**The history of Saudi Arabia**

in its current form as a state began with its foundation in 1930 by Abdulaziz Al Saud, although the human history of the region extends as far as 20,000 years ago. The region has had a global impact twice in world history:

From the mid-20th century the discovery of vast oil deposits propelled it into a key economic and geo-political role.[citation needed]

At other times, the region existed in relative obscurity and isolation, although from the 7th century the cities of Mecca and Medina had the highest spiritual significance for the Muslim world, with Mecca becoming the destination for the Hajj pilgrimage, an obligation, at least once in a believer's lifetime, if at all possible.

For much of the region's history a patchwork of tribal rulers controlled most of the area. The Al Saud (the Saudi royal family) emerged as minor tribal rulers in Najd in central Arabia. From the mid-18th century, imbued with the religious zeal of the Wahhabi Islamic movement, they became aggressively expansionist. Over the following 150 years, the extent of the Al Saud territory fluctuated. However, between 1902 and 1927, the Al Saud leader, Abdulaziz, carried out a series of wars of conquest which resulted in his establishing the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 1930.

From 1930 until his death in 1953, Abdulaziz ruled Saudi Arabia as an absolute monarchy. Thereafter six of his sons in succession have reigned over the kingdom:

Saud, the immediate successor of Abdulaziz, faced opposition from most in the royal family and was eventually deposed.

Faisal replaced Saud in 1964. Until his murder by a nephew in 1975, Faisal presided over a period of growth and modernization fueled by oil wealth. Saudi Arabia's role in the 1973 oil crisis and, the subsequent rise in the price of oil, dramatically increased the country's political significance and wealth.

Khalid, Faisal's successor, reigned during the first major signs of dissent: Islamist extremists temporarily seized control of the Grand Mosque in Mecca in 1979.

Fahd became king in 1982 - during his reign Saudi Arabia became the largest oil producer in the world. However, internal tensions increased when the country allied itself with the United States, and others, in the Gulf War of 1991. In the early 2000s, the Islamicist opposition to the regime carried out a series of terrorist attacks.

Abdullah succeeded Fahd in 2005. He instituted a number of mild reforms to modernize many of the country's institutions and, to some extent, increased political participation.

**Pre-Islamic Arabia**

There is evidence that human habitation in the Arabian Peninsula dates back to about 63,000 years ago.

Archaeology has revealed some early settled civilizations: the Dilmun civilization on the east of the Arabian Peninsula, Thamud north of the Hejaz, and Kindah kingdom and Al-Magar civilization in the central of Arabian Peninsula. The earliest known events in Arabian history are migrations from the peninsula into neighbouring areas.

There is also evidence from Timna (Israel) and Tell el-Kheleifeh (Jordan) that the local Qurayya/Midianite pottery originated within the Hejaz region of NW Saudi Arabia, which suggests that the biblical Midianites originally came from the Hejaz region of NW Saudi Arabia before expanding into Jordan and Southern Palestine.

The spread of Islam

Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam, was born in Mecca in about 570 and first began preaching in the city in 610, but migrated to Medina in 622. From there, he and his companions united the tribes of Arabia under the banner of Islam and created a single Arab Muslim religious polity in the Arabian Peninsula.

The tribes of Arabia at the time of the spread of Islam (expandable map(

Following Muhammad's death in 632, Abu Bakr became leader of the Muslims as the first Caliph. After putting down a rebellion by the Arab tribes (known as the Ridda wars, or "Wars of Apostasy"), Abu Bakr attacked the Byzantine Empire. On his death in 634, he was succeeded by Umar as caliph, followed by Uthman ibn al-Affan and Ali ibn Abi Talib. The period of these first four caliphs is known as the Rashidun or "rightly guided" Caliphate (al-khulafā' ar-rāshidūn). Under the Rashidun Caliphs, and, from 661, their Umayyad successors, the Arabs rapidly expanded the territory under Muslim control outside of Arabia. In a matter of decades Muslim armies decisively defeated the Byzantine army and destroyed the Persian Empire, conquering huge swathes of territory from the Iberian peninsula to India. The political focus of the Muslim world then shifted to the newly conquered territories.

Nevertheless, Mecca and Medina remained the spiritually most important places in the Muslim world. The Quran requires every able-bodied Muslim who can afford it, as one of the five pillars of Islam, to make a pilgrimage, or Hajj, to Mecca during the Islamic month of Dhu al-Hijjah at least once in his or her lifetime.[9] The Masjid al-Haram (the Grand Mosque) in Mecca is the location of the Kaaba, Islam's holiest site, and the Masjid al-Nabawi (the Prophet's Mosque) in Medina is the location of Muhammad tomb; as a result, from the 7th century, Mecca and Medina became the pilgrimage destinations for large numbers of Muslims from across the Muslim world.