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Book note:

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THE BEDOUNS AND THE DESERT: ASPECTS OF NOMADIC LIFE IN THE ARAB EAST. By Jibrail S. Jabbur. Translated by Lawrence I. Conrad. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995. Pp. xxix + 670. N.p., ISBN 0-791-42851-6.

This is a gold mine of information on Bedouin life in the Arabian desert. Jabbur couples his personal experiences with his erudition to produce a comprehensive survey of nomadism. Following a discussion of the social, economic, military, and political significance of nomadism, Jabbur introduces the "Pillars of Bedouin life." Under the pillar "desert," Jabbur describes desert flora including fruit-bearing trees, fungi, and flowers. He also details the fauna with which the average Bedouin is familiar, moving from the onager to the camel while continually establishing the importance of the species to the Bedouin. The treatments of the hyena's grave-robbing practices and the Bedouin art of falconry are particularly interesting. Jabbur also describes the fabric, construction, and placement of the Bedouin's tent, before moving to the largest portion of the work, a discussion of the Bedouins themselves. Taken up here are fourteen tribes, their organization, social and religious institutions, customs, leisure activity, food-gathering techniques, and education. Also surveyed are Bedouin folk-tales, poetry, and various literary genres. The Şulayb tribe are given a separate and exhaustive treatment. Jabbur closes with a historical survey of the Bedouins in Northern Arabia, from antiquity to Ottoman times. Included are appendixes outlining documents found in the Egyptian archives and the British Foreign Office, a glossary of plants and shrubs, useful indexes, a copious bibliography, and nearly eighty photographs. Recommended for the interested comparativist and lay reader.

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