

Americans in Arabia: American Geologists and Workers in Saudi Arabia during the 1930s and the 1940s

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ABSTRACT

Oil American companies started searching and discovering oil after the famous concession between the Saudi King Abdul-Aziz Ibn Saud and the representative of Standard Oil of California in 1933. American companies such as Standard Oil of California (SoCal) and Texas Oil Co. (Texaco) started sending its engineers and geologists to discover oil in the Saudi desert. They interacted with the native Arabs (Bedouins) who worked with them as guardians and guides. There are many names from each side that engaged in shaping that unique interaction such as Max Steineke and Khamis Bin Ramthan. This paper will study the history of those individuals who shaped the relationship between the two nations and built bridges between the people of both nations and gave the opportunity for them to know each other's closely. Moreover, this paper will study the papers that were written by the American geologists themselves that describe their journey in the desert. In addition, this paper will include interviews in several journals and magazines that were published by ARAMCO (Arabian-American Oil Company) and other Saudi historical organizations.

Key words: Saudi Arabia, the United States of America, Middle East, Oil, Standard Oil, Aramco, Casoc.

INTRODUCTION

The world oil boom began in the second half of the nineteenth century in North America. During that energyboom, Standard Oil Company became the biggest oil company in the world. However, by the second decade of the twentieth century, as a result of a Supreme Court decision (*Standard Oil Company of New Jersey v. the United States*), Standard Oil had divided into many small branches such as Standard Oil of California and Standard Oil of New Jersey. Those companies focused their exploration operation on North and South America. They desired to expand their scope of exploration to the Middle East, but there were several obstacles in their way. Most of the Middle East at that time was under the political influence of the British Empire. The American oil companies' leaders thought that it was a great step to start exploring the Middle Eastern lands and search for oil in places that were not under British influence [38].

The beginning of the unification epic of Saudi Arabia began with Ibn Sa'ud's (King Abdul-Aziz bin Abdul-Rahman Al-Faisal) attack on his ancestors' capital, Riyadh, in 1902. After that attempt, he annexed most of the Arabian Peninsula, defeating many enemies of his royal family. By the year 1932, King Abdul-Aziz had completed the unification of his Kingdom and started looking for financial resources to begin the development plans for his country and people. In 1922, King Abdul-Aziz signed Al-Uqair Protocol with the British Empire. Sir Percy Cox, the British high commissioner in Iraq, represented the British side in this agreement. This drew the Saudi boundaries with Iraq and Kuwait, which were under British mandate. After the Protocol, the British government stopped the king's annual reward, which resulted in a financial crisis for his government. Due to that, in 1923, King Abdul-Aziz gave a small concession to explore oil in the Eastern province of Saudi Arabia to Frank Holmes, who was known as "Abu Naft" (the Father of Oil). Holmes was a New Zealand mining engineer who explored oil in Bahrain and Kuwait and other parts of the Middle East; however, after beginning the geological studies of the Eastern Province, he was not enthusiastic about exploring in Arabia because he did not believe in finding oil in commercial quantities. This, plus his financial problems, caused him to sell the Kuwaiti and Bahraini concessions to American companies [39].

In the beginning of the 1930s, Standard Oil of California (SoCal) approached the Saudi king and started a negotiation agreement, encouraged by their success in Bahrain and following mining engineer

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Karl S. Twitchell’s recommendation. The minister of finance for the king, Abdullah Al-Sulaiman, led the Saudi group in the negotiation, and the American lawyer Sir Lloyd N. Hamilton represented SoCal. After three-and-a-half months of hard negotiations, the Saudis and SoCal signed the agreement in Jeddah on May 29, 1933 [39].

After the agreement, the American company began the exploration journey for oil that lasted about five years. This branch of the company was called California-Arabian Standard Oil Company (Casoc) until 1944, when it became Arabian-American Oil Company (Aramco). The task was not easy because it was a new experience for the Americans and because of the size of the concession area. Saudi Arabia is a large country and the concession area size was around 371,263 square miles. It was bigger than the entire country of France. The geologists involved faced many obstacles and many cultural differences pertaining to food, clothes, religion, and weather; however, they succeeded in overcoming those obstacles and they built a strong relationship with the Saudi people. At the same time, the Saudi king benefited from the American-British economic conflict in the Middle East, especially in the Gulf region, in the 1920s. The most important reason behind him favoring the Americans was that he needed to protect his kingdom from meddling by the British or other European/far-Eastern powers. In addition, he preferred the Americans because they did not interfere in the kingdom’s domestic affairs [8].

This paper will examine the American and Saudi interactions in the field, as well as the history of the first oil pioneers in Saudi Arabia and their mutual reactions to cultural differences such as food, clothes, weather, hospitality, and religion. It also explores several examples of the strong relationships between some of the geologists and the people of Saudi Arabia, as well as focusing on some of the sensitive issues in Saudi Arabia at that time, such as slavery and the American reaction to that practice. The founding of Aramco is one of the most extraordinary events in the history of Saudi Arabia and the Middle East in the past thousand years. This paper will tell the story of the individuals of two nations whose efforts contributed to writing a new phase of the history of the Arabian Desert.

Likewise, this study shows the impact of the two cultures on each other and the mutual curiosity about their type of life. For example, Saudis became good at American sports such as baseball and football while the Americans participated in Eastern province sports such as donkey races and other local games. In addition, it highlights how the Americans used to eat Saudi food and sit on the floor with crossed legs like Arabs while eating with their right hands. It shows the Americans’ reaction to the Saudi government protocol and their opinion of its customs. It is important to notice that one of the origins for the good friendship between the Saudis and the Americans was fear of the Saudi government, because any American-Saudi fight would result in jail time and deportation [11].

The Arabian Desert was an independent land that had never been under a western occupation in its history. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia’s origin was an alliance between political leadership (Al-Sa’ud) and religious leadership (Aal Al-Shaikh). The king was a devout Muslim and surrounded by religious leaders. Because of his shrewdness, he managed to ease the religious leaders’ concerns about the presence of the Americans and kept the Americans searching for oil. The people of Arabia consisted of various segments such as Bedouins, villagers, and city residents, and the vast majority of them especially in the interior, had not seen or interacted with any Western people before this [38-42-53]. It was a unique adventure for the early Americans due to this, and they had to be cautious in their interactions with the local people. At the beginning, they dressed like the Saudis and grew their beards, especially during their early trips to the inner side of the desert and because it was illegal to wear Western clothes in the kingdom at that time. The early Americans were mesmerized by the type of hospitality and kindness that was characteristic of the people of the desert [1-14-15].

During this time, economic crisis struck both the Saudis and the Americans, so SoCal searched for a partner that could support it financially and support its operation in Arabia. SoCal sold half of the Saudi concession to Texas Oil Company (Texaco). After five years, in 1938, oil was discovered in commercial amounts. However, the company stopped its operation after the beginning of the Second World War until the end of the War in 1945 due to many Americans in Saudi Arabia returning to the United States.

The scholarship studying the interaction between the American geologists and the Saudi people in the early stages of oil discovery is rare. Most of the historical scholarship of oil in Saudi Arabia discusses the political and economic gains of the Americans from discovering oil in Saudi Arabia. In addition, it

studies the American system's influence on the founding of Aramco, such as labor problems. It is a field that political scientists and international relation experts study in-depth, such as in Robert Vitalis' book, *America's Kingdom: Mythmaking on the Saudi Oil Frontier*, and *Search For Security: Saudi Arabian Oil and American Foreign Policy, 1939-1949* by Aaron David Miller. In addition, this field discusses the Saudi-American agreement and the role of the Saudi government during that period.

Thomas Barger's letters to his wife Kathleen are considered one of the important sources that discuss the life of the Saudis and the American reaction to the life of the desert. Barger's letters were published in a book called *Out in the Blue*. Also, Philip McConnell's diary is considered an important source on the American-Saudi interactions in the early days of exploration. Oral history and newspaper interviews such as Carol Hicke's book *American Perspectives of Aramco, the Saudi Arabian Oil Producing Company, 1930s to 1980s* and Abdul-Aziz Al-Shalfan interviews, are considered important because of the lack of published books or available documents that discuss the social history of that period. Likewise, journalists contributed to the scholarship that studies the history of that period such as Aramco World Magazine articles. Some of the company workers wrote books that recount their lives and their involvement in the history of the company, such as Michael Sheldon Cheney's book, *Big Oil Man From Arabia* and Philip McConnell's book, *The Hundred Men*, and *Kings and Camels: an American in Saudi Arabia* by Grant Butler.

Photography is also an important source of information that presents the life of those Americans and their experience in the desert. American workers and geologists who came to Saudi Arabia took a sizable number of images that illustrate the American experience of the life of the desert. Joseph Mountain, who came to Saudi Arabia in the 1930s as a pilot, took around 500 images that demonstrate the social life and the American's interaction with the Saudis. There are also various company publications published during the American management such as *Aramco Handbook*, Aramco World Magazine, the Arabian Sun and Flare, and Qafilat Az-Zait, and books that were published after the Saudis took control of the company, such as Steve McMurray's book, *Energy to the World: The Story of Saudi Aramco* [39].

The American focus on oil production began south of the United States in Latin America. Most of the American companies started searching for oil in Mexico, Columbia, and Venezuela in the beginning of the twentieth century. The focus on exploring oil in the Middle East came later, in the beginning of the 1930s. Most of the American geologists who came to Saudi Arabia had worked in South American oil operations. Similar to the Saudi experience, the historical scholarship that studies American oil companies' expansion focuses on political and economic histories. Latin American historical scholarship that studies oil production focuses on the same fields, as well as the nationalization of oil companies. John D. Wirth's book *The Oil Business in Latin America: the Early Years* analyzes the politics of energy in Latin American oil industry.

THE INTERACTION WITH THE SAUDIS AND THE OBSERVATION OF THE CULTURE

During the late days of 1933, American geologists and exploration equipment began to arrive in Saudi Arabia. The American geologists who arrived at that time were few. Upon their arrival, they settled in two camps: the first was in Jubail and the second was in Jabel Dhahran [40-44]. The Saudi government appointed a number of guardians and guides for them to help the Americans know find their way in the desert; one of them was Kumayyis bin Ramthan. At the beginning of the exploration, the American team had a small plane for aerial photography that was piloted by Dick Kerr, Charles Rocheville, and Joseph Mountain [14]. The beginning of the exploration was not encouraging; however, when Max Steineke arrived in Saudi Arabia, exploration operations changed dramatically because he planned a new, careful strategy. American geologists were convinced that the Dammam area contained oil, so he focused the drilling in the Dammam Dome where the first geologists (Robert Miller and Krug Henry) believed there was a reservation of oil. The company leaders thought about giving up the Arabian venture but Steineke fought for it and requested more time. In 1938, oil was produced in commercial quantities [39-40-].

Officials such as Max Steineke, the chief American geologist, believed that the company employees, after arriving in Arabia, should go to see the people and observe the new culture. Thomas C. Barger—an American geologist and the company president and CEO 1959-1969—described in a letter to his

wife Kathleen that when he arrived in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia in 1937, there were around sixty Americans in the camp. During his arrival, there was a meeting between the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia, Prince Saud, and the king of Bahrain. He recounted that his new boss Max Steineke greeted him and suggested that he should go to see the celebration.

This morning, at Max’s suggestion, I went back to al-Khobar to see the celebration. Every Arab was armed with either a sword or a rifle or both. The collection of rifles was the most varied I have ever seen. There were all makes and calibers, from the latest bolt action to ancient muzzle-loaders, such as you see in the movies [3].

The Saudi dancing and the variety of swords and rifles amazed Barger, and he compared that type of dancing with that of the Native Americans because the Saudis danced with their rifles in their hands. Moreover, Joseph Mountain shows the Saudi dancing and war celebration in his extraordinary photography collection and illustrating this way of dancing by swords and rifles [1-40].

It seems that it was an obligation or a part of Arab hospitality that the company workers had to join the king, the crown prince, or the provinces’ princes when they visited the Eastern province [11-40]. When American workers passed the prince’s camp, they have to join him to drink coffee, tea, and eat a premium meal even if they were heading to work. The banquets in Saudi Arabia during the 1930s and the beginning of the 1940s consisted of meat and rice; a whole camel or sheep would be placed on a large tray of rice, with Arab bread on top of the meat [1]. The Americans imitated the Saudi way of sitting on the floor, legs crossed, and eating with the right hand. It was a custom that if the honored guest finished his meal and arose from the banquet, every one had to follow him and finish their meal. Sometimes that annoyed the Americans because of the rush in washing their hands and following the guest to the *Majlis* [1]. However, because it was difficult for them, the Saudi Government started to serve banquets that contained knives and forks, surprising some of the Saudi Bedouins [3]. Moreover, the Americans became familiar with the Arab coffee customs; Thomas Barger described a coffee gathering in the prince’s *Majlis*: “It is good manners to drink two cups of coffee and even better to drink three.” [3-11].

The American geologists became expert in knowing the Arab manners. Barger recounted that there was an argument between the prince of the Eastern port Al-Uqair and Max Steineke about the prince refusing to give them two soldiers because the order did not come from his superior, the prince of the Eastern Province Sa’ud Bin Jiluwi. Steineke writes, “Then they served us sweetened tea, but insulted us. The Emir’s cup had been filled first, forgivable but showing no deference to his guests, and then the insult. The chief soldier’s cup was filled next.” [3].

Americans discussed their culture, weather, and their country’s style of life with the Arabs during the early phases of discovery. They were amazed at what good listeners the Arabs were and how curious they were about American culture. Americans complained about the hot weather in Saudi Arabia and noticed that some years were hotter than others; on the other hand, Saudis were surprised about the winter in the United States and they “could not understand anyone would live in a country piled with ice and snow half of the year.” [1-3-34-49]

The camel was the most important animal in Saudi Arabia at the time of the Americans’ arrival [34]. In addition, it is the most precious property for the people of the desert. The company used “the ship of the desert” in their early stages. In the beginning, camels were used as rides for the early geologists and then they relied on them to transport goods, as well [2-45-53]. Barger told a story about meeting an old Bedouin near a well in one of his field trips near Selwa:

The other day we met an old camel herder at a well. He asked Walt if it rained in the north. Walt replied, “Yes, and perhaps it will rain here.”

“Yes” replied the old man, “Allah Kareem,” God is generous. Later, the old man brought us a big aluminum bowl of camel’s milk. It taste good. The Bedu can live on the salty water of this well because they let the camel drink it and they drink the camel’s milk. It is not unusual for a man to go for months without drinking water at all [3].

Camels and their products were a source of life and a sign of generosity for the people of the desert. More interestingly, Americans knew the *Wasm*, the tribe marking on the camels’ hips so every tribe could know their own camels [1]. Americans also became familiar with other Arabian Desert animals

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such as the Arabian Oryx or *AlMaha*. They held some of them in their camps' barns and some of them were sent to American zoos [9].

The Americans also learned many words of the Arabic language that were important to use with the local population, such as “*Salaam aleikum*,” which means peace be with you and “*Mesak Allah bilKhair*,” which means the peace of God be with your evening. In addition to their personal efforts to learn Arabic, the American company newspaper, “The Arabian Sun and Flare,” had an occasional section called Arabica to teach the Arabic language [17-29]. It is amazing how Thomas Barger observed the Saudi Arabian culture so accurately shortly after his arrival. This story proves how he was accurate in describing the Saudi culture:

After the tea the coffee. The coffee beans are roasted in a shallow pan at the campfire, ground with a mortar and pestle and made into coffee immediately. It is served in little cups, smaller than the teacups, which are half filled with the black unsweetened brew. Sometimes it is flavored with cardamom seed, sometimes with cloves. To get a full cup of coffee is a sign of disfavor, the implication being that you should drink up and be gone, the sooner you leave the better [3].

It is true that the Arabs have their own habits that they inherited generation after generation regarding hospitality, and it is amazing how some of those Americans knew how to deal with those habits immediately upon their arrival to the Arabian Desert.

LIFE OF THE ARABIAN DESERT

The early pioneers enjoyed the life of the desert, which was a new experience for them. Thomas Barger was amazed at how the Arabs enjoyed the life of hunting, especially by using hawks, and how the Emirs trained those hawks to be good hunters. He told a story of one of the Emir of Selwa's hawks, whose name was Fellah, in which he says, “The old hawk, Fellah, has caught 113 *hubarrah*, a game bird something like a sage hen and about the size of a young turkey.” [3]. Other Americans, such as Kerr and Mountain, presented their fascination with falcons and the Bedouin way of hunting.

Mountain's photocollection contains many images of falcons and falconries because it was a favorite sport in Saudi Arabia [2-14]. It represents the genuinity of the Arabian culture. Barger was confused about the Saudi use of heated iron to cure illness; it was the first time that he encountered someone who used it like the Saudi Bedouins did. He saw that the use of heated iron and burningsome parts of the human body could be plausible because he figured that using the heated iron on a place other than the hurting place let the patient forget about the previous illness to focus on the new pain. Moreover, it was a Bedouin custom to give a gift to their guest, such as a camel. It is important to mention that crossing the Arabian Peninsula was one of the heroic adventures for those Americans [3-40].

It is amazing how Thomas Barger focused on every detail of Saudi life. However, he was confused about the Muslim prayers because he says that the soldiers prayed five times every day while they were in the camp and prayed three times when traveling, and that is not accurate. Muslims while traveling are allowed to pray the second and the third prayers (Dhuhr and Asr) together and the fourth and the fifth prayers (Maghrib and Isha) together which make it seem likethey are only praying three times while in fact they are still five prayers; this is becauseIslam makes worship easier for travelers [3].

Americans geologists, in their trips in the Eastern Province, met a lot of Bedouins who were watering their camels or traveling in the desert. The Bedouins lived in the desert in black tents made from goat wool. These tents were a useful home for a people who travel frequently in the desert chasing water and grass for their camels. The Bedouin tent divides into two parts: one is for men and the owner's guests, and the other part is for the women and children and it is not allowed forstrange men to enter that part [2].

Americans became experts in the Arabic language and its accents during their discussions with the guides. Some Bedouin tribes had a pronunciation for a place thatwas different from other tribes. For example, Thomas Barger told a story about when they were surveying the east coast around the boundary of the Trucial Coast Sheikdoms (The UAE currently.). Their guide, who was an expert in that area, was from the Murra tribe and he pronounced the Oasis of “Liwa” as “Jiwa” and that confused them because they did not find it on the map until Khamis explained the difference to them [3]. While Americans enjoyed the Bedouins' companionship, sometimes they complained about some of their

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habits, such as insisting on the invitation for drinking coffee or inviting them for coffee at an unpleasant time. However, they admitted that the Bedouins had a good sense of humor and were not offended when some of the Americans joked with them [3].

Likewise, the Americans became familiar with the local history of the Arabian Peninsula, learning most of it from the Bedouin soldiers, the guides, and the company publications. For example, old Bedouin soldiers told their stories about participating in the desert tactics of raids before the unification of the kingdom [3-28]. American geologists during their exploration field trips spent some of their time playing football, which was completely unknown to Arabs in the desert. What surprised them is that some of those Bedouins became experts in playing football. It was clear that some of those Americans enjoyed the life in Saudi Arabia and adapted themselves to the life habits of the people of that place. They drank camel milk for the first time in their lives and they ate baby camel meat, which they thought was similar to beef [3-44]. In addition to learning the Saudi culture, Americans enjoyed listening to Arab poems, even though they did not understand the meaning. Their amusement came from the way the Arabs used to recite their poems; most of the poems they heard were about the bravery of their tribesmen or recounting the glories of the king or one of the Gulf's royal families [1].

The exploration of oil was not an easy task. One of the company's first Saudi employees, Abdul-Aziz Al-Shalfan, recounted his time with the company and how the exploration trips were risky because of their length (some of those trips lasted for more than eight months in the desert). One such trip was in May 1934 through the East Province and the center of Arabia looking for geological samples, and it consisted of him, two American geologists, and ten soldiers and guides (one of them was the famous Khamis Bin Ramthan). He said that the company plane came every week to bring supplies and mail to a particular site. The harshness of the desert appeared in his words: “The wolves parks do not let us sleep. Scorpions disappear in the day light but in the night they appear and bite some of us.” [4]. In addition, when he injured his hand, there was no professional hospital nearby, so the company sent him to Bahrain.

Similarly scarce in Saudi Arabia was clean, sweet water, the source of life. Thomas Barger mentioned in his field trips to the Eastern Province that most of the wells were salty or bitter. He was astonished by how the children in the desert drank such water from these wells. In addition, he was amazed at how some Bedouins relied on camel milk because they let their camels drink that water, then they would drink the milk. Al-Shalfan said that in 1935 when he resided in Dhahran, which was at that time the headquarters of the company and a primitive camp, sweet water was rare, so the company brought water from Bahrain or other wells near the gulf [5]. Al-Shalfan talks about the American company representatives' and geologists' trips to Riyadh or Al-Hijaz and how they were difficult, long trips. There were no paved roads and the trip takes around eight days from Dhahran to Jeddah in Al-Hijaz [6].

Americans noticed the change that King Abdul-Aziz (or as he was known in English sources, Ibn Sa'ud) had brought about in his kingdom. It was obvious for them that the king was respected throughout the kingdom because of the application of Islamic laws. Americans respected the laws while they were there, because they applied to them, as foreigners, as well [33]. The Americans were the king's guests, which meant no one could interfere with them. The country went through unification wars for more than thirty years but when the Americans arrived, the king's status was stronger than ever before. The American geologists read some of the famous books that were written by European travelers about the life of Arabia. They noticed the differences especially when they heard stories from the Bedouin soldiers and guides about life before the founding of the modern Saudi Arabia by Ibn Sa'ud. They noticed it by observing the formation of their guides and soldiers; they were from many Arabian tribes. Most of the Americans admired King Abdul-Aziz and believed that “the biggest change in centuries has been Ibn Sa'ud.” [3].

The Americans shared their country's history and the stories of the Founding Fathers with the Saudi Bedouins. Thomas Barger says about one of their surveying trips:

Jerry and I spent the night swapping stories with the soldiers around the campfire. Jerry told about Daniel Boone throwing tobacco in the eyes of his Indian captors and swinging over river gorge on a vine to make his escape. I stumbled through Custer's Last Stand. The Indians are called “the American Bedu” and the soldiers, “the Army of the Government.” Khamis and the

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rest are used to my terminology and especially love the Indians names such as Crazy Horse, Red Cloud and rain in the Face. Abdul-Hadi hadn't heard of the Indian before and was fascinated with them. He wanted to know where they lived and finally ventured his opinion that they must be related to the tribes in Iraq [3].

The Saudis Bedouins' fascination with the Native American stories rose from the similarities between the two cultures. The Bedouins and the Native Americans liked to live in the wild and had their own tribal system. The Bedouins began to compare their history with the Native Americans' history in the United States. Similarly, sometimes during the night circle in front of the campfire, some of the Saudi soldiers shared stories about some of the Arab heroes such as Abo Zaid. Moreover, Saudis used to write Arabic literature stories in the American company's newspaper *The Arabian Sun and Flare*[1].

American geologists were curious about various things such as the meaning of and the story behind the names of some places. For example, Barger tells many stories about his curiosity, such as asking about the story behind the naming of the well of *Abu Jumbia*(the father of the dagger) in the Eastern Province; it was named because two Bedouins were fighting and one of them stabbed the other with his dagger (*Jumbia*) and from that fighting the name became official for that well [3].

The American geologist pioneers who came during the 1930s encountered various new things that they had not seen or heard of before. The Arabian Desert was full of secrets that they had yet to discover. It was not only oil that they were discovering; they discovered many things that amazed them and surprised them as well such as knowing various new animals like the Dhab. The Dhab (a reptile looks like a lizard) was one of the new animals that the Americans did not know anything about. There is a strong relation between Bedouins and the Dhab because it is considered a necessary meal for them. More importantly, one of the issues that surprised Americans geologists was slavery. It was one of the practices that existed in Saudi Arabia during their arrival to the Eastern coast of the Arabian Gulf.

THE ISSUE OF SLAVERY

Some Americans were surprised that there were slaves in Saudi Arabia when they came to Saudi Arabia in 1938. Barger, in one of his letters, told his wife that the vast majority of those slaves are in the center of Saudi Arabia (Najd) and in the Western Coast (Hejaz) and those slaves were brought from East Africa [3]. Butler tries to justify slavery in Saudi Arabia in his book *Kings and Camels: an American in Saudi Arabia* by saying that slavery was accepted by Islamic law, but Islam encouraged slave owners to free their slaves. He references John Rentz, Aramco's adviser on Arab affairs, saying that slavery was not a big issue in Saudi Arabia and there were very few slaves in the country. It was obvious that the company took the kingdom's side on the issue of slavery and also they defended the kingdom's position. Paul Arnot says that there were a sizable number of the company workers who were slaves or former slaves [11-44]. The company did not intervene in that issue because it seems that they did not want to get involved in issues considered to be domestic affairs because of the interests they held with the kingdom.

FOOD AND DRINK

It is challenging for those Americans to adapt with the new type of food and drinks in Saudi Arabia. However, they became familiar with the Saudi type of cooking and enjoyed the Saudi cuisine whether in their field trips or in the camp. Rabbits were one of the best meals for Bedouins in the desert. American geologists enjoyed that meal during their field trips because Bedouins always hunted rabbits for their meals when traveling. They also enjoyed hunting gazelles and Arabian Oryx, or as Arabs called it, *Almaha*. American geologists noticed that the Arabs (Bedouins) who live in the desert, were healthier and stronger than the Arabs who lived in towns. In addition, Arabs were amused by the American type of eating, such as food canes, which were strange for some of those Bedouins who did not know anything except water, milk, and dates. On the contrary, American geologists were amazed by the Bedouin style of bread, which was known as coal bread (*QursAljamer*). Bedouins mixed brown flour with water and put it in a hot sand and coal for period of time then clean the upper side of it then put it in a pan with sugar and cook it for period of time. Americans realized the harshness of desert life when they saw their guards and guides eat locusts; Arabs believe that locusts are good for the stomach [3-40-49].

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It was not until the end of the Second World War that the company adopted a new system of providing fresh food to all of its workers, whether they were Americans or from other countries [11]. Alcohol was illegal in Saudi Arabia since the beginning of oil exploration, even in the privacy of one's home, because the king was anxious that if he gave Americans the permission, alcohol would be in his people's hands. When the company requested the king's permission, the king tested the Americans' ability to drink alcohol privately in their homes before giving them the grant in 1940 [38-49-54]. Camel milk was considered a basic meal for the people of the desert in addition to palm dates. Americans enjoyed both of them in their geological field trips and expanded their knowledge about dates and palm trees [23-24-25].

MUTUAL SPORTS

The interaction between Saudis and Americans resulted knowing each other's sports and games and playing those games and sports together in their free time. Americans came to Saudi Arabia from many parts of the United States. Some of them had seen sand dunes or had read about them. Even when they came to Saudi Arabia, they had read travelers' books that talked about sand dunes and the singing of those dunes. Barger says in one of his letters that he and Khamis witnessed a large sand dune whose height was around 250 feet. The dune was singing for more than nine minutes and that was more than any record that was written in the travelers' books [3-49]. Max Steineke enjoyed driving in the desert especially going over high sand dunes in the company cars, and he became an expert in that type of driving [49]. The Saudis enjoyed playing baseball and football, which they learned from the Americans, and some of them became expert at these games. Saudi villagers organized donkey races which the Americans participated in [13-22]. Aramco annually held New Year's celebrations with donkey races and would publish the news of that race in its newspaper *The Arabian Sun & Flare*. Mountain took many images of Eastern games that the Americans enjoyed in Saudi Arabia such as Carrom and the game of *Um Tisea* (the mother of nine) [2].

Along with the introduction of American sports for the Saudis, the arrival of the Americans introduced technological equipment to the Saudis. That introduction of technology resulted Saudis' curiosity that led them to seek knowledge and education. Moreover, it resulted an essential change in the Saudi type of thinking.

SAUDIS AND TECHNOLOGY

The arrival of the American oil company started an era of technological change for the people of the desert. There was a significant suspicion of technology among Saudis, most of whom had never seen any technological devices before such as planes, cars, and the telegram. Some Bedouins called cars “camels” because it was new to them, so some of the Saudi soldiers and the American geologists made jokes about them [3]. For example, they hired a Bedouin to stay with one of the soldiers guarding a station wagon because it needed a part repaired. After three days of exploring the desert, they returned back to the station wagon. The Bedouin requested his money because of his companionship for the other soldier and for guarding “the camel” (the station wagon) and he said that if they gave him more money he would be honored. Barger was shocked and retold this story about that Bedouin, Hamid, known as “the engineer from America,” *

Jerry then asked Hamid if the station wagon had gone out to get anything to eat while we were gone. He replied that no, the camel had stayed right where it was all the time. At this, the soldiers, without cracking so much as a smile, expressed a great shock of Hamid's thoughtlessness. Didn't he know to feed the car? Three days without water was bad for it. They continued until Hamid became genuinely concerned [3].

It is hard to imagine how some of those Arabs who lived in the desert reacted to the new technological equipment and cars. This story reflects the innocent thinking of some of those Saudi Bedouins. Moreover, Saudis were curious when they saw the plane for the first time in 1934. It was beyond their imaginations [15].

The arrival of the Americans with their strange equipment and vehicles made the Bedouins and villagers curious, and encouraged the Saudis to seek education. Soak Hoover, who was the third American to step in the Eastern Province, told this story about a little boy who became one of the company employees:

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We hired a man to watch our stockpile of equipment at Hinna; it had gasoline, food and everything. We would send our camel men in to pick it up. We'd come by every once in a while and often when we did the man that watched it had his little son with him. I thought it was his son. He turned out to be his nephew. He would come and ask us what we were doing and so on and I'd talk to him and play with him. In October 1965 I was out at Chevron Geophysical [Hoover formed and headed the subsidiary based in Houston, Texas] at my desk, working hard, and the telephone rang. It was San Francisco, our main office. I thought it was some boss going to raise hell with me. A man started talking to me in Arabic. I could tell he was a real Arab. He said, “Do you remember setting up a supply dump in Hinna?” I said, “Yes.” He said, “Do you remember my uncle? I was the little boy that you used to come and talk to and play with. Do you remember that you told my uncle that he should send me to a school and give me an education?... He sent me to school and I got a good education and now I'm back and I'm working in Dhahran for the Company in the Accounting Department.” His name was Ahmed Abdullah Qurishi [39].

It is fascinating to observe the impact of the American geologists and workers on the Saudis. Those American individuals inspired many Saudis who were illiterate to educate themselves and their children. Be that as it may, the Saudi reaction of the American presence in Saudi Arabia differed from one to another. While some Saudis thought it was a great opportunity for them to learn and have jobs, other Saudis were suspicious from the American presence.

THE REACTION OF SAUDIS

It is important to say that not all Saudi Arabians were friendly with others. Some Saudi Arabians were suspicious of strangers, whether they were Americans or Saudis but not from their tribe [49]. As a result of that, some of them would be cautious in dealing with the newcomers. It is a Saudi custom that if the other person gains the Saudi trust, the Saudi would be faithful and honest with him. Therefore, it was a matter of trust. When Khamis joined the early American geologists' company, he taught them how to deal with other Saudis. For example, Khamis gave Thomas Barger several pieces of advice: “Do not ask the Bedouin a direct question when you meet him. Do not ask immediately for directions, such as, what is the name of the *Jabal* over there? You will get the wrong answer or no answer at all, for you are a stranger, and he does not trust you.” [49].

Saudis were kind with Americans and the vast majority of them interacted with Americans in a good way. Elizabeth Arno, a house woman in Abqiq (one of the Aramco camps in the Eastern Province) says that the Saudis were nice people and they did not have an aggressive attitude toward Americans. She said that if she visited a nearby village, she would see curiosity and kindness. Paul Arnot says that Saudis are smart people and easy to train and there were no problems with them at all. They mastered the English language better than Americans mastered Arabic and he recalls that in his whole life in Arabia he has not seen any fighting between a Saudi and an American. In addition, when Americans became lost in the desert or their cars broke down or got stuck in the sand dunes without any communication devices, Saudis would help them to go back to their camps if they came upon them in the desert [11].

THE AMERICANS AND THE SAUDI PROTOCOL

One of the astonishing features of the American geologists' experience in Saudi Arabia was dealing with the Saudi king, his royal family, and the Eastern Province ruler (Al-Hasa) the *Amir* Sa'ud Bin Jiluwi. The Americans were not used to the Arab customs of dealing with their rulers. It was difficult for them to manage the conversation and the Saudi protocol at that time. They went to the Eastern Province's ruler to pay their respects every religious holiday and when they needed to start a field trip [2]. However, after a short time, they became experts in managing all of that protocol whether it involved wearing the Saudi clothes, starting a conversation, or knowing the time to visit and leave. American geologists were amazed that the Saudi protocol was so simple and delicate in the *Amir Majlis*. Thomas Barger recited one of his visits to Prince Sa'ud Bin Jiluwi to give his respect before beginning one of his field trips:

I first met Sa'ud Ibn Jiluwi, the governor of al-Hasa, on my second field trip in the fall of 1938. He was famed for his taciturnity. One time we went to his majlis in Hofuf. It was a long room on the second floor. He sat on a chair at the far end with chairs all along both sides occupied by his

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khuwiya or guards. I said, 'as-salam 'alaikum' (peace be upon you), and he said, 'wa 'alaikum as-salam' (and upon you be peace). We went through all the ritualized Arabic greetings, 'Evenings of light', 'How is your health?', 'Praise be to God!', 'And how is your health?', 'al-hamdu li-llah!' Then he stopped. We sat and we sat. I said, 'Well, we're going down to the south there. As you know, we're a party of geologists and we came to pay our respects.'

He just replied quietly, 'al-hamdu li-llah.' Then a guard down at the far end of the room hollered at the top of his voice, 'qahwa!' They had been watching IbnJiluwi's lips, and he had said 'coffee' under his breath. It caught us by surprise, this man with a rifle, bandoliers and daggers, suddenly shouting out like that. Then you could hear the call for coffee going down the stairs and clear out into the recesses of the kitchen, 'qahwa! qahwa!' Then they brought coffee. We chatted some more. Then he whispered 'qahwa!' We had more qahwa and then left [3].

It seems that those geologists in Saudi Arabia became more Saudis than American. They became experts in most of the Saudi culture and the life of the Bedouins in the desert.

American geologists had visited the capitol of Saudi Arabia, Riyadh, many times, especially in the early days of discovery between 1933 and 1938. Their task was to survey the geological layers of that part of the center of Saudi Arabia to drill for water wells. In addition, the Saudi King Abdul-Aziz requested the company to design an electrical system for his palace in Riyadh. Riyadh and its gardens and muddy houses and palaces amazed the Americans. The type of food that was served to them in Riyadh was different and more delicious than what they had before. They noticed the difference in the food quality, whether it was dates, butter, or milk. When they visited Riyadh, they lived in tents near the king's palace and it was known that they were the king's guests. At the same time, they would go to the minister of finance Abdullah Al-Suleiman's private farm outside of Riyadh to spend the day as his honored guests [3].

In addition, King Abdul-Aziz and the Saudi officials visited the American company's camps in Dhahran and RasTanura various times and the Americans were remarkably familiar with the Saudi protocol. Raymond Daniel presents a story about one of the king's sons who climbed one of the airplanes and started the engine when an American sergeant stopped him and “soundly spanked him.” All that day, the Americans and the Saudis were worried and afraid of the king's reaction but he approved of what the sergeant had done [20].

THE IMPACT OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR AND THE ARAB ISRAELI WAR

The Second World War, which had begun in Europe in 1939, had affected the Saudi-American oil production industry extremely. It had a huge economic and political impact on the Americans who stayed in Saudi Arabia as well as the Saudis but they were enthusiastic about the Arabian venture and the result of war in general [1]. As a result of the war and because of the Italian bombing of the Dhahran camp in October 1940, the United States government encouraged its citizens in Saudi Arabia to go home. The company almost shut down all of its oil operations in Saudi Arabia because of the war. Moreover, supplies from the United States became rare because it was difficult to import supplies due to the Axis raids in the oceans and the seas. Communication also became difficult. A small number (around one hundred) of geologists and engineers stayed in Saudi Arabia to manage the oil facilities and wait for the end of the war. Those geologists and workers were known as “the Hundred Men” that Philip McConnell talks about in his diary and book. In the night, they went to sleep in the desert near the camp and when they heard the siren they went quickly to the trenches [3-5]. At the same time, commodities prices began to increase with the American involvement in the Second World War [11-31-40].

Because of the war, the Americans who stayed in Saudi Arabia fell short in many important supplies, whether they were food or equipment such as car parts for repairs. For that, the Americans and the Saudis knew that they were alone in their situation until the end of the war and they would have to work together to obtain their previous accomplishments. For example, after the discovery of the *Abqaiq* oil field, Americans needed to carry supplies to their new operational area. Because of the shortages in cars, Khamis Bin Ramthan managed to organize camel caravans to transport supplies from the company warehouses in Dhahran to Abqaiq [1-49].

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Because of the war, food supplies stopped coming from America; therefore, the Saudis and the Americans searched for alternatives such as the Saudi-American farm project in Al-Kharj [12]. In addition, a Saudi person named Mutlaq proposed for an American (Steve Furman), who worked in the company and owned a farm in Al-Khobar, to bring cattle from Yemen so he could buy them. Furman agreed to that deal, so Mutlaq went to Yemen and drove that herd to Dhahran in 1942 [40-49]. By the end of the war, Furman owned a large ranch that contained thousands of animals such as sheep, chickens, rabbits, pigeons, and cattle.

By the end of the Second World War, Americans in Saudi Arabia began to face various political problems. Palestine fell under the British mandate after the Ottoman defeat in 1917. The Balfour Declaration promised a Jewish state in Palestine and that resulted in a Jewish migration to Palestine and continuing tensions with the Arabs, especially after the end of the Second World War. Arabs did not agree with the concept of Zionists establishing a Jewish state in Palestine. King Abdul-Aziz stood against that idea and helped the Arabs in Palestine to defy the Jewish presence. The Americans in Saudi Arabia were in a complicated position because of the American support for Zionism. King Abdul-Aziz threatened that Americans would lose their concession if the Zionists founded a Jewish state in Palestine [36]. The Saudi King sent an army that joined the other Arab armies in the Arab-Israeli War in 1948 which is known in Arabic literature as “the Catastrophe.” The American company leaders were shrewd because they convinced the king that they were against the American government’s policy of supporting the new Jewish State. The company made donations for Palestinian refugees and employed and trained Palestinians to work in the company [37].

CONCLUSION

The early pioneers who came to Saudi Arabia to search for oil took a huge gamble, whether by the company or the geologists who came looking for oil because of the Great Depression, the uncertainty of finding oil, and the bad operations in other locations. At the same time, the Saudi government was in need of money at that time but decided to choose the best bargain. In this paper, there are various stories that show the American adaptation to the Saudi culture. Those stories show their amusement and curiosity about the Saudi culture and their way of life during the early days of their arrival. They also present the Saudi fascination with American advancement in technology and management. During the 1930s and the 1940s, the Americans and the Saudis, with the differences in their lifestyle, language, religion, and culture succeeded in building strong relationships that were mostly unique.

From their experience in Saudi Arabia, Americans understood various important cultural values about the Saudis and the Arab culture in general that might not be understood without this experience. At the same time, they learned so much regarding the life of the Arabian Peninsula. They became aware about Saudi manners and the Saudi way of eating, drinking, and wearing clothes at that time. The scholarship that discusses the life of the people of Arabia and the arrival of the Americans is rare. Most of the studies regarding the history of oil and the Saudi American relation focus on the political and economic values of the founding of the Arabian American Oil Company.

I hope that this study will contribute to the scholarship of the cultural and social history of the early Americans in Saudi Arabia and their Saudi friends. In addition, I hope it clarifies some of the sensitive issues such as slavery and religion and the American reaction regarding them. Saudi Arabia was not utopia for those American geologists and workers. Some of them did not like the Saudi restrictions in the early years, such as not allowing alcohol and or religious leaders in their camps. Some of them did not like the Saudi hospitality custom because they thought it was annoying.

Americans came to Saudi Arabia to perform one task, and that was the exploration of oil but by the end they realized that it has been much more; nevertheless, they enjoyed their participation in Arabian life and the simple life the people lived. While they were in their field trips that some times lasted for many months, Americans enjoyed the companionship of the Saudis and exchange their cultural values, stories, and important figures with them. In other words, the relationship between Americans and Saudis was not about work only and exploring oil. Rather, it was a relationship that impacted them simultaneously and made both of them influence the other.

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