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Pivotal moments in focus as the Kingdom celebrates Founding Day

Lama Alhamawi Riyadh

Discover centuries of culture, sacrifice, and bravery woven into the timelines of historical moments that paved the way for the Founding Day celebrations marked on February 22nd across the Kingdom.

Hundreds of years ago before the modern-day celebrations of Founding Day there stood the city of Diriyah, a fertile and strategic land filled with potential but whose economic resources and population were quite limited.

Ancestors of the Saudi royal family first settled alongside Wadi Hanifah in the 15th century, founding the city

of Diriyah in 1446. It wasn't until the determination of Imam Mohammed bin Saud's efforts of sowing the seeds of unity to transform the city-state into a nation-state, bringing peace and prosperity to the wider Arabian Peninsula.

Imam Mohammed bin Saud's perseverance led to the unification of the Kingdom and the

founding of the first Saudi State in 1727 sparking a renaissance of education, architecture, culture, trade, and vast opportunity for migrants across the peninsula.

The Arab News Founding Day coverage takes readers back in time to explore the pivotal moments that shaped and unified the Kingdom and wider Arabian region led by

the Founder of the First Saudi State Imam Mohammed bin Saud.

The articles and detailed videos dedicated to the Deep Dive highlight the stories of brave leaders, governing districts, traditional cuisines, culture, and education that laid the foundation stones centuries ago for modern-day Founding Day in the Kingdom.

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Pages from a magnificent history brought to life

NOOR NUGALI | ASSISTANT EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is on a long journey that began some 300 years ago. The country we know today has a past, a present, and a future that is embedded in, and springs from, its history.

The founding of the country by Imam Mohammed bin Saud is celebrated on Feb. 22, and its unification by King Abdulaziz on Sept. 23 which is known as National Day.

Through our Arab News Founding Day Project, we have slowly and meticulously uncovered hidden gems of Saudi history, information which has only recently come to light through our collaboration with the scholars and historians at the Diriyah Gate Development Authority.

It has been a loving and detailed project indeed. For years, what is now Saudi Arabia was seen as a desert land, little known outside the Muslim world though loved and revered by Muslims as the site of Makkah and Madinah. Other than in a few Arabic sources and memoirs which were unavailable to those unfamiliar with Arabic, little was known of the land or its people.

The celebration of our Founding Day is, however, in essence a reminder of where we came from as well as how both our present and our future are reminders that both are built on important foundations of civilization.

We have worked painstakingly and closely with historians, translating those Arabic historical memoirs, manuscripts, and documents into English - and we have brought to light what was largely unknown and unfamiliar. The idea is to bring to light pages from our magnificent history which have thus far been available only in Arabic. These documents reveal our fascinating history, something that we are all — and should be — proud of.

Diriyah is not only a UNESCO heritage site, but within every structure and every brick there lies a hidden story to reveal. Yes, it is the birthplace of our leadership, where the legacy of Al-Saud was laid and continues to thrive, but also at the heart of what the Kingdom represents: A country that has never been colonized.

That is most remarkable in itself, for that rich history, untouched by foreign powers,



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reveals an authentic and ancient cultural aspect which we see until this very day.

Last year, Diriyah's historian Dr. Badran Al-Honaihen compared Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman to Imam Saud bin Abdulaziz (the great), third ruler of the First Saudi State. The comparisons are remarkable: Both are visionaries; both are groundbreakers and, most importantly, their people lived and are living today in what is a golden era.

On Founding Day, Saudis celebrate their heritage, their culture, and their history. The country is made up of five different regions and though each one is unique, all come together to celebrate their common history and to be embraced by it.

One of the hidden gems, we discovered in our research is Princess Modhi bint Abi Wahtan. She was not only the wife of the First Saudi State leader but also his confidant

and adviser. Siblat Moudhi, a famous charitable endowment for the community, stands tall to this day. Its location is strategically to the east of Salwa Palace, on the southeastern side of the At-Turaif district.

By means of vast amount of interviews and research done by historians, one thing became very clear: Saudi women have played a crucial role in the history of the Kingdom. Poems have been written about their generosity along with stories of their bravery in times of peril. We continue to revere and honor them today.

Celebrating Founding Day is a tradition that we will honor and hold dear for generations to come: We embrace our history; we thrive in the present and we look forward to a bright future.

Happy 300 years of stability, security, and prosperity.

Happy Saudi Founding Day!

The Kingdom's rich history, untouched by foreign powers, reveals an authentic and ancient cultural aspect which we see until this very day.