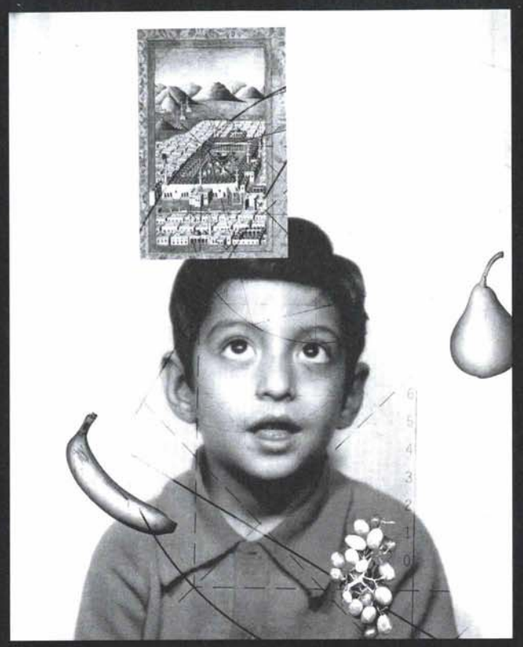
Additional reading:

Thesiger: A Biography. Michael Asher. 1994, Penguin, 0-67083-769-5, hb.

Wilfred Thesiger: A Life in Pictures. Alexander Maitland. 2004, HarperCollins, 1-86063-165-7, hb.

Pitt Rivers Museum: www.prm.ox.ac.uk

Events&Exhibitions



Nazar: Photographs From the Arab World is a two-part exhibition of 250 works by 18 Arab and 17 non-Arab photographers that presents the complex contemporary cultures of Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Tunisia, Iraq, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Algeria. Reportage, landscape, studio and conceptual photography appear alongside vintage images from the Arab Image Foundation archive. "The diversity is staggering," wrote reviewer Patricia Johnson in the *Houston Chronicle*. "It offers symbolic images and surrealist ones, appropriation, formal portraiture, candid shots, landscapes and cityscapes. In both content and style, the show is as complex as the region it covers." ⓘ www.fotofest.org. **Arab Eyes** and **A Look Back** show Arab photographers at FotoFest, **Houston**, through June 11; **Western Eyes** shows western photographers at the ArtCar Museum, **Houston**, through June 25.

"Memory of Memories 1" by Anas Al-Shaikh (Bahrain), 2001.

<< Ongoing

Alexandria: Paintings by Anna Boghigiuan demonstrates the contemporary Egyptian painter's understanding of form and structure. In her depictions of bridges, buildings and other architectural sites, she shows squeezed or elongated structures in the process of deconstruction. Safar Khan Gallery, **Cairo, Egypt**, through May 22.

"The Hour Has Come": Paintings by Issam el-Said, the Baghdad-born, London-trained theorist and artist, are exhibited at the Aya Gallery, **London**, through May 25.

Art of the Ancient Mediterranean World: Ancient Egypt, Greece and Rome shows 204 works that span a period from predynastic Egypt—6000 years ago—to the Roman late imperial period about AD 350. Egyptian, Greek and Roman civilizations developed neither in sequence nor in parallel, but changed in a complicated and interactive manner, and this exhibition demonstrates how they influenced one another throughout their histories through travel and trade on the Mediterranean Sea. Drawing on evidence from history, archeology, folklore, geography, religion and culture, the exhibition traces the rise and fall of power-seekers, the unchanging daily needs of ordinary people and, above all, their creative energy. BYU Museum of Art, **Provo, Utah**, through June 4.

Edge of Desire: Recent Art in India offers a decade-long perspective on contemporary visual practices in India, presenting works dating from 1993 to the present that speak through a rich variety of materials and in a rich variety of idioms. The exhibition includes 80 works by more than 30 artists who represent three generations and who work in sculpture, painting, drawing, installation, video and interactive media. **Queens** Museum of Art, **New York**, and Asia Society, **New York**, through June 5.

Fatal Love: South Asian American Art Now presents the work of some of the most important, engaged and emotionally charged artists of South Asian descent now working in the northeastern United States, particularly New York City. It features contemporary photographic, print, video, web-based and installation works and captures an important moment of change, focus and redefinition in South Asian–American art: a movement from an art that seeks to define an identity for the community to an art that, since September 11, seeks to resist an often distorted and limited identity imposed by media and government. **Queens** Museum of Art, **New York**, through June 5.

Beyond the Bag: Textiles as Containers explores the ways different cultures create textiles to be used as containers, whether for specific purposes—like the Iranian salt bags on display—for general utility or to convey festivity, gender or status. Unlike clay or glass containers, textile containers adapt to their contents and collapse to take up minimal space when not in use. Exhibited containers come from Mexico, Central Asia and Iran. Textile Museum, **Washington, D.C.**, through June 5.

Art of the Written Word in the Middle East. Throughout the Middle East, the written word is an emblem of the highest learning, the deepest thought and the greatest beauty, and is often incorporated in works of fine art. This exhibition explores different forms of the beauty of writing through manuscript pages of religious, scientific and legal texts; poetry and prose; and inscribed tiles, ceramics and metalwork. University of **Michigan** Museum of Art, **Ann Arbor**, through June 5.

The Sharjah Biennial 7, on the theme "belonging," raises the questions of intersecting artistic traditions and partaking in "globalized" art events: To what point must the event transcend local prerogatives, and how can it uphold its specificity without looking helpless or folkloric? More than 70 artists are exhibited. **Sharjah** Art Museum and Expo Centre **Sharjah, United Arab Emirates**, through June 6.

Pharaoh was far more than a sovereign: He was also god, priest-king, victorious warrior and uxorious family man—guarantor of the equilibrium of the world. All power in his immense realm, unified around 3300 BC, was his. This exhibition traces the principal stages of Egypt's history through the monuments left behind, beginning with a gallery of pharaonic portraits. Some 200 objects, mostly from the brilliant New Empire period (ca. 1550–1069 BC), illuminate different aspects of the rulers' personalities. Institut du Monde Arabe, **Paris**, through June 12.

From Mind, Heart, and Hand: Persian, Turkish, and Indian Drawings from the Stuart Cary Welch Collection features 76 Indian, Persian and Turkish drawings that date from the 15th through the 18th century, and also includes a small selection from the early colonial era in India. The exhibition showcases the role that drawings played within the artistic traditions of Persia (modern-day Iran), Turkey and India. A wide range of drawing applications will be represented, from spontaneous sketches to master drawings that were highly prized works of art in their own right. Fogg Art Museum, **Cambridge, Massachusetts**, through June 12.

Treasures from the Royal Tombs of Ur features more than 200 Sumerian treasures that reveal traditions of royal life and death, excavated in the 1920's by Sir Leonard Woolley. They include the famous 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. Catalog $75/$50. University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archeology and Anthropology, **Philadelphia**, through June 18.

Wealth of Africa: 4000 Years of Money and Trade highlights a long and rich history spanning ancient kingdoms, colonialism and independence. The story begins with the use of weighed metal in ancient Egypt, and with Africa's earliest coins in Cyrenaica (today's Libya) in the sixth century BC. The wealth of Mali, Zimbabwe and the Swahili coast show Africa's power and influence before the arrival of European traders whose legacy, including colonialism, continues to profoundly affect the economic expression of African cultures. British Museum, **London**, through June 26.

FOTOFEST

<< Ongoing

Luxury and Luminosity: Visual Culture and the Ming Court includes 48 objects—not all of them blue-and-white, and not all porcelain—that demonstrate the dynasty's connections with other cultures and the artistic influence it exchanged with them. Ming artists' use of turquoise and cobalt blue probably derived from ceramics imported from the Islamic world, and Ming porcelain was exported in enormous quantities to Egypt, Turkey and other parts of the Muslim world. Freer Gallery, **Washington, D.C.**, through June 26.

The Sport of Kings: Art of the Hunt in Iran and India explores the rich traditions of the hunt in West and South Asia through a presentation of paintings, ceramics, decorative arts and weaponry. The exhibition focuses on forms of hunting and on thematic associations of hunting, warfare and kingship. Sackler Museum, Harvard University, **Cambridge, Massachusetts**, through June 26.

Antoin Sevruguin and the Persian Image offers a rare look at Iran at the turn of the 20th century through images made by one of that country's most renowned early photographers. They include self-portraits, portraits of Iranians, ethnographic images, scenes from the royal court, landscapes and images of historic sites. The photographs, of great technical precision and artistry, are complemented by a small selection of late 19th- and early 20th-century Persian artifacts. University of Pennsylvania Museum, **Philadelphia**, through July 2.

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. The program is fully funded and workshops may be requested by any school, district, office of education or university. ⓘ www.awair@igc.org, www.mepc.org or www.awaironline.org; 510-704-0517. Sites and dates currently scheduled include: **Anchorage, Alaska**, June 17–21; **Sacramento, California**, July 6–7; **Cambridge, Massachusetts**, July 27–28; **Las Vegas, Nevada**, September 22–24; **Jordan, Utah**, October 1 and 8; **Birmingham, Alabama**, October 13–14; **Concord, New Hampshire**, November 4 and December 9; **Niagara Falls, New York**, November 8–9; **Louisville, Kentucky**, November 17–18.

Iraq and China: Ceramics, Trade and Innovation focuses on revolutionary changes that took place in Iraqi ceramics during the ninth century as the humble character of Islamic pottery responded to a wave of luxury Chinese goods. During this period, Iraq became a center for Islamic ceramic production as new technologies transformed common earthenware into a vehicle for complex multi-colored designs. Following the disintegration of the Abbasid Empire after the 10th century, migrating Iraqi potters transmitted these techniques to Egypt and Iran, whence they traveled to Europe, giving rise to the great "majolica" tradition in medieval Spain and Renaissance Italy. In China, 14th-century experiments with cobalt blue from the Islamic world led to Yuan and Ming blue-and-white, which in turn influenced such European production as Delft, Royal Copenhagen and English blue-and-white. Sackler Gallery, **Washington, D.C.**, through July 17.

Views From Africa brings to life the 500-year-old story of African encounters with Europe. From masks to salt cellars, the objects reveal different aspects of European relations with Africa—as perceived by Africans. While some were produced specifically for sale to Europeans, others were made for use in a number of contexts by African communities. Through the challenges of trade, religion, war and independence, the exhibition reflects not only Africans' personal experiences but also a dynamic social engagement with change. British Museum, **London**, through July 24.

Sephardic Horizons uses paintings, graphics and artifacts from the museum's collections to tell the story of Sephardic Jews' creative coexistence with surrounding Christian and Muslim cultures during centuries of spiritual, intellectual and material flowering on the Iberian Peninsula. Magnes Museum, **Berkeley, California**, through July 31.

In the Realm of Princes: The Arts of the Book in Fifteenth-Century Iran and Central Asia. In 1370, the Turkic warlord Timur, known as Tamerlane in the West, conquered a vast territory that extended from Anatolia to the borders of China. He chose Samarkand as his capital and established the Timurid dynasty, whose rule ushered in one of the most artistically brilliant periods in the history of the Islamic world. The exhibition includes some 30 individual objects from the Timurid period, ranging from monumental Qur'an folios and delicately painted manuscript illustrations to an exquisitely carved agate cup and a finely tooled wooden door. They illustrate how Timurid patrons fostered the development of a distinct, highly refined artistic language that bolstered their religious and secular authority and affirmed their role as the rightful heirs of the Persian political, cultural and artistic tradition. The exhibition also includes four rare paintings by the legendary late–15th-century artist Bihzad, never before seen together. Sackler Gallery, **Washington, D.C.**, through August 7.

Mummy: The Inside Story uses cutting-edge computer graphics and the latest scientific and medical research to allow visitors to view a "virtual unwrapping" and autopsy of the 2800-year-old mummy of Nesperunnub, priest of Karnak in Egypt. Visitors sit in a state-of-the-art immersive theater where, wearing 3-D glasses, they can scrutinize the mummy's body and objects inside the wrappings. British Museum, **London**, through August 14.

Petra: Lost City of Stone, a traveling exhibition, features extraordinary art and artifacts from the red sandstone cliff city in southern Jordan. Petra was a major crossroads of international trade routes from the first century BC to the second century of our era, when it was governed by the Nabataeans, who were renowned for their skills in trade, agriculture, engineering and architectural stone carving. The exhibition presents some 200 objects, including stone sculptures and reliefs, ceramics, metalwork and ancient inscriptions, and a selection of 19th-century artworks documenting the European rediscovery of Petra. Calvin College, **Grand Rapids, Michigan**, through August 15; Glenbow Museum, **Calgary, Alberta**, October 29 through February 20.

10,000 Years of Art and Culture From Jordan: Faces of the East presents archeological evidence of the various cultures of the region from the Early Neolithic (eighth millennium BC) to the early years of Islam in the eighth century of our era—a time span during which fundamental developments in the history of civilization took place, as well as events that shaped western culture. Archeological discoveries of the last 15 years have considerably changed our view of the region's history, and now more than 700 superb objects, lent by Jordanian museums, illuminate the great eras and the turning points of important cultures. Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle, **Bonn, Germany**, through August 21.

Africa Garden by Ground Force has been designed as a walk through the continent's three climatic sections: desert, tropical and temperate. Visitors to the garden will be able to make connections among the plant life, its native cultures and the African objects inside the British Museum. **London**, through September 4.

Palace and Mosque: Islamic Art from the Victoria and Albert Museum includes over 100 of the V&A's finest masterpieces. The exhibition highlights recurrent themes in the development of Islamic art from the eighth to the 19th century: the key role of Arabic script and calligraphy; the poetic background of much secular iconography; variation in the use of images in different regions and periods; the development of mathematics and science in the service of religion and in the creation of elaborate geometric designs; the central role of Islam; dynastic patronage in courtly art; artistic interaction with other cultures; and the prestige of Islamic art in medieval and early modern Europe. Kimbell Art Museum, **Fort Worth, Texas**, through September 4.

Textiles for This World and Beyond: Treasures from Insular Southeast Asia explores the important role that textiles in Indonesia and Malaysia play in daily society, their part in many old beliefs and customs still followed today and their use in ceremonies to maintain harmonious relationships with the deceased or the gods. On display are more than 60 Southeast Asian textiles dating from the 19th to the early 20th century, many never before exhibited. Catalog. Textile Museum, **Washington, D.C.**, through September 18.

This Fertile Land: Signs + Symbols in the Early Arts of Iran and Iraq explores late prehistory at about 4000 BC—the pivotal moment just before the development of writing. Imagery on seals and painted pottery used what we must regard as a type of visual language to communicate about wealth and abundance, ritual and magic, health, fertility and sexuality. The exhibition features a remarkable collection of stamp seals, seal impressions and painted vessels. Kelsey Museum of Archaeology, **Ann Arbor, Michigan**, through September 30.

Carved for Immortality. In ancient Egypt, brightly painted carved wooden figures of the deceased were placed in special chambers or niches in tombs to represent the person at different stages of his or her life. In some cases, additional carvings represented family members and servants. Because the wood used was often soft sycamore fig (*Ficus sycamorus*)—appropriate in that twin sycamores were believed to stand at the eastern gate of heaven, from which the sun god Re emerged each morning—relatively few of these statues have survived from ancient times. Walters Art Museum, **Baltimore**, through November 6.

Threads of Tradition: Palestinian Bridal Costumes highlights magnificent embroidery and colorful dresses from the late 19th and early 20th century in the Munayyer Collection. Other *objets d'art*, such as brass oil lamps, inlaid wooden tables and tapestries, complement the dresses. Embroidery patterns, some dating back to pre-Islamic and pre-Christian times, became incorporated into the rich designs and brilliant colors that identify the specific village or town where the dress was made. The collection, one of the most extensive in America, is presented by the Palestinian Heritage Foundation. Antiochian Heritage Museum, **Ligonier, Pennsylvania**, through November 19.

Mummies: Death and the Afterlife in Ancient Egypt features 140 objects—including 14 mummies and/or coffins, the largest collection ever to leave the British Museum—and illustrates the fascinating story of how Egyptians prepared and sent the dead into the afterlife. It covers embalming, coffins, sarcophagi, *shabti* figures, magic and ritual, amulets and papyri, and displays furnishings created specifically for an individual's coffin, such as spectacular gold jewelry and a wooden boat to transport the dead into the underworld. Bowers Museum, **Santa Ana**, California, ongoing.

Morocco: Art and Design 2005 presents a broad overview of the contemporary art climate in Morocco, displaying painting, photography and sculpture as well as industrial and fashion design by 21 artists, all of whom have strong reputations in Morocco, and in some cases also abroad. Wereldmuseum **Rotterdam**, through March 5, 2006.

<< May

In/visible: Contemporary Art by Arab American Artists presents works that shed light on the diversity of contributions by first- and second-generation Americans of Arab heritage, including Rheim Alkadhi, John Halaka, Emily Jacir and Helen Zughaib. Arab American National Museum, **Dearborn, Michigan**, May 19 through October 30.

Continued from previous page

<< May

Osmanli'da Ermeni Bestekarlari: Armenian Composers of the Ottoman Empire will be performed by Armenian performers of Boston with a new generation of Turkish and American musicians. MIT's Big Kresge Hall, **Cambridge, Massachusetts**, May 20.

Exploring New Forms and Meanings: The Intersection of Audience, Ideas and Art will explore modes of representation and reception of Arab–Americans' visual and creative art forms within the context of transnationalism and globalization. Scholars and artists will share their experiences of working between two worlds, and challenge the audience to reassess their notions of art by non-western artists. Arab American National Museum, **Dearborn, Michigan**, May 20–21.

Farid Belkahia, one of the founders of contemporary art in Morocco, presents his most recent work: twelve large, circular maps of the world as it never was, more than 150 centimeters (60") across, painted on cowhide whose natural coloration defines the continents. The "continental drift" he depicts overthrows the usual artistic and geographical orientations. Institut du Monde Arabe, **Paris**, May 24 through July 17.

Ziad Dalloul's colors are earthy, dark and crusty—the colors he remembers from his childhood in Syria and his years in Algeria, the colors that have enabled him to undertake the spiritual discipline of trying to renew past tradition by present-day questioning. This exhibition presents oils, engravings and drawings, and demonstrates the unity and uniqueness of the vision that produced them. Institut du Monde Arabe, **Paris**, May 24 through July 17.

<< June

Teaching Islam in the Undergraduate Curriculum is the subject of a conference featuring distinguished plenary speakers, papers and panels by participants and *liqa'at*—small-group guided conversations on specific topics. Teaching materials will be on display. ⓘ downes@unca.edu. Registration deadline March 20. University of **North Carolina** at **Asheville**, June 2–4.

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***"Kalimuna*—Speak to Us,"** the first conference of the Radius of Arab American Writers, Inc. (RAWI), includes panels where writers from across the United States will discuss everything from literary blogs to teaching Arab–American literature, from hybridity in Arab–American writing to critiquing the community. Leading authors will offer workshops in writing for children, creative nonfiction, starting the novel, poetry and other topics. Evenings will include an open poetry mike and awards. ⓘ www.shems.info/rawi or al-rawi@earthlink.net. Hunter College, **New York**, June 3–5.

Earthenware From Antiquity focuses on the birth and development of the technology of making jewelry, amulets, small statuary, vessels and decoration of glazed and unglazed clay, exhibiting works from Egypt, the Middle East and the Greek and Roman worlds. Beginning in the fourth millennium BC, the technology advanced rapidly in the second, with the use of glass, multiple colors and incrustation, and in the first, when pierced work, relief, vitreous bodies and intense colors appeared. Musée du Louvre, **Paris**, June 10 through September 12.

Genghis Khan and His Heirs: The World Empire of the Mongols presents archeological artifacts, old maps, manuscripts and miniatures that exemplify the cultural achievements of the Mongol Empire, founded 800 years ago. The apogee of a long series of states established by nomads in the steppes of Eurasia, Genghis Khan's empire stretched from the Pacific Ocean to Central Europe and was as efficiently administered as it had been brilliantly and brutally conquered. An effective bureaucracy, a postal system, the use of paper money and broad religious and cultural tolerance were at the foundations of the *Pax Mongolica*; under it, trade in goods and ideas between Europe and Central Asia blossomed until into the 16th century. Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle, **Bonn, Germany**, June 16 through September 25.

Pearls of the Parrot of India. *The Khamsa (Five Tales)* by Indian poet Amir Khusraw Dihlavi, dating from 1597 or 1598, is represented here by one of the most sumptuous manuscripts of the early Mughal period. Twenty-one surviving full-page illustrations from the manuscript are owned by the Walters Art Museum, another eight by the Metropolitan. The unbinding of the Walters's manuscript for conservation purposes will allow all 29 painted folios to be united in this jewel-like exhibition. Also on view will be eight to 10 decorative and text pages from the manuscript and four or five other Persian and Indian manuscripts belonging to the Walters. Walters Art Museum, **Baltimore**, June 19 through September 11; Metropolitan Museum of Art, **New York**, October 14 through January 15.

Matisse, His Art and His Textiles: The Fabric of Dreams presents some 45 paintings, drawings, prints and painted-paper cutouts that attest to Henri Matisse's lifelong interest in textiles, including works from the 1910's and 1920's demonstrating the influence on him of North African fabrics and screens. Metropolitan Museum of Art, **New York**, June 23 through September 25.

Caravan Kingdoms: Yemen and the Ancient Incense Trade. From around 800 BC to the year 600 of our era, the kingdoms of Qataban, Saba (biblical Sheba) and Himyar grew fabulously wealthy from their control over the caravan routes of the southern Arabian Peninsula and, in particular, from the international trade in frankincense and myrrh. Excavations at the capitals of these ancient kingdoms have yielded spectacular examples of architecture, distinctive stone funerary sculpture, elaborate inscriptions on stone, bronze and wood, and sophisticated metalwork. This exhibition of approximately 200 objects explores the unique cultural traditions of these ancient kingdoms, with special emphasis on their rich artistic interaction with the eastern Mediterranean, northeastern Africa, and southern and southwestern Asia. Only North American venue. Sackler Gallery, **Washington, D.C.**, June 25 through September 18.

Paisley and Peacocks: Woven and Embroidered Textiles from Kashmir and North India brings together two very different but equally striking traditional textiles from the Indian subcontinent, both rapidly disappearing: Kashmiri shawls, woven at the foot of the Himalayas from the finest and softest wools in intricate paisley patterns; and boldly embroidered women's head coverings from rural villages in northern India. Kashmiri shawls are treasured for their beautiful patterns, warmth and lightness. By contrast, the village textiles of Hiranya Pradesh and the Punjab are made of rough homespun wool. Long unknown in the West, tribal textiles are rapidly gaining international attention for their bold colors and designs. University of **Michigan** Museum of Art, **Ann Arbor**, June 25 through October 16.

The World History Association's Annual Conference will be on the dual themes of "The Mediterranean in World History" and "Africa in World History," reflecting Morocco's special geographical and cultural position. Scholars, teachers and others are invited to attend. The WHA promotes the study of history with special attention to global processes, and assists teachers at all academic levels by providing venues and media for discussion of innovative pedagogy and the best current research in the field. University of Al Akhawayn, **Ifrane, Morocco**, June 27–29.

<< July

Voices of Southeast Asia combines four unique exhibits to create a celebration of Southeast Asian culture. One presents masks, textiles, ceramics and photographs from Vietnam; in the second, the museum's own permanent Asian collection shows more than 80 world-class sculptures, including rare pieces from Cambodia, China and Thailand that illuminate religions and mythologies. The personal stories of immigrants who left their homelands in Southeast Asia to begin new lives in Canada make up the third exhibit; the fourth presents works of contemporary first-generation Asian–Canadian artists. Glenbow Museum, **Calgary, Alberta**, July 1 through September 25.

The Earthenware of Antiquity: Egypt, the Near East, Greece continues the museum's investigation of artistic techniques, begun with the "Ivories" exhibition, with an examination of the arts of fired earthenware. Using objects from the museum's own collections, the exhibition describes different techniques of creation and the uses of the objects produced. Musée du Louvre, **Paris**, July 1 through September 26.

<< August

Heartland Youth Seminar on Arabic Music offers instruction for ages 8–15 from Karim Nagi Mohammed, Naser Musa and Alan Shavarsh Bardezbanian. ⓘ www.xauen-music.com. DeKoven Center, **Racine, Wisconsin**, August 1–4.

Silver and Shawls: India, Europe, and the Colonial Art Market highlights the evolution of shawls and silver table wares produced during the colonial period in India, especially in the 18th and 19th centuries. The presentation hinges on two opposing stylistic developments: that shawl design evolved from traditional Indian compositions and decoration to patterns that responded to European tastes; while Indian silver production grew from small studios of foreign artisans producing restrained, Georgian-styled objects into a larger industry employing local artists and incorporating "exotic" imagery. Sackler Museum, **Cambridge, Massachusetts**, August 27 through January 29.

<< September

The Quest for Immortality: Treasures of Ancient Egypt dramatically illustrates the ancient Egyptian concept of the afterlife through 143 magnificent objects and a life-sized reconstruction of the burial chamber of the New Kingdom pharaoh Thutmose III (1490–1436 BC). Ranging in date from the New Kingdom (1550–1069 BC) through the Late Period (664–332 BC), the works of art include luxurious objects that furnished tombs, including jewelry, painted reliefs, implements used in religious rituals, a sarcophagus richly painted with scenes of the afterlife and an ancient painted model of the royal barge that carried the pharaohs along the Nile. **Dayton [Ohio]** Art Institute, September 1 through January 3.

Silk & Leather: Splendid Attire of 19th-Century Central Asia features different types of garments and accessories worn by the ruling class and urban and nomadic elites of the region. The exhibition includes coats, hats, boots, belts, queue covers, children's clothing, purses, pouches and veils. Leather, felt and fur, as well as a distinctive clothing style that included trousers, made life easier for the horse-riding nomadic pastoralists of the vast, sparsely populated Eurasian steppe. Until the Russian conquest, completed in the late 19th century, the western part of Central Asia, including Samarkand and Bukhara, was ruled by different groups that had originated in the Eurasian steppes. Although they largely gave up their nomadic lifestyle, these ruling elites retained their taste for rugs, textiles and the garments worn on the steppe. The copious production of silk, its brilliant dyeing and multifaceted use in textiles of urban and nomadic manufacture, along with the continued use of leather, were all part of the spectacular blossoming of the textile and related arts during the 19th century in western Central Asia. Textile Museum, **Washington, D.C.** September 2 through February 26.

Gold: The Asian Touch examines the meanings and uses of gold in different Asian cultures. While including some golden status symbols, the exhibition's primary focus is on the subtle and distinctive combination of gold with other materials and its use in enriching and enhancing luxury objects and works of art. Works on view are mostly Chinese and Japanese, but also include gold inlaid and overlaid weapons from Mughal India and gilded silver vessels from Parthian and Sasanian Iran. Sackler Gallery, **Washington, D.C.**, September 3 through February 26.

The Art of Medicine in Ancient Egypt. The causes of illnesses were little understood in ancient Egypt, and their prevention and cure were major concerns for most Egyptians—ones that inform much of ancient Egyptian art. This exhibition will highlight objects from the museum's collection that address this concern, allowing visitors to appreciate them in new ways. Included will be the rarely seen Edwin Smith Papyrus, one of the world's oldest scientific documents. Metropolitan Museum of Art, **New York**, September 13 through January 15.

Viewing Text, Reading Image: Examining a 16th Century Manuscript offers a unique opportunity to examine the museum's 1584 copy of the *Khamsa (Five Tales)* of Nizâmî, a 12th- to 13th-century quintet of long narrative poems—among the most copied and illustrated works of Persian literature—that is both a collection of beloved stories and an ethical and moral commentary. The exhibition considers the process of producing such a work, from the modular layout of the text pages to the design of the painting sequences, and finally the felicities, as well as slips, of the copyist's pen. The full impact of the original *Khamsa* is further explored through accompanying translation of the text and explanation of the images. University of Pennsylvania Museum, **Philadelphia**, September 27 through March 26, 2006.

<< October

The Golden Age of Arab Science. The coming of Islam and its subsequent territorial expansion, especially after the establishment of the Abbasid caliphate in Baghdad, brought about an intellectual flowering that led to remarkable advances in all branches of science. From Andalusia to the borders of China, Arabic became the language of scholarship. Going beyond their translations of their Greek, Iranian and Indian predecessors, Arabic-speaking scientists carried the torch of knowledge to new heights and into new disciplines. Scholars worked in such fields as philosophy, mathematics, astronomy, optics, medicine, pharmacology, chemistry and alchemy, grammar, geology and engineering. The exhibition presents Arab achievements in all these sciences, and closes with examples of their application in practical forms. Institut de Monde Arabe, **Paris**, October 25 through March 19.

Style and Status: Imperial Costumes From Ottoman Turkey presents some 100 of the world's finest and most luxurious Ottoman royal textiles from the Topkapı Palace Museum, the Kremlin Armory and other collections. Distinguished by their bold designs, breathtaking colors and technical complexity, Ottoman imperial silks were fashioned into clothing, furnishings and such "movable architecture" as tent hangings and floor covers. They denoted rank and privilege and were important in the economic, political and ceremonial life of the Ottoman Empire. By the late 15th century, the Ottoman silk industry, centered in Bursa, exported raw and woven silk as well as cloth of gold and silver to Europe, the Balkans and Russia—the Ottomans' largest market. The artistic influence of Ottoman textile motifs endures today, inspiring artists like William Morris, who incorporated Ottoman motifs into his textiles and wallpapers. Sackler Gallery, **Washington, D.C.**, October 29 through January 22.

<<Permanent

Alexander's Image and the Beginning of Greek Portraiture illustrates the reign of Alexander the Great of Macedon and the beginning of portraiture through ancient coins. Alexander opened the way to revolutionary economic and ideological changes in the ancient monetary system, and his idealization and deification on coins of his successors led to new ways of representing the human figure. With the images of Alexander the Great, the use of individualized portraiture for purposes of political propaganda began in the western world. Sackler Museum, **Cambridge, Massachusetts.**

The Saudi Aramco Exhibit 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. Most institutions listed have further information available through the World Wide Web, and our Web site, saudiaramcoworld.com, contains more extensive listings. Readers are welcome to submit information for possible inclusion in this listing.

ANDREAS F. VOEGELIN / ANTIKENMUSEUM BASEL UND SAMMLUNG LUDWIG / LACMA

Tutankhamun and the Golden Age of the Pharaohs includes 130 works from the Egyptian National Museum and presents a selection of 50 spectacular objects excavated from the tomb of Tutankhamun, including one of the canopic coffinettes, inlaid with gold and precious stones, that contained his mummified internal organs. Additional pieces in the exhibition derive from the tombs of royalty and high officials of the 18th Dynasty, primarily from the Valley of the Kings. These additional works place the unique finds from the tomb of Tutankhamun into context and illustrate the wealth and development of Egyptian burial practice during the New Kingdom. The exhibition, more than twice the size of the 1979 "King Tut" exhibition, marks the first time treasures of Tutankhamun have visited America in 26 years. ⓘ 323-857-6000. **Los Angeles** County Museum of Art, June 16 through November 15.

This golden diadem, inlaid with colored glass and semi-precious stones, was still in place around Tutankhamun's head when Howard Carter opened the royal coffin more than 3200 years after the young king died.

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