

**PERSIAN
EMPIRE
MAP**

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC

Ancient **Iran**

**INSIDE A NATION'S
PERSIAN SOUL**

African Monkey Island 68
Japan's Premier Park 92
Moscow Never Sleeps 106
Target Earth 134

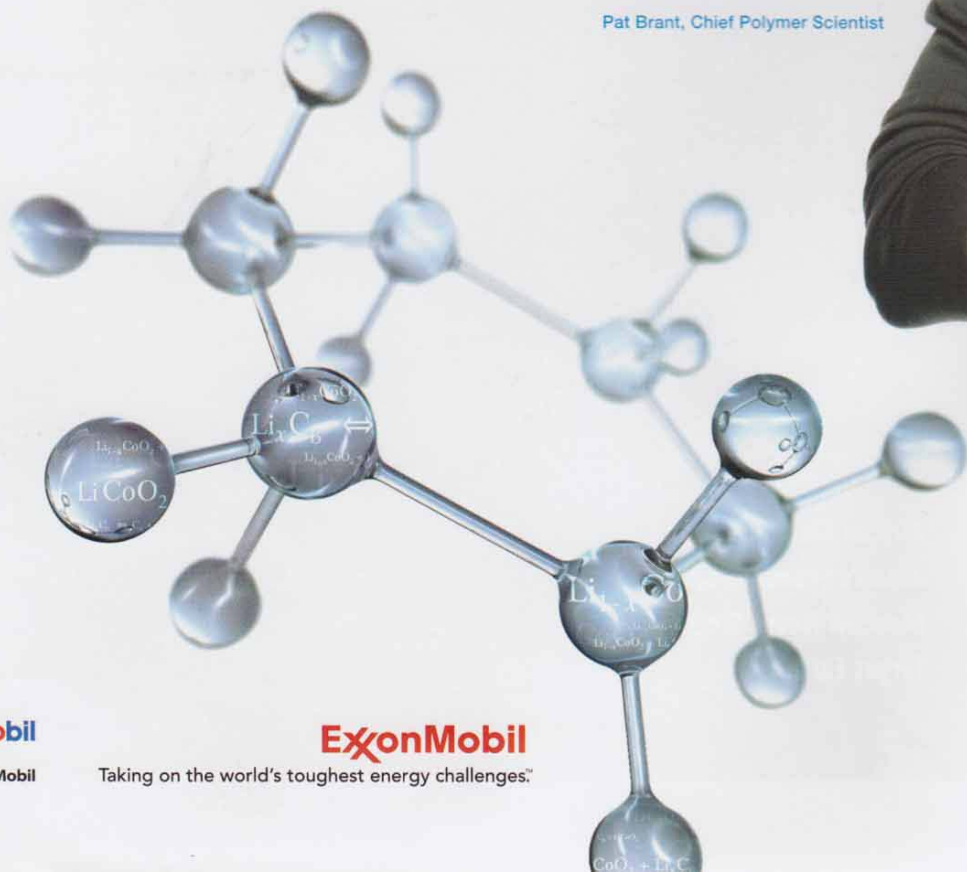
if you like hybrids, you'll love our new separator film.

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"Lithium-ion batteries transformed cell phones because they were smaller, lighter and more efficient. Now they have the chance to transform hybrid and electric vehicles, too."

Pat Brant, Chief Polymer Scientist

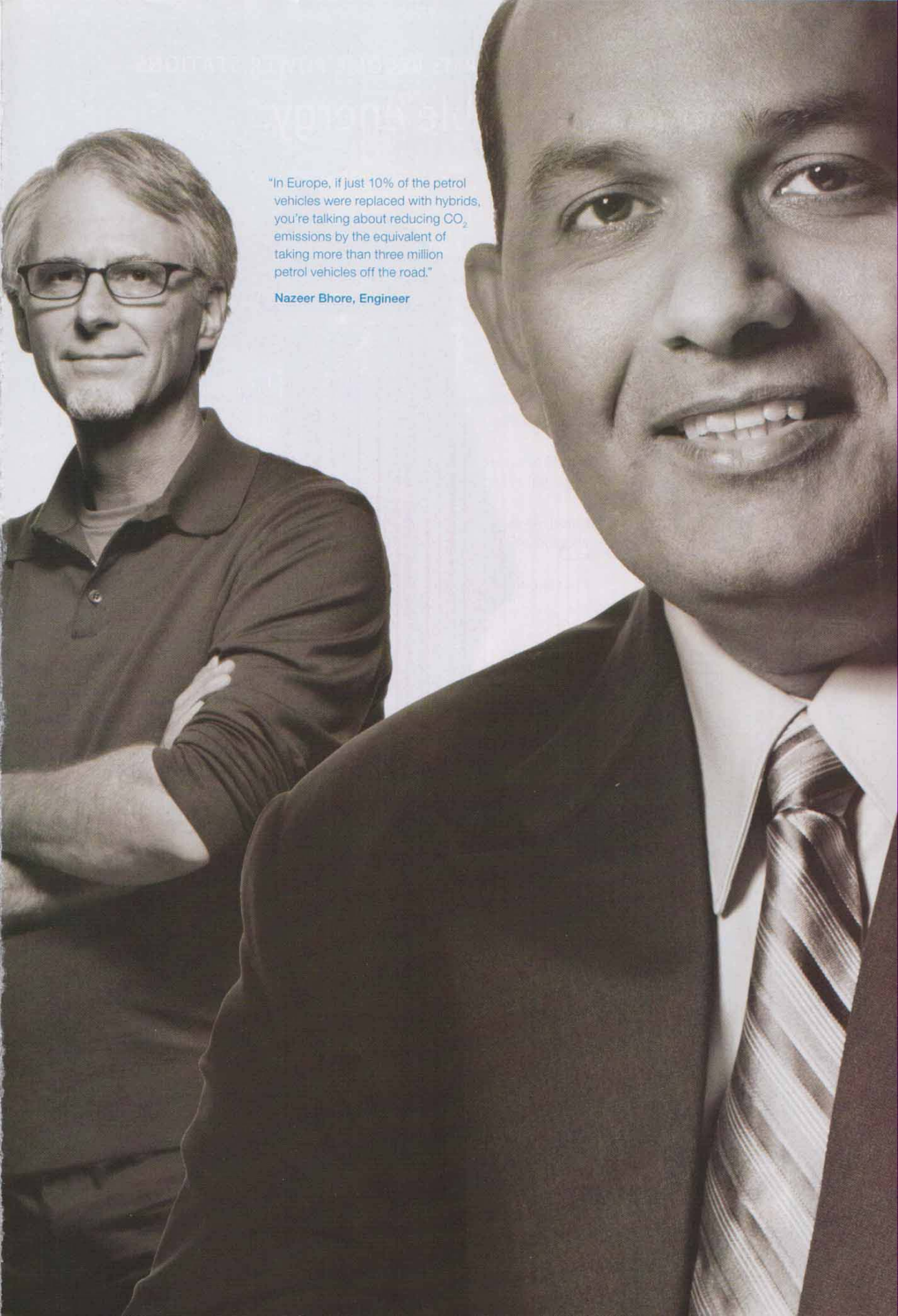


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Nazeer Bhore, Engineer

ENERGY DEMANDS INCREASE | FARMS BECOME POWER STATIONS

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NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC

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- Ancient Soul of Iran** 34 The glories of Persia inspire the modern nation.
By Marguerite Del Giudice Photos by Newsha Tavakolian
Photographic portfolio by Simon Norfolk
- Monkey Paradise** 68 The bush-meat trade stalks an African island ark.
By Virginia Morell Photographs by Tim Laman, Ian Nichols,
Joel Sartore, and Christian Ziegler
- Between Volcanoes** 92 Fire and water collide in Japan's largest national park.
By Gretel Ehrlich Photographs by Michael Yamashita
- Moscow Never Sleeps** 106 When the sun sets, the Russian capital heats up.
By Martin Cruz Smith Photographs by Gerd Ludwig
- Target Earth** 134 A killer asteroid may be headed our way.
By Richard Stone Photographs by Stephen Alvarez

Special Supplement: Iran/Persian Empire



Visitors to Moscow pay top ruble for a hotel room with this Red Square view. Suites go for as much as \$9,000 a night. Story on page 106.

GERD LUDWIG

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC

AUGUST 2008

Editor's Note

Letters

Your Shot

Photo Journal

Visions of Earth



HISTORY

Birth of a Sign

The peace symbol is 50 years old.



FOOD

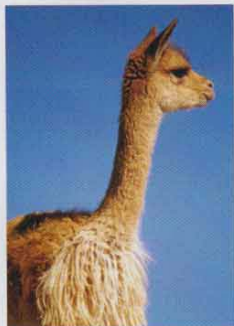
Pedigreed Pizza

The EU wants you to know your pie.

CONSERVATION

The Vicuña's Golden Fleece

This story is all fluff.



LANDSCAPES

Dead-End Road

In Bolivia, consider an alternate route.

WILDLIFE

Why Bees Can Fly

They shouldn't be able to. Yet they do.



ENVIRONMENT

Sea Glass

The ocean turns trash to treasure.

Follow Up

Inside Geographic

Flashback

On the Cover

Persia in profile: A stone relief of a royal guard stares across the ages in Persepolis, Iran.

Photo by Simon Norfolk

ngm.com



Off and Shooting

The 2008 International Photo Contest starts accepting entries August 1. Last year's winners are on display, and a selection of new entries will be posted in daily galleries.

LARRY LOUIE

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EDITOR'S NOTE

The hand singed by the blowtorch looks human. Close inspection reveals that it belongs to a drill, a baboon-like primate, for sale in the bush-meat market in Malabo, the Bioko Island capital of Equatorial Guinea. Scorching flesh brings a higher price for monkey meat, a delicacy in this part of the world. Photographer Joel Sartore captured this alarming scene, hoping to provoke change. He was part of an International League of Conservation Photographers project called a RAVE (Rapid Assessment Visual Expedition)



Bioko's bush-meat trade threatens animals like this young drill.

to document wildlife on Bioko. There, primates are hunted and sold through a growing trade fueled by money earned in nearby oil fields. The commitment to make a difference motivated three other *National Geographic* photographers—Tim Laman, Ian Nichols, and Christian Ziegler—to accompany Joel. *National Geographic* and Conservation International sponsored the expedition. Along with writer Virginia Morell, Joel, Tim, Ian, and Christian have produced a startling story for this issue. We hope their work will raise awareness of the need for conservation on the island, to help ensure Bioko remains what one biologist calls a “monkey paradise.”

PEOPLE BEHIND THE STORIES

■ **Richard Stone** While reporting “Target Earth,” science journalist Stone saw plenty of heavenly sights—and missed a few too. Trying to glimpse the 900-foot-wide asteroid Apophis that could one day hit Earth,



he and astronomer David Tholen ran afoul of Hawaii's rainy season. “Dave stuck it out in the control room, hoping for a break in the weather,” says Stone of one soggy November night, “and I stayed up, on call at the hotel. The skies didn't clear, and Dave had to call it a night at 3 a.m. I was crushed: I had lost not just a great opportunity to observe an infamous asteroid, but also to observe a master of the art of asteroid detection.”

■ **Martin Cruz Smith**

A Russia observer and the author of many novels, Smith says the former Soviet Union is changing all the time—



though not to everyone's benefit. “Those who are the most traditionally Russian,” he says, “the most soulful, have fared the worst” in the new economy. Yet during his latest visit—made while writing this issue's “Moscow Never Sleeps”—Smith saw that the more things change, the more they stay the same. From Potemkin villages to Putin's rule, “it's a system of muscle and sham. It always has been.” What's next for Russia? Smith won't speculate. “It's a bit like Hollywood,” he says. “No one knows anything.”



NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC

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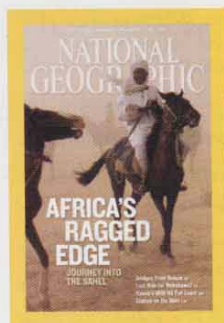
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April 2008

Lost in the Sahel

It took courage for author Paul Salopek to return to a place that caused him pain. Though this article describes horrific scenes and great injustices, I was comforted by the compassion shown by Fatim, who fed a struggling stranger even though she had so little herself.

EMILY McMAHON
Bellingham, Washington

Your story profoundly moved me. This is a story of the human condition: day-to-day survival in a land without guarantees, health care plans, minimum wages, unemployment insurance—without any insurance, actually. A land with a high mortality rate, rampant poverty for most, and a high birthrate.

PETER VANWERDEN
Westlock, Alberta

I was puzzled by the author's puzzlement over Mr. Abakar's Arab ways. In other African countries with Arab influences, like Mauritania, where I've lived, it can be mandatory to practice Arab customs and speak Arabic. You did as your rulers did or faced severe consequences.

LISA ENGLERT
Buellton, California

I don't know whether to laugh or cry looking at the photograph in which the U.S. Special Forces sergeant is teaching Nigeriens the art of maintaining their machine guns. Because of the circumstances in areas like the Sahel, changes of government are unpredictable. Sooner or later, those well-oiled and well-prepped machine guns will have the power.

MIGUEL ÁNGEL MÉNDEZ
Panajachel, Guatemala

My only sense of the borders of the Sahara has come from childhood readings of *The Little Prince* and *Tintin*. Your journalism shows reality yet appeals to a sense of wonder, as those fictions do.

COLIN SHELTON
Winnipeg, Manitoba

Almost Human

I learned a great deal about chimps—but just as much about the sociology of primatologists. Kudos to Jill Pruetz for her graceful handling of the fact that colleagues dismissed or downplayed her observations about a chimp “sharpening a branch with her teeth and wielding it like a spear” to stab prey. Pruetz is what science needs—a researcher enamored of her subject and not academic recognition, especially from chest-thumping males who believe publishing papers is what makes the world of science turn.

PHYLLIS D. THOMAS
Ridgeland, Mississippi

It was interesting that Pruetz wasn't always credited for her reported observations about the use of tools by chimpanzees. While it is unfortunate that her work was at times

overlooked, when I read these articles with their constant references and credits to nature, it makes me wonder: How does God feel?

GARY KEES
Wyomissing, Pennsylvania

It was edifying to read how intelligent chimpanzees and other primates are. Conversely, it's mortifying to know that chimps, gorillas, bonobos, and other apes are being massacred to the verge of extinction in many of their homelands. Maybe we should spend more time and money rescuing them rather than studying them.

BRIEN COMERFORD
Glenview, Illinois

Your article on chimps sharpening and using sticks to stab bush babies for a meal is interesting, but to say we are “watching time-lapse footage of human evolution” is absurd. How is this any different from an otter opening a clam for a meal by hitting it with a rock or a beaver cutting sticks to make a dam?

GEOFFREY LINDSAY
Ridgecrest, California

Author Mary Roach makes the comment: “Humans share... maybe 40 percent [of their gene sequence] with lettuce.” I don't know about you, but that explains so much to me.

BRUCE HOFFMAN
Albuquerque, New Mexico

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Peninsular Bighorn Sheep
(*Ovis canadensis cremnobates*)

Size: Head and body length, 1.5 - 1.9 m; shoulder height, 81.3 - 91.4 cm

Weight: 48 - 115 kg

Habitat: Eastern slopes of peninsular mountain ranges in Southern California in the US and Baja California in Mexico

Surviving number: Estimated at fewer than 3,200

Photographed by Patricio Robles Gil

WILDLIFE AS CANON SEES IT

Head for the hills! That's exactly what the peninsular bighorn sheep does when a predator threatens, fleeing to higher ground where its uncanny ability to navigate rocky terrain gives it an advantage. It even gives birth to single offspring from the relative safety of steep slopes, as vantage points let the sheep spy out danger before it gets too near. The new generation is entering an increasingly uncertain world, however, facing not

only age-old nemeses such as mountain lions, bobcats and coyotes, but also threats brought on by human encroachment. From automobile strikes to entanglement in fences, perils are mounting.

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This is a mission we at Canon feel called to share. One prominent vehicle of our commitment has been our “Wildlife As Canon Sees It” advertising series, which has raised the profile of endangered species for more than 27 years. We have brought over 300 species to the attention of *National Geographic* readers to date — and there are still many more awaiting their turn.

In a world where there is always more to show and more to do, it's comforting to know the National Geographic Society is here. We salute you on the occasion of your 120th anniversary.

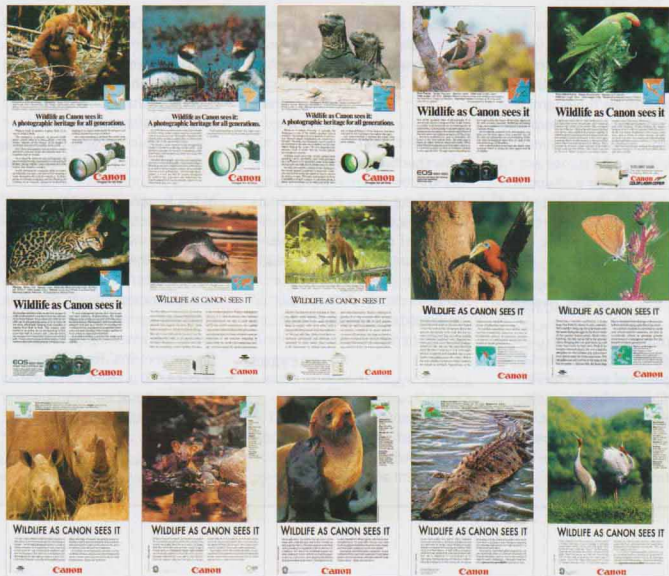


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WILDLIFE AS CANON SEES IT



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Since April 1981, Canon Inc. has supported National Geographic magazine with advertising highlighting different endangered species. Researched and created in conjunction with a National Geographic photographer, the information is verified by leading wildlife experts. Unique in the history of advertising, we feel this campaign has contributed to the public's understanding of threats to wildlife.

On the occasion of National Geographic Society's 120th anniversary, we wish to thank Canon for their support and look forward to prolonging our partnership.

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Gilbert Grosvenor
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 NATIONAL
GEOGRAPHIC
MAGAZINE

LETTERS

Biomimetics: Design by Nature

I was amused by the author's designation of evolution's experiments as "inelegant" from an engineering viewpoint, albeit wonderful and fabulous. What is inelegant about a gecko that can do just about whatever it wants on just about any surface, or a blowfly that can execute a 90-degree turn quite literally in a flash?

LINDA GINGRICH
Issaquah, Washington

I began the article with fascination, until I reached the photograph of the severed whale flipper. My horror was not lessened by the caption and its attempt at a disclaimer. It does not matter where it came from. Your decision

to show the bloody flipper, suspended by ropes from a hook, was inappropriate.

MICHAEL SUTCLIFFE
Glendale, Arizona

Nā Pali Coast

I am shocked you would discuss the harm that humans have done to the Kalalau Trail and Valley but not present visuals of the trash that has accumulated in such a beautiful place. If you showed the horrible decay, perhaps we could expect some sort of action to fix the problem.

ERIC FRIESE
San Francisco, California

Last summer I visited Kaua'i and hiked on the Kalalau Trail to Hanakāpī'ai Beach. As I rounded a sharp bend, the

whole Nā Pali Coast stretched out before me, and I definitely got "chicken skin"—the Hawaiian phrase for goose bumps. It was nothing short of a religious experience.

KELLY CHAMBERS
Glendale, Arkansas

In the People Behind the Stories section you write about "a former marine who'd been... repairing the trail and helping injured hikers." This ex-marine and veteran of Desert Storm, a stonemason by trade, has been fixing the most dangerous parts for ten months. Treacherous sections that used to be called Terminal Traverse and Chivalry Pass (ladies go first) are now among the safest on the trail.

ARIUS HOPMAN
Hanapēpē, Kaua'i

When you have the time to travel

will you have the money?



Last Days of the Rickshaw

As a person who grew up in Kolkata, I read with interest Calvin Trillin's excellent article on the rickshaw pullers. The rickshaw is a legacy of India's shameful colonial past. Introduced in Japan in the 1860s, rickshaws were brought to India in 1880. In the beginning they were used mainly by Chinese traders in Kolkata to transport goods but were soon used to transport people. It is an inhuman and degrading form of transport that rightly and justifiably should be banned. The only remaining option in navigating the narrow lanes of Kolkata may be the most economical and eco-friendly: walking.

SOUMITRA SARKAR
Arcadia, California

Twenty-four years ago I found myself on a cycle rickshaw in Malang, Indonesia. The driver was much older than I and didn't seem up to the task. After a couple of minutes, I told him to stop. I couldn't stomach watching another human being toil so hard to move me and some carry-on supplies. I paid him handsomely and walked away on my own legs, carrying my supplies on my shoulder. No human should undergo such a humiliating toil. I hope the great nation of India will muster the strength to break this cycle of human exploitation.

HABTE ASFAHA
Oakland, California

Why should it be the last ride for rickshaws? The government of Kolkata should

look into subsidizing lightweight, high-gearing pedal rickshaws. That way, the rickshaw *wallahs* get to keep and improve their livelihood, and the already congested streets of Kolkata will not be burdened with yet more pollution.

NICK JENKINS
Fribourg, Switzerland

Corrections, Clarifications

April 2008:

Last Days of the Rickshaw

The word *mishti*, on page 94, is Bengali for any sweet, not just "sweetened yogurt." *Mishti doi* is the term for sweetened yogurt.

Biomimetics

The photo on page 75 is of a burdock fruit, not a cocklebur. Aristotle lived in the fourth century B.C., not the fifth century.



Here today.
Where tomorrow?

FORTIS



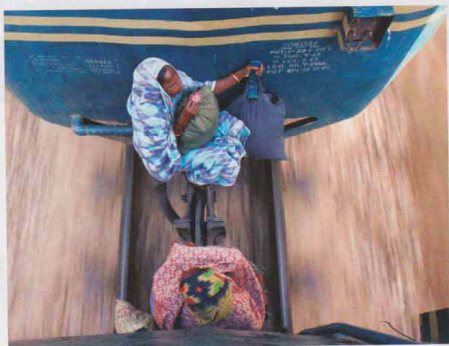
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Just a Minute Are you ready for your close-up? Every week the Your Shot editors compile a new selection of reader-submitted images in a themed video with musical accompaniment called the My Shot Minute. Look under the Video tab on ngm.com to see if your photograph made the final cut. Get guidelines, a submission form, and more information at ngm.com/yourshot.



Thaddeus Bowling Key Largo, Florida

Just east of Guymon, Oklahoma, last year, storm chaser Thad Bowling caught this huge cloud after a four-hour pursuit. "This cell did not spawn a tornado," he says. "What you see in the center is a dense rain shaft." The photo was voted an ngm.com audience favorite.



Wahid Adnan Chittagong, Bangladesh

"Poor people from nearby villages get on buffers in between compartments, or on the roof, or on the walkway of the locomotive," explains Wahid Adnan, 28, a lawyer turned photographer who saw these women traveling the hard way on the route to Nazir Hat. "These kinds of riders are common, though railway police try to keep them out."



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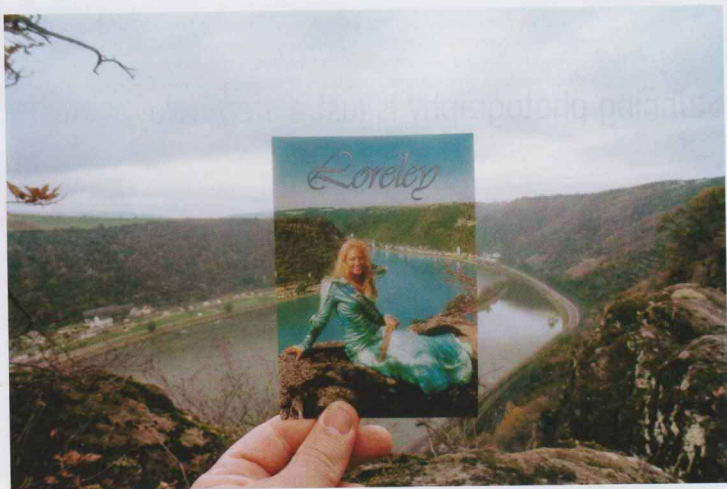
Great features, professional ergonomics and lightweight - all good reasons to jump for joy over the new D60. Thanks to its VR NIKKOR lens with built-in Vibration Reduction, you'll still be able to shoot steady and get pin-sharp images even in the murkiest conditions. Combine all this with the integrated dust reduction system and in-camera editing, and you've got the camera that is the best choice in its class.

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EXPEED

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A postcard beauty sits in for Loreley, a mythical Rhine maiden who lured boatmen to their deaths with her songs.

London-born photographer Michael Hughes has lived in Germany since 1982.

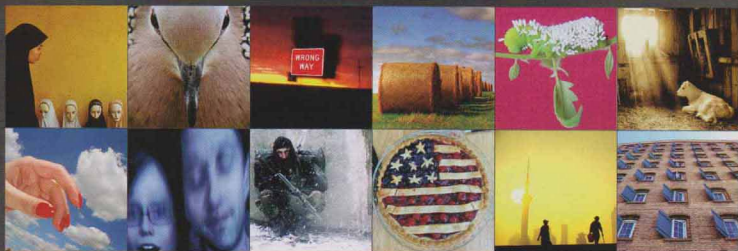
Fitting Memento Picture a cold November day at the Loreley cliff on the Rhine near Koblenz, Germany. I was on assignment for a Finnish newspaper, but the light was terrible—flat and gray. A postcard I'd bought for my daughter looked much better than the drab scenery before me. I pulled it out of my pocket and realized I was standing in exactly the spot where its image had been made (above). I held the postcard in my left hand, and my camera in my right. A millimeter up or down, left or right, in or out, made a difference in how perfectly reality and memento aligned. I filled an entire roll of film getting this one scene just right. The Germans say *wie das Melken einer Maus*—like milking a mouse.

Of course souvenirs can be staggeringly awful. Tacky. Mundane. And they lose much of their charm once they're collecting dust on a shelf. But everyone collects souvenirs, whether they call them that or not. They're evidence that we've taken part in the great dance of life—been places, seen things. They're connections between us and something grander and more eternal than we are. And they belong to us. Tourists shooting blurry mobile-phone-camera snapshots of the "Mona Lisa" or Niagara Falls want to prove they were there, not to have art to hang on their walls. The camera itself becomes a kind of souvenir machine.

My photography has come to have a sort of sporting aspect. Can I find just the right souvenir? Can I find the precise location to frame it? I hope to get to Egypt soon. That should be fabulous.

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 NATIONAL
GEOGRAPHIC
MAGAZINE

VISIONS OF EARTH



India Decorated in pink powder, a bull dives through a crowd of men who hope to hang on to the animal long enough to win a prize. The sport, *jallikattu*, is part of harvest celebrations in the Tamil Nadu town of Alanganallur.

PHOTO: PALANI MOHAN, REPORTAGE BY GETTY IMAGES

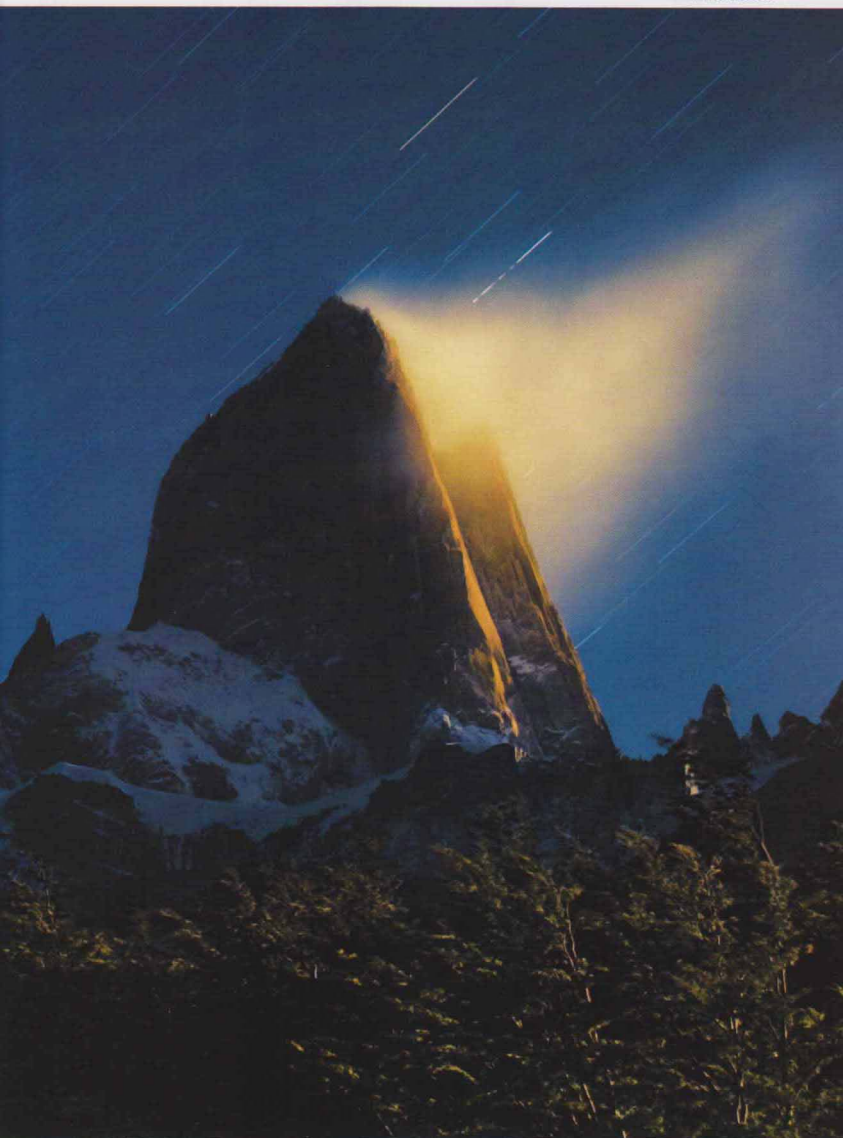


Argentina Moonlight sets mist aglow on the Patagonian peak of Mount Fitz Roy, known to local people as Cerro Chaltén, or "smoking mountain," because its summit is often capped in clouds.



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PHOTO: JORDI BUSQUE



Gaza City Missing her claws, a few teeth, and the tip of her tail, a lion stolen as a cub from the Gaza Zoo is returned—two years later—in an SUV. Hamas police provide armed escort.



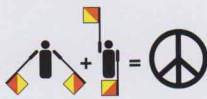
See more Visions of Earth images at visionsofearth.ngm.com.

PHOTO: ABID KATIB, GETTY IMAGES





In 1958 marchers carried their new signs to the United Kingdom's Atomic Weapons Establishment.



N + D = Nuclear Disarmament

A British artist combined two semaphore letters to create an antinuclear symbol.

Sign Language On a rainy Easter weekend 50 years ago, a crowd of protesters set off from London on a four-day march for the fledgling cause of nuclear disarmament. A new movement needs a new symbol, so they waved signs bearing a simple logo that has since gone on to become a universal emblem for peace.

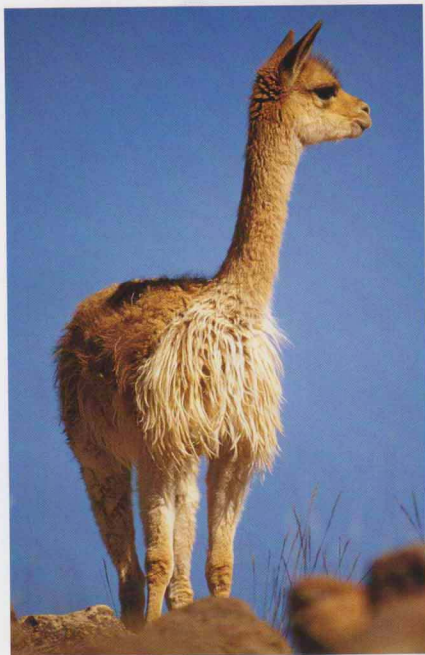
The peace symbol is neither the track of a dove nor a chicken, as hawks have sneered. Artist Gerald Holtom based it on the semaphore initials for nuclear disarmament (left), although he later said that it also represented himself in despair, palms out and down.

Purposely never copyrighted, used in everything from Vietnam War protests to cigarette ads, the symbol is easy to recognize—and to misdraw. Pat Arrowsmith, 78, helped plan the 1958 march and still goes to antinuclear and antiwar events. A common mistake—leaving out the middle leg—turns a peace sign into the Mercedes-Benz logo. She fixes that: "I get out my ballpoint immediately." —Helen Fields



Pedigreed Pizza

There is pizza, and there is Pizza Napoletana. The two, connoisseurs say, have as much in common as a *premier cru* Bordeaux has with the plonk in a screw-top jug. Soon pedigreed Neapolitan pizza will join the pantheon of European Union–certified edibles like Spanish serrano ham and English blue Stilton cheese. Warning: It takes longer to read the EU specs for Neapolitan pizza than to bake one. To bear the imprimatur of Guaranteed Traditional Specialty, pizza must not stray over 35 centimeters in diameter nor the crust exceed two centimeters in thickness; ingredients must include type 00 flour and up to 100 grams of tomatoes (preferably Marzanos) applied in a spiraling motion. The word “pizza” first appeared in an A.D. 997 manuscript from Gaeta, a southern Italian town. A millennium later, in 1997, separatist militants in northern Italy tried to boycott pizza—the icon of their southern nemesis. Neapolitans responded to the effect “Let them eat polenta,” referring to the cornmeal-based mush dear to the wealthier, but allegedly culinarily impoverished, north. If only Naples had patented pizza, food writer Burton Anderson observed, “it would be among Italy’s wealthier cities instead of one of its poorest.” —Cathy Newman



THE MAKINGS OF A SWEATER

Starting at age two, a vicuña is sheared every two years or so, yielding seven to eight ounces of fleece—the finest and softest used commercially.



Merino sheep



Cashmere goat



Vicuña

Fiber diameter (microns*)

18 — 27 15 — 19 6 — 13

Fleece per harvest (ounces)



160-240
EVERY
YEAR



Vicuña pullover
\$4,575



Golden Fleece Fabulously expensive and buttery soft sweaters may help save the vicuña. Millions of the llama kin once capered in the Andes, warmed by fluffy coats ideal for high altitudes. The Inca clipped the wool for royal garments, but after the Spanish conquest vicuñas were killed for their pelts. By the 1960s only a few thousand survived. As countries protected their herds and international laws banned vicuña products, the animal began to rebound.

Vicuña couture is the latest boost. In 1994 Italian luxury clothier Loro Piana started a line using fleece sheared from Peruvian vicuñas. Styles are classic. The fabric, usually undyed to preserve its softness, makes even cashmere seem harsh. Other fashion firms have jumped in. The result is a boon for Peru's vicuñas—they now number about 150,000, up from 62,000 in 1981—and for villagers who sell wool from animals they've guarded and sheared. But some wild vicuñas are being fenced. Feeding and inbreeding are concerns; poaching is on the rise. Putting vicuña on the runway has its costs. —A. R. Williams

*ACTUAL SIZE NOT SHOWN

PHOTOS: MARK JONES, ANIMALS ANIMALS (ABOVE LEFT); MARK THIESSEN, NG PHOTOGRAPHER. NGM MAPS. SOURCE: JERRY LAKER

Dead-End Road It clings to the Andes: a winding dirt path about ten feet wide and 22 miles long, descending 6,500 feet. Cliffs loom, chasms gape. Few guardrails. Lots of landslides. Welcome to what some call “the world’s most dangerous road.”

Built in the 1930s by Paraguayan POWs, Bolivia’s Nor Yungas Road was once the only way from La Paz to Coroico. Drivers poured booze on their tires to appease the goddess Pachamama, chewed coca leaves to stay alert. But prayers went unanswered; crosses dot ledges where hundreds have perished. The worst accident: the 1983 crash of a produce truck carrying scores of people. Most died. “My Lord,” says La Paz native Diego Ballivian. “I regret even taking a peek. I still have nightmares.”

Since 2006 a new road has offered safe passage. The old way now draws mostly bikers and tourists—but is still not safe, with cyclists dying this year. Says biking-company owner Alistair Matthew: “People were more cautious when there were [more] cars.” —*Jeremy Berlin*



A truck negotiates Bolivia’s “Road of Death,” from high plains to cloud forest.



How Bees Wing It Don't tell the bees, but they aren't fit for flight. At least that's what a French mathematician concluded in 1934, so one story goes. *C'est faux*, of course: Bees fly just fine; early researchers simply had no way to gauge the insects' complex wing movements. Caltech biologist Michael Dickinson and colleagues report that while honeybees don't have it easy—their small wing-to-body-size ratio means they must work harder to fly than other insects—their unorthodox flapping method lets them hover, fight wind, evade predators, and get lift even when loaded up with nectar or pollen. —Jennifer S. Holland



BEAT GENERATION

Studies show that many insects move their wings in long, sweeping strokes (145 to 165 degrees) at roughly 200 beats a second. But honeybees flap in short arcs (about 90 degrees), so they have to compensate with speed. How much? Up to 240 beats a second—nearly twice what you'd expect given their size.



WIND BENEATH (AND ABOVE) THEIR WINGS

To beat gravity, you need to generate an upward force. Fast flapping plus wing flipping does the trick for honeybees.

→ Direction of wing flap
 ↻ Air currents



0.0 milliseconds
 Wings flap forward, creating a vortex above the bee and generating lift.



0.8 ms Wings begin to rotate and slow down in preparation for the backward stroke.



1.2 ms Wings finish rotating and start sweeping backward, utilizing the previous stroke's wake.



2.0 ms Wings flap backward, creating a new vortex in the process. The cycle then repeats.

Note: Scientists count two of the above cycles as one wing stroke.

ART: BRUCE MÖRSER, WING ARC DIAGRAM: MARIEL FURLONG, NG STAFF

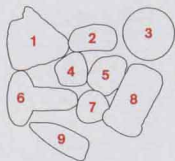


Sea glass is found worldwide. Red and orange are rare; white—which once was clear glass—is most common.

The Shard Way Blame it on plastic. Sea glass—the bright bits of old bottles scoured by sand and salt water—is getting increasingly difficult to find. “We’re at the end of the sea glass window,” notes Mary Beth Beuke, president of the North American Sea Glass Association. “There is less glass packaging now and more recycling.” Much of the glass consigned to the waves decades ago, she says, “is tumbled so tiny it’s almost not worth picking up.”

Of course, it started out as something not worth keeping. Trash tossed off ships or washed from dumps must spend years in the water to become good sea glass. Wave churn, shore terrain, water acidity, and composition of the glass itself all play a part in creating the smoothed shards’ characteristic matte texture.

Beuke, who finds sea glass all over the world, offers these tips for fellow beachcombers: Search at low tide and after a storm. Rocky shores are better than sandy. And leave clear, jagged pieces where they lie, she says. “They’re not finished yet.” —Margaret G. Zackowitz

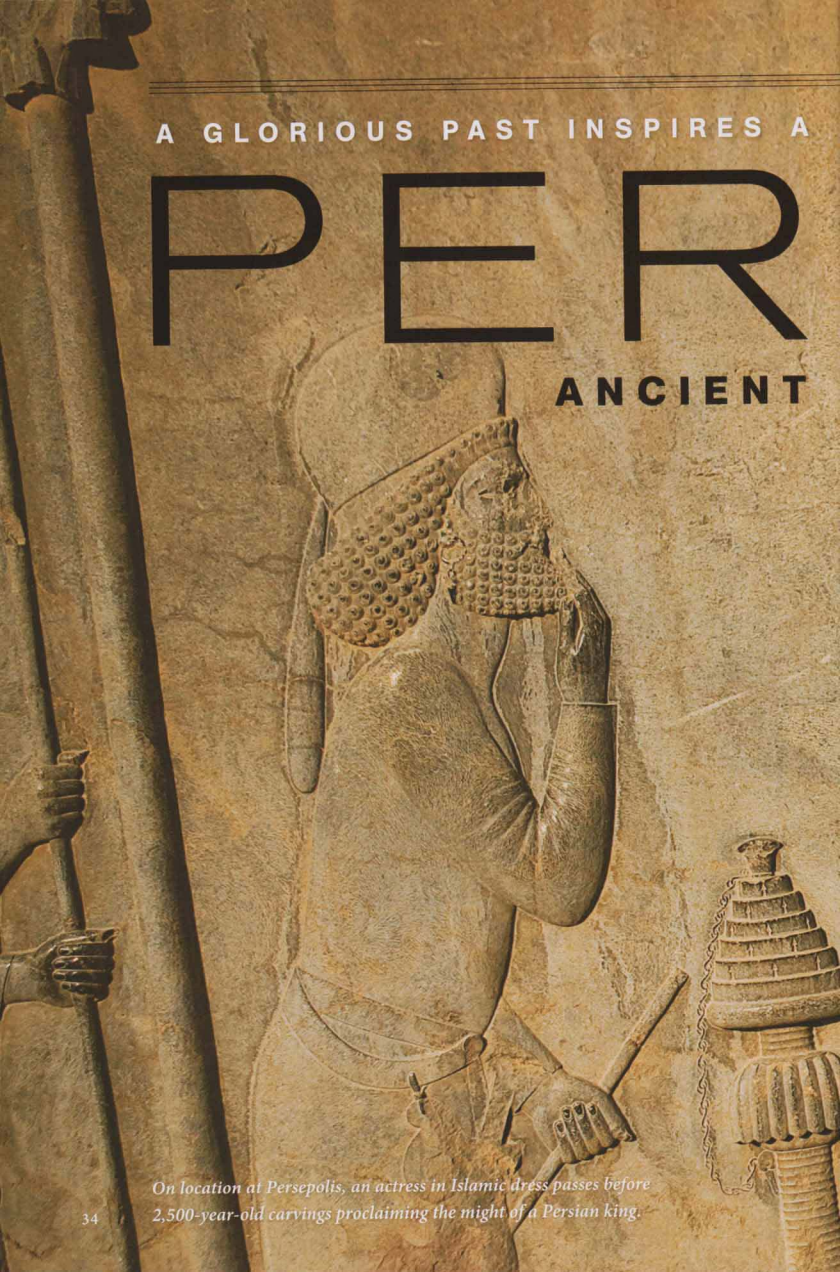


- 1 Chemist's bottle
- 2 Wine bottle
- 3 Shooter marble
- 4 Signal light
- 5 Bottleneck rim
- 6 Bottle stopper
- 7 End-of-day glass
- 8 Bottleneck
- 9 Car taillight

A GLORIOUS PAST INSPIRES A

PER

ANCIENT



On location at Persepolis, an actress in Islamic dress passes before 2,500-year-old carvings proclaiming the might of a Persian king.

CONFLICTED NATION

SIA

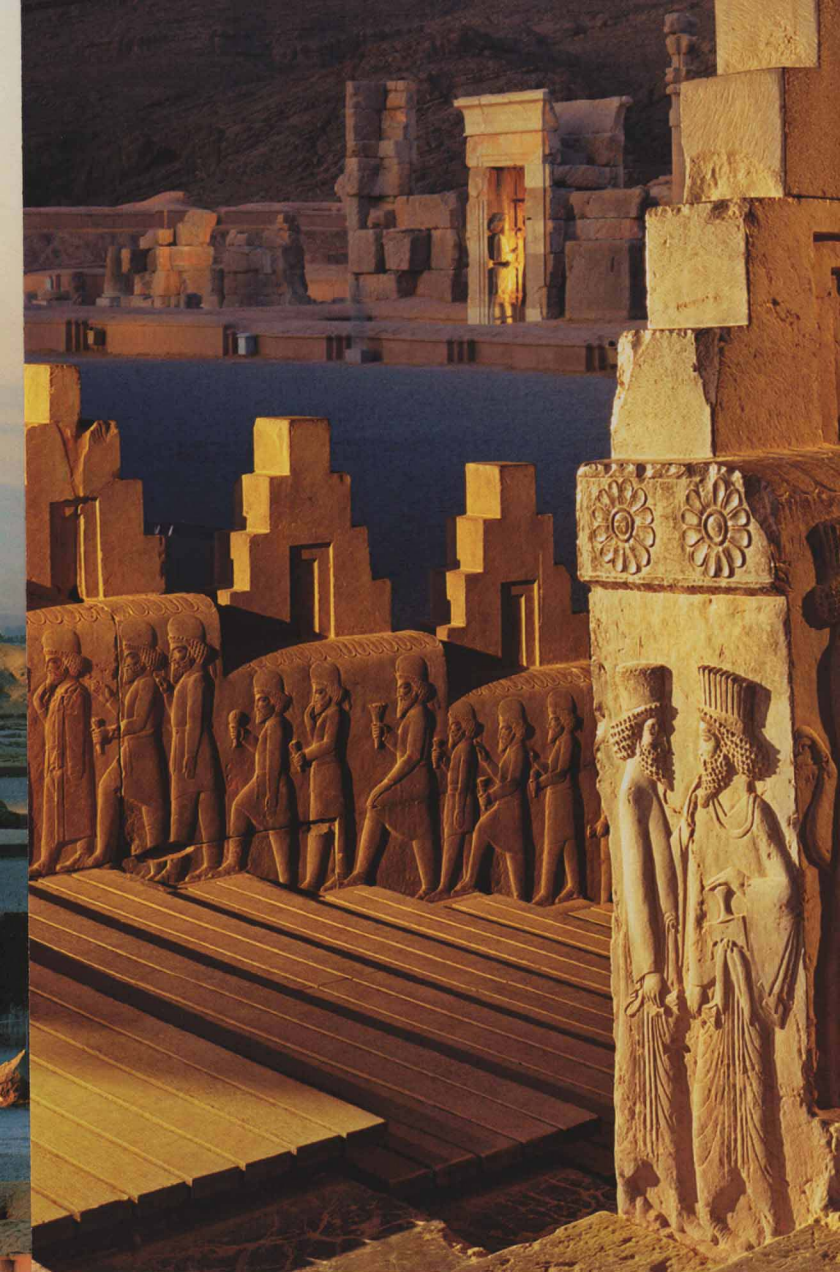
SOUL OF IRAN







PERSEPOLIS *Testament to Persian power established by Darius the Great (522 to 486 B.C.), Persepolis awed dignitaries who came from the far ends of the largest empire of the age to present gifts. Jaw-dropping even in ruins (previous pages), its structures are rife with commanding motifs, like the griffin above. "The art of Persepolis was brilliant propaganda," says archaeologist Kim Codella. It played to aspirations: Persian nobles ascending stairs hand in hand to the Tripylon hall (right) may signal fraternity among the empire's elites.*





BY MARGUERITE DEL GIUDICE

PHOTOGRAPHS BY NEWSHA TAVAKOLIAN

WHAT'S SO STRIKING about the ruins of Persepolis in southern Iran, an ancient capital of the Persian Empire that was burned down after being conquered by Alexander the Great, is the absence of violent imagery on what's left of its stone walls. Among the carvings there are soldiers, but they're not fighting; there are weapons, but they're not drawn. Mainly you see emblems suggesting

that something humane went on here instead—people of different nations gathering peacefully, bearing gifts, draping their hands amiably on one another's shoulders. In an era noted for its barbarity, Persepolis, it seems, was a relatively cosmopolitan place—and for many Iranians today its ruins are a breathtaking reminder of who their Persian ancestors were and what they did.

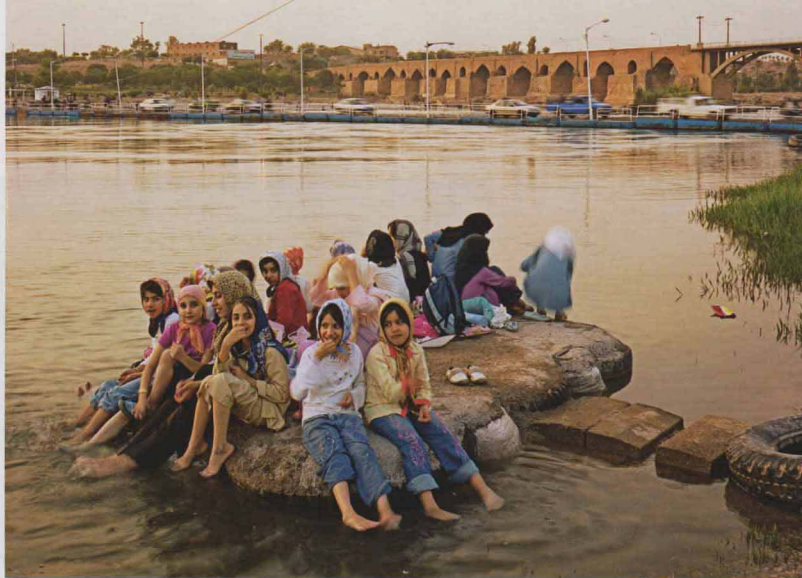
The recorded history of the country itself spans some 2,500 years, culminating in today's Islamic Republic of Iran, formed in 1979 after a revolution inspired in part by conservative clerics cast out the Western-backed shah. It's arguably the world's first modern constitutional theocracy and a grand experiment: Can a country be run effectively by holy men imposing an extreme version of Islam on a people soaked in such a rich Persian past?

Persia was a conquering empire but also regarded in some ways as one of the more glorious and benevolent civilizations of antiquity, and I wondered how strongly people might still

identify with the part of their history that's illustrated in those surviving friezes. So I set out to explore what "Persian" means to Iranians, who at the time of my two visits last year were being shunned by the international community, their culture demonized in Western cinema, and their leaders cast, in an escalating war of words with Washington, D.C., as menacing would-be terrorists out to build the bomb.

You can't really separate out Iranian identity as one thing or another—broadly speaking, it's part Persian, part Islamic, and part Western, and the paradoxes all exist together. But there is a Persian identity that has nothing to do with Islam, which at the same time has blended with the culture of Islam (as evidenced by the Muslim call to prayer that booms from loudspeakers situated around Persepolis, a cue to visitors that they are not only in a Persian kingdom but also in an Islamic republic). This would be a story about those Iranians who still, at least in part, identify with their Persian roots. Perhaps some millennial spillover runs through the makeup of what is now one of the world's ticking hot spots. Are vestiges of the life-loving Persian nature (wine, love, poetry, song) woven into the fabric of abstinence, prayer, and fatalism often

Marguerite Del Giudice wrote about Iceland in the March issue. Newsha Tavakolian, an Iranian photographer, documents women in the Middle East.



Schoolgirls in the city of Dezful cool their feet on a sweltering summer day. Physical reminders of Iran's long history abound, such as the foundations of the bridge in the distance, built to span the Dez River in the third century A.D.

associated with Islam—like a secret computer program running quietly in the background?

SURVIVING, PERSIAN STYLE

Iran's capital city of Tehran is an exciting, pollution-choked metropolis at the foot of the Elburz Mountains. Many of the buildings are made of tiny beige bricks and girded with metal railings, giving the impression of small compounds coming one after the other, punctuated by halted construction projects and parks. There are still some beautiful gardens here, a Persian inheritance, and private ones, with fruit trees and fountains, fishponds and aviaries, flourishing inside the brick walls.

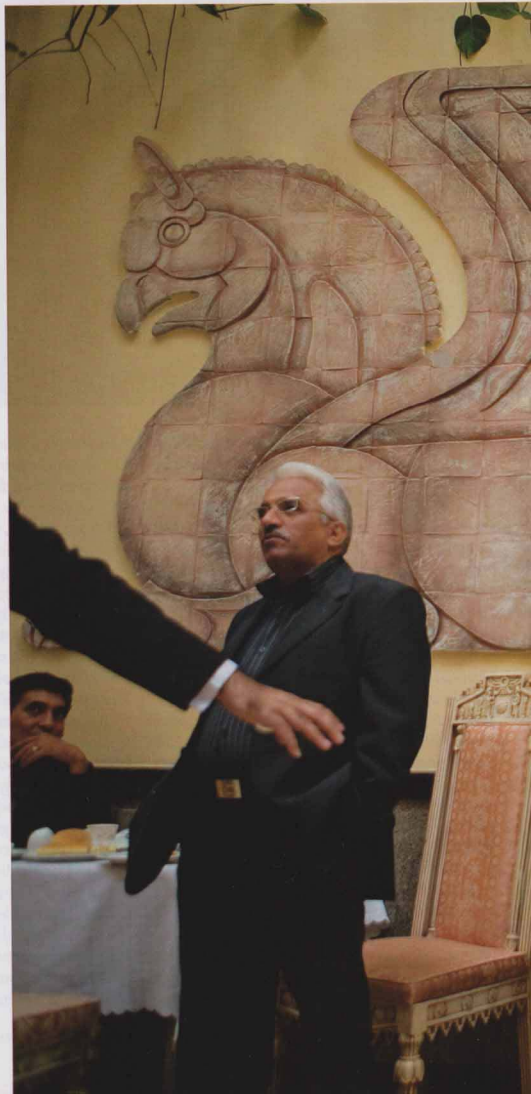
While I was here, two Iranian-born American academics, home for a visit, had been locked up, accused of fomenting a velvet revolution against the government. Eventually they were released. But back in the United States, people would ask, wasn't I afraid to be in Iran?—the

assumption being that I must have been in danger of getting locked up myself.

But I was a guest in Iran, and in Iran a guest is accorded the highest status, the sweetest piece of fruit, the most comfortable place to sit. It's part of a complex system of ritual politeness—*taarof*—that governs the subtext of life here. Hospitality, courting, family affairs, political negotiations; *taarof* is the unwritten code for how people should treat each other. The word has an Arabic root, *arafa*, meaning to know or acquire knowledge of. But the idea of *taarof*—to abase oneself while exalting the other person—is Persian in origin, said William O. Beeman, a linguistic anthropologist at the University of Minnesota. He described it as “fighting for the lower hand,” but in an exquisitely elegant way, making it possible, in a hierarchical society like Iran's, “for people to paradoxically deal with each other as equals.”

Wherever I went, people fussed over me and made sure that all my needs were met. But

A griffin and a winged goddess, representing a fanciful blend of Persian and Greek imagery from a time when Persia's rule stretched far and wide, accompany breakfast at the opulent Dariush Grand Hotel on the island of Kish.





they can get so caught up trying to please, or seeming to, and declining offers, or seeming to, that true intentions are hidden. There's a lot of mind reading and lighthearted, meaningless dialogue while the two parties go back and forth with entreaties and refusals until the truth reveals itself.

Being smooth and seeming sincere while hiding your true feelings—artful pretending—is considered the height of *taarof* and an enormous social asset. “You never show your intention or your real identity,” said a former Iranian political prisoner now living in France. “You’re making sure you’re not exposing yourself to danger, because throughout our history there has been a lot of danger there.”

GEOGRAPHY AS DESTINY

Indeed, the long course of Iranian history is saturated with wars, invasions, and martyrs, including the teenage boys during the Iran-Iraq war of the 1980s who carried plastic keys to heaven while clearing minefields by walking bravely across them. The underlying reason for all the drama is: location. If you draw lines from the Mediterranean to Beijing or Beijing to Cairo or Paris to Delhi, they all pass through Iran, which straddles a region where East meets West. Over 26 centuries, a blending of the hemispheres has been going on here—trade, cultural interchange, friction—with Iran smack in the middle.

Meanwhile, because of its wealth and strategic location, the country was also overrun by one invader after another, and the Persian Empire was established, lost, and reestablished a number of times—by the Achaemenids, the Parthians, and the Sassanids—before finally going under. Invaders have included the Turks, Genghis Khan and the Mongols, and, most significantly, Arabian tribesmen. Fired with the zeal of a new religion, Islam, they humbled the ancient Persian Empire for good in the seventh century and ushered in a period of Muslim greatness that was distinctly Persian. The Arab expansion is regarded as one of the most dramatic movements of any people in history. Persia was in its

inexorable path, and, ever since, Iranians have been finding ways to keep safe their identity as distinct from the rest of the Muslim and Arab world. “Iran is very big and very ancient,” said Youssef Madjidzadeh, a leading Iranian archaeologist, “and it’s not easy to change the hearts and identity of the people because of this.”

They like to say, for instance, that when invaders came to Iran, the Iranians did not become the invaders; the invaders became Iranians. Their conquerors were said to have “gone Persian,” like Alexander, who, after laying waste to the vanquished Persia, adopted its cultural and administrative practices, took a Persian wife (Roxana), and ordered thousands of his troops to do the same in a mass wedding. Iranians seem particularly proud of their capacity to get along with others by assimilating compatible aspects of the invaders’ ways without surrendering their own—a cultural elasticity that is at the heart of their Persian identity.

WELCOME TO ARATTA

The earliest reports of human settlement in Iran go back at least 10,000 years, and the country’s name derives from Aryans who migrated here beginning around 1500 B.C. Layers of civilization—tens of thousands of archaeological sites—are yet to be excavated. One recent find quickening some hearts was unearthed in 2000 near the city of Jiroft, when flash floods along the Halil River in the southeast exposed thousands of old tombs. The excavation is just six seasons old, and there isn’t much to see yet. But intriguing artifacts have been found (including a bronze goat’s head dating back perhaps 5,000 years), and Jiroft is spoken of as possibly an early center of civilization contemporary with Mesopotamia.

Youssef the archaeologist, an authority on the third millennium B.C., directs the digs. He used to run the archaeology department at the University of Tehran but lost his job after the revolution and moved to France. Over the years, he said, “things changed.” Interest in archaeology revived, and he was invited back to run Jiroft. Youssef thinks it may be the fabled “lost” Bronze Age



Millennia of power struggles and cultural creativity have left thousands of important ancient sites scattered across Iran. More are now being unearthed by Iranians, thanks to increasing official support for homegrown archaeologists.

land of Aratta, circa 2700 B.C., reputedly legendary for magnificent crafts that found their way to Mesopotamia. But thus far there's no proof, and other scholars are skeptical. What would he have to find to put the matter unequivocally to rest? He chuckled wistfully. "The equivalent of an engraved arch that says, 'Welcome to Aratta.'"

Prospects for more digs at the thousands of unexplored sites seem daunting. In Iran the price of meat is high, there aren't enough jobs, the bureaucracy is inscrutable, bloated, and inefficient, and state corruption—as described to me by three different people—is “an open secret,” “worse than ever,” and “institutionalized.”

“The country has many needs,” Youssef said, “and certainly archaeology is not the main subject.” But since Jiroft, “all the provinces are interested in excavating, and every little town wants to be known around the world like Jiroft. They're proud, and there are rivalries.”

Youssef was slouched happily in a faux-leather chair in the offices of his publisher, munching tiny green grapes while musing about why Iranians are the way they are. As much as anything else, he thought, it was the geography, for when the Iranians were being overrun time after time, “where could they go—the desert? There was no place to run and hide.” They stayed, they got along, they pretended and made taarof. “The tree here has very deep roots.”

SUPERPOWER NOSTALGIA

The legacy from antiquity that has always seemed to loom large in the national psyche is this: The concepts of freedom and human rights may not have originated with the classical Greeks but in Iran, as early as the sixth century B.C. under

the Achaemenid emperor Cyrus the Great, who established the first Persian Empire, which would become the largest, most powerful kingdom on Earth. Among other things, Cyrus, reputedly a brave and humble good guy, freed the enslaved Jews of Babylon in 539 B.C., sending them back to Jerusalem to rebuild their temple with money he gave them, and established what has been called the world's first religiously and culturally tolerant empire. Ultimately it comprised more than 23 different peoples who coexisted peacefully under a central government, originally based in Pasargadae—a kingdom that at its height, under Cyrus's successor, Darius, extended from the Mediterranean to the Indus River.

So Persia was arguably the world's first superpower.

“We have a nostalgia to be a superpower again,” said Saeed Laylaz, an economic and political analyst in Tehran, “and the country's nuclear ambitions are directly related to this desire.” The headlines are familiar: A consensus report of key U.S. spy agencies—the National Intelligence Estimate—concluded last December that a military-run program to develop nuclear weapons in Iran was halted in 2003. Iran continues to enrich uranium, insisting that it wants only to produce fuel for its nuclear power plants, but highly enriched uranium is also a key ingredient for a nuclear bomb. As a deterrent, the UN has imposed increasing economic sanctions. But Iran's president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, a conservative hard-liner, is giving no ground while at the same time making frequent threatening remarks about nearby Israel, denying the Holocaust, and, according to the U.S. government, sending weapons and munitions to extremist militias

Are vestiges of the life-loving Persian nature

(wine, love, poetry, song) woven into the fabric of abstinence, prayer, and fatalism often associated with Islam?



Excavations at Konar Sandal, near Jiroft, have yielded signs of a vibrant civilization some 5,000 years ago. The little-known people who raised what may be an eroded citadel mound were contemporary with the builders of Mesopotamia.

in Iraq that are being used against Iraqis and U.S. forces there.

“At one time the area of the country was triple what it is now, and it was a stable superpower for more than a thousand years,” said Saeed, a slender, refined man in glasses and starched shirtsleeves rolled to three-quarter length, sitting in his elegant apartment next to a lamp resembling a cockatoo, with real feathers. The empire once encompassed today’s Iraq, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkey, Jordan, Cyprus, Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Egypt, and the Caucasus region. “The borders have moved in over the centuries, but this superpower nostalgia, so in contradiction to reality,” he said, “is all because of the history.”

At the foundation of which, again, is Cyrus, and in particular something called the Cyrus Cylinder—perhaps Iran’s most exalted artifact—housed at the British Museum in London, with a replica residing at UN headquarters in New

York City. The cylinder resembles a corncob made of clay; inscribed on it, in cuneiform, is a decree that has been described as the first charter of human rights—predating the Magna Carta by nearly two millennia. It can be read as a call for religious and ethnic freedom; it banned slavery and oppression of any kind, the taking of property by force or without compensation; and it gave member states the right to subject themselves to Cyrus’s crown, or not. “I never resolve on war to reign.”

“To know Iran and what Iran really is, just read that transcription from Cyrus,” said Shirin Ebadi, the Iranian lawyer who won the 2003 Nobel Peace Prize. We were in her central Tehran apartment building, in a basement office lined with mahogany-and-glass bookcases. Inside one was a tiny gold copy of the cylinder, encased in a Plexiglas box that she held out to me as if presenting a newborn child. “Such greatness as the cylinder has been shown many times in Iran,” but the world doesn’t (Continued on page 62)



GLORY

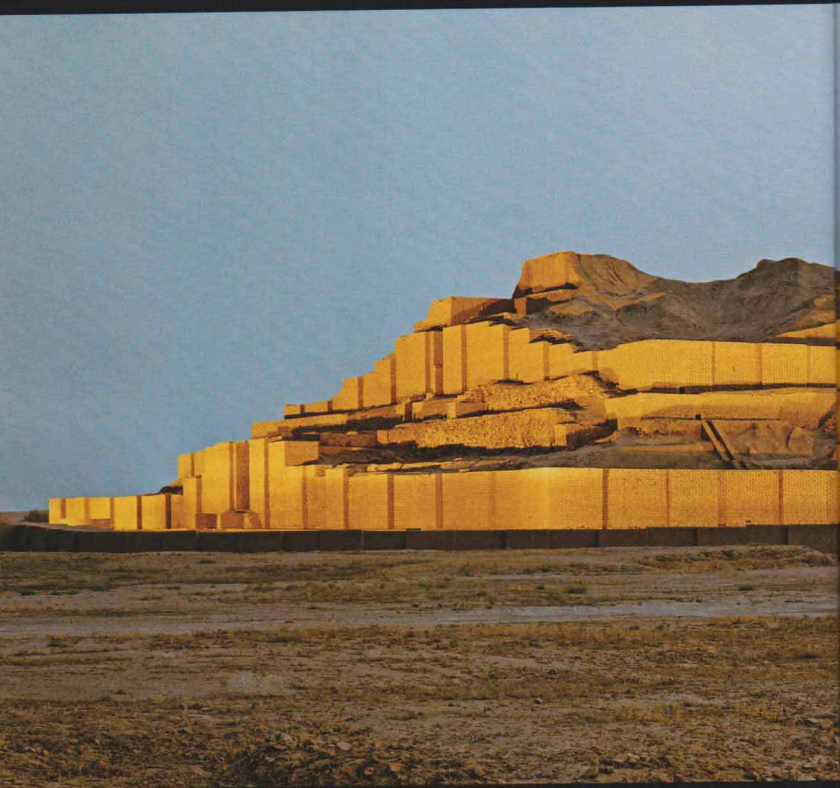
O F I R A N



PORTFOLIO BY SIMON NORFOLK

*On a grand staircase in Persepolis, a ravaging lion brings down a bull—
an ancient cross-cultural metaphor for the power of the king. Under the
Achaemenid rulers, who controlled numerous realms in a domain
stretching from the Indus to the Mediterranean, Persia became the greatest
empire the world had known. Even then, in 500 B.C., Persians looked to the
distant past for universal imagery. Bull icons also appear on a chlorite vase
from near Jiroft—where such items were crafted 2,000 years earlier.*

Simon Norfolk's photographs of Maya monuments appeared in the August 2007 issue.



Konar Sandal

ca Third Millennium b.c.

The recently discovered site near Jiroft may hold clues to a legendary Bronze Age land, Aratta.

Elamites

ca 2400 b.c. to 539 b.c.

Elamites join the Persian Empire in 539 b.c. when Cyrus the Great takes their capital, Susa.

Achaemenids

ca 550 b.c. to 330 b.c.

Their realm—the first Persian Empire—expands to become the largest empire the world had seen.

Alexander and the Seleucids

ca 330 b.c. to 129 b.c.

Alexander the Great conquers the Persian Empire but soon dies. His general Seleucus wins control; a chain of successors gradually lose power to the Parthians.

2500 b.c.

2400 b.c.

600 b.c.

500

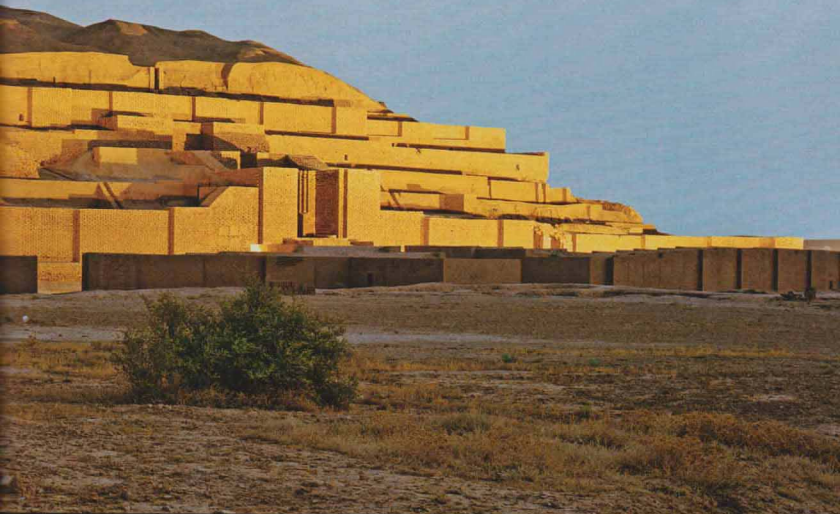
400

300

200

100

CHOGA ZANBIL Long before Persians arrived, the Elamites (ca 2400 to 539 B.C.) had built one of the world's early civilizations in southwestern Iran. At a high point of their power in the 13th century B.C., the mighty ziggurat in the city of Dur Untash towered over the realm. Partly restored, it is one of the largest ziggurats in the world. The Elamites' cultural influence continued after their world was absorbed by Persia.



Parthians

ca 247 B.C. to A.D. 224

Tribal warriors from northeast Persia, the Parthians create what is often called the second Persian Empire and challenge Rome.

Sassanids

ca A.D. 224 to 641

A new ruling family forms the third Persian Empire, a golden era of city building and grand art.

Arab Conquest

A.D. 641-42

Armies spreading Islam bring Persia under Arab rule, but Persians remain a cultural force in the emerging Muslim world.

100

200

300

400

500

600

700



PASARGADAE *Scaffolding surrounds the tomb of Cyrus the Great (ca 559 to 530 B.C.), the first Persian emperor, while archaeologists strive to restore its roof. Admired as an early champion of human rights, Cyrus allowed religious diversity and respected the local customs of those he conquered.*