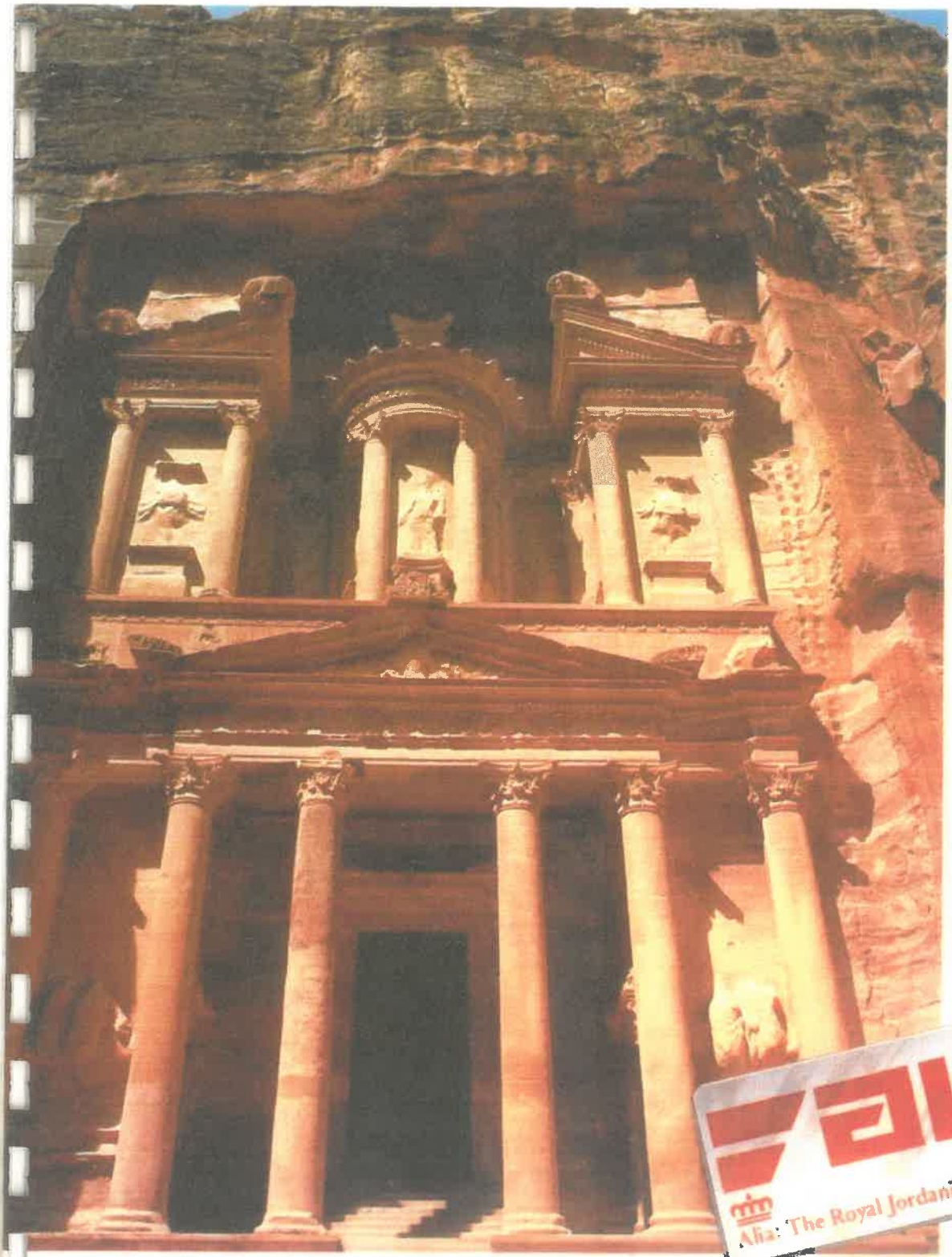

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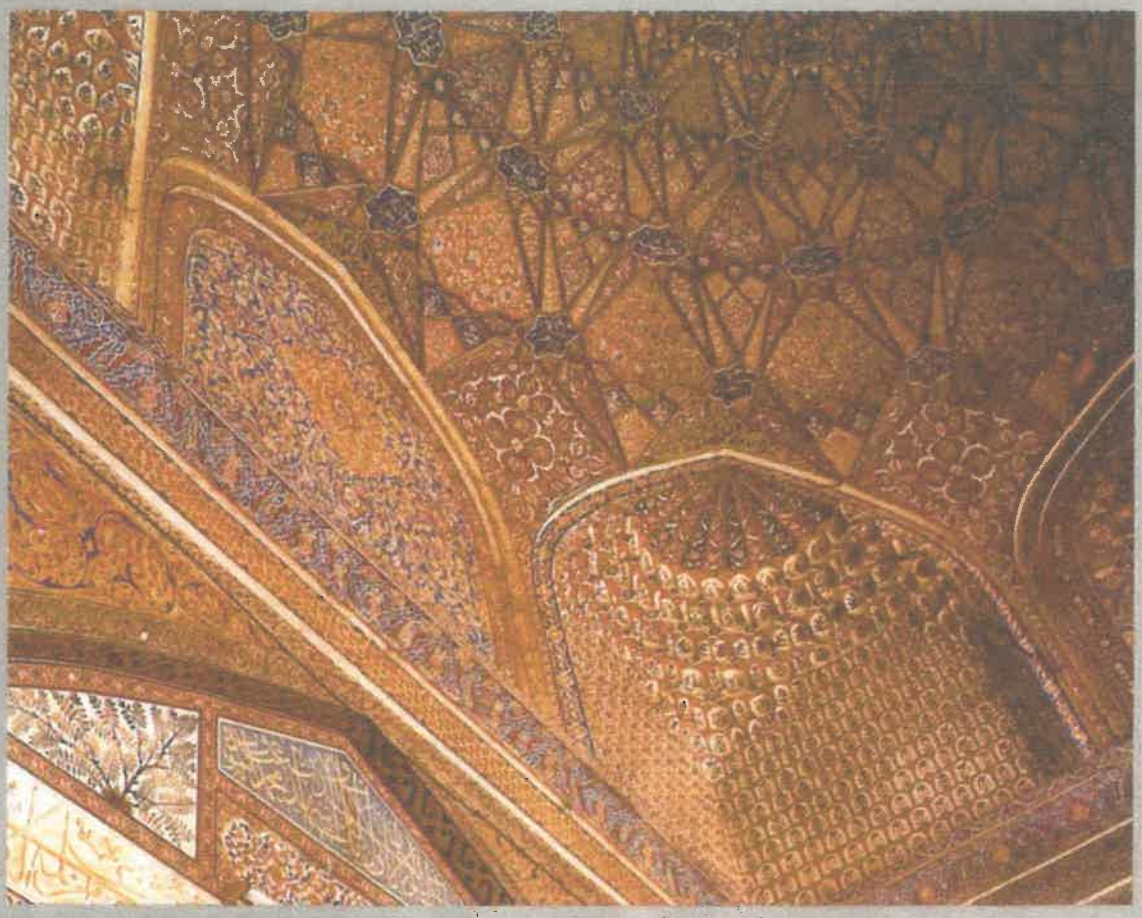
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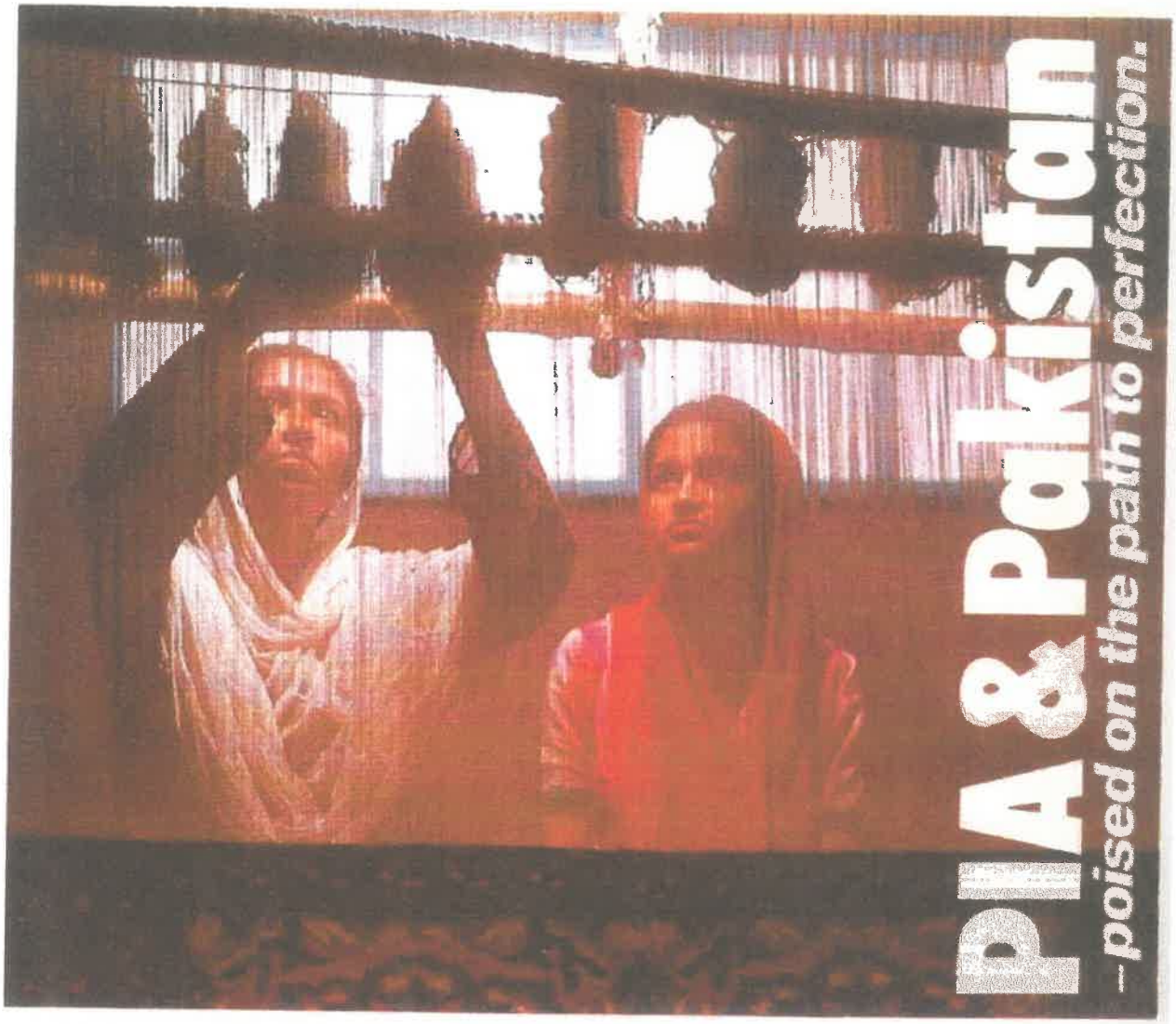
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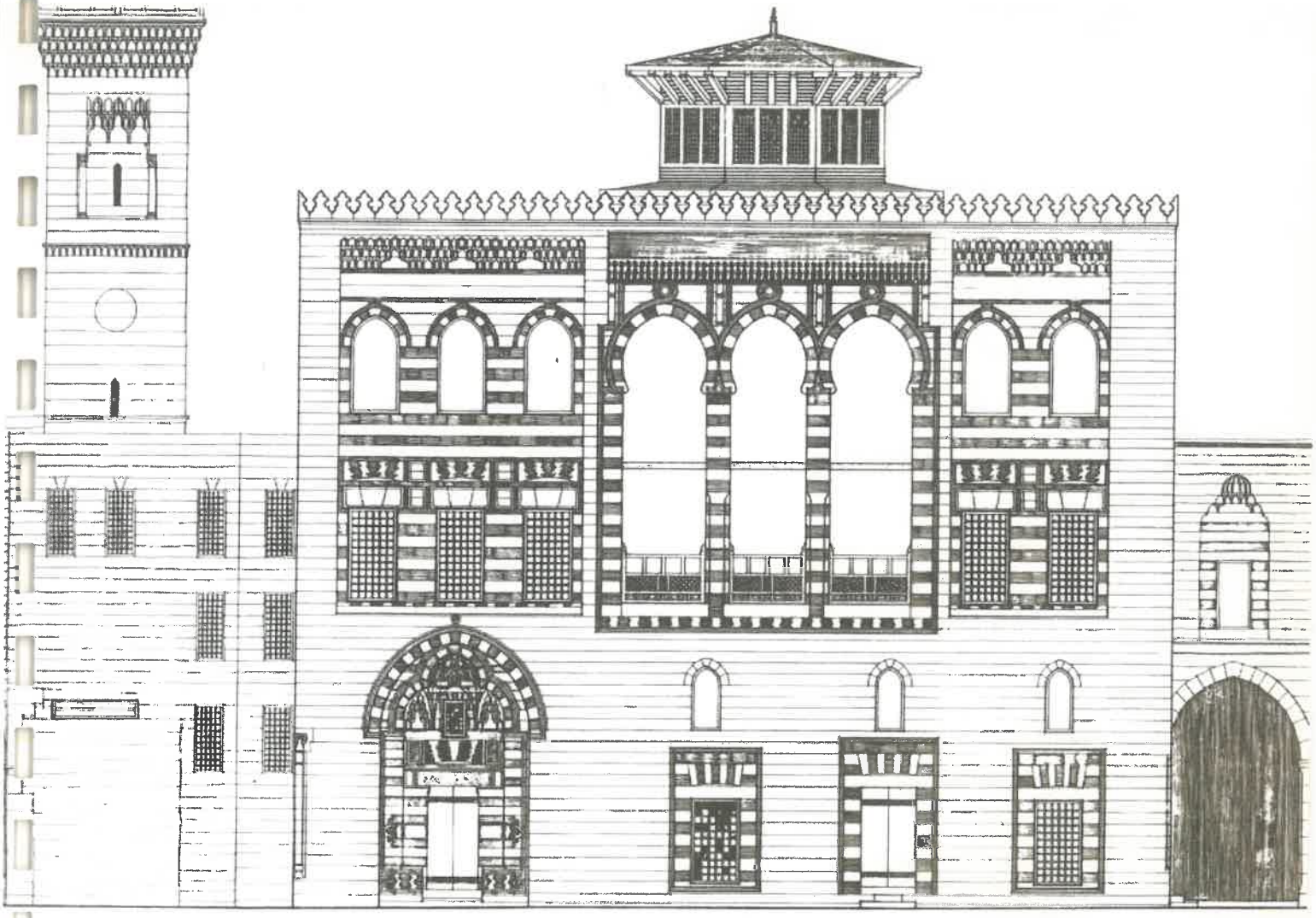
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Al-Ashrafiyya: Restorted east elevation.

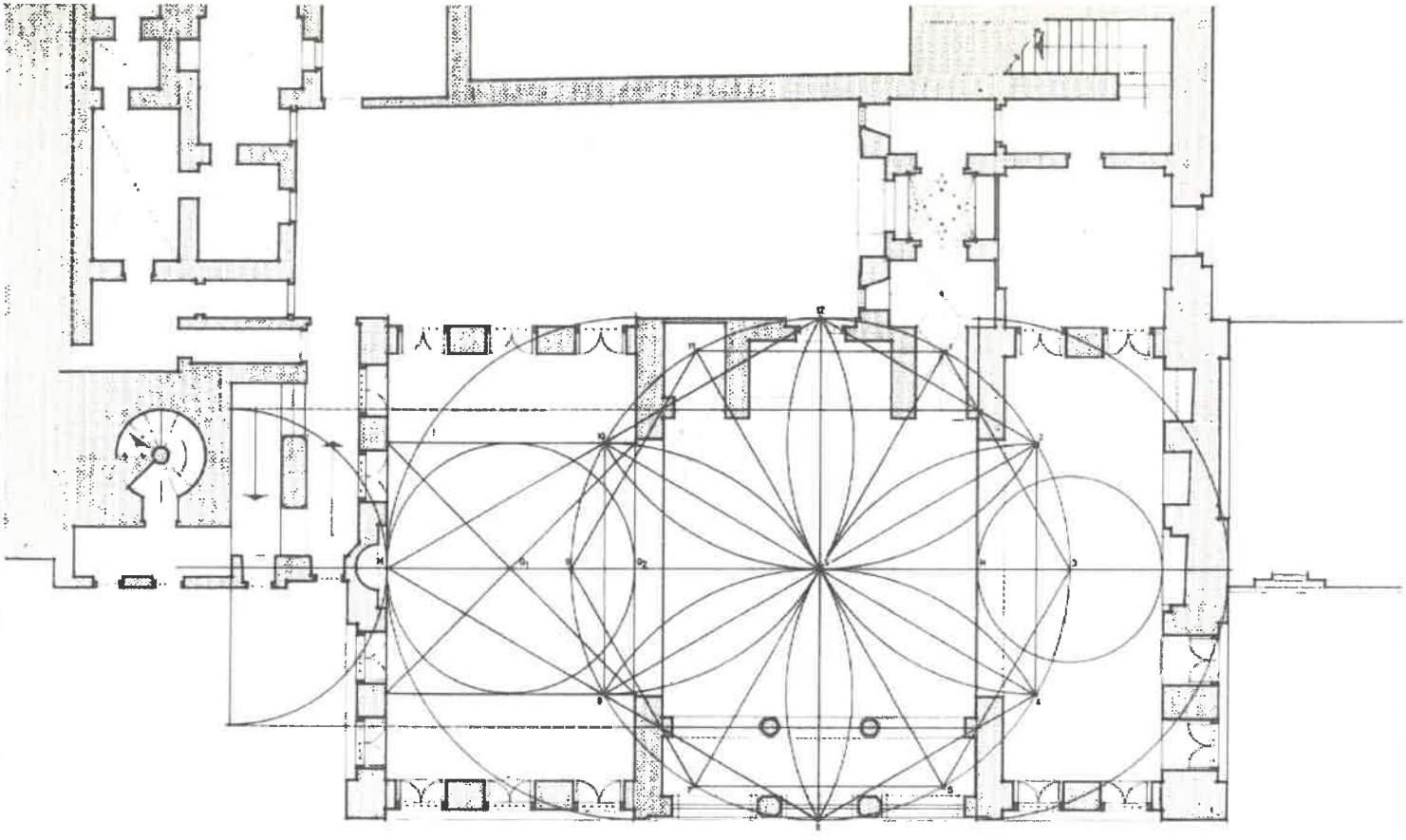
Al-Ashrafiyya

Third Jewel of the Third Shrine of Islam
Its Physical and Geometric Form

Archibald G. Walls

The Madrasa al-Ashrafiyya was undoubtedly the most impressive of all the Mamluk monuments to be built in Jerusalem. It was completed in 887/1428 by the Sultan Qāytbāy, and subsequently ruined in an earthquake in 952/1545.[2] From the present elevation (see Fig. 1 and P.I), it is hard to believe its qualites to have been such that the great Arab chronicler, Mujīr al-Dīn,[3] described it in 1494/95 as the Third Jewel, stressing its connection with the two other Jewels - the Dome of the Rock and al-Aqsā Mosque - by writting of a week in 882/1477 when the lights of al-Aqsā, the Dome of the Rock and al-Ashrafiyya were lit up on the Friday, Sunday and Monday respectively.

Although a number of historians have contributed to our knowledge of al-Ashrafiyya, there is one outstanding contributor, an Israeli historian, S. Tamari, who has given considerable thought to the many problems posed by the present ruin, and whose conclusions concerning its original physical form, if correct, cast doubt on Mujīr al-Dīn's claims making them appear exaggerated and intended only to enchance the standing of Mujīr al-Dīn in the imperial eyes of Qāytbāy. In two publications,[4] both subtitled "An Imperial Madrasa in Jerusalem". Tamari provides detailed and thorough analyses of the contemporary documentation and planning arrangements. In addition he discusses previous publications whose authors he criticizes and accuses of incompetence in his footnotes.[5] It is therefore unfortunate that he, himself did not remain within his own areas of specialization, for Tamari's painstaking archaeological studies are inaccurate, and his drawings, containing incorrect measurements, details



Al-Ashrafiyya: Geometric form superimposed on the first floor plan.

and phasing, are incomplete, he even goes so far as to suggest the original height of al-Ashrafiyya (see dotted line in Fig 2) to be only slightly greater than the springing of the north iwan's great arch, which still exists, so missing a great opportunity to establish the uniqueness of al-Ashrafiyya.

Using the existing architectural evidence and a design process likely to have been followed by the architects in the service of Qāytbāy, it is my intention to prove Mujīr al-Dīn correct, and to show why Tamari's drawing is fantasy.

The description given by Mujīr al-Din is not the only contemporary source to indicate that al-Ashrafiyya was an imperial foundation along the lines of those to be seen in Cairo. Exceptional evidence of this is also found in an illustration in Bernhard of Breydenbach's *Peregrinationes in Terram Sanctum* (1486), which test ifies to the height and basic elevational treatment of al-Ashrafiyya which stands between the Dome of the Rock (on its right) and the Minaret Bāb al-Silsila.

Building Sequences

Before studying the ruins of al-Ashrafiyya, we should look at a brief chronology of a rather chequered history of construction gleaned from contemporary documents.[7]

870-72 A small and simple madrasa, typical of Jerusalem, was constructed for Sultan Khushqadum above the west riwāq or arcade of al-Haram al- Sharīf by the Amīr Hasan al-Sharīf, Superintendent of the Two Harams in Jerusalem and Hebron. (This will be referred to as the Old Madrasa).

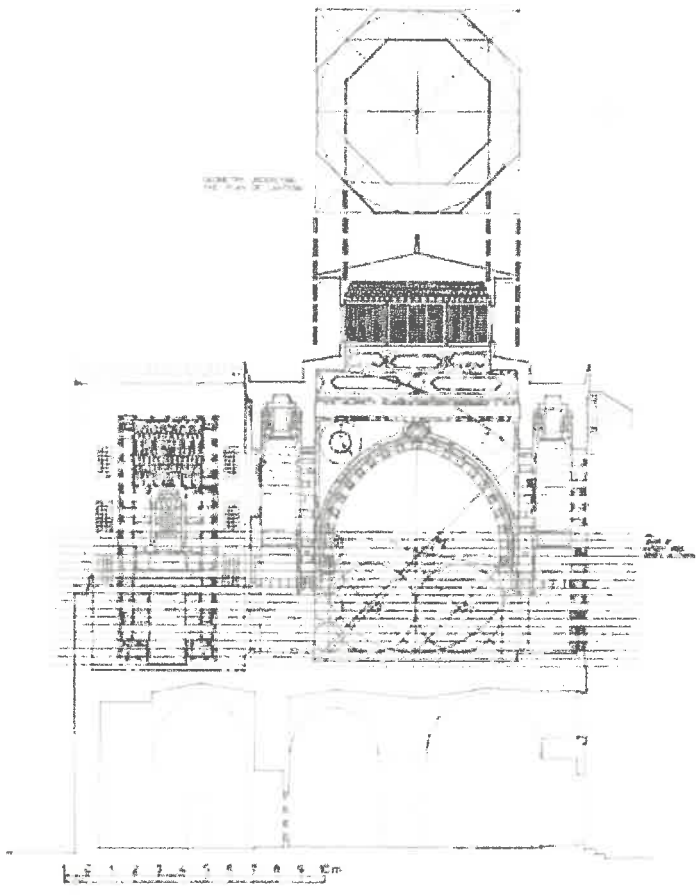
872 Sultan Khushqadum died. At this time the exterior of the Old Madrasa had been completed although the interior required a further year's work before completion. Following the death of the Sultan the Amīr Hasan travelled to Cairo to pay homage to the new Sultan, al-Sultan al-Malik al-Ashraf Abu-n-Nasar Qāytbāy, and to request that the madrasa in Jerusalem might be honoured with Qāytbāy's name, which, if he accepted, could be inscribed on the entrance of the Old Madrasa.

873 The interior of the Old Madrasa (now named al-Ashrafiyya) was completed by the Amīr Birdibak Tāji, the new Superintendent of the Two Harams. Entrance was gained through the same gate as that which led to the Minaret of Bāb al-Silsila by way of a narrow and difficult stair. Accomodation comprised a meeting hall, a passageway and a separate room for the sheikh, all of which were above the riwāq. Over the east īwan of the Madrasa of the Amīr Mankalī-bughā (Madrasa Baladiyya),there was a courtyard or terrace with more rooms.

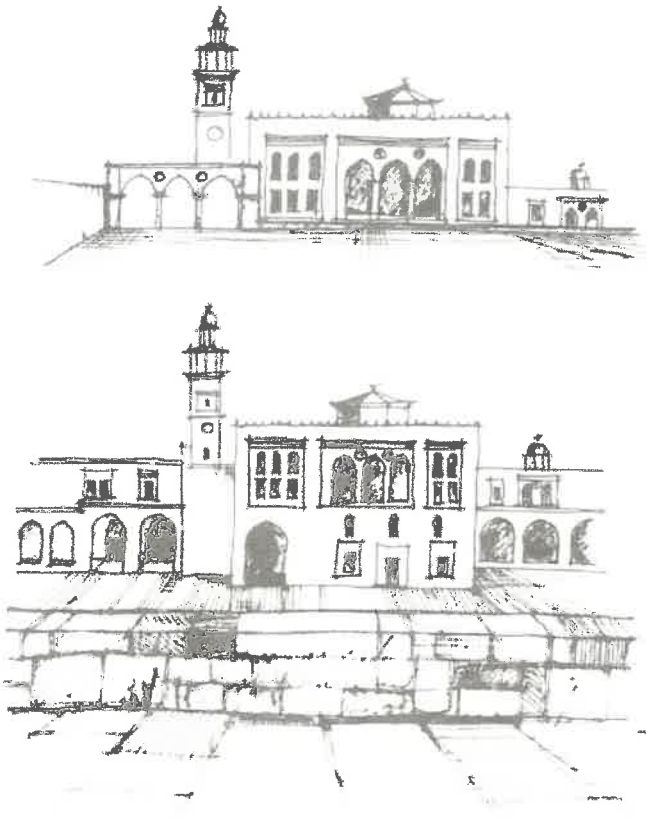
875 The construction text of the Old Madrasa is dated 1st Rabī 1 of the year 875 (28th August 1470), and includes the name of Nāsir al-Dīn Muhammad b. an-Nashāshībī, the treasurer of Qāytbāy, who was appointed Superintendent of the Two Harams in Muharram 875 (July 1470).

876 Qāytbāy ordered the demolition and replacement of the Old Madrasa.

877 Qāytbāy attached to the Madrasa sixty sufīs, pupils and lawyers. He also gave the waqf property situated within the town of Gāza. The upper portions of the Old Madrasa were



Al-Ashrafiyya: Geometric base superimposed on cross-section



Al-Ashrafiyya as it might have been seen from the south door of the Dome of the Rock and from the parapet of the Upper Terrace, between 887/1482-1845

partially demolished.

880 On Monday, 27th Rajab, Qāytbāy visited Jerusalem and attended mid-day prayers in his madrasa. He was so unimpressed with the appearance of the Old Madrasa that he ordered its demolition prior to the construction of a new building more in keeping with his royal stature.

884 A demolition order arrived in Jerusalem on Wednesday, 3rd Rabī II.

885 The foundations belonging to the 1st Phase of the New Madrasa were cut on Sunday, 24th Shabān. The architects began constructing the meeting hall for the sufīs below the riwāq, whilst continuing to demolish the Old Madrasa above the riwāq. The Sheikh of the Madrasa was prompted to go to Cairo to involve Qāytbāy more fully in the project, probably due to the fact that the workmen, being local, were less skilled than those required.

886 A team of masons, architects and sculptors under the leadership of a highly skilled and trusted Christian architect arrived from Cairo. The Christian used the authority granted to him to demolish the recently undertaken building of the 1st Phase of the New Madrasa, as the work was unsatisfactory. He also extended southwards the area to be demolished, thereby including three arches of the riwāq, before beginning the construction of the final Madrasa al-Ashrafiyya.

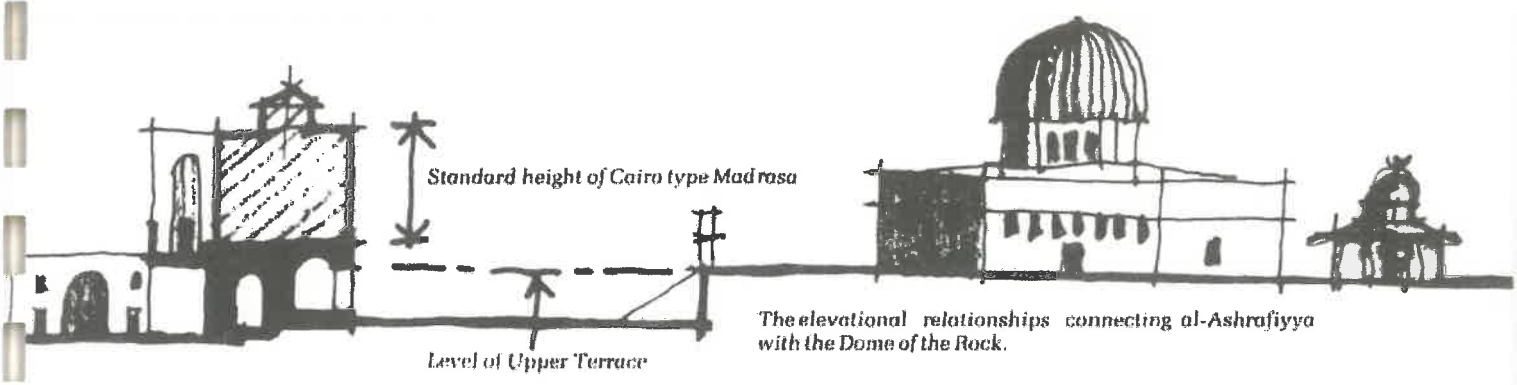
887 An inscription dated Rajab 1 of the year 887 (August-September 1482) was made to commemorate the completion of the construction of al-Ashrafiyya

An Architectural Concept

On entering al-Haram for the first time in 886/1481, the Christian architect and his team must immediately have recognised the potential of al-Ashrafiyya's superb location. Standing between the two most frequented entrances to al-Haram, Bāb al-Silsila (combined with Bāb al-Salām) and Bāb al-Qattānīn, it could hardly have been closer to the focal point of al-Haram - the Dome of the Rock. However, to construct a Cairo-type madrasa on such a small area would present many difficulties to the architect, particularly in view of the fact that formerly smaller structures had either been squeezed on to the roof of the riwāq, between the Madrasa Baladiyya, or they had been extended into riwāq below.

The architectural solution to this problem of the restricted site may have astounded the religious authorities. It was to construct an elevated platform (see illus.) specially designed to accomodate a Cairo-sized madrasa (see illus.) which would extend into the actual precincts of al-Haram, beyond the traditional building line defined by the cornice of the riwāq. The architect was offered an additional opportunity to take full advantage of the visual potential of the site; the relative levels of the riwāq roof and the Upper Terrace of al-Haram, the former being slightly higher(see illus.) Thus he could design the elevation of the madrasa of al-Ashrafiyya so as to make the whole visible from the south door to the Dome of the Rock.

Furthermore, the fact that the Dome of the Rock could be seen from within the madrasa inspired a unique design in the east īwān of the madrasa where, we are told, an arcade Loggia with marble columns was constructed (see illus.) Such novel concepts and ideas must have received the full and enthusiastic support of



The elevational relationships connecting al-Ashrafiyya with the Dome of the Rock.

Qāytbāy, for they established al-Ashrafiyya as unique among its peers - the great mosques and madrasas of Cairo.

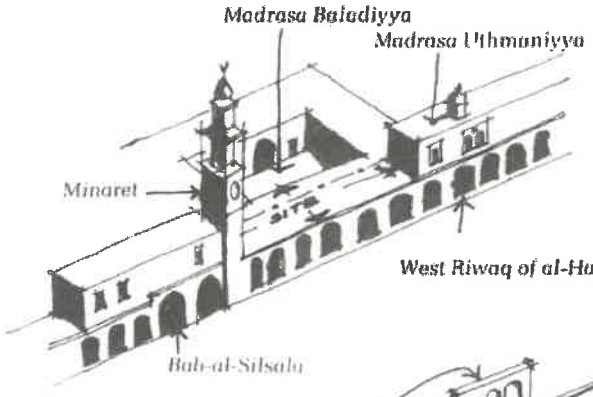
The Existing Evidence And Its Significance

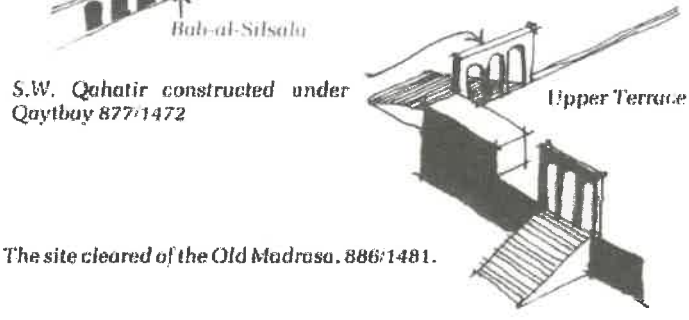
Having shown how the original form and volume of al-Ashrafiyya can be simply determined, where can confirmation be found in the existing ruin? There is no doubt about the elevated platform as it still exists, thus establishing the overall area of al-Ashrafiyya. However, problems must exist relating to the original plan and height of the madrasa if an historian such as Tamari can apparently go so far astray. To resolve these problems we must firstly reconstruct the plan of the madrasa and then compare it with its contemporaries in Cairo.

It will be seen as illustrated that both the qibla and north īwāns have over fifty per cent of their plans extant. and that the plan of the west īwān is complete. Notice also in Plate I that the height of the present wallheads is constant at about five meters above the existing surface level. From this we can gather a considerable amount of information about the fenestration and the general quality and type of detail used in the madrasa, which is essential when making architectural comparisons between al-Ashrafiyya and its peers. There is little evidence on which to reconstruct the east īwān or loggia, but it is possible, although here only a general view will be given, leaving a more detailed study for a future occasion.

The plan indicates that the mihrāb in the qibla wall and the larger recess of the northern wall of the north īwān lie on the same axis. If this axis is accepted as the central axis of the madrasa, then it follows that the eastern walls of the qibla and north īwān and their respective window openings can be reconstructed. (See Fig 8) Naturally this axis can be used to rediscover the spans of the great arches that once separated the qibla and the north īwān from the sahn, and to determine the dimensions of the sahn itself.Thus the span of these two great arches, plus their side abutments, equals the west-east width of the sahn, 8.54m, a dimension which compares favourably with the width of 8.61m given in a drawing of the sahn of the Mosque and Mausoleum of Sultan Qāytbāy, 877-79/1472-74, in Cairo(see illus.)shows the great arch in the Mosque and Mausoleum which separates the sahn from the qibla īwān, and from this one can assume that a similar arch was used in the madrasa of al-Ashrafiyya. Fortunately, in al-Ashrafiyya the western abutment of the northern arch still exists, together with its muqarnasat or "stalactite" impost block and part of its linked hood moulding which borders the four remaining ablaq or polychrome voussoirs.

These existing features confirm that the great arches of al-Ashrafiyya resembled those of the Mosque and Mausoleum in Cairo, so providing the opportunity to





The site cleared of the Old Madrasa. 886/1481.

reconstruct them along Cairo lines. Although here we will not go into the long and involved design process necessary to arrive at an accurate reconstruction, detailed studies were made of eight significant architectural elements which appear constantly in Mamluk buildings in Cairo, and which could relate to the remains of al-Ashrafiyya. Particular attention was given to the number of stone causes in each element and its parts, since, to me, it would appear that stone courses were perhaps linked to the proportions of a building, thereby indicating the system of measurement or module used. A list of the architectural elements considered is given here, the numbers in brackets referring to the number of Cairo buildings in each comparison: Recessed External Window (10); Sahn Great Arch (5); Sahn Side Arch (7); Sahn Side Wall (7); Side Īwān Wall (1); Qibla Wall (5); Sahn Colonnade (4).

Full understanding of the above comparisons and their application along a logical design path to the remaining elements of al-Ashrafiyya is essential for an architecturally acceptable reconstruction of the great arches. (see illus.) Such a reconstruction establishes indisputably the height of the madrasa and consequently the overall height of al-Ashrafiyya.

At this point the search for the general physical form of al-Ashrafiyya can be concluded. We have seen how a Cairo-sized madrasa was placed on what was originally a very restricted site, and how full use was made of new architectural concepts and vistas to enable the architect and his team to produce this magnificent jewel, not only in the context of al-Haram and Jerusalem, but in that of Mamluk architecture as a

whole. We can now imagine that impact of the elevation, including the unique arcading of the east īwān (see illus.) not only on the chronicler Mujīr al-Dīn, but on all Sultan Qāytbāy's subjects.

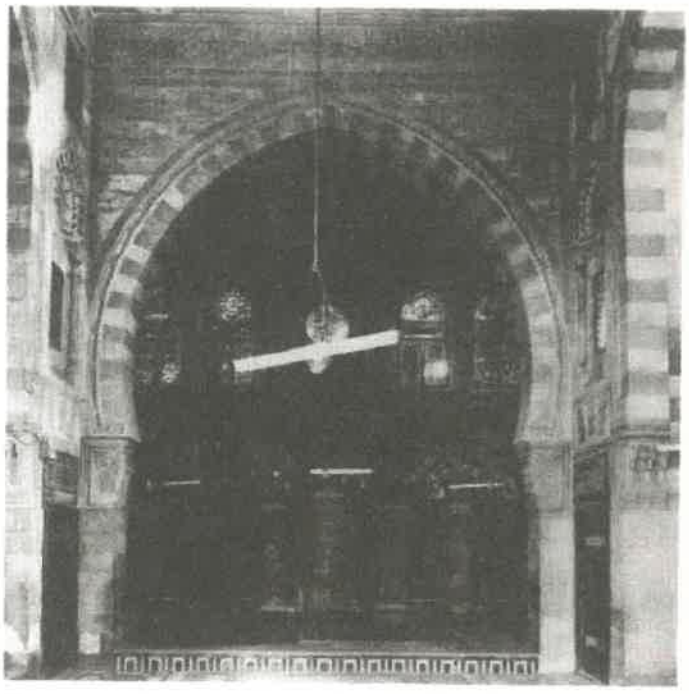
The Geometric Form

To seek the geometry underlying architectural designs seems to be a favourite hobby of the architectural historian even though his results are generally controversial. It is difficult at the best of times to specify precisely the mode of measurement, as architectural details will defy it, and others will readily accuse the historian of manipulation of the evidence to fit the solution. Why then does the Madrasa al-Ashrafiyya warrant such an investigation if the results are likely to be contentious and when other magnificent works of Sultan Qāytbāy still exist in their entirety? The reason is simple: the design restraints are easily identifiable, and thus the historian is better able to determine the design process and its underlying geometry.

In open country, what restraints might have affected the construction of a building: topographical, financial, artistic? Whatever they might have been, they would be obscured by the passage of time. Alternatively, consider the construction of an urban building surrounded by a jumble of houses and a maze of streets: design restraints can be supposed, but which constraints would have been considered important at the time of building? In the Madrasa al-Ashrafiyya the design restraints are clear: the initial obstacle was the size of the site which was over come by designing a platform. The only further constraints would have been the dimensions of the platform which, in all probability, were determined by the underlying geometric form.

The critical dimension of the platform appears to be its width, rather than its length to which minor adjustments could be made [10]. Therefore by scrutinising the width and its relationships, it should be possible to generate a geometric form. Such a geometric form is shown in Figure 13: its centre, point S, lies at the visual centre of the madrasa, the central point of the sahn, which is midway betweeen the external face of the west wall of the madrasa and the eastern edge of the platform. From S a circle is drawn with a radius (the 'Generating Unit') equal to half the width of the madrasa, within the circle a double hexagon, points 1-12, is inscribed. When lines 6-8 and 12-10 are produced they intersect at M, a point coinciding with the centre of the mihrāb and the internal face of the qibla wall: this creates two equilateral triangles, either 12,M,6 with sides equal to the width of the madrasa, or 10.M,8 with sides equal to the Generating Unit.

The depth of the qibla īwān also equals the Generating Unit: thus a square with sides equal to the Generating Unit can be constructed along the axis M-S where M is the mid-point of one of the sides of the square, the centre of this square, point Q1, is also the centre of the qibla īwān, and point Q2 coincides with the īwān's north wall to establish the depth of the īwān. It can be observed that Q2 lies at the centre of the span of the great arch which separates the qibla īwān from the sahn, and that the span is almost equal to the length of the square and so to the Generating Unit, the discrepancy between the two dimensions being explained by it equalling the projections of the muqarnasat impost



The great arch separating the qibla īwān from the sahn in the Mosque and Mausoleum of Sultan Qāytbāy, 877-79/ 1472-74, in Cairo.

blocks from which the arch springs.

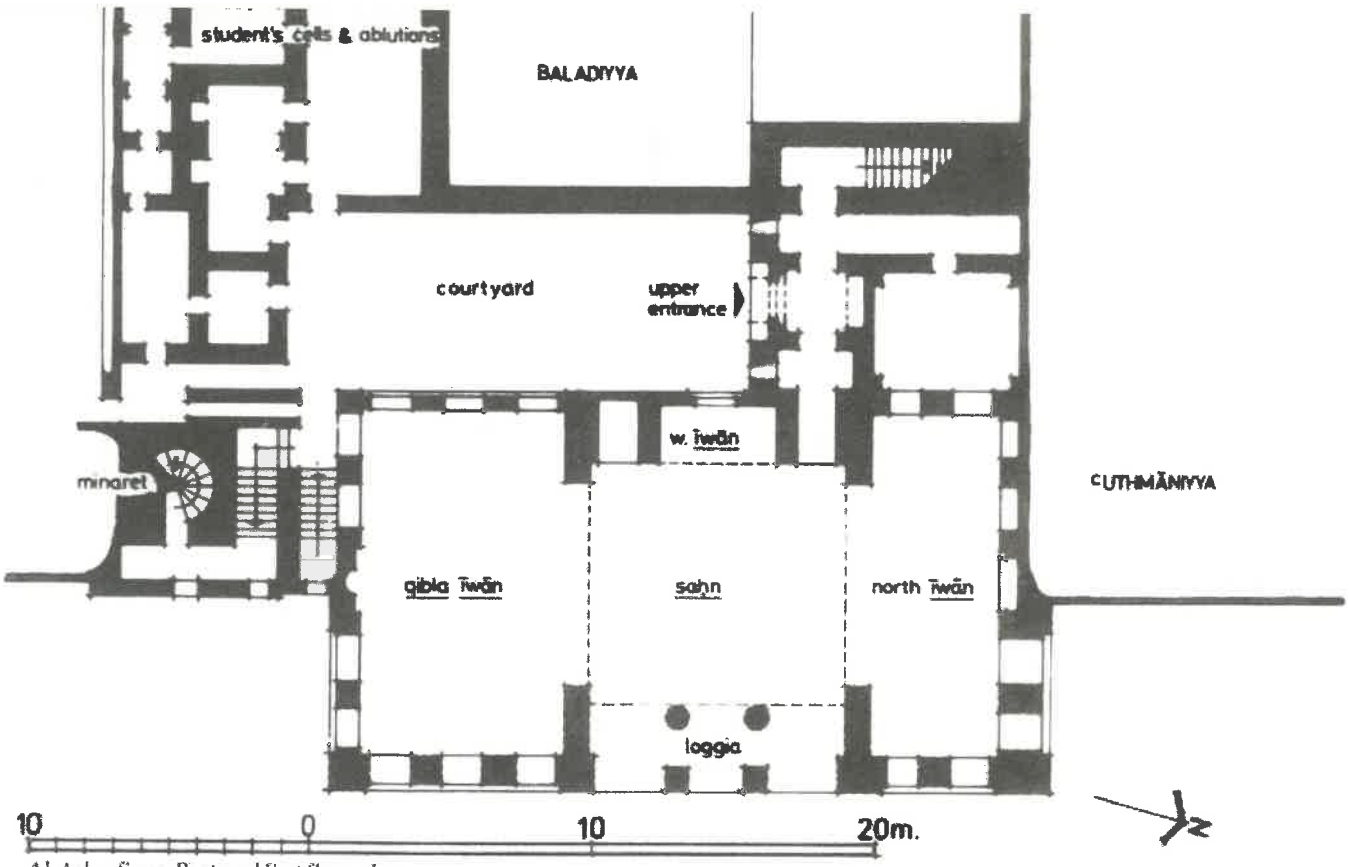
Returning to the sahn, if a square is constructed by joining the intersections of (12-2,1-3), (3-5,4-6), and (9-11,10-12) on one side it touches the face of the sahn's south wall, (which also provides the width of the intrados of the great arch). The opposite side of the square meets the face of the sahn's north wall, and its remaining two sides lie along the central lines of the west and east walls of the sahn respectively.

The internal face of the north wall of the north īwān is tangential to a circle on point 3 with a radius equal to 3f-N. With point N as the centre and a radius equal to the Generating Unit, a circle can be drawn tangential to the external face of the north wall, which was founded upon the roof of the adjoining and older Madrasa Uthmāniyya.

At the southern end of the site, the Minaret Bāb-al-Silsila has always been the limiting factor, and its relationship thereto seems not to have been overlooked. The distance between the Minaret and point M equals half the length of the sides of the square associated with the sahn.

Before concluding this article, one digression into detailed restorations of al-Ashrafiyya and their associated geometries should be allowed. My researches have proved that the heights of the stone courses are directly related to the Generating Unit, a fact which should not come as a surprise but which, nevertheless, fails to be given proper consideration in historical analyses. Thus the integration of stone courses, and the geometric forms underpinning the architectural design (see illustration) should be expected. Another significant fact, is that, the height of the sahn from the floor to the underside of the octagonal lantern, is in the proportion of 2 (equivalent to the diagonal of a square) to the width of the sahn.

These constructions establish a simple and direct geometric form generated from the width of the platform, this should however be considered only as a primary geometry for it can be extended by a logical design -process to embrace anything from a window opening to the inscribed brass revetments from the



Al-Ashrafiyya: Restored first floor plan.

main entrance "My hope is that these findings, will not be controversial, but rather that they will be accepted as representing the most likely thought processes of the architects of al-Ashrafiyya. ■

1 The material for this article formed part of an unpublished doctoral thesis, Walls, A.G., *An Attempted Reconstruction of Design Procedures and Concepts during the Reign of Sultan Qāytbāy (872-901/1468-1496) in Jerusalem and Cairo; with special reference to the Madrasa al-Ashrafiyya and the Minbar in the Khānqāh of Farag Ibn Barqūq*. Edinburgh College of Art and Heriot-Watt University, October 1979. It was also given as a paper at a symposium "Recent Research in Mamluk Architecture" held by the Aga Khan Programme for Islamic Architecture at M.I.T in 1981.

2. The method of calculating this date is given in Walls, A.G. and D.A.King, "The Sundial on the West Wall of the Madrasa of Sultan Qāytbāy in Jerusalem", *Art and Archaeology Research Papers*, 15, June 1979, p.20. fn.7.

3. Mujīr al-Dīn al-Ulaymī, *Al-Uns al-Jalīl bi Tā'rīkh al-Quds wa'l Khalīl* begun in 900/1494.

4. Tamari,S., "As-Sultaniyya al-Ashrafiyya - An Imperial Madrasa in Jerusalem... *Bar Ilan Departmental Researchers I : Arabic and Islamic Studies* 1973. Hebrew text pp. 9-40 with an English summary on pp. LI-LII, pls. 1-40, plans I-V. See also Tamari,S., "Al-Aśraffiyya: An Imperial Madrasa in Jerusalem". *Memorie, Classe di Scienze Morali, Storiche e Filologiche, Serie VIII, Volume XIX, Faschoulo 5, Atti Della Accademia Nazionale de Lincei* 1976. pp. 536-68, pls. 1-40, plans I.V.

5. Examples of his acid comments can be found in Tamari, 1976, p.542, fn. 18. When discussing Aref al-Aref, *Al-Mufassal fī Tā'rīh al-Quds*. 1961, Tamari states",...whereas Aref's repetition of the textual part, as possible background material for this history of the madrasa, may containing (sic) nothing extraordinary, it is surprising that an historian such as he, who was not obliged to cope with all the difficulties encountered by the non-Muslim researchers of the Haram, should not have taken the trouble to have painstaking archaeological study prepared, not only of the Ašrafiyya but also of all the other madrasas and Islamic monuments still extant in Jerusalem...". Firstly, having worked daily in al-Haram over a period of years, I, as a non-Muslim, encountered no difficulties with either the Muslim authorities or the local inhabitants, despite the fact that it was during a military occupation. Secondly, it is unreasonable to consider it possible for one man to survey all of the extant monuments; the British School of Archaeology in Jerusalem have so far spent fifteen years on the task. Tamari continues by refering to the BSAJ having "...published the results of an architectural survey (with plans, cross-sections and photographs, but meager in textual commentary)..." Although this criticism was not levelled at me, the first architect on the survey, but at M.H. Burgoin, who joined me in 1969, I would argue that we, as practicing architects rather than arabic historians or epigraphers, rightly restricted our work to our own areas of competence.

6. Inaccuracies such as the semi-circular arch given to the porch of al-Ashrafiyya by Tamari can be seen by comparing his elevation (Fig 2) and my own (Fig 1). As Tamari's drawings are on a larger scale than any as yet published, this is a good opportunity to indicate some of the errors: in the ground floor plan two are immediately obvious; the first is the contraction of the pier at the south-east corner of the porch which is dismissed; and the second is a chamfer or cutback in the north wall which is ignored, thus maintaining the same thickness throughout the length of the wall. In the first floor plan, there are further significant errors; firstly, in the west wall of the madrasa, the section of window recess is illustrated as a blocking-up at some later stage, and its thickness is drawn at one meter instead of the actual fifteen centimeters. Secondly, the internal and external faces of the qibla wall are drawn in line,, when in fact a chamfered corner behind the mihrāb in fact reduces the thickness of the internal walls. Most misleading of all, are his errors in the dimensions of the madrasa: the following tables show, in meters, Tamari's measurements as against the actual measurements taken from qibla īwān.

For the qibla wall:

Tamari 0.80:0.55:1.10:0.55:0.80:1.30:1.10:1.30:0.40
Actual 0.70:0.54:1.26:0.54:0.71:1.46:1.00:1.45:0.31

For the West wall:

Tamari 0.40:1.10:1.30:1.10:1.30:0.60
Actual 0.30:1.44:1.14:1.44:1.14:1.44:0.30

7. The textual evidence surrounding the construction of al-Ashrafiyya, which is given here in a skeleton form, is discussed in great detail by Max van Berchem in *Materiaux pour un Corpus Inscriptionum Arabicarum. Deuxieme Partie: Syria du Sud. I - Jerusalem "Ville"*. pp.352-73, 1952, edited by Gaston Wiet, *Memoires de l'Institut Francais d' Archeologie Oriental, volume 43*.

8. *See Van Berchem, p.355. Also, further proof of the existence of arches is given by Bernhard of Breydenbach's illustration.*

9. *I am grateful to Dr Abd al-Tawab and his staff in the Centre for Islamic and Coptic Documentation in Cairo in whose archives I discovered an unsigned measured drawing entitled "Mosquee de Kaitboy de Desert: Avant Project". Presumably the "Project" referred to was the restoration by the Comite c. 1897.*

10. *Proof that minor adjustments could be made along the north-south axis is provided by the fact that over one meter of the thickness of the north wall is built upon the roof of the older Madrasa Uthmāniyya. Furthermore, the former external face of the south wall of Uthmāniyya now forms the rear wall of three of the recesses in the north īwān of the madrasa.*

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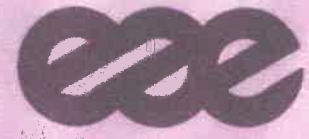
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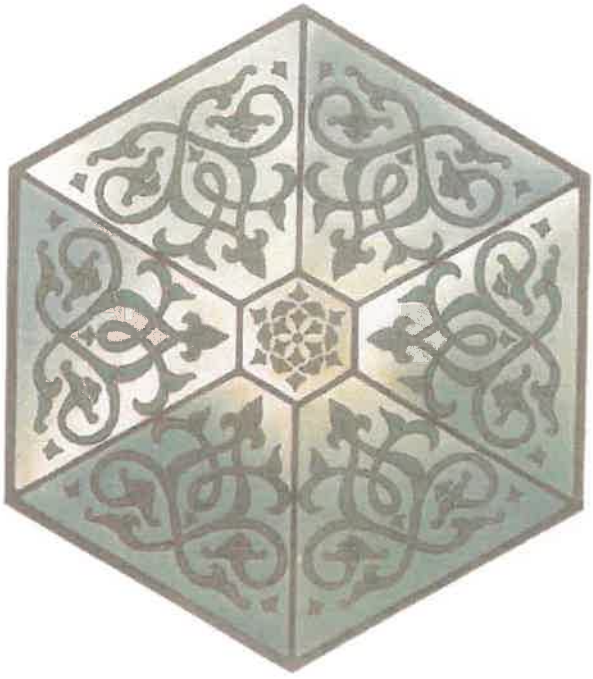
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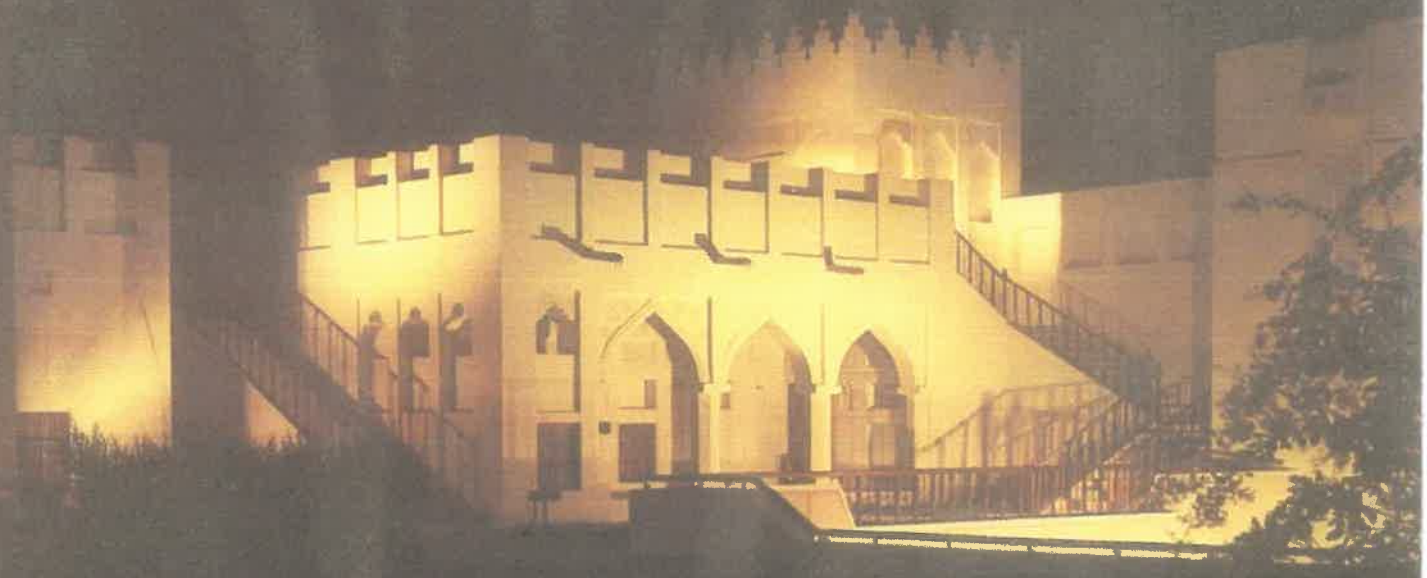
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A MODERN STATEMENT IN ISLAMIC ART

J. Graham

The centre-piece of the recently completed King Khaled International Airport in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia is a mosque of contemporary design significance. One of the world's largest,it is hexagonal in plan, about 51 meters on each side, and accomodates over 5,000 worshippers.

It is richly endowed with artwork conceived in Islamic traditions, yet fully contemporary in effect. It has an enclosed gross floor area of approximately 5,800 square meters, and its dome rises to an elevation of 40.5 meters.

Vesti Corporation of Boston was commissioned to design and fabricate the integral artwork, which includes the largest mosaic band ever produced (250 square meters), a total of 675 square meters of mouth blown and fully leaded stained glass, 38 pairs of carved wood doors measuring 2 x 3 meters each, 350 meters of carved travertine, and a mihrab and minbar of comparable scale. This is the largest integral art project in modern history.

The guiding principle behind the design programme was the fusion of Islamic traditions with the freshness of modernity. Historically, Riyadh has been a nexus of trade routes, and today continues as a focal point for international commerce and diplomacy.

Within this conceptual framework, Vesti assigned the mosque artwork designs to two extraordinary artists: Brian Clarke, for the stained glass, and Edman Aivazian, for the mosaic, carved stone, carved wood and ceramic. Through a process of repeated rejection and refinement the emergent designs are of uncompromising quality. Each artwork element serves in the overall function of the mosque - a religious center within a modern airport of a modern capital city and each is aesthetically integrated within its immediate



KKIA Mosque Exterior view



Mihrab Centre Panel



Clerestory and Mosaic Band



Carved Wood Door, Detail



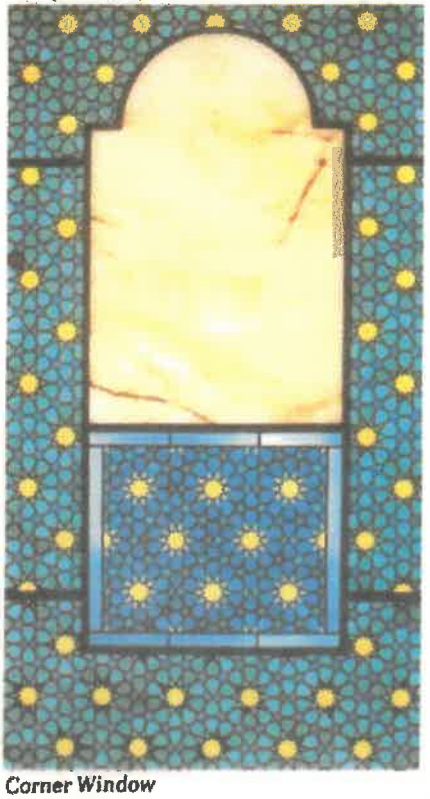
Mosque Interior



Acid etched Glass/Stained glass Sidelight

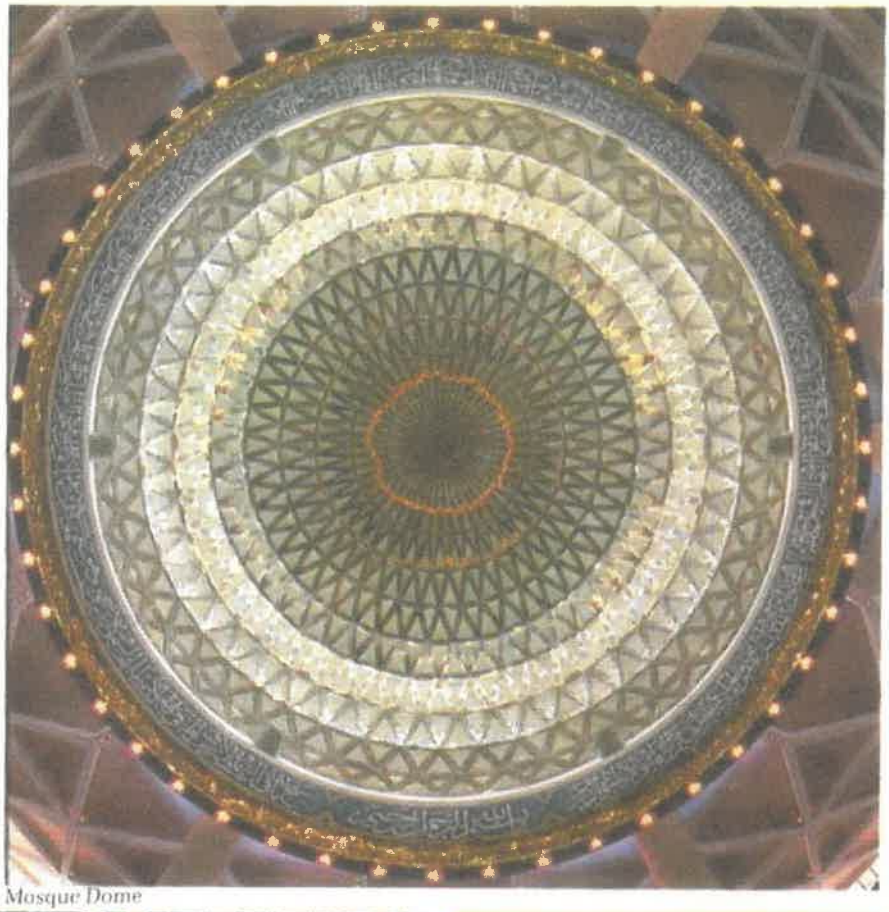


Office Window, Detail



Corner Window





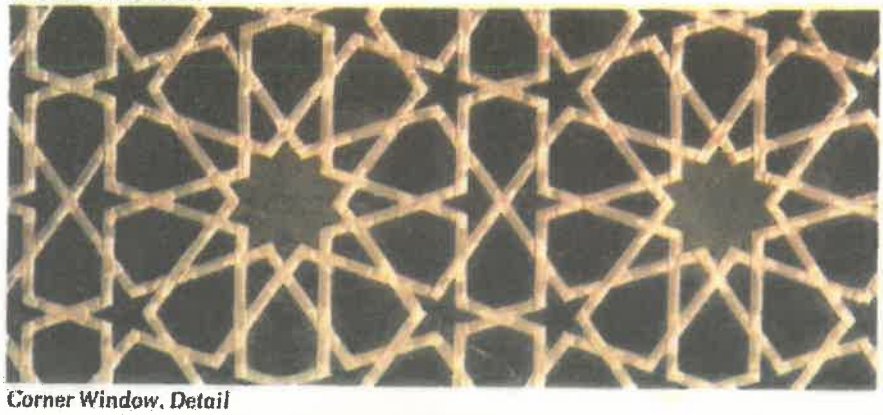
Mosque Dome



Mosaic Band, Detail



Sand Blasted Panel, Detail



Corner Window, Detail



Minbar, Detail

architectural environment.

Once designwork has been completed and approved, Vesti embarked on an extensive search for qualified artisans, workshops and factories to realize the designs. During the pre-qualification and survey analysis, many respected firms were disqualified because they had shifted to mechanical production in order to meet the exigencies of modern building schedules and economics, and were therefore no longer capable of producing the required quality of craftsmanship.

The stained glass production was divided amongst five West German studios, due to the enormous project scope and construction deadlines. Koranic inscriptions were carved from travertine in Bournemouth, England, and craftsmen in Munich set the vast calligraphic mosaic frieze in record time.

Well-known for their stonecarving traditions, a Querceta studio in the Carrara region of Italy crafted the mihrab travertine arches. Henry Moore's chief artisan headed the team of carvers on Vesti's project, while an associate of Picasso's glazed the mihrab ceramic tile in nearby southern France.

Many of the network designs encouraged technological breakthroughs. The carved wood doors, for example, required a method of joinery which would allow the individually carved pieces of wood to independently expand and contract within temperature extremes of 120 desert heat and 75 interior airconditioning. Craftsmen in Jeddah, Damascus and Switzerland executed the four designs. New glass cutting techniques emerged from the intricate stained glass designs, which are also the first to incorporate metal (gold-plated brass) and onyx stone.

"This is my conception of the mosque integral artwork", says Dr Wayne Andersen, president of Vesti Corporation, "to unite traditional Islamic forms and values with the most advanced technique". Wayne Andersen, who in 1981 assembled a notable museum-quality collection of contemporary Arab art in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, continues: "My whole purpose at Riyadh was to express the beauty and integrity of Islamic thought and feeling in a way that is at once thoroughly modern, even post-modern, yet also timeless. God the ineffable, the merciful, the everlasting One: this is the idea of the Islamic faith. The artist working in the Islamic tradition must never try to represent God directly, for that would be idolatry. What he strives for is simply an apprehension of the divine. Perhaps this is what all of the world's great religions, in their highest expression, are groping toward".

Vesti Corporation itself, founded six years ago, is an international art consulting and design services firm with offices in Boston and Geneva. It has designed and implemented artwork programmes for some of the world's largest corporations, including IBM, Bechtel, AT&T, Chemical Bank and Standard Oil, apart from having considerable experience in the Middle East.

In the area of art consultation, Vesti advises corporate, institutional and governmental entities on the acquisition and management of art. The firm is credited with assembling one of the world's greatest collections of Arab art at the King Abdulaziz International Airport in Jeddah, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, in 1981. Vesti also recently acquired over 300 artworks (some already in existence, others commissioned by Vesti) for the new Wells Fargo Southern California headquarters in Los Angeles.

Vesti's integrated architectural design services include interior design and space planning, integral art design, landscape architecture, and design management.

The President and founder of Vesti Corporation Dr Wayne Andersen, has been Professor of the Theory of Art and Architecture at MIT since 1964. Born in Iowa, he was educated at the University of California and Columbia universities. The author of three major books and numerous scholarly articles on art history and criticism, Dr Andersen is internationally known for his expertise and achievements in the fields of art and design.

The KKIA Mosque art work programme was performed under the Ministry of Defence and Aviation, International Airports Projects, Major General Sai Y. Amin, Director.

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Reverse



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PROFILE

THE ART OF BAHMAN FORSI

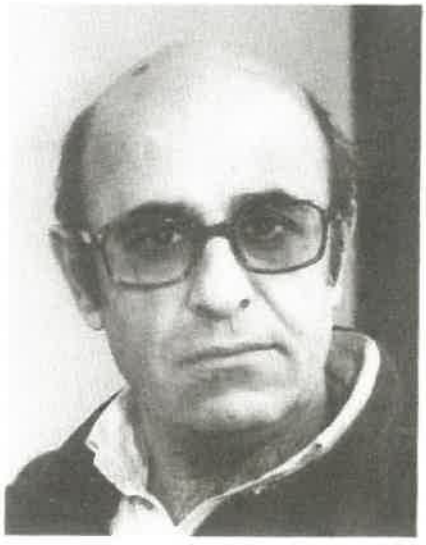
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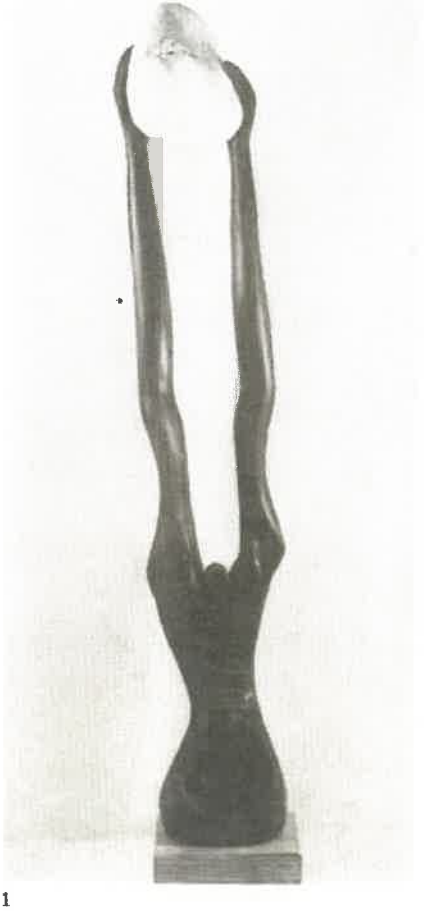
The opening in London, earlier this year of an exhibition of drawings, collages and sculptures by Bahman Forsi offers an occasion to see some of the many talents of this gifted Iranian artist.

The wide range of Forsi's art cannot, however, be fairly assessed by what he displayed in the exhibition. He is a highly versatile artist whose works embody many fields of art. His two main areas of work are painting and literature.

Forsi, a native of Tabriz, was a leading light as an author and playwright during the 60s and 70s in Iran. He has written more than ten plays, several collections of short stories, and some satire. He has been active both as a director and as an actor in the theatre and was the main exponent of the Theatre of the Absurd in Iran. He started experimental painting some twenty years ago, working in oil, watercolour and collages. He even had an interesting exhibition of his works designed entirely with fragments of bone. His experiments with the Persian scripts, dating back to 1965, are possibly his most engaging works. It is in these works that one can see Forsi's great asset: being an innovative artist who may yet find the perfection of his original ideas in other people's work. He is undoubtedly the pioneer in adapting the Persian script to the medium of modern painting. While many Iranian painters came under the direct influence of modern western painting, Forsi responded by creating a distinctively Iranian style of painting by using letters and words as elements of a modern composition. This style found a wide acceptance, was taken up by many others and developed into an established school of Iranian art during the 60s. Forsi's own creative energy during that period was channelled into his literary works. It is only during the last six years, while living in London, that he has gone back to calligraphic drawing.

Forsi argues that calligraphy could not become a major art form in the west since the Latin alphabet created relatively short, disjointed words which limited the possibility of stringing together a large number of letters, unlike the Persian and Arabic calligraphies. Although Forsi's calligraphic drawings are based on a few Persian words or letters, in the final product they have been so radically transformed that it is hard to identify them as distinct entities. Letters and words are modified so far as to enter the new territory of abstract painting, becoming the underlying pattern rather than the immediate form. This gives his calligraphic drawing a universal quality, despite its having its roots in the Persian script. The end result in his drawings resembles figures like growing trees and flying birds, which give a sense of breaking out and freedom. One interesting example (No 4) has the Persian word for God خدا reproduced three times one on top of the other, though in a vertical arrangement. A more complex pattern (No 3) is developed from محمد رسول الله (*Muhammadur Rasulu'llah*). All his calligraphic works are entitled 'Voice and Space' indicating the connection between speech and printed words.



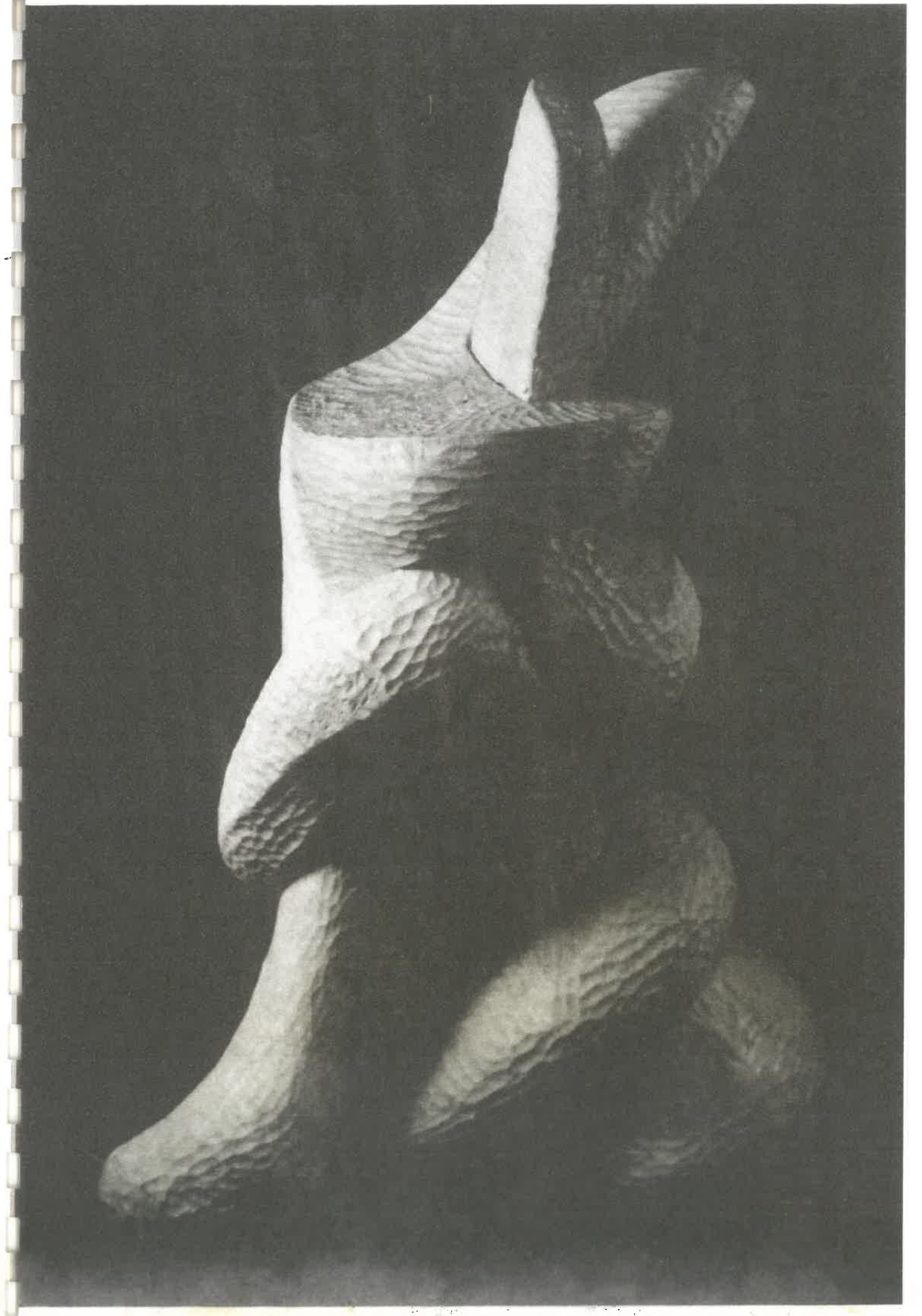


1

1. Ebony! Ivory!
Opposite page:
A Tie of Passion

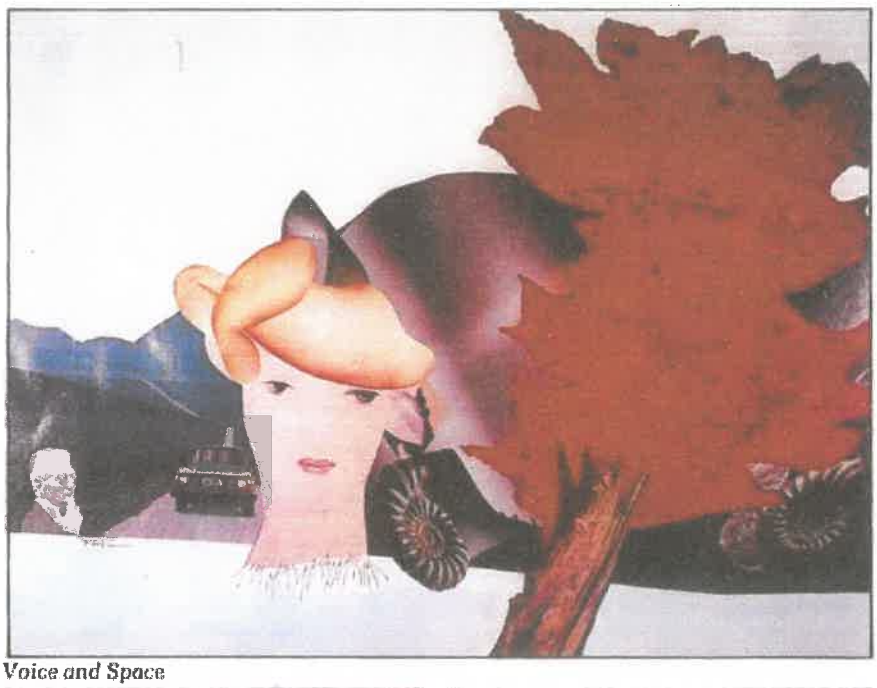
For a man so deeply involved in literature, Forsi's exclusive concentration on drawing and sculpture is surprising. His own explanation is that he has lost faith in written words as a means of conveying one's ideas to others. Even simple and straightforward words are usually interpreted quite differently from what the writer intends. Forsi believes that this problem is largely overcome in painting and sculpture, where the choice of words has a far less limited influence on the viewer and allows him greater freedom to see things in terms of his own individual concepts.

As most good works of art defy simple theorising, Forsi the theorist contradicts himself in his works when his literary





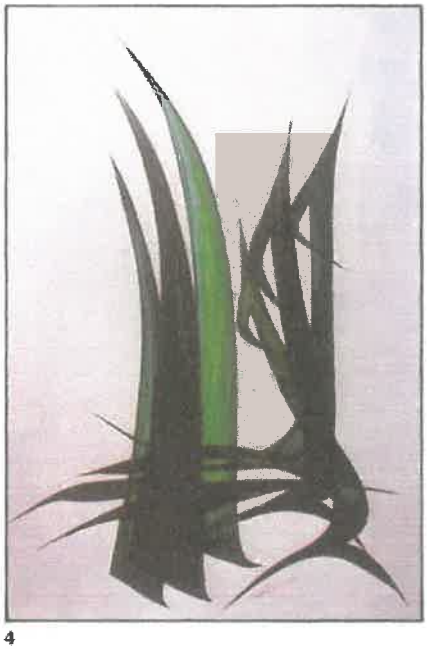
Voice and Space



Voice and Space



3



4

background unconsciously intervenes, as one can see from the suggestive titles of his collages. Intended meaning and symbols are more visible in these collages. There is a very limited use of paint, his material consisting mainly of printed matter. These collages also show an immense skill in overcoming the fundamental problem in painting, and particularly collages, namely, how to combine various shades so as to create the harmonious effect required when the object is seen from a specific lighting angle. The problem is, of course, formidable when the material comes from many different sources, as it does in collages. Yet Forsi manages to put his cuttings together with such precision and care that he skilfully creates the harmony of light characteristic of photomontage. Another feature of Forsi's collages is the use of straight lines, from which his images hang in mid-air, giving a sense of suspense and floating to his works.

Forsi's involvement with sculpture is relatively recent and he works only with wood. He has already produced over thirty pieces in which he displays his characteristic technical ability and sensitivity to forms. One feature of his sculpture is exaggeration in proportions. His 'Ebony, Ivory' has a small head, is hollow inside and has long arms (hungry Africa throwing a large stone!?). It is often said that sculptors are of two types. The first group is of those who impose their own predetermined ideas on their material and remould it to those ends. On the other hand, the second group is exemplified by Michelangelo who was once asked how he created his masterly works. He responded by saying that he did not create them, they were already hidden inside his stone; all he was doing was to chop off the extra stone and reveal the hidden figures. Forsi is a follower of this latter philosophy. He values spontaneity, avoids a definite line and executes his sculpture with simplicity and innvoation. ■

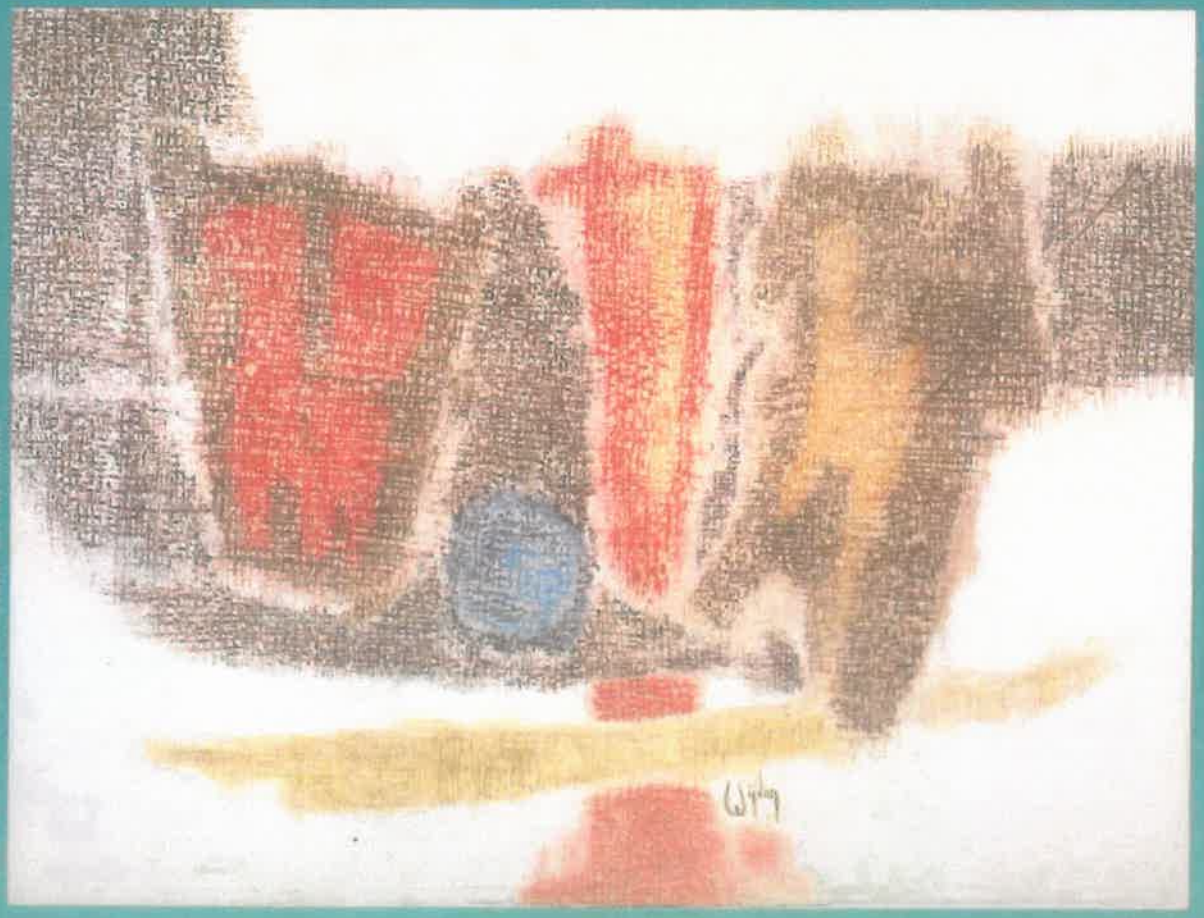
The Arts in

JORDAN

A Special Supplement

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Wijdan Ali: 'Evil Eye of Babylon' Oil on canvas

its preservation and the costs involved.

2. A Workshop on "Contemporary Social and Economic Conditions in the Muslim World and the Process of Social Change", to be held in Amman, Jordan with the collaboration of the Royal Academy and the Pakistan Administrative Staff College, Lahore. The Workshop is one of the academic activities of the Royal Academy within the framework of its third Annual Conference scheduled for April 1984.
3. A complete collection of copies of documents and photographs on Jordan and the Royal Hashemite Family from the Private Papers collection in the Middle East Centre, Oxford University. Using these documents and photographs, the Royal Academy published an illustrated book on *The Life and Times of the Late King Abdullah of Jordan*, with an accompanying exhibition of photographs.
4. An agreement with Cambridge University Library to enable the Library to continue publishing *Index Islamicus* through a yearly grant from the Royal Academy.
5. A research project on "Arab Islamic Educational Thought" in cooperation with the Arab League Education, Cultural and Scientific Organisation (ALECSO), and the Arab Educational Bureau for the Gulf States in Riyadh.

Finally, these brief notes are just a quick review of what the Royal Academy for Islamic Civilisation Research (Al-Albeit Foundation) is doing and what it hopes to achieve.

It is needless to say that such ambitious academic endeavours need a good number of specialised scholars of international reputation, patient handling and an international open outlook towards research and scholars. The Academy will continue to make sure that the implementation of its projects will take into consideration such requirements, and make every possible effort to come up, at the end, with studies which are needed and appreciated by the world at large and the Muslim World in particular. ■

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The Collection of the Jordan National Gallery

Wijdan Ali

The concept of modern art is a new concept for Muslims in general and Arabs in particular. Owing to geographical, political, religious and social considerations, all Arab countries were late in joining the western art bandwagon. Egypt, owing to the westernisation policy of its ruler, the Khadive Ismail, was the first Arab country to hold an art exhibition and open a School of Fine Arts at the turn of the twentieth century. Other countries, such as Iraq, did not start until the thirties and others followed much later. Artists in countries such as Yemen are barely aware of a fine arts movement and still find self-expression in their indigenous crafts. In Jordan, an art movement first started in the fifties, and since then it has been building up momentum, until, in the seventies, the need for a national art institution became evident. In 1979, The Royal Society of Fine Arts was established. The main aim of the Society was to start a National Gallery in Jordan.

Upon hearing the title of a National Gallery, images of the National Gallery in London or in Washington immediately come to one's mind; images of opulent buildings, *avant-garde* wings and gigantic halls, where all that is heard are echoes of footsteps intercepted by subdued whispers; images of architectural treasures housing art treasures that go back to pre-Renaissance times.

Yet in Amman and on one of its seven hills rests a modest structure made of local Jordanian stone, a building that was until 1979 the private residence of Mr Raouf Abu Jabir, a collector and art-lover. The Royal Society of Fine Arts rented it to house its collection of works by modern Islamic artists, thus transforming it into the Jordan National Gallery, a unique establishment whose links with convention end with its title.

Having been the home of a conventional Jordanian family, the building remains of human-scale, while the warmth and love continue to linger in the air among the watercolours, gouaches and graphics on the first floor and the paintings and sculptures in the new extension.

Watercolours and Gouaches

The most striking of the watercolours are Ali Jabiri's (Jordan) realistic scenes of the old port of Aqaba and historic monuments of Egypt. Jabiri's excellent draughtsmanship, sense of balance, and keen perception of folklore can hardly be surpassed.

The expert use of colour and absence of lines in Amin El Basha's (Lebanon) ethereal landscapes radiate joy and a sense of exhilaration. George Bahgoury (Egypt), the well-known, Paris-based painter and cartoonist, depicts everyday life with a touch of humour.

Wide-flowing strokes in monochromes from hazy, fictitions landscaps by Yussef Husseini (Jordan), while muted blues, greys and pinks form well-balanced and sad abstracts by Abu Ali Abdul Aziz (Morocco).

Other works are by Rashed Shuwar (Bahrain), Saleh Abu Shendi (Jordan), Jamil Naqsh (Pakistan), Muhamad Abu Zreik (Jordan), Haji Mohamed Sharif

(Pakistan), Adnan Yehya (Jordan), Mustafa Plevneli (Turkey), Hassan Daas (Jordan) and Ayad El-Nimr (Egypt).

New Mediums

Many new mediums are tried by contemporary Islamic artists. A mixture of African and Egyptian art emerge from Abdul Wahab Mursi's (Egypt) work on papyrus. Coffee grinds and washes intercepted by china inks and gold are expertly applied by Suhail Bisharat (Jordan). Having trained as a geologist, his works, even in the form of portraits, relate to the earth. Omar Basoul (Jordan) executes his semi-abstracts with liquid wax and gouaches, resulting in a primitive cave painting's aura cum Negroid art.

Issam el-Said (Iraq), a member of Christie's Contemporary Artists group, executes his well-studied Arabesque and calligraphy plaques in magnetic, enamelled, aluminium plates which can be arranged in different series while still guarding their original beauty and sense of balance.

Farid Belkaya (Morocco) has gone back to his country's crafts to transform them into symbolic abstract paintings by working with henna on stretched leather, while Muhamad Melehi's (Morocco) large, multicoloured, enamelled panels always recall his motif of an ocean wave in different formations. Pleated printers' zinc sheets covered with oil paints form Saleh Jumaii's (Iraq) luscious turbulent abstracts.

Gold paint mixed with sand and tar is used by Munira Nusseibeh Toukan (Jordan) to depict scenes of veiled women and robed men from the Arabian Gulf.

Graphics

As printing has made works of art more accessible to the general public, there are more Islamic artists who have turned to graphics; among those, there are works by Suha Youssef (Iraq), Suad Attar (Iraq), Ahmad Nawar (Egypt), Rafiq Laham (Jordan), Yassir Duweik (Jordan), Ahmad Naawash (Jordan), Juliana Seraphim (Lebanon), Kamal Amin Awad (Egypt), Melika Agueznay (Morocco), Alia Berger (Turkey), Menhat Allah Helmi (Egypt), Hayati Mismar (Turkey), Tawfik al-Sayid (Jordan), Meher Afroz (Pakistan), Naira Ahmad Alla (India), Amin el-Basha (Lebanon), Mustafa al-Razaz (Egypt), Arab Jawa (Saudi Arabia), Gazbia Sirry (Egypt) and two master graphic artists, al-Hashimi Azza (Morocco) and Munir Islam (Bangladesh).

Calligraphy

For the past fourteen centuries, the power of the written word has never ceased to influence Muslim artists; thus we find that calligraphy in all its aspects forms an inherent part of modern Islamic art. Among those artist-calligraphers are Kamal Baullatta (Palestine), Rashid Koraishi (Algeria), Hassan Massoudy (Iraq), Rafii Nasiri (Iraq), Issam el-Said (Iraq), Rafiq Laham (Jordan), Mahmoud Taha (Jordan) and Muna Saoudi (Palestine).

The Orientalists

In a separate and rather secluded room there is a small collection of Orientalist works. They are personal interpretations of the East by those Western artists on whom Islam and its culture had a spellbinding impact. Among the best known in the collection are works by Jean Leon Gerome, his student Le Compte de Nouy and Eugene Delacroix from France, Frederico Bartolini and Giulio Rosati from Italy, Rudolph Weiss from Switzerland, Rudolph Ernst from Austria, David Roberts and Frederick Goodall from England, Schwinger from Germany and, from Russia, Alexander Roussoff, while from Denmark there is Hans Hansen. Almost all of this collection came as donations from friends and patrons of the National Gallery.

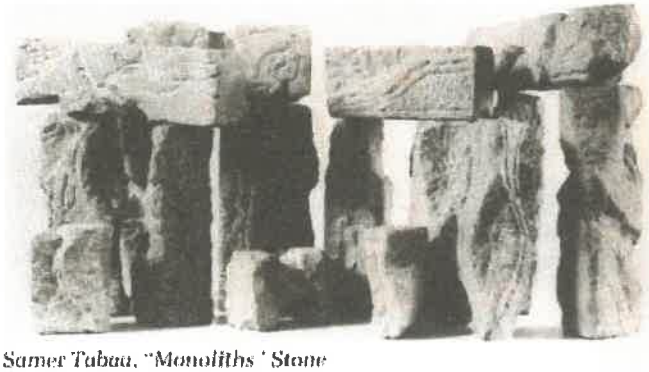
The Pioneers

The pioneer painters of Jordan are four artists of different nationalities. The Turkish Ziauldine Suleiman, who came in the thirties, used to exchange his impressionistic land- and cityscapes for a cup of tea and a sandwich.

The British Jack Girdlestone came to Palestine as an orderly with the British army during World War One and had been living on and off in Jordan until his death in 1980 at the age of 94. His naïve paintings of Jordanian and Palestinian countryside reflect the love Girdlestone had for this land and establish him as the only truly naïve painter in the country. He used to sell his works and give the proceeds to his needy Palestinian refugee friends.

George Alief, who was a white Russian refugee, first lived in Jerusalem and then in Amman. He used to make a living out of giving private painting lessons and among his students were Muhanna Durra, Rafik Laham and Naila Deeb. In the fifties, Bruno Armando came from Italy and established a proper studio, to which artists and students flocked. Muhanna Durra and Wijdan Ali were among his students.

Although each of these artists was of a different artistic background, each and every one of them, in his own way, made an impression on Jordanian modern art.



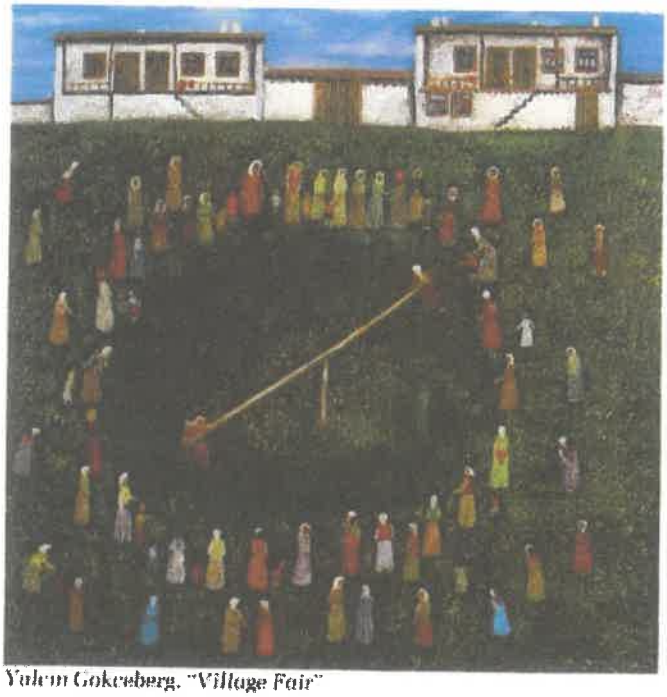
Samer Tabaa, "Monoliths' Stone

Paintings

When the National Gallery first opened in February 1980, the collection of the Royal Society of Fine Arts consisted of seventy works only, the rest of the exhibits then being on loan. In 1982, the collection had grown to over 400 pieces, mostly paintings by prominent modern Islamic artists. The Jordanian group of paintings includes the child-like linear figures of Ahmad Naawash, depicting the tragedies of a frustrated generation. Naawash is a most uncompromising artist when it comes to his art; he never caters to the public's taste, and thus has contributed in educating his public to understand his art. Muhanna Durra has gained international fame with his portraiture of faces from the desert and villages of Jordan, while his blue cubist period brought him to city structures.

Hafiz Kassis, the Director of the Fine Arts Centre, is the only artist in Jordan who works with oil, stained glass and mosaics. Aziz Amoura, who teaches at Yar-

mouk University, is known for his tragic peasant and refugee women. Nasr Abdul Aziz' stylized horses and playful children are reminders of the existence of pastoral Arabia. A young and very promising artist is 20-year-old Daif Alla Abidat. His large, well-constructed, surrealistic canvases betray a hidden suffering that has contrived to polish his talent. The doyenne of Jordanian artists is Fahrul Nissa Zeid. Turkish by birth, Arab by marriage, international by fame, she has lived and worked in London and Paris and has finally come back to settle in Amman. She is a giant artist whose prolific works are in museums and galleries in the United States, Europe and Turkey. She has established her



Yalcin Gokceberg, "Village Fair"

own school at her house in Amman and is teaching a handful of students and followers. Suha Noursi lives in the States and does abstract canvases whose fields of colour bring to one's mind fields of flowers in a crepuscul or haze. Afaf Arafat leans towards impressionism in her landscapes. Samia Zaru interprets Jerusalem and the Palestinian cause with richly coloured collages, using embroidered pieces of Palestinian peasant dresses.

Other works in the Jordanian group are those of Ibrahim Al Najjar, Omar Hamdan, Fuad Mimi, Wijdan Ali, Tawfiq Al Sayed, Muhamad Mustafa, Saleh Abu Shindi, Fatma al-Muhib, Faruk Lambaz and Yussef Baddawi. The Pakistani works are a mixture of modern techniques with the old school of miniatures; among this group are Shakir Ali, Collin David, a superb neorealist artist, Jamil Naqsh, Ali Imam, an excellent eastern impressionist, Saad Shujaa, Najmi Surra, Rashid Ahmad Arshad, Lubna Agha,Hussain and Nahid Ali.

After Kemal Ataturk's revolution, the Turkish artists took all their training and inspiration from the West; among these were Fikrat Muallah, Bedri Rahmi and Omer Fawzi. Lately, there has been a comeback to roots as in the Anatolian school and Turkish miniatures, among which are those of Valcin Gokcebag, Nuri Abac, Devrim Erbil, Gemil Eren, Adnan Turani, Turan Erol and Avni Arbac. Some Turkish artists, such as Buirhan Ulger and Abidin Elderglu,. have revolutionised modern art in their country.

Faik Hassan, Khalid el-Jadir, Hafiz Droubi and



Ahmed Naawash, "The Massacre" Oil on canvas



Faik Hassan, "The Tent" Oil on canvas



Fikrat Mualla, "Untitled" Oil on canvas



Ali Imam, "The Weaver" Oil on canvas



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1. *Suhail Bisharat, "Conchiverous"*
2. *Juliana Seraphim, "la Femme Fleur"*
3. *Munir Islam, "The Creation of nature"*
4. *Fuad Mimi, "Landscape"*
5. *Muhamed Mustafa, "The Scream"*
6. *Fredrick Goodall*
7. *Saleh Al Jumai, "Abstract"*
8. *Mahmoud Taha, "Ceramic"*
9. *Kimaur Nimri, Figure*
10. *Paul Guisaagorrian, "Time"*
11. *Jack Girdlestone, "At the wall"*
12. *Mounira Toukan, "4 Arab Women"*

Photographs by Mr J L Nott and Mr Yves James.

Ismail el-Sheikli have all had great impact, not only on their compatriot Iraqi artists but on many Arab artists of the fifties and sixties. Other works from Iraq belong to Nouri el-Rawi, Alaa Bashir, Saad Kaabi, Issam el-Said, Mehdi Mutashir, Rafii Nasiri, Naziha Saleem, Suad Saleem, Nizar Saleem, Abdul Karim Mahmoud, Jawdat Hasseeb, Rakan Dabdoub, Ghaleb Nahi, Turky Abdul Ameer, Salem al-Dabagh, Salman Abbas and Shawkat al-Rubaii.

Lebanon is another country in the Middle East which had a big impact on art in this area. Among the Lebanese artists of the Gallery are the giants Paul Guiragossian, Juliana Seraphim, Helen Khal, Amin el-Basha, Hreir and Wajih Nahle.

From Egypt there is Inji Ifflatoun, who depicts simple Egyptian country life with a simplicity of style that betrays greatly polished talent and years of arduous work. Other Egyptian artists whose works are at the Gallery are Mina Seraphim, Bret Raouf Ghaly and Mustafa Abdul Muti.



Rashid Koreishi,"Untitled" Graphic

Saudi Arabia's modern art is in its infancy but has shown rapid acceleration in growth, especially during the last few years. Ahmad Flemban, Abdullah Sultan and Abdul Halim Radawi are all well-established Saudi artists in their own right. Northern Yemen is represented by a lone artist, Abu Nooman.

Owing to the turbulent political circumstances in Iran, there are only two of its artists' works in the Gallery: Rami Samimi with his classical brush and moving Iranian faces and Farida Lashai with her dreamlike ethereal landscapes.

Sculpture

In the Arab Middle East, there has never been a tradition of sculpture. Even during the time of the Nabateans, sculpture has never occupied an important role in art. For fear of idolatory, there has always been an aversion to sculpture in Islam. Because of an insufficient background in this art, the number of painters in the modern Muslim world exceeds the number of sculptors. Muna Saudi (Palestine) is among the few who have mastered her art. One of her highly polished abstract stones will soon be the first sculpture to be displayed publicly in Amman. Samer Tabaa (Saudi Arabia) is another skilled sculptor who works with stone and wood. Kiram Nimri (Jordan) works with live-wood utilising its natural grain to enhance his subject. Munira Toukan (Jordan) prefers bronze-casting; for her strong Arab personages, she leans towards realism rather than abstraction. Samia Zaru (Jordan) is a sculptor and a welder working with clay and metal. Shahid Sajjad (Pakistan) is Henry Moore of modern Islamic art, while Zahur Akhlaq (Pakistan) goes all the way towards combined abstract forms. Mukbil al-Zahawi (Iraq) is a sculptor-potter. His gigantic abstract figures and murals are made of polished, baked clay but give the impression and feel of metal.

Pottery

There are many good potters among modern Islamic artists. Pottery has always been a traditional art and craft in the Muslim world. Nuha Radi (Iraq), Mahmoud Taha (Jordan), Freish Kanikian (Iraq), Saad Shaker Muhamad (Iraq) and George Dabikkeh (Jordan) are but a few of those who have adopted a traditional craft to make it into an art form.

An Aim for Today, a Dream for Tomorrow

To set up a National Gallery in Jordan is not, in itself, such a great feat, for there are several such galleries in Egypt, Syria, Iraq and Pakistan, founded by the state and displaying the works of each country's artists. But to found a National Gallery by a private society that is financed by private and public donations, and to have a collection of works of art, not only from local artists but from a number of Islamic countries, is quite an achievement for a small, third-world country. The Modern Islamic Art collection of the Royal Society of Fine Arts at the Jordan National Gallery is the only one of its kind in the world. Although it is still far from complete, what is important is that the collection has been started. With time, dedication, the will to continue and a strong belief in the gifts of our artists, one day we will achieve our aim.

Like all cultural and artistic projects in this part of the world, there are many handicaps that impede the Society's work. One of the biggest is to find enough money to keep the Gallery going and fulfil its programme of bringing international exhibitions to Jordan, taking exhibitions from its collection abroad, sending artists on scholarships, building up its reference art library and setting up art programmes for children and adults, not to mention increasing its collection.

If it had not been for the donations of works of art, money and time by art-lovers and artists alike who believe in the Society's cause, nothing could have been accomplished.

Today the aim of the Royal Society of Fine Arts is to have a complete collection of modern Islamic art. Its dream for tomorrow is to have a third-world gallery that will house the biggest collection of art by gifted artists of Asia, Africa and South America. God willing, one day this dream will come true. ■

ART TODAY IN JORDAN

Suhail Bisharat

One of the gems of Islamic art, Qasr 'Amra, lies nestled in the desert not far from the great Amman - Baghdad highway, its brilliant, lascivious frescoes as bright today as they were in the 8th century. The desert sun reflects in dazzling brilliance from the bath's diminutive walls, and inside is the cool, calm darkness which, once the eye adjusts to it, turns into a riot of verdant colour. Green leaves and full grapes entwine among farmers, builders and nude figures with musical instruments, who dance from one wall to the next in relaxed merriment, while the leaders of the world congregate to wish their new Ummayad lord well.

How has the rough desert traffic let such a gem survive? What creative force brought it forth during the earliest expansion of Islam and what affection has preserved it in the desert for so long?

If Qasr 'Amra or the Nabatean rock city of Petra were counted in Europe among the wonders discovered by European travellers of the nineteenth century, they were part of a familiar landscape for the Jordanian Bedouin who lived around and in them throughout the centuries from the time of their creation. They were preserved until the twentieth century, and not obliterated or destroyed. Had the distant Ottoman Sultan, Abdul Hamid II, not been so free in disposing of antiquities at the beginning of the twentieth century, Mushatta, the



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1 Qasr Amra
2 Royal Cultural Centre
3 National Gallery of Fine Arts

greatest of the desert hunting lodges, would still lie nearly complete just south of Amman as it did in the 8th century, rather than as it does today in the Berlin Museum where Kaiser Wilhelm placed it.

These works of art from a distant past survived in the landscape and lives of the Jordanian people. The margin between the sown and desert lands of Islam draws a clear north-south line in Jordan; an axis of transit and tolerance. The people were known to be tough; on the borderlands they were never dominated but they were also not domineering. For centuries it was not an urban culture. If lacking in the large architectural monuments and art movements of the high urban cultures, it also suffered none of the iconoclasm and petty insularity of the cities.

This expansive freshness may be the key to the way Jordan, once it had a real city, has moved so rapidly in the arts. In barely a generation since Amman became the capital of the Hashemite Kingdom, the country has been transformed, opening outwards to the Arab World and the West, and building an expansive urban culture where the whole international array of art forms in sculpture, ceramics, mosaics and painting are being tested and manipulated with varying degrees of success. In only a few years, Amman has become a centre for the exhibition of works by Arab and Muslim artists from the sweep of countries that extends from Morocco on the Atlantic eastwards into the Pacific.

What has been the driving force that has capitalised on a receptive climate unencumbered with prejudices?

In part, it is a not so simple a question of supply and demand. Both sides of the equation have received support from the economic expansion of the region and leaders in both the Government and the private sector know how to capitalise on this buoyancy for cultural profit. Jordan's greatest natural resource is its manpower; its export is the country's strongest guarantee of foreign exchange and the promotion of its productive capacity at home the safest investment for the future. No conscious, concerted effort has been made to promote training in the arts or a market for artistic production, but it has come about as a natural by-product of an increasingly educated and sophisticated public whose doors are open to all parts of the world. As one intellectual leader remarked after a trip to the Gulf to seek support for a Jordanian organisation, "I racked my brains about what token of our respect I should take the Emir from Jordan. A mother-of-pearl box from Jerusalem? He has many. Instead, I took him a selection of paintings from prominent Jordanian artists. He was delighted".

The Royal Hashemite Family have given the essential backing and leadership, as patrons of the arts, to maintain the exuberance for new art forms. The Royal Society of Fine Arts, under the patronage of Their Majesties King Hussein and Queen Noor, is a private, non-profit institution, which, as one of its activities in promoting the arts, operates a National Gallery. The President of the Royal Society of Fine Arts, Princess Wijdan Ali, is herself a painter of international repute.

The National Gallery, opened only three years ago, has a significant and growing collection of contemporary works of art not only from Jordan but also from a wide range of Arab and Islamic countries. Its support comes from individual donors, most of them businessmen and intellectuals, and private companies, as well as from research institutions and universities. All the members may be counted among the small but growing number of Jordanians who are serious private collectors of works of art.

Education and training in Jordan is aimed at the international marketplace and as such emphasises the engineering and medical sciences. Until recently there was little perception that this might contain a place for a career in the arts. Only architecture served as a bridge. As the local market itself has grown more selective, niches have opened up for the artistically talented, but they are still few and unstructured. The individual artist must be an enterprising, strong individual who shapes demand and sets the definition of a profession for others.

Jordanian companies only this year began to advertise positions for graphic designers. This term was not even known until a few artists turned their hand to graphic design and showed banks, advertising agencies and government offices what a graphic designer can do. New forms of calligraphy have accompanied this. Another artist has shown that museology may be a profession, designing display cases and museum halls for exhibiting and preserving the traditional crafts of Jordan. A third is making a place for fashion design and film production as art forms. Perhaps architectural conservation, frescoe and mosaic restoration will come next. Jordan is rich in early mosaics whose consolidation and restoration may develop skill and inspiration for new forms.

The Government has supported training in the arts first with scholarships abroad and now with scholarships at the national universities as well. An Institute of Art within the Ministry of Culture and Youth also gives a training ground where students can benefit from the first generation of art teachers trained abroad. The view of art as a career, then, as now, was directed towards education; the Government saw art students largely as future art supervisors or teachers assigned by the Ministry of Education.

While contemporary art in Jordan is still young, there are three distinguishable generations. There are those who came just after the First Wrld War, who constitute the pioneers. The next generation went abroad, and was influenced by Western art movements. The third group, though its media and subjects vary widely, shares a common sensibility: a search for their own cultural identity.

Yarmouk University, one of Jordan's three young universities (none is yet a generation old), has a promising Fine Arts Department. The University has done more than establish academic training in the arts. It has reached outside the university to the nation by promoting a national festival at the ancient Roman city of Jerash. Here, in two separate summers, all forms of the performing and visual arts, in many amateur, as well as international, professional forms, have been presented to the Jordanian public. This has proved a staging ground for new talent while also developing the public interest and appreciation without which the arts cannot thrive.

Artists as a group are becoming more vocal in pressing for and achieving new opportunities, such

as the Jerash Festival, for exhibiting their work. The Arts Association, a professional association of artists, organises exhibitions, houses its own exhibitions and hosts lectures, while also assisting needy artists with working space. Where only a few years ago an artist could exhibit his work only in the halls of one of the few foreign cultural centres in Amman, there is now an abdundance of choice. And some of the spaces rank at international standards,

Architecturally the most impressive is the Royal Cultural Centre, which opened in 1982. The Centre contains a theatre and a spacious, multi-purpose performance hall, as well as studio space for the performing arts. But for the visual arts, its foyer, two large wing halls and a delicate .rotunda give a magnificent choice of both hanging space large enough to accommodate two-storey murals, and lighting conditions. A recent, exquisitely hung retrospective exhibition of the works of Fahrelnissa Zeid, covering the years from 1915 to the present, showed the versatility and monumentality of this space at its best. The same space was opened to all artists to compete before the public in honour of Jordanian Armed Forces Day. The Royal Cultural Centre's greatest attraction, beyond its physical facilities, is its constant activity, which may draw an audience day or night to see works on display, even if it is only in passing.

To Jordan, the public, and especially the buyers, are both the greatest asset and the greatest complaint of the producing artist. The public's taste is unpredictable and, in general, undeveloped, as all contemporary art forms, beyond traditional crafts, are new on the Jordanian landscape. There is an eagerness to acquire and display, but what?: If purchased from abroad, especially from the West, it bears a special cachet belonging to the New World, be it a reproduction, masterpiece or amateur rendition of a familiar scene. If purchased at home, an import must nevertheless be better than the local product. Or if produced at home, the best seal of superiority must be a high price tag.

This may be the talented young artist's discouraging perception of the boom about him. On the other hand, it is just this eagerness of an untutored public to try new forms that holds out hope for an enterprising, it not necessarily talented, artist to make a career for himself. Commercial galleries, prominent among them the Alia Gallery, offer any artist a stab at the market with no interference in prices. Hotels welcome individual exhibitions for sale in their foyers. Tales of prices and sales, one more astounding than the other, circulate about the city. While much of today's work is uneven, overpriced and effervescent, there is some real talent and dedication that will survive. The Jordan National Gallery, which holds no commercial exhibitions, serves the public as a reference point with its one-man and group exhibitions of established Arab artists and its permanent collection of contemporary Arab art.

Jordan's expansion in the arts today depends on a receptivity and tolerance not only for new ideas and forms but for new people as well. A quick glance through a catalogue from the Jordan National Gallery prepared for a collection of Jordanian contemporary art sent abroad in 1982 to the Turkish Museum of Fine Arts in Ankara shows that few of Jordan's noteworthy artists were born in what today constitutes the country. While their birthplaces range over the Arab world, there is a special concentration from those lands now under Israeli occupation. All have made Amman, or the smaller towns in Jordan, their home. Their training is even broader, ranging from those who have studied in the major art centres of the West to the autodidact from a small village in the north of Jordan. Most are young, only a few are over fifty. All have found refuge and support in this small country whose major resource is its open society and belief in human potential.

There is yet little perception that art may take many forms beyond the conventional western ones of painting and sculpture displayed in limited settings. There are indications of some promise in ceramics, but not yet in the variety of marketable forms that made Islamic ceramics over the centuries such a strong form of cultural expression.

The great lustreware production of the past, for example, and decorative tiles, were not produced for only the rich to display, but were part of middle-class trade and everyday life. Jerusalem and Hebron, one the centre for ceramics and tilework, the other for glass production, are under Israeli occupation and little of the craft that has survived has yet reestablished itself across the Jordan River.

Unless traditional crafts can make the transition to today's technologies of production, there is little reason to expect them to survive as more than isolated tourist attractions. As Rifat Chadirji of Baghdad has propounded so well since the 1950s, Islamic art and architecture cannot dwell on the past but must take the spirit of our culture and, with the most advanced technologies, infuse new life into the everyday forms about us.

The building trade and urban expansion in Jordan offer the artist and designer new canvases and materials, not yet structured. Textile design, mosaics, glass, stonemasonry and sculpture may all be used in interiors and some in landscaping or the shaping of urban spaces. One or two local sculptors have taken up the offer to create works for public spaces, and the field is open for design to turn new squares and intersections into human spaces.

New forms need time to take root, just as do the plants and trees of Palestine that have been transplanted to the rocky terrain of the Transjordanian steppe country. With an eagerness and almost frenetic determination to try new forms, the last decade has witnessed an eclectic production, sometimes of dubious quality, but of remarkable sincerity and freshness. Barely a week passes in Amman without two or three new exhibitions opening. The next decade should bear fruit just as have the new citrus plantations of the Jordan Valley.

As, during the first expansion of Islam, the Muslim rulers settled on latifundia, lived in peaceful coexistence, and experimented with new crops, new building forms and new arts, so one may hope for Jordanians in their new, settled life to absorb advanced technologies and new plant strains to produce an exuberance that may echo Qasr 'Amra. Not long ago, the Jordan Valley was a malarial swamp. Today, it is full of citrus and hothouse produce that rivals the lush frescoes of Qasr 'Amra. ■



THEATRE IN JORDAN

Nabil Sawalha

The Theatre in Jordan is as old as time but as young as the people who live there (at present more than 50 per cent of the population are under 14 years of age). A visit to its historical and archaeological landmarks will unveil many amphitheatres which are thousands of years old. There is the 8,000- seat amphitheatre in Amman (known as Ammon or Philadelphia in the past), and the 4,000 seat well-preserved south amphitheatre in Jerash, not to mention the theatres to be found in Petra, Um Qais and other regions of Jordan. Although many of these huge theatres were built during periods of occupation, mainly Roman, they must have witnessed and enjoyed the skill of local artists and Thespians performing to an appreciative local audience.

One theatre in particular in Jerash can be turned into a swimming pool and regular swimming spectacles were performed there by torchlight. It is also said that when Christianity came, the theatre was encouraged by the Church as means of furthering its teachings, much as it encouraged the touring, horse-drawn theatre carriages used in pre-Shakespearian times in England. Sadly, in Jordan, it is not possible to find any documented details of theatre activities in that time, mainly because all the conquerors and invaders (among whom were Greeks, Persians and Romans) forced the indigenous population to adopt their culture and ensured that whatever local culture existed was destroyed or adapted to their own.



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1. South Theatre, Jerash
2 & 3. Touring Puppet Theatre, Royal Arts Centre.
Photographs by Bill Lyons

The coming of Islam saw a flowering of literature, especially in the spoken arts of poetry and prose. These arts had a long and rich history, starting from the pre-Islamic era, when poets gathered at a cultural and social festival in the Souk Ukad in Makkah once a year to read their poems, which were then echoed throughout the Arab world. The outstanding poems were inscribed in gold on parchment and hung on the gates of Makkah for all to see and read.The theatre, as we know it today, had little or no share in the world of Islam at one time. This was because Islam did not favour impersonation,- whether in the theatre or in the art of sculpture. This is not so today, as the theatre in all its forms, has become an integral part of Islamic cultural life.

The lack of a metropolis within the borders of Jordan over the past few centuries hindered the development of a local art form. The nearest similar activity to the theatrical at that time was that of the storyteller, who travelled far and wide recounting his melod-





SOME ASPECTS OF JORDANIAN FOLKLORE

Mahmoud Zayoudi

Jordan consists of five distinct folkloric areas each one with its own characteristic clothes, customs, traditions and colloquial expressions influenced by the geographical position and its effect on the life of the people. A number of studies have been undertaken on the folklore of the West Bank and the Palestinian heritage. This study deals with the northern area of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan on the East bank of the River Jordan.

The Northern District. This is the Governate of Irbid, extending from the borders of Syria in the north to the river Zurgh'a in the South excluding an area of steppeland and part of the area of the Bani Hassan which is influenced by the area of Al Balqa.

The District of Al- Balq'a. This area stretches from the River Zurgh'a in the north to the river Mujib in the south excluding an area of steppeland.

The Southern District. This area stretches from the river Mujib in the north up to the Gulf of Aqaba excluding an area of steppeland and the Wadi Araba which is influenced by the traditions of the Bin Saba'a and the city of Aqaba which in turn has been influenced by the Hejaz and Egypt.

The Steppeland. This is an area east of the Hejaz railway line which cuts the country from north to south. It also includes the Al Shana mountain region, Al Kuwaria, Hasma and Wadi Ram.

The Ghor. The east bank of the river Jordon comprises the area running from the river east to the foothills of Jebel Ajlun, Al Balqa, Dhiban and Al Karak. This area stretches from El Hamma in the north to the southern end of the Dead sea.

In the past Beduin traditions have been influenced by all areas which have been mentioned. The population of the mountain chain overlooking El Ghor is employed in agriculture using agricultural implements which are made of wood from the forest. People of this area live in houses made of mud and stone. We find that the Beduins in this area are continously on the move and the peasants have adopted certain Beduin customs such as using Beduin entertainers for their celebrations and using Beduin musical instruments such as the Rababa, at rural feasts. There is a close connection between peasant society and tribal traditions of horsemanship, generosity and tribal loyalty. We find that peasant poets recite their poetry in peasant dialect and have preserved in their poetry the meter originally used by the Beduins whether they lived in the greater Syria or in the Nejd.

The social changes that occured following the political divisions of the Arab nation, especially in greater Syria, and increasing contact with cities and the growth of new cities, has led to an interchange with folklores of other societies.

In the north the clothing of women consists of a black robe embroidered with coloured threads, whereby the colours red, yellow and green prevail, as well as a head-dress made of silk and b rought from the markets of Damascus and Hums, which has the form of a red turban with fringes, folded and wrapped around the head. This manner of dress spread to the area of Al Balqa and the steppeland where it developed into a long robe, twice the length of the northern robe. The woman weaves half of the robe folded around the waist and this covers the body in three or four layers which is tied by a woolen belt, this protects her from the cold and it prevents showing the charms of the body. In the south, the Jordanian woman removed the sleeves, and she wears coloured shirts which show on the forearms of the traditional robe, the head-dress, however, is smaller and lighter than the traditional head-dress of the northern area and Al Balqa.

Jordanian men generally wear a woolen robe with a jacket that is called "Al- Jibbah" as well as a white or a red headdress with a black cord. In the north the men mainly wear black trousers which is a result of the influence of Hawran where this manner of dress is common.

Weapons have been used since ancient times and are among the popular possessions of the Jordanians. We mention here the dagger, the sword as well as the more recent guns and handguns. There is also a particular kind of stick called Qurwah, which is cut from the roots of an oak tree and has a rounded bulge on the end. These sticks are used by shepherds. In the dwellings we find leather water jugs made by hand in which water, milk, fat and oil are kept. There is clay pottery as well as containers made of wheat straw and engraved wooden bowls in different shapes and sizes. There is also an outstanding deep wooden container which is used to grind Arabic coffee and called "Al Muhabash". We also find brass coffeepots with the daily coffee brewing on the fire that burns night and day.

The care the Jordanians give to horses and camels led to specialised legislation regulating the process of buying and selling. The thoroughbred Arabian horses in particular are not fully surrendered when sold, as the seller has the right to either the first foal to which the mare gives birth, or to the return of the mare after she has given birth to a foal. There are specialists in the lineage of camels and their breeding and they attend the markets and certify to the new owner the lineage, within their knowledge of the animal's physical features and the tribes that own them.

Thousands of popular poems of the Arab desert have descriptions of camels and horses. The Beduin poet starts his poem with a description of horses and camels carrying messages to a friend or a beloved. Some horses were used to pull a plough, just like a pack of oxen under a yoke have been used by peasants since old times. Jordanians celebrate marriage with singing by both men and women as they accompany the bride on her trip to the house of her husband and in the evening at a gathering where bride and bridegroom are both present.They form a circle and dance.

The "Sunur", as he is called, is a poet who sings, accompanied by three or four men, while two girls dance with two men in the middle of the circle. They sing fiery songs of war, harvest seasons and construction work as well as prayers for water. Women calling for rain from sky form groups and go round the village singing these prayers.

When death occurs men and women gather around the dead person, recollecting, grieving and regretting the departure.

In the past the Jordanian society has been subject to tribal justice in combination with its customs and traditions which were in the minds of people but not put in writing. Consequently in the Arab nation where the majority of the population is Beduin, numerous studies have been done by scholars and anthropologists on this subject, but unfortunately many of the details have been disregarded.

As a result of the rapid development that occured in the lives of the people and the fear of losing the knowledge of traditional folklore, the Department of Art and Culture initiated a general survey of the Kingdom. This survey produced about 1000 tapes, each of which is about an hour long, carrying interviews and dialogues with the elders discussing the customs and traditions, the texts of songs and stories, dates and locations of folklore. This documentation enjoys great popularity in the Jordanian festival of the Samer and the Dibrah (group dance), where they can also be heard. Groups of different areas of the Kingdom sing and dance on stage in the capital Amman, and these groups have also started to participate in international festivals. ■

Traditional Costumes of Jordan and Palestine

Widad Kawar

The subject of traditional costumes is a most interesting study as it combines within itself a study of culture, tradition, workmanship and style. Above all, it is a revelation of the soul and personality of the village women of Jordan and Palestine who, for ages past, have been silently weaving and embroidering their lives and their love into these masterpieces.

Jordan and Palestine have a unique location which has made them the bridge and stage for many cultures and civilisations. These civilisations, interacting over time historically, geographically and politically, have passed down to us a rich cultural heritage which is expressed in all aspects of our daily life.

Our traditional costumes, with their embroidery, textiles and accessories, are one aspect of this cultural heritage, which is deeply rooted in the past and is still alive in present-day society. Arab society in general falls into three social groupings:

1. The Bedouin, who in some areas wore very colourful embroidered costumes.
2. The city or town people, who wore ordinary town dress similar to that of any other town around the Mediterranean.
3. The villagers or farmers, who were the largest grouping, and have always had the richest culture and the richest costumes.

The village consists of many large family units divided into smaller families. The villager and his family have always identified strongly with their village. For them their costume is a way of showing their sense of belonging to the village and the area. The village woman, particularly, is proud of her costume and she tries to make it perfect. For her, her costume is a passport and a mark of her identity.

To keep this identity the woman had to stay true to her traditional arts. Costumes undergo many changes and adjustments, and styles flourish and deteriorate with economic conditions. These changes are usually apparent in the textiles and in the embroidery on the costumes.

Embroidery has always been done by the women and they have been true artists in this field. Their costumes, lovingly embroidered, express both spiritual wealth and a high standard of workmanship. The village woman had a heavy burden of work, varying with the seasons. Yet she always found many leisure hours when she would sit with other women and they would work on their most beautiful craft - embroidery.

The social life in the village revolved around weddings. Girls prepared their embroideries for this event years ahead. From the time they were about twelve years old they would sit beside their mothers learning the art and preparing costumes for their trousseau. They never had patterns to copy from, their only guide being memory and tradition.

There were certain main wedding costumes that were a must for every girl. One costume was prepared for the "henna" night, when the bride and all the young girls of her family were decorated with henna. Another costume was for the wedding day and is the one in which she would leave her father's home.

For one week after the wedding, the bride changed her costume every day. The third important dress was for her first public appearance as a married woman when she was invited back to her father's home. This was usually the richest costume and, with this, she ended the wedding celebrations. The bride then wore the same costumes later for feasts, weddings and all other special occasions.

Apart from her wedding costumes, the bride prepared embroideries for other accessories, such as cushions, caps, bags for different occasions and head shawls.

What distinguished costumes of one area from another was the textiles used, the cut and the patterns of the embroidery. The embroidery patterns in Jordan and Palestine are all geometric in origin, though different in stitch. Each area has its own general patterns and sometimes outside influences infiltrate as an outcome of marriage, travel or the mere love of copying.

The names of motifs are symbolic of everyday life and events. The 'tree of life' is found in all areas in a variety of forms. Other motif names are 'four eggs in a pan', 'four slices of soap', 'flowerpots', 'old man's teeth', 'lover's lane', 'the tree of love', sun, moon, stars, 'road to Egypt', orange blossoms, vine leaves, 'the elegant man', etc. Triangles are found on every costume and they are regarded as amulets against the evil eye.

However, textiles are fragile and perishable and, unlike paintings, they have perished, leaving few examples for us of early masterpieces. It is difficult to know now how the costumes looked in the 18th and early 19th century. References were occasionally made by travellers but they usually gave only a sketchy description. We know that all the early costumes up to 1930 were made of handwoven cotton, linen or silk. Cotton was grown in the Ghor and in Galilee. Linen threads were brought from Egypt and Cyprus, and silk fabrics were imported from Syria and the Lebanon.

The threads for embroidery were home-dyed with vegetable and insect dyes. Alum, salt and vinegar were added to the dyes to make the colours fast and shiny.

With better communications,



Romall Costume



Southern Palestine Bedouin Costume of Tovaha Tribe circa 1910



Detail from Bethleham Costume

styles of costumes began to change. Machine-produced fabrics appeared on the market and replaced the hand-woven materials. Around 1930, the DMC cotton threads replaced the silk threads and the new DMC pattern books were circulating among village women, introducing a trail of new European patterns and designs.

The costumes of Jordan and Palestine differ, except in the Ghor area. Costumes in North Jordan, Ramtha and Irbis are beltless and made of black cotton and are very similar to the costumes of the Hauran area.

The background of the lower back, sides and front of the dress is filled with a rich variety of patterns, with specific descriptive names such as 'four eggs in a pan', footprints of a horse' and 'melon seed'. These patterns are done mainly in running stitch and satin stitch, where spaces of the fabric are left empty, creating an effect of relief. The buttonhole-stitch is used as a divider between the patterns and as a border. The embroidery in Ramtha is done only in white threads; in other areas it is multi-coloured.

The city of Maan, having a railway station, has always been exposed to outside styles. The costume is made of a variety of silk fabrics played up in a beautiful continuation. One large painted sleeve is put over her head when the woman leaves the house.

The Salt dress is like the Jericho costume – made of black cotton fabric. It is supposed to be as long as the women's room. The woman wears it by pulling it over a tight belt giving it a flowing, tent-like style. The woman wears a beautiful silk scarf (*aske*) rolled turban-style round her head.

The Palestinian costumes are different in cut and embroidery and fabrics from those of the surrounding areas. Embroidery is in cross-stitch and crouching. The few examples I shall mention start with the Bethlehem bridal costume, which is known as *malak*. The fabric is handwoven, striped linen and silk, embroidered in gold thread in crouching stitch. Similar embroidery in gold thread is found in Turkey, the Greek islands and Iran.

The southern part of Palestine is the home of many Bedouin tribes. Like the villager, the Bedouin has a strong sense of identity with his tribe. The costumes are of black cotton, heavily embroidered. The colour of the embroidery is red for a married woman and blue for an unmarried woman to indicate who is available for marriage.

Ramallah, north of Jerusalem, is famous for its embroidery and weaving. The main dress is of white linen with cross-stitch embroidery in geometric patterns.

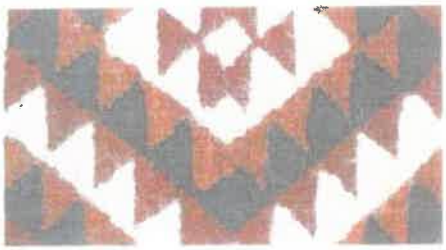
On her head, Palestinian women wear embroidered caps in different styles, which are adorned with gold and silver coins by the bridegroom.

I have taken only a few samples from each area as illustrations. Today, the dresses have the same basic styles, but the hand-woven fabric and the home-made silks and fine embroidery are lost in the past. ■

Photographs by Samia Zaru

JORDAN'S TRADITIONAL CRAFTS

Samia Zaru



Weaving



Basket Weaving



Hebron Glass

Art is the vital force of a nation; it is the essential basis of culture. Countries throughout the ages have developed their own indigenous art forms, which later followed function. Yet man's need to enrich his world aesthetically was evident in his creative and imaginative forms, fashioned and crafted by his hands.

Jordan, whose history can be traced back almost 10,000 years, to the walled city of Jericho and the round houses of Beidah, has an especially rich heritage. The glory of the past has acted as an inspiration to the present, for this land which has encouraged men to produce the sculptural forms of Petra, the columns of Jerash, the desert castles and the Holy City of Jerusalem, is still encouraging its people to create.

Jordanian and Palestinian folk culture includes many crafts. Each piece tells the story of the people who made it, their way of life, traditions and superstitions, their rituals and beliefs, their insight and determination, and the long tedious hours they spent to produce this kind of fine craftsmanship. Each piece gives a message to the children of those craftsmen; the plea to keep alive and preserve their tradition. All these aspects are clearly expressed in bold lines, free, geometric decorative patterns, and repeated motifs in rustic or very sophisticated materials - all of which is the effect of the desert and the sun, the sand and rocks, the roughness, and the gentleness of the winds of Jordan.

Tradition preserves crafts in many ways; and is interwoven with it. It was tradition that required silver jewellery, beautiful, vividly-embroidered costumes, colourful, patterned, woven rugs, intricate inlay of mother-of-pearl on wooden chests, clear-coloured, hand-blown, glass vases, engraved brass and copper utensils, slip-coloured pottery, and wheat-stalk baskets for Arab weddings and celebrations for both villagers and Bedouins.

Primitive weaving is done on the simplest form of loom, called *Al-madid* (the ground loom), which can be assembled and dismantled quickly and easily. The Bedouin wove his tent from goats' hair, using the natural colour of hand-spun wool to make himself a hospitable home, gracious in shape, light in architectural form, solid in structure, yet beautifully blending with the landscape, and offering all the necessities of a house.

Villagers round Bethlehem, Hebron and Madaba used the ground loom. The Madaba *bsat* rug, with *naqesh* patterns, is characteristic, and the colourful geometric patterns have symbolic meanings: the straight bold stripes mean faith, the triangles stand for fire and water, and the comb-like designs signify cleanliness and the act of ablution. Weavers, artists in their own right, wove rugs, saddles and bags from home-cured sheep's wool, which was washed, dried and combed with two wooden combs and then spun on a simple wooden spool. The wool was then dyed by the use of vegetable, and recently, chemical, dyes of various colours: bright reds and oranges, indigo, yellows, and the natural range of greys, black and white. The weaving process started on a treadle loom, which was operated by men only. Those more advanced looms are operated by foot pedals and the weft, or *luhmeh*, is moved between the longitudenal warp, or *sada*, by the use of a wooden spool. The heddle is exchanged by a paddle movement after every spool move. another kind of loom is the vertical or *nol el-sha'ar* (goat-hair) loom, which produces items similar to the ground loom, but with more pattern. It is used usually for making panels for the backs of tents.

A few hundred years ago, a family from Hebron moved to Damascus, where they learnt the method of glass-blowing. They later moved back to Hebron, where they began the open-furnace method of glass-blowing. Local dyes gave the glass

beautiful transparent and traditional colours of emerald, cobalt blue, mauve and honey brown. Glass furnaces now operate on crude oil, and the artist glass-blower creates a variety of shapes by moving the glass lump on the tip of a tube over the blazing fire. This method allows for air-bubble formation and a rough texture, as well as irregularity of form, making each piece a unique beauty. The items are then put in a warm furnace to cool gradually. Certain modifications to shapes and techniques have now been introduced and some artists are applying Arabic designs with gold paint as highlights.

Embroidery is one of the most legendary and colourful of the traditional handicrafts, and it is the most widely retained craft of our cultural heritage. Women carried the patterns and motifs and thread, their inborn sense of colour, and the spontaneous choice and distribution of patterns, wherever they moved. The thread was used instead of the pencil as an expression of their love for the warmth of their colourful, bright land.

Embroidery was traditionally done by girls on their wedding dress; a project started and worked on from the age of 13 or 14. Each pattern reflected the surrounding history and geography, and each dress was like an identity card, indicating the girl's origin in a particular area or village. This delicate art of needle-and-thread remains true to its Islamic origins on the East and West Banks, with infinite and intricate variations on geometric forms carefully counted and repeated, while intervals outline the neckline, sleeves and panels on the skirt and hemline. Other distinctive features of the costumes are the style and cut which is mostly a tent-like, flowing style. The predominant cross stitch, 'peasant-stitch', was the only one used until others were introduced, such as the 'nuns-stitch' and appliqué. Of all the embroidery, Bethlehem is the richest and most varied, with couch stitch, chain, satin and silver gilt cord.

Despite the intricate patterns on her costumes, the peasant and the Bedouin woman was not quite satisfied with this form of ornamentation. Thus, she also adorned her ears, neck, arms and ankles with the most exclusive, handcrafted jewellery of silver and gold: necklaces, pendants, medallions and earrings, as well as strung beads, cloves, coral, turqoise and seeds, with designs of crescents, fish and stars, which were usually an indication of status and wealth. In Jordan, these designs were also used to ward off evil. This need led to the development of amulet jewellery for instance, the *hijab*, which was a charm worn round the neck.

As in embroidery, each motif identifies the area of its origin. Many motifs were borrowed from earlier cultures or influences in either design or technique, such as Nabatean pendants, Byzantine and early Islamic earrings, Circassian neolin work, Armenian filigree, and Yemeni and Saudi-Arabian granulation and hammering. There is a great similarity between these patterns and motifs in embroidery, pottery and jewellery, each modified to suit the application technique. Other interesting ornaments for women were the tasselled headpieces and the elaborate coins collected by the bride for her headdress (*safah*).

Straw-work is another craft which was practised by villagers, mainly for domestic purposes, for the manufacture of bamboo baskets and straw trays. The availability of raw materials on the banks of the Jordan River and Azrak swamps made the bamboo-woven baskets a folk-craft. Other items include the patterned, wheat-straw trays and baskets which are made by women in most of the villages of the East and West banks.

Clay modelling dates back to 6,000 B.C. in this part of the world. It was not until 3,000 B.C. that the potter's wheel was introduced, and the 'pinch' and 'slab' methods were the techniques commonly practised, the items being fired in primitive open kilns after being sundried. Electric and crude oil kilns are at present used. Potters in the past excelled in the design and technique of pots and other forms. It is worth noting that the quality of clay in this area is one of the world's best and comes in a range of colours due to the different oxides in the soil. This proved to be the incentive for production, other than the need for functional forms to be used as utensils. The present pottery is greatly inspired by the old in form and technique, especially the slip-colour decoration which is still very popular in the villages of Sinjil in the West Bank and areas of Ajloun in the East Bank.

The ancient crafts of stone- and wood-carving and engraving have been passed down through the centuries. Items including weapons, utensils and furniture have become more sophisticated in technique, to meet the standards of modern living. The shapes and forms, however, have not changed, and this is prominent in the beautifully engraved daggers and swords, the pride of the Bedouins, and the *mihbash* (wooden coffee-grinder), with its rhythmic beats sending messages of welcome to the guest.

Olive wood-carving started about 1,000 A.D. Tourist items are still produced in Bethlehem and its surroundings, where the skilled woodcarvers exhibit the beautiful grain and colour of aged olive wood in a great variety of forms, beads, crosses and vases. Mother-of-pearl carving and engraving, handed down from father to son, is also common in the Bethlehem area. The colourful mother-of-pearl is imported from Italy and Japan. Carving is done underwater or on pre-soaked material with intricate details of scenes from the Holy Land. Crosses, beads and necklaces are also carved.

A variety of naturally-coloured sands are found in Wadi Musa and Petra. The inhabitants of these areas fill glass bottles with the coloured sand in a variety of patterns and designs as an expression of their love for colour. This technique is also popular in the City of Aqaba on the Red Sea. Men skilfully drip coloured sand through a paper funnel into glass bottles, to form colourful, uniform geometric patterns. Occasionally, commercial dyes are used for a wider range of colours.

Our nation's traditional crafts are a reflection of our pride in our land and its produce over centuries of various cultures and civilisations that have come and gone. They are a reminder of the long hours our grandmothers and grandfathers spent producing treasured masterpieces of culture. We are able to think of our forefathers with pride and tell them that their pleas for preservation have not gone unanswered. And we, the grateful, shall, in turn, convey these pleas to our grandchildren. ■

Extension to the National Gallery

Jafar Tukan



1



2

1 & 2. Jordan National Gallery

It was rather unusual and exciting to have to design an extension to the National Gallery of Art, for the following reasons:

1. The extension is an addi-

Designing *Houses* in Amman

Jafar Tukan



Mubarak Villa



Kazimi Villa



Salfiti Villa

tional floor to a rented building.

2. The lower floor, which is to receive the addition, is a villa rather crudely transformed to serve as a Gallery of Art.
3. Since the villa is rented and may be released to the owner after some time, and since he may wish to put it back into residential use, the extension has to allow for this possibility.
4. The funds available for this gallery were too ridiculously limited to allow for any relaxation on the cost.
5. The gallery was suffocating with stuff to exhibit and a solution had to be found and implemented immediatley.

I started by trying to identify the problems posed by the above facts. A residential villa must have ample windows in its walls, thus wasting the wall area so precious for a gallery. Closing the window with a temporary type of closure would deprive the hall of natural light and ventilation. If windows are to be provided, they must follow those of the lower floor.

The idea of free-standing walls in front of the windows seemed to be the natural solution; it would solve the above problems and add some useful bonuses.

The free-standing wall allowed for the provision of the same windows as on the floor below and simultaneoulsy extra wall area, at the same time allowing natural lighting, which became, by this wall indirect and diffused. This was a bonus. The walls also allowed heating convectors to be concealed behind them, thus avoiding direct hot-air streams reaching the paintings. This was the second bonus.

The free-standing walls made an interesting and exciting play of planes which enhanced the interior aspect of the space.

The only exception to obscuring all the windows was having a window on the main facade overlooking a garden. The window was only partially obscured, thus allowing a pleasant and necessary contact with the outside world.

The walls are built out of simple concrete blocks which can easily be demolished when the building is released back to the owner.

The finish of the whole interior is white plaster and paint on the walls and terrazzo floor tiles. The colour choice is a natural conclusion for the enhancement of the exhibits. Furthermore, it is a most economical choice.

Lighting was supplemented by projectors on rails to allow flexibility in distribution in accordance with the exhibits' requirements.

The flow within the space is straightforward and allows a continuous movement inside with sufficient room to allow seating for a lounge or even a seminar.

The roof of this floor is properly finished so that it can be utilised as an outdoor exhibition space. ■

Designing houses in Amman is probably the most talked about subject in architecture. One finds that the proportion of articles or books written about the architecture of houses exceeds by far any writings about that of any other type of building.

A house is the space most intimate to any man's life. The diversity of the activities that take place in it, the relatively small size and the impact it has on its' users, psychologically, socially and economically, make it a very intricate subject of design.

The constraints imposed upon the architect while designing a house increase further the complexity of such an assignment. The architect is dealing with a specific person, who has his own personality, way of life and financial status, all at a particular moment in time. Such conditions are so dynamic and ever-changing that they can change drastically even during the design and construction stages. Designing a house involves a serious and imaginative look into not only the present conditions but also the future. This is an aspect which is induced by the specific requirements of the owner of the house.

Furthermore, there are contextual considerations; climate, materials, culture and the general social and economic structure of the region.

One could argue, and rightfully so, that such considerations exist in every architectural work; yet they become magnified in domestic architecture, particularly when such effort is related to the fees that any architect may charge for designing a house. No matter how lavish such fees are, they can never be compatible with the effort required.

Some solutions to this problem were sought in standard, off-the-shelf designs. The results were obviously not compatible with the seriousness of the task.

Each and every house seriously designed is a unique experience. The mutual intimacy that grows between the architect and his client can never be achieved in any other way. The relationship may not always be smooth and friendly, but it is always enriching.

It is a pleasure and a luxury to design a house.

I have been a practising architect for twenty-five years now. During this period I designed over fifty houses. Some were built, others did not go beyond the preliminary design stage. I am not much of the theoretician and I do not consciously relate myself to any particular school of architecture. I try always to start from the basics and work my way through a logical sequence based on the direct sensation of the uniqueness of the owner.

During all this process of abstraction I try to maintain a close awareness of the material and technological aspects of the project, in the hope of achieving a well-integrated end-result. It does not always work out!

I would like to discuss here a few houses which may demonstrate some of the above points.

Mubarek House in Amman

A tight site, densely built surroundings and a fairly extended programme are typical conditions in Amman.

This house had to have five bedrooms apart from those of the staff. The reception and dining spaces, a study, two family rooms, a playroom in the basement and miscellaneous service spaces totalled over 700 square metres on 900 square metres, and with the obligatory setbacks, hardly a ribbon of 4 - 6 metres wide open space was left round the house.

A simple formal plan was

worked out with four two-storey corner masses connected by a square atrium that provides a supplementary inner garden, which also compensates for the limited possibilities of opening to the outside.

Stone, being the predominent material of construction in Amman, was used here. The tooling and construction details were an atttempt to enhance the monolithic and rich nature of the stone, to accentuate lines that define the masses of the house.

Kazimi House in Amman

Another large house on a tight site (over 1,000 square metres on a 900 square metres site). A multiplicity of levels provided the required space within a limited footprint. Gradual setting back of floors as we went higher helped relieve the pressure of the adjacent buildings and a semi-internal, semi-external garden space provided a supplement to the limited exterior garden space.

The stone-handling is similar to that of the previous house. At present, the house is still under construction.

Salfiti House in Amman

Not typical of Amman houses, the site here was quite relaxed for a city plot. The house was developed around a central living space with a high ceiling that extends into the garden through an open-air, but sheltered, living space. The total area is just under 700 square metres, the site area 2,500 square metres.

The openings and stone-handling are similar to that of the previous two houses.

Abu Rahmeh House in Amman

This was another relatively small site for a one-storey house, but had the advantage of a slope and a magnificent view of Amman. The design capitalised on the view, while at the same time providing an internal garden with a glazed roof.

In this scheme, the stone-handling is unique with respect to Amman; no tooling whatsoever was required and the natural rockface of the naturally thin strata of the stone bed was left as it comes from the ground. Exposed concrete spanned the wide openings induced by the desire to maximise utilisation of the views. ■

New Mosque for Amman

Jan Cejka

The original design of the King Abdullah Mosque in Amman was the outcome of an international architectural competition held in 1979. The site selected was a difficult one, of an irregular, triangular shape with a rather steep slope towards one of the sides. The programme called not only for the Mosque proper (capacity up to 3,000 people), but also for an Islamic conference centre catering for 700 participants. A royal *maqsura*, library, *madrasa*, houses for the *imams*, places for ablution and a large garage were required as well.

Our answer to the problems involved was fully to exploit the slope of the terrain and to place the conference centre under the Mosque, thus having both the main functions directly accessible from the different levels of the surrounding streets.

In order to cope with the irregularities of the site, an octagonal layout was suggested for the prayer hall, avoiding the difficult corner situations which an ordinary rectangle would have created.

The concept of the Mosque was based on an old Islamic structural device, the ribbed dome. Beautiful examples of such domes are found in Andalusia: in the *maqsūra* of the Great Mosque of Cordoba, in the so-called Bāb Marjūm mosque in Toledo and in some later examples there and in North Africa. Similar ribbed domes, however, in different material (brick instead of stone) can be seen in the Friday Mosque in Isfahan and other Seljuq buildings in the eastern realm of Islam. It occurred to me that this system, based on crossing pairs of parallel ribs creating star-shaped figures, could be as easily interpreted in a large-span reinforced concrete structure, and the programme asked for such a large span.

After some model experiments (conducted with my students at the University of Jordan), a pattern was selected where two pairs of supports on opposite sides of an octagon were connected by two parallel girders (fig. 1). These girders were designed in such a way, that each centre of the span was elevated, creating a triangular "arch", an element frequently used in Fātimid Cairo (fig. 2). The resulting figure was a complex, three-dimensional composition of an almost crystalline quality. Above the smaller octagon in the centre, a domed lantern was suggested.

The jury criticised the lantern, because, due to the geometry involved, it was relatively small compared to the rest. The model has clearly shown that the structural concept was sound and that it created an amazingly rich, column-free space of nearly 50 metres in diametre.

After being awarded the first prize (Arch. Ribhi Sobeh, Hasan Nouri and myself responsible for the concept, we were asked by the client to reconsider the concept in order to provide for a larger dome. After many trials, a new geometry, based on a similar principle, was adopted. In this concept, the pairs of girders create two intersecting squares inscribed into the basic octagon (fig. 3). This configuration allows for a much larger dome, for my feeling almost too large compared to the rather thin strips of intersecting beams. The client was pleased with the amendment and the design was carried out by the joint effort of the offices of Ribhi Sobeh and Hasan Nouri. I remained as an external consultant during the working drawings stage.

The articulation of the outer face of the Mosque, compared to the competition scheme, was also improved, and so were many details. Its design in the commonly used motif was an obliquely projecting spandrel (fig. 4) occurring at many points, such as the porticoes of the court (*riwāq*), the gates, the doorways and the eight cardinal points of the Mosque. This was a summarised version of the projecting *muqarnasat* or 'stalactites' found in similar situations in traditional Islamic architecture.

Also, the eight main v-shaped (in plan) supports of the prayer



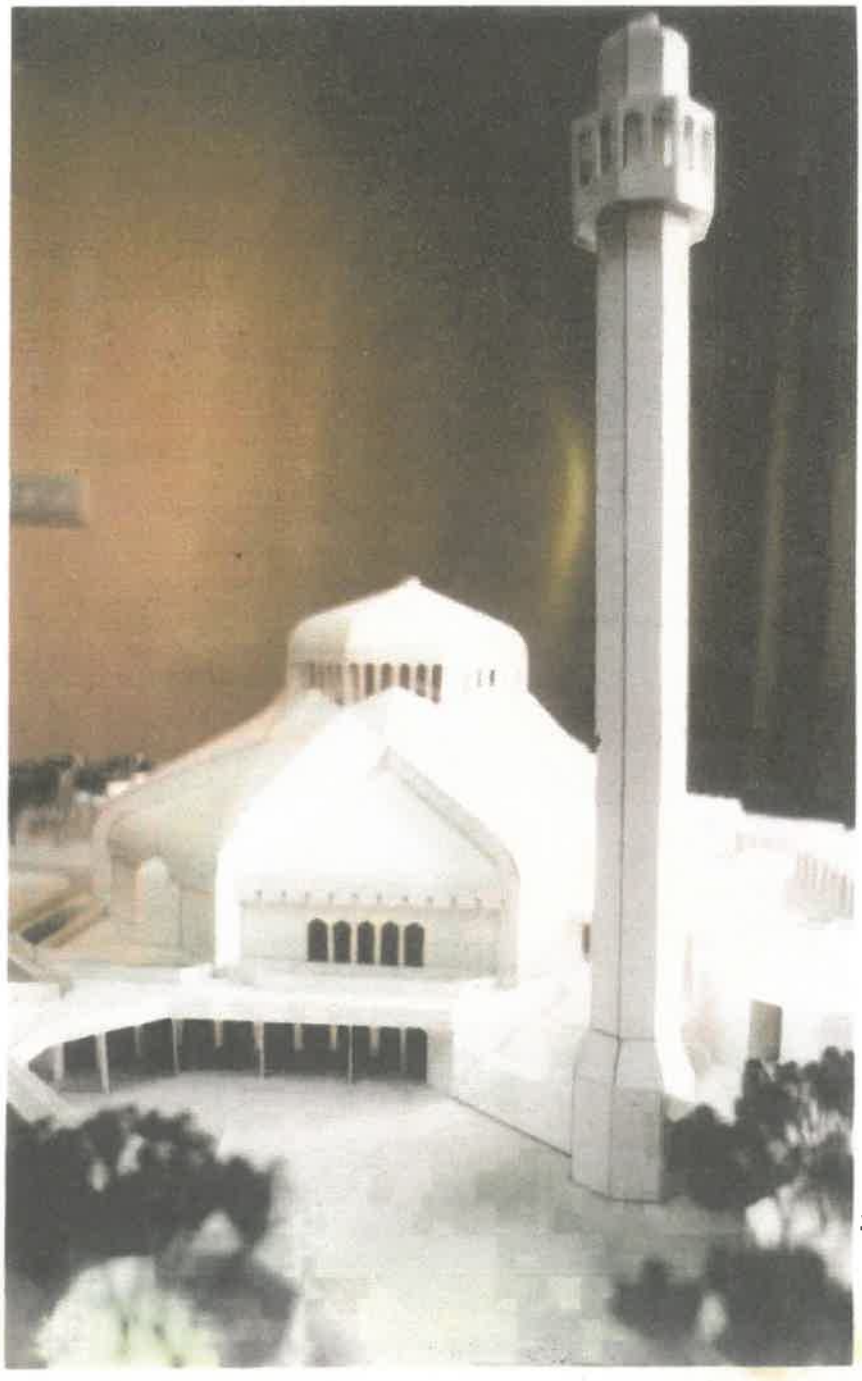
hall were expressed more clearly and have been separated from the walls by recessed vertical strips of glass. An interesting solution for natural lighting was preserved from the original competition design. The light is reflected from the surrounding pavement onto the sloping ceiling and from there indirectly into the interior of the mosque (fig. 5). Direct glare is thus prevented and the complex geometry of the roof is enhanced. The light from the ring of smaller windows in the drum of the dome is filtered through ornamental stained glass.

The more than 50 metre tall minaret is crowned by a gallery using the oblique cantilevers already mentioned. In plan, it is based on the same octagonal system as the Mosque.

A large stairway winds up between the free-standing minaret and the court (*sahn*). During the important Muslim feasts, the court will also be used for prayers.

The interior decoration was not included in the commission and we hope it will be executed in keeping with the architectural design, and based on the octagonal geometry.

The aim of the architects was to create a mosque clearly contemporary in spirit, yet unquestionably Islamic to everybody. How far we succeeded in doing so it is up to the public to judge. ■



1 & 2. King Abdullah Mosque, Amman, Model

COMMUNITY HOUSING

Rasem Badran



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1, 2 & 3. The Cluster
4. The Approach
5. The Enclosure

Jordan was established only 60 years ago with Amman as its capital. Amman has a long history dating back over 3,000 years. But the nucleus for modern Amman started only in 1922, when it became the capital of Trans-Jordan, now known as the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. From a desert village with a few scattered settlers it expanded to a city of 3 million inhabitants in an extremely short time.



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This rapid, unorganised development called for quick decisions and aroused the urge to build housing settlements to provide shelter and protection for its inhabitants in a short period of time.

Owing to the urgent need for housing settlements, the policy of the special authorities was to provide housing satisfying only the basic needs, by the most simple, functional and economical

engineering methods and that would house the greatest number of people.

This attitude was adopted by most of the public and private institutions and became the golden rule for such projects. No attempt was made to develop the house concept and the philosophy behind it; even its social influence on its inhabitants was neglected.

Thus most of the housing projects were mass-produced by a repetative pattern of box-like enclosures with lots of openings to let in air and sun, regardless of the social, economical and cultural status of their inhabitants. They did not even fulfil people's essential needs for privacy and identity, considering that most of them were brought up in a warm and rich architectural atmosphere that fulfilled their need for an emotional and spiritual relationship with their dwellings.

All this had many negative influences on the society and on the family structure itself. It affected social understanding and relationships and even deprived the individual of a chance to appreciate beautiful values.

The lost link between the environment and human nature affected people's daily conduct and carried them away from their origional, simple, kind-hearted Arabic nature.

Realising these negative results, some architects offered new perspectives for housing projects based on a thorough study and analysis of previous Arabic culture and social systems.

This new image can be seen in the public security housing project, designed by Rasem Badran, a Jordanian architect, in a hilly area in the suburbs of Amman. The first stage, which includes only 48 apartments, is now being constructed.

The medium economic status of the owners was an essential factor in the commercial success of this project. The client wanted a housing complex of multi-storey buildings, each having the same interior spaces and functions and the same area, to be owned by public security officials.

Badran tried to mould his preconceived image of how a typical Arabic housing complex should be according to the clients' needs and budget. He says:

1. The apartment's interior functions were classified into two categories, private and public, separated at the entrance lobby by opposite directions and linked through the living room. This distribution allowed for easy circulation yet also for privacy.
2. He tried to achieve the privacy and individuality of the Arabic house by offering, for each building, a semi-public space, an internal court having vertical ciculation, to give a gradual transfer from the (outside) public space to the (inside) private one. Also this court allowed split-level private entrances for each apartment and added variety to its exterior.
3. Six apartments, that is, two sets of three floors, were gathered on opposite sides of the previously mentioned court. This offered four different side elevations for each building.
4. The basic element of the housing complex was made by gathering four buildings around a private, split-level, courtyard, which presented the transfer space from the public environment to the more defined and private courts of the buildings. This served also as a private playground and green area for each group. This element reflects the original neighbourhood atmosphere of the Arabic society.
5. Connecting these elements, through their courts, are pedestrian malls that vary in atmosphere, one crossing a souk, another a court of a mosque, another being a narrow stepped path, etc. This enriched the atmosphere of the complex and stressed the individuality and identity of each group.

Being on a hilly site, the four buildings of the basic element aquired different levels and were connected by arches to stress the shape and volume of their courts. Also, in the same manner, each element aquired a different level.

This procedure reflected a typical image of Amman, which is situated on 7 hills, and offered a variety of shapes and spaces as one approaches the complex from different sides.

Badran says that this project is ideal for him, being divided into different stages. This allows him to study, analyse and evaluate the social and environmental aspects of the first stages and then spontaneously re-evaluate and remould the other stages according to the feedback from the previous ones. ■

THE CITY OF SALT

Rami Khouri

The lovely, gentle, urban architecture that spread throughout large Middle Eastern cities such as Damascus and Cairo at the turn of the century has been particularly well preserved in the small Jordanian city of Salt (pronounced "Sulf", as in cult). A recently launched, two-pronged strategy aims to preserve the charming architectural heritage of the city of Salt, while meeting both the developmental requirements of its residents and the city's need to grow and broaden its industrial and economic base.

Salt has a population of just over 35,000 people today, representing a modest expansion of the city from its 25,000 population at the turn of the century – when Amman was just a village of several thousand people and Salt was the seat of the Ottoman administration in the land of Jordan. Because of the fast growth of the Jordanian capital of Amman, 25 kilometres to the south east, Salt has been largely bypassed by the political, economic, touristic, trade and demographic pressures that have transformed the Amman region into a hectic, often haphazard, urban complex of some 1.4 million people.

For the past 60 years, or since the founding of the modern state of Jordan and the formal establishment of its capital in Amman in 1923, Salt has retained its human-scale character and aesthetic stamp. As it was at the turn of the century, Salt today remains a pedestrian city where walking is the main means of transport. Its setting in a small valley surrounded by three large mountains has dictated a terraced pattern of house construction. This, combined with the yellow building stone that was widely used in the period from 1880-1930, gives Salt its special look and its congenial temperament – in short, a human-scale urbanism which has disappeared from the large cities of the Middle East but is still there to be preserved and nurtured in cities such as Salt.

The fact that Salt has grown slowly during this century is the key to its desire to preserve its special architectural unity. The heart of this effort is the two-year-old Salt Development Corporation. This volunteer association of prominent "Saltis" has launched a programme which aims to make the city that carried Jordanian urbanism from the 19th to the 20th Century the same one that shows other cities how to grow, yet maintain a human scale, in the closing decades of the 20th Century.

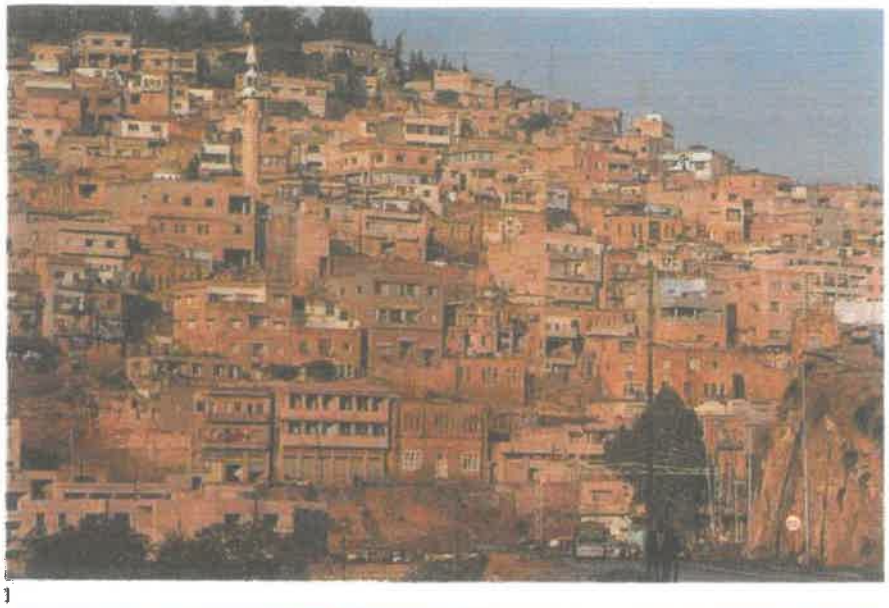
The Salt Development Corporation (SDC) has three main aims: formulating a long-range masterplan for the municipal authorities to follow as the city grows into the 21st Century; establishing a multi-purpose cultural centre in the heart of the city; and launching smaller initiatives to establish other institutions throughout the city, including new schools, a continuing education centre for women, an eye hospital and an annual city fair.

The immediate priority facing the SDC and the municipal authorities under Mayor Dr Abdel Razzaq Nsour is to make sure that none of the older buildings of the city are torn down to make way for modern structures, while ensuring that new buildings are designed in a manner that does not violently upset the architectural and aesthetic harmony of the old neighbourhoods in the heart of the city.

The old buildings that give Salt its special look date mainly from the turn-of-the-century period, or about 1890-1920. The traditional Salt house is a one-to-three-storey building of yellow stone with a combination of arched elements, balconies, staircases, pillars, windows and doors that combine to give the city its unique look. The Salt house typically had a courtyard or a passage that gave access to the interior, from where doors led into a special visitors' room, a multi-purpose family room, bedrooms, a kitchen and an outdoor toilet. Projecting balconies were a common feature.

The distinct style of the individual buildings is enhanced by the collective aesthetic statement of the separate neighbourhoods. The steep hillsides of the city-centre meant that the city developed along a series of parallel, horizontal streets connected vertically by a veritable mesh of stairs and footpaths. Until World War Two, the city maintained its turn-of-the century character almost totally, but in the past three decades the demands of urban expansion have taken their toll of some neighbourhoods. New buildings made of different materials, adopting disruptive scales and reflecting modern styles have been awkwardly superimposed on traditional parts of the city. As the masterplan prepared for the municipality said: "The old town emerged from a unity of style, fabric and setting to a contradiction in style, poorer fabric and insensitive settings."

The balance between the old and the new is at a critical point today, and the city authorities hope to redirect new building schemes to expansion areas to the



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north west of the city centre. A survey of residents and owners of the old houses in the heart of the city revealed a widespread desire to improve the level of services, such as water, sewage and electricity, and it is the aim of the municipality and the SDC to encourage owners of old houses to rehabilitate them and improve their services without changing the exterior architectural unity of the better-preserved quarters.

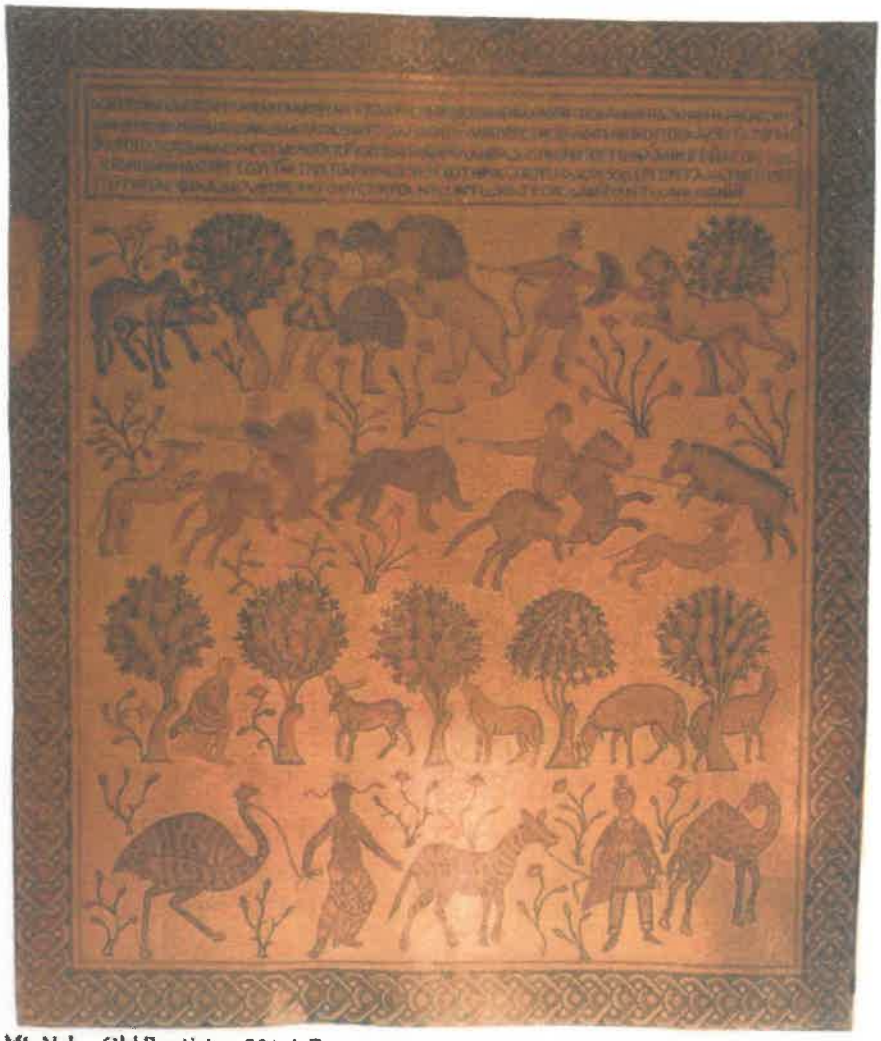
The special opportunity that Salt offers is that its historic buildings are still the heart of the city's contemporary life, and in many cases are still owned and inhabited by the same families that built them around 100 years ago. Some particularly noteworthy buildings are being given special treatment. The most important, in this respect, is the house built by Saleh Abu Jabar in the 1860s. This wealthy farmer and trader brought in Italian engineers to help him implemet his ideas, and the result is a well-preserved building with Italian white marble floors, and plastered ceilings and walls with their original paintings still in place. The Abu Jabar family intends to turn the house into a public museum. ■

1. *General views showing Salt's hillside construction style, with tiers of houses on parallel streets one above the other.*
2. 3. 4. 5. *Architectural details that give Salt buildings their special character.*
6. *The Muasher family house in Salt, showing distinctive turn-of-the-century style.*

Photos by Rami G Khouri.

The Mosaics of Jordan

Michele Piccirillo



Mt. Nebo. Old Baptistry, 531 A.D.

The first mosaic floor was discovered accidentally at Madaba in 1887, in the Church of the Virgin. It was the first in a long series of such discoveries which has continued to the present day. During last summer, digging in the atrium of the same Church of the Virgin, we were able to bring to light one of the finest examples of mosaic art not only of Jordan, but of the whole Byzantine Empire. The floor mosaics of the late Roman-Byzantine period represent a popular expression of art which continued from its origins in the 1st Century A.D. until the Ummayad period in the 8th Century A.D. The inscriptions included on the mosaic floors of churches are extremely useful in the research and chronicling of the Christian communities livng in the cities and villages of this far-flung province of the Empire bordering with the desert of which there are few contemporary written records.

The oldest mosaic in Jordan belongs to the Herodian era (the last decades of the 1st Century B.C.) and consists of a fragment of the floor of the apoditerium (Changing room), in the baths of the fortified palace built by Herod the Great at Macheronte, in the desert on the border of the territories of the Nabateans of Petra.

In 1907, a mosaic floor in a fairly good state of preservation was accidentally discovered at Jerash, in the quarter to the east of the stream. Prof Watzinger, who saw this work, advised the Berlin Museum to purchase it. Half of the mosaic is now conserved in the Staatliche Museum in Berlin and half in the Orange Museum in Texas. The remains consist of the external border with the seasons represented in the corners and of busts of the Muses and portraits of poets and writers surrounded by a garland of fruit and flowers supported by putti. The work is datable to the 3rd Century A.D.

Mosaics with mythological themes dating from the 4th and 5th Century A.D. have been found at Madaba. Conserved in the Archeological Museum is part of a Bacchanalian scene, while another fragment (from a quite different quarter of the city) consists of a panel which has as its principal subject full-frontal portraits of Achilles playing the lyre. Patroclus leaning on a lance and a female figure crowned with cherubs who with one hand holds out a flower

and with the other lifts the hem of her gown. From the same workshop responsible for the Baccanalian scene and this panel there is the figure of a youth strangling a lion. The inscription and the club depicted in the top right-hand corner clarify the significance of the scene – the mosaicist intended to represent Hercules strangling the lion Nemeo.

The great majority of mosaics in Jordan are found on the floors of churches and date from the end of the 5th through to the 7th Century A.D. These are some of the best and most complete examples of the art which developed during the renaissance promoted by the Emperor Justinian. Besides the more usual hunting, pastoral and country themes one also finds Classical subjects depicted in the mosaics. The most significant example decorates a great hall. Perhaps the law-court or council chamber of the city, built near an ancient nymphaeum, on the Roman road which runs through Madaba. The composition is framed by a wide border of acanthus enclosing the main body of the mosaic which is subdivided into three rectangular panels. Bird and flowers decorate the pillars dividing these panels. The border is animated with hunting and pastoral scenes. Between the spirals of acanthus ferocious beasts and dogs chase gazelles and hares; a wild boar confronts a bear; a bare-footed hunter in a white tunic is on the point of spearing a leopard; behind him another hunter, elegantly booted, dressed in a long-sleeved tunic and armed with a bow and quiver aims at a lion. A third hunter, wearing thonged sandals, spears a wild animal. The four corners are decorated with representations of the Seasons: Spring and Autumn on the west side. Summer and Winter on the east side. All four are represented half-length as Tyches (Goddesses of Fortune) and wear turreted crowns on their heads. The figure of Spring holds in her left hand a cornucopia full of spring flowers, that of Autumn a cornucopia laden with fruits, that of Summer ears of corn, that of Winter a cornucopia from which water flows.

The first panel of the mosaic is crossed by diagonal ribbons of flowers. In the diamond-shaped spaces are floral and animal motifs inspired by scenes of the Nile: flowers and plants alternate with aquatic birds. In the centre of the composition, a seagull with wings outstretched glides over the water.

The central panel, which has been partially destroyed by the foundations of the church built above it, depicts the myth of Phaedra and Hyppolitus. The characters of this tragedy, told by Euripides in Greek and by Seneca in Roman, are indicated by inscriptions. Servant girls are assisting Phaedra while her nurse speaks to Hyppolitus. He is accompanied by friends and by his groom who holds the reins of his horse.

The third panel is dominated by Aphrodite seated on a throne beside Adonis. The goddess brandishes her sandal to ward off a winged cupid held up to her by a Grace while another cherub supports her bare foot; a third watches the scene and a fourth is busy emptying a basket of flowers. Two Graces chase two further cupids, one of whom has taken refuge in a tree. Also in the scene is a peasant woman bearing fruits from the fields and holding a partridge in her right hand.

Beyond the border on the eastern side is an irregular space decorated with bunches of flowers, birds, a fish and two confronted sea-monsters, both with the tails of fish and heads of a lion and bull respectively. Behind them are the enthroned personifications of three cities: Madaba, Constantinople and Rome. All three figures bear an astylar cross in their right hands.

The small corridor facing the entrance is decorated with a medallion depicting a pair of sandals framed by four birds.

The prominence given to Aphrodite and the punishment of Eros by the addition, outside the border, of the sea-monsters is probably intentional and is related to the theme of the drama, namely the tragic death of Hyppolitus, punished by the Goddess of Love for his irreverent behaviour.

The style of the mosaic is in keeping with other works of the mid-6th Century A.D. by the mosaicists of Madaba but it must be emphasised that this work has a beauty and sense of form that make it quite unique. Undoubtedly, the artist was in possession of a cartoon originated in the Hellenic tradition but re-interpreted in some important centre of the Byzantine Empire. Certain limitations in the work are evidence that the "Master of Hyppolitus" was an artist of Madaba who demonstrated a remarkable sensitivity to colour both in its choice and rendition. While making great use of warm tints, he avoided more vivid hues; blacks and greys are blended and balanced with white in a continuous flow of colour-schemes that animate and breathe life into the entire composition. To date this remains the best example of the skill achieved by the mosaicists of the school of Madaba.

It is possible to follow the evolution of this school from the 4th Century to the early 7th Century A.D. in the basilica dedicated to the prophet Moses on Mount Nebo. The basilica has been excavated and restored during the last fifty years by Franciscan archeologists. Here exists another masterpiece in a perfect state of preservation which is both signed and dated. It decorates the baptistry of the basilica. A panel of flowering interwoven crosses decorates the area opposite the stairs leading to the chapel. A composition of fish and other scaled creatures frames the baptismal font and a large area of the floor is decorated with pastoral and hunting scenes, bordered by a pleated band. Two long inscriptions in Greek, dated 6th August 531 give the names of the artists: Soelo, Kaimono and Elia.

Also known are the names of three other mosaicists: Nahuma, Kiriakos and Tommaso. They worked in the same period on the mosaics of the Church of St. George in the city of Nebo not far from the sanctuary dedicated to Moses. Entering through the door in the north wall, a rectangular panel is immediately visible. It is decorated with six medallions formed by two intertwined grapevines with leaves and clusters of grapes. These enclose different motifs: two peacocks facing a small tree, a grape-picker and a young man wearing a short tunic and short boots with his arms raised in an attitude of prayer. He is identified in the inscription as John, son of Ammonius, one of the benefactors of the church.

The largest number of mosaic floors dating from the first years of Justinian's reign have been found in Jerash. The most famous group of buildings, which can still be visited, is built in the area behind the

Mausoleum. A single pillared atrium stands before the facades of three flanked churches: St George, St John and one dedicated to the Medici Saints, Sts Cosmo and Damian. Mosaics were laid in these churches between 529-533 A.D. The best preserved floor is in the third church. Alongside the dedicatory inscription which runs along the step to the Presbytery there are portraits of Theodore and his wife Georgia between two small trees. The nave is decorated with a geometric composition of alternating squares and diamonds which enclose portraits of benefactors, figures of animals and geometric motifs. An elongated rectangular panel between two pillars is decorated with aquatic birds and fish.

Around 562 (the confirmed date of one of these works), during the time of Bishop John, many mosaic floors were laid down in Madaba and the surrounding area. These are of great importance and stand out particularly because of their harmonious compositions and rich chromatic effects.

They are to be found in the Chapel of St Theodore, in the Cathedral of Madaba, the Church of Sts Lot and Procopius, and the Church of Father John in the city of Nebo (Khirbat al-Mukhyyat).

The rather narrow and elongated hall of the Chapel of St Theodore is surrounded by a border of acanthus leaves and decorated with hunting and pastoral scenes which are both vivid and colourful. The central part of the floor is decorated with linked hexagons which enclose a circle and form octagons. The octagons and circle are decorated with the usual designs: a flute-player, a donkey, a hunter with a lassoo, baskets of fruit and fish. The most interesting elements are the personifications of the four rivers of Paradise (Tigris, Euphrates, Gihon and Fison) which decorate the corner octagons.

The floor of the central nave in the Church of Sts Lot and Procopius at Nebo is divided into two panels. Six medallions, formed by four grapevines enclose pastoral, hunting and grape-picking scenes. The other panel, near the west wall is decorated with a tree in each corner and a design of confronted animals. Great care was devoted to the rectangular panels between the columns which show details of a Nile scene. Of particular interest is a river-scene with a fisherman and a boatman standing beside a small church.

Also in the city of Nebo, a chapel built alongside the north wall of a pre-existing church, was decorated with many splendid mosaics thanks to the interest of a certain Father John who is identifiable in a portrait of a man with a tonsure in the mosaic. The oblong mosaic is divided into two separate compositions. Near the altar a niche with a shell and tympanum supported by four pillars frames an inscription giving the names of the benefactors. The rest of the floor is subdivided into registers by three archways of acanthus enclosing hunting and pastoral scenes. The second register, almost in the centre of the chapel, is decorated with a personification of Earth, to whom two youths offer baskets of fruit. This subject is Classical and like the personifications of cities, rivers and the sea, is typical of the Justinian era. These three mosaic floors have similar characteristics and represent similar themes: they were produced in the same area and are of similar date. This inevitably leads one to conclude that they were the product of one single workshp of mosaicists who not only possessed a good set of cartoons from which to copy but must also have been under the leadership of a master with perfect taste and judgement, with an unerring instinct in the choice of subjects and colours which ensured entirely harmonious results.

The mosic of Hyppolitus previously mentioned is contemporary with these three works and so, in all probability, is the Map of Madaba which is the best known mosaic in Jordan and depicts biblical localities mentioned in the Old and New Testaments. This famous mosaic is not so much a map of the Byzantine period as a theological representation of the Coming of the Saviour placed in a geographical context. At the centre of the inhabited world, redeemed by the blood of Christ, is the Holy City of Jerusalem. Its main edifice the complex of the Holy Sepulchre, built by Constantine on the Rock of Calvary and the tomb of Christ. From Jerusalem the view extends to the biblical locations of Palestine, Jordan, Egypt, Syria and Lebanon. While biblical names and other references confirm the mosaic as a record of ancient times, the appearance of words such as "nunc" and the depictions of familiar churches give the mosaic a contemporary immediacy. One interesting feature of the map is the extent to which the territorial limits of Jordan have been reduced. It no longer includes the eastern bank of the Dead Sea. Ainon Sapsafas, where John baptised, nor the baths of Calliroe and Baaras (Zara and Hammamat Ma'in), nor Kerakmoba (Kerak), and the sanctuary of St Lot near Zoara (Ghor al-Safi).

Another extraordinarily gifted mosaicist was Salamaino who dated and signed his work in 574 in the Church of the Apostles in Madaba, built during the time of Bishop Serge. He and his workshop were responsible for the circular panel in the central nave decorated with a personification of the sea, and a detailed design of bands of acanthus bordering a rather monotonous floral pattern enclosing the main mosaic carpet, and also the vigorously drawn animals at the end of the nave. The sea is represented by a woman, bareheaded and breast partly uncovered; she rises like a Thetis from the sea, amidst glistening fish, brandishing a tiller like a banner. The border includes the figures of three children playing with birds, another motif borrowed from Classical art.

Other works dating from the period of Bishop Serge can be seen in the crypt of the Elianeo in front of the Church of the Virgin in Madaba, in the recently discovered baptistry of the Cathedral and in the baptistry of the Basilica of Nebo. The decoration of the Chapel of the Virgin Mother of God, also in the Basilica of Nebo is a good example of work of the 7th Century. All that remains of the figural decoration is a gazelle and part of two bulls beside an altar in a schematic building which represents the Temple of Jerusalem.

Contemporary mosaics have been found at Jerash, at Amman and in the villages of this region, for example: Suwayfiyeh, Zay al-Gharbi, Rihab bene Hasan, Khirbat al-Samra ...

The latest mosaics in Jordan are of the Umayyad period. They have been found in churches and in palaces built by the Caliphs.

The floor of the Church of the Virgin at Madaba, mentioned at the

beginning of this article, is the most famous of these mosaics and one of the best preserved. There are no figural depictions but this is for stylistic reasons, rather than any ideological aversion; instead decoration consists of geometrical patterns with inscriptions, flowers, stylized fruits and diamond shapes of different sizes. The mosaic was completed in February 662.

Another church rebuilt in the Umayyad period was discovered on the acropolis of Ma'in. The mosaic is dated 719-20. The border is of great documentary and historical significance; it includes depictions of ecclisiastical buildings with explanatory inscriptions which locate them to towns East and West of Jordan. Unlike the Church of the Virgin, this mosaic continues the tradition of hunting scenes. During the iconoclastic crisis which followed some years later, such scenes were generally disguised or destroyed.

The third church, dated 717, was discovered in the village of Qweshmeh, south of Amman. The panels of this geometric composition are decorated with sketchily drawn birds, flowers and churches.

Several factors suggest an Umayyad date for the recently discovered mosaic floor in the village of Shuneh al-Janubiyeh. The execution is careless, the tesserae are taken from older mosaics, and the composition consists mainly of geometric and plaited motifs with repetitive floral designs.

Following the discovery of the palace of Hisham in Jericho, which remains the richest source of mosaics of this period, recent work at Qusayr Amrah, Qastol, Qasr Hallabat and the palace on the acropolis of Amman have brought to light many new examples. These are evidence of the unbroken tradition of the mosaicists working in the region who continued to decorate the churches and palaces of their new sovereigns. The most interesting example is a mosaic found at Qasr Hallabat. There remains only a fragment of what was once a magnificent design comparable in harmony and richness with the finest mosaics in Jericho, produced by the same school of mosaicists. ■

Translated from the Italian by Jenny Condie and Melanie Gibson.

Photographs by Piccirillo.



Madaba. St. Elianos



The Hyppolitus Hall, 6th. century



Mt. Nebo. 597 A.D.



Hassuh, 5th. century



The Hyppolitus Hall, 6th. century



Madaba, St. Elianos Gospel, 597 A.D.



The Apostles Church, Madaba, 574 A.D.



Mt. Nebo. St. Lot / Procopius Church, 6th. century



Hassuh, 5th. century



The Hyppolitus Hall.
6th. century



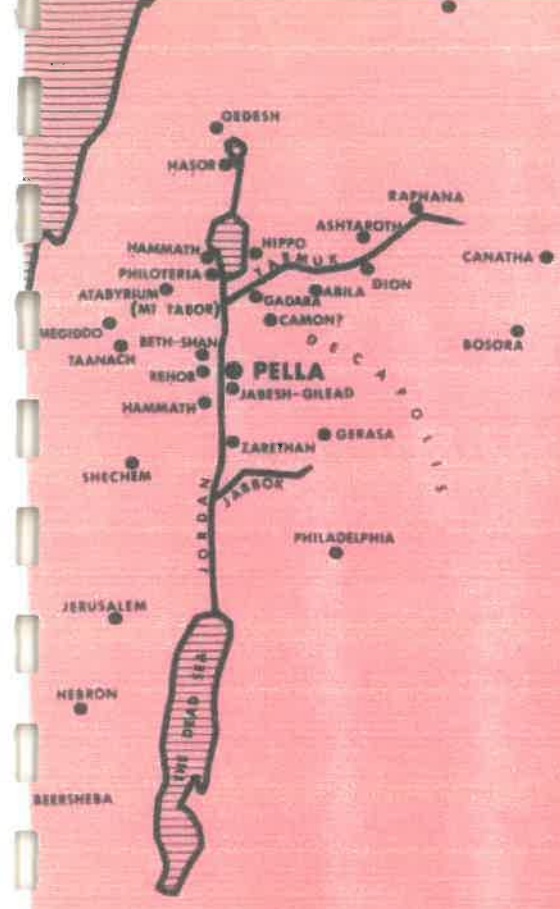
Shunuh-al-Junubiah,
8th. century Church



Mt. Nebo. Priest John Church,
6th. century



Shunuh-al-Junubiah
8th. century Church



Pella of the Decapolis

Robert Houston Smith

At eleven o'clock on the morning of January 18, A.H. 128 (the year 745/46 A.D. in the Western calendar), a massive earthquake shattered the tranquility of the winter day in Palestine, Syria and Transjordan. The tremor was so powerful that the cities Jerusalem, Damascus and Jerash were seriously damaged. Another of the casualties of that upheaval was Pella, where, within a few minutes, the entire city was destroyed.

The people of Pella themselves could not have realized how many thousands of years of history came to an end on that fateful day. They knew, of course, that almost everywhere that they dug pits or wall foundations they came upon ancient walls and bits of broken pottery. If they could have read the archaeological record that lay beneath their very feet, they would have learned that their city had been in existence for at least six thousand years – a longer continuous history than that of any other site in the region that we know today as Jordan. And on nearby slopes there is evidence of sporadic human occupation extending back, perhaps, as far as a quarter of a million years.

The site was a natural one for habitation. It lies at sea-level, about two-thirds of the way up the Jordan Valley, some three kilometres east of the Jordan River (*See Black-and-White Plan*). Although within easy reach of the valley, it is almost hidden from the west by low intervening hills, which provided the ancient occupants with a measure of security. One attraction of the site over the many thousands of years was the mild winter climate and the relatively arable soil on the uplands around the city; but undoubtedly the most important single factor was the powerful spring that gushes from the base of the *tell* into the Wadi Jirm creekbed, which lies just to the south of the mound. (*Illustration 1*).

The first major archaeological expedition to Pella was sponsored by The College of Wooster in Ohio. In the spring of 1967, I directed the first of a number of projected seasons of excavation. The June War of that year interrupted our work, and it was not until 1979 that we returned to Pella, this time in a joint expedition with The University of Sydney, Australia. More than twenty months of field work have now been carried out by the joint expedition, the Sydney team excavating in the winter under the direction of J B Hennessy and A W McNicoll and the Wooster team excavating during the spring under my direction. Both teams make use of a permanent field headquarters constructed with the financial and technical assistance of the Department of Antiquities, which from the beginning has been a constant and helpful partner. Among the major sources of funding for the expedition have been the Australian Grants Committee, the National Geographic Society, the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Australian National Gallery.

Some two dozen areas have now been archaeologially investigated at Pella, in places which were anticipated to give maximal information about the history of the site. There have been major stratigraphic excavations on top of the *tell*, soundings on a steep natural hill called Tell el Husn located south of the Wadi Jirm, excavations of tombs in several of the cemeteries which encircle the city, and probes at a number of occupational spots in the immediate vicinity of Pella. During this time, related scientific investigations have also been undertaken, yielding information about the geography, geology, zoology and biology of the region.

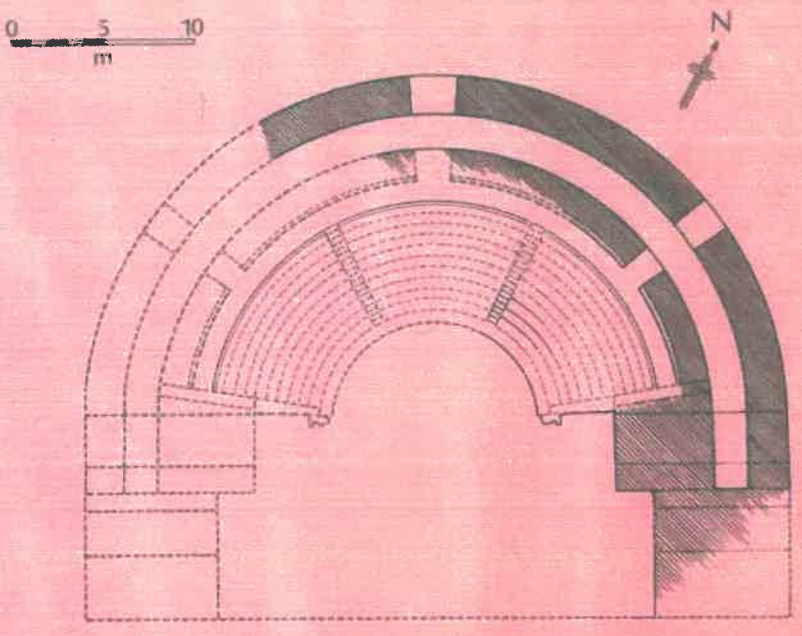
Drawing upon the results of our excavations and environmental studies, we are now able to reconstruct, in outline, the history of the city from the earliest beginnings of settled occupation on a natural gavel hill beside the perennial spring, through the Neolithic, Chalcolithic, Early Bronze, Middle Bronze and Late Bronze Ages. Our discoveries have shown the essential accuracy of many of the historical texts which refer to Pella. In recent spring excavations we found, for the first time, major archaeological evidence of Pella as a strong city in the 19th Century B.C., a period when an Egyptian text names "Pihilum" – the old Semitic name for the city – as having been hostile to Egyptian influence.

After a somewhat uneven history during the Iron Age (1200-600 B.C.), which is gradually being revealed through excavation, Pella came under Hellenistic influence

in the 3rd and 2nd centuries B.C. Previously, the city had participated, in a very limited fashion, in trade with other regions; but under Ptolemaic and Seleucid rule, trade burgeoned. During the 2nd and early 1st centuries B.C., the inhabitants of the city imported large numbers of ceramic vessels that had been manufactured elsewhere, some as far away as Greece. Chief among the imports were handsome plates from western Asia Minor and wine jars from Rhodes.

Brought into the Roman Empire by the general Pompey in 64 B.C., Pella became a part of a loose federation of commercial cities known as the Decapolis. It continued to be prosperous throughout the Early Roman Period, as the construction of a theatre on the edge of the Wadi Jirm at around the end of the 1st century of this era attests. (*See Black-and-White Plan*) Pella's status is reflected in the coins that the city began to issue at about this time and continued to issue intermittently until as late as the early 3rd century A.D. The city throve during most of the Byzantine Period, particularly in the 5th and 6th centuries, when it reached its maximal size. But of special significance is the history of Pella in the earliest period of Islam, the Umayyad period, which lasted about one hundred years. At Pella, the earthquake of 746 A.D. encapsulated a relatively clear and significant record of this culture, especially during the three decades prior to 746 A.D.

The picture that emerges is one of interesting contrasts. On the one hand, Pella had clearly been in decline since the Islamic conquest in A.H. 13 (634/635 A.D.). Many of the city's public buildings, including its numerous ecclesiastical structures, had gradually fallen into decay and disrepair. (*Illustration 2*) Some of the large private houses in the city, which had been built during the prosperous Byzantine Period, had been abandoned, and the population had clearly been undergoing a decline. Those dwellings which did continue to be inhabited now housed not only persons but also a considerable number of cattle, sheep, donkeys and other domesticated animals. (*Illustration 3*) The houses were furnished with the most rudimentary furniture, a fact evidenced by the few metal fittings or decorative



elements found in the debris left by the earthquake of 746 A.D. On the other hand, Pella's inhabitants were using a wide range of handsome and skilfully made ceramic, bronze and glass vessels in their everyday lives. (*Illustrations 4, 5, 6; Also Black-and-White Drawing of Vessels*).

Some of the discoveries related to the earthquake have been particularly dramatic. On the floor of the Civic Complex Church, the excavators found two human skeletons. One person died in a huddled position close to the south wall of the sanctuary, as if trying to protect himself from the falling stones. Another had fallen nearby, arms and legs outstretched. In an adjoining building, the skeletons of seven camels and a donkey were found sprawled grotesquely on the flagstone paving. (*Illustration 7*) In a foetal position beside the door that led into this "Hall of the Camels" was the skeleton of a young man – perhaps the herder – who had been killed while carrying some of his prized possessions: a dagger, a pruning hook, a small iron ring, a fragment of a gold earring, three silver dirhams and a gold dinar. (*Illustration 8*) This, with other archaeological evidence, suggests that trade with the south and east increased greatly in the Umayyad Period. Pella doubtless was a caravan city, collecting duty on goods that passed through its territory and perhaps warehousing goods coming from both east and west.

Pella's history did not entirely end with the earthquake in 746 A.D. Although the city was never rebuilt, the great spring continued to attract nomads. Occasionally a group of people, perhaps only a family, would come and stay for a time amid the ruins, where their flocks had ample water. In the Mamluke period, a thriving sugar industry arose in the Jordan Valley and the expanding population pushed its fields and mills into the Wadi Jirm as far as Pella. They lived in simple mud-brick houses at scattered places on the mound and near the spring. The one stone structure which they are known to have constructed was a small mosque, which they placed near the highest spot on the ancient mound. (*Illustration 9*) When these people departed, they left the ground littered with a gaudy array of sherds from their handmade vessels and even an occasional intact jar. (*Illustration 10*) They also left behind a few burials, such as that of the young woman who had been laid in a narrow crevice in the ruins of the Civic Complex. She had been interred in a simple shroud, adorned only with a few bronze bracelets and a small strand of assorted beads. (*Illustration 11*).

Each year after the winter rains break the long drought and heat of summer, the vicinity of Pella bursts into life. The mound is carpeted with mallow, and the hillsides are vibrant with hundreds of other kinds of flowering plants. Farmers using ancient methods cultivate the small upland plains and valleys much as their ancestors did thousands of years ago. Now the city itself is also beginning to emerge from a long winter. As excavations expose the buried



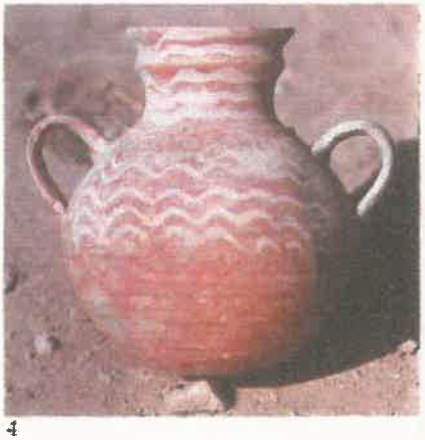
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city and fallen columns are reset. Pella is again coming to life, no longer as a living city but as an archaeological site of importance in the long history of Jordan. ■



5

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1. *Map of ancient Palestine and Transjordan, showing the location of Pella in relation to other important historical and archaeological sites.*

2. *Plan of the Roman theatre located in the Civic Complex at Pella of the Decapolis. Broken lines are restorations of missing portions.*

1. *Surviving walls of the mosque constructed atop the mount of Pella during the Mamluke Period, dating from about the 14th century A.D. The view is to the southwest. In the south wall, facing Makkah, is a small mihrab.*

2. *Handmade jug of the Mamluke Period, decorated with bold geometric designs executed in strong black paint. The vessel dates from about the 14th century A.D.*

3. *Gold dinar of Damascus, dated 94 A.H. (717/13 A.D.), found with the skeleton of the man killed in the "Hall of the Camels" during the earthquake of 746 A.D.*

4. *Pot of Umayyad type in use at Pella at the time of the earthquake in the mid-8th century A.D. The vessel is attractively decorated, with wavy white horizontal lines on its shoulder.*

5. *Skeleton of a camel, one of seven found in the "Hall of the Camels" in the Civic Complex. The camels had been killed in the earthquake of 746 A.D.*

Photographs by Robert H Smith and Douglas Kuylenstierna. Line drawings by Robert H Smith and Brian Cannon.

Neolithic Art from Ain Ghazal

Gary O.Rollefson









1. *A "family portrait". The face in the top centre is from a statue; the rest are from busts.*
2. *One of the twelve busts from Ain Ghazal. Note the elongated neck.*
3. *Side view of the Ain Ghazal statues and busts. The "Astarte" statue is at the far end.*
4. *Red, painted strips adorn the face of this chubby statue head.*

Photographs by Gary P. Rollefson

In midsummer of 1983, one of the most stunning archaeological discoveries ever found came to light at the prehistoric village of Ain Ghazal, on Amman's northeastern outskirts. Some twenty-two or more human figures were unearthed from a single cache. As the dirt was carefully removed, some faces peered out in stark, wide-eyed amazement, while other faces glared in haughty disdain at this unprecedented disturbance of their 8,000-year-old peace. But whether these plaster human forms understood it or not, the archaeological team held them in as much awe as their original creators, and the twentieth century people treated them with as much reverence and respect as did the ancient residents of Ain Ghazal.

This unparalleled collection consists of two principal representations of humans. The first group includes ten or more large statues about 90 cm tall, and the second group is composed of twelve or more smaller busts varying from 30 to 45 cm high. All contain an inner "skeleton" (statues) or core (busts) of twigs and reeds wrapped firmly with coarse twine, around which a fine plaster was modelled to produce robust and lively forms. The statues are highly stylised, with stumpy feet, short thick legs, and squat, mostly featureless torsos. Both groups are characterised by markedly elongated necks and oversized heads which are decidedly flattened front-to-back.

Among the busts, it cannot be determined at the present time if both men and women are represented, but the small size of one head suggests that it represents a child. At least one of the statues is a woman, however, lying on her back with her head towards the west. Although badly damaged in antiquity by a later pit dug into the ground, one can still see her right arm bent back severely at the shoulder and up sharply at the elbow, with her hand pushing up at the muscular part of her chest. In this pose she seems to be drawing attention to her pendulous breasts, much in the manner of Astarte representations from several millenia later. Presumably this statue is associated with a fertility cult.

The faces of both forms are similarly treated in terms of general details. The noses are rather narrow, straight, and slightly turned up at the end, with narrow vertical incisions representing the nostrils. The lips are gently moulded, with a light horizontal incision

indicating the mouth. The eyes are whiter than the rest of the face, and probably they were carved from chalk, which is found close by the village. In the centre of each eye, a small circle of asphalt was placed to simulate the iris. There is some variability in the moulding of other features of the face, with very delicate brows and cheeks in some cases but with emphasised contours in others. One statue, for example, has a strong chin, while on another the chin is rounded into the pudgy, almost puerile, cheeks.

It is on this last individual (perhaps a chubby adolescent?) that we also have the most evidence of facial decorations. While all the busts and statues had a thin eyeliner of green or blue-green pigment around each eye, the face of this one statue also bore three bold vertical stripes on the forehead and three diagonal stripes on each cheek, all evidently of red ochre. Whether any of the other statues or busts were similarly painted must await the results of patient laboratory cleaning.

Although the statues and busts obviously conform to a set of cultural standards for expressing human form in three dimensions, the actual combinations of the facial features suggest strongly that individual people are represented. Whether these are specific models of once living people, personifications of social ideals, human representations of deities or anthropomorphic natural spirits or forces, is not clear at the present time. The size variation among the busts suggest that at least two generations are depicted, if not actual members of a family, and there are faint indications that people of different ages are also portrayed among the statues.

There is no doubt that there is a strong ceremonial association attached to these figures. The careful placing of the statues in a single two-tiered cluster, with the bodies oriented primarily in an east-west direction, and the semi-circular arrangement of the busts along the feet and sides of the statues, demonstrates the respectful dispositon that the pieces demanded. What cannot be determined on the basis of the present evidence is just what ritual meaning they all entail. The smaller and less detailed busts presumably played a lesser role than the statues, but to say with what ends either group is associated would be an exercise in unsubstantiated speculation. Are they all religious in nature? Or political? *Or a combination of both?*

In addition to the outstanding group of statues and busts, Ain Ghazal has also yielded smaller figurines of both humans and animals. More than twenty tiny human statuettes made of clay or plaster have been found so far. Most are probably ten centimetres or less in length, but fragmentary compared to the relative completeness of their larger relatives.

Several human figurines are closely related in terms of their shape and probable meaning. These are depictions of obviously pregnant women, often decorated with vertical or diagonal rows of rocker-stamped tattooing. Very similar to much earlier statuettes from Europe, these miniatures are obviously concerned with the idea of the successful bearing of many healthy children to ensure the continuity of the family and social group. Some other nude females, not pregnant in appearance, are also probably connected with fertility, and all of these pieces are possibly associated with the large Astarte statue.

The remaining human statuettes are less imposing in rendition. Two are simple rotund pieces made of plaster, extremely stylised in form, and rather resembling headless "snowmen", with only the faintest indications that they are human at all – perhaps they are also related to human fertility, although this would be difficult to prove. One small complete bust is charming in the simplicity of its rendering, with only slight indentations on either side of a vertical ridge on a "button-shaped" head. Another figurine is represented by the head only, which is unfortunate since this piece is so well executed: made of very fine clay baked to a sophisticated hardness, the "bald" head has two small nubbles of clay applied to represent the eyes. Finally, there are several torsos broken at the neck, very abstract in design and rather unimpressive to the twentieth century eye, perhaps.

While the function of the fertility statuettes is easy to understand, the fragmentary nature of the rest of the human figurines presents more problems in assessing their roles. It should be noted that of the twenty-two statuettes, only the "button-faced" bust is complete: the rest are either heads with no bodies or bodies without heads.

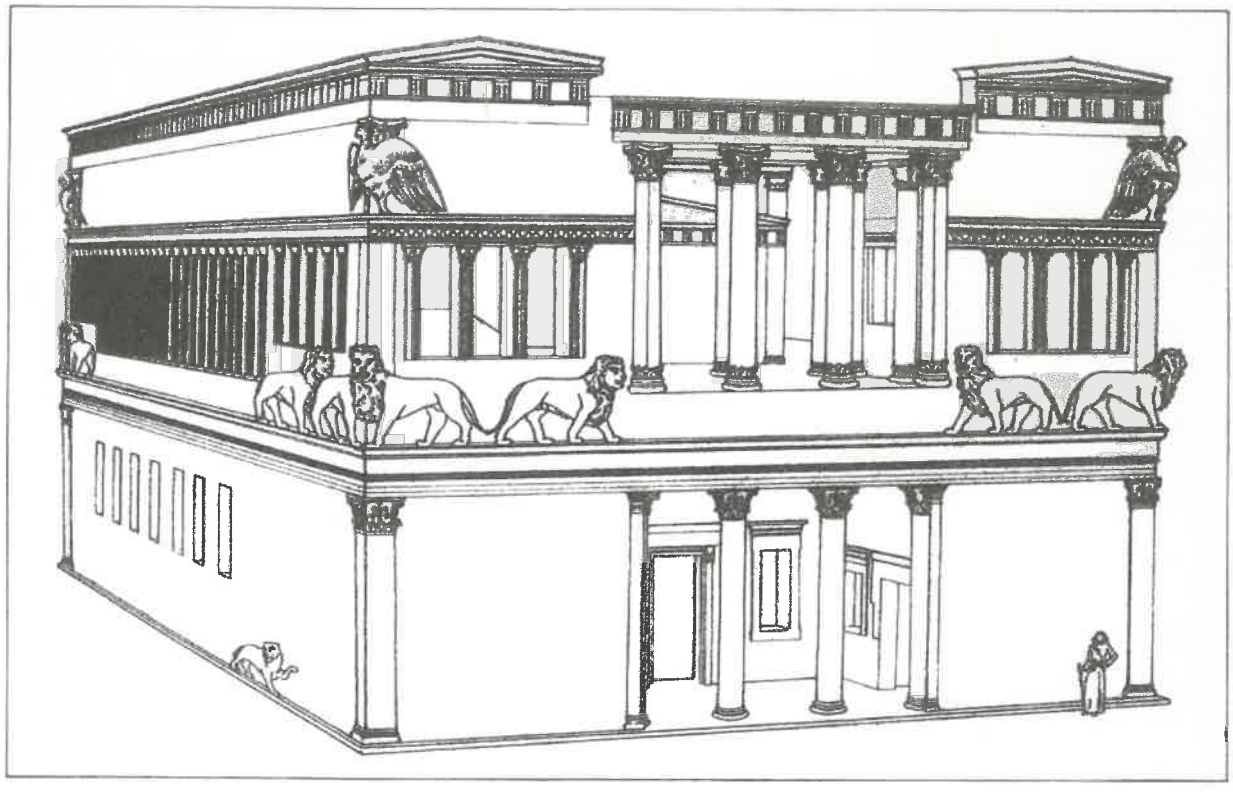
But it is precisely this condition that provides a valuable clue that the small human figurines filled some religious need of the ancient Ain Ghazal people. Compare the "decapitated" state, for example, with the way most people were buried at Ain Ghazal: for a reason difficult to comprehend, nearly every dead person found in the village had had the skull ritually removed before interment, a trait common in the burial practices throughout the Levant at this time. The act of breaking off the heads of the figurines may represent symbolically the "death" of the figurine, perhaps a respectful treatment after the utility or purpose of the piece had come to an end.

What of the heads of the people buried at Ain Ghazal? This cult practice appears to have placed great store by this part of the human body, for many instances have been found at Neolithic villages in the Near East of skulls which have received a special treatment. After the flesh of the head had deteriorated, facial features were recreated by applying a delicately modelled layer of plaster to form what Dame Kathleen Kenyon termed "portrait skulls". It was her opinion, shared by many archaeologists, that these were recreations of respected people of the community, kept in special places for consultation in times of stress in a sort of ancestor worship.

Although details remain sketchy due to the slow and careful work necessary to clean the specimens, two plastered skulls were found at Ain Ghazal in 1983. The plaster is not well-preserved in the upper face of the skulls, but it remains inside the eyesockets and attached to the upper lip and cheek areas. (Other parts of the lower face may still retain plaster, but these areas are still surrounded by the dirt that originally covered them). There is one indication that the Ain Ghazal plastered skulls were decorated: across one eyesocket, a thin line of asphalt represents the junction of the upper and lower eyelids. The possible presence of other decoration, such as painting, must await further laboratory work for confirmation.

Limited space does not permit much discussion about the nearly 100 small animal figurines from Ain Ghazal. Made of clay, these figurines represent both young and adult individuals, including goats, cattle, horse, pig, and one quaint and unique seated example of either a fox or a small bear cub. Although goats were

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Iraq El Amir

The IFAPO's Research Programme

E. Will

Close to Amman – at a distance of about 20 kilometres – the site of Iraq el-Amir presents a spectacle which is both imposing and charming. The Wadi Sir, a well-watered and green valley, opens into a cirque towered over by a huge rocky cliff; tiers of terraces, now cultivated and planted with pomegranate, orange, fig and poplar trees, rise from the south to the north bordering a line of hills to the west and overlooking a precipitous ravine on the eastern side. A very ancient track, no longer in use today, follows this ravine; it used to be the road to the Dead Sea and Jericho.

As early as 1818, two Commanders in the British Navy, C L Irby and J Mangles, visited the site, which their companion Bankes identified as the *Tyrus* of the Tobiad Hyrcanus, a place which Josephus describes in his *Antiquities* (XII, 229) in great detail. Later, in 1862-63, two French scholars launched a controversy which is hardly over today: shall we, with M de Vogüé and in accordance with ancient testimony, recognise in the most spectacular ruin the palace of Hyrcanus, or, with F de Saulcy, a pagan temple? In 1906, the American Howard C Butler remained undecided, while working out a restitution of the monument which was generally accepted for seventy years.

In 1963, another American, P. Lapp, tried to found a more precise chronology on a series of soundings, and extended his investigation to the whole of the site. But the main problems remained unsolved and in 1976 the IFAPO* (French Archaeological Institute for the Near East) was able to start a new research programme in collaboration with the Jordanian authorities. The support given by Dr Adnan Hadidi, Director General of the Department of Antiquities, assisted by Dr Fawzi Zayadine, was essential to a good issue of this enterprise.

The name Tobiah is carved twice in the rock beside an entrance to the caves cut out in the cliff. For three centuries, the Tobiads, first mentioned in the Bible (*Nehemia* II, 10), were governors of Amman, first for the Great King of Persia, then for the Lagid King of Egypt, and we have proof that they were established in Iraq el-Amir in the 3rd Century B.C. at the latest. There, the last of them to be heard of, Hyrcanus, met a tragic death in 175 B.C. He had tried to make Iraq el-Amir the seat – both as a residence and a place of refuge – of a small principality enjoying some degree of independence but, as it turned out, this was an unrealistic dream. Most of the still visible, sometimes grandiose, remains may well be due to the imagination of his adventurous mind.

We also know for certain that the site was occupied much earlier by his ancestors. Nor were they the first occupants, since traces of occupation in the Bronze Age and beginning of the first millenium have been found. And, as a large estate, it was not abandoned before

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Um Qais

Nazmieh Rida Tawfiq

Um Qeis - ancient Gadara - was one of the important cities of Jordan during the Greco-Roman period. Situated on a hilltop north-west of Irbid at an altitude of 1,700 feet, it commanded the impressive views and hence the strategic advantages, of Lake Teberias (the Sea of Galilee), the Yarmouk River Valley and the Golan Heights of Syria.

Um Qeis was described as the "Inexpugnable Stronghold" in ancient records and mentioned in the history of the 3rd century B.C. in the records of the wars between the Seleucids of Syria and the Ptolemies of Egypt. In 218 B.C., the Seleucid Emperor Antiochus III conquered Ptolemy IV, the King of Egypt, near Sidon and then proceded towards the Jordan River to occupy Pella and Gadara.



Western Theatre in Um Qais

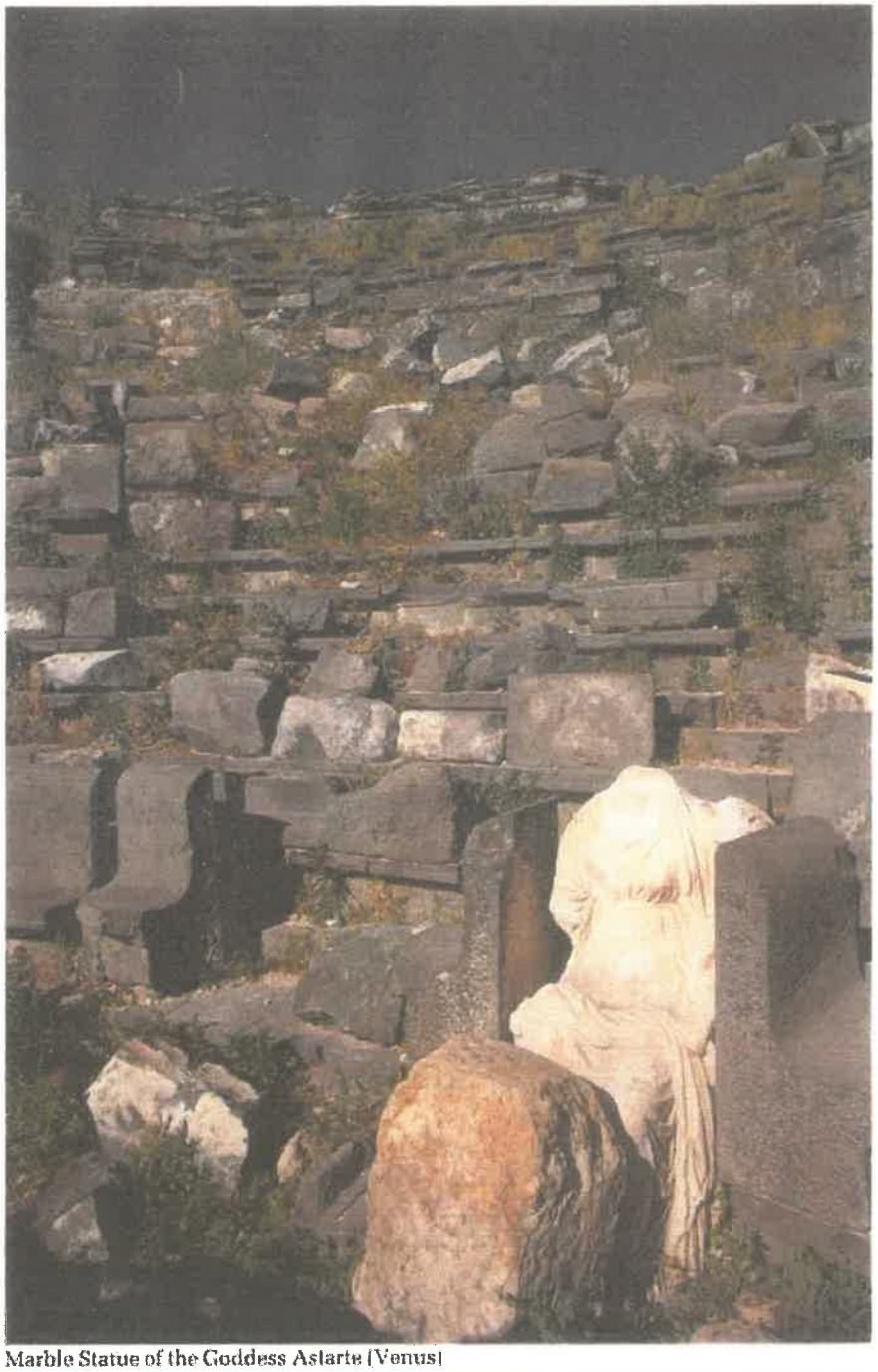
Um Qeis flourished during the Hellenistic period but its heyday was short lived as the Maccabaean leader, Alexander Jannaeus of Palestine, destroyed all Hellenistic cities and Hellenistic culture in Gadara - Um Qeis - in the year 100 B.C.

In 63 B.C., the Romans, under the leadership of Pompey, rebuilt Um Qeis upon their arrival in Syria, declaring the freedom of all Greek cities north of Jordan.

Pompey created the Decapolis - a league of ten cities - including Gadara in order to control the trade and caravan routes and to stop the Nabataeans' advance to the north.

The Nabataeans were

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Marble Statue of the Goddess Astarte (Venus)



General View from Um Qais showing the Yarmouk Valley and the Golan Heights.

Sotheby's Course on Islamic Decorative Arts

In response to the great revival of interest in Islamic art and culture, Sotheby's has established a course for those who wish to develop their knowledge and understanding of Islamic decorative arts. It is to be run twice a year, and the first course began on 27th February at the Royal Aeronautical Society in London.

The course lasts ten weeks and is arranged chronologically from the seventh century to the present day, "so that by its completion, students will be able to perceive both the essential unity of Islamic art and culture, as well as the rich diversity to be found over a period of 1300 years in empires which extended from Spain to the borders of China". The subjects covered include Islamic architecture, pottery, metalwork, glass, the arts of the book, rugs and textiles, epigraphy and numismatics, the conservation of pottery, metalwork and textiles.

The course is arranged as a combination of lectures by leading world experts in the field and a series of visits to museums, private collections, exhibitions and specialists. Students will also view and attend the relevant sales at Sotheby's auction rooms. In this way, Jack Franses, Director of Sotheby's Islamic Department, believes, through exposure to the finest available teaching and to the works of art themselves, the course will provide a unique oportunity to absorb the heritage of Islam, which is not yet covered in a comprehensive literature.

The aim is to introduce students to the enormous scope of the field and to some of the distinguished lecturers who will guide them through more detailed topics. Dr Giza Fehervari, F.S.A., Lecturer in Islamic Art and Archaeology at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, will give a general introduction to Islamic Art and explain the use and functions of the S.O.A.S. Library. Dr Duncan Haldane, Deputy Keeper of The National Arts Library at the Victoria and Albert Museum will speak on Arab Painting and act as guide on the students' first visit to the Victoria and Albert Museum's magnificent Islamic collections. Dr Oliver Watson, Assistant Keeper of Islamic Art in the Department of Ceramics, Victoria and Albert Museum, will introduce students to Islamic Pottery, and a fuller appreciation of its outstanding quality will be cultivated in subsequent weeks as he covers the Pottery of the Umayyad, Seljuk, Fatimid, Timurid and Mongol periods in detail. On the final day, Dr Watson also contributes an extremely useful talk on Fakes and Forgeries! Dr James Allan, Deputy Keeper in the Department of Oriental Art, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, leads students week by week through the metalwork of different periods. Dr Julian Raby, Lecturer in Islamic Art at the Oriental Institute, University of Oxford, will guide students round the Turkish Collections of the Victoria and Albert Museum, while those of the British Museum will be expounded by Dr Michael Rogers, F.S.A., Deputy Keeper of Oriental Antiquities and organiser of the splendid exhibition of *Islamic Art and Design 1500-1700* at the British Museum.

The experts on the course also include:- Godfrey Goodwin, Dr Mehrdad Shokoohy, Mitchell Crites, Dr A S Melikian-Chirvani, Dr Robert Charleston, Dr David Bivar, Joan Allgrove-McDowell. Alidad Mahloudji, Robert Elgood, Dr Heather Elgood, B W Robinson, Susan Stronge, Barbara Brend, Monique Vajifdar, Dr John Mills, Dr Nigel Seeley, Karen Finch, and Katharine Tubb.

Apart from approximately twenty hours of lectures each week, work will be carried out in study groups to encourage a degree of specialisation. There is a maximum of twenty places and the cost is £2,000 plus V.A.T. The next course commences on 10 September 1984. All enquiries should be directed to the Secretary of the Course Suzanne Marland, Sotheby's Islamic Department, 34-35 New Bond Street, London W1A 2AA, Telephone: 01-493 8080). ■



Georges Washington "A Skirmish" Oil on canvas

Important Orientalist Paintings at Mathaf Gallery

The Mathaf Gallery in London has announced its forthcoming exhibition of important Orientalist paintings which opens at 24 Montcomb Street on March 20 for a month. As the Chairman, Mr. Brian Macdermot, has emphasised in his introduction, considerable controversy surrounds the subject of 19th century Orientalism as an important part of the art in Victorian England and post-Napoleonic France. "Highly rated in their day,

only to be ridiculed by the Impressionists and finally reinstated in the 1970's, these artists were capable of both good and bad works. Where they visited the Arabian countries and showed what was splendid and to be admired in the world of Islam, they were at their best. Where they approached the Orient with preconceived biblical ideas and tried to Europeanize their paintings of Arabia, they were at their worst. Particularly suspect are Harem scenes, which few of the artists could have witnessed first-hand! The Mathaf attempts to make careful selection, ensuring first of all that all the paintings it handles are genuine, and secondly that the subjects chosen reflect the enthusiasm of the artists for what is best in the Muslim way of life. We believe that many of these works are a tribute to the Arab World and depict customs and traditions which are rapidly disappearing. The value of these is bound to increase as they become scarcer."

At the same time A.C.R. Publications in Paris will be launching their book "The Orientalists, Painter-Travellers 1828-1908" written by Lynne Thornton with the co-operation of the Mathaf Gallery. ■



Edward Lear, "Mount Sinai" Oil on canvas



Carl F.M. Werner, "Entrance to the Souk" Watercolour

London Exhibition of Paintings from Bahrain

The Bahrain Art Society is holding a major exhibition in London of 100 paintings by its members in oil, watercolours and acrylic. It will be held at Leighton House June 4 - 23, 1984, and is the first exhibition of the Society to he held in London. It follows a highly successful exhibition in Kuwait last October together with an exhibition to mark the opening of its new premises in Bahrain, officially opened by the Prime Minister of Bahrain in December.

The Bahrain Art Society is "a non-profit making organisation established by several of Bahrain's leading artists. The main purpose of the Society is to increase an awareness of the Arts for all inhabitants of Bahrain and, on the international front, to demonstrate the professionalism of the Bahraini artists through exhibitions such as the one being housed at Leighton House."

The Chairman of the Bahrain Art Society is Shaikh Rashid Khalifa Al-Khalifa, a member of the Bahraini Royal Family, who studied art in England and will be one of the artists featured in the Exhibition.

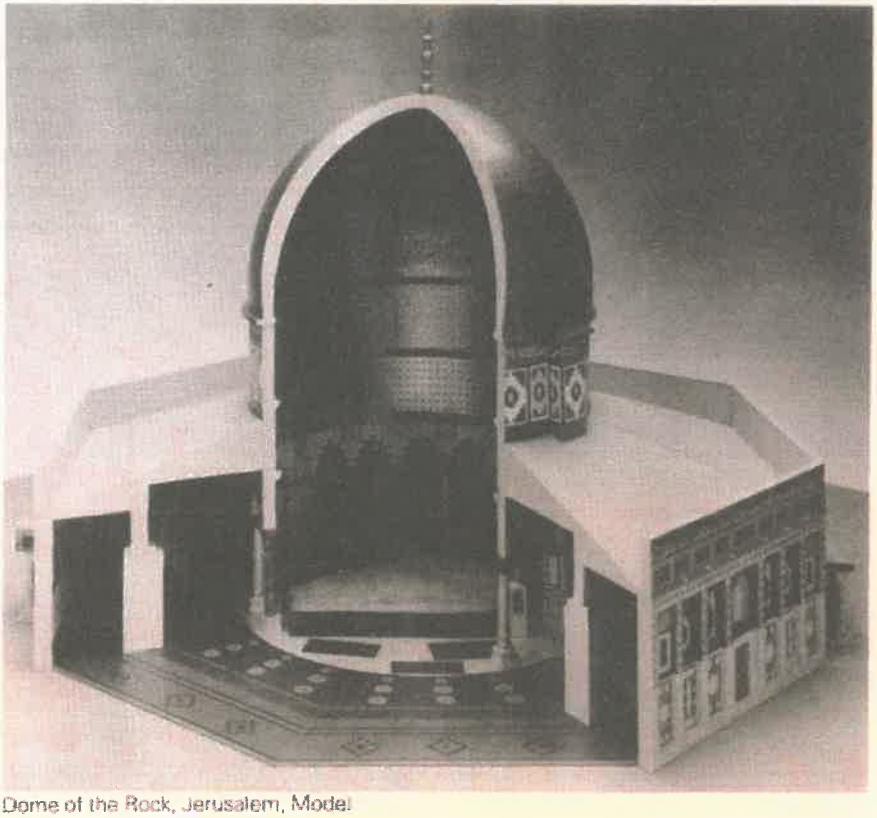
Leighton House was built in 1866 for Frederic, Lord Leighton of Stretton, PRA (1830-1896), the only painter to date to have been raised to the Peerage. The spectacular Arab Hall, an interesting and unusual feature of Leighton House, is an authentic reconstruction designed by George Aitchison RA (1825-1910 and has Islamic tiles from 13th - 17th centuries, including a particularly fine set of tiles, 16 feet in length, bearing a verse from the Koran in Arabic. ■

Bird Paintings from Mughal India

A selection of 19 natural history paintings by three 18th century Patna artists trained in the tradition of the Mughal court will be on display at an exhibition being organised in London by Michael Goedhuis Ltd., Colnaghi Oriental, in association with Mallet, at 14 Old Bond Street (June 12 - July 14).

The series of paintings, which contained more than 150 individual studies dating from 1777 to 1782, were commissioned by Lady Impey, wife of the first Chief Justice of Bengal, Sir Elijah Impey (1732-1809). The paintings depict exotic birds perched on flowering branches. The one animal in the group is a finely detailed painting of a lynx. ■

Arab Architecture Past and Present



Dome of the Rock, Jerusalem, Model

"The introduction of modern Western technology in the Middle East is a reality from which there is no retreat. This has transformed life and living patterns. Style in architecture has, throughout history, been determined by the current knowledge of building materials and technology. Modern architecture is conditioned by the same factors. It is certain that the builders of the tomb of Oljeitu at Sultanieh or the Taj Mahal would not have ignored modern technology. The question is how to use technology to its best advantage – as a tool – to contribute to forms of buildings that are an outcome of an intrinsic assessment of the spirit and essence of Islamic architecture." (Garry Martin, "Building in the Middle East Today – in Search of a Direction", pp 29-32 of the catalogue to the Exhibition, Arab Architecture: Past and Present.

The question being raised by Mr Martin, and indeed a great many people living or working in the Arab world today, forms the underlying theme of the Arab British Chamber of Commerce's first ever exhibition: "Arab Architecture: Past and Present" (Florence Hall, Royal Institute of British Architects, January 24 - February 17). The same idea is often reflected in the work presented at the exhibition by Arab and British firms working in the Middle East.

For although it is as much a trade show as a cultural event, the exhibition has been instrumental in confronting vital issues which roughly come together under the heading "Whither Arab Architecture?" The question on the lips of all those aware of the crisis in building and design in the Middle East today.

As Egyptian architect Abdulwahid El-Wakil puts it: "Whereas architectural styles from periods covering many centuries had, in our ancient towns, flowed into an integrated whole, modern architecture interrupted this continuity and through its very isolation contributed to and largely brought about the present identity crisis." ("Identity, Tradition and Architecture, pp 26-28, exhibition catalogue).

The most prominent signposts of this loss of identity are the skyscrapers, those shimmering glass towers which bear no relation to the region in terms of design, materials or living concepts. But they are simply the most prominent. Other disasters follow: poorly thought out, badly executed, housing schemes; "fantastic" hotels which mainly fulfilled some architects' wildest dreams; "1001 nights" palaces and villas built in the poorest taste by those eager to satisfy rich and misguided clients; and embarassing hybrid structures, superficially "Islamicised" with ill-suited domes, arches and other such symbols grafted haphazardly onto their facades.

The early boom years in the Gulf area in particular were a disaster for architecture and it is only now, as development projects are slowed down by the effects of worldwide recession as time begins to take its toll on the first badly constructed buildings, that a real reassessment begins to take place.

The Arab British Chamber of Commerce exhibition comes just at this time and in its own way attempts to address the problem by first pointing up the beauty of traditional Arab architecture and then inviting contemporary architects to display their work, not exactly in comparison but in the context of what has gone before.

At the very heart of the exhibition, literally and figuratively, stands a meticulously executed scale model of one of the most beloved and respected symbols of Islamic architecture, the Dome of the Rock. Surrounding it are a series of panels depicting the principal aspects of Arab/Islamic architecture under the broad headings: *Religion and Education, Public Buildings, Domestic and Vernacular, Government* and *Component Parts*. Each display consists of an explanatory text and black and white etchings and colour photographs representing some of the finest examples of architectural design in the Arab world. The display fulfils its role as a sharp reminder of what has gone before and though effective enough, is not without weaknesses. For while

the supporting text gives a reasonably succint summary about the evolution of architectural traditions, the pictures fail to lend adequate support. Under *Public Buildings*, for example, there is mention of hamams, caravanserai, shrines, souqs and so forth, whereas the visuals are virtually dominated by souqs. Under *Domestic*, the text considers the palatial interiors of the houses and the sense of unity and community achieved by the courtyard, whereas we actually find ourselves confronted by such things as a windtower to the citadel in Aleppo, intriguingly captioned "Houses at entrance of ..." with no houses to be seen! In brief, the photographs could have been more thoroughly researched.

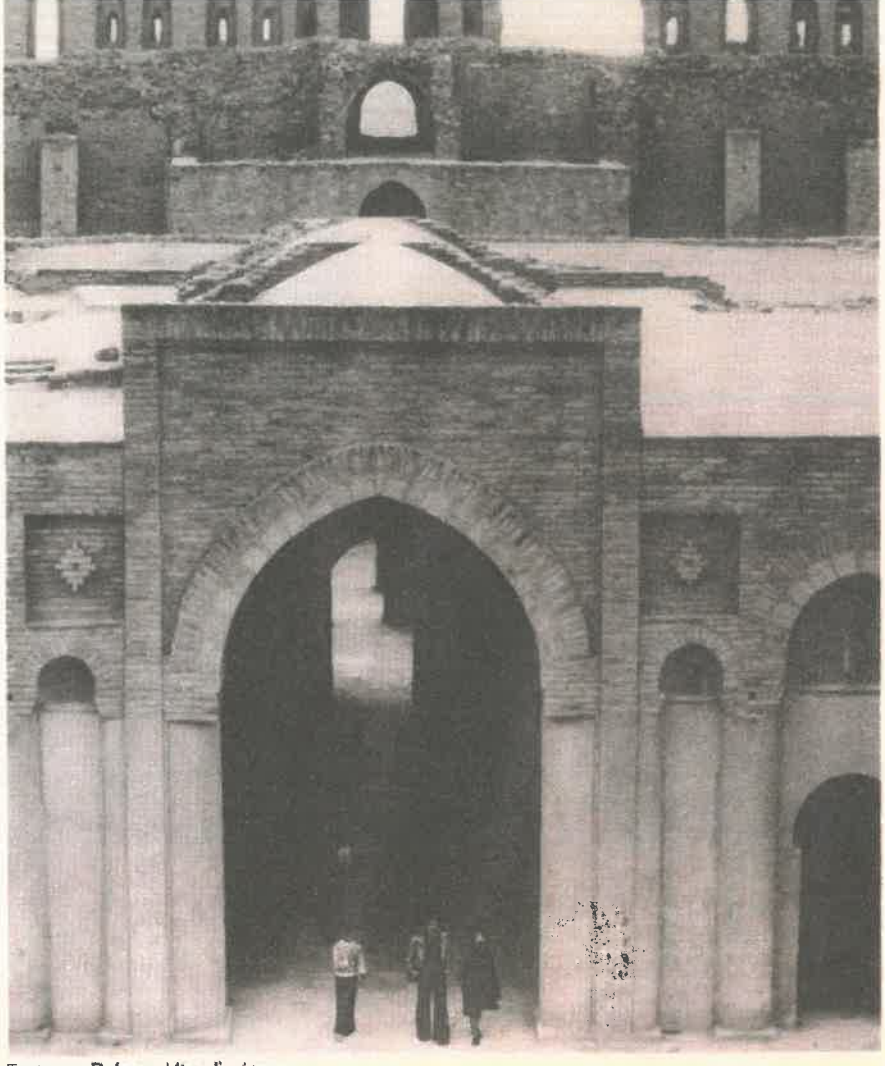
Despite this, the point is made and it is with certain trepidation that one leaves the central classical area to follow a winding path around and behind to examine the panel displays by over 60 architectural firms, British and Arab, now working in the Middle East.

A number of the better-known firms are represented including the Halcrow Group, Sir Alexander Gibb and Partners, John R Harris Architects, Robert Matthew, Johnson-Marshall and Partners, YRM International, John S Bonnington Partnership, John Brunton Partnership and many more. Their panels proudly display some of the most prestigious projects recently completed or presently under way in the area. Displays include colour photographs, scale models, drawings, artists designs and blueprints, supported by explanatory notes. These are always informative but it is not easy to gauge the final product in the one dimensional photographic form.

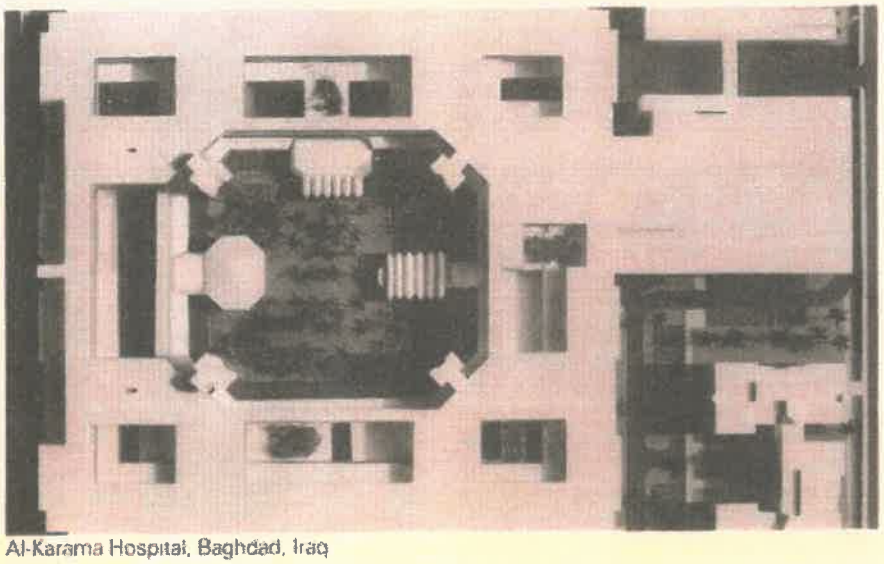
Many of the designs are quite stimulating, others are perplexing and border on the outrageous, others simply confirm one's worst fears. The John R Harris blow up of the towering Dubai International Trade Centre, a huge skyscraper made even more monstrous by its mirror reflection in water, is an example. So too, the neon-lit, Dubai Bank at night, a modern, square, glass block; less so the Sulaibkhat Hospital in Kuwait.

Fortunately these skyscrapers and massive concrete blocks seem to be the exception rather than the rule where the exhibition is concerned and one can often discern genuine attempts to interpret the traditional, albeit rather loosely.

IDEA International's plan for an equine centre in Saudi Arabia, ingeniously modelled on the bedouin tent, seems, in theory, highly innovative. The same thing can be said for the International Stadium in Riyadh, designed by Ian Fraser, John Roberts and Partners and now under construction. Here too the idea of the tent has been brought into play in the form of a huge, crown-shaped fabric cover protecting all but the central playing area.



Fortress Palace, Ukaidir, Iraq



Al-Karama Hospital, Baghdad, Iraq

Many companies have tried to address themselvs to the questions of scale, space and the interplay of space, so vital to Arab architecture and to working within the constraints of environment and climate, for which the "International Style" has so little regard.

Yet the work can often differ radically from project to project with enormous deviations even within the same displays. The Percy Thomas Partnership design for a hotel in Sanaa illustrates a deep respect for the traditional architecture of the area, whereas the company's design for a State Mosque in Kuwait looks something like a giant sea-shell with minarets atop. ARP's Crystal Tower represents all that is unsuitable for the area, whereas the designs for private villas take both environment and tradition into consideration.

Amongst the Arab companies represented are Makiya Associates, El-Wakil Associates, Rifat Chaderji, ARC Design Consultants, Alousi Associates and Basil Al-Bayati. All



Sultan Qaboos University, Sultanate of Oman, Master Plan Model.



Jordan Mausoleum Mosque



Old Jeddah



Windtower in a private house, Bahrain

illustrate a grasp of the traditional influences and appear to be making sincere attempts to respect all the unwritten rules underlying the classical style, while translating their work into the contemporary context. Makiya's Isa Town Gate in Bahrain, El-Wakil's modern and sometimes sumptuous mudbrick structures and ARC's Iraqi housing projects are among the more encouraging. Omrania's design for a diplomatic club in Riyadh shows a truly unusual sensitivity to the surrounding (desert) environment and the unusual topography of the site but, as far as can be seen in the photographs, borders slightly on the whimsical at certain points.

The work of other leading Arab architects such as Hassan Fathy, Wissa Wassef, Rassem Badran, the brothers El Minawy and Ben Miled, is presented in a series of photographic displays, not as part of the commercial section of the exhibition but almost as a tribute to those known to be capable of achieving the fusion between what is vital to modern living and what is desirable in terms of traditional aesthetics.

The exhibiton actually proved more heartening than anticipated, for although architecture is big business and can often be a ruthless profession, there does indeed appear to be a movement towards revision and atonement for past mistakes. The attractivly presented displays certainly offer plenty of food for thought and the architects have obviously taken a lot of trouble to prepare them with this in mind. ■

Maureen Ali



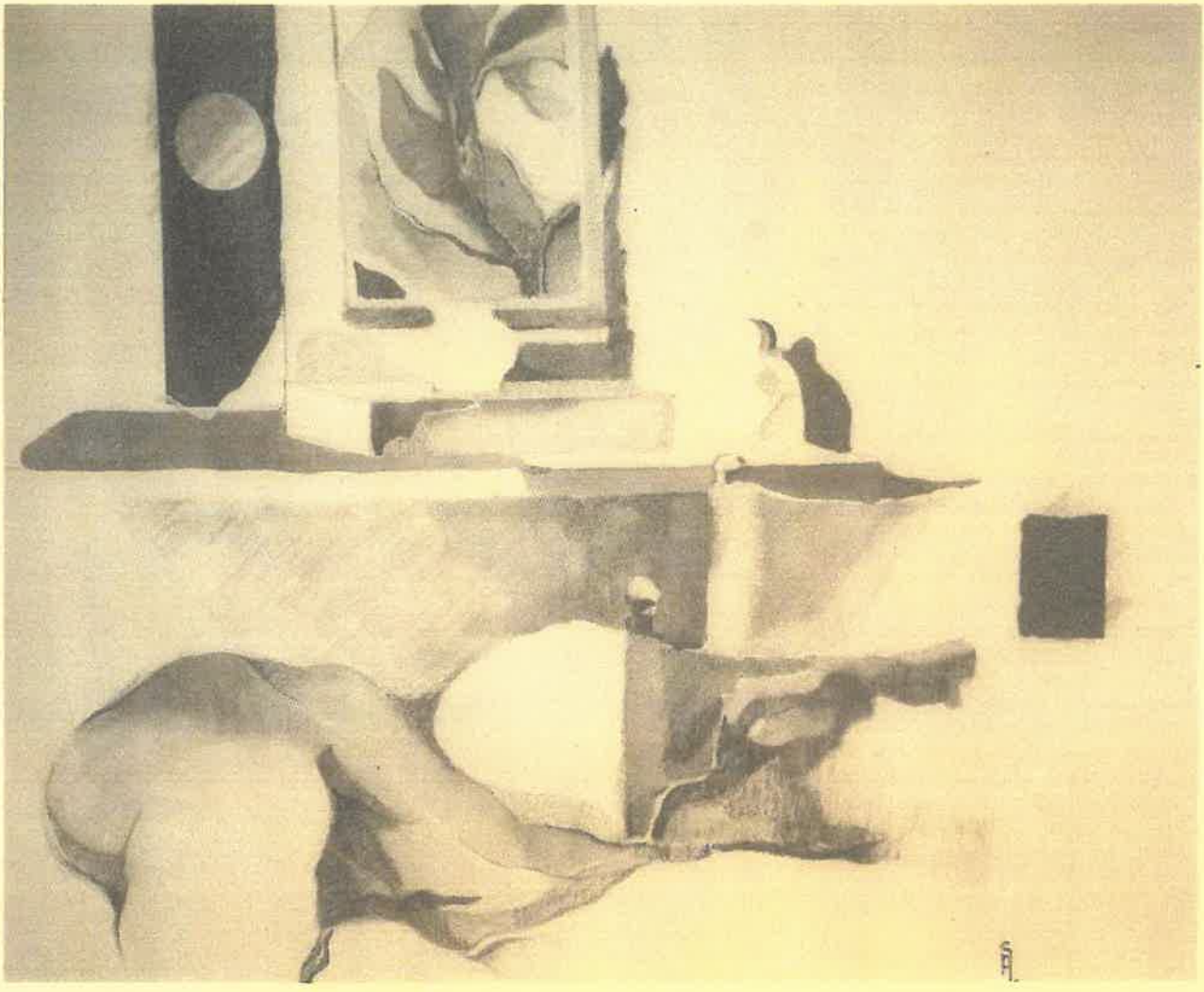
Salima Hashmi's paintings at Indus Gallery in Karachi

Salima Hashmi, whose latest paintings were on display at the Indus Gallery, Karachi in December, is the daughter of the celebrated Urdu poet Faiz Ahmed Faiz. That fact is being mentioned at the outset of this assessment not by way of attempting to add to her credentials as an artist but to define the starting point for the political themes that form an important part of her new work. It is from Faiz and his revolutionary poetry that she derives both her awareness of the political milieu and her rejection of the social and economic injustices that exist within it. This is not to say that hers is a political consciousness that is entirely inherited, only to highlight a key source for some of the elements in it.

Howsoever derived, the presence of political themes or, for that matter, any other kind of subject matter, in an artist's work is justifiable only in terms of the degree to which the artist succeeds in blending together the content and the medium into a complete artistic statement, that is, one in which the medium and content become a single interacting, organic whole. Judged by that yardstick, Salim Hashmi's new work certainly merits more critical attention that it has received so far.

Trained at the National College of Arts, Lahore in the late fifties and early sixties, and later also at the Bath Academy of Arts, Wiltshire, England, Salima Hashmi's paintings have been shown at many group shows in Pakistan and elsewhere, including at the Sao Paolo Biennale, the Delhi Triennale and at several National Exhibitions. In addition, she has had two individual shows, the one in Karachi being the latest.

That all forty-three of her paintings on display at the Karachi show were sold is a refreshing sign of the extent to which individual members of the Pakistani public are prepared to not only view art but also to buy it, a sign, moreover, that may come as something of a surprise to those in other countries who have a somewhat jaundiced view of the cultural scene in present-day Pakistan. However, the fact that, in spite of its acceptance by the viewing public, Salima Hashmi's work has not received wider critical attention says something about not only the state of art criticism in Pakistan but also, and more important, the artistic isolation in which the Pakis-





tani artist has to function in an international sense.

With a few exceptions, this is more or less true about all painters in Pakistan. Even though many of them have done work of a high order of excellence, all but a handful of Pakistani artists remain largely unknown outside their own country. This is not the fault of the artists themselves so much as it is indicative of the failure of Pakistan's cultural establishment to promote the work of its own artists. State patronage of the arts may not be a vital factor in the West (though even there it can and does make an important contribution to the development of the arts). In a Third World country like Pakistan, however, which also has no equivalent of the private foundations, museums and other institutions that support the work of artists in the West, the absence of state patronage acquires a critical dimension.

That so much good work has been done by painters in Pakistan in spite of this is a measure of the tenacity of the breed and of its creative energy. Even a mere roster of the names of some of the Pakistani artists who have produced work of international quality gives evidence of that fact. In

terms of the early period, both before and after the country got independence in 1947, the list would include Chughtai (who carried forward the classical Mughal and Persian style), Allah Baksh (with his romantic realism and rural subjects), Nagi, Haji Mohammed Sharif (the miniaturist), Sadequain (who initially derived his line from Picasso and who was, and remains, one of the country's most prolific painters), Fayzee Rahamin (who was a student at the Royal Academy, London and later worked with J.S. Sargeant, and who ultimately abandoned his Western-influenced portraiture in favour of a more indigenous approach), Askari, Aftab Ahmed (also a miniaturist) and Sheikh Shujaullah.

The years that followed this initial period in the history of Pakistani painting saw the emergence of such fine painters as Zubeida Agha (the first Pakistani woman artist to gain recognition), Shakir Ali (the first in the country to break with classical realism;), Shemza, Ahmed Pervez, Ali Imam, Anna Molka Ahmed, Ozzir Zuby, Haneef Ramay, Gulgee, Ajmal Hussain (who now divides his time between Paris, London and Karachi, and whose new work in both oils and a sort of stained-glass technique is taking an increasingly innovative turn) and Khalid Iqbal (perhaps the finest landscape painter produced by the sub-continent).

These painters, most of whom came to prominence in the 1950's, were, in a sense, the founders of the modernist school in Pakistan. Though some of them worked initially in the borrowed imagery of the West, many of them were able to evolve forms and techniques that were a more accurate reflection of their own sensibilities both as Pakistanis and as individuals. This does not mean that their work retained no links with what was being done in other countries, which, in any case, is something neither possible nor to be desired – all art belonging in the ultimate sense, to one great, central tradition. However, it does mean that they were able to break away to an extent from the forms and modes in use elsewhere, particularly the romantic realism of the English nineteenth-century school.

The group that followed these, as it were, middle-period artists also has in it many painters of a high calibre, including Zahoor Akhlaq (recently commissioned by the Nobel Foundation to do a series of lithographs of Nobel Prize winners), Jamil Naqsh, Colin David, Ahmed Khan, Ijaz-ul-Hassan, Kohari, Saeed Akhtar, Mansoor-Rahi, Rashid Ahmed Arshad (the calligraphist), Rabia Zuberi, Maqsood Ali and Mansur Aye. Most of these painters are still active and continue to produce work of a consistently



high quality. For example, the portraits and geometric designs of Colin David, who teaches at the National College of Arts are as good as similar work being done anywhere. The still lifes and nature paintings of Ijaz-ul-Hassan are equally good, canvas after canvas striking the viewer with the singular force of their radiance. And these are but two of many such examples.

Following these figures, the artists whose work is coming to the fore now include Lubna Agha, Naheed, Sumbul Nazir, Meher Afroze, Qudsia, Mansura Hassan (presently living in Washington D.C.), Imran Mir and Mashkoor. It is to this last group (perhaps significantly one that has in it more women artists than men) that Salima Hashmi belongs. Though she started painting some years before most of the others in the group did, she is very much a product of the same contemporaneity, the same increasing awareness that the artist in Pakistan can no longer afford (if ever he could) to live cut-off from both his own political and social milieu and events elsewhere.

In Salima Hashmi's case, evidence of this significant change in attitude is seen in recent works like 'November Portrait' (21" x 30", mixed media), 'The Wall' (27" x 36", oil and collage) and 'Coming of Age' (mixed media), all of which make strong statements about recent political events in the country. Other paintings like 'Shatila Morning' (oil and collage) and 'Sabra Dawn' (mixed media) are her reaction of outrage and sorrow to the plight of the Palestinians. Some of these works incorporate, to considerable effect, photographs of protesting people. Others employ the colour red in a manner that suggests a spreading stain of blood. But these paintings are no mere political posters. All of them are also fully realised works of art.

And if there are images of despair, anger and protest in her work, there are also images of rebirth and the flowering of life. The leaf motif, the figure of the nude and, indeed, at times the colours themselves are handled by her in a manner that gives evidence of this. Some of the themes in Salima Hashmi's work are centred round concepts that do not yield their meaning easily, reflecting in many ways the multi-dimensional patterns of contemporary life itself, with its often bewildering range of sensations, impressions, political philosophies and the host of images that clamour for our attention. It is a tribute to her art, however, that one comes away from it not with a feeling of bewilderment but a sense of having been in the presence of work that both accepts the complexity of the world in which we live and succeeds in investing it with the clarity of the artist's vision. In this sense, it acquires a dimension that goes well beyond an exercise in self-surveillance. ■

Kaleem Omar

Islamic Art in India

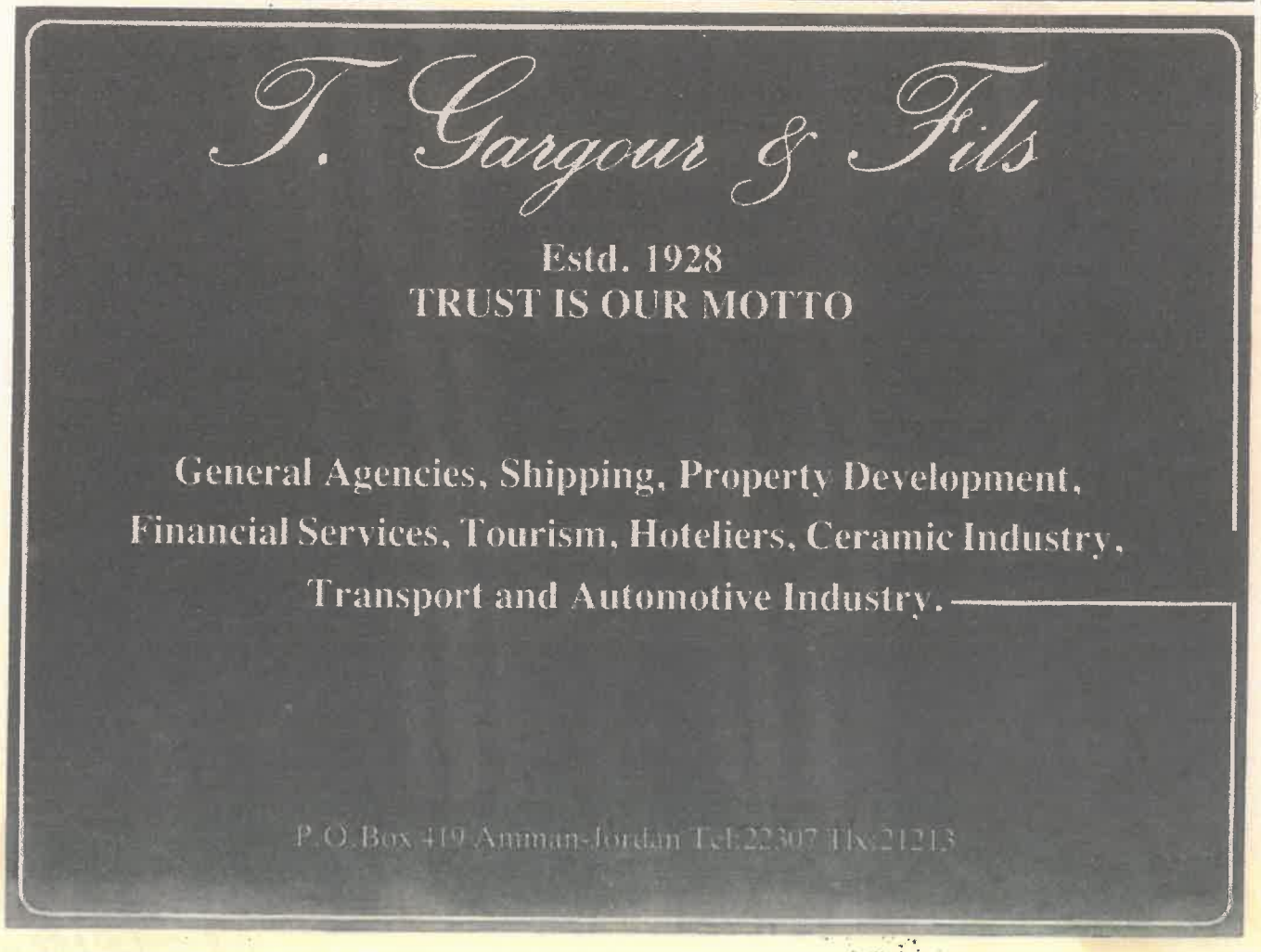
The latest Marg publication *An Age of Splendour: Islamic Art in India* is a sumptuous volume with outstanding contributions by more than a dozen experts and specialists from various Indian museums and academic institutions, and an illuminating piece from Jeremiah P. Losty, of the British Library, London, on early Bijapuri musical paintings. Six of the articles are by staff members of the National Museum, New Delhi, venue of the 1981 exhibition entitled "Islamic Heritage of India", which brought to light a wealth of material in this field, and served to underscore the influx of ideas and concepts "that led to an exciting new synthesis of culture – the Turkish, the Persian and the Indian".

The Guest Editor is Karl Khandalavala, Honorary Editor of the quarterly journal *Lalit Kala* and Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Prince of Wales Museum, Bombay, whose own 30-page contribution deals extensively with the heritage of Islamic art in India, arguing that "the might of Islam came to India not in the context of barbarian conquerors, but as rulers who already had traditions of praiseworthy literature, architecture and other arts inherited from Central Asia and Persia", and that over the centuries "the Islamic heritage of art in India had inevitably to be a fusion of the artistic talents of the ruler and the ruled".

Apart from well-known aspects such as illustrated Islamic manuscripts, arms and armour, metal; the glassware, Islamic architecture, coinage, calligraphy, carpets, jewellery and textiles etc., the volume includes two stimulating pieces which deserve special mention: one by the Editor of Marg, Saryu Doshi, on Islamic elements in Jain manuscript illustration, and the other by the Director of the Salar Jung Museum in Hyderabad, Dr. M.L. Nigam, on Mughal jades.

The *tour de force* is the collaborative review, by Karl Khandalawala and Dr Narindra Nath, Keeper of Manuscripts, National Museum, New Delhi, of 10 illustrated manuscripts of Muslim India. Six of these are of the Mughal period – Babur Nama, Jahangir Nama, Diwan-i-Hafiz, Tarikh-i-Khandan-i-Timuria (not mentioned by Abul Fazl), Talismat, and Duval Rani Khizr Rani, transcribed by Sultan Bayazid in 1576. Of the remaining four, two are of the Sultanate period, Kalil-ul-Damna and Bustan-i-Sa'di; and the other two are Deccani versions of Khusrau-u-Shirin of Nizami, one dated 1723 in Hyderabadi *qalam*, and the other painted in Golkanda in 1568.

The volume is published by Marg Publications, a division of Tata Sons Ltd., Bombay, and is distributed in U.K. by Books from India (UK) Ltd., 45 Museum Street, London WC1A 1LR at £30. ■



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Neolithic Art from Ain Ghazal

certainly herded by the people of Ain Ghazal, the status of the other animal species remains in doubt. Some researchers have expressed views that the small figurines may have been toys for the enjoyment of children, but it is likely that these items had a more practical intent, such as magic charms to ensure the fertility of domesticated animals and for success in the hunt.

The artwork briefly described above comes from a village which, by today's standards, must be considered a small community, perhaps numbering no more than 1,500-2,000 people. The residents were simple farmers and herders who supplemented their daily diet with the meat and wild game and naturally available berries, nuts, seeds and herbs. To most modern urbanites, they must appear as rustic people of the land, with no knowledge of metals nor even of fired pottery.

Yet, in its time, Ain Ghazal was one of the major population centres of the Near East, nearly three times the size of its neighbour Jericho in the Jordan Valley. Ain Ghazal was a principal focus of innovation and change in terms of the arts, although most of the expressions we have seen were probably directly related to religion and social order, it cannot be denied that Ain Ghazal was the seat of splendid craftsmen in human and animal depiction, who produced unexpectedly sophisticted, appealing and charming manifestations of love, respect and humour. The more imposing monumental works of "civilisations" would not appear for several thousands of years after Ain Ghazal had ceased to exist, but the achievements these later developments engendered cannot eclipse the personal and organic emotions of the arts enjoyed by their earlier ancestors at Ain Ghazal. ■

Acknowledgements

The remarkable discoveries from Ain Ghazal came about as the combined effort of a very large group of people, unfortunately too numerous to name individually. Certain individuals were instrumental in providing the funds and facilities for the two seasons of work in 1982 and 1983, and we would like to express our gratitude to the following people, listed alphabetically: Her Highness Princess Alia, Dr Adnan Badran, Dr Crystal-M Bennett, Mr Ali Ghandour, Dr Adnan Hadidi, Dr Shaher el-Hassan, Dr Mo'awyiah Ibrahim, Dr Svend Helms, Mrs Diana Kirkbride-Helbaek, Dr Ilse Köhler-Rollefson, Dr David McCreery, Dr Ma'an Abu Nuwwar, His Highness Prince Ra'ad ibn Zeid, Dr Alan Simmons, and Mrs Kathy Tubb.

Funds to conduct the archaeological excavations at Ain Ghazal were provided by Yarmouk University (Centre for Jordanian Studies), the National Geographic Society (USA), The Department of Antiquities of Jordan, an anonymous donor from the United States, the Cobb Institute of Archaeology (Mississippi State University), the Wenner-Gren Foundation and the University of Kansas. We would like to acknowledge our deep appreciation for their support.

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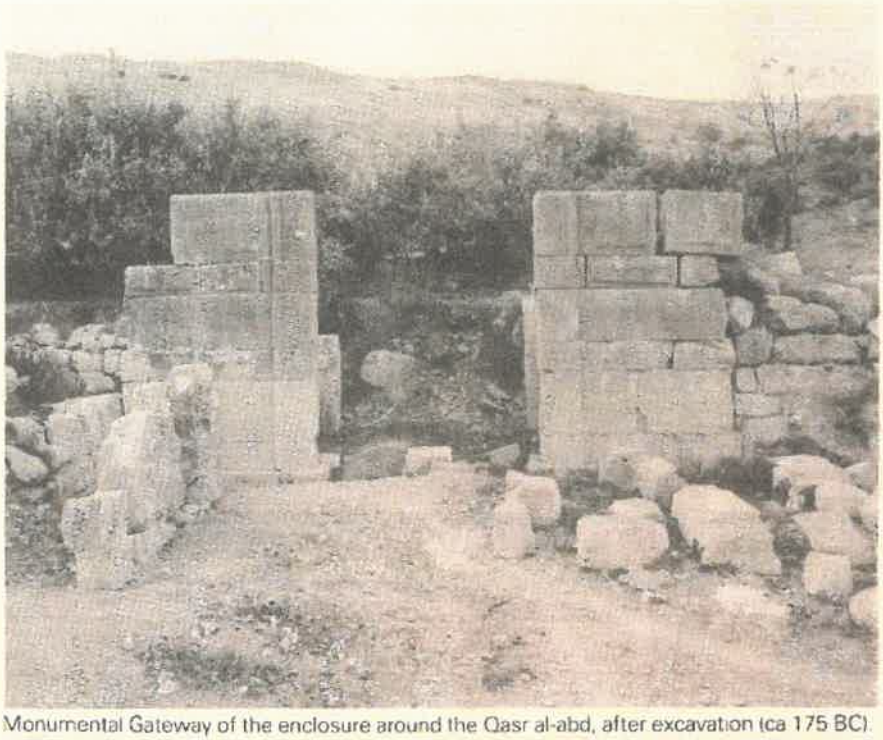
Iraq El Amir

the end of the Byzantine period (with a possible survival into Umayyad and Ayubid times). No wonder: a well-watered and fertile valley will always prove attractive.

The occupation of the Wadi-Sir valley and the surrounding area is the first item of the new programme. Aerial photographs furnish the base of the research: 103 sites have been identified and located and the investigation on the ground is being carried out by F Villeneuve. Several military encampments and fortifications such as Khirbet es-Sour and Khirbet es-Suwwan, dating back to different periods and assignable to different people, have been identified, supporting the idea that the wadi was one of the roads of communication between the Jordan valley and the plateau of Amman. Moreover, we shall now be able to distinguish between what, in antiquity, was cultivated land, grazing ground, forest or wilderness, which will lead to a more precise view of the large estate put together at some time by the Tobiads, one among several others, as reported by Josephus, of equal size, which was characteristic of ancient farming and land tenure.

The second point of the programme focuses on the site of Iraq el-Amir itself, the centre of the above-mentioned estate. There a wall of several hundred metres long, in fact a limit rather than a defence, surrounded a residential area of about 100 acres, with, grouped among gardens and orchards, a number of structures of various kinds, including first the caves in the cliff to the north, and then the village and the cultivated terraces as far as the imposing ruin of the Qasr el-Abd at the southern end, the whole length being 700 metres and the difference of level 54.

Then, on the other side of the qasr we come upon an embankment, serving as both causeway and dam, about 200 metres long, 20 high, and articulated in three tiers, which bars this part of the valley. Today the artificial lake thus created around the qasr is filled with a very fertile soil for vegetables and only becomes accidentaly flooded by stormy rain. In his palace, Hyrcanus could enjoy the coolness of the water, while the lake was the storage basin needed to water his fields and flocks, as well as his soldiers' mounts. Nearby, a monumental gateway, studied by J M Dentzer, was the southern entrance of the area.



Monumental Gateway of the enclosure around the Qasr al-abd, after excavation (ca 175 BC).



Panther, East Wall of the Qasr al-abd (ca 175 BC).

A map on the scale of 1/2,500 is in preparation; on it will figure the remains of all ancient structures, with special reference to the channels which caught the waters of the Wadi Sir somewhere above Iraq el-Amir in antiquity, as they still do in our time, according to P Gentelle in his authoritative study.

We have already mentioned the caves hollowed out in the rocky cliff overlooking the site, forming a succession of large rooms on two levels which today shelter only the Bedouins' goats. Josephus describes these caves with admiration, praising luxurious installations which, in fact, do not seem to have existed (one of them preserves only some remains of sculptural decoration); but he might have been right in suggesting that Hyrcanus planned to use them as a last and impregnable refuge. It would take time and money to clear some of these rooms, and the results would be problematic. However, another problem might be solved, that of the access to the caves. The two ancient gateways open about 20 metres above the small, modern road, which may well overlay an ancient one. But there is no saying what the actual layout was in antiquity, everything being hidden

under a huge, steep mass of rubble.

Branching out from the road on the south, another road leads into the modern village. There a narrow rocky platform with precipitous slopes towards the east and the south was chosen in very early times as a dwelling-place, a view supported by findings of Bronze and Iron Age pottery on the spot. At the southern end of the village, some pieces of Hellenistic architecture, very similar to those belonging to the Qasr al-'Abd, reveal another chapter of the great design of Hyrcanus, and the "plaster building", excavated by P. Lapp on the west side of the village, goes back to the same period.

But the most interesting discovery was the stone wall surrounding the site. In a preliminary and limited sounding, F Villeneuve brought to light a gateway in this wall at a place where the remains of two main phases were preserved, a Hellenistic (3rd-2nd cent.) one and an earlier, probably Achaemenid, one. There seems to have been a last important phase in Byzantine times, though the wall was dismantled at the beginning of the Roman occupation. Therefore the Jordanian authorities have started expropriating some of the modern houses with a view to extending the excavations.

But nothing on the site is more spectacular than the Qasr el-'Abd, whose restoration by the architect F. Larché, as well as its study, is now drawing to a close. The pile of gigantic blocks forming the ruin, with only two angle piers still erect, has given way to a building reconstructed as high as the ground floor, a far from easy task considering that blocks weighing up to 15 tons and more had to be moved and put back. ■

IFAPO
Institut Français d'archéologie du Proche-Orient (Beyrouth-Damas-Amman).

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Um Qais

endangered by the arrival of Mark Anthony, who appointed Herod King of the Jews, causing the break out of many battles and resulting in the defeat of the Natataeans during the period of Malichos I. Later, Octavius granted the city of Gadara to Herod the Great, and it was not until his death that Gadara gained its freedom.

In 68 A.D., when the first Jewish revolt broke out, Vespasian captured the cities of Jordan in order to destroy the Jewish colonies, and he was welcomed to Gadar. During the period of Trajan - The Roman Emperor - Gadara maintained its independence, reaching its golden age in the 2nd century A.D., to which most of its buildings dated.

Gadara is further mentioned in the New Testament, where it is stated that Jesus came to Gadara and exorcised the devil from a madman, sending the unclean spirits into a herd of swine feeding nearby.

Nevertheless, history shows that deep paganism persisted over a long period before Christianity established itself. In the 4th century A.D., Gadara was an episcopal seat and flourished until the 7th century A.D.

Strabo, the Roman geographer, mentioned Gadara, in his writings, as a city famous for its hot springs and a place for entertainment and culture, an obvious explanation for the many theatres to be found there and the residence of poets and philosophers. Schumacher, the traveller, was the first to write about the ruins of Gadara in 1889.

The general plan of Um Qeis follows the pattern of Greek and Roman cities, the archaeological remains being theatres, churches, colonnaded streets, baths and tombs.

The archaeological excavations, undertaken by the German Evangelical Institute of Archaeology in the Holy Land, north of the western Theatre, uncoverd a Byzantine central church, with four internal apses in the corners, forming an inner octagon. The south-eastern apse was partitioned off from the rest of the building by marble chancel screens fixed to eight basalt columns with basalt capitals and the floor was paved by colourful decorative tiles in geometrical patterns, and eight columns were uncovered on the western side of the church. All the buildings in this area date back to the Roman period, though they were re-used by the Byzantines.

A Danish team of archaeologists in 1977/78/81 uncovered a Byzantine bath. The floor of the main room was paved with hard-burned clay tiles and carried 130 cm high basalt pillars, which supported a basin. A column of granite is in the north eastern corner of the room.

The basin walls are of clay tiles and hollow; under the basin created by the basalt pillars was a hypocaust. A great number of broken tiles were found that came partly from the roof and partly from the clay pipes of the hot air channels cut in the wall.

The calidarium room has a semi-circular vault built upon a podium. The floor consisted of large tiles of gypsum with large fragments of marble slabs in between. The panels of this room were also of gypsum, and three steps lead to it from the north. Under the floor of the calidarium room there is a hypocaust of clay tiles.

The oven is also built of clay tiles, showing little traces of smoke and fire which indicate that the bath was not used for some time before the final destruction.

A door way in the western wall of the main room opened to the room with standing basalt hypocaust pillars on clay tiles. This room was heated in a way similar to that of the main room.

The colonnaded street which leads to the Western Gate was used for many centuries, and was paved with slabs which can still be seen today. Ancient cartwheel marks are clearly visible on these stones. The street is 13.50 metres wide and the edging stones form the base support for the column shafts.

A large mausoleum discovered in 1968, with a stairway of 18 steps 3 metres wide, leads to a rectangular courtyard where some columns with Corinthian capitals can still be seen. In fact, there is a small semi-circular portico which is thought to have been added later. From this portico, four steps lead to a domed square chamber of 4.50 x 4.50 metres. There is a very heavy basalt stone door to this chamber. On three sides of the chamber there are 6 loculi in two stories; the upper loculi are cut out in the wall on both sides of the door.

There is another mausoleum on the southern slope, built on a platform and reached by a stairway. A Greek inscription is engraved on a basalt lintel which lies near the south-eastern corner of the site.

Translated, it reads:

"To you I say, passer-by:
As you are, I was; as I am,
You will be;
Use life as a mortal."

The west Theatre is situated to the south of the church. It is smaller than the North Theatre and ... its remains are still well preserved. The orchestra measures 24 metres and has seats built from basalt stone in two stories and 15 rows with a stairway in between; the vaults supporting the seats are still in good condition. There are doors built into the vaults as means of access into the theatre.

Among the first row of seats is a white, headless, seated statue of Goddess Astarte (Venus). She holds a cornucopia in her left hand and the legs of her seat are decorated with lions' heads.

The Northern Theatre stands on the border of the plateau to the north, the orchestra measuring about 48 metres in diameter. Most of its basalt stones have been moved, the theatre being in a considerable state of ruin. Again, in common with other Roman theatres, vaults were the support structure, and parts of it were engraved in the rock.

Um Qeis being one of the most important archaeological and touristic sites in Jordan, the authorities are planning to carry out more conservation and restoration projects. ■

Photographs by Adam Woolfitt

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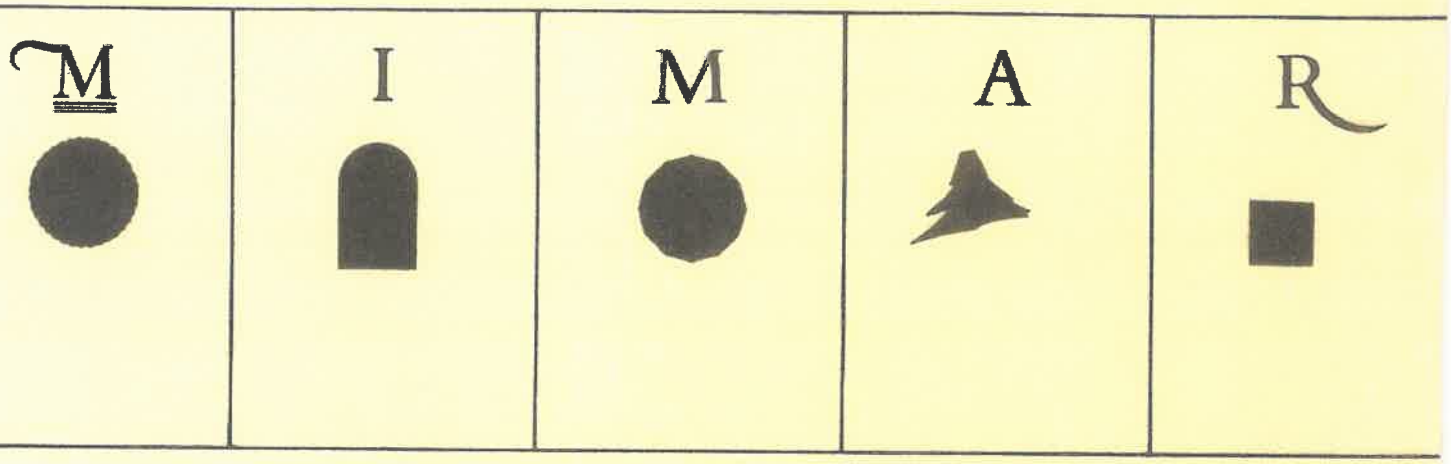
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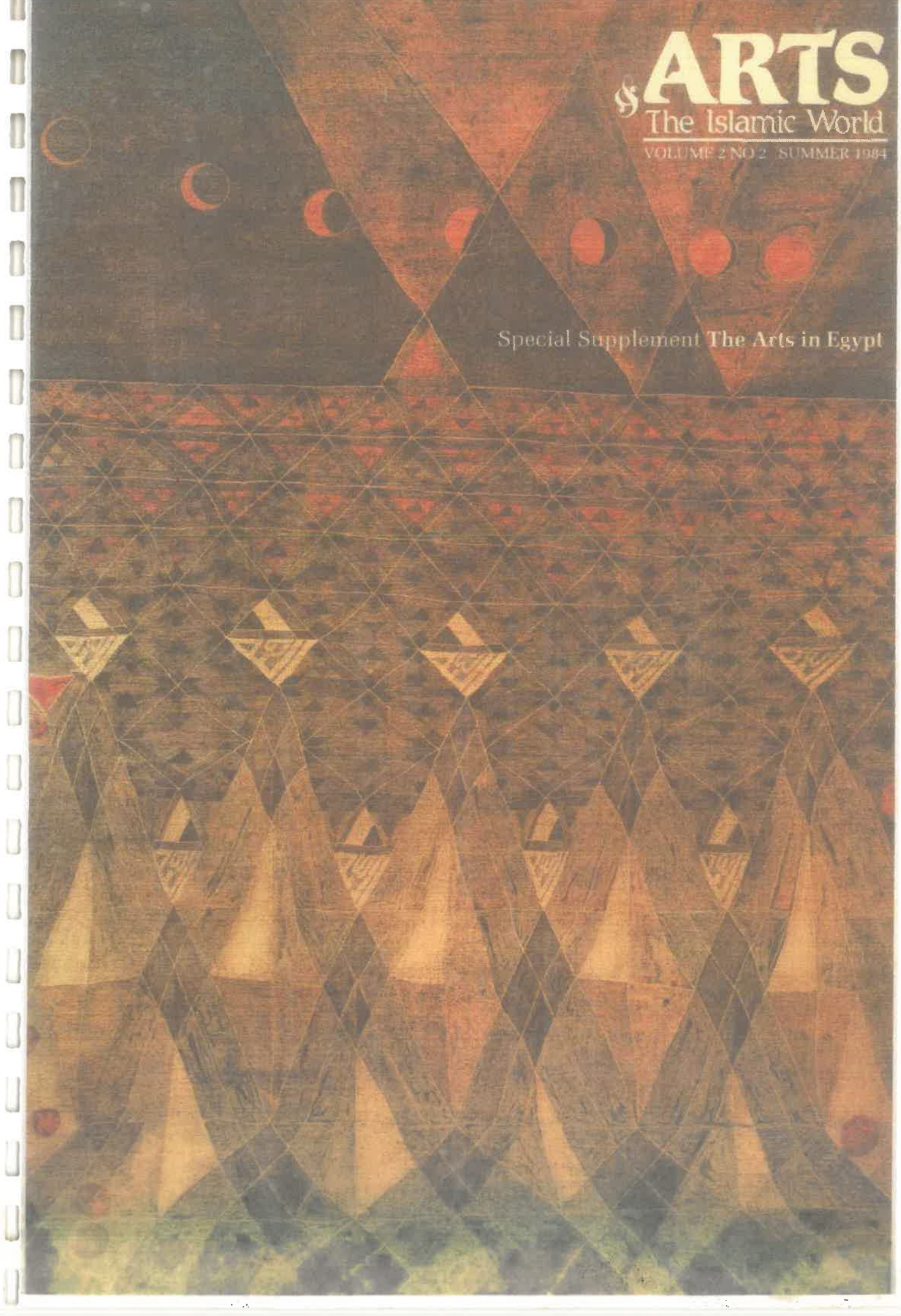
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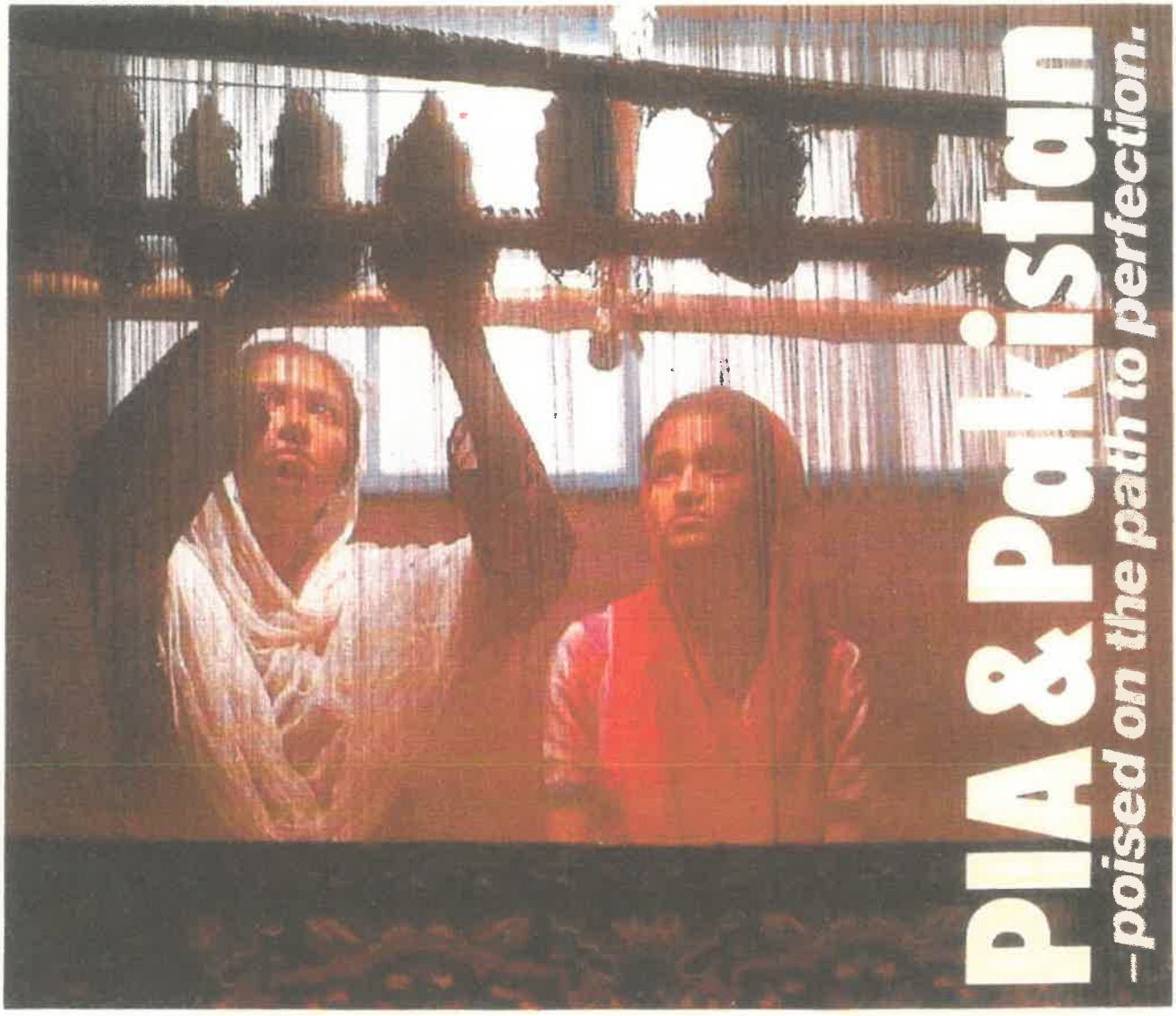

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(*left*) Silver inlay brass tray-stand with Arabic inscription. Diam. 17.5 cms. Ht. 17.5 cms. Egypt, 14th century.

(*right*) Silver inlay brass tray with Arabic inscription. Diam. 26 cms. Ht. 3 cms. Egypt, 13th century.

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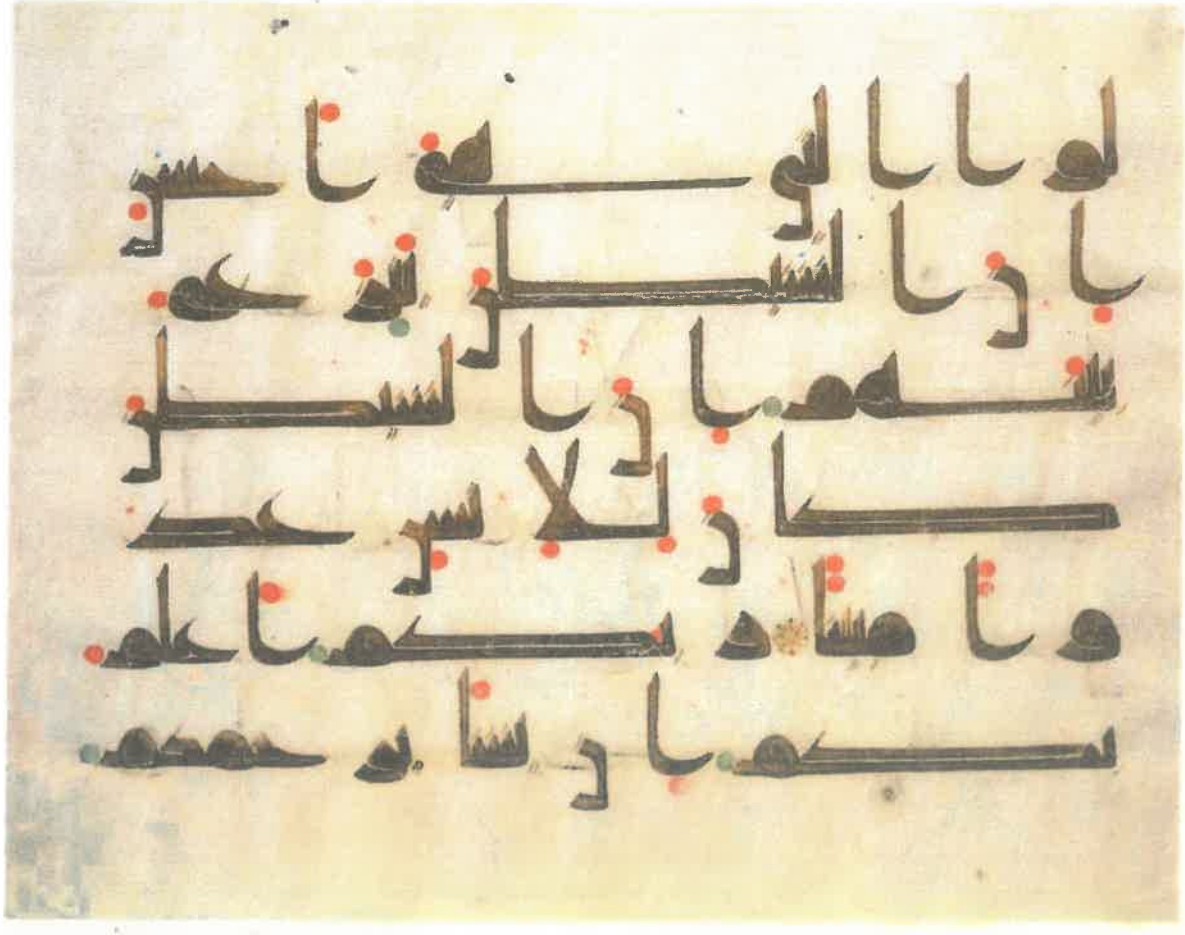
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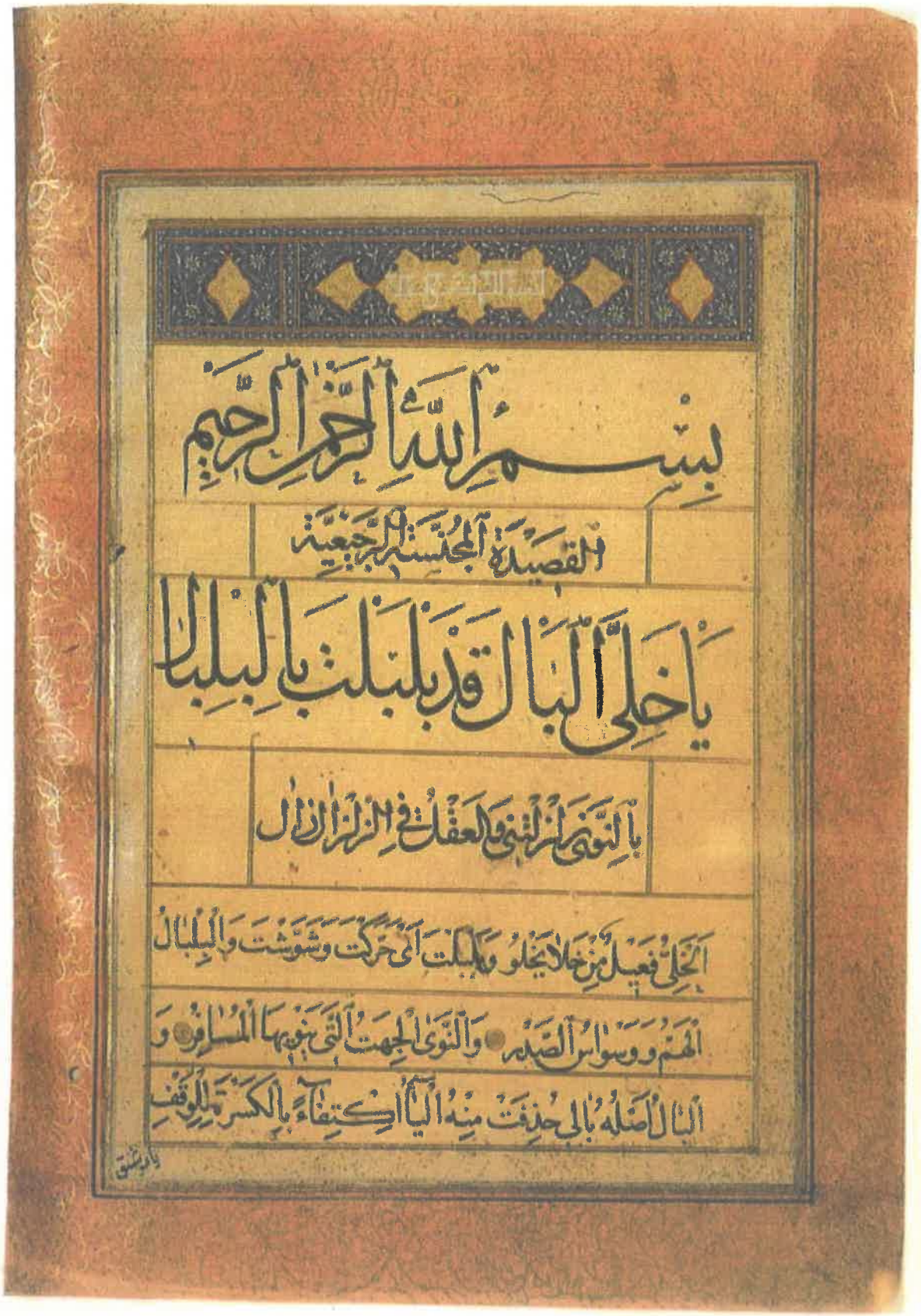
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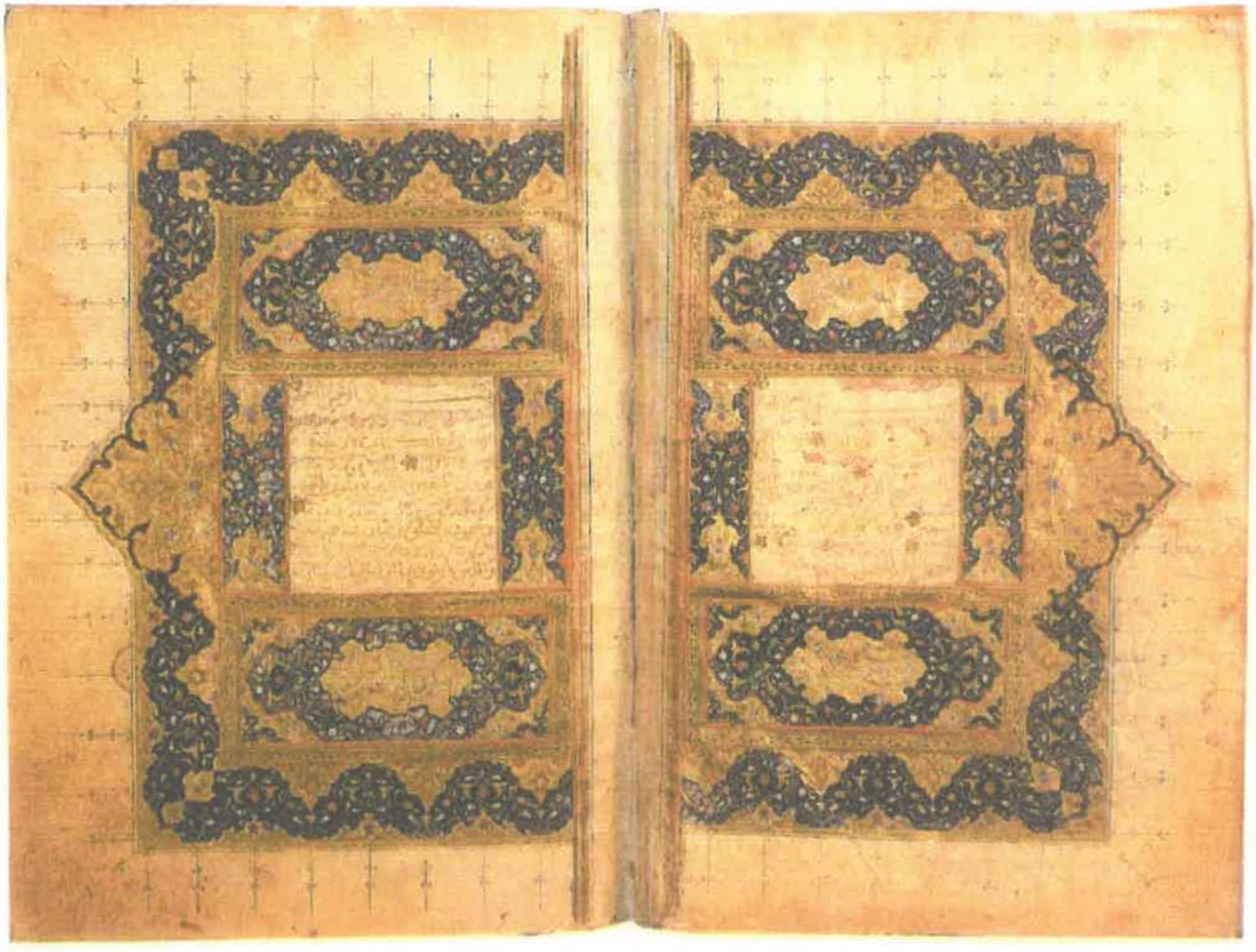




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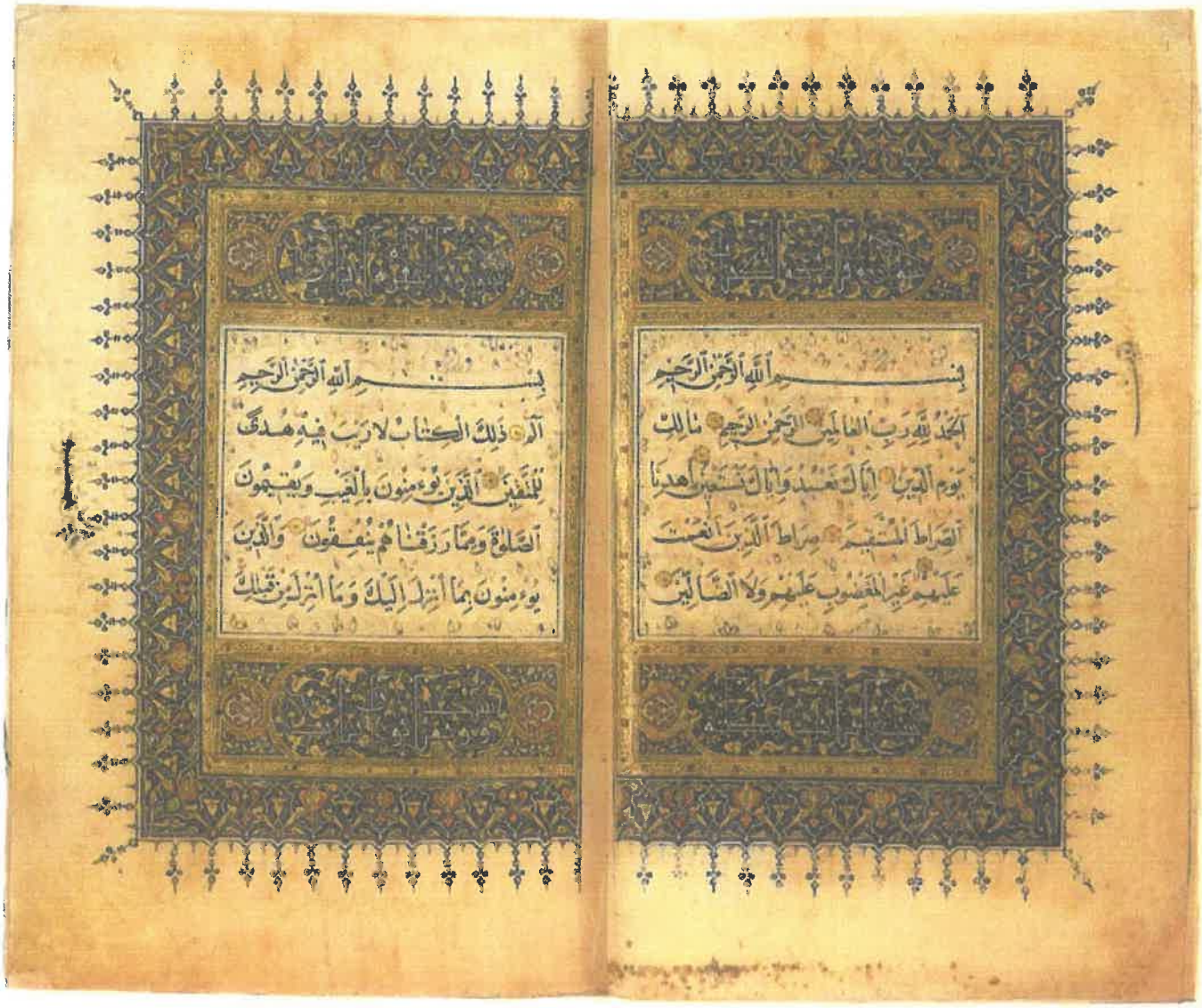


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25 × 17 cms. Persia, early 16th century.

Opposite

(*top*) A large bowl decorated with black *Kufic* inscription around the rim.
Diam. 33 cms. Ht. 5 cms. Persia, Nishapur, 10th century.

(*bottom*) A large bowl decorated with six groups of green splashes on the rim and three lines of *Kufic* inscription in between.
Diam. 31 cms. Ht. 8 cms. Iraq, 9th century.



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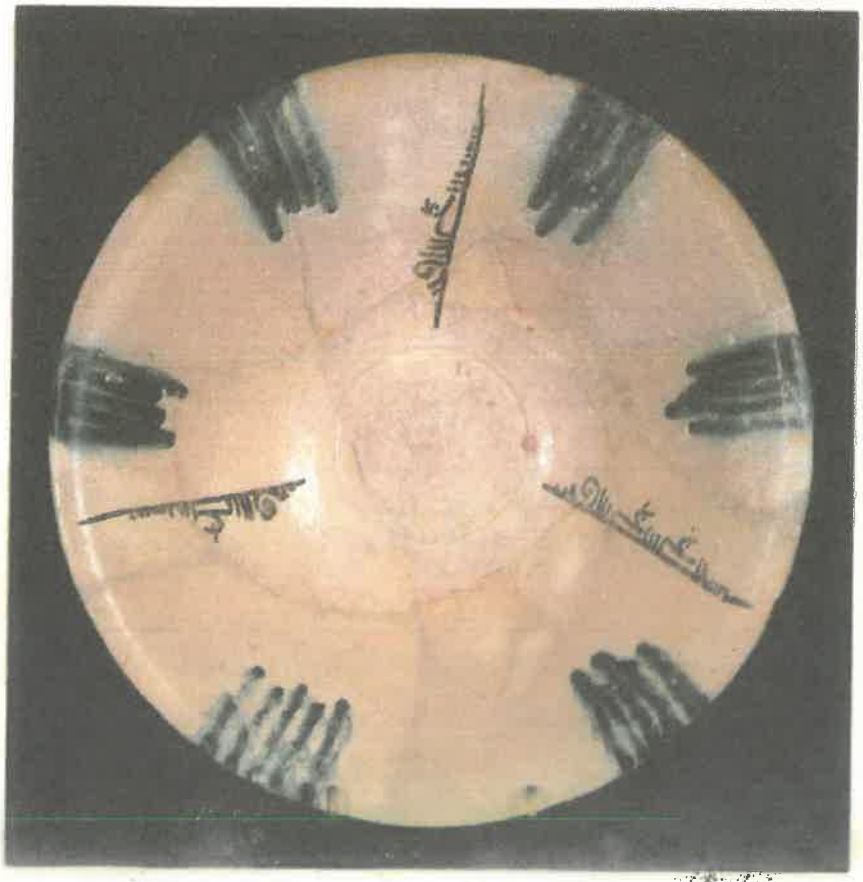
Opposite

(*top*) A very rare Qur'an leaf copied in gold *Kufic* on blue vellum.
37 × 25 cms. Tunisia, Qairawan, 10th century.

(*bottom*) A rare Qur'an leaf copied in black *Kufic* with diacritical dots in red and green on vellum.
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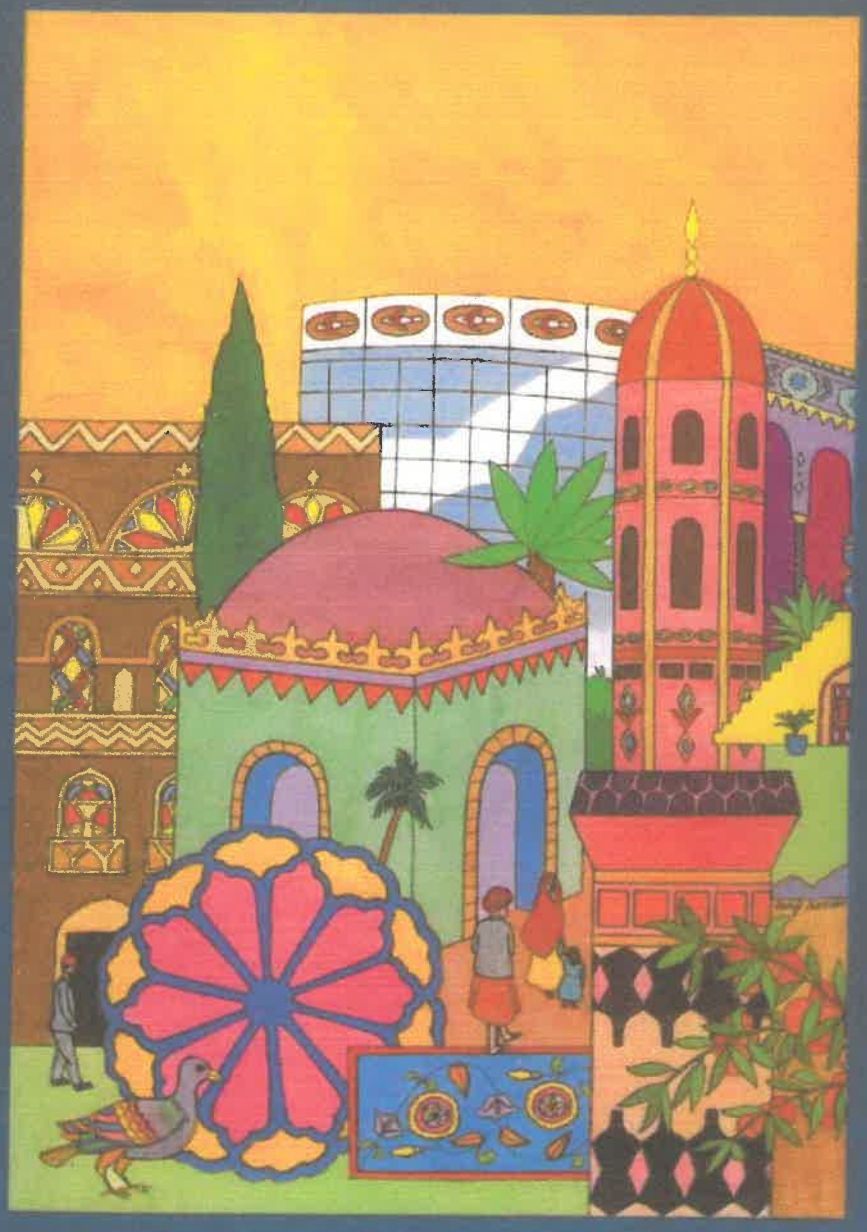
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"You also
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ABD-AR-RAHMAN, 18th Century

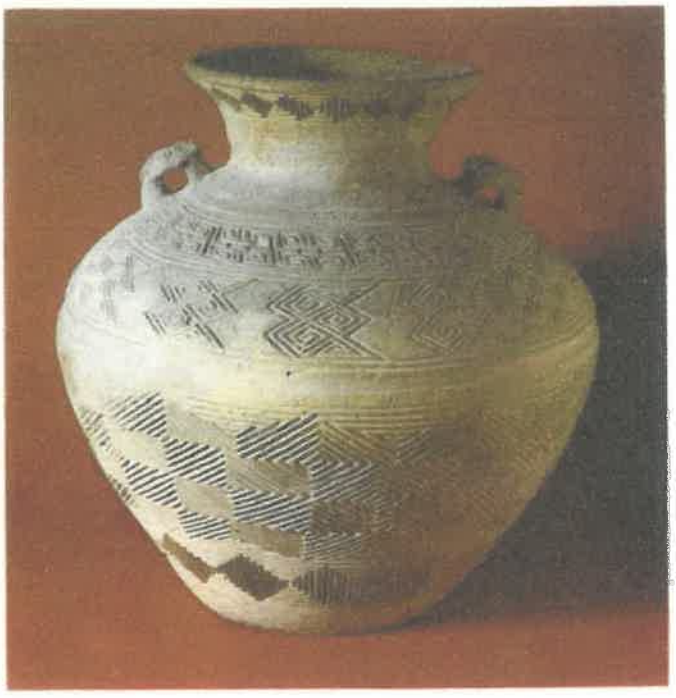
CHINA AND THE ISLAMIC WORLD

Artistic traditions and influences

Michael Gulbenkian

As the development of our common human heritage is carefully exposed by the work of the historian and the archaeologist, one of the most fascinating and evocative inter-relationships which has ever existed, that between the Chinese and the Islamic worlds between the 7th and 19th Centuries, will again assume its rightful place before the eyes of the world. The purpose of this article, therefore, is to re-introduce Chinese art, culture and historical development to the Middle East and to prove that it is not a novel thing, but rather the continuation of a tradition which winds backwards for at least 2,600 years.

One of the earliest attestable influences of the Middle East on the art of China was in a minor key, for it was merely the importation, and the reproduction, of tiny coloured glass-beads, and it seems strange that these pleasant playful distractions should have been the ambassadors of so grand and mutually beneficial a relationship.



2



3

China, as with all great empires, experienced long periods of expansion and contraction: during the period of the Han dynasty, 202-220 A.D., united and at peace, she sought to conquer, neutralise and to understand the lands beyond the wall. The greatest danger to all this wealth and stability lay in the Hsiung-Nu, a great "barbarian" nation as energetic and expansionist as the Chinese themselves and a constant challenge to the influence in the Northern border area. This tribe had recently fought and defeated another Nomad people, the Ta-Ueh-Chi, who had moved westwards and, in pursuit of them, with a message of friendship and a desire for alliance, was sent an intrepid individual, Chang-Ch-ien, who spent long years (138-126 B.C.) finding, failing to convince, and returning to China after many adventures.

From his journeys, the Chinese historians were able to codify their own ideas about those vast, unfriendly regions and as the Chinese bureaucracy was ever efficient, every impression and memory was fixed forever in Chinese subconscious, like a fly in amber. The first step had been taken – there could now be only one outcome, a closer understanding with the outer world.

There is a natural inevitability in the events which followed. In the year 104 B.C., the Emperor Wu despatched an army headed by General Li Kuang-li, the brother of a favourite concubine, to humble the barbarians but, as yet, the Chinese were no match for these elusive warriors and suffered a humiliating defeat, leaving the chastised general an exile from his own land. Fortunately, his second attempt succeeded, and both he and China benefited from his triumph.

There matters rested until the year 73 A.D., when a brilliant administrator, Pan-Chao, set about the task of organising this vast area. Once this was accomplished, he marched westwards, crossing the T'ien Shan Mountains with 70,000 men, and advanced to the shores of the Caspian Sea, almost to the frontiers of Europe.

His envoy, Kan-Ying, was sent to probe further westward; he visited Parthia (An-Hsi) and reached the coast of the Great Sea. Beyond this barrier, he knew that there lay the Roman Empire (Ta-T'sin), with whom the Chinese had long had dealings. The Parthians had the monopoly in this trade and naturally not wishing to lose it, actively discouraged Pan-Chao, who lost his nerve and ventured no further.

Although the final full contact had not been made, the Chinese had, in the course of the Han dynasty, established a clear picture in their own minds of the lands beyond their borders which they largely dominated and they had caught also a rapturous glimpse of the glories lying beyond. And so a path had been cleared which would, in the next great flowering of Chinese adventure, turn into the "Royal-Road", the Silk Route, on which would travel all the wondrous luxuries, which the Emperor and people of China had come to learn, to need: and this need, this grand curiosity would slowly dispel the distances between the different races.

This extraordinary lumbering invention has about it all that a bear may be, for it is large in dimension yet delicate in detail. Beneath its tender eyes and patient paws, there lurks the steel of destruction, too easily provoked.

This period of the T'ang dynasty (618-907 A.D.) was, in China, one of those quite extraordinary times in human history when diverse dreams, ideas and inspirations are allowed to flourish without hindrance, in a society so secure in its own beliefs and values as to feel unthreatened by differing concepts, to accept them and thereby to enrich its own heritage.

It was therefore particularly fortunate that the T'ang experiment should have coincided with the birth of Islam, for this was perhaps the only time in which the Chinese were prepared to accept the world as it truly was, and not as they wished it to be.

Perhaps the first the Chinese knew of Islam was gleaned from their Sassanian neighbours who were being hard pressed in 638 A.D. In that year, messengers arrived from the last Persian King, Yezdegord, desperately defending the remnants of his empire from the ferocious attacks launched on him by the adherents of the faith, appealing to the Chinese Court for assistance. The Emperor did not send assistance – perhaps the memories of China's civil war were still too fresh to contemplate such an involvement.

That the Chinese had a very clear perception of their western neighbours is shown by the following from the Hsin T'ang Shu:

"Ta Shih", says the T'ang Shu, "was formerly part of

Persia. The men have large noses and black beards. They carry silver mounted swords on a silver girdle. They drink no wine and have no music. The women are white and veil the face when they leave the house. There are large halls for worship which can hold several hundreds of persons. Five times daily they worship the god of heaven. Every seventh day (Friday) their King (the Caliph) seated on high, addresses his subjects, saying: Those who die in battle will be reborn in Paradise. Those who fight bravely will obtain happiness! Therefore their men are very valiant soldiers. The land is poor and cannot grow cereals; they hunt and live on meat, and collect honey among the rocks. Their dwellings are formed like the hoods of a cart (tent). They have grapes which sometimes are as big as a hen's egg."

The Islamic movement advanced, lapping like an oncoming tide, closer and closer to the Chinese heartland, leading to strong diplomatic, cultural and even military involvements.

Between 707-713 A.D., Kutaiba, the general of the Caliph Walid, began the conquest of Central Asia and the region now forming Afghanistan (which was Buddhist); Samarkand, Bokhara and the Confederacy of Western Turks appealed to China. The Emperor Hsuan Tsung listened instead to an Arab embassy proposing peace.

Very soon after, Arab mercenaries sent by the Caliph Abu Jafar al Mansur in A.D. 756 helped the Tang Emperor to defeat the rebel general, An Lu-Shan.

It has been suggested that, when their duty was done, many of these men settled in China, thereby increasing the flourishing Mohammaden community who escaped the persecutions of foreign religions, the Nestorian-Christians, the Manicheists, Zorastrians and even the Buddhists which was one of the regrettable consequences of the loss of direction, at the end of the T'ang dynasty. Perhaps the reason for this tenderness towards the Mohammadens was the power of the Caliph to the west.

The Muslim community in China was large, even very large, and extraordinarily active, especially in commerce. The port of Canton was almost entirely dominated by them; the sea-borne trade to the Middle East, to which we will refer later, was theirs: they had a Kadi elected by themselves and were subject to Koranic Laws. There were further communities in China, especially in Kansu, Shensi and Yunnan and the overland trade to the Middle East was dominated by them. It was all naturally so, for they were the co-religionists of the people with whom this trade was done.

The pathway to the west which had been opened so long ago, had now become the Silk-Road, winding its way through Central Asia into the Middle East. Camels quite naturally were the means of transport and the camel-men of Shansi and Peking were all Muslims. Their portraits, with aquiline features, dark beards and piercing eyes, have been immortalised by the genius of the Chinese potters, as have the camels. Art again becomes the living testimonial of man's past.

The parallel trade route was by sea, from Arabia via the Indian Ocean to Canton. The Chinese priest, Ganjin, wrote in 750 A.D. of the large and expanding communities in Canton, the visible presence in China, so to speak, of the international trade. It was truly fortunate that this second route existed for when, in the 8th century, the troubled state of Eastern Turkestan caused the "Royal-Road" to fall into disuse, trade could be turned towards the Sea Route.



4



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As we have seen above, the Middle Eastern profile dug deeply into the artistic subconscious, for the Chines artisan, despite his total dedication and reverence for the art of his own culture, had an ability to love and to absorb all the new influences to which he was exposed.

When considering the history of a nation, it is, I believe, of the greatest importance to understand the basic psychological motivation. In the case of Imperial China, it was a quite simple one – that China was the Celestial Kingdom and the centre of the earth and that the world owed allegiance to its Emperor. Yet it must be understood that this was a psychological rather than a military motivation and although China did launch foreign invasions, most often in a purely defensive role, the over-riding interest was in world order. China then, thought of itself as a guardian of peace and stability.

Much has been written of the Tribute system, yet this was, in effect, the willing visitation of delegations from Korea, Campu-Chi, Burma and later Arabia for commercial purposes and the interplay of knowledge

which it much advanced. That the delegations were required to kow-tow to the Imperial Throne was but the etiquette of that particular realm, and, in the case of a Mohammaden who refused to kow-tow to any man, his memorable words being "We bow to no man – only to God" – the need was immediately removed by the Emperor's elegant answer "Etiquette is not the same throughout the world".

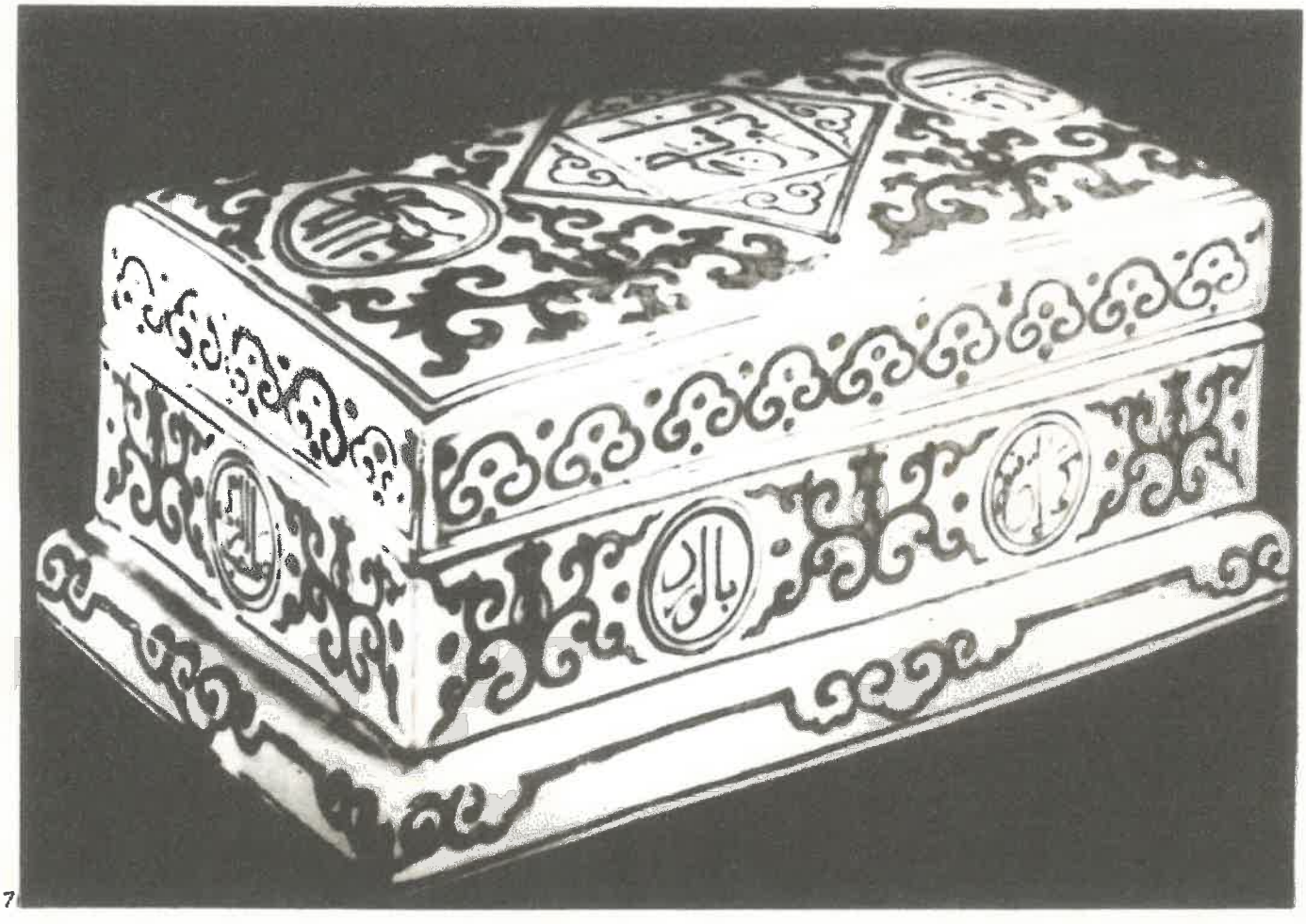
We have much information concerning these delegations for the Chinese completed official histories, this task very often falling on to the following dynasty, and it is noteworthy that, not only did the Arabian Ambassadors tread their weary way towards the Royal Throne, but that many delegations from foreign lands included Arabian objects amongst their own indigenous treasures, as gifts, indicating how highly prized such things must have been to the Court. In 961 A.D., Champa (the Central Coast of Vietnam) sent 4 Arabian bottles of aromatic products. In 1167 A.D. their gifts were rejected as the Court knew that they had been plundered from the ships of Arabian merchants.

From Sri-Vijaya (South Sumatra) in 1156 A.D. came 39 items of Arabian glassware, Arabian sugar, 4 Arabian glass bottles. From the same source in 1178 A.D. were given 189 items of Arabian glassware, 4 green Arabian glass bottles, 4 Arabian glass bottles weighing 15.8 katis; foreign dates in 3 Arabian glass bottles weighing 8 katis and 4 Arabian glass bottles weighing 180 taels.

In return, the substance of the Imperial edict was "to give according to the value of the gifts made so that both parties would not lose out". Amongst the Arabian delegation from the Abbasid dynasty (Da-se) in 993 A.D. comes an enormous list of things and in 1023 A.D., they were asked to come via the Sea-Trade route because of the problem of national security in the north.

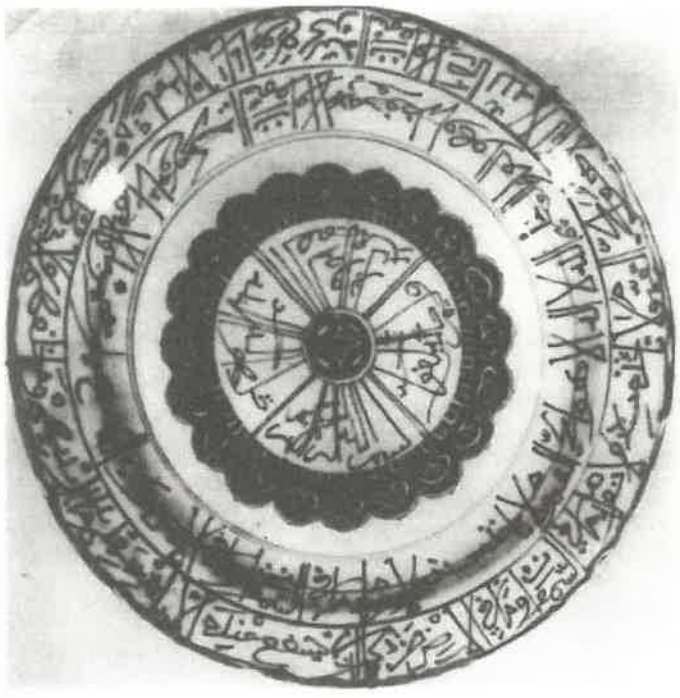


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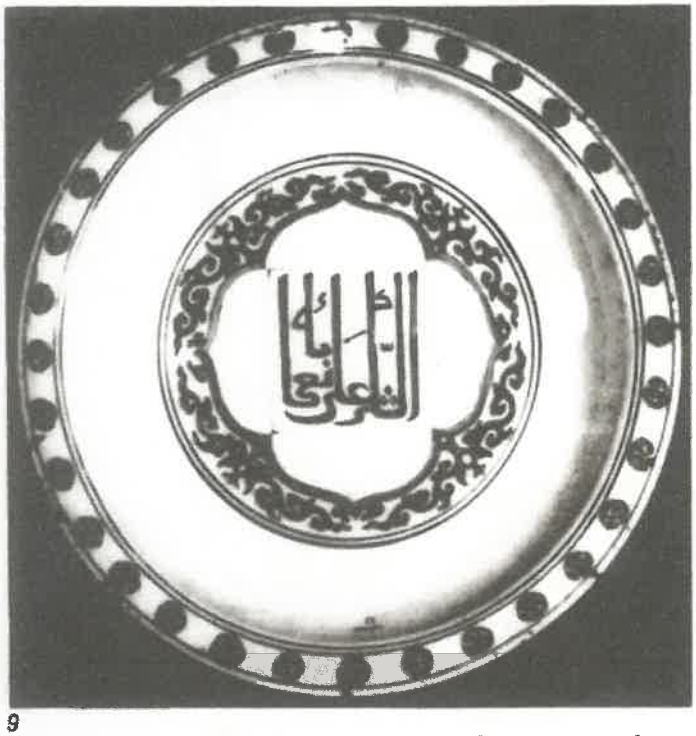


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There then occured in the history of the world, an extraordinary eruption of destructive energy which somehow was tamed and absorbed into the human development, and which, in its own way, served to draw even closer together, a galaxy of nations: the advent of the Mongol invasions which, in a few short years, knitted together in clotted blood every man, woman and child from China to Syria. Its positive legacy was a reduction of the concept of space – never again could a nation live in isolation: it was, perversely, one of the most positive events in the history of man. The world had become in a moment both a smaller and



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a larger place – smaller in that a world empire inherently simplifies communications, larger for the freer flow of ideas across the vanishing borders.

This extraordinary time brought its own rewards to all the major religions of China for the Mongols were, in religious matters, most tolerant, their basic religion being Shamanasian, which recognises a multitude of spiritual forces. To the Muslims most especially, as this new world empire linked them so completely to their co-religionists in the Middle East, these events must have opened further opportunities for world trade, and their steady growth would seem to justify this view. Kubla-Khan's first Finance Minister was a Muslim and, according to Palliot, the eminent French Sinologist, "they were the great money merchants of the Far East during the Mongol period".

And in art also, there were great developments for, as we gain a clearer picture of the development of Blue and White porcelain, we are, in effect, examining the history of the cultural inter-action between the Islamic and Chinese world for perhaps more clearly than in any other field, the Islamic world may claim to be the father of Chinese Blue and White.

It would appear that cobalt blue, a highly prized substance, was first used in the T'ang dynasty, during the 9th-13th Centuries in Northern and Southern China, for they were at this period politically divided. Blue under glazed painting, using a cheap local substitute, developed at the T'su-Chu and other kiln sites. About the beginning of the 14th century, at Ching-te-Chen, the great ceramic kiln site in Southern China, blue and white, as we know it, finely painted on a porcelain body began to be produced, using the precious cobalt blue from the Arab world, imported no doubt by the Sea-Route. In the Near East, the use of cobalt for the decoration of pottery had a long history and, in the 13th century, the Persians often used it under an alkaline glaze on their tiles.

At this time, the Chinese were enchanted with all things Middle Eastern: they copied not only the concepts but the details also. The shape of the dishes borrowed heavily from Islamic Metalwork, and the designs, densely and heavily packed with finely wrought detail, hardly conceding a centimetre of unused space, are totally Middle Eastern in spirit. The Chinese scholars at first scorned such works, preferring rather the exquisite Caledon and white monochromes of earlier days, but they too, like the Court and the merchants, became captivated by a new beauty.

Side by side, with these extraordinary events, a subtler event occured, as the shapes of Eures, conscious of the silhouettes created far away, entered into a strange marriage of ideas, following the Middle Eastern prototype in basic form, yet seeking to belong to the Chinese tradition by virtue of their indigenous decorations.

In the reign of the third Ming Emperor, Yung-lo, China undertook one of its most remarkable peaceful expeditions in the annals of the sea-faring nations, in the pursuit of a fear and a dream. The fear concerned Yung-lo's nephew and predecessor, Chien-wen. Had he died in the ruins of the Imperial Palace during the fall of his capital. Nankin, or, as rumour would have it, had he escaped, dressed as a Buddhist monk, to South East Asia? An uncomfortable rumour for an usurper to live with.

The dream was more tangible, and it was based not only on the natural movement of Chinese history but also on the private predilections of the Emperor for in his earlier years at Nankin, he had seen with wonder the Ambassadors from foreign lands, bearing their treasured gifts to the Court.

In pursuit of this double dream, seven huge fleets of ships, under the command of the Eunuch, Cheng-Ho, a Muslim, sailed as far as Africa. To give some indication of this achievement, it is necessary only to note that a displacement of 3,100 tons has been suggested for the treasure ship, three decks high on the stern, and carrying between 450 to 500 men, which would have allowed much additional space for cargo and passengers. The first expedition was made up of 62 ships. Between 1403-1419, the Lung-Chiang shipyards, aided by others in Chekiang, Fukien and Kwangtung, built together 2,149 sea going vessels of all types. There were amongst these, 94 treasure ships of the larger type. The naval capabilities of China begun by the Southern Sung Emperor, Kao-Tsung (1126-62 A.D.) were therefore continued under the early Ming.

Cheng-Ho undertook seven voyages and, in the map, the general direction of these expeditions will be noticed. It was the sixth voyage which gently hugged the Arabian and African coasts. These great events, coming so soon after the Mongol adventure, would have brought the Middle East into an even closer relationship with China.

In these years, it would, perhaps, be wrong to speak of the Islamic influence upon China, for was not China itself, in part a part of the Islamic experience? In the offices of Government, some of the highest positions were held by Muslims, among the palace Eunuchs, who





because of their closeness to the centre of power wielded enormous influence, many followers of the faith could also be found.

Throughout history, it has been possible to evaluate a civilisation, and its degree of completeness, by its attitude towards religion, and it will be found that it is only at the finer moments of man's adventure that different creeds are protected and made welcome. China, it must be said, has a long and wonderful record of such toleration, despite the obligatory distrust of the Confucians.

According to S Bushell, an eminent Sinologist, writing in 1896 A.D., there were 25,000,000 adherents of the faith in China, as many as in the British Raj, and far more than under the Sultanate of Turkey. In the capital, Peking, could be numbered 20,000 Muslim families with eleven mosques, many of their own shops and eating houses, all marked with the sign of the Crescent. Every large city had its own mosque, and it has been argued that a great deal of the Muslim literature was produced within these places of worship. One of the most famous mosques, which in China are called Li-Pai-Ssu, temple of ritual worship, was in Canton, said to have been founded by Saad-ibn-abu-Waqas, maternal uncle of Prophet Mohammed. Although this is a legend, it does point to an old religious centre.

There remains the gateway to a mosque, built close outside the palace wall, within the City of Peking, by



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the Emperor, Ch'ien Lung, for the benefit of a favourite lady, a princess of the old royal line of Kashgaria.

It was in the 18th Century that the contradictions and disciplines built into the Confucian system of things began to show an incompleteness of resources, an inability to adapt to the new dimensions of thought and activity, which had begun to envelope western thinking.

Throughout its long history, China had remained great, almost despite itself, for into its sub-conscious had been poured the poison of unchanging perfection. The Confucian scholars and gentlemen had come to regard experimentation and even science as a lowly art, an imperfect world fit only for charlatons and magicians, jesters and the suspicious, and very carefully distanced themselves from all such injuries. That they were wrong, to follow only a world of perfect contemplation, should have been apparent even in the earlier days of the Ming dynasty, when astronomers from the Arab world had to be used to reform the very calender which they followed so punctilliously in the observance of their religious duties.

I should like to end this short paper with an interesting observation. As is well known, the Chinese love Jade above all things for, to them, it is the ultimate

medium of art. All other things, calligraphy, painting, porcelain, are but substitutes, excelling only when they become Jade like. A great Emperor was jade like for his purity, his clarity and his unswerving honesty: a great piece of ceramic ware, perhaps the rarest of all the Ru ware, was merely jade like – all else was but an echo.

In the later years of the Chin dynasty, John Goette observed that the Mohammadens not only largely handled the transportation of jade from Khetan, where it was "mined", to Peking and Shangshi, the great jade centres, but that they were often the craftsmen who made these pieces. A little earlier in the 18th Century, many pieces of jade were created in the "Mogul" style and there has been some debate as to where these pieces were made, whether in India or China. And, in earlier times, as the trade was probably in the hands of the Muslims, how great was their influence in the jade carving world? Very great I should think. Is it not a beautiful reflection that the most precious of all



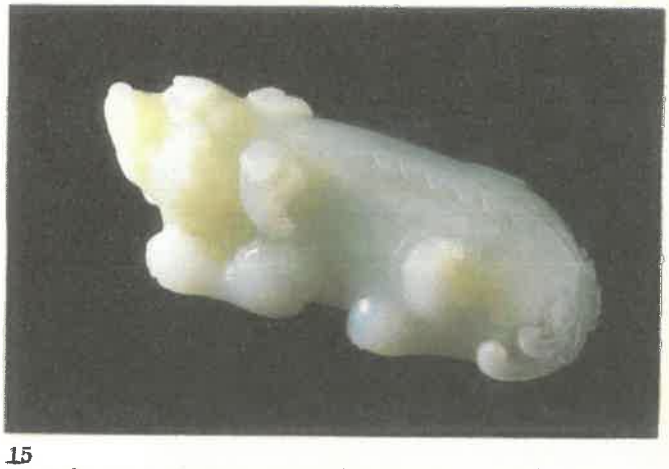
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Chinese things, indeed the very heart of old China, should have been held in the delicate, dedicated hands of the Muslims? ■

1. *The Chinese, perhaps above all other peoples, are a reflective race forever looking to the past, to redefine it, and to give it a new, a living meaning. This they have done in our brilliant 17th century cut Bronze Cencer, looking over their shoulders, not only to an earlier design, but, as the work was so very fine, setting an earlier reign-mark in the base as an added respectful nod towards the past.*
2. *White Eartheneware Jar. This is one of the finest examples of this rare type, in western collections. The design reflects faithfully the work on the marvellous bronzes of the Shang-Yin period.*
3. *A fine and rare Red stem cup, from the period of the Ming Emporer Chia-Ching. 1522-1566 AD. It is interesting to note the inguilding, a middle eastern influence.*
4. *A Bronze Vessel, used on ceremonial occasions. This work is rather special in that it has along inscription. Early Han dynasty.*
5. *This Rock-crystal tea pot, from late in the 18th centrury is an astonishing work, carved from a single faultless stone, it has a simplicity which is totally in harmony with the medium from which it was wrought. Rock crystal has an extended relationship with the Chinese peoples, some fine pieces having been recovered from the tomb of Lady Fu-Hao, one of the sixty four known wives of the Shang-Yin Emporer Wu-T'ing. And in the Islamic World, it was used also, for the artisans of Fatimid Egypt, among others, had become most skillful in finding the fulfilment of their dreams, in its hard cruel form.*
6. *Islamic Jade.*
7. *Middle Ming.*
8. *The Arabic script on these two porcelain works shows a differing attitude for, while on the bowl the script has become purely decorative, even nervain echoing the coveting dragon on the outside, the work on the dish while still, thin and feverish, does show a greater regard for the internal dignity and substance of the Arabic script. The Bowl is early 16th century while the dish is from the second half of that century. Both pieces are from the Topkapi collection.*
9. *The Ardebil shrine abounds with a brilliant collection of Chinese ceramics, a small percentage of which have Islamic inscriptions, and of this group, the present dish, as with the Ontarion box, is a powerful example of the integration of the Arabic script, within a well planned Chinese design.*
10. *An aged Lohan, one who has found enlightenment stands gazing at a world he does not see. Such carving are rare, and this work dates from the 9-11th century AD.*
11. *A Jade bolder form the 17th century. Finely carved with temples, trees and animals, all imbued with a deep mystical meaning.*
12. *A sword fitting of jade, carved during the period of the warring-states.*
13. *A very find Jade archaistic Tsung from the Sung dynasty*



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14. *A fine Jade Bird from the Ming dynasty, making good use of the yellowish Celedon of the body, and the golden brown of the outer skin in the overall design.*
15. *There are many ways to seek to judge a Jade, and one of them is by its faultless colour. This dog is just such a piece, superbly carved from a glorious pebble of creamy white jade, it is without doubt, one of the finest examples of Sung jade carving in existance. Such master works were the touchstones, by which all other works of art were judged.*

البنك الأهلي المصري

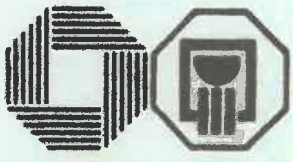
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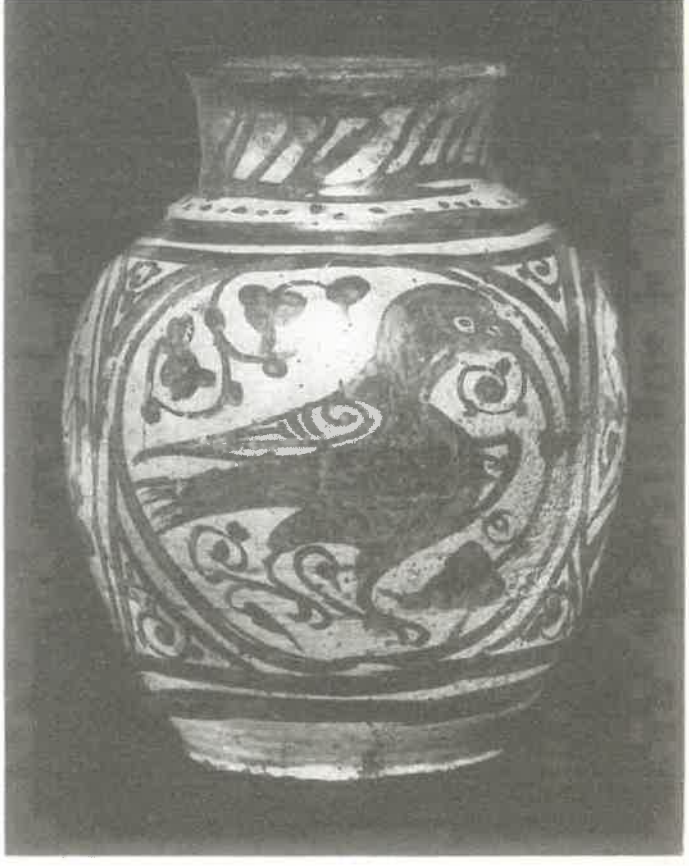
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Al-Sabah Collection Kuwait National Museum

Manuel Keene



Page 23. Jar, earthenware, opaque white glaze, Egypt, 11th. century.

It is especially appropriate to celebrate the al-Sabah Collection in *Arts and the Islamic World*, both these institutions symbolizing and very effectively actualizing the coming-home, so to speak, of Islamic tradition and studies, bright establishments on a world level which can represent Islamic culture from the Islamic perspective. That both have shown that they can do this without retreating into provincialism or chauvinism is in today's world a remarkable testament to all those involved.

Through numerous reviews and articles (including one in this periodical -- see Huon Mallilieu, "The Al-Sabah Collection in the Kuwait National Museum", Spring, 1983), as well as through the commemorative volume issued at the time of the first opening in February 1983, the al-Sabah Collection, installed as the Dar al-Athar al-Islamiya in the Kuwait National Museum, has become well-known and highly acclaimed. The authors of these articles include outstanding experts and connoisseurs in the field of Islamic art history, and they have warmly welcomed it as one of the most important and comprehensive collections of Islamic art in the world.

The enhancement of the al-Sabah Collection has continued at a rather brisk pace since the opening in 1983, some four hundred or so carefully chosen objects having been added during a year's time. The majority of these were installed in the museum and another mini-opening took place in February, 1984. These pieces include numerous spectacular and highly important objects and would in and of themselves make the collection notable. No collection of course is truly complete, but this one is continually becoming more so.

We may here point out that Islamic collections in general are especially important to world art for a number of reasons. There are vast areas and subjects within the discipline of Islamic art history which have not been adequately studied, if at all. Of course those outside the field, including scholars, art historians and artists, as well as the general public, are unusually unaware of the character, scope, variety and contributions of Islamic art on the world scene. That Islamic art (and indeed Islamic culture) is inadequately represented in humanities education and general art surveys is part and parcel of this vicious cycle. For such reasons this publication and this museum have a special value, and can do much to correct this situation.

To commemorate this year's opening, a small portfolio, introducing forty-seven new items through reproductions and accompanying text, was issued. Some of these are briefly described here and a selection is also reproduced.

The collection has been immensely enhanced by the acquisition of a sixty-seven page partial manuscript of the Qur'an which probably dates from the late first/seventh to the second/eighth century. The manuscript seems to represent a stage in the development of the art of fine Qur'an manuscript production considerably more developed but not much later than the great "ma'il" pages featured at the beginning of the exhibition.

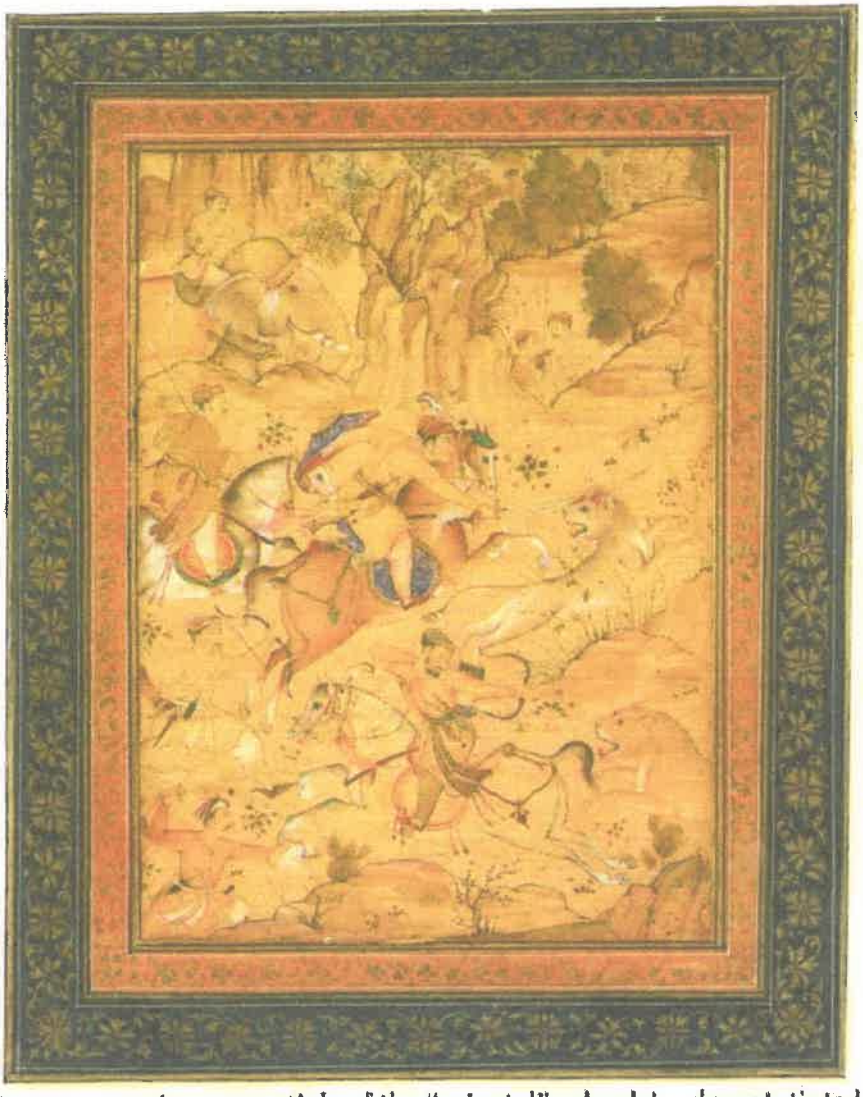
Incidentally the present writer feels that those earlier pages have been too conservatively dated in the past, and should belong firmly to the first/seventh century, probably well before the building of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem (690-92 A.D.). In the manuscript now acquired, the style has become elegantly regularized, and several features such as the introduction of decorative bands in gold and colors to mark chapter headings, show new departures pointing the way to later developments; at the same time, the verse markers (a simple series of touches of the reed pen's nib) and the *ma'il* ("leaning") script tie the style closely to the earlier one.

Another significant acquisition is a page from an eighth/fourteenth century Mamluk manuscript of the *Salwan al-Muta'*. While the complete text and extensive series of miniatures of the Collection's famous manuscript of the *Book of Ingenious Mechanical Devices* by al-Jazari make it one of the most important treasures therein, this page brilliantly



1. *Panel, wood, carved and painted, Mughal, 17th. century.*
2. *Lion hunt, miniature, Mughal, 17th. century*
3. *Part of a manuscript of the Qur'an, parchment, Region unknown, late 7th-8th century.*
4. *Hat for a Dervish, wool felt, embroidered with silk. Iran, 16-17th. century.*
5. *Pair of doors with post, wood, carved and fitted with forged iron and other hardware, Iran, 12th. century.*
6. *Sixteen gaming pieces, Ivory, lathe-turned, carved, painted and gilded, and other hardware. Iran, 12th. century.*
7. *Star tile, composite body, transparent coloured and colourless glazes, overglaze enameled, Iran, 13th-14th. century.*

Page 26 Belt buckle, walrus or Narwhal ivory, carved, Turkey, 16th. century.





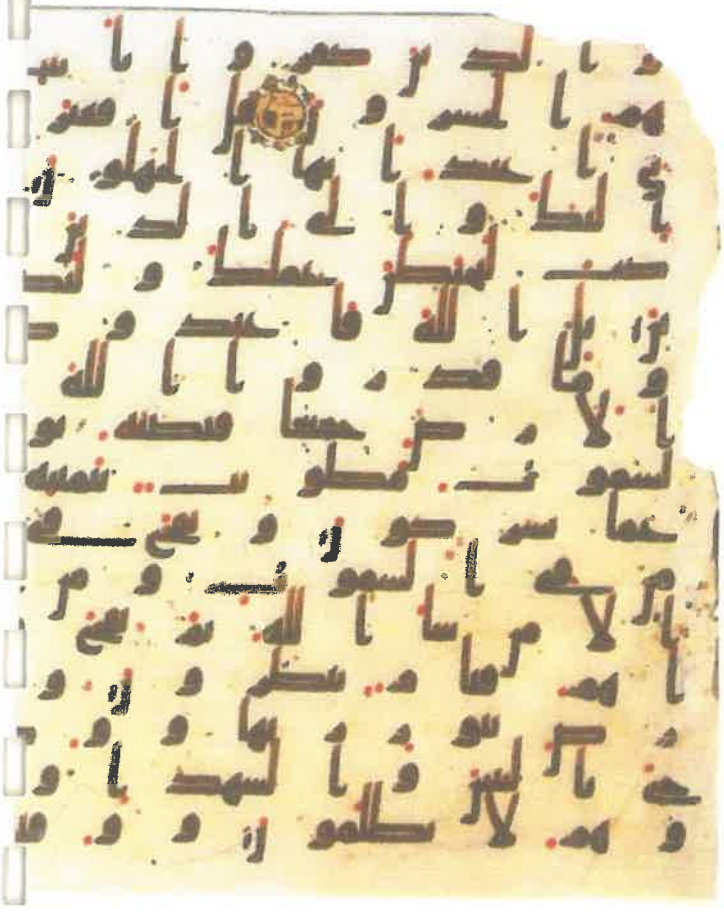
represents a more literary genre in Mamluk painting as well as giving a better sense of the compositional and representational style of the period.

In certain senses at least, the Mughal Indian school of miniature painting can be seen as representing Near Eastern painting at its most developed. Retaining most of the essentials of the "oriental" schools' taste for the decorative and the elegant, and of the story-telling potential at the expense of literal-minded representation, the Mughal and related schools of the subcontinent acquired and absorbed new lessons and devices from a variety of sources, enhancing their power to achieve their ends. One of these elegant tinted drawings depicts a royal Mughal beater/enclosure hunt, a pastime which gave the rulers a pretext for policing their territories in addition to an impressive demonstration of kingly power.

It is remarkable that from early Islamic times, the most functional and humble of objects could be beautifully made and decorated. In













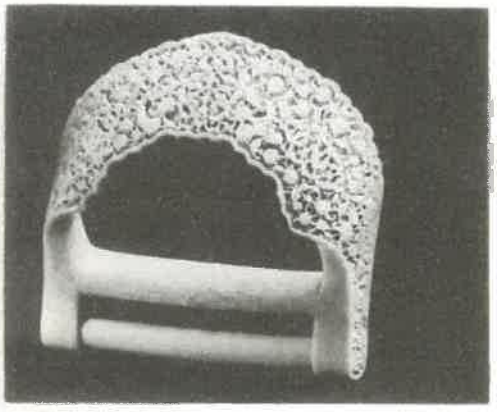
fact, were it not for the decoration, it would probably be difficult to confidently ascribe a date to the piece. The content of the inscription may intend a double-entendre, wishing that the blessing as well as the turning do not end.

Another indication of the importance of everyday, in this case mass-produced, objects is an unglazed oil lamp which is not only inscribed with signature and date but stated to be made in a particular place. The style of the script is interesting as well, especially in light of its early date.

Probably without parallel is a large and imposing jar, a spectacular representative of an important and well-established type, but one of which complete examples of any size are hard to enumerate.

The star tile with its beautiful colors and subtly modelled flowers is yet another of the al-Sabah Collection's new objects for which we know no mate. This is particularly puzzling in the present case, since such tiles were used to cover large wall surfaces, and thus were made in great numbers of practically identical pieces. They would have been especially similar in such a case as this, where the form as well as the decoration has been molded.

Overglaze painting in metallic lusters was one of the Islamic ceramic art's most important contributions, and luster-painted



pieces produced from the third/ninth century exist in the thousands in various art centres. However, the products of the justly famous school of Fatimid Egypt are exceedingly rare today; and to have found a fine and intact piece is occasion for special satisfaction.

A superb example of the most distinguished late Islamic school of luster-painting shows the subtle and mysterious effects achieved through the combination of colors of glaze and luster. Handleless, the piece is nevertheless provided with a pouring spout, an unusual combination.

There are also two of ten long-lost blocks from the throne-room facade of the second/eighth century palace known locally as "al-Mushatta", one of the most important and well-known of the early Islamic palaces. Most of the outer facade of this building is to be seen set up in the Staatliche Museum in East Berlin, having been a gift from the Ottoman sultan 'Abd al-Hamid to the emperor William II. A series of eight blocks, have been installed in the Kuwait National Museum on their original arc to show how they framed the great central arch.

The presence of elaborate decoration closely paralleling that of architecture puts us in the fortunate position of being able to firmly date the earring (reproduced here) to the Umayyad period, which we should be otherwise hard put to do, since it seems to be the only significant piece of Umayyad jewelry so far identified. The presence of an earwire which could essentially only be emplaced and removed by the jeweler, as well as the use of "beaded" wire, both indicate an early date also, neither being features of Islamic jewelry in its fully developed form.

There is an engraved copper pendant which, on the basis of both the calligraphic style and the arabesque composition of the centre has been attributed to the eighth/fourteenth century, a period for which we have very little recognized jewelry of any sort in the whole corpus of Islamic art. The basic form of the pendant is a traditionally Islamic one. Again, considerable artistic merit is embodied in an object which must have been relatively inexpensive in its day.

Entirely raised from thin bronze sheet, a large goblet-like vessel is one of the finest known examples of a type most often seen in the form of rectangular trays, the latter also featuring animals inside compartments and bordered by similar cursive Arabic inscriptions with good wishes for the owner. The form of this piece is so far otherwise unexampled.

Embodying a standard form of third/ninth century Islamic glassware, there is a beautiful goblet which reminds us of the surprising number of today's standard drinking glass shapes which were in currency in the early Islamic repertory. Other pieces of this particular form which come to mind are decorated with luster painting and with diamond-point engraving, whereas this piece focuses on glass' plastic and coloristic potential.

The great quality of the design and execution, particularly of the inscriptions, which are embroidered on a dervish hat in the collection reminds one of those in architectural ornament. We may conclude from the skill and care employed in the making of the piece that the intended owner was of some importance.

Paralleled only by certain pieces in the Topkapi itself, there is an exquisite ivory buckle which certainly ranks as one of the finest of all Islamic ivory carvings. One is astonished by the sheer minuteness of the details, realizing at the same time that everything is coherently planned as well as perfectly executed in the decoration. Ultimately, however, it is most wonderful for the way in which it, like so many Islamic works of art, manages to use and orchestrate such elaborate ornament not to the detriment but the enhancement of form and overall impact, here one of great simplicity, subtlety and power.

There is a beautiful set of ivory gaming pieces from Mughal India. That the decoration here so closely parallels that seen in a variety of Mughal arts is especially fortunate, allowing us to date them with greater confidence and precision, as well as making them an important part of the body of Mughal art.

Other items added to the collection include Iranian carved wood of this period which is extremely rare, especially when it comes to ensembles of this quality and condition. The close parallels with carved architectural stucco ornament and with stone carving of the period afford us, in the absence of a dating inscription here or of other dated examples of such wood pieces, the possibility of a firm date attribution for this beautiful and impressive work.

Yet another category which makes the al-Sabah Collection of great importance is that of Mughal carved wood, of which an extensive series may be studied there. In one of the pieces, the looping of the compartment borders may remind one of contemporary arts to the west (in Iran and Turkey), but the forms of the flowers are characteristically Indian. In addition to the great quality of design and execution, the presence of probably original paint is an additional plus.

The energy and discrimination with which the process of acquisition, under the guidance of Sheikh Nasser Sabah al-Ahmad al-Sabah, goes forward, as well as the vision and perseverence evidenced in the museum's expanding programs and developing infrastructure under its director, Sheikha Hussa Sabah al-Salem al-Sabah, are such as to make us optimistic in a variety of ways. And we may look forward to our continuing enlightenment and delight through the presentation of such wonderful and important objects of Islamic art.

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PROFILE

BASIL ALKAZZI

Maureen Ali

For many artists, location and environment play a vital role in the process of creation. For Kuwaiti-born painter, Basil Alkazzi this appears to be less and less the case. For Alkazzi carries within him an enduring vision which seems to have become invulnerable to external influences as he returns to it time and again with greater understanding and conviction. Whether he is working under the grey clouds of England (his home for many years), under the vibrant Mediterraneah skies of Greece (his home in recent years), or the harsh desert sun of Kuwait (his native country), his themes and his approach have become more consistent. A recent exhibition held at the Sultan Gallery in Kuwait testifies to the durability of this vision.

It is a vision deeply spiritual in nature, looking far beyond the matrial and physical aspirations of this life to that distant horizon where man searches for understanding and peace. This is expressed mainly in the form of man's struggle with the forces of good and evil both internally and externally in order to achieve a state of grace.



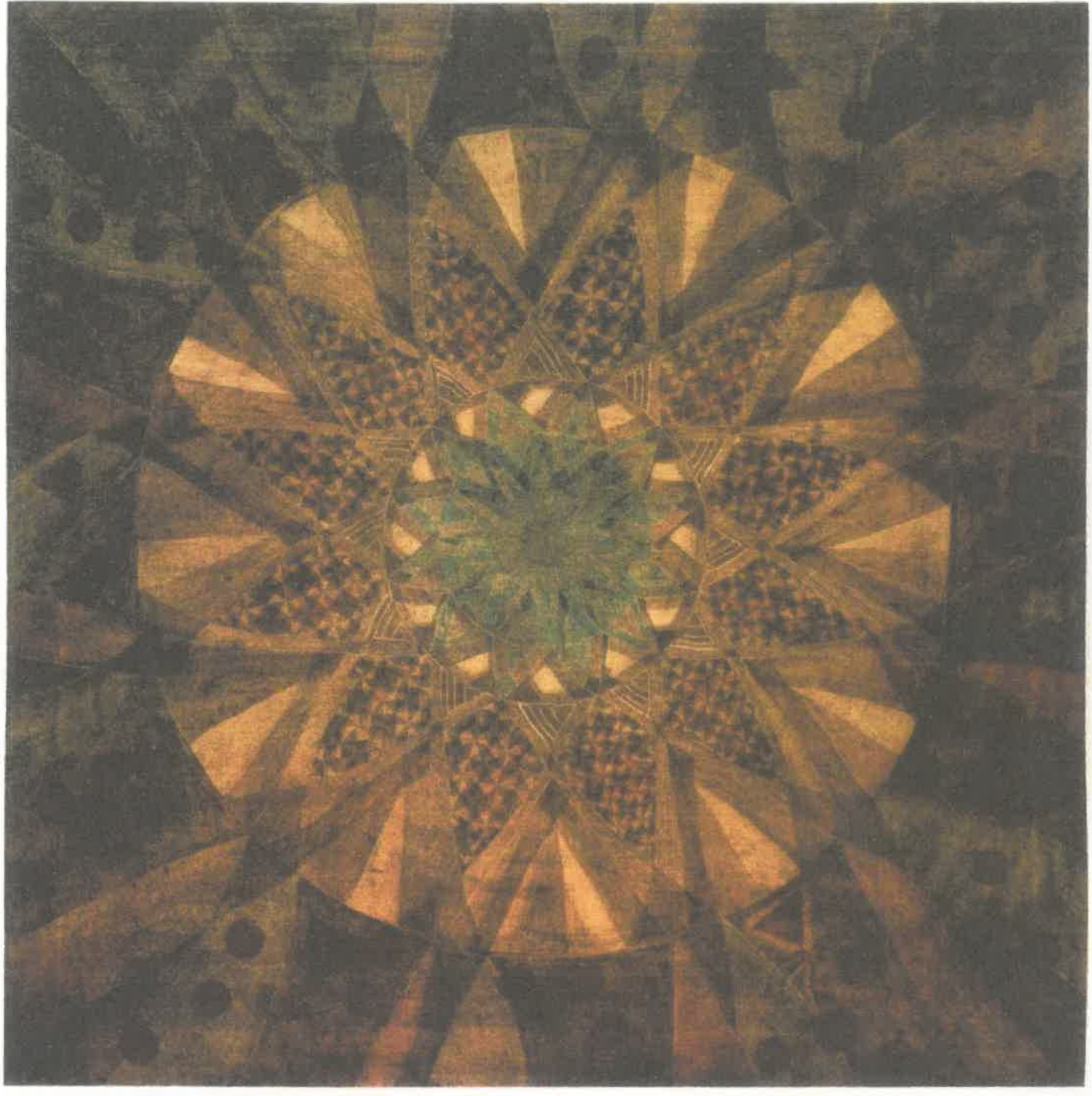
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Although he totally rejects the term Sufi painter which has been associated with his name for some years now, informing almost all of Alkazzi's paintings are the symbols of his Sufi training. These include the seven moons, seven steps (both representing the seven Sufi stages from birth to beautitude; the triangle of knowledge; the bird-soul or anima; the doorway or pathway to knowledge; heavenly bodies, seen as shadowy figures, often rather translucent, sometimes strangely spectral, grouped or interlinked in multiples of three, occasionaly appearing





as dervishes whirling through the cosmos; and finally "lovers" either human or heavenly or both, meeting and struggling in the quest to

1. *Come, the night of glory has come*, oil on canvas, 1977
2. *Seascape with fish III*, ink, 1974
3. *Xania-Now Perfumed, Now Garlanded, the Fragrance of that Love awakens IV*, gouache, 1983
4. *Lovers in a season of Remembrances II*, oil on canvas, 1977
5. *Xania-Now Perfumed, Now Garlanded, the Fragrance of that Love Awakens III*, gouache, 1982

achieve their peace and understanding.

In Alkazzi's work, the road to fulfilment often leads through the open doorway of a humble mud brick house, one of his most dominant metaphors. The house is usually a simple, white-washed, domed dwelling, rather Mediterranean in style. Almost invariably its door and one or more windows stand open beckoning the viewer not just inside but across its threshold to a far distant horizon where lies the promise of knowledge and understanding. Rarely in Alkazzi's work is the eye or the mind encouraged to stop at the here and now. Rarely even is the eyé allowed to focus merely on the foreground, but rather up and beyond, as if the things of this earth are of little relevance. We pass into the house merely as one uses a stepping stone to cross a stream.

Occasionally there is no house: it is as if we have already passed through its portals and have penetrated deep into the far plain and sometimes onto the very cosmos. Here the eye and the mind are plunged into contemplation by a complex interplay of colours, shapes and forms, sometimes soaring even upwards, and at others gathering a certain momentum from their centripetal direction.

And almost always, one encounters those shadowy, symbolic figures of the beyond, sometimes as if in confrontation, others as a gentle reminder of man's spiritual destiny.

This particular vision of Alkazzi's has been gathering strength over a number of years, each time with more conviction. In his latest exhibition "Xania, reflections of a city of dreams and lovers, those gone and past, those present and those yet to come", it appears to have reached a new intensity.

Here, as always, the house predominates. And here, more than at any other time, man's quest for revelation. through the metaphor of love. seems to be coming closer to fruition. In almost all the paintings there is a greater sense of peace than before. For once there seems to be more hope than merely longing, more promise than disappointment, harmony rather than discord.

This comes in stark contrast with Alkazzi's work of 20 years ago when life was perceived as a mortal struggle. The mid-sixties were obviously a time of great pain and inner conflict for the artist and this was characterised in his work by terrible, tormented, almost primordial creatures locked in battle with each other and with life. His "lovers" were there, but as bitter, warring, stick-like creatures. The cycle of life was portrayed as a dreadful struggle for mother and child, writhing on the dry, parched earth. The benign bird of later paintings was a vicious creature of prey, and at first, the beneficent moon was nothing but a throbbing purple planet.

Only after a break from these themes filled with thoughtful pen and ink sketches and colourful sea and landscapes, was Alkazzi able to return to the question of life/death/knowledge with a fresh view and a calmer aspect. The house, which had made its early appearance in 1970, now began to dominate and the artist began working in his characteristic vibrant blues, and contrasting white, with occasional sorties into multi-hued green and earthy browns .The horizon began to open up through the arched doorway and gradually the vision progressed to the beyond, whence the spirits of the blessed appeared.

Thus Alkazzi worked for a prolonged period until the early 80's when man's struggle with life suddenly resumed the same terrible intensity of 20 years earlier, only this time it was symbolised by burly, gladiator-like figures locked in mortal combat within and outside the house. Gone were the vibrant colours and the transluscent figures; in their place appeared brooding earth shades and massive beings.

Now, as we enter the mid-80's and Xania (the ancient city of Crete) the figures have assumed a relaxed, long-limbed, somewhat fluid aspect and are free to embrace with warmth and understanding. Now the promise of fulfilment seems so much nearer. Lovers of the past, present and future approach each other with mutual respect. Together they pass through the portals of the famous house and embark on their journey to the beyond. They greet each other with expectation and blend together in harmony. Their progress is watched by benign spirits presiding over, as if waiting to receive them at the end of their journey. Their chances of successfully completing that journay seem more assured than at any other time.

How heartening that such an optimistic vision should appear at a time of unprecedented violence and conflict in the Arab world. It is as if Alkazzi has gone deeper and deeper within himself, possibly as refuge against the turmoil all around him. But in doing so, he has brought a moment of respite and relief to those fortunate enough to enter his private vision within him. Xania appears to be Alkazzi's most optimistic work to date and is especially valuable for the feeling of tranquility and hope it portrays.

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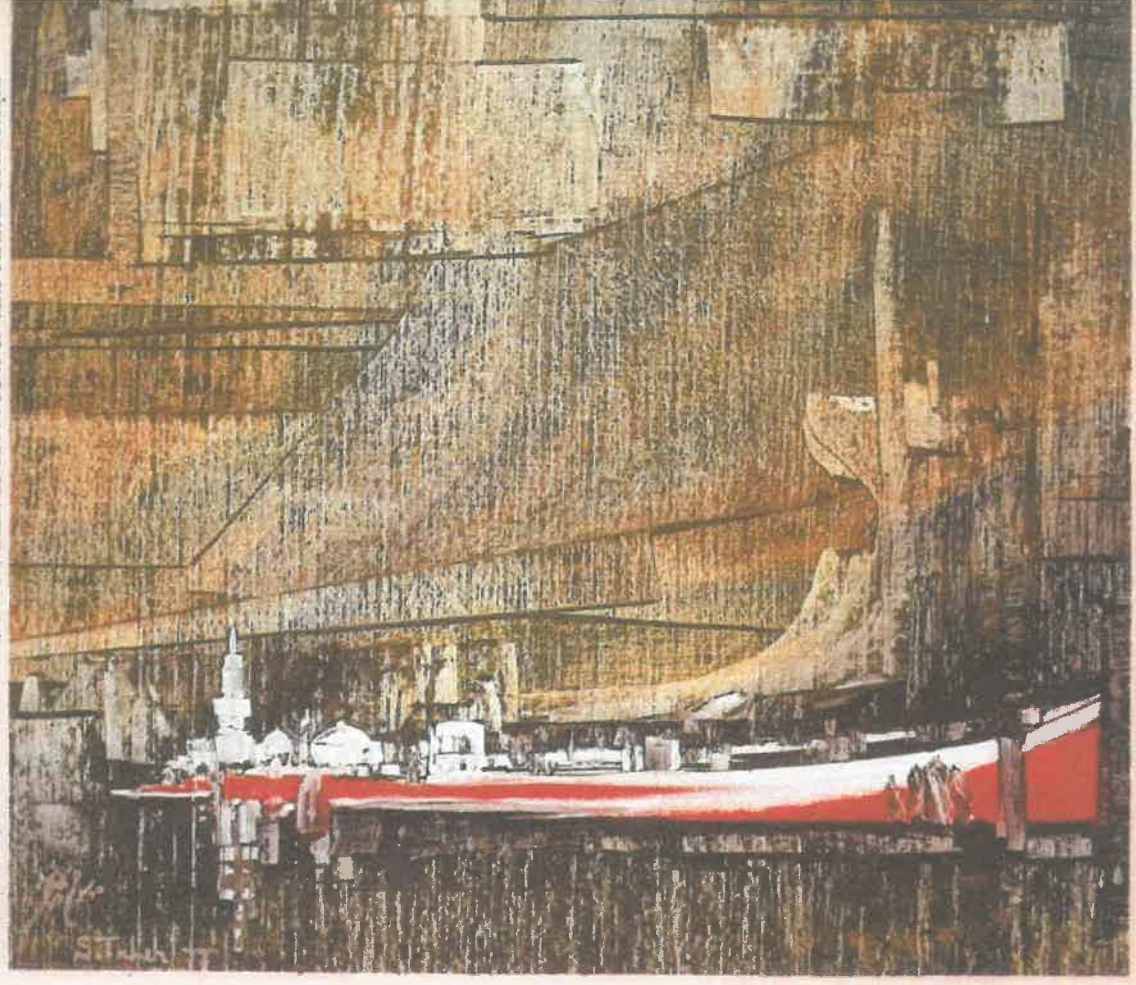
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Salah Taher, Mukkattam Hills, Oil on Canvas 1977. 51 x 47 cms Artists Collection.

The Arts in

EGYPT

A Special Supplement

Guest Editor in Cairo: **Elizabeth Rodenbeck**
Coordinating Editor in London: **Azra J. Ahmed**

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State of the Arts: A Retrospect

Elizabeth Rodenbeck

One of the most memorable cultural events of the last 25 years must have been one gala night at the old opera house on Ezbekiyya Square in the winter of 1966, when President Nasser entertained Chairman Khruschev by treating him to a stage-side box at a performance by Egypt's legendary singer, Um Kulthum. Still in her prime Um Kulthum was not only the most popular performer in the Arab World, fanatically adored from Gibraltar to Baghdad, but was also the last living link with the authentic tradition of classical Arabic song. Nearly as popular throughout much of the Arab World himself, Gamal Abdel Nasser was then at the height of his prestige and power, the first Egyptian to rule in Egypt in more than two thousand years. The Opera House, a technically superb European-style wooden *bijou*, not yet a century old, had been built by one of the more colourful representatives of the Mohamed Ali dynasty that Nasser had overthrown, the Khedive Ismail, who had opened the Suez Canal and ushered in an era that combined rapid development with foreign influence that ended in domination. And in Chairman Khruschev was the representative of a different, and still welcome foreign influence, which had already extended, like its nineteenth century predecessors, even into the arts.

Just a few years later Nasser and Um Kulthum were both dead, the Russians were gone and Ismail's Opera House had burned to the ground. Here, perhaps, is a good reference point to begin a discussion of the state of the arts in Egypt in the '80's.

Egypt is often thought of as a poor country, and economically -in today's terms - it is indeed poor. But in history, in culture, and above all in its abundant and varied humanity it is uniquely gifted and rich. It is this wealth that Flaubert saw in the 1840's when he remarked that for him Egypt evoked the idea of a "giant butterfly ball". The land itself is rich in visual beauty. The colours of the lush Nile Valley and the burgeoning Delta, with their range of greens - the grey-green fronds of the palm groves casting swaying shadows across the clamant green of the berseem - contrasting with the ochres, purples and pinks of the stark and bony forms of the Western and Eastern desert, the wild and beautiful desolation of Sinai, and the deep turquoise of the Mediterranean and Red Seas. It is a land of apparent stasis but in reality of constant change. At midday the sun glares, draining out the colour, but in the early morning and the late afternoon shadows are long and deep, and the light tender and golden.

In this edition of *Arts and the Islamic World* we have not attempted to deal with art in a historical sense, as the subject is so enormous as to be overwhelming, nor have we ventured to bring into focus all the artists working in Egypt today. We simply indicate some general trends and influences in the swirling contemporary scene, finding even this task somewhat bewildering - Egypt stands at the confluence of a diversity of currents.

The most stable strand in this complex picture is certainly the folkloric, though, as Shahira Mehrez and Susan Weeks point out, it too is changing with alarming speed as the population becomes rapidly urbanized. Patterns and motifs in dresses and jewelry, in celebrations and popular festivals, can be traced far back into a distant past. Hilary Weir and Jayme Spencer describe some recent developments in crafts practised by unsophisticated people whose innate response to colour and pattern have produced work of great beauty and charm.

Customs fortunately still persist. At popular festivals and moulids, lights are strung from side to side of the streets, appliqued tents are set up as booths for colourful sugar dolls and sweetmeats, and the common people dress, sometimes in the most outrageous juxtaposition of colours, to enjoy themselves far into the night. The musicians tune up their traditional instruments, so well described by Dr. Sanafawy. These instruments are often played with incredible virtuosity, and the strains elicited from a simple *rababa*, *simsimaya* or *oudh* can bring tears as they evoke the rippling of the waters, the whispering of the wind, and the cooing of the doves, sounds that summon up that nostalgia for the ideal peace of village life that is so deeply ingrained in the soul of the Egyptian people.

But the Egyptian people are changing. Overwhelmingly rural even two short decades ago, a majority are now city-dwellers, increasingly removed from both the traditional charms and the traditional hardships of country life, as nostalgia itself testifies. Millions of Egyptians have meanwhile gone abroad, either permanently or temporarily to live and work, and have thus become exposed to new and foreign influences on a scale and to a degree unknown in Egypt's history ever before.

No discussion of art can ignore the impact of the west. A convenient landmark is perhaps the date 1869, the opening of the Suez Canal, the commissioning of Verdi to write Aida, the new Opera House, and the visit of the Empress Eugenie. Since that date three generations of western-influenced artists, sculptors, actors and musicians have struggled to establish and maintain their identity and individuality, despite wave upon wave of social and political upheaval.

After the founding of the School of Fine Arts at the beginning of this century, on the staff of which, of course, there was not one single Egyptian (nor were there any Egyptians among the exhibitors at the first few annual Salons,) the twenties produced a surge of nationalistic feeling, and a crop of native artists, led by an outstanding genius in sculpture, Mukhtar and a brilliant painter Mahmoud Said, both of whom captured the new urgent spirit of awakening and progress. Many students went to Europe and absorbed western trends and techniques, returning to Egypt to create a considerable cultural boom. Cairo and Alexandria were sophisticated cosmopolitan cities at the time, akin with Paris, London or Rome. Music, painting, the cinema and the opera flourished. Patronage was forth-

coming from the wealthy haute bourgeoisie, and the court, producing a brief golden age. Today's scions of art remember that time.

World War II hardly interrupted this florescence, as refugees, many of them members of the European *ancien regime*, gravitated to Cairo, as they did to New York, and orchestras, poets, painters and entertainers were enthusiastically encouraged, even among the hard-bitten desert rats of the Allied armies.

In 1952 the nationalist giant aroused from its slumber, shaking off its shackles, and a free Egypt emerged. Casualties were caused in the arts by the birth of the new state. The class of cosmopolitan capitalists, the patrons of the arts, the foreign teachers, the Greek, Armenian, Italian and Jewish communities left, as did many rich Egyptians.

Patterns of patronage changed, but the new regime made a brave attempt to make the arts accesible to all the people and not just to the privileged. The new Ministry of Culture established schools for the performing arts, an orchestra, an art gallery, and regional councils for the arts. These developments are well documented by Dr. Sama al Kholy and Dr. Mursi Saad el Din, both of whom are living witnesses to Egypt's struggles to come to grips with its myriad problems. Culture during the early years of the revolution in the fifties and sixties was positively influenced by the socialist bloc. Under the direction of Dr. Sarwat Okasha, a gifted and popular Minister of Culture, the Medinet al Fanoun, the Puppet Theatre and National Theatre were built. Meanwhile singers of the calibre of Um Kulthum,Abdel Halim Hafez and Mohamed Abdel Wahab enjoyed a tremendous following both popular and intellectual; the theatre was active, and opera and ballet still played regular seasons at the Opera House. It was during this time that our opening scene took place.

The best painters, musicians and actors may have suffered some crimp in their style from bureaucratic restrictions, but they were not allowed to starve. Often their subject matter would be in celebration of the revolution, idealizing the common people, though socialist realism was not imposed. Some of the work was good, but politicization tended to produce platitudes.

As Dr. Mursi Saad el Din says in his article on the Theatre, however, the defeat of '67 and the subsequent economic pinch had a very demoralizing effect. Nasser felt keenly that he had failed the revolution. Conscious of a new isolation artists tended to become depressed and to withdraw into themselves. Even materials were hard to come by. It was a gloomy time. The country's treasures and talents tended to be relegated to the background. The burning down of the old Opera House in 1971 seemed to mark a watershed.

At the same time new and other threatening problems were coming to a head, the most difficult and overwhelming being the proliferation of the Egyptian population itself, which now in the 80's is bursting the physical and moral fabric of the country, particularly in the cities and the centres of culture. The education and cultivation of this human wave is itself a forbidding task, let alone the maintenance of any kind of quality of life. Another huge disruption has been caused by the consumerism arising from the flood of new money and the new availability of western technology to a hitherto simple people. The new generation tend to be very materialistic. Aesthetic taste and thoughtful enjoyment of the arts have given way to the pursuit of money, cars, videos, computers and household appliances, though perhaps one should commend the TV commercials which have been produced to sell these things, which sometimes display both wit and grace. Concomitantly as government spokesmen themselves have declared, the bureaucratic attitudes often tend to stifle orginality and creativity, thus thwarting the ambitions of talented people.

Lately however, there have been some hopeful signs. A new and very energetic Minister of Culture, Mr. Mohamed Abd el Hamid Radwan is doing his best to resusicate tired institutions, spruce up Egypt's treasures and give painters, poets and musicians a chance to be seen and heard. New private galleries are opening, and the Egyptians are buying more paintings. The generous Japanese will be building a new Centre for the Performing Arts on the south end of Gezira Island. There will also be a new Museum of Egyptian Civilization, and very shortly a new art gallery. Egypt is to play host to a pan-Arab festival of the arts during 1984.

In this brief survey we have been unable to cover all aspects of such a diverse subject as the arts in Egypt today. There are an almost bewildering number of influences and modes, the historic, the Western, the Mediterranean, the African. Many of today's painters, sculptors and ceramicists are employing themes of Arabic calligraphy, that wonderful adaptable flowing script, which far more than other writings can be adjusted and used decoratively as a delight to the eye in itself, quite apart as being a vehicle for thought. It is to these painters whose themes are clearly Islamic that Dagmar Painter has limited her discussion. Future editions of *Arts and the Islamic World* will certainly treat the subject of Arabic calligraphy more fully, as well as give more adequate space to other talented Egyptian artists who do not fit into this necessarily arbitrary category. Finally,the contributions on architecture, by Abdullah Schleifer on the work of Omar El Farouk, and by Neil MacFarquhar on Mud Brick are very contemprary and in a way hopeful, as these demonstrate the ultimate practicality and aesthetic value of all that Hassan Fathy, Egypt's most important architec has been saying continually for the last forty years.

Mistakenly identified almost exclusively with a love of the past Hassan Bey has never been given the opportunity to exercise the full scope of his genius which has always been concerned with planning the cities of the future. He confesses privately that he is tired of crying in the wilderness, but let him rest assured that somewhere someone is listening reverently even in Egypt, and is carrying on his work.

Museum of Islamic Art

Irene Ertugrul

Fatimi, Panel, carved wood from Palace, 11th.c.



Fatimi, Carved marble from Palace of Wazir



CAROLINE WILLIAMS

On May 4, 1983 President Hosni Mubarek presided at the opening of Cairo's dramatically renovated Museum of Islamic Art. Work on refurbishing the museum had started a year earlier (as part of an over-all plan to renovate Egypt's major museums) and, although the museum officially closed its doors for only two months during the work, a great many changes were nevertheless carried out. The exterior of the building was painted in a warm ochre tone, the two museum entrances were redesigned, the exhibition halls were repainted and were laid with marble flooring and the building was completely rewired to provide better illumination. A petrol station adjacent to the the museum was dismantled to make room for a spacious garden hosting exhibits of sculpture and a kiosk selling catalogues and postcards (the latter having not been previously available). Upon entering the museum one finds a pleasant lounge where one can be served tea while watching a video summary of the museum's exhibits (with the representation alternating between Arabic and English commentaries).

The museum's collection well merited a better setting since it comprises, after all, the world's finest and most extensive store of Islamic art. It was in 1880 that the Egyptian Government started to collect objects of art from old mosques and monuments. At first it relegated them to the eastern cloister of the Mosque of el-Hakim but later it built a small museum in the courtyard of this mosque and called it "The Museum of Arab Art". The first guidebook to the museum was written in 1895 and some years later, in 1903, the collection was transferred to the present building which stands at Ahmad Maher Square. In 1952 the museum's name was changed to the Museum of Islamic Art to reflect the fact that many of its objects come from countries such as Turkey and Iran which are not Arab but where Islamic Art has predominated. The items held by the Museum date from the beginning of the Islamic period in the 7th century to the end of the 19th century,and the rate at which the collection has swelled is evidenced by the fact that the museum 's holdings have grown from 7,028 objects in 1903 to more than 78,000 at the present time. These have come from purchases and donations and through archeological discoveries; especially the finds of Fustat.

A special emphasis is naturally given to works of art which reflect the cultural heritage of Egypt during the Islamic period. Thus, from the style of objects and various inscriptions it is possible to gain information about the succession of dynasties that have ruled the country. And owing to the geographical breadth of the collection, one can also make comparative studies of Islamic art in other countries at a given period.

The first halls to greet visitors entering the museum are lined with skilfully-crafted woodwork, some massive, some delicate, and all in the deep welcoming tones of lustrous, ancient wood. Although Egypt has never been producer of high-quality wood, its craftsmen have shown great skill in adding a personal imprint to wood imported from neighbouring countries cedar from Lebanon, teak from India and ebony from the Sudan.

The museum offers an excellent collection of wood objects belonging to various Muslim periods. From the earliest Islamic style – that of the Umayyad Caliphs (661-750) who had their capital in Damascus – are examples of woodwork which are influenced by Sassanid and Hellenistic tendencies at that time prevalent in Syria. Thus, we see deep incisions and realistic depictions of grapes, wine leaves and scrolls, marked by decorative motifs derived for Hellenistic art. The early Abassid age (8th to 9th centuries) has left objects typified by concentric circles, interlacing arches and small pierced oblongs in which open work has been widely used.

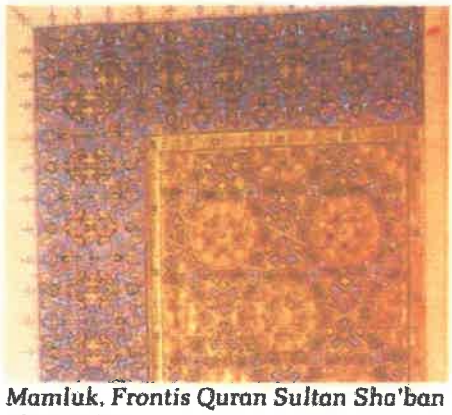
In 868, when Ibn Tulun became ruler of Egypt, a new style was developed both in design and method. Scrolls and lines formed stylized designs for animals and birds and carving turned to the slanting or leveled method.

The Fatimid (969-1171) woodwork is well preserved and represents the highest standards of Fatimid art. It derives from palaces, mosques and Coptic churches. But it was during the reigns of the Fatimid Caliphs Al-Zahir and Al-Mustansir (1020-1094) that wood carving as an art reached its greatest perfection. The designs used then more truly reflected reality, scrolls and leaves were elaborately carved





Salsabil, ex monas. Tirli Palace circa 1830



Mamluk, Frontis Quran Sultan Sha'ban circa 1370

and animals and birds were naturalistically depicted. The richly carved boards found in the Maristan of Oalaun are the best example of this tendency and the depiction they offer of hunters, dancers, musicians and other scenes from daily life provide us with an insight into the world of the Fatimids.

During the reign of the Fatimid Caliph Al-Mustali, at the close of the 12th century, a new method of woodcarving was inaugurated – that of decorating larger surfaces. Rather than forming a continuous pattern, the decoration was divided into small units, such as hexagons and stars, each comprising a separate design. An outstanding example of this style is the meticulously carved Mihrab of Sayyida Rukayaa. Decorative birds and animals continued to serve as motifs but their depiction became more careless, and the figures were often treated as silhouettes with little surface detail.

In the Ayyubid period (1171-1250, woodcarving carried in the style of the late Fatimid but the arabesque elaborate and certain of the Ayyubid woodcarvings of Syrian provenance show Seljuk influence.

The height of elaboration, however, come under the reign of the Mamlukes (1382-1517). It was a style of geometrical patterns comprising small panels which usually consisted of hexagons clustering around central stars – all of which were worked in elaborate patterns of arabesques. Such motifs were carved in chests, pulpits, doors and chairs.

During the reign of the Fatimide another form of woodwork, the *Mushrabiya* or lattice-work screen, gained great popularity. Such screens were utilized in private homes and also in mosques to segregate the sanctuary.

Unfortunately, however, as political and economic conditions in Egypt deteriorated after the 15th century, the art of woodcarving also slowly went into decline.

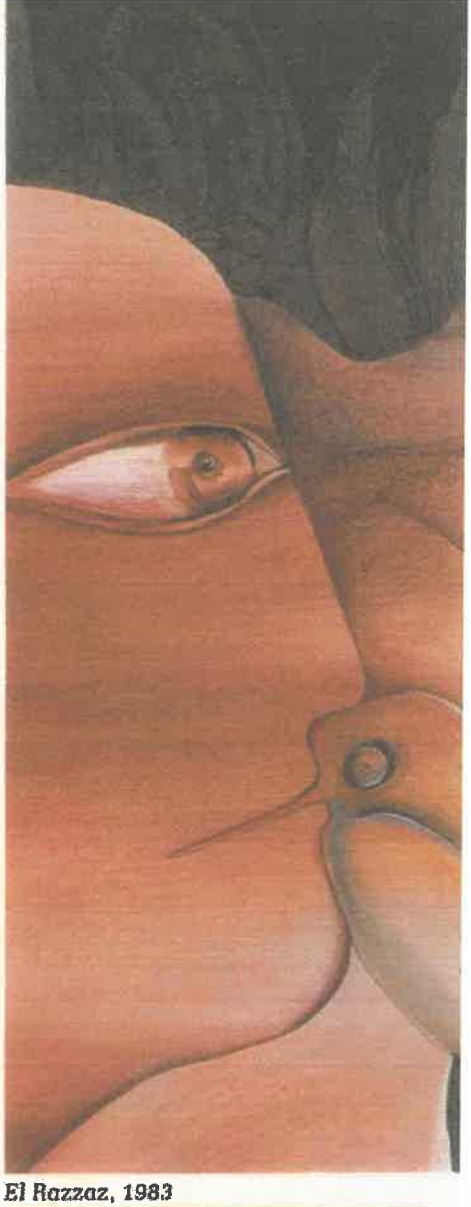
In addition to leading the world's museums with its collection of Islamic woodcrafts, Cairo's museum also houses the world's most complete collection of enamelled glass lamps, Egyptian ceramics, filters of water jugs, textiles and inscribed stones. Often the works of art displayed carry blazons revealing the position of the owner at court: the symbol of the cup for the cup-bearer, the sword or bow and arrow for the armour-bearer, two polo-sticks for the polo master, a pen-box for the secretary and a napkin for the dress master.

The display of the museum's collection is divided according to style with separate displays being reserved for objects of Umayyad, Abbasid, Tulunid, Fatimid, Ayyubid, Mamluk, Turkish and Persian provenance. The objects are also grouped according to material and classified in the chronological order. Thus, separate halls are given over to woodwork, metalwork, armaments, ceramics, textiles, stone and marble, the art of the book, glass and coins. Owing to limited space, the museum's carpets are displayed along the walls of various rooms, rather than grouped separately.

In the recent renovation, more space was allotted to the library, which now holds 20,000 books. Although some 16,000-17,000 people visit the museum each month, most of the visitors are Westerners. As one of the museum's curators lamented: "The museum is here for Muslims to be able to learn about their heritage but they do not seem to be interested in coming, despite all we do to try to entice them. ■

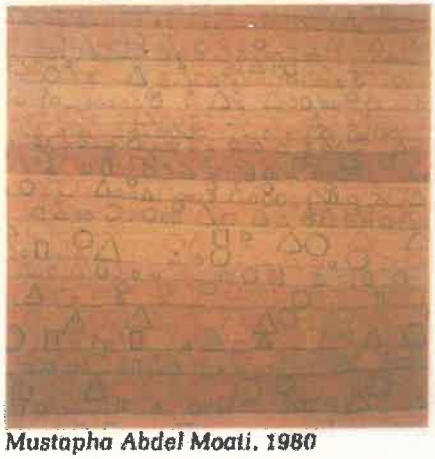


Mohamed Taha Hussein, 1983



El Razzaz, 1983

CONTEMPORARY EGYPTIAN ART



Mustapha Abdel Moati, 1980

Dagmar Painter

"What I want to show in my work is the idea which hides itself behind so-called reality. I am seeking for the bridge which leads from the visible to the invisible..."

This statement, expressing a concept universal to all great artists, is attributed to Michelangelo, but it is equally applicable as a touchstone to the concept of modern art. The aesthetic experience, couched in a language of form and colour, became increasingly more intellectual, as artists sought to build the bridge from visible to invisible without the former buttresses of figurative representation.

In Egypt, where the influence of European artistic movements had formed a goodly part of the training of the leading artists, the movement to abstraction was not so much a deviation as a return to two deeply rooted traditions – the ancient Pharaonic and the wide nationality of an Arab Islamic identity. In today's movements, artists have further refined their approaches, so that contemporary art in Egypt is no longer a response to western trends, but a reflection of contemporary Egyptian thinking.

The milestone of change, approached consciously by some, unconsciously by others, was the period in late 1960s when Egyptians re-evaluated their sense of identity. In personally searching for their sense of Egyptian national identity, many artists began to see their art as a reflection and expression of that identity. They started a visual





Ahmed Nawar



El Gebali. 1983



Ramzi Mustapha. 1984

dialogue, between themselves and their work, and between their work and the Egyptian people.

Two major trends emerged from this period of re-examination. Some artists sought to explore traditional folk life, and drew on the conventions of folk art, both figurative and symbolical, to create an entirely new, but purely Egyptian, mode. Others turned from pure abstraction to a more formalised contemporary application, that of Islamic ornamentation. These roots are ancient to Arabic script having come into existence even before Islam, with inscriptions dating from 568 A.D. Again, both types of classical ornamentation, polygonal and floral, are dynamically re-interpreted in contemporary Egyptian art.

Contemporary art in Egypt is stimulated by the Council of Arts of the Ministry of Culture, with its sponsored galleries and biennials, by the Faculties of Fine and Applied Arts and Art Education, the Syndicate of Artists, and private schools, galleries and cooperatives. From among the many contemporary artists active today, we will take a sampling:

Ahmed Fouad Selim is well known as an art theorist and Director of the Centre of Arts in Cairo. He concentrates on possibilities in the anatomy of the Arabic letter, in the form of Islamic calligraphy and modifications of demotic script. Anatomy is the key concept, as Selim explores the relationship,

integral in Egyptian culture, between the written and the spoken word – what he terms 'perspectives of vocalities'. In his paintings, he seeks to translate voices into shapes, abstracting calligraphy to indicate modulations of tone, and using colour, with the application of oil on canvas, in its vocal, musical sense, to shape and shadow the voice. The rounded forms, sudden slashing divisions, deep earthy tones and broad-brushed applications of paint echo the ebb and flow of oratorical skill, a skill much valued among Egyptians. In his latest paintings, Selim addresses the conflict between stiff geometry and Islamic beauty, the rounded calligraphic forms weighing a portion of the canvas, divided from jagged angles of colour by monochromatic waves of colour.

Ahmed Nawar, both painter and engraver, explores the concepts of geometry and anatomy to quite a different effect. His work is rooted in strict classical geometry, both the three-dimensional collage paintings and the monodimensional graphics, but with a definite ideological frame of reference. Inside a unified geometrical frame, based on two opposing squares, forming an eight-fold star, organic shapes are organised. The main lines of the eight-fold figure remain true in each version, while the intersecting parts have differing structural orders, allowing multiple reformations and adjustments. To this extent, his work has a direct link with polygonal ornamentation. But the introduction of the organic forms in the centre of each work represents Nawar's concept of the human conflict. The middle of the picture is the inner world of the human being, while the highly ordered geometrical surroundings represent the outside world. The resultant tension is palpable, both in his engravings, with their grey-to-black chrome, and in the paintings, where colours shade into one another and vie with actual shadows cast by three-dimensional cutouts, adding yet another layer to the intricate geometry.

Hussein El-Gebali,one of Egypt's premier lithographers, is technically adept at all categories of engraving, including woodcut, intaglio and serigraphy . After honing these skills in Italy, he returned to Egypt to develop a new vision. He turned to Egyptian antiquities, predominantly Islamic monuments, from which he developed a unique



Hussein Bikar, 1983



Refaat Ahmed, 1979





F.A. Hafiz

Kamal Amin, 1983

perspective on calligraphic ornamentation. El-Gebali's graphic works combine a sensitive use of colour with densely organised interpretations of calligraphy. He uses his modern calligraphic elements in the traditional way, incorporating them into a unified design element, the inner forms merging to create a secondary, independent form. These multiple formations are framed in an Egyptian architecture of pyramids, sun-circles, towers, and planes. Areas of colour balance and counterbalance the architectural weight, and sometimes define tertiary shapes themselves. The measure of El-Gebali's achievement is the serene rhythm which flows from this complex balance and counterbalance. In his latest works, El-Gebali is pushing technical skill to its limits, developing huge woodcuts and lithographs, designed in sections which, fitted together, cover entire walls. The calligraphic elements, blown up to this scale, become exercises in motion and the flow of colour, and a great deal is implied about the physical process of writing and creating. On an equally massive scale, El-Gebali has recently been translating his graphic works into the medium of tapestry. Abstract landscape and architectural forms merge with letterforms in contemporary reinterpretation of the arts of the Persian carpet. In merging different weaving techniques and varying pile, El-Gebali uses texture as an integral design element, and is able to create the most subtle nuances of colour. Part of his notion in developing this textile art is to merge the images of contemporary graphics with the ancient Egyptian skill of weaving, a skill heretofore limited to products for the modern tourist industry.



Salah Taher, 1978



Abd el Rahman Nashar, 1984



Farouk Shehata, 1977



Salah Reda, 1983

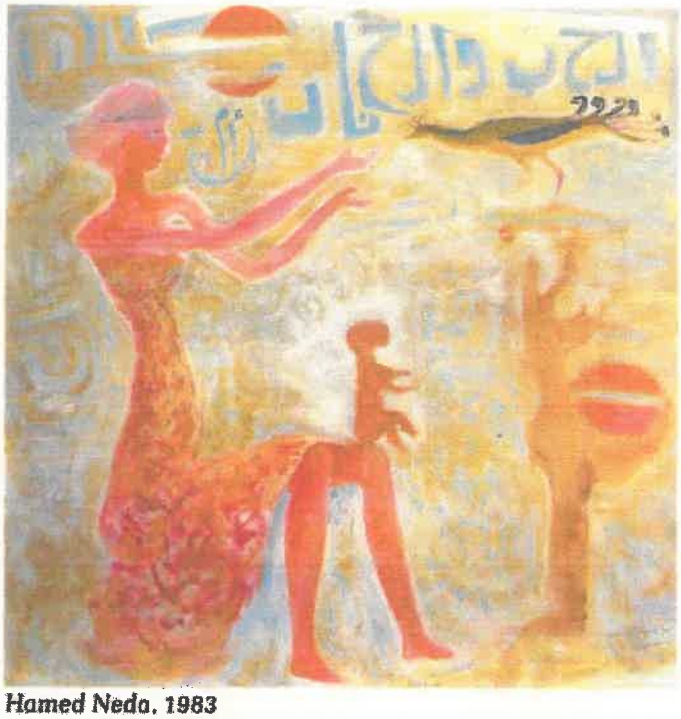
The tactile and three-dimensional is explored by a number of contemporary sculptors. *Ramzi Moustafa* interprets the motif of the Name of Allah in a contemporary mode in his massive white sculptures. In a more abstract vein, *Saleh Reda* expands traditional Arabic form – that of *mashrabeyya* – into an interlocking assemblage of form and space. Sleekly painted wood or gleaming metal, Reda's forms echo the stark architecture of a soaring minaret, and the subtle precision of a perfectly fitting joint. This magnification of point and counterpoint clarifies a basic reality in Arabic design.

Sobhi Guirguis's metal sculptures do not define space so much as make peace with it. Guirguis' intensely emotional anthropomorphic figures seem two dimensional – bodies, thin and elongated, with tiny heads, or oblong and flat, with heads or arms protruding in the same plane, as though they were mere shadows of themselves. But these figures are surfaced with curves and angles that catch and hold the light, a patina of script-like ornamentation mysteriously between heiroglyphics and calligraphy. In dialogue with the surrounding environment, the sculptures deliver rhythmic messages of man trying to make peace with an overwhelming world. There is the imprisoned spirit, a small figure trapped behind climbing barbed wire, or the figure with three hands, two being insufficient to accomplish all the work waiting to be done. And the figure rising upward several metres until coming up against a solid line, the limit that keeps him from going further. Yet there is a kind of optimism in Guirguis' vision – man in space, a silvered form, bound by earthly ties, yet floating in an ever-expanding cosmos.

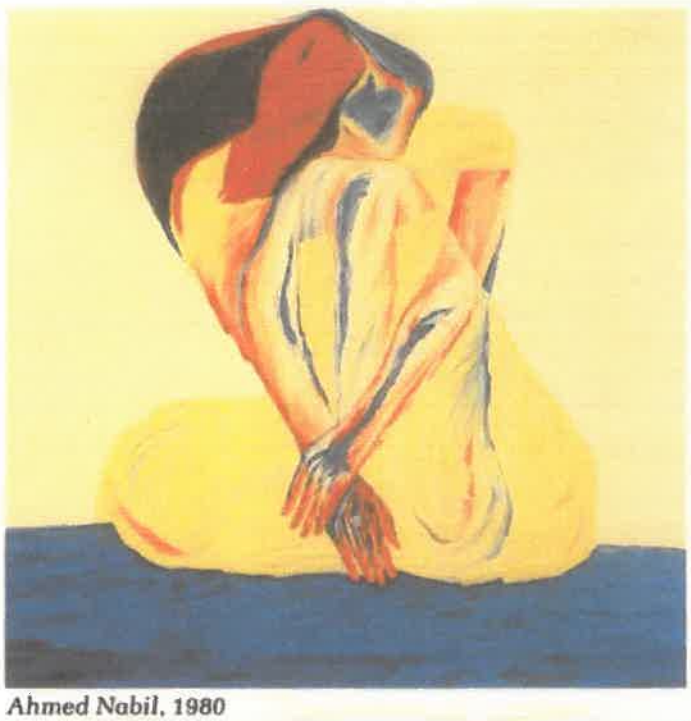
Sculptural forms echoed in painting is the hallmark of work by *Farghalli Abdel Hafiz*. Farghalli's form is the Egyptian doll, painted, sculptured in wood or moulded life-size in papiermache. Using folk art and the Nubian tradition as a particular inspiration, Farghalli regularly returns to upper Egypt for influence. Particularly important to his work is the strong, pure light and sharp shadow. Blinding white dominates his canvases, with hot yellows and pinks, and brilliant blues, speaking at once of painted and enamelled treasures from ancient tombs or brightly painted Nubian houses. His canvases are cut and shaped, with his abstract doll form emerging from the folds of the canvas, a shrouded female form replicated some twenty or thirty times in metre-high papiermache surrealism. The dolls, observing the paintings and at the same time part of them, personify Farghalli's concepts of fertility, growth and development.

Moustafa El-Razzaz's paintings and constructions are a joyous blending of ancient and modern Egypt. A mixed menu of calligraphic and folk motifs, Razzaz's work features densely crowded images executed in splashes of colour. Each series has a central element, sometimes calligraphic variation, sometimes organic ornament, such as birds, flowers or horses, often bound together in geometrical repetition.

Hamed Nada, one of the first Egyptian artists to turn to folk themes, paints canvases filled with symbols of popular superstitions. His style and use of colour is reminiscent of European surrealists, but his images are rooted in Egyptian soil. These paintings have links with primitive cave paintings in their simplified, scattered images and their air of storytelling. There is a faintly ominous aura about many of them, filled as they are with legends, magical symbols and taboos. Images reoccur – the fish, the cat, the hand, hovering birds, keys, doorways, mirrors, naively daubed female body forms and pharaonic creatures in landscapes of pastel clouds. Surrealist totems extend to Nada's interior scenes. Sheltered by a piece of roof or part of a wall, domestic dramas proceed as in a dream sequence. A woman enters a room, watched by an ethereal child, by her reflection in a



Hamed Neda, 1983



Ahmed Nabil, 1980



Ahmad Fouad Selim



Sobhi Guirguis Saad, 1983

mirror, by eyes above the mirror, by a cat outside the room, and by an unseen audience outside the painting. The viewer enters into the drama, becoming part of the surrealism. Seeing Nada's cats perch on sinks and crouch on couches, the viewer feels that he is peering into private rooms suddenly illuminated by the textured pastel beam of Cairo's dusty light. Nada's folk tales and cityscapes reflect aspects of Egypt that the viewer has sensed but could not express – a peep around the other side of the mirror.

Moustafa Abdel Moati's paintings depend heavily on an intellectual approach to the use of form. His signature motifs are the triangle, the square and the circle. From this most basic geometry, Moati creates a lyrical, poetic hymn to Egyptian life. His great concern is the search for Egyptian personality, which his paintings approach with a discipline that expands the limited elements with which he works until they represent a universal human condition. Square format, with black backgrounds or dark bands of colour, Maoti's paintings house processions of figures, images that could be people, could be architecture, or could be landscape, each according to the balance, arrangement and density on the canvas. Each built up of the three basic images – triangle, square and circle – striking, the brightly coloured figures roll over the canvas at cockeyed angles and leap from the background. Moati creates his own abstract society, sometimes sombre, sometimes bubbling with life and action.

In any overview of contemporary art, many names must be mentioned. So many of today's Egyptian artists have developed an individual style, recognisable as their own. In this group, many are working in a figurative mode, others have adopted expressionism, others are embracing modern movements in the mainstream of world-wide art. These artists, with their wide range of approaches, as well as the particular artists profiled here, synthesise the richness of contemporary art in Egypt. ■



Islamic Architecture and the Discipline of Design

The work of Omar El Farouk

Abdullah Schleifer

Not far from the water's edge on Khim Penninsula, facing Bombay, the foundations are being dug for the Dubash House, nearly twenty rooms as well as a guest house, servants quarters and a swimming area, to be built around a series of inner courtyards, in which domes, vaults and malqaf (windcatchers) are employed for thermal comfort and not as some structurally irrelevant tacked-on piece of "Islamic kitsch". With this residence, Omar El Farouk, an Egyptian architect, interior designer and professional, life-long disciple of Hassan Fathy, extends to the East a process already under way in Egypt, Saudi Arabia (see article on A.W. Al-Wakeel in *Arts & The Islamic World*, Vol.I No.4), and the Gulf - the return of inwardness, spiritual grace and indigenous authenticity to that same starting point - the palatial residence by which the extroverted, alien, outwardly conspicuous and inappropriate Western design first penetrated Dar al-Islam more than a hundred years ago in the Muhammed Ali dynasty's Egypt, Anglo-India and the capitulation-ridden Ottoman territories.

In Kuwait, precisely at water's edge, the domes and vaults and walls of desert-coloured sand brick work are nearly finished. This villa, the Sheikh Nasr House, will be the first intrinsically Islamic house to be built in Kuwait in at least three decades. Architectural design - Hassan Fathy, interiors by Omar el Farouk, who is also a visiting supervisor of construction.

For what has already become the pilot or forward point of a hoped-for 'imitation effect' to reintroduce Islamic design into Kuwait, one could not have asked for a better patron - Sheikh Nasr al-Sabah, with an extraordinary personal, privately-acquired collection. (See *Arts & The Islamic World Vol I No.3*). His wife, Sheikha Hussa, who worked closely with her husband in the acquisition and cataloguing of the collection, is Curator of the Museum.

The process, inshallah, has begun. El Farouk has been commissioned by two more members of the Kuwaiti ruling family as well as by a prominent Kuwaiti businessman, to build three more Islamic homes.

In Giza, Farouk's Mansouria house - a weekend residence - is nearly finished, but the latest focus of his enthusiasm is the design for a house in Maadi, close to the Sakanat Mosque, which he will build for a particularly pious Egyptian doctor who has worked in Saudi Arabia for many years and now wishes to return to Egypt.

The doctor will also build a medical clinic extending from his home to the Mosque to serve the poor. Maadi is where Omar el-Farouk lives and where he maintains his office - ARCADE (Arab Research Centre and Design Egypt). Maadi-Cairo's famous "garden suburb", now in typical Cairo decline, is at least as significant a site with its Victorian and Tudor mansions and grand mosquito-breeding English-lawn gardens, as turn-of-the-century Heliopolis, as the most stylish, comfortable and seductive point for penetration of an eclectic Western architecture into Egypt.

As one of Hassan Fathy's peripheral historians, I knew quite a bit about Omar el Farouk long before I came to meet him. I knew of



toric sense of an Islamic architectural revival, this aspect of his work may prove more critical in the nature of the challenge and more critical in determining whether Hassan Fathy's revival ends up as an exotic fad losing the integrity of its form in popularized transmission, or, indeed, will have a significant impact and saving grace upon contemporary living in the Muslim world. For, in a sense (as Hassan Fathy has always insisted), the modern concept of 'the architect' is an expression of the alienation of the master builder - a master craftsman among a supporting cast of craftsmen utterly at home and at work within the broadest cut of traditional Islamic social fabric. Then

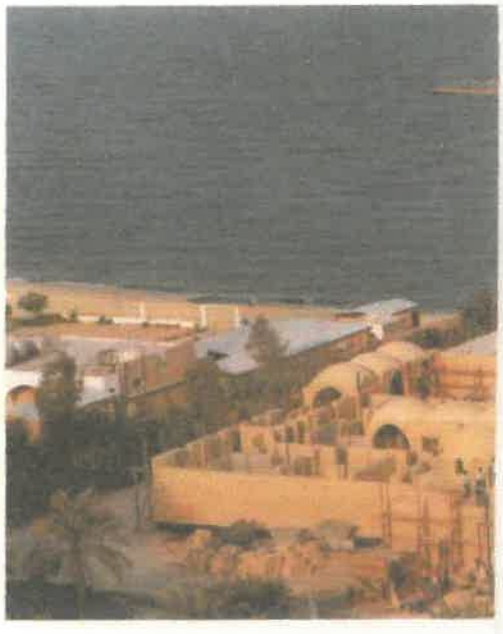
him as Hassan Fathy's apprentice and assistant from the early sixties, doing the drawings for the aborted Pyramids Cultural Centre, as an assistant at Baris Oasis, and as draftsman for Fathy's Fuad house on the road to Sakhara.

Then in the late sixties, El-Farouk went on to do postgraduate work and eventually lecturing at the Architectural Association's school in London, where he studied with Keith Critchlow, the author of "Islamic Patterns" (see *Arts & The Islamic World Vol I No 3*), and acquired a still more precise sense of the Sacred Geometry that informs Islamic building crafts and the spiritual source of its symbolism. He also studied with Paul Oliver, who encouraged his classes to seek the functional beauty of traditional Third World houses and town planning design.

I also knew that the product of El Farouk's discipleship with Hassan Fathy was too involved in the most painstaking research to ever become mannerist. El Farouk supervised the heat-transfer study of experimental rooms at Cairo's Building Research Centre in the early seventies, a study Hassan Bey always cites as irrefutable proof of the inappropriateness of concrete as roof and wall material in hot climates. El Farouk also directed the teams that put together the comparative climatic studies of old Cairo houses and streets.

Then Hassan Fathy called El Farouk back to join him in Oman for a series of projects that eventually incorporated designs for the replanning of Sohar Port and thermal and materials research on traditional building materials in Oman - a particularly important study, for it





demonstrated the viability of Hassan Fathy's thesis of the appropriateness of traditional local materials in other climates than that of Cairo and Gourna. Oman's climate is coastal - highly humid as well as hot. On his own, El Farouk prepared the design of a new market for the Nizwah while also replanning the Nizwah Fort area and the Burami Fort area. But a leftist insurrection in the south was to deprive the Sultanate in those years of 80% of its originally budgeted development project funds and the projects died.

Scattered throughout Cairo are dozens of private residential apartments, which have, in common with downtown Cairo's Bank of America, an interior design by Omar El Farouk. This side of El Farouk, measured by immediate results, seems less visible, less dramatic, seemingly less serious than any standing building. But in the history of the Islamic revival, how much more alienated as a concept is an 'Islamic interior design'.

'Interior design' in the traditional Islamic building is inseparable from the structural characteristics of the building design. If the building is designed to be cooled by a courtyard, then the screen-walls of the *Mushrabiya* facing in on the courtyard, and the rugs, fabrics and stone-inlay, are all obvious expressions of a communally-shared traditional taste.

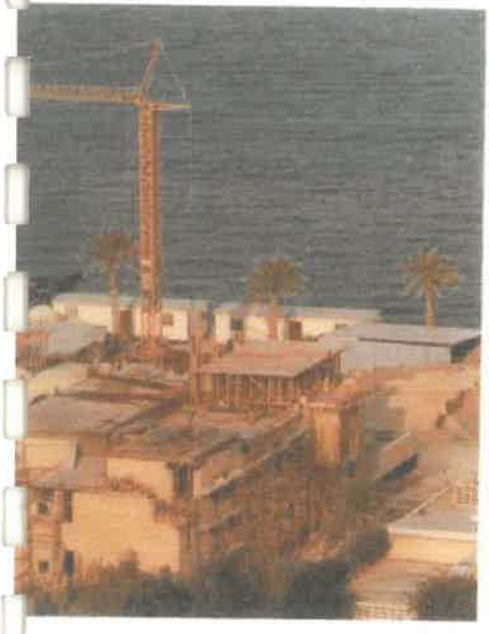
By concentrating as much upon all aspects of the traditional interior design (El Farouk's Ph.D. is on *Mushrabiya*) as upon architecture, El Farouk has positioned himself for the same battle waged on two fronts.

The first front: any architect attempting to build a residence according to those canons of Arab-Islamic architecture recovered and revived by Hassan Fathy too frequently discovers that the client's support of the Islamic revival ends

where the client's wife's insistence on French furniture or Swedish Modern or wall-to-wall, or whatever, begins.

El Farouk not only can argue that interior design is inseparable from structural design but can make his case with the detailed studies, sketches and proposals of a working interior designer, albeit Islamic. By this I do not mean to picture El Farouk as some sort of slick operator. It is perhaps to his credit, by the spiritual virtue of his modesty and lack of pretension (and no doubt a factor in his late blooming as architect-designer who has only 'arrived' professionally in the past year), that El Farouk suffers from, if anything, too little jet-set panache.







Rather, I am trying to suggest the amazing way he has proceeded to apply many of Hassan Fathy's prescriptions - sharing a scientific rather than a sentimental appreciation of traditional structures. El Farouk undertakes painstaking lighting studies to analyse the client's needs and the site characteristics for any given *Musahrabiya* design and installation. For Fathy's insistence that with the breakdown of the traditional routes that transmit the nature of architectural symbolism, we must turn to the surviving structures to speak to us - their secrets must be secured by repeated encounters and absorbed by a spiritual intellection. So an Omar Farouk presentation is not just colour-tint sketches of interiors - it includes taking his potential clients on a tour of such surviving houses in Islamic Cairo as Suhaimi and Jamal Eddin Zahabi, as well as monumental buildings such as the Sultan Hassan Madressa-Mosque, so that they and their wives may sense for themselves the organic relationship of interior design to structure and the functions that in part inspire the structure.

The second front resembles the slower, less spectacular advances across no-man's-land that may, in the end, undermine the enemy as much by any number of small but accumulating encounters as by the occasional spectacular advance.

I refer to El Farouk's commissions to transmutate the Western flat of standardized, rather than client-appropriate design, extroverted rather than introverted into an Islamicised space by the power of interior design.

This on-going practice is of critical importance for it directly confronts the great danger to the revival - decadence and kitsch, and, as some Europeans have said of the American Century, the threat that the revival will leap from obscurity to decadence without going through a Golden Age. I refer to that most apparent manifestation of Islamic chic - *Mushrabiya* tabletops and picture frames.

El Farouk insists that there are real uses or benefits for traditional interiors and to the degree that he can introduce those uses and retrofit the Western flat, its space becomes partially Islamicised.

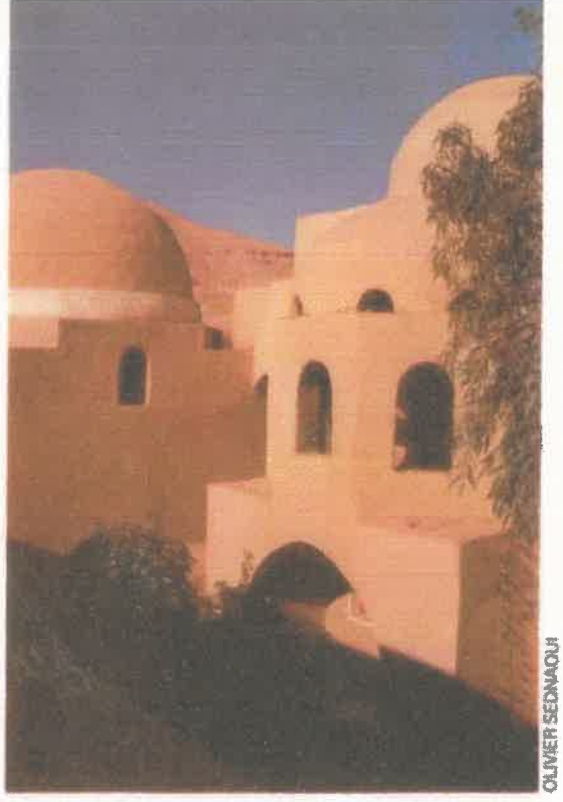
In the course of a recent interview on the Cairo radio programme *Shahid Ala Asr* (Witness to the Times), Hassan Fathy alluded to Omar El Farouk's Ph.D. study of *Mushrabiya*. Not only does *Mushrabiya* allow air to circulate while defusing the intense Egyptian and Arabian light, but the rounded shapes of its wood components prevent the high-contrast glare resulting from the sharp edges of conventional Western sunbreakers.

As the promoter of privacy allowing those within the interior setting to see without being seen, *Mushrabiya* fulfils the intrinsic requirement - the centrality of privacy - of any of the various Islamic structural designs, which otherwise may vary substantially, given differences of climate and local culture within the Islamic world.

El Farouk's research also established the hygrometic properties of the wood elements in the *Mushrabiya*, absorbing humidity from the air currents passing through the *Mushrabiya* and thereby cooling the air. And the *Mushrabiya* serves as a transitional element that enables the openness of the contained inner courtyard (onto which the *Mushrabiya* faces in traditional homes and wakalas), with its cool night air, its fragrant plants, and the sight and

Continued on Page 49

MUD BRICK



OLIVIER SEDNAOUI

Neil MacFarquhar

Sitting atop the plateau on Luxor's West Bank five years ago, urban planner David Sims and architect Olivier Sednaoui decided to build a mud brick house. Both of them had wanted to learn to work with mud for some time, and they had come to Luxor to see the village of New Gorna, Hassan Fathy's aborted 1940's experiment in revitalizing mud brick.

They stared down at the village from the top of the plateau, paying little heed to the sweep of temples, colossi, fields and river. "We had seen that the village was good," said Olivier, "and we said, 'Nobody is doing mud brick architecture so why don't we do it?'"

Their Pilot Project House –utilitarian name they still apply to the graceful villa they created – sits on the borderline between fields and desert behind Medinet Habu temple, adjacent to the plateau where they first decided to build it.

Since finishing the house David, 37, and Olivier, 31, are consulted regularly by a growing number of architects, clients, and organizations who believe that peasant methods can be reforged to create aesthetic, energy-efficient housing. The Pilot Project House is becoming a pilgrimage point because it is considered an archetype of this kind of evolution. It was nominated for an Aga Khan award last year, but was not among the prize-winners because it is not entirely finished. Some of the rooms have yet to be plastered or fitted with windows and doors.

Seeing foreigners, especially a trained architect, building in mud brick has helped revive the locals' faith in their indigenous materials. "They realize that they are very à la mode. It's good for them," said Olivier.

The masons, trained through their work with David and Olivier, are in great demand in the area. They show pride in their work and manifest excitement in talking about their new skills, asking if there is perhaps work for them in America. They have built mosques, churches for a local monastery, and communal rooms used for receptions in villages, all buildings which just a few years ago would have been built with red brick and reinforced concrete.

The locals do not subscribe completely to the Western interpretation of their dwellings. While they accept barrel vaulting for domestic architecture they do not want to live under domes because the latter evoke the tombs of the religious sheikhs. Some of the reluctance of the peasants to live in the houses at New Gourna, Olivier believes, can be attributed to this uneasiness.

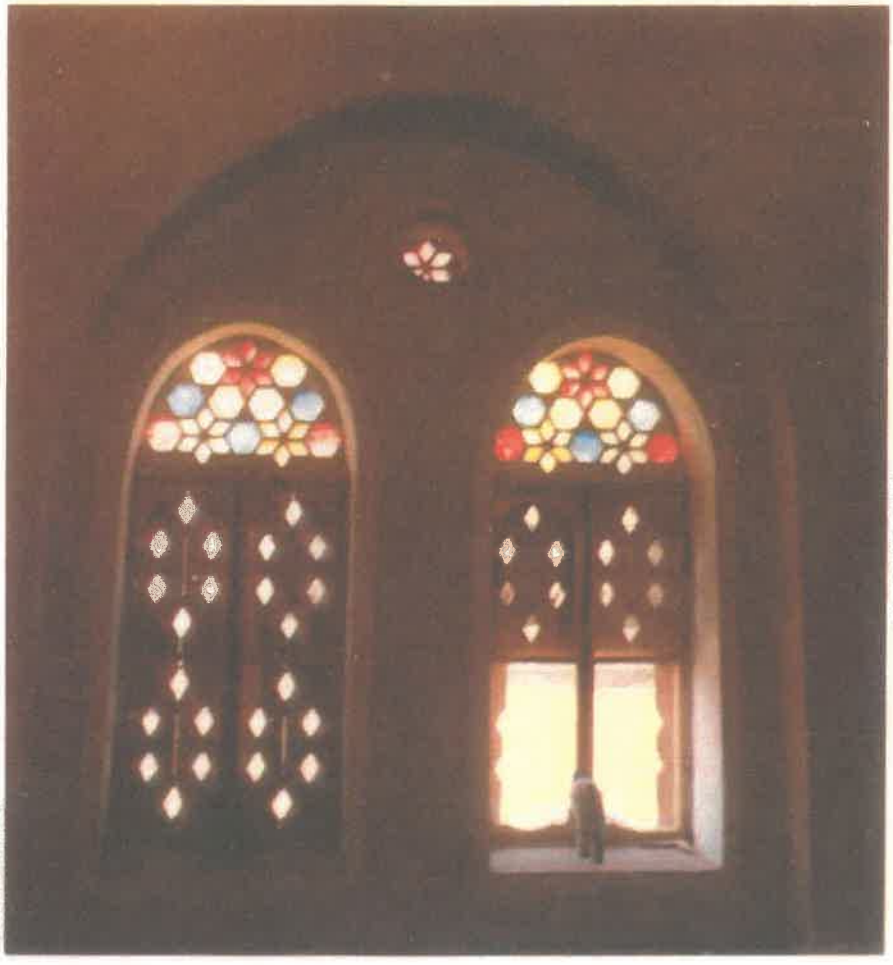
Aside from the locals, organizations working in the area have begun to appreciate the benefits of using mud brick as well. Olivier is currently finishing a mud brick centre to house the German Archeological Institute, and several private clients have requested designs for houses and mosques.

In consultation with David, it took Olivier three months to design the Pilot Project House. Armed with the design, permission from the Egyptian Antiquities department to build near the temple, and a thirty-year lease for the site from a farmer, they began construction in May 1978. The building was completed in November 1980. Actually it only took 160 working days to build, but David was employed elsewhere and Olivier was still in his third year at the Architectural Association School in London, so neither could devote his full time to the house.

The 260 square metre house follows some basic tenets of Islamic architecture while incorporating various Western elements. The almost completely closed exterior lends it the air of a small medieval inn; it has an entranceway large enough to admit the burdened pack animals of a weary caravan but high walls with only small windows to discourage night-time marauders. The vaulted entrance block is not on the central axis of the house but in one corner, and once inside, there is an entrance to the main vaulted living room immediately to the left. Thus visitors can be received without bringing them through the core of the house. The back of the entrance block opens into a high barrel vault which to the left gives on to the central courtyard.

Unlike the courtyards of more traditional houses, this one does not unveil the ground plan of the house – the house is not built *around* the courtyard. Stairways, doors and two smaller courtyards are partially visible from this tree-shaded juncture which serves as a knot for the independent interior components of the house. From this vantage point the





OLIVIER SEDNAOUI



OLIVIER SEDNAOUI

house is simultaneously secure and mysterious. Convenient access to the courtyard and other communal parts of the two-storey house is assured by four stairways and multiple doors, but none of the interior rooms opens directly on to a public area. This allows for extensive privacy in a house inhabited by a fluid group of friends, relatives and itinerant travellers rather than a conventional family.

There is intense, penetrating light at Luxor and each room filters it according to varied requirements. The bedrooms have only small windows – partially or completely filled with stained glass set in plaster – but the communal rooms are rich in natural light.

The kitchen, for example, was designed to be the focal point of activity in the house. It has a pierced dome and small windows at the center of each of the walls at the base of the dome, in addition to four eye-level windows and two doors. The two-storey room is detached from the rest of the house, set in the centre of the east wall and surrounded on three sides by courtyards. Thus throughout the day the light in the kitchen is strong but diffuse, allowing for comfortable work around the kitchen table. The interior of the kitchen and the courtyards along each side of it are not visible from the entranceway and front living room, making it a *haramlik* to which conservative local visitors are not exposed.

The delight elicited by the house flows from a charmed attention to details – coloured glass in the pierced dome above the shower, for example, or the pigment from the nearby mountains mixed with the plaster for the domes which adds to the harmony between the house and its environs. The mud walls blend with the fields below and the domes do not interrupt the view of the distant plateau. A series of arched windows along the eastern wall improve air circulation and leave the impression that the house is open to the fields.

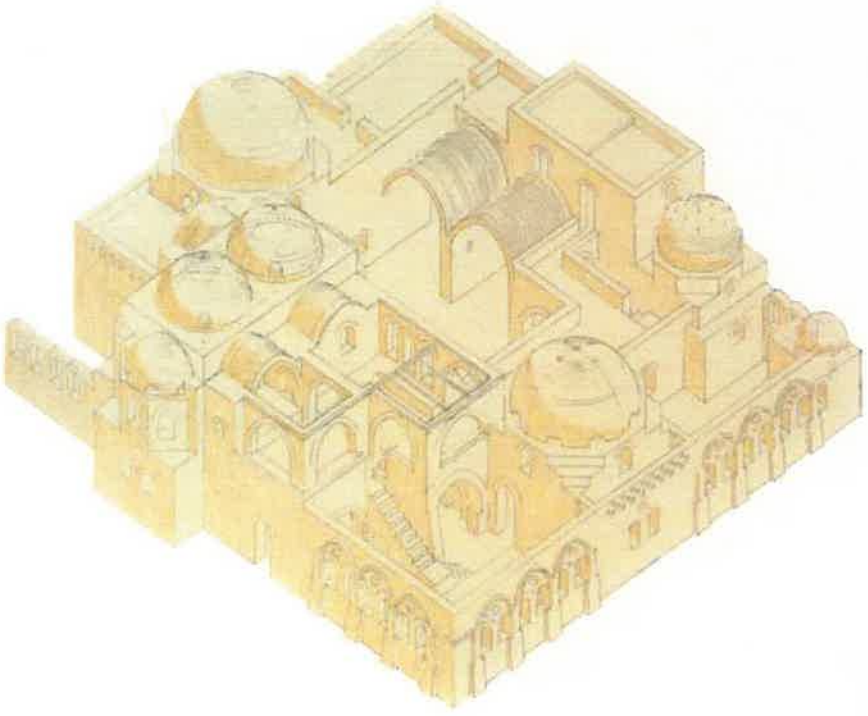
Overall, the house meets both Western and local functional requirements. This, combined with the thermal qualities of mud brick and the allure of simple geometric shapes, all executed at low cost, makes it a prototype: a well-executed synthesis of peasant techniques and skilled design.

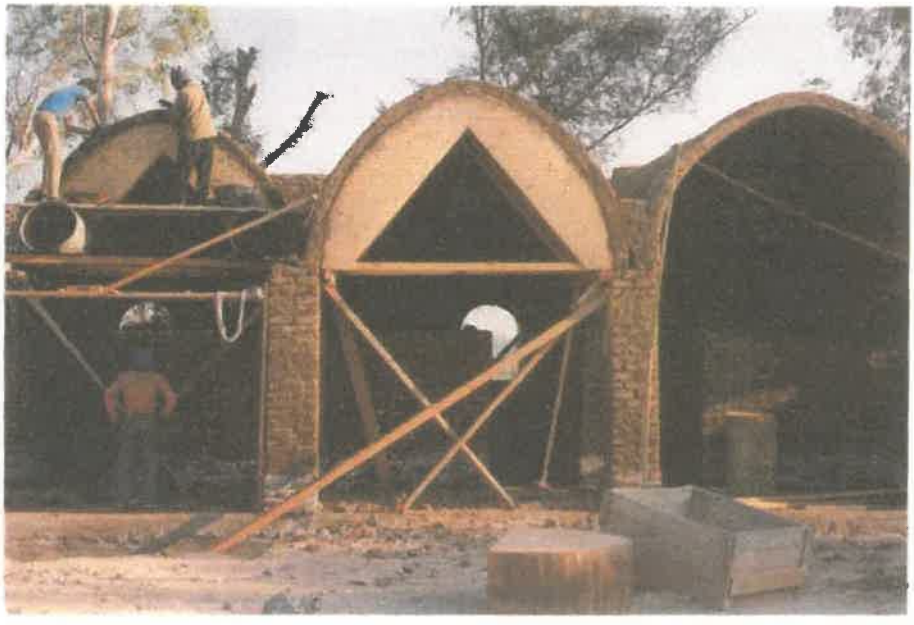
The tenets of building in mud brick have changed little since the vaulted mud brick granaries in the Ramesseum temple complex – located about two kilometres from the Pilot Project House – constructed in 1,400 B.C. There are basically two types of bricks used in mud brick construction – a light brick for the vaults and domes and a heavier one for the walls. The vaulting bricks contain proportionally more straw and dung as opposed to the sand and gravel in wall bricks. the latter materials cannot be used in vaulting because they tend to cause cracks in the bricks during the long drying process.

While straw is the most frequent material added to the mud to insure the solidity and shape of the finished brick, poor farmers use dung. Olivier has discovered through experimenting with different percentages of straw, dung, and mud – experiments he would like to take to the level of scientific research – that dung immeasurably enhances the strength of the brick. It contains many of the indigestible fibres from the animals' fodder and "it has a certain glue-like quality because it has been digested," he said. Thus it serves as an adhesive, binding the bricks together and preventing cracks in the mud used as mortar.

Critics of mud brick architecture – and they are legion – claim that making bricks from the beleagured agricultural land, already disappearing under the onslaught of urban expansion, will only serve to weaken the country's agricultural base. Olivier points out that the red bricks made throughout Egypt contain proportionally more of the same clays used in mud bricks. He argues that, in many fields like those around the Pilot Project House, the silt is at least three metres thick. Taking off the top 20 centimetres to make bricks actually reveals a rich layer of soil underneath. Soil cannot be scraped off indiscriminately, *sibakh*, the contents of the sublayers must be assessed beforehand.

Olivier dreams that where surface mud is unavailable, silt from Lake Nasser could be brought in to make millions of bricks. Alternatively, bricks could be made with sand. Some silt or a small amount of lime or cement would be required to stabilize this kind of brick, which would drive up the cost.





In terms of the actual construction process, David and Olivier worked to simplify the skills needed to build and roof a house. Traditionally for example, barrel vaulting was done by masons trained to draw a perfect parabola on the mirror wall and lead out from it. Olivier now uses a system of plywood and timber forms, which the unskilled masons have adopted quickly. They still lean the initial rows into the wall, but with the forms the work proceeds much faster.

The forms are set on scaffolding underneath the space to be spanned, and the bricks and mortar are set in place across the top of the form. As soon as the row – convenient arm's length across – is dry, the form is dropped and re-installed to start the next row.



OLIVIER SEDNAOUI

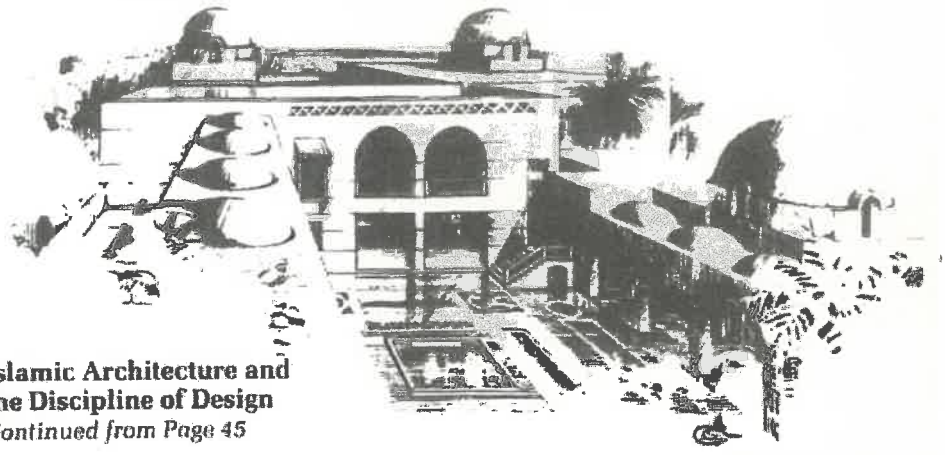


OLIVIER SEDNAOUI

According to Olivier, the forms could simplify the process of cross-barrel vaulting and would allow for curved vaults: "The whole tradition can be modern and progressive," he says.

Mud brick architecture does not have a more widespread application in Egypt because architects and engineers are not trained to use it. They are ardent followers of the geometric shapes derived from traditional architecture, but use pre-poured concrete to create them. Olivier believes mud brick should be more popular. In areas with some rainfall, a good foundation and good plaster will protect the house from erosion and the low cost of the materials leaves it a viable option for most builders. The Pilot Project House cost only $12,000 to put up.

Olivier hopes more young architects will build in mud: "It's creating a sublime piece of art at low cost. It's a one-material house. The challenge is unique."



Islamic Architecture and the Discipline of Design

Continued from Page 45

sound of its fountain, to be absorbed into the interiors that face onto the courtyard without dispelling the tranquility of total enclosure.

Farouk will take a large terrace of a typical international-style penthouse apartment, and double the elevation of the one-meter safety wall that runs round it with *Turkiya* screens (tightly-latticed strips of split turned wood which achieve a *Mushrabiya* effect at a third of the normal *Mushrabiya* cost).

He will then build planters the length of the terrace walls for climbing shrubs and vines and suddenly the exposed conspicuous terrace has taken on the characteristics of veiled, protected and contained space.

The accurate use of *Mushrabiya* to eleminate glare and assure privacy in window openings, if used consistently, gives extroverted-designed living rooms, the possibil-ity of an inward dimension, depending on the willingness of the client to refrain from filling up the 'felt space' of the transformed room.

'These are Western-designed flats', El Farouk concedes. 'But you can introduce a number of traditional elements to convert them into a more indigenous Islamic interior. To reduce the amount of free-standing furniture that usually goes into a Western flat, we substitute more structural elements - the *mustaba* (a built-in bench), wood benches, built-in cupboards and *mushrabiya* in place of large glass windows. It all works' Omar El Farouk says.

It is a process that can, in theory, be endlessly duplicated through any contemporary Muslim city and thereby suggest, as an educational process, the possibilities of beauty, grace, and Islamic function to far greater numbers than are exposed to the few contemporary Islamic residences now standing in Giza, Jeddah, Riyadh and soon Kuwait.

But at this point El Farouk is pessimistic. The crafts he relies upon as an interior designer are dying (if one ignores the recent revival of thoughtlessly-produced, out-of-proportion pieces of *mushrabiya* being ground out for the Islamic chic traffic).

The social situation that sustained the crafts has collapsed. There was a time in Cairo, certainly more than a hundred years ago, when not only did every wealthy house maintain a permanent craftsman, but even the poorest families had *mushrabiya*.

Twenty years ago, El Farouk completed his Fine Arts Diploma project - the restoration and revival as a craft and residential centre of the Khayamiyya quarter. Located in front of Bab-al Suweyla, its craftsmen, the tentmakers, remain in the area to produce and trade and would be delighted to be able to live in any of the potentially restorable and extended duplex galleries that are now abandoned above street level and whose beauty is such an obvious product of a spiritual age.

El Farouk's brilliant plans and detailed drawings drew everyone's praise and then, as happens so often in the East, were forgotten. Perhaps here is a possibility. Right now, Cairo is the beneficiary of an extraordinary burst of energy animating the Ministry of Culture and the Antiquities Department to clear away some of the blight around Islamic Cairo. Perhaps here - in El Farouk's Khayamiyya crafts community design - is an opportunity to be grasped by the outstanding personalities responsible. It would take the official campaign a significant step closer to neighbourhood revival than the favoured technique of face lifting an individual site.

It would also mean a move back onto a social plane of the sort envisaged by Hassan Fathy nearly forty years ago in New Gourna and then so cruelly aborted, to the loss of Egypt and the Muslim world. ■

THE WISSA WASSEF ATELIER AT HARRANIA

Hilary Weir

Just off the road to Saqqara, on the outskirts of an undistinguished village, the observant traveller will notice a cluster of domed buildings half-concealed behind an enclosure wall. No bill-board will seek to divert him towards them, and even those familiar with the place can easily over-shoot the inconspicuous turn, until the memory is jolted by an intentionally-misleading roadside stall advertising its wares as "Harrania tapestries".

The village of Harrania is indeed famous for tapestries, but tapestries very different in quality and inspiration from those crude, albeit colourful, weavings which are offered for sale thoughout the Cairo region. Within the complex of domed buildings on the outskirt of Harrania is the atelier of Ramses Wissa Wassef, in which today not only tapestries but also batique paintings, wheel-turned pottery and ceramic models are produced. But the atelier began with tapestry weaving, and its greatest achievement remains the unique works created on its looms.

Ramses Wissa Wassef, who died in July 1974, was an architect by profession, and a recent tribute to this aspect of his work was the inclusion of the centre at Harrania among the nine other buildings or complexes in countries selected to receive the Aga Khan Award for Architecture in September 1983. This award was appropriate in several ways, for the history of the tapestries in a sense begins with architecture. In 1941, Wissa Wassef was appointed architect to a small private school being built in Old Cairo. The historic associations with many ancient buildings of this quarter of the city determined him to find an architecture appropriate to the environment. Having recently been in Upper Egypt, he chose the traditional vaulted or domed style of Nubian dwellings, and brought masons from Aswan to execute the design. Once the school was complete he persuaded the governing body to permit him to set up a few looms and to engage a local weaver to teach the children after school hours.

Wissa Wassef describes the thinking which led him to conceive the weaving experiment in the Introduction to *Woven by Hand*, his book about Harrania which was published in 1972. For some years, he explains, he had felt disturbed by the ugliness of many aspects of contemporary civilization and by the inability of craft industries to remain vital in an age of ever-increasing mechanisation. He was convinced "that every human being was born an artist," but came to believe that "his gifts could be brought out only if artistic creation were encouraged by the practising of a craft, from early childhood"[1]. Wissa Wassef defined "craft" as "the individual working of materials to produce a useful and beautiful object". He considered that artistry and craftsmanship were aspects of a single activity, and that one of the advantages of training individuals in craftsmanship was that the products could be economically viable, given the "almost unhealthy value attributed to any old object"[2] and the great demand for handicrafts in today's world. He chose weaving as the particular craft through which to conduct the experiment because it provides a happy medium between manual work and artistic creation, involving as it does the production of images by means of a craft technique.

The project that now flourishes at Harrania thus began in a school in Old Cairo forty years ago. Using high-warp looms, which are known to resemble the very earliest looms used in Egypt, the children were taught the technique of weaving in local wool dyed with natural dyes. They were not allowed to draw sketches on paper, still less to see or copy the work of others, in order to ensure that the images produced on the loom were the direct expression of their own emotions. Wissa Wassef restricted his own role to that of "a screen between the army of external influences and the children's own rich natures. By means of direct creative activities, I aroused and protected the free play of spontaneous impulses".[3]

Ramses Wissa Wassef and his wife were so encouraged by the experiment in Old Cairo that in 1952 they bought land and built a workshop, in the same traditional style, in the village of Harrania. They made friends with local peasant children, offered to pay them for some small tasks, and taught them to spin, thread beads and knit. Once the first two looms were ready, the Wissa Wassefs brought Myriam, one of three children from Old Cairo who had continued to weave in adult life, to teach them the basic techniques. People expressed astonishment that the children should be paid for such primitive work, but Ramses Wissa Wassef was not deterred. By 1958 the quality of

the children's weaving was such that an exhibition was held in Cairo to great acclaim. The "experiment" had worked, and went on from strength to strength.

Although the centre at Harrania is associated only with the name of Ramses, it is doubtful that it could have succeeded without the devoted contribution, before and after his death, of his wife Sophie. Sophie Wissa Wassef was indeed brought up to believe in the principles to which her husband later gave expression. Her father, Habib Gorgi, studied art in London; when he returned to Egypt he became dissatisfied with the slavish fidelity of Egyptian art teaching to European norms, when there existed an authentic and deep-rooted indigenous artistic tradition. Gorgi believed that individuals inherited both a local and a universal legacy of art, and that this could be tapped and fostered by encouraging close observation of nature and uninhibited "childish" creativity. Three children were brought from poor Coptic schools to live with the Gorgi family and were taught to model in clay. The results led Gorgi, by then chief inspector of art for the Ministry of Education, to introduce new principles into the art teaching curriculum of Egyptian schools. He effected something of a revolution in his own country, and carried abroad his theories about the validity of childish or "primitive" art. In 1937 Gorgi presented a paper to an International Congress for Art Education, Drawing and Art Applied to Industry in Paris, entitled "The Supposed Errors in Drawing Common to Beginners: Their Relation to the Revival of Racial Art". In 1950 he organised an exhibition under UNESCO auspices in Paris and London, entitled "Spontaneity in the Art of Young Egyptians". No less a figure than Oskar Kokoschka wrote of the exhibition: "I am simply speechless in the face of this terrific power of expression, a power which manifests itself here visually by showing the immense surge of sensitiveness that only comes from the innermost heart. Nowhere in the modern school experiments in Europe or America, in the Far East, in Japan or China, have I found such originality expressed in colour and plastic form as well as in spiritual content."

This, then, is the background to Ramses Wissa Wassef's atelier at Harrania. Some of the early tapestry weavings from Old Cairo were included in his father-in-law's exhibition in 1950, and by 1960 the weavers of Harrania were producing work of a quality and volume to merit their first independent foreign exhibition, held in Stockholm and other towns in Sweden. Since then there have been exhibitions of Wissa Wassef tapestries in almost all important cities of the west. It is hoped that a major exhibition will take place in London in September 1985.

The centre at Harrania is now very much larger than in its early days in the 1950s, but it retains the same spirit and philosophy. Within the enclosure walls are most of the natural features that appear as images in the tapestries and batiques. On the left as one stands at the entrance, facing west towards the desert, is the museum designed by Wissa Wassef to house the collection of ceramic sculptures started by his father-in-law. Natural spots of light beam through small windows in the domes upon the figures – human and animal – which fill niches and recesses in the walls. On the right are the workshops, galleries for finished weavings and batiques, and Sophie Wissa Wassef' house. In between and all around is a spacious garden, filled with every variety of plant and tree. There is a small pond for ducks and geese, coops for chickens, and rough lawns grazed by goats and sheep. The adjacent village and fields provide most of the other components of the weavers' landscape: mosques, churches, and simple dwellings; water buffaloes, camels and donkeys; innumerable wild birds; a rich variety of human activity; and in the distance, across the intervening desert, the pyramids of Giza. Some of the tapestries display a wider knowledge, of under-sea life, for example, or of animals such as elephants and giraffes which are not to be found in the neighbourhood. Sophie Wissa Wassef is careful to explain that nothing is derived from books or museums: the weavers are taken to the coast, to the zoo, to Upper Egypt. Any more exotic scenery may derive from what they see on television, but this is always reinforced by personal observation.

The gallery for finished weavings has recently been extended. The display is changed as new works are finished and others are sold, although Sophie Wissa Wassef is loathe to part with the great works of her most experienced weavers, and retains a large permanent collection. The main gallery can hold about sixteen very large pieces, sometimes interspersed with smaller works by a single artist. The styles and subjects depicted show considerable variety, and certain pieces stand out as being of exceptional quality.

The most arresting tapestries in the gallery in late 1983 were three by Ashour Meselhi. Thirty seven years old, Ashour started to weave in the early days of Harrania, but his progress was interrupted by four years military service from the age of eighteen. Until they reach this age, the weavers work on small to medium size looms, mastering the techniques and building up a vocabulary of images. The best then graduate to looms on which tapestries of up to two by three metres in size are produced. Having lost four vital years, Ashour felt impelled to work at ferocious speed to create large pieces, and all three tapestries were executed within twelve months, an achievement without precedent at Harrania.

Ashour Meselhi's "Sunset on the Sea", occupying pride of place on the end wall, is his most recent finished work. It has an almost visionary quality, reminiscent in certain respects of some of Samuel Palmer's paintings. The composition shows an almost classical sense of balance with rocky shore and sea plants at the lower end of the tapestry, fishy waters in the middle, sands and fiery sun at the top. The colours graduate, appropriately, from green-brown through sea blue to pink, gold and sunset red. But in the very centre there rears a growth of some surreal plant, coral perhaps, neither in nor above the water, savage in the intensity of its crimson hues, challenging the beholder's eye, anticipating and refracting the setting sun above. The eye then penetrates the detail of the picture, trying to link water surface with fishy depths, and slowly comprehends that Ashour employs the age old perspective of Pharaonic art: objects are seen simultaneously from above and from the side, the image presented as it is perceived by the mind as well as by the eye of the artist.

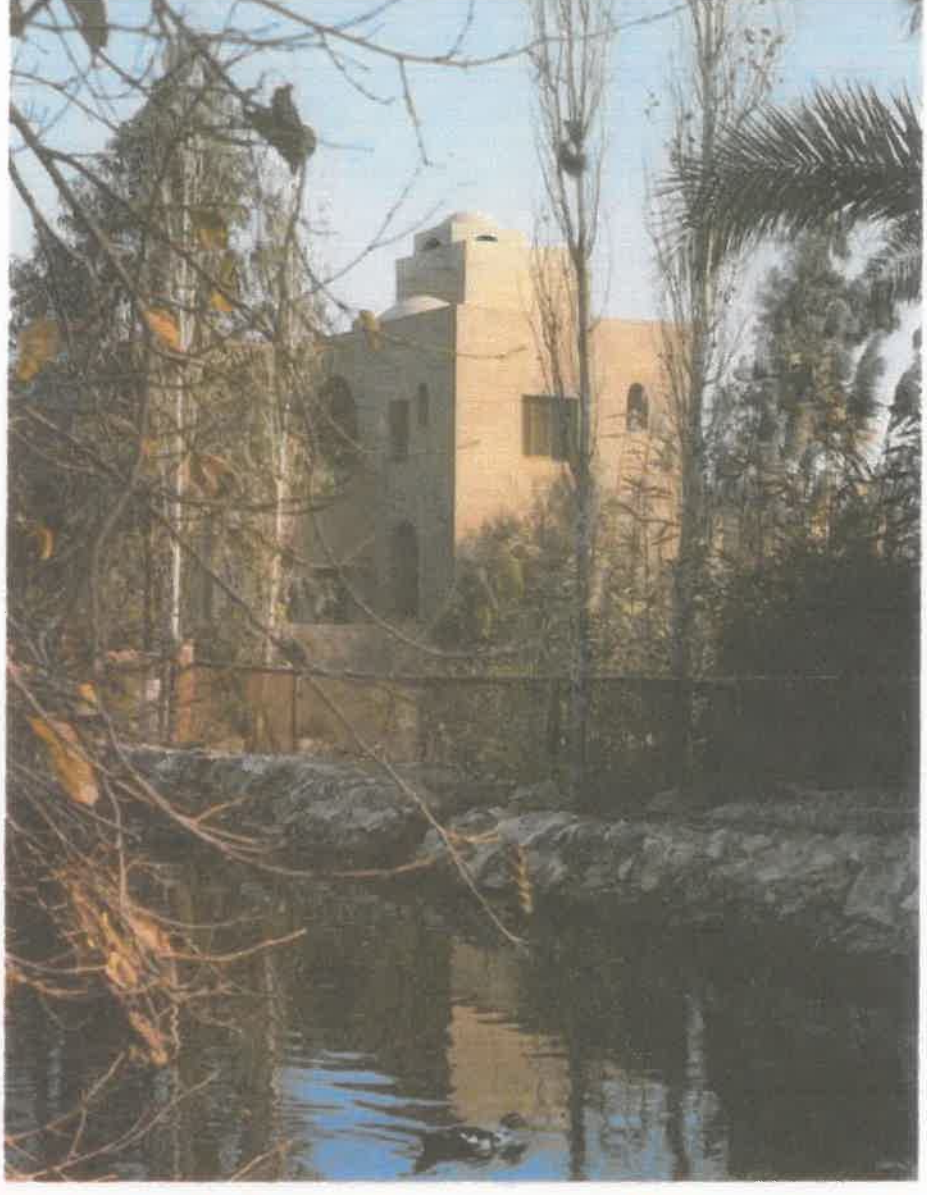
Ashour's two other finished works are very different. One, of turkeys, relies solely on close-up, intimate observation of this bird. There is no distant landscape, and every inch of the warp is filled with detail. Feathers overlie each other; the birds jostle in intricate proximity to

one another and to the plants of the confined space they occupy. The colours are subtle, muted, to convey impression more than image.

The third tapestry depicts the Nile in Upper Egypt, twisting around islands and between banks of narrow cultivation. Feluccas cruise at random with lazy sails; church and mosque vie for prominence in the meagre villages. A leaf from a holiday sketch book, worked up once back home: "this I saw, while having a wonderful time"?











Ashour was one of two weavers who went with Sophie Wissa Wassef on a Nile cruise (all were invited, but none of the rest could go). She took out pencil and paper, and drew; Ashour attempted to do the same, but produced the crudest of childish scribbles. The pencil is an alien tool to the peasant of Egypt, and Ashour is himself illiterate; but armed with a loom he will create astonishing works of art.

In late 1983 Ashour Meselhi was weaving another enormous tapestry, likely to be two metres square. It was instructive to observe him mid-way through the work. The weaver must contain in his mind the entire design, for not only does he make no sketch or woven cartoon, but all save an inch or two of what he has woven is concealed, wound beneath and behind the loom to maintain a comfortable working level. Ashour undid the loom to crank up this portion, revealing a powerful design of sunflowers and birds. To the lower right, a small flock of birds stood knee deep in plants; at the centre left a much larger bird balanced on one leg on a sunflower stalk, bent horizontal

beneath its weight, to peck fiercely at the black-centred flower. From the left his rival flew down with angry open beak. Sunflower heads nodded and bobbed from every angle. Ashour explained that the composition would be balanced by another large bird to the upper right. He estimated six more weeks to complete the work, which he had started six weeks before.

Ashour is but one of 34 tapestry weavers at Harrania today. About half of this number are mature adults, survivors of the original pupils of Ramses Wissa Wassef. The rest are younger, now in their late teens, having been taken in after Ramses' death in 1974 when his daughters Suzanne and Joanna persuaded their mother to start a new school. Seventy village children wanted to be admitted. Of this once only intake, Suzanne now has 12 weavers and three ceramicists, while Joanne supervises fifteen cotton weavers and six batique painters. There are also five or six children, six to ten years old, but these are exceptions, sons and daughters (or nephews and nieces) of the original weavers, for the school has no further scope to expand. Sophie Wissa Wassef remarked that the children whose parents had learnt to weave were generally less apt than pupils from families not previously associated with the school: the latter came without preconceived ideas and expressed themselves with greater freedom and spontaneity.

The success of the Wissa Wassef experiment lies in the commitment of Ramses and Sophie Wissa Wassef, and now also their daughters, to the creativity they believe to be latent in all individuals. They have devoted their lives to the nurturing of this talent, encouraging children to learn and adults to continue to weave by offering payment even for indifferent work, helping with family and financial problems and giving each weaver as much time as she or he requires to complete a tapestry. The project is thus free from all normal commercial pressures, and individual weavers are left to develop at their own pace.

Although the whole philosophy of Sophie Wissa Wassef is opposed to commercialism, the centre has to rely upon the income generated by sales. Each piece is priced by consensus and its author paid one third of the agreed value, even if the piece itself is not sold. The remaining two thirds of the price is ploughed back into the centre, to meet running costs and to provide capital for expansion. The price tags are often thought to be rather high, though in fact the smaller, simpler items like wheel-turned pottery and children's weavings cost only a few pounds. When assessing the price of an adult tapestry, comparisons should be made not with the crude imitations on sale elsewhere, but with works of art. The largest tapestries are increasingly sought by museums around the world; they are also bought by institutions such as universities, and by corporations, all of whom can well afford the sum requested.

Sophie Wissa Wassef believes that it is both just and necessary to pay the weavers well – by local standards – for their work. If she does not, they will leave and take more remunerative but humdrum jobs, in the construction industry for example. She is moreover convinced that given time and the right environment, sensitive guidance and an absence of pressure, the creative spirit will assert itself through and beyond the skilled application of craft technique. In the words of her late husband, the result of the experiment at Harrania is "a whole new language, an unlimited source of poetry", which has now remained abundant for 31 years.' ■











1. Background pages 50 and 51. Wissa Wassef, Harrania
2. Birds and Trees. Tapestry: detail.
3. Tapestry, Animals swim in Nile. detail.
4. Tapestry, men in village with mosque and church in background. detail.
5. Exterior, Wissa Wassef.
6. Tapestry, husband and wife with animals. detail.
7, 8, 9 and 10. Children at work.
11. Exterior Wissa Wassef.

Silver Jewellery in Sittel Balad

Susan Weeks



1

The crescent shape has become the symbol of Islamic belief and is a common jewellery motif in all Arab countries, but in Egypt it has been found as an amulet in Ptolemaic ruins, and in Nubia it has even older associations with an ancient horn cult. Pendant-hung, large silver crescents are a common decoration here, but they first appear as bone or ivory horns joined in the centre by a silver band, reminders of the stone-encrusted horn-crown of ancient Nubian kings. Animal horns are still seen hung above doorways near Aswan, and are said to "spear evil".

Also common in all Muslim countries are floral motifs (used because Islam prohibited the depiction of human figures), but in Egypt these again added meaning as they clearly represented olive branches on Bahariya Oasis discs, sugar cane on Luxor charms and palm branches on Dakhla earrings.

Small fish-shaped pendants have been worn since Pharaonic times for luck and prosperity; often they represent the *Bolti*, a Nile fish whose remarkable reproductive habits made it a symbol of rebirth and abundance.

Many other charms are sold in the silver bazaars, although many of the original reasons for wearing them have been forgotten. There are small bath-clogs, writing-boards, mermaids, horns-of-plenty, special coins, small Qur'ans and inscribed verses from the Qur'an are especially popular. Hollow amulet cases are made in tubular, rectangular and triangular shapes and may be embossed with floral or bird designs. Originally containers for folded and written charms, they often also carried perfume and incense, and these again date to before the Arab invasion. Even the small tinkling bells which are so characteristic of Egyptian silver jewellery were probably first worn to keep away evil spirits. And the idea of magical properties originally attributed to all the coloured beads, coral, carnelian and other stones set into the silver is a study in itself.

Collecting the nicknames given to the various ornaments is a fascinating task. One earring of a very old design is called *sakia* (water wheel), another is called *Hussein's window*, and there is a necklace called *nightingale's nest*. Many of the earrings from Sharkia province, which was famous for its horsemanship and military tradition, are named after shields, daggers and curved swords. Siwans call one large finger-ring after a tabletop, and in Luxor, *kuba zam-zam* rings are named after the sacred well near Makkah. The tiny silver rings clearly show the dome-covered water and the two hills it lies between.

Silver beads become "cones of sugar", "minarets", "ribbed seeds" and "olive pits". Many other ornaments are named after objects in nature: e.g., shells, seeds, spices, leaves and grains. Necklaces of hollow silver "barley" come from the Eastern Delta and Sinai, where barley is an important life-giving staple food. Qurna women wear earrings of "coriander seeds", and necklaces made of silver "chick peas" and "purslane leaves".

Even the familiar bracelets of heavy silver braid, so popular that they are known as *asawir misri* (Egytian bracelets) in other Arab countries, become something special when we discover that mediaeval bracelets of exactly the same design have been excavated from Bahariya Oasis cemeteries.

But perhaps the best known of all the jewellery worn by Egyptian women is the *kholkhal*. Indeed, the heavy silver anklets have become the symbol of marriage, and may be woman's only ornament. "The ringing of thine anklets has deprived me of my reason," is said in an old song, and *Ranet el Kholkhal* (When the Anklet Jingles) is the name of a modern Cairo ballet. *Kholkhal* is also the appropriate title of a recent study of Egyptian women. When the Prophet Muhammad cautioned the women of Arabia against the use of these tinkling anklets, he specially pointed out that "some of the Egyptians still decorate themselves with them", thus again demonstrating that it was a tradition from long before the Arab invasion. We can see in the Egyptian Museum heavy silver anklets from ancient Nubia bearing very similar decorations to those made in Aswan today. Like many other ornaments pictured by Edward Lane in *Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians*, the anklet's basic design has not

changed at all since 1831. It remains one of the few pieces of silver jewellery that is still fashioned entirely by hand from Alexandria to Aswan. As we watch a smith at work in a cobbled alleyway within the shadow of a mediaeval jeweller's *Khan*, we hope that the tapping of tiny hammers will be heard here for a thousand more years.

There has been a renewal of interest in the traditional silver jewellery that until recently was worn by the *Sit el Belad* of Cairo, and is still worn daily by country women of Nile Valley villages, in the oases, and by the Bedouin of the desert. The traveller to once isolated areas is rewarded with tantalising glimpses of massive cuff-like bracelets on the wrists of *Awlad Ali* women as they work among the fig orchards of the north coast, and the bellhung anklets of Esna women as they fill water-jugs at the river bank. The recent return of the Sinai arouses our admiration at the elegant attire of its tribal women – veils hung with coins and embroidered shawls hiding elaborate silver necklaces. Many museums in Cairo have undergone renovation, their collections of folk jewellery and costume being catalogued for the first time, and new regional museums are being opened.

Egyptians and tourists alike are increasingly appreciative of the diversity of design and true craftsmanship involved in the elegant arabesques, fine granulation, and delicate filigree work of a type that is impossible to duplicate in the mass-produced and machine-made modern jewellery that now fills our shopwindows. While gold jewellery has rapidly replaced silver as a means of investment, and many women have parted with this heritage of their maternal ancestors, at least the lovely, old anklets and earrings are no longer thrown into the melting pot when worn out to be lost to us forever. Wise silversmiths and merchants are now saving the complete necklaces and are no longer breaking them up, as they have come to recognise the value of the original fastenings and elements. They send out their scouts to rural towns, where, on market-days, exchanges are made for gold, and thus save some of the regional ornaments, which satisfy a growing clientèle. They are no longer willing to sell certain older items by weight, but instead charge by the piece, thus driving up prices; nevertheless, devoted collectors are eager to buy.



2

1. *Amulet cases*
2. *Crescent. Nubian*

Recently there have been published many art books and magazine articles filled with beautiful photographs of Arab and other ethnic jewellery, which stimulate further interest. Some contemporary jewellers in Cairo have returned to traditional designs for their inspiration, and have met with success, because these old pieces are as beautiful and timeless as the land itself.

There is an astonishing variety of styles and designs found in Cairo's silver bazaars. This is because Egypt, especially in the Middle East, has been a cross-road of many religions and cultures in its long and complex history. We see here multi-chained, hanging head-pieces that are the direct descendents of Byzantine jewellery and earrings much like those of ancient Circassian filigree crescents that are obviously Turkish inspired. The styles of many Nubian bracelets have their origin in the Sudan, Ethiopia, and even as far away as Niger. And many pieces bear a close resemblance to the silver jewellery found in excavations of the ancient Nile kingdoms of Kush and Ballana. The famous and massive silver ornaments of Siwa Oasis are engraved with floral, fish and bird designs that have come across the border from Libya and Tunisia and reflect the Berber origin of her people. The complex necklaces and colourful attire of the Sinai Bedouin are much the same as were worn in Biblical Palestine and Syria. And many designs go as far back as Pharaonic Egypt and even into prehistoric times. The modern inhabitants of ancient Thebes still wear amulets of *Udiat* eyes and bits of old faience, and set scarabs into their silver rings. All of this makes for a fascinating study, and any visit to the Egyptian, Coptic and Islamic Museums in Cairo, or the Graeco–Roman Museum in Alexandria will reveal new design sources. A study of the old collections in the Ethnographic Museum, Folklore Centre, or Agriculture Museum in Cairo will show the origins and evolution of the styles still made today in the silver bazaars of the *Sagha*.

Much of the jewellery worn in Egypt is rich in symbolic meaning and was originally worn to avert the "Evil Eye", belief in which is still strong in rural villages. The "Hand of Fatimah", called more often simply *khamsa* (five) in Egypt, is seen as a decoration on Cairo's taxi cabs, as a brass ornament on Luxor horse carriages, and as dangling bark on earrings from Kharga Oasis. ■

Traditional Costumes

Shahira Mehrez

Travellers throughout history have been mainly concerned about the historical sites and the large urban centres of Egypt, completely ignoring the more humble traditions of the countryside. We have no documentation concerning rural architecture, costumes or handicraft. Whenever costumes have been described, they were always those of the large cities, while the wide variety of Egyptian female costume throughout the Nile Valley and those of the Bedouin and oasis dwellers has passed unnoticed. The





2









1. *Dress from Shurqiyya Province showing beads reminiscent of Pharaonic ornament.*
2. *Front of dress from Okhlah Oasis*
3. *Traditional dress from Upper Egypt showing metallic stitching known as "Telli"*
4. *Dress from Behera Province showing bold prints and vivid colours preferred by women of Bedouin origin.*
5. *Details of yokes from Behera Province, with the high bustline known in the West as empire. The Egyptian peasants still refer to it as "Embir" a debased form of the French word and a relic of the French expeditionary force of 1798.*

Background Page 57
Traditional dress motifs reinterpreted to suit cushion formats

Palm trees, stars and feathers surround a desert flower on this cushion.

Traditional dress motifs reinterpreted to suit cushion format

Cypress variations pattern purses.

El-Arish Needlework

reason for this neglect could well be the difficulty of doing any study involving women in areas where relations between the sexes were and still are restricted and frowned upon; but it could also be due to a certain neglect of things still living when compared to the nostalgic appeal of things past, particularly in a country like Egypt, which has an artistic tradition several thousand years old. If this is the case, then the fact that the regional costumes of Egypt are on the way to becoming obsolete makes them all the more deserving of attention. Past neglect is certainly undeserved, as the variety, boldness and richness of the traditional Egyptian costumes is equalled by few countries.

Roughly speaking, one can divide the dresses of the Egyptian rural areas into two groups: those of the inhabitants of the Delta and the villages of the fertile agricultural valley, and those of the poorer, upper Egyptian villages, Bedouin and oasis dwellers.

Peasant women of the Nile Valley have always represented a large percentage of the labour force in Egypt. For thousands of years they have fully cooperated with their menfolk in farming the land, ploughing the fields, picking cotton, planting and harvesting. In addition, they performed the traditional female tasks, such as breeding chicken, pigeons, ducks and geese, milking water buffalos, making and selling butter and cheese, sifting flour, baking, cooking, washing, mending and cleaning the house, as well as taking care of all the members of the household from newborn babies to aging grandparents. The peasant women's day starts at sunrise and only ends after sunset, leaving her with very little time to devote to her own needs. She seems, therefore, to have relied quite early on a professional dressmaker for the sewing of her garments. Payments are not always in cash, barter being still used in many transactions, and few Egyptian villages have been completely transformed into a cash economy. Thus even the poorest woman can have a dress made to measure and even the smallest agglomerate or *'isba* of the Delta will have one or more women making a living as a dressmaker. However, even in the larger villages, few shops are available for the purchase of cloth. Most of the shopping is done during the weekly market-day, when peddlers exhibit poor quality cottons and trimmings at higher prices than the government shops of the cities. Better quality luxury material, such as velvet or silk, is usually bought from large towns on special occasions such as weddings and feasts.

Two types of dresses are usually made: an everyday printed cotton frock to be used while working at home or in the fields, and an official black garment, preferably of silk or velvet, for special outings. Today, the widely spread model from Alexandria to Aswan is that of a very simple long and wide gown, opening in front, with a small collar and a round yoke highlighted with a lace trim; the sleeves are long and terminated with a cuff. A variant of these is the so-called *modah* (fashion) dress that has introduced tight waists, fancy collars and knee-length skirts worn above trousers.

Traditional regional dresses were much more elaborate and sophisticated. Each province of Egypt had at one time a style of its own, though the fluctuations of the official borders between governorates throughout history are often a source of confusion.

The basic elements of these dresses were the same: long-sleeved, wide gowns with a yoke, followed by a long skirt terminated by several horizontal tucks and a flounce of variable size. All of them are very chaste in their appearance, completely concealing the body. Nevertheless, feminine coquetry has found ways to attract the eye to its charms: the graciousness of the neck is emphasised by an opening outlined by velvet inserts, piping or trimmings; the sleeves are fitted with various kinds of tucks and pleats that draw attention to the shoulders, often giving the impression of the "leg of mutton" sleeves of the European Renaissance; and the bosom line is always enhanced by gathers suggestive of fulness or by a succession of narrow horizontal pleats (mervures) that accentuate the rounds of the breasts and the curvature of the waist. As for the back, four large pleats called *defayir* (braids), stopping below the waist, underline both the flatness of the back and the roundness of the buttocks.

Variations are particularly noticeable in the decoration of the bodice and yoke: golden beads are a great favourite and wherever they are found they probably date back to pharaonic tradition. They occur mainly in the province of Sharqiyya, where some of the ancient pharaonic capitals were located, and at the village of Abu Rawwash at the foot of the Pyramids, where ample supplies of pharaonic beads must have been available by simply scratching the surface of the sand. Terms describing the patterns of the beading are often the same as those used for jewellery, such as the *kerdan* or pectoral.

Embroidery inspired from the couching technique and the silver stitching known as *sermah*, both of which can be traced to 18th and 19th century urban costumes, is also frequently found in rural areas, where people are more conservative and have often preserved styles that have been discarded in the large centres. This is true, for example, of the embroidery of the yoke of the Bortos dress illustrated. Velvet inserts and trimmings that accentuate the bosom line, as well as tucked sleeves, might be attributed to the influence of the French Expeditionary Force led by General Buonaparte at the end of the 18th century, since words like *embire* (arabicised form of "Empire"), describing different effects, recurs in many areas of the Delta where French troops were known to have been garrisoned. French fashions adopted by elegant ladies of the capital and Alexandria at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries had a great impact on the rural areas as well as on many of the terms for patterns, trimmings and other finery which are derived from French equivalents (e.g., *tentanna* for dentelle, *Boheyyat* for bias, *soutage* for soutache, etc.)

Whatever the style and origin of the ornamentation, the regional styles were always wide enough to be worn one on top of another, to provide warmth in winter, to suggest a plumpness which in the countryside has always been associated with wealth, or to be used during pregnancy (at which time small slits are made below the yoke as nursing openings).

In most areas, the "official dress" is always of black material. The reasons for this choice are both economic and social.

Throughout 7,000 years the industrious Egyptian peasant, who was producing the wealth of Egypt, had no share in it. He lived in a small mud-brick house to spare as much as possible of the precious fertile land that he farmed; he was a saver, avoiding any unnecessary consumption to re-invest his meagre earnings in the acquisition of a few square yards of land of his



own and the purchase of one or more heads of cattle to provide additional income and insure him against poor harvests and famine. Preference for black material reflects a desire to own a multiple-purpose dress that will last many years; it withstands all kinds of hardships, can be redyed easily and can dissimulate most degrees of penury. Besides, the durability of the most expensive of materials available, velvet, makes it a good investment even for the poorest of women, as this is an expense she will face only once in a lifetime and it will give her the satisfaction of being as well-dressed as the wife of the most important man in the district. Thus, the black gowns create an appearance of social equality, despite economic differences and help in diminishing potential social conflicts.

Wherever coloured and printed dresses take precedence over the black ones, we are dealing with either a relatively rich village involved in some kind of industry or craft other than agriculture, such as the village of Abu Rawwash, which has been breeding frogs and reptiles for the research institutes of the faculty of medicine, or the village of Kerdasa, where traditional Bedouin textiles are woven for export to Libya (Illus.4); or with a group of "Arab" origin, i.e., Bedouin, as opposed to peasant, stock. This is the case with most of the inhabitants of the Beheira Province, a relatively newly reclaimed agricultural area where Arab tribes settled in the 19th century as farmers, but never completely adopted the customs or the mentality of the traditional peasant.

Women of the isolated villages of Upper Egypt, Bedouin of the Eastern desert and oasis dwellers have little choice of fabric at their disposal. The only available cloth is usually a heavy black cotton, but the poverty of the material is more than made up for by the richness of the embroidery.

The traditional dress of Upper Egypt was an ample black gown with an almost square cut, reminiscent of the costumes of the Coptic period (which is not surprising, as the South of Egypt has always been less permeable to foreign influences and therefore the last stronghold of tradition). The cloth is embroidered with narrow bands of silver or brass, forming glittering, elaborate, geometrical patterns on the shoulders and along the neck opening and ending with a large diamond-shaped design just below the waist (Illus.5). This technique of metal-stitching, known as *telli*, has today almost completely disappeared. The only parallel in the Arab world is to be found in Tunisia, though any possible connection needs further study to be proved; possibly the origin was Fatimid.

Another striking Egyptian dress is that of the women of the Oasis of Siwah, on the Libyan border: it consists of a wide shirt-like gown, with large sleeves, usually white or black, though coloured ones are not unheard of (Illus.6). The multi-coloured embroidery starts around the neck opening and spreads in a diverging sun-ray pattern, which might be traced to the cult of the sun-god Amon-Ra, for which the Oasis was famous in antiquity. A multitude of mother-of-pearl buttons are added onto the embroidery but their origin is difficult to trace; they could be modern substitutes for circular pharaonic pieces which would have been symbolical of the sun disc. But another explanation might one day be found, as the same mother-of-pearl buttons are to be seen in Saudi Arabian headgear, though again it is difficult to find a connection between the Berber tribes of Siwah and the Bedouin of the Hijaz.

Embroidered black dresses are also to be found in the oases of Khargah, Dakhlah and Bahareyya. Though they differ in the type of embroidery on the upper part of the dress, the overall pattern of the costumes of these three oases is very much the same: From a heavily embroidered top, stitched bands run down to the hem of the dress, producing a striped effect. At the lower part of the back, these vertical bands form a square embroidered panel (Illus.7). Coins are interspersed all over the embroidery of the shoulders and front, giving a glittering aspect to the dress, perhaps to compensate for the scarcity of jewellery in these relatively poor areas. The colour scheme includes all shades of reds and purples, with minor effects of yellow, green and blue.

The last category of Egyptian embroidered dresses is the type worn in the Eastern Desert and Sinai. These were executed almost exclusively in cross-stitch, and in the finer and older examples the embroidery was laid down on the material without the help of a canvas grid, using only the warp and weft as guidelines. These dresses are most certainly derived from the costumes of the Palestinian peasants, a fact that can be easily accounted for by the free migration of tribes and the frequent intermarriages previous to 1948, as well as by the exodus following this date. This dress is belted and has a large woollen girdle tied round the waist; although, to the layman, all the dresses of this area look alike, it is sometimes possible to recognise the workmanship of women of a particular tribe. The size, shape and decoration of the face veil, however, are indisputable distinguishing criteria in determining the affiliation of a particular woman.

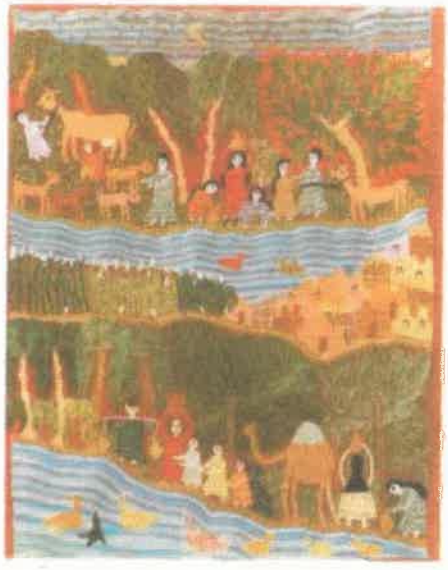
Though all these embroidered dresses are made on a very old, established patterns, each woman tries to surpass her neighbour in the arrangement of the traditional motifs, choice of colours and refinement of stitches. The most beautiful of these gowns are usually the wedding gowns. Girls are trained from childhood to embroider their own. Though the work is extremely time-consuming, it costs them nothing but the price of the material.

In most of Egypt, women's costumes are completed by a headdress. Peasant women tie a colourful beaded scarf *mandil* round their head and drape a black veil *tarha* over it. Bedouin and oasis women wear heavy, black cloaks, often decorated in the same manner as their dress. Face veils are not worn by peasant and oasis women, because most of their work is inside their houses or in the fields. Only Bedouin women, whose duties are limited to grazing herds of sheep and goats, wear veils, and these are richly embroidered and held in place by silver chains and coins. The shape of most of these veils suggests that they are for protection against the elements and desire for anonymity rather than that they denote any kind of social restriction.

Although they are perfectly adapted to economic, social and climatic conditions, the traditional costumes described above are gradually being discarded by the younger generations as a sign of underdevelopment and backwardness. The introduction of modern fashions represents one more step in the transformation of the Egyptian rural areas into consumer societies. With this change, we will be losing not only a part of our heritage but also an important factor of social and economic equilibrium. ■

EMBROIDERY in AKHMIM and EL-ARISH

Jayme Spencer







The Middle East has long been noted for its handicrafts – intricate calligraphy winding its way around gleaming hand-beaten brass, delicate filigree silver jewellery, gold inset with semi-precious stones, mahogany and ebony boxes inlaid with tiny pieces of ivory and mother-of-pearl and bold colourful embroidery filling dress hems and sleeves. As development comes to this region, some of these crafts have declined and traditional methods of craftsmanship have been laid to rest. Machines whirl the brass, stitch the dress, spin the gold, stamp the cloth and slowly the old skills die. But sometimes projects which spring forth in the name of development also serve the purpose of preserving tradition.

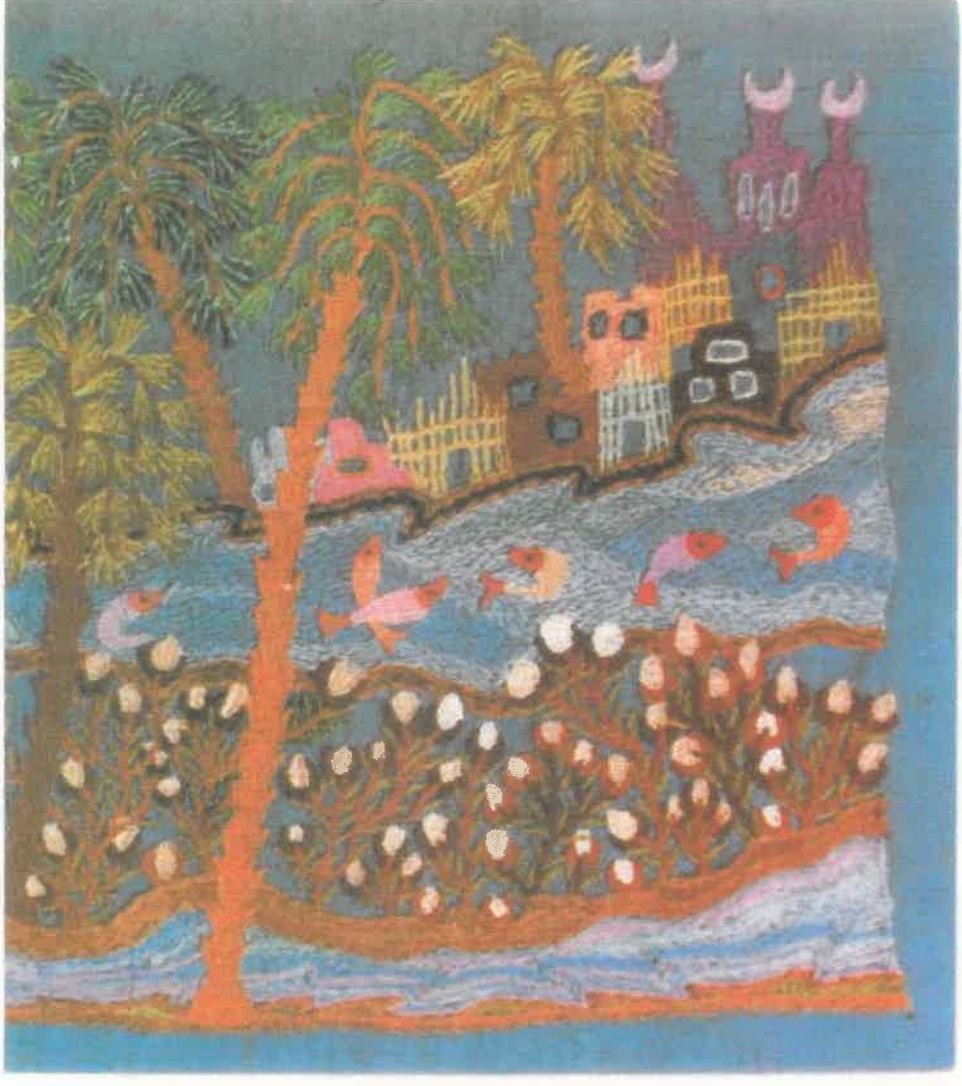
Two such projects presently operating in Egypt – one building on a 4,000 year-old heritage in Middle Egypt, the other utilising the skills of women in the Sinai – are designed to give greater autonomy (in the form of money) to women in those regions and to foster a sense of independence outside the home setting. Though small in scope, both succeed, while maintaining rigorous standards for quality and producing for a fairly sophisticated market rather than a mass market.

Akhmim Community Centre

The Akhmim Community Centre, sponsored by the Association of Upper Egypt for Schools and Social Promotion, specialises in hand-loomed, naturally dyed cotton cloth in traditional patterns and colours as well as embroideries. Already known in the United States through a number of exhibitions, the Centre has chosen to present its work for sale at a biennale exhibition in Cairo.

Founded in the 1960s, the Centre sought a way to give economic assistance to the young women of Akhmim as well as to present a programme that would encourage individual development. Adaptation of the famous Akhmim weaving became the vehicle for these aims. Throughout the known world, Akhmim, or Panapolis as it was then known to the Greeks, was one of the most important of the linen-manufacturing cities in Pharaonic times. By the Coptic period, the Akhmim fabrics were in great demand, several of the nearby monastries producing superior materials with intricate woven designs. Examples of Akhmim textiles can be seen in museums all around the world. Fortunately, the burial grounds of Akhmim have yielded numerous examples of these textiles, ranging from the early Greco-Roman epoch through Christian times of the era of the Arab conquest. Excavations in the area were intensive in the years 1884-1893 and many important museum collections were begun in those years.

Utilising this heritage, a number of designs and a variety of colours were chosen to be produced in the Centre. Throughout the years these designs and colours have been standarised and are instantly recognisable as Akhmim. Durable and practical, these materials come in several geometric patterns, all completely reversible. From the beginning, the women have been involved in all aspects of production, being organised into a self-governing co-operative. The cloth is woven on looms at the Centre from locally spun thread. The cutting, sewing and embroidery may be done at home and returned to the Centre. The frames for the pictures are made by women themselves who maintain quality by self-evaluation supervised by their own elected







1. *Mary Ramzi, View of Akhmim, 1979*
2. *Iqbal Tawfiq, Cotton, 1979*
3. *Mariam Azmi, breadbaking "The Sunbread", 1979*
4. *Noura Khalaf, The Fisherman, 1979*
5. *Noura Khalaf, Norag and fields, 1979*

committee.

In addition to the textiles, embroideries play an important part in the work of the Centre. One style of embroidery recreates Coptic motifs on solid-colour Akhmim material. Adapted from woven designs, the embroideries present the overall effect in a different manner. Animal and floral motifs are commonly seen on Coptic cloth. One of the Akhmim favourites is the "tree of life" – a delightful adaptation showing a rabbit flanked by two birds in the branches of a tree. Almost the same design can be seen on a 5th century scrap of cloth in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. The 1983 exhibition featured large, banner-style wall hangings edged with Greco-Roman figures. All the designs were based on materials found in Akhmim itself in the earlier mentioned excavations of the late 19th century.

Another style, increasingly popular with the public, gives free range to the creative instincts of the workers. These spontaneous embroideries usually reflect village life and the countryside of Upper Egypt. Often, to stimulate the imagination, stories will be related or an excursion taken and the experience interpreted in thread. This results in some years in giving a theme to the exhibition – as in 1972 when cats and cows gave birth to kittens and calves on every wall of the exhibition – or in 1976 when the intricacy of threshing captured many imaginations and resulted in swirling, golden designs. Dozens of chain-stitched soldiers crossing the Canal were featured in 1974.

Miriam Azmi is typical of the women of the Centre. She has been embroidering pictures since 1968

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EGYPTIAN CINEMA

Mursi Saad El-Din

In 1925, efforts were made to produce full-length films, but it was only in 1927 that the first of such films was shown. It was *Layla*, made by Aziza Amir, a pioneer in the film world in Egypt. At the same time, another film was made and shown, *A Kiss in the Desert*, by the Lama brothers, who were to contribute greatly to the development of the film industry in Egypt. They established their own studio in Cairo where they produced a number of successful films.

In 1929, Muhamed Karim, who was to become one of the leading film directors, made his first film, *Zeinab*, based on a novel by Egypt's leading writer Hussein Heikal. Of course, the films were silent, and it was not until 1930 that sound came in, having already been used in Europe and America since 1927. The Egyptian cinema owes its greatest strides to the introduction of the sound film, which revolutionised the industry. Whereas silent films made anywhere could be shown in many countries, the use of sound made it important to know the language of the film. This gave Arabic language films a superiority over imported films, and the Egyptian film began to flourish. Sound made it possible to include songs, an important form of entertainment in Egypt and the Arab world.

In 1934, Talaat Harb, a financial tycoon, started the Misr Theatre and Cinema Company which founded Studio Misr. The studio was a landmark in the history of the industry in Egypt, since it brought in up-to-date equipment as well as foreign experts. As René Jeanne and Charles Ford mention, the War years, 1939-44, saw a real flourishing of the Egyptian film industry. Studios were being built and many production companies were formed. At one moment there were 150 companies in existence, with a sum total of 70 full-length films being produced every year.

In 1939, a new kind of film emerged, typified by *Al-Azima* (willpower) made by Kamal Selim. Up to that time, most films had depended on song and dance and any attempts to make a film with some constructive aim was doomed to fail. *Al-Azima* departed from this rule, and although it did have some scenes of belly-dancing, it had a serious content, and the dancing

EGYPTIAN THEATRE

Mursi Saad El-Din

The theatre in Egypt has a great tradition behind it, probably one of the oldest in the Middle East. Of course I am referring to modern times Drama certainly existed in ancient times in Egypt, as is witnessed by mural paintings on temples, but if one wants to fix a date for the beginning of the theatre in modern Egypt, it would be the year 1869. In that year, an Egyptian writer Yacoub Sanwaa, decided to initiate a theatre. Sanwaa had studied in Italy where he learned French and Italian and became interested in drama. He began to translate and adapt a number of plays, and because of his love for comedy, Moliere was the first writer he translated.

Sanwaa was also a journalist and he produced the first magazine with cartoons, *Abbu Naddara*. This magazine became the forum for criticism of the Khedive and of corruption in the country. It was closed down a number of times and eventually Sanwaa was exiled to Paris.

When Sanwaa started up his theatre, he decided that he could convey his ideas better through comedy than through any other dramatic form. Apart from his translations, he presented a number of plays he himself had written. The plays were shown at the open-air Ezbekia Theatre, which had been devoted to foreign companies performing for foreign communities. The first play Sanwaa wrote was in the nature of vaudeville and, through some of his influential friends, he was able to present it in the Khedival Court. It was a comedy and Sanwaa managed to evoke laughter from the pashas and the beys who formed his audience. The success of this play led him to show it at the Ezbekia Theatre.

When he began to form his own troupe, he was faced with the problem of getting female performers. Initially young boys used to play these roles, until he managed to persuade two poor and needy girls whom he taught to read and write, to join his compnay.

The first performance at the Ezbekia Theatre was a great success. It was attended by leading personalities in the Court and the Government and was seen by over three thousand spectators. Sanwaa's philosophy was to make people laugh. He used colloquial Arabic to present satire and pointed anecdotes, directed against various

not just thrown in with no significance. The film was a great success and it heralded the birth of realism in the Egyptian cinema. From that time onwards Egyptian films have been preoccupied with the day-to-day issues and problems of society.

Following Kamal Selim, a succession of film directors followed the same line of realism: Salah Abu Seif, with his film *Foreman Hassan*, Kamal el-Sheikh with *House No.131*, and Yusuf Shahin with *Papa Amin*. Shahin achieved real fame with his film *Bab el-Hadid* (Cairo Railway Station). Another name that should be mentioned in this context is Tewfik Saleh, who made *Idiot's Alley*. Then came Hussein Kamal, Khalil Shawky and others. According to the official statistics, the average annual film production from 1945 was 50, rising some years later to 69 films.

In the heyday of the Egyptian cinema, during and after the second World War there must have been about 150 film production companies and many substandard films were brought out. The quality and type of film were dictated by the distributor. This may need some explanation. Most of the production companies had what one might call a sleeping partner. That sleeping partner was none other than the distributor, whose sole qualification was his money. He was usually a banker or a trader who was ready to lend money on the security of the film. He was also the sole distributor of the films he financed, not only in Egypt but also in other Arab countries which had no film industry of their own. Of course he was in a position to dictate his conditions, which were high interest on the loan, a percentage for distribution and the inclusion of songs and belly-dancing in most of the films, the latter nearly always completely out of context.

As a result, there was semi-chaos in the film industry. One of the first things the 1952 Revolution did in the field of the arts was to establish a big company with a large production capacity; hence the formation of the Nile Cinema Company with capital distributed by a certain number of active small producers. That reflected a realisation on the part of the Revolution of the value of the film and its impact on the people. But unfortunately the company, after producing films of a fairly high quality, had to cease its activities after two years.

The Government, still aware of the importance of films, created a Producers Aid Organisation in 1958, which, after a number of changes and reorganisation, became the Cinema Organisation, under the Ministry of Culture. The Organisation aimed at combining a number of production and distribution companies, being solely responsible for film production. The Organisation aimed at combining a number of production and distribution companies, being solely responsible for film production. The Organisation produced a number of prestige films which were of very high quality. Later it was merged with the theatre sector to become the Egyptian Organisation of Cinema and Theatre, still later to be separated against into one for the cinema and the other for the theatre.

The Egyptian film industry can claim a number of successful film directors who were able to create their own style and, in the case of some, to stand up to international standards. Some of them were the

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characters in Egyptian society. The first butt of his satire was those Egyptians who blindly imitated Europeans, then he attacked greedy traders, and eventually the political situation, lampooning British interference in the internal affairs of Egypt, and foreign economic control of Egyptian resources. His theatre can be described as comic, ethical and nationalist.

It was natural that eventually the authorities would feel the effect of his plays. When the Khedive called him to perform in the Palace, Sanwaa chose three plays. The first two passed with no problems and the Khedive was so delighted that he called Sanwaa 'the Moliere of Egypt'. When the third play was performed however - it was a skit on polygamy - the Khedive was offended, since he thought it was a satire against himself and his harem.

As well as being the author of his plays, Sanwaa was the leading actor, manager, director and owner of the theatre. He was the first to create what has come to be called 'the political theatre', which, in a way, was his undoing. When he presented *The Nation and Liberty*, in which he poked fun at John Bull, the British were upset. They convinced the Khedive that the plays carried the seeds of subversion, and he gave orders for the theatre to be closed and Sanwaa to be deported.

A number of other companies followed, both for comedy and drama generally: Selim Naqqash, Abu Khalil el Kabbany, Salama Hegazi and others. One of the artists of the time deserves special mention: George Abiad, who studied acting in Paris and returned to Egypt in 1911, bringing with him a French troupe which, for some time, presented French plays. It was in 1914 that George Abiad formed a company specialising in tragedy, mostly French and English, but performed in Arabic. George Abiad's *Othello* was his *piece de resistance* and he continued to perform it until his death in the fifties. Aziz Eid, an actor in his company, was to form his own company in 1915, again to specialise in comedy. It included a number of actors who were later to become the master comedians of Egypt, Stefan Rustum, Hassan Fayek and, of course, Naguib el Rihany, who was to establish the genuine comedy theatre which achieved great success and attracted steady audiences.

Rihany in turn formed his own company and was the star, director, and part-author of the plays performed. What characterised Rihany's theatre was its ability to go deep into Egyptian society, from the sublime to the ridiculous. Perhaps his own life can best describe his threatre: he was a beachcomber who literally slept in the streets, passing hungry days and cold nights, but he also made a fortune and lived in the best hotels. Rihany lost money as quickly as he gained it, and many a time was declared bankrupt.

But he was able to depict Egyptian life and his characters reflected different types and different walks of life. Rihany was a great comedian who was able to evoke laughter, but could also make his audiences weep. It would not be an exaggeration to compare him to Charlie Chaplin. Rihany created character roles, not only for himself but also for other members of his company. These character types appeared in almost all his plays: the spoilt aristocratic youth, the stupid rich man, the insolent housemid, the co-

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Musical Life in Egypt

Samha El-Kholy

The Egyptians have an inborn passion for music. This nation, which has one of the oldest cultures of the world, has shown abundant proof of the love of Egyptians for music. Reliefs and paintings dating back to the Pharaonic Old Kingdom show all three types of musical instruments – percussion, string and wind – being practised by ancient Egyptians in different aspects of their daily life. They even had their own early concept of a musical group, comprising a singer who led the group with cheironomic (hand) movements, a *nay* (wind instrument) and a harp player.

Throughout the history of Egypt, and across the five millennia, this love of music has gathered impetus. In every era, new cultures and musical influences came to enrich Egyptian music. The Arab conquest, and later the Ottoman and other cultures, left their mark. Out of the fusion of Arabic, Turkish and Persian musical influences, there emerged an Egyptian musical art, an Egyptian brand of the common musical language of the Islamic Arab world: namely the traditional Arab art music of Egypt.

Traditional Arab music, together with folkmusic, are the main constituents of music in Egypt. In both cases, our music is purely monodic, i.e., uses only melody and rhythm (with very few exceptions of certain types of folk music where heterophony and simple polyphony are practised). Its melodies are based on modes, and not the scales of the major-minor system of the West. Each mode has its peculiar arrangement of intervals, and hence its special mood or atmosphere. The modes are either diatonic, i.e., consisting of whole and semitones, or special combinations of them, such as the augmented second, which is widely used in many typical modes, such as Hijaz and its derivatives, or they contain the so-called neutral third, or the "three-quarter-tone" interval. To simplify this, let us say that the basic scale of Arab music has a flattened third and seven degrees; that is, the third note of the scale is a neutral third which is halfway between the minor and the major third. To Western ears this might sound odd, but to us it is the essence of the Arabic modality, and the most characteristic feature of our traditional music.

Arab traditional music, as practised in Egypt, is very rich in modes. The first International Music Conference held in Cairo in 1932 counted more than a hundred modes. Each has its name and its own specific arrangement of intervals which creates its special psychological atmosphere. In the early fifties, however, there arose a marked tendency to simplification, by classifying the modes used in Egypt, according to their basic types, to nine only.

Arab traditional music is likewise rich in rhythms. There are "rhythmic modes", that is, complete units of rhythm, based on a succession of strong and weak beats and arranged in special ways, or modes. Some of the most interesting rhythmic modes consist of an uneven number of beats to each unit or pattern, such as 5,7,9 or 13, to mention only a few of the most typical irregular rhythms of classical Arabic music. Our rhythms are cumulative, and are based on the marked differentiation between strong *dum* and weak *tak* beats.

Normally a "musical evening", as performed at ceremonies and in the homes of rich music lovers, consisted of a *Waslah*, that is, a suite of instrumental and vocal pieces all in the same mode. The main figure was the singer, accompanied by a *takht* – a small ensemble of virtuoso players on the lute, *qanun* (a zither-like instrument), violin, *nay* and a tambourine. A small chorus (of three or four male voices) used to accompany the singer, in the lengthy *waslah*, which usually continued for hours in a leisurely atmosphere. Nowadays, with the advent of the mass media, the performance of traditional Arab music has moved into concert halls or radio and television studios.

Numbers have been drastically augmented, from the classical five-member *takht* to a huge ensemble of many violins, lutes, two *qanuns*, one or two cellos and even a double-bass.

The chorus has also expanded from the older *bitana* or four or five to something like thirty members – a somewhat controversial development unjustified in the presence of the microphones and sound systems used lavishly in concerts of traditional Arab music.

There are two important ensembles of traditional Arab music in Cairo today. One is the State Ensemble, which forms part of the Sector of Music of the Ministry of Culture, the Musical Director of this instrumental and vocal ensemble being Abdel-Halim Nuweira. The other is the Um-Kalthum Ensemble, which is formed of graduates and students of the Institute of Arab music – one of the seven institutes (or faculties) of the Academy of Arts in Cairo, which is university for the performing arts. The conductor of the Um Kalthum Ensemble is Hussein Geneid. Each ensemble gives two regular public concerts of instrumental and vocal music each month at the Sayed Darwish concert hall of the Academy of Arts. These concerts are always full to capacity. Most of their performances are recorded for radio and television and are used in weekly programmes specialising in Arab music.

There has been a marked revival of interest in traditional Arab art-music in Egypt, following a period of decadence in the forties and fifties. Nowadays, *mouwashshahat*, a very old vocal form, and adwar, have regained their place in the musical consciousness of the general public.

This heritage of art-music has been handed down by oral tradition, and shows the rich variety of detail that a piece can acquire through the process of oral transmission from master to disciple. However, in the last six or seven decades a musical notation of Arab art-music has been evolved in Egypt and many Arab countries, especially since the foundation of music institutes which provide tuition in Arab art-music.

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Cairo Seminar on the Modern Muslim Metropolis

The challenge of the modern Muslim metropolis in the face of the urban explosion in the Third World will be the theme for a Seminar in Cairo being organised by the Aga Khan Award for Architecture, in November 1984, the 9th in a series of seminars initiated six years ago.

The first seminar held by the Aga Khan Award for Architecture was entitled "Toward an Architecture in the Spirit of Islam" (Paris, April 1978), and was above all the establishment of a dialogue which would often and fondly be referred to by the participants in the years to follow. Through it were addressed the questions of the specificity and universality of Islamic traditions and the necessary aspects of regionalism in architecture, the conflicts between traditional tenets and foreign influences. Amongst the participants, who comprised architects, planners, sociologists, historians, engineers and journalists, were those who stressed the importance of perceiving past identity to clarify the elements which are characteristically Islamic, and of combining rational building processes with internal spirituality. Though the focus of debate was a search for definitions of Islamic architecture, other issues which are central to the Award were raised, including low-cost housing, urban planning, legislation and conservation. With the conclusion of the first seminar, participants felt convinced of the far-reaching reality that no single definition, no school of architecture, is exclusively applicable to the search for an appropriate environment - that Islamic architecture has reflected different peoples, different climates, different times and materials.

The process of search had begun and would have to proceed step by step, remaining open to the many facets of Islam and the realities of today. Yet, there was a generally felt need for urgency: Throughout the Islamic world there is a thirst for the images of modernity, of material progress - the symbols of power - while the treasures of our past are being destroyed. The second Award seminar was held in Istanbul in September 1978 to confront this problem under the theme, "Conservation as Cultural Survival". In it were highlighted the concerns which the Award shared with a number of organisations including the Islamic Arts Foundation and UNESCO. Conservation was conceived not as an isolated, nostalgic undertaking, but as a logical step in the evaluation of changes in the environment as a whole. As a cultural decision in the face of financial constraints, conservation must rely on increasing public awareness to find an answer to a question voiced by the Aga Khan: "Should we allow future generations of Muslims to live without the self-respect of our cultural and spiritual symbols of power?",and to share His Highness' convictions of the need for "conservation projects to squarely face the complex human problems produced by environmental change". The strategic possibilities of the Award were stressed in this respect, since premiation could reinforce the role of any of the institutions which attempted a positive approach to conservation and adaptive re-use. A number of cases were studied including those of Makkah, Mina, Arafat and Fez, viewing the projects in terms of spatial arrangements, institutions, living conditions, water and sewage systems, commercial areas, transportation and demographic growth. In many cases, it was found that present planning regulations were inadequate to restrain ongoing destruction and that success would require the concept of conservation to fit into larger programmes of rehabilitation. The endemic inferiority complex perceptible in many Islamic countries would have to be faced with legislative, educational and financial inducement.

Just as conservation was seen as part of a larger environmental and programmatic context, the third international seminar focused on the planning and design of the housing environment. The seminar "Housing, Process and Physical Form", held in March 1979 in Jakarta, not only focused upon low-cost housing, of such crucial concern to governments of the so-called "lesser developed countries" but highlighted the widespread use of parameters developed almost exclusively outside those countries. What distinguished this particular Seminar from others on housing was its focus on the Islamic context: Within the concepts of identity, roles and final products, the question of the "Islamic nature" of housing in the Muslim world poses many interesting problems. The cities and neighbourhoods in the Islamic world did have a common character defined by the tenets of the faith: cooperation, community outlook and privacy have all been cited as determinants of the physical particularities of its housing.

Many of the participants had never visited Indonesia and gained enormously from the experience. The site visits, including those hosted by local communities, offered most of them a new perspective of housing in the Muslim world. In the words of the Aga Khan, the opportunity to explore this field in the most populous country in the Muslim world helped to find "ways in which the Award for housing can encourage planners to seek new means of solving this great contemporary dilemma".

If the task of the architect is to create an environment which is identifiable by a society as its own, then contemporary building sets a challenge for the profession of identifying, understanding and creating forms which are at once new and familiar. The fourth seminar attempted to outline those aspects of architectural history which would be useful for the architect. Entitled "Architecture as Symbol and Self-Identity", it was held in Fez in October 1979 with participants including historians, sociologists, a philosopher, an anthropologist, a teacher and specialists in cultural affairs from countries as diverse as Afghanistan and Canada. It sought, in the wider anthropological sense, to indicate those areas of Islamic sciences and philosophy which could provide the cultural background, methods of observation and social sciences which could adequately characterise attitudes towards space and buildings in contemporary Islamic societies.

The study of symbolism within forms of Islamic architecture shows that, in regional traditions, there is a tendency to repeat particular forms and signs. Some of these were identified in the course of the Seminar, permitting the observation of formal and stylistic variations. The range of inscriptions on a minaret, for example, provides evidence that individual monuments may have several different levels of significance. What valid directives this can provide for the assessment of architecture in its historical as well as contemporary context was a question which concerned both the social scientist and the scholar of Islamic philosophy. In Fez, as in many other cities, particular social groups had created the urban environment. Not only the buildings, but the open public spaces, the streets and houses held a variety of references and memories. Now that new groups inhabit these built environments, are the buildings and urban forms merely a part of an old social contract, or do they have meanings transferable to the new dwellers?

In recent years, many countries in the Islamic world have emerged as sovereign nations and with this came the desire to symbolise achievements through commemorative monuments, government buildings, national mosques, and whole new capitals. The seminar in Amman, Jordan, held in May 1980 on "Places of Public Gathering in Islam", dealt with a variety of such complexes and explored several of the background issues which shape them. Three general categories of public spaces were considered: places of an educational nature; places for recreational and touristic use; and commercial and institutional places. Historically, most Muslim settlements represented a holistic integration of functions within the urban form. Contemporary towns and cities, however, have tended to develop specialised complexes. The discussions therefore tackled two basic issues in our societies: Islam and change - a renewed understanding of and its relationship to contemporary political and economic realities which will give rise to the Muslim architecture of the future.

These five seminars were held prior to the presentation of the first Awards in 1980. Through a stimulating dialogue between scholars and experts, there emerged a conceptual base for the Award's search.

At the beginning of the second three-year Award cycle, the series of seminars resumed with the sixth Award seminar, on the theme "The Changing Rural Habitat", was held in October 1981 in the People's Republic of China. Hosted by the Architectural Society of China, it addressed an area of paramount importance and which was underlined in the selection of the 1980 Award. The opportunity to hold the event in China was welcomed as highly appropriate in view of the size of the country's rural population, 850 million at the time, including a significant Muslim minority in the North Western Province of Xinjiang, formerly Chinese Turkestan.

The scientific gathering dealt with the concepts of habitat as being both the dwelling, and the larger environment in which people reside, which involves the questions of utilities, roads, public buildings, places of work, the specific technologies for their realisations and the less tangible symbolic aspects. With these were discussed the "indirect" results of social actions including agricultural reclamation, foreign remittances and the slowly rising wealth of communes - circumstances within which individuals and families make choices about their dwellings and environment. The effect of direct intervention and foreign expertise were explored.

Since in rural situations architectural services are not usual, the architect may participate as in China in the design of building prototypes or in their adaptations to local needs, while allowing the participation of local people as well as of the administration and technicians.

Case studies from a variety of cultures were made ranging from Africa to South East Asia and a number of technical papers were presented on specific aspects of technology related to the problems and opportunities of rural area. Finally, in terms of ideology, the question of the rationales underlying the changes in the rural habitat were considered - how do organised religions, especially Islam in Muslim areas, influence attitudes towards change or impinge upon building and planning?

Following the symposium in Beijing, the Chinese hosts accompanied the foreign participants to several sites along the ancient Silk Route, westwards through central and northwestern China to Xian, Turfan, Urumchi and Kashgar where examples of rural architecture were seen and discussed.

From a focus on rural habitat in China, the Award's next seminar addressed the contemporary city in the Sahelian region of West Africa. Held in Dakar in November 1982, it was entitled "Reading the Contemporary African City". By "reading" an urban space was meant reflecting in a new and radical way upon the relationships, undeniable yet difficult to define, between the formal physical environment in which a community lives and the aesthetic, ethical and symbolic universe which this community organises to assert itself.

At the very outset, when one observes the outskirts of the large African cities such as Dakar, Casablanca and Nouakchott, one is struck by a feeling of wild, poorly controlled expansion. the population groups are uprooted and forced to put together a precarious existence from day to day, symbolised by salvaged materials and a life on the streets. It is difficult, indeed rare, to perceive urban policies dealing not just with construction plans for housing, but involving a pluri-disciplinary search for ways to think out the city in terms of emerging social relationships, cultural initiatives or political potentials. The centres and outskirts are experiencing the same crisis of existence: the break with symbolic support systems which are linked to religion and cultures, which are widely invested in the traditional house or village and which are not compensated for in contemporary development. Therefore, the immediate question which faced participants was - what is the importance of the urban tradition, and what can be its future significance?

The discussions went beyond a mere description of appearances or historical and sociological accounts, to obtain a grasp of the breaks with the past in order to explain situations which have been created and to identify the most urgent problems. Architecture, it was felt, should aim at reaching this level of critical analysis, of creative imagination and of integrated reflection. Dakar was chosen to allow the African voice to express itself beyond the particular field of Islamic tradition.

The fundamental authenticity and diversity of cultural life, of which the built environment is a tangible component, define the identity of a community. The objectives of the Aga Khan Award for Architecture are based upon the preservation of that identity in the fact of profound and accelerated transformations affecting the Islamic world, and it was on this major issue that the eighth seminar was held in Sana'a in May 1983. Yemen provided a uniquely appropriate setting to consider "The Impact of Development on Architecture and Urbanism", with its enormously rich architectural heritage, its sophisticated indigenous building forms shaped by the social, economic and ecological conditions of a traditional society over centuries.

The traditional architecture and urban patterns of Yemen are in danger of deterioration and even extinction. Since 1962, when the Government of Yemen Arab Republic was established, the country has evolved rapidly - with economic growth and increased communications with the outside world, a process of urbanisation and loss of agricultural self-sufficiency have created tremendous dependence on foreign investments and remittances from migrant labour. While mountain towns and villages are becoming depopulated, rapid urbanisation poses a serious threat to the fabric of cities, resulting in housing shortages, and in the indiscriminate use of modern construction technologies. The lack of infrastructures in Yemeni cities already provokes a deterioration of the quality

of life. The participants were given the opportunity to observe the impact of change in a series of site visits into tribal areas to the north of the capital and historic sites to the south. In the course of discussions and through a number of workshop sessions, were addressed questions such as: "What are the social forces which have given rise to modernisation in Yemen?"; "To which degree is this modernisation dependent upon the presence of foreign expatriates?"; "What are the existing symbols of modernity in Yemen?" "Where do these come into conflict with the existing environment?"; and "What are the appropriate roles for foreign experts and institutions, and according to what guidelines should they face the impact of development?".

This seminar, the first in the Award series to focus exclusively on one Muslim country, was the last to take place in the second cycle which culminated with the announcement of the Awards in Istanbul in September 1983.

Hitherto the Award has treated a number of themes in the preceding seminars it has organised: e.g. Conservation (Istanbul), Housing (Jakarta), Public Places (Amman), Symbolism (Fez), Rural Architecture (Beijing), Modernity and Tradition (Sana'a).It has now been felt appropriate to consider tying together these various themes in the context of the complex metamorphoses presently overtaking and engulfing large Muslim cities. The prismatic nature of the issues, the multiplicity of the agencies dealing with various aspects of the problems, the legal and technical overlaps confronted in implementation, all argue for a reality where the whole is more than the sum of the parts. While it was wise for the Award to avoid confronting the totality during its first six years of existence, there is now enough body of thought developed in previous seminars on various individual aspects of the problem to make it timely and appropriate to confront a very pertinent issue : the challenge of the modern Muslim metropolis in the face of the urban explosion in the Third World.

The choice of a whole metropolitan area, rather than solely its historical quarters, has been preferred. Indeed, it is in the rapidly expanding cities where the battles of modernisation and historic conservation tend to be most acute and where the Islamic architectural heritage is most endangered.

Cairo has been selected as the logical candidate for such a seminar. It is itself the prime laboratory for observing the conflicting forces of modernity and tradition, progress and decay at work. The unique Islamic cultural heritage of the historic Cairo, as well as its pre-eminence as the largest city in Africa and the Middle East have argued in favour of its selection as both subject and venue for the forthcoming ninth Award seminar in November 1984.

The seminar participants will examine the main issues related to Cairo's rapid urban expansion such as : conservation, rehabilitation, contemporary architectural expression, housing, public utilities, transport, land-use, institutional mechanisms, demographic growth, and new towns policies. The examples of Bombay, Casablanca, Islamabad, and Brazilia will also be presented. A number of workshops will focus on the future of Cairo taking into account projections and extrapolations of key trends in demography and socio-economic changes. Finally, the Egyptian National Institute for Urban Planning and the Department of Architecture, Cairo University, will undertake on behalf of the Award, photographic surveys of significant buildings constructed between 1920 and 1960. The results of these surveys will be exhibited during the seminar.

The tenth and final seminar in the Award's present cycle (1984-86) will deal with architectural education in the Islamic world and is scheduled to take place in the autumn of 1985 in Seville, Spain. ■



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Baku and the First International Carpet Symposium

Baku, capital of the Azerbaidzhan SSR, is situated on a magnificent, crescent-shaped bay. Hills rising steeply almost from the water's edge form a natural amphitheatre, gracefully framing the city against the sky. The drama of the setting inevitably invites comparison with that other city-on-a-bay, Naples - to Baku's advantage.

Today Baku is a major industrial centre, fifth largest city in the USSR. Little more than a century ago, however, it was still a sleepy little oriental town. Its tangled skein of narrow, evil-smelling streets assailed the senses and bewildered the stranger. Low-roofed houses huddled against domed and minareted mosques. Blank mud walls hid the cool, secret courtyards from curious eyes.

Then, suddenly, towards the end of the last century this was all changed. The transformation that turned Baku into a bustling, modern city was due to its vast reserves of one precious commodity: oil. As world demand grew, the oil industry flourished and speculators of all nationalities hurried to Baku. Land prices soared and fortunes were made and lost overnight.

Foreign investors such as Nobel and Rothschild gave their names to whole areas of the city. Vast factory complexes sprang up in the grimy 'Black Town', palatial mansions for the new millionaires in the residential 'White Town'. Baku was re-born as a city of parks and imposing public buildings, straight, wide streets and plate-glass and shop fronts.

Since then it has never ceased to grow and develop. Visually it is one of the most exciting Soviet cities, a living chronicle of changing styles and tastes. Outstanding historical monuments such as the 12th-century Maiden's Castle and the 15th-century Palace of the Shirvanshahs co-exist with extraordinary late 19th-century extravagances of Venetian Gothic and 'Hispano-Moresque'. Some of the best examples of 1920s Constructivism are found here, as well as its most impressive [illegible]



An Afgan runner, 300cm by 110cm

ture.

In some cities these contrasts might jar, but Baku has a genius for synthesis. Traditionally a meeting place of different cultures, it unites rather than divides.

It was very much in this spirit that Baku recently played host to the International Symposium on the Art of the Oriental Carpet. The Symposium, which took place on September 5-11, 1982, was organised by the Ministry of Culture and the Academy of Sciences of the Azerbaidzhan SSR, with the assistance of UNESCO. Over 120 delegates, as well as a large number of observers, attended. About one third of the delegates came from abroad, including sizeable contingents from America, Britain, France, Switzerland and Turkey.

It was the first event of its kind to be held in the USSR and its success will surely ensure that it is not the last. It provided a unique opportunity for scholars and carpet-lovers from all over the world to meet and discuss matters of mutual interest. Such informal contacts are invaluable, often the basis for more formal co-operation at a later date.

Three days were set aside for the presentation of papers. It soon became apparent, though, that the volume of material was far too great to be encompassed within that time. Delegates agreed to confine themselves to brief summaries of their papers which will, in due course, be published in full.

The central preoccupation of the Symposium was 'Azerbaidzhani Carpet-Making and its Relation to Carpet-Making in Other Areas'. It was a flexible enough subject to allow a wide variety of questions to be examined.

A number of papers concentrated on the description of Azerbaidzhani carpets in particular collections. N. Chenciner (London)'s 'Azerbaidzhani Carpets in the Victoria and Albert Museum' aroused particular interest, since in addition to describing the carpets, he produced maps to show the ancient trade routes; most of these maps were previously unknown to his audience.

Problems of technique and style received much attention. D. Tsintsadzé (Tbilisi)'s 'Raising of the Carpet-Maker's Role in the Creation of Carpets' reflected the knowledge of some sixty years of painstaking research into the craft of carpet-making. Of the papers which considered historical questions, J. Franses (London)'s 'Ardebil Carpet in the Victoria and Albert Museum' was welcome for its re-examination of the vexed origin of this famous carpet in the light of historical evidence.

The sheer beauty of great carpets is such that one easily forgets that they are, in fact, commercial products. A. Abbasov (Krovebat)'s 'Azerbaidzhan Carpets on Internal and Foreign Markets (18th and Early 20th Centuries)' was a timely reminder of the

economic aspect of the carpet trade.

Intellectual stimulation was not all the Symposium had to offer. The participants were royally entertained throughout. There were concerts of folk and classical music, displays of dancing and magnificent feasts of local specialities - shashlyk, pilau, many sorts of fish and, by no means least, glistening bowls of black caviar from the Caspian.

A number of excursions were organised to places of interest outside Baku. These were of special value, for they gave the visitors a chance to see new and often unsuspected facets of Azerbaidzhan's rich, immensely ancient cultural heritage. The prehistoric rock carvings at Kobystan, for example, bear a curious resemblance to some of the stylised figures on the local rugs. The magical palace of Sheki, on the other hand, is the embodiment of the luxury and refinement that prompted the manufacture of some of the finest specimens of the weaver's art. The Fireworshippers' Temple, built by Indian traders in the 18th century, adds yet another strand to the extraordinary mix that is Azerbaidzhan.

All the Symposium participants were given copies of publications connected with the event. The major work was the second and third volume of Latif Kerimov's detailed and highly personal study of the Azerbaidzhani carpet. Himself a carpet-maker of extraordinary dexterity and inventiveness, he brings to the subject the experience of the craftsman as well as the knowledge of the scholar. Since it is, unfortunately, very difficult to acquire books of this sort outside the Soviet Union, the foreign visitors were particularly delighted with such an impressive gift.

Perhaps the most important achievement of this Symposium was its legacy of cordiality and the desire for greater international co-operation in the future. It was a significant first step. The next will be to ensure that the initial momentum is not lost. ■

Shirin Akiner

Symposium on Oriental Carpets

Report from a Soviet participant

The First International Symposium on Oriental Carpets, held in Baku, capital of Soviet Azerbaidzhan, in September 1983, was attended by distinguished scholars and art-lovers from 57 countries. Amongst them were B.V. Veimarn, Member of the Academy of Arts of the USSR (Moscow), L.N. Tsitsishvili, art critic (Tbilisi), Karol Gombosh, Director of the Budapest Museum of Decorative Arts (Budapest), Lyudmila Kibalova, carpet expert (Prague), Robert Pinner, editor of *Hali* (London), Jack Franses, Director of the Islamic Department Sotheby's (London), Richard Wright, art expert (USA), Oktay Aslapana, Nurhan Atasoy and Faruk Sumer, professors of history (Istanbul), Irfan Nasrattinoglu, folklore and carpet expert (Ankara) and many others. Representatives from Azerbaidzhan itself included Latif Kerimov, Najiba Abdullayeva and Kyubra Aliyeva.

The main themes of the Symposium were: a) the proposition that the history and traditions of the ancient art of carpet-making require a more profound approach than has hitherto been the case; b) the consideration of how this unique art form is to be preserved and developed by future generations. The focal point of the Symposium was carpet-making through the ages in Azerbaidzhan. Many interesting papers were presented on all aspects of these questions.



A Kazakh rug, 244cm by 142cm

The final plenary session was attended by A.M.M'Bow, Director General of UNESCO. He expressed his appreciation of the invitation to attend the Symposium and to participate in its activities. He was, he told the Presidium of the Supreme Council and Government of Azerbaidzhan, happy to visit a region so full of ancient traditions and present prosperity, the home of such a high level of cultural attainment. On behalf of UNESCO, he gratefully accepted the gift of a magnificent carpet, woven by Latif Kerimov, which depicted the portrait of Ajmi Nakhichevani, a medieval architect.

During the Symposium, exhibitions were held in many parts of the town. The former Juma Masjid, now the Carpet Museum, had a display of carpets representing particular themes. Amongst the pile and flat-weave carpets of the 19th and early 20th century were examples of the types *Ashi* ('Horses and Dogs') and *Develi* ('Camels') from the Karabakh region, and the 'Four Seasons', 'Dervish' and 'Khayyam with the Beloved' from Tebriz. There were also some large modern carpets by Latif Kerimov, depicting the 12th century-poet Nizami of Gandzha. Latif Kerimov, who has been honoured by the title 'People's Artist of Azerbiadzhan', is the most renowned carpet-maker in the USSR today; he specializes in realistic imagery, skilfully executed to convey a wealth of emotion.

In the Archaeological Centre, situated in the former fortress, there was a fascinating exhibition of objects connected with weaving and an actual display of young weavers at work. The Art Gallery concentrated on pile carpets of the 18th-20th centuries. There was a rich variety of design and colour to be seen. The most striking of all, however, were the elegant products of Kuba, Baku and Shirvan, with the delicate ornamentation that is so typical of the 'Pirebedil', 'Zelve', 'Fyndygan', 'Surakhany', 'Kyurdadamir' and 'Pirgasanly'. Some of the exhibits had come from museums in other parts of the USSR and one of the most notable of these was the Baku carpet from the State Museum of Moscow; dated 1801, it bears the inscription *Karkhanae Hile*

It was not the museums alone that put on special displays for the foreign visitors. The whole of the old 'Inner City' was decorated for the occasion, its balconies and windows hung with multi-coloured carpets. In the 'Caravan Saray' there were folk songs and dances, while the bazaar was alive with all the noise and verve of a true oriental market. Hand-made embroideries, carpets and jewelry vied for attention with traditional sweetmeats such as *shekerchorek*, *shekerbury*, paklava and sherbet. Excursions to the ancient cities of Sheki and Gandzha showed yet other aspects of Azerbaidzhan's great cultural heritage.



A Pirbedil rug, 190cm by 145cm



A Kazakh rug, 203cm by 132cm

The Symposium was further marked by the publication of the second and third volumes of Latif Kerimov's monumental work *The Azerbaidzhani Carpet. The Wisdom of the Carpet*, by the poet Anar, and pamphlets on *Flat-weave Carpets* (K. Aliyeva), *Decorative Processing of Metal* (N. Abdullayeva and S. Asadova) and *Stone Plastics* (R. Efendiyeva) also appeared in time to coincide with the Symposium.

The comments of two participants sum up the feelings of many. I. Starodubov, from the editorial staff of the Fine Arts and Architecture section of the publishing house 'Soviet Encyclopedia', said, 'For me, the Symposium will live on like an ancient oriental fairy-tale'. Jack Franses of Sotheby's (London) underlined the importance of the event; he explained, 'It's gratifying that the working sessions are accompanied by the exhibitions, thus giving a deep understanding of the process of development of the art of the carpet in Azerbaidzhan'.

The peaceful, joyous and eternally youthful nature of carpet-making was emphasized by Latif Kerimov. Comrade K.M. Bagirov, First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Azerbaidzhan made a similar point in his reply to the speech by Mr. M'Bow, the Director General of UNESCO, when he stressed that the people of Azerbaidzhan considered it an honour to be able to organise the International Symposium on Oriental Carpets, since its objectives were not only to study the problems of carpet-making, but to serve the course of peace and friendship among all the nations of the world.

A resolution was passed, agreeing to hold another international Symposium on the Azerbaidzhani Carpet, in Baku in 1987.

Adapted from report by K. Aliyeva, member of the Institute of Art and Architecture, Azerbaidzhan Academy of Sciences, Baku. ■

Egyptian Theatre
Continued from page 63

quettish girl, the native with his special turban, the old and cunning *effendi* and the old Turkish woman. Yet underlying this Egyptian veneer, Rihany's plays were basically taken from French models. What he managed to do, and quite successfully, was to Egyptianise these characters and to breathe Egyptian life into them.

Another great figure in the development of the Egyptian theatre was Yussuf Wahbi. The son of a rich aristocrat, Wahbi shocked his family by choosing acting as a profession. He went to Italy, where he studied acting, and on his return formed his Ramses Company, which was to become a landmark in the history of the theatre. He also built Ramses City, which was a complex designed for a variety of performances and entertainments. Ramses Company became a kind of drama school where most of Egypt's famous artists made their debut.

It was after the 1952 revolution that the theatre, like all other cultural manifestations, experienced a great change, not only in dramatic themes, but in its very structure. With the establishment of a Ministry of Culture and a Supreme Council of Arts and Literature, the State began its intervention and control of cultural life, including, naturally, the theatre. After experimenting with different kinds of controls, an Organisation for Theatre and Music was created in 1959 as a part of the Ministry of Culture. The Organisation was responsible for the National Troupe and the Cairo Symphony Orchestra, but in the same year new companies were created: the Cairo Puppet Theatre, the National Folk Dance Troupe, then in 1960 the Musical Theatre.

Other theatres followed, in 1962 the Pocket Theatre came into being with the aim of presenting both local and world experimental plays

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Parvin's Work at Medici Gallery

Parvin Iftikhar Ali, wife of Pakistan's ambassador to the USSR generally spends most mornings painting before fulfilling her diplomatic duties. This is no hobby. She is one of Pakistan's contemporary artists with a firmly established international reputation having exhibited all over the world - from Montreal and Monte Carlo to Moscow, Bonn and Berlin. Her first one woman exhibition in London has just closed at the Medici Gallery in Grafton Street.

Colour, colour and more colour; vibrant singing colours beloved of the Impressionists, eloquent brushwork, economy of line, are the "hallmark" of



her work. She is "thirsty" for colour, she says. She eats, sleeps and lives colour.

And it is these colours - her semi-abstract paintings are awash with them - which make first impact. The canvases almost leap out of their frames demanding attention.

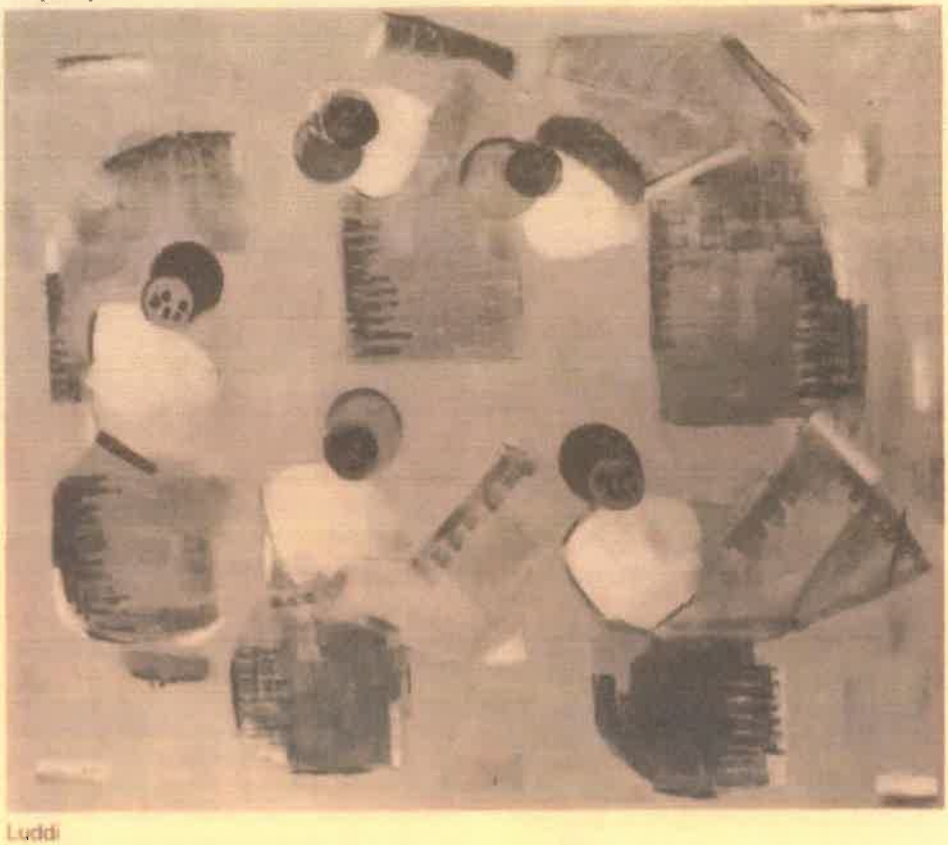
Then there is the content which is diverse. She captures, for instance, the marvellous fluid, swirling movements of Khattak dancers with such accuracy that you can almost see the cloud of dust kicked up by their thudding feet. Your nostrils almost tickle from the dust.

In a townscape of Lahore, a red muddle of buildings, there is the feeling of heat and city smells, while with a large canvas of daffodils, a positive riot of yellows, the immediate thought is of Spring, as evocative to the viewer as Wordsworth's golden "host" is to the reader.

Parvin Iftikhar Ali has painted all over the world from Bonn where she painted the daffodils after visiting a garden exhibition - to Turkey and Tunis. Wherever her husband's diplomatic postings take the family; they have four children, she sets up her



"Gupshup"



Luddi

studio. The bulk of the work in the London exhibition was painted in Moscow where they have been for the last three years.

Scenes from her native Pakistan are rarely far from her mind. She paints from memory. Memories of village women such as in "Gupshap," sitting in their saris in the cool of the morning chatting after their husbands have gone to work.

The blues and cool greens in this painting beautifully portray the calm grace and serenity of these women with their children gathered round them. There is the same sense of peace in her painting "Sindhi Village".

In stark total contrast are her paintings of refugees. Sad huddles of figures which spell out all too clearly the terrible pathos of their plight. Thousands of refugees are flooding into Pakistan annually from Afghanistan, she says, and her childhood memories of refugees at the time of the creation of Pakistan are all still very vivid.

In the last decade, she has tended to paint even more colourfully. This is to compensate for the lack of her native sunshine in the drabber, colder climes of Canada, Germany and latterly, Moscow.

Parvin Iftikhar Ali, was born in Multan, educated in the Punjab, and studied art in Egypt, Tunis, London and Washington where she worked with the American artist Jack Perlmutter.

Her work very much reflects her international "globetrotting." But not perhaps surprisingly, a colourful canvas of her birthplace, Multan, was included in the London exhibition. Multan is known as the city of saints and tombs and dust and the sunny dustiness of the place is vibrantly caught. It is in striking contrast to the tranquil townscape of Samarkand, all blues and cool greens again and bright whites.

As with the Khattak dancers of the Khyber Pass, her intense sense of rhythm and the movements of the human body are graphically depicted in a painting entitled Luddi. This is a dance done by local women in Pakistan at harvest time. Her lines emphasise their innate grace in this celebration dance.

Anyone seeing her work for the first time will be fascinated by her approach to faces. She only paints the eyes. The eyes are the mirror of the soul, she says, and you can tell everything about a person by their eyes.

Another highly individual aspect of her paintings are the figures she often paints just in one or two corners of a canvas. The rest is blank. The effect arresting. It is as though they are walking into the picture and out of it.

This is Parvin Iftikhar Ali a keen student of philosophy, symbolises people passing through the Life in general.

David Black Oriental Carpets: Flatweaves from Fjord and Forest

Oriental influence on Scandinavian Tapestries

David Black Oriental Carpets are well known as an innovatory gallery with a remarkable ability for finding neglected types of Islamic textiles. In this vein their annual major exhibition has in the past included such notable successes as The Undiscovered Kelim and The Unappreciated Dhurrie which together with their early attention to tribal rugs and embroideries has had a very considerable influence on collectors' taste and on the Islamic rug market generally. The neglected textile types exhibited by the Gallery have invariably rocketed in price in a manner that few investment brokers seem able to equal. This year the gallery continues its bold policy by exhibiting Flatweaves from Fjord and Forest: a display of Scandinavian tapestries of the 18th and 19th centuries.

As usual the exhibition is accompanied by an illustrated catalogue with excellent colour plates and descriptions of weaving and dying techniques. Undoubtedly it will be an essential addition to any serious collector's library. Yet such a collection might reasonably expect to have something of the background history and iconography of these charming folk pieces existing in such conspicuous lacking.

Indeed, reading Flatweaves from Fjord and Forest one might gain the impression that Peter Willoord, who wrote the text, and Black and Loveless who edited it are indifferent to the essential fact that these objects are strongly indebted to Islamic prototypes. (In fact an historical section to the book was commissioned but was not ready at the deadline for printing. This is regrettable for material of great interest to oriental rug collectors has thereby been omitted). In particular the painstaking research of Agnes Geijer, for many years head of the textile department of the Central Council of Antiquities in Stockholm is scarcely acknowledged, though her important work, Textilkonstens Historia, Lund 1980 does rate an entry in the bibliography, which consists of 14 titles in Scandinavian languages. One might have expected the editors to have indicated that this crucial publication is available in English in a revised edition



Flamskvav, Sweden. Circa 1800. 99cm by 48cm

entitled A History of Textile Art published by the Pasold Research Fund in association with Sotheby Parke Bernet in 1979. Geijer's hypothesis is one that anybody interested in the history of trade between Christendom and the Islamic world will subscribe to - namely that Islamic objects, in this case fabrics, exercise considerable influence on domestic production.

Textiles are easy to transport, being lightweight, relatively impervious to damage and easily saleable and were therefore more frequently traded than any other commodity. Archaeological finds from the Viking age demonstrate that the Norsemen had a taste for magnificent foreign silks. Many of the

trading centre of Birka in central Sweden dating from about 800 to 975 AD contain silk fragments. Most of these appear to be Byzantine from the 7th century AD.

Harald Sigurdsson, (better known as Harald Hardradi or Harold the Ruthless to English history, killed by King Harold of England in 1066) was a Viking mercenary in the service of the Byzantine Emperors until he returned to Norway to claim the throne. His Saga written by the great Islandic historian Snorri Sturluson some one hundred and seventy years later demonstrates the remarkable internationalism of the Vikings. Harald led his Vikings in campaigns in Sicily, the Greek Islands and Palestine. The Byzantine Emperors had a personal Scandinavian bodyguard - the Varangian (Voeringjar) Guard, though after the Norman conquest of England, the English largely replaced the Scandinavians.

The Norsemen travelled by many routes to the East. The Chronicle of Nestor written during the 12th century at a monastery in Kiev tells the story of a Swede named Rurik who in 852 AD founded a domain which came to include the cities of Novgorod and Kiev. The Russian sources call the Swedes and their kingdom Rus. The Rus sailed down the Volkov to Novgorod which became a major trading centre. After a short overland passage, accomplished by rolling the longships on logs, they reached the Dnieper and so to the Black Sea and Constantinople.

The Rus also travelled down the Volga to the Khazar state on the Caspian. This brought them into contact with the Silk Route - linking China and the Near East.

Another route led from the Baltic through Poland by way of the Vistula or the Oder - a route which became popular in the 10th century when the eastern route became too hazardous. Indicative of the huge scale of this trade are the 60,000 Arab coins dating from the early 8th to the early 11th centuries AD found in Northern Europe. 30,000 coins minted by the Samanid dynasty of Eastern Iran were found in the important Viking trading port of Gotland. Kiev was captured by the Mongols in 1240 AD and the Golden Horde effectively sealed off Central Asia from the North for 300 years. The Scandinavian merchants adopted more westerly routes though contact remained with Muscovy and trade increased in the 16th century. The English and the Dutch became involved, the former with Chancellor's Muscovy Company and the latter founding Archangel in 1583 which subsequently became the main rival to the Baltic ports controlled by Sweden in the 17th century.

A Russo-Swedish treaty of 1557 provided that Swedish merchants might travel freely to Novgorod, Moscow, Khazan and Astrakhan and one of the principal aims of Swedish diplomacy until the 18th century was to gain control of all Oriental trade passing through Russia to Northern Europe. The trade in silk, usually from Persia, was a monopoly of the Tsar.

One of the oldest surviving Oriental carpets is the well known, early 15th century Marby carpet from a church in Northern Sweden. The demand for oriental carpets was very great throughout Northern Europe as can be seen in European paintings. What could be more understandable than that Northern craftsmen should try and emulate the patterns and colours of oriental carpets. The Victoria and Albert Museum has a knotted English carpet dated 1603 based on the so called "Holbein" group of Turkish carpets. Plate 5 in the exhibition catalogue - a small cushion cover dated to "pre-1878" has a medallion design with many resemblances to the Marby carpet. Visitors to the exhibition will enjoy finding other "Scandinavianised" Islamic carpet motifs and patterns.

Special impetus to a domestic fabric industry came from the efforts of Gustav Vasa in the 17th century to check the financial drain caused by the extensive purchase of luxury fabrics and with this mind he encouraged sheep farming and embroidered cloth production. In the 18th century this industry was protected by tariffs and subsidies. The majority occupation of Sweden from the Medieval period until the 1900s was farming and cloth production by the women became an important supplement to the family income, based on techniques and patterns, that changed little over the centuries.

The results can be seen in this interesting exhibition for which the organisers deserve every credit. ■



Rollakan, Sweden, early 19th c. 1.00m. by 48cm





Detail, Rollakan cover, Sweden, 1811 AD. 1.72 by 1.18m.

Robert Elgood



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Musicial Life in Egypt
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The oldest of these schools or institutes, special establishment which was partly a club for rich music-lovers and partly a school for Arab music, was founded in the early twenties as the Club of Oriental Music. It is housed in a beautiful building in the heart of a busy main street in Cairo now called Ramses Street. Later, in the early thirties, the Ministry of Education founded an Institute of Music to train women music teachers for the schools. This Institute has recently developed into the Faculty of Music Education of the Helwan University. It fulfils the same function of training music teachers for schools, but not only for Egypt, as most of its graduates are now responsible for music education throughout the Arab world. This institute used to give its students a good knowledge of both an oriental instrument, namely the lute, and a Western instrument, namely the piano. This dual music education was effective in forming musicians who were proficient in both traditional Arab music and Western music and its theory. Most of the graduates of the former Institute, now the Faculty of Music Education, have assumed leading roles in the musical life of Egypt.

The youngest musical institute is the Cairo Conservatoire, which is also one of the seven Institutes of the Academy of Arts of the Ministry of Culture. It was founded in 1959 with the aim of producing professional performers, vocal and instrumental, composers and others. Throughout its twenty-five years, the Conservatoire has become the stronghold of cultured musicianship in Egypt, comparable to equivalent schools abroad, yet unique among conservatories in that it concentrates on the study of Arab musical theory and, on the practical side, singing, besides offering a thorough study of Western music – its harmony, counter-point, form, etc. – in performance as well as in composition.

The Conservatoire has seven departments: Piano, Strings, Wind and Percussion, Singing, Composition, Solfege and the newly founded Musicology Department, the only one of its kind in the Arab world. This last department trains musicologists in one of three areas: Arab traditional music, folk music or historical studies. It is a post-graduate course which admits graduates from all the music institutes in Egypt.

The graduates of the Cairo Conservatoire have attained high levels in most disciplines. Some of them are now well-known abroad; some have distinguished themselves at international musical competitions. All the best graduates are now following further studies in Germany, France, Britain, the USSR, the USA and other places.

The Conservatoire has formed the first all-Egyptian orchestra, which has acquired a high reputation at home and abroad. It has toured extensively in Europe since 1976, performing in Britain, West Germany, France, Spain, Belgium, Hungary, Italy, Yugoslavia and the USA. Its latest tour, as a chamber orchestra, in January and February 1984, took it to Italy, Czechoslovakia and West Germany, and its programme included works by Haydn, Respighi, Bartok, Stravinsky and four Egyptian composers of different generations and styles.

The Conservatoire also has a very successful children's choir of sixty members from the affiliated School for Talented Children, which was opened in 1968.

The Conservatoire, with its wealth of Egyptian teachers as well as British, Czechoslovakian, Italian, Polish and German ones, has become a source of musical activity which lends vigour and brilliance to the life of Egypt. Two of the composers have been awarded the State Prize for composition: Gamal Abdel-Rahim, the Head and Founder of the Composition Department and Gamal Salama, a younger member of the staff.

We shall discuss in detail, in another article, the new Egyptian school of polyphonic composers, whose first generation worked in the early forties. The foremost representative of that first generation is Abu-Bakr Khairat, the architect and composer, who was the first Dean of the Cairo Conservatoire in 1959. He held this post until his death in 1963.

The Conservatoire and the Institute for Arab Music have branches, or units, in Alexandria offering tuition in music to young, talented Alexandrians. There is also an Alexandrian branch of the Ballet Institute; thus three of the Institutes of the Academy of Arts have extended their educational facilities to the second capital. A new branch of each of the three Institutes will be opened in 1948 in Ismailia.

We cannot leave the domain of music education without mentioning the free, extracurricular course for talented children at the Conservatoire, which has, since 1958, provided musical tuition for thousands of amateurs, who are thus won to the cause of good music, and who become, at the end of these almost free studies at the age of fifteen, dedicated music-lovers and provide audiences for orchestral, operatic, and all types of good music.

Still in the sphere of education, we should mention the newly founded Institute of Folklore Studies, one of the seven Institutes of the Academy. After a long struggle on the part of enthusiastic scholars it was founded in 1982 as a post-graduate school designed to train people as collectors and researcher in folklore. Before its foundation, all fieldwork was left to the Centre of Folklore, founded by the Ministry of Culture in 1956. Now, providing personnel who can undertake scientific work on collecting, classifying and studying Egyptian folklore is the responsibility of the new Institute. Its expeditions are still few but are planned to cover those areas which are most threatened by the spread of civilisation, e.g., Nubia. The Centre and its collection of folk songs and dances from various parts of Egypt is now a part of the Institute for folklore, where some Arab and Sudanese students are at present training.

Folk music in Egypt, the other component of the musical tradition of the nation, has not been treated in this article, as it has been discussed in a special one for the same issue of this magazine.

The Music Sector of the Ministry of Culture is responsible for the Cairo Symphony Orchestra and the Egyptianm Opera. As this is a very important aspect of the musical life of Egypt and deserves to be fully discussed – together with the Egyptian School of National Composers – we have left both subjects for a future article. ■

Embroidery in Akhmim and El-Arish
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when she was 13 years old. Her early pictures are primitive folk art elongated, gangly animals cavorting across large empty spaces. The 1983 exhibition bore witness to her development as an artist. Not only

has her technical skill improved, but she has developed an artistic eye for composition and detail. Most of her compositions come from the life surrounding her in Akhmim. Grains of wheat were sprinkled across many of her pictures in the last exhibition. To prepare to stitch them she gathered wheat stalks from the field and studied their structure and arrangement throughout the growing process. Miriam is very happy with her work; indeed, she says that she would not marry any man who insisted that she give up her work. Through the Centre, Miriam has learned a craft that gives her pleasure in its execution, met many people, gained some economic independence and visited Cairo.

Although referred to as a village, Akhmim is actually a thriving town of over 45,000 located just across the river from Sohag. As more and more women turn to the spinning factory at Sohag, the danger of losing these traditional crafts looms. The factory can offer a fixed monthly wage as well as the benefits of insurance and retirement plans. Thus, support for the Centre becomes even more important.

El-Arish Needlework Programme

Demographic studies of the Sinai have revealed a population concentrated in the northern sector, with females exceeding males and a high percentage of widows. Thus a programme to aid women in this region is a natural idea. Since Bedouin embroidery is famous, the next step is obvious – a development project involving needlework.

In just the ten short years since its establishment, the El-Arish Needlework Programme has built a reputation for quality. An offshoot of the Palestinian needlework programme begun over 30 years ago in Jerusalem by the Mennonite Central Committee, the El-Arish programme has undergone a number of administrative changes. At first administered by the MCC in Jerusalem, the programme office moved to Cairo when Sinai reverted to Egypt in 1979. Then in 1982 the programme left the aegis of the MCC and Shahira Mahrez became the Director. Thus the programme begun by the MCC in an effort to help refugees utilise a traditional skill to generate income has become a full women's co-operative employing six women full time and over 300 needleworkers.

Modern El-Arish is peopled by Palestinians, Egyptians from the Delta, descendants of a few wondering Crusaders, and even a Westerner or two. This outside influence has modified the typical Bedouin dress and patterns. Today traditional costumes are sometimes mixed with European dress. Conversely, Westerners have admired and sought the colourfully embroidered Bedouin and Palestinian dresses. The older costumes display fine, handworked cross-stitching across the front and back of the bodice, down the sleeves and along the main seams in a rich mixture of patterns and colours. The inspiration for the motifs of both Bedouin and Palestinian decoration comes from a variety of places – desert scenery, carpets, events and even Western influences. Although many seem meaningless, being rather geometric in concept, they represent what brought beauty or pleasure to the mind of the originator. The patterns utilised do not differ so much from tribe to tribe as from individual to individual. Some are easily recognisable, such as a cedar tree or a bird. One design, identified as "the train to Cairo", was stitched in commemoration of the building of the railroad between Cairo and Jerusalem. It is primarily from these older examples th at the present El-Arish programme is developing its repertoire of Sinai patterns.

It is Mrs. Mehrez' belief that a definite vocabulary exists in these designs that is slowly being lost or misinterpreted by those outside the culture. Thus she is working with the women of El-Arish, the Bedouins and the Palestinians in an attempt to define that vocabulary. Originally the folkloric decoration of a dress was an obligatory task for each young girl. Often those who displayed talent would embroider other items, other women's dresses. There was an inherent grasp of colour, of pattern placement and of proportion. What might appear to the untrained eye to be a riot of colour had been in fact carefully thought out and controlled. A great deal of research still needs to be done to record these patterns and their names, to study the colour interplay from an artistic level and to ascertain the significance of pattern usage by region or tribe.

In the El-Arish programme a myriad of items – tablecloths placemats, napkins, baby blankets, aprons, purses, blouses, guest towels, pincushions, belts and coasreinterpretation of these typical Sinai patterns. Sometimes a folkloric pattern taken out of context, i.e., isolated from the other patterns used on a dress, will seem untypical.

Such is the case with one motif identified as "Rhoda" – a beautiful geometric design, it does look Greek in isolation. One pattern popular with Cairo residents, the camel, is totally false to the folklore. This pattern was introduced by Westerners in yet another example of "orientalism". Bedouins never embroidered their dresses or any other item with camels. Asked to comment, Mrs. Mehrez remarked that to the Bedouin the camel was a common place thing, not something perceived as of particular beauty and thus, not surprisingly, bypassed in favour of a bird or tree.

All of the items are cross-stitched on Egyptian cotton by women settled in El-Arish. For most of these women, the money they can earn with their needle is an extra; for others it is vital. They take their materials from the workshop in El-Arish and work the pieces at home. When the finished product is submitted, the women are paid according to the number of stitches, the size of the item and the quality of the stitch. In this way, standards of quality are maintained. At the end of the year the profits are shared with the women proportionally to the amount of work each has produced during the year. The workshop employees finish the item – hem, launder, iron, fringe, stuff or whatever is required. From El-Arish, the products are taken to Cairo, where they are marketed through a private boutique and numerous bazaars. A monthly exhibition held on each third Tuesday at the boutique, draws many buyers.

Both of the above described programme capitalise on available local expertise and build on traditional folkloric patterns. Both depend on outside agents for their marketing but contribute greatly to the upgrading of life for the women involved. It is gratifying that both the Akhmim and the El-Arish programme are increasingly popular with the local population and are not limited to the favour of the foreign community.

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Egyptian Cinema

Continued from Page 63

actual writers of the film, story and scenario. At the beginning, there were no scenarists who could understand the technique or the potential of the film. Later on, however, with the establishment of the Higher Film Institute in 1954, with a special department for scenario writing, a number of good and accomplished scenarists assumed their position in the film industry. The Institute has also been responsible for the production of many technicians, cameramen, editors, sound experts, and others.

Before dealing with the state of the industry now, a quick survey of some of the leading Egyptian directors and their styles would not be amiss. One of the early directors, who left an indelible mark on the film industry, was Mohamed Karim. He pursued his studies in Italy and Germany and his first film, *Zainab*,m could compare with any European or American film of the time. That was in 1929 and he followed it with *Sons of Aristocrats* in 1931, but it was with *The White Rose* that he introduced to Egypt what can be termed the musical film. His leading actor, Mohamed Abdel-Wahab, was also the leading singer; on the great success and popularity of the film, he followed it with a number of other musicals with the same actor and singer. Karim is described as a typical classical director in his feeling and his film language. He was also a perfectionist and tough, almost dictatorial, in his dealing with artists. For eight years he served as the head of the Higher Film Institute, where a number of students graduated bearing his mark.

Many other names can be mentioned, Gamal Madkur, Ahmed Badrakhan, Kamal Selim, Niazi Mustafa and, of course, Salah Abu Seif and Yussuf Shahin, of whom I have already written, Fatin Abdel Wahab, Kamal el-Sheikh, Alif Salem, Husam el-Din Mustafa and many others. Each of these directors has his own distinctive style, in a range embracing romanticism, classicism, neo-classicism, and realism.

Lately, however, for many reasons, the Egyptian film industry has been going through some kind of crisis. The first, which is common to film industries in other countries, is the emergence of television as a threat to films. Whereas the industry in other countries, notably the U.S.A., Britain and France, has been able to meet the challenge by adapting their production to this new medium, the Egyptian industry is still in a quandary, indecisive and not quite ready.

Other reasons, as explained in a recent report by the Film Committee of the National Council for Arts and Culture are:

1. The bad state of equipment in the studios, which has seen no renovation or improvement since the early days of the industry.
2. The stoppage of a number of projects for the creation of new studios for lack of funds.
3. The deplorable decrease of the number of cinemas, which has dropped from 450 in the sixties to 70.
4. The exorbitant augmentation of production costs.
5. The control of distributors, especially non-Egyptians, and its effect on the quality of the films.
6. The effect of the Arab boycott, since Arab countries constituted the main export market for Egyptian films. The boycott has recently been easing, but the damage has already been done.
7. The serious competition with foreign films, which led to the issuing of a law defining the ratio of Egyptian films to foreign films, in favour of the former.

The report comes up with some constructive recommendations which might assist the industry. One is the necessity for cooperation and coordination between the film industry and television, especially since, in the last few months, television has had its own film production. Another recommendation is the renovation of the studios and equipment, and the exemption of equipment and film from customs duty. Then there is the important question of increasing the number of cinemas. For these recommendations to be effective, the report is proposing the creation of a special fund or bank to finance the private sector so that it can shoulder a part of the responsibility.

In their book *History of the Cinema* , René Jeanne and Charles Ford write about the Egyptian film industry between 1939 and 1945:

> "The number of Egyptian films increased from a dozen in 1939 to over 50 in 1945. The same thing happened with the number of film theatres, which increased from 130 to 200. This prosperity did not stop with the war and the Egyptian cinema continued its expansion in answer to the needs of all countries whose people speak Arabic."

In fact the film industry in Egypt was one of the earliest in the world and, possibly, the first in the Third World. For over half a century, the Egyptian cinema has supplied the whole of the Arab world with its films. Even in the middle of political differences and the so-called boycott of Egypt, cinemas and television in the Arab countries continued to show Egyptian films.

Before discussing the present situation of the film industry in Egypt, it would not be amiss to give a bird's eye view of its history. The industry began on a large scale in the 1930s when Talaat Harb, the founder of Bank Misr, the first Egyptian bank, built Studio Misr. Prior to that, there were individual efforts, and it was as far back as 1912 when the first films were shot. Of course they were not films in the proper sense of the word, merely shots of the crowds in the streets and public places, who were then invited to see

themselves on the screen.

It was only in 1917 that real films came into being. They were films that did not last more than 30 minutes.

The films were made by an Alexandrian photographer, Umberto Dores, who was able to persuade the Banco di Roma to finance his project. He was joined by Aloise Orfanelli and the brothers Bruno and Aldo Salvi and together they produced burlesque films until 1925, when Egyptian films proper were born. ■

Egyptian Theatre

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and introducing world theatre to the educated and cultured. In the same year, a Museum for the Arts of Theatre and Music was erected and in 1964 el-Hakim Theatre was born, named after Tewfik el-Hakim, one of Egypt's leading authors; it was to present serious drama. In July of the same year, the organisation merged with the television theatres, which were: the Modern Theatre, the World Theatre, the Comedy Theatre, the Reda Folk-Dance Troupe, the Cairo Revue Troupe, the Children's Theatre. In 1966 the National Circus was born.

At the same time, great care was given to the educational side, and Institutes for Drama, Cinema and Arabic Music, a Conservatoire and a Ballet School were started. Later on, the Institutes were combined to form the Academy of Arts, which now has its own Ballet Company, Opera Group and Arabic Music Ensemble as well as its own stage at the Sayyed Darwish Hall, just off the Pyramids Road. Dr. Samha al-Kholy is the current Dean of the Academy of Arts.

The period from 1959 to 1967 was marked by a great flourishing of the theatre. Theatres played to full houses and new plays were being produced by the dozen. New playwrights emerged who had great contributions to make. They dealt with the deep changes affecting Egyptian society both before and after the Revolution. The period also witnessed advances in the productions themselves, from both the technical and the directing point of view. A number of young directors, lighting experts, designers and others were sent to study in Italy, France, England and Germany, and on their return they stood at the helm of the theatre.

That golden era ended abruptly with the defeat of June 1967, which was to be reflected in all our lives. In a recent report by the National Specialised Council of Culture, Arts, Literature and Information, reasons are given for what the report calls 'the decline in the theatre'. Of course the defeat itself was one of the chief causes and all other causes were consequent on it. After 1967, the theatre suffered from a decreasing number of plays, low attendance, and the closing down of some theatres. Consequently, the role of the Organisation of Theatre and Music, which was originally to support the theatre and encourage it to flourish, became that of a financial supporter, and the theatre changed into yet another Government Department, with all the disadvantages of red tape, overstaffing and inefficiency. In fact all those working in the theatre: directors,actors, stage managers, etc., became Government officials, put in certain grades receiving regular salaries.

While some found in this set-up a kind of security for theatre workers, it certainly had many drawbacks. First, it did away with competition between the different theatres, and the Organisation and its theatres went through a period of complete nonchalance and neglect. The best artists turned to the cinema and then to television, where the renumeration was much higher, while still retaining their government posts. They became absentee officials as it were. At the same time, a number of private companies emerged, catering to a new class of spectators with little if any culture. They presented mainly comedies, indeed cheap farces, which attracted large audiences, but helped to devalue the theatre.

In the face of this semi-collapse of the serious theatre, great efforts have been exerted by the Ministry of Culture and the National Specialised Councils. Complete reorganisation was introduced, creating what is called in Arabic *Biyut Masrahiya*, that is, Theatrical Houses. This makes every theatre independent, but, at the same time, guarantees its budget. The whole organisation and administration are within the theatre itself and the workers in the theatre receive a certain share of the profits. This seems to have created a new, healthier atmosphere, with great scope for competition and, consequently, improvement.

The experiment has just started, but already there are signs of success and some of the theatres have been presenting new plays of a high standard and have been playing to full houses. Still, one cannot say that the problems of the modern Egyptian theatre have been completely solved. This is what has led the National specialised councils to come up with some proposals which are worth mentioning:

- Enlisting the efforts of radio, television and the press to develop a general artistic taste by presenting plays of a high quality.
- Giving more stress to the school theatre, since this will help to create a habit of theatre-going
- Giving special care to the University Theatre, which is a potential source of theatrical revival.
- Encouraging the theatre movement in the provinces.
- Sending theatre workers abroad to see modern developments in other countries at close quarters
- Increasing the fees for plays and creating annual prizes for the best performances, in both the private and public sectors.
- Translating world masterpieces into Arabic.

The Council also proposes that the state theatres should specialise in the following fashion:

- The World Theatre to present world drama, classical and modern.
- The National Theatre to present an Egyptian repertoire of leading Egyptian playwrights.
- The Modern Theatre to present plays by up-and-coming playwrights.
- The Pioneer Theatre to present Egyptian and foreign experimental drama.
- The State Theatre to present grand musicals, both Egyptian and foreign.

They also propose the removal of what is called entertainment tax, since the theatre is not a commercial but a cultural concern. Together with these proposals, there are different sub-committees examining the situation in different areas, who will make recommendations.

It is certain that these proposals and recommendations will be treated seriously by the Government, since there is a general feeling that the important role of the theatre in Egypt should be revived, and that it is due for a new heyday. ■

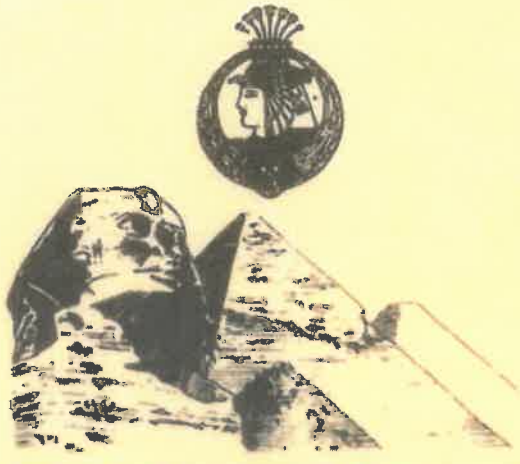
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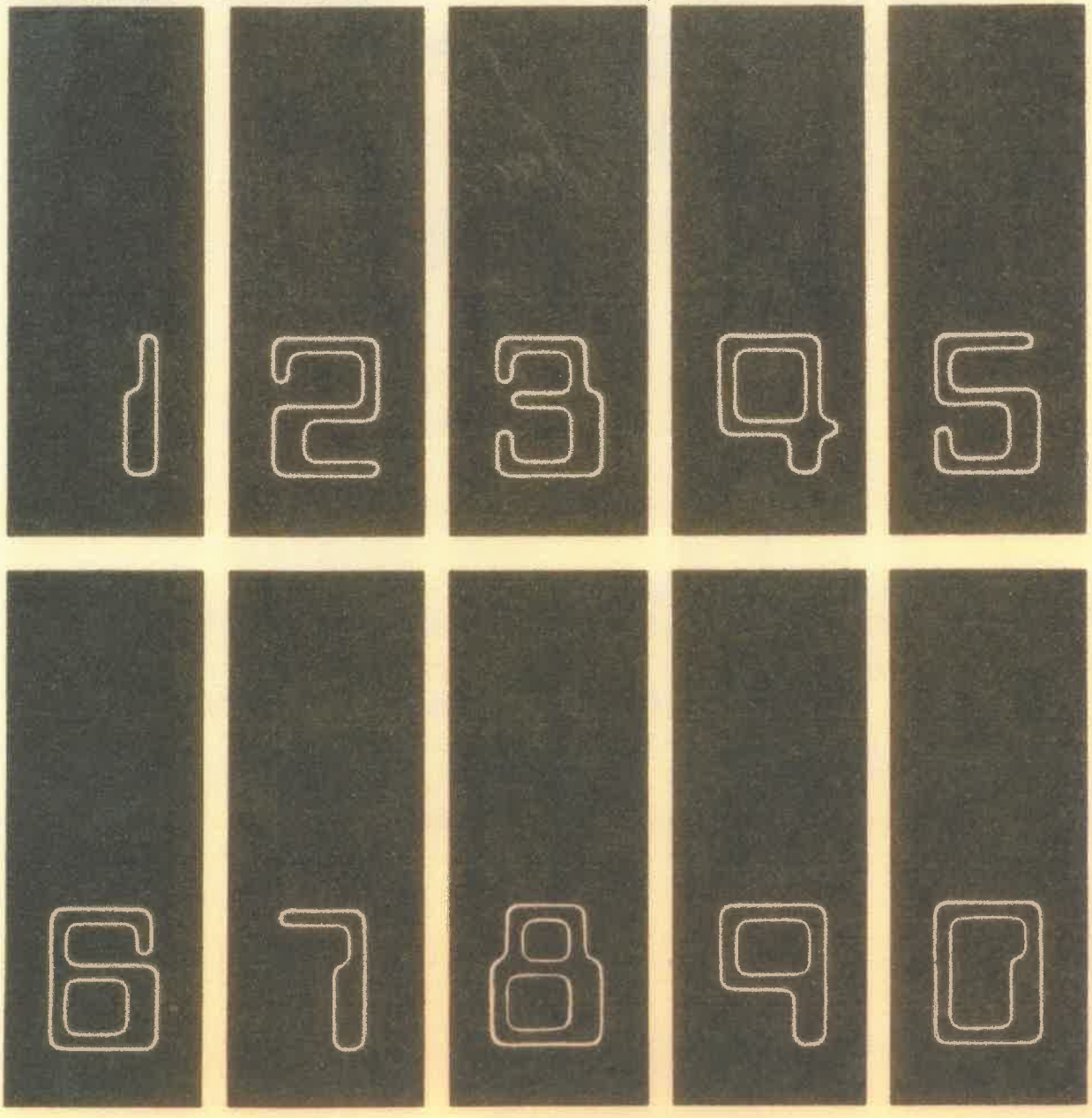


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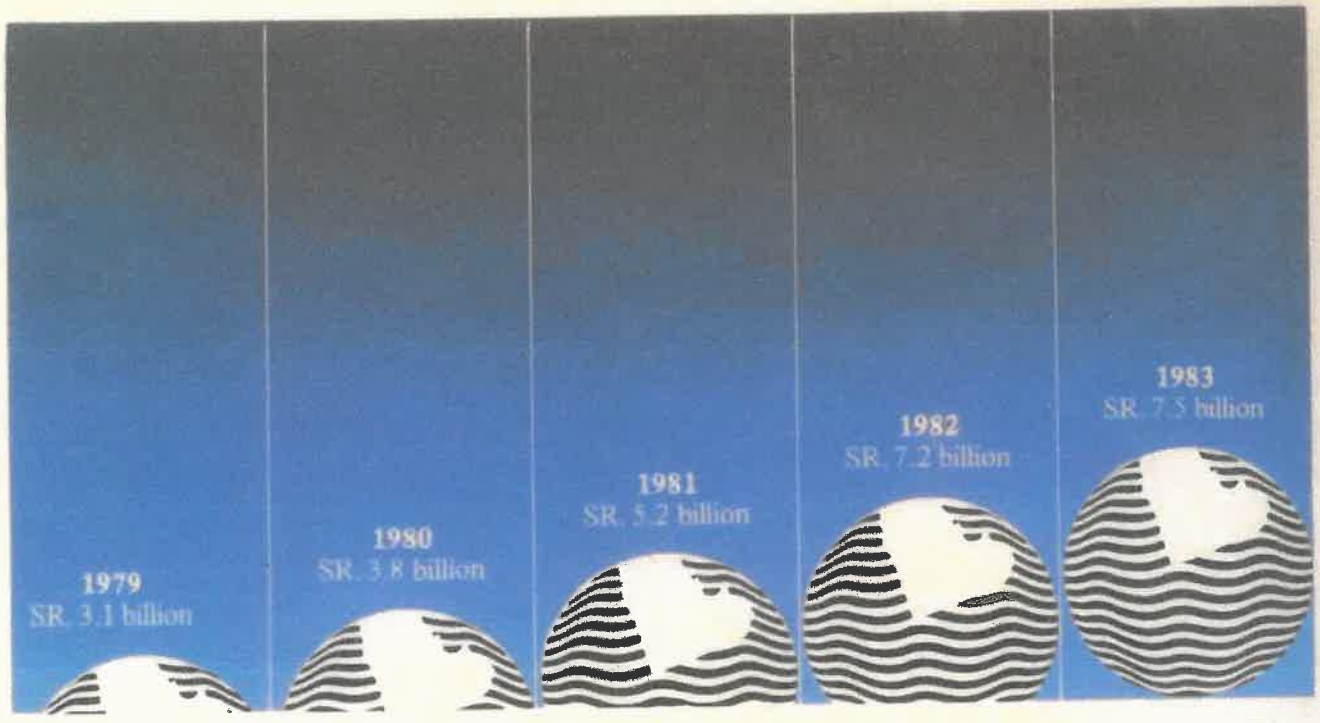


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