LIBYA AND THE ARAB WORLD; A GEOGRAPHICAL VIEW.

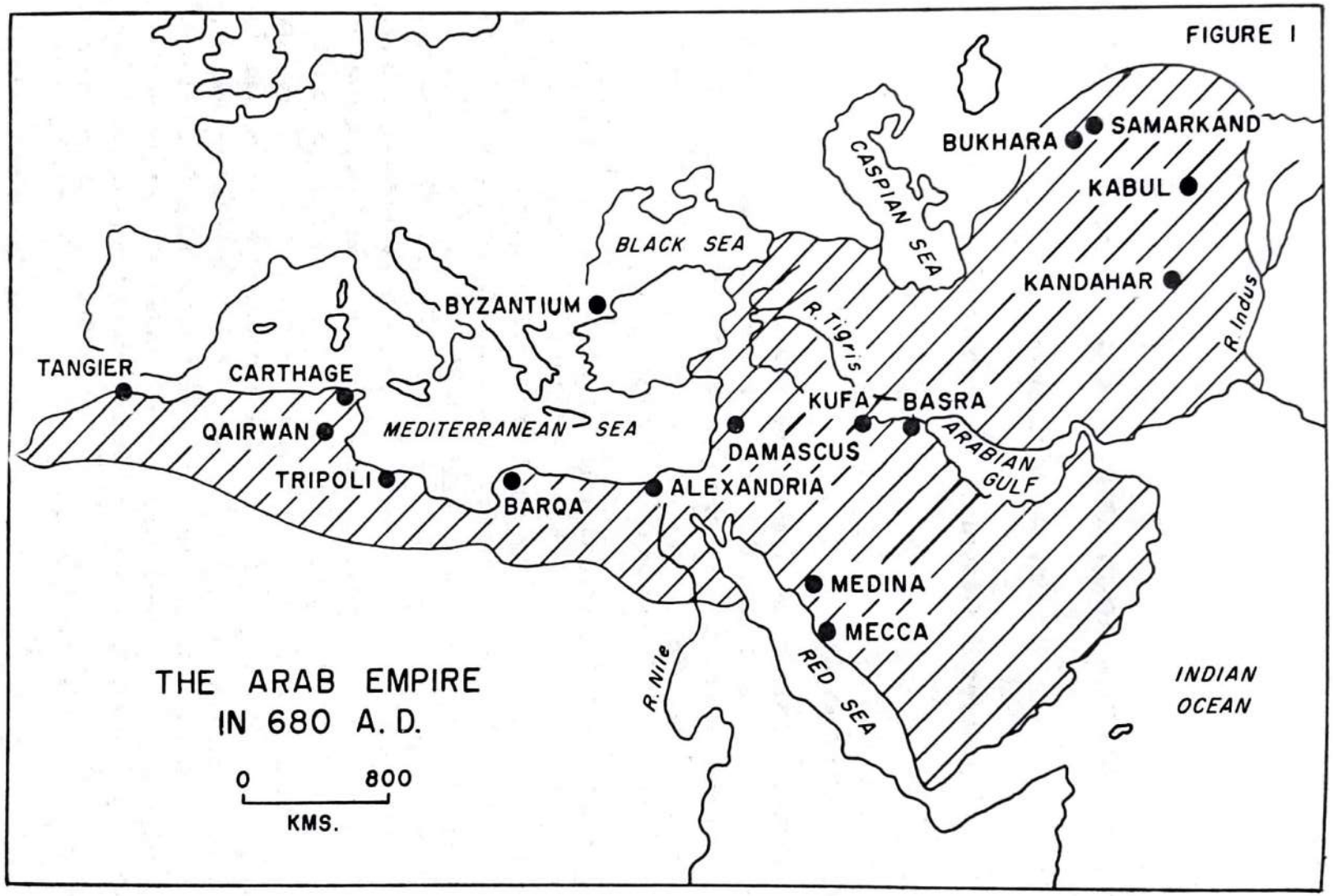
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Where is the Arab World ?

« The Arab World » is a term used very widely both in the West and in countries of the Middle East and North Africa, but what precisely is meant by it ? Can it be defined and drawn on a map ? If so, is the concept of an Arab World valid ? There is of course no simple answer to these questions, but a number of answers might be suggested.

Historically, the Arab World comprised those vast areas of South West Asia, North Africa and Southern Europe which fell to Islam during the seventh and eighth centuries. The early impetus for these amazing conquests came from Arabs from the Arabian peninsula, most of them nomadic tribesmen from central Arabia. To begin with little or no attempt was made to convert conquered peoples to Islam, but where conversion occurred voluntarily as was frequently the case, the defeated races automatically became the equals of the conquerors and were able to mix and intermarry with the Arabs. In time therefore the terms « Moslem » and « Arab » became virtually synonymous, and by the middle of the eighth century A.D. conquests in the name of Islam were being conducted by others, and the flow of warriors, administrators and migrants from Arabia became less important. In 750 A.D. (133 A.H.) the Abbasid dynasty seized power, and with its capital in Baghdad the empire became essentially Islamic rather than Arab and multi-racial in character. Nevertheless through the ninth and tenth centuries, A.D., Arab culture became more firmly established and en-


FIGURE 1
BUKHARA
SAMARKAND
KABUL
KANDAHAR
CASPIAN SEA
BLACK SEA
BYZANTIUM
R. Tigris
R. Indus
TANGIER
CARTHAGE
QAIRWAN
MEDITERRANEAN SEA
TRIPOLI
BARQA
ALEXANDRIA
DAMASCUS
KUFA
BASRA
ARABIAN GULF
MEDINA
MECCA
RED SEA
R. Nile
INDIAN OCEAN
THE ARAB EMPIRE
IN 680 A. D.
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tered its golden age. Above all, the Arab language prospered and not only were the Greek philosophers translated into Arabic, but original works appeared in such subjects as algebra, astronomy, geography and medicine. Poetry and architecture flourished and the growth of strong internal commercial relations within Islam and with Europe and the Far East tended to give the Arab World increasing cultural identity. The majority of its people probably had scarcely a drop of Arabian blood in their veins, but the language, culture and religion of the Arabs was becoming diffused at every level. In later centuries the rise and spread of the Ottoman empire, the Mongol invasions, the penetration of Europeans ant other influences weakened distinctly Arab cultural elements, particularly on the fringes of the old empire, but the Arab language survived widely to become one of the most powerful nation — forming ingredients in the twentieth century.

Precise definition of the Arab World historically therefore is impossible. Its frontiers expanded and contracted, and the degree of Arabisation varied from region to region, and changed with time. Figure 1 therefore illustrates the Arab empire in 680 A.D. (A.H. 61) less than fifty years after the death of Mohamet when Arabians were still pre-eminent in the territories they had conquered. In later years Arabs were to make gains in Spain and Southern France, and as late as the eleventh century were directly responsible for the conversion of the Tuareg in the Sahara as a result of the irruption of the Beni Hillal from the east. It is worth noting however that the exception of the upper Nile basin, no really important permanent additions have been made to the Arab World since about 680 A.D.

Probably the best definition of the contemporary Arab World is provided by those states who declare themselves to be « Arab » by their voluntary association in the League of Arab States which came into being in 1945 (Figure 2). While Qatar, the Trucial States and Muscat are not members, their history, culture, and geographical location within the Arabian peninsula mark them out as unmistakably Arab. All of them are states for whom « the central fact of history is the mission of Mohamet and the memory of the Arab empire and who in addition cherish the Arab tongue and its cultural heritage as their common possession ».(1) Arabic is their official language, and with the exception of Lebanon, the official

religion is Islam. The international land frontiers of these states provides us with at least the most precise if not the most meaningful definition of the Arab World that has ever been possible. Its landward boundaries, one need hardly add, are largely the creation of the last 100 years of European colonial acitivity. Indeed the boundary between Turkey and Syria was broadly fixed as late as 1929 and adjusted again in 1939, while the Iraq-Iran boundary corresponds closely to the agreement of 1914 when Iraq came into being. In North Africa the southern limits of the Arab states have been less well defined and subject to considerable dispute from time to time. Final agreement and demarcation, if any, has generally been achieved only during the past sixty or seventy years. There is therefore a sense in which it is justifiable to see the political map of the Arab World as reflecting the ambitions and machinations of imperial powers without due consideration for the aspirations of the Arab people. The existence of Israel in the heart of the Arab world is perhaps the best example of this, and the existence of so many international boundaries within the Arab World itself may be considered another. At the same time the outer limits of the Arab world as defined by these frontiers cannot be said to exclude any major territories which ought legitimately to have been included, apart from Israel which included a quarter of a million Arabs within its frontiers even before June 1967. Even so, the Jews have had a substantial majority since 1948 in Israel.

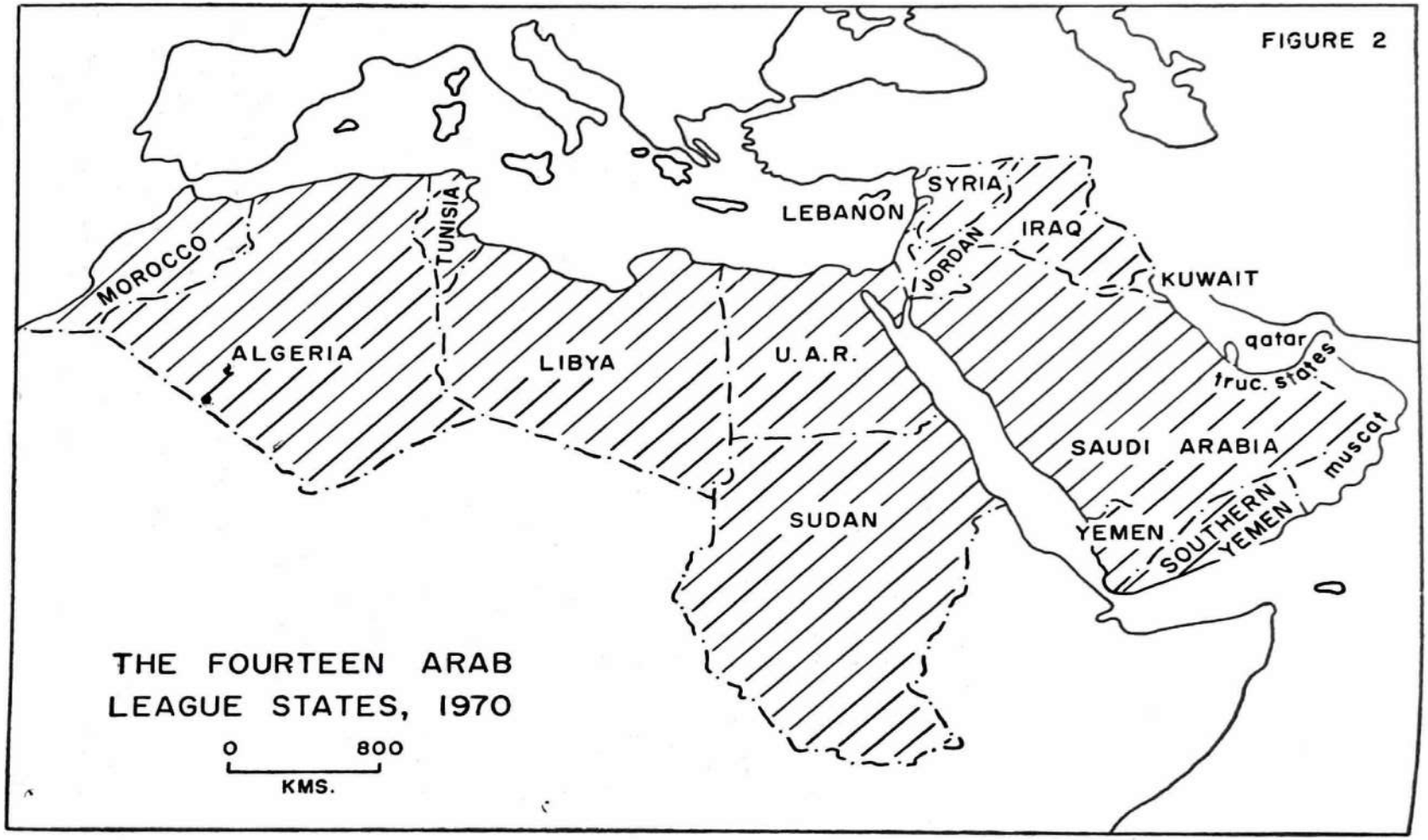
The distribution of Arabic and other languages show in Figure 3 is of particular interest in this connection. In South West Asia only small pockets of Arabic-speaking peoples can be found beyond the frontiers of the Arab World so defined — in Iran, notably along the eastern shores of the Arabian Gulf were communities of Arab fishermen and sailors are to be found and in Turkey were Arabic is still the first language of a tiny minority. In North Africa on the other hand there are very large regions where Arabic is the predominant language but which are not embraced by a political definition of the Arab World. The Saharan state of Mauritania could indeed be regarded in many ways as part of the Arab World; It is Islamic, and three-quarters of the population of just over one million speak Arabic. On the other hand, when Arabic became the second official language with French in 1967 there was strong opposition from the negro minority, particularly in the south of the country, although most are at the same time Moslems. Indeed, somewhere in Mauritania there is pro-

bably a more genuine divide between the Arab World and negro Africa than that represented by the southern boundaries of Morocco and Algeria. A similar situation exists in the Sudan where fundamental differences of language, culture and race between north and south are further empha sised by religious differences, the south being largely Christian and pagan the north largely Moslem. Here, the Arab World as defined by Sudan's political boundaries embraces a vast region of more than three million people (30 percent of Sudan's population) who do not belong to it by reason of historic association, political aspiration, culture, language or religion. Besides this outstanding anomaly, Figure 3 indicates two other linguistic minorities deserving comment. First, in North Africa the most important areas of Berber speech, mostly in the remoter highland and desert regions where Arabic has penetrated slowly. In Morocco about 10 percent of the population speak Berber, with a further 10 percent bilingual (2), while in Algeria about 30 percent speak Berber (3). The large region of southern Algeria where Berber dialects are spoken in fact only embraces a small number of people. A few Berber-speaking villages also survive in Libya and Tunisia, but Berber is generally declining in these countries. Secondly, the Kurdish speaking region of northern Iraq. Politically, Iraq's Kurdish minority has been the cause of internal conflict on and off for fifty years, not least because of the presence of Kurdish peoples across the border in Turkey, Syria and Iran. While the Berbers survive as cultural and linguistic enclaves within the Arab World, the Kurds of Iraq are on its northern fringe, with strong external links and a language and nationalism of their own. The political settlement of 1970 could mark the strat of more harmanious relationships, but there remains a sense in which the Kurds do not constitute part of the Arab World. At least 16 percent of the population of Iraq are Kurdish speakers, with Persian (3 per cent) and Turkish (2 per cent) less important minority langua ges (3).

Libya's place in the Arab World.

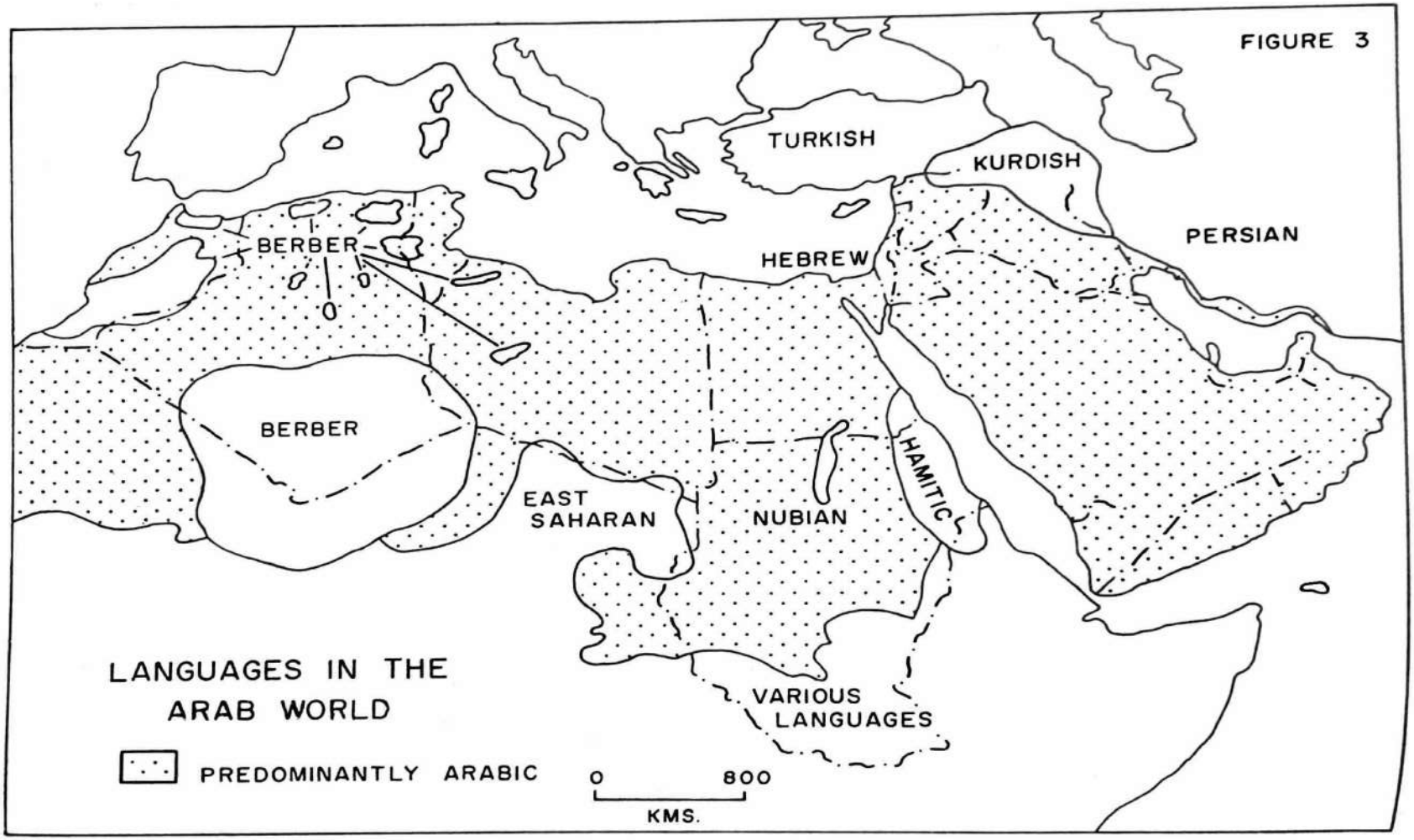
The question of whether or not certain problem region of Iraq ano the Sudan are to be regarded as part of the Arab World is of course an academic one. The regions are not negotiable and it would be impertinent to suggest otherwise. Thus the Arab World today comprises six independent sovereign states in North Africa, and nine in South West Asia

FIGURE 2


MOROCCO
ALGERIA
TUNISIA
LIBYA
U. A. R.
SUDAN
LEBANON
SYRIA
JORDAN
IRAQ
KUWAIT
qatar
truc. states
SAUDI ARABIA
muscat
YEMEN
SOUTHERN YEMEN
THE FOURTEEN ARAB LEAGUE STATES, 1970
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together with Bahrain, Qatar and seven Trucial States. Their total populations, taking latest available census figures, amount to 108 million, or just over three percent of the world population. Approximately 95 million speak Arabic as their first language. Table 1 summarises the populations and area of all the important Arab states, the seven Trucial states (Sharjah, Ras al Khaimah, Umm al Quwain, Ajman, Dubai, Abu Dhabi and Fujairah) having been lumped together for convenience. The relatively sparse population of the Middle East and North Africa is illustrated by the fact that the average density in North Africa is nine persons per square kilometre and sixteen in South West Asia compared with a world average of 25 persons per square kilometre. The Arab World embraces more than eight percent of the land surface of the earth, excluding polar regions, but supports just over three percent of the total world population. Libya itself it an extreme example of a small population inhabiting a vast area; although the third largest Arab state by area, its population of 1.6 million places Libya twelfth by population size, among the featherweights of the Arab World.

The dimensions of the Arab World are impressive. From the Atlantic Ocean in the west to the shores of the Arabian Gulf and the Indian Ocean in the east, it spans some 5,700 kilometres, while the northern border of Syria and the southern border of Sudan are nearly 4,000 kilometres apart. Within this region migrations of people, trade by land and sea, and the spread of language and religion has resulted in the creation of a fairly coherent cultural realm in spite of the marked discontinuity of densely populated regions (Figure 4). The basis of a common identity was the Arab language, the religion of Islam and a tradition on nomadism bred in the desert regions which every part of the Arab world posesses. More recently new dimensions have been added to this identity in the experience of European political interference, and in North Africa of European colonisation. The delineation of national boundaries and the emrgence of individual nation states were largely a result of European activity, and no part of the Arab World escaped. More recently, problems of economic development have added a new theme. With analogous environments, a general paucity of certain vital minerals and raw materials, and a common inheritance of many social and économic traditions the Arab World shares many common problems. Above all perhaps, the fact that half the Arab states are oil producers gives them a similar outlook towards the


FIGURE 3
TURKISH
KURDISH
PERSIAN
HEBREW
BERBER
BERBER
EAST
SAHARAN
NUBIAN
HAMITIC
VARIOUS
LANGUAGES
LANGUAGES IN THE
ARAB WORLD
PREDOMINANTLY ARABIC
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major world consumers. In all there aspects, past and present, Libya is a highly qualified member of the Arab community, having every ingredient and passing through every formative experience common to the Arab World

son's University Library, London 1953, Vol. II, PP. 9-10.

TABLE 1. POPULATION AND AREA OF THE ARAB STATES

	Census year	Population in thousands	Area (Sq. km.)	Rank by size
1. U.A.R.	1966	30,080	1,000,202	5
2. Sudan	1956	13,540	2,505,823	1
3. Morocco	1960	13.450	410,805	7
4. Algeria	1966	12,093	2,381,741	2
5. Iraq	1965	8,261	444,442	5
6. Saudi Arabia	1966	6,600	1,600,000	4
7. Syria	1960	5,300	184,475	11
8. Yemen	—	5,000	195,000	10
9. Tunisia	1966	4,457	125,180	12
10. Lebanon	1932	2,400	10,400	17
11. Jordan	1961	2,016	96,610	13
12. Libya	1964	1,617	1,759,540	3
13. Southern Yemen	—	1,250	291,287	8
14. Muscat and Oman	—	770	212,380	9
15. Kuwait	1965	467	15,540	16
16. Bahrain	1965	182	598	18
17. Trucial States	—	130	83,600	14
18. Qatar	—	105	22,014	15
Total		107,718	11,339,641	

Sources, United Nations; **Demographic Yearbook** (1968) Oxford Regional Economic Atlas : **the Middle East North Africa (1960)**

Libya's geographical location within the Arab World is more advantageous than appears at first sight. The mean distance by air between Beida and other capitals of the Arab World is 2,400 kilometres, some 200 kilometres less than the figure for Cairo. Moreover, within 1,500 kilometres of Beida lie several of the most significant foci of the Arab World : the Nile delta its teeming population; the Suez Canal; Palestine, with its potential for once again resuming its role as one of the worlds' most important

routeways; and at least some of its most influential intellectual and commercial leadership in Beirut and Cairo. In more practical terms, Libya provides an essential physical link between the Maghreb and the eastern Arab World. This function will become increasingly important as the present programme of road building from east to west is completed. On the other hand communications between Libya and the rest of the African continent are probably less well developed than in other north African states in spite of the importance of Libyan Trans-Saharan caravan routes in the past. But it is interesting to conject that if ever an international highway linking Europe with central and southern Africa was to be built, the most likely route would be via Tripoli and Sebha. The construction of such a trunk route is merely a dream for the future, but in an east — west direction along the coast Libya seems likely to acquire an increasingly important transit role both for the movement of goods and tourist traffic by road.

The great Arab conquests of North Africa were carried out by land, but in previous centuries both Greece and Rome had been able to control and colonise large parts of North Africa on account of the short passage across the Mediterranean sea. In 1911 Italy began its invasion of Libya, and during the Second World War the country became the scene of bitter fighting between British and American and German and Italian forces. Such reminders of the proximity of Europe have been recurrent throughout Libya's history, being continued until 1970 by the presence of an American air base at Wheelus and small British bases at Tobruk and El-Adem. Since becoming a major oil producer, Libya has at last been able to turn this proximity to her own advantage in capturing on increasingly high proportion of the lucrative European market for oil. Of the Arab oil exporters only Algeria enjoys the same locational advantages, but Algerian production is in any case far below Libyan levels and is increasing only slowly. (Table 2). Similarly, Egyptian exports are as yet too small to offer any serious competition, but the day may come when production in the Western Desert will result in large exports, in which case Egypt will be well placed to sell oil to both eastern and western European markets.

Even before the closure of the Suez Canal in June 1967 Libya had a significant advantage over Arab oil producers in South West Asia. An oil tanker took approximately ten days to reach England from the Arabian Gulf via the Suez Canal compared with six days from Libyan terminals

on the Gulf of Sirte. A similar advantage applied to all the major oil ports of northern Europe — Rouen, Rotterdam, Bremen, Hamburg etc., and the lower freight costs involved more than offset slightly higher production costs in Libya.

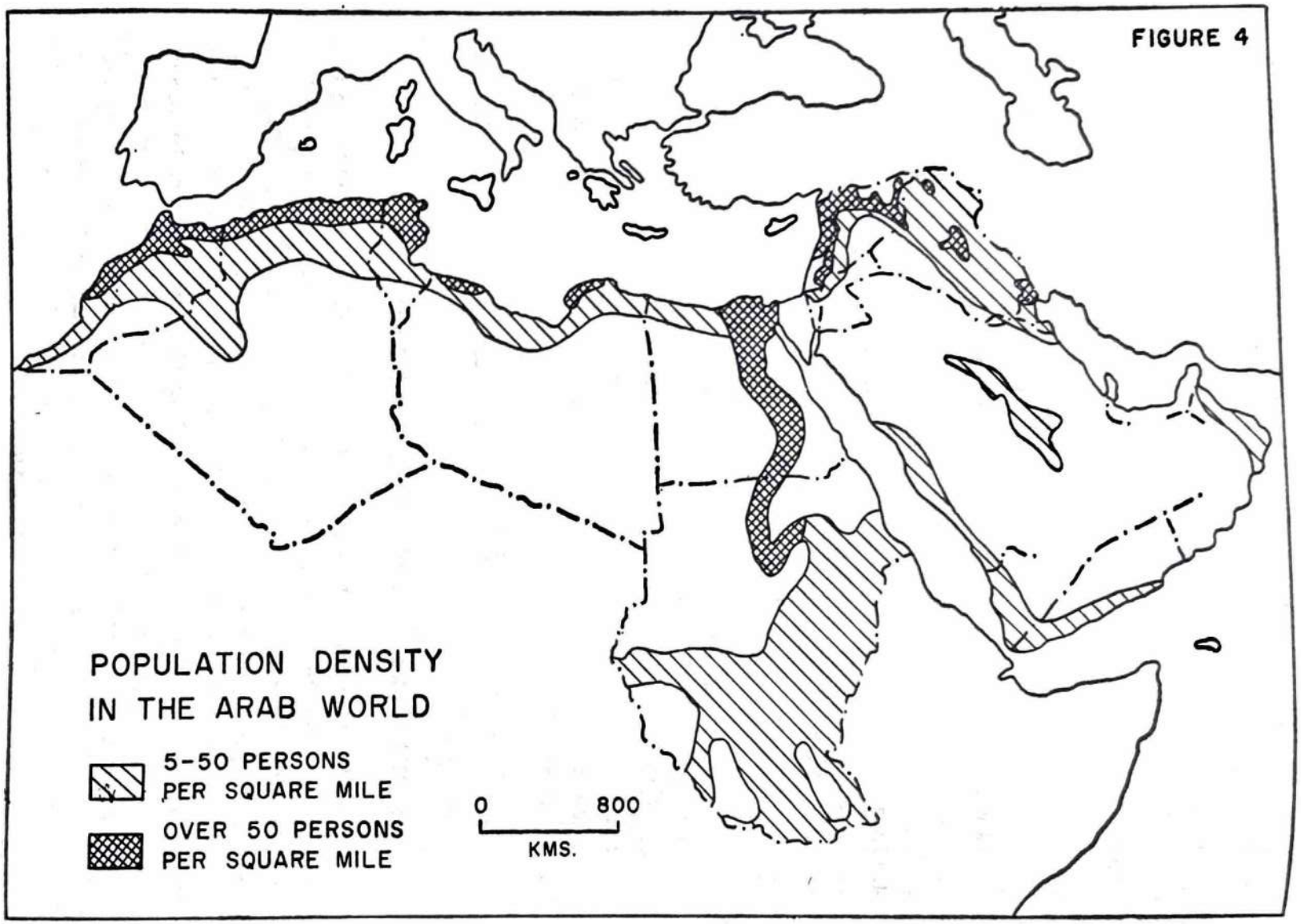
TABLE 2. ARAB OIL PRODUCTION 1969

	Million metric tons	% change 1968/69.
1. Libya	150,000	+20.5
2. Saudi Arabia	148,300	+ 5.2
3. Kuwait	129,000	+ 5.6
4. Iraq	74,700	+ 1.1
5. Algeria	44,000	+ 4.4
6. Abu Dhabi	28,800	+19.9
7. Kuwait/Saudi Neutral Zone	23,700	+ 3.8
8. Qatar	17,100	+ 4.5
9. Muscat and Oman	16,300	+35.1
10. U.A.R.*	16,000	+45.5
11. Bahrain	3,800	+ 0.8
12. Syria	3,500	+250.0
13. Tunisia	3,400	+ 7.1
14. Morocco	60	—32.6
Total Arab production	658,660	+10

(*including Sinai fields occupied by Israel).

Source : **Middle East Economic Digest,** 13th February 1970.

When the Suez Canal closed, several thousand miles were added to the passage from the Gulf, and Libyan production was given an immense impetus resulting in a 49 percent increase in 1968 compared with 1967. Since then, Gulf producers have greatly reduced transport costs to western Europe by the introduction of giant tankers of up to 250,000 tons, but Libyan exports to Europe have continued to steadily increase. In recent years significant quantities of oil have been imported into central and northern Europe by pipeline from the Mediterranean ports of Genoa and Marseilles. The sea route from Marsa Brega to Genoa is less that 900


FIGURE 4
POPULATION DENSITY
IN THE ARAB WORLD
5-50 PERSONS
PER SQUARE MILE
OVER 50 PERSONS
PER SQUARE MILE
0
800
KMS.

kilometres and Libyan supplies have benefitted from this accessibility and could benefit more in future, not only through the export of crude oil. In 1969 for example Libya joined the exclusive ranks of liquified natural gas exporters with regular shipments from Brega to Spain and Italy. It should be remembered that western Europe is the world's most rapidly expanding market for oil, and more than half the world's crude oil imports are to west European countries. A recent report sugests that before long the six European Economic Community countries alone will account for half the world's crude oil trade (4). It is not surprising therefore that approximately nine tenths of Libya's production is destined for western Europe with West Germany the biggest customer followed by Italy, France and the United Kingdom. A similar proportion of Algeria's production goes to western Europe, whereas the Arab states of South West Asia export less than one third of their production to western Europe. Several factors have been responsible for creating this pattern of trade, but geographical location is by far the most important single influence.

The most significant event in the Arab World last year was undoubtedly the September revolution in Libya. Since that time « the balance within the Arab camp has been tilted away from the « conservatives » and, for the first time, an Arab state with surplus cash has been solidly on the side of the « progressives ». The new Libya — the biggest Arab oil producer with an annual oil revenue of £500 million — is dedicated to the policies of President Nasser and to the cause of Palestine liberation.»(5) It is not the purpose of this short paper to discuss Libya's foreign policy, but if this is an accurate interpretation of the present position it provides a fascinating postscript to a discussion of Libya and the Arab World. Historically Libya has been subject to two major influences both of which owed much to geographical location; by sea from the north, and by land from the east. Successive waves of conquerors and settlers and administrators have been absorbed — Greek, Roman, Arab, Ottoman, Italian and others, whose central government lay far away from Libya itself. Now the position appears to have been reversed. An independent Libya maintains strong commercial maritime links with Europe to the north, and is looking politically more towards the east. Technical and economic cooperation with the Maghreb may also develop in future in spite of the postponement of the conference of Maghreb Economic Ministers in March 1970 as a result of Libya's absence. In three directions, north, west and

east, Libya has an important contribution to make based primarily on enormous resources of crude oil, but backed by favourable geographical location within the Arab World and on the doorstep of Europe.

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