

HURREIZ, SAYYID HAMID. *Folklore and Folklife in the United Arab Emirates. Culture and Civilization in the Middle East*. London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002. xiv + 192 pages. Map, illustrations, bibliography, glossary, appendices, index. Hardcover US\$70.00; ISBN 0-7007-1413-8.

Documenting the rapidly disappearing folklore and folklife of the Arabian Gulf states is not an easy task. While there has been considerable effort directed in Kuwait and Oman, there is very little information available on traditional culture of the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The main work available by A. S. Kanafani (1983) was in fact an M.A. thesis at the

American University of Beirut. After a very general introduction to the basic history of the region and an assessment of folklore studies in the UAE, the rest of Hurreiz's book may be divided into two parts. Two chapters on folklore in private and public life and on folklore and the state deal mainly with resources within the country and educational programs. The founder and long-standing ruler of the UAE, Shaikh Zayed bin Sultan, is noted as a recognized *nabaʿi* poet and an ardent falconer. As a result he took a personal interest in preserving the traditional lore of the region. More recently the Emirates Heritage Club was formed in 1993, followed by the Zayed Centre for Heritage and History in 1999.

The final five chapters summarize the various genres of folk knowledge in the UAE. These deal with, respectively, folk literature, folk customs and beliefs, folk medicine, performing folk arts and material culture. A brief conclusion summarizes the author's contention that the traditional lore has been profoundly affected by Islamic doctrines and beliefs alongside outside influences from neighboring Arab countries (especially Oman), Iran (for example, in vernacular architecture), Africa (several dances and the *zār* ritual) and India (for example, in gold working). The bibliography is a useful guide to Arabic references. A glossary of basic Arabic terms and a list of selected informants round out the volume.

Hurreiz is correct in noting (18) that traditional culture in the UAE should be approached as part of a wider regional context rather than the nation state of the UAE *per se*. The tribal, political and linguistic links are especially strong with Oman due to a shared heritage in date palm cultivation, pearling, fishing and seafaring trade. But the overriding factor for analysis of "traditional" lore in the UAE must be seen against the backdrop of a rich oil kingdom in which an estimated seventy percent of the population are foreign. As Hurreiz observes (2), "The changes dictated by the emergence of a newly constituted affluent oil state, the intensive flow of population from foreign countries with diverse cultural backgrounds, the noticeable impact of sub-cultures, the impact of modern mass media and the adoption of a new way of life have affected the traditional culture of the indigenous population." The visual metaphor of a group of young Emirate falconers parking their Land Cruisers and walking into an internet café with their birds is a poignant reminder that heritage is being recreated in a distinctively modern mode.

The main value of the study is background (30–41) on the history of folklore research in the relatively recent nation state of the UAE, which began in 1971. Apart from the author's linkage of an indigenous fictitious tale and local legend to the folklore motif index, there is little of value in this superficial overview and largely derivative account. It is odd that the author refers to the motif index without acknowledging the exhaustive efforts of Hasan EL-SHAMY (1995) on Arab folk tales according to this index.

The basic problem with the book is that it is superficial and fails to provide a range of examples from the folklore documented in Arabic. The author is clearly more at home with folk literature as he provides samples of a fictitious story and a legend, but inexplicably there is virtually no discussion of *nabaʿi* poetry, a major genre in the region. In commenting on a local work which documents 143 folk games for the UAE, the author fails to provide a description or discussion of any of these. Also missing from the volume is lore about pearling and sailing seasons, as well as data about the methods of date palm care, camel raising, camel racing, or falconry!

There is a wealth of heritage data in the sources cited, but most of this book deals with generalities that might be true of almost anywhere in the region. A case in point is the chapter on the life cycle. The discussion of birth, childhood, marriage and death is not contextualized. It is not clear if all indigenous segments of the UAE share these practices, nor how in most cases traditions are changing in the past several decades of unprecedented foreign impact. The author suggests, for example, that some 85% of families still prac-

tice female circumcision. Yet there is no description of how severe the process is, how the midwives are influenced with the widespread availability of modern medical care and the official position of Muslim intellectuals. As a result the reader is advised to consult the pioneering ethnographic work of Kanafani or wait for systematic anthropological research.

There are several typographical errors in the text, the most glaring a mistranslation of the caliph Abu Bakr as Abu Bark (16). At times the author renders Arabic *qâf* as a "g" but he is not systematic; nor is there any discussion of dialect features. It is curious that an author fluent in Arabic sources would quote the dated derivative work of S. B. MILES (1919) in a discussion (16) on the Riddah wars in the early Islamic period.

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