



The “Penguins” and the Infidels

A Whole New Look at a Flightless Bird in a Tuxedo

Soly Catfish Batman, he’s finally blown his top, or quaffed one too many jugs of Jeddah Jin! Why in the world are we talking about an Antarctic Bird in conjunction with Camel Tails? I thought those critters are confined to the extreme southern regions of the rotating globe, or to zoos with air-conditioning, and appropriately cooled swimming pools? Good question my well informed friend, but it comes under a different heading – to paraphrase Longfellow...

“Listen my children
and you shall hear,
of the late night Souk raid
of two infidels dear!”

Heh, heh, heh...

Obviously, a new definition must be proffered before this entire tail (tale?) becomes clear. In short, a definition of a Penguin to an Expat of Western extraction has absolutely nothing to do with a zoo, unless of course you are willing to define the entire sandpit (aka The World’s Largest Litter Box) a zoo. In retrospect, there may be ample rationale for such a definition, but lest I get distracted, let me stick to the story of the Penguins and the Infidels.

It seems that when Mohammad was splicing his new religious teachings into what would become the Qur’an, he was faced with a rather rebellious and unruly crew of camel raiders as his converts. Now these gents were imbued with a squalid set of moral standards, and social graces. Licentiousness was rampant, and off-duty orgies were the order of the day. Such conduct, he commanded, must stop if they were to please the Almighty! In desperation, he took a very secular solution to



**A Pair of Souk Raiders with the RSMC
(Prior to Penguin Evaluation)
Hartnett (L) Culver (R)**

what has now taken on the 'mantel' of (and been accepted as) holy writ. The new guidelines of personal conduct must discourage drunken revelry, and constant "*squeeze-poaching*" must be nipped in the bud, lest it encourage traditional Arabic Blood feuds over rivalries concerning the female of the species. Rather than take a simple "commandment route" as had Moses, Mohammad decided to go the "what you don't know (or see)" may well prevent inner-tribal and inner-personal rivalries and warfare.

The solution? Take your women and "**hide** them (and their more alluring features)" under the guise of protecting them from the world! What could be simpler? First you must cover the ladies' limbs and any projecting skin that might tweak the interest of licentious individuals.

Many of the inhabitants of the Arabic climes had only an occasional lonely camel to satisfy their carnal desires during lonely weeks in the dunes. When reintroduced into civilized society during occasional trips to the population centers, a lustful camel jockey would be less likely to go 'wenching' if he could only see what appeared to be a black potato sack propelled with a mostly hidden pair of feet. The total image would be accomplished by covering the female body with a black wrap-around garment called an "Abaya." The Abaya was complimented with an appropriate head covering, called a "Hijab" (often white or light colored, although it *can* be black), topped off with a face veil (colors vary) called a "Niqab" that would allow the lady to breath, but "mask" (a verb) the facial features while still allowing enough vision to keep the camouflaged female from bumping into an occasional donkey cart during the normal course of a day's activities.

To an uninitiated Infidel, the resultant Arabic vision of loveliness would appear, at first glance to approximate the appearance of a Penguin. The black Abaya with contrasting light colored head covering, (the Hijab) together with the Niquab (veil, usually of a wispy material) give credence to the visual analogy of the well known flightless bird of Antarctic origins.

Certain other Muslim social conventions apply here, but are seldom spoken of in public. These are usually passed on in whispers to any newcomers to the Dunes to allow them to sidestep less obvious faux pas to keep them out of trouble. In a rough, but not necessarily chronological order, they are:

- 1) Arabic Ladies of Islamic Faith are not allowed on the streets unescorted except by male members of the family.
- 2) Infidels or even other male members of the culture are not allowed to comment on the appearance of the ladies while in polite society. For instance, it is never permissible to tell a Muslim male that he is married to a beautiful lady, (not that you can truly tell under the Penguin attire anyway).
- 3) Prayer Call goes five times per day, calling for the Muslim Faithful to attend Mosque. If you are out in a Souk (shopping center/area), you will notice the female members of the Muslim world are not allowed to attend Mosque with their male counterparts. While by tradition, there is supposed to be a Mosque within walking distance in settlements, there are apparently no alter-facilities for the female counterparts. If a family is out shopping, this leaves unescorted Penguins loose in the Souk by themselves.

While no written guidelines have been proffered to the "unwashed," apparently it is considered quite proper for all of the unescorted ladies to "*flock*" together (an appropriate term for Penguins) for protection and a bit of female companionship. They are NOT allowed to speak to any non-Muslim males when so flocking, and the penalty

to both parties is said to be extreme. “Head Chopping,” (the Saudi method of capital punishment), is often mentioned in hushed whispers in conjunction with such transgressions. Infidels caught talking to such ladies are instantly considered to be at fault, as no truly faithful Muslim female would even think of violating such an unthinkable (but unspoken) rule! As an infidel, you are immediately considered to be guilty, because if you were **not** in their country, the incident would not have occurred, capisca?

- 4) No female of *ANY* sort is allowed to be in the company of a male unless he is a member of the family (husband, father, brother, cousin, uncle, etc.). No exceptions, and this applies to Infidel Females as well. At least ONE male member of the family must be present in a vehicle or in a walking group. The Religious Police are quite strict on enforcing this one.
- 5) Ladies (wives, daughters, or even girl friends) of Saudi employed Infidels are “quasi-required” (or encouraged) to wear an Abaya to cover their bare skin, although the face veil portion is not usually enforced (licentious Arabs like to “cop” a look too!). A sort of self-appointed gaggle of bored little old men haunt the Souks, drinking tea in small groups awaiting an unwary female infidel to show herself without appropriate skin covering. Upon sighting such lawful prey, the religious “*Nazi over the hill gang*” rush out of their darkened alley corners with cans of spray paint to decorate the offending areas of exposed skin. This is of course meant to be a lesson to the unfeeling female transgressors, and I suppose to give these old geezers a feeling of self-worth in an otherwise lusterless life. In western countries, bored little old men play chess or checkers, but these tools are simply frustrated graffiti artists!

These individuals who I will refer to as the “Graffiti Police,” are another matter entirely from the official Religious Police. I suppose approved body graffiti does give the aging retirees a sense of purpose. The *real* Religious Police usually look the other way during the “paint-job(s)” unless some sort of physical altercation occurs. If the lady is accompanied by the appropriate male member of the family, and still gets spray painted, physical confrontations have been known to occur between the geezers and a protective husband. The geezer usually gets his posterior handed to him, in which case the Religious Police pick up all parties, but usually allowing the geezers to go with a pat on the back. Normally the offending husband is put in the Saudi Slam until his employer can bail him out. Usually, the punishment (to satisfy a sense of “geezzer honor”) is a trip back to your country of origin.

While the above diatribe seems a bit mundane, the consequences of transgression are deadly serious! The list is meant to give you a sort of feel for the local religious practices and social customs of the Muslim society as applied to Saudi Arabia. As pointed out above, essentially the only (true) religious significance attached to the Abaya and the facial coverings is/was an attempt to prevent “wench-poaching” in a wildly licentious society as viewed by Mohammad in the 7th Century. However, the “word” was put out by Mohammed, and is therefore considered to be divinely inspired, regardless of the original rationale. It would seem that Sodom and Gomorra were not the only population centers encouraging lewd and licentious behavior in days of yore.

Venturing into the Souk on a nightly basis was quite common for members of the Royal Saudi Marine Instructor’s staff as a group or by ones and twos. Remaining in your quarters,

your choice of entertainment consisted of a company controlled TV network, run by volunteers. The TV fare was mainly ancient British Soap Operas. Arrrrggg... Dear Allah!

Basil (our parent company), *did* maintain a paperback library stocked by employee (book) donations, but usually without the current top ten best sellers occupying the shelves. The literary fare wasn't exactly awe-inspiring, although I had found an occasional good read amongst the piles of much read tomes.

The Souk? Now, that's a different kettle of fish. The shops are well equipped with everything from gold and silver, to electronics, cameras, "boom-boxes," or even perfume shops. Such a plethora of shopping goodies allow the Expats to pick up presents for their friends and loved ones at home, but best of all, the shopping was legitimate entertainment and exercise!

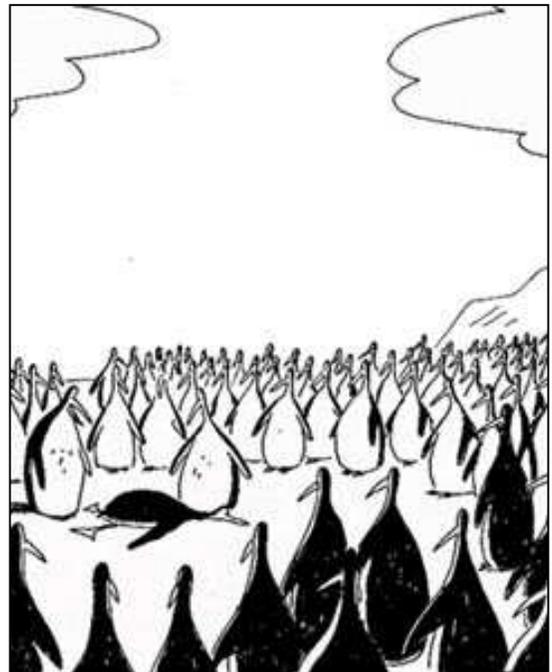
On one of these nightly forays into the commercial shopping area known as "The Main Souk" you could expect to be caught in at least one prayer call about mid-evening (the exact times depended on the phases of the moon). Even during evening Prayer Call which usually lasted for about 30-45 minutes (actually there was one long and one relatively short evening prayer), the non-Muslims could wander around the Souk and peer through the security screens/roll-down bars placed over the shop windows.

The shopkeepers and many of the shoppers would head for the nearest Mosque, leaving the streets almost empty of the faithful during prayer call. The only inhabitants of the quasi-deserted Souk were the Infidels, a few gendarmes, and some Penguins who were not allowed to attend Mosque with their men-folk. It was during just such a prayer call that our story occurs.

Skip Hartnett and I were walking through the Souk during prayer call, and having nothing better to do, were checking out the offerings in the window of a perfume shop. Off to our right was a large flock of Penguins apparently killing time until their male loved ones returned from Mosque. Since there was nothing worth looking at in the flock, (maybe Mohammed had a point there?), I turned back to the shop window. Suddenly I was aware of being surrounded by the entire Penguin flock, giving every appearance of checking out the perfume choices (or at least so we thought). Suddenly the flock was getting VERY close and crowding in allowing little or no movement. In retrospect, it would seem to have been a deliberate ploy masking their activities from the eyes of the roving religious police.

Hartnett says to me, "Culver, get your hand off my 'posterior' (using a different word of course, starting with the letter "a")!"

"What in the hell are you talking about?" I replied. "Both of my hands are in my back pockets!"



Hartnett, I felt this "flipper" on my fanny, and just lashed out! Dear Allah, what have I done?

“Bull \$h+t,” says Hartnett, “somebody just grabbed my fanny!”

“Well it sure as hell wasn’t me, I ain’t into that sort of stuff!”

“Culver, don’t mess with me, I *felt* it!”

About the time it was gonna’ get personal, I felt a hand distinctly placed on my own rear end, and it was considerably smaller than Hartnett’s sizeable meat hooks! Hummm... It suddenly dawns on me! We are being “felt” or perhaps “groped” by the curious Penguins! Uh oh, this does *not* bode well! I look over and Skip is chuckling, now seeing what was transpiring. He held both of his hands out to give me the idea! Now what “Maynard?” It would seem that the much sheltered female members of Arabic Society are just as human as “real girls!”

Trying to figure a safe way out of a mess that could have serious consequences, I hear a voice behind me speaking in feminine tones in perfect English. I answered to be polite (upsss Culver, don’t urinate-‘em off, they might call for the cops – a variation of the old “badger game?” ...*Danger* Will Robinson!). As it turned out, our initial fears were unfounded, although the consequences could still be humongous if caught en-flagranté!



¹ They were most curious about the United States. All of a sudden several more chimed in and soon we had a very pleasant, many way conversation going. We tried to satisfy their curiosity (intellectual only! – I *know* what you’re thinking)! We took care to keep our voices low enough to prevent them carrying outside our “flock” to avoid attracting the attention of the gendarmes. The girls seemed to

understand the drill, and played the same low-key game while we conversed on many subjects. Much of the conversation had to do with the freedoms of American Girls in what they (correctly) perceived as a more open society! Soon the street hubbub indicated that Mosque was over and the Muslim shopkeepers and shoppers were returning to the streets. The Penguins started to discretely disburse, and “de-flock” themselves. We were soon left on our own perusing the perfume selection in the shop window. I somehow felt a bit wistful at their departure, as it was refreshing to find that all people, regardless of societal restrictions are basically the same.

While it was tempting, we never went back to the exact same location during prayer-call to see if our new found conversationalists would return. I wondered (as I suppose did Skip) if our posteriors passed Arabic muster in the overall scheme of things? Hee, hee, hee...

Always remember, all situations, no matter how dangerous the *potential*, have their humorous side, along with a slight adrenaline rush! Whenever I saw a flock of Penguins after that, I always wondered? ...but consideration of the possible consequences always pulled me back into reality! Sigh...

ROC

End Notes:

¹ The Marvelous Penguin graphics were shamelessly stolen from one of my favorite cartoonists, Gary Larson in his *Far Side Series*. While the original captions wouldn't have been appropriate, I substituted my own to fit in with the story line. My apologies and "unauthorized thanks" to Mr. Larson, much as I have pirated parodied lines of Robert Service's and Rudyard Kipling's poetry over the years. Obviously he's in good company (theirs if not mine).

