



Peoples and Cultures of the Middle East (2nd Edition)

By Daniel G. Bates, Amal Rassam

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Editorial Review

From the Inside Flap

Preface

This is the second edition of a book that has gone through more than twenty printings since its original publication in 1983. The unexpected vitality of the original edition was as pleasant as it was unexpected. In the normal course of events, reports about regions and people have a relatively short shelf life. The fact that the first edition has continued to be read indicates, to us at least, that there is a sense in which social scientific findings have a cumulative quality that goes beyond the fads of the moment. It would also seem that there is a need for scholarly reporting that is broadly accessible and relatively free from an overburden of scholarly jargon and theoretical minutiae. The first edition had this as an explicit goal, and to some extent at least, it seems that it was successful. We hope that this edition is equally useful.

This anthropological essay builds on nearly three decades of teaching and research by both authors in various countries of the Middle East and in neighboring regions in Africa, the Balkans, and Central Asia. As friends and colleagues of long standing, we have maintained an ongoing dialogue about the craft of anthropology and what it offers the student of Middle Eastern society. Our different but complementary points of departure and field experiences have helped, we feel, to make our discussions particularly fruitful. This book has no senior author. Indeed, it would not be possible to attribute any passage or section to any one of us; the venture was truly collaborative in all respects. In the first edition the actual, sometimes tedious, process of writing and revising was done in joint sessions; in this edition we had relatively brief but intensive sessions of joint work, but the actual crafting of chapters was necessarily done while working on separate continents, with Bates often in Turkey and Rassam in New York.

As the title suggests, we see this book as an exercise in social anthropology. To that extent, our objectives are to provide a synthesis of what we feel our discipline has been able to contribute to an understanding of this important area of the world. We have avoided theoretical polemics and specialized jargon in the hopes of avoiding a common social science tendency to mystify and thereby to explain less than is already known by common sense.

Our point of departure—in fact, the assumption underlying the analysis we provide—is that explanations of cultural institutions and social processes must be relatable to the behavior of individuals, their needs, values, and motivations. Individual decisions and actions, indeed, behavior of all sorts, take place in the context of particular social or cultural settings. These social and cultural settings are themselves shaped by the momentum of a specific history. Not only do the material constraints of the moment affect the strategies of individuals today, but the particular ways in which material problems or opportunities were handled in the past also influence current choices.

Systems of values, norms, and religious beliefs are also an integral part of social process. Not only does an ideational system give meaning to individuals' actions, but the system itself is a source of constraints facing the individual and society, as well as an arena in which people compete. Individuals and groups use ideologies of all sorts as they strive for power—to control resources, gain prestige, and influence outcomes. Although we have not paid great attention to national-level politics and economics, we have consistently kept this larger and important context in view as we developed our analysis. It would not be too much to say that a full understanding of the activities of people in the most remote village today requires an awareness of

how that community fits into a national, indeed, a world economic and political system.

Many people are to be thanked for the assistance they have rendered us directly or indirectly. Both of us were students of William Schorger at the University of Michigan at critical junctures of our intellectual growth. To him we express that special thanks due to one's teachers. We also want to acknowledge our special intellectual debt to Eric Wolf, who as teacher, friend, critic, and colleague, stimulated and challenged us over many years. In fact, at the outset of this enterprise, we took as a model his early book, *Sons of the Shaking Earth*, which describes the cultural history of the valley of Mexico. To us, this book exemplifies a superb treatment of a complex historical and cultural tradition, a treatment at once elegant, sympathetic, and honest.

Of the many friends and colleagues who assisted us by the critical reading of parts of the present manuscript, we would like to thank Ayse Alalin, Alan Duben, David Gilmore, Greg Johnson, Ugur Komecoglu, Luci Saunders, Aseel Sawalha, Ali Murat Yel, Judith Tucker, and at least two anonymous but very constructive readers. Luci Saunders, a friend of long standing, was especially encouraging and thoughtful in urging this revision at a time when the undertaking was languishing. Ron and Nancy Adams, Goble Messer, and Joe Morris provided much needed help to Bates while he was ignoring his family and neighborly obligations. Ulku Ulkusal, Marc de Clercq, Jonathon Shanon, Aseel Sawalha, Caglar Keyder, and Harald Skogseid kindly made available photos for use. Three colleagues at Istanbul Bilgi University, Arus Yumul, Alan Duben, and Ugur Komecoglu, were especially generous in sharing their time and thoughts. Among other colleagues at Bilgi University, Didem Danis, Duygun Erim, and Aybike Hatemi were unfailing in their practical and moral support.

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Daniel Bates, Istanbul
Amal Rassam, New York City

From the Back Cover

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Daniel Bates, Istanbul
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