FOREWORD

North African studies, until recently the almost exclusive province of French scholarship, has in the last decade become a subject of increasing interest on this side of the Atlantic. *The Ways of the Desert*, previously available only in French, responds to this interest by offering the reader a fascinating introduction to the life of the North African Arab nomad. Its companion volume, *Horses of the Sahara*, provided a detailed description and history of the great breeds of Arab horses; *The Ways of the Desert* not only shows us how these horses are used, but adds detailed information about related activities in the Sahara desert.

The appeal of this volume goes well beyond its attractions for those of us with a special interest in the lore of desert hunt and chase. General Daumas and his major collaborator-informant, the Emir Abd-el-Kader, together provide sensitive insights into the total culture of the North African desert people of the nineteenth century. Both spiritual and material aspects of desert life are encompassed in this work, which ranges from translations of Arab poetry to descriptions of the uses of the fat and remains of the ostrich! The patterns of conviction and conduct described form an important part of the rich cultural heritage of the modern Maghreb nations.

General Daumas had the tastes and style of an ethnologist if not the formal training, for his descriptions are clearly built upon interviews with native informants who were experts in their particular line of activity. Thus the way of life described in this book is often presented from what comes very close to being an inside point of view. Occasionally the good General feels obliged to indicate his disapproval of

certain practices or beliefs or to criticize his Arab friends, but in large part his underlying sympathy for the Arab people of the North African desert overcomes his conventionalized ethnocentrism and permits his informants to speak clearly through his pen.

A great part of the book is devoted to the descriptions of the various animals that are both hunted and used for hunting. The reader, however, will find also a great deal of information about tribal customs and the problems of the domestic tent. So also will he discover something of the Arab nomads' religious feeling, thus gaining a view of Islam quite different from that reflected in the formal statements of those scholars who find the principle more interesting than the practice.

This is a charming book, charming in the most positive sense of the word. The style, happily conveyed in Mrs. Ohlendorf's excellent translation, serves well the educated French General, the Arab aristocrat, and the Arab nomads, whose views are all well portrayed. General Daumas did not attempt social analysis: He was not interested in resolving academic problems. He has, however, provided us with an ethnography which compares favorably with the best of the travel literature of the nineteenth century, and which greatly enhances our understanding of North African life today. We are in Mrs. Ohlendorf's debt for making it available to a new readership.

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