

QUASAR
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معهد كوازار الدولي
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FOR A NEW FUTURE

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Sheikh I'd Abu Rashed of the Bedouin village of Um Thnan in the Negev Israel

BEDOUIN SHEIKHS & KINGS: MODERN MIDDLE EAST IS LED BY BEDOUINS FROM A PROUD & RICH TRADITION

BY CAROL LOFTUR-THUN

"Bedouin" has been used as an insult, but it is really a compliment. Even the Prophet Muhammed was a Bedouin.

The modern Middle East and North Africa is led by kings and sheikhs from historically Bedouin, or in Arabic Bedu, tribes. These modern Bedu descendants include kings and leaders of Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar, Oman, Kuwait, Bahrain, Jordan, Libya, Algeria, Morocco, and Sudan, among others in the Middle East and North Africa. In the modern MENA region, being a "Bedouin" and from the Bedu tradition can mean being a king and leader.

Bedu or Bedouin culture is organized around self-help and collective responsibility, with a very strong honor code or "sharaf." The Bedu are world famous for their hospitality, even for strangers. Known for their poetry, fierce courage, close family ties, generosity, humility, and the finest Arabian horses and camels, the Bedu are also some of the toughest survivors, enduring in unforgiving climates of brutal sun, mere inches of rain, and extreme temperatures with little food or water. They know the earth, moon and stars, and how to adapt, survive, and thrive through the centuries.

BEDU CULTURE & LEADERS

What is Bedu or Bedouin in Arabic Culture?

In Arab culture, heritage, and language 'Bedu' refers to one who lives in the desert, and all the Arab tribes were originally Bedu. Current leaders of many Middle East and North African nations are from tribes that were Bedu. The word 'badawiyin' (of which the English word Bedouin is derived) means desert dweller, and Bedouin is the anglicized version of Bedu.

Generally speaking, a Bedu has traditionally meant an Arab who lives in one of the desert areas of the Middle East and raises camels, sheep, or goats. Bedu tradition is that they are descendants of Shem, son of Noah, whose ancestor was Adam, the first man (see the book of Genesis, chapter 5, of the Bible). Most Bedu converted to Islam, but Christian Bedu tribes exist as well. Bedu shepherds discovered the Dead Sea Scrolls, Jewish texts from ancient times.

Although most Arabs from Bedu tribes now live in urban areas, there are Bedu communities still living in the desert in traditional ways in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, UAE, Oman, Bahrain, Egypt, Syria, Palestine, Israel, Jordan, Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Morocco, Sudan, Algeria, Tunisia, Lebanon, and Libya. Even for urbanized Arabs, the legacy and traditions of Bedu culture influence their lives today.



King Faisal was a direct descendant of the Prophet Muhammad and became King of Syria and then King of Iraq. Being from a Bedu tribe, he promoted pan-Arabism and unity. He also advocated tolerance and friendship with the Jews, Christians, and Kurdish communities in his kingdom.



EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

DR. ZEYAD ALSHAMMARI

Quasar International Institute is a nonpartisan educational nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting peace, prosperity, and a sustainable future for us all. Our goal is to fight hate, build peace, and foster people-to-people exchanges and relationships.

"OUR BEDU TRADITION IS A PROUD LEGACY OF COURAGE, HOSPITALITY, AND HONOR, AND IT IS A PRIVILEGE TO BE CALLED BEDOUIN."

I invite you to join me in achieving these goals and fulfilling Quasar's mission. We welcome diverse views and we hope to hear from you.

BEDU VALUES, SHEIKHS & 21ST CENTURY CHALLENGES

Bedu or Bedouin culture places a strong emphasis on ensuring the tribe as a whole survives and thrives in some of the harshest climates on earth. It is a communal culture, built to thrive in the Middle East and North Africa. The culture has uniquely adapted over the centuries to exist in harmony with the natural world, despite its harshness.

Bedu sheikhs are responsible for the welfare, protection, and prosperity of the entire tribe with shared land, water, and labor in an informal system of power sharing with a council of elders from the tribe. Sheikhs traditionally did not have unilateral power to enforce decisions, instead relying on influence gained through listening to tribal members and demonstrating an astute understanding of their communities' needs. Age, wisdom, piety, generosity, and hospitality confer status. Bedu society thus embraces a participatory style of leadership, where the sheikh is first among equals.

As our planet faces existential threats from pandemics, climate change, nuclear capability, artificial intelligence, and extremely rapid technological and societal change, the values and leadership style from this Bedu tradition have never been more applicable. The ability to live in harmony with nature; the values of community, courage, perseverance, honor, generosity, and equality; and this participatory style of leadership where diverse voices are heard and considered can serve us well in addressing these threats for our survival.



Sheikh Auda ibn Tayi of the Howeitat tribe in Saudi Arabia and Jordan was a leader of the Arab Revolt and a fierce advocate for Arab independence. He was immortalized in T.E. Lawrence's "Seven Pillars of Wisdom" as epitomizing the nobility, power, and pride of the Bedu tribal ethos.



Sheikhs led their tribes as entire communities to endure, survive, and thrive in the harshest of conditions. They oversaw communal land, water, and labor in consultation with tribal councils. They were expected to epitomize humility, generosity, listening, and focused on the welfare, protection, and prosperity of all community members.

BEDU SERVANT LEADERSHIP Leadership for the 21st Century

In "Servant Leadership in the Bedouin-Arab Culture," Yasin Khalaf Sarayah refers to Robert Greenleaf's definition of Servant Leadership:

The servant leader is servant first. This begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, and then one's conscience aspires one to lead. The best test to evaluate the effectiveness of the servant leader is to inquire if those served grow as persons. Do the served become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? And, what is the effect on the least privileged in a society? Will they benefit, or, at least, not be further deprived?

Sarayah describes how Servant leadership is deeply rooted in Bedu culture. Many similarities can be found between Bedu leadership practices and those of Servant Leadership, including humility, putting others and community first, listening to diverse community members, empowering others to succeed, and caring for the welfare and benefit of all. Wisdom, courage, and generosity brought more influence and power than wealth or force. He notes the example of Sheikh Hajj Ali in the 1960s in Southern Jordan, and the tribal saying "The youngest is the servant and the one who rules is likewise the servant." These are key leadership skills for the 21st Century.

BEDU KINGS & LEADERS

From the historical formation of Saudi Arabia to the recent reunion at the GCC summit, leaders from Bedu tribes and traditions have shaped the Middle East and North Africa.



Gulf Cooperation Council leaders before the opening session of the historic 41st GCC summit in the northwestern Saudi city of al-Ula, January 5, 2021. These leaders individually and collectively represent many of the Bedu tribes from the region. Credit: AFP/Saudi Royal Palace/Bandar al-Jaloud



Saudi Arabia's King Abdul Aziz Ibn Saud met with the US President Franklin Theodore Roosevelt (FDR) in 1954 aboard the USS Quincy in the Great Bitter Lake on the Suez Canal, and their meeting resulted in close diplomatic relations for many decades. Ibn Saud from the Al Saud tribal family drew together the Bedu tribes to create Saudi Arabia

BEDU ECHOES AT QUASAR

Quasar's Executive Director from Shammar Tribe Inspired by Science Diplomacy

Dr. Zeyad Alshammari from Ha'il is from the Shammar tribe, and his great grandfather was the rafiq for noted English explorer, archeologist, and kingmaker Gertrude Bell. She was called al-Khatun which means "Queen" in Persian and "The Lady of the Court" by the Bedu tribes and leaders she helped to make kings. She visited Ha'il in 1913 as part of her 1800 mile trek from Damascus.

As an internationally ranked geopolitical analyst, Dr. Alshammari co-founded Quasar International Institute to promote peace, prosperity, and a sustainable future, drawing on Bedu traditions of humility, listening, generosity, hospitality, and working for the benefit for all.

Dr. Alshammari has embraced Science Diplomacy as a vehicle to promote peace and prosperity for his homeland of Saudi Arabia, and as a way to help strengthen not only the Kingdom, but to help build peace and cooperation in the Middle East and North Africa. His Royal Highness Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's Middle East Green Initiative is an inspiration and example of Science Diplomacy.



Al Hailam ibn Khlaif, who was the rafiq for British explorer Gertrude Bell, "al-Khatun"

BEDOUINS & TODAY'S CRISES

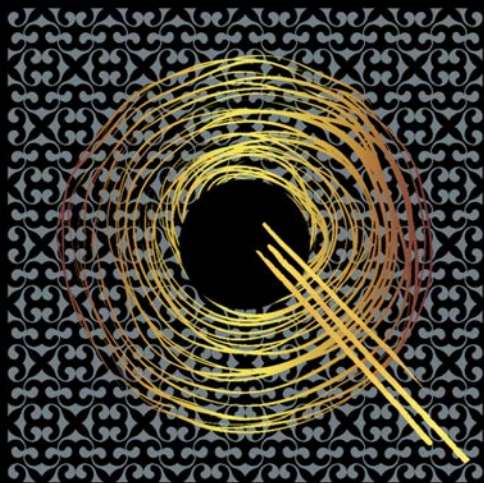
As scientists deepen our understanding of climate change, pandemics, and other crises--and as diplomats and politicians try to achieve peace--the value of traditional indigenous cultures, knowledge and practices becomes more and more apparent.

From regenerative agriculture to alternative medicine to eco-tourism to leadership, ensuring traditional knowledge, wisdom, and techniques are preserved and prominent is gaining traction. For example, Bedouin regenerative agriculture in Saudi Arabia's Al Baydha project has been shown to mitigate and reverse desertification, as well as improve the health of the soil and its productivity.

It is imperative that we learn from and integrate age-old wisdom, knowledge, and practices from Bedu tribal cultures for our common survival and our common good. **Stay tuned to Quasar to learn more.**



Al Badi tribal members in Oman during a tribal celebration. Modernization, urbanization, and conflicts throughout the Middle East are threats to preserving Bedouin communities and traditions. Photo by Jeff Topping for The National



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OUR MISSION

We build international understanding, peace, and cooperation through people-to-people exchanges, experiential learning, leadership development, and travel focused on learning about and engaging in projects in key emerging sectors essential to our collective future.

Quasar is a nonpartisan educational nonprofit dedicated to building understanding and building bridges. Located in Washington, DC, Quasar focuses on developing cooperation, collaborations, and strategic partnerships. Quasar works to enhance U.S. awareness, knowledge, and understanding of Arab countries, the Middle East, and the Islamic world, and we enhance MENA awareness, knowledge, and understanding of the U.S.