Globalization, the State, and Narrative Plurality: Historiography in Saudi Arabia

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Declaration for PhD thesis

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Abstract

This thesis examines historiography in modern Saudi Arabia. Many students of modern Arab historiography have focused on the development of historical professions and the historiographical legitimation of regimes. In contrast, this thesis seeks to explain the emergence of a plurality of historical narratives in the kingdom in the absence of formal political pluralism. It thus pays special attention to amateur and unofficial histories. Since the 1920s, texts about local, tribal and Shiite communities emerged that diverged from, and contested, the histories focusing on the royal family. They emphasized the communities' historical independence from the Al Saud or asserted the communities' importance in Saudi national history. Since the 1970s, distinct social and economic histories also developed. These histories described important historical events as the result of wider social and economic factors rather than the actions of individual rulers or communities.

The thesis argues that this narrative plurality was the product of the building and expansion of the Saudi state in the context of globalization. The state subsidized not only dynastic histories, but also many texts on local, social and economic history. It also provided an increasing number of its citizens with education and employment in the expanding public sector. It thus empowered a variety of previously illiterate and relatively poor sections of Saudi society, including former Bedouin tribespeople, to produce conformist, but also dissenting histories. Globalization not only facilitated narrative plurality by putting Saudi historians in contact with different ideologies, methodologies, and source material from abroad, it also allowed authors to publish their works abroad and online beyond governmental censorship. But state expansion and globalization have not been restricted to Saudi Arabia, and this thesis suggests that these processes may also have led to narrative plurality in Arab historiography more generally, even under the conditions of authoritarianism.

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List of Abbreviations and Glossary

Aramco—Arabian American Oil Company

BJMES—British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies

BRISMES—British Society for Middle Eastern Studies

CUP—Cambridge University Press

DMA—Dārat al-Malik ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz (cf. KAFRA)

EI²—Encyclopaedia of Islam: New Edition

ḥaḍar—sedentary people

IJMES—International Journal of Middle East Studies

Imam University—Imam Muhammad ibn Saud Islamic University

IRO—Islamic Revolution Organization (Munaẓẓamat al-Thawrah al-Islāmīyah)

jāhilīyah—an 'age of ignorance' that represents the opposite of Islam

JESHO—Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient

JIMSI—Jāmiʿat al-Imām Muḥammad ibn Suʿūd al-Islāmīyah (cf. Imam University)

JMA—Jāmiʿat al-Malik ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz (cf. KAU)

JMS—Jāmiʿat al-Malik Suʿūd (cf. KSU)

JTS—al-Jamʿīyah al-Tārīkhīyah al-Suʿūdīyah

KAFRA—King Abdulaziz Foundation for Research and Archives (cf. DMA)

KAU—King Abdulaziz University

KSU—King Saud University

MEJ—Middle East Journal

MES—Middle Eastern Studies

MMFW—Maktabat al-Malik Fahd al-Waṭanīyah

OUP—Oxford University Press

SOAS—School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London

takfīr—declaring somebody an unbeliever

UCLA—University of California, Los Angeles

WI—Die Welt des Islams

WM—Wazārat al-Maʿārif

WTT—Wazārat al-Tarbiyah wa-al-Taʿlīm

To my family, with many thanks

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department of history at King Khalid University in Abhā in February 2010, and the third again by the King Faisal Center in October 2011.

Moreover, I express gratitude to all my interviewees for their time, cooperation, the numerous books and unpublished manuscripts they presented to me, and, in many cases, for their friendship. These interviewees have not only been a major source of biographical information about Saudi historians. They have also often pointed out important written sources, which I might have overlooked otherwise, and shared their own interpretations of historiography in the kingdom with me. Special thanks go to Abdullah al-Askar for sending me parts of his unpublished memoirs *My Historical Writings* (*Kitābātī al-tārīkhīyah*). Finally, I thank my parents, Sibylle and Michael, my brothers, Christian and Claudius, and the members of my extended family for all their love, support and encouragement ever since I can remember. The dedication of this work to them is but a small reflection of what I owe them.

Note on Transliteration, Translation and References

In writing Arabic names, I have tried to use forms that are recognizable or can be looked up easily in encyclopaedias and on the internet. When a common Romanization or translation of the names of Saudi individuals and institutions exists, I follow it. This is the case with many Saudi rulers and governmental agencies. I thus write, for instance, 'King Faisal' instead of 'King Fayṣal' and 'King Saud University' instead of 'King Suʿūd University'. When authors have a preferred way of spelling their names in Latin characters, for instance, in their publications in European languages, I follow this preference. I thus write, for example, Abdullah al-Askar instead of ʿAbd Allāh al-ʿAskar. For common Arabic terms and place names that entered the English language (like ulema, Eid ul-Fitr and Riyadh), I use the forms in *The Oxford Dictionary of English*.[1]

   For the bibliographical details, I broadly follow the Romanization standard of the American Library Association and the Library of Congress (ALA-LC).[2] I hope that this will allow readers to find literature easily in library catalogues. I use the same standard for the transliteration of proper names that do not have a common Romanized form and for Arabic terms that have not entered *The Oxford Dictionary of English*. All translations, unless otherwise acknowledged, are my own. Unless declared otherwise, I have been the interviewer in the interviews cited in the footnotes. All amounts given in dollars are in US dollars. Citations broadly follow the notes and bibliography citation style in the *Chicago Manual of Style*.[3]

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[1] Stevenson, *The Oxford Dictionary* (2010).

[2] Library of Congress, "ALA-LC Romanization" (2010). I transliterate the personal suffix *–hu/i* as *–hū/ī*, e.g. in *lahū*, following standard Arabic phonology. *Abjad* numerals, as in page numbers of introductions, are transliterated ''', 'b', 't', 'th', 'j', etc. I follow vocalizations as they appear in the Arabic texts themselves. In most cases, I thus write 'suʿūd' instead of 'saʿūd'.

[3] University of Chicago Press, *The Chicago Manual* (2010), 660–784.

1. Introduction

Between the mid-1980s and the early 2000s, a series of books on the history of the southern province of Asir appeared in Saudi Arabia. These books offered an entirely different view of the history of the kingdom than that provided by official textbooks. The most controversial works in the series were *The Entertainer's Pleasure: Supplement to the Spectator's Delight* and *The History of Asir*. Their alleged authors were followers of the Āl ʿĀʾiḍ, the former rulers of Asir, whom the Saudis had ousted in the 1920s.[1] Both works presented a glorious history of Asir and the Āl ʿĀʾiḍ over more than a thousand years. This was in contrast to official textbooks, which mentioned the dynasty only briefly in the context of twentieth-century Saudi expansion.[2]

In glorifying the Āl ʿĀʾiḍ, *The Entertainer's Pleasure* and *The History of Asir* turned textbook notions of the history of Arabia on their head. The works rejected widespread arguments that a religious 'age of ignorance' or *jāhilīyah* had preceded the start of the Wahhabi mission in the eighteenth century.[3] *The History of Asir* stated that 'Islam had not been erased from the region, neither from others.' It claimed that the works by Asiri scholars 'praise the religiosity of the region's inhabitants, the rise of preachers and religious instructors and the appearance of judges and religious scholars'.[4] *The Entertainer's Pleasure* and *The History of Asir* also argued that an Asiri prince had already established a 'consultative council' or *majlis al-shūrá* in the ninth century, a measure that the Saudis

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[1] Al-Dūsarī, *Imtāʿ* (1984). Al-Ḥifẓī, *Tārīkh* [1992/93].

[2] E.g., al-ʿUthaymīn, *Tārīkh al-mamlakah al-ʿarabīyah al-suʿūdīyah: lil-ṣaff al-thālith* (2007), 78–79.

[3] The Wahhabi mission is a religious reform movement associated with the teachings of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703–1792). Its followers have mostly rejected the label 'Wahhabi'. They have preferred to call themselves 'Muslims' or *muwaḥḥidūn* 'professors of God's unity'. Since the early twentieth century, they have also more frequently referred to themselves as 'Salafis', followers of the way of the first generations of Muslims' (*salaf*). Other revivalist movements, however, also used this concept. Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission* (2006), vi, 215. Following Commins, I speak of the 'Wahhabi mission' rather than of the 'Wahhabi movement' or 'Wahhabism'. This is closest to a common term in Saudi Arabia, 'Sheikh Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab's mission' (*daʿwat al-shaykh muḥammad ibn ʿabd al-wahhāb*). On the concept of 'Salafi', see also Lauzière, "The Construction" (2010).

[4] Al-Ḥifẓī, *Tārīkh* [1992/93], 44.

undertook only in the twentieth century.[5] Using terms that official texts reserved for Saudi rule, *The History of Asir* contended that Asir lived in 'security' (*amn*) and 'stability' (*istiqrār*) under the Āl ʿĀʾiḍ due to this consultative council.[6] Finally, the works also portrayed the Āl ʿĀʾiḍ as heroes in the fight against colonialism.

Perhaps more controversial than the books' narratives about Asir's glorious past were their genealogical claims. *The Entertainer's Pleasure* traced the lineage of the Āl ʿĀʾiḍ back to an Umayyad prince, who had allegedly fled persecution from the Abbasids in 750 CE and established an independent principality in Asir. This descent from the Umayyads, and thereby from the Prophet Muhammad's tribe, Quraysh, elevated the Āl ʿĀʾiḍ to a status of nobility higher than the Saudi royal family, the Al Saud.[7]

The Entertainer's Pleasure and *The History of Asir* sparked heated debates in Saudi Arabia. Official commentators denounced them as 'forgeries', and as a foreign attack on Saudi national history. They suggested that the real author of *The Entertainer's Pleasure* was 'a mercenary from outside the country', who did not understand the 'glories' that the people of Asir had gained under the Saudis.[8] Unable to stop the circulation of the work, however, the main governmental historical research institute, the King Abdulaziz Foundation for Research and Archives, took an exceptional decision. It issued its own edition of the work in two volumes in 1998 and 2006.[9] In the introductions and footnotes of these official editions, commentators sought to refute the text's alleged 'lies, allegations, and errors'.[10]

The publication of *The Entertainer's Pleasure* through the King Abdulaziz Foundation for Research and Archives only drew attention to the work. It made the unofficial versions even more attractive.[11] Fuelling the controversy, other authors came out to defend the work

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[5] Al-Dūsarī, *Imtāʿ* (2006), 49.

[6] Al-Ḥifẓī, *Tārīkh* [1992/93], 58.

[7] Al-Dūsarī, *Imtāʿ* (1998), 11.

[8] Ibid., 10.

[9] Al-Dūsarī, *Imtāʿ* (1998); *Imtāʿ* (2006).

[10] Al-Dūsarī, *Imtāʿ* (1998), 9.

[11] Al-Zākī, "Kitāb" (2002), 284.

and argued more broadly for the inclusion of former local dynasties into national history. In a

newspaper article in 1999, Muḥammad al-Asmarī, an Asiri writer, accused the official

commentators of 'insulting one of the regions of Saudi Arabia, the region of Asir'.[12] He

argued that the 'unification of the nation' by King Abdulaziz Al Saud (r. 1902–53) 'does not

invalidate the political entities, which were scattered across the territory of the present

kingdom, like the principalities of the Āl Rashīd in Ḥāʾil, the Āl ʿĀʾiḍ in Asir, and the Sharifs in

the Hejaz'. Al-Asmarī added that 'one cannot ignore them in history, nor the leaders and the

people's braveries in fighting the foreigners who had invaded all the regions mentioned'.

According to the writer, 'the leaders of the struggle, who were exiled, killed and whose

capitals were burned down, are heroes of the nation in history'.[13]

Narrative plurality

The controversy surrounding *The Entertainer's Pleasure* and *The History of Asir* forms part

of a considerable plurality in Saudi writings about the past. This plurality is the central theme

of my thesis. I focus on the production of different textual historical narratives and thus

speak of 'narrative plurality'. In order to explore the full extent of Saudi narrative plurality, I

employ a broad definition of historical narratives based on two criteria. First, historical

narratives are stories 'which frame and give meaning to academic and popular

understandings of the past in relation to the present'.[14] Second, historical narratives aim 'to

be truthful—to reconstruct reality in a "factual" way, that is, to be free from fictivity'.[15]

With such a broad definition, I assume that historical narratives are not restricted to

so-called 'narrative histories', that is, the event-based histories from which the French

Annales historians and other proponents of 'analytical', 'scientific' histories sought to

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[12] Al-Asmarī, "Imtāʿ" (2002), 272.

[13] Ibid., 271. Another commentator took the controversy surrounding *The Entertainer's Pleasure* as an occasion to assert that Asir 'is an important historical landmark'. Al-Zākī, "Kitāb" (2002), 284.

[14] Duara, "Historical Narratives" (2008), 99.

[15] Waldman, *Toward a Theory* (1980), 17.

distance themselves.[16] Instead, I follow an approach within scholarship on Arabic

historiography that argues for the existence of narrativity in a wider range of historical texts,

including chronicles.[17] I thus postulate that stories about the past that aim to be meaningful

and truthful exist in a broad range of Saudi texts. They include works in historical sociology

as well as social and economic histories that comprise seemingly non-narrative elements,

such as statistics. My premise is that the historical narratives in different texts can be

compared and contrasted in terms of the strategies behind their employment, their patterns

of argumentation, and their main protagonists, sources and terminology.

I examine narratives in several groups of writings on the history of Saudi Arabia and

its various communities. These groups of writings include histories of the Al Saud, or

dynastic histories, as well as local, tribal and Shiite histories, and, finally, social and

economic histories. Almost by definition, these different histories widely diverge in their

contents. However, in order to examine the precise nature of Saudi narrative plurality, I pay

special attention to narratives about certain key periods and processes. These periods and

processes allow for an examination of how different histories may agree or conflict in their

respective treatments of common topics. These shared periods and processes that stand in

the centre of my analysis are the period before the Wahhabi mission, the foundation and

development of the first, second and third Saudi states and the associated Saudi conquests.

They are arguably similar to the *lieux de mémoire* described by Pierre Nora in the French

context, that is, sites or realms where collective memory 'crystallizes' or is condensed.[18]

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[16] Richard Evans, *In Defence* (2000), 336–37, preferred such a narrow definition of 'narrative histories'. For an overview of definitions of narrative histories, see Rigney, "Narrativity" (1991).

[17] Hirschler, *Medieval Arabic Historiography* (2006); "The 'Pharao' Anecdote" (2010). Al-Azmeh, "Histoire" (1986). Waldman, *Toward a Theory* (1980). While Waldman builds on Hayden White, she also criticizes him for failing to see the strategies of 'ordering, juxtaposition, selection, association, and omission' as parts of a chronicle's implicit narrativity. Waldman, "'The Otherwise" (1981), 786.

[18] Nora, "Between Memory" (1989), 7. Nora associates the *lieux de mémoire* with 'la république', 'la nation' and 'Les France', categories that—with the possible exception of the 'nation'—have no equivalent in the Saudi context. Nora, *Les lieux* (1997).

My focus on the pre-Wahhabi period and the Saudi states does not mean, however, that narrative plurality is necessarily restricted to writings about the period from the seventeenth century onwards. Future research could investigate, for instance, to what extent writings about the more distant past might have been less subject to censorship and characterized by greater plurality. However, narratives about important and sensitive areas of modern and contemporary history, like the Saudi conquests between the eighteenth century and the twentieth, provide us at least with the minimum plurality that emerged in Saudi historiography.

In analysing these different histories, I have mostly worked inductively. That is, I have tried to develop my own arguments from my reading of the texts rather than applying theories about other historiographies deductively to Saudi texts. However, I have also used previous research on a variety of historiographies to inform my reading. In selected instances, I have found theories and observations in secondary literature that fitted my initial readings of Saudi histories and sharpened my view of them. The result of this back and forth between readings of Saudi historical texts and theories of historiography has been that I have found several different theoretical approaches to the study of historical narratives useful for understanding different parts of Saudi historiography, and other approaches I have not. Some of these approaches have hardly ever been explicitly used in the study of modern Arab historiography.

For my analysis of dynastic histories, I have found John Breuilly's distinction between 'nation-as-frame' or national histories on the one hand and 'nation-as-historical agent' or *nationalist* histories on the other hand particularly useful. In this distinction, a history can be dynasty-focused and national at the same time. In a national history, kings and princes form the main actors while the nation is the main framework, within which actions are ordered.[19] This is in contrast to Prasenjit Duara's definition of 'national' history as being anti-dynastic,

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[19] Breuilly, "Nationalism" (2007), 18; "Historians" (2009), 55.

which is informed by the Chinese case. In national history, according to Duara, 'the nation appears as the newly realized, sovereign subject of History embodying a moral and political force that has overcome dynasties, aristocracies, and ruling priests and mandarins, who are seen to represent merely themselves historically'.[20] In the context of my discussion of dynastic historiography, I thus ask when and how Saudi dynastic histories became 'national' in Breuilly's sense, adopting a Saudi national frame while keeping the Al Saud at the centre.

For my analysis of local as well as tribal and Shiite histories, I found an observation by Felix Driver and Raphael Samuel particularly fruitful. According to them, some local histories may appear as 'a deeply conservative project, mired in a particularistic and introverted vision of the past of places'.[21] While I do not use the potentially value-laden labels of conservatism or introversion, I have found the idea of 'particularistic' local histories useful. I have tried to combine this idea with an approach to the study of women's histories. Gerry Holloway conceives of two groups of women's histories: one group studies women on their own terms; the other group are a 'women's contribution history' that emphasizes 'women's contribution to male-dominated organizations'.[22] I take this 'own terms'/'contribution' distinction from the context of Western gender studies and apply it to my own consideration of local, tribal and Shiite histories. I will thus discuss to what extent Saudi local, tribal and Shiite histories are, on the one hand, 'particularistic' and mainly concerned with their communities on their own terms or, on the other hand, 'contribution histories' that assert their communities' participation in national history.[23]

For my analysis of social and economic histories and their relation to dynastic as well as local and tribal historiographies, I have used parts of Hayden White's approach in his

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[20] Duara, *Rescuing* (1995), 4.

[21] Driver and Samuel, "Rethinking" (1995), v.

[22] Holloway, "Writing" (1998), 180. Holloway relied on Gerda Lerner. For her view, see Lerner, "Placing" (1975).

[23] The assertion of the place within the nation can also take the form of an emphasis of its 'authenticity' as an indigenous group of Saudi Arabia. Madawi Al-Rasheed has convincingly shown such a 'search for cultural authenticity' in Shiite historical production. Al-Rasheed, "The Shiʿa" (1998).

seminal work *Metahistory*.[24] Two of White's modes of explanations are relevant to my own study: the 'formist' and the 'contextualist' modes. The formist mode makes the 'uniqueness' of certain agents central to the inquiry.[25] The contextualist mode, in contrast, explains events within the 'context' of their occurrence.[26] I will thus investigate to what extent Saudi social and economic histories can be distinguished through their usage of the contextualist mode.

In order to gain a deeper understanding of narratives in Saudi historiography, I will also examine whether certain 'paradigms' underlie some of these historical narratives. I understand 'paradigms' as scholarly worldviews in the sense of 'articulate theoretical frameworks based on an explicit set of assumptions of 'how the world works''.[27] I have found Yoav Di-Capua's work particularly relevant for my thesis. Di-Capua describes a 'founder paradigm' in Egyptian historiography. This paradigm viewed Muhammad Ali (r. 1805–48) as the founder of the modern Egyptian nation on top of a corrupt Ottoman order. In the first half of the twentieth century, the Egyptian monarchy contributed to the emergence of this paradigm by establishing an archive and sponsoring historical works that privileged the history of Muhammad Ali's dynasty and excluded Ottoman and subaltern pasts.[28] I will argue that the Saudi government contributed to the establishment of a similar paradigm through its support for archives and sponsorship of historical texts. However, I will also show that the Saudi 'founder paradigm' differed from the Egyptian 'founder paradigm' as the two developed in very distinct historical and historiographical contexts.

Within a given paradigm, there is space for plurality, originality, and creativity. And, unlike Di-Capua's research on Egypt, I do not assume that one paradigm dominates, or is at

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[24] White, *Metahistory* (1973).

[25] Ibid., 14.

[26] Ibid., 18. White's two other modes of explanation, the 'Organicist' and the 'Mechanistic', seem to have not been frequently used by Saudi writers.

[27] Fulbrook, *Historical Theory* (2002), 34. In her elaboration of 'paradigms' in historical research Fulbrook builds on Thomas Kuhn. See Kuhn, *The Structure* (1996). On paradigms in historiography, see also Veit-Brause, "Paradigms" (1990).

[28] Di-Capua, *Gatekeepers* (2009).

the basis of, most Saudi historical writing.[29] While I will trace the emergence of paradigms, especially in dynastic histories, I will also show how local, tribal, Shiite and social and economic histories diverged from these paradigms in terms of arguments, terminology and usage of primary source materials.

However, rather than merely describing the different narratives that make up Saudi narrative plurality, the main aim of this thesis is to provide a deeper understanding of the *emergence* of this plurality. In answering the question, why and how narrative plurality emerged in the Saudi case, I hope to contribute to research on modern Arab historiography generally. This research can be divided into three broad schools.[30] The first has focused on the development of a modern historical profession and the transition from 'traditional' chronicles to 'modern' histories.[31] Studies within this school have often dealt with a number of prominent individuals, such as the Egyptian historian Shafik Ghorbal (1894–1961). Students of historiography have viewed these figures as founders or representatives of indigenous schools of history, but have paid relatively little attention to diversity within these schools.[32]

Especially in the 1950s and 1960s, a number of researchers within this first school conceived the professionalization of Arab historiography in terms of modernization and secularization under Western influences. They tended to favour modern 'objective' professional historians and criticised or dismissed writings by many amateurs as 'biased',

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[29] Here I follow again Fulbrook, *Historical Theory* (2002), 32, who sees a co-existence of a plethora of 'paradigms' in history as well as other human sciences, as no single paradigm commands the field. Fulbrook not only differs from Kuhn, *The Structure* (1996), and Di-Capua, *Gatekeepers* (2009), but also from Haridi, *Das Paradigma* (2005), who views a certain paradigm at the basis of the discipline of Islamic studies in modern Germany. In Fulbrook's sense, 'paradigm' is also narrower than Foucault's notion of 'discourse'. Foucault views whole disciplines, such as economics or medicine, as 'discourses'. Foucault, *The Archaeology* (2002), 71.

[30] In this division, I partly follow Gorman, *Historians* (2003), 1. For an overview of scholarship on Arab and Muslim historiography, see also Ammann, "Kommentiertes Literaturverzeichnis" (1997).

[31] E.g., Touati, "Algerian Historiography" (1997).

[32] Choueiri, *Modern Arab Historiography* (2003); "Arab Historical Writing" (2011). Gombár, "Modern Arab Historiography" (2002).

'unintellectual' or 'emotional'.[33] In subsequent decades, scholars of modern Arab

historiography produced more refined and sophisticated country studies. Yet, they also

based their approach on a dichotomy between professional 'scientific' and politicized

'ideological' histories. They thus overlooked many writings, such as local amateur histories,

that did not appear as either representatives of 'scientific' or state-sponsored 'ideological'

texts. While the scholars contributed a great deal to our understanding of modern Arab

historiography, they did not engage with the full spectrum of historiographical plurality and

were not explicitly concerned with its emergence.[34]

A second broad school in the study of modern Arab historiography has focused on the

political utility of historical writing in the service of revolutionaries, regimes and nation

states.[35] They have furthered our understanding by demonstrating the political rather than

merely academic nature of historiography in the region. A number of texts produced since

the 1960s have focused on the so-called 'decolonization of history',[36] especially in the

Maghrib. This was an attempt by intellectuals and new regimes to refute the arguments of

colonial historians and justify the independence movements and newly independent states.[37]

Other works on historiography have studied how governments tried to control historical

production in order to legitimize themselves and achieve hegemony over society.[38] Some

studies have pointed out the malleability of historical representation, as different regimes

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[33] Chejne, "The Concept" (1967). Faris, "The Arabs" (1954). Sivan, "Modern Arab historiography" (1972). Ziada, "Modern Egyptian Historiography" (1953).

[34] Di-Capua, "The Professional Worldview" (2009); "'Jabarti" (2004). Freitag, *Geschichtsschreibung* (1991). Havemann, *Geschichte* (2002). El Mansour, "Moroccan Historiography" (1997). Di-Capua, *Gatekeepers* (2009), 311, however, does to some extent consider historiographical plurality.

[35] Gorman, *Historians* (2003), 2, identified this second school.

[36] Sahli, *Décoloniser* (1965).

[37] Bellmann, "Das Geschichtsverständnis" (1981). Burke III, "Theorizing" (2000). Gellner, "The Struggle" (1961). McDougall, *History* (2006); "Martyrdom" (2006). Shinar, "The Historical Approach" (1971). Wansbrough, "The Decolonization (1968); "On Recomposing" (1969). Weulersse, "Histoire" (2005–2006).

[38] Al-Rasheed, "Political Legitimacy" (1998). Lisa Anderson, "Legitimacy" (1991). Crabbs, "Politics" (1975). Davis, *Memories* (2005); "Theorizing" (1991). Freitag, "In Search" (1999). Sela, "Arab Historiography" (1991). Ṭaha, *Mushkilat kitābat al-tārīkh* (1992).

sought to legitimize themselves under changing political circumstances.[39] Other studies

have put greater emphasis on a related aspect, namely the creation of national identity and

allegiances through history writing.[40] In many cases, however, these researchers have

focused on textbooks and other writings produced by state institutions or intellectuals who

were part of, or close to, the regimes. The researchers have thus not been primarily

interested in narrative plurality. Only occasionally have they used examples of

historiographical divergence in order to show that state control over historical production was

not complete.

Finally, a third school in the study of modern Arab historiography has focused on

historiographical contestation rather than on the development of a historical profession or

historiographical legitimation. Studies within this school have often gone beyond the study of

academic works and official textbooks in order to consider non-academic and unofficial

texts. A number of students of historiography have analysed texts written by Marxist,

Islamist, and feminist historians.[41] Others have concerned themselves with histories of

religious minorities and their conflicts with official national histories.[42] Most recently, a few

works have also paid special attention to local and tribal histories.[43] However, this third

school is probably the youngest and still the smallest within the study of modern Arab

historiography.

While the writings of the first two schools have informed my research, I situate my

own thesis within this third school. However, rather than speaking of 'contestation', I see

'plurality' as the main theme in Saudi historiography. Laying the emphasis on 'plurality'

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[39] Abbassi, *Entre Bourguiba* (2005); "Le traitement" (2002). Gershoni, "New Pasts" (1981). Mayer, *The Changing Past* (1988). Marsans-Sakly, "The Revolt" (2010).

[40] Abbassi, "Le discours" (2000). Betty Anderson, "Writing" (2001). Freitag, "Writing" (1994). Schäbler, "Das Prinzip" (1994). Sfeir-Khayat, "Historiographie" (2005). Wild, "Der Generalsekretär" (1982).

[41] Gorman, *Historians* (2003). Kozma, "Moroccan Women's Narratives" (2003). Meital, "Who Is" (2003). Shamir, "Self-View" (1981); "Radicalism" (1983).

[42] Al-Rasheed, "The Shiʿa" (1998). Beydoun, *Identité* (1984). Matthiesen, "The Shia" (2011).

[43] Shryock, *Nationalism* (1997). Maisel, "Self-Representation" (2010). Alon, "The Emergence" (2010). Buessow, "Writing" (2010).

permits the identification of historical narratives that do not overtly challenge each other or 'contest the nation', to borrow a phrase from the title of Anthony Gorman's book on Egypt.[44] As Saudi nationalism is a more recent phenomenon than Egyptian nationalism, 'particularistic' local histories, for instance, might simply diverge from dynastic histories without overtly disputing, or even referring to, 'national history'.

I thus use plurality in Saudi historiography mainly in the sense of a multiplicity of divergent and sometimes contesting narratives. A plurality of histories does not imply that individual historians are committed to a philosophical view called 'historical pluralism'. According to Hayden White, this view 'presupposes either a number of equally plausible accounts of the historical past or, alternatively, a number of different but equally meaningful constructions of that indeterminate field of past occurrences which by convention we call "history"'.[45]

I consider plurality in modern Arab historiography as an important topic of research, because of its relationship with authoritarianism, which has persisted in the Arab world.[46] The development of historiographical plurality in Arab countries in the twentieth century challenges common assumptions that under authoritarianism, a plurality of voices could only exist to a very limited extent or under severe constraints. Catherine Merridale, a historian of modern Russia, expressed such an assumption clearly: 'The past is something that dictatorships do not leave to chance. They almost always control academic research. They limit public access to information.'[47] Merridale points out that Stalin, for instance, personally read many historical works and 'maintained strict censorship over the rest. Dissident historians were arrested and, occasionally, shot.'[48] Such assumptions also fed into some

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[44] Gorman, *Historians* (2003).

[45] White, "Historical Pluralism" (1986).

[46] Also the 'Arab Spring' of 2011 has not yet led to a widespread disappearance of authoritarianism in the Arab world. Because the political events are still in flux during the time of my writing, I refrain from discussing the possible impact of the Arab spring on historiography.

[47] Merridale, "Redesigning" (2003), 13.

[48] Ibid., 15.

research about historiography in the Middle East, especially Iraq, where Saddam Hussein took a similar personal interest in historiography.[49] Eric Davis argues that in 'authoritarian states, political elites use state-sponsored historical memory to foster feelings of paranoia, xenophobia, and distrust'.[50] Thus, in Iraq under the Baath Party 'some intellectuals sold their souls to the state, while others chose outright resistance leading to exile, imprisonment, or worse'.[51]

The link between authoritarianism and control over historiography has its counterpart in a common association between historiographical plurality and political pluralism. Stefan Berger and others argue that in nineteenth-century Western Europe, the birth of the modern party system 'and the competing national popular mobilisation by different political parties contributed a great deal to the pluralisation of competing historical discourses'.[52] Piotr Wandycz observes that political pluralism in Poland since 1989 'has its counterpart in a divergence of historical approaches'.[53] Similarly, Gerry van Klinken argues that after Suharto's resignation as president of Indonesia in 1998, 'a much freer publishing environment saw long suppressed historiographies reemerge' and a 'proliferation of historical debate in the public arena'.[54]

This association between political and historiographical pluralism has also informed some research on the Arab world. Thomas Mayer postulates with reference to Egypt that 'the very existence of proliferation of additional historiographical interpretations depended on the regime's tolerance of opposing political views'.[55] Meir Hatina argues that the 'political

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[49] Wild, "Der Generalsekretär" (1982).

[50] Davis, *Memories* (2005), 6.

[51] Ibid., 21–22. Ulrike Freitag, however, notes that 'historians quite often are more free to express their opinions in historical terms than are politicians and ideologues'. Freitag, "Amatzia" (1992), 156.

[52] Stefan Berger et al., "Apologias" (1999), 11.

[53] Wandycz, "Historiography" (1992), 1023.

[54] Van Klinken, "The Battle" (2005), 237.

[55] Mayer, *The Changing Past* (1988), 67.

and ideological pluralism' initiated by Anwar al-Sadat and Hosni Mubarak in the 1970s and

1980s 'nurtured numerous narratives competing for hegemony'.[56]

I do not doubt that political pluralism facilitates historiographical plurality. Yet, the case

of Saudi Arabia invites us to undertake deeper research into the roots of narrative plurality,

as here we have a multiplicity of voices about the past that emerged in the absence of

formal political pluralism. It has been argued that Saudi Arabia became authoritarian in the

1960s, when the oil wealth allowed the government to massively expand its bureaucratic

and technological means of controlling society.[57] Since then, the kingdom has generally

ranked among the least democratic and pluralistic countries even in the Arab world.[58] In

contrast to Egypt and many other Arab countries, Saudi Arabia lacked legal political parties,

an elected parliament, and even trade unions.

Forming part of Saudi Arabia's authoritarian political system, the kingdom's

censorship laws remained strict for much of the twentieth century. In 1962, the Saudi

government founded the Ministry of Information (since 2003 the Ministry of Culture and

Information), to which authors and publishers had to submit their manuscripts for review.

The ministry could give or refuse permission for publication or request changes. In 1965, a

National Security Law banned 'public criticism of the government in books or newspapers, or

in any form that could be made available to others'.[59] Although a Press and Publications

Code in 1982 formally guaranteed 'freedom of expression', it prohibited any material

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[56] Hatina, "History" (2004), 117. Di-Capua, *Gatekeepers* (2009), 311, calls the situation under al-Sadat and Mubarak 'authoritarian pluralism'.

[57] Jones, *Desert Kingdom* (2010), 252–53. Aarts, "The Longevity" (2007), 253, puts the beginning of Saudi authoritarianism even earlier, stating that the Al Saud has ruled Saudi Arabia 'since 1932 in an authoritarian fashion'.

[58] In 2008, the *Economist* ranked Saudi Arabia 161st out of 167 countries in terms of electoral process and pluralism, functioning of government, political participation, political culture, and civil liberties. Economist, *The Economist Intelligence Unit's Index of Democracy* (2008). In 1990, only five out of seventeen major Arab states exhibited 'an element of pluralism' according to the *Economist*. They were Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, and Tunisia. Hudson, "After the Gulf War" (1991), 407. On authoritarianism in Arab monarchies generally, see also Lucas, "Monarchical Authoritarianism" (2004).

[59] Article 19, *Silent Kingdom* (1991), 3.

'advocating destructive ideologies, disturbing or destabilizing public confidence, or sowing discord amongst citizens'.[60]

In the 2000s, the King Abdulaziz Foundation for Research and Archives, one of the major institutional actors in the Saudi historiographical field, also began participating in censorship. In March 2001, a royal decree charged the foundation with 'examining publications about the kingdom and contacting those publishing information on the kingdom in order to correct any errors'.[61] The foundation's secretary general since 1995, Fahd al-Semmari, defended its role by asserting that his institution did not engage in 'censorship' (*raqābah*) but that it was a 'guide' (*murshidah*). Its role was to make history writing more 'exact' and 'improve' it. It was rather the Ministry of Culture and Information that took the final decision whether to allow or forbid the publication of a given book.[62] Yet, some Saudi historians expressed criticism of the foundation's role. One complained that the foundation acted like 'the police'. Others spoke of the foundation as 'big brother' and even of its 'dictatorship' in the historiographical field.[63]

Besides 'correcting' works, the King Abdulaziz Foundation for Research and Archives also sent reviews of new books to its chair since the late 1990s, Prince Salman ibn Abdulaziz (b. 1939), who could request formal bans by the monarch himself. This was the fate of the book *The Entertainer's Pleasure.* At the request of Salman, King Abdullah signed a memorandum in 2006 that banned *The Entertainer's Pleasure* and its potential derivatives. The memorandum ordered Saudi governmental agencies to advise fellow 'Arab censorship agencies not to permit the publication of any book quoting it or relying on it as a source'. The Saudi Historical Society, the main professional association of Saudi historians, and research

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[60] Ibid., 9–10. On censorship in Saudi Arabia, see also Mostyn, "Saudi Arabia" (2001).

[61] Dārat al-Malik ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, *Al-mamlakah*, vol. 1 (2007), 239.

[62] Interview, 3 November 2009.

[63] Interviews in 2009 and 2010. Besides the foundation's censorship role, other Saudi historians, however, praised the foundation's 'service' to history through its publications.

centres in the Arab world and elsewhere should also 'notify its members not to rely on this book, nor to refer to it in historical studies' (figures 7 and 8 in the appendix).

Historians did not only suffer from censorship, but sometimes also engaged in it themselves. Especially in the contentious field of tribal histories, some authors exploited governmental concerns about tribal conflicts by asking senior officials to ban the competing works of fellow historians. By arguing that these writings caused 'fitna' between the tribes,[64] they urged the rulers to take action according to their duty of preserving the harmony of the community.[65] One tribal historian, who had suffered from the ban of one of his books, called this infighting among tribal writers 'friendly fire'.[66]

Despite various mechanisms of repression, however, most Saudi historians had relatively little to fear apart from a ban on the distribution of their works in Saudi Arabia and less possibility of cooperation with official agencies. To the best of my knowledge, no university-based historian has ever been imprisoned for his or her writings.[67] Marcel Kurpershoek observes that there is no physical violence against tribal authors in Saudi Arabia. 'The stubborn offender simply runs the risk that certain doors will remain closed to him, and the authorities will act with reservation towards him in a manner that will never be fully explained. He will disappear into the grey area of citizens whose welfare the bureaucracy and those in power are less concerned with.'[68] Even, the formal ban of books and their derivatives only happened in isolated cases, like *The Entertainer's Pleasure.* Similarly, the Saudi anthropologist Saad Sowayan explained in reference to professional historians and social scientists in the Middle East in 2009: 'In the region, Saudi Arabia is a lenient place. The worst thing that happens is that you are being marginalized.'[69]

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[64] Interviews with several Saudi historians in 2009 and 2010.

[65] Lacey, *Inside* (2009), 319.

[66] ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Shuqayr, interview, 29 October 2009. The book that was banned was al-Faraj, *Al-khabar* (2000).

[67] Also De Baets, *Censorship* (2002), 424–25, gives no account of any imprisoned academic historian.

[68] Kurpershoek, *Arabia* (2001), 141–42.

[69] Interview, 26 October 2009.

Sowayan added, 'in the West you at least have your students who respect you. Here, you have no audience.'[70] This quotation indicates that the relatively small number of authors and readers of academic historical writings in Saudi Arabia might have been a factor behind the regime's 'leniency'. The government has perhaps felt secure enough to ignore at least some dissident writings, especially if they were published abroad. However, the comparative 'leniency' of the Saudi government regarding historiography might also be explained by the 'relatively soft, rent- and patronage-based authoritarianism' in Saudi Arabia and other Arab oil monarchies.[71] As Saudi Arabia has had a high 'GDP per academic capita',[72] the Saudi government could attempt to co-opt rather than coerce its historians by providing them with employment and prizes. The King Abdulaziz Foundation for Research and Archives administered a number of such prizes, including, since 2005, the Prince Salman ibn Abdulaziz Prize and Scholarship for Studies. With about 900,000 riyals (about 240,000 dollars) handed out in prize money in 2005 alone, it was the largest funding scheme exclusively for history in the kingdom, covering studentships as well as prizes for theses and articles.[73]

Yet, despite censorship and the regime's means of co-optation, the salient characteristic of Saudi historiography is not uniformity, but plurality. In order to explain the emergence of this plurality, my study will examine the influence of two processes on history writing: state expansion and globalization. In combination, they have never been studied extensively and explicitly in relation to Arab historiography.

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State expansion

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It would be tempting to explain the emergence of narrative plurality in Saudi Arabia by arguing that Saudi historians enjoyed considerable independence from the state or that the

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[70] Interview, 26 October 2009.

[71] Hertog, "Rentier Militaries" (2011), 400.

[72] Hegghammer, "Jihad, Yes" (2009), 409, speaks about a high 'GDP per militant capita'.

[73] Dārat al-Malik ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, *Al-tārīkhīyah* 20 (2005), 3.

state was 'weak'—despite being 'fierce', as Nazih Ayubi put it.[74] However, if anything, the

Saudi state became more powerful and more resourceful from the middle of the twentieth

century onwards. Until that time, King Abdulaziz Al Saud ruled most of the country mainly

through 'personal links with trusted lieutenants, local intermediaries, and clients'. Most of the

departments at his court were 'occupied with the logistics of the court itself and not with

broader administration or public services'.[75] In 1947, only three ministries existed—those of

foreign affairs, finance, and defence.[76]

The personalized state under Abdulaziz became more institutionalized and expanded

from the middle of the twentieth century onwards. In the 1950s, the monarch and his son

and successor Saud (r. 1953–64) created a number of new governmental agencies. This

followed rapid increases in oil revenues after World War II. Moreover, a new generation of

princes, who vied for power and prestige, drove the expansion of the state. In 1953, Saud

created the ministries of education and agriculture and entrusted them to two of his half-

brothers, Fahd (r. 1982–2005) and Sultan (1929–2011).[77] These measures brought millions

of Saudis, for the first time, 'into direct contact with representatives of the government'.[78]

Considering the expansion of the state as one of the most important processes in

twentieth-century Saudi history, I will investigate to what extent it has paradoxically

contributed to narrative plurality. Some previous scholarship has already identified that

authoritarian states may inadvertently provoke contestation of official texts by repressing or

neglecting alternative accounts of the past. James Wertsch argues that in Soviet Estonia,

state enforcement of a single, monolithic historical past and repression of alternative

interpretations led to 'prolonged resistance to official accounts of the past'. This resistance

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[74] Ayubi, *Over-stating* (1995).

[75] Hertog, *Princes* (2010), 42.

[76] Niblock, *Saudi Arabia* (2006), 34.

[77] Hertog, *Princes* (2010), 44.

[78] Jones, *Desert Kingdom* (2010), 89.

'resulted in a kind of clear, if not stark, opposition between it and unofficial histories'.[79] Similarly, in the Saudi case, Madawi Al-Rasheed argues that 'narratives of the state' provoked 'alternative visions and counter-discourses that remain rooted in the historical imagination of the people in Saudi Arabia'. Specifically, 'the neglect of regional history in the official historical narrative has encouraged the production of counter-narratives written by Saʿudi intellectuals from the regions. Their work celebrates local tradition and culture.'[80]

While state repression and neglect probably played some role in instigating local histories specifically, an important way in which state expansion shaped historiography was paradoxically the state-financed establishment of an indigenous historical profession. In 1957, the government founded the first Saudi university, King Saud University (KSU), based in Riyadh. This university educated and employed some of the first professional Saudi historians. In the following decades, the state established universities and colleges with departments of history in all provinces. Looking at the relationship between the establishment of a historical profession and narrative plurality, the question arises whether the Saudi state unintentionally opened a 'Pandora's box' through its support of historical research. Nicola Miller has shown such a development in Cuba, where the state invested heavily in the training of a new generation of historians after the revolution in 1956. In the 1990s, members of this very generation went on to criticize the 'the regime's monopoly over Cuba's past'.[81]

Independent from the universities, the King Abdulaziz Foundation for Research and Archives has emerged as a new state agency in the expanding field of historiography since 1972. Apart from providing library and archival services, the foundation also functioned as one of the most important publishers of historical works on the kingdom. By 2008, it had published more than 200 books, including monographs, textbooks, historical atlases,

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[79] Wertsch, "Is it Possible" (2000), 47.

[80] Al-Rasheed, *A History* (2002), 188–89. See also Al-Rasheed, "The Shiʿa" (1998).

[81] Miller, "The Absolution" (2003), 151, 162.

editions of earlier Arabic chronicles, translations of European works on Arabia, and bibliographical guides.[82] This was in line with the foundation's official founding mission, namely 'to serve the history, geography, literature, intellectual and architectural traditions of the kingdom particularly and of Arabia and the Arab and Muslim world generally'.[83]

Apart from financing academic institutions, the expanding state also influenced historiography through the spread of primary literacy and education on a basic level. I will investigate, to what extent this expansion of education enabled amateurs from wide sections of society to engage in historiography. This point is worth pursuing, as Saudi public education budgets increased tremendously over the twentieth century: from about 28,000 dollars in 1926 to 21.6 million in 1954–55, and 7.3 billion in 1983–84. Although education was not compulsory, the number of pupils in primary, intermediate, and secondary schools underwent a surge of similar magnitude: from 700 in 1926 to 8400 in 1948, and about 4.11 million in 2000.[84] It is because of this expansion of education that the literacy rate in Saudi society soared from an estimated 5 per cent in 1956 to 84.7 per cent among men and 70.8 per cent among women in 2003.[85]

Moreover, the expansion of bureaucracy provided many Saudis with a share of increasing governmental revenues through relatively high salaries as well has other benefits. This may have allowed them to undertake private historical research. Already before the discovery of commercial quantities of oil in 1938, the bureaucracy grew in the Hejaz. In Jeddah, Mecca, Yanbuʿ, Medina, Umluj, Rābigh, and many other towns, servants paid by the central government collected fees and taxes under the Directorate of Fees (Mudīrīyat al-Rusūm).[86] After World War II, the civil service grew from a few hundred in the 1950s to

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[82] Al-Sunaydī, *Muʿjam* [2008], 552–68.

[83] Dārat al-Malik ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, *Dalīl* (1981), 31.

[84] Rugh, "Education" (2002), 41–42. Abū ʿAlīyah, *Al-iṣlāḥ* (1976), 246–47.

[85] Hertog, Princes (2010), 49. Central Intelligence Agency, "Literacy" (2010).

[86] Chaudhry, *The Price* (1997), 61.

about 27,000 in 1962/63, 85,000 in 1970/71, and 245,000 in 1979/80.[87] I will consider, of course, the possible effects of dependency on the state for employment on the production of historical narratives. However, I agree with Nicola Miller that 'simply taking a job in public bureaucracy in order to scratch enough of a living to pursue a writing career is hardly being coopted'.[88]

Globalization

Although scholars have sometimes viewed the expansion of the nation state as the antithesis of globalization, the history of the Saudi state and its influence on historiography cannot be properly understood in isolation from this global process. Globalization or global integration here means the 'development, concentration, and increasing importance of worldwide connections'.[89] While this larger process is global, it also encompasses the emergence of many connections and smaller processes that do not span the globe, but are transnational and 'translocal'.[90] Although the term 'globalization' is recent, I do not consider the process a product of the end of the Cold War.[91] I also do not understand it as driven by a neo-liberal ideology or project to Americanize the world economically, politically and culturally.[92] Instead, I follow the view common among world historians that globalization as a process has occurred at least since the nineteenth century.

When exactly globalization began is disputed among world historians. Anthony Hopkins and Christopher Bayly trace an 'archaic globalization' back to antiquity.[93] David

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[87] Owen, *State* (2004), 39.

[88] Miller, "The Anxiety" (2000), 136.

[89] Osterhammel and Petersson, *Globalization* (2005), 26.

[90] On translocality, see Freitag and von Oppen, "'Translocality'" (2010), who also criticize the notion of globalization as single global process.

[91] Here, I disagree, for instance, with Abdulla, "The impact" (2006), 182.

[92] On the neo-liberal ideology of globalization and its challengers, see Rupert, *Ideologies* (2000). For a view of globalization as neo-liberal Americanization and its effect on Arab historiography, see al-Qādirī Būtshīsh, *Mustaqbal* (2001).

[93] Hopkins, "Introduction" (2002). Bayly, "'Archaic'" (2002).

Northrup sees the beginning of global integration around 1000 AD.[94] Others argue that the first wave of globalization started in the late sixteenth century with the establishment of 'regular exchange of commodities around the world'.[95] What is widely agreed upon, however, is that globalization accelerated with the technological revolution in the nineteenth century.[96] This development was not linear however, as global integration also slowed down in some periods, such as the global economic crisis of the 1930s. Some scholars have thus argued that globalization has occurred in different waves. Marks, for instance, describes a first wave of globalization beginning in 1571, a second wave in the nineteenth century, a third wave after World War II and a fourth wave beginning in 1991.[97] My thesis is not the right place to take the debate about the origins of globalization further. However, it seems certain that globalization has affected Arabian history since at least the early nineteenth century and has thus accompanied the building of the modern Saudi state in the twentieth century.[98]

Although state building and globalization are introduced separately here, both processes were, in fact, intertwined. The establishment of the modern Kingdom of Saudi Arabia occurred within a world system of new nation states.[99] The administration in the Hejaz that the Saudi government took over in the 1920s had itself been the product of an Ottoman and Hashemite 'defensive modernization' against European global empires.[100] The development of the early kingdom also relied principally on the influx of capital from abroad, including British and American subsidies, royalties from the oil concessions and dues levied

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[94] Northrup, "Globalization" (2005).

[95] Marks, *The Origins* (2007), 203.

[96] O'Rourke and Williamson, "When did globalisation" (2002), 23, argued that 'a very big globalisation bang took place in the 1820s'.

[97] Marks, *The Origins* (2007), 203–4. For further criticism of linear conceptions of globalization, see Freitag and von Oppen, "'Translocality'" (2010).

[98] Freitag, "The City" (2011), 225, describes globalization effects on nineteenth-century Jeddah.

[99] Vitalis, "Crossing" (1998), 16.

[100] Ibid., 17.

on imported goods and the pilgrim traffic.[101] From the middle of the twentieth century onwards, the Saudi bureaucracy relied more on global demand for oil for its expansion. At the same time, Saudi Arabia, as one of the largest oil exporters, has provided some of the fuel for contemporary globalization.

Globalization has shaped historiography in particular, because the development of education in the kingdom generally relied on the import of educated foreigners. Between the 1940s and 1970s, large parts of the public education sector became 'Egyptianized', as the Saudi Ministry of Education hired numerous Egyptians as teachers, administrators and consultants.[102] The Saudi government even hired the prominent Egyptian intellectual ʿAbd al-Wahhāb ʿAzzām (1894–1959) as the first director of King Saud University in 1957. Non-Saudi Arabs also built up the departments of history at several universities, such as King Saud University and Imam Muhammad ibn Saud Islamic University (Imam University). Out of seventeen professors at KSU's department of history in 1976, ten were Egyptians and only four were Saudis, with the remaining three coming from Iraq, Jordan and Sudan.[103]

A further crucial component in globalization's influence on historical writing, which my thesis will investigate, is the sending of Saudi students abroad. These student missions partly aimed at replacing Egyptians and other Arabs as teachers and administrators. Under Hafiz Wahba (1889–1967), who was ironically an Egyptian-born historian and official, the Saudi Directorate of Education decided to send a few dozen Hejazi students to Egypt in 1928/29.[104] With the increasing oil revenues after World War II, the government widened these programmes so that they comprised more than five hundred students in 1958/59.[105] Supported by a generous stipend, Abdul-Aziz Khowaiter (b. 1928), perhaps the first

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[101] Niblock, *Saudi Arabia* (2006), 34.

[102] Steinberg, *Religion* (2002), 295.

[103] Jāmiʿat al-Riyāḍ, *Dalīl* (1976), 11–13. Between 1964 and 1981, King Saud University was officially called Riyadh University. In order to avoid confusion with other universities in Riyadh, I speak of the university throughout as 'King Saud University'.

[104] ʿAbd Allāh al-Ḥuqayl, *Tawḥīd* (2000), 101.

[105] Dārat al-Malik ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, *Al-wathāʾiq* (2002), 39.

professional Saudi historian, gained his PhD from SOAS in 1960.[106] By 1976, the four Saudi professors teaching at KSU's department of history had all obtained their doctorates from British universities.[107]

Globalization also shaped historiography through the influx of foreign literature into the kingdom. This influx dramatically expanded the choice of readings available to Saudi historians. In the first half of the twentieth century, scholars confined themselves mainly to reading and copying the main local Najdi chronicles. In addition, ulema and notables read medieval Arabic historical works, including Ibn Kathīr's (d. 1373) *The Beginning and the End* (*Al-bidāyah wa-al-nihāyah*) and Ibn al-Athīr's (1160–1233) *Complete History* (*Al-kāmil fī al-tārīkh*).[108] With increasing oil revenues and the development of international postal services, however, Saudi libraries and individuals imported numerous modern books and journals. By 1977, Saudi Arabia had become the largest consumer of foreign books in the Arab world, purchasing books worth about 31.8 million dollars that year. It had also become the largest Arab importer of American literature, of which it purchased an amount worth 2.4 million dollars.[109] At the same time, Saudis benefitted from regulations that excluded 'from censorship book imports to universities, libraries and other government bodies'. The only condition was that these institutions did not publicly display any prohibited publication.[110]

Globalization not only facilitated the import of foreign books, but also gave Saudi historians increased access to publishers based abroad, whether in Cairo, Beirut or London. As the first press in Riyadh was only established in 1955,[111] Saudis made use of foreign publishers to distribute their works in the first half of the twentieth century. My thesis will thus consider to what extent Saudis used foreign publishers to circumvent censorship. Finally, globalization also brought the introduction of public access to the internet in 1999. While the

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[106] Al-Khuwayṭir, *Narr* (2008), 202–7.

[107] Jāmiʿat al-Riyāḍ, *Dalīl* (1976), 11–13.

[108] Steinberg, *Religion* (2002), 133, 136. Hurgronje, *Mekka* (1970), 164.

[109] Al-Dobaian, "The Book Industry" (1985), 131.

[110] Ibid., 188.

[111] Al-Jāsir, *Madīnat al-riyāḍ* (1966), 132.

government sought to centralize and censor internet availability, it also acknowledged 'the necessity of internet access for economic and business development'.[112] Since 1999, it is not only institutions of professional historiography, like the universities and the King Abdulaziz Foundation for Research and Archives, which have established an online presence.[113] Amateurs also launched hundreds of websites concerned with local, regional, and tribal communities in the kingdom. By 2011, at least 390 websites of Saudi tribes existed.[114] Moreover, many digitized texts on the kingdom became available online. In 2011, the Ukrainian file sharing service 4shared.com alone offered at least 590 books on Saudi Arabia.[115]

<div align="center">Sources</div>

In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of Saudi narrative plurality, this study is based on a wide reading of Saudi texts about the past. They comprise school and college textbooks, monographs, volumes for a general audience and texts in Riyadh's National Museum. Previous scholars have analysed some of these texts. Yet, they have mainly focused on historical works produced in the 1990s and have thus paid less attention to longer historiographical developments.[116] In order to gain further insights into debates among academic historians, I have read most issues of several specialized Saudi journals founded since the 1960s. They include *al-ʿArab*, *al-Dārah*, *al-Dirʿīyah*, *al-Wāḥah*, the *Journal of the Saudi Historical Society*, the *Journal of the College of Arts*, *King Saud University*, the *Journal of King Abdulaziz University: Arts and Humanities*, and *al-Sāḥil*. I have also gone through many issues of the cultural and literary journal *al-Manhal*. In order to investigate the

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[112] Hudson, "The Gulf" (2006), 153.

[113] Dārat al-Malik ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, "Al-ṣafḥah" (2011). Al-Jamʿīyah al-Tārīkhīyah al-Suʿūdīyah, "Al-jamʿīyah" (2010).

[114] ArabO, "Saudi Arabia" (2011).

[115] 4shared, "Al-suʿūdīyah" (2011).

[116] Al-Rasheed, "Saudi Arabia" (2007); "The Capture" (2004); *A History* (2002), 188–95; "Political Legitimacy" (1998). Okruhlik, "Struggles" (2004). Center for Monitoring the Impact of Peace, *The West* (2003). Doumato, "Saudi Arabia" (2008).

global connections of Saudi historiography, I have also considered a number of unpublished

master and doctoral dissertations written by Saudis in the United States, the United Kingdom

and Egypt, as long as the authors lived in the kingdom before and after their studies. Finally,

I have examined numerous websites dedicated to the history of various local and tribal

communities. Most of these websites have been unexamined by students of

historiography.[117]

In analysing Saudi historical texts, I restrict myself to non-fiction. To be sure, many

fictional and historical texts are similar in style and tropes, and Hayden White even argues

for the existence of 'novelesque histories'.[118] Moreover, historical novels not only formed

part of a general plurality in narrations about the past. The government also took these texts

seriously, to the extent that it banned *Cities of Salt*, one of the best-known Saudi novels, and

stripped its author Abdelrahman Munif (1933–2004) of his Saudi citizenship. *Cities of Salt*

provided a critical account of oil production in a fictional desert oasis. Yet, these fictional

narratives do not aim at historical truthfulness as factual historical narratives do, or at least

not at the same kind of truthfulness. Most historical novels have also not been understood

as 'history' (*tārīkh*). Nor have they entered the formal historiographical debates in historical

journals and at conferences.[119] They are thus beyond the scope of my thesis.

My study is concerned with historiography *in* Saudi Arabia in the sense that it

concentrates on narratives produced by people based in Saudi Arabia. This means that I

examine not only the works of indigenous Saudis but also those of foreigners, such as St

John Philby (1885–1960), who spent extended periods in the kingdom. I exclude, however,

texts by a few Saudi scholars who permanently resided abroad.[120] Although the careers of

these scholars are themselves evidence for the effects of globalization and authoritarianism

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[117] An exception being Maisel, "Self-Representation" (2010).

[118] White, *Metahistory* (1973); "Novelesque Histories" (2009).

[119] Munif, *Cities of Salt* (1987). On the Saudi historical novel, see al-Ḥumūd, "Al-riwāyah" (2010).

[120] A prolific Saudi scholar, whom I have thus left out, is Madawi Al-Rasheed, who has spent virtually all of her professional life abroad.

on Saudi historiography, they are less relevant for understanding plurality *within* the Saudi political system.

Moreover, I confine myself to texts on the history of states and communities within the territory of the contemporary kingdom. Besides histories of the Saudi state and dynasty, I give special attention to local and regional histories that appeared throughout the kingdom. They narrate the past of Mecca and Medina, the Asir Mountains and the oasis of al-Aḥsāʾ, to name a few places. Moreover, I investigate tribal writings and the historiography dealing with the kingdom's Shiite minority. Finally, I study distinct social and economic histories. I have been fortunate to have received many of these texts, including banned books, from the authors themselves during my fieldwork between 2009 and 2011. I accessed many others in the King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies, the King Fahd National Library, the King Abdulaziz Public Library, the King Abdulaziz Foundation for Research and Archives, as well as the libraries of Imam University, King Saud University, King Abdulaziz University (KAU), and King Khalid University. In Europe, I accessed the rich collections of the SOAS Library, the British Library, and the university libraries in Exeter and Tübingen.

In order to investigate the reasons for the emergence of narrative plurality, I have not restricted myself to reading Saudi historical texts. I conducted semi-structured interviews with more than fifty Saudi historians as well as other intellectuals between 2009 and 2011. They include current and former history faculty members of KSU, Imam University, KAU, King Khalid University, Qassim University, King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals, King Khalid Military Academy, and Naif Arab University for Security Sciences. I also met several current and former employees of the King Abdulaziz Foundation for Research and Archives, and the Saudi Historical Society. In almost all of these cases, I took down notes rather than recorded the interview at the request of my interviewees. Finally, I interviewed several sons of deceased Saudi historians and two former American supervisors of Saudi students.

My stays in the kingdom also allowed me to witness contemporary debates between Saudi historians at a number of conferences in Riyadh. In 2008, I participated in a Conference on Documents of the Ottoman Archive at King Saud University and a conference on King Faisal (r. 1964–75) organized by the King Abdulaziz Foundation for Research and Archives. In January 2010, I attended the Seventh International Symposium on Studies in the History of Arabia. In October 2011, I attended a workshop on 'The Teaching of National History in Public Education' held at Imam University. Between 2007 and 2008, I was also fortunate to have had the experience of working at a Saudi university myself, as I was teaching German at KSU in Riyadh.

I also analysed 'grey literature', that is, publications with limited circulation, on the development of the historical profession in Saudi Arabia. These include numerous reports, newsletters, guides, and pamphlets by the King Abdulaziz Foundation for Research and Archives and the Saudi Historical Society. In addition, various administrative guides and reports by Saudi colleges and universities proved very useful. Annual reports post the budgets of higher education institutions over the years.[121] Faculty and library guides detail the effects of changes in those budgets on salary schemes and acquisitions of literature.[122] Other guides comprise history curricula and give statistics about faculty members, students and graduates and lists of completed master and doctoral dissertations.[123] Here, I found the sections of governmental publications at the libraries of King Saud University, Imam University and King Abdulaziz University to be a treasure trove. Besides, Saudi newspapers and magazines covered important historical conferences, jubilees and biographies of historians. I accessed a number of them on paper, microfilm and online, including *Umm al-Qurá, al-Riyāḍ, al-Jazīrah, al-Ḥaras al-Waṭanī, al-Waṭan, Okaz* and *al-Sharq al-Awsaṭ.* In gathering information on prominent historians and officials, state celebrations and

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[121] E.g., Jāmiʿat al-Malik Suʿūd, *Al-taqrīr* [2003].

[122] E.g., Jāmiʿat al-Malik Suʿūd, *Al-murshid* (1984).

[123] E.g., Jāmiʿat al-Malik ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, *Dalīl* (1975).

censorship, I also benefitted from the published correspondences of British and American diplomats.

Finally, I accessed the websites of Saudi universities, the King Abdulaziz Foundation for Research and Archives, the Saudi Historical Society and other organizations, which were launched since the introduction of public internet access to the kingdom in 1999. Departments of history have not only published their curricula and accounts of their own history online.[124] Since about 2007, university administrators have also encouraged faculty members to put their CVs, lists of publications, and teaching material on the web to raise the national and international profile of their institutions.[125] This greatly facilitated my enquiries into the biographies and working conditions of Saudi historians.

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Overview of the thesis

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On the basis of these sources and within the framework outlined above, I investigate the reasons for narrative plurality through an in-depth analysis of the development of a number of different currents in Saudi historiography. Chapter 2 analyses dynastic histories, a group of writings that concentrated on the Al Saud, the Saudi state and the Wahhabi mission. I trace the origins of these histories back to a series of Najdi chronicles written with support from two predecessors of the modern (or third) Saudi state—the first Saudi state (c. 1744–1818) and second Saudi state (c. 1818–91). Subsequently, I focus on the further development of dynastic historiography under foreign-born authors and servants of the modern Saudi state until about the 1960s.

Chapter 3 contrasts this dynastic historiography with the emergence of a loose group of local histories written between the 1920s and 1970s. I will pay special attention to how their narratives relate to those of dynastic histories. In seeking to explain the appearance of these histories, I will examine how the building of the modern Saudi state and globalization

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[124] E.g., Jāmiʿat al-Malik Suʿūd, "Barnāmaj" (2010).
[125] E.g., al-Muṭawwaʿ, "Al-sīrah" (2010).

provided new opportunities for education and employment in the provinces and thus fostered the emergence of a number of pioneering local authors.

The three following chapters deal with the period since the 1960s and 1970s, in which both the expansion of the Saudi state and globalization have progressed rapidly. Chapter 4 discusses the development of official dynastic historiography in the context of the emergence of Saudi nationalism and a Saudi historical profession. I scrutinize how state institutions and Saudi historians who had studied abroad fostered the development of Saudi national paradigms of foundation and development.

A boom in writing about other communities accompanied the development of dynastic historiography from the 1970s. These communities included not only towns and regions, but also tribes and the Shiites. Chapter 5 investigates these new local, tribal and Shiite histories both in their relation to the 'nationalized' dynastic histories as well as earlier local histories. In order to explain the boom in these histories, I examine to what extent the expanding state incidentally fostered this non-dynastic historical production through the provision of mass higher education and the distribution of oil revenues. I also investigate to what extent local, tribal and Shiite historians made use of new opportunities to study and publish abroad.

Chapter 6 discusses the development of a group of histories with distinctively social and economic approaches. It first describes the relationship between these histories and dynastic, local, tribal and Shiite histories. Subsequently, it analyses how the development of a historical profession and governmental scholarship programmes helped produce social and economic histories by connecting Saudi historians to social and economic historiography globally. The chapter then examines how a number of social and economic historians and historical sociologists challenged and diverged from dynastic as well as certain local, tribal and Shiite histories by offering new interpretations of the rise of the Wahhabi mission and the Saudi state.

Finally, the conclusion brings together the findings of the core chapters and points out the limitations of these findings. Discussing again state expansion and globalization, I

summarize the main factors for the emergence of narrative plurality in Saudi historiography. Moreover, the conclusion discusses some implications that my case study on Saudi Arabia raises for the study of modern Arab historiography generally. Finally, an epilogue sketches the possibility for future narrative plurality through an observation of the effect of the Saudi 'opening' in the 2000s on historiography.

2. Histories of a Muslim Arab Dynasty, Early Beginnings to 1960s

In 1961, Suʿūd ibn Hadhlūl (1906/7–83), a Saudi provincial governor and member of the extended royal family, published a book entitled *The History of the Kings of the Al Saud*. It was one of the first elaborate histories of the Saudi dynasty written by one of its members. It gave the biographies of fourteen Saudi rulers, beginning with Saud ibn Muhammad ibn Muqrin, the eighteenth-century ancestor who lent his name to the Al Saud, ending with King Abdulaziz (r. 1902–53). However, Ibn Hadhlūl's work was not the first dynastic history written in Saudi Arabia. A number of historians from the Arabian peninsula and outside of it preceded him. Indeed, one of Ibn Hadhlūl's motivations was to 'correct' previous writings. In his introduction, he wrote, 'I read most of the writings by contemporary historians on Najd and on the history of the royal Saudi family and think that many events were told either in a falsified or distorted way'.[1]

Although Ibn Hadhlūl was critical of some aspects of previous dynastic historiography, he also relied on this historiography for his own account of the Al Saud. In this account, Arabian history effectively started with the appearance of the Saudi family in the eighteenth century. Ibn Hadhlūl wrote that 'this Saudi house is the great pillar of the renaissance of the Arabian peninsula. No more testimony or evidence is needed than a reading of most historians' writings. By reading this, it becomes very clear that Najd was not worth mentioning before the rule of the Al Saud.' At the time, Najd 'was a region whose people were torn apart by division. Hunger, bareness and illnesses killed them. It was completely stricken by ignorance, and its inhabitants only conspired against and killed each other.' As for Islam, 'it had absolutely no influence. Superstition spread, sins prevailed, and rocks and

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[1] Ibn Hadhlūl, *Tārīkh* (1961), 3.

trees were worshipped instead of God.' 'If we now compare the present of this nation with its past', Ibn Hadhlūl went on, 'we find that the difference is like the difference between day and night, heaven and earth. This is due to God and the glorious Al Saud, who supported the pure Islamic mission started by the Imam, the reformer and renewer, Sheikh Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab.'[2]

Ibn Hadhlūl's work thus constructed a glorious political and religious history centred on the Al Saud. The fall of the first and second Saudi states in 1818 and 1891 respectively interrupted this history only temporarily. The governor argued that 'during the times, in which the rule of the Al Saud is overwhelmed by its enemies, is weak or suffers a setback, this country returns to its first condition. It becomes divided and is being brought down. Chaos rules, calamities spread, and relatives fight each other, until God sends someone from the Al Saud who renews the mission and unites the word. Then calm prevails, the country prospers, and matters become straight.'[3]

In producing his narrative, Ibn Hadhlūl relied on, and formed part of, a tradition of dynastic histories that had its roots in the first Saudi state (c. 1744–1818).[4] While many of these histories were entitled histories of Najd, Saudi Arabia or the Arabian peninsula, they tended to focus on the history of the Al Saud from the eighteenth century onwards. In this chapter, I describe how Saudi state building and globalization contributed to the development of three features of Saudi dynastic historiography from its early beginnings under the first Saudi state until the 1960s. These features are to some extent also present in Ibn Hadhlūl's book. The first was a narrative describing the Al Saud as the only true Muslim dynasty, which spread Islam where it had been absent. The second feature was an exclusivism that disregarded historical events other than those related to the Saudi dynasty.

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[2] Ibid., 3–4.

[3] Ibid., 4.

[4] For Ibn Hadhlūl's sources, see ibid., 4–5.

The third feature of dynastic histories emphasized the Arab character of the Saudi family,

presenting it as leading the Arabs' modern renaissance and their struggle for independence.

The Ibn Ghannām School and the Saudi state

Histories of the Al Saud first emerged at the turn of the nineteenth century within a new

school of Najdi chronicles. The founder of this school was Ḥusayn ibn Ghannām (1739–

1810), a scholar from the oasis of al-Aḥsāʾ in eastern Arabia who entered the service of the

first Saudi state. Saud ibn Abdulaziz (r. 1803–13), one of the princes of the Al Saud, invited

him to teach Arabic in the first Saudi capital al-Dirʿīyah near Riyadh. There, Ibn Ghannām

authored two major historical works at the order of either Saud ibn Abdulaziz or Muhammad

ibn Abd al-Wahhab, the founder of the Wahhabi mission himself.[5] Both were written in an

elaborate rhymed prose (*sajʿ*). The first was entitled *The Garden of Ideas and Concepts for*

Someone Exploring the State of the Imam (the imam referred to Ibn Abd al-Wahhab). It

included a portrait of the situation in Najd and al-Aḥsāʾ before the Wahhabi mission, a

biography of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab and a comment on some of his letters to various

dignitaries. The title of Ibn Ghannām's second historical work was *The Koranic Raids, the*

Divine Conquests, and the Reason for Them. It chronicled the Saudi expansion across

Arabia from 1746 until 1797.[6]

Although Ibn Ghannām was the pioneer of Saudi dynastic historiography, he was not

the first chronicler in Najd. At least six scholars, who mainly worked as judges, preceded

him. They included Aḥmad ibn Bassām (d. 1631), al-Manqūr (1656–1713), Ibn Rabīʿah

(1654–1745), Ibn ʿUḍayb (d. c. 1747), Ibn Yūsuf (whose work reaches 1759/60) and Ibn

ʿAbbād (d. 1761). This historiography was a local evolution that bore no explicit reference to

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[5] Peskes, *Muḥammad* (1993), 181.

[6] The rhymed original titles of the two works were *Rawḍat al-afkār wa-al-afhām li-murtād ḥāl al-imām* and *Al-ghazawāt al-bayānīyah wa-al-futūḥāt al-rabbānīyah wa-dhikr al-sabab alladhī ḥamal ʿalá dhālik*. On Ibn Ghannām and his work, see Peskes, *Muḥammad* (1993); al-Zaʿārīr, "Al-muʾarrikhūn" (1998); al-ʿUthaymīn, *Murājaʿāt* (2009), 31–58; al-Shuwayʿir, "Min turāthinā: ibn ghannām" (1978); Abu-Hakima, "Ibn Ghannām" (1971).

historical literature elsewhere in the Middle East. It recorded skirmishes, migrations, rainfalls, droughts, deaths of religious scholars and other events from the sixteenth century onwards. The chronicles probably emerged out of some sort of private diaries recording private and public events. Al-Manqūr, for instance, inserted a reference to the birth of a son, or his planting of an orchard, alongside killings and droughts.[7]

In contrast to Ibn Ghannām's works on Ibn Abd al-Wahhab and the expansion of the Al Saud, the pre-Wahhabi Najdi chronicles focused on the small hometowns and regions of their authors. Moreover, they neither explicitly took side in conflicts nor explained the reasons for, and consequences of, certain events. Their statements were brief, usually ambiguous and put in the passive form. As Michael Cook notes, 'in such-and-such a year, the chronicler will tell us, so-and-so was killed, the people of this settlement attacked the people of that, such-and-such a lineage migrated from here to there'.[8] The chroniclers thus offered hardly any explicit support to states and empires outside of Najd. Ibn ʿAbbād, for example, even mentioned the Ottoman conquest of Baghdad in the seventeenth century only briefly. He stated, 'In 1638, the battle of Baghdad happened, and Sultan Murād conquered it. Murād died after the conquest that year.'[9]

Ibn Ghannām's texts marked a departure from these previous Najdi annals. Written under the patronage of the first Saudi state, they formed an elaborate history of an expanding political and religious entity. The chronicler transcended his home region of al-Aḥsāʾ and followed the growth of the first Saudi state and the Wahhabi mission. In contrast to pre-Wahhabi authors, Ibn Ghannām also established the 'takfīrist' paradigm (from *takfīr* 'to declare someone an unbeliever'[10]) that featured so prominently in later Saudi historiography, such as Ibn Hadhlūl's text. This paradigm assumed that only the followers of the Wahhabi

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[7] Cook, "The Historians" (1992), 170. On the pre-Wahhabi Najdi historians generally, see also Al-Thenayan, "History Writing" (1976); Ibn Yūsuf, *Tārīkh* (1999), 35–47.

[8] Cook, "The Historians" (1992), 165.

[9] Ibn ʿAbbād, *Tārīkh* (1999), 57.

[10] Hunwick, "Takfīr" (2000), 122.

mission, led by the Al Saud, were true Muslims. Non-Wahhabi Muslims were described as infidels or idolaters.

Putting the takfīrist paradigm into practice, Ibn Ghannām applied a whole set of ideas and idioms from the historiography of early Islam to the first Saudi state. Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, the 'imam', propagated 'monotheism' (*tawḥīd*). He performed a 'hijra' from the land of polytheism in search for supporters. The Al Saud, who agreed to support his mission in 1744, subsequently undertook 'jihad', 'raids' (*ghazawāt*) and 'conquests' (*futūḥāt*). Earlier generations of Muslim historians used *ghazawāt* (singular *ghazwah*) and *fatḥ* (pl. *futūḥ* and *futūḥāt*) particularly to describe the Prophet Muhammad's expeditions against infidels.[11] In line with this terminology, Ibn Ghannām usually referred to the Al Saud and their subjects as the 'Muslims' and to their Arabian enemies as the 'idolaters' (*mushrikūn*). The Ottomans, for their part, appeared as the 'Romans' or 'Byzantines' (*rūm*).[12] Rebellions against the Al Saud were termed 'apostasy' (*riddah*),[13] implicitly referring to the battles between Arabian tribes and the early Muslims under the Prophet Muhammad and the first caliph Abu Bakr (r. 632–34).[14]

Ibn Ghannām's takfīrist paradigm was the expression of the violent exclusivism that characterized the Wahhabi mission, as the first Saudi state expanded from its base in al-Dirʿīyah and came into conflict with its neighbours. In this conflict, the Saudi leadership called all neighbouring rulers and their people to repentance for having lapsed from the pure monotheism of the early Muslims and for having espoused 'corrupt and decadent beliefs and practices', such as the veneration of tombs and saints.[15] In 1802, the Saudis sacked Karbala

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[11] Johnstone, "Ghazw" (1965), 1055. A term of the same root, *maghāzī*, came to prominence with *Kitāb al-maghāzī*, a work on Muhammad's campaigns by al-Wāqidī (747/48–822). Hinds, "al-Maghāzī" (1986), 1161. Baṭāyinah, "Al-fatḥ" (1978), 230–31. See, for instance, the *History of the Muslim Conquests* (*Futūḥ al-buldān*) by the ninth century historian al-Balādhurī, which described the conquests of Syria, Armenia, Egypt, the Maghrib, Iraq and Persia.

[12] Ibn Ghannām, *Rawḍat al-afkār* (1919).

[13] Al-Ziriklī, *Shibh al-jazīrah*, vol. 1 1970), 35.

[14] Lecker, "al-Ridda" (2004).

[15] Sirriyeh, "Wahhābīs" (1989), 123.

and destroyed the Shiite shrine of Muhammad's grandson Ḥusayn (626–80). By 1805, they

had conquered Mecca and Medina and had the audacity to call the Ottomans infidels. The

'imam' Saud ibn Abdulaziz, who had invited Ibn Ghannām to al-Dirʿīyah, proudly reminded

an Ottoman leader in Iraq that he refused a truce even if the Ottomans were willing to pay

tribute.[16] In another letter to the Ottoman governor of Iraq, dated 1810, Saud seemed to

deny that the governor and his followers were Muslims. He 'gave a long list of their sins,

concluding with a threat that if they did not mend their ways, the Wahhabis would fight them

until they did so'.[17]

An important part of the takfīrist paradigm in Ibn Ghannām's work was a conception of

the pre-Wahhabi situation as a *jāhilīyah* or 'age of ignorance', a term that refers to the time

before the Prophet Muhammad and denotes the opposite of Islam.[18] Ibn Ghannām argued

that before the Wahhabi mission, most people in Najd, al-Aḥsāʾ and neighbouring regions

had fallen back to 'idolatry' (*shirk*), 'aberration' (*ḍalāl*), and 'abominations'.[19] This argument

also reflected the Wahhabi discourse of his time. While Ibn Ghannām in his original text fell

short of actually using the term '*jāhilīyah*', other contemporary ulema were explicit in this

regard. They included, among others, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's grandson ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn

Ḥasan (1779–1869). He wrote that 'the people of Najd had been ignorant as in the *jāhilīyah,*

aberrant and blind. Idolatry had prevailed among them.'[20]

In contrast to the pre-Wahhabi Najdi chronicles, which had been written by scholars in

small towns, Ibn Ghannām's work represented historical production in the service of a

nascent state. With an income from taxes and booty that far exceeded the budgets of the

earlier Najdi petty princes, the Saudi religious and political leadership were able to finance

his elaborate historiography. The state did not only employ Ibn Ghannām as teacher in al-

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[16] Al-Fahad, "From Exclusivism" (2004), 494.

[17] Ibid., 495.

[18] B. Lewis, "Djāhiliyya" (1965). On *jāhilīyah* in Arabic historiography, see also Webb, "'Barbarism'" (2011), and Peter Webb's forthcoming thesis at SOAS.

[19] Ibn Ghannām, *Rawḍat al-afkār* (1919), 5.

[20] ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb et al., *Majmūʿat al-rasāʾil* (1928), 136.

Dirʿīyah. The state's leadership also sought to collect historical sources, thus putting the author in contact with the historiography of early Islam, whose idioms he adopted. John Lewis Burckhardt (1784–1817), a Swiss traveller who visited western Arabia between 1814 and 1815, observed that historical works appeared to be 'in particular request' in al-Dirʿīyah. He noted the purchase and removal of numerous works from the Hejaz and Yemen and believed the library of Ibn Ghannām's patron Saud ibn Abdulaziz to be the richest of its day in 'Arabic manuscripts on historical subjects'.[21]

The violent expansion of the first Saudi state, and especially its challenge of the Ottomans through the conquest of Mecca and Medina, as well as incursions into Iraq, eventually led to its demise. Because of this, the resource base and infrastructure for elaborate dynastic historical production was also destroyed. In 1818, Egyptian–Ottoman forces left al-Dirʿīyah in ruins and shipped many descendants of Muhammad ibn Saud and Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab to Egypt. Abdullah ibn Saud (r. 1814–18), the last ruler of the first Saudi state, was executed in Istanbul at the behest of the sultan. Thus, patronage for histories of the Al Saud was interrupted in central Arabia. Moreover, the libraries of al-Dirʿīyah were looted and their manuscripts burnt or moved to the Hejaz.[22]

After the fall of al-Dirʿīyah, the power of the Al Saud re-emerged in the form of the second Saudi state. In 1824, forces led by Turki, a son of the executed Abdullah ibn Saud, re-conquered Riyadh from the Egyptians under Muhammad Ali, and made this town the capital of his new state. The second Saudi state did not gain the same reach as its predecessor. It neither conquered Mecca and Medina nor attacked Karbala. However, by controlling much of central and eastern Arabia, and especially the rich eastern oasis of al-

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[21] Burckhardt, *Notes* (1830), 142. Quoted in: Cook, "The Historians" (1992), 176. On libraries and scholarship in al-Dirʿīyah, see al-Munīf, "Al-ḥayāt" (2010).

[22] Al-Munīf, "Qirāʾah" [2009], 5–6.

Aḥsāʾ, this state still commanded considerable resources. These resources allowed it to sponsor some scholarly works in history as well as other fields.[23]

Under the second Saudi state, the writing of dynastic history that Ibn Ghannām had started continued in the work of Ḥamad ibn Laʿbūn (c. 1767–1844). From Najd, Ibn Laʿbūn became a supporter of the Saudi state and the Wahhabi mission. He became a tax collector under Abdulaziz ibn Muhammad ibn Saud (r. 1765–1803) and later imam of the grand mosque of the town of al-Tuwaym.[24] Trained as a religious scholar, Ibn Laʿbūn also authored a chronicle. Drawing on the pre-Wahhabi Najdi chronicles by Ibn Bassām, al-Manqūr, and Ibn Rabīʿah as well as other works, he began his account with Adam.[25] He focused, however, on the history of the Saudi state since 1744. For this period, he drew on Ibn Ghannām and, like him, expressed the takfīrist paradigm. He also stripped Ibn Ghannām's account of its rhymed prose (*sajʿ*), making the history of the Al Saud more accessible to readers.[26]

While Ibn Laʿbūn adopted Ibn Ghannām's takfīrist paradigm, he also made his own contribution to dynastic historiography. Whereas Ibn Ghannām had introduced the idea of a pre-Wahhabi *jāhilīyah*, Ibn Laʿbūn was the first Arabian historian to conceive the emerging power in Najd as a 'state', calling it 'the Ḥanafī Saudi state' (*al-dawlah al-suʿūdīyah al-ḥanafīyah*).[27] 'Ḥanafī' probably related to the Banū Ḥanīfah, the Al Saud's parent tribe, or *ḥanīf*, 'following the true monotheistic religion'.[28] In order to strengthen the contrast between the new Saudi state and the smaller Arabian petty emirates and sheikhdoms, the historian called Muhammad ibn Saud, the first ruler of the Saudi state, 'imam' or supreme leader of

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[23] On the second Saudi state, see Wagemakers, "The Enduring Legacy" (2012); Winder, *Saudi Arabia* (1965); Abū ʿAlīyah, *Al-dawlah* [1969].

[24] Ibn Laʿbūn, *Tārīkh* (2008), 29. On Ibn Laʿbūn's life, see also al-Muṭawwaʿ, "Naẓarīyāt" (2011).

[25] Al-ʿAskar, "Ibn laʿbūn" (2009).

[26] Ibn Laʿbūn, *Tārīkh* (2008), 33.

[27] Ibid., 48. While *dawlah* may also mean 'dynasty', Ibn Laʿbūn's particular usage of the term suggests that he meant 'state'. On *dawlah* as 'dynasty', see Rosenthal, "Dawla" (1965). On *dawlah* as 'state', see al-ʿAskar, *Taḥqīb* (2009), 62–66.

[28] Al-ʿAskar, "Ibn laʿbūn" (2009).

the Muslims. Ibn Ghannām, in contrast, had still mentioned him until his death with the title

of most Arabian chiefs, 'emir', and only called his successors 'imams'.[29]

Besides Ibn Laʿbūn, the second Saudi state supported another scholar who built on

Ibn Ghannām's account: ʿUthmān ibn Bishr (1795–1873). Thus, during the late eighteenth

and nineteenth centuries, a school of takfīrist chroniclers of the Al Saud gradually came into

being. This school can be called the Ibn Ghannām School, with Ibn Bishr as its third

prominent member. From the town of Jalājil in Najd, Ibn Bishr moved to the capital of the

first Saudi state, al-Dirʿīyah, in about 1809. There, he studied Arabic under Ibn Ghannām

and attended lectures on Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's manifesto, the *Book of Monotheism* (*Kitāb al-

tawḥīd*).[30] After the establishment of the second Saudi state, Faisal ibn Turki (r. 1834–38 and

1843–65), the state's longest-ruling monarch, hired Ibn Bishr to write a new chronicle on the

history of his state. To that end, he not only supplied the scholar with paper imported via

pilgrims from the Hejaz, but also personally corrected his work.[31] Relying on Ibn Ghannām

and Ibn Laʿbūn, Ibn Bishr authored a new chronicle of the Saudi dynasty and the Wahhabi

mission up to 1850. It was entitled *The Symbol of Glory in the History of Najd*.[32] Like Ibn

Laʿbūn, Ibn Bishr also wrote his work in plain prose.

Stressing the difference between the Ibn Ghannām School and its Najdi

predecessors, Ibn Bishr put great distance between his own takfīrist dynastic writing and

pre-Wahhabi scholars. He extended the notion of the pre-Wahhabi 'age of ignorance' to the

field of historiography, arguing that previous Najdi ulema produced hardly any real history. At

the beginning of his chronicle, he stated that 'the people of Najd and their ancient and

modern scholars were not concerned with recording what happened during their times or in

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[29] Al-Ziriklī, *Shibh al-jazīrah*, vol. 1 (1970), 35–36. Ibn Laʿbūn, *Tārīkh* (2008), 481–82. On descriptions of the Saudi state in Ibn Laʿbūn's work, see also al-Muṭawwaʿ, "Tārīkh" (2011).

[30] Al-ʿUthaymīn, *Muḥammad* (2009), xvii. Āl Bassām, *ʿUlamāʾ*, vol. 5 [1999], 115–16. Al-Shuwayʿir, "Min turāthinā: ibn ghannām" (1978), 37.

[31] Al-Munīf, "Al-ḥayāt" (2010), 149; "Qirāʾah" [2009], 2–3. Abdullah al-Muneef, interview, 2 October 2011.

[32] Ibn Bishr, *ʿUnwān* (1910). For a discussion of Ibn Bishr's work generally, see Peskes, *Muḥammad* (1993). For an overview of Ibn Bishr's sources, see Ibn Bishr, *Sawābiq* (2008), 5–16. For the relationship between Ibn Bishr, Ibn Ghannām and Ibn Laʿbūn works, see Ibn Laʿbūn, *Tārīkh* (2008), 32–34.

their hometowns, or who built them'. Regarding the 'rare pieces' of writing that existed, Ibn Bishr complained about their lack of argument. 'When they mention a year, they only state that so-and-so the son of so-and-so was killed, and do not mention the name of the killer nor the reason. When they mention a fight or event, they state that in this year the battle so-and-so happened.' Ibn Bishr continued that 'we all know that since the time of Adam, there has been fighting. What we want to know is the truth and the reason.' Yet, 'all of this is absent' from previous Najdi histories.[33]

While Ibn Bishr was dismissive of the method of pre-Wahhabi Najdi chroniclers, he nevertheless used their accounts. They served him in drawing a sharp contrast between the periods before and after the establishment of the first Saudi state. Precisely because the records of fights and killings appeared meaningless to him, they allowed him to draw a static image of conflicts and division in pre-Wahhabi Najd. In an innovation that marked a departure from most pre-modern Arabic historiography, Ibn Bishr paused after certain sections in the main body of his annals that dealt with the history of the Saudi state. In these pauses, he inserted accounts of the pre-Wahhabi past as kind of 'flashbacks'.[34] They include reports of killings and battles written by the pre-Wahhabi authors, al-Manqūr, Ibn Rabīʿah, Ibn Yūsuf and Ibn ʿAbbād. The flashbacks thus served to remind the listeners of the security and prosperity that Najd enjoyed under Saudi rule.[35]

Despite the pro-Saudi agenda of the Ibn Ghannām School, the relative isolation of the second Saudi state did not allow for a wide distribution of the School's works. Even at its height under Ibn Bishr's patron Faisal ibn Turki, the state lacked access to printing presses, which the Ottomans only introduced to the Arabian peninsula in the 1870s and 1880s.[36] After the death of Faisal in 1865, the second Saudi state itself suffered from infighting within the Al Saud and collapsed in 1891. In total, probably not more than ten copies of each

[33] Ibn Bishr, *ʿUnwān* (1982), 29. See also Cook, "The Historians" (1992), 165.
[34] Rentz, *The Birth* (2004), 237.
[35] Al Juhany, *Najd* (2002), 11.
[36] Ibn Junayd, *Al-ṭibāʿah* (1998).

chronicle were produced in the nineteenth century.[37] Three manuscripts of Ibn Bishr's

Symbol of Glory, dated 1843, 1854, and 1858, are known to have survived until the

present.[38] Likewise, three manuscripts of Ibn Laʿbūn's history and three handwritten copies

of Ibn Ghannām's work, one of them dated 1886, have been preserved.[39]

The influence of the Wahhabi mission, however, reached beyond, and survived, the

second Saudi state. This led some of its opponents to produce historical accounts that

challenged the portrayals of the Al Saud as the only true Muslims. One of the most important

opponents was Aḥmad Daḥlān (1816–86), the Shāfiʿī mufti of Mecca.[40] Besides anti-

Wahhabi tracts, he wrote *A Synopsis of the Princes of the Sacred City*, a history of the

Meccan sharifs. It was printed posthumously in Cairo in 1888.[41] Contrary to the Ibn

Ghannām School, Daḥlān sought to demonstrate that the Wahhabi mission contradicted the

Sunna, and thus Islam. He emphasized that during the Saudi conquest of Ta'if of 1803, the

followers of Wahhabism treated the local Muslims as infidels. They killed them

indiscriminately, including women and children, and even those praying in the mosques.

They looted everything except the manuscripts of the Koran and Hadith collections, which

they destroyed in the streets.[42]

Daḥlān's condemnation of the Wahhabi mission formed part of a wider criticism of

Wahhabi teachings and practices.[43] Such criticism already arose among contemporaries of

Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, as the Wahhabi mission and the first Saudi state expanded. In the

second half of the nineteenth century, however, the criticism flared up again and reached

larger audiences thanks to the proliferation of the printing press. For instance, Dāwūd ibn

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[37] Abdullah Al-Muneef, e-mail to me, 24 January 2011.

[38] Ibn Bishr, *Sawābiq* (2008), 20–3.

[39] Ibn Laʿbūn, *Tārīkh* (2008), 18. Al-ʿUthaymīn, *Muḥammad* (2009), 152. Public readings might have led to further circulation, although its extent is not clear in the nineteenth-century Najd. On reading practices, see Hirschler, *The Written Word* (2012).

[40] On Daḥlān, see Freitag, "Der Orientalist" (2003); Schacht, "Daḥlān" (1960).

[41] Daḥlān, *Khulāṣat al-kalām* [1888].

[42] Peskes, *Muḥammad* (1993), 140–41.

[43] On Sunni opposition to the Wahhabi mission, see also Redissi, "The Refutation" (2008).

Jirjīsh (1816–82), a Shāfiʿī scholar in Baghdad, published a number of tracts in which he argued that the Wahhabi postulates had no basis in Sunni Islam generally nor in the Ḥanbalī School of Islamic legal thought, to which Ibn Abd al-Wahhab had ascribed.[44]

The criticism of the Wahhabi mission by Daḥlān as well as other scholars encouraged the mission's followers to further support the proliferation of the Ibn Ghannām School.[45] In the early twentieth century, these followers benefitted from the mission's expansion into Middle Eastern countries that already possessed printing presses. In 1925, a book appeared in Cairo that relied heavily on Ibn Bishr. It was entitled *The History of Najd* and written by Maḥmūd al-Ālūsī (1856–1924), a scholar in Baghdad, whose family enjoyed a close relationship with the Al Saud. Against the notion that the Wahhabi mission contradicted the Sunna, al-Ālūsī argued that 'the people of Najd are all Muslims and professors of God's unity'. They follow the 'beliefs of the pious ancestors [*al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ*]', that is, the early Muslims.[46] In 1910, two of al-Ālūsī's Najdi disciples printed Ibn Bishr's *Symbol of Glory* for the first time in Baghdad. This edition aimed at gaining recognition of the Wahhabi mission among Sunnis outside of Najd.[47]

After a brief interregnum following the fall of the second Saudi state, a new Saudi state emerged under the leadership of Abdulaziz Al Saud, a grandson of Ibn Bishr's patron Faisal ibn Turki. This state, commonly called the third or modern Saudi state, would take on the name 'Kingdom of Saudi Arabia' in 1932. Abdulaziz also sponsored a continuation of the Ibn Ghannām School. He hired the Najdi chronicler Ibrāhīm ibn ʿĪsá to write an addendum to Ibn Bishr's history under the title *The String of Pearls*.[48] Ibn ʿĪsá's work in turn received a supplement by ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Nāṣir (1897–1970), another religious scholar. Ibn Nāṣir's

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[44] Peskes, *Muḥammad* (1993), 126–29.

[45] Ibid., 152.

[46] Al-Ālūsī, *Tārīkh* (1924), 41. For a discussion of Al-Ālūsī's *History*, see Peskes, *Muḥammad* (1993), 152–64. On al-Ālūsī and his work, see also Ḥāṭūm et al., *Al-madkhal* (1982), 597–99. On the relationship between the Ālūsīs, the Wahhabi mission, and Al Saud, see also Fattah, "'Wahhabi'" (2003); al-Sakkar, "A Saudi–Iraqi" (1976).

[47] Ibn Bishr, *ʿUnwān* (1910). Peskes, *Muḥammad* (1993), 341.

[48] Āl Bassām, *Khizānat al-tawārīkh*, vol. 2 (1999), 10–9. Ibn ʿĪsá, *ʿIqd* (1999).

text begins in 1884, ends with the events of 1936/37,[49] and resembles Ibn Bishr's history in its title: *The Symbol of Fortune and Glory*.[50] This latest member of the Ibn Ghannām School probably also received, or at least, sought patronage from the state's leadership, as he sent his manuscript to King Abdulaziz's brother Musaid (1922–86).[51]

Abdulaziz Al Saud used the translocal connections of the Wahhabi mission to print Ibn Ghannām's work for the first time. Here, the ruler benefitted from the Gulf's scholarly and trade links to India. Already in the late nineteenth century, followers of the Wahhabi mission published a number of books, including Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's *Book of Monotheism*, in British India and thus beyond the reach of Ottoman censorship.[52] With the help of a merchant from Riyadh, Abdulaziz published Ibn Ghannām's two books through a press in Mumbai in 1919.[53] They were combined under the title *The Garden of Ideas and Concepts for Someone Exploring the State of the Imam and the List of Islamic Raids*.[54]

In the 1920s, the Saudi government became able to print the works of the Ibn Ghannām School inside the kingdom. In 1924, Saudi forces conquered Mecca for the second time after 1803 and took possession of the first printing press. In 1885/86, the Ottomans had originally brought this press to Mecca, where it subsequently served the Hashemites by printing *al-Qiblah*, their official gazette. Under the Saudis, the press was promptly renamed Umm al-Qurá Press.[55] The press mainly published the official newspaper *Umm al-Qurá*, 'The Mother of Towns' (i.e. Mecca). Yet, in 1938, it also printed a part of Ibn Laʿbūn's history, which had first spoken of a Saudi 'state', at the order and expense of King Abdulaziz.[56]

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[49] Al-Shibl, "Ahamm" (1980), 264–86.

[50] *ʿUnwān al-saʿd wa-al-majd fī-mā ustuẓrifa min akhbār al-ḥijāz wa-najd.*

[51] Al-Shibl, "Ahamm" (1980), 269. Abū ʿAlīyah, "Makhṭūṭ" (1979), 304.

[52] Al-Ḍubayb, "Ḥarakat iḥyāʾ" (1975), 45–46.

[53] Al-Rifāʿī, "ʿInāyat al-malik" (1986), 65.

[54] Ibn Ghannām, *Rawḍat al-afkār* (1919).

[55] Wensinck et al., "Makka" (1991), 175–76.

[56] Ibn Laʿbūn, *Tārīkh* [1938]. Ibn Laʿbūn, *Tārīkh* (2008), 30.

Despite its new capability to print books domestically, the Saudi government continued to use foreign presses, which were often more technically advanced, for the publication of works of the Ibn Ghannām School. From the 1920s onwards, it co-operated with the Salafīyah Press, which two Syrian Salafis had founded in Cairo in 1909. This private press was instrumental in spreading the term 'Salafism' and its association with 'Wahhabism' in the twentieth century.[57] It thus contributed to rehabilitating the Wahhabis in the eyes of many Sunni Muslims as followers of the way of the pious 'ancestors' (*salaf*).[58] In 1924, the Salafīyah Press published the *History of Najd* by Maḥmūd al-Ālūsī, who had relied on Ibn Bishr.[59] In 1927, it established a branch in Mecca that specialized in Ḥanbalī and Wahhabi texts. Three years later, in 1930, this branch issued an extended version of Ibn Bishr's *Symbol of Glory*.[60]

After World War II, the Najdi scholar and entrepreneur ʿAbd al-Muḥsin Abābuṭayn (1918/19–81) joined the Salafīyah Press in publishing editions of the chronicles of the Ibn Ghannām School. He was a former student of several Wahhabi ulema, including Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm Āl al-Shaykh (1893–1969), a descendant of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab and later grand mufti of Saudi Arabia.[61] In 1945, Abābuṭayn opened one of the first commercial bookshops, the Ahlīyah, 'Private', Bookstore in Riyadh. Through this bookshop in 1949, he republished Ibn Ghannām's work under the new, 'modern' title *History of Najd*.[62] In the absence of any printing presses in Riyadh, he commissioned the Cairo-based Muṣṭafá al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī and Sons Bookstore and Press to print the work. This press possessed a record of accomplishment in publishing historical work.[63] In 1954, Abābuṭayn's Ahlīyah

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[57] Lauzière, "The Construction" (2010), 376–83.

[58] Lauzière, "The Evolution" (2008).

[59] Al-Ālūsī, *Tārīkh* (1924).

[60] Ibn Bishr *ʿInwān* [1930].

[61] Hunaydah, "Al-ʿallāmah" (2009).

[62] Ibn Ghannām, *Tārīkh* (1949), 3.

[63] Al-Waqt, "Al-bābī" (2008).

Bookstore also paid for the publication of a new edition of Ibn Bishr's history. This edition included the first print of Ibn ʿĪsá's chronicle, *The String of Pearls*, as an appendix.[64]

While the Salafīyah and Ahlīyah companies were private businesses, the Saudi state encouraged and supported their publication of the chronicles of the Ibn Ghannām School. When the Salafīyah Press established its Mecca branch, the government exempted it from all customs on their equipment and machines as well as from the financial deposit required by law. In 1932, it also removed import duties from paper used for the printing of religious books generally.[65] In 1930, the official newspaper *Umm al-Qurá* recommended Ibn Ghannām, Ibn Bishr and Ibn ʿĪsá's chronicles in a front-page article as 'the books authored by the most formidable Najdis'.[66] Finally, Abdulaziz ordered the purchase of numerous copies of Ibn Ghannām and Ibn Bishr's histories and their free distribution.[67]

The Saudi state also promoted the Ibn Ghannām School by suppressing dissenting histories. This becomes clear in the story of Muqbil al-Dhukayr (1882/83–1944), a Najdi, whose international connections in the Persian Gulf allowed him to gain an education outside the Saudi realm. From a wealthy family of merchants and landowners, al-Dhukayr studied in his hometown ʿUnayzah in the region of al-Qaṣīm as well as in Kuwait and Bahrain. In addition, he read books and literary magazines imported from Egypt and Lebanon, including the pioneering Arabic scientific review *al-Muqtaṭaf*, 'The Digest'. After he had worked as a secretary and accountant for Bahraini merchants, King Abdulaziz appointed him as the director of the treasury of al-Aḥsāʾ in 1924/25. In 1930/31, al-Dhukayr retired from this position in order to set up a business in Bahrain. By that time, he had also completed a manuscript chronicle of Najd.[68]

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[64] Ibn Bishr, *ʿInwān* (1954).

[65] Al-Ḍubayb, "Ḥarakat iḥyāʾ (1978), 10.

[66] Umm al-Qurá, "ʿUthmān" (1930), 1.

[67] Al-ʿUtaybī, *Al-mamlakah* [1999], 205–7.

[68] Āl Bassām, *Khizānat al-tawārīkh*, vol. 7 [1999], 7–19:

Al-Dhukayr did not intend his chronicle to be anti-Saudi. One of the titles the author

contemplated even read *The Dawn of Good Fortune: The History of Najd and the Al Saud*.[69]

However, the work was critical of Ibn Ghannām and Ibn Bishr and did not share their

takfīrism. Al-Dhukayr argued, for instance, that Ibn Ghannām was mistaken in his negative

judgment of Dihām ibn Dawwās (r. 1737–74), an emir of Riyadh and long-term opponent of

the Al Saud. During Dihām's time, the Saudi family resided in neighbouring al-Dirʿīyah. Al-

Dhukayr stated that 'Ibn Ghannām is probably not free from prejudice against Dihām'

because of Dihām's 'opposition' to the Wahhabi mission. In contrast to Ibn Ghannām, al-

Dhukayr saw positive aspects in Dihām's reign, like the growth of Riyadh. In addition, he

portrayed the conflict between the Saudis and Dihām as political rather than religious,

considering Dihām's 'strong resistance that lasted seventeen years not as directed against

religion but as defence of his position'.[70] Al-Dhukayr also denounced Ibn Ghannām and Ibn

Bishr's depiction of an anti-Saudi rebellion in his home region, al-Qaṣīm, in the 1780s as

'apostasy'. Al-Dhukayr called this depiction a 'vilification of the people of al-Qaṣīm' and

'irrational talk'.[71]

Unsurprisingly, al-Dhukayr became a victim of censorship. While he worked for the

Saudi government in al-Aḥsāʾ, his chronicle aroused the interest of King Abdulaziz, who

asked the author to send him a copy. Upon receipt, the ruler, however, was reportedly not

pleased by the chronicle's praise for some individuals of the Āl Rashīd, the former rulers of

the region of Jabal Shammar in northern Saudi Arabia. Consequently, Abdulaziz did not

return the manuscript to its author. For unknown reasons, Iraqi authorities confiscated a

second copy from a merchant at Baghdad airport during the reign of King Ghazi (1933–39).

Al-Dhukayr's history thus remained unpublished until ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-

Bassām (b. 1927/28–2003), a judge and descendant of the pre-Wahhabi chronicler Aḥmad

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[69] *Maṭāliʿ al-suʿūd fī tārīkh najd wa-āl suʿūd*. Al-Shuwayʿir, "Min turāthinā: muqbil" (September 1978), 86.

[70] Al-Shuwayʿir, "Min turāthinā: muqbil al-dhukayr wal-tārīkhuhū "2"" (December 1978), 126.

[71] Ibid., 127.

ibn Bassām, presumably found the second copy. Somehow, it had ended up in a library of the University of Baghdad.[72]

Censorship of al-Dhukayr's work and control over the Najdi historiographical tradition generally continued even in ʿAbd Allāh al-Bassām's time. In 1999, the judge published al-Dhukayr's history within a ten-volume collection entitled *Library of Najdi Histories*. This collection, which was published in Beirut, also contained editions of numerous other Najdi manuscript chronicles in the possession of al-Bassām and his family. Besides works by Ibn ʿĪsá, Ibn Laʿbūn, and Ibn Nāṣir, these chronicles included works by previously little known writers who did not belong to the Ibn Ghannām School.[73] The Saudi government bought up and banned this collection almost immediately.[74] Fahd al-Semmari, the secretary general of the King Abdulaziz Foundation for Research and Archives, justified this measure through a 'problem' in the 'method' of the edition. 'Sheikh al-Bassām is an old man. He just gave the manuscripts to the printing press, where they were typed.' The edition thus contained many errors. 'There is a page by Ibn ʿĪsá in the history of Ibn Nāṣir, for instance.' This was intolerable, because 'people rely on these sources'. Al-Semmari added that the King Abdulaziz Foundation for Research and Archives would re-edit and republish the work.[75] This, however, has not yet happened, and the work has been successfully put out of circulation.

After individual entrepreneurs had published the first printed editions of the chronicles of the Ibn Ghannām School, the Saudi government and senior Wahhabi ulema became more involved in their promotion in the 1960s. However, they continued to rely on foreign expertise. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz ibn Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm Āl al-Shaykh (1919–2005), the eldest son of the Saudi grand mufti, sought to make Ibn Ghannām's chronicle more appealing to

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[72] Āl Bassām, *Khizānat al-tawārīkh*, vol. 7 [1999], 8.

[73] Ibid., 7–8.

[74] Interviews with several Saudi historians in 2009 and 2010. Al-Munīf, "Tārīkhunā" [c. 1999], 1.

[75] Interview, 3 November 2010.

the 'contemporary youth'.[76] He thus commissioned Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Asad (b. 1922), a Jordanian scholar, with a re-edition. Al-Asad was charged especially with rephrasing the text in order to rid it of the rhymed prose (*saj'*), which hindered understanding.[77] The text, which was published through a Cairo-based press as *History of Najd*, was thus altered, but kept the takfīrist paradigm. Probably under the influence of ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz Āl al-Shaykh, al-Asad's edition explicitly spoke of a pre-Wahhabi 'age of ignorance' or *jāhilīyah*, a notion that had remained implicit in Ibn Ghannām and Ibn Bishr's original texts.[78] The rephrased text stated that 'most Muslims—at the beginning of the eighteenth century—had regressed to idolatry [*shirk*] and fallen back to the age of ignorance [*jāhilīyah*]'.[79]

Like Ibn Ghannām's work, Ibn Bishr's history also appeared in new editions sponsored by the government and endorsed by the Wahhabi establishment. After the edition of Abābuṭayn's Ahlīyah Bookstore had sold out, the Ministry of Education reissued the work in 1967 and distributed it without charge. Thereby, the ministry claimed to fulfil the wish of the 'Imam of the Muslims', King Faisal, 'as this noble scholarly work corresponds with his Islamic directives and religious zeal'.[80] In 1971, the ministry, then under Ḥasan Āl al-Shaykh (1933–87), published the work again in an edition by ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn ʿAbd al-Laṭīf Āl al-Shaykh, yet another descendant of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn ʿAbd al-Laṭīf promoted Ibn Bishr's *Symbol of Glory* as the foundational text for the writing of Najdi history. According to him, it was 'the only source on the historical events that happened in Najd from the dawn of the reform movement and the appearance of the Salafi mission until fifteen years before the death of Imam Faisal ibn Turki', that is, until about 1850.[81]

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[76] Ibn Ghannām, *Tārīkh* (1994), 5.

[77] Ibid., 8.

[78] Ibn Ghannām, *Rawḍat al-afkār* (1919). Ibn Bishr, *ʿInwān* (1930). I thank Abdullah Al-Muneef for pointing this out to me.

[79] Ibn Ghannām, *Tārīkh* (1985), 13.

[80] Ibn Bishr, *ʿUnwān* (1971), 8.

[81] Ibid., 7.

The result of this state support over many decades was the domination of the Ibn Ghannām School in the Najdi historiographical tradition and subsequently in dynastic historiography in the emerging modern kingdom. The imposition of this school also sidelined the Hejazi historiographical tradition.[82] Being subsumed under the notion of a pre-Wahhabi 'age of ignorance', the memory of the pre-Wahhabi historians themselves had become suppressed if not obliterated in the minds of many. These minds included Ḥasan Āl al-Shaykh, who was the first chair of the King Abdulaziz Foundation for Research and Archives besides being minister of education. In 1975, he gave an interview in the foundation's flagship journal *al-Dārah*. He argued that in Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's time, 'people lived in a state of anxiety, trouble, and fear. Therefore, no one in Arabia would have been concerned with its history, had God not sent the two sheikhs Ibn Ghannām and Ibn Bishr'.[83]

Foreigners and dynastic exclusivism

While the chronicles of the Ibn Ghannām School were published and republished, a number of authors wrote new works on the history of the Saudi dynasty between the 1920s and 1960s. With the exception of Ibn Hadhlūl and a few others,[84] most of these authors were not indigenous Saudis, but foreigners who became close to, or formed part of, the Saudi government. These authors developed a dynastic exclusivism that conceived the history of the country essentially as the history of the Al Saud. While the chroniclers of the Ibn Ghannām School had focused on the actions of Saudi rulers as residents in Najd who partly drew on pre-Wahhabi local chronicles, they had also noted non-dynastic events in their local environments, such as biographies and deaths of scholars, droughts and rainfalls. The foreigners in contrast, who had few ties to local communities, focused much more on the Al Saud. Their histories thus became more dynastic histories than 'histories of Najd' (as editions of Ibn Ghannām and Ibn Bishr's histories were entitled).

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[82] On the Hejazi tradition, see al-Haylah, *Al-tārīkh* (1994).

[83] Al-Fātiḥ and Āl al-Shaykh, "Ḥiwār" (1975), 38.

[84] Another indigenous dynastic historian was ʿAbd al-Ghafūr ʿAṭṭār (1916–91). See his *Ṣaqr al-jazirah* (1946).

These foreign authors were attracted by the new international prominence the Saudi state had gained in the 1920s. The Saudi realm not only comprised the Muslim holy places of Mecca and Medina after 1925, but also remained formally independent unlike most other Arab countries. In addition, Saudi Arabia became more integrated into global political and economic systems. By 1938, thirteen countries, including the Soviet Union, France and the United Kingdom, had embassies or consulates in Saudi Arabia. The kingdom in turn had representatives in the United Kingdom, Egypt, Iraq and Syria.[85] At the time, however, few indigenous Saudis were proficient in foreign languages, international law and international relations. The government thus needed the foreigners for its engagements in the international arena.

One of the first foreign dynastic historians was Ameen Rihani (1876–1940), a Lebanese-American writer. After having developed an interest in the politics of the Arab world, he attended the ʿUqayr conference in 1922, in which Abdulaziz Al Saud negotiated the Najdi–Kuwaiti borders with the British.[86] Subsequently, Rihani travelled to Riyadh, where he persuaded the Saudi ruler to accept him as his biographer. Over the course of six weeks, Abdulaziz dictated his life and the history of his family to him. In addition, the ruler provided the writer with copies of Ibn Ghannām and Ibn Bishr's histories. After his return to Lebanon, Rihani continued to receive letters with comments and corrections from the Saudi monarch as well as copies of *Umm al-Qurá*, the official gazette.[87] On that basis in 1928, the writer published a book entitled *The Modern History of Najd and its Dependencies and the Life of Abdulaziz ibn Abdulrahman al-Faisal Al Saud, King of Hejaz and Najd and their*

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[85] Nallino, *Raccolta* (1939), 148.

[86] Muḥammad al-Thunayyān, *Amīn* (1997). On Rihani and his historical works, see also Hajjar, *The Politics* (2010).

[87] Āl Suʿūd and al-Rīḥānī, *Al-malik* (2001).

Dependencies. In the same year, he also published a book for English-speaking audiences under the title *Ibn Sa'oud of Arabia: His People and His Land*.[88]

The Modern History of Najd and Its Dependencies was one of the first histories displaying dynastic exclusivism. Rihani as a foreigner who spent relatively little time in Najd had few ties to local communities and did not use pre-Wahhabi works. In his history, specific towns and regions thus only appeared in connection to conquests and other actions by Saudi rulers. The oasis of al-Aḥsāʾ, for instance, appeared mainly in a chapter about Abdulaziz's 'conquest of al-Aḥsāʾ' (in 1913) and the Hejazi town of Ta'if in 'the fall of Ta'if' (in 1924).[89]

Some foreigners not only visited Saudi Arabia, but due to their foreign education they also became senior members of the Saudi government. They included a group of officials, whom some indigenous officials and Hejazi notables still resentfully called 'the Syrians' years after they had gained Saudi citizenship.[90] One of the most prominent was Youssef Yassin (1892–1962), a Syrian from Latakia who had come to Mecca in the early 1920s and served as the founding editor of *Umm al-Qurá* and as Abdulaziz's director of publicity. Later, he worked as director of the political section of the royal court and minister of state.[91] Another major figure was Fuad Hamza (1899–1951). From Lebanon, he was educated at the Syrian Protestant College in Beirut and Jerusalem's Law School.[92] Subsequently, he enjoyed a similar career to his colleague and rival Yassin. In 1926, Abdulaziz appointed him as a personal interpreter and advisor. Thanks to his skills and the 'flat hierarchies' in Abdulaziz's highly personalized government, Hamza quickly rose to the position of deputy minister of foreign affairs.[93]

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[88] Al-Rīḥānī, *Tārīkh* (1928). Rihani, *Ibn Sa'oud* (1928). Rihani also covered Abdulaziz in al-Rīḥānī, *Mulūk* (1924).

[89] Al-Rīḥānī, *Tārīkh* (1928).

[90] Childs, "Syro-Lebanese Clique" (1980), 158. Kostiner, *The Making* (1993), 147.

[91] Phillips, "Leading Personalities" (2008), 150–51.

[92] Jordan, "Personalities" (1997), 122.

[93] Al-Ziriklī, *Al-aʿlām*, vol. 5 (1969), 367.

The absence of many indigenous Saudis trained in foreign languages and international relations benefitted migrants from Greater Syria. Yet, the Saudi leadership also had strategic interests in employing them. According to a British diplomat, King Abdulaziz seemed to have retained Yassin and Hamza in his service partly in order to cement good relations with Syria and Lebanon. He hoped to keep both states as allies against the Hashemites, the former rulers of the Hejaz who headed the monarchies of Iraq and Transjordan.[94] Domestically, Abdulaziz preferred to employ foreigners in the royal court, as they did not hold a local power base. Relying on them, he was able to keep the old Hejazi elite away from real power.[95]

The Syrians also worked for Abdulaziz in public relations, which included the field of dynastic historiography. While Yassin oversaw the publication of articles on the king's life and travels in the official gazette *Umm al-Qurá*, Hamza published two books on the Saudi state in 1933 and 1937: *The Heart of Arabia* and *Saudi Arabia*.[96] Both works catered for the increasing international demand for information about the kingdom. Hamza justified the publication of *The Heart of Arabia* by claiming that the 'public needs a modern reference work that is easily accessible and combines the general information scattered across old Arabic works and books by orientalists and European travellers that do not exist in Arabic'.[97] A few years later, he still noticed 'a clear lack of factual information and necessary details' about the Saudi state among politicians, writers and journalists from outside the country. He claimed to fill this lack with *Saudi Arabia*.[98]

Like Rihani's *History of Najd*, Hamza's books also displayed an exclusive concern with the Saudi dynasty. Stricter than Ibn Bishr and Ibn ʿĪsá, the author mentioned Arabian towns and regions mainly in relation to the Al Saud. Thus, the establishment of the modern

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[94] Childs, "Syro-Lebanese Clique" (1980), 159.

[95] Al-Hassan, "The Role" (2006), 158.

[96] Yāsīn, *Al-raḥalāt* (1999). Ḥamzah, *Qalb* (1933); *Al-bilād* (1937).

[97] Ḥamzah, *Qalb* (1933), j.

[98] Ḥamzah, *Al-bilād* (1968), 5.

Saudi kingdom appeared primarily as a series of conquests led by Abdulaziz. After the 'conquest' (*fatḥ*) of Riyadh in 1902, Hamza narrated the 'annexation' of al-Kharj in southern Najd, and the 'conquest' of al-Aḥsāʾ in 1913.[99] Hamza's unfamiliarity with local history strengthened his exclusivism. Not only was he from outside the Arabian peninsula. He also spent most of his time among members of the royal court in Riyadh, Mecca, and Jeddah, and on diplomatic missions abroad. He first travelled to Asir in 1934, eight years after his arrival in the kingdom, and still called the region 'this virgin land' in a book published in 1951, the year of his death.[100]

Hamza's conception of the country's history as the history of the Al Saud was also a reflection of his political work. In 1932, the foreign-born official co-designed the formal merger of the Kingdom of Hejaz and the Kingdom of Najd and its Dependencies. Putting a dynastic stamp on the country, he invented its new name 'Kingdom of Saudi Arabia'.[101] The reasons for this 'unification' (*tawḥīd*), as the merger was called, were partly 'dynastic', as a British diplomat explained at the time. The 'unification' aimed at assimilating Asir and consolidating 'the Hejaz as a Saudi possession, to the final discouragement of Hashemite or Republican aspiration'. In addition, the merger sought to 'cover the absorption of the resources of the Hejaz in those of Nejd and perhaps to facilitate the publication of a single Saudi budget of a kind that may create confidence in the money markets'. Finally, Hamza as a jurist probably also sought to solve the constitutional difficulties of the 'dual Kingdom and set about building a tidier and more critic-proof edifice of State'.[102]

Besides anti-regionalism, Hamza also developed another form of exclusivism: a strong anti-nomadism, expressed in takfīrist terms. In his book *The Heart of Arabia*, he presented the Bedouin not only as an obstacle to the state, but also as living in a *jāhilīyah*. According to him, 'the incurable disease of Bedouinism is a form of existence in ignorance of

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[99] Ibid., 27.

[100] Ḥamzah, *Fī bilād* (1951), 11.

[101] Trott, "Leading Personalities" (2005), 177.

[102] Hope Gill, "Mr. Hope" (1986), 189.

the prohibitions of religion. Through the nature of their life, including migration and travelling, the Bedouin have no homeland and no fixed property that they fear to lose. Therefore, they are people whose affections and interests change and who are unreliable for the establishment of stable rule.'[103] Following from that, Hamza described the forced settlement of the nomads in villages under Abdulaziz in the 1910s and 1920s as a conversion to Islam. He stated that 'the settlements are, in religious terms, mosques filled with people who gave up the superstitions, heresies, customs of the age of ignorance, and manners of the Bedouin. They turned to a humble religious life, a life of righteousness and virtue, morals and belief.'[104]

Hamza's takfīrist anti-nomadism largely resulted from the very settlement project he described. The conversion from *jāhilīyah* to Islam was a major part of the discourse that Wahhabi ulema and preachers spread among the nomads. The former Bedouin tribesmen thus referred to themselves as the Ikhwān or Muslim 'Brothers'. They called each of their villages a 'hijra', a term that also referred to the Prophet Muhammad's emigration from Mecca as a place of polytheism. Notably, the chronicler Ibn ʿĪsá, who was a contemporary of the settlement project, was already much harder in tone towards the nomads than Ibn Bishr had been, in whose time no such endeavour was undertaken. Ibn ʿĪsá called the Bedouin of the ʿUjmān tribe, for instance, 'refractory and inveterate enemies of the Muslims' and 'a tribe of wicked men, full of cunning, treachery, and evil'.[105]

Foreign authors who were close to the royal family or served the Saudi government were also important in establishing the conventional partition of Saudi history into three Saudi states or one Saudi state in three stages. The introduction of this periodization marked a further strengthening of dynastic exclusivism, as it marginalized times without Al Saud rule. The poet Khālid al-Faraj (1898–1954/55) took one of the first steps in this direction. Born in

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[103] Ḥamzah, *Qalb* (1933), 373.

[104] Ibid., 375.

[105] Quoted in: Kurpershoek, *A Saudi Tribal History* (2002), 42.

Kuwait, he studied in one of the emirate's first modern schools, the Mubārakīyah School, and later worked for the Saudi provincial government in al-Aḥsāʾ. In 1928 and 1930, he recited two lengthy poems in front of Abdulaziz Al Saud, which contained a historical outline of Najd since the time of the king's ancestor Muhammad ibn Saud. Both texts were published under the title *History of Najd (Tārīkh najd)* in the official newspaper *Umm al-Qurá*. In addition, at the request of the monarch, al-Faraj wrote a lengthy treatise explaining the poem entitled *Story and Witness in the History of Najd*.[106]

Inspired by Ibn Bishr, his principal source, al-Faraj divided the history of the Al Saud into two general periods. The first was the 'emirate' from 1454 until 1744, when Muhammad ibn Saud and his ancestors had merely been 'emirs'. The second period, since 1744, was the 'imamate'. The Kuwaiti-born poet further subdivided the imamate, creating elements of a periodization that later became standard. 'After the end of the tragedy of al-Dirʿīyah', the poet stated, 'the curtain fell over this great kingdom for the first time'. This was followed by an age of 'chaos' that lasted until Turki ibn Abdullah's reign (1819–20 and 1824–1834), that is, the beginning of the second Saudi state. Finally, the writer portrayed the fall of Riyadh to the rival dynasty of the Āl Rashīd in 1891 as the end of an era. This year would become the conventional end date of the second Saudi state.[107]

Foreigners were also influential in producing the notion of Abdulaziz's reign as the period of a new state. This notion was the concluding element in the later division of Saudi history into the history of 'three states'. Hamza split the history of the Al Saud in his *Heart of Arabia* into four 'stages': 1724–1814, 1814–65, 1865–1900, and finally, the age of Abdulaziz since 1900.[108] In *Saudi Arabia*, he elevated Abdulaziz's reign, calling it, as one of the first authors, the stage of 'the modern renaissance [*nahḍah*]'.[109] Speaking of *nahḍah*, he employed a term that had become widespread in Egypt, Lebanon, and other Arab countries

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[106] Al-Faraj, *Al-khabar* (2000).

[107] Ibid., 25.

[108] Ḥamzah, *Qalb* (1933), 326.

[109] Ḥamzah, *Al-bilād* (1968), 73.

since the nineteenth century. Hamza thus also tried to insert Saudi history into concepts of historical development that had become dominant in the wider Middle East.

Another foreigner who saw Abdulaziz's reign as a new era was St. John Philby. Born in British Ceylon, he studied oriental languages at Trinity College, Cambridge, before joining the Indian Civil Service and the British administration in Baghdad under Percy Cox (1864–1937).[110] He first met Abdulaziz while on a political mission to Riyadh in 1917 and sought to persuade him to take up arms against the Ottomans. In 1924, Philby resigned from the British services and settled in Jeddah as partner in a trading company. Although he was no official servant of the Saudi government, he counselled the king in his relations with Western powers and oil companies and developed cordial relations with him.[111] Abdulaziz supported Philby's expeditions across the peninsula and presented him with a house in Mecca and a slave girl, who became Philby's second wife, after his conversion to Islam in 1930.[112] In 1930 and 1955 respectively, Philby published two major books on the modern history of Arabia: *Arabia* and *Sa'udi Arabia*.[113]

Although Philby's books were published in London, they were also strongly influenced by the Ibn Ghannām School. Philby avoided European sources on Arabian history and took most of his information from the takfīrist chronicles instead.[114] In his *Arabia*, he took Ibn Ghannām as his main source on the first Saudi state, calling him the 'the father of Arabian history'.[115] For his later book, *Sa'udi Arabia*, he also consulted Ibn Bishr, Ibn ʿĪsá and Ibn Nāṣir as well as a manuscript of Ibn Hadhlūl's *History of the Kings of the Al Saud*.[116] This resulted in his adoption of major elements of their takfīrism, including the notion of the pre-Wahhabi *jāhilīyah*. Philby stated in *Arabia* that before the appearance of the Wahhabi

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[110] Monroe, *Philby* (1998). On Philby, see also Shaz, *In Pursuit* (2003).

[111] Monroe, *Philby* (1998), 191–93.

[112] Ibid., 159.

[113] Philby, *Arabia* (1930); *Sa'udi Arabia* (1955).

[114] Vassiliev, *The History* (1998), 22.

[115] Philby, *Arabia* (1930), x.

[116] Philby, *Sa'udi Arabia* (1955), 6. Rentz, "Philby" (1979), 32.

mission, Najd and al-Aḥsāʾ were 'sunk deep in the abyss of paganism'.[117] This had happened to the people of central Arabia 'within a thousand years of their rescue from a similar state by the call of Islam'.[118]

Captivated by Abdulaziz's personality, 'whom he considered a man as close to perfection as any he would have ever encountered',[119] Philby conceived the king's rule as a departure from the previous Saudi states. He thus contributed to the notion of the modern kingdom as a separate 'third Saudi state'. In his book, *Arabia*, Philby conceived Abdulaziz's reign as 'the Second Wahhabi Empire', after 'the First Wahhabi Empire' in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[120] In *Saʻudi Arabia*, the British author went further, implying that Abdulaziz's age was more important than Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's. According to Philby, the monarch's death in 1953 'closed a brilliant chapter in the history of the Arabs'. This chapter was 'second in importance, perhaps, only to the Meccan episode of the early seventh century, from which Islam emerged as a vital and permanent factor in human evolution. Like the prophet Muhammad, ʻAbdul-ʻAziz ibn Saʻud was also a man of destiny.'[121]

As in Hamza's case, the growth of the Saudi state in a globalizing context also encouraged the production of Philby's books by creating international demand for information on Abdulaziz and his dynasty. By the late 1920s, this demand had already transcended the Arab world, as the British author addressed his *Arabia* to a wider English-speaking audience. He described his work as 'a sketch designed for the use of those members of the general public—Members of Parliament, journalists, business men and the like—who may be desirous of understanding something of the principal forces and

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[117] Philby, *Arabia* (1930), 4.

[118] Ibid. 5–6.

[119] Goldberg, "Philby" (1985), 223.

[120] Philby, *Arabia* (1930), 77, 160.

[121] Philby, *Saʻudi Arabia* (1955), xi.

tendencies which have been at work in the desert spaces of the Arabian peninsula during comparatively modern times.'[122]

His panegyrics notwithstanding, Philby's use of London-based publishers also allowed him to express criticism, as he grew disaffected with what he considered wasteful handling of the new oil wealth after World War II. Access to foreign publishers thus facilitated narrative plurality even within dynastic historiography based on the Ibn Ghannām School. In his book *Sa'udi Arabia*, Philby complained about 'the weakness of a system, so entirely dependent on the will of an absolute monarch, and devoid of any technical devices of accountancy'. Moreover, he lamented 'the brine of corruption, which permeated every branch of the public life of the land'.[123] Despite his criticism, however, Philby retained some loyalty to the Al Saud. Saud ibn Jalawi (1901/2–67), the governor of the Eastern Province, commented that 'Philby did not say anything. He could have said much more.'[124]

Senior members of the Saudi government were nevertheless appalled by Philby's comments and gave the writer a choice to either leave the kingdom or to write a letter to King Saud expressing contrition and to submit all future writings for censorship. Philby preferred to move with his family to Beirut, noting in a memorandum, 'I obviously could not leave my dependents and my possessions (mainly books) to the tender mercies of the Saudi Government'.[125] Even Samir Shamma (c. 1921–2001), a Palestinian-born legal advisor to the Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs, suffered from governmental repression. He published a critical but positive review of *Sa'udi Arabia* in the newspaper *al-Yamāmah* just days before or after the announcement of Philby's banishment on the Mecca radio. Shamma noted that 'Mr Philby is brutal in his attacks on any man of the kingdom whom he does not like'. Yet, the official also praised the work as 'the most complete, well-balanced and serious book on

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[122] Philby, *Arabia* (1930), vii.

[123] Philby, *Sa'udi Arabia* (1955), 342–43.

[124] K. E. Evans, *U.S. Records*, vol. 4 (1997), 3.

[125] Quoted in Monroe, *Philby* (1998), 280.

Saudi Arabia until now'.[126] He was reportedly immediately degraded to 'some minor post in the Ministry of Finance'.[127]

After World War II, with increasing levels of education, native Saudi citizens gradually replaced foreigners as ministers and ambassadors. However, the rapid expansion of the state apparatus, including the public education sector, still required the employment of educated foreigners, some of whom engaged in dynastic historiography. In the 1950s and 1960s, the Saudi government benefitted not only from increased oil revenues but also from various coups and purges in Syria, Egypt and Iraq. Many members of the political elite lost their positions or suffered from persecution in the course of these events. Some of them thus found it attractive to seek asylum and employment in the kingdom.

One of the most prominent Arab political refugees was Mounir Ajlani (1911–2004), son of a wealthy Syrian landowner. He was highly educated, having first studied in Damascus and later in Paris, where he had gained a doctorate in law. Returning to Damascus in 1933, Ajlani also gained considerable political experience. He worked as a journalist and served as an independent member of the Syrian parliament between 1936 and 1956. In addition, he worked as minister of propaganda and youth, minister of education, and finally minister of justice and deputy prime minister. In 1956, however, Ajlani's opponents in the Syrian government accused him of being part of a 'great conspiracy' that worked against Syrian unification with Egypt and imprisoned him. After the declaration of the two countries' unity, Gamal Abdel Nasser transferred him along with other political prisoners to Alexandria in 1959. Following his release, the Saudi government welcomed the arrival of the political refugee in Jeddah in 1962.[128]

Ajlani did not reach such senior political positions as some members of the previous generation of Arab immigrants, like Yassin or Hamza, did. Yet he became very influential in

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[126] Shammā, "Kitāb" (1955), 35, 39.

[127] Philby, "Letter" (1955). Hughes, "Letter" (1955).

[128] Al-Sayf, "D. munīr" (2004).

historiography and education generally. This was still a field in which few indigenous professionals were active. The Syrian was appointed senior advisor to the Ministry of Education in 1963, and published a four-volume, albeit uncompleted, *History of Saudi Arabia* between 1965 and 1972. This history was based on numerous manuscripts and documents, which he had accessed in Beirut, Istanbul, Paris, and London.[129] Ajlani co-authored a history textbook for primary schools in the 1960s, which was entitled *Images of the Modern World*.[130] In the 1970s, he also worked as an advisor to the principal government historical research institute, the King Abdulaziz Foundation for Research and Archives.[131]

With his *History of Saudi Arabia*, Ajlani not only published a very detailed account of the Saudi dynasty. Most significantly, he also completed the notion of the three Saudi states, to which Hamza, al-Faraj and Philby had contributed earlier. The Syrian virtually excluded periods without Saudi rule from the country's history, as he divided 'Saudi history' into three stages: 'the first Saudi state' 1744–1817, 'the second Saudi state' 1824–91, and 'the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia' since 1902.[132] Dark ages interrupted these bright periods. The textbook *Images of the Modern World* narrated, for instance, that the destruction of al-Dirʿīyah by Egyptian-Ottoman forces in 1818 was followed by 'chaos', 'oppression', and 'darkness'.[133] Ajlani was also very explicit in his exclusivism. He conceived only the territories historically ruled by the Al Saud as forming part of 'Saudi Arabia'. He justified calling his book a *History of Saudi Arabia* rather than of 'Najd' not only with the remark that 'the name Saudi Arabia is known and familiar', but also that 'the country, which the Saudis ruled was sometimes smaller than Najd and sometimes larger than Najd'.[134] He thus synchronized 'Saudi Arabia' with the Saudi dynasty itself rather than a physical territory.

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[129] Al-ʿAjlānī, *Tārīkh* (1965, 1972)

[130] Al-ʿAjlānī et al., *Ṣuwar* (1965).

[131] Al-Sayf, "D. munīr" (2004).

[132] Al-ʿAjlānī, *Tārīkh* (1965), 23–24.

[133] Al-ʿAjlānī et al., *Ṣuwar* (1969), 39.

[134] Al-ʿAjlānī, *Tārīkh* (1965), 21.

Besides further restricting Saudi history to three periods of Al Saud rule, foreigners were influential in focusing dynastic historiography on Abdulaziz Al Saud. Dynastic exclusivism even marginalized Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, who had been at the centre of Ibn Ghannām and Ibn Bishr's chronicles. This shift in dynastic historiography largely resulted from the foreigners' distance from the Wahhabi mission. Unlike Ibn Ghannām or Ibn Bishr, Rihani, Hamza, al-Faraj and Philby had not received training by Wahhabi scholars. Rihani was a Maronite, and Hamza belonged to the Druze, whom even many non-Wahhabi Muslims regarded as heretics.[135] The foreigners thus became much closer to the Al Saud than to the scholarly elite around the Āl al-Shaykh, the 'family of the sheikh' (Ibn Abd al-Wahhab). The only exception was Youssef Yassin, whom a British diplomat described as 'probably a more convinced Wahhâbi than most of the King's alien entourage'.[136]

While already Rihani's *History of Najd* and Philby's *Sa'udi Arabia* focused on Abdulaziz's life, this focus reached its peak in the work of yet another foreigner: Khayr al-Dīn al-Ziriklī (1893–1976), author of the well-known biographical lexicon *The Great Figures*.[137] In hiring him, the Saudi government benefitted from colonial repression in neighbouring countries during the interwar years. From a Syrian family, al-Ziriklī studied at a private and an Ottoman state school. Later, however, the Ottoman authorities suspected him of propagating Arab nationalism, and he had to flee to Beirut. There, he studied French literature and subsequently taught history and Arabic literature. In 1920, the French authorities sentenced him to death in absentia for activities against their occupation of Syria. Following a pardon, he first travelled to the Arabian peninsula at the invitation of Hussein, the Hashemite King of the Hejaz. Subsequently, he worked for the Transjordanian

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[135] Al-Ziriklī, *Al-aʿlām*, vol. 5 (1969), 367.

[136] Jordan, "Personalities" (1997), 136. Yassin's affinity to the Wahhabi mission was probably shaped by previous studies under the influential Syrian Salafi Rashīd Riḍā (1865–1935). Lauzière, "The Evolution" (2008), 133.

[137] Al-Ziriklī, *Al-aʿlām* (1927).

government in Amman between 1921 and 1923.[138] In 1934, al-Ziriklī was appointed advisor

to the Saudi foreign ministry at the suggestion of Youssef Yassin.[139] In the following

decades, al-Ziriklī worked as Saudi minister to Egypt and the Arab League in Cairo, and

finally as ambassador to Morocco.[140] As he was mostly deployed abroad, he developed

even fewer links to local communities outside the government than Hamza or Philby did.

This presumably strengthened the dynastic exclusivism in his writings.

Al-Ziriklī, together with other foreigners, was a major contributor to a planned state

celebration that sought to present Abdulaziz as the single founder of the modern Saudi

state. This was the golden jubilee in 1950, which marked fifty years in the Islamic lunar

calendar since the capture of Riyadh and beginning of Abdulaziz's rule in 1902. On that

occasion, al-Ziriklī, in coordination with Youssef Yassin, prepared a book entitled *Abdulaziz

Al Saud: Founder of a State and Renewer of a Nation*.[141] Sparing no costs, the government

even brought the poet Khālid al-Faraj by plane from the eastern oasis of al-Qaṭīf to Riyadh in

1949 so that that he could contribute to the work.[142] The official gazette *Umm al-Qurá* also

produced a special issue with a biography of Abdulaziz, which it planned to distribute among

foreign newspapers through Saudi representations abroad.[143]

Yet, as foreigners sought to celebrate Abdulaziz in 1950 without consideration of

Wahhabi teachings, they also met resistance from religious scholars. According to an

American diplomat, Youssef Yassin and Khayr al-Dīn al-Ziriklī apparently prepared the

golden jubilee 'without seeking the opinion of the ulema on the permissibility of such

celebration'.[144] King Abdulaziz himself, however, eventually consulted Muḥammad ibn

Ibrāhīm Āl al-Shaykh, the kingdom's mufti, and other ulema. In a fatwa, they considered

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[138] Shāhīn, "Khayr al-dīn" (2008), 21–25. On al-Ziriklī, see also al-ʿAlāwinah, *Khayr al-dīn* (2002); al-Ziriklī, *ʿĀmān* (1925).

[139] Trott, "Leading Personalities" (2005), 186

[140] Shāhīn, "Khayr al-dīn" (2008), 29–33.

[141] Al-Ziriklī, *Shibh al-jazīrah*, vol. 1 (1970), 17.

[142] Al-Faraj, *Al-khabar* (2000), 10.

[143] Umm al-Qurá, "Barnāmaj" (1950).

[144] K. E. Evans, *U.S. Records*, vol. 4 (1997), 161.

such a jubilee to be an invention of the Christians and the Jews and thus contrary to Islam.[145] The king cancelled the celebration, and al-Ziriklī's manuscript was kept in the royal court.[146]

Yet, in the 1960s, generous state support allowed al-Ziriklī to complete his historical project. The royal court returned the manuscript to its author, and the monarch commissioned him to expand on it. The Saudi government also granted al-Ziriklī indefinite leave from his position in the foreign ministry, provided him with an apartment near the sea in Beirut, a car, a driver, a typist and a servant to facilitate his writing.[147] In his choice of sources, al-Ziriklī mainly relied on official documents and accounts by dynastic historians and officials close to King Abdulaziz. They included writings as well as oral accounts by Rihani, Yassin, Philby and Hamza.[148] All of them contributed to his focus on the king. The result of several years of work was a four-volume work on *Arabia under King Abdulaziz*, which al-Ziriklī published in 1970.[149]

Al-Ziriklī's *Arabia under King Abdulaziz*, tellingly authored in Beirut, represented the pinnacle of dynastic exclusivism. His account of modern Arabian history over 1400 pages was essentially a huge life story of the first Saudi king. An abridged version in 1972 was entitled *A Brief Biography of King Abdulaziz*.[150] Connecting most developments in modern Arabian history to the first Saudi ruler, the Syrian inserted 'King Abdulaziz' in almost all headings. They included, for instance, 'King Abdulaziz seized al-Qaṣīm', 'King Abdulaziz and security during his reign', and 'King Abdulaziz and poetry'.[151] Even the history of the first and second Saudi states is restricted to a background chapter entitled 'King Abdulaziz: An

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[145] Philby, *Saʿudi Arabia* (1955), 354.

[146] Al-Ziriklī, *Shibh al-jazīrah*, vol. 1 (1970), 17.

[147] Al-ʿAlāwinah, "Shibh al-jazīrah" (2004), 234.

[148] Shāhīn, "Khayr al-dīn" (2008), 220–32; al-Ḥumayd, "Manhaj" (2001), 57–59.

[149] Al-Ziriklī, *Shibh al-jazīrah* (1970).

[150] Al-Ziriklī, *Al-wajīz* (1972).

[151] Al-Ziriklī, *Shibh al-jazīrah* (1970), vol. 1, 145; vol. 2, 447; vol. 3, 1059.

overview of the life of his ancestors'.[152] Strengthening the contrast between Abdulaziz's

reign and previous eras, al-Ziriklī even applied the idea of the *jāhilīyah* to the pre-Abdulaziz

period. 'The end of our last age of ignorance', he wrote, 'was the beginning of the

peninsula's modern age, the age of renaissance and oil in the days of Abdulaziz'.[153]

Arab nationalism

Dynastic exclusivism was not the only feature that foreign-born authors introduced to

dynastic historiography based on the Ibn Ghannām School. They also added narratives

influenced by Arab nationalism. Whereas the focus of Ibn Ghannām and Ibn Bishr's

chronicles was restricted to Najd, references to the wider Arab world increased in the new

texts published between the 1920s and 1960s. The takfīrist paradigm, which conceived the

Saudis as the true Muslims restoring Islam, remained, but the Al Saud also started to appear

as heroes of the Arab nation and its 'renaissance' (*nahḍah*).

Arab nationalism spread widely in Arabic lands between the 1920s and 1940s,

especially in Iraq, Greater Syria, and Egypt.[154] Already in the nineteenth century, 'a sense of

cultural and ethnic Arabism' had emerged and consolidated itself in parts of the Ottoman

Empire.[155] As Michael Provence argues, additional foundations of Arab nationalism lay in

'the Ottoman mass education and conscription project and in the regionwide struggle against

colonial rule in the 1920s and 1930s'.[156] Between around 1880 and 1913, Ottoman military

and civil schools and the army nurtured identities of 'religion, nation, and homeland'. At the

outbreak of World War I, Ottoman citizens, like their European counterparts, had thus 'been

generally conditioned to patriotic sacrifice and the idea of membership in vast imagined

communities'.[157] After the war, the fight against the European occupation of Syria and other

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[152] Ibid., vol. 1, 31.

[153] Ibid., vol. 1, 108.

[154] Dawisha, *Arab nationalism* (2003), 75. On Arab nationalism, see also Khalidi, "Arab Nationalism" (1991).

[155] Choueiri, *Arab Nationalism* (2000), 65.

[156] Provence, "Ottoman Modernity" (2011), 206.

[157] Ibid., 221.

Arab countries fuelled this popular nationalism. Frequently, former members of the Ottoman armed forces led this fight. In the 1920s and 1930s, writers and political parties in the new Arab states elaborated notions of Arab (rather than Ottoman) nationalism in terms of self-determination and independence.[158]

As one of few formally independent Arab states after World War I, the Saudi realm was an attractive refuge for Arab nationalists, especially for those who sought to combine Arab nationalism with Islam. The life of Chekib Arslan (1869–1946), a prominent writer from Lebanon, is a pertinent example. The French authorities refused to issue a Lebanese passport for him, but the Saudi government granted him citizenship in the mid-1920s. He wrote, 'from the moment I set foot on the quay at Jiddah, I felt like a free Arab in a free Arab country. I felt I had escaped the oppressive foreign rule which weighs so heavily on all Arab countries.' It was also important to Arslan that Abdulaziz's state had remained 'subject to the Islamic *shariʿah* in all its principles'.[159] In subsequent writings, Arslan portrayed Abdulaziz as an exemplary Arab Muslim leader.[160]

Like Arslan, several of the foreign-born officials and writers of dynastic histories were also Arab nationalists with strong anti-colonial sentiments. While still serving the Transjordanian government between 1921 and 1923, Khayr al-Dīn al-Ziriklī attempted in vain to persuade it to openly oppose the French presence in his home country Syria.[161] Between 1943 and 1945, as Saudi representative in Cairo he worked towards the formation of the Arab League and co-drafted its charter together with Youssef Yassin.[162] With regards to Yassin, a British representative in Jeddah stated about him that 'throughout his career, he has been an Arab nationalist and as such is to a considerable extent anti-British though he is

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[158] Choueiri, *Arab Nationalism* (2000), 82–83.

[159] Cleveland, *Islam* (1985), 74.

[160] Ibid., 106.

[161] Shāhīn, "Khayr al-dīn" (2008), 33.

[162] Ibid., 32. Al-ʿAlāwinah, *Khayr al-dīn* (2002), 22.

equally opposed to any other foreign influence'.[163] Fuad Hamza was knighted during a Saudi diplomatic mission to London early in his career. Yet, British diplomats later described him as an Anglophobe and a devoted Arab nationalist who stayed in contact with like-minded people in Palestine and Syria even while in Saudi service.[164]

Already in the 1920s, the Lebanese-American writer Ameen Rihani introduced Arab nationalist narratives to dynastic historiography. He developed his Arabism in the United States, while studying the history of Arab Spain and reading English travel literature on Arabia.[165] In contrast to other Arab nationalists, such as the Syrian Constantin Zureiq (1909–2000), Rihani's Arabism was, of course, monarchical. As Nijmeh Hajjar notes, Rihani 'argued that the Western "republican" system did not suit the Arab "monarchist mentality" and political culture especially in Arabia'.[166] He thus praised the first Saudi king as an Arab nationalist hero. In 1926, Youssef Yassin, then King Abdulaziz's director of publicity, allowed the Lebanese writer to publish an article entitled 'Ibn Saud: Liberator of the Arabs' on the front page of *Umm al-Qurá*.[167] In his book, *History of Najd*, published two years later, Rihani described Abdulaziz as the unifier of the Arabs and a 'second Umar'.[168] Addressing the monarch in his introduction, the writer stated that 'from the reign of Caliph Umar until the beginning of your Saudi reign, the Arabs did not enjoy anybody who gathered them, united their word, and supported their causes'.[169]

Even Philby as a former official of the British Empire developed sympathies for Arab nationalism. During his studies at Cambridge, he became an anti-imperialist.[170] While he was still a servant of the Empire, he seemed to have genuinely hoped for Arab

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163 Phillips, "Leading Personalities" (2008), 150–1.

164 Jordan, "Personalities" (1997), 122. Trott, "Leading Personalities," (2005), 178. C. C. Lewis, "Ibn Saʿūd" (1933), 527.

165 Shahid, "Amīn" (1988), 234. Al-Ḥāzimī, "Arab Travellers" (2010), 234–35.

166 Hajjar, "Ameen" (2004), 139.

167 Al-Rīḥānī, "Ibn suʿūd" (1926).

168 Al-Rīḥānī, *Tārīkh* (1981), 8.

169 Ibid., 8.

170 Shaz, *In Pursuit* (2003), 199.

independence after World War I. In one of his first books in 1922, he described the Arabs as 'a proud race long ground down under the heel of the Ottoman Turk'.[171] In his book *Arabia* in 1930, he portrayed even the settlements of the Ikhwān as places of national awakening rather than—as Hamza did—as places of conversion. Philby stated that the settlements 'embodied the new nationalist spirit of Arabia and formed the backbone on which Ibn Sa'ud could count for the realisation of his ideal of an Arab state united in support of its independence against the foreigner, the Turk'. The Turk's objective, in contrast, 'was to obstruct and prevent, if he could, the formation of an Arabian nation, and to maintain his imperial dominance over the land of the Arabs'.[172]

While the Arabism of Rihani and other dynastic historians was monarchical, a new revolutionary form of Arab nationalism rose to prominence after World War II. Following the Egyptian Revolution of 1952 and Egypt's defiance of Britain, France and Israel in 1956, the spirit of the movement in many countries became 'republican and socialist'.[173] While the Saudi government initially supported Egypt in its rivalry with the Hashemite kingdoms of Jordan and Iraq, it soon considered this revolutionary Arab nationalism 'destabilizing'. Following a visit by King Saud to the United States and prompting by the American government, Saud turned against the Egyptian president Abdel Nasser in 1957. That year, the United States also launched the 'Eisenhower Doctrine', pledging 'assistance, including the dispatch of armed forces, to nations requesting American help "against overt aggression from any nation controlled by international communism"'.[174] The Egyptian government responded with a propaganda campaign against the kingdom. Broadcasts from its radio station *Voice of the Arabs* denounced Saudi Arabia as a 'feudal monarchy' and a 'focal point of Arab reaction and Western intrigue'.[175]

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[171] Philby, *The Heart*, vol. 1 (1922), xxiii.

[172] Philby, *Arabia* (1930), 227.

[173] Niblock, *Saudi Arabia* (2006), 122.

[174] Dawisha, *Arab Nationalism* (2003), 188–89.

[175] Niblock, *Saudi Arabia* (2006), 58.

Although the Saudi government opposed the revolutionary and socialist form of Arab nationalism, the *Voice of the Arabs*, Arab migrants as well as Saudis who had studied in Egypt also brought this ideology to the kingdom. Palestinian and Yemeni workers spread revolutionary ideas in the camps of the Arabian American Oil Company (Aramco) in Dhahran in the 1950s. Egyptian and Saudi journalists working in the kingdom also expressed their enthusiasm about Nasser until a crackdown on the media in the early 1960s.[176] The influence of Egyptian media even reached government officials. John Chalcraft reports a telling episode about a conversation in 1962 between a British diplomat and Ziad Shawwaf (1926–1990), a legal adviser in the Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs. 'The Saudi official and the Briton had apparently argued "from midnight till dawn," with the former defending a series of anti-imperialist positions on Palestine, Muscat, and other issues. An Englishman present wrote: "I had decided to put Ziad in the anti-British category . . . when he concluded: 'I enjoyed our talk. You must remember that we know nothing about these places, apart from the Cairo brainwashing of the past ten years.'"[177]

In the Saudi struggle with Nasser, senior Wahhabi ulema started to denounce Arab nationalism categorically. Around 1960, ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz ibn Bāz (1912–99), the later grand mufti, wrote his *A Critique of Arab Nationalism Based on Islam and Reality*. He conceded that 'any Muslim with the slightest knowledge of Islamic history does not doubt the merits of the Muslim Arabs. They carried the message of Islam in the best centuries and brought it to all people'.[178] Yet, Ibn Bāz argued that 'the call for Arab nationalism or any other kind of nationalism is false, a grave error, pure vice, and abominable ignorance [*jāhilīyah*]'. One of the reasons he gave was that 'the call for Arab nationalism divides Muslims and separates the non-Arab Muslim from his Arab brother'.[179] Moreover, he found that according to 'many historians of Arab nationalism', the first proponents of Arab nationalism in the nineteenth

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[176] Chalcraft, "Migration" (2011). See also Vitalis, *America's Kingdom* (2007).

[177] Chalcraft, "Migration" (2011), 37–38.

[178] Ibn Bāz, *Naqd* [c. 1960], 3.

[179] Ibid., 10.

century were 'Westerners through missions in Syria'. Their aim was 'to separate the Turks from the Arabs and divide the Muslims'.[180]

In contrast to the ulema, however, a number of historians and officials did not denounce Arab nationalism. They rather sought to demonstrate that the Al Saud were 'more authentic Arab nationalists than Nasser'.[181] The Saudi kings were thus Arab as well as Muslim leaders. This was a vision promoted even by King Faisal (r. 1964–75) himself. In an interview published in 1972, Faisal argued that 'Arab unity has been our demand and our goal for a long time, before people appeared in the Arab world claiming Arabism and the demand and strife for unity'. He added that 'Arabism is no doctrine, principle or belief. It is feeling, blood, and language. We do not need to prove our Arabism'.[182]

In order to assert its Arab authenticity, the Saudi government again relied on foreigners. One of the most prominent voices was Hafiz Wahba (1889–1967), an Egyptian who had joined the royal court in 1923. In the following decades, he rivalled Hamza in his career in the Saudi diplomatic service. Starting as a foreign-affairs advisor to Abdulaziz, he became civil governor of Mecca and, in 1928, director of education. In the latter function, he sent the first mission of Hejazi students to Egypt in order for them to pursue higher education. Subsequently, he became minister plenipotentiary and first Saudi ambassador to the Court of St James. In 1960, Wahba published *Fifty Years in Arabia*, a combination of autobiography and history of the Saudi dynasty.[183]

In his *Fifty Years in Arabia*, Wahba portrayed Abdulaziz as a pan-Arab hero, as Rihani did. Moreover, he even traced the Saudi service to the Arab nation back to the eighteenth century. In a section on 'the birth of the Arab League', he stated that 'the Arab union, or Arab unity, was the hope of every Arab, after the Arabs had tasted the bitterness of the Turkish occupation of their country'. This union had appeared in different forms since the eighteenth

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[180] Ibid., 12.

[181] Foley, *The Arab Gulf States* (2010), 41.

[182] Al-Fātiḥ and Āl Suʿūd, *Al-fayṣalīyah* (1972).

[183] Wahbah, *Khamsūn* (1960).

century. 'In the form of the first Saudi movement this union appeared in the Arabian peninsula. However, the Saudi forces clashed with the Turkish forces in Iraq and Syria and stopped at the borders of these two regions. In 1818, the movement was crushed by Ibrahim Pasha's invasion of Najd.'[184] In the twentieth century then, Abdulaziz appeared. He was, according to Wahba, an 'Arab, who loved his Arab people, was devoted to Islam and its teachings, desired to found a young Arab kingdom that took over the cause of the Arabs and sought to restore their ancient glory'.[185]

The struggle with Nasser made it attractive for the Saudi government to employ men persecuted by the Egyptian state, who were adept at countering Nasser's rhetoric.[186] In the field of historiography, these authors included, besides Mounir Ajlani, a fellow Syrian named Amin Said (1891–1967). Born in Latakia, Said became a journalist and publisher in Damascus and later in Cairo, following prosecution by the French authorities over political activities.[187] An early proponent of Arab nationalism, he published a three-volume work on the Arab anti-colonial struggle entitled *The Great Arab Revolution* in 1934.[188] Through his work for newspapers, he met Faisal, Yassin and Hamza in the Hejaz, Egypt and Syria.[189] In 1960, when relations between Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Republic were tense, Said travelled to many Saudi cities at the invitation of the Saudi government. Upon his return to Egypt, Said published a book entitled *Glories of the Al Saud* in 1961, in which he praised Saudi Arabia's modern development.[190] This offended Nasser and led to Said's imprisonment in Egypt for eleven months, during which the Saudi embassy in Cairo supported the author's wife and children.[191]

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[184] Ibid., 200.

[185] Ibid., d.

[186] Ende, "Religion" (1981), 389.

[187] Amīn Saʿīd, *Fayṣal* (2008), 313–14.

[188] Amīn Saʿīd, *Al-thawrah* (1934). Schäbler, "Das Prinzip" (1994), 206. Rafeq, "Ottoman" (1992), 48.

[189] Al-Samak, "Al-muʾarrikh" (2002), 112–13.

[190] Amīn Saʿīd, *Amjād* (1961).

[191] Al-Samak, "Al-muʾarrikh" (2002), 114.

Indebted to the kingdom's leadership, Said continued to engage in dynastic historical production. Following his release, he moved to Lebanon and Syria, where he published three books on Saudi history between 1964 and 1965: *The History of the Saudi State*, *The Life of Sheikh Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab*, and *Faisal the Great*.[192] Subsequently, Faisal invited Said to Riyadh and presented him with an office close to the royal court. The author continued to reside in the kingdom until 1967, when he died while spending the summer in Beirut.[193] After his funeral in Damascus, his family remained in Riyadh and continued to receive support from the Saudi government.[194]

In contrast to socialist and secular forms of Arab nationalism, Amin Said sought to combine Arabism with Islam in his historical narrative. He thus related the idea of the pre-Wahhabi *jāhilīyah* to the notion of Arab decline. Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, according to him, was not only 'the first to perceive the state of stagnation and backwardness of the inhabitants of Najd, and the Arabs and Muslims like them'. He was also 'the first to realise that the direct cause for all the stagnation and decline was the people's departure from the essence and spirit of religion'.[195] Against this background, Said presented the Wahhabi mission as an Arab nationalist as much as an Islamic movement. Ibn Abd al-Wahhab was 'the first harbinger of Arab nationalism'. From Najd 'the germs of the new renaissance, the germs of awakening and reform, spread to the neighbouring Arab countries.' Subsequently, the Arabs 'started to fight the corrupt Turkish rule and strove to replace it with an Islamic Arab national rule'.[196]

Said's combination of Arab nationalism and Islam was in line with Saudi policies to reach out to the Muslim world in the kingdom's struggle against Arab socialism and communism. In 1961, at the height of the Cold War, Saudi Arabia established the Islamic

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[192] Amīn Saʿīd, *Tārīkh* (1964); *Hādhā* (1964); *Fayṣal* (1965).

[193] Al-Samak, "Al-muʾarrikh" (2002), 114–15.

[194] Amīn Saʿīd, *Fayṣal* (2008), 320.

[195] Amīn Saʿīd, *Tārīkh*, vol. 1 (1964), 27.

[196] Ibid., 16–17.

University of Medina as a proselytizing institution in order to train international students to fight against 'Soviet atheism'.[197] A year later, in response to the Egyptian military involvement in Yemen, the government organized a conference in Mecca to discuss ways of combating secularism and socialism. This conference resulted in the creation of the Muslim World League. Subsequently, further pan-Islamic organizations were created with Saudi sponsorship. They included the International Islamic Relief Organisation and the World Assembly of Muslim Youth, which sought to warn the new generation against 'false' ideologies.[198] These initiatives were widely seen as countering Arab nationalism, but King Faisal rejected such views. In his interview published in 1972, the monarch was asked whether there was not a 'conflict' between the Arab League and his 'call for Islamic unity'. He responded that he considered 'Arab unity and the Arab union as the nucleus of a greater Islamic unity'. Thus, Islamic solidarity was 'a force for Arab solidarity and the Arab League'.[199]

Although the immediate threat of revolutionary and socialist forms of Arab nationalism ended with the Israeli victory over Egypt in 1967, non-state actors continued to challenge the Saudi regime's legitimacy. Especially prominent was a leftist group around Nāṣir al-Saʿīd (c. 1923–79). A former strike leader at Aramco, al-Saʿīd escaped to Syria after having attempted to form an Arabian Trade Union Association in 1956. In 1958, he founded the oppositionist organization Union of the People of Arabia (Ittiḥād Shaʿb al-Jazīrah al-ʿArabīyah). While the organization was mainly active abroad, it enjoyed limited support in the region of Jabal Shammar, among the Aramco workforce and among foreign Arabs in the kingdom.[200] In December 1979, the Saudi secret service abducted al-Saʿīd in Beirut.[201]

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[197] Al-ʿAskar, "Ḥadīth" (2011). See also Mike Farquhar's forthcoming thesis on the Islamic University of Medina.

[198] Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission* (2006), 152–53. Hardy, "Ambivalent Ally" (2008), 101.

[199] Al-Fātiḥ and Āl Suʿūd, *Al-fayṣalīyah* (1972), 79–80.

[200] Abir, *Saudi Arabia* (1993), 35–36.

[201] Article 19, *Silent Kingdom* (1991). Hamzah Al-Hassan, interview, 8 November 2010. De Baets, *Censorship* (2002), 424–25;

The opposition by the Union of the People of Arabia had an important historiographic

dimension. In 1983/84, the organization published a monograph by Nāṣir al-Saʿīd entitled

The History of Al Saud. [202] It was an overt anti-royalist dynastic history, which narrated the

path of the Al Saud from the eighteenth century until the twentieth with the aim of

discrediting it. This was clear in the cover page, which displayed a shocking rendering of the

Saudi coat of arms, with a decapitated head instead of the palm tree on top of the two

sabres (see figures 1 and 2).
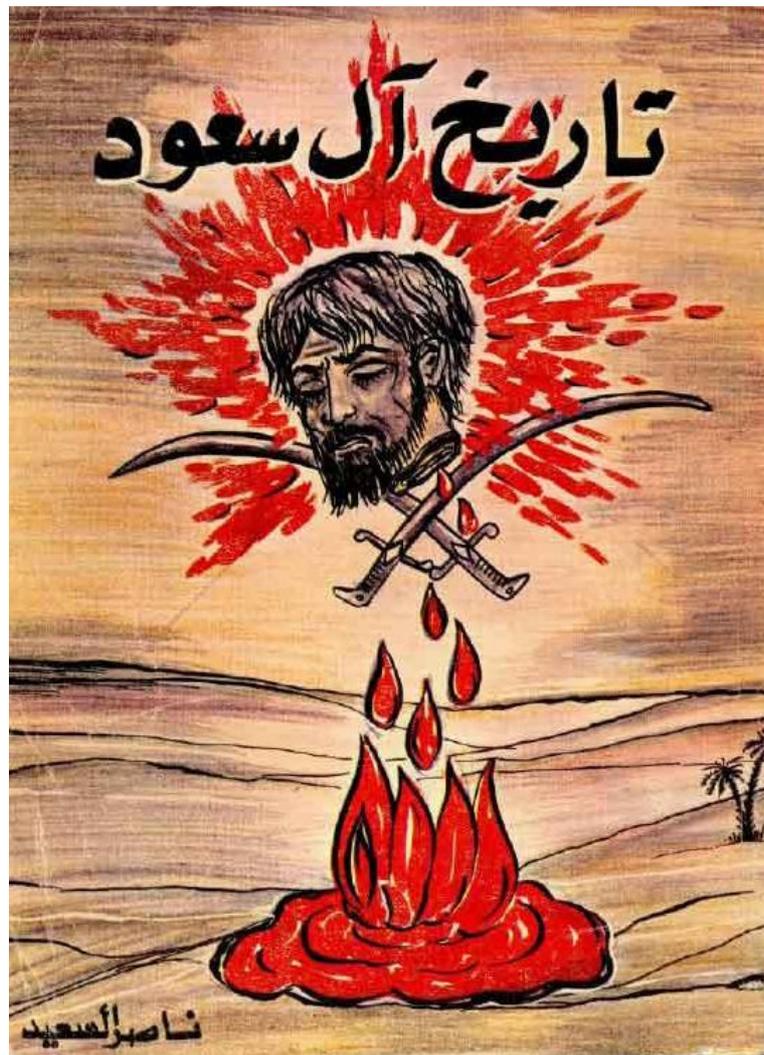
Figure 1: Cover of Nāṣir al-Saʿīd, *Tārīkh* [1983/84].

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[202] Nāṣir al-Saʿīd, *Tārīkh* [1983/84].

Figure 2: The Saudi coat of arms, adopted in 1950.

Nāṣir al-Saʿīd's *History of the Al Saud* aimed at delegitimizing the Saudi regime in the Arab world. On the first pages of the book, the oppositionist rejected the depictions of the Al Saud as the most authentic Arabs, declaring that 'the following facts will disprove the claims of the Al Saud. They will also refute the lies of the writers and historians who sold their souls to them, fabricated history, and inserted the genealogy of the Al Saud into the lineage of the Arab prophet.'[203] Similar to sporadic allegations of Yasser Arafat's Jewish origins, al-Saʿīd also claimed to provide 'evidence for the Jewish character of the Al Saud'.[204]

Al-Saʿīd's anti-Saudi stance also mirrored the anti-imperialism in contemporary dynastic histories, as he alleged close collaboration between Saudi Arabia, Western powers and Israel. He dedicated a chapter to the 'trinity of treason' of Abdulaziz, the Kuwaiti emir Mubārak al-Ṣabāḥ (r. 1896–1915) and Khazʿal (d. 1936). Khazʿal was the ruler of the semi-autonomous Gulf sheikhdom of Moḥammerah who concluded a treaty with the British for the benefits of the Anglo-Persian Oil Company. Al-Saʿīd also emphasized 'the unlimited English support for Abdulaziz' in his crushing of a rebellion by the ʿUjmān tribe in eastern Arabia.

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[203] Ibid., 8.
[204] Ibid., 1039.

Moreover, he told the 'history of the Saudi betrayal of Palestine', the 'truth about the success of the conspiracies by the Zionists, the Americans, the Saudis and al-Sadat'.[205]

Such anti-Saudi narratives make it not surprising that the Saudi government, with increasing oil revenues, continued to employ foreigners persecuted by neighbouring regimes for its Pan-Arab legitimation effort even after the Egyptian defeat of 1967. A notable author was Muhammad Keshk, a communist-turned-Islamist who had been prohibited from working in Egypt between 1964 and 1967.[206] In 1981, Keshk published a tome entitled *The Saudis and the Islamic Solution: The Source of the Legitimacy of the Saudi Regime*.[207] The Saudi government sponsored this publication by purchasing and distributing numerous copies, thus enabling him to sell three editions at a price of a hundred riyals (around twenty-nine dollars) per copy in less than twelve months.[208] Here, Keshk benefitted from a policy of the Ministry of Information to 'encourage' Saudi as well as foreign writers through 'the purchase in quantity of books which can be useful for cultural and information purposes, after careful study of their contents. These books are then distributed on a wide scale'.[209]

Keshk was among the most explicit voices in promoting the superiority of the Saudis as a Muslim Arab dynasty over secular Arab nationalists. In his monograph, he argued that from the start of the Wahhabi mission in the eighteenth century, the Saudis put forward the 'Islamic solution' in fighting European 'imperialism' and Westernization. While secular Arab movements led to 'subordination and division', the 'Muslim Arabism of the Saudis' succeeded in achieving 'liberty and unity'.[210] This made King Abdulaziz 'a Muslim Arab national giant' and was the basis of the supreme legitimacy of the Saudi monarchy.[211]

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[205] Ibid., 1036–39.

[206] Kishk, "Ḥiwār" (2009).

[207] Kishk, *Al-suʿūdīyūn* (1981).

[208] Kishk, *Al-suʿūdīyūn* (1982), 4. Interviews with several Saudi historians in 2009 and 2010.

[209] Al-Mani and as-Sbit, *Cultural Policy* (1981), 58.

[210] Kishk, *Al-suʿūdīyūn* (1981), 7–8.

[211] Ibid., 12.

In another instance in which the employment of a foreigner led to plurality even within

dynastic historiography, Keshk also denounced Rihani and Philby's texts for alleged pro-

Western stances. He argued that 'Rihani's Arab nationalism was naïve and simple: expelling

the Turks from Arabia and opening this land to Western civilization through European

presence'.[212] Thus, Rihani 'did not conceal his support for a British occupation of Arabia for

the sake of developing it'.[213] According to the Egyptian author, Philby 'did not believe in

Islam or Wahhabism, nor did he possess any tendencies of liberation, and he did not believe

in an Arab nation'.[214]

Conclusions

Keshk's work represents the endpoint and pinnacle of a series of histories describing the Al

Saud as a true Muslim Arab dynasty. The expansion of the Saudi state in a globalizing

context contributed to, and shaped, the emergence of this dynastic historiography. Over the

nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, the developing Saudi polity supported the production

and publication of a series of Najdi chronicles. Under the influence of the Wahhabi mission

and the violent confrontation between the Saudis and their neighbours, these works argued

that the Al Saud were the only true Muslims. This argument was part of a takfīrist paradigm

that described non-Wahhabi Muslims as unbelievers and included the notion of a pre-

Wahhabi 'age of ignorance' (*jāhilīyah*).

Between the 1920s and 1960s, the expanding state attracted foreigners who, besides

serving the government in its international relations, authored major dynastic histories.

These were produced by foreign or foreign-run publishers and were intended partly for

international audiences. The authors adopted major parts of earlier takfīrism, but also

undertook two major innovations. First, as men whose principal loyalties lay with the Saudi

monarchs and who had limited contacts with local communities, they strengthened dynastic

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[212] Ibid., 711.

[213] Ibid., 719.

[214] Ibid., 731.

exclusivism; a tendency to conceive the country's history essentially as the history of the Al Saud. Second, in the context of rising Arab nationalism in the region and the Saudi struggle with the ideology's revolutionary and socialist forms, foreign writers introduced Arab nationalist narratives to dynastic historiography, alongside the takfīrist narratives already prevalent in this genre. They presented the Saudi dynasty as having led the Arab world's struggle for unity and independence, and thus as being the most authentic Arab nationalists.

While foreigners dominated dynastic historiography between the 1920s and 1960s, they did not control the Saudi historiographical field entirely and enforce narrative uniformity. The works by pre-Wahhabi local historians as well as authors critical of the Ibn Ghannām School, in Najd were, indeed, suppressed. Yet, as the next chapter will demonstrate, new local historians emerged in the kingdom from the 1920s onwards. They used parts of the pre-modern annalist tradition as sources, but at the same time published non-annalist works in modern style. Focusing on local and regional history, they challenged dynastic historiography, and thus contributed to narrative plurality, especially regarding the critical pre-Wahhabi situation.

3. Particularistic Local Histories, 1920s to 1970s

Between the 1920s and 1970s, it was not only historical works on the Saudi dynasty which proliferated. About a dozen major monographs and numerous articles on local history appeared too. These texts dealt with a variety of places in Najd, the Hejaz, Asir, the southern region of Jāzān as well as the eastern oases of al-Aḥsāʾ and al-Qaṭīf. Virtually all of their authors were indigenous Saudis. They were thus more homogeneous in their backgrounds than the authors of dynastic histories, who included many foreigners. Yet, as this chapter will show, local historians did not draw on a single tradition, like the Ibn Ghannām School of Najdi chroniclers. Nor did most of these historians gather in a single institution, like the royal court or the foreign ministry, as many of their dynastic counterparts did. Instead, they lived across the country and only started to form a loosely connected group in the decades after World War II, when a few of them established journals that served as platforms for local historiography.

While local historians were primarily concerned with their own specific regions, their endeavours bore a common feature in relation to dynastic historiography: a particularistic expression of a local community's historical independence from the Al Saud. Three related characteristics constituted this particularism. The first was the narration of local political, religious and social traditions that were often distant from the traditions of Najd or suppressed by the Al Saud and the Wahhabi mission. The second characteristic was the narration of a long, multi-dynastic local history as opposed to dynastic exclusivism, that is, the tendency to exclude periods without Saudi rule from the country's history. The third characteristic of many Saudi local histories was an assertion of the presence of Islam even during periods before and without Saudi rule. This was in contrast to the takfīrist paradigm of dynastic histories, which assumed that Muslims not reached by the Wahhabi mission were infidels.

The production of particularistic histories was helped by the fact that nation building was in its infancy between the 1920s and 1970s. The different regions of the Hejaz, Asir, Najd and al-Aḥsāʾ were not only culturally distinct. They had also enjoyed political autonomy and, in the case of the Hejaz, even recognised statehood before the Saudi conquests in the early twentieth century.[1] Regionalism remained especially strong in the Hejaz. Among the sources of this regionalism were the claims of the Hashemite family who continued to rule Transjordan and Iraq. Other sources include the more cosmopolitan environments of Mecca and Medina and the Red Sea trading port of Jeddah in comparison with Riyadh and other towns in southern Najd. Even decades after the Saudi conquest of the region in 1924–25, Hejazis often saw their own urban culture as 'sophisticated', in contrast to the 'rough' and austere Najdi culture, which they associated with the Bedouin.[2]

Given the strong regionalism, the Saudi conquests in the early twentieth century led to resentment especially among the local elites, which culminated in several anti-Saudi rebellions. Pressure on their religious identity led the Shiites of al-Qaṭīf to take up arms in 1927–28.[3] In 1932, the Hejaz and Asir also witnessed rebellions. The organizers of these rebellions were wealthy Hejazi families, who opposed the Saudi exploitation of the Hejazi economy in the middle of the global economic crisis.[4] In Asir, they found support in the region's nominal ruler al-Ḥasan al-Idrīsī, who protested against the 'outright annexation' of his realm by the Saudis.[5] Even after the Saudi government had crushed these rebellions resentment continued, especially in the Hejaz, and national integration was slow. Mixed marriages across regional and sectarian lines remained rare and were, in some cases, considered 'shameful and sinful'.[6]

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[1] Al-Hassan, "The Role" (2006), 102.

[2] Chalcraft, "Migration" (2011), 37. For cosmopolitanism in Hejaz, see Freitag, "The City" (2011); "Handelsmetropole" (2007). On Hejazi regionalism generally, see Mai Yamani, *The Cradle* (2004).

[3] Al-Hassan, "The Role" (2006), 170.

[4] Kostiner, *The Making* (1993), 161.

[5] Walmsley Jr., "The Asir Revolt" (1976), 150.

[6] Al-Hassan, "The Role" (2006), 232.

While the lack of sufficient national integration contributed to particularism, this chapter will investigate the ways in which globalization and state expansion shaped the emergence of these local histories. Globalization brought opportunities to study and publish abroad and increased access to foreign literature. In addition, it led to the establishment of the first modern schools influenced by foreign models. Growth of the Saudi state meant not only the institutionalization of censorship. It also brought the employment of an increasing number of people in the bureaucracy and the further development of the public education sector. In addition, state building involved a spatial re-organization of the country's provinces, the subjects of many local histories.

Narrating local political, religious and social traditions

A major feature of the particularism of the Saudi local histories produced between the 1920s and 1970s was a narrative organized around local political, religious and social traditions suppressed under Saudi rule. The focus on these traditions was especially frequent in the Hejaz and Jāzān. Most local historians did not explicitly demand independence from the central government. Yet, their emphasis on local and regional traditions presented local communities as having been historically autonomous from the Al Saud and the Wahhabi mission. In some instances, local historians even explicitly lamented the destruction of local traditions by the Saudi conquests. This was in contrast to the takfīrist narratives in most dynastic histories, which presented the Saudis as bringing the light of Islam and political order against the background of ignorance, chaos and division.

One of the first representatives of this particularistic local history approach was Ḥusayn Naṣīf (1905/6–54[7]). He was a member of a prominent merchant family who benefitted from new opportunities in education brought about by globalization in the port city

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[7] ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Ḥuqayl, *Muʿjam* (1993), 144. Al-Madīnah, "Shakhṣīyāt" (2010). ʿAbd al-Quddūs al-Anṣārī, *Mawsūʿat tārīkh* (1980), 613, provides the less likely dates of 1903/4–59/60.

of Jeddah. He was the grandson of an agent of the sharifs in Jeddah[8] and a son of the scholar Muḥammad ibn Ḥusayn Naṣīf (1885–1971). This privileged background allowed him to study at the Falāḥ, 'Success', School in Jeddah, one of the first modern schools in the Arabian peninsula. [9] The school itself was part of a trans-regional network. Its founder and owner was the trader in pearls Muḥammad ʿAlī Zaynal Riḍā (1882/83–1969), who also created schools with the same name in Mecca, Bahrain, Dubai and Mumbai.[10]

Naṣīf's education and the increasing contacts between Jeddah and Egypt enabled him to publish a book with the title *The Past and Present of the Hejaz*. The author focused explicitly on the political traditions of the Hejaz, as he wanted to 'leave the study of its environment and nature' to a planned book by another graduate of the Falāḥ School.[11] Two scholars with strong connections to Egypt helped and encouraged Naṣīf in writing his work. One of them was Maḥmūd Shākir (1909–97), an Egyptian writer and sharif. He had migrated to the Hejaz in 1928 and established a new primary school in Jeddah at the request of King Abdulaziz. The other supporter of Naṣīf was Aḥmad al-ʿArabī (1915–99), another sharif and a graduate of the Falāḥ School in Mecca. Al-ʿArabī incidentally formed part of the first Saudi student mission to Egypt, which the Egyptian-born official and dynastic historian Hafiz Wahba had initiated. He was one of the first Saudis with a modern university education in the early 1930s. Thanks to these men, Naṣīf was able to find a printing press in Cairo for his book on the Hejaz and thus to circumvent Saudi censorship.[12]

In Naṣīf's *Past and Present of the Hejaz*, there was no notion of a common political community shared with Najd or the Al Saud. Instead, the author sought to narrate the brief political tradition of an independent Hejazi nation in the early twentieth century. This was a

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[8] Philippe Pétriat, e-mail to me, 3 November 2011. Carter, *Merchant Families* (1984), 183.

[9] ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Ḥuqayl, *Muʿjam* (1993), 144. ʿAbd al-Quddūs al-Anṣārī, *Mawsūʿat tārīkh* (1980), 613.

[10] Maghribī, *Aʿlām* (1981), 279, 292. Naṣīf, *Māḍī* (1930), 7. Davidson, "Higher Education" (2008), 27.

[11] Naṣīf, *Māḍī* (1930), j. However, the planned book on *The Hejazi Environment* (*Al-muḥīṭ al-ḥijāzī*) by ʿAbd al-Wahhāb Nashshār (1902–68) was not published. Muʾassasat Suʿūd ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Bābuṭayn lil-Ibdāʿ al-Shiʿrī, "ʿAbd al-wahhāb" (2011).

[12] Naṣīf, *Māḍī* (1930), 214.

tradition that exclusivist Saudi dynastic histories largely ignored. Naṣīf began his book with a

biography of Hussein (r. 1916–24), the first Hashemite king of the Hejaz, and concluded it

with the surrender of Jeddah to Abdulaziz Al Saud in 1925. Drawing on the former Hejazi

official gazette, *al-Qiblah*, Naṣīf gave detailed accounts of the Hashemite state in the Hejaz,

including its finances, communications, schools and the judiciary. Celebrating local political

traditions, the Hejazi author even printed images of Hussein and his sons, the Hashemite

flag, coat of arms, and stamps.[13]

Despite the prominence of the Hashemites in Naṣīf's work, the book was more a

Hejazi national history than a Hashemite dynastic chronicle. Naṣīf was primarily interested in

the fate of the Hejaz rather than that of the Hashemites per se. Thus, he even praised the

former Ottoman governor Vehib Pasha (1877–1940), whom Hussein had fought. The author

narrated that with Vehib the Ottoman Empire had chosen a man 'who combined the

attributes and capabilities of a governor from administrative skills to intelligence,

shrewdness, love of good, sympathy for the people, bravery, determination, and strictness'.

According to Naṣīf, Vehib 'rightly won the admiration of the wise men of the Hejaz'.[14] In the

later parts of his book, Naṣīf also told the history of the Hejazi National Party, which had

ousted Hussein at a time when the Hashemites were losing the war against the Saudis in

1924. Through his father, who had been co-founder of the party in 1924,[15] Naṣīf was also

able to access numerous letters between the party and the Hashemites. He published these

letters and even included the party's principles in his book. The first of them was explicitly

anti-Saudi, namely 'to seek by every means to save the country from the imminent

catastrophe', that is, the Saudi conquest.[16]

Naṣīf not only narrated local political traditions. Drawing on foreign literature, he also

discussed an important religious practice suppressed under the Saudi regime. This practice

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[13] Naṣīf, *Māḍī* (1930).

[14] Ibid., 9.

[15] Ibid., 133, 140.

[16] Ibid., 133.

was the usage of the *maḥmal*, a camel palanquin that carried the Kaaba's cloth or *kiswah* from Cairo and other cities to Mecca. Saudi authorities had refused to admit it to Mecca in the early nineteenth century and again in the twentieth century on the ground that it was a heresy (*bidʿah*) and used as an object of prayers instead of God.[17] In contrast to the dynastic author Hafiz Wahba, for instance,[18] Naṣīf made no reference to the *maḥmal* being heretical. Instead, he presented the *maḥmal* as a legitimate historical tradition by narrating its long history. He explained that the practice began with the sultana of Egypt Shajar al-Durr (r. 1250), who rode a camel with a palanquin as a pilgrim to Mecca in 1248. In addition, Naṣīf quoted an Egyptian traveller from the early twentieth century who stated that 'the Prophet rode a *maḥmal* to Mecca with gifts for the Kaaba'.[19]

At the time of the publication of his work in 1930, Ḥusayn Naṣīf was not alone in his concern for Hejazi political and religious traditions. He was part of a circle of similar-minded Hejazi nationalists, who were principally members of the elites of Jeddah and Mecca. In 1932, a relative of Naṣīf and another co-founder of the Hejazi National Party, Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ Naṣīf (1895–1973), founded the newspaper *Ṣawt al-Ḥijāz*, 'Voice of the Hejaz', in Mecca. Just as Ḥusayn Naṣīf focused on Hejazi political traditions with hardly any praise for the Saudis, the editorial of the first issue of *Ṣawt al-Ḥijāz* in 1932 was, as one Hejazi writer commented later, 'completely free from praise and glorification' of the Saudi government and 'did not mention it at all'. Instead, the editorial claimed, it was 'our sacred national duty to raise our voice in this newspaper in order to tell the world about the life of us, the Hejazi nation'.[20]

The expression of Hejazi nationalism was helped by the fact that the Saudi government formally unified the dual Kingdom of the Hejaz and Najd only in 1932. Hence, the Hejaz as a legal entity continued to exist for eight years after the Saudi conquest of

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[17] Robinson, "The Mahmal" (1931).

[18] Wahbah, *Jazīrat al-ʿarab* (2009), 323.

[19] Naṣīf, *Māḍī* (1930), 93. Naṣīf referred to al-Batanūnī, *Al-riḥlah* (1909; 1911).

[20] ʿAbd al-Jabbār, *Al-tayyārāt* (2008), 159.

Mecca in 1924. The regime, however, gradually suppressed this form of regionalism in order

to consolidate its possessions. It banished the editor-in-chief of *Ṣawt al-Ḥijāz* from the Hejaz

after the newspaper's thirteenth issue. He was accused of 'factionalism' (*ḥizbīyah*) and

'spreading lies in inflating the incident of Ibn Rafādah'. This incident was the unsuccessful

anti-Saudi rebellion in the Hejaz in 1932.[21]

Over the following decades, an official emphasis on the social and political

homogeneity of the kingdom led to suppression of the term 'the Hejaz', although no decree

explicitly prohibited its usage.[22] *Ṣawt al-Ḥijāz* only continued until 1941, when the

government suspended all newspapers and magazines except *Umm al-Qurá*, the official

gazette. This was justified with the shortage of newsprint during World War II. In 1953, *Ṣawt

al-Ḥijāz* re-appeared under the new, national name *al-Bilād al-Suʿūdīyah*, 'Saudi Land'. This

name was later shortened to *al-Bilād*, 'The Country'.[23] It is not clear whether Naṣīf's book on

Hejaz was formally banned. Yet, the author did not realize his intention to publish a second

volume of the work.[24] Nor has a second edition appeared since.

Despite the repression of Hejazi nationalism, the expansion of the Saudi state in its

global context also indirectly facilitated the publication of some other Hejazi histories with

underlying narratives of local traditionalism. One of the main figures was 'Abd al-Quddoos

al-Ansari (1905–83), another member of the group of new Hejazi writers that emerged with

the expansion of modern education and increasing global connections. Al-Ansari studied at

one of Medina's first modern schools, the School of Legal Studies (Madrasat al-ʿUlūm al-

Sharʿīyah).[25] At the same time, he read magazines imported from Egypt, including *al-Balāgh

al-Usbūʿī*, *al-Hilāl* and al-*Muqtaṭaf*. They influenced him in adopting a plain prose instead of

the prevalent rhymed prose (*sajʿ*), which he was learning at school. In the late 1920s, few

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[21] Ibid.

[22] Mai Yamani, *The Cradle* (2004), 14.

[23] Wensinck et al., "Makka" (1991), 176.

[24] Naṣīf, *Māḍī* (1930), 214.

[25] Aramco, "Portrait" (1964), 4.

Saudi periodicals existed, through which al-Ansari could have gained experience as a writer. He was, however, able to place articles in a number of foreign print media. Besides *al-Muqtaṭaf*, the media included *al-Murshid al-ʿArabī*, a Yemeni newspaper, and *al-ʿĀlam al-Islāmī*, a periodical from Sumatra.[26]

Thanks to his modern education, al-Ansari quickly found employment in the expanding Saudi bureaucracy. This provided him with a salary that financed his writing about local history. After his graduation from the School of Legal Studies in 1928, he became one of the youngest employees in the diwan of the new Saudi governor of Medina. This position allowed al-Ansari to publish a book on *The Ancient Monuments of Medina*, in which he explored the Ottoman and pre-Ottoman heritage of his hometown. In the absence of many local presses before World War II, he used a Damascene publisher to print the book in 1935. Al-Ansari thus benefitted, as dynastic authors did, from foreign expertise in typesetting and printing that was still unavailable in Saudi Arabia.[27] In addition, globalization facilitated the publication of his book by creating international demand, especially among the increasing number of pilgrims to the holy sites of Medina. An abridged version of *The Ancient Monuments of Medina* was reportedly translated into French and Indonesian.[28]

Apart from paying al-Ansari a salary, the Saudi state supported him in publishing the magazine *al-Manhal*, 'The Spring', which became a new medium for local historiography. This periodical covered literary texts as well as articles on a broad range of topics, including social sciences, ethics, linguistics, geography and the natural sciences. Between 1937 and 1981 alone, *al-Manhal* also published forty-four articles on the history of regions, towns and villages in Saudi Arabia. In addition, it featured dozens of biographical articles about local scholars and other historical figures.[29] The government hesitated to allow the establishment of such a privately owned literary magazine. Despite al-Ansari's work for the state, it only

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[26] Taqī al-Dīn, *Majallat al-manhal* (1986), 315–16.

[27] ʿAbd al-Quddūs al-Anṣārī, *Āthār* (1935), 1. Aramco, "Portrait" (1964), 5.

[28] Taqī al-Dīn, *Majallat al-manhal* (1986), 317.

[29] ʿAbd Allāh al-Qaḥṭānī, *Al-kashshāf* (1994), 151–74.

granted him a licence about seven years after his initial application and following a review of his personal history and a sample of his writings.[30] Thereafter, however, the state assisted al-Ansari considerably. The governmental Umm al-Qurá Press, which also issued the official newspaper, printed some of the first issues of *al-Manhal* in 1937. In an interview in 1964, al-Ansari acknowledged that the government 'extended much help to the magazine, foremost of which is free airmailing privileges inside the country and abroad, placing of ads for some of its ministries and major branches, and tax exemption for the paper'.[31]

In overcoming the government's initial resistance to the founding of his magazine, al-Ansari benefitted from the Arab nationalist and anti-colonial sentiments that some foreign-born members of the Saudi government held at the time. The writer described his magazine in 1928/29 as a means to 'defend Arabism and Islam' against 'the Westernization of everything'.[32] Specifically, he sought to fight the 'change from the Arabic to the Latin alphabet', which had happened in Turkey. He also claimed to resist 'the abolition of the Arabic grammar and the replacement of the standard language by the vernacular in its various forms in the Arab and Muslim countries'.[33] With this agenda, al-Ansari gained the support of the Syrian-born Arab nationalist and dynastic historian Fuad Hamza, who was then the Saudi deputy foreign minister. Thanks to Hamza's intervention, al-Ansari finally gained the licence for *al-Manhal* alongside exemption from the legal deposit fee in 1937.[34]

Perhaps helped by the fact that al-Ansari's son Nabīh (b. 1937/38) worked as supervisor of printing in the Saudi Ministry of Information for many years,[35] the Hejazi editor enjoyed considerable freedom in publishing texts on local history. These texts included *Our Recent History*, a series of articles on modern Hejazi history mixed with autobiographical accounts by ʿAbd al-Ḥaqq Naqshabandī (1904–88). Naqshabandī was a poet and writer who

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[30] Jones, *Desert Kingdom* (2010), 277.

[31] Aramco, "Portrait" (1964), 6.

[32] Taqī al-Dīn, *Majallat al-manhal*, vol. 2 (1986), 315.

[33] ʿAbd Allāh al-Qaḥṭānī, *Al-kashshāf* (1994), 30.

[34] Ibid., 26–27.

[35] Ibid., 3. ʿAbd al-Ghanī, "Mudīr" (2009).

had benefitted from the increasing connections between the Hejaz and the rest of the world. These connections allowed him to receive an education in India, Greater Syria as well as Medina.[36] In *Our Recent History*, published in 1963, Naqshabandī narrated the Saudi–Hashemite war in 1924–25 from a Hejazi perspective and without any concessions to Saudi versions of this event. He even reproduced pro-Hashemite lyrics as he recalled his excitement about the Saudi–Hashemite war while studying in Medina. He wrote, 'what increased our vigour and enthusiasm were those songs that reached us from Syria, Lebanon, and Mecca. We used to sing them in the schoolyard in the morning and evening. Most of them praised Hussein and the Hashemite house. There is no objection to giving some examples: (1) Oh great lord, pride of all Arabs, magnificent King; your ancestor was the Prophet. [Oh soldiers,] March towards the King to rescue the homeland! Attack the enemies to save the homeland!'[37]

The Hejaz remained the only region, in which historians presented the past in the framework of an independent 'nation'. Yet, local authors elsewhere also emphasized non-Saudi political traditions, which dynastic histories excluded. Muḥammad al-ʿAqīlī (1918–2002) in Jāzān is a pertinent example. He illustrates how the expanding Saudi state indirectly facilitated such historiography by employing locals in the bureaucracy and thus providing them with an income that paid for their research expenses. Born in the town of Ṣabyā, al-ʿAqīlī received a religious education from his father, a scholar, as well as other ulema in the region. Subsequently, he worked for the Saudi government in various positions. In 1937, he began working for the Ministry of Finance in Jāzān and eventually became the director of the local department of revenues. In 1957, al-ʿAqīlī administered Jāzān's orphanage and subsequently was appointed a member of Jāzān's Municipal Council (al-Majlis al-Baladī) and Administrative Council (al-Majlis al-Idārī).[38] These appointments offered

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[36] Muʾassasat Suʿūd ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Bābuṭayn lil-Ibdāʿ al-Shiʿrī, "ʿAbd al-ḥaqq" (2011).

[37] Naqshabandī, "Al-ḥalqah" (1963), 16.

[38] Al-Dāʾirah lil-Iʿlām, *Muʿjam* (1990), 243.

him sufficient material security to facilitate years of research in his spare time. It also allowed him to build up a private library. By 1963, this library contained more than thirty-five manuscripts, on which he had spent 'large amounts'.[39] The research culminated in the publication of his first book in 1958: *The History of al-Mikhlāf al-Sulaymānī or the Arab South in History*.[40] Al-Mikhlāf al-Sulaymānī, 'the Sulaymānid District', was the traditional name for the region around Jāzān.[41]

Employment in the administration of his home region, which lasted for more than three decades until his retirement in 1972,[42] indirectly fostered al-ʿAqīlī's engaging in local historiography. For his fiscal and political work, he presumably needed to gather information about, and keep records of, local social and genealogical relations as well as the property of individuals, families, and tribes. This probably encouraged encyclopaedic interests,[43] but only on the local level. Besides his *History of al-Mikhlāf al-Sulaymānī*, al-ʿAqīlī published articles on geography, a book on ancient ruins, a vernacular dictionary and a literary history. Yet, he kept his focus in all of these works on Jāzān.[44] Even in 1992 he still seemed to have been more devoted to Jāzān than to any other place. He stated, 'our lives do not belong to any of us. They belong to the history of Jāzān. Thus, I write it with sincerity and honesty for generations'.[45]

Al-ʿAqīlī's employment in local administration facilitated a particularistic portrayal of the past by providing him with access to many local sources. Well connected through his fiscal and municipal work, the author was able to interview various heads of villages and local tribes and even a former servant of the Idrīsids who had ruled the region between 1908 and 1930. He thus gathered information, which historians of the Al Saud had missed or chosen

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[39] Al-ʿAqīlī, *Maqālāt* [2000], 12.

[40] Al-ʿAqīlī, *Min tārīkh* (1958).

[41] Bosworth, "Mikhlāf" (1998), 35.

[42] Al-ʿAlāwinah, *Maʾāl* (2009), 86.

[43] ʿAfīfī, *Muḥammad* (1997).

[44] Al-ʿAqīlī "Al-muʿjam" (1969); *Muʿjam* (1990); *Al-tārīkh* (1992). Saʿd al-Rāshid, "Al-āthār" (2007), 236.

[45] Al-ʿAqīlī, *Al-tārīkh* (1992), 980.

to ignore.[46] Moreover, while twentieth-century dynastic historians relied on the Ibn Ghannām School of Najdi chronicles, al-ʿAqīlī accessed the letters by Muḥammad ibn Idrīs (1876–1923), the ruler of his hometown Ṣabyā, as well as manuscript annals of local dynasties.[47] He even edited an anti-Wahhabi chronicle of a local ruler entitled *The Fragrance of Aloes: The History of the Dynasty of Sharif Ḥumūd*.[48]

The influx of literature from abroad benefitted al-ʿAqīlī's exploration of the non-Wahhabi past too. It allowed him to avoid relying on the chronicles of the Ibn Ghannām School, on which dynastic historiography was based. In his *History of al-Mikhlāf al-Sulaymānī,* he drew, for instance, on the *History of the Islamic Peoples* by the German orientalist Carl Brockelmann (1868–1956).[49] A Lebanese private press had published this work in Arabic only a few years before al-ʿAqīlī wrote his history.[50] Al-ʿAqīlī could also rely on the library of his father in Ṣabyā, which contained about 300 works. These works included not only classical texts, such as the historical manual *Erudition* (*al-Maʿārif*) by the Kufa-born judge ʿAbd Allāh ibn Qutaybah (828–89). They also comprised modern books from outside the Arabian peninsula, like the *Arabic Encyclopaedia* by Buṭrus al-Bustānī (1819–83) from Mount Lebanon.[51]

Al-ʿAqīlī's devotion to Jāzān and its past did not mean that he saw his home region in complete isolation or that he did not imagine any larger communities. In fact, he was very affected by the rise of Arab nationalism in the 1950s. In his *History of al-Mikhlāf al-Sulaymānī,* he asserted that the history of his region 'is in fact a part of the history of the Arab nation and its families and the history of its vast lands'.[52] It is thus not so much part of Saudi Arabia. Moreover, al-ʿAqīlī even proclaimed to serve Arab unity. He wrote, 'I hope to

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[46] Al-Ḥumayd, "Manhaj" (2001), 61.

[47] Al-ʿAqīlī, *Tārīkh*, vol. 2 (1982), 756–909.

[48] Al-Bahkalī, *Nafḥ* (1982). On the author of the chronicle, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Bahkalī (1768–1832), see also al-Zaʿārīr, "Al-muʾarrikhūn" (1998).

[49] Al-ʿAqīlī, *Min tārīkh*, vol. 2 (1958), 480.

[50] Brūkilmān, *Tarikh* (1948).

[51] Al-Bustānī, *Dāʾirat al-maʿārif* (1876).

[52] Al-ʿAqīlī, *Min tārīkh*, vol. 1 (1958), w.

have contributed to this blessed renaissance and passionate consciousness in this important phase of the noble Arab nation, which has begun to complete the building of its unity'.[53] In this statement, he seemed to refer to the merger of Egypt and Syria that took place in 1958, the same year as his book's publication. Consequently, the author from Jāzān also addressed this work to a pan-Arab rather than a local audience. He stated in the introduction, 'I hope to receive encouragement from my brothers, the sons of the Arab nation in the Arab homeland. This will drive me to finish the remaining two volumes.'[54]

Despite his pan-Arab professions, the focus of the *History of al-Mikhlāf al-Sulaymānī*, however, remained on Jāzān and neighbouring regions, especially Yemen and Asir. Al-ʿAqīlī focused mainly on the political traditions of these regions. In the first part of his work, he discussed 'the most famous ancient governments' in Yemen, and gave accounts of the Sabaeans and of Yemen during the Umayyad and Abbasid periods. Entering early modern and modern times, he focused on Jāzān, narrating the fate of various local dynasties and rulers until the Idrīsids, who finally surrendered to King Abdulaziz. Only a few chapters referred to the Saudi dynasty and the Wahhabi mission. These dealt with the Wahhabi expansion in the area during the early nineteenth century and Saudi–Idrīsid relations.[55]

Local sources provided al-ʿAqīlī with material on local political and religious traditions. On their basis, the author from Jāzān dedicated chapters to the history of the Ismaili dynasty of the Ṣulayḥids (c. 1047–1138) and the Sufi Idrīsids.[56] He also conceived the 'Wahhabi-Salafi mission' as only one of several 'religious and political currents and factors' fighting over Jāzān for much of the nineteenth century. One of them was Zaydism, which Sharif Ḥumūd's Āl Khayrāt dynasty supported. Another one was the Aḥmadīyah Sufi order, which 'found the way paved for extending its spiritual authority over the people'.[57]

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[53] Ibid., h.

[54] Ibid., w.

[55] Al-ʿAqīlī, *Min tārīkh*, vol. 2 (1958).

[56] Al-ʿAqīlī, *Min tārīkh* (1958).

[57] Al-ʿAqīlī, *Tārīkh*, vol. 2 (1982), 619.

Al-ʿAqīlī's discussion of local traditions was in line with his aim to serve Arab nationalism and bring about a social revolution that would remove religious and class differences. In his introduction to the *History of al-Mikhlāf al-Sulaymānī*, he stated that 'the modern approach to writing history requires rational deduction in the broadest areas of thought'. The author claimed to use this approach in order to 'abolish the differences between the classes of the one nation'. These differences 'divide and waste energy through sectarian conflicts and tribal hatred, thus corrupting the healthy body of the nation'.[58]

Based on local primary sources and foreign secondary literature, al-ʿAqīlī even authored a monograph on *Sufism in Tihāmah.* ʿAbd al-Quddoos al-Ansari helped to publish it in Jeddah in 1964. This book gave detailed biographies of twenty-five Sufi leaders who lived in Jāzān and northern Yemen between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries. As his monograph was published inside the kingdom, it is not surprising that al-ʿAqīlī at least paid lip service to Wahhabi condemnations of the Sufis' belief system. He stated about Sufism that, 'without any doubt, it is a heresy [*min al-bida*]'.[59] However, with his view that all religious traditions formed part of the Arab nation's history, he defended the study of such a 'very delicate' topic.[60] 'I believe', he wrote, 'that as a nation we must benefit from the experiences and lessons of our past by studying them in depth, with sincerity and in the light of the spirit of religion, with which God has fostered the Arabs.'[61]

Besides local political and religious traditions, some local historians, particularly in the Hejaz, also narrated local social and cultural heritage. They thus presented their region as having been culturally autonomous from the Najdi centre in the past.[62] An important author in this field was Muḥammad ʿAlī Maghribī (b. 1913/14). Born in Jeddah, he studied at the city's Falāḥ School, which had already educated Ḥusayn Naṣīf, the author of *The Past and*

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[58] Al-ʿAqīlī, *Min tārīkh*, vol. 1 (1958), h.

[59] Al-ʿAqīlī, *Al-taṣawwuf* (1964), 5.

[60] Ibid., 3.

[61] Ibid., 35.

[62] Mai Yamani, *The Cradle* (2004), makes similar observations of Hejazi social rituals.

Present of the Hejaz. Subsequently, Maghribī entered the emerging Hejazi literary scene and publishing industry. In 1941, he worked briefly as editor of *Ṣawt al-Ḥijāz*, and, after World War II, for the newspaper's successor, *al-Bilād*.[63] This work for Hejazi newspapers led Maghribī to study Hejaz's political and social traditions. In 1981, he published a lexicon on *Great Figures of the Hejaz, 1883–1980*.[64] Besides this, he also wrote three books on the Medina-based early Islamic caliphs Abu Bakr, Umar and Uthman.[65] This biographical research led him to investigate the social context of prominent Hejazis, which culminated in the publication of a book on *Features of the Social Life in the Hejaz* in 1982.[66]

Maghribī celebrated past Hejazi culture without reference to Wahhabi teachings. In his *Features of the Social Life in the Hejaz*, he described Sufi practices and included colourful drawings of Hejazi women singing and dancing without wearing veils.[67] In addition, with a clear sense of nostalgia, he described Hejazi musical traditions that had declined and stopped under Saudi rule. He wrote, 'singing was the most prominent original Hejazi art in the 1920s and 1930s. Mecca was distinguished by two stars during that time, who were leaders of this art: Sheikh Ismāʿīl Kardūs and Sheikh Ḥasan Jāwah.' Both 'gave concerts that were always held at the big weddings in Mecca and Jeddah'.[68]

The narration of local traditions occasionally entailed negative views of the Saudi conquests that had put an end to them. Such views characterized the book *Mecca in the Fourteenth Islamic Century* (i.e. 1882–1979). It was written by the Meccan writer Muḥammad ʿUmar Rafīʿ and published posthumously in 1981 by the Mecca Cultural Club. Incidentally, Rafīʿ also benefitted from state employment as he worked for the Saudi Directorate of Education. He gained familiarity with foreign literature early in his life, as he travelled to India, the Malay Peninsula and Turkey as well as a number of Arab countries in the 1920s

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[63] Al-Dāʾirah lil-Iʿlām, *Muʿjam* (1990), 331.

[64] Maghribī, *Aʿlām* (1981).

[65] Maghribī, *Malāmiḥ* (1985), 279.

[66] Maghribī, *Malāmiḥ* (1982).

[67] Ibid.

[68] Ibid., 210.

and 1930s.[69] Like Maghribī's work on *Features of the Social Life in the Hejaz*, Rafī''s book

focused on Hejazi social traditions. It included chapters on Meccan houses, furniture, dress,

food and beverages, wedding customs, transportation, economy, the local vernacular,

proverbs, education and the press.[70]

With regard to the Saudi conquest of Mecca in 1924, Rafī' depicted the desperation of

the city's inhabitants, after the Ikhwān had 'occupied' it in the name of King Abdulaziz. 'The

prices of everyday commodities and especially of food were soaring', he wrote, 'and the city

and its inhabitants worried in silence not knowing how this situation would end'. 'Intense

arguments between the Bedouin soldiers and some inhabitants frequently arose. When one

of the Ikhwān caught sight of a cigarette in the hand of an inhabitant or its light from afar, the

devil rode him. He started a brawl that led to fighting and beating, in which the Bedouin

soldier was the one with the loudest voice and the gun in his hands.' Rafī' also negatively

portrayed the enforcement of the Wahhabi public order by the Ikhwān in Mecca. He stated

that 'they started to destroy the graves of the Hashemites in the graveyard of al-Maʿlá. They

also announced a ban on smoking and the punishment of flogging for anyone, who engaged

it, as well as a ban on everything they considered a heresy [*bidʿah*].'[71]

Perennialism

The narration of local political, religious and social traditions was not the only means by

which historians expressed the historical autonomy of their towns and regions from the

Saudi dynasty and dynastic historiography. The particularism of local histories received

further strengthening from 'perennialist' narratives.[72] These narratives stressed the

continued existence or recurrent rise of a town or region over many centuries or even

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[69] Rafī', *Fī rubūʿ* (1954), 2–4.

[70] Rafī', *Makkah* (1981).

[71] Ibid., 287.

[72] I have taken the term 'perennialism' from Smith, *Myths* (1999), 11. He applies perennialism to the study
of nationalism, where it denotes that 'nations (if not nationalism) have existed throughout recorded history'.

millennia. By emphasizing a continuous history under various leaders and governors over such long periods, local historians gave a city or region an identity that in the long term allows it to survive the coming and going of individual rulers.[73]

To be sure, not all particularistic histories shared perennialism. The scope of Ḥusayn Naṣīf's *The Past and Present of the Hejaz*, for instance, was limited to the early twentieth century, when the Hejaz was an independent state.[74] However, perennialism was a recurrent feature, as, for instance, in Muḥammad al-ʿAqīlī's work. By starting his *History of al-Mikhlāf al-Sulaymānī* with accounts of the ancient Yemeni civilizations, south-west Arabia as a historical entity appeared to have existed for thousands of years before the appearance of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab in the eighteenth century.[75]

Another prominent local historian besides al-ʿAqīlī, who combined the narration of local traditions with perennialism, was Ahmad Subaʿi (1905–84). Born into a middle-class family in Mecca, he was, like Naṣīf, one of the first Hejazis to receive a modern education. Subaʿi attended the city's Hashemite School, which taught mathematics, literature, and history alongside Koranic recitation and other subjects.[76] This education prepared him for two years of studies at the Coptic High School in Alexandria.[77] After his return to Mecca, he retained an interest in foreign social and literary trends, reading books and journals that Meccan intellectuals brought back from travels to Egypt.[78]

With his relatively high level of education in the Saudi context, Subaʿi, like Maghribī, joined the Hejazi newspaper industry, which grew in the 1920s and 1930s and again after World War II. This provided him with experience in writing and publishing that was beneficial for his historiography. After publishing a few articles in the official gazette *Umm al-Qurá*,[79] he

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[73] I have taken this idea from Melville, "Persian" (2000), 13.

[74] Naṣīf, *Māḍī* (1930).

[75] Al-ʿAqīlī, *Min tārīkh* (1958).

[76] Subaʿi, *My Days* (2009), 9.

[77] Al-Dāʾirah lil-Iʿlām, *Muʿjam* (1990), 152. Wensinck et al., "Makka" (1991), 177.

[78] Zohair Sebai, interview in Jeddah, 18 January 2010.

[79] Al-Qashʿamī, *Aḥmad* (2005), 8–9.

worked for *Ṣawt al-Ḥijāz*, one of the main forums for young Hejazi writers,[80] and became its editor-in-chief. When *Ṣawt al-Ḥijāz* stopped publication during the war, Suba'i relied, as many of his colleagues did, on the state for an income, working as an inspector for the Ministry of Finance. In the 1950s, however, he returned to the publishing industry, founding the magazine *al-Quraysh* (Muhammad's tribe) in Mecca in 1959.[81]

Influenced by his education, his readings of Egyptian literature and involvement in the community of Hejazi journalists, Suba'i became a liberal social critic and an innovative writer who sought to push the boundaries set by Wahhabi ulema and religious conservatives generally. Already in the 1930s, decades before the establishment of the first state schools for girls in 1960, he published articles in support of female education. Frequently, he used pseudonyms like 'girl of the Hejaz' or 'Khadījah', which was the name of the Prophet Muhammad's first wife.[82] In the literary field, Suba'i founded one of the country's first theatres in Mecca. Signifying his attachment to Mecca, he also called it 'al-Quraysh' and intended to stage a play on *The Conquest of Mecca* (by Muhammad in 630). Yet, he reportedly closed the theatre due to pressure by 'conservatives'.[83]

While Suba'i looked outside of the Hejaz for education and literary inspiration, his historical interests were centred on his hometown Mecca. As a young man, he worked as a hajj operator or *muṭawwif* for several years, bringing pilgrims from neighbouring countries to Mecca and guiding them to the city's sacred sites.[84] He thus benefitted from an increase in the number of pilgrims after the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869.[85] This work fostered Suba'i's wish to write a comprehensive history of Mecca, which he initially planned together with another Hejazi journalist and friend of his. In 1937 and 1950, 'Abd al-Quddoos al-Ansari also allowed him to publish two articles on Meccan and Hejazi history in *al-Manhal*. In 1953

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[80] Suba'i, *My Days* (2009), 105.

[81] Al-Dā'irah lil-Iʻlām, *Muʻjam* (1990), 152.

[82] Al-Qashʻamī, *Aḥmad* (2005), 12–13.

[83] Ibid., 13–14.

[84] Al-Qashʻamī, *Aḥmad* (2005), 5. Zohair Sebai, interview, 18 January 2010.

[85] Kholaif, "The Hijaz Vilayet" (1986), 120.

and after years of work, Suba'i finally published a monograph with the title *The History of Mecca: Studies in Politics, Scholarship, Society and Civilization*.[86]

Suba'i's *History of Mecca* expressed a strong perennialism that portrayed Mecca as having existed since the beginnings of humanity. In one of the first chapters, the author stated that 'Mecca has been known for long, immemorial times before the time of Abraham'. 'The Kaaba was a meeting place of people before its construction by Abraham, as many Muslim sources tell us.'[87] Over several hundreds of pages, Suba'i then followed the course of Mecca through the ages of Ishmael, the Quraysh, the Prophet Muhammad, the Umayyads, Abbasids, Fatimids, Ayyubids and Mamluks. After that, Suba'i focused on how Mecca passed through the 'age of the Ottoman Turks', 'the first Saudi age' in the early nineteenth century, 'Muhammad Ali's age' and 'the second Ottoman age'. The book ended with Mecca under the Hashemites.[88]

Suba'i's perennialism was facilitated by the influx of literature from abroad. This literature provided rich information about the pre-Wahhabi past of Mecca in contrast to the Najdi chronicles of the Ibn Ghannām School. Already by the middle of the nineteenth century, the Ottomans had refilled the stocks of the local libraries, which had suffered from looting and destruction after the Saudi conquest of the city a few decades earlier. This formed part of wider Ottoman subsidies and support for the Hejaz as a province whose possession lent great prestige to the Sultans.[89] Sultan Abdülmecid (r. 1839–61) sent a library of more than 3,000 books to Mecca, which formed the basis of the library of the grand mosque. In 1927/28, another library of more than 1,000 volumes belonging to Muḥammad al-Shirwānī (d. 1875/76), a former Ottoman governor of the Hejaz, was added to its growing collection.[90] In these and other libraries, Suba'i was able to access works by a number of

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[86] Al-Sibā'ī, *Tārīkh* [1953].

[87] Al-Sibā'ī, *Tārīkh* (1984), 16.

[88] Al-Sibā'ī, *Tārīkh* (1984).

[89] Ochsenwald, "Ottoman Subsidies" (1975).

[90] Wensinck et al., "Makka" (1991), 175. Al-Ziriklī, *Shibh al-jazīrah*, vol. 3 (1970), 1035–36.

medieval Muslim chroniclers, which he repeatedly cited in his *History of Mecca.* The

chroniclers included Ibn Hishām (d. 833 or 828), al-Masʿūdī (d. 956), Ibn Khaldūn (1332–

1406) and al-Maqrīzī (d. 1442).[91]

In one important respect, the Saudi state inadvertently facilitated Subaʿi's

perennialism. In the 1930s, it supported the publication of a chronicle of Mecca by the ninth-

century scholar al-Azraqī. Its editor was the Palestinian-born Rushdī Malḥas (d. 1959), one

of the many foreigners in the service of the expanding state. Malḥas worked as editor-in-

chief of *Umm al-Qurá* and subsequently as assistant to the Syrian-born official Youssef

Yassin in the royal court. The edition of al-Azraqī was itself based on an earlier edition by

the German orientalist Ferdinand Wüstenfeld (1808–99) as well as Hejazi manuscripts.[92] As

one of few historical works not belonging to the Ibn Ghannām School, King Abdulaziz

ordered the purchase of copies of it and their free distribution.[93] Ahmad Subaʿi thus found it

easy to rely on al-Azraqī's work in his accounts of Mecca's pre-Islamic and early Muslim

past.[94]

Support for al-Azraqī's history of Mecca as a work on the early Muslim community in

Mecca—and thus on the 'pious ancestors' (*salaf*)—was in line with Abdulaziz's sponsorship

of Salafi and Wahhabi literature in general.[95] However, increasing demand for historical

accounts of Mecca through the expansion of the hajj industry perhaps also played a role in

the publication of al-Azraqī's book and Subaʿi's history itself. After a low of only 20,000

foreign pilgrims during the Great Depression in 1933, the number of hajj arrivals reached

about 50,000 in 1937 and 150,000 in 1953, when Subaʿi's book was first published. One

factor behind this increase in the number of pilgrims was the development of international

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[91] Al-Sibāʿī, *Tārīkh* (1984).

[92] Al-Azraqī, *Akhbār* (1933–38). Wüstenfeld, *Die Chroniken* (1858).

[93] Al-Ziriklī, *Shibh al-jazīrah*, vol. 3 (1970), 1032.

[94] Al-Sibāʿī, *Tārīkh* (1984). Zohair Sebai, interview, 18 January 2010.

[95] Al-Ziriklī, *Shibh al-jazīrah*, vol. 3 (1970), 1032–33.

transport, including air transport after World War II. Another factor was the 'security' that the expanding Saudi state was able to enforce in the Hejaz after the 1920s.[96]

A direct link between the increase in the number of pilgrims and the publication of al-Azraqī's and Suba'i's histories is difficult to establish. However, the publication of yet another book by a Mecca bookseller in 1951 indicates such a link. This book was the chronicle of Mecca by the sixteenth-century scholar Quṭb al-Dīn al-Ḥanafī.[97] The declared aim behind its publication was to 'satisfy the needs of the pilgrims who ask the hajj guides, teachers, and servants of the grand mosques about certain topics'.[98]

While pre-modern chronicles provided material for Suba'i's perennialism, twentieth-century works also influenced his writing. Combined with the writer's interest in social issues, foreign works inspired a new methodology. Suba'i mentioned that historical works by the Egyptian writer Ṭaha Ḥusayn (1889–1973) influenced his style of referencing.[99] Moreover, the Meccan writer investigated not only political events, but also social and cultural history. This is indicated in the sub-title of his work, *Studies in Politics, Scholarship, Society and Civilization*. Suba'i also claimed to give a more analytical account of Meccan politics than his predecessors had done. He complained that a previous group of Meccan chroniclers 'was not as concerned with the details of politics as the philosophy of history is. Mostly, it was satisfied with mentioning an instance of strife in Mecca or Arafat, the name of the person responsible, and its result. It neither investigated the conditions that led to its outbreak nor its diplomatic consequences.'[100]

Suba'i's interest in social and cultural history added a further dimension to his perennialism that put his *History of Mecca* in contrast not only to contemporary Saudi dynastic histories but also to earlier Muslim historiography. The writer reframed Mecca as a

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[96] Wensinck et al., "Makka" (1991), 169–70.

[97] Al-Ḥanafī, *Tārīkh* (1951).

[98] Al-Dubayb, "Ḥarakat iḥyā'" (1980), 24–25.

[99] Al-Sibā'ī, *Tārīkh* [1953], h.

[100] Ibid., ḥ.

city as viewed by its inhabitants, that is, a mundane city with a role beyond Islamic salvation history. As such, Mecca appeared to possess a history worth narrating even after the seat of the caliphate was lost to Damascus in the seventh century. In this vein, Suba'i criticized premodern Arab chroniclers for ignoring centuries of the Meccan past. He wrote that 'most chroniclers among our ancestors treated the history of Mecca unjustly, a fact for which they are not to blame'. Suba'i explained that 'their perspective on the history of the region was purely Islamic. The historians were interested in this region during the time, when it was the cradle of the Arabs and produced the lord of the Arabs.' After the period of the early caliphs, 'their pens followed the Muslim caliphate to Syria and subsequently to Baghdad. They left the Hejaz and mentioned it only occasionally, when the context demanded.'[101]

Perennialism was not restricted to Mecca, but reached even historians of places with a much poorer tradition of pre-modern historiography. A pertinent example is the work *The Gift of the Beneficiary of al-Aḥsā''s Ancient and Modern History*. Muḥammad Āl 'Abd al-Qādir (1894–1971), another author who benefitted from employment by the state, published it in two volumes in 1960 and 1963.[102] From the town of al-Mubarraz in al-Aḥsā', Āl 'Abd al-Qādir served as that town's judge at the appointment of King Abdulaziz from 1925 until his retirement in 1961/62. In addition, he taught in local schools and headed the education board of al-Aḥsā' from 1941 to 1945.[103]

Āl 'Abd al-Qādir's work for the state contributed to his engagement in local historiography in various indirect ways. Like al-'Aqīlī in his fiscal work, Āl 'Abd al-Qādir as a judge also needed to know local social, genealogical and property relations. This fostered an interest in the local past. In addition, thanks to his relatively high income and connections to other ulema, he was able to accumulate one of the largest private libraries in al-Aḥsā', which

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[101] Ibid., h.

[102] Āl 'Abd al-Qādir, *Tuḥfat al-mustafīd* (1960; 1963).

[103] Al-Bābuṭayn, *A'lām* (1996), 80. Āl 'Umar, "Mu'arrikh" (2001), 181–82.

included rare historical manuscripts dating back to the eleventh century.[104] While his salary would have allowed him to publish the work at his own expense, transnational connections rendered this unnecessary. The Qatari sheikh ʿAlī Āl Thānī (r. 1949–60), who was also a sponsor of other Muslim historical works, agreed to subsidize the publication of *The Gift of the Beneficiary*.[105]

Based on a number of pre-modern Arabic works, Āl ʿAbd al-Qādir conceived a much longer history of al-Aḥsāʾ than most dynastic authors did. He first gave geographical descriptions of the region taken largely from the *Lexicon of Regions* (*Muʿjam al-buldān*) by Yāqūt (1179–1229). Subsequently, and similar to Subaʿi in relation to Mecca, he emphasized al-Aḥsāʾ's passage from pre-Islamic times to the Prophet Muhammad, the Umayyad, Abbasid and Qarmaṭian dynasties, and ultimately to the Saudi and Ottoman periods. In his narration, Āl ʿAbd al-Qādir drew on further pre-modern works, including Ibn al-Athīr's *Complete History* and *The Fulfilment of Faithfulness* (*Wafāʾ al-wafā*), a chronicle of Medina by al-Samhūdī (1440–1506).[106]

British penetration of Eastern Arabia and Saudi state building facilitated Āl ʿAbd al-Qādir's perennialism by contributing to territorial understandings of al-Aḥsāʾ. These understandings allowed al-Aḥsāʾ as a spatially rather than tribally defined entity to move through time and survive the shifts of political influences intact. Al-Aḥsāʾ and Najd emerged as fix and 'bounded' areas in the reports, guides, handbooks, and maps used by the British personnel stationed in the region. Discussions on imaginary boundary lines preceded the publication of John Gordon Lorimer's (1870-1914) *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, 'Oman, and Central Arabia* in 1908. This gazetteer was the largest compendium on the Gulf produced by the government of India.[107] At the ʿUqayr conference in 1922, the British and

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[104] Al-Dharmān, *Min aʿlām* (2004), 246–51. Al-Ziriklī, *Shibh al-jazīrah*, vol. 3 (1970), 1045.

[105] Āl ʿAbd al-Qādir, *Tuḥfat al-mustafīd*, vol. 1 (1982), m.

[106] Āl ʿAbd al-Qādir, *Tuḥfat al-mustafīd* (1960).

[107] Fuccaro, "Between Imara" (2008), 43. Lorimer, *Gazetteer* (1908). Toby Matthiesen kindly pointed out to me that the Ottomans had contributed to the creation of a territorial notion of al-Aḥsāʾ earlier.

Abdulaziz Al Saud defined Najd and al-Aḥsāʾ's borders with Kuwait and Iraq. At the time, it seems that Abdulaziz did not share the concept of physically defined borders. Percy Cox, the British High Commissioner in Baghdad, reprimanded him for his 'childish attitude' in imagining boundaries based on tribal loyalties.[108] In the following year, the London-based finance group Eastern and General Syndicate obtained a concession for oil exploration in al-Aḥsāʾ. Although this concession ended a few years later, both sides had thus delineated the borders of al-Aḥsāʾ.[109]

In the case of Asir, the production of territorial understandings by foreign powers and Saudi state building was even more radical than in al-Aḥsāʾ. It turned a confederation of tribes into a province, thus allowing for an Asiri local instead of tribal history to be written. Asir, as the name of a region, was probably an Egyptian or Ottoman invention. Before the nineteenth century, 'Asir' meant a tribal confederation centred on the town of Abhā in a mountain range called al-Sarāt or Sarāt ʿAsīr. Only during Muhammad Ali's campaigns beginning in 1834 did the notion of Asir as a separate region intervening between the Hejaz and Yemen develop. In 1872, the Ottomans created a district (*mutaṣarrifiyah*) around Abhā belonging to the province of Yemen.[110] After the Saudis had defeated the regional dynasty of the Āl ʿĀʾiḍ in the 1920s, they established Asir as a province led by an 'emir', or governor. This province subsequently gained clearly defined administrative borders, including with Yemen to the south after the treaty of Ta'if in 1934.[111]

One of the first authors who took up the task of writing a history of the new province of Asir was Hāshim al-Niʿmī (b. 1921/22). He received a traditional education under ulema but also benefitted from state-provided education. The son of a judge, he went to a Koranic school or *kuttāb* in his birthplace, a village near Abhā, and attended the first governmental primary school in Abhā after it opened in 1936/37. Subsequently, al-Niʿmī studied Hadith,

[108] Fuccaro, "Between Imara" (2008), 43–44.
[109] Vidal, "Al-Ḥasā" (1979), 238.
[110] Headley et al., "ʿAsīr" (1960), 707–9. Reissner, "Die Idrīsīden" (1981), 167.
[111] Abdulfattah, *Mountain Farmer* (1981), 14–15.

Koranic exegesis (*tafsīr*) and Arabic under scholars in Mecca's grand mosque from 1939 to 1942. In addition, he developed his historical interest by reading a variety of medieval annals. They included Ibn al-Athīr's *Complete History*, al-Ṭabarī's (838–923) *History of Prophets and Kings* (*Tārīkh al-rusul wa-al-mulūk*) and Ibn Kathīr's *The Beginning and the End*.[112]

Upon his return from his studies in Mecca, state employment also facilitated al-Niʿmī's particularistic historiography. The scholar taught jurisprudence and Arabic grammar at Abhā's primary school, and served as judge of several Asiri towns, including Abhā, between 1946 and 1991.[113] His legal work further deepened his interest in local history and genealogy, as it presumably required him to learn the tribal and family relations of claimants and defendants. His contacts with other scholars in the region and relative affluence also allowed him to accumulate a private library of several thousand volumes, including many manuscripts, where he is said to have spent up to six or seven hours a day reading.[114] In addition, similar to al-ʿAqīlī's case, al-Niʿmī's position as a judge probably facilitated his access to senior informants, such as sheikhs of Asiri towns and villages.[115]

As al-Niʿmī spent most of his professional life in his home region dealing with local affairs, such as property disputes between local tribes and families, he developed encyclopaedic interests in his home region—as al-ʿAqīlī did in Jāzān. Al-Niʿmī's writings were mainly restricted to Asir but focused on many different aspects. The writings included a biographical lexicon of Asiri scholars, a geographical dictionary of the region, a history of Abhā, a book on the lineages of Asiri tribes, as well as a manuscript entitled *Asir between Geography and History*.[116] Perhaps his most important historical work, however, was his first

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[112] Al-Niʿmī, *Shadhā* [1994/95], 380. ʿUkāsī fī zaman qāsī, "Sīrat al-ʿallāmah" (2010).

[113] Al-Niʿmī, *Shadhā* [1994/95], 380. ʿUkāsī fī zaman qāsī, "Sīrat al-ʿallāmah" (2010).

[114] Al-Ḥusayn ibn Hāshim al-Niʿmī, interview, 27 February 2010.

[115] Al-Niʿmī, *Tārīkh* [1962], 270.

[116] Al-Niʿmī, *Shadhā* [1994/95]. ʿUkāsī fī zaman qāsī, "Sīrat al-ʿallāmah" (2010). *ʿAsīr bayna al-jughrāfiyā wa-al-tārīkh.*

book: *The History of Asir in the Past and Present*, published in 1962. With his salary as a judge, al-Niʿmī was able to print it at his own expense.[117]

Saudi state building incidentally fostered al-Niʿmī's writing in another way. It brought people from outside Asir to the region, people whose observations provoked a local reaction. The deputy foreign minister and dynastic historian Fuad Hamza led an expedition to the region in 1934 in the context of border conflicts with Yemen and recorded geographical, social and historical information in a book in 1951.[118] In 1940, the Directorate of Education also sent the Meccan local historian Muḥammad Rafīʿ to Asir. Rafīʿ worked as director of the school of Rijāl Almaʿ and established several other schools in southern Saudi Arabia.[119] In 1954, he published his observations of the region in a book entitled *In the Quarters of Asir*.[120] Al-Niʿmī was dissatisfied with these outsiders writing about his region. He wrote, 'I am not the first writer who attempted or thought about writing about the history of this part of our beloved homeland known as the region of Asir'. Yet, al-Niʿmī found previous works 'extremely brief'. According to him, they 'look at the history of this region from a narrow angle that does not give it the position that it deserves.'[121]

Al-Niʿmī conceived Asir as a territory corresponding to the new administrative definition. Reflecting remnants of older identities, however, he also spoke of Asiri tribesmen and their customs. His perennialism thus had both a tribal and territorial dimension. The judge began his historical account with a chapter on 'the Arabs before Islam' and their ancestors in traditional Arab genealogy, ʿAdnān and Qaḥṭān.[122] He thus provided the Asiris with a primordial ancestry that formed the basis of his perennialism. In the latter parts of *The History of Asir*, he switched from a genealogical to a territorial definition of Asir, conceiving it

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[117] Al-Niʿmī, *Tārīkh* [1962], 1.

[118] Ḥamzah, *Fī bilād* (1951).

[119] Qayṣī, "Rijāl" (2009). Ṣaqr, "Muḥammad" (2007).

[120] Rafīʿ, *Fī rubūʿ* (1954).

[121] Al-Niʿmī, *Tārīkh* [1962], 3.

[122] Ibid., 71.

as a 'region' (*bilād*) rather than a tribal confederation.[123] This allowed him to present a

continuous, uninterrupted sequence of Asiri emirs. In his presentation of 'emirs', he exploited

the double sense of the word as 'princes' and 'provincial governors'. Thus, in his account,

the 'emirs' of Asir Turkī al-Sudayrī and ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-ʿAskar, who were in fact Saudi

governors and from Najd, followed the 'emirs' of Asir from the local dynasty of the Āl ʿĀʾiḍ.[124]

Thereby, the Asiri entity appeared to endure regime changes intact and to some extent

autonomously from developments in the rest of Arabia.

While perennialism strengthened a local identity independent from the Al Saud, this

feature of particularism was rather subtle and was not seen as challenging Saudi rule

directly. As a result, the government did not categorically repress this kind of historiography.

State agencies allowed the publications of six editions of Subaʿi's *History of Mecca* alone in

Saudi Arabia up to 1984.[125] Similarly, al-ʿAqīlī's *History of al-Mikhlāf al-Sulaymānī*

reappeared twice in print up to 1989.[126] Moreover, at various points in time the state even

subsidized re-editions of some perennialist local histories. The government re-issued Subaʿi

and al-Niʿmī's works within the frame of the kingdom's centennial celebrations in 1999.[127]

In one major instance, a governmental agency even commissioned the production of a

perennialist local history. This was the *History of Jeddah* by ʿAbd al-Quddoos al-Ansari, the

editor of the magazine *al-Manhal*, which was one of the main periodicals of local

historiography.[128] The Jeddah Municipality under the mayor ʿAbd Allāh al-Qaṣabī paid for the

work, perhaps in order to raise the profile of the city nationally.[129] Although al-Ansari did not

originate from the Red Sea town, al-Qaṣabī chose him for his credentials as one of the most

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[123] Ibid., 55.

[124] Ibid., 203–61.

[125] Al-Sibāʿī, *Taʾrīkh* (1984).

[126] Al-ʿAqīlī, *Tārīkh* (1989).

[127] Al-Sibāʿī, *Taʾrīkh* (1999). Al-Niʿmī, *Tārīkh* (1999), 71.

[128] ʿAbd al-Quddūs al-Anṣārī, *Tārīkh* (1963).

[129] Ibid., 1. ʿAbd al-Quddūs al-Anṣārī, *Mawsūʿat tārīkh*, vol. 1 (1980), 7.

prominent Hejazi local historians.[130] The *History of Jeddah* extensively covered the positive

development of Jeddah under Saudi rule. In over 900 pages, the author described the city's

architectural development, society, education, economy, and the biographies of its rulers as

well as the city's mosques, banks, arts, press and writers.

The book's positive coverage of Saudi rule made it not only attractive to the Jeddah

Municipality but also to the central government. In October 1963, Crown Prince Faisal sent a

letter to al-Ansari, congratulating him on his work: 'We gratefully received a copy of the book,

History of Jeddah, which you authored in order to inform about the progress and

development of this town and its ancient and modern history in detail and with clarity'. Faisal

added, 'we appreciate your scholarly effort, as this is the first history of its kind published on

Jeddah. Thereby, you rendered an important service to the country, knowledge and

history.'[131] Two decades later, in 1983, the Ministry of Education re-printed the *History of

Jeddah* for distribution among the libraries of state schools.[132]

Although al-Ansari's *History of Jeddah* praised Saudi rule and focused more on the

twentieth century than Suba'i's *History of Mecca* did, it also had perennialist traits. Al-Ansari

considered the derivation of the city's name from the nearby tomb of Eve, the 'grandmother'

(*jaddah*), a 'pure legend'.[133] This was in contrast to Suba'i's upholding of Mecca's Abrahamic

stories. Yet, al-Ansari narrated a history of Jeddah that far exceeded the periods of Saudi

rule. He followed the line of local rulers from the tenth century onwards.[134] Moreover, the

author narrated with equal pride three instances, when Jeddah was the capital of a realm.

He thus celebrated the city's recurrent importance under different regimes. Al-Ansari wrote

that 'we can conclude that Jeddah became the seat of a principality or kingdom three times'.

'The first time was when Sharif ʿAbd al-Muḥsin ibn Aḥmad ibn Zayd resided in it as a guest

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[130] Aramco, "Portrait" (1964), 7.

[131] ʿAbd al-Quddūs al-Anṣārī, *Mawsūʿat tārīkh* (1980), ṭ.

[132] ʿAbd al-Quddūs al-Anṣārī, *Mawsūʿat tārīkh* (1983).

[133] ʿAbd al-Quddūs al-Anṣārī, *Tārīkh* (1963), 38.

[134] Ibid., 297.

of its governor Sulaymān Pasha in the eighteenth century.' The 'second time was during the reign of King Ali ibn Hussein' in 1924–25. 'The third time was in 1954/55, when the Saudi government made it its seat before it moved to Riyadh.'[135]

Muslim pasts

The particularism of local histories in relation to the Saudi dynasty also bore another major feature besides the narration of local traditions and perennialism. This feature was the assertion of the persistence of Islam among local communities even in periods without Saudi rule. It contrasted with the takfīrist paradigm of dynastic histories, which assumed that people were heretics unless they adhered to the principles of the Wahhabi mission. The rejection of takfīrism further strengthened the notion that a number of towns and regions were historically independent rather than being part of a common nation led by the Al Saud and Wahhabi ulema.

An important part of the rejection of takfīrism was the absence of the notion of a pre-Wahhabi 'age of ignorance' or *jāhilīyah* in many local histories. Instead, and in combination with perennialism, many local authors described a continuous presence of Islam at least in their own regions since the seventh century. One of these authors was 'Abd al-Quddoos al-Ansari. In 1964, he published an article entitled *Medina: Second City of Islam* in *Aramco World*, the magazine of the Arabian American Oil Company. Al-Ansari recognized the loss of political power in Medina after the death Muhammad and the early caliphs. However, he argued that the grand mosque of his hometown remained a major centre of religious scholarship. Al-Ansari narrated that 'the influence of Medina has been steadily throughout the history of Islam, drawing Muslims to the scene which witnessed the final epochal events of the Prophet's life. But by the Middle Ages both Medina and Mecca had lapsed into comparative obscurity as political power gravitated steadily toward the Mediterranean. The

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[135] 'Abd al-Quddūs al-Anṣārī, *Mawsūʿat tārīkh* (1980), 99.

Mosque of the Prophet, however, continued to be a place not only of respect but of learning.'[136]

A more elaborate assertion of the enduring presence of Islam in Medina than that found in al-Ansari's writings characterized the work of another writer from Medina named ʿAbd al-Salām Ḥāfiẓ (1929–95). Although his father was a Sufi, Ḥāfiẓ also benefitted from employment in the expanding state sector and from increasing access to foreign publishers.[137] After having studied at a Koranic school or *kuttāb* and a modern primary school, Ḥāfiẓ worked as a secretary for a governmental project to expand the grand mosque from 1952/53 until 1954/55. Subsequently, he served as a police inspector for five years, until a cardiac disease forced him to retire.[138] His salary allowed him to travel extensively, and he visited Egypt seven times between 1950 and 1961 as well as Syria, Lebanon and Turkey. These visits also led him to marry an Egyptian woman. Using his connections to Egypt, he published a book entitled *Medina in History: A Comprehensive Study* through a Cairo publishing house in 1961.[139]

In his book, *Medina in History*, Ḥāfiẓ presented a continuance of religious learning and observance in his hometown. After providing a lengthy account of the life of the Prophet Muhammad and his successors in Medina, he discussed the town's political history up to the twentieth century without mentioning any 'age of ignorance'. Later in the text, 'as a sample of the scholarly, literary, and religious movements over time',[140] the author from Medina gave biographies of major religious scholars in every century from the seventh until the twentieth.[141] Between the seventeenth century and the mid-eighteenth, in which most

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[136] ʿAbd al-Quddoos al-Ansari, "Medina" (1964), 33.

[137] Ḥāfiẓ, *Al-madīnah* (1961), 164; *Al-imām* (1969), 172–73.

[138] Ḥāfiẓ, *Al-madīnah* (1961), 166; *Al-imām* (1969), 150.

[139] Ḥāfiẓ, *Al-madīnah* (1961), 150.

[140] Ḥāfiẓ, *Al-madīnah* (1982), 150.

[141] Ibid., 150–74.

dynastic historians situated the pinnacle of the *jāhilīyah* or 'age of ignorance', at least twenty distinguished ulema lived in the city, according to Ḥāfiẓ.[142]

In line with his assertion of Medina's Muslim past, Ḥāfiẓ paid relatively little attention to Ibn Abd al-Wahhab. The writer did not include the biography of the religious reformer, although he had studied in Medina. Nor did he discuss Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's theological stances. The author mentioned the rise of the Wahhabi mission in the context of Medina's twentieth-century history, but did not give it special significance in Islamic history. He stated, 'here in the Hejaz, there was a religious movement that had arisen for the second time and consisted of the followers of Sheikh Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab. They came from Najd in order to extend their rule in the name of fighting corrupt beliefs and heresies [*bida*]— things that exist in every age'.[143]

Besides the notion of the pre-Wahhabi *jāhilīyah*, few local histories adopted the related takfīrist idioms that implied that the enemies of the Al Saud were non-Muslims. Influenced by the persistence of regionalism in the early kingdom, many historians of towns and regions instead conceived conflicts between the Saudis and their Arabian neighbours in terms of regional opposition. They avoided, for instance, the usage of the takfīrist terms *fatḥ*, 'conquest', and *ghazwah*, 'raid', which were central to the narratives of many dynastic histories. In *The Past and Present of the Hejaz*, for instance, Ḥusayn Naṣīf spoke of 'the fall of the Hejazi coasts into the hands of Najd' in 1924/25. 'Najdi armies' (rather than 'Muslim' armies) 'entered' (*dakhalat*) Mecca. 'Najdi forces' 'occupied' (*iḥtallat*) Yanbuʿ in the course of the same war.[144] Similarly, Ḥāfiẓ in his *Medina in History* conceived the Saudi conquests in the early twentieth century as an expansion of dynastic rule rather than a spread of Islam.

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[142] Ibid., 159–65.

[143] Ḥāfiẓ, *Al-madīnah* (1961), 96.

[144] Naṣīf, *Māḍī* (1930), 200.

He described the Al Saud as a 'movement that came from eastern Arabia in order to expand its authority and to annex the two holy cities'.[145]

As with perennialism, access to source texts not belonging to the Ibn Ghannām School fuelled narratives of an enduring Islam since the time of the Prophet Muhammad. Among the most important sources for Hejazi local historians was the history of the Meccan sharifs *A Synopsis of the Princes of the Sacred City* by Aḥmad Daḥlān. Daḥlān had been the Shāfiʿī mufti of Mecca and an opponent of the Wahhabi mission.[146] Hardly surprising, his book does not mention a general pre-Wahhabi 'age of ignorance', let alone one that was specific to Mecca. Although Saudi authorities banned the book due to its anti-Wahhabi stances, it continued to be accessible in Hejazi libraries, at least private ones.[147] Subaʿi, Ḥāfiẓ and al-Ansari all referred to Daḥlān's *Synopsis* as one of their major sources.[148]

The use of local anti-Wahhabi sources, like Daḥlān's chronicle, also contributed to a more secular rather than takfīrist idiom in describing wars between the Saudis and their neighbours. Relying on Daḥlān, al-Ansari in his *History of Jeddah*, for instance, gave an account of the Ottomans and the sharifs ousting the Saudis from Mecca in the early nineteenth century. Consistent with Daḥlān's account, the Jeddah-based author narrated the events from the Sharifian instead of the Saudi perspective and mentioned the Saudi ruler Saud ibn Abdulaziz ibn Muhammad with the secular title 'emir' instead of 'imam'. Al-Ansari wrote that 'after the wali and his deputy had agreed to fight Emir Saud, the governor Sharif Pasha and his deputy supported Sharif Ghālib in his war against Emir Saud'. 'Sharif Ghālib and the wali entered Mecca, who presented a larger gun to him that had been transported from Jeddah by fifty camels. When this huge gun arrived at Mecca, it bombarded the walls of

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[145] Ḥāfiẓ, *Al-madīnah* (1961), 186.

[146] Daḥlān, *Khulāṣat al-kalām* [1888]; *Tārīkh* (1993), 83–84.

[147] Wensinck et al., "Makka" (1991), 176. ʿAbd al-Jabbār, *Al-tayyārāt* (2008), 196.

[148] Ḥāfiẓ, *Al-madīnah* (1961), 226. ʿAbd al-Quddūs al-Anṣārī, *Mawsūʿat tārīkh*, vol. 1 (1980), 94. al-Sibāʿī, *Tārīkh* [1953], 440–41.

the garden, in which [the Saudi commander] ʿUthmān Abū Nuqṭah lived. The latter sought a truce that was granted. Subsequently, he left with his men for Najd.'[149]

One of the most emphatic voices in the assertion of Islam in the local community, however, did not come from the Hejaz. Although the Wahhabis opposed Sufism, the camel palanquin (*maḥmal*) and other practices in the Hejaz, the sanctity of the Muslim cities themselves was widely accepted. Among the Shiites, who mainly populated the eastern Arabian oases of al-Qaṭīf and al-Aḥsāʾ, defence against Wahhabi takfīrism was a much more critical issue. In 1927, the ulema of Riyadh issued a fatwa calling on Abdulaziz to refuse the Shiites the right to worship publicly, to destroy their places of worship in al-Aḥsāʾ, and prevent them from visiting the Shiite shrines in Karbala and Najaf. Moreover, the Wahhabi scholars argued that the ruler should force the Shiites to submit to the 'religion of God and His Prophet', to attend the five prayers in mosques, and to undergo instruction in the writings of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab.[150] Although Abdulaziz did not order forcible conversion, the Shiites suffered from religious discrimination. Shiite literature and mourning processions, which Wahhabi doctrine considered 'idolatry' (*shirk*),[151] were banned. Likewise, courts did not recognize Shiites as witnesses.[152]

Not considered Muslims and frequently called 'rejectionists' (*rāfiḍah*) or 'idolaters' (*mushrikūn*) by Wahhabis, Shiites were excluded from many benefits that Saudi state building brought to Sunnis. Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm Āl al-Shaykh, the Saudi grand mufti, once issued a fatwa according to which the ruler should forever exclude the Shiites from receiving 'state booty' (*fay*) and 'should not allocate any portion to them whatsoever unless they overtly abandon their beliefs'.[153] Shiites were not accepted in the armed forces and the National Guard or in leading positions in the provincial administration. In addition, they were

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[149] ʿAbd al-Quddūs al-Anṣārī, *Mawsūʿat tārīkh*, vol. 1 (1980), 94.

[150] Fouad Ibrahim, *The Shiʿis* (2006), 26. Al-Yassini, "The Relationship" (1982), 103. On the Shiites in Saudi Arabia, see also Matthiesen, "The Shia" (2011); Ende, "The Nakhāwila" (1997).

[151] Al-Atawneh, *Wahhābī* (2010), 13.

[152] Ayubi, *Over-stating* (1995), 237.

[153] Fouad Ibrahim, *The Shiʿis* (2006), 34.

markedly underrepresented in the education and health sectors. To make matters worse, the government invested considerably less in infrastructure and public services in Shiite quarters than it did in Sunni areas. These services included schools, clinics, roads, sewage, electrification, and water supplies.[154]

One of the first Shiite local historians, who reacted against Wahhabi takfīrism, was Muḥammad al-Muslim (1922–94).[155] In 1960, he published a book on his native oasis of al-Qaṭīf, entitled *The Black Gold Coast: A Historical and Cultural Study of the Arab Gulf Region*. A second edition was published in Beirut, beyond Saudi censorship, in 1962.[156] Al-Muslim received his main inspiration not in the kingdom, but in Baghdad in the 1950s, where he studied accounting and English and participated in the city's literary life. He first developed the idea for his book, when a friend encouraged him to publish a historical overview of al-Qaṭīf in an Iraqi newspaper in 1952. Subsequently, al-Muslim read foreign literature and copied rare sources on the region's history in Baghdad's public and archaeology libraries.[157]

This contact with literature from outside Saudi Arabia created in al-Muslim the feeling that al-Qaṭīf had been ignored or misrepresented, similar to al-Niʿmī's feeling about Asir. This feeling encouraged al-Muslim to write his history and served as a justification for his endeavour. The author lamented, 'It made me sad to find many people who fail to know al-Qaṭīf'. 'This reaches the point that even some intellectuals do not know its geographical location and its historical role.' It 'hurt' him that some authors, like the French journalist Jean-Jacques Berreby (b. 1927), 'did not mention it or only in passing, although it was the most prosperous town in the Gulf'. If he finds a writer 'who is completely unfamiliar with it, he pronounces it al-Quṭayf' or confines himself to the 'statement that it is one of the oilfields of

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[154] Ibid., 33–34.

[155] I thank Toby Matthiesen for advising on this point and for providing me with a copy of al-Muslim's book, *The Black Gold Coast*.

[156] Al-Muslim, *Sāḥil* (1962). 4. In my research, I have relied on the 1962 edition, as I was not able to access a copy of the 1960 edition.

[157] Sāmī al-Muslim and Ayman al-Muslim, "Al-muslim" (2004). Al-Muslim, *Sāḥil* (1962), 12–13.

Saudi Arabia, as if it were an unknown spot of the Empty Quarter or a Bedouin site in the

wilderness of the desert'.[158]

Despite sectarian discrimination, the growth of the Saudi economy, which was fuelled

by increasing oil revenues, also benefitted many Shiites, including al-Muslim. In 1959, he

returned to the kingdom and, with his training as an accountant in Baghdad, was able to take

up a position with Riyad Bank in Dammam. By then, Dammam had become the capital of

the Eastern Province, in which the oil industry was concentrated.[159] The leisure that al-

Muslim gained upon commencement of this work made possible the completion of his book

after he had gathered sufficient material in Baghdad. Following his return to Saudi Arabia, he

remembered, 'I was given free time that I had not dreamt about'. In order to escape his

'boring routine life', he was 'killing spare time through writing over two years'.[160]

Al-Muslim's book on *The Black Gold Coast* was highly particularistic. The Shiite

author also emphasized local traditions, as Naṣīf in the Hejaz and al-ʿAqīlī in Jāzān did. His

book included positive evaluations of times without Saudi rule. According to al-Muslim, even

the Egyptian occupation of Eastern Arabia in the 1830s brought benefits for the local

population. In contrast, dynastic historians argued that this occupation, which followed the

destruction of the first Saudi state, had caused 'chaos'. Al-Muslim contended that al-Qaṭīf

and al-Aḥsāʾ perhaps benefitted most from the Egyptian occupation of the area through the

'creation of a committee of experts'. This committee 'organized the governmental agencies,

introduced taxes and arranged their collection. This had been unknown in this area.'[161] In

contrast to local development under the Egyptians, al-Muslim occasionally described

victimization of the Shiites by the Saudis. He stated that at the end of the eighteenth century,

Saud ibn Abdulaziz (r. 1803–13) 'marched towards al-Qaṭīf in order to occupy it. He

besieged the town of Sayhāt and entered it forcefully, looted it, and killed a group of its

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[158] Al-Muslim, *Sāḥil* (1962), 10–11.

[159] ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Ḥuqayl, *Muʿjam* (1993), 137. Sāmī al-Muslim and Ayman al-Muslim, "Al-muslim" (2004).

[160] Al-Muslim, *Sāḥil* (1962), 13.

[161] Ibid., 185.

inhabitants. He also occupied the village of ʿAnak, killed four-hundred men of its inhabitants, and confiscated their possessions and property.'[162]

In response to the perceived neglect of his home region by previous writers, al-Muslim also developed an elaborate perennialism. He portrayed al-Qaṭīf as having existed for millennia and as the cradle of human civilization. He stated, 'perhaps few people know that the ancient people of this region were the first who invented the alphabet. They were the first teachers of the whole world, and this region was the abode of ancient civilizations. They are some of the most ancient civilizations in known history, and the civilization of the Semites emerged from it, which became prevalent from Mesopotamia to Lebanon'.[163]

However, while al-Muslim accused foreign scholars of ignoring al-Qaṭīf, he also used foreign literature, which he had accessed in Baghdad, as a source for his construction of a perennial history. Foreign researchers led al-Muslim to argue that al-Qaṭīf even dominated eastern Arabia before Saudi rule. The Shiite author pointed out that the Egyptian intellectual and first director of King Saud University ʿAbd al-Wahhāb ʿAzzām had stated that the whole Saudi Gulf coast had once been 'called al-Qaṭīf'. According to al-Muslim, the prominent Egyptian scholar Rifāʿah al-Ṭahṭāwī (1801–73) had written that 'the Arab Gulf was termed the sea of al-Qaṭīf'. The Austrian orientalist Aloys Sprenger (1813–93) for his part mentioned that it had been called 'the Gulf of al-Qaṭīf before it was given any other name'. Based on these quotations, al-Muslim concluded that 'these areas on the western shores of the Gulf were all provinces belonging to this city'.[164]

In his assertion that the Shiites were Muslims, al-Muslim drew on foreign literature too. Relying on an earlier *History of the Shiites* by the Iraqi scholar Muḥammad al-Muẓaffarī, he argued that Shiism had already been present during the Prophet Muhammad's time.[165] 'Shiism', he stated, 'goes back to the time of the Prophet, when the Umayyad Saʿīd ibn al-ʿĀṣ

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[162] Ibid., 178.

[163] Ibid., 10.

[164] Ibid., 17.

[165] Ibid., 95. Al-Muẓaffarī, *Tārīkh* (1933; 1942).

was the governor of Bahrain. He was a client of Ali and the one who planted the seed of Shiism there.'[166] To substantiate his argument, al-Muslim also quoted the well-known Syrian Sunni historian Muḥammad Kurd ʿAlī (1876–1953). Kurd ʿAlī wrote that 'a group of Muhammad's companions were known for their support of Ali during the time of the Prophet, like Abū Dharr al-Ghifārī'. Al-Muslim commented that this quotation was 'sufficient as a reply to those who defame Shiism'.[167]

While al-Muslim was clear in his assertion that the Shiites were not idolaters, he still sought a kind of accommodation with the Saudi state. He thus played down the differences between Shiites and Sunnis, although not explicitly those between Shiites and followers of the Wahhabi mission. He argued that between the Sunnis and the Twelver Shiites 'no fundamental difference exists', apart from the Shiites' belief in the spiritual leadership of Ali and the imams succeeding him. 'Although there is conflict over some legal questions, this disagreement is not greater than those between the Sunni schools. As for those distinguishing features, like funeral ceremonies, et cetera, they are incidental creations over time and merely customs and traditions inherited from the time of the Būyids in Baghdad in 963/64.'[168]

Despite this accommodationist stance towards the Sunnis more generally, *The Black Gold Coast* contradicted the conception of the leaders of the first and second Saudi states as 'imams'. Al-Muslim emphasized that 'the Shiites believe that the imamate is restricted to the family of the Prophet'.[169] He referred to Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law as 'Imam Ali', but refused to confer the same title to any Saudi prince. He stated, for instance, that Muhammad ibn Saud's son Abdulaziz inherited only the 'political leadership' (*ziʿāmah*), making no mention of an imamate. In a list of Saudi rulers, none of them appeared with the

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[166] Al-Muslim, *Sāḥil* (1962), 95.

[167] Ibid., 96.

[168] Ibid., 98. Toby Matthiesen, however, kindly pointed out to me that religious doctrines were not of primary importance to al-Muslim, as he was a 'secular leftist'.

[169] Ibid.

title 'imam'. Abdulaziz was, according to al-Muslim, 'succeeded by Saud, Abdullah, Turki, Faisal, Abdulrahman, and finally His Majesty the late King Abdulaziz'.[170]

Al-Muslim also avoided many of the takfīrist terms that were prevalent in dynastic historiography. He spoke of the Saudi 'occupation' (*iḥtilāl*) of al-Aḥsāʾ and al-Qaṭīf in the late eighteenth century. He avoided the verbs *fataḥa*, 'to conquer', and *ghazā*, 'to raid', which corresponded to the nouns *fatḥ* and *ghazwah* and implied a struggle against non-Muslims. Al-Muslim stated, for instance, that Abdulaziz in 1913 'seized [*istawlá*] al-Aḥsāʾ and al-Qaṭīf. In 1921, the ruler defeated the Āl Rashīd, the princes of Ḥāʾil. In 1922, he extended his influence to the region of Asir. In 1924/25, he seized the Hejaz.'[171]

As the question of being Muslims or idolaters was as important as it was sensitive for the Shiites, al-Muslim had clearly crossed a boundary with his particularistic history of a Shiite-dominated area. Saudi authorities imprisoned him briefly and forced him to edit out certain critical statements in the second edition of *The Black Gold Coast* in 1962. This was mainly a reaction to his discussion of Shiism and its oppression under Saudi rule. In 1964, the authorities jailed al-Muslim again for ten years. Moreover, he was forbidden to travel outside Saudi Arabia.[172] Following his release, however, Riyad Bank re-employed him in the Eastern Province until his retirement as a branch manager.[173]

Not all local historiography between the 1920s and 1970s rejected the terminology of dynastic historiography as categorically as al-Muslim's history did. Increasing state control over education, mass media and support for dynastic historiography also brought more authors in the Saudi periphery in contact with the narratives of dynastic histories. Āl ʿAbd al-Qādir, for instance, used the terms '*fatḥ*' and '*ghazwah*' as well as the title 'imam' for Saudi

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[170] Ibid., 98, 176.

[171] Ibid., 193.

[172] Jones, "The Dogma" (2006), 10; *Desert Kingdom* (2010), 142, 278. Munaẓẓamat al-Thawrah al-Islāmīyah fī al-Jazīrah al-ʿArabīyah, "Asmāʾ" (1988), 22.

[173] Sāmī al-Muslim and Ayman al-Muslim, "Al-muslim" (2004).

rulers in his history of al-Aḥsāʾ.[174] This can be explained by the fact that he was a Sunni, studied Wahhabi beliefs, corresponded with the Najdi chronicler Ibrāhīm ibn ʿĪsá, and relied on Ibn Bishr's chronicle.[175] Similarly, Hāshim al-Niʿmī called Abdulaziz ibn Muhammad ibn Saud and other Saudi rulers 'imam' in his *The History of Asir*.[176] In his case, his education in monotheism (*tawḥīd*) in the Abhā primary school and his work as a member of the religious police or Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice may have contributed to his adoption of this terminology.[177]

However, even Āl ʿAbd al-Qādir and al-Niʿmī as trained religious scholars working for the Saudi state did not adopt all elements of the takfīrist paradigm. In particular, they seemed to have been unwilling to apply the notion of the pre-Wahhabi *jāhilīyah* to their home regions. Al-Niʿmī did not mention this idea,[178] while Āl ʿAbd al-Qādir considered heresies and chaos as having been restricted to Najd. Āl ʿAbd al-Qādir wrote that when Ibn Abd al-Wahhab appeared, 'the Muslims in the Najdi lands were hostile to one another and divided'. Following Ibn Bishr, he added that 'they had neither king nor imam, and no law and order ruled. They killed each other, the strong consumed the weak, and they did not refrain from the heretical acts they were committing.'[179] As with perennialism, Saudi authorities seem to have tolerated this absence of the notion of the pre-Wahhabi *jāhilīyah* or its restriction. They allowed a re-publication of Āl ʿAbd al-Qādir's work inside the kingdom in 1982.[180]

Even one of the first major histories of the Saudi capital did not adopt the notion of a pre-Wahhabi 'age of ignorance'. This was Hamad Al-Jasser's (1910–2000) book *Riyadh over the Course of History*, published in 1966. Al-Jasser claimed that readers of some of his

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[174] Āl ʿAbd al-Qādir, *Tuḥfat al-mustafīd* (1982), 124–207.

[175] Al-Bābuṭayn, *Aʿlām* (1996), 81.

[176] Ibid., 133.

[177] Al-Niʿmī, *Tārīkh* [1962], 274.

[178] Al-Niʿmī, *Tārīkh* [1962].

[179] Āl ʿAbd al-Qādir, *Tuḥfat al-mustafīd* (1982), 124–25.

[180] Ibid. The notion of the pre-Wahhabi *jāhilīyah* is not absent from all local historiography, however. Muḥammad al-ʿAqīlī includes the notion through a quotation from the American author Lothrop Stoddard (1883–1950) that by the eighteenth century, 'the Moslem world had sunk to the lowest depth of its decrepitude'. Al-ʿAqīlī, *Min tārīkh*, vol. 2 (1958), 475. Stoddard, *The New World* (1921), 20.

newspaper articles had encouraged him to publish the book.[181] Similar to other local works, the history gave the city a perennial identity that was not tied exclusively to the Al Saud, but to a multi-dynastic political heritage. The author began his account with the history of ancient Ḥajr, Riyadh's predecessor, up until the rule of the Banū Ḥanīfah. He continued with Ḥajr in the early Islamic and the Abbasid periods, repeatedly emphasizing its enduring importance. He wrote, for instance, that 'most historians of the ninth century agree that Ḥajr was still the capital of al-Yamāmah in this century'.[182] Subsequently, Al-Jasser discussed the history of the oasis from the rule of the Shiite Ukhayḍirids between the ninth and eleventh centuries until the reign of Dihām ibn Dawwās in the eighteenth. The book ended with the Saudi periods and their interruption by the Āl Rashīd emirate between 1891, when the second Saudi state fell, and 1902, when Abdulaziz Al Saud captured Riyadh. Less than a sixth of the book was concerned with Riyadh under Saudi rule.[183]

Although Al-Jasser wrote about the Saudi capital, he was, unlike many dynastic authors, from a humble background and did not form part of the royal entourage. He was, however, able to exploit new opportunities in the expanding public education sector. Born in a village to the north-west of Riyadh, Al-Jasser studied under ulema in Riyadh and, between 1930 and 1935, at the kingdom's first modern secondary school, the Saudi Scientific Institute (al-Maʿhad al-ʿIlmī al-Suʿūdī) in Mecca.[184] This school was itself part of Saudi state building. It was intended to train primary school teachers for the country's towns and villages. The Saudis hoped it would provide them, as Henri Lauzière put it, 'with an indigenous means for consolidating the new state through education'.[185] From 1928, the institute thus paid its students generous stipends.[186]

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[181] Al-Jāsir, *Madīnat al-riyāḍ* (1966), 7.

[182] Ibid., 68. Al-Jasser makes a similar statement about Ḥajr in the fourteenth century; ibid., 80.

[183] Ibid., 104–35.

[184] Al-ʿAlāwinah, *Ḥamad* (2001), 12.

[185] Lauzière, "The Evolution" (2008), 150.

[186] Ibid., 151.

Upon graduation from the Scientific Institute, Al-Jasser also worked in a variety of positions in the public education sector. Initially, he became a primary school teacher in the Hejazi town of Yanbuʿ. In 1939, he briefly studied history at the College of Arts of Fuad I University in Cairo as part of a student mission, until the Saudi government recalled him and his colleagues following the outbreak of World War II. Subsequently, Al-Jasser worked in a variety of governmental positions. They included censor of publications and newspapers in al-Aḥsāʾ, education commissioner in Najd, assistant director of Riyadh's Scientific Institute (al-Maʿhad al-ʿIlmī) and director of two colleges in Riyadh.[187]

As in the case of other local historians, however, state employment did not mean co-optation. Like Subaʿi, Al-Jasser became—after his work as a censor—a critical voice in the Saudi newspaper and publishing industry. He established al-ʿArab Bookstore (Maktabat al-ʿArab) in Riyadh in 1949/50, one of the first bookshops in the city selling modern Arabic works.[188] Between 1953 and 1961, he issued *al-Yamāmah*, one of the first newspapers in Najd, and in 1955 founded Riyadh Presses (Maṭābiʿ al-Riyāḍ), one of the first publishers in the Saudi capital. Subsequently, *al-Yamāmah* proved to be one of the country's most critical media outlets.

Because *al-Yamāmah* was critical, Al-Jasser also suffered from a tightening of governmental control over the media. In its struggle against Nasser and revolutionary forms of Arab nationalism, the government decreed a law of the press and publications in 1959. It banned newspapers from publishing material propagating 'aberration, atheism, or destructive principles, or contradicting the customs and traditions of this country'.[189] Violating the law carried a fine of between 100 and 1000 riyals (c. 22–222 dollars) or a prison sentence of between three weeks and three years.[190] In 1964, the government promulgated the National Press Regulation that sought to ensure that the newspaper industry was run on

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[187] Khālid al-Māniʿ, "Muqaddimat al-ṭabʿah" (2005), 11–16.

[188] Ibid., 17. Ibn Junayd, "Muqaddimat al-ṭabʿah" (2005), 33.

[189] Quoted in ʿAbd al-Jabbār, *Al-tayyārāt* (2008), 204.

[190] Ibid. 205.

officially acceptable lines. The regulation enabled the Ministry of Information to withdraw the concession of a Saudi newspaper, if it considers 'that the country's interest deems it necessary'. The ministry also became able to remove the editor-in-chief of any Saudi newspaper if it finds 'he is incapable of carrying out his duties in a manner ensuring the public interest'.[191]

The crackdown even led to Al-Jasser's temporary exile. In 1959, King Saud took an article published in *al-Yamāmah* 'as an attack on Islam, punishable by death'. Although Crown Prince Faisal intervened on behalf of the writer,[192] in a report Youssef Yassin, the head of the Political Section in the Royal Court, later singled out *al-Yamāmah* as a newspaper not in line with the government. On this basis, King Saud ordered the seizure of *al-Yamāmah* and the imprisoning of Hamad Al-Jasser in 1962. Fortunately for Al-Jasser, he received notice of this order while in Beirut and continued to live there with his family until the outbreak of the Lebanese Civil War in 1975. After Faisal had become king in 1964, he allowed Al-Jasser to establish al-Yamāmah House (Dār al-Yamāmah). This publishing house was based in Riyadh but retained an office in Beirut.[193]

Al-Jasser also assisted his peers in having their local histories printed, which was done partly abroad and thus beyond Saudi censorship. Like 'Abd al-Quddoos al-Ansari, he thereby helped Saudi local historians form a loosely connected group. His Riyadh Presses published the first editions of al-ʿAqīlī's *History of al-Mikhlāf al-Sulaymānī* and Āl ʿAbd al-Qādir's book on al-Aḥsāʾ.[194] In addition, Al-Jasser wrote the introduction to al-Muslim's *Black Gold Coast*.[195] Through al-Yamāmah House, he started publishing the journal *al-ʿArab* in 1966. Printed in Beirut and later in Cairo, *al-ʿArab* became an important platform for local

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[191] Burdett, *Records* (1997), 619–23.

[192] Jarman, *Political Diaries* (1998), 338.

[193] Al-ʿAlāwinah, *Ḥamad* (2001), 18–19. Al-Qashʿamī, "Riḥlah" (2010). Al-ʿArab Ahlī, "Aṣl" (2005).

[194] Al-ʿAqīlī, *Min tārīkh* (1958). Āl ʿAbd al-Qādir, *Tuḥfat al-mustafīd* (1960).

[195] Al-Muslim, *Sāḥil* (1962).

historians besides *al-Manhal*. In subsequent decades, al-ʿAqīlī, al-Niʿmī, and al-Muslim all contributed articles on the history and geography of their regions to the journal.[196]

Although Al-Jasser later suffered from repression under the regime, he also benefitted from the rise in Saudi oil revenues after World War II through his work for the Saudi government and publishing activities. When he taught at Yanbuʿʾs primary school between 1935 and 1939, that is, before the growth of the oil industry, he, like his colleagues, initially endured long delays in the payment of his salary. At one point, seven months without income forced him to sell some of his books.[197] However, a few decades later, he was able to travel extensively and access historical documents in the Vatican in 1960 and the Hagia Sophia in Istanbul in 1965.[198] By 1970, his private library had a reputation for containing precious manuscripts.[199]

Some of the terminology of dynastic historiography also entered Al-Jasser's work. This was not surprising given his dependency on the Saudi government and his familiarity with official discourses through his education and publishing work. Moreover, Prince Salman, the governor of Riyadh, had sponsored the publication of *Riyadh over the Course of History*.[200] Similar to Āl ʿAbd al-Qādir and al-Niʿmī, Al-Jasser called the first Saudi king, Abdulaziz, 'imam', for instance.[201] However, he did not denounce Dihām ibn Dawwās, the former ruler of Riyadh and enemy of the Saudis, as an infidel. This was in contrast to the dynastic chronicler Ibn Ghannām. Al-Jasser merely stated that Dihām was 'one of the toughest opponents' of the Wahhabi mission.[202] Moreover, the historian did not speak of a pre-Wahhabi 'age of ignorance'. He did not describe the Ukhayḍirid rulers of al-Yamāmah as heretics, but merely stated that 'their sect is Zaydism'. Al-Jasser also did not describe the

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[196] E.g., al-ʿAqīlī, "Al-muʿjam" (1968); al-Niʿmī, "Min awdiyat bilād" (1983); al-Muslim, "Al-judhūr" (1986).

[197] Al-Jāsir, *Bilād* (1966), 135–36.

[198] Ibn Junayd, "Muqaddimat al-ṭabʿah" (2005), 42–43, 48.

[199] Al-Ziriklī, *Shibh al-jazīrah* vol. 3 (1970), 1044.

[200] Al-Ḥumayd, *Salmān* (2009), 31.

[201] Al-Jāsir, *Madīnat al-riyāḍ* (1966), 115.

[202] Ibid., 95.

religious situation in the area before the Prophet Muhammad as negative. On the contrary, he quoted the early medieval Muslim geographer al-Hamdānī (c. 893–945), stating that 'nobody had been a polytheist' in ancient Ḥajr.[203]

Finally, Al-Jasser, who was from the Ḥarb tribe and a descendent of the Bedouin,[204] even considered the migrant pastoralists as Muslims. Here, he contradicted Fuad Hamza and other dynastic historians. Al-Jasser argued in an article in *al-Yamāmah* in 1954, that the nomads were the most powerful weapon of Islam, in early Islamic as well as King Abdulaziz's times. The first Saudi king, according to Al-Jasser, 'saw in the Bedouin what al-Fārūq [Caliph Umar] had already seen in them, namely that they were the original Arabs and the substance of Islam. He considered them the most powerful weapon and the strongest army, with which he could unify Arabia under one banner.'[205]

Conclusions

Through his own writings and his publishing work, Al-Jasser formed a central figure connecting local historians in the kingdom. The texts produced by these historians were distinguished by their particularism in relation to dynastic historiography, that is, the expression of the historical independence of local communities from the Al Saud. They thus established narrative plurality during the period between the 1920s and 1970s, in which the first major dynastic histories were also printed. The particularism had three elements: the emphasis on local political, religious and social traditions, the perennialist narration of a long, multi-dynastic past as opposed to dynastic exclusivism, and the persistence of Islam in contrast to dynastic takfīrism. While censorship curbed criticism of the government, state building inadvertently supported local historiography. The expansion of state education and the bureaucracy provided authors in the provinces with the skills and financial means necessary for their research. In some cases, state agencies even directly subsidized local

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[203] Ibid., 18.

[204] Khālid al-Māniʿ, "Muqaddimat al-ṭabʿah" (2005), 11.

[205] Al-Jāsir, "Al-bādiyah" (1954), 6.

histories. Moreover, globalization stimulated local writings by giving authors increased opportunities to study and publish abroad and thus beyond Saudi censorship. This global process also facilitated an influx of foreign literature, which inspired local historians and provided authoritative material for perennialism and depictions of a continued presence of Islam even without Saudi rule.

Despite their differences, particularistic local histories and exclusivist dynastic histories had an important element in common: the relative absence of references to a Saudi nation. Neither historians of towns and regions nor those of the Al Saud thus contested a Saudi national history. Instead, they rather diverged in their interests, often without criticizing the works of the other group directly. The situation would change, however, from the 1960s onwards, as dynastic historiography and later local historiography too would become 'nationalized'.

4. The Saudization of Dynastic Historiography, 1960s to Present

Two days after the Saudi National Day on 23 September 2009, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Wābilī, a historian and lecturer at King Khalid Military Academy in Riyadh, published an article in the Saudi newspaper *al-Waṭan*, 'The Nation'. It was entitled *Our National Need for New Historians.* Al-Wābilī stressed the importance of history for the nation, postulating that 'history in relation to the nation is like what memory is for man'. If the nation 'loses its history, this is a huge disaster and calamity, a collective damage to the memory of the citizens and the nation in general'. He went on to say that history produces 'man' as well as 'the present official discourse' within nations. Hence, 'we can imagine the extent of the confusion in relation to man and the nation, if both are the product of loss, deficiency or a misreading of their history'.[1]

In his article, al-Wābilī gave a few examples of the shortcomings of previous historiography. The first example was part of 'our Islamic Arab history' and dealt with the murder of the second caliph Umar by a Persian in 644. Distinct from 'our Islamic Arab history', al-Wābilī drew his second example for historical misunderstandings from 'our Saudi national history'. This example concerned the story of the capture of Riyadh by Abdulaziz Al Saud and about sixty men in 1902. This event was typically called 'the battle of Riyadh' or 'the conquest of Riyadh'. Al-Wābilī, however, considered the usage of the term 'battle' for this historical event 'completely inaccurate'. According to him, it 'confuses the reader or listener, creates doubts or makes him believe that there was external support or intervention in support of King Abdulaziz in his seizure of Riyadh'. A 'military battle as understood by the reader takes place between two armies that are equal in size'. Instead, al-Wābilī suggested

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[1] Al-Wābilī, "Ḥājatunā" (September 2009).

that the capture of Riyadh should be called a 'special military (commandos) operation'.[2]
Within two weeks of the publication of his article, al-Wābilī received many e-mails that made
him feel, as if he had 'raised a discussion on a contemporary and sensitive subject that
touches and moves people's lives directly'.[3]

In his article, al-Wābilī may seem to be merely a military expert dissatisfied with
nomenclature. Yet, the whole episode also signified that by the time of al-Wābilī's writing in
2009, Saudis had become concerned with a 'Saudi national history' and its details. This
'Saudi national history' was distinct from an 'Islamic Arab history'. Whereas the Saudi kings
stood in the centre of the former, the early caliphs were the focus of the latter. This placing
of the Al Saud in a Saudi national history was different from earlier dynastic histories that
had seen the Al Saud as part of an Islamic and Arab salvation history. In the earlier histories,
the Al Saud had appeared as restorers of Islam and leaders of Arab independence and
renaissance after an 'age of ignorance'. Yet, in al-Wābilī's article, an event involving the
Saudi national capital of Riyadh stood at the centre of the discussion of King Abdulaziz's
history. This narrative is indicative of a dynasty-centred Saudi national history distinct from
Arab national history that had emerged by 2009. In other words, the history of the Al Saud
had become nationalized or, more precisely, 'Saudized'.

As a general background to the emergence of a Saudi national history, one may see
the slow emergence of a Saudi national identity and Saudi nationalism. Suliman Toufik
argues that during the 1960s, 'almost every segment of the nation' in Saudi Arabia started to
feel the presence of the state. At that time, the kingdom had become the 'ultimate political
organization' with which many citizens of Saudi Arabia identified themselves. Moreover, a
unified educational system and a national economy formed the basis of a Saudi
nationalism.[4] In the 1980s, as John Chalcraft points out, an economic slowdown with lower

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[2] Ibid.

[3] Al-Wābilī, "Ḥājatunā" (October 2009).

[4] Toufik, "The Emergence" (1985), 298–300.

oil prices also 'stoked the fires of local nationalism' in the Arabian peninsula and led to nationalization policies.[5] From that time onwards, the term 'Saudization' for the nationalization of the workforce gained currency.

This rise of Saudi nationalism did not mean that a Saudi national identity replaced regional or tribal identities, but rather that a Saudi identity was added to the identities Saudis could draw on. Hamza Al-Hassan wrote in 2006 that 'sub-identities are still far stronger than the national one, and loyalty to region is stronger than loyalty to the state'.[6] However, by 1997, it had become possible for the prominent Saudi businessman Hani Yamani to publish a book under the title *To Be A Saudi*, in which he made his attachment to the kingdom clear: 'When I am travelling, I am on a constant search for news on Saudi Arabia. It is my country, where I was born and bred, and all my family live there. It is not enough just to telephone home, I find a need to read about any news related to the land where I belong.'[7]

Saudi nationalism and national identity did not preclude concerns for a wider Arab national identity. Developing what Orit Bashkin calls a 'hybrid' form of nationalism,[8] some Saudis did not, and perhaps could not ignore, wider pan-Arab and Islamic issues despite their concerns for a Saudi nation. In fact, as James McDougall argues, Arab nationalism probably provided Arab nation-states such as Saudi Arabia with 'Arabist languages of legitimacy'.[9] To be sure, Saudi religious scholars, like the grand mufti ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz ibn Bāz, continued to see contradictions between nationalism and Islam. Other Saudis, however, were more inclined to admit multiple identities. The prominent Saudi historian ʿAbd Allāh al-ʿUthaymīn (b. 1936) explained his allegiances in terms of 'circles'. 'In the first circle, I am a son of the Arabian peninsula. The regions of the peninsula were united under the kingdom.

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[5] Chalcraft, *Monarchy* (2010), 26. On nationalism in the Arab Gulf states, see also Partrick, *Nationalism* (2009).

[6] Al-Hassan, "The Role" (2006), 10. Fouad Ibrahim speaks of 'an identity crisis' in Saudi Arabia; Fuʾād Ibrāhīm, *Al-suʿūdīyah* (2010). On Saudi national identity, see also Baroni, "Color" (2007); Piscatori, "The Formation" (1981); Weston, "Political Legitimacy" (1987).

[7] Hani Yamani, *To Be a Saudi* (1997), ix–x.

[8] Bashkin, "Hybrid Nationalisms" (2011).

[9] McDougall, "Dream" (2011), 253.

Hence, I am a Saudi. Then there is the wider region: I am an Arab. Then I am a Muslim.'[10]

Al-ʿUthaymīn also mentioned that the saying 'love of the homeland is an article of faith' (*ḥubb al-waṭan min al-īmān*) was no Hadith, but 'good in itself'.[11]

This chapter will analyse how the expanding state in a globalizing context contributed to the production of a dynasty-centred national history. This national history was a product of the emerging Saudi national identity and at the same time aimed at strengthening this identity. I will pay special attention to the related processes of the creation of a national archive, the establishment of an indigenous historical profession, and the celebration of national dynastic jubilees. These processes all involved the import of foreign expertise, despite having 'national' aims.

King Abdulaziz and the foundation of Saudi Arabia

An important element of the Saudization of dynastic historiography was the development of a 'founder paradigm'. This paradigm conceived Abdulaziz Al Saud as the 'founder' of the modern Saudi nation. Historians influenced by the founder paradigm still focused on Saudi monarchs, as earlier dynastic authors had done. Yet they introduced the Saudi nation as the main frame of dynastic histories. Whereas many earlier dynastic histories had measured the actions of the Al Saud with reference to the Muslim community and the Arab world, the new histories focused more on how the Saudi dynasty served the Saudi nation. Moreover, the dynastically defined national space of Saudi Arabia appeared as the setting. Thereby, as Yoav Di-Capua argues with reference to Egyptian royalist historiography, the dynasty and the territory 'were synchronized in a movement toward the future'.[12]

The notion of Abdulaziz as the founder of a new nation was not an invention of the 1960s, but had already appeared in some of the propaganda of the Saudi government

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[10] Interview, 3 October 2011.

[11] Al-ʿUthaymīn, *Khawāṭir* (2010), 12. This saying was the motto of Buṭrus al-Bustānī's (1819–83) magazine *al-Jinān*. Tibi, *Arab Nationalism* (1997), 103.

[12] Di-Capua, *Gatekeepers* (2009), 61–62.

during the monarch's lifetime. The Saudi diplomat and dynastic historian Khayr al-Dīn al-Ziriklī gave a speech on Cairo radio in 1946 in honour of a state visit by King Abdulaziz to Egypt. Al-Ziriklī described the foundation of the kingdom in the following words: 'Emirates were united, a nation formed, a state built'. 'Within less than fifty years, one man was able to establish between the Red Sea and the Gulf of the Arabs what had been impossible to establish or to bring about in twelve centuries.'[13]

Despite al-Ziriklī's early statement, however, the founder paradigm formally emerged only after the 1960s. Of principal importance to this process was the King Abdulaziz Foundation for Research and Archives. According to the foundation's own accounts, King Faisal established it in 1972 as an 'independent agency' in order to 'commemorate the great leader, His Majesty King Abdulaziz, who laid the foundations of this country and spread security and justice in its corners'. The foundation was the first state institution outside of the universities that specialized in history. It saw itself as 'a symbol of the nation which King Abdulaziz had united' and the 'abounding spring that is frequented by everybody who wants to learn about the kingdom particularly and about Arabia and the Arab world generally'.[14] Signifying the importance Faisal attached to the foundation, he appointed the minister of education Ḥasan Āl al-Shaykh as its first chair. Far from being only a symbolic head, Āl al-Shaykh was very interested in dynastic historiography. Already during the 1960s, he had commissioned the publication of histories of the Al Saud by Mounir Ajlani and Ibn Bishr—one of the members of the Ibn Ghannām School—through the Ministry of Education.[15]

Dissatisfaction among members of the government with previous histories of the country, most of which had been the products of foreign-born amateurs, drove the establishment of the King Abdulaziz Foundation for Research and Archives as a national, professional institution of history. In 1975, Ḥasan Āl al-Shaykh stated in an interview that

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[13] Al-Ziriklī, *Shibh al-jazīrah*, vol. 1 (1970).

[14] Dārat al-Malik ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, *Dalīl* (1981), 23.

[15] Al-ʿAjlānī, *Tārīkh* [1965]. Ibn Bishr, *ʿUnwān* (1971).

Saudi history 'had not been written as it should be, despite the manifold writings on the history of Saudi Arabia'. He recalled that when King Faisal contemplated the foundation's creation, he requested that it published 'a book on the history of Abdulaziz that encompassed Saudi history'. Paying reference to an idea of historical professionalism, Faisal had demanded that it should be 'an academic book without flattery for King Abdulaziz'.[16]

Marking a step in the Saudization and professionalization of dynastic historiography, the government chose Muhammad Al-Sha'afi (b. 1938/39) as secretary general of the foundation. Al-Sha'afi was one of the first indigenous Saudis professionally trained in the history of the Saudi state. Born in Asir, he attended the School for the Preparation of Student Missions (Madrasat Taḥḍīr al-Biʿthāt) in Mecca. Subsequently, he studied history at Cairo University and, in the absence of appropriate programmes in the kingdom at the time, went to England for postgraduate studies.[17] In the course of his career, he acquired a national outlook. A colleague later stated about Al-Sha'afi that 'he does not differentiate between Najd and Asir'. To him, 'those at the foot of the mountains are equal to those in the desert, and the Bedouin is like the townsman'.[18]

While Al-Sha'afi received a professional historical education abroad, his research did not challenge the takfīrist paradigm that put the 'Islamic' Saudi state in opposition to its 'heretic' neighbours. This made him a suitable candidate for leading the new centre of a nationally oriented dynastic historiography. In 1967, he completed a doctoral dissertation at the University of Leeds on *The First Sa'udi State in Arabia.* In his thesis, he sought to depart from previous writings on this state, which, according to him, had concentrated on 'recording historical events'.[19] In contrast, he set out to investigate the state's administrative, military, and economic organization. He did not deviate from the notion of the Saudi state as a

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[16] Al-Fātiḥ and Āl al-Shaykh, "Ḥiwār" (1975), 48.

[17] Al-Shaʿfī, "Aḥmad" (2004).

[18] Thaqfān, "Al-shaʿfī" (2007).

[19] El-Shaafy, "The First" (1967), i.

religious project, however. He wrote in his conclusion that the Saudi 'military activities which were carried out against the neighbouring countries were wholly based on religious motives'. This was because the state sought 'to restore the Islamic religion to its purity'. Also administratively, the aim of the Saudis was to 'establish an Islamic state on the model of the first Islamic state'.[20]

Despite Al-Sha'afi's credentials as an indigenous professional historian who upheld the takfīrist paradigm, he remained the foundation's secretary general for only three years. In 1975, after a personal 'conflict' over unknown matters with other members of the foundation, he left the research institute.[21] Subsequently, three further secretaries general of the foundation were appointed up to the early 1990s. While none of them held a PhD in history, all of them were known as men who enjoyed the personal trust of Ḥasan Āl al-Shaykh.[22]

Although Al-Sha'afi's tenure at the King Abdulaziz Foundation for Research and Archives was brief, it laid an important basis for the founder paradigm. Here, the foundation fulfilled a similar function as the ʿĀbdīn palace archive in Cairo. This archive had contributed to the emergence of a view of Muhammad Ali as the founder of the modern Egyptian nation. Systematically, it privileged the history of Muhammad Ali's dynasty and excluded Ottoman and subaltern pasts.[23] It is likely that the foundation sought to imitate the ʿĀbdīn archive, as it built up a collection that focused on the Al Saud generally and on King Abdulaziz in particular.

In creating a royalist archive that was similar to the ʿĀbdīn palace archive, the foundation relied on Muhammad Tamimi (d. 1976/77), a Saudi who, in fact, had worked at the ʿĀbdīn archive in Cairo between 1931/32 and 1946/47. During a time of good relations between the Saudi and the Egyptian monarchies, Tamimi had 'corrected wrong information'

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[20] Ibid., 281.

[21] Muhammad Al-Sha'afi, interview, 24 October 2009.

[22] Āl Zulfah, "Thalāthat ʿuqūd" (2003). The secretaries general were Ṭāmī al-Baqmī (b. 1939/40), ʿAbd al-Mālik Āl al-Shaykh and ʿAbd Allāh al-Ḥuqayl (b. 1933/34).

[23] Di-Capua, *Gatekeepers* (2009).

about the Wahhabi mission in Egyptian textbooks in co-operation with the Egyptian Directorate of Education.[24] In addition, he drew one of the first comprehensive family trees of the Al Saud, which the Egyptian government printed on King Abdulaziz's state visit to Cairo in 1946.[25] Based on Tamimi's experience in Egypt, the Saudi Ministry of Education hired him in 1961/62 to work as director of library administration and to author history textbooks. Between 1968 and 1970, the ministry, then under Ḥasan Āl al-Shaykh, commissioned Tamimi with photocopying documents from Ottoman and British archives. These copies would subsequently form the core of the foundation.[26] This process was similar to the establishment of the ʿĀbdīn archive based on Egypt-related documents in European archives.[27]

The foundation's archival policies excluded periods before the rise of the first Saudi state and thus privileged the dynastic past. Generally, the documents in the possession of the foundation were restricted to those 'shedding light on Arabian affairs from the second half of the eighteenth century until the 1930s'. Copies of British documents in the foundation were confined to Abdulaziz's reign itself, while copies of Ottoman documents were limited to the period from 1746 until the early twentieth century. In 1974, the government also created a national archive, which was attached to the foundation in 1976. The 'national documents' preserved were, however, initially restricted to the period from 1815 until the end of King Saud's reign in 1964.[28]

The King Abdulaziz Foundation for Research and Archives not only contributed to the development of the founder paradigm through the creation of a dynasty-centred national archive. It also placed Abdulaziz at the centre of national history through its publications.

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[24] Al-Samārī, "Muḥammad" (2001).

[25] Winder, *Saudi Arabia* (1965), ii.

[26] Al-Samārī, "Muḥammad" (2001).

[27] Di-Capua, "'Jabarti" (2004), 433.

[28] Dārat al-Malik ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, *Dalīl* (1981), 65–69.

These publications included the journal *al-Dārah* founded in 1975.[29] Muḥammad Zaydān, another man trusted by Ḥasan Āl al-Shaykh, edited it until his death in 1992. Previously, Zaydān had taught Wahhabi theology with the consent of ʿAbd Allāh Āl al-Shaykh (1870–1959), the father of Ḥasan Āl al-Shaykh and former chief cadi in the Hejaz.[30] Zaydān also professed a Saudi national identity, which he did not see as in conflict with a broader Islamic identity. In the first issue of *al-Dārah*, he described his commitment to the journal. He stated that his 'respect for the principles of the foundation and the history of the Al Saud only means love for this nation as part of love for this religion, Islam'.[31]

Through *al-Dārah*, Zaydān promoted a Saudi national identity centred on the Al Saud. He saw this identity as part of, rather than separate from, a wider Arab and Islamic identity. According to him, King Abdulaziz was thus the founder of a modern nation that was central to the Arab and Muslim world. Building on football as a means of nation building, Zaydān gave a lecture at Ittihad Football Club in Jeddah on the Saudi National Day on 23 September 1975. Shortly thereafter, he published the lecture in *al-Dārah* under the title 'The National Day'. He began his lecture by asking, 'The National Day, why do we celebrate it?' He answered that 'we in Saudi Arabia' are 'the motherland'. 'We are the ones who have given Islam to the Muslim umma and we are the ones have given Arabic to its millions of speakers.' Zaydān narrated that 'our lord, God's messenger, left this peninsula united for us, and how similar are its borders today to its borders yesterday'. 'God united it through King Abdulaziz, after it had been fragmented. The day of this unification is our National Day.'[32]

In the early 1980s, the idea of a conference on King Abdulaziz emerged that would consolidate the founder paradigm. In another instance of foreign influence on the development of dynastic historiography, Ḥusayn Amīn (b. 1925), the Iraqi secretary general of the Union of Arab Historians, proposed the organization of an international conference on

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[29] Dārat al-Malik ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, *Majallat al-dārah* (2004), 22.

[30] Āl al-Shaykh, "Īḍāḥ" (1975), 13–14.

[31] Zaydān, "Fātiḥat al-majallah" (1975), 4.

[32] Zaydān, "Al-yawm" (1975), 185.

'King Abdulaziz's personality and life'.[33] Presumably, Ḥusayn Amīn, a devout Arab

nationalist,[34] saw Abdulaziz as a pan-Arab as well as Saudi hero. Independent from Amīn,

ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Shathrī put forward a similar idea. Al-Shathrī was then the editor-in-chief

of *al-Ḥaras al-Waṭanī*, the magazine of the Saudi National Guard. In an editorial in *al-Ḥaras

al-Waṭanī* in 1981, he argued that the hundredth birthday of Abdulaziz in 1980 and the fiftieth

anniversary of the establishment of the modern Saudi state in 1982 'merit the

comprehensive academic study of King Abdulaziz's biography and achievements in various

fields'. A conference would, in al-Shathrī's view, study these 'achievements in the service of

his people, country, and Islamic umma' and produce a 'useful book for researchers and

students now and in the future'.[35]

Imam Muhammad ibn Saud Islamic University (Imam University) in Riyadh took up

Ḥusayn Amīn's proposal and turned the idea of the conference into major public event. In

1982, a preparatory committee began working on what was called the International

Conference on the History of King Abdulaziz. This committee consisted of ʿAbd Allāh al-Turkī

(b. 1940), the director of Imam University, as well as delegates from other universities, the

King Abdulaziz Foundation for Research and Archives, and the Union of Arab Historians. A

media sub-committee was responsible for television interviews and radio programmes.

Moreover, it sought to co-operate with the Ministry of Information in inviting foreign

journalists to attend the conference.[36] Besides academic historians, King Fahd (r. 1982–

2005) and Ḥasan Āl al-Shaykh, who had become minister of higher education by then, both

agreed to give speeches at the conference. In December 1985, when the weeklong

conference was finally held, it received extensive coverage in the Saudi press.

Conceived as a media as well as an academic event, the conference on King

Abdulaziz sought to strengthen allegiances to the Saudi dynasty and nation internally, while

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[33] Jāmiʿat al-Imām Muḥammad ibn Suʿūd al-Islāmīyah, *Buḥūth* (1999), 24.

[34] Freitag, "Writing" (1994), 19.

[35] Āl Dāwūd et al., "Milaff" (1985), 15.

[36] Āl Dāwūd et al., "Muʾtamar" (1985), 35–37.

also presenting the kingdom to the outside world. Domestically, the conference aimed at 'reminding' the audience 'of the blessings, which God bestowed upon this country and its people. They were represented in the blessing of unification, the blessing of security and stability thanks to the application of Islamic law and the blessing of prosperity.' Internationally, another declared aim of the conference was 'to present the political and social system which King Abdulaziz established and which his sons promoted in the Muslim world and the whole world after him, so that people learn from it and follow its example'. The final official aim was 'to express appreciation, gratitude and recognition of the service of this great man, who established this big entity, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, on the basis of piety. He also established the basis for its rise, consolidated its Islamic and international position, and served his religion, nation and humanity'.[37]

Through its lectures, the conference sought to put Abdulaziz at the centre of narratives about the founding of the nation. In one of the opening speeches, ʿAbd Allāh al-Turkī, the director of Imam University, stated that 'King Abdulaziz appeared in a period of darkness full of hardship and depression and marked by a decline in intellectual strength and material production'. According to al-Turkī, the monarch was 'the strong man, the unifier, the applier of the sharia who held on to a total programme of reform, the builder'.[38] The final declaration of the conference read that 'in spite of a period of time full of difficulties, King Abdulaziz was able to build a strong nation; the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia'. This was 'a nation that is guided by Islam, achieved unity, granted security to both citizens and residents, made great efforts in rebuilding the Two Holy Mosques, facilitated the accomplishment of Islamic rites for all Muslims'.[39]

In order to consolidate the narrative of Abdulaziz as the single founder of the modern Saudi nation, the organizers of the conference relied not only on Saudi academics and

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[37] Jāmiʿat al-Imām Muḥammad ibn Suʿūd al-Islāmīyah, *Buḥūth* (1999), 25.

[38] Al-Turkī, "Kalimat maʿālī" (1986), 24.

[39] Imam Muhammad ibn Saud Islamic University, *Selected Papers* (1998), 39.

officials, but also on foreign professional historians. ʿAbd al-Raḥīm ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ʿAbd al-Raḥīm (1936–2006), a professor of history at Cairo's Azhar University, delivered one of the leading papers at the conference. It was entitled 'The Effect of King Abdulaziz's Resoluteness in the Formation of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia'. ʿAbd al-Raḥīm argued that the monarch's personality was the defining factor in the kingdom's creation. Abdulaziz overcame various difficulties with his resolution, confidence and wisdom until he had built a 'strong Arab structure, the 'Kingdom of Saudi Arabia''. Later, the monarch reformed this structure internally and thus 'proved to the world that a successful leader was a leader who had resolution, self-confidence, and ability to overcome the difficulties he faced'.[40]

After the conference on King Abdulaziz, an important element of the founder paradigm came to prominence. This was the founding story or myth about the capture of Riyadh by Abdulaziz and about sixty men in 1902, which would become so controversial in al-Wābilī's article in 2009.[41] The capture of Riyadh was probably more suitable as a foundation story than the arguably far more important conquests of al-Aḥsāʾ in 1913 and the Hejaz in 1924/25. A possible reason for the absence of both regions in the narrative, as Madawi Al-Rasheed writes, was the reluctance to reactivate dormant sentiments among some people in the outlying provinces who still regarded Saudi rule 'as an imposition of an alien Najdi leadership'.[42] In addition, members of some Najdi families and tribes close to the Al Saud probably favoured the capture of Riyadh as a foundation story because they were relatives of Abdulaziz or his sixty men and they could claim a share in the foundation of the kingdom.

The story of the capture of Riyadh had been part of the oral tradition and the historiography of the Al Saud since the early twentieth century, although it had not entered wider public celebrations. Abdulaziz himself regularly told the story in his council or majlis. His audience consisted not only of tribal sheikhs, Arab functionaries and foreign guests, but

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[40] ʿAbd al-Raḥīm, "Athar" (1999), 123.

[41] Partrick, *Nationalism* (2009), 3.

[42] Al-Rasheed, "The Capture" (2004), 195.

also writers. Thereby, the event entered the monographs of the dynastic historians Ameen Rihani, Fuad Hamza, Hafiz Wahba, and St John Philby.[43] In the 1960s, the dynastic authors Mounir Ajlani and Muhammad Tamimi also included the story in a history textbook for primary schools. Under the title, 'the great adventure', they wrote that Abdulaziz set out from Kuwait in a second attempt to 'recover' Riyadh in 1902 from ʿAjlān, a governor of the Āl Rashīd. During the first night after their arrival at the town, 'Abdulaziz and a handful of his relatives and brave men were able to kill the emir of Riyadh and make his large, heavily-armed and entrenched army surrender. At dawn, they entered the town square, and one of them shouted, "God is great! The rule belongs, thanks to God, to Abdulaziz."'[44] With some variation, this story has remained in different textbooks until the present.[45]

In 1950, as discussed above, Abdulaziz cancelled the celebrations of the golden jubilee of the beginning of his rule. The capture of Riyadh was thus not commemorated outside of oral narratives and historical books. In the late 1980s and 1990s, however, a number of influential actors in the capital felt that the government should invest more in the public commemoration of the capture of Riyadh. This was during a time, in which the King Abdulaziz Foundation for Research and Archives appeared to have fallen 'asleep', as the local historian Mohammed al-Zulfa described it. Until his death in 1988, Ḥasan Āl al-Shaykh, the chair of the foundation, had given the institution 'much time and effort'. Under its new chair, Abdul-Aziz Khowaiter, who succeeded Āl al-Shaykh as minister of education and higher education, the foundation received a 'lower degree priority, to the extent that it almost became forgotten'.[46] This happened although Khowaiter was himself a historian.

The foundation's inactivity coincided with a general budgetary austerity in the education and research sectors in the late 1980s and early 1990s. During that time,

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[43] Ibid., 185.

[44] Al-ʿAjlānī et al., *Ṣuwar* (1969), 52–54.

[45] Ibrāhīm and Maḥmūd, *Tārīkh* (1971), 80–81. Al-Rasheed, "The Capture" (2004), 184. Al-ʿUthaymīn, *Tārīkh al-mamlakah al-ʿarabīyah al-suʿūdīyah: lil-ṣaff al-thālith* (2007), 67–70.

[46] Āl Zulfah, "Thalāthat ʿuqūd" (2003).

increased Saudi military expenditure exacerbated the effects of lower oil prices. Saudi

Arabia first supported Iraq during its long war against Iran between 1980 and 1988.

Subsequently, it shouldered much of the financial burden of the war against Iraq in 1990–

1991. Muhammad Al-Sha'afi, the former secretary general of the foundation, remembered

that 'during the time of the Gulf War, there was a lack of everything'. 'First, money was spent

on Iraq and then on the multinational forces.'[47]

Despite the kingdom's fiscal difficulties, another writer named ʿAbd Allāh al-Ruwayshid

demanded new initiatives in dynastic commemorations from the government. Al-Ruwayshid

was a man close to the Al Saud and a frequent contributor to the journal *al-Dārah*. In 1989,

he published an article in *al-Dārah* entitled 'The Legendary Epic of the Conquest of Riyadh

and the Sixty Heroes Led by King Abdulaziz'. He urged Abdul-Aziz Khowaiter in his function

as minister of education to 'give the name of every one of those sixty conquering and

founding heroes to sixty schools in every province, town and village'. Likewise, he called

upon Ibrāhīm al-ʿAnqarī, the minister of municipal and rural affairs, to 'give the name of every

one of those sixty Fedayeen to sixty streets'.[48] With the term 'Fedayeen' instead of 'martyrs',

al-Ruwayshid's statement was also part of a nationalist discourse.

Parallel to ʿAbd Allāh al-Ruwayshid, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Ruwayshid (b. 1928), who

was also close the royal family, developed the idea of celebrating the hundredth anniversary

of the capture of Riyadh. His father had worked in the house of one of Abdulaziz's wives.

Thus, al-Ruwayshid had known several princes since his childhood. He enjoyed a special

friendship with Prince Salman ibn Abdulaziz (b. 1939),[49] a senior member of the royal family

very interested in history.[50] After having studied law and education in Riyadh and Beirut, al-

Ruwayshid rose to the position of director of the administration of textbooks and curricula in

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[47] Interview, 24 October 2009.

[48] ʿAbd Allāh al-Ruwayshid, "Al-malḥamah" (1989), 116.

[49] ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Ruwayshid, interviews, 25 October 2009 and 15 February 2010.

[50] Talal ibn Abdulaziz Al Saud, interview, 10 March 2010. On Salman and his interest in historiography, see also al-Ḥumayd, *Salmān* (2009).

the Ministry of Education. In 1970, he transferred to the Ministry of Interior, where he ended

his administrative career as assistant to the secretary general of the National Security

Council.[51] His work in both the state's education and security apparatuses probably

convinced him that a new attempt to celebrate a royal jubilee would contribute to the

regime's legitimacy. In addition, as a man who had grown up in the royal household he

found that many previous books 'did not cover all the aspects of King Abdulaziz's life'.[52]

The idea of the centenary, however, was bound to face the opposition of ulema who

rejected projects to strengthen nationalism, whether Arab or Saudi. In 1950, Muḥammad ibn

Ibrāhīm Āl al-Shaykh, the grand mufti, had considered the Golden Jubilee as contrary to

Islamic law. Official textbooks quoted his successor, ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz ibn Bāz (1912–99), as

characterizing Arab nationalism as a *jāhilīyah*, 'a movement of ignorance whose main

purpose is to fight Islam and shake its teachings and rules'.[53] Ṣafar al-Ḥawālī (b. 1950), a

prominent former teacher at Umm al-Qurá University in Mecca, also rejected both Arab and

local nationalism (*waṭanīyah*). According to him, both 'were produced and exported from the

West to prevent the unity of Islam'.[54]

Given the opposition of the ulema, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Ruwayshid initially planned the

centennial celebrations in secrecy together with a few high-ranking government officials. In

the late 1980s, he proposed the event to his friend Prince Salman, who 'liked the idea' and

subsequently attained King Fahd's consent. As al-Ruwayshid remembered it, he worked

with two other men close to Fahd on the project, without being able to 'tell anybody about it'.

One of the men was Ibrāhīm al-ʿAnqarī, the minister and subsequent personal advisor to

Fahd. The other one was ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Sālim (b. 1932), then secretary general of the

council of ministers. In 1990/91, the Gulf War, however, interrupted the planning. King Fahd

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[51] ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Ruwayshid, "Sīrah" (2009).

[52] ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Ruwayshid, interview, 25 October 2009.

[53] Al-Rasheed, "Political Legitimacy" (1998), 31–32.

[54] Al-Hassan, "The Role" (2006), 148. On Ṣafar al-Ḥawālī, see also Fandy, "Safar" (1998); *Saudi Arabia* (1999).

was desperate to gain the support of the ulema for the invitation of non-Muslim forces to the kingdom during the war. In order not to offend this constituency, he asked al-Ruwayshid and his collaborators 'not to talk about the centenary again'.[55]

Yet, the centennial celebrations were also meant to be an instrument in nation building. This became urgent in the 1990s, when the government 'felt the necessity of an identity that could help in overcoming the unprecedented internal and external problems, including the threat to the unity of the state'.[56] During the Gulf War, Saddam Hussein challenged the cohesion of the country by addressing Saudi Arabia as the 'lands of Najd and the Hejaz'. The crisis also made it clear to members of the royal family that they could not rely on the loyalty of the whole religious establishment. They were able to extract a fatwa from ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz ibn Bāz justifying the invitation of foreign, non-Muslim forces to the kingdom. This fatwa, however, led to a schism within the religious establishment, with some scholars, including Ṣafar al-Ḥawālī, opposing the invitation.[57]

Against external and internal threats to the Saudi state's security and legitimacy, the government made new efforts to foster a national identity centred on the Al Saud. Already during the war, Ghazi Algosaibi (1940–2010), then Saudi ambassador to Bahrain, countered the Iraqi propaganda with a poem that was later turned into a popular song. The poem emphasized national unity, with the first line being 'yes, we are the Hejaz and we are Najd, we have glory here and glory there'.[58] In 1996, the Ministry of Education also created the new school subject 'national education'.[59] One of its aims was to 'introduce pupils to the history of their nation and its achievements and the struggle of their ancestors'. Another aim

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[55] ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Ruwayshid, interview, 25 October 2009.

[56] Al-Hassan, "The Role" (2006), 168.

[57] Al-Rasheed, "God" (1996), 362. On religious dissent in Saudi Arabia in the 1990s, see also Al-Rasheed, *Contesting* (2007); Alshamsi, *Islam* (2011); Fandy, *Saudi Arabia* (1999); Hegghammer, *Jihad* (2010); Lacroix, *Les islamistes* (2010).

[58] *Ajal naḥnu al-ḥijāz wa-naḥnu najd, hunā majd lanā wa-hunāka majd.* Shafi Aldamer, interview, 17 September 2009.

[59] Al-Jamʿīyah al-Waṭanīyah al-Ḥijāzīyah, "Iṣlāḥ" (2002), 20.

was to 'strengthen the belonging to the nation and the concern for its security, stability, and protection'.[60]

As part of the nation-building project, the government also resumed the planning of the centennial celebrations. Al-Ruwayshid's idea thus turned into a state project. On the Saudi National Day on 23 September 1996, Prince Salman publicly announced that the celebration would take place three years later.[61] Salman also headed the newly established Supreme Committee for the Preparation of the Centenary of the Kingdom's Foundation. Giving witness to the importance the government attached to the centenary, this committee contained no professional historians, but only men of ministerial rank apart from ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Ruwayshid. It included the finance minister and the minister of information as well as Ibrāhīm al-ʿAnqarī and ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Sālim. In addition, ʿAbd Allāh al-Turkī, the former director of Imam University, served on the committee in his new function as minister of Islamic affairs.[62]

The centenary gained unprecedented dimensions, as not only ministries, but also the King Abdulaziz Foundation for Research and Archives contributed with new vigour to dynastic historical production. After the foundation's publication activities had stagnated during the late 1980s and early 1990s, a new leadership expanded its activities. The government offered ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Ruwayshid the position of the foundation's secretary general, but he declined in order to dedicate himself to publishing *al-Shibl*, a children's magazine.[63] Instead, Fahd al-Semmari (b. 1957/58) became the first professional historian after Muhammad Al-Sha'afi to administer the historical research institute. Like Al-Sha'afi, he had also studied abroad. He completed a doctoral dissertation on Saudi diplomatic relations under King Abdulaziz at the University of California, Riverside.[64]

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[60] Al-Fawwāz et al., *Al-tarbiyah* (2009), 5.

[61] Al-Ḥumayd, *Salmān* (2009), 73.

[62] Dārat al-Malik ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, *Al-mamlakah*, vol. 1 (2007), 157.

[63] ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Ruwayshid, interview, 25 October 2009.

[64] Al-Semmari, "Saudi Arabian-German Political and Economic Relations" (1989).

Soon after al-Semmari's appointment as secretary general in 1995, Prince Salman became the new chair of the foundation. Al-Semmari's leadership and Salman's backing allowed the research institute to expand and assume a pivotal role in the centennial celebrations. In 1999, together with the newly founded General Secretariat for the Celebration of the Centenary of the Kingdom's Foundation, which Salman also headed, the foundation organized a five-day international conference with 197 papers. In addition, the foundation and the general secretariat produced five documentaries, organized six exhibitions, and issued sixty-four books. Aiming at broad audiences, these books not only comprised academic studies but also children's books on Abdulaziz's life and battles.[65]

Having the full backing of the government, the organizers of the centenary were able to overcome the resistance of the ulema. This was in contrast to the jubilee of 1950, when Saudi nation building was still in its infancy. As expected, ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz ibn Bāz, the grand mufti, issued a fatwa declaring the centenary a heresy (*bidʿah*) shortly before the festivities began. This caused elaborate decorations to vanish from shop windows in Riyadh.[66] ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Ruwayshid was familiar with the ulema's arguments, however, as he had studied under Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm Āl al-Shaykh, the former grand mufti, and he managed to persuade Ibn Baz not to oppose the celebration. He argued that the centenary was merely a 'political commemoration'. As it was not to be repeated every year, it could not turn into an 'Eid'. In return for all their efforts for the centenary, Fahd awarded al-Ruwayshid and other contributors to the centenary the highest order of the kingdom, the King Abdulaziz Order.[67]

As an attempt to promote Saudi national allegiances without alienating the ulema further, the aims of the centenary had both Islamic and national dimensions. The first two official objectives sought to legitimize the state religiously. According to them, the festivity

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[65] E.g., ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Thunayyān, *Al-futūwah* (1999).

[66] Al-Rasheed, "The Capture" (2004), 186.

[67] ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Ruwayshid, interview, 15 February 2010. Al-Jazīrah, "ʿAqiba" (1999). An anecdote, which a Saudi historian told me in Riyadh in 2010, has it that Ibn Bāz asked King Fahd, 'We do not celebrate the prophet's birthday. Why should we celebrate your father's achievements? Was he more important than the prophet?'

was supposed to 'highlight the importance of the Islamic pillars on which the kingdom is based' and to 'explain the effect of the application of the sharia on the security and stability in the kingdom'. The remaining aims sought to foster national unity by 'revealing the specialty of the kingdom's unity' and 'explaining national achievements in order to strengthen national identity'.[68]

In order to foster a Saudi national identity, the centennial celebrations gave central attention to the national foundation story of 1902. The centennial logo itself displayed a silhouette of Riyadh's Muṣmak fort, which Abdulaziz and his men had captured in that year. In addition, the logo featured the date '1319' in the Islamic lunar calendar, which is the equivalent of 1902 in the Gregorian calendar (see figure 3). The centenary organizer ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Ruwayshid also published a compilation of the biographies of the men involved in the capture of Riyadh: *The Sixty Men of Eternal Memory: The Forefront of the Recovery of Riyadh and the Unification of the Kingdom*.[69] In this work, al-Ruwayshid reiterated the importance of these men for the foundation of the kingdom. He wrote that 'it was Abdulaziz, on whom the hopes of the Al Saud and the hopes of the citizens for the unification of their country relied'. These hopes 'began to appear, when he led this group, who achieved the first step, the recovery of Riyadh'.[70] King Fahd honoured sons and grandsons of these 'pioneers' in a large ceremony in central Riyadh during the centenary, and a large plate bearing the pioneers' names was placed in front of the Muṣmak fort.[71]

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[68] Dārat al-Malik ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, *Al-mamlakah*, vol. 1 (2007), 162.

[69] ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Ruwayshid, *Al-sittūn* (1998).

[70] Ibid., 12.

[71] Al-Ḥumayd, *Salmān* (2009), 74.

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Figure 3: Official logo of the centenary in 1999

Unification, not jihad

As the government popularized the paradigm of Abdulaziz as the founder of the nation, this paradigm was combined with the notion of unification. A similar founder paradigm in Egyptian historiography viewed Muhammad Ali (r. 1805–48) as the father of the modern nation 'on top of a corrupt Ottoman order'.[72] Saudi dynastic histories, in contrast, portrayed Abdulaziz as the unifier of the nation against the background of previous division. The notion of national unification further contributed to the Saudization of dynastic historiography, after earlier dynastic histories had portrayed the Al Saud mainly as restorers of Islam and champions of the Arab world. Consequently, the takfīrist paradigm lost ground. 'Unification'

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[72] Di-Capua, *Gatekeepers* (2009), 12.

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replaced 'jihad' and 'conquest' (*fatḥ*), and the idea of pre-Wahhabi political disunity became more important than a religious 'age of ignorance'.

Although dynastic histories between the 1920s and the 1970s emphasized jihad and the spread of Islam, the notion of unification, like the foundation story of 1902, also appeared during the early consolidation of the Saudi state. The notion first arose during the official renaming of the Hejazi and Najdi kingdoms as the 'Kingdom of Saudi Arabia' in 1932. The 23 September marking this event was initially called 'Union Day' (*ʿīd al-tawḥīd*).[73] Later, it was termed the 'National Day' (*al-yawm al-waṭanī*) following resistance by Wahhabi ulema to the usage of the term 'Eid' (*ʿīd*).[74] Fuad Hamza, one of the officials involved in the consolidation, however, continued to use the term *tawḥīd*. In his book *Saud Arabia* published in 1937, he called the renaming of 1932 the 'unification of the kingdom's parts'.[75]

With the rise of Arab nationalism after World War II, the notion of 'unification' remained part of governmental discourse. Although it principally referred to a Saudi national rather than an Arab national process, Saudi leaders also used it to emphasize their commitment to Arab unity. In an interview published in 1972, a journalist put to King Faisal the observation that 'it seems that the kingdom has not been happy with some projects of unity' in the region. This observation presumably referred to the United Arab Republic headed by Nasser, with which Saudi Arabia had wrestled in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Faisal responded that Saudi Arabia, in fact, was 'the first establisher of unity. The late King Abdulaziz struggled to unify the parts of this kingdom, after it had been ravaged by conflicts, fighting, and looting.'[76]

Since the 1970s onwards, historians have used the notion of 'unification' frequently and have applied it not only to the 'merger' of 1932 but also to the preceding conquests. This happened during a time, in which the idea of the Saudi nation as an object to be unified

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[73] Hope Gill, "Mr. Hope Gill" (1986), 189.

[74] Al-Hassan, "The Role" (2006), 192.

[75] Ḥamzah, *Al-bilād* (1937), 84.

[76] Al-Fātiḥ and Āl Suʿūd, *Al-fayṣalīyah* (1972), 79–80.

became consolidated. In addition, the rise of the concept of 'unification' coincided with the

appearance of more and more indigenous dynastic historians who shared a national outlook.

One of these authors was Ibrahim Al Khamis (b. 1906), an author from al-Dirʿīyah and close

to Al Saud. After having fought in the Saudi armies under King Abdulaziz's brother

Muhammad (1878/79–1944), Al Khamis became a trader travelling to Kuwait, Iraq, and other

neighbouring countries. With the help and encouragement of Muhammad ibn Abdulrahman's

sons and Ḥasan Āl al-Shaykh, the minister of education, he completed a semi-

autobiographical book entitled *The Lions of the Al Saud and My Experience in Life* in 1972.[77]

The 'lions' were King Abdulaziz, his son Faisal and his brother Muhammad.

In Al Khamis's text, unification and jihad initially occurred together. He still used the

earlier terminology, but combined it with unification of the nation. He spoke of Abdulaziz's

'conquest' (*fatḥ*) of Ḥāʾil in 1922, and stated that the Al Saud 'raided' (*ghazaw*) the Shammar

and ʿUtaybah tribes.[78] However, he also argued that 'the Al Saud and their helpers led by

Abdulaziz fought battles in order to unify the country in one strong kingdom'.[79] In Al Khamis's

characterization of Faisal, the notion of jihad, or service to Islam, and unification, or service

to the nation, merged. The author wrote that Faisal, under his father Abdulaziz, 'fought the

battles of jihad and struggle in order to liberate and unify the country. Then he fought and

fights until this day the battles of the greater jihad in building, reforming, constructing and

laying the bases of growth, prosperity, stability and justice in the country'. According to Al

Khamis, 'nothing has kept him away from carrying out what he saw as in the interest of his

country and what he saw as in the interest of all Arabs and Muslims'.[80]

Although the national term 'unification' arose at the expense of jihad, it was not

entirely secular. What contributed to the success of the term was, in fact, its association in

Arabic with Islam and the Wahhabi mission as well as with the nation. While the word did not

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[77] Āl Khamīs, *Usūd* (1972), 16. On Ibrahim Al Khamis, see also Carter, *Leading* (1979), 10.

[78] Āl Khamīs, *Usūd* (1972), 151.

[79] Ibid., 123.

[80] Ibid., 12.

have the strong takfīrist meaning of *fatḥ*, 'conquest', *tawḥīd* retained a religious connotation

in contrast to the 'unification of Germany' (*deutsche Einigung*) of 1871 and the Italian

unification, or 'resurgence' (*il Risorgimento*).[81] It also meant 'monotheism', the belief that

'there is no other god but God' (*lā ilāha illā allāh*), as stated in the Muslim profession of

faith.[82] As such, it was a central concept in Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's doctrines, as expressed in

his manifesto, *The Book of God's Unity* (*Kitāb al-tawḥīd*).[83]

Forming an obstacle to the rise of the unification narrative, the notion of the pre-

Wahhabi *jāhilīyah* and related takfīrist narratives retained an important platform at Imam

Muhammad ibn Saud Islamic University (Imam University). After having published an edition

of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's works in seven volumes in 1977/78,[84] the university organized the

Sheikh Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab Week in 1980, a conference aimed at 'informing

Muslim public opinion about the truth of Sheikh Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab's mission'.[85]

In his opening speech, Prince Salman ibn Abdulaziz still argued that the pre-Wahhabi period

was 'a stage of chaos and ignorance, in which heresies prevailed, until God blessed this

country with a true mission and faithful rulers. Imam Muhammad ibn Saud and Shaykh

Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab thus began to call for a return to the Koran and the Sunna,

adherence to monotheism, and jihad.'[86] Here, Salman expressed a governmental view that

still saw the Wahhabi mission at the centre of the regime's legitimacy. In 1975, the minister

of higher education, Ḥasan Āl al-Shaykh, was asked in an interview how he would imagine

the Arabian peninsula and the Arab and Muslim world without the Wahhabi mission. He

answered, 'void, lost, and full of strife, wars and darkness'.[87]

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[81] Al-Rasheed, "Reflection" (2009), 227.

[82] Gimaret, "Tawḥīd" (2000).

[83] Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission* (2006), 12.

[84] Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb, *Muʾallafāt* [1977/78].

[85] Al-Khayyāṭ, "Sumūw" (1980), 98.

[86] Ibid.

[87] Al-Fātiḥ and Āl al-Shaykh, "Ḥiwār" (1975), 47–48.

An influential author at Imam University, who followed the takfīrist paradigm, was ʿAbd Allāh al-Shibl (b. 1936/37). He was a professor of history who served as the institution's secretary general twice between 1977 and 1995.[88] In 1978, al-Shibl published an article in *al-Dārah* on 'Sheikh Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab's Mission'. He argued that before the sheikh, 'aberrance from the true Islamic religion in the form of idolatry, heresies, and superstition prevailed in all countries of the Muslim world'.[89] Still in 1999, al-Shibl claimed that pre-Wahhabi Najd had deteriorated to a 'level comparable to, or greater than, that of the age of ignorance'.[90] 'Within two years after the Sheikh had moved to al-Dirʿīyah', the historian maintained, the mission had 'gathered its military forces, announced jihad in order to bring the people to the truth, and created the right atmosphere to spread the mission and to return the Muslims to the way of God'.[91]

However, while the establishment of an indigenous historical profession gave takfīrism an academic platform, it also facilitated its erosion. This contributed to the gradual rise of 'unification' at the expense of 'jihad'. Importantly, professional historical training encouraged criticism of sources and the use of new sources beyond the takfīrist chronicles by Ibn Ghannām and Ibn Bishr. Abdul-Aziz Khowaiter, the future minister, established the new approach to sources in higher education in the kingdom. After having studied at Cairo University, he gained a PhD from SOAS in 1960.[92] For his thesis, he edited a source on Mamluk history under the supervision of the historian Peter Holt.[93] As one of the first Saudis with a doctorate,[94] the government appointed him as secretary general and subsequently

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[88] Jāmiʿat al-Imām Muḥammad ibn Suʿūd al-Islāmīyah, "Majlis " (2011).

[89] Al-Shibl, "Daʿwat al-shaykh" (1978), 24.

[90] Al-Fākhirī, *Tārīkh* (1999).

[91] Ibid., 26.

[92] Al-Khuwayṯir, *Narr* (2008), 206–7.

[93] Al-Khowayter, "A critical edition" (1960).

[94] Al-Qashʿamī, "Man nāla" (2009).

deputy director of King Saud University. As a fellow Najdi, King Faisal also entrusted him

with teaching Saudi history at the university between 1961 and 1971.[95]

As part of his teaching at King Saud University, Khowaiter passed on his skills in

historical research, which he had gained in Cairo and London, to the first generation of

professional historians trained inside the kingdom. He thus encouraged them to criticize and

contrast different sources. In a manual on *Research Methods*, published in 1975, he

introduced his students to a variety of source materials, including oral narrations,

manuscripts, inscriptions, writings on leather and papyri, coins, stamps, jewellery and even

furniture.[96]

Moreover, Khowaiter encouraged his students to study and edit chronicles other than

those by Ibn Ghannām and Ibn Bishr in order to discover more about the country's history.

These chronicles included previously unpublished pre-Wahhabi Najdi texts, which lacked

takfīrism. Khowaiter himself published al-Manqūr's chronicle in 1970, considering this edition

as a service to national history. He argued that the work contained 'jewels of information

that, if polished, emit a guiding light that connects an important past episode in the history of

this country to its present'. 'The little that has been written on the history of Najd over the last

five centuries made me feel that any effort towards some of it, either by studying or

commenting upon it, is a clear service, however small the effort may be.'[97]

'Abd Allāh al-Shibl, who graduated from King Saud University under Khowaiter in

1962, succeeded his teacher as a prolific editor of Najdi histories. As part of his master's

dissertation, he edited a chronicle by Muḥammad al-Fākhirī's (1772/73–1860).[98] In 1980, al-

Shibl completed a PhD thesis on *The Most Important Najdi Sources on the History of the

First Saudi State*. While he dedicated large passages to the works of the Ibn Ghannām

School, he also discussed the pre-Wahhabi authors Aḥmad al-Bassām, Ibn Yūsuf and al-

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[95] Wazārat al-Maʿārif, *Mawsūʿat tārīkh*, vol. 5 (2003), 125. Al-Khuwayṭir, *Fī ṭuruq* (1975), 3.

[96] Al-Khuwayṭir, *Fī ṭuruq* (1975), 11–22; 36–38.

[97] Al-Manqūr, *Tārīkh* (1970), 3.

[98] Al-Fākhirī, *Tārīkh* (1999), 7. Jāmiʿat al-Riyāḍ, *Jāmiʿat al-riyāḍ* (1978), 16.

Manqūr.[99] In 1999, Khowaiter's former student also published the chronicles by Ibn ʿAbbād and Ibn Rabīʿah.[100]

Keeping the notion of the pre-Wahhabi *jāhilīyah*, ʿAbd Allāh al-Shibl employed Ibn ʿAbbād's chronicle with its accounts of battles and killings mainly to substantiate the idea of 'chaos' before Ibn Abd al-Wahhab.[101] ʿAbd Allāh al-ʿUthaymīn, one of al-Shibl's classmates at King Saud University, however, analysed the religious and political background of the Wahhabi mission more critically. He became a specialist in Saudi history rather incidentally and as result of Western interest in the Wahhabi mission as an underresearched topic. When his supervisors at King Saud University decided to send him for postgraduate studies to Britain, they demanded that his research topic should not be Saudi history. This was because Muhammad Al-Sha'afi had already written his PhD on the first Saudi state, and, as al-ʿUthaymīn put it, 'the officials at the university thought at that time that this was enough in this field'.[102] Instead, al-ʿUthaymīn was supposed to study the Arab presence in East Africa for his PhD. However, Montgomery Watt (1909–2006), his supervisor at the University of Edinburgh, convinced him to study Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab. As al-ʿUthaymīn remembered it, Watt justified this change of topics by stating that 'researchers in the West were looking for more information about him'.[103] In 1972, al-ʿUthaymīn thus completed a dissertation on *Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb: The Man and His Works*.[104]

Upon his return to the Kingdom, al-ʿUthaymīn was able to continue his research on Saudi history and publish the results of his graduate work in 1979.[105] More important for the rise of the unification narrative at the expense of the takfīrist paradigm, however, was that he re-investigated the pre-Wahhabi situation in Najd in the light of new sources. These sources

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[99] Al-Shibl, "Ahamm" (1980).

[100] Ibn ʿAbbād, *Tārīkh* (1999); Ibn Rabīʿah, *Tārīkh* (1999).

[101] Ibn ʿAbbād, *Tārīkh* (1999), 8.

[102] Al-ʿUthaymīn, "Taḥadduth" (2005).

[103] Al-ʿUthaymīn, *Murājaʿāt* (2009), 7.

[104] Al-ʿUthaymīn, "Muḥammad" (1972); *Muḥammad* (2009).

[105] A-ʿUthaymīn, *Al-shaykh* (1979).

included vernacular poetry and the chronicles by al-Manqūr and al-Fākhirī. They provided

him with a picture of Najd in which Islam had been present. Between 1975 and 1978, al-

ʿUthaymīn published the results of his research in an article in four parts in *al-Dārah*. It was

entitled 'Najd from the Tenth/Sixteenth Century until the Rise of Sheikh Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd

al-Wahhāb'.[106] The historian contended that his sources 'stress that Najd was the homeland

of important scholars, most of whom were graced by piety and righteousness. They also

depict most of its urban inhabitants (at least) as faithfully adhering to the rules of Islam and

carrying out its duties and practices.' In contrast to Ibn Ghannām and Ibn Bishr's

descriptions, 'the poetry of this period contains nothing that conflicts with sound Islamic

belief or is incompatible with the general rules of Islam. In fact, the poems emphasize the

adherence of their poets to their faith and their commitment to Islam'.[107]

These findings led al-ʿUthaymīn to break with the takfīrist notion of the pre-Wahhabi

'age of ignorance'. He criticized Ibn Ghannām and Ibn Bishr, who had been pertinent in

establishing this notion in Saudi dynastic histories. The historian argued that 'the religious

situation in Najd was not conformant with the picture given in those sources that supported

Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb's reformist *daʿwa*'. He conceded that 'there were, indeed, ignorant

people who performed polytheist or paganist rites, but their number was apparently small'.

However, 'there was also strict observance of the Sharīʿa, and those who adhered to the

religious principles of Islam and the duties and practices it enjoins.'[108]

Having rejected the notion of the pre-Wahhabi *jāhilīyah*, al-ʿUthaymīn described the

Wahhabi mission mainly as a unifying force in the context of previous political division. He

concluded that Najd was 'ripe for a political movement that would unite its various emirates

and tribes under one banner, in order to achieve security and stability'. The region 'provided

fertile ground for the success of such a movement for it was remote from the control of a

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[106] Al-ʿUthaymīn, "Najd" (1975); "Najd" (1977); "Najd" (1978).

[107] Al-ʿUthaymīn, "Najd from the Tenth" (2010), 84.

[108] Ibid., 86.

strong central authority. Thus it was possible for a movement to achieve at least initial success without drawing the attention of outside powers.'[109]

Al-ʿUthaymīn's replacement of *jāhilīyah* and jihad by division and unification did not fail to meet resistance from scholars of Imam University who continued to follow the takfīrist paradigm. One of them, Ṣāliḥ al-Ḥasan, published a comment on al-ʿUthaymīn's article in *al-Dārah* in 1979. He stated that the article 'questioned the role played by the Imam, the Sheikh of Islam, Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, in fighting idolatry and returning the community to the Koran and the sunnah'. Al-Ḥasan added, 'I do not consider it justified that Muslims practicing history resort to philosophy and analyze some events and history in order to question important facts in the building of the Muslim community. This is what Dr al-ʿUthaymīn did, when he investigated the religious aspect of that time.'[110]

ʿAbd Allāh al-ʿUthaymīn did not appear to have suffered in his career from al-Ḥasan's criticism. The historian continued to teach at King Saud University and, in 1981, was promoted to full professor. Later, he also worked as an advisor to the ministries of education and higher education. Moreover, he has served as secretary general of the King Faisal International Prize since 1987 and as member of the Consultative Council (Majlis al-Shūrá) for the legal maximum of three terms from 1999 to 2009.[111] Presumably, the Wahhabi credentials of his brother Muḥammad ibn ʿUthaymīn, who was a senior official religious scholar, offered him some protection.[112] What was also not a disadvantage for him was that al-ʿUthaymīn's former teacher Abdul-Aziz Khowaiter served as a government minister since 1974, including as minister of education between 1975 and 1994.[113]

Supportive of al-ʿUthaymīn's revisions of the pre-Wahhabi past was the fact that Abd al-Rahman al-Ansary, a colleague of his at King Saud University, challenged previously held

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[109] Ibid., 86–87.

[110] Ṣāliḥ al-Ḥasan, "Taʿqīb" (1979), 353.

[111] Al-ʿUthaymīn, "Al-sīrah" [c. 2009], 1–2.

[112] Al-Marrī, *Al-durr* (2003), 402.

[113] Wazārat al-Maʿārif, *Mawsūʿat tārīkh*, vol. 5 (2003), 125.

notions of earlier Arabian history. They included what al-Ansary called 'legends' about the

pre-Muhammad *jāhilīyah* in traditional Islamic historiography, such as female infanticide and

the burning of Christians at al-Ukhdūd, today's Najrān in southern Saudi Arabia. Al-Ansary

studied Arabic and textual criticism at Cairo University. Subsequently, he developed critical

approaches to the ancient Arabian past, while studying for a PhD at the University of

Leeds.[114] Back in the kingdom, al-Ansary led excavations at Qaryat al-Fau in central Arabia

between 1971 and 1995, discovering the capital of the ancient Arab kingdom of Kindah.[115]

Keen to study the Arabian past beyond the limits of traditional chronicles, he co-organized

two international conferences on the history of Arabia at King Saud University in 1977 and

1979, including on 'Pre-Islamic Arabia'.[116] In 1982, al-Ansary also published a book on

Qaryat al-Fau that spoke of Saudi Arabia's 'pre-Islamic civilization' rather than 'age of

ignorance'.[117]

Although al-Ansary challenged previous historiography, his archaeological work also

received support from a government devoted to nation building. The kingdom's first five-year

plan between 1970 and 1975 already recognized the 'cultural importance of antiquities and

the scientific value of museums'. The plan specified that the Ministry of Education carry out

'an annual programme under which missions could be sent out to survey archaeological

sites, to look for antiquities and define their exact location'. The second development plan

between 1975 and 1980 included among its objectives the 'institution of a comprehensive

antiquities survey programme' and 'detailed exploration in selected sites of archaeological

importance'. Important for the fostering of a national identity, the plan also comprised the

'creation of a national museum to give Saudis the chance to increase their knowledge of the

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[114] Abd al-Rahman al-Ansary, interview, 10 February 2010. ʿUkāẓ, *Mawsūʿat al-shakhṣīyāt* (2006), 60. Also
Marzūq ibn Tunbāk, another KSU scholar, who was trained at Edinburgh University like al-ʿUthaymīn, revised
previous understandings of pre-Islamic female infanticide. Ibn Tunbāk, *Al-waʾd* (2007).

[115] ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Anṣārī et al., *Al-ḥaḍārah* [2006/7], 284.

[116] Abd al-Rahman al-Ansary et al., *Sources* (1979); *Pre-Islamic Arabia* (1984).

[117] Al-Ansary, *Qaryat al-Fau* (1982).

religious, cultural and social heritage and to increase their appreciation and understanding of this heritage'.[118]

With the notions of *jāhilīyah* in both antiquity and early modern times being shaken, the national narrative of 'unification' came to dominate dynastic characterizations of the kingdom's foundation. One of the first authors who made this narrative the overarching theme of a biography of Abdulaziz was Mohammed Almana, a former Najdi translator in the royal court between 1926 and 1935 who had previously studied in India. In 1980, Almana published a book in English, in which he summarized Abdulaziz's achievements under the title *Arabia Unified*. Almana's work responded to the previous domination of Saudi dynastic historiography by foreigners and sought to provide Western markets with a 'native' view. He decided to write the book after several of his English friends had told him that 'they were tired of reading books and articles about Arabia and the Arabs by Europeans who had appointed themselves experts on the subject after visiting our country for only a few weeks. It was about time, they thought, that a native Arab wrote a book in English, giving an Arabian view of his country's recent history.'[119] ʿAbd Allāh al-ʿUthaymīn later gave Almana's book a more explicit Saudi national frame. The historian at King Saud University reviewed the book and found that '"Saudi Arabia Unified" would be a more suitable title for the book'.[120] Subsequently, he translated the work into Arabic and changed the title to *The Unification of Saudi Arabia*.[121]

In 1985, the notion of foundation-as-unification also entered the speeches at the International Conference on the History of King Abdulaziz. King Fahd himself urged historians to follow this idea in his opening speech, while appealing to their professionalism. 'When we research King Abdulaziz's history', he urged his audience, 'we should as academics and honest historians remember his determination when he was young to unify

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[118] Al-Mani and as-Sbit, *Cultural Policy* (1981), 11–12.

[119] Almana, *Arabia* (1980), 15–16.

[120] Al-ʿUthaymīn, "A Critical Study" (1984), 28.

[121] Muḥammad al-Māniʿ, *Tawḥīd* (1982).

this precious country which was yearning for unity and dreaming of it in his thoughts and feelings. At one time this country experienced disunity and lack of security and its life was filled with fear and instability. People became certain that unification was extremely necessary for the existence of the country.'[122]

Importantly, the notion of unification also replaced parts of the takfīrist narratives of earlier dynastic historiography. Following Al Khamis, al-ʿUthaymīn described Saudi expansion in textbooks with the terms *tawḥīd*, 'unification' or 'restoration', and *ḍamm*, 'annexation' or 'joining'. They largely replaced 'jihad', *fatḥ*, 'conquest', and *ghazwah*, 'raid'. In his textbooks on *The History of Saudi Arabia*, al-ʿUthaymīn spoke of 'the unification [*tawḥīd*] of Najd', 'the annexation [*ḍamm*] of al-Aḥsāʾ', 'the unification of Asir', 'the unification of the Hejaz' or 'the annexation of the Hejaz', et cetera.[123] This idiom also appeared in other publications by the Ministry of Education and as well as those by the King Abdulaziz Foundation for Research and Archives.[124]

The establishment of an indigenous historical profession also fostered a preference for 'unification' over Islamic 'conquest' and jihad in a more indirect way. Universities and conferences gathered researchers from all parts of the kingdom and fostered a sense of mutual tolerance and respect—as between al-ʿUthaymīn from Najd and Muhammad Al-Sha'afi from Asir. Al-ʿUthaymīn remembered that he started using *tawḥīd* instead of *fatḥ* soon after his return from the University of Edinburgh to the King Saud University in the early 1970s. Distancing himself from takfīrism, he explained that he did not want to imply that the Hejazis, for instance, had not been Muslims.[125]

On the centenary, the organizers of the event applied the notion of unification to the foundation story of 1902. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Ruwayshid in his book *Sixty Men of Eternal Memory* introduced the event by stating that 'it was Abdulaziz, on whom the hopes of the Al

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[122] Imam Muhammad ibn Saud Islamic University, *Selected Papers* (1998), 24.

[123] Al-ʿUthaymīn, *Tārīkh al-mamlakah* (2007); *Tārīkh al-mamlakah*, vol. 2 (2007).

[124] Wazārat al-Maʿārif, *Ahamm* (2000). Dārat al-Malik ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, *Mukhtaṣar* (2004).

[125] Interviews, 23 January 2010 and 3 October 2011.

Saud and the hopes of the citizens for the unification of their country relied. These hopes

began to appear, when he led this group, who achieved the first step, the recovery of

Riyadh'.[126] In contrast, Mohammed Almana in *Arabia Unified* had still implied that

Abdulaziz's right to capture Riyadh from the Āl Rashīd was based on inheritance rather than

unification. He wrote that there had been 'many influential chiefs and tribesmen' who 'would

have been only too happy to see the family of Saud resume their rightful place in Najd'.[127]

Al-ʿUthaymīn and al-Ansary's work also contributed to the narratives underlying the

presentation of a national history in the Saudi National Museum, which was opened in 1999

as part of the centenary. In contrast to the earlier dynastic exclusivism, which conceived the

history of Saudi Arabia essentially as a history of the Saudi family, this institution presented

the dynasty within the frame of a perennial nation. In five galleries, visitors followed the

nation's path from pre-history to the period of the pre-Islamic Arabian kingdoms through to

the ages of Muhammad, the Umayyads, Abbasids, Mamluks and Ottomans. Subsequently,

they moved on to two galleries on the three Saudi states.[128] In long preceding discussions,

al-Ansary and his colleagues had been able to persuade officials to base the depiction of

pre-Islamic Arabia on the results of twentieth-century archaeology rather than traditional

Muslim historiography.[129]

The narrative of modern Saudi history in the National Museum was decisively less

takfīrist than those in texts by ʿAbd Allāh al-Shibl and earlier dynastic historians. The text at

the entrance to the 'gallery of the first and second Saudi states' described pre-Wahhabi

religious deterioration, but not an 'age of ignorance'. One text stated that when Ibn Abd al-

Wahhab was born, Arabia was 'in a state of chaos and constant wars between towns and

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[126] ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Ruwayshid, *Al-sittūn* (1998), 12.

[127] Almana, *Arabia* (1980), 33. This reflected an earlier discourse promoted by King Abdulaziz himself, which associated the kingdom (*mamlakah*) with the royal family's inherited possessions (*mulk*). Al-Hassan, "The Role" (2006), 83. The official gazette *Umm al-Qurá* stated in a biography on the Golden Jubilee in 1950 that he had set out from Kuwait to Riyadh 'to recover the possessions of his forefathers'. Umm al-Qurá, "Sīrat jalālat al-malik" (1950), 2.

[128] Boddy, "History's" (1999). Okruhlik, "Struggles" (2004). Clark, "The Centennial's" (1999).

[129] Abd al-Rahman al-Ansary, interview, 10 February 2010. Maisel, "Archaeological" (2009), 36.

tribes. Despite the presence of ulema and scholarship, heretical practices, idolatry, and superstition, such as the veneration of graves of saints, trees and rocks, were common in some towns and village in Najd as well as in the rest of the Muslim world. Sheikh Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab sought to return the Muslim faith to purity of the Prophet Mohammed's teachings.'[130] In the gallery on King Abdulaziz, entitled 'unification of the kingdom', the 'unification' narrative had won over 'jihad' and '*fatḥ*'. One text stated that 'during thirty years from the recovery of Riyadh until the proclamation of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 1932, King Abdulaziz could restore [*tawḥīd*] southern Najd and al-Qaṣīm in 1903–4, the Eastern Province in 1913, Asir in 1920, Ḥāʾil in 1921, and the Hejaz in 1924–25. He completed the restoration [*tawḥīd*] of Jāzān and Tihāmah in 1930.'[131]

Development

Besides foundation or foundation-as-unification, dynastic historiography also produced another, complementary national paradigm: development. This paradigm sought to provide additional legitimacy for the Saudi dynasty. After Abdulaziz had 'founded' and 'unified' the nation, he and his sons and successors went on to 'develop' it. The rise of the notion of development also formed part of the Saudization of dynastic histories. Dynastic historians did not stop portraying Saudi kings as champions of Islam and the Arabs. Yet they focused more on describing them as leaders in the development of the Saudi nation. They thus sought to give the Saudi dynasty an elaborate Saudi national as well as wider Arab and Islamic legitimacy.

While the paradigm of development in dynastic historiography referred to the Saudi nation, the idea or 'ideology'[132] of development itself was a global one. During the 1930s, the idea of development as a state-mediated national process was consolidated in the United

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[130] Text recorded on 16 January 2010.

[131] Text recorded on 12 December 2007.

[132] Easterley, "The Ideology" (2007), described development as an 'ideology' that 'promises a comprehensive final answer to all of society's problems, from poverty and illiteracy to violence'.

States, parts of Latin America, and Europe.[133] In the 1940s, the British Colonial Office used it as a framework for a series of policy initiatives in order to assume greater control over the economy during the war effort, to improve living standards in the colonies and to re-legitimize empire. After World War II, however, nationalists and trade-unionists in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia appropriated the language and concepts of state-mediated development. As Mark Berger put it, they thus escalated 'demands for better wages, social services and improved living standards as well as political power and national sovereignty or independence'.[134] Subsequently, India played a key role in universalizing the idea of national development, raising expectations that Indian 'efforts to deliver material improvement and prosperity to its citizens could serve as a model'.[135] By the 1970s, development had become a 'global ideology' of the world economy.[136] As Immanuel Wallerstein put it, 'when the United Nations declared that the 1970s would be the "decade of development," the term and the objective seemed virtually a piety'.[137]

Ideas of the Al Saud as leaders of a modernization of the country had already emerged in some writings during King Abdulaziz's reign. A prominent proponent of this idea was Chekib Arslan, the Muslim and Arab nationalist from Lebanon who found refuge in the kingdom in the 1920s. He reacted against widespread assumptions among social and political reformers in the Middle East that Islam and modernization were incompatible. In the late 1920s, he initiated a campaign that sought to show that King Abdulaziz not only enforced the sharia, but 'that he was also a modernizer'. Arslan thus portrayed the first Saudi king as 'eagerly introducing automobiles, electricity, a new postal system, and other attributes of modern civilization into the Hijaz'.[138]

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[133] Mark Berger, *The Battle* (2004), 37.

[134] Ibid., 39.

[135] Ibid., 40.

[136] Grosfoguel, "Developmentalism" (2000), 349.

[137] Wallerstein, "After Developmentalism" (2005), 1264.

[138] Cleveland, *Islam* (1985), 127.

A few decades later, in the early 1960s, the Saudi government produced a full-fledged programme of 'development'. This step was a symbolic response to self-described 'progressive' foreign governments, such as Nasser's, which classified Saudi Arabia as 'reactionary' and 'backward'.[139] King Faisal himself was aware of the negative reputation that his kingdom had among foreign observers and sought to counter it publicly. In his interview published in 1972, the interviewer remarked that 'you are accused of backwardness, of course without a clear definition of the meaning of his accusation. This was first, because you are leading a monarchic regime, and second, because you are calling for Islam and are doing so in the last third of the twentieth century'. Faisal dismissed the criticism of the alleged backwardness of Islam outright. Regarding the issue of the kingdom's monarchic system, he responded by arguing that 'the important thing is not the name, but the application. Any regime, whether it is monarchical or republican, should reflect benevolence and progress.'[140]

Apart from being a message addressed to foreign audiences, the Saudi government's development programme also served as a modernist legitimation directed against internal dissent. By 1962, as Toby Jones put it, 'Islam was no longer viewed as sufficient to pacify restless citizens', and development was formulated 'as a means to engender social and political harmony'.[141] That year, the government issued a ten-point-plan that 'shaped a message in which Islam and development, science, and modernity were to come together in forging a new era of Saudi prosperity'.[142] In 1970, the government started the first five-year development plan for the kingdom. Yet, in contrast to socialist or semi-socialist development plans of many other developing countries at the time, this plan, drafted with the assistance of American consultants, was based on capitalist concepts, such as the free market.[143]

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[139] Lacroix, *Les islamistes* (2010), 19.

[140] Al-Fātiḥ and Āl Suʿūd, *Al-fayṣalīyah* (1972), 85.

[141] Jones, *Desert Kingdom* (2010), 83.

[142] Ibid., 63.

[143] Nehme, "Saudi" (1994), 634–35.

Soon after the paradigm of development had entered Saudi policies, it also appeared in history textbooks. These textbooks described King Faisal as the leader of national development. A primary school textbook from 1969 co-authored by Mounir Ajlani and Muhammad Tamimi stated that Faisal had so far carried out 'the development of the Ministry of Information, radio, the press, and television, and spread those media across the kingdom. He has also actively sought to reform the administration and to drive forward the scientific and cultural renaissance based on the country's possibilities and capacity.'[144] Another textbook issued two years later contained sections on 'agricultural renaissance', 'educational renaissance', 'health care', and 'communications and their development' under Faisal.[145]

Whereas the founder paradigm focused on King Abdulaziz, the development paradigm initially concentrated on Faisal. This partly served to justify Faisal's deposition of his brother Saud in 1964 after an extended power struggle. In their 1969 textbook, Ajlani and Tamimi thus mainly credited Faisal with the development of the country. While the authors did not ignore Saud's reign between 1953 and 1964, they attributed the establishment of new ministries, hospitals, schools, and new military units principally to Faisal's tenure as prime minister during that time.[146] The textbook from 1969 blamed members of Saud's entourage for exploiting their master's authority in order to 'gain positions and spoils'. When Saud temporarily removed Faisal from his office as prime minister in response to their intrigue, he caused a 'major setback and a serious catastrophe involving the country's foreign relations, financial, economic, and domestic situation'. Subsequently, the textbook stated that 'the entourage's plots and the king's expenditures made it necessary to depose him and proclaim Crown Prince Faisal as king'.[147]

In producing development policies, the government relied on, and tried to appeal to, a new kind of elite besides the princes and the ulema, namely the 'intellectuals'

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[144] Al-ʿAjlānī et al., Ṣuwar (1969), 69.

[145] Ibrāhīm and Maḥmūd, Tārīkh (1971), 117–21.

[146] Al-ʿAjlānī et al., Ṣuwar (1969), 61.

[147] Ibid., 62.

(*muthaqqafūn*).[148] Most of these people had not pursued a traditional religious education, but had studied secular subjects abroad with governmental scholarships. Many of them supported the 'modernization' of the kingdom, and gained themselves important positions in the state. In a strategy endorsed by the Arabian American Oil Company (Aramco) and US advisors, King Faisal and his successor Khalid (r. 1975–82) preferred to appoint graduates of foreign universities to key positions in the government and its new agencies.[149] By 1977, out of the twenty-six members of the Council of Ministers, ten held a master's degree or doctorate from Western universities.[150] King Fahd continued this strategy, so that by 1997, out of the ninety members of the Saudi parliament or Consultative Council, 64 per cent held doctorates and an additional 14.4 per cent held master's degrees. Western universities had awarded 80 per cent of these postgraduate degrees. Only 14 per cent of the members had backgrounds in Islamic studies, with the rest being educated in secular subjects. Backgrounds in engineering, political science, economics, and public administration topped the list.[151]

A major technocratic institution in the production of development narratives was the Ministry of Information. It was founded in 1962, the same year as King Faisal's ten-point development plan was issued. Besides being responsible for media censorship, the ministry was supposed to advertise the kingdom's developmental policies among foreign as well as domestic audiences. Among the aims of the ministry, as stated in a publication from 1981, was to publicize 'the Comprehensive Development Plan, its objectives and projects' and to spread 'knowledge of the work of the state in various fields in the light of the Development Plan'. To that aim, the ministry was supposed to receive foreign press delegations in order 'to acquaint them with the progress and development of the country and provide them with all relevant information'. In addition, the agency sought to classify 'data relating to

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[148] Lacroix, *Les islamistes* (2010), 18–19.

[149] Abir, *Saudi Arabia* (1993), 61.

[150] Braibanti and Al-Farsy, "Saudi Arabia" (1977), 28–29.

[151] Dekmejian, "Saudi Arabia's Consultative Council" (1998), 209–12.

development in the kingdom so that they may be available to visitors in a scientific and objective form'.[152]

The Ministry of Information's engagement in the promotion of development narratives partly resulted from the leadership of Fouad Al-Farsy (b. 1946). His interest in development grew out of previous academic work. In 1976, he completed a PhD dissertation at Duke University in North Carolina entitled *Saudi Arabia: a case study in development*.[153] In addition, he helped his former dissertation supervisor, Ralph Braibanti (1920–2005), to gain Saudi governmental funding for the establishment of an Arabian Development Studies Center at Duke University in 1977.[154] The same year, Al-Farsy was appointed assistant deputy minister of information. In 1984, he was promoted to deputy minister and, in 1993, to minister of information.[155]

While directing the Ministry of Information, Al-Farsy also published a revised version of his PhD thesis as a book in 1978. In line with King Faisal's ten-point plan, this book stressed that the kingdom 'developed' while still preserving its traditions, especially Islam. Al-Farsy mainly argued against foreign literature on political development in Saudi Arabia, complaining that it 'manifested the bias and ignorance of scholars who neither can read Arabic nor have ever been to the country'.[156] Against this literature, he presented Saudi Arabia as a 'unique model of nation building'. 'Modernization and development have occurred and are still occurring at a slower but forceful pace and in a manner which will enable the Kingdom to maintain and preserve its culture, heritage, and distinctive identity.' This he saw in contrast to 'most developing countries', which 'risk the loss of their cultural identity while modern transformation takes place. Alien societal norms and values, not in

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[152] Al-Mani and as-Sbit, *Cultural Policy* (1981), 58.

[153] Al-Farsy, "Saudi Arabia" (1976).

[154] Duke University, "Ralph" (2005).

[155] Al-Farsy, *Custodian* (2001).

[156] Al-Farsy, *Saudi Arabia* (1978), 166.

harmony with these nations' heritages and cultures, seem to overwhelm indigenous values.'[157]

Al-Farsy also used the Ministry of Information to sponsor at least three re-editions of his book in English between 1982 and 1990, making it one of the most widely distributed works on the development of Saudi Arabia.[158] He did not convince his international academic readership, however. One reviewer of the first edition in *The Journal of Developing Areas* concluded that Al-Farsy's book 'sounds more like an apology than an attempt to raise fundamental questions'.[159] Another reviewer of a later edition in the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* stated that the work 'resembles the sort of government-sponsored propaganda where official announcements, reports and documents, statements by government officials, and the like, are taken at face value, and whose arguments are usually simply restatements of the government line on various issue.' 'On the positive side', the reviewer noted that 'the book contains a good deal of information on Saudi Arabia'. Yet, he still 'wonders how a work like this could be accepted as a doctoral dissertation at Duke University'.[160]

Despite Al-Farsy's doubtful impact on international academic audiences, with the backing of technocrats like him, 'development' increasingly became a complementary narrative to foundation and unification in the 1980s and 1990s. Development also spread from descriptions of Faisal's reign to portraits of Abdulaziz. At the International Conference on the History of King Abdulaziz held at Imam University in 1985, King Fahd himself applied the notion of both unification and development to his father's history. He stated in his opening speech that 'the history of King Abdulaziz was not only the history of the unification

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[157] Ibid, 21.

[158] Al-Farsy, *Saudi Arabia* (1978); *Saudi Arabia* (1982); *Saudi Arabia* (1986); *Modernity* (1990).

[159] Moughrabi, "Saudi Arabia" (1980), 293.

[160] Dadkhah, "Fouad" (1991), 120–21.

and foundation of a great entity. It was also the history of service and developmental construction on scientific bases and on methods based on science and faith.'[161]

After the 1985 conference, development also entered the centennial celebrations of the beginning of King Abdulaziz's rule. Their slogan was 'unification and building'. Influential in making the centenary a celebration of development alongside the unification of the kingdom was the participation of numerous ministries in the event. As they competed with each other for resources and responsibilities, they found it convenient to use the framework of development in displaying their respective 'achievements' over the decades. The centennial conference organized by the King Abdulaziz Foundation for Research and Archives contained, besides studies by academics, papers that were essentially, as the local historian Mohammed al-Zulfa put it, 'performance reports' by governmental organizations.[162] Ministries also issued their own works on the occasion. They included a volume on *The Development of Electricity over the Last Hundred Years* by the Ministry of Industry and Electricity and a 'documentary study' on *Transportation and Telecommunications in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia during 100 Years* by the Ministry of Communications.[163]

The ministerial publications in turn contributed to the spread of development narratives among academic works, as they provided authors with officially endorsed statistical material for dynastic success stories. One of these works was the book *Saudi Arabia: A Hundred Years of Achievements*. It was written by ʿAbd Allāh al-Shahrānī, a faculty member of King Fahd Security College (Kullīyat al-Malik Fahd al-Amnīyah) in Riyadh. Al-Shahrānī could easily fill dozens of pages with quotations taken from reports on the success of development plans by the Ministry of Planning and the texts by Fouad Al-Farsy himself.[164]

After the centenary, development narratives became more important than stories of unification, as the focus of dynastic historiography shifted from Abdulaziz and Faisal to their

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[161] Jāmiʿat al-Imām Muḥammad ibn Suʿūd al-Islāmīyah, *Buḥūth*, vol. 1 (1999), 30.
[162] Āl Zulfah, "Muḥāḍarāt" [c. 2000], 23.
[163] Wazārat al-Ṣināʿah wa-al-Kahrabāʾ, *Taṭawwur* (1999). Al Salloum and al-Ansary, *Transportation* (1999).
[164] Al-Shahrānī, *Al-mamlakah* (1999).

successors. Members of a new generation of princes, grandchildren of Abdulaziz, drove this shift, as they sought to give their fathers a prominent position in national history. This came during a time, when an increasing number of princes sought to strengthen their position in expectation of future competition over succession to the throne. In 1996, King Fahd suffered a debilitating stroke, and Crown Prince Abdullah took over many of his duties. After Fahd's death in 2005, Abdullah created the Allegiance Commission (Hayʾat al-Bayʿah) in 2006. This commission comprised all living sons as well as a number of grandsons of King Abdulaziz. They would choose the next crown prince from among themselves. The commission thus provided dozens of princes with theoretically equal rights in competing for the post of the crown prince.[165]

The first significant move away from King Abdulaziz and King Faisal was the twenty-year jubilee of Fahd's accession to the throne in 2001/2. Like the centenary, it was a state project with the Ministry of Information, the King Abdulaziz Foundation for Research and Archives, and the national universities issuing dozens of books.[166] An influential figure behind the organization of this jubilee was Fahd's youngest and favourite son Abdulaziz (b. 1973). A minister of state without portfolio, he was concerned with both the legitimacy of the government and his own ailing father's historical legacy. The prince personally sponsored the sixth annual meeting of the Saudi Historical Society in cooperation with the foundation in 2002. Its theme was the kingdom's history under King Fahd.[167]

King Fahd's twentieth anniversary brought little innovation to the narratives of dynastic historiography in general. Shortly after the conference, Abdullah al-Askar (b. 1952), a social and economic historian, published an article in the Egyptian newspaper *al-Ahrām*, which caused 'waves of opposition', as he saw it. In his article, al-Askar accused his fellow Saudi historians of 'recycling history', by which he meant 'writing history through the use of the

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[165] Sowayan, "Fresh" (2009), 79. On the Allegiance Commission, see Al-Badi, "Institutionalising" (2008).
[166] For instance, al-Samārī and al-Juhaymī, *Al-mamlakah* (2002); Dārat al-Malik ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, *Al-ʿalāqāt* (2002); Dār al-Mawsūʿah al-ʿArabīyah, *Khādim* (2001); Jāmiʿat al-Malik Suʿūd, *Khādim* (2002).
[167] Al-ʿAskar, "Tadwīr" (2002).

same sources and reference works without referring to a new source or reference'.[168] In a

subsequent article in the newspaper *al-Riyāḍ*, he repeated his claims, complaining that 'in

this country we repeat history and recycle it similarly to industrial recycling'. 'After every

historical lecture or conference', according to him, most members of the audience

complained about 'the weakness of the treatment, repetition, the emphasis on chronology

and descriptiveness'.[169]

Irrespective of the repetition of narratives, the celebration of the twentieth anniversary

of King Fahd's reign also contributed to the Saudization of dynastic historiography. It still

praised the service to Islam by a king who had replaced his title 'Majesty' with 'Custodian of

the Two Holy Mosques' in 1986. Yet, the jubilee also emphasized his achievements within

the frame of the Saudi nation. This was expressed in the logo of the anniversary. While the

display of the pious Fahd next to the two grand mosques of Mecca and Medina was central,

Saudi Arabia with its contemporary borders, flag, and coat of arms surrounded them.

Neighbouring countries did not even appear, as the kingdom's landmass arose like an island

from the empty background (figure 4).

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[168] Ibid.

[169] Al-ʿAskar, "Shahr" (2003).

Figure 4: Official logo of Fahd's twentieth anniversary as king in 2001/2

As the Saudi government did not seek to give up its religious and pan-Arab legitimacy for a secular Saudi national one, the older frameworks of the Arab and Muslim world did not disappear. In a jubilee book on *Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Fahd bin Abdul Aziz*, the minister of information Fouad Al-Farsy, for instance, described the pan-Arab and pan-Islamic nature of Fahd's foreign policy. He narrated that Fahd 'has shown throughout his years as Crown Prince and King an unfaltering commitment to the unity of the Arab world and to the unity of the still more broadly defined community of the Islamic faith'.[170]

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[170] Al-Farsy, *Custodian* (2001), 189. Saudi support for pan-Arab issues, above all Palestine, also continued to feature prominently in textbooks. Al-Rasheed, "Saudi Arabia" (2007), 228.

Despite the pan-Arab and pan-Islamic references, the twentieth anniversary, however, primarily celebrated Saudi national development. This was implied in its slogan, 'twenty years of growth and prosperity'. The Ministry of Higher Education through its universities issued a book series on the occasion that sought to portray Fahd's reign in these terms. The aim of the series was to 'be evidence for the achievements of an important episode in the history of development and construction during the reign of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques'.[171] One volume produced by King Saud University concentrated mainly on the economy. It asserted that 'King Fahd has demonstrated great interest in economic development and especially in building the Saudi citizen over the past twenty years'. His policies aimed at 'lessening the reliance on oil, expanding the economic basis by developing and diversifying non-petroleum exports, and strengthening the role of the private sector in order to achieve a balanced development'.[172]

In placing development at the centre of the history and legitimacy of the Saudi monarchy, some authors also implicitly prioritized it over other royal achievements. These authors included Mayy al-ʿĪsá, a granddaughter of the Najdi chronicler Ibrāhīm ibn ʿĪsá. She was one of the first female professional Saudi historians, gaining a PhD from King Saud University in 1996. In 2001, she wrote the editorial to a special jubilee edition of the journal *al-Dirʿīyah* entitled 'The Nation Commemorates Service and Growth'. She argued that 'the power of states manifests itself in their development achievements'. 'History immortalizes the names of the great leaders to the extent that they achieved resurgence, development, and progress for their country, and to the extent that they participated in the international arena. These facts touch our feelings as the children of this blessed nation, Saudi Arabia, as we celebrate twenty years since the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques took over the rule.'[173]

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[171] Al-Luḥaydān, *Khādim* (2002), back cover.

[172] Jāmiʿat al-Malik Suʿūd, *Khādim* (2002), y.

[173] Al-ʿĪsá, "Iftitāḥīyah" (2001), 5.

After the centenary and King Fahd's jubilee, children of the late King Saud also felt

encouraged to re-establish their father in dynastic historiography after decades of perceived

marginalization following his deposition. They used the paradigm of development as a

means to emphasize Saud's contribution to national history, thereby strengthening the

national development paradigm in dynastic historiography overall. With the help of Prince

Salman ibn Abdulaziz they were already able to introduce Saud's history into the programme

of the centennial conference organized by the King Abdulaziz Foundation for Research and

Archives.[174]

In 2005, Prince Salman ibn Saud (b. 1944) issued a three-volume work entitled *The

History of King Saud ibn Abdulaziz, 1902–69: An Academic and Historical View of His Role

in the Unification and Government of Saudi Arabia.* As the sub-title suggests, the work

sought to re-insert Saud into the main dynastic narrative. Perhaps because of the sensitivity

of this matter, Salman issued the book not in the kingdom but through the British publisher

Saqi. The author argued that under King Saud 'a great expansion in the state's activities in

development in various fields' occurred. In contrast to previous allegations that King Saud's

'expenditures' and his entourage's 'intrigue' had threatened the state, he asserted Saud's

effort to 'organize the bodies regulating the state's accounts'.[175]

In 2006, the King Abdulaziz Foundation for Research and Archives even organized a

three-day conference on King Saud in Riyadh. Perhaps seeking to establish a balance

between the different sons of Abdulaziz, the foundation used it as the starting point for a

series of biennial conferences, each dedicated to a specific Saudi king. One of the main

figures behind this rehabilitation of Saud in the family history through the foundation was

Fahda, another child of Saud. She had gained a higher education abroad, studying at the

American University of Beirut and SOAS.[176] In 2006, she gave one of the leading papers at

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[174] Fahdah Āl Suʿūd, "Dirāsat tawthīq" [2008], 66.

[175] Salmān ibn Suʿūd Āl Suʿūd, *Tārīkh*, vol. 2 (2005), 29.

[176] Fahdah Āl Suʿūd, "Fahdah" (2010).

the conference entitled the 'Documentation of King Saud ibn Abdulaziz'. Fahda lamented the

difficulty in, and asserted the necessity of, recovering details about her father. She noted

that after Saud's deposition, many copies of royal speeches, treaties, and correspondences,

and even published books on his reign were removed from Saudi libraries and other

institutions.[177] Moreover, she found that many contemporaries of his reign 'were afraid of

bringing forward their information'. She also complained that 'there was no major road in the

kingdom' bearing her father's name.[178] Yet, she saw the conference of the foundation as the

beginning of a 'revision of King Saud's history', which 'was lost at times'.[179]

In his opening speech at the conference, Prince Salman ibn Abdulaziz, the chair of

the King Abdulaziz Foundation for Research and Archives, did not mention the struggle that

had led to King Saud's deposition. Instead, he used the development paradigm to re-insert

Saud in the history of the dynasty and the nation, thus stressing an uninterrupted line of

Saudi monarchs and their developmental achievements. He narrated that 'King Saud

continued, after his father, the construction and development, the service to the two holy

mosques, the support for Arab and Muslim issues, and the nation's advancement in many

fields of civilization. The results of his efforts became visible in education, politics, economy,

culture, administration, et cetera.' The conference, like the centenary and King Fahd's

jubilee, thus became an occasion to strengthen the development paradigm. 'Undoubtedly',

Salman stated, 'this conference will document these great efforts and many achievements,

which were realized in the country during King Saud's reign and present them to future

generations.'[180]

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[177] Fahdah Āl Suʿūd, "Dirāsat tawthīq" [2008], 67–69.

[178] Ibid., 75–76.

[179] Ibid., 66.

[180] Dārat al-Malik ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, *Al-malik suʿūd*, vol. 1 [2008], 25.

After the 1960s, dynastic histories underwent a profound development of narratives. After earlier being characterized mainly by takfīrism and Arab nationalism, they gradually developed features of a Saudi national historiography. Importantly, dynastic histories produced a paradigm that conceived King Abdulaziz as the founder of the modern Saudi nation. This view had existed in earlier writings, but received strengthening through the establishment of the King Abdulaziz Foundation for Research and Archives as well as through the centennial celebrations in 1999. Moreover, the founder paradigm was combined with the notion of unification, resulting in the presentation of Abdulaziz as the unifier of the country. While the term unification (*tawḥīd*) retained a religious connotation, this theme partly replaced earlier takfīrist narratives of Saudi rulers waging jihad against the background of a *jāhilīyah*. This process was fostered by the development of professional historical research and the usage of new sources that led to a questioning of a pre-Wahhabi 'age of ignorance'.

Finally, the Saudization of dynastic historiography also involved the rise of the paradigm of national development led by the Al Saud. This view complemented the paradigm of foundation and unification, as it gave King Abdulaziz and his successors an ongoing legitimacy to rule even after the nation had been unified. It was derived from the global ideology of development, which the Saudi government adopted in the 1960s as a supplement to its Islamic legitimacy. Subsequently, members of the royal family and technocratic governmental agencies all used narratives of development to celebrate Faisal and other Saudi kings.

The emergence of the paradigms of national foundation, unification, and development, however, did not produce uniformity in the Saudi historiographical landscape. Even inside dynastic historiography, takfīrist notions of the Al Saud as the true Muslim Arab dynasty continued alongside, and sometimes competed with, narratives of the monarchs as Saudi national developmental leaders. As the next chapter will explore, local, tribal, and Shiite

histories contributed to further narrative plurality. Under the influence of the expanding Saudi state in its global context, they adopted elements of the new Saudi national narratives from the 1960s onwards, but used them for their own purposes.

5. Asserting Towns, Tribes and the Shiites in National History, 1970s to Present

The period since the 1960s has not only witnessed a surge in historical production centred on the Al Saud, but also a boom in local, Shiite, and tribal histories. Whereas the kingdom had seen the publication of only about a dozen major books on local history until about 1970, this number has since reached at least several hundred. Moreover, the literature came to cover not only the major cities and regions, like Riyadh, Mecca, al-Aḥsāʾ and Asir, but also small towns and districts. In addition to these urban and rural communities, tribes have also made an emphatic appearance on the historiographic stage. Between 1996 and 2005 alone, 117 books on tribal history were published in Saudi Arabia, more than in any other Arab country.[1]

Fouad Ibrahim interprets this rise in writings about regions and tribes as the result of flourishing 'tribal, regional and sectarian tendencies' amidst a 'crisis of national identity' with the challenge to the state during the Gulf War in 1990/91.[2] However, while regional and tribal identities indeed contributed to these histories, the trend did not start in the 1990s, but has a longer pedigree. Moreover, rather than being the result of the crisis of national identity, the tribal histories were clearly affected by nation building and the Saudization of dynastic histories. In contrast to earlier particularism, many historians of towns, tribes, and the Shiites adopted national narratives, including those of unification and development. They thus acknowledged the existence of, and to an extent legitimized, the nation state. Rather than describing a given town or region on its own, they focused on its relation to the nation and

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[1] Saudi Arabia was followed by Lebanon with 75 books, Syria with 68 books, Jordan with 45 books, and Kuwait with 40 books. Saudi authors commissioned some of the publications in Lebanon as well. The total number of publications in the Arab world was 507. Fāʾiz al-Ḥarbī, *Ẓāhirat al-taʾlīf* (2006), 97. On tribal writings in Saudi Arabia, see also Nadav Samin's forthcoming dissertation at Princeton University.

[2] Fouad Ibrahim, *The Shiʿis* (2006), 70.

the centre. These histories were now, in Thongchai Winichakul's words, partial histories of the 'national whole'.[3]

The new nationally oriented histories of towns, tribes and the Shiites did not become subservient to dynastic historiography, however. In order to assert their communities in national history, many writers wrote 'contribution histories', that is, histories which argued for the contribution of their communities to national achievements.[4] While contribution arguments involved, to some extent, the adoption of the national narratives of unification and development, they challenged the nature of the state as an exclusively royal project. The authors of contribution histories thus competed with dynastic historians, and with each other, in claiming a share in national history for different regions, towns, sects, tribes and families.

I will investigate the reasons for this rise in regional local, tribal and Shiite contribution histories with a focus on a number of processes related to state expansion and globalization since the 1970s. These processes included not only the development of higher education, which simultaneously shaped the 'Saudization' of dynastic historiography. They also comprised the emergence of new state institutions beyond the King Abdulaziz Foundation for Research and Archives and the universities in the Saudi historiographical field. Moreover, the governmental distribution of oil revenues brought changes in social mobility to large sections of the population, which affected historical production among different communities.

Local contribution histories

The increase in the number of Saudi local histories and their employment of contribution arguments are connected to the expansion of professional historical education. This process saw a number of students write master and doctoral dissertations about their hometowns or

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[3] Winichakul, "Writing" (2003), 10–11. Some large tribal confederations, such as Shammar and ʿAnazah, also appeared, however, as transnational groups in texts like Ibn ʿAbbār's *Aṣdaq al-dalāʾil* (1982), 88–89. This text did not confine itself to a Saudi national context, but listed the Al Sabah of Kuwait, the Al Khalifa of Bahrain as well as the Al Saud among the families of the ʿAnazah.

[4] 'Gerda Lerner used the term 'contribution history' for histories that describe 'women's contribution to, their status in, and their oppression by male-defined society'. Lerner, "Placing" (1975), 5. Holloway, "Writing" (1998), 180.

regions. Out of ninety-eight MA dissertations in history submitted to the College of Social Sciences at Imam University in Riyadh between 1978 and 2007, eighteen were explicitly dedicated to local history. Out of thirty PhD theses in history examined at the same college between 1980 and 2006, three focussed on a specific town or region.[5] The phenomenon also comprised Saudi students studying abroad. At least seven Saudi students completed doctoral dissertations on the history of towns and regions at American and British universities between 1974 and 1999 alone.[6]

While textbooks focused on the history of the Saudi dynasty, higher education curricula permitted the study of local history as part of dissertations and essays. Many professors even encouraged the treatment of local topics, partly because they considered them less sensitive than the contemporary history of the state.[7] Ghithan Jrais (b. 1959), for instance, encouraged his students in the course 'historical research' at King Saud University's College of Education in Abhā to write essays on local topics. By 2002, his students had produced 234 papers about the southern provinces of Asir, al-Bāḥah, Jāzān, and Najrān.[8] As Daniel Woolf notes regarding local historiography elsewhere, micro-studies promised to provide 'an exhaustively documented monograph on a particular area that is nevertheless manageable within a short period'.[9] When the authors studied their home regions, their familiarity with the area and access to local sources also provided them with advantages and their supervisors with confidence in the dissertations' completion.

One of the first and most prominent authors of local contribution histories was Mohammed al-Zulfa (b. 1950),[10] a professional historian who had benefitted greatly from the new educational opportunities provided by the expanding state. From a village in Asir, he

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[5] Jāmiʿat al-Imām Muḥammad ibn Suʿūd al-Islāmīyah, *Dalīl* (2007), 65–84.

[6] Al-Amr, "The Hijaz" (1974). Al-Zulfa, "Ottoman Relations" (1987). Alorabi, "The Ottoman Policy" (1988). Al-Thenayan, "History" (1976). Babeair, "Ottoman Penetration" (1985). Jrais, "The Social" (1989). Kholaif, "The Hijaz Vilayet" (1986).

[7] Interviews with several Saudi historians in 2009 and 2010.

[8] Ibn Jurays, "Bibliyūjrāfiyā" (2000), 270–73; "Bibliyūjrāfiyā" (2002), 431.

[9] Woolf, "Local History" (1998), 569–70.

[10] Awadh al-Badi, personal communication in Riyadh, 21 February 2010.

has been interested in the history of his region since his childhood. He thus perceived the history of the region to be 'neglected' in many books. When he studied history at King Saud University (KSU) in Riyadh in the early 1970s, he found Asir's history to be 'neglected' even there. This fuelled his interest in Asir's history.[11] That some of his non-Saudi teachers at KSU reportedly doubted whether the province possessed a written history only encouraged him further.[12] Al-Zulfa also benefitted from a relatively meritocratic hiring scheme. He recalled that he had studied hard in order to 'achieve the necessary grades' which would qualify him 'to gain the position of graduate assistant'. After his graduation in 1973, King Saud University indeed hired him as a graduate assistant and sent him abroad to gain a master's degree and doctorate.[13]

In his search for Asiri history, al-Zulfa came to use new sources other than the Najdi dynastic chronicles of the Ibn Ghannām School, especially unpublished documents. Incidentally, the creation of the King Abdulaziz Foundation for Research and Archives facilitated his first encounter with such documents. A few months after King Saud University had hired him as a graduate assistant, the Ministry of Education charged him with assisting Muhammad Tamimi, one of the researchers who built up the foundation. The two visited archives in Istanbul and copied a large number of documents over three months. Thereafter, Tamimi sent al-Zulfa back to Riyadh with letters and copies of rare documents on Saudi–Ottoman relations. Al-Zulfa handed one of these letters to Ḥasan Āl al-Shaykh, the minister of higher education and chair of the foundation. The minister was impressed by al-Zulfa and proposed to send him to Turkey for his postgraduate studies. Al-Zulfa insisted on going to the United States but promised to work on Arab-Ottoman relations and use Ottoman sources.[14] A few years later, in 1979, al-Zulfa completed a master's degree at the University

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[11] Mohammed al-Zulfa, interview, 15 October 2011. On al-Zulfa's exposure to Asir's history as a child, see also Āl Zulfah, "Li-mādhā" (2011).

[12] Saʿīd al-Qaḥṭānī, interview, 27 February 2010.

[13] Āl Zulfah, "Thalāthat ʿuqūd" (2003).

[14] Ibid.

of Kansas. Subsequently, he was admitted to Cambridge University, where he gained a

doctorate in 1987.[15]

During his doctoral studies, al-Zulfa visited Asir and discovered a variety of

documents in the possession of individuals, including letters between sheikhs from Asir and

King Abdulaziz. These documents led him to emphasize Asir's role in national history.[16] In

1985, al-Zulfa participated in the International Conference on the History of King Abdulaziz

organized by Imam University. While most other lectures focused on King Abdulaziz's role in

founding the kingdom, al-Zulfa's paper was entitled 'The Importance of Asir in the Formation

of Saudi Arabia'. 'Asir', the historian contended, 'was the first brick outside Najd in

constructing the big entity of comprehensive political unity that later became Saudi Arabia'.

Emphasizing Asir's economic importance, al-Zulfa added that his home region was the

'corner stone' in the formation of Saudi Arabia 'due to its strategic location and human and

economic resources'. He explained that Asir was 'in the pre-oil period far richer than Najd

and the Hejaz'.[17]

After al-Zulfa had gained his doctorate from Cambridge, he returned as an assistant

professor to King Saud University. This appointment allowed him to continue his research on

Asir. In 1995, he published a monograph that was based on many unpublished documents

and contained his argument in its most elaborate and comprehensive form. The monograph

was entitled *Asir during King Abdulaziz's Reign: Its Political, Economic, and Military Role in*

Building the Modern Saudi State.[18] In contrast to earlier particularistic writings, the work

asserted the region's age-old belonging to a common Saudi state and nation. Al-Zulfa

argued that Asir had 'strongly supported the first Saudi state'.[19] Even after the fall of al-

Dirʿīyah in 1818, its relationship with Najd was only interrupted by short periods that 'did not

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[15] Al-Zulfa, "Ibn Abd El-Wahhab's Call" (1979); "Ottoman Relations" (1987). ʿUkāẓ, *Mawsūʿat al-shakhṣīyāt* (2006), 249.

[16] Mohammed al-Zulfa, interview, 15 October 2011.

[17] Āl Zulfah, *Dirāsāt* (1991), 77.

[18] Āl Zulfah, *ʿAsīr* (1995), 10.

[19] Ibid., 8.

supersede the sweet memories, in which both sides were under one regime and one central government'.[20]

Venturing into economic history and relying on letters between King Abdulaziz and sheikhs in Asir, al-Zulfa situated Asir's most important contribution to national history in the twentieth century. In contrast to the founder paradigm that conceived King Abdulaziz as the single founder of the modern kingdom, al-Zulfa propounded that Asir participated in the formation of the contemporary Saudi state. As the rich agricultural produce of its fertile highlands fed the Saudi armies, Asir made possible the subjugation of the Hejaz and the suppression of the rebellions of the Ikhwān and the Idrīsids. In addition, the region allowed for the creation of 'secure borders and enduring peace' with Yemen.[21]

Al-Zulfa's contribution history challenged the exclusivism of dynastic historiography, the tendency to conceive the history of the country exclusively as the history of the Al Saud. This makes it not surprising that he did not publish his texts through government presses. Out of about nine historical books up to 2003, all were published through private presses and mainly at the author's expense.[22] Al-Zulfa's lecture on 'The Importance of Asir in the Formation of Saudi Arabia' in 1985 did not appear in a publication of *Selected Papers* from the International Conference on the History of King Abdulaziz.[23] Nor has a manuscript of 'Lectures on the Contemporary History of Saudi Arabia', which he submitted to the King Abdulaziz Foundation for Research and Archives in the early 2000s, so far been published.[24]

Although governmental agencies did not publish his writings, al-Zulfa was able to benefit from Saudi nation building by acting as what John Eidson calls a 'cultural broker', linking 'nation-oriented and community-oriented groups' and institutions. Within the 'politics of meaning', he sought to establish an identity for Asir to secure its status as autonomous

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[20] Ibid., 9.

[21] Ibid., 197.

[22] Āl Zulfah, *Dirāsāt* (1991); *Dhākirat al-ummah* (1992); *Riḥlah* (1993); *Lamaḥāt* (1994); *ʿAsīr* (1995); *Taṭawwur* (1996); *Al-marāghah* (2002); *Daʿwat al-shaykh* (2003); *Lamaḥāt* (2003).

[23] Jāmiʿat al-Imām Muḥammad ibn Suʿūd al-Islāmīyah, *Buḥūth* (1999).

[24] Āl Zulfah, "Muḥāḍarāt" [c. 2000]. Mohammed al-Zulfa, interview, 11 March 2010.

part of a larger whole.[25] This was at a time when the central government had formalized its relations with its periphery through the Law of the Provinces (*niẓām al-manāṭiq*) decreed in 1992.[26] On the one hand, al-Zulfa established himself in national circles in the capital. Besides his academic work as a professor of history at King Saud University, he served, as one of the few people from Asir, as a member of the kingdom's Consultative Council between 1997 and 2009.[27] Nonetheless, he kept his connections to Asir, founding the al-Zulfa Cultural Centre in al-Marāghah, his village of birth. In this centre, he placed his private library and presented Asir's history within the framework of national unification.[28]

Inspired by al-Zulfa's success, other academic local historians, especially from Asir, followed him in producing local contribution histories. Asiris were perhaps initially more interested in developing contribution histories than people from other regions, because they felt a greater need to assert the importance of their region. Although Asir was more fertile than other regions, it did not enjoy the prestige and wealth that Najd as the political centre, the Hejaz as the region of Mecca and Medina, and the Eastern Province as the centre of the oil industry possessed. Contribution histories also promised to counter negative stereotypes of Asiris associated with the low political and economic status of the region. One study of such stereotypes found that students from other regions described Asiris as 'poor, simple, ignorant, patient, generous, and backward'.[29]

One of the Asiri scholars who followed al-Zulfa's example was Ahmad Faea (b. 1969/70), who also benefitted from the expanding public education. After gaining a degree in history from King Saud University in 1991/92, he worked as an assistant in Abhā's Teachers' College. Later, he returned to his alma mater and gained a master's degree in 1999. In

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[25] Eidson, "German" (1993), 144.

[26] Nevo, "Religion" (1998), 47.

[27] ʿUkāẓ, *Mawsūʿat al-shakhṣīyāt* (2006), 249.

[28] Āl ʿUṭayf, "Maʿriḍ" (2010).

[29] Melikian, "The Modal Personality" (1977), 169.

2006, he published his MA dissertation as a book entitled *The Role of the Āl al-Matḥamī in Extending the First Saudi State in Asir and Neighbouring Regions, 1800–18*.[30]

Thus, a state-sponsored professional historical education incidentally allowed Faea to diverge from dynastic historiography. Faea's work refuted the notion of a pre-Wahhabi 'age of ignorance' or *jāhilīyah* in Asir. The relatively open research environment of King Saud University, in which the dynastic historian al-ʿUthaymīn had already challenged takfīrism in the 1970s, perhaps facilitated this refutation. Partly based on inscriptions on eighteenth-century Asiri mosques, Faea argued that the religious situation of the region before the arrival of the Wahhabi mission did not correspond to the 'bad and dark picture drawn by some contemporary sources and later reference works'. Instead, it was 'good'. In an original logical twist, he combined this argument with one of participation in the Wahhabi mission. Because of the presence of Islam, the Asiris 'hastened to join the Salafi movement, as it did not bring anything new, which they had not known before or had not been familiar with'.[31]

While al-Zulfa explored economic history, Ahmad Faea saw the Asiri contribution to national history primarily in military and religious terms. He wrote that the 'sons and leaders' of Asir had 'shed their blood on the soil of this precious nation' in order to defend the Wahhabi mission and the first Saudi state. By privileging military leaders and scholars, his work also had a local elitist flavour in contrast to al-Zulfa's socially broader regionalism. As the title of the work, *The Role of the Āl al-Matḥamī*, suggests, the author sought to demonstrate the 'distinct role of the emirs of Asir from the Āl al-Matḥamī in accepting the principles of the Salafi mission'. After the emirs had travelled to al-Dirʿīyah, they became the Saudi representatives in Asir. In this position, they not only 'defended the mission and the state as leaders of the region's tribes'. They also 'sought to spread the mission and extend the influence of the Saudi state in the surrounding regions'.[32]

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[30] Āl Fāʾiʿ, "Āl al-matḥamī" [1999]; *Dawr* (2006).

[31] Āl Fāʾiʿ, *Dawr* (2006), 402.

[32] Ibid., 403–4.

Following al-Zulfa's model, Faea acted as a cultural broker between the provincial and the national levels in the context of increasing governmental investment in heritage and historiography after the 1970s. Al-Zulfa and Faea sought to attract the central government's attention to their region. They were especially interested in gaining more funding for their own field of research. Already in 1991, al-Zulfa demanded the foundation of a regional archive and a museum of popular culture in Asir. He did not voice this demand in a regional medium, but in the national newspaper *al-Riyāḍ*.[33] Fifteen years later, in the conclusion to *The Role of the Āl al-Matḥamī*, Faea called upon the King Abdulaziz Foundation for Research and Archives, the King Fahd National Library, the Ministry of Education and other institutions to 'send representatives, provide necessary facilities and give material support to researchers in order to gather the heritage of Asir'.[34] In 2009, the Saudi Commission for Tourism and Antiquities indeed laid the corner stone of an Asir Regional Museum.[35]

The expanding state not only supported local contribution histories indirectly through its development of a university system, from which al-Zulfa and Faea benefitted. While the foundation and the Ministry of Education continued to produce accounts centred on the Al Saud, another agency also published some histories that asserted regions in national history. This was the General Presidency of Youth Welfare, established in 1974. The parallel government support for different and contradictory approaches in historiography resulted from a fragmentation of the state beginning in the 1960s. This fragmentation was itself the product of the rapid, oil-propelled expansion of the state and the oligarchy within the royal family. In order to lessen family conflicts over responsibilities and reward his allies in the struggle with his brother King Saud, Faisal used the kingdom's abundant resources to establish parallel structures with similar tasks but under different senior princes and officials.

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[33] Āl Zulfah, *Dhākirat al-ummah* (1992), 147.

[34] Āl Fāʾiʿ, *Dawr* (2006), 405.

[35] Shams, "Amīr" (2009).

Subsequently the Ministry of Defence and Aviation, the Ministry of Interior, and the National Guard all became states within the state.[36]

The parallel structures established under King Faisal were not only found in the security sector, but also in the cultural fields, including in historiography. By 1981, seven agencies besides the King Abdulaziz Foundation for Research and Archives were all active in these fields. They included the Ministry of Education and the General Presidency of Girls' Education, which were responsible for textbooks, the Ministry of Higher Education, which supervised the universities, and the Ministry of Information, which publicized the country's 'development' under Saudi monarchs. In addition, the Ministry of Defence and Aviation and the National Guard comprised cultural departments.[37] In the 1970s, the General Presidency of Youth Welfare also emerged as a major actor in the field. Most importantly in this context, it concerned itself more with local historiography than the other agencies did.

From its establishment in 1974, the General Presidency of Youth Welfare engaged in nation building on the local level through its promotion of sports, especially football, as well as cultural and literary activities.[38] The presidency's local concerns partly resulted from a broad presence in the provinces, whereas the King Abdulaziz Foundation for Research and Archives, as the principal sponsor of dynastic historiography, focused its activities initially on Riyadh. The presidency supervised not only numerous sports clubs, but also a network of cultural and literary clubs across the kingdom. In 1975, Prince Faisal ibn Fahd, the vice-president of youth welfare and the eldest son of the later King Fahd, agreed to establish six such clubs in Mecca, Medina, Jeddah, Ta'if, Jāzān and Riyadh. This followed a request by a number of writers, including the local historians Ahmad Subaʿi, Muḥammad al-ʿAqīlī, Hamad

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[36] Hertog, *Princes* (2010), 13. Rather than speaking of parallel structures or 'states within the state', Madawi Al-Rasheed distinguishes between different 'circles of power' centring on specific princes. Al-Rasheed, "Circles" (2005).

[37] Al-Mani and as-Sbit, *Cultural Policy* (1981).

[38] Kurpershoek, *Arabia* (2001), 44.

Al-Jasser, and 'Abd al-Quddoos al-Ansari.[39] Subaʻi and al-ʻAqīlī also became the first

presidents of their respective clubs in Mecca and Jāzān.[40]

The presidency's support for cultural production was facilitated by the state's adoption

of an ideology of development and the preparation of five-year development plans from the

1960s onwards. The government justified the establishment of the literary clubs with its

desire that 'development' should 'be comprehensive and embrace all aspects of intellectual

and social life'.[41] The third development plan published in 1980 specified not only economic

goals, but also objectives for youth welfare, the principal field of the presidency. One of

these objectives was to 'organize and channel the energies and creative capabilities of youth

so that they may contribute positively to the country's social and economic development'.[42]

Through its cultural and literary clubs, which it subsequently established in all

provinces of the kingdom, the presidency provided amateur local historians with necessary

infrastructure and material support. As in the case of chambers of commerce, local members

elected the board of each club.[43] Yet, the presidency supervised them and, with soaring

governmental revenues during the 1970s, paid each club a foundational grant of 250,000

riyals (about 67,000 dollars) and an annual subsidy of up to one million riyals (about 270,000

dollars) in its first years. These clubs hosted libraries, organized lectures, and paid for the

publication of books by local authors.[44]

Between the 1980s and the 2000s, the General Presidency of Youth Welfare

supported local historiography in a more targeted manner. In 1982, it launched the series

This Is Our Country (*Hādhihī bilādunā*), which comprised books on the history and

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[39] Sāʻātī, *Ḥarakat al-nashr* (2000), 397. Nādī Jiddah al-Adabī al-Thaqāfī, *Masīrat al-andiyah* (1999), 30. Mike Farquhar kindly pointed out to me that the answer to 'requests from local notables is a common trope in narratives of (semi-) state structures'. However, I have no evidence suggesting that the request by writers in this case was not genuine.

[40] Al-Dāʾirah lil-Iʻlām, *Muʻjam* (1990), 152, 243.

[41] Al-Mani and as-Sbit, *Cultural Policy* (1981), 52.

[42] Ministry of Planning, *Third Development Plan* (1980), 373.

[43] Lacroix, *Les islamistes* (2010), 24.

[44] Nādī Jiddah al-Adabī al-Thaqāfī, *Masīrat al-andiyah* (1999). Al-Mani and as-Sbit, *Cultural Policy* (1981), 51–53.

geography of most towns and regions of the kingdom. This series was the idea of

Muḥammad al-Qashʿamī (b. 1943/44), who directed the presidency's offices in Ḥāʾil and al-

Aḥsāʾ. With a sense of a national mission, al-Qashʿamī volunteered to distribute publications

and posters by authors from northern Saudi Arabia in the south and vice-versa. Together

with intellectuals affiliated with al-Qaṣīm's Literary Club, he won the support of Prince Faisal

ibn Fahd, who had become the president of youth welfare by then.[45] Under al-Qashʿamī's

supervision, the presidency paid the authors of *This Is Our Country*, who were generally

drawn from the local population, 10,000 riyals (about 2700 dollars) each and printed all

volumes at its own expense.[46]

    As part of its efforts in nation building, the presidency conceived and advertised this

collection of local histories as a national project that served to create a more inclusive

national history. According to Faisal ibn Fahd, *This Is Our Country* aimed at 'providing the

Saudi library with national publications that present the history of the nation in a series of

simplified academic books and record the intellectual and artistic heritage and the kingdom's

customs and traditions'.[47] The prince justified this project by situating it within policies to

nationalize the Saudi historical profession. He stated that 'it is best for any nation to write its

history by itself through its loyal sons who have been given the opportunity to learn and

reach the highest academic degrees'.[48]

    In a departure from most dynastic histories, *This Is Our Country* tried to include local

communities that were peripheral to the Saudi heartland of southern Najd. *Outlines of Ḥāʾil*,

the first volume of the series, included an account of the dynasty of the Āl Rashīd, the former

rivals of the Al Saud.[49] The volume was written by Fahd al-ʿUrayfī (1929–2002), a journalist

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[45] Wāfiyah, "Muḥammad" (2009). Ḥusayn al-Ḥarbī, "Taḥwīl" (2010). Al-Shahwān, "Muḥammad" (2010).

[46] Muḥammad al-Ḥumayyid, interview, 2 March 2010.

[47] Al-ʿUrayfī, *Lamaḥāt* (1982), 5.

[48] Ibid.; Muḥammad al-Zahrānī, *Bilād* (1988), 5.

[49] Al-ʿUrayfī, *Lamaḥāt* (1982), 81–83.

and member of the Shammar tribe, to which the Āl Rashīd belonged.[50] Curiously, the presidency even hired the Shiite Muḥammad al-Muslim to write a volume on al-Qaṭīf in 1989.[51] Previously, al-Muslim had been imprisoned following the publication of the particularistic history *The Black Gold Coast*. Generally, the series also sought to cover less populated areas that had not received scholarly attention previously. By 2004, the presidency had issued 67 volumes on places as diverse as the ancient northern oasis of Taymāʾ, the isolated Farasān islands in the Red Sea, and Raʾs Tannūrah, the principal Gulf oil terminal.[52]

With the presidency's inclusive vision of national history, it encouraged the authors of *This Is Our Country* to place their own localities prominently on the national map. These localities even included towns and regions commonly considered peripheral. Volume 5 of the series on *The Zahrān Region*, for instance, covered a small area of the southern province of al-Bāḥah. Its author was Muḥammad al-Zahrānī (b. 1943/44), a native from the area who had studied at Cairo University. He emphasized that the Zahrān region was 'an important region of Saudi Arabia by virtue of its geographical location as a link between the western and southern regions' as well as its 'agricultural and animal wealth'.[53] In a departure from earlier particularistic histories, the author also asserted that 'the society of the Zahrān region is an inseparable part of the larger Saudi society'.[54] ʿAbd Allāh al-Qushayrī, a graduate of Imam University and an administrator of public education in Asir, was commissioned to provide a monograph on the small Asiri town of al-Namāṣ that would form volume 67 of the series. This allowed him to express a similar contribution argument to Faea and al-Zulfa's. In his book, which was published in 2004, al-Qushayrī contended that 'the sons of al-Namāṣ and its surroundings made honourable contributions to the unification of the peninsula,

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[50] Kurpershoek, *Arabia* (2001), 139.

[51] Al-Muslim, *Al-qaṭīf* (1989).

[52] Al-Qushayrī, *Al-namāṣ* (2004), 321–24.

[53] Muḥammad al-Zahrānī, *Bilād* (1988), 9.

[54] Ibid., 83.

especially in its southern part'. These contributions included the participation in the Saudi capture of Jeddah from the Hashemites in 1925.[55]

The provinces of Asir and al-Bāḥah were fertile topics for contribution histories, because of their politically and economically peripheral status compared with Najd, the Hejaz, and the Eastern Province. Yet, contribution arguments were not restricted to writers from the kingdom's southern regions. Members of the Najdi elite too felt the need to assert their communities' importance in national history. A typical example is Khaled Al-Jeraisy (b. 1964), a manager working for the family conglomerate Jeraisy Group.[56] In 2002/3, Al-Jeraisy published *Raghbah*, a monograph on the hometown of his father Abdul-Rahman, the founder and proprietor of the Jeraisy Group.[57] The monograph was printed in several glossy, colourful editions in English and Arabic and contained a professional curriculum vitae of Abdul-Rahman Al-Jeraisy in a section on 'Renowned Personalities from Raghbah'. As such, the work probably sought to promote the Jeraisy family business as much as the town itself.[58]

Given that Raghbah only had a population of 1369 in 2004, according to Al-Jeraisy himself,[59] the subject of his contribution history was much smaller than Asir. Asir, in contrast, recorded 1.7 million inhabitants (about seven per cent of the kingdom) during the same year.[60] Khaled Al-Jeraisy did his best, however, to emphasize the importance of his town and family. 'Raghbah', he argued, 'was one of the first towns of al-Miḥmal that responded and supported the Salafi mission. This was in 1750, only six years after the mission's start'. Paying special attention to one of his own ancestors, he claimed that 'the people and the

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[55] Al-Qushayrī, *Al-namāṣ* (2004), 103.

[56] Al-Juraysī, "Al-sīrah" (2010).

[57] Jeraisy Group, "Chairman's Biography" (2010). Al-Jeraisy, *Your Guide* (2006), 67–70.

[58] Al-Jeraisy, *Your Guide* (2006); *Raghbah* (2006).

[59] Al-Jeraisy, *Your Guide* (2006), 63.

[60] Āl Jandab, "Rasmīyan" (2008).

prince of Raghbah played an outstanding and honourable role, when Emir Ali Al-Jeraisy built his famous castle, al-ʿUqdah, before 1757. It was one of the fortresses of the mission.'[61]

Probably in order to preserve their privileged positions under the Saudi state, members of the traditional Najdi aristocracy added to the burgeoning group of contribution histories. In the wake of the new contribution histories produced in the periphery and by the nouveaux riches, they perhaps felt that dynastic historiography despite its focus on Najdi events did not properly represent them. One of these authors was ʿAbd al-Muḥsin ibn Muʿammar (b. 1955), a graduate of KSU's College of Education and supervisor of cultural affairs in the National Guard. In 2004, he published a monograph that combined local with family history more explicitly than Al-Jeraisi's book did. It was entitled *Pages of Najdi History: The al-ʿUyaynah Emirate and the History of the Āl Muʿammar*.[62]

Reminding the readers of the status of his family, Ibn Muʿammar stated that the emirate of al-ʿUyaynah had 'reached the peak of its power in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries'. At that time, it 'became the most powerful emirate in Najd under the leadership of the Āl Muʿammar'.[63] In the later part of the books, Ibn Muʿammar gave biographies of great family figures, including that of his father, who served as Saudi governor of various towns and districts.[64] The author, however, complained that even his family was neglected in national historiography. He stated that 'despite the important role of the Muʿammar family in Najdi events, it did not gain the share of studies that it deserved apart from some references in sources on the history of Najd and Sheikh Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab's reform movement'.[65]

Although Ibn Muʿammar partly covered a town, al-ʿUyaynah, his motive of preserving the position of his own family—rather than that of all people of al-ʿUyaynah—becomes

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[61] Al-Jeraisy, *Raghbah* (2006), 37. Al-Miḥmal is a region to the north of Riyadh.
[62] Ibn Muʿammar, *Ṣafaḥāt* (2004),
[63] Ibid., 39.
[64] Ibid., 35, 490, 637.
[65] Ibid., 39.

sufficiently clear. He expressed contribution arguments similar to those of the Asiri historian al-Zulfa. He stated that 'the Āl Muʿammar employed all their human and material resources in participating together with the unifier, King Abdulaziz, in the unification of our precious country'.[66] Backed up by a list of biographies, Ibn Muʿammar promoted a view that the Al Saud and the Āl Muʿammar had led, and perhaps ought to lead, the country together. He stated that most of his relatives had 'assumed positions as administrators and leaders by virtue of the trust between the two noble families, the Al Saud and the Āl Muʿammar. This trust had deep historical roots.' In juxtaposing the two families that way, he perhaps sought to imply a sense of equality between the two houses. Ibn Muʿammar stressed that in the contemporary kingdom, his relatives have continued to hold, alongside the Al Saud, 'offices of ministers, governors of towns and regions and other leading and administrative positions, in which they have served loyally and whole-heartedly'.[67]

Tribes entering the arena

After the 1970s, tribes emphatically appeared on the historiographical stage. The term, 'tribe' (*qabīlah*) is obviously more vague than the names of the towns and provinces described by other historians. It denoted 'a joining together of several or more clans as the descendants of a common ancestor'.[68] Frequently, the tribes are also identified with the Bedouin, and contrasted with the settled folk (*ḥaḍar*), as almost all of the nomadic population has been based on tribal formations.[69] Such nomads still formed over 25 per cent, or about 1.9 million, of the kingdom's inhabitants in the 1974 census.[70] However, it is doubtful whether there has

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[66] Ibid., 456.

[67] Ibid., 457.

[68] Cole, "Where Have" (2003), 262. The term 'tribe' has been criticized as a colonial invention with the 'pejorative connotation of the primitive and the premodern', especially in the African context. Thiong'o, "The Myth" (2009), 17. However, Saudis frequently identify with certain tribes and do not see the term *qabīlah* as colonial or necessarily pejorative. Still, 'tribe' is ambiguous and might be 'best approached as "a state of mind, a construction of reality, a model for organization and action"'. Varisco, "Metaphors" (1996), 140.

[69] Cole and Altorki "Was Arabia" (1992), 75.

[70] Ibrahim and Cole, *Saudi Arabian Bedouin* (1978), 3.

ever been a clear-cut social and cultural dichotomy between the Bedouin/tribes and the sedentary population. Not only has there been a 'broad spectrum of intermediate forms and interactions between nomadic and sedentary lifestyles'.[71] Most of the major Arabian tribes also had large proportions of their population, sometimes over 50 per cent, in permanent settlements even in the pre-oil era. Through the production of dates, these settled tribespeople 'played an important economic role in the life of the nomadic elements of the tribe'.[72] Nevertheless, many Saudi tribal historians, especially in Najd, divided Saudi society into people of Bedouin/tribal and urban/non-tribal backgrounds.[73]

From its inception, the Wahhabi mission had, as Marcel Kurpershoek put it, the 'objective of breaking the tribal spirit and merging the tribesmen into one Islamic community subject to Islamic law under the political overlordship of the Saudi rulers'.[74] In the second half of the twentieth century, the state's adoption of an ideology of development under the influence of foreign expertise further consolidated this anti-tribalism at the heart of Saudi state and nation building. In the early 1960s, the government started the King Faisal Settlement Project, one of the most 'sophisticated' projects of its kind, which planned to settle a thousand Bedouin families in eight newly established villages in the Rub' al-Khali. The objectives of the project, according to a 1966 report by the Ford Foundation, which advised the government, combined sedentarization with the promotion of national identity. The objectives included changes from 'nomadic pastoralism to modern farming', 'kinship to citizenship', and from 'tribal participation as a kinsman to national participation as a citizen'.[75]

The anti-tribalism of the Wahhabi mission and Saudi nation building also shaped the official representations of tribal belonging. A textbook on Islamic history for secondary schools from 1993 argued that 'tribal group feeling' (ʿaṣabīyah) causes the disintegration of

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[71] Kurpershoek, *A Saudi Tribal History* (2002), 93. See also Al-Fahad, "The *'Imama*" (2004).

[72] Cole, *Nomads* (1975), 151.

[73] Interviews in Saudi Arabia in 2009 and 2010.

[74] Kurpershoek, *Bedouin Poets* (1999), 47.

[75] Quoted in: Cole, *Nomads* (1975), 147–48.

the Muslim community. Its consequences include 'fanaticism' based on kinship loyalty, which should be 'replaced by loyalty to faith and the *umma*'.[76] Even university curricula almost completely excluded tribal history.[77] One of the few courses treating the subject was a course entitled 'Pedigree of the Arab Tribes', which formed part of the undergraduate history curriculum at King Saud University in 1987.[78]

Despite its anti-tribal and anti-nomadic tendencies, however, Saudi state building left the 'social, ideological, and territorial structures' of the tribes 'largely intact'.[79] In 1925, the Saudi government abolished collective territorial rights.[80] Yet, in practice, it accepted the existence of tribes and the areas predominantly owned and settled by their members. Moreover, Saudi princes made use of the 'the ill-defined, but effective authority exercised by tribal chiefs of various ranks over tribal groups' by rewarding the sheikhs who actively cooperated with the government and withholding favour from those who refused to do so.[81] Beginning in the 1960s, the Ministry of Interior formally administered stipends for the tribal leaders,[82] many of whom frequently attended the royal councils (*majālis*).[83] 'Their function as a conduit for information, counsel and the exercise of influence from and to the court' reinforced their position of eminence among their own tribespeople. In turn, it enabled the ruling house 'to keep a finger on the pulse of popular feeling in a discreet and invisible manner'.[84] This fine balance between central government and tribal autonomy greatly facilitated the task of government, especially in the rural areas.[85]

Saudi state building also benefitted tribespeople through the provision of modern education and employment. It thus empowered them to write their own histories. Although

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[76] Al-Rasheed, "Political Legitimacy" (1998), 31.

[77] Fāʾiz al-Ḥarbī, *Ẓāhirat al-taʾlīf* (2006), 11. Interviews with several Saudi historians in 2009 and 2010.

[78] Jāmiʿat al-Malik Suʿūd, *Waṣf* (1987), 15.

[79] Kurpershoek, *A Saudi Tribal History* (2002), 123.

[80] Al-Rasheed and Al-Rasheed, "The Politics" (1996), 108.

[81] Kurpershoek, *The Story* (1995), 31–32.

[82] Hertog, *Princes* (2010), 80.

[83] Kurpershoek, *A Saudi Tribal History* (2002), 90.

[84] Kurpershoek, *The Story* (1995), 31–32.

[85] Kurpershoek, *A Saudi Tribal History* (2002), 90.

the government did not make education compulsory, it encouraged the Bedouin to send their children to schools for the sake of 'development' and nation building. The Ministry of Education paid for the accommodation, food and clothing of many students and compensated fathers for the losses caused by their sons' attendance of schools instead of herding sheep or camels.[86] The National Guard not only recruited its members primarily from among the Bedouin, but also organized Arabic literacy classes and training in the English language and modern military sciences for them. In this context, it also sent some former Bedouin to the United States and other countries for training as officers. The Ministries of Defence and Interior established similar programmes, although they opened them to Saudis from sedentary as well as nomadic backgrounds.[87] As a result of all these initiatives, by 2003, illiteracy among young tribespeople had been almost wiped out even among the Āl Murrah tribe.[88] As late as 1975, Donald Cole had still described this tribe as the 'nomads of the nomads'.[89]

Although many tribespeople in rural areas did not become as wealthy as the urban business elites did after the start of the oil boom in the 1970s, they also benefitted from governmental handouts, especially through the so-called 'land and loan' (*arḍ wa-qarḍ*) policy. In this programme, every Saudi was in principle entitled to a piece of land and half a million riyals (about 200,000 dollars at the beginning of the oil boom) in order to start up a farm. In addition, he would receive subsidies for machinery, fertilizers and seeds. Moreover, the government granted interest-free loans of 300,000 riyals for the building of a villa and required only half the amount to be repaid over thirty-five years. Hence, the standard of living soared even in political and economic backwaters, such as Wādī al-Dawāsir, the home

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[86] Al-Salmān, *Al-taʿlīm* (1999), 155.

[87] Cole, "Bedouin" (1981), 139–40.

[88] Cole, "New Homes" (2006), 385.

[89] Cole, *Nomads* (1975).

of the Dawāsir tribe in southern Najd.[90] The distribution of land, which was formally started in

1968, also reinforced the tribal system, as it was in practice based on tribal membership.[91]

Access to the state's increasing resources was not equal between different tribes and

their branches however. This differential access made the arguments of contribution

histories attractive. Proving the historical loyalty of one's tribe and national importance to the

Al Saud may have served to help claim a greater share of the oil wealth. One of the tribes

discriminated against was the Shammar, who, in contrast to the ʿUtaybah for instance, were

considered historically disloyal. Until about the 1970s, Shammarīs were not allowed to work

in the oil industry.[92] Moreover, the National Guard neither paid them regular salaries nor set

up units in their area.[93]

The material improvements and the monopoly of violence claimed by the state also

increased the symbolic capital stored in narratives about the tribal past. Traditionally,

courage in war, protection of the weak, hospitality, and 'pure-blooded', or *aṣīl*, descent

determined one's position in society. One's 'rank and pedigree', or *ḥasab wa-nasab*, in turn

signified, as Marcel Kurpershoek put it, a person's 'worth on the market where affinity

relations are created through marriage'.[94] The state, however, banned intertribal violence

and, through its distribution of the enormous income from oil, devalued the virtues of

hospitality and protection of the weak, thereby closing the traditional 'avenues for the

acquisition of honour'.[95] Moreover, the attainment of a specific economic level created a

sense of 'lack' or 'loss' among some in the community in terms of symbolic capital, which is

specifically locked to family and its antiquity'.[96] Hence, many Saudis of tribal backgrounds

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[90] Kurpershoek, *Arabia* (2001), 179.

[91] Al-Rasheed and Al-Rasheed, "The Politics" (1996), 108.

[92] Kurpershoek, *Arabia* (2001), 135.

[93] Al-Rasheed and Al-Rasheed, "The Politics" (1996), 109.

[94] Kurpershoek, *The Story* (1995), 40.

[95] Ibid., 37.

[96] Varghese, "Writing" (2004), 899.

turned to stories about past glories and asserted their 'forefathers' nobility as a measure of their own standing'.[97]

In addition to the economic boom, Saudi nation building paradoxically further increased the symbolic value of tribal belonging and, by extension, popular interest in writings about the tribal past and genealogy. After the abolition of slavery in Saudi Arabia in 1962, all Saudis theoretically 'became equal before the law, as they were already before God'.[98] As the government insisted on this equality, the use of derogatory terms, such as 'craftsman' (ṣāniʿ) and 'slave' (ʿabd), for Saudis without recognized pedigrees became less and less acceptable. However, many tribespeople still refused to marry fellow Saudis without equivalent 'rank and pedigree', regardless of their wealth.[99] In order to avoid being lumped together with former slaves and other sedentary people without recognized pedigrees, settled tribesmen started calling themselves 'Bedouin' (badw) instead of 'settlers' (ḥaḍar).[100] Without losing its sense of Arab nomad, the word 'Bedouin' thus came to denote 'social groups that pride themselves on a tribal affiliation which is generally known and recognized as being deeply rooted in history and belonging to a lineage unadulterated with blood from outside the Arabian society of tribes'.[101] As no central register of the Bedouin nobility existed,[102] research into tribal history and genealogy became a means to assert one's belonging to this class.

Despite the rejection of tribalism in textbooks, the King Abdulaziz Foundation for Research and Archives upheld the value of tribal descent in the symbolic economy of pedigrees and status by publicizing the lineage of the Al Saud. The foundation republished *The Stimulant of Ecstasy: The Lineage of the Kings of Najd* twice in 1979 and 1999. This was a genealogical work on the Al Saud by Rāshid ibn ʿAlī ibn Jurays (c. 1834–85), a Najdi

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[97] Kurpershoek, *The Story* (1995), 37.

[98] Kurpershoek, *Arabia* (2001), 65.

[99] Ibid., 179.

[100] Kurpershoek, *A Saudi Tribal History* (2002), 96.

[101] Ibid., 94.

[102] Kurpershoek, *Arabia* (2001), 70–71.

scholar and contemporary of Ibn Bishr.[103] The foundation also included the pedigree of the Al Saud in some of its other publications, like an *Abridged Historical Atlas of Saudi Arabia for Students*, published in 2004.[104]

Prince Salman ibn Abdulaziz, the foundation's chair and one of the most senior members of the royal family, also took a personal interest in his family's genealogy. He advised the dynastic historian ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Ruwayshid in the production of a tome on *The Family Trees of the Saudi Royal Family*.[105] In 2004, Prince Salman published an open letter in the newspaper *al-Riyāḍ*, seeking to 'correct' information on this family tree. This came in response to a programme on *al-Mustaqillah*, a London-based satellite-channel. While Salman maintained that 'the Saudi state was based on the Koran and the Sunna and not on a regional or tribal basis', he felt the need to clarify that the Al Saud descended from the Banū Ḥanīfah of Wāʾil and neither from the Tamīm nor the ʿAnazah tribe.[106]

Finally, although official textbooks formally rejected tribalism, the state also supported an important periodical covering tribal history and genealogy. This was the journal *al-ʿArab*, which the local historian Hamad Al-Jasser had established in 1966. Besides dealing with the history and geography of towns and regions, the journal also covered tribal history. Initially, *al-ʿArab* mainly responded to queries by individuals. In 1969, for instance, one reader asked *al-ʿArab* to publish an article on the Hizzān tribe. In response, Al-Jasser published a text, in which he argued that the tribe 'took a magnificent and heroic stance in maintaining their dignity and defending their country, when the Egyptian army invaded Najd after the elimination of the first Saudi state'.[107] Later, *al-ʿArab* also published longer articles, including

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[103] Ibn ʿAlī, *Kitāb* (1979); *Muthīr* (1999). The Salafīyah Press had published the first edition of Ibn ʿAlī ibn Jurays's work. Ibn ʿAlī, *Muthīr* (1959). On the author, see al-Munīf, "Rāshid" (2009).

[104] Dārat al-Malik ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, *Mukhtaṣar* (2004), 9.

[105] ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Ruwayshid, *Al-jadāwil* (1998), 6.

[106] Salmān ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz Āl Suʿūd, "Āl suʿūd" (2004).

[107] Al-ʿArab, "Qabīlat banī hizzān" (1969), 670.

excerpts of a two-volume *Lexicon of the Tribes in Saudi Arabia*, authored by Al-Jasser himself.[108]

Conceived as a general historical and geographical journal that treated tribes as only one of its topics, *al-'Arab* was initially able to thrive on governmental support. Until 1975, Al-Jasser published the journal outside Saudi Arabia, namely in Beirut.[109] During that time, various agencies, including the National Guard, the Ministry of Interior, and the Ministry of Agriculture and Water, placed advertisements in the journal.[110] In an editorial in 1978, after *al-'Arab* had moved to Riyadh, Al-Jasser thanked the Saudi government for its support and for permitting the continuation of his journal.[111] Eventually, various state universities and other governmental institutions subscribed to the journal. In 1985, King Saud University alone subscribed to twenty-five copies per issue.[112] This was, however, not because of tribal topics, but because of King Saud University's interest in *al-'Arab*'s geographical articles.[113]

In the mid-1980s, one state agency even saved *al-'Arab* from closure. At the time, *al-'Arab* suffered from the general economic downturn with the fall in oil prices. In 1986/87 alone, the subscriptions to the journal fell by 41 per cent compared to the previous year.[114] These subscriptions not only included those by individuals, but also by governmental institutions. In 1985, *al-Ḥaras al-Waṭanī*, the cultural magazine of the National Guard, reported that Hamad Al-Jasser would stop *al-'Arab*. When asked about his reasons, Al-Jasser responded that he had recently received an order from a ministry for one copy only. He wrote back to the ministry, 'consider it as a gift'.[115]

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[108] Al-Jāsir, *Muʿjam* (1981).

[109] Al-Jāsir, "Fī mustahall" (1979), 4.

[110] *Al-'arab* 4 (1969–70).

[111] Al-Jāsir, "Al-'arab" (1978), 2.

[112] Al-Ḥaras al-Waṭanī, "Ḥamad" (1985), 126.

[113] Fayez al-Harbi, interview, 25 October 2011.

[114] Al-Jāsir, "Wa-fī maṭlaʿ" (1991), 4.

[115] Al-Ḥaras al-Waṭanī, "Ḥamad" (1985), 126.

At that point, the General Presidency of Youth Welfare stepped in because of its interest in geography and local historiography generally.[116] Shortly after the report in *al-Ḥaras al-Waṭanī*, Prince Faisal ibn Fahd met with Hamad Al-Jasser and published a statement in Saudi newspapers. He announced that the General Presidency of Youth Welfare would 'take all measures to guarantee the continuing publication and development of the journal *al-ʿArab*. It believes in its importance and the great cultural role it plays inside and outside of the kingdom'.[117] *Al-ʿArab* thus continued.

Most authors of tribal histories published in *al-ʿArab* and elsewhere were self-taught amateurs who had benefitted from Saudi state expansion in various ways. One of the first authors who sought to unlock the symbolic capital stored in his tribal ancestry was ʿĀtiq al-Bilādī, the son of a storyteller from the Ḥarb tribe. Born among Bedouin near Mecca, al-Bilādī entered the Saudi army. This allowed him to gain a formal education in the Infantry School (Madrasat al-Mushāt) in Ta'if. In 1956, he was dispatched to Jordan as part of Saudi reinforcements to the front against Israel. In Amman, he was able to gain diplomas in journalism and English. Later, he reached the rank of a lieutenant colonel at the Border Guard in Jeddah.[118] In 1977, just after his retirement, al-Bilādī published a book entitled *The Pedigree of Ḥarb: Its Lineages, Branches, History, and Territories.* The book reflected the great value the author attached to genealogy. It was dedicated 'to those who search for their pure-blooded roots and their eternal heritage, for the history of their bright nation, and for the glories of knowledge about their honourable, blessed ancestors'.[119]

As one of the first prominent tribal authors, al-Bilādī reclaimed the history of Arab Bedouin tribes from the perspective of town-based chroniclers. He stated that 'the historians in Mecca and Medina were not interested in these tribes'. 'When they mentioned them, they wrote, "Emir So-and-so punished the insurgents of tribe So-and-so." Alternatively, they said

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[116] Fayez al-Harbi, interview, 25 October 2011.

[117] Al-Jāsir, "Al-sanah" (1986), 1–2.

[118] Al-Bilādī, *Nasab* (1977), 453. On al-Bilādī, see also al-Ḥumayd, "'Allāmat al-ḥijāz" (2010).

[119] Al-Bilādī, *Nasab* (1977), 3.

that the Emir "stopped at this village after his return from fighting tribe So-and-so."' In battles between a ruler of Mecca and the surrounding Bedouin tribes, the chroniclers presented 'the prince as the always victorious hero'[120] and spoke about the tribes 'with the tongue of the judge'.[121] Al-Bilādī set out to offer a different interpretation of the history of his tribe, basing his account on the Ḥarb's oral tradition.

Al-Bilādī also sought to shield his tribe from the takfīrist anti-nomadism of dynastic authors. According to him, the Ḥarb of the Hejaz did not live in an 'age of ignorance' or *jāhilīyah* before the establishment of the Saudi state. On the contrary, they formed an 'encyclopaedia'. Al-Bilādī emphasized particularly the Ḥarb's religious learning. Because 'their territories lie on the hajj route' and their dialect was close to standard Arabic, 'many Bedouin memorized stories about Ali, many companions of the Prophet and old virtuous men'.[122] Al-Bilādī also contended that tribal judges delivered verdicts that were 'sometimes close to a Sharia sentence' and 'always striking in their logic'.[123] Moreover, according to him, the Ḥarb even possessed profound natural knowledge. Al-Bilādī argued that even illiterate members of this tribe had been experienced in 'medicine, veterinary medicine and meteorology'. This, according to him, 'was during a time, in which no innovations and discoveries, medical instruments and drugs of the West had reached us'.[124]

Al-Bilādī also developed contribution arguments, as many historians of towns and regions did. He thus joined the competition to assert the importance of one's community in national history. He emphasized the Ḥarb's participation in the conquests led by Abdulaziz Al Saud (also known as Ibn Saud) over the participation of the ʿUtaybah tribe in particular. Al-Bilādī lamented that 'everybody who reads the modern history of Saudi Arabia knows that Ibn Saud entered the Hejaz'. He also knows that 'Ibn Bijād, the emir of the Barqā of

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[120] Ibid., 115.
[121] Ibid., 6.
[122] Ibid., 233.
[123] Ibid., 302.
[124] Ibid., 282.

ʿUtaybah, and Khālid ibn Luʾayy al-ʿAbdalī were the two, who entered Mecca victoriously'. However, 'history has not told us that the Ḥarb were the frontrunners with Ibn Saud'.[125] The tribal historian continued that during the 1920s and 1930s, his tribe participated in the conquest of Jeddah, the defeat of the rebels of the Ikhwān in the decisive battle of al-Sabalah, and the war with Yemen.[126]

While al-Bilādī worked on Hejazi history more broadly after the publication of his *Pedigree of Ḥarb*, his research on the tribe specifically was continued by Fayez al-Harbi (b. 1956). Al-Harbi was a man whose public education and employment also empowered him to engage in amateur scholarship. He gained a diploma in hospital administration from the Institute of Public Administration in Riyadh in 1978. Subsequently, he worked for different hospitals in central Saudi Arabia while gaining a bachelor's degree in business administration from Imam University and a master's degree in health and hospital administration from King Saud University. Later, he worked for eight years as chief executive officer of the Prince Sultan Cardiac Center, a specialist hospital with about 150 beds. His relatively high salary even allowed him to set up his own publisher, Dār al-Badrānī, through which he published most of his historical books.[127]

Having chosen an administrative career in urban Najd, Fayez al-Harbi initially had little interest in tribal historiography. However, the encounters with Saudis from different backgrounds in higher education encouraged him to reflect upon, and investigate, his roots. In 1981, he was sent to the United States as part of a student mission to gain a diploma in health sciences. There, he first became interested in tribal histories, when his fellow Saudi students inquired about his tribal background, regarding which he had little knowledge. After his return to the kingdom in 1983, he started to undertake research in this field. Besides relying on oral accounts, he read accounts by foreign travellers and was one of the first tribal

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[125] Ibid., 192.

[126] Ibid., 193–94.

[127] Al-ʿAtīq, *Rāʾid* (2008). Fayez al-Harbi, interview, 25 October 2011.

historians to access documents. Al-Harbi's interest in the tribal past even led him to retire

early from his position as a hospital chief executive officer in order to devote himself to

historical studies.[128]

Like his fellow tribesman al-Bilādī, al-Harbi struggled to reclaim the history of the

Bedouin from earlier urban authors. Working on Najd as well as the Hejaz, he not only

criticized chroniclers from Mecca and Medina for their neglect or misrepresentation of tribal

history. He also turned against members of the Ibn Ghannām School and other Najdi

chroniclers. This was already evident one of his first monographs, which he published in

1994. The monograph was entitled *The History of the Tribes in Najd, 1446–1800.* Al-Harbi

contended that 'the history of the Bedouins of Najd has not enjoyed the interest of our

historians, who were all from the people of Najdi settlements and villages'. Al-Harbi

complained that Ibn Ghannām, Ibn Bishr and Ibn ʿĪsá, as well as the pre-Wahhabi author al-

Manqūr recorded only events relating to these settlements.[129]

In 1996, Fayez al-Harbi published another book entitled *Chapters on the History of the*

Ḥarb Tribe in the Hejaz and Najd. In this book, he was more critical of urban historians. He

lamented that in the past, mostly 'followers and protégés of the state' had written history,

'whether the Sharifs of the Hejaz, the military commanders, the pashas, or their clients'.

They had proceeded with a 'clear bias in favour of the state and its followers, at the expense

of the Arab Bedouin sheikhs and their followers, who were their opponents and enemies.'

Thus, 'an unjust historical picture was formed', which 'glorifies the state' and 'denies the

rights, and belittles the heroism', of the Bedouin.[130]

In response to perceived neglect and distortions by both dynastic and Hejazi local

historians, Fayez al-Harbi sought to place the Ḥarb tribe prominently on the historical map.

In contrast to ʿĀtiq al-Bilādī's book, *The Pedigree of Ḥarb*, however, this map was more

[128] Al-ʿAtīq, *Rāʾid* (2008). Fayez al-Harbi, interview, 9 January 2010.

[129] Fāʾiz al-Ḥarbī, *Min akhbār* (2002), 7–8.

[130] Fāʾiz al-Ḥarbī, *Fuṣūl* (2008), 14–15.

explicitly national. Saudi nation building had already affected al-Harbi as a man of a younger generation. He drew on the paradigm of national development when he asserted that 'the sons of the Arabs', that is, the Bedouin, had become 'doctors, judges, engineers, pilots, technicians and soldiers' under Saudi rule. Thus, they had 'transformed into important national pillars in the building of the nation, preserving its security and interests'.[131]

In 1997, al-Harbi directly attacked official dynastic historiography. In an article in *al-ʿArab*, the author criticized a textbook for secondary schools on *The History of Saudi Arabia*, written by ʿAbd Allāh al-ʿUthaymīn. The article was entitled *The Āl Muḍayyān, the Sheikhs of the Ḥarb Tribe: Are They Not Worth Mentioning?* As the title suggests, al-Harbi complained that the textbook did not include the leaders of the Ḥarb in its discussion of the history of the first Saudi state. He argued that the Āl Muḍayyān 'played a fundamental role in the annexation of Medina and its surroundings to the Saudi state' and 'spread the Salafi movement among the tribes of the region'. Against an accusation in the textbook that the Ḥarb tribe had collaborated with the invading Egyptian forces, the tribal historian emphasized the sacrifice of the Āl Muḍayyān. Their sheikh, Masʿūd ibn Muḍayyān, was even 'captured and sent to Istanbul, where he was strangled'.[132]

The Saudi government did not repress al-Harbi's attack on one of its textbooks. ʿAbd Allāh al-ʿUthaymīn merely published a response in *al-ʿArab* in order to 'eliminate confusion among some readers'. Concerned not to offend tribal sensibilities, he stated he had 'the same appreciation towards the Āl Muḍayyān as towards any leaders of the tribes of this nation'.[133] However, he had mentioned only a few examples of 'emirs and leaders of the first Saudi state', because he did not want to burden the pupil with the need to 'remember them

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[131] Fāʾiz al-Ḥarbī, *Baʿḍ al-aʿyān* (2002), 36.

[132] Fāʾiz al-Ḥarbī, "Āl muḍayyān" (1997), 100.

[133] Al-ʿUthaymīn, "Ḥawla maqāl" (1999), 148.

all'. He also stated that the 'efforts' of some of the Saudi emirs, which he *had* mentioned, were at least equal to the 'efforts of the Āl Muḍayyān, if not greater'.[134]

Although al-Bilādī and al-Harbi frequently spoke of 'the sons of the Arabs' or 'the Bedouin' collectively, tribal authors were not united in their criticism of dynastic historiography. As they discussed intertribal warfare and conflicts, their narratives frequently offended other tribespeople. Turkī al-Qaddāḥ, an author from a younger generation and member of the ʿUtaybah tribe, for instance, dedicated a whole book to a criticism of al-Harbi's *History of the Tribes in Najd.* He accused his counterpart from the Ḥarb of 'concentrating on the author's tribe and glorifying its history while raising doubts about the battles of other tribes'. Al-Qaddāḥ also made use of the state's hostility to tribalism. Because al-Harbi had partly relied on Ḥarb oral traditions, al-Qaddāḥ contended that his work 'lacks accuracy and objectivity, while the abominable smell of tribal group feeling [*ʿaṣabīyah*] reveals itself, which blinds the view and silences the call for any truth'.[135]

The government took such quarrels between tribespeople like al-Harbi and al-Qaddāḥ seriously. While allowing a considerable amount of tribal literature to appear, it was ready to ban titles that threatened to obstruct Saudi nation building. As Kurpershoek observes, the Ministry of Information permitted some 'tribal boasting and bragging about the feats and virtues of the forefathers' as long as this could be disguised as a contribution to the 'common pride of the Saudi nation'[136] and 'national character-building'.[137] Fahd al-Semmari, the secretary general of the King Abdulaziz Foundation for Research and Archives, however, made clear in 2007 that he sought an 'interest in the history of the tribes' that was 'as distant as possible from agitation, controversy, and passion'. Refusing tribalism on national rather than religious grounds, he warned that the increasing interest in tribal history might lead to the spread of tribal 'group feeling'. This group feeling was 'insulting the national view that

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[134] Ibid., 167.

[135] Al-Qaddāḥ, *Waqafāt* (2008), 151.

[136] Kurpershoek, *The Story* (1995), 23.

[137] Kurpershoek, *Bedouin Poets* (1999), 49–50.

binds the sons of this one nation together'. Hence, the secretary general of the main governmental historical research institute considered it 'necessary to get rid of the heroic literature'.[138]

Not only battle narratives but also pedigrees as a source of symbolic capital made tribal writings contentious in the eyes of other tribespeople as well as governmental agencies concerned with building national unity. Fayez al-Harbi considered genealogy 'one of the most difficult fields of writing, because of the surrounding sensitivity and the fear of reactions by others'.[139] In 2008, ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Sanāḥ, a fellow researcher from the Muṭayr tribe, warned his colleagues not to 'rely on oral narratives in composing pedigrees as this causes discontent among the members of the tribes'. The promotion of such disputed lineages 'troubles the ministries of information and interior as well as the governorates of the provinces and serves neither the umma nor the nation'.[140]

One of the books banned for causing a genealogical controversy was a work by the young ʿUtaybah author Turkī al-Qaddāḥ, who had accused Fayez al-Harbi of displaying 'tribal group feeling'. In early 2010, al-Qaddāḥ published a book titled *An Inquiry into the Genealogy of the ʿUtaybah tribe*. In March 2010, in an article in the newspaper *al-Riyāḍ*, members of his own tribe accused him of 'distorting names and contradicting the truth that existed among the tribal elders'.[141] In April 2010, the Ministry of Culture and Information thus banned the book and fined al-Qaddāḥ 8000 riyals (about 2100 dollars).[142] Subsequently, al-Qaddāḥ was prohibited from writing on genealogy, 'because he was not a specialist' and because of the 'problems' his book had caused. These problems had led to 'discord among the sons of the one tribe', that is, the nation.[143]

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[138] Al-Samārī, "Iftitāḥīyah" (2007), 8–9.

[139] Fāʾiz al-Ḥarbī, *Fuṣūl* (2008), 9.

[140] ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Sanāḥ, *Qabīlat muṭayr* (2008), 49.

[141] Al-Duhaynah et al., "Raddan" (2010).

[142] Al-Riyāḍ, "Saḥb" (31 August 2010).

[143] Al-Riyāḍ, "Saḥb" (29 October 2010).

Authors seeking to assert tribes in national history faced additional difficulties, as one

of the most suitable topics for contribution histories, namely the Ikhwān, remained highly

sensitive. While poetry attacking the Ikhwān was taboo due to their association with the royal

family, poetry extolling the Bedouin warriors remained rare. This rarity resulted from painful

memories of the suppression of the rebellion in 1930 and from the fact that the movement

had, as Marcel Kurpershoek put it, 'cut across the entire tribal society, pitting one section of

a tribe against another and leaving deep rifts'.[144] Even in academia, resistance towards the

topic of the Ikhwān remained. Talal Al-Azma', a member of a prominent family of the Subayʿ

tribe, for instance, proposed to write an undergraduate dissertation on the Ikhwān at King

Saud University. His supervisor at first rejected the idea and later forced him not to mention

the name Ikhwān in the title.[145]

Despite this sensitivity, tribal authors developed contribution arguments with reference

to the Ikhwān. Here, they benefitted from globalization by studying abroad and co-operating

with foreign scholars. After his BA from King Saud University, Talal Al-Azma' went on to

doctoral studies at the University of Durham. He did not receive a governmental scholarship,

but was fortunate to have the support of Talal ibn Abdulaziz Al Saud, a liberal prince who

had taken care of his orphaned namesake since his childhood. At Durham, Al-Azma'

completed a doctoral thesis on *The Role of the Ikhwan under 'Abdul-'Aziz Al Sa'ud 1916-*

1934. Al-Azma' based his thesis largely on interviews with fellow tribesmen, who were,

according to him, not affected by 'the forgery concerning the great achievement of their

fathers, grandfathers, and great grandfathers in unifying the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia'.

Relying on these accounts, he gave the main credit for the kingdom's existence to the

Ikhwān.[146] Playing down the eventual Ikhwān rebellion against King Abdulaziz in the late

1920s, Al-Azma' argued that the overwhelming majority of the Ikhwān, including members of

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[144] Kurpershoek, *The Story* (1995), 23–24.

[145] Al-Azma', "The Role" (1999), 9.

[146] Ibid., 10.

his own tribe, remained loyal and supported the Saudi monarch 'in his conflict with the minority rebels'.[147]

More explicitly than many other tribal authors, Al-Azma' also expressed open hostility towards many dynastic historians. These historians included 'the national Arab writers', like Rihani, Hamza and Wahba, and 'the writers of the *hadhar* of Najd', like Mohamed Almana and ʿAbd Allāh al-ʿUthaymīn. According to Al-Azma', all of them ascribed 'the role of the creation of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to the *hadhar* of Najd' and 'neglected the main role of the bedouin of the *Ikhwan*'.[148] He even drew a picture of a historiographic conspiracy by the 'village writers', or *ḥaḍar*, against the 'Bedouin'. He argued that there 'has been a historical conflict between the tribes of Najd and the *hadhar* of Najd because the Bedouin of Najd held the power and prestige in Najd' and the Bedouin 'looked down upon' the *ḥaḍar*. In response, scholars from the *ḥaḍar*, including al-ʿUthaymīn, 'sought to steal the achievements of the tribes of Najd and claim that they were behind the unification of the new Saudi state'. As most 'researchers and postgraduate students are from the *hadhar* of Najd' due to their early advantage in education, they had, according to Al-Azma', 'great opportunity to fashion' Saudi Arabia's history.[149]

In Al-Azma''s case, the Saudi Ministry of Higher Education suppressed the attack on dynastic historiography. It did not recognize his PhD and barred him from becoming a professor at a Saudi university.[150] However, Al-Azma' did not remain the only historian asserting the role of tribes in national history against dynastic authors. In parallel, Sulṭān ibn Ḥithlayn (b. 1952), a member of one of the leading families of the ʿUjmān, worked on a book

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[147] Ibid., 273.

[148] Ibid., 12.

[149] Ibid., 14.

[150] In a decision from 2001, the ministry considered his degree not suitable 'for academic purposes'. Since then, Al-Azma' has worked for Talal ibn Abdulaziz's office in Riyadh. Talal Al-Azma', interview, 28 October 2009.

entitled *The History of the ʿUjmān Tribe*. It was published abroad, in Kuwait in 1998, like many other histories of towns and tribes, to avoid Saudi censorship.[151]

Sulṭān ibn Ḥithlayn did not only benefit from globalization in the form of access to foreign scholarship, as Al-Azmaʾ had through his studies in Durham. In a rare case among tribal historians, he also benefitted from employment at a state university. After studying at Imam University in Riyadh, he gained a PhD in Islamic studies from the University of Birmingham in 1997. That same year, the King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals in Dhahran appointed him as an assistant professor in its Department of Islamic and Arabic Studies. For a revision of the history of his tribe, Ibn Ḥithlayn teamed up with Zekeriya Kurşun, a historian at Marmara University, Istanbul, who read Ottoman documents on the history of the ʿUjmān tribe.[152]

Ibn Ḥithlayn was conscious of the general sensitivity surrounding tribal historiography. He acknowledged that 'some people have reservations over bringing up the history of tribes in Saudi Arabia with the argument that its presents former conflicts that will revive the different tribal feuds'. In a commitment to national unity, he thus sought to reassure his readers that, 'in our present age, the concept of loyalty and citizenship has taken root among the sons of the tribes, and this history has become memory and stories'.[153] In this spirit, the author argued against the view of his tribe as a historical obstacle to the Saudi state. Ibn Ḥithlayn instead suggested proximity between his tribe and the Al Saud. He contended that 'the ʿUjmān had adopted the banner of the Saudi state' in the late eighteenth century. His tribe had also promoted the Wahhabi mission 'in the north, south, east and West during the reign of Abdulaziz ibn Muhammad and his successors'.[154]

The dynastic historian ʿAbd Allāh al-ʿUthaymīn reviewed Ibn Ḥithlayn's work in the newspaper *al-Jazīrah*. He acknowledged plurality in the writing of the kingdom's history, but

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[151] Ibn Ḥithlayn and Kūrshūn, *Tārīkh* (1998).

[152] Ibid.; al-Shāmirī, "Al-sīrah" (2005).

[153] Ibn Ḥithlayn and Kūrshūn, *Tārīkh* (1998), 9.

[154] Ibid., 33.

also criticized Ibn Ḥithlayn. He wrote that texts on the history of Saudi Arabia included 'writings on the general history of the Saudi state concentrating on the works of its leaders'. Other writings treated 'the history of one of the regions which this state has united or the history of one of the tribes that have come under its rule'. Ibn Ḥithlayn's book was, according to al-ʿUthaymīn, a history of 'a tribe of our dear homeland that has its own role and status and that has been famous for its courage and strength'.[155] Al-ʿUthaymīn, however, 'corrected' numerous details in the tribal history, referring mainly to Ibn Ghannām and Ibn Bishr.[156] In his conclusion, he expressed the hope that future writings would be 'deeper in their scrutiny'.[157]

Al-ʿUthaymīn's review provoked Ibn Ḥithlayn to challenge dynastic histories and their reliance on the Ibn Ghannām School. Given that members of nomadic tribes had produced few writings before the mid-twentieth century due to very high illiteracy rates, the tribal historian argued for the recognition of oral history and poetry as valid sources. In a rejoinder to al-ʿUthaymīn, Ibn Ḥithlayn contended that 'restricting Arabian history to only some sources and making them the main reference is a constraint that does not conform to the academic method, even if those sources are the size of Ibn Bishr and Ibn Ghannām'. He asserted that 'the most knowledgeable people in the history of these tribes were the trusted narrators who transmitted their events and history from generation to generation. Even if these stories contain some omissions and errors, they can never be ignored.'[158]

Beginning in 1999, another aspect of globalization, namely public internet access, also facilitated the production of controversial tribal histories. Although the kingdom's public internet hub, the King Abdulaziz City for Science and Technology, blocked access to many websites,[159] hardly any tribal websites were affected.[160] Many Saudis, even those, who did

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[155] Al-ʿUthaymīn, "Qirāʾah" (16 October 2000).

[156] Al-ʿUthaymīn, "Qirāʾah" (23 October 2000); "Qirāʾah" (6 November 2000); "Qirāʾah" (13 November 2000).

[157] Al-ʿUthaymīn, "Qirāʾah" (20 November 2000).

[158] Ibn Ḥithlayn, "Wajhat naẓar" (2001).

[159] Teitelbaum, "Dueling" (2002).

not regularly buy and read books, still authored and read tribal literature online and downloaded electronic copies of volumes that were unavailable in Saudi bookstores.[161] One of the most active tribal historians on the web was the historian of the Muṭayr tribe ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Sanāḥ. He was one of the supervisors and main contributors to the *Muṭayr Tribe Website*, established in 1999. In 2010, it contained pedigrees, biographies, poetry, accounts of 'braveries', pictures, a historical dictionary, and forums.[162]

Presumably expecting the ban of a printed version, al-Sanāḥ published a collection of reviews exclusively as a Portable Document Format (PDF) file. This collection was entitled *The Muṭayr Tribe in the Writings of Saudi Historians: Remarks on the Errors by Some Historians*.[163] In a broad attack on dynastic historians, including ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Ruwayshid and ʿAbd Allāh al-ʿUthaymīn, al-Sanāḥ claimed that he 'found many errors and contradictions in the writings by our historians especially when treating the history of our dear nation'. Similar to Al-Azma', he contended that these historians 'tried to marginalize the role of the members of the Muṭayr tribe even if their influence had been strong'.[164] Specifically, he accused al-ʿUthaymīn of not paying attention to the role of the Najdi tribes along 'with King Abdulaziz Al Saud in his steps to unify the country'. In al-Sanāḥ's opinion, al-ʿUthaymīn 'decreased the standing and prestige of the Najdi tribes'.[165] Asserting his tribe in national history, al-Sanāḥ also criticized the King Abdulaziz Foundation for Research and Archives for failing to recognize a member of the Muṭayr tribe as a participant in the capture of Riyadh in 1902, the nation's foundation story. Al-Sanāḥ contended that 'through the lack

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[160] Maisel, "Self-Representation" (2010).

[161] Personal communications by several Saudis in their twenties in Riyadh in 2010. One user posted links to download tribal books in the *ʿUtaybah Forum*, e.g. Ibn Muwarriq, "Taḥmīl kutub" (2010).

[162] Mawqiʿ Qabīlat Muṭayr, "Mawqiʿ" (2010). Al-Shallāḥī, "Shukr" (2010).

[163] ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Sanāḥ, *Qabīlat muṭayr* (2008). A link to download the work was posted on the *Muṭayr Forum* website in 2008. Muḥammad al-Sanāḥ, "Kitāb" (2008).

[164] ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Sanāḥ, *Qabīlat muṭayr* (2008), 4.

[165] Ibid., 31. The author had developed this criticism earlier; al-Muṭayrī, *Qabīlat muṭayr* (2005), 291.

of tribute to Muḥammad ibn Hazzāʿ al-Muṭayrī the foundation loses its credibility among researchers in explaining and documenting our oral history'.[166]

Shiite histories from revolution to contribution

Besides local and tribal writings, histories of the Shiite community in Saudi Arabia have flourished since the 1980s.[167] Very important in producing Shiite histories was the oppositional movement the Islamic Revolution Organization (Munaẓẓamat al-Thawrah al-Islāmīyah, IRO). Its members operated in Syria, Iraq, and Iran as well as Saudi Arabia.[168] Besides numerous pamphlets and books, this organization published, beginning in 1980, *al-Thawrah al-Islāmīyah*, 'The Islamic Revolution', a monthly newsletter that called for a revolution and an overthrow of the Saudi government. Its publication was inspired by the Iranian Revolution of 1979 and followed the repression of demonstrations against Shiite marginalization in the modernization of Saudi Arabia.[169]

In the late 1980s, the discourse of the Islamic Revolution Organization shifted from revolution to a more 'moderate' position. According to Fouad Ibrahim, many Saudi Shiites by that time had become 'convinced that the revolutionary option had been unsuccessful in their region'.[170] The Saudi government also made a few concessions to the Shiites. In 1987, a massacre of hundreds of Iranian pilgrims in Mecca produced tensions in the country. In order to reduce these tensions, King Fahd issued a general amnesty in favour of the Shiite prisoners in the Eastern Province. Following this amnesty, the IRO decided in 1987 to gradually soften the tensions with the Saudi regime.[171] In early 1991, the organization

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[166] ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Sanāḥ, *Qabīlat muṭayr* (2008), 14.

[167] Matthiesen, "The Shia" (2011), chapter 1, provides the best analysis of Shiite historiography in Saudi historiography. Another study is by Al-Rasheed, "The Shiʿa" (1998).

[168] Fouad Ibrahim, *The Shiʿis* (2006), provides the most comprehensive account of the Shite opposition movement.

[169] Jones, "Rebellion" (2006). For the wider context, see Jones, *Desert Kingdom* (2010).

[170] Fouad Ibrahim, *The Shiʿis* (2006), 140.

[171] Ibid., 141–43.

renamed itself the 'Reform Movement' (al-Ḥarakah al-Iṣlāḥīyah).[172] By relinquishing

revolution in favour of reform, the Shiite movement 'implicitly recognized the status quo in

Saudi Arabia and the Saudi regime'.[173]

As part of its new focus on reform, the rhetoric of the Shiite opposition movement

shifted from a call to overthrow the regime to a criticism of the regime's human rights abuses

and the restrictions of civil liberties.[174] This shift was influenced by Mikail Gorbachev's policy

of perestroika and the fall of the Soviet Union. It also coincided with the move of senior

members of the Shiite opposition from Syria to London and Washington, where they found

audiences for reports on human rights abuses. In late 1990, for instance, the IRO

established a non-profit organization in Washington named International Committee for

Human Rights in the Gulf and Arabian Peninsula.[175] Between 1991 and 1993, the Reform

Movement's London office also issued a new magazine entitled *al-Jazīrah al-ʿArabīyah*, 'The

Arabian Peninsula'. According to Mamoun Fandy, the magazine's purpose was 'not to incite

a revolution against the royal family'. Instead, it focused 'on human rights, tolerance,

problems of public administration in Saudi Arabia, government corruption, and abuses of

civil rights'.[176]

In the early 1990s, the historical publications by the Reform Movement included

demands for an end of authoritarianism and discrimination against their community. In 1992,

Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Majīd, a young Shiite writer affiliated with the movement, published a

book on *Sectarian Discrimination in Saudi Arabia*. In the preface, Ḥasan al-Ṣaffār (b. 1958),

the leader of the Reform Movement, lamented that 'at a time when the winds of democracy

are blowing over most peoples of the world and the defence of human rights rises

everywhere, our people in the Arabian peninsula is still languishing under the weight of

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[172] Ibid., 155.

[173] Ibid., 156.

[174] Fandy, "From Confrontation" (1996), 5–6.

[175] Fouad Ibrahim, *The Shiʿis* (2006), 151.

[176] Fandy, "From Confrontation" (1996), 6.

political despotism and the policy of sectarian discrimination'.[177] In line with this statement, 'Abd al-Majīd's book demanded a 'constitution', 'respect for human rights', and 'freedom of opinion, religion and expression'. It also demanded 'freedom to form parties, organizations, and unions'. 'Abd al-Majīd also put forward specific demands related to the Shiites. They included the freedom to practice their religious rituals, the permission to build their own mosques and the right to Shiite religious education in areas with a Shiite majority. Moreover, the author demanded 'permission to print and import Shiite books and the granting of licences to Shiites to publish magazines and newspapers'. Finally, he also pleaded for a general 'abolition of sectarian discrimination in universities, educational institutions and governmental jobs'.[178]

Unlike many local and tribal historians, 'Abd al-Majīd rejected the unification narrative of dynastic histories outright. Instead, he portrayed Saudi rule as having damaged and divided the nation. He argued that before the establishment of this rule, 'the sons of the Arabian peninsula were all living in harmony, unity and co-existence'. 'Doctrinal difference was no factor of differentiation between the sons of the one nation'.[179] With Saudi rule, however, 'division began to prevail and the doctrinal, ethnic, and regional differences appeared', as the 'authorities began to subjugate and suppress anyone who did not believe in their doctrines'. Moreover, the author accused the Saudi princes of having treated the 'national resources as if they were a private family possession'.[180]

Despite his rejection of the unification narrative, 'Abd al-Majīd also employed contribution arguments in order to emphasize the Shiites' rights as an integral part of the nation. In contrast to his harsh criticism of the Saudi dynasty, 'Abd al-Majīd praised the Shiites' contribution to the nation and its unity. He argued that 'the Shiite community in the Arabian peninsula over time adopted heroic and bright national and Islamic positions',

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[177] 'Abd al-Majīd, *Al-tamyīz* (1992), 5.

[178] Ibid., 126–30.

[179] Ibid., 67.

[180] Ibid. 78.

standing up 'against foreign colonialism and domestic repression and dictatorship'.[181] The

Reform Movement 'insisted on the one nation, the co-existence of all doctrines and schools

of thought and the preservation of the achievements of the homeland'.[182] In 1990, when Iraqi

forces invaded Kuwait, the Shiites 'rushed to defend the borders of the nation'. Many of them

'poured into the volunteering offices to add their names to the lists of volunteers'. Even

travellers 'cut short their holidays and returned home to face all the threats to the country'.[183]

During the Gulf crisis, the Saudi Shiites did indeed largely remain loyal to the

kingdom. This was in contrast to some Sunni activists who condemned the invitation of

American forces to the kingdom. In January 1991, a representative of the Reform Movement

stated in the Shiite magazine *al-Jazīrah al-'Arabīyah* that 'we are ready to defend the nation

and the independence of the nation'.[184] In recognition of their loyalty, the Saudi government

concluded an accord with members of the Shiite opposition led by Ḥasan al-Ṣaffār in 1993.

Representatives of the Shiites agreed to 'suspend their activities abroad, including putting

out publications that attack Saudi Arabia's policies and record on human rights'. In return,

Prince Naif (b. 1933), the minister of interior, agreed to allow the dissidents to return home,

release a number of political prisoners and reissue passports to others. As part of the

accord, King Fahd declared a general amnesty of Shiite oppositionists, many of whom thus

returned from exile.[185]

Hamzah Al-Hassan, one of the chief negotiators of the 1993 accord, was also a

prominent historian of the Saudi Shiites. After having studied politics at King Saud

University, he left the country in 1980 amidst the wave of governmental repression of his

community. In exile, he was involved in the IRO and published texts critical of contemporary

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[181] Ibid., 60.

[182] Ibid., 68.

[183] Ibid., 66.

[184] Quoted in: Fouad Ibrahim, *The Shi'is* (2006), 156.

[185] Youssef Ibrahim, "Saudi Officials" (1993).

Saudi history and politics.[186] In addition, he contributed to a report by Article 19, a London-based non-governmental organization, on restrictions to freedom of expression in Saudi Arabia.[187] In the year of the accord, Al-Hassan published *The Shiites in Saudi Arabia*, a two-volume work on the history of the community since 1871.[188]

In his history of the Shiites, Al-Hassan also expressed a counter-narrative to the unification narrative of dynastic histories. He called the Saudi conquest of al-Aḥsāʾ and al-Qaṭīf in 1913 an 'occupation' (*iḥtilāl*).[189] Rather than naming Abdulaziz 'the unifier' of the country, he described him as a 'man who had expansionist ambitions at the expense of his neighbours'.[190] The Shiite author also dismissed King Abdulaziz's alleged 'historical rights' over the region by arguing that in the nineteenth century Saudi control of al-Aḥsāʾ only lasted for thirty-one years and was disrupted by local revolts.[191] In 1913, al-Aḥsāʾ and al-Qaṭīf 'did not want' Abdulaziz to invade the region, but 'were unable to resist'. This was due to the people's 'fatigue' from the insecurity that Abdulaziz himself had created through his campaigns.[192]

Despite the counter-narrative of 'occupation', Al-Hassan also seemed to have accepted the belonging of al-Aḥsāʾ to a common Saudi nation. Nevertheless, and similarly to his fellow Shiite ʿAbd al-Majīd, he warned the Saudi government that its policies threatened the nation's unity. He stated that his book 'does not aim to raise age-old sectarian issues, which deepen division and place more barriers between the followers of the one religion and the one nation'.[193] Yet, he warned that continued repression would indeed strengthen separatist tendencies. He admitted that 'we all know the fact that unity is better than

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[186] Al-Hassan's texts included Fahd al-Qaḥṭānī, *Zilzāl* (1987). Al-Hassan shared this pseudonym with other authors affiliated with the IRO. Hamzah Al-Hassan, interview, 8 November 2010.

[187] Article 19, *Silent Kingdom* (1991).

[188] Ḥamzah al-Ḥasan, *Al-shīʿah* (1993).

[189] Al-Rasheed, "The Shiʿa" (1998), 133. Ḥamzah al-Ḥasan, *Al-shīʿah*, vol. 2 (1993) 8–17.

[190] Ḥamzah al-Ḥasan, *Al-shīʿah*, vol. 1 (1993) 350.

[191] Al-Rasheed, "The Shiʿa" (1998), 131.

[192] Ḥamzah al-Ḥasan, *Al-shīʿah*, vol. 1 (1993), 351.

[193] Ibid., 7.

separation. However, a unity that puts the rights of a large segment of the population at risk cannot be in our interest, as it spreads among the oppressed the spirit of separatism.'[194]

Asserting the place of the Shiites within the nation, Al-Hassan aimed at gaining equal rights for the members of his community as 'citizens' (*muwāṭinūn*), a term that he used over and over again. He made clear that his monograph 'calls for equal treatment of all citizens in their rights and duties irrespective of the sects, regions, and tribes they belong to'.[195] He turned explicitly against Wahhabis who did not acknowledge the Shiites as their compatriots. The historian and political activist complained that 'a number of those sectarianists—among them officials in the Saudi state—do not refrain from accusing their Shiite subjects of being Iranians who should be expelled from the country. They ignore the fact that Shiism and the Shiites are not alien to this region.'[196]

In support of his demand for equality between Saudi citizens of all sects, Al-Hassan developed a genealogical argument that rejected claims that the Saudi Shiites were of foreign ethnicity. He contended that 'the Shiites are original Arabs. One part belongs to the original ancient Arab tribes who lived in the region before Islam, ʿAbd al-Qays and Bakr ibn Wāʾil, and another part originates from Bedouin who settled down and adopted Shiism.'[197] Al-Hassan did not see the lack of genealogical evidence as a problem, but, on the contrary, argued that the Shiites, who had given up tribal forms of social organization and forgotten parts of their pedigrees, were more pious than Sunni tribespeople who knew their lineages in detail. He postulated that 'no religion' unites these tribespeople 'more strongly than their pedigree. No spirit of brotherhood and Islam supports them like the group feeling [*ʿaṣabīyah*] of the tribe.'[198]

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194 Ibid., 9.

195 Ibid., 8.

196 Ibid., 28–29. In a later work, Al-Hassan rejected a claim made by Hafiz Wahba that the Shiites in al-Aḥsāʾ were an 'amalgamation of Arabs, Persians, Turks and others'. Al-Hassan, "The Role" (2006), 95.

197 Ḥamzah al-Ḥasan, *Al-shīʿah*, vol. 1 (1993), 27.

198 Ibid, 31.

Al-Hassan argued against discrimination of his sect based not only on 'their 'authenticity' (aṣālah) as an indigenous Arab and Muslim community in Saudi Arabia'.[199] He also emphasized their contribution to the national economy and complained about differential access to the oil wealth. He lamented that the Shiites of the Eastern Province were 'the only ones who saw nothing of the revenues, although they produce the main wealth of the country, and their land is the source of the riches'.[200] Even before the discovery of oil, he argued, 'the Shiite areas were the richest of the Arabian peninsula'. Hence, their occupation by the Ottomans in 1871 was one of the main reasons for the end of the second Saudi state.[201] With the appearance of oil, these regions became 'the heart of the kingdom that fills the other parts with life'. Al-Hassan also contended that without the Saudi oil workers, 65–70% of whom were Shiites, 'not a drop of oil would be exported'. He even went so far as to say that, 'without oil and the Shiite workers, the kingdom would not exist'.[202]

Although contribution histories proliferated among Shiite authors, particularistic tendencies did not disappear. The rise of such nationally oriented writings thus represented a pluralization rather than a complete transformation of Shiite historiography. Al-'Awwāmīyah, a town within the al-Qaṭīf oasis and the centre of an anti-Saudi rebellion in 1929/30,[203] formed the topic of a particularistic book published in 1995. Its author was Zakī al-Ṣāliḥ, an amateur historian and another former activist of the Islamic Revolution Organization. His book, al-'Awwāmīyah, celebrated the town's Shiite traditions without references to Wahhabi doctrines. It gave the biographies of many of the town's ulema, including the leader of the 1929/30 rebellion, Ayatollah Muḥammad ibn Nimr. Al-Ṣāliḥ praised al-Nimr as 'a famous scholar, mujtahid, and mujahid'.[204]

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[199] Al-Rasheed, "The Shiʿa" (1998), 134.

[200] Ḥamzah al-Ḥasan, Al-shīʿah, vol. 2 (1993), 306.

[201] Ibid., 235.

[202] Ibid., 287.

[203] Steinberg, Religion (2002), 503.

[204] Al-Ṣāliḥ, Al-ʿawwāmīyah (1995), 331.

Al-Ṣāliḥ added to the particularism of his history through the development of a perennialist argument. He stated that 'al-ʿAwwāmīyah is an ancient city with deep historical roots. At one time, it was connected to the history of al-Zārah, the famous historical city that was the capital of al-Khaṭṭ and Bahrain from pre-Islamic until early Islamic times.'[205] Subsequently, the author narrated a story of endurance, stating that, 'for parts of its history', al-ʿAwwāmīyah 'faced violent shakeups resulting from sectarian oppression, persecution, and injustice'.[206] The town, however, survived the coming and going of different rulers and conquerors. They included 'Emir Saud'—and not 'Imam' as in dynastic historiography—, who 'looted enormous wealth from al-ʿAwwāmīyah' in the early nineteenth century.[207]

Despite the accord of 1993, most Shiite historians continued to publish their books abroad and suffered from censorship in the kingdom. The accord itself did not provide any legal protection, but was mainly an exchange of a right to return for political quiescence. A member of the royal family stated in 1993 that 'there are no deals as such, but those who issued these publications will stop them, and they can come back home where they are welcome'.[208] Hamzah Al-Hassan thus returned to the kingdom, but his book on *The Shiites in Saudi Arabia* was banned.[209] In the following years, he applied for a licence to publish a historical journal with the title *al-Wāḥah*, 'The Oasis'. However, the Ministry of Information rejected this application, ostensibly because it seemed to focus on a specific region, namely the 'oasis' of al-Qaṭīf rather than the whole nation. Al-Hassan viewed this argument as hollow, because other periodicals, such as the newspapers *al-Riyāḍ* and *al-Madīnah al-Munawwarah*, also referred to specific places.[210]

Despite the continued repression of Shiite historiography, increasing connections between Saudi Arabia and the rest of the world also allowed Shiite scholars to continue their

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[205] Ibid., 11.

[206] Ibid., 46.

[207] Ibid., 35.

[208] Youssef Ibrahim, "Saudi Officials" (1993).

[209] Al-Rasheed, "The Shiʿa" (1998), 123.

[210] Interview, 8 November 2010.

historical production from abroad. In 1995, Al-Hassan and colleagues of his launched *al-Wāḥah* as a private non-profit journal. In 1998, the historian and activist left Saudi Arabia again for London, where he continued editing the journal.[211] The periodical focused on the history, heritage, culture, and literature of al-Qaṭīf especially and of the Persian Gulf coast generally. Although it took London as its base, it also engaged in inner-Saudi debates about nationalism and national unity. Its articles covered topics such as citizenship and rights, national unity and terrorism, and national responsibility. From 2007 onwards, the *al-Wāḥah*'s website provided open access to most of its contents. By 2011, more than 400 writers based in Saudi Arabia and abroad had contributed articles, and the journal's website had registered more than 50,000 visitors.[212]

While the articles in *al-Wāḥah* covered a diverse range of topics, arguments about the historical contributions of the Shiites to the nation also appeared in some of them. In 2004, for instance, Muḥammad al-Ḥirz, a member of the journal's editorial board, published an article on *The Role of the Ulema of al-Aḥsāʾ in Building National Unity*. Al-Ḥirz wrote that already in the early eighteenth century, the oasis had been a 'cradle' of both Shiite and Sunni scholars who had sought to 'build a peaceful society'. Mutual visits between Shiites and Sunnis contributed to 'calming sectarian strife', and Shiite ulema even copied works by Sunni scholars. This created an extraordinary 'harmony' between the sects that was noted by Arab travellers. A manifestation of this harmony was that by the end of the nineteenth century, the 'national spirit was strong' among all scholars of al-Aḥsāʾ, and 'the development of the country was the only obsession that drove them'. In his conclusion, al-Ḥirz lamented that this 'intimacy and tearing down of the sectarian wall' no longer existed after the Ottoman period. However, the writer proposed to revive it in the form of 'joint committees' of Shiite and Sunni scholars in order to 'preserve our national cohesion and unity'.[213]

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[211] Hamzah Al-Hassan, interview, 8 November 2010.

[212] Al-Mallāk, "Dawr" (2007).

[213] Al-Ḥirz, "Dawr" (2004).

Conclusions

As the example of *al-Wāḥah* makes clear, significant parts of Shiite historiography have joined the histories of towns, regions and tribes that have been affected by Saudi nation building and the nationalization of dynastic historiography since the 1970s. While particularistic notions of a community's historical independence continued in some works, many of these histories employed national frames and references. This did not mean, however, that the historiography of towns, tribes, and sects became subservient to dynastic histories. Many authors questioned the history of Saudi Arabia as an exclusive royal project and asserted their communities in national history. To that aim, they developed contribution arguments, asserting the contribution of different communities to national achievements.

The emergence of these contribution histories was largely driven by the state-financed expansion of education, from which even the former Bedouin benefitted. In addition, the General Presidency of Youth Welfare, as a state institution rooted in the provinces, came to support nationally oriented local historiography. Moreover, formal equality between Saudi citizens combined with differential access to the state's resources encouraged some authors to develop contribution arguments for the fulfilment of various aims. The authors aimed at ending sectarian discrimination, increasing a specific community's share of the oil wealth, gaining symbolic capital located in the tribal past, or establishing themselves as cultural brokers between local and national institutions. In many cases, assertions of the role of Shiite and tribal communities in national history was met with repression by the state. Nevertheless, increasing opportunities to study abroad, to co-operate with foreign scholars, and to publish abroad and online facilitated a plurality of narratives.

While the different assertions of various regions, towns, tribes and the Shiites in national history have so far had little success in changing official textbooks, in March 2011 Prince Salman ibn Abdulaziz indicated that future textbooks on the kingdom's history might become more inclusive. Amidst the 'Arab Spring', the chair of the King Abdulaziz Foundation

for Research and Archives gave a lecture at Medina's Islamic University. Perhaps seeking to stabilize the country during the regional turmoil, he made a concession to contribution arguments. He acknowledged that 'there is no family or tribe in this country whose fathers or grandfathers did not contribute effectively to the unification, building, and strengthening of the country'. Departing from dynastic exclusivism, he added that 'everybody in this nation is an inseparable part of the historical success of this blessed state and participated in building, unifying, and consolidating it'.[214]

Whether the King Abdulaziz Foundation for Research and Archives and the Ministry of Education will act according to Salman's statements and change textbook approaches towards the national past, is difficult to foresee. Even if they do, this would probably not be the end of the history of Saudi historiographical plurality. As the next chapter demonstrates, this plurality was not restricted to the contest between the histories of the Saudi dynasty and of the various towns, regions, sects, and tribes in the kingdom. The state-sponsored expansion of Saudi higher education in a globalizing context also shaped the emergence of another approach in the historiography of the kingdom in the 1970s and 1980s. This new school transcended the confines of both dynastic and subnational histories in order to develop new interpretations of broader changes in Saudi society, including the key processes of the rise of the Wahhabi mission and the Saudi state itself.

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[214] Wakālat al-Anbāʾ al-Suʿūdīyah, "Al-amīr" (2011).

6. Social and Economic Histories, 1970s to Present

In 2001, two years after the Saudi centennial celebrations had brought a flood of new historical publications, Dalal al-Harbi, a historian at Girls' College in Riyadh, published an editorial in the journal *al-Dirʿīyah*. The editorial's title asked, 'Does the History of the Kingdom Need More Studies?' Hardly surprising for a professional scholar, al-Harbi's answer was a definite yes. However, rather than calling for more texts on the contribution of this tribe or that region to the political and military 'unification' of the country, she supported the writing of distinct social and economic histories. According to her, previous studies concentrated mostly on what she called 'the political'. New studies, in contrast, should focus on 'the economic, intellectual, and social aspects', making use of 'the hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of documents preserved in official agencies'. In order to establish social and economic history in Saudi Arabia, al-Harbi hoped that 'departments of history at the kingdom's universities and colleges consolidate the concepts of the new studies'.[1]

As al-Harbi's call for more research suggests, social and economic histories formed a much smaller group of writings than dynastic, local and tribal histories did. To be sure, texts about Saudi kings or the history of Asir or Mecca often included descriptions of social and economic life. However, this chapter is mainly concerned with studies, which put social and economic factors at the very centre of their inquiry. Such distinct studies in social and economic history were few compared with the hundreds of studies on dynastic, local and tribal topics. Professors with significant contributions to social and economic history did not exceed a few dozen out of several hundred between the 1970s and the 2000s. One study classified 168 master and doctoral theses in modern and contemporary history that were examined at Saudi colleges and universities until 2000. It found that only twelve (7.1%) dealt with 'economic history', five (3%) with 'social history', and nine (5.4%) with 'cultural history'.

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[1] Dalāl al-Ḥarbī, "Iftitāḥīyah" (2001).

Still, sixty-two (36.9%) of the topics were situated within international relations and forty-six (27.4%) within 'political history'. The study also found that at least until 2000, departments of history in the kingdom offered no course entitled 'social history'.[2]

This chapter will discuss a number of distinct social and economic histories as well as studies in historical sociology produced by Saudis since the 1970s. Through their focus on wider social and economic change, these histories often differed from takfīrist dynastic texts and to a lesser extent from local and tribal writings. Dynastic as well as local writings frequently used 'formist' explanations, which consider 'the uniqueness of the different agents, agencies, and acts which make up the events' as central to one's inquiries.[3] Formist dynastic historians presented Ibn Abd al-Wahhab and Muhammad ibn Saud as 'great men', who suddenly appeared against the background of an ahistorical 'age of ignorance' or *jāhilīyah*. Other formist arguments focus on the unique contribution of a given tribe or family to national history. In contrast, social and economic historians as well as historical sociologists contested, and diverged from, takfīrist and contribution narratives by developing 'contextualist' arguments. These arguments sought to explain events, like the rise of the Wahhabi mission, by setting them 'within the "context" of their occurrence' and by revealing 'the specific relationships they bore to other events occurring in their circumambient historical space'.[4]

The chapter will explore the rise of social and economic histories as a group of writings that further broadened narrative plurality in Saudi historiography. I will pay special attention to an important way in which Saudis, supported by the state, participated in globalization: the Saudi student missions to the United States and other countries. In the first section of the chapter, I will explain these student missions and their influence on the production of social and economic historians and historical sociologists. In the second

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[2] Muʾnis, *Al-dirāsāt* (2003), 33, 99.

[3] White, *Metahistory* (1973), 14.

[4] Ibid., 18.

section, I will focus on the ways in which social and economic historians, many of whom had been part of student missions, sought to 'contextualize' the emergence of the Wahhabi mission and thus challenged takfīrism.

In the third section, I will focus on the work of historical sociologists and political scientists. Although not part of the 'historical profession' in a narrow sense, these social scientists often studied together with social and economic historians abroad and were supervised by social historians. In their research, they also built on the work by social and economic historians and engaged in discussions with them as well as with representatives of dynastic historiography. Moreover, they produced new interpretations of the history of the Saudi state that contradicted takfīrism and thus contributed to a wider plurality in narratives about the past.

From student missions to social history

Compared with other countries, social and economic history advanced rather slowly in Saudi historiography. Abdullah al-Askar (b. 1952), who would later publish a major book on the economic history of southern Najd, remembered that when he studied history at King Saud University (KSU) in Riyadh in the early 1970s, he 'only learned chronological history, names and dates, especially political history and a bit of military history'. History, according to him, 'was presented as separate from other humanities and social sciences' and 'as if it was the ideal truth'. Al-Askar's classmate Mohamed Al-Freih (b. 1950), who would write a PhD dissertation on social and economic history, was of a similar opinion. He recalled that his education at KSU had been 'monolithic' and had interpreted history 'in political and religious terms'.[5]

A political climate opposed to communism, socialism, and materialism curbed the development of social and economic history in Saudi Arabia. Al-Freih remembered that during his studies at King Saud University, 'socio-economics had the touch of Marxism' and

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[5] Al-ʿAskar, "Kitābātī al-tārīkhīyah" (7 February 2011), 2–3. Mohamed Al-Freih, interview, 4 November 2009.

was therefore 'avoided'.[6] Anti-communism was present even before World War II, and

alleged communist writings suffered from censorship.[7] This tendency received further

strengthening during the Arab Cold War in the 1950s and 1960s, in which the Saudi

government championed 'Islam' against what it perceived as 'atheist' socialism. In 1975,

Ḥasan Āl al-Shaykh, the minister of higher education and chair of the King Abdulaziz

Foundation for Research and Archives expressed this point clearly. In an interview with the

foundation's journal *al-Dārah* in 1975, he stated that 'Muslim solidarity is construction, [while]

communism [is] destruction'.[8] In 1982, the Saudi government also decreed a charter that

required the Saudi media to resist 'atheist tendencies' and 'materialist philosophies'.[9]

Between the 1950s and 1970s, the Saudi government brought many members of the

Muslim Brotherhood and other Sunni religious groups into the country. Many of these men

had suffered from persecution in the socialist Arab republics, especially Nasser's Egypt. In

its confrontation with socialism, the government also gave these men positions in education,

administration as well as other sectors. This affected Saudi curricula, including history.

Mohammad Atar, in a study of several Saudi history textbooks from 1985 to 1988, found that

these books 'reflect the ideological assumptions of the Muslim Brotherhood, to the degree

one might suspect the texts were written by them'.[10] In particular, the books advocated belief

in the Muslim umma rather than an Arab nation.[11]

The influence of the Muslim Brotherhood combined with that of the Wahhabi

establishment also led to a proliferation of Islamic subjects in history courses at Saudi

universities. This happened at the expense of social and economic history and in opposition

to materialist interpretations. The proliferation was particularly strong at Imam Muhammad

ibn Saud Islamic University (Imam University). The university's director from 1976 to

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[6] Mohamed Al-Freih, interview, 4 November 2009.

[7] ʿAbd al-Jabbār, *Al-tayyārāt* (2008), 201.

[8] Al-Fātiḥ and Āl al-Shaykh, "Ḥiwār" (1975), 60.

[9] Ende, "Religion" (1982), 531.

[10] Atar, "Quest" (1988), 161.

[11] Ibid., 163.

1993/94, ʿAbd Allāh al-Turkī, was himself a former Muslim brother.[12] Out of eighty-four credit hours of the history undergraduate curriculum in 1981, eighteen (about 21 per cent) were reserved for religious subjects. They included the history of the prophets and the life (*sīrah*) of Muhammad as well as several courses that were compulsory for students across all disciplines: Hadith, Koranic exegesis (*tafsīr*), and Islamic culture. In the 1987 curriculum, two further courses were introduced: monotheism (*tawḥīd*) and principles of Islamic education. The share of essentially theological subjects had slightly increased to forty-three (about 22.6 per cent) out of 194. Social and economic history, in contrast, was virtually absent from these curricula.[13]

Despite opposition to materialism, however, the large social and economic transformations that accompanied the expansion of the oil industry after World War II provided a fertile ground for historical studies going beyond political and religious events. Not only did many Saudis experience the development of transport, urbanization, the building of state institutions and the emergence of the nuclear family in their own lives over the twentieth century. Through increasing mobility as well as access to national and international media, they recognized that these transformations were not peculiar to their local communities but were wider social phenomena. New ideologies, like Arab nationalism, also affected Saudi history students in the 1960s and 1970s. They created in Mohamed Al-Freih 'the feeling that there was something missing' in the histories taught at Saudi schools and universities at the time.[14]

However, the main unintended driver of the emergence of social and economic histories was the state-financed growth of a historical profession in the kingdom in combination with the rise of development policies. Beginning in the 1970s, the government

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[12] Lacroix, *Les islamistes* (2010), 55. Also King Abdulaziz University introduced compulsory courses in Islamic culture and sought to create an 'Islamically-oriented conception of knowledge' in the late 1970s. Faheem, "Higher Education" (1982), 199.

[13] Jāmiʿat al-Imām Muḥammad ibn Suʿūd al-Islāmīyah, *Dalīl jāmiʿat al-imām* (1981); *Dalīl al-dirāsāt* (1981); *Dalīl jāmiʿat al-imām* (1987).

[14] Mohamed Al-Freih, interview, 4 November 2009.

supported some writings on social and economic change, especially when they conceived social development as a royal 'achievement'. This was underpinned by the regime's adoption in the 1960s of an ideology of development as a second pillar of its legitimacy alongside Islam.[15] In 1974, the King Abdulaziz Foundation for Research and Archives organized the King Faisal Prize for historical studies in three areas, one being 'social reform during King Abdulaziz's reign'.[16] Three years later, the foundation organized a competition for the King Abdulaziz Prize for University Students. It awarded six thousand riyals (about 1600 US dollars) to the best student papers about Abdulaziz's reign in five categories, including agriculture and industry and trade.[17]

One of the first recipients of state support for a study in social history was ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ Abū ʿAlīyah, a Jordanian who contributed to building up Imam University's history department. He won the foundation's King Faisal Prize in 1974 in the area of social reform. Encouraged by Albert Hourani (1915–93) and Muhsin Mahdi (1926–2007), two historians of the Middle East with whom he stayed as a visiting researcher at Harvard University, Abū ʿAlīyah authored one of the first monographs on social change in modern Saudi Arabia. It was entitled *Social Reform during the Reign of King Abdulaziz*. Relying on archival documents in London, Washington and Istanbul, Abū ʿAlīyah analysed the settlement of the Bedouin under Abdulaziz and the changes in economic and social life following the discovery of oil. The historian distanced himself somewhat from exclusivist dynastic historiography. Although he frequently referred to King Abdulaziz, he stated that he sought to produce a study in which 'the entire society is the hero of the story'. Yet, the King Abdulaziz Foundation for Research and Archives still published the book in 1976 at the expense of the Ministry of Higher Education.[18]

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[15] Jones, *Desert Kingdom* (2010), 83.

[16] Dārat al-Malik ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, *Dalīl* (1981), 47.

[17] Ibid., 49–50.

[18] Abū ʿAlīyah, *Al-iṣlāḥ* (1976).

More important than prizes to the emergence of social and economic history, however, was another part of the state-sponsored growth of the indigenous historical profession: the student missions to foreign countries. These missions aimed at educating Saudi citizens so that they could contribute to national development and replace foreigners as officials and professors in history as well as other disciplines. The first generation of Saudi professional historians and archaeologists, including Abdul-Aziz Khowaiter, ʿAbd Allāh al-ʿUthaymīn and Abd al-Rahman al-Ansary, gained their doctorates mainly from British universities in the 1960s and 1970s. Thereafter, the United States became the favourite destination for many of their Saudi students. This shift not only reflected the increasing importance of Saudi–American relations but also a growing consciousness of American leadership in many disciplines after World War II. Financed by the increased revenues in the 1970s, the number of Saudi students in the United States across all disciplines soared from 851 in the summer of 1970 to some 11,000 by late 1979.[19] In history alone, thirty-six Saudis completed doctoral dissertations at American universities between 1970 and 1990.[20]

At King Saud University in particular, members of the second generation of graduates were encouraged to use the new opportunities for state-financed studies in the United States. The professor of archaeology Abd al-Rahman Al-Ansary recalled that he and his colleagues at the university's history department supported their students in their applications to American research universities. They put 'great hopes' especially in the return of Mohamed Al-Freih and a few other students admitted to the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA).[21] Besides professorial recommendations, the diffusion of positive ideas about Western academia also made it attractive for Saudis to apply to universities in the United States. One of the Saudi students affected by this diffusion of ideas was Abdullah Al-Subaiy, who went on to do postgraduate studies at Michigan State University after

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[19] Hertog, *Princes* (2010), 105.

[20] Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission to the U.S.A., *Directory* (2006), 182–84.

[21] Abd al-Rahman al-Ansary, interview, 10 February 2010.

completing a BA in history at King Saud University in 1970. Al-Subaiy remembered that reading magazines about life in the US and the UK and the tales by fellow Saudis, who had returned from abroad, created aspirations. 'We had a dream. We wanted to see the foreign universities, Oxford, Cambridge, Stanford, Michigan.'[22]

Members of the religious establishment voiced concern over the influence of Western ways of life on Saudis studying in America. Yet, the government exerted relatively little control over these students, which it sent abroad in order to contribute to the nation's 'development'. In his interview in 1975, Ḥasan Āl al-Shaykh, the minister responsible for the student missions, was asked about what he did in order to 'prevent that our young people, whom we have sent abroad, get lost in the abyss of Western currents'. He replied that Saudi students were encouraged to 'join Islamic societies in the countries in which they pursue their studies' and that 'some preachers and enlightened ulema' held workshops for them abroad. In addition, the government sought to provide foreign scholarships only to students who had completed their undergraduate studies in the kingdom.[23] In 1982, Imam University also initiated a four-week preparatory programme that every scholarship holder had to pass. The programme comprised 'all that one is supposedly either to watch out or to look for while he is out of the country'. It also included the advice to 'associate only with designated Islamic organizations, either in Europe or in the United States'.[24]

Despite governmental attempts at religious 'guidance', however, a number of Saudi students exposed themselves to social and political debates on US campuses and in the media. This fostered an interest in social history.[25] The students included graduates predominantly from King Saud University, like Abdullah al-Askar, who was the first of a group of Saudi history students at UCLA in the 1970s and 1980s.[26] During his time at UCLA,

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[22] Abdullah Al-Subaiy, interview, 22 October 2009.

[23] Al-Fātiḥ and Āl al-Shaykh, "Ḥiwār" (1975), 58–59.

[24] Al-Sultan, "Class Structure" (1988), 258.

[25] Interviews with several Saudi historians in 2009 and 2010.

[26] Michael Morony, interview, 17 May 2011.

he followed political analyses, subscribed to the *Washington Post* and the *Los Angeles Times*, read *Time* and *Newsweek*, and watched televised discussions in the programmes *60 Minutes*, *Meet the Press*, and *Face the Nation*. In addition, he immersed himself in American cultural life, visiting theatres, cinemas, forums, and conferences.[27] Abdulrahman Al-Shamlan, another KSU graduate who had gained a PhD from the University of Michigan, recalled that 'political activity, demonstrations, and radicals' had influenced him and other Saudi students while they had lived on US campuses.[28]

Besides the impact of social and political movements and discussions, students perceived that they could think more critically and access new approaches at American universities. After al-Askar had arrived at UCLA, he 'learned about different kinds of histories, like religious history, social history, and economic history'. The 'best thing' he learned, however, was that he 'should have an open mind and should not engage in questions of history without thinking, analysis, and scepticism'.[29] Mohamed Al-Freih was more sober in his memories about California. He recalled that the teaching at King Saud University and at UCLA had been 'the same basically'. 'The professor lectured, the students took notes and left after the lesson.' However, Al-Freih also observed that at Saudi universities, there was 'only one school, only one interpretation of history'. In the US, in contrast, 'there are several schools of thought, and you are intellectually free'.[30] Similarly, Al-Subaiy stated that many Saudi students gained an 'open mind' by studying abroad, although this partly depended on their 'personality'.[31]

That a few dozen Saudi students learned about social and economic history during their studies in UCLA and other American universities resulted not only from the Saudi student missions. In a global historical juncture, it was also due to the rise of social and

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[27] Al-ʿAskar, "Kitābātī al-tārīkhīyah 2" (25 March 2011), 1.

[28] Abdulrahman Al-Shamlan, interview, 8 October 2009.

[29] Al-ʿAskar, "Kitābātī al-tārīkhīyah" (7 February 2011), 3.

[30] Mohamed Al-Freih, interview, 4 November 2009.

[31] Abdullah Al-Subaiy, interview, 22 October 2009.

economic approaches in Western studies of the Middle East. In the first half of the twentieth century, scholars of Europe had given increased attention to social and economic history. They founded specialized journals like *Vierteljahrschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte* in Germany in 1903 and *Annales d'histoire économique et sociale* (*Annales*) in France in 1929.[32] After World War II, this interest also grew among Middle East historians. This growth partly resulted from unprecedented access to the oriental records of European and Ottoman governments and post-war social debates and movements.[33] In 1958, the first specialized periodical emerged under the title *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* (*JESHO*).

In the United States, several new centres in Middle Eastern studies promoted an affinity between historical, social and economic approaches after World War II. In contrast to earlier philologically based studies of the region, the new area studies centres were grounded in the social sciences. Reflecting increased American interests in non-Western regions during the Cold War, they were conceived to give rise to interdisciplinary expertise that would be useful to policy makers and companies. In the 1940s and 1950s, Princeton, Harvard and UCLA established new centres of Middle Eastern Studies.[34]

The founding director of the Near Eastern Center at the University of California, Los Angeles, was Gustave von Grunebaum (1909–72). He was one of the founders of *JESHO* and made his center at UCLA a hub for research in Middle Eastern social and economic history. An Austrian orientalist who had migrated to the United States in 1938, von Grunebaum had previously taught Arabic at the University of Chicago.[35] There he became influenced by cultural anthropology and historical scholarship that had in turn been shaped by the French *Annales* School.[36] In 1957, UCLA appointed von Grunebaum as Professor of

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[32] Iggers, "Introduction" (1979), 5.

[33] Bayly, "The Orient" (2009), 113.

[34] Lockman, *Contending Visions* (2004), 123.

[35] Rosenthal, "In Memoriam" (1973), 355.

[36] Gallagher, *Approaches* (1994), 7.

Near Eastern History and director of the Near Eastern Center. Considering himself as a 'social scientist' despite his philological training, von Grunebaum attracted people with 'new perspectives' on the Middle East.[37]

At UCLA, a number of Saudi students subsequently developed an interest in social and economic history. One of the first was the aforementioned Abdullah al-Askar, who was from southern Najd. Following a bachelor's degree from KSU in 1974, he went on to pursue postgraduate studies at UCLA. The chair of his doctoral committee was Michael Morony (b. 1939), one of von Grunebaum's former students and a young social and economic historian of the Middle East.[38] Besides him, a number of social scientists fostered al-Askar's interest in social history in the United States. They included Georges Sabagh (1920–2003), a sociologist at UCLA, and Anouar Abdel-Malek (b. 1924), an Egyptian Marxist whom al-Askar 'met many times'.[39] Abdel-Malek probably influenced al-Askar through his arguments for the replacement of the 'paradigms and methods of orientalism' by those of disciplines such as 'history, sociology, anthropology, and political science'.[40] The Saudi historian developed his interest in the social sciences further through a friendship with Dale Eickelman, who worked on eastern Arabia in the 1970s and 1980s.[41]

At UCLA, al-Askar produced one of the first major works by a Saudi in social and economic history. This was a doctoral dissertation on al-Yamāmah or southern Najd entitled 'Regional Politics, a Case Study: Al-Yamama in the 6th and 7th Centuries'. He described the topic as a 'natural' choice, as he came from the region and found that little research had been undertaken on its history during the period.[42] His dissertation argued that by virtue of its geography, al-Yamāmah formed an economic unit, which produced a 'constant regional feeling'. This regional feeling formed the basis of a number of early Islamic conflicts between

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[37] Michael Morony, interview, 17 May 2011.

[38] Al-ʿAskar, "Kitābātī al-tārīkhīyah" (7 February 2011), 3.

[39] Al-ʿAskar, "Kitābātī al-tārīkhīyah 2" (25 March 2011), 1.

[40] Gallagher, *Approaches* (1994), 11.

[41] Al-ʿAskar, "Kitābātī al-tārīkhīyah 2" (25 March 2011), 1.

[42] Michael Morony, interview, 17 May 2011.

the central Arabian region and neighbouring powers. These conflicts were associated with

Musaylimah—the 'false prophet'—, the Riddah (apostasy) wars following Muhammad's

death, and the Khārijī rebellion. In contrast to other scholars who interpreted these wars as

originating in sectarian or tribal disputes, al-Askar viewed them as struggles by the Yamāmīs

for autonomy and independence. He wrote that this regional feeling appeared to be

'religious', 'sectarian', or 'tribal'. Yet, in every case, it was 'a matter of the local population in

al-Yamama struggling to advance the economic interests of their region'.[43]

While the main part of al-Askar's analysis was concerned with Arabia in the sixth and

seventh centuries, his findings also led him to offer one of the first explanations of the

emergence of the Wahhabi mission based on economic factors. In the conclusion to

'Regional Politics', he speculated about the persistence of an economically driven central

Arabian regionalism up to the modern era. Al-Askar claimed that it 'is no exaggeration to say

that even the modern Wahhabi movement drew on regional feeling. That is Yamami regional

feeling persisted well into the nineteenth century.'[44]

While al-Askar's studies at UCLA fostered his interest in social and economic history,

they also familiarized him with previous American studies that were decisive for the

development of his arguments about struggles for autonomy and the continuation of regional

feeling over centuries. In 1967, al-Askar's friend Dale Eickelman had already published an

article in the *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*. Eickelman suggested

that the resistance of the Banū Ḥanīfah under Musaylimah to Islam had served to 'maintain

or strengthen their independence by supporting a rival prophet of their own'.[45] In another

article referred to by al-Askar,[46] the American social historian Roy Mottahedeh (b. 1940) had

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[43] Al-Askar, "Regional Politics" (1985), 214.

[44] Ibid., 220

[45] Eickelman, "Musaylima" (1967), 50.

[46] Al-Askar, "Regional Politics" (1985), 244.

attested to an 'Iranian group feeling in the tenth and eleventh centuries'. This group feeling

had been 'strong enough to survive a long succession of non-Iranian masters'.[47]

After his return to the kingdom in the mid-1980s, al-Askar did not publish his thesis for

about seventeen years, mainly because it was marked by 'sensitivity unbearable to the

censor'.[48] This sensitivity resulted from his challenge to the Islamic historiographic tradition.

Al-Askar provided an economic explanation for central Arabian opposition to the early

Islamic community, as in the form of Musaylimah, 'without considering the interpretations of

the clerics'. Moreover, al-Askar conceived a long-lasting conflict between al-Yamāmah (later

Najd) and the Hejaz based on regionalist struggles for autonomy.[49] This conception

contradicted not only the traditional view of early Islamic history, but also the national unity

that the Saudi government sought to promote. In addition, King Saud University did not

generally encourage al-Askar and his colleagues to publish their dissertations after their

return from the US. The university administrators considered graduate research mainly as

training in methodology and expected al-Askar and his colleagues to produce new research

to gain promotion.[50]

While the sensitivity surrounding his arguments remained, however, al-Askar was able

to make use of the commitment of the King Abdulaziz Foundation for Research and Archives

to supporting historical research generally and achieved a partial victory over censorship in

the 2000s. He persuaded the foundation to include his thesis in a scheme to publish the

works of Saudi historians in English. This scheme sought to 'expose' these works to

international audiences.[51] In 2002, the foundation issued al-Askar's dissertation in

association with the British Ithaca Press. However, because of its 'sensitivity'—as al-Askar

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[47] Mottahedeh, "The Shu'ûbîyah" (1976), 182.

[48] Abdullah al-Askar, e-mail to me on 13 April 2011. Al-Askar did however publish a few related articles, including al-'Askar, "Hijrat banī ḥanīfah" (1992).

[49] Abdullah al-Askar, e-mail to me on 14 April 2011.

[50] Michael Morony, interview, 17 May 2011.

[51] Fahd al-Semmari, interview, 25 October 2011. The scheme also included al-Semmari, *A History* (2010) and al-'Uthaymīn, *Muḥammad* (2009).

saw it—, it was published only in English.[52] The words 'Regional Politics', which contradicted

the notion of national unity, were also removed from the new, uncontroversial, title: *al-*

Yamama in the Early Islamic Era.[53]

After governmental scholarships had incidentally facilitated controversial new studies

on Arabian history, such as al-Askar's, state funding for academic research generally, and

thus also for social and economic history, declined in the 1980s and 1990s. The decline in

funding occurred in the context of the plummeting of Saudi oil revenues from 108 billion

dollars in 1981 to 18 billion in 1988 because of falling prices.[54] In the 1990s, oil prices

remained volatile, and Saudi Arabia accumulated foreign debts in the course of the Gulf war.

Declining governmental revenues translated into stagnating university budgets. In 1984, for

instance, KSU had an annual budget of about 4.9 billion riyals (about 1.4 billion in 2009

dollars[55]). In the financial year 1991, the effective spending of the university was 1.9 billion

riyals (about 709 million dollars). This amount only slowly increased to about two billion

riyals (about 796 million dollars) in the financial year 1995.[56] Still in 2005, it was only slightly

higher at about three billion riyals (about 942 million dollars).[57] As a result, Saudi universities

did not increase the salaries of faculty members between 1981 and 2007 and thus exposed

them to high inflation. 9650 riyals (about 2500 dollars) per month remained the starting

salary for a Saudi assistant professor and 18,875 riyals (about 5000 dollars) the salary of a

full professor.[58]

The decline in funding affected historical writing generally, but especially studies in

social and economic history. These academic studies benefitted to a smaller extent than

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[52] Abdullah al-Askar, e-mail to me, 14 April 2011. Fahd al-Semmari, however, claimed that the foundation had offered al-Askar to publish his dissertation in Arabic. Interview, 25 October 2011.

[53] Al-Askar, *al-Yamama* (2002).

[54] Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission* (2006), 158.

[55] Following the implied purchasing power parity conversion rate according to International Monetary Fund, "Report" (2009).

[56] Jāmiʿat al-Malik Suʿūd, *Mīzānīyat al-jāmiʿah* (1984); *Bayānāt* (1996), 16.

[57] Jāmiʿat al-Malik Suʿūd, *Al-taqrīr* (2006), 283.

[58] Jāmiʿat al-Imām Muḥammad ibn Suʿūd al-Islāmīyah, *Al-lāʾiḥah* [1983]. Jāmiʿat al-Malik Suʿūd, *Al-murshid* (1984); *Dalīl* (1992). Interviews with several Saudi historians in 2009 and 2010.

dynastic histories from state extravagance on jubilees, like the centenary in 1999.[59] They

also attracted fewer self-funded amateurs than local and tribal histories and were thus more

exposed to budget cuts at universities. More importantly, budget cuts in the 1980s and

1990s hit social history in the kingdom through a decline in foreign scholarships. Hence, the

first generation of Saudi social historians, including al-Askar, found it difficult to reproduce by

sending their own students to foreign institutions. Between 1981 and 2007, history

departments hired hardly any new graduate assistants, who would have held the entry

position for an academic career, and awarded hardly any new scholarships for studies

abroad.[60] Between 1990 and 2005, only one Saudi student completed a PhD in history at an

American university.[61]

Despite financial pressure, however, a number of Saudis continued to undertake

research in social history after their return from studies abroad in the 1980s. They included

Abdullah Al-Subaiy, the graduate of King Saud University who went on to study at Michigan

State University. Having grown up and worked in al-Aḥsāʾ between the 1940s and the

1960s, he presumably was conscious of the large social changes affecting the region with

the establishment of the oil industry.[62] However, he only started studying them

systematically after he had gained his PhD in 1980 and a colleague at a conference on the

Middle East had pointed out the importance of the topic to him.[63] While working as assistant

professor at King Saud University and deputy educational attaché at the Saudi embassy in

Washington between 1980 and 1988, Al-Subaiy produced a seminal trilogy on change in the

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[59] Interviews with several Saudi historians in 2009 and 2010.

[60] Interviews with several Saudi historians in 2009 and 2010. Abd al-Rahman al-Ansary, remembered that KSU's history department was only allowed to hire new Saudi assistants if foreign faculty members were made redundant at the same time. This proved impossible, however, because new assistants were not able to teach until they had completed postgraduate studies abroad. Interview, 10 February 2010.

[61] Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission to the U.S.A., *Directory* (2006), 182–84.

[62] ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Ḥuqayl, *Muʿjam* (1993), 68. Al-Subaiy, "Curriculum" (2010), 1.

[63] Abdullah Al-Subaiy, interview, 22 October 2009.

Eastern Province 1933–60. The trilogy included the titles *The Discovery of Oil and Its Influence on Social Life* and *The Discovery of Oil and Its Influence on Economic Life*.[64]

While the state sponsored his research through scholarships and employment, Al-Subaiy, like al-Askar, also turned against the prevailing historiography. In *The Discovery of Oil and Its Influence on Social Life*, he complained that 'historians, who set out to write the history of Saudi Arabia or parts of it, have confined themselves to traditional history writing without attempting to embark upon social historiography'.[65] In his work on oil and economic life, he strengthened his criticism of 'traditional historiography'. This genre, according to him, did not 'analyse social, economic, and cultural aspects, and produce a comprehensive historical study presenting various historical, environmental, and social information'. Traditional historiography thus failed to 'put a great economic event' like the discovery of oil 'in its wider perspective'.[66]

Al-Subaiy's social and economic perspective also led him to distance himself from dynastic historiography. Instead of focusing on political and military events relating to Saudi kings, such as Abdulaziz's capture of Riyadh in 1902, he put the production of oil at the centre of national history. Al-Subaiy contended that the discovery of oil 'was probably among the biggest events, which this century has witnessed in Arabia or even in the whole world'. He merely conceded to the unification narrative that 'perhaps', this event was 'only surpassed in importance for the modern history of the country by the unification of the kingdom itself'.[67]

Al-Subaiy's social and economic histories of the Eastern Province also departed from many particularistic and contribution histories of towns and regions. He neither expressed the historical independence of al-Aḥsāʾ from the Al Saud nor singled out its contribution to national achievements. Instead, he treated the Eastern Province as a case study for a

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[64] Al-Subayʿī, *Iktishāf* (1987); *Iktishāf* (1989). The third book of the trilogy is al-Subayʿī, *Al-ḥayāt* (1989).

[65] Al-Subayʿī, *Iktishāf* (1987), 17.

[66] Al-Subayʿī, *Iktishāf* (1989), 17.

[67] Ibid., 17–18.

'theory of social change'.[68] According to him, his results 'can be—unreservedly—generalized regarding other regions, in which the exploration of oil was conceded to other companies later.' Al-Subaiy selected the Eastern Province primarily because it was the location in which oil had first been discovered. 'Its first effects, particularly in social terms, became clearly visible there before they did so in the other regions of the country.'[69]

Besides continuing to undertake social and economic research after their return to the kingdom, some Saudi historians who were partly trained abroad also called for the strengthening of social and economic history in the university curricula. They included Ghithan Jrais, who had completed a PhD on the social and economic history of the Hejaz at the University of Manchester in 1989.[70] In 1997, Jrais published an article entitled 'An Opinion about the Teaching of History at University'. He complained that 'most of what we taught and teach is history related to political personalities and military leaders.' He urged his colleagues instead to teach history according to 'the modern view'. This view 'is not restricted to political history but comprises all aspects of society and the factors affecting it, whether cultural, social, economic, or spiritual, et cetera'. He also sought to contextualize individuals within their societies and argued for the primacy of the 'people' in history, stating that 'peoples are the ones, who made and make history.' According to him, 'the individual or hero is the product of his society'. Such an individual appears 'in response to social needs, be they religious, political, economic or military'.[71]

The activities by Jrais, Al-Subaiy, al-Askar and other Saudi social historians trained at Saudi, American and British universities contributed to a growing acceptance of social and economic studies produced in the kingdom in the 1990s and 2000s. The King Abdulaziz Foundation for Research and Archives even published a few dissertations in social history

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[68] Al-Subayʿī, *Iktishāf* (1987), 48.

[69] Ibid., 17.

[70] Jrais, "The Social" (1989).

[71] Ibn Jurays, *Buḥūth* (1997), 9. Earlier versions of the article were published in the journal, *al-Manhal*, in 1993 and the magazine, *al-Qāfilah*, in 1994.

produced inside the kingdom. They included a book on *Social and Economic Life in the Second Saudi State, 1824–91* by Ḥiṣṣah al-Zahrānī. The book was based on an MA thesis completed at the Girls' College of Education in Riyadh in 1999.[72] Al-Zahrānī, like her colleagues, promoted social and economic history, stating that 'the study of society with its customs, traditions, transformations and economic developments is important for understanding the history of nations and states'.[73]

Al-Zahrānī relied on documents in the King Abdulaziz Foundation for Research and Archives and other archives as well as foreign sources, such as William Palgrave's *Narrative of a Year's Journey through Central and Eastern Arabia (1862–63)*. On that basis, she argued that the geographical and economic environment greatly influenced Najdi traditions and customs. Contact with India, for instance, affected popular games and arts in al-Aḥsāʾ and al-Qaṭīf, while women's clothes in Ḥāʾil displayed northern Arabia's proximity to Syria. However, al-Zahrānī also considered religious factors. She concluded that Islamic doctrines shaped not only celebrations, such as such as Eid ul-Fitr and Eid ul-Adha. Through zakat, alms and endowments, they were also crucial for social solidarity.[74]

<div align="center">Contextualizing the Wahhabi mission</div>

A number of Saudi social and economic historians educated in the United States also challenged takfīrist narratives of dynastic historiography. In particular, they developed a 'contextualist' approach towards the emergence of the Wahhabi mission in the eighteenth century. One of the first Saudi historians using this approach was Uwaidah Al Juhany, another King Saud University graduate who turned to social history during his state-sponsored studies in the United States. After awarding him a BA in history and English in 1973, KSU provided him with a scholarship to undertake graduate research. At the University of Washington, Al Juhany's initial dissertation topic was eighteenth-century

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[72] Ḥiṣṣah al-Zahrānī, *Al-ḥayāt* (2004), 8.

[73] Ibid., 9.

[74] Ibid., 761–63.

Islamic movements. This fitted the pan-Islamic orientations of the Saudi government in the 1960s and 1970s.[75] However, in the course of his studies under the social and economic historian of the Middle East Jere Bacharach (b. 1938), Al Juhany came to understand the Wahhabi mission as a social rather than religious movement.[76] He thus set out to investigate its background beyond the accounts of pre-Wahhabi heresies and *jāhilīyah* that had characterized many dynastic histories since the production of Ibn Ghannām's chronicle.

Through his state-sponsored studies in the United States, Al Juhany also read two articles on eighteenth-century Arabia by the American historian of Islam John Voll, which influenced his arguments. The two articles contextualized Ibn Abd al-Wahhab and challenged the notion that his teachings had been preceded by an 'age of ignorance'.[77] In the first article, from 1975, Voll departed from previous studies that had mainly demonstrated how the Wahhabis influenced other revivalist movements. Instead, he studied the background out of which the Wahhabi mission grew. He argued that a circle of scholars influenced Ibn Abd al-Wahhab during his studies in Medina.[78] In his second article, from 1980, Voll contended that the eighteenth century in Islamic history was not a 'dark age of ignorance and intellectual stagnation'. It was, in fact, 'a period of major developments in the key aspects of the Islamic tradition'.[79]

While Al Juhany received inspiration on his topic and argument in the United States, he still depended on Saudi sources for his inquiry into the pre-Wahhabi past. This made his research a transnational enterprise rather than a project carried out in the West and based on Western literature alone. One of his most important sources was a chronicle by ʿAbd Allāh ibn Muḥammad al-Bassām (1851–1927), a Najdi scholar and merchant. It was entitled

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[75] Similarly, Abdulrahman Al-Shamlan at King Saud University wanted to study 'modern Arab history' in the early 1970s. The dean, however, advised him to call his topic 'modern Muslim history … for the government, for the university'. Interview, 28 October 2009.

[76] Uwaidah Al Juhany, interview, 13 February 2010.

[77] Al Juhany, *Najd* (2002), 199–200.

[78] Voll, "Muḥammad" (1975), 38–39.

[79] Voll, "Hadith" (1980), 264.

The Masterpiece of the One Longing for the History of Najd, the Hejaz and Iraq. Al-Bassām, who had had travelled to India, Iraq, Egypt and the Hejaz, had a more cosmopolitan outlook than the chroniclers of the Ibn Ghannām School. His chronicle was one of the first histories of Najd to include European events, like the invention of the printing press and the discovery of electricity.[80] Rather than setting Ibn Abd al-Wahhab against an ahistorical background, al-Bassām provided his readers with an account of numerous Arabian events since the fifteenth century that were absent from other Najdi works.[81] The text itself reached Al Juhany after a transnational journey. A Palestinian teacher copied the manuscript in the town of ʿUnayzah in 1956 after having borrowed it from the judge ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Bassām. A professor at the University of Haifa then acquired this copy, from where the text made its way to Canada and finally to Al Juhany's supervisor Jere Bacharach.[82]

Through his dependency on Saudi primary and secondary sources, two dynastic historians incidentally facilitated Al Juhany's inquiry into the social and economic background of the Wahhabi mission. Of special significance was the article 'Najd from the Tenth/Sixteenth Century until the Rise of Sheikh Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb'. ʿAbd Allāh al-ʿUthaymīn had published it in four parts between 1975 and 1978. This pioneering article on pre-Wahhabi Najd had already caused a controversy by questioning the religious descriptions by Ibn Ghannām and Ibn Bishr. It thus formed a major reference for Al Juhany.[83] Ironically, ʿAbd Allāh al-Shibl of Imam University, one of the proponents of the idea of the pre-Wahhabi *jāhilīyah*, provided the graduate student with another crucial source for a rejection of this idea. Out of professional courtesy, he lent the student a private manuscript that included accounts by the pre-Wahhabi Najdi historians Ibn Yūsuf, Ibn Rabīʿah, al-

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[80] Muḥammad al-Thunayyān, "Al-muʾarrikh" (1989). ʿAbd Allāh ibn Muḥammad al-Bassām, *Tuḥfat al-mushtāq* (2000).

[81] Al-Juhany, "The History" (1983), 21.

[82] Uwaidah Al Juhany, personal communication in Riyadh, 7 January 2010. Mutawa, "The Ulama" (1989), 19, mentions that the teacher was Egyptian.

[83] Al-Juhany, "The History" (1983), 308. Decades later, al-ʿUthaymīn himself described his article as 'the vanguard of academic studies' on pre-Wahhabi Najd, including Al Juhany's. Al-ʿUthaymīn, *Najd qubayla ẓuhūr* (2010), 13.

Manqūr, and Ibn ʿAbbbād. These chronicles did not draw an image of an 'age of ignorance'. On the contrary, they gave the impression of a vivid intellectual life by recording the activities of numerous religious scholars.[84]

In addition to Najdi chronicles not belonging to the Ibn Ghannām School, biographies of central Arabian scholars led Al Juhany to conceive the rise of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab in a context in which Islam and religious learning were present. One of the social historian's main sources was *The Rain Clouds over the Tombs of the Ḥanbalīs* by Muḥammad ibn Ḥumayd (1820/21–78), a Ḥanbalī mufti of Mecca and opponent of the Wahhabi mission. *The Rain Clouds* included biographies of many pre-Wahhabi Najdi scholars while excluding Ibn Abd al-Wahhab and his descendants. Using state-provided academic infrastructure, Al Juhany accessed a manuscript of *The Rain Clouds* in the library of King Saud University.[85] Moreover, the graduate student relied on *The Ulema of Najd during Six Centuries*, an anthology published in 1978 by the judge ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Bassām. This three-volume work was the most comprehensive collection of biographies of Najdi scholars hitherto.[86] Besides covering both Wahhabi scholars and their enemies, al-Bassām included the biographies of 109 pre-Wahhabi scholars, drawing on manuscripts in the possession of his family.[87] He found that before Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, the four Sunni legal schools 'were all present in Najd, while the most widespread school was the Ḥanbalī school'.[88]

The accounts of pre-Wahhabi Najd by Ibn Ḥumayd and the Bassām family provided Al Juhany and subsequently other social historians with material for a contextualist explanation of the Wahhabi mission as resulting from a growth of religious learning rather than an 'age of ignorance'. Al Juhany offered this explanation in his 1983 doctoral dissertation entitled 'The History of Najd Prior to the Wahhābīs: A Study of Social, Political and Religious Conditions

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[84] Al-Juhany, "The History" (1983), x, 302.

[85] Ibid., 40. Facilitating Al Juhany's endeavour, Hamad Al-Jasser had already published extracts of Ibn Ḥumayd's *Rainclouds* in 1978. Al-Jāsir, "Al-suḥub" (1978).

[86] Al-Jāsir, "ʿUlamā" (1978), 156.

[87] Al-Juhany, "The History" (1983), 26–27.

[88] ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Āl Bassām, *ʿUlamā*, vol. 1 (1978), 18.

During Three Centuries Preceding the Wahhābī Reform Movement'. Rejecting formist narratives about the uniqueness of the rise of the Wahhabi mission, Al Juhany contended that this rise 'did not occur by mere coincidence'.[89] Between the sixteenth century and the eighteenth, Najd witnessed urbanization and large population growth, which caused competition over the region's limited resources and, thus, conflicts. These conflicts in turn required an increasing number of judges and other ulema for mediation and hence fuelled a 'growth in religious learning'. This growth was evident in the numbers of scholars treated in *The Rain Clouds* and *The Ulema of Najd*.[90] Al Juhany concluded that Ibn Abd al-Wahhab 'was a product of that new society and the cream of that growth of religious learning'.[91]

Al Juhany's attempt to turn the notion of the pre-Wahhabi *jāhilīyah* on its head was of similar sensitivity as al-Askar's regionalist interpretation of Arabian history. Hence, the historian did not publish his thesis for years after his return to King Saud University. Fearing that his arguments would not be acceptable in Saudi Arabia, Al Juhany even required that the microfilm of his thesis should not be reproduced for five years.[92] After the centenary in 1999, the King Abdulaziz Foundation for Research and Archives, however, included the dissertation in its scheme to publish Saudi theses. With slight adaptations, like the replacement of 'Wahhābī' by 'Salafi', 'The History of Najd Prior to the Wahhābīs' appeared in 2006 under the title *Najd before the Salafi Reform Movement*.[93] However, perhaps due to continued sensitivities, just like al-Askar, the foundation published Al Juhany's work only in English.

Even before Al Juhany's dissertation was published, however, other social historians trained at the state's expense in Riyadh and the United States made use of it. They included Mohammed Al-Freih, another graduate from King Saud University. Two years after the

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[89] Al-Juhany, "The History" (1983), 2.

[90] Ibid., 240, 300.

[91] Ibid., 2.

[92] Ibid., i. Uwaidah Al Juhany, interview, 13 February 2010.

[93] Al Juhany, *Najd* (2002).

completion of his BA in 1974, the university hired him as a graduate assistant and sent him with a scholarship to the US. Like al-Askar, Al-Freih received his postgraduate education at UCLA under the Middle East social historian Michael Morony and the sociologist Georges Sabagh. The graduate student received further inspiration and guidance from the chair of his doctoral committee Afaf Marsot (b. 1933), an Egyptian social historian and former student of Albert Hourani. Under her, Al-Freih developed an interest in social as well as economic history, which was then the 'history du jour'.[94] Al-Freih remembered that at the time, he 'didn't have a strong background in socioeconomic interpretations'. However, he 'learned about socioeconomic issues' in Marsot's lectures.[95] With this approach, he worked on a dissertation that he completed in 1990 on 'The Historical Background of the Emergence of Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb and His Movement'.[96]

Like Al Juhany, Al-Freih offered a contextualist explanation of the rise of the Wahhabi mission. Rejecting formist approaches, he asserted that 'great men', like Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, and their movements 'neither emerge nor operate in a vacuum'.[97] He criticized previous studies for a 'lack of deeper analysis' of pre-Wahhabi politics and for neglecting an 'economic crisis within settled Najd'.[98] Al-Freih explored these contexts relying not only on Al Juhany's thesis, but also on a similar set of sources as his colleague's, including ʿAbd Allāh al-Bassām's *Masterpiece* and Ibn Ḥumayd's *Rain Clouds*.[99]

While their topics and primary sources were similar, Al-Freih contextualized Ibn Abd al-Wahhab within the wider Muslim world in contrast to Al Juhany's focus on Najd. In particular, the historian connected the Wahhabi mission to an eighteenth-century revivalist movement in Mecca and Medina, in which many Indian ulema had been involved. This movement centred on Koran and Hadith studies through which the scholars sought to

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[94] Afaf Marsot, e-mail on 12 June 2011.

[95] Interview, 5 October 2011.

[96] Al-Freih, "The Historical Background" (1990), x.

[97] Ibid., 4–5.

[98] Ibid., 2–3.

[99] Ibid., 422.

provide 'solid and practical solutions to real problems facing their own societies'.[100] Relying

on the American historian John Voll—as Al Juhany had done—, Al-Freih argued that the

revivalist movement had 'greatly influenced and inspired' Ibn Abd al-Wahhab during his stay

in the Hejaz. There, rather than in Najd, the sheikh had gained his 'universal vision of

reforming Islam'.[101]

Like Al Juhany, Al-Freih conceived conflicts resulting from settlement and urbanization

in Najd as a major factor behind the Wahhabi mission. Yet, he explained the conflicts from a

global perspective. He argued that the European attempt to control the 'lion's share of the

eastern trade' after the sixteenth century had led to a decline in trans-Arabian trade.

Facilitated by abundant rainfalls, Najdis began to 'invest internally', especially in agriculture,

and to establish settlements.[102] This process exacerbated abusive relationships between the

established members of towns, namely the landowners and merchants, and new settlers

lacking property. These relationships were marked by usury, 'loans with high interest rates

and perpetual indebtedness', and 'the maximum exploitation of the labor of the poor'. Thus,

Al-Freih argued that pre-Wahhabi Najd was not characterized by an 'age of ignorance', but

by 'a socio-economic crisis', which 'was begging for a solution'.[103]

Al-Freih thus presented Ibn Abd al-Wahhab as a social reformer solving the crisis of

exploitation. Inspired by the Hejazi revivalist movement, the sheikh rejected un-Islamic taxes

and usury and offered the concept of a state with a ruler 'whose legitimacy was based on

religion rather than the ownership of land'. For his success, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab did not rely

on the princes—as in dynastic narratives—but, according to Al-Freih, on the proletariat. It

was 'the destitute masses, who supported him', and 'it was only the elite that had deeply

established interests in maintaining the status quo who opposed him'.[104]

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[100] Ibid., 4.

[101] Ibid., 419. Voll, "Hadith" (1980).

[102] Al-Freih, "The Historical Background" (1990), 415.

[103] Ibid., 417–18.

[104] Al-Freih, "The Historical Background" (1990), 420.

After the completion of his doctorate in 1990, Al-Freih, like al-Askar and Al Juhany, was appointed assistant professor at KSU's department of history. Yet, his thesis also remained unpublished. He attributed this mainly to his teaching responsibilities and the revisions that his thesis would have required prior to publication. However, he also found it sensitive to argue that Ibn Abd al-Wahhab 'was a politician first and then a sheikh'. According to him, this sensitivity has remained because senior members of the royal family and officials, like Prince Salman ibn Abdulaziz, considered the 'religious legitimacy of the royal family' more important than its 'political legitimacy'.[105] The King Abdulaziz Foundation for Research and Archives thus did not publish Al-Freih's dissertation alongside those by al-Askar and Al Juhany.[106]

Al Juhany and Al-Freih formed part of a group of Saudi social and economic historians who were educated at King Saud University and in the United States and who investigated pre-Wahhabi Arabia. Another scholar within this group and a colleague of Al-Freih at KSU and UCLA was Abdullah Mutawa (b. 1956). Following the usual pattern, he did his undergraduate studies in history, joined KSU as a graduate assistant and then moved to UCLA, where he gained a PhD in 1989.[107] In Los Angeles, Afaf Marsot, Michael Morony and Georges Sabagh formed his doctoral committee.[108] Under their supervision, Mutawa rather incidentally came to study pre-Wahhabi Najdi society. At first, he had intended to write a dissertation solely on the ulema under the first Saudi state. In the course of his research, however, he found that this topic 'was too restricted', and that 'it was necessary to look into the roots of the Wahhabi reform movement'. A chapter on pre-Wahhabi religious scholars, which was intended to form an introduction, then turned into the whole dissertation, while he

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[105] Mohamed Al-Freih, interview, 4 November 2009.

[106] Fahd al-Semmari claimed that Al-Freih, unlike al-Askar and Al Juhany, had 'refused' an offer by the foundation to publish his thesis. Interview, 25 October 2011.

[107] Mutawa, "The Ulama" (1989), xii.

[108] Ibid., ii.

consigned the ulema of the first Saudi state to 'a separate study'.[109] His dissertation was entitled 'The Ulama of Najd: From the Sixteenth Century to the Mid-Eighteenth Century'.

In his doctoral dissertation, Mutawa consolidated Al Juhany's contextualization of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab within a growth of religious learning related to settlement in Najd. Like Al Juhany and Al-Freih, he used the principal sources of pre-Wahhabi Najdi history, namely ʿAbd Allāh ibn Muḥammad al-Bassām's *Masterpiece*, ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Bassām's *Ulema of Najd*, and the pre-Wahhabi chronicles by al-Manqūr, Ibn Rabīʿah, Ibn Yūsuf and Ibn ʿAbbād. On this basis, Mutawa conceived a rise in the number of religious scholars in the central region between the tenth century and the eighteenth. This rise resulted from the process of settlement, which led 'to a greater desire for learning, since literacy and legal training was necessary for urban life'. In the second half of the eighteenth century, the ulema were 'participants in the new religious-political order which emerged in Najd'.[110]

While his dissertation, like Al-Freih's, remained unpublished, Mutawa continued to undertake research into Najdi social history even after his return to King Saud University. As a professor in the department of history, he used state-financed academic infrastructure for the production of several studies. He benefitted from increasing funding for research generally with higher oil revenues in the 2000s. Notably, Mutawa was able to use a subsidized series of monographs named *Historical Studies*, which the Saudi Historical Society had launched on the centennial in 1999. This series alleviated some of the financial difficulties from which social historians had suffered in trying to publish their research during the time of low oil prices in the 1980s and 1990s. Until 2008 alone, twenty-six monographs appeared within the series, including six on social and economic history.[111]

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[109] Ibid., 2. Abdullah Mutawa, interview, 28 January 2010.

[110] Mutawa, "The Ulama" (1989), 375–76.

[111] Al-Sunaydī, *Al-riʿāyah* (2002). Ibn Ṣarāy, *Al-ʿalāqāt* (2006). Al-Rifāʿī and al-Ḥārithī, *Al-wathīqah* (2001). ʿAdwān, *Dawr* (2001). Al-Shaʿbān, *Al-ḥayāt* (2000). ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, *Yahūd* (2008).

In the series *Historical Studies*, Mutawa published a volume in social history entitled *The Society of al-Dirʿīyah during the Time of the First Saudi State.* It gave an overview over the different quarters of the former Saudi capital and its different groups, including the rulers, ulema, merchants, peasants, and artisans.[112] In 2005, the historian also published an article on 'Political and Social Transformations in al-Dirʿīyah, 1446–1744', in the *Journal of King Saud University*.[113] Both texts were an indirect product of the state-sponsored student missions, of which Mutawa was part. He was inspired to write them by the article 'The Social Organization of Mecca and the Origins of Islam' by the Marxian anthropologist Eric Wolf (1923–99).[114] This seminal essay, which Mutawa had read during his doctoral studies at UCLA, had featured on students' reading lists at Western universities for decades after its publication in 1951.[115]

Mutawa's work contributed to the gradual acceptance of social and economic history gained in Saudi Arabia in the 1990s and 2000s. After Mutawa had presented a copy of his book on *The Society of al-Dirʿīyah* to Fahd al-Semmari 'as a colleague',[116] the foundation's secretary general published a positive review of the work in the newspaper *al-Riyāḍ*. Al-Semmari acknowledged that 'many studies in the history of Saudi Arabia' treated 'political and military aspects', while 'neglecting many other aspects, notably social and cultural aspects'. Hence, he congratulated 'the Saudi historical school for specialized academic studies like this one, which move away from comprehensiveness and political aspects and concentrate on specific topics and social aspects'.[117] For his article on 'Political and Social Transformations', the foundation even awarded Mutawa the Prince Salman ibn Abdulaziz

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[112] Al-Muṭawwaʿ, *Mujtamaʿ* (2003).

[113] Al-Muṭawwaʿ, "Al-taḥawwulāt" (2004).

[114] Wolf, "The Social Organization" (1951).

[115] Abdullah Mutawa, e-mails to me on 19 April 2011. Rippin, "The Social Origins" (2000), 682.

[116] Abdullah Mutawa, e-mail to me on 19 April 2011.

[117] Al-Samārī, "Mujtamaʿ" (2003).

Prize for Studies in Arabian History, one of the most prestigious awards for historical

scholarship in the kingdom.[118]

While contextualist theses on the rise of the Wahhabi mission were initially restricted

to scholars trained at King Saud University and the United States, historians at Imam

University also started to investigate the pre-Wahhabi Najdi past in the 1980s. One of them

was ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-ʿUraynī (b. 1952), who had gained his entire higher education at the

university. In 1984, he completed one of the first MA dissertations in social history at a Saudi

university. It was entitled 'The Social Life among the Bedouin of Najd and the Influence upon

it of Sheikh Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab's Mission: From the Fifteenth Century to the Fall

of al-Dirʿīyah'.[119] Based on recommendations by his examiners, al-ʿUraynī submitted a

complementary PhD thesis to Imam University in 1989: 'The Social Life among the Settled

People of Najd from the Fifteenth Century to the Rise of Sheikh Muhammad ibn Abd al-

Wahhab's Mission: 1494–1744'. Thereby, al-ʿUraynī sought an 'integration of the study of the

social life of the two main groups in Najd, so that a comprehensive study of social life among

the sedentary people and Bedouin of Najd emerges'.[120] In introducing this approach, he also

criticized dynastic historians. According to him, 'these historians were no more innovative

than previous chroniclers, whose interests focused on political issues and the history of

rulers and the beginning and end of dynasties'.[121]

In contrast to Al Juhany and Al-Freih's theses, al-ʿUraynī's contextualist explanation of

the rise of Wahhabi mission still contained elements of the notion of the pre-Wahhabi

jāhilīyah. This was probably helped by the fact that his supervisor in both dissertations was

ʿAbd Allāh al-Shibl, who upheld the notion of an 'age of ignorance' in his own writings. Yet,

al-ʿUraynī was also influenced by Al Juhany's unpublished dissertation, which he had

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[118] Al-Muṭawwaʿ, "Al-sīrah" (2010). On the Prince Salman Prize, see Dārat al-Malik ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, *Jāʾizah* [2007].

[119] Al-ʿUraynī, "Al-ḥayāt" (1984). Muʾnis, *Al-dirāsāt* (2003), 100.

[120] Al-ʿUraynī, "Al-ḥayāt" (1989), ḥ.

[121] Ibid., ʾ.

received from his colleague.[122] In 'The Social Life among the Settled People', he argued that

in Najd, the 'theological aberrations before Sheikh Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab's

movement did not amount to the level of some neighbouring and more distant Muslim

societies. They also did not reach that of the Bedouins of Najd during this period.' Relying on

al-Bassām's *Masterpiece* and other works, al-ʿUraynī characterized his own region, Najd, as

a place of relative religious observance, in contrast to the accounts of the Ibn Ghannām

School. He stated that the heresies in Najd were only 'echoes of those known in the

neighbouring lands'. This made the central region 'suitable' for the creation of the Wahhabi

mission. However, despite this partial revision of Najdi history, al-ʿUraynī still made a

concession to the notion of the pre-Wahhabi *jāhilīyah.* He stated that 'if there had not been

those deviations and heresies, the sheikh's mission would not have played this great and

effective role'.[123]

Although al-ʿUraynī's theses remained unpublished, other researchers at Imam

University followed him in exploring pre-Wahhabi social history. Aḥmad ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-

Bassām, a younger member of the Bassām family, found that by about 1990, the university's

history department even openly encouraged students to choose topics 'related to the

situation in Najd before the establishment of the Saudi state' as an underresearched area.[124]

Al-Bassām thus wrote a PhD dissertation on the intellectual contexts of the Wahhabi mission

under the supervision of ʿAbd Allāh al-Shibl and with the help of his relative and biographer

of Najdi ulema ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Bassām. In 2005, the King Abdulaziz

Foundation for Research and Archives published the revised dissertation under the title

Scholarly Life in Central Arabia in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries and the Effect

upon it of Sheikh Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab.[125] Criticizing the notion of the pre-

Wahhabi 'age of ignorance', Aḥmad al-Bassām considered Ibn Ghannām and Ibn Bishr's

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[122] Ibid., ṣ.

[123] Ibid., 505–6.

[124] Aḥmad al-Bassām, *Al-ḥayāt* (2005), 10.

[125] Ibid, 19.

descriptions of a 'bad religious situation' before Ibn Abd al-Wahhab an 'exaggeration'. According to al-Bassām, the descriptions mainly applied to Bedouin, while there were also 'people adhering to the provisions of the sharia'.[126] However, he still argued that the appearance of the Wahhabi mission had brought an increase in religious learning. Whereas Najdi scholars had restricted themselves to fiqh earlier, they subsequently ventured into Koranic exegesis (*tafsīr*), Hadith, and beliefs.[127]

The rise of contextualist social histories even led a man at the centre of the Wahhabi establishment to revise some of the prevailing notions about the pre-Wahhabi economy and society. In 1991, Muḥammad al-Shuwayʿir, an advisor to ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz ibn Bāz, published an article in the journal *al-Dārah*. It was entitled 'The Cultural Features of Central Arabia 250 Years Ago'. Al-Shuwayʿir still upheld that Muhammad ibn Saud and Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab agreed in 1744 to 'spread God's religion, show the truth, and rescue the people from the pits into which they had fallen as many Muslims had done everywhere'. However, al-Shuwayʿir turned against 'those, most of whom are Westerners, who state that only a few nomadic Bedouin lived in Najd who fought each other for trivial reasons and who were stricken by ignorance and poverty'.[128] He argued that one of the features of Najdi history between the fourteenth and the eighteenth century was the 'foundation of towns', some of which were 'famous for their industry and agriculture'. Relying on Ibn Ḥumayd's *Rainclouds* and al-Bassām's *Ulema of Najd during Six Centuries*, he also noted an increase in the number of Najdi religious scholars during the same period.[129]

From the beginning of the 1990s, the idea of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab emerging in the context of a growth of religious learning entered further studies, albeit not textbooks. These studies included a book by Mayy al-ʿĪsá who, rather incidentally, found her way to social

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[126] Ibid, 389.

[127] Ibid., 391.

[128] Al-Shuwayʿir, "Min al-maʿālim" (1991), 9–10. He did not mention specific authors against whom he argued.

[129] Ibid., 14.

history. Originally, she had set out to write a doctoral dissertation on political history at King Saud University in the 1990s. Her professors considered this field not 'suitable' for women, however, and she thus turned to social history. One of her professors, the Sudanese economic historian Izzud-din Mousa, also encouraged her to use statistics.[130] Yet, her supervisor, the dynastic historian ʿAbd Allāh al-ʿUthaymīn, rejected 'mathematics' in history. Thanks to the encouragement of the historian and later minister Abdul-Aziz Khowaiter, however, she still submitted her thesis, which used statistical evidence, and passed her final examination.[131] In 1996/97, al-ʿĪsá was even able to publish her study as a book through the King Abdulaziz Foundation for Research and Archives and at the expense of Prince Salman ibn Abdulaziz. It was entitled *The Scholarly Life in Najd from the Rise of Sheikh Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab's Mission until the End of the First Saudi State*.[132]

Drawing on the previous research by other scholars from King Saud University, al-ʿĪsá's study consolidated the view of a growth in religious learning rather than an 'age of ignorance' in pre-Wahhabi Najd. In her *Scholarly Life*, she relied on the dissertations by Al Juhany, Al-Freih, and Mutawa. She concluded that the 'scholarly life in Najd witnessed a gradual positive growth from the fifteenth until the eighteenth century'. This growth was represented in 'a rise in the number of scholars from one period to another and a relative increase in the migrations of scholars and their travels to study inside and outside of Najd'. The growth was also represented in 'a rise in the number of centres of learning and a surge in the number of authors and works'.[133]

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[130] Mayy al-ʿĪsá, interview, 29 January 2010. Izzud-din Mousa, interview, 15 October 2011.

[131] Mayy al-ʿĪsá, interview, 29 January 2010. Overall, also more men submitted MA and doctoral dissertations in political history at Saudi universities than women. Muʾnis, *Al-dirāsāt* (2003), 106.

[132] Al-ʿĪsá, *Al-ḥayāt* [1996/97].

[133] Ibid., 317.

Theorizing the Saudi state

Since the 1970s, political scientists and sociologists as much as historians have studied past Arabian societies. Working in the field of historical sociology, they also challenged the narratives of dynastic historiography on key processes in Saudi history, such as the establishment of the Saudi state. Although these social scientists often built on the works of historians and had historians as supervisors, they tended to be more theoretical than the contextualist historians. Rather than discovering new primary sources, such as pre-Wahhabi Najdi chronicles, many of the social scientists put greater efforts into developing new theoretical understandings and situating their findings within the global literature on Saudi and Middle Eastern societies. Focusing on social and economic factors, they frequently challenged the notion of the Saudi state as an essentially religious project. This put them in opposition not only to individual dynastic authors but also to the King Abdulaziz Foundation for Research and Archives. Although the foundation published a considerable number of social and economic histories, it viewed the historical legitimacy of the Saudi regime as religious rather than social or economic.[134]

Nevertheless, the Saudi state, in its global context, incidentally supported social and economic theorizing about its history by organizing and financing the training of indigenous political scientists and sociologists in the kingdom and abroad for the sake of national 'development'. Since its foundation in 1957, King Saud University taught political science, at first jointly with economics and since 1972 in a separate department.[135] In 1971, KSU established a department of social studies to 'educate national cadres in order to cope with the requirements of comprehensive development in the kingdom'.[136]

As the first teachers in these departments were non-Saudis, Saudi universities were eager to send indigenous students abroad for postgraduate training. Between 1964 and

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[134] Mohamed Al-Freih, interview, 5 October 2011.

[135] Jāmiʿat al-Malik Suʿūd, "Kullīyat al-ḥuqūq" (2011).

[136] Jāmiʿat al-Malik Suʿūd, "Qism" (2010).

2005, sixty-seven Saudis gained a PhD in political science and ninety-two achieved a

doctorate in sociology from American universities alone. Most of them wrote their

dissertations on Saudi Arabia. While some undertook empirical research in confined areas of

contemporary social work and welfare, others theorized about wider social and political

change in the past.[137] This was helped by the rise of historical sociology in Western area

studies after World War II. The rise was reflected in the establishment of the journal

Comparative Studies in Society and History in Chicago in 1958.[138] One of its editors was

Gustave von Grunebaum, who made UCLA a hub for the study of Middle Eastern social

history.[139]

Besides granting scholarships, state agencies also published studies in historical

sociology, as long as they did not perceive them as Marxist. In order to celebrate

development achievements in religious terms, the King Abdulaziz Foundation for Research

and Archives and the General Secretariat for the Celebration of the Centenary of the

Kingdom's Foundation hired sociologists from Imam University, who were more inclined to

practice sociology within a religious framework than their colleagues at King Saud

University.[140] One of the foci of the five-day centennial conference organized by both

agencies was 'social development in the kingdom'.[141] The conference comprised several

papers by sociologists, including *Continuities and Changes in Saudi Society* by Abdullah

Khalifah (b. 1955) from Imam University. Not surprisingly, Khalifah conceived Islam as a

major factor behind the 'stability, balance, development, and integration' in Saudi society.[142]

He argued that 'the Islamic religion contributed to the establishment of the Saudi state and to

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[137] Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission to the U.S.A., *Directory* (2006).

[138] Raphael, *Geschichtswissenschaft* (2003), 202.

[139] Gallagher, *Approaches* (1994), 135.

[140] The mission of Imam University's department of sociology and social work, as of 2011, was to 'contribute to the achievement of social change in the light of the principles and values of the sharia'. Jāmiʿat al-Imām Muḥammad ibn Suʿūd al-Islāmīyah, "Qism" (2011).

[141] Dārat al-Malik ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, *Al-mamlakah*, vol. 1 (2007), 165.

[142] Al-Khalīfah, "Al-thawābit" (2007), 487. Other sociological papers at the centennial conference included al-Ḥājirī, "Taṭawwur" (2007); al-Mālik, "Al-thawābit" (2007); al-Juwayr, "Al-thawābit (2007).

the fusion of culturally diverse social groups in one melting pot'. Moreover, Islam through its scholars created 'social acceptance of policies of development and modernization'.[143]

While some texts by mainly Imam University scholars championed religious factors, a few historical sociologists and political scientists educated at King Saud University and in the United States privileged economic factors. At least one Saudi scholar, Mishary Al-Nuaim (b. 1957), even came to consider himself a Marxist. Incidentally, he read about Marx during undergraduate studies in political science at King Saud University in the 1970s. He remembered that 'at King Saud University, we got exposed to Marxism in the political philosophy course, but only to Marx'. Subsequently, he undertook his own readings on Marxism.[144] He had no recollection of any 'censorship' during his undergraduate studies in political science.[145]

Following his undergraduate studies, King Saud University sent him—like al-Askar, Al-Freih, and Mutawa—to the University of California, Los Angeles. There, he continued his readings in Marxist theories and came to apply them to Saudi state formation. He remembered that 'reading traditional studies about Wahhabism was dull. It was all about the Bedouin and the true religion. I thought, why not look for Marxism?'[146] Under the supervision of Michael Lofchie, a development theorist, as well as the social historian Afaf Marsot, who also supervised the historical PhDs by Al-Freih and Mutawa, Al-Nuaim completed a PhD dissertation in 1987. Making the Marxist approach clear in its terminology, its title was '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'.[147]

Employing a materialist perspective, Al-Nuaim challenged the idea of the Saudi state as a religious project, which was so prominent in dynastic historiography. He argued that the

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[143] Al-Khalīfah, "Al-thawābit" (2007), 483.

[144] Interview, 10 October 2011.

[145] Comment following a presentation of mine at the King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies, Riyadh, 25 October 2011.

[146] Interview, 10 October 2011.

[147] Al-Nuaim, "State Building" (1987).

Wahhabi mission was an 'urban ideology', which 'catered to the commercial interests'.[148]

The Wahhabi mission 'carried with it the aspirations of the urban dominating class toward

stabilizing and expanding the materialist bases of their domination'. The merchants 'were an

integral part of that class and Wahhabi doctrines legitimized a fairly reasonable degree of

commercial freedom'.[149] Hence, the Saudi state was not simply the product of the

agreement between Muhammad ibn Saud and Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, but of the

'alliance of an indigenous trio, political leadership, merchants, and ulama'.[150] Speaking about

twentieth-century history, Al-Nuaim even removed the religious scholars from the picture. He

argued that 'the alliance between the political leadership and the merchant class was at the

very basis of the establishment and consolidation of the state'.[151]

     While he was also offering a social and economic explanation for the emergence of

the Saudi state, Al-Nuaim, as a political scientist, laid greater emphasis on the construction

of a theoretical framework than the historians Al-Freih and Al Juhany did. Within the context

of the global theoretical literature, he especially argued against the notion of the Saudi state

as a tribal creation. This notion was, according to Al-Nuaim, influenced by Western travellers

who associated Arabia and the Saudi state in a 'romantic' way with the Bedouin. Their views

were combined with the social theories produced by the North African scholar Ibn Khaldūn

(1332–1406). Ibn Khaldūn, in his *Introduction* to history, or *Muqaddimah*, had considered the

strong group feeling (*ʿaṣabīyah*) of nomadic tribes central to the establishment of new

dynasties.[152]

     In his theoretical discussion, Al-Nuaim mainly criticized contemporary writings by non-

Saudis who considered the Saudi state to be the product of tribalism and Islam. He thus

rejected the influential views of 'Muslim Society' held by Ernest Gellner (1925–95). Al-Nuaim

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[148] Ibid., 350.

[149] Ibid., 6.

[150] Ibid., 7.

[151] Ibid., 343.

[152] Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah* (1967). See also Talbi, "Ibn K̲h̲aldūn" (1979).

conceded to Gellner that 'nomadic structures and Islam have been characteristic features of Arabian and North African life'. However, to consider them as 'the primary drives behind Middle Eastern history' is 'a misrepresentation'.[153] Al-Nuaim also complained that a monograph by the Lebanese writer Waddah Charara 'has not escaped the Khaldunian paradigm'.[154] Thus, the Saudi political scientist called for the Khaldūnian theory to 'be laid to rest after long centuries of overuse and misapplication to different socio-historical contexts'.[155]

Instead of relying on Ibn Khaldūn, Al-Nuaim's theory of the emergence of the Saudi state drew on historical materialism. The social scientist made the Marxist concept of the 'mode of production' central to his inquiry. He rejected, however, Marx's notion of the Asiatic mode of production, in which private property was unknown, and called it one of the 'Orientalists' ethnocentric misconceptions'. In contrast, Al-Nuaim argued that privately owned land 'has been a striking feature of the Arabian economy'.[156] Yet, he did not view the Arabian mode of production as capitalist. Relying on Louis Althusser (1918–90), Étienne Balibar (b. 1942), and Nicos Poulantzas (1936–79), he identified pastoral/tribal and tributary/urban modes of production within a non-capitalist Arabian society.[157]

While Al-Nuaim used Marxist theoretical concepts, he still argued against Western Marxists who interpreted the Saudi state as a product of capitalism or imperialism. Instead, he conceived it as an indigenous, pre-capitalist creation. He criticized a monograph on the Saudi political economy by Helen Lackner for leaving out the 'urban factor' and portraying modern Saudi Arabia as 'the result of British imperialist interference in the local inter-tribal struggle'.[158] Al-Nuaim also refuted an argument in the widely read work *Arabia Without Sultans* by Fred Halliday (1946–2010). Al-Nuaim disagreed with Halliday's view that the

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[153] Al-Nuaim, "State Building" (1987), 20. Gellner, *Muslim Society* (1981).

[154] Al-Nuaim, "State Building" (1987), 21. Sharārah, *Al-ahl* (1981).

[155] Al-Nuaim, "State Building" (1987), 34.

[156] Ibid., 41–42.

[157] Ibid., 77.

[158] Ibid., 26. Lackner, *A House* (1978).

expansion of capitalism since 1500 was responsible for transformations in Arabia. He stated that 'the trade patterns associated with the emergence of the Saudi state were primarily noncapitalist with very little connections with capitalist firms or products'.[159] Thanks to 'local *precapitalist* merchant capital', the Saudi state was 'structurally established on relatively stable grounds before the infiltration of the capitalist mode of production'. This infiltration happened only with the discovery of oil in commercial quantities in the 1930s.[160]

Al-Nuaim's doctoral research was a transnational enterprise, not only in terms of theoretical inspiration but also primary sources. Like the historian Al Juhany, Al-Nuaim drew on Western as well as Saudi sources. After he had pondered the role of internal socio-economic forces in the formation of the Saudi state, his research in the British diplomatic archives in London established 'the pattern of the merchant's participation' in the creation of Saudi Arabia. Subsequent fieldwork in Najd and his home region al-Aḥsāʾ consolidated this picture, as he interviewed a number of people who 'had direct knowledge of the merchants' dealing with the political leadership'.[161] Al-Nuaim's many conversations with social and economic historians at UCLA presumably encouraged him further in developing his arguments. He remembered that he 'used to have social gatherings' with Mohamed Al-Freih and others, in which he talked about his dissertation.[162]

Al-Nuaim also took up an assistant professorship at King Saud University after his PhD. Yet, his thesis remained unpublished, although the author expressed the hope to publish it after his 'retirement'. Al-Nuaim stated that it would require many 'changes' and deletions of some quotations, such as those by Mao Zedong.[163] Turki al-Hamad (b. 1952), another political scientist, undertook further research on Saudi state building. He also undertook doctoral research in Los Angeles. While he studied at the University of Southern

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[159] Al-Nuaim, "State Building" (1987), 27. Halliday, *Arabia* (1974).
[160] Al-Nuaim, "State Building" (1987), 347.
[161] Ibid., 1–2.
[162] Interview, 10 October 2011.
[163] Interview, 10 October 2011.

California, he also used the rich library of UCLA, where he met the social and economic historian Abdullah al-Askar and his colleagues.[164] In 1985, al-Hamad completed a dissertation entitled 'Political Order in Changing Societies, Saudi Arabia: Modernization in a Traditional Context'. This dissertation sought to provide another sociological explanation of the contemporary history of the Saudi state.[165]

Like Al-Nuaim, al-Hamad positioned his thesis within international sociological literature. He primarily argued against the influential book *Political Order in Changing Societies* by the American political scientist Samuel Huntington (1927–2008). Huntington himself contended that modernization breeds instability in developing countries.[166] Al-Hamad, in contrast, proposed that modernization in Saudi Arabia, thanks to the surge in oil prices after 1973, led to political stability.[167] With its high oil revenues, the Saudi monarchy was able to 'follow the line of modernization and economic development without threatening the existing traditional institutions and structures and, hence, without finding itself pressured to meet rising social and political demands from new and traditional groups'.[168] The state assimilated many people into an enlarged bureaucracy and enhanced its support for the military and the religious establishment. Thereby, it 'decreased social mobilization and the level of political consciousness'.[169]

After his state-sponsored graduate studies and while working as assistant professor at King Saud University, al-Hamad turned from modernization theory to the study of ideology.[170] In this process, he came to perceive the Wahhabi mission as an ideology rather than religion. In order to avoid Saudi censorship, he placed several articles in the journal *al-Mustaqbal al-ʿArabī*, 'The Arab Future'. This leftist journal has been published by the Centre

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[164] Abdullah al-Askar, interview, 22 October 2011.

[165] Al-Hamad, "Political Order" (1985).

[166] Huntington, *Political Order* (1968).

[167] Al-Hamad, "Political Order" (1985), x–xi;

[168] Ibid., 338.

[169] Ibid., 340.

[170] Al-Ḥamad, *Dirāsāt* (1992).

for Arab Unity Studies (Markaz Dirāsāt al-Waḥdah al-ʿArabīyah) in Beirut since 1978 and has been open to social theorizing. One of al-Hamad's articles, published in 1986, was entitled 'The Unification of Arabia: The Role of Ideology and Organization in the Breaking of Social Structures Hindering Unity'.[171]

In his article on 'The Unification of Arabia', al-Hamad proposed a theory that Saudi state formation was a social rather than religious process and followed earlier European models. According to him, 'the Wahhabi ideology and the organization based on it (the Ikhwān movement) played a pivotal role in breaking down the barriers and obstacles that stood in the way of a nation state with a unified central authority and comprehensive sovereignty'.[172] Hence, the Wahhabi mission and its 'understanding of unity and equality' played 'the same role in Saudi Arabia as the ideology of the social contract (especially Thomas Hobbes's contract) did in Europe'. In this role, the emergence of the Wahhabi mission was marked by 'the destruction of all groups, loyalties, alliances' and their new mobilization through a 'new ideology and a different system of values'. In this way, the establishment of the central state in Najd in the eighteenth century ended the 'war of all against all', especially between the 'sedentary farmer' and the 'nomadic Bedouin'. These two groups competed with one another in either cultivating the land or using it as a grazing ground for cattle.[173]

In 1995, al-Hamad retired from his position at KSU. Yet, Abdulaziz Al-Fahad, a Saudi lawyer trained at American universities, built on the research of the political scientist. While practicing as an attorney in Riyadh, he wrote a paper entitled 'The *ʿImama* vs. the *ʿIqal*: *Hadari*–Bedouin Conflict and the Formation of the Saudi State'. He considered it a response to previous literature about the kingdom, and published it in a collection of *Counter*

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[171] Al-Ḥamad, "Tawḥīd" (1986).

[172] Ibid., 40.

[173] Ibid., 36.

Narratives in 2004. Its editors were Madawi Al-Rasheed and Robert Vitalis, two scholars who also challenged narratives of dynastic historiography.[174]

Abdulaziz Al-Fahad built on the studies by al-Hamad and the social historian Uwaidah Al Juhany and argued that the Saudi state was a project of the settled communities (*ḥaḍar*) 'with profound anti-tribal and anti-Bedouin tendencies'. This contradicted the widespread identification of the Saudi state with the Bedouin. According to him, 'the Wahhabi revivalist movement, and the state that emerged therefrom, had been conceived, spearheaded, and manned' by the *ḥaḍarīs*. It appeared in the eighteenth century, when the *ḥaḍarī* population of southern Najd 'had lost its tribal organization' and 'Najdi pastoral nomadism had been characterized by a high degree of flux resulting in instability in inter- and intra-tribal as well as Bedouin–*Hadari* relations'. The sedentary population exploited this crisis by building the Saudi state with its aim 'to end Bedouin historical hegemony throughout pre-modern Arabia'.[175]

Khalid al-Dakhil (b. 1952), who also benefitted from state-financed education and employment, made another theoretical enquiry into the emergence of the Saudi state.[176] Initially, he wanted to study philosophy, but no Saudi university offered such a course. He thus studied sociology at King Saud University as the 'nearest thing to philosophy' that he liked. After his BA in 1977, King Saud University provided him with a scholarship for graduate studies at the University of California, Los Angeles. Under the supervision of Georges Sabagh and the social historian Afaf Marsot, al-Dakhil gained a PhD in sociology in 1998. During his studies, he remembered that he was 'preoccupied with the question, 'where did this state come from?'' The 'official' answer to the question involved, according to him,

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[174] Al-Fahad, "The *'Imama*" (2004).

[175] Ibid., 35–36.

[176] The Arabic form of al-Dakhil's name is al-Dukhayyil. Yet, the Saudi passport authorities spelled his name al-Dakhil in Latin characters, and he continued to use this form in his English publications. Khalid al-Dakhil, personal communication, 1 October 2011. I thank Bernard Haykel for pointing this out to me first in early 2010.

'just religion'. He asked, 'What about the people?' 'What about the tribes?'[177] Among his

readings at UCLA, one book 'influenced' him in particular, namely *Social Origins of*

Dictatorship and Democracy by the American political sociologist Barrington Moore (1913–

2005). Borrowing from the book's title, al-Dakhil gave his PhD thesis the title 'Social Origins

of the Wahhabi Movement'.[178] After he had returned to KSU as assistant professor, he

published the results of his doctoral research in the journal *al-Mustaqbal al-ʿArabī* in 2000.

Signifying a departure from both Saudi and foreign writings on the kingdom's history, al-

Dakhil called his essay 'A Different Reading on the History of the Saudi State'.[179]

Building on previous contextualist research into the social history of pre-Wahhabi

Najd, al-Dakhil developed the most elaborate theory of the emergence of the Wahhabi

mission so far. The historical sociologist acknowledged Al Juhany and Al-Freih's 'attempts'

to 'situate this movement within its own historical context' in contrast 'to the dominant and

ahistorical theses'. Yet, he considered their links between urbanization, religious learning,

and the Wahhabi mission an 'assumption more than an argument'.[180] Criticizing their lack of

sociological theory, he stated that their dissertations offered 'a historical sequence, but

without any analytical link'.[181] Based on their results, however, al-Dakhil was able to develop

three arguments. First, in rejection of the notion of the pre-Wahhabi *jāhilīyah*, the

background of the emergence of the Wahhabi mission was not characterized by 'a

deterioration of religious beliefs, but by turbulent social and political conditions'. Second,

refuting notions of the state as a tribal project, al-Dakhil argued that 'the first Saudi state

came after the structure of the sedentarized tribe disintegrated'. Third, Saudi state building

underwent three phases, namely 'tribal collective settlement', 'the decline of the tribe and the

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[177] Khalid al-Dakhil, interview, 16 October 2011.

[178] Khalid al-Dakhil, interview, 16 October 2011. Khalid al-Dakhil, "Social Origins" (1998).

[179] Al-Dukhayyil, "Al-judhūr" (2000).

[180] Khalid al-Dakhil, "Social Origins" (1998), 13–14. Al-Dukhayyil, "Al-judhūr" (2000), 51.

[181] Al-Dukhayyil, "Al-judhūr" (2000), 51.

rise of the towns', and 'the central state which was based on the principles of

Wahhabism'.[182]

Like Al-Nuaim, who was his colleague at UCLA and KSU, al-Dakhil engaged with the

global literature, turning against foreign scholars who conceived the Wahhabi mission in

Khaldūnian terms. To him, a book by the Lebanese historian Masʿūd Ḍāhir on the state in

the eastern Arab lands, for instance, formed 'an example of weak history'. This book

described the Saudi state, as a 'modern realization of the ancient Khaldūnian formula'. Tribal

group feeling (ʿaṣabīyah) under the Saud tribe allied itself with religion in order to establish a

state.[183] Similarly, the Saudi sociologist reproached the Syrian scholar Aziz Al-Azmeh for

'repeating once again the cliché' that Wahhabi ideology served tribal solidarity and for

considering 'raiding and looting' the only means for Arabian society to reproduce itself.[184] Al-

Dakhil concluded his literature review with a criticism of the Lebanese political scientist

Ghassan Salamé. To al-Dakhil, Salamé offered a 'superficial reading of the history of the

Wahhabi movement', in which he stuck 'literally to what Ibn Khaldūn stated in his

Muqaddimah'.[185]

Apart from the Ibn Khaldūn–based theories about tribal group feeling, al-Dakhil also

argued against seeing religious factors as behind the establishment of the Saudi state.

Interestingly, he did not attack Saudi dynastic historians explicitly but the British historian

Michael Cook (b. 1940). In 1989, Cook had published a chapter on 'The Expansion of the

First Saudi State'. He argued that the 'forces for and against the creation of a Najdi state

were very evenly balanced' and that 'the factor which eventually tipped the balance in favor

of the Saudis may well have been faith'. Thus, he described the emergence of the Saudi

state as 'an act of God'.[186] Al-Dakhil dismissed this argument entirely. The historical

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[182] Khalid al-Dakhil, "Social Origins" (1998), 258–59.

[183] Al-Dukhayyil, "Al-judhūr" (2000), 45. Ḍāhir, Al-mashriq (1986).

[184] Al-Dukhayyil, "Al-judhūr" (2000), 44.

[185] Ibid., 48–49. Salamé, "'Strong'" (1990).

[186] Cook, "The Expansion" (1989), 676, 679.

sociologist considered this 'metaphysical explanation' as either 'a cynical position' or 'an expression of the author's despair'.[187]

Although al-Dakhil mainly engaged in theoretical debates, his arguments—unlike those Al-Nuaim or Al-Hamad—did not remain confined to academic platforms, but also entered newspapers. In the daily paper *al-Riyāḍ* in 2001, Abdullah al-Askar recommended al-Dakhil's article to a broad audience and lauded his friend and colleague for combining history with sociology. Al-Askar wrote that the essay in *al-Mustaqbal al-ʿArabī* 'will please neither Michael Cook' nor 'the local textual and narrative historians', but 'it pleases us'.[188] Al-Dakhil himself published two articles in the Emirati newspaper *al-Ittiḥād*, 'The Union', in 2006. The first article was entitled 'Why Did the Saudi State Arise in al-ʿĀriḍ?', al-ʿĀriḍ being the central Arabian region around Riyadh and al-Dirʿīyah. The second article made its argument clear in the title: 'The Disintegration of the Tribe and Not Idolatry Was behind the Appearance of the Wahhabi Movement'. Transnational networks were important in bringing about this debate. Al-Dakhil's articles responded to a question that the London-based Saudi anthropologist Madawi Al-Rasheed had originally posed via e-mail to Saad Sowayan (b. 1944), a Riyadh-based anthropologist.[189]

Relying on al-Askar, Al Juhany and Al-Freih, al-Dakhil's articles argued again that the Wahhabi mission had social and not religious roots. Challenging the takfīrist narratives of dynastic histories, al-Dakhil stated that the appearance of the mission 'was not related to the deterioration of religious life or the spread of idolatry [*shirk*] in Najd, as is widely believed'. Instead, the historical sociologist explained the mission 'as the culmination of processes of settlement and urbanization, which had continued for centuries after the fall of the Ukhayḍirid state in the eleventh century'. Al-Dakhil considered this case in line with a general theory about the rise of states. 'All states, which emerged in human history,

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[187] Al-Dukhayyil, "Al-judhūr" (2000), 41–42.

[188] Al-ʿAskar, "Al-judhūr" (2001).

[189] Al-Dukhayyil, "Li-mādhā" (2006); "Taṣadduʿ" (2006). Khalid al-Dakhil, "Urban life" (2009).

appeared in regions that had previously witnessed processes of settlement and societies characterized by urbanization'. Hence, the Saudi state arose in al-ʿĀriḍ of all the regions of central Arabia, because 'al-ʿĀriḍ had been the oldest or at least one of the oldest regions of settlement and urbanization in Najd since the time before Islam'.[190]

By publicizing his theories about the social basis of the Wahhabi mission in newspapers rather than restricting them to his thesis and academic publications, al-Dakhil had apparently crossed a red line. Within weeks of their publication in *al-Ittiḥād*, Fahd al-Semmari, the secretary general of the King Abdulaziz Foundation for Research and Archives, published a response. Like al-Dakhil, he used international Arabic media, namely the Emirati newspaper *al-Khalīj*, 'the Gulf', and *al-ʿArabīyah*, 'The Arabic', channel. Al-Semmari's article was entitled 'Reply to Dr Khalid al-Dakhil: The Saudi State Did Not Arise That Way'.[191] He maintained that 'the truth is that the foundation of the Saudi state is religion and nothing else'. According to him, al-Dakhil's view 'reduces events and connects them within an illogical frame'. Al-Semmari pointed out that the Saudi state had not appeared in Najrān or al-Aḥsāʾ, although both regions had been more urbanized than al-ʿĀriḍ was. He also asserted the primacy of dynastic historiography, calling upon the historical sociologist to 'to stop this arbitrary theorizing and to turn to the study of the history of the Saudi state in its three stages in depth'. The return 'to the literature of the Saudi state, its imams, and religious scholars' should make the 'extent of the religious connection to the state's establishment and expansion clear to him'.[192]

Al-Semmari also used the occasion to warn against historical sociology generally. He contended that 'the danger in some new readings of historical events from a sociological or economic perspective lies in the domination of theory'. 'In order to prove the intended view, the focus is on specific events supporting this theory, while most other events are ignored'.

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[190] Al-Dukhayyil, "Taṣadduʿ" (2006).

[191] Al-Samārī, "Raddan" (2006). Al-Dukhayyil, "Radd" (2006).

[192] Al-Samārī, "Raddan" (2006).

In particular, the foundation's secretary general rejected 'the materialist school of historical interpretation', claiming that its members 'inflated and emphasized terms' and 'raised controversial questions with pre-determined answers'. 'In this kind of reading, one recognizes the suppression of historical facts and the rejection of a religious basis.'[193] Coming from one of the central authorities on historiography in the kingdom, this opposition forced al-Dakhil to discontinue his series of newspaper articles. *Al-Ittiḥād* asked him to stop writing on the subject and put him on leave for several months.[194]

In his criticism of al-Dakhil's approach, al-Semmari considered himself in agreement with Prince Salman ibn Abdulaziz.[195] The prince was deeply concerned with the religious legitimacy of the state. In 2008, Salman gave a lecture at Umm al-Qura University in Mecca, in which he reinforced the notion of his family's state as a religious project. He maintained that 'the Saudi state was based on the Koran and the Sunna. It was not based regionally, tribally, or ideologically (on human thought).'[196] Salman's view was probably shaped by his personal religious belief and his education under Wahhabi ulema.[197] Presumably, however, the collapse of the Soviet Union also strengthened his view that secular ideologies and materialist narratives were incapable of protecting and legitimizing the state. In his lecture, Salman stated that 'we witnessed the breakup of the Soviet Union, when it abandoned its communist thought, although it is a materialist thought and belief'. Hence, he called upon citizens to embrace Islam, 'this divine belief, on which the state is based, and not allow anyone to damage this basis. This is the supreme legitimacy, which transcends the region, group feeling [*ʿaṣabīyah*] and the tribe.'[198]

While this opposition to social and economic understandings of the Wahhabi mission and the Saudi state persisted, Khalid al-Dakhil, however, was able to use the internet and

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[193] Ibid.

[194] Ambah, "Saudi Writer" (2007). Khalid al-Dakhil, interview, 16 October 2011.

[195] Fahd al-Semmari, interview, 25 October 2011.

[196] Salmān ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz Āl Suʿūd, *Malāmiḥ* [2010], 25.

[197] Al-Ḥumayd, *Salmān* (2009), 18.

[198] Ibid., 31.

foreign publishers to continue the debate. In 2006, the sociologist reacted to al-Semmari's criticism with an article on two websites, *al-Tajdīd al-ʿArabī*, 'The Arab Renewal', and SaudiDebate.com. SaudiDebate.com was a platform on which the London-based Saudi scholar Madawi Al-Rasheed and the KSU anthropologist Saad Sowayan had also published critical comments on contemporary Saudi affairs. In his rejoinder, al-Dakhil defended 'theorizing', considering it 'the main objective, and in the final analysis the natural outcome of any scientific research'. Consequently, he decried al-Semmari's comments as being 'anti-scientific, and openly so'.[199] In 2009, al-Dakhil also published his research in a conference volume on *Wahhabism and the State* edited by the US-based scholars Mohammed Ayoob and Hasan Kosebalaban. He repeated his argument that the roots of the Wahhabi mission 'were political and social in character' and that the mission 'was the product of processes of settlement and state formation that characterized the history of Najd until the first half of the eighteenth century'.[200]

Conclusions

Although not a professional historian in a narrow sense, the historical sociologist Khalid al-Dakhil joined the historians al-Askar and Al-Freih to form a group that privileged social and economic factors in narratives of the Saudi past. The group offered a sophisticated and sustained challenge to the narratives of dynastic historiography from the 1970s onwards. This challenge was different from the challenges of many local, tribal and Shiite histories and thus broadened the spectrum of narrative plurality in the kingdom. The studies in social and economic history, as well as historical sociology, transcended the role of specific individuals and communities and analysed the key processes of the rise of the Wahhabi mission and the Saudi state with a focus on wider social and economic factors. Some scholars contended that the Wahhabi mission had not emerged against the background of an

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[199] Al-Dukhayyil, "Radd" (2006). Khalid al-Dakhil, "Academics" (2009), 208–9.
[200] Khalid al-Dakhil, "Wahhabism" (2009), 25, 33.

ahistorical 'age of ignorance', but in the context of a growth in religious learning in Najd between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries. Other researchers developed theories that conceived the Saudi state as a social and economic rather than religious project.

A combination of factors related to the expansion of the Saudi state and globalization gave rise to this group of social and economic histories. The broad social and economic transformations since the discovery of oil provided fertile ground for studies going beyond political and military events and the actions of individuals. More importantly, the state's support for higher education, particularly through programmes to send students to the United States, was a major factor in the formation of the first generation of Saudi social and economic historians and historical sociologists. Governmental agencies opposed some of the narratives produced by members of this generation. At the same time, however, globalization provided this generation with possibilities to avoid censorship by publishing abroad and online.

7. Conclusion

A plurality of narratives emerged in historiography in Saudi Arabia from the early twentieth century. An important, but not the only, group of histories focused on the Al Saud and Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab since the eighteenth century. From the production of the chronicle by Ibn Ghannām under the first Saudi state onwards, many of these dynastic histories were characterized by a takfīrist paradigm that assumed that Muslims who were not reached by the Wahhabi mission were infidels. The histories presented the Al Saud as waging jihad against its neighbours, and as spreading Islam against the background of a pre-Wahhabi 'age of ignorance' or *jāhilīyah*. Between the 1920s and 1960s, dynastic histories developed two further characteristics. In an exclusivist manner, they narrated the history of the country essentially as the history of the Al Saud. Moreover, in the context of strong Arab nationalism in the region, they presented the Al Saud as leaders of the Arab struggle for independence. After the 1960s, however, an important shift of emphasis occurred. With emerging Saudi nationalism and an ideology of development, dynastic historians came to present Saudi kings primarily as founders, unifiers and developers of the Saudi nation. Narratives of national foundation, unification and development thus complemented and sometimes replaced *jāhilīyah* and jihad in many texts.

One loose group of histories diverging from, and challenging, this dynastic historiography dealt with the past towns, regions, tribes and the Shiites. Until the 1970s, these texts confined themselves to cities, like Mecca, and major regions, including al-Aḥsāʾ and Asir. They were mostly particularistic, expressing historical independence from the Al Saud. In a perennialist manner, they portrayed towns and regions as passing through many centuries of history and surviving the coming and going of different dynasties. Thereby, they fostered the enduring identity of a place independent from the fate of specific rulers. Moreover, local authors characterized the people of Mecca or the Shiites of al-Qaṭīf as

Muslims even before the Wahhabi mission had reached them, in contrast to the idea of takfīrism. Since the 1970s, not only did many historians of tribes join these local authors. A new kind of narrative strategy also appeared. With the growth of Saudi nationalism, many local and tribal histories abandoned particularistic stances and adopted a national framework along with the narratives of unification and development. However, they did not become subservient to dynastic histories. Instead, and in contrast to dynastic exclusivism, many local, tribal and Shiite authors wrote 'contribution histories', underlining the contribution of their communities to national history.

Another group of texts forming part of Saudi narrative plurality consists of distinct social and economic histories as well as studies in historical sociology. These histories departed from most dynastic as well as many local and tribal writings that focused on unique political, religious, and military events. Investigating the social developments in pre-Wahhabi Arabia, several historians contested the widespread notion in dynastic histories of the pre-Wahhabi *jāhilīyah*. They contended that the Wahhabi mission did not emerge against the background of an ahistorical 'age of ignorance' but in the context of a growth in religious learning. Other scholars, who were mainly political scientists and sociologists, developed theories that conceived of the Saudi state as a social and economic rather than, as in most dynastic histories, a religious project.

The coverage of Saudi historiography in this thesis has been far from complete. Dynastic, local, tribal, Shiite, social, and economic histories do not represent all historical writing that has been produced in the kingdom. Research into the history of other Arab and Muslim countries as well as other regions of the world also developed. Out of 168 master theses and doctoral dissertations in modern and contemporary history examined at colleges and universities in Saudi Arabia between 1978 and 2000, only 46 (or 27.4 per cent) were on

the history of Saudi Arabia, while the remaining 72.6 per cent covered other countries.[1]

Despite analysing the effects of globalization, my thesis has thus largely remained within the 'paradigm of the nation state',[2] focusing on histories written in Saudi Arabia on Saudi Arabia.

My thesis has also been limited in at least one other way. Due to restrictions on meetings between unrelated men and women, I could interview only a few female professional historians. The Saudi historian ʿAbd al-Laṭīf al-Ḥumayd rightly pointed out that I had omitted the contribution of Saudi women historians in a presentation in Riyadh in 2009. In the chapters of this thesis, I have mentioned a number of female scholars, but I am aware that my study does not give the full picture of the activities of female scholars in the Saudi historical profession.[3] The 1990s witnessed, for instance, the emergence of a small but growing field of women's history in Saudi Arabia, pioneered by Dalal al-Harbi among others.[4]

Despite the lack of full coverage of Saudi historiography, my thesis has analysed several important trends that, taken together, exemplify narrative plurality in Saudi Arabia. I consider my analysis of dynastic, local, tribal, Shiite and social and economic histories sufficient to answer the principal question of this study, that is, why and how narrative plurality emerged in Saudi Arabia. Arguably, the factors I have discerned might also be applicable to those streams within Saudi historiography that I have not covered in my thesis.

An empowering state

One of the main factors shaping Saudi historiography has been the expansion of the state since the early twentieth century. As would be expected, this expansion, combined with the lack of formal political pluralism, brought restrictions to historiography. Until the 1950s, Saudi kings themselves or members of their courts censored historical works. Until the present,

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[1] Muʾnis, *Al-dirāsāt* (2003), 59. On Saudi narratives about Arab, Muslim and world history, see also Athopaiti, "A Comparative Analysis" (1987); Doumato, "Saudi Arabia" (2008); Al-Rasheed, *A History* (2002).

[2] Conrad, "Vergleich" (2007), 231.

[3] On Saudi female historians, see al-Qublān and al-ʿUrwān, "Isʿhāmāt" (2002); al-Ḥumayd, "Isʿhām" (1999).

[4] Dalal al-Harbi, *Prominent Women* (2008). Dalāl al-Ḥarbī, *Nisāʾ* (1999).

Saudi monarchs also retained, and occasionally made use of, the right to ban publications. As historical production increased, more specialized agencies, like the Ministry of Information and more recently the King Abdulaziz Foundation for Research and Archives, also started to examine historical works prior to publication. Moreover, rather than engaging in a straight-forward struggle of 'state vs. society',[5] a number of historians themselves made use of the censorship apparatus of the expanding state in order to suppress histories written by their colleagues and competitors.

Despite censorship, however, I argue that the expansion of the Saudi state incidentally contributed to the development of Saudi narrative plurality. Unsurprisingly, the state allocated a large part of its support to dynastic historical production. Even before oil revenues soared after World War II, King Abdulaziz Al Saud sponsored the publication of several nineteenth-century chronicles. With increasing resources, the state also subsidized new monographs, textbooks, and conferences commemorating dynastic achievements. In 1999 and 2001, this support reached two peaks in jubilees celebrated by universities and ministries alike: the centenary of the kingdom's foundation and the twentieth anniversary of King Fahd's accession to the throne.

Apart from dynastic histories, however, the expanding state also incidentally also funded the publication of histories that did not conform to the dynastic narratives. While the King Abdulaziz Foundation for Research and Archives primarily supported dynastic historiography, it also published a few texts on social and economic history. As the expanding Saudi state 'fragmented' into various ministries and other agencies with increased oil revenues in the decades after World War II,[6] some of these agencies were also able to engage in their own historiographical and wider cultural policies. The General Presidency of Youth Welfare, which shared a vision of the nation more inclusive of local communities, paid for the publication of a number of local histories that employed

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[5] Teitelbaum, "Dueling" (2002).

[6] Hertog, *Princes* (2010), 13.

contribution arguments. These histories challenged the dynastic conception of Saudi history as being essentially the history of the royal family.

Besides direct support for publications, the government incidentally enabled many members of local and tribal communities to write their own histories as it sought to 'develop' the country. From the early twentieth century onwards, the state provided an increasing number of its citizens with free education. This education was initially restricted to primary and secondary schools. After World War II, however, new universities taught Saudis advanced skills in research and writing. People belonging to formerly largely illiterate groups, like nomadic tribespeople, thus became able to produce sophisticated texts about the past.

Moreover, in order to enhance the level of education in the country, the Saudi state provided thousands of students from a variety of backgrounds with scholarships to study abroad. These student missions began on a modest level in the late 1920s and expanded with increasing oil revenues after 1945. While some holders of master's and doctoral degrees from American and British universities subsequently questioned the extent of the pre-Wahhabi *jāhilīyah*, others went further in challenging dynastic historiography. Trained in social and economic history or sociology at the University of California, Los Angeles, and other universities, they developed social and economic explanations of the Wahhabi mission and the Saudi state.

The state not only educated a broad range of historians in the kingdom or sponsored their education abroad. It also employed a considerable number of them so that they replaced foreign teachers and educated new generations for the sake of national 'development'. Several authors of local contribution histories enjoyed tenure as professors at public universities. Similarly, although some social and economic historians and historical sociologists challenged dynastic narratives in their theses at UCLA, they were still employed as faculty members at KSU after their return to the kingdom.

Government employment was not restricted to the higher education sector. As part of state expansion, an increasing number of people acquired positions in various parts of the

bureaucracy. These positions provided them with a middle class standard of living and an income that allowed them to fund their own research. Already before the oil boom of the 1970s, at least a dozen local historians worked as administrators, teachers, and judges in various towns and provinces for at least parts of their lives. These positions funded their research and provided them with the connections necessary to access private historical documents. With the expansion of the bureaucracy after the 1970s, the public payroll increased and came to comprise some tribal historians. At the same time, the distribution of oil revenues, combined with the rise in literacy, created a market for local and tribal publications.

Finally, the state shaped particularistic and 'contribution' narratives in more indirect ways. The establishment of the state, with its borders and national and provincial administrations, gave rise to new territorially defined as opposed to kinship-defined communities, such as Asir. These facilitated the perennialism that described a region as passing through centuries of multi-dynastic history. In the case of some Shiite authors, state repression also helped foster historical narratives which asserted that members of the sect were Muslims, in contrast to the narratives of takfīrist dynastic histories. In other cases, formal equality between Saudi citizens, combined with differential access to the state's resources, encouraged some authors to argue for their groups' contribution to national history. They did so in order to increase their communities' share of the oil wealth or to gain symbolic capital located in past tribal glories. In other instances, local historians sought to establish themselves as cultural brokers between local and national institutions.

Globalization and pluralization

The second major factor behind Saudi narrative plurality is globalization. Dynastic and, to a smaller extent, social and economic historiographies were shaped by the influx of foreigners, which global integration facilitated. Non-Saudi Arab officials in the court and Foreign Ministry not only served the Saudi government in its international relations. Some of them also

published some of the first major histories of the Saudi dynasty. As men who had few loyalties to local and regional communities, they strengthened dynastic exclusivism, the tendency to conceive the country's history essentially as the history of the Al Saud. A number of non-Saudi professional historians also built up the first departments of history at Saudi universities.

Globalization encouraged the state's empowerment of an increasing number of citizens through education and the distribution of oil revenues. Awareness of global competition as well as the adoption of the global ideology of development contributed to efforts to develop the national human resources. They included the introduction of free public education at all levels, as well as scholarships for studies abroad. Furthermore, policies to 'Saudize' the workforce emerged in reaction to the overwhelming reliance on foreign labour and unemployment among Saudis. While these policies failed in the private sector, they were relatively successful in the public sector.[7] This contributed to an expansion of the middle classes and increasing numbers of amateur historians.

Globalization also encompassed global diffusion of knowledge, which influenced a variety of historiographical approaches. Studies and research trips abroad and the influx of foreigners and foreign literature brought Saudi historians into contact with a variety of ideologies prevalent elsewhere in the world. The strong Arab nationalism in the region between the 1920s and 1960s affected a number of later dynastic historians who arrived in the kingdom from Greater Syria and Egypt. These historians subsequently introduced a pan-Arab frame to Saudi dynastic historiography while still maintaining elements of the takfīrism of earlier Najdi chronicles. After the 1960s, the global ideology of development also affected a variety of writings. Dynastic historians presented Saudi kings as leaders of national development, while other scholars argued for the contribution of local, tribal and Shiite communities to this process.

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[7] Hertog, *Princes* (2010), 186–87.

Apart from ideologies, contact with foreign literature also inspired different historiographical approaches in the kingdom. Through reading books in Arabic and Western languages about Arabia and the Gulf, many Saudis perceived misrepresentations of their hometowns and home regions. Such perceptions encouraged them to write local histories. During their studies in the United States, some Saudis engaged with global sociological theories about Saudi Arabia and the Middle East. In seeking to gain new understandings of the kingdom's social and economic development, they challenged narratives of the Saudi state as a primarily religious project. Saudi historians not only took inspiration from global literature, but also used it as source material. Many amateurs used books by Arab and European travellers for the writing of local and tribal history. Some professional historians found information on regional pasts in French, British, and Ottoman archives. In disputed matters, some scholars also drew on foreign scholars to lend authority to their claims.

Finally, the growth in the kingdom's transnational connections also gave residents of Saudi Arabia opportunities to publish histories abroad and online. Not only did dynastic historians publish texts in Cairo and Beirut, where they benefitted from foreign expertise in editing and printing, but social and economic historians also used foreign publishers for the dissemination of new interpretations of the rise of the Saudi state. They used prestigious foreign platforms to gain a global, Arabic-speaking audience, and to avoid censorship. The introduction of public internet access in 1999 further facilitated the avoidance of official controls. This necessary step in the context of the globalizing economy allowed the establishment of tribal websites on which several authors published controversial historical accounts.

Narrative plurality beyond Saudi Arabia

The development of narrative plurality has been a global phenomenon in historiography in the twentieth century. This has certainly been the case in democracies. In the United States, for instance, the histories of women and racial and ethnic minorities have questioned older

narratives of national history that focus on the male White Anglo-Saxon Protestant elite.

These histories expressed a general scepticism towards any single narrative of the

American past. This plurality of historical narratives has resulted not only from the American

democratic system and its civil liberties generally. A more specific factor has been the

'democratization' of higher education, that is, the broadening of access to university places

and positions for women and members of minorities.[8]

Outside the Western world, narrative plurality has also been evident, especially in 'full'

or 'flawed' democracies. In independent India, frequently considered the 'largest democracy

in the world', numerous approaches have developed, including secular nationalist and Hindu

nationalist histories, as well as various kinds of histories rooted in Marxism and post-colonial

theories, among them Subaltern Studies.[9] In Thailand, local history, regional history,

economic history, the history of gender, and post-modernist history have flourished since a

democratic transformation in the 1970s.[10]

Far less research has been undertaken on modern Arab historiography than on its

European and American counterparts. My thesis suggests that we revisit this research in

order to find out whether narrative plurality may have also been a wider phenomenon in

historiography in the Arab world, despite the persistence of authoritarianism. A few studies

indicate that contestation has been a feature of historiography in Egypt and perhaps other

countries. Anthony Gorman has shown that in late twentieth-century Egypt, besides the

official secular-nationalist and Islamic currents, feminist, and Coptic historiographies also

'contested the nation'.[11] Other researchers have pointed to the rise of tribal writings in

Jordan, Syria and Iraq, where they challenged the absence of tribes from official textbooks.[12]

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[8] Appleby et al., *Telling* (1994).

[9] Lal, *The History* (2005).

[10] Reynolds, *Seditious Histories* (2006), ix.

[11] Gorman, *Historians* (2003).

[12] Shryock, *Nationalism* (1997). Buessow, "Writing" (2010). Davis, *Memories* (2005), 238.

Much more research still needs to be undertaken before we can provide a comprehensive picture of the extent and form of narrative plurality in modern Arab historiography. My case study of Saudi Arabia is only a small contribution to this wider picture. However, its approach may be useful for future studies. It invites other researchers to study to what extent the expansion of the state brought about a pluralization, if not 'democratization', of higher education in general and professional historiography in particular in the Arab world. Beyond professional historiography, much more research needs to be undertaken on amateur writings, especially on local and tribal topics. Here, I propose that we pay special attention to the effects of globalization, including the spread of internet access, on these writings.

Previous studies have not made this combination of state expansion, globalization and narrative central to their inquiry. However, as I re-read studies in the light of my own findings, they offer some instances indicating that a similar combination might have been at work elsewhere. The growth in state provision of higher education and the establishment of an indigenous historical profession seems to have been a general phenomenon in Arab countries—as it was elsewhere in the world. In this field, Saudi Arabia developed rather late compared with Egypt and other countries. The Egyptian University, later renamed Cairo University, was founded in 1908, almost fifty years before the establishment of the first Saudi university, King Saud University.[13] An indigenous Egyptian historical profession emerged in the 1920s and 1930s. Its Saudi counterpart only appeared in the 1960s and 1970s. Yoav Di-Capua has shown that this professionalization in Egypt limited historiography through a 'founder paradigm'.[14] Gorman, however, indicates that historians from a variety of backgrounds—including women—and with divergent interests and allegiances also benefitted from the growth in education.[15]

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[13] Iggers and Wang, *A Global History* (2008), 195.

[14] Di-Capua, *Gatekeepers* (2009).

[15] Gorman, *Historians* (2003).

In some instances, direct state sponsorship for professional historical publications in other Arab countries benefitted historians who were not following the dominant ideologies. Ulrike Freitag has shown that a project to re-write history by the Syrian Ministry for Culture and National Guidance in 1965 included a 'wide spectrum of participants whose opinions were published'. This spectrum comprised Marxist and 'more conservative members of the Ba'th party' and even a member of the Muslim Brotherhood. According to Freitag, 'this pluralism of views' might have served a legitimizing purpose by being 'attractive to the public, although it was mediated by a careful selection of divergent views'.[16] Even the Iraqi Ba'thist state once sponsored a study of *The Iraqi Working Class* by Kamal Mazhar Ahmad, a leftist Kurdish professor at Baghdad University. According to Eric Davis, Ahmad 'treated an extremely sensitive topic without conforming to Ba'thist precepts'.[17]

Besides state expansion, globalization also seems to have shaped the development of modern historiography in Arab countries other than Saudi Arabia. If we see European colonialism in the nineteenth and early twentieth century as part of globalization and the establishment of global empires,[18] then globalization had tremendous effects on the emergence of anti-colonial histories in the Maghrib, for instance. James McDougall traces the beginnings of modern Algerian historiography back to Tawfiq al-Madani (1899–1983) and other scholars. These were founding members of the Algerian branch of the wider movement for Islamic 'reform' or Salafīyah movement—which itself became a global movement in the twentieth century.[19] Although al-Madani sought to refute the arguments of French scholars about Algerian history, he took his sources, categories, modes of argumentation, and conception of 'valid history' from colonial scholarship.[20] This enabled him to develop a new language of history and nationalism even under the conditions of a

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[16] Freitag, "In Search" (1999), 4.

[17] Davis, *Memories* (2005), 216.

[18] On 'global colonialism', see Darwin, *After Tamerlane* (2008).

[19] McDougall, "Martyrdom" (2006), 52.

[20] Ibid., 54–55. For a similar phenomenon in Indian historiography, see Prakash, "Writing" (1990), 388.

colonial authoritarianism.[21] Similarly, several prominent Arab historians, including Muhammad Kamil Ayad from Syria and Sultan Bin Muhammad al-Qasimi from Sharjah, criticized Western conceptions of Arab history. Yet they had originally gained their doctorates from Western universities.[22]

In my thesis, I have considered the employment of foreigners by the Saudi state for the writing of history as part of globalization. This employment has also not been unique to Saudi Arabia. Although he did not conceptualize it as part of globalization, Yoav Di-Capua shows the importance of foreigners for the development of Egyptian historiography. In the first decades of the twentieth century, a significant part of the faculty of Egyptian universities was European.[23] Only after the 1930s did history become 'Egyptianized', as indigenous historians writing in Arabic replaced foreigners.[24] Similarly, well-educated Palestinians contributed to the development of historical studies in Kuwait and Libya.[25] During the founding phase of Syrian professional historiography between 1948 and 1960, visiting professors from Lebanon and Egypt were invited to teach history at the University of Damascus because of a lack of indigenous professional historians.[26] These foreigners may at least have laid the basis for the subsequent development of a 'plurality' of approaches in Syrian studies of Ottoman history.[27]

Finally, the development of indigenous historical professions in other countries depended on people who—facilitated by globalization—had studied abroad, and often in the former colonial metropolises. Shafik Ghorbal, who led the 'Egyptianization of history' in his own country, had himself undertaken graduate research at the University of London under

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[21] McDougall, *History* (2006). McDougall also demonstrates al-Madani's ability to transgress the colonial boundaries and move all across the Mediterranean in his lifetime. This ability can also be seen as part of globalization, even though McDougall does not explicitly identify it as such.

[22] Freitag, "Die Entwicklung" (1993), 84–85. Choueiri, "Arab Historical Writing" (2011), 503.

[23] Di-Capua, "'Jabarti" (2004), 434.

[24] Ibid., 435.

[25] Choueiri, "Arab Historical Writing" (2011).

[26] Freitag, "Die Entwicklung" (1993), 85.

[27] Ibid., 87. Freitag does not see a plurality in Syrian studies of contemporary Syrian history, however. Ibid., 90–91.

the English historian Arnold Toynbee. Similarly, leading professional historians from Jordan, Sudan, Libya, Iraq and other Arab countries in the twentieth century had all studied at British or American universities. In the case of Iraq, several of these foreign-educated historians, including Abd al-Aziz al-Duri and Ali al-Wardi played a crucial role in introducing social and economic history to the country.[28] The Syrian historical profession also comprised graduates with divergent interests from universities in Egypt, Spain, Germany, the Soviet Union, Turkey, and other countries.[29] Numerous Moroccan historians also received their doctorates from French universities, where they were influenced by the *Annales* School.[30]

These examples, taken from research on historiography in other Arab countries, perhaps seem rather arbitrary. They are certainly insufficient to make a general argument about modern Arab historiography. Much more research needs to be undertaken. Nevertheless, previous research does suggest that a relationship between narrative plurality, state expansion and global integration might not have been confined to Saudi Arabia.

Epilogue: The Saudi opening and historiography

As stated earlier, state expansion and globalization drove the emergence of narrative plurality even in the absence of formal political pluralism. Yet, they also contributed to a political opening of Saudi Arabia in the early twentieth-first century, which may allow for future historiographical plurality within the frame of political pluralism. In the 2000s, the Saudi government embarked on a series of political reforms. They included the organization of the first municipal elections for decades in 2005. Although the government appointed half of the members of municipal councils, international observers generally considered the election of the other half of members as free and fair.[31] Since 2003, the state has also sponsored the King Abdulaziz Center for National Dialogue. It held public discussions on a

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[28] Choueiri, "Arab Historical Writing" (2011).

[29] Gombár, "Contemporary Historiography" (2000), 68. Freitag, "Die Entwicklung" (1993), 84.

[30] El Mansour, "Moroccan Historiography" (1997), 116.

[31] Kraetzschmar, "Electoral Rules" (2010).

number of sensitive issues, including religious extremism, women's rights, and the situation of youth. In unprecedented moves, the Center invited not only women but also Shiites as discussants.[32]

The Saudi opening has sometimes been interpreted as the result of the shock of the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 combined with the moderate personality of King Abdullah (r. since 2005). Robert Lacey argues that '9/11 gave Abdullah the chance to introduce the reforms that he had long wished to implement'.[33] Yet, the long-term empowerment of citizens through state-financed education and new technologies also contributed to this opening. Already in spring 2001, that is, before, the events of 11 September, the Saudi government had introduced a new press and publication law that allowed 'constructive criticism', sending a message to society that the state allowed 'wider discussion of issues affecting the kingdom'.[34] One Saudi minister considered education to be the most important factor behind the political change under King Abdullah. He stated that even 'religious education in universities obliged students to learn about the thoughts of religious schools other than the writings of the Wahhabis'. This led, according to him, to increased tolerance for alternative views. He added that rather than Abdullah 'driving the change', it was the change of society 'driving Abdullah' in his reforms.[35]

During the Saudi opening, a number of Saudi historians, who were all educated at the state's expenses, publicly turned against censorship. The historian Dalal al-Harbi argued in the newspaper *al-Jazīrah* in 2006 against the retraction of books because of 'sensitivity', 'dissatisfaction' with contents or 'disagreement with the author'. Instead, she called for an 'opening of the floor for academic criticism' and for discussions of sensitive works in periodicals. This would 'give the author of the criticized work the right to respond and defend

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[32] Drewes, "Das Nationale Dialogforum" (2010). See also Menno Preuschaft's research on the National Dialogue.

[33] Lacey, "Has 9/11" (2010).

[34] Ehteshami, "Reform" (2003), 68.

[35] Interview, 5 November 2009.

his point of view'.[36] Two years later, Rāshid ibn ʿAsākir, a Najdi local historian, complained in the newspaper *al-Riyāḍ* that 'researchers, professors, and amateurs still suffer from the censor's scissors and from demands for deletions and changes'. 'Such difficulties', he stated, 'make many Saudis turn to foreign publishers to complete their work and to print a book fast'. In order to benefit local publishers and save the authors travelling time and costs, he called upon the Ministry of Culture and Information to 'remove the various problems' of censorship.[37]

These calls for an end to censorship already enjoyed some success. Saudi newspapers have even published reviews of controversial books. They include a work published by the journalist ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Khiḍr (b. 1968) in 2010. It is entitled *Saudi Arabia, History of a State and Society: A Reading of a Third of a Century of Intellectual, Political and Developmental Transformations*. In this social history, al-Khiḍr described sensitive topics, including the religious awakening, or *ṣaḥwah*, since the 1960s, the development of the media and religious censorship, the position and rights of Saudi women, and opposition to the Saudi regime. Moreover, he frequently used Marxist terminology, speaking of a Saudi 'bourgeoisie' and the ages of 'feudalism' and 'capitalism'. Thus, it was not surprising that the book appeared outside of Saudi Arabia, namely in Beirut.[38] Yet, the work found widespread acclaim in the kingdom. A reviewer in the newspaper *al-Waṭan* praised it as 'the undisputed book of the year', while a colleague in *al-Riyāḍ* called it a 'foundational text of modern social history'.[39]

In an unprecedented move, the newspaper *al-Waṭan* even published a review of a history of the Saudi Shiites in 2010. The well-known television presenter Turkī al-Dakhīl (b. 1973) reviewed a book titled *Saudi Shiites* by Ibrahim Al-Hatlani, a human rights activist. He commented upon this extraordinary event, stating that 'after the technological revolution',

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[36] Dalāl al-Ḥarbī, "Al-bawāriḥ" (2006).

[37] Ibn ʿAsākir, "Dawr" (2008).

[38] Al-Khiḍr, *Al-suʿūdīyah* (2010), 757–58.

[39] Al-Qāsim, "Sīrat "al-khiḍr"" (2010). Mushʿān, "Al-suʿūdīyah" (2010).

'there are no longer restrictions or prohibitions in historical writing'. Although al-Dakhīl had himself been educated as a Sunni theologian, he commended Al-Hatlani for 'overcoming extremism' and 'the bias of some of those whose sectarian belonging crept into historiography'. To him, Al-Hatlani's work was an 'objective research experiment' without 'superficiality and agitation'.[40]

The pluralization of Saudi politics and a potentially freer publishing environment has of course not stopped senior princes or governmental agencies from attempting to influence historical writing. Governmental influence has continued to stretch beyond curricula in state schools and has even reached academic research. Paradoxically, the liberalization of higher education allowed the King Abdulaziz Foundation for Research and Archives under Prince Salman ibn Abdulaziz to make inroads into Saudi universities. In line with governmental policies to change Saudi Arabia into a 'knowledge-based society', King Saud University and other higher education institutions started in 2007 to accept private funding for the creation of research chairs. Two years later, Salman endowed the Prince Salman ibn Abdulaziz Chair of Historical Studies at KSU. While the director of the university headed the chair's supervisory board, the King Abdulaziz Foundation for Research and Archives remained influential in appointing the holder of the chair and determining its agenda. Fahd al-Semmari, the foundation's secretary general, headed the chair's academic committee and worked as its executive advisor.[41] Also in 2009, Salman endowed the King Abdulaziz Chair of Studies in the Kingdom's History at Imam University. Marking a continuation of dynastic historiography, one of the first plans of this chair was to organize a new conference on King Abdulaziz.[42]

Through the universities, governmental agencies also attempted to influence amateur writings on topics other than dynastic history. In 2009, Prince Naif, the minister of interior,

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[40] Turkī al-Dakhīl, "Al-tārīkh" (2010).

[41] Dārat al-Malik ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, *Al-tārīkhīyah* 29 (2010), 13.

[42] Jāmiʿat al-Imām Muḥammad ibn Suʿūd al-Islāmīyah, "Al-amīr" (2009).

endowed another research professorship at Imam University, the Prince Naif Chair for National Unity Studies. This chair sought to co-opt the hundreds of Saudi tribal websites into spreading nationalism instead of tribalism. Thus, one of the chair's first initiatives was to hold a conference in order to discuss programmes to 'incentivize tribal websites to contribute to strengthening national belonging'. The conference also sought to encourage the placing of nationalist adverts on these sites.[43]

While members of the royal family have remained influential, an opening to historiographical trends in other countries is likely to contribute to further narrative pluralization. With shifts in global alliances, this opening may well be eastwards as well as westwards. In 2006, King Abdullah became the first Saudi monarch to visit China. On that occasion, the social and economic historian Abdullah al-Askar published an article on 'Saudi History in China' in *al-Riyāḍ*. He argued that in order to 'consolidate strategic relations with China', Saudi Arabia could not depend on 'economic interests only' but also needed to 'strengthen scientific and cultural relations'. He thus proposed the establishment of a Saudi centre for Chinese studies that would bring 'Muslim Chinese scholars' to work with Saudis on Chinese language, culture, and history. Moreover, al-Askar stressed the need to 'explore the valley of Chinese historical writing' in order to 'get to know the Chinese ways of thinking when they deal with our history'.[44]

What narratives future Saudi historiography in its global context will produce, is, of course, impossible to foresee. In 2009, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Wābilī, a lecturer at King Khalid Military Academy in Riyadh, however, offered a glimpse into the kinds of new interpretations of the past that may result from a connection of Saudi history to global history. On the Saudi National Day on 23 September, he published an essay in *al-Waṭan* on 'The Saudi Revolution and the Three Revolutions of the Modern World'. He called the agreement between Muhammad ibn Saud and Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab in 1744 the 'Saudi Revolution'.

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[43] Jāmiʿat al-Imām Muḥammad ibn Suʿūd al-Islāmīyah, "Kursī" (2009).
[44] Al-ʿAskar, "Al-tārīkh" (2006).

This revolution 'first introduced the organization of the modern state, rather than that of an empire, to the Arab region, and influenced the other countries of the region'. He thus put the 'Saudi Revolution' in line with the other two revolutions that formed the 'beginning of modern world': the American Revolution and the French Revolution.[45]

Seeking to place Saudi history prominently within global history, al-Wābilī even speculated about connections between the Saudi, French, and American revolutions. According to him, the European geographical discoveries as contributors to the American and French revolutions were also a reason behind the 'Saudi Revolution'. They allowed the Europeans to bypass the Arab countries in the trade from east to west, which led to the 'impoverishment of the Arab region'. Subsequently, the Ottomans neglected the Arabian peninsula, which gave Muhammad ibn Saud and Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab the leeway to establish their state. Moreover, al-Wābilī argued that 'the American Revolution supported the French Revolution'. In turn, the French revolution 'communicated with the Saudi Revolution in an attempt to coordinate their positions, but they did not reach a point of understanding'. Al-Wābilī ended his article with a call for Saudis to be conscious of the global dimension of their past: 'Are we allowed to abandon our global historical depth, to which we have contributed by formulating and forming modern and contemporary global history?'[46]

Whether Saudi historiographical pluralization will continue within a framework of political pluralism remains, of course, to be seen. This study, however, has shown that narrative plurality developed even in the absence of formal political pluralism and as the result of state expansion in a globalizing context. Thus, even if the Saudi opening does not continue and censorship again becomes strict, narrative pluralization may well continue.

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[45] Al-Wābilī, "Al-thawrah" (2009).

[46] Ibid.

Appendix

Figure 5: Map of Saudi Arabia

(produced by the Central Intelligence Agency, in the public domain)

Figure 6: Provinces of Saudi Arabia

(public domain)

اطّلعنا على برقية سموكم الخطية رقم ٤/١/٦٤٧/م وتاريخ ٢/٦/١٤٢٧هـ المشار فيها إلى الأمرين رقم ٢٨٥/٧/م وتاريخ ٣/٦/١٤١٩ هـ القاضي بالموافقة على قيام دارة الملك عبدالعزيز بطباعة كتاب (إمتاع السامر بتكملة متعة الناظر) لمؤلفه/ شعيب بن عبدالحميد الدوسري طبعة جديدة مع تعليقات الأستاذين/ عبدالرحمن الرويشد، ومحمد الحميد، والملاحق التي أعدّها الأستاذ/ أبو عبدالرحمن بن عقيل عن هذا الكتاب.. ورقم ٤١٦٩٠/ب/٧ وتاريخ ٢٧/١٠/١٤٢٣هـ القاضي بالموافقة على قيام الدارة بتكليف بعض المختصّين تحت إشرافها للتعليق على الجزء الثاني من الكتاب المشار إليه وطبعه مع الجزء الأول في كتاب واحد لتفنيد مغالطاته وأكاذيبه.

وما أوضحتموه سموكم من أن الدارة أصدرت مؤخراً الجزء الثاني من ذلك الكتاب بتعليقات الأساتذة/ عبدالرحمن الرويشد، ومحمد الحميد، وفايز الحربي والذي تأكّد فيه أن الكتاب بقسميه الأول والثاني كتاب مُزوّر ومصنوع نُسب إلى المدعو/ شعيب بن عبدالحميد بن سالم الدوسري زوراً وافتراءً، وفيه تجرّد كامل من الأمانة التاريخية وتحرّر واضح من قيود المسؤولة، وكشف تساهل الباحثين من عدم المسارعة إلى كشف حقيقته وتعريفه والتحذير منه حتى لا ينخدع أهل الاختصاص ولا يفتح باباً للتزوير والتلفيق في المؤلفات التاريخية وأنساب الأسر والقبائل، وأنه من أجل تنبيه الباحثين والجهات ذات العلاقة داخلياً وخارجياً بحقيقة الكتاب، ومن أجل الحدّ من انتشار ظاهرة الكتب المكذوبة.. تقترحون سموكم الموافقة على التوصيات الآتية :-

١- إصدار إعلان تشهيري وتوضيحي من وزارة الثقافة والإعلام ببطلان الكتاب بكافة أقسامه ليكون عامة الناس على علم بحقيقته ومكانته العلمية.

Figure 7: Ban of *The Entertainer's Pleasure* (page 1)

(copy of a memorandum to the Ministry of Higher Education, handed to me by a Saudi historian in 2010)

٢- وضع الكتاب ضمن قائمة الكتب المزوّرة وغير المُعتمـدة لـدى وزارة الثقافـة والإعلام وتنبيه الكتاب والباحثين بعدم النقل عنه أو الاعتماد عليه.

٣- التعميم عن طريق إدارات الرقابة العربية والمطبوعات بعـدم فسـح أي كتـاب يُنقل عنه أو يجعله ضمن مصادره.

٤- إبلاغ المراكز العلمية والمكتبات العامة في الدول العربيـة والعالميـة بحقيقـة الكتاب خاصة وأن الباحثين البعيدين عن الاطلاع على مصادر تاريخ المملكة قـد ينخدعون به وبأمثاله عن حسن نية.

٥- إحاطة الجمعية التاريخية السعودية لإبلاغ أعضائها بعدم اعتماد هذا الكتـاب وعدم الإشارة إليه في البحوث التاريخية، وقيامها بإبلاغ الجمعيات التاريخيـة في دول مجلس التعاون وغيرها بذلك.

ونخبركم بموافقتنا على التوصيـات المشـار إليهـا أعـلاه.. فـأكملوا مـا يلـزم بموجبه، ،،،،

عبدالله بن عبدالعزيز
رئـيس مجـلس الـوزراء

Figure 8: Ban of *The Entertainer's Pleasure* (page 2)

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