

# THE LINK

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## The Child in the Arab Family

By Audrey Shabbas

"Children are the wealth of the Arabs" proverbially describes the great joy that Arabs derive from their children. One particular story, with some variations, is often told to express the value of Arab children: A stranger visits a house where he sees no light, but many children. The same stranger visits a house with many lamps but no children. He then remarks: "The house with many children was lighted, but the house with lamps was dark."

The Arab child is considered a gift from God, while the best marriage has traditionally been the one which produced the most children.<sup>1</sup> Anticipated with delight and hope, not only by its parents, but also by its larger family, the expected child enters the total extended family as an enlargement of that family, not as an addition to it.

Though a son is greatly desired, especially as a first child, girls are pampered and cherished, particularly if preceded by boys. The prophet Muhammad reproached his followers for lamenting the birth of a daughter. This preference for boys is not unique to Arabs. In a 1974 survey, the Harvard Project on Socio-Cultural Aspects of Development found that few men in six developing nations listed girl children as first choice. Even in the United States, a large majority of parents, according to the Population Reference Bureau, would rather have boys than girls.

What form does the "family"

take? Sociologists describe the traditional Arab family pattern as patrilineal, patrilocal, patriarchal, extended, familial, sometimes polygamous and endogamous.

Patrilineal, patrilocal and patriarchal refer to a traditionally male-dominated society. Patrilineal considers every person as belonging to the father's family; descent is traced

through the male line; a person's loyalty is directed to the father's family. Patrilocal refers to the custom whereby a newly married couple resides in the house or compound of the husband's father and family. Patriarchal describes a family system in which the father has authority over the family (at least outwardly).

Extended encompasses not only the

Dancing Khalid Kasim, 12, Kuwait





# About This Issue

The United Nations has designated 1979 as the International Year of the Child. 1979 also marks the 20th anniversary of the U.N. Declaration on the Rights of the Child. Our feature story on the Child in the Arab World is by Audrey Shabbas, past president of Najda (Women Concerned about the Middle East) and co-author of Najda's *The Arab World: A Handbook for Teachers*. She is co-founder of Arab World Consultants, an educational consulting firm, which recently developed six highly acclaimed multi-media units of study on various aspects of Arab culture. Audrey is currently on the Advisory Board for the University of Califor-

nia School of Education's Social Science Adolescent Prejudice Project.

The children's pictures were provided by the Information Center on Children's Culture, a Service of the U.S. Committee for UNICEF. The photos were taken for *The Link* by Will Geens of the Belgium Mission to the United Nations. Drawings in the section on Children's Dress are from Penny Williams, *Paper Dolls of the Middle East*, courtesy of William Collins and World Publishing; drawings and material in the Toys and Games sections are courtesy of Arab World Consultants. The Iraq photo essay was provided by Audrey Shabbas.

*Conspiracy of Silence* by Anthony Pearson is reviewed by Bill Mulligan. Bill recently retired from Aramco after 32 years in that company's Government Relations Department.

He has contributed to the Encyclopedia of Islam and has written numerous articles on the Middle East. A.M.E.U. is offering *Conspiracy of Silence* to its readers at a substantial discount; see Books To Order section for details.

Our next issue of *The Link* will be on Jordan, a state whose economic, cultural and political role in the Middle East is assuming an ever growing importance.

John F. Mahoney, *Executive Director*

father, mother and minor children, but also grown sons and, if married, their wives and children.

Polygamous identifies the practice of a man taking more than one wife at a time, and, with regard to Arab cultural patterns, is an incorrect term. It has been a Muslim practice, but the terms "Arab" and "Muslim" are not synonymous. The rise of Islam actually reformed the practice as it existed in Arabia, and today polygamy is illegal in many Arab countries, representing no more than 5-8 percent of Arab marriages.

Endogamous describes a pattern of marriage preference within a narrow circle of relatives, traditionally between a man and his father's brother's daughter, often called "cousin-right."

Familial stresses family interests and requires the individual to govern his actions with the family in mind. In this regard, Arab culture is correctly called a familial or kinship culture.

The extent to which endogamy, polygamy, or any of the other forementioned practices are followed or ignored, is a function of traditional-

ism, area, urbanization, education and convenience.

The conjugal or nuclear family predominates in all but the rural areas of the Arab world. While extended in the sense that relatives live in close proximity—the same compound, same neighborhood, same town—the family is no longer patrilocal in the sense that the extended family all lives under the same roof with the grandfather at its head.

Large city residences, which sometimes housed 30-40 persons at the turn of the century, now serve as schools or headquarters for institutes or as separate dwellings for nuclear families.

Despite the change, the nuclear family still exists within the framework of the extended family, whose interdependence in business and public life is just as strong as in domestic affairs and personal relationships.

Some traditional functions of the extended family are declining. Trade unions, social security, factory legislation, for example, represent the current presence of the state, formerly under family jurisdiction. As the state

performs more functions, including education and the regulation of marriage, the traditional family influence will decline.

The Arab child, then, is at all times part of his nuclear family and his extended family circle, within which he receives security and self-fulfillment and offers his devotion and loyalty. Each member, according to his or her age and status, has a secure place with definite duties and obligations. The importance of this kinship can be seen in the custom of the child being addressed by members of the family, not by his name, but by the one which describes his relationship to the speaker. The child's world quickly becomes peopled with kin of specific designation, each with a special set of mutual rights and obligations.

## Family Roles

In the nuclear family, the mother's first responsibility is to her children; she plays the key role in their early years. The father assumes an increasingly important role in the child's third or fourth year, becoming the symbol of authority and chief disciplinarian.



Other members of the extended family have their roles. When the nuclear family lives in isolation, father and mother are expected to deal with all the child's needs most often met by adults. Within an extended family, some of these needs may be met by aunts and uncles and adult cousins, because these individuals may be better equipped to deal with certain needs of the child than the child's own parents. American teenagers and their parents would be the first to see the many advantages of such a family system. The Arab child simply has many more avenues of guidance, help and friendship.

Paternal uncles play a significant role in the child's life. As a substitute father, the father's brother assumes all the father's responsibilities in the event the father dies or is incapable of performing them.

Grandparents in the extended family contribute to the child's development. In the Arab world, prestige and power are attached to age—especially for the grandmother. Of course, the power grandmother wields largely depends upon the forcefulness of her own character. Grandmother often intercedes on behalf of her grandchildren and will even intercede in the disciplining being meted out by her son, the child's father. Grandfather,

if present in the child's household, is the undisputed head of the family. Everyone submits to this authority. Grandmother submits at least overtly.

It is the grandfather, though not uncommonly the grandmother, who passes along an oral tradition through stories (often told as parables) and history. This prescribed role not only directs moral guidance and character development, but also endears the grandparent to the family.

What is the role of the Arab child in the family? Pampered and spoiled by a family of many adults, the child is the object of a great deal of physical contact. While lacking toys in the material sense of store-bought items, the Arab child does not lack amusements and games. The Arab child also has few responsibilities toward the family.

In analyzing the religious influences on child-rearing practices in the Arab world, it is not correct to speak of the "religious aspects" of the Arab child or of child-rearing practices, because this *culture as a whole is religious*. Religion permeates the whole of it. Life in its totality falls under the aegis of religion. It is a way of life, a code of behavior, a total frame of existence. Popular religion here is not of the pure theological character found among the ranks of

the religiously educated.

Religion in this ancient land is to be seen as a new layer laid upon the older ancient layers of folk-religion—continuing beliefs and practices that represent not only superstition but also basic values which enrich and give meaning to life. Anthropologists have suggested that parallels in beliefs and popular practices in Judaism, Christianity and Islam might be traced to an older folk-religion of the region.<sup>2</sup>

## Choosing A Child's Name

Naming a new born child draws upon ancient practices and beliefs. Because Arabs view their children as blessed gifts and as the object of aspirations for the continuance of traditions and



Untitled Mona Said, 5,  
United Arab Emirates

for the continuance of the family line, choosing a child's name is approached with method, deliberation and even consultation.

Arab society traditionally consists of Muslims, Christians and other smaller minority groups, of various ethnic backgrounds and religious faiths. Despite this diversification, the people of the Arab world share a common culture and way of life. Patterns in choosing a child's name may be categorized as: religious or historical, natural phenomenon, personality traits or occupation.

One custom that cuts across all religious lines is that children are never named after parents—or

Al-Musaharaty Ismail Awad Al Tahan, 11, Jordan





anyone else still living. A child is occasionally named for an aging grandparent or aunt, for example, when that person makes such a request.

Since the time of Abraham, Jesus and Muhammad, giving names has followed a tradition of identification with the prophets themselves or others mentioned in the holy books—the Bible and the Koran. Arab Muslims use typical names found in the Old and New Testaments and the Koran. Ibrahim (Abraham), Suleiman (Solomon), Daoud (David), Musa (Moses), Yusuf (Joseph), Issa (Jesus), and Jibril (Gabriel) for boys, and Sara, Merriam (Mary) for girls, as well as names derived from descendants of the prophet Muhammad: Hashem, Hussein, Ali; and female names: Fatima, Aisha, Kadija. Of course, the name of Muhammad from *hamida*—"to praise," "to thank," is most frequently given to Muslim boys, along with its derived Mahmoud and Ahmed.

Arab Christians often choose those names derived from the Bible, though early Christian leaders stand out

amongst these: Boulos (Paul), Butros (Peter), Hanna (John). Other names chosen by Arab Christians tend to be secular and/or pre-Islamic: Farid, Fuad, Labib, for boys; and Hoda, Farida, Hind, for girls.

Another group of religious names often chosen by Arab Muslims are names of the *Abed* category. The prefix *abed* means "servant" with "God" understood, hence its meaning "servant of God." The name *Abed-allah* literally means "servant of God."

According to Muslim tradition, God has a hundred qualities or names. Ninety-nine of these names are known to man. Ninety-nine are the beads of the Muslim "rosary"—a bead for every one of God's ninety-nine attributes which the Muslim theologian can say.<sup>3</sup> The hundredth name, so it is said, is known only to the angels of Heaven. Some of these names are: Abdul-Rahim, Abdul-Karim, Abdul-Wahhab, Abdul-Rahman, Abdul-Hadi. Each has a literal meaning, i.e. Abdul-Rahman ("Servant of the Compassionate"),

Abdul-Aziz ("Servant of the Beloved"), but since the attributes all refer to God, all of these names can be figuratively seen as meaning "Servant of God."

Proud of their history and civilization, Arabs often choose historical names such as Omar, Walid, Khalid, Tareq, Ošama, for boys, and Khadija and Aisha, for girls. These may be thought of as religious/historical names because they are the names of leaders who were both political and religious. Interestingly, these are used in many areas by both Muslims and Christians, while in other areas by Muslims only.

The Crusades influenced Arab Christian names. Inter-marriage between local Christians and European crusaders, as well as later European contact, introduced such names as George, Antonius, Frederick, Charles, etc., now common among the Christian population.

The attachment of the Arabs to nature finds expression in other names. Such terms as "the light of the sun" and "the cool of the breeze" or "the beauty of the moon" and names of birds, animals and plants are frequently manifested in Arab names.

<i>Boys Names</i>		<i>Girls Names</i>	
Nour	"light"	Noura	"light"
Naseem	"breeze"	Najma	"star"
Asfour	"sparrow"	Rema	"deer"
Laith	"lion"	Suheila	"summer star"
Nimer	"tiger"	Nuara	"blossom"
Asad	"lion"	Laila	"night"

Personality or character traits, in addition to numerous cultural values, such as nobility, courage, honesty, wisdom, loyalty, generosity, are built into names:

<i>Boys Names</i>		<i>Girls Names</i>	
Sharif	"honest"	Sharifa	"honest"
Karim	"generous"	Karima	"generous"
Sadiq	"friend"	Amineh	"loyal"
Ha-keem	"wise"	Najeeba	"intelligent"
Mar-wam	"chivalrous"	Fadela	"gracious"

What about family names? Traditional town or city dwellers tend to have family names drawn from ancestors' occupations: This is similar to the Western pattern in which we see family names such as: Baker, Smith, Carpenter, Hunter, Weaver, Taylor, etc. The following are representative

Mosques M. Saleh Attia, 13, Saudi Arabia





of the Arab pattern: Hajjar (stonemason), Haddad (blacksmith), Khayyat (tailor), Samman (grocer).

Often the father's first name becomes the child's second name (whether a boy or a girl). And sometimes the word Ibn (or Ben) meaning "son of," or Bint, "daughter of," inserted between the child's chosen name and that of the father was all that was necessary in order to identify a person. But today the complexities of life and the resultant interactions between formerly distant town and tribes has necessitated a family name for everyone. A father, grandfather or great-grandfather's given name has

referred to as "mother of X" and "father of X." If the eldest son is Karim, for example, the father becomes *Abu-Karim* ("father of Karim") and the mother becomes *Umm-Karim* ("mother of Karim").

## Early Child Care and Development

The birth and infancy of the urban Arab child differs little from that of the American child. Hospital procedures and child-rearing practices, at least in infancy, are very much like those in the West.

Long-standing practices, that con-

on local customs, one universal notion considers the birth process as being "women's work" and shameful for men to be present. Hence the necessity for the *daya* ("midwife").

The midwife obtained her knowledge empirically or from her mother. Usually an elderly woman, she was respectfully perceived as a mother and grandmother. The midwife, with several other women working under her supervision, kept order among the women present (relatives, friends), exhorting them to remember the seriousness of the occasion, while ordering them to tend to this or that.

The delivery completed, the midwife would then carefully examine the child. She would check the baby frequently during its first days and weeks.

Before the advent of the baby bottle, all babies were breast-fed by the mother and/or a wetnurse. To be fed, the baby required its mother at all times, for the baby must never be allowed to be hungry. No rigid feeding schedules here; the Arab baby was and is fed often and upon demand, or at the slightest sign of restlessness.

If the mother was unable to nurse, or had died, the child was given over to a wetnurse. Sometimes, for example, during the busy harvest time when all labor is needed, the mother would be forced to leave her baby with a woman who had a baby and had offered her services as a wetnurse.

Beliefs concerning the influence of the wetnurse and her milk upon the child and its character were as numerous as the local customs involved. But one widespread custom defined children nursed by the same woman as foster siblings. A boy and a girl nursed by the same woman were considered brother and sister and could not marry.

Such foster-brothers and foster-sisters often helped each other throughout life and would call each other brother and sister.<sup>3</sup>

With the advent of the baby bottle and the substitution of animal's milk for mother's milk, nursing by another person was no longer necessary. Then too, the relationship of foster-brother and foster-sister, and all its consequent customs of caring and sharing, began gradually to disappear.

The third traditional custom, now confined to rural areas and related to babyhood, is the custom of swaddling (continued on page 8)



Neighborhood Celebration Sharea Abdel Hadi Abeid Al Motayri, 9, Kuwait

become the family name—or the village name, the tribal name, or the like. (A woman, incidentally, does not upon marriage take the name of her husband. She retains for life her own family name.)

Children give their parents names too. The first son (or first daughter, if there are no sons) gives his parents new names. Upon becoming parents, the mother and father are thereafter

continue today in some of the rural areas of the Arab world, are worth mentioning. Three traditional practices include: the mid-wife, the wetnurse, and swaddling.

At a time when midwifery is making a comeback in the West, this institution is quietly disappearing from many parts of the Arab world.<sup>4</sup> And while midwife methods varied greatly from one age to the next depending



# IRAQ: Pacesetter in Children's Services

**In a great watery world**, the Marshes of the south, young girls travel to and from school by canoe (a). Because fast-paced building has not yet caught up to demand, many of Iraq's schools, particularly in rural areas, run in double and triple shifts. Here boys attend in the morning, girls in the afternoon, and mothers and grandmothers in the evening.

**The world unfolds** for preschool children in Barahm Nursery (b), one of six nurseries operated by The General Federation of Iraqi Women. Run on a \$3-million annual budget, the program costs each working mother a day's salary per month.

**Twenty thousand books** line the Children's Library, which also houses an auditorium for film and theatrical productions, art and music rooms, and a lounge where parents may wait for youngsters using the facilities (c). All programs and classes are free.

**Modern methods** at Amal Institute for deaf children incorporate small group learning and the latest equipment. Vocational training classes, such as this one in woodworking, prepare students for job placement (d). Some graduates become teachers at the institute. As in Iraq's five other special schools for the handicapped, children live at home with their families.

**Gifted children** attend the School for Music and Ballet, a public school with a current enrollment of 320 students with special interests and abilities in music or ballet (e,f). Music classes are given in all types of music and on classical as well as traditional instruments, and students progress to private lessons. In the ballet wing, boys and girls study the classical dance as well as other dance forms and gymnastics.

**Computer science**, recognized as an important part of the present and future, will be offered in Iraqi schools starting at the sixth-grade level. This young electrical engineer, a hardware specialist trained at Iraqi universities, now designs computers for the National Computer Center, the first of its kind in any developing nation (g).



a.



b.





c.



f.



d.



e.



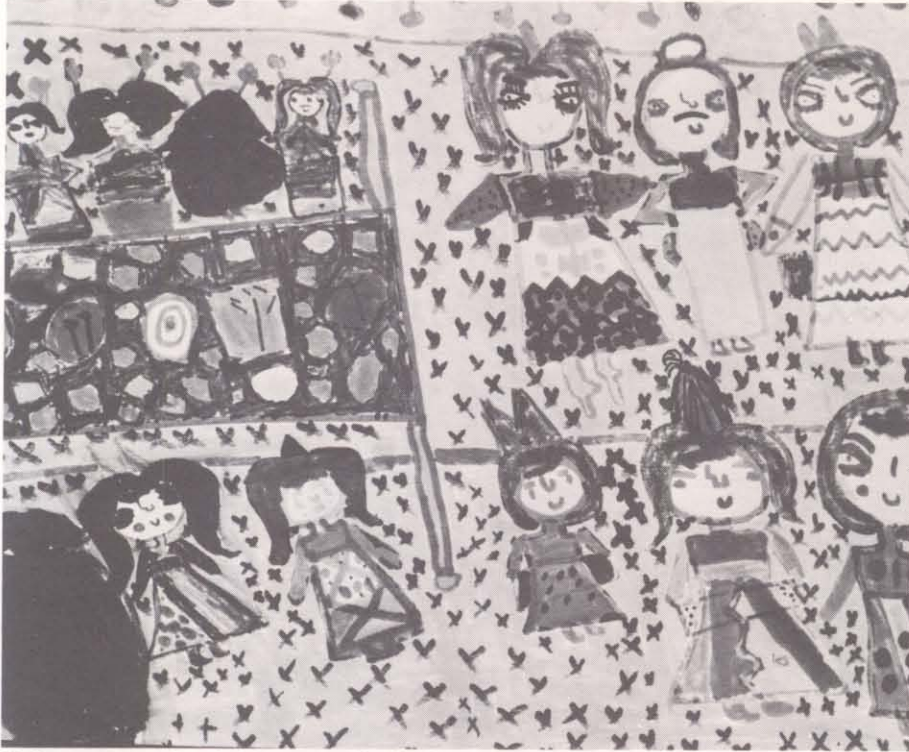
e.



(continued from page 5)

infants. A midwife's role included the bathing of the newborn infant in warm water to which she added salt and olive oil, both thought to be beneficial to the skin. Then the child was wrapped and wound in pieces of soft cloth, the total effect termed "swaddling."

The midwife, the wetnurse and swaddling represent three ancient institutions which for millenia have played an important role in the birth and childhood of the people of this region. What of today?



Christmas Party Sarah Marzoug Alkarib, 8, Kuwait

While customs and practices have seen considerable change in the past century, important values have not changed. The underlying cultural values relating to childhood and the role of the child in the family have remained little altered.

The baby bottle is becoming extremely common and is associated by many Arab women with Western and emancipated ways. This is reinforced by makers of infant formula who would have their customers believe it is modern and scientific and that it ensures what we all want: what's best for our babies.

The consequences for many babies in developing countries has been just the opposite. The Nestle Company is currently the target of a U.S. boycott campaign which cites this largest seller of infant formula to developing nations as responsible for much of

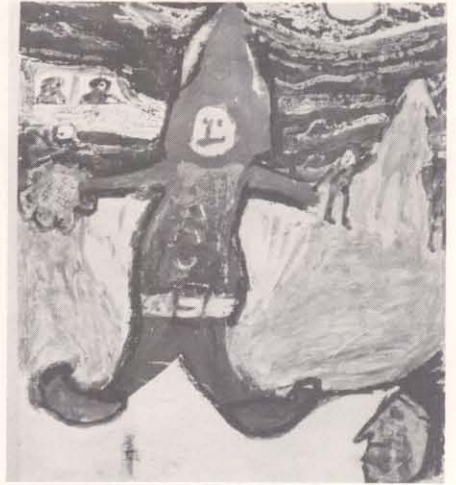
the widespread "bottle illness" taking its toll of infants in Third World nations.<sup>6</sup>

The degree to which the "Bottle-Baby Scandal" is applicable to the Arab world is not clear. Most of the data related to "bottle illness" center on black Africa, South America and India, while little has come forth regarding the Middle East.

It is known that some Arab countries have taken measures to counteract the threat. Algeria, for example, has nationalized baby milk imports

and spans for misbehavior, but also offers encouragement to the child to walk and talk and, by the age of three, to toilet train.

Arab children usually learn to walk at a later age than many Western children. One popular theory explains that the constant fondling and carrying by adults, leaves little opportunity for the child's feet to touch the ground.



Haji Firoz Vahidreza Bahadori, 14, Iran

At about the age of three or four the father and other male relatives begin to play a more important role in the child's life. As the child begins to see the father as an authority figure, the mother's role changes. It is she to whom the child is likely to turn for help with an angry or disagreeable father. Not unlike the roles played by Western family members, mother often intercedes with the father on behalf of her son, while the daughter is likely to seek the father's intercession with the mother.

The Western stereotype of the stern authoritarian Arab father is not a correct one. The Arab father, to generalize, is neither "cold" nor "aloof" within the family circle. Usually warm and tender towards his children, he enjoys the physical contact—the romping and playing.

Childhood in urban areas lasts long and is a time of carefree games and amusements within a large circle of cousins, relatives and neighborhood friends. Boys in particular have few household responsibilities. After school and depending on age, girls (particularly the oldest girl) assist their mothers—fetching things, caring for younger children, while boys run errands, assist their fathers, or keep a watchful eye on younger brothers and sisters when adults are away.



Rural children play more of a role in the economic life of their family. They have more chores and greater responsibilities. Rural life for girls was, and is, equally hard, if not harder than that of boys. Doing women's work, she cleans, baby tends, fetches wood, eggs and water, and works in the fields.<sup>7</sup>

The rate at which any Arab child progresses through developmental sequences of childhood, is, it should be noted, influenced by the child's sex and sibling order and by family structure. For example, the care and treatment a first born boy receives compared with his sisters and later-born brothers is usually one of greater indulgence. The oldest girl has greater responsibilities as mother's helper. Her childhood is short, and she has less time to spend with her peers. The oldest boy, although greatly spoiled, is most quickly pushed into adult associations and responsibilities. His responsibilities will be great indeed! The baby of the family, too, receives a great deal of attention (until he is

replaced by another). And of course, the amount and quality of attention given to any one child depends on the size of the nuclear family and the availability of the extended family to meet some of the child's needs.

## Educational Patterns

Education to an Arab family means much more than what takes place in the formal school setting. The school meets the academic requirements—providing the child with basic skills, then following through with acquisition of knowledge both through the study of the accumulated knowledge of mankind and through the scientific method of experiment and observation.

It is the family, however, which instills a value system, social conscience, and the very rules which govern daily life and a complex system of social interaction.

A system of etiquette, called *adab* in Arabic, teaches the type of behavior expected of the well-behaved

child, who is termed *adib*. Intrinsic values teach the child to: obey parents, respect elders, demonstrate politeness in the presence of elders. An *adib* is expected to be generous, cooperative, humble and helpful.

The child finds that the tongue is most important. Proverbs reproach those who: gossip, quarrel, lie or speak in ways less than kind: "What if a woman is beautiful, if she has an evil tongue?" "A kind word can attract even the snake from his nest."

A happy countenance is important too. The prophet Muhammad said there are three things in this world which give joy: fresh water, fresh green, and a fresh and happy face.

Still other proverbs and sayings express values of honesty, cooperation, hard work and common sense. Such proverbs or sayings themselves are not relegated to the folk-legend or literature, but are commonly used to accentuate everyday conversation.

While patterns of behavior taught at home are reinforced at school, the school is not looked upon as a social-

Untitled Yasser Mohammed Abd El Latif, 7, Egypt







Boy—Morocco



Girl—Syria

izing agent or as a source of religious or moral teachings, but as the source of academic wisdom and training. How well the school fills this role varies from one part of the Arab world to the next. Education, for boys and girls, declined greatly during the past centuries of foreign domination and economic stagnation, and only recently have the Arab states, especially those producing oil, been able to finance mass education for both boys and girls. As in poor countries elsewhere, the luxury of education in the Arab world was, until now, reserved for boys as the future support of their families.

Educational services vary from one country to the next in the Arab world. Many are compulsory; some have separate facilities for boys and girls; all are free (some including university and schooling abroad). Some receive as much as 20 percent of their country's annual budget, and a few have as desirable a student-teacher ratio as 12 to 1.

Formal schooling is highly regarded by the Arab family, which instills in its children a love of learning and respect for scholarly pursuits, as well as the family's inherent teachings which carry over to the school, ie.

"respect for elders" includes teachers, etc. Arab school children, of whatever age, are eager to go to school and take immense pride in their scholastic accomplishments.

As attention is drawn to the International Year of the Child, it is appropriate to consider the life of the Arab child. Of the Arab world's 140 million people, some 45 percent are children (under the age of 15 years).

Recent development in this region has greatly improved the lives of all the people. For the children it has meant a declining infant mortality rate, a drastic reduction in childhood diseases, greatly increased educational opportunities for all children, including the handicapped child.

Few would deny that problems remain. But more than ever before, Arab children, psychologically prepared and with access to greatly improved medical care and the necessary education, will be well equipped to take advantage of the opportunities the future holds.

## Styles of Dress

Like it or not, an "international costume" is replacing former "national costumes," as far as young

people are concerned. Of course, the new costume is blue jeans. Both Arab boys and girls in urban areas can be seen wearing the familiar faded blue jeans.

Rural areas today still reflect the former standard dress of childhood, traditionally copying adult styles. This meant some type of long embroidered and embellished dress for girls, simple striped dress for boys. (Even in rural areas today, however, going to school means a uniform, thereby reinforcing the notion that traditional garments are outmoded.)

Arab children dressed in patterns and styles which reflected local custom and traditions, varying greatly from one part of the Arab world to another.

## Simple Toys

Before the influx of Western commercial games and toys, Arab boys and girls made up games, using objects such as stones or shells, or simply-made objects such as a ball from an old pair of socks.

Dolls were made at home out of discarded clothing or rags. A grandmother usually assisted a girl in doll making. Some dolls were made by tying long and short sticks together with a strip of cloth to form a cross, the basis of a person. Then a piece of cloth would be stretched over a large button or wad of padding to make the head. More strips of cloth were wound round the two sticks, being careful to secure the head in place.

Dressing the doll depended on what girls and women of a particular region wore. The idea was to copy the style of clothing worn by real people. Dresses were long, with long sleeves as well. Girls didn't mind that their dolls had no hands or feet, since these did not show.

Older girls would experiment with dolls that had a trunk, so that arms, legs and a head could be attached. The result would be a cloth doll sewn together by hand and filled with padded cloth, sand or seeds.

Bread dough was available to girls because they assisted their mothers with the kneading of dough for bread. Mother would give them some dough from which they fashioned small ovens, dishes and other tiny toys.

Stones were often used by boys as gaming equipment. In one simple



game, very similar to American jacks, small stones would be gathered, then one tossed in the air, while the rest were gathered up in many different ways requiring greater skill with each round. The difficult part of this game, in contrast to jacks, where the tossed ball bounces once and is then caught, is to complete these maneuvers while the tossed stone is still in the air and then catch it before it hits the ground.

Slings were fashioned by the boys themselves. Traditionally woven from a length of wool acquired from mother's needlework project, slings today are fashioned by boys using appropriately fork-shaped branches and pieces of old innertubes from tires. Boys learn from each other how to make slings.

Such slings, it should be pointed out, are not used simply in play. Shepherds use them so skillfully that they are able to drop a stone exactly in front of a wandering sheep, causing the animal to turn and return to the flock. Slings are used in hunting too. Pigeons and such small birds as sparrows are a part of the diet in many areas, and are hunted with the sling.

## Nursery Rhymes and Riddles

Poetry has played an integral part of Arab culture from pre-Islamic times to the present, among the illiterate as well as the educated. A favorite past-time of Arab people has been the impromptu poetry recitation.

It is not surprising then to find poetry a part of the Arab childhood as well. And while improvisation is highly valued, other poems are memorized and taught from one generation to the next. Here is a simple nursery rhyme that is a favorite of the children of Iraq:



Playtime in the Garden Khaled Sabri, 9, Kuwait

*Bajilla* is a large bean, larger than a lima bean, also known as a fava bean. *Bab allah* is literally "God's door" but figuratively means everywhere, anywhere, all of creation. You should be able to hear the rhyming: *bil Hillah, Bajillah, Mai allah, Bab allah*.

Riddles too are an expression of the poet and the thinker. Meant as brainteasers, riddles are often plays on words too. Here is a sampling of riddles of the "what is it?" type:

1. Two things, when they meet, separate.
2. The cheapest when present; the most precious when absent.
3. And what is the thing which, when you take away from it, it increases and when you add to it, it decreases?
4. And what is the thing, which if you eat all of it, you don't die,

but if you eat half of it, you die?

Answer: 1. scissors 2. water 3. a hole 4. "simsim." (The whole word *simsim* means "sesame," but half of it, *sim*, means "poison.")

## Arab Songs

The first music a child hears are the lullabies mother sings. She sings of the love she has for her child and the helplessness of her baby.

One lullaby, sung in Palestine, equates the mother of the child with the wings and feathers of the bird:

It is right for the Creator to furnish a bird with wings.

A baby without its mother, how can it sleep?

It is right for the Creator, to have furnished the bird with feathers.

A baby without its mother, how shall it live?<sup>8</sup>

Children continue to hear music as they grow. Music and dance are an important part of family rites and celebrations: circumcision, baptism, marriage, etc. are all occasions for drums, tambourines and flutes. Singing, clapping and dancing are the usual accompaniment to such merry-making. Other occasions, particularly religious festivals, call for the retelling of traditional stories, and these are often told to the accompaniment of the one-string rabab.

### Coocookti ("Little Dove")

*How it sounds in Arabic*  
Coocookti bil Hillah,  
Shi tackul? Bajillah.  
Sha tishrub? Mai allah.

Wain itiruh? Bab allah.

*What it means in English*  
Little dove from Hila,  
What do you eat? *Bajilla* (beans)  
What do you drink? *Mai allah* (God's water)  
Where are you going? *Bab allah* (God's door)



## Children's Games

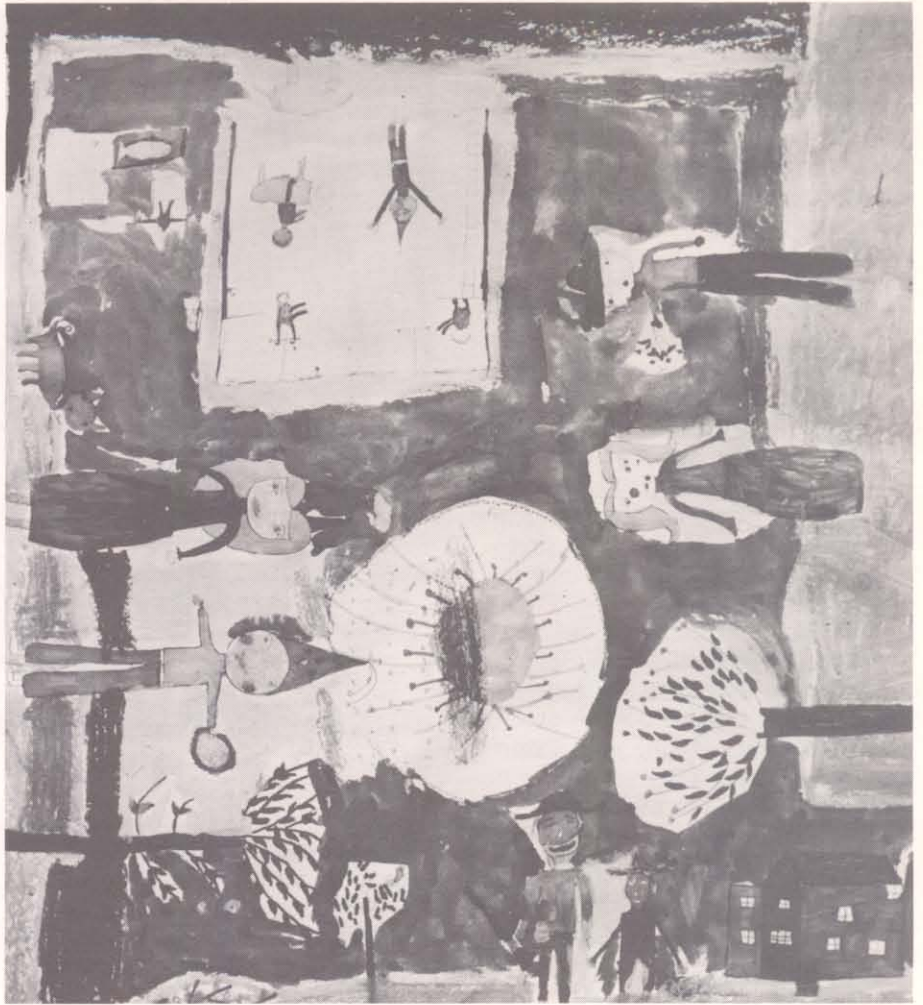
Arab children spend a great deal of time at play. Games, particularly field games, are highly varied and played with enthusiasm.

Perhaps the most popular games played by Arab youngsters are backgammon, as the most popular board game, and soccer, the most popular field game. A longer list of games played would include: chess, dominoes, caroms (a favorite of Yemeni children), egg jousting, mancala (12-hole games played in variation throughout the region), seega (North Africa), field games such as sock ball and seven stones, and street games such as hopscotch, hide-and-seek and chasing games.

Here are rules for playing two board games and one field game.

Mancala variations are played throughout the Middle East and Africa, and have found their way to the West, too.

"Al-Hawaileh" is a version played by the bedouin tribes of northern and eastern Saudi Arabia. Begin with 12 holes in the ground, six each in two rows. (An empty egg carton makes a good substitute.) Five pebbles in each hole. Player picks up all the stones from one of the holes on his side and drops them one by one counter-clockwise in the adjacent holes. Should the



In the Park K. Rezi M. Aminzade, 10, Iran

last hole contains one or three, these are taken too. Turn passes to the other player, who scoops up stones from one of the holes on his side and play continues in the same manner. The game ends when all the holes are empty or only two stones remain (making further play impossible). Player with the most stones is the winner.

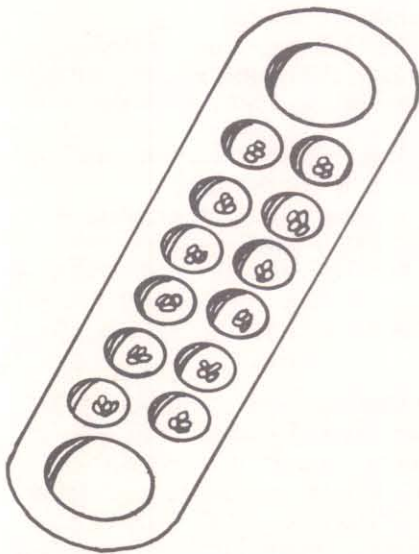
Seega is a game for two people and is played throughout the Arab countries of North Africa. In this version played in Egyptian villages, equipment consists of 25 holes in the ground (5 rows of 5 holes each in straight lines) or a board of 25 holes fashioned from an empty egg flat. (An egg flat has 36 holes, 6 across and 5 down. Cut off one row of 5 holes to make your board.) Also needed are two sets of 12 pieces each: small pebbles, buttons, shells or checkers. Each player has 12 pieces.

Players take turns putting one piece at a time on the board, leaving the center hole empty. When the board is filled, the second stage of play be-

gins. (With increased play, the strategy of placement becomes more apparent.)

The next player in turn moves one of his pieces to the empty space in any of four directions: up, down, left or right. He may not move diagonally! The object of the game is for one player to enclose one of the other player's pieces between two of his own, vertically or horizontally (but not diagonally). If he does this, he removes that player's piece from the board. He may then move his same piece again, if it is possible to capture another of his opponent's pieces. He continues to play with the same piece as long as he can continue to capture. When he cannot capture another piece, play passes to the other player.

The next player then plays in the same way, moving any of his pieces to an empty space. Each player must move at least once when it is his turn. He may not skip a turn. The game is over when one player loses all of his pieces. (Note: only the player whose turn it is to move can capture. If you



last stone end in a hole which then contains one or three stones (not two), the player takes and places them to one side. Also, if the hole immediately next on the right of the



place your piece between two of the opposing player's pieces, you do not lose your piece.)

Seven stones, a game played by Arab village children, is popular in Egypt and Palestine. Though similar to American baseball, with an element of dodgeball thrown in, the person who is "up" pitches the ball at a pile of stacked-up stones. All you will need are an empty field or playground, a dodgeball or volley ball, and seven stones (if flat river stones are not available, substitute nursery school blocks or small cardboard boxes with their covers taped closed, stuffed with rags or newspapers to weight them down so that the wind can't blow them away.)

The object of the game is to score "runs" by knocking down the seven stones with the ball, and running around the bases before the stones are re-stacked and the ball retrieved.

The field is diamond shaped, like the baseball field, with three bases and a home plate. Seven stones are stacked up in a pile at a point about where a pitcher's mound would be in baseball.

Players divide into two teams. The fielding team spread out behind this pile of stones, ready to pick up and re-stack the stones once they have been knocked down, and ready to retrieve the ball. Each team takes turns at bat. Actually, the batter pitches the ball from behind home base. The first player up throws the ball in an attempt to knock down the stones and scatter them as widely as possible. He has three chances. If a player does not knock down the seven stones after three tries, he is out and the next player is up. Three outs and the next team is up, as in baseball.

If the player knocks the stones down, he attempts to run around the bases as far as possible before the other team can re-stack the stones. Fielders run to gather the stones, re-stack them and to catch the ball. After the stones are re-stacked, fielders may attempt to tag the runner by throwing the ball at him or by touching him with the ball. No runner may be tagged out before the stones are stacked. If a player reaches a base without being tagged, he is safe and the next player is up. If a player reaches home, he scores a run and the next player is up. If a player is tagged out or hit with the ball off base, after the stones have been stacked, he is out and the next player

is up. Play an agreed upon number of innings, as in baseball.

## Stories Old and New

The stories with which an Arab child is most familiar are those of the oral tradition. While this oral folkloric tradition has always existed alongside a whole body of fine literature, it is the former which are best-known.

Once a popular figure, entertaining at weddings and other important life passages, the professional storyteller was an accomplished poet, imparting stories which contained long portions of rhymed verse. An authentic storyteller (*fedawi* or *rawi* in Arabic) is hard to find in today's modern Arab world, though today one can hear their stories during the month of Ramadan (a month of Muslim fasting, meditation and reflection on tradition), over the radio broadcasting systems in Arab urban centers.

In the absence of the professional storyteller, Arab children now meet these traditional tales in published book form. The most important are *Joha*, the fables of *Luqman*, and the epic tales of *Abu-Zaid Al-Hilali* and of *Antar* and his heroine *Abla*.

The beloved folkfigure *Joha*, or *Jeha*, or *Goha*, is at times a peasant, at times a fool, at times a cunning city slicker. The *Joha* stories are more

properly termed anecdotes or jokes, told as amusements or as parables illustrative of some like experience under discussion.

*Luqman Bin 'Ad* is an historical figure spoken of in the *Koran*. He is also a folk hero whose wit and wisdom have come down to us in the form of proverbs as well as animal fables. Of *Luqman's* 49 animal fables, 47 are identical to those of *Aesop*. Similarities between these two figures, both in the stories about their personal lives and in the fables credited to them, are more than coincidence, scholars believe.

*Abu-Zaid Al-Hilali* is the hero of the *Sirat Beni Hilal*, the folktale of epic proportions, which traces the history of the *Beni Hilal* ("sons of the crescent moon") tribe as they move from their native *Nejd* across North Africa.

*Antar* and *Abla* are the hero and heroine of the *Sirat Antar*, the long epic tale tracing the life of its black hero,<sup>9</sup> *Antar*, through the adventures which earn him the reputation as the bravest, strongest and wisest of his tribe. Not at all incongruous with traits of courage and physical prowess, is *Antar's* proficiency as a poet, and these stories of action and suspense are interspersed with *Antar's* poetry.

Past and Present Hamoud Ali Hadi, 14, Saudi Arabia







A Lively Scene in the Mountains Nadia S. Saikala, 15, Lebanon

*Sirat Antarah* represents a folktale legend built around the life of a real warrior-poet, Antarah, of the pre-Islamic period.

*The Fables of Kalila wa Dimna* are also stories well known to Arab children—perhaps the best known. Kalila and Dimna are two jackals who offer

moral and practical advice in a collection of animal fables bearing their names.

These represent not an oral tradition, though often recited, but respected literature. Next to the Koran, *Kalila wa Dimna* is considered the best of the classical Arab prose.

Originally written in Sanskrit as the *Fables of Bidpai* in the 4th century, they were later translated to classical Persian and then to Arabic.

Western comic book heroes are well known to Arab children who press newsstands for monthly issues of such adventures as Rejal Watwat (“Bat Man”), Tarzan, and that well-known reporter Nabil Fawzi, whom the West knows as Clark Kent, alias Superman.

And in addition to these pulp comic books, there are a growing number of very fine children’s magazines, such as *Majelati* (“My Magazine”) published in Iraq, whose issues contain a host of fine articles, short stories, games and projects for children.

Television, too, is becoming a source of entertainment and a source for the transmission of childhood literary classics—as well as bringing to Arab youngsters a variety of American programming. Depending on which Arab country you are in, you might see (dubbed or with Arabic subtitles) such favorites of American children as *Bonanza*, *Father Knows Best*, *The Brady Bunch*, and a newer one, *Little House on the Prairie*—so popular with Baghdad viewers that they recently demanded it be aired twice a week.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>While the child is viewed as a gift from God, the large family has been more of an economic advantage and a source of prestige and security than an act of religious compliance. Among more educated urban populations of the Arab world, there has been the gradual adoption of the smaller family model. And while the parents of a large family may still speak of their brood with great pride, they can also now be found to express concern over the financial burden of feeding, clothing and educating a large number of children. Islam is not opposed to birth control, and more than one Arab country has adopted family planning as a matter of national policy.

<sup>2</sup>“In this way one might discover the common older Palestinian belief; an ancient layer that lies below the—often rather thin—surface of the official Jewish, Muhammadan [sic] and Christian religion.” Hilma Granqvist, *Birth and Childhood Among the Arabs* (New York: AMS Press) 1975, p.43.

<sup>3</sup>These 99 attributes or names are scattered throughout the Koran in references to God, and are collected and listed in one of the Hadiths. The “Abed” prefix was used in nam-

ing prior to Islam (both the prophet Muhammad’s father and grandfather had names with this prefix) but was then used in association with pagan deities. Its use now in Islam is in reference only to monotheism, to the one God.

<sup>4</sup>Some Arab governments, however, have begun to tap and harness this ancient and honorable profession, using the old to build the new. Rather than suppress the midwife, governments such as Saudi Arabia and Jordan have instituted “midwife control”—training these old women in modern procedures, equipping them with needed supplies—and have, at the same time, tapped their wisdom by having college-trained R.N.’s learn from them. Eventually these will replace the time-honored sisterhood of midwives.

<sup>5</sup>Another foster-sibling custom is worth mentioning. For centuries in Palestine, any child born in the same week as another automatically became the foster-brother or foster-sister of that child. And such relationships cut across religious lines. Thus the 1930’s leader of the Arab revolt against continued Zionist immigration had himself three Jewish foster-brothers.

<sup>6</sup>*Consumer Reports* has recently stated: “When there is unclean water, inadequate refrigeration, poor home hygiene, or too little money to buy enough formula, bottle-feeding can be dangerous and even fatal. The Bottle-Baby Scandal is the result of such conditions leading to the syndrome of malnutrition, infection, diarrhea—and further malnutrition.”

<sup>7</sup>Studies on the Arab woman have pointed out that rural women here have traditionally enjoyed a greater degree of freedom than their city sisters. This has been explained by the fact that the labor of women in rural areas was very badly needed and that women often worked alongside their men in the fields.

<sup>8</sup>Granqvist, op cit., p. 118.

<sup>9</sup>It is of some interest to note that both of these epic heroes—Abu-Zaid Al-Hilali and Antarah—are not the swarthy dark complected “Arab” of Western stereotype, but are *black* Arabs.



# Books To Order

## New Selection

Anthony Pearson, **Conspiracy of Silence: The Attack on the U.S.S. Liberty**, Horizon Press. 179 pp. \$9.95. An account of the Israeli attack on the Liberty during the June 1967 Middle East War and the ensuing lack of publicity and information. The author believes it was not an accident, as the Israelis claimed, and gives reasonably certain conclusions as to why the attack took place and the reasons for the cover-up. Our price, \$6.75.

R. Afifi, A. Al-Qazzaz & A. Shabbas, **The Arab World: A Handbook for Teachers**, Najda, Albany, Calif. 128 pp. \$5.00 (paperback). A book of interest not only to teachers but to all having an interest in the Arab world. The authors offer it as an antidote to the prevalence of distortions, stereotyping, etc., found in most school texts covering the Arabs, their culture, history and society. Our price, \$3.25.

Robert B. Betts, **Christians in the Arab East**, rev. 1978, John Knox. 318 pp. \$12.00. A comprehensive study of the Arabic-speaking Christians and the role they have played in the Middle East from the time of the Islamic conquest up to present day developments. Valuable demographic statistics and a comprehensive bibliography included. Our price, \$7.65.

Odd Bull, **War and Peace in the Middle East**, Leo Cooper, London. 205 pp. \$15.00. A noteworthy account of U.N. peace-keeping force activities from 1963 to 1970. Impartial factual reporting of various Israeli/Arab encounters. Includes photos and documentary appendices. Our price, \$9.85.

Ray Cleveland, **Middle East and South Asia**, revised 1978, Stryker-Post Publications. 98 pp. \$2.75 (paperback). The author gives a short historical background on the early empires in these areas, followed by a treatment of each of the present countries. This treatment consists of a set of statistics, a short history, a

description of the culture, an outline of economy and finally an analysis of the future prospects. Maps included. An excellent study book. Our price, \$2.50.

John H. Davis, **The Evasive Peace**, revised 1976, Dillon/Liederbach Inc. 136 pp. \$5.95. Factual background to present Arab-Israeli dilemma, with a prescription for peace in Middle East. Our price, \$3.50.

F.H. Epp, **The Palestinians, Portrait of a People in Conflict**, Herald Press. 240 pp. \$10.00. Tells a story not widely heard in the West—the Palestinian side of the present Middle East conflict. Our price, \$6.25.

Philip Gabriel, **In the Ashes**, Whitmore Publishing. 249 pp. \$7.95. Begins with a concise, fascinating account of the forces molding Lebanon from 1900 B.C. on. Largely deals with the tragic story of waste and destruction in Lebanon, set in the context of overall Middle East conflict. Our price, \$4.75.

David Hirst, **The Gun and the Olive Branch**, Faber & Faber. 367 pp. 6.50 pounds. Aptly subtitled "The Roots of Violence in the Middle East." In tracing these roots, the author explodes a number of myths about both Arabs and Zionists. A carefully researched and documented account. Our price, \$7.95.

**Who is Menahem Begin?**, Inst. for Palestine Studies, ed. and publisher. 61 pp. \$2.00 (paperback). A compilation of Begin's own statements vis-a-vis terrorist activities of the Irgun and Haganah before and during the creation of Israel in 1948. Various speeches and interviews since then. Short biographical sketch. Our price, \$1.45.

Alfred Lilienthal, **The Zionist Connection: What Price Peace?**, Dodd, Mead & Co. 800 pp. \$20.00. Covers the Arab-Israeli conflict from the time of Herzl to Camp David. It treats the subject from every angle. It is well-documented; the research involved is monumental. Contains

much information of which Americans are mostly unaware. One authority has said that it should be read by every responsible citizen in the West. Our price, \$12.75.

Peter Mansfield, **The Arab World** (title of British edition, "The Arabs"), T.Y. Crowell. 572 pp. \$16.95. A very readable history of the Arabs from pre-Islamic times to the present, with an objective account of the establishment of the State of Israel and the resultant effect on the attitudes of the Arabs. Our price, \$10.00.

Ephraim Sevela, **Farewell, Israel**, Gateway Editions. 295 pp. \$12.95. The author's disenchantment with Israel, which he had thought would be the fulfillment of his dreams, is emotionally expressed in his treatment of what he calls Israel's "racism" and the disintegration of the world's Jewish communities. Our price, \$8.00.

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## Books

### Conspiracy of Silence

By Anthony Pearson. *Quartet Books, Horizon Press, U.S. distributors, London, Melbourne, New York. 1978. U.K. 4.99 pounds; U.S. \$9.95.*

Early in the afternoon of 8 June 1967, on the third day of the Six-Day War between the Arabs and the Israelis, the Liberty, a U.S. Navy electronics intelligence ship, was attacked by Israeli fighter-bombers and torpedo boats in the Mediterranean off the coast of Sinai. Within 15



minutes, 34 Americans were dead and 171 others injured. Rocket and cannon fire left 821 holes in the ship. One torpedo seriously crippled the vessel, causing 22 deaths. Despite heavy damage, the Liberty radioed its predicament to other ships of the Sixth Fleet. As rescue planes headed toward the Liberty, Israel called off the attack and announced it had made a mistake. Commander William L. McGonagle, though wounded, directed the remnants of his ship and crew first to the protection of the main body of the Sixth Fleet and then into Malta harbor.

The U.S. Government accepted Israel's apology but not its explanation. (Israel claimed the Liberty had been mistaken for an ancient Egyptian troopship and had not been flying the American flag.) Israel paid \$3,325,500 in compensation to the next of kin of the 34 men killed and \$3,566,457 to the men wounded. It has consistently refused to pay the U.S. claim of \$7,644,146 for damage to the Liberty. Commander McGonagle was promoted to Captain and, in what has been described as "a muted ceremony," was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor (Richard K. Smith, "The Violation of the 'Liberty,'" *U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings*, June 1978). In *Conspiracy of Silence*, Pearson maintains that the commendation was submitted to the Israeli Government for approval, and that is why there are no references in it to the nationality of the attackers. Four Silver Stars, other decorations, and 170 Purple Hearts were also distributed among the Liberty's 19 officers and 295 men.

At the time of the action, the Liberty crew believed their attackers were from one of the Arab states. Presumably, the Sixth Fleet command and Washington officials feared it was being made by Russians, a notion that brought considerable relief when Israel admitted its responsibility.

Some American government officials and journalists felt the Israeli story lacked credibility. Yet because the Liberty incident occurred when most Americans were cheering the Israelis on while gloating over Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser's misfortunes, most Americans accepted the Israeli line that the Arabs had started the war. It would be some time before Israel switched to the concept of "preemptive" action. It is not surprising under the cir-

cumstances that the Liberty episode created less of a stir than the subsequent seizure by North Korea of another American ship, the *Pueblo*.

In the summer of 1975 Pearson sold the idea of an article about the attack to *Penthouse* magazine. Eventually the story appeared in two parts in May and June 1976. Pearson's book retells the incident competently, but the story surrounding the preparation of the book is another matter entirely. Behind the scenes lies the self-posturing record of Pearson's journalistic researching and the sinister occurrences involving him and others since his article appeared in *Penthouse*.

Many of the people Pearson identifies refused to speak to him. Of those who did, several are now dead. A couple of his best sources refused to be identified. Yet he assures us that his authorities include "survivors of the Liberty's crew, senior officers in the Pentagon, friends and interested parties in the Central Intelligence Agency, other writers and commentators on Middle East affairs, and some important former members of the administration of President Lyndon B. Johnson."

At one point Pearson complains that while working for *Penthouse* he lacked the backup and assistance he usually received on newspapers. He has been served in much the same manner by his book publisher. Some of the better howlers to get by the editors are: McClean, Virginia (the location of CIA headquarters), Senator Him Abourezk, and Abdul Gamal Nasser (twice).

Unlike the *Penthouse* articles, the book includes a "revelation" by an unidentified American general. In addition to spying on the true course of the war in the Sinai, the Liberty supposedly was communicating with a Polaris submarine standing by to knock out Israel missile sites, if there were indications that nuclear weapons were about to be employed.

If, according to Pearson's source, the Israelis knew of this second mission of the Liberty, General Dayan would have been justified in ordering the strike. But Dayan did not know and, in the eyes of the general, the action was "a premeditated and devious act of back-stabbing."

The story of the brave men of the Liberty is here, but they deserve something better.

Reviewed by William E. Mulligan

*The Link* aims at maintaining contacts among Americans who believe that friendship with the people of the Middle East is essential to world peace, who would contribute to this goal by spreading understanding of the history, values, religions, culture and economic conditions of the Middle East, and who would—in this context—press for greater fairness, consistency and integrity in U.S. policy toward that area.

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