

HISTORICAL PROFILES / Saudi Arabia

First Saudi State

The First Saudi State was established in 1744 when leader Sheikh Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab settled in Dir'iyya (in central Saudi Arabia or the Najd region) and Prince Muhammad ibn Saud agreed to support and espouse his cause, with a view to cleansing the Islamic faith from distortions. The House of Saud with other allies rose to become the dominant state in Arabia controlling most of it: the First Saudi State lasted for about 75 years. Concerned at the growing power of the Saudis, the Ottoman Sultan instructed Muhammad 'Ali Pasha to re-conquer the area. 'Ali sent his son Ibrahim Pasha, who was successful in routing the Saudi (Wahhabi) forces in 1817. It would be only a few years before the Sauds would return to power, forming the Second Saudi State. Rulers of the First Saudi State: –Imam Muhammad bin Saud (1726–65) –Imam 'Abd al-'Aziz ibn Muhammad ibn Saud (1765–1803) –Imam Saud ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz ibn Muhammad ibn Saud (Saud al-Kabir) (1803–14) –Imam Abdallah ibn Saud (1814–18)



Second Saudi State – Saudi fortunes revive

Out of the chaos that followed the razing of Dir'iyya, the deportation, torture and mutilation of many Saud family members and sons of Sheikh Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab, and the in-fighting of claimants to the rule, Imam Turki ibn Abdullah al- Saud finally emerged as leader. Imam Turki expelled Ottoman occupying forces. In 1824, choosing Riyadh as the capital, he went on to revive the spirit of the Reform Movement, unifying Najd and al-Ahsa once again. Between 1820 and 1824, Riyadh emerged as the chief garrison town. When in 1823 Imam Turki ibn Abdullah emerged from hiding, he benefited from the long-standing Saud roots in the area and the people's loyalty to the Saud family, which was supportive of the Reform Movement and establishing security, stability and unity of the people. By 1824 Imam Turki ibn Abdullah was able to force out the Ottoman forces, first from southern Najd, and then from the al-Qassim region. Because of the devastation in Dir'iyya, the well-maintained garrison town of Riyadh made the obvious choice as the capital of the Second Saudi State. In 1889, Prince 'Abd al-Rahman ibn Faisal, became the legitimate Imam of the Saudi State after the death of his brother, Imam Abdallah. With the tide turning against him, in 1891, Imam 'Abd al-Rahman decided to retreat into temporary exile and take his family, including his young son, the future King 'Abd al-'Aziz, with him.

Return of Al-Saud and the establishment of Saudi Arabia

Still in exile with his family in Kuwait in the late 1890s, the young 'Abd al-'Aziz ibn 'Abd al-Rahman Saud nurtured his ambition to recover the patrimony of his fathers. In 1901 he made an unsuccessful bid to recapture Riyadh. On 14 January 1902 'Abd al-'Aziz along with a handful of men made a daring dawn assault on the Masmak Fort in Riyadh, and the rule of the House of Saud was restored. By 1906, having driven rival al-Rashid's forces out of the Najd region, the Ottomans recognised 'Abd al-'Aziz as their client in Najd. His next major acquisition was al-Ahsa, which he took from the Ottomans in 1913, and which brought him control of the Arabian Gulf coast and what would later become Saudi Arabia's vast oil reserves. He avoided involvement in the Arab Revolt, having acknowledged Ottoman suzerainty in 1914; instead, he continued his struggle with al-Rashid in northern Arabia. Turning his attention to the southwest in 1920, 'Abd al-'Aziz seized 'Asir, the region between the Hijaz and Yemen; the following year he finally defeated al-Rashid's forces and annexed the whole of northern Arabia. By the Treaty of Jeddah, signed on 20 May 1927, the United Kingdom recognised the independence of 'Abd al-'Aziz's realm (then known as the Kingdom of Hijaz and Najd), following conquest of the Hijaz. In 1933, the two kingdoms of the Hijaz and Najd were united as the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Boundaries with Transjordan, Iraq and Kuwait were established by a series of treaties negotiated in the 1920s, with two "neutral zones" created, one with Iraq, and the other with Kuwait.

The country's southern boundary with Yemen was partially defined by the 1934 Treaty of Ta'if, which ended a brief border war between the two states.



King 'Abd al-'Aziz in Kuwayt in AH 1328 (1910), aged 34

AH 1328 / AD 1910



King 'Abd al-'Aziz posing for Gertrude Bell

AH 1334 / AD 1916