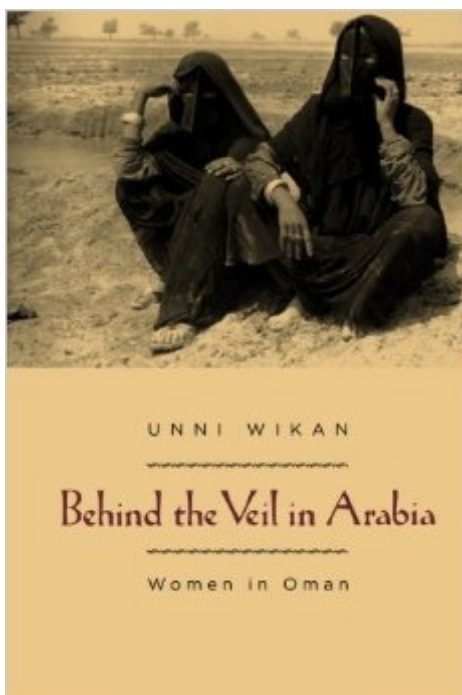


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Behind The Veil In Arabia: Women In Oman



Synopsis

Through photographs and detailed case histories, Unni Wikan explores the strict segregation of women, the wearing of the burqa mask, the elaborate nuptial rituals, and the graceful quality of Oman's social relations."Wikan does provide insights into the real position of these secluded and segregated women. . . . All this is interesting and valuable."âAhdaf Soueif, Times Literary Supplement"The book is detailed, insightful, and . . . engrossing. Anyone interested in the day-to-day triumphs and sorrows of women who live 'behind the veil' will want to read this account."âArab Book World"Wikan, a fine ethnographer, has an eye for everything that is distinctive about the culture and . . . builds up a wholly convincing picture. Above all, there is a sustained attempt to penetrate the inner lives of these strangely serene people."âFrank H. Stewart, Wilson Quarterly"This book will certainly be of interest to all scholars concerned with sexual identity in the Islamic world."âHenry Munson, American Anthropologist

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Customer Reviews

It's not as if there are so many anthropology books written about the women of Arabia and their lives. No, I haven't found a great number. I bought this one some years ago and just got around to reading it. The Arabic-speaking Norwegian author, wife of renowned anthropologist Fredrik Barth, lived in Oman for six months back in the 1970s, not long after the country opened up to the world. It was an excellent chance to study a culture not yet much affected by "globalization" (though many men had worked abroad in the Emirates, Saudi Arabia, India or Zanzibar). I liked her introduction for readers, and all her descriptions of interactions between women, between husband and wife, and

between women and their families. I liked the fact that she did not swallow the common Western preconceptions about Muslim or Arab women, but dealt with everything as she saw it, with fresh eyes, as it were. I appreciated her efforts to analyze what she saw and come to some broader statements about the lives, roles, and overall position of women in Omani society (or at least that of Sohar, on the Batinah coast). She realized that many Omani women were not the oppressed creatures often depicted in Western press and literature and she described how they relished their roles, felt comfortable, and proud. So far, so good. Very good even. But as I read through this study, many questions kept coming up in my mind. First of all, how accurate could this study be if the author only stayed six months in the town of Sohar, split into two occasions? The topic she'd chosen demanded a longer period of research, though not all anthropology does require it. Secondly, I noted that most of her friends and informants were young girls, between 13 and 19 years old.

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