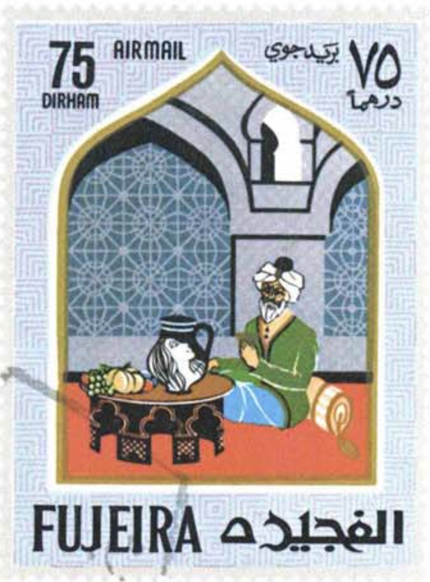
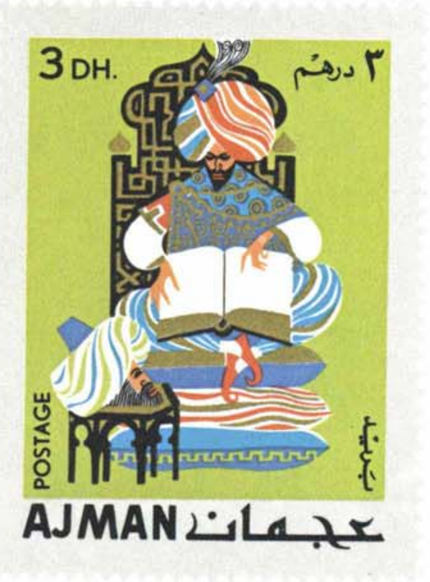
ARAMCO WORLD
magazine
P.O. BOX 2106
HOUSTON, TEXAS 77001
(Printed in England)
ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED
RETURN POSTAGE GUARANTEED





ARAMCO WORLD magazine

SEPTEMBER–OCTOBER 1977

The Return of Scheherezade

ARAMCO WORLD magazine

VOL. 28 NO 5 PUBLISHED BIMONTHLY SEPTEMBER – OCTOBER 1977

All articles and illustrations in Aramco World, with the exception of those indicated as excerpts, condensations or reprints taken from copyyrighted sources, may be reprinted in full or in part without further permission simply by crediting Aramco World Magazine as the source.

SPECIAL BLUE BINDERS DESIGNED TO HOLD 12 ISSUES OF ARAMCO WORLD MAGAZINE (REGULAR SIZE) ARE AVAILABLE FROM EASIBIND LTD., 4 UXBRIDGE STREET, LONDON W8 7SZ, ENGLAND, FOR $5 EACH. BINDERS FOR SPECIAL ISSUES (SIZES 10" X 14") ARE ALSO AVAILABLE FOR $5 EACH. MAKE ALL CHECKS PAYABLE TO EASIBIND LTD.

THE BRIGHT THREAD 2

BY MARY NORTON

Norton

Brought by the conquering Arabs in 661, Islam has ever since played an important role in Afghanistan's turbulent history, and is central to Afghan life today.

THE RETURN OF SCHEHEREZADE 12

BY ROBERT OBOJSKI

Obojski

Stamp collectors can now look forward to a new specialization: the collection of beautiful Middle Eastern postage stamps on themes from *The Arabian Nights*.

A TALK WITH FREYA STARK 16

BY BETTY PATCHIN GREENE

Greene

Fifty years of travel, an elegant style and affectionate, clear-eyed perception have made Dame Freya Stark the doyenne of Middle East travel writers.

WRESTLING WITH A TWIST 20

BY JOHN LAWTON

Lawton

The Turks have been wrestling at Kirkpinar for over 600 years, but with a unique variation they adopted from the Byzantines: olive oil.

THE MUHTASIB 22

BY CAROLINE STONE

Stone

Standard weights, public health and safety, and good order generally were the purview of the *Muhtasib* and his deputies in the Arab empires.

SUEZ REBORN 26

BY ELIAS ANTAR

Antar

The warfront wastelands along the Suez Canal are being rebuilt, and imaginative planners hope to make the area a bustling new economic center for Egypt.

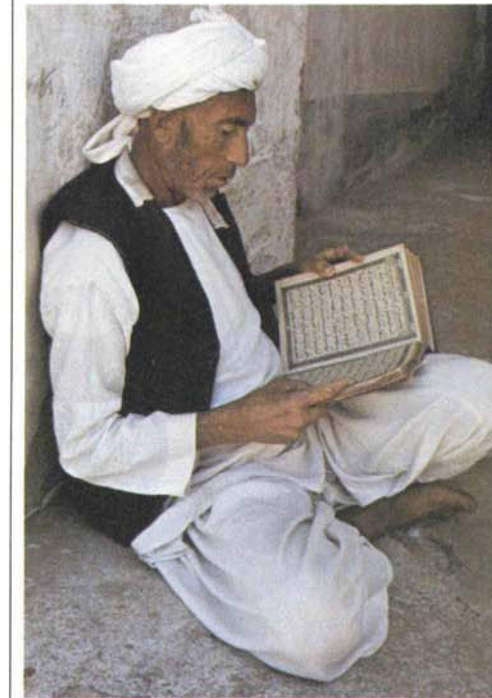
Published by Aramco, a Corporation, 1345 Avenue of the Americas, New York, N.Y. 10019; F. Jungers, Chairman of the Board and Chief Executive Officer; R. W. Powers, President; J. J. Johnston, Secretary; Charles P. Sawaya, Treasurer. Paul F. Hoye, Editor; Robert Arndt, Assistant Editor. Designed and produced by Motivation Techniques Limited. Printed in England. Distributed without charge to a limited number of readers with an interest in Aramco, the oil industry, or the history, culture, geography and economy of the Middle East. Correspondence concerning **Aramco World Magazine** should be addressed to The Editor, 55 Laan Van Meerdervoort, The Hague, The Netherlands. Changes of address should be sent to Aramco Service Company, Attention J. C. Tarvin, 1100 Milam Building, Houston, Texas 77002.

ISSN 0003-7567

Cover: *The Black Horse*, or *The Flying Horse*, one of the famous stories from Scheherezade's *Arabian Nights* tales now providing themes for numerous stamps being issued by states in the United Arab Emirates. This is from an Ajman issue. Rear Cover: Other *Arabian Nights* themes.

◀ The Tomb of Abdul Rahman Khan, a ruler of Afghanistan, to which the Arabs first brought the teachings of Islam in the seventh century.

The Bright Thread



WRITTEN BY MARY NORTON
PHOTOGRAPHED BY HAROLD SEQUEIRA

In Afghanistan's turbulent past and changing present, the role of Islam was and is of central importance.

Tucked up in the eaves, if not on the roof of the world, is Afghanistan, a land of compelling beauty which has, from antiquity, been swept by the forces of history: migrations, invasions, conquests, tribal wars, and the rise and collapse of dynasties and of empires.

Into Afghanistan have come Aryans, Greeks, Persians, Bactrians, Scythians, Parthians, Kushans, Sassanians, Arabs, Turks, Indians, Russians and English. The fabled Silk Route from Rome to China traversed the Afghanistan landscape, its caravans conveying ivories, silks, spices and jewels, frankincense and furs, gold and silver. And great men of history, for good or ill, have left their mark here: Cyrus, Zoroaster, Alexander, Ashoka, Genghis Khan, Tamerlane, Babur and Marco Polo. For more than a millennium, however, one force has dominated the history of Afghanistan: the rule of Islam. And its impact is still visible and tangible today.

Tradition has it that about 661, when the first Arabs came to Kabul, the present capital, they prayed beside the river, placing a stone to orient themselves towards Mecca. Near the site, today in the heart of old Kabul, stands the large, imposing Pul-i-Khisti Mosque.

One of the best views of Pul-i-Khisti is from Sher Darwaza Hill, home of the "Noon Gun," the cannon which, for decades, marked midday for Kabulis. Its roar also marked the end of the hours of fasting during Ramadan. The city, its outlines softened by clusters of mulberry trees, stretches across level land to the embracing ring of dun-colored mountains which seem to shrink in the face of the glistening, snow-streaked peaks of the Hindu Kush beyond. Below, the tangle of simple houses and buildings crowds the azure dome and slender minaret of Pul-i-Khisti, but in the courtyard of the mosque the feeling is one of space and simplicity. Mosaic tiles, yellow, blue and white, in geometrical and floral motifs, adorn the arched windows and portals of the white stone edifice. Spanning the facade, near the roof, is a band of Arabic calligraphy – verses of the Koran in white on deepest blue.

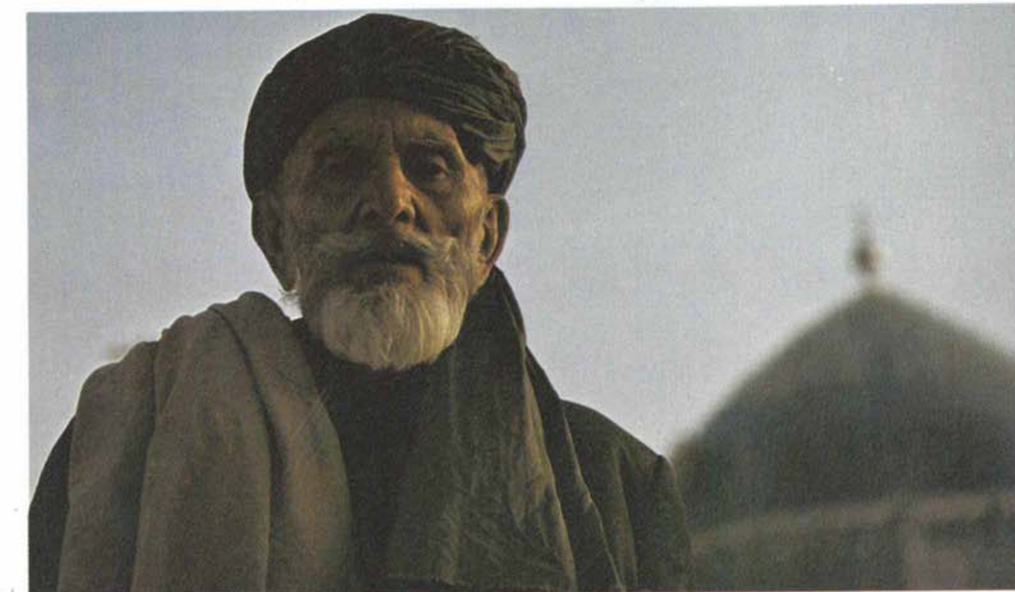
The interior is plain: sturdy, wine-red Turkoman rugs underfoot and, on the walls near the mihrab, plaques lettered with Islam's Profession of Faith, the *Shahadah: "La ilaha illa Allah; Muhammadun rasulu-Allah,"* "There is no god but God; Muhammad is His Messenger."

At the cry of the muezzin five times a day, the mosque is soon filled with men, a crowd that swells at 'Id feasts to more than 5,000. From across Kabul's oldest bridge; from the narrow, twisted alleys behind Jodi Maiwand, the broad, new thoroughfare; from the *chai-khanas,* the tea houses, they come; from ancient Shor Bazaar and Char Chatta Bazaar, redolent and resonant marketplaces, they come in their turbans and sandals, their loose shirts and baggy trousers sometimes combined with vests and jackets, picking their way through traffic part automobile, part bicycle, part donkey and goat.

Side by side, after ablutions, they bow, kneel, prostrate themselves, facing Mecca, these Pushtuns, Tajiks, Turkomans, Uzbeks: a human mosaic, tribally distinct, but, at the call of the muezzin, bound together as brothers in their Muslim faith.

I had seen them in the streets, many carrying loads to break the spirits, if not the backs, of men: the Hazaras, for example, hitched in pairs to a simple "Karachi," cart, loaded with crates 10 tiers high and 10 across, pulling it from one end of the

city to the other. And I had read of the difficulties of life in Afghanistan: that, for example, 40 percent of Kabul's popultion lived on four percent of the land in the area of Shor Bazaar – with few basic amenities – and that summers could be searingly hot, winters icy cold; that, as in many emerging countries, prices were risng and wages were low. Yet, in the lined and leathery faces of those at prayer, I had noticed, or thought I noticed, a calmness, an absence of anxiety rarely encountered nowadays. Was I correct? And was there a link between the serenity and the religion they seemed to so devoutly embrace?



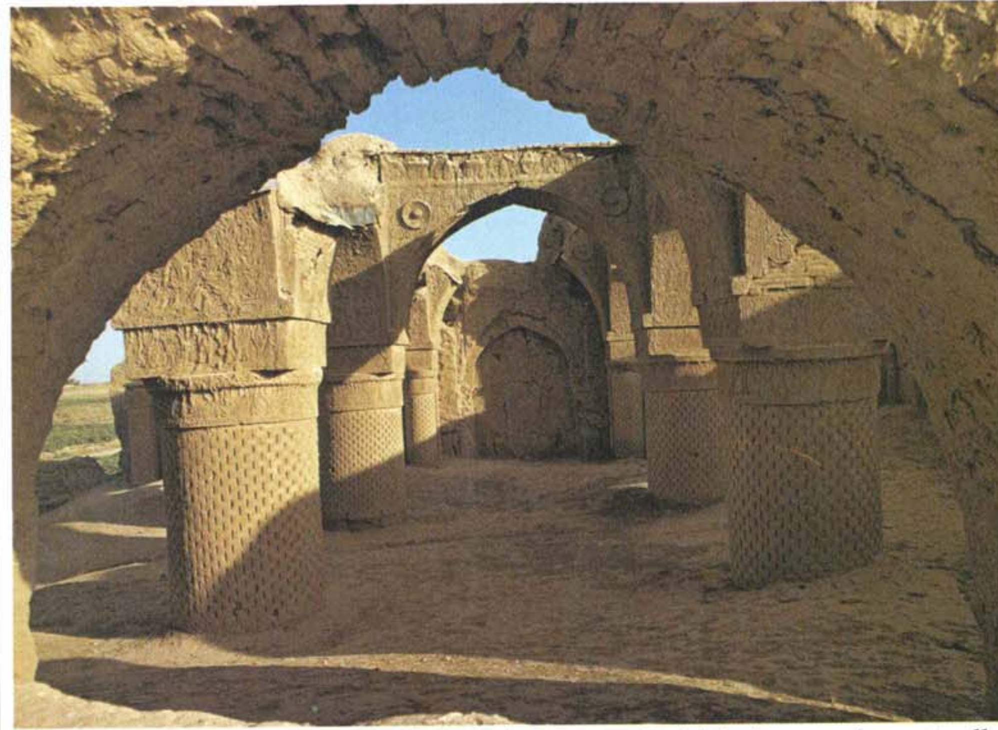
Gul Muhammad Katib Sahib, the white-bearded, gentle imam of Pul-i-Khisti Mosque, thought there was. "There is a strong drive in the people to believe that everything that comes, comes from the hand of God," he said. "If a man has but a single piece of bread for his dinner, that is because God wills it, and if his table is full, that too, is the will of God. Poor – rich – poor, all comes from God, is the will of God, and is accepted by the people." He paused and smiled. "'Islam' means 'submission,'" he went on, "and that is the key." This is not to say that God does not will mankind to overcome hunger, disease and poverty. Indeed, devout Muslims feel that in striving to improve the human condition they *are* submitting to the will of God.

Submission to God, however, is one thing, submission to man another. Although the Afghan peoples eventually embraced Islam they have always been proud defenders of their lands. When, therefore, the Arab seventh century armies, afire with their new religion and exhilarated by swift victories over Syria, Mesopotamia and Persia, turned eastward, the Afghan peoples did not submit. And although the superb horsemanship and camelry maneuvers of the Arabs would propel them far and fast across the steppe regions – where they conquered Bukhara, Samarkand and Tashkent – they won no easy victories in the land now called Afghanistan.

More than half the territory of present-day Afghanistan is mountainous, the gorges ideal for ambushes and the passes often choked with snow. This terrain, and above all the steep, jagged peaks and plunging ravines of the Hindu Kush, rendered the usual Arab military tactics inoperable. In the high valleys, numerous petty kingdoms held sway, partly isolated, virtually autonomous and fiercely independent; their peoples, like the Arabs of the desert, had been honed on a pitiless terrain, and for years they were a match for the best of the intruders.

After a year-long siege, Kabul capitulated to the Arabs in 664, but the city was contested again and again. Not until late in the 10th century, long after Arab rule had given way to local Muslim dynasties, were the tenacious rulers of the Hindu Shahi dynasty finally driven from power.

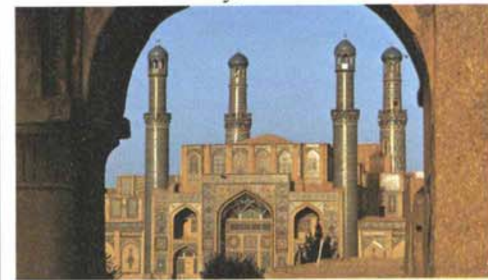
In the non-mountainous areas – Sistan and Kandahar in the south,



Herat in the west, and Balkh in the north – the Arabs fared better. By the eighth century, Arab governors were installed who, backed by military garrisons, permitted local rule. As a pattern of revolt persisted, however, and as the Abassid Caliphate declined, local dynasties arose. One such dynasty, the Samanids, fostered a flowering of Islamic art and culture. By the ninth century, many beautiful mosques could be found throughout Kabul, which the Arabs called "Umm al-Bilad," "Mother of Cities."

Despite those ancient wars and the country's difficult climate, one of the ninth-century mosques – discovered just 10 years ago – has come down to the present. By far the earliest Islamic monument yet found in Afghanistan, Masjid-i-Haji Piyada, a nine-domed mosque, is located in a field a few miles out of Balkh and, according to Afghanistan expert Nancy Hatch Dupree, is an architectural delight. As she says in her recent book, *History of Afghanistan*, "The elegantly carved stucco decoration is the wonder and beauty of this mosque. The capitals of the columns and the arches which span them exhibit an infinite variety of geometric and abstract floral designs: vine scrolls twist around grape leaves forming circles and semi-circles, squares, rectangles and polygons within borders of pearls, hatchings, mazes and meanders. On the capitals, pairs of palmettes frame trefoil lotus blossoms and plump pomegranates sprout at their base."

In the second century, Greco-Bactrians in Afghanistan erected columns of the Corinthian order, and in the 16th century, the Ottomans in-



vested the traditional decorative patterns with extraordinary richness and beauty. Standing midway between the two in time, the ninth century Haji Payada Mosque, with elements of each, is indeed, as the locals have named it, the *Masjid-i-Tarikh,* the "Mosque of History."

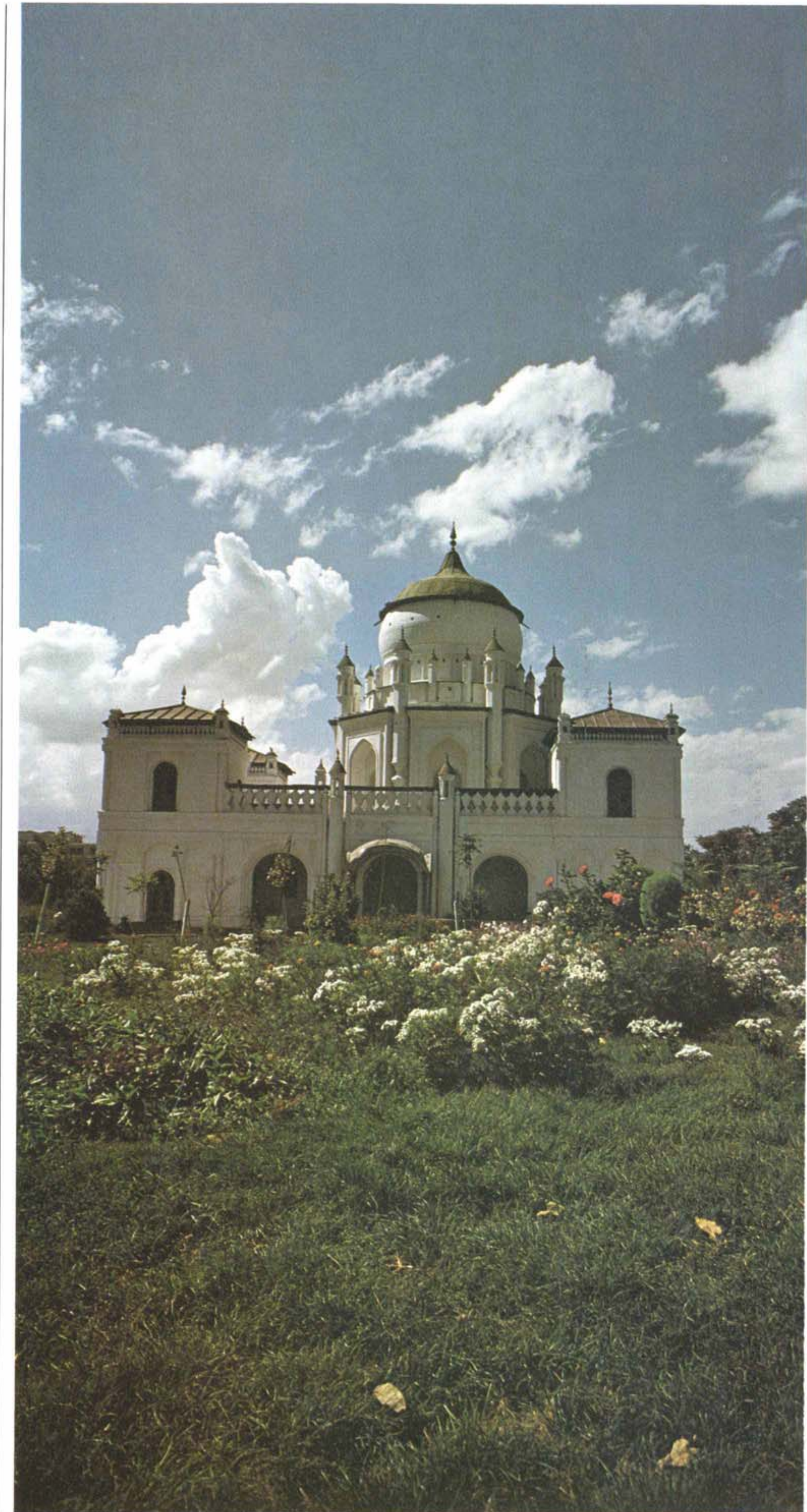
The first great Islamic civilization in Afghanistan arose around Ghazni, south of Kabul. Called the Ghaznavid Empire, this civilization was founded by a former Turkish slave and eventually stretched from the Caspian Sea and to beyond Benares in India. Through wealth brought back from India, the Ghaznavids financed the embellishment of Ghazni and other cities with mosques, minarets, aqueducts, palaces and gardens, until they fairly shone with splendor. The historian 'Utbi calls the great mosque of Ghazni the "Bride of the Sky," comparing it in beauty to the mosque at Damascus.

In addition to winning many converts for Islam in India, the Ghaznavids brought, from the far corners of the empire, the most celebrated scholars and scientists, artists and craftsmen, architects and poets – Persia's finest, Firdausi, among them – creating a court of dazzling artistic and intellectual attainment. Firdausi's epic *Shah Nameh,* or Books of Kings, the national epic of Persia, was completed at this court. As a result, the museums of Ghazni and Kabul today are rich in ceramics and superb bronze-ware: ewers, incense burners, bowls and such, richly engraved, and in laid with animal and floral motifs and complicated calligraphy. In addition there still survive the chief examples of their patrimony in Afghanistan: two soaring minarets, star-shaped in plan, 400 yards apart on a silent, dusty road.

The Ghaznavids, however, found themselves under attack almost as soon as they established the borders of the empire. In the early part of the 11th century, the Seljuk Turks took two great provinces and later all of its territories in Iran and Central Asia. For another 100 years, the dynasty held onto eastern Afghanistan and northern India, but then, in 1151, the Ghorids of central Afghanistan sacked and burned Ghazni itself. Their leader, Ala-ud-Din Hassan, took for himself the name of Jahansuz, "World-burner," but the Ghorids themselves were extinguished not long after: in the 13th century they were overcome by the Turk Khwarazm-Shah. That victory too was short lived as, that same century, the Mongol tide led by Genghis Khan swept over Afghanistan as it would eventually sweep over most of the Muslim world.

Descending upon Balkh, his forces 100,000 strong, Genghis Khan, in a dreadful assault, obliterated the area and its inhabitants. As the historian Juvaini, who visited Balkh 30 years later and whose father had ridden with the Mongols, wrote, "...Ghenghis Khan commanded that the population of Balkh, small and great, few and many, both men and women, should be driven out onto the plain and ... put to the sword ... and they cast fire into the gardens of the city and devoted their whole attention to the destruction of the outworks and walls and mansions and palaces."

Next, the Mongol hordes advanced on the enchanting valley of Bamiyan, once a flourishing center of Buddhism, but now a thriving Islamic center. As the Muslims chose to resist, and as Genghis Khan's grandson was killed in the fighting, the Mongol leader ordered that every living thing be destroyed. This



was accomplished, and the city thereafter became known as the "City of Sighs." or "City of Skulls." It has never been inhabited since.

The Mongol destruction, however, had no effect on the forces of religion. Marco Polo, visiting Afghanistan some 75 years after Genghis Khan, speaks of the population as entirely Muslim. Despite death and desolation, the faith of Islam survived and after another conqueror, Timur-Leng – Tamerlane – a descendant of Genghis Khan, Islam in Afghanistan was to rise to new pinnacles of culture and grandeur.

Tamerlane, to be sure, destroyed many cities in his invasions but he sometimes spared the populations and transported artisans to Samarkand for the enrichment of his court. And Shah Rukh, Tamerlane's son, who became governor of Herat in 1391, set about restoring the city at once. Later, Shah Rukh was largely responsible for a great efflorescence of culture in Iran, Afghanistan and Khorasan centered in Herat. Steeped in Persian traditions, Shah Rukh and his extraordinary queen preferred scholarship to conquest, creation to destruction, art to arms; as a result they drew to their court the most brilliant minds of the time in science and literature, architecture and art. They also passed on their love of culture to their son, Baisungur, poet and calligrapher. Baisungur founded the School of Herat, which set such standards of excellence that it became the model for all subsequent schools of painting in Iran, Turkey, Transoxania and India, and Timurid examples of the arts of the book – calligraphy, miniature painting, illumination and binding – remain among the finest ever produced.

Queen Gawhar Shad herself presided over the construction of a magnificent *madrasah* – place of learning – a project financed, by some accounts, through the sale of her jewelry. Of this grand complex of portals, arcades, minarets and domed buildings, once completely covered with mosaic tiles – each brilliant bit of turquoise or gold or other color glaze separately fired, then placed in position in a wealth of ornament – only the Queen's mausoleum and a few minarets have survived. They suffice, however, to convey a sense of the delight the Timurid buildings must have evoked when they were set, as was the custom, amid fountains in flowering orchards and parks.

With the decline of Timurid rule, Afghanistan became a battleground for contesting empires: Shaybani Uzbeks in the north, Persian Safavids in the west and, in the east, the Indian Moghul dynasty, whose founder Babur had begun his reign in Kabul. In addition, many individual tribes asserted their independence, shifting their allegiances from one dynasty to another and their alliancies with each other as circumstances dictated. Eventually, an Afghan nation was formed by Ahmed Shah Durrani – crowned king in Kandahar in 1747 – but on his death, disorders again ensued and England, fearful of Iranian and joint Russian-French designs on Afghanistan, entered the area. Finally, in 1880, the forceful Amir Abdul Rahman Khan emerged to unify the various tribes under one central government and thus lay the foundation for modern Afghanistan.

Through those centuries of vicissitudes, the faith of Islam was the single bright thread linking the disparate – and sometimes warring – peoples. Spreading now slowly, now more rapidly, Islam in 1896, with the conversion of the Kafirs, isolated in the remote, high, forested regions of Kafiristan in the eastern mountains, eventually triumphed. All Afghanistan was then an integral part of Islam.

Today, the impact of the Arabs of the seventh century and of the religion they brought is clearly visible in Afghanistan. In Kabul, for instance, there are 350 mosques – some of them as small as shop stalls – and government religious colleges are scattered throughout the country, including Kabul's Daral-'Ulim-i-Khatib-i-Arabiyyi, from which the brightest go on to the Shar'iah College at Kabul University, and eventual posts as judges. Others will teach religion in high schools or perhaps become neighborhood religious leaders.

More importantly, the impact is visible in the practice of its faith. Unlike many Muslim countries today, at the call of the muezzin men throughout the country flock to mosques to pray or, if they cannot, drop to their knees wherever they are. The fast of Ramadan, furthermore, seems to be strictly – and widely – observed; in Kabul, the capital, only those restaurants catering to foreigners remain open during the day in the month of Ramadan. And when the 'Id feast arrives at the end of the month of fasting, the country seems to have locked itself up for several days and thrown the key away.

With respect to other pillars of Islam – the main duties of Islam – veteran observers say Afghanistan Muslims are equally diligent. Almsgiving is taken seriously – with each family likely to dispense the expected two-and-a-half percent of debt-free income to whom it sees fit. And those who can afford it do make the *Hajj*, the Pilgrimage to Mecca. As in other emerging nations economics often prevents this long and costly journey but many, nonetheless, do so – some after a lifetime of scrimping.

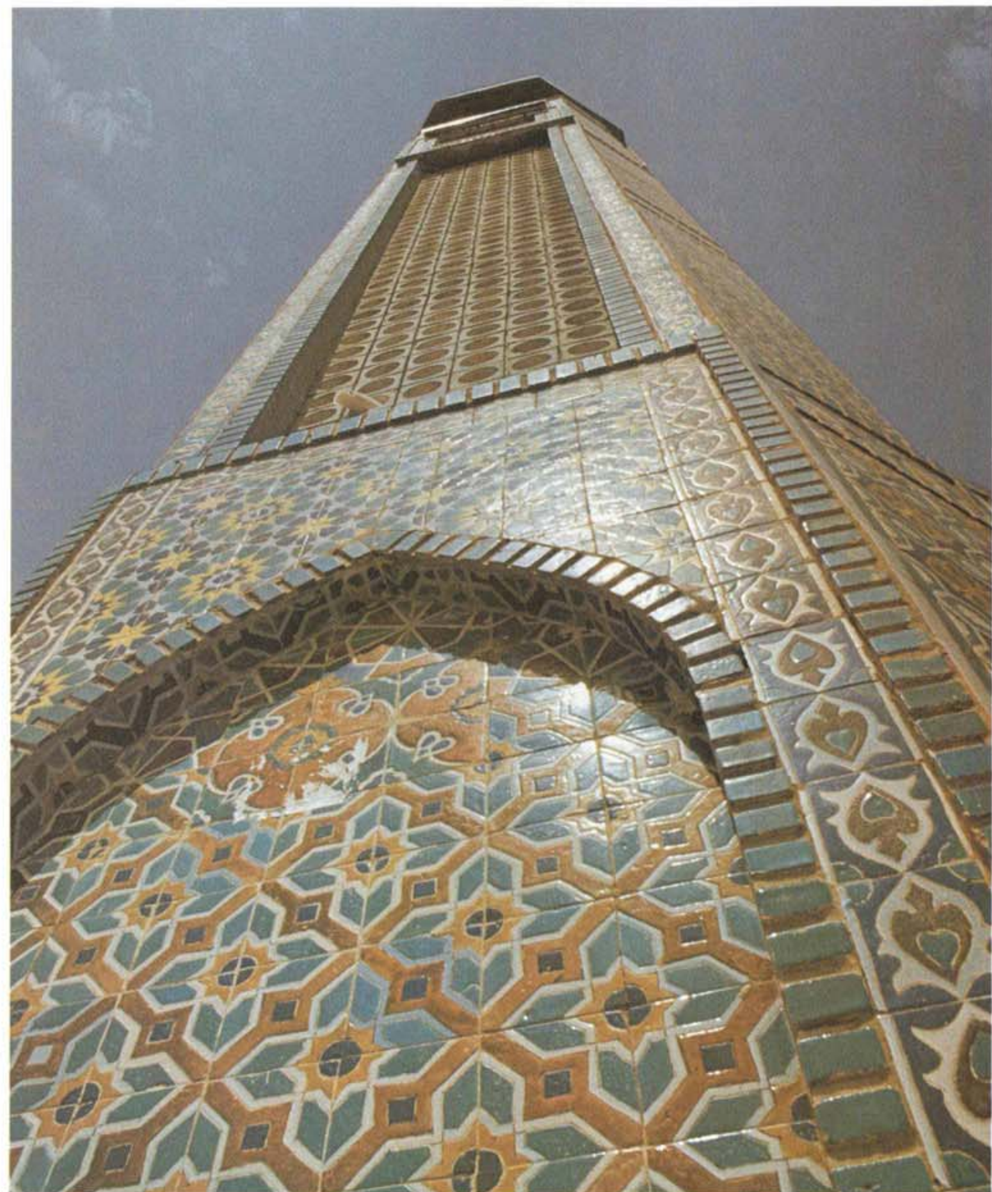
Some Afghans are members of a small sect which venerates the memory of 'Ali, a cousin and successor of the Prophet Muhammad. They pay particular homage to him at Mazar-i-Sharif, a shrine dedicated by them to 'Ali and accepted by some as his tomb.

The shrine is the scene of a widely known festival held each year on Nawruz, the Afghan New Year

which falls on March 21. A few days beforehand, people from all over the country – up to 100,000 by some estimates – converge on the grounds to ride ferris wheels and merry-go-rounds, play games, listen to music and buy delectable kebabs, cakes, fruits and nuts, and colored syrupy drinks from stalls. Then, on the morning of Nawruz, the crowds gather in the courtyard and gardens to witness, amid fanfare and emotion deeply felt, the raising of the standard of 'Ali, which will fly for 40 days. Those nearest the flagpole, which lies between the shrine and the mosque, clamber to touch the pole or the flag in its slow ascent.

Although Islam flatly rejects the concept of sainthood, shrines or

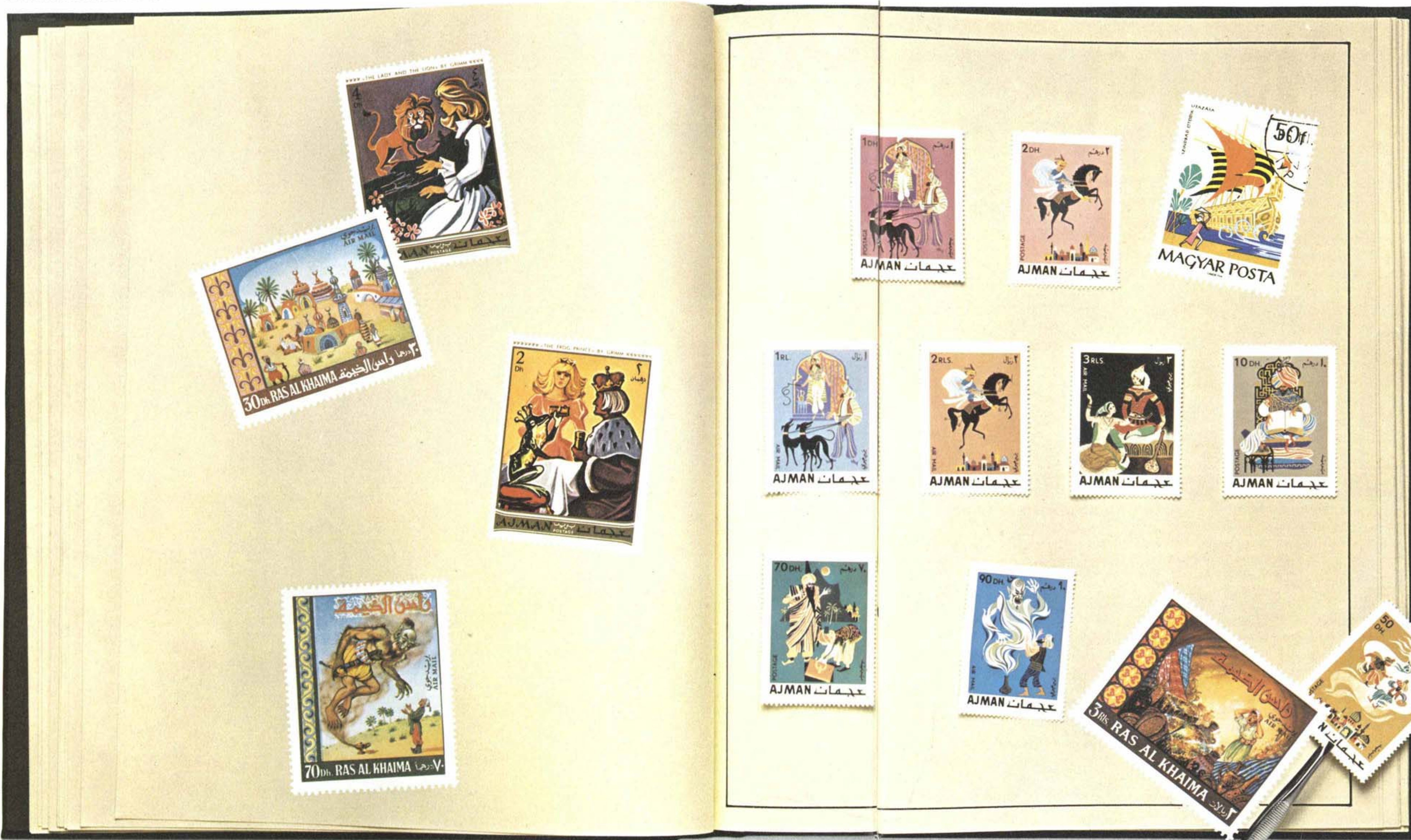
ziarets dedicated to pious or heroic persons, who may have lived in the seventh century or died last month and who are believed to possess powers of intercession with the Divine, flourish and proliferate in Afghanistan. These, out of centuries old superstitions are beseeched through prayer; for favors asked, personal reminders are left; often a scrap of cloth from the garment of the supplicant. One comes upon them everywhere – elaborate *ziarets* in the center of Kabul; small, domed structures encompassed by fields of wheat on the plains of Turkestan; and deep in the Hindu Kush, in the terrifying, blue-black kingdoms of stone, nomad shrines, a mound of rocks and a pole, tied with strips of colored cloth: ensigns of hope fluttering endlessly in the wind.



These departures from Islamic beliefs are, of course, frowned upon in traditional circles – as is the new and sometimes critical sophistication of many well-traveled young people. But they are not, in fact, sources of major concern. The traditional Muslim in Afghanistan believes firmly – and calmly – that all Muslims, including their own occasionally dissenting offspring, will in time return to the fold. They believe too that although some change will inevitably occur, the Afghanistan they know and cherish will, in time, absorb the flaws and errors of all. This is the Afghanistan I saw: fantastic sandstone cliffs with striations of magenta, green, slate blue and beige; terraced mountainsides in yellows and greens with the snowy summits always beyond, untouched, original, unpolluted, almost unseen; and ancient watchtowers jutting from the crests of rocks; and caravanserais in pieces. And, too, young boys nudging their flocks of goats along the narrow, zigzag mountain trails; an old man, sniffing a rose in a park in Balkh; Turkoman ladies, bejeweled and dressed in scarlet robes, their tall, domed hats giving them a queenly aura as they crouch by their carpet looms, fingers flying: in time, the work of art emerges, the flaw carefully woven in, since only God is perfect.

Mary Norton, who has lived in Saudi Arabia since 1958, is a frequent traveler to Afghanistan and an occasional contributor to Aramco World.

Stamps from the author's collection



NEW FORMS FOR OLD CLASSICS

The Return of Scheherezade

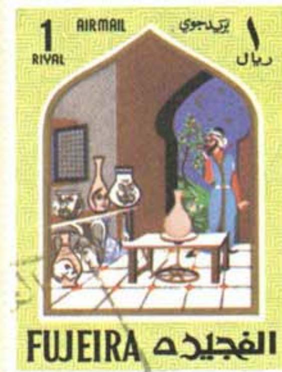
Stamp collectors, a noted expert on philately reported recently, have some new collectors' items to paste down in their albums: new issues of stamps illustrating famous tales from *The Arabian Nights,* more accurately known as *The Thousand and One Nights.*

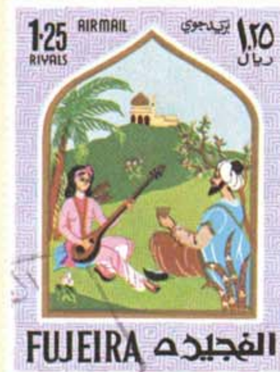
The expert, George Tlamsa, based his comment on his recent effort to catalog all stamps published by the United Arab Emirates – formerly The Trucial States – during which, he said, he found that philatelic issues depicting scenes from Scheherezade's endless stories are becoming popular with stamp collectors the world over. Indeed, he added, stamps devoted to tales from *The Arabian Nights* are now so numerous that collectors could begin to put together sizeable specialized collections.

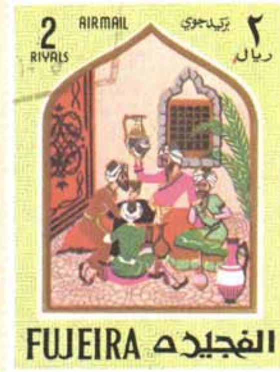
One of the most famous works to come out of the Middle East, *The Thousand and One Nights* is a collection of stories of diverse origin which assumed their final form in Egypt during the 15th century. The tales first appeared in Europe beginning in 1704 in a full French translation by Antoine Galland, but the most famous compilation is Sir Richard Francis Burton's 12-volume English translation which appeared between 1885 and 1889. Burton, the British orientalist, traveler and explorer, worked from Arabic texts, as well as with two earlier English versions: one published by E. W. Lane in 1839-41, and the other by John Payne in 1882-84. Burton titled his book "The Book of the Thousand Nights and a Night," and added this subscript to the title, "A plain and literal translation of 'The Arabian Nights' Entertainments!"

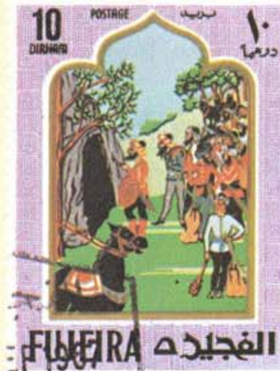
Basically *The Arabian Nights* consists of more than 200 separate tales, linked together as the efforts of a king's bride to prevent her husband from executing her. The King, it seems, had once been betrayed by a wife and decided that each girl he married would be killed on the morning after the wedding. The beautiful and clever Scheherezade, however, persuaded the King to let her entertain him on their wedding night by telling him a story – and then suddenly stopped at the most exciting point. Intrigued, the King allowed Scheherezade to live another day so he could hear the end of the story. On the second night, however,

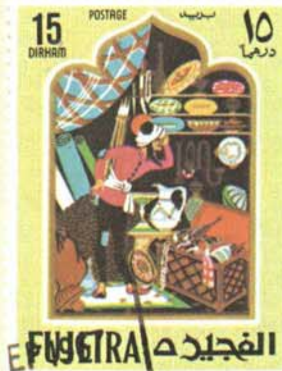
WRITTEN BY ROBERT OBOJSKI











she started another story immediately after ending the first, and again the King let her live to finish it. As the imaginative Scheherezade managed to come up with fascinating tales night after night for a thousand and one nights, the King continued to let her live and, eventually falling in love with her, cancelled his decree and permitted her to live – happily, one assumes, ever after.

Scholars are still probing the origins of *The Arabian Nights,* but it is obvious that there were numerous contributors – the style and literary merit vary widely – and that some were gifted artists. Furthermore, the various editions are far from uniform. As Professor G. M. Wickens of the University of Toronto wrote, "Individual tales and passages are included, omitted, or varied in haphazard fashion. . ." The stories in *The Arabian Nights* cannot even be conveniently placed into a single category; they include fairy tales, fables, romances, farces, lègends, parables, semi-realistic tales of travel and adventure and small novels of moral and social significance. The tales, moreover, have a sweeping variety of settings: Baghdad, Basrah, Cairo and Damascus, as well as China, Greece, India, North Africa and Turkey.

But whatever their origins *The Arabian Nights* achieved an unparalleled popularity and became one of the most famous works of Arab literature in the English speaking world. Various versions of the tales have been frequently adapted for the movies, television, theater and opera and still other, watered-down adaptations have long been a staple of children's literature everywhere.

Among the most famous of the tales – although not included in the original compilation – is *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves,* which has provided the English language with one of its more durable clichés. Centered on a young woodcutter named Ali Baba, it tells how he learns that the magic words "Open Sesame" open the door to a thieves' great cave where a band of 40 bandits store their ill-gotten gold. As Ali Baba helps himself to the treasure, the 40 thieves, when they learn Ali Baba's identity, conceal themselves in huge jars outside his house, intending to surprise and kill him in the night. Their plan, however, is defeated by Ali Baba's servant girl, Marjana, who pours hot oil into the jars and kills the thieves.

Another famous tale is *The Magic Carpet,* or *Prince Husain's Carpet,* which tells of an enchanted flying carpet that can transport the person who stands upon it to any place he desires; one of the most famous of the flying carpets was that of King Solomon, which, according to legend, was of green silk and big enough to hold the King's throne and a platoon of his warriors. There is also *The Black Horse* – sometimes called *The Ebony Horse* or *The Flying Horse.* An off-shoot of the flying carpet theme, it tells of a horse, crafted in wood, which, by magic, can soar high in the air above towns and cities. A third world-famous tale concerns Aladdin and a magic lamp from which, when Aladdin rubs it, emerges a "genie" who is able to grant Aladdin all his wishes. Like the Ali Baba tale, the Aladdin story may have been added later. Still another series of stories focuses on the adventurous voyages of Sinbad the Sailor. Told by Sinbad later, when he had become a wealthy merchant, they include Sinbad's seven hazardous voyages, his encounter with a gigantic bird – a "roc" – and his landing on an island which proves to be a huge whale.

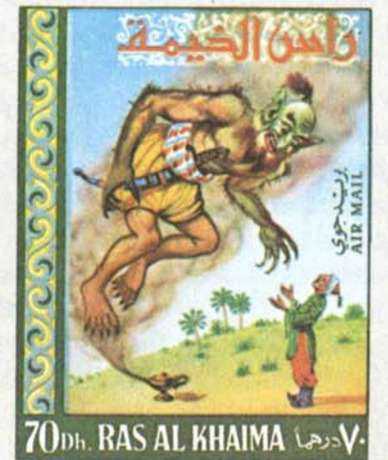
Unlike many of the tales, the Sinbad stories started out as fairly realistic travel tales, *(Aramco World, July – August, 1975),* which evolved into the fantastic tales eventually incorporated in *The Thousand and One Nights.*

To depict such colorful tales, the artists chosen by three U.A.E. countries – Ajman, Fujeira and Ras al-Khaima – opted for bright colors and a lavish use of gold – to subtly suggest, perhaps, the treasures that *Arabian Nights* protagonists either sought or won. In 1967, for example, both Ras al-Khaima and Ajman came out with *Arabian Nights* stamps, all glowing with color. The Ras al-Khaima set consists of five varieties and the Ajman series consists of 11, plus a souvenir sheet.

Fujeira has also issued two series of six stamps based upon two of the most noted tales from *The Arabian Nights;* the first, a set of regular issues, features scenes from *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves,* while the second, a group of airmails, has scenes from *The Magic Carpet.*

That same year Turkey, to publicize its International Tourist Year, issued a series of stamps including two puppets acting out an eastern fairy tale. Even earlier, in 1965, Hungary had issued a series of nine stamps including *The Black Horse, Aladdin and the Magic Lamp, The Magic Carpet, Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves,* and *Sinbad the Sailor.*

In addition to the Arab world's own fairy tales, Ajman, in 1971, issued a series of six stamps illustrating some of the famous fairy tales by the Brothers Grimm. Fujeira, carrying the fairy tale theme even further, issued a 60-stamp set, in 1972, showing scenes from Walt Disney's film versions of such classics as *Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty* and *Snow White.*



For stamp collectors, gathering a complete collection of *Arabian Nights* and other fairy tale stamps from the United Arab Emirates is far from simple. Few dealers maintain comprehensive stocks of philatelic issues from these particular states because, as the proprietor of a large philatelic store in New York City said recently, "The United Arab Emirates have issued such a wide variety of stamps within the past decade that it's really difficult to keep up with all of them; if I'm sold out of a specific series, then I can't always get replacements very readily". Hobbyists who want to collect United Arab Emirates stamps according to a particular topic, therefore, may have to do some hunting. And hunting down all the fairy tale issues can present a distinct challenge since most of them were produced in two major varieties; in perforated and in imperforate form.

Such a search, however, may be worthwhile. *The Arabian Nights* issues are growing in popularity and philatelists everywhere are beginning to value them highly.

Robert Obojski revised Reinfeld's Stamp Collectors' Handbook, *has been the regular stamp colomnist for the* Christian Science Monitor, *and has contributed to many philatelic publications.*

A Talk with Freya Stark

WRITTEN BY BETTY PATCHIN GREENE

She has raised the literature of travel to new levels of grace and perception

ILLUSTRATED BY DON THOMPSON

For centuries the lands that lie between East and West have attracted imaginative and articulate travelers fascinated by past and present civilizations. During the last 100 years, in particular, such travelers have not only replenished the literature of travel, but also have raised it to new levels of grace and perception – none more skillfully than Freya Stark.

A Middle East traveler, an explorer and, above all, a writer, Freya Stark has, with an incomparably clear eye, looked toward the horizon of the past without ever losing sight of the present. Her books are route plans of a perceptive intelligence, traversing time and space with ease. Fording a stream on foot, she looks down at the stones and sees an ancient carved inscription through the running water. On the other side of the stream, the Bedouin guide is waiting, and there is a living village, built on the site of heaven-knows-how-many vanished habitations.

The explorer lodges happily in such villages, in the old quarters of ancient cities, and in the black tents of the Bedouin that "rest on the surface of the world like a seagull on a wave."

Unlike some of the travelers, Freya Stark never sentimentalizes the lives and lands that so obviously fascinate her. She is willing to admit frustration and discomfort, and to express affection, amusement and irritation – often all at once – without a trace of condescension. Perhaps this adjustment to travel was inherited. As she writes in *The Freya Stark Story:* "My parents treated Europe with extreme nonchalance as a place to run about in." And indeed, the handsome, talented pair of young artists – first cousins of old Devonshire stock – found the baby, born in Paris in 1893, no drawback. Her cradle was highly mobile.

The Starks built houses in rural England, settled for a time in London's elegantly bohemian St. John's Wood, then swung back to the continent, especially northern Italy. In these places Freya and her younger sister Vera grew up, multi-lingual, educated by governesses and nuns, exposed to all sorts of people and to a life close to nature.

Her parents' eventual separation was desperately hard on a girl with strong affections. Yet the need to communicate with them led her to write. In a series of remarkable early travel letters, at once factual and poetic, it is easy to trace the outlines of the many books she later produced.

She did not, of course, reach the Middle East overnight. By the time she started for Lebanon in 1927, Freya had attended Bedford College in London, served as a nurse – in wartime Italy and England – and as a censor. These were years of unobtrusive development – accompanied at times by illness and grief.

After the war, Robert Stark, who had emigrated to Canada, gave his daughter a small house with a piece of land on the Italian Riviera – where she and her mother made a home attractive to a cosmopolitan group of friends and where Freya built up a modestly profitable market garden business.

Some of the hard-earned money went for Arabic and Persian lessons, later continued in England and Lebanon, which were important later when – despite ill health and a slim purse – she began her wanderings through Syria, Persia, Iraq, Palestine and southern Arabia.

In a sort of chain reaction, the new languages she learned sent her off on her explorations, the explorations in turn resulted in her first books and publication of her first writings brought grants from the Royal Geographical Society and, eventually, such honors as the title of Dame, the equivalent of a knighthood for a woman. Public recognition for such books as *The Southern Gate of Arabia* and *In the Valleys of the Assassins* followed.

During the Second World War, Freya Stark served with the British in the Middle East, using her knowledge and talent to help counteract Nazi influence in Aden, Cairo and Baghdad. Later she was also sent on mission to the United States, Canada and India.

After the war came the historically-inspired Asia Minor expeditions, resulting in such books as *Alexander's Path* and *Riding to the Tigris*. These, found on the shelves of the Dhahran Library some years ago, were my own introduction to Freya Stark.

Last summer I finally met the explorer at home in Asolo in northern Italy. Incredibly young and vital at 84, she had just returned from Turkey where she had voyaged down the Euphrates by raft – a project jointly sponsored by the BBC and Syrian Television. As we looked over a stack of photographs she told us a little about the trip. It was a very Starkian time-bridger. Setting out in Northern Syria, the raft, resembling an open-sided thatched hut set on a platform, first traversed a land where the old customs still survive. Then, after various adventures – at one point the river flooded the raft – she drifted into the 50 mile lake formed by the new Euphrates Dam *(Aramco World, January-February, 1974).*

Here, dame Freya emerged from the past, delighted both with the river and with the technological achievements of her old friends the Syrians. As she remarked, the dam is a great effort for an emerging country, and will produce considerable material benefits for Syria and other Arab countries.

Returning north overland, the Stark expedition visited the camp of the Rawallah Bedouin, who were sending camels down into Saudi Arabia where, as she said in our interview, she had her "first vision" of Arab life. And with that we came full circle, back to her beginnings.

A Talk with Freya Stark

Interviewer: You have always liked the Bedouin; how do you feel about them now?

Stark: Well, my feelings haven't changed. I remember my first sight of the Rawallah camels south of Damascus. I had never seen camels loose before outside a zoo, and suddenly the whole earth seemed full of these creatures, browsing along, apparently going very slowly. But really, although I was young then, I could hardly keep up with them as I rushed to take photographs. That was my first vision, and I've never forgotten it. It was in 1927, just 50 years ago.

Interviewer: And other peoples?

Stark: Well, we've been a month on this venture down the Euphrates on the raft, and I found them just as lovable, and just as kind and friendly, as before. They still have the old fashioned ways. You can't *buy* bread, you know: the Headman came with the flat bread they make to offer it to us as strangers – always given, never sold. Such a nice man.

Interviewer: They will give to a stranger when they are in need themselves, won't they?

Stark: Yes, the Bedouin will give their last drop of water.

Interviewer: In your explorations you have always seemed to be more interested in people than in archeology.

Stark: I have never called myself an archeologist. I don't have the scientific side of it at all. I like, if anything, history. I like the change of races more than the finding of objects.

I was very lucky to be in Iraq just when Leonard Woolley had made his great discoveries. I remember being shown over the Ziggurat of Ur by him, and the little town where, he told us, he knew every house in the street where we were walking. He knew the inhabitants – this was a shop, this was a school, and he explained it all. He was the most gentle and courteous man. I wasn't known in any way, yet he took as much trouble explaining it all as if I had been an important visitor. He became a very great friend.

Interviewer: I think one thing that has made your books popular is your unforced feeling for historical personalities. What is it like to travel with Herodotus and Alexander the Great?

Stark: All I can say is that they seem just as real to me as a lot of living people. They *are* living to me. Perhaps it was because we began very early. We had a German governess – it was the age of governesses – and she made us read little stories from Homer when I was about nine or 10 years old. So they became real.

Interviewer: What would be your advice to a young person who wanted to explore today? Are there any more frontiers?

Stark: Well, not so much frontiers, but there are plenty of little blank spots. But you see, they . . . go in cars now. I don't think that is the proper way to go.

Interviewer: The Second World War rather put a stop to exploration but you had an interesting career during the war years. Can you tell us about that?

Stark: In a way, that *was* exploration to me. I was sent to Aden and in my next volume of letters, which is coming out almost simultaneously with the BBC travel film, I describe that. I was also sent to the Yemen. I spent two months up there and it was wonderful because it was very little known. We had about three people there, a doctor and a nurse and that was all. That was quite new. Then I went to Cairo.

Interviewer: What is it like to be in a nomad camp?

Stark: For one thing, they are very pleasant to be with. They have certain manners that I think are delightful. One is that you don't have to talk all the time. If you have something to say, you say it. But they don't mind a circle of 10 or 12 or 20 people, quite quiet and silent, who haven't anything much to say. And then, if someone *has*, they say it. These pleasant pauses are so agreeable that one is inclined to get into the habit, and it isn't the thing at all in a European drawing room.

Before the meal they have a long social time and then, late in the evening, the sheep or whatever it is is brought in, and then you eat and go home. The real evening is before the meal.

And I've never heard a Bedouin interrupt another in conversation. They never get excited and shout at each other. Conversation is a whole art which, I have a theory, comes from the fact that the lighting in their tents has never been good enough for reading. You can't really do anything except sit and talk.

Interviewer: They are a very word-oriented people – in their love of poetic recitation, for example, aren't they?

Stark: It comes largely from this habit of depending on speech. Also on the very great beauty of the language. It is the most poetic language. It is incredibly rich. That is really the difficulty of learning it – the very great quantity of words.

Interviewer: Many people consider that your writing has a highly poetic quality. Do you think Arabic has influenced your style?

Stark: I don't know. I've loved poetry and I've loved words since the age of six. I think I've always seen things rather in the dress of words. I enjoy Arabic. I don't speak it at all elegantly but I enjoy it immensely.

Interviewer: You never really wrote until you went to the Middle East, did you?

Stark: What happened was that I wrote a bad poem when I was about eight or nine, grew up wanting to write, and was discouraged when I showed something to a friend who was a writer and who said, "Oh well, if you worked very hard you *might* . . ." It was very discouraging, so I gave up and thought no more about it. Then my mother typed out my diaries and things from my first Persian journey and said I must make a book. I hadn't written before.

Interviewer: One subject that interests westerners very much is the Arab woman. You had many chances to meet them. Did you make friends?

Stark: They were very kind to me always. I like Arab women. And, of course, I feel women are just as influential when they are shut up as when they are let loose. I think we run the world wherever we happen to be.

Interviewer: What first made you want to go to the Middle East after a European upbringing?

Stark: I loved languages, you know, and I loved to travel. My sister and I were brought up to travel; we wandered about. I always had a feeling for learning languages, and Arabic covers the greatest number of countries with the most interesting history that was within my reach. I never thought of Far Eastern languages, but I could learn Arabic, and it covers the greatest area. And, strangely, I thought when I was about 20 that the countries where oil was being found were going to be the most interesting in my life. I can't think why I thought it, but I did.

Interviewer: I think people would be very interested in hearing something of the "Brotherhood of Freedom" which came into being during those times.

Stark: I was in the Ministry of Information, and in 1940 the job was to convince the Egyptian people that we meant to win the war in the end. We and the enemy were one to eight in the desert. Our guns shot a little over half the distance of the German guns, and we had all this population to keep happy. I was given that job – to talk to the people – and the difficulty was to get at enough of them. You can't just do it alone. So, I thought, I must get different committees in different places set up who were doing the same sort of work, and we would be a central committee and give them the material.

We started with 12 friends and gradually spread. In a year or two, we had over 100,000 people in the committees who wanted to help us. You see, Egypt had offered to fight for us but we could not spare the arms. We said, "If we give you the arms, it deprives our soldiers and that just doesn't do." We needed every single weapon we had...Yet the ones who wanted to help were anxious to do something, and so we had our Brotherhood and they helped in every way. When the Italians came through very near Cairo one day, the Brotherhood did marvelously . . . they stood very firm . . . They were people who wanted to help and hadn't the means to do so officially – over 100,000 of them.

Interviewer: And that all grew from the little committee of 12.

Stark: Yes...It was very touching. I would meet these little committees in out-of-the-way places. They started there on their own afterwards and it was perfectly disinterested. They didn't really think we would win that war.

Interviewer: What a wonderful thing! And it's almost a forgotten phase of the war now.

Stark: Wait until the next volume of letters, the one that is coming out this year! It's all the letters written from Cairo. Of course, our part in that huge war was tiny...but there is a picture of the struggle as it was in those days.

Interviewer: Have you had the opportunity to meet young Arabs recently?

Stark: Yes. I haven't met them on a sort of political level. Our trip down the Euphrates was just for fun and we had not a single political discussion. We were all enjoying it. I found that this was certainly the way to the heart of the young there, because they like an adventure of any sort.

Interviewer: Do they have a feeling for the past? Are they interested in their own history?

Stark: Yes, but they are not documentarians as we are. We are becoming wedded to the document. I don't think they care about it. They care about the *feeling*. It is perhaps the old-fashioned way. They care about their own history; they are very proud of memories and of course they are a believing people. Religion is still a great force; they have a faith in their religion. People will tell you that this is old-fashioned and that you hear nothing but oil and money being talked of... but I noticed that among the young people we were with – and they were most of them young – that when you got to know them they were just the same as I always remembered them, with a very strong belief that perhaps we used to have and lost: a belief of being entirely in the hands of Allah, of God, so that human decision is subordinate.

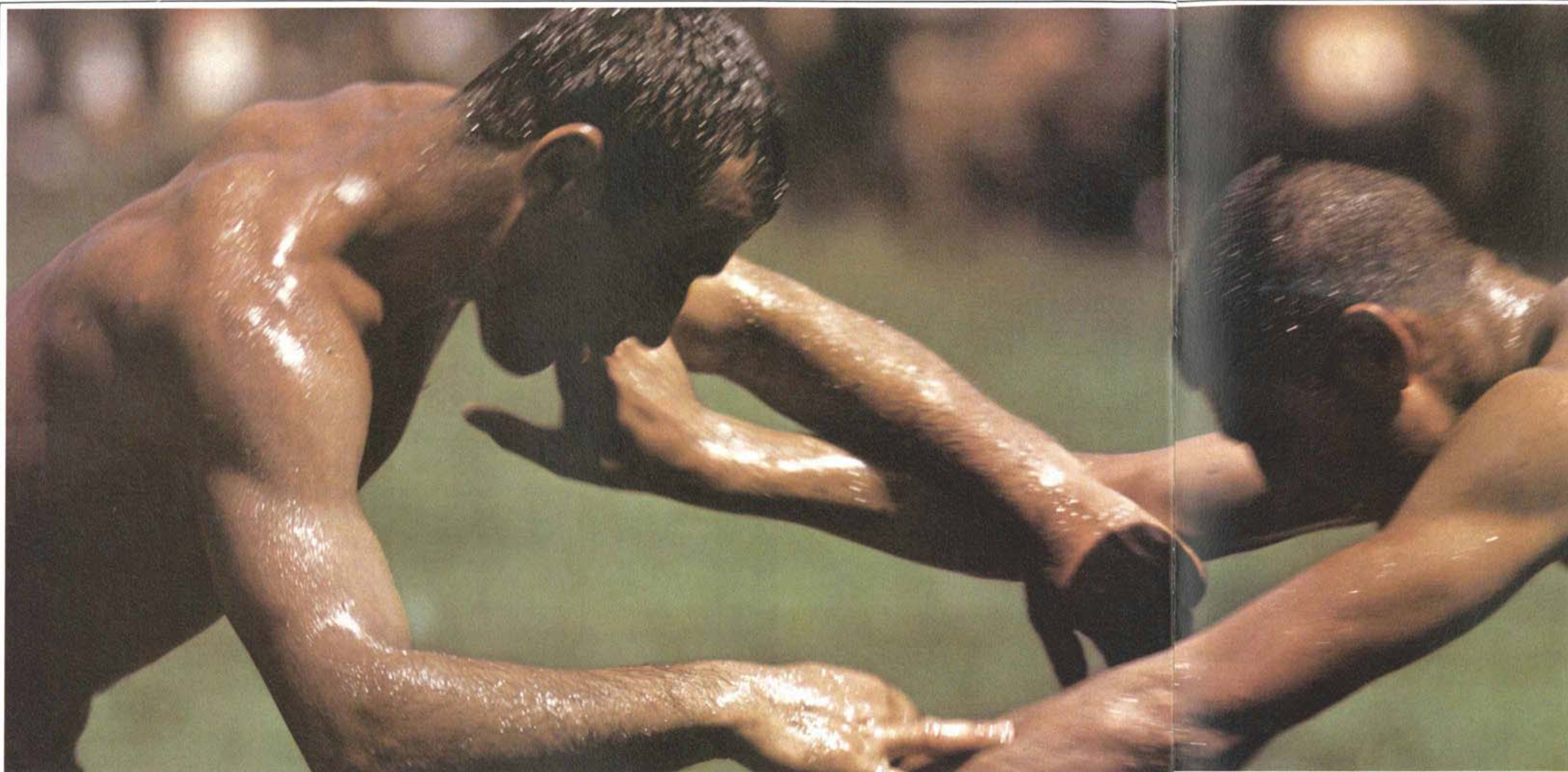
It is a great strength, and it interests me because I think you find it among the Elizabethans. You know Sir Humphrey Gilbert's last words, crossing the Atlantic in a little boat that was sinking: "We are just as near to Heaven on the sea as on the land." Well, the Arab really believes that. We are inclined to say it but not quite believe it. I've seen him in action that way.

Dame Freya had summed up her points: a feeling for the past based not on sentimental regrets, but on a sense of historic human values; and a hope for the future drawn from the renewed values she had found on her latest expedition, down a river at the heart of an ancient world.

Books by Dame Freya Stark:

Alexander's Path
Dust in the Lion's Paw
East is West
Gateways and Caravans
A Portrait of Turkey
Perseus in the Wind
Rome on the Euphrates
The Southern Gate of Arabia
The Valleys of the Assassins
Ionia: A Quest
Journey's Echo
Minaret of Djam
Lycian Shore
The Zodiac Arch

Betty Patchin Greene was born in China and has lived in Europe and the Middle East. She writes travel and historical articles for American newspapers and magazines.



Add olive oil to one of the world's oldest sports, and the result is...

Wrestling With A Twist

WRITTEN BY JOHN LAWTON

PHOTOGRAPHED BY ARA GÜLER/TÜRK HABERLER AJANSI

For four grueling hours the two men fought to pin each other to the ground. But each time one seemed certain to succeed, his opponent slipped free. In a unique twist to one of the world's most universal sports, the two wrestlers were coated from head to toe with olive oil.

Now the two 280-pound contenders for Turkey's greased wrestling crown crouched locked in combat in the center of the grassy arena as 10 turbanned drummers beat an incessant tattoo. Sweat dripped from the matted ends of Kara ("Black") Ali's heavy mustache and ran in rivulets across the glistening skin of Mustafa Yildiz as the two men heaved and strained to overpower each other.

The throb of drums mingled with the sounds of revelry and the smell of charcoal fires in the hot afternoon air. In the woods, fields and fairgrounds surrounding the stadium, happy, jostling crowds made merry, seemingly oblivious to the epic struggle going on inside. In the arena, however,wrestling fans, crammed into the banked stands, tensed as the referee stepped forward to decide the deadlocked contest. By drawing lots he declared Yildiz the winner. It was a short-lived triumph. In an ensuing, fierce ten-minute struggle, Yildiz in turn was downed by Aydin Demir, who was declared the new *bashpehlivan* – champion greased wrestler – of all Turkey.

So ended the 615th annual Kirkpinar Tournament: a week-long greased wrestling elimination contest that combines strength and skill, tradition and pageantry, feasting and festivity.

The tournament, which dates back to the 14th century, takes its name from the place where, until recently, it was always held. According to legend, Kirkpinar was the scene of a fierce battle between Turks and Bulgars in which 40 Turkish warriors, all renowned wrestlers, were slain. As the spot where each man fell is said to have become a tiny spring, the Turks named the meadow Kirkpinar, or "Forty Springs", and – in honor of the dead – have held an annual wrestling tournament there ever since.

When Kirkpinar was recaptured in 1912 by the Bulgarians, the site of the tournament was moved to the former Ottoman capital of Edirne, near the present-day Turkish-Bulgarian border. But the name and the traditions prevailed.

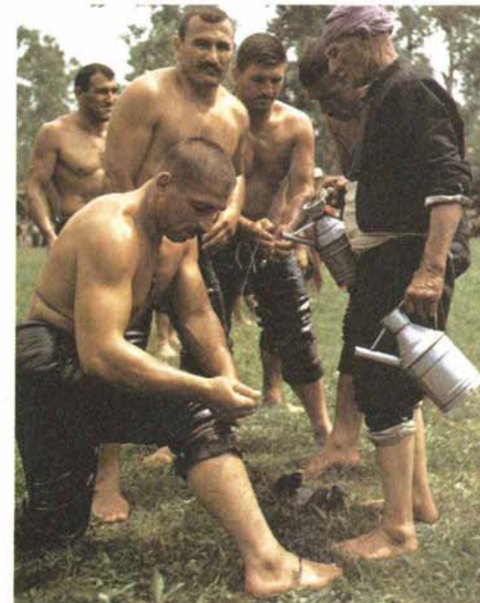
As in days of old, greased wrestlers from all over Turkey still come to the Kirkpinar Tournament each June to match their strength and skill for the sport's most coveted trophies – and cash prizes. Last year, over 300 wrestlers took part. Bouts are held in five categories: from wiry, agile lightweights to hulking, stolid heavyweights. But the main interest centers on the battle for the heavyweight crown.

At Kirkpinar, wrestling is more than just a sport. The tournament begins with prayers at the Edirne cemetery, where some of Turkey's most famous wrestlers are buried. This is followed by the auction of a sacrificial lamb. The highest bidder becomes the *agha*, or master of ceremonies, of the tournament, and his bid – this year 105,000 Turkish pounds ($6,000) – becomes the prize money. During the contests, the *agha*, dressed in the rich red and purple gold-embroidered costume of an Ottoman lord and escorted by black-clad bodyguards, struts around the arena or sits grandly in a special box smoking a water pipe.

The wrestlers fight in relays, with as many as 20 individual contests going on in the square arena at one time. As there is no time limit, each bout ends when one of the wrestlers pins his opponent's shoulders to the ground.

Before each bout, competitors douse themselves and their opponents with olive oil from huge, metal cauldrons hanging in the wrestlers' compound. They then line up and, yelling bloodcurdling battle cries, execute a series of aggressive leaps and slow-motion maneuvers designed to unnerve the opposition – and oddly similar to the traditional warming-up exercises of Japanese sumo wrestlers. Drums and horns are played throughout the contests.

Getting a firm hold on a slippery opponent and maintaining it long enough to twist him on his back require both strength and speed. One favorite trick of greased wrestlers is to force one hand down the top of an opponent's thick, black buffalo-hide breeches and the other up the leg, clasp him in the middle, heave him off the ground by the breeches, and hurl him on his back. They also use such conventional holds as the headlock, hammerlock and half nelson.



As the ranks of the contenders are thinned excitement mounts, and as the finals approach thousands of people converge on Edirne: wrestling fans, gypsy fortune-tellers, politicians, belly dancers, traders, pickpockets, fair folk and families. As one result the old bustle and importance that Edirne enjoyed as capital of the Ottoman Empire from 1362 to 1453 is revived. As another a contagious carnival atmosphere spreads through the streets and, apart from those who absolutely cannot avoid working, everyone takes a week off to join in.

Wrestling has long been a favorite sport of the Turks, but they adopted the use of oil from the Byzantines when they first conquered Edirne. Then it became a favorite court sport of the Ottoman sultans, who personally presided over the annual Kirkpinar Tournament. Several sultans, in fact, were wrestlers in their own right; Sultan Murat IV, for example, died an unbeaten champion. Turkish wrestlers reached their zenith in 1898, when Koca ("Big") Yusif Ismail toured the world, trouncing all comers. But on his way back to Turkey after an unbeaten tour of the United States, his ship, unfortunately, sank and Koca Yusif, who kept his winnings in gold in a money belt, drowned.

Actually, wrestling goes back much further than the Turks and the Byzantines. Hundreds of holds are depicted in the murals at Beni Hassan, Egypt, dating from before 2000 B.C., and a bronze figurine of two wrestlers, cast about the same time, was found at Khafajah, near Baghdad, Iraq. The Greeks introduced wrestling into the Olympic Games about 708 B.C. In the Far East the two sons of the Japanese emperor wrestled for the throne in 858, and in Europe the sport reached its pinnacle in 1520, when King Henry VIII of England challenged Francis I of France to a bout at the Field of the Cloth of Gold. The Frenchman won.

In recent years, especially in the television era, wrestling in the United States and Western Europe has degenerated into a frequently prearranged display of rough-and-tumble theatrics. But it is still taken very seriously in Turkey. Turks start off as children thrashing around in the dust of Anatolian villages. The best of them finish up on the grassy meadow at Kirkpinar. And Kirkpinar champions usually make it to Turkey's national wrestling team. In international bouts, the competition may be tougher – but at least your opponent isn't covered all over with grease.

John Lawton, a veteran UPI reporter, now freelances from Istanbul and contributes frequently to Aramco World.

Clean streets and fair trade, thanks to...

The Muhtasib

WRITTEN BY CAROLINE STONE
ILLUSTRATED BY PENNY WILLIAMS

All good citizens think of the government inspector with mingled fear and amusement. He is the man who declares your hobby shop a fire hazard and makes you rip out all that lovely electrical wiring, which you installed yourself to dodge the extravagant demands of the local electricians' union. Oh, for the good old days, you think, when you could blithely endanger your own and your neighbor's life at will and when meddlers, official or not, could be ignored.

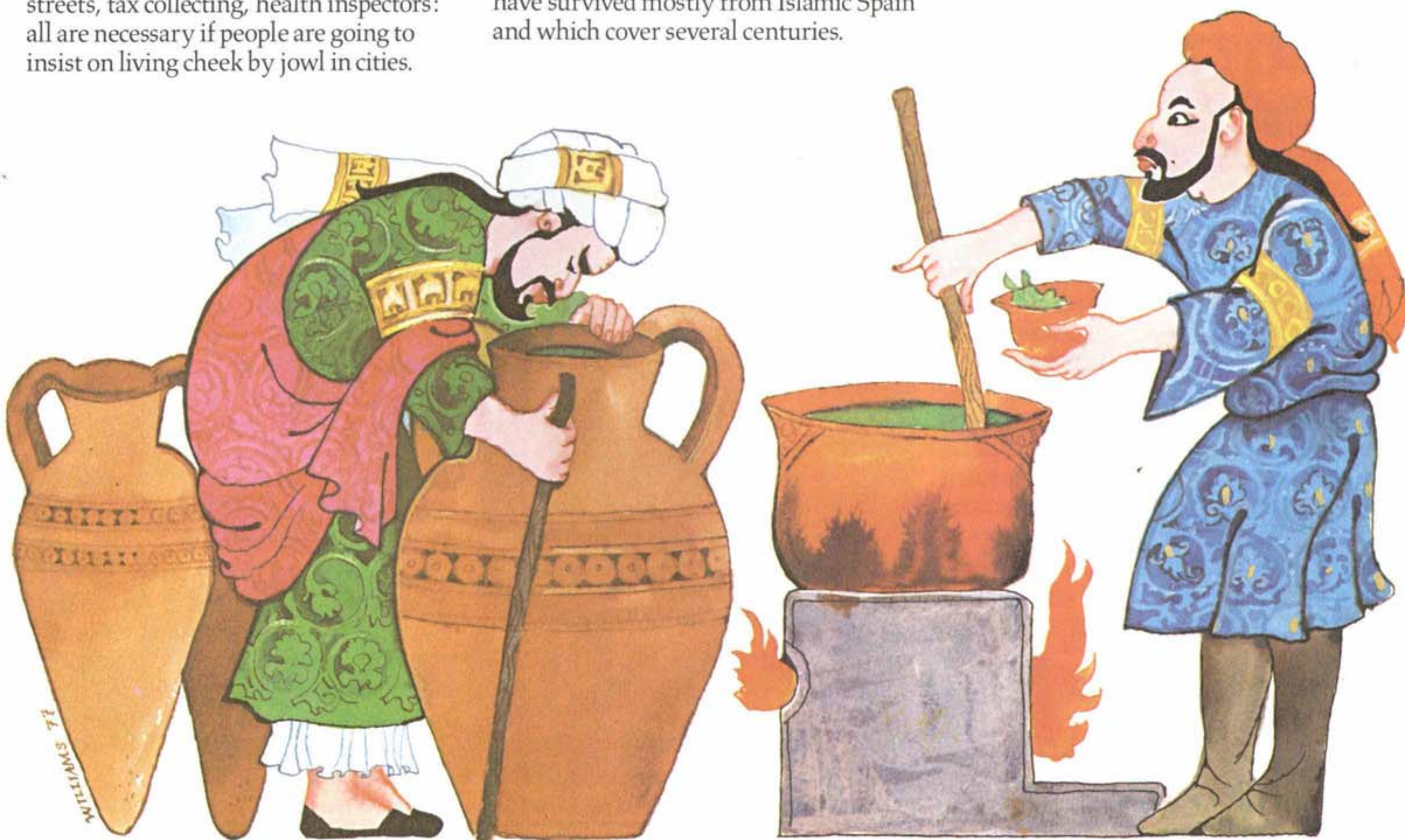
Well, there *were* no good old days. Since the beginning of urban life in the Nile delta, the floodplains of Mesopotamia, or on the great rivers of China, a primary function of government has been to intervene in the affairs of honest – and not-so-honest – citizens. Standard weights and measures, clean streets, tax collecting, health inspectors: all are necessary if people are going to insist on living cheek by jowl in cities.

The Arabs of Islam's Golden Age – a period centered around the year 800 – brought the art of urban living to a high state of perfection, and this perfection included the appointment of a special officer charged with maintaining public order. He was the *Muhtasib,* the Inspector General of Weights and Measures, a title that does no justice to his sweeping powers.

The Muhtasib was certainly in charge of weights and measures, but he was also in charge of standards generally – even standards of public behavior. He was, moreover, backed by a body of inspectors who were empowered to make regular checks on all the shops in the city, and to arrest offenders. We know a good deal about the precise functions of the Muhtasib from a series of handbooks outlining the duties of the office, which have survived mostly from Islamic Spain and which cover several centuries.

One of the most interesting of the Muhtasib's areas of responsibility was public health, a matter in many ways more important and harder to control than the relatively simple question of ensuring fair weights. He and his inspectors, therefore, fought a continuing battle to keep the streets clean – at least in the more important parts of the town – and to regulate dumping.

And that was only part of the job. Because the importance of clean food and drink in the prevention of disease was recognized by Muslim science, the ordinances governing food and drink were severe and the Muhtasib, enforced them strictly. All slaughtering had to be carried out in public slaughterhouses; to prevent the people being cheated, goat's flesh was kept separate from mutton and marked yellow with saffron, the tails being left on the carcasses until the last moment to help identification. The sale of the meat of sick animals to public cooks was forbidden, and such meat had to be hung outside the shop and not confused with the good meat inside. At the end of the day, the butcher was supposed to sprinkle his block with salt and cover it with palm mats to keep away dogs and vermin. Similarly, fish vendors were ordered to wash and salt their baskets and implements daily; any fish unsold by evening had to be dried or salted, provided it had not already gone bad, in which case it was to be disposed of on a midden beyond the city limits. Slaughtering and the preparation of fish could only take place in a special area; the same was true of tanning and other "unclean" trades.



The Muhtasib also inspected public eating houses. He could order pots and pans to be re-tinned or replaced; all vessels and their contents had to be kept covered against flies and insects. (In Iran, the house fly had been suspected as a spreader of disease as early as 1000 B.C., and there were strict injunctions even then against flies touching food and drink.) The Muhtasib and his deputies were also in charge of inspecting bakeries, where they suspected bakers often used adulterated wheat, engaged in unhygienic practices and gave short measure. In late Abbasid times, if a man was repeatedly charged with a serious offense against the community, such as selling carrion meat, the Muhtasib was empowered to have him executed.

The importance of milk and water – so often sources of communicable disease – was also recognized in the Arab world. In Baghdad, water was of two classes, the best being taken from wells, the less good from the river. The water was hawked around the city in large jars which had to be kept covered with a perforated lid or with palm leaves. Water was sold to passersby using little jars, and it was strictly forbidden to drink from the main jar or to dip one's hand into it. All the jars had to be scoured daily over a fire. The Muhtasib could punish any offense against these regulations by closing the shop and pouring away the water.

River water was known to be less safe than well water, and in order to prevent it being any more polluted than necessary, the 11th century Caliph al-Muqtadi forbade the keepers of public baths to empty their waste water into the Tigris; he had special disposal pits dug for it instead. Efforst were also made to prevent garbage being thrown into the river.

River water was sold in open buckets or in water-skins of the kind familiar to travelers in the East today and to readers of *The Arabian Nights.* But as new water skins were unsafe, because the water leached tannin from the cured hide, the Muhtasib insisted that before they could be used to transport water for human consumption, they be broken in on water for the building trade. In public baths it was compulsory to keep a large porous water jar clearly labeled "PUBLIC DRINKING WATER."

The baths themselves, not surprisingly, also came under the jurisdiction of the Muhtasib. The water had to be clean and fresh and the stone floors well scrubbed. The washing of felt or leather or anything that smelled unpleasant was not allowed, and sufferers from leprosy or skin diseases were rigorously excluded.

The sale of milk was regulated even more strictly than that of water. All veseels used were to be kept covered and washed daily. All dairies had to be whitewashed and paved and the roofs frequently renovated. It was illegal to skim milk or to dilute it or adulterate it in any way, and various tests were devised to check on its quality.

The Muhtasib was also expected to keep a close check on all doctors, surgeons, blood-letters and apothecaries. Before the year 931, there seems to have been nothing to prevent anyone who wished

From the *Treatise of Ibn Abdun,* written in 12th century Seville.

§ 95 The weights used should be of glass or iron, carefully made and checked, and with the stamp of the superintendent clearly visible; merchants must not be allowed to use stone weights because these are too anonymous. It is important to check the *ratl* weights of the merchants two or three times a year, as well as the lesser weights of all the scales used in the town – and this should be done throughout all corporations and guilds.

§108 Fig vendors must not sell string bags of fruit already tied up; this enables them to mix good and bad quality figs and to sell all the nets at one price, which is pure robbery. Figs should not be sold unless the buyer is allowed to examine them, as always used to be done, especially since there are large and small figs and each sort should be sold at its correct value.

§130 Fruit should not be sold before it is ripe, since it is valueless. Exception will be made in the case of green grapes, which are good for pregnant women and invalids. Large size cucumbers which can easily be counted must not be sold by weight.

§109 No seller of fruit or vegetables is to weigh his merchandise by picking up his scales himself; on the contrary, they are to be hung from a fixed point.

§113 Sellers of eggs should have pots of water in front of them to test for bad eggs.

§225 Saffron should not be sold as a paste cut into pastilles, because then it is adulterated and bad, but as separate stamens.

§127 The copper cauldrons of the *harisa* vendors and the pans of those who sell fritters and other fried stuffs must be tinned and nothing but tinned: for oil turns rancid (some even say poisonous), in contact with copper.

§134 When someone has gold or silver coins tested by an assayer and when some part of the precious metal is subsequently shown to be debased, it is up to that assayer to give back the equivalent value, since he has committed a fault which is in fact fraudulent and has cheated one who trusted him.

§139 No one should be allowed to claim mastery over an art which he does not possess, above all in the case of the practice of medicine, since this can lead to the loss of human lives: in truth it is the earth covering the tombs of dead men which hides the mistakes of the physician . . . . Each artisan's activities should be limited to the exercise of his own trade; only those whose experience is recognized may claim to have mastered a skill.

§177 No itinerant merchant should be allowed to shelter under an umbrella unless it is higher than a man on horseback, otherwise the passersby risk having their eyes poked out.

§195 A beast of burden should not be left standing in the bazaar, because it blocks the road and hinders people from passing, and it might . . . kick someone walking by.

§188 Building must be forbidden on places where earth is dug to make plaster and on gravel pits, for these places are of public use.

§213 Metal workers and brass beaters must be made to stop the noisy part of their work during the canonical times of prayer.

from taking up those professions, but in that year the Caliph al-Muqtadi learned that one of his subjects had died as the result of a mistake made by a private doctor. He wrote an order in his own had that the Muhtasib should institute a medical licensing test to be administered by one of his own cout physicians. This was done, and in the first year, 860 doctors were licensed in Baghdad alone. Those newly entering the profession were directed to take up a particular specialty on the basis of their examination. Ophthalmologists were under particular scrutiny and considerable efforts were made to insure that unlicensed persons did not attempt to remove cataracts or perform other eye operations.

Unfortunately, those regulations and the periodic efforts to ban the unskilled and often totally unscrupulous quacks of both sexes were largely failures – the populace often felt more at ease with someone reassuring whom they knew, even if he was ignorant; in any case they could not afford the fees charged by the highly trained doctors, not all of whom gave their labor for charity.

The Muhtasib was also charged with checking the doctor's equipment and administering the Hippocratic Oath. The former entailed not only seeing that each man had the tools he needed for his specialty – magnificent boxes of surgical instruments have survived from Safavid and Qajar Iran – but also controlling the quality of the metal used in making them, the artisans again being under oath not to use imperfect metal or inferior methods of manufacture. The druggist likewise came under the watchful eye of the Muhtasib, and the adulteration of expensive drugs with cheaper ones was severly punished. The Muhtasib also had the right to appear unexpectedly, at any hour of the day or night, to inspect the shop and to make sure that it was tidy and everything clean and scoured, including the jars containing drugs.

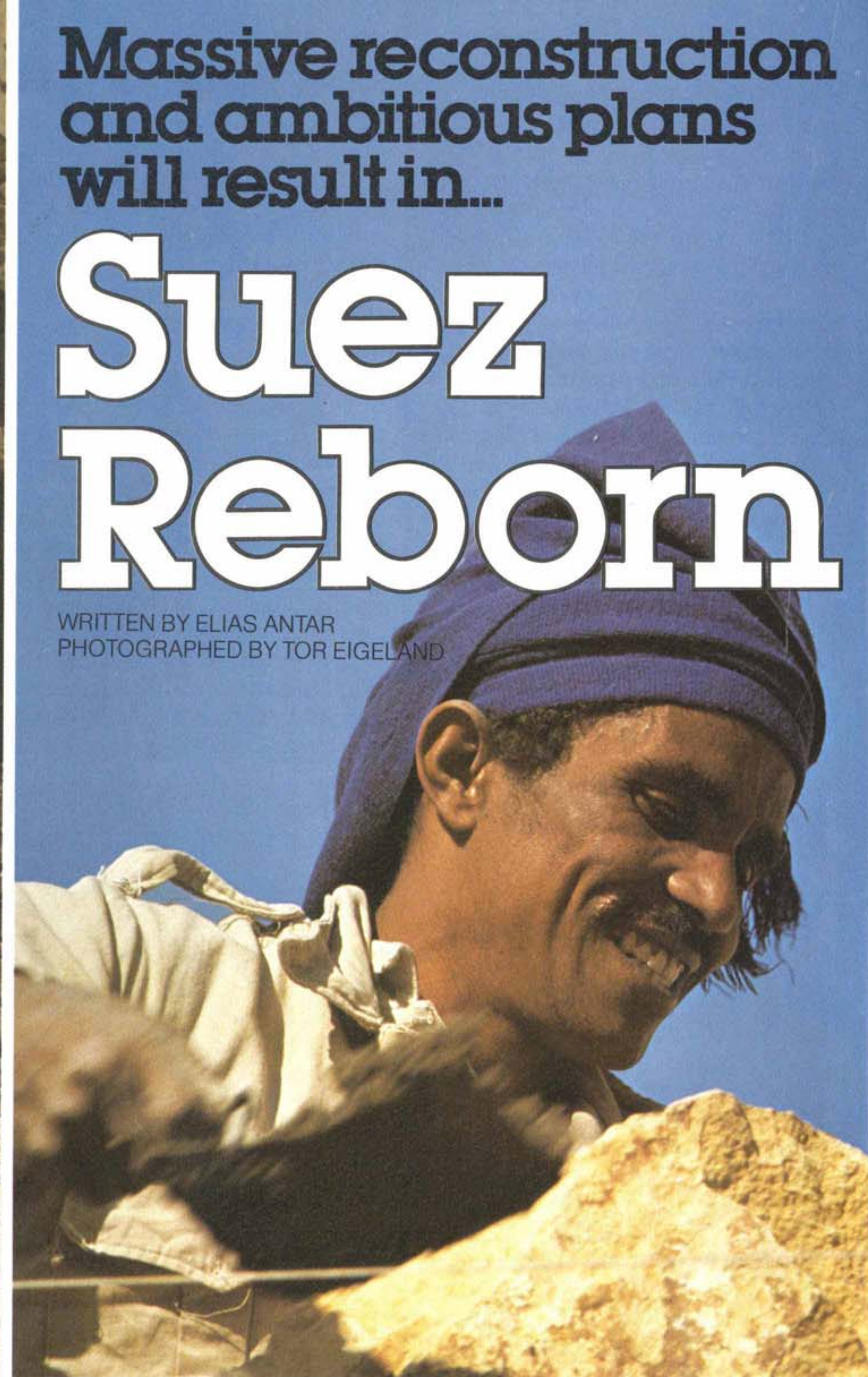
The Hippocratic Oath, with variations, has probably existed ever since the medical profession began. Almost certainly, it stretches back beyond Greece into ancient Iran and India. The oath which the doctors of Baghdad swore before the Muhtasib more than 1,000 years ago included, among other things, prohibitions against preparing, administering or purveying poisons; revealing confidences made by patients; and taking liberties with female patients. The same oath, or a version of it, is taken today by doctors all over the world, though it is no longer administered by a government official with the sweeping powers of interference for the public good that the Muhtasibs of the Golden Age enjoyed.

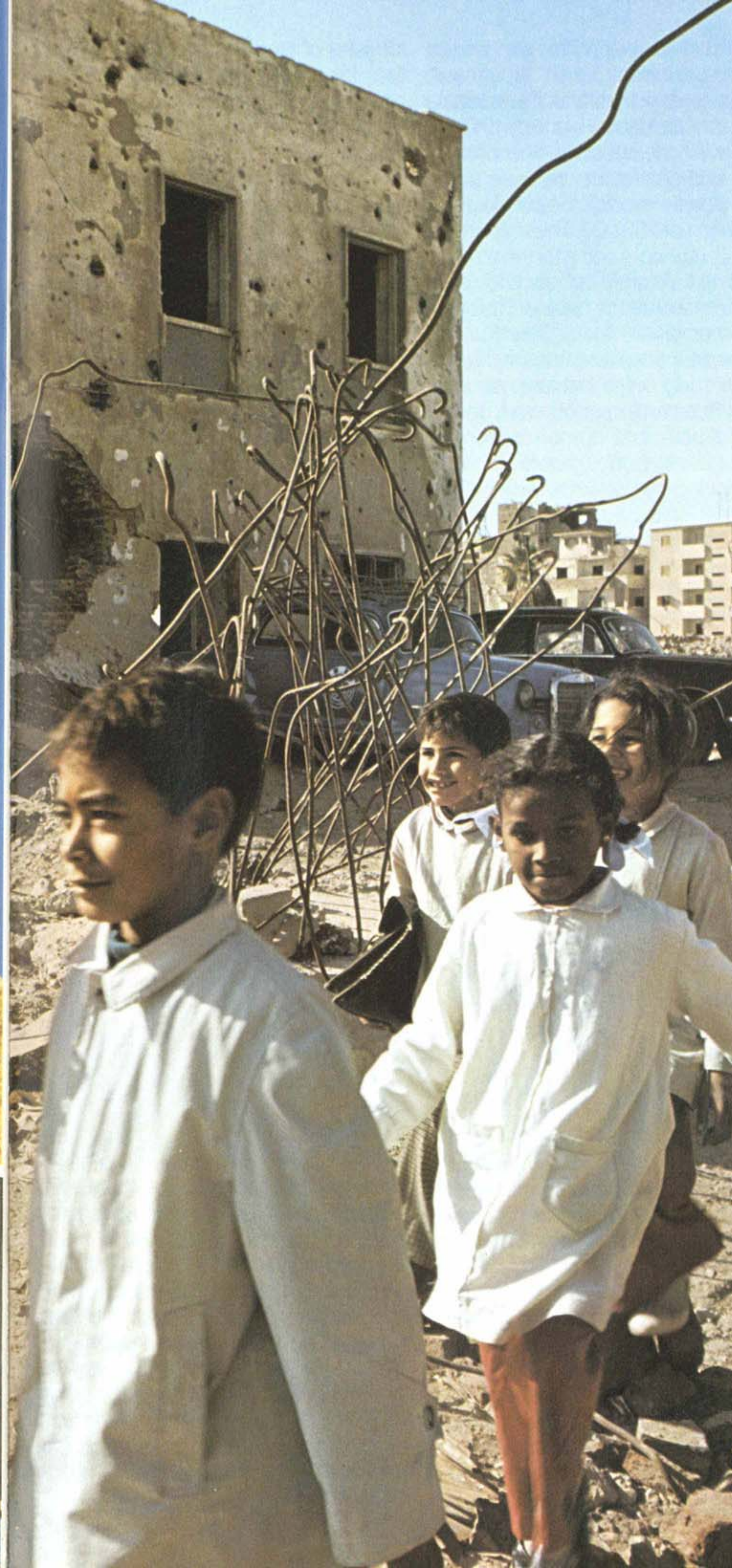
Caroline Stone specialized in medieval languages at Cambridge and is currently preparing an English version of of al-Mas'udi's "The Meadows of Gold."

Massive reconstruction and ambitious plans will result in...

Suez Reborn

WRITTEN BY ELIAS ANTAR
PHOTOGRAPHED BY TOR EIGELAND





In Port Said, the Italian *Achille Lauro* gleamed blue at its anchor as some 600 tourists disembarked. Tugs hooted in the roadstead, cranes rattled on the wharfs, horses neighed and coins tinkled. The air crisp, crowds gathered to watch and the vendors, in full cry, moved in.

"Hey, Mister, come and see my camels, small camel only 20 dollars!... Hey, *ragazza*, look, look! This real scarab... Mister! Mister! This way visit Bor Saeed. Fast horse, go quickly, quickly! Hey, lady! *Buon giorno!* You want cheap Frigidaire? Very good Frigidaire only 900 dollars! Hey, Mister! Hey, Mister!"

The world, the peddlers evidently thought, was as it should be. Port Said was alive again. And so are Suez, Ismailia and a dozen villages along the Suez Canal that for eight years were war front wastelands – scarred, deserted and silent.

Today, these communities have been reborn. Under a massive and continuing reconstruction program that got underway almost immediately after the 1973 conflict with Israel, they have been rebuilt to an astonishing degree.

And if funds are available and plans for the future work out, the Suez Canal region by the end of the century may well develop into a prosperous 100-mile urbanized strip of some 2.5 million people living on industry, agriculture, tourism and, of course, the canal.

The plans, admittedly, are ambitious, and even the most optimistic officials could not say just where Egypt will get the $12 billion needed to finance them.

But in light of what was achieved in the first 30 months of reconstruction, it is not unreasonable to expect that a good portion of the plans will eventually come true, despite Egypt's present economic straits.

In the autumn of 1973 such imaginative planning would probably have been laughed off as a pipe dream by anyone visiting the canal region. Few people looked ahead with hope then. Instead they harked back nostalgically to the early part of 1967 – when the canal was open for traffic and its cities were bustling with commerce – or looked with dismay at the aftermath of

the Six-Day War: the canal blocked, the cities deserted and in ruins and the Israeli army encamped less than 400 yards away.

The war, of course, was only part of it. After the war, and until 1970, Suez was pounded mercilessly by artillery and in 1968, Ismaila was hit too. According to official Egyptian accounts, Suez was hit daily by artillery or air raids – and sometimes both – from the spring of 1969 until a ceasefire in the summer of 1970. In Ismailia the artillery exchanges were at point blank range. As a result, Egypt evacuated nearly all the civilians – about a million people – and by 1971 the cities were depressing museums of death and destruction. In Suez some 5,000 people remained – out of a 1967 population of 250,000. These few kept essential services going for the soldiers patrolling the canal, but rats, they said, far outnumbered the people. The scars were everywhere. In Port Tewfik waterfront restaurants were unrecognizable piles of rusty metal and torn concrete, and in Suez entire streets were devastated. Shells had turned apartment buildings into huge, grotesque skulls with gaping eye sockets. At the Convent of the Good Shepherd, the roof of the church had been blasted off and the fortunes of war had torn one statue off the wall, but left another unscathed. All told, the Egyptians say, Suez suffered losses of about $650 million in destroyed housing, utilities and industries.

In Ismailia the picture was the same. Railway cars lay derailed and rusting. Several floors of the Suez Canal Authority hospital at the edge of the waterway had been destroyed and later taken over as a lookout's redoubt. In the town, the graceful balconied villas built by the French in another era lay shattered, and entire sides of apartment blocks lay exposed, the floors inside crushed together like a pack of playing cards.

The 1973 war brought still more damage. Port Said, until then almost intact, was hit by air raids and artillery fire, villages on the western shore of the Great Bitter Lakes were battered during the Israeli thrust across the canal and Suez itself was half-occupied. By the end of the October war, 85 percent of Suez and a fifth of both Ismailia and Port Said were destroyed or damaged beyond repair. And the town of Qantara, site of a ferry across the canal, was obliterated.

Little wonder then that the prospect of rebuilding the cities appeared far-fetched in the autumn of 1973. But with the war over less than a week – and the Israelis still in their cease-fire positions along the canal and around Suez – President Anwar Sadat appointed a Minister of Housing and Reconstruction and told him to start bringing the canal towns back to life.

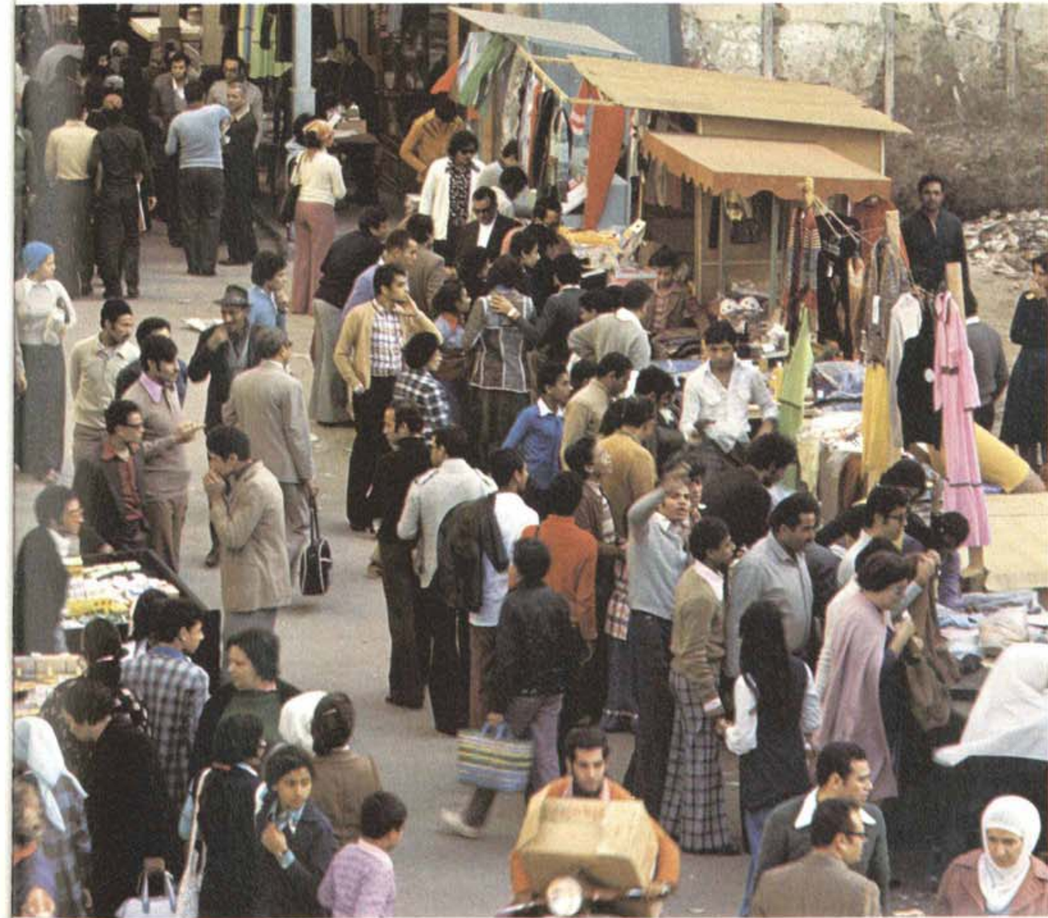
The Minister's reply was typical. "I said okay, I'll try," recalls Osman Ahmed Osman, archetypical "can-do" man and the Arab world's leading contractor. (See *Aramco World,* May-June 1974). Head of "The Arab Contractors Company, Osman Ahmed Osman," he had built airports, bridges, factories, housing and roads all over the Middle East and – his crowning achievement – the Aswan High Dam, built in cooperation with the Soviet Union. Now, in the wake of war, he was faced with a challenge that, in financial terms, was even bigger.

Osman, who has subsequently resigned from his ministerial post, moved rapidly. By the spring of 1974, he unveiled a program that, in fact, was a vision of the canal region during the next 25 years. Industry and agriculture would multiply the populations of the three cities. Free trade zones in Port Said and Suez would attract foreign investment. Tunnels under the canal would bring people and fresh water to Sinai and allow shipments of minerals in the other direction for the canal industries. Tourist resorts would be built, along with, eventually, international airports in each city.

First, however, the cities would have to be rebuilt, their populations brought back and roads, electric power lines and other necessities repaired. Immediately, therefore, Osman marshaled a huge workforce. "We sent in nearly 30,000 workers, as many as built the High Dam," said Hasaballah Kafrawy, head of the Executive Authority for the Reconstruction of the Canal Cities, a department of the Ministry of Reconstruction. Using picks and shovels – and often their bare hands – until equipment was available, the men began clearing away the ruins of war. Their orders were crisp and pragmatic: repair what can be repaired, tear down what must be rebuilt, and do it all as quickly as possible.

Which they did. A year after reconstruction began, some 55,000 apartments, 210 schools and 46 hospitals in the Suez Canal zone had been repaired, replastered or repainted. In Suez itself, some 60 apartments were repaired per day. Some of those repairs, it is true, consisted only of filling in bullet holes; but new housing was provided too. "In Suez we have built 7,000 housing units from scratch," said Kafrawy, and "some 200,000 people have returned."

There is still a tremendous job to be done. "We are still below the 1967 level," Kafrawy went on, "and we need 20,000 more housing units. Economic activity also is still sluggish because services are lacking. Suez will need much work."



Nevertheless, what has been done is impressive. At the western entrance of Suez, for example, stands King Faisal City, a housing district named after the late Saudi Arabian monarch who helped finance its construction and who laid its cornerstone in July 1974.

It consists of three-story buildings with one-, two- and three-bedroom apartments renting from $10.24 to $23 dollars a month. To save concrete and steel needed elsewhere in Egypt, the buildings are of limestone blocks quarried nearby. "The Egyptians did a very good job of constructing good quality housing in record time," said a Western expert involved in the reconstruction plans. At one point, apartments were being completed at the rate of one and a quarter per hour.

At the Convent of the Good Shepherd opposite the rebuilt railway tracks, things are looking up these days. Along with several mosques erected in the city, the government made it a point to rebuild the convent and the church, and insisted that the sisters of the religious order which runs it return to Suez. The roof of the church has been repaired and the entire complex refurbished, all at state expense. Even though there were only 50 parishioners in early 1977 – one tenth the 1967 figure – the sisters returned. "We have started up our kindergarten and our first primary school class," said Sister Stanislas, who runs the dispensary and works in a nearby government hospital. "We hope to build up gradually until we have a full primary school going again".

One building in Suez was left the way it was at the end of the fighting: with half of it crushed and the shell-holes untouched... as a memorial.

At Ismailia, the picture is even brighter. In 1977 the pre-war population of 143,000 had swelled to 220,000, light industries had started up again and the city was bustling. "We have built 6,000 housing units, but because the city is already too crowded, we now need 15,000," said Kafrawy. As in Suez, friendly Arab states pitched in to help. A 4,500-apartment housing development spread over 250 acres on the northern edge of Ismailia is named after Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan al-Nahyan, ruler of Abu Dhabi and President of the United Arab Emirates. As in Faisal City, the buildings are of limestone and, standing over long arcades bordered by arched stone columns, have a faintly Arabian air.

And in Port Said, according to Kafrawy, the imaginative program had a still greater impact. Although only 4,000 out of 10,000 housing units badly damaged or destroyed have been rebuilt, the population jumped from 280,000 in 1967 to 360,000 in 1977 – primarily because President Sadat declared the entire city a "Free Zone" in January, 1976. That meant that goods could be sold in shops for hard currency without customs duties being imposed, and the results have been impressive. Stores, for example, are overflowing with consumer items, including refrigerators – but not at the outrageous $900 claimed by the dockside vendors. In addition, acreage has been set aside for outside firms to set up trans-shipment facilities and light industries, all tax-free.

There are, certainly, problems with overcrowding and a lack of services. But, says Kafrawy, "The Suez Canal cities are attractive anyway. People who can't get apartments in Cairo come here and find them. Priority is given to the families of dead soldiers, then to the townspeople whose homes were destroyed, then to others. In all the canal region, about 850,000 to 900,000 persons out of the one million who left have returned. If the funds are available and

we continue as we are doing, the entire region will be back to its 1967 population soon."

The effort so far has not come cheap. Reconstruction of housing alone has cost about $358.4 million, Kafrawy said, and when the cost of restoring rail lines, roads, services and the other necessities of community life is added, the total cost will be about one billion, of which Abu Dhabi, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia have already made multimillion dollar contributions.

If the reconstruction effort so far has gone well, however, there is less optimism among foreign experts about the plans for the future. The chief criticism is that they are far too ambitious in light of the country's current economic conditions and the level of foreign investment. "In many areas Egypt has overreached and will have to reassess things," was the judgment of one analyst.

The plans for the future are certainly ambitious. Three master plans, one for each of the main cities on the canal, have been drawn up, mostly by foreign experts, plus a regional scheme. They project growth and development to the year 2000 and the three plans have been priced at $12 billion dollars, at 1975 values. This is for development only, and does not include what has already been spent on reconstruction, or the widening and deepening of the canal itself, which is a separate project.

Even so, the Egyptians think that they are not unrealistic. "The master plans are broad guidelines for what is supposed to happen," said Ibrahim Zaki Kenawy, Chairman of the Central Organization for Housing and, like Osman, a veteran of Aswan days. "There naturally will be changes, and probably not everything will be done. But as far as possible we intend to stick to them."

The general objectives, he went on, are to set up industries and tourist resorts, boost agriculture and the free trade zones, and develop the Sinai Peninsula so that the populations of Port Said, Ismailia and Suez will grow to 750,000, 600,000 and one million respectively. Tunnels under the canal will take road and rail traffic to Sinai and water from the Nile will be pumped across to irrigate vast tracts of land that hopefully will turn green.

The Port Said master plan envisages enlarging the existing town southwestward, expanding the industry and free zone area south of it and building new port facilities linked to the Suez Canal below the industrial zone. "The industries which appear to offer the best prospects of creating employment are textiles, leather goods (particularly footwear), plastics and furniture," the plan says. Planners believe that in the long term, between 500 and 1,000 jobs can be created per year in the free trade zone "if there is the necessary confidence in investing generally in the Egyptian economy." The expanded port, if all goes as planned, is expected to handle some three million metric tons of goods in 1980 and 10 million metric tons by the end of the century. The coastal area to the northwest of the city and along the shore of Lake Manzala will be developed for the luxury tourist trade with high class hotels, a casino, apartment buildings and restaurants. Agro-industries on 68,000 acres could prove profitable, the plan says.

Ismailia, it is hoped, will grow westward and continue its role as the headquarters of the Suez Canal Authority and as the commercial and financial center of the surrounding area. Some 500,000 acres of land are thought capable of being developed for agriculture, although – planners warn – the cost might be unacceptably high. The plan projects total employment in the city of 170,000 persons by the year 2000, with hundreds of thousands more in adjacent areas living, directly or indirectly, on agriculture. In addition, a university is planned, with faculties of petroleum engineering, commerce, minerals technology and mechanical and electrical engineering. The university will also have merchant marine and shipbuilding colleges located elsewhere along the canal. Tourism will be developed on the eastern shore of the Great Bitter Lake south of the city.

Suez has plenty of desert land around it that will allow extensive construction for industry, planners say. Focusing mostly on light and medium industries such as fertilizers, cement and textiles, the plan projects total employment in the city of 125,000 people by the year 2000. The port will be expanded for general cargo, and for tourists there will be a sports stadium, museums, a zoo, marinas and a country club with a golf course.

Of all the future projects, the most visible start has been made in the Free Trade Zone in Port Said and on the tunnels. Because of the over-optimism and false starts inevitable in such huge undertakings, progress, admittedly, has been slower than expected. By the end of 1976, for example, only one of three tunnels had been started. But it had been started.

This tunnel, some 11 miles north of Suez, will be one mile long and will be 58 feet under the present bed of the canal and some 30 feet below the bottom of the waterway when it is deepened to its maximum planned size. About 36 feet in diameter, the concrete-and-steel tunnel will be capable of handling 1,000 vehicles an hour in either direction at maximum service conditions. Drinking water for Sinai and fuel lines are also planned to go across inside the tunnel. The tunnel will cost $102 million dollars, Kenawy said. Construction of the project first began at a site further south which proved to be too sandy, and another site had to be found. Kenawy said this saved about 40 percent of what it would have cost to build on the original site, but it delayed the project by seven months. Egyptian officials originally had set a target time of two years for construction of each tunnel, but analysts now say four years would be more realistic.

Some progress has been reported, too, on plans to reclaim up to one million acres from the desert or already populated zones. A pilot project of 100 acres on the Sinai bank of the canal has already proven successful and 2,000 more acres will be tackled in 1977. "We are preparing 35,000 acres in Sinai for reclamation," said Kenawy.

The foreign investment aspect of the Port Said free trade zone, like commercial sales in the city itself, has also been getting under way. Warehouses have been built and, Kafrawy said, about 40 firms have set up operations. But these are mostly trans-shipment and bonding activities, and local officials in the city say no foreign industry has yet committed itself to Port Said. In 1975 it was announced that Iran would contribute to the reconstruction of Port Said and would use its future facilities for shipping operations.

As Egypt at present is operating on a very tight budget and top officials are allocating money to projects with far more restraint than they would like to exercise, the rebirth of Suez is still far from complete. But the master plans are designed to attract foreign investment by showing the potential of the canal region in a studied, rational way, and given a better overall economic climate there is no reason to think that they will not be implemented, at least in considerable part. As Osman put it, when his men first arrived at the Aswan High Dam site, they found "rocks, mountains, the Nile and nothing else." In the canal region Egypt is starting with considerably more.

Elias Antar, a long-time correspondent in the Middle East, is a regular contributor to Aramco World.