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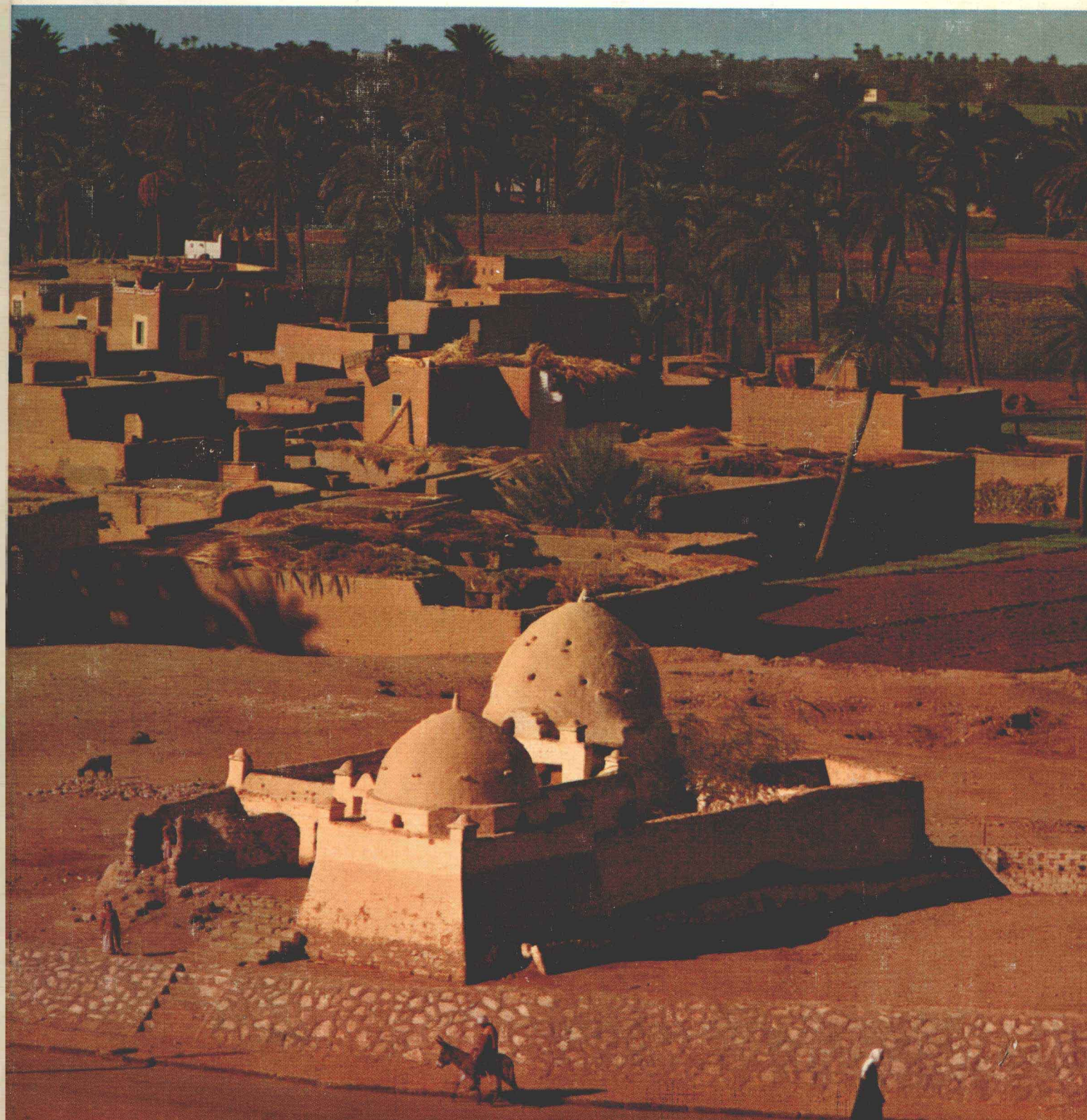
THE ARAB WORLD



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THE ARAB WORLD

by Desmond Stewart
and The Editors of LIFE

TIME INCORPORATED NEW YORK

COVER: Not far from the life-giving Nile, the Upper Egypt town of Luxor huddles in the blazing sun. The town occupies part of the site of ancient Thebes, a flourishing city 4,000 years ago.

ABOUT THE WRITER

Desmond Stewart, who wrote the interpretive text for this volume in the LIFE World Library, is a British writer who has spent many years in the Middle East. A graduate of Oxford, he taught English literature in Iraq and Lebanon from 1948 to 1958 and has visited almost every country in the Arab world. A poet and a translator of Arab literature, he has contributed articles on Arab affairs to a number of American and British publications. Mr. Stewart is the author of several novels with Middle East backgrounds, including *Stranger in Eden* and *The Men of Friday*. He now lives in Cairo.

Library of Congress catalog card number 62-19070.

Contents

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The text for the chapters of this book was written by Desmond Stewart, for the picture essays by Walter Karp and David S. Thomson. The following members of LIFE Magazine helped in producing the book: James Burke, Larry Burrows, Eliot Elisofon, Michael Rougier and Howard Sochurek, staff photographers; Keith Wheeler, staff writer; and Doris O'Neil, Chief of the LIFE Picture Library. Valuable assistance was also provided by the following staff members of Time Inc.: Donald Bermingham and George Caturani of the Foreign News Service; Edward Behr of the Paris Bureau; and Content Peckham, Chief of the Bureau of Editorial Reference.

Introduction

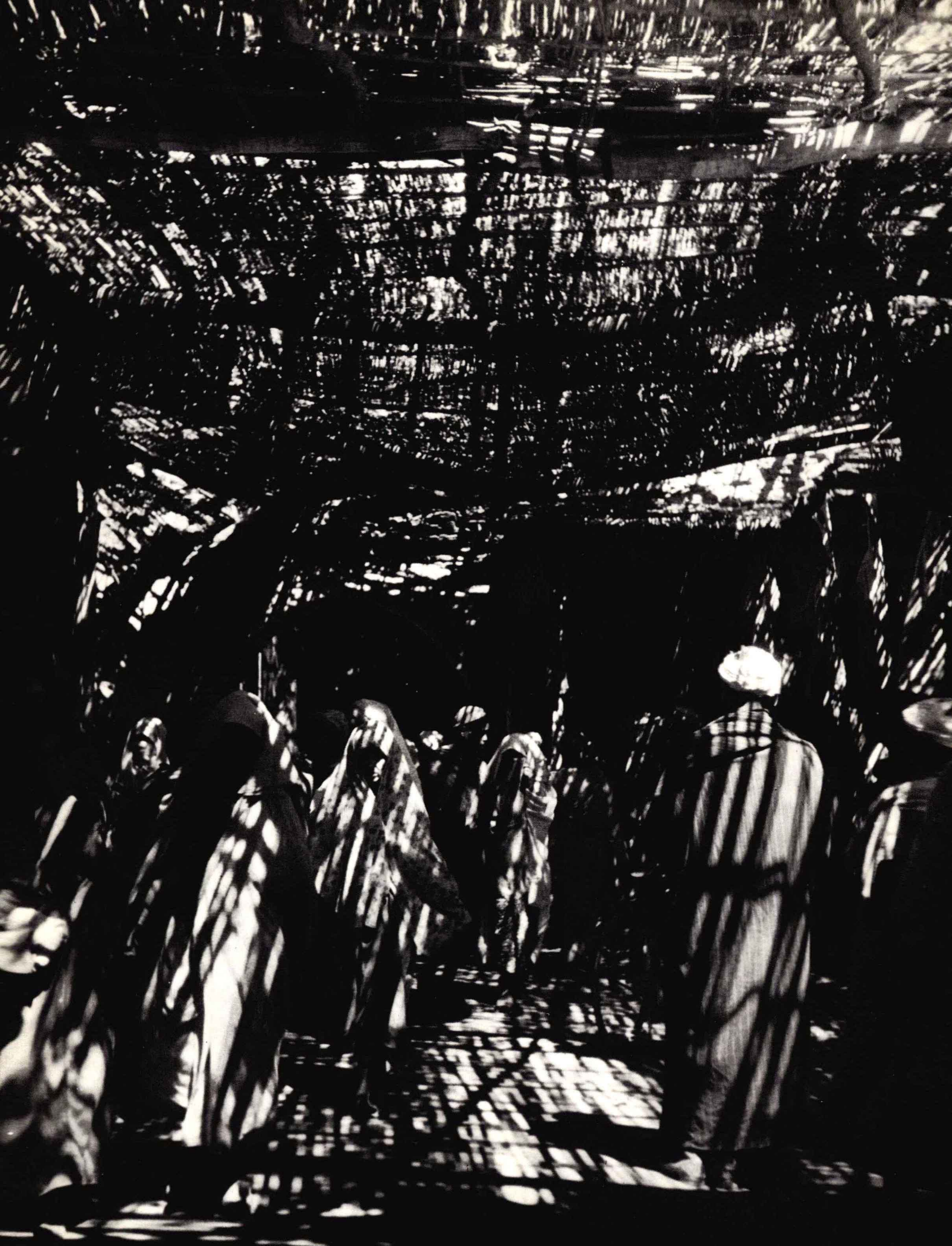
Not since the Middle Ages, when its tremendous drive for expansion had a profound effect on the development of European civilization, has the Arab world been an area of such vital concern to the West. Today, as the Arab peoples are stirring once again, both political and economic considerations place them at the center of world attention. Knowledge and perception are necessary as we approach these peoples whose culture is so closely linked with that of the West.

But perception requires mutual understanding. It is fitting that the Editors of LIFE have made this effort to bring the Arab world into perspective for the American reader. I hope the book will also be widely read in the Arab world. As Desmond Stewart's lucid prose and the book's fine pictorial essays bring out, the Arabs are heirs to an extraordinarily rich religious, cultural and scientific tradition whose development in many ways affected that of the West. It was out of the wellspring of the Judaeo-Christian tradition that the Prophet Mohammed brought to fruition in the arid deserts of Arabia the powerful new religion of Islam. It was Arab scholars who first rediscovered the classical writings of Greece, which were later to stimulate a renaissance of thought in Europe. Arab mathematicians, too, formulated systems which the West employs in modified form today.

Despite these cultural affinities, the new and old states of the Arab world harbor considerable feelings of mistrust toward the West, and therefore toward its strongest nation, the United States. Western powers long held undisputed sway over the destinies of the Arab countries; the memory rankles among Arab leaders and citizens alike. Western capital and control long dominated their enterprises; their economies still show the effects. But although the West no longer controls the area, it should not abandon its concern.

The Arab world is an extraordinarily complicated one. Inspired by new leaders, enriched by modern technology, anxious to push forward with an educated younger generation into the 20th Century, it is solving its problems in ways often baffling to western onlookers. For this reason, Mr. Stewart's revealing insight into Arab problems and aspirations should perform a service for international understanding. For without understanding there can be no friends in an uncertain and perilous world.

GEORGE V. ALLEN
former U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and African Affairs



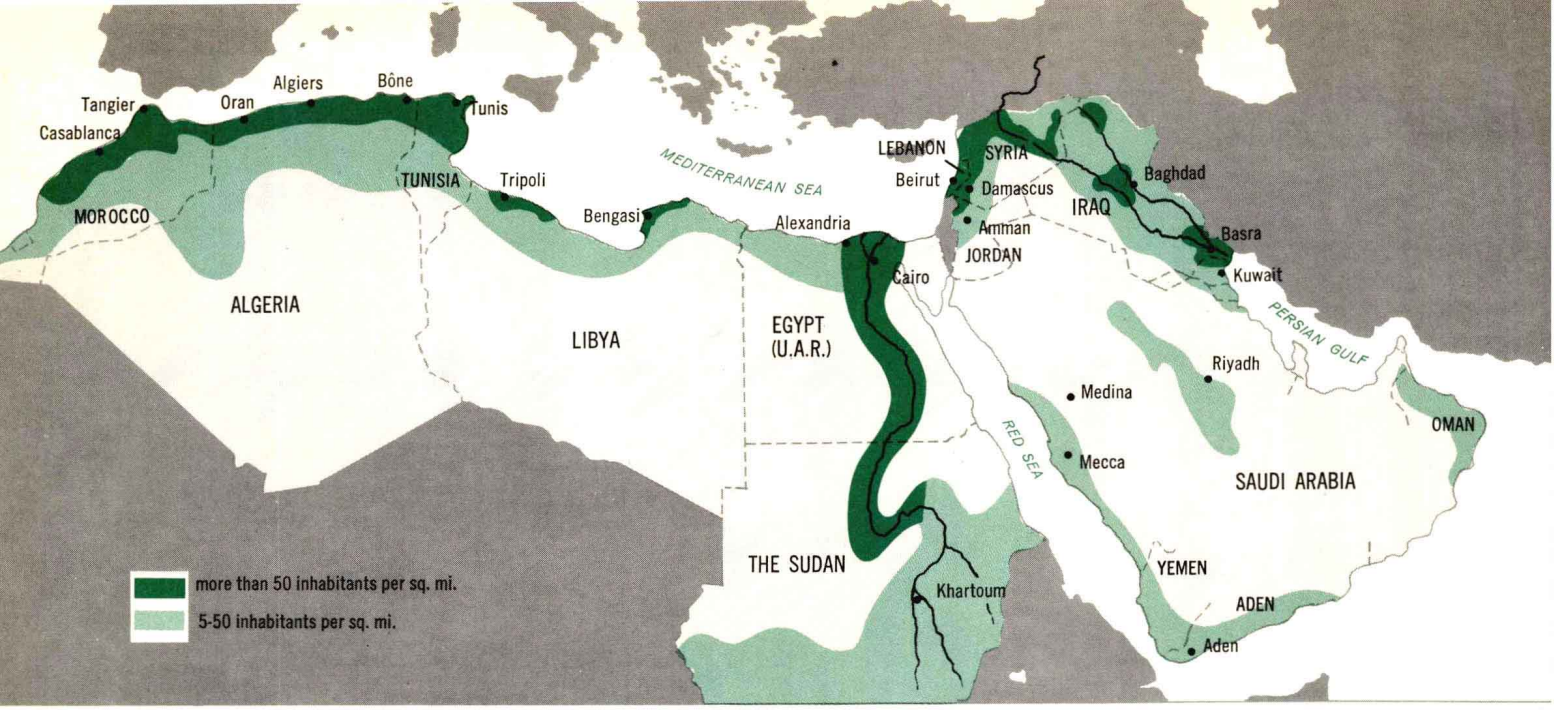
SUN-STREAKED SHOPPERS in a Moroccan town promenade through a straw-thatched *souq*, or series of market stalls. The arcades and bazaars in the winding streets are throbbing centers of public life for Arab townspeople.

1

Unity of the Disunited

STRETCHING more than 4,000 miles across North Africa and the Middle East, all the way from the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean, a conglomerate of more than a dozen independent nations, protectorates, sheikdoms and other political units is encompassed in a simple phrase: "the Arab world." At first glance, however, that world seems to deny all semblance of unity. Much of it is pure wilderness. One part of this world, the Sudan, is larger than all of western Europe; yet the Sudan has a smaller population than the Netherlands. Saudi Arabia is bigger than Texas and Alaska combined and has fewer people than New York City. Egypt, the Arab state with the largest population, has less arable land for its 27 millions than West Virginia; more than 95 per cent of Egyptian territory is desert.

A true map of the Arab world would show it as an archipelago: a scattering of fertile islands through a void of sand and sea, islands that stretch from Morocco through the Algerian coastal plain and the thin periphery of Libya to the slim island valley of the Nile, then on to the oases of Syria and Arabia and, finally, the larger island of Iraq. Bahrain and Aden and the oases of Siwa and Dakhla are as minute as Pacific atolls. On this map the desert, like the sea, both



Scattered areas of settlement in the Arab world, each hemmed in by sea or desert, are indicated on a map showing density of population.

divides and joins. On it the small fertile areas outweigh in importance the spaces of *sahara*, the Arab word for desert.

In these oases, large and small, Arab men and women weave the distinctive fabric of their life. New factories are breaking the monopoly of pyramids; new habits clash with old; yet within it all there is a fusion and a unity.

The fabric is visible in multitudinous details. A bearded old man, white turban wound tightly around his red fez, punctures the cold hours before dawn with his age-old cry: "Prayer is better than sleep!" A jet streaks through the pale sky as donkeys patter through village lanes. In government offices and in the bazaars, there is the rattle of spoons in glasses of mint tea. There is the hum of gossip as bolts of vivid cloth are unrolled before dark-eyed women. In coffee shops, the radio, out of tune, blares the news of the day. In curbside stalls boys fan charcoal as meat is grilled. A scent of spice makes an ordinary street mysterious, and when day ends, the night, identified in Arab poetry with the lover, brings magic under the sapphire stars. From the desert, beyond the minarets and palm trees, come the howls of jackals.

Yet, despite the similarity of custom and image throughout the Arab archipelago, it is not custom and image which bring unity to the Arab world. Nor is religion the sole binding force; neighboring Iran, which is as Moslem as the Arab world, is not a part of it, whereas Lebanon, despite being half Christian and half Moslem, is. Rather, the cement which unites the islands of the Arabs is the shared language of Arabic. The fact should not be surprising to Americans who feel more identity with English-speaking nations like Britain than they do with other democratic countries with similar goals and institutions. President Gamal Abdul Nasser of Egypt, perhaps the most important figure of the Arab world, has himself defined an Arab as "anyone whose mother tongue is Arabic."

The archipelago is as disunited politically as it is geographically. The world hears from its newspapers of an Arab League. This League has its headquarters in Cairo. Its members are Morocco, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, the Sudan, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. Ironically, the League was established in 1945 in part because of the promptings of the wartime British foreign secretary, Anthony Eden, who wished to rally the Arabs to support the British cause and who lost his office as prime minister in 1957 as a result of Britain's attack on Egypt in the Suez Canal

crisis. The League is too useful for the Arabs to discard; at the same time it is too weak to solve any basic problem. Around one table delegates assemble from states which have not left the Middle Ages and from states which have institutes of nuclear physics. In Arabic, the members of the League render each other graceful compliments. Even when one Arab state quarrels with another, it is with a habitual cliché: "sister Egypt" or "sister Syria," as the case may be. But the quarrels are harsh, and the intrigues are constant. Arab leaders spend fortunes in plotting each other's assassination.

Except on two issues—colonialism and Israel—the Arabs do not speak with one voice. They have a gift for disunion and a gift for uniting against any leader who tries to unite them. Six centuries ago the great Arab historian Ibn Khaldun quoted the Koran, the scriptures of Islam, when speaking of Mohammed's miracle in uniting the Arabs: "If you had expended all the treasures on earth, you would have achieved no unity among them. But God achieved unity among them." This divine miracle, however, took place seven centuries before Ibn Khaldun. Today, despite soothing assurances of brotherhood, it is far harder for the ordinary Arab to move about the Arab world than it is for the ordinary European to move about Europe. There is still no customs union, and mail service between Egypt and Iraq takes several days longer than it does between either of them and London or New York. Currency regulations and the need for exit visas from many states are an additional obstacle. Nor are the Arab countries well-informed about each other. It is rare for an Arab newspaper to maintain a full-time correspondent in another Arab capital.

NO two Arab states have precisely the same form of government. The Arabs are ruled by a miscellany of systems which delight political scientists. There are absolute monarchies like Yemen, where a favorite duty of the all-powerful ruler, the Imam, is watching the public beheading of rebels. Education is minimal, and few foreigners are allowed to travel to this beautiful, backward, mountainous land. Saudi Arabia, Yemen's larger and oil-rich neighbor, has been forced for business reasons to open its doors. But Christians are not allowed in the holy cities of Mecca and Medina, and Jews are allowed nowhere. Those Westerners who live in Saudi Arabia are confined to what can be described only as air-conditioned ghettos. Saudi Arabia is the last country in which slavery is a legal institution. But even "free" Saudi Arabian citizens have no political rights. There are no elections, ministers are largely recruited from the ranks of royal princes and public flogging is the punishment for flouting the Koran's prohibition against drunkenness.

THREE monarchies—those of Jordan, Morocco and Libya—can be imprecisely described as constitutional. In each, inconvenient laws can be suspended if the monarch wishes. The throne of Jordan, a state lacking industry, resources and sufficient agricultural land, was created by the British and is now held in place by money supplied by the United States and Britain and by an army recruited from the Bedouin, or nomadic Arabs, of east Jordan. There are elections, but they are usually rigged. Monarchy has firmer support in Morocco and Libya. Moroccans feel that their king, Hassan II, has inherited some of the *baraka*—a power to confer blessing and fortune—which was held by his father, Mohammed V, whose expulsion by the French in 1953 made him a martyr for Moroccan freedom. In Libya the aged King Idris enjoys similar prestige. A man of simple tastes, Idris is also the leader of the puritan Senussi sect, whose members resisted the Italian occupation before World War II at the risk of torture and death.

The six Arab republics—Lebanon, Syria, the Sudan, Egypt, Tunisia and Iraq—are also dissimilar. Lebanon was the first to be established and is the smallest. It has, in a sense, the freest electoral system. Different parties compete for power, and Beirut, the capital, is served by no fewer than 29 daily newspapers. But the parties represent powerful individuals

or religious sects rather than political ideas, and the newspapers are often the mouthpieces of foreign embassies which give them financial subsidies. Thus one newspaper expresses the Egyptian viewpoint, another the French, another the Iraqi, another the British and yet another the Soviet. The Communist party is outlawed, as it is in most other Arab countries, but Communist literature is available.

With four universities (one American, one French, one Egyptian, one Lebanese), Lebanon has the highest level of literacy in the Arab world, around 90 per cent. This achievement is reflected in a political sophistication and tolerance rarely found elsewhere.

Tunisia, another small republic, has much the same pro-western tendency noticeable in Lebanon. But even here President Habib Bourguiba's Neo-Destour party, the group which won independence from France in 1956, behaves as if its opponents were also traitors.

Egypt has been a republic since 1953. The government of President Nasser permits no political opposition, and while the press criticizes individual ministers and individual errors, no general criticism of government policy has appeared in print. Egypt is saved from being a tyranny only because the overwhelming majority of the people back Nasser; they believe that they are in the midst of a revolution akin to war, and they accept consequent limitations on their freedom. The limitations are there, and for those who disagree with Nasser's policies, Egypt seems a police state.

THE SUDAN was given independence in 1956 from what was known as the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium—an administration which was in fact solidly British, with a scattering of minor Egyptian officials. The British bequeathed a democratic system which was technically the purest in the Arab world; the first Sudanese elections, internationally supervised, were honest and fair. Unfortunately the illiteracy (93 per cent) of the electorate and the venality of the elected resulted in a confusion resolved in 1958 by an army coup led by General Ibrahim Abbud. Since then President Abbud has maintained a moderate military dictatorship.

Iraq is also governed by a military regime. The country has not yet worked out a stable substitute for the unpopular monarchy overthrown in 1958. There is no elected president; elections have been postponed; sovereignty still resides in a three-man council appointed by General Abdul Karim Kassem, leader of the 1958 revolt. The seesaw nature of these new "democracies" is illustrated by the way in which one Iraqi politician—Abdul Salaam Aref—was first of all Kassem's partner in revolution, then sentenced to death for plotting against Kassem, then released. The instability of Iraq, described by Kassem as a "republic of Arabs and Kurds," was underlined in 1961 and 1962 when the government felt it was necessary to shell whole villages of dissident Kurds, the people of the northeastern mountains.

IN physical appearance the Arab peoples differ quite as much as they do in their forms of government. The Lebanese can easily be mistaken for southern Europeans; a certain lushness in their features alone distinguishes them from the more angular Greeks. Their men are hirsute and stocky; their women model Paris clothes with a Parisian flair. It would be hard to imagine a people more unlike the Lebanese than the tall, slim grape-black Sudanese. The greatly varied Moslem Egyptians, the descendants of many races, have intermarried with Arab tribes and Turks. The Christian Copts of the same country retain more of the appearance of the ancient Egyptians, with the same thick lips and swarthy skins. Egyptian peasants are big-boned, slow-moving and massive; their diet keeps them slim, but when they migrate to Cairo they and their women often put on weight. Until recently at least, a big belly was the visible sign of the benediction of God. As against the Egyptians, the Arabs of the desert are thin-boned, glossy-haired and marked by hawklike noses and liquid eyes. This lean fragility may be a transient thing. Better diet in a rich city like Kuwait can in a single generation

transform Bedouin into far more robust people.

Yet even the casual western visitor recognizes a unity amidst all this divergence. Whether he alights from his plane in Morocco by the Atlantic Ocean, in Egypt by the Suez Canal or in Qatar by the Persian Gulf, his childhood reading comes back to him. This is the realm of Aladdin and Ali Baba. The people remind him of his illustrated Bible. What he sees is strange, but recognizable.

For however much the divided Arabs modernize, however high they push their skyscrapers in Cairo or Casablanca, however sumptuous the automobiles they drive in Beirut or however gaudy the shirts they put on their backs in the Bahrain oil fields, the Arabs possess a distinctive common culture which they can no more throw off than a hummingbird can change its nesting habits to those of a thrush.

This culture has nothing to do with education. It can be found in university graduates as well as in illiterates. It shows itself in the Arab manner of treating strangers, from an overwhelming social hospitality to a prickly bringing up of political issues. It shows in an unpunctuality carried to the level of an art and in a postponement of plans to the last moment. It shows in the advertisements for Coca-Cola; even in neon, Arabic script is graceful. It shows in the shapes of minarets and mosques. It shows in the trees, above all the date palm under which, according to the Koran, Mary was sitting at the time of the Nativity. It shows in the crowded, secretive alleys of the cities, where the houses gaze inward, and where on the flat roofs both parapets and age-old conventions prevent the men of one household from peering over at the women of another. It shows in the desert where man sings, noble and alone.

To the Arabs, the identity of their world is reflected in the manners of everyday life, in a way of regarding events—the future, in particular. No one thinks of making a definite appointment; it is qualified by "*InshAllah,*" "if God wills." Nothing is inevitable or fixed; all is subject to a Providence before which men are small. However automatic it may be, reference to the deity is good form. Even atheists (and there are some) invoke the Allah they deny.

Poetry in the past was an Arab bond; at present music, song in particular, takes its place. Um Kalthum, the Egyptian woman singer, is more truly "The Voice of the Arabs" than Ahmed Said, a political commentator for a Cairo radio station of that name. Throughout the entire Arab world, the first Thursday evening of each month is dedicated to her hour-long songs on Radio Cairo; her recitals last long into the night. A woman of around 60, Um Kalthum has the volume of the great Norwegian soprano Kirsten Flagstad, and her popularity is as high with cabdrivers as with cabinet ministers. As she twists her handkerchief between frenzied hands, she wrings the hearts of Arab youth. In Baghdad, lawyers listen to her in their clubs over leaves of lettuce and the potent liquor known as *araq*. In Cairo, it is not necessary to have a radio; Um Kalthum's oceanic voice swirls over the city from other people's.

If the Westerner sees an Arab unity in such external things as the reedy music of quarter tones, the gritty dust that seeps into Arab cities from nearby sands or the shape of the moon over a palm frond, the Arab himself feels at

SPELLING ARABIC WORDS

The transliteration of Arabic words into English is a continuing problem for scholars. Not only does the pronunciation of Arabic vary throughout the Arab world, but several of the 28 letters of the Arabic alphabet represent sounds for which the English language has no exact equivalents. Thus, so common an Arabic name as "Mohammed" has been variously spelled in English as "Muhammad," "Mohamed" and "Mehemet." None of these spellings gives the exact equivalent of the Arab pronunciation. This book uses the spellings most familiar to Americans–for example, "Mohammed," "Moslem" rather than "Muslim," and "Koran" rather than "Al-Qur'an."

home, from Morocco to Kuwait, in innumerable details of attitude. An Arab's king may be at radio war with the next country's president, but when he greets a stranger with "*Salaam aleikum!*"—"Peace be with you!"— he does indeed know the peace which comes from shared assumptions. No one will question him about his wife; he will question no man about his. If he visits a house, he will be told, "This is your home," and if he admires an object, it will be offered to him—and so he takes care not to express his admiration.

The Arab will not offer, or be offered, pork. He will never split a check, in the sense of going Dutch. Whoever pays does so lavishly, for the payer is privileged. The Arab will never criticize anyone to his face, nor expect to be so criticized. When he asks an impossible favor of some bureaucrat, he will not be turned down, but will be given a temporizing answer. Who knows? With God's favor the impossible may become possible. If the Arab visits a friend, he will never be turned away with the phrase, "So and so is not at home," however busy the man he visits may be. Wherever he goes he will be addressed by strangers, even by bus conductors, with some intimate Arabic phrase. He may be greeted as *ya aini* (my eye) or, more commonly, as *ya akhi* (my brother).

THE Arabic language, in fact, is more than the unifying bond of the Arab world; it also shapes and molds that world. Like other languages, it carries within it a whole series of built-in judgments and attitudes. Since it is also the language of the Koran and Mohammed, the Prophet of God, it has an even greater effect on its speakers than other languages have on their speakers. It is impossible for a Westerner to speak Arabic with any fluency without becoming Arabized to a certain extent.

Written Arabic is the same everywhere. When a journalist in Beirut or in Casablanca writes about nuclear tests, he writes in the same language. When an orator broadcasts from Cairo or Baghdad, he speaks in the same tongue, although Egyptians pronounce their president's first name as "Gamal" and Iraqis say "Jamal."

The journalist and the broadcaster revert deliberately to a formal Arabic idiom as different from the language they use with family and friends as the 14th Century language of the English poet Geoffrey Chaucer differs from modern American—or British—English. This need to switch from the words a man chats in to the words a man writes in imposes a strain on all Arabs. The speaker or writer metaphorically puts on singing robes. He is not quite the same man as the man of everyday. No wonder that what he says on these high occasions often bears little relation to what he really feels.

IF the classical language is the same for all Arabs, the spoken language has differences. These apply to many common terms—good, bad, clothing, health, rain, countryside—but above all they apply to things which the ancient Arabs did not have.

The Arabs of the desert ate squatting on the earth; they did not use tables any more than the Bedouin do today. The ancient Arabs therefore had little need for the word for "table," and modern Arabs use a variety of words for it. An Iraqi puts his chicken and rice on a *mayz;* a Lebanese serves his stuffed vine leaves from a *towleh;* the Egyptian eats his beans in oil from a *tarabayzah*. These borrowed terms are reminders of external influences on the Arab world. Iran is Iraq's eastern neighbor and has given the Iraqis much besides the word for table. Italian influence in the Middle East has given the Lebanese their unit of money, lira, as well as a distortion of *tavola* for table. In Egypt, Greeks long had a near monopoly of small-scale commerce. The Egyptian name for a table comes from a word which in Greek also means a bank.

Whatever the small differences in his language, whatever the disputes of his rulers, whatever the variations in his climate or customs, the ordinary Arab feels at home inside the Arab world. He understands and is understood. To an Arab, every other Arab is his brother, but not always in an idealistic sense. Brothers, after all, have been known to become enemies.

Neatly uniformed Egyptian high school girls file past a bemused street peddler in the port city of Alexandria after a day of classes.

Fruitful Flux in a Once-Static Land

Once mellowed and moldering, the far-flung civilization of the Arabs is being swept today by invigorating winds of change. A fruitful kind of disorder is replacing the old fixed patterns of life. Women in slacks and women in veils, politicians and peasants, oil workers and nomadic herdsmen—such disparate elements march side by side, often conflicting. The old spirit of fatalism is fading as the Arab world senses a renewed opportunity for greatness.

SLEEK HOTEL opened in 1959, the Nile Hilton in Cairo *(above)* looks like a Florida transplantation to the nearby river after which the building is named. The lordly lion stands at the entrance to a bridge across the river.

SUBURBAN TOWERS housing Cairo's prosperous middle class *(opposite)* rise between the western shore of the Nile and the Giza pyramids beyond. The houseboats are a favored abode of artists and theater people.

BLARING BILLBOARD provides a backdrop for a daring young girl on a Cairo playground swing *(below)*. The use of a very un-Egyptian-looking girl in the advertisement is geared to an Egyptian preference for blondes.