

*Full citation:*

J.E. Peterson. "The Arabian Peninsula in Modern Times: A Historiographical Survey (1991)." Online edition from [www.JEPeterson.net](http://www.JEPeterson.net) (posted September 2000)

*Originally published as:*

J.E. Peterson. "The Arabian Peninsula in Modern Times: A Historiographical Survey." *American Historical Review*, Vol. 96, No. 5 (Dec. 1991), pp. 1435-1449.

*N.B. The text in this online edition has not been updated from the originally published version.*

## THE ARABIAN PENINSULA IN MODERN TIMES: A HISTORIOGRAPHICAL SURVEY

In 1935, the British Foreign Office produced a memorandum entitled "The Seven Independent Arabian States."<sup>1</sup> The independent states in the Arabian Peninsula still number seven. But of those described only a half-century ago (Yemen, 'Asir, al-Hijaz, Najd, Kuwait, Jabal Shammar, and Jawf), only two still exist in similar form. Six of the seven states of today are monarchies: Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Oman. The seventh, the Republic of Yemen, was formed only in 1990 out of the merger of North and South Yemen.

This immense change provides an illustration of the fragile and transitory nature of traditional Arabian states, given their foundations on shifting tribal allegiances, their absolute dependence on strong and capable leadership, and their lack of firm territorial grounding. But today's seven states have a more durable appearance, even able to withstand the recent conquest of one by a rapacious neighbor. Obviously, much has transpired in just a half-century to change this situation. It can be argued that the process of state-formation is the single most fundamental factor in the modern history of the Arabian Peninsula. Earlier writing on the Peninsula dealt mostly with rulers and tribes. More recent writing, whether scholarly or otherwise, has concentrated heavily on country case studies. Much of this is political history ("names and dates") but the country emphasis also holds true generally for what little economic and social history exists. As such, state formation provides a convenient and useful prism through which to view the historiography of Arabia.

At first glance, the literature on Arabia seems misleadingly substantial. Its bulk is descriptive or narrative. Until the last several decades, most authors have been either travellers, both casual and "professional," or government officials (principally British) stationed in the region. It should not be surprising that the travel literature has been of mixed quality. Nevertheless, the accounts of intrepid travellers such as Carsten Niebuhr, George Sadleir, J.R. Wellsted, Charles Doughty, the Bents, and Richard Burton, quite often constitute the few surviving records of much of modern historical

---

1. India Office Library and Records (London), L/P&S/18/B446, "The Seven Independent Arabian States," W.J. Childs, Foreign Office, May 1935. For the sake of clarity and brevity, I have adhered in this essay to the following conventions: (a) use of "the Gulf" refers to the Arabian or Persian Gulf; (b) "Gulf states" means the six member-states of the Gulf Cooperation Council; (c) "the region" means the Arabian Peninsula, as do the terms "Arabia" and "Arabian"; (d) transliteration of Arabic words and names conforms generally with the Library of Congress system except that diacritical marks have been omitted, apart from " " and " " for the 'ayn and hamza); (e) references are almost exclusively to books, except where a seminal article may be concerned a subject not otherwise treated (this should not be interpreted as an implicit judgment against the value of periodical literature). Most references are published in English, although I have cited a few seminal Arabic works.

interest.<sup>2</sup> That tradition has been continued by such twentieth-century travellers, explorers, missionaries, and journalists as Bertram Thomas, St. John Philby, Paul Harrison, Claudie Fayein, Daniel van der Meulen, Wilfrid Thesiger, and David Holden.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, diplomats and expatriate administrators have made seminal contributions to the history of Arabia, not unlike the way in which they collected specimens of geology or flora and fauna for analysis in museums back in Europe. Many of these works, among them Samuel Miles, Snouk Hurgronje, and Sir Arnold Wilson, provide the basic foundations upon which later writers, both Western and indigenous, have been able to build.<sup>4</sup> As a source on subjects as diverse as political narratives, economy, slavery, telegraphs, and tribal gazetteers, J.G. Lorimer's compilation is without comparison.<sup>5</sup>

While the factual outlines of the development of the seven states are fairly well known, little work has been done to fill in the contours. All too often, new writing consists of a rehash of stories already told, often relying on the same secondary sources, or of superficial country surveys prompted by the region's high profile over the last decade or two. Scholarly attention to the Peninsula is the product largely of no more than the last quarter-century. It is relatively sparse, and variable in its quality. With few exceptions, historical scholarship has yet to move beyond the comfortable horizons of country studies and political analysis. One feature of Saudi Arabia's socioeconomic development and the emphasis placed on higher education has been the creation of a body of scholarly work, generally in the form of unpublished doctoral dissertations, by Saudi students, many of whom later rose to high positions in the government. One wonders to what degree these students were able to translate their ideas into practice upon their return home to government service.

Broadly speaking, two sorts of state formation in the Arabian Peninsula can be distinguished: the long-standing proto-states of Yemen and Oman, based in part on their sectarian imamat, and tribal states elsewhere. There has been a fundamental revolution in the character of states in the Peninsula, a transformation from these traditional and tribe-dependent states to nation-states (or more accurately in some cases city-states). It has not been a complete revolution, however. While in formal terms, the territorial states are modern creations, their roots are old and the legitimacy of their ruling families is based on their evolution from traditional relationships. Modern structures have

---

2. Carsten Niebuhr, *Travels Through Arabia, and other Countries in the East* (n.p., 1792), George Foster Sadleir, *Diary of a Journey Across Arabia (1819)* (Bombay: 1866; reprinted Cambridge: Oleander Press, 1977), J.R. Wellsted, "Narrative of a Journey into the Interior of Oman," *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society*, Vol. 7 (1837), pp. 102-113, Charles M. Doughty, *Travels in Arabia Deserta* (London: Jonathan Cape and The Medici Society, 1926), J. Theodore and Mabel V.A. Bent, *Southern Arabia* (London: Smith, Elder, 1900), Sir Richard F. Burton, *Pilgrimage to Al Medinah and Meccah* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1907).

3. Bertram S. Thomas, *Alarms and Excursions in Arabia* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1931; Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1931) and *Arabia Felix: Across the Empty Quarter of Arabia* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1932); Paul W. Harrison, *Doctor in Arabia* (New York: John Day, 1940; London: Robert Hale, 1943); Claudie Fayein, *A French Doctor in the Yemen* (London: 1957); Daniel van der Meulen, *Faces in Shem* (London: 1961); Wilfrid Thesiger, *Arabian Sands* (London: Longman, 1959); and David Holden, *Farewell to Arabia* (London: Faber and Faber, 1966). Citations of Philby's works are given below.

4. S.B. Miles, *The Countries and Tribes of the Persian Gulf* (London: Harrison and Sons, 1919; 2nd ed., London: Frank Cass, 1966); C. Snouk Hurgronje, *Mekka in the Latter Part of the Nineteenth Century* (reprinted Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1970); H.R.P. Dickson's *The Arab of the Desert* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1949) and his *Kuwait and Her Neighbours* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1956); and Arnold T. Wilson, *The Persian Gulf: An Historical Sketch from the Earliest to the Beginning of the Twentieth Century* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1928; reprinted 1959).

5. *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman, and Central Arabia* (Calcutta: Superintendent, Government Printing, Vol. 1: 1915; Vol. 2: 1908; reprinted Farnborough, Hants.: Gregg International, 1970; Shannon: Irish Universities Press, 1970; in six volumes; reprinted London: Archive Editions, 1989). Other examples of the profitable partnership of policy and scholarship are United Kingdom, Admiralty War Staff, Intelligence Division, *A Handbook of Arabia* (London, vol. 1: 1916, vol. 2: 1917), and United Kingdom, Admiralty, Naval Intelligence Division, *Western Arabia and the Red Sea* (Oxford: HMSO, 1946).

been superimposed on traditional methods. The way "things really work" in some ways is not all that changed from traditional practice. These remain patrimonial societies and, with the exception of Yemen, retain patrimonial political systems.

Until comparatively recently, states in Arabia were minimalist, whether considered in terms of structure, functions, or their relationships with their citizens. In rural areas, the tribe was central to the individual's existence: in many ways, it formed something of a self-contained entity, politically, economically, and certainly socially. Allegiance to a larger state structure was ephemeral, produced either by force or transitory self-interest. Paul Dresch's study of tribes and politics focuses on Yemen, but it has considerable applicability elsewhere.<sup>6</sup> While urban areas largely were outside the tribal sphere, they still formed a complex relationship with tribes. Tribes constituted the trading hinterland, controlled vital routes, provided the armed levies for rulers, and were a frequent threat to towns and cities. The impact of tribalism on state formation in the two traditional political entities of Yemen and Oman is as substantial as in those states evolving out of the leadership of a dominant tribal clan.

The panoply of Yemen's rich history has been profiled by Robert Stookey, as well as in a breezier account by Robin Bidwell.<sup>7</sup> Yemen is now an isolated corner of the Middle East but it is well known for its pre-Islamic civilizations. The subsequent long series of invasions and conquests serve as a microcosm for the currents of Islamic history. Traditional historians, such as 'Abd al-Wasi' al-Wasi'i and 'Abdullah al-Jarafi, focus on the dominant role of the Zaydi imamate over the last thousand years.<sup>8</sup> This was a minimalist state whose imam was elected from the ranks of the great sayyid families (descendants of the Prophet Muhammad). The strength of the imams derived from the support of the northern tribes of the Zaydi sect, but the lack of an independent power-base was also their weakness. Strong imams extended their control from the northern highlands over the Sunni areas of the south and sought to keep the office within their families.

The nineteenth century saw the imamate in decline, threatened from the south by the British capture of Aden and from the north by a recrudescence of Ottoman interest. However, by the end of the century, an imam was elected from the Hamid al-Din and his son Yahya (r.1904-1948) took dramatic steps to strengthen and transform the imamate into a central government. Since many of the measures instituted by Imam Yahya were based on Ottoman introductions (some of his officials were even former Ottoman officials who remained in Yemen following dissolution of their empire), it is unfortunate that there has been little work done on that formative influence.<sup>9</sup>

To European observers such as Hugh Scott, Harold Ingrams, and Basil Seager, the Yemen of the Hamid al-Din was a medieval anachronism.<sup>10</sup> But as Manfred W. Wenner shows, the process of neotraditional consolidation carried out by Yahya and his son Ahmad (r.1948-1962) carried the

---

6. *Tribes, Government, and History in Yemen* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

7. Robert W. Stookey, *Yemen: The Politics of the Yemen Arab Republic* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1978); Robin Bidwell, *The Two Yemens* (London: Longman; Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1983).

8. 'Abd al-Wasi' Yahya al-Wasi'i, *Tarikh al-Yaman* (2nd ed.; Cairo: Matba'at Hijazi, 1947); 'Abdullah 'Abd al-Karim al-Jarafi, *al-Muqtatafmin Tarikh al-Yaman* (Cairo: 'Isa al-Babi al-Halabi, 1951).

9. For an exception, see Jon E. Mandaville, "Memduh Pasha and Aziz Bey: Ottoman Experience in Yemen," in B.R. Pridham, ed., *Contemporary Yemen: Politics and Historical Background* (London: Croom Helm, for the University of Exeter Centre for Arab Gulf Studies, 1984), pp. 20-33. Also relevant in this regard is William Ochsenwald, *Religion, Society and the State in Arabia: The Hijaz Under Ottoman Control, 1840-1908* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1984).

10. Hugh Scott, *In the High Yemen* (London: John Murray, 1942); W. Harold Ingrams, *The Yemen: Imams, Rulers and Revolutions* (London: John Murray, 1963); Basil W. Seager, "The Yemen," *Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society*, Vol. 42, Pts. 3-4 (July-October 1955), pp. 214-230.

seeds of its own destruction.<sup>11</sup> J. Leigh Douglas details the opposition movement that briefly took over in 1948 and provided inspiration for subsequent dissidents.<sup>12</sup> In September 1962, a coup d'etat staged by the army plunged Yemen into five years of civil war, with Egypt supporting the nascent Yemen Arab Republic in the cities and south, and Saudi Arabia backing the royalist and Zaydi tribal forces in the extreme north. The war received international attention and involvement, as indicated by Dana Adams Schmidt's report by a journalist and David Smiley's account of a British officer recruited to assist the royalists.<sup>13</sup> National reconciliation was not achieved fully until 1970. A few years later, the army regained control of the state, which it has held ever since, despite assassinations and hostilities with South Yemen. Mohammed Zabarah, J.E. Peterson, and Robert Burrowes detail the twin difficulties of building legitimacy around a narrowly based government while trying to carry out modest socioeconomic development with a minimum of resources.<sup>14</sup>

Meanwhile, in the southern half of Yemen, Aden had been taken over by the British in 1839 because of its strategic location, enhanced more by the opening of the Suez Canal. As R.J. Gavin shows, for more than a century, British policy vacillated between restricting its presence to Aden Colony itself and establishing a forward policy in the outlying Protectorates.<sup>15</sup> These consisted of a myriad of petty states with traditional rulers remained mired in stagnation in comparison with urbanized and bustling Aden. A border agreement with Istanbul demarcated the northward limits of British influence but this was never recognized by the Zaydi imams or subsequent republic, resulting in constant tension along the border. To the East, the Hadramawt and Mahra country also fell under British sway. Even more isolated, these areas received scant political or economic attention until after the Second World War, as Harold Ingrams, the first resident political officer, describes.<sup>16</sup>

But the Aden Colony and Protectorates were also affected by the Arab Cold War of the 1950s and 1960s. It was not long before political opposition to the British presence escalated into guerrilla warfare and acts of terrorism. The most reliable account of this episode is Julian Paget, but one should also consult the personal recollections of various governors of Aden.<sup>17</sup> The subsequent establishment of the only Marxist state in the Arab world and the frequent battles within its party for control have created a certain morbid interest by the outside world in the affairs of this small state,

---

11. *Modern Yemen, 1918-1966* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1968).

12. *The Free Yemeni Movement, 1935-1962* (ed. by Giovanni Chimienti; Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1987).

13. Dana Adams Schmidt, *Yemen: The Unknown War* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968); David Smiley, with Peter Kemp, *Arabian Assignment* (London: Leo Cooper, 1975). The latter book also describes the author's experiences in commanding the Sultan of Oman's army during the 1950s rebellion in Oman.

14. Mohammed Ahmad Zabarah, *Yemen: Traditionalism vs. Modernity* (New York: Praeger, 1982); J.E. Peterson, *Yemen: The Search for a Modern State* (London: Croom Helm; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982); and Robert D. Burrowes, *The Yemen Arab Republic: The Politics of Development, 1962-1986* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press; London: Croom Helm, 1987).

15. *Aden Under British Rule, 1839-1967* (London: C. Hurst, 1975).

16. *Arabia and the Isles* (2nd ed.; London: John Murray, 1952. 3rd ed.; London: 1966).

17. Julian Paget, *Last Post: Aden 1964-67* (London: Faber and Faber, 1969). The recollections include Sir Tom Hickenbotham, *Aden* (London: 1958), Sir Charles Johnston, *The View From Steamer Point* (London: Collins, 1964), and Sir Kennedy Trevaskis, *Shades of Amber: A South Arabian Episode* (London: Hutchinson, 1968).

as reflected in the books by Joseph Kostiner and Helen Lackner.<sup>18</sup> Western assertions that South Yemen was an aggressive state providing a platform for Soviet penetration of Arabia have been suitably punctured by Fred Halliday.<sup>19</sup> His earlier *Arabia Without Sultans*,<sup>20</sup> based on first-hand visits to the Yemens, was a Marxist interpretation of political change in Arabia and external involvement. Closed to the West, the changes and tensions within South Yemeni society largely remain a mystery, although Norman Cigar has provided insights.<sup>21</sup>

The two Yemen republics had ended several border wars with a reaffirmation of their longstanding commitment to unity, but their opposing political structures seemed to be an insurmountable barrier, as F. Gregory Gause III discloses in his history of the unification impulse.<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, the two halves of Yemen did manage to unify in May 1990, under the leadership of the northern president.

On the opposite side of the Peninsula, Oman displays many similarities to Yemen, geographically, socially and, until this century, politically.<sup>23</sup> Through the centuries, the heartlands of both countries have been dominated by the tribes, banding together in great confederations under the leadership of especially dynamic shaykhs. The countries' isolation from the main centers of Islam and their mountainous terrain have allowed small unique Islamic sects to flourish, the Zaydis in Yemen and the Ibadis in Oman. The balance of power between the tribes has in both cases been exercised by elected imams, acting more as chairmen over tribal confederations than as rulers of central states. Strong imams tended to pass on office to their families and so dynasties arose, deteriorated, and were replaced by "pure" imamates. In the case of Oman, at least, this development has seen to be so regular as almost to take a cyclical form, as postulated by J.C. Wilkinson.<sup>24</sup>

However, the last cycle, with the election of an Al Bu Sa'id as imam in the mid-eighteenth century was interrupted, perhaps permanently. Robert G. Landen places emphasis for this development on the impact of modernization.<sup>25</sup> But the ruling Al Bu Sa'id family, having moved from the interior to Muscat on the coast and given up the title of imam, were weakened also by the division of the state into its Zanzibari and Omani components in the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>26</sup>

---

18. Joseph Kostiner, *The Struggle for South Yemen* (London: Croom Helm; New York: St. Martin's Press, 1984) and *South Yemen's Revolutionary Struggle, 1970-1985* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1990); Helen Lackner, *P.D.R. Yemen: Outpost of Socialist Development in Arabia* (London: Ithaca Press, 1985).

19. *Revolution and Foreign Policy: The Case of South Yemen 1967-1987* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). For an overview of both Yemens' foreign relations, see Eric Macro, *Yemen and the Western World Since 1571* (London: C. Hurst, 1968).

20. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974; New York: Vintage Press, 1975)

21. "State and Society in South Yemen," *Problems of Communism*, Vol. 34, No. 3 (May-June 1985), pp. 41-58; "Islam and the State in South Yemen: The Uneasy Coexistence," *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (1990), pp. 185-203.

22. "Yemeni Unity: Past and Future," *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 42, No. 1 (Winter 1988), pp. 32-47.

23. See J.E. Peterson, "Legitimacy and Political Change in Yemen and Oman," *Orbis*, Vol. 27, No. 4 (Winter 1984), pp. 971-998.

24. *Water and Tribal Settlement in South-East Arabia: A Study of the Aflaj of Oman* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977).

25. *Oman Since 1856: Disruptive Modernization in a Traditional Arab Society* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967).

26. Patricia Risso, *Oman and Muscat: An Early Modern History* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986).

Briton Cooper Busch shows how, at the same time, increasing British concern with European rivals in the Gulf led to a formal position of superiority in Muscat, thus reducing Muscat to little more than a protectorate in a de facto sense.<sup>27</sup> This was followed by a division of the country into the Al Bu Sa'id controlled coast and an autonomous interior under a newly elected imam in, as J.C. Wilkinson points out, the realization of a renaissance Ibadi movement.<sup>28</sup> This historical division has been reflected in the indigenous histories of modern Oman. Ibn Ruzayk reflects the Muscat or Al Bu Sa'id emphasis, while the Salimis (father and son) were activists in the nineteenth- and twentieth-century imamates.<sup>29</sup>

The split was not healed until the forces of the sultanate forcibly regained control of the interior in the 1950s. For the first time in nearly a century, an Al Bu Sa'id sultan, Sa'id b. Taymur (r.1932-1970), visited the heartland of his own country, making the epic overland journey from his southern province described by James Morris.<sup>30</sup> Still, the sultanate's problems were not over. As J.E. Peterson demonstrates, continuing dissatisfaction was prompted by Sa'id's parsimonious nature, petty restrictions, and minimalist and not very efficient government.<sup>31</sup> This was most pronounced in the southern province of Dhufar, which the sultan regarded as a personal estate. What began as nationalist rebellion acquired a Marxist character, relying on outside assistance, before extensive British help enabled the sultanate to put it down. The government's side of the war has been told by British soldiers, including Ranulph Fiennes, Tony Jeapes, and John Akehurst, among others.<sup>32</sup> Another vital factor in the subsidence of the rebellion was the replacement of the old sultan by his Sandhurst-educated son Qabus b. Sa'id (r.1970- ). Since then, Oman has used its modest oil resources to develop extensively along the lines of the other Gulf monarchies.

Elsewhere in the Arabian Peninsula, states evolved out of tribal leadership. An eighteenth-century alliance between a petty shaykhly family of the Najd in central Arabia, the Al Sa'ud, and an itinerant Islamic reformer, Muhammad 'Abd al-Wahhab, produced the means and motivation for Saudi expansion over much of Arabia during the last 200 years. Ultimately, however, that expansionism was checked principally by encounters with the British sphere of influence. The maturation of the third Saudi state in this century, beginning with the recapture of Riyadh in 1902 and continuing through the adoption of the name of Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 1932, is the most widely chronicled example of state formation in the Peninsula.

Despite its prominent position on the world stage in recent years, Saudi Arabia remains a closed and largely unknown country. The bare outlines of its history have been recounted a number

---

27. *Britain and the Persian Gulf, 1894-1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967).

28. *The Imamate Tradition of Oman* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

29. G.P. Badger, ed. and tr., *The History of the Imams and Seyyids of 'Uman, by Salil-ibn-Razik, from 661-1856* (London: Hakluyt Society, 1871); 'Abdullah b. Humayd al-Salimi, *Tuhfat al-A'yan bi-Sirat Ahl 'Uman* (5th ed.; Kuwait: Dar al-Tali'a, 1974; first published 1927); Muhammad b. 'Abdullah al-Salimi, *Nahdat al-A'yan bi-Hurriyat 'Uman* (Cairo: Dar al-Kitab al-'Arabi, n.d. [1961?]).

30. *Sultan in Oman* (London: Faber and Faber, 1957; New York: Pantheon, 1957).

31. *Oman in the Twentieth Century: Political Foundations of an Emerging State* (London: Croom Helm; New York: Barnes and Noble, 1978).

32. Ranulph Fiennes, *Where Soldiers Fear to Tread* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1975); Tony Jeapes, *SAS: Operation Oman* (London: William Kimber, 1980); John Akehurst, *We Won a War: The Campaign in Oman, 1965-1975* (London: Michael Russell, 1983).

of times, for instance, in the popular histories by David Holden and Robert Lacey.<sup>33</sup> Still, the process by which a minor family of the central Najd gained dominion over much of Arabia, lost it twice, and then gained it again, plus a prominent position on the international stage, has not been examined adequately. Details of the early period are scarce and often contradictory. Even the dates of the early imams (as the Al Sa'ud leaders were styled) are not clear, not least because of rival pretenders and overlapping dates. Neither Western accounts, as written by George Rentz and Bayly Winder, or modern Saudi renditions, as that of Zirkali, are conclusive, because of the lack of written evidence.<sup>34</sup> In the nineteenth century, any clear line of succession is clouded by the Egyptian destruction of the original Saudi capital at al-Dir'iyah in 1818 and the holding of hostages in Cairo. Family rivalries and Ottoman intrigues resulted in the decline of the second Sa'udi state in the 1870s, with pretenders to the Al Sa'ud leadership in exile again, this time in Istanbul.

It was not until the turn of the century and the emergence of young 'Abd al-'Aziz b. 'Abd al-Rahman that the Al Sa'ud regained control of Najd and set the foundations for the third Saudi state. The recapture of Riyadh has assumed mythological proportions in contemporary Saudi historiography and provided the stage-setting in forming the legend of King 'Abd al-'Aziz. The first stage in 'Abd al-'Aziz's drive to restore Saudi fortunes was the reconquest of the Najd. In this and his later campaigns, 'Abd al-'Aziz was heavily dependent on the Ikhwan, the bedouin tribesmen turned into warriors of Wahhabi Islam. The relationship of the Saudi leader with the Ikhwan, as well as the question of whether he founded the movement or simply took it over, is still a matter of conjecture, as shown in John Habib and Christine Helms.<sup>35</sup> By the end of the 1920s, however, the Ikhwan had turned against the Al Sa'ud and it was only with great difficulty and British help that 'Abd al-'Aziz managed to deflect their challenge. But the antipathy of the Ikhwan and the ultra-conservative Wahhabis to the Al Sa'ud never completely died away, as witnessed in the 1979 siege of the Great Mosque in Makkah.<sup>36</sup>

One factor in the disillusionment of the Ikhwan resulted from 'Abd al-'Aziz's forbidding them from continuing their raids north into the British mandates of Iraq and Transjordan. Given the preeminent position of Britain in the region, it should not be surprising that 'Abd al-'Aziz's success, once he began to expand out of the interior of Arabia, was dependent on good relations with London. Since British archives not only record the ties but also constitute one of the few extensive primary sources on Saudi history, it should not be surprising that this subject has received extensive treatment, with books by Gary Troeller, Clive Leatherdale, Jacob Goldberg, and others.<sup>37</sup>

---

33. David Holden and Richard Johns, with James Buchan, *The House of Saud: The Rise and Rule of the Most Powerful Dynasty in the Arab World* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1982); Robert Lacey, *The Kingdom: Arabia and the House of Saud* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982).

34. George S. Rentz, "Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab (1703/04-1792) and the Beginnings of the Unitarian Empire in Arabia" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of California at Berkeley, 1948); R. Bayly Winder, *Saudi Arabia in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Macmillan, 1965); Khayr al-Din al-Zirkali, *Shibh al-Jazira fi 'Had al-Malik 'Abd al-'Aziz* (3rd ed.; Beirut: Dar al-'Ilm lil-Milayin, 1985).

35. John S. Habib, *Ibn Sa'ud's Warriors of Islam: The Ikhwan of Najd and Their Role in the Creation of the Sa'udi Kingdom, 1910-1930* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1978); Christine Moss Helms, *The Cohesion of Saudi Arabia: Evolution of Political Identity* (London: Croom Helm; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981).

36. Joseph A. Kechichian, "Islamic Revivalism and Change in Saudi Arabia: Juhayman al-'Utaybi's Letters' to the Saudi People," *Muslim World*, Vol. 80, No. 1 (1990), pp. 1-16.

37. Gary Troeller, *The Birth of Saudi Arabia: Britain and the Rise of the House of Sa'ud* (London: Frank Cass, 1976); Clive Leatherdale, *Britain and Saudi Arabia, 1925-1939: The Imperial Oasis* (London: Frank Cass, 1983); Jacob Goldberg, *The Foreign Policy of Saudi Arabia: The Formative Years, 1902-1918* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986).

British policy toward the Al Sa‘ud exhibited a curious bifurcation during this formative period, arising from a governmental division in responsibilities towards the Middle East. In Cairo, the Arab Bureau represented the views of the Foreign and Colonial Offices and favored the Hashimis of al-Hijaz to lead the Arab revolt against the Ottomans, as popularized in the film "Lawrence of Arabia." The Gulf, however, was the preserve of the Government of India, which viewed the Al Sa‘ud as the more dynamic and viable force. The failure of His Majesty's Government to throw its weight behind the Najdis and, even more, its encouragement of a Hashimi Kingdom of the Hijaz after the war, was a principal factor in the decision of H. St. John B. Philby to resign from government service and offer his services to ‘Abd al-‘Aziz. As a result, Philby was able to take advantage of a unique opportunity to chronicle the geography and society of great portions of Arabia.<sup>38</sup> It also provided Elizabeth Monroe, in her biography of Philby, a focal point around which to dissect the rivalry within British official circles.<sup>39</sup>

It seems undeniable that without ‘Abd al-‘Aziz, the modern Saudi state would not exist, at least not in its present form. There is no lack of published material praising the founder of the third Saudi state, both by such Saudi writers as Mohammed Almana and Prince Turki M. Saud Al Saud, and by Western biographers, including Ameen Rihani and David Howarth.<sup>40</sup> At the same time, it is not surprising that the role of a single strong personality has been out of proportion. Mishary Nuaim outlines the pivotal role of merchants from the Najd, Hasa and Hijaz in financing ‘Abd al-‘Aziz's early expansion, while Mohamed Elgari argues that the Hijazi merchant families were able to shape the economy and bureaucracy of the resultant state to their considerable advantage.<sup>41</sup>

Recent Saudi history aptly illustrates the predicaments inherent in hereditary succession. Under ‘Abd al-‘Aziz's chosen heir, King Sa‘ud (r.1953-1964), the kingdom drifted. Riyadh's activist policy on boundaries in the Gulf led to near-disaster. In 1952, Saudi soldiers moved into al-Buraymi oasis, shared between Abu Dhabi and Oman. It heralded an unusual alliance between the conservative kingdom and Egypt's ‘Abd al-Nasir against Britain and its allies. A pro-Saudi view of the situation was published by the Arabian American Oil Company (ARAMCO) while the British side was given by J.B. Kelly.<sup>42</sup> But the Riyadh/Cairo axis fell apart after the Yemeni revolution in 1962, as Gregory Gause and Saeed Badeeb explain.<sup>43</sup> Direction was restored only under King Faysal

---

38. *Arabia of the Wahhabis* (London: Constable, 1928), *The Empty Quarter* (London: Constable, 1933; New York: Henry Holt, 1933), *Arabian Days* (London: 1948), *Arabian Highlands* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1952), *Arabian Jubilee* (New York: 1953), *Saudi Arabia* (London: Benn, 1955), *Forty Years in the Wilderness* (London: Robert Hale, 1957), and *Land of Midian* (London: 1957).

39. *Philby of Arabia* (London: Faber and Faber, 1973).

40. Mohammed Almana, *Arabia Unified: A Portrait of Ibn Saud* (London: Hutchinson, Benham, 1980; rev. ed., 1982); Prince Turki M. Saud Al Saud, "The Great Achievement: King ‘Abd al-‘Aziz And the Founding of the Third Saudi State, 1902-1932" (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of London, School of Oriental and African Studies, 1983); Ameen Fares Rihani, *Ibn Saud of Arabia: His People and His Land* (London: Constable, 1928); David Howarth, *The Desert King: A Life of Ibn Saud* (London: Collins, 1964).

41. Mishary Abdalrahman Al-Nuaim, "State Building in a Non-Capitalist Social Formation: The Dialectics of Two Modes of Production and the Role of the Merchant Class, Saudi Arabia 1902-1932" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 1986); Mohamed Ali Elgari, "The Pattern of Economic Development in Saudi Arabia as a Product of its Social Structure" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Riverside, 1983).

42. Arabian American Oil Company, *Oman and the Southern Shores of the Persian Gulf* (Cairo, 1952); J.B. Kelly, *Eastern Arabian Frontiers* (London: Faber, 1964).

43. F. Gregory Gause, III, *Saudi-Yemeni Relations: Domestic Structures and Foreign Influence* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990); Saeed M. Badeeb, *The Saudi-Egyptian Conflict Over North Yemen, 1962-1970* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press; Washington: American-Arab Affairs Council, 1986).



(r.1964-1973). His relatively weak successor King Khalid (r.1973-1982) was replaced by the intermittently more dynamic King Fahd (r.1982- ), who has been faced with such problems as a drastic fall in income and external threats from Iran and Iraq. Just as importantly, all of 'Abd al-'Aziz's sons have had to contend with resistance and rivalries within the vast royal family, as is made clear in studies by Gary Samore, Alexander Bligh, and Mashaal Al Saud.<sup>44</sup>

Meanwhile, the creation and evolution of a modern government structure went hand-in-hand with increasing political sophistication. The creation of the first council of ministers in 1953, King Faysal's inclusion of younger educated Saudis in the 1970s, and the emergence of the various ministries and departments have been examined by Charles Harrington, David Long, Summer Scott Huyette, and Arthur Young.<sup>45</sup> Much valuable work has been contributed by Saudi scholars, such as Tawfiq Sadiq, Soliman Solaim, Ibrahim Awaji, Hamad Al-Hamad, Mohammed al-Tawail, Motleb Nafissah, and Othman Rawaf, some of whom now occupy senior positions.<sup>46</sup> In a related arena, Fayez Badr dissects the evolution of development planning.<sup>47</sup>

Fouad al-Farsy provides a comprehensive overview of the kingdom's social and economic development, while reflections from different viewpoints on the more fundamental prospects and problems brought by oil income are provided by Fatina Shaker, and John Shaw and David Long.<sup>48</sup> The country's wealth, regional prominence, and secrecy have provoked ample criticism, whether

---

44. Gary Samuel Samore, "Royal Family Politics in Saudi Arabia (1953-1982)" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1983); Alexander Bligh, *From Prince to King: Royal Succession in the House of Saud in the Twentieth Century* (New York: New York University Press, 1984); Mashaal Abdullah Turki Al Saud, "Permanence and Change: An Analysis of the Islamic Political Culture of Saudi Arabia As It Faces the Challenges of Development with Special Reference to the Royal Family" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Claremont Graduate School, 1982).

45. Charles W. Harrington, "The Saudi Arabian Council of Ministers," *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (1958), pp. 1-19; Summer Scott Huyette, *Political Adaptation in Sa'udi Arabia: A Study of the Council of Ministers* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1985); David Edwin Long, "The Board of Grievances in Saudi Arabia," *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 27, No. 1 (1973), pp. 71-76; Arthur N. Young, *Saudi Arabia: The Making of a Financial Giant* (New York: New York University Press, 1983).

46. Muhammad Tawfiq Sadiq, *Tatawwur al-Hukm wal-Idara fi al-Mamlaka al-'Arabiya al-Sa'udiya* (Riyadh: Matbu'at Ma'had al-Idara al-'Ammah, 1385/1965); Soliman A. Solaim, "Constitutional and Judicial Organization in Saudi Arabia" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Johns Hopkins University, 1970); Ibrahim Mohamed Awaji, "Bureaucracy and Society in Saudi Arabia" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Virginia, 1971); Hamad Sadun Al-Hamad, "The Legislative Process and the Development of Saudi Arabia" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Southern California, 1973); Mohammed Abdulrahman al-Tawail, "Institute of Public Administration in Saudi Arabia: A Case Study in Institution Building" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, West Virginia University, 1974); Motleb Abdullah Nafissah, "Law and Social Change in Muslim Countries: The Concept of Islamic Law Held by the Hanbali School and the Saudi Arabian Legal System" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard Law School, 1975); and Othman Yasin al-Rawaf, "The Concept of the Five Crises in Political Development – Relevance to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia," (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Duke University, 1980).

47. Fayez Ibrahim Badr, "Developmental Planning in Saudi Arabia: A Multidimensional Study" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Southern California, 1968).

48. Fouad al-Farsy's regularly updated book, *Modernity and Tradition: The Saudi Equation* (London: Kegan Paul International, 1991); Fatina Amin Shaker, "Modernization of the Developing Nations: The Case of Saudi Arabia" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Purdue University, 1972); John A. Shaw and David E. Long, *Saudi Arabian Modernization: The Impact of Change on Stability* (New York: Praeger, with the Georgetown University Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1982; Washington Papers, No. 89).

from Western conservative critics such as J.B. Kelly, Western leftists such as Helen Lackner, or virulent internal opponents such as Nasir al-Sa'id.<sup>49</sup>

The smaller states of the Gulf have evolved from similar origins as Saudi Arabia. However, an additional key factor in their modern history involves the consolidation of British influence in the Gulf, particularly in the nineteenth century, through the exclusion of European (and Ottoman) rivals. This process is the focus of J.B. Kelly's immense treatise in imperial history.<sup>50</sup> Kelly has also provided an explanation of the system of British representation in the Gulf.<sup>51</sup> The rise of the British position more-or-less coincided with the emergence of certain tribes along the Gulf littoral. As Ahmad Mustafa Abu Hakima shows, the Al Sabah and the Al Khalifa derive from well-pedigreed tribes of the Najd which found their way to Kuwait and Bahrain respectively in the mid-eighteenth century.<sup>52</sup> The pre-eminent families in Kuwait essentially formed a partnership whereby the Al Sabah took responsibility for providing governance while the others pursued commerce.

This balance was disturbed by two factors. Shaykh Mubarak (r.1896-1915), in addition to keeping Kuwait out of the clutches of the Ottomans by signing a treaty of protection with the British in 1899, consolidated power into his own hands. As Naseer Aruri, Ahmad Baz, Suhail Shuhaiber, and Jill Crystal show, once the Kuwaiti oligarchy had been replaced by an autocracy, subsequent Al Sabah rulers have been unwilling to restore the balance.<sup>53</sup> Their dominant position was considerably enhanced by the discovery of oil and the collection of oil payments to the ruling family. The initial ministries and public services departments functioned as little more than fiefdoms of close relatives of the Ruler. The intrusion of currents of Arab nationalism from Nasirist Egypt and revolutionary Iraq renewed demands from various sectors of Kuwaiti society for more participation. The elected National Assembly, created soon after independence in 1961, seemed to satisfy some aspirations, but it has been a tortuous path, as shown by Abdo Baaklini, Nicolas Gavrielides, and J.E. Peterson: the Assembly was suspended in 1976 and again in 1986.<sup>54</sup>

---

49. J.B. Kelly, *Arabia, the Gulf and the West: A Critical View of the Arabs and Their Oil Policy* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson; New York: Basic Books, 1980); Helen Lackner, *A House Built on Sand: A Political Economy of Saudi Arabia* (London: Ithaca Press, 1978); Nasir al-Sa'id, *Tarikh Al Sa'ud* (n.p., Manshurat Dar Makka al-Mukarrama, 1404).

50. *Britain and the Persian Gulf, 1795-1880* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968).

51. "The Legal and Historical Basis of the British Position in the Persian Gulf," in *St. Antony's Papers*, No. 4 (London: Chatto & Windus; New York: Praeger, 1959), pp. 119-140. See also Herbert J. Liebesny, "British Jurisdiction in the States of the Persian Gulf," *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 3 (July 1949), pp. 330-332.

52. *History of Eastern Arabia, 1750 - 1800: The Rise and Development of Bahrain and Kuwait* (Beirut: Khayats, 1965).

53. Naseer H. Aruri, "Kuwait: A Political Study," *Muslim World*, Vol. 60, No. 4 (October 1970), pp. 321-343; Ahmed Abdullah Saad Baz, "Political Elite and Political Development in Kuwait" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, George Washington University, 1981); Suhail K. Shuhaiber, "Political Development in Kuwait: Continuity and Change in an Arab Independent Gulf State" (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, St. Catherine's College, University of Oxford, 1981); Jill Crystal, *Oil and Politics in the Gulf: Rulers and Merchants in Kuwait and Qatar* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

54. Abdo I. Baaklini, "Legislatures in the Gulf Area: The Experience of Kuwait, 1961-1976," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 3 (1982), pp. 359-379; Nicolas Gavrielides, "Tribal Democracy: The Anatomy of Parliamentary Elections in Kuwait," in Linda L. Layne, ed., *Elections in the Middle East: Implications of Recent Trends* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1987), pp. 153-213; J.E. Peterson, *The Arab Gulf States: Steps Toward Political Participation* (New York: Praeger, 1988; published with the Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington Papers, No. 131).

The development of Bahrain as a modern state was more complicated. To begin with, the Al Khalifa and their Najdi tribal allies arrived as conquerors. Mohammed Rumaihi and Fuad Khuri discuss the way in which their control over the more numerous Baharina (indigenous Shi'a Arabs), as well as the smaller communities of hawala (families that have immigrated from Persian coast but claim Arab origins) and ethnic Persians, has bedevilled Bahraini politics and social relations ever since.<sup>55</sup> Although indigenous Shi'a communities, mostly but not entirely Baharina, exist in various places along the Arab littoral of the Gulf, they have received very little attention. F.S. Vidal's study of al-Hasa, the oasis complex of eastern Saudi Arabia is one exception, as is James Bill's article.<sup>56</sup>

The lack of checks and balances which allowed some members of the ruling family to run roughshod over other Bahrainis forced British intervention in internal affairs. Talal Farah shows the pattern of British intervention during the late nineteenth century while Mahdi Tajir takes up the story in this century, which included the forced abdication of Shaykh 'Isa b. 'Ali (r.1869-1923) and then the appointment of Charles Belgrave as Adviser to the Ruler.<sup>57</sup> Belgrave's long stay (as chronicled in his autobiography) became a key issue in the emerging tension between the Al Khalifa and an increasingly organized and radicalized opposition.<sup>58</sup> Under a disinterested Ruler, Belgrave virtually assumed all the reins of administration. By the 1950s, when Bahrain had developed a complex government and an organized opposition movement, he had become a symbol of popular discontent.

The Suez crisis of 1956 brought political tensions in Bahrain to a head. Saeed Hashim shows how Arab politics influenced opposition movements in the Gulf.<sup>59</sup> After a demonstration deteriorated into riots, seven opposition leaders were jailed, four of them in exile on St. Helena Island. The Political Resident in the Persian Gulf at the time, Sir Bernard Burrows, provides an explanation and apologia for Britain's role in these events.<sup>60</sup> Given this history of tensions, it seems a bit surprising that Bahrain, like Kuwait, established an elected National Assembly after independence. But as Emile Nakhleh shows, it was suspended within several years.<sup>61</sup> These tensions were exacerbated by Iranian interference in the 1980s and by the virtual exhaustion of Bahrain's small oil reserves; the emirate's attempt to diversify as a regional banking center suffered from the post-1986 economic recession throughout the Gulf.

The Qatar Peninsula served as the jumping off point for the Al Khalifa to Bahrain. A small population and paucity of resources before the discovery of oil ensured Qatar's place on the margin of history until the discovery of oil. The dominant Al Thani family, who had risen to prominence

---

55. M.G. Rumaihi, *Bahrain: Social and Political Change Since the First World War* (London: Bowker, 1976); Fuad I. Khuri, *Tribe and State in Bahrain: The Transformation of Social and Political Authority in an Arab State* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

56. F.S. Vidal, *The Oasis of Al-Hasa* (New York: Arabian American Oil Company, 1955); James A. Bill, "Resurgent Islam in the Persian Gulf," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 63, No. 1 (Fall 1984), pp. 108-127.

57. Talal Toufic Farah, *Protection and Politics in Bahrain, 1869-1915* (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1985); Mahdi Abdalla al-Tajir, *Bahrain 1920-1945: Britain, The Shaikh and the Administration* (London: Croom Helm, 1987).

58. *Personal Column* (London, 1960).

59. Saeed Khalil Hashim, "The Influence of Iraq on the Nationalist Movements of Kuwait and Bahrain, 1920-1961" (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Exeter, March 1984).

60. Bernard Burrows, *Footnotes in the Sand: The Gulf in Transition, 1953-1958* (Wilton, Salisbury, Wiltshire: Michael Russell, 1990).

61. Emile A. Nakhleh, *Bahrain: Political Development in a Modernizing Society* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books/D.C. Heath, 1976).

early in the twentieth century, have very nearly turned the small state into a family enterprise. The pattern of this development has been described well by Jill Crystal and Rosemarie Said Zahlan, while Yousof Abdulla concentrates on the relationship with the protecting power.<sup>62</sup> One aspect of the social transformation of the country was the move of the indigenous labor force from herding and fishing to salaried work as oil company employees. Their stories have been recorded by Nasser al-Othman.<sup>63</sup>

Until independence in 1971, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) was known as the Trucial Coast or Trucial Oman. This name, signifying the accession of the littoral shaykhs to the Perpetual Treaty of Maritime Peace (1853), replaced an earlier European designation as the Pirate Coast. While the Gulf was home to some genuine freebooters in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the accusations of piracy were principally aimed at the al-Qasimis, and several British expeditions were directed at Ra's al-Khayma and other Qasimi strongholds. It has fallen to the present Ruler of Sharjah, Shaykh Sultan Muhammad al-Qasimi to refute the charge against his ancestors.<sup>64</sup>

Since then, the balance of power along the Trucial Coast shifted south. Frauke Heard-Bey explains how, at the turn of this century, Shaykh Zayid b. Khalifa (r.1855-1909) enhanced and expanded a web of tribal allegiances and coalitions to create a large and powerful "state" in Abu Dhabi.<sup>65</sup> At the same time, the Al Maktum were beginning to develop nearby Dubai as a regional entrepot. Dubai's prosperity antedated its income from oil but oil wealth was responsible for completing Abu Dhabi's rise to predominance along the Trucial Coast. As Ali Mohammed Khalifa shows, that wealth enabled Abu Dhabi to assume the presidency of the newly independent UAE.<sup>66</sup> But it is a fragile leadership that has left the seven members of the UAE jealous of their autonomy in a number of spheres.

The UAE owes its birth to the stimulus of Britain's withdrawal from the Gulf in 1971, when all the amirates but Kuwait received their independence (Kuwaiti independence came in 1961). While physical withdrawal involved little more than the removal of a few thousand troops, it also marked the end of an era of British predominance in the Gulf and responsibility for the integrity of the states under its protection, as shown by Glen Balfour-Paul.<sup>67</sup> International concern about the future of the Gulf, given the smallness and vulnerability of the oil states, gave rise to the topic of

---

62. Crystal, *Oil and Politics*; Rosemarie Said Zahlan, *The Creation of Qatar* (London: Croom Helm; New York: Barnes & Noble, 1979); Yousof Ibrahim Al-Abdulla, *A Study of Qatari-British Relations, 1914-1945* (Doha: Orient Publishing and Translation, n.d.).

63. *With Their Bare Hands: The Story of the Oil Industry in Qatar* (London: Longman, 1984). For a more scholarly view, see Ian Seccombe and Richard Lawless, "The Gulf Labour Market and the Early Oil Industry: Traditional Structures and New Forms of Organisation," in Lawless, ed., *The Gulf in the Early 20th Century: Foreign Institutions and Local Responses* (Durham: University of Durham, 1986), pp. 91-124.

64. *The Myth of Arab Piracy in the Gulf* (London: Croom Helm, 1986; 2nd ed.; London: Routledge, 1988).

65. Frauke Heard-Bey, *From Trucial States to United Arab Emirates: A Society in Transition* (London: Longman, 1983). See also M. Morsy Abdullah, *The United Arab Emirates: A Modern History* (London: Croom Helm, 1978); and Rosemarie Said Zahlan, *The Origins of the United Arab Emirates: A Political and Social History of the Trucial States* (London: Macmillan, 1978).

66. *The United Arab Emirates: Unity in Fragmentation* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press; London: Croom Helm, 1979).

67. *The End of Empire in the Middle East: Britain's Relinquishment of Power in Her Last Three Arab Dependencies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

Gulf security, but as J.E. Peterson explains, security was a serious concern well before the 1970s.<sup>68</sup> John Duke Anthony and 'Abdullah Taryam disclose how the 1968 announcement of impending withdrawal led to a flurry of negotiations over unity.<sup>69</sup> In the end, Bahrain and Qatar chose to go their own way, leaving only the smaller Trucial States to join in the UAE.

The discovery of oil and the subsequent influx of income undoubtedly has been the key phenomenon in the recent history of the six oil-producing monarchies. Looking at Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states prior to the Second World War, it would have been very difficult to foresee the magnitude of change brought about by oil. The original oil concessions gave the major British and American companies the right to exploit the oil beneath entire countries on payment of small royalties and minimal taxes, as the studies by Olaf Caroe and Stephen Longrigg show.<sup>70</sup> It would be years before oil-producing states took increasing control of their resources, began a gradual policy of nationalization of producing companies, created their own national companies, and acquired the clout which made OPEC a force to be feared in the 1970s. This story, ably told by Steven Schneider, Ian Skeet, and Daniel Yergin, extends far beyond the confines of this essay.<sup>71</sup> A view from the Gulf by Farouk M.H. Akhdar casts a strongly critical eye on ARAMCO's role in Saudi society and politics.<sup>72</sup>

Another effect of oil was the creation of triangular relationships between host countries, Western oil companies, and Western governments. The winning of the Saudi concession by what was to become the Arabian American Oil Company (ARAMCO) proved to be an opening step in the lessening of the Al Sa'ud's dependence on Britain and the creation of a "special relationship" with the United States, as pointed out by Irvine H. Anderson.<sup>73</sup> Husain Albaharna and J.C. Wilkinson explain how the Anglo-American commercial and political rivalry over control of oil resources also embroiled the two allies in boundary disputes, in al-Buraymi and elsewhere.<sup>74</sup>

The burgeoning of oil production in the Peninsula, shortly followed by the tremendous process of socioeconomic transformation, essentially began in the late 1940s (although Bahrain's production dates from the 1930s). J.P. Bannerman and Ibrahim Al-Elawy show how the immediate impact of oil production altered the social structure of tribes and communities, as well as inducing

---

68. *Defending Arabia* (London: Croom Helm; New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986).

69. John Duke Anthony, *Arab States of the Lower Gulf: People, Politics, Petroleum* (Washington: Middle East Institute, 1975); 'Abdullah Omran Taryam, *The Establishment of the United Arab Emirates, 1950-85* (London: Croom Helm, 1987).

70. Olaf Caroe, *The Wells of Power: The Oil-Fields of South-Western Asia* (London: Macmillan, 1951), Stephen Longrigg, *Oil in the Middle East: Its Discovery and Development* (3rd ed.; London: Oxford University Press, for the Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1968).

71. Steven A. Schneider, *The Oil Price Revolution* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983); Ian Skeet, *OPEC: 25 Years of Prices and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Daniel Yergin, *The Prize* (New York: 1991).

72. "Multinational Firms and Developing Countries: A Case Study of the Impact of the Arabian American Oil Co. 'ARAMCO' on the Development of the Saudi Arabian Economy" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Riverside, 1974).

73. *Aramco, the United States and Saudi Arabia: A Study of the Dynamics of Foreign Oil Policy, 1933-1950* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981).

74. Husain M. Albaharna, *The Arabian Gulf States: Their Legal and Political Status and Their International Problems* (2nd rev. ed.; Beirut: Librairie du Liban, 1975); J.C. Wilkinson, *Arabia's Frontiers: The Story of Britain's Blue and Violet Lines* (London: I.B. Tauris; New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991).

labor migration and a decline in traditional economies.<sup>75</sup> Gary Anderson details the process of change in rural areas and urbanization in eastern Saudi Arabia, while Soraya Altorki and Donald Cole use a Najdi town as a case study.<sup>76</sup> Taha El-Farra, Mohammed al-Fiar, and Mohammed Ebrahim explain why planned bedouin sedentarization projects were unsuccessful, while Abdulasoul Moosa reveals continuing problems of assimilation in Kuwait.<sup>77</sup> The larger process of social change as a result of the gradual penetration of outside influences is the subject of Mohammad Mutawa, while Jacqueline Ismael uses dependency theory to demonstrate the linkage between internal change and external penetration.<sup>78</sup>

The emergence of a new middle class in Arabia, as elsewhere in the Middle East and Third World, has been the subject of considerable conjecture. Stephen Duguid used the example of an early Saudi oil minister to analyze it.<sup>79</sup> Other observers, such as William Rugh, Mark Heller and Nadav Safran, Mordechai Abir, and J.E. Peterson, have also discerned the makings of a middle class, although its size and development are a matter of debate.<sup>80</sup> Muhammed Rumaihi points out that problems of dislocation, family relations, restrictions on women, and dependence on welfare states still remain.<sup>81</sup> Oil has had far-reaching, if indirect, consequences on the Yemens, through foreign aid from the oil states, remittance flows from workers in the Gulf, and a transformation of those workers' social and political attitudes. Yemen's problems are more typical of Third World countries, as Mohamed Said el Attar's analysis shows.<sup>82</sup>

---

75. J.P. Bannerman, "The Impact of the Oil Industry on Society in the Arabian Peninsula," in R.I. Lawless, ed., *The Gulf in the Early 20th Century: Foreign Institutions and Local Responses* (Durham: University of Durham Center for Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies, 1986), pp. 76-90; Ibrahim S. Al-Abdullah Al-Elawy, "The Influence of Oil Upon Settlement in Al-Hasa Oasis, Saudi Arabia" (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Durham, 1976).

76. "Differential Urban Growth in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia: A Study of the Historical Interaction of Economic Development and Socio-Political Change" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Johns Hopkins University, 1985); Soraya Altorki and Donald P. Cole, *Arabian Oasis City: The Transformation of 'Unayzah* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1989).

77. Taha Osman M. El-Farra, "The Efforts of Detribalizing the Bedouins on the Internal Cohesion of an Emerging State: the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 1973); Mohammed Hussein al-Fiar, "The Faisal Settlement Project at Haradh, Saudi Arabia: A Study in Nomad Attitudes Toward Sedentarization" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Michigan State University, 1977); Mohammed Hossein Saleh Ebrahim, "Problem of Nomad Settlement in the Middle East With Special Reference to Saudi Arabia and the Haradh Project" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Cornell University, 1981); Abdulasoul A. Al-Moosa, "Bedouin Shanty Settlements in Kuwait: A Study in Social Geography" (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of London, School of Oriental and African Studies, 1976).

78. Mohammad A.J. al-Mutawa, "Social Change and Political Development in the Omani Coast 1934-1970" (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Reading, November 1983); Jacqueline S. Ismael, *Kuwait: Social Change in Historical Perspective* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1982).

79. "A Biographical Approach to the Study of Social Change in the Middle East: Abdullah Tariki as a New Man," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (July 1970), pp. 195-220.

80. William A. Rugh, "Emergence of a New Middle Class in Saudi Arabia," *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 27, No. 1 (1973), pp. 7-20; Mark Heller and Nadav Safran, *The New Middle Class and Régime Stability in Saudi Arabia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, Center for Middle Eastern Studies, 1985); Mordechai Abir, *Saudi Arabia in the Oil Era: Regimes and Elites—Conflict and Collaboration* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1988); J.E. Peterson, "Change and Continuity in Arab Gulf Society," in Charles Davies, ed., *After the War: Iraq, Iran and the Arab Gulf* (Chichester, West Sussex: Carden, for the University of Exeter Centre for Arab Gulf Studies, 1990), pp. 287-312.

81. *Beyond Oil: Unity and Development in the Gulf* (London: Al Saqi Books, 1986).

82. *Le Sous-Developpement Economique et Social du Yemen* (Algiers: Editions Tiers-monde, 1964).

The record of historical exploration of the Arabian Peninsula is replete with paradoxes.<sup>83</sup> On the one hand, it displays an ancient pedigree; on the other hand, scholarly attention is the product of only several decades. While serious writing on the Peninsula is meager compared to, say, Egypt or Iran, trendy subjects such as Gulf security (and the war for Kuwait) generate a flood of uneven and largely unremarkable publications. Some writers emphasize the extent and pace of change; others tend to stress the continuity of tradition. The outlines of Arabia's modern history are well-known. It is the underlying firmament that remains terra incognita. The exploration of that territory remains necessary to sort out the correct balance between change and continuity and to reach reliable conclusions about the nature of state formation in the Arabian Peninsula.

---

83. It would be amiss for this survey to conclude without mentioning a number of collections and conference proceedings that should not go overlooked: Derek Hopwood, ed., *The Arabian Peninsula: Society and Politics* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1972), Alvin J. Cottrell, gen. ed., *The Persian Gulf States: A General Survey* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), Paul Bonnenfant, ed., *La Péninsule arabe d'Aujourd'hui* (Paris: Editions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1982), Robert W. Stookey, ed., *The Arabian Peninsula: Zone of Ferment* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1984), R.I. Lawless, ed., *The Gulf in the Early 20th Century: Foreign Institutions and Local Responses* (Durham: University of Durham Center for Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies, 1986), Ian Richard Netton, ed., *Arabia and the Gulf: From Traditional Society to Modern States; Essays in Honour of M.A. Shaban's 60th Birthday (16th November 1986)* (London: Croom Helm; Totowa, NJ: Barnes & Noble, 1986), and the papers of annual symposia of the University of Exeter's Centre for Arab Gulf Studies (all published in London by Croom Helm): Tim Niblock, ed., *Social and Economic Development in the Arab Gulf* (1980), Tim Niblock, ed., *State, Society and Economy in Saudi Arabia* (1982), B.R. Pridham, ed., *Contemporary Yemen: Politics and Historical Background* (1984), and B.R. Pridham, ed., *Oman: Economic, Social and Strategic Developments* (1987).