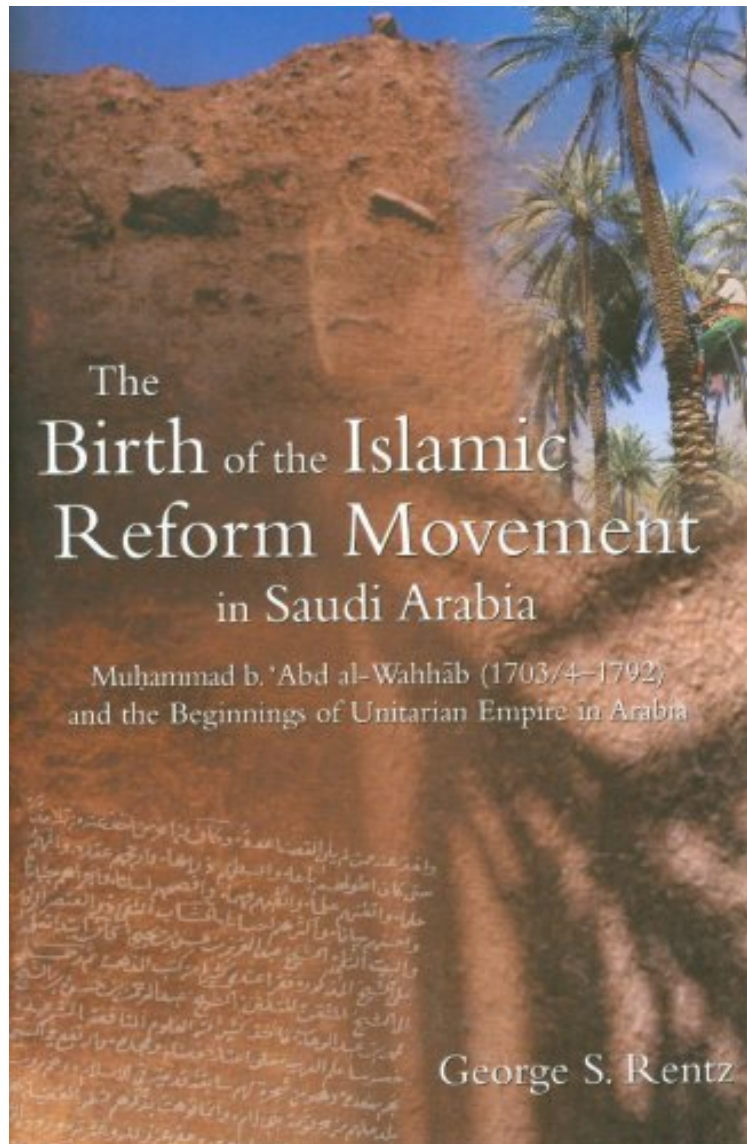


(Download) The Birth of the Islamic Reform Movement in Saudi Arabia: Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703/4-1792) and the Beginnings of Unitarian Empire in Arabia

## The Birth of the Islamic Reform Movement in Saudi Arabia: Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703/4-1792) and the Beginnings of Unitarian Empire in Arabia

G. S. Rentz

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## Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703/4-1792) and the Beginnings of Unitarian Empire in Arabia:

0 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Multi-layered approach to a complicated subject  
By Tristan Cajar  
The book's premise is that there are many views on the Wahhabi movement, and that in a comparative manner, the reader may find that there are many conflicting accounts as there are opinions on the subject. Being such a specific group, it tends to be more scholarly and not an entry level tome such as Natana Delong-Bas' "The Wahhabi Movement." The prospective reader is cautioned about some of the biases present in the book which must be taken into account if working on any sort of scholarly project.

Current troubles in the middle east have focused much international attention on Saudi Arabia. However, little has been published in English on the background to its culture and its roots in the First Saudi State that arose in 18th-century Najd (central Arabia). The Islamic reform movement that imbued it with its sense of mission, and the life and thought of its proponent Shaikh Muhammad b. 'Abd al- Wahhab (1703/4-1792), have been similarly neglected.

George Rentz was the modern pioneer of Western studies of Wahhabism and the early history of Saudi Arabia. It is strange that it has taken more than half a century for such a ground-breaking work [his 1947 Ph.D thesis] to be published. But this scholarly and well-indexed volume does Rentz proper homage, and, as the editor William Facey remarks in his introduction, what the publication lacks in punctuality is made up for by its topicality. The events of 9/11 have propelled the legacy of Muhammad bin Abd al-Wahhab from obscurity to a topic of widespread concern. (Robert Lacey *Journal of Islamic Studies*, 18/2, 2007) Anyone interested in the rise of Islam, Islamic state formation, the complex relationships between tribes and towns and, above all, the unifying power in an Islamic context of a simple message of return should find much to ponder in this book. William Facey's scrupulous edition at last makes a fundamental work on the rise of the most significant force in the Islamic world today available to a wide readership. His introduction is exemplary, reviewing the literature on the rise of the muwahhidun and providing a careful assessment of George Rentz's life and work. This is a major contribution to Arabian studies, made even more valuable by the splendid maps. (Paul Lunde *Bulletin of the Society of Arabian Studies*, 2006) Much gratitude is owed to the writer and publisher, William Facey, for releasing into the public domain George Rentz's important study of the life of Shaikh Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, the 18th-century Arabian founder of the Wahhabi, or Unitarian, Islamic reform movement. The general reader now has accessible indigenous material to lie alongside familiar western accounts such as those of Niebuhr and Burckhardt. The result is the achievement of a far sharper focus than existed before on Saudi Arabia's Islamic credentials. (Alan Rush *Asian Affairs*) Rentz's 1947 Ph.D. dissertation, long used by scholars, is here published for the first time. Rentz's thesis, now of great interest outside the academy, is published virtually unchanged, but includes several maps not in the original that help navigate the text. (Saudi Aramco *World Magazine*, March/April 2006) *The Birth of the Islamic Reform Movement in Saudi Arabia* by George S. Rentz is devoted to the first Saudi state, and provides a detailed, footnoted account of its history up to the death of the reformer. My sampling fully supports the editors statement that the dissertation appears unchanged and in full. Rentz's version of early Saudi history is definitely not a sanitized one. The party best served by the publication of the book is undoubtedly the specialist reader. Rentz's dissertation was in its day the only genuine scholarly, adequately footnoted, source-critical account of the early Saudi state. Amazingly, it still is. Without question, the book is [also] accessible to readers with no specialist knowledge of Saudi history and the Wahhabi movement. It is clearly written and does not take much for granted. (Michael Cook *Times Literary Supplement*) The academic community, in particular specialists of Saudi Arabia, should rejoice at the publication of this 1947 thesis. [It] will give them readily available evidence of how ARAMCO historians propagated myths that are still adhered to despite evidence to the contrary. (Madawi Al-Rasheed *Middle Eastern Studies* 42:1) **About the Author** Born in Pennsylvania in 1912, George S Rentz was recruited by Aramco in 1946 to set up the company's research and translation division at Dhahran. His sojourn there (1946-63), where he immersed himself in the history, culture and geography of the Arabian Peninsula, transformed him into Aramco's resident authority on Arabic and Arabian matters and established him as a scholar of international repute. Rentz influenced a generation of Arabist scholars, and laid the foundations for the study of Saudi Arabian history in the West. William Facey is a historian of Arabia. He is also a museum consultant and a director of the London Centre of Arab Studies.