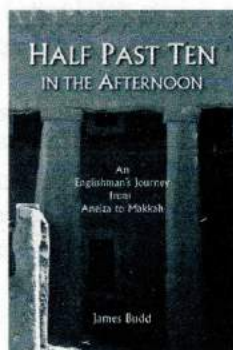


Budd, James, *Half Past Ten in the Afternoon: an Englishman's journey from Aneiza to Makkah*, Arabian Publishing Ltd, 2014, hardback, 240pp, isbn 978-0957676336, £20.



A family holiday to Morocco as a child and his reading of Wilfred Mesinger's "Arabian Sands" at the age of sixteen are referred to by the author, an Englishman born in 1943, before going on to recount his wish to follow up his degree in Arabic at Cambridge with experience of living in an Arab country, determined to improve his knowledge of the language. It was the chance London meeting of a university friend in 1965 that would lead to James Budd's almost four and a half years' teaching English in what was then a remote town in central Saudi Arabia. *Half Past Ten in the Afternoon* is a personal account of the author's journey to Aneiza, the friendships he made and the ultimately stronger resistance to his presence that he experienced from differing elements of the community. By Budd's own admission he explains that much of his description of late 60's Aneiza is based on memory as he did not keep a diary at the time, however, the final two chapters of this insightful book record the author's conversion to Islam in 1988, his journey back to Saudi in 1995 to perform the Hajj and his first return visit to Aneiza in 2011.

Budd's Cambridge University friend had described in positive terms how he was teaching English in Eastern Saudi Arabia; on being pressed as to whether there might be a similar job for him Budd was given the telephone number of a Saudi who was at the time in London recruiting teachers for positions in the Kingdom.

It may be of interest to explain that Sheikh Abdulaziz al Turki was then head of education in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia and the first person to advocate the hiring of British teachers to teach English in the Kingdom; he visited London in

the summers of 1965, '66 and '67 to interview and hire candidates. In 1968, Sheikh Abdulaziz moved with his young family to London as a diplomat, taking up the post of Cultural Attaché at the Saudi Embassy, remaining in the job until his untimely death in 1985. Sheikh Abdulaziz's own family came from the town of Aneiza, so it is unsurprising that on accepting the job offered to him, Budd found that he was to teach in the Saudi heartland of al Qassim.

On his arrival in the Kingdom, the author was impressed by the modernity of Dhahran and nearby al Khobar before taking the train to the capital Riyadh and his onward, eventful and seemingly time-travelling journey to his new place of work. 1960s Aneiza may not have looked so different to the 1870s description given in Charles Doughty's *Travels in Arabia Deserta*, first published in 1888. Doughty recalled visiting a "great new (clay) house...the loam brick-work at Aneyza is good, and such house walls may stand above one hundred years". Budd clearly relished his new job and with the kindly help of a number of friendly inhabitants settled into life in Aneiza as much as was possible. The intrigues and financial skirmishing of some of his (non-Saudi) Arab fellow teachers, was to be an accompaniment to Budd's work but relations with his students were generally positive and encouraging.

In part perhaps to make up for Budd's lack of a personal written record he intersperses his text with passages from *Travels in Arabia Deserta* and descriptions of Doughty's experiences of Aneiza, in addition to references to T.E. Lawrence and other earlier Western travelers to the country.

From the time of Budd's arrival in Aneiza tensions in the Middle East, both between neighbouring Arab countries and relations between Israel and its neighbours, were escalating alarmingly and the author provides the reader with his views on how events unfolded and the effect it had on his relations with some of the inhabitants of Aneiza. That he should have found living in the town increasingly difficult, resulting in his departure for a new post in Riyadh in February 1970, would not surprise the reader but his experiences of the warm hospitality, help and kindness of many left an indelible impression on the author.

His post in Riyadh was short lived however, the author being informed in June of 1970 that "in the

public interest” he was “not to be allowed back after the summer”. Budd left Saudi Arabia and took up other jobs teaching English in Kuwait, Qatar and Oman before returning home to England in 1986. In England Budd began a personal struggle to come to terms with which religious path he should follow and finally converted to Islam in 1988. His resulting experience of undertaking the Hajj and again his later journey back to Saudi and return visit to Aneiza are recounted in a most interesting and descriptive manner and this enjoyable book concludes with warm words both for his many Saudi friends and their country.

Robin Start