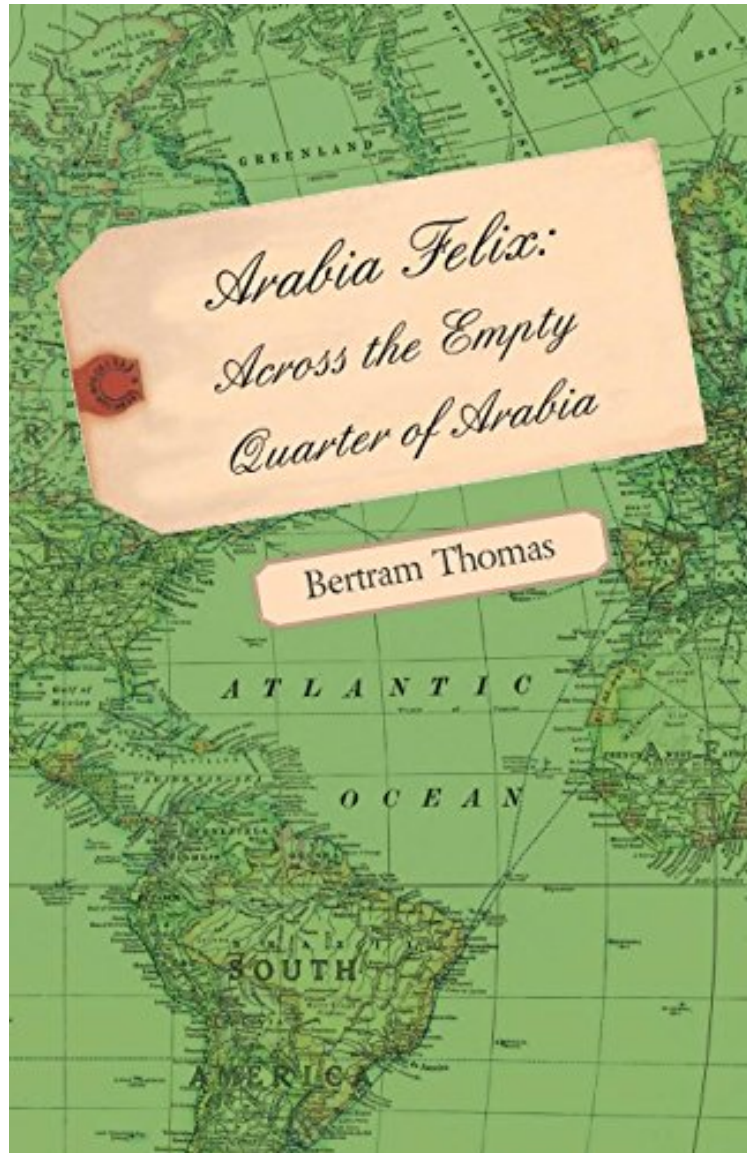


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Bertram Thomas

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#2502217 in Books Bertram Thomas 2006-11-12 Original language: English PDF # 1 8.50 x .98 x 5.511, 1.23
#File Name: 1406722057442 pages Arabia Felix | File size: 49.Mb

Bertram Thomas : Arabia Felix: Across the Empty Quarter of Arabia before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Arabia Felix: Across the Empty Quarter of Arabia:

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. The first crossing of the Rub Al-Khali (the Empty Quarter) by a Westerner...By John P. Jones IIIBertram Thomas crossed the vast southern desert of the Arabian Peninsula in the winter of 1930-31. To those who do not live there, it is called the Rub Al-Khali, the Empty Quarter. It is one of the most sparsely populated places on earth, outside the polar regions. And hence the lure. He commenced in Salalah, the

major port city of the Dhufar region of Oman, and finished in Doha, in modern day Qatar. Although he advanced in stages, the crossing of the central portion of the Rub Al-Khali, ar Rimal (the Sands), was accomplished in the company of only 12 other Arabs, from two different tribes, the Al-Rashids and the Al Murrah. Water, naturally, was the obsession of the trip, along with adequate grazing for the camels that they rode. Along with fear of attack from rival tribes. He left Muscat, Oman on October 05, 1930, arriving in the Dhufar region shortly thereafter, and awaited his contacts in the desert for almost two months, with occasional forays into the nearby Qara mountains. The actual crossing commenced in mid-December, and he arrived in Doha on February 05, 1931. It remains a stunning achievement, one that is almost certainly never to be duplicated. And his exploration is little-known, eclipsed by a much better "promoter," Wilfred Thesiger, who undertook two crossings after the Second World War, and wrote *Arabian Sands* (Penguin Classics). Thomas was a Captain in the British Army, and old "Middle East hand," starting with an assignment in Mesopotamia (modern day Iraq) during World War I, from 1916 to 1918. He stayed on in the area, and eventually became Wazir (Minister) to the Sultan of Oman, which certainly helped with the necessary "contacts" for the trip. He not only spoke Arabic, but the various dialects of the region. He undertook several preparatory journeys, in the preceding years, including one to the oasis of Mugshin, in remote southwestern Oman. He was a polymath. Everything seemed to interest him. He carried the instruments to determine his geographical location and elevation. He collected samples of the flora and fauna, and paid the Bedouin to assist him in this regard. He took samples of the well water, and later determined their chemical composition. Like Nabokov, he carried a butterfly net, and collected numerous samples. He recorded (on paper) the various Arab chants that the Bedouin would use. He noted the varying political alliances and feuds of the principal tribes, the Sa'ar, the Murrah and the Rashids. Although now largely discredited, he studied the racial features of the various people by measuring their heads with calipers. The forward to Thomas' work was written by TE Lawrence, yes, the "Lawrence of Arabia." He furnishes a rococo flourish of Romanticism to Thomas' achievement, going back to the exploration of Raleigh, and concluding with: "Last year I could have retorted - There is but a hand's-breadth we do not know'-thinking of that virgin Rub Al Khali, the last unwritten plot of earth big enough for a sizable man's turning in twice or thrice about, before he couches." Likewise, Thesiger's account had similar flourishes of romanticism, and he expressed grave fears that modernization would destroy the "nobility" of the Bedouin. He also seemed to become much more attached to his youthful companions than Thomas did. Several points in Thomas' narrative resonated strongly. His guide, from the Al Murrah tribe, was Hamad, of which he said, after Thomas described the ice in his native England: "I detected in his expression a fear lest I be the advance guard of a party of invaders, anxious to forsake such misery for their own delectable sands." It was a different Hamad, the government-appointed Sheikh of the Al Murrah, that gave me the same look, in Yabrin, in 1979. "Really, what are you up to,?" was written all over his face. For the next two decades I "played" around the edges of the Rub Al Khali whenever I could. The most extensive journey was a six day one, from Najran, through some high dunes, to Wadi Dewasir. On that journey I noted some brilliantly executed rock engravings of ostriches running. I felt they must have been done in pre-historic times, but Thomas says that although ostriches were extinct in 1930, they had been hunted by some of his companions. I deeply regret that I did not read this book when I lived in Saudi Arabia, and furthermore, that it has taken another decade since I left to find a good copy, with an excellent map that details his trip (there are also numerous unique black and white photos). It truly does contain a wealth of information. Who would have thought that the gastric juices of the gazelle are a delicacy? Or, to demonstrate affinity for the Bedouin, that it would be "au courant" to call their camels "Ata y Allah" (the gift of God). The area around Salalah remains an enticing destination, even today, since it alone, of the entire peninsula, turns lush green when it catches the monsoons that soak India each summer. And, also, there is the frankincense, that grows on the backside of the Qara mountains, but only between 2,000 and 2,500 ft. On a few points I would welcome comments. In the introduction, Thomas says that the term "Arabia Felix" (Happy Arabia) applies to the entire peninsula south of the Syrian desert. Yet I thought the Romans used that term only for the Yemen, and its greenery. And Thomas never explains how he managed to handle the money for such a trip, and not be robbed by someone. For anyone interested in the Arabian peninsula in particular, or just one of the little-explored corners of this planet, Thomas' account is an essential 5-star plus read. Just make sure the copy you purchase contains the map!

0 of 7 people found the following review helpful. Lonely Saharan desert
By MACK HUGHESI have never seen it but I have always been impressed by the Sahara desert..it is at the same time deadly and wonderful and is to be respected at all times..I admire the peoples who live and work there...God forbid any one who tries to change it...4 of 11 people found the following review helpful. A Cultural and Geographic Page Turner
By elnbThorkhild Hansen's *Arabia Felix* is about the fateful 1761-1767 Danish Expedition to Yemen, a country virtually unknown to Europeans at the time. Although the book is very well-regarded in Denmark, *Arabia Felix* and his *Slave Trilogy* are all often out of print, difficult to find, or expensive in English. Nevertheless, I definitely recommend *Arabia Felix*. It is a fast-paced page turner (I finished it in three sittings) and reads more like a novel than non-fiction. Furthermore, the real life cast of characters is great with the rivaling personalities and heroic lone survivor. Originally published in 1962, some of the terminology may appear out-dated, and Hansen also tends to embellish the story with his own interpretation of events. Nonetheless, *Arabia Felix* is such a good read that I am surprised it is almost unknown in the English reading public, especially at a time when the Middle East is very much

on the radar.

This vintage book is Bertram Thomass 1932 travelogue, *Arabia Felix*. It is a factual account of his epic voyage across the vast southern desert of the Arabian Peninsula from 1930-3. A fascinating page-turner that chronicles a stunning achievement likely never to be attempted again, *Arabia Felix* would make for a worthy addition to any collection, and constitutes a must-read for lovers of exciting non-fiction. Contents include: A Propitious Start and an Early Check, At Dhufar: Anarchy, Treachery, and Hospitality, Skull-Measuring and Devil-Dancing, In the Qara Mountains: Ain ar Rizat, In the Qara Mountains, Ancient Survivals and the Blood Sacrifice, The Qara Mountains. Hyenas, Faith Cures and Circumcision, etc. Bertram Sidney Thomas (1892-1950) was an English Arabist and the first person from the West to cross the Rub' al Khali. We are republishing this classic volume in an affordable, modern, high-quality edition complete with a specially commissioned new biography of the author.