Abdulaziz ibn Abdul Rahman ibn Faisal ibn Turki ibn Abdullah ibn Muhammad Al Saud, usually known within the Arab world as Abdulaziz and in the West as Ibn Saud, was the first monarch and founder of Saudi Arabia, the "third Saudi state".

He reconquered his family's ancestral home city of Riyadh in 1902, starting three decades of conquests that made him the ruler of nearly all of central Arabia. He consolidated his control over the Hejaz in 1922, then conquered the Hejaz in 1925. He extended his dominions into what later became the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 1932. As King, he presided over the discovery of petroleum in Saudi Arabia in 1938 and the beginning of large-scale oil production after World War II. He fathered many children, including 45 sons, and all of the subsequent kings of Saudi Arabia.

Early life and family origins

Ibn Saud was born on 15 January 1875 in Riyadh in the region of Najd in central Arabia. He was the son of Abdul Rahman bin Faisal, last ruler of the Emirate of Nejd, the "Second Saudi State", a tribal sheikhdom centered on Riyadh. His family, the House of Saud, had been a power in central Arabia for the previous 130 years. Under the influence and inspiration of Wahhabi Islam, the Saudis had previously attempted to control much of the Arabian peninsula in the form of the Emirate of Riyadh, the "First Saudi State", until its destruction by an Ottoman army in the Ottoman-Wahhabi War in the early nineteenth century. Ibn Saud’s mother was a member of the Sudairi family, Sarah Al Sudairi. She died in 1910.

In 1890, the House of Saud’s long-term regional rivals, the Rashidis, conquered Riyadh. Ibn Saud was 15 at the time. He and his family initially took refuge with the Al Murrah, a Bedouin tribe in the southern desert of Arabia. Later, the Al Sauds moved to Qatar and stayed there for two months. Their next stop was Bahrain, where they stayed briefly. Their final destination was Kuwait, where they lived for nearly a decade.

In the spring of 1901, Ibn Saud and some relatives, including a half-brother, Mohammad, and several cousins, set out on a raiding expedition into the Najd targeting for the most part tribes associated with the Rashidis. As the raid proved profitable, it attracted more participants. The raiders’ numbers peaked at over 200, but numbers dwindled over the ensuing months.

In the autumn, the group made camp in the Yabrin oasis. While observing Ramadan, he decided to attack Riyadh and retake it from the Al Rashid. On the night of 15 January 1902, he led 40 men over the walls of the city on tilted palm trees and took the city. The Rashidi governor of the city, Ajlan, was killed in front of his own fortress. The Saudi recapture of the city marked the beginning of the Third Saudi State.

Rise to power

Following the capture of Riyadh, many former supporters of the House of Saud rallied to Ibn Saud’s call to arms. He was a charismatic leader and kept his men supplied with arms. Over the next two years, he and his forces recaptured almost half of the Najd from the Rashids.

In 1904, Abdulaziz of Al Rashid (a.k.a. Ibn Rashid) appealed to the Ottoman Empire for military protection and assistance. The Ottomans responded by sending troops into Arabia. On 15 June 1904, Ibn Saud’s forces suffered a major defeat at the hands of the combined Ottoman and Rashidi forces. His forces regrouped and began to wage guerrilla warfare against the Ottomans. Over the next two years, they were able to disrupt their supply routes, forcing them to retreat. The victory of Ibn Saud in Rawdat Muhanna, in which Ibn Rashid died, ended the Ottoman presence in Najd and Qassim by the end of October 1906.

He completed his conquest of the Najd and the eastern coast of Arabia in 1912. He then founded the Ihwan, a military-religious brotherhood, which was to assist in his later conquests, with the approval of local Ikhwan ulama. In the same year, he established agrarian policies to settle the nomadic pastoralist Bedouins into colonies and to replace their tribal organizations with allegiance to the Ihwan.

During World War I, the British government established diplomatic relations with Ibn Saud. The British agent, Captain William Shakespear, was well received by the Bedouin. Similar diplomatic missions were established with any Arab power who might have been able to unify and stabilize the region. The British entered into the Treaty of Diriyah in December 1915, which made the lands of the House of Saud a British protectorate and attempted to define the boundaries of the developing Saudi state. In exchange, Ibn Saud pledged to again make war against Ibn Rashid, who was an ally of the Ottomans.

The British Foreign Office had previously begun to support Sharif Hussein bin Ali, Emir of the Hejaz by sending T.E. Lawrence (a.k.a. Lawrence of Arabia) to him in 1915. The Saudi Ikhwan began to conflict with Hussein Sharif of Mecca also in 1917, just as his sons Abdullah and Faisal entered Damascus. The Treaty of Diriyah remained in effect until superseded by the Jeddah conference of 1927 and the Damman conference of 1952, during both of which Ibn Saud extended his boundaries past the Anglo-Ottoman Blue Line. After Diriyah, he stockpiled the weapons and supplies which the British
Later years

Although his power had been concentrated in the region of Hijaz, Ibn Saud soon reconquered the Ikhwan and other tribes who had been hostile to him. His exiting oil wealth brought with it a great deal of power and influence that Ibn Saud would use to advantage in the future relations between the two countries.

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With international recognition and support, Ibn Saud continued to consolidate his power. By 1927, his forces had overrun most of the central Arabian Peninsula, but the alliance between the Ikhwan and the Al Saud collapsed when Ibn Saud forbade further rising. The few portions of central Arabia that had not been overrun by the Saud-Ikhwan forces had treaties with London, and Ibn Saud was so keen to gain the provocation of the British by pushing into these areas. This did not sit well with the Ikhwan, who had been taught that all non-Wahhabis were infidels. Tensions finally boiled over when the Ikhwan rebelled. After two years of fighting, they were suppressed by Ibn Saud in the Battle of Sabilla in March 1929.

On 23 September 1932, Ibn Saud formally united his realm into the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, with himself as its king. He transferred his court to Murabba Palace from Masmak Fort in 1938 and the palace remained his residence and the seat of government until his death in 1953.

Ibn Saud had to first eliminate the right of his own father in order to rule, and then distance and contain the ambitions of his five brothers, particularly his oldest brother, Muhammad, who had fought with him during the battles and conquests that gave birth to the state.

Oil discovery and his rule

Petroleum was discovered in Saudi Arabia in 1938 by American geologists working for Standard Oil Company of New York (SOCO) in partnership with Saudi officials. Through his advisors St John Philby and Ameneh Rihan, Ibn Saud granted substantial authority over Saudi oil fields to American oil companies in 1944, much to the dismay of the British who had invested heavily in the House of Saud’s rise to power in hopes of open access to any oil reserves that were to be surveyed. Beginning in 1915, he signed the “friendship and cooperation” pact with Britain to keep his militia in line and cease any further attacks on their protectorates for whom they were responsible.

His newfound oil wealth brought with it a great deal of power and influence that Ibn Saud would use to advantage in the Hajj. He forced many nomadic tribes to settle down and abandon “petty wars” and vendettas. He also began widespread enforcement of the new kingdom’s ideology, based on the teachings of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab. This included an end to traditionally sanctioned rites of pilgrimage, recognized by the orthodox schools of jurisprudence, but at odds with those sanctioned by Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab. In 1926, after a caravan of Egyptians on the way to Mecca were beaten by his forces for playing bugs, he was impelled to issue a conciliatory statement to the Egyptian government. In fact, several such statements were issued to Muslim governments around the world as a result of beatings suffered by the pilgrims visiting the holy cities of Mecca and Medina. With the uprising and subsequent decimation thereafter of the Ikhwan in 1926 via British air power, the Ikhwan’s mark was a point marked by the allies. His crimes of equal mark. His petroleum ideology was in full force, ending nearly 1400 years of accepted religious practices surrounding the Hajj, the majority of which were sanctioned by a millennium of scholarship.

Ibn Saud established a Shura Council of The Hijaz as early as 1927. This Council was later expanded to 20 members, and was chaired by the king’s son, Faisal.

Foreign wars

Ibn Saud was able to gain loyalty from tribes near Saudi Arabia, tribes such as those in Jordan. For example, he built very strong ties with Prince Rashid Al-Khuzaee from the Al Frahat tribe, one of the most influential and royally established tribes during the Ottoman Empire. The Prince and his tribe had dominated eastern Jordan before the arrival of Sharif Hussein. Ibn Saud supported Prince Rashid and his followers in rebellion against Hussein.

Prince Rashid supported Izz ad-Din Al-Qassam’s defiance in 1935 which led him and his followers in rebellion against Abdullah I of Jordan. In 1937, when they were forced to leave Jordan, Prince Rashid Al-Khuzaee, his family, and a group of his followers chose to move to Saudi Arabia, where Prince Rashid lived for several years in Ibn Saud’s hospitality.

Later years

Ibn Saud positioned Saudi Arabia as neutral in World War II, but was generally considered to favor the Allies. However, in 1938, when an attack on a main British pipeline in the Kingdom of Iraq was found to be connected to the German Ambassador, Fritz Grobbba, Ibn Saud provided Grobbba with refuge. It was revealed that he had been disfavoring the British as of 1937.

In the last stage of the war, Ibn Saud met significant political figures. One of these meetings, which lasted for three days, was with U.S. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt on 14 February 1945. The meeting took place on board USS Quincy in the Great Bitter Lake segment of the Suez Canal. The meeting laid down the basis of the future relations between the two countries.

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In 1948, Ibn Saud participated in the Arab-Israeli War, but Saudi Arabia’s contribution was generally considered token. While most of the royal family desired luxuries such as gardens, splendid cars, and palaces, Ibn Saud wanted a royal railway from the Persian Gulf to Riyadh and then an extension to Jeddah. This was regarded by all of his advisers living in an old man’s folly. Eventually, ARAMCO built the railway, at a cost of $70 million, drawn from the King’s oil royalties. It was completed in 1951 and was used commercially after the king’s death. It enabled Riyadh to grow into a relatively modern city. But when a paved road was built in 1962, the railway lost its traffic.
Personal life

In accordance with the customs of his people, Abdul Aziz headed a polygamous household comprising several wives and concubines. According to some sources, he had twenty-two consorts. Many of his marriages were contracted in order to cement alliances with other clans, during the period when the Saudi state was founded and stabilized. Abdul Aziz was the father of almost a hundred children, including forty-five sons.

He was a heavy man standing between 1.93 m (6 ft 4 in) and 1.98 m (6 ft 6 in).

Relations with family members

Ibn Saud was said to be very close to his paternal aunt, Jawhara bint Faisal. From a young age, she ingrained in him a strong sense of family destiny and motivated him to regain the lost glory of the House of Saud. During the years when the Saudi family were living almost as refugees in Kuwait, Jawhara bint Faisal frequently recounted the deeds of his ancestors to Abdulaziz and exhorted him not to be content with the existing situation. She was instrumental in making him decide to return to Najd from Kuwait and regain the territories of his family. She was well educated in Islam, in Arab custom and in tribal and clan relationships. She remained among the king's most trusted and influential advisors all her life. Ibn Saud asked her about the experiences of past rulers and the historical allegiance and the roles of tribes and individuals. Jawhara was also deeply respected by the king's children. Ibn Saud visited her daily until she died around 1930.

Ibn Saud was also very close to his sister Noura, who was one year older than him. On several occasions, he identified himself in public with the words: "I am the brother of Noura." Noura died a few years before Ibn Saud.

Assassination attempt

On 15 March 1935, armed men attacked and tried to assassinate Ibn Saud during his performance of Hajj. He survived the attack unhurt.

Successor

He appointed his second son Prince Saud heir to the Saudi throne in 1933. He had many quarrels with his elder brother Muhammad bin Abdul Rahman as to who should be appointed heir. Muhammad wanted his son Khalid to be designated the heir. His eldest son was Turki Al Awwal, who was the Crown Prince of the Kingdoms of Najd and Hejaz, but Turki died at age 18, predeceasing his father, and his younger full-brother was appointed Crown Prince. Had Turki not died, he would have been the Crown Prince. Ibn Saud had 45 sons, of whom 36 survived to adulthood. Ten of his sons were capable enough to be candidates for the succession. They were Saud, Faisal, Muhammad, Khalid, Faisal, Abdullah, Sultan, Nayef, Salman and Muqrin. Of these ten, six became king. Muhammad, Sultan, Nayef and Muqrin were crown prince but never succeeded to the throne. Muhammad resigned from the post, Sultan and Nayef predeceased King Abdullah, and Muqrin was removed from the post.

Views

In regard to essential values for the state and people, he said, "Two things are essential to our state and our people... religion and the rights inherited from our fathers."

Amani Hamdan argues that the attitude of Ibn Saud towards women's education was encouraging since he expressed his support in a conversation with St John Philby in which he stated, "It is permissible for women to read."

His last words to his two sons, the future King Saud and the next in line Prince Faisal, who were already battling each other, were "You are brothers, unite!" Shortly before his death, Ibn Saud stated, "Verily, my children and my possessions are my enemies."

Death and funeral

In October 1953, Ibn Saud was seriously ill due to heart disease. He died in his sleep of a heart attack at the palace of Prince Faisal in Ta'if on 9 November 1953 (2 Rab al-Awwal 1373 AH) at the age of 78. Prince Faisal was at his side. Funeral prayer was performed at Al Hawiya in Ta'if. His body was brought to Riyadh where he was buried in Al Oud cemetery.

The US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles stated after Ibn Saud's death that he would be remembered for his achievements as a statesman.

Honors

In 1935, Ibn Saud was awarded the British Order of the Bath, in 1947 the U.S. Legion of Merit and in 1952 the Spanish Order of Military Merit (with White Decoration).

See also

- King of the Sands (2012 film) - a biopic film on Ibn Saud directed by Nadat Anzour.

References

1. ^ His birthday has been a source of debate. It is generally accepted as 1875, although a few sources give it as 1880. According to British author Robert Lacey's book The Kingdom, a leading Saudi historian found records that show Ibn Saud in 1891 greeting an important tribal delegation. The historian reasoned that a nine or ten-year-old child (as given by the 1880 birth date) would have been too young to be allowed to greet such a delegation, while an adolescent of 15 or 16 (as given by the 1875 date) would likely have been allowed. When Lacey interviewed one of Ibn Saud's sons prior to writing the book, the son recalled that his father often laughed at records showing his birth date to be 1880. Ibn Saud's response to such records was reportedly that "I swallowed four years of my life."Page 561


3. ^ Ibn Saud meaning son of Saud (see Arabic Name), was a sort of title borne by previous heads of the House of Saud, similar to a Scottish clan chief's title of "the MacGregor" or "the MacDougall". When used without comment it refers solely to Abdul Aziz, although prior to the capture of Riyadh in 1902 it referred to his father, Abdul Rahman (Lacey 1982, pp. 15, 65).

4. ^ Current Biography 1943, pp. 330-34

Further reading

- The Egyptian magazine Noon, Cairo, Egypt - History of Prince Rashed Al-Khuzai with King Abdul Aziz Al Saud an article published by the American Writer Muneer Husainy & the Saudi Historian Khalid Al-Sudairy. 27 November 2009
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Ibn Saud
House of Saud
Born: 1876    Died: 1953

Regnal titles
Preceded by
Abd al-Aziz ibn Mut'ib
   Preceded by
   Himself as Emir of Nejd
   Preceded by
   Himself as Sultan of Nejd
   Preceded by
   Ali bin Hussein
   Preceded by
   Himself as King of Hejaz and Nejd
   Preceded by
   Abdul Rahman bin Faisal Al Saud

   Emir of Nejd
   1902-1921
   Sultan of Nejd
   1921-1927
   King of Nejd
   1927-1932
   King of Hejaz
   1926-1932
   King of Saudi Arabia
   1932-1953
   Head of the House of Saud
   1901-1953

Succeeded by
Himself as Sultan of Nejd
Himself as King of Nejd
Himself as King of Saudi Arabia
Saud

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Ibn Saud was considered a 'magnetic' leader, and many former supporters of the House of Saud once again rallied to its call following the capture of Riyadh. For two years following his dramatic capture of Riyadh, Ibn Saud recaptured almost half of Nejd from the Rashidi. In 1904, however, Ibn Rashid appealed to the Ottoman Empire for assistance in defeating the House of Saud. The Ottomans sent troops to Arabia, setting Ibn Saud on the defensive. Abd al-Aziz ibn Saud (1880-1953) was an Arab political leader who founded the kingdom of Saudi Arabia. During his rule, from 1932 to 1953, much of the Arabian peninsula developed from a group of desert sheikhdoms to a politically unified kingdom with new wealth from oil fields. Ibn Saud was born in Riyadh in the central Arabian principality of Nejd. He escaped with his father, Abd al-Rahman, to exile in Kuwait in 1921, when the rival Rashidi family seized Saudi lands. For more information, please visit the website of King Abdul-Aziz Al Saud, founder of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.