DURABLE AND NON-DURABLE DYNASTIES: THE RASHĪDĪS AND SA'ŪDĪS IN CENTRAL ARABIA[1]

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Interest in the tribes, dynasties and states of the Middle East has been revived with the recent publication of an inter-disciplinary volume by Khoury and Kostiner (1991). *Tribe and State Formation in the Middle East* examines the definition, function and interrelationships of tribes and states. It also mirrors the current debate regarding the use in scholarly work on the Middle East of controversial terms such as 'tribe', 'dynasty' and 'state'. The anthropological contributions in this volume stress the coexistence of tribes and states over time and suggest that although tribal political systems manifest certain state structures, rarely were they transformed into states.

A crucial question underlies this volume. Whenever Middle Eastern tribes, dynasties and states are discussed, the notion of the durability and non-durability of tribal political structures dominates scholarly debate. In this paper, I examine this issue by drawing on two examples from Central Arabia. The Rashīdī dynasty (1836-1921) stands for the non-durable polity; the third Sa'ūdī dynasty (1902-), on the other hand, represents a case where a polity evolved into a stable state, at least until the present day.

To argue that the decline of the Rashīdī dynasty is attributable to the fact that its political structure was based on tribal solidarity alone and lacked the unifying force of religion as in the Sa'ūdī-Wahhābī polity is a simplistic way of explaining the decline of the former and the success of the latter. This involves the unjustified assumption that these two polities were closed political systems immune from outside influences. I propose that the durability and non-durability of the two cases were related to foreign intervention. This is not to say that religion was irrelevant. On the contrary, religion in the form of Wahhabism provided an important umbrella for administrative and institutional organization. It regulated the collection of *zakāt* (Islamic tax), marriage, divorce and inheritance. Above all, it formalized the relationship between the ruler and the ruled. It also endowed this relationship with sanctioned legitimacy. On the other hand, religion was the ideology to sanction territorial expansion, conquest and military organization. Gellner has rightly pointed out that tribal cohesion is enhanced with religious fervour. He equally alludes to the importance of outside influences in determining the chances of a dynasty's maturing into a stable state:

1. This paper is based on research which was done as part of a PhD dissertation at the University of Cambridge. A book based on this work entitled *Politics in an Arabian Oasis* was published in 1991. The focus was on the construction of the Rashīdī dynasty from the following sources: the interpretation of Shammar and Rashīdī oral poetry and narratives, interviews with members of the Rashīdī lineage, historical archival material in the India Office Library and Records (IOR), archives of the Ministère des Affaires Etrangères (Paris) and the monographs of European travellers.

> 'This special formula of tribe plus religious revival can lead to political fortune, particularly when combined with the good fortune of an alignment with outside powers victorious in a world war. The faith-linked chieftaincy can then triumph over its main rival, whom in other respects it resembles. This is in effect the story of the Saudi victory over the Rashīdīs' (Gellner 1991: 117).

It is specifically this foreign intervention that set in motion an irreversible process which led to the development of the Sa'ūdī polity into a fully-fledged state. At the same time, it brought the end of the Rashīdī dynasty. I particularly focus on the role of foreign governments, the Ottoman Empire and the British Government, in upsetting the balance of power between the two rival dynasties in Central Arabia. The durability and non-durability of the two dynasties are dependent variables which will be examined from an anthropological-historical perspective. This involves placing these regional political developments into their relevant international and historical framework.

The Rashīdī Dynasty

In 1836 'Abd Allāh ibn Rashīd, a member of the Ja'far lineage of the Shammar camel-herding tribe became ruler of Hā'il, a northern oasis in Central Arabia. Hā'il was situated at an important location along the pilgrimage and trade caravan routes from Mesopotamia to the Ḥijāz. It became an important trading centre for the pilgrims, the merchants and the local inhabitants of Jabal Shammar.

The founder of Rashīdī hegemony was assisted by two important factors. First, the solidarity of his Shammar tribe played an essential role in consolidating his leadership in the oasis. The support of the Shammar upset the balance between him and his cousin Ibn 'Alī, the previous ruler of the oasis. Neither historical sources nor Shammar oral narratives give us a clear description of the causes of the dispute between the two cousins. Musil claims that Ibn 'Alī feared the growing power and popularity of his young cousin: consequently, he banned him from entering Hā'il (Musil 1928: 237). While in exile, Ibn Rashīd spent time with the Shammar nomads who promised to support him in his attempt to overthrow his cousin. Palgrave described how Ibn Rashīd used his kinship and marriage relation with the Shammar to strengthen his position:

> 'He had at an early period contracted a marriage alliance with a powerful chieftain's family of Djaafar, his near kinsmen by blood. Strong in the support of this restless clan, he subdued with their help the rivalry of town and country nobles, and gratified at once his own ambition and the rapacity of his bedouin allies by the measures that crushed his domestic enemies and ensured his pre-eminence' (Palgrave 1865: vol. 1, 127).

Second, the success of Ibn Rashīd in establishing his family hegemony over Hā'il coincided with the destruction of the first Sa'ūdī-Wahhābī dynasty (1744-1818) by the Ottoman-Egyptian forces. By the 1830s, Central Arabia

had suffered from the expansion of this dynasty and the religious wars which the Sa'ūdī forces launched against the majority of the population in Central Arabia. The Turko-Egyptian forces of Muḥammad 'Alī put an end to Sa'ūdī domination with the destruction of their capital Deraiya in 1818. However, the Egyptian invasion failed to establish peace and order in the region before the withdrawal of the troops from Arabia.

Although the Sa'ūdīs tried to re-establish a new base for their leadership in Riyadh in 1824, their influence among both the sedentary and nomadic population had already withered away. On the other hand, the Rashīdīs benefited from the presence of the Egyptian troops which they turned to their own advantage. Having seen the fate of the Sa'ūdīs, Ibn Rashīd realised the difficulty in opposing the advancing Egyptian troops. Instead, he tried to win the trust of the Egyptian Commanders. He sent 2000 camels to Khūrshīd Pasha who was at that time the Commander of the troops in the Ḥijāz. Musil claims that as early as 1834, Ibn Rashīd 'supported the Egyptian governor, Hursid Pasha, in his plundering raids against the Harb and Htejm tribes' (Musil 1928: 239). Ibn Rashīd's aim was to win the support of the Pasha and negotiate a peaceful settlement which would guarantee his leadership in Hā'il. Khūrshīd Pasha was pleased with Ibn Rashīd's attempt to bring about a *rapprochement*, which he described in a letter to Muḥammad 'Alī. He confessed that Ibn Rashīd could be trusted to provide a constant supply of camels for the transport of the troops. In return for these services, Khūrshīd Pasha recognised Ibn Rashīd as the legitimate ruler of Hā'il and Jamal Shammar (National Archives of Cairo, *Miḥfaẓat 'Ābidīn* 240). Khūrshīd also undertook to give Ibn Rashīd a monthly allowance to cover his expenses as a ruler, and allowed him to keep one third of the *zakat* of Jabal Shammar (Ibid. 264).

These two factors contributed to the consolidation of Rashīdī rule initially over Hā'il and Jabal Shammar, and later over most of Central Arabia. By supporting the Rashīdīs, the Shammar were seeking a leadership to guarantee their security and autonomy during the period of turmoil which prevailed in Central Arabia during the first half of the nineteenth century. Their actions were an adaptive strategy aiming at mitigating their encapsulation by outside forces. The Shammar laid the foundation for organizing their defence and strengthening their unity which in the past had been expressed in terms of adhering to an ideology of common descent and origin. They and their leadership took advantage of the power vacuum created by the destruction of the first Sa'ūdī-Wahhābī dynasty and succeeded in manipulating the Egyptian leadership to their own benefit. This laid the foundation for the emergence of an oasis-based tribal polity with Rashīdī leadership and an important depth in the desert reflected in the Shammar's support. This polity began to be transformed as it developed into a relatively centralized political structure with a tribal elite resident in the oasis and in control of political, economic and military organization.

At the political level, Rashīdī leadership was initially an extension of their role as tribal shaykhs. It was only during the leadership of 'Abd Allāh ibn Rashīd's successors that centralization gathered momentum. The Rashīdī

shaykhs became known as *amīr*s (commanders, or rulers). With the adoption of this title, their role as leaders of the tribe changed into the role of rulers of both the sedentary and nomadic population.

Hā'il had twelve *amīr*s over a period of eighty-five years. During this time, a general hereditary principle regarding succession was followed. The office of *amīr* was occupied by people who claimed descent from Rashīd. However, succession oscillated between the horizontal line (from the *amīr* to his brother) and the vertical line (from the *amīr* to his son). Nevertheless, the system of succession was characterized by ferocious power struggles between the various members and branches of the Rashīdī lineage. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, succession by assassination became the rule.[2]

As far as political organization in the dynasty was concerned, the consolidation of the *amīr*s' rule in Hā'il did not undermine the role of the traditional Shammar shaykhs. Rather, the *amīr*s and the shaykhs coexisted, each having his own sphere of influence within which he exercised his authority. The leadership of the Shammar shaykhs was limited to their own *'ashīra* (tribal section). They had no authority or competence outside the section. On the other hand, the *amīr*s had a wider constituency which included the Shammar tribe, the settled population of the oases in Jabal Shammar, and the nomadic tribes which entered into their sphere of influence. Their rule was unquestioned even among the northern Shammar of the Syrian Jazīra,[3] who were reported to have said to Montagne years after the Rashīdī power disintegrated: 'Nous ne connaissons d'autre chefs que les Al Rashid' (Montagne 1932: 65).

The shaykhs continued to represent their own sections in the *amīr*s' *majlis* (council). During their seasonal visits to Hā'il, the Shammar shaykhs were the guests of the *amīr*. While in his *majlis*, the shaykhs renewed their allegiance and loyalty to the Rashīdīs. They were usually informed about future military raids and political plans. They were expected to take part in the *amīr*'s spring expeditions, meet him in the desert, and participate fully in his *ghazw* (raids). In return for expressing loyalty, the shaykhs often left Hā'il with various gifts of dates, rice, coffee, clothes and above all weapons. They also received regular seasonal subsidies from the *amīr*.

The *amīr*s' economic fortune rested on their ability to control the caravan commercial network which linked Iraq and Persia in the east to the Ḥijāz and its holy cities in the west. As Jabal Shammar was geographically central to both the trade and pilgrims' caravan route from the east to the west, its capital Hā'il was transformed from a small isolated oasis at the beginning of the nineteenth century into a major caravan transit station whose importance was equal to that of Mecca and Madina. Hā'il also had its merchant community

2. A detailed description of the system of succession to the office of *amīr* is found in Al Rasheed 1991.

3. The northern Shammar of the Jazīra inhabit the area between the Tigris and the Euphrates. The majority migrated from Jabal Shammar towards the end of the eighteenth century under Wahhābī pressures. The northern Shammar consist of three tribal sections, the Jarba, Toqah and Zaqarit. For further details on the Shammar of the Jazīra, see Williamson 1975.

and commercial caravans which took great interest in the long-distance trade network.

Their control over the pilgrim and trade caravans generated for the Rashīdī *amīr*s a considerable income in the form of protection tax. The *amīr*s supervised the *ḥajj* and trade caravans by appointing a caravan leader whose responsibility was to carry the *amīr*s' flag, a gesture indicative of the caravan being under the protection of the Hā'il *amīr*s. The *amīr*s also assigned a police force mounted on camels to enforce order among the caravans themselves and protect them from the attack of nomadic tribes. In return for this protection, the caravan leader collected on behalf of the *amīr* a toll which varied from year to year, depending on the security of the route and the merchandises being transported. This arrangement was also used for the protection of the pilgrims who made the journey from Mesopotamia to Mecca and Madina every year. Musil described how the *amīr*s regulated the passage of the pilgrims:

> 'Everyone of the pilgrims, who sometimes numbered ten thousand, had to pay for water and for his camels thirty megidijjat ($25) on the outward and fifteen megidijjat on the return journey. Furthermore a portion of all goods imported or transported by the pilgrims was exacted as a toll. In this manner Mohammad [the *amīr* of Hā'il] increased the prosperity not merely of the ruling house but of the settlers who acted as merchants and of the bedouins who were accustomed to hire out their camels to the caravans' (Musil 1928: 239).

Their control of the caravan network was an important factor in the consolidation of the *amīr*s' powers. It enabled them to build a military organization which in turn allowed them to expand and conquer territories outside the traditional Shammar areas. The Rashīdī military force consisted of tribal warriors, slaves, mercenaries and non-slave armed men who were known as *rajajil al-shuyūkh* (men of the shaykhs). The latter were recruited by voluntary enlistment form the oases and villages of Jabal Shammar. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the *amīr*s imposed military service on the sedentary population to supplement their military force.[4]

This diverse military force enabled the Rashīdī *amīr*s to expand to the north where they incorporated the oasis of al-Jawf at the edge of the great Nafud Desert. They also spread their sphere of influence to most of the oases and villages of the Qasim, the central region of Najd. Most importantly, their forces spilled over to southern Najd and were able to conquer the Sa'ūdī capital, Riyadh, where a Rashīdī representative resided in 1891. By the end of the nineteenth century, Rashīdī hegemony had already been extended from the borders of Aleppo and Damascus to Basra, Oman and Asīr (Musil 1928: 248). The *amīr*s became the sole undisputed rulers in Central Arabia, especially after they had expelled the Sa'ūdī Imāms initially to the Empty Quarter and later to Kuwait. From now on, Rashīdī power and expansion allowed them to enjoy the deference and fear of the local population. They became the major actors

4. On the economic basis of Rashīdī power and their military forces, see Al Rasheed 1989 and 1991.

on the Arabian scene, which neither the Ottoman Empire nor the British government could afford to ignore.

The Sa'ūdī State

The present Sa'ūdī state has its roots in the eighteenth century. The rise of the fundamentalist religious movement of Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb in southern Najd laid the bases for a long-term alliance between the Āl Sa'ūd, the ruling clan of a small oasis called Deraiya and the founder of the movement in 1744. The rulers of Deraiya adopted the call for a pure, orthodox Islam and took Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb under their wing. This gave their rule a religious tone which they continue until the present day to exploit. With the religious sanctions of Wahhabism,[5] the Sa'ūdīs launched a series of expansionist wars which led to the incorporation of most of Central Arabia, the Ḥijāz and the eastern provinces along the Persian Gulf into their sphere of influence (Abdulrahim 1976).

As the holy cities of the Ḥijāz fell into Sa'ūdī-Wahhābī hands, pilgrims from the provinces of the Ottoman Empire and elsewhere were harassed and prevented from making the *ḥajj* peacefully. The Shi'ite pilgrims from Mesopotamia and Persia suffered the most because they were regarded by the orthodox Wahhābī preachers as innovators (*ahl al-bid'a*).[6] At this point, the Ottoman Sultan reacted to the menace of the Wahhābīs by commissioning the *Walī* of Egypt to organize a punitive expedition against the forces of Āl Sa'ūd.[7] In 1811, Egyptian troops began to land at Yanbo on the Red Sea with the objective of launching an attack on the Sa'ūdīs and terminating their rule over Arabia. In 1818, the troops advanced to Deraiya which was put under siege for almost five months. Ibrāhīm Pasha, the Commander of the Egyptian troops, captured 'Abd Allāh, the Sa'ūdī ruler and sent him to Istanbul where he was beheaded. Deraiya was completely destroyed, its date plantations were burnt, and its population was plundered. This put an end to Sa'ūdī rule and marked the end of the first Sa'ūdī-Wahhābī dynasty, which had lasted for almost seventy years (1744-1818).

In the nineteenth century, a weak Sa'ūdī-Wahhābī revival was launched with the establishment of a new Sa'ūdī base in Riyadh in 1824. The Sa'ūdī

5. Those who adopted the Wahhābī call prefer to be known as *ahl al-tawḥīd* (the unitarians). However, in Western literature, they are referred to as the Wahhābīs and their call is known as Wahhābism.

6. The Sa'ūdī leadership in Riyadh was eager to attract the pilgrim caravans to pass through territories under their control. However, the fanaticism of the early Wahhābī followers continued to deter the Shi'ite pilgrims of Persia and Mesopotamia. Palgrave described how these pilgrims were badly treated in Sa'ūdī territory: 'Feyzul, after extracting the exorbitant sum which Wahhabi orthodoxy claims from Shiite heretics as the price of permission to visit the sacred city and the tomb of the Prophet, had assigned them for a guide and a leader one Abdulaziz Abu Botein, who was to conduct and plunder them in the name of God and the true faith all the rest of the way to Mecca and back again' (Palgrave 1865: Vol. 1, 160).

7. By choosing Muḥammad 'Alī for this mission, the Sultan was seeking to achieve two objectives: the first was the collapse of Sa'ūdī-Wahhābī power, and the second was the exhaustion of Muḥammad 'Alī's forces during a fierce struggle in Najd the results of which were unpredictable. The Sultan realized the dangers that Muḥammad 'Alī represented. Subsequent history justified his fears.

ruler, known as Imām Turkī, endeavoured to reconquer the Hasa region in the 1830s and enforce Sa'ūdī hegemony along the coast of the Persian Gulf. Although Turkī was a faithful follower of Wahhābism, he was careful not to fan the embers of Wahhābī fanaticism and tried to avoid clashes with the Egyptian troops in the Ḥijāz. However, the withdrawal of the troops from Arabia in 1841 under international pressure opened the door for the Sa'ūdīs to reassert their presence and rebuild their ancestors' power.[8] The greater challenge they faced, however, stemmed from rivalry within branches of the ruling house. They also began to sense the lack of enthusiasm of both the sedentary population and the nomadic tribes of Central Arabia who suffered tremendously as a result of the heavy taxation which the Egyptian commanders enforced in the area. Both factors undermined Sa'ūdī rule especially after the death of Imām Fayṣal in 1865. The Sa'ūdī power entered a phase of decline which culminated in their loss of their capital Riyadh in 1891. In this year they fought a battle with the Rashīdī forces at Muleida and lost their hegemony immediately after the battle (Winder 1965, Ibn Rashīd 1966, Philby 1955). This brought an end to the second Sa'ūdī-Wahhābī dynasty (1824-1891). The ruling family fled first to the Empty Quarter and later took refuge with the Āl Ṣabāḥ, the *amīr*s of Kuwait. Their capital Riyadh was governed by a representative of the Rashīdī *amīr*s (Winder 1965: 277, al-Rīḥānī 1928: 104).

It was only in 1902 that a young descendant of the Sa'ūdī family, 'Abd al-'Azīz ibn Sa'ūd (known as Ibn Sa'ūd) returned to Najd with the intention of re-establishing his ancestors' power over their town Riyadh. Ibn Sa'ūd entered the town and was able to kill the Rashīdī representative (Hamza 1933: 132, al-Rīhānī 1928: 108-113, Philby 1955: 231). He immediately announced himself the ruler of the town. Using Wahhābism to cast legitimacy over his leadership, he then endeavoured from Riyadh to spread his domination over most of the Arabian Peninsula.

The creation of a religious fighting force was the most crucial step in Ibn Sa'ūd's expansion. This fighting force was inspired by the teachings of Wahhābism and was dedicated to spreading its message through a holy war. It was known as the *Ikhwān* (Muslim Brothers). Habib defined it as follows:

> 'Those bedouins who accepted the fundamentals of orthodox Islam of the Hanbali school as preached by Abdl-Wahhab which their fathers and forefathers had forgotten or had perverted and who through the persuasion of the religious missionaries and with the material assistance of Abdl-Aziz abandoned their nomadic life in the Hijrah which were built for them' (Habib 1978: 16).

The Ikhwān were required to abandon their tribal allegiances and ways of life and settle in the special agricultural settlements created for them to lead a

8. As Muḥammad 'Alī was increasingly being supported by the French government, Britain regarded his expansion in Arabia as a threat to her interests in the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf. This expansion meant greater involvement on behalf of the French in the affairs of the region. Consequently, more than the Ottoman Sultan, Britain was eager to see the day when the Egyptian troops withdrew from the Arabian Peninsula.

religiously inspired life. The *Ikhwān*, according to Kostiner, possessed three main qualities: traditional military prowess, religious fervour, and detachment from restraining official positions. Consequently they played a key role in Sa'ūdī expansion (Kostiner 1991: 231). They remained during the first three decades of this century the most ferocious warriors of Ibn Sa'ūd's armed forces which spread his control over most of the Arabian Peninsula under the cover of Islamic revivalism and the objective of establishing an Islamic government.

At the beginning of his rule, Ibn Sa'ūd's dynasty resembled a tribal dynasty with a web of tribal alliances which were organized to include a number of tribal groupings. However, it had a strong religious dimension that proved to be essential for its expansion. Kostiner stresses that the Sa'ūdīs engaged in two processes: territorial expansion to conquer new commercial and strategic areas and overpower other chieftaincies militarily; and internal consolidation to avoid the traditional unreliability of tribes and allow for integration of new conquered territories (Ibid.: 229).

The main factor which triggered the process whereby Ibn Sa'ūd's dynasty began to show state-like features was when his authority and power took precedence over other groups and institutions, including those of religious orientation. It was only then that Ibn Sa'ūd ceased being merely *primus inter pares*, as he and his ancestors had been in the former chieftaincies (Ibid.: 233). This change was marked by his announcement of himself as the King of the Ḥijāz in 1926 and of Najd in 1927.

Foreign Intervention

Foreign intervention played a crucial role in determining the winners and losers as far as local dynasties were concerned in Central Arabia. In the following section I discuss how this intervention led to the disintegration of the Rashīdī dynasty and the consolidation of Sa'ūdī rule.

Throughout the nineteenth century, the Ottoman empire maintained a nominal suzerainty over Central Arabia.[9] This was reflected in a vague recognition of the Sultan's authority by the local shaykhs and *amīr*s (Philby 1930: 129). However, from time to time the Sultans tried to enforce their rule over Najd through a series of military campaigns which aimed at establishing a permanent military and administrative presence on the outskirts of Najd. The relationship between the Ottoman government and local *amīr*s was complex, as it did not follow a fixed pattern. The general tribal policy of the Ottomans oscillated over time. Like most power centres, their policies aimed at exercising direct control when this was possible and indirect rule when this was advantageous and less risky. The guiding principle behind this policy was to maintain maximum control at minimum cost. Moreover, they faithfully adhered to the old principle of 'divide and rule', which became manifest as they overtly supported the Rashīdīs while maintaining secret contacts with their

9. An example of this vague recognition of the Sultan's authority is given in an account which describes how the mentioning of the Sultan's name during Friday prayers in Hā'il was more than enough: 'Talal had to preserve appearance with the Sultan whose name looms large in the Friday prayers at Hail but who derives no other benefit from the province' (IOR L/P & S/20C 240 p.48).

rivals, the Sa'ūdīs. This was clear in their policy after Ibn Rashīd had conquered Riyadh in 1891:

> 'The allowance paid by the Turkish government to the young amīr of Jabal Shammar, Saud Ibn Abdulaziz, has lately been raised from £150 to £200 a month. He has also received the title of Amir al Umara in 1910' (IOR R/15/5/25).

Ibn Rashīd continued to receive subsidies and ammunition from the Ottoman governor of Basra who at the same time paid a regular allowance to the Sa'ūdīs during their exile. 'Abd al-Raḥmān, the Sa'ūdī Imām, was invited to the Hasa region by its Ottoman *wālī*, who allocated to him a monthly allowance of 33 Liras (IOR R/15/6/19, p.56).

As the shadow of the First World War approached, the Ottomans revised their policies in Central Arabia. Instead of encouraging Ibn Rashīd to attack Ibn Sa'ūd, they endeavoured to reconcile the two rulers and obtain a promise of their military cooperation during the war (IOR L/P & S/20/C 247A p.25). They felt that the old method of setting off one *amīr* against another would no longer have the success of past times even in maintaining that nominal sovereignty over them. The involvement of the Ottomans in the war required a more positive policy towards local leaders. Instead of the old strategy of 'divide and rule', the Porte encouraged local rulers to overcome their rivalries and provide the support which they demanded. However, this proved to be an impossible task with the intervention of Britain in the affairs of Najd.

The outbreak of the war freed Britain from its previous commitment to a non-intervention policy in Central Arabia.[10] Britain was searching for some local allies in Najd whose support and cooperation were crucial to terminate Ottoman rule in the area. Ibn Sa'ūd took advantage of the new circumstances created by the war and showed willingness to receive the British envoy, Captain Shakespear, who was to advise Ibn Sa'ūd on matters related to the war and the necessary military actions to be taken. This was followed by the signing of a mutual cooperation treaty between Ibn Sa'ūd and the British government in 1915. According to this treaty, Ibn Sa'ūd was not allowed to maintain any contacts with other foreign powers without prior consultation with Britain. In return, the British government sanctioned his control over Najd, the Hasa, Qatif, Jubayl, and all the towns and ports within this territory. Ibn Sa'ūd also received a monthly subsidy of £5000 in addition to weapons and ammunition (Vasiliev 1986: 282-284, Aitchison 1933: 206).

As Britain guaranteed the allegiance of Ibn Sa'ūd, her representatives in the Persian Gulf tried to win over Ibn Rashīd and deprive the Ottomans of a potential local ally. British officials suggested to their government that they open negotiations with him, the objective of which was to sign a similar treaty with the northern dynasty of the Rashīdīs. British officials argued that if Ibn

10. British officials in the Persian Gulf were under strict orders that 'His Majesty's government cannot intervene in any way in the affairs of Central Arabia ... and the interests and influence of Britain are to be strictly confined to the coastline of Eastern Arabia, and that no measures are to be taken or language used, which might appear to connect them even indirectly with the tribal warfare, now in the progress in the interior' (IOR L/P & S/10/384).

Rashīd agreed to side with Britain, the Turks would lose their chief source of camel supply, and would have a troublesome enemy on their borders (IOR L/P & S/10/387 p.254). Britain equally encouraged Ibn Rashīd to reach a reconciliation with Ibn Sa'ūd as it was believed that this would be helpful to British interests especially if the two rulers acted together against Ottoman interests. Once again, these attempts were doomed to fail as Ibn Rashīd declared through his envoys to British officials that he would certainly join the Ottomans during the war, especially if the latter sent troops to aid him. By this time, Ibn Rashīd had already been appointed by the Ottoman government as 'Commander of the whole of Najd' (Ibid.: 177 & 271). He was also sent twenty-five German and Turkish officers with 300 soldiers to advise him during the war.

Once it became clear that Ibn Rashīd's alliance with the Ottomans had already been well-established, Britain abandoned its policy of reconciliation. Consequently, Ibn Sa'ūd was encouraged to attack Ibn Rashīd from the south (IOR L/P & S/10/388 p.13). This, it was believed, would keep Ibn Rashīd busy defending his southern borders and would inevitably prevent him from providing valuable military support to the Ottomans in the north. By 1917, the Cairo-based Arab Bureau had already authorized Ibn Sa'ūd to attack the Rashīdī capital Hā'il. Colonel Hamilton was sent to assist Ibn Sa'ūd in planning the attack. It was agreed that Ibn Sa'ūd should maintain more effective control, and put real pressure on the Shammar. British officials also came to the conclusion that Britain should assist him with 1,000 rifles and 100,000 rounds to achieve this end (IOR R/15/5/104 p.19).

In addition, to weaken Ibn Rashīd, Britain thought it necessary to deny Ibn Rashīd's followers and tribesmen access to the markets of Kuwait and Basra where Britain had already established her control. This kind of economic pressure was believed to be essential for weakening Ibn Rashīd and forcing his Shammar tribesmen to abandon him. It was expected that the latter would declare their allegiance to Britain or take refuge with Ibn Sa'ūd (Ibid.: 20).

In spite of Ibn Rashīd's awareness of these measures, he continued to support the Ottoman government during the war. It was thought that an alliance with the Ottomans would allow the Rashīdīs to maintain their local autonomy. This was made clear as they observed how the allies of Britain were expected to take an active part in showing their allegiance and support. Both allies of Britain, Ibn Sa'ūd and the Sharīf of the Ḥijāz, were required to participate actively in the war. In contrast, The Porte continued during the war to provide Ibn Rashīd with supplies and subsidies without actually being able to force him to participate in the war. The Ottoman government was not in a position to do so. The poor communications network with local chiefs prevented them from imposing strict control over their allies. From the point of view of the Rashīdīs, an alliance with a weak central government was regarded as more beneficial to the maintenance of local independence. However, with the defeat of the Ottoman empire in the war, the Rashīdīs began to realise that, though their alliance with the Ottomans had succeeded in safeguarding their local autonomy in the short-term, in the longer term it had proved to be disastrous, as they found themselves without the support of a

central government after the disintegration of the empire. On the other hand, their rival, Ibn Sa'ūd, enjoyed the support of the victorious party, Britain.

After the war, Britain defined its policy in Arabia as being to achieve the following objectives: the security of the pilgrimage routes, the immunity of the Arabian Peninsula from any foreign intervention, and the preservation of peace and the promotion of trade (IOR L/P & S/11/1331 p.457).

As far as her policies towards Ibn Rashīd were concerned, Britain realised that after they had captured Jerusalem from the Ottomans in 1918, Ibn Rashīd was no longer in a position to do any harm or provide support to the Ottomans in Syria and the northern territories. Consequently, it was believed that his total elimination from Arab politics might result in embarrassment. Therefore, the conclusion was reached that his retention would assist in the maintenance of the balance of power between Ibn Sa'ūd and the King of the Ḥijāz. The Viceroy of India advised the Foreign Office in this regard:

> 'We, therefore, recommend that Cox should keep Ibn Saud in play by presents of money, but that assistance in arms and instructors should not be given except very sparingly. Otherwise, we seem to risk the establishment of two powers in Arabia mutually hostile, but to both of whom we have given pledges of support' (IOR L/P & S/10/389 p.179).

Clearly, the Viceroy of India was referring to the contradictory promises that Britain had made to the Sharīf of the Ḥijāz in return for his launching the Arab revolt against the Turks in 1916, and her promise to recognise Ibn Sa'ūd as the sole ruler in Arabia. The two promises could not be realised without alienating one of the contestants. Consequently, the presence of Ibn Rashīd as a third actor in perpetual conflict and rivalry with Ibn Sa'ūd would keep the latter preoccupied and divert his attention away from entering into direct confrontation with the Sharīf.

The British government decided that Ibn Sa'ūd should be given a limited supply of weapons to launch minor attacks on Ibn Rashīd without enabling him to capture their capital. It was believed that the possession of Hā'il by Ibn Sa'ūd would only increase his powers and British difficulties in the area. This also would make the Sharīf more suspicious and would make friction between him and Ibn Sa'ūd more likely to take place.

However, the new British policy towards Ibn Rashīd failed to deliver the expected results. Ibn Sa'ūd, together with his British advisor Philby and his Ikhwān warriors, continued to launch attacks on territories in Jabal Shammar regarded as falling within Ibn Rashīd's sphere of influence. These attacks succeeded in putting enormous pressures on the Rashīdīs. From 1918 to 1920, Ibn Sa'ūd's ambition was centred around the idea of uniting all Najd under his leadership. He realised that the only obstacle was Ibn Rashīd's control over the northern parts of Central Arabia. In 1921, he was finally successful in conquering Hā'il as his continuous expeditions exhausted the oasis leadership and its population (Al Rasheed 1991). His victory over the Rashīdīs did not meet any serious opposition from Britain, which was at that time preoccupied with sorting out the complications of her contradictory promises and policies

in the Middle East in general.[11] The major concern of Britain was to establish her control over Iraq and Trans-Jordan. In that context, the incorporation of Hā'il in Ibn Sa'ūd's realm and the disintegration of Rashīdī power were not perceived as a threat to British interests in the north of Arabia, since Ibn Sa'ūd was still maintaining friendly relations with Britain.

In summary, the defeat of the Ottoman empire to whom the Rashīdīs swore allegiance was an important factor in upsetting the balance between their power and that of the Sa'ūdīs. The latter were able to seize the opportunity to expand their realm and enforce their grip over their rivals' territories after the confusion which followed the end of the war. The international scene seemed to be in favour of Sa'ūdī hegemony to the detriment of that of the Rashīdīs. Foreign intervention of the Egyptian troops put an end to the first Sa'ūdī dynasty and promoted the Rashīdīs' rise to power in Hā'il in the middle of the nineteenth century. Similarly, the foreign intervention of Britain reversed that process and resulted in the consolidation of Sa'ūdī domination.

Success and Decline

Ibn Khaldūn was the first to emphasize that dynastic rule is strengthened by the unifying power of religion. He argued in the *Muqqadima* that the kinship phenomenon *'aṣabiyya* (tribal solidarity) is essential for the success of dynastic rule. The conditions of pastoralism, coupled with the insecurity of desert life, endow people with cohesion. Common descent and blood ties lie at the heart of this cohesion. However, he declared that dynasties with wide powers and large royal authority have their origin in religion. The rise of the Muslim Empire in the seventh century and the successive caliphates were the examples that enabled Ibn Khaldūn to reach this conclusion. He equally emphasized that religious propaganda cannot materialize without group feeling, i.e. *'aṣabiyya* (Ibn Khaldun 1987: 125-127).

in the light of this model, the Rashīdī dynasty can be described as a tribal polity which enjoyed the solidarity of the Shammar and benefited from their tribal cohesion. The rise of the *amīr*s to power was attributed to the support of the Shammar tribe and in particular the Ja'far lineage. This endowed their leadership with the legitimacy necessary to occupy the position of *amīr*s. As the *amīr*s expanded their sphere of influence, they were asserting the dominance of the Shammar. The non-Shammar conquered groups regarded the predominance of Hā'il as an imposition of an alien rule. These groups were not able to free themselves from this leadership until the collapse of the dynasty in 1921. The foundation of Rashīdī rule was based on tribal cohesion. This remained unchallenged throughout the nineteenth century in spite of the presence of a rival ideology expressed in Wahhābism. The second Sa'ūdī dynasty was faithful to the tenets of Wahhābism, but failed to represent a real threat to Rashīdī rule. Towards the end of the last century, the Rashīdī

11. The major preoccupation of Britain at that time was to solve the problem of the King of the Ḥijāz, who was still waiting for Britain to fulfil her promise to recognize him as 'King of the Arabs'.

dynasty with its tribal cohesion triumphed over the Sa'ūdī-Wahhābī alternative.

In an attempt to comprehend the reversal of the process in the twentieth century, Montagne wrote in *La Civilisation du Desert* that the Rashīdī dynasty lacked the stabilising effect of a religious ideology. This led to fragility and instability:

> 'Il faut la puissance de la religion pour fonder, avec les matériaux sociaux, des empires théocratiques qui meritent vraiment de retenir l'attention des historiens. La tradition de son gouvernement est trop incertaine. Les institutions, sur lesquelles il pourrait se reposer, sont trop rudimentaires pour que l'oeuvre subsiste au délà de deux ou trois générations' (Montagne 1947: 159).

It is true that in the twentieth century Sa'ūdī leadership was armed with Wahhābism which provided the bases for unifying the various tribes of Arabia. Wahhābism was an overarching ideology which appealed to various groups in the area. With its emphasis on the equality of all Muslims and its rejection of tribal hierarchies based on notions of nobility and pure tribal origin (*aṣl*), Wahhābism attracted many tribes which had enjoyed an inferior status in the hierarchies of Arabia such as sections of the sedentary population, the sheep and goat herders and the Sullab.[12] The latter were the most despised groups with the lowest status. It is not surprising then to see them becoming the most dedicated and most ferocious warriors among the Ikhwān fighters. Wahhābism granted them a new status as Muslim brothers and promised to free them from the servitude which they had experienced over the years.

If we apply the Ibn Khaldūnian model to early twentieth-century Central Arabia, we have two rival dynasties, one appealing to tribal cohesion and solidarity, the other to religious feelings. The rivalry was resolved to the advantage of the Islamic alternative. This would prove the validity of Ibn Khaldūn's assumption that governments benefit from the strong unifying force of religion. One can conclude then that the durability of dynastic rule is highly dependent on the presence of this factor.

However, this would be a simplistic way of explaining the decline of the Rashīdī dynasty and the success of its rival. It is true that Wahhābism undermined tribal autonomy and contributed to the consolidation of Sa'ūdī rule at the political, economic, social and military levels. Since the eighteenth century, Wahhābism had continued to endow Sa'ūdī leadership with legitimacy. Yet the movement, its founder, and the Sa'ūdīs were challenged twice in the nineteenth century. Their first dynasty disintegrated as a result of the Egyptian invasion in 1818 and their second attempt collapsed as a result of the Rashīdī expansion in 1891. Their third successful attempt was aided by Wahhābism, but was not completely dependent on it. Wahhābism cannot be considered to be the element behind the durability of the third Sa'ūdī realm. Rashīdī decline and Sa'ūdī success were two parallel processes which took

12. The Sulab were often hunters of gazelles and ostriches. They never participated in tribal raids and their property was not considered to be worth plundering by the strong camel-herding tribes of Arabia. For further details, see Dickson 1951.

place not in isolation, but in conjunction with a whole series of historical and international events beyond local control. The disintegration of the Ottoman empire and the subsequent intervention of the British government favoured the dominance of Sa'ūdī rule. The Islamic alternative triumphed over tribal cohesion only as a result of the interference of these external events and international developments.

The collapse of the Ottoman empire set in motion the process of state formation not only in Central Arabia, but also in the area now known as the Middle East. Although the majority of the region entered into mandatory relations with Britain and France, societies were geared towards organizing themselves into state-like structures. Before the establishment of the Sa'ūdī state in 1932, the history of Central Arabia had followed a repetitive cycle where tribal dynasties rose to power, expanded over adjacent territories, and indulged in political centralization. These polities disintegrated as a result of the strong tradition of tribal autonomy, unreliable pastoralism and foreign intervention. The dynasties were themselves unstable, whereas the general cyclical pattern was not. The cycle was broken only with the intervention of modern conditions and the external pressures of foreign governments. These factors, rather than religion, determined the durability or non-durability of dynasties. Those dynasties which succeeded in benefiting from the new changes became known as states.

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