Int. J. Middle East Stud. **43** (2011), 737–747
doi:10.1017/S0020743811000985

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KEYS TO THE KINGDOM: CURRENT SCHOLARSHIP ON SAUDI ARABIA

ROBERT VITALIS, *America's Kingdom*, updated edition (London: Verso, 2009)

TIM NIBLOCK with MONICA MALIK, *The Political Economy of Saudi Arabia* (Abingdon, U.K.: Routledge, 2007)

TIM NIBLOCK, *Saudi Arabia: Power, Legitimacy and Survival* (Abingdon, U.K.: Routledge, 2006)

MANSOOR JASSEM ALSHAMSI, *Islam and Political Reform in Saudi Arabia* (Abingdon, U.K.: Routledge, 2011)

STÉPHANE LACROIX, *Awakening Islam: The Politics of Religious Dissent in Contemporary Saudi Arabia* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2011)

THOMAS HEGGHAMMER, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia: Violence and Pan-Islamism since 1979* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010)

TOBY CRAIG JONES, *Desert Kingdom: How Oil and Water Forged Modern Saudi Arabia* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010)

Among the Arab states of the Middle East and North Africa, Saudi Arabia is at once paradigmatic and exceptional. The kingdom epitomizes what every schoolchild knows about this part of the world—limitless deserts, camel-herding nomads, oil wells, jet-setting princes, reactionary religious authorities, severely restricted gender relations—all in one neat package. At the same time, it takes these features to extremes approximated only by neighboring Abu Dhabi and Qatar, neither one of which has elicited anything like the same degree of journalistic or scholarly scrutiny.[1] It is no wonder that the concept of the rentier state has been applied more persistently and innovatively to Saudi Arabia than anywhere else, including Iran, whose political economy the notion was originally coined to describe.[2]

Widely accepted terms of analysis for Saudi politics took shape early on. The remarkable stability of the regime is most often explained by the ruling family's adroit deployment of hydrocarbon revenues, along with the prestige that the Al Saʿud enjoys due to its long-standing partnership with an influential corps of ultra-orthodox religious scholars, whose uncompromising interpretation of Islam galvanized the splintered population of central Arabia into a unified community.[3] In the 1970s, Fred Halliday and

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https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743811000985 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Helen Lackner did their best to undermine this conventional approach to Saudi politics by highlighting challenges to the regime from workers in the oil fields and dissident princes who advocated liberal reforms.[4] Two decades later, Madawi Al-Rasheed proposed an even less orthodox view of local political dynamics that shifted the spotlight away from the ruling family and its allies and detailed instead the Al Saʿud's battle against its most dangerous rival, the Al Rashid of Haʾil.[5] But none of these alternative narratives succeeded in overturning the generally agreed-upon framework, which became canonized in a pair of magisterial tomes aimed at general readers.[6]

Two conference volumes assaulted the conceptual consensus regarding Saudi politics as the 21st century got under way. The first, which grew out of the 2001 Mediterranean Research Meeting sponsored by the European University Institute in Florence, features a reevaluation by Abdulaziz Al-Fahad of the social forces and alliance dynamics that propelled the Al Saʿud to a predominant position in Arabian affairs; a critical retelling by Madawi Al-Rasheed of the story of Sultan ʿAbd al-ʿAziz Al Saʿud's 1902 seizure of Riyad; and a reformulation by Robert Vitalis of the standard account of relations between the Saudi authorities and the Arabian–American Oil Company (ARAMCO).[7] The second, which emerged from a 2004 workshop at the International Institute for the Study of Islam in the Modern World in Leiden, includes a reassessment by Guido Steinberg of the connection between the ruling family and the religious establishment; a survey by Stéphane Lacroix of escalating tensions between "liberal" and "jihadi-salafi" Islamist currents; an explication by Madawi Al-Rasheed of hidden fault lines inside the Al Saʿud; and an analysis by Roel Meijer of interactions between the regime and a variety of opposition movements. It also contains an evaluation by Monica Malik and Tim Niblock of the government's economic liberalization program; a reconceptualization by Steffen Hertog of the underlying structure of the domestic economy; and an excursus by Giocomo Luciani on the conditions that might transform the country's private businesspeople into an active bourgeoisie.[8]

Several of the contributions to these pathbreaking volumes have subsequently been refined and expanded. Vitalis's vigorous deconstruction of the tale of ARAMCO provides the core of his book *America's Kingdom*, first published in 2007 and updated in 2009, which sets out to overturn a panoply of myths that continues to shape academic and public interpretations of Saudi affairs. Among these are the belief that ARAMCO brought enlightenment and progress to a benighted, apathetic society; the presumption that U.S.–Saudi relations represented an exceptional, and non-imperial, connection between a benign patron and a compliant client; and the chestnut that Egypt and Saudi Arabia positioned themselves as implacable antagonists in the Arab Cold War of the 1950s and 1960s. The bulk of the text focuses on ARAMCO's business and labor practices and persistent jockeying between U.S. government officials and the oil company, along with occasional excursions into the wiles of Saudi diplomacy. The book, Vitalis aptly asserts at the outset, "is not about Saudi Arabia. It is about America" (p. xxxvi).

Nevertheless, patient readers looking to learn something about the politics of Saudi Arabia will be rewarded with insights into at least three seldom-explored and poorly understood topics. First, *America's Kingdom* provides the best account yet of the labor movement of the 1950s. Worker discontent flared as early as September 1942, "in Riyadh, not in Dhahran, and it did not involve ARAMCO" (p. 92). But from June 1945 to June 1956, skilled and unskilled laborers in the Eastern Province carried on

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a sustained campaign to win higher wages, better working conditions, and tolerable living arrangements (pp. 93–95, 146–51, 159–60, 172–76, 179–83). For the most part, labor activists looked to the Al Saʿud for support in the fight against the oil company, and King ʿAbd al-ʿAziz responded in August 1945 by "order[ing] ARAMCO to begin negotiations to redress the workers' grievances" (p. 96). His son Saʿud turned out to be even more sympathetic: during the spring of 1953 the crown prince championed "many reforms designed to secure the welfare of the Eastern Province, which included amending the 1947 labor code and gaining ARAMCO's recognition, finally, of a responsibility for educating the sons of its workers" (p. 146); shortly after becoming king, Saʿud forced the company to make good on its promise to raise salaries and increase subsidies (p. 155). In August 1955, workers complained to Saʿud that the provincial governor had failed to ensure that ARAMCO fulfilled its commitments and "sought the king's help in achieving the workers' right to pay and benefits comparable to those of the Americans" (p. 173).

Second, Vitalis resurrects a forgotten cohort of Saudi policymakers, who undertook to transform the kingdom into a prosperous, well-governed polity. Prominent among these visionary statespeople stand ʿAbd al-ʿAziz bin Muʿammar, ʿAbdullah Tariki, Faisal Hejalan, and Mustafa Wahba, along with the better-known Talal bin ʿAbd al-ʿAziz Al Saʿud. The programs they envisaged were opposed at every turn by ARAMCO and were eventually crushed by the coalition of "reactionaries" that coalesced around Crown Prince Faisal bin ʿAbd al-ʿAziz (p. 216). Still, their efforts launched the nationalization of the oil industry, the rationalization of the government bureaucracy, and the halting inclusion of public interests into the policymaking process.

Third, the book overturns conventional interpretations of the struggle between Saʿud and Faisal for command over the kingdom.[9] Vitalis reminds us that the battle took place in the context of regional developments that inflicted severe damage on the Saudi economy and jeopardized the country's strategic interests (pp. 184–85). King Saʿud responded by creating a commission to carry out wide-ranging commercial and monetary reforms, by bringing the country under the purview of the International Monetary Fund, and by giving a green light to Tariki's plans to extract more revenue from ARAMCO (p. 190). He then approved a state budget that included "unprecedented" cuts in stipends to members of the ruling family (p. 192), authorized "unprecedented" but broadly "popular" local elections in the Eastern Province and "other locales, including Riyadh" (p. 218), and in December 1960 appointed "a cabinet that remains until today the most uncharacteristic and progressive ever seen in Saudi Arabia" (p. 220). Such initiatives galvanized members of the Al Saʿud who were "fiercely loyal" to Crown Prince Faisal. These figures "feared" the liberal ministers, "sought payback for losing their [own] ministerial posts," and "were angered by what the [U.S.] embassy called the 'inequitable distribution by the king of favors and bounties'" (p. 223). They eventually succeeded in ousting Saʿud and installing Faisal in his place. Vitalis highlights the regional context that enabled the reactionaries to prevail (Chapter 8), but his account lays the groundwork upon which some future analyst can construct a more comprehensive and detailed explanation—one that (dare we hope?) will rely on local sources.

Malik and Niblock's survey of economic liberalization between 2000 and 2004 in *Saudi Arabia in the Balance* provides the basis for a full-fledged overview of the

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kingdom's political-economic trajectory from 1962 to 2006 in *The Political Economy of Saudi Arabia*. After reading Vitalis, it is hard to stomach the book's repeated assertions that King Faisal exerted "rigorous control over wasteful state expenditure [that] released resources which could now be devoted to development" (p. 38), introduced "a more coherent vision of economic and social development in[to] the Kingdom" (p. 39), and "made it possible for the Saudi state . . . to pursue a state-led development policy" (p. 51). But the novel argument that a handful of policies implemented from 1970 to 1973 laid the foundation for subsequent shifts in economic strategy, funded by the flood of post-1973 oil revenues, sheds welcome light on key institutions like the Agricultural Bank and the Saudi Industrial Development Fund (pp. 67–68). Niblock's discussion of the political implications of the growth of the private sector after 1973 rests squarely on the work of Kiren Chaudhry (p. 89), despite the dismissal of her ideas at the beginning of the book (p. 24). The apparent discrepancy is addressed at a later point in the text: although, as Chaudhry demonstrates, new private interests that had few connections to the commercial establishment continued to gain strength after 1985, Niblock claims that they never totally displaced the "old Hijaz-based merchant elite." In addition, he asserts that "all aspects of [Saudi] business were characterized by common characteristics: heavily dependent [*sic*] on the government for the contracts, licences and commercial protection which they needed, and yet often frustrated by the bureaucratic hurdles placed before them and the predatory behaviour of some of those in positions of power or influence" (p. 132). Nevertheless, on the basis of a different set of data, Niblock observes that "the hub of big business activity had moved to Riyadh, and many of the successful new businesses came from outside the traditional merchant families" (p. 137). This is the finding that Chaudhry presented a decade ago.

Much trickier is how to categorize those enterprises that are owned or controlled by the Al Saʿud. The introduction points out that the line between private companies and "the state" is hard to draw in the Saudi case (p. 26). But what is really difficult to determine is just how much of the private sector consists of members of the ruling family, who became increasingly active as investors and business partners after 1970 (p. 89). During the recession of the mid-1980s, various components of the Al Saʿud most likely stepped up their involvement in economic ventures, particularly in manufacturing and services (pp. 136–37). A survey conducted by Malik in 1999 concludes that "members of the royal family were seen [by other 'private' businesspeople] as being the most crucial channels of influence and, as a result, the main beneficiaries" of policies designed to bolster private enterprise (pp. 152–53).

Niblock points out in the conclusion that the Saudi state exhibits a form of "embedded autonomy" with regard to other social forces that differs from the pattern throughout East Asia: "In the Saudi case, the embedded autonomy rests less on institutional structures than on personal channels of communication." Such channels have increasingly become "developmental" rather than "predatory" in nature, thanks to the fact that private wealth in the kingdom is no longer "dependent on the state and indeed much of it is held outside the state (part of the estimated one trillion [dollars'] worth of assets which the Saudi private sector owns abroad)" (p. 226). Consequently, private business has steadily been gaining strength, and "the businessmen who are leading the development of strategic sectors . . . can put themselves forward to government personnel as championing the rights and interests of a wider private sector" (p. 227). To what extent the rising class of nonstate

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capitalists incorporates the Al Saʿud is not only a crucial empirical question but may also determine whether or not private interests congeal into a coherent bourgeoisie that can effectively challenge the regime.

In *Saudi Arabia: Power, Legitimacy and Survival*—a companion volume to *The Political Economy of Saudi Arabia*—Niblock surveys the kingdom's contemporary domestic and foreign politics. He begins by noting that "it would be difficult to describe the Al Saʿud as a state entity. They do not all hold [government] positions, and many are active in the private sector rather than the state administration (although a significant number are now active in both)" (p. 14). The ruling family is accorded a considerably larger role in the private sector in *Saudi Arabia* than it is in *The Political Economy* (pp. 76–77), to the point that in 2003 a group of liberal reformers petitioned King ʿAbdullah bin ʿAbd al-ʿAziz to take steps to counteract pervasive corruption and other inequities resulting from the growing involvement of the Al Saʿud in the local economy (pp. 118–19).[10] The monarch's ability to construct "a democratic/structural basis of legitimacy" for the regime is likely to hinge on the extent to which the authorities accede to such demands (p. 173).

Just mentioning the concept of legitimacy with regard to Saudi Arabia opens the door to disquisitions on religion and politics. Niblock recounts the tale of the fateful alliance between the Al Saʿud and the followers of the 18th-century reformer Muhammad bin ʿAbd al-Wahhab and then devotes four whole pages to a summary of "the bases of ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhab's thought" (pp. 23–27), one of the longest single sections of the entire book.[11] The regime's steady drift away from these principles is credited with sparking the Islamist uprising of 1979 (pp. 77–79), which in turn "inflamed" the Shiʿi community of the Eastern Province into mobilizing popular protests against the regime (p. 82). Crown Prince Fahd bin ʿAbd al-ʿAziz, acting on behalf of his ailing brother King Khalid, quickly reasserted the monarchy's "Islamic credentials" by allocating greater resources to the construction of mosques and other religious purposes, appointing a descendant of ʿAbd al-Wahhab as minister of justice and Islamic affairs, and placing the education system "under tighter religious control" (pp. 83–84). These measures dampened the Islamist challenge but only until the fall of 1990, when hard-line disciples of ʿAbd al-Wahhab started to criticize the Al Saʿud for inviting U.S. troops to guard Saudi territory against the threat of invasion from Iraq (pp. 94–100).[12]

Here Mansoor Alshamsi steps in to serve as guide and interpreter. Heightened Islamist activism in the kingdom since 1991 is intimately associated with the writings and lectures of three major figures: Safar bin ʿAbd al-Rahman al-Hawali, Salman bin Fahd al-ʿAwdah, and Nasir bin Sulaiman al-ʿUmar.[13] *Islam and Political Reform in Saudi Arabia* situates this trio of scholars firmly in the Sunni tradition of legal injunctions (*fiqh*: Chapter 3) and in particular its concern with protecting rights (*huqūq*: Chapter 4). Such principles permeated the successive petitions that were drawn up and presented to the authorities from 1991 to 1993 (Chapters 7–8). The arrests of al-Hawali and al-ʿAwdah in September 1994 precipitated large-scale popular demonstrations, most notably in the relatively disadvantaged region of al-Qasim (pp. 126–27). But after five years of imprisonment, the leadership of the Islamist reform movement adopted a more "realistic" and accommodationist posture in its dealings with the regime (Chapter 12), largely in response to the emergence of radical Islamist groups whose cadres did not hesitate to use the most violent tactics.

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Alternative perspectives on the kingdom's Islamist radicals are advanced in Stéphane Lacroix's *Awakening Islam* and Thomas Hegghammer's *Jihad in Saudi Arabia*. Building on his contribution to *Saudi Arabia in the Balance*, Lacroix reiterates the distinction between the "Islamo-liberal trend" and the "jihadi-salafi trend" in Saudi Islamism.[14] Both currents can be traced to the influence of exiled Muslim Brothers who occupied key positions in the kingdom's institutions of higher education during the 1960s (pp. 42–51). These scholars formulated an amalgam of the principles of Muhammad bin ʿAbd al-Wahhab and the more moderate ideas of Egypt's Sayyid Qutb, which provided the intellectual basis for the comparatively liberal Islamic Awakening (al-Sahwa al-Islamiyya) that gained momentum in the 1970s. Clandestine cells (*jamāʿāt*) of radical Sahwis took one of two paths: the first closer to the militant wing of Egypt's Muslim Brothers (pp. 64–68) and the other, rooted primarily in al-Qasim, closer to the Marwan Hadid faction of Syria's Muslim Brothers (pp. 69–71). The divergent movements competed for adherents partly by offering prospective members material incentives, such as access to scarce housing on Saudi university campuses (p. 73).

After the death of Grand Mufti Muhammad bin Ibrahim Al al-Shaikh in 1969, state officials created a new complex of religious institutions under the auspices of the Council of Senior ʿUlamaʾ. This reconfigured religious establishment lavished the kingdom's post-1973 oil wealth on all sorts of Islamists, including the *jamāʿāt*. At the same time, critics of the state-sponsored religious revival coalesced into a movement that called itself "Advocates of the Received Wisdom" (Ahl al-Hadith) (pp. 81–83). These activists championed a reformed version of "the spirit of Wahhabism," one purged of ʿAbd al-Wahhab's unfortunate acceptance of the Hanbali school of legal interpretation, and leveled sharp condemnations at followers of Sayyid Qutb (pp. 85–86). They thus came into direct conflict with the Sahwa as well as with the regime's new doctrinal and lifestyle enforcers, the *muṭawwaʿīn* (p. 89). One wing of the Ahl al-Hadith carried out the 1979 assault on the Grand Mosque in Mecca (pp. 89–100)[15]; others, whose members equally firmly rejected the Al Saʿud's right to rule, set up isolated communities in the wastelands of central Arabia and Yemen (pp. 100–101). Meanwhile, radicals who believed that the restructured religious hierarchy of the 1970s marked an illegitimate departure from the teachings of ʿAbd al-Wahhab fueled a resurgence of the movement of Brothers (Ikhwan), centered in the al-Buraida district of al-Qasim (pp. 103–107). Veterans of the war against the Red Army in Afghanistan, angered by the Sahwa's refusal to endorse the anti-Soviet jihad, formed yet another nucleus of anti-regime activism (pp. 109–18), which Lacroix labels jihadi.

As oil income stagnated during the mid-1980s, jockeying among all of these movements escalated (Chapter 4). The struggle for control over doctrine and practice among the kingdom's faithful grew even more intense in the wake of the deployment of U.S. troops on Saudi territory in August 1990, when the Sahwa itself fragmented into three camps: the prominent ʿulamaʾ discussed by Alshamsi (pp. 164–68), a collection of "traditional Wahhabi ʿulama'" who had earlier allied themselves with the establishment but had become more and more alienated as a result of being passed over for promotion (pp. 168–72), and a handful of "enlightened Sahwah intellectuals" who attacked the regime's foreign policy choices (pp. 172–75). Representatives of the three camps composed and circulated the open letters and petitions to the authorities that shook the political order from 1990 to 1993 (pp. 175–93). The Al Saʿud's adamant refusal to acknowledge the

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movement's demands set the stage for a tactical alliance between the Sahwa and its long-time opponents—various "rejectionist" offshoots of the Ahl al-Hadith and jihadis alike (pp. 193–98). Armed struggle between these forces and the regime came to an end not so much due to brutal repression by the security services as to fragmentation among the challengers and the inability of the opposition to construct a foundation of popular support (Chapter 6).

Lacroix's astonishing book tells us pretty much everything we need to know about the structure and dynamics of the heterogeneous Sunni Islamist movements that were active inside Saudi Arabia from the 1960s to the 1990s.[16] Readers unfamiliar with the subject may find it hard to follow the twists and turns of the Sahwa's relations with the authorities. Why exactly the Sahwa moved into opposition against the regime gets a bit lost in the details. Equally hard to discern are the differences among groups that oppose the Al Saʿud for straying from the true path laid out by Muhammad bin ʿAbd al-Wahhab, those that oppose the existing order because the Saudi monarchy is inherently incompatible with ʿAbd al-Wahhab's ideas, those that advocate a fundamental revision of ʿAbd al-Wahhab's doctrines, and those that reject Wahhabism as a whole. Just what produced the "unexpected alliance between the Sahwi protesters and their historic opponents in the Saudi Islamist family" (p. 193) could also be spelled out more clearly for the benefit of the uninitiated.

For Hegghammer, the crucial analytical distinction is not between liberals and jihadis but rather a two-fold matrix that distinguishes Islamist currents that act nonviolently from ones that adopt violence on the one hand, and those whose purpose is to promote piety versus those that champion the interests of the global Islamic community as a whole (that is, pan-Islamism) on the other (pp. 5–8). The book focuses on currents that engage in violence and points out that with very few exceptions the groups that have turned out to be most active in contemporary Saudi Arabia have consisted of pan-Islamists. Of all the pan-Islamist groupings, it is al-Qaʿida on the Arabian Peninsula (QAP) that predominates.[17]

Jihad in Saudi Arabia proposes to explain the emergence and evolution of QAP in terms of a modified form of social movement theory. The book first charts the regional components of the political opportunity structure that enabled QAP activists to organize. These include King Faisal's pursuit of "Muslim solidarity" during the 1970s, Riyad's support for Palestinian guerrillas, the kingdom's involvement in the Afghanistan jihad, and officially sanctioned "private recruitment and fundraising for [beleaguered Muslims in] Bosnia" (p. 33). Proponents of radical Islamist activism also urged the faithful to join the fighting in Algeria, Somalia, Tajikistan, and Chechnya (pp. 52–58). In all of these places, zealous young Saudis engaged in a desperate campaign to protect the broader Muslim community from attacks by non-Muslims—the classical definition of jihad. Almost all of the fighters were "men in their early twenties from urban middle-class backgrounds" (p. 59). At first most came from al-Hijaz; later they came from Najd, although a large number of fighters in Chechnya hailed from the Eastern Province (p. 60). The great majority had a secondary school education (p. 242). Recruitment was haphazard (pp. 65–69).

Pan-Islamist militants shifted their attention to the west at the end of the 1990s, largely as a result of struggles among radical activists following the deaths of "the three grand old men of salafi Islam: Abd al-Aziz bin Baz (d. 13 May 1999), Nasir al-Din

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al-Albani (d. 1 October 1999), and Muhammad bin Uthaymin (d. 10 January 2001)" (p. 83). Hegghammer shows how key figures based in al-Qasim coalesced around the outspoken reactionary Hamud bin ʿUqlaʾ al-Shuʿaibi, most notably through their shared experience in Saudi prisons (pp. 84–91). The resultant al-Shuʿaibi school leaped to the defense of the Taliban, and "by describing Afghanistan as the world's only Islamic state, [sent a strong signal that its adherents] did not grant Saudi Arabia the same status" (p. 96). The al-Shuʿaibi school quickly eclipsed moderates like al-Hawali and al-ʿAwdah, who refused to rise to the bait after their own experiences of imprisonment.

QAP took shape as adherents of the al-Shuʿaibi school joined forces with veterans of the campaigns in Afghanistan, Bosnia, and Chechnya. Its activities were financed by charitable contributions, which were accorded credibility by respected scholars like Yusuf al-ʿUyairi and Khalid al-Subait (pp. 125–28, 170–80).[18] When Saudi officials resorted to increasingly brutal tactics to repress the radicals in the fall of 2002, the nascent QAP detonated a series of bombs and engaged in firefights with the police and security services (pp. 159–60), and by the spring of 2003 the jihad against the Al Saʿud was in full swing (pp. 202–217).[19] Like most applications of social movement theory, Hegghammer's analytical framework offers little in the way of explanation for why things worked out the way they did. But the loose notion of political opportunity structure that is deployed here allows the author to tell a cracking good story in exhaustive detail.

Like Molière's bourgeois gentleman, who was delighted to discover that he had been speaking prose all this time, readers of Toby Jones's *Desert Kingdom* will be surprised to learn that the Saudi authorities have tried for more than eight decades to augment regime security by making sure that the kingdom's parched citizenry enjoys access to water. The far-flung territories that the Al Saʿud conquered in the early 20th century harbored crucial pockets devoted to farming and animal husbandry, which ensured that from the very beginning "Saudi leaders understood that their political fortunes were linked to the control of water, the agricultural production it made possible, and, most important, the people who depended on both" (p. 25).[20] The new rulers relied heavily on settled agricultural communities for support in their campaigns against both rival tribal confederations, like the one led by the Al Rashid, and the cities of al-Hijaz.[21] The discovery of oil in the 1930s not only filled "the Saudi purse with much-needed revenue" but also "helped heighten Saudi faith in science, and especially geology, and strengthened the belief that it would be geologists who would help the kingdom locate and harness whatever [water] resources remained undiscovered" (p. 40).

Despite severe shortages of revenue during the 1940s and early 1950s, the regime "commissioned at least seven hydrological surveys around Riyadh" and asked ARAMCO to map "the Wasia aquifer, a massive reservoir of water deep underground that many believed was adequate to provide Saudi Arabia with all the water it needed for years to come" (p. 58). After Faisal took over as king, "identifying and integrating more fully the country's limited water and other natural resources once again became key objectives for central authorities [*sic*]"; this initiative "had an underlying political purpose, most notably to get the central government more involved along the margins of the kingdom [particularly in the 'water-rich' Eastern Province], where social discontent had first reared itself, lending a spatial logic to the government's domestic geopolitical strategy" (p. 70). Between 1965 and 1973, the annual budget of the Ministry of Agriculture and

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Water soared 150 percent (p. 73). The ministry's expanding programs "brought millions of Saudis into direct contact with representatives of the government and compelled them to participate in a dependent relationship for their livelihood" (p. 89; see also pp. 136–37 for the impact of state water policies on the inhabitants of the Eastern Province), thereby enhancing the Al Saʿud's internal hegemony.

Highly trumpeted water projects dramatically raised the expectations of Saudi Arabia's poorer rural communities, while at the same time putting the regime's legitimacy on the line. "By the end of the 1970s," Jones asserts, "the environmental and social consequences generated by development work and by the failure of the state to ameliorate environmental problems would help radicalize some elements of the Eastern Province's Shia community, turning some of them into militants" (p. 138). The burst of economic activity and jump in population that accompanied the growth of the oil industry steadily drained provincial water supplies (p. 143), while repeated demands that the authorities take steps to remedy the situation fell on deaf ears (pp. 150, 160). Complaints about sewage flowing through the streets of al-Qatif proved particularly incendiary (pp. 164–72) in the mid-1950s and the late 1970s alike. "Poor environmental conditions and the government's clear disinterest in addressing the public's long-standing concerns about limited access to water, degraded water infrastructure, and the health risks posed by antiquated and broken public facilities like sewage systems excited outrage" among Shiʿa all across the Eastern Province by the last quarter of 1979 (pp. 183–84). Communities that suffered the most severe water problems constituted the most active centers of violent protest at the end of the year (pp. 195–99).[22]

After the uprising of 1979–80 was quelled, the regime stopped promoting science and technology and took a sharp turn toward Islam. Still, "the provision of water to citizens in major cities as well as in smaller village outposts persisted as a key concern" (p. 223). Major investments in dams and desalination plants were undertaken, and a modern sewer system was finally constructed in al-Qatif (pp. 224–25). At this point the story rather abruptly ends: the lean years of the mid-1980s prompted state officials to launch a drive to achieve self-sufficiency in food, which pushed water consumption to "staggering" levels (p. 231). But just how recent developments have affected regime security is left unexplored. The reader is not even told whether or not the remarkable King ʿAbdullah University of Science and Technology boasts a faculty of hydrology (pp. 241–43). One suspects that it does.

Thanks to the scholarship surveyed here, we not only know much more about Saudi Arabia than we did in September 2001 but also have at our disposal a substantially wider range of vantage points into the kingdom's usually opaque domestic political arena. If Robert Vitalis is correct in the foreword to the Verso edition of *America's Kingdom*, and there are yet more outstanding studies by the rising generation of Saudi specialists "that are about to be published" (p. xxi), then observers of this peculiar Arab polity can count themselves fortunate indeed.

NOTES

[1]Christopher M. Davidson, *Abu Dhabi: Oil and Beyond* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009); Jill Crystal, *Oil and Politics in the Gulf: Rulers and Merchants in Kuwait and Qatar* (Cambridge: Cambridge

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University Press, 1995); Mehran Kamrava, "Royal Factionalism and Political Liberalization in Qatar," *Middle East Journal* 63 (Summer 2009).

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[15]See also Thomas Hegghammer and Stéphane Lacroix, "Rejectionist Islamism in Saudi Arabia: The Story of Juhayman al-ʿUtaybi Revisited," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 39 (2007): 103–22.

[16]Shiʿi groups lie outside the purview of Lacroix's book, as they do for Alshamsi. See Fouad Ibrahim, *The Shiʿis of Saudi Arabia* (London: Saqi Books, 2006); Laurence Louër, *Transnational Shia Politics: Religious and Political Networks in the Gulf* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008); and Toby Matthiesen, "Hizbullah al-Hijaz: A History of The Most Radical Saudi Shiʿa Opposition Group," *Middle East Journal* 64 (Spring 2010).

[17]Hegghammer offers a more comprehensive look at Islamist attacks against the Al Saʿud in "Jihad, Yes, But Not Revolution: Explaining the Extraversion [sic] of Islamist Violence in Saudi Arabia," *British Journal of Middle East Studies* 36 (December 2009).

[18]See also Roel Meijer, "Yusuf al-Uyairi and the Transnationalisation of Saudi Jihadism," in Al-Rasheed, *Kingdom without Borders*.

[19]On the concurrent involvement of Saudi jihadists in Iraq, see Madawi Al-Rasheed, "The Minaret and the Palace: Obedience at Home and Rebellion Abroad," in Al-Rasheed, *Kingdom without Borders*.

[20]Jones relies on Guido Steinberg, "Ecology, Knowledge and Trade in Central Arabia (Najd) during the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries," in Al-Rasheed and Vitalis, *Counter-Narratives*.

[21]Jones notes al-Fahad, "The 'Imama vs. the 'Iqal."

[22]See also Toby Craig Jones, "Rebellion on the Saudi Periphery: Modernity, Marginalization and the Shiʿa Uprising of 1979," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 38 (2006): 213–33.

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