



Married to a Bedouin

Marguerite van Geldermalsen

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Married to a Bedouin Marguerite van Geldermalsen

‘Where you staying?’ the Bedouin asked. ‘Why you not stay with me tonight—in my cave.’ He seemed enthusiastic. And we were looking for adventure.” Thus begins the story of how Marguerite van Geldermalsen—a New Zealand-born nurse—became the wife of Mohammad Abdallah Othman, a Bedouin souvenir-seller of the Manaja tribe, and lived with him and their children in a community of 100 families in the ancient caves of Petra in Jordan. Marguerite and a friend were traveling through the Middle East in 1978 when she met the charismatic Mohammad and decided that he was the man for her. Their home was a lofty 2,000 year-old cave carved into the red rock of a hillside. She became the resident nurse and learned to live like the Bedouin—cooking over fires, hauling water on donkeys, and drinking sweet black tea—and over the years she became as much of a curiosity as the cave-dwellers to tourists. This is her extraordinary story.

Married to a Bedouin Details

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From Reader Review Married to a Bedouin for online ebook

Yara Eisa says

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C. says

Surprisingly enough, I enjoyed this a lot. A really interesting look into Bedouin culture, and deciphering all the accented, dialectical, bizarrely-transcribed Arabic was a lot of fun, even if it did make me realise what an embarrassing mistake I made in my oral exam last semester.

Most interesting, though, was the narrative voice. Taking the book at face value, which is probably stupid - she even said at the end that she left out a lot of the bad stories because she's not interested in remembering them - Marguerite is a truly interesting personality. For a New Zealander to slip so easily into the life of a Bedouin woman, to adopt their cultural quirks and foibles with so little resistance and so much ease, seemed utterly extraordinary to me. That someone could be open-minded and open-hearted enough to grow to love it as she did, I can barely believe. Probably this says more about me than it does about her.

I did find it strange how little she questioned the things that were going on around her. Everything was reported as if by a totally impartial observer: the example that really struck me was when she talked about the men bringing over second or third brides from Egypt. I was expecting some small attempt at analysis, or at least empathy, but there was nothing; no hint that they might have experienced loneliness and culture shock from being uprooted from Cairo to a cave in the desert of Jordan, nothing really except a comment that she couldn't understand their accents. But this is typical of the book, really: no emotions are described except for her love for her Bedou husband. Strange, and interesting.

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Rhonda Bartlett says

I was loaned this book by a friend who visited Petra last year and met the author. At first I was put off by the title but when I began reading it I was enthralled. I visited Petra in 1995 and our guide had spoken of the Bedouin who lived there until the mid 80s when the Jordanian government built housing for them and they were relocated. It was fascinating to read about their daily lives, making a life for themselves amidst antiquity. At first I couldn't understand how the author thought she could adapt to such a huge cultural difference. As it turns out she did adopt many aspects of Bedouin and Muslim culture but not all. It was also interesting to learn a little about how the Bedouin felt about the relocation. Sometimes the story was a little hard to follow when Arabic words are used but there is a glossary at the end of the book. Overall I really enjoyed the book.

Kate says

I really enjoyed this book. Unlike Queen Noor's book - this book had a good narrative, and gave me good insight into the world of the Bedouin from a Western woman's perspective. I also enjoyed how she made conscious choices to join in to the culture of her new home, and to abstain when she felt that there was something to gain by doing so.

I have visited jordan a few times, and I think that's what makes the topic more interesting to me ... but it's possible that we can all learn something from this book.

It wasn't a central topic, but I enjoyed noting the ways that Islam influence her life ... everyone is Muslim,

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Walaa Fathi says

unfamiliar way of life. However, by the time I reached the last paragraph I was sold. It all was so clear and so simply put in a few lines, and it dawned on me that this could happen, she really was there because she loved a Bedouin. I guess there's a reason the book is called "Married to a Bedouin", not "A Kiwi in the Desert" or something else of the sort.

It was great to get such a closer look and so much insights about the Bedouin way of life, however ironic it was that I, a Jordanian, was learning about Jordan and authentic Jordanian traditions from a New Zealander. But come to think about it, she's probably more Jordanian than I'll ever be.

Benjamin baschinsky says

Really a 2.5. Having been in the Middle East recently I was able to relate to Petra and the lifestyle. That being said, the writing wasn't outstanding and I felt at times it was redundant.

Eng.Roudha says

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Meg says

My partner went to school with the authors son, so when the book came out he made sure to pick it up. Unfortunately he found it hard to get into. However, after I read a few lines of the first chapter I found myself interested in seeing what happened next.

This book provided a straight-forward account from a european person integrating into Bedouin life-a very different culture. I found it interesting and the author provided a pretty clear picture of every day life. The one thing missing from this book was emotion, a confiding voice. How did such an independant person feel about suddenly living in a culture where she couldn't speak the language? Was she lonely? Was she scared? How did she feel, sleeping under an open sky/living in a cave/married to a man from a very different culture? I would have loved to know more about how her relationship with her husband worked. Despite somewhat dry narrative, I did enjoy this book and found it a fairly easy read/

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