glossaries and indices is also given. In his work Barhebraeus made heavy reliance on non-Christian authors. He used to take an Arabic work as his model and framework around which to build his work. He followed the sequence of al-Ghazālī in Iḥyāʾ ‘U lkūm al-Dīn in his Ethicon, and Ibn Sinā’s al-Shifāʾ in his Butyrum Sapientiae. He relied also on al-Ṭūsī’s Tadhkirah fi ‘Ilm al-Hay’ah in his Ascensus mentis. The part on civil law in his Nomocanon depended on al-Ghazālī’s Kitāb al-Wajīz and in his Tegrāt Tegrātā (Treatise of the Treatises) on al-Ghazālī’s Maqāṣid al-Falāṣifah.

Muhammad Khalifa Hasan Ahmad


‘September 11’ has been a defining event in the world history. It facilitated the modern capitalism in selecting Islam as its next target in the war of absolute power, after displacing international communism. Saudi Arabia enjoys a unique position in the Muslim world, as the custodian of two holiest places in Makkah and Madīnah, a key provider of hydrocarbon energy internationally, and the biggest buyer of US military hardware. Its government, people and institutions became especially suspicious after 9/11, as 15 out of 19 hijackers were identified as Saudi Arabians and the whole episode was allegedly planned by a Saudi elite, Osama bin Laden.

A positive aspect of the new game is that it has created a new interest in the Western world, to know more about Islam as a religion and Muslims as a community. The resultant flow of information is no doubt substantially flawed and is being produced to paint Islam and the Muslims as villains of Western civilization, but a good part of it is a serious effort to understand and know the religion of Islam and the Muslim community as they are, to identify their characteristics, their strengths and weaknesses, their potential and their possible role in the new world order.

This book falls in the second category. It is a case study of Saudi Arabia, and provides an in-depth analysis of its government, people and institutions in
all possible dimensions. It is an important study as little is known about Saudi Arabia and its institutions despite its significant role in the world power game.

“The book is the outcome of an international project centered around a three-day workshop organized by the editors at the International Institute for the Study of Islam in the Modern World (ISIM) in Leiden in February 2004, and sponsored by ISIM, the Dutch Foreign Ministry, the European University Institute and Lancaster University in England” (p. 2). The selected papers from the workshop were augmented by additional contributions by certain experts.

“The aim was to elicit a conversation and ‘cross-fertilization’ between empirically and theoretically innovative work, bringing together a variety of perspectives to examine contemporary trends in Saudi Arabia’s politics, society, economy and international relations, exploring their roots as well as possible future development” (p. 2). More specifically, the case study, according to editors, was an attempt to examine following specific questions in relation to the Saudi Arabia:

- “How viable is the House of Sa’ud?
- Can the House of Sa’ud transform itself and if so, how?
- What is the nature of opposition, and what are its prospects?
- How should the nature of violent extremism and terrorism in Saudi Arabia, and its prospects be assessed?
- What are the prospects of political reforms?
- What are the key trends in the Saudi economy? To what extent has it been able, and is now likely, to transcend the limitations of the rent-economy? Can a viable private sector producing added value emerge? Indeed, has it done so already?
- How are economic and political trends linked and with what effect?
- How is the relationship between religion and politics evolving?
- What is the nature of ‘Wahhabism,’ and how is it evolving?
- What is the role of education in Saudi society and economy, and what are the principal trends?
- What trends are, if any, observable in civil society and among the intelligentsia that might be relevant to possible transformation in the social, economic and political domains?
- What are the determinants of Saudi foreign policy? What is the relative importance of domestic, regional and international factors in this regard? How much autonomy does the Saudi regime have at these three levels in fashioning its regional and global policies?
- What are the dynamics of Saudi Arabia’s relations with the United States, what are the key patterns, and what is likely to happen in the future? Do current difficulties indicate a major shift or only a temporary blip?” (pp. 3–4).
All of these questions are relevant and substantive from the viewpoint of all those who are interested in Saudi Arabia as a leading Muslim state and its role in the future world politics and economics, but these questions are especially so from the European perspective, as determining a response or anticipating a behaviour pattern to these questions would contribute to the formulation of their foreign policy in the Middle East. Developing an authentic and reliable response to these questions is, however, not an easy job, as Saudi Arabia is an ‘opaque’ society and little information is available for analysis, especially relating to its socio-economic dynamics.

For examining and exploring these questions, the presentation has been divided into four parts; namely: (a) Ideology and Change (pp. 11–84), containing three papers on the role of Islam and ‘ulama’ in Saudi politics and society and the pattern of education in the country. The paper on education in Saudi Arabia has been titled as “The War of Ideas,” which provides an indication of how the educational paradigm has been viewed. (b) Political Economy (pp. 85–184), containing three papers which primarily discuss the reforms agenda of WTO and the relationship between the rulers and the bourgeoisie that provides the driving force in a ‘rentier’ economy. (c) Regime and Opposition (pp. 185–314), containing four papers which discuss circles of power in Saudi Arabia, their interaction and the resultant political change over time. The papers provide an overview of the failed attempts made by ‘armed opposition’ groups in the country to bring a change in the power structure. (d) External Relations (pp. 315–432), containing four papers on determinants and patterns of Saudi foreign policy with special reference to its special relationship with United States and the four pillars on which this relationship has been built; “i.e., oil, security, Saudi Arabia’s moderating power in the Arab- Israeli conflict, and its prominent place within Arab and the Islamic world.”

All the papers are analytical in approach and try to highlight issues and challenges being faced by Saudi Arabian government and elite in balancing contradictory and at times opposite domestic demands and external pressures and in maintaining status quo. An exceptional characteristic of the papers is that they examine these challenges and issues in the above areas from all the three levels, i.e., domestic, regional and international. The case study, therefore, makes a conscious effort to capture the whole dynamics of the Saudi Arabian society, state and polity.

There are a few areas which do not seem to have been adequately covered as the case study has been prepared primarily as an input for the medium term requirements of European foreign policy. Such areas include: (a) Emergence of China and India as major consumers in oil market and its impact on the Middle East politics and economics; (b) Dynamics of changing relationship
with neighbouring countries as a result of US initiatives in Afghanistan and Iraq and its impact on Saudi Arabia’s domestic policies; (c) The role of European Union countries and Russia in the Middle East and (d) Expectations of poor and developing Muslim countries and Muslim minorities in Africa and Asia and Saudi response. Had these areas been adequately covered in the case study, it would have made it a very comprehensive document.

An outstanding feature of the case study is the last paper written as “Conclusions and Outlook" by the editors. This paper is not an executive summary of the other 14 papers included in the book, but an overview of the findings and concerns scattered in these papers. Thus it is an attempt to correlate all the papers and integrate them into a well-knit discourse. One may agree, partially agree, or disagree with the outlook of the editors but there is likely to be a consensus on the conclusion drawn by them that Saudi Arabia is in a flux — in domestic politics, society, economy and foreign relations. Yet in such a flux, a number of patterns and trends can be identified. And, that “the reforms and liberalization (of Saudi economy and society) do not equate to democratization — nor do they necessarily lead to it.” This consensus can lead to further exploration of the dynamics of Saudi Arabian society.

The case study is a thought-provoking exercise and should motivate other institutions and stake-holders to undertake such exercises. It may also help in soul-searching by the Saudi elite about their past, present and future.

Ather Zaidi


In the aftermath of 9/11, most writers on Islam can be classified into one of two broad classifications: they are either seen as apologists for Islam, or polemists against the religion. Akbar Ahmed, Ibn Khaldun Professor of Islamic Studies at American University falls into neither classification. He stands in the vanguard of the extremely few that have transcended such labeling. He has been honoured by the Islamic Society of North America as well as the Anti-Defamation League: two entities that have diametrically