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Saudi Arabian Portfolio



Synopsis

Photo essay on the kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Book Information

Hardcover: 208 pages

Publisher: Fretz Bros.; Fifth or Later Edition edition (1978)

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Customer Reviews

Photo essay on the kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

With the above quote, Robert Azzi starts the preface to his remarkable series of photographs of the Kingdom. The book is a true "artifact," now 30 years old, capturing the country in the first blush of petro-dollar fueled development. It is an optimistic take on what the future will bring, with many a smiling face. Mr. Azzi states that he had "access," attested by the number of pictures of the Royals at work and leisure, as well as the aerial photographs. There are sections on The Royal Court, History and Tradition, the King's Cup (the annual camel race), From the Land, The Rush to Build, A New Society, and the Holy Land (the pilgrims at Mecca - which is spelled that way prior to the official designation of "Makkah.") Also indicating the sponsorship of the book, there is an introduction from Prince Saud Al Faisal, the Minister of Foreign Affairs. The book was published in 1978, just before the Kingdom, and the world made a "right turn," that is, formed governments with much more conservative policies. In the United States, it was the "Reagan revolution," in the United Kingdom, it was Margaret Thatcher. The causes for this turn in those two countries are complex, and one cannot point to a single incident. In the Kingdom however, although they retained the same government, almost certainly the turn can be traced to a single event, the taking of the Grand Mosque in Makkah by religious fundamentalist who thought the House of Saud had become much too liberal. The pictures that confirm that "liberal" period are there: there is a Western woman, in a

knee length dress, no abaya, no scarf, at the camel races; even more remarkably are the pictures of young Saudi women, all unveiled, at the Dar Al Hanan school in Jiddah - a couple of pictures show them engaged in sports, one in volleyball, the other in tennis, and the most remarkable one is of a young Saudi woman in a dress with bare shoulders; the men on the soccer field are in shorts much too short, and today they would face the black ink of the censors if sold in the Kingdom; there is also a picture of Prince Saud Al Faisal with his family - even at that time, it would not be customary to be photographed with his wife, but he is with all his children, including his teen age daughter, all wearing western attire. But there are many more images of "eternal" merit, which reflect Aziz's keen eye - for example, the silhouettes of young boys at play against a background of mud-walled houses (p68-69); a man giving directions in the Asir (p 92-93); unloading cement bags, the old-fashioned, and labor-intensive way (p115); a Saudi woman (p134); and a man reading the Holy Book, (p194-195). An excellent book, viewed solely on the artistic merits of the photographs, or as a vital record of how "the times they are a changin'" - one photo is worth 10,000 words from a parachute journalist.

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