

SAUDI-ARABIC HEADSTART

المملكة
العربية
السعودية
رغمنا

SEPTEMBER 1980

CULTURAL NOTES

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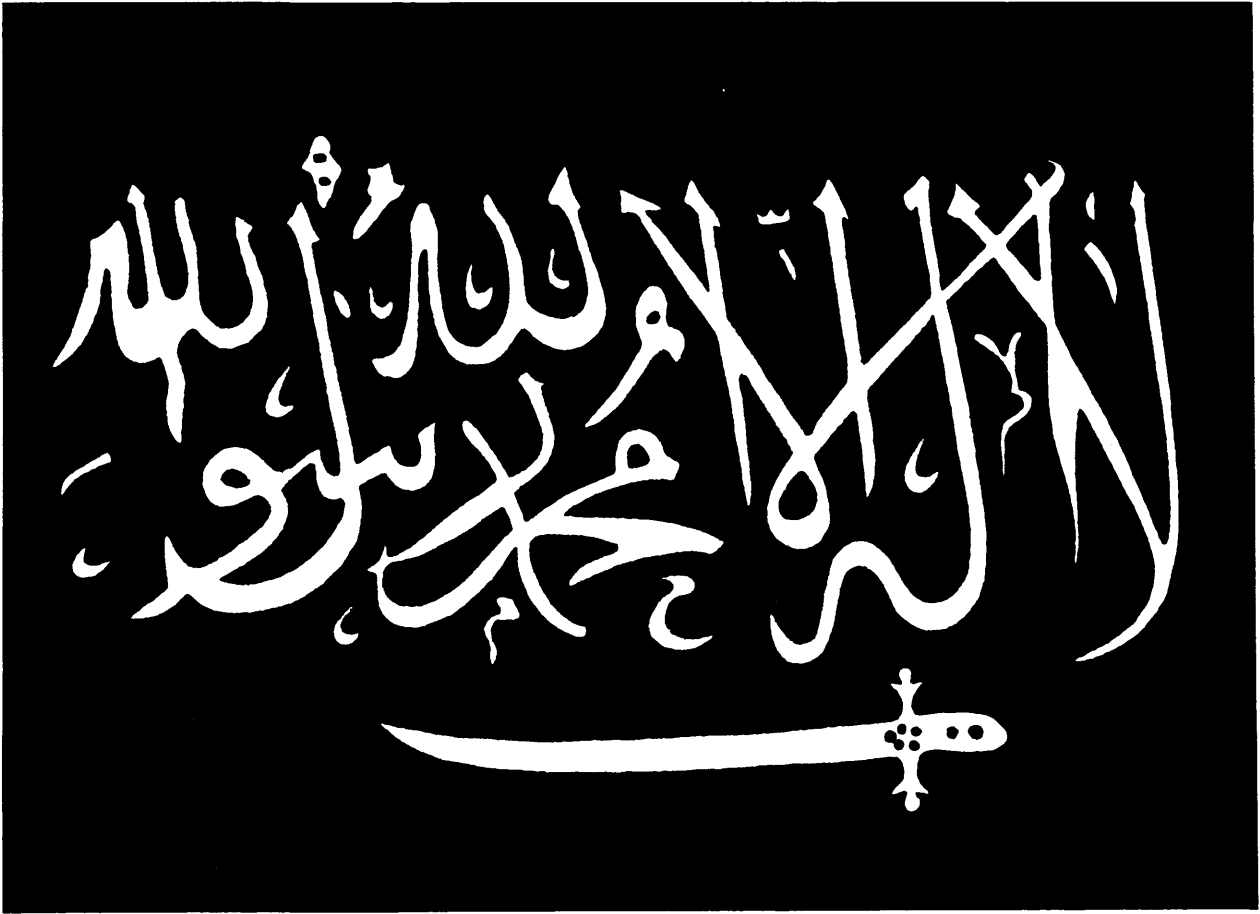
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THE FLAG OF SAUDI ARABIA



A sword of righteousness and the Islamic creed
"There is no god but God; Muhammad is the messenger
of God" are in white and lie in a field of green.

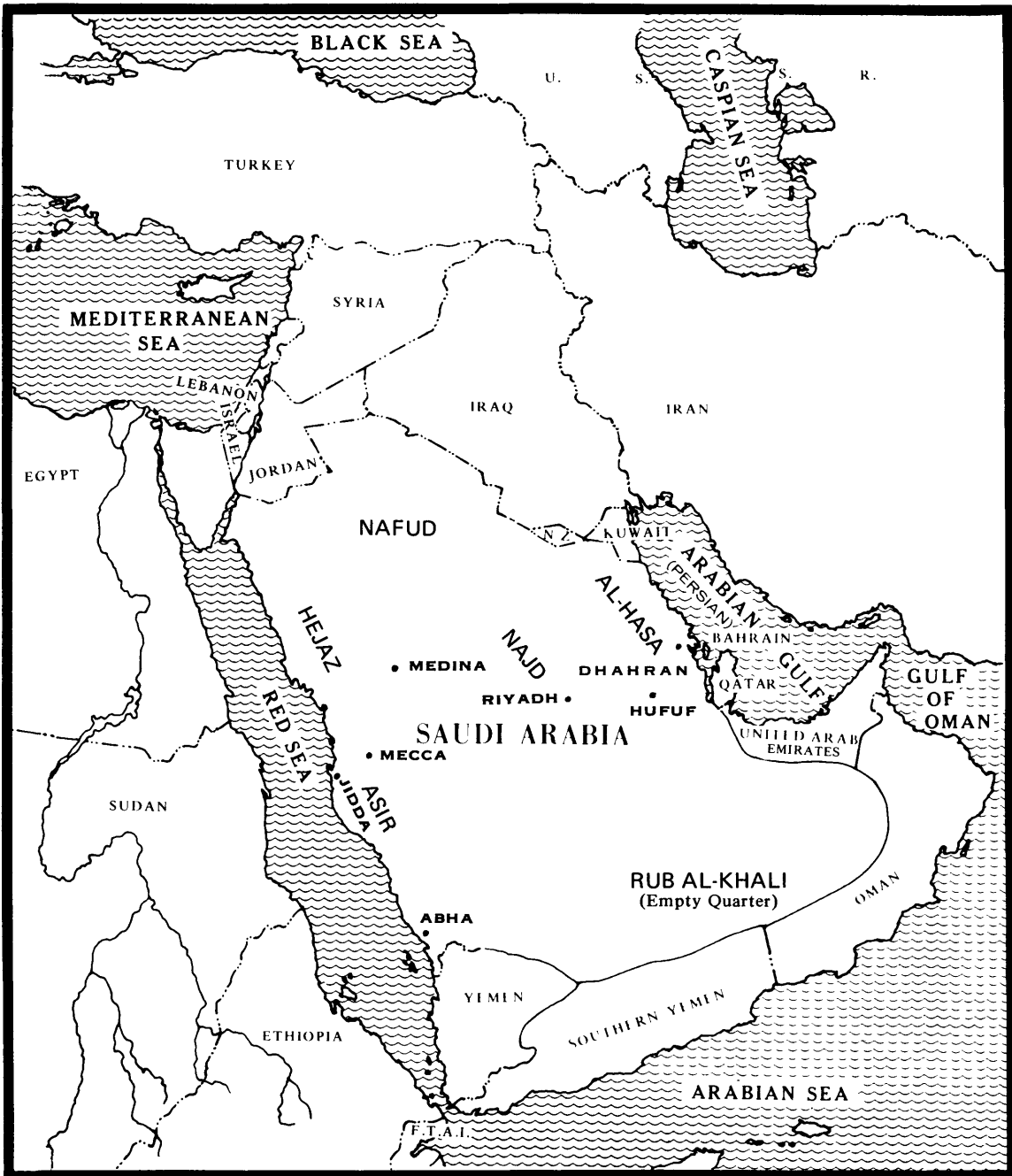
INTRODUCTION

You are about to go to Saudi Arabia, a place you probably never expected to see in your lifetime, and you are wondering what it will be like there. You are no doubt aware that life in Saudi Arabia is vastly different from that of the United States. If you have already had the experience of being stationed abroad, let's say, in Germany, Japan, or Vietnam, then you know what it is like to be a foreigner in a land with a different language, traditions, and often baffling set of social customs. But perhaps you have never been outside the United States, in which case, this type of experience will be new for you.

You will discover that, although the Saudi way of life is very strange to Americans at first, it is no longer puzzling once you have learned some of the basic facts about the historical, religious, and social background of the Saudi people. The aim of this booklet is to give you precisely that relevant background information which you will need in order to successfully orient yourself in Saudi Arabia, and thus do your job better and have a happier stay there.

This booklet is divided into four basic background information sections, four sections which give you some practical information concerning your future everyday life and living conditions in Saudi Arabia, and a section on Yemen. Yemen has been included since that country has recently become an area of greater interest to all those concerned with the Arabian Peninsula.

It will be to your advantage to take time to carefully read this booklet. Perhaps later on, you can reread it once or twice to refresh your memory concerning the main points about Saudi Arabia and its people.



THE LAND

Saudi Arabia, officially "the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia" --named after King Ibn Saud, who established the kingdom in 1932--occupies most of the Arabian Peninsula, a land mass of about one million square miles wedged between Africa and the mainland of Asia. Geographers classify it as the largest peninsula in the world and, indeed, it is about the size of the continental United States east of the Mississippi River. Arabs commonly call this peninsula "the Island of the Arabs."

All the countries that border Saudi Arabia are Arab nations. To the north, the neighboring nations are Jordan, Iraq, and Kuwait. A small, diamond-shaped area called a "neutral zone," located along a section of the border with Iraq, is administered jointly by Saudi Arabia and Iraq. Neighboring nations to the east are Bahrain; the Emirate ("principality") of Qatar; and the United Arab Emirates, a confederation of seven small principalities which includes Dubai, Sharja, and oil-rich Abu Dhabi. The southeastern and southern borders of Saudi Arabia, not well-defined because of the border area being mostly inhospitable desert, are shared with the state of Oman, the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (or Southern Yemen), and the Yemen Arab Republic (usually referred to simply as Yemen). Saudi Arabia has an eastern coastline of about 200 miles along the Persian Gulf, which is referred to by the Arabs as the Arabian Gulf. Saudi Arabia's western border is the shore of the Red Sea, and the border to the northwest is the Gulf of Aqaba.

THE GEOGRAPHIC REGIONS

Saudis traditionally divide their country into five major geographical areas: the Hejaz and Asir; the Najd; Eastern Arabia (Al-Hasa); Northern Arabia; and the Great Deserts, which are the Rub al-Khali and the Nafud, and a strip of desert called Dahna which connects them.

The Hejaz and Asir. The Hejaz region includes most of Saudi Arabia's coastal area along the Red Sea. It is a mountainous region, where the two holy cities of the Islamic faith, Mecca and Medina, are located. Mecca, the birthplace of the prophet Muhammad and the focal point of the Islamic pilgrimage rites, is a city of about 185,000 people. Medina, where Muhammad is buried, has a population of about 150,000. A third important city within the Hejaz is Jidda, the chief

port and commercial capital of the nation. It is a bustling city of more than 200,000 people, where many foreign embassies and consulates are currently located. The southern parts of the Hejaz are especially mountainous. Many of the mountains reach elevations of 8,000 feet and more.

The mountain ranges of the Hejaz continue into Asir, the region along the southernmost stretches of Saudi Arabia's Red Sea coast. Asir enjoys more rainfall than any other region in the country and is known for its fertile valleys and oases. It is one of the country's main agricultural areas. Its population center is Abha, a small but growing city high up on the mountain plateau.

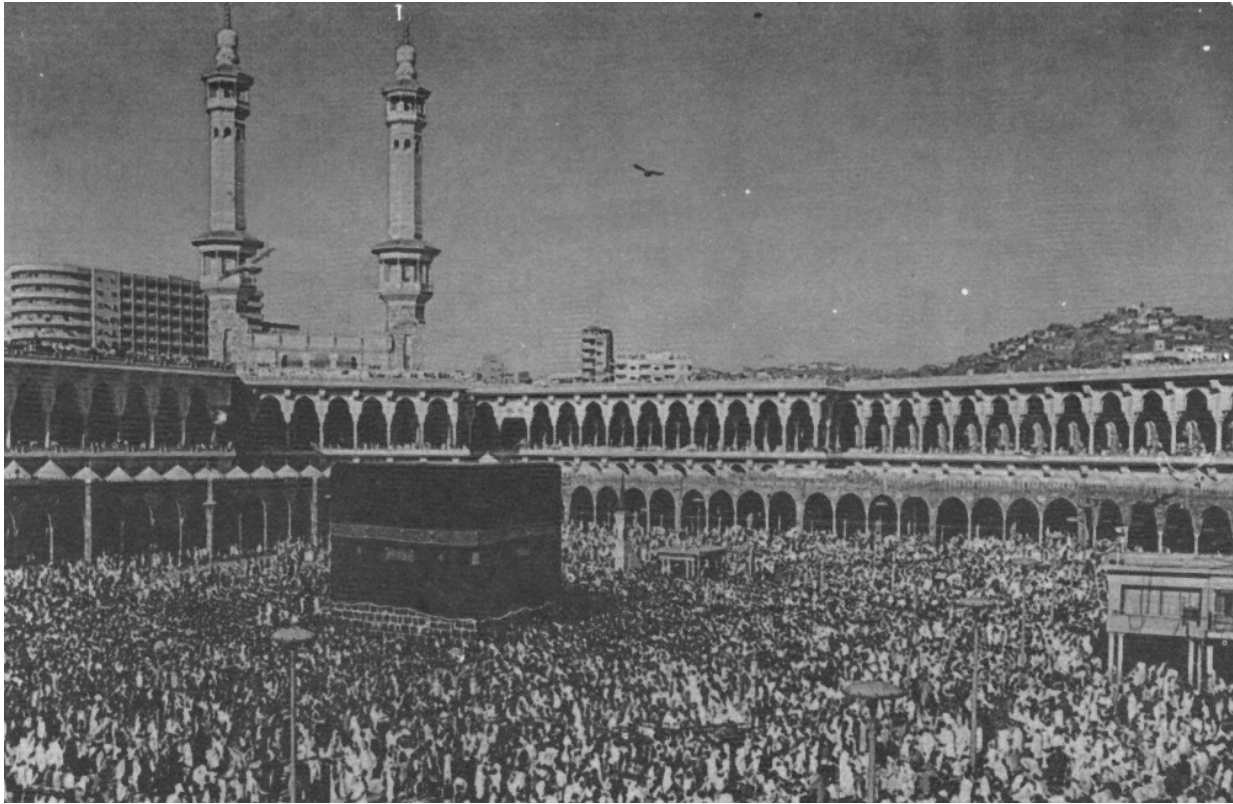
The Najd. The central part of Saudi Arabia is known as the Najd. It is a plateau region with small mountain ranges, sand deserts, and oases. The Najd is the homeland of the Saudi royal family and thus its traditional power base. Riyadh, the national capital, is a fast-growing modern city of about 700,000 people, and is located near the center of this region.

Eastern Arabia (Al-Hasa). Saudi Arabia's coastal area along the Arabian Gulf, Al-Hasa is by far the area most important to the economy of the nation. Almost all of Saudi Arabia's significant oil reserves are located here. The area is mostly a desert coastal plain, but in it is one of Saudi Arabia's largest and richest oases which surrounds the town of Hufuf. Within Al-Hasa is Dhahran, the center of the Saudi petroleum industry and headquarters of the Arabian-American Oil Company (Aramco).

Northern Arabia. Northern Arabia is the part of the country bordering on Jordan and Iraq and is an arid region partially covered by scattered volcanic rock and gravel, and criss-crossed by numerous wadis, river valleys, which are dry except during the seasons that bring rain. The inhabitants of Northern Arabia are mostly bedouin tribesmen who roam the area seeking pasture for their herds.

The Great Deserts. The Rub al-Khali ("the Empty Quarter") is the larger of two great desert regions of Saudi Arabia. Located in the southeast, the Rub al-Khali is the largest accumulation of sand in the world, with dunes sometimes reaching heights of 1,000 feet. Two large oil deposits were

The Holy Kaaba in Mecca.



The city of Medina.



Jidda

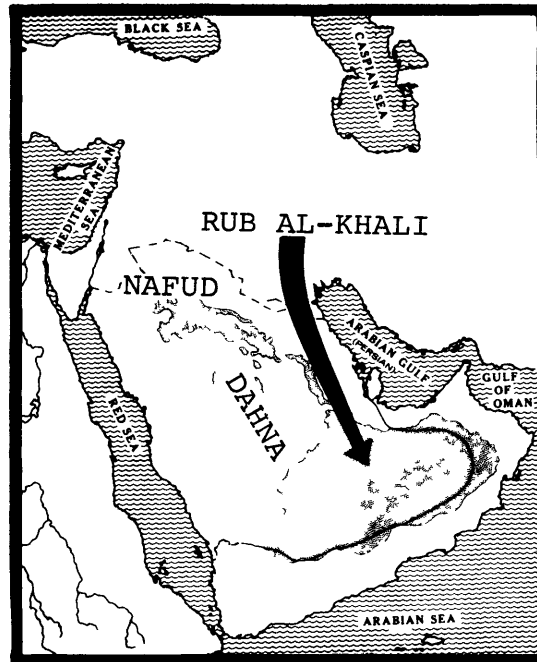


Riyadh



found there, and presently those oil fields are being worked.

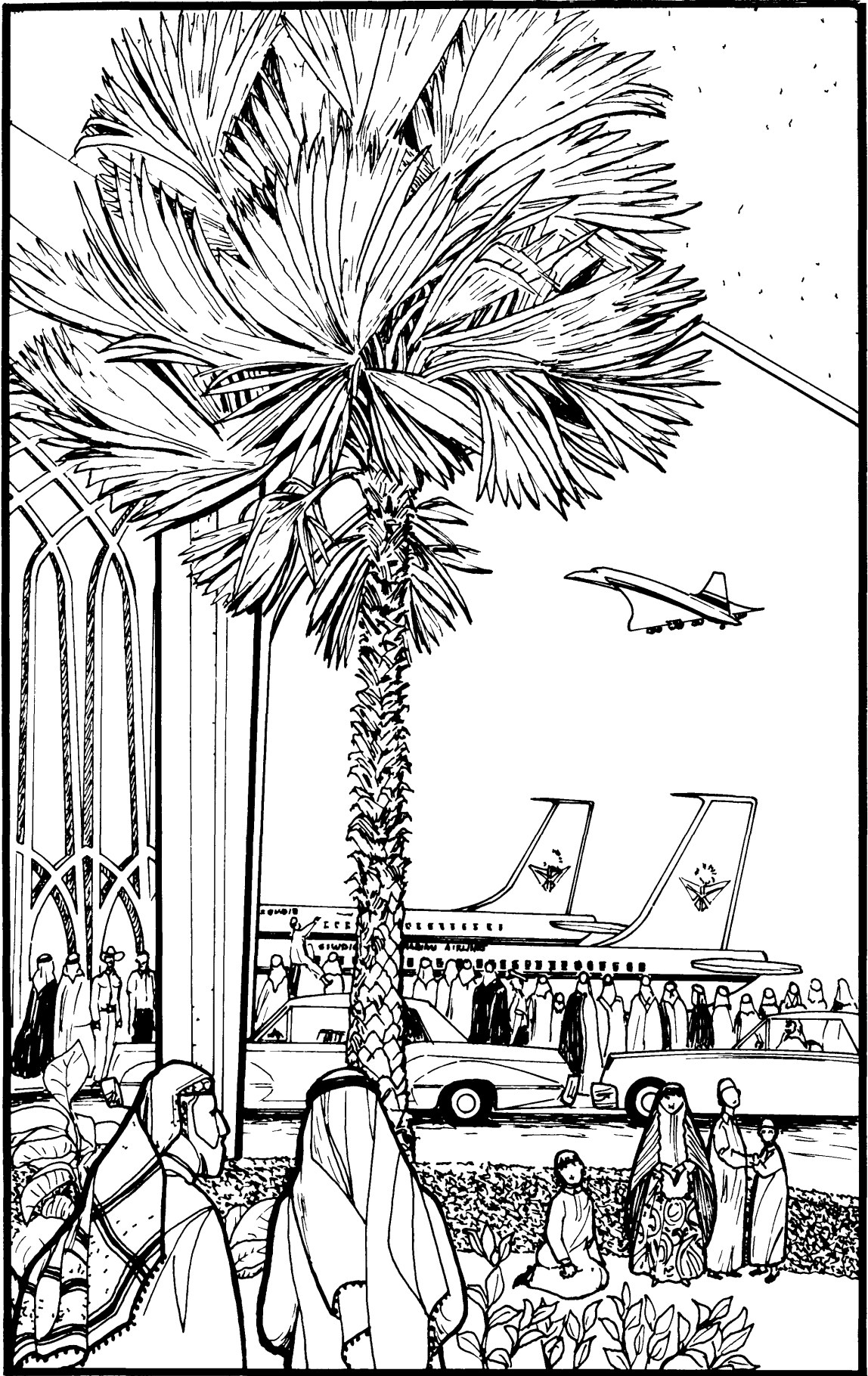
The Nafud, or "Great Nafud," is located in the north and, like the Rub al-Khali, is a vast sand desert, although not quite as extensive as the Rub al-Khali. The Dahna is a band of sand desert which runs almost the entire length of the country, connecting the Rub al-Khali and the Nafud. The Dahna forms a natural dividing line between Saudi Arabia's central plateau and eastern coastal plain.



THE CLIMATE

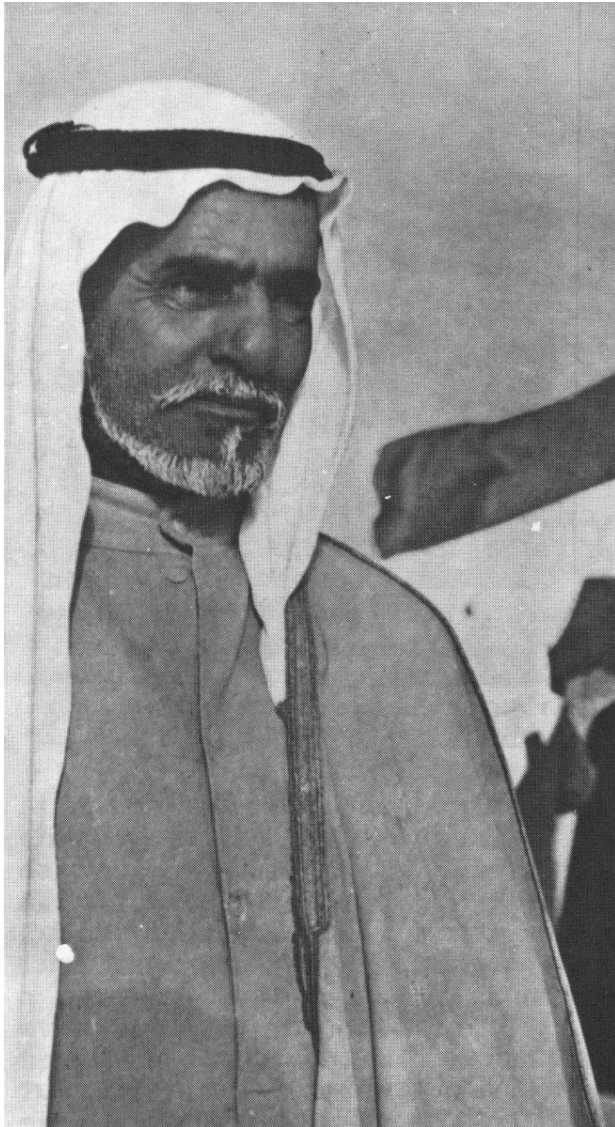
Except for the Red Sea and Arabian Gulf coastal areas, Saudi Arabia's climate is that of a desert--very dry, with hot daytime temperatures which drop rather abruptly after nightfall. It is a climate very much like that of Arizona or New Mexico. During the summer, a daytime temperature reading of 130°F is not uncommon in the Najd and other inland areas. Although the average daytime high temperature is around 110°F, night temperatures in those areas drop to 75°F or 80°F during the summer months. Inland temperatures during winter are usually 75°F to 80°F during the day, but often drop to around 30°F at night.

Humidity is virtually nonexistent in the interior of Saudi Arabia. Rainfall is very sparse, occurring only in winter and early spring. In fact, the only area in the entire country which has abundant rainfall, 12 inches annually, is the mountainous area of Asir. Summer temperatures along the Arabian Gulf and Red Sea coasts are usually slightly cooler than inland, but do not drop as low after dark as in the inland regions. The coastal areas have very high humidity, usually between 85% and 100%, which makes living along the coast much more uncomfortable than in the interior.



THE PEOPLE AND THEIR HISTORY

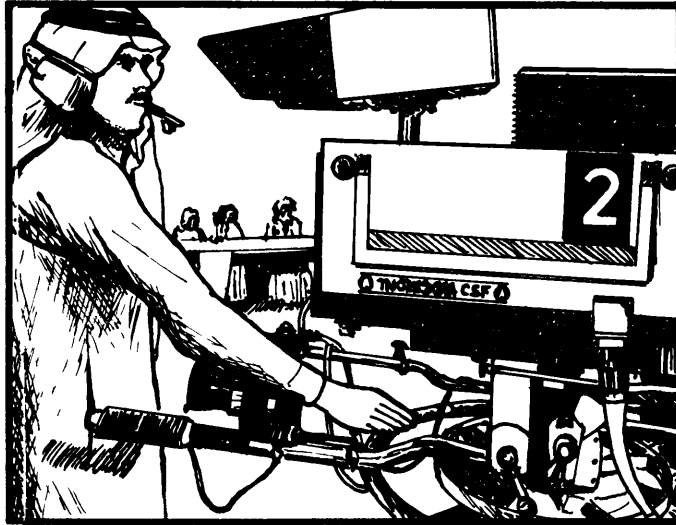
THE PEOPLE



The people of Saudi Arabia, as those of many other countries of the Middle East and North Africa, are Arabs. Until recently, most of them were bedouins--desert nomads--who raised camels and sheep. The Saudi people speak Arabic, an ancient and highly expressive language. Their religion is Islam and, as followers of this faith, they are called Moslems.

You will find that the Saudis are generally a hospitable and helpful people who tend to be mild-mannered. They want to have a good relationship with Americans, both on the official and personal levels. Their way of life and customs are very different from ours, but they respect the customs and values of Americans, and they expect Americans, in turn, to show them the same type of respect. Quite a few educated Saudis speak English; many of them have studied in the United States and know a great deal about Americans.

Although life in Saudi Arabia is greatly influenced by the values of an ancient, conservative, and religious society, the country is experiencing a period of rapid modernization because of the recent oil boom. The combination of the ancient and modern makes life in Saudi Arabia quite unique. You will see, for example, veiled women riding through the streets of Jidda in the back of a big luxury car, or you



might be surprised to see--when you watch the TV news in Riyadh--that the newscasters are wearing the traditional long Saudi garment (the thoob or thobe) and typical Arab headdress (the ghutra).

Native Saudis number about 5 or 6 million. There are a million or so foreigners living and working in the country. Most of these are from nearby Arab countries, especially Yemen and Iran, and places such as Pakistan, India, and Korea. They work mainly as skilled or unskilled laborers in the construction and petroleum industries, in commercial offices, and in small business concerns. There is also a large group of Americans in the country, numbering about 50,000, who work mainly with construction and development projects or as employees of Aramco.

THEIR HISTORY

Historically, the Arabian Peninsula (or Arabia, as it is often called) has been the home and realm of the bedouins. They have always grouped together as tribes, migrating with their animals in search of adequate water and pasturing land. The early Arabs also founded commercial centers, such as Mecca and Medina, which were located at key points along the caravan trade route between Yemen and the ancient Mediterranean world. With the rise of Islam during the seventh century A.D., Arabia's tribes conquered both neighboring and distant lands, and became the masters of a huge empire.



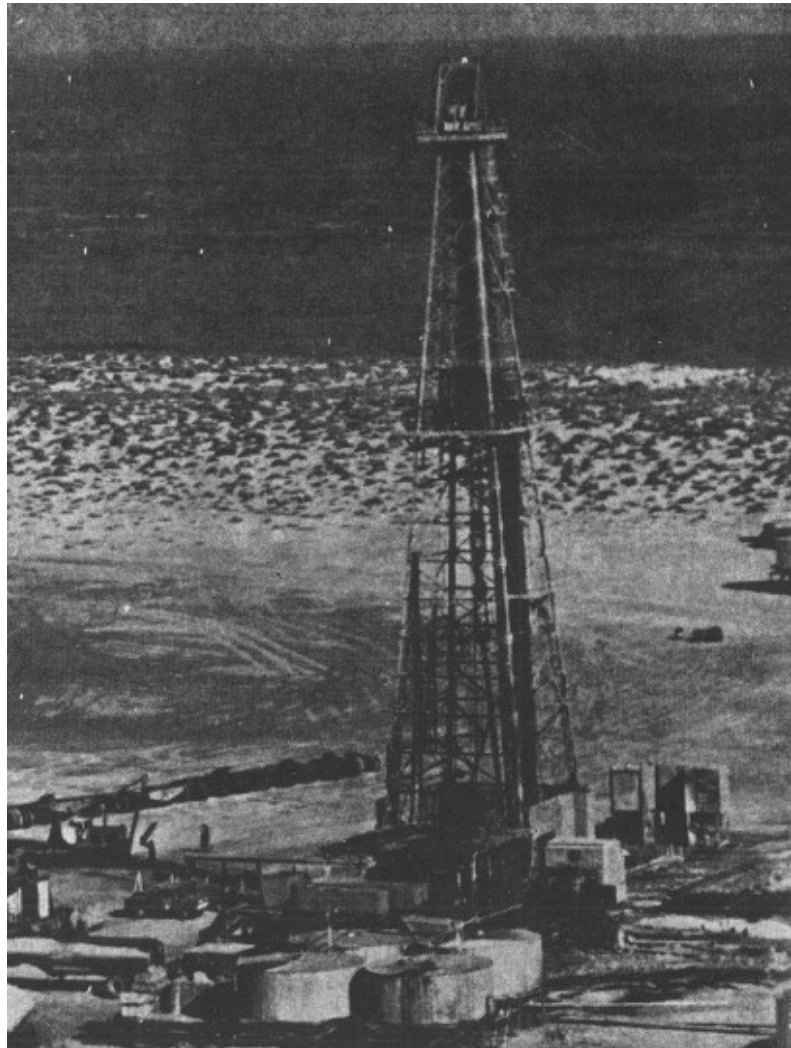
A bedouin prepares coffee for his guests.

At first, Medina was the capital of this empire, but soon thereafter, in A.D. 661, the Arab tribes transferred their capital outside the Arabian Peninsula to Damascus; then, in A.D. 749, to Baghdad, in Mesopotamia. The extension of Islam to these other areas was followed by a decline in the importance of the Arabian peninsula, and once again it became a remote area, isolated from the arena of important historical events. The Arab Islamic Empire then came under the rule, in turn, of Syrians, Mesopotamians, Egyptians, Persians, and Turks. During medieval and modern times, parts of Arabia, especially the Hejaz and Al-Hasa, sometimes came under the domination of the Mamlukes of Egypt and the Ottoman Turks.

In the eighteenth century, in the Najd area of central Arabia, an Islamic fundamentalist reform movement was born. This movement called upon all Moslems to once again closely follow the orthodox practices of Muhammad's time and adhere strictly to the word of the Koran, the holy book of the Moslems. This religious reform movement was espoused by Muhammad Ibn Saud, ruler of the Najd, and spread throughout

the area. After varying fortunes during the next century and a half, the Saudi dynasty and its followers managed, by 1932, to conquer all of the area which today comprises Saudi Arabia. Ever since, the country has been a monarchy ruled by the elected, or agreed upon, head of the Saudi family who is its king.

In the 1930s, American geologists discovered large deposits of oil in the eastern part of Saudi Arabia, and this was to determine the country's future. After World War II, Aramco, a conglomerate of several large American oil companies, began exploring, extracting and producing Saudi oil in huge quantities, and since then relations between Saudi Arabia and the United States have been very close. During the last twenty years or so, Saudi Arabia has become an extremely wealthy country due to its oil revenues. Because of this, the country has been modernizing at a very rapid rate, although it has remained a devoutly conservative Islamic country. After the oil embargo of 1973, Saudi Arabia has enormously increased both its political and economic influence on the international scene. Today, this once remote ancient land of the bedouins has become, in many ways, the most powerful Arab country in the world.



THE RELIGION

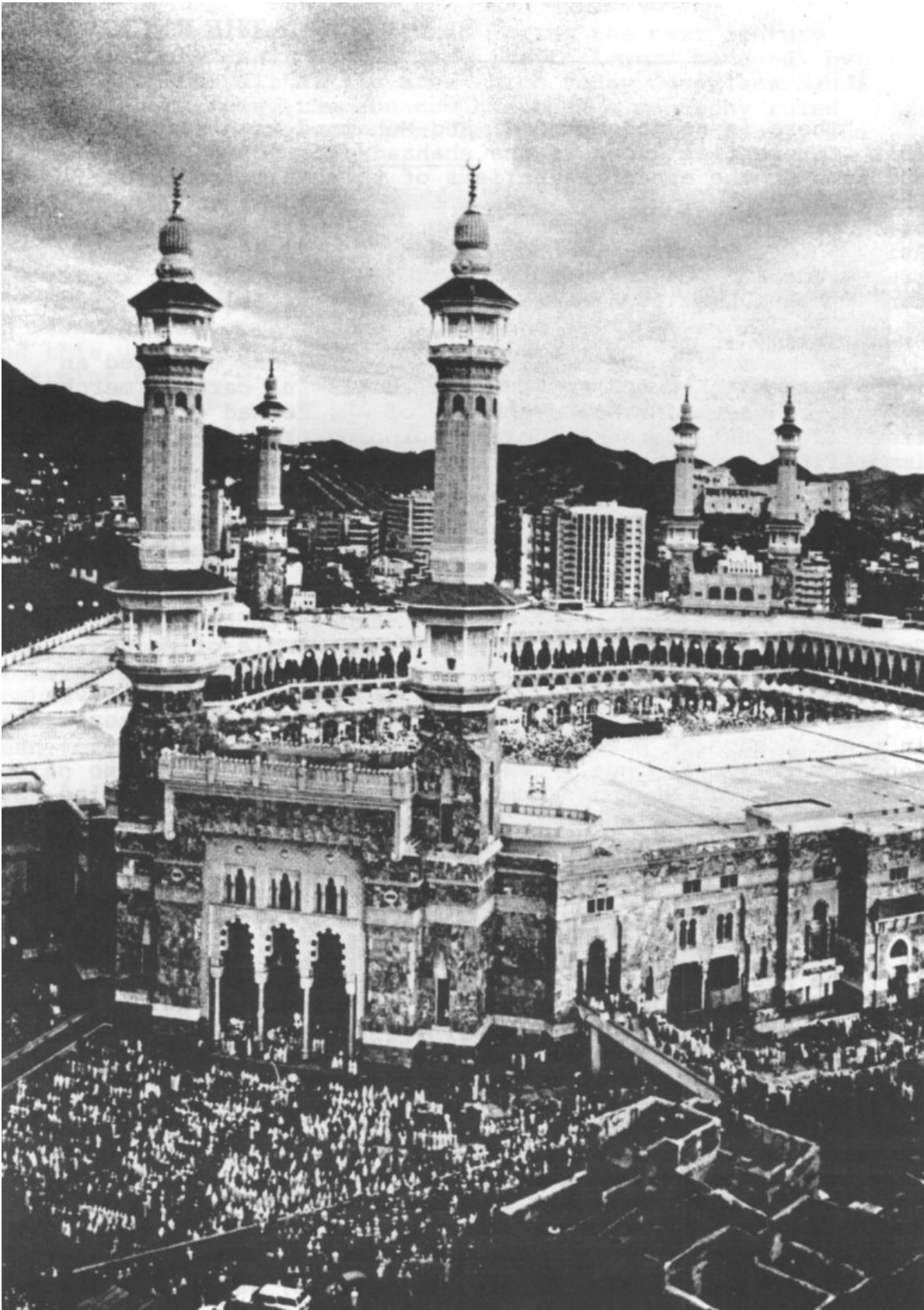
"There is no god but God, and Muhammad is his messenger." This statement is known as the shahaada, or "creed," of Islam, and sums up the essential beliefs of this major religion whose followers include all Saudis, most Arabs, and hundreds of millions of people of many other nationalities in Africa, Asia, and other parts of the world. As indicated in the creed, Moslems regard Muhammad as God's last and most important prophet. As such, he is the founder of Islam.

Muhammad was born in Mecca in A.D. 570 and survived an impoverished childhood to become a successful caravan merchant. By the time he had reached the age of 40, he had grown deeply troubled by the heathen, idol-worshipping practices and immorality among the people of his city and among the Arabian tribesmen who travelled the trade routes.

According to Islamic tradition, Muhammad was absorbed in meditation in a cave outside Mecca when, in the year 610, he was visited by the Angel Gabriel and received the first of a series of divine revelations. Through these revelations, God instructed Muhammad to preach to the people of Mecca that there existed only one God and that everybody, one day, would face the Day of Judgement and then enter either heaven or hell. Although Muhammad gained support from some people in Mecca, those in power there bitterly opposed him and denounced his teachings. Finally, Muhammad was forced to leave the city. He and a number of his followers travelled north to Medina (then known by its ancient name, Yathrib) and there, at the invitation of a group of the City's leading citizens, he organized the first Moslem community. Moslems refer to this journey, which took place in the year 622, as the hijra, and it marks the beginning of the Islamic calendar.

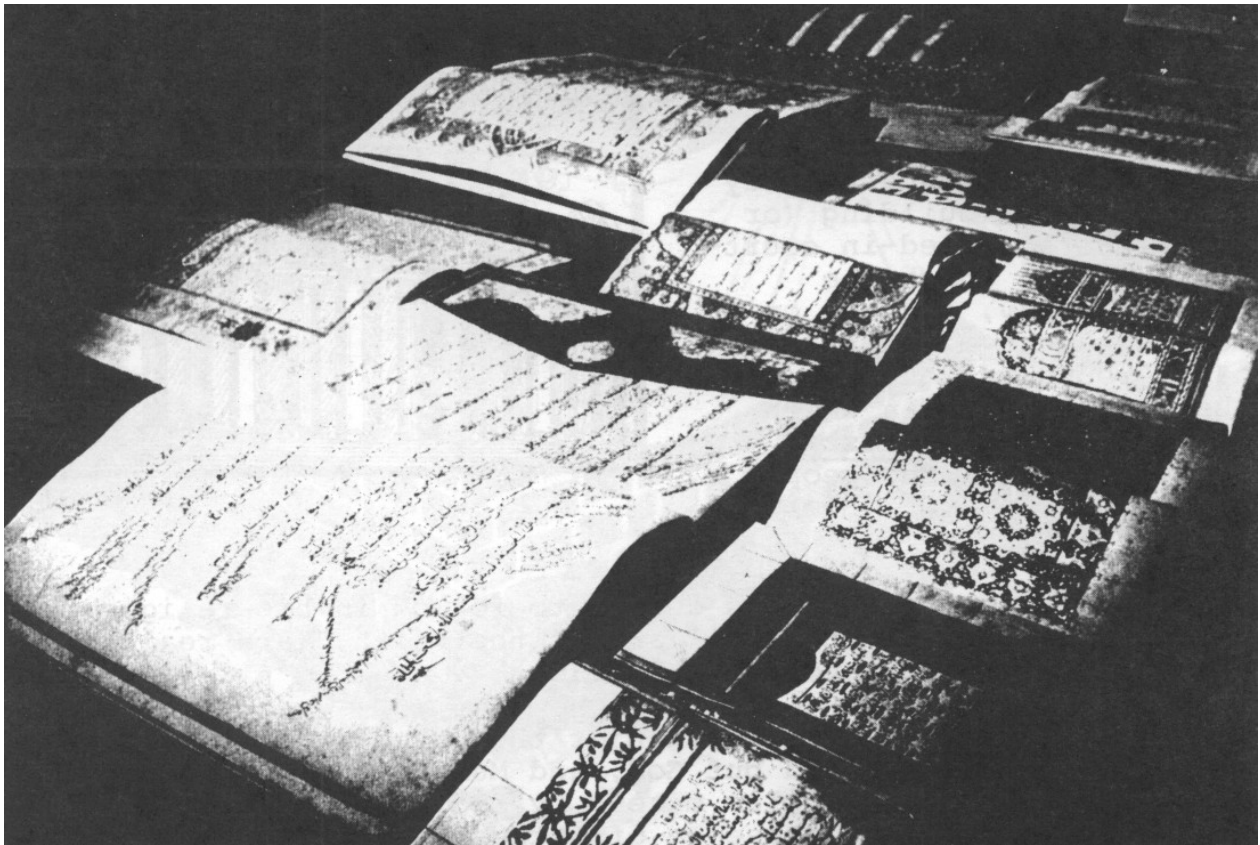
The Moslem community of Medina armed itself and became a formidable fighting force. After some years of raids and battles between the Moslems and the forces of Mecca, Mecca surrendered to the Moslems in 630 and accepted Islam. Islam then spread rapidly throughout the Arabian Peninsula and, not long after Muhammad's death in 632, Moslem raiders pushed into neighboring countries to the north. These raids became campaigns of conquest and, in a surprisingly short period of time, the Arabs overran and spread Islam to an area that stretched from the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean.

The Arabic word Islam means "submission to God," and the God in whom the Islamic faithful believe is, as stated in the shahaada (creed), a singular entity. The God of Islam is the creator of the universe and the force for good in all things.



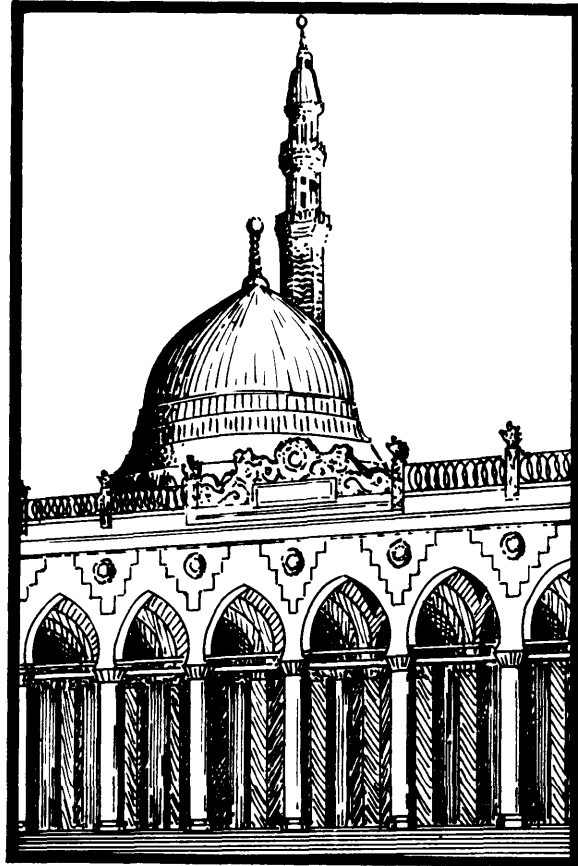
The Sacred Mosque, Mecca

The Islamic concept of God, known to Moslems as Allah (simply the Arabic word for "God") is not at all contrary to Judeo-Christian beliefs. In fact, Moslems recognize the sacred literature of Jews and Christians as valid statements of prophecy and revelation, and all of its well-known prophets of the Jews and Christians (especially Abraham, Moses, and Jesus) are also revered as prophets by Moslems. Moslems, however, regard Islam as a further development and ultimate perfect form of Judaism and Christianity. Jesus is seen by them not as the actual Son of God, or as God's equal, but as one of their major prophets.



The Koran, the holy book of the Moslems, is considered by them to be the very Word of God, revealed to Muhammad by the Angel Gabriel, and then orally passed on by Muhammad to mankind. In no sense do Moslems consider Muhammad to be the author of the Koran. The utterances of the Koran were only later put into writing by those who had committed its verses to memory. The verses are grouped together into chapters that are arranged according to their length, the longer chapters coming first. The Koran encompasses not only the events of Muhammad's times, but also those of the Old and New Testaments. It lays down all of the fundamental laws of Islam, and a thorough knowledge of it is traditionally considered to be a cornerstone of every Moslem's education.

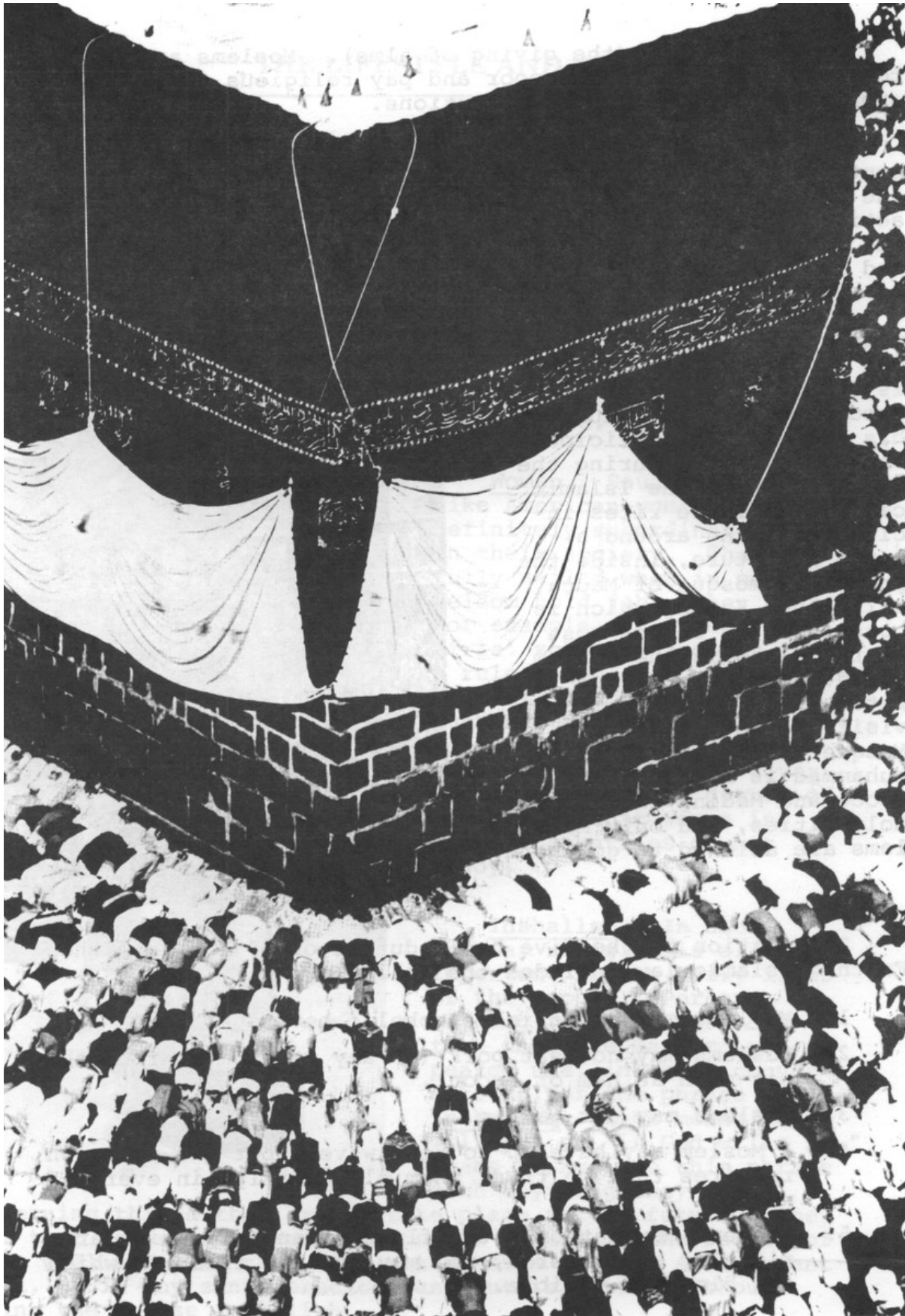
Although Islam has a great deal in common with Christianity and Judaism, it still has its own distinctive form and traditions. The Moslems' house of worship is called a mosque. Devout Moslems pray every day as individuals and, in addition to this, they worship together in a mosque on Friday. At this time, they are led in prayer by an imam, an individual who is not an ordained priest or minister but simply a member of the community who is widely respected for his knowledge of Islam. A mosque usually consists of a building (or sometimes a walled-in courtyard) inside which the faithful pray, and one or more adjacent minarets, a tall, round or square-shaped structure in which a man known as a muezzin ascends to call the people to prayer.



A Moslem has five basic duties to follow in his religion. These duties, called the "Pillars of the Faith," are really the basis of Islam, and are as follows:

1. The shahaada (recitation of the creed). This is the creed: "There is no god but God, and Muhammad is his messenger." One becomes a Moslem merely by reciting the creed sincerely, and in the presence of witnesses. It emphasizes the oneness of God and the special importance of Muhammad. Being a basic belief, the creed must be regularly repeated by every true Moslem as a reaffirmation of his faith.

2. The Salaat (prayer). A devout Moslem is expected to perform prayers five times a day at designated times, whether at home, at work, or at a mosque. In performing his prayers, he spreads out a special carpet, if available, faces in the direction of Mecca, and alternately stands, kneels, and prostrates himself as he recites prayer verses from the Koran. On Friday at noon, he prays together with his fellow believers in a mosque. After the Friday group prayer, there is usually a sermon by a religious leader.

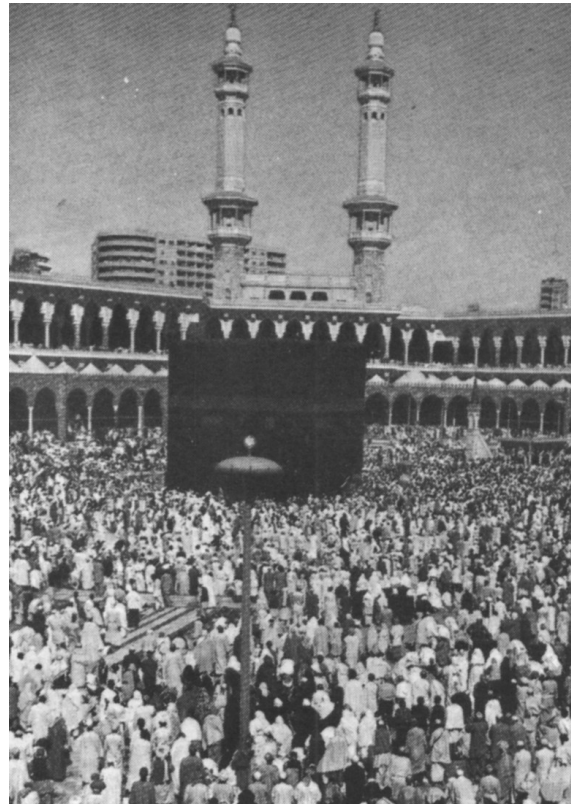


Pilgrims bow in prayer.

3. The zakaat (the giving of alms). Moslems are expected to both give alms to the poor and pay religious taxes to support their religious institutions.

4. The Sawm (fasting). During the Moslem calendar's month of Ramadan, every Moslem must totally abstain, during the daylight hours, from eating, drinking, smoking, and sexual activity. Expectant and nursing mothers, people travelling, the sick, and others in certain hardship categories are exempted from fasting.

5. The Haj (the pilgrimage to Mecca). Every Moslem who can afford the journey is expected to travel to Mecca at least once during his lifetime to participate in special rites during the final month of the Islamic calendar. These rites include circling around a large structure, inside the principal mosque of Mecca, called the Kaaba, which is considered to be the most sacred place in the Moslem world. The pilgrimage rites are concluded with a visit to the Prophet's Mosque in Medina, where Muhammad is buried. Both Mecca and Medina are Islamic holy cities, and only Moslems are allowed to go there.



In addition to the five basic duties or "Pillars of the Faith," Islamic law includes the following:

1. Moslems may not drink alcoholic beverages.
2. Moslems may not eat pork (or any other meat from the pig such as ham or bacon).
3. Moslems may not gamble.
4. A Moslem may have up to four wives, but his religion requires that he treat them all equally, in every way.
5. Moslems may eat only the flesh of animals which are ritually slaughtered, and may not eat flesh in which the blood is visible.

THE LIFESTYLE AND SOCIAL CUSTOMS

The Saudi lifestyle is quite different from that of Americans. In general, Americans live a type of life which is fast-moving, fast-changing, and closely tied to advanced technology, while the Saudi way of life flows along in a much more leisurely fashion, much as it has since ancient times. This is not to say that the Saudis do not want progress for their country. They do indeed want progress, and fast change is taking place all over Saudi Arabia. But the Saudis want mainly industrial and technological change, and do not welcome any social changes that would conflict with the orthodox beliefs of Islam. This is especially true where the traditional status of women is concerned.



Women. Saudi women, unlike American women, are very definitely subordinate to men in their society. They are fully veiled when in public; seldom hold jobs other than, for example, as teachers in girls' schools; and are, as a rule, completely segregated from all men except their husbands and close relatives. As Saudis view it, though, this subordinate role gives their women a high degree of protection that women in Western countries do not enjoy.

Inshallah. In Saudi Arabia, religion is all-important in the daily lives of the people. Perhaps nothing reveals this more than does the Saudis' repeated use, in their conversations, of the phrase inshallah, which means "God willing" or "if God wills it." Arabs always use this phrase with anything they say

concerning things that are to take place in the future. They feel that whatever takes place in the future is the result of God's will and that they dare not presume to make a statement about, or in any sense predict, any future action without adding the phrase inshallah.

Ritual greetings and polite phrases. The Saudis' social customs are essentially the traditional ones of Arab bedouins and townspeople, strongly influenced by Islam. Saudi life revolves around these ancient customs and conventions to a degree that Americans will find quite surprising. This fact is nowhere more apparent than in the vast numbers and variety of ritual phrases, with fixed responses, with which Saudis greet each other, wish each other well, show hospitality, and so forth. In fact, they have standard ritual-type phrases appropriate for almost any situation which occurs in life. Saudis do not expect Americans or other foreigners in their country to know all their customs or to master all their polite phrases. But for an American in Saudi Arabia, knowing at least some of them will make a great deal of difference and create a very favorable impression, even if he has little or no command of Arabic.

There is one Saudi custom which Americans do need to be aware of when having business or official dealings with Saudis. Social etiquette in Saudi Arabia requires that, when two people meet, for any sort of appointment, they initiate their conversation by profusely greeting each other, inquiring about each other's health, and generally engaging in considerable small talk before taking up the business at hand. The American approach of "getting right down to business" is considered very rude in Saudi Arabia and very likely to bring negative results.

Hospitality. Probably the most outstanding feature of Arab customs is that of generous hospitality. To the Arabs, extending good hospitality is more than just an admirable thing to do--it is a matter of honor and also a sacred duty. The reason for this is that the Arab bedouins, especially those in



the Arabian Peninsula, have always lived in a desert environment in which travelling nomads have depended upon each other's hospitality in order to survive thirst, hunger, and sudden raids or enemy attacks. In the course of time, these essentially bedouin customs of hospitality became common to all Arabs, including villagers and city people.

The result of all this is that when a Saudi extends hospitality to you, he does it not only to make you, a guest in his country, feel at home, he also does it because his customs and culture require it and it demonstrates his virtue to do so. It is for these reasons that most Arabs you meet will turn out to be very skilled in matters of hospitality and we, as Americans, can learn a great deal from them in this regard.

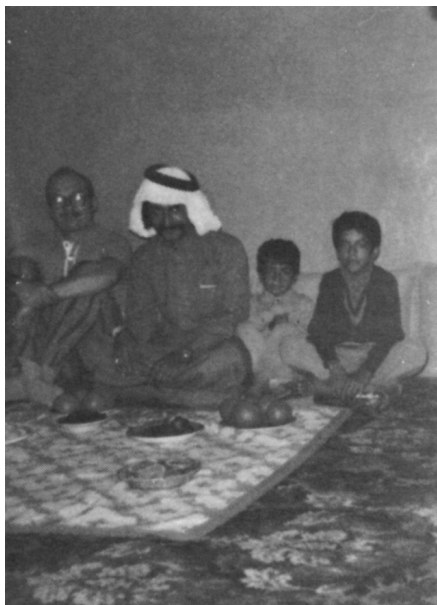
How is this Arab hospitality expressed? For example, usually when an Arab reaches for his pack of cigarettes, he will offer you one before taking one himself. If you refuse, he may insist once or twice because this is his custom, and it does not mean that he is trying to "push" his cigarettes on you. In fact, when a person is offered something, it is considered good manners to refuse the first time, and accept only after the person offering has "insisted" that it be accepted. The same rule holds when a person is a dinner guest in an Arab home. The host will "insist" repeatedly that the guest eat more, but this does not mean that he really expects the guest to consume a mountain of food. This insistence and abundance of food are meant to display the host's hospitality toward the guest. A wise procedure for the guest to follow would be to eat small amounts of food from each platter or bowl (since more courses might follow) and profusely thank the host for his generosity (karam).

A meal in a Saudi home will provide a few other surprises to the uninitiated American. Probably the first thing that will happen is that a servant or relative of the host will come around with a large brass pot, pour a small amount of hot, bitter coffee into a small round cup which has no handle, and hand it to the guest to drink up on the spot. Usually a guest will have two or three cups of such coffee--it is considered rude to drink more than that. The coffee, however, will keep being poured unless the guest, when handing the cup back to the coffee pourer, shakes the cup from side to side to indicate that he has had enough.

In addition to this, you will find that many Saudis do not use tables and chairs in their homes; they sit on carpets on the floor, prop up their backs and elbows with cushions, and



when eating, they may use only their hands (it is for this reason that they wash their hands both before and after a meal). An American who is used to sitting at a table in a chair and using silverware might find this situation to be a difficult one. One way to prepare for it would be to practice sitting on the floor with your legs crossed (at first your legs will get very tired, but you will soon get



used to it), and eating ribs and rice out of a large bowl or from a big platter. Practice taking a handful of rice with your right hand and rolling it into a small ball and then eating it. After you have learned to eat the Arab way and have had a meal in a Saudi home, you will have one more surprise coming. After the meal, everyone goes home! There is little or no after-dinner conversation; Saudis consider the meal to be the climax of the evening.

THINGS TO DO; THINGS NOT TO DO

Now that you know that a Saudi's cultural heritage and customs are quite different from those of an American, what can you do to get along with the Saudis while in their country? The main thing is to respect their customs and to learn something about them, so that you can do a few things the Saudi way. The "things to do" listed below will help you win rapport among Saudis. The list of "things not to do" can help you avoid serious blunders that might offend Saudis.

THINGS TO DO

Use the Arabic that you have learned. Most Saudis do not speak English, so you will need to speak to them in Arabic. Saudi officials and military officers quite often do speak good English, but they, too, will highly appreciate your efforts to speak their language.

Learn as much as you can about Islam. Many Saudis enjoy talking about religion with foreigners after they have become friends. Quite often they are interested in comparing Christianity with Islam. The more you know about Islam, the easier it will be to talk about this subject. (Be sure, though, not to show a negative attitude toward their religion.) Also, understanding Islam will make it generally much easier for you to live and function in Saudi Arabia.

Offer refreshments to visitors. At home or at work, remember to offer Saudi visitors coffee, tea, or a soft drink upon their arrival. And offer cigarettes to any Saudis who might be in your presence when you wish to smoke.

Offer to let Saudis go first. According to Arab etiquette, polite individuals gesture to others to go first when going through a door, getting into a car, entering a line, or taking seats, and so on. This often leads to a moment of standoff as each person tries to be polite, but you will probably be "out-insisted" by your Saudi companions. It is important, however, that you make this gesture since you will have shown the type of courtesy that Saudis appreciate.

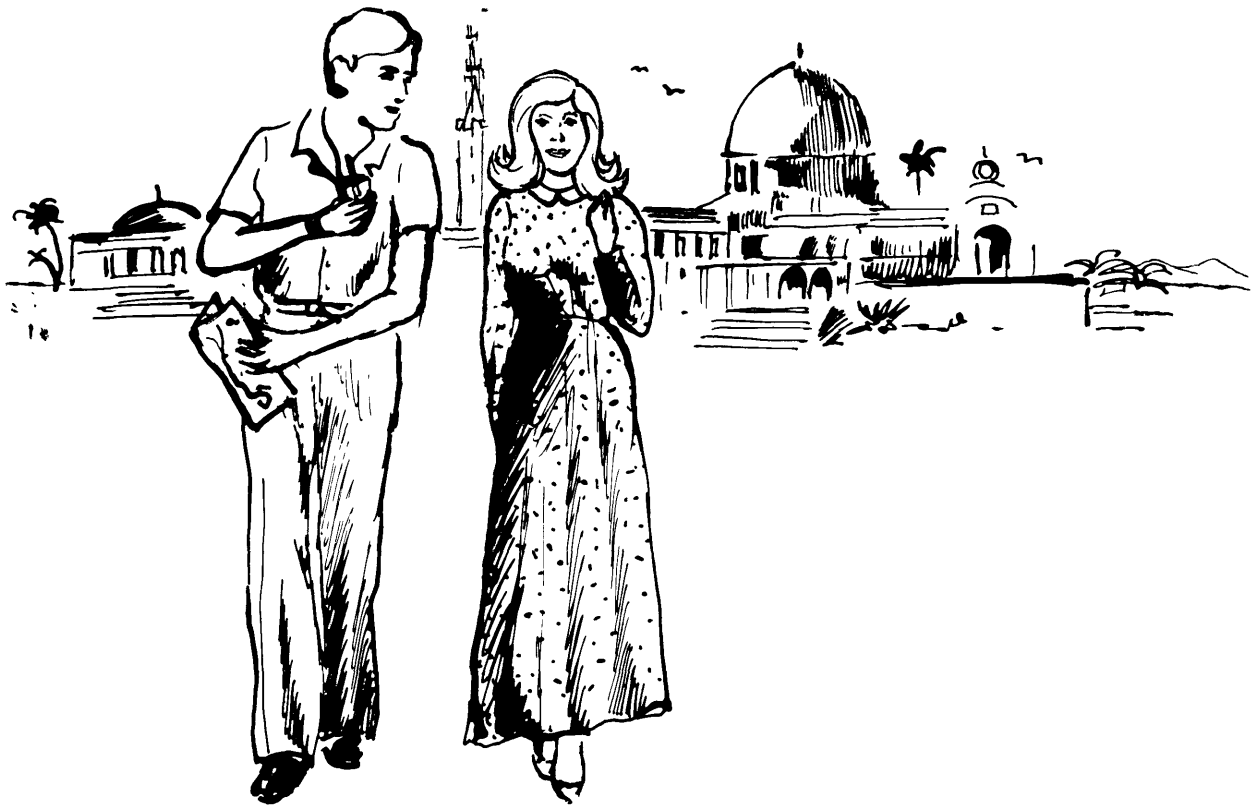
Pay for everyone. In any Arab country, when you invite one or more persons to accompany you to a restaurant to dine, to have refreshments, or anything of this sort, you must pay the bill for everyone. Arabs almost never follow the system of Dutch treat or "separate checks." Whoever invites, or even merely suggests the activity, always pays.

Learn to eat Saudi style. This means learning to sit on the floor, with your legs crossed, and to eat with your right hand. Most Saudis eat in this traditional Arab fashion, but many who have been abroad have adopted the custom of using chairs, tables, and silverware during meals.

Develop a taste for Arab food. Roasted meats, rice, kebob, and Arab bread are some of the specialties. Give everything a try. You will like most Arab food right away. If you don't care for some dishes, you should try them again later on. Many Americans find that they develop a taste for foreign foods only after frequent samplings over a period of time.

Provide your Saudi guests with plenty of food. When Saudis invite guests to their homes, they provide more food than the guests could possibly eat. This is done to demonstrate generosity and hospitality. You should do the same when you are the host.

Dress modestly, especially in public. Men should always wear long pants and a shirt, even when it is quite hot. Women should wear long, loose dresses with high necklines and long sleeves. To disregard this convention will offend the Saudis and, in the very conservative areas, could even lead to trouble for you.



"When in Saudi Arabia, do as the Saudis." When you visit a Saudi home and all the guests remove their shoes before entering a room, remove your shoes also. This is a sign of respect for your host.

Accept no more and no less than two cups of Arab coffee. The way to refuse politely is to cover the cup with your hand, or shake it from side to side indicating you have had enough. Also, drink tea if it is offered to you. You are being honored as a guest.

Be mindful of the Saudi religious morality police. Their express purpose is to maintain morality. You could be accused or punished in public if an act is regarded as immoral in their eyes.

Sit properly. According to Arab customs, the soles of your shoes should never face a person. This is considered extremely bad manners, especially among older Saudis. American women should always keep their legs covered.

Always respect the Saudis' customs and performance of their religious duties. Saudi customs are hallowed by tradition and must be observed by Saudis. For example, Islam expects its followers to pray regularly, wherever they might be, and in Saudi Arabia both the government and society require their people to adhere to this. Therefore you, as an American, must respect a Saudi's need to perform this and any other religious duties.

THINGS NOT TO DO

Do not attempt to enter the holy cities of Mecca and Medina unless you are a Moslem. It is absolutely forbidden for non-Moslems to set foot in either place.

Do not attempt to enter a mosque. In Saudi Arabia, normally only Moslems may enter a mosque. It may happen that a Saudi will invite you to go to a mosque. In such a case, be sure to remove your shoes before you go in.

Do not eat, drink, or smoke in public during Ramadan. Since Moslems are not allowed to eat, drink, or smoke during the daylight hours of this month of fasting, an American should also abstain from these activities in the presence of Saudis in order not to offend them. Also, he or she should avoid doing these things even in private if Saudi visitors or co-workers are present, and certainly should not offer them a cigarette or anything to eat or drink.

CULTURAL NOTES

Do not engage Saudis in political arguments. Avoid doing this in public especially, and never make any unfavorable comments to Saudis about their country's royal family or internal affairs.

Do not accept or give food or drink with your left hand. In the Middle East, the left hand is used for purposes of personal hygiene and is not offered in any way to someone else. If you are left-handed, you will especially have to remember to be careful to observe this custom; otherwise you may insult a Saudi.

Do not appear to be in a hurry when you are among Saudis. For example, during a business appointment or social visit with a Saudi, do not look at your watch or otherwise act as if you have little time to talk. Saudis can be very offended by this. Time is much less rigidly scheduled in Saudi Arabia than in the U.S.; so, in any case, you will have little need to be in a hurry.

Do not openly admire a Saudi's possessions. If you do, he may feel compelled to observe an ancient custom and give you the object you admired as a gift, either on the spot or by delivering it to you later.

When in public, do not demonstrate affection for a spouse or friend of the opposite sex. Saudis never do this, and find such behavior quite unacceptable. You may, however, occasionally see Arab men walking hand-in-hand with each other. This indicates nothing more than the fact that they are good friends. If you should become good friends with a Saudi and he should reach out and hold your hand, try not to be startled. Accept it as the Saudis' customary demonstration of friendship. Keep in mind also that sexual relations between unmarried persons are strictly against the law in Saudi Arabia.



CULTURAL NOTES

Do not photograph people without their permission. Many Saudis associate cameras with the "evil eye." Cameras should not be carried with the cover open and ready for picture-taking. In fact, in some towns, picture-taking of any kind is ill-advised and may result in either your camera or its film being taken away from you. Before attempting to take pictures at marketplaces or other public places, it is best to ask around and try to learn what the reaction of the local people generally is toward picture-taking.

Do not photograph airports, post facilities, or government or military installations. Saudi airports are considered military installations. Saudis are very security conscious, and even picture-taking while flying over the country is forbidden.

Do not bring to Saudi Arabia any items which are either illegal or considered offensive to Saudis. This refers mainly to alcoholic beverages and books and magazines of an explicit sexual nature. It also includes books, magazines, or any publications containing material which is critical of the Arabs, Islam, and Saudi Arabia.

Do not show any type of--even very casual--interest in any Saudi woman. This means do not speak to them, stare at them, or photograph them. The only exceptions might be Saudi (or other Arab) women working in hospitals, or in business offices. But you should never try to date them. When visiting in a Saudi home, never ask about or show interest in the female members of the family. It's quite unlikely that you will even see them. Also, if you invite a Saudi family or couple to your place, it is very probable that only the male head of the family will come. This may not apply in the case of a Saudi family or couple that has been abroad and learned to speak English. They might follow Western social customs when with Americans.

Do not urge an Arab to remove his traditional headgear when visiting you. A Saudi considers his headcloth (ghutra) or skull-cap to be an integral part of his outfit and normally takes it off only when undressing.

Do not openly show anger or curse in any fashion; you can be jailed for this.

Do not get overly excited in public or burst out with loud congratulations upon yours or anyone else's good fortune. If you want to celebrate, do it quietly.

Do not touch or pet a dog in front of a Saudi. Dogs are considered unclean by Moslem law.

Do not walk in front of someone praying, or step onto a prayer rug at any time.

Do not point your finger or a pencil at anyone while speaking, or beckon anyone with your finger. It is considered a threat, and only animals are treated in this manner.

Do not use nicknames, slang, or insulting words, even jokingly.

Do not act as an arbitrator between Saudis having an argument or fight.

Do not voluntarily get involved in social incidents or accidents, even to give first aid. This can lead to complications.

Do not refer to a Saudi as a "Mohammedan." Use the term "Moslem."

SOME PRACTICAL TIPS

Driving. As in the western United States, virtually all ground transportation in Saudi Arabia is by car, and distances are such that driving is essential. U.S. military personnel are allotted, on a pro-rata basis, sedans and jeeps for official and personal use. Driving in Saudi Arabia is much more of an adventurous undertaking than in the United States since Saudis drive considerably faster and more unpredictably than American drivers. One must learn to drive by "instinct" and make much more effort to judge the intentions of other drivers and pedestrians.

Good highways exist between major cities, but any local excursions into the desert must be done by jeep; and even then, you run the danger of getting stuck in the sand unless you are familiar with the area and the jeep trails. If you are driving in the desert it is the custom to help a person in trouble. Driving long distances between cities in Saudi Arabia must be accompanied by careful planning, since service stations and rest stop locations are few and far between. Soon after arriving in the country, you will be issued a Saudi driver's license. Women (whether Saudi or foreign) are not allowed to drive in Saudi Arabia.)

Travel. Travel between the various bases in Saudi Arabia is accomplished on U.S. military planes (small planes and cargo transports) on a space-available basis. Saudia Airlines flies to all major cities and towns in the country. Military hops are also available to Europe for "rest and recreation" purposes.

Eating out. Most quality restaurants in Saudi Arabia are operated by non-Saudis and cater mainly to foreigners who work in the country. Thus, they are "foreign" restaurants serving mainly non-native food and have menus in both Arabic and English. The prices can be very high, with evening meals usually costing 20 dollars or more. You will discover that your mess hall serves food which is just as good and costs only about one-eighth as much. Probably the best and most interesting meal to have in Saudi Arabia is the traditional Saudi or bedouin-type meal which consists of roasted meat, rice, and fruit--all served on huge platters placed in front of you. Such meals are not served in restaurants, but rather in private homes and at outdoor gatherings, and you must be invited to them.

Shopping. Although you may have commissaries and PXs in which to shop, you or your wife will find it interesting to browse through the local stores for food or souvenirs. You will find many small food markets in which to shop, and in cities such as Riyadh, Jidda and Khobar (near Dhahran), you will be able to shop in supermarkets. You should have no trouble finding interesting items to buy as souvenirs; there will be so many! Bargaining is accepted in most of the smaller shops, but is not done in supermarkets. Local fresh produce is quite reasonable; however, as in most countries, imported goods are always very expensive. Check on restrictions by Saudi Arabia of removing antiques and other items from the country.

Servants. Wherever you are stationed in Saudi Arabia, you may be provided with a male servant who will clean your quarters and perform small jobs which you might request. He will usually come in the morning and leave as soon as his work is done. Except for a few Saudis who work in the Dhahran area, most of these servants are from Yemen, the Sudan, Pakistan, or Thailand.

What to wear. Civilian dress in Saudi Arabia is very informal (almost no one ever wears a tie) and consists of light, summer clothing. You should, however, bring along a sweater or jacket to wear at night during the winter or at various times during the year in the higher elevations such as Taif and Khamis Mushayt.

Hobbies. While stationed in Saudi Arabia, it is a good idea to find a hobby and cultivate it, since the country has few tourist attractions and little opportunity for entertainment. You may well be stationed in a place, such as Riyadh or Dhahran, where there are many facilities set up to meet the needs of American servicemen. But, on the other hand, you might end up in an area where there are few, if any, Americans and limited recreational facilities. In such a case, a hobby will greatly help pass the time.

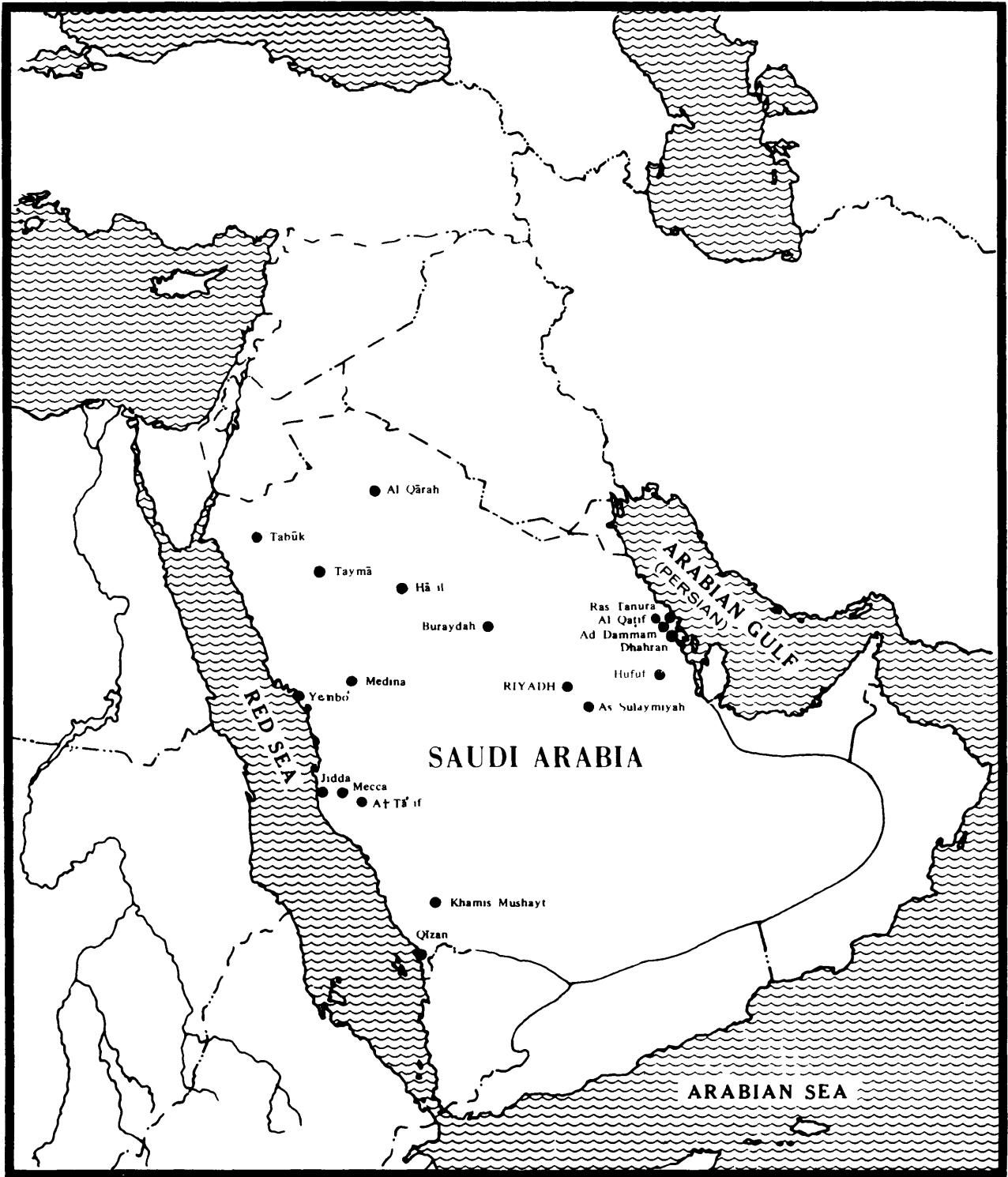
Telephone System. Saudi Arabia has just completed an intra-kingdom telephone system in which anyone can call within the country on a commercial phone. Also, commercial, direct dial calls from the United States are available to a Saudi resident phone.

YOUR LIVING SITUATION

There are six places in Saudi Arabia where U.S. military personnel are stationed: Dhahran, Riyadh, Jidda, Taif, Tabuk, and Khamis Mushayt. The great majority of personnel is in Dhahran and Riyadh, with only small detachments stationed in the other four locations. The following is a brief description of the living conditions in each place. Major private construction programs are underway which will greatly increase the availability of modern buildings throughout each city.

Dhahran is located on the Arabian Gulf, in Eastern Arabia (Al-Hasa) and has a very hot and humid climate. U.S. military personnel live on a medium-sized air base which is shared by the Saudi, American, and British military, each group having its own facilities. The BOQ and EM barracks are old, but quite adequate; higher ranking officers with dependents have separate housing. The dining hall is a very nice and large one. Recreational facilities include television (an Aramco channel which broadcasts in English), pool tables, a swimming pool, two tennis courts, a movie theater, and sailing on the Gulf at a location known as Half-Moon Bay for men only. The base also has a commissary and medium-sized PX. The Dhahran International Airport is literally next door, and both the Aramco compound and the interesting little town of Al Khobar are but a few miles away. Local shopping opportunities are available in Al Khobar, as well as in Damman, a large town about 15 miles away from the base. The Dhahran base serves as the administrative headquarters for USMTM (the United States Military Training Mission) in Saudi Arabia.

Riyadh, the capital, is located in the Najd, in the country's interior and in the middle of the desert, and thus has a very hot, extremely dry climate like that of southern Arizona. U.S. military personnel in Riyadh are attached either as advisors to the Modernization Project of SANG (the Saudi National Guard), to USMTM, Army Corps of Engineers, or AF Logistical Command. Personnel associated with SANG live in a beautiful, newly-built compound of their own which has superb family-type housing (bungalows and villas). USMTM also has a large, modern compound of its own with BOQ-type housing, family-style houses, and a small, but very good mess hall. Both the SANG and USMTM compounds have very good and complete recreational facilities: each has tennis courts, a modern swimming pool, pool tables, a movie theater, and TV which shows a large variety of video-taped American programs. Good commissary and BX facilities are available about five miles away from the compounds, and other shopping opportunities can be had in downtown Riyadh. The two compounds, about a mile apart, are located in the city, not far from the airport. Other personnel assigned as TAFT (Technical Advisory Field Teams) members usually live in 2-8 unit villas in the local community.



Jidda is located in the Hejaz on the Red Sea and has a climate much like that of Dhahran. U.S. military personnel here--few in number--live in a small apartment building less than a mile from the center of the city. Living and recreational facilities are very modest, but satisfactory. The apartment building has a pool table, TV video-tape showings, and movies. The mess hall is quite adequate, and a tiny PX in the building sells basic necessities. All other shopping must be done on the economy and, although shopping opportunities are good in Jidda, the prices are extremely high, as everywhere in Saudi Arabia. This area has a very good, inexpensive recreational facility (swimming, waterskiing, skin-diving) called Jidda-by-the-Sea which is run by the Corps of Engineers and which is available to all U.S. military personnel.

Taif is located in the Hejaz in the mountains not far from Mecca, and thus has a very good, mild climate. Most U.S. military personnel in Taif live in the small USMTM, Corps and TAFT detachment compound on the outskirts of town, but some are housed, as the need arises, in corporation-owned or leased modern villas in various places around the city. The compound mess hall is quite small, but good; a very modest PX caters to basic needs. Recreational facilities in the compound consist chiefly of a tennis court, pool table, and room for showing movies. The compound housing is old and anything but plush. Taif's very large and colorful marketplace, or souk, is the highlight of the town and provides very interesting (but expensive) shopping opportunities.



Khamis Mushayt is located on a plateau high in the mountains of Asir not far from Yemen, and about 25 miles away from Abha, Asir's major city. The climate is very similar to that of Taif. The very small number of U.S. military personnel stationed here live on a large Saudi base similar to the one in Tabuk, and occupy modest, but adequate, housing facilities. Military personnel have very good recreational facilities at their disposal (tennis courts, swimming pool, movies, pool tables, ping-pong). Mess facilities are operated by private foreign corporations working with Saudi military. Fairly good shopping opportunities are available in the souk of Abha and in the town of Khamis Mushayt. The surrounding area is quite hilly and interesting.

Tabuk is located in Northern Arabia in the desert not far from Jordan, and has a climate similar to that of Riyadh, but slightly cooler. There are very few U.S. military personnel stationed here. All of them live on a large Saudi military base about six or seven miles away from the small town of Tabuk. The housing and recreational facilities (tennis courts, movies, pool tables, swimming pool) are quite satisfactory, and the mess hall, which belongs to a private corporation, is outstanding. Shopping opportunities are limited to the stores in Tabuk where there is little variety of goods, all of which are quite expensive. From Tabuk, it is possible to drive to Aqaba, on the Red Sea in Jordan, where seaside resort facilities are available.

NOTES FOR FEMALE DEPENDENTS

While in the Middle East, you--the American woman--should be aware that as a representative of the United States it will be important to use good judgment, tact, and diplomacy in your daily associations with the Saudis, for you and your family will be observed through the eyes of a people who, for centuries, have maintained rigid Islamic laws and traditions.

You will find your status as an individual radically changed. The many legal and religious restrictions imposed on Moslem women will most likely be imposed on you also. For the Westerner this change will be dramatic. You will have to adjust your frame of mind to the differences in living conditions, social values, customs, and traditions. At first the adjustment may not be easy.

In addition to the guidelines below, you should become thoroughly familiar with the section "Things to Do; Things Not to Do." They are intended to help you and your children avoid situations which can be misinterpreted as disrespectful to your host country, or be considered in violation of Moslem traditions.

I. Remember always to

a. be aware that men and women in the Saudi social community are two distinct and separate groups. They do not usually intermingle at public or social functions;

b. seek opportunities to participate in social activities for women. There are many volunteer groups and international women's clubs which you can join;

c. offer extra servings and refreshment at least three times when you have guests. Since Saudi custom considers it rude to accept immediately, most Saudis will refuse the first few times;

d. bargain in a Souk. Saudi vendors expect this, regardless of the time and effort it takes to agree on a price;

e. know where your children are all times. They should be discouraged from riding unaccompanied in a taxi, or wandering through the towns without letting you or their friends know exactly where they are going, with whom, and when they are expected to return;

f. caution your children against making derogatory remarks or making fun of any Saudi person or situation;

g. keep a close watch on your children when you are out in public and discourage any mischief-making.

II. Remember NEVER to

a. drive a car. It is against the law for women to drive;

b. discuss the issue of women's rights, equality, or liberation with either men or women;

c. speak to Arab men unless you have been properly introduced;

d. stare at Saudi men, or stare at veiled women or persons who are praying;

e. visit Arab homes between 2:00 and 4:00 p.m. as this is the customary time for rest and relaxation;

f. linger beyond dinner when you are invited to a Saudi home. Dinner is the final climax of an evening of conversation and entertainment;

g. offer a Saudi any liquor or pork, as these are forbidden by the Moslem religion.

III. Some Suggestions

All the precautionary measures you would normally take in the United States for the safety and security of your family would, of course, apply while you are in any foreign country.

If you are expecting a servant, or men to service your household utilities, always make sure they show the proper identification; your children should be made aware that they are never to accept offers of transportation from strangers; always keep your doors locked whether you are in your home or sitting in a car waiting for your husband or friends; and you should be wary of any stranger who might approach you at the airport unless you have prior knowledge of the individual's identification, or have proof that the person is a part of a previously arranged plan to offer you transportation.

In all situations, plain common sense and prudence should be your guide to assure you and your children an interesting and pleasant stay in a foreign country.

YEMEN

It could happen that you will be sent to Yemen, whether you are in the Army, the Navy, the Air Force, or in some other capacity. In such a case, it would be helpful for you to know a few basic facts about that country.

NORTH AND SOUTH YEMEN

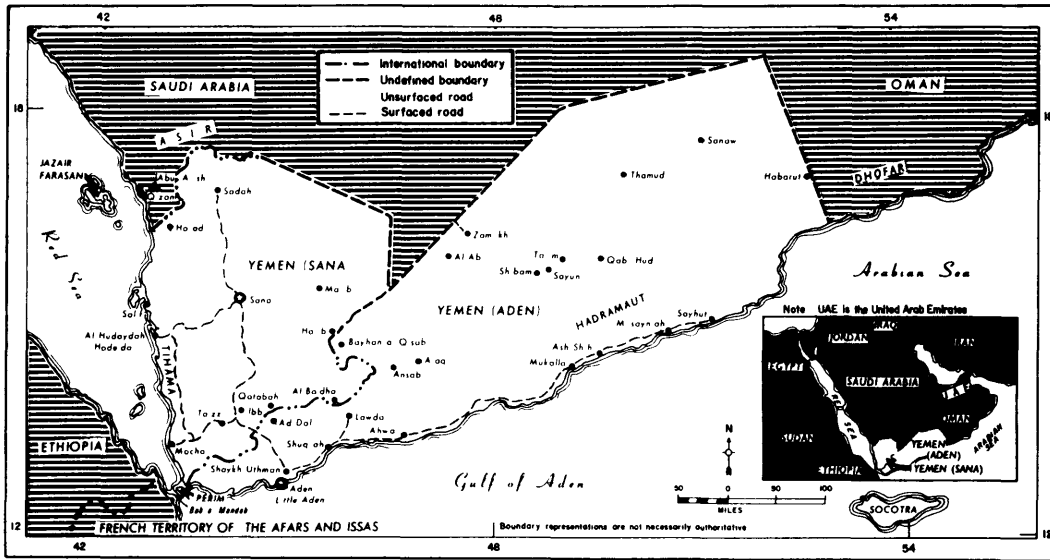
The first thing for you to know is that there are two Yemens: the Yemen Arab Republic (usually called simply "Yemen" and sometimes called "North Yemen") and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (usually called "South Yemen"). Yemen, or North Yemen, is a republic, with a basically neutralist or non-aligned foreign policy, but with an increasing tendency toward cooperation with Saudi Arabia and the United States. South Yemen is a republic with strong ties to the Soviet Union and other communist countries, and has no diplomatic relations with the United States. Since it is highly unlikely that you will ever be going to South Yemen, we will say a few words about North Yemen only.

THE COUNTRY AND ITS CLIMATE

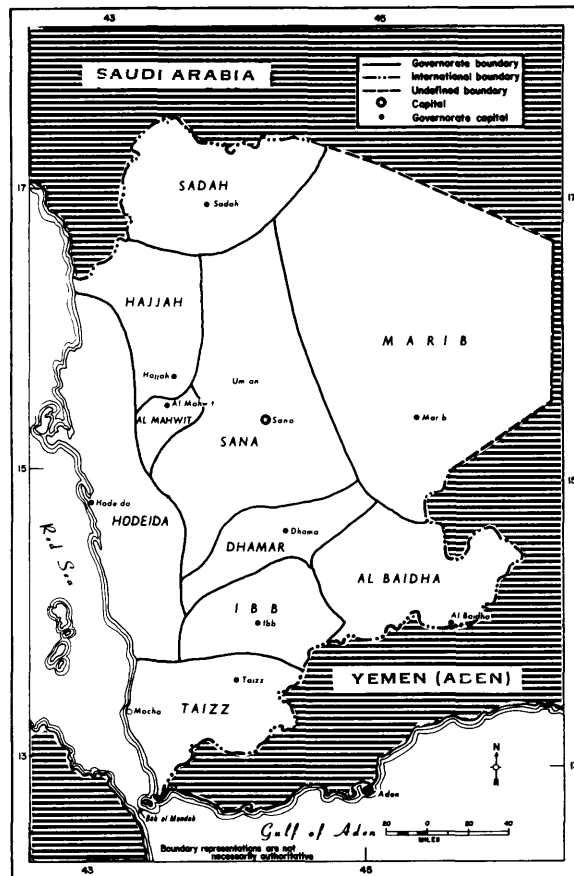
North Yemen is located in the southwestern corner of the Arabian Peninsula, and has a population estimated at about 7 million. The country's western border is the Red Sea; to the north and northeast it borders on Saudi Arabia; and its neighbor to the south and southeast is South Yemen. The capital of the country is Sana, a city of about 100,000, located high up in the central mountain range. Other important cities are Hodeida (about 60,000), the country's chief port on the Red Sea coast; and Taizz (about 90,000), at the foot of the central mountain range, close to the border with South Yemen. Two smaller port cities are Mocha, further south, and Salif, north of Hodeida.

Yemen has three airports--at Sana, Taizz, and Hodeida--which handle both domestic and international flights. The country also has its own airline, Yemen Airways. The road system in Yemen is still in the stages of initial development. It consists of about 3,000 miles of roads, only about one-fourth of which is asphalt. The principal cities of Sana, Hodeida, and Taizz are, however, connected by largely hard-surface roads.

In many ways, Yemen is like Saudi Arabia. The Yemenis' spoken language, traditions, and social system are almost the same as those of the Saudis. Like the Saudis they are devout Moslems and basically a tribal people. But unlike most of



The Yemens 1976



Yemen Arab Republic, Governorates, 1976

CULTURAL NOTES

Saudi Arabia, Yemen is largely a rugged, mountainous country with abundant rainfall and many fertile valleys where most of its people are engaged in agriculture. The climate is very hot and humid in the Red Sea coastal area, but in the central mountain areas it is much cooler. The remote eastern part of the country, part of the Rub al-Khali desert, is extremely hot and dry.

HISTORY

Yemen's history goes back a very long way. It had been the seat of many ancient civilizations before Islam established roots in A.D. 630. Thereafter, it was controlled by various Arab dynasties until the sixteenth century when the Ottoman Turkish Empire took over the country. After World War I and the fall of the Ottoman Empire, Yemen was ruled by a dynasty of local religious leaders called imams. First there was Imam Yahya, then his son Ahmad, and then his grandson Badr under whom the country began to come under the influence of Nasser's Egypt and the Soviet Union. In 1962, Colonel al-Sallal carried out a military coup; a civil war erupted, with Egyptian forces supporting Colonel al-Sallal's leftist Republican forces, and Saudi Arabia giving its support to the deposed Imam Badr's Royalist forces. This civil war continued until 1967, when the Egyptian forces withdrew. Since then, Yemen has been a republic, with its leaders trying to accommodate all of the country's various political and tribal factions. During the last decade or so, the country has taken great strides toward modernization. This process has been helped along to a large degree by aid from Saudi Arabia and by funds sent home by Yemeni working in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates.

MISCELLANEOUS PRACTICAL INFORMATION

Yemen's currency is called the "Yemeni riyal," and the exchange rate is about 4.5 Yemeni riyals to the U.S. dollar. Since exchange rates fluctuate, you should check with a bank dealing in international currency to find out the latest exchange rate of the Yemeni riyal.

Modern housing is still limited in Yemen, and the construction of such housing has begun only recently. Traditionally, dwellings are of stone and mud brick, and in the cities they are frequently seven or eight stories high. Furnishing consists of carpets and floor-level cushions; there is usually no plumbing. Sanitation conditions are still quite rudimentary when compared with American standards, and Yemenis have a low level of health. Diseases of all types are prevalent and the drinking water supply is usually polluted and unsuitable for

drinking. Serious efforts to improve Yemen's public health standards have begun only recently.

When you are in Yemen, you will find fewer people speaking English than in Saudi Arabia, and fewer foreigners living or working there. It can be said that their traditional family-centered social system, with sexes generally not mixing socially, has been even less prone to change than that of Saudi Arabia.

RECOMMENDED READING

If you would like to know more about topics dealt with in this booklet, the following books are recommended:

History:

The Arabs: A Short History by Philip Hitti, Gateway Editions, 1970.

Saudi Arabia in General:

Area Handbook for Saudi Arabia prepared by Foreign Area Studies of the American University for the U.S. Army. (DA Pam 550-51) Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 1977.

Saudi Arabia Today: An Introduction to the Richest Oil Power by Peter Hobday, St Martin's Press, 1978.

Come Along to Saudi Arabia by L.E. Leipold, Denison, 1974.

Islam:

The Cambridge History of Islam by P.M. Holt, A.K.S. Lambton, and B. Lewis (eds.), Cambridge University Press, 1970. (Vol I: The Central Islamic Lands; Vol II: The Further Islamic Lands, Islamic Society and Civilization.)

Yemen in General:

Area Handbook for the Yemens prepared by Foreign Area Studies of the American University for the U.S. Army. (DA Pam 550-51) Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 1977.