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Birth and childhood among the Arabs: studies in a Muhammadan village in Palestine.

Author: Granqvist H

Source: Helsingfors, Finland, Soderstroms, 1947. 289 p.

Abstract: This book is an ethnographic study of birth and childhood among the Arab folk life and customs in the village of Artas in Palestine. Fieldwork was done between 1935-31. Topics which are covered include: 1) pre-natal customs (cohabitation, conception, pregnancy), 2) birth (in the home), 3) post-natal customs (announcements of birth, treatment of mother and new-born child), 4) mother and baby (nursing, lullabies, children in village life), 5) play and work (games and work), 6) education and character (education of boys and girls, heredity, determinism, free-will, morality, and society), and 7) circumcision (festivities, ceremony, expenditures, place, age, and time). Pregnancy in new marriages is of special interest to all villagers. The sex of children is considered unknown until birth by anyone but God. Births are considered difficult. No men are present when births are in the home. Midwives are the most important person in birth-giving. She must be old enough to have ceased to menstruate herself. Techniques for extracting the afterbirth include blowing into a bottle, burning a blue rag and letting the smoke rise into the woman's face, shaking the woman. Shaping new-born children's heads is a common custom after birth. Announcements of the sex of new borns are subject to formal customs. If a boy is born the announcement to the father is rapid and gifts are often given. Female births are considered deficient. Special rites are given for the mother and child after birth. Honey is often given to a new born child. Mothers usually have to wait several days before they can breast-feed. Nursing is a constant affair and done openly. Differences exist between boys and girls education, play and work. Circumcision is a rite of passage for Arab boys.

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