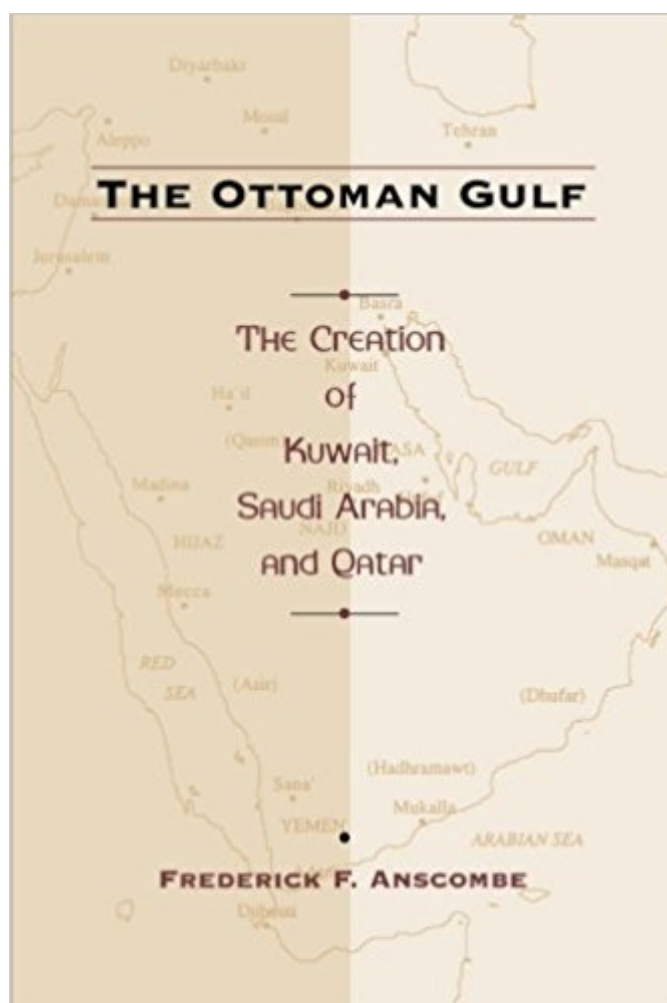


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# The Ottoman Gulf: The Creation Of Kuwait, Saudia Arabia, And Qatar



## Synopsis

What caused the decline of the Ottoman empire in the Persian Gulf? Why has history credited only London, not Istanbul, with bringing about the birth of the modern Gulf States? Using the Ottoman imperial archives, as well as European and Arab sources, Anscombe explains how the combination of poor communication, scarce resources, and misplaced security concerns undermined Istanbul's control and ultimately drove the Gulf shaikhs to seek independence with ties to the British.

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"The nineteenth-century Persian Gulf has been much studied but, Anscombe stresses, always relying primarily on the British archives and therefore seen predominantly from the British point of view. He instead bases his work on the Ottoman documents and sees the Gulf from the perspective of Istanbul.... Excellent." -- "Middle East Quarterly"

What caused the decline of the Ottoman empire in the Persian Gulf? Why has history credited only London, not Istanbul, with bringing about the birth of the modern Gulf States? Using the Ottoman imperial archives, as well as European and Arab sources, Anscombe explains how the combination of poor communication, scarce resources, and misplaced security concerns undermined Istanbul's control and ultimately drove the Gulf shaikhs to seek independence with ties to the British.

Very informative! This book deserves more attention than it has received. Well written!

this was a gift

In *The Ottoman Gulf*, Frederick F. Anscombe sets out to show the inaccuracy of the thought that Britain was the main force behind the creation of the Persian Gulf's Arab states. Anscombe indicates the responsibility of the Ottoman Empire and its operations in Arabia as the central factor behind the development of the states of Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait. Instead of the conventional notion that Britain always intended to establish its influence and gain dominance in the region, Anscombe argues that it was rather the Ottoman rule of the area that led to the formation of the states. As Anscombe states in his introduction, "...if the Ottomans had governed the mainland effectively, Britain would not have become entangled in the territories that were to become the states of Kuwait, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia...the British were drawn, often unwillingly and even unwittingly, into mainland politics" (3). Anscombe begins his narrative by tracing the causes for the renewed Ottoman interest in the Arabian Peninsula that arose during the 1870s. Istanbul felt that it needed to reassert its right to rule over the area so that a Wahhabi insurrection could be avoided and so that the Ottoman governance of the area north of the Peninsula, such as Iraq and Syria, could be protected from the raiding tribes that achieved were so prevalent in the Peninsula in the late 19th century. However, as Anscombe also points out, the Ottomans did feel competition from the British in the region. But Anscombe describes that this competition was fictitious and created much more by Ottoman insecurity than actual British interest and action. The author then proceeds to cover the Ottoman take of the region of Hasa and the subsequent governance of Midhat Pasha in the area. Anscombe looks very favorably upon the programs of Pasha and believes that if Pasha had been allowed to stay in power for a longer period of time, his program would have succeeded in subduing the tribal problems that disrupted Ottoman rule. As Anscombe writes, "Midhat may have been an optimist, yet his visions were not beyond reason" (37) and states later of Pasha's plan to implement taxes on the region and promote agricultural development that, "If implemented as planned, the new economic, administrative, and social regimes would have been marked improvements on the decaying institutions of the Wahhabi era...His successors did not build on his initiatives, and the upheavals that were soon to strike the empire distracted Istanbul's attention for the remainder of the decade. The bad effects of official neglect were to appear within several years of Midhat's departure from Baghdad in 1872" (53). In the following chapters, Anscombe portrays the numerous problems that eventually caused Ottoman rule to fail in the Arabian Peninsula. Anscombe places the blame for this failure squarely on the Ottomans and the financial difficulties. He writes, "As a result of the empire's extreme financial troubles in the period, anything that was to be

attempted in Hasa was to be done cheaply. Money was not to be invested there, it was to be extracted. In such a harried atmosphere, political efficiency received as little attention as the economy. Consequently, little trace of Midhat's plans survived, and when challenges to the Ottomans' position rose thickly in the 1890s, they found that it rested on a fatally flawed foundation" (55). Thus, it was not the British, but rather the Ottomans that are at fault for the turmoil in the Persian Gulf states from the late 19th century until the outbreak of WWI. Incredibly corrupt Ottoman officials attempted to extract taxes from the local population that created a great deal of resentment to the Ottoman presence in the area. The Ottomans dug their own grave. Bribes amongst officials were common and such horrible governors as Bazi only caused hatred for Ottoman influence in the Peninsula. Anscombe is able to effectively close his narrative and prove his thesis by following Mubarak's insurrection in Kuwait. Anscombe dispels the contention that Mubarak's success came from long and developed British involvement in his revolt. Rather, the author illustrates how it took a great deal of time and pressure to finally get the British to support Mubarak and it was the inability of the Ottomans to deal with Mubarak that was the true cause of the upheaval's success. Anscombe even goes so far as to state in his conclusion that, "On the whole, Britain's experience in the Gulf prior to the war was positive, especially when compared to the mixed fortunes of the Ottomans" (173). While a slightly more comprehensive dealing with history prior to 1870 would help the strength of Anscombe's objective, he is able to convey in a limited number of pages a very compressive survey of the region. The portrait he paints of the Persian Gulf states prior to 1914 is one of disorder and chaos chiefly due to the Ottoman inability to govern effectively in the region. Overall, Anscombe is very successful in showing how Ottoman, and not British influence, was the direct cause of the states in the Arabian Peninsula. By chronicling the ineptitude of Ottoman governance in the region and highlighting the financial difficulties that limited the amount of control the Ottomans could exert of the area, Anscombe is able to contradict convincingly the notion of British superiority of influence in the history of the Persian Gulf states. While the author does not ignore the obvious impact of British influence after World War I and the discovery of oil deposits in the region, he points out the lack of intention and planned involvement in the affairs of Arabia that British showed before 1914. The inability of the Ottomans to control tribal factions and institute a government that appeased the people of the region was a much more significant factor to political development in Arabia than any pre-1914 British involvement. Responsibility for the Ottoman loss of the Arabian Peninsula rests solely with Ottoman inadequacy and blame directed at outside sources is only an attempt to divert this responsibility. Anscombe's analysis of the history behind the formation of the states is entirely successful in highlighting this responsibility of the Ottomans for

their Empire's own problems and failing reign in the region.

The modern history of the Persian Gulf has been the subject of several published studies, most notably those of J.B. Kelly and Briton Cooper Busch. The perspective of those works was, however, decidedly Anglocentric, relying heavily on British documents from the Foreign and India Offices. Frederick Anscombe offers a new perspective; he relies largely on the Ottoman archives, though the standard English language works are by no means ignored. Anscombe is particularly interested in the economic factors which hindered Ottoman attempts to subjugate the eastern Arabian littoral (largely, between Qatar and Kuwait) during the period 1870-1914. The initial impetus for the Ottoman policy of asserting control over this largely autonomous area was provided by the British. The Ottomans were concerned that British obsession with maintaining the routes to India would result in attempts to establish hegemony over the Gulf (in which the British already had a large presence), Arabia and Kuwait. These fears had some justification during the last quarter of the 19th century and the early years of the 20th. But the Ottoman plan for bringing eastern Arabia under tighter control was doomed from the outset, because however well-conceived the plans for doing so, the Ottomans had neither the economic strength nor the will to bring their plans to fruition. Al-Hasa, the province of eastern Arabia bordering the Gulf, had little to offer the Ottomans in the way of economic return. This meant that the reforms, the communications infrastructure and, ultimately, the political dependence which the Ottomans intended to establish in the region would have to be funded by the Porte. With external pressure already being brought to bear in more strategically significant areas, such as the Balkans, Hasa ranked very low on the Ottoman list of priorities. This over-arching point has been made by Kelly, Busch and others, but Anscombe's study offers confirming evidence from the Ottoman perspective. Anscombe's text of 173 pages is accompanied by some rough and unhelpful maps, ill-situated in the text. The 60 pages of endnotes contain many interesting substantive points, some of which would have been better woven into the text. The Ottoman Gulf is suited to students of modern Ottoman history, the modern Middle East and the British Empire. For these readers, Anscombe has provided a valuable study.

This book covers the interactions between the Ottoman Empire and the Arabian peninsula. This is one of many interesting but mostly ignored bits of world and regional history. The author makes good use of the Ottoman archives to give a good picture of the players and political interactions in the area before 1914. Most books on the region treat the first world war as the beginning of history in the area. Western historical maps \*to this day\* simply draw a dotted line south of modern

Syria/Iraq within the Ottoman Empire and treat Arabia as a wilderness without landmarks. This book fills in the landmarks. He also sheds light on the continuous European involvement in the region from the Portuguese to the British and the creation of the Persian Gulf states. This book is the best easily accessible source for anyone interested in the history of the Arabian peninsula and its relations with (and within) the Ottoman empire.

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