



MARCH 7, 2006

SAUDI ARABIA-US

US returns stolen 13th century coins to Saudi Arabia

On March 6, Saudi Ambassador Turki Al-Faisal accepted a large cache of ancient coins that were returned to Saudi Arabia by the United States.

A recreational diver had taken the coins in 1994 from a shipwreck in the Red Sea about 100 yards off the Saudi coast, and smuggled them back to the US with the intention of selling them. An anonymous tip led to a US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) investigation in 2004. A Key West man admitted to taking the coins improperly and surrendered them to ICE agents in April 2005.

Experts who examined the coins speculated that they were from the 13th or 14th century, and that they possibly were on a trading vessel that sank in the Red Sea or belonged to pilgrims making their way to Makkah for the Hajj. Of the coins, 803 are restored and some 132 lbs remain encrusted. Prince Turki said they will be displayed at the National Museum in Riyadh upon their return to the Kingdom.

Assistant Secretary of Homeland Security for ICE Julie L. Myers formally turned the coins over to Prince Turki in a ceremony at ICE headquarters in Washington. "Thieves that loot artifacts rob a culture of some of their most precious commodities – their heritage and their history," Myers said.

In remarks, Prince Turki thanked all of the agencies involved for their efforts to recover and return the priceless artifacts to Saudi Arabia, and noted that such exchanges are an indication of the depth of Saudi-US relations.

"These coins are treasured artifacts that reflect the cultural heritage of humanity as well as Saudi Arabia's unique history as an ancient trade center and as the birthplace of Islam," stated the ambassador. "Their recovery and return to the Kingdom is an example of the deep friendship between Saudi Arabia and the United States and the respect the US has for cultural heritage."

FOREIGN POLICY

King Abdullah holds talks with French president in Riyadh

King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz welcomed French President Jacques Chirac for a three-day visit to the Kingdom March 4-6. The Saudi-French talks focused on bilateral cooperation as well as regional and international issues such as Iran's nuclear program, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq and the Palestinian situation. In a press

conference March 6, Chirac said that the Saudi Arabia and France held similar views on those issues.

Chirac also delivered an historic address to the Shura Council, the first Western leader to do so. In his remarks, Chirac noted the strength of the Saudi-French friendship, and praised King Abdullah's efforts to combat terrorism. He also lauded King Abdullah's domestic agenda for development and ambitious general investment program.

SAUDI ARABIA

New Saudi TV channel to broadcast legislative sessions

Culture and Information Minister Iyad Madani said March 4 that the Kingdom is in the process of creating a new television channel that will broadcast Shura Council and Municipal Council deliberations exclusively. Madani said that the new channel is being launched in order to acquaint the public with the workings of the legislative bodies. He also said that the Saudi Channel Two would be completely overhauled, and its programming devoted exclusively to foreign media.

ECONOMY

Kingdom lifts ban on scrap metal export in compliance with WTO

Saudi Arabia has officially lifted its 16-year ban on the export of scrap metal in compliance with World Trade Organization (WTO) requirements, the Arabic-language newspaper *Al-Iqtisadiyah* reported March 3. Saudi Arabia formally joined the WTO in December 2005.

