January 15, 1902

‘Abd al-‘Aziz ibn ‘Abd al-Rahman Al Sa‘ud

On that historic day, ‘Abd al-‘Aziz took an important step toward becoming ruler of Najd, the Peninsula’s central region. From there he led the difficult campaigns that gradually unified the tribes, and there carried out the careful international diplomacy that—some three decades later—led to the proclamation of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. ‘Abd al-‘Aziz ruled that kingdom until his death in 1953, and his heirs today carry on his legacy.

This special issue of Arabian World commemorates that legacy, which has inspired both the leaders who followed King ‘Abd al-‘Aziz and the ordinary men and women of Saudi Arabia, who together, over the century following the recapture of Riyadh, have raised up a modern nation.

One hundred years ago by the lunar Islamic calendar, on 5 Shawwal, 1319 (January 15, 1902) a small band of men from the House of Sa‘ud—lighty armed and heavily outnumbered—stole into the Arabian city of Riyadh by night. At dawn, they recaptured Riyadh’s citadel, a mud-brick fortress called al-Masmak.

Although the House of Sa‘ud had ruled great expanses of the Arabian Peninsula for much of the preceding century, a rival had deposed the family a decade earlier and driven it into exile. The leader of the victorious return, a son of the reigning head of the House of Sa‘ud, was only in his early twenties. He was ‘Abd al-‘Aziz ibn ‘Abd al-Rahman Al Sa‘ud, known to his subjects as ‘Abd al-‘Aziz, and to be known in the West as Ibn Sa‘ud.
48 THE SERVANTS OF GOD’S HOUSE
By Greg Naous
Makkah and Madinah are the first two holy cities of Islam, and their leading mosques—the
Sacred Mosque and the Prophet’s Mosque, respectively—have been updated and
expanded more since the early days of ‘Abd al-Qadir than at any time in their 14 centuries
of history. Today, they each welcome several million pilgrims a year.

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homes, where smooth monochromes often predominate, a colorfully
decorated, skillfully crafted door catches the eye, welcoming, and
hinting at hospitality within. Regional styles add charm and variety.

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women is heard almost exclusively by women at weddings and other celebrations. Until the past
eight years, women from all over Saudi Arabia have come to Riyadh to share their art.

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From rice- and meat-based dishes of the deserts to fish recipes of the coasts, Saudi cuisine is
as old as human settlement. Since the dawn of Islam, pilgrims and traders—
Levantine, Turkish, Egyptian, Central Asian, Indian, European, American and
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Arabia into the next century.

"THERE WERE 40 OF US..."
It looked like any of the intertribal raids that had characterized Arabian warfare
for centuries, but it became the founding moment of a nation. Here is the story of
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30 PRELUDE TO DISCOVERY
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any oil at all lay beneath the king-
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geological survey of the region
was focused not so much on
oil, but on precious water.

36 PIONEER PHOTOGRAPHER OF THE HOLY CITIES
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Leader of a survey team to the Hijaz in 1861 and again in 1880, Egyptian Colonial Muhammad Sadiq carried with him
a ponderous, wet-plate collection camera, which he used in his spare time. His photographs of Makkah and Madinah
were not only the first ever taken of the holy cities, but also the first ever made anywhere in what is today Saudi Arabia.
"We had an extraordinarily interesting day with Ibn Saud, who is one of the most striking personalities I have encountered. He is splendid to look at, well over 6'3"., with an immense amount of dignity and self-possession... As a leader of irregular forces he is of proved daring and he combines with his qualities as a soldier that grasp of statecraft which is yet more highly prized."

These remarks were written by the British traveler Gertrude Bell in a letter she wrote following a meeting at Basra (now in southern Iraq) in 1916. Never easy to impress, Bell was nonetheless clearly awestruck by her first encounter with a man who at that time was already shaping the history of Arabia and was later to become a significant player on the world stage. Although the meeting was essentially a political affair, it revealed much about the personalities involved, in particular the startling impact 'Abd al-'Aziz had on his British hosts. It worked both ways: In later years, he would amuse friends and relatives by recounting how the booby and indomitable Bell had batted about him in Basra, asking his opinion on every subject under the sun and prefacing her questions with a shout "Ya 'Abd al-'Aziz!"

At the time, the British were intrigued by this man who was emerging as a potential leader from the turmoil and hardships of inner Arabia. Desperate to court him once war with the Turks became a reality in 1914, the British Government engaged in a long-term strategic relationship that benefited both sides: British support aided the Saudis in their efforts to reunify the country, which meant driving the Turks from the region, and the rising Arabian polity that resulted meant that Britain could look upon a friendly government in a part of the world that the British regarded as essential to the defense of the centerpieces of their empire —India. Yet throughout the years, 'Abd al-'Aziz Ibn 'Abd al-Rahman Al Sa'ud, commonly known to Westerners as Ibn Sa'ud, remained something of an enigma to the British. To this day, his personality and achievements are surprisingly little known outside the region in which he played such an instrumental role. 'Abd al-'Aziz's roots ran deep in the heart of Arabia. His family, the Al Sa'ud, traces its origins back more than 500 years. Traditionally, it has been associated with the central Arabian province of Najd, most particularly with the cities of al-Dir'iyyah and, later, Riyadh. The family history is one of the most distinguished in Arabia, but like all noble lines, it was subject to the political inconstancies of the day. At the time of 'Abd al-'Aziz's birth in 1880 or thereabouts, central Arabia had fallen into political fragmentation, and the Al Sa'ud in Riyadh were engaged in a power struggle with the rulers of the city of Haiyil, the al-Rashids. This conflict led 'Abd al-'Aziz's father, 'Abd al-Rahman, to evacuate his family from Riyadh in 1891...

By today's standards, conditions throughout Arabia were unimaginably hard. Life was often short and brutal. A forbidding climate and exceedingly inhospitable terrain meant that the area was virtually closed to all but the most intrepid of outsiders. Little had changed for centuries.

From his early years, 'Abd al-'Aziz had been exposed to the power politics and warfare of Arabia's ruling families. However, despite (or perhaps because of) the uncertain and lawless nature of the political context in which he grew up, he found enduring security and comfort in the Qur'an and in the discipline of regular prayer. This highly developed sense of faith, order and personal duty characterized his life, and it played more than an incidental role in his political success.

Opposite: Photographed approximately 11 years after his recapture of Riyadh, 'Abd al-'Aziz Ibn 'Abd al-Rahman Al Sa'ud was in the sixth generation in direct descent from Sa'ud ibn Muhammad ibn Mas'in, who died in 1735 and from whom the Al Sa'ud and Saudi Arabian take their names. Above: In 1916, three years after 'Abd al-'Aziz won control of the Arabian Gulf coast, he met with British political officers Sir Percy Cox and Gertrude Bell to strengthen the Saudi—British tie that had been formalized by treaty the year before.
The First and Second Saudi States

In the early 18th century, north of Riyadh, a religious leader was born who, in alliance with the House of Sa’ud, would pave the way for the establishment of the modern Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. His name was Muhammad ibn ’Abd al-Wahhab. The son of a qadi, a religious judge, he studied in Makka, Madinah, Biara and al-Hassa before returning to Najd. By the time he returned, Shaykh Muhammad, as he was thereafter known, had become familiar with the currents of religious thought and the great political and social problems of his time. By then, too, he had concluded from his observation of the world and his wide reading that reforms were imperative. He began to call for a return to basic principles of Islam as contained in the Qur'an and the sunnah, or example of the Prophet.

Like most reformers, Shaykh Muhammad ran into opposition. He was driven from his home town, al-'Uyaynah, and forced to take refuge in the town of al-Diriyah, very close to present-day Riyadh. The ruler there was Muhammad ibn Sa’ud, who met Shaykh Muhammad and welcomed him. The year was 1745, and this meeting marked the beginning of the first Saudi state.

The two men—one an idealistic reformer and the other an astute chieftain from among the many tribes of Najd—formed an immediate warm regard for one another’s qualities, and established a relationship that links their descendents to the present day.

As Shaykh Muhammad was an eloquent and sincere preacher, his uncompromising reaffirmation of the basic beliefs of Islam soon won many followers. It also alarmed many leaders in Najd, especially those in independent Riyadh, so near al-Diriyah. The nascent movement, whose followers called themselves al-Muwahhidin, “those who affirm the Unity of God,” or “Unitarians,” was seen as a threat to established patterns of authority.

Muhammad ibn Sa’ud died in 1786, but under his very able son and successor, ’Abd al-’Aziz, the Muwahhidin movement continued. In 1773, ’Abd al-’Aziz—brother of King ’Abd al-’Aziz’s (Ibn Sa’ud’s) great-grandfather—captured Riyadh, and within 15 years controlled all of Najd. Then, in the winter of 1789–90, the Muwahhidin crushed the paramount tribe of al-Diriyah, known as Bani Prophet, and expanded

This 1957 photograph of part of the walls of Riyadh shows a few of the vast groves of date-palms outside the city that were vital to its agricultural economy. Before leaving on an early version of Saudi Arabia’s national flag, a contingent of ’Abd al-’Aziz’s troops rides across the scrub desert near Riyadh, in today’s Eastern Province, in March 1911. The Baghe carries the Islamic shahada, or creed: “There is no God but God and Muhammad is the Messenger of God.”

very close. Najd had been central to the first and second Saudi states, and its loss engendered a deep sense of resolve in ’Abd al-’Aziz to act to recover his patrimony, to restore the Al Sa’ud to the leadership of central Arabia.

In early 1901, ’Abd al-’Aziz saw an opportunity. Joining a raid led by Shaykh Mubarak from Kuwait into al-Rashid territory, he seized Riyadh from the al-Rashids and besieged its fortress, al-Masmak. He held the city for three months before he was forced to withdraw. He immediately began to plan a new offensive, which was to lead to the event that has defined Arabia’s history ever since.

Taking advantage of the fact that most of the al-Rashid forces were deployed in a counter-attack against Kuwait, ’Abd al-’Aziz correctly judged that this would be the most effective time to try and seize Riyadh permanently. In a daring raid, ’Abd al-’Aziz and 40 men stormed the al-Rashids’ garrison at Masmah fort early on January 15, 1902. (See page 12.) Overpowering those inside, the Sa’ud seized control of the city and, welcomed as a liberator, ’Abd al-’Aziz later that day led Riyadh’s inhabitants in prayer. Still only in his early twenties, he was now at the forefront of contemporary politics, and he had brought his family to the threshold of renewal.

Acutely aware that his family’s hold on Riyadh must not be allowed to slip again, ’Abd al-’Aziz immediately ordered the city walls repaired. He also set about gaining the allegiance of the local people, without which he knew he could not hope to stay in power. He understood that long-term political survival was based essentially on a delicate balance of force and persuasion: Force had been used to take Riyadh, and now persuasion would be required to hold it. He therefore set about forging alliances with local tribes in hopes of undermining the al-Rashids’ political power base.
from the disruption of the Saudi state. These ambitions, however, were thwarted by Turki bin 'Abd Allah, a close relative (though not the son) of the dead 'Abd Allah.

During the siege of al-Diryah, Turki had taken refuge in a nearby town, but in 1823 he felt the time was ripe for a counterattack. Entering al-Diryah without a fight, he immediately moved against Riyadh, which he took as well, founding at that time the second Saudi state. He was also the first member of the House of Saud to make Riyadh his capital.

Turki ruled for 11 years. By the time of his death in 1834, he had largely restored the boundaries of the Saudi state to what they had been before the Egyptian invasions, though he did not recover the holy cities. He was succeeded by his son Faysal, who previously had been captured and then had escaped from the Egyptians. Faysal was faced with yet another Egyptian attempt to establish control over Najd. In 1838 he was captured once again, bravely giving himself up to the enemy rather than see his loyal followers slaughtered. For the second time, he was taken to Egypt and imprisoned.

For the second time too, he escaped, and he made his way back to Najd in 1843 in an exploit that added to his popularity among the tribes and also marked the end, for a while, of Ottoman efforts to quell the House of Saud. 'Abd Allah 'Ali was growing old, and the Ottomans, distracted by wars in Moldavia and Walachia, eventually had to content themselves with exercising only titular control of the Hijaz.

With the death of Faysal in 1886, this relatively brief period of peace and prosperity came to an end. First, rivalry over the succession weakened Saudi unity. Then, taking advantage of the Saudis' internal conflict, the Ottomans occupied much of the eastern seaboard and the oasis of al-Hassa. Landing in 1876 at Ras Tanura, the present site of a Saudi Aramco oil refinery and shipping terminal, the Turks took Qatif, then marched 160 kilometers to Hofuf, the main town of al-Hassa, where they overcame stubborn resistance put up by the Saudi governor and occupied the fortress.

Two other events, however, overshadow this invasion, which had ambitions to carry on to Najd but in fact went no further. One was the birth of a son to 'Abd al-Rahman bin Faysal, the man who had emerged as the reigning head of the House of Saud. The son—who would later create the modern kingdom of Saudi Arabia—was 'Abd al-'Aziz bin 'Abd al-Rahman Al Saud. The other event was the rise to power of a rival dynasty, al-Rashid, which led to a conflict that would occupy the Saudis, and young 'Abd al-'Aziz, for decades.

Based in north-central Arabia, the al-Rashids had taken advantage of the uncertainties over the Saudi succession to install a deputy governor in Riyadh, in Saudi territory. In response, 'Abd al-Rahman attacked Riyadh and recaptured it in 1890. His rival, Muhammad ibn Rashid, in turn marched on Riyadh and, finding the defense too strong for a direct assault, besieged it. During the siege he cut down a large number of date palms on which the townspeople depended for sustenance, a common practice in Arabian warfare in that period. After 40 days of this harsh but indecisive action, Ibn Rashid proposed negotiations with the defenders. In the Saudi delegation was a young boy making his debut on the stage of history—'Abd al-'Aziz.

The truce that was arranged as a consequence of these negotiations was short-lived. Muhammad ibn Rashid soon led his men to the area of the Casim, in northern Najd, where he attacked and routed the Saudis at the battle of al-Mulayyah on January 21, 1891. Isolated and bereft of allies, 'Abd al-Rahman sent his women and children to the protection of the ruler of Bahrain, who was a friend, while he himself, with no hope of returning to Riyadh, took to the desert south of the city, where he had friends among the tribes. For a time, 'Abd al-Rahman and a handful of loyal followers roamed the fringes of the Rub' al-Khali, but later they moved on to Qatar and then to Bahrain. Finally, they took refuge in Kuwait, where they spent the rest of their days.

For young 'Abd al-'Aziz, the years he and his father spent in Kuwait as guests of the ruler, Mukabir Al-Sabah, provided valuable insights into international politics. Mukabir was an able politician and Kuwaiti, strategically placed at the head of the Arabian Gulf, was the focus of Western activity in the area. The British had special treaty relationships with Kuwait, Bahrain, Oman and the shaykhdoms on the Trucial Coast (now the United Arab Emirates); the Russians, as part of their centuries-old search for a warm-water port, were probing for outlets in the Arabian Gulf; and both the Germans and the Turks, in an attempt to challenge Britain's hegemony in the Gulf, were looking toward Kuwait as the possible terminus of the Berlin-to-Kabudhah railway.

As he observed the international negotiations of Mukabir Al-Sabah, however, 'Abd al-'Aziz also kept an eye on the al-Rashids, now allied with the Turks, who still occupied al-Hassa.

In 1901, 'Abd al-'Aziz, then in his early twenties, decided that it was time for the House of 'Abed al 'Aziz to win back the lands wrecked from it by Ibn Rashid and the Turks. As the entire force the Saudis could muster at this time consisted of only 40 men, 'Abd al-Rahman, his father, tried to dissuade him. But 'Abd al-'Aziz persisted, and toward the end of the year he set off for Najd. Within two months he would have a victorious.

Success at diplomacy was backed up by arms, and bloody battles continued between the two warring families. Open conflict between al Sa'ud and the al-Rashids ended with the death in battle of Ibn Rashid in 1906, and the al-Rashids withdrew to their power base in Hayil, in northwestern Arabia. 'Abd al-'Aziz then turned his attention to other centers of opposition, and over the next few years, he personally led his men to victory on many occasions.

His behavior in conquest was notable for its magnanimity. Reprisals were rarely allowed, and generally the vanquished were welcomed back as brothers. Often, 'Abd al-'Aziz took wives from the ranks of those he had defeated. Such actions were primarily political, part of 'Abd al-'Aziz's overall strategy of inclusion rather than division. This even extended to the al-Rashids, who continued to skirmish with 'Abd al-'Aziz throughout the early 1920s. Ever mindful of the need to keep an eye on one's potential foes, 'Abd al-'Aziz later welcomed the surviving members of the al-Rashids into his court, where they remained and were treated well, as befitted their noble status.

Feeling adequately secure at home in Najd, in 1913 'Abd al-'Aziz marched dramatically onto the international stage, seizing first the Turkish garrison at Hofuf and then the coastal towns of al-Uqayr and Qatif, thus winning control of the Gulf coast. With this campaign, he brought into the Saudi remit an area that was, by virtue of its oil reserves, to provide unparalleled wealth for his nation in later years. 'Abd al-'Aziz's more immediate successes, however, centered around his astute calculation that on the one hand, the Turks were so weakened as to be incapable of resisting his advance and, on the other, the British would be sufficiently concerned to start taking him seriously. This they did, as is clear from a report made to the India Office in 1914: "The Arabs have now found a leader who stands head and shoulders above any other chief and in whose star have implicit faith."

Turkey's defeat in World War I left a political vacuum that 'Abd al-'Aziz had been readying himself to fill for some time. By 1920 he had assumed control of the Hijaz and south-western al-Rashid stronghold of Hayil in the north. He was then able to turn his attention to the Hijaz, in which were located the holy cities of Makkah and Madinah, and the major port of Jiddah. The weakened Hashemite regime that governed the region was eventually forced to cede to the more organized Saudi forces, and in 1927 'Abd al-'Aziz was recognized as King of the Hijaz and Najd and Dependencies, with Riyadh and Makkah as his two capitols.

These years also marked the beginnings of modern Arabia. 'Abd al-'Aziz understood the potential advantages Western technology offered; the importa
tion of a fleet of automobiles and, later, the building of airstrips gave him the means of reaching distant parts of his territory in a fraction of the time required previously. He also ordered the creation of an extensive information network based on the wireless telegraph, through which he was able to extend his "eyes and ears" across the country. However, some of his followers were less than enthusiastic, and their leader spent much time and effort explaining personally the value of the telephone in particular. 'Abd al-'Aziz finally overcome their opposition by inviting skeptics to listen to recitations from the Qur'an being read down the phone line.

The creation of a formal, modern system of government also dates from this time, with the establishment of the first ministries, although 'Abd al-'Aziz continued to exercise a high level of personal control over the activities of the state for the rest of his life. He was by now ruler of a dominion three times the size of France and, in 1922, proclaimed the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. It marked the culmination of a process started more than three decades earlier, and as King 'Abd al-'Aziz ibn 'Abd al-Rahman Al Sa'ud, he reigned over his people for an additional 21 years before his death in 1932. Since then, his heirs have continued to rule the country he established.

By any standards 'Abd al-'Aziz's achievements are astonishing. He rose from leader of an exiled clan to participant in the post-World War II international stage, which saw him meeting with both British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and US President Franklin D. Roosevelt to exchange views on issues of common interest, including the subject of Palestine. Inheritor of a fragmented and impoverished land, he welded the tribes into an incipient nation, imposing both central authority and, eventually, the rule of law. At the time of his death, Saudi Arabia enjoyed both unparalleled wealth and security, a situation directly attributable to 'Abd al-'Aziz.

Today, the scale and significance of 'Abd al-'Aziz's impact is even clearer than in 1932. Not only did he establish a new state, but he structured it to grow room for continued strength and development. Aware that the fledgling nation would be ill-equipped to function in the 20th century without industrial modernization, he was eager to embrace technology; however, he was no less aware that change had to be selected and gradual if it was to be accepted by the citizenry and be of lasting benefit. The well-known Arabist and historian Leslie McLoughlin pointed out that "it was the insight of Ibn Sa'ud that slow change without disruption was better than speed of change with great disruption." Central to this process was the long search to expand the kingdom's sources of revenue, and to this end, 'Abd al-'Aziz granted the first oil concession as early as 1923. (See page 6.) Although this venture bore fruit, it was the first step in an endeavor of lasting significance.

"Abd al-'Aziz's cruel smile in this snapshot, made in 1922 by Harry St. John ('Abd Allah) Philby, is one of few extant photographs that exist at the late king's lighter side, which often impressed both subjects and visitors almost as much as his courage and religious discipline. Opposite: The earliest known photographs of 'Abd al-'Aziz (seated, far left) date from his 1910 visit to Kuwait, where he met with its ruler, Maharik Al-Sabah, whose family had hosted the Al Sa'ud during their decade of exile. It was here that 'Abd al-'Aziz first met the camera-carrying British political officer, Captain William Shakespear.

Paramount in his success were 'Abd al-'Aziz's personal qualities. He was a complex character, and something of a paradox in the sense that he exhibited wide-ranging, often contradictory attributes. These frequently showed themselves in rapid succession, with fierce bursts of temper followed almost immediately by acts of great tenderness and compassion. But he commanded respect at all times, and by a combination of charm and authority secured the personal and political commitment of his people. The writer Amin al-Rihani noted how 'Abd al-'Aziz always found time to speak to those around him and was never at a loss for words on any subject at any occasion.

'Abd al-'Aziz was both a brave and a cautious man. His personal courage when leading his troops into battle is legendary, but it is equally well-established that he sought to avoid excessive bloodshed wherever possible. By breaking the historical pattern of strife and conflict, he was able to set his people on a new path of peace and prosperity, and his statesmanship set new standards for political behavior, ones that placed him apart from most of his contemporaries. His actions and personality ensured the long-term stability and prosperity that are hallmarks of modern Saudi Arabia.

'Abd al-'Aziz's profound religious faith gave him a conviction and a self-confidence that propelled him toward what he considered the just destiny of his family and country. Yet he was aware of the diversity of the nation he was bringing together, and he repeatedly warned followers he considered overzealous that they must not replace dissent with division and retribution. The long-term impact of this notion of nation-building is only now becoming clear, as the world witnesses the disintegration of states in other parts of the world within which a sense of inclusion has broken down.

We cannot know for sure the direction Arabia's destiny would have taken had 'Abd al-'Aziz not risen to such prominence. It is quite likely that the political divisions he inherited would have continued unabated under anyone of less forceful character and drive, and that Arabia would have remained a warring collection of disparate factions, spiraling into chaos and, perhaps, colonial domination. With such acute political insecurity, the economic gains made possible by the discovery of oil well might have been squandered and a unique opportunity for national advancement lost. Equally clear is the fact that the circumstances of the day called for leadership of singular ability. In 'Abd al-'Aziz, personal stature married with circumstance to produce a man who led his people from a fractional poverty into secure prosperity.

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“There were 40 of us...”

5 Shawwal, 1319

The small force that 'Abd al-'Aziz Al Sa'ud led south from Kuwait to recapture Riyadh did not attack immediately. Instead, the group spent several months south of its target, on the northern fringes of the Rub' al-Khali, hoping to win reinforcements from the tribes camped near the wells of Yobrin and Haradh, the latter of which is now one of the kingdom’s largest agricultural projects. 'Abd al-'Aziz was able to recruit only 20 more warriors but, reluctant to wait any longer, he decided to attack Riyadh anyway, and with only 60 men behind him he set off.

At a distance of one and a half hour’s march from Riyadh, 'Abd al-'Aziz left one-third of his forces with the camels, instructing them to return to Kuwait if no message was received from him within 24 hours. Then, with the rest of his men, he advanced on foot—to be less conspicuous—until he reached the outskirts of the city. There 'Abd al-'Aziz waited for night to fall. January 15, 1902
At last it was time. 'Abd al-Aziz stationed his brother Muhammad in the palm grove with 33 men to act as a backup force and quietly scaled the wall with the others. Inside, the walls, they knocked on the door of the house of a cattle dealer, who fled. His daughters, recognizing 'Abd al-'Aziz, were gagged and locked up. Next, 'Abd al-'Aziz sent a messenger back to tell Muhammad, waiting outside the walls, to advance with all possible stealth into the city. Finally, by standing on another's shoulders, 'Abd al-'Aziz and his men entered the house of 'Ajlân, Ibn Rashid's governor, silenced the servants, and searched the house. Learning that 'Ajlân was in the custom of spending his nights in Masmak fort in the city, they decided to wait for morning when the gates of the fort would be opened.

It was difficult to wait. As 'Abd al-'Aziz recalled in later years, they "slept a little while, ... prayed the morning prayer and sat thinking about what we should do." But at last the dark desert sky lightened and they prepared for action. Originally they had planned to take 'Ajlân prisoner as soon as he left the fort and entered the house. But as the sun rose and the gates of the fort opened, they saw that 'Ajlân was not alone; he walked out of the gate accompanied by 10 bodyguards. Luckily 'Abd al-'Aziz and his followers sprang to the attack, leaving four men in the house to cover them with rifles.

At the sudden appearance of 'Abd al-'Aziz, 'Ajlân's bodyguards bolted, leaving 'Ajlân facing the Saudi onslaught alone, with only a sword for defense. Daring forward, 'Abd Allah ibn Jihawi, a cousin of 'Abd al-'Aziz who later became governor of the Eastern Province, threw a spear at 'Ajlân but missed; the spear went into the gate of the fort where the steel point, embedded in the wood, remained until its removal in the 1970s.

No coward, 'Ajlân lunged at 'Abd al-'Aziz, who later reminisced: "He made at me with his sword, but its edge was not good. I covered my face and shot him with my gun. I heard the crash of the sword upon the ground and knew that the shot had hit 'Ajlân, but had not killed him. He started to go through the western gate, but I caught hold of his legs. Then men inside caught hold of his arms while I still held his legs. His company was shooting at our frontiersmen at us, and throwing stones upon us. 'Ajlân gave me a powerful kick in the side so that I was about to faint. I let go of his legs and he got inside. I wished to enter, but my men would not let me. Then 'Abd Allah ibn Jihawi entered with the bullets falling about him. After him 10 others entered. We flung the gates wide open, and our company ran up to reinforce us. We were 40 and there before us were 80. We killed half of them. Then four fell from the wall and were crushed. The rest were trapped in a tower; we granted safe-conduct to them and they descended. As for 'Ajlân, Ibn Jihawi slew him."

Such is the epic story, as related by King 'Abd al-'Aziz, of how Riyadh was taken on January 15, 1902 as the sun was rising over the desert and the city was just coming to life. The recapture of Riyadh marked the dawn of a new era in the history of Arabia and a turning point in the fortunes of the House of Saud.

The recapture of Riyadh marked the dawn of a new era in the history of Arabia and a turning point in the fortunes of the House of Saud.

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Adapted from Saudi Aramco and Its World (1995)
The Centennial’s Jewel:
When British Political Agent Captain William Shakespear made the first known photographs of Najaf in 1911, the main city of 8,000 people looked much as it had when Abd al-`Aziz recaptured it nine years earlier. Built almost entirely of mud brick, it was surrounded by 7.5-meter (25') walls that enclosed about 100 hectares (250 acres), inside which were abundant date groves.
Riyadh
First bursting its walls in the 1930's, Riyadh's most rapid growth has taken place largely since the 1970's, when it became one of the world's fastest-growing capital cities. Today, the television tower punctuates the downtown area, and the city whose name means "gardens" in Arabic is home to 3.5 million people.
The men who stormed Masmak fort in the heart of Riyadh on January 15, 1902 would be bedazzled by today’s capital, city, the centerpiece of this year’s centennial celebrations. Since that daring raid 100 hijri years ago, Riyadh has grown almost beyond description. Then, visitors arrived on camelback at one of nine gates and, once inside, threaded their way along narrow, sandy streets shadowed by overcrowded, mud-brick houses. In this century, Riyadh has changed dramatically—perhaps more radically and rapidly than any other modern city.

“One hundred years means a big change in any city, and Riyadh needs only 10 years to change totally,” says Abd al-Aziz Al ash-Shaykh, director of research and studies at the Riyadh Development Authority (RDA), which oversees city planning. “The city would be unrecognizable to King Abd al-Aziz from the 1980s when he died … or even to King Faisal from the 1970s,” he adds, noting that Riyadh’s recent annual growth rate of 8.1 percent makes it “one of the fastest-growing cities in the world.”

Riyadh long ago burst out of the mud-brick walls that Abd al-Aziz reformed within 60 days of seizing Masmak fort. Today the capital hums with activity, broken five times a day by the call to prayer. Heavy traffic flows through a steel-and-glass landscape, illuminated at night by neon and sodium streetlights, into ever-expanding suburbs and to towns and cities beyond.

As late as 1917 the heavy wooden gates of the city were closed at night, but now they are opened to the world. Riyadh’s population has grown from 250,000 in 1950 to over 3 million in 2002, with a growth rate of 8.1 percent annually. The city is now home to over 3 million people, making it one of the fastest-growing cities in the world.

Riyadh, an important oasis in the Najd, Arabia’s arid central region, was the gateway to the country’s unification.
Today, Riyadh is striving to preserve the few structures that remain from 'Abd al-'Aziz’s era, or to reconstruct them using traditional styles.

Modernization,” writes William Facey in Riyadh, The Old City, “and the major mud buildings of the city center—the old palace and the Great Mosque—were demolished,” to be replaced by buildings of concrete and stone.

Even in today’s Riyadh, however, King 'Abd al-'Aziz would still recognize old friends from the places and palaces where he worked, lived, and mingled with his countrymen for more than 50 years. Indeed, the city is striving to preserve and protect the few structures that remain from his era and, when that is impossible, to reconstruct them using traditional styles or building techniques.

Two major projects worth a total of about 1.6 billion Saudi riays (842 million) are the centerpiece of this effort: the Qasr al-Hokm project in the old city center, and the King 'Abd al-'Aziz Historical Center at the Murabba Palace complex about a kilometer (half a mile) to the north.

The Qasr al-Hokm project, which began in 1976, set in motion the rehabilitation of old Riyadh. Of most interest to historians, the RDA has preserved Masmak Fort within a wide square, and rebuilt the city’s main Imam Turki bin Abdullah Mosque at its original location to accommodate 17,000 worshippers. In another key development, city planners have rebuilt the Qasr al-Hokm or “Justice Palace”—King 'Abd al-'Aziz’s headquarters after retaking Riyadh—on its original site in traditional architectural style.

Two covered passageways between Qasr al-Hokm and the mosque recall the bridges originally built to allow the king to cross above the traditional market area, “and invoke the strong traditional links between the seat of government and the religion of Islam,” says the RDA report.

The project has also reconstituted two city gates, a small part of its wall and a watchtower, all at their original sites, and built several public squares and a big new souk, or traditional marketplace. Visitors today can retrace the path of early 20th-century guests arriving to meet the king. Walking from the eastern, al-Thumairi Gate a couple of hundred meters down to al-Masmak Square, they will find Masmak Fort on their right and Qasr al-Hokm straight ahead.

In Kunit and Her Neighbors, Dame Violet Dickson described the scene at the square in front of the sprawling por when she arrived via al-Thumairi Gate with her husband in 1937. “Suddenly we were in front of the King’s palace in the great market square. The open space was crowded with Bedu and camels, and seated in a long row on a datifa [earthen bench] were those awaiting audience with His Majesty.”

Later, she watched the ‘artha, or sword dance, from a window in the palace: “It was now about eight o’clock. Down in the court, drums were beating, and men dancing with swords in upraised hands, while lines of others were swaying to and fro with linked arms and chanting some sort of war song, telling of love and courage… Slowly the dancers moved toward the king, who then joined in and there in the distance, sword in hand and towering above the multitude, he danced with them for what must have been 20 minutes.”

Masmak Fort, the redoubt to which 'Abd al-'Aziz first laid siege in 1901 and which he retook in 1902, fell on harder times than the palace. “It is used only as an arsenal, jail and storeroom by Bin Sa’ud,” wrote British explorer-diplomat Harry St. John (‘Abd Allah) Philby, who first visited Riyadh in the winter of 1917-18, in The Heart of Arabia. Today, the fortress has been born anew as a museum operated by the Department of Antiquities and Museums. Resplendent with traditional wooden doors and other accouterments of yesteryear, its high-ceilinged rooms are devoted to exhibits about the unification of the kingdom.

The final stage of the Qasr al-Hokm development plan is being carried out in tandem with private enterprise to improve the wider area’s appearance and encourage investment. The district encompasses a number of old mud-brick houses dating back to 'Abd al-'Aziz’s time and before. The RDA’s Heritage Program study has suggested that owners convert these buildings from residential to commercial use to make them viable economic units.

The goal of the Qasr al-Hokm project is “to keep the heart of the city alive,” says Abdulrahman al-Sarri, director of urban and cultural development for the RDA. Riyadh’s main business district has moved to the north, Al-Sarri points out, but by providing a core of public buildings, infrastructure and services the RDA hopes “to convince the people to come back and invest their money in the old city.”

Considerable spending has been directed recently to the King 'Abd al-'Aziz Historical Center, which includes educational, cultural, historical and religious facilities in the vicinity of the Murabba Palace, which the king used as his majlis, or reception rooms, from the late 1930s.
By the 1950's, Riyadh was 10 times larger than its original, walled enclosure.

Today, its core is surrounded by nearly two dozen suburban municipalities.
One of the centerpieces of the project that set in motion the rehabilitation of old Riyadh is the mosque named after Imam Turki bin 'Abd Allah, who in 1833 was the first member of the House of Sa'ud to make Riyadh his capital. 


until his death. "Qura al-Hokm is the administrative part of the city center, and we hope the Historical Center will become the northern node and the cultural part of the city center," explains Tariq al-Farja, director of the ROU's project management unit.

The original Murabba' Palace complex was so grand that new arrivals sometimes mistook it for the capital city itself. "Away in the distance was what I thought must be the city of Riyadh a great fortress with many towers rising above the walls and tops of many buildings," wrote Dickson in Kuwait and her Neighbors. Only when Riyadh itself suddenly appeared amid the palm groves to the left did she realize that "what we now saw was no city ... but the King's new palace... then in the course of erection."

The challenging King 'Abd al-'Aziz Historical Center project, for which ground was broken only 19 months ago, covers some 260,000 square meters (3,000,000 sq ft). It includes not only the Murabba' Palace and associated mud-brick palaces, which have been renovated using traditional Najdi materials under the eye of a Saudi master builder, but also a number of brand-new facilities built using traditional Najdi architectural elements.

The Historical Center includes the Riyadh Water Tower, another city landmark. Nearby stands al-Hamra Palace, named after its distinctive red color and built by Crown Prince Sa'ud, who became king in 1953 after his father's death. The palace later became the chambers of the kingdom's first Council of Ministers.

The Center is located in a large public park set with gardens and pathways, and is reached easily by automobile. A separate special park planted with 100 date palms symbolizes the centennial, and a major Riyadh avenue, King Sa'ud Street, runs through the complex. The objective, explains al-Sari, is to make the Historical Center so accessible that it becomes "part of the daily memory of the city."

A world-class national museum, covering 29,000 square meters (312,000 sq ft), lies immediately east of the main square, fronted by a sweeping wall of yellow Riyadh limestone. The museum features comprehensive cultural, scientific, religious and historical sections, and the unification of the kingdom is the subject of a major, two-story gallery. West of the square are the restored Murabba' Palace, the King 'Abd al-'Aziz Foundation for Research and Archives, and the King 'Abd al-'Aziz Mosque. A large library and an auditorium to the south round out the development.

King 'Abd al-'Aziz would certainly recognize the Murabba' Palace and other original structures: two towers and a section of the north wall, and the mud-brick "treasury" building in the courtyard of a second palace where he lived. That palace was torn down and a new building constructed in its footprint to house the King 'Abd al-'Aziz Foundation for Research and Archives after studies showed that structural inconsistencies made the original impossible to preserve. But the treasury—whose massive mud walls keep it comfortable even in Riyadh's searing summer temperatures—was successfully renovated in keeping with its past.

In renovating the Murabba' Palace, the private, Riyadh-based foundation Al-Turath ("heritage") relied on the knowledge and skills of Abdulla Bin Hamid, a Saudi master craftsman who grew up nearby. Bin Hamid is one of the few men remaining with firsthand knowledge not only of traditional Najdi construction skills, but also of King 'Abd al-'Aziz Nasr.

"Abdulla is well-versed in Najdi architecture and has special expertise in jurr, or gypsum plaster," which covered palace pillars and walls and served as a canvas for palace decoration, says Zahir Othman, Al-Turath's director general. "We totally renovated the Murabba' Palace, ..."
"The kingdom has witnessed astounding, unique development," says Fahd al-Semmari of the King 'Abd al-'Aziz Foundation for Research and Archives, "and this is what we are celebrating."

Paradoxically, some of the best photographic records of old Riyadh were the work of the very men who, ultimately, helped pave the way for its transformation into a modern city. They included Philby, who served as an intermediary between King 'Abd al-'Aziz and social, in the early 1930s, and who also opened the first automobile dealership in the kingdom; Karl Twickell, who carried out the first survey of geological resources in the country and was another social intermediary; and Max Steineke, the indefatigable geologist whose pioneering work led to the discovery of Saudi Arabian oil.

While photos from the early 1930s still show a maze of traditional, flat-topped mud-brick buildings bordered by palmiers, a 1955 picture of road-work in the city center clearly tells the story of the future—one in which the car, not the camel, would rule the streets. "New streets superimposed upon the ancient city will be straight and 16 meters (52 ft) wide in contrast to the winding three-meter (10-ft) streets of earlier days," reads the caption.

"We've lost a lot," says Othman, former director of planning and architecture for the RDA. "But I think it doesn't matter what we've lost. What we might lose is the question. There are still a good number of buildings that have to be restored in different parts of the city.

Dr. Fahd al-Semmari, deputy secretary of the kingdom's 100th Anniversary Committee and general director of the King 'Abd al-'Aziz Foundation for Research and Archives, will occupy one of the new offices at the King 'Abd al-'Aziz Historical Center. He says he's proud that "pivotal parts" of the kingdom's history have been saved in Riyadh. "I feel that what's been done in the al-Hokm area and at the King 'Abd al-'Aziz Historical Center is something pleasing to every historian. We have preserved history there."

The protected and restored monuments in the modern city illustrate a special marriage of past and present, he notes. "The kingdom of Saudi Arabia has witnessed astounding and unique development in the last hundred years," he says. "This is what we are celebrating in the centennial."

Al-Semmarri emphasizes that the centennial is being marked in cities kingdom-wide. But he calls Riyadh the "jewel of the celebration" because it was the "gateway" for the country's unification, and because today the city's architectural heritage reflects Riyadh's central place in the kingdom's history. "Riyadh witnessed the beginning of the establishment of the state," he says, "and we call her the 'Queen of Saudi Arabia.'"
It is impossible to say exactly when the search for oil in Arabia began. But if one date had to be chosen, it might well be January 15, 1902, the day that 'Abd al-'Aziz ibn 'Abd al-Rahman Al Sa'ud recaptured Riyadh and began the march to Arabian statehood.

Without the stability King 'Abd al-'Aziz assured by consolidating nine-tenths of the Arabian Peninsula into a single polity, a search for oil would likely not have been possible. The prosperity that characterized Saudi Arabia today could not have happened under auspicious circumstances, nor would it have continued if the country was not a unified kingdom.

The discovery of oil in the Middle East occurred in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The first major discovery was in Persia in 1901, when the British discovered the Masjid-i-Sulaiman oil field. The oil was initially thought to be of low quality, but it was later found to be of high quality.

The discovery of oil in the Middle East had a significant impact on the region's economy and politics. Oil revenues have been a major source of revenue for many countries in the region, and they have been used to fund development projects and improve infrastructure.

When 'Abd al-'Aziz took control of the Hijaz in 1926, he was a young and ambitious leader who was determined to modernize his kingdom and expand its influence. He was a visionary leader who was able to see the potential of oil as a source of wealth and power. He was also a shrewd businessman who was able to negotiate favorable deals with foreign oil companies.

In 1925, Holmes signed a concession with the island state of Bahrain. But he believed that oil could be found in even greater quantities a short distance away on the Arabian mainland, along the Arabian Gulf coast.

After meeting with both 'Abd al-'Aziz in al-Haas in 1922, Holmes returned the following year to al-Unaizah, where he once again saw the ruler. In May 1923, King 'Abd al-'Aziz signed an agreement with Holmes which entitled the Eastern and General Syndicate to find a company to search for oil in eastern Saudi Arabia.

Six years after 'Abd al-'Aziz's recapture of Riyadh, the first commercial oil well in the Middle East began to flow in Iraq. In 1930, 'Abd al-'Aziz, opposite, signed the first exploration contract for oil in the Arabian Peninsula, but the concession-holding failed.

Portraits: See following pages.
Opposite, lower right: An early exploration camp near Abu Jefin in the Eastern Province.
In 1931, after Bahrain’s first well came in, Abd al-Aziz dispatched Twitchell to the United States to find an oil company to search for oil in eastern Arabia.

Abd Allah al-Sulayman

Originally from the heartland of Arabia, Abd Allah al-Sulayman studied trade and bookkeeping in Bombay before he was named finance minister by King Abd al-Aziz in 1932. He was a man who could make a little go a long way, and he proved a shrewd manager for the kingdom’s Depression-era economy. Generally regarded as one of the king’s most able ministers, he was responsible also for defense and oversight of the flotilla.

Yet even though al-Sulayman was unable to convince Social to provide the immediate £180,000 loan he regarded as vital to pay off the kingdom’s debts, he did succeed in securing more than that amount contingent upon the discovery of commercially useful oil resources. But his far more lasting legacy is that he ensured in the 1933 Social contract that Arabia would continue to receive substantial portions of all future oil revenues. It was this framework that in time brought his nation unprecedented prosperity, and laid the groundwork for the establishment in 1983 of Saudi Arabia’s nationally owned oil company, Saudi Aramco.

Following his conquest of the Hijaz in the mid-1920s, Abd al-Aziz’s primary source of income became pilgrim receipts, fees charged as pilgrims traveled from the kingdom, through Arabia, to Mecca, Jeddah, and Madinah. In the late 1920s, the number of pilgrims averaged between 100,000 and 130,000 annually. But by 1931, the year this photograph was taken, the Great Depression had reduced those numbers to below 40,000, and national income had fallen proportionately. As the worldwide depression deepened, Abd al-Aziz began to look with more interest toward mineral-resource development. But Twitchell’s survey turned up little—ever oil was then only a hope, not at all a proven resource. Foreign oil ventures had already disappointed Abd al-Aziz once, when Major Holmes’ 1923 venture collapsed for lack of financial backing. In March 1932 the king confided to Shaykh Ahmad al-Sabah of Kuwait that he remained skeptical of the region’s oil potential and was furthermore “not eager in the least to grant concessions to foreigners.”

Yet when the Social subsidiary Bahrain Petroleum struck oil in neighboring Bahrain in May 1932, Abd al-Aziz began to accept cautiously that another oil concession might be worth the risks.
William Knox D'Arcy signed one of the earliest oil concessions, first offered by the Persian Shah in 1900, but it took seven often discouraging years before his exploration crew brought in the region's first modern, commercial oil well, some 200 kilometers (125 mi) north of the Arabian Gulf coast.

Sheik Muzzafar al-Din Kadjar, eager to shore up his country's economy during the hard times he inherited upon his coronation in 1896, began selling a variety of industrial concessions to international investors—among them one granted on May 28, 1901 to D'Arcy.

Calouste Gulbenkian in 1912 helped form the Turkish Petroleum Company (TPC) with British, Dutch, German, and, later, US interests. After World War I, he was the architect of the "Red Line Agreement," which barred TPC partners from independent exploration outside the former Ottoman Empire, including all of Arabia except Kuwait.

Harry St. John (Abd Allah) Philby, remembered best today as an early Western explorer of Arabia, met Abd al-Aziz in 1917 while Philby was a British political officer. In 1925, Philby gave up his post, settled in Jiddah, and soon afterward embraced Islam and took the Muslim name Abd Allah. By the early 1930s he was a confidant of the king, who frequently included him in aftermoon driving tours of the Hijaz.

Major Frank Holmes was an avuncular optimist from New Zealand who believed so strongly that oil could be found naturally on the south seas of Persia that he earned the nickname "Abu al-Nahr," or "Mr. Oil." Although his Arabian concession, granted to him by Abd al-Aziz in 1923, lapsed unprofitable, Holmes later was successful in later oil developments in Bahrain and Kuwait.

Charles Crane, heir to a US plumbing fortune, was impressed by Abd al-Aziz's leadership long before the king invited him to Jid- dah in 1931. Later, when Crane's engineer, Karl Twitchell, reported a death of water but a possible abundance of oil, Crane reportedly turned down the king's offer of a concession, saying that he did not wish to profit from a gesture he had viewed as a favor to a man he admired.

Karl S. Twitchell, a mining and civil engineer, arrived in 1931 with the assignment to search for arisinal wells, primarily in the Hijaz. Although Twitchell found no underground water supplies, he noted the geological similarity between al-Hassa in eastern Arabia and Bahrain, and helped convince both Socal and Abd al-Aziz that a second concession might be worth pursuing.

Lloyd Hamilton was only 40 when he arrived in Jiddah in February 1933 to Socal's concession lease negotiation. As the three months of difficult parleys went on, he and Finance Minister Abd Allah al-Sulayman appeared to gain great respect for each other.

1999: The dispatch area of the Operations Coordination Center at Saudi Aramco headquarters in Dhahran is the heart of the round-the-clock work that supplies oil and gas to customers in the kingdom and around the globe.

Number of round-trips between the Earth and Mars that a car getting 25 miles per gallon could make using the gasoline refined from a single day's Saudi Aramco crude-oil production: 48

Approximate number of customers' ships per month that offshore Saudi Aramco crude oil at lighting stations in the Gulf of Mexico: 35

Chances that a supertanker loaded with Saudi Aramco crude oil in 1997 offloaded in the US: 1 in 5

Chances it offloaded in Asia: 2 in 5

Chances that a tanker loaded with Saudi Aramco refined products in 1997 offloaded in the US: 1 in 10

Chances it offloaded in Asia: 1 in 2

Approximate number of houses built since 1951 by Saudi employees of Saudi Aramco using company-provided home loans: 41,400

Number of Saudi Government boys' and girls' schools built and maintained by Saudi Aramco since 1953: 113

Current enrollment in those schools: 65,000

Chances that an employee of Saudi Aramco lives in Dhahran: 1 in 10

Number of nations from which Saudi Aramco's international employees are drawn: 51

Rank of the US among these: 2

Rank of the Philippines: 1

Square meters of Dhahran's 27-hole golf course that are covered in grass: 0

Average number of days each year since 1993 that the daily average temperature at Saudi Arabia's Abqaiq Plants, the world's largest crude oil stabilization center, exceeded 45 degrees Centigrade (113°F): 55

Number of years that oil exploration field teams in Saudi Arabia had no access to air conditioning: 22

Current average price of a US gallon of gasoline at a gas station in Saudi Arabia: 51¢

Number of oil and gas fields discovered by Saudi Aramco between 1989 and 1998: 25

Percentage of all Saudi Aramco's oil and gas fields that this represents: 30

Sources:
* *State of Alaska, Department of Natural Resources, Division of Oil and Gas; all others: Saudi Aramco

1933: Having agreed on a specific schedule of remuneration to the national treasury, Abd Allah al-Sulayman and Lloyd Hamilton signed the concession agreement that gave Socal the right to search for oil in Saudi Arabia.
Pioneer Photographer of the Holy Cities

Muhammad Sadiq

Written by John de St. Jorre
Photographs courtesy of Farid Kiumi/Agpeyophila
In late January 1861, as Americans were preparing for civil war, an Egyptian colonel in Cairo was boarding an east-bound train for Suez on a mission of a more peaceful kind. Muhammad Sadiq, an officer of the general staff and an engineer, had packed a large assortment of surveying instruments in his luggage, including a "hectometre," a wheel-like device for measuring distance. He had also carefully stowed away another relatively new invention: a large, unwieldy wet-plate camera.

Sadiq's destination was Arabia. His military mission was to explore the area between the Red Sea port of Wajh and the holy city of Madinah and report on the topography, climate, routes, and human settlements of the region. Photography, it seems, was not an official part of the plan, merely a hobby that the colonel had taken up and hoped to pursue on his travels. After a short stay in Suez, Sadiq took ship and reached Wajh two days later. Wajh was then a busy, medium-sized port on the Egyptian pilgrimage route that ran southward from Aqaba along the Red Sea coast.

In an account of his travels published later in Cairo, Sadiq's observant, meticulous reporting style was immediately apparent. Nine kilometers (5.6 miles) inland from Wajh, he reported, there was "a fort ... built amidst the mountains, which are composed of red sandstone. It is well-armed with guns, and is a proper store for the supplies of the pilgrims. ... The place is shewn with pebbles and stones, and is the point where three routes meet, the first leading to Suez and known as the al-'Ula Route, the second is called El-Sitar, and the third leads to the Holy City of Madinah." Sadiq went on to record the nature of the terrain around the fort, the district's water supply, the relations between the Ottoman governor and the Arabs, and the differences between the local camels and those of Egypt and Syria.

Sadiq and his small group then headed south, and they took 12 days—a leisurely pace for the time—to cover the 418 kilometers (259 miles) to Madinah, following the Wadi al-Hashim for much of the way. As they moved, Sadiq measured, mapped and recorded the barren, mountainous route, noting fortifications and areas where fresh water and provisions could be obtained. It was hard going. Temperatures exceeded 38 degrees Centigrade (100°F) during the day and plummeted to near freezing at night. But finally, the great walled city of Madinah, with its slender minarets rising against the surrounding hills, came into view. The party halted and the colonel, for the first time since he left Cairo, unpacked his precious camera.

The Hijaz, a scorched landscape of eroded hills, dry wadis and drifting sands comprising the coastal plain and mountains of northwest Arabia, had long been familiar to pilgrims...
This panoramic view of Madinah made in 1861 is the first known photograph taken inside what is today Saudi Arabia. Sadiq did not carry his camera to Makkah until 1880.
Panorama of the Sacred Mosque, Makkah, 1880.
Sadig was among the first photographers to create panoramic images. He did so by joining two separate photographs in such a fashion that it looked as though the image had come from one plate.

As though the image had come from one plate.

"No one before me," Sadig noted factually in his diary, "has ever taken such photographs."

Sadig then proceeded to measure and draw a detailed plan of the site, another "first" for the Egyptian colored. Richard Burton had produced sketches in 1853 but they were very different from Sadig's careful architectural-style drawings. Sadig of his trips to the holy cities. The citizens, he noted, were "nice and civilized, and welcoming to traveling strangers."

After leaving Madinah, Sadig and his party traveled westward to the Red Sea port of Yathrib, where they arrived a week later. Back in Cairo, Sadig presented a report to his military superiors, but he did not publish anything until 1877, when his account appeared initially in The Egyptian

In the late afternoon of February 12, 1861, as Muhammad Sadig stood gazing at Madinah with his camera at his side, he seemed aware of the historic fashion that it looked as though the image had come from one plate. "No one before me," Sadig noted factually in his diary, "has ever taken such photographs."

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...
The Colonels Camera and Photography in His Time

When Colonel Muhammad Sadiq decided to take a camera with him on his first trip to Madinah in 1861, he had no alternative but to pack a large, cumbersome device known as a wet-plate collodion camera. Photography was barely 20 years old and the collodion method, which used a glass plate rather than paper as a support for the light-sensitive salts, had only been invented a decade earlier by Frederick Scott Archer. Collodion was a light-sensitive emulsion composed of nitro-cellulose and ether which, together with silver salts, was coated on a sheet of glass.

Glass negatives were more durable than the earlier paper negatives, produced clearer photographic images, and could be used to make a large number of prints using albumen-coated paper, on which Sadiq's photographs accompanying this article are printed. The disadvantage, apart from the camera's size, was that the collodion negative had to be sensitized immediately before use and exposed in the camera while still wet, otherwise it lost its sensitivity. The traveling photographer thus had to carry with him a portable darkroom, and this is what Sadiq was determined to do on his first expedition in 1861.

The technology had improved by the time he returned to the Hijaz in 1880. Collodion plates could then be used dry, without any loss of sensitivity, although their over-sensitivity to blue light meant that the sea and the sky lost definition. In the late 1860s, a new method using a gelatine plate was invented. This meant that cameras became smaller and lighter and the photographer had less paraphernalia to carry with him. But it is not known whether Sadiq was able to take advantage of those advances.

Sadiq was meticulous in documenting his photographs. Descriptive titles were written in Arabic and he signed each plate "Saidie, Bey," using the French spelling of his name, and also in Arabic. After his photographic exhibitions in Philadelphia in 1876 and Venice in 1881, he had a circular stamp made which read: "Saidie, Bey, Colonel d'Etat Major Egyptian. Photographie Diplomé à L’Exp. de Philèe 1876, Médaille d’Or à L’Exp. de Venice 1876."

Sadiq's photographic achievements in the 19th century picked up a thread of Middle Eastern history spun some 900 years earlier when an Arab physicist, Abu Ali al-Husain ibn al-Haytham, wrote a treatise describing how an inverted image could be made on the wall of a darkened chamber—camera obscura in Latin—by using a small aperture whose size also governed the clarity of the image. Italian Renaissance architects used a device based on Ibn al-Haytham's idea to help them with their drawings. By the 19th century, the camera obscura was well established, and it was upon its principles that Jacques Daguerre and W. H. Fox Talbot began experimenting with focus, control of the light entering the apparatus and, ultimately, the fixing of the images on paper.

In 1876, Sadiq exhibited his photographs from the holy cities at the Philadelphia Exhibition; in 1881 his portfolio won a gold medal at the Third International Congress of Geographers in Venice.

In 1896, The Guide to the Hijaz for Its Universal Arriving Visitors, which summarized the findings of his three journeys and offered practical advice to pilgrims. By this time his hortific methods had expanded and he was known as Muhammad Sadiq Pasha—a contemporary photographic portrait shows him wearing the gold-embroidered frock coat reserved for men of that rank—and he was a respected figure in Cairo's intellectual circles. In cities themselves, but also the first pictures ever taken inside what is now Saudi Arabia. Sadiq combined his photographic technical skills with a fine visual sense. He was also a serious and curious-minded scholar. It is interesting that a devout Muslim should have been the first person to produce photographic images of Islam's holy places. But at least there could be no doubt of Sadiq's motives, which were scholarly, religious and altruistic rather than mercenary or sensational.

There is perhaps no better epitaph for Sadiq than the phrase that D. G. Hogarth used about his illustrious predecessor, the Swiss explorer, Johann Ludwig Burckhardt: "Praising Burckhardt's descriptions of Juddah and Makka, Hogarth wrote that they were "the patient harvest of an observant, leisured eye, for which nothing lacked interest." Sadiq, of course, was able to go one better and produce photographic images of his own rich harvest, images that still convey something of the original, technical skill, and sense of wonder that animated their author every time he released the shutter in the holy cities of Arabia well more than a century ago.
Makkah al-Mukarramah—"Makkah the Honored"—was the birthplace of the Prophet Muhammad in 570. Within today's city, at the center of the Sacred Mosque, is the focal point of Islamic prayer worldwide—the Ka'ba. The 15-meter-high (50 ft.) roughly cubical structure was first built as a place for the worship of the one God by Ibrahim (Abraham) and Isma'il (Isma'il), and it is then a physical reminder of the links between Islam and the dawn of monotheism, between the Qur'an and previous revelations, and between the Prophet Muhammad and earlier Messengers of God. Previous spread: During Ramadan, the month of fasting from sunrise to sunset, prayers called tarawih are performed each evening, and they often draw even more worshippers—as many as three million in Makkah alone—than the hajj, the annual pilgrimage. At left, Tarawih in the Sacred Mosque in Makkah; at right, the same prayers at the Mosque of the Prophet in Madinah.
The very success of King 'Abd al-'Aziz’s efforts, from 1921 till his death in 1953, to ease the rigors of the Hajj meant that Makkah’s Sacred Mosque soon became unable to accommodate the numbers of pilgrims, which have increased more than 20-fold since his era. Lefts a calligraphic carving on an Ottoman-built facade in the Sacred Mosque commemorates the leadership of Abu Bakr, the first caliph of Islam following the death of the Prophet Muhammad in 632, who demonstrated the viability of an Islamic state to the empires of the Persians and Byzantines.

By the 10th century, the Sacred Mosque covered an area of some 27,000 square meters (6 acres). Throughout the Fatimid, Ayyubid, Mamlik and Ottoman periods until the early years of our century, work on the mosque was limited to renovation and restoration of this existing structure. Upon gaining control of Makkah and the surrounding region in 1925, King 'Abd al-'Aziz set about making the Hajj safer for pilgrims. This was both a matter of religious duty and of pragmatism, because previously the pilgrims—who paid taxes for their visits—had had to brave poor sanitary conditions, inadequate accommodations and even highwaysmen on their way to fulfill their religious obligations. By the mid-1930’s, British Muslim Harry St. John (Abd Allah) Philby observed that the pilgrims were “safe, comfortable, contented, well-provided with water and medical attention from excellent physicians and attendants, while a Government that sincerely believes that no man dies except of God’s will has done more, far more than any of its predecesors to reduce the death rate of the pilgrims.”

Yet the very success of King 'Abd al-'Aziz’s efforts meant that by the time World War II was over, the existing mosque was soon unable to accommodate the rising numbers of pilgrims. Congestion was compounded by the fact that the Hajj cities must each be performed in certain locations within a certain period of time by all of the pilgrims. For example, it is not possible to reduce crowding by letting half the pilgrims go to the Plain of Arafat one day while the other half waits in Makkah, and then the next day have them switch places. In 1955, King 'Abd al-'Aziz ordered the first expansion of the Sacred Mosque in more than a thousand years. The mosque’s area was increased five-fold, to 152,000 square meters (37½ acres), which gave it a capacity of half a million worshipers. Seven-hundred-meter (2850) minaret replaced shorter minarets, and the minaret was developed to better accommodate and regulate the flow of pilgrims between al-Safa and al-Marwa. Provisions for draining floodwaters—which have always plagued the low-lying areas of Makkah—were also implemented. This expansion gave the mosque its current unique architectural character, a synthesis of Islamic styles, as well as its configuration: It is the only mosque in the world in which the direction of prayer is inward, for this mosque is the physical center point of Islam, and all others are like points on the circumference of a wheel, each orient-ed toward this one.

Subsequent projects in 1959 and 1981 brought further improvements to the mosque’s structure and ornamentation, a network of basements and service tunnels, a vast cooling and ventilation system and further improvements to drainage.

(For captions see p. 65.)
In 1988, the largest expansion in the history of Sacred Mosque was begun under the leadership of King Fahd ibn Abdul Aziz, who adopted the title Khidim al-Haramayn ash-Sharifayn, or "Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques." Finished in the 1990s, this most recent expansion added a western gallery that roughly doubled the mosque’s area, updated numerous older sections, and added heat-resistant tiles to the vast plazas and air conditioning throughout. Opposite: Two of the seven 86-meter (282-foot) minarets that replaced shorter ones in 1955. This was done under the direction of King Saud, the first of ibn Abdul Aziz’s sons to succeed him. Although the area of the Sacred Mosque was expanded five-fold in the 1960’s, within a few decades, the numbers of worshipers became large enough to warrant the greater expanses of the 1980’s and 1990’s.
Until the middle of this century, most foreign pilgrims arrived in Makkah over-land or by sea, after journeys that lasted weeks or even months. But the advent of widespread air travel has made the holy places more accessible than ever. This, combined with rapid demographic growth, has led to an exponential growth in the numbers coming for Hajj. In King 'Abd al-Aziz's time, 100,000 pilgrims might perform Hajj in a given year, but fewer than 60 years later, the number had surpassed 20 times that.

In 1988, King Fahd laid the cornerstone for the largest expansion project in the history of the Sacred Mosque. Now complete, the project's most visible feature is the extension of the mosque's western gallery into an area that had previously been an open esplanade. The extension is marked by a monumental entranceway framed by two new minarets, giving the Sacred Mosque a total of nine. A line of three new domes is set parallel to this entrance, while the extension also incorporates 18 smaller entranceways and some 500 new marble columns within the mosque itself. The Sacred Mosque now encompasses fully 356,000 square meters (88 acres), including the rooftop prayer areas and the open plazas surrounding the mosque. Although it comfortably holds a million worshipers, during Hajj and Ramadan more than twice as many pack into and fill its adjoining plazas.

This latest expansion project not only allowed for more worshipers but also made them more comfortable. Specially developed heat-resistant marble tiles cover the floor—an important consideration when daytime temperatures in the summer consistently top 40° (104°F). The complex also now boasts one of the world's largest air-conditioning plants. A new sound system and an internal radio network enable worshipers in all parts of the mosque to participate in the congregational prayers. Zamzam water is cooled and sterilized for drinking with ultraviolet light. Escalators whisk 15,000 people an hour to the rooftop prayer areas, while tunnels for pedestrians and vehicles ease the omnipresent Hajj gridlock in the streets around the mosque.

In the city itself, medical services, sanitary facilities and housing have been improved, and other sites of Hajj rites, including Mina, Muzdalifah and Arafat, have been upgraded. With 90 percent of foreign pilgrims arriving by air, a dedicated Hajj terminal at Jeddah's King 'Abd
Over the last decade, the Prophet's Mosque in Madinah, too, has been greatly expanded. Today the mosque and its plazas are roughly as large as the entire pre-Islamic city of Yathrib, which was renamed Madinah following the Prophet Muhammad's flight from persecutors in Makkah in 622. That hijrah ("emigration") marks the beginning of both the Islamic calendar and the Islamic state.
One after another the people grasped the halter of his camel. Qaswa. "Let her go her way," (Muhammad) said, "for she is under the command of Allah." After wandering for some distance, seeming ready to settle (amidst growing excitement), then ambushing forward again, taking her time and fulfilling her destiny, Qaswa at last halted and sank to the ground, with all the groaning and grumbling of a camel which is noble and self-important camel is capable. Here was built, in due course, the first mosque of Islam, together with the Prophet's house and the apartments of his wives.

When the Prophet died a decade later, he was buried within the building, and his successors, Abu Bakr al-Siddiq and Umar, were later entombed beside him. That first mosque was made of palm logs and bricks, and it was large for its time: some 1,050 square meters (11,300 sq ft). Today, the Prophet's Mosque is the product of an expansion project every bit as vigorous as that in Makkah, and it can hold up to a million worshipers.

Like Makkah's Sacred Mosque, the Prophet's Mosque also has a long history of expansion and renovation. The caliphs 'Umar and 'Uthman both extended the mosque, and the Umayyad ruler Al-Walid built minarets, a mihrab (a prayer niche for the imam) and additional prayer halls. Further improvements were made under the Abbasids. The mosque's distinctive green dome, which rises above the Prophet's tomb proper, was built in the 13th century while Makkah was under the control of the Cairo-based Mamluks. In 1649, the Ottoman's 'Abd al-Majid carried out the last expansion effort prior to the founding of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Two years before his death, King 'Abd al-'Aziz initiated a building program to enlarge the mosque area by some 60 percent. Later, King Faisal built some 35,000 square meters (nearly nine acres) of open plazas around the mosque, and this area was later doubled by his successor, King Khalid. In 1985, King Fahd launched the most extensive expansion in the mosque's history, which enlarged the mosque itself by a factor of 10. As the King himself noted, the present mosque is "equal to [the area of the city of Makkah in ancient times]."

Six new 105-meter (345 feet) minarets brought the mosque's total to 10; seven new entrances were added, and a series of 27 domes, each 15 meters (45 ft) in diameter and capable of being electronically slid open or closed, were incorporated into the new roof. A dozen awnings, which resemble giant umbrellas, open automatically to shade the building's courtyard and shelter the pilgrims from the sun. The mosque is air-conditioned by a massive system that produces 54,300 liters (14,480 gallons) of water every minute. Additional escalators, new lighting and an internal radio network were also included in the project. The extension was even designed to allow for the future addition of yet another level. Service and transport tunnels, as well as extensive drainage facilities and parking garages, have been built underground.

In a more traditional medium, Madi- nah's King Fahd Holy Qur'an Printing Complex publishes some 10 million copies of the Koran in Arabic and in translation, which are distributed free both in the city and throughout the world. Each year, 10 million copies that the house has produced has been stamped "Al-Madina al- Munawwarah" at the frontispiece. This is consistent with the holy cities' traditions of generosity and scholarship, for it was in Makkah and Madinah that for centuries many of the city's sacred works and great minds naturally met, and many stayed on to study or teach for varying lengths of time.

This legacy is preserved in Makkah at Umrah University, which takes its name from one of the holy city's appellations, "the mother of villages." In Madinah, too, as in the past, students from throughout the Muslim world come to study: Some 85 percent of the students at that city's Islamic University, founded in the 1960's, are non-Saudis who receive tuition-free religious education. When they return to their home countries, they take with them deeper knowledge of the Qur'an, hadith and the Prophet as well as vivid memories of the Prophet's city.

Speaking to a gathering of pilgrims some decades ago, the late King Faisal said:

When God bestowed on us the honor of being the servants of His House and of looking after His Pilgrims, He enabled us to say with pride that we are meeting brothers in our religion who have come to perform one of the basic duties of Islam...Islam, my friends, is a message to all the world and not a special privilege of a specific country or a specific people. So let all unite and cooperate for the good of our world and their religion.

As the king celebrates the 100th Hijri years ago that brought unity of Islam as an idea and a way of life to a far greater unity, and to stewardship, finds two of its most inspiring expressions in the very heart of the faith was born 14 centuries ago.

Greg Nash is a staff writer for Saudi Arabian in Riyadh.

Twenty-seven sliding domes, each some 15 meters (48 ft) in diameter, were installed at the Prophet's Mosque in the early 1990's. They allow natural ventilation to complement one of the world's largest air-conditioning systems.
Along the central arcade of the Prophet's Mosque, the rectilinear grid of the coffered ceiling is broken by the radial geometry of the chandeliers. **Left:** A workman inspects the skeletal structures of concrete forms during renovations authorized in 1985 by King Fahd, which increased the mosque's size twofold. **Opposite:** In the expanded mosque, daily lessons in the study of the Qur'an are offered to students of all ages, who come to Madinah from around the world, just as they have since the earliest days of Islam.
One of the most remarkable engineering feats in the renovated Prophet’s Mosque is the two courtyards shaded by square, umbrella-like awnings that “blossom” automatically in sunlight. Below: With the umbrellas in the retracted position, the 15th-century green dome that rises above the tomb of the Prophet can be seen from the courtyard. Above: Fast, wide escalators whisk worshippers from one level to another.
Its new doors aglow with reflections from a sunset sky, the marble plaza of the Mosque of the Prophet is dotted with worshippers from around the world. Above: The tomb of the Prophet is lavishly decorated, but like other tombs in Islam, it is not itself a place of veneration. Below: An internal video system helps officials maintain an orderly flow of the sometimes more than a million worshippers, and it proves especially useful in spotting situations that require assistance, such as the medical emergencies that inevitably occur in huge crowds.
Doors of the Kingdom

Photographed by Haizjar Conseries

Used adapted from "Doors of the Kingdom: Photographs by Haizjar Conseries" (Apartment No 9, 1998, ISBN 0-9381-837-80)

Sometimes there is nothing more pleasant or arresting than a door. The intriguing possibilities that lie beyond or behind it have inspired many Arab poets to use the door as a metaphor for both hope and denial. Islamic scholars also use the word for (door) to distinguish the various chapters of their books—so the door is, after all, the threshold between ignorance and enlightenment.

In a land known for its tents and its nomadic past, the 1996 Door Exhibit at the Heritage Center of the Natiza Philanthropic Society for Women in Riyadh allowed us to stand before an array of entrances of such variety and beauty as to make us wonder why we nowadays have such dull doors. For this article, as with the book from which it is drawn, we chose to show not the Natiza’s collection of some 72 doors, but rather doors where doors actually should be—as part of an edifice. In doing so, we sought the full range of doors, from the elegant to the most common, recognizing that perfect workmanship cannot be easily found, since perfection demands discernment and therefore a complete vision. Thus it is not a search for such perfection, but rather for the soul behind the craft—the dignity and truthfulness in representation—that moves us. Ultimately, since technology often only replaces inspiration with a tool and does not itself move us closer to perfection, all we can do with it is imitate and draw upon that which is already ours. Perhaps, looking at these doors, we will understand the limitations of our cluttered minds, hoping never to lose the soul that inspired and the vision that guided their form and color beyond chaos, toward infinity.

Maha Al Faisal, Director of the Heritage Center of the Natiza Philanthropic Society for Women
Architectural Styles in the Four Major Regions of Saudi Arabia

By Sultan Ghali bin Awasib Al-Qu’atti and Gray Henry

Differences in climate, topography, vegetation and social conditions throughout what is today Saudi Arabia have produced regional approaches to architecture that can be grouped loosely according to the four major regions of the country: the central region, or Najd; the Eastern Province and Arabian Gulf coast; the western region, or Hijaz, and the southern mountain region, Asir. (See Aramco World, July/August 1998.)

Najd

This region is characterized by both fortress and residential architecture. One of the best examples of the fortress style is Masmak Fort, built in the late 18th century, captured by ‘Abd al-Aziz in 1902 and fully restored in the 1990s. In its essence as in Najd homes, one of the most distinctive features is the use of triangular perforations on both inner and outer walls, which serve not only as decoration, but also for ventilation, light, and the deflection of rainwater. (See previous spread.) The traditional decorative patterns were composed of rows of such triangular as well as rounded fruit designs; they adorned front doors, lintels, structural beams and occasionally the lower portions of the wall of the sufi or reception and conference salon. The fortresses were decorated predominantly in blues, reds and yellows derived from gum, gypsum, powdered rock and charcoal.

Najdi houses were often built around a central courtyard, with only a few openings to the street, thus ensuring privacy for the family. Entrances to the houses were closed by large rectangular wooden doors, geometrically decorated by varied combinations of burning, carving and painting. For the sake of privacy, front doors were never directly opposite one another. The inner vertical slats of a door were of palm wood; the outer ones were of hardwood. Early 20th-century doors were sometimes made from imported teak chests and packing cases. Large doors had a diagonal hardwood brace across the back.

Saudi Door Design in Islamic Art

By Khalid Azzam

Many works within the architecture of Islam are designed to lead a person from the distractions of the outside world to the peace of an internal space. It is an architecture which establishes a hierarchy of spaces, and which distinguishes each one from the others with a series of transitional zones. In Islamic architecture, the door of a house marks the transition from community space—city, town or village—to family space, the home. It is one of the most important thresholds in the daily life of the Muslim.

Doors are often the only form of artistic expression that the private life of the family projects to the outside world. The outer walls of these buildings are usually blank, with very few openings and with little sense of formal composition. The bright colors and bold patterns on the front door emphasize this point of entrance to the private world of the family and provide a glimpse of the richness that lies behind the unassuming elevations and thick walls.

Traditional Islamic architecture always sought the integration of the constructed environment with its natural surroundings, and that of Saudi Arabia is a good example. From the smooth curves of mud-brick construction to the massive solidity of stone architecture, and from the orientation of the skylines to the recesses and protrusions of the walls, we see varied traditional buildings that blend gracefully with their surroundings. Even the internal space of a building, the courtyard—which is metaphorically the heart of the building—is open to the sky.

The traditional architect’s aspiration to reflect laws of nature is also seen in his use of decorative techniques that deflect attention from physical mass and draw it instead to a plane of color, geometric design, or biomorphic form. This decoration is not mere adornment but an essential element in the overall
Eastern Province

The doors of this region were often decorated with a delicate white lacy pattern on a black background. Sometimes doors were decorated with round metal studs set in simple patterns and had a carved central jamb, referred to as "the nose of the door." This jamb often had marvelous designs. Metal studs set in similar patterns are also found on large chests formerly in use in this region and other areas of the Gulf.

A number of designs that one meets a little inland from the Gulf coast—right up to the edge of the Najd plateau—have roots in the Sumerian, Akkadian and Babylonian cultures, and they have survived relatively unchanged in the isolated desert region. Along the coast, refined post-Islamic Persian and Indian influences have been superimposed on these earlier Mesopotamian traditions. Indian influences appear to have been strongest from the 18th to the mid-20th centuries, whereas Persian and other neighboring Islamic regions have had a longer, more ongoing effect that is still perceptible today.

One of the most commonly discussed features of Islamic art has always been the prohibition of the portrayal of human figures. Some have suggested that this prohibition created a void which had to be filled and thereby caused the development of a more abstract art, in particular, geometric patterns and arabesque forms. However, these forms are not a compensation for the lack of images, but a positive contribution toward a perception of reality higher than material form, one in which the world is not a series of discrete images, objects or forms but one in which the disappearance of the human figure does not leave a void. In his Mirror of the Intellect, Titus Burckhardt wrote:

By transforming a surface into a tissue of colors into a vibration of light and shadow, the ornament prevents the mind from fixing itself on any form that says "I." As an image says "It." The center of an arabesque is everywhere and nowhere, each "affirmation" being followed by its "negation" and vice versa.

The designs employed by the artisans of these doors convey concepts that cannot be expressed through more physical form, while at the same time they understand and fulfill the meaning of form. Form that exists on the physical level has limits of time and space. The "abstract" interpretation of form in Islamic art raises one's perception of reality from the physical realm. It encourages a contemplative state of mind and a perception, through beauty, of the manifold unity in this world. An understanding of the meaning of traditional artistic form overwhelms the individuality of the artist without suppressing his creative instinct. It stretches his mode of expression beyond the realm of the individual, into the realm of timeless art.

Khalid Azem practices architecture in Cairo and London, where he also teaches at the Prince of Wales's Institute of Architecture.
Hijaz

The Hijaz region includes the holy cities of Makkah and Madinah, which have been pilgrim destinations for centuries. Pilgrims traveling to these sites, especially those who afterward settled in the Hijaz, brought with them aspects of their craft and culture from their countries of origin.

Doors with floral, ornate, and elliptical patterns are generally from the Indian subcontinent—especially those which are set with or framed by Moghul, Gujarati (Pathan), or Rajasthani arches (with the exception of the horseshoe type that reveals North African Andalusian influences). Geometric motifs tend to originate in Syria, Egypt and North Africa. Strong European influences from Ottoman and other Islamic lands under European rule are also found. Some affluent house owners imported carved doors and wooden pillars from Egypt, India, Java, East Africa and other regions.
Asir

In contrast with the sobriety of architecture and decoration in the rest of Arabia, exuberant color and ornamentation characterize those of Asir. The painting extends into the house over the walls and doors, up the staircases, and onto the furniture itself. When a house is being painted, women from the community help each other finish the job. The building then displays their shared taste and knowledge. Mothers pass these on to their daughters.

This artwork is based on a geometry of straight lines and suggests the patterns common to textile weaving, with solid bands of different colors. Certain motifs reappear, such as the triangular millah (or niche) and the palette. In the past, paint was produced from mineral and vegetable pigments. Coves and alfalfa yielded green. Blue came from the indigo plant. Red came from pomegranates and a certain mud. Paintbrushes were created from the tough hair found in a goat's tail. Today, however, women use modern manufactured paint to create new looks, which have become an indicator of social and economic change.

Sultan Chalib bin 'Abd al-Rahman Al-Qa'it was a scholar of Islamic history and Arabian studies. He has written a history of the Hadramaut region of Yemen, as well as essays on poetry, literature and commerce.

Gray Henry directs the US branch of Dar Al-Ma'arif, a Riyadh-based publishing house dedicated to transmitting and preserving Islamic heritage and culture through books for children.

Hanjar Gouwerneur holds a degree in journalism from the American University in Cairo. She has worked at Arab Radio and Television in Italy, and is presently photographing the treasures of Egypt's National Library in Cairo.
Her dark, kohl-rimmed eyes sparkled as she stepped forward and turned slowly in place, showing off a gold-embroidered green silk bride’s costume from Jaizan, her home town on Saudi Arabia’s southwestern coastal plain of Tihama. A row of gold coins decorated her forehead below a jasmine-covered headdress whose scent enveloped her like a mist. Floral designs traced in henna danced on her forearms. Finishing her turn, she gazed out at the audience of women that filled the festival hall outside Riyadh during the first of three women’s days at Janadiyah, Saudi Arabia’s national festival of traditional culture.
Stepping off the stage, she presented herself first to the event’s patron, H.H. Nafis bint Abd al-Aziz, to give her a close look at her headgear, and then paraded through the crowd of students, home-makers, professors, writers, artists, journalists and intellectuals, with some old friends who approached, conversations stopped, and the only sound was the jingling of her anklets.

The young woman from Jazan was one of many who modeled traditional bridal costumes at the opening. Other women presented centuries-old folk songs and dances.

Women’s folk dances, traditional dances, make up a large part of Saudi Arabia’s cultural heritage. Women participate in dances to celebrate events, such as national holidays and school graduations. Each region, and each town within each region, has its unique dance customs, though there may be other, broader traditions. For example, the stale dance performed in Jizan, in which the women link arms and bob to the music while shifting their feet in tiny steps, sometimes adding slight bows forward and little kicks. This dance is also performed by men, but the women’s version is softer and more graceful. But not all women’s dances are so. The stomp dance, which hails from the Upland of Mahay, whose members dance in a circle, is reminiscent of costumes from Sudan and Ethiopia, too. The women dance to their own rhythm, sometimes adding slight bows forward and little kicks. This dance is also performed by women of the Mahay tribe. The women’s version is softer and more graceful. But not all women’s dances are so. The stomp dance, which hails from the Upland of Mahay, whose members dance in a circle, is reminiscent of costumes from Sudan and Ethiopia, too. The women dance to their own rhythm, sometimes adding slight bows forward and little kicks. This dance is also performed by women of the Mahay tribe.

The geography of the southern region has great variety, with its mountains, its plains, its desert, and its greenness,” said Nafis. And, with her presence, one of the organizers and a former director of a women’s charity in Jizan. “Those different traditional costumes, as well as various traditions—clothing, cuisine and the folk arts. We consider it a really rich region.”

To Laila Bassam, an expert on traditional costume and a professor of home economics at Riyadh Women’s College, one of the most surprising performances came from a troupe from the southern Saudi coastal town of Jizan. “I think their costumes are so different because of the sea,” she said. “You see how the sea affects people who live near it, because it gives them contact with other places. Oman and the others were affected us all here in Jizan too, even in the names we give material.” She gives the word for Indonesian cotton, jossa—deri from “jawa”—that for wool, kasuri (from which English also takes its “cashmere”).

The towns and districts of Jizan al-Mahay, Shuhrani, Bani Shahr, Bish, al-Qohan, Najran and Jizan all sent women’s dance troupes to Jizan. As they reflected influences from contacts with Africa, India, the deserts to the north and Yemen to the south, each troupe became a living example of the cultural interchange that through the centuries has shaped Arabia. During performances, the women of Asir passed through the audience carrying traditional aloeswood incense, known as afd. Other offered delicately-embossed naseegs of jasmine and sage, as well as dates and juicy raisins, fresh from farms and coops.

The government has also taken initiatives to preserve and promote traditional heritages, including setting up heritage sites and museums. Despite the modernization and globalization, there is a growing interest in preserving and showcasing the rich cultural heritage of Saudi Arabia. The traditional dances, costumes, and songs continue to be an integral part of the cultural identity of Saudi women, passed down from generation to generation. These performances serve as a reminder of the rich cultural diversity that exists within the kingdom and the importance of preserving these traditions for future generations.
In some ways, the basic structure of the musical performance remains little changed. A lead singer, or matriarch, heads a group that usually has between 10 and 25 players as chorus and drummers, many of whom are friends and family. In addition to the tar in various sizes, in Jazir both men’s and women’s folk bands use the zir ardhi, a shallow clay drum played on the ground with a stick; the naba, a multihanded drum that looks like a spiked wheel; and the janduk, an instrument fashioned from a large rectangular slate or olive tin and played as a hand drum. At Janduk, a group from the village of Rijal al-Ma’ added three women playing the mortar and pestle to accent the end of each rhythmic phrase.

Throughout the Peninsula, women’s folk songs consist of simple repeated melodies overlying complex repeated polyrhythms that pulse steadily through songs lasting up to 15 minutes. The melody usually stays in a single maqam (mode or scale) and is repeated throughout a series of verses, sung in colloquial Arabic, as well as both choral and instrumental refrains. The singer embellishes the melody with modest ornamentation, if any at all. While the structure is simple, the interplay between the melody and the layers of percussion is hypnotic. This simplicity of structure and style is in direct contrast to the highly ornamented Arab art singing that developed over centuries in the Islamic and Arab courts. The latter tradition employs literary Arabic and transitions among multiple rhythms and maqams—and in this century gave rise to artists such as Egypt’s Umm Kulthum and Syria’s Sabah Fakhri. In Saudi towns and big cities, some matriarchs play the ‘ud, the fretless predecessor of the Western guitar, with an occasional accompanist on violin. Today’s popular wedding singers, such as Riyadh’s Nuha al-Jassas and Mary Said
and Jeddah's Sarah Musaifie, favor electronic keyboards specially designed for Arab music's quarter-tones—and which otherwise come without key.

Other Gulf-region songresses such as Rabab and Fattoomah record with large orchestras, release compact discs and appear in music videos produced mostly in Dubai and Kuwait. Yet for all their international exposure, these singers too stay close to their musical roots: simple melodies with modest ornamentation that overlap complex rhythms. The visuals of their music videos also often reflect their musical heritage: They are often shot in traditional music-performance settings such as a woman's nujja (reception room) or daww (salon). But at Janadriyyah, the audience heard only the centuries-old women's folk singing that is difficult to buy in recorded form, since it is still for women only.

"We sing this when we go out with the herds in the early morning," said a shepherd from the mountainous region of Qah-
tan, as she sat straight-backed in her chair backstage before her performance. Her hair was tied in a braid that fell down her back, and she casually passed around her black-
and-silver face mask. Then she took a deep breath and began a melody as long as a line of poetry. It skipped up by thirds to a high point, then back down to the low end of her vocal range before ending on the base note, or tonic. Each time she repeated it, the tune seemed to explore the levels of the ter-
raced hills she saw when she sang it at dawn, its notes echoing across the valley.

The musicsian learn from each other or are self-taught. As among folk musicians everywhere, the skills tend to run in fami-
lies. "I'm the leader of the troupe from Shahran and I'm from Shahran myself," explained Umm Fahad, a mother of five. "This is the first time I have taken part in the festival. It's a spectacular event. I've been playing music for 20 years. I learned dagh (percussion) and the tar (frame drum) from the others in the group. I taught myself how to sing.

"This is the most requested instrument of the south, the tanbur," said a young drummer from Qibtaan, Nuha 'Abd al-Rah-
am, as she held up a rectangular date tin, open at one end, its sides perforated. She was wearing the traditional black, fitted dress of embroidered cotton worn by the entire group from Qibtaan. "Few people play this. A lot of drummers play the tar, and tabah (cylindrical clay drums), but this is rare. You take a date or a dhiyar and cut holes in it like this." When she started to strike it with her hand, playing its sound-
drum like tones in the Nabiyya's catchy 4/4 rhythm, four ladies stood up, joined arms and began to dance. "And I don't just play this," she remarked, with pride, disregarding the dancers. "I also play the zir-
afith, the till and the asafir. I play all types of percussive instruments," she pointed out. Like most folk musicians at the festi-
val, she learned her art from her mother, also a world-renowned dancer.

A few minutes later when the Qibtaan shepherd sang on stage, without a micro-
phone, there was not a single shaft of light. She would easily carry across a small or two, as she held the high notes in suspension to maximize the distance the notes could echo.

Meanwhile, the troupe from Bishah, a town on the edge of the desert that stretches northwestward to Riyadh, sat patiently outside in the spring sunshine, waiting to go on next. Their brilliant red

dresses and black headscarves were reminiscent of the Bed-
ouin. "Every year during the holiday [in the month of Ramadan], we have huge cele-
brations in Khams Mushayt. We perform everywhere," explained Umm Fahad, leader of the group. Their troupe of a dozen members occasionally travels as far as Jeddah for par-
ties. She laughed when I asked her what she learned at art, her gold-and-turquoise nose post gleaming against her dark skin.

"I learned the old songs, al-
urar al-shari'aan ["the old tradi-
tions"], from my mother and aunts and I prefer them. My girls here in the group," she said, calling over her teenaged

daughter Salwa and a niece, "they like the new songs.

At last the women from Bishah danced onto the stage in a tight-knit group to a soaring 6/8 rhythm, carrying the town flag. Some of them loosened their long hair and sawing it from side to side as they bobbed. This dis-
tinctive women's dance movement, found in many parts of the Arabian Peninsula, is known as al-marhooj. "It is a very beautiful word. It is as far south as Kuwait and is believed to be originated among the Bedouin,

Throughout the Peninsula, women's folk songs consist of simple

repeated melodies overlaying complex-repeated polyrhythms that

too steadily through songs lasting up to 15 minutes.

The audience cheered loudest for dancers with wrist-length tresses that flew out in a spectacular arc around their heads, pulsing with the rhythm. The Bishah dancers so

stoned the audience that many stood up to
dray, whistle and encourage them, some-
times waving the edges of their shawls in
time to the drumming.

Most listeners to Saudi women's folk music don't judge the groups on any

finished their presentations, a group of girls from Riyadh, some as young as five years, performed modern interpretations of 'Asir dances, choreographed by a young secondary-school adminis-
trator. The formal choreography blended traditional movements with modern dance, and they even included dancing with swords to mimic the men's sword dances al-arrida, and a few moments of especially difficult "hair tosses" executed in figure-eight patterns.

Meanwhile, outside the per-
formance hall on the festival grounds, hundreds of women streamed in and out through the gates. "Fresh dates, fresh dates here!" called out women staffing the stall of the Nadheed factory, where they also gave away t-shirts. Another booth sold fresh falafel

(fried bean patties). Women by the hundreds visited the stalls of the traditional craftsman in the artisans’ village, for in such places it is traditional that men and women can mix. Under a full-sized replica of an 'Asir stone fort, dozens of other women set up shop to sell their craft goods, just as they do on market days in towns and vil-
lages all over the country. Ali Al-Hazim, an embroidery and clothing artisan from 'Asir, smiled as he estimated he had sold 100 machine- and three hand-embroidered dresses. Near-
by, Umm 'Abd Allah and her two daughters from Abba sold additional silver jewelry as they had for the past four years at Janadriyyah.

The women's festival also included evening events in Riyadh. Princess Nasr was the patron of an evening of poetry at King Abd al-Aziz Library that featured Saudi women poets reading their work—poems dealing both with social issues and with the same inner reflection that poets engage in worldwide.

At the campus of Riyadh's King Saud University, women also ran evening panel discussions about social issues.
Jahiyah al-Masayid during one of the festival's evening discussions. She spoke quietly, occasionally running her fingers along the long scarf at her neck, that matched her long white gown. "We are a developing society, and we are still advancing one step at a time. In recent years we have been able to take giant leaps. These leaps need a generation that understands what we were in the past. Jahiyah responds to the questions, "What were we in the recent past?" "How did our fathers and grandparents live?" "How can we benefit from the future, and meet it?"

"The attendance at the cultural evenings is really amazing," pointed out poet Huda al-Dhiglig, who also writes for national and international magazines. "You'll notice there's no empty chair. It shows that Saudi women are very thirsty for ideas," she said. "Most of the women attending are housewives. Often you see mothers with their daughters next to them. They want their daughters to hear about these issues."

"Jahiyah has generated much interest on the popular and the official level. It crystallizes the rising interest among Saudis in all aspects of folk culture and traditional life," said folklore expert Sa'd Sowayan, who wrote his doctoral thesis on Arabia's folk nabati poetry and is considered the leading proponent in Saudi Arabia today. He is also heading the compilation of a 15-volume encyclopedia of traditional Saudi culture. "We want to maintain a continuity between the past and the present," he said.

"I think there is no pleasure equal to that of seeing traditional performances, for example of seeing people in traditional costumes, even their traditional way of sitting and walking, body language and gestures. All these things are very interesting to watch and study. Yet how do we open our eyes and minds and try to draw meaning from all this? You can get all sorts of meanings and explanations from these things. If we are interested in studying the moon and the stars, maybe it is even more important to study ourselves, to study our planet, and to study what is on earth. Those things are more immediate, relevant and important for our survival and well-being," he adds.

"Jahiyah helps the new generations to understand cultural heritage, how our society was in the past for our fathers and grandfathers," said writer

"The importance of Jahiyah is two-fold, both domestic and international," she continued. "First, it allows us to display our heritage on the national stage. Then the cultural and intellectual discussions allow us to shed light on the most important issues that we want to discuss, whether they be social, intellectual or humanitarian issues. On the international level, Jahiyah has enabled us to build a bridge between our society and other societies. Our visitors from abroad see the progress we have made. At Jahiyah they also see that there are people who think, speak and discuss and have their own independent opinions and who can study, become doctors, intellectuals or writers. And women too can become writers, and teachers. This is important, because people outside don't know what is happening here at all. We can build a bridge between our country and the rest of the world."

"Another point," she continued, "is that it has helped us here to be open to other cultures, and this is important. Not only do people learn about us, we also get to know others' ideas. Our ideas, methods and points of view might differ, but this does not destroy the nature of friendship. On the contrary, it helps our society develop and flourish."

Two days after the festival closed, Jahiyah's executive committee chair Huda Murshid-Abd Allah took a non-stop stream of calls about the festival on "Wahban li Wab" ("Face to Face"), a live call-in television show. The audience appeared to be discussing the festival as if it had been a World Cup soccer match and this were the post-game wrap-up. Fatimah, calling from Makaha, suggested they send honor students to the festival as a reward for their studies. A correspondent from the Eastern Province daily Al-Yam suggested the government increase its support for the teaching and preservation of the folk arts.

As for the next Jahiyah, which will commemorate the hajj centennial of the beginning of the hajj, there will be special programs from all four major regions of the country. The women organizers hope that once again the festival hall will fill for several days with women and their traditions, with the scents of incense and jasmine, with the sounds of multilayered drumming and of women's voices raised in song and zaghrah, all in loving recreation and living invitation to the world of their grandmothers and great-grandmothers.

Former Saudi Gazette and Arab News writer Key Hardy Campbell lives near Boston, where she studies classical Arabic music and helps direct the annual Arabic Music Retreat. She recently wrote the script for Shafta, a dance-theater production based on a Bedouin folk tale.

Watercolor artist Judy Laurino attended the Alberta College of Art. She lives in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, where she teaches drawing and watercolor through the Dhahran Art Group.

Jahiyah responds to the questions, "What were we in the recent past?" "How did our fathers and grandparents live?" "How can we benefit from the future, and meet it?"
Saudi Arabia’s food is a reflection of the country’s history and its people’s customs, religion and ways of life. For centuries, Arabs of the Peninsula have traded with—and beyond—India, Africa, Central Asia and the Levant, and that trade has brought Arabia not only wealth but also cultural and especially culinary influences.

In urban centers, the simple Bedouin diet of dates and milk yielded to dishes made with a steadily growing repertoire of ingredients, including spices, and soon a flavorful and varied Saudi cuisine emerged.

Perhaps nowhere in the Peninsula is the cuisine more varied, rich and cosmopolitan than in the western province of Hijaz. From the earliest times, caravans laden with frankincense and myrrh, spices and other goods propelled the growth of the region, which lay athwart important trade routes of the ancient world. Makkah, Madinah, Jiddah and Taif became thriving business communities.

The emergence of Islam in the seventh century, however, had a marked effect on the foodways of the region. Not only were some foods and drinks prohibited, but pilgrims flocked to Makkah and Madinah for the Hajj from greater distances and in greater numbers than had attended the annual pagan festival of pre-Islamic times. Ever year, some stayed behind and wove themselves into the fabric of Hijazi society. Others came to the holy cities to escape religious persecution elsewhere. All these immigrants were ultimately fully assimilated, but they collectively left a deep impact on the customs and dress of the main population centers of the Hijaz, and their distinct cooking traditions enriched Hijazi cuisine. In modern times, with increasing mobility within Saudi Arabia, the influence of the Hijaz has reached all regions of the kingdom.

The sophisticated Hijazi urban merchant class has adapted and adopted many exotic dishes from Egypt, Syria, Turkey, India, Indonesia and Central Asia—but has assimilated them so
completely that today it is difficult to think of those dishes as foreign. They are now almost indistinguishable from the indigenous Hijazi cuisine, as represented by harish; a dish of meat with crushed wheat, served with sugar; 'ajid duh lahme, a pizza-like dish topped with meat, leeks and tahini; jujubiyah, a dessert made with goat's cheese; ma'sah, bananas mashed with sweetened homemade whole-wheat Arab bread; lihle, crepes with meat and yogurt; and multifiq, pastry with minced meat or cheese, bananas or cream.

As a child in the early 1970's, visiting my Aunt Maymunah in Makkah, I remember passing through the dimly lit alleyways of Aydah—a 1500-year-old quarter in the heart of Makkah—in my rush to attend sunset prayers at the Holy Mosque. On my return, the area would be completely unrecognizable. Lanterns hung at the ends of stalls, merchants uncovered their wares and passers-by toasted their eyes on the treasures revealed. Within minutes the alleys were transformed into a bustling market.

People lined up in front of bakers selling huge rounds of sesame-garnished tamis bread, originally from Central Asia. Then they moved on to vendors preparing Egyptian-style ful madammas. This sweetened fava-bean dish is now an integral part of Hijazi meals, both as a breakfast staple and as a dinner entrée. Other shoppers waited patiently for a portion of za'azeb buli, a rice dish synonymous with Hijazi cuisine all over the kingdom—though as its name indicates, it too came from Central Asia.

Yet other people bought sandwich, a light Indo-Iranian fried pastry stuffed with meat or vegetables, an item that would have been familiar to the citizens of Harun al-Raschid's Baghdad. These and many other dishes with foreign pedigrees are now as Hijazi as the Madinan 'asライde, made of mashed dates mixed with whole-wheat flour, or the Makkani lathoh.

Naturally, I was drawn to the vendors selling snacks. I would stop one who was balancing on his head a tray filled with such goodies as firnis—fresh, salted, crunchy lupine beans—and fulhah, fenugreek sprouts. Another hawker sold dinner-plate-sized, multicolored rice crackers known as nanfah, as well as Indonesian shrimp crackers. My favorite was the seller of boiled chickpeas, who cried, “WARMlihli, warml lihli, come and get it,” as he deftly mixed pickles, spices, vinegar and, on request, hot-pepper sauce into the chickpeas. I would often hear a few attention-getting hand-claps from a grilled window in one of the multi-story houses nearby. Glancing up, I would see a feminine hand lowering a basket to a vendor.

The vendor would pluck the money from the basket, replace it with the requested bit of food and the basket would ascend. Many housewives bought snack foods in this modest and expeditious manner.

Today when I visit Makkah and Jiddah, I turn at the slightest sound, hoping to see a vendor. Instead, I see restaurants—including fast-food restaurants—on most corners, and opt instead for a home-cooked meal. So, again, I head for my aunt's house, where I can enjoy a typical smorgasbord of Hijazi cooking, some of its dishes of pre-Islamic provenance, others as modern as American apple pie. At my aunt's home, breakfast often starts with harishah, ma'sah, ful madammas, Nabulsi cheese, Syrian olives and local eggs, along with tamis bread and Arab bread—the kind called "pita" in the United States.

As more and more families with two working parents find they cannot easily get together for lunch, dinner has become the main meal in most homes, except on weekends. That meal typically begins with soup and a green salad. These are usually followed by rice, two vegetable dishes, a meat dish and fruit or various types of dessert. The rice dish may be plain white, or saffron-tinted hiriyah, red-hued raizz Baklavi or brown-tinted sayadiyah. The last is an unusual rice-and-fish dish that Makkans learned from the Jiddawis—the people of Jiddah. Traditionally, Makkans did not eat fish because of their inland location, but as travel between the two cities became easier, fish dishes became more common.

Jiddawis' love affair with seafood has deep historical roots. To honor a special guest, they often lay out course after course of fish specialties, beginning with a fish soup and fish salad, followed by fish patties, fish cooked in coconut milk Indonesian-style and fish baked with tamarind sauce, tahinuh or coriander leaf (cilantro), and ending with sayadiyah or hiriyah with fish or shrimp.

Makkans, meanwhile, have long favored vegetable and meat dishes. Okra (ladyfingers), white beans, cubed potatoes, peas or other available vegetables are prepared with meat and a variety of spices and sauces. One dish in which dill is used—generally rare in Saudi cooking—is diblisten 'arabi: squash, yellow lentils and lamb, heavily flavored with dill and cooked in a tomato-based sauce. Sorrel, spinach or green haricot beans are often combined with meat, or sautéd in oil without meat.

Lentils are sometimes cooked with spinach, purslane, sorrel or other leafy greens that have a high iron content to mitigate some of the metallic taste of the iron.
Little girls learn to roll and fill sambuka, a dough-covered mixture of ground meat and spices that may be either baked or deep-fried. Below is a popular griddle-fried dish—also in the category of dough-covered spicy-meat-dishes—is mutabbah, a “fast food” whose popularity has spread from the Hijaz to the entire kingdom. Its name comes from the word tabbâgh, which means “to fold.”

Another favorite dish is the well-known Egyptian mukhârijjâ, mallow cooked with ground meat. It is often served in a soap-bottle mixture garnished with garlic fried in oil and served with either bread or rice. Stuffed vegetables, both Mediterranean and Turkish in origin, are also popular. Known asnutce, these may be tomatoes, grape leaves, cabbage leaves, green peppers, potatoes, carrots or zucchini—or a combination of these—stuffed with rice and meat. They are cooked in a spiced tomato-based sauce.

Makkah has long been acclaimed for its meat dishes. Lamb shanks, chicken cooked in gravy, or kufta (ground-meat patties) are served with lemon wedges and Arabic bread, or often with rice. A typical Makkkan dish for special occasions—prepared by professional cooks who come to the home with their grills, skews and ingredients—is nahlâr, a lean, finely ground lamb that is pressed hand onto skewers and grilled. It is served on a bed of rice along with a thick yogurt salad prepared only with this dish, in which the yogurt is enriched with a mixture of clarified lamb fat and butter, known as simn halab.

Special occasions such as religious holidays, Weddings, funerals and the night-time meals eaten during the month of Ramadan are eaten as traditional as possible. Many are served to guests. Razza bi humus is often served to family members and mourners at funerals. This specialty dish of chicken, meat and rice is cooked in the meat broth and served with a tahina-and-cucumber salad spiced with a dash of cumin, salt and pepper. Salat is popular at weddings, a rice-and-lamb (or nowadays also rice-and-chicken) dish original from Taif, also prepared in a professional way. They build fire pits and fill pots big enough to accommodate a whole lamb. They then prepare a rich and thick gravy, then cook it rich and thick, thenonly a Hijazi but also gaining fame in other parts of the kingdom— is made of fresh coriander, hot chili peppers, garlic, tomato and lemon juice. A Hijazi meal is round out with fresh fruits and desserts. The Hijazi is rich in regional dishes such as kabzieh, a sweet made with milk; jububijn, a delicacy made from halal goat cheese; and nafnil, a milky pudding whose name means “parental approval,” perhaps because it is so sweet and nourishing. Due to the once-powerful Ottoman presence in the area, Turkish dishes also abound, as well as some of the dishes from the Near East and Eastern European origins. UrmAli and yâche al-saraye, both made with bread, are special guest of the dish. The desserts are the crowning touch of a meal, often followed by mint or green tea or Turkish coffee.

The Najd, or “highland,” is located in the central region of the kingdom along with the Hijaz and the flat coastal plain of the Arabian Gulf. Isolated by its red-sand desert and arid climate, it remains a backward area until the coming of Islam, when many Najdis traveled as far as China in the task of converting. The resulting fame, reputation, and adaptability served them well in the societies they found in a world beyond their own.

Najdis, as in the rest of Arabia, hospitality is a very important cultural trait, and the hallmark of the people. Many hosts eat only after their guests have finished eating, devoting themselves to serving the guests throughout the meal: They stand in wait- ing, checking whether the guests need more water, juice, salad or any other item while the meal is in progress. From the poorest corner of the kingdom to a guest or visitor is expected, and practiced.

Though Najdis have adopted various dishes and desserts, many still prefer their traditional meal. These include ghiyâsh, made of whole dates cooked with butter, flour and yoghurt and served warm—and often served in winter for breakfast. Date balls, bars and puddings are dishes that illustrate the importance of this ingredient.

Arab cardamom-flavored coffee served with dates is an integral part of meals in the Najd. It is served throughout Arabia. This coffee both greets a guest and later ends his meal. A few more dips accompany the farewells, along with the passing of a frankincense censer or a sprinkle of cologne on the guests’ hands and clothing.

In the dynamic Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia, people enjoy spicy foods, both in the area of the land’s longstanding trade routes as well as by neighbors favored by their cuisine such as India, Pakistan and Afghanistan. Along this flat littoral, people there like fava beans, cultivated in the fertile land where that was possible, or roasted the desert; those with initiative often voy- aged to the desert.

For centuries, the inhabitants of the area, especially the fishermen and pearl divers, relied heavily on the bounty of the sea.
Other parts of the population lived in and on the coasts of the region, and the nomadic elements were also dependent on oasis villages and towns for necessities: dates, staples, as well as manufactured goods. (See Arabian World, March/April 1995.) As in other parts of the kingdom, enterprising individuals in the Eastern Province formed commercial and social ties with their neighbors in their own country, in the Gulf countries and across the oceans.

With the discovery of oil in eastern Saudi Arabia in the late 1930’s, a social, economic, and demographic transformation on an unprecedented scale began. The old towns and villages of the al-Hassa Oasis, Tarut Island and Qatif grew in importance. The small fishing villages of al-Khobar, Jubail and Dammam mushroomed into modern cities. Other centers of population or industry, such as Dhahran, Ras Tanura and Abqaiq, further changed the landscape. With the internal migration of many Saudis and the influx of large numbers of expatriates, the composition of the Eastern Province’s population changed—and so did its cuisine.

Even though Saudis generally use a wide range of spices, Eastern Province cooks reign supreme in that field. Muhammad Tahlawi, an ebullient local connoisseur whose father owned a spice business, recalls that in the early 1960’s his family imported spices through the seaport city of Jeddah. “Mounds of whole spices were washed and dried in shady areas of the courtyard of our home,” he says. “Some were sold whole, and large burlap bags and bales of cinnamon, cloves, cardamom, turmeric and others were also taken to a mill in al-Khobar to be ground. We made up the mixtures by hand in large vats and bagged them to be sold by weight.”

Today, special blends of spices for meat, fish and vegetable dishes are often mixed at home after being cleaned, sifted and toasted. But many busy housewives purchase them ready-mixed from spice merchants. Saffron, cumin, cloves, coriander, saffort (lichen) and a variety of artemisias (A. arborescens) are among the spices used. So are whole or ground dried limes, black pepper and pungent, originally brought from Oman.

In addition to his abundant use of spices, the Eastern Province is known as the home of some of the best fresh seafood to be had in the kingdom. Grouper, mackerel, red snapper and other species of fish—including parrotfish and other reef-dwellers—are often caught, bought and cooked the same day, which makes for exceptional fare. Tahlawi mentioned two traditional fish dishes. “Harful, fried mackerel roe, served with rice or salad, is one,” he says. “Another is mubahka, an elaborate rice and fish dish preferably prepared with fried kan’d, mackerel, or another meaty fish. Onions are browned and home-mixed spics are added to make the khashab from which the dish derives its name. The fried fish is laid atop the khashab in a pot. White rice, prepared separately, is heaped on the fish and gently pressed down, and the pot is turned out onto a serving dish so that the fish and khashab form the top and the rice the bottom of the molded shape.”

Visitors find the open-air fish markets to be the area’s most fetching feature. Markets teem with seafood all year round. Shrimp, crab, squid, crayfish and even shark are available in both the traditional markets and in the modern, air-conditioned retail stores that have replaced the fish stalls of earlier days. Jabir Saleh Jam‘ah, a gentle expert on local cultural and literary history and descendant of one of the first families to settle al-Khobar, recalls the fish stalls of old. “When I was a young child,” he says. “King Sa‘ud Street, the only street in town, was the site for fish merchants. They displayed their wares on mats or in baskets, and would make a handle by looping a palm-leaf rib through a fish’s gills so the customer could carry it home.”

“Two types of rice accompanied grilled or fried fish,” Jam‘ah continues. “One was silih, white rice sauteed in oil with cloves, cardamom pods and whole black pepper, and the other, served with grilled fish, was mubahar, rice cooked in date molasses. We had mubahar once a week, but the strange thing is that the younger generation always preferred the plain rice. They did acquire a taste for the sweet dish as they grew older, though, it happened in my case, and I now consider mubahar one of my favorites.”

Nowadays Saudis and expatriates flock to fish markets at villages such as Salih and Safwa, and the one at Qatif is visited by buyers not only from other parts of Saudi Arabia but from other Gulf countries as well, making it one of the largest and busiest in the Gulf region. Late each afternoon, boats deposit tons of seafood for vendors to auction off by the meter, a unit of weight equal to nearly 16 kilos (about 35 lb). Buyers are particularly eager in shrimp season, which usually starts in August, for shrimp is much in demand by restaurant owners, wholesalers and individual buyers.

Rice dishes, widely considered the supreme test of culinary skill, are another specialty of the Eastern Province, and the richest array of rice specialties is found here. Flavored with rose water or saffron, garnished with nuts, onions, dried limes and various mixed spices, rice can be the product...
of a master cook, fit for celebrations of all kinds. It can also be an everyday dish, cooked plain and served with other dishes. Here, as all over the kingdom, the long-grained, delicately fragrant basmati rice, mostly imported from India, is preferred.

Mishkhal is a popular Arabian Gulf rice dish made with mutton, chicken, fish or shrimp. Fi'ar'ah, which means “at the bottom of the pot,” is a layered dish made with spiced shrimp, chicken or meat cooked with green peppers and potatoes— a prime example of the area’s cuisine. Dried limes, cloves, cinnamon sticks and each household’s proprietary spice mixture give this dish its zest, and it is crowned with saffron, or rose water-flavored rice. New rice recipes have appeared as Eastern Province housewives change the spicing and the ingredients of Indian biryani—and these dishes continue to evolve. Rass Balhari is one of various originally foreign rice dishes known in the province. Restaurants advertise mandi, a western-region rice dish cooked in a clay oven with lamb or chicken, and rice dishes from the south such as mahjli, which has a zesty smoked flavor. In this manner many Eastern Province families have acquired new tastes and preferences.

Jum’ah recalls the Eastern Province diet of 40 or 50 years ago. “At breakfast we youngsters enjoyed halawat tabnia [sesame halvah]—known in the Eastern Province as raha, jams and butter and imported hard yellow Kraft Danish cheese, along with such things as eggs and olives. Bread and tea with milk accompanied these staples. A favorite was a boiled, cumin-spiced broad-bean dish known as baqil. We bought it from the baker, who sold it just as is done now with full maddoomus. The older generation had dates and preferred to eat a lighter breakfast.

“But the major difference between the way we ate in the 50’s and 60’s and the way we eat now is that it was a real must to have a lunch after mawlid or noon prayers, and dinner after magrib or sunset prayers. Housewives had to prepare two main meals. Both were often centered on fish dishes; my favorite was mahshala. Fish dishes, as now, were typically accompanied by radishes, rocket (arugula), rounds of raw onion and green salad, Jum’ah says.

Beef, chicken, pasta, casseroles and many other foods have become integral parts of the cuisine of the Eastern Province and compete with fish and rice, though the latter are still popular. And, Jum’ah says, the ubiquitous “Arab bread” (pita) was introduced to the area by incoming Hijazis.

“The Hijazis living in al-Khebar were used to eating their food with bread, which they called ‘pita’—a word that means ‘rice’ in eastern Arabian dialects. We would often see Hijazi boys carrying homemade bread dough to the bakery and returning with the puffed rounds of baked bread balanced on their heads. Each boy got a harm, a specially prepared piece of bread smaller than the regular loaf, as a reward for carrying out this task.”

Till the end of the 1960’s and throughout the early 70’s people ended their meals with dates or watermelons grown in Qatif and neighboring towns. Sugar was added to the watermelons if they were not sweet enough, a practice that has disappeared with the prevalence of sweeter melon varieties. But fruit was not actually considered a dessert. Jum’ah notes that “the only time of the year when our family had desserts was during Ramadan. We were then treated to mulad-lahiyqah, a rice pudding; crème caramel; lapmamit, like hushpuppies dipped in sugar syrup or date molasses; sago pudding, a tapioca-like dish flavored with saffron; or tafti, a custard served either plain or topped with shredded coconut.”

The art of Saudi cooking is still passed on from mother to daughter as it has always been. But an interesting phenomenon is appearing in Saudi foodways. With the recent spread of cookbooks about Saudi foods, in Arabic and even in English, many more Saudi women have begun to prepare dishes from other regions of the kingdom than their own. Dishes from northern towns as far off as ‘Ar’ ar and Tabuk, or far southern ones like Ahba and Najran, are gaining recognition and fame all over the kingdom. Traditional dishes are thus preserved, but are also giving rise to new variations and new possibilities. Changes strengthen the local component of Saudi cuisine, as distinct from the influences from the Arabian Gulf, Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, India, Italy, the United States and elsewhere that arrive with trade, pilgrims, international cookbooks, fast-food chains and even television cooking shows.

Certainly, Saudi cuisine will continue to enrich and renew itself in future. But one most important thing will remain “as constant as the North Star” and as warm as a desert campfire: the legendary, proverbial, all-embracing hospitality of the Saudi people.
In a Makkah photo studio, a pilgrim poses for his portrait against a painted backdrop showing the Ka’ba, which stands at the center of the Sacred Mosque. (Photo by Abbas/Magnum) Below: A pilgrim inside Makkah’s Sacred Mosque drinks from a cooler filled at Zamzam, the well about which part of the mosque is built. Opposite: Pilgrims from Africa pray at the Prophet’s Mosque in Madinah. (Peter Sanders) [2] Previous spreads: Dawn in the heartland of Saudi Arabia, the Najd. (Wayne Espey) Among the al-Hajj camel-herders in the Eastern Province, a campfire lights the faces of young and old. (Abdullah Y. Al-Dobais) Saudi Arabia at 100

Terraces, stairs, mirrors and glass swirl in Jiddah’s Al-Hanna shopping mall. (Sanders)
Each of these laborers may call a different country home, but in Madinah they are united by craft and religion, and by Arabic, the language of the Qur'an. (Sendem) Below: Saudi Aramco deep-desert driver Salah Al-Suha's pauses for discussion with a co-worker along the 800-kilometer (500-mi) route between Dhahran and Shaybah, one of Saudi Aramco's most remote oil fields, which lies in the Rub' al-Khali, the Empty Quarter. (Al-Dhiba'i)

Producers and technicians oversee the broadcast of "Good Morning Saudi Arabia," a talk show hosted by Wafaa Younis, from one of the control rooms of Riyadh Television. (Al-Dhiba'i) Below: In Dhahran, Dr. Hanan Ali Al-Subai, who earned her degree at King Faisal University in the neighboring city of Dammam, examines a young patient. (Jodi Cobb/National Geographic Society)
Business is personal in Jiddah's older shopping areas, where merchants sit outside their doors or stand by their wares, ready to display them to customers and discuss their merits. (Susan Baaghil) Below: As the nation built modern highways, such as this one that links Riyadh and Dharan, engineers designed overpasses not only for motorized traffic, but also for the livestock that many Saudis still keep, either as a traditional way of life or out of nostalgia. (Wendy Cocker)

International styles—from Mogul India, Mamluk Egypt to 20th-century Europe—have long added flair to the culturally hybrid architecture of Jiddah, the port through which millions of pilgrims from around the world have passed for 1400 years. (Abbas/Magnum) Below: Most of the flowers grown in the greenhouses of Astra Farms in Tabuk, in the northwest, are exported to Europe for sale. (Ali Dobais)
Boys banter outside Riyadh Schools, a leading educational institution in the capital. (Al-Dobaisi) Below: Children who might otherwise wear western or modern Saudi clothing don traditional finery for a lesson in folklore. (Saughill)

Social workers and medical staff of the Jiddah Home Health Care Center, one of hundreds of private charitable organizations throughout the kingdom, use home visits to assess a family’s needs. (Noba Al-Qulibi) Below: Tea and talk nurish the bonds of friendship. (Kristie Burns)
Folk musicians prepare to perform in Abha, capital of Asir, Saudi Arabia’s top tourism region. Below: A visitor from town discusses the price of sheep with a herder in the highlands near Abha. (Al-Dubai [2])

Braving a Najd sandstorm, Ayesha and Huda Gouyih of the al-Shammah fight their way upwind to care for their sheep. (Eastep) Following pages: Camels graze near Madain Salih, an ancient Nabatean trading center in the northwest. (Ali Kazayoshi Nomachi) A 35,000-barrel ethane storage tank at Yanbu’ on the Red Sea is part of Saudi Aramco’s Master Gas System, which has added natural gas to the hydrocarbon exports that provide an important part of Saudi Arabia’s income. (A.K. Amin/Saudi Aramco) Departing worshippers trace liquid paths during a time exposure made at the Prophet’s Mosque in Madinah. (Nomachi) Inside back cover: Afternoon shadows play across the same mosque’s vast plaza. (Sanders)