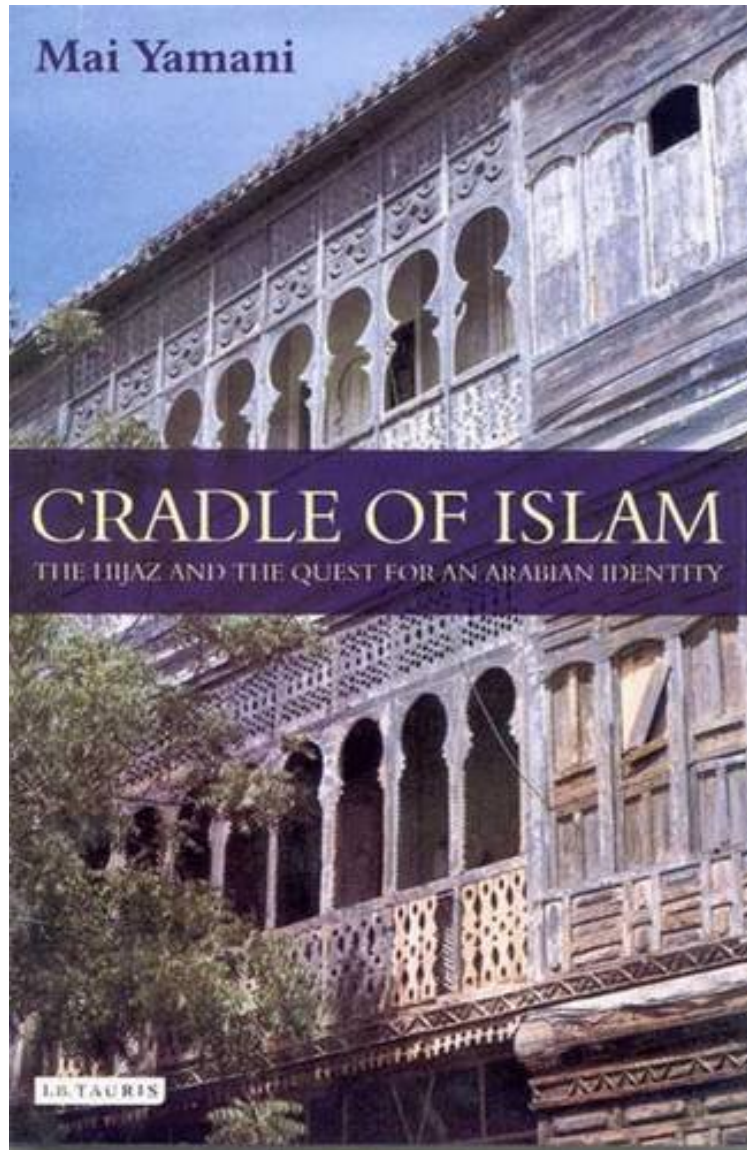


(Free and download) Cradle of Islam: The Hijaz and the Quest for Identity in Saudi Arabia

Cradle of Islam: The Hijaz and the Quest for Identity in Saudi Arabia

Mai Yamani

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Mai Yamani : Cradle of Islam: The Hijaz and the Quest for Identity in Saudi Arabia before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Cradle of Islam: The Hijaz and the Quest for Identity in Saudi Arabia:

0 of 2 people found the following review helpful. great choiceBy msCaliforniaSo sorry about the delay in

acknowledging this wonderful book as it arrived some time back and in excellent condition. Thank you! 2 of 4 people found the following review helpful. *Cradle of Islam : The Hijaz and the Quest for an Arabian Identity* By Michael Rubin The Saudi challenge remains one of Washington's greatest. While nominally a U.S. ally, Saudi princes regularly donate to Al-Qaeda, Hamas, and other terrorist groups. Saudi schools promote Wahhabism, the radical and intolerant interpretation of Islam embraced by Osama bin Laden and the 9-11 hijackers. Despite this, many of those who watch the kingdom maintain that any U.S. government decrease in support for the Saudi royal family would backfire. They say that the Saud are the lesser of two evils: no matter how corrupt and unhelpful King Fahd and his family may be, the even more Islamist Ikhwan, fiercely conservative tribal Bedouin, would be worse. Yamani, a Saudi scholar resident at London's Royal Institute for International Affairs, has another idea. In *Cradle of Islam*, she provides a detailed study of the Hijazi identity, a taboo subject inside the kingdom today. She begins with a brief account of how, in 1924, Abdul Aziz Saud and tribesmen from Najd, the conservative central region of Arabia, overran the more cosmopolitan kingdom of Hijaz, home to such cities as Mecca, Medina, and Jeddah. The conquest of Hijaz was easier than its digestion. It would be eight years before the Saudi family would feel secure enough in their control to abolish Hijaz and announce the formation of Saudi Arabia. The Saudi state was not able to eradicate regional feeling despite sometimes violent attempts to stifle dissent. The reasons are multifold: tribal Najdis continue to resist assimilation of the urban Hijazis, forcing Hijazis to rally around their own. Traditional families of Mecca and Medina, meanwhile, resent the Najdi takeover of the lucrative pilgrimage trade. While Najdi religious clerics imposed Wahhabism upon their Hijazi brethren, they distrust the sincerity of the conversion. Many Hijazis prefer a more liberal approach to religion. As a result, Saudi history is punctuated by occasional purges of Hijazi elites from positions of influence. Yamani details the interactions of elite Hijazi families as a window into the survival of Hijazi identity. The meat of her study is anthropological. By examining everything from customs of birth, marriage, death, and life events in between, Yamani constructs a convincing argument that the Saudis' 80-year effort to eradicate Hijazi culture and society has failed. Hijazis retain a strong identity, often catalyzed by Riyadh's "Saudification" policies. So where goes Hijaz? Yamani suggests that it will play an intermediary role between the Saudi orthodoxy to which it remains economically connected and the more cosmopolitan Arab world with which it identifies culturally. With an identity too strong for Riyadh to eradicate, Hijaz might be a moderating influence within the Saudi state. At the very least, a better understanding of Saudi regionalism bypasses the old argument that Western governments should support the Saudi royal family only because the Ikhwan are worse. That might be true, but bolstering relations with regional elites might provide a way to withdraw some support from the Saudi royal family without necessarily empowering even more Islamist elements. Middle East Quarterly, Summer 2005 6 of 6 people found the following review helpful. *Folk ethnography of a group of Saudi elites* By David Wilmsen This work is an ethnography of the elites of Hijazi society and their attempts to preserve and in some instances embellish or invent their local traditions and thereby assert their distinctiveness from broader Saudi society. That practice is not without its peril in the face of the overbearing Najdi cultural uniformity imposed by the house of Saud. For it means denying in often subtle ways official nationalistic doctrines in a state not known for its tolerance of diversity. That the Hijaz is the birthplace of Islam and its prophet shields the Hijazi elite, the *ʿawa'il* (prominent families), some of whom can rightly claim descent from the Prophet or his companions, from some of the censure that other segments of Saudi society could face when asserting their own regional identities. Nevertheless it does not entirely remove them from the scrutiny of the religious police and other elements of official enforcement. The author sets about cataloguing the techniques employed by these prominent Hijazi families to affirm their unique identities as placing them apart from their Najdi cousins, whom they tend to regard as something of uncouth bumpkins next to their venerable, urbane cosmopolitanism. As she observes, this is practised in some of the most basic aspects and activities of human existence. Things like manner of dress; habits of eating and entertaining; rituals surrounding birth, death, and marriage; and the observance of festivities in the religious calendar are all invested with significance for the Hijazi identity. As such they may attract the attention of the authorities, who on one hand are anxious to minimize regional differences but who on the other wish to cultivate the favour of Hijazi notables precisely for their sophistication in education, commerce, and technical skill. This is an engaging book for all of its being somewhat nave in its execution, arising perhaps out of the author's origins among the self same people as those she is examining. It thus falls into that genre of anthropological writing and inquiry performed by natives of the societies under study. There is nothing at all wrong with this. True to one of the characteristics of that genre, it tends to favour description over theory. Given the present state of anthropological theory--if such it may be called now--as it has devolved over the last generation, this may be a good thing. Toward the end of the work, the author makes a few attempts at aligning her work with some current fashions when she speaks of the gendering of Hijazi society, but she is not clear about what she means by that or how she views it. Indeed, this itself tends to be a bit of a gendered work as such, inasmuch as the author dwells somewhat more on the distaff side of Hijazi elite society. This too reflects her own origins, as it were, and is not necessarily to be lamented.

In 1932, the Al Saud family officially incorporated the Kingdom of the Hijaz into the new Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The Hijazis became a people without a country of their own. *Cradle of Islam* focuses on contemporary Hijazi life and

culture made subservient to the dominant national rules of Saudi Arabia, as dictated by a political and religious elite rooted in the central Najd region of the country. But centralization was not enough to assimilate or tame Saudi Arabia's distinct regional cultures. The Al Saud family could rule but not fully integrate. This book is an insiders account of the hidden world of the Hijazis including their rituals which have helped to preserve Hijazi identity until now.

""Mai Yamani is consistently the sharpest observer of modern Saudi Arabia and paints a vivid picture of the cauldron of political and religious divisions that are tearing it apart. This is a major contribution to the study of Arab diversity-- at a time when the West urgently needs to understand it."" -- Tim Sebastian, BBC Hard Talk""My father was born in Mecca and much of what I have read here reminds me of my father, grandfather and relations. Mai Yamani has provided us with a unique perspective on the Hijaz. This is an invaluable contribution to the social and political history of a hitherto largely unknown, ignored and unrecognised people. An irrefutably powerful argument for the preservation of cultural identity, respect for human dignity and a celebration of our human diversity."" -- HRH Prince Hassan of Jordan""Definitely authoritative, thought-provoking and refreshing...revealing book a fascinating read a unique access to a rather unknown area of diversity and cultural richness."" --Iftikhar H. Malik, The Muslim World Book