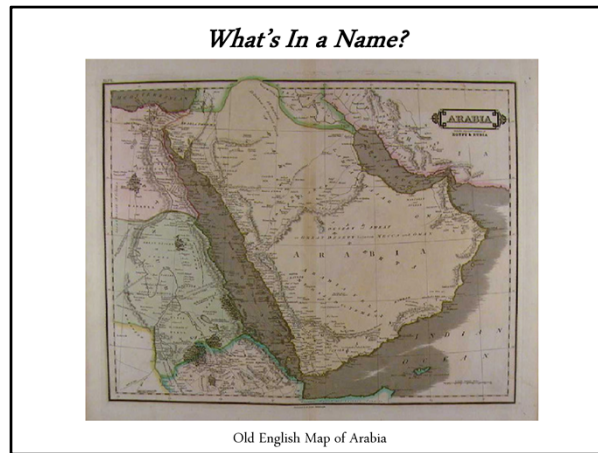


The Saudi Speakers Bureau believes that knowledge begets understanding; that understanding begets respect; and that greater knowledge, better understanding and deeper respect together beget the possibility that the nations and peoples of the world can find ways to live together in peace. To that end, the following presentation offers a look at the long and varied history of Saudi Arabia, a rich, vibrant tale unique among the nations of the world.

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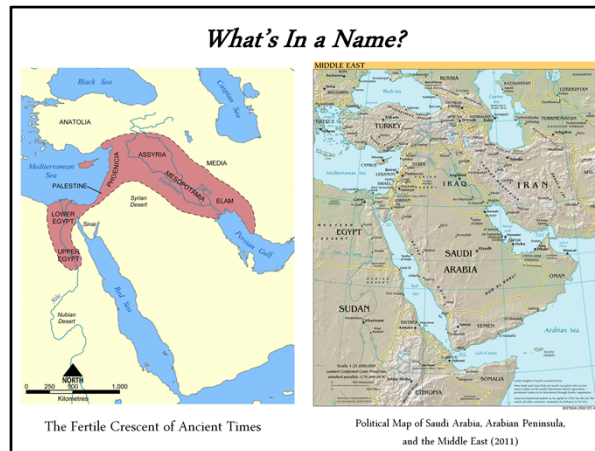


When people the world over speak of Arabs, Arabia and Saudi Arabia, few non-Arabs realize the significant history underlying these words. Likewise, geographically, as a rule most people place Saudi Arabia squarely within a region referred to by English speakers as “the Middle East.” A curious person might rightfully ask two questions: the first, “The middle of what?” the second, “East of where?”

The earliest known use of the word Arab dates from ancient Assyria in the ninth century BCE. The term is thought by some to be derived from a Semitic root associated with nomadism. Uses of the closely related word *Arabia* followed soon thereafter. The term *Arabia* historically has referred the Arabian Peninsula proper, as well as adjacent lands and waters, extending as far west as the Nile River and as far north as the shores of the Mediterranean Sea. This area is known collectively as the “Fertile Crescent.”

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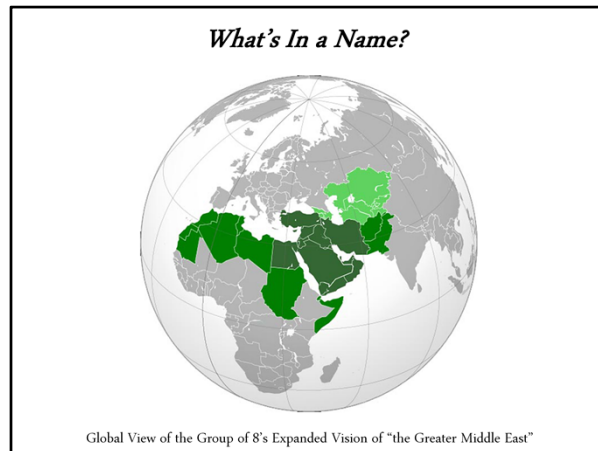


In modern times, the term Arabia has been attached more narrowly to the world's largest peninsula, a boot-shaped land mass bordered on three sides by water—by the Red Sea to the west, by the Arabian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman to the east and by the Arabian Sea and the Gulf of Aden to the south. The peninsula is the twenty-first century home to nine Arab countries: Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Iraq, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Oman and Yemen. At 830,000 square miles (over 1.3 million square kilometers), the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is by far the largest of the nine, roughly one-third the size of the continental United States, making it the fourteenth largest country in the world in terms of area.

With the term the “Middle East,” the nine countries of the Arabian peninsula are clustered together with countries as far north as Syria and as far west as Egypt. At its core, this expression reveals a European perspective, which considered the distant lands of China, Japan and Korea to be the “Far East.” With this mentality, nineteenth century Europeans viewed Arabia as the “Near East,” which this century has re-labeled as the “Middle East.”

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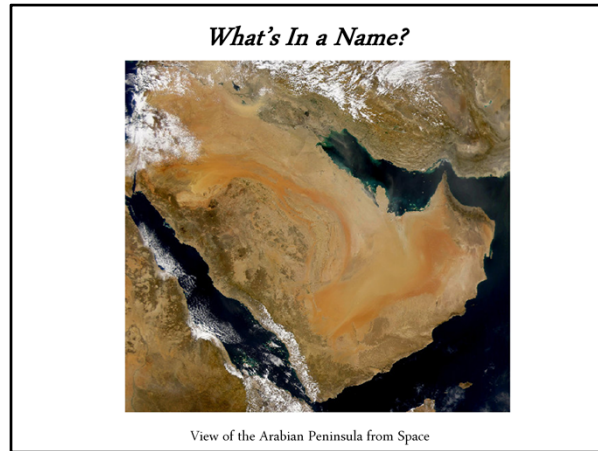


In 2004, the Group of 8 ("G8") expanded the concept of the Middle East further, declaring that there is a "Greater Middle East" extending to the west to Morocco, Western Sahara and Mauritania on the northwest Atlantic coast of Africa. To the east, it reaches Pakistan and Afghanistan at the western borders of India and China in Asia. To the south, their vision now includes Sudan and Somalia. Later, they expanded their definition still further, incorporating Turkey and the former Soviet republics of the Caucasus region and middle Asia.

One dominant common element shared by all of the countries now included by the G8 in their definition of the Middle East is their Islamic heritage. Another, with varied tones, is language.

[50 seconds]

[Click for Page 5](#)



From a Saudi's standpoint, Italy, France, America and their brethren are the West, while India, China, Japan and their kindred nations to him are the East, leaving his own Arabian Peninsula as the central fulcrum upon which the world balances.

Labels like the "Middle East" are just that, labels. Look beyond labels if you truly want to understand another country or culture or people. The richness of Saudi Arabia begins to come alive when we set aside simplistic labels and explore up close its many facets.

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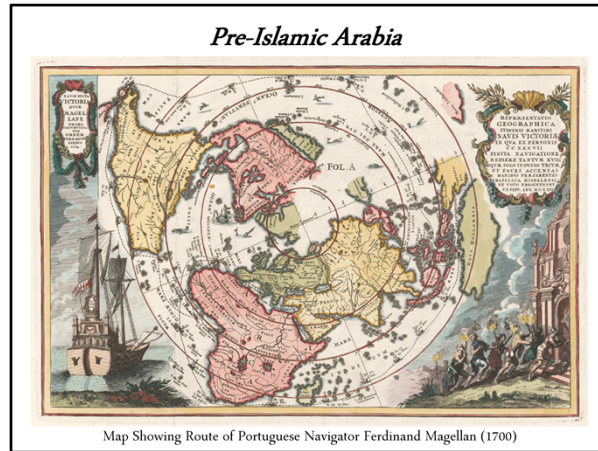


The earliest confirmed signs of human settlement in Arabia date back over 15,000 years to prehistoric times at the end of the last Ice Age. The earliest historical records date back 5,000 years at the establishment of the Egyptian civilization on the banks of the Nile. Lacking a mighty river to water and enrich their soil, limited by scant resources, and confronted by a climate of great extremes and a succession of foreign armies, the native peoples of the Arabian Peninsula have forever faced numerous challenges in their everyday lives. And yet, for five millennia and more, they have thrived and influenced the history of the world.

Set at the crossroads of three continents—Africa, Asia and Europe—Arabia was known for its trade routes which flowed the bulk of luxury items from Asia to the Mediterranean Basin and Europe. Camels and donkeys burdened with pepper, ginger, cardamom, cinnamon, cassia, turmeric and more from India's Malabar Coast trekked Arabia's caravan routes. Other valuable goods making their way across the Spice Trade included silks, precious stones, silver, gold and aromatics like balsam, terebinth, frankincense and myrrh. Celebrated traditions and enduring images emerged from this fabled land and era, often appearing as themes in fine art, literature and popular culture.

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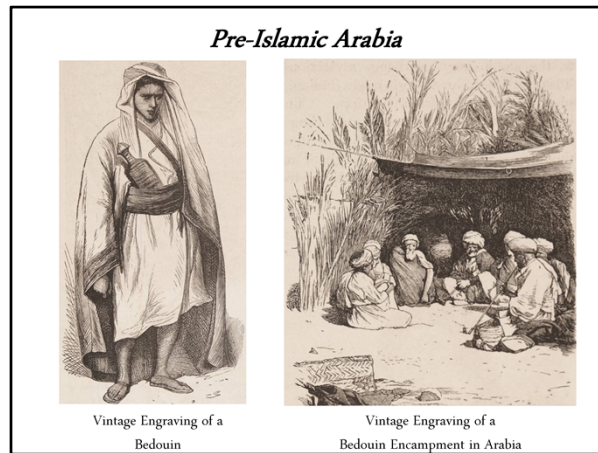
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Until the Age of Exploration in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, which opened direct, all-sea trade routes to the “Far East,” a significant portion of the luxury goods from Asia craved by the European world traveled through the land and waters of Arabia. Nearly five hundred years passed before a singularly-powerful leader—King Abdul Aziz bin Abdul Rahman Al Saud (Ibn Saud)—united the kingdoms of Najd and Hejaz to form the country we know today as Saudi Arabia. The discovery of an astonishing source of wealth buried deep beneath its sands brought his new creation wealth and influence on a scale comparable to that enjoyed by its forbearers of yore.

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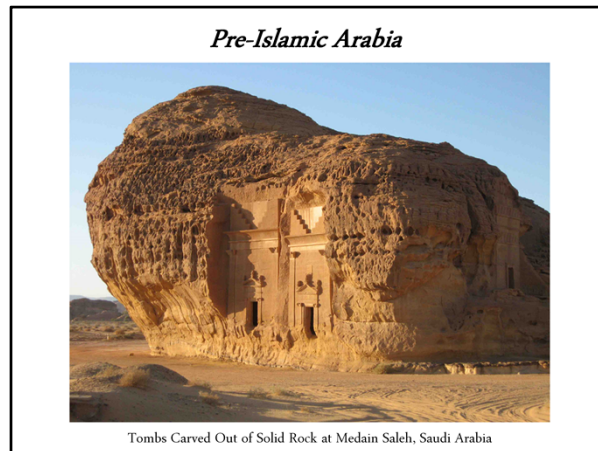


For vast stretches, the land traversed by those long-ago caravans was arid, challenging terrain, mostly desert, with a seemingly endless ocean of sand dunes lying far to the south in a region known as “Rub’ al Khali” (“The Empty Quarter”). Local tribes, each with their own distinctive traditions, populated the peninsula; some exist to this day. The rigors of adapting to life in such a land led to a system of communal life where deep-rooted tribal, clan and family loyalties helped make survival possible.

Over the centuries, those tribes struggled often amongst themselves and their environment. Through countless generations, hardy nomads found ways to survive in even the harshest of the peninsula’s tracts, steeling themselves to the desert’s heat and cold and conditioning themselves to endure for days at a time without food and water. Endurance, determination and perseverance are hallmarks of the Saudi character, key elements in understanding who and what these people are and how they view and live life.

[1 minute]

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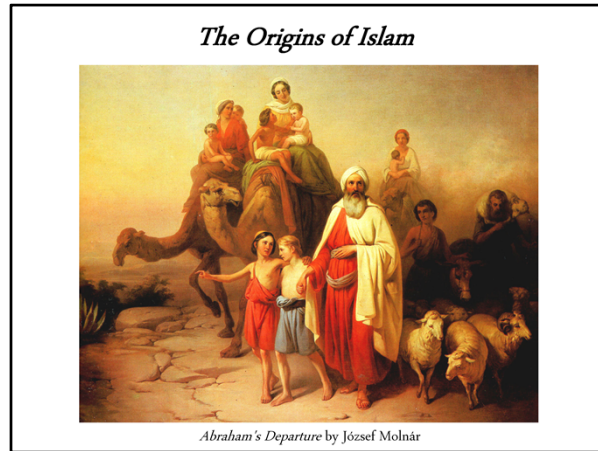


From the dawn of recorded history into the seventh century CE, waves of foreign conquerors occupied peripheral areas of Arabia for varying periods of time, lasting in some cases for centuries. Among those conquerors were the Phoenicians, the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Egyptians, the Persians, the Greeks, the Romans and the Byzantines. The vast distances and daunting landscapes of the peninsula's interior, however, coupled with the hardness of its peoples, protected large areas of Arabia from foreign control.

Concurrent to the travails brought by invaders from afar, within Arabia itself, struggles between indigenous tribes shaped life on the local level. Meanwhile, on a larger scale, a succession of Arab kingdoms struggled for control in the peninsula, as evidenced today by the magnificent ruins of the palaces and fortresses and places of worship they left behind. The intricate pattern of human enterprise woven by these many events is too complex to portray in its fullness here. Their most significant legacy arguably is that they served as an extended prelude to the rise of Islam.

[1 minute]

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Three major monotheistic religions originated in Arabia: Islam, Christianity and Judaism. Islam was founded in the seventh century CE by the prophet Muhammad. Arab Muslims consider themselves descendants of the patriarch Abraham through his first-born son, Ishmael, by his wife Sarah's handmaiden, Hagar. Judaism, like Islam, also recognizes Abraham as a patriarch. Following a different course than Islam, it charts its lineage after Abraham through his second-born son, Isaac, by his wife Sarah. As an offshoot of Judaism, Christianity also traces its origins to Abraham through Isaac, and originated following the death of Jesus. Because all three religions recognize Abraham as a forefather, they are often referred to as the "Abrahamic religions."

[45 seconds]

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Judaism recognizes neither the divinity of Christ nor his messianic mission, while Christianity declares him to be the Son of God. Muslims, in contrast, revere Jesus as a messenger of God, calling him Isa, but, like the Jews, view him as a human, not as a deity. Muslims further believe that Muhammad was a direct descendant of Abraham, without divine origins.

Over the centuries, countless writers have dealt with the complex similarities and differences between these three faiths. We shall focus on one aspect of that story: the history of a faith whose impact on Saudi Arabia and Arabs has been paramount—Islam. Without understanding the rise of Islam, one cannot understand the history of Saudi Arabia, nor the history of the modern world.

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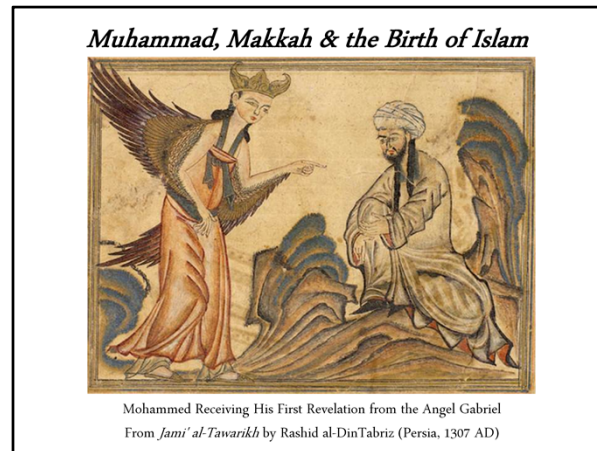
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Located inland from the Red Sea, the holy city of Makkah sits in the Plain of Abraham, surrounded on three sides by a mountainous landscape. In the center of Makkah stands the Kaaba, the holiest place of worship in Islam. Set within the cube-shaped Sacred Mosque, the Kaaba is a similarly cube-shaped stone built by the prophet Abraham. Nearby rests the Black Stone, believed to be of meteoric origin. Both the Kaaba and the Black Stone were venerated by Arabs many centuries before the birth of Islam. At the dawn of the seventh century, Makkah was the most important political, commercial and religious center of Arabia.

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Muhammad ibn 'Abdullah was born in Makkah in 570 CE, a member of the powerful Quarysh tribe. Orphaned by age 6, he was raised by an uncle. After working as a shepherd and a merchant, at age twenty-five he married a rich widow, Khadeejam, fifteen years his senior. Together they had six children; only their daughter Fatima survived. Growing discontented with the degenerate heathens in Makkah, Muhammad retired into the nearby mountains. In those mountains, at age 40, in the month of Ramadan, he received the first in a series of revelations ("hadiths") from God, delivered by the angel Gabriel, revelations that continued until his death in 632.

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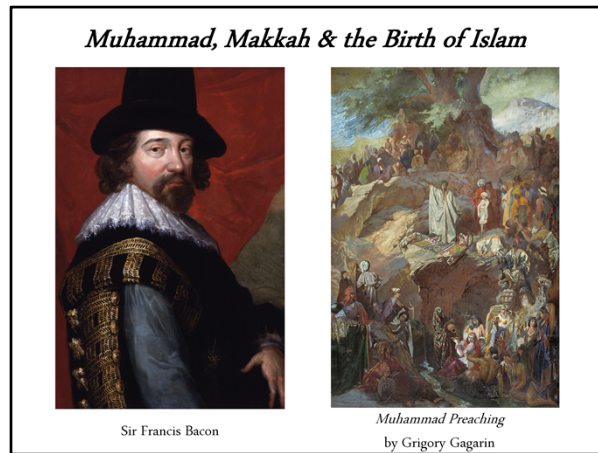


Surrounded by a group of about forty dedicated companions (“Sahabahs”) in 613, Muhammad began preaching publicly that there was but one true god to whom all men must submit, launching a direct attack on the polytheism of Makkah. In 622, the threat of persecution by local authorities forced him to flee Makkah for Madinah, an event known as the Hejira, or Flight, marking the start of the Muhammadan Era, which is also the first year of the Muslim calendar. Resettled in Madinah, Muhammad was recognized by believers as the prophet of God. Drawing to himself many followers, he led them on a series of conquests, culminating in the taking of Makkah in 630. Triumphant, he demolished the many pagan idols in the Kaaba and instituted the monotheistic religion we know today as Islam.

At age sixty-three, Muhammad died from a violent fever and was succeeded by his father-in-law, Abu Bakr, one of the original forty companions. Abu Bakr was named the first Caliph, or leader. Previously, Abu Bakr’s daughter Aisha had become Muhammad’s second wife following the death of his first wife.

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[Click for Page 15](#)



Based on surviving historical evidence, the details of Muhammad's life are well-documented. Yet, one of the best-known stories to non-Muslims concerning the prophet has no verifiable evidence to support it. It first appeared in the writings of the English philosopher Sir Francis Bacon in 1625, which contains the adage, "If the hill will not come to Mahomet, Mahomet will go to the hill."

According to legend, Muhammad was trying to prove a point to his followers by praying for the mountain to come to him. When it did not, he instead walked to the mountain himself, thanking God for His mercy—for, had Muhammad's prayer been answered, he and everyone with him would have been crushed. The lesson to be learned was, Deal with the world as it is; do not expect it to conform to you.

If you hear the expression today, remember that this tale is anecdotal, apocryphal, with no historical evidence to support it and no mention in the holy book of Islam, the Qur'an.

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Muhammad, Makkah & the Birth of Islam



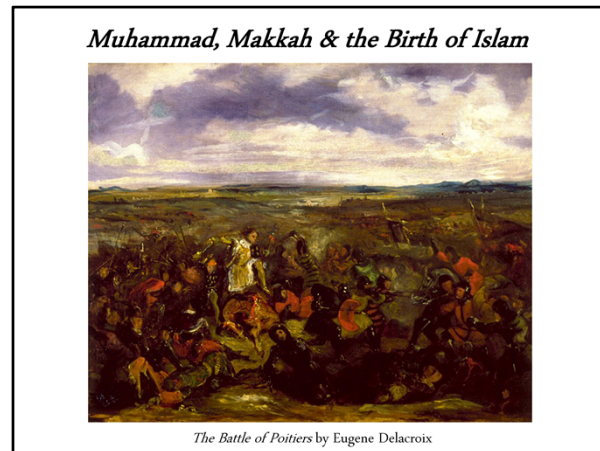
Dome of the Rock Mosque in Jerusalem, Originally Built by Caliph Umar in 637

Over the twenty-seven months following Muhammad's death in 632, under Abu Bakr's leadership, Muslim forces continued the geographical expansion begun by Muhammad, invading territories held by the Persian Sassanid Empire and the Byzantine East Roman Empire. These two empires had recently been locked in a seemingly endless, mutually-debilitating war which left them vulnerable to the armies of Islam. A pandemic outbreak known as the Justinian Plague had also devastated both their populations, wreaking havoc on their economies and severely weakening them against their Muslim antagonists.

Abu Bakr was the first of four Caliphs, also known as the "Rightly-Guided Caliphs." After his death in August 634, Abu Bakr was followed by Umar, then Uthman ibn al-Affan and then Ali ibn Abi Talib. These three successors continued the wars of expansion into Persian and Byzantine territory first launched by Abu Bakr.

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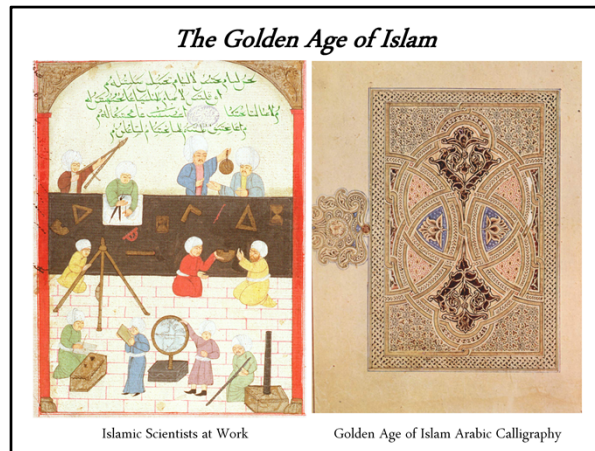


In 636, Muslims forces under Umar conquered Syria. The next year, they took Persia and Jerusalem and, five years later, Alexandria in Egypt, all under Umar's leadership. Up till then, the political and religious center of Islam had remained in Madinah and Makkah. By 661, however, the political center of Islam was transferred under the Umayyad caliphs to Damascus. From there, the caliphs directed their armies on continued conquests westward along the coast of North Africa and across the Strait of Gibraltar to Spain. In time, most of the Byzantine Empire and the entirety of the Sassanid Empire came under Muslim rule.

The Muslim advance into Western Europe was finally stopped in October 732 when Frankish forces led by Charles ("The Hammer") Martel defeated them at the Battle of Tours in north-central France. This encounter is also known as the Battle of Poitiers to the French and "Battle of Court of the Martyrs" among Muslims. Many historians speculate that, had the forces of Islam continued their advance into the European heartland, the subsequent history of Europe and the world at large would have been quite different. The defeat at Tours came 100 years after the death of Muhammad. For a full century, the forces of Islam had been invincible.

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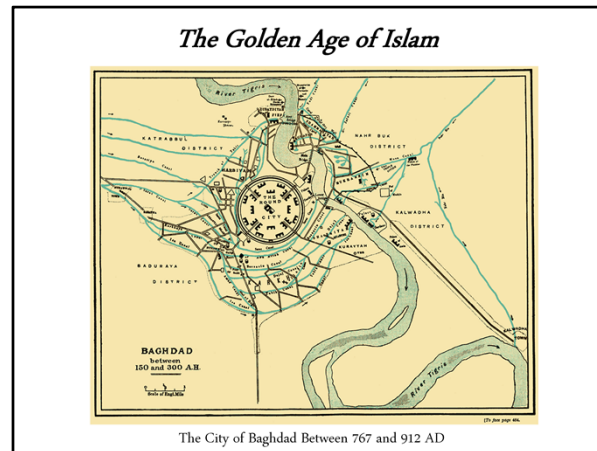


It is worth noting that Islamic caliphs showed tolerance toward the religious beliefs of the peoples they conquered, while also welcoming conversions to the Islamic faith. Christians and Jews living under Islamic rule were allowed to practice their faith with few restrictions, and adherents to those faiths held many important public posts. At the same time, all Muslims were expected to learn Arabic so they could read the Qur'an. This sharing of a common language helped to unite the diverse ethnic groups encompassed by the sprawling Islamic empire.

Through a long series of conquests, the caliphs created a vast empire lacking internal political boundaries that was largely free from external attack. Within the Islamic world, life was peaceful and secure compared with prevailing conditions in other parts of the world. Trade and cultural exchanges flowed freely across the Islamic world, bringing together the knowledge and wisdom of India, China, ancient Greece and Rome, Persia and Egypt. Muslim rulers left their new conquests administratively and intellectually intact, preserving, not destroying, the best of those civilizations. The Roman Empire at its height at the time of Christ enjoyed what historians call "Pax Romana"—Roman Peace; similarly, the Muslim Empire at its height enjoyed what some historians call "Pax Islamica"—Islamic Peace.

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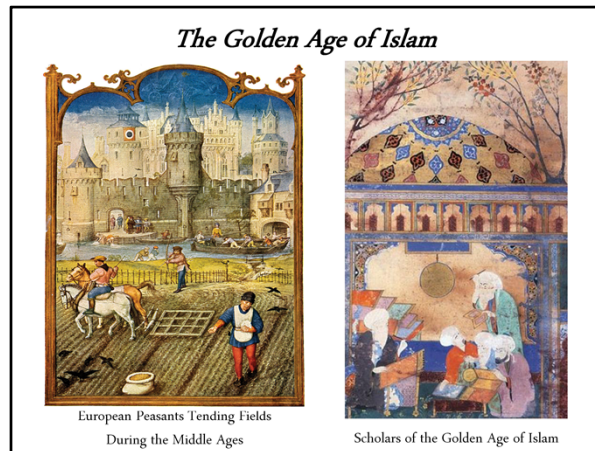
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With the ascendancy of the Abbasid dynasty in 750 and the founding of Bagdad twelve years later, the political center of the Muslim world shifted from Damascus to this new city on the west bank of the Tigris River. The spiritual capital of Islam, however, has always remained Makkah. For over 1,000 years, until the rise of the House of Saud and the forming of modern day Saudi Arabia, the holy cities of Madinah and Makkah were under control of the Sharif of Makkah, who at various times owed political allegiance to major Islamic empires based elsewhere.

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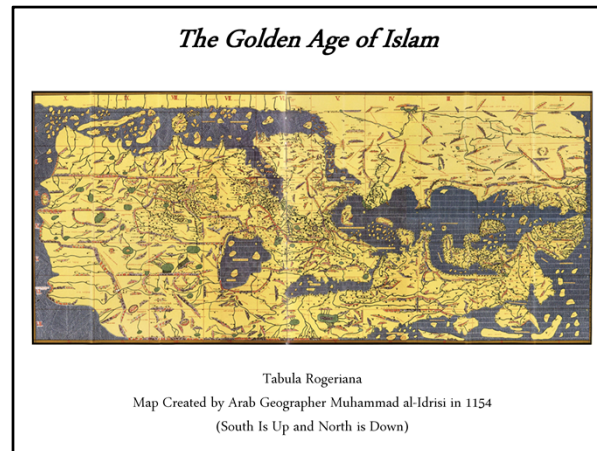


Following the fall of Rome in the fifth century CE to barbarian invaders from the north, Western Europe entered a period called the “Dark Ages.” Once-prosperous cities began a slow, steady decline economically and socially, and intellectual life stagnated. In some places, it disappeared all but completely. The truncated, localized system of governing known as feudalism replaced the universal rule of the Roman Empire. Peasants struggled in their daily lives, with many becoming serfs. Visions of death, the devil and the Apocalypse haunted art and literature.

Islamic civilization at its height during the European Middle Ages embodied Muhammad’s belief in the paramount importance of knowledge. In contrast to the situation in Christian and barbarian Europe, the Muslim world entered a period of astonishing economic, cultural and scientific achievement in the mid-ninth century CE, which lasted some 400 years until invading Mongols sacked Bagdad in 1256. Muhammad had mandated public education for Muslims, giving a tremendous boost to the pursuit of knowledge. This era is known as the Golden Age of Islam.

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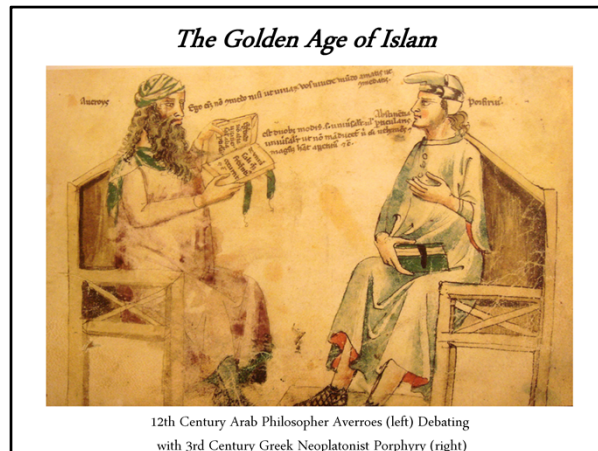


About the time the Abbasids came to power, paper making technology was introduced into the Muslim world from China, leading to the replacement of expensive parchment and papyrus with inexpensive paper. There soon followed an explosion of printed works, accompanied by the rapid expansion of knowledge as extensive libraries, both public and private, sprang up throughout the Muslim world.

Under Abbasid rule, the Muslims built the world's first astronomical observatory and scientists speculated on the rotations of the planets around the sun, this at a time when many in Europe believed that the world was flat. Arab scientists were able to use their mathematical prowess to calculate the circumference of the earth to within a few thousand feet. Arab cartographers used their extensive knowledge of distant lands and waters to produce the finest maps the world would know for many centuries.

[1 minute]

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While the literacy rate in Western Europe outside the Catholic church and the courts of princes fell to near zero, Arab scholars translated classical Greek works into Arabic, including the writings of Aristotle and Plato, helping to preserve vital texts fundamental to the development of modern civilization that otherwise might have been lost.

Arab mathematicians developed and refined algebra and geometry and spread the use of Arabic numerals—originally brought in from India—in place of limited Roman numerals. As well, they introduced the concept of zero. These innovations opened up a new world of scientific exploration. Other breakthroughs introduced by Arab scientists, scholars and doctors included the astrolabe for navigation, advances in health care and medicine, new methods in agriculture, livestock breeding and water distribution, and fresh approaches to understanding history and philosophy.

Over nearly a millennium, the culture and civilization of Arab lands arguably surpassed those of Western Europe. When Europe entered the era known as the Renaissance (French for “rebirth”), and continued through the Reformation and toward the birth of modernity, Arab contributions were prodigious. In this same era, imagery taken from Arabia appeared frequently in the great works of art of the age.

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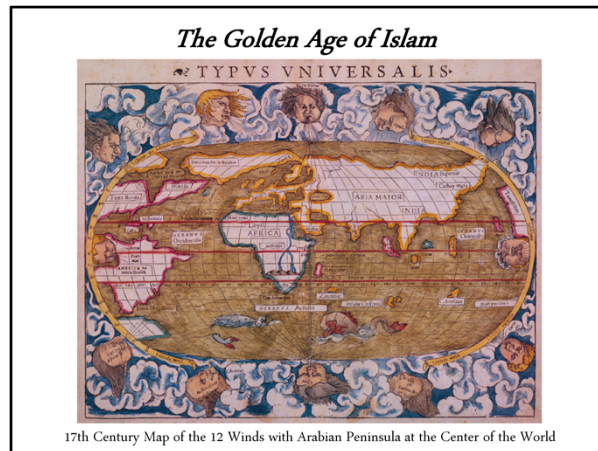
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In 1453, invading forces of Ottoman Turks led by Mehmed II captured Constantinople, bringing an end to the thousand-year reign of the Byzantine Empire. The Ottomans extended their empire northeastward into the Balkans and central Europe, northward into the Ukraine and Russian territories, eastward into the Caucasus and present-day Iraq and Iran and westward along the southern coast of the Mediterranean Sea from Egypt all the way to Algiers. While the Ottoman Empire ruled the eastern and western coastal areas of the Arabian Peninsula, including Makkah and Madinah, the interior territory and southern reaches of the Arabian Peninsula were never conquered by their armies, strengthening the spirit of defiant independence in the native tribes living there.

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A unified Muslim Ottoman Empire continued to thrive during the Renaissance and Reformation in Western Europe into the seventeenth century and the emergence of Early Modern Europe. Just when powerful monarchies in France, England and Spain were consolidating their control over the territories that comprise these nations today, a series of military defeats brought a end to Ottoman expansion and led to the rise of smaller Muslim kingdoms.

While science, industry and commerce progressed in Europe, they began to lag in Arab lands. During this time, the peninsula entered into a period of relative isolation. Throughout these centuries and beyond, Makkah and Madinah remained the spiritual heart of the Islamic world and continued to attract pilgrims from many countries around the world.

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The House of Saud and the Rise of the Saudi State



The Restored Royal Palace at Diriyah, Seat of the First Saudi State

A large part of the unique character of the Saudi people derives from the nomadic culture of their Bedouin heritage. The first modern attempt to unify the diverse tribes of the Arabian Peninsula was led by Prince Muhammad bin Saud in 1744. His revolt resulted in the formation of the First Saudi State. Once in control, ibn Saud sought to restore a distinctively Bedouin vision of orthodox Islam in the peninsula. Much as the prophet Muhammad had done many centuries before, he wished to cleanse the land of heretical practices and lead its people back to the rightful worship of the One God.

Bin Saud looked for guidance to the teachings of a Muslim scholar and reformer named Shaikh Muhammad bin Abdul-Wahhab. Early in the eighteenth century, Abdul-Wahhab advocated a return to the original form of Islam, founding the Wahhabist strain of Islam. Persecuted by established Islamic scholars and religious leaders, he sought protection in the town of Diriyah, then ruled by Muhammad bin Saud. In time, bin Saud married Abdul-Wahhab's daughter, thereby establishing the royal line that rules the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia today. It was this alliance of bin Saud and Abdul-Wahhab that made the First Saudi State possible.

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The House of Saud and the Rise of the Saudi State



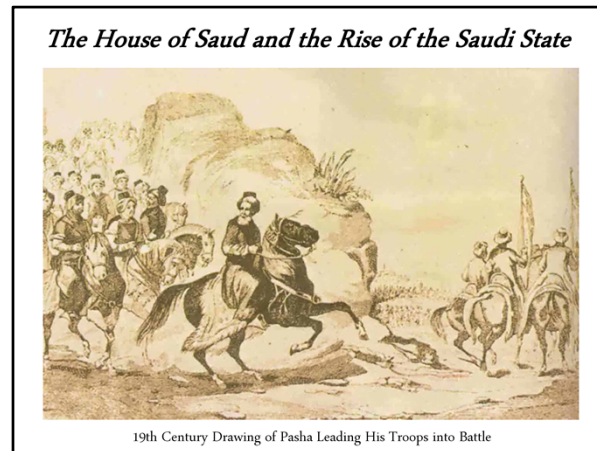
View of the Tawaiq Escarpment in Najd

Over the next sixty-plus years, under the leadership of the House of Saud, the kingdom continued to expand. In 1765, Bin Saud was succeeded by his son, Abdul-Aziz. By 1814, at the height of its glory under Abdul-Aziz's son Saud, the House of Saud ruled most of the central plateau territory of the peninsula—a region known collectively as the Najd—and Red Sea coastal areas including the holy cities of Makkah and Madinah.

The Ottoman Empire was the preeminent political power in the Eastern Mediterranean and North Africa at this time. Fearing a challenge to their rule, and upset when the Saudis won control of Makkah and Madinah, the Turks decided to put an end to the upstart state. In 1811, the Ottomans began what turned into a seven year war with the kingdom. Following Saud's death in 1814, the Turks continued their assault, challenging the rule of Saud's son, Abdullah.

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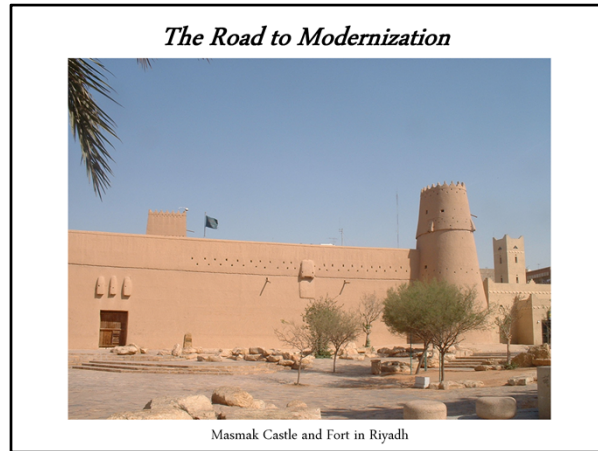


In 1818, entering the seventh year of fighting, a large and well-armed force made up mostly of Egyptians launched a final, determined drive. Abdullah's forces suffered a crushing defeat late that year, and the Ottomans took control of the Saudi capital of Diriyah. Captured and sent to Istanbul, Abdullah was tried and beheaded by the Ottomans, putting an end to the First Saudi State. Many members of the local nobility, including those of the Al Saud clan, were sent as prisoners to Egypt and Turkey.

As a final punishment, the leader of the Turkish forces, Ibrahim Pasha, ordered his troops to raze the Saudi capital to the ground with their artillery. He further had them ruin the wells and uproot the date palms, rendering the area nearly uninhabitable. In the brief aftermath to the Ottoman–Saudi War of 1811–18, a 350-year-old, once-flourishing city became a ghost town. When Saudi rule returned to life in its second iteration as the Second Saudi State, it established its new capital some twenty miles to the south in Riyadh, the current capital. What remains of Diriyah are largely ruins.

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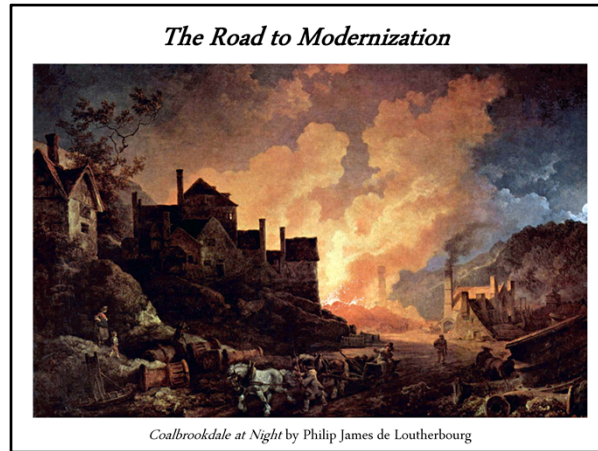
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Resilient and determined, the House of Saud responded to their defeat by Ibrahim Pasha by launching a rebuilding program where they reclaimed control in the central Arabian Peninsula by 1824, creating the Second Saudi State. Ultimately, the intimidating tactics of the Turks failed. Whatever short-term misery they produced, they did more to spark a forceful Saudi response than to quell it. The new Saudi ruler, Turki bin Abdullah Al-Saud, located his capital to Riyadh. Over an eleven year period, Turki managed to recapture most of the lands recently lost to the Ottomans. For the next thirty years, ruled first by Turki and then by his son and successor, Faisal, the people of the peninsula enjoyed a prolonged period of peace and prosperity, as trade and agriculture flourished.

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The nations of Western Europe by this time had entered into the age of radical economic, social, demographic and political change known as the Industrial Revolution, which saw one nation after another transform itself over the span of a few decades from agrarian into industrial societies. Throughout the nineteenth century, factories arose, productivity grew, populations ballooned and cities burgeoned in Britain, France and Germany, forcing governments to adapt to manage the new dynamic. On the Arabian Peninsula, economic, social and demographic change on a comparable scale would only come more than a century later. For Saudi Arabia, political unification came first.

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The First Industrial Revolution largely by-passed the nascent Saudi state. The peninsula had to wait for the discovery of oil before it would undergo a Second Industrial Revolution, one that has dramatically transformed the nation, its infrastructure and the quality of life of its people.

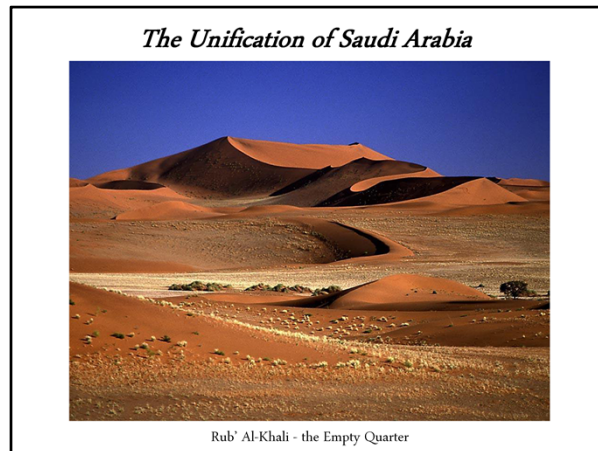
The recent history of Saudi Arabia is dominated by three developments:

- The formation of a strong, centralized political state;
- The development of a vibrant industrial economy; and
- The transformation of Arabian society as it adapted to new and unforeseen realities.

Each of these developments posed its own set of challenges, and none of them came easily or without cost. Major powers like Turkey, Egypt, Great Britain and France had their own political ambitions that often conflicted, sometimes violently, with Saudi dreams. While fending off the aggressive outsiders, Saudi leaders had their own internal difficulties. Reaching their goals meant finding a way to meld the peninsula's 5,000-year-old nomadic heritage together with the confounding realities of the modern world. Accomplishing all of this within the life spans of a handful of generations is one of the great achievements by any nation in recent history.

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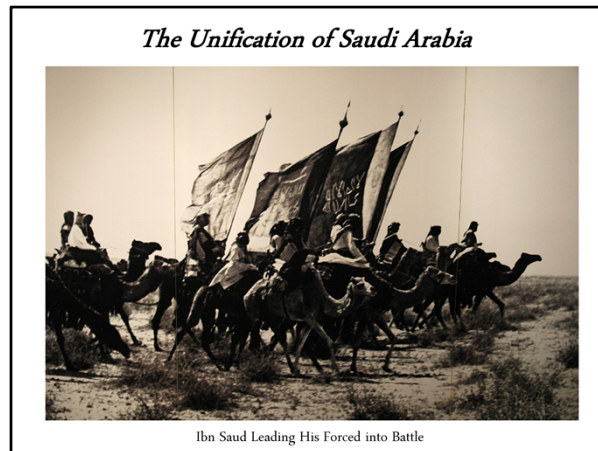
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For nearly a century after the Turks destroyed Diriyah, they continued to wage war against the House of Saud's dream of creating an enduring, unified Arab state. In 1865, the Ottomans renewed their campaign to extend their empire into the interior of the Arabian Peninsula. Supported by the Ottomans, the rival (and, from the Turkish perspective, accommodating) Al-Rashid family of Hail rose up in an attempt to overthrow the Second Saudi State. After a long struggle, the head of the House of Saud, Abdulrahman bin Faisal Al-Saud, was forced to give up his throne and seek refuge with the Bedouin tribes in the Rub' Al-Khali, the "Empty Quarter," in 1891. In time, Abdulrahman and his family relocated to Kuwait. As a new century dawned, his young son Abdul Aziz took his first steps toward finally securing the independence of modern Saudi Arabia.

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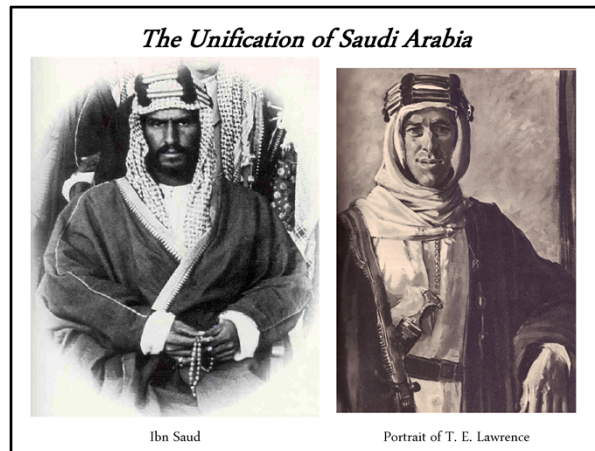


Few people ever have had the impact on their nation that Abdul Aziz ibn Abdur Rahman ibn Faisal al Saud, better known as ibn Saud, had on his. Conqueror, warrior, leader, visionary, commanding in presence, fearless in battle, cunning in negotiations, by force of will he created the modern nation of Saudi Arabia. What George Washington is to Americans, what Ghandi is to Indians, what Simon Bolivar is to Latinos, ibn Saud is all of that and more to the people of Saudi Arabia.

In 1902, at the age of twenty-three, ibn Saud took his first not-so-tentative step toward greatness. Though badly outnumbered, he led a band of nine armed men in a daring early-morning raid on Riyadh, then under the control of the rival Al-Rashid family. Having just overthrown the Al-Rashid ruler there, he reportedly called out to an assembled crowd, "Who is on my side... Who? Your own amir [prince] is with you again."

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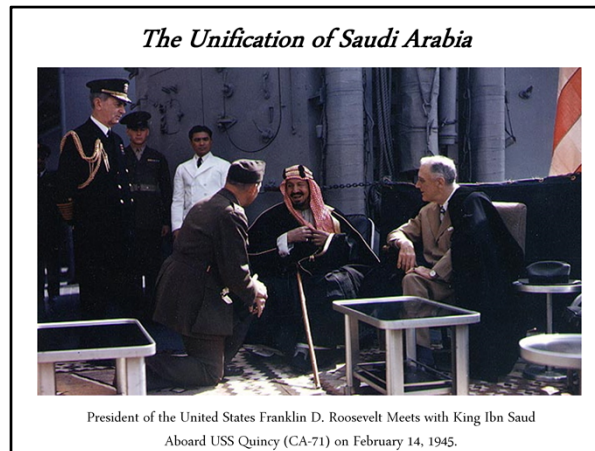


For the next thirty years, ibn Saud continued his campaign of territorial conquest and administrative consolidation, bringing more and more of the peninsula under his control. Carefully navigating through the treacherous waters of the First World War, he balanced his kingdom's interests against those of the Ottoman Turks and their Austrian and German allies on the one side and those of the Allied forces, including Great Britain and France, on the other.

The campaign against the Ottomans made famous by T. E. Lawrence's autobiographical account, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, and by David Lean's cinematic epic, *Lawrence of Arabia*, was waged largely on the fringes of the peninsula, on the outskirts of the Saudi realm. While the House of Saud aided the Allied march against the Ottoman Turks to a degree, it remained largely an observant bystander to the events depicted in that film. An exercise in creative license by its director, the film is not an accurate portrayal of the history of Saudi Arabia. The true history of the kingdom is arguably more colorful.

[1 minute]

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Throughout the 1920s and into the 1930s, overcoming formidable odds at every turn, ibn Saud finally achieved his goal of political unification of the majority of the peninsula. Operating from his inland base in the high plateau of Najd, by 1926 he had conquered the western slice of Arabia bordering the Red Sea known as the Hejaz, where the holy cities of Makkah and Madinah lay. For the next six years, he ruled what became known as the Kingdom of Najd and Hejaz. On September 23, 1932, ibn Saud formally established the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia by royal decree.

Ibn Saud was a great leader, but even great leaders need financial resources to accomplish their dreams. The discovery of oil on March 3, 1938 soon magnified his power, enabling the total recasting of the Saudi economy with all of the attendant benefits for the Saudi people. By the time of his death in 1953, the country was deep into a wall-to-wall, floor-to-ceiling, oil-fueled makeover.

[1 minute, 15 seconds]

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The discovery of commercial quantities of oil at Damman Dome on March 4, 1938 forever changed the course of Saudi history. Global geopolitics would never be the same again once the Arabian Peninsula became the epicenter for oil and gas production. By 1940, annual Saudi output surpassed the 5 million barrel mark. After World War II, production reached 60 million barrels per annum by the end of 1946. By the time King Saud died in 1953, the annual number exceeded 300 million barrels. In recent years, the *daily* production of crude oil in Saudi has exceeded 8,000,000 barrels.

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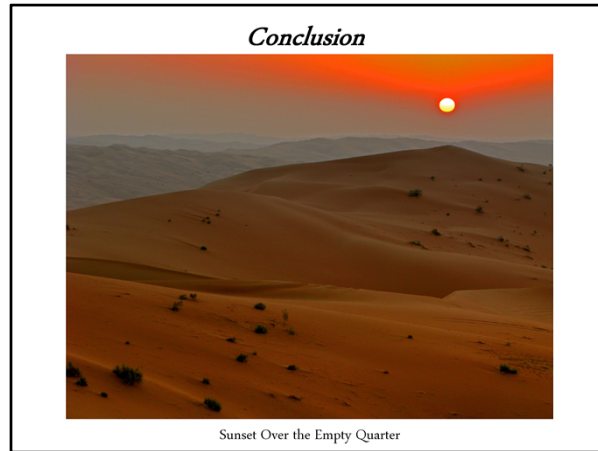
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The changes engendered by the nation's oil wealth are countless. Prior to the 1960s, most Saudis lived a nomadic or semi-nomadic existence. Today, over 95 percent of the population is settled. With a birth rate that well exceeds the death rate, the country has seen the median age of its people dip below 25 years. In comparison, the median age in the United States today is 35.6 years. Dramatic changes are evident in all aspects of Saudi life: in education, quality of life, health care, basic infrastructure, and industry. Other industrialized nations like the United States, Germany and Great Britain underwent these fundamental changes over a period of two centuries; Saudi Arabia has experienced as much in just over half a century. The two critical forces for these changes were ibn Saud and oil. The story of modern day Saudi Arabia starts with them.

[1 minute]

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You have just taken a journey down a 5,000-year-long road leading to the nation of Saudi Arabia we know today. The Saudi story does not end here, however; it has just begun. In future Speaker's Bureau presentations, we shall explore the geography of Saudi Arabia, the role of women in Saudi Arabia, Saudi industry, the Arabian-American Oil Company (Saudi Aramco), and the King Abdullah University of Science and Technology.

Thank you.

[30 seconds]

End of Presentation