

The volume is beautifully illustrated with eighty-four, full page, colour images collected at the end, and black and white images integrated within the texts. The inclusion of the introductory bibliography is a useful addition for further research, particularly the catalogue of exhibitions and collections where Arab painting material can be found. This is an essential text for any student or scholar of Islamic art which brings to the fore a fascinating body of new or often neglected material, within a contextual approach which provides a blueprint for the future study of Arabic manuscripts.

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FAHD AL-SEMMARI (ed.); SALMA K. JAYYUSI (trans.):

A History of the Arabian Peninsula.

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This book consists of translations of sixteen articles originally published in Arabic between 1975 and 1998 in the journal *al-Dārah*, edited at the King Abdul Aziz Foundation for Research and Archives in Riyadh. Most of the authors are scholars who worked or are working in Saudi Arabia, among them ‘Abd Allāh al-‘Uthaymīn, retired professor of modern history at King Saud University (KSU) in Riyadh, who contributed three chapters. Fahd al-Semmari, secretary-general of the King Abdul Aziz Foundation and current editor-in-chief of *al-Dārah*, selected the articles, and Salma Khadra Jayyusi, a literary scholar, poet and former faculty member at the universities of Khartoum, Algiers and Constantine, translated them.

The chapters mainly deal with the history of the areas within the contemporary borders of Saudi Arabia in the Umayyad age, the period preceding the Wahhabi movement and the periods of Saudi rule until the mid-twentieth century. Two chapters deal with Yemen and Egypt, but these focus on the influence of the Wahhabi mission in the two regions. The areas of today’s Kuwait, Qatar, UAE and Oman are almost excluded, so this volume presents studies in the wider, and mainly modern, history of Saudi Arabia rather than in the history of the Arabian Peninsula as a whole.

Although the volume lacks a proper introduction and conclusion to link the chapters and produce a single consistent narrative, the selection and ordering of the chapters presents the history of Arabia in a specific way. In the Umayyad age, a variety of factors related to the Muslim conquests led to the emigration of tribesmen from the Banū Ḥanīfah (to whom the genealogy of the House of Saud is frequently traced back) from the Arabian Peninsula to Iraq, Syria and North Africa. Thereafter, centuries passed in which Arabian society remained divided into sedentary people and nomads, conflicts between families and tribes prevailed, in Najd in particular, people performed polytheist rites, such as worship of the dead. In the eighteenth century then, Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb preached monotheism, as it was practised in the early Muslim community. His mission overcame opposition from other religious scholars and spread from al-Dir‘īyah, the capital of the Saudi rulers, to wider parts of the Arabian Peninsula and even to Egypt, where it influenced the teachings of Muḥammad ‘Abduh in the nineteenth century.

In the twentieth century then, King Abdul Aziz, a competent leader in favourable circumstances, unified Saudi Arabia and settled the Bedouins in agricultural communities where they learned about the unity of God and acquired a sense of citizenship, which replaced their tribal affiliations.

With such a presentation of Arabian history, al-Semmari's book overemphasizes the mission of Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb and the personal role of King Abdul Aziz and ignores wider historical developments that led to the emergence of the Wahhabi movement and contributed to the foundation of the contemporary Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The social, political and religious situation in the Peninsula before the Wahhabi movement is described as rather static. Although al-Uthaymīn in one of his chapters recognizes an increase in the number of religious scholars from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries and the existence of unjust rule by local princes in Najd before the Wahhabi movement, he does not engage with Mohamed Al-Freih's argument that both resulted from increasing sedentarization in Najd, in turn a result of more rainfall and the decline of trans-Arabian trade with the Europeans' use of the route to India around the Cape of Good Hope (*The Historical Background of the Emergence of Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb and His Movement*, PhD diss., UCLA, 1990). Al-Uthaymīn's other chapter, entitled "Success of King Abdul Aziz in unifying the country", glorifies the late king's personality and leadership as factors for his success and does not mention British support or consultations with British agents. Al-Uthaymīn praises the king's personal attributes on seven pages without mentioning a single negative attribute, and failing to engage with H. St. J. Philby's argument that the king's generosity was detrimental to the economy and that his expenses became an intolerable burden for the exchequer (*Saudi Arabia*, London, 1955, p. xii).

However, besides the general weakness of the analysis compared with other recent books (such as Madawi Al-Rasheed and Robert Vitalis (eds), *Counter-Narratives: History, Contemporary Society and Politics in Saudi Arabia and Yemen*, New York, 2004), al-Semmari's volume still provides new and valuable information. 'Abd Allāh Abū Dāhish, who relies partly on manuscripts in his personal possession, gives interesting details about the arrival of the Wahhabi mission in 'Asīr, Najrān and Yemen. Maṣū' Ibrāhīm al-Ḥāzīmī, a retired professor of Arabic literature at KSU, examines the writings of Arab travellers to Saudi Arabia in the twentieth century, relatively unknown and little-studied, with the exception of Amīn al-Rīḥānī's books. In al-Ḥāzīmī's analysis, some literature appears to contain a kind of inter-Arab Orientalism (although al-Ḥāzīmī does not use this term): he argues that Egyptian journalist Muḥammad Shafīq Muṣṭafā writes about the Najdis and their beliefs as if he were writing "about primitive tribes in Africa or the Far East" (p. 241). Finally, despite some inconsistencies (such as the appearance of the Najdi dynasty of Rashīd as Rushaid and Rashīd) and inaccuracies (such as the rendering of al-Murabba' palace in Riyadh as al-Mirba'), the accurate translation of the chapters and the transcription of Arabic words by Salma Jayyusi are to be lauded.

To conclude, the chapters selected by al-Semmari vary widely in their quality and a number of them do not represent the current state of research and analysis. Consequently, it is certainly not an introductory book or textbook on the history of the Arabian Peninsula. However, scholars of Saudi Arabia in particular will still find very interesting and useful information.

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