

Inside the Kingdom - Kings, Clerics, Modernists, Terrorists and  
the Struggle for Saudi Arabia by Robert Lacey.  
Hutchinson 2009.

Thirty years after his ground-breaking book on Saudi Arab, *The Kingdom*, was published, Robert Lacey returned to live in the country about which he had written so extensively three decades before to consider the impact on it of events both national and international that had occurred between 1979 and 2009 and to consider its future development and direction.

In view of Saudi Arabia's key dual role, as an exporter of oil and extreme Wahhabi Islam, such a book is both timely and extremely important for all who wish to understand the politics of the Middle East in general and one of its key players in particular.

*Inside the Kingdom* is divided into three sections: *Kingdom of God*, *Kingdom at War*, and *Al-Qaeda Comes Home*. The first, having retraced the story of the founding of the kingdom by Ibn Saud, and the way in which power and leadership (not necessarily the same things in Saudi Arabia) has been maintained by his sons, Lacey considers various events, such as the capture by Saudi terrorists of the Grand Mosque complex in Mecca, and individuals such as the cleric Abdul Aziz Bin Baz that have played a major role in shaping recent Saudi history. The second considers the impact on Saudi of the first Gulf War, Operation Desert Storm, which brought significant numbers of 'infidel' soldiers onto Saudi soil and the various acts of terrorism initiated by the Saudi exile Osama Bin Laden against Saudi and foreign nationals. The third details the impact on the country of the fact that fifteen of the 9/11 hijackers were Saudi, the difficult relationship with America and some of the social changes quietly bubbling away under the surface.

Robert Lacey enjoyed major access to key figures in the country in writing *Inside the Kingdom*, and it shows; the book has the ring of both authority and authenticity and ably demonstrates the complexity and fragility of this key nation in the Middle East. Lacey's style is engaging, informative and pacy and as well as everything else *Inside the Kingdom* is an excellent read.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh