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Jonas Yazo Srouji

A Legitimate Kingdom:
The Use of History and Narratives in a Saudi Schoolbook

Who controls the past controls the future: Who controls the present controls the past.

- George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

A Legitimate Kingdom: The Use of History and Narratives in a Saudi Schoolbook

A Master's Thesis

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Frontmatter: A billboard in Riyadh, showing the founder of modern Saudi Arabia, King Abdelaziz ibn Saud in the center, flanked by the current King Salman bin Abdelaziz (right) and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (left), with the previous kings below. From left to right, Abdullah, Fahd, Khalid, Faisal, and Saud. Picture courtesy of Victor Jacobsen.

Summary

This thesis seeks to understand how history is used by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to legitimize the state and regime internally. Based on a textbook printed for use in secondary schools to teach Saudi students the history of the kingdom, the main part of the thesis analyses how the narrative explains the pre-Saudi history, and the founding, rise, and fall, of the first (1744-1818) and second (1824-1891) Saudi states.

Opening with a short exploration of states and legitimacy and how these terms can be understood by drawing on Max Weber and Tim Niblock, the thesis discusses the main explanations of Saudi legitimacy found in the previous scholarly literature, namely well-being through Rentierism and Wahhabism as a state ideology. Turning to studies of Saudi curricula, the thesis finds that most previous works have been focused on intolerance in the religious curricula, with few authors looking at why or how history is used. Those few who look at history textbooks are either based on dated sources or small samples translated by others.

Following an exploration of the Saudi school system to show the role and reach of the book, a methodological and theoretical section defines central terms and presents a theoretical framework to analyze the textbook. Based on an understanding of *constructed historical narratives* drawn from Hayden White and Jörg Mathias Determann, the thesis presents the notion of a *historical consciousness,* a collective imagination that frames the way people understand the past and forms their expectations to the present and future, which is shaped by historical narratives. How such a historical consciousness can then legitimize a state and political system is explored through some theoretical thoughts mainly drawn from Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* and Eric Hobsbawm in *The Invention of Tradition.*

Analyzing the narrative in the textbook, the thesis finds a clear dichotomy between times of ignorance and war when the Al Saud are not in control, and stability and security when they are. Peppered with notions of ending foreign domination, the narrative is a story of how the Al Saud united the country and ruled according to the faith, with support from the founder of the Wahhabi movement. The narrative represents the clergy as subservient to the rulers while reducing the presence of the people to being saved by the dynasty, with little agency of their own. Country and state are repeatedly conflated, while unification is presented as a religious goal. The three states are tied together in the narrative, which compares the first state to that of Muhammad, in turn implying that modern Saudi Arabia is structured in the same way. Finally, the fall of the previous states is explained as a direct result of division and disloyalty, while framed as a return to chaos.

Through this narrative, it is imprinted into the Saudi historical consciousness that the country is old and naturally constitutes one unit. The state is represented as belonging to the rulers, and that if all

does not support the Al Saud, a new era of war, ignorance, and foreign domination might begin. By creating a fear not of the state, but of the lack of the state, the narrative presents the Saudi kingdom as the only guarantee for the well-being of its denizens. The relationship between secular rulers and a supportive, if subservient, clergy also underpins legitimacy through a religious ideology, further strengthened by making a united country a religious goal. In these ways, the historical narrative underpins other sources of legitimacy. It also gives a historical legitimacy on its own, by repeatedly making the state the domain of the rulers, presenting it as naturally united, and delegitimizing any other previous rulers of parts of the state. It seems that this has long been an active strategy of the Saudi state, not just in schoolbooks but through other means as well, yet the use of history in Saudi Arabia has been left understudied in academia, despite its possible influence on Saudi society.

Note on Translation & Transliteration

All translations in this thesis are my own. In the transliteration of Arabic terms and quotes, I have largely followed the IJMES transliteration system.[2] When directly quoting in Arabic, I transliterate completely. If a common English version exists in the literature for the spelling of personal and place names, as well as certain terms with a regular form in English, I have used it in the main body of text. Thus, the founder of Saudi Arabia in 1932 will be referred to as Abdelaziz ibn Saud not *ʿabd al-ʿazīz ibn ʿabd al-raḥman āl saʿūd*, Mecca will be used instead of *makka*, and ulama in place of *ʿulamāʾ*. As Arabic does not distinguish capital letters, I do not do so myself when quoting, yet I do capitalize names and titles that appear in the main text, such as the book, *Tārīkh al-Mamlaka al-ʿarabiyya as-Saʿudiyya.* When quoting English-language literature that employ Arabic terms, any transliterations will be as in the cited text. Despite the main source using the Islamic Hijri calendar, I have converted all years to the Gregorian calendar for ease of understanding.

[2] For details, see the guide on the website of the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* at https://ijmes.chass.ncsu.edu/ijmes_translation_and_transliteration_guide.htm

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Introduction

The stories we tell each other about how we came to be, matters greatly in how we understand our societies and our place in them. How we understand the past and narrate our history, tells us why we are who we are, why our systems are structured and work as they do. In Denmark, a common story is that instead of revolution or civil war, the king and the citizens saw times were changing and found a peaceful compromise, writing a constitution in 1848-49 that brought an end to absolutism but still protected the role of the ruler. This story is part of a narrative of the Danes as a small and peaceful people seeking compromise. Elsewhere, in the partly German duchies of Schleswig and Holstein also ruled by the Danish king, a different story was told in those years – in which the king, their duke, was held captive by the revolutionary mob in Copenhagen and forced to concede his rule. Three years of war followed; a civil war between the constituent parts of the Danish state at the time. In most histories, this is either left out in favor of the peaceful end of absolutism or told as a war against the Germans. Neither of these versions are wrong per se, but how this history is told affect how we understand the Danish national character and in turn the political system of modern Denmark as based in compromise and slow development, rather than war or revolution.[1]

The narratives reflected above are versions of a national history, explaining how the contemporary political system came to be by describing how the people and the nation-state arose from an absolutist dynastic state. Saudi Arabia remains a dynastic state today, named for the Al Saud, the family ruling the state as absolute monarchs. How they tell their history, of the state, dynasty, and political system, is what this study explores. By telling a narrative that frames history before the Al Saud as a chaotic time of ignorance and war, yet with the dynasty as saviors who unified the country, the state seeks to create a Saudi historical consciousness which legitimizes the state and the regime on top.

Shaping how people understand history can be done in many ways. Foremost among them, and readily available to the state, is public education. While some countries allow a large amount of freedom in selecting the textbooks used in schools, in Saudi Arabia the curricula are prepared and distributed by the Ministry of Education, ensuring that the same story is told in all schools across the country. Even in private schools, the official curricula must be used if they take on Saudi citizens as students.[2] For that reason, this study explores how the early history of Saudi Arabia is told by a textbook used in secondary schools called *Tārīkh al-Mamlaka al-ʿarabiyya as-Saʿudiyya* or *The History of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.* The current kingdom is the third iteration of a Saudi state. The first (1744-1818) and

[1] For an exploration of these narratives on Danish history, see Mørch 1996, chapter 12.
[2] Fadaak and Roberts 2019, 68.

second Saudi states (1824-1891) both rose and fell on the Arabian Peninsula before the founding of the modern kingdom. The focus of this study will be on how the narrative explains these two states in relation to the modern kingdom, looking at how their rise and fall are framed, and what this tells readers about why the current state is legitimate.

As such, this study is not so much an investigation into Saudi history in and of itself, but an exploration of how this history is presented as a narrative in a school textbook used across the country, and how the narrative is used to shape an understanding of history that legitimizes the state and monarchy. Thus, the central question guiding this study concerns how the Saudi state uses history to legitimize itself. Under this main question, three working questions can be set up:

1. How have previous scholars understood the ways the Saudi regime legitimizes itself in the eyes of the population?
2. How does the Saudi state use a historical narrative in the book *Tārīkh al-Mamlaka al-ʿarabiyya as-Saʿudiyya?*
3. How does this historical narrative then serve to legitimize the Saudi state?

While drawing on available secondary literature and other studies of a similar perspective, the essence of this study is an analysis of the history of the first two states as presented in this book. By looking at the contents, wording, and focus, this study will show how the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia weaves a historical narrative of a past filled with violence and ignorance, a preacher who cleanses the land of heresies, and a dynasty that heroically unites the country. All of this serves to instill in the population a view of the state, royal house, and religious establishment as fundamentally legitimate and necessary.

Structure of the Thesis

The first chapter concerns those who came before me. To answer my first working question, I begin with a short overview of how to understand legitimacy and the state. Drawing on the work of Tim Niblock, I identify the main explanations of Saudi legitimacy in the literature. Beginning with rentier state theory, I turn towards the widespread religious explanations, as I funnel through the literature, towards the specific studies of curricula and the use of history, as this is the main topic concerning this thesis. While a lot has been written on the Saudi curricula, it has been focused on religious studies and how the curricula may lead to an intolerant view of others, rather than on history or legitimacy. Little has been written on how history

is used – and what have, have for the most part been in broader studies not focused on textbooks or legitimacy.

A second chapter deals with my source and how I approach it. A discussion of the source and its validity will show how this is a qualitative study, with an in-depth analysis of a single source. As a historical analysis, it is not so much focused on the actual history but rather how it is told and what this means for the way the past is understood. Drawing on the work Hayden White and BE Jensen, I define historical narratives and how they might affect a historical consciousness, before exemplifying how this can grant legitimacy based on a theoretical framework borrowed mainly from Benedict Anderson and Eric Hobsbawm.

The main analysis of the book is found in the third chapter, which answers my second working question. Analyzing what terms they use, what they cover and leave out, who are the main actors, the contrasts of the Arabian Peninsula before and after the rise of Al Saud, the role of Wahhabism,[3] and more, I uncover how the narrative presents Saudi Arabia as a natural state, with the Al Saud and the Wahhabi clergy as the necessary leadership to ensure the country against backsliding into chaos.

The final chapter before the conclusion will sum up the results of my analysis while returning to the theories and previous literature. This answers my third working question by discussing how the narrative serves to legitimize Saudi Arabia. In short, it both serves to underpin other sources of legitimacy identified by previous scholars, while also standing on its own as a sort of historical legitimacy.

The study finds that the Saudi state seeks legitimacy in the eyes of its population through a variety of means, among which are economic largesse based on oil-rents and a religious ideology, as covered by other scholars. However, less attention has been given to the way the state uses a narrative presented in its history education to ensure legitimacy, by insinuating civil war, foreign domination, and religious ignorance, if all does not fully support the state and ruling dynasty. In the end, a brief perspective will be given, tying this understanding of history to current events.

[3] *Wahhabism* is not a term its adherents use. For lack of a better term, it will be used as shorthand for the dominant Salafi interpretation of Islam in Saudi Arabia, founded by Muhammad bin Abdul-Wahab.

Legitimacy, Curricula Reform and Saudi Historiography

This study is not the first to approach the broader subject of state legitimacy in Saudi Arabia, nor the specific topics of Saudi curricula and historical narratives. In the following, I will present the major threads in the previous academic literature, starting from wider questions of legitimacy in Saudi Arabia to answer my first working question on how previous scholars have understood the ways the Saudi regime legitimizes itself internally. Following a section on how to understand legitimacy itself, I will do a broad-brush exploration of the literature on Saudi legitimacy, which is focused on the role of oil-rent and religious ideology as the two main explanations, often seen as working in conjunction. Then, I will narrow down through the literature towards my main topic, first by looking at previous analyses of the Saudi curricula, and finally the few previous treatments of the way the Saudi state uses history, to situate my study within the scholarship and show why this study is relevant and necessary.

How to understand states and legitimacy have long been subjects of debate. Max Weber's definitions remain common and are a good starting point. In *Politics as Vocation*, Weber defined the state as "a human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory."[4] Weber then turns to questions of legitimacy, as how this community can successfully claim the monopoly of violence is naturally the following question. Of this, Weber writes that:

> *Like the political institutions historically preceding it, the state is a relation of men dominating men, a relation supported by means of legitimate (i.e. considered to be legitimate) violence. If the state is to exist, the dominated must obey the authority claimed by the powers that be. When and why do men obey? Upon what inner justifications and upon what external means does this domination rest?*[5]

That is, legitimacy is the justifications and means that make a population compliant of domination, obeying the orders and rules of the state, and accepting of its violence. Weber goes on to name three legitimations, the traditional, which argues that it has always been like this and should continue; the charismatic, based on confidence in the individual leader; and the legal, belief in the rationality of the rules of society. These are ideal-types, and while reality is complex and often multiple sources work in combination, all legitimacy springs from these three basic legitimations, according to Weber.[6]

[4] Weber 1946, 1.
[5] Ibid., 1–2.
[6] Ibid., 2.

Despite a wealth of different interpretations, developments, and criticisms, Weber's definition of the state remains the most common in academia, while his ideal-types of legitimacy are also still in use.[7] His understanding of the state corresponds closely to how I use the concept in this study, yet a few notes on the state and agency are necessary. As the state is a political institution in a relationship of dominance over others, this study concerns one way the state acts to enforce this dominance, through a system of symbols and narratives that seek to make the populace accept the relationship. In this view, the state itself functions as an actor with its own agency. As a political organization of humans ruling others, "men dominating men" in Weber's words, the state is a system of many moving parts, yet working together in a somewhat unitary fashion. While there is a leading regime on top – in Saudi Arabia, it is mainly the king, senior princes, and ministers – this only creates the wider lines. The agents of the state, all the way down through the ministries, bureaucracies and civil servants, implements these lines, giving the state agency and ability to act, specifically in the case of this study, acting to frame history in a way that makes the population believe in the fundamental right of the state to exist, and the regime to rule.

However, while Weber's notion of the state is useful with the caveats mentioned above, his understanding of legitimacy is lacking if applied to Saudi Arabia. While Weber turned legitimacy into an analytical category connected with all questions of state,[8] his definition is by now a century old, and was made with a conceptualization of the state and legitimacy centered on early twentieth century Europe – Weber himself argues that the legal systems upon which his third type is built is "peculiar to the Occident" and "has not been fully rationalized, in the cases of India or Islamism."[9] Thus, while Weber's definitions inform this study and much of the literature it draws on, they are not sufficient for a discussion of Saudi Arabia, where religion and economic benefits are the most common explanations. [10]

Instead, this overview of legitimacy in Saudi Arabia takes its point of departure in Tim Niblock's book, *Saudi Arabia: Power, Legitimacy and Survival.* Drawing on a definition by Seymour Lipset, Niblock understands legitimacy as "the capacity of the system to engender and maintain belief that the existing political institutions are the most appropriate ones for the society."[11] As such, while a monopoly on violence can certainly be included, if pure force were to be the only source of legitimacy, no political leadership nor state institutions would last long[12] – as was perhaps made abundantly clear in the regional

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[7] For a critical discussion of these concepts and how they have been used, see Lottholz and Lemay-Hébert 2016.
[8] Anter 2014, 53.
[9] Weber 1946, 10.
[10] While he identifies other sources as well, the rentier bargain and a religious ideology are considered the main reasons for domestic stability in Saudi Arabia by Davidson 2012, 49-50.
[11] Niblock 2006, 9.
[12] Ibid., 10.

events of 2011. Rather, legitimacy is a broader process in which the ruled acquiesce to the political system and the rulers on top.

Perhaps inspired by Weber's three legitimations, Niblock identifies five different sources of legitimacy relevant for Saudi Arabia: Ideological, traditional, personal, eudaemonic, and democratic/structural legitimacy.[13] Traditional and personal corresponds roughly to Weber's traditional and charismatic, respectively. With the personal legitimacy being a factor of the charisma belonging to the leader at a certain point in time, it has little influence regarding the state on a larger timescale – it might explain why King Saud was removed and King Faisal took over,[14] but lacks explanatory power as a legitimization of the state in the long run. What Niblock calls the democratic/structural legitimacy dominates in liberal democratic polities, yet he argues it is very weak in Saudi Arabia, only being used with reference to *majālis* (informal councils) in which citizens can raise issues with those in power.[15] Since Niblock wrote his book, Saudi Arabia has held elections to municipal councils, most recently in 2015, showing that the reliance on this strategy is increasing, despite a turnout of only 5% of the estimated eligible population in 2015.[16] While the state might be attempting to draw on democratic legitimacy, it has had little internal effect so far.

The two remaining sources, eudaemonic and ideological, are the ones most commonly found in the literature, even if referred to by other names. The eudaemonic legitimacy concerns the ability of the state and its policies to ensure the well-being of the population. To Niblock, this includes not only material benefits but also issues such as national security and crime prevention.[17] However, material benefits based on oil-rent are how he mainly uses it for the rest of the book.[18] This is intimately tied to rentier state theory, perhaps the main explanation found in the scholarly literature and the first one I will discuss below.

Ideological legitimacy concerns the way a political system gains acceptance from the population by creating, promoting, and protecting a belief-system that enforces the organization of society. In Saudi Arabia, Niblock argues that this ideology is based on an Islamic conceptualization of how society should be organized. By projecting itself as an Islamic state, protecting the faith and the two holy mosques in Mecca and Medina, and promoting Islam around the world, Saudi Arabia claims legitimacy through a religious ideology. While this legitimization is mostly articulated in terms of Islam in general, the Wahhabi

[13] Ibid., 9–13.
[14] Ibid., 12, 45–46.
[15] Ibid., 9, 13.
[16] Quamar 2016, 438.
[17] Niblock 2006, 12.
[18] Ibid., the discussion on page 172 is a good example of this.

interpretation dominant in the official religious discourse creates a more specific ideological basis which excludes certain groups, such as the Shi'is of the Eastern Province.[19] Along with rentier state theory, arguments concerning the Wahhabi nature of Saudi Arabia are dominant in the previous academic explanations of Saudi legitimacy and will be explored further.

Finally, due to the topic of this paper, a few words should be tied to traditional legitimacy. While its most basic form is that things were this way previously and thus should continue, there is a deeper aspect to this. Niblock writes that the Al Saud having ruled previously is not the deciding factor; rather it is because they led the unification and founded the country, and on that basis should retain the rulership and prevent the country from disintegrating.[20] This is closely related to the way the history of the country itself is understood by the population – for such a strategy to work, the dominant historical narrative needs to underpin a conceptualization of history that enforces the need of the Al Saud. However, while much has been written on Saudi history, few scholars have considered in detail how it is used to legitimize the state, as this study aims to do. The few who have will be explored at the end of this chapter.

On Oil and Allah

Among scholars examining legitimacy and the social contract that makes the Saudi state durable, two general explanations seem the most widespread. The first is based in the rentier state theory, originally posited by Hazem Beblawi and Giacomo Luciani, and largely corresponds to Niblock's eudaemonic legitimacy. The second concerns the religion as an ideological glue that ties the country together and entrenches the political structures. This reflects what Niblock called ideological legitimacy.

The premise of the rentier state theory derives from the economic basis of the state. As rent, or unearned income, is created by exporting the product of a tiny subset of the population and typically accrues directly to the state, it creates an allocation economy where the state shares its wealth with the wider population, that does not pay any taxes. According to the basic version of the theory, this population will then be less demanding in political participation.[21] As an explanation for the legitimacy of an absolute monarchy such as Saudi Arabia, the idea is that the rentier economy allows the state to act independent of societal demands,

[19] Ibid., 10–11.
[20] Ibid., 11.
[21] Beblawi 1990, 89–90.

with a social contract in which the population accepts the state as it is, in return for a share in the wealth created by the rentier economy.

This theory has been further developed and applied to Saudi Arabia by, among others, Steffen Hertog. With a theoretical approach drawn from Historical Institutionalism, Hertog argues that Rentierism did not so much shape the Saudi state, but rather that the rentier economy allowed the royal elite to create a patrimonial state structure of what he calls 'segmented clientelism', based on the pre-oil political and socioeconomic dynamics, turning government agencies into personalized fiefdoms. Meanwhile, to secure loyalty, the rent-based income was distributed to the population, largely through cooptation by offering lucrative public-sector jobs in an overgrown bureaucracy.[22] However, Hertog also notes that the creation of state-institutions from scratch was used as a tool of cooptation, such as by creating a far-reaching and free educational system, under the control of the religious establishment.[23] By thus ensuring the well-being of the population, both in material terms but also through supplying education and healthcare, the state gain the support of the populace.

While the exact relationship between state and society, as well as the way rent influences the state has been further elucidated or revised, the general idea as regards the political structures remain the same. Matthew Gray gives a clear example in his influential theory of Late Rentierism, which mainly concerns the Arab Gulf states. Gray criticizes parts of what he calls the first and second phase of the theory, for believing that the rentier state became completely autonomous from society through repression and economic cooption. Yet one of Grays main points with Late Rentierism is that:

> *Rentierism remains the theory with the most utility and cogency in explaining the political dynamics, but not the economic structures, of the Gulf states, but that the RST [Rentier State Theory] of early decades is no longer sufficiently detailed, sophisticated, or adaptable enough for the task of understanding the rentier bargains that have underpinned state power in the Gulf since the 2000s.*[24]

Early or late, Rentierism does hold a strong explanatory value, as the lack of taxation and the allocation of goods, jobs, and more, to the population underpins the social contract. Earlier in his text, Gray notes how King Abdullah dispersed "traditional rentier-style largesse" in February 2011, as a response to the Arab Uprisings, showing that Saudi Arabia while not democratic, is still at some level responsive to the population. [25] At the least, then, the previous king of Saudi Arabia seems to have believed in the theory.

[22] Hertog 2010, Especially 14-16.
[23] Ibid., 17.
[24] Gray 2011, 37.
[25] Ibid., 22–23.

Nonetheless, it is not the only theory. One of the criticisms levied against rentier state theory argues that the political systems still differ across rentier states, often due to the historical dynamics and peculiarities of the social systems before the era of oil rent.[26] For Saudi Arabia, authors such as Sean Foley has argued that rentier dynamics date back to the pre-oil era, where income gained from the Hajj, British stipends as well as loot following raids were distributed to the supporters of Abdelaziz ibn Saud before commercial quantities of oil were exported – 80% of all Saudi revenues in the mid-1930s were from the Hajj and related customs, while a similar amount of the annual budget was spent on subsidies to supporting tribes and towns.[27] With the rentier economy argued to have been a central part of the Saudi state even in the pre-oil era and the reason behind the peculiarities of the Saudi system, it lends credence to arguments of rents and subsidies as a central source of legitimacy. It also includes another central point – that the Saudi state and political system is historically contingent. That is, they did not spring out of the ground fully formed but is the result of a historical process. How this development is explained and understood can lend credence to the current structure.

While rentier state theory explains Saudi legitimacy through a mainly material lens – what Niblock termed eudaemonic legitimacy – it is not the only way the topic has been explored. The most common ideological explanation of the Saudi state is the role of religion, with the Wahhabi theology dominating the religious establishment considered the defining variable. Religion as a state-ideology and source of legitimacy is not unique to Saudi Arabia – at times Protestantism has been argued to be central for the formation of modern states in Europe,[28] while the role of religion as a source of legitimacy and state-building has also been discussed concerning post-conflict societies.[29] Rarely, however, is it considered as central a theme as in the literature on Saudi legitimacy.

Good examples of the ways religion is used to legitimize the Saudi state can be found in the 2008 book *Religion and Politics in Saudi Arabia: Wahhabism and the State,* edited by Mohammed Ayoob and Hasan Kosebalaban, in which a series of authors consider the influence of Wahhabism on the political dynamics of Saudi Arabia. One of the stronger cases in the book is the chapter by Gwenn Okruhlik. While at times critical of its effectiveness, she forcefully argues that the Saudi regime constantly uses Wahhabism in sometimes contradictory ways to entrench their power. According to Okruhlik, by naming the Quran as constitution and Sharia as the law, and then associating itself with the ulama, the Al Saud has framed itself and the state as protector of faith and moral integrity. By conflating disobeying the law and political

[26] Ibid., 12.
[27] Foley 2010, 22.
[28] Gruhn 2015, 353.
[29] Dragovic 2015.

opposition with going against everything from cultural tradition, family values to the religion itself, the regime attempts to minimize opposition.[30] At the same time, by using religion to rule on as banal topics as nail-polish and allowing for a minimum of domestic debate, the state turns the discussion away from reforming the regime, instead directing it towards the extremes of Wahhabi orthodoxy.[31]

A more recent take is Gadi Hitman's 2018 article on Wahhabism and Nationalism. Arguing for a special Wahhabi-nationalism, Hitman shows how different groups in Saudi society are not considered part of the national collective, despite carrying citizenship. While the state does not officially ask about religious affiliation if the answer is Islam, the 10-15 percent of the population who are Shi'a, the different brands of Salafists and Muslim Brothers, as well as those belonging to *Madhāhib* (Schools of Islamic jurisprudence) other than the Hanbali from which Wahhabism sprung, are not allowed access to certain public sector jobs, to high-ranking positions in the security services, nor their own schools and religious institutions.[32] This leads to a stronger coherence among the Wahhabi population who are treated as citizens and members of the collective, while the marginalized groups become subjects and are often treated as a threat to the Wahhabi nation.[33]

While the two texts do not refer directly to each other, Hitman's ideas are closely related to Madawi Al-Rasheed's analysis of the use of Sectarianism in Saudi Arabia during the Arab Spring. While she also notes the strategy of distributing economic benefits, similar to Gray, her focus is on the way the Saudi regime politicized religious differences, especially between Sunnis and Shi'as – in part corresponding to Hitman's citizens and subjects. [34] This becomes most glaring and draws heavily on a common historical imagination when the Council of Higher Ulema proclaimed a *fatwa* against demonstrations in 2011, and in Al-Rasheed's words:

> *Official religious scholars warned of an Iranian-Safavid-Shi'a conspiracy […] to cause* fitna *(chaos) and divide Saudi Arabia. They relied on sectarian religious opinions against the Shi'a, historically depicted as heretics, and more recently as a fifth column acting as agents of Iran. They reminded the believers of the need for* ijma´ *(consensus) around the pious rulers of the country, and warned that fragmentation, tribal warfare, civil war and bloodbaths were to be expected if people responded to the calls for demonstrations.*[35]

[30] Okruhlik, in Ayoob and Kosebalaban 2008, 94–97.
[31] Okruhlik, in ibid., 94-95,101.
[32] Hitman 2018, 88–91.
[33] Ibid., 93–94.
[34] Al-Rasheed, in Hashemi and Postel 2017, 143–144.
[35] Ibid., 151.

While Al-Rasheed is placing the explanatory value on the use of religion for legitimizing the regime and pre-empting revolts, the arguments used by the Saudi religious establishment is couched in a historical understanding. If references to the Safavids – a 16th to 18th century Iranian dynasty – combined with warnings of tribal warfare and bloodbaths as a result of compromising the rulers position are to be successful, it necessitates a popular conceptualizing of pre-Saudi history as dominated by a fragmented country stuck in a spiral of chaos, war, and foreign intervention. Al-Rasheed has touched upon this in other works, which I will explore in more depth later, as how this historical imagination has been created through the educational material is the main topics of this thesis.

One of the most thorough studies of Saudi Arabia and state ideology is Afshin Shahi's 2013 book, *The Politics of Truth Management in Saudi Arabia,* parts of which come very close to my approach, as he also touches upon how history is taught in Saudi schools. I will return to his thoughts on history later, for now, this will be a cursory overview of his study as pertaining Wahhabism as a religious ideology that legitimizes the state.

Shahi's main argument is that through the Wahhabi goal of restoring an 'authentic Islam' as it was during the time of Muhammad, Saudi Arabia gains an underlying ideological structure, which allows for monopolization of power around the regime as both guardian and enforcer of 'authentic Islam.' This ideological structure is created and upheld through official narratives, symbols, and institutions which shape a collective consciousness in the country. The Saudi state thus acts to create an ideology, which serves as a *raison d'être* for the state itself.[36] Based on this, Shahi investigates how this ideological structure underpins the state and how the state has historically created and managed it, such as through socializing institutions, ranging from the Ministry of Religious Affairs to the educational system, as well as through violence.[37]

As implied from the title, Shahi explores his topic through a concept of 'truth management' which he grounds in a Foucauldian notion of the production of knowledge as a tool of power. The very concept of 'truth' becomes less fact and more a perspective that has overpowered other perspectives.[38] This is closely related to power, not just as violence but as all mechanisms of social engineering through which a social or political system defines what is the right way to interpret the world – thus, the truth is created by a social framework that marginalizes and excludes other perspectives.[39]

[36] Shahi 2013, 19–20.
[37] Ibid., 24–26.
[38] Ibid., 17.
[39] Ibid., 29–30.

The Saudi 'truth' that is managed is in Shahi's analysis based in Wahhabism, which he tracks through a historical analysis, following its roots, ideas, development, and the ways it has been managed and implemented by the Wahhabi ulama and the Saudi states from its origin to his time of writing.[40] While his discussion on how Wahhabism has been transformed through history is beyond the scope of this study, his book persuasively shows how Wahhabism act as an ideological legitimization for the state, and how this ideology is both institutionalized as the official 'truth,' as well as socialized into the population through religious institutions, education, and violence.[41] However, Shahi concedes that the creation of these institutions and socializing agencies were predicated on the disposable oil-income, which in turn also made them necessary, as the influx of wealth led to exposure to differing 'truths.'[42]

In accordance with the literature reviewed above, this thesis does not seek to explicitly argue against either the religious or the rentier explanations of Saudi legitimacy – unless perhaps one takes them to their purest, most reductionist forms. Both have explanatory value and certainly plays their part in legitimizing the Saudi state and monarchy and must be considered as strategies that affect the legitimacy of Saudi Arabia. As alluded to above, the relation between them has been touched on by Al-Rasheed and Shahi, who both argues that they most likely work together, something further explored in the aptly titled *Saudi Society and the State: Ideational and Material Basis* by Muharrem Hilmi Özev. Özev's main point is that Wahhabism serves as the main source of legitimacy and a tool in nation-building, such as by letting the ulama control much of the educational infrastructure and religion being a center of state ideology. However, he persuasively shows how this legitimization is in large part made possible by the rentier economy, as it has allowed for the formation of official religious institutions subject to the will of the state, in which the last word always lies with the ruler.[43] Thus the state ensures that while the ulama are essential for the ideological legitimacy, it is within limits set by the monarchy.

As sketched out above, there are different ways to explain how the Saudi state and its political system is legitimized in the eyes of the population. In the scholarship, the two main explanations are found in Rentierism, a source of what Niblock called eudaemonic legitimacy, and in Wahhabism, an ideological source of legitimacy. Both economic and ideological factors are relevant, as the strategies of the Saudi regime include both economic cooptation as well as notions of a national collective and identity founded in a religiously inspired ideology. As argued by Özev and others, these two strategies support each other with

[40] Ibid., especially chapters 2 & 3.
[41] Ibid., 217–220.
[42] Ibid., 99–100.
[43] Özev 2017, 1007–1010.

oil revenues allowing for both expansion and control of the religious institutions. However, as implied in my reading of Al-Rasheed, such an ideological strategy requires a shared worldview and conceptualization of history that allows for this legitimization. How this worldview is created, as well as the historical basis of the traditional legitimacy discussed by Niblock, has barely been studied. School textbooks are one of the primary ways of imparting a worldview on a population. With Saudi Arabia having one of the most expensive educational systems in the world, it stands to reason that the subjects taught would play a central role in forming the perspective of the population. For that reason, I will now turn towards the previous studies of the Saudi curricula.

The Saudi Curricula: Intolerance and Reform

Two lines of inquiry are present in the studies of Saudi curricula. The first is rather far from my study and of a more educational bent. Scholars following this pedagogical approach have asked questions about the efficiency of the educational system, the use of English-language in higher education, the quality of graduates, and so on. Such questions are valuable – and the studies resulting from them are useful in answering the underlying questions of my work, such as the structure and reach of education.[44] They are, however, a bit far from my actual topic. For that reason, I will not discuss them further.

A second and more interesting line of inquiry for this study concerns the contents of the curricula used in Saudi education and how this impacts the population. Much has been written in this vein, especially in the 21st century, yet the studies are mostly focused on the curricula used in religious classes and whether they encourage intolerance. While university-based academics author some of these studies, most have been done by different organizations, with little thought given to the reasons behind the curricula. The overrepresentation of Saudi citizens among the hijackers behind the attacks of 11 September 2001, made tolerance of other religions in Saudi Arabia a salient question, discussed in the media,[45] international organizations, as well as by other states and their institutions, leading to heavy criticism of the curricula used in Saudi schools.

Mikaela Prokop made one of the first academic studies prompted by this, published in early 2003. In her article, *Saudi Arabia: The Politics of Education,* Prokop looked at the role of education within the Saudi political system, mainly by looking at the curricula used in the six different religious classes taught in public schools – which are *Quran*, *Tawhīd* (translatable as monotheism), *Tajwīd* (recitation), *Tafsīr*

[44] Examples of such texts that inform this study are Rugh 2002; Ramady 2010; Tayan 2017; Fadaak and Roberts 2019.
[45] The general discussion appears to have started with the *New York Times* article, “*Anti-western and extremist views pervade Saudi schools”* of 21 October 2001.

(exegesis or interpretative commentary), *Hadīth* (words and actions of the Prophet Muhammad), and *Fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence). She also briefly touched on the classes in history and Arabic literature.[46] In short, Prokop saw the various classes of religious studies as overrepresented in the educational system, with their curricula focused on obedience to authorities and denouncing all but those following the most stringent Wahhabi interpretations as *kuffār,* or heretical unbelievers. This is done both directly, such as by labeling Shi'a practices as *shirk* (idolatry), and indirectly, by calling certain Hejazi traditions grave sins. Meanwhile, the books encourage jihad against all unbelievers, whether Christians, Jews, or the *kuffār,* and warns against mingling with them unless to convert or fight them.[47]

In the few paragraphs concerning the history curriculum, Prokop argued that they are reflecting a government aim of unifying the population by creating a national identity. She based this on a glorification of the Al Saud as unifiers, allowing all the kingdom to return to the right path of Islam while glossing over the violence and conflicts that led to the foundation of the modern Saudi state. She also notes that non-Najdi history is ignored and that more recent events and developments, such as pan-Arabism, Nasserism, the Iranian Revolution, and the Gulf War are not taught at all, while British and American support for Jews is highlighted as the reason behind the creation of the state of Israel.[48] Most of the article concerns how passages "[…] that condone intolerance and that can be considered as inciting hatred towards others"[49] are spread throughout the world through Saudi-funded mosques and schools and might lead to violent jihadism, despite not necessarily being condoned by the entire Saudi establishment.[50]

While details might diverge from Prokop, the Saudi curricula have faced criticism from many sides, with agitation for intolerance and violent jihad as a common thread. Among these are reports made by Freedom House,[51] the US State Department[52] and others – even Saudi scholars found issues in the curricula and presented it to then-Crown Prince Abdullah at the National Dialogue Conference of 2004.[53] In general, all found derogatory references to Jews and Christians, as well as Shi'ites, Sufis, and other branches of Islam. These studies generally stopped once they had shown that intolerant passages exist, but few approached the topics of why this might be, and what influence this might have outside of inspiring jihadis.

[46] Prokop 2003, 79.
[47] Ibid., 80–81.
[48] Ibid., 80, 82.
[49] Ibid., 85.
[50] Ibid., 89.
[51] Shea 2006.
[52] Ahmad 2016.
[53] Dankowitz 2004.

One who did, despite not completely agreeing with Prokop and others who thought the textbooks agitated for violent jihad, argued that the curricula used in religious classes sought to make a common Islamic identity within the kingdom. Published in early 2003 like Prokop's article, Eleanor Abdella Doumato's *Manning the Barricades: Islam According to Saudi Arabia's School Texts* does not deny the existence of problematic passages but gave a more apologetic view. Based on a delineated source material and thus a far more in-depth look, Doumato argued that a critical eye could find problematic passages with ease, they have been cherry-picked and presented with no context by others. In her analysis, these passages are fundamentalist, but for the most part defensive and not actively encouraging violence.[54] Compared to other studies, Doumato added some interesting thoughts on the reasoning behind the curriculum. According to Doumato, the textbooks presented a version of Islam that was if not faulty, then at least a very simplified version of Islam accepting only a single strand within the various theological and philosophical schools. Interestingly, she argued that this was done to create a common Islamic identity based in Wahhabism for the ethnically and religiously heterogenous kingdom.[55] While she does not use the term legitimacy, this is very much in line with the arguments shown above for a religious ideology legitimizing Saudi Arabia, as an attempt to inculcate this belief in the population through education.

Comprehensive reforms of the curricula were announced several times by Saudi diplomats, cabinet ministers, and even the late King Abdullah.[56] A few of these are worth pointing out. First, in 2003, under pressure from the U.S. State Department, the Saudi government promised a wholesale revision of textbooks to remove any derogatory language.[57] Second, in 2006, with Saudi officials claiming that all such language had been removed, the debate was reignited by the report *Curriculum of Intolerance,* published by Freedom House. This led to a Saudi commitment to reform all textbooks and distribute new versions within two years, before the beginning of the 2008 school year.[58] One of the ways this was implemented, was by the formation of committees under the Ministry of Education supposed to review all topics taught at all school levels.[59] Finally, in 2007, King Abdullah announced the King Abdullah Public Education Development Project, commonly known as *Tatweer*, from its Arabic name. While *Tatweer* was a broad project reforming many aspects of education, it also included modernization of all curricula.[60] Nonetheless, issues in the material have continually been found, most recently in a report by the Anti-Defamation

[54] Doumato 2003, 230–231, 242.
[55] Ibid., 244–245.
[56] Shea 2006, 19.
[57] Weinberg 2014, 8–9.
[58] Shea 2011, 47.
[59] Alnahdi 2014, 5.
[60] Tayan 2017, 65.

League (ADL) published in 2018.[61] It is worth noting that while the passages found are indeed problematic, groups such as ADL and Freedom House start their studies with a goal of finding issues in the material, and rarely seek to explain why this is so, or what this might lead to, as Doumato and Prokop did. [62] For that reason, aside from their influence on and documentation of the reforms done regarding Saudi educational material, they are beyond the scope of this study.

While much has been written on Saudi textbooks and reform, the debate centered on the curricula for religious studies. Two things are worth pointing out regarding this overview. First, while the reports focused on intolerance in religious textbooks, passages from the history curricula were often included, as the historical representations of events and other religious groups were among the points of contention.[63] For this reason, the textbooks used in history classes were included in the promised reforms at every step, some of which were even supposed to cover all subjects. As this study mostly concerns the use of history in textbooks, it is important to note that the book discussed in the coming parts are the result of several revisions. As such, the narrative presented within it is not an old legacy but has been made and continually propagated as an active choice within the Saudi Ministry of Education.

Second, the political or societal effects of the curricula entered the discussion rarely, and often as an afterthought. Prokop considered how the curricula might influence people to acts of violence, while Doumato touched upon how the contents in the curricula were meant to create an Islamic identity for a population with various ethnic and religious affiliations, making her more relevant for this study as it ties the curricula to a strategy of ideological legitimacy. However, while Prokop drew on parts of the history curricula, Doumato did not. Luckily, a few other scholars have explicitly looked to Saudi history and how this is used in legitimizing the state.

Studies of History

Many works have been written on Saudi history that could be discussed, but the different interpretations on the history of Saudi Arabia are not directly relevant for this study. As this study concerns how history is used to legitimize Saudi Arabia, the focus will be on the little scholarship that exists on the historical

[61] Weinberg 2018.
[62] Other academic studies touching on the debates of Saudi curricula includes Raphaeli 2005 and; Shahi 2013, 159-166, among others. However, I focus on Prokop and Doumato as they are the most widely cited and few later studies have added much to their analyses that are relevant in this context.
[63] Prokop 2003, 79–80; Shea 2006, 24; Shea 2011, 6.

narratives presented in Saudi textbooks. While the history curricula have at times been brought in as a supplement to studies of intolerance as seen above, few scholars have actively studied the use of history in Saudi Arabia, such as by looking at the textbooks used in the history classes of Saudi schools, and only rarely have they considered their influence on legitimacy.

Afshin Shahi, as seen in the previous section, discussed the role of religion and Wahhabism in Saudi legitimacy. His concept of 'truth management,' is analyzed through its historical development as much as its modern implementation, by looking at how and by which means Wahhabism was translated into becoming "the indisputable 'truth' in the official discourse of the state."[64] He considers education as one of the most important methods, exploring the many religious classes as well as how the history of the kingdom is presented in the educational system to help enforce such a discourse.[65]

According to Shahi, one of the most important ways truth has been managed is through education. Concerning history education, he writes that:

> *Along with religious studies, history has been the most significant subject to be manipulated within the official education system. […] Since history is a living narrative and it has powerful indoctrinating properties, those who are in charge of controlling the reflections of the past are in a position of great power. It is indeed the power of representation. Saudi official historiography has been very much aware of this empowering tool of representation. Accordingly, the official history, which is taught across the education system, is tailored to create a 'natural' historical context for the existing power complex in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.*[66]

He goes on to convincingly explore how this is done. According to Shahi, the official history is couched in Islam, beginning in the early years following Muhammad, using this Golden Age period to imply that the original and 'pure Islam' was the reason for the success of the early caliphates, implying that the Wahhabi 'truth' represented by the state is a return to the original form of the religion, and thus legitimizing the political system.[67]

When discussing the history of Saudi Arabia as taught in schools, Shahi argues that Najd is romanticized, while other regions are neglected, and finds an implication that the Al Saud acted as a 'savior tribe' which brought unity, prosperity and Islamic enlightenment to the rest of the country, following a time of ignorance. This is added to by a focus on the modern achievements of the Al Saud as beneficial to Islam

[64] Shahi 2013, 19.
[65] Ibid., 124.
[66] Ibid., 125.
[67] Ibid., 150–151.

while implying that all other ideologies, such as Arab Nationalism, has led to failure and corruption due to being man-made.[68] In other words, Shahi's analysis of the Saudi history education claims that it is used primarily to impose the Wahhabi understanding of 'truth' and thus legitimizes the state, its underlying ideology, and the status quo.[69]

Shahi makes a strong case and is surely right in many ways. However, his focus on 'truth management' and the fact that his analysis of the history education comes on the heels of chapters concerning the development of religious institutions colors the result, which is focused on the Wahhabi 'truth' – this is, in the end, what he seeks to explore, and he does it very well. Yet by arguing that all is in service to the Wahhabi perspective of the world, he never quite approaches other ways that a historical narrative can lend legitimacy, outside of simply underpinning a religious ideology, despite his theoretical framework allowing for such an analysis. Perhaps the reason is that he does not seem to have read the textbooks himself, but bases his analysis on the writings of others, only quoting the sections that are translated and published in reports such as by Freedom House.[70] This only underlines the need for an in-depth analysis of a history textbook, like the one found in this study.

Jörg Matthias Determann has also touched upon the use of history in Saudi Arabia, but once again as a secondary object in his work. In the book *Historiography in Saudi Arabia: Globalization and the State in the Middle East,* as well as a series of related articles,[71] Determann has deeply explored the different ways history has been written in Saudi Arabia, which includes the curricula used in schools. However, as his main topic is the entire historiography of the country, the textbooks serve as minor points in a larger discussion of how this historiography developed.

Mainly, the textbooks and other publishing by the Ministry of Education serves as part of the official historiography, one of several strands Determann identifies within Saudi historiography. He argues for what he calls a 'narrative plurality,' that multiple different versions and understandings of Saudi history exists and is written, despite many assuming that only the official version exists. According to Determann, among these multiple narratives are local histories, tribal histories, as well as social and economic histories, which has appeared among academics since the 1970s, and even Shiite histories despite their often-

[68] Ibid., 152–153, 156.
[69] While the argument concerns the entire chapter, this is most clearly and succinctly expressed on page 156
[70] Shahi 2013, notes 125-135 on pages 173-174.
[71] Determann 2009; 2014a.

marginalized role within the country.[72] A full discussion of this plurality is beyond the scope of this study, as it is concerned with the official narrative. [73]

The official historiography is mostly referred to by Determann as 'dynastic histories' as they center on the role of the royal family.[74] While the focus is on the Al Saud, the official historiography has changed and passed through different phases. Beginning as "Histories of a Muslim Arab Dynasty" in Determann's words, the official historiography until the 1960s were for the most part based in Islamic and Wahhabi conceptualizations of Saudi history, with the Al Saud as the only true Muslims ending a second *jāhilīyah*[75] – the age of ignorance before the Prophet Muhammad. Nationalism mainly plays a role due to the regional conflict with the revolutionary pan-Arab nationalists, leading to a presentation of the Al Saud as "the most authentic Arab Nationalists."[76] While Determann argues that the official historiography changed with time, some enduring traits were formed during this period. For instance, writing an official history for the Saudi Ministry of Education, the Syrian Mounir Ajlani cemented the notion of the three Saudi states with little attention given to the periods in-between,[77] which remains a common approach even in international academic writings on the history of Saudi Arabia.[78]

While some of these tropes continue to influence the narratives, Determann tracks a new official historiography from the 1960s and onwards, which clashes with Shahi's Wahhabi-focused reading. While foreigners in exile mostly wrote the earlier histories – often Islamists fleeing the secular regimes in Egypt and the Mashreq – Determann argues for a *saudization* of dynastic historiography beginning in the 1960s.[79] In this period, the narrative changes from one of jihad against the *kuffār* to one concerned with the unification against a backdrop of chaos and division. Some of the previous tropes and Islamic terms remain, and there continues to be a religious undercurrent, yet it is a notable change, especially regarding the view of other groups and regions within Saudi Arabia.[80] While Determann does not do an in-depth analysis of curricula, he notes that this change entered the Saudi school textbooks in the 1980s through the work 'Abd Allāh al-'Uthaymīn, who in an interview with Determann has claimed that this was an active

[72] Determann 2014b, 3–6.
[73] For an example of how history has been used in Saudi Arabia outside of the official narratives, see e.g. 'Shii Historians in a Wahhabi State' by Matthiesen 2015.
[74] Determann 2014b, 216.
[75] Ibid., 61.
[76] Ibid., 62.
[77] Ibid., 47–48.
[78] For instance, Bowen 2015, an otherwise fine book, devotes a single paragraph to the time between the First and Second Saudi States, despite containing an in-depth coverage of the Peninsula since before the time of Muhammad.
[79] Determann 2014b, Chapter 3.
[80] Ibid., 117–120.

choice to avoid implying that Hejazis and other groups were not true Muslims.[81] A second change in the narrative is the role development starts to play, as a way to provide legitimacy to the continued rule of the Al Saud after the unification led by Abdelaziz in the early twentieth century. Initially focused on King Faisal, this developmental paradigm entered textbooks as early as 1969, according to Determann.[82]

While Determann's broad coverage touches on curricula as an ancillary part, his book mainly deals with the broader themes in Saudi historiography, giving some indication of what will be found in the textbook this study focuses on, and how it fits with earlier developments within the historiography, allowing me to situate the results of my analysis within the historiography of Saudi Arabia. However, his disagreement with Shahi regarding the central role of Wahhabism, shows the need for an in-depth study focused on the historical narrative as presented to students, as Shahi only approaches history textbooks through second-hand sources, while Determann tracks how they have changed according to the broader trends in the official Saudi history and other narratives, but barely touches on their use as legitimizing tool.

Some of Determann's articles go deeper into the historical narratives presented in Saudi textbooks. In a 2008 article on how the Crusades are presented in Arab textbooks, Determann used a comparative approach, studying narratives of the Crusades in textbooks from Lebanon, Syria, Egypt, Jordan, Libya, Tunisia, and Saudi Arabia. The exact details of all these textbooks are not relevant for now, suffice to say, that by looking at the sources upon which they are based, the terminology used, the events told and untold, the explanations of causes and effects, the narratives presented, and the way history is conceptualized, Determann shows that the almost 1000-year old story is presented in very different ways according to the population, international relations, and state ideologies of the different countries.[83] He finds that Saudi Arabia conceptualizes the Crusades through an Islamic lens, as a conflict between the morally inferior Crusaders and the morally superior Islamic world, with intra-Islamic disputes as the reason for the early successes of the Crusades, while conflating the medieval Crusades with 19th century imperialism and modern Israel.[84] However, as the article covers the textbooks of seven different countries, Determann never manages to deeply discuss the effects of these historical conceptions in the different countries, only giving the most cursory exploration – as the Crusades are far removed in time, this is perhaps reasonable. As this thesis concerns the history of the Saudi state, the narrative will have a stronger influence on the political system. Nonetheless, Determann's article has been useful in identifying some of the narrative strategies worth looking at in my own analysis.

[81] Ibid., 125–126.
[82] Ibid., 129.
[83] Determann 2008.
[84] Ibid., mainly 211-212.

Finally, while Madawi Al-Rasheed has already been mentioned regarding the sectarian explanation, in other works, she has made the most in-depth studies of how history is used in Saudi Arabia. Al-Rasheed has written on Saudi history and how it is used multiple times, in the 1999 chapter *Political Legitimacy and the Production of History: The Case of Saudi Arabia*,[85] the 2010 book *A History of Saudi Arabia* which includes a chapter on how history is used in contemporary Saudi Arabia, [86] and the 2016 chapter *The Capture of Riyadh Revisited.*[87] They all discuss how history is used for legitimacy, albeit with slightly different foci. The most expansive discussion comes in the book, *A History of Saudi Arabia,* which itself includes both references to the 1999 chapter[88] and an earlier version of the 2016 chapter.[89] It is worth noting that while the 2016 chapter is focused on the centennial celebrations of the capture of Riyadh, they all include examples drawn from textbooks. However, all three of her texts refer to the same books, printed in 1993.[90] Despite the age of her source material, her analysis of how "the state […] has also created historical narratives that encourage a new kind of legitimacy"[91] is the approach that lies closest to my study, and deserve a closer look.

Al-Rasheed's argument rests on the point that it is vital for the state to extend its domination not only through violence, administration or economic benefits but also in a "symbolic realm of ideas and visions of the past, present and future." and that "narratives about the past create a framework within which Saudi Arabia, people and government, are situated."[92] In other words, by creating a historical narrative and controlling the way the population conceptualizes the past, the state can legitimize itself by showing the status quo as not only beneficial but also the natural culmination of history.

Like Determann's work on the Crusades, Al-Rasheed finds that the history taught regarding the Caliphates and the Middle Ages takes its point of departure in Islam, considering Islamic civilization superior and flourishing, especially in the earlier periods, but the textbooks identify the reasons for Islamic defeats and weakness in the disputes within the Islamic world, whether sectarian or tribal.[93] Even nationalism is represented as a "conspiracy promoted by the West and Zionism to undermine the unity of Muslims" with Arab Nationalism named "an atheist *jahiliyya*"[94] referring to the pre-Islamic age of

[85] Al-Rasheed, in Lenore 1999.
[86] Chapter 7 in Al-Rasheed 2010.
[87] Chapter 7 in Al-Rasheed and Vitalis 2016.
[88] Al-Rasheed 2010, page 287, note 3.
[89] Ibid., starting on page 197.
[90] Ibid., page 287, note 2; Al-Rasheed and Vitalis 2016, page 199, note 4.
[91] Al-Rasheed 2010, 182.
[92] Ibid.
[93] Ibid., 183–184.
[94] Ibid., 184–185.

ignorance. In the end, according to Al-Rasheed's analysis, this is framed as an inevitable historical process, where the glorious Islamic civilization was undermined, split and stagnated, leading to the disintegration of society and abandonment of faith. Only the rise of Wahhabism and the Al Saud turned this around. Incidentally, this is also when the history shifts its scope, from the Islamic world in general to the history of Saudi Arabia in particular. [95]

According to Al-Rasheed, the treatment of Saudi Arabian history begins with the rise of the Wahhabi movement and mainly concerns the three Saudi states. Following a description of the Arabian Peninsula as locked in "a general state of moral, intellectual, religious and political decay" and in need of religious reform, the textbook of 1993 names Najd as both the religious and political heart of Arabia, and the natural home of this reform, which was started with the pact between Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahab and Muhammad ibn Saud.[96] Focused on the modern kingdom, the book runs through the conquest and unification under Abdelaziz ibn Saud with lists of battles, yet with no exploration of their consequences, significance nor why other leaders fought the Saudis. Following the unification, several chapters outline the process of modernization under the auspices of the Saudi kings, ending in a chapter describing Saudi Arabia as a champion of Arab, Gulf, and Islamic interests.[97] In general, with this focus on the Al Saud, unification and modernization, the analysis of Al-Rasheed thus seems to fit well with the themes Determann argued to be dominant in the official historiography of Saudi Arabia, despite Determann using the term development rather than modernization.

By constructing a glorious and nostalgic past, a period of ignorance and decay due to internal strife, and finally a Wahhabi-Saudi alliance that unites the country, reforms the religion and leads the modernization, Al-Rasheed argues that Wahhabism and the Al Saud are presented as the natural culmination as well as the salvation for the people of Saudi Arabia. Loyalty to the rulers is celebrated, while all regional or international identities – aside from a very general and wide identification with the Islamic *Umma* – are neglected.[98] In short, according to Al-Rasheed, the "historical memory is concerned with promoting the legitimacy of the ruling group at the expense of creating a national identity."[99]

Finally, it is worth noting that using historical narratives, in education or elsewhere, to legitimize the state is not peculiar to Saudi Arabia, nor necessarily negative. While the level might vary, this form of engineering of the national consciousness and historical imagination is integral to every modern

[95] Ibid., 185.
[96] Ibid., 186.
[97] Ibid., 186–188.
[98] Ibid., 188–189.
[99] Ibid., 188.

state, both in educational and other policies, as a means to create order, stability, morality, and, of course, legitimacy.[100] Previous studies of this has been done across the Middle East, in Egypt,[101] Iraq,[102] and Israel,[103] as well as in the West – for instance, new educational policies including an official Danish 'canon of history' in the 2000s led to academic debates of a 're-nationalization' of the history curricula in Denmark.[104]

History education serves a highly important role in the legitimization of Saudi Arabia, as shown by Al-Rasheed, despite the age of her sources. While this can be read as a tool of ideological legitimacy based in Wahhabism, as Shahi does, both Determann's cursory overview and Al-Rasheed's analysis implies that other factors than the purely religious are in play – such as unification, development, and even Arabism as Determann hints entered the official histories in the 1950s. Returning to Niblock, this is closely related to his thoughts on traditional legitimacy – that it works not just because the Al Saud ruled previously, but because they unified and founded the country, and can argue that they are necessary to avoid disintegration. For this to be a working source of legitimacy, the historical imagination of the populace must be shaped in a certain way. However, with so few scholars actually looking at how the history is told, even fewer at how this influences society or serves as a legitimation, disagreements between them, and the most in-depth one based on books published over two and a half decades ago, a new analysis is long overdue.

Based on the previous scholarly literature, this chapter has explored three central topics for the study. First, there are various explanations of Saudi legitimacy in the scholarly literature. Based on the five strategies of legitimization identified by Niblock, the two most widespread in the literature concerns the role of oil-rent as a source of eudaemonic legitimacy and the function of Wahhabi Islam as an ideological legitimacy underpinning the state. As Özev and others have argued, for a full understanding of Saudi Arabia, both material and ideological sources of legitimacy must be looked at, as well as the interplay between them. Among the more ideational strategies, I concur with Al-Rasheed, in that controlling the historical memory of the population serves as a legitimizing tool. It does this both to underpin the religious ideology as argued by Shahi, but also on its own terms as a historical legitimization.

[100] Shahi 2013, 128–129.
[101] For an in-depth study of Egyptian historiography including how it has redefined the past according to contemporary interests, see Di-Capua 2009.
[102] Davis 2005 concerns how historical memory has been used by the Iraqi state.
[103] Feldt 2007 concerns Israeli discourses on history in the 1990s.
[104] A good example is Haas 2011.

The second topic explored by this chapter concerns the debates over the contents of the Saudi curricula and their reforms. Intolerance in the curricula has been questioned, especially following the attacks of 11th September 2001. While the discussion led to several rounds of reform, the studies of the curricula mainly looked at the religious textbooks, and rarely analyzed why the contents might be shaped as they were and how this might influence society. However, for this study two important points remain worth taking away from the debate: First, that the history curricula were included in the reforms, and their contents is thus an active choice by the Ministry of Education. Second, that while much was written on Saudi curricula in the past two decades, the history curricula were understudied and mainly included tangentially to underscore points made on intolerance in the religious curricula.

The final topic explored was directly related to how historical narratives have been used in the curricula as a source of legitimacy. A grand total of three scholars have touched upon this: Shahi, Determann, and Al-Rasheed. Of these, Shahi based his analysis not on the books themselves, but on what others have published about them. Determann's study concerned the general historiography of Saudi Arabia, and while focused on narrative plurality, the textbooks at times entered his analysis of the official histories and how different legitimizing themes entered the curricula, but mostly remained a sideshow. Al-Rasheed, then, appears to be the only scholar to have made an in-depth study of legitimization through historical narratives, based on a reading of the textbooks – from which she argues that historical legitimacy as taught through the textbooks play an important role in Saudi Arabia. Nonetheless, the textbooks on which she based her analysis were published in 1993, and since much has happened since then, including promises of reform, a new study of how history is told is necessary.

Tracking a Narrative and its Implications: On Sources, Methods and Theories

The main question of this study concerns how history is used to legitimize the Saudi state. As we have seen above, history can be a source of legitimacy in different ways, yet they all demand a common understanding of history among the populace. In order to answer how the educational material in Saudi Arabia serves to create this understanding, an analysis of how the textbook *Tārīkh al-Mamlaka al-ʿarabiyya as-Saʿudiyya* (The History of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia) treats the rise and fall of the first and second Saudi states, and how the historical narratives therein attempt to give legitimacy to the state are the central part of this study. Before analyzing the textbook and narrative, a few words are necessary on the source and how I approach it. In the following, I will discuss my main source, including how it figures in the Saudi educational system, its relevance, and its influence. This will lead to a more methodological section, where I explore how I approach and analyze the book and its narrative, before clarifying some concepts and theories that will be relevant for the analysis itself.

The Structure of Saudi Education and *The History of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia*

As previously mentioned, this study is mainly based on one book, the *Tārīkh al-Mamlaka al-ʿarabiyya as-Saʿudiyya* (hereafter the *Tārīkh*) published by the Ministry of Education for use in secondary schools, in the academic year of 2012-2013. In short, the book concerns the history of the kingdom. A brief look at the contents discloses that this is split into five parts each containing 3-4 chapters, starting with Muhammad bin Abdul-Wahab and his preaching, including an overview of the area in the time before and his alliance with the Al Saud. It goes on with parts on the first and second Saudi states, respectively, the founding of the third and contemporary Saudi Arabia, and finally ends with a part on the modern renaissance (*Nahḍa)* of the state and its foreign policies.[105] For the purpose of this study, the first three parts are in focus – that is, the chapters covering the time before, the preaching of Muhammad bin Abdul-Wahab, the rise and fall of the first state, and the tumultuous history of the second state.

In Saudi Arabia, all education is free, yet no schooling is compulsory. The curriculum is written, printed, and distributed by the Ministry of Education to all students free of charge. While private and international schools exist throughout the country, if they wish to take on Saudi students, they must use the official curricula supplied by the ministry.[106] In addition, in 2017, only 2% of the total labor force

[105] Ministry of Education 2012, 4. This, and all other references to the Tārīkh, use the page numbers of the PDF found in Appendix I.

[106] Fadaak and Roberts 2019, 68.

had not passed primary school, despite it not being compulsory.[107] As such, the Ministry of Education has an enormous influence on how young Saudis are schooled.

The educational system is split by age, consisting of six years of primary school beginning at the age of six, three years of intermediate school beginning at the age of 12, and three years of secondary school, from the age of 15. Despite not being compulsory, of those aged 30-34 in 2017, 82% had achieved a diploma from secondary or higher education, a trend that only seems to have been continuing upwards for the later cohorts.[108] Beginning in secondary schools, the students are split into four categories according to their wishes and grades, that is, Natural Science, Technical Science, Sharia and Arabic, and Administration and Social Science. At the level of secondary education, history is only taught in the branches of Sharia and Arabic, and Administration and Social Science.[109]

The *Tārīkh* is printed for use in the last year of secondary education, in the two branches teaching history. While most young Saudis pass through secondary school, fewer will actually read the book. However, with Islamic and social studies taking on the largest number of students at the university level,[110] it is not an insignificant group who study in these branches – for those beginning their undergraduate studies in 2017, specializations in language, social sciences, and Islamic studies accounted for more than 60%, with humanities and educational specializations further increasing this number.[111] Thus, despite the *Tārīkh* only being used in certain branches, most graduates will be likely to have read it. Due to the branches that use it, it is aimed at the students who are likely to later serve in religious institutions and government agencies, perhaps the two most central structures of the state. While political influence is of course limited for most Saudis, those with any chance of gaining some will most likely be taught through this book.

While all students will not have read the *Tārīkh*, it remains useful for a view into the historical narratives taught to all Saudis. Books of the same name, The History of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, are used in both the last year of primary school and the last year of intermediate school.[112] According to Al-Rasheed, three topics are taught in history classes with different books – the history of the prophet, the history of Islamic civilization, and the modern history of the kingdom. While I have been unable to access the books from primary and intermediate schools, based on Al-Rasheed and the other

[107] Ibid., 84.
[108] Ibid., 69.
[109] Shahi 2013, 143.
[110] Ramady 2010, 405.
[111] Fadaak and Roberts 2019, 88.
[112] Shahi 2013, 153-155. Note that Shahi refers to 'Grade VI' and 'Grade IX' seeing the different schools as one continuum.

history textbooks quoted by Freedom House, it seems that the books of the same name include the same story, just in a simplified version for the younger audience. Being taught to older students, the *Tārīkh* is likely the most in-depth version of the story that the Ministry of Educations wishes to impart on students and the one written with the most academic rigor. Aside from those going on to study history at the university level, this is also the last chance the Ministry has for influencing the historical imagination of its students.

While much can be said based on the textbook itself, how the materials are used by teachers in the classroom also influences the students and their understanding of history. While I personally followed an Arabic course and have had conversations with some Saudis about their schooling, I have not been able to attend any – certainly not a representative number of – history classes. How the narrative plays out in the classroom will not be a part of this study. However, previous studies of Saudi education are often criticizing Saudi schools for focusing on committing facts to memory and rote-learning based on books rather than critical thinking and free discussion, even at the university level.[113] Thus, it can be argued that the textbook will have a larger influence than in other educational systems.

Understanding Narratives

In analyzing the *Tārīkh* and its narrative, the goal is not to find every factual error or misleading statement to criticize the authors for misrepresenting history. Rather, the point of this study is to look at the book, identify the narrative and the strategies which it rests upon, and then consider how this might serve to legitimize the state and monarchy.

As a historical analysis, this approach is far from the original ideals of Leopold von Ranke that considered history a strict impartial science showing the world as it was, under the slogan of "*wie es eigentlich gewesen"* – How it actually was.[114] While such an objective goal might be noble, it has little interest for this study. Instead, my approach is couched in a postmodernist understanding of history, perhaps more indebted to the work of Hayden White. While White might have gone too far in arguing that there are no criteria of truth at all when writing history, his notion of a 'metahistory' based on the claim that "historical narratives are verbal fictions, the contents of which are as much invented as found"[115] is useful in this study. In that light, even if the facts are out there to be discerned through the primary sources, when writing history the author will choose some, leave out others, and weave a narrative that

[113] Fadaak and Roberts 2019, 87.
[114] Iggers 1997, 25–26.
[115] White, as quoted in ibid., 118–119.

will never be objective, and be as much a literary exercise as a scientific one. White thus argues that the construction of a historical narrative is based on ethical and aesthetical choices, rather than the facts of the past.[116]

I depart from White's understanding of narratives in two ways. First, I would argue that for the pure ideal of a historian as a writer, ethics and aesthetics might be governing the choices made. In official histories, especially in an autocratic regime such as Saudi Arabia, questions of power and domination might be added as factors that shape the construction of narratives. Second, I depart from Whites view of historical narratives as fictions that might as well be literature. Instead, I refer to Determann, who defines a historical narrative as a story which frames and give meaning to the past in relation to the present, yet still aim to be truthful in their reconstruction of the historical reality.[117] My understanding is in between the two, splitting from Determann in the second point of his definition. That is, a narrative might not *aim* to be truthful to past events, yet if it *claims* to be, I would still consider it a historical narrative for the purpose of this study. In short, historical narratives are defined as stories that relate the past to the present by framing and giving it meaning, while claiming to be a truthful account of history.

With this notion of historical narratives as invented in hand, my analysis looks at the narrative present in the *Tārīkh* as *a* telling of *a* history – that is, one among many possible *histories* – with little care for ontological notions of a historical truth that might be out there. Instead, I am looking at the narrative created in this telling of history and seek to understand its implications and the reasons for creating this narrative by its authors. By looking at how the narrative is constructed and for what goals, we can perhaps learn more about how the Saudi regime – or at least the historians at the Ministry of Education – wants the populace to conceptualize history, and by extension how this history serves to legitimize the state by framing and giving meaning to the past.

In tracking this narrative, I seek to look at the themes which dominate, the terminology that is used, which groups and persons act and the reasons why they do, how causes and effects are explained, and which events or persons are covered and left out. This will show how the narrative presented to students through this book is a telling of history that serves to make them conceptualize Saudi Arabia as both the natural outcome of historical processes, and one that is deeply necessary for their security and wellbeing.

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[116] White's theories are more encompassing than presented here, as I have only drawn on the conceptualization of history relevant in this context. For a full exploration, see White 1973.
[117] For a further exploration of this definition and its historiographical roots, see Determann 2014b, 3–4.

Nonetheless, it is worth noting again that it is one among many histories. As Determann argued, even in Saudi Arabia, there exists a narrative plurality.[118] There are other narratives out there which might not agree with the one in the *Tārīkh*. Al-Rasheed's *A History of Saudi Arabia* is one, Shahi presents another, and so does Niblock, each with different foci as they tell different stories. As such, while the goal is not to point out inaccuracies, it will be noted when events are forgotten, or discrepancies between different sources are left out to tell a clear story most suitable to their framing of the past while ignoring other perspectives. In this, the analysis comes closer to the 'classical' historical analysis of Ranke, where sources are critically read and compared to find the truth. However, rather than finding the truth, I compare the narratives to identify the goals. As the focus is on a single source, this study is of a qualitative nature.

In approaching the textbook, I have, for the most part, worked inductively. That is, I have read the text itself, and developed my hypotheses and arguments from the contents, rather than deductively approaching the subject with a basis in theory. While some theoretical and conceptual clarifications have already been presented in the first chapter, and more will follow below, these are an aid in presenting the narrative within an analytical framework, rather than theories I used to approach the *Tārīkh* itself. That said, I have of course been aware of these theoretical positions beforehand, and while I have not actively used them in my original reading, they have likely colored it and allowed me to understand the narrative in a different way than a layman.

On Imaginations, Nations, and Traditions

To not only identify the narrative present in the *Tārīkh* but also analyze how this narrative serves to legitimize the state and monarchy, some theoretical considerations are necessary before diving into the book. The point of departure is that through a historical narrative, the state can shape the historical consciousness of the population, in a way that legitimizes the current political order. In the following, I will look at how this historical consciousness is to be understood and how the framing of a narrative might grant legitimacy by drawing on some theoretical approaches. In short, by presenting itself as the natural outcome of historical processes, and thus the 'right' way of governing the territory, the state gains legitimacy. This is not dissimilar from most nation-states, in which the state is framed as the endpoint of all the trials and tribulations of the people, which are also based in a certain historical consciousness. First, then, a definition of the historical consciousness is needed, as well as some thoughts on how this can be shaped. Following this, I will explore some concepts from nationalism and national histories which deal

[118] Ibid., 3.

with similar topics, before finally borrowing some thoughts on how invented pasts might work to grant legitimacy.

I draw my concept of a historical consciousness mainly from the extensive writings of the Danish historian, Bernard Eric Jensen. [119] Drawing on a vast literature in English, French, German, and Danish, Jensen considers the historical consciousness as based in the relationship between past, present, and future. Resting upon a common understanding and interpretation of the past, the historical consciousness includes both the personal and societal remembrance of the past in the present and the expectations of the future. Having such a common understanding of the past is a necessary precondition for forming and sustaining societies, he argues, as one of the most central functions of a common historical consciousness is to create common identities, including opinions, values, and feelings. [120] This gives the people sharing a historical consciousness common expectations to societal and political structures on a very basic level. Thus, shaping this historical consciousness is also an exercise of power, despite it being a hard task. Schools, of course, play a part, but movies, museums, comic books, family histories and so on all act together to shape the historical consciousness – while they at the same time tap into it, in a two-way relation.[121]

As seen in the first chapter, Niblock noted that one source of legitimacy for Saudi Arabia was what he called a traditional legitimacy – that is, they draw legitimacy from not just having inherited the throne, but on the claim that they formed the modern kingdom from its constituent parts, and are the common element that binds them together.[122] This is, of course, closely related to the historical consciousness, as there needs to be a common historical consciousness for such claims to not only be accepted but simply to be understood.

Related to the historical consciousness is the role of memory and forgetting, explored by Ussama Makdisi and Paul Silverstein in their introduction to the 2006 book, *Memory and Violence in the Middle East and North Africa.* They do not deal directly with Saudi Arabia, as they investigate contested narratives and civil violence elsewhere in the region, yet some of their thoughts are useful to elucidate how the historical consciousness works. Through terms such as the historical imagination,[123] they explore how memory and forgetting are essential parts of what creates the modern nation through a common

[119] Jensen distinguishes between two terms in Danish, *Historiebevidsthed* and *Historisk Bevidsthed,* both of which would translate to historical consciousness in English. I draw on the first term in this text.
[120] Jensen 2017, Chapter 1, especially pages 25-35.
[121] Ibid., Page 27 includes an illustration listing 25 different factors.
[122] Niblock 2006, 11.
[123] This is also the term of choice in Feldt 2007.

understanding of the content and context of certain narratives, that continually recreate a heroic, immemorial past in the everyday of the present.[124] Drawing on the work of Benedict Anderson, they argue that civil violence and state-building tend to be based in an imagined community, that defines itself through narratives about common historical individuals, places, and events – and while these collective narratives are often contested, they are essential to the political expectations of each generation, as well as how the contemporary politics are experienced.[125]

The imagined communities of Benedict Anderson deserve a closer look in this regard. In his seminal study of nationalism, Anderson defines the subject as "an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign."[126] Imagined, as all members will never meet each other but consider themselves as living together. Limited, as not everyone can be a part of it. Sovereign as it wishes for the nation to rule itself. Finally, it is imagined as a single community as there might be inequality and other issues, yet people are willing to die for this fraternity.[127] I do not bring up Anderson or his imagined communities as an argument for Saudi nationalism – itself an oxymoron as the Al Saud are the ruling family, not the nation. Instead, I draw on imagined communities as closely related to the historical consciousness or imaginations discussed above, and some of the ways Anderson discuss as important in constructing an imagined community can aid in understanding how history legitimizes Saudi Arabia.

Anderson covers many different factors and results of nationalism, only a few of which are relevant for this study. Of these, what he calls 'official nationalism' and 'last wave nationalism' are central. Official nationalism, as the name implies, is found in pre-existing states, often headed by a dynasty, which marshals the power of the imagined national community to entrench their position. He draws mainly on the case of early twentieth century Siam – in many ways similar to Saudi Arabia, as one of the few non-colonized dynastic states – in which King Vajiravudh introduced state-controlled primary education, state-organized propaganda, as well as an official rewriting of history, to turn the multitude of vassals and subjects into Thai citizens – while simultaneously mobilizing and solidifying the nascent community by naming the Chinese as a foreign enemy. By thus concealing the discrepancy between dynasty and nation, official nationalism allowed for a strengthening of dynastic states, often legitimizing them as a ward against foreign rule.[128]

[124] Makdisi and Silverstein 2006, 11.
[125] Ibid., 1.
[126] Anderson 2006, 6.
[127] Ibid., 6–7.
[128] Ibid., 99–101 & 109–112.

Anderson mainly identifies last wave nationalism with the states gaining independence after the Second World War. As elsewhere, he puts a lot of explanatory power into the use of language and the form of education. Part of the reason the multi-ethnic and -religious Indonesia became one country after independence while French Indochina split, is to be found in the use of different languages of instruction and educational materials in French Indochina. The French only unified the curricula between Saigon and Phnom Penh in 1935, a decade before the outbreak of the First Indochina War that led to independence, and used Vietnamese administrators in Vietnam, Lao in Laos, etcetera.[129] In contrast, the Dutch taught all students in a single dialect of Malay, using a colossal school-system with standardized textbooks and diplomas all across Indonesia. This educational system created a "self-contained, coherent universe of experience"[130] of Indonesia as a single unit, leading to an imagination of the various groups as one community with a single frame of reference. In the standardized textbooks were the same maps of the area, with British Malaya colored differently from Dutch Indonesia, further cementing the notion of the area as one political stage on which political movements could act.[131]

What can we learn from this? That context might be as important as content – that is, the very fact that students across Saudi Arabia are taught the same curriculum, using the same maps and the same stories might be enough to legitimize Saudi Arabia as a unified state in the eyes of the population, creating a common national consciousness, if not a nationalist one. Meanwhile, the content is what legitimizes the power structure of the absolute monarchy. The very fact that students all across Saudi Arabia goes to schools with the same curriculum and are taught the same narrative, leads to a common imagined community, a Saudi historical consciousness if you will, where the inhabitants consider Saudi Arabia as belonging together for almost 'natural' reasons and less as different regions forced together through conquest.

If the historical consciousness is essential for drawing legitimacy from claims to historicity, how then, can this be shaped? Determann's article on the Crusades provided an inkling of how it works in practice, and more will be clear once we dive into the *Tārīkh*. Yet some theoretical thoughts can be added through the classic *The Invention of Tradition* edited by Eric Hobsbawm and Terrence Ranger. The book describes how most traditions were invented at some point, and often far later than people expect. However, they represent themselves as old traditions and thus natural. This is done through constant repetition and reference to the past, no matter how far back in time the tradition extends, to create a historical authority for contemporary institutions. Invented traditions are defined as a series of connected

[129] Ibid., 124–131.
[130] Ibid., 121.
[131] Ibid., 119–123.

practices governed by implicit or explicit rules of a symbolic nature, which are meant to inculcate certain norms or values, by a repetition that implies continuity and connection to the past. Traditions are more than a Christmas tree, for instance, in the face of changing social norms, Hobsbawm notes how universities went through massive changes in the nineteenth and twentieth century yet retained a nominal continuity despite being different in almost every way.[132]

Similarly, as will be shown, Saudi Arabia draws on tradition and the past, claiming a direct lineage from the Saudi state of the eighteenth century, despite being the third iteration and having changed massively since the modern kingdom was founded in 1932. Indeed, Saudi Arabia and Wahhabi Islam seek to draw even deeper, by looking to the first years of Islam as a nostalgic past to be emulated, despite territorial states and national histories being invented – not to mention introduced to the region – in the last few centuries.[133] Thus, by inventing a tradition of a national history, indeed of the state and its political structure, Saudi Arabia gains legitimacy, despite being less than a century old.

In the final chapter of the book, Hobsbawm discusses some traditions invented for political reasons which are informative for the case. One of the central themes concerns how states interpreted their histories and invented new traditions to legitimize themselves. While Hobsbawm focused on early twentieth century Europe, the point is just as relevant to Saudi Arabia as he argues that "[…] a changing society made the traditional forms of ruling by states and social or political hierarchies more difficult or even impracticable. This required new methods of ruling or establishing bonds of loyalty."[134] Through a series of invented traditions, the recently unified German Empire reinterpreted its history, to fit into the mold of the new state, despite the varied history of the Holy Roman Empire and different statelets did not lead organically to a united Germany. This was done by reinterpreting the history and teaching it in a new way, but also through monuments and national celebrations drawing on this new history.[135] In the European monarchies, German or otherwise, the royal person and dynasty became a center for such pageantry. Using the educational system, the ruler and his forebears were invented as a focus of the country's unity, a symbol of glory and the connection between the entire past of the country and its continuation into the present.[136]

This idea is relevant for the Saudi case, in which such invented traditions, the pomp of the Saudi National Day, the cultural festivals such as Janadriyyah, the camel races held under the auspices of

[132] Hobsbawm and Ranger 2012, 1–6.
[133] Ibid., 13–14.
[134] Ibid., 263.
[135] Ibid., 273–279.
[136] Ibid., 282.

the king, and indeed the very institution of the royal family as tying the country together, are all traditions invented in Saudi Arabia which underline the historical legitimacy of the political structures, despite localized village and tribal polities being the main form of organization until the twentieth century.[137] While this study centers on the Saudi historical narrative as an invented tradition that seeks to legitimize the state, it acts in a wider way as well. By laying the groundwork for the practices above, the official historical narrative is not only a tradition itself, but one that grounds and legitimizes other traditions, which in a circular way also strengthens the narrative while giving legitimacy to the state and regime. Thus, these different strategies serve together to form the historical consciousness of the populace, leading to an understanding of Saudi Arabia headed by a king from the Al Saud as the natural culmination of history.

[137] Davidson 2012, 70–72.

The History of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Having discussed previous scholarship, the relevance of the book, as well as understandings of narratives and how history is conceptualized, I now turn to the textbook, the *Tārīkh al-Mamlaka al-ʿarabiyya as-Saʿudiyya,* in order to identify the narrative within and how this narrative is used – and through that answer my second working question. In this part, I analyze the book on its own terms, so to speak. That is, I approach the book as it is meant to be read, beginning on the first page and progressing through the chapters relevant for this study, to show not only the narrative but also how it is structured. In short, the narrative paints a picture of anarchy and ignorance, that is ended by Wahhabism and the Al Saud unifying the country. It demonizes foreigners and foreign influences, turns Najd into the true heart of the realm, and shows that internal divisions have destroyed the state twice before, sending it back into local wars and foreign control, and thus implying that this might happen again if all do not support the rightful rulers.

I: Preface and Prehistory

In the preface, the unnamed authors present their reasons for the book. Following the traditional invocations (*al-ḥamdu lillah rab al-ʿālamayn…)* and a short paragraph mentioning that the book is a new edition for the third year of secondary schools, the authors describe that the book concerns the historical period since the founding of the First Saudi State, as a result of the pact between the Sheikh Muhammad bin Abdul-Wahab and the Amir Muhammad bin Saud in the year 1744, to the present day. This pact, they write, was made for the support of *at-tawḥīd.*[138] The term, *Tawḥīd,* can be translated as both 'monotheism' and 'unification'[139] and it is unclear which meaning is intended here. Throughout the book, *Tawhīd* is used with both meanings, and this conflation serves to connect the religious concept of monotheism to the creation of a single state under Saudi rule in the entire area.

Several connections are made in these few lines. First, it makes this pact in 1744 into a founding of Saudi Arabia and the beginning of Saudi history worth studying. Second, it names the contemporary kingdom as the heir to this pact and the First Saudi State, hinting at the continued relationship between the Al Saud and the Wahhabi ulama. Third, it gives a teleological agency to both Amir Muhammad bin Saud and Sheikh Muhammad bin Abdul-Wahab, by indicating that they actively set out to unite the kingdom, though little action was taken towards such a goal for decades.

[138] Ministry of Education 2012, 5.

[139] See توحيد in *Hans Wehr: A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic,* ed. Milton-Cowan 1979, 1236–37.

They go on to write that this history has borne witness to many events expressing the bravery, audacity, endurance, and steadfastness of the leadership, as well as the *"tarābuṭan qawiyyan"* (strong cohesion) between the leaders and the *"ʿāma afrād al-shaʿb"* (common individuals of the people) leading to *"hadhā al-waṭan al-ʿazīz ʿalaynā jamīʿan"* (This dear homeland for all of us).[140] That is, while showering the actors of the story with positive attributes, the text states that cohesion between leaders and the led are what made the modern kingdom. Thus, not only is the country for all its inhabitants and worth defending, it is there because the people followed the leaders – in turn implying that the people should continue following their leaders, for the sake of the country.

The narrative opens with a chapter called *"al-ḥāla as-siyāsiyya wa-l-dīniyya fī al-jazīrat al-ʿarabiyya qabla daʿwa ash-shaykh muḥammad bin ʿabd al-wahāb"* (The political and religious situation on the Arabian Peninsula before the call of Sheikh Muhammad bin Abdul-Wahab). [141] By starting with the situation *before* the coming of Wahhabism or the First Saudi State the narrative also presents the reasons why both Wahhabism and uniting the state were necessary.

Time itself in this first section is fluid, compared to the rest of the book, which progresses chronologically. While these pages mostly describe the general situation just before the preaching of Abdul-Wahab in the middle of the eighteenth century, the description of the area only mentions few years and jumps seamlessly between events far removed in time and place – the only years mentioned being 1516, 969, 1517, in that order. In general, this serves to give an air of the Arabian Peninsula less in a certain and specified historical period, but more comparable to a sort of mythic time, before the world was ordered and put together as we know it today.[142]

The first real sentence of the book, aside from contents, preface, and headings, describes "The spread of Ottoman influence into most parts of the Arab Mashreq"[143] noting how the conquest of Egypt in the 1500s made Ottoman influence reach the Hejaz. Then, it quickly turns to the Ottoman conquest of Iraq, and how this led to their influence spreading into the east and south of the peninsula – ending the paragraph by ominously writing *"wa-bi-dhālika aṣbaḥat minṭaqat najd muḥāṭa bi-l-nufūdh al-ʿuthmānī."* (And with that the region of Najd began to be surrounded by the influence of the Ottomans.)[144]

[140] Ministry of Education 2012, 5.
[141] Ibid., 8.
[142] Mythological or just mythic time is a common concept in the academic studies of religions. See, e.g. Jensen, Sørensen, and Rothstein 2011, 18.
[143] Ministry of Education 2012, 8.
[144] Ibid.

That is, the narrative begins with a notion of foreign influence dominating the Arabian peninsula, yet Najd, the home of the Al Saud and origin point of Wahhabism, remained fully independent despite being surrounded by Ottoman subjects. Interestingly, Yemen and the southern parts of Arabia were tenuously at best under Ottoman influence, as the Ottomans were driven from the south in the 1600s by the Zaydi Imamate and remained unable to appoint a governor until the mid-1800s – that is, in the relevant period Ottoman influence in the south was almost non-existent. Similarly, Ottoman rule in the east of the Arabian Peninsula began in 1550, was ended by the Bani Khalid in 1670, and did not return until the 1870s.[145] In short, from the very start, the narrative is bending history to highlight Najd as the true heart of Arabia, the only area not influenced by outsiders, and thus the place where both the real interpretation of faith and the legitimate rulers shall hail from in the coming chapters.

Under the headline of 'the political situation' the description is split into four sections, each covering a geographic area – *al-hejāz*, *sharq al-bilād* (the east of the country), *janūb gharb al-bilād* (the south-west of the country), and *najd.*[146] These geographical divisions are constant throughout the book – in later chapters, there are headlines such as "*ḍamm al-imām turkī li-sharq al-bilād"* (Imam Turki's incorporation of the east of the country).[147] By consistently referring to these divisions by only their location, rather than other names, they give Najd and Hejaz primacy and imply a lack of other local identities by denying them names. Incidentally, the east and south-west are the only areas with noticeable groups of Shi'ites.[148] Furthermore, they are not named as the east of the peninsula or other purely geographical names, but as the east of the *country*. That is, they are explicitly part of the country in the historical narrative, even before becoming part of the state or indeed that state being founded. Incorporating them into the state is not to be seen as conquest – In the Saudi historical consciousness, it instead becomes the natural incorporation of the constituent parts of the country into a single political unit.

The political situation shows the reasons that it was not only legitimate but even necessary, for the Al Saud to unite the country. The Hejaz is described as ruled from Mecca by the Sharifs, who had been subordinate to Egypt since "*zaman al-ʿabīdiyyīn"* (the time of the slaves[149]) and had settled their loyalty to the Ottomans. The east is ruled by the Bani Khalid tribe, said to be subjects of the Ottomans, at

[145] Al-Rasheed 2010, 13.
[146] Ministry of Education 2012, 8–9.
[147] Ibid., 45.
[148] Niblock 2006, 11.
[149] Removing the suffix, "*ʿabīd"* literally translates as 'slaves'. From the context – that they ruled Egypt since the year 969 and is followed by the Ayyubids and the Mamluks – this is a clear reference and thinly veiled insult to the Fatimid dynasty, who were Ismaili Shi'ites.

least in name. In the southwest, the mountains of Asir are described as under the rule of local tribal leaders, and would remain so, until *"ẓuhūr al-daʿwa al-iṣlāḥiyya"* (the emergence of the corrective call[150]), while the subregion of Najran is also under local chiefs, who are described as noble and retaining their rule until coming under the influence of the First Saudi State.[151] It should come as little surprise, when the Saudis extend their influence over these areas later on in the story, Asir joined the state due to belief in Wahhabism, while in Najran the leaders saw they were outmatched and began paying Zakat to the First Saudi State.[152]

Najd is described as divided between several small and weak emirates, with incessant warfare between them. However, it is again pointed out that Najd remained outside foreign control.[153] From the lines on Najd, two interesting points appear. First, being divided, weak, and engulfed in constant warfare, is generally not seen as positive. While the need for a unification putting an end to the warfare is not directly stated, it is not a far leap to say it is implied. Second, there is a point of comparison, in that the stronger and united east and west are under the influence of the Ottomans, yet Najd remain independent despite being weak and divided – and it is thus the natural place for the founding of an 'indigenous' state.

To sum up this description of the political situation, it leads the reader towards understanding the country as a unit, even before being founded or united. At the same time, by describing a history filled with constant warfare and foreign domination, the narrative implies that without being united under a strong local dynasty, Saudi Arabia would be split into smaller parts waging bloody wars and under the thumb of foreigners. Yet Najd, despite also being subject to internal strife, retained their independence and is the only part of the country that remained 'pure' from the influence of Turks, Shi'ites, or others.

The state of religion follows, opening with the line, *"qalla al-taʿlīm fi najd wa-tafshā al-jahl,"* (The teachings diminished in Najd and the ignorance disseminated). *Jahl* is a keyword in this section, and while it translates as ignorance, it is related to and connotes the *jāhilīyya,* the pre-Islamic 'age of ignorance' ended by the prophet Muhammad. Indirectly comparing the time before Wahhabism and the Saudi state, to the age of ignorance before the prophet, the text is legitimizing the state and the Wahhabi ulama – while it would never be explicitly stated, in an implicit way the founders become a sort of 'modern Muhammads' by ending the ignorance.

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[150] This term, translatable as 'corrective call' or 'reformative mission' is used throughout the book to describe Wahhabism.
[151] Ministry of Education 2012, 8–9.
[152] Ibid., 28–29.
[153] Ibid., 9.

However, this is not just a vague description of ignorance. There are many examples couched in negative terms. Perhaps most central is the term *al-bidaʿ,* which translates as both innovation and heresy, and is to be understood as heretical innovations to the original faith – something Wahhabism is most stringently against. Other words used to describe the religious situation is *al-munkarāt* (reprehensible acts), *al-khurāfāt* (superstitions), and *al-ʿaqāʾid al-fāsida* (corrupt doctrines). This led people to let go of the foundations of Islam, seeking blessings from the trees and the rocks, and going to tricksters and fortunetellers. Much of this is in general terms, yet specific examples are brought out in the text. In the town of al-ʿUyayna, the grave of Zayd bin al-Khaṭṭāb, a companion of Muhammad and brother of the Caliph Umar, is described as a place of worship to which people come to pray in matters pertaining only to God.[154]

Leaving Najd, there are aggravating circumstances. In the Hejaz, it is written that there was a prosperity of knowledge due to the two holy mosques – and so they should implicitly know better – yet they had built 'domes on the graves.' Neither are the east and southwest free, they are described as filled with *bidaʿ*, superstition, and even *al-madhāhib al-bāṭila* (the false schools of law), likely a reference to the Shi'a in this region as at least misguided, if not unbelievers who arose in this time of ignorance.[155]

While the charges are put in terms that are generally negative, it is worth noting the conflations that are happening here. While superstition and praying to the trees and rocks might be something most if not all Muslims would agree to be wrong, these are connected to traditions only Wahhabis consider wrong, such as the veneration of saints, which has a long tradition and is widespread and accepted by other branches of Islam, among both Sunni and Shi'a.

All these descriptions of heresy end on a more hopeful note. I will quote at length my translation of the last paragraph in the section, which states that:

> *And thus the Arabian Peninsula was in an urgent need for a missionary of reform to decree against the heresy, and enliven the Sunna, and wage war against the manifestations of idolatry, and call the people to return to the origins of the true faith. Just as there was a pressing need for a strong ruler to unite its parts and spread the security and the tranquility in its territories, and to promote the interests of the people. And this was the missionary, the Sheikh Muhammed bin Abdul-Wahab, and this was the ruler, the Amir Muhammad bin Saud.*[156]

[154] Ibid., 10.
[155] Ibid.
[156] Ibid.

The beginning sets the scene for the narrative to come. It shows a time of division and warfare, weakness and foreign domination, idolatry and ignorance. Most of the country – despite not being a country yet – is under the influence of foreigners or split into weak emirates locked in constant warfare. Few years are given, there are centuries between them, and they are centuries before the actual narrative. There is an impression of the time before time, before the world was set in order – yet this chaotic age ends, with the coming of the Sheikh and the Amir. By describing the time before Wahhabism and the Saudi state in this way, the narrative is used to impress into the historical consciousness that it was legitimate and necessary to unite the land and set it in order. The close connection between the political and religious situation intertwines them, giving the appearance that one cannot be solved without the other – and then both are solved, by the Sheikh and the Amir. This legitimizes the position of both institutions, the royal family and the ulama, and that without these two existing and working together in a united country, it would return to both religious ignorance, as well as warfare and foreign domination.

II: The Call of Muhammad bin Abdul-Wahab

As described by authors before me, Wahhabism is central to the ideological legitimacy in Saudi Arabia. It should come as little surprise that a large part of the book is dedicated to Muhammad bin Abdul-Wahab. This section follows immediately after the descriptions of the country before the rise of Wahhabism and Al Saud, and while the previous pages were setting the stage, this is the actual beginning of the narrative in the book. In this part, the story follows the Sheikh Muhammad bin Abdul-Wahab, from his family and childhood, his call to reform, the resistance he faced and finally how he came to be a part of the founding of the First Saudi State.

The book first seeks to establish the credentials of Muhammad bin Abdul-Wahab, to argue why he was the right reformer. It notes that he was born in 1703 to a family of knowledge and jurisprudence, and by the age of ten, he had learned the Quran by heart and began studying the Hanbali school of law. Fascinated by knowledge, he read the books of *tafsīr, ḥadīth,* and *fiqh,* and the writings of Ahmad ibn Taymiyya, a 13th century Sheikh whose puritanical views on Islam were controversial in his own time.[157] In all of this, he was aided by “his sharp cleverness, the strength of his memory, and his zeal for knowledge.”[158] Even from his

[157] For an exploration of Ibn Taymiyya, his views, and their influence on Wahhabism, see Shahi 2013, 57–60.
[158] Ministry of Education 2012, 10–11.

childhood Muhammad bin Abdul-Wahab was a prodigy from a family of knowledge, studying the central texts, and with a series of positive adjectives connected to him.

In his youth, Muhammad bin Abdul-Wahab went on the Hajj and a series of travels to increase his knowledge. He studied in Mecca for a time, where his *daʿwa* (Call, missionary message) first began to take form, and in Medina, where he studied under what the book calls the two most famous ulama, from whom he gained both endorsement and support for his *daʿwa.*[159] The story goes on, as Abdul-Wahab left Medina and after a short stay at home, he decided to travel to Basra and continue his studies there. This is notable as one of the few times anyone leaves the area of modern Saudi Arabia, and the description of Basra is not flattering. During his time there, he saw much of *al-bidaʿ* and *al-munkarāt* – yet when he tried preaching against it, the locals were angered, and he was forced to leave. Traveling south, to al-Aḥsa in the east of modern Saudi Arabia, he found more piety and knowledge, and for a time he stayed there teaching his *daʿwa* before returning to Najd.[160]

The trip to Basra and back has some interesting connotations. While the logical conclusion from the previous section would be that Abdul-Wahab must have grown up surrounded by *bidaʿ,* it is never mentioned in his childhood and youth. Only when he leaves the territory of modern Saudi Arabia is he faced with it – and when he tries to teach the people of Basra the error of their ways, he is forced to leave. Returning to the areas of modern Saudi Arabia, all is good – despite being in the east, which was described in no uncertain terms less than two pages ago. This underlines the general theme of foreign influence as negative, as traveling outside the country leads to a den of evil where the population will not accept the true call, even when presented to them.

Second, the text notes without any doubt where he traveled and in what order, including a map to show the itinerary – like all maps in the book, it is centered on Najd – and details such as a wish to travel onwards to Syria but returning due to a lack of funds.[161] However, Shahi notes how the original sources include different versions of his travels, one claiming he lived for years in Basra under the patronage of the local governor, as well as other trips to Baghdad, Kurdistan, Iran, and Anatolia.[162] Regardless of where he traveled and when, the *Tārīkh* does not present any other interpretations or sources, instead focusing on telling a single narrative that paints Abdul-Wahab as a rightly guided scholar in an ignorant time – and this ignorance gets worse the farther you travel from Najd.

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[159] Ibid., 11.
[160] Ibid., 11–12.
[161] Ibid., 12.
[162] Shahi 2013, page 86, note 75.

To underline the narrative, the book sums up three factors that influenced his call to reform. First, "his family" – he grew up in a pious and wise family, where he was taught the right tenets of his faith. Second, "his environment" – he observed the practices around him and found them faulty, once more described as heresy and superstition. Third, "his travels seeking knowledge" – he traveled to study under the senior ulama of his time, and there found both knowledge and support for his ideas.[163] None of these three reasons given are new at this point, they follow clearly from the narrative of the last few pages. Yet repetition is key to remembrance and summing up the points to remember is a general method used throughout the book. The takeaway is that a young man of good family and education could see the faults in the religious practices in society, and with the blessing of the wisest scholars set out to change it.

On his return to Najd, the Sheikh Muhammad bin Abdul-Wahab began his preaching in earnest. In the town of Huraymlaʾa he started explaining to the people *"haqīqat at-tawḥīd"* (the truth of monotheism), and to disavow the ignorance of "*al-bidaʿ w-al-munkarāt w-ash-shirk"* (the heresy/innovation, reprehensible acts, and idolatry). He continued in the face of resistance, yet once his father asked him to stop, Muhammad bin Abdul-Wahab complied. Following the death of his father Muhammad once again began preaching, now in his birthplace of al-ʿUyayna supported by the Amir ʿUthmān ibn Muʿamar. The trees that had been worshipped were cut down, the domed tomb of Zayd bin al-Khaṭṭāb was destroyed, and adulterous women were stoned.[164] Already some of the issues described in the religious situation were put in order – and punishments followed as well. The punishment is violent, and one still practiced by the modern state, in which religious scholars have a large influence on the judicial system. In a way, this acts to set a precedent that legitimizes modern Saudi law.

This, the book tells us, was the beginning of a second phase for *al-daʿwa al-iṣlāḥiyya* (the corrective mission or reformative call), in which it was implemented. Unsurprisingly, the implementation made Muhammad bin Abdul-Wahab some enemies. Yet all their efforts failed at first, as they could not get support from the local leaders, so they turned to the ruler of al-Aḥsa in the east. According to the text, the influence of the ruler of al-Aḥsa reached to al-ʿUyayna, and fearing military action, Amir ʿUthmān ibn Muʿamar exiled the preacher.[165] It is worth noting, that when returning from Basra, it was in al-Aḥsa that Muhammad bin Abdul-Wahab stayed while teaching his *daʿwa* with local support. There is no attempt in the *Tārīkh* to reconcile these two conflicting descriptions. Instead, it seems that al-Aḥsa is good and pious when compared to Basra, yet its ruler is almost a foreign enemy when seen from Najd.

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[163] Ministry of Education 2012, 12–13.
[164] Ibid., 14.
[165] Ibid., 14–15.

Sheikh Muhammad bin Abdul-Wahab then began the third phase of his *daʿwa,* one that is named *qiyām ad-dawla* (creation of the state). This section begins with four reasons why the Sheikh decided on Diriyah as the right place to continue his missionary work*.* First, it was close to al-ʿUyayna. Second, and more interesting, is *al-istiqrār* (the stability), *al-amn* (the security), and the strong development of its military forces. Third, Diriyah had hostile relations with the ruler of al-Aḥsa. Finally, the reformative mission had already spread there and had supporters – and among these supporters were members of the ruling family, the Al Saud.[166] That is, not only were the Al Saud able rulers of a stable polity with a strong military force, even in these chaotic times, they also came around to Wahhabism of their own volition. From their very first appearance, the Al Saud are connected to stability and security.

Through his brothers, the Amir Muhammad bin Saud heard that the Sheikh Muhammad bin Abdul-Wahab had arrived in Diriyah, and the Amir went to meet the Sheikh.[167] This is an interesting change of agency – so far, the one acting in the story has mainly been the Sheikh, yet once the Al Saud enters the story, they become the actors. Soon the Sheikh and Amir made the *ittifāq ad-dirʿiyya*, (Pact of Diriyah), pledging allegiance to one another. The book then narrates that "on the foundation of this pact, arose the Saudi state on the proven principles based in the word of *at-Tawḥīd."*[168] Whether *Tawḥīd* is here taken to be unification or monotheism, it is clear from the narrative that Saudi Arabia exists due to this pact. Elsewhere, the book refers to the First Saudi State, but here it is simply the Saudi state, connecting the pact to the modern kingdom. The connection is underlined on the following page, in a box which contains a few quotes the two men supposedly said to one another at the momentous occasion. Here, the Sheikh says to the Amir:

> *[…] You will see all of Najd and its regions shut to the idolatry and ignorance and dissent, and the disagreements and the killing which truly divide some, so I plead for you to be the Imam on whom the Muslims will be gathered, and your progeny after you*.[169]

With the pact made, the narrative jumps to a new headline, called "the success of the *daʿwa* and the backing of Al Saud to it" listing the results of the Sheikh settling in Diriyah, where he taught the people and preached, while sending letters to the lords and scholars around Najd informing them of the call to reform – and many of the towns closest to Diriyah joined the new state. Meanwhile, the *daʿwa* with the support of the Saudi amir led to "*fa-namat ad-Diriʿiyya bi-surʿa mudhhila"* (So Diriyah developed with amazing speed), and an influx of people came to Diriyah wishing to join the fledgling state.[170] It is clear from this reading

[166] Ibid., 15.
[167] Ibid.
[168] Ibid.
[169] Ibid., 16.
[170] Ibid.

that simply the joining of forces, the support of the Sheikh to the Amir and Amir to the Sheikh, was enough to launch the massive success of both Wahhabism and the Saudi state – and implicitly, should this alliance break, it might all be lost. Witnessing this success, the Amir of al-ʿUyayna realized his error in sending Abdul-Wahab away and came asking for his return. To this, the Sheikh replied, "That is not under my command, rather that lies with the Amir Muhammad bin Saud."[171] Cementing that in this relationship that lasts until the modern day and is beneficial to all, the final power lies with the ruler.

The final page of text in this first part of the book concerns the goals and results of the *daʿwa.* Most of the goals concern the faith – enjoining good and forbidding wrong, struggling against "*ash-shirk wa-l-bidaʿ wa-l-khurāfāt"* (idolatry, innovation and superstition) and so on. However, among the goals are also the implementation of the Sharia*,* and the creation of an Islamic state capable of protecting this. Once these goals have been presented, the results of the *daʿwa* are listed in seven points. The first two corresponds to the goals, being the elimination of heresy, and the implementation of Sharia and Islamic culture. The following points are closer to the issues presented when describing the political situation, as the third one concerns the spreading of security and tranquility and the ending of war and conflict.

The fourth point on the list of results, "*tawaḥḥadat ajzāʾ al-bilād taḥt qiyāda wāḥida"*[172] (United the parts of the country under a single leadership), is perhaps the most interesting. By connecting the unification with religious reform, the narrative also makes separatism tantamount to heresy. As previously, the term used is *al-bilād,* meaning simply 'the country,' and while the narrative has yet to show how the country was unified, from the maps present in the book and the fact that the book is used in schools everywhere in the country, it is clear this concerns all Saudi Arabia – similar to what Anderson discussed regarding Dutch Indonesia. The final three points, concern the flourishing of Najd in general and Diriyah especially, in areas of economy, architecture, and learning, noticeably as a center for students coming from all the peninsula – and leading to a spiritual awakening all across the Islamic World, with four reformist movements from Nigeria to India mentioned as a result of the *daʿwa* of Sheikh Muhammad bin Abdul-Wahab.[173]

The chapter ends on this high note, followed by a table of all rulers of the three states, from Muhammad bin Saud to the time of printing – and excluding those who ruled in between the Saudi states or other parts of the country.[174] Once more linking the modern rulers with the Pact of Diriyah, it implies that they ruled the entire country and that all those that ruled in-between were illegitimate. Coming as it

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[171] Ibid.
[172] Ibid., 17.
[173] Ibid.
[174] Ibid., 20.

does, right after the description of all the successful results of Abdul-Wahab and his *daʿwa*, the link between the Wahhabi mission, the economic and academic flourishing of Najd, and the contemporary rulers are further established. Finally, it is worth noting that it splits the rulers into three historical periods – the First Saudi State, the Second Saudi state, yet not the third, but the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. By ending the numbering, the table is also implying that this is the endpoint, there will be no fall and fourth state.

By first presenting the credentials of the Sheikh Muhammad bin Abdul-Wahab, and doing everything to cement it, the narrative tells us that he is the right one to begin the reformative call and that he is worth emulating. Yet he does not just go out and call for change. He studies under the leading scholars of the time. While he forms his first opinions there, he also gets their approval before even thinking of implementing his ideas. When he finally starts preaching, he stops at the request of his father, and when he takes up the call again, he does so with the support of a ruler. In short, while much was wrong, the reformer who had the perfect credentials did not do anything without the blessing of the best scholars in the land, the local ruler, and his father – Religious, political and familial authorities are to be obeyed. After his banishment and the pact of Diriyah, he will not return to the town of his birth as it is outside his power. The main character so far swears loyalty to the Al Saud and is presented as unswerving in this loyalty. Due to this, the land flourishes, the city grows, and all is well rewarded.

III: The First Saudi State – Uniting the Country

The following part of the book concerns the First Saudi State. While its roots were dealt with in the first part, the founding, growth, and fall of the First Saudi State is the story most closely related to legitimacy, and central to this study. The Sheikh Muhammad bin Abdul-Wahab, the main character so far, barely plays a role – the state-ideology and religion might be shaped by the ulama, but the history of Saudi Arabia is a narrative of unification under the Al Saud. This part of the book is split into three chapters, one concerning the founding and expansion, a second on the way the state is ruled, and a third on its fall. The first state is described in positive terms and acts as a sort of historical mirror for the contemporary state, and thus the way it is ruled becomes prescriptive, while the reasons for its fall become lessons to be avoided. It is mainly a narrative of overcoming resistance and uniting the country, and this unification is consistently described in positive terms and with little mention of resistance to Saudi rule – implying that it was often a natural and voluntary process.

The narrative of the First Saudi State opens with a short history of the Al Saud describing how they came to be rulers, ending with the pact of Diriyah. This is followed by a short repetition, under the headline of "*qiyām ad-dawla as-saʿudiyya al-awala"* (Creation of the First Saudi State), concerning how supporting and protecting the Sheikh Muhammad bin Abdul-Wahab led to a stream of supporters coming to Diriyah, and many local leaders happily joining the young state – including the Amir of al-ʿUyayna. Others were less willing to join yet could be subjugated by force – the narrative describes that 17 battles were fought with the Amir of Riyadh.[175]

This narrative quickly becomes a story of how the Saudis overcame resistance. The *Zaʿīm* (leader) of the Bani Khalid in the east sent his forces to Najd but were forced to retreat. Then a *Zaʿīm* from Najran fell upon the Saudi forces and defeated them in a confused battle, yet this setback is described as "a practical lesson to the Saudis." When the Bani Khalid returned in support of the Amir of Riyadh, the "steadfastness of the Saudi forces" forced the Bani Khalid to retreat with great loss of their men.[176] The Saudis were from the very beginning faced with attacks, especially from those under foreign influence – yet they defeated their enemies, turned their setbacks into lessons, and due to their steadfastness were victorious.

Then follows the longest part of the chapter by far, under the headline *"tawḥīd al-bilād taḥt al-ḥukm as-saʿūdī"* (Unification of the country under Saudi rule), split into different subheadings each covering part of the country, describing the wars and the voluntary submissions, bringing all parts of modern Saudi Arabia under the rule of the First Saudi State. This chapter also opens a new *ʿahd* (age) of the state, as it begins with the death of Imam Muhammad bin Saud and the ascension of his son, Abdelaziz.[177] I will not go into the descriptions of how every region came to join the state, yet some are worth highlighting to show the general themes and narrative choices made in describing the unification.

The first expansion described by the book is the conquest of Riyadh. Or, rather, not the conquest, as the book describes it neutrally as *"dukhūl ar-Riyāḍ taḥt as-siyāda as-saʿūdiyya"* (Entrance of Riyadh under the Saudi sovereignty). Nonetheless, the text narrates how the many Saudi raids into Riyadh dwindled its forces, making resistance impossible. The story then happily notes how this success not only ended the greatest foe to the Saudi state for the past 27 years but also increased the fear in the souls of their enemies and allowed the Saudi forces to strike further afield.[178] While the narrative does not deny the

[175] Ibid., 22.
[176] Ibid., 24.
[177] Ibid.
[178] Ibid.

use of violence, the terms used, that Riyadh entered Saudi sovereignty, downplays it and makes it seem like a natural outcome of history rather than violent conquest through a war of attrition.

In adding the rest of Najd and the northern parts of the peninsula to the Saudi state, few battles are described. Rather, defeating one enemy means all others will happily join the Saudi state. Thus, after success in annexing Buraidah in 1765, Saudi influence spread into the north, leading Qassim and other towns to join the Saudi state, with no reasons given. Due to now having Saudi support the ball kept on rolling, so to speak, as a leader from Buraidah brought the region of Jabal Shammar under Saudi rule. A campaign from Jabal Shammar and Qassim then brought the north of the Arabian Peninsula into the state.[179] Here the narrative of unification is at its clearest – there is some resistance, but parts of the country willingly join, and others then follow.

The annexation of the east adds some highly interesting points as well. There is little description of events; instead, the *Tārīkh* gives general reasons as to why the Saudis set their eyes on the east, why they successfully incorporated it into the First Saudi State, and what this meant for the state. Four reasons are given as to why the east should be joined to the state. First, is the wish of spreading Wahhabism to the Gulf. Second, the strategic and economic importance of the region. Third, a wish to destroy the Bani Khalid leadership, due to their continued hostility to the Saudi State. And fourth, weakening the direct Ottoman influence on the area.[180] Most interesting are perhaps the final two. The third one – the hostility of the Bani Khalid – builds on multiple previous mentions of them, always attacking the Saudi state, essentially saying that they started it. This is a common theme throughout the narrative whenever the unification is done by conquest. The final point relates to the previous picture of foreigners in general, and the Ottomans especially – they are enemies, and their defeat is presented as inherently good.

The reasons they were successful in destroying the Bani Khaled and adding the east to their state is perhaps even more interesting from a thematic standpoint. While there is a paragraph of text to explain it, the book sums it up in two points on its own. First, "*Tawḥīd āl saʿūd li-najd kullaha"* (the unification of all Najd by the Al Saud), which increased their military and economic power. Second, *"tajaddud al-khilāfāt al-dākhiliyya"* (Renewal of internal conflicts) among the Bani Khaled.[181] That is, under the Al Saud, Najd had been united, and thus became strong and able to defeat their enemies, while internal conflicts within the Bani Khaled became their downfall. The lesson that is easily drawn from this is that unity is strength, division is defeat – a theme that runs throughout the narrative, especially regarding the

[179] Ibid., 25.
[180] Ibid., 26.
[181] Ibid.

Second Saudi State. Finally, in this section on conquering the east, no mention is made on the subjugation of Qatar and Bahrain, despite also coming under Saudi dominion at the time.[182]

The annexation of Hejaz gets the longest treatment. It opens by noting that through Najdi missionaries, news of the Wahhabi movement had reached Hejaz, where the ruling Sharif adopted a hostile position and banned Wahhabis from performing the Hajj. Once the Sharif Ghālib took charge, he began fighting a war against the Saudi state.[183] The narrative gives no reasons as to why these actions might have been taken, but as with the east, the origins of the conflict are put in the transgressions of the other part. Additionally, with modern Saudi kings styling themselves as Custodians of the Two Holy Mosques, and officially letting all Muslims perform the Hajj regardless of creed, they are further legitimizing their rule of the holy places by implying they are 'better' guardians than the previous regime.

The Sharif Ghālib dispatched several forces against the First Saudi State, the book narrates, yet all were defeated. After the largest one was defeated, the Sharif realized the depth of his defeat, and a peace was agreed in which the Wahhabis were again allowed to perform the Hajj. Yet with the Saudi victory, many tribes of the Hejaz flocked to join the Saudi State, with even the brother-in-law of the Sharif seeing the truth of Wahhabism and joining the Saudis. This is described as "*akbar al-naksāt"* (greatest of the setbacks) for the Sharif.[184] As with the Bani Khaled, it is once again shown that divisions lead to destruction – his own family leaving is the biggest setback.

Sharif Ghālib wished to punish the tribes which had left him, and conflict was soon resumed. With Saudi support, the brother-in-law and the tribes seized Ta'if in 1802 – no more details are given in the *Tārīkh* on how they entered Ta'if, while Niblock notes a massacre of some 1500 people.[185] Soon, Mecca came under a siege led by Saud bin Abdelaziz. The Sharif Ghālib fled to Jeddah, leaving Mecca under the command of his brother, who then surrendered to Saud and was in turn allowed to remain governor of Mecca under Saudi rule.[186] Once more, the divisions among their enemies are the reason for their fall – and the Al Saud are benevolent to those who accept their rule while massacres are glossed over.

The description of Saud bin Abdelaziz's entrance into Mecca in 1803 is worth looking at in some detail, as his actions also serve to legitimize conquering the Hejaz. First, Saud guaranteed the security of the people, canceled "*al-ḍarāʾib al-jāʾira"* (the unjust taxes) and gathered the people behind one

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[182] Al-Rasheed 2010, 20.
[183] Ministry of Education 2012, 27.
[184] Ibid.
[185] Niblock 2006, 28.
[186] Ministry of Education 2012, 28.

imam.[187] By naming the taxes as unjust, they imply that the previous regime was seeking to extract wealth from the holy city and thus illegitimate – while this legitimizes imposing a new order, it is also a parallel to the rentier structure and lack of taxation in contemporary Saudi Arabia. Second, gathering the people behind one imam once again indicates that uniting is inherently good, but also that the city had been religiously divided previously, and that by coming under Saudi sovereignty the religion was unified.

The accolades continue, describing how Saud distributed many alms to the poor, gave gifts to the people of the city, and finally that he tore down the domes that had been built on the graves, from which the people had sought blessings.[188] That is, the narrative focuses on the generosity of Saud, even to those he has conquered, as well as ending the wrong practices – despite these being general Islamic practices and common for centuries. This is similar to the actions of Abdul-Wahab, so instead of focusing on the religious dimension, I believe the role of the people (*ahl* in this case, *shaʿb* is rarely used elsewhere) ought to be considered. The people can be unjustly taxed, or they can be showered with gifts, and their security can be guaranteed. The treatment of the people is part of the legitimizing narrative – they should be treated well by the rulers. Yet they cannot act on their own in any way, except for seeking blessing in the wrong place, of which they are only indirectly judged with no mention of punishment. Instead, they fall into the background of a dynastic history, and while they might be misguided if not united behind the right leadership, they have little agency of their own.

The war for the Hejaz goes on. Suffice to say, that the Imam Abdelaziz is noted to pass away at this time, Saud bin Abdelaziz inherits the throne, and the Sharif Ghālib sues for peace, submitting as a vassal of the Al Saud due to not receiving any aid from the Ottomans. The south-west is annexed shortly later.[189]

The word '*ḍamm'* is consistently used by the *Tārīkh* when explaining how parts of the country were brought into the Saudi state. From the root ḍ-m-m, in the form mostly used in the text, the word has several meanings, such as to bring together, to join, or to add up. It can mean, and is taken to in these cases, annexation.[190] But the headline '*ḍamm al-ḥijāz'* might as well be translated as 'the joining of the Hejaz.' For what is often a violent seizure of territory, words such as *istilḥāq* (annexation), *iqtisār* (conquest) or *tadwīkh* (subjugation) might be more applicable. Yet with *ḍamm,* the narrative sidesteps the

[187] Ibid.
[188] Ibid.
[189] Ibid., 28–29.
[190] See ضم in Milton-Cowan 1979, 636.

implications of a violent conquest by Najdis, instead implying that the different parts of the country are simply joined together as one.

Once the unification is covered, the book moves on to discuss *al-malāmiḥ al-ḥaḍāriyya* (civilized characteristics) of the First Saudi State, in a general exploration of how the state was administered. This is covered in only two pages, while eight pages were devoted to the previous chapter on the creation of the state and unification of the country. Nonetheless, these two pages include some highly interesting points that are comparable to modern Saudi Arabia.

As the first thing, the book notes that the state was founded on the *tawḥīd allah* (oneness of God) and ruled according to his revelation. This is directly followed by noting that the Sheikh Muhammad bin Abdul-Wahab and the Al Saud ruled together, yet soon the Sheikh withdrew to only serve as an advisor. A cultural and scholarly *nahḍa* (renaissance) in the first state is also described, focused on different Islamic studies and the Arabic language.[191] This is, of course, the religious legitimacy, described by several other scholars, yet it is given a centuries-long history, grounding it in the historical consciousness of the reader – and it is also cementing that while religion is the basis of the state, the ulama serves in an advisory capacity and has done so since the beginning. Similarly, it is said the ruler, called the Imam, ruled, and his heir led the military.

Taxes were also levied – yet not the unjust taxes of the Sharif. Rather, the financial matters are directly compared to the Islamic State at the time of the Prophet. The main income is from the Zakat and the acquisition of booty from raids. The expenses of the state are described as protection and defense, the requirements of administration, salaries of judges, teachers, and students, alms for the poor, and aid to those struck by disaster. It is also noted that the income exceeded expenditure.[192] This first state, which is given as not only the historical roots of the modern state but described as founded and ruled according to the faith and compared to the state ruled by the Prophet Muhammad himself, is thus allowed to tax the population, at least with the Zakat. The expenditures, of course, goes only to the good and necessary causes, most of which benefit the population directly.

The incomes, the expenses, and the surplus are all comparable to the economic system of modern Saudi Arabia, so is the relation between ruler and ulama, as well as being officially founded in religion. In addition, the theme of *nahḍa* gets a full chapter when the book reaches the modern kingdom.

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[191] Ministry of Education 2012, 30–31.
[192] Ibid.

Yet the only direct comparison made is to the original Islamic State of the 7th century. By becoming both a reflection of the modern kingdom and early Islam, all three are tied together in the historical consciousness, and all are framed as the right way to rule, informing the expectations of the students on what is a good political system. The first state becomes a sort of historical mirror, with the first state not only connected to the modern one but also reflecting it, giving lessons for how to rule and, in the following, how to avoid a fall.

The final chapter in this part is a long exploration of how the first state fell. While the book spends several pages on army movements and battles, I will focus on those events with larger thematic implications, such as the reasons given for the fall. How the narrative explains the end of the previous Saudi states is, of course, highly interesting when it comes to understanding the legitimacy of the modern state. If this is but an earlier iteration of the current kingdom, what brought it down?

For the first time in the book, a reason is given for why someone attacks the Saudi state. The Ottomans considered the loss of the Hejaz from their influence as a blow to their standing in the Islamic World. They entrusted the task to their governor of Egypt, Muhammad Ali Pasha, in 1807. He excused himself at first, knowing that he was simply not capable of defeating the Saudis. Thus, he demanded to command all the forces of Iraq and Syria, in addition to those of Egypt, as well as funds from the sultan to supply his armies with modern guns and ships, and then spent years on planning. Finally, after four years of preparations, Muhammad Ali entrusted his son Tusūn Pasha to begin the campaign.[193] From this introduction to the war that ended the First Saudi State, the gist of the narrative is already clear – one does not simply defeat the Al Saud. All the forces of the region equipped with the most modern weapons and years of preparation were necessary.

The story is one of overwhelming power arrayed against them, along with unfair tactics and bad luck at every turn. Tusūn distributed funds to the tribal leaders as he advanced towards Medina – yet under the leadership of Abdallah bin Saud, the Egyptians were surrounded and dealt a crushing defeat. Tusūn soon received reinforcements and more funds to lure the tribes to his side. Thus, the tribes of the Hejaz turned their backs on the Al Saud, and when Medina was besieged, the Saudi garrison was struck by disease, and forced to surrender. With the fall of Medina, the Sharif Ghālib turned coat and betrayed the Saudis, more tribes followed him, soon Tusūn entered Mecca, and controlled all of the Hejaz by 1813.[194]

[193] Ibid., 32.
[194] Ibid., 32–33.

Treason, unending reinforcements, and ill-timed diseases all worked together to inflict the first real defeat on the First Saudi State.

Other Saudi victories are described in the long-winded war, but the end of the First Saudi State came with the siege of Diriyah by Ibrahim Pasha, another son of Muhammad Ali. Imam Saud had passed away, and his son, now Imam Abdallah, led the defense. An inordinate amount of details is told of the siege, two of which are worth noting. First, that the siege was only possible due to the enemy continually receiving supplies and reinforcements from Egypt, Iraq, and parts of Najd. Second, the defense was weakened by betrayal, when parts of the Saudi forces left to join Ibrahim and informed him of the weak points in the defenses. Seeing the weakness of their position, Abdallah surrendered in order to avoid a bloody sack.[195] Thus, the lesson might be that unending strength on the part of the enemy and treason among their own is necessary to bring down a Saudi state, which brought so much good to the population – and even then, they are not really defeated, as much as the benevolent ruler sacrificed himself.

This final point, the self-sacrifice of Abdallah, is hammered home in the text. The terms of surrender are described in three points – the city surrenders, Abdallah goes to Egypt as a prisoner, and that Diriyah is not razed and no harm comes to the people. Abdallah is literally described as an exemplar of heroism and self-sacrifice, ransoming the people and city with his life. Muhammad Ali is even said to admire Abdallah's courage and self-control, as he is sent to his death in Istanbul. Meanwhile, Ibrahim Pasha reneged on the agreement, burned the houses, cut the date palms, scattered the residents, and captured any he could find of the Al Saud and the family of Abdul-Wahab.[196] In short, the narrative tells the students that the royal family has happily laid down their lives to protect their subjects and that the foreigners are not to be trusted – without the protection of the Al Saud, their homes will be burnt and livelihoods destroyed.

Finally, the reasons for the fall of the First Saudi State are summed up again to ensure they are remembered by the students, and it seems central to the narrative that they would never have been defeated in a fair fight. The inequality in numbers, funds, and equipment – especially modern and heavy weapons – are given as reasons. So is the Egyptian enticement to the tribes. The fact that Imam Abdallah was unwilling to exploit an opportunity when the enemy provisions caught fire is also highlighted, along with not using hit-and-run tactics despite enemy superiority, altogether giving the impression that the Saudis fought fairly despite bad odds. Treason during the siege itself was among the greatest reasons. In

[195] Ibid., 27–28.
[196] Ibid., 27.

the end, it is noted that the death of Imam Saud and the leadership of the inexperienced, if honorable, Abdallah made the circumstances difficult for the First Saudi State.[197]

As explored in the previous chapter, Makdisi and Silverstein considered memory and forgetting equally important parts of the historical consciousness – and some events have been forgotten by the narrative in the *Tārīkh.* The lack of reasons given for the enmity of their foes, aside from the Ottomans, is a good example. Yet there are events in the history of the First Saudi State that ought not to be left out, despite not appearing in this narrative. One example is a failed attempt at conquering Yemen. According to Al-Rasheed, once the Hejaz and the south-west had become part of the state, a campaign was launched to invade Yemen, where heavy resistance and unfamiliar terrain led to failure.[198] This failed campaign is only given a few lines by Al-Rasheed and is not that central to Saudi history – yet the defeat is conveniently forgotten, in the comprehensive descriptions of how other areas were successfully brought into the state.

Second, the Sack of Karbala is considered among the most important events in other histories, yet it is not mentioned at all in the *Tārīkh.* According to the versions presented by both Niblock and Al-Rasheed, the forces of the First Saudi State often raided into Iraq, especially targeting the Shi'a population. The city of Karbala was sacked in 1802, where the sacred tomb of Husayn bin Ali was plundered, and some 4000 Shi'ites were massacred. The Imam Abdelaziz, who the *Tārīkh* simply says passed away, was assassinated in 1803 by a Shi'a Muslim angered by the sack.[199] As the story has not shown itself averse to implying heresy on the part of the Shi'a, it is unclear why this is omitted. I see three possible reasons, first that the Shi'a are only implied to be present, never clearly mentioned, and it might simply be part of removing them from the national history – delegitimizing their presence in the country. Second, it could be that the example of a ruler being murdered is one thought should be avoided. Third, it could have been removed in the reforms, following the criticism of intolerant representations in Saudi curricula.

From this exploration, it appears that the narrative of the first state is used with a few goals in mind. By naming it the first, it becomes clear that the second and third states are inheritors of its legacy. By beginning the chapter with a history of the Al Saud, who are the main actors throughout, it also becomes clear that this is the state of the Al Saud, not Abdul-Wahab – however instrumental he might have been in

[197] Ibid., 28.
[198] Al-Rasheed 2010, 20.
[199] Niblock 2006, 28; Al-Rasheed 2010, 20–21.

the preceding chapter. This is already established at the end of the chapter on Abdul-Wahab, when he promised that the heirs of Muhammad bin Saud should rule the state and is further underlined by the list of rulers leading up to the time of writing. While it is covered in few pages, the section exploring the structure of the state is in many ways reminiscent of the workings of the modern kingdom, with an absolute ruler on top though he heeds his advisors, with Zakat being the only tax, and it being spent on protection as well as redistribution to the poor, administration, and funding of scholars.

While contemporary Saudi Arabia thus gets a long and strong basis in history – giving a certain legitimacy through tradition as Hobsbawm might say – by being a precursor to the modern kingdom, the first state also acts as a mirror, with its similar administration and the story of how it spread out from Najd to unite all the areas of modern Saudi Arabia. By being a mirror, the narrative serves as a case from which lessons of history can be drawn for the modern kingdom. Its rulers are lionized, shown as smart, effective, and compassionate, and the state brought not only peace and unity to the warring statelets, it also brought the true faith, through its alliance with Abdul-Wahab – who remained subservient as a trusted advisor – and it brought economic prosperity and a renaissance of learning. All of this, then, can be seen as traits of the modern kingdom that are given a long tradition, as well as features to be emulated, lest the land should return to idolatry and war.

Finally, the way and reasons it fell, act as lessons on what must be avoided at all costs. The invasion is the first enemy action where any attempt has been made at explaining their reasoning. That the Ottomans sought the destruction of the First Saudi State due to their conquest of the Hejaz is not controversial. However, by denying a reason for the transgressions of the Sharif in the Hejaz and the Bani Khalid of the east, it leads to an understanding of these attacks as fundamentally illegitimate – and thus, that they should have accepted Saudi rule without conflict. After all, these regions are part of the country, and their leadership ought not to have fought against the unification that brought so much good.

The reasons for the fall are noteworthy as well. One thing is the narrative of how difficult a time their enemies had, the need to spend years planning and plotting while gathering men and weapons from half the Arab world – such stories of brave resistance against the unending strength of the enemy are rather common in national histories. The reasons given for the final defeat are more interesting. Overwhelming enemies are one thing, but trying to fight fair, then being abandoned first by the tribes, and then betrayed by their own troops during the siege who disclosed the weak points in the defense, were necessary for their defeat. Thus, while state and unity brought only good, disloyalty and treason brought it down – leading to the end of the state, ruining of the capital and scattering of the population despite the efforts of the royal family to avoid such an outcome.

IV: The Second Saudi State – Divisions Sow Destruction

The narrative of the Second Saudi State is used to underline points already introduced. First, it acts to show how the fall of the first state led to the country sliding back into local wars and foreign domination – yet the Al Saud rise to the occasion and end the occupation. That it is the Al Saud who are successful in this, connects to the second point, that this family and a specific line of it are the only legitimate rulers of the country. Third, it serves to show a theme presented as an issue among the enemies of the first state, that internal divisions are what leads to destruction, and thus that standing together with the rightful ruler is good and necessary.

Little attention is given to the immediate years following the destruction described during the fall of the First Saudi State. The book tells that the first attempt at forming a Najdi state was by a Muhammad bin Mishāri. This lack of any state structure implies a time of lawlessness. Bin Mishāri's attempt was centered on Diriyah, but only with the return of the Al Saud did the surrounding townships join. In the space of a single paragraph, two identical parentheses appear, written in blue to stand out, stating *"rājiʿa nasab ḥukkām āl Saʿūd"* (The lineage of the Al Saud rulers returned), each time when a member of the Al Saud joined.[200] The very bloodline of the Al Saud is thus used to confer legitimacy – and in turn, must be taken to legitimize the modern kingdom.

One of these returning Saudis, Mishāri bin Saud, was the son of the Imam Saud of the first state. With no reason given as to why or how, aside from the parenthesis of his bloodline, he compelled Muhammad bin Mishāri to yield the rulership. Muhammad bin Mishāri then went to his hometown, gathered his family and supporters, arrested Mishāri bin Saud, and sent him to *"al-qāʾid al-ʿuthmani"* (the Ottoman commander) to gain his support. Turki bin Abdallah, the son of the late Imam Abdallah of the first state, seized Muhammad bin Mishāri, had him killed, and from a base in Riyadh began the efforts of creating a new Saudi state.[201] While telling of the beginning of the second state, the narrative here appears to have two goals. First, showing that a new state cannot be founded without the Al Saud in charge. Second, while not a founding myth for Riyadh, it serves to tell how Riyadh became the capital – in the larger scope, this is, after all, a story of how Saudi Arabia came to be as it is today.

[200] Ministry of Education 2012, 44.
[201] Ibid.

The presence of an Ottoman commander is interesting on its own. It implies that Najd was under foreign occupation, and yet people can attempt to found states while killing each other for the rulership – without Saudi rule, even while occupied by foreign troops, the country was reverting to internal strife. This narrative of occupation continues, as when Muhammad Ali heard of events in Najd and these "*muḥāwalāt li-tawḥīdaha"* (attempts to unite it), he sent a force to crush the new Saudi state before it began. Turki withdrew at first but continued "*nashāṭuhu li-muqāwamat al-muḥtallīn"* (his activities to resist the occupiers), reentering Riyadh in 1824 and declared the creation of the Second Saudi State. From then on referred to as Imam Turki, not two years passed until all of Najd had come under his rule without war – the inhabitants of Najd saw their divided leadership, realized the need for *"al-amn wa-l-istiqrār"* (security and stability), as well as the great attributes of leadership held by Turki.[202]

With Najd united behind him, Imam Turki set out to reunify the country – in the east, the Bani Khalid had arisen again with fall of the first state but were handily defeated. Yet Turki did not wish to provoke an Ottoman or Egyptian invasion, so he avoided sensitive areas such as invading the Hejaz. After stating this, a parenthesis in the text directly asks, "what is the lesson to be inferred from this?"[203] While the answer is not given, by posing the question the book implies that the Hejaz is part of the country, and that there must be a reason it was not added to the state.

As the founder of the Second Saudi State, Turki is consistently referred to in highly positive terms. When he removed a cousin of his as governor of a local town, the cousin attempts to topple Turki as ruler. The coup failed, due to the appreciation and amazement of Turki by the people of Najd. Nonetheless, Turki was murdered in another plot led by the same cousin in 1834. This ends the age of Imam Turki, the story tells us, "which was characterized by the attributes of powerful leadership, of most prominent courage, of good planning and justice, and made possible the clearing of Najd from the remaining forces of Muhammad Ali Pasha."[204] The man who ended the foreign occupation and recreated the state is lionized and described in the most flattering way. As for the people, they are loyal and appreciative of their fair Saudi rulers.

Turki's son, Faisal, was campaigning during the murder but returned to avenge his father and retake control. The murder introduces perhaps the most important theme in the story of the Second Saudi State: Division within the state leads to its destruction. Faisal's return ended the usurpation, but first he had to stabilize the realm once more. Thus, he had delegations from the towns of Najd come and swear

[202] Ibid., 45.
[203] Ibid., 46.
[204] Ibid.

loyalty to him, while he subjugated those "*ahl al-bādiyya"* (people of the desert) who had abstained from paying Zakat.[205]

The themes of loyalty and legitimacy remain in the center, when Muhammad Ali again tried to invade the Arabian Peninsula. He was set on destroying the young state, the book narrates, yet he had by then realized that the people of Najd were loyal to the Al Saud. For that reason, he sent not only an army but also Khalid bin Saud, who had been imprisoned in Egypt since the fall of the first state. The people, afraid of the Egyptian forces who had razed Diriyah, were unwilling to resist, and Faisal withdrew with his supporters.[206] The Al Saud as the only possible rulers is entrenched in the historical consciousness when even the foreign enemies see that they must use one as a puppet if they are to control the country. The people are once again described on the verge of agency – they can be afraid, but they do not act of their volition.

The Egyptian forces were soon withdrawn, and Khalid was removed by a cousin from the Thunayan branch of the Al Saud, who ruled for less than two years before Faisal once again took the throne. This is, incidentally, the first mention of a place outside the Islamic world, as the Treaty of London in 1840 is identified as the reason the Egyptian troops withdrew.[207] Neither of the two intervening rulers are described with the title of Imam, while Faisal is referred to as such even when ousted – these two rulers are considered usurpers. Faisal's two periods of rule are described as times returning respect to the state, and unity and stability to the country. With his death, follows a list of positive adjectives as with his father.

The death of Faisal also ends the chapter. The headline of the following chapter, "The conflict between the sons of Imam Faisal and the end of the Second Saudi State"[208] sums up its contents and connects its story as a lesson. That is, internal conflict destroyed the state. While we have already seen some conflict between different members of the Al Saud, the sons of Faisal took it to another level. The chapter describes how Abdallah, the eldest son of Faisal, initially took the position as ruler, but in a circle of violence, his brothers and nephews fought both Abdallah and each other, each of them, in turn, winning, fleeing, gathering support, and ruling the state in intermittent periods.[209] This division and internal struggle sowed the seeds that brought about the fall of the Second Saudi State, by weakening the rule and allowing their enemies to exploit it. So many tribes and places are named in this section – among them, al-Aḥsa, Najran, and Dawasir in Saudi Arabia, as well as Bahrain, Baghdad, and Oman outside – that the reader gets

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[205] Ibid., 47.
[206] Ibid.
[207] Ibid., 48–49.
[208] Ibid., 50.
[209] Ibid., 50–52.

an impression of a localized 'world war' in which everyone was fighting everyone, with both local and international support. When the country is divided, internal warfare and foreign intervention become the norm.

This internal conflict weakening the state and allowing others to intervene brought about the fall of the state. In fact, the book says so, in no indirect terms: "The struggle between the sons of Imam Faisal bin Turki led to the weakness of Saudi rule, and granted a chance to those who lurked[[210]] on the Second Saudi State,"[211] and then noting how the *Wālī* of Baghdad exploited the chance and seized Al-Aḥsa from the Saudis with Ottoman troops. Shortly later, it is claimed that the one who benefitted the most from the struggles was the Amir of Jabal Shammar, Muhammad bin Rasheed, who sought to rule all of Najd at the expense of the Al Saud.[212] Previously, the story indicated that Muhammad bin Rasheed was granted Jabal Shammar due to his friendship with Imam Faisal.[213] Then, this becomes not only opportunistic and illegitimate but also a rebellion and betrayal.

While the personal traits of the different Saudi leaders are for once not dwelt on, Abdul-Rahman and his son, Abdelaziz, get the best treatment in the narrative. The main contest is at first between Abdallah and his brother Saud, with the other brothers supporting one of them. At this point, Abdul-Rahman first appears, when he attempts to negotiate an Ottoman withdrawal from the east after it was invaded. Abdul-Rahman is most often referred to by his relationship to the sitting ruler – there are multiple mentions of the ruler "and his brother Abdul-Rahman."[214] Furthermore, when Abdul-Rahman becomes Imam, it is not through coup or battle, but when his older brother passes away. He immediately moves to constrain the outsized influence of the Rasheedis, by arresting a man they had put in charge of a garrison in Riyadh – and with him in custody, Abdul-Rahman sends his son, Abdelaziz, who successfully negotiates a prisoner-exchange. Nonetheless, the Saudis are soon defeated by a Rasheedi force, in what is named the final battle of the Second Saudi State.[215] In short, Abdul-Rahman remained loyal to the ruler and attempted to keep the realm together in the face of foreign attacks. While the narrative ends with the fall of the second state, it is worth noting that Abdul-Rahman fled to Kuwait after the defeat, and from Kuwait, his son Abdelaziz returned in 1902 to seize Riyadh and create the modern Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Thus, the

[210] The word '*mutarabbiṣīn*' is often used in the meaning of 'candidates,' but as a form V active participle of the root R-B-Ṣ in the present context, a more fitting translation would be 'waiting in ambush', 'looking for misfortune' or 'those who are lurking' – See ربص in Milton-Cowan 1979, 371.
[211] Ministry of Education 2012, 51.
[212] Ibid.
[213] Ibid., 47.
[214] Ibid., 51–52.
[215] Ibid., 52.

lineage of the current royal family is established, and their direct forefathers are shown to be loyal and defending the state and its integrity rather than squabbling over who should rule.

The narrative of the Second Saudi State is used with three functions within the wider story. First, it shows that with the fall of the first state, internal strife and foreign occupation was once again the facts of life – the picture painted of pre-Saudi history is reinforced and a return is shown to be possible. Second, it establishes the connection between legitimacy and the Al Saud in general, and the current ruling line especially. The return of the lineage of the Al Saud is repeatedly hailed both by the text itself on a meta-level and within the narrative. In the end, a connection is made to the modern rulers, by showing that Abdul-Rahman and Abdelaziz sought to protect the state while the others were fighting for power, and thus when Abdelaziz founded the modern kingdom, it was not only the Al Saud but the right branch of the family who was enthroned. Third, it shows that the internal division and rebellious vassals led to destruction. This is by far the strongest theme, and it is repeated both as implications within the narrative and directly stated. By teaching that division and rebellion are what brought down the state and led to anarchy, the modern state is framed as the guardian against this, and that it is important to stand united against enemies, both internal and external.

All agency remains with the Al Saud. While the descendants of Muhammad bin Abdul-Wahab appear in the story, they do so rarely and only act as representatives of the state. All actions that are taken are either by a Saudi prince or a foreign ruler. The people are reactive; they cannot act on their own and only reacts as a unit that might be scared or admiring someone. It is a story of a dynasty, not of social forces. By not giving popular movements any real agency, the narrative shows that action and change are the domain of the rulers.

Summing up the wider narrative, it begins by establishing a background of idolatry and warfare, a preacher of impeccable credentials going against it with blessing from authorities, his alliance with the Al Saud then spreads peace and prosperity while uniting the constituent parts of the country, despite facing opposition. The first state is destroyed by foreign invasion and treason, the following occupation is anarchic but ends with the return of the Al Saud, yet internal divisions and rebellion ruin the second state.

The narrative repeatedly conflates the state and the country, which is considered to include all parts of modern Saudi Arabia. By referring to unification as the goal of the Al Saud and Wahhabism, describing the different regions as part of the country before becoming so, and using terms more akin to

joining than conquest, the geographical area is constructed as a single unit that naturally belongs together. Nonetheless, the previous local rulers were dominated by foreigners and fighting each other, and without the Al Saud on top, the country will fragment once more. As such, the narrative is used to shape the historical consciousness, into an imagination where the country is conceptualized as a single unit, brought together by the Al Saud, around whom everyone must stand united, if the country is not to break apart, be occupied by foreigners, and locked in a new circle of violence and ignorance.

While the commonalities between Saudi Arabia today and the first state are superficial at best, the narrative works to connect them. By making the first and second state precursors and naming the pact of Diriyah as a founding moment of the Saudi state rather than the first state, the narrative gives the modern kingdom a long history stretching back to 1744. At the same time, all features of the first state mentioned in the narrative and the story of unification are similar to the story and workings of the third state. In this way, the narrative also creates a sort of historical mirror, which makes the lessons told applicable to modern Saudi Arabia.

The narrative also combines the state with religion. This is done by beginning the narrative with Muhammad bin Abdul-Wahab, by framing the pact of Diriyah as the founding moment, and by making unification not only a goal of the Al Saud but also of the Wahhabi mission itself. This connection makes separatism or revolt not only a secular crime but religious heresy as well.

The Al Saud are not only lionized by describing them in positive terms, but they are also repeatedly presented as the only possible leaders of the state and with support of the people. In addition, they are the main characters with agency in the story. Abdul-Wahab acts in the first part, and their enemies do as well, but the narrative centers on the royal family as the main actors. As such, it is a dynastic history, representing the Al Saud, and especially the line of the current rulers, as the only legitimate leaders with the best interests of the country at heart. The people are unable to act, but at times react. They are represented as a single mass, who can be misguided, afraid, or supportive, but unable to affect change except by giving their support to a ruler, who then acts on their behalf.

Finally, the book hides other interpretations or versions of history – such as the travels of Abdul-Wahab or failed campaigns of the Al Saud. By creating a single undisputed narrative, it both enforces the themes they bring forth and are not encouraging for a critical discussion of the story. It is true and to be accepted as such, and as this story concerns a heroic dynasty uniting the country for the good of all, the country ought to remain under this dynasty.

Drawing Legitimacy from History

As seen above, the narrative in the *Tārīkh* works in different ways and with several goals. Perhaps most central, are the conflation of state and country, the connection between the three states, the chaos preceding and in-between them, and the Al Saud as the only possible leaders and main agent able to affect change throughout the narrative. Thus, the book tells a story that on its own lends legitimacy to the modern kingdom and its leadership. While my third working question, on how the narrative serves to legitimize the state has been partially answered by the above analysis, in the following I will return to the previous literature and theories explored in the first chapters, to show how this both strengthens the legitimations often used to explain Saudi Arabia, but also serves on its own by granting a form of historical legitimacy.

As I have alluded to throughout the analysis, by framing the past in a certain way, the narrative works to shape the historical consciousness. In the work of BE Jensen, this consciousness connects an understanding of the past with expectations of both present and future. Perhaps the most central theme in the narrative is that which opens and ends both parts – the chaos preceding the first state, follows it, and ends the second state. While it might seem an almost circular understanding of history, chaos and order repeatedly replacing one another, the framing of the modern state not as the third one, but simply as Saudi Arabia acts as an end to this. The ending of the numbering implies that there shall be no fall and rise as a fourth state.

Nonetheless, the chaos, war, and ignorance between the states remain present as a looming threat. While the fall of the first state was precipitated by foreign invasion, the narrative also made clear that disloyal tribes and treasonous soldiers made the fall possible. Similarly, the second state was weakened and ultimately ended due to infighting – and while the infighting was between the Al Saud, the contenders had support from different parts of the country as well as from foreigners. Thus, it is cemented that unless all support the ruler, division will reappear, the state will fragment into warring parts, and the foreign enemies will dominate once again. This is perhaps the main theme that the narrative seeks to impart into the Saudi historical consciousness – times of war and ignorance are never far away, and without unity around the rulers, they will return. This is what makes the warning Fatwa issued in 2011 which Madawi Al-Rasheed touched upon effective, with its threats of chaos, bloodbaths and foreign domination.

The chaos-state dichotomy connects to another central theme, that of obeying authorities. Many of the divisions mentioned that brought down the state is also a result of individuals not obeying their rightful leaders. This theme is spelled out concerning Abdul-Wahab who would not preach without approval from religious, familial, and political authorities – and once he had sworn loyalty to the Al Saud, he

remained. Similarly, those who should have been loyal to the Sharif Ghālib during the wars in the Hejaz were not, and due to this he lost to the First Saudi State. By framing a lack of obeisance to authorities in the past as leading to destruction, the narrative also frames the political expectations of the population in the present and future to obey authorities, not due to fear of consequences from the state, but due to fears of the end of the state – which as seen would lead to internal war and foreign domination.

Simply telling people to obey authorities is not legitimacy in the narrowest sense of the word. Yet drawing on Niblock and in turn, Lipset, with legitimacy as the capacity of the system to make people believe the system itself is appropriate, creating an understanding in the population of the necessity of obeying the current system for their own good is part of this capacity. That is, it does fall within the wider understanding of legitimacy, despite not fitting neatly into any of the five categories Niblock set up. The most fitting category might be the eudaemonic legitimacy – while mainly expressed as the basis of the rentier state, Niblock argued that it included not only material benefits but also the capacity of the state to ensure the well-being of the population. Warfare and foreign domination are definitely not well-being, and through a narrative of violence and ignorance as a direct result of disobeying authorities, the historical narrative is used to underpin a state-guarantee of general security, by implying that if the state and regime are not unconditionally supported, chaos is the result. While war and ignorance are the keywords preceding the state, in the periods of strong Saudi rule, words such as *istiqrār* (stability) and *amn* (security) are central.

As with the eudaemonic legitimacy, the ideological legitimacy – that is, the religious ideology of the state as described by Shahi, Okruhlik, and others – is also further strengthened through the historical narrative, by the connections between religion and state. As has already been discussed, the connection made through *Tawḥīd*, as both unification and monotheism, gives the unification an inherent air of religiosity. Second, by naming the unification of the country under an Islamic state headed by the Al Saud as one of the goals of the Wahhabi-movement, revolt and separatism become akin to heresy. Religion is, of course, also a large part of the reason given for the unification under the Saudi states, presented along with the political situation as part of the chaotic age of ignorance – which is described as filled with *bidaʿ* and compared with pre-Islamic Arabia through religiously loaded terms such as *jahl.* A religious undercurrent is thematically present everywhere and at every time in the narrative to strengthen other arguments – For instance, Basra is tainted by their idolatry and heresy, which feeds into the negative portrayal of foreign influence.

Another way that the religious ideology legitimizes the state through the use of the historical narrative is by granting it a long history stretching back to Muhammad bin Abdul-Wahab and the pact of

Diriryah in 1744, which is also framed as a history of the ulama being subservient to the Saudi state. The interpretations of Wahhabism and its relation to the state has changed massively throughout the years, both in the expansion of the modern state throughout the middle of the 20th century, but especially so in the religious revival following 1979. As Hobsbawm and Ranger argued for, simply inventing this tradition of the religious institution being closely connected yet subservient to the Saudi state with a long basis in the past, grants it a certain legitimacy as the way it is and has always been.

While I criticized Shahi in the first chapter for putting too much weight on the religious truth even when discussing the teaching of history, he is right in that the religious truth is present in the historical narrative and legitimized through it. However, rather than the historical narrative simply serving to add weight to the ideological or eudaemonic legitimacies described above, I would argue that the historical narrative also grants legitimacy to the state on its own. This is done mainly in two ways. First, by narrating the history of Saudi Arabia as a dynastic history of the Al Saud, it enables what Niblock called traditional legitimacy. Second, the narrative grants what I would simply call a historical legitimacy as well, which has largely been left unanalyzed in the scholarship.

The construction of foreigners as negative and the focus on Najd is one of the ways the narrative serves the traditional legitimacy. As Anderson described with Siame as the example, naming a foreign enemy against whom all must unite is a common nationalist strategy, especially of state-sponsored official nationalism. The descriptions of Ottoman influence, of Basra as heretical, and of Egyptian occupation is drawing heavily on such themes. With Najd described as the only area not under foreign influence, it becomes romanticized as others have noted. It becomes the 'pure' homeland, untainted by foreigners, which then naturally is the root of the native dynasty who united the country and ended the foreign domination – in the part of the book discussed, the Al Saud both ended the Ottoman influence in the Hejaz and the east as part of the unification under the first state, and brought an end to the actual occupation in the second. By teaching a narrative with Najd as the center and the Al Saud based there as the leaders who united the country and drove out the foreigners, they turn the rulers into the nation – or at least the saviors of the nation – and thus grants this traditional legitimacy which Niblock described.

Discussing Anderson and the nation might imply that I consider this a nationalist history, and while there is an element of nation-building, some central themes are lacking before it would be fitting to call it nationalist. There are national characteristics, such as the unification of the country and foreign rule being central themes, but it differs in the role of the people as unable to act on their own. When Determann described the official historical narrative as a dynastic history, he drew on a distinction first

posited by John Breuilly, in which nationalist histories use the nation itself as the agent, while national histories present the nation as the framework within which the rulers act.[216] In the *Tārīkh,* the people exist, but as a rule they do not act and are not in the center of the story. When they are described, it is either as misguided or unjustly taxed, such as in Mecca, or as impressed and appreciative of their Saudi rulers. They might react at times, fearing the Egyptians or supporting Turki against a coup, but the role of the people is reduced to a gauge of whether a ruler is good for them. In this historical narrative, the state is not created by or even for the sake of the people – it is often said or implied that the state is good for the people, but the state is really made by and for the ruling dynasty. For it to be a truly nationalist history, the people – the nation – ought to play a larger role.

An effect of this agency within the narrative concerns the way the students understands historical changes. As the framing of the past in the historical consciousness gives shape to the expectations of the present, teaching history in a way where only the rulers are able to affect change also precludes other ways of changing the world. That is, the understanding of historical agency also nudges the consciousness towards an understanding in which social groups or the people as a mass have power is nigh-impossible. Thus, in the current kingdom, the population might be discouraged from resistance through social organization, or at least channeled into groups with a small leadership that might easily be co-opted.

As a dynastic history connecting the current kingdom with the previous states and the pact between the Sheikh and the Amir in 1744, the narrative invents a history of the state that is far longer than otherwise might be expected and one in which the dynasty connects the three periods. After all, the kingdom as it is today is hardly reminiscent of the one founded in 1932, which was barely related to what began with the capture of Riyadh in 1902, an event which Al-Rasheed argues is often framed as the beginning of the national mythology.[217] Creating an even longer line – and as a dynastic history with the Al Saud front and center – makes the state and its rulers seem like an inevitable outcome of history, and further legitimizes them. Hobsbawm's exploration of European rewritings of national histories to show the central role of the dynasty and legitimize them is an apt comparison.

Despite being a largely dynastic history, the narrative taught in the *Tārīkh* is part of a wider strategy to legitimize Saudi Arabia and its regime through history, aside from supporting the other sources of legitimacy. For that reason, I would argue that a historical legitimacy perhaps ought to be added to Niblock's five sources. That is, history is used to support the different sources of legitimacy, of which the traditional legitimacy is perhaps the one most strongly connected to history, yet the traditional legitimacy

[216] Determann 2014b, 4.
[217] Al-Rasheed and Vitalis 2016, 184.

described by Niblock is intimately tied to the dynasty itself, and the history is used in some ways that depart from this. First of these is the conflation of state and country. Second, the double comparison of the first state with both the modern kingdom and early Islam. Third, the state and regime are clearly aware of history and its use and act accordingly.

While discussed somewhat in the previous chapter, the way the narrative treats state, country, and unification are informative for this legitimacy drawn from the historical narrative. It works on a sort of meta-level, in that it does not directly say that the state is good, but rather implies that all areas of the country naturally belong to the state. Closely related to Anderson's comparison of Indochina and Indonesia, the very fact that this history is taught across Saudi Arabia is part of it, creating a common historical consciousness and frame of reference for all Saudis, while discouraging regional identities. However, it is also at work throughout the narrative itself, often through the choice of language. The descriptions of unification, especially under the first state, are informative. The wordings such as '*ḍamm sharq al-bilād'* (joining of the east of the country) has already been touched upon, and the many places said to simply join the state with no reason given acts to enforce this idea of the state and country as the same. While *ḍamm* remain the word of choice in cases where battles against the local leadership are described, there are no explorations of why anyone within the territories of the modern state fought against unification under the Al Saud – however, the wars of the Saudi state are always given reasons. In addition, there is no mention of the worst parts of these wars, such as the massacre in Ta'if or other casualties. It all serves to make the Saudi state seem fundamentally reasonable and legitimate in ruling over all regions, while other rulers and polities were not, and the unification is framed more as the country happily joining due to naturally being one unit, rather than a Najdi dynasty conquering their way across the peninsula.

The second way the narrative serves to grant legitimacy outside of Niblock's sources concerns the way the First Saudi State is compared directly to early Islam and indirectly to the modern kingdom. All the traits of the first state described by the *Tārīkh* are similar to the third state. The formation of the present kingdom under a theme of unification is the main feature dealt with in the history of the third state – at least, that is the result of Al-Rasheed's analysis[218] – in the same way as the first state is discussed. Meanwhile, the economy, administration, academic and cultural renaissance, and the relationship between ruler and ulama of the first state are all presented in ways that evoke the workings of contemporary Saudi Arabia. The first state thus becomes more than a simple precursor and instead acts as a stand-in for the modern state within the narrative. At the same time, the book directly compares the first state with the Islamic state of the 7th century. As this leads Saudi rule to become a return to original Islam,

[218] Al-Rasheed 2010, 187.

it is clearly to be understood as good – but it is more than an ideological legitimacy through a Wahhabi understanding of original Islam. This double comparison also makes the first state prescriptive for the modern kingdom, and thus legitimizes the contemporary state and its political and economic structures through the historical comparison connecting both the first state and early Islam.

By making this connection right before narrating the fall of the state, the book also turns the reasons for the fall into lessons to be remembered to avoid this happening again. While the years of planning, unfair strategies, and overwhelming strength of their enemies are hard to plan against for the population, these factors are described as prerequisites for the invasion more than the reason it was successful – After all, victories were achieved by Saudi leadership against the invasion, and these are highlighted in the narrative. The reason that the state fell, in the end, came not from outside. As with the second state the reasons were to be found inside, as the tribes switched sides with the promise of gold and a large part of the Saudi forces deserted, who then informed on the weak links of the defense. In framing the first state as a mirror, and its end as a result of people cooperating with the foreign enemies, the narrative is essentially telling students that not only is the current political and economic system inherently good, it is also necessary to constantly support it as any dissent might lead to another period of chaos.

As previously stated, the scholars who have looked at how the Saudi state use history are few and far between. Madawi Al-Rasheed has done the most work on the topic, and there is little fault in her studies. However, it is based on dated sources and largely focused on the framing of 20th century history. As this study has shown, the Saudi narrative of history stretches further back into the 18th century, and this story is continually framed to support the state and the regime positioned at its top. Meanwhile, Determann's work on Saudi historiography shows that the Saudi rulers were preoccupied with how this history was presented, as even those who ruled the first state hired chroniclers to write their history in positive terms.[219] This trend has continued and only increased into the present day with most historical scholarship today sponsored by the state, which dedicates large resources to publish and distribute books and digital resources to the population, as well as on large public events celebrating their version of history.[220] This study has focused on a single textbook, but history is actively used by the Saudi state in other ways, and the regime is acutely aware of the role a historical narrative can serve for legitimacy. A perfect study might have included how the history is used in other contexts, such as museums, political speeches, and more, but for now, this investigation into the official narrative of early Saudi history can contribute to what seems an understudied topic within the broader area of Saudi Arabian legitimacy.

[219] Determann 2014b, 26.
[220] Al-Rasheed and Vitalis 2016, 183–184, 188.

Conclusions

This thesis began with three working questions, under a broader question of how the Saudi state uses history to legitimize itself. First, it found that while there are several sources of legitimacy at work in the Saudi case, previous scholarship has mainly focused on how an economic system based on oil-rent has allowed the state to support the population while remaining somewhat autonomous, or how Wahhabism serves as a religious ideology that underpins the state. Meanwhile, the scholarship on the Saudi curricula had a narrow focus on jihadism and intolerance, while little work has been done on how history is used.

Second, the historical narrative in the *Tārīkh* is used to support the state, mainly by creating a fear of its disappearance. By painting pre-Saudi history as a time of ignorance, war, and foreign domination, and then having the Wahhabi-movement and its alliance with the Al Saud end this by uniting the country and bringing peace and prosperity, it creates a dichotomy between the stability and progress under the Saudi states and the incessant warfare without. Meanwhile, by making treason and division the reasons the first two states fell, it implies that if all does not support the contemporary state, a new era of chaos might return. It also connects the state with religion, and roots both in the pact of 1744, ascribing unification as the goal of both the reform movement and the Al Saud while showing that even religious reformers ought to follow authorities, as they have for centuries. The unification is conflated with religion through the term *tawḥīd,* while the narrative refers to different regions as part of the country being joined together, rather than conquered, glossing over any events or sources that might go against the general narrative or paint the leaders in a bad light.

Finally, this narrative serves to legitimize the state and regime in four central ways. First, it underpins what has been called eudaemonic legitimacy. That is, by referring to the state and regime as the only guarantee against civil war and foreign domination, the state ensures the well-being of the population. Second, it supports Wahhabi Islam as an ideological legitimacy, by granting it a long history as part of the state, and naming unification under an Islamic state as a religious goal of the movement. Third, by mainly being a story of the Al Saud while not granting the people any agency, it puts an inordinate weight on the role of the dynasty as saviors and unifiers, thus granting a traditional legitimacy in which the state might be good for the people, but belongs to the family. Fourth, aside from supporting other sources of legitimacy, it serves to create what can be called historical legitimacy as well. The narrative refuses to grant other rulers any reason for fighting against unification, while referring to regions as part of the country before becoming so, in turn framing the country as naturally one and the Al Saud as its only reasonable and legitimate leadership. By comparing the first state to the state founded by Muhammad, it becomes prescriptive for what is the right way to rule. By then describing it in terms that also apply to the modern kingdom, the contemporary state is indirectly said to be right, good, and legitimate – and the reasons for

the fall of the state become lessons to be remembered. In the end, it must be noted that while little scholarship has been made on how the Saudi state use history, it appears that the Saudi regime itself is acutely aware of the role history can play and have long been actively using it in different ways as a source of legitimacy.

Perspectives Today

While the rest of the thesis has answered the questions posed on how Saudi history is used to grant legitimacy, in this final part I wish to briefly connect some events in modern Saudi Arabia to the topic. I spent six months in the kingdom in 2018-2019, and while this will partly be anecdotal and conjecture, it shows the implications today of the historical framing.

During my stay, Saudi Arabia faced a series of international crises. In early August, the Canadian ambassador was declared *persona non grata,* all trade and investments deal were cut off, and the thousands of Saudi students in Canada told to return, all due to a tweet. Later that month, a school bus was struck by a Saudi missile in Yemen, restarting the debate on Western support for the Saudi monarchy and the war. In October, Jamal Khashoggi, a Saudi journalist working for the Washington Post, disappeared when he entered the Saudi consulate in Istanbul. While Saudi officials at first claimed that they knew nothing of his whereabouts, as the case unfolded, it became clear that he had been killed inside by a Saudi hit squad. A lot of the blame for these crises was pinned on the young Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman, who had begun the war in Yemen during his time as Minister of Defense and at whose feet the trail from Khashoggi ended. He was said to be brash and quick, acting too fast without thinking of the consequences.

There was a lot of murmuring, both among analysts and the diplomatic community in Riyadh – and a few Saudis as well – that the controversial Crown Prince might be removed. Indeed, with talks in the US Congress of applying sanctions on the kingdom, a lot of international media talked of an impending removal of the Crown Prince, especially following the return of Prince Ahmad, a younger brother of King Salman who had long lived in London.[221] With the events at the Ritz-Carlton just a year previously, where a series of princes and businessmen had been arrested, the Crown Prince had enough enemies who might want to remove – or replace – him. Yet nothing happened.

Divisions lead to destruction was the main lesson from the history of the first two states. While Saudi media at first ignored Khashoggi, they soon jumped to the defense of the country, painting it

[221] Financial Times, Kerr 2018.

as an existential war, a plot by the foreigners to destroy the country. [222] If all in the country were schooled to think that they must unite, especially in times of crisis, to avoid collapse, war, and foreign domination, perhaps that explains why Prince Ahmad returned – not to remove his ill-tempered nephew, but to stand together, preventing the fall of the state and a new era of chaos.

[222] Arab News, Al-Rashed 2018.

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Appendix I: *Tārīkh al-Mamlaka al-ʿarabiyya as-Saʿudiyya,* or *The History of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia*