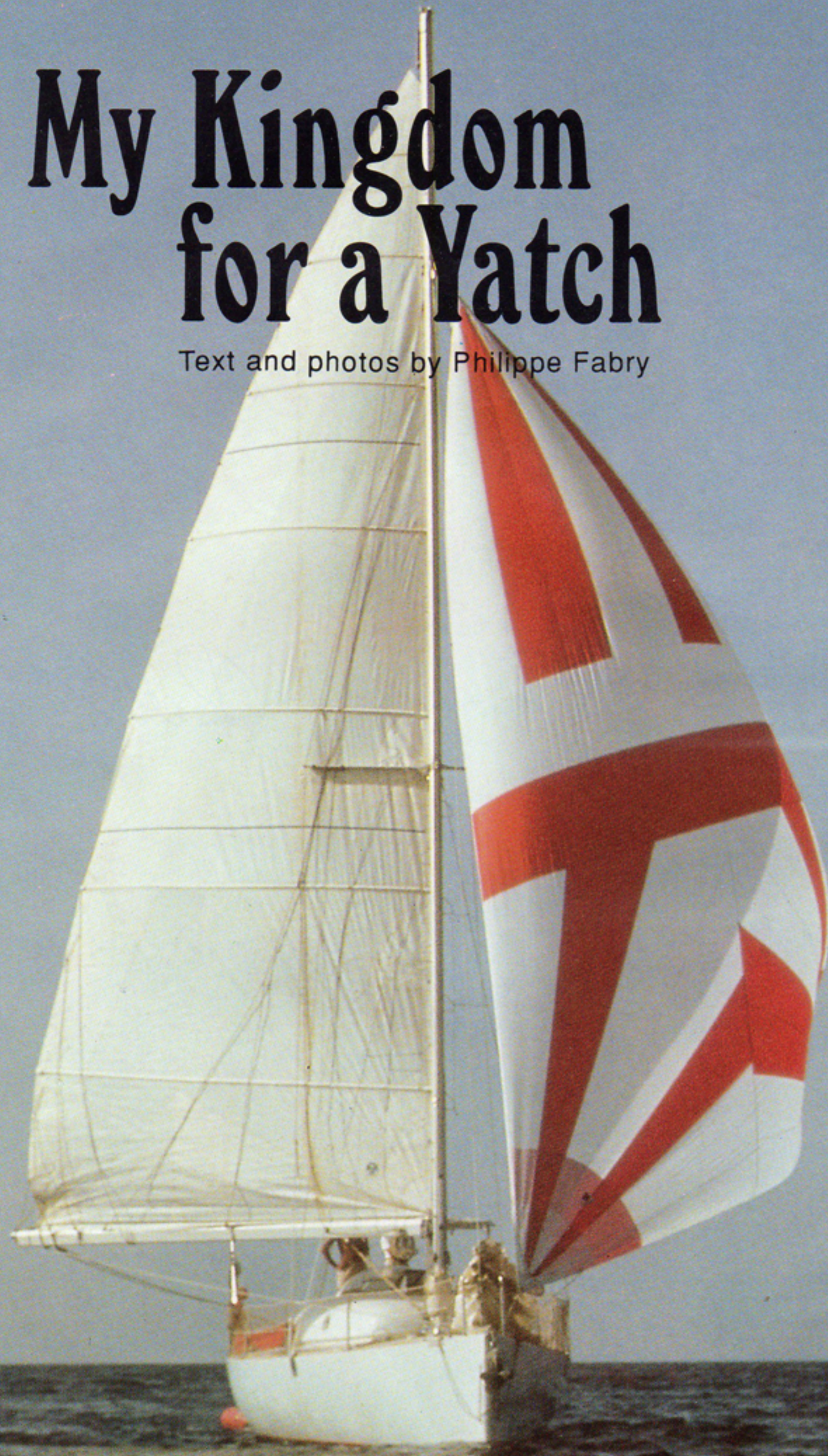


My Kingdom for a Yatch

Text and photos by Philippe Fabry

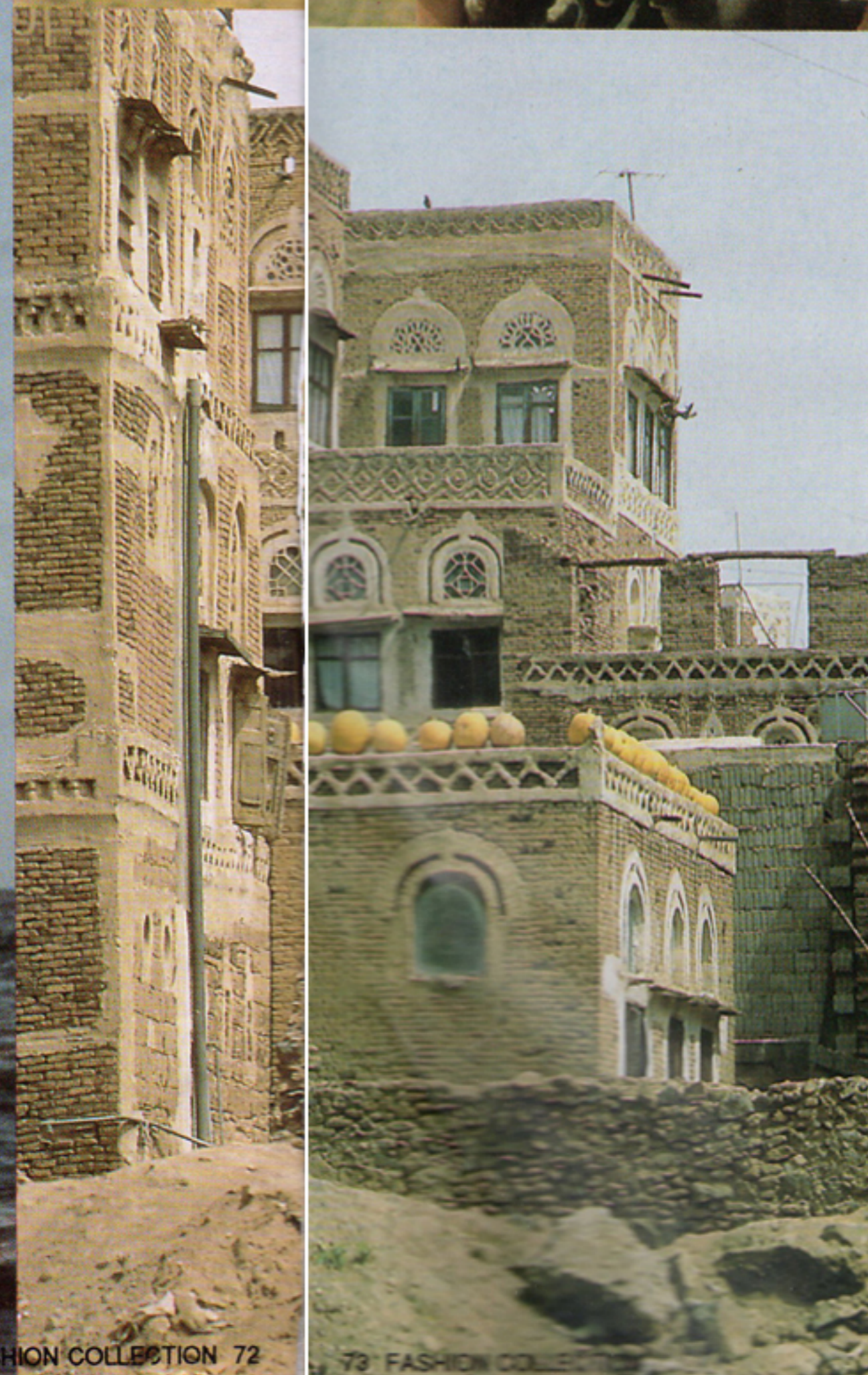


A few weeks ago, a French sailing yacht sailed in to Karachi waters. The captain, Philippe Fabry, was "coming back" with a present: his last years' work on Pakistan! Exclusively for "Fashion Collection," he recalls some highlights of his adventures from the South of France to Karachi...

"le Dragon de Maud" in full splendour.



Above, members of the crew in Egypt.



Left, an example of Yemeni architecture in Sanaa.

"le Dragon de Maud" our 13 metres long sailing yacht drops her anchor in the Karachi harbour after a long journey. Her last port of call is Muscat but from the turquoise waters of the "Cote d'Azur" - the French Riviera - her hull has been gliding on more than one sea. She was designed by two architects (Bouvet and Petit) who became famous after their boats arrived first and second in the last "Globe Challenge" - the toughest race ever devised around the world: single-handed, nonstop and no assistance. She proudly shows her origins by having the same beautiful look of a racer. She is. But before all, she is home for me, for my wife Lisa, and our four-year-old daughter Alexandra, our friend Daniel and, during the holidays (since she studies in France), for my eight-year-old daughter Maud.

The trip could have been made in two or three months: it took about ten times more! First of all, because it is not the philosophy on board to be in a hurry. For that, there is the plane, and I had enough of the same frustration it gives; when you fly, you are still where you come from and not yet at your destination. A slow means of transport shows you links between

cultures and civilizations as well as allowing a deeper feeling for the people and their cultures. Therefore, "le Dragon de Maud" a fast-sailing yacht, stops often and for a good span of time.

Beside that is the fact that a sailing boat depends totally on the weather conditions. Because of the lack of wind, for instance, we stayed five days in sight of the Omani coast while we were sailing our last leg to Karachi. On the other hand, storms or hurricanes are a real threat and a constant worry. When we sailed out of Turkey for Cyprus, a strong storm caught us in the middle of the passage after two days at sea. The night was pitch black and we could only see lightning and the white crest of the angry sea which was rushing towards us on port side. This was winter and the temperature obliged us to stay in the boat, one of us being on watch. I was inside when suddenly I heard something banging on the hull. I rushed outside fearing that Daniel might have been taken away by an enormous wave, this accident being too frequent and most feared amongst yachtsmen. It was not that bad. Almost. One of our two rudders had just been torn out and was hanging from its command, banging on the hull. Hard to imagine the rescuing operation to save what could be saved, lying in the cockpit open over

The colours of water.



tenebrous depths, the deck washed thoroughly by the icy water of ferocious waves, hands hurt by the uncontrollable rudder. Eventually, after a long, half-hour fight, we salvaged then secured the rudder on the deck. But that was an ill-fated day. We hardly had time to change our damp clothes for dry ones when the same banging noise announced the worst news we could expect; the second rudder had gone and the boat was out of control! The same dangerous rescue operation had to be carried out again. Then the terrible feeling of being lost at sea without even a radio to send a "Mayday" - an emergency call - . It would be for a "land-er" like being in a moving car suddenly without its steering system. The positive point was that we were far at sea with no close coast or rocks to be dashed against. Forty-eight hours later, exhausted but happy, we dropped anchor in Limassol harbour. This became possible by an ingenious repair carried out by Daniel, a sailor with twenty years' experience.

Fortunately, this type of experience is rather exceptional even though bad weather can always be expected. Most of our days are quiet and peaceful, busy with basic needs and simple activities. The boat itself requires a lot



Above, a typical landscape of the Sudanese coast on the Red Sea.

of attention. When we are sailing, to navigate, we have to keep adjusting the sails and check if our way is clear of dangers, ships or rocks. But once moored, it is not yet time to relax. The propeller needs to be cleaned, the oil has to be changed or the automatic pilot to be repaired.

After tending to the boat, care must be taken of the crew, and an important role is played by Lisa who is in charge of the "housework". That includes not only cooking but also baking, the management of fresh water reserves, and food supplies and the supervision of order in the boat.



Above, Daniel shopping for lunch.



Left, Bay of Marmris in Turkey, where we started the last leg of our journey to Karachi.

Coping with the elements and respecting these basic rules gives us some very rewarding moments. Like when we entered this narrow gorge in the Red Sea; we had been sailing for many days and were looking for shelter. The coast was identical mile after mile, and even the map was not accurate enough to guide us. Upon instinct we entered this narrow opening knowing full well the dangers we might face if it were a



Above, Sanaa. A mountain village in Yemen - our home for two months. Right, work of the sea near Muscat - Oman.



dead end. The gully was winding deeper and deeper into the land. Suddenly after a curve, we reached a small inland sea. On the beach, a few hundred metres from us, a group of antelopes was staring at us. After the initial surprise, they vanished into the bushes behind with a few gracious leaps. The setting was absolutely gorgeous. Rugged hills backed by misty grey mountains. scarce vegetation of bronze palm trees and deep turquoise waters.

Meaning to stop only for the night, we stayed a whole week. A week of delightful dives in this warm water where we played with turtles, rays, octopus and so many friendly fish, it was with regret that we caught some for our meals. In the shallow waters near the beach Maud and Alexandra were running after baby sharks and were surprised to discover one with a saw in place of a nose!

The youngest member of the crew, the four year old Alexandra, knows more about the sea than most children and adults and is very fond of wild life. She has seen manta rays jumping out of the sea, patted an exhausted tern resting on the deck of the boat, eat an octopus, identified bright green and yellow coloured dorado, but is anxiously awaiting her friends - the dolphins. They often come jump and

play near the bow. She sits there and watches them as long as they accompany us. At night whilst I am on watch and she sleeps, I often hear their call close to our hull, not far from her blond head resting on a pillow.

The first question she asked when her feet touched land was "is there a school here?". Ever since, each morning she happily joins her new Karachi schoolmates for a few hours of learning.

She had a second question "how do you say lighthouse in Urdu"...

Philippe's treasure includes:

- * a 16 mm colour film (92 minutes) mainly on Pakistan: "L'Indus, du Tibet a l'Ocean Indien" (co-author P. Moreau).
- * a photographic book on the same subject: "les derniers seigneurs de l'Indus" (co-author P. Moreau)
- * a luxurious book of photographs called: "Balouchistan" and
- * a mesmerizing exhibition of forty poster-size photos on Baluchistan.

Dinner! Delicacy from a Yemeni island.

