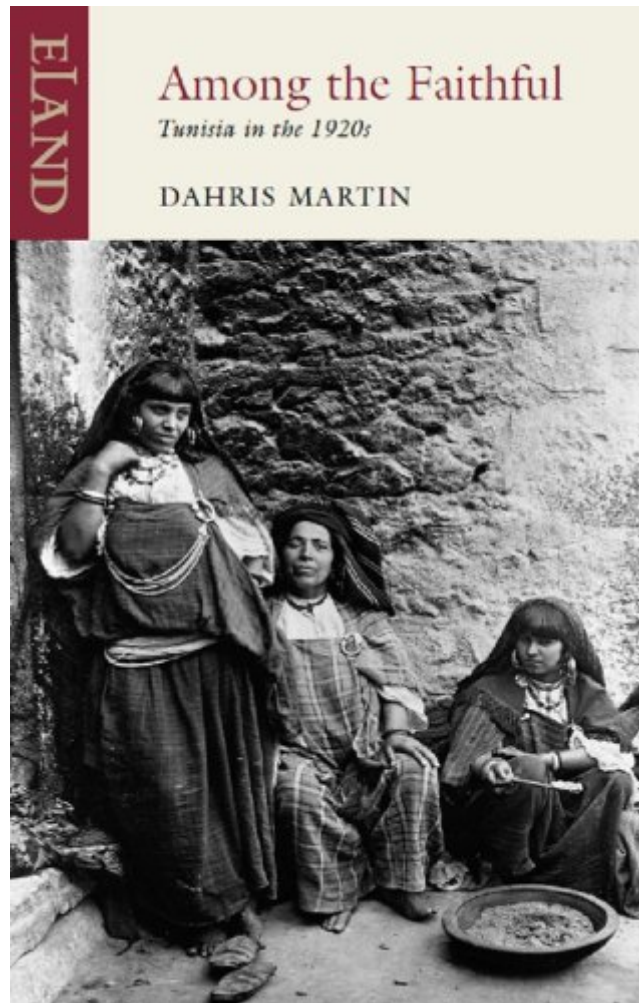




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Among The Faithful: Tunisia In The 1920s



Synopsis

Dahris Martin, a young American in search of sun, arrived in the holy city of Kairouan in the late 1920s. Befriended by the roguish Kalifa, she is welcomed into his circle of friends and family. Among the Faithful is a unique portrait of traditional Tunisian society. It tells of barefoot pilgrims and bedouin, the deflowering of virgin brides, spirit possession and dances held for djinn. It sings the praises of the unsung: Eltifa the blind musician, Zinibe (who had a heart for all the world) and the entrancing, dancing Aisha. Dahris Martin witnessed domestic life in Tunisia from within, a privilege she shares without pretension, with affection and with a sure lightness of touch.

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Customer Reviews

Tremendously interesting in that it's an account of two Western women in the 1920s living in Tunisia amongst the locals. Nicely and sensitively written.

When the winter in the S of France turns cold, and when her cheque doesn't come through, American author Dahris Martin (accompanied for part of the time by artist Beatrice (Cuming)) sets off for the warmer, cheaper option of Tunisia. This is a beautifully written description of their life in the

holy city of Kairouan. Taken up by a local man, Kalipha, the author gets to know his family, and experiences birth and death, marriage, Islam and the simultaneous belief in djinns, the oppression of women and the life of the desert Bedouin. I loved the vivid descriptions, such as this one of nightfall during Ramadan as everyone awaits their meal: "Kairouan had shaken off its torpor. Everything was alive and exciting, waiting for the signal from the minarets that the day's penance was done. Coffee-houses were ready for business, the fry-shops were piling up mountains of honey-coils...little girls darted home from the public ovens with covered bowls on their heads, the beggars under the Great Gate had never been so importunate, vendors wearing trays of cakes or carrying pitchers of coloured syrups praised the Prophet and their merchandise in the same breath...Every man had an unlit cigarette between his fingers. The sun had set. The muezzin was already on the balcony of the little mosque next door...."Very enjoyable read that transports you to another time and place.

Dahris Martin was a young Irish American woman in her early twenties when she bravely travelled to the middle east with another female companion. Their mission was to live amongst the Tunisians, to learn their life and culture, and then bring their combined knowledge back to the states. Dahris was the author of a few childrens books and her friend a budding artist. Arriving in the mid 1930s, their destination was the city of Kairouan. Immediately after disembarking their ship after the long voyage, they are met by a rather cartoonish character, a local tour guide named Kalifa who has recently been forced out of his job due to the fact that his brother is an assassin. Kalifa still the tourist chaperone lays claim to the two girls and takes them under his wing, establishing them in local lodgings, showing them the sites, and introducing them to his family, friends and the best of the local shopkeepers and cafes. This is a wonderful and truly evocative adventure travel narrative full of excitement of the exotic landscape and it's passionate people. Humorous in the telling, Dahris details her three year stay as friend to Kalipha and his beloved kinsmen. For those interested in learning the culture of Tunisia this book will provide you with insight to the personalities of its people, their religion of devout Muslim faith, their food, their clothing, their history. Told to us in a light hearted narrative, I thoroughly enjoyed reading Dahris' story and felt I was alive and well accompanying her on her journey. Riding camels with her across the desert sands, learning to cook lamb and couscous over a firepot, hearing her perform her own exquisite muezzin calls to prayer as if she were born and raised in Tunisia, watching with her as bridal ceremonies and death rites were enacted, all allowed me to feel transported to this wonderful and colorful region of North Africa's Arabic city. I read the first US edition published in hardcover titled "I Know Tunisia" in 1943 which

is scarce to find, but this fabulous true story is now available from Eland publishing in a reprint trade paperback.

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