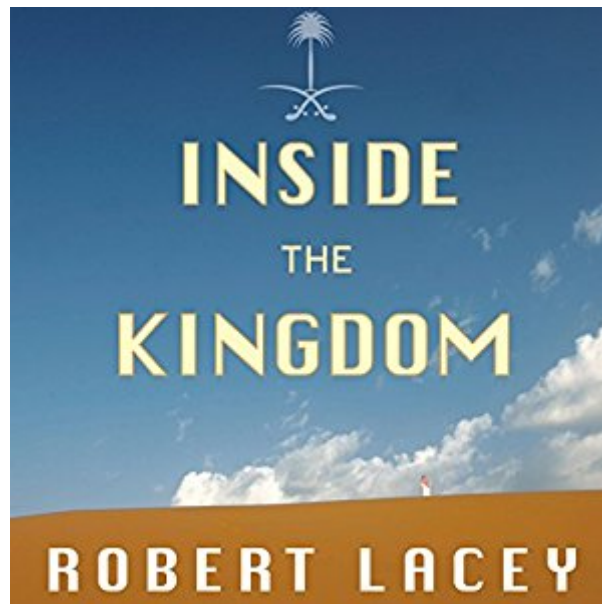


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Inside The Kingdom: Kings, Clerics, Modernists, Terrorists, And The Struggle For Saudi Arabia



Synopsis

Best-selling author Robert Lacey tells us what happened in the Middle East's oil-rich powerhouse---while we weren't looking.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

... to The Kingdom: Arabia and the House of Sa'Ud which ends at the beginning of the '80's. At the beginning of his previous work, Lacey relates how a Georgetown educated member of the House of Saud told him that he had lived in the Kingdom for 30 years, and if he tried to explain the country, and how it worked, the best he could do is get a B+ on the paper, and therefore, Lacey, as an outsider, could only hope to earn a C. I disagreed, and in my review, said that Lacey deserved at least a B+, if not an A-. For this work, which covers the last 30 years, he deserves a solid A. Lacey starts with "Angry Face," Juhayman, and his followers, including the expected "Mahdi," who seized the mosque in Mecca (Makkah) in 1979. (This event is also covered well by Trofimov, in The Siege of Mecca: The 1979 Uprising at Islam's Holiest Shrine). The author selected a wonderfully appropriate epigraph for this section, from Dostoevsky: "Nothing is easier than to denounce the evildoer. Nothing is more difficult than to understand him." Lacey did a commendable job in explaining the grievances of those being overwhelmed by the "future shock" that was roiling the Kingdom as a result of the influx of money and foreigners (and their ideas) following the sharp increase in oil prices after 1973.

i would give the book itself, as it is, 5 stars, had it not been entitled and promoted the way it is the

title 'inside the kingdom', at least to me, somehow implies that we are about to be briefed in on special insights that come from someone who intimately knows the country and its people as an insider, or, in the case of Saudi Arabia, at least a semi-insider. On the front flap, the text reads 'with inside the kingdom, bestselling author Robert Lacey gives readers a remarkable portrait in full of this most enigmatic of lands', so that also helped to build up expectations that, eventually, did not materialize. Whatsoever the book is little more than an extremely meticulously researched list of political events of the last 30 or so years, more or less in chronological order, and focussing almost exclusively on the royal Al-Saud family and their halo circle, and their significant political enemies within and outside Saudi Arabia. So far so good, and if that's what you are after, you will get it in excellence (in fact, the subtitle does narrow down the scope of the book), but do not expect real insider's knowledge. The book, for the best part of it, may have been written in a library anywhere in the world with good research facilities. The book is also very materialistic in the sense that it focusses on material events and, sometimes quite annoyingly, in such painstaking detail that I got the impression that digging up details had become to the author an end and not a means.

Saudi Arabia is the proverbial "man behind the curtain," the guy who exerts power, wields influence, and manipulates events but seeks to remain largely anonymous. Trouble is, Robert Lacey keeps pulling back the curtain to reveal the secrets and mysteries of this most peculiar kingdom. Thirty years ago Mr. Lacey published a history of Saudi Arabia called "The Kingdom," a book, by the way, that the House of Saud elected to ban. Mr. Lacey's new tome basically picks up where the last one left off. Mr. Lacey's prose is enjoyable and his book is well structured, describing and explaining events in a logical and chronological sequence with digressions and thematic developments where appropriate. And after reading his book, I have gained a renewed appreciation for the Law of Unintended Consequences. We learn that the Arab oil embargo, which was precipitated by U.S. support for Israel during the 1973 war, resulted in unprecedented prosperity in Saudi Arabia which, in turn, caused a backlash among Islamic conservatives, which fostered the growth of organizations such as the Muslim Brotherhood where Osama Bin Laden found a home, who then went to Afghanistan to fight the Soviets, and so on and so on. Mr. Lacey also does a fine job of chronicling the evolution of the relationship between the United States and Saudi Arabia and the Royal Family's genuine fear of the Shia extremists that control the government of neighboring Iran. And he effectively buttresses his arguments with insightful anecdotes and telling vignettes. The events in this book have been chronicled elsewhere--it doesn't contain startling revelations or previously undisclosed diplomatic secrets.

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