

# EDITORIAL

It was the third time I visited Japan on which the sun rises some six hours prior to its rise on our part of the world, and thus Japan starts its day before we do, sleeps before it is our turn to sleep, and the Japanese work much harder than we to accomplish what we can never achieve. The first visit was in the middle of the 70s of the last century; our delegation was extending an invitation for an International symposium on the Studies in the History of Arabia Peninsula, sponsored by the Department of History, College of Arts, King Saud University, Riyadh. The first item on the seminar agenda had to do with "the sources of the history of the Arabian Peninsula." At that time, we contacted the Japanese universities in Tokyo, and informed them of the seminar. We, however, failed in reaching the experts in the field who could have participated. In 1989, when I was dean of the College of Arts, a kind invitation from the Japanese Government led to my second visit. This time the visit was highly organized; its program was carefully drawn to include visits to universities and institutions that have interest in civilization, cultural heritage, and archaeology.

During that second visit I came learn about things I had never thought I would know. I used to hear that Japanese had their interest in archaeology, but I took it to be a mundane interest that does not match up to that of the West. Westerners have thoroughly searched the four corners of the Arab World (Iraq, Syria, Egypt, N. Africa, Yemen, and some of the Gulf States). Their interest in the Arabian Peninsula fell rather short; they surveyed without aggressive excavation. In fact, they only touched on two sites in the eastern part of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Of these two, one was studied by a Danish mission which was working originally in Bahrain. The other, Jawan burial ground, was excavated by ARAMCO and was studied by Mr. Viedal who published his report in Arabic in the Sudi magazine, Al-manhal.

The program of this second visit included a field trip to an archaeological site in the city of Tokyo. Visitors ascended an archaeological hill under torrent rain. They, umbrillas in hands to protect themselves, filed through a path enclosed between two yellow ropes, winding through excavation square-grounds. Tens, perhaps hundreds of visitors passed in silence; excavators to the right and left kept explaining to those visitors what layers and finds they had.

The next day I attended a meeting of the Japanese Archaeological Society; it was its fifty fifth meeting, I learned. Having asked about the number of the society's members, I was told it was not large, about five thousand. Those attending were about the tenth of the total number. I was shocked! I also attended a lecture on a certain archaeological site, and what I saw was some wonder. In their work, the Japanese utilize all modern technological means. If, in their work, they encounter a problem, they usually halt their activities and seek one of the corporations which will help design for them the needed tool that will practically and scientifically smooth out the process of excavation. I also happened to visit Koyoto, the old capital of Japan, and found that it was preserved culturally and architecturally. You find no debris, bad odors, or tumult bustle. Though the town is fairly populated, all you find is a reigning peaceful serenity as if it has been deserted.

Close to Koyoto, there is "Nara" site, a completely preserved site despite the passage of hundreds of years. Here, you can actually see how life had been and how the ancient people lived. As for the Museums of International Culture and Heritage, one cannot help but wonder. These Museums trans-

port you to the particular world not through pictures but through lived experience by means of the exhibited international popular culture. Such exhibits cover the popular culture of the entire world. Even the Ghabany shal and the Makka hat are there; you actually feel as if you were in Makka's neighborhoods some fifty years ago. Rather than going to cultures and civilizations, these are brought to you. In this way you learn more about the Others, and feel compelled to embark on a trip to see these people and how they live, and what changes have taken place as a result of the dominance of the Western civilization which has lately assumed the role of changing the lives of peoples.

\*\*\*\*\*

These two visits were rich enough; so why the third? Some three years ago the phone rang in my office. Professor Kawatoko, the famous Japanese archaeological scholar, was speaking at the other end; he wanted to visit with me. I welcomed him along with one female student of his. In addition to the publication of numerous papers and works, Kawatoko's work includes excavations in Fustat, the first capital of Islam in Egypt and Africa; in Sinai desert and Mount Sinai, where he uncovered one Islamic port. His aim of surveying the Sinai port at Mount Sinai was to explore the relationship between China and the ports of the Arabian seas: the Red Sea, the Arabian Sea, and the Arabian Gulf. Having talked almost about everything, he said, "now that you have known everything, what is your advice?" He added, "the department of Antiquities and Museums of the Saudi Ministry of Education has approved the principle of exploration and surveys, and I would like to first execute an archaeological survey, especially since my student Risa Tokunaga would like to survey and study some ancient Arabic inscriptions, and I would like to begin the survey from Najran towards the North." "It is wonderful!" said I, "to begin your visit at the archaeological sites in Najran." But since Kawatoko is interested in tracing the routes of trading between China and the ports of the Red Sea, I suggested he follow his interests, and begin with the port of "al-Jar."

Al-Jar is an ancient Islamic port of which many scholars have spoken. The last one to speak of the port has been the first traditional archaeological pioneer, AbdulQudus Al-Ansari who wrote a book on the port and drew its map. Professor Kawatoko said, "I have a fair idea about all of this, and you seem as if you have been reading my mind. Surely I would like to study a site that has a historical root." As regards historical roots, I told him, look no further than the next site; all our sites have such historical and civilization roots. In terms of civilization, Islam is actually a continuation of what the Arabian Peninsula used to have; only faith did change. The matter was settled; he made his survey trip, and decided, upon returning, that "al-Jar" was the most suitable place. From a site close to Najran-- Bi'r Hima and its neighborhood-- his female student, Risa Tokunaga, was able to cull some two thousand inscriptions. She felt she had returned with a treasure. Their visits with me were frequent; during one of these he asked if I would contribute to his student's study of those inscriptions and accept to be an external examiner once her study is complete. I accepted. He started sending me parts of his student's work, and I read and commented on what I received. Months after months had passed; then I received the dissertation of the student in two volumes. A while later I received a generous invitation from Kaeio Univeristy, Tokyo, not only to be an external examiner of the student, but also to give two lectures: one for the graduate students, and the other for the staff.

The reader may not be interested in all this; one, however, may be interested in knowing, as I have come to know, that Tokyo treasures a civilization under its surface. Therefore, no building is allowed to be constructed on any place suspected of being an archaeological site. At any moment

such a likelihood presents itself, work is immediately halted; archaeologists are given ample time to examine the site and execute thorough excavation. The methods of excavation the Japanese follow indicate the great skills, patience, and endurance they have mastered. The results they usually reach are meticulous and incontrovertible. I doubt if they ever use phrases like, "it is likely; perhaps it is, or it is possible..".

My last visit has given me the chance to closely familiarize myself with the Japanese Academic life. One may be surprised to learn that one academic scholar studied the journey of Ibn Battuta, translated it into the Japanese language in volumes, authenticated the places the journey mentioned, drew maps for the whole journey, classified what the journey related as an eye-witness or hearsay observation, and discussed the credibility of what Ibn Battuta had heard. For us, unfortunately, the journey meant nothing other than a pastime amusement. We were so happy when Professor Abdul Hadi al-Tazi authoritatively edited the journey in five volumes. But to subject it or other journeys to a thorough and careful anthropological study is something way beyond our conceptual orientation, even though the material is ready at hand and needs only a scholarly investigation and a distinct methodology.

\*\*\*\*\*

One Japanese scholar showed me a full album about the archaeological ruins in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the sites he had visited. He is all wishes to have the chance to excavate Late Palaeolithic sites in the North of the Kingdom. Of Quraiah site, to the west of Tabuk, he says it is the most important because it symbolizes the originality of Arab-- yes, Arab-- history. The site is actually unique in its pottery and finds, and has no similarities to civilizations close by. Many other academics enumerated their interests in various aspects of civilization in Saudi Arabia.

Still, the most important event, which gave immense pleasure, was the attendance of H. I. H. prince Mikasa, uncle of the present Japanese Emperor. He actually attended my lecture for the students rather than the one for the staff members. Professor Kawatoko suggested to him that he may attend the staff lecture, but the prince declined politely, justifying his choice by saying his knowledge of the Kingdom's archaeology is in no way beyond that of the students. He enjoyed the lecture, and I was much pleased by his presence, modesty, amiability, and homeliness.

Our student Risa Tokunaga did incredibly well in her study; of what she had collected, she studied no less than 800 inscriptions. These she analyzed, explicated, and attended to their vocabulary. She also tried to put them in a chronological order, and she provided a picture and a drawing for each inscription she included in her study. This effort, a commitment to epistemological discovery, is certainly a distinctive mark of the strong will that characterizes the Japanese individual. Why would it be important for a Japanese to learn that much about the Arab thought and culture? This is perhaps the wrong question; however, our interest in such question is perhaps the reason why we, the Arabs, have failed to learn about the civilizations and history of other nations, even though we have sent scholarship students abroad. Our universities have none who have studied the European Middle Ages; our students in almost all fields, to take the easy way out, usually relate their Ph.D. topics to something that has an affinity with the Arab East or Islam. We always travel the most comfortable way back.

## **Editor-in-Chief**