State Formation and Political Stability: Al-Aqilat as an Epistemic Community in the Third Saudi State (1902–1932)

Saleh Ibrahim Alsakaker

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Abstract

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State Formation and Political Stability: Al-Aqilat as an Epistemic Community in the Third Saudi State (1902–1932)

By

Saleh Ibrahim Al Sakaker

This thesis presents an in-depth analysis of Al-Aqilat as an epistemic community that contributed to the political, economic, and military stabilization of Third Saudi State between 1902 and 1932. Traditionally recognized as a merchant group, Al-Aqilat's influence extended far beyond trade to encompass financial diplomacy, intelligence gathering, strategic mediation, and logistical support. Through their control over trade routes, financial capital, and intelligence channels, they negotiated policies, facilitated cross-border agreements, and supported military operations positioning themselves as indispensable non-state actors, especially in contrast to the Ikhwan's destabilizing militancy. Challenging state-centric and tribal dominant narratives, this research emphasizes how knowledge-based governance played a crucial role in stabilizing the emerging state.

Guided by Epistemic Community Theory (ECT), Social Network Theory (SNT), and Historical Institutionalism (HI), the study explores how Al-Aqilat functioned as a merchant-intelligence network shaping diplomacy, governance, and regional security.

This research is archival based**,** drawing from British, French, Ottoman, and Saudi historical documents, analyzed through a qualitative thematic coding approach using NVivo. The study employs inductive thematic analysis to allow theoretical constructs to emerge from archival materials, ensuring that the themes and epistemic attributes of Al-Aqilat are data-driven rather than imposed. By thematically coding historical correspondences, financial agreements, and

intelligence reports**,** this study reconstructs how Al-Aqilat functioned as an epistemic community in Saudi state-building**.**

The findings extend ECT by showing how historical merchant-intelligence networks operated as knowledge-based agents of governance, not merely within modern policy environments. The integration of SNT further explains how Al-Aqilat's transregional intelligence networks facilitated strategic knowledge exchange, while HI sheds light on their long-term influence on institutional governance, economic policies, and diplomatic practices.

This research contributes to historical political economy, governance studies, and epistemic theory by highlighting how trade-based intelligence networks historically functioned as mechanisms of political stability and security. It also draws practical parallels with contemporary financial intelligence networks, offering insights into the enduring role of knowledge-driven trade communities in shaping economic sovereignty and transnational governance.

Ultimately, this study reframes Al-Aqilat as a sophisticated epistemic community whose strategic expertise and knowledge capital significantly shaped the formation and stability of modern Saudi Arabia.

Keywords: Epistemic Community, Al-Aqilat, Saudi State Formation, Economic Intelligence, Political Stability, Social Network Theory, Historical Institutionalism, Governance.

Table of Contents

Abstract ..... *i*

Research Thesis: Declaration of Authorship ..... *vi*

Acknowledgements ..... *vii*

Chapter 1 Introduction *1*

1.1 Introduction **1**

1.2 Case Selection and periodisation: 1902-1932 ..... **3**

1.3 Introducing Al-Aqilat and positioning the scholarship **5**

1.4 Problematization and Contextual Background **8**

1.5 Research Significance and Rationale **9**

1.6 Research Questions and Objectives **11**

1.7 Theoretical Contributions **14**

1.8 Scope and Limitations **15**

1.9 Structure of the Thesis **16**

Chapter 2 Theoretical Framework *17*

2.1 Defining Epistemic Communities **17**

2.2 Limits of State-Formation Debates in the Saudi Case **26**

2.3 Mechanisms of Influence in Epistemic Communities **33**

2.4 Gaps in Literature **37**

2.5 Strengths of the Epistemic Communities Theory in State-Building **41**

2.5.1 Expertise as a Unifying Force in Fragmented Political Environments 42

2.5.2 Facilitating the Institutionalization of New Governance Structures 42

2.5.3 Enhancing Policy Coherence and Continuity 43

2.5.4 Legitimizing State Authority Through Knowledge-Based Governance 44

2.6 The Conditional Influence of Epistemic Communities in State-Building **48**

2.6.1 Political and Institutional Alignment 49

2.6.2 The Impact of Epistemic Communities on State Identity and Policy 54

2.6.3 Addressing the Gaps Through Al-Aqilat 56

2.7 Employed Theoretical Framework **58**

2.7.1 Epistemic Community Theory 60

2.7.2 Historical Institutionalism (HI) and State Embeddedness 62

2.7.3 Social Network Theory 68

2.8 Summary of research gaps and theories **72**

Chapter 3 Methodology *77*

3.1 Methodological orientation and research design **77**
3.1.1 Qualitative historical-documentary design rationale 78
3.1.2 Analytic approach: Inductive reflexive thematic analysis 79
3.1.3 Positioning: interpretivist logic with theory-guided interpretation (ECT, HI, SNT) 80

3.2 Archival corpus and document selection **81**
3.2.1 British documentary corpus 81
3.2.2 French documentary corpus 81
3.2.3 Saudi documentary corpus I: Dictionary of Buraydah Families 82
3.2.4 Saudi documentary corpus II: King Abdulaziz Foundation (Darah) collections 83
3.2.5 Ottoman documentary corpus 83
3.2.6 Document inclusion criteria 83

3.3 Archival Accessibility, Provenance and Re-Verification Workflow **84**
3.3.1 British documentary materials: published compilation with independent archival verification 85
3.3.2 French documentary materials: published compilation corroborated through Saudi institutional holdings 86
3.3.3 Saudi documentary materials: institutional retrieval and published multi-volume corpus cross-verification 87
3.3.4 Ottoman documentary materials 89

3.4 NVivo-supported coding, transparency, and analytic audit trail **90**

3.5 Source criticism, triangulation, and trustworthiness **92**
3.5.1 External criticism (provenance and authenticity) 93
3.5.2 Internal criticism (bias, framing, and institutional standpoint) 93
3.5.3 Triangulation and cross-source comparison 94
3.5.4 Translation provenance and multilingual documentary workflow 94

Chapter 4: Historical background *97*

4.1 History of Saudi States: The First Saudi State 1744-1818: **104**
4.1.1 Origin of Al-Saud and First Saudi State: 104
4.1.2 Muhammad Ibn Abd Al-Wahab and His Beliefs 106
4.1.3 Saudi-Wahhabi Expansion 110
4.1.4 Siege of Diriyah Fall of First Saudi State (1818) 113

4.2 The Second Saudi State 1818-1891 ..... **116**
4.2.1 Formation of the Second Saudi State (Emirate of Najd): 1818-1891 116
4.2.2 Turki bin Abdullah Al-Saud 118
4.2.3 Battle of Mulayda (1891) 121
4.2.4 Fall of the Second Saudi State (1891) 125
4.2.5 Abdulrahman bin Faisal Al-Saud's refuge with Bedouin tribes (1891) 125

4.3 The Third Saudi State 1902: **129**
4.3.1 Historical & Political Role 129

4.4 Movements & Revolts **132**
4.4.1 Arab Revolt 1916: 132
4.4.2 Ikhwan Movement 1911-1930: 134
4.4.3 Tensions between Ibn Saud and the Ikhwan 138

4.5 Case Study of Al-Aqilat: **141**

4.5.1 Members of Al-Aqilat 149
4.5.2 Biographical Narratives 150
4.5.3 Significance of Al-Aqilat Members 159

Chapter 5 Empirical Findings 162

5.1.1 Financial networks for political stability 163
5.1.2 Military contributions and state defence 175
5.1.3 Strategic conflict mediation and dispute management 191
5.1.4 Trade diplomacy and external commercial governance 205
5.1.5 Media, State communications, and narrative stabilisation 219

5.2 Mechanisms of Al-Aqilat Influence 222

5.2.1 Epistemic authority under uncertainty 222
5.2.2 Networked brokerage as governance capacity 225
5.2.3 Institutional embedding and durability 228
5.2.4 Integrated mechanism synthesis 231

Chapter 6 Discussion and Conclusion 234

6.1 Interpreting the findings in relation to the study aims 235

6.2 Study Implications 250

6.3 Limitations and future research directions 252

6.4 Conclusion 258

Archival References 262

References 263

Coding Index 275

Table 3.5.4 Translation and Documentary Workflow Across the Multi-Archive Corpus **95**

Table 4.5.2 Key Al-Aqilat Figures and Their Roles in Trade, Governance, and State Formation **151**

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I declare that this thesis and the work presented in it are my own and have been generated by me as the result of my own original research. I confirm that:

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Chapter 1
Introduction

1.1 Introduction

The study of state formation and political stability has been a pivotal subject and a central concern in political science and history. Traditional theories emphasize the role of military conquests, institutional governance, and tribal alliances in shaping emerging states, particularly in regions like the Arabian Peninsula (Tilly, 1985; Mann, 1984; North, 1990). Work on genealogy and tribal belonging clarifies how lineage claims shape political incorporation and legitimacy in Saudi Arabia, which matters for interpreting alliance-making in consolidation contexts (Samin, 2015). However, these perspectives often overlook the economic and intellectual dimensions that underpin state consolidation, especially the informal systems through which information, resources, and credibility circulate when formal institutions are still in formation (Slater, 2010; Commins, 2006). In the case of Saudi Arabia, much of the literature explains consolidation through leadership, coercion, tribal mobilisation, and external diplomacy, leaving non-military actors comparatively under-analysed (Ochsenwald, 1981; Al-Rasheed, 2002; Vassiliev, 2000).

This thesis challenges conventional narratives by exploring the role of Al-Aqilat, a merchant-based social group from Al-Qassim in central Najd, as an influential actor in the formation of Third Saudi State. A more systematic positioning of Al-Aqilat in relation to comparable merchant actors is provided in the Al-Aqilat literature section later in this chapter. Existing historiography has acknowledged merchants in functional terms, yet Al-Aqilat's influence extended beyond trade into financial coordination, mediation, and the circulation of strategic knowledge across multiple arenas (Al-Rasheed, 2010; Commins, 2006). Al-Aqilat was a highly organised network of traders and caravan leaders whose transregional reach enabled them

to accumulate financial capital and commercial intelligence. Although historical accounts recognise their role in trade and resource mobilisation, there has been limited scholarly attention to their broader political significance in the processes through which stability is built and maintained (Vassiliev, 2000; Al-Rasheed, 2010).

To make that political significance analysable, this study reinterprets Al-Aqilat's historical influence by framing them as an epistemic community. The concept is commonly associated with scientific, bureaucratic, and policy-driven groups, and it highlights how shared expertise and interpretive authority can shape governance outcomes (Haas, 1992, p. 4; Adler and Haas, 1992; Cross, 2013, pp. 138–140). Yet its application to state-building processes, particularly in non-Western and pre-institutional contexts, remains significantly underexplored (Cross, 2013, pp. 138–140; Stone, 2013). This thesis argues that Al-Aqilat functioned as an epistemic community despite lacking formal institutional affiliations because their expertise in economic strategy, provisioning, negotiation, and intelligence gathering could be translated into influence over governance choices and stabilisation practices (Haas, 1992; Al-Rasheed, 2010).

Merchant communities have historically shaped political ordering by acting as brokers of information, financing & trust mechanisms, and cross-border relationships, as seen in Baghdadi Jewish commercial elites and Hadhrami trading diasporas (Stillman, 1991), as well as Levantine Christian financiers operating through regional capital and trust networks (Khater, 2001). These parallels show that merchants can matter politically without governing formally. The argument advanced here is that Al-Aqilat represents a particularly important case for understanding how trade-based knowledge and mobility can contribute to political stability in a formative state-building context (Al-Rasheed, 2002; Vassiliev, 2000).

By drawing on the concept of epistemic communities, this study redefines Al-Aqilat's role in Saudi state-building, moving beyond their conventional classification as traders. Their ability to coordinate large-scale trade networks, mediate political relationships, and support resource

mobilisation positioned them as facilitators of stability alongside, and in contrast to, more coercive actors that dominate standard state-formation narratives (Tilly, 1985; Al-Rasheed, 2010; Habib, 1997). The next section sets out the case selection and periodisation rationale and explains why the chosen historical context provides the most appropriate setting for examining Al-Aqilat's stabilising roles.

1.2 Case Selection and periodisation: 1902-1932

The period from 1902 to 1932 is treated in this thesis as a bounded phase of state formation because it captures the complete trajectory from the initial restoration of Al Saud authority in Riyadh to the proclamation of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The recapture of Riyadh in 1902 is widely identified as the turning point that transformed a local claim to rule into an expansionary political project, as it provided Ibn Saud with a territorial base, a renewed legitimacy claim, and an operational centre for coalition building and military mobilisation (Vassiliev, 2000; Al-Rasheed, 2010). What follows is not a simple story of territorial conquest but a multi-arena process of consolidating authority across diverse regions, negotiating relations with tribal and urban constituencies, and managing external pressures shaped by late Ottoman decline and the rise of British influence in the Gulf and the wider Middle East (Commins, 2006; Anscombe, 1997). By the early 1930s, the political order that emerged from these struggles was sufficiently consolidated to be formally declared as a unified kingdom in 1932, marking the institutional endpoint of the state formation cycle examined here (Al-Rasheed, 2010; Vassiliev, 2000). Focusing on 1902 to 1932 therefore allows the thesis to analyse how authority was built, stabilised, and legitimised during a recognisable historical transition from fragmented sovereignty to a durable state structure, while keeping the empirical scope coherent and analytically defensible.

This thesis concentrates on the emergence of the Third Saudi State because it is the moment when state formation unfolded under regional and global conditions that made transregional knowledge, mobility, and external linkage unusually consequential. Unlike the first and second

Saudi states, whose political economies and diplomatic horizons were more locally anchored, the third state developed at the intersection of imperial competition, shifting border regimes, and intensifying market connectivity that linked Najd to Iraq, the Levant, the Hijaz, and the Gulf (Anscombe, 1997; Commins, 2006). The Third Saudi State was also formed through a distinctly war centred trajectory in which coercion mattered, but where the consolidation of rule required mechanisms beyond battlefield victory, including the management of commercial lifelines, mediation across social divides, and the handling of cross border pressures that constrained raiding and compelled new forms of governance (Kostiner, 1985; Habib, 1997).

In this setting, the internal social balance between hadari and bedouin constituencies, and the political consequences of disciplining mobility and violence, became central to the formation of state authority (Al Fahad, 2004). These conditions make the third state the most analytically suitable case for examining how a merchant network could matter for state formation in ways that are visible in the historical record and conceptually legible to political science debates. It is also the period where the role of merchants as an organised social force has been explicitly argued to be relevant to state building dynamics in Saudi Arabia, even if that role has rarely been traced through a focused empirical account of specific merchant networks (Al Nuaim, 1987; Al Fahad, 2004). The Third Saudi State therefore provides the most appropriate historical context for investigating whether and how Al-Aqilat operated as a knowledge-based collective actor whose capacities complemented, constrained, or redirected the dominant war-making narrative of Saudi state formation. This aligns with arguments that merchants in Najd, Hasa, and Hijaz were central to the inception and consolidation of the Saudi state, giving state formation an explicitly urban political economy dimension (Al Nuaim, 1987).

Merchants and long-distance trading actors certainly existed in earlier Saudi political formations, and commercial mobility was not new to central Arabia. However, the third-state consolidation created structural conditions in which transregional linkage, border pressures, and external diplomatic constraints made commercial intelligence, mediation, and logistical

coordination more consequential to state stabilisation than in earlier phases that were more locally anchored in their political economies and diplomatic horizons (Anscombe, 1997; Commins, 2006; Al-Rasheed, 2010). For this reason, the thesis does not claim that Al-Aqilat were absent before 1902, but argues that the third-state context made their stabilising capacities more visible in the historical record and more analytically central to the consolidation problem examined here (Vassiliev, 2000; Al-Rasheed, 2010).

1.3 Introducing Al-Aqilat and positioning the scholarship

Al-Aqilat refers to a historically identifiable network of long-distance merchants and caravan leaders associated primarily with Al-Qassim, especially towns such as Unayzah and Buraydah, whose commercial activity linked central Arabia to wider markets and administrative centres in Iraq, the Levant, the Hijaz, Egypt, and the Gulf. In Arabic, the root ʿa-q-l carries the sense of restraint and "binding", and classical lexicography links it to the act of securing with an ʿiqāl, the rope used to hobble a camel (Ibn Manẓūr, 1990; AlMaany, 2026). In this thesis, the label Al-Aqilat is used in its established historical usage to denote the itinerant merchant-caravan network described in the scholarship on overland trade, rather than a tribal lineage or a single family grouping (Pétriat, 2020; Al Sharida, 2015; Al Sharida, 2023). The label is used in Arabic historiography and local writing to denote these itinerant traders and organisers of caravan movement, and it has been increasingly employed in recent scholarship to reconstruct Al-Qassim's external trade and the regional circuits through which Najdi merchants operated (Altorki and Cole, 1989; Al Sharida, 2015; Al Sharida, 2023). Al-Aqilat should not be understood as a tribe or a single lineage. Rather, they are best approached as a community of practice shaped by shared commercial expertise, route and market knowledge, and a reputation-based mode of organisation that enabled sustained mobility across politically fragmented spaces (Altorki and Cole, 1989; Pétriat, 2021; Al Sharida, 2015).

In sociological terms, Al-Aqilat are typically described as emerging from Al-Qassim's sedentary town-based merchant milieu, while operating professionally through extensive mobility across desert corridors and border zones (Altorki and Cole, 1989; Al Sharida, 2015; Al Sharida, 2023). This combination of local embeddedness and regional movement placed them in a distinctive position within Najdi society and in relation to surrounding arenas (Altorki and Cole, 1989; Pétriat, 2021). Caravan commerce relied on cooperation, reputation, and trust-based practices that enabled trade to continue under conditions of uncertainty and changing political authority (Pétriat, 2021; Pomeranz and Topik, 2006). These practices were not only economic, because mobility and exchange required negotiated access and credible intermediaries across multiple jurisdictions and communities (Pétriat, 2021; Pomeranz and Topik, 2006).

In this thesis, Al-Aqilat are treated as a historically traceable network rather than as a fixed corporate body. References to them in the record are uneven across sites and genres, and the term does not always function as a stable category with explicit membership rules (Pétriat, 2020; Al Sharida, 2015). For that reason, the analysis proceeds by identifying recurring patterns of association, repeated routing, and role-consistency across documents, instead of assuming that every appearance of a similar label signals the same form of collective organisation (Pétriat, 2020; Cross, 2013, pp. 148–149). This approach keeps the argument empirically disciplined while recognising that networked actors can be historically coherent even when they are not institutionalised in modern terms (Stone, 2013; Adler and Haas, 1992).

The contribution of this thesis is to specify mechanisms through which such a network could matter for political stability without overstating its autonomy from state actors. The analysis focuses on mechanisms that are visible in archival traces, including the circulation of strategic information, brokerage across political and commercial arenas, and the mobilisation of resources and connectivity that reduced uncertainty for decision-makers during consolidation (Haas, 1992; Al-Rasheed, 2010; Vassiliev, 2000). Framed in this way, Al-Aqilat are not presented as an alternative sovereign authority, but as knowledge-bearing intermediaries whose capacities could

complement, constrain, or redirect choices made by formal rulers and coercive actors (Haas, 1992; Cross, 2013 pp. 148–149). This also clarifies the analytical contrast developed in the thesis: stabilisation is examined not only through coercion and mobilisation, but through the governance effects of knowledge, connectivity, and credible intermediaries (Tilly, 1985; Mann, 1986; Stone, 2013).

Positioning Al-Aqilat in this way requires moving beyond a purely descriptive treatment of trading activity and addressing how existing narratives shape what becomes visible as politically relevant. Mainstream historiography of the Third Saudi State understandably centres war-making, coalition building, and ideological mobilisation, especially around the Ikhwan and the consolidation of authority, which has tended to render non-military actors analytically peripheral even when they appear in the background of events (Kostiner, 1985; Habib, 1997; Commins, 2006; Al-Rasheed, 2010). In addition, merchant activity is often documented in dispersed administrative reporting, correspondence, and commercial records that do not map neatly onto event-centred political histories, making its political mechanisms easy to understate (Vassiliev, 2000; Pétriat, 2020; Al-Rasheed, 2010). This thesis therefore treats "neglect" as a combined outcome of narrative emphasis and evidentiary dispersion, and responds by systematically re-assembling merchant traces across archives for analysis (Pétriat, 2020; Vassiliev, 2000).

Finally, the thesis acknowledges that Arabic-language secondary literature on Al-Aqilat is extensive and valuable for contextual grounding, particularly for names, routes, and local memory, but it is not always framed around causal explanation in state-formation terms (Al Sharida, 2015; Al-Rasheed, 2010). Arabic-language scholarship on Al-Aqilat is not limited to local compilations; it also includes peer-reviewed academic studies that examine Al-Aqilat's routes, commercial geography, and regional influence, as well as biographical historical studies published in Saudi academic journals (Al Shubaan, 2018; Alajlan, 2023). This Arabic scholarship is used here for contextual grounding and historiographical positioning, while the thesis triangulates claims about political influence and stabilisation mechanisms through multi-archive documentary evidence (Al

Sharida, 2015; Vassiliev, 2000; Al-Rasheed, 2010). The study therefore uses Arabic secondary works to support contextual reconstruction and triangulation, while placing interpretive weight on multi-archive documentary evidence (Vassiliev, 2000; Anscombe, 1997). This evidentiary strategy aligns with the thesis's theoretical move: ECT provides a structured way to analyse how expertise and shared interpretive orientations can shape governance under uncertainty, and it offers the conceptual bridge from these historical materials to the research questions and objectives set out in the next section (Haas, 1992; Adler and Haas, 1992; Cross, 2013).

1.4 Problematization and Contextual Background

Religious authority also operated as a governance constraint and legitimacy resource, since Ibn Saud's consolidation required managing Wahhabi zeal while pragmatically integrating foreign expertise and new political economy linkages (Commins, 2005, pp. 4–6). The Saudi Arabia state formation study has traditionally been framed through paradigms that emphasize military conquest, tribal alliances, and colonial interventions as the primary drivers of political consolidation. Dominant historiography attributes the amalgamation of the Arabian Peninsula to the strategic leadership of Ibn Saud, supported by British diplomacy and tribal mobilization (Al-Rasheed, 2002; Vassiliev, 2000). While these factors were undeniably central, this framework has led to a neglect of non-military actors particularly economic communities that significantly contributed to the state-building process.

One major reason for this oversight is the historiographical bias toward state-centric and militarized models of governance. Classical theories of state formation, such as those by Tilly (1985) and Mann (1986), stress coercive power, territorial control, and bureaucratic development as the engines of political stability. Economic actors, when acknowledged, are typically portrayed as subordinate to political elites or beneficiaries of state protection, rather than as independent participants in shaping governance. Consequently, influential merchant communities like Al-Aqilat have been excluded from narratives of political agency. This study challenges dominant

state-building theories that prioritize formal institutions and centralized authority by showing how informal knowledge networks such as Al-Aqilat acted as stabilizing forces through their strategic and economic roles.

Compounding their absence from state-building literature is the limited application of epistemic community scholarship to historical and non-Western contexts. The concept, developed by Haas (1992, p. 3), describes networks of experts with shared normative and causal beliefs who influence policymaking through specialized knowledge. However, its application has remained largely confined to modern scientific, bureaucratic, and advisory domains (Cross, 2013). This study extends the framework by demonstrating that Al-Aqilat's accumulated economic knowledge, intelligence functions, and diplomatic reach qualify them as a historical epistemic community one that shaped political outcomes outside formal state apparatuses.

Furthermore, colonial sources particularly British and French archives tend to frame merchant communities in functional terms, as traders or informants, without acknowledging their political influence. This Eurocentric lens has contributed to the marginalisation of economic actors in Middle Eastern historiography. Yet, these archives contain valuable evidence of Al-Aqilat's logistical expertise and strategic positioning, which this study reinterprets as indicators of epistemic authority.

The next section outlines the research objectives and questions guiding this study, addressing the identified theoretical and historiographical gaps.

1.5 Research Significance and Rationale

This thesis is significant because it reframes state formation in the Third Saudi State by examining how political stabilisation can be shaped through non-military, knowledge-based

capacities. Dominant historiography of Saudi consolidation has understandably focused on coercion, coalition building, and ideological mobilisation, but this emphasis has often left the political relevance of commercial intermediaries under-analysed, particularly when their roles are dispersed across administrative correspondence and cross-border reporting rather than narrated as formal governance (Al-Rasheed, 2010; Vassiliev, 2000; Commins, 2006). By reconstructing merchant traces across British, French, Ottoman, and Saudi archival materials, the study contributes to a fuller historical account of how stabilisation was practised under conditions of uncertainty, fragmented jurisdiction, and external pressure (Anscombe, 1997; Pétriat, 2020).

The research also contributes to political science debates on state formation by bringing into view an influence pathway that is not reducible to war-making or bureaucratic expansion alone. Classical accounts of state formation often privilege coercive capacity, territorial control, and institutional development as the main engines of durable authority (Tilly, 1985; Mann, 1986; North, 1990). Without denying the centrality of coercion in Saudi consolidation (John, 1970; Philby, 1928), this thesis shows why analysing credibility, brokerage, and strategic knowledge can help explain how authority was stabilised across multiple arenas in the early twentieth-century Arabian Peninsula. It therefore strengthens state formation debates by specifying how non-state actors can matter politically through knowledge and connectivity rather than through formal office.

A further contribution lies in extending ECT to a historical setting where expertise was not anchored in modern bureaucratic or scientific institutions. Epistemic communities have most commonly been studied in contemporary policy environments where expert networks shape governance under uncertainty through shared knowledge and interpretive frames (Haas, 1992, p.4; Adler and Haas, 1992; Cross, 2013). This thesis develops the argument that historical merchant networks can be analysed through a similar lens when they display recognisable expertise, reputational authority, and consistent involvement in information brokerage that affects decision-making. This extension adds to epistemic scholarship by demonstrating how knowledge-based

influence can operate through practice, credibility, and transregional networks in pre-institutional contexts (Stone, 2013; Cross, 2013).

Finally, the study addresses a clear historiographical and theoretical gap by placing Arabic and non-Arabic scholarship into dialogue with multi-archive documentary evidence. Arabic academic scholarship has examined Al-Aqilat's routes and commercial geography and preserved valuable contextual detail, while external archives often frame merchants in functional terms that require careful reinterpretation (Al Shubaan, 2018; Alajlan, 2023; Al-Rasheed, 2010). By triangulating across these bodies of evidence, the thesis clarifies why Al-Aqilat are analytically relevant to questions of political stability and state formation, and it prepares the ground for the research questions and objectives that guide the study.

1.6 Research Questions and Objectives

This study seeks to investigate how Al-Aqilat contributed to the formation and stabilization of Saudi Arabia between 1902 and 1932. While previous historiographical works have acknowledged their role in trade facilitation, financial networks, and regional diplomacy (Al-Rasheed, 2002; Ochsenwald, 1981; Vassiliev, 2000), their knowledge-based influence on governance has not been systematically examined through the epistemic community lens.

The research is guided by the following primary question:

- **How did Al-Aqilat function as an epistemic community in Saudi state-building?**

To comprehensively answer this, the study is structured around the following sub-questions:

- What were the primary epistemic attributes that allowed Al-Aqilat to influence governance, particularly in economic, political, and military spheres?
- How did Al-Aqilat's networks operate within trade, military, and diplomatic frameworks, and what mechanisms enabled them to act as intermediaries between different political entities?
- What role did Al-Aqilat play in intelligence gathering, economic stabilization, and conflict mediation during the formation of Saudi Arabia?
- How does the epistemic community framework provide a more nuanced understanding of Al-Aqilat's influence in contrast to traditional historical narratives?

Research Objectives and Rationale

The research objectives are designed to systematically uncover the epistemic attributes of Al-Aqilat and their impact on Saudi state-building between 1902 and 1932. Given the existing historical gap in recognizing Al-Aqilat as an epistemic community, the objectives align directly with the research questions while ensuring the study contributes to historical, political, and epistemic scholarship.

1. Identifying and analyzing the knowledge systems and expertise held by Al-Aqilat: This objective seeks to examine the specialized knowledge that Al-Aqilat possessed, which allowed them to operate as a network of trade experts, intelligence brokers, and diplomatic intermediaries. This study explores Al-Aqilat's involvement in economic planning, intelligence operations, and conflict resolution to assess whether their collective behavior aligns with the epistemic traits outlined in Haas's (1992) framework.
2. Examining the mechanisms through which Al-Aqilat contributed to state-building: Beyond knowledge possession, the study aims to analyze how Al-Aqilat operationalized their knowledge to actively shape governance. This involves an exploration of their role in intelligence gathering, economic regulation, and diplomatic negotiations**.** Al-Aqilat were deeply involved in covert political communication, resource allocation for military

campaigns, and strategic economic transactions, making them a crucial part of the Saudi state's stabilization efforts.

3. Exploring Al-Aqilat's networks as an informal yet structured system of knowledge-sharing: Al-Aqilat's influence was not based on formal bureaucratic structures but rather on a self-regulated network of merchants and intelligence brokers. This objective investigates the ways in which Al-Aqilat circulated, retained, and transferred knowledge across extensive trading corridors that linked regions such as the Arabian Peninsula, the Levant, Iraq, and adjacent territories, and how this networked structure enabled coordination across shifting political regimes. This study challenges the prevailing focus on modern, institutional epistemic communities by demonstrating that pre-modern social groups, such as Al-Aqilat, can also function as knowledge-based actors without formal structures.
4. Contextualizing Al-Aqilat's contributions within state-building theories: A critical objective of this research is to position Al-Aqilat's role within broader state-building theories**,** including Historical Institutionalism (HI) and Social Network Theory (SNT)**.** By examining their long-term economic and political influence, this study will assess whether their activities contributed to institutional continuity, governance stabilization, and transnational economic integration**.**
5. The final objective is to critically reassess the historical treatment of Al-Aqilat and redefine their role through the epistemic community framework. By systematically analyzing primary sources from British, French, Ottoman, and Saudi archives, the study will reconstruct Al-Aqilat's actual influence on governance, correcting historiographical omissions and Eurocentric biases in past research. Most existing historical accounts do not classify Al-Aqilat as a knowledge-based community, instead viewing them through traditional merchant-class frameworks. By introducing ECT into this historical analysis, this study challenges conventional categorizations and demonstrates how Al-Aqilat functioned as an epistemic force within a pre-modern governance structure.

By achieving these objectives, this study will redefine the historical understanding of Al-Aqilat**,** not just as merchants, but as a networked epistemic community that actively contributed to state-building. This contributes to three main fields:

1. **Historical Studies** – By offering a new interpretation of Arabian state-building that includes economic and knowledge-based actors.
2. **Political Science** – By applying ECT to a historical case, demonstrating its relevance beyond modern policy studies.
3. **Governance and State Formation Studies** – illustrating how non-state actors such as Al-Aqilat functioned as stabilizing forces in early governance structures.

This research expands the understanding of Saudi Arabia's state formation by highlighting the role of knowledge-driven merchant networks, emphasizing how Al-Aqilat's economic expertise, intelligence networks, and diplomatic mediation contributed to political stability and governance between 1902 and 1932.

1.7 Theoretical Contributions

This study draws on Epistemic Community Theory (ECT) (Haas, 1992; Adler and Haas, 1992; Cross, 2013, pp. 148–149) to frame Al Aqilat as a knowledge-based network influencing governance during the formation of the Third Saudi State. While ECT has most often been applied to contemporary technocratic institutions (Verdun, 1999; Dunlop, 2017), scholarship has also encouraged extending its scope to historical and non-Western settings (Checkel, 2005; Stone, 2013). This thesis advances that agenda by demonstrating that a historical merchant intelligence network could generate epistemic authority through economic diplomacy, intelligence brokerage, and reputational credibility, shaping governance outcomes outside formal bureaucratic office.

The thesis contributes to the evolution of ECT in two main ways. First, it shifts the empirical focus from scientific policy communities in postwar institutional settings to a historical merchant network, showing that the structured transmission of specialised knowledge can be produced through trade corridors, financial coordination, and cross border negotiation rather than through

expert committees alone (Haas, 1992; Cross, 2013, pp. 143–145). Second, it extends ECT from contemporary governance arenas to early state formation, arguing that epistemic communities can operate in non bureaucratic environments where authority and coordination are negotiated through networks and practice, not institutional mandate.

To strengthen explanation, the thesis integrates ECT with Social Network Theory and Historical Institutionalism. ECT specifies what counted as valid expertise and how authority formed under uncertainty. Social Network Theory clarifies how ties, brokerage positions, and embedded relationships structured the flow of information and the diffusion of influence across regions and arenas (Granovetter, 1973; Burt, 2000). Historical Institutionalism explains how repeated practices became embedded and durable over time, and how constraints and critical junctures shaped longer trajectories of governance and political order (Pierson, 2000; Steinmo, 2008). Together, these lenses support a mechanism focused account of Al Aqilat influence, linking epistemic authority, transmission through brokerage, and durability through institutional embedding.

1.8 Scope and Limitations

This study investigates Al-Aqilat's contributions to Saudi Arabia's state formation (1902–1932) by analysing their roles in trade, intelligence, and governance as a knowledge-based social group. It draws primarily on archival materials from British, French, Saudi, and Ottoman sources, supported by relevant secondary literature. The analysis is confined to documented evidence and therefore excludes oral histories and ethnographic data, both because of the historical distance and because the study prioritises verifiable documentary traces.

The study has several limitations. Archival coverage is uneven, and access to some records is restricted or incomplete, particularly within parts of the British and Ottoman collections. Some intelligence and diplomatic reports also reflect colonial framing, which can shape how actors and events are represented. To address these constraints, the research relies on source triangulation across multiple archives and applies critical source analysis when interpreting administrative descriptions and political categorisations. Finally, because Al-Aqilat's activities often operated

through informal ties that are not consistently recorded, the study reconstructs patterns through thematic coding across dispersed documentary references rather than depending on any single archive or narrative source.

1.9 Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is organised into six chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the research problem, explains the periodisation (1902–1932) and the focus on the Third Saudi State, introduces Al-Aqilat as a historically identifiable merchant-caravan network, and sets out the study's research questions, significance, and theoretical contribution. Chapter 2 develops the theoretical framework by positioning Epistemic Community Theory in dialogue with state-formation debates and specifying the complementary roles of Social Network Theory and Historical Institutionalism in explaining transmission and durability. Chapter 3 sets out the methodology, including the construction of the multi-archive documentary corpus, the document selection and verification workflow, and the NVivo-supported thematic coding approach used to produce the study's themes and mechanisms.

Chapter 4 provides the focused historical background needed to interpret the empirical record, clarifying the state-formation setting within which Al-Aqilat operated. Chapter 5 presents the empirical findings in two linked layers. First, it reports Al-Aqilat's stabilising roles across five thematic arenas: financial networks for political stability, military contributions and state defence, strategic conflict mediation and dispute management, trade diplomacy and external commercial governance, and media and narrative stabilisation. Second, it synthesises the findings through a mechanism section that explains how influence operated through epistemic authority under uncertainty, networked brokerage as governance capacity, and institutional embedding and durability, before integrating these mechanisms into a consolidated explanatory account. Chapter 6 provides the discussion and conclusion, interpreting the findings in relation to the study aims, drawing out the thesis's scholarly contributions and implications, and concluding with limitations and future research directions.

Chapter 2
Theoretical Framework

This chapter sets out the theoretical framework used to analyse Al-Aqilat as a knowledge-based collective actor in Saudi state formation. It first defines epistemic communities and clarifies their core attributes, before reviewing relevant historical examples and the concept's relevance to state-building contexts. The chapter then outlines the main mechanisms through which epistemic communities exert influence, evaluates the strengths and conditions of the approach, and identifies key gaps in the existing literature. Finally, it explains how these gaps are addressed through the Al-Aqilat case and positions ECT alongside Historical Institutionalism (HI) and Social Network Theory (SNT) as the combined analytical framework for the thesis.

2.1 Defining Epistemic Communities

The idea of epistemic or knowledge-based communities influencing policy and governance has become a central analytical lens for understanding how expert influence operates within state structures. Peter Haas, writing in the early 1990s, introduced the notion that clusters of professionals grounded in specialized expertise play a pivotal role in guiding policymakers especially during periods marked by uncertainty through shared understandings and interpretive frameworks (Haas, 1992, p. 4). According to this view, these expert collectives shape state preferences and policy trajectories by building consensus around specific norms and evidence-based strategies. While Haas's original formulation emerged from contemporary policy coordination settings, later work shows the concept can be extended historically to contexts where expertise is embedded in commerce, mobility, and the disciplined circulation of intelligence.

Deringer's (2017) concept of "mercantile epistemology" offers a precise bridge for making this historical extension without diluting the core criteria of ECT. Deringer shows that merchant groups can function as epistemic communities because their "business to know" depends on systematic accumulation, verification, and circulation of commercial and political intelligence forms of expertise that can shape statecraft rather than merely respond to it. In a comparable way, Al-Aqilat can be conceptualised as a caravan-based epistemic community: a mobile network whose cross-regional trade activity positioned them as repositories of geopolitical, economic, and cultural knowledge across Central Arabia and adjoining arenas (Deringer, 2017; Pétriat, 2020; Steinberg, 2004). Steinberg notes that "Najdi students had followed all the important trade routes for some centuries" (Steinberg, 2004, p. 84), underscoring how knowledge transmission was structurally tied to trade mobility. This knowledge was not merely individual; it was socially produced and reproduced through network relationships, apprenticeship, trading protocols, and intergenerational transmission dynamics consistent with epistemic community processes of knowledge creation and circulation (Håkanson, 2005; Onley, 2007).

Such communities typically function through a cohesive foundation of common values, interpretative approaches, and technical knowledge, allowing them to wield significant authority over both national and transnational policymaking arenas. Framing merchant activity in this way clarifies why epistemic influence in state-formation contexts can be exercised through non-bureaucratic channels, especially where formal expert institutions are limited or emergent.

When applied to state formation, these knowledge groups emerge not merely as commentators but as active participants in shaping institutional structures. They contribute to the generation, translation, and communication of ideas that influence state priorities and governance mechanisms. Their ability to diagnose challenges, frame political and economic problems, and propose coherent solutions underscores their relevance in establishing long-term state frameworks.

Meyer and Molyneux-Hodgson (2010) describe these groups as deeply embedded in knowledge systems, where their core function involves organizing and transmitting specialized

insights. This process, they argue, is instrumental in negotiating the often fragmented and politically sensitive pathways that lead to institutional legitimacy and policy coherence.

Furthermore, epistemic communities are recognized for their ability to influence state behavior and international cooperation, as they "exercise decisive power in the construction of world politics" through their authoritative claims on knowledge (Antoniades, 2003, p. 56). By providing a coherent and scientifically informed perspective, epistemic communities help to steer state building efforts, particularly in scenarios where traditional political mechanisms may fall short.

In International Relations (IR), epistemic communities were introduced to explain how expert knowledge gains authority under conditions of uncertainty and becomes consequential in governance beyond the state. Haas defines epistemic communities as networks of professionals with recognised expertise and competence in a particular domain who share normative commitments, causal beliefs, shared criteria of validity, and a common policy enterprise (Haas, 1992, pp. 3–4). Efforts to formalise and categorise epistemic communities also show that these groups can be analytically described according to their internal structure and hierarchies, reinforcing that ‘community’ is an empirical property rather than an assumed label (Roth and Bourgine, 2005). Subsequent IR work shows that the analytical value of the concept is not confined to “technical” sectors but extends to broader questions of how transnational policy problems are framed, how credibility is constructed, and why some interpretations travel into decision arenas while others do not. Cross (2013) reinforces this point by arguing that epistemic communities remain central to understanding transnational governance, precisely because they connect authoritative expertise to policy-relevant influence and help explain why knowledge-based claims can shape outcomes even when political interests compete (Cross, 2013, pp. 137–139).

As outlined earlier, epistemic communities are typically understood as collectives of experts or professionals who possess acknowledged expertise and influence within a specific area of specialization. According to Haas (1992), these communities furthermore, are distinguished by

their shared normative beliefs, causal understandings, and commitment to a common policy enterprise. They not only possess specialized knowledge but also share a consensus on how to interpret this knowledge and apply it to policy-making, particularly in areas characterized by uncertainty and complexity. This shared understanding enables epistemic communities to guide decision-makers in defining state interests and formulating policies that are both scientifically sound and politically feasible.

The application of ECT to the Al-Aqilat requires extending Haas's framework beyond policy coordination to encompass institutional creation. The Al-Aqilat functioned as what might be termed a 'caravan epistemic community' a network whose mobility across the Arabian Peninsula, Ottoman Empire, Gulf, and Indian Ocean positioned them as carriers of applied political economic knowledge (Pétriat, 2020; Steinberg, 2004). Their epistemic authority derived from their unique position at the intersection of multiple knowledge domains: Bedouin tribal politics, Ottoman bureaucratic practices, British imperial protocols, and Indian Ocean commerce. Beyond technical competence, epistemic authority is sustained by normative coherence shared values that make a community's knowledge claims believable and actionable.

Normative coherence is particularly important in historically rooted commercial communities, where credibility is earned through reputational discipline rather than formal certification. In the Al-Aqilat's case, commercial authority was reinforced through what may be described as an "ethical economy" grounded in socially recognised values; such as honesty (*ṣidq*), trustworthiness (*amāna*), courage (*shajāʿa*), generosity (*karam*), and patience (*ṣabr*); which structured exchange practices and made long-distance cooperation viable. As Pétriat observes, the ʿAqīl trading network's effectiveness depended on trustworthiness, goods quality, and route security (Pétriat, 2020, p. 169), indicating that reputational capital functioned as a governance resource rather than a private virtue. Analytically, this matters for state-formation because actors who are widely treated as trustworthy can reduce uncertainty, stabilise expectations, and enable coordination where emergent institutions cannot yet guarantee reliability thereby making such intermediaries credible conduits for finance, intelligence, and negotiation.

This normative basis of credibility also anticipates the later institutional and network discussions, because durable authority requires both recognised trust and channels through which trusted interpretations can circulate.

Although ECT is often presented as a policy-studies tool, it emerged from International Relations (IR) as an explanation for how expert knowledge acquires authority in transnational governance under uncertainty. Haas defines epistemic communities as networks of professionals with recognised competence in a given domain who share normative and principled beliefs, causal beliefs, shared criteria for validating knowledge, and a common policy enterprise (Haas, 1992, pp. 3–4). This IR lineage matters because it establishes that epistemic influence is not confined to domestic bureaucracies; it can operate across borders through credibility, shared validity standards, and problem-framing capacity that becomes salient when decision-makers face uncertainty (Haas, 1992, pp. 3–4).

Adler and Haas (1992) deepen this point by linking epistemic communities to international policy coordination, showing how knowledge-based authority can shape state conduct and institutional development by defining what counts as a "rational" or legitimate response to complex governance problems. However, later IR scholarship has also warned against treating epistemic communities as automatically cohesive or uniformly influential. Cross (2013) refines the concept by showing that epistemic authority is socially produced through professional boundaries, access to decision arenas, and credibility contests that determine which knowledge claims become policy-relevant and which remain marginal (Cross, 2013, pp. 137–139). This refinement is important for historical application: it supports analysing epistemic communities not as free-floating "expert groups," but as bounded authority formations whose influence depends on recognition, access, and the institutional channels through which their interpretations travel (Haas, 1992, pp. 3–4; Cross, 2013, pp. 137–139).

This IR-grounded specification also clarifies why credibility and uptake remain central when ECT is extended historically: epistemic influence depends not only on possessing

knowledge, but on being recognised as a legitimate authority within specific political and institutional conditions (Galbreath & McEvoy, 2012).

While the foundational characteristics of epistemic communities shared causal beliefs, normative commitments, and policy goals offer a strong conceptual starting point, questions of credibility and uptake remain central, particularly when the framework is extended to historically embedded and informally organised knowledge actors. A number of scholars have raised theoretical and empirical concerns about the scope, consistency, and contextual limitations of the framework. These critiques are essential to consider before extending the concept to historical, informal, or non-Western governance contexts. The next section therefore reviews these debates to clarify the conditions under which epistemic influence becomes possible and where it is likely to be constrained**.**

2.1.1 Historical examples of ECs

Scholars have long critiqued the epistemic communities framework for its tendency to prioritize technical expertise, often overlooking the influence of surrounding political dynamics. A key historical illustration of this tension is found in the role of the Delors Committee during the formulation of the European Monetary Union (EMU) in the late 1980s and early 1990s. According to Verdun (1999), the committee composed of specialists in monetary policy operated as a cohesive epistemic community, playing a pivotal part in shaping the direction of European monetary integration.

However, the Delors Committee's effectiveness did not solely stem from technical knowledge; its influence was also closely tied to how well it aligned with the interests of leading political actors across Europe. This case highlights how the reach of epistemic communities can be amplified or limited depending on their capacity to navigate prevailing political environments. In this sense, the case of the EMU emphasizes the critical role of contextual political alignment in determining whether epistemic advice is adopted or sidelined during key moments of institutional change.

The impact of epistemic communities on policy-making is not absolute; it is often contingent upon the broader political and institutional context. Another instructive case can be found in the involvement of U.S. economists during the Bretton Woods negotiations of the 1940s, where their expertise played a central role in designing the post-World War II global economic framework. As noted by Sebenius (1992), the epistemic community of economists, including figures like John Maynard Keynes and Harry Dexter White, was instrumental in shaping the Bretton Woods system.

However, their influence was contingent on their ability to align their economic proposals with the geopolitical interests of the Allied powers, particularly the United States. This case highlights how the impact of epistemic communities is highly context-dependent, reliant on the receptiveness of the political environment and the presence of institutional support. It challenges the notion that epistemic communities can exert influence solely based on their expertise, instead highlighting the importance of strategic alignment with political and institutional goals. As Checkel (1997) argues, the ability of epistemic communities to shape policy is often greater in more centralised regimes, where fewer veto players may facilitate the integration of expert advice into decision-making processes. However, these same regimes may be less accessible or open to external epistemic input, creating a paradox in which centralized states are both harder to penetrate and more capable of enacting epistemic-informed reforms once engaged.

Beyond Euro Atlantic cases, epistemic communities also operate through regionally networked policy arenas. The Asia Pacific epistemic community surrounding the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank illustrates how expert networks can influence institutional design by circulating shared templates of legitimacy, risk, and development governance (Jerdén, 2017).

A further criticism of the idea epistemic communities is the potential over-reliance on expert-driven policies, which can sometimes lead to a disconnect with public sentiment and practical realities. An illustrative case is found in the Uruguay Round of GATT negotiations, where the epistemic community of trade experts focused heavily on the technical aspects of trade

liberalization. Sebenius (1992) discusses how these experts often prioritized economic theory over the broader social and economic impacts on domestic industries and labor groups. This overemphasis on technical expertise, without sufficient engagement with the affected stakeholders, led to tensions and resistance from those whose livelihoods were directly impacted by the agreements. This example illustrates the risks associated with prioritizing expert knowledge over the lived experiences and concerns of the broader population, which can undermine the legitimacy and effectiveness of policy outcomes. Later scholarship on Saudi governance highlights how technical and infrastructural expertise can become a core component of state capacity and legitimacy, which helps clarify why "expertise" should be treated as politically consequential (Jones 2010).

Incorporating these critiques and empirical examples, it becomes clear that while epistemic communities play a crucial role in shaping policies related to state building, their influence must be understood within a more complex landscape of knowledge and power dynamics. The theory of epistemic communities, therefore, should not be viewed as a monolithic or universally applicable model but rather as one that operates within specific contexts and is influenced by a multitude of factors. By recognizing the diversity within epistemic communities and the limitations of their influence, it becomes clear that their role in state-building is both significant and conditional. This nuanced understanding is essential for appreciating the full scope of their impact and for ensuring that policies informed by epistemic communities are inclusive, contextually appropriate, and ultimately effective in achieving sustainable state-building outcomes.

2.1.2 Epistemic Sovereignty and Knowledge Control in State Formation

The concept of epistemic sovereignty, developed by Bourdieu (1991), refers to authority over the production, validation, and circulation of knowledge. It is closely tied to the ability of actors to shape public discourse, define truth regimes, and influence institutional frameworks by controlling what knowledge is legitimised, suppressed, or amplified. In the context of state-building, epistemic sovereignty therefore extends beyond formal governance structures,

positioning certain actors often operating outside formal bureaucracy as central agents of political influence through knowledge control rather than through formal office.

This emphasis on knowledge control is particularly relevant to state-formation settings where authority is still consolidating and where the struggle is not only over coercion and resources but also over *meaning*, *legitimacy*, and *credible interpretation*. As Lustick argues, state formation is not simply a linear institutional build-up but a contested process in which rulers and competing actors seek to make particular political arrangements appear natural, inevitable, and legitimate; this involves organising narratives, managing uncertainty, and shaping what is socially recognised as "common sense" about authority and order (Lustick, 1993). In this sense, epistemic sovereignty captures a core mechanism through which actors can stabilise emergent rule: by influencing which interpretations dominate, which threats are emphasised or downplayed, and which policy options become thinkable or acceptable.

Placing epistemic sovereignty alongside ECT also clarifies an important conceptual distinction. Traditional epistemic communities, as defined by Haas (1992), are composed of scientific and policy experts who shape governance largely through formal advisory roles and the mobilisation of specialised knowledge. Epistemic sovereignty, by contrast, provides a broader lens for identifying how informal actors such as economic elites, merchants, intermediaries, or media influencers can perform knowledge-governance functions without necessarily belonging to formal expert bodies. These actors do not merely supply expertise; they influence which kinds of knowledge are treated as authoritative, which interpretations circulate widely, and which narratives become embedded in institutional practice.

This distinction is essential for understanding the role of Al-Aqilat, whose influence was not always derived from formal positions of power but from their capacity to operate as knowledge brokers across trade, diplomacy, intelligence, and communication. Their access to transregional information flows, their control over commercial routes, and their strategic signalling through networks of trust enabled them to shape epistemic narratives that contributed to regime legitimacy

and governance stability. By affecting what information was visible or concealed especially during periods of crisis or uncertainty they exercised a form of epistemic sovereignty that could support consolidation by reducing ambiguity, coordinating expectations, and strengthening the perceived credibility of the emerging political order.

Importantly, this conceptual layer can be developed without relying on broad critical theory claims, by focusing instead on the practical governance effects of controlling credibility, access, and interpretive authority. In state-formation contexts, the central issue is not simply whether knowledge exists, but *whose* knowledge is treated as reliable, *how* their interpretations travel across networks, and *when* such interpretations become actionable in decision-making arenas. This thesis therefore treats epistemic authority as a form of socially recognised credibility that can stabilise rule by shaping what counts as valid information and which strategic options appear feasible particularly where institutions are emergent, information is unevenly distributed, and legitimacy is actively being constructed rather than assumed.

Hence, combining the epistemic community framework with epistemic sovereignty enables this study to capture the hybrid role of informal elite actors like Al-Aqilat, who operated as covert state-builders and strategic intermediaries rather than merely as policy advisors. Their influence is best understood not only through what they *knew*, but through how they governed the circulation of knowledge, aligned interpretations with consolidating authority, and contributed to making the emerging state appear coherent, credible, and durable (Bourdieu, 1991; Haas, 1992; Lustick, 1993).

2.2 Limits of State-Formation Debates in the Saudi Case

State formation scholarship has been dominated by coercion-centred accounts that treat war-making, territorial consolidation, and extraction capacity as the primary engines of durable political order (Tilly, 1985; Mann, 1986). From this perspective, consolidation is explained mainly through organised force, coalition-building, and the gradual construction of bureaucratic reach. These approaches are powerful for specifying why coercive capacity matters and how rulers

expand control, but they can under-specify *how governance functions in practice* in settings where formal institutions are thin, authority is uneven, and stability depends on coordination across dispersed arenas rather than on uniform administrative penetration (Mann, 1986; Slater, 2010). This is a key limitation for cases where rule is assembled under conditions of uncertainty and where "state effects" depend not only on force but also on the management of movement, information, provisioning, and negotiation across multiple constituencies.

While coercion-centred and extraction-focused accounts have been highly productive for explaining why rulers seek to monopolise violence and build territorial control, they tend to treat the state as if it is consolidated primarily through *material* instruments force, revenue, and administrative reach whose causal power is largely self-evident (Tilly, 1985; Mann, 1986). What often remains under-specified in these traditions is *how* political order becomes workable and recognisable in the everyday sense: how authority is made credible, how categories of loyalty and threat are stabilised, and how rulers acquire the practical capacity to coordinate across fragmented social terrain where formal institutions are thin and rule depends on negotiated compliance rather than uniform bureaucratic penetration (Mann, 1986; Slater, 2010).

Ayubi's intervention helps sharpen this problematisation in Arab governance contexts by showing why Weberian expectations of bureaucratic consolidation often mis-specify how authority and capacity are actually assembled. Rather than treating the state as a uniform institutional container, Ayubi argues that governance capacity in many Arab settings is produced through hybrid arrangements personalised leadership, informal mediation, and socially anchored legitimacy mechanisms that operate alongside (and sometimes in place of) formal bureaucratic routines (Ayubi, 1995, pp. 23–31; Heydemann & Lynch, 2024). This matters for the Saudi case because it supports analysing consolidation as more than coercion or administrative expansion: it directs attention to the governance functions performed by non-bureaucratic actors who enable coordination, mediation, and informational capacity that emergent institutions cannot yet internalise. In this sense, Ayubi provides a region-sensitive bridge between coercion-centred state formation debates and the thesis's focus on knowledge-bearing intermediaries as empirically

consequential contributors to stabilisation trajectories (Ayubi, 1995, pp. 23–31). Recent syntheses on the Arab state emphasise hybrid authority and informal mediation alongside formal institutions, aligning with your focus on non-bureaucratic stabilisation mechanisms (Heydemann & Lynch, 2024).

Taken together, this shows that explaining consolidation in the Saudi case requires attention not only to coercion and administrative reach, but also to the interpretive and cultural processes through which authority becomes legible, credible, and governable an issue developed more directly through Steinmetz's state/culture intervention**.**

This is where Steinmetz's intervention becomes especially useful. Steinmetz argues that state-formation debates frequently point to cultural factors only symptomatically as background "values," national character, or residual explanation without treating culture/state relations as a systematic object of theorisation (Steinmetz, 1999, pp. 23–26). Yet culture, in this view, is not an optional add-on to "hard" state-building; it is constitutive of how power is organised, interpreted, and reproduced. Cultural processes provide the shared meanings through which governance becomes intelligible, legitimate, and actionable: they shape what counts as authority, what kinds of claims are considered binding, and what forms of coordination are viewed as acceptable or trustworthy. Put differently, state power is not only exercised through coercive resources; it is also made durable through classificatory schemes, reputational cues, and interpretive frames that structure how actors read each other's intentions and obligations.

The implication is crucial for cases where consolidation is achieved through dispersed arenas of negotiation and brokerage rather than through deep administrative penetration. Where institutions are uneven, and where rulers must govern through intermediaries, the state's "reach" depends not only on how much force it can deploy but also on whether it can mobilise credible channels of information, risk-management, mediation, and cross-regional coordination. In such settings, informal actors who can perform governance functions by translating priorities, brokering commitments, reducing uncertainty, and sustaining reputational trust may be central to

stabilisation even if they do not occupy formal office. Steinmetz's critique therefore helps reframe what is missing in coercion-centred accounts: the mechanisms through which *meaning* and *credibility* enable governance capacities to travel across space, connect constituencies, and stabilise rule.

Seen through this lens, a key analytical question becomes not only *who conquered* and *which* coalitions were coerced, but also which actors made rule governable by supplying the interpretive, informational, and relational infrastructure that allowed authority to operate across fragmented political geography. This matters directly for the Saudi case, where dominant historiography has understandably foregrounded conquest, tribal alliance-making, religious mobilisation, and external diplomacy, yet can leave underdeveloped the stabilising contributions of non-military intermediaries whose influence was expressed through transregional connectivity, practical expertise, and credible brokerage rather than formal command or bureaucratic office (Kostiner, 1985; Vassiliev, 2000; Commins, 2006; Al-Rasheed, 2010; Al Nuaim, 1987).

Owen (2000) similarly cautions that Middle East state formation cannot be read as a simple transplant of European institutional templates, because external pressures, fiscal constraints, and elite coalition-making shape governance trajectories in historically specific ways (Owen 2000, pp.2-4). Middle East state formation scholarship links state capacity to political economy and development trajectories, offering a regional baseline for evaluating the Saudi consolidation case (Bromley, 1993; John, 1970; Philby, 1928). War and state formation research itself has been shaped by a Europe centred agenda, and Heydemann shows why Middle East cases require treating war making as a social and institutional process with limited portability from European sequences (Heydemann, 2000, pp. 1–5, Heydemann, 2003). Relatedly, Bromley criticises culturalist accounts that treat the region as "peculiar" and instead argues that historically specific relations of surplus extraction and social power better explain political development than reified claims about Islam or Arabism (Bromley, 1993, pp. 3–4).

Commins (2006) demonstrates that consolidation under Ibn Saud relied not only on coercion and territorial expansion, but also on the production of religious–political legitimacy through sustained coalition management with Wahhabi scholarly constituencies and the governance norms that emerged from that relationship. This emphasis is analytically important because it treats legitimacy as an outcome that is actively constructed through recognised authority and credible interpretation, rather than as a secondary by-product of military victory. At the same time, historiographical focus on rulers, clerics, and tribal incorporation can leave underdeveloped the role of non-tribal intermediaries whose influence operates through cross-regional information, reputational credibility, and strategic brokerage. In this sense, Commins' account helps specify the legitimacy arena while also clarifying why informal knowledge actors require explicit analytical attention when explaining governance stabilisation in settings of emergent institutions. This legitimacy arena can be specified further by examining how religious institutions, educational mobility, and migration circuits connected disparate actors to the emerging Saudi project.

Farquhar (2016, ch. 2) strengthens Saudi state-formation analysis by demonstrating that consolidation depended on the articulation of diverse actors and institutions into a shared project through circuits of learning, mobility, and religious mission. Analytically, these circuits function as governance infrastructure: they move authorised interpretations across space, standardise expectations about correct practice and legitimate authority, and thereby stabilise compliance in settings where formal administration remains uneven. This perspective clarifies a mechanism often under-specified in coercion-centred accounts: state capacity is partly assembled through socially embedded channels that transmit credibility and normative order, not only through coercive reach. At the same time, Farquhar's account highlights what remains analytically open in the Saudi case namely the role of non-religious intermediaries whose stabilising influence operated through economic intelligence, trade diplomacy, and brokerage across political arenas an explanatory space addressed directly through the epistemic-community and network mechanisms developed in this chapter.

This wider ecology of institutional articulation provides a useful backdrop for the next step, which is to specify the mechanisms through which particular knowledge bearing actors acquire authority, secure uptake, and translate credibility into governance outcomes.

Al-Fahad (2004) adds an internally grounded perspective on how authority and governance were negotiated through the practical interfaces between leadership, social elites, and the normative frameworks that sustained rule. This helps clarify that consolidation cannot be reduced to military campaigns alone; it also involved stabilising recognised authority and aligning key constituencies around credible interpretations of political order. At the same time, attention to these internal dynamics makes analytically visible why epistemic intermediaries matter: where governance depends on persuasion, coordination, and the management of information among multiple constituencies, actors able to circulate credible knowledge across social boundaries can become disproportionately influential. This provides a direct bridge from Saudi historiography to the mechanisms developed later in this chapter credibility under uncertainty, institutional embedding over time, and the networked transmission of authoritative interpretations across arenas.

A second strand highlights institutions and path dependence, arguing that political outcomes are shaped by sequencing, critical junctures, and the gradual embedding of authority through rules and organisational routines (North, 1990; Pierson, 2000; Steinmo, 2008). This literature improves on purely coercive models by explaining why early organisational choices and institutional constraints structure later trajectories. However, it often treats "institutions" as formal or state-centred and can leave informal coordination systems analytically residual despite the fact that, historically, stabilisation frequently depends on actors who can perform institutional functions (coordination, mediation, resource mobilisation, credible signalling) without holding office (North, 1990; Pierson, 2000, 252–254). The implication is that historical state formation may be misunderstood if attention is restricted to rulers, armies, and formal administration, while the social infrastructure that sustains governance under fragile conditions is treated as background.

A third debate foregrounds state–society bargaining and the politics of legitimacy, emphasising how coalitions, social bases, and compliance are produced through negotiated exchanges rather than imposed solely through coercion (Migdal, 1988, pp. 19–26; Slater, 2010). This lens directs attention to non-state actors who can shape political outcomes by controlling resources, knowledge, and networks that rulers need to govern. Yet, even here, merchant actors are often conceptualised primarily as "economic" supporters or beneficiaries, rather than as *knowledge-bearing intermediaries* who can influence stabilisation by enabling cross-border coordination, risk management, and credible brokerage in fragmented environments. For the Saudi case, mainstream historiography has tended to privilege conquest, tribal alliance-making, religious mobilisation, and external diplomacy as the dominant explanatory drivers of consolidation (Kostiner, 1985; Vassiliev, 2000; Commins, 2006; Al-Rasheed, 2010). A detailed historical account of the Wahhabi mission also shows how religious authority and doctrinal consolidation became entwined with governance and state legitimacy in Saudi Arabia (Commins, 2005). These accounts are foundational, but their dominant emphasis can leave analytically underdeveloped the contribution of non-military actors whose capacities were expressed through transregional connectivity, reputational authority, and practical expertise rather than through formal command or bureaucratic office (Vassiliev, 2000; Al-Rasheed, 2010).

This thesis therefore positions its theoretical contribution at the intersection of these debates. It retains the insight that coercion and coalition-building mattered for consolidation (Tilly, 1985; Kostiner, 1985; Al-Rasheed, 2010), while arguing that stabilisation also depended on *knowledge-based capacities* that enabled governance across contested arenas, especially where administrative reach was still limited (Mann, 1986; Slater, 2010). This is why ECT is deployed to specify mechanisms of influence through expertise, credibility, and shared interpretive frameworks (Haas, 1992; Adler and Haas, 1992), Historical Institutionalism is used to locate these roles within sequencing and institutional embedding over time (Pierson, 2000, p. 255; Steinmo, 2008), and SNT is used to conceptualise how influence is exercised through relational structure and brokerage across arenas (Granovetter, 1973, pp. 1361–1365; Burt, 2000). Together, these

frameworks provide the analytical tools to treat actors such as Al-Aqilat not as background "economic context," but as empirically traceable contributors to stabilisation through knowledge, coordination, and networked mediation.

While Tilly's account assigns a central role to merchants in supporting war-making through taxation, credit, and capital accumulation within emerging European fiscal military states, the role played by Al-Aqilat differed both structurally and functionally. Rather than being integrated into formal extraction systems, Al-Aqilat operated as intermediaries who mobilised resources, transmitted intelligence, and facilitated coordination across fragmented political spaces without exercising coercive or fiscal authority. This distinction reflects a broader difference between European state formation, characterised by centralising extraction, and Arabian state formation, where authority was constructed through brokerage, negotiation, and socially embedded networks (Tilly, 1992, pp. 67–75; Ayubi, 1995, pp. 23–31). Al-Aqilat thus did not replicate the European merchant role identified by Tilly, but instead performed an epistemic and connective function that enabled state consolidation under conditions of limited bureaucratic capacity.

The next section specifies the mechanisms through which epistemic communities exert influence, providing the analytical toolkit used later to interpret Al-Aqilat's historically traceable roles.

2.3 Mechanisms of Influence in Epistemic Communities

Epistemic communities shape governance not simply by possessing expertise, but by mobilising knowledge through identifiable mechanisms that affect how decision-makers interpret problems, select options, and stabilise policy choices under uncertainty (Haas, 1992; Adler and Haas, 1992). Scholarship differs on whether epistemic influence is best understood as a primarily *cognitive* process (reducing uncertainty by supplying shared causal beliefs), a *normative* process (embedding standards of appropriateness), or an *institutional* process (locking ideas into durable rules and routines). For analytical clarity, this thesis treats epistemic influence as operating through five interrelated mechanisms: persuasion, socialisation/social learning, framing,

institutionalisation, and crisis leverage (Haas, 1989; Haas, 1992; Checkel, 1997; Johnston, 2001; Adler and Haas, 1992).

In contemporary IR debates, the value of ECT lies not simply in identifying "experts," but in explaining how expertise becomes power (Risse, 2000). Sending (2015) argues that expertise operates as a political resource through practices that constitute authority problem definition, classification, and the establishment of credible boundaries between legitimate and illegitimate knowledge. This shifts analysis away from assuming that knowledge persuades by its intrinsic correctness, toward examining the social conditions under which expert claims become binding, taken-for-granted, or institutionally privileged (Ruggie, 2002). The implication is that epistemic influence should be modelled as conditional and contested: it depends on whether expert authority is recognised, whether its validity standards are accepted, and whether it aligns with institutional interests and coalitional incentives (Sending, 2015).

This mechanism-centred reading also clarifies how ECT differs from neighbouring IR approaches. Finnemore and Sikkink's (1998) norms scholarship foregrounds persuasion, socialisation, and legitimacy dynamics in the diffusion of appropriate behaviour, whereas ECT centres on epistemic credibility and shared validity criteria as the basis for authoritative problem-framing. Similarly, Keck and Sikkink (1998) conceptualise transnational advocacy networks as mobilisation structures that use moral framing and "boomerang" politics to pressure states; this differs from epistemic communities, whose leverage derives less from activism and more from recognised competence and problem-solving authority. Slaughter's (2004) account of transgovernmental networks, in turn, highlights coordination among state officials across borders; by contrast, epistemic communities need not be composed of officials and can exert influence through recognised expertise even when they remain outside formal office. This is consistent with scholarship on the transnational construction of expert authority, which shows how professional credibility and shared evaluative standards can travel across borders and become institutionally consequential (Fourcade, 2006). These contrasts matter analytically: they prevent conceptual stretching and clarify why Al-Aqilat are not best captured as advocacy entrepreneurs or

intergovernmental regulators, but as a historically embedded knowledge-bearing formation whose authority rested on credibility, interpretive capacity, and cross-arena problem framing (Sending, 2015; Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998; Keck and Sikkink, 1998; Slaughter, 2004).

With these boundary conditions clarified, the subsequent discussion specifies the core ECT mechanisms most relevant to historical state-formation settings uncertainty, credibility/authority, persuasion, and policy enterprise.

First, *persuasion through expert authority* occurs when epistemic actors supply coherent causal accounts and policy-relevant interpretations that decision-makers treat as credible guides under complexity (Haas, 1992). This influence depends less on coercion than on the perceived reliability of the community's knowledge claims and its capacity to present problems in actionable terms. Yet persuasion is not automatic: critics note that "expert authority" competes with political interests, and uptake depends on receptivity within governing coalitions and on whether expertise is seen as aligned with feasible solutions rather than abstract diagnosis (Haas, 1992; Checkel, 1997). Classic work on international environmental cooperation illustrates how expert consensus can become persuasive when it is translated into policy language and credible risk narratives (Litfin, 1994).

Second, epistemic communities influence through *socialisation and social learning,* whereby repeated interaction shifts what policymakers see as reasonable, legitimate, or appropriate. Here, the mechanism is not only informational but normative: ideas become embedded through contact, reinforcement, and the internalisation of shared standards (Checkel, 1997; Johnston, 2001). This literature also emphasises a constraint: socialisation effects tend to be strongest where institutional settings enable repeated engagement and where actors have incentives to seek legitimacy from expert consensus (Johnston, 2001; Checkel, 1997).

Third, epistemic influence is exercised through *framing,* meaning the power to define what counts as the "problem," which indicators matter, and which responses become thinkable or legitimate (Haas, 1992; Haas, 2004). Empirically, EU environmental policy debates illustrate how

epistemic actors shape governance by defining which indicators count as evidence and which policy trajectories appear rational, before formal bargaining begins (Smirnova and Yachin, 2014). Framing is analytically important because it links knowledge to governance agendas: by shaping interpretive boundaries, epistemic actors affect which policy choices appear rational or necessary. However, framing is also contested because competing actors may advance rival narratives; thus, epistemic framing is most consequential where uncertainty is high and authoritative interpretive resources are scarce (Haas, 1992; Haas, 2004).

Fourth, epistemic ideas become durable through *institutionalisation,* when knowledge claims and associated norms are incorporated into procedures, administrative routines, or governance agreements (Adler and Haas, 1992). Institutionalisation matters because it stabilises influence beyond the moment of persuasion, turning expert interpretations into taken-for-granted practices. At the same time, scholarship cautions that institutionalisation may dilute epistemic coherence over time as ideas are absorbed into broader bureaucratic and political compromises (Adler and Haas, 1992; Verdun, 1999).

Finally, epistemic communities often gain disproportionate influence through *crisis leverage,* when war, regime transition, or severe uncertainty creates demand for authoritative interpretation and workable coordination (Haas, 1989; Haas, 1992). In such moments, decision-makers may rely more heavily on knowledge brokers who can diagnose risks, forecast consequences, and propose stabilising courses of action. Yet crisis leverage is conditional: it depends on access, credibility, and the ability to translate expertise into governance-relevant guidance rather than simply producing information (Haas, 1989; Haas, 1992).

Together, these mechanisms provide a framework for analysing how knowledge-based actors can shape governance without formal office. In this thesis, they are used as sensitising analytical tools to identify and interpret influence pathways in historical archival evidence, and to specify how knowledge claims, brokerage, and coordination can become politically consequential in state-formation environments (Haas, 1992; Adler and Haas, 1992). The empirical chapters

operationalise these mechanisms through thematic analysis of archival material, tracing how knowledge was produced, circulated, and converted into stabilising practices across multiple arenas.

2.4 Gaps in Literature

Although Epistemic Community Theory (ECT) has become a widely used framework for explaining how expert knowledge shapes policy under conditions of uncertainty (Haas, 1992), the subsequent literature reveals important conceptual and contextual limits that remain under-addressed especially when ECT is mobilised for historical state-formation contexts. The core challenge is not whether epistemic communities can matter, but *how, under what conditions, and with what degree of autonomy* their knowledge claims translate into durable governance effects. Existing scholarship provides valuable insights, yet it also produces a set of recurrent blind spots: the tendency to assume coherence within epistemic communities, to treat influence as linear and mainly ideational, to privilege modern Western institutional arenas, and to under-theorise knowledge-based intermediaries operating in fragmented or pre-bureaucratic political orders. These limits are particularly consequential for studies that seek to recover non-institutional actors such as merchant-intelligence networks within state-building trajectories.

A first gap concerns the *internal coherence assumption* embedded in many foundational deployments of ECT. Haas's (1992) conceptualisation foregrounds shared normative and causal beliefs, common notions of validity, and a policy enterprise that allows an epistemic community to act as a relatively cohesive carrier of expert consensus. Yet later work shows that epistemic communities are not necessarily unified or stable; they can be internally divided, strategically heterogeneous, and politically contested. Failure cases further demonstrate that epistemic consensus does not guarantee policy influence, and that communities can be overridden, fragmented, or sidelined even when their expertise is strong (Löblová, 2017). Adler's (1992) study of security-related expertise demonstrates that even where broad agreement exists on the desirability of arms control, epistemic actors may diverge sharply over causal models and preferred

policy pathways. Zito (2001) similarly problematises the assumption of cohesion by showing how competing interpretations and institutional rivalries can fragment the community's influence. This matters because cohesion is often treated as a *precondition* for epistemic impact; where coherence is overstated, the theory risks becoming a retrospective label applied to outcomes rather than a rigorous explanation of how knowledge coordination actually operated.

A second and closely related gap lies in the literature's tendency to imply *linear knowledge-to-policy influence,* underplaying the political and institutional mediation through which "expertise" becomes authoritative. Verdun's (1999) analysis of expert input into European monetary integration illustrates the analytical payoff of treating epistemic influence as conditional rather than automatic: technical consensus may be necessary for policy convergence, but it is not sufficient without political uptake and strategic alignment. The domestic-level literature reinforces this point. Thomas's (1997) work on interagency cooperation shows that even when expert knowledge is available and shared, bureaucratic incentives and institutional competition can redirect, dilute, or block its translation into policy. In short, epistemic communities do not "apply" knowledge to policy environments from the outside; they operate within contested fields of authority, where their influence depends on gatekeepers, coalitions, and institutional receptivity (Checkel, 1997; Cross, 2013).

This conditionality has been sharpened by critiques that question the image of epistemic communities as *autonomous knowledge brokers.* Antoniades (2003) argues that epistemic influence is mediated through power struggles and the politics of knowledge, implying that epistemic authority cannot be assumed to stand above political contestation. Cross (2013) further emphasises that epistemic communities flourish particularly when decision-makers face uncertainty and seek cognitive shortcuts, yet their influence becomes fragile where political hierarchies are rigid, ideational arenas are crowded by competing claims, or epistemic recommendations disrupt dominant priorities. Taken together, these critiques identify a third gap: ECT often explains *why expertise becomes relevant* under uncertainty, but it less consistently specifies *how epistemic authority is negotiated, who authorises it,* and *how far it can travel* before

being constrained by elite strategy and institutional structure (Checkel, 1997; Antoniades, 2003; Cross, 2013).

A fourth gap is the literature's *domain and geography bias.* Much of the most influential ECT scholarship has been developed through cases embedded in modern Western or transnational governance arenas, where expert authority is routinised through formal committees, regulatory bodies, and stable bureaucratic channels (Haas, 1992; Verdun, 1999; Cross, 2013). This produces a conceptual narrowing: expertise is often tacitly equated with technocratic professionalism and institutionalised access. As a result, the literature is less equipped to analyse epistemic actors whose authority is rooted in *embedded networks, commercial intelligence, reputation, or brokerage across fragmented polities* conditions more typical of historical state-building settings. The problem is not simply "non-Western underrepresentation"; it is that the theory's operational indicators often assume the existence of modern policy architectures that historical cases may lack.

These limitations become sharper when ECT is brought into conversation with dominant *state-formation debates,* which have historically prioritised coercion, extraction, and institutional consolidation as the primary engines of state power. Tilly's (1992) account of war-making and resource mobilisation and Fukuyama's (2011) emphasis on institutional capacity and legitimacy remain highly influential in framing state formation as a process anchored in coercive and administrative power. In the Middle Eastern context, scholars such as Anderson (1987) and Owen (2000) have highlighted trajectories shaped by colonial entanglements, political economy, and distinctive patterns of state–society relations. Yet across these debates, a persistent analytical tendency remains: intermediary actors are often positioned as peripheral supports, beneficiaries, or clients rather than as *knowledge-bearing nodes* that can shape governance choices through informational advantage, economic leverage, and networked mediation. This is the fifth gap that a historical application of ECT must address: mainstream state-formation accounts offer powerful explanations for coercion and institutions, but they often leave under-theorised the role of *non-bureaucratic intermediaries* who can extend state reach, stabilise authority, and influence strategic decision-making without formal office.

A sixth gap concerns the conceptual vocabulary available for explaining *non-coercive authority* in settings where formal institutions are thin. Weber's (1978) typology of authority provides a useful way to think about how legitimacy is produced and stabilised beyond mere force, but ECT scholarship has not consistently integrated legitimacy dynamics into its explanations of epistemic impact. Bourdieu's (1984) concept of symbolic capital further clarifies how authority can be accumulated through reputation, trust, and recognition mechanisms especially relevant to broker communities whose influence depends on being perceived as reliable intermediaries. Boone's (2003) work adds a crucial spatial dimension: state authority often varies across territory, requiring intermediated governance in peripheral zones. These perspectives suggest that epistemic influence in state-building contexts may operate less through formal advisory channels and more through *brokerage, symbolic authority, and territorially differentiated governance arrangements* a set of mechanisms that ECT can accommodate only if it loosens its default association between expertise and modern bureaucratic access.

A seventh gap is methodological and historiographical: much ECT work is built around contemporary settings where actors, institutional memberships, and outputs are observable, whereas historical cases demand inference from dispersed records and contested narratives. This makes the literature vulnerable to a selection problem: epistemic communities become easiest to "see" where documentation mirrors modern policy processes. Addressing this requires clearer criteria for identifying epistemic attributes (shared beliefs, validity standards, policy enterprise) and tracing influence through indirect indicators such as consistent brokerage roles, repeated problem-solving interventions, durable network reproduction, and recognisable patterns of elite uptake rather than relying on modern institutional proxies (Haas, 1992; Adler, 1992; Cross, 2013). The recent emphasis on epistemic performance conditions such as how diversity and internal structure affect problem-solving success also strengthens the case for moving beyond simplistic cohesion assumptions (Grim et al., 2019).

Finally, there is a language and source-visibility issue that intersects with both ECT and Saudi historiography. The ECT literature has developed largely through English-language debates,

while historical accounts of Arabian state-building including Arabic historiography often organise explanation around different categories of causality, legitimacy, and social structure. The result is a double asymmetry: ECT brings a powerful analytic lens but risks imposing modern institutional expectations, while historiographical traditions may recognise intermediary roles without conceptualising them as epistemic authority. A rigorous gaps section should therefore treat the problem not as "absence of evidence," but as an artefact of conceptual frameworks and archival visibility precisely the kind of knowledge-politics problem foregrounded by critiques of epistemic autonomy (Antoniades, 2003). The implication is that applying ECT to historical state formation requires both conceptual extension and methodological discipline: epistemic influence must be theorised as *conditional, mediated, and context-dependent*, rather than assumed as a direct substitute for coercion or institutions (Checkel, 1997; Cross, 2013).

In summary, the gaps in the literature are not resolved by merely asserting that epistemic communities can exist outside modern policy domains. The sharper task is to (i) move beyond coherence assumptions by recognising internal heterogeneity (Adler, 1992; Zito, 2001), (ii) replace linear influence models with a conditional account of political uptake and institutional receptivity (Thomas, 1997; Verdun, 1999; Checkel, 1997), (iii) treat epistemic authority as mediated by power and knowledge politics (Antoniades, 2003), and (iv) bring ECT into disciplined dialogue with state-formation debates without collapsing back into purely coercion-centric explanations (Tilly, 1992, pp. 67–75); Fukuyama, 2011; Anderson, 1987; Owen, 1992). This provides the conceptual space to evaluate historical, non-bureaucratic knowledge actors through a framework that is critical, empirically testable in archival terms, and attentive to legitimacy, territory, and networked brokerage (Weber, 1978; Bourdieu, 1984; Boone, 2003).

2.5 Strengths of the Epistemic Communities Theory in State-Building

The epistemic communities approach offers strong analytical advantages for explaining state-building processes, particularly where governance emerges through coordination of expertise, shared problem definitions, and the circulation of credible knowledge under uncertainty.

It is especially useful for understanding how non-coercive forms of influence can shape institutional development and policy direction in contexts where authority is still consolidating.

2.5.1 Expertise as a Unifying Force in Fragmented Political Environments

One of the fundamental contributions of epistemic communities in fragmented political environments is their ability to offer coherent, knowledge-based guidance during times of institutional transition. In moments of state formation or political uncertainty, when competing actors may advance divergent visions or strategies, expert networks serve as stabilizing forces by generating technically sound and collectively acceptable recommendations. A notable example is found in Verdun's (1999) analysis of the Delors Committee during the formation of the European Monetary Union (EMU). Acting as a group of specialized monetary experts, the committee managed to bridge divergent national economic interests and promote integration by articulating a shared economic rationale. In a similar vein, Zito (2001) explains that the epistemic community surrounding early European integration supplied the intellectual cohesion necessary to bring together diverse national agendas under a unified institutional structure.

The capacity of epistemic communities to unify fragmented political entities is particularly relevant in early stages of state formation, where legitimacy and coherence are often fragile. In his study on the role of epistemic communities in the creation of the European Union, Radaelli (1999) underscores how these communities helped mitigate conflicts among member states by promoting shared policy frameworks based on expert consensus. This ability to foster unity through expertise is a critical strength of the theory, especially in contexts where state-building requires the reconciliation of diverse and often conflicting interests.

2.5.2 Facilitating the Institutionalization of New Governance Structures

Another significant strength of ECT is its emphasis on the role of expert networks in the institutionalization of new governance structures. State-building often requires the establishment of new institutions capable of managing complex administrative, economic, and security

challenges. Haas (1992) provides foundational insights into how epistemic communities contribute to this process, particularly in the context of international environmental governance. Haas (1992) argues that epistemic communities shape governance structures by embedding their technical knowledge and normative beliefs into institutional decision-making processes. These communities influence policymakers by providing specialized expertise and framing issues in ways that align with their epistemic authority, as seen in international environmental governance where scientific and technical experts shaped treaty negotiations and regulatory frameworks (Haas, 1992).

By influencing agenda-setting and policy formulation, epistemic communities contribute to the institutionalization of governance structures in ways that support continuity, adaptability, and resilience against political fluctuations. Extending this analysis, Jasanoff (2004) highlights how epistemic communities not only transfer technical knowledge but also embed shared normative beliefs into emerging institutional architectures. In her analysis of environmental and biotechnological governance, Jasanoff shows how expert networks shape institutional design by framing risks, standards, and regulatory logics in ways that become embedded in legal and bureaucratic systems, enabling governance frameworks to achieve legitimacy and stability even in politically volatile contexts (Jasanoff, 2004).

In the context of state formation, Zurn (2000) provides an analysis of how epistemic communities facilitated the institutionalization of governance structures beyond the nation-state, particularly within the European Union. This study emphasizes the role of epistemic communities in shaping not only the initial design of institutions but also their long-term sustainability by embedding shared norms and practices within the governance framework (Zurn, 2000). This process of institutionalization is critical for the long-term stability of new states, as it helps create a stable environment where governance can flourish.

2.5.3 Enhancing Policy Coherence and Continuity

The notion of epistemic communities offers valuable insights into how policy coherence and continuity are maintained during state-building. In many post-conflict or fragmented political

settings, governance transitions are marked by inconsistent policymaking and abrupt shifts in strategic direction. Epistemic communities alleviate these disruptions by fostering shared policy norms, expert consensus, and institutional learning mechanisms. For instance, Zito (2001) demonstrates how epistemic actors contributed to the coherence of European integration policies by fostering a collective vision among member states. Rather than simply issuing technical advice, these communities engaged in sustained dialogue and norm diffusion across national bureaucracies (Zito, 2001). Similarly, Keohane and Nye (2001) highlight how epistemic communities stabilize complex international policy frameworks by embedding expert knowledge into institutional memory, supporting continuity beyond leadership turnover (Keohane and Nye, 2001).

Wendt's (1999) theory of the social construction of state identity reinforces this point by showing that epistemic influence operates not only through technical guidance but also through shaping how state actors perceive their roles and policy priorities. Through iterative interaction and social learning, epistemic communities can sustain policy coherence over time, reinforcing institutionalised governance patterns beyond short-term political shifts (Wendt, 1999; Zito, 2001).

2.5.4 Legitimizing State Authority Through Knowledge-Based Governance

One of the most significant contributions of epistemic communities to state-building lies in their capacity to legitimize state authority by grounding policies in expert-driven, evidence-based knowledge. This legitimacy becomes especially vital in emerging or transitional states, where authority is often fragmented or contested. In such contexts, epistemic communities enhance the credibility of state actions by presenting them as rational, scientifically-informed, and serving the public interest. This perceived rationality helps fill the vacuum left by weak institutions, making policy decisions more acceptable both to domestic populations and international observers. In state-building contexts, this legitimacy effect is particularly significant because knowledge-based authority can stabilise governance when coercive capacity and institutional credibility remain uneven.

Legitimacy, however, is not produced only through the visible performance of rational policy; it is also produced through the infrastructures that stabilise what counts as credible knowledge and recognised authority. In the Saudi case, scholarship on the Wahhabi mission points to institutional circuits through which authorised interpretations were circulated and normalised across dispersed constituencies, helping consolidate compliance even where administrative reach was uneven (Farquhar, 2016, ch. 2). The analytical implication is that legitimacy depends on the capacity to shape informational environments and to standardise expectations about correctness and authority, not merely on the possession of coercive resources. Yet much of this literature privileges religious institutions as the primary channel of authorised meaning, leaving under-specified how other non-bureaucratic actors also contributed to legitimacy by managing credibility, information, and coordination through different infrastructures. This gap motivates the framework developed here: it treats knowledge-based governance as a broader field in which multiple actors can regulate what becomes publicly credible, institutionally acceptable, and politically actionable.

Heydemann and Lynch (2024) help specify legitimacy as an outcome of how regimes manage "stateness" in practice rather than as a fixed attribute of institutional design. Their critique of deficit style comparisons shows that Arab state trajectories are often misread as deviations from Weberian ideal types, even though they display distinct configurations of capacity, symbolic performance, and coercive reach that are actively shaped by regime survival priorities. This matters for the present thesis because it clarifies why knowledge-based governance can stabilise rule through credibility management, interpretive framing, and the selective deployment of state capacities, especially where institutional consolidation remains uneven and contested (Heydemann & Lynch, 2024, pp. 2–6).

The analytical value lies in the proposition that legitimacy is sustained when actors can manage informational environments controlling credibility, shaping interpretive frames, and stabilising narratives that justify strategic action. This reinforces the argument that knowledge-based governance operates as statecraft: influence is exercised not only through possession of

information, but through capacity to shape which information circulates, how it is interpreted, and how it translates into practical governance choices during critical episodes of consolidation.

In this legitimacy-focused reading, authority is strengthened not only by institutional design or coercive reach, but by whether state action is experienced as *appropriate, credible, and worth complying with*. Rich argues that legitimacy can be understood as a psychological orientation toward authority and as the extent to which rule is regarded as rightful, which in turn shapes the likelihood of voluntary compliance and the durability of political order over time (Rich, 2017, pp. 3–4). In emerging or contested settings, this is particularly relevant because knowledge-based governance can function as a legitimacy-producing resource: when policies are framed and implemented through credible problem-definition, reliable classification of priorities, and demonstrably competent coordination, they can reduce uncertainty, lower enforcement costs, and stabilise acceptance even where formal institutions are still consolidating (Rich, 2017, pp. 3–4).

Building on this, Haas (2004) emphasizes that the strength of knowledge-based expert networks lies in their capacity to influence how both decision-makers and the broader public understand and respond to complex governance issues. Through the provision of empirically grounded insights, these communities guide actors toward scientifically informed responses (Haas, 2004). Gough (2001), similarly notes that such networks play a pivotal role in shaping state policies, particularly by lending credibility to state actions through evidence-based, technical reasoning (Gough, 2001).

IR scholarship on authority strengthens the legitimacy argument by showing that knowledge-based governance is not merely "advice provision," but a mode through which rule becomes credible and sustainable. Barnett and Finnemore (2004) demonstrate that authority can be exercised through classification and problem definition of the power to name, categorise, and institutionalise priorities in ways that appear rational-legal and therefore legitimate to key audiences. From this perspective, legitimacy is reinforced when governance produces predictable and intelligible outputs through credible interpretive routines, not only through coercion or

ideology. Sending's (2015) account complements this by emphasising that expertise gains political force through institutionalised practices that stabilise what is treated as valid knowledge and who is authorised to speak for it; legitimacy is thereby tied to recognised competence and the performative reproduction of credibility (Barnett and Finnemore, 2004; Sending, 2015).

This lens clarifies the legitimacy mechanism relevant to state-formation contexts: where institutions are emergent and authority contested, actors who can frame problems credibly, prioritise responses, and coordinate across arenas can reduce uncertainty, lower enforcement costs, and stabilise compliance by making governance appear reliable. The implication for this thesis is that epistemic authority functions as a legitimacy resource when knowledge-bearing intermediaries enable governance performance coordination, dispute management, security signalling under conditions where bureaucratic routines are not yet fully consolidated (Barnett and Finnemore, 2004; Sending, 2015).

This legitimacy pathway also helps explain why epistemic influence becomes durable only when it is institutionally and politically aligned an issue developed in the following section on institutional and coalition conditions.

In the context of state-building, this legitimizing function becomes foundational. It contributes not only to the development of policy but also to the consolidation of state authority and the promotion of long-term institutional stability. Adler and Haas (1992) further argue that epistemic communities shape how states understand their own roles both as policy actors and as rational institutional entities. By integrating expert knowledge into bureaucratic processes, these networks help construct an image of the state as a capable, problem-solving institution, enhancing perceived legitimacy and fostering citizen trust during times of transition or uncertainty (Adler and Haas, 1992).

To summarize, the conceptualization of epistemic communities offers several strengths in understanding the state-building process. It highlights the importance of expertise in unifying fragmented political environments, facilitating the institutionalization of new governance

structures, ensuring policy coherence and continuity, and legitimizing state authority through knowledge-based governance. These strengths make the theory a valuable tool for analyzing how states emerge and consolidate power, particularly in contexts where technical knowledge and expert consensus play a crucial role in shaping governance outcomes.

2.6 The Conditional Influence of Epistemic Communities in State-Building

While the theory of epistemic communities underscores the significant role that expert networks can play in shaping state-building processes, it also highlights that such influence is conditional and depends on political, institutional, and social contexts. This section examines how these enabling and constraining conditions shape the extent to which epistemic communities affect state formation and governance.

The influence of epistemic communities is often amplified in situations of external pressure or crisis, where decision-makers are more likely to seek expert advice to navigate complex challenges. Haas (1989) illustrates this in his study on Mediterranean pollution control, where the Mediterranean Action Plan (MAP), established under the United Nations Environment Programme, incorporated scientific advisory bodies into decision-making processes. This institutional design enabled environmental experts to leverage international pressure and advocate for stronger environmental rules, demonstrating how crises can create opportunities for epistemic communities to exert greater influence on governance outcomes.

However, Trantidis (2022) offers a critical lens on the role of expert networks in the formation of democratic states, highlighting that their intellectual foundations can at times be problematic especially during moments of political crisis. He argues that when democratic transitions are treated through rigid, linear models, there is a risk of overlooking the complexities and unpredictabilities of political change. This can result in well-intentioned expert advice producing unintended or even harmful outcomes. His critique underscores that the power of epistemic communities is not uniform or unproblematic; rather, it is heavily shaped by the broader political environment. In times of crisis, the urgency to achieve rapid results may drive the

adoption of overly simplified or poorly adapted policy recommendations, which can ultimately weaken rather than strengthen state-building efforts.

2.6.1 Political and Institutional Alignment

A key condition for the influence of epistemic communities is their ability to align their expertise and policy recommendations with the prevailing political and institutional environment. The study by Haas (1997) demonstrates that the effectiveness of epistemic communities in international policy coordination depends significantly on how well their knowledge aligns with the existing power structures and interests of policymakers. This alignment is crucial for these communities to shape state-building outcomes, particularly in complex and technical policy areas.

Similarly, in their study on the role of epistemic communities in the development of trade in services during the Uruguay Round, Drake and Nicolaïdis (1992) found that while the epistemic community of trade experts played a critical role in framing the issue, their influence was ultimately contingent on the extent to which their proposals aligned with the governments' pre-defined interests. When government interests diverged from the community's recommendations, the influence of the epistemic community diminished, revealing the limits of their power in shaping state policies.

Jones (2006) reinforces this point by showing that epistemic influence is not determined by technical credibility alone but by whether expert claims can be carried through political coalitions and institutional pathways that make them appear compatible with prevailing interests. In practice, receptivity to epistemic input often varies even within the same governance setting: decision-makers tend to absorb knowledge that supports strategic priorities and stabilises elite bargains, while sidelining knowledge that threatens core legitimacy narratives or redistributes authority in politically costly ways (Jones, 2006). This clarifies why epistemic communities should be analysed as conditionally influential rather than automatically persuasive, and it also anticipates the next mechanism discussed in this section namely that institutional embedding and bureaucratic

access shape whether aligned expertise can be translated into policy uptake and sustained implementation.

IR work on transnational influence reinforces this conditionality by showing that receptivity to knowledge is shaped by domestic and institutional opportunity structures rather than by "expertise" alone. Risse-Kappen's approach demonstrates that cross-border ideas and knowledge claims do not enter domestic decision arenas uniformly; they are filtered through coalition alignments, institutional access points, and the configuration of state-society relations that determine whether external or intermediary input is amplified, negotiated, or blocked (Risse-Kappen, 1995). This matters for modelling epistemic communities historically because it clarifies why the same knowledge-bearing actors may be influential in one episode and marginal in another: uptake depends on whether epistemic claims reinforce strategic priorities and elite bargains, and whether institutional pathways exist that translate advice into adopted practice. The alignment mechanism therefore connects epistemic authority to political constraints, demonstrating that epistemic influence is best analysed as contingent and mediated**,** not automatic (Risse-Kappen, 1995).

This conditional receptivity also implies that relational position matters: where formal access points are limited, intermediaries who bridge arenas can become disproportionately influential a mechanism theorised in SNT and developed in Section 2.7.3.

Another critical factor influencing the power of epistemic communities is the degree of institutional support they receive and their integration into bureaucratic structures. The work of Galbreath and McEvoy (2013) on minority rights in Europe highlights how epistemic communities can drive policy innovation and institutional change when they are embedded within influential international regimes. However, the study also points out that the hierarchy among experts within these communities can impact their ability to influence policy diffusion and persistence, suggesting that their influence is not uniform but varies depending on their position within the institutional framework.

Faleg (2012) extends this analysis to the European Union's security sector reform (SSR) initiatives in post-conflict environments, particularly in the Western Balkans. He highlights how security and defense experts from EU institutions, think tanks, and academic circles functioning as epistemic communities played a leading role in shaping SSR norms by promoting democratic control of armed forces, civilian oversight, and integrated border management. These epistemic actors influenced the EU's approach to restructuring local security forces in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo by embedding technical standards rooted in liberal institutional models. However, their influence was ultimately hindered by internal political divisions among EU member states and a lack of coordinated implementation at the local level. This underscores that while epistemic communities can shape normative frameworks, their long-term success in state-building requires cohesive institutional support and alignment between expert recommendations and political will.

The influence of epistemic communities can also vary significantly across different state-building contexts, depending on the historical, cultural, and geopolitical factors at play. The study by Bliesemann de Guevara and Kostić (2019) on international intervention and state-building emphasizes that the effectiveness of epistemic communities is closely linked to the local context in which they operate. Their research suggests that in some cases, the knowledge and expertise provided by these communities may be perceived as external impositions, leading to resistance from local actors and limiting the community's impact on state-building. This contextual argument is equally relevant when ECT is applied historically: the influence of knowledge-bearing actors depends on the social and institutional channels through which expertise can be mobilised an issue Møller foregrounds in his account of medieval communalism and European state building.

Møller's (2018) analysis of the medieval roots of the modern European state provides a focused comparative insight that strengthens the historical application of ECT in this study. His central claim is that *geopolitical pressure alone* cannot explain why early modern European state-building generated high state capacity bound by legal constraints, whereas comparable pressure in other historical systems did not. Instead, Møller argues that Europe's outcome was conditional on

the prior existence of "*medieval communalism*" that is, durable norms and institutions of communal representation rooted in local units such as towns and parishes which shaped both the direction and the institutional character of state development (Møller, 2018, pp. 2–6).

Møller specifies that medieval communalism consisted of legally recognised forms of self-organisation and intermediary institutions that structured bargaining between rulers and ruled. Drawing on Tocqueville and Blickle, he emphasises that Western Europe was not a tabula rasa: parishes, towns, councils, and associated corporate bodies provided an already-existing sociopolitical infrastructure through which information could circulate, claims could be articulated, and collective coordination could occur (Møller, 2018, pp. 6–9). These features mattered because they constituted the social and institutional channels through which governance-relevant knowledge, credibility, and coordination could be mobilised in response to emerging state demands.

The argument is developed through two mechanisms that are particularly valuable for theoretical framing. On the demand side, Møller shows that where local communities and organised social groups were strong, rulers were pushed toward bargaining and cooptation rather than repression, producing state-building "from below" and embedding constraints on power through law (Møller, 2018, pp. 10–13). On the supply side, he argues that communal structures and administrative "technologies" (for example, organisational templates associated with the Church and self-governing towns) could be integrated into state structures, enabling more predictable administration and the diffusion of governance techniques (Møller, 2018, pp. 13–15). Where communalism was weak or absent his intra-European contrast highlights coercion-intensive trajectories in Eastern Europe/Russia state-building tended to rely more heavily on coercion and patron–client patterns, limiting the emergence of law-bound governance (Møller, 2018, pp. 16–19).

For this thesis, Møller's conceptual contribution is not that he "uses" ECT directly, but that he clarifies how historically embedded structures condition whether organised knowledge can

shape governance outcomes. This provides a clear methodological bridge for applying ECT beyond contemporary technocratic venues: epistemic influence can be traced historically when the record shows stable channels of access, recognised credibility, and repeated patterns of coordination that connect knowledge-bearing actors to state-building needs. In this sense, Møller supports the rationale for examining Al-Aqilat as a historically situated knowledge network during Saudi state consolidation (1902–1932), where influence is expected to operate less through modern institutional office and more through embedded social channels such as brokerage, interregional connectivity, and trusted mediation that enable knowledge to be mobilised into governance practice (Møller, 2018, pp. 6–9, 13–15). However, structural access and credibility do not in themselves guarantee influence: epistemic authority is also negotiated through ideology and culture, which can amplify, filter, or constrain the reception of externally framed knowledge.

Schwarz (2011) reinforces the argument that state-building outcomes are frequently shaped by intermediary elites whose influence depends less on formal appointment than on their ability to operate across segmented arenas of authority. Rather than depicting governance as a purely bureaucratic transmission mechanism, Schwarz highlights how merchant and notable networks can become politically consequential when they provide connective capacity: access to information, mediation channels, and coordination resources that institutions cannot yet generate internally. This strengthens the proposition that epistemic influence is conditional on political receptivity and institutional fit, yet enacted through relational positioning that makes certain actors repeatedly valuable during consolidation. In practical terms, Schwarz helps connect the "alignment" claim to a concrete mechanism: where formal institutions are thin or emergent, rulers often rely on socially embedded brokers to translate uncertainty into actionable strategy.

The influence of epistemic communities is also shaped by ideological and cultural factors, which can either enhance or constrain their ability to shape state-building outcomes. Kaczmarska (2016) examines how the "myth" of the international community has been used as a rhetorical and political device in post-Soviet state-building. She provides the example of Russia's post-1991 political reforms**,** where Western epistemic actors particularly international advisors, think tanks,

and multilateral institutions promoted liberal democratic norms such as rule of law, market economy, and political pluralism. However, the effectiveness of these epistemic communities was limited by local resistance, cultural disconnects**,** and the instrumental appropriation of their advice by domestic elites. This example illustrates that epistemic communities can shape the discourse of legitimacy but their impact is highly contingent on how well their knowledge frameworks align with local cultural and political realities (Kaczmarska, 2016).

These historical insights align with a broader claim in the epistemic communities literature: epistemic influence is contingent not only on the presence of enabling social and institutional structures, but also on whether political elites perceive uncertainty and therefore demand expert guidance. To this regards, the study by Rojas-de-Galarreta (2022) on Chile's decision to join the Pacific Alliance provides a similar insight, showing that the epistemic community of Chilean economic technocrats primarily economists and policy advisors affiliated with the Ministry of Finance, Central Bank, and academic institutions played a key role in promoting regional economic integration. Their influence, however, was limited by a lack of uncertainty among broader political elites and the concentration of decision-making within a narrow circle of senior officials. This suggests that epistemic communities are most effective when they can introduce new ideas or frameworks that resonate with the cultural and ideological orientations of the state's decision-makers.

Overall, the influence of epistemic communities is shaped by whether their expertise aligns with political interests, whether they are institutionally embedded, and how contextual factors shape receptivity to their claims. These conditions highlight why epistemic authority is not automatic, but contingent on the governance environment in which knowledge is received and acted upon.

2.6.2 The Impact of Epistemic Communities on State Identity and Policy

The success of epistemic communities in influencing state policy hinges on whether decision-makers seek and value expert input demand that often increases under uncertainty and,

in some settings, also arises through routine policy work (Löblová, 2017). Influence is strengthened when epistemic actors are positioned close enough to decision-making to translate expertise into implementable options, including through "specialised politicians" who combine technical competence with legislative experience (Marier, 2008). Yet epistemic authority does not travel evenly across policy arenas: effects vary with the configuration of the policy environment and the extent to which expert actors engage critics and incorporate contestation into deliberation, which can generate more inclusive and resilient outcomes (Eimer, 2014). Taken together, these studies suggest that epistemic communities can shape both policy direction and state identity most effectively when expertise is institutionally usable, politically legible, and embedded in processes that enable learning rather than mere assertion.

At the same time, epistemic communities are not neutral conduits of knowledge; they are social formations with internal boundaries that can narrow what is heard, validated, or adopted. One recurring limitation concerns the marginalisation of alternative perspectives: where communities are composed of like-minded experts with shared normative and causal beliefs, dissent can be screened out, producing technically coherent but socially narrow policy frames (Gough, 2001). Relatedly, epistemic communities may reproduce power asymmetries in which dominant actors shape agendas, define "valid" knowledge, and monopolise interpretive authority, thereby influencing policy and identity in partial ways (Keohane and Nye, 2001). Institutional settings can reinforce these dynamics: professional standards and organisational norms often delimit what counts as actionable expertise, constraining epistemic influence especially where governance requires negotiating multiple knowledge traditions and social constituencies (Cross, 2015).

These limits become sharper when the framework is extended beyond the scientific and technocratic settings that dominate early epistemic community scholarship. Calls to broaden the concept to domains such as international law underline both its portability and its strain: epistemic authority may work differently where expertise is entangled with legal interpretation, identity claims, and contestation over norms (Cross, 2012; Bianchi, 2019). Critics therefore argue that the

approach requires stronger theoretical refinement and firmer empirical attention to the interaction of knowledge with power, culture, and institutions particularly in state-building settings where formal advisory structures may be absent (Dunlop, 2009; Dunlop, 2014; Dunlop, 2017). This is analytically relevant to cases such as Al-Aqilat, where influence is more plausibly traced through embedded commercial intelligence, diplomatic mediation, and logistical coordination than through formalised policy advisory roles. Finally, critiques of linear assumptions in democratic state-building remind us that epistemic input can be partial, contested, or misfitted to political complexity, and should therefore be treated as conditional rather than inherently stabilising (Trantidis, 2022).

2.6.3 Addressing the Gaps Through Al-Aqilat

This study responds to key limitations in epistemic community scholarship by introducing a historically grounded, non-Western case: Al-Aqilat, a merchant network whose activities can be examined as a knowledge-based form of influence in a pre-oil state-building setting. A further theoretical clarification concerns the merchant role in state formation. Tilly's (1992) account of European state formation assigns merchants a role largely tied to war-making, extraction, and the fiscal foundations of coercion, where commercial actors become implicated in taxation capacity and the financing of conflict. Al-Aqilat do not map neatly onto this role. Their influence was not primarily exercised through tax extraction or institutionalised war finance; rather, they functioned as *knowledge-bearing intermediaries* whose leverage derived from trade-based intelligence, diplomatic mediation, and logistical coordination across transregional routes. The difference is not merely empirical but contextual: the Saudi case involved a distinct political economy and institutional environment in which merchant authority could operate as strategic knowledge power without becoming a fiscal arm of the state in the European sense.

Much of the epistemic communities literature has concentrated on formalised expert groups embedded in Western bureaucratic environments particularly in international policy domains such as environmental governance, European integration, and institutionalised diplomacy (Haas, 1992;

Adler and Haas, 1992; Verdun, 1999; Cross, 2013). While this scholarship establishes how expert consensus can shape policy under uncertainty, it tends to privilege technocratic authority and institutional proximity, leaving less analytical space for informal knowledge systems and commercially grounded networks that operate outside committee structures and formal advisory mandates (Antoniades, 2003; Cross, 2013; Checkel, 2005). By centring Al-Aqilat, the thesis extends the scope of ECT to a setting in which expertise is constituted through mobility, mediation capacity, and reputational credibility rather than professional accreditation or bureaucratic appointment.

Conceptually, Al-Aqilat are treated here not as modern policy advisors but as a historically traceable community of practice whose influence is best understood through the circulation of applied knowledge route intelligence, commercial risk assessment, negotiation skills, and cross-regional brokerage within trust-based networks. This form of authority aligns with the core insight of ECT that influence can emerge when actors possess recognised competence and can stabilise interpretations of complex environments for decision-makers, especially under conditions of uncertainty (Haas, 1992; Adler and Haas, 1992, Dunlop, 2017). At the same time, it also speaks directly to critiques in the literature: epistemic influence is rarely autonomous, and it is often mediated through power structures, political receptivity, and contestation over what counts as credible knowledge (Antoniades, 2003; Cross, 2013; Checkel, 2005). In this historical setting, Chapter 4 shows why these brokerage and information functions mattered in practice, because consolidation unfolded through shifting regional pressures, contested movement corridors, and external diplomatic constraints that shaped the governance problems facing the emerging Saudi polity (Vassiliev, 2000; Kostiner, 1985; Commins, 2006; Al-Rasheed, 2010).

Positioning Al-Aqilat in this way helps bridge a conceptual gap between formal, Western-centric models of knowledge production and historically rooted epistemic formations where expertise is embedded in commerce, mobility, and relational trust. It also creates the rationale for integrating complementary frameworks Historical Institutionalism and Social Network Theory because the mechanisms at stake are not only about “ideas” but also about how knowledge travels,

becomes durable, and is anchored in patterned relationships over time (Pierson, 2000, pp. 252–253); Burt, 2000; Granovetter, 1973, pp. 1361–1365). The next section sets out how HI and SNT are used alongside ECT to analyse the durability of knowledge-based practices and the network structures through which Al-Aqilat's influence can be traced.

2.7 Employed Theoretical Framework

This thesis employs an integrated theoretical framework to explain how knowledge-bearing intermediaries can shape state-building without holding formal authority. The framework combines Epistemic Community Theory (ECT) with Historical Institutionalism (HI) and Social Network Theory (SNT) to capture three dimensions that are often treated separately in state-formation scholarship: (i) the authority of expertise under uncertainty, (ii) the historical and institutional conditions that enable or constrain that authority, and (iii) the networked channels through which knowledge and influence travel (Haas, 1992; Adler and Haas, 1992, Dunlop 2017, Dunlop, 2009).

Møller's work is particularly valuable here because it shows how arguments compatible with ECT can be mobilised historically, beyond contemporary technocratic policy settings. Although Møller does not necessarily label medieval actors as "epistemic communities" in Haas's (1992) strict sense, the logic is comparable: knowledge-bearing groups operating through networks, shared understandings, and informational advantage can shape governance outcomes even where formal bureaucratic structures are limited or emergent. This provides a direct justification for using ECT historically in the Saudi case, where knowledge authority and influence were exercised through non-bureaucratic channels during state consolidation.

The starting point is ECT, which conceptualises policy influence as an outcome of shared causal beliefs, principled norms, and recognised expertise that can guide decision-makers when problems are complex and outcomes uncertain (Haas, 1992). However, ECT has also been criticised for sometimes implying a "clean" pathway from expert consensus to policy change, underplaying contestation, political bargaining, and unequal access to decision-making arenas (Zito, 2001; Cross, 2013). To avoid treating epistemic influence as automatic, the framework

incorporates HI to clarify how historically produced institutional pathways shape what kinds of knowledge become governable, legitimate, and actionable over time (Pierson, 2004; Thelen, 1999). It also incorporates SNT to specify *how* influence operates in practice through brokerage, bridging ties, embedded trust, and structural positioning especially where intermediaries operate across political and geographic boundaries rather than inside formal bureaucracies (Granovetter, 1973; Wasserman and Faust, 1994; Burt, 2005).

Together, these theories allow the analysis to move beyond two common limitations in the literature. First, they avoid reducing state-building to coercion, tribal alliances, or ideology alone, by foregrounding the role of *knowledge, coordination, and informational advantage* in enabling strategic governance choices under uncertainty (Haas, 1992; Cross, 2013). Second, they avoid romanticising intermediaries as autonomous decision-makers by treating epistemic influence as conditioned: shaped by political receptivity, institutional fit, and the distribution of network power (Zito, 2001; Cross, 2013). In this way, the theoretical framework is designed to explain influence as situated, relational, and historically embedded, rather than assumed or implied.

The three theories are integrated because each answers a different limitation in dominant state-formation explanations of Saudi consolidation: coercion-centred models under-specify knowledge authority; institutional accounts under-specify brokerage; and network accounts under-specify why certain information is treated as credible and actionable. Rather than treating ECT, HI, and SNT as separate lenses applied in parallel, this thesis integrates them to explain (i) how knowledge authority operates (ECT), (ii) how such influence becomes historically embedded and persists through institutional development (HI), and (iii) how network structure and brokerage shape information flows and strategic positioning (SNT).

To ensure conceptual transparency, the integrated framework is operationalised through three clearly defined mechanism-based analytical buckets that guide both coding and interpretation in the empirical chapters. Within ECT**,** the analysis traces how Al-Aqilat generated influence through uncertainty reduction**,** epistemic authority/credibility**,** persuasion and framing**,** and a policy enterprise expressed in stabilising governance choices under constrained institutional

capacity. Within HI, the analysis identifies how these roles became durable through path dependence**,** critical junctures**,** and institutional layering, explaining why certain knowledge practices persisted and accumulated effects across episodes of consolidation. Within SNT**,** the analysis specifies how influence operated through relational structure: brokerage**,** centrality**,** and information diffusion showing how intelligence, finance, and mediation travelled through merchant ties rather than formal bureaucratic pipelines.

To make this integration traceable across the literature reviewed in this chapter, each cited study is positioned explicitly within one (or more) of these mechanisms. This structured mapping ensures that the literature review does not read as a sequence of adjacent debates, but as cumulative theoretical scaffolding that the empirical chapters later operationalise through archival analysis.

2.7.1 Epistemic Community Theory

ECT conceptualises policy-relevant influence as emerging from networks of actors who share *(i) normative commitments, (ii) causal beliefs, (iii) criteria for valid knowledge, and (iv) a common policy enterprise* (Haas, 1992, pp. 1-14). The theory's principal analytical strength is that it explains how expertise can become politically consequential when decision-makers face uncertainty, limited information, or contested interpretations of the policy environment. Under such conditions, epistemic communities can shape both the definition of problems and the range of "reasonable" solutions by providing coherent interpretive frames and credible causal narratives (Haas, 1992; Adler and Haas, 1992).

At the same time, the literature shows that epistemic communities are not always cohesive or politically decisive. Influence is frequently mediated through institutional access, competition among expert claimants, and strategic alignment with ruling priorities (Zito, 2001; Cross, 2013, pp. 137–139, Dunlop, 2014). This critique matters conceptually because it shifts the analysis away from treating expertise as a "trump card" and toward treating it as a form of authority that must be recognised, channelled, and stabilised within a broader political context. Accordingly, this thesis employs ECT not as a deterministic model of expert control, but as a framework for identifying

what kind of knowledge claims were treated as authoritative, how consensus was produced or fractured, and how expertise interacted with political priorities (Haas, 1992; Zito, 2001; Cross, 2013).

2.7.1.1 Constructive Definition of Epistemic Communities

In this study, epistemic communities are defined as *knowledge-bearing networks whose authority derives from recognised competence and shared interpretive frameworks*, and whose influence operates through the circulation of policy-relevant information, evaluative judgments, and strategic understandings. This definition deliberately avoids limiting epistemic communities to modern technocratic committees or scientific advisory bodies. Instead, it accommodates historically grounded actors whose expertise is practical, networked, and relational, and whose authority may rest on trust, reputation, and cross-regional positioning rather than formal credentials (Haas, 1992; Adler and Haas, 1992).

Bromley (1993) demonstrates that epistemic authority becomes politically consequential when decision-makers treat certain actors as credible under uncertainty especially in environments where information is incomplete and outcomes are contested. Rather than assuming that "expertise" automatically converts into policy, Bromley's account shows that influence depends on socially recognised credibility, interpretive capacity, and access to decision arenas, meaning that the key analytical question becomes: whose interpretation counts**,** and why. This supports the definitional move makes widening epistemic communities beyond modern technocratic committees to include historically grounded actors whose authority is practical, reputational, and relational. In ECT terms, Bromley helps justify why the thesis codes for credibility markers (trust, reputation, reliability of information) alongside shared beliefs and policy enterprise because these are the conditions under which knowledge claims travel, persuade, and become actionable in emergent governance settings.

2.7.1.2 Link to Analytical Focus and Empirical Coding

ECT provides the conceptual apparatus to examine how non-tribal knowledge actors can shape state-building by: (i) defining problems, (ii) producing and circulating strategic information, and (iii) offering coherent interpretive frames for decision-making under uncertainty (Haas, 1992). The theory is used to specify the *content* of epistemic influence (beliefs, frames, standards of validity) and the conditions under which such influence becomes politically actionable (Cross, 2013; Zito, 2001).

Crucially, however, applying ECT to the Al-Aqilat case also reveals two analytical problems that ECT alone does not resolve with sufficient specificity. First, ECT explains how shared causal beliefs and credible expertise can shape decision-making under uncertainty, but it does not by itself explain how such influence becomes durable across time when the state is still institutionally emergent and governance operates through hybrid arrangements rather than stable bureaucracies. Second, ECT tends to treat "influence" as a function of epistemic authority and access, yet in a merchant-intelligence setting the decisive mechanism is often relational positioning who connects whom, through which channels, and with what brokerage advantages rather than formal advisory proximity. These two limitations are analytically central to this thesis because Al-Aqilat's influence depended both on the historical embedding of their roles within the evolving Saudi political economy and on the networked pathways through which intelligence, resources, and mediation travelled. For this reason, Historical Institutionalism (HI) is integrated to capture institutional durability and path dependence, while Social Network Theory (SNT) is integrated to specify the relational mechanisms through which epistemic authority is operationalised in practice.

2.7.2 Historical Institutionalism (HI) and State Embeddedness

Historical Institutionalism explains how governance outcomes are shaped by institutional trajectories, path dependence, and critical junctures that structure what kinds of political choices become feasible over time (Pierson, 2004; Thelen, 1999, pp. 3–6). This emphasis on self reinforcing processes and temporally structured causation is central to path dependence accounts

(Mahoney, 2000, pp. 507–511; Pierson, 2004, pp. 9, 11–12). In the present thesis, HI is introduced not as a parallel theory competing with Epistemic Communities Theory (ECT), but as a targeted extension that strengthens the explanatory reach of the framework in a historical state formation context. Where ECT clarifies how knowledge-based authority becomes decision relevant under uncertainty, HI clarifies how that authority becomes embedded, reproduced, and constrained over time through institutional development, historically sedimented routines, and path dependent dependencies.

The central analytical reason for drawing on HI is that influence in state formation should not be treated as episodic or purely situational if the empirical record indicates repeated reliance. The thesis argues that Al-Aqilat's stabilising roles were not reducible to isolated instances of assistance. Instead, the argument is that their influence became consequential through repeated brokerage functions across finance, defence enabling, dispute management, and trade diplomacy with external commercial governance, and that these functions interacted with an evolving institutional architecture during consolidation. HI provides the conceptual tools to explain why repeated reliance can become durable reliance, how certain intermediaries become repeatedly valuable as governance resources, and how early arrangements can channel later possibilities.

A key HI debate concerns how institutional effects persist and why certain solutions become easier to reproduce over time. Path dependence is often used to describe self reinforcing dynamics in which early choices create increasing returns, raising the costs of reversal and making alternatives progressively less feasible (Pierson, 2004, pp. 17–22; Mahoney, 2000, pp. 507–511). In state formation, this matters because early reliance on particular practices can become institutionalised through repetition, not necessarily through formal office creation. The empirical implications are subtle but important. A practice may be informal and yet still institutional in HI terms if it becomes routinised, expected, and embedded in governance problem solving. This is precisely the type of durability that the thesis needs to explain. The stabilising contribution of Al-Aqilat is framed not as a timeless attribute of a group, but as an historically situated influence pathway whose durability is a product of repeated uptake and the accumulation of dependencies.

The role of critical junctures is equally central in HI accounts of temporality. Critical junctures are periods in which structural uncertainty is high and choices have amplified long term consequences because institutions are being formed, reconfigured, or redirected (Pierson, 2004, pp. 135–140; Thelen, 1999, pp. 3–6, Erk, 2007). The relevance to this thesis lies in the consolidation environment itself. State formation generates recurrent uncertainty, particularly when authority is contested and institutional penetration is uneven. In such contexts, stabilising practices that successfully reduce uncertainty and coordination costs can become the basis for later institutionalised reliance, not necessarily because they are formally codified, but because they become the default solution repertoire for recurring problems. HI therefore provides a temporal explanation of how a knowledge bearing intermediary becomes more than a convenient option and instead becomes part of a patterned governance architecture.

A second HI debate concerns how institutions change. While early HI accounts often emphasised punctuated shifts around critical junctures, later work also emphasises gradual change, where institutions evolve through incremental reconfiguration, reinterpretation, or layered accretion rather than sudden replacement (Thelen, 1999; Mahoney & Thelen, 2010; Kechichian, 2001). The argument is not that stabilising roles remain identical across time, but that the governance value of intermediated capacities can persist through adaptation. Under gradual change, a practice can remain influential because it is re-inserted into new contexts, attached to new routines, or repurposed as the institutional environment shifts. This perspective is particularly useful for historical cases where formal state institutions are expanding unevenly and where informal governance capacities may be partially incorporated, partially displaced, or partially maintained alongside new offices.

Applying this debate to the thesis framework clarifies why HI is necessary as a complement to ECT. ECT helps explain why recognised competence matters under uncertainty, but on its own it can leave under specified why influence persists once the immediate uncertainty episode passes. HI helps explain the temporal dimension of epistemic authority by showing how repeated reliance can become anchored through expectations, routines, and dependencies that shape future

receptivity (Pierson, 2004; Thelen, 1999). The same knowledge claim can have different political effects depending on whether institutional arrangements enable uptake, whether historical legacies create receptivity or suspicion, and whether prior governance practices make certain solutions appear natural, credible, or illegitimate. These are not merely contextual observations. They are mechanisms of temporal constraint and enablement that determine whether knowledge-based influence is fleeting or durable.

The thesis uses HI to clarify institutional embeddedness in a specific sense: the embedding of intermediated governance capacities within the evolving state building project. Embeddedness is not equated with formal office holding. Instead, it refers to the routinisation of reliance, the creation of predictable expectations about who can solve which problems, and the accumulation of dependencies that make certain intermediaries repeatedly valuable. This allows the analysis to avoid a common misinterpretation in historical work, where informal governance capacities are treated as outside institutions simply because they are not codified. HI provides a basis for treating patterned informal practice as institutionally consequential when it becomes part of the recurring governance repertoire and when it structures future choices through constraint and enablement.

This conceptualisation is particularly important for the thesis's mechanism architecture. Chapter 5.2 specifies institutional embedding and durability as one of the core mechanisms through which stabilising influence persists. HI expands the theoretical foundations of that mechanism in two ways.

First, it clarifies what durability means in analytic terms. Durability is not the mere continuation of activity. It is the persistence of a reliance relationship within governance problem solving, supported by self reinforcing processes such as learning, reputational consolidation, reduced transaction costs from repeated cooperation, and the increasing costs of switching to alternatives (Pierson, 2004, pp. 17–22). The thesis does not need to claim that reliance is absolute or permanent. It needs to explain why reliance can persist across multiple episodes within 1902–1932, and HI provides that temporal logic.

Second, it clarifies how durability is produced without full bureaucratic incorporation. Institutions can embed practices through layered routines and dependencies even when the actors involved remain outside formal state hierarchies. This is especially relevant where administrative penetration is uneven and where governance capacity is assembled through a mix of formal and informal arrangements. Thelen's emphasis on institutional evolution through incremental processes is useful here because it shows how durability can be produced through repeated practice and gradual embedding rather than through explicit institutional design alone (Thelen, 1999; Mahoney & Thelen, 2010).

HI also strengthens the thesis by clarifying the relationship between agency and constraint. A frequent misunderstanding of institutionalism is that it eliminates agency by treating outcomes as mechanically determined by structures. In HI, however, agency remains central, but it is temporally situated. Actors make choices within institutional constraints, and those choices can reshape constraints over time, particularly during periods of institutional fluidity (Mahoney & Thelen, 2010). This is directly relevant to the thesis because Al-Aqilat's stabilising roles are interpreted as strategic and adaptive capacities that operated within the consolidation environment. The argument is not that intermediaries automatically stabilise states. It is that under particular conditions of uncertainty and uneven penetration, certain intermediated capacities can become stabilising resources and can be repeatedly drawn upon in ways that produce durable reliance. HI provides the language to maintain this balance, showing how agency operates through institutional contexts and how repeated solutions become progressively entrenched.

The integration logic with ECT can therefore be stated more precisely. ECT clarifies the authority problem: why certain knowledge claims become decision relevant under uncertainty and how credible interpretation becomes persuasive. HI clarifies the durability problem: why that authority becomes embedded and reproduced through routines and dependencies, and why certain reliance relationships persist across time rather than dissipating after single events. This also clarifies why the thesis avoids treating epistemic influence as detached from institutional histories. Epistemic authority is not a free floating resource. Its uptake and persistence depend on historical

sequencing, legacies, and the institutional environment that channels receptivity. HI therefore guards the framework against thin applications of ECT that treat epistemic influence as immediate persuasion without temporal embedding.

HI further contributes by clarifying how early consolidation environments can create lasting governance repertoires even when formal institutions remain incomplete. Where authority is contested and administrative reach is uneven, rulers and intermediaries face recurring governance problems that require workable solutions. When a solution proves effective, it becomes repeatable. When it becomes repeatable, it can become institutionalised through routines and expectations. When it becomes institutionalised, it reshapes future choices by reducing uncertainty and by narrowing the set of plausible alternatives. This is the temporal logic that underpins the thesis claim that Al-Aqilat were not merely present but became consequential stabilising intermediaries within the consolidation period.

Finally, HI also provides a disciplined way to state scope conditions. The thesis is bounded to 1902–1932 and does not assume continuity of influence beyond that period. HI is useful precisely because it explains durability within the bounded period without requiring assumptions about indefinite persistence. It also clarifies why influence might weaken. If later institutional expansion internalises functions into formal offices, if alternative validation channels become stronger, or if the governance environment reduces reliance on intermediated brokerage, then the same influence pathway would be expected to decline. These are not empirical claims about later periods. They are theoretical scope conditions that follow logically from HI's emphasis on institutional change, displacement, and the shifting costs of reliance and substitution (Pierson, 2004; Mahoney & Thelen, 2010).

In sum, HI is used to explain why epistemic authority becomes institutionally consequential over time in a historical state formation setting. It provides the temporal and institutional foundations for the durability mechanism specified in Chapter 5.2 and strengthens the integrated framework by clarifying how stabilising influence becomes embedded through repeated reliance,

routines, and path dependent constraints, while keeping the thesis claims appropriately bounded to the consolidation period.

This HI framing also informs the analytical workflow used later in the thesis. Rather than treating durability as an assumed outcome, the analysis operationalises institutional embedding through temporality and repetition in the documentary record, tracing how reliance becomes routinised across recurrent governance problems and how certain solutions become the default repertoire over time. This is reflected in the coding focus on sequences, recurrence, and escalation or stabilisation points across the consolidation period, allowing the thesis to distinguish episodic involvement from patterned reliance and to identify moments of institutional fluidity where practices appear to consolidate or shift. In HI terms, this approach aligns with the emphasis on temporally structured causation, where early choices and repeated practices generate increasing returns and raise the costs of substitution, while also remaining attentive to gradual change through layering and reconfiguration rather than assuming static continuity (Pierson, 2004; Thelen, 1999; Mahoney & Thelen, 2010, Erk, 2007).

2.7.3 Social Network Theory

Social Network Theory (SNT) provides tools for analysing how influence operates through *relational structure* rather than formal position. It treats actors as nodes embedded in networks of ties, where power derives from *centrality, brokerage,* and the capacity to bridge otherwise disconnected groups (Wasserman and Faust, 1979; Burt, 2005). Social Network Theory is integrated because the central empirical claim of this thesis is not only that Al-Aqilat possessed knowledge, but that they exercised influence through networked brokerage across territories and authorities. In this setting, epistemic authority cannot be understood purely through institutional access or formal advisory roles; it depends on how information and resources travelled through ties of trade, trust, and mobility, and on how specific actors occupied bridging positions between otherwise disconnected political spaces. SNT therefore supplies a structural grammar for analysing the channels through which epistemic influence operated: weak ties that enable information

diffusion, brokerage positions that control cross-regional flows, and network centrality that magnifies the strategic value of certain intermediaries (Kadushin, 2012).

In state-building contexts especially where formal institutions are developing or uneven SNT is particularly useful for explaining how information, resources, and strategic knowledge travel across social and geographic boundaries and how intermediaries gain leverage by controlling key connections. This can be specified more concretely by showing which network structures create leverage for intermediaries and why.

IR network scholarship provides a robust rationale for treating relational structure as causal rather than descriptive in state-formation analysis. Kahler (2009) argues that "networked politics" can shape outcomes by structuring access, influence, and coordination capacity across fragmented arenas, particularly where authority is dispersed and information travels through relational channels rather than hierarchical command. Hafner-Burton, Kahler, and Montgomery (2009) similarly show that network structures can generate systematic political effects by shaping who connects to whom, which ties carry information, and how influence diffuses across nodes. This matters for the present framework because it justifies using network concepts brokerage, centrality, and diffusion not as metaphor but as explanatory mechanisms that clarify how intermediaries convert connectivity into leverage and how knowledge travels when formal bureaucratic pipelines are weak or emergent (Kahler, 2009; Hafner-Burton, Kahler and Montgomery, 2009).

On this basis, the following discussion specifies the SNT mechanisms most relevant to historical state-building: brokerage and bridging ties, centrality and access, and the diffusion of information and authority across arenas (Dunlop, 2014).

In Burt's terms, brokerage is amplified where "structural holes" exist gaps between clustered groups that make intermediaries disproportionately valuable because they can bridge otherwise disconnected arenas (Burt, 1992). For trading networks operating across Central Arabia, the Gulf, and adjacent imperial spheres, such structural holes are not incidental; they are produced by segmented authorities, distance, and differentiated political jurisdictions. In this setting, weak

ties matter because they enable access to novel information from distant network segments, allowing intelligence and opportunity to travel beyond local clusters (Granovetter, 1973). Pétriat notes that the ʿAqīl network" established partnerships and exchanged key information on markets and partners" at caravan stops (Pétriat, 2020, p. 170), illustrating how mobility converts dispersed contacts into actionable informational advantage. Onley's work on transnational merchant families further clarifies the organisational form through which such brokerage can be sustained over time: merchant houses often maintained extensive family business networks across multiple commercial centres (Onley, 2007, p. 55), enabling coordination, rapid communication, and capital mobility across distance. Together, these mechanisms support treating brokerage not as a descriptive label but as an explanatory channel through which intermediaries convert relational positioning into political leverage under fragmented authority conditions.

Specifying brokerage in these terms also clarifies what the empirical chapters must demonstrate: not simply that connections existed, but that bridging positions shaped what information travelled, who could coordinate across arenas, and how such coordination became politically consequential. Lu (2013) provides an operational bridge between network concepts and state-building practice by demonstrating how brokerage positions convert connectivity into political leverage under conditions of fragmented authority. Rather than treating networks as descriptive background, the study conceptualises them as mechanisms that shape what actors can do: brokers gain influence by linking otherwise disconnected arenas, filtering information, and accelerating (or constraining) diffusion across boundaries (McPherson et al, 2001). Crucially, brokerage matters because it enables actors to regulate *who receives what information, when*, and to shape interpretation by selectively framing, prioritising, and validating messages as they move across social and territorial divides. In this way, network position becomes governance capacity: brokerage reduces uncertainty, synchronises expectations, and facilitates coordination across dispersed constituencies even where unified bureaucratic channels are absent. This mechanism is particularly relevant for historical state-formation settings in which intelligence, finance, and mediation travel through interpersonal ties and commercial routes rather than formal

administrative pipelines, rendering brokers strategically valuable not merely as messengers but as actors able to convert informational advantage into coordinated action and sustained compliance (Lu, 2013).

SNT also enables a more precise account of trust and credibility. Strong ties can sustain cohesion and reliability, while weak ties can transmit novel information and create access to otherwise closed arenas (Granovetter, 1973). Granovetter defines a bridge as the only network path linking two otherwise disconnected points, and argues that such bridging positions are typically produced through weak ties (Granovetter, 1973, p. 1364). This distinction helps avoid vague claims about "networks" by specifying *which* relational mechanisms matter for the circulation of intelligence, the mediation of disputes, and the strategic positioning of intermediaries in multi-actor governance environments (Granovetter, 1973; Burt, 2005).

In combination with ECT and HI, SNT performs a distinct explanatory task. ECT identifies Al-Aqilat as a knowledge-bearing community capable of shaping judgments under uncertainty; HI explains why their functions could persist and become embedded within evolving governance arrangements; and SNT shows how, concretely, influence travelled through which ties, which brokers, and which network positions. This integrated design is therefore methodological rather than decorative: it prevents the analysis from collapsing into either (a) purely institutional narratives that miss informal governance, or (b) purely network descriptions that lack an account of epistemic authority and historical durability.

Integration Logic: How the Framework Works as a Whole

The framework is integrated through a clear analytical division of labour:

- **ECT** explains the *content and authority* of knowledge: how shared beliefs, standards of validity, and interpretive frames generate epistemic authority under uncertainty (Haas, 1992; Adler and Haas, 1992).

- **HI** explains the *conditions and durability* of influence: how institutional trajectories and historical constraints shape receptivity, access, and persistence (Pierson, 2004; Thelen, 1999).
- **SNT** explains the *pathways and mechanics* of influence: how network structure, brokerage, and tie-strength enable knowledge to travel and become actionable (Wasserman and Faust, 1994; Granovetter, 1973; Burt, 2005).

By integrating these three perspectives, the analysis avoids treating knowledge as either purely autonomous or purely derivative of coercion. Instead, it conceptualises knowledge-based influence as structured by institutions, enabled by networks, and recognised through epistemic authority a combination that is particularly appropriate for analysing non-bureaucratic intermediaries operating across borders and political arenas.

2.8 Summary of research gaps and theories

The state-formation literature has generated powerful explanations of consolidation through coercion, war-making, and institutional expansion, yet it often under-specifies how knowledge authority operates in settings where formal institutions are emergent and information is unevenly distributed. ECT addresses this limitation by explaining how shared causal beliefs, normative commitments, and professional credibility allow specific actors to stabilise interpretation under uncertainty and shape governance choices. However, most ECT applications remain concentrated in contemporary policy domains and formally organised expert networks, leaving a notable gap in historical cases where non-bureaucratic actors especially merchant communities performed governance-relevant knowledge functions outside the state.

This study addresses that gap by extending ECT to a historical non-tribal merchant formation, arguing that Al-Aqilat operated as an epistemic community through economic intelligence, diplomatic mediation, and strategic resource mobilisation during early twentieth-century Saudi consolidation. Rather than treating epistemic influence as confined to formal advisory structures, the thesis shows how epistemic authority can be generated through credibility,

shared interpretive frames, and trusted mediation across arenas. In doing so, it also advances the ECT literature by contributing a historically grounded case that demonstrates how epistemic influence can be exercised through decentralised and transregional knowledge practices (Cross, 2013, pp. 138–140).

To ensure the argument is not reduced to "expertise explains outcomes," the thesis integrates insights from International Relations scholarship on transnational influence, which emphasises that knowledge uptake is politically filtered and institutionally mediated rather than automatic (Dunlop, 2014, Dunlop, 2017). This IR lens strengthens the problematisation by clarifying why the same knowledge-bearing actors may be influential in one episode and marginal in another: receptivity depends on coalition alignments, institutional access points, and the compatibility of knowledge claims with elite bargains and legitimacy narratives. Epistemic influence is therefore treated as conditional and contested, not merely technical.

HI is incorporated to explain the temporal durability of epistemic influence and the conditions under which knowledge roles become embedded in evolving governance structures. While ECT clarifies how authority is generated under uncertainty, HI explains how such authority persists through path dependence, critical junctures, and institutional layering (Thelen, 1999). This addresses an underdeveloped dimension in much epistemic communities research: how informal knowledge-based actors can become structurally consequential over time, leaving institutional residues that shape later governance capacity.

SNT provides the structural mechanism for tracing how influence travels. While SNT is widely applied to contemporary organisational and political networks, historical state-building research rarely reconstructs how merchant ties functioned as brokerage infrastructures for intelligence, finance, and mediation across fragmented territories (Granovetter, 1985, pp. 481–484). In this thesis, SNT is used to specify brokerage, centrality, and information diffusion as the relational conditions through which Al-Aqilat converted connectivity into political leverage, particularly where formal bureaucratic pipelines were limited or absent.

Analytically, the framework is applied in a sequenced and complementary way: ECT identifies how Al-Aqilat reduced uncertainty and acquired epistemic authority through credibility, persuasion, and policy-relevant knowledge; HI explains how these roles became embedded and durable through temporality and institutional development; and SNT maps the relational pathways through which intelligence, finance, and mediation circulated across arenas. This sequencing ensures the empirical analysis explains not only that influence occurred, but how it operated, when it was adopted, and why it persisted.

Overall, the framework foregrounds ECT to explain how epistemic authority is generated under uncertainty, while IR scholarship clarifies why the uptake of such authority is politically mediated and uneven across episodes. HI then explains durability through temporality and institutional development, and SNT specifies transmission through brokerage and diffusion. Taken together, the framework explains how knowledge-bearing intermediaries can function as stabilising actors in state-building even when authority is not fully bureaucratised.

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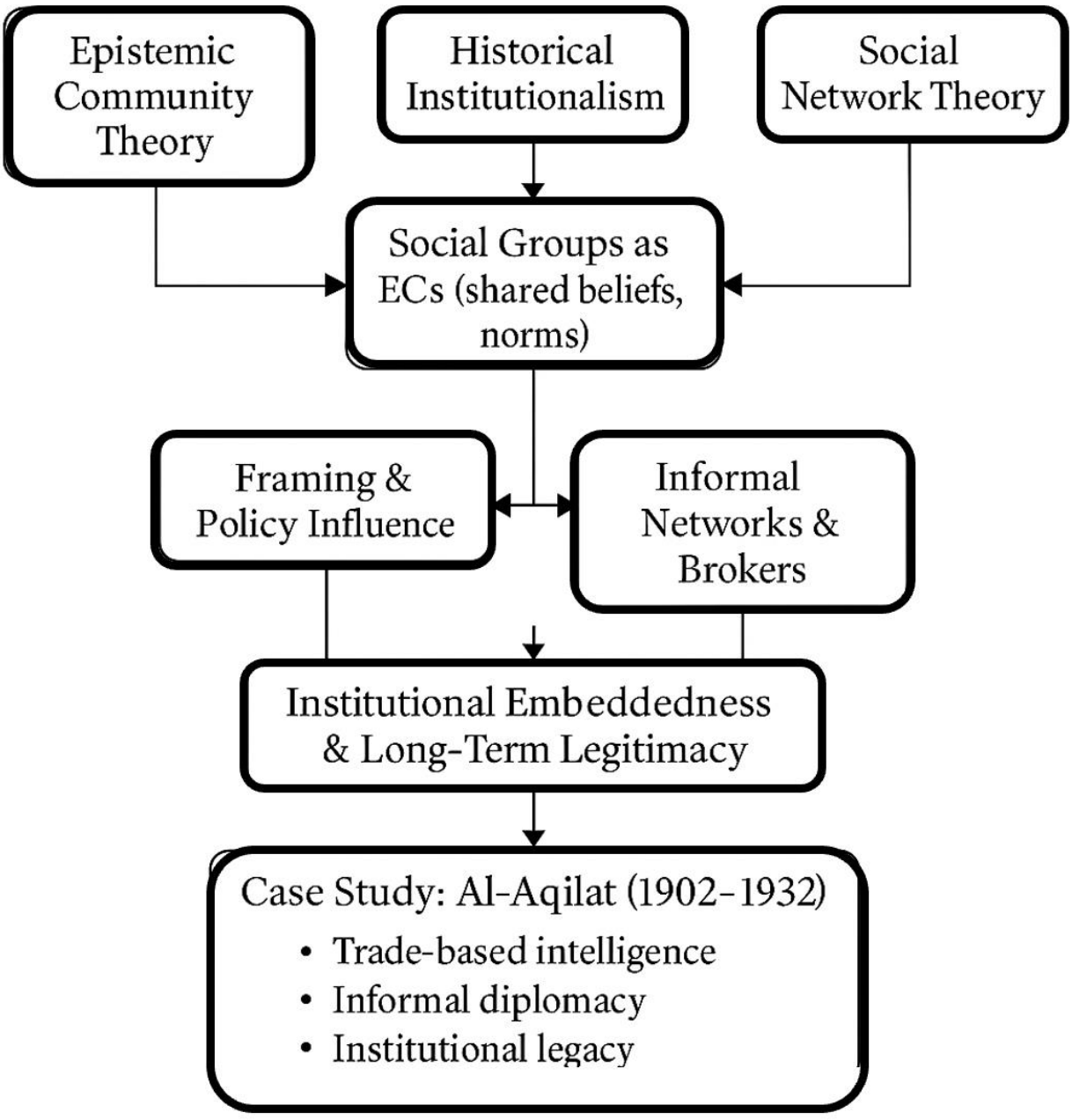


Figure 1Integrated Theoretical Framework

Figure 1 summarises the study's integrated framework, showing how ECT, HI, and SNT jointly guide analysis of Al-Aqilat's role in early Saudi state-building (1902–1932). ECT provides the primary mechanism for explaining influence through epistemic authority shared interpretive frames, credibility under uncertainty, and persuasive problem-framing that shapes governance choices. HI specifies how these knowledge practices become durable through temporality and constraint (path dependence, critical junctures, and institutional layering), helping explain persistence across episodes of consolidation. SNT identifies the relational channels through which influence travels brokerage, centrality, and information diffusion clarifying how intelligence, finance, and mediation moved through merchant ties rather than formal bureaucratic pipelines. Read together, the diagram makes the line of sight explicit between theory, coding, and explanation: knowledge authority (ECT) becomes historically embedded (HI) and travels through network structure (SNT).

Chapter 3
Methodology

This chapter outlines the methodological approach used to investigate the role of Al-Aqilat in Third Saudi State-building and political stability between 1902 and 1932. It explains the research design, the construction of the archival corpus, and the analytic procedures used to generate and interpret findings. The study adopts a qualitative historical documentary design and analyses multi-origin archival materials using inductive reflexive thematic analysis. The chapter also explains how documentary evidence was evaluated through source criticism and how credibility was strengthened through cross-source comparison and triangulation. Finally, it clarifies how the inductively developed themes are interpreted through the study's integrated theoretical framework (ECT, HI, and SNT), ensuring a transparent link between evidence, analysis, and explanation.

3.1 Methodological orientation and research design

This study adopts a qualitative historical documentary research design to examine how Al-Aqilat operated as an epistemic community and contributed to Saudi state-building between 1902 and 1932, particularly through diplomacy, trade intelligence, and strategic support in contrast to the Ikhwan's destabilising role. The core dataset consists of archival and documentary texts (e.g., correspondence, reports, agreements, administrative records, and published documentary compilations). Such materials are best analysed through qualitative interpretation because their evidentiary value lies not only in "what happened," but also in how actors framed problems, justified actions, and mobilised knowledge within specific institutional and geopolitical contexts (Scott, 1990; Bowen, 2009).

3.1.1 Qualitative historical-documentary design rationale

A qualitative historical-documentary design is appropriate for three reasons. First, archival documents are context-dependent and meaning-laden: they contain strategic language, omissions, and assumptions shaped by institutional position (e.g., colonial officials, local intermediaries, and state agents). Consequently, analysis must account for provenance, audience, and purpose, rather than treating documents as transparent factual recordings (Scott, 1990; Howell and Prevenier, 2001). Second, the study's aims are explanatory and interpretive rather than predictive. The research investigates mechanisms such as how knowledge, networks, and institutional pathways enabled Al-Aqilat's influence, rather than measuring variables for statistical inference. This requires close reading across sources to reconstruct patterns of practice, meaning, and political framing (Tosh, 2015; Bowen, 2009). Third, the archival corpus is heterogeneous, spanning multiple repositories and document genres with different production logics and biases. A flexible qualitative strategy is therefore required to compare evidence across institutional standpoints while keeping interpretation anchored to historical context (Mogalakwe, 2006; Bowen, 2009).

This study approaches documents critically as constructed institutional records rather than neutral containers of "facts." Documentary research therefore requires attention to the conditions of production and preservation, and recognition that strategic silences, selective emphasis, and normalised assumptions may be analytically meaningful when examining state formation and political stability (Scott, 1990; Howell and Prevenier, 2001). In line with documentary analysis guidance, credibility is strengthened through explicit evaluation, cross-source corroboration, and transparent linkage between documentary extracts and interpretive claims (Bowen, 2009; Mogalakwe, 2006). This is particularly important in mechanism-oriented inquiry, where explanation depends on how actors framed problems and mobilised knowledge within institutional constraints and geopolitical competition (Bowen, 2009; Howell and Prevenier, 2001).

3.1.2 Analytic approach: Inductive reflexive thematic analysis

The analysis is conducted using inductive reflexive thematic analysis (RTA). Coding begins with close, iterative reading of documents to generate initial codes that capture recurring meanings and actions (e.g., financial mediation, cross-border brokerage, intelligence exchange, and diplomatic facilitation). Themes are then constructed through iterative refinement reviewing coded extracts, mapping relationships between themes, and consolidating them into coherent analytic patterns (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Braun and Clarke, 2019).

RTA treats themes as interpretive outputs constructed through systematic engagement with the dataset rather than as categories that automatically "emerge" through coding or software functions (Braun and Clarke, 2019). Consistent with established guidance, this study followed the core analytic phases of familiarisation, initial coding, theme development, review, definition, and writing-up, while documenting interpretive decisions through memoing to maintain a visible pathway from extract to code to theme (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Braun and Clarke, 2019). This approach supports analytic depth because it focuses on patterned meaning and mechanism across heterogeneous documents rather than descriptive summarisation or frequency-based reporting (Braun and Clarke, 2019).

To avoid reducing analysis to descriptive topic coding, codes were constructed to capture mechanisms and roles relevant to the study aims (e.g., brokerage/mediation, diplomatic facilitation, intelligence exchange, financial support), and were refined through repeated comparison across document types and archival origins. Theme development was strengthened through systematic comparison of how similar mechanisms or actors were framed across British, French, Ottoman and Saudi sources, allowing convergences, contradictions, and omissions to be treated as analytically significant rather than noise, and interpreted in relation to institutional standpoint and purpose (Scott, 1990; Howell and Prevenier, 2001). This aligns with qualitative document analysis principles emphasising corroboration and transparent linkage between extracts and claims as foundations for credibility (Bowen, 2009; Mogalakwe, 2006).

The next section explains how these inductively developed themes are subsequently interpreted through the integrated theoretical framework (ECT, HI, and SNT).

3.1.3 Positioning: interpretivist logic with theory-guided interpretation (ECT, HI, SNT)

The study is positioned within an interpretivist qualitative logic, treating archival texts as socially produced records that reflect institutional interests, strategic framing, and historically contingent meanings (Bowen, 2009; Tosh, 2015). Interpretation is then strengthened through a theory-guided stage: the themes generated inductively are examined through the integrated theoretical framework of ECT, HI, and SNT.

Importantly, theory is used here to organise and explain the empirical patterns identified through coding. Specifically:

- ECT is used to interpret how shared expertise, credibility, and policy-relevant knowledge operated as influence mechanisms.
- HI helps explain how institutional constraints and path-dependent arrangements shaped opportunities for particular actors and strategies.
- SNT supports interpretation of brokerage roles, relational influence, and connectivity across regions and political spaces.

Within this design, ECT, HI, and SNT are not used to pre-classify documents or impose fixed categories at the coding stage. Instead, they provide distinct explanatory lenses applied after inductive theme development: ECT supports interpretation of knowledge authority and influence mechanisms, HI explains institutional constraints and path-dependent opportunity structures, and SNT clarifies brokerage, connectivity, and relational power across regions. This sequencing strengthens analytic transparency by separating inductive pattern construction from theory-guided explanation, while ensuring that theoretical claims remain anchored in documentary evidence (Braun and Clarke, 2019).

3.2 Archival corpus and document selection

This section defines the documentary corpus used in the study and explains the selection logic applied to identify materials relevant to Al-Aqilat's epistemic roles in Saudi state-building (1902–1932). The corpus was constructed to support cross-source comparison across multiple institutional standpoints (British, French, Ottoman, and Saudi), enabling triangulation of claims and a more balanced reconstruction of mechanisms such as brokerage, diplomatic facilitation, intelligence exchange, and financial support. Because each source stream is shaped by distinct institutional purposes and representational logics, corpus construction is treated as an analytic choice and is read in conjunction with the source-criticism procedures set out later in the chapter (Scott, 1990; Howell and Prevenier, 2001; Bowen, 2009).

3.2.1 British documentary corpus

Source: *The Arabian Peninsula in British Archives (Najd and Hejaz), Parts 1–7* (Dar Al-Saqi, 1996; trans. Najdat Fathy Safwa).

British documents were included because they provide extensive colonial administrative and intelligence reporting on Najd, Hejaz, and wider regional dynamics during the study period. These materials support analysis of: (i) British representations of intermediary actors and merchant networks, (ii) trade, security, and diplomatic priorities, and (iii) documented interactions involving Saudi leadership and regional brokers. In this study, these records are treated as institutionally produced texts reflecting British policy concerns and geopolitical interests; their evidentiary value is therefore assessed through contextual interpretation, attention to purpose and audience, and cross-source comparison with non-British corpora.

3.2.2 French documentary corpus

Source: *King Abdulaziz Al Saud: His Life and Reign in Foreign Documents* (King Fahad National Library; Circle for Publishing & Documentation, 1999).

French documentary materials were included to broaden external perspectives beyond British reporting and to strengthen triangulation across colonial/diplomatic frames. The French compilation provides documentary material relevant to regional diplomacy, strategic interests, and commercial discussions during early state consolidation, offering a distinct standpoint shaped by French regional interests and diplomatic positioning. These documents are used comparatively to identify convergences and tensions in how Al-Aqilat linked roles, events, and mechanisms were represented across foreign administrative contexts.

3.2.3 Saudi documentary corpus I: Dictionary of Buraydah Families

Source: Al-Aboudi, M. bin N. (2010) *Dictionary of Buraydah Families*. Riyadh: Dar Al-Tholothia.

The Dictionary of Buraydah Families was selected because it provides a comprehensive documentary compilation relating to the families of Buraydah and the wider Al-Qassim region, including individuals, commercial networks, and locally grounded historical references associated with Al-Aqilat. For this study, the collection served as a documentary finding aid to identify archival records, individuals, and events relevant to the research objectives before these materials were traced and verified through institutional archival repositories.

Unlike a conventional historical narrative, the Dictionary of Buraydah Families combines reproduced archival documents with editorial commentary, genealogical information, and contextual explanations prepared by the compiler. Accordingly, the collection was evaluated with methodological caution and treated as a documentary compilation rather than as a standalone historical authority. Archival materials that included the compiler's commentary or interpretation were excluded from the dataset, and only documentary records presented without editorial intervention were retained for analysis.

The procedures used to verify archival records identified through the Dictionary of Buraydah Families, distinguish primary documentary evidence from the compiler's editorial

commentary, and prepare the verified documentary texts for analysis are described in Section 3.3.3.

3.2.4 Saudi documentary corpus II: King Abdulaziz Foundation (Darah) collections

Source: King Abdulaziz Foundation (Dārat Al-Malik ʿAbd Al-ʿAzīz), Riyadh.

Saudi institutional documents were included to anchor interpretation in locally curated historical records relating to state formation, governance, diplomacy, and economic organisation. These materials strengthen contextualisation of domestic priorities and administrative logics and support cross-checking of foreign documentary framings. Within NVivo, these materials were organised under a dedicated source category to ensure transparency and consistency in coding across the multi-archive corpus.

3.2.5 Ottoman documentary corpus

Source: Ottoman Archives, Istanbul (documents accessed via authorised procedures; translated through a specialist workflow described in Section 3.3.4).

Ottoman documents were included to capture an additional institutional perspective on governance and regional dynamics relevant to the late imperial and transitional context shaping early twentieth-century Arabia. These records support analysis of administrative conventions, regional policy concerns, and geopolitical relationships that intersect with the emergence of new authority structures. The Ottoman corpus strengthens triangulation by adding a non-European institutional standpoint to comparisons of events, actors, and mechanisms, while the translation process is treated as an interpretive stage managed through the workflow described later in the chapter (Howell and Prevenier, 2001).

3.2.6 Document inclusion criteria

Documents were selected using purposive, criteria-based inclusion, guided by the study's aims and the types of evidence needed to trace epistemic roles and mechanisms. A document was included where it met one or more of the following criteria:

- **Actor relevance:** explicit reference to Al-Aqilat individuals, families, merchant intermediaries, or identifiable brokers tied to Al-Qassim networks.
- **Mechanism relevance:** evidence of practices aligned with the study focus (e.g., brokerage/mediation, intelligence exchange, diplomatic facilitation, financial support, trade security, logistical mobilisation).
- **Institutional relevance:** content linked to state-building processes such as governance consolidation, negotiation of authority, security arrangements, administrative coordination, or inter-polity relations.
- **Temporal relevance:** alignment with 1902–1932, with limited contextual documents included only where needed to interpret boundary events.
- **Comparative value:** materials enabling corroboration or contrast across British/French/Ottoman/Saudi sources to reduce reliance on a single narrative.
- **Analytic richness:** documents containing sufficient contextual detail (actors, location, actions, motivations, consequences) to support meaningful coding and theme development.

Given that parts of the corpus were accessed through published compilations as well as institutional repositories, the next section details the access pathways and re-verification procedures used to confirm provenance and traceability.

3.3 Archival Accessibility, Provenance and Re-Verification Workflow

This section explains how documentary materials were accessed and authenticated across the four source streams used in this study (British, French, Saudi, and Ottoman). Because parts of the corpus were accessed through published documentary compilations, the study adopted an explicit traceability and verification workflow to ensure that documents used in analysis corresponded to the original archival records. Across all collections, verification focused on (i) confirming the original reference identifiers, (ii) matching document content against the source record, and (iii) ensuring that documents were obtained through authorised institutional channels or verified through recognised repositories.

3.3.1 British documentary materials: published compilation with independent archival verification

British materials were initially obtained through a published compilation released by Dar Al-Saqi. The compilation presents British archival documents with brief descriptions and without analytical commentary. To address potential concerns regarding provenance and authenticity, the study implemented a verification step through the British archival system in London by commissioning an authorised independent archival researcher via a paid verification service. Document identifiers were provided exactly as listed in the Dar Al-Saqi compilation, and the corresponding archival records were checked for content consistency. The verification process confirmed that the records obtained and used in this study matched the archival originals in terms of document content and reference details, supporting the authenticity of the British documentary set.

The original British archival records were created in English and are preserved within the British archival collections in London. For this study, relevant documents were initially identified through The Arabian Peninsula in British Archives (Najd and Hejaz) (Dar Al-Saqi, 1996), a documentary compilation prepared by the historian and researcher Najdat Fathy Safwa. In this publication, original British archival documents were systematically collected, organised, and translated from English into Arabic to facilitate access for Arabic-speaking researchers.

The Arabic documentary texts contained in the Dar Al-Saqi compilation were subsequently translated from Arabic into English by the researcher for import into NVivo, coding, thematic analysis, and quotation within this thesis. Consequently, English quotations presented in this study represent the researcher's English translation of the published Arabic documentary texts rather than direct transcriptions of the original English archival wording. To preserve documentary integrity, the cited archival records were independently verified against the corresponding documents held

within the British archival collections, confirming consistency of documentary content, document identifiers, and archival metadata.

3.3.2 French documentary materials: published compilation corroborated through Saudi institutional holdings

French materials were obtained through a documentary collection published by Dar Al-Da'ira for Publishing and Distribution (DDPD), focusing on foreign documents related to the reign of Ibn Saud. As with the British compilation, documents are presented with descriptive information and without extended analysis. To ensure provenance and accuracy, the authenticity of the French documents listed in the DDPD compilation was confirmed through the King Abdulaziz Foundation (Darah). The original archives copies were collected from DDPD, and cross verification showed all content matching including meta-data of archives. Verification indicated that the documents corresponded to the institutional records and were consistent with the source copies, thereby supporting their suitability for inclusion in the analytic corpus.

The original French archival records were created in French and later formed part of the official documentary project *King Abdulaziz Al Saud: His Life and Reign in Foreign Documents*. This project was undertaken under the supervision of the King Abdulaziz Foundation (Darah), with publication by Dar Al-Da'irah for Publishing and Documentation. As part of the project, a specialist translation team commissioned through Darah translated the original French archival documents into Arabic, producing an authoritative Arabic documentary edition for researchers.

The researcher subsequently translated these Arabic documentary texts into English for NVivo coding, thematic analysis, and quotation within this thesis. Accordingly, English quotations represent the researcher's English translation of the officially published Arabic version rather than direct translations from the original French archival documents. To strengthen documentary

traceability, original archival copies obtained through the King Abdulaziz Foundation were cross-verified with the published Arabic compilation, confirming consistency of documentary content, document identifiers, and archival metadata before analysis.

3.3.3 Saudi documentary materials: institutional retrieval and published multi-volume corpus cross-verification

A. King Abdulaziz Foundation (Darah): Direct institutional access

Saudi institutional documentary materials were obtained directly through the Documentation Center at the King Abdulaziz Foundation (Darah), the official national repository responsible for preserving historical records relating to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Access requests were submitted in accordance with the Foundation's archival procedures, specifying the research topic, objectives, and documentary scope. Following an institutional search, Darah identified archival records relevant to Al-Aqilat and associated actors, which were subsequently requested and supplied for this research. This process ensured that the Saudi institutional corpus was obtained through official archival channels and remained fully traceable to the Foundation's holdings.

The Saudi institutional documentary corpus was obtained directly from the King Abdulaziz Foundation (Darah), the official national repository responsible for preserving and providing access to historical documents relating to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The documentary collection contains records originating from multiple archival traditions, including Arabic, English, French, and Ottoman language. Where documents were not originally written in Arabic, the versions supplied through Darah had already been translated into Arabic through authorised institutional translation processes to facilitate scholarly access.

For the purposes of this study, the Arabic documentary texts supplied by Darah were translated into English by the researcher before import into NVivo for coding, thematic analysis, and quotation. Accordingly, English quotations presented in this thesis represent the researcher's English translation of the Arabic documentary texts supplied through Darah rather than direct reproductions of the original-language archival documents. Throughout the research process, documentary references, archival identifiers, and content were retained to preserve traceability between the analytical dataset and the institutional archival holdings.

B. Dictionary of Buraydah Families: Systematic extraction and institutional corroboration

Archival records relevant to Al-Aqilat and associated actors were systematically identified through the *Dictionary of Buraydah Families* and subsequently traced against the holdings of the King Abdulaziz Foundation (Darah). This procedure enabled the systematic identification of archival records relevant to the study while avoiding an initial document-by-document search across the complete institutional repository.

Where corresponding archival records were available through Darah, documentary references, archival identifiers, and textual content were verified before inclusion in the research corpus. This verification process confirmed consistency between the published documentary compilation and the institutional archival holdings, thereby strengthening documentary provenance and source authenticity.

During corpus construction, only institutionally verified archival documents were retained for the analytical dataset. Editorial commentary, genealogical descriptions, explanatory notes, and interpretive discussions prepared by the compiler were excluded from the analytical dataset and were not subjected to thematic analysis. The verified documentary texts were subsequently

translated into English by the researcher for NVivo coding, thematic analysis, and quotation within this thesis. Accordingly, all English quotations presented in this thesis are the researcher's own translations of the verified Arabic documentary texts contained in the institutional corpus, rather than reproductions of editorial translations or commentary. The complete multilingual translation workflow is presented in Section 3.5.4. Reproduced[1] archival documents (Original archives) are cited using their institutional archival identifiers, document dates, and relevant archival metadata. Where the compiler's editorial or contextual commentary is not used in any used quotations of archives or included in datasets. This citation practice maintains a clear distinction between the reproduced archival record and Al-Aboudi's editorial interpretation.

After verification, the Arabic documentary texts supplied through the institutional corpus were rendered into English by the researcher for NVivo coding, thematic analysis, and quotation in the thesis. The English extracts used in the analysis should therefore be understood as researcher-prepared translations of the verified Arabic documentary corpus. This process preserves traceability between the archival item, the institutional copy, and the English analytical dataset used in the study.

3.3.4 Ottoman documentary materials

Ottoman materials were obtained through the Ottoman Document Center in Istanbul. Access procedures and communication challenges relating to translation and correspondence were resolved prior to document retrieval. A specialist in historical studies was then engaged, and the research objectives and relevance criteria were communicated through this channel. The

[1] Reproduced text is mentioned with the understanding that original documents were collected, categorized and used without changing their content and republished as collection.

Document Center subsequently shared a list of documents relevant to Al-Aqilat and associated actors. The list was reviewed, and documents matching the research focus were selected and requested. Payment was made according to the center's procedures, and the documents were supplied.

Given the language requirements, translation proceeded through a staged workflow. A specialist translator first translated the original Ottoman language archival documents into Arabic. The researcher subsequently translated the Arabic documentary texts into English for NVivo coding, thematic analysis, and quotation within this thesis. Accordingly, English quotations derived from the Ottoman corpus represent the researcher's English translation of the verified Arabic documentary texts rather than direct translations from the original Ottoman language records. This staged translation process maintained a transparent chain of documentary traceability from the original archival record through the specialist Arabic translation to the final English analytical dataset. Throughout the process, archival references, document identifiers, and associated metadata were retained to preserve source integrity and facilitate verification.

3.4 NVivo-supported coding, transparency, and analytic audit trail

To implement the inductive RTA procedures described above across a large multi-archive dataset, NVivo was used as the study's sole software environment for coding, retrieval, and documentation. Its main contribution in this study is procedural transparency: it enables systematic storage of documents by source stream, consistent coding of extracts, and rapid retrieval of all text segments coded to a concept or mechanism. This is particularly important in documentary research where claims must remain traceable to specific records and locations and where the analysis requires repeated cross-reading across institutional sources (Bowen, 2009). NVivo therefore supported an auditable link between (i) archival extracts, (ii) codes, (iii) theme development, and (iv) the final analytical narrative, strengthening the credibility of findings by ensuring that

interpretive claims are anchored in retrievable evidence rather than impressionistic reading (Bazeley and Jackson, 2013).

At the same time, NVivo does not "produce" themes or guarantee rigour by itself. Thematic analysis remains an interpretive method, and the quality of themes depends on the researcher's analytic judgement, reflexivity, and iterative engagement with the dataset (Braun and Clarke, 2019). To avoid reducing analysis to descriptive coding or mere aggregation, coding in this study was treated as an analytic act: codes were constructed to capture *mechanisms and roles* (e.g., brokerage, mediation, intelligence exchange, diplomatic facilitation) rather than only topics. Memos and analytic notes were used to document evolving interpretations, tensions between sources, and emerging explanations, ensuring that the pathway from evidence to theme remained explicit and theoretically meaningful (Bazeley and Jackson, 2013; Braun and Clarke, 2006).

NVivo also enabled structured cross-source comparison, which is critical for a corpus spanning different institutional standpoints (British, French, Ottoman, and Saudi). Queries and retrieval functions were used to compare how the same actor, event, or mechanism was framed across archives and to identify convergences, contradictions, and omissions that are analytically significant in documentary research (Scott, 1990; Howell and Prevenier, 2001). This approach supports a more critical reading of documents as institutionally situated texts and strengthens analysis through corroboration and contrast rather than reliance on a single narrative stream (Bowen, 2009; Mogalakwe, 2006). Importantly, NVivo was used to support *systematic handling and traceability*; interpretive authority remained with the researcher throughout coding, theme construction, and theory-guided explanation.

The coding and theme building process produced two linked analytic outputs that structure the reporting chapters. First, inductively developed themes were consolidated into the stabilising role clusters reported in Chapter 5.1, reflecting recurring practices and governance functions that could be traced across the multi archive corpus through coded extracts and cross source

comparison. Second, a higher-level interpretive consolidation examined how influence operated across those arenas, producing the mechanism architecture reported in Chapter 5.2. In this sense, NVivo supported traceability and retrieval, while the analytic sequence moved from extract to code, code to theme, and theme to mechanism guided explanation, ensuring that the Chapter 5 structure is directly anchored in retrievable coded material rather than in narrative aggregation alone.

3.5 Source criticism, triangulation, and trustworthiness

This study applies established principles of source criticism to strengthen the credibility of interpretations drawn from British, French, Ottoman, and Saudi documentary materials. In documentary and archival research, validation is not limited to confirming authenticity; it also involves evaluating the conditions of production, institutional purpose, and potential bias embedded in records (Scott, 1990; Howell and Prevenier, 2001). Accordingly, the study combines external criticism (provenance and authenticity checks) and internal criticism (content evaluation, framing, and bias assessment), supported by systematic cross-source comparison and triangulation across corpora (Howell and Prevenier, 2001; Bowen, 2009; Mogalakwe, 2006).

This study maintains ethical and scholarly transparency in handling archival materials by providing clear attribution for all documentary sources, including translated documents, and by distinguishing between documentary extracts and the researcher's interpretive analysis. Where documents were accessed through published compilations, institutional repositories, or authorised archival procedures, citation practices reflect the source stream and document identifiers used in analysis. Because translation is an interpretive stage, translated extracts are treated cautiously and are triangulated across corpora where possible; translation procedures are documented in the access workflow (Section 3.3.4) and in the translation risk-management subsection (Section 3.5.4). Archival access conditions and relevant permissions/copyright requirements were respected through the procedures used to obtain and reproduce documents for scholarly purposes.

3.5.1 External criticism (provenance and authenticity)

External criticism was used to establish that documents relied upon in analysis were traceable to identifiable archival origins and had not been materially altered. This involved confirming key provenance features such as archive reference identifiers, dates, locations, and archival classification details. Where applicable, institutional markers (e.g., cataloguing records and file-level metadata) were used to support traceability. Importantly, the study did not treat provenance as sufficient in itself; rather, it provided the baseline for using documents as evidence within a critical interpretive framework (Scott, 1990; Howell and Prevenier, 2001). For published compilations, provenance concerns were addressed through the re-verification procedures outlined in Section 3.3, ensuring that documents used in analysis corresponded to the original archival records.

3.5.2 Internal criticism (bias, framing, and institutional standpoint)

Internal criticism was applied to evaluate documentary content for bias, political framing, and selective reporting. Archival materials especially those produced within colonial, imperial, or state administrative settings often reflect the priorities and assumptions of the producing institution rather than a comprehensive account of events (Scott, 1990; Howell and Prevenier, 2001). British and French records, for example, may emphasise security concerns and diplomatic strategy; Ottoman records may reflect imperial administrative priorities; and Saudi institutional or locally produced materials may privilege internal legitimacy narratives or celebratory representations. These perspectives were therefore treated as analytically meaningful rather than as distortions to be "removed," with interpretation focused on how institutional standpoint shaped the representation of actors and events (Howell and Prevenier, 2001; Bowen, 2009).

Because parts of the corpus originate from British and French colonial administrations, the study treats these records as institutionally situated texts that may reflect Eurocentric assumptions,

strategic framing, or selective emphasis aligned with imperial priorities rather than neutral observation. Such standpoint effects are not treated as "noise" to be removed; instead, they are interpreted as part of how information was produced and circulated in contested state-building contexts. To mitigate the risk of reproducing a single institutional viewpoint, interpretations drawn from colonial documents are evaluated alongside Saudi and Ottoman materials and assessed through cross-source corroboration, contradiction analysis, and contextual reading (Scott, 1990; Howell and Prevenier, 2001; Bowen, 2009).

3.5.3 Triangulation and cross-source comparison

To prevent a single archival perspective dominating interpretation, the study systematically compared how key actors, events, and mechanisms were framed across British, French, Ottoman, and Saudi corpora. Where sources converged, convergence strengthened confidence in the interpretation; where they diverged, discrepancies were analysed as evidence of competing institutional logics, political interests, or information constraints (Bowen, 2009; Mogalakwe, 2006). This triangulation approach supported more robust mechanism-tracing such as brokerage, diplomatic facilitation, intelligence exchange, and strategic support by requiring themes to be substantiated across multiple documentary standpoints rather than relying on isolated extracts (Scott, 1990; Howell and Prevenier, 2001).

3.5.4 Translation provenance and multilingual documentary workflow

This study draws upon documentary materials originating from four archival traditions and multiple source languages, including English, French, Ottoman, and Arabic. As documented in Sections 3.3.1–3.3.4, each documentary corpus followed a transparent translation pathway appropriate to its archival origin, with all translation stages recorded to maintain documentary traceability. Table 3.5.4 summarises the translation provenance and multilingual documentary workflow applied across the complete archival corpus.

Translation was treated as a methodological stage rather than a purely linguistic exercise because historical documents often contain context-dependent terminology, administrative expressions, and culturally specific meanings that may not transfer directly across languages. Consequently, the researcher distinguished between the original archival language, officially published or institutionally authorised Arabic documentary versions where applicable, and the English renderings prepared for NVivo coding, quotation, and thematic analysis. Where an English quotation was produced from an Arabic documentary version, it is presented as the researcher's analytical translation for this study rather than as a verbatim reproduction of the original archival wording. Where original-language wording or published archival metadata was available, it was used to maintain traceability between the original archival record, the documentary compilation, and the English analytical dataset.

To minimise interpretive bias, translation was undertaken within a broader framework of historical source criticism. Documentary meanings were interpreted alongside their historical context, institutional purpose, and documentary genre rather than through literal linguistic equivalence alone. Where uncertainty arose, translated extracts were considered alongside parallel accounts from other archival corpora, documentary metadata, and consistent thematic patterns identified across multiple documents. This process reduced the risk of isolated mistranslation or context-dependent interpretation and strengthened the credibility and transparency of the analytical findings (Howell and Prevenier, 2001; Bowen, 2009).

Table 3.5.4 Translation and Documentary Workflow Across the Multi-Archive Corpus

Documentary Corpus	**Original Language**	**Published/Institutional Arabic Version**	**Researcher's Translation**
British	Original British archival documents (English)	Dar Al-Saqi documentary compilation (English → Arabic)	Arabic → English (Inserted to Nvivo after reverification with originals)

French	Original French archival documents (French)	Official Darah documentary project (French → Arabic)	Arabic → English (Inserted to Nvivo after reverification with originals)
Saudi (King Abdulaziz Foundation)	Multilingual repository documents	Arabic versions supplied through Darah (original Arabic retained where applicable)	Arabic → English (Inserted to Nvivo after reverification with originals)
Saudi (Dictionary of Buraydah Families)	Arabic archival records collected by Al-Aboudi	Documentary compilation organised and published in Arabic	Arabic → English (Inserted to Nvivo after reverification with originals)
Ottoman	Ottoman Language	Specialist translation (Ottoman Language → Arabic)	Arabic → English (Inserted to Nvivo after reverification with originals)

As summarised in Table 3.5.4, each documentary corpus followed a documented and traceable translation pathway appropriate to its archival origin. Although individual workflows differed according to the language and provenance of the source material, all corpora were subjected to the same principles of documentary verification, transparent translation, and source criticism before inclusion in the analytical dataset. These procedures ensured that multilingual archival evidence was analysed through a consistent methodological framework while preserving transparency from the original archival record to the final thematic interpretation.

Chapter 4: Historical background

Chapter 4 provides the historical background required to interpret the thesis argument rather than to retell the general history of Saudi state formation. Its purpose is to identify the specific historical conditions under which Al-Aqilat became an identifiable community of practice and to clarify how their distinctive attributes emerged in ways that matter for the analytical framework adopted in this study. The chapter therefore focuses on historical developments that explain why knowledge-bearing intermediaries could become politically consequential in the Third Saudi State (1902–1932), and why this relevance is less visible in earlier Saudi political formations.

This chapter addresses four linked historical questions that are necessary for the argument developed in Chapter 5. First, it asks when and how did Al-Aqilat take shape as a recognisable trading network associated with Al-Qassim, rather than as isolated merchants. Second, how did they develop features consistent with epistemic community attributes, including shared trade expertise, reputational credibility, and practical knowledge of routes, markets, and political conditions. Third, why did the Third Saudi State create stronger demand and greater receptivity for such knowledge, compared with the first and second Saudi states, particularly under conditions of shifting imperial influence, border-making, and intensified cross-regional connectivity. Fourth, how did key geopolitical episodes and institutional pressures between 1902 and 1932 make brokerage, intelligence circulation, mediation, and logistical coordination central to consolidation.

The chapter proceeds through a focused historical sequence. It first summarises the political trajectories of the first and second Saudi states only to the extent necessary to explain the structural differences that shaped the role of commercial intermediaries. It then situates the

emergence of the Third Saudi State within regional dynamics, including Ottoman decline and the expansion of British influence, and highlights how these conditions altered the strategic value of transregional trade networks. It then turns to movements and revolts that affected consolidation, including the Arab Revolt and the Ikhwan, as episodes that intensified uncertainty and increased reliance on credible intermediaries. Finally, it introduces Al-Aqilat as a case study community and explains why biographical narratives are included, not as commemorative accounts, but as evidence of how individual trajectories embodied the shared expertise, networks, and governance-adjacent roles that the thesis analyses as historically grounded epistemic influence.

Tribalism, state-building, and tribal civilizations must be understood through human evolution. Since many tribal organizations have historically resisted centralized governance, especially in the context of nomadic traditions, their relationship to the state is often characterized by tension rather than clear opposition (Dresch, 1989; Al-Rasheed, 2010, Eickelman, 2016, Gellner, 1990; Tapper, 1990; Tibi, 1990). The anthropological conversation around tribes and tribalism, since the nineteenth century, has emphasized these dynamics. Lewis Henry Morgan, regarded as a founding figure in anthropology, described tribes as social forms organized "by name, by a separate dialect, by a sovereign government and by the possession of a territory which is inhabited and defends as its own" (Morgan, 2020, Eickelman, 2016). While this definition reflects a more territorial model, it contrasts with nomadic and semi-nomadic groups**,** for whom the notion of fixed boundaries or hierarchical governance posed practical limitations. Thus, tribal resistance has often been more about opposition to centralization and imposed territorial fixity, rather than an inherent rejection of the state itself.

Currently, more than a hundred tribes and various sub-groups with distinct origins and structures form a diverse tribal landscape in Saudi Arabia. Today, tribal populations are dispersed across both rural and urban environments, often converging in areas that were once historically designated as Diras, the traditional homeland of tribes. Although this classification was formally abolished in the 1960s, many tribal families continue to reside in areas historically linked to their

tribal identity. For example, the territory between Afif and Dawadimi is historically tied to the Otaibah tribe. Similarly, the Dawasir in Sulayil, the Shammar in Hail, and the Bani Ghamid and Zahran in Baha maintain geographic associations with their ancestral homelands (Alfahed, 2004).

Despite urban development and regional expansion, tribal affiliations continue to influence residential patterns, though these do not dominate entire cities or neighborhoods. Urbanization did not erase tribal identity but rather contributed to its evolution (Tibi, 1990). This transformation led to stratification within the population, distinguishing between tribal and non-tribal affiliations. One of the earliest differentiations categorized people as either Bedouins (nomadic) or Hadar (sedentary), based on their lifestyle. This distinction faded with the decline of nomadism, but social hierarchies persisted. Tribes were further categorized into perceived hierarchies rooted in ancestry, occupation, and historical roles such as camel herding, farming, or other forms of livelihood (Alfahed, 2004; Alqassemi, n.d.).

According to traditional Najdi historical accounts, particularly those associated with Ibn Bishr, society in Najd before 1744 was characterised by political fragmentation, recurrent local conflict, and religious practices that reformist scholars subsequently criticised as deviations from their understanding of Islamic teachings (Ibn Bishr, 2001). These descriptions should not be treated as neutral accounts of pre-reform Najd. Rather, they formed part of a reformist historiographical framework that contrasted a supposedly disordered past with the political and religious order associated with the alliance between Muhammad Ibn Saud and Muhammad Ibn Abd Al-Wahhab. Although the Wahhabi movement contributed to processes of political consolidation, its role should be understood alongside military expansion, economic conditions, tribal alliances, and the incorporation of local communities (Vassiliev, 2000).

The alliance formed in 1744 between Muhammad Ibn Saud and Muhammad Ibn Abd Al-Wahhab provided the emerging Saudi polity with an influential religious and political framework. Reformist teachings facilitated the mobilisation of supporters, the collection of zakat, and the

extension of authority beyond Diriyah. However, this process was contested within Najdi society and combined religious mobilisation with military expansion, political negotiation, and the incorporation of neighbouring settlements and tribal groups (Al-Rasheed, 2010). The First Saudi State was subsequently defeated by the Egyptian-Ottoman campaigns of 1811–1818, when Muhammad Ali Pasha of Egypt, acting under Ottoman orders, launched a series of invasions into central Arabia to suppress the Wahhabi movement and dismantle the First Saudi State (Al-Rasheed, 2010). The Wahhabi call, in its union with Muhammad Ibn Saud, became the ideological weapon to overcome the social and political division within Najd, as signs of shifting from the concept of loyalty based on the tribe to another, more comprehensive type, which is loyalty to the reform advocacy 'Wahhabi movement' that unites all (Andreotti, 2013).

After the Egyptians took over Najd and destroyed Diriyah, Turki bin Abdullah (1769-1834), considered the true founder of the second Saudi state, restored the rule of Al-Saud to Najd and expanded the scope of rule across the lands of the Arabian Peninsula as the second Saudi state has a solid foundation and a history rooted in the countries of Najd, which helped Turki bin Abdullah restore rule faster (Abdulghani, 2014). However, the fighting between the branches of the Saudi government led to the end of the second Saudi state, then the beginning of Ibn Rashid's rule of Najd, a period marked by the dominance of the House of Rashid based in Ha'il, who governed Najd as Ottoman allies after defeating the Saudis at the Battle of Mulayda in 1891. Their rule represented a significant shift in power, as the Rashidis suppressed Saudi influence and consolidated regional control with Ottoman backing with the influence and authority of Ibn Rashid over Najd, differences began between Ibn Rashid and the people of Al-Qassim (Al-Aqilat) is increasing, which formed an internal opposition movement in Najd and another external. The two movements interacted and began communicating with Abdulaziz bin Abdulrahman (1876-1953), who was in Kuwait until he began to restore the rule of his ancestors after he sensed that Najd wanted him and did not want Ibn Rashid.

Al-Aqilat, a social group from Al-Qassim in central Najd, plays the trading role. The British Admiral Intelligence reports (1917) defined them as holding most camel trade in Damascus and other areas. In addition, they are all Najd Arabs, townsfolk, or primarily Qassim. They are the recognizable guides and conductors of caravans in Arabia. They are a club-like organization with a president who is always a native of Buraydah and a base of operations in Baghdad (Admiralty-war-staff, 1917). Al-Aqilat was an Epistemic Community as EC now onwards, that controlled the trade inside and outside Najd as per what was referred to in the British Admiral intelligence report (1917): From the Qassim, trade is conducted in central Arabia. For instance, it would be nearly impossible to purchase a significant number of camels from Ibn Rashid (Amir of Ha'il) due to the monopoly of the Al-Aqilat and the unwillingness of the Sheikhs to deal with other buyers (Admiralty-war-staff, 1917).

According to Vassiliev (2000) In the late eighteenth century, Al-Aqilat held exclusive control over the authority to organise, lead, and protect the caravans that traversed the Syrian desert. In addition, what supports our argument that Al-Aqilat is an EC, is that they thwarted Bonaparte's plans to invade India by preventing him from transferring his messages to the rulers of the region and preventing him from communicating with Diriyah, with whom he hoped to make contact (Abdulghani, 2014). This is what is referred to by Doughty (1921). After eight days of continuous riding through the northern deserts, the post bag is delivered from Damascus to India through Al-Aqilat (Doughty, 1921). However, this looks highly relevant to Al-Qassim due to its economic, social, and political influence. These factors allowed Al-Qassim to establish extensive trade networks and cultural connections that were exclusive to the region. Furthermore, these characteristics were also the reason why ambitious powers were compelled to collaborate with, assimilate, or conquer Al-Qassim (Valenti, 2015). Consequently, this economic influence led to political hegemony in the region and made Al-Qassim and its people the focus of regional competition between all the conflicting forces.

Al-Aqilat emerged in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as a powerful merchant network originating from the Al-Qassim region of central Arabia. Their influence extended across the Arabian Peninsula and beyond, reaching trade hubs such as Damascus, Basra, Cairo, and even as far as India and Istanbul. Known for their command over transregional camel caravans, Al-Aqilat dominated the overland trade routes that connected Najd to the broader Islamic world. Their roles were not confined to trade alone; they also served as navigators, guides, and intelligence operatives who conveyed critical geopolitical information between tribal leaders, religious authorities, and ruling families. Their ability to traverse tribal, political, and geographic boundaries gave them privileged access to both local and international actors.

In addition to economic functions, Al-Aqilat were instrumental in mediating tribal disputes, facilitating diplomatic exchanges, and managing cross-border political communication, particularly during times of instability and regime transition. Their strategic location in Qassim, a region that became a crossroads of competing influences (Ottoman, Rashidi, and later Saudi), enhanced their centrality in regional decision-making processes. Al-Aqilat's internal organization, generational knowledge-sharing, and systematized methods of route planning, financing, and intelligence gathering set them apart from conventional merchant collectives.

Given their ability to influence political dynamics, regulate regional commerce, and disseminate strategic knowledge across domains of power, Al-Aqilat can be conceptualized as an epistemic community. According to Haas (1992), epistemic communities are defined by their shared causal and normative beliefs, collective enterprise, recognized expertise, and authoritative claim to policy-relevant knowledge. Al-Aqilat meet these criteria through their transregional influence, their embedded networks of trade and diplomacy, and their role in shaping decisions related to security, economy, and governance in the Arabian Peninsula. Rather than being passive economic agents, they functioned as a knowledge-driven social group whose epistemic authority shaped the political trajectory of the region during the formation of the Third Saudi State.

The organizational structure of Al-Aqilat further supports their classification as an epistemic social group. This level of coordination enabled them to control trade routes and enforce economic policies, reflecting the characteristics of an epistemic community where knowledge and expertise are institutionalized within a group. Their presence in multiple cities, including Damascus, Baghdad, and Arabia, highlights their expansive network, which functioned as a transnational system of commerce and intelligence.

Beyond trade, Al-Aqilat played a significant role in intelligence operations and diplomatic mediation. Their disruption of Napoleon Bonaparte's communications with regional rulers illustrates their strategic involvement in geopolitical affairs. British sources suggest that Al-Aqilat monitored caravan routes and maintained informants across key trading hubs like Damascus, Aleppo, and Baghdad. Their familiarity with desert terrain, combined with their control over postal relay networks, allowed them to intercept or delay the transfer of critical messages. By preventing Napoleon's envoys from reaching Diriyah, Al-Aqilat obstructed attempts to form alliances with Najdi leaders, thereby undermining Franch colonial ambitions in the region. This level of geopolitical awareness and logistical control highlights their function not merely as traders but as strategic knowledge brokers an essential characteristic of epistemic communities, whose influence stems from the production and circulation of expert knowledge in policymaking domains.

British intelligence sources from 1917 confirm Al-Aqilat's dominant role in camel trade and regional logistics, noting that even leaders like Ibn Rashid had to negotiate with them due to their effective monopoly over the market. Their control over trade routes meant that even ruling authorities had to negotiate with them, reinforcing their role as key economic actors. Their influence extended beyond commercial transactions, as they facilitated secure communications and resource movements, demonstrating a high level of strategic coordination.

Their involvement in cross-regional communication networks further emphasizes their epistemic function. Charles Montagu Doughty, a British explorer and author of *Travels in Arabia*

Deserta (Doughty, 1921), describes how Al-Aqilat facilitated the transfer of messages between Damascus and India, acting as intermediaries in a vast communication network. This role required not only logistical expertise but also trust and recognition among different political and economic entities. Their ability to operate across vast territories and maintain stable trade and communication channels under shifting political conditions reflects the kind of specialized, policy-relevant knowledge that defines epistemic communities.

Taken together, these factors establish Al-Aqilat as an epistemic social group. Their expertise in trade, intelligence, and diplomacy, combined with their structured organization and strategic influence, enabled them to shape economic and political developments in the region. Their ability to control key resources, influence state actors, and maintain a transnational network places them within the framework of epistemic communities, reinforcing their significance in the historical context of Najd and the broader Arabian Peninsula.

4.1 History of Saudi States: The First Saudi State 1744-1818:

4.1.1 Origin of Al-Saud and First Saudi State:

Al-Fakhri (1999) depicts pre-reform Najd as characterised by recurrent competition among settlements and conflict within local ruling families. Similarly, Ibn Bishr (2001) portrays the period preceding the First Saudi State as marked by insecurity, tribal conflict, and religious practices that he regarded as inconsistent with pure monotheism. These accounts reflect the perspectives and political-religious assumptions of their authors. They are therefore used here as historically situated interpretations rather than as objective descriptions of Najdi society.

During the 18th century in Najd, particularly in the settlement of Diriyah, communities typically consisted of a diverse mix of individuals including traders, farmers, religious scholars, enslaved persons, and craftsmen (Al-Rasheed, 2010). Diriyah, a modest settlement with no more than seventy households (Hakima, 1965), was led by Muhammad Ibn Saud, the progenitor of the

ruling Al-Saud family. His leadership in Diriyah began in 1727, representing a group that had established and settled the oasis. His authority stemmed from two key factors: his ownership of vital resources such as wells and arable land surrounding Diriyah, and his physical presence in the oasis itself. These elements positioned him within Najd's landowning elite (Cook, 1992).

The governance system in Diriyah mirrored that of other Najdi settlements at the time, characterized by conventional local authority structures (Cook, 1992). In the 1740s, the Amir of Diriyah held limited power within his domain. Though he had the capacity to gather tribute, his ability to exert control as an oasis leader remained weak (Barrett, 2015). Two significant limitations undermined the early Saudi leadership's capacity to establish a viable state. First, it lacked a unifying tribal lineage that could link it firmly to a larger tribal alliance. Second, the leadership did not possess substantial financial resources. Prior to the Wahhabi movement, the ruling elite in Diriyah could not unify the surrounding tribes under a centralized authority, largely due to the absence of a common tribal identity.

While Muhammad Ibn Saud may have generated some revenue from local trade and his role within the settlement, this income alone was not sufficient to differentiate him from other tribal leaders. The leadership's commercial base was not robust enough to ensure a stable and substantial flow of resources. This economic constraint limited their ability to exert influence beyond their immediate surroundings or establish control over broader trade and caravan networks. It was the advent of the Wahhabi reform movement that facilitated the state's ability to collect Zakat, contributing to the consolidation and financial stability of early Saudi governance.

To establish broader influence, the early Saudi leadership required a more developed commercial infrastructure that could support political expansion beyond Diriyah and give them leverage over the region's key trade routes. However, the lack of such a foundation constrained their capacity to extend governance or integrate neighboring settlements. Andreotti (2013) notes

that before the emergence of the Wahhabi movement, the sedentary leadership in Diriyah lacked the means to manage the political and military autonomy of the nomadic tribes.

Another significant barrier to centralized authority was the insufficient availability of exploitable natural resources that could be channeled into economic redistribution among both nomadic and settled populations. This deficiency in fiscal means hindered efforts to unify the territory under a single governing structure throughout the early to mid-1700s. It wasn't until the ideological momentum sparked by the religious teachings of Muhammad Ibn Abd Al-Wahhab gained traction particularly following his alliance with Muhammad Ibn Saud in 1744 that the conditions began to shift, enabling the emergence of a more centralized political order (Andreotti, 2013).

Al-Saud's fortunes began to change with the adoption of the Wahhabi movement, associated with Muhammad Ibn Abd Al-Wahhab. This allowed the use of Wahhabism to collect Zakat, which strengthened the centralization of internationalism and maximized its material resources; thus, it combined materialistic theory and theological theory with building the state. The materialistic theory in explaining the phenomenon of the first Saudi state stems from applying theological theory. On the other hand, it was only possible to collect Zakat to obtain material returns by adopting the Wahhabi call, as both are complementary.

4.1.2 Muhammad Ibn Abd Al-Wahhab and His Beliefs

Muhammad Ibn Abd Al-Wahhab was born in 1703 or 1704 in the town of Uyaynah in Najd, into a respected family of Hanbali scholars. His father, Abd Al-Wahhab Ibn Sulaiman, was a judge (qadi) and his earliest teacher (Vassiliev, 2000). Raised in a scholarly environment, Muhammad received a classical education grounded in the Hanbali school of Islamic jurisprudence one of the four major Sunni legal traditions and the predominant school followed by tribal

communities in Najd. He later studied with other Hanbali scholars across the Arabian Peninsula, including in Mecca and Medina, where he was also exposed to a broader set of theological debates and reformist influences.

Muhammad Ibn Abd Al-Wahhab was from Banu Tamim, a Nadji sedentary tribe where members were the inhabitants of oases in Najd (Hakima, 1965). This family was a hub for numerous religious scholars but did not have considerable wealth. Muhammad Ibn Abd Al-Wahhab spent his life in poverty with three of his wives. He was the owner of a date garden and twenty cows. Nevertheless, he followed the path of his ancestors and traveled to Basra, Medina, and Hasa to pursue Islamic education (Al-Rasheed, 2010). After traveling to seek knowledge, he returned to Uyaynah village to preach a different message. He differentiated himself from others by emphasizing monotheism's importance, denunciation of all kinds of mediation between the believers and God, the obligation to pay Islamic tax to the Muslim community's leader (Zakat), and the obligation to be present if a holy war occurs against the ones who were not following these mentioned principles (Al-Rasheed, 2010).

He was trying to purify Islam from what is known as the worship of the righteous saints and by applying Shariah law, both of which require support from political authority. He formed a religious opinion about practical matters and encouraged people to carry out communal prayers and refrain from smoking tobacco. Most importantly, he insisted that people pay zakat and made a rule that it must be paid on agricultural produce, which is apparent wealth, as well as concealed wealth, such as silver and gold stored with the people (Hakima, 1965). He also declared that veneration of saint objects like trees leads to unbelief in the oneness of God (kufr), polytheism and blasphemy, and tawhid (doctrine of God's oneness) must be respected strictly (Al-Rasheed, 2010).

Muhammad Ibn Abd Al-Wahhab's ideological development was shaped by his engagement with reformist thinkers in cities such as Mecca and Medina, along with his opposition to various regional religious customs particularly those involving shrine worship, Shi'a influences,

and folk healing traditions (Campo, 2009). His early scholarly training was grounded in the Hanbali tradition of Islamic jurisprudence. Hanbalis emphasize the primacy of the Quran and Sunnah as foundational legal authorities, followed where necessary by the collective judgments of the Prophet Muhammad's Companions, provided these do not conflict with the original texts. Individual statements from the Companions may also be accepted if they align with these sources.

This legal school tends to be cautious about using analogical reasoning, only resorting to it when absolutely essential (Delong-Bas, 2004). Ibn Abd Al-Wahhab is particularly known for his call to maintain firm commitment to traditional Islamic legal sources. He argued for a return to direct engagement with the hadith and Quran, urging Muslims to rely less on historical commentaries. He emphasized that both men and women should be personally engaged in reading and understanding the Quran (Delong-Bas, 2004).

Muhammad Ibn Abd Al-Wahhab adopted a rigid position against Shiism and Sufi interpretations of Islam. He denounced certain pre-Islamic rituals and cultural customs, including practices rooted in superstition, the worship of idols, and elements of solar cults that had resurfaced in the Arabian Peninsula. His mission urged Muslims to return to the foundational tenets of Islam. Over time, he became increasingly critical of widespread practices such as tomb visitation and the veneration of saints, which he saw as diverging from Islamic monotheism (Commins, 2006). His reformist agenda centered on restoring the concept of tawhid (oneness of God) and was strongly influenced by the theological writings of classical scholars like Ibn Qayyim and Ibn Taymiyya (Nafi, 2006).

The teachings of Muhammad Ibn Abd Al-Wahhab were opposed by most Sunni Muslim scholars of his period, including his brother and father (Bunzel, 2018; Crawford, 2014). This opposition led to his departure from Uyaynah towards Diriyah, where Muhammad Ibn Saud welcomed him and entered into a religiopolitical pact with him to develop the Emirate of Diriyah, known as the first Saudi state (Zarabozo, 2005). This initiated a power-sharing arrangement and a

dynastic alliance among the families, which still continues in Najd (Weismann and Itzchak, 2005; Delong-Bas, 2004; Commins, 2006). As is well known, the leading religious Saudi family, The Alsheikh, are Ibn Abdul Wahhab's descendants (Weismann & Itzchak, 2005) and they historically led the Ulama (religious scholars) in the Saudi state (Commins, 2006), which dominated the clerical institutions of the state till today (Bunzel, 2018; Crawford, 2014).

Muhammad Ibn Abd Al-Wahhab and Muhammad Ibn Saud's 1744 pact marked the first Saudi state's rise, also known as the Emirate of Diriyah, established in 1744. Al-Saud defined the religious mission of the pact in clear terms, and this alliance offered ideological motivation for the expansion of the Emirate of Diriyah (Schacht et al., 1986; Delong-Bas, 2004). Ibn Abd Al-Wahhab deduced from his harrowing experiences in Uyaynah and understood the importance of political backing from a stronger entity of Islamic politics to alter the domestic socio-religious status quo and safeguard the territorial base of Wahhabism from external pressure. After the consolidation of Ibn Abdul Wahhab's position in the Emirate of Diriyah, he wrote to the clerics and rulers of different towns. He appealed to them to adopt his policies. Although some observed Ibn Abdul Wahhab's calls, others rejected them and accused him of sorcery as well as ignorance (Weismann and Itzchak, 2005; Delong-Bas, 2004).

In simple terms, Wahhabism may be compared to the Reformation of mediaeval Europe based solely on the external effort to 'purify' the original, 'genuine' religion from later admixtures. Only in this regard can one speak of a superficial resemblance between two phenomena with completely distinct sociopolitical and even theological content (Vassiliev, 2000). It is undeniable that Wahhabism appeared in an atmosphere of widespread popular dissatisfaction in social and political sphere. It was a reaction to the existential crisis of the Arabian tribal community in the Arabian Peninsula and, particularly, Najdi society, where strivings for new ideals and political presence were widespread. However, most of those who supported this movement, had no political ambition as individuals, tribes, or civilian communities. On the contrary, whoever had political ambition stood against it.

4.1.3 Saudi-Wahhabi Expansion

During the early days of the Saudi-Wahhabi expansion, an essential element was obtaining submission to the tenets of Wahhabi Islam from the nomadic and sedentary population. It paved the 1744 alliance between the Wahhabi religious reformer and the ruler of Diriyah and the way for establishing a religious Emirate in central Arabia. Without Wahhabism, it is improbable that Diriyah and its leadership would have attained significant political importance (Al-Rasheed, 2010). However, there was broad tribe's confederation to assist any expansion beyond the establishment, nor was there sufficient wealth for Muhammad Ibn Saud to assemble a fighting force to subjugate other settlements. Moreover, the settlement lacked the human resources required to begin the conquest of other oases or tribal territories (Al-Rasheed, 2010). This submission provided the basis for quasi-tribal confederation creation with which different territories could be conquered without an identifiable confederation of Saudi tribal. Wahhabism has also offered an original impetus for the centralization of politics. Expanding with the conquest was the only way for the Emirate to reach above the levels confined for a particular settlement.

Jihad occupies a central role within Wahhabi doctrine, serving as a key driver behind territorial expansion. The emergence of Wahhabism emphasized purifying religious practices and enforcing Sharia law, forming the core expectations of the movement. The alliance formed between Muhammad Ibn Abd Al-Wahhab and Muhammad Ibn Saud proved instrumental in embedding Wahhabi principles into the foundation of Saudi leadership, providing it with a renewed and assertive force for territorial consolidation and governance. The Wahhabi framework also offered this political leadership tangible incentives, such as spiritual legitimacy and access to material and authoritative benefits. Without this alignment, the expansion of Saudi Arabia may not have occurred. As a result, the Saudi leadership rose in regional prominence (Al-Farsy, 1990). Prior to this, from the time following the Righteous Caliphs, the Najdi population remained largely excluded from political influence. Attempts at statehood were consistently undermined by the lack of favorable conditions. It was not until Muhammad Ibn Saud’s adoption of Wahhabism that the

foundation of statehood took shape, with jihad becoming integral to its ideological and military expression.

The financial dimension was the collection of Zakat to be spent on the expansion of the state. This is an example of those promises that Wahhabism provided a framework to collect Zakat from people and deposit it in the state's coffers, which increased its strength. However, the regional role of Najd would only have expanded and established a state by adopting and supporting the Wahhabi movement, with the state wearing its slogan.

The territorial expansion of the Saudi-Wahhabi domain beyond Diriyah relied heavily on the formation of a committed military force, tasked with spreading the ideological message of religious reform and political authority. The people of southern Najd were among the earliest supporters of Wahhabism, taking up arms against dissenters as part of the movement's rise. Men aged 18 to 60 formed the core of this newly emerging Wahhabi fighting force. While some embraced Wahhabism out of genuine belief, others adopted it due to pressure or fear. Historical accounts suggest that the Saudi-Wahhabi state was aligned with the settled populations of Najd (Al-Rasheed, 2010). Supporters of the movement were expected to publicly align with its religious-political leadership by expressing loyalty and contributing financially through Zakat. The campaign advanced through a combination of military action and religious outreach. While securing the oases proved manageable, enforcing unity among the diverse and autonomous tribal groups of Arabia proved far more challenging. Many tribes retained their independence through cultural traditions and their mobile way of life, which hindered efforts to centralize control.

However, they were once subjugated but have proven to be a vital force in spreading Wahhabism's message. They also provided human resources with which the Saudi-Wahhabi Emirate was expanded. The Saudi-Wahhabi expansion appealed greatly to tribal confederations as it assured a share of loot due to raiding the disobedient dwellers in the oasis and other tribes that were not succumbing to Wahhabism. Also, coercion was not enough to guarantee the expansion

level achieved by the Saudis towards the end of the eighteenth century (Jones, 2006). Ibn Abdul Wahhab presented a jihad decree against the tribes that followed religious practices to make pilgrimages to tombs.

Under the command of Muhammad Ibn Saud's son, Abd Al-Aziz (1765 – 1803), the jihadi raids for opponents became more successful. Therefore, while spreading the Wahhabism message, the leadership of the Emirate of Diriyah could subjugate most of Najd's chieftains. After this, the Saudi forces moved east of Hasa, ending Banu Khalid's rule. In 1780, after Qatif's capture, the road to Oman and the Persian Gulf also opened. Uthman Ibn Muammar (1729-1750), Amir of Uyaynah, initially endorsed these reforms, but he later expelled Muhammad Ibn Abd Al-Wahhab from the oasis due to pressure from Banu Khalid Hasa chiefs.

Reformers who were hesitant to participate in communal prayers were harshly penalized under the leadership of Muhammad Ibn Abd Al-Wahhab, who enforced interpretation of Shariah law. Muhammad Ibn Abd Al-Wahhab continued to support the military campaigns initiated by Muhammad Ibn Saud, forming an alliance with Abdulaziz Ibn Muhammad. Together, they managed to extend their control over much of central Arabia, encompassing present-day Najd and Riyadh, which is now the capital of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (Kostiner, 1993). Their authority and influence quickly gained visibility. However, their expansion faced obstacles in the southwest due to Meccan resistance, and similar resistance arose from tribes in the southern, northern, and eastern regions. Muhammad Ibn Abd Al-Wahhab passed away in 1792. Subsequently, Qatar recognized Saudi suzerainty in 1797, followed by Bahrain, both of which contributed Zakat to Diriyah.

Nevertheless, Abdulaziz Ibn Muhammad continued raiding the parties, prowling the Shiite Muslim's holy city of Karbala in 1802 and capturing Mecca the following year. The speed of the conquests lies in the marginalisation felt by those villages and regions, as well as by the tribes, and what they see in the Wahabi movement of strength in restoring the spirit of those areas in the

regional map, where the religious spirit was rooted in the souls of these simple peoples and was only waiting for someone to awaken them and exploit them politically. Its axis is the tribe, and it turned into another type of Asabiyya (tribal group solidarity) (Andreotti, 2013), more global and egalitarian. It was just waiting for the spark to launch.

4.1.4 Siege of Diriyah Fall of First Saudi State (1818)

The Saudi forces moved to the west, and despite solid resistance from Mecca's Sharif, in 1802, Saud Ibn Abd Al-Aziz (1803-1814) was still able to hold power on Taif, Mecca (1803), and even Madina (1804). Wahhabism's call leaders ordered the destruction of the tombs constructed for everyone, as per the belief of not constructing the monuments on the graves (Safran, 1991). The Saudi forces also marched into the Asir, where the domestic leaders embraced Wahhabism but were unsuccessful in entering Yemen. In 1802, the attacks were experienced by the Shiite holy city of Karbala. During the attack at Karbala in 1803, Abd Al-Aziz, the Saudi ruler, was killed by a Shiite Mosque in Diriyah (Al-Rasheed, 2010).

The Ottomans responded to the Saudi-Wahhabi challenge by sending troops into the Arabian Peninsula in 1811 (Al-Rasheed, 2010). Most of the tribal confederations switched their sides to foreign troops. After the Hijaz region was freed, Muhammad Ali Pasha occupied Najd and destroyed Diriyah’s capital city, murdering various Wahhabi religious scholars later. In 1814, Abdullah, after the death of his father Saud, concluded a truce with the Egyptian and Ottoman forces. In 1816, another army of Egypt was pushed into the Najd region.

The campaign in Najd included multiple armed confrontations initiated by Egypt on behalf of the Ottoman Empire between 1817 and 1818. These events were part of the larger Saudi-Ottoman conflict spanning those years. The offensive during 1817–1818 was commanded by Ibrahim Pasha, who aimed to seize Diriyah. His military success resulted in the collapse of the

First Saudi State, following directives issued by Sultan Mahmud II of the Ottoman Empire. In 1818, the Saudi leadership was compelled to surrender. Their ruler, Abdullah, was detained and later executed in Constantinople. This marked the conclusion of the first Saudi-Wahhabi era, centered in Diriyah (Barrett, 2015). Although Mishari, Abdullah's brother, momentarily asserted leadership in 1820, most Saudis regard Abdullah's death as the definitive end of the first Saudi state.

Al-Aqilat during the First Saudi State:

It is significant that none of Najd's historians explicitly referenced Al-Aqilat's involvement in the events of the First Saudi State. This is due to the recognition of Al-Aqilat as an essential component of the Al-Qassim populace, with talks regarding the inhabitants of Al-Qassim encompassing Al-Aqilat and others. Alternatively, the designation "Al-Aqilat" may not have been distinctly delineated or broadly recognized by historians at that time, especially as these events transpired at the onset of Al-Aqilat's genuine undertakings, particularly beyond the Arabian Peninsula, in Iraq (Al-Salama, 2021). Al-Salama (2021) suggests that the designation "Al-Aqilat" was not yet widely used in Najd, where actors connected to Al-Qassim were often absorbed into broader labels such as "people of Qassim." The label became more visible outside Najd in Iraqi records after the 1778 Basra-Baghdad crisis, when Najdi Arabs identified as "Aqail" appeared in Al-Basri's account as mediators between rival factions and later as supporters of Hassan Pasha against Ajam Muhammad's adherents (Al-Basri, 1952).

In the early nineteenth century, Ibn Bishr also used the designation in accounts of 1810, 1813, and 1815, referring to episodes in which "Aqail" were involved in Baghdad-related political and military conflicts: the 1810 confrontation after Abd Al-Rahman Pasha Al-Kurdi entered Baghdad, the 1813 struggle between rival Baghdad factions struggling for political control of Baghdad and the Basra province, and the 1815 campaign involving Iraqi forces and Shammar to reassert control over the Baghdad region (Ibn Bishr, 1982, pp. 313, 336, 380). These references do not prove that Al-Aqilat operated under a fixed corporate identity during the First Saudi State.

They show, more cautiously, that actors later associated with Al-Aqilat were visible under related labels such as “Aqail” and “people of Qassim,” while the specific designation Al-Aqilat became clearer in later historical usage.

From the above, we deduce that during that period, when Al-Aqilat were not referenced, historians employed the term "people of Qassim" to encompass Al-Aqilat and others. Al-Salama (2021) confirms that they regarded them as part of the Al-Qassim populace, thus rendering separate mention unnecessary. This is additionally corroborated by historical records that reference the involvement of certain Al-Aqilat in these events, even if they did not explicitly identify them as "Al-Aqilat." One of the earliest documented figures among the notable members of Al-Aqilat is the distinguished Prince Hujaylan Ibn Hamad (Al-Shuraida, 2015) who became the governor of Buraydah in 1780. Upon assuming office, Hujaylan Ibn Hamad exhibited his political allegiance to the Diriyah administration by upholding its authority in the region and orchestrating multiple military engagements to enhance the state's dominance in Ha'il and Al-Jawf, particularly during the Egyptian incursions into Najd. Following Ibrahim Pasha's consolidation of authority in Qassim, he accompanied Governor Hujaylan Ibn Hamad to Medina, along with several individuals from the Al-Saud family and other sources. His incorporation of Hujaylan signifies the latter's robust endorsement of the First Saudi State (Al-Salama, 2021).

During and after the Egyptian battles, Al-Aqilat encountered a challenging predicament, as they were obligated to collect taxes and remit outstanding levies. Saleh Ibn Hussein Aba Al-Khail, a distinguished figure of Al-Aqilat, was assigned this role (Al-Aboudi, 2010). The Egyptian authorities required Al-Qassim to remit seventy thousand French riyals in taxes (Al-Salama, 2021). These combined conditions compelled many of Qassim's inhabitants to leave the region (Alsharidah, 2020). These migrations contributed to the emergence of Al-Aqilat as a transregional merchant community and laid the foundations of the epistemic community examined in this study. During this period, however, Al-Aqilat remained a relatively small community outside their homeland, and their political significance had not yet fully developed.

The significance of the first Saudi state for this study is not to locate Al-Aqilat as absent, but to clarify why the political economy and diplomatic horizon of this period did not generate the same structural demand for transregional commercial brokerage. The limited institutional receptivity for mobile merchant intermediaries during this earlier phase helps explain why the epistemic and networked roles examined in this thesis become more visible and politically consequential in the Third Saudi State.

4.2 The Second Saudi State 1818-1891

4.2.1 Formation of the Second Saudi State (Emirate of Najd): 1818-1891

The Second Saudi State was also known as the Emirate of Najd, and it existed between 1818-1891 in the regions of Hail and Riyadh in Najd (Vassiliev, 2000). The Ottoman-Wahhabi War (1811–1818), also known as the Egyptian-Saudi War, was a military campaign launched by the Ottoman Empire through its Egyptian viceroy, Muhammad Ali Pasha. The war aimed to suppress the Wahhabi movement and dismantle the First Saudi State, which had challenged Ottoman religious authority and territorial control. Muhammad Ali's son, Ibrahim Pasha, led the Egyptian forces deep into the Arabian Peninsula, capturing major towns in Najd and eventually besieging Diriyah, the Saudi capital, in 1818. After a prolonged siege, Diriyah was destroyed, and Imam Abdullah bin Saud was captured and later executed in Istanbul. This marked the end of the First Saudi State and a temporary restoration of Ottoman control over central Arabia (Al-Rasheed, 2010; Vassiliev, 2000).

Following the fall of the Emirate of Diriyah, often referred to as the First Saudi State, authority was re-established over central and eastern parts of Arabia. This restoration came after Egyptian forces, acting on behalf of the Ottoman Empire, had dismantled the First Saudi State during the Ottoman-Wahhabi conflict (1811–1818) (Al-Rasheed, 2010). In 1824, Turki bin Abdullah Al-Saud expelled the Egyptian presence from Najd and successfully reclaimed Riyadh. Egyptian forces were subsequently confined to the Red Sea coastline of the Hijaz region, which

includes the cities of Medina and Mecca. Although Turki bin Abdullah asserted his authority, his succession was contested. He was eventually assassinated in 1834, and his son Faisal assumed leadership. Faisal would later become the grandfather of Ibn Saud, the founder of modern Saudi Arabia.

Faisal's governance faced disruption in 1837 when he failed to remit tribute to Egyptian authorities in the Hijaz. Consequently, Egyptian forces launched a campaign to apprehend Faisal and deport him to Cairo. In his absence, Khalid, a member of the Al Saud family, was installed by the Egyptians to govern the southern regions of Najd (Al-Rasheed, 2010). This arrangement persisted until Abdullah Ibn Thunayan, a distant relative within the Al-Saud family, opposed Khalid, prompting the latter to retreat to Jeddah from Riyadh. In 1838, Egyptian troops returned to Najd and reinstated Khalid, a sibling of Mishari and Abdullah, as ruler in place of Faisal. However, by 1840, Egypt faced mounting external pressures that forced a military withdrawal from the Arabian Peninsula, leaving Khalid with minimal support. Shortly thereafter, Abdullah Ibn Thunayan overthrew Khalid, who passed away in 1841 (Vassiliev, 2000).

Muhammad Ibn Saud's brother, Abdullah bin Thunayan, ruled for two years until Faisal escaped from Cairo in 1843 and returned to rebuild his rule with the Rashid tribe's aid. The Second Saudi state experienced prosperity and peace. It flourished in trade and agriculture until 1865 when the Ottoman campaign was renewed to expand their empire further in the Middle East in the Arabian Peninsula. The Ottomans' armies captured different parts of the Saudi State, which Abdulrahman, Faisal's son, ruled. Al-Rashid's family in Hail made significant efforts with the support from the Ottomans to over through Saudi State.

The second reign of Faisal is well known and notable for its length (22 years), earlier restoration, and prosperity compared to the other reigns. Until now, the Saudi princes take pride in claiming their heritage by describing themselves as Al-Saud Al-Faisal. This era has also been remembered for the chaos that succeeded after the death of Faisal in 1865 when two of Faisal’s

sons claimed the right to succession perhaps over a succession of the state. Abdullah, the eldest, took control of the throne initially but lost his position to his other brother, Saud, in 1871. Alongside, this family also lost control over eastern and central Arabia, where it had previously exerted influence (Al Farsy, 1992).

In 1875, at the death of Saud, the family's leadership passed briefly to Abdulrahman, the third brother. In the same year, Abdullah was enthroned and retained this position until he died in 1889. Abdulrahman became the head of the clan in the same year, and by this time, the Rashid tribe that ruled Hail at the request of Faisal since 1835, with the Ottoman's support and extended influence over the left Saudi territory. Abdulrahman and his family were forced to emigrate to Kuwait in 1891 after two years of his rule, which marked the end of the Second Saudi State (Vassiliev, 2000).

4.2.2 Turki bin Abdullah Al-Saud

Following the downfall of the First Saudi State and the execution of Amir Abdullah bin Muhammad Al-Saud by Ottoman forces, leadership passed to his sons. Among them, Turki bin Abdullah took control, becoming widely recognized as the architect of the Second Saudi State, alongside his descendants (Muhammad R., 2018). Despite rebuilding a strong political framework, Turki bin Abdullah opted to remain under Ottoman oversight due to the events surrounding Abdullah bin Saud (Al-Rihani, 1981). Nevertheless, his strategic initiatives remained active over the next few years, he worked to solidify control over Najd, including regions like Qassim, Jabal Shammar, and Kharj, which had largely acknowledged Saudi governance by 1828 (Rashid, 1985; Tamim, 2003). Although the Red Sea and Hijaz were dominated by Egyptian forces, his ambitions extended eastward. By 1830, the eastern province came under his authority, following resistance from the Banu Khalid tribe (Al-Hussain, 2004; Vasiliev, 2000). He also promoted Saudi authority along the Arabian Gulf coastline. However, his campaigns met with mixed outcomes. In 1833, a

mere threat of invasion was enough to stabilize Oman, yet Bahrain continued to resist Saudi authority that same year, with tensions lingering until Turki's death (Tamim, 2003).

Turki bin Abdullah was known for his devout character and active participation in warfare. Alongside his military and political activities, he also supported poets, such as Abdulaziz bin Hamad bin Nasir bin Muammar, during his rule (Tamim, 2003). Although he managed to restore the influence of the House of Saud, internal rivalries posed significant challenges (Samore, 1984). Turki's reign over the Second Saudi State took place in two distinct phases: the first from 1821, and the second from 1823 until his death in 1834. Both intervals were marked by continuous political and military challenges. A notable power struggle occurred between Turki and Muhammad bin Mishari Al Muammar, involving both Ottoman and Turkish interventions, which destabilized his leadership.

Despite these upheavals, Turki reclaimed control, reinforcing his family's rule and officially re-establishing the Second Saudi State, a position he held until 1834 (Al-Rihani, 1981). That same year, he became the target of an assassination attempt by his nephew, Mishari bin Abdul Rahman, who hailed from the Mishari branch of the family. Mishari, often referred to as the third son of the first Saudi rulers, briefly assumed power but ruled for only forty days before being killed by Faisal bin Turki, who avenged the deaths of his father and Mishari (Al-Rihani, 1981). Faisal then restored Saudi control, and the leadership of the second Saudi State was passed to his descendants following his demise.

Al-Aqilat during the Second Saudi State:

Following Imam Turki bin Abdullah's expulsion of the Ottoman soldiers from Najd during the Second Saudi State, he promptly dismissed Muhammad Al-Arfaj, the Emir of Buraydah, a notable figure among Al-Aqilat and an esteemed poet. He designated him as the Emir of Al-Jawf, a position he held until 1831 (Al-Aboudi, 2010). Following the resumption of the Ottoman

campaigns under Khurshid Pasha, Al-Aqilat refrained from assisting these efforts by supplying camels, despite the prosperity of their camel trade after the halt of the Ottoman campaigns with the establishment of the Second Saudi State, until the return of the Ottoman campaigns led by Ismail Bey. This occurred despite the campaign leaders' attempts to acquire camels, seemingly attributable to Al-Aqilat's reluctance to collaborate with those campaigns and their political allegiance to Imam Faisal bin Turki (Al-Salama, 2021).

Imam Faisal bin Turki maintained an exemplary rapport with the inhabitants of Qassim, particularly Al-Aqilat. Nonetheless, specific events, particularly the Battle of Al-Juwayya in 1845 and the significant casualties among the populace of Qassim, especially from Unaizah, along with Imam Faisal's position on the issue, facilitated tension in the relationship between Imam Faisal and the Emirs of Qassim. This strain culminated in sporadic violence and hostilities between the two factions, enduring for around 15 years from 1849 to 1861 (Al-Salman, 1999). Al-Aqilat significantly influenced these events, both politically and militarily, facilitating the emergence of several individuals in the political and military arenas, thereby granting them sway over subsequent local and regional developments (Al-Salama, 2021). Certain leaders of Al-Aqilat significantly influenced those events. The princes of Al-Qassim answered Imam Faisal's summons to swear allegiance to him. They dispatched Muhanna Al-Saleh Aba Al-Khail, a leader of Al-Aqilat, as their envoy to address the escalating crisis (Ibn-Bishr, 2001).

In 1863, during Imam Faisal's reign, the Al Bu Aliayan family's governance of Buraydah concluded with the appointment of Prince Muhanna Al-Saleh Aba Al-Khail from Al-Aqilat as governor. He was renowned for his valorous exploits, affluence, and broad commerce. The Aba Al-Khail family's governance of Al-Qassim commenced at that time and persisted until the formation of the Third Saudi State (Al-Salama, 2021).

Prince Muhanna Al-Saleh Aba Al-Khail passed away in 1874 and was succeeded by his son, Prince Hassan Al-Muhanna (1836-1902), regarded as one of the most distinguished leaders

of Al-Aqilat. Muhammad Ibn Rashid, the Emir of Ha'il, is purported to have ascended to power in Najd due to the support of Prince Hassan Al-Muhanna and his Al-Aqilat adherents. Gradually, Prince Muhammad Ibn Rashid formulated a strategy to dissolve his partnership with Ibn Muhanna by seeking a justification to destroy him, as Ibn Muhanna was his sole competitor in Najd following the House of Saud's decline due to internal strife. He proceeded to regard him with disdain, akin to a powerful sovereign addressing a subordinate (Al-Salman, 1999). The battle intensified when regions governed by Qassim, which had been remitting zakat to Prince Hassan Al-Muhanna, were assailed by Prince Muhammad Ibn Rashid, who dispatched his agents to collect their zakat in 1889 (Al-Salama, 2021). This war presumably sprang from business competition between the prominent Hajj caravans of Al-Aqilat and Ibn Rashid. The conflict between Ibn Rashid and Hassan Al-Muhanna resulted in a coalition between two prominent Al-Aqilat leaders: Prince Hassan Al-Muhanna of Al-Qassim and Prince Zamil Al-Salim of Unaizah (Al-Salama, 2021). This compelled Muhammad bin Rashid to permit Imam Abdullah and his brother Imam Abdulrahman (Father of Ibn Saud) to return to Riyadh, and he vowed to designate Imam Abdullah as the governor of Riyadh. Imam Abdullah passed away in 1889 (bin-Issa, 1999). Imam Abdulrahman subsequently sought the governorship; however, Ibn Rashid designated Salem Al-Subhan as the governor of Riyadh instead. This attack initiated the partnership between Al-Aqilat and Imam Abdul Rahman, which ultimately culminated in the Battle of Al-Mulayda in 1891.

4.2.3 Battle of Mulayda (1891)

The last most important battle during the Second Saudi State period was the Battle of Mulayda (21st January 1891) (Goldrup, 1971). It took place between the forces of Muhammad bin Abdullah bin Rashid, the Amir of Hail, and the people of Al-Qassim, led by the Amir of Buraydah, Hassan Al-Muhanna (1836 – 1902). The reasons for the occurrence of that battle are the issues related to the emergence of the power of Ibn Rashid and the apparent greed in the Al-Qassim region, as well as the destructive relationship between him and the Amir of Buraydah also, Rashidi leaders (Salem Al-Sabhan) was arrested by Abdulrahman bin Faisal. As well as, there was fierce

rivalry between regions of Hail and Al-Qassim in terms of commercial activity, as evidenced by the different types of commercial caravans and Al-Aqilat's trade. Additionally, there was a third activity of religious nature that generated substantial financial income, which involved leading and safeguarding Hajj convoys from Iraq and Persia (AlKhowaiter, 2015).

Participants in this battle from Al-Aqilat princes included Prince Hassan Al-Muhanna, his sons Saleh (1865-1907) and Suleiman (1874-1960), his brother Abdulrahman (1869-1928), Suleiman Abdulkarim Al-Issa (1850-1919), Muhammad Ahmed Al-Rawaf (1849-1931), among others (Al-Wahaibi, 2017). The Prince of Qassim, Hassan Al-Muhanna, along with his sons and cousins, was apprehended and kept incarcerated in Hail until his death in 1902. Prince Hassan Al-Muhanna's residence in Hail resembled house arrest during the tenure of Prince Muhammad bin Rashid. Following the demise of Prince Muhammad bin Rashid and the rise of his nephew Abdulaziz Al-Mut'eb (1870-1906) to authority in 1897, the treatment of Prince Hassan and his associates altered. They were shackled and relocated to a general prison, whereas Prince Hassan Al-Muhanna was confined to a solitary cell, where he stayed until his death in 1902. Certain family members successfully fled to Kuwait (Al-Salama, 2021).

All these factors led the Rashidis to end the Second Saudi State and conquer Al-Qassim (Al-Salman, 1999). The defeat of the people of Al-Qassim in Mulayda, which is located west of the city of Buraydah, paved the way for Ibn Rashid to take control of all the cities of Najd and killed many notables, intellectuals and poets, between 800-1000 dead. Subsequently, Muhammad Ibn Rashid's dominion extended across the entire region of Najd, where he generally displayed benevolence towards its inhabitants. However, in instances where he observed signs of defeat among the people of the Al-Qassim region and their allies, he resorted to executing their injured soldiers. This particular action instigated a profound sense of animosity and resentment within the hearts of the people of Najd, especially those residing in the region of Qassim. Consequently, they actively sought weaponry and assistance to support any opposition forces engaged in combat against him (AlKhowaiter, 2015). The reason for this was the emigration of an unlimited number

of people to escape the oppression of the new ruler who appointed Ibn Rashid to Buraydah (Al-Salman, 1999). In those emigrants, Abdulaziz bin Hassan (1855-1937) was working in Kuwait for his ruler Mubarak Al-Sabah (1840-1915) as an advisor (Alwahibi, 2017).

This disruption, caused by the conflict and political instability in Najd, helped many people migrate to Kuwait and other regions. Three crucial points regarding this conflict need to be emphasized: Firstly, it is noteworthy that the conflict took place in Al-Qassim region, which has consistently served as a middle-ground or frontier between emerging empires since the 19th century; this indicates the vital geographical location of the region of Qassim. Furthermore, the significant involvement of prominent families known as "Al-Aqilat" and the cities of Al-Qassim region in the struggle was not merely as subordinates of the Al Sa'ud but instead as a demonstration of their regional interests. They formed a coalition with the Al Sa'ud, functioning as equal partners in this anti-Rashidi endeavor (Valenti, 2015).

The third point is that the Battle of Al-Mulayda marked the culmination of a prolonged period of violent conflict and trade competition between the Al-Rashid and Al-Qassim region people factions. After this battle, the strength, influence, and dominance of Al-Aqilat began to appear clearly as an EC and this increased due to multiple migrations to Kuwait, Levant, and Iraq. After that, the mercantile elements, known as Al-Aqilat, assumed the role of local powerbrokers and middlemen (Valenti, 2015).

They acted as intermediaries between the Al-Qassim people and external powers, including Al-Sa‘ud, Al-Rashid, the Hashemites, Al-Sabah, and Ottoman officials (Valenti, 2015). When they perceived a threat to their personal or regional interests, they were not hesitant to confront the political system. This was the moment when the Al-Aqilat began to emerge as an epistemic community, developing a guild-like structure with its own bylaws, training regimes, hierarchy, and political and economic interests. While recognizing they were not a tribe, Lawrence saw them

as a tight-knit group and called them “clannish”. All of these elements and characteristics developed and became more closely integrated after the results of this battle.

Bin Rashid's clan allies successfully ended the second Saudi state and insisted that the House of Saud and their allies flee. The sons of Faisal struggled to have power, which led to eroding the Saudi state's structure and collapse. Abdullah bin Faisal, during the struggle with Saud, his brother, allied with the Ottoman forces to dethrone him, while the Ottomans found it an insufficient justification for seizing the region of Hasa and Basra. Moreover, the Rashidi family considered this conflict between Abdullah bin Faisal and the Ottomans an opportunity to overthrow their government and take the holder of it from the House of Al-Saud after the war between these parties (Al-Qahtani, 1988). Due to this, Al-Rashid took control of Riyadh and expelled its past rulers; Abdulrahman Faisal and his family were also forced to emigrate to Kuwait (Muhammad R. , 2018).

Why was Abdullah Ibn Faysal unable to regain power during that historical period? Amin Al-Rihani reported that Ibn Saud “King Abdulaziz” (1877- 1953) informed him that the governance of the Najd did not remain in the control of Abdullah for three specific reasons: Initially, the nephews' presence in the region of "Al-Kharj" is causing the tribes to incite against him (Valenti, 2015). Furthermore, he supported and aided the Al-Ulayyan, the previous rulers of Qassim, in their conflict against the Al-Muhanna, who were the reigning rulers at that particular period (Valenti, 2015). It was unwise for 'Abdullah to join forces with a defeated family at his vulnerable period, as this undercut his power in Al-Qassim (Valenti, 2015). Furthermore, Muhammad Ibn Rashid emerged with the ambition to govern the Najd and formed an alliance with Al-Muhanna (Valenti, 2015). This alliance is commercial because Al-Muhanna is one of Al-Aqilat's merchants who own commercial caravans and needs peace and stability to develop his trade. Subsequently, the Al-Aqilat community's shift towards backing the Saudis in the late 19th and early 20th centuries was mostly driven by the direct competition between the Rashidi state and the caravan and mercantile networks controlled by Al-Aqilat (Valenti, 2015).

4.2.4 Fall of the Second Saudi State (1891)

Abdulrahman was forced to leave with his family from the state and settle in Kuwait, which marked the end of the second state. Unlike the end of the first Saudi state, which ended due to external conquests, the second Saudi state chiefly fell due to family and internal disputes among the royal family members (Kostiner., 1993).

Although the first Saudi's disintegration was partly due to the Egyptian's intervention as they acted on behalf of the Ottomans. The second Saudi state collapsed for two reasons: First, the Saudi leadership was fragile during the nineteenth century's second half and weakened further by an internal strike from the Saudi family members. (Winder, 1972). The second reason was the increase in the rival's power in central Arabia. During this period, the Saudis faced difficulties and struggled with one another in political leadership. Abdulrahman's flight from Riyadh under the Rashidi caused the remaining member's Al-Saud family to be taken as hostages in Hail. The Hail Amirs still commanded Riyadh till the year 1902. The final revival of Saudi rule started to take shape during the beginning of the Third Saudi State in the 20th century.

4.2.5 Abdulrahman bin Faisal Al-Saud's refuge with Bedouin tribes (1891)

Abdulrahman bin Faisal Al-Saud was Najd's last Amir, who reigned from 1875 to 1876 and 1889 to 1891. He was the father of Abdulaziz and Amir Faisal bin Turki bin Abdullah's youngest son. Abdulrahman bin Faisal Al-Saud was forcefully moved from the Saudi state in 1891 (Vassiliev, 2000). He took refuge in the Bedouin tribes in the vast desert of eastern Arabia, also known as the Empty Quarter or Rub' Al-Khali, towards the southeast with Al-Murrah tribe (Peterson, 2003). He was exiled with his family from Riyadh in the year 1890. In 1890, he and his family were exiled from Riyadh, subsequently relocating to Kuwait, where he established residence. He selected Kuwait because of its considerable distance from the menace represented

by Ibn Rashid, and because it had emerged as a sanctuary for individuals from Najd escaping their territories, particularly those from Qassim, including Al-Aqilat, following Ibn Rashid's dominance over Najd. He selected Kuwait because to the robust commercial connections between Najd and Kuwait during that period, enabling the Imam to remain apprised of Najd's matters through the activities of its merchants and those from Qassim, particularly Al-Aqilat (Al-Salama, 2021). The Ottoman authorities granted them permission to settle in Kuwait (Dhaifallah, 2017; Al-Rasheed, 2010).

By 1896, a member of the Kuwaiti royal family, Mubarak Al Sabah (1844-1915), had established strong ties with Abdulrahman's sons, particularly Abdulaziz, who frequently engaged in gatherings at the royal Diwan (Vassiliev, 2000). This resulted in the formulation of the concept of the Battle of Al-Sarif in 1901.

Battle of Al-Sarif (1901)

The escape of several Al-Aqilat from Ibn Rashid's walled jail at Hail constituted a significant affront to Ibn Rashid's pride and the stature of his emirate. This exacerbated tensions and hatred between Kuwait and Hail, particularly after a significant influx of influential individuals from Najd, including Al-Aqilat, sought asylum in Kuwait (Al-Salama, 2021). The tension was exacerbated by the defection of Sheikh Yusuf Al-Ibrahim, a prominent and affluent figure of the era (1845-1906), a Kuwaiti political adversary of Sheikh Mubarak Al-Sabah, to Hail, where he sought retribution for the assassination of Muhammad and Jarrah Al-Sabah, and the usurpation of authority by Sheikh Mubarak.

Since the killings, Yusuf Al-Ibrahim's actions against Sheikh Mubarak aimed primarily to restore governance of Kuwait from Sheikh Mubarak to the heirs of the deceased individuals. Under this banner, Sheikh Yusuf undertook persistent, diverse, and vigorous military and political endeavors across various fronts for a decade to realize his primary objective of reinstating Kuwait's governance. Consequently, Sheikh Yusuf fortified his alliance with the formidable ruler of Najd,

Prince Abdulaziz Al-Mut'ib, and his engagement with Hail specifically foreshadowed a violent confrontation that subsequently occurred at Al-Sarif. Following Prince Abdulaziz Al-Mut'ib's ascension to power in Hail, tensions intensified, resulting in Yusuf Al-Ibrahim becoming a resident of Hail (Al-Khowaiter, 2014) Upon Sheikh Yusuf Al-Ibrahim's arrival in Hail, he was utilized as a negotiation tool and a means of leverage between Sheikh Mubarak and Ibn Rashid, with each faction employing him against the other (Al-Salama, 2021). The crux of this statement was: "To facilitate the removal of Yusuf Al-Ibrahim, you must first eliminate the Al Saud, Al Salim, and Al Muhanna families who have absconded." From that moment forward, a confrontation became inevitable. Sheikh Mubarak commenced assembling his soldiers and structuring his ranks, recruiting several allies, and proclaimed his endorsement of Imam Abdulrahman in reinstating his authority over Najd. Imam Abdulrahman subsequently mobilized his men and allies, particularly the Al-Aqilat merchants based in Kuwait, to join Sheikh Mubarak. Considering all these circumstances, the substantial army departed from Kuwait in route to Najd in 1901. Upon their arrival in Qassim, the majority of the residents allied them, and Prince Saleh Al-Muhanna entered Buraydah (Al-Salama, 2021).

In 1901, the two forces clashed, resulting in a ferocious combat regarded as one of the most pivotal episodes in contemporary Arab history (Al-Rihani, 1981). The conflict concluded with a devastating setback for Mubarak and his allies, resulting in around six thousand fatalities. The assets of numerous Al-Aqilat merchants were seized, similar to the actions taken by Ibn Rashid against trader Rashid Al-Sharida, from whom he appropriated five thousand French riyals. He also appropriated fifty thousand French riyals from ‘Abdulrahman Al-Rabadi (1840-1901) before murdering him and his son, Sulaiman. Abdulrahman Al-Rabdi, a leader of Al-Aqilat, was killed due to his commitment to financially support Mubarak's troops in their conflict against Ibn Rashid (Al-Salama, 2021). The unfairness and persecution prompted a faction of Al-Aqilat to depart, apprehensive for their safety and assets.

The Al-Aqilat's support for the allied troops against Ibn Rashid is multifaceted. Al-Khowaiter (2014) discusses their political inclinations and aspirations to reinstate their previous

rulers from the Al-Muhanna and Al-Salim families to their emirates, the heightened taxes levied by Ibn Rashid, and Ibn Rashid's intention to relocate the economic epicenter to Ha'il while diminishing Al-Aqilat's economic influence. This aspiration commenced following the Battle of Al-Mulayda and persisted until the Battle of Al-Sarif. Following the 1901 confrontation at Al-Sarif between Abdulaziz bin Rashid Prince of Hail and the allied forces of Abdulrahman Al-Saud and Mubarak Al Sabah, Abdulrahman ultimately abandoned his aspirations of reclaiming his leadership (Tamim, 2003).

After Al-Sarif, it is well understood that prominent Al-Qassim families, such Al-Muhanna and Al-Salim, who were exiled in Kuwait following the Battle, provided assistance to the Al-Saud in their efforts to restore their state (Valenti, 2015). Additionally, Mubarak's enduring association with Qassim, together with his influence over individuals from many social strata, resulted in significant political and economic impact (Valenti, 2015). As an illustration, he dispatched Abdulaziz Bin Hassan, a Kuwaiti official hailing from Al-Aqilat to Al-Qassim in order to engage in negotiations with the Mutayr tribe. During that period, the Mutayr tribe formed an alliance with the Ibn Rashid and together they exerted pressure on Al-Qassim (Valenti, 2015). However, Bin Hasan, acting on behalf of Mubarak, successfully persuaded the leader of the Mutayr tribe to dissolve their partnership with Ibn Rashid which weakened Ibn Rashid's efforts in Al-Qassim (Valenti, 2015). The political and economic connections undoubtedly helped Al-Aqilat play a significant role in the region as an EC.

Analytically, the second Saudi state illustrates an intermediate phase in which trade and mobility existed but the consolidation problem remained largely centred on internal contestation rather than sustained cross border governance pressures. For the purpose of this thesis, the second state therefore functions as a contrast case that helps clarify why the Third Saudi State, formed under intensified external pressures and shifting border regimes, created stronger incentives for rulers to rely on credible intermediaries with route knowledge, cross regional ties, and practical expertise.

4.3 The Third Saudi State 1902:

Abdulaziz Ibn Saud established the Third Saudi State on January 13, 1902. In doing so, he played a key role in reviving Riyadh and laying the foundation for the modern-day Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. This Third Saudi State succeeded the First and Second Saudi States, forming the basis of today's unified nation (Vassiliev, 2000).

Initially referred to as the "Emirate of Riyadh" and later as the "Emirate of Najd and Hasa," the Third Saudi Kingdom gradually extended its authority across the Najd region. The Emirate's existence is recorded up to the year 1921. After defeating the Emirate of Ha'il, the rulers of Najd and Al-Ahsa adopted the title "Sultanate of Najd." Upon their subsequent conquest of the Kingdom of Hejaz, the entity's name was changed again to reflect its expanded control over Hejaz, Najd, and associated regions.

This naming convention remained in effect until 1932, when the southern provinces were formally unified under the newly declared Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, marking the official announcement of its formation.

4.3.1 Historical & Political Role

During the process often described as the "Unification of Saudi Arabia," the Al Saud family led extensive military and political operations to bring together numerous autonomous entities across the Arabian Peninsula. These included various tribes, sheikhdoms, city-states, Emirates, and small kingdoms. The unification movement began in 1902 and culminated in 1932, when Ibn Saud officially declared the formation of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

This modern kingdom is often referred to as the Third Saudi State, following the First Saudi State (centered in Diriyah) and the Second Saudi State (based in Najd). Both previous states were also governed by the Al-Saud lineage. Since 1893, the Al-Saud family had been removed from authority twice, most notably by the Al-Rashid Emirate of Ha'il. However, in 1902, Abdulaziz Al-Saud succeeded in recapturing Riyadh, the dynasty's historical capital. This victory laid the groundwork for further territorial consolidation. He soon set his sights on Qassim, driven by three

main objectives. Among the factors encouraging this move was the knowledge that local leaders in Al-Qassim including the Al-Muhanna of Buraydah, Al-Sulaym of 'Unayzah, and the prominent Al-Aqilat merchants were supportive of displacing the Rashidi rule from the region (Alsharidah, 2020).

Furthermore, Ibn Saud saw Al-Qassim as a strategically important military objective due to its population and the potential contribution of its troops to his army (Alsharidah, 2020). Furthermore, because of its thriving trade and prosperous agriculture, Al-Qassim held great economic importance for Ibn Saud (Alsharidah, 2020). The clear evidence of the majority support for Ibn Saud is the homecoming of approximately three thousand men from Al-Aqilat who came back from Iraq, Syria, and Egypt to protect their homeland and assist Ibn Saud in his conflicts against Al-Rashid (Alsharidah, 2020). The Al-Aqilat group played crucial roles in these wars by organizing camel-mounted units, supplying weapons and provisions, and acting as military guides familiar with the terrain. In the momentous Battle of Al-Bukayriyya in 1904, they supported Ibn Saud's forces by securing supply lines and mobilizing returnees from Iraq and Syria, many of whom had military experience and financial means (Valenti, 2015).

The triumph at Al-Bukayriyah was largely attributed to the assistance and military achievements of their Al-Qassim people allies (Valenti, 2015). Therefore, it can be argued that the formation of the Third Saudi State was primarily influenced by the Al-Bukayriyah Battle in 1904, rather than the conquest of Riyadh in 1902 (Valenti, 2015). Between 1913 and 1926, Ibn Saud conquered the rest of Najd, Hasa, Jabel Shammar, Asir, and Hejaz (where Mecca and Madina are located). In 1927, the two regions united to become the Kingdom of Najd and Hejaz, then in 1932, they merged with Al-Hasa to form the modern-day Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

After a battle with Ibn Rasheed in 1902, Ibn Saud took control of Riyadh. From that point on, Ibn Saud extended his rule with the help of the tribes (Kostiner, 1993). Ibn Saud's ability to understand the tribal context was displayed in how he included the tribes in the process of

statecraft. He initially tried to unify the central Arab peninsula's tribes by preparing them for military service. One of the projects he directed was arranging marriages between members of different aristocratic clans to foster strategic alliances. However, he maintained the tribes' loyalty and support by appealing to their conception of authority (Kostiner., 1993). Instead of imposing a new ideology on the Arab peninsula, as Wahhabism did, Ibn Saud drew on the region's preexisting culture based on Islamic and tribal values (Kostiner., 1993).

Unifying the tribes was not simple, but Ibn Saud was ultimately successful. Splits developed when specific communities refused to abandon Ibn Rasheed (Kostiner., 1993). Some tribes, like the Mutayr and the Al-Qassim tribes, stayed staunchly on Ibn Saud's side despite the political changes, while others switched sides. Some of Qassim's tribes remained loyal to Ibn Rasheed despite the widespread infighting. Nevertheless, even within a given tribal group, there might be variations. For example, within Ibn Saud's large family, there were arguments about who should be loyal to whom. Ultimately, Ibn Saud shaped and utilized these allegiances to end battles and consolidate his power (Kostiner., 1993).

Because the British supported the ruler of Hejaz then, Ibn Saud refrained from making any territorial gains there. However, once the British cut off their support in 1924, Ibn Saud's desire to push into Hejaz grew (Kostiner., 1993). The resulting chaos prompted the British to participate in diplomatic efforts and Ibn Saud to amass an army (Kostiner 1993; Gause 1994). In order to bolster his army, Ibn Saud turned to the Wahhabis (Gause 1994). The British disapproved of this show of force but could not prevent it (Gause 1994). To build international relations. Ibn Saud's judgment was predicated on the notion that a trader, known as one of the members of "Al-Aqilat," who had remained in a particular country or city for an extended period, would possess comprehensive knowledge of its political, economic, cultural, and occasionally linguistic aspects (Alsharidah, 2020). Simultaneously, when a merchant was designated as a representative or agent for Ibn Saud in a particular country or place where they had already lived, the local people would have greater familiarity and confidence in this merchant than someone newly chosen (Alsharidah, 2020). This

helped him strengthen his propaganda and influence in Islamic countries. In 1932, Ibn Saud, then known as King Najd, unified the kingdoms of Najd and Hejaz under the banner of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, rechristening himself to Ibn Saud (Kostiner., 1993).

The Third Saudi State provides the most analytically suitable setting for examining Al-Aqilat because consolidation after 1902 required more than battlefield expansion. It required managing uncertainty across multiple arenas, sustaining commercial lifelines, handling external diplomacy and border pressures, and coordinating information across regions. These conditions increased the political value of knowledge-bearing intermediaries and made the influence of Al-Aqilat empirically traceable in archival records, which is why the period 1902 to 1932 frames the core analysis in Chapter 5.

4.4 Movements & Revolts

4.4.1 Arab Revolt 1916:

According to both academic and popular historical sources, the Arab Revolt led by Sharif Hussein of Mecca between 1916 and 1918 is often viewed as the primary Arab resistance against Ottoman authority during World War I (Tauber, 2013). In June 1916, loosely organized and poorly trained tribal fighters launched attacks on Ottoman military posts in and around Medina and Mecca, initiating what came to be known as the Arab Revolt. When the initial offensive failed to achieve its objective, the tribal forces withdrew and established a defensive perimeter. This maneuver accelerated the surrender of Mecca despite the geographic separation from Medina.

One key reason for the strategic Ottoman response was the presence of a railway connecting Medina to the Syrian front, which facilitated the arrival of reinforcements. Eventually, Ottoman forces that had initially attacked were repositioned along the primary route to Mecca to

maintain control. For several weeks, the military campaign saw little progress. In anticipation of renewed conflict in Mecca, the Ottoman army dispatched additional troops by train to Medina.

The first phase of the Arab army's advance was led by commanders of Arab origin who had previously served under the Ottoman military structure. Britain's involvement in the Arab revolt was critically significant. Lawrence (2004) identifies this role, noting that by promoting Arab nationalism, emphasizing the injustices faced by Arabs, and nurturing the aspiration for an Arab homeland governed by their own, Britain facilitated the exploitation of these populations to undermine the Ottoman Empire over an extended period. The outcome was the revolt, which Britain supported through substantial financial resources, armaments, and the deployment of military advisors to direct and coordinate actions against the Ottomans. The plan to cut the Hejaz railway line demonstrates this clearly (Lawrence, 2004).

One notable consequence of the Arab Revolt within the context of Saudi Arabia was the gradual retreat of the Hijaz from Sharif Hussein's moral and territorial leadership, and its increasing alignment with Saudi political influence. Unlike other Arab nations, where independence and nationalistic ideologies were the primary drivers of change, Ibn Saud's territorial consolidation was largely achieved through tribal affiliations and alliances rather than ideological campaigns for sovereignty or self-rule (Al-Rasheed, 2010). Movements such as Al-Aqilat and the Ikhwan exemplified how tribal networks functioned as effective extensions of state power.

At this time, the Al-Aqilat expressed numerous grievances against the Ottomans, leading them to support and assist the Sharif. Al-Aqilat retracted from the Ottoman garrisons in the Hijaz and returned to Qassim, with some members participating militarily in the Arab Revolt and engaging in various anti-Ottoman campaigns (Al-Salama, 2021). Approximately 500 fighters are estimated to be under the command of Saleh Al-Balla', a leader of Al-Aqilat. Al-Balla' fled Al-Qassim after composing a poem critical of Ibn Rashid and subsequently allied with the Sharif (Al-Aboudi, 2019)

While Al-Aqilat supported the Sharif in various battles, they occasionally exercised authority that surpassed his own. Their refusal to execute multiple tasks was contingent upon the release of certain detained comrades and the fulfillment of their demands (Abdulghani, 2014).

In this context, a significant question emerges: Did Al-Aqilat align with the Sharif's side at that time, with the consent of Ibn Saud, to whom they and their region were politically subordinate? During the Arab Revolt, it is evident that Ibn Saud, despite his contentious relationship with Sharif Hussein, refrained from obstructing the participation of Al-Qassim in the Sharif's forces. Moreover, he aimed to prevent any further deterioration in his relationship with the Sharif, which led him to accept the situation without objection, despite his internal concerns. Following the deterioration of relations between the two parties, he perceived no advantage in Al-Aqilat's support for the Sharif's forces. He refrained from taking any actions that might provoke the people of Qassim, particularly Al-Aqilat, given their hardships resulting from the British blockade of Kuwait and its repercussions (Al-Salama, 2021).

Therefore, to fully comprehend Saudi Arabia's twentieth-century development its governance, societal organization, and capacity for transformation one must explore the nation’s tribal undercurrents and social structures through detailed socio-political analysis (Al-Rasheed, 2010). For the purpose of this study, the Arab Revolt matters because it intensified regional uncertainty and restructured the strategic environment in which Najd, the Hijaz, the Levant, and Iraq became more tightly connected through imperial competition and wartime governance. This environment increased the value of intermediaries able to move, communicate, and coordinate across jurisdictions, which helps explain why merchant networks with transregional access could acquire governance relevance during consolidation.

4.4.2 Ikhwan Movement 1911-1930:

Who exactly was the Ikhwan? The Ikhwan, a Bedouin movement of sedentarization and militarization with a strong religious connotation, was instrumental in the 1920s expansion of the Saudi state beyond the central region of Najd (Andreotti, 2013). In 1911, the Ikhwan movement

was formally established by religious leaders in Najd with the support of Ibn Saud, who sought to use them as a militarized force to expand his control over the Arabian Peninsula (Al-Rasheed, 2010). This term, which was loosely defined, sometimes encompassed individuals who were resistant to accepting Saudi authority (Al-Rasheed, 2010). The Ikhwan demonstrated exceptional proficiency in this form of warfare, achieving numerous triumphs against the Rashids and the Ottomans. Their ultimate success came in the decisive battle of Rawdat Muhanna (1906), where they eliminated the Rashid leader, Abdul-Aziz (Commins, 2006).

An uprising that the Ikhwan were leading shook the Arabian Peninsula beginning in 1927 and continuing into 1930. In 1927, tribe members from Otaibah, Mutayr, and Ajman rose against Ibn Saud's dominion, which sparked a chain of insurrections that spread into Transjordan, Mandatory Iraq, and the Sheikhdom of Kuwait. These conflicts were sparked in all three of those regions. According to McLoughlin (1993), in December of 1928, the relationship between the House of Saud and the Ikhwan deteriorated so that open violence was used.

On February 22, 1929, Sultan Ibn Bijad "one of the leaders of Ikhwan," launched a simultaneous attack on both the Najd Shammar and a group of Najdi camel traders, primarily Al-Aqilat (Goldrup, 1971). The camel traders, who were primarily from the Al-Qassim region, suffered devastating losses, with most reportedly wiped out (Goldrup, 1971; Safran, 1991). Suleiman Al-Sharida, a prominent merchant from Al-Aqilat, was killed by the Ikhwan in 1929 while en route to Syria for trade. The killing is regarded as one of the factors that prompted Ibn Saud to engage the Ikhwan in the Battle of Sabilla several months later (Al-Salama, 2021). The massacre of the traders sparked widespread outrage in Najd and shifted many tribal leaders' hesitant attitudes toward open hostility against the Ikhwan (Safran, 1991). As a result, the situation began to deteriorate dramatically, with hesitant attitudes toward Ikhwan changing into intense and real hostility. Indeed, there was a consensus among the power centers that this rebellion must be ended urgently. The incident of Al-Aqilat merchants was pivotal in changing the balance between Ibn Saud and Ikhwan. Due to that, Ibn Saud successfully mobilised a substantial auxiliary army

from the inhabitants of Al-Qassim (Goldrup, 1971). Al-Aqilat possessed the financial capabilities and international relations that suppressed mobilize consensus to support this rebel group.

Prior to the Battle of Sabilla, Ibn Saud convened a meeting in Al-Qassim with his leaders, dignitaries, and supportive tribal chiefs to address the issue concerning the Ikhwan. A significant number of Al-Aqilat merchants offered material, moral, and military assistance to the king in his efforts against the Ikhwan. Al-Aqilat perceived the confrontation as an act of retribution, given that the Ikhwan had assaulted their caravans, engaged in looting, and killed their proprietors. The Ikhwan presented a barrier to trade, particularly in the northern region of the Arabian Peninsula. Moreover, it is noteworthy that certain members of the Ikhwan regarded Al-Aqilat as infidels (Al-Salama, 2021). As a result, the principal organizers of the uprising were victoriously put down after the Battle of Sabilla, which took place on March 29, 1929. However, after engaging in battle with Abdulaziz's army in the Jabal Shammar region for the third time in August 1929, members of the Ikhwan group launched an attack on the Awazim tribe on October 5, 1929 (Commins, 2005, pp. 4-6). Faisal Al-Dawish, a significant rebel commander and a member of the Mutayr tribe, escaped to Kuwait in October 1929 to evade detection by the British and be turned over to Ibn Saud. However, he was apprehended and turned over to Ibn Saud. He passed away in Riyadh on October 3, 1931, due to a cardiac attack (Commins, 2006; Shoqairat & Simmons, 2010). The fighting was ultimately stopped on January 10, 1930, when other Ikhwan rebel commanders surrendered to the British. This allowed government forces to put an end to the conflict. However, as a direct result of this, the leadership of the Ikhwan was eradicated (Andreotti, 2013) later, and the remaining group members were absorbed into the mainstream Saudi army. Sultan bin Bajad, one of the three most important commanders of the Ikhwan, was passed away in 1931.

Around the turn of the twentieth century, tribal warfare wreaked havoc throughout Arabia; nevertheless, the area achieved peace and stability under Al-Saud's authority. The Ikhwan, a Wahhabist-Bedouin tribal militia headed by Sultan bin Bajad and Faisal Al-Dawish, was the primary instrument to accomplish these victories (Kostiner., 1993). By the end of 1925, the Ikhwan

had completed their conquest of the territory destined to become Saudi Arabia with the assistance of the collapse of the Ottoman Empire that occurred during World War I. The day after his coronation as King of the Hejaz on January 10, 1926, Abdulaziz anointed himself King of the Najd, on the following day, January 27. Previously, Abdulaziz was known as the Sultan.

After the conquest of the Hejaz, some of Ikhwan's leaders envisioned expanding the Wahhabist monarchy into the British protectorates of Transjordan, Iraq, and Kuwait. After suffering numerous fatalities in both the Kuwait-Najd Border War and in incursions into Transjordan, the tribe members decided to try their hand at something new. On November 5, 1927, in defiance of Ibn Saud, sections of the Ikhwan, headed by the Mutayr tribe and operating under the leadership of Al-Dawish, launched an invasion into southern Iraq. They engaged Iraqi soldiers in action near Basrah, and both sides lost 20 men during the conflict. The erection of a police fort at Basrah was one of the contributing reasons that led to the outbreak of the rebellion. Finally, on January 8, 1928, warriors belonging to the Ikhwan invaded Kuwait. Despite the widespread destruction inflicted by the raids, the British Royal Air Force (RAF) and the Kuwaiti government responded firmly.

To address the escalating tensions, Ibn Saud convened the General Assembly commonly referred to as the Al-Riyadh Conference in the Saudi capital during November 1928. This gathering brought together approximately 800 participants, including prominent religious scholars and tribal leaders, all of whom were affiliated with the Ikhwan movement. Despite the scale of the meeting, the initiative was ultimately unsuccessful in resolving the conflict.

Nonetheless, the Ikhwan played a significant role in facilitating Ibn Saud’s use of tribalism as a tool for ideological unification. This approach helped to forge a sense of collective identity among various fragmented communities. It also offered a framework to evaluate the strengths, weaknesses, and constraints of mobilizing religious rhetoric for political purposes (Andreotti, 2013). This strategy marked a historic turning point in the Najd region, as it laid the groundwork

for consolidating tribal influence under the newly politicized authority of Ibn Saud, who gained dominance in the region.

Contrary to expectations, tribalism did not serve as the primary influence in shaping the newly emerging Saudi state. Instead, the endurance and structure of the Saudi state established in 1932 were significantly influenced by its inclusive leadership. This leadership did not stem from a single tribal or Bedouin background but rather incorporated representatives from a wide array of tribal, social, and political groups across the Arabian Peninsula (Al-Rasheed, 2010).

The Ikhwan movement matters here not only as a military actor but as a source of uncertainty that made informational credibility and brokerage politically valuable. The tensions it generated required coordination across regions, mediation with constituencies, and the management of external relations, thereby creating conditions under which reliable intermediaries could stabilise decision making and reduce risk for state builders.

4.4.3 Tensions between Ibn Saud and the Ikhwan

The conflict between Ibn Saud and the Ikhwan was rooted in a fundamental clash of objectives. While Ibn Saud initially relied on the Ikhwan's religious zeal and military prowess to expand his territory, tensions emerged as his priorities shifted from conquest to governance and diplomacy. The Ikhwan, driven by puritanical Wahhabi beliefs, insisted on continued jihad against neighboring regions, including British protectorates, and rejected any compromise with Shiites or non-Wahhabi Muslims. In contrast, Ibn Saud sought to consolidate power, gain international recognition, and avoid provoking the British, which required moderation and pragmatism. This ideological divergence between the Ikhwan's uncompromising religious expansionism and Ibn Saud's emerging statecraft ultimately led to a breakdown in their alliance.

Ibn Saud preferred a more adaptable approach to governance that could respond to local conditions and maintain order, particularly in newly annexed territories with limited Wahhabi presence. In contrast, the Ikhwan insisted that Ibn Saud uphold strict Wahhabi doctrines. Following the capture of Mecca and Medina, Ibn Saud attempted to reassure the wider Muslim community that the new regime would not interfere with pilgrimage practices. However, the Ikhwan demanded a more rigid implementation of religious principles.

In 1926, during a gathering of Ikhwan leaders in Al-Artawiya, Ibn Saud faced accusations of failing to clearly distinguish between belief and disbelief. He was deemed guilty of this claim and faced criticism for his openness toward Shiites and his support for technological innovations such as cars and telephones. Additionally, his taxation of nomadic groups without their consent drew disapproval. Ibn Saud referred the complaints to religious scholars (ulama), who not only validated the Ikhwan's demand for stricter policies on non-Wahabi communities but also reinforced that only the monarch had the authority to declare jihad.

The Ikhwan Movement played a pivotal role during this era, becoming a key factor behind the uprisings against Ibn Saud (Vassiliev, 2000). During this turbulent phase, it is vital to understand why groups like Al-Aqilat emerged as Ibn Saud's principal allies in suppressing these revolts. The strategic and economic significance of merchant families in the Arabian Peninsula cannot be overstated. Their influence extended beyond commerce, impacting the region's social, cultural, and political landscape (Field, 1985). The legacy of Al-Aqilat encapsulates the broader historical and political evolution of Najd from the emergence of the first Saudi State to the founding of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia under Ibn Saud (Abdulghani, 2014).

Ibn Saud accomplished a triple triumph, as commonly described. Initially, he subdued the bedouins' innate belligerence and insubordination, as they had previously shown little inclination to comply with a central governing body, thus undermining its stability. Furthermore, he successfully utilised the military expertise and bravery of the bedouins for his own and Najd's

purposes. Additionally, he propagated and solidified the religious and ideological framework of the Wahabi rule in Najd (Kostiner., 1993). In contrast, a question arises: Did the Ikhwan truly form a distinct and autonomous entity "group" within Najdi society? (Kostiner., 1993). The explanation for this question is, the active Ikhwan forces behaved in a manner consistent with groups driven by their own self-interests, rather than as a dominant minority within the prevailing economic framework (Kostiner., 1993). Their primary objective was to gain control over the policy-making process in Najd, and subsequently establish themselves as an independent political force in the provinces where they resided (Kostiner., 1993). Nevertheless, it failed to be an EC due to its lack of a strategic view of politics and international relations fluctuations. It dealt with most situations with the tribe's mentality and not with the mentality of the state. In this sense, the Ikhwan achieved military success but failed politically because they lacked the strategic capacity to translate coercive power into durable governance. Due to their political vulnerability, they were well-suited to forming alliances with leaders who could offer security in return for economic assistance, and this is what happened to them as they lacked economic resources.

In general, the story of Ikhwan is that, Ibn Saud required the assistance of the Ikhwan to consolidate his dominion. Thanks to their fervent religious devotion, he was able to achieve victories that would have otherwise been impossible and afforded his forces unparalleled mobility during the early 1900s (Commins, 2006). Nevertheless, in order to accomplish this, he needed a method to not only generate the Ikhwan, but also to enhance their ranks and cultivate widespread backing for himself in adjacent regions (Commins, 2006). Religion emerged as the optimal remedy for all of these issues. By leveraging religion, specifically Wahhabism, Ibn Saud successfully recruited and redirected the Ikhwan's inclination for raiding and violence towards his own adversaries (Commins, 2006). Additionally, he skillfully employed religion to build localized animosity towards rulers who were not him (Commins, 2006). Hence, both the Ikhwan and the tribal troops played dual roles as both catalysts for conquest and regime support, as well as sources of instability within the vulnerable state (Barrett, 2015). On the other hand, we note that Al-Aqilat, as an EC, was a source of mobilization, money, developing international relations, and, most

importantly, supporting local stability. By contrast, Al-Aqilat can be understood as a knowledge bearing intermediary community whose contributions operated through mobilisation of resources, brokerage across regions, and the circulation of credible information for coordination and negotiation. In this context, the subjugation of the Ikhwan can be interpreted as a turning point in consolidation, because it reduced a major source of internal instability and shifted attention towards governance challenges that required mediation, external diplomacy, and cross regional coordination.

This episode matters for the argument because it illustrates how consolidation depended not only on coercion but also on the capacity to manage uncertainty, coordinate information, and stabilise relations across multiple arenas. As internal contestation became more contained, the political value of credible intermediaries increased, particularly those able to bridge trade routes, regional elites, and external counterparts through reputational authority and brokerage.

4.5 Case Study of Al-Aqilat:

Origin of Al-Aqilat's Name:

Scholars do not agree on a single, settled etymology for the label "Al-Aqilat", and the literature typically presents the term as a social designation that became meaningful through usage rather than through one fixed origin story. Abdulghani (2014) summarises three main interpretations. The first links the name to the agal (headband) associated with the group, which became a visible marker distinguishing them from others. The second interpretation traces the term to the Bani Aqil, a tribe historically connected with the commerce of horses and camels, and suggests that the label migrated into usage because Al-Aqilat were active in similar trading circuits. A third interpretation relates the term to practice, proposing that it derived from the group's association with hobbling camels, a routine technique used in caravan life (Abdulghani, 2014).

While none of these accounts can be treated as definitively proven, Abdulghani's (2014) first explanation has the advantage of plausibility as a social marker that would have been immediately recognisable to observers: it connects the label to a visible and repeatedly observed feature that could readily be used to identify a category of people in mixed settings. This is consistent with the way occupational and mobility-based groups often acquire names in the historical record, where clothing, tools, and distinctive travel practices become shorthand for a wider set of roles and reputations. The diffusion of the term is also explained through the same logic. If the agal was not uniformly associated with Najd as a whole, but was more recognisable in the northern parts of Najd, then the label could function as a differentiating sign when Najdi traders and travellers interacted with other communities. In this reading, "Al-Aqilat" becomes less a statement of lineage and more a pragmatic identifier, gradually stabilised through repeated use in Najd and beyond (Abdulghani, 2014).

Oppenheim (2007) adds another layer to the early picture by describing Al-Aqilat as internally differentiated in roles and status. He distinguishes between the "Jamamil", portrayed as affluent caravan leaders, and the "Zaqart", described as attendants or personal guards for princes (Oppenheim, 2007). While these categories should be read carefully as classificatory descriptions rather than as rigid social "types", they indicate that contemporaries and later observers perceived Al-Aqilat as occupying a range of functions linking commercial mobility with security and service. Oppenheim (2007) also identifies Baghdad and Damascus as principal nodes where Al-Aqilat congregated, while noting that their adherents in the Arabian Peninsula largely comprised "Qusman", associated with the Al-Qassim region. This combination of congregating sites and regional identifiers reinforces an understanding of Al-Aqilat as a mobility-oriented community anchored in Najd but operating across a wider set of commercial and political geographies (Oppenheim, 2007).

From a genealogical perspective, Al-Salama (2021) notes a tradition that traces their ancestry to an individual called Sheikh Ali, which is offered as an explanation for why some refer

to themselves as “Awlad Ali” (children of Ali). In the literature, such claims function less as proof of a single descent line and more as evidence of how group identity can be narrated in ways that create cohesion and recognition, especially when membership is socially diverse. In practical terms, Al-Salama (2021) uses this discussion to support the broader claim that many leading Al-Aqilat figures are associated with Buraydah and Unaizah, commonly represented as major commercial centres in Najd. This point is important for the thesis, not because it requires a strict origin story, but because it links the emergence of a recognisable group identity to specific localities that later appear consistently in narratives of mobility, trade, and regional brokerage (Al-Salama, 2021).

The Beginning of Al-Aqilat Activity

As with the origin of the name, the beginnings of Al-Aqilat’s activities are described in the literature as difficult to date with precision. The sources do not converge on a single “start date” because the group’s activities likely emerged gradually through patterns of mobility, trade, service, and network-building that were not initially recorded as a distinct collective phenomenon. Al-Muslim (1984) places the beginning of their activity in the sixteenth century, implying a long period of Najdi movement into wider Arab commercial spaces. This early dating is contested by Al-Shuraida (2015), who introduces a plausibility challenge based on local development constraints. He argues that since Buraydah was established in 1577, it is difficult to imagine a newly formed settlement immediately maintaining caravan trade at scale and simultaneously developing a commercial sector while also being exposed to taxation pressures from a neighbouring town, identified as Al-Shamas, whose economic base is described as predominantly agrarian. Within this reasoning, the combination of early urban formation, the demands of caravan trade, and exposure to Bedouin incursions would have created obstacles to rapid commercial expansion (Al-Shuraida, 2015).

This argument is useful because it compels the reader to treat early datings with caution and to ask what kinds of infrastructure, security conditions, and institutional arrangements would have been necessary for sustained long-distance trade. However, it does not fully resolve the question because Al-Aqilat's emergence as a recognised category may not require a large, highly organised system at the very earliest stage. It is possible for mobility and trade practices to exist before the later consolidation of a recognisable label, and for identities to become clearer as networks mature. On this point, Al-Salama (2021) takes a more cautious stance, proposing that Al-Aqilat's substantive activities became clearer in the early nineteenth century, while acknowledging that earlier engagement is difficult to date precisely. This position effectively separates the existence of Najdi mobility and trade from the later consolidation of the group's distinctive profile in historical narration (Al-Salama, 2021).

Abdulghani (2014) challenges the early nineteenth-century start point by suggesting that Al-Aqilat's activity began earlier, during the formative period of the First Saudi State in the eighteenth century. The plausibility of earlier usage is strengthened in the literature through references that imply the presence of the label or related titles by the early nineteenth century. Abdulghani (2014) points to a document describing a purchase in Iraq in 1801 in which a witness is described as "Sheikh Uqaylat", and Al-Aboudi (2010) is cited in relation to the appearance of this title, which implies that the designation had already acquired social recognition sufficient to be used in formal witnessing contexts. The analytical value of this point is not that it "proves" a precise beginning, but that it suggests the label was in circulation and socially meaningful by this time, which supports the view that the group's identity and reputation had already begun to crystallise in cross-regional settings (Abdulghani, 2014; Al-Aboudi, 2010).

Given these competing interpretations, the most defensible position within the existing literature is that the precise inception of Al-Aqilat's activities cannot be treated as definitively established. Al-Salama (2021) explicitly acknowledges that there is no single definitive and unambiguous date for the beginning of Al-Aqilat's activity, and the disagreements across sources

reinforce the point that Al-Aqilat's emergence is best approached as a gradual process rather than a discrete historical moment (Al-Salama, 2021). What can be stated with greater confidence is that the decline of their role is more clearly associated with structural transformations in the regional order. Al-Salama (2021) places the conclusion of their major activity around 1948, connected to the end of the British Mandate over Palestine and the consolidation of recognised borders among Arab governments. He also notes that some limited activity continued, particularly between Al-Qassim and Sudan and Egypt, which implies that the practices associated with long-distance mobility did not disappear instantly but were increasingly constrained by formal border regimes and new political controls over movement (Al-Salama, 2021).

Definition of Al-Aqilat

Definitions of Al-Aqilat in the literature vary because the term is used to describe a social category that is not reducible to one occupation or one narrow institutional role. Al-Basri (1952) recounts events in 1778 and refers to the "inhabitants of Najd" in Iraq as "Uqayl", identified with "Al-Aqilat". Read carefully, this indicates that the label could be applied broadly to Najdi migrants in Iraq, not only to a specific commercial guild. It also implies that the designation had a social meaning that was recognised in contexts where Najdi migrants lived and moved, independent of whether every individual associated with the label was engaged in the same form of trade or service (Al-Basri, 1952).

Al-Muslim (1984), writing from the perspective of accompanying Al-Aqilat during travel, presents the group as a migration stream from Najd, particularly from Qassim, into various Arab countries and beyond since at least the sixteenth century, driven by the search for livelihood and employment, whether through commerce or other sectors. This view highlights mobility and economic strategy as core features of the group's identity and provides a social explanation for why a recognisable category could form around repeated movement, shared practices, and repeated interaction with specific routes, markets, and political environments. In this framing, Al-Aqilat are

not simply “merchants”, but a broader community associated with long-distance movement and the practical knowledge that movement requires (Al-Muslim, 1984).

Abdulghani (2014) argues that Al-Aqilat operated as a cohesive group in ways that sometimes encouraged mistaken assumptions of a single ancestry. He describes them as a unified military and economic organisation, shaped by regional political, security, and economic dynamics. In this account, their significance lies in their ability to operate across domains: business activity, security-related roles, and involvement in government agencies. The implication is that Al-Aqilat were positioned at points where political order, security provision, and economic exchange intersected. This positioning also means that they were affected by political and economic events in ways that fed back into their strategies, trajectories, and social roles, rather than remaining isolated from the wider transformations taking place in the region (Abdulghani, 2014; Abdulghani, 2017).

Al-Wahaibi (2017) similarly identifies Al-Aqilat as merchants originating from Najd, more specifically from Al-Qassim, with many associated with Buraydah and surrounding rural villages. A key point in his definition is social diversity: he emphasises that they are not descended from a single tribe but include individuals from various Arab tribes residing in Buraydah, described as the administrative centre of the Al-Qassim region. This diversity matters for interpretation because it cautions against treating Al-Aqilat as a tribal unit and instead encourages analysis of how a shared identity and collective reputation can form across mixed social and ethnic origins. This also helps explain why defining Al-Aqilat is analytically challenging. Their cohesion must be understood as socially produced through practice, reputation, and repeated interaction, rather than assumed through lineage alone (Al-Wahaibi, 2017).

Within the broader scholarship, several authors approach Al-Aqilat from different vantage points that collectively highlight the complexity of the group. Al-Muslim (1984) interprets the community through travel experience and participation, focusing on how practices of movement

and livelihood shaped identity. Al-Wahabi (2017) shifts attention from personal experience to the foundations of social identity and the process through which Al-Aqilat became coherent and influential. He links their influence to embeddedness in Najdi society's moral economy and to their role as cultural intermediaries between tribes and state authorities, emphasising not only what they did economically but how they were socially positioned to translate across contexts. Alwuhaibi (2014) develops a wider historical argument, focusing on economic, military, and political roles as mechanisms through which Al-Aqilat's influence became visible in regional history. This work contributes to the larger debate by treating Al-Aqilat as historically consequential actors rather than as marginal commercial figures (Al-Muslim, 1984; Al-Wahabi, 2017; Alwuhaibi, 2014).

Other strands of literature focus on narrower dimensions of their activity. AlSharida (2015) provides evidence on Al-Aqilat's commercial role and their economic links with the Hijaz from the mid nineteenth century onwards, highlighting the durability of these relationships over time. Al-Khidri (2017) examines Al-Aqilat in an explicitly international context, focusing on engagements with the Syrian state across social, political, and economic domains. These studies are important because they demonstrate that Al-Aqilat were not confined to local markets but operated across political boundaries and interacted with emerging state institutions outside Najd, which supports an interpretation of them as transregional intermediaries (AlSharida, 2015; Al-Khidri, 2017).

At the same time, the literature remains uneven in how it conceptualises what kind of collective actor Al-Aqilat were. Much scholarship documents their economic, military, and political presence, but often stops short of treating them as a knowledge-based intermediary community whose influence depended on credibility, expertise, and networked access. This is the primary gap that motivates the present study. By applying an epistemic community framework, the thesis seeks to explain how Al-Aqilat's practical knowledge of routes, markets, and political conditions, combined with reputational credibility and transregional networks, could translate into

governance-relevant influence during consolidation. This reframing is not intended to replace existing historical accounts, but to specify the mechanism through which Al-Aqilat could contribute to political centralisation, economic governance, and transregional diplomacy in the formation of Saudi Arabia, thereby addressing what existing accounts have not systematically theorised (Al-Khidri, 2017; AlSharida, 2015; Abdulghani, 2014; Al-Muslim, 1984).

Numerous scholars have discussed Al-Aqilat's role within the political, economic, and military history of Najd. Abdulghani (2014) highlights their contributions as Najdi migrants who served in the Ottoman armed forces and became entangled in the empire's political landscape. Al-Muslim (1984) portrays them as "Mindful Merchants of Najd", emphasising moral economy and strategic mobility. Valenti (2015) situates Al-Aqilat within the global economic integration of Qassim, arguing that local actors in Al-Qassim negotiated influence and articulated interests amid competition among stronger political entities, such as Al-Sa'ud and Al-Rashid, across the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries. This line of work is especially relevant to the present thesis because it frames Al-Qassim not as a peripheral space but as a politically and economically contested arena in which intermediary actors could acquire strategic significance (Abdulghani, 2014; Al-Muslim, 1984; Valenti, 2015).

However, even where the literature recognises the prominence of Al-Aqilat, it does not consistently explain how their influence was produced through knowledge and credibility, nor how this influence could become durable through repeated reliance by political authorities across time. For example, Abdulghani (2014) includes the claim that some members fought in major conflicts, including against Napoleon, which demonstrates how wide-ranging their service roles could be, but such claims are rarely analysed for what they imply about credibility, trust, and the institutional value of intermediaries. Al-Muslim's (1984) account gives rich detail on early presence and practice but does not systematically develop the political implications of those practices for state-building. Valenti (2015) provides an important insight by asking how local actors negotiated their interests vis-à-vis stronger entities, and by observing that Al-Qassim appears to have had particular

significance in the consolidation era, yet this does not become an explicit conceptual argument about how knowledge-bearing intermediaries functioned in governance (Abdulghani, 2014; Al-Muslim, 1984; Valenti, 2015).

Accordingly, the present thesis positions its contribution as conceptual rather than merely additive. It does not aim to repeat the substantial descriptive work already produced on Al-Aqilat, but to specify what is underdeveloped across this scholarship: the absence of a sustained application of epistemic communities theory to a historical, non-tribal merchant network operating under conditions of political competition and regional transformation. By treating Al-Aqilat as an indigenous, knowledge-based minority whose authority depended on credibility, shared expertise, and transregional access, the study clarifies how such actors could shape governance outcomes during state formation. In this sense, the purpose is to address a gap in mechanism and conceptualisation, not a gap in the mere existence of historical material. The thesis therefore brings together existing historical insights and reinterprets them through the epistemic community lens in order to explain how Al-Aqilat's expertise and networks could become stabilising resources in decision-making and implementation during the formation of Saudi Arabia.

4.5.1 Members of Al-Aqilat

The Al-Aqilat community was composed of a network of influential traders, diplomats, and political figures who played a significant role in the economic and political history of the Arabian Peninsula. Originating primarily from the Najd region, particularly from the Al-Qassim province, Al-Aqilat were known for their extensive trade routes that spanned across the Middle East, North Africa, and parts of India. Their expertise in trade and commerce, coupled with their ability to navigate political alliances and engage in diplomatic negotiations, positioned them as key players in regional state-building efforts.

This section provides a biographical overview of prominent Al-Aqilat members, highlighting their individual contributions to trade, politics, military affairs, and governance. Many of these figures served as envoys, advisors, and merchants who facilitated economic exchanges and strengthened diplomatic ties between Saudi Arabia and neighboring regions. Several members of Al-Aqilat were closely associated with Ibn Saud, contributing to the unification of Saudi Arabia through financial, political, and military support.

The biographical records presented here illustrate how these individuals collectively embodied the attributes of an epistemic community, possessing specialized knowledge, trade expertise, and political influence. Their ability to leverage economic power for political stability and strategic advantage underscores their historical significance. By examining the lives and careers of these individuals, this study sheds light on the intricate role Al-Aqilat played in shaping the economic and political landscape of the Arabian Peninsula during the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

4.5.2 Biographical Narratives

The following biographical narratives are included not as commemorative profiles, but as analytical evidence supporting the thesis argument. The individuals listed below appear repeatedly in historical and archival records and are associated with trade, mediation, governance, finance, diplomacy, and security functions. Presenting them in structured form allows the reader to observe how specific actors embodied shared attributes relevant to this study's analytical framework, including specialised commercial knowledge, cross-regional mobility, brokerage capacity, reputational credibility, and institutional embedding. The table therefore clarifies how Al-Aqilat operated not merely as individual merchants, but as a knowledge-bearing intermediary community whose members occupied positions linking economic networks with emerging state structures.

Table 4.5. 1Key Al-Aqilat Figures and Their Roles in Trade, Governance, and State Formation

Sr no.	Person	Dates and origin	Primary state building function	Transregional reach	Framework link	Thematic link
1	Assaf Hussein Al-Assaf	Born Al Rass 1890; died Makkah 1954	Frontier governance as governor of Al Jawf	Najd; Al Jawf	Institutional authority and administrative credibility	Governance capacity and security consolidation
2	Yassin Ibrahim Al-Rawaf	Not specified in the narrative provided; origin Burayda h	Diplomatic representation as Saudi envoy to Syria and Lebanon	Iraq; Levant; Syria; Lebanon	Networked brokerage and reputational access	Trade diplomacy and diplomatic representation
3	Suleiman Ali Al-Mushaiqa h	Born Burayda h 1873; died Cairo 1937	Envoy work under French mandate era; consular representation in Syria	Kuwait; Iraq; Levant; Palestine; Egypt; Syria	Epistemic authority through experience and reputation; symbolic	Trade diplomacy and diplomatic representation

					projection of state presence	
4	Fawzan bin Sabiq Al-Fawzan	Born Burayda h 1859; died Cairo 1954	First official envoy and ambassador for King Abdulaziz	Kuwait; Iraq; Levant; Palestine; Egypt	Brokerage capacity and cross border credibility	Trade diplomacy and diplomatic representati on
5	Mohamma d Eid Al-Rawaf	Born Damascu s 1892; died Riyadh 1963	Envoy to Baghdad; later mayor of Jeddah; Council of Agents member	Iraq; Levant; Syria	Institutional embedding through office holding; brokerage	Governance capacity and administrati ve consolidatio n
6	Abdulaziz Al-Jumai'a	Born Burayda h 1915; died Burayda h 1975	Merchant leadership; military participation in unification campaigns	Kuwait; Iraq; Jordan; Levant; Palestine; Egypt	Integrated ECT and SNT mechanism: capability plus network mobilisation	Military support and logistical capacity
7	Ali Al-Rabadi	Born Burayda h 1876;	Merchant leadership strengthening economic	Not specified in the narrative provided	Epistemic authority rooted in merchant	Economic governance and

		died 1965	base and elite cohesion		leadership and credibility	commercial capacity
8	Hammoud Mohammed Al-Barrak	Born Burayda h 1873; died 1967	Merchant prince; reinforcement of cross border commercial relations	Kuwait; Iraq; Jordan; Levant; Palestine; Egypt	Network centrality and brokerage through trade routes	Economic governance and commercial capacity
9	Mansour Rumaih Al-Rumaih	Born Al Qara'a near Burayda h 1854; died Burayda h 1949	Political support and close relationship with King Abdulaziz; unification support	Not specified in the narrative provided	Reputational authority and elite access; institutional embedding via ruler linkage	Political consolidatio n and elite brokerage
10	Fahad Ali Al-Rashoudi	Born 1865; died 1948; origin Burayda h	Senior merchant leader; advisor; financial and political support to King Abdulaziz	Not specified in the narrative provided	Epistemic authority plus institutional embedding through advisory role	Financial provisioning and political consolidatio n

11	Abdullah Al Suleiman Al-Hamdan	Born Unayzah 1884; died Jeddah 1965	Minister of Finance and Defence; early state administration building	India; Najd; state centre	Institutional embedding and path dependent administrative capacity	Institutional formation and fiscal governance
12	Ibrahim Al-Rashoudi	Born Burayda h 1868; died Burayda h 1945	Financial and military support to King Abdulaziz	Not specified in the narrative provided	Integrated mechanism: capital mobilisation plus loyal service	Credit, liquidity, and mobilisation support
13	Abdullah Suleiman Al-Essa	Born Burayda h 1895; died Burayda h 1969	Commerce plus political and strategic support for stability	Kuwait; Iraq; Levant; Palestine; Egypt	Epistemic authority under uncertainty through experience	Governance capacity and security consolidatio n
14	Abdulaziz Al Hamoud Al-Mushaiqa h	Born Burayda h 1863; died Burayda h 1953	High level corresponden ce with rulers; financial influence	Not specified in the narrative provided	Institutional embedding through corresponden ce and elite linkage	Financial provisioning and political consolidatio n

15	Issa Rumaih Al-Rumaih	Born Al Qara' 1844; died Burayda h 1934	Senior reference point for Al-Aqilat across borders	Not specified in the narrative provided	Epistemic authority as recognised node; reputational centrality	Network governance and coordination capacity
16	Mohamme d Abdullah Al-Bassam	Born Unayzah 1844; died Baghdad 1933	Trade logistics infrastructure and capital accumulation	India; Iraq; Levant	Networked brokerage through assets and logistics	Trade capacity and economic infrastructur e
17	Abdullah Muhamme d Al-Fadl	Born 1881; died Cairo 1969	Assistant to Viceroy in Hijaz; Council of Agents member; hosting elite meeting on renaming	Hijaz; Egypt; not specified further	Institutional embedding through governance bodies	Institutional consolidatio n and state naming politics
18	Abdulaziz bin Hassan Al-Hassan	Born Al Asiyah near Burayda h 1855; died 1937	Advisor and minister to Sheikh Mubarak Al Sabah; regional influence	Kuwait; Buraydah and Al-Qassim politics	Brokerage across polities; institutional embedding	Political mediation and elite brokerage

19	Suleiman Saleh Al-Dakhil	Born Burayda h 1873; died Baghdad 1946	Journalism and ideological dissemination ; public sphere shaping	Iraq; Najd	Epistemic production and diffusion through media	Media, ideas, and state legitimation
20	Jarallah Al-Dakhil	Born Burayda h 1859; died Baghdad 1941	Advisor role; encourageme nt for Al Ahsa campaign; media co founding	Iraq; Najd	Brokerage and influence through proximity to ruler	Strategic mobilisation and political consolidatio n
21	Muhamma d Abdullah Al-Misfir	Died Burayda h 1957; other details not specified	Lending and financial support to King Abdulaziz	Not specified in the narrative provided	Epistemic authority via financial capacity and credibility	Credit, liquidity, and fiscal support
22	Ibrahim Muhamma d Al-Rabadi	Died Burayda h 1928; other details not specified	Trusted economic and political figure through corresponden ce	Not specified in the narrative provided	Institutional embedding through ruler corresponden ce	Financial provisioning and political consolidatio n

23	Muhammad Abdul Rahman Al-Sharida	Born Burayda h 1846; killed Jurab 1915	Tribal network influence and political role	Not specified in the narrative provided	Network brokerage across tribal structures	Governance, security, and conflict dynamics
24	Abdullah Saleh Al-Khamis	Born Burayda h 1829; died 1907	Settlement formation and community anchoring in Iraq	Iraq	Institutional embedding through settlement and community formation	Mobility, settlement, and diaspora embedding
25	Abdullah Muhammad Ibn Aqeel	Born Al Rass 1878; died Riyadh 1965	Military leadership and governance of Al Jawf	Najd; Al Jawf	Institutional authority and coercive capacity under state building	Military campaigns and frontier governance
26	Abdullah Al-Misfir	Died Egypt 1939; other details not specified	Prestige and social status within elite networks	Egypt; not specified further	Reputational credibility and elite positioning	Elite brokerage and social capital

27	Prince Muhammad Abdullah Turki Al-Otaishan	Born Burayda h 1888; died Britain 1972	Military reform; police force founding; modern uniform adoption	Britain; not specified further	Institutional layering and durability in security institutions	Institutional formation and security apparatus
28	Mohamme d Ahmed Abdullah Al-Rawaf	Born Burayda h 1849; died Burayda h 1931	Military participation; leadership identity as Amir Aqeel	Not specified in the narrative provided	Epistemic authority through leadership and field experience	Military support and mobilisation
29	Suleiman Muhamma d Al-Sharida	Not specified in the narrative provided	Political turning point through death attributed to Ikhwan	Levant route implied; not specified	Path dependence trigger in ruler policy recalibration	Security conflict and policy shift

The following short synthesis clarifies how the biographical evidence supports the chapter's argument about governance capacity and state building. Several entries in the biographical section point to episodes that were decisive for political consolidation, including conflict moments such as the Battle of Jarrab (Jurab) in 1915. The value of mentioning Jurab here is not to provide a battle narrative, but to show that some Al-Aqilat figures were positioned within the same high-risk environments that shaped Najd's political trajectory. When a prominent Al-Aqilat actor is recorded as being killed in Jurab, it signals that the group's relationship to state formation was not limited to commerce and long distance brokerage. It also involved exposure to

the uncertainties of armed struggle and the reputational stakes that accompanied alignment with the emerging ruling centre. For this thesis, that matters because such episodes help explain how credibility, loyalty, and trusted standing could later translate into influence in finance, mediation, and administrative coordination. In short, Jurab functions as an empirical marker of embeddedness, supporting the argument that Al-Aqilat authority combined economic capacity with political reliability during the formation of Saudi Arabia.

4.5.3 Significance of Al-Aqilat Members

The members of Al-Aqilat and their significance can be understood through several key aspects:

Al-Aqilat established a vast and sophisticated trade network that spanned across the Arabian Peninsula, Mesopotamia, the Levant, and North Africa. They controlled the trade of camels, horses, and other essential goods, making them indispensable to regional economies. Their deep knowledge of trade routes, market fluctuations, and financial transactions allowed them to exert economic influence that extended beyond their immediate communities. By monopolizing specific trade commodities, such as camels used for military and transportation purposes, Al-Aqilat effectively controlled critical aspects of the regional economy.

Beyond trade, Al-Aqilat acted as key intermediaries in diplomatic affairs. Their ability to navigate complex political environments and maintain connections with multiple ruling entities including the Ottomans, British, and emerging Saudi state made them valuable actors in state-building efforts. Their trade relationships often translated into political leverage, as they facilitated negotiations, brokered agreements, and acted as informal envoys between competing powers. Their financial support and logistical capabilities played a significant role in strengthening the position of Ibn Saud during his efforts to unify the Arabian Peninsula.

Al-Aqilat's influence extended into military affairs, particularly in providing logistical support for armed campaigns. Their control over camel and horse trade meant that they were instrumental in supplying military forces with transportation and essential resources. Historical records indicate that their involvement in intelligence gathering and information dissemination also contributed to strategic military planning. Their involvement in information circulation and intelligence gathering, as suggested in some historical accounts, indicates how mobility and trade networks could also support strategic coordination in conflict settings.

As a well-connected trading community, Al-Aqilat facilitated not only economic exchanges but also the transmission of knowledge, ideas, and cultural influences across regions. They brought innovations in commerce, governance, and communication to the Arabian Peninsula, enriching the intellectual and economic fabric of society. Their ability to navigate multiple cultural and linguistic contexts highlights their function as carriers of specialized knowledge, further reinforcing their identity as a social group with epistemic attributes.

Perhaps their most significant contribution was their role in the formation and consolidation of the Saudi state. Through economic support, political alliances, and strategic intelligence, Al-Aqilat members played a key role in the success of Ibn Saud's state-building project. Their ability to mobilize resources, forge alliances, and provide financial backing allowed the emerging Saudi state to establish a stable economic and political foundation. Many Al-Aqilat members were closely associated with the leadership of the early Saudi state, serving as advisors, financiers, and logistical coordinators.

The significance of Al-Aqilat members extends far beyond their role as traders. They were political strategists, diplomats, intelligence gatherers, and economic powerbrokers whose influence was deeply embedded in the historical development of the Arabian Peninsula. This influence manifested in various ways: several Al-Aqilat leaders served as trusted envoys for Ibn Saud in the Levant and Iraq, acting as intermediaries between the nascent Saudi state and foreign

powers. Others, such as Abdullah Al-Suleiman, rose to become the Kingdom's first finance minister, shaping its fiscal architecture. Their commercial reach across the Ottoman, British, and French spheres also allowed them to gather and relay intelligence critical for strategic decisions. Through their wealth, mobility, and social capital, they exercised a hybrid form of soft power that complemented military conquest with economic and diplomatic maneuvering. Their ability to leverage trade for political and military advantage underscores their importance in regional history. By examining their contributions, this study highlights how a seemingly economic network functioned as a key force in state-building, regional stability, and the shaping of governance structures in the early Saudi state.

Chapter 5
Empirical Findings

This chapter presents the empirical findings derived from qualitative thematic analysis of historical archives, examining how Al-Aqilat contributed to the formation and stabilisation of Saudi Arabia between 1902 and 1932. The chapter is organised around two complementary analytical aims. First, it documents the roles through which Al-Aqilat supported state building across economic, security, diplomatic, and governance arenas. Second, it identifies the mechanisms through which these roles operated as knowledge-based influence, showing how expertise, brokerage, and institutional embedding shaped outcomes in conditions of uncertainty and fragmented authority. Consistent with accounts that treat Saudi state-building as an articulation of diverse actors and institutions through channels of circulation and authority (Farquhar, 2016, ch. 2). This thesis extends that insight by examining how merchant-brokerage networks constituted a parallel channel of circulation, operating through economic intelligence, mediation, and cross-regional coordination.

The chapter is structured into two main sections. Section 5.1 provides evidence led findings on Al-Aqilat's roles in state building, organised into four thematic clusters: financial networks for political stability, military contributions and state defence, strategic conflict mediation and dispute management, and trade diplomacy with external commercial governance. Each cluster draws directly on archival material to show how stabilisation was achieved through identifiable practices, including credit and resource mobilisation, intelligence and logistics, negotiated settlement and compensation, and the management of cross border documentation and representative authority.

Section 5.2 shifts from role description to mechanism interpretation. It does not restate the empirical narratives, but instead explains how the evidence in 5.1 demonstrates (1) epistemic authority under uncertainty, (2) networked brokerage as governance capacity, and (3) institutional embedding and durability over time. The section concludes by integrating these mechanisms to clarify how Al-Aqilat functioned as a knowledge bearing intermediary network whose stabilising

influence extended across multiple arenas while remaining conditioned by credibility, receptivity, and institutional constraints.

5.1 Evidence Led Findings

5.1.1 Financial networks for political stability

Financial networks mattered for political stability because the early Saudi state repeatedly faced liquidity constraints, war related market disruption, and contested sovereignty along trade corridors. Across British, Ottoman, French, and Saudi records, the same pattern appears: Al-Aqilat were not only traders operating near the state, they were financial intermediaries who supplied credit, moved value across regions, and administered revenue linked to caravan movement. This section therefore treats finance as a state building mechanism, not a background condition, and traces how Al-Aqilat capital and connectivity were converted into political endurance.

5.1.1.1 Credit and liquidity provisioning through Al-Aqilat elites

The clearest evidence of Al-Aqilat financial support appears where named Al-Aqilat figures are recorded in credit relations with Ibn Saud, either through cash lending, repayment instructions, or loans in kind. A Saudi directive records an explicit repayment order: "He delivered to the order of Ibrahim Ali Al Rashoudi[2] one hundred Majidi liras in exchange for a loan" [3]. The content is important because it shows a recognisable credit relationship rather than arbitrary extraction. The transaction is documented, authorised, and framed as repayment, which signals that the ruler depended on merchant capital while also protecting the trust conditions that make

2 Ibrahim Al-Rashoudi (1868–1945), Buraydah-born Al-Aqilat leader associated with financial support to Ibn Saud during consolidation. See Table 4.5.2: Biographical Profiles of Al-Aqilat Members Demonstrating Epistemic and Governance-Related Roles.

3 Saudi Archives: King Abdulaziz Foundation (Darah), Document No. 33785, directive from King Abdulaziz Al-Saud to Muhammad Effendi regarding the delivery of funds to Ibrahim Al-Rashoudi, dated 21 Rajab 1335 AH (13/05/1917)

future lending possible. That is precisely how a merchant network functions as a stabilising financial infrastructure: it supplies liquidity while preserving relational credibility.

The same logic appears more prominently in the Saudi archival material, which repeatedly links named Al-Aqilat leaders to major lending moments during consolidation. The record identifies Fahad Al-Rashoudi[4] while subsequent Saudi archival correspondence documents a request for camel loans[5] from Fahad Al-Rashoudi, Ibrahim Al-Rashoudi, and Abdulaziz Al-Hamoud Bin Mushaiqah, followed shortly afterwards by confirmation that the requested camels had been received and would be repaid[6]. A contemporary British report likewise records that Ibn Saud was heavily indebted to Al-Qassim merchants, providing independent corroboration of the scale of merchant financial support.[7] Even though these entries are presented within a compiled primary source format, their analytical weight is strong for 5.1.1 because they locate financial support in identifiable Al-Aqilat nodes and tie it to decisive state building episodes where political stability depended on sustaining siege logistics and administrative continuity.

Financial support also operated through loans in kind, which matter because they demonstrate how liquidity constraints were bridged through assets that enabled governance functions. In a letter addressed to Fahad Ali Al-Rashoudi, Ibrahim Ali Al-Rashoudi, and Abdulaziz

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[4] Fahad Al-Rashoudi, identified in Buraydah family records as providing substantial credit to Ibn Saud during the consolidation period. See Table 4.5.2: Biographical Profiles of Al-Aqilat Members Demonstrating Epistemic and Governance-Related Roles.

[5] Saudi Archives, Dictionary of Buraydah Families (2010), letter from King Abdulaziz to Fahad Al-Rashoudi, Ibrahim Al-Rashoudi, and Abdulaziz Al-Hamoud bin Mushaiqah requesting a loan of camels, 13 January 1926, p. 432 (Part 7)

[6] Saudi Archives, Dictionary of Buraydah Families (2010), letter from King Abdulaziz to Fahad Ali Al-Rashoudi, Ibrahim Al-Rashoudi, and Abdulaziz Al-Hamoud bin Mushaiqah acknowledging receipt of the camel loan and promising repayment, February 1926, p. 438 (Part 7).

[7] British Archives (1996) The Arabian Peninsula in British Archives (Najd and Hejaz), Parts 1–7. London: Dar Al Saqi. FO 371/5065 (B.349), memorandum by Major H. R. P. Dickson on the political situation in Najd, July 1920, p. 387 (Arabic), P5.

Hamoud Al-Mushaiqah[8], Ibn Saud requests a loan not in cash but in camels to enable Hajj operations, with repayment understood[9]. A subsequent item confirms the arrival of the camels as the loan and reiterates the repayment expectation[10]. These entries show two things that are critical for this argument. First, Al-Aqilat wealth was not only monetary; it was convertible assets and supply capacity. Second, the relationship is framed in the language of borrowing and repayment, which is governance through consent and obligation rather than coercion.

In a British correspondence [11] it is recorded that people of Al-Qassim fought for Ibn Saud while he was in Al-Ahsa with Bin Rashid, it shows they stopped Bin Rashid's preceedings of occupancy. In continuation of this event, a Saudi historical source[12] records that leading figures from Al-Qassim informed Ibn Saud of their readiness to provide financial resources and military support whenever required. This account illustrates the mobilisation of the people of Al-Qassim in support of Ibn Saud's campaign against Ibn Rashid and reinforces the close military relationship between Ibn Saud and influential figures from the region. In a British correspondence it is recorded that the people of Al-Qassim fought for Ibn Saud while he was in Al-Ahsa with Ibn Rashid, showing that they halted Ibn Rashid's advance. This is further reinforced by a Saudi archival document recording King Abdulaziz's financial directive concerning Ibrahim Al-Rashoudi, demonstrating the trusted financial responsibilities entrusted to leading members of Al-Aqilat network during this period. Together, these records illustrate the close military and financial

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[8] Abdulaziz Hamoud Al-Mushaiqah, Buraydah-based Al-Aqilat actor appearing in Buraydah family records correspondence with Ibn Saud regarding loan provision in camels during the consolidation period (1344 H / 1926), illustrating resource mobilisation within merchant networks. See entry no.15 Table 4.5.2.

[9] Saudi Archive, Dictionary of Buraydah Families (2010), letter from Ibn Saud to Fahad, Ibrahim Al-Rashoudi, and Abdulaziz Al-Hamoud bin Mushaiqah, 28/06/1344 H (13/01/1926), Part 7, p. 432

[10] Saudi Archive, Dictionary of Buraydah Families (2010), "Proof of the arrival of the loan, which is camels", letter from Ibn Saud to Fahad, Ibrahim Al-Rashoudi, and Abdulaziz Al Hamoud bin Mushaiqah, 08/1344 H (02/1926), Part 7, p. 438.

[11] British Archives (1996) The Arabian Peninsula in British Archives (Najd and Hejaz), Parts 1–7. London: Dar Al Saqi, FO 371/2479 (184438), Holland (Basra) report, 2 January 1915, Arabic enclosure, p. 381 (P1).

[12] Saudi Archives: King Abdulaziz Foundation (Darah), Document No. 33785, directive from King Abdulaziz Al Saud to Muhammad Effendi regarding the delivery of funds to Ibrahim Al-Rashoudi, dated 21 Rajab 1335 AH (13/05/1917).

relationship between Ibn Saud and influential figures from Qassim. This reinforces the same association between Al-Qassim merchant capacity and political stability, but from an external observer standpoint. The wording captures a stabilising pledge: financial backing is presented as part of a loyalty compact, and it is issued through leaders identifiable with Buraydah and the Rashoudi circle, which aligns directly with the Al-Aqilat actor set being traced. Another British record links Ibn Saud's stability to his dependence on Al-Qassim merchants by recording that he owed Al-Qassim merchants "about six lakhs of rupees"[13]. Rather in regard to Al-Aqilat claim, this strengthens it, because Al-Qassim merchants in these archival contexts are the commercial elite from which Al-Aqilat networks were drawn.

As a historical context to the financial support, during the time of the conflict between Ibn Saud and Sharif Hussein of Mecca in 1918 to 1924, Ibn Saud was given subsidy that was compremised from British powers to neutralize the fight between two regional powers. The context clarifies the reason for financial support from Al-Qassim people for Ibn Saud.

5.1.1.2 Network architecture and corridor brokerage as financial stabilisers

A second layer of evidence shows that Al-Aqilat finance was not only local lending, it was a transregional network that enabled movement of value, goods, and political communication across contested spaces. A Saudi archival document based on Gertrude Bell's note describes the "Aqail" as merchants who finance their own enterprises and form a capitalist network linking Damascus, Zubair, and Qassim, "all playing into one another's hands"[14]. This is directly relevant to financial networks for stability because it explains the mechanism that makes Al-Aqilat finance

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[13] British Archive, (1996) The Arabian Peninsula in British Archives (Najd and Hejaz), Parts 1–7. London: Dar Al Saqi, H. Dickson (Major), "Memorandum on the Political Situation in Najd", Political Agent in Bahrain, July 1920, FO 371/5065 (B.349), IOR: L/P&S/18/B349, p. 387, p. 5 (noting Ibn Saud's reported debts to Qassim merchants).
14 Saudi Archives, King Abdulaziz Foundation, (Darah). A memoir about "Aqail" prepared by Gertrude Bell. Miss Bell attaches to her memo a list of the most famous Aqail (Al-Aqilat) families and their locations. Archive no. 1524 (R/15/1/480) 20/12/1917

politically valuable: capital is distributed across nodes, mobility is routine, and partnerships bridge the interior and the Levant. In state building terms, this network structure supplies resilience. When one corridor is disrupted, alternative nodes can still channel goods, cash, and credit.

French archives provide a precise instance of how this brokerage translated into political stability through trade corridor security. A French record states that Ibn Saud requested, through "a Najdi merchant resident in Damascus (Al-Aqilat)," that French authorities take measures with local tribes to ensure "the free movement of the Najdi caravans" coming to buy supplies from Damascus[15]. The request is channelled through an Al-Aqilat intermediary, and the objective is stabilisation of caravan movement, which protects commercial flows and reduces the risk of shortages and unrest. Also, French authorities understand that Al-Aqilat were the crucial channel between Najd and Syria. This demonstrates Al-Aqilat acting as intermediaries who translate commercial needs into governance coordination across borders.

The institutional embedding of Al-Aqilat in fiscal administration appears even more clearly in the French consular record describing the Najdi representation in Damascus. Ibn Saud dismisses a former representative and appoints Suleiman bin Ali Al-Mushaiqah[16], instructing him to facilitate subjects' affairs and safeguard rights, while also specifying structured fee rules including "one and half majidi for each head of camels" and additional charges under defined conditions[17]. This is not merely trade. It is fiscal governance mediated through a merchant intermediary. The consulate here functions as a revenue and regulation node connected to mobile traders, and Al-Mushaiqah is the

[15] French Archives (1999), King Abd Al-Aziz Al Saud: His Life and Reign in Foreign Documents, Fonds Beyrouth/662 (1), Secret Letter No. 162/S.P./1 from the Delegate of the French High Commissioner in Damascus to the French High Commissioner in Beirut concerning Najdi caravans and French guarantees for their safe passage, 6/02/1924, p. 420.

[16] Suleiman Ali Al-Mushaiqah (1873–1937), Buraydah-born Al-Aqilat figure described in the literature as operating across Kuwait, Iraq, the Levant, Palestine, and Egypt, and associated with envoy and representational functions during the late Ottoman and early mandate periods. See entry 3 Table 4.5.2

[17] French Archives (1999), King Abd Al-Aziz Al Saud: His Life and Reign in Foreign Documents, Fonds Beyrouth 662 (6), Letter from Abdulaziz Al-Saud to Suleiman Al-Mushaiqah (Damascus representative), 1 April 1926, p. 40.

operational agent. The effect on stability is practical and immediate: predictable fees reduce arbitrary exactions, routinise revenue, and make caravan commerce legible and governable.

A related French document links customs duties disputes to Al-Mushaiqah and records negotiations involving Mohammed Al-Nahhas, the Director of Finance in Najd, including fee arrangements and a push toward agreement that would reduce duties for Najdi merchants[18]. Read together with the Damascus consular rules, this shows a stabilising governance pattern: Al-Aqilat linked commercial realities to institutional bargaining, reducing friction that could otherwise escalate into political conflict or trade shutdowns. The trade memorandum further anchors the macro consequences: it notes exports from Najd to Syria and imports from Syria to Najd, and that instability such as rebellion and invasion threats slowed trade[19]. Even if Al-Aqilat are not named in that memorandum, it explains the structural stakes of the corridor that Al-Aqilat intermediaries were managing.

5.1.1.3 Financial security, political risk, and bargaining power

Ottoman archives reveal the political sensitivity of financial assistance to Abdulaziz and the risks faced by Al-Aqilat intermediaries operating under contested authority. One Ottoman record states that Muhammad Al-Wasil, identified as being from the Al-Aqilat, was imprisoned on the pretext that he sent "one thousand riyals" to Ibn Saud as assistance[20]. Companion documents track

18 French Archives (1999), King Abd Al-Aziz Al Saud: His Life and Reign in Foreign Documents, Fonds Beyrouth 1043 (4), Letter No. 1331/SP (Acting Delegate of the French High Commissioner in Damascus to the French High Commissioner in Beirut), 13 July 1925, p. 638.

19 French Archives (1999), King Abd Al Aziz Al Saud: His Life and Reign in Foreign Documents, Fonds Beyrouth/662 (3), Note 519/CB/MD, memorandum on trade exchange between Syria and Najd (exports of camels, sheep, wool and butter from Najd to Syria; imports of fabrics, cotton textiles and cardamom to Najd; statistics for 1927 to 1929), 19 July 1929, p. 641.

20 Ottoman Archives, Istanbul Archive Center, DH.TMIK.M.203/45 (1-1), Ministry of Justice and Denominations (No. 94) to the Ministry of the Interior, royal order on pardoning the people of Qassim and releasing prisoners, 25 Rabiʿ Al Akhir 1323 AH (1905).

the administrative processing of the case and its completion[21]. This cluster matters because it shows that Al-Aqilat finance was not apolitical commerce. Cash transfers were treated as alignment, monitored by authorities, and subject to legal consequences. In analytical terms, this is high value evidence of state formation politics: money flows function as political signals, and Al-Aqilat intermediaries incur risk by sustaining the financial base of the emerging ruler.

The Ottoman petition from Al-Aqilat merchants refers to a petition submitted to the Sublime Ottoman Government in which Al-Aqilat merchants complained that money, livestock, and commercial property had been seized during caravan travel and requested official intervention to recover their losses and improve the security of regional trade routes. The petition describes raids that stole money and livestock and highlights insecurity for "our money and ourselves".[22] For 5.1.1, this evidence is important because it ties stability to protection of capital and property rights. When caravans are looted, wealth drains from the network, prices and provisioning become unstable, and authority is delegitimised. This is why Al-Aqilat stability seeking behaviour is rational: a stable political order reduces predation risk and preserves the conditions for trade and credit.

British material illustrates how economic governance decisions had to account for Al-Qassim merchant leverage, which again maps onto the Al-Aqilat merchant environment. One record notes Ibn Saud's admission that Al-Qassim merchants were involved in smuggling and his position that

21 Ottoman Archives, Istanbul Archive Center, DH.TMIK.M.203/45 (5-2), Committee drafts (No. 12300), coded telegram to the Baghdad Vilayet concerning the detention case of Muhammad b. Abdullah Al-Hamdan and Muhammad Al-Wasil (Al-Aqilat), 28 Tammuz 1321 Rumi (1905).
Ottoman Archives, Istanbul Archive Center, DH.TMIK.M.203/45 (6-1), encrypted telegram from the Baghdad Vilayet to the Sublime Porte, Ministry of Interior (Maktobi Office), on concluding the case of Muhammad b. Abdullah Al-Hamdan and Muhammad b. Wasil for sending 1,000 riyals to Ibn Saud and ordering their release, 4 August 1321 Rumi (1905).

22 Ottoman Archives, Istanbul Archive Center, Y.MTV.M.00104.00002.002, petition from Al-Aqilat merchants to the Sublime Ottoman Government, 1 Rabiʿ Al Awwal 1321 AH (1903).

punishing them would risk "angering Qassim"[23]. Another records reports that he wrote to emirs, especially in Qassim, emphasising absolute necessity of obeying orders and implementing anti smuggling commitments. These documents support Al-Aqilat argument in a specific way. They show that policy compliance was negotiated through Qassim's commercial structures. That is a stability mechanism: the ruler avoids destabilising enforcement against economically powerful networks, and instead manages compliance through communication and negotiated obligations.

Finally, British subsidy discussions provide context for why internal financial networks remained decisive even when external funds were possible. One British telegram proposes structuring a loan through monthly instalments and attaching treaty revision for signature[24]. Another warns that financial aid "on the scale now proposed would be dangerous"[25]. A later record states a lump sum payment and termination of the financial support[26]. These documents show that external finance was conditional and politically strategic. That context strengthens the logic of Al-Aqilat networks: domestic merchant finance and corridor revenue offered a stabilising resource that was not dependent on external diplomatic conditionality.

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[23] British Archives (1996) The Arabian Peninsula in British Archives (Najd and Hejaz), Parts 1–7. London: Dar Al Saqi. L/P&S/10/390, report on the Najd Mission operations (29 October 1917 to 1 November 1918), written by John Philby, 12 November 1918, p. 722 (Arabic), P3.

[24] British Archives (1996) The Arabian Peninsula in British Archives (Najd and Hejaz), Parts 1 - 7. London: Dar Al Saqi. FO 371/2479 (150910) No. 1946 B, Lieutenant Colonel Sir Percy Cox, Political Resident in the Persian Gulf (Basra), to the Secretary to the Government of India, Department of External Affairs and Policy (Simla), 15 September 1915, p. 415 (Arabic), P1.

[25] British Archives (1996) The Arabian Peninsula in British Archives (Najd and Hejaz), Parts 1 - 7. London: Dar Al Saqi. FO 371/3056 No. 1390, cable from Sir Reginald Wingate (Cairo) to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 23 December 1917, p. 675 (Arabic), P3.

[26] British Archives (1996) The Arabian Peninsula in British Archives (Najd and Hejaz), Parts 1 - 7. London: Dar Al Saqi. FO 371/8937 (E 3736) No. 182, telegram from the Minister of Colonies to the High Commissioners in Iraq and Palestine, 7 April 1923, p. 178 (Arabic), P7.

5.1.1.4 Analytical synthesis and identifiable mechanisms

This archive set allows the thesis to identify concrete mechanisms consistent with the built theoretical framework, detailed interpretation to a later discussion section in 5.2.

First, brokerage and networked liquidity. The credit transactions and lending episodes show that Al-Aqilat capital moved through identifiable nodes that connected ruler, markets, and corridors. This is consistent with social network theory mechanisms of bridging ties and brokerage, where specific actors enable resource circulation between otherwise disconnected arenas.

Second, knowledge bearing intermediation, consistent with ECT when applied to historical merchant groups. The Damascus corridor documents show that Al-Aqilat intermediaries did not simply provide funds. They enabled route security requests, administered fees, and negotiated customs arrangements, which requires expertise in tribal corridor politics, market rules, and administrative procedures. The knowledge is practical, relational, and governance oriented, and it becomes politically stabilising when it is converted into predictable movement and revenue.

Third, institutional embedding and path dependence, consistent with historical institutionalism. The movement from ad hoc borrowing to routinised dues and consular rules indicates gradual layering of governance practices around existing commercial institutions rather than sudden bureaucratic replacement. This helps explain durability: stability emerges as rules and practices accumulate around corridor management and merchant intermediaries.

Overall, the archives support a focused claim: Al-Aqilat contributed to political stability by supplying credit and convertible assets during moments of fiscal strain, by maintaining transregional circulation of goods and value, and by serving as intermediaries through which corridor security and revenue practices were negotiated and administered. These were not peripheral activities. They were core mechanisms through which the emerging state sustained itself materially and politically.

External subsidy pressure and Al-Aqilat buffered financial resilience, 1915 to 1923

British documentation shows that Ibn Saud's political room for manoeuvre was exposed to external financial conditionality during the post war transition. In September 1915, a British record notes that the Government of India was asked for "a support of 10,000 rupees and 1,000 rifles," with the justification explicitly framed around mounting costs and the need to sustain Ibn Saud's position in a volatile environment[27]. In October 1915, a further British document records the decision to provide "a special grant of 20,000 pounds"[28] to Ibn Saud, again indicating that funding flows were treated as discretionary and politically managed rather than fixed entitlements. These two items establish the key contextual constraint for this theme: the leadership's fiscal stability was repeatedly exposed to external levers that could be expanded, reduced, or re timed to influence behaviour.

That leverage becomes more explicit in 1923, when British documentation records a policy shift to end routine payments. A British note states that the Government would "cease to pay him the allowance after 31st March," while discussing alternative forms of limited support such as a single "lump sum" payment[29]. Crucially, the same archival trail makes clear that finance was linked to political conditions beyond fiscal need. The same British document ties any contemplated payment to a "satisfactory agreement between Ibn Saud and Hussein," positioning money as an instrument for steering Ibn Saud toward a preferred regional settlement rather than merely stabilising Najd's internal finances. A separate 1923 communication adds a practical coercive

[27] British Archives (1996) The Arabian Peninsula in British Archives (Najd and Hejaz), Parts 1 - 7. London: Dar Al Saqi. FO 371/2479 (150910) No. 1946-B, letter from Lieutenant-Colonel Sir Percy Cox, Political Resident in the Persian Gulf (Basra), to the Secretary to the Government of India, Department of External Affairs and Policy (Simla), concerning financial assistance and military support requested by Ibn Saud, 15 September 1915, p. 415 (Arabic), P1.
[28] British Archives (1996) The Arabian Peninsula in British Archives (Najd and Hejaz), Parts 1 - 7. London: Dar Al Saqi. FO 371/2479 (150910) Letter No. 367.P, from Ministry of India to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 14 October 1915, p. 419 (Arabic), P1.
[29] British Archives (1996) The Arabian Peninsula in British Archives (Najd and Hejaz), Parts 1 - 7. London: Dar Al Saqi. FO 371/8937 (E 3736) No. 182, telegram from the Minister of Colonies to the High Commissioners in Iraq and Palestine on informing Ibn Saud of a £50,000 lump sum for 1923 to 24 and cessation of the allowance after 31 March, 7 April 1923, p. 178 (Arabic), P7.

mechanism: “We regret that we cannot pay the aid in advance, as this is a principle,” while signalling that any release of funds would follow British procedural timing rather than Ibn Saud’s urgent liquidity requirements[30]. Read together, these documents demonstrate that the subsidy was not simply support; it operated as conditional finance that could be delayed, reshaped, or terminated to produce compliance.

The analytical question for Al-Aqilat is not whether British leverage existed, but how Ibn Saud remained financially and politically operational when that leverage tightened. Here, the evidence points to an internal merchant credit architecture centred in Qassim, commonly associated in this thesis with Al-Aqilat’s wider trading milieu. In July 1920, a British memorandum reports: “In conclusion, Ibn Saud’s debts are worrying him again. I heard that he owed Al-Qassim merchants about six lakhs of rupees”.[31]

This is a direct statement of merchant creditor exposure on a scale that is politically meaningful. It also functions as evidence of a financing relationship already exercised, because the debt implies earlier advances or sustained provisioning that substituted for, or complemented, external subsidy flows. The significance here is not a romanticised “merchant generosity,” but the structural implication: Ibn Saud’s capacity to maintain authority could draw on a dense merchant credit base whose incentives were aligned with regime survival and with the protection of trade corridors that underpinned their own wealth.

A second strand of evidence clarifies why this merchant creditor relationship had political weight. In June 1921, Ibn Saud explicitly frames his engagement with Damascus around “economic links resulting from commercial transactions between the inhabitants of the Al-Qassim

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[30] British Archives (1996) The Arabian Peninsula in British Archives (Najd and Hejaz), Parts 1 - 7. London: Dar Al Saqi. FO 371/8947 No. 35, telegram from Minister of Colonies to the High Commissioner in Iraq concerning financial assistance to Ibn Saud, 17 January 1923, p. 118 (Arabic), P7.

[31] British Archives (1996) The Arabian Peninsula in British Archives (Najd and Hejaz), Parts 1 - 7. London: Dar Al Saqi. FO 371/5065 (B 349); IOR: L/P&S/18/B349, memorandum on the political situation in Najd by H. Dickson (Political Agent in Bahrain), July 1920, p. 387 (Arabic), P5.

region of our lands and the inhabitants of the Syrian provinces," and the aim "to protect the lives and property of our subjects and preserve their rights during their travels between the two countries".[32]

This matters for the argument because it shows Al-Qassim merchant movement and asset security as a state level concern. It also reveals a stabilising logic: when external subsidy becomes unreliable or politically weaponised, continuity of cross border commercial circuits becomes an alternative basis for fiscal endurance through trade income, credit networks, and the protection of mobile capital.

Ottoman documentation further supports the proposition that Al-Aqilat linked money flows to Ibn Saud in ways that were institutionally visible and politically sensitive. An Ottoman administrative record describes a case in which detainees were accused of "sending 1,000 riyals to Ibn Saud as assistance," including "Muhammad Al-Wasil described as from Al-Aqilat".[33]

The analytical value of this evidence lies in two features. First, it frames the transfer as "assistance," not ordinary trade payment, which supports the claim that merchant finance could be mobilised for political ends. Second, the fact that the act generated administrative action indicates it was not treated as trivial, reinforcing the interpretation that merchant finance intersected with geopolitical contestation.

Saudi archival selections add an additional layer by evidencing explicit loan and repayment practices through named intermediaries. One entry records the "payment of 100 Majidi liras to Ibrahim Al-Rashoudi in exchange for a loan"[34]

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[32] British Archives (1996) The Arabian Peninsula in British Archives (Najd and Hejaz), Parts 1 - 7. London: Dar Al Saqi. FO 371/7711, letter from Imam Ibn Saud to the British High Commissioner in Iraq, 21 June 1921, p. 139 (Arabic), P6.

[33] Ottoman Archives, DH.TMIK.M.203/45 (1-1), Ministry of Justice and Denominations (No. 94) to the Ministry of the Interior, royal order on pardoning the people of Qassim and releasing prisoners, 25 Rabiʿ al Akhir 1323 AH (1905).

[34] Saudi Archives: King Abdulaziz Foundation (Darah), No. 33785, directive from King Abdulaziz Al-Saud to Muhammad Effendi to deliver an amount to Ibrahim Al-Rashoudi, dated 13/05/1917.

This entry records a defined credit transaction, showing that fiscal shortfalls were bridged through merchant lending relationships. When aligned with the British subsidy record, the combined picture is that Ibn Saud operated within a hybrid financial ecology: external aid that could be conditioned or withdrawn, and internal merchant credit and liquidity channels that could be activated through trusted intermediaries.

This triangulated configuration is where the theoretical mechanism becomes visible. The archives indicate that Al-Aqilat were not merely economic actors operating beside the state; they functioned as knowledge bearing intermediaries whose financial capabilities and cross border commercial competence provided a stabilising buffer when external finance was politicised. The British subsidy record demonstrates conditional receptivity pressures that threatened autonomy. The Al-Qassim merchant debt record demonstrates an alternative support base rooted in merchant credit, implying the ability to sustain governance even under subsidy uncertainty.

The 1921 statement on protecting Al-Qassim commercial transactions shows why that base mattered for state policy, because safeguarding the merchant circuit was itself a governance priority tied to security and rights protection. Ottoman evidence then confirms that Al-Aqilat linked funds to Ibn Saud in ways that drew administrative attention, indicating politically legible support rather than merely private commerce. The analytical conclusion that can be defended without overclaim is therefore precise: the documentary record shows British attempts to shape Ibn Saud through the timing and termination of financial support, while simultaneously showing that merchant based financial networks associated with Al-Qassim and Al-Aqilat provided credit, liquidity, and cross border commercial continuity that increased Ibn Saud's capacity to absorb or resist external fiscal pressure.

5.1.2 Military contributions and state defence

Military contribution in this study is treated as a bundle of defence enabling practices rather than a narrow focus on battlefield combat. Across the archival base, Al-Aqilat appear as actors who (1) enable material flows under insecurity (weapons, provisioning, and corridor movement), (2) supply human intelligence and manage sensitive communication channels, and (3) support

mobilisation and internal security ordering during rebellion and border escalation. The evidentiary value of these documents lies in their real time depiction of how defence capacity was assembled through intermediated networks, institutional routines, and targeted mobilisation around Ibn Saud.

5.1.2.1 Logistics and resource mobility for defence operations

A first layer of military contribution is visible in the material foundations of defence: weapons, ammunition, and the resources required to keep forces under arms. A British political resident records that, pending clarification of required assistance, "I sent him 300 rifles seized from the Turks" and authorised a payment of "10,000 rupees as temporary assistance," while also discussing the scale of provision that should not be less than "1,000 Sturdemo rifles with 200,000 rounds of ammunition" alongside monetary support[35]. This matters analytically because it links military endurance to supply chains and external acquisition, rather than treating military supremacy as a purely internal function. The same record frames wartime economic shock as a defence constraint, noting that due to war "his subjects (Al-Qassim people)" were unable to sell dates and cattle as usual, and that he had incurred "very heavy expenses by having to keep large forces under arms". In other words, defence is immediately shown as a resource problem tied to the mobility and market access of the Al-Qassim commercial base.

A second mechanism is procurement and facilitation across jurisdictions. French intelligence reporting records that a former officer was seen making contacts "with the Italian consul to purchase aircraft" and was "waiting for the return of the representative … to Damascus

[35] British Archives (1996) The Arabian Peninsula in British Archives (Najd and Hejaz), Parts 1–7. London: Dar Al Saqi. FO 371/2479 (150910) No. 1946 B, from Lieutenant-Colonel Sir Percy Cox Political Resident in the Persian Gulf (Basra) to Secretary to the Government of India (External Affairs and Policy), 15 September 1915, p. 415 (Arabic), P1.

to finalise the deal"[36]. The key point is not whether the purchase was completed, as the document does not confirm completion. The analytical value is that defence capacity building is pursued through cross border brokerage, with acquisition dependent on intermediated access and timing, which aligns with the idea of knowledge bearing actors converting external contacts into strategic capability options.

Weapons movement across contested corridors is also directly documented. A French telegram notes that a convoy of "Aqeel's (Al-Aqilat) men" coming from Najd through Wadi Al Sarhan "has delivered rifles and ammunition"[37]. The evidentiary point is not to infer a single unified political purpose for the shipment beyond what the document states. Rather, it provides hard proof of logistical capacity: a cross-border route, a transport convoy, and the movement of weapons and ammunition through a strategic corridor. This type of movement is itself an enabling condition for defence and coercive capacity in a fragmented regional environment.

Logistics is also visible in routine provisioning and patrol administration. A Saudi archives record documents a transfer of soldiers' provisions, stating that Muhammad bin Otaishan[38] "received … the amount … which is the rest of the periodic soldiers," from Abdullah bin Suleiman Al-Issa in his capacity as head of patrols in Makkah[39]. Even though the amounts are small in this specific entry, the document is significant because it evidences routinised distribution and

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[36] French Archives (1999), King Abd Al-Aziz Al Saud: His Life and Reign in Foreign Documents, Fonds Beyrouth/1043 (1), Letter No. 440/3 S.R., Chef de Bataillon Couvert (Aleppo Delegation) to the Chief of the French Army Intelligence Service in the Levant, 16 April 1924, p. 435.

[37] French Archives (1999), King Abd Al-Aziz Al Saud: His Life and Reign in Foreign Documents, E Lev. 18 40/Arab Hedj./30 (1), Telegram No. 9, French Minister of Foreign Affairs to the Deputy French Consul in Jeddah, 14 April 1927, p. 253.

[38] Prince Muhammad Abdullah Turki Al-Otaishan (1888–1972) was a Buraydah born figure associated with early security and administrative modernisation, including police force formation and uniformed reform initiatives. See entry no. 12 in Table 4.2.5

[39] Saudi Archives, Dictionary of Buraydah Families (2010), Mohammed bin Abdullah Al-Otaishan to Abdullah bin Sulaiman Al-Issa, 28 Rabiʿ I 1346 AH (25 September 1927), p. 370 (P15).

accounting for security personnel, a basic infrastructural layer of defence capacity rather than an episodic wartime improvisation.

Material mobilisation also appears through local resourcing during major confrontation. A Saudi archives record states participation in financing the Buraydah army in the Battle of Al Sabla, naming Fahad Al-Rashoudi, Ibrahim Al-Ali Al-Rashoudi, and Abdulaziz Al-Hamoud Al Mushaiqah as financiers, and it notes that a letter was addressed to them "on the second day of the battle … telling them what happened and promising them victory"[40]. The military significance of this record is that it makes resourcing traceable to named Al-Qassim actors, showing how local commercial elites supplied the defence effort at a critical moment rather than appearing only as passive beneficiaries of state protection.

Finally, corridor insecurity operates as a constant constraint on material mobility and therefore on defence logistics. An Ottoman petition by "Aqeel" merchants (Al-Aqilat) describes a raid at Muzayrib, theft of money and livestock, and the resulting "lack of security for our money and ourselves," requesting recovery and protection[41]. A later French article reports an attack on a caravan "loaded from Buraydah to Hejaz," theft of camels and money, and a military response in the form of a dispatched force [42]. Used together, these documents show that supply, transport, and provisioning are always conditioned by corridor violence and the risk of disruption, which is precisely why merchant route knowledge and convoy organisation become defence enabling functions rather than merely economic activity.

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[40] Saudi Archives, Dictionary of Buraydah Families (2010), Fahad Ali Al-Rashoudi Explain the situation with the Ikhwan and the king's letter to Fahad, Ibrahim Ali Al-Rashoudi and Abdulaziz Al-Hamoud Al-Mushaiqah, 20 Shawwal 1347 AH (01/04/1929), p. 429 (Part 7).

[41] Ottoman Archives, Istanbul Archive Center, Y.MTV.M.00104.00002.002, petition from Al-Aqilat merchants to the Sublime Ottoman Government, 1 Rabiʿ Al Awwal 1321 AH (1903).

[42] French Archives (1999), King Abd Al Aziz Al Saud: His Life and Reign in Foreign Documents, PAAP026 Bonin/29 (2), article titled "The Situation in the Arabian Peninsula" by Al Munawar Kalal, 31 March 1928, p. 441.

5.1.2.2 Intelligence capacity and strategic advantage

A second layer of military contribution is the production, transmission, and institutionalisation of intelligence for strategic advantage. A British consular report describes a human intelligence and liaison mission by "Mansour bin Rumaih[43], a member of the 'Al-Aqilat'," sent to Al-Usaimi Pasha[44] with instructions to connect him with tribal leaders and provide "money and aid," after which Mansour toured the Damascus area, met tribal leaders, and delivered messages and letters[45]. The document is not a general statement about diplomacy. It lists movement patterns, named intermediaries, and sequences of contact, making the intelligence mechanism empirically legible: brokerage is executed by mobile agents embedded in merchant and tribal networks, with the ability to enter multiple localities and transmit instructions. In theoretical terms, this is boundary spanning knowledge in action, where the capacity to move and communicate across segmented authority spaces becomes a strategic asset.

This intelligence architecture also includes the management of sensitive channels. A British consular report notes that French authorities were attempting to reach an understanding not through the official agent but by a "special messenger" sent on an occasional camel and introduced by Al-Usaimi [46]. The relevance to state defence is that it shows the governance system depends on channel control and trusted intermediaries. It also shows that external actors perceived these

[43] Mansour Rumaih Al-Rumaih (1854–1949), born in Al-Qara'a near Buraydah, is noted for political support and close ties to King Abdulaziz, contributing to political consolidation and elite brokerage through reputational authority and ruler linkage. See entry no. 9 in Table 4.5.2 (Biographies)

[44] Al-Usaimi Pasha (Muhammad bin Barak bin Abdulaziz Al-Usaimi) (1287–1360 AH/1941) was a senior Al-Aqilat merchant and Najdi leader. Born in Al-Zulfi and raised in Al-Zubair, he held political influence in Al-Zubair and Basra, opposed British power in Iraq, then lived between Damascus and Beirut under the French mandate, maintaining correspondence and mediation links with King Abdulaziz.

[45] British Archives (1996) The Arabian Peninsula in British Archives (Najd and Hejaz), Parts 1–7. London: Dar Al Saqi. FO 371/7715 (E 14038), British Consul (Aleppo) to Minister of Foreign Affairs, 30 November 1922, p. 462 (Arabic), P6.

[46] British Archives (1996), The Arabian Peninsula in British Archives (Najd and Hejaz), Parts 1–7. London: Dar Al Saqi. FO 371/10005 (E 901), British Consul (Damascus) to Foreign Secretary, 9 January 1924, p. 400 (Arabic), P7.

channels as variable and contestable, suggesting that intelligence and diplomacy were not separate domains but overlapping practices of access and influence.

Institutionalisation is visible in Saudi archive material. A royal order transfers Abdullah bin Suleiman Al-Issa[47] to the position of "head of the intelligence department in the capital," requiring direct commencement of duties [48]. This record is important because it moves the argument beyond "informal networks" and shows formal absorption of network actors into state security institutions. Treated alongside the membership classification already established in the thesis, it is evidence of Al-Aqilat linked actors occupying structured intelligence roles and therefore shaping the state's capacity to monitor, anticipate, and respond to threats.

The consolidation of security capacity is also visible in routine reporting. A Saudi archive telegram to the Director General of Police states: "Thank God, no incidents have occurred in the past twenty-four hours"[49]. While terse, this is an institutional signal that routine monitoring and reporting had become normalised. In historical institutionalist terms, it is evidence of durable administrative routines, where daily reporting becomes part of a stabilising security apparatus.

Security is also shaped by information control and propaganda sensitivity. An Ottoman coded message draws attention to publications by Al-Riyadh newspaper (Jarallah Al-Dakhil[50])

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[47] Abdullah Sulaiman Al-Essa (1895–1969), born and died in Buraydah, is associated with commerce alongside political and strategic support for state stability across Kuwait, Iraq, the Levant, Palestine and Egypt, and is characterised as exercising epistemic authority under uncertainty through experience, contributing to governance capacity and security consolidation. See entry no. 16 in Table 4.2.5 (Biographies).

[48] Saudi Archive, Dictionary of Buraydah Families (2010), letter from Deputy His Majesty King Abdulaziz, Prince Faisal bin Abdulaziz (King Faisal), to Abdullah bin Sulaiman Al-Issa, royal order transferring him to the post of head of the intelligence department in the capital, 1347 AH (1928), p. 494, P16.

[49] Saudi Archives, King Abdulaziz Foundation (Darah), telegram from Jeddah Police Director Mohammed Al-Otaishan to the Director General of Police in Mecca reporting that no incidents occurred during the past twenty four hours, 9 Jumada I 1349 AH (2 October 1930), no. 61181 (2474).

[50] Jarallah Al-Dakhil (1859–1941), born in Buraydah and died in Baghdad, is associated with advisory roles, encouragement for the Al-Ahsa campaign and media co-founding, operating across Iraq and Najd, and exercising

praising Ibn Saud and discussing negotiations with the English, stating that "the newspaper should be completely closed" if the state has no objection [51]. This is defence relevant because it shows that information flows were treated as strategic resources and security threats by rival authorities. It also supports a mechanism of reputational and informational struggle that accompanies territorial conflict.

The logic of securitising mobile intermediaries is explicit in Gertrude Bell's note on Al-Aqilat, which describes them as "professional neutrals" whose movements "should therefore be watched carefully and reported" in wartime[52]. The document's significance is not to accept every intelligence claim it contains as fact about particular individuals. Its evidentiary value is that it identifies a recognised structural role: mobility and route knowledge produces both utility and suspicion. That duality explains why merchant intermediaries become simultaneously necessary for securing movement and targeted for surveillance under war conditions.

Strategic advantage is also produced through counsel and decision shaping by leading Al-Qassim figures. Saudi archival correspondence shows that King Abdulaziz maintained direct strategic communication with Fahad Al-Rashoudi, Ibrahim Al-Rashoudi, and Abdulaziz Al-Hamoud Al-Mushaiqah concerning the conflict with the Ikhwan, explaining military developments, political circumstances, and government strategy.[53] A subsequent letter continues

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brokerage and influence through proximity to the ruler, contributing to strategic mobilisation and political consolidation. See entry no. 23 in Table 4.2.5 (Biographies).

[51] Ottoman Archives, Istanbul Archive Center, DH.KMS 2/2/2 330, coded telegram to the Baghdad Vilayet concerning Al Riyadh newspaper publications praising Ibn Saud and reporting his negotiations with the British, recommending closure of the newspaper, 9 March 1330 (1912).

[52] Saudi Archives, King Abdulaziz Foundation (Darah), memorandum by Gertrude Bell, "Note on the Aqail", listing prominent Al-Aqilat families and their locations and noting they are Najdi but not a single tribe or part of a tribal organisation, 20 December 1917, no. 1524 (R/15/1/480).

[53] Saudi Archive, Dictionary of Buraydah Families (2010), correspondence from Saud bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud (King Saud) to Abdulaziz Al-Hamoud Al-Mushaiqah explaining the situation with the Ikhwan and the suppression of the rebellion, dated 20/10/1347 AH (01/04/1929), p. 189, P20.

this pattern by providing a detailed explanation of the suppression of the Ikhwan rebellion and the rationale behind state actions, demonstrating that these figures remained trusted recipients of politically sensitive communications.[54] These records support a defensible analytical claim: military contribution includes not only material supply and manpower but also strategic judgement and counsel embedded in local knowledge of alliances, timing, and risk. In epistemic community terms, these are moments where knowledge-bearing elites influence policy and operational direction through trusted advisory roles.

Finally, the frontier environment in which these intelligence practices operated is visible in French material that claims an emir in Al-Jawf sent threatening letters to tribal chiefs in Damascus and Transjordan[55]. This functions as contextual evidence of coercive signalling and frontier authority practices, clarifying why intelligence, channel control, and intermediary brokerage were continuously relevant to defence ordering.

5.1.2.3 Mobilisation, suppression of rebellion, and border defence pressures

A third layer of state defence is the capacity to mobilise, sustain loyalty, suppress rebellion, and manage border escalation. British reporting offers an early depiction of mobilisation and extraction dynamics. A translated account attributes to Ibn Saud a policy of "summoning his warriors two or three times a year," and of demanding "men" from one place and "money" from another[56]. This evidence is not used to glorify or condemn the practice. It is used to demonstrate the structural logic of mobilisation: military capacity was repeatedly assembled through recurring

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[54] Saudi Archive, Dictionary of Buraydah Families (2010), correspondence from King Abdulaziz to Fahad, Ibrahim Al-Rashoudi, and Abdulaziz Al-Hamoud Al- Mushaiqah explaining the situation with the Ikhwan, dated 1348 AH (1929), p. 430, P7.

[55] French Archives (1999), King Abd Al-Aziz Al Saud: His Life and Reign in Foreign Documents, E-Lev. 18-40/Arab Hedj./24 (7), "Wahhabism and its Neighbors 2", French High Commission Intelligence (Beirut) and High Command of the Army of the Levant, 31 August 1922, p. 371.

[56] British Archives (1996), The Arabian Peninsula in British Archives (Najd and Hejaz), Parts 1–7. London: Dar Al Saqi. (1996) FO 371/3054 (174974), T.E. Lawrence interview with Sharif Husayn, 28 July 1917, p. 287 (Arabic), P3.

calls on settlements whose wealth and manpower could be activated, which is a core state defence mechanism in the pre bureaucratic phase of consolidation.

Mobilisation also appears as voluntary commitment by Al-Qassim elites. A British record that[57] the people of Qassim repelled Ibn Rashid's advance while Ibn Saud was engaged in Al-Ahsa, illustrating their independent mobilisation in support of his cause. The significance of this record is that it links mobilisation to demonstrated military commitment rather than rhetorical declarations alone. It evidences a defence-oriented coalition in which Qassim elites actively supported Ibn Saud during his absence by resisting Ibn Rashid's advance. This reinforces the broader argument that Al-Aqilat and allied Qassim elites functioned as stabilising supporters whose contribution extended beyond financial assistance to practical military support when required.

The capacity to plan operations and assemble forces across multiple theatres is visible in British intelligence reporting. A report states that Ibn Saud was making preparations for "an action of a rather extensive nature" directed against Transjordan, and it describes mobilisation in Hail[58] under "30 corps of 500 men each," alongside arrangements in Damascus to launch attacks from multiple directions[59]. The analytical use of this archive is limited to what it records: planning, mobilisation, and coordination across spaces. It evidences that operational capacity was conceived as multi node and trans regional, relying on agents and arrangements beyond Najd itself.

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[57] British Archives (1996), The Arabian Peninsula in British Archives (Najd and Hejaz), Parts 1–7. London: Dar Al Saqi. FO 371/2479 (184438), Holland (Basra) to Chief of General Staff (Simla), 2 January 1915, p. 381 (Arabic), P1.
[58] Hail is a city in Saudi Arabia, whereas previously it was considered the capital of Bin Rashid State.
[59] British Archives (1996), The Arabian Peninsula in British Archives (Najd and Hejaz), Parts 1–7. London: Dar Al Saqi. FO 371/8949 (E 10504) No. CX/132051, confidential intelligence report to Mr. Clausen, 25 October 1923, p. 346 (Arabic), P7.

The late 1920s rebellion provides a concentrated set of mobilisation pressures and external constraint. A French intelligence bulletin reports that attacks on Kuwait, Iraq, and Transjordan were framed as being launched "in a spirit of rebellion," provides large fighter estimates for rebel leaders, and states that Ibn Saud ordered "the mobilization of all the Najdi tribes that still support him" [60]. In the same report, external pressure is linked to trade and corridor life, stating that the British reportedly asked Iraqis and Kuwaitis to cut ties with Wahhabi traders, and that Ibn Saud "ordered his men to trade with incoming caravans only with his special permission". The defence implication is direct: rebellion and border raids produce coercive constraint not only on battle lines but on commerce, mobility, and the political economy of loyalty.

Mobilisation from Al-Qassim is explicitly recorded in a French translation of an RAF bulletin stating that Ibn Saud "gathered three banner from people of Al-Qassim," in the context of fears about rebels near Kuwait and offensive planning[61]. The document does not name Al-Aqilat. Its correct analytical use is therefore to demonstrate Al-Qassim mobilisation as a defence resource pool, which aligns with the thesis membership logic that situates Al-Aqilat within Al-Qassim networks without asserting that every Al-Qassim mobilised actor is necessarily Al-Aqilat.

Coalition mobilisation and external alignment building is visible through the Damascus consular channel. A French information bulletin states that Yassin Al-Rawaf,[62] consul in Damascus, went to Nuri Al-Shaalan and conveyed that Ibn Saud wanted the Rulah tribes to participate in suppressing rebellion in Najd, clarifying that it did not take the character of an

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[60] French Archives (1999), King Abd Al-Aziz Al Saud: His Life and Reign in Foreign Documents, S.L./1044 (7), Levant Intelligence Service bulletin (French High Commission, Beirut), "Wahhabi crisis in Najd" report, 3 March 1928, p. 408.

[61] French Archives (1999), King Abd Al-Aziz Al Saud: His Life and Reign in Foreign Documents, S.L./1044 (7), French translation of RAF India (Iraq) Information Bulletin No. 43, extract nos. 196–197, 25 October 1929, p. 695.

[62] Yassin Ibrahim Al-Rawaf, prominent Buraydah merchant and Saudi envoy to Syria and Lebanon, known for his extensive commercial and political networks across Iraq and the Levant, which positioned him as a representative of Saudi interests during the early consolidation period. See Table 4.5.2 entry no. 2

ultimatum[63]. This is a key defence mechanism: when rebellion threatens internal coherence, suppression is not only a military act but a coalition building process requiring credible intermediaries who can communicate requests in forms acceptable to tribal leadership, manage uncertainty, and prevent rival alignment.

Armed participation is recorded in earlier French reporting that notes an expedition including "150 men from Aqeel"[64]. This evidence is used conservatively as documentation of Al-Aqilat labelled armed manpower in regional operations, without assuming it maps neatly onto the specific Al-Aqilat network in every instance.

Internal defence and suppression of armed challengers is directly attributed to named Al-Aqilat actors in later French correspondence. A letter reports that "Ibn Aqeel and his companions attacked" an armed group near Jabal Shar and that Ibn Rafada, his sons, and those with him "were killed"[65]. Separately, a French information note reports that the army led by "Ibn Aqeel and Ibn Zaher" was "equipped with modern weapons" and "stands ready at the border"[66]. These records are valuable because they connect security action and readiness to identifiable persons rather than treating internal defence as an anonymous state function. They also allow the argument to show continuity from mobilisation and coalition building into enforcement and frontier readiness.

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[63] French Archives (1999), King Abd Al-Aziz Al Saud: His Life and Reign in Foreign Documents, Fonds Beyrouth/662 (2), Information Bulletin No. 4 (part 1), French intelligence (Damascus), 7 January 1930, p. 9.
[64] French Archives (1999), King Abd Al Aziz Al Saud: His Life and Reign in Foreign Documents, E Lex. 18-40/Arab Hedj./1 (8), from Coss to the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Report No. 84, 20 August 1918, p. 213.
[65] French Archives (1999), King Abd Al Aziz Al Saud: His Life and Reign in Foreign Documents, Fonds Beyrouth/1045 (4), Prince of Al Wajah City to Mohammed Al Usaimi, French translation of the letter, 7 July 1932, p. 587.
[66] French Archives (1999), King Abd Al Aziz Al Saud: His Life and Reign in Foreign Documents, Fonds Beyrouth/1045 (1), French Consulate General (Jerusalem) to the French High Commissioner (Beirut), Information Note No. 338, 31 August 1932, p. 619.

French archival material also anchors the relationship between Al-Aqilat and Al-Qassim merchant networks and patterns of frontier insecurity and security mobilisation. An article on the situation in the Arabian Peninsula records that a caravan travelling from Buraydah to the Hejaz was attacked by Sheikh Awda al-Atna and his group on 12 October. The report states that two men were killed, including Ali Al-Rashoudi, another Al-Rashoudi was wounded, and camels and money were stolen. It further notes that continuing abuses and the silence of the Transjordanian government compelled King Abdulaziz to send a force against Bani Sakhr. Read in this context, the material indicates that Al-Aqilat and related Al-Qassim merchant networks were not merely financiers or commercial intermediaries, but actors whose exposure to frontier violence shaped security concerns and mobilisation decisions during the consolidation phase.[67] Used strictly as letter based evidence, it supports the claim that Al-Qassim figures were not merely financiers or intermediaries but also participants whose death and wartime status were recorded as politically meaningful within the local memory of the consolidation phase.

Border and corridor insecurity remains an enabling context for these mobilisation choices. British consular reporting states that a long anticipated attack "has finally materialized," based on news provided by Fawzan.[68] Another British record, addressed to Ibn Saud, reports that raids launched by Al-Duwaish[69] created a "bad impression" and were "harmful to your reputation" and interests, urging reciprocal understanding with Iraq[70]. Within Najd, a letter reports communication of a ban on trading in Kuwait and warns that whoever trades after the ban "does not feel safe with

[67] French Archives (1999), King Abd Al-Aziz Al Saud: His Life and Reign in Foreign Documents, PAAP026 Bonin/29 (2), article entitled "The Situation in the Arabian Peninsula" by Al-Munawar Kalal, 31 March 1928, p. 441.
[68] British Archives (1996), The Arabian Peninsula in British Archives (Najd and Hejaz), Parts 1 - 7. London: Dar Al Saqi. FO 371/8945 (E 6749), British Consul in Damascus report, dated 09/06/1923, p. 237 (Arabic), P7
[69] Ikhwan leader Faisal Al Duwaish, (1882-1931).
[70] British Archives (1996) The Arabian Peninsula in British Archives (Najd and Hejaz), Parts 1 - 7. London: Dar Al Saqi. FO 371/10007, Amin Al Rayhani (Beirut) to Ibn Saud, 26 May 1924, p. 476 (Arabic), P7.

his money or himself"[71]. These documents together show that mobilisation and defence policy were constrained by reputational cost, external diplomatic consequences, and coercive regulation of mobility and commerce.

Finally, French consular reporting from Baghdad states that 130 men from Mutayr "opened fire on British aircraft" and that the aircraft responded "by dropping bombs," while also describing Iraqi troop movement and British armoured cars[72]. This is used only as contextual evidence of border escalation and external retaliation risk. A press based French item reporting that Faisal Al-Duwaish was killed is kept as minor corroboration only and is not used as primary proof of any operational claim[73]. Together, these materials illustrate that state defence in the late 1920s unfolded under simultaneous internal rebellion and external military pressure, reinforcing why stabilising intermediaries, coalition management, and disciplined mobilisation were necessary for consolidation rather than optional.

5.1.2.4 Analytical synthesis and identifiable mechanisms

This section's evidence can be read through three connected lenses, epistemic community dynamics, social network mechanisms, and historical institutional patterns. The purpose of this alignment is to show how the documentary record of defence, logistics, intelligence, and mobilisation makes the underlying mechanisms visible in practice.

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[71] Saudi Archives, King Abdulaziz Foundation (Darah), Mohammed Abdulaziz Al-Ajaji and his brothers to Yousef Abdulrahman Fakhro (Famous Bahraini Trader), letter prohibiting trade with Kuwait, 11 Ramadan 1331 AH (14 August 1913), no. 1267.

[72] French Archives (1999), King Abd Al Aziz Al Saud: His Life and Reign in Foreign Documents, E-Lev. 18- 40/Arab Hedj./31 (1), Roger Maigret (French Consul, Baghdad) to the French Foreign Minister, Letter No. 1, 5 January 1929, p. 569.

[73] French Archives (1999), King Abd Al Aziz Al Saud: His Life and Reign in Foreign Documents, S.L./1044 (1), Extract No. 215, Information Bulletin No. 149 (French High Commission, Beirut), 16 April 1929, p. 604.

Epistemic community mechanisms are visible where defence outcomes depend on specialised knowledge and trusted judgement rather than formal rank alone. The British record of Mansour bin Rumaih's mission shows intelligence and liaison work executed through movement, contact building, and message transmission across multiple localities. What matters theoretically is that the effectiveness of such missions rests on situated knowledge: familiarity with tribal leadership, route conditions, and the social protocols that allow information to be gathered and conveyed without triggering immediate resistance. The French record of a procurement attempt involving contacts "to purchase aircraft" [74]further illustrates how knowledge of external systems and consular environments can be converted into a defence capability opportunity. The document does not prove purchase completion, but it does show that defence planning extended into non local procurement spaces where only actors with the relevant access and knowledge could advance negotiations.

The epistemic dimension is also visible in counsel and decision shaping during high risk periods. Saudi archives records describing Fahad Al-Rashoudi's advice after Jarab and before Al-Sabla indicate that strategic direction was influenced through trusted advisory roles. In epistemic community terms, the core point is that such advice reflects more than loyalty. It reflects a claim to practical authority based on experience, information access, and reputation. The repeated pattern across these documents suggests that defence planning relied on a distributed knowledge environment in which certain commercial elites and intermediaries were treated as credible sources of judgement and situational assessment.

Social network mechanisms are visible in how defence capacity is assembled through brokerage rather than through a single hierarchical chain. The French record describing Yassin Al-

[74] French Archives (1999), King Abd Al Aziz Al Saud: His Life and Reign in Foreign Documents, Fonds Beyrouth/1043 (1), Letter No. 440/3 S.R., Chef de Bataillon Couvert (Aleppo Delegation) to the Chief of the French Army Intelligence Service in the Levant, 16 April 1924, p. 435.

Rawaf's approach to Nuri Al-Shaalan to secure Rulah participation in suppressing rebellion demonstrates bridging across distinct social and political clusters. The intermediary operates between the Najdi centre and a tribal leadership node outside it, translating a request into a form intended to secure cooperation rather than trigger confrontation. This is brokerage as a defence mechanism: the ability to connect groups, reduce uncertainty, and coordinate action when coercion alone is costly or impractical.

Network structure is also visible in the movement of material and in corridor governance under threat. The French telegram reporting a convoy of Al-Aqilat men delivering rifles and ammunition through Wadi Al-Sarhan shows the physical layer of the network: routes and convoys that can move weapons across space. The Ottoman petition by Al-Aqilat merchants describing raids and insecurity, together with the later French reporting of attacks on caravans and responses, shows that corridors are not neutral geography. They are contested arenas where networked mobility enables defence supply, but also creates persistent vulnerabilities that must be managed. In social network terms, the defence system depends on maintaining bridging ties across dangerous spaces, and on the capacity of intermediaries to sustain flows despite predation risks.

Historical institutional mechanisms are visible where defence practices become routinised, formalised, and durable rather than remaining ad hoc responses to crises. The appointment of Abdullah bin Suleiman Al-Issa as head of the intelligence department in the capital indicates that intelligence work was not only an informal merchant agent practice, but was absorbed into formal state roles. The Saudi police telegram stating that "no incidents have occurred in the past twenty-four hours" provides evidence of routine reporting and administrative monitoring as a stabilising institutional practice. These documents support an institutional interpretation in which early reliance on mobile networks and personal trust gradually becomes layered with offices, reporting routines, and assigned responsibilities.

Institutional constraint and competing governance frameworks also appear directly in the record. Regarding Al-Riyadh newspaper and the proposed closure, coded ottoman document

demonstrates that information and reputation were treated as strategic security assets by rival authorities, not as neutral public discourse. This helps explain why defence capacity included information management and why mobile intermediaries could be securitised under wartime conditions. The Bell's note describing Al-Aqilat mobility as something that "should therefore be watched carefully" shows the same institutional logic from another angle: the very network features that enable trade and communication can also trigger surveillance and restriction when threat perception rises. In historical institutionalist terms, this reflects how institutional responses are shaped by path dependent threat frames, where mobility becomes alternately an asset or a risk depending on the governing authority's security priorities.

Finally, the late 1920s crisis documents show how these mechanisms interact under acute pressure. French intelligence reporting on mobilisation orders and concentration of forces, together with Al-Qassim mobilisation and border escalation evidence, shows a defence environment in which rebellion and cross border retaliation risks create simultaneous demands for coercive capacity, coalition management, and corridor control. The network and epistemic mechanisms above explain how mobilisation could be assembled in such conditions, while institutionalisation explains how the state could sustain these pressures through offices, routines, and leadership assignments. The combined reading is that Al-Aqilat related actors contributed to defence not as a separate armed organisation, but as intermediaries whose knowledge, brokerage position, and institutional embedding supported the assembly and endurance of Ibn Saud's defence capacity during consolidation and rebellion management.

Taken together, the section evidences that military contributions and state defence capacity were assembled through the interaction of (1) material mobility and provisioning, (2) intelligence production and channel control, and (3) coalition mobilisation and enforcement. Within that configuration, Al-Aqilat appears not as a separate coercive organisation but as knowledge bearing intermediaries whose networks were repeatedly utilised, institutionalised, and regulated in order to sustain Ibn Saud's defence posture and consolidation trajectory.

The defence practices traced above did not operate in isolation. Military readiness, intelligence, and logistical mobilisation were repeatedly activated in response to conflicts that were as much political and social as they were operational. In several episodes, the maintenance of order depended not only on coercive capacity but also on the ability to contain disputes, negotiate access, and prevent localised tensions from escalating into wider instability across Najd and its borderlands. The next section therefore examines conflict mediation and dispute management as a complementary stabilising function, focusing on how intermediaries and trusted figures helped manage crises, broker settlements, and reduce the destabilising effects of rebellion, intergroup tensions, and cross-border incidents.

5.1.3 Strategic conflict mediation and dispute management

This section examines conflict mediation and dispute management as stabilising practices that operate alongside coercive capacity. Across the archival base, disputes emerge in three recurrent arenas. First, interauthority conflicts where borders, raids, compensation, and extradition require negotiated closure. Second, governance disputes around the status and conduct of representatives, the handling of subjects' claims, and the credibility of documentary authority across mandate jurisdictions. Third, corridor justice and intertribal mediation, where caravan seizures, tributes, and territorial contestation are managed through brokerage, reassurance, and conditional settlements. Throughout, the documents show that the durability of Ibn Saud's authority depended not only on imposing outcomes, but on managing the terms through which disputes were contained, repaired, and converted into workable relations.

5.1.3.1 Interstate and interauthority dispute management

A core pattern in the record is the use of conferences, apologies, restitution, compensation, and extradition to end disputes that otherwise risked regional escalation. A French telegram reports a conference concerned with border demarcation between Iraq and Najd, between the Hejaz and eastern Jordan, and with disputes involving Kuwait, with attendance by multiple governmental

representatives and senior tribal leaders[75]. The key point for conflict management is not the technicality of border lines alone, but the stated objective that demarcation would "end of the conflicts between the Arab rulers" through a convened and represented process.

A second French report describes improvement in relations between Najd and Kuwait after Ibn Saud "apologised in a letter" for attacks by Wahhabi tribes and "ordered the return of looted funds to their owners in Kuwait" [76]. This provides a clear mediation sequence: acknowledgement of harm, a symbolic repair act, and restitution. It is analytically significant because it shows dispute settlement operating through reputational repair and corrective redistribution, rather than through denial or continued coercion.

British correspondence reinforces the same settlement logic by explicitly tying future relations to compensation. A British communication states that until "full and complete compensation has been made" for the Ikhwan's raid on Iraq, relations would not be placed "on a permanent basis"[77]. This is a strong documentary expression of conditional normalisation, where the closure of a security dispute is converted into a measurable requirement.

A separate British letter frames raids as strategically damaging and insists on containment through reciprocal understanding, stating that raids are "harmful to your reputation" and that "a reciprocal understanding with Iraq is the preferred policy"[78]. This record matters for mediation

[75] French Archives (1999), King Abd Al Aziz Al Saud: His Life and Reign in Foreign Documents, E-Lev. 18-40/Arab Hedj./28 (3), letter No. 28 from Henri Gaillard (French Minister in Cairo) to the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 12 February 1924, p. 422.
[76] French Archives (1999), King Abd Al Aziz Al Saud: His Life and Reign in Foreign Documents, S.L./1044 (5), informant report on Britain Abdulaziz dispute over Bahrain and Najd Kuwait relations, 26 July 1924, p. 447.
[77] British Archives (1996) The Arabian Peninsula in British Archives (Najd and Hejaz), Parts 1 - 7. London: Dar Al Saqi. FO 371/10005, British Political Resident (Persian Gulf) to Sultan of Najd and its dependencies, 9 August 1924, p. 490 (Arabic), P7.
[78] British Archives (1996) The Arabian Peninsula in British Archives (Najd and Hejaz), Parts 1 - 7. London: Dar Al Saqi. FO 371/10007, Amin Al Rayhani (Beirut) to Ibn Saud, 26 May 1924, p. 476 (Arabic), P7.

because it makes reputational cost and interstate accommodation part of the governing calculus that stabilises relations. A related British item proposes economic pressure as a means to prevent incursions[79], and another notes how resource pressures and political bargaining intersect during this period[80]. These are used as supporting references because they show that dispute management was pursued through both negotiated norms and coercive constraint.

Evidence of dispute closure also appears in a French official communication describing extradition. It states that Faisal Al-Duwaish and supporters entered neighbouring territories, that extradition was requested, and that they were "handed over" after "negotiations between his government and the governments of neighboring countries"[81]. The analytical implication is that even in high-salience security conflicts, settlement mechanisms depended on cross-government negotiation and agreed transfer procedures, not unilateral action alone.

This negotiated logic also extended beyond episodic incidents into formal interstate boundary management. Finally, dispute management also appears in interpersonal and symbolic repair practices in high-level correspondence. A letter attributed to Sharif Hussein states that after an episode of disturbance, Ibn Saud "made satisfaction, repented and forgave enough to judge the two cases"[82]. This is not treated as a normative endorsement of the actors involved. It is treated as documentary evidence that satisfaction and repentance language functioned as a recognised

[79] British Archives (1996) The Arabian Peninsula in British Archives (Najd and Hejaz), Parts 1 - 7. London: Dar Al Saqi. FO 371/9998 (E 5196/4/91), Ministry of India to Minister of Colonies, 14 June 1924, p. 479 (Arabic), P7.
[80] British Archives (1996) The Arabian Peninsula in British Archives (Najd and Hejaz), Parts 1 - 7. London: Dar Al Saqi. FO 371/7711 (E 2566), Imam Ibn Saud to British High Commissioner (Iraq), 21 June 1921, p. 132 (Arabic), P5.
[81] French Archives (1999), King Abd Al Aziz Al Saud: His Life and Reign in Foreign Documents, E-Lev. 18- 40/Arab Hedj./54 (2), Jacques Roger Maigret (French Chargé d'affaires, Jeddah) to the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, Letter No. 8, official communication (French translation), 30 January 1930, p. 40.
[82] British Archives (1996) The Arabian Peninsula in British Archives (Najd and Hejaz), Parts 1 - 7. London: Dar Al Saqi. FO 371/4144 (1181), Sharif Husayn to British agent (Jeddah), 2 December 1918, p. 629 (Arabic), P3.

closure device within the moral economy of regional politics, making reconciliation legible to broader audiences.

5.1.3.2 Dispute governance for Najdi subjects, representation constraints, and documentary authority

A second pattern centres on how disputes were processed through representation, legal channels, and documentary authority across mandate space. Several French documents show routine claims-making that seeks settlement through investigation and referral rather than informal retaliation. The Head of State of Syria transmitted a request submitted by Ibn Saud's representative in Damascus concerning compensation for Abdullah Al-Fawzan, who was robbed of "385 Ottoman gold liras" near Baalbek, noting that the representative urged that the request be forwarded to Beirut[83]. A separate handwritten letter from the Damascus representative presents a claim that "1600 pounds of English gold" were stolen from a Najdi notable, and states that an investigation confirmed the validity of the claim, requesting the matter be brought to the competent authority for resolution[84]. These records show dispute management as procedural justice: investigation, validation, and escalation to competent authority are used to pursue closure.

Dispute governance also operates within the Najdi diaspora and its own representative institutions. French correspondence records complaints about interference by Najdis residing in Damascus with local authorities, and notes cases of citizens arriving without power of attorney, alongside tensions over who is entitled to intervene in consular, administrative, and judicial

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[83] French Archives (1999), King Abd Al Aziz Al Saud: His Life and Reign in Foreign Documents, Fonds Beyrouth/1043 (1), Subhi Barakat Head of State of Syria, to the French High Commissioner in Beirut (via Damascus delegate), Letter No. 666/3508, 31 March 1925, p. 598.

[84] French Archives (1999), King Abd Al Aziz Al Saud: His Life and Reign in Foreign Documents, Fonds Beyrouth/1024 (2), Suleiman bin Ali Al-Mushaiqah to the French High Commissioner in Damascus, handwritten letter, 28 August 1925, p. 647.

matters[85]. A follow-up draft reports that the Hejaz government had learned of the actions of Yassin Al-Rawaf, that he had been summoned for this reason, and "will not return to work in Syria"[86]. Analytically, these documents show that dispute management was not only external. It included internal governance corrections where representatives could be restrained or removed when their interventions created conflict, blocked legal recourse, or generated administrative backlash.

The status of representation itself is also a dispute domain shaped by foreign powers' attempts to mediate or capture influence. A French ministerial letter instructs the High Commissioner not to allow the British Consul in Damascus to interfere in the affairs of Najdi authority, and requests improving relations with the Najdi representative and facilitating his matters so that he does not need British assistance[87]. This is a governance dispute at the inter-consular level: it shows how mandate authorities negotiated the boundary between facilitating Najdi representation and resisting rival intermediary claims. Related French items used as supporting references show continued reputational discipline and pressure regarding representative conduct [88], and a cluster of records[89] on intercepted letters and the selection of

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[85] French Archives (1999), King Abd Al Aziz Al Saud: His Life and Reign in Foreign Documents, LECOFJ/B/3 (3), French Foreign Minister to Ibrahim Dapoui (Deputy French Consulate, Jeddah), Letter No. 27, 22 December 1927, p. 371.

[86] French Archives (1999), King Abd Al Aziz Al Saud: His Life and Reign in Foreign Documents, LECOFJ/B/3 (1), French Consulate Agent (Jeddah) to the French Foreign Minister, handwritten letter draft no. 3, 8 January 1928, p. 381.

[87] French Archives (1999), King Abd Al Aziz Al Saud: His Life and Reign in Foreign Documents, Fonds Beyrouth/662 (3), Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of France to Sarrail (French High Commissioner in Beirut), Letter No. 193, 4 April 1925, p. 605.

[88] French Archives (1999), King Abd Al Aziz Al Saud: His Life and Reign in Foreign Documents, E Lev. 18-40/Arab Hedj./28 (2), Sarrail (French High Commissioner in Beirut) to the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, Letter No. KD/297, 15 May 1925, p. 619; French Archives (1999), King Abd Al Aziz Al Saud: His Life and Reign in Foreign Documents, Fonds Beyrouth/662 (1), Acting Representative of the French High Commissioner in Damascus to the French High Commissioner in Beirut, Secret letter No. 1583/D.D/3, 23 June 1925, p. 633.

[89] French Archives (1999), King Abd Al Aziz Al Saud: His Life and Reign in Foreign Documents, Fonds Beyrouth/1043 (3**)**, 26/02/1925, Suleiman Al-Mushaiqah (rep. of Abdulaziz Al -Saud in Damascus) → French High Commissioner (Beirut)**,** p. 575; Fonds Beyrouth/1043 (2), 03/03/1925, French intelligence service (Damascus) → French High Commissioner (Beirut) & delegate (Damascus) Information Bulletin No.30**,** p. 580; Fonds Beyrouth/662

trusted channels. These are cited as supporting references because the substantive incident has already been treated as a concentrated micro-case elsewhere.

British material documents the same governance problem from another angle: the risk that intermediaries claim authority and generate entanglements that then require formal disavowal and legitimacy withdrawal. A French annex discusses evidence that Muhammad Al-Usaimi was involved in plots against French authorities while pretending to be the authorised delegate carrying out instructions. It then records that Ibn Saud "clearly denied that he had appointed Al-Usaimi as his representative," acknowledges correspondence, but states he "has lost confidence in Al-Usaimi" and can no longer give him a position after discovering his character[90]. This is a direct statement of dispute governance through de-authorisation: the centre stabilises relations by withdrawing legitimacy from an intermediary whose conduct creates external risk.

A later British report describes how Sheikh Suleiman's drafted letter was treated as "a disguise" intended to mislead the consulate into believing he had faithfully carried out a suggestion, implying strategic document management under suspicion [91]. Supporting British items caution that agents may allow enthusiasm to exceed prudence[92] and that channel strategy may shift

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(1), Memo 996/K4, 14/03/1925, Dentz (Head, French intelligence, Beirut) → Head, French intelligence (Damascus) (via delegate), p. 587; Fonds Beyrouth/662 (2), Memo 995/K4, 14/03/1925, Dentz (Head, French intelligence, Beirut) → (recipient not stated in excerpt), p. 587; Fonds Beyrouth/662 (1), Secret letter 738/D.D/3, 28/03/1925, Delegate of French High Commissioner (Damascus) → French High Commissioner (Beirut), p. 598.

[90] French Archives (1999), King Abd Al-Aziz Al Saud: His Life and Reign in Foreign Documents, Fonds Beyrouth/662 (2), confidential letter No. 1091/D.D/3, from the French High Commissioner in Damascus to the French High Commissioner in Beirut regarding the nomination of Salah Ali Al-Baras to deliver a verbal message to King Abdulaziz and the assessment of Suleiman Al-Mushaiqah and Muhammad Al-Usaimi, 10 May 1925, p. 614.

[91] British Archives (1996), The Arabian Peninsula in British Archives (Najd and Hejaz), Parts 1–7 (London: Dar Al Saqi; FO 371/10016 (E 9975), British Consul in Damascus to the Foreign Office (London), Report, 27 Oct 1924, p. 592 (Arabic), P7.

[92] British Archives (1996), The Arabian Peninsula in British Archives (Najd and Hejaz), Parts 1–7 (London: Dar Al Saqi; FO 371/8936 (E 1330), British High Commissioner in Iraq to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Letter, 16 Jan 1923, p. 115 (Arabic), P7.

away from an official agent to a special messenger[93]. Together, these sources show that dispute management depended on credibility control, calibrated communication, and the management of how authority is represented through texts, messengers, and claimed mandates.

Documentary authority disputes also appear directly in French intelligence reporting. A secret message recounts signed blank papers, inability to account for their use, later allegations of forgery, and the political anxiety this created around Al-Jawf [94]. This is evidence of how documentary instruments become conflict triggers: signatures, papers, and claims to authority can be mobilised to reshape sovereignty disputes, requiring counterclaims and careful narrative management.

Saudi sources add a domestic layer of grievance submission and authority recalibration. A complaint from Buraydah notables states that the emir prevented Bedouins from buying dates, harming date palm owners, and the complaint is presented as a corrective appeal to central authority[95]. A second letter by Fahad Al-Ali Al-Rashoudi and Abdulaziz Al-Hamoud Al-Mushaiqah criticises the emir's restrictive practices, including preventing people from going to Kuwait, and links such practices to harm to livelihoods and regional interests [96]. These documents evidence dispute governance as institutional feedback: local elites articulate harm and press for

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[93] British Archives (1996), The Arabian Peninsula in British Archives (Najd and Hejaz), Parts 1–7 (London: Dar Al Saqi; FO 371/10005 (E 901), British Consul in Damascus to the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, letter ("French and Ibn Saud"), 9 Jan 1924, p. 400 (Arabic), P7.

[94] French Archives (1999), King Abd Al-Aziz Al Saud: His Life and Reign in Foreign Documents, Fonds Beyrouth/662 (3), secret message No. 232/K.3 from Terrier of the East Intelligence Service in Beirut to Mortier, Director of the East Intelligence Agency, concerning Nuri Al-Shaalan, Muhammad Al-Usaimi, and reports published in the Damascus newspaper Al-Umran, 27 January 1930, p. 36.

[95] Saudi Archives, Dictionary of Buraydah Families (2010), complaint letter from Buraydah notables (Ibrahim Al-Rabadi, Fahad Al-Rashoudi, Sulaiman bin Issa, Abdulaziz bin Mushaiqah, Mansour Al-Sharida, Abdulkarim Al-Nasser bin Jarboua) to King Abdulaziz about Emir Fahad bin Muammar (incl. restricting Bedouin purchase of Qassim dates), 25/11/1333 AH (04/10/1915), p. 320 (P3).

[96] Saudi Archives, Dictionary of Buraydah Families (2010), Fahad Al-Ali Al-Rashoudi and Abdulaziz Al-Hamoud Al- Mushaiqah to King Abdulaziz, letter complaining about Emir Fahad bin Muammar's practices (including preventing people from going to Kuwait), 22/11/1337 H (19/08/1919), p. 192 (P20).

recalibration of local governance practices to prevent economic and political instability. Supporting Saudi item specify the mechanics of representative governance: first, the king authorises designated agents to act as the official interface for subjects' disputes and paperwork abroad, centralising cross-border case handling[97], Second, French correspondence shows that when a representative becomes contested (through overreach, misconduct, or foreign complaints), representation turns into a reputational liability that can trigger pressure for replacement.[98], and Third, letters/telegrams indicate that access to audiences was managed through intermediaries who controlled requests, timing, and permissions, functioning as contact gatekeepers within the wider network[99].

Ottoman documents reinforce that documentary authority and procedural compliance were used to manage potential disputes before they escalated. A letter from central administration instructs Baghdad authorities on requirements for licensing a newspaper, including appointing a responsible director and conducting investigations, as a condition for issuance[100]. Supporting Ottoman items record verification processes and pledges to comply with publication systems and accept court decisions[101]. A coded message recommending closure of Al-Riyadh newspaper due to its content shows the coercive end of information governance, where censorship is used as a

[97] Saudi Archive, Dictionary of Buraydah Families (2010), Abdulaziz bin Abdul Rahman Al-Faisal (King Abdulaziz) to the people of Buraydah, letter, 29/11/1340 AH (1921), p. 152 (P20).
[98] French Archives (1999), King Abd Al-Aziz Al Saud: His Life and Reign in Foreign Documents, Fonds Beyrouth/662 (2), letter No. KD/297 from the French High Commissioner in Beirut to the French Minister of Foreign Affairs reporting concerns over Suleiman Al-Mushaiqah's conduct and proposing his replacement as Abdulaziz Al Saud's representative, 15 May 1925, p. 619.
[99] Saudi Archives, King Abdulaziz Foundation (Darah), Fawzan Al-Sabiq to Habib Lutfallah, letter (no objection to meeting King Abdulaziz), 22/12/1350 AH (28 April 1932), No. 6629.
[100] Ottoman Archives, DH.MUI.1/47 (1), Grand Vizier's Office (Al-Maktobi) to Baghdad Vilayet, on Jarallah al-Dakhil's request to issue the newspaper al-Riyadh under the new publications regulations, 7 Sha'ban 1327 AH (1909)
[101] Ottoman Archives, Istanbul Archive Center, DH.MUI.1/47 (2-1), [sender not stated in archive] to His Excellency the Governor's Office, on implementing the 1909 Publications Law and Interior Ministry circular (No. 178) setting eligibility/conditions for licensing a newspaper, 1909.

conflict containment practice[102]. This is treated as supporting reference only here, because information control has already been evidenced in the prior section and the purpose in 5.1.3 is to show the continuity of documentary governance as a dispute management tool.

5.1.3.3 Mediation between tribes, rulers, and corridor justice

A third pattern focuses on corridor justice, restitution disputes, and the mediation practices that prevent localised conflicts from escalating into wider instability. British correspondence provides a detailed mediation episode concerning tributes collected from Najdi caravans by the Rula. It records attempts at amicable resolution, a concession by Nuri Al-Shaalan not to collect future tribute, a refusal to refund past collections, and a symbolic act of friendship through a lunch invitation at the Najdi agency, alongside the expectation that settlement must be referred to the centre for acceptance[103]. This is strong evidence of a layered dispute mechanism: negotiation, concession, symbolic repair, and referral to central authority.

The same corridor dispute domain appears in a set of British reports about territorial rights and escalation management with Nuri Al-Shaalan and the Rula. A report notes that Nuri recognised leadership in one letter, while another message declared that unless French authorities kept Nuri away from Qurayyat Al-Malah, an attack would follow, and it records that Fawzan promised to advise acceptance of a proposal rather than deliver a letter directly[104]. A further letter instructs negotiation with the Syrian government "in an official manner," states that Nuri and his tribe are

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[102] Ottoman Archives, Istanbul Archive Center, D.H. KMS 2/2/2 330, code to Baghdad State on Al-Riyadh newspaper (Jarallah al-Dakhil) praising Ibn Saud and reporting on his negotiations with the British, 9 March 1912 (1330).

[103] British Archives (1996), The Arabian Peninsula in British Archives (Najd and Hejaz), Parts 1–7 London: Dar Al Saqi, FO 371/10005, British Consul (Damascus) to Foreign Secretary (London), 8 August 1924, p. 486 (Arabic), P7, enclosing translation of Sulaiman Ali Al-Mashiqah (deputy Najdi representative in Damascus) on Rula tribute collection from Najdi caravans.

[104] British Archives (1996), The Arabian Peninsula in British Archives (Najd and Hejaz), Parts 1–7 Dar Al Saqi;), FO 371/8948 (E 9869/678/91), Palmer (Damascus) to Curzon, report, 19 Sep 1923, p. 310 (Arabic) P7.

"our subjects," sets conditional pathways depending on whether Syria considers him its subject, and requests permission to punish if protection cannot be guaranteed, while advising consultation with the British consul in Damascus on negotiation method[105]. A later report records that Nuri promised to tell Fawzan he never used derogatory words and that his words were "clearly misquoted"[106]. Together, these three records show mediation operating as managed escalation: threatening pathways are articulated, but the preferred route is formal negotiation with neighbouring authority and reputational repair through intermediaries.

French material adds a connected corridor justice dispute around seized camels. A letter excerpt reports concern about camels that Ibn Saud demanded be returned to their owners after tribal factions settled on them, and describes mediation efforts to alleviate pressure on a prince whose orders were not obeyed by tribes[107]. A second French translation states that Prince Abdullah summoned intermediaries, including Al-Usaimi and Al-Bassam, to intervene with Ibn Saud over a caravan seizure involving about "12,000 camels," and notes that an envoy had been sent to demand return[108]. These documents show two mediation mechanisms: the use of elite intermediaries to negotiate restitution and the use of emissaries to demand return while managing a host authority's limited coercive reach.

A later French intelligence bulletin reports that a notable met Ali Al-Rawaf, identified as the representative in Damascus, and that a meeting was announced to be held between Prince Nuri

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[105] British Archives (1996), The Arabian Peninsula in British Archives (Najd and Hejaz), Parts 1–7 London: Dar Al Saqi; FO 371/8948 (E 9869/678/91), British Consulate Damascus, enclosure/translation of a letter from Ibn Saud to Fawzan al-Sabiq, 9 August 1923, p. 313 (Arabic) P7.

[106] British Archives (1996), The Arabian Peninsula in British Archives (Najd and Hejaz), Parts 1–7 London: Dar Al Saqi; FO 371/8945 (E 10414/232/91), British Consulate Damascus, report noting that Nuri al-Shaalan promised to visit Fawzan and stated his words were misquoted, 5 October 1923, p. 323 (Arabic) P7.

[107] French Archives (1999), King Abd Al Aziz Al Saud: His Life and Reign in Foreign Documents, S.-L./1044 (3), Reda al-Rikabi to Muhammad Al-Usaimi, excerpt/translation, 10 March 1927, p. 231.

[108] French Archives (1999), King Abd Al Aziz Al Saud: His Life and Reign in Foreign Documents, S.-L./1044 (3), Reda Al-Rikabi to Aref Idlebi (Damascus), letter translation, 10 March 1927, p. 231.

Al-Shaalan and Ibn Saud after correspondence between the parties[109]. This is direct evidence of brokerage moving a dispute toward face-to-face settlement through scheduled meeting after correspondence and intermediary contact.

Saudi sources show mediation and reconciliation attempts in internal conflict management. A letter describes sending senior scholars and inviting opponents to Sharia compliance, taking pledges, and issuing further invitations before the "sedition was ended," in a message addressed to Al-Rashoudi and Al-Mushaiqah figures[110]. These documents collectively suggest that leading Al-Aqilat figures exercised an informal advisory and consultative role within King Abdulaziz's governing network, although the correspondence demonstrates this through trusted communication and policy dialogue rather than explicit references to formal advisory appointments. These documents provide direct evidence of mediation steps that precede and accompany coercive resolution, and of elite counsel focused on preventing cycles of revenge.

The documentary evidence indicates that leading Al-Aqilat figures occupied a consultative position within the emerging Saudi state. In one letter, King Abdulaziz personally informed Fahad Al-Rashoudi, Ibrahim Al-Rashoudi, and Abdulaziz Al-Hamoud Al-Mushaiqah of the government's strategy for addressing the Ikhwan rebellion, explaining the sequence of negotiations, reconciliation efforts, and the eventual military response[111]. In another document, Fahad Al-Rashoudi and Abdulaziz Al-Hamoud Al- Mushaiqah communicated their concerns

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[109] French Archives (1999), King Abd Al Aziz Al Saud: His Life and Reign in Foreign Documents, Fonds Beyrouth/662 (1), French intelligence service in Syria, excerpt from Handwritten Information Bulletin No. 237 on Nuri al-Shaalan–King Abdulaziz relations, 17 December 1929, p. 724.

[110] Saudi Archives, Dictionary of Buraydah Families (2010), letter from King Abdulaziz to Fahad Al- Ali, Ibrahim Al-Rashoudi, and Abdulaziz Al-Hamoud Al-Mushaiqah explaining the situation with the Ikhwan and inviting them to advise and persuade them to return to obedience, dated 20/10/1347 AH (01/04/1929), Part 7, p. 429.

[111] Saudi Archive, Dictionary of Buraydah Families (2010), letter from King Abdulaziz to Fahad Al-Rashoudi, Ibrahim Al-Rashoudi, and Abdulaziz Al-Hamoud bin Mushaiqah explaining the government's efforts to reconcile with the Ikhwan and the subsequent suppression of the rebellion, dated 20/10/1347 AH (01/04/1929), p. 429, P7.

directly to King Abdulaziz regarding restrictions that were harming regional trade and livelihoods[112]. Considered together, these documents demonstrate that Al-Aqilat leaders were trusted participants[113] in political communication and policy consultation, receiving sensitive state information while also conveying their views directly to the ruler.

Saudi archive material also provides an early example of interauthority mediation that prevents commercial disputes from becoming broader conflict. A British agent's report records that a trade caravan from Al-Qassim was prohibited from entering Mecca by order of the Sharif, and that Sheikh Muhammad bin Isa Al-Khalifa mediated, resulting in permission for the specific caravan to sell goods, framed as a token of respect [114]. This is a clear case of dispute resolution through elite mediation, converting exclusion into conditional access and preventing a trade conflict from hardening into prolonged hostility. Supporting French and British items show that external constraints could shape conflict management choices, including British strictness around weapons and border sensitivity[115], and that organised raids threatened merchants and commercial networks, requiring diplomatic mediation and political intervention to prevent wider conflict.[116].

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[112] Saudi Archive, Dictionary of Buraydah Families (2010), letter from Fahad Al-Ali Al-Rashoudi and Abdulaziz Al-Hamoud Al- Mushaiqah to King Abdulaziz concerning the adverse effects of restrictions on travel and trade between Al-Qassim, Kuwait, and Iraq, dated 22/11/1337 AH (19/08/1919), p. 192, P20.

[113] Saudi Archive, Dictionary of Buraydah Families (2010), letter from King Abdulaziz to Fahad Al-Rashoudi, Ibrahim Al-Rashoudi, and Abdulaziz Al-Hamoud bin Mushaiqah concerning conditions following the Ikhwan conflict, dated 1348 AH (1929), p. 430, P7.

[114] Saudi Archives, King Abdulaziz Foundation (Darah), British agent in Bahrain, report on Sheikh Muhammad bin Isa Al Khalifa's mediation with the Sharif of Mecca to allow an Al-Qassim trade caravan to enter Mecca, 12 January 1913, No. 642 (R/15/2/58),

[115] Saudi Archives, Dictionary of Buraydah Families (2010), Letter from Abdulaziz bin Abdul Rahman Al-Faisal (King Abdulaziz) to Ibrahim Al Muhammad Al-Rabadi and the people of Buraydah, 22 Rajab 1338 AH (11 April 1920), p. 129 P7.

[116] French Archives (1999), King Abd Al-Aziz Al Saud: His Life and Reign in Foreign Documents, S.-L./1044 (3), translation of a letter from Reda Al-Rikabi to Muhammad Al-Usaimi concerning mediation over tribal disputes and the return of camels, enclosed with secret letter 232/E.S./2/C from Pierre Alype to the French High Commissioner in Beirut, 10 March 1927, p. 231; British Archives (1996), The Arabian Peninsula in British Archives (Najd and Hejaz), Parts 1–7. London: Dar Al Saqi. FO 371/9998, telegram summary from Colonel Knox in Kuwait to the Minister of

Ottoman archival records demonstrate that disputes involving individuals associated with Al-Aqilat were addressed through formal legal and administrative procedures rather than informal retaliation alone. An imperial order granted amnesty to the people of Al-Qassim and authorised the release of detained individuals[117]. Subsequent committee correspondence examined whether Muhammad bin Abdullah Al-Hamdan and Muhammad Al-Wasil, identified as a member of Al-Aqilat, fell within the scope of the royal amnesty despite residing in Baghdad[118]. A further encrypted telegram confirmed the outcome of the investigation and ordered their release[119]. Together, these records document a structured process of investigation, administrative review, legal deliberation, and official implementation, demonstrating that dispute management was pursued through institutional channels rather than prolonged cycles of retaliation.

5.1.3.4 Analytical synthesis and identifiable mechanisms

The conflict mediation evidence supports an interpretation in which stabilisation depends on knowledge-bearing intermediaries and networked brokerage, operating under changing institutional constraints. Epistemic community dynamics are visible where dispute closure requires specialised understanding of how to phrase claims, which authorities to petition, and how to combine moral language, legal procedure, and reputational repair into an acceptable settlement strategy. The Ottoman archival records demonstrate that dispute resolution was pursued through established legal and administrative procedures, including royal amnesty, committee review, and

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Colonies concerning Ibn Saud's request for financial assistance, organised raids, and protection of Najdi agents and merchants, 4 April 1924, p. 445 (Arabic), P7.

[117] Ottoman Archives, Istanbul Archive Center, DH.TMIK.M.203/45 (1-1), Ministry of Justice and Denominations to the Ministry of the Interior, royal order concerning the pardon of the people of Al-Qassim and the release of detainees, dated 25 Rabiʿ Al-Akhir 1323 AH (1905).

[118] Ottoman Archives: Istanbul Archive Center, DH.TMIK.M.203/45 (5-2), Committee Draft No. 12300, coded telegram to the Baghdad Vilayet concerning the detention of Muhammad bin Abdullah Al-Hamdan and Muhammad Al-Wasil (Al-Aqilat) and the applicability of the royal amnesty, dated 28 Tammuz 1321 Rumi (1905).

[119] Ottoman Archives: Istanbul Archive Center, DH.TMIK.M.203/45 (6-1), encrypted telegram from the Baghdad Vilayet to the Ministry of the Interior confirming the conclusion of the investigation concerning Muhammad bin Abdullah Al-Hamdan and Muhammad Al-Wasil and ordering their release, dated 4 August 1321 Rumi (1905).

official confirmation of detainees' release. Rather than relying on retaliatory practices, these records illustrate governance through institutional investigation, legal deliberation, and administrative implementation, positioning dispute resolution as a formal function of state authority. French and British claim-processing files similarly show that closure is pursued through investigation, validation, and referral to competent authority rather than purely through force, as in the recovery claims for stolen sums and the demand that cases be brought to competent authority for resolution. These are instances where practical knowledge of procedures becomes a stabilising resource that reduces incentives for retaliatory escalation.

Social network mechanisms appear as the connective tissue of mediation. Disputes are rarely resolved by one actor acting alone; they are moved through intermediaries who bridge otherwise disconnected arenas. The British corridor dispute with the Rula shows layered brokerage linking caravan merchants, tribal leadership, mandate officials, and the Najdi agency, producing a conditional settlement that must still be referred to the centre. The same brokerage logic appears in the Nuri Al-Shaalan dispute, where letters, threats, negotiation instructions, and misquotation repair are channelled through Fawzan and consular relationships, combining deterrence with an insistence on official negotiation. French records of camel restitution disputes similarly show intermediaries such as Al-Usaimi and Al-Bassam being summoned to intervene, illustrating bridging ties between Transjordan authority, merchant networks, and Najdi demands. These cases make brokerage mechanisms empirically visible: intermediaries reduce uncertainty, transmit credible signals, and reframe disputes into negotiable terms.

Historical institutional mechanisms are visible where dispute management shifts from personal negotiation toward routinised offices, procedures, and formal constraints. The French files reveal how representatives and consular channels became governance sites for managing claims and regulating who could intervene in judicial matters, including corrective actions such as summoning a representative and restricting return to Syria when interventions became problematic. British and French materials show institutional boundaries being actively negotiated, such as the French directive to prevent British consular interference and facilitate the Najdi

representative to avoid creating a precedent “without any legal basis”. British evidence of disavowal and legitimacy withdrawal in the Al-Usaimi episode shows institutional learning: when intermediary conduct creates external risk, the centre stabilises relations by clarifying authorisation boundaries and withdrawing confidence. Ottoman publication licensing rules and pledges demonstrate pre-emptive dispute prevention through procedural checks, while censorship recommendations show coercive containment when informational conflict threatens stability.

Taken together, the archives support a coherent argument about dispute management as a stabilising capability: negotiated demarcation and restitution, compensation-linked normalisation, and extradition after intergovernmental bargaining anchor interstate settlement; procedural claim processing and credibility management stabilise representation across mandate space; and corridor justice is maintained through brokerage, symbolic repair, and conditional settlements that prevent local disputes from escalating into persistent instability. In this configuration, Al-Aqilat-linked actors and networks appear not as abstract “influence,” but as concrete intermediaries and petitioning communities through whom disputes are translated into administratively actionable forms, routed to the appropriate authorities, and managed through a combination of negotiation, procedural discipline, and reputational repair.

5.1.4 Trade diplomacy and external commercial governance

Trade diplomacy in this thesis refers to the negotiated management of cross border commerce, meaning the practices through which Ibn Saud’s government pursued commercial access, reduced frictions with external authorities, and protected Najdi subjects while travelling and trading outside Najd. External commercial governance refers to the delegated rules and administrative instruments used to organise that commerce beyond the territorial reach of Najdi enforcement, such as the appointment of agents, the collection of fees and duties, and the management of documentation that enabled mobility. In the archival record used here, these functions appear repeatedly through Najdi merchant intermediaries, including Al-Aqilat, who operated as boundary spanning actors linking Najd’s state building objectives to the commercial

and administrative realities of Damascus, Beirut, Egypt, and other transit corridors. In the archival record examined here, these practices are visible as negotiated brokerage, consular routines, and documentation control across multiple jurisdictions, rather than through fully formalised diplomacy alone.

Al Sharida's mapping of Qusman commercial mobility provides the structural context for why "external commercial governance" becomes an operational state-building function rather than a descriptive label. By the late nineteenth century, Qusman traders were linking Al-Qassim to Damascus, Cairo, Baghdad, Basra, Mecca, Madinah, and Jidda, alongside Indian Ocean nodes such as Karachi, Bombay, and Calcutta (Alsharida, 2023). In such a corridor economy, cross-border commerce depended on regulated passage, credible representation, predictable fiscal routines, and documentation control across overlapping authorities. The archives below show Ibn Saud's external commercial governance working through precisely these mechanisms, repeatedly routed through merchant intermediaries in Levantine administrative space.

5.1.4.1 Merchant intermediaries as diplomatic conduits for market access and protection

A direct indication of Al-Aqilat's role as a conduit for trade diplomacy appears in a French report dated 20 February 1924. The document records that Abdulaziz Al-Saud requested, "through a Najdi merchant resident in Damascus (Al-Aqilat)," that the French Government take measures with local tribes to "ensure the free movement of the Najdi caravans" coming to Damascus "to buy their goods" and to obtain supplies from Damascus[120]. This is not presented as a general aspiration but as a concrete diplomatic request routed through an identifiable merchant intermediary. The

[120] French Archives (1999), King Abd Al-Aziz Al Saud: His Life and Reign in Foreign Documents, E-Lev. 18-40/Arab Hedj./28 (2), "Letter No. 155", signed by Vegan, French High Commissioner in Beirut and High Command of the Army of the Levant, to the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 20 February 1924, p. 425.

core governance objective is explicit: security of movement and the continuity of caravan commerce.

A second French record shows that this brokerage was not limited to movement security, but extended into tariff negotiation and the management of administrative credibility with mandate institutions. In 1925, the Acting Delegate in Damascus reports that "the issue of customs duties was a misunderstanding" triggered by Suleiman Al-Mushaiqah's demand that Najdi merchants pay "a fee of 2.5 % on each head of camels sold," alongside an entry fee "of 50 Qrash."[121] for a claimed statement by the High Commissioner, while the customs inspector emphasised "the keenness of the customs administration to reduce duties for Najdi merchants," and Muhammad Al-Nahhas "expressed his desire to reach a special agreement for trade exchange between Syria and Najd." For instance: fiscal ordering is negotiated through identifiable intermediaries, but its success depends on documentary discipline and representative credibility, because credibility shapes whether interactions move toward stabilising "special agreement" making or toward administrative pushback. The archive even ends by recommending that the Damascus representative be replaced due to "the incompetence and dishonesty of Suleiman Al-Mushaiqah," showing that external commercial governance was continuously judged through competence signals, not only through political alignment.

A complementary British document frames these same cross border relations as a rights protection issue generated by commerce. It states that relations with the government of Damascus relate to "economic links resulting from commercial transactions" between Al-Qassim inhabitants and the Syrian provinces, specifically "to protect the lives and property of our subjects and preserve

[121] French Archives (1999), King Abd Al-Aziz Al Saud: His Life and Reign in Foreign Documents, Fonds Beyrouth/1043 (4), "Letter No. 1331/SP", Acting Delegate of the French High Commissioner in Damascus to the French High Commissioner in Beirut, 13 July 1925, p. 638.

their rights during their travels between the two countries and their stay in the Syrian provinces"[122]. Read together, the French and British records converge on a shared problem definition: commerce produces vulnerabilities outside Najd, and these vulnerabilities require diplomatic management rather than purely internal enforcement.

The same logic appears in earlier regional mediation over access to the Hijazi market. A British report dated 1913 describes a "small caravan of Al-Qassim people" carrying cargo "for sale in Mecca" who were "prohibited to enter Mecca" by the Sharif's orders[123]. The account then records intervention that produced a limited permission for the caravan to sell its goods, despite the Sharif's grievance that "they make agreements and then violate them". Even though this item does not name Al-Aqilat, it documents the recurrent structure within which Najdi commercial actors faced externally imposed constraints and required negotiated access through intermediaries.

5.1.4.2 Delegated agency as an external governance architecture

A key feature of external commercial governance is the formal appointment of agents who are authorised to represent Najdi interests and to administer fees and procedures abroad. A Saudi record dated 1928 states, "we have assigned Yassin Al Ibrahim Al-Rawaf the matter of our agency in Syria" and "officially relied on him to observe all the interests of the subjects," adding that "everyone must pay the known fees on livestock imported from Najd and Iraq to Syria via the Syrian desert or via Palestine" [124]. This shows a governance architecture in which mobility and

[122] British Archives (1996), The Arabian Peninsula in British Archives (Najd and Hejaz), Parts 1–7 London: Dar Al Saqi; FO 371/7711, letter from Ibn Saud to the British High Commissioner in Iraq, 21 June 1921, p. 139 (Arabic) P6.
[123] Saudi Archives: King Abdulaziz Foundation (Darah), A report issued by the British agent in Bahrain on the success of Sheikh Muhammad bin Isa Al-Khalifa. Archive ref. 642 (R/15/2/58), 12 January 1913
[124] Saudi Archives: King Abdulaziz Foundation (Darah), An order from King Abdulaziz to appoint Yassin Al-Rawaf as an agent in Syria, Archive ref. 1179, 7 Safar 1345 AH (30 January 1928).

trade are administered through an external agency that both safeguards subjects and regulates fiscal or quasi fiscal transactions connected to trade flows.

French material illustrates the operational detail of this delegated governance through what the record describes as the Najdi consulate in Damascus. A letter dated 1 April 1926 records that Ibn Saud dismissed his former representative and appointed Suleiman bin Ali Al-Mushaiqah, asking him "to facilitate the affairs of the subjects of Najd and ensure their rights." The same document specifies a fee schedule: Najdi traders should pay "one Majidi for each head of camels," and in cases where numbers increased during the journey the consulate collects "one and a half majidis for each head of excess camels," and "five majidis for every 1,00 sheep." It also notes that the consulate held "official papers" for visas and instructs the representative to follow prior practice[125]. This is commercial governance in the strict sense: pricing rules, documentary control, and a designated administrative site outside Najd.

The governance function is further clarified by a separate instruction about passport stamping. The document states that the representative should follow what is done "in other independent countries," and that for territories under the British Mandate, passports should be sent "to the British Consul after being stamped," while other countries' consuls provide the necessary visas [126]. Here, trade diplomacy and external governance intersect: Najdi documentation practices were being aligned with external recognition structures, indicating that merchant agents were not

[125] French Archives (1999) King Abd Al-Aziz Al Saud: His Life and Reign in Foreign Documents, Fonds Beyrouth/662 (6), "Letter in Arabic", Abdulaziz Al Saud to Suleiman Al-Mushaiqah (representative in Damascus), 17 Ramadan 1344 AH (1 April 1926), p. 40.
[126] French Archives (1999) King Abd Al-Aziz Al Saud: His Life and Reign in Foreign Documents, Fonds Beyrouth/662 (5), – secret letter No. 458/E/S "Telegram in Arabic No. 288", Abdulaziz Al-Saud to Suleiman Al-Mushaiqaḥ (representative in Damascus), 11 April 1926, p. 43.

only facilitating trade but also navigating the international administrative order that conditioned mobility.

Saudi evidence shows that this agency model was not limited to Damascus. A Saudi document records a royal directive to the people of Buraydah to select an agent in the Levant "for review with governments in the affairs of our subjects," stressing that the agent must have "courage and knowledge of matters" and noting that discussions must occur "between us and the countries"[127]. This phrasing frames external agency as a political function tied to the welfare of subjects, not as a narrow commercial appointment. The fact that the addressees are Buraydah people is analytically important for the thesis because it locates the recruitment pool in a merchant community that forms the social base through which Al-Aqilat operated.

French correspondence records that, following criticism of the previous representative, King Abdulaziz personally reaffirmed Suleiman Al-Mushaiqah's appointment, entrusted him with the administration of Najdi affairs in Damascus, instructed him to safeguard the rights of Najdi subjects, oversee political matters in consultation with the ruler, and continue the established passport and consular procedures. The document illustrates how representative authority was reaffirmed and institutional continuity preserved through formal royal appointment rather than personal influence alone[128]. This nomination logic translated into formal appointment and external recognisability in multiple arenas. French records show Fawzan Al-Sabiq[129] functioning as Najd's

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[127] Saudi Archives, Dictionary of Buraydah Families (2010). letter from Abdulaziz bin Abdul Rahman Al Faisal to the people of Buraydah, 29 -11-1340 AH (1921). p. 152 (P20).

[128] French Archives (1999), King Abd Al-Aziz Al Saud: His Life and Reign in Foreign Documents, Fonds Beyrouth/1043 (2), Annex 2 to Information Bulletin No. 131 issued by the French Intelligence Service in Damascus, containing a French translation of King Abdulaziz Al Saud's private letter to Suleiman Al Mushaiqah regarding his appointment, authority, political responsibilities, and administration of Najdi affairs in Damascus, 23 July 1925, p. 641.

[129] Fawzan bin Sabiq Al-Fawzan (1859–1954), Buraydah born Al-Aqilat figure described as King Abdulaziz's first official envoy and ambassador, active across Kuwait, Iraq, the Levant, Palestine, and Egypt. See Table 4.5.2; Al Wahaibi (2017).

representative in Damascus, carrying correspondence between Sultan Abdulaziz and French officials, and being treated by the French authorities as an authorised intermediary in diplomatic communication.[130]. These documents locate external governance in concrete chokepoints and host states, showing how merchant-linked agents performed state-connected functions along the trade routes that mattered for regional commerce.

The further archival records also indicates that Al Aqilat linked external agency should be treated as delegated representation with ambassadorial functions, rather than as an incidental extension of commerce. The critical point is that representatives were not chosen randomly. They were selected through reputational screening and competence criteria because the task required interfacing with governments on the affairs of Najdi subjects. Here in the Saudi record addressed to the people of Buraydah, Ibn Saud explicitly requests the selection of suitable agents and frames the purpose as managing the affairs of subjects in relation to governments, while specifying that the nominees must be credible and capable, which signals a deliberate nomination mechanism for cross jurisdictional representation.[131]

This nomination logic translated into formal appointment and external recognisability in multiple arenas. A Saudi record shows Umm Al Qura records a royal order appointing Fawzan Al-Sabiq as an agent in Egypt and notes that credentials were sent, demonstrating an institutional

[130] French Archives (1999), King Abd Al-Aziz Al Saud: His Life and Reign in Foreign Documents, Fonds Beyrouth/662 (2), French translation of a letter, Abdulaziz Al Saud, Sultan of Najd and its annexes, to Schoeffler, representative of the French High Commissioner in Damascus, 30 May 1924, p. 440; French Archives (1999), King Abd Al-Aziz Al Saud: His Life and Reign in Foreign Documents, Fonds Beyrouth/662 (2), Letter No. 855/S.P./I, French High Commissioner in Damascus to the Commander-in-Chief of the French Army in the Levant, 13 July 1924, p. 445.

[131] Saudi Archives, Dictionary of Buraydah Families (2010). letter from King Abdulaziz to the people of Buraydah requesting selection of an agent in the Levant for engagement with governments over the affairs of subjects, dated 29 Dhu Al Qa'dah 1340 AH (1921) p. 152 (P20).

move from nomination to authorised representation.[132] A parallel Saudi order appoints Yassin Al-Rawaf as the agency representative in Syria, placing on him responsibility for the interests of subjects and structured administrative matters such as fees and routes, which illustrates that the representative role was operationalised as governance abroad.[133] French mandate reporting further confirms that such representation was legible and contested by other authorities, framing Suleiman Al-Mushaiqah as an informal representative of Ibn Saud and discussing replacing him, which indicates that even informal representation carried political weight.[134] Finally, the ambassadorial capacity of this merchant community had deeper precedent in their engagement with external authority: an Ottoman era petition by Al-Aqilat merchants appeals to the Ottoman centre for protection and restitution after raids in Syria, showing that they possessed an established practice of addressing imperial authorities through formal political language.[135] For operational detail on how these delegated representatives executed documentation control, fee schedules, and routine protection of subjects, see the wider evidence already presented in this section earlier.

5.1.4.3 Trade terms, customs disputes, and the negotiation of commercial regimes

Trade diplomacy is not only about movement and protection, it also concerns the negotiation of trade terms, customs, and dispute resolution with external authorities. A French record dated July 1925 documents a dispute over customs duties that became "a misunderstanding" linked to Suleiman Al-Mushaiqah's claims about what Najdi merchants were ordered to pay. The record notes that French customs officials explained their "keenness" to reduce duties for Najdi

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[132] Saudi Archives, King Abdulaziz Foundation (Darah), Umm Al Qura Newspaper issue 56, royal order appointing Fawzan Al Sabiq as agent in Egypt and noting credentials, dated 22/01/1926

[133] Saudi Archives: King Abdulaziz Foundation (Darah), No. 1179, order appointing Yassin Al-Rawaf as agency representative in Syria with responsibilities for subjects' interests and associated fees and routes, dated 30/01/1928

[134] Saudi Archives: King Abdulaziz Foundation (Darah), No. 19939 (297/KD), French High Commissioner report describing Suleiman Al-Mushaiqah as informal representative and proposing replacement, dated 15/05/1925.

[135] Ottoman Archives: Istanbul Archive Center, Y.MTV.M.00104.00002.002, petition from Al-Aqilat merchants to the Ottoman government regarding raids and losses in Syria and requesting protection and restitution, dated 1903.

merchants, and that Muhammad Al-Nahhas, identified as Director of Finance in Najd, expressed a desire to reach "a special agreement for trade exchange between Syria and Najd" [136]. This is a clear instance where commercial governance moved from ad hoc complaint to the pursuit of a negotiated regime, with a Najdi financial official engaging French customs administration in Damascus.

A closely related French item reports that Fawzan Al Sabiq, described as Najd's representative in Damascus, conveyed that Abdulaziz was ready to sign "an offensive and defensive agreement with France, accompanied by commercial and customs duties," and the French assessment states that Abdulaziz sought an "outlet to the West" and requested a reply to carry back to the envoy[137]. The point here is not the military content alone but that commercial and customs provisions were treated as integral components of diplomatic alignment. This positions trade terms as instruments of external orientation and state survival strategy, implemented through representatives embedded in commercial space.

The governance of Najdi subjects within mandate legal systems also appears as a diplomatic issue. A French document dated November 1924 reports that the courts of Greater Lebanon refused to treat Najdi subjects according to existing directives, leading Suleiman Al Mushaiqah to protest and request intervention so that Najdis would be treated according to instructions in force in the Syrian Federation [138]. This demonstrates that trade diplomacy also

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[136] French Archives (1999), King Abd Al-Aziz Al Saud: His Life and Reign in Foreign Documents, Fonds Beyrouth/1043 (4), Letter No. 1331/SP, Acting Delegate of the French High Commissioner in Damascus to the French High Commissioner in Beirut, 13 July 1925, p. 638.

[137] French Archives (1999), King Abd Al-Aziz Al Saud: His Life and Reign in Foreign Documents, Fonds Beyrouth/662 (2), French translation of a letter from King Abdulaziz Al Saud to Schoeffler, representative of the French High Commissioner in Damascus, 30 May 1924, p. 440.

[138] French Archives (1999), King Abd Al-Aziz Al Saud: His Life and Reign in Foreign Documents, Fonds Beyrouth/662 (1), French translation of Letter No. 4252, Suleiman Al-Mushaiqah representing the Sultanate of Najd and its annexes in Damascus to the Secretary General of the French High Commission in Beirut, 3 November 1924, p. 485.

involved the legal classification of subjects abroad, because commercial activity and residence produced disputes that required recognised procedures.

5.1.4.4 Security threats, illicit commerce, and the limits that shaped external governance

Alongside negotiated market access and delegated agency arrangements, the archival record also shows that Ibn Saud's external commercial governance was repeatedly shaped by coercive security incidents, communication interception, and mandate legal constraints that pressured representatives and forced adaptive reconfiguration of trusted channels. The trade routes documented here were exposed to recurring insecurity and to allegations of illicit commerce. These pressures shaped why external commercial governance was necessary and why merchant intermediaries mattered.

An Ottoman archival record illustrates the same concern through administrative rather than petitionary procedures. An imperial order granted amnesty to people from Al-Qassim and authorised the release of detained individuals, while subsequent committee correspondence reviewed the applicability of that amnesty to Muhammad bin Abdullah Al-Hamdan and Muhammad Al-Wasil, an Al-Aqilat member. A final encrypted telegram confirmed the conclusion of the investigation and ordered their release. Together, these records demonstrate that commercial security and cross-regional movement were protected through recognised legal and administrative mechanisms, indicating that merchants and associated individuals relied upon institutional governance rather than informal retaliation to safeguard their interests[139].

[139] Ottoman Archives: Istanbul Archive Center, DH.TMIK.M.203/45 (1-1), royal order concerning the pardon of the people of Al-Qassim and the release of detainees, 25 Rabiʿ al-Akhir 1323 AH (1905); DH.TMIK.M.203/45 (5-2), Committee Draft No. 12300 concerning Muhammad bin Abdullah Al-Hamdan and Muhammad Al-Wasil (Al-Aqilat), 28 Tammuz 1321 Rumi (1905); DH.TMIK.M.203/45 (6-1), encrypted telegram confirming the investigation and ordering their release, 4 August 1321 Rumi (1905).

A cluster of French intelligence records documents a corridor security breach that directly affected communication and representation. A letter addressed to the French High Commissioner reports that a number of Najdis were rounded up and taken by force, and that letters carrying sensitive information were seized, with the incident framed as one that would affect political relations and that relations should be free from spying and betrayal [140]. The subsequent intelligence bulletin adds operational detail by stating that Suleiman Al-Mushaiqah, identified as the representative in Damascus, would file a protest that could evidence that the two men confiscated letters from Ibn Saud, including letters addressed to senior authorities, and that these letters were delivered onward to Prince Abdullah bin Al Hussein[141]. Read together, these records show that external commercial governance was exposed not only to material threats on routes, but also to coercive interception of official communication, making document security a practical condition for sustaining cross border relations.

The same episode also shows that representation functioned as a communication gate, not merely as a commercial appointment. A memorandum from Dentz asks whether a verbal message can be conveyed to Ibn Saud without the knowledge of Mohammed Al-Usaimi and Suleiman Al-Mushaiqah[142]. This is evidence of channel sensitivity. The question itself implies that access to the ruler was mediated through named intermediaries whose involvement could not be assumed to be neutral from the perspective of mandate intelligence. For the argument in this section, the point is

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[140] French Archives (1999), King Abd Al-Aziz Al Saud: His Life and Reign in Foreign Documents, Fonds Beyrouth/1043 (3), letter from Suleiman Al-Mushaiqah, representative of King Abdulaziz Al Saud in Damascus, to the French High Commissioner in Beirut, 26 February 1925, p. 575.

[141] French Archives (1999), King Abd Al-Aziz Al Saud: His Life and Reign in Foreign Documents, Fonds Beyrouth/1043 (2), Information Bulletin No. 30, French Intelligence Service in Damascus to the French High Commissioner in Beirut and his delegate in Damascus, 3 March 1925, p. 580.

[142] French Archives (1999), King Abd Al-Aziz Al Saud: His Life and Reign in Foreign Documents, Fonds Beyrouth/662 (1), Memo No. 996/K4, Dentz, Head of the French Intelligence Service in Beirut, to the Head of the French Intelligence Service in Damascus via the French High Commissioner's delegate in Damascus, 14 March 1925, p. 587.

that external governance relied on identifiable nodes, and that the politics of trusted transmission shaped how messages and decisions moved across jurisdictions.

A further memorandum clarifies the legal and reputational limits that host authorities attached to this governance architecture. It states that mandate approval to transfer a Najdi case to court does not mean approval of a law or controls such as the Bedouin customs law, and it notes that the issue of letters placed Ibn Saud in an awkward position before the Syrian government[143]. The same memorandum argues that the continued appointment of Al-Mushaiqah in Damascus is undesirable and suggests requesting that Ibn Saud change his representative through the French consul in Jeddah or other means. The follow-up secret letter then shows how the system attempted to adapt by seeking a trusted verbal channel, excluding experts due to distrust, and selecting a named active trusted local informant (*Khabir*) who enjoyed the trust of officers to carry the message [144]. As a micro case, this evidence demonstrate that external commercial governance was continuously conditioned by mandate jurisdictional rules and reputational assessments, and that communication security could force the reconfiguration of who was trusted to represent or transmit sensitive information.

British materials illustrate how illicit commerce and surveillance concerns intersected with merchant networks. One British record states that Ibn Saud denied food smuggling to Medina and Hail, although officials arrested caravans, including a caravan "headed by Ibrahim Al-Bassam"

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[143] French Archives (1999), King Abd Al-Aziz Al Saud: His Life and Reign in Foreign Documents, Fonds Beyrouth/662 (1), Secret letter NO. 1583/D.D/3, Acting Representative of the French High Commissioner in Damascus, to French High Commissioner in Beirut, 23 June 1925, p. 633.

[144] French Archives (1999), King Abd Al-Aziz Al Saud: His Life and Reign in Foreign Documents, Fonds Beyrouth/662 (1), Secret Letter No. 738/D.D/3, Delegate of the French High Commissioner in Damascus to the French High Commissioner in Beirut, 28 March 1925, p. 598.

who fled when officials ordered tracking and arrest.[145] Another British record reports that Ibn Saud confirmed most trade traffic went from Kuwait to Hail or Damascus "avoiding the border," and admitted that "Al-Qassim merchants are also involved in smuggling to some degree," explaining that punishing merchants would risk "angering Qassim" [146]. These documents show that Al-Qassim merchant networks, which overlapped with Al-Aqilat's trading world, were simultaneously essential to commerce and politically sensitive to regulate, creating constraints on coercive governance and increasing the value of negotiated and delegated mechanisms.

The Saudi archives material further clarifies how foreign authorities perceived Al-Aqilat. A British circular memo attaches a note on the "Agail (Al-Aqilat)" and reports that "the desert is full of them," looking to buy commodities for export, advising that they should be treated with suspicion and detained if unable to explain themselves[147]. This demonstrates that merchant mobility produced external scrutiny and securitised interpretations. At the same time, the accompanying note defines Al-Aqilat as "professional neutrals who conduct the commerce of the desert," emphasising that they are recognised as neutrals and "given freedom of passage," and that "they alone make trade in the desert tolerably secure" because they enable exchange between tribes and towns [148]. These two texts together capture the dual condition in which Al-Aqilat operated: valued as neutral brokers for trade security, yet also monitored as actors whose networks could be politicised by external powers.

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[145] British Archives (1996) The Arabian Peninsula in British Archives (Najd and Hejaz), Parts 1–7. London: Dar Al Saqi. FO 371/3381, letter from King Hussein to the British High Commissioner in Cairo, 5 June 1918, p. 691, P3, enclosure translation on alleged foodstuffs smuggling to Medina and Hail, referencing Ibrahim Al-Bassam.
[146] British Archives (1996) The Arabian Peninsula in British Archives (Najd and Hejaz), Parts 1–7. London: Dar Al Saqi. L/P&S/10/390, report by Captain John Philby (Najd Mission) to Lt Col A. T. Wilson (Acting Civil Commissioner, Iraq), 12 November 1918, p. 734 (Arabic) P3.
[147] Saudi Archives: King Abdulaziz Foundation (Darah), ref. 1523 (R/15/1/480), memorandum from Percy Cox to the Acting British Political Resident in the Gulf on Al-Aqilat trading activity, 20 December 1917.
[148] Saudi Archives: King Abdulaziz Foundation (Darah), ref. 1524 (R/15/1/480), Gertrude Bell memo "Note on the Aqail", 20 December 1917.

Finally, the French record of visa requirements for pilgrims adds a parallel administrative dimension. Yassin Al-Rawaf reports receiving instructions that pilgrims from mandate territories would not be allowed to enter without visas from the consulate, and asks the French authorities to issue the necessary instructions "to facilitate their affairs," adding that the government would prevent violators from entering[149]. This indicates a move from informal facilitation to formal gatekeeping, consistent with an expanding state's attempt to govern cross border flows through documentary regimes.

5.1.4.5 Analytical synthesis and identifiable mechanisms

Across these documents, the external commercial governance performed through merchant linked agents can be analytically characterised by four recurring mechanisms.

First, boundary spanning brokerage. Trade diplomacy repeatedly occurs through intermediaries positioned outside Najd, such as the "Najdi merchant resident in Damascus (Al-Aqilat)" who channels Abdulaziz's request for measures and security for caravans and representatives who move letters and negotiate understandings with mandate officials.

Second, delegated authority and administrative codification. The appointment of an agency in Syria with authority to "observe all the interests of the subjects" and to collect "known fees on livestock imported", the fee schedule for camels and sheep and the management of visa papers, and instructions for passport processing with mandate consuls all show governance through codified rules administered externally.

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[149] French Archives (1999), King Abd Al-Aziz Al Saud: His Life and Reign in Foreign Documents, Fonds Beyrouth/663 (1), French translation of Letter No. 651/48, Yassin Al-Rawaf, Consul General of the Kingdom of Hejaz, Najd and its Annexes in Damascus, to de Reffye, Acting French High Commissioner in Beirut, 13 April 1927, p. 252.

Third, protection of subjects as a commercial state practice. Multiple records define the diplomatic purpose in terms of safeguarding "lives and property" and preserving rights during travel and residence abroad, ensuring rights of Najdi nationals in Lebanon's legal system, and facilitating pilgrim affairs through visa governance. Commercial governance is therefore inseparable from a subject protection agenda.

Fourth, security constrained commerce. Ottoman archival evidence concerning commercial insecurity, the British records of smuggling and border avoidance involving Al-Qassim merchants, and the British and Saudi archive texts on surveillance and suspicion of Al-Aqilat mobility show the structural constraints that made negotiated, networked governance more feasible than purely coercive control.

Taken together, the evidence supports a coherent interpretation: in the period covered, commercial diplomacy and external governance were not peripheral activities but central instruments through which Ibn Saud's state building project managed markets, protected subjects, and stabilised trade corridors. The recurring reliance on Najdi merchant intermediaries, including explicitly identified Al-Aqilat actors in key instances, indicates that these functions were implemented through a knowledge-based and networked merchant infrastructure that operated effectively across political boundaries and administrative regimes.

5.1.5 Media, State communications, and narrative stabilisation

The empirical record indicates that Al-Aqilat influence extended beyond financial mobilisation, logistics, mediation, and trade diplomacy into the management of political narratives and state communications. This matters for state building because stabilisation is not only produced through coercion or resource capacity, but also through credible messaging, reputational management, and the disciplined circulation of official signals across fragmented political space. In this case, narrative work was not separate from governance. It operated as a practical instrument for reducing uncertainty, aligning expectations, and strengthening compliance in environments where formal institutions were still consolidating.

A key entry point is the documentary trail around press activity associated with Jarallah Al-Dakhil. Ottoman records show that issuing a newspaper required formal eligibility checks and explicit pledges of compliance with the publications system. Jarallah Al-Dakhil's request to publish a newspaper in Baghdad under the name Al-Riyadh presents the paper as a vehicle for scientific, political, and commercial content, and the process demonstrates how political communication was governed through licensing, verification, and legal responsibility rather than being treated as a neutral commercial activity.[150]

The same documentary cluster includes statements committing the publisher to avoid prohibited material and to comply with the rules of publication, indicating that the press was understood as a politically sensitive arena in which the state sought to regulate the boundaries of permissible discourse.

Analytical significance is the governance logic implied by the archive trail. First, the press appears as a regulated interface between political authority and public interpretation. Second, compliance is framed as a condition for operating within that interface. Third, the licensing process itself reveals that information dissemination was treated as a security relevant activity, requiring vetting and accountability, rather than as a purely social or cultural practice.

Within the empirical story of Al-Aqilat, this provides concrete evidence that some members operated inside the legal and bureaucratic constraints of empire while simultaneously maintaining political linkages that later became relevant to Saudi state consolidation. The point is not that a newspaper alone created legitimacy, but that the capacity to communicate within

[150] Ottoman Archives (n.d.), Istanbul Archive Center, Baghdad provincial and Interior Ministry records on Jarallah Al Dakhil and Al Riyadh newspaper, covering licensing, investigations, compliance pledges under the Publications System, and official correspondence on regulation and attempted closure, 1909–1912 (DH.MUI.1/47, parts 1–5; D H. KMS 2/2/2 330, 9 March 1330/1912).

controlled environments is part of how intermediaries sustain influence without triggering repression.

The narrative dimension becomes even clearer when the evidence is extended from press regulation to official state messaging and symbolic state identity. A French archival document reproducing the 1932 royal order records that Ibn Saud issued the order after receiving telegrams from across the Kingdom of Hejaz and Najd and its annexes, and it formalised the new name "Kingdom of Saudi Arabia" while specifying continuity of treaties, rights, and obligations.[151] This happened after a meeting of notables occurred in Abdullah Al-Fadl's house, where the proposal to change the country name was discussed, and that view was conveyed to the King Abdulaziz who accepted it.

In empirical terms, this shows that state identity was not merely declared from above. It was channelled through consultative and communicative pathways that connected local elites, travelling notables, and state leadership. This episode is not treated as symbolic decoration. It is treated as evidence that narrative stabilisation was institutional work. The royal order connects identity naming with political and religious status, and it simultaneously reassures external and internal audiences that existing agreements remain valid and that rights and interests are preserved.

That combination of identity, continuity, and reassurance is a stabilising act in itself, because it reduces uncertainty for diplomatic partners, local power holders, and administrative agents who must implement the transition. In that sense, the naming event becomes part of the

[151] French Archives (1999) King Abd Al Aziz Al Saud: His Life and Reign in Foreign Documents, document number LECOFJ/B/5 (2), 'A true copy of Royal Order in Arabic No. 2716 signed by King Abdulaziz Al Saud', Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Hejaz and Najd and its annexes to the French Consulate in Jeddah, 18 September 1932, p. 624.

empirical pattern whereby governance is performed through credible communication, not only through coercion or redistribution.

Taken together, the press licensing trail and the 1932 naming record show that state communications, narrative control, and symbolic identity formation were not peripheral to the state building process described in this thesis. They formed an additional arena in which Al-Aqilat connected institutions, elites, and publics, and they clarify how stabilisation was produced through a combination of regulated media activity, controlled dissemination of official signals, and relationally embedded endorsement that could travel credibly across regions.

5.2 Mechanisms of Al-Aqilat Influence

The preceding sections (5.1.1–5.1.4) established the empirically evidenced roles through which Al-Aqilat networks contributed to stabilisation during the consolidation period. This section shifts from role description to mechanism identification. Rather than re narrating episodes or reproducing archival quotations, it explains how the evidence demonstrates identifiable mechanisms of influence. Drawing on ECT, SNT, and HI, the analysis specifies how credible knowledge reduced uncertainty and shaped decision making, how brokerage and bridging ties enabled coordination across fragmented political spaces, and how these practices became durable through routines, roles, and institutional dependencies. The section concludes by integrating these three lenses to show how knowledge, transmission pathways, and institutional embedding operated together as a coherent stabilising architecture.

5.2.1 Epistemic authority under uncertainty

The evidence assembled in 5.1 indicates that Al-Aqilat influence cannot be reduced to material support alone. Their stabilising contribution operated through epistemic authority, meaning the capacity to make certain interpretations, options, and procedures credible and actionable under uncertainty. In epistemic community terms, authority is generated when a community is recognised for competence in a domain, shares validity standards and causal beliefs,

and pursues a policy enterprise that decision makers treat as problem solving rather than factional pressure.

The empirical chapters show that Al-Aqilat performed governance relevant knowledge functions across multiple arenas. In 5.1.1, the financial record does not only reveal lending or liquidity. It reveals structured credit relations, repayment norms, and transregional monetary movement that required knowledge of risk, trust, and corridor reliability. In 5.1.2, defence capacity is repeatedly shown as dependent on information, access, and channel control, alongside logistics and mobilisation. In 5.1.3, disputes are contained through procedural claims making, calibrated language of satisfaction, compensation and restitution, and the routing of grievances into appropriate authorities. In 5.1.4, external commercial governance hinges on document routines, fee schedules, and credibility constraints in mandate space. Taken together, these patterns show a community whose authority lay in its ability to translate uncertainty into governable routines, rather than in formal bureaucratic office alone.

The first mechanism is *problem framing and boundary work*. The archives in 5.1 repeatedly show that instability was not treated as a single issue of coercion. Instead, it was framed as a set of governable problems: liquidity strain, corridor insecurity, document validity, compensation disputes, and compliance failures. This matters because problem definition narrows the range of plausible options and makes certain responses appear legitimate. In 5.1.4, for example, commercial mobility becomes a governance problem of documentation, fee predictability, and recognition, rather than merely a merchant activity. In 5.1.3, violence and raids become disputes that require compensation and procedural closure to restore relations, rather than simply triggers for retaliation. This reframing is the epistemic move that converts scattered incidents into a policy enterprise of stabilisation.

The second mechanism is *persuasion through credible interpretation*. Under uncertainty, decision makers require reliable causal accounts: what caused the disruption, what actions will prevent escalation, and which channels can be trusted. Across 5.1.2 and 5.1.3, the evidence shows

repeated reliance on intermediaries and elite advisors who could supply actionable interpretations about threats, alliances, and timing. Persuasion here is not rhetorical performance. It is the acceptance of specific judgement as a guide for action, because it is treated as credible and informed by access to information that the centre does not directly possess. The key empirical implication is that authority travelled with credibility and competence signals, not only with formal rank.

The third mechanism is *social learning and coordinated expectations*. A recurring stabilising function is the reduction of uncertainty for multiple parties at once: merchants expecting predictable dues, tribes receiving calibrated messages, or neighbouring authorities receiving assurances linked to compensation. In 5.1.4, fee schedules and documentation routines reduce uncertainty for traders and administrators. In 5.1.3, settlement sequences create shared expectations about what counts as dispute closure. In 5.1.2, channel control and intelligence routines reduce uncertainty about threats and coordination. This produces social learning not as abstract diffusion of ideas, but as the normalisation of specific procedures and settlement repertoires that make future behaviour more predictable.

The fourth mechanism is *institutionalisation*. The record in 5.1 does not only show personal influence. It shows the gradual conversion of practice into durable routines: consular record keeping, structured dues, and offices that formalise intelligence or representation. This matters because epistemic authority becomes durable when it is anchored in routines, expectations, and dependencies that make certain intermediaries repeatedly valuable. In this sense, Al-Aqilat influence is not captured as episodic advice. It is captured as repeated brokerage functions that become embedded within the evolving governance architecture.

The fifth mechanism is *crisis leverage*. Crisis leverage does not mean opportunism. It means that uncertainty and external pressure increase demand for credible intermediaries and raise the value of those who can coordinate across fragmented arenas. In 5.1.1, external financial conditionality increases the strategic value of internal credit networks and corridor competence. In

5.1.2, rebellion and border escalation increase the value of intermediated intelligence and coalition mobilisation. In 5.1.3, raids and interauthority disputes increase the value of compensation based settlement and negotiated closure. Crisis conditions therefore amplify epistemic authority by expanding the space where problem solving credibility matters more than formal position.

These mechanisms also clarify why epistemic authority is conditional and contested. The evidence in 5.1.4 shows that representatives could be judged for competence and credibility in mandate institutions, and that recognition constraints could reshape how governance was performed. In 5.1.3, documentary authority disputes and disavowal episodes show that the centre could withdraw legitimacy from intermediaries when their conduct created risk. This is an important boundary condition: epistemic authority does not operate as automatic persuasion. It depends on receptivity, credibility recognition, and institutional fit, and it can collapse when the validity of claims or the conduct of representatives is challenged.

In sum, 5.1 establishes the roles. 5.2.1 specifies the mechanism through which those roles became politically consequential. Al-Aqilat stabilising contribution operated through epistemic authority: framing governable problems, persuading through credible interpretation, reducing uncertainty through shared procedures, institutionalising routines, and gaining leverage in crises when such problem solving capacity became indispensable. This mechanism framing sets up the next section by showing why network structure matters. If epistemic authority is the content of influence, the pathways through which it moved across territories, authorities, and communities are explained through network brokerage.

5.2.2 Networked brokerage as governance capacity

The evidence in 5.1 demonstrates that Al-Aqilat influence did not operate through territorial control or a single formal chain of command. It travelled through networks. In social network terms, the stabilising role is best understood as brokerage and coordination capacity: the ability to connect otherwise separated arenas, move information and resources across them, and filter what is credible and actionable under fragmented authority. This section therefore focuses

on the pathways of influence, showing how network structure converted mobility and connectivity into governance leverage, without re narrating the episodes already established in 5.1.

A first mechanism is bridging ties across segmented political spaces. The roles evidenced in 5.1 repeatedly require the ability to traverse or connect distinct jurisdictions: Najd, the Levant mandate environment, border tribal formations, and external authorities. The point is not that any single intermediary controlled all ties. Rather, the network provided a distributed capacity to sustain cross border linkage when sovereignty was fragmented. In 5.1.4, consular and agent nodes in Damascus and Egypt function as bridging sites where commercial governance, documentation routines, and protection claims are processed across jurisdictions. In 5.1.3, compensation disputes and settlement processes show that closure is achieved only when communication can move between tribal leadership, mandate authorities, and Najdi decision arenas. The network mechanism here is that bridging ties make governance possible where direct bureaucratic reach is absent.

A second mechanism is brokerage as translation and coordination. Brokerage is not simply carrying messages. It is converting interests into negotiable formats that other actors can accept. This is visible when intermediaries shape disputes into compensation terms, frame grievances into procedurally valid claims, or deliver mobilisation requests in tones designed to secure cooperation rather than provoke resistance. It is also visible in the defence evidence where intelligence missions rely on contact building, sequencing of meetings, and the delivery of letters and messages across multiple localities. The key analytical point is that brokerage reduces coordination costs. It allows the centre to act on information and to manage commitments without being physically present at every node.

A third mechanism is the management of structural holes, meaning gaps between communities that otherwise lack direct contact. Many of the tensions documented in 5.1 arise precisely because such gaps exist: mandates and Najdi representatives operate under different legal expectations; tribes and merchants contest tribute, access, and corridor rights; external authorities impose recognition constraints on semi formal representation. Al-Aqilat network positioning

matters because it provides a set of actors who can occupy the interface. They can speak the language of commerce and local practice while also navigating consular procedures and administrative norms. The significance is that governance leverage emerges where a broker can mediate between groups that do not trust each other, do not share procedures, or lack direct channels.

A fourth mechanism is filtering and validation of information. The evidence in 5.1.2 and 5.1.3 shows that not all channels were treated as equally credible. Channel choice itself becomes a governance act. The use of special messengers, the selection of trusted informants, and the disavowal of intermediaries whose conduct generated external risk all demonstrate that networks do not merely transmit. This filtering function is central to epistemic influence because it shapes which signals reach decision arenas and which interpretations become actionable. When credibility contests occur, network actors perform validation work, either by corroborating information, routing it through trusted individuals, or redesigning channels to avoid interference.

A fifth mechanism is the coupling of resource mobility with information mobility. In 5.1.1, financial stabilisation relies on the ability to mobilise liquidity and credit through transregional ties. In 5.1.2, defence capacity relies on matériel movement, provisioning routines, and the mobilisation of manpower under corridor insecurity. In 5.1.4, external commercial governance relies on documentation systems, fee routines, and the control of mobility permissions. These are not separate systems. The same network that moves information can also move resources, and the ability to coordinate both is what converts connectivity into state capacity. The analytical implication is that networks provide multi-dimensional governance infrastructure: they allow the centre to access money, intelligence, and compliance mechanisms through the same bridging architecture.

Network centrality also emerges as a relevant mechanism in the findings, although the thesis does not provide quantified network maps. What can be inferred from Section 5.1 is a qualitative centrality logic: certain nodes recur as access points because they sit at the intersection

of mobility corridors, representative offices, and elite contacts. In Section 5.1.4, Damascus repeatedly appears as a governance site where disputes, documentation, and trade regulation converge. In Section 5.1.3, intermediaries recur in settlement, reassurance, and channel management. This pattern indicates centrality by function, not as a measured centrality score, but as repeated hub like roles through which information and coordination flows pass and are stabilised.

These mechanisms also clarify why network influence is conditional. Brokerage only works when other actors accept the broker's legitimacy and when the broker can operate without triggering institutional pushback. The evidence in 5.1.4 shows that representatives were evaluated for competence and could be pressured for replacement under mandate sensitivity, while 5.1.3 documents disavowal and authority withdrawal when intermediary conduct threatened relations. The analytical conclusion is that networks create capacity, but they also produce vulnerabilities: if a broker loses credibility, the tie can become a liability. This conditionality is part of why the network must remain adaptable, redesigning channels, switching messengers, or shifting representatives when external constraints intensify.

Overall, 5.2.2 shows how the stabilising roles described in 5.1 depended on network form. Al-Aqilat influence operated through bridging ties, brokerage translation, structural hole mediation, information filtering, and coupled resource and information mobility. These mechanisms explain how governance was extended beyond territorial reach and why influence could persist across multiple arenas at once. The next section turns from pathways to durability, asking how these networked practices became embedded into routines, offices, and institutional expectations over time.

5.2.3 Institutional embedding and durability

The evidence in 5.1 shows repeated reliance on intermediaries, routines, and delegated roles, but the mechanism question is why these practices produced durable stabilising effects rather than remaining episodic responses to crisis. Historical institutionalism provides the language to

explain this durability through institutional trajectories, path dependence, critical junctures, and layering. In this section, the aim is to show how Al-Aqilat linked practices became embedded in governance routines and constraints over time, without retelling the empirical episodes.

A first mechanism is institutional layering, where new governance practices are added onto existing social and commercial arrangements rather than replacing them. The patterns described in 5.1.4 illustrate layering clearly. External commercial governance is performed through consular routines, fee schedules, documentation practices, and agent appointments that sit atop older merchant corridor networks and representative brokerage. The state does not suddenly build a fully formalised bureaucracy across borders; it layers procedures onto merchant intermediaries who already possess the mobility, local knowledge, and access required to operate in mandate space. This produces a hybrid form of governance that is durable precisely because it leverages existing capacity while gradually formalising parts of it.

A second mechanism is the creation of routines and expectations. Institutionalisation becomes visible when the record reflects repeated, standardised practices rather than ad hoc improvisation. In 5.1.4, documentation stamping and visa routines indicate an expectation that movement and access are governed through procedure. In 5.1.3, compensation claims, investigations, referrals to competent authority, and settlement language indicate an expectation that disputes should be processed through routinised channels rather than resolved only through retaliation. In 5.1.2, the evidence points to the development of routine monitoring and reporting, alongside formal assignments of security responsibilities. These practices build durability because they normalise a repertoire: actors begin to anticipate that disputes will be handled through claims and compensation, that mobility will require documents and fees, and that security monitoring will be reported through offices and designated roles.

A third mechanism is path dependence, where early solutions generate self-reinforcing dependence on particular channels, intermediaries, and governance sites. The evidence in 5.1 suggests that certain nodes became repeatedly necessary because they solved recurring problems

under fragmented sovereignty. Damascus becomes a repeated site where disputes, documentation, representation, and external negotiation concentrate. Once routines and credibility are established around such nodes, the state and external authorities alike come to rely on them, making alternative arrangements costly or slower. This is how non-bureaucratic capacity becomes durable: repeated use produces dependence, and dependence stabilises the channel even when the political environment shifts.

A fourth mechanism is the absorption of network functions into offices and formal roles. Durability increases when practices are no longer tied only to personal reputation, but are anchored in positions that can be filled, transferred, and recognised as institutional responsibilities. The evidence in 5.1.2 that intelligence leadership becomes a formal appointment is significant here because it indicates movement from informal information gathering toward institutional security capacity. Similarly, in 5.1.4 the repeated appointment of agents and representatives formalises external governance functions even when their status remains contested by host authorities. The implication is that merchant-linked intermediaries do not remain external to state formation; their roles become part of the state's organisational repertoire.

A fifth mechanism is constraint and conditionality, which also contributes to durability by shaping how institutions adapt. The evidence in 5.1.4 shows that representation is subject to recognition limits and reputational evaluations in mandate institutions. The evidence in 5.1.3 shows that intermediaries can be disavowed or removed when their conduct generates risk. These constraints matter institutionally because they force selective adaptation: governance practices are refined to fit external legal and political environments, and intermediary roles are adjusted to maintain operational effectiveness. In historical institutionalist terms, this is a process of institutional adjustment under constraint, where durability comes not from rigidity but from adaptive modification that preserves core functions while responding to changing boundary conditions.

Critical junctures provide a final durability mechanism. Periods of intensified uncertainty and external pressure increase the value of stabilising routines and accelerate institutional embedding. The evidence in 5.1.1 and 5.1.2 shows that fiscal strain, subsidy conditionality, rebellion, and border escalation amplify demand for trustworthy channels, coordinated mobilisation, and dependable resource flows. When such pressures recur, governance actors are more likely to formalise what works, rely repeatedly on the same channels, and build routines around them. This is how crisis does not only test institutions; it shapes which practices become institutionalised and which are abandoned.

Taken together, these mechanisms explain durability in a way that complements the earlier sections. The stabilising roles evidenced in 5.1 persist not because Al-Aqilat influence was constant or uncontested, but because governance capacity was layered onto existing networks, routinised through repeated procedures, stabilised through path dependent reliance on key nodes, and partially absorbed into offices and roles. Constraints from external authorities and credibility contests did not eliminate this capacity; they shaped its form and encouraged adaptive refinement. This durability logic sets up the final synthesis section by clarifying how epistemic authority and network brokerage translate into institutional consequences over time.

5.2.4 Integrated mechanism synthesis

The empirical roles established in section 5.1 become analytically clearer when treated as a connected mechanism set rather than as separate categories of finance, defence, trade governance, and dispute management. The mechanism logic is cumulative. Epistemic community dynamics explain why certain intermediaries were treated as credible problem solvers under uncertainty. Social network mechanisms explain how that credibility and knowledge travelled across fragmented political spaces. Historical institutionalism explains how repeated reliance on these practices produced durability through routines, offices, and self-reinforcing dependencies.

ECT explains the content of stabilising influence. Across 5.1.1 to 5.1.4, the evidence repeatedly shows problem solving practices that reduce uncertainty: structured credit relations,

calibrated mobilisation and intelligence routines, dispute closure through compensation and procedural claims, and external commercial governance through documentation and predictable dues. These are not merely instances of support. They are practices that rest on recognised competence, shared standards of validity, and the capacity to frame issues in ways that make specific interventions appear legitimate. In this reading, stabilisation occurs when knowledge-bearing intermediaries convert uncertain environments into governable problems with workable routines.

SNT explains the transmission and coordination pathway. The roles in 5.1 depend on ties and brokerage that connect arenas that cannot be governed through direct reach alone. Finance depends on credit networks and transregional nodes; defence depends on information missions, channel selection, and mobilisation across dispersed supporters; trade governance depends on consular sites and intermediaries operating in mandate space; dispute management depends on routing claims and settlements across tribal, mandate, and central arenas. These patterns reveal why connectivity is not incidental. Brokerage, bridging ties, and selective filtering determine what reaches decision arenas, how fast coordination can occur, and which settlements become possible under fragmented sovereignty. This mechanism layer explains how stabilising practices could operate simultaneously across multiple arenas without requiring continuous central presence.

HI explains why these mechanisms did not remain episodic. The evidence indicates layering of procedures onto existing networks, the emergence of routines and expectations around claims processing and documentation, and the absorption of some functions into roles and offices. As these practices repeat, path dependence emerges. Certain nodes become unavoidable because they solve recurring problems at acceptable cost, and the governance system becomes dependent on the continued functioning of those nodes. Constraints and credibility contests do not negate this process; they shape it by forcing selective adaptation, reconfiguration of intermediaries, and refinement of procedures to maintain receptivity and operational legitimacy. This durability layer explains why the stabilising effects described in 5.1 could persist through cycles of crisis, negotiation, and institutional contestation.

When integrated, the mechanism logic also clarifies the distinction between descriptive evidence and explanatory interpretation. The roles in 5.1 show that Al-Aqilat linked actors contributed to stability by mobilising credit, enabling defence logistics and intelligence, sustaining cross border commercial governance, and translating disputes into administratively actionable forms. The mechanism analysis in 5.2 explains how these roles operated: epistemic authority generated credibility and problem frames, network brokerage moved and filtered resources and information across fragmented spaces, and institutional embedding produced durability through routines and dependencies. The combined framework therefore explains why these contributions were stabilising even when Al-Aqilat operated outside formal bureaucratic structures, and why their influence depended on conditional receptivity rather than automatic dominance.

This synthesis also establishes clear boundaries for the discussion chapter. The present chapter has shown how stabilisation worked within the empirical record, by identifying mechanisms that connect evidence to explanatory concepts. The next chapter can therefore move from mechanism identification to higher-level implications: how these findings reshape interpretations of state building in this period, how they refine the application of epistemic community theory to historical merchant intermediaries, and how they contribute to debates on non-bureaucratic governance capacity under fragmented sovereignty.

Chapter 6
Discussion and Conclusion

The most significant finding to emerge from this study is that Al-Aqilat operated as stabilising contributors to Third Saudi State consolidation through a repertoire that combined financial reliability, defence enabling capacity, dispute settlement, and external commercial governance. This repertoire does not sit comfortably within narratives that treat merchants as background economic context. This is demonstrated empirically through repeated instances of financial mobilisation, defence enabling coordination, dispute mediation, and delegated external representation that substituted for uneven administrative reach and reduced enforcement costs (see Sections 5.1.1–5.1.4). It instead indicates that consolidation was partly achieved through knowledge-based intermediation that reduced uncertainty, enabled coordination, and sustained workable arrangements over time.

Taken together, the evidence assembled in Chapter 5 suggests that stabilisation was multidimensional and constraint driven. In this case, the binding constraints were informational uncertainty, uneven administrative penetration, and high coordination costs across fragmented arenas (Dunlop, 2014, Dunlop, 2017). This is consistent with scholarship that emphasises negotiated authority and uneven state reach, rather than uniform bureaucratic consolidation as the baseline expectation in Middle East governance contexts (Migdal, 1988; Ayubi, 1995; Owen, 2000; Jones, 2006). The contribution of the thesis lies in specifying how these constraints were addressed through a historically grounded intermediary repertoire, rather than leaving coordination and credibility as implicit background conditions.

The discussion also positions the findings within International Relations debates on knowledge power and non state influence in world politics. ECT was developed in IR to explain

how recognised expertise can shape state preferences and coordination, especially under uncertainty. This contribution is sharpened by distinguishing epistemic authority from neighbouring IR approaches, because the Al-Aqilat case turns on competence based credibility and problem framing rather than norm diffusion, moral mobilisation, or formal inter governmental coordination. Norms scholarship foregrounds persuasion and legitimacy in the diffusion of appropriate behaviour, transnational advocacy networks emphasise moral mobilisation and boomerang politics, and transgovernmental networks focus on coordination among state officials. In contrast, epistemic communities derive leverage from recognised competence and shared validity criteria, meaning influence rests on authoritative problem framing rather than activism or official regulatory coordination.

The discussion proceeds by answering the research questions set out in section 1.6 and by situating each answer within the relevant debates on epistemic communities, state formation, and the governance role of networks and institutions.

6.1 Interpreting the findings in relation to the study aims

This section develops the central interpretive argument of the thesis by linking the empirical record and mechanism architecture established in Chapter 5 to the aims and objectives set out in Chapter 1. The focus is on what the findings show, why this matters for explanation, and what is added to existing scholarship by treating stabilisation as a problem of epistemic authority, networked brokerage, and institutional embedding rather than as a function of commercial activity treated as contextual background. The discussion proceeds by addressing each research question in turn, clarifying how the evidence supports the claim, how the integrated framework increases explanatory leverage, and what the scope conditions and boundary limits of the argument are within the period 1902–1932.

Stabilisation is treated here as a composite governance outcome rather than a single domain achievement. The empirical record in sections 5.1.1 to 5.1.4 shows that stabilising capacity was

assembled across financial reliability, defence enabling capacity, dispute management, and trade diplomacy with external commercial governance, and the mechanism architecture in sections 5.2.1 to 5.2.4 clarifies how influence operated through epistemic authority, networked brokerage, and institutional embedding (Dunlop, 2009; Dunlop, 2010; Dunlop, 2017). The discussion therefore proceeds by interpreting patterned convergence across these arenas and by stating scope conditions explicitly: the claims are anchored in the consolidation period 1902 to 1932, when uncertainty, uneven administrative penetration, and high coordination costs shaped what kinds of authority and coordination were feasible.

Research question 1: How Al-Aqilat functioned as an epistemic community in state building

The thesis asked how Al-Aqilat functioned as an epistemic community in Saudi state building. The findings indicate that Al-Aqilat operated as a knowledge bearing intermediary collective whose recognised competence became governance relevant under uncertainty. Influence was expressed through repeated uptake of judgement, trusted circulation of actionable knowledge, and patterned intermediation across arenas, rather than through formal bureaucratic office. This is evidenced across the four role clusters developed in section 5.1 and the mechanism architecture consolidated in section 5.2.

These findings are consistent with the core proposition of epistemic communities scholarship, namely that authoritative expertise becomes consequential when decision makers face uncertainty and require credible interpretations to guide action (Haas, 1992; Adler and Haas, 1992). The case also supports the critical refinement that epistemic influence is conditional, mediated by receptivity, access, and the political environment, rather than operating as a linear expertise to policy pipeline (Checkel, 1997; Verdun, 1999; Antoniades, 2003; Cross, 2013, Dunlop, 2017). In this case, epistemic authority appears as a practical governance resource that gained traction because uncertainty and coordination demands were persistent features of the consolidation environment.

The findings also re-balance the explanatory emphasis in state formation debates. Coercion, coalition management, and institutional development remain central to consolidation accounts, but they do not fully explain how governance becomes workable where authority is negotiated and state reach is uneven (Tilly, 1985; Mann, 1986; Migdal, 1988; Ayubi, 1995). The evidence in Chapter 5 suggests that stabilisation was partly assembled through intermediary capacities that reduced uncertainty and coordination costs, thereby enabling other consolidation strategies to operate more effectively. The cross arena repertoire is established in section 5.1.1 to 5.1.4. The mechanism architecture that clarifies why this repertoire mattered is consolidated in section 5.2.1 to 5.2.4.

The classification of Al-Aqilat as an epistemic community is analytically earned because the record supports three minimum conditions operating together within this period. First, epistemic authority under uncertainty is visible as credible problem definition and persuasion through credible interpretation. Second, influence is transmissible because coordination is enabled through networked brokerage as governance capacity, including bridging ties across segmented political spaces. Third, the stabilising contribution persists because practices become embedded through repeated reliance and routine formation. This combination aligns with the core ECT proposition about authority under uncertainty while remaining consistent with critiques that epistemic influence is conditional on receptivity, access, and political mediation (Haas, 1992; Cross, 2013). The boundary condition is equally important: where alternative validation channels are strong, where brokerage is blocked or discredited, or where institutional expansion internalises these functions into formal offices, the same influence pathway should be expected to weaken.

Research question 2: epistemic attributes enabling influence across economic, political, and military spheres

The thesis asked what epistemic attributes enabled Al-Aqilat to influence governance, particularly in economic, political, and military spheres. Three attributes emerge as central, and

their combined effect provides a stronger account than single factor explanations based on wealth, status, or coercion.

The first attribute is competence recognised under uncertainty. The evidence indicates repeated reliance on judgement and interpretive capacity in environments where information was fragmented and validation was costly. This aligns with epistemic communities scholarship emphasising uncertainty as a key condition that increases demand for authoritative interpretation (Haas, 1992; Cross, 2013). It is also consistent with bounded rationality arguments that explain why decision makers rely on trusted interpretive shortcuts under complexity (Bromley, 1993).

A possible explanation for this result is that competence substituted for institutional capacity. Where bureaucratic tools to verify information and enforce compliance were limited or unevenly effective, competence and reliability became politically usable resources. Competence is most visible in the financial stabilisation and defence enabling clusters in section 5.1.1 and 5.1.2, and it is interpreted through the epistemic authority mechanism in section 5.2.1.

The second attribute is credibility, expressed through practices that stabilised what counted as reliable information and authoritative interpretation. Credibility does not operate as a social embellishment in this setting. It operates as a governance resource that enables uptake, coordination, and compliance where formal certification is limited. This resonates with arguments that symbolic authority and recognised legitimacy shape what is treated as valid knowledge and who is believed (Bourdieu, 1984). In this case, legitimacy was reinforced through repeated reliance on the same intermediaries for verification, nomination and credentialing practices, and the recognition of representative roles in external administrative arenas, which made their information more likely to be accepted and acted upon (see sections 5.1.1–5.1.4 and 5.2.1). It also supports the conditional influence critique of epistemic communities, which shows that expertise must be socially and politically accepted to become consequential (Checkel, 1997; Antoniades, 2003; Cross, 2013).

This also sharpens the distinction from wealth explanations. Wealth may enable action, but it does not by itself explain why certain actors are treated as credible carriers of valid judgement across multiple arenas. Credibility is visible across dispute management and external commercial governance in section 5.1.3 and 5.1.4, and it is anchored in the epistemic authority and institutional embedding components synthesised in section 5.2.

The third attribute is cross arena applicability. The evidence suggests that expertise travelled across finance, defence enabling, mediation, and external commercial governance because these arenas shared underlying constraints: uncertainty reduction, coordination demands, and credible commitment problems. This extends epistemic communities reasoning by demonstrating that influence can be organised around recurring governance problems rather than around a single technical policy domain (Haas, 1992; Lu, 2013). Empirically, the same knowledge practices reappear across arenas: credibility based screening and verification in finance, coordination and mobilisation in defence enabling, negotiated settlement in disputes, and delegated representation in external commercial governance, which together show a transferable repertoire rather than domain specific expertise (see sections 5.1.1–5.1.4). It also aligns with scholarship emphasising hybrid governance and negotiated authority, where the same actors often operate across multiple domains because the boundary between political and economic governance is porous (Ayubi, 1995; Migdal, 2001; Heydemann, 2024). Cross arena effects are evidenced by the consistent pattern across Sections 5.1.1 to 5.1.4 as mentioned previously.

Taken together, the three attributes operate as a bundle rather than as separate features. Recognised competence under uncertainty provides the content of authority, credibility secures uptake, and cross arena applicability explains why influence travels across finance, defence enabling, dispute management, and external commercial governance instead of remaining confined to a single arena. This bundled logic strengthens explanation because it addresses what single factor accounts leave under specified. Wealth can mobilise resources but does not explain authoritative problem framing. Status can open access but does not explain coordination capacity across segmented political spaces. Coercion can compel compliance but does not explain reliable

transmission and durable reliance under uncertainty. The bundle is therefore best read as an influence pathway whose strength depends on credibility maintenance and brokerage access, and whose limits become visible when credibility fractures or when institutional penetration reduces reliance on intermediated governance capacity.

Research question 3: how networks enabled intermediation across trade, defence, and diplomacy

The thesis asked how Al-Aqilat networks operated within trade, military, and diplomatic frameworks, and what enabled them to act as intermediaries between different political entities. The evidence indicates that Al-Aqilat networks operated as bridging infrastructures that converted relational positioning into coordination capacity across fragmented arenas. Under this research question, the findings show that Al-Aqilat's contribution extended into delegated representation, where selected intermediaries operated with recognised authority across external administrative arenas and translated state interests into practical protection of subjects. This is most clearly evidenced in the external commercial governance materials (section 5.1.4.2), which document nomination, credentialing, and representative engagement within foreign administrative settings.

These findings are consistent with social network scholarship that explains why bridging ties and brokerage positions become influential when they connect otherwise segmented groups and enable information to circulate across boundaries (Granovetter, 1973; Burt, 2000; Wasserman and Faust, 1994). In this case, brokerage was not abstract connectivity. It was enacted through nominated and credentialed representatives who could cross administrative boundaries, negotiate with foreign authorities, and translate state directives into implementable arrangements for mobility, fees, and protection of subjects (see section 5.1.4.2). The network effect therefore lay in boundary spanning roles that reduced transaction costs and uncertainty across fragmented jurisdictions, converting relational position into coordination capacity rather than merely expanding contacts. The evidence supports the inference that influence travelled because

coordination was structurally enabled through bridging positions, not because connectivity existed in the abstract.

At the same time, the findings qualify network only accounts. Brokerage becomes governance capacity when paired with credibility and sustained uptake. The findings qualify network only accounts by showing that brokerage becomes stabilising influence only when paired with recognised competence and sustained political uptake. This supports the critique that influence is not mechanically produced by network structure alone, but is shaped by trust, acceptance, and political receptivity (Cross, 2013). In the empirical material, this shaping is visible in how representatives were selected and credentialed, how their authority was recognised in external administrative arenas, and how their brokerage produced compliance through negotiated routines rather than through coercive enforcement (see sections 5.1.4.2 and 5.1.2). It also aligns with the view that governance in weak institutional contexts is often organised through informal networks that underpin formal authority, rather than replacing it (Schwarz, 2011; Heydemann, 2024). Intermediation is most visible in trade diplomacy and external commercial governance in section 5.1.4, and it is reinforced by defence enabling in section 5.1.2. The brokerage logic is consolidated in section 5.2.2.

The network interpretation also aligns with IR network scholarship that treats relational structure as causally consequential rather than merely descriptive. Networked politics can shape outcomes by structuring access, influence, and coordination capacity across fragmented arenas, particularly where authority is dispersed and information travels through relational channels rather than hierarchical command. In this study, that logic is evidenced in how intermediaries enabled resource mobilisation and financial coordination (Section 5.1.1), facilitated defence enabling linkages across arenas (Section 5.1.2), mediated disputes where formal authority was fragmented (Section 5.1.3), and operated as delegated representatives within external administrative settings (Section 5.1.4.2). This provides an IR grounded rationale for treating brokerage and bridging ties as explanatory mechanisms in a state formation setting, rather than as metaphorical language.

A further implication is that brokerage should be understood as a practical governance instrument rather than a descriptive network property. Brokerage mattered because it made coordination feasible across arenas that were not easily governed through a single territorial chain of command. In the findings, coordination is made visible through the coupling of financial mobilisation with defence enabling logistics, the use of brokerage in dispute settlement to prevent escalation, and delegated external representation to negotiate administrative routines for movement and protection of subjects (see sections 5.1.1–5.1.4). When authority is fragmented and information is uneven, bridging ties across segmented political spaces reduce transaction costs by enabling translation, filtering, and validation of information, while also linking information mobility with resource mobility so that commitments can be acted upon rather than merely communicated. This interpretation strengthens the IR contribution of the thesis because it connects knowledge power to coordination capacity in an environment shaped by cross border commercial governance routines rather than fully formalised diplomacy alone. The boundary condition is that brokerage does not automatically translate into governance capacity: where credibility is low, where gatekeeping blocks access, or where rival channels produce competing interpretations, network position alone is insufficient to generate stabilising influence.

Research question 4: the role in intelligence, economic stabilisation, and conflict mediation

The thesis asked what role Al-Aqilat played in intelligence gathering, economic stabilisation, and conflict mediation. The findings suggest that these were not isolated functions but mutually reinforcing stabilisation practices that addressed a common set of constraints: uncertainty reduction, credible commitment, and enforcement cost minimisation.

The evidence indicates that stabilisation depended on informational governance, meaning the circulation of actionable knowledge and the management of credibility within information flows. This aligns with epistemic communities arguments that authority becomes influential when it structures interpretation under uncertainty and when it frames what is treated as actionable (Haas,

1989; Haas, 1992). In the empirical record, this authority operated through curated intelligence and verification practices that reduced uncertainty for decision makers, including the screening of information, the validation of claims across networks, and the translation of signals into implementable directives (see sections 5.1.1 to 5.1.4 and the mechanism synthesis in section 5.2). The findings also support the conditional view that informational influence is most consequential when uncertainty is high, while its uptake remains mediated by access and receptivity (Cross, 2013). The intelligence and information brokerage function is visible across multiple clusters, and it is most clearly interpreted through the epistemic authority and brokerage mechanisms consolidated in section 5.2.

Economic stabilisation in this case is best interpreted as reliability and mobilisation capacity rather than formal extraction or tax administration. This is important because it prevents misfitting European state formation assumptions onto the Saudi case. This thesis refines comparative state formation debates by showing how reliability and mobilisation can substitute for extraction in producing credible capacity where bureaucratic penetration is uneven. Classic European accounts highlight extraction and war finance dynamics (Tilly, 1985; Mann, 1986), while Middle East focused scholarship emphasises negotiated authority and uneven institutional penetration (Ayubi, 1995; Owen, 2000). Empirically, this is visible in the finance cluster where obligations were met through trusted mobilisation channels and reputational enforcement within merchant networks, enabling resource availability for state consolidation without establishing a tax collecting bureaucracy (see Section 5.1.1). Conceptually, this reflects a shift from extraction based state capacity to credibility based capacity, where enforceable commitments and reputational sanctions substitute for formal taxation and bureaucratic monitoring under uneven administrative reach. The findings provide a grounded account of stabilisation through credible mobilisation and networked financial reliability, without requiring claims of formal fiscal authority by Al-Aqilat. Financial reliability is developed in section 5.1.1.

The findings indicate that dispute settlement functioned as governance work that reduced enforcement burdens and limited escalation risks. This complements state in society arguments

that treat authority as negotiated and compliance as produced through bargaining and mediation, not only through coercion (Migdal, 1988; Migdal, 2001). Empirically, the dispute settlement cluster shows intermediaries absorbing escalation risks by brokering agreements, clarifying claims, and restoring workable coordination between actors who could not be governed through a single chain of command (see Section 5.1.3). Analytically in mechanism terms, this illustrates negotiated authority in practice: compliance is secured through credible mediation and relational leverage that lowers enforcement costs, rather than through uniform bureaucratic penetration or coercive capacity alone. It also refines Saudi historiography by showing how stabilisation practices operated alongside coalition management and legitimacy construction, rather than being reducible to either (Commins, 2006; Al-Fahad, 2004; Fahad, 1989, Al-Rasheed, 2002; Vassiliev, 2000). Dispute management is developed in section 5.1.3.

These functions are most convincingly interpreted as a stabilisation repertoire because they operate on the same constraints from different angles. Informational governance reduces uncertainty, financial reliability reduces volatility in mobilisation capacity, and dispute management reduces enforcement burdens by producing credible closure. Read together, the repertoire enables consolidation to remain workable across multiple arenas without requiring continuous coercive escalation or uniform administrative penetration. This also clarifies an important boundary. The discussion does not treat intelligence as a formal apparatus claim. It treats it as an informational governance function visible through epistemic authority and brokerage, and it is therefore anchored in the same mechanism architecture rather than implying institutionalised intelligence structures that are not claimed in the empirical chapter.

Research question 5: what the epistemic community framework adds compared to traditional narratives

The thesis asked how the epistemic community framework provides a more nuanced understanding of Al-Aqilat's influence in contrast to traditional historical narratives. The findings

indicate that the framework adds explanatory precision by shifting attention from actor presence to influence pathways.

Traditional narratives of consolidation commonly foreground coercion, alliances, ideological legitimacy, and institutional development. These remain central elements of the historical story (Commins, 2006; Al-Rasheed, 2002; Ochsenwald, 1981; Vassiliev, 2000). The epistemic community lens adds a complementary layer by clarifying why knowledge becomes authoritative under uncertainty, why influence travels through credible coordination channels, and why stabilisation practices persist through repeated reliance. In this thesis, these mechanisms are evidenced in the financial reliability cluster (Section 5.1.1), defence enabling coordination (Section 5.1.2), dispute settlement practices (Section 5.1.3), and delegated external commercial governance and representation (Section 5.1.4). In line with these debates, the case shows that influence rested on recognised competence and credible interpretation under uncertainty, while uptake depended on political receptivity and repeated reliance rather than automatic deference to expertise. This thesis advances the literature by specifying how credibility based intermediation converts network position into governance capacity under conditions of uneven administrative reach. This aligns with foundational ECT arguments about authority under uncertainty (Haas, 1992; Adler and Haas, 1992) and with critiques that emphasise conditional uptake and political mediation (Checkel, 1997; Verdun, 1999; Cross, 2013).

The result is not an inversion that makes merchants the primary drivers of state formation. The result is a refined explanation of stabilisation under constraint, where knowledge-based intermediation helps explain how consolidation became workable across arenas of finance, defence enabling, dispute management, and external commercial governance. The stabilisation repertoire is developed across section 5.1.1 to 5.1.4, and the integrated mechanism synthesis is consolidated in section 5.2.4.

The explanatory value of the epistemic community framework becomes clearest when it is compared against what traditional narratives already explain well. Existing accounts foreground

coercion, alliances, ideological legitimacy, and institutional development, and these remain essential for understanding consolidation dynamics. What is often left under specified, however, is how authority becomes workable under uncertainty and uneven administrative penetration, particularly how credible interpretation is produced, how coordination is achieved across fragmented arenas, and why reliance on particular intermediated practices persists. The integrated structure developed in section 5.2 increases explanatory leverage because it separates authority, transmission, and durability as distinct requirements of stabilisation rather than treating coordination and credibility as background assumptions (Haas, 1992; Pierson, 2000).

In International Relations terms, this reframing links knowledge power to practical governance under fragmented sovereignty. The case shows how cross border commercial governance, documentation practices, and mediated representation create a space in which credible intermediaries can shape coordination under uncertainty, even without formal diplomatic machinery. This provides a historically grounded contribution to IR debates on non state influence by showing that authority can be exercised through recognised competence and credible problem framing, while influence travels through brokerage rather than through formal bureaucratic pipelines. The historiographical implication follows directly: Al-Aqilat moves from being treated as merchant context to being analysable as stabilising intermediaries through a specified influence pathway, culminating in an analytically grounded identification of Al-Aqilat as an epistemic community within this period.

Research objectives synthesis

The objectives stated in section 1.6.1 are addressed through the empirical findings in Chapter 5.1 and the mechanism architecture consolidated in section 5.2. This section draws the objectives together at the level of interpretive payoff. It shows how stabilisation is explained through epistemic authority under uncertainty, networked brokerage as governance capacity, and institutional embedding and durability, rather than through commercial activity treated as contextual background.

Objective 1: *identifying and analysing knowledge systems and expertise*: this objective is fulfilled by demonstrating that expertise is visible as epistemic authority under uncertainty, expressed through problem definition and persuasion through credible interpretation. The evidence shows that authority was not dependent on formal office holding. It rested on being treated as a reliable source of actionable knowledge across the stabilisation arenas documented in section 5.1, and it became most consequential where decision environments were uncertain and validation was constrained.

The analytical implication is that expertise is specified as a governance relevant capacity rather than a descriptive social characteristic. Epistemic authority clarifies why the same intermediary community can matter across finance, defence, dispute management, and trade diplomacy with external commercial governance. It also clarifies why influence is best understood as conditional and relational, because it depends on recognised credibility and uptake rather than on institutional position alone.

Objective 2: *examining how Al-Aqilat contributed to state building through mechanisms*: This objective is fulfilled through the mechanism specification in section 5.2, which shows how stabilising contribution operates through epistemic authority, travels through networked brokerage, and becomes durable through institutional embedding and routine formation. The discussion chapter treats this mechanism architecture as an explanatory structure, separating authority, transmission, and durability as distinct requirements of stabilisation, rather than presenting them as parallel labels.

The interpretive payoff is that the thesis moves from describing roles to explaining how those roles generate influence. The same stabilising repertoire documented in section 5.1 becomes intelligible as a coherent influence pathway because epistemic authority makes knowledge persuasive, brokerage makes coordination feasible across segmented political spaces, and embedding explains why reliance persists through repeated practice. This also protects the thesis

against single factor accounts, because it shows why wealth, status, or coercion alone are insufficient to account for cross arena influence and persistence.

Objective 3: *explaining networks as an informal but structured system of influence and coordination:* This objective is fulfilled by demonstrating that influence travelled through networks rather than through territorial control or a single formal chain of command, and that network form produced governance capacity via bridging ties across segmented political spaces and brokerage as translation and coordination. In section 5.1, network effects are visible across the arenas where coordination problems are most acute, and in section 5.2 the brokerage mechanism specifies how connectivity becomes leverage and coordination capacity.

The interpretive implication is that networks are treated as governance infrastructure rather than generic connectivity. The discussion can therefore specify how information filtering and validation, the diffusion of credible interpretations, and the coupling of resource mobility with information mobility made stabilising effects operational across arenas. This adds analytical depth without repeating the empirical record, because the focus is on what network structure explains that narrative description does not, namely how coordination becomes possible under fragmented authority and why brokerage positions generate leverage.

Objective 4: *contextualising contributions within state building theories:* this objective is fulfilled by the integrated theoretical logic established in section 5.2 and carried into the discussion chapter. SNT clarifies the pathways of influence through brokerage and bridging ties, and Historical Institutionalism clarifies durability through routines, layering, and path dependent reliance. Epistemic Communities Theory remains central by explaining authority under uncertainty and the production of credible interpretation.

The interpretive consequence is a division of explanatory labour that increases precision rather than multiplying vocabularies. Authority is treated as a distinct problem from transmission, and transmission is treated as distinct from durability. This allows the discussion chapter to show

why stabilisation is most convincingly explained when these components are analytically separated, and how the integration avoids theoretical overlap by assigning each theory a specific explanatory task that is visible in the empirical structure.

Objective 5: *reassessing historiography and redefining Al-Aqilat through the epistemic community framework*: This objective is fulfilled by reconstructing a stabilisation repertoire across finance, defence, dispute management, and trade diplomacy with external commercial governance, and by demonstrating how those roles become politically consequential through epistemic authority and networked brokerage, with persistence clarified through embedding and routine formation. The discussion chapter then consolidates this into a classification claim that is grounded in the empirical and mechanism structure rather than asserted as a narrative preference.

The interpretive payoff is historiographical. It reframes accounts that have treated Al-Aqilat primarily as commercial background by demonstrating, on the basis of archival evidence, that their intermediary roles performed governance work across finance, defence enabling, dispute settlement, and delegated external representation (see sections 5.1.1–5.1.4). The thesis repositions Al-Aqilat as stabilising intermediaries whose contributions are visible across governance arenas and explainable through a coherent influence pathway. The concluding classification is therefore logically earned: Al-Aqilat are identified as an epistemic community because the record supports recognised epistemic authority under uncertainty, credible transmission through brokerage, and durable influence through institutional embedding.

Across the five objectives, the thesis achieves a single coherent contribution: it reconstructs a stabilisation repertoire in section 5.1 and explains its influence pathway in section 5.2 through epistemic authority, networked brokerage, and institutional embedding. This allows the discussion to treat Al-Aqilat as a governance relevant actor category without overstating continuity beyond the consolidation period or attributing formal office where none is claimed. Within the bounded scope 1902 to 1932, the objectives therefore converge on the same conclusion: Al-Aqilat are most plausibly identified as an epistemic community because stabilising influence is visible as

recognised epistemic authority under uncertainty, credible transmission through brokerage, and durability through embedded reliance.

6.2 Study Implications

The findings provide a new understanding of stabilisation as a composite process shaped by uncertainty and coordination constraints. This supports negotiated authority perspectives and challenges accounts that treat credibility and coordination as secondary background conditions (Migdal, 1988; Ayubi, 1995; Owen, 2000; Jones, 2006). The implication is that consolidation analysis gains explanatory power when informational and coordinative infrastructures are treated as analytically consequential, particularly in contexts characterised by uneven institutional penetration.

The findings extend epistemic communities scholarship by demonstrating that epistemic authority can be constituted through historically grounded practices of competence recognition and credibility, rather than only through modern technocratic advisory institutions (Haas, 1992; Antoniades, 2003; Cross, 2013). The case also suggests that ECT is strengthened when it is evaluated alongside network and institutional approaches that clarify transmission and durability, rather than being treated as a standalone explanation.

The findings indicate that Al-Aqilat should be placed in the historiography as stabilising intermediaries whose contributions extend beyond trade facilitation. This does not conflict with existing accounts of legitimacy construction and pragmatic alliances. It complements them by making visible a stabilisation infrastructure that helps explain how governance operated under constraint (Commins, 2006; Fahad, 1989; Al-Fahad, 2004; Al-Rasheed, 2002; Vassiliev, 2000).

Challenges in interpretation

Three challenges shape interpretation.

1. Archival visibility is uneven across practices and arenas, which limits the precision of tie reconstruction and attribution.
2. Evidence often captures outcomes and transactions more clearly than internal deliberation, making mechanism inference dependent on patterned convergence across sources.
3. Conceptual application requires calibration to historical settings, and the claims must remain bounded to what the record supports.

These challenges are consistent with the conditional influence perspective that treats epistemic authority as mediated and context dependent, rather than automatic (Checkel, 1997; Cross, 2013).

Implications for International Relations scholarship

The findings contribute to International Relations in three related ways.

1. They extend IR work on epistemic communities by demonstrating that epistemic authority can operate in a historical state formation context through informal but structured governance capacities, rather than only through modern technocratic advisory arenas. This strengthens a central IR claim that knowledge can operate as power through recognised competence and authoritative interpretation.
2. They clarify how international administrative order conditions state building through cross jurisdiction practices of mobility, representation, and documentation. The empirical record conceptualises trade diplomacy as the negotiated management of cross border commerce and external commercial governance as delegated rules and administrative instruments used to organise commerce beyond territorial reach. These practices are visible as negotiated brokerage, consular routines, and documentation control across multiple jurisdictions, rather than fully formalised diplomacy alone. This provides an IR relevant account of sovereignty as practically assembled through cross border governance routines, not only asserted through territorial enforcement.

3. They sharpen conceptual boundaries in IR by showing why the case is best captured as an epistemic community rather than as advocacy, norm entrepreneurship, or transgovernmental regulation. The influence pathway rests on epistemic credibility and problem framing capacity under uncertainty, which differentiates it from mobilisation centred and official centred network accounts.

6.3 Limitations and future research directions

The study is constrained by the visibility and selection characteristics of archival records. Actors are not named consistently across sources, and the preservation and classification of documents reflect institutional priorities that can obscure informal practices. The analysis also relies on the surviving traces of communication and representation, which means that some activities may be under recorded or unevenly documented. Finally, while the thesis advances a mechanism based explanation, it does not claim exhaustive coverage of all intermediaries involved in state building during the period.

A key interpretive consideration concerns how documentary access pathways shape what becomes visible in the evidentiary record. The corpus combines institutional repositories with published documentary compilations and locally produced reference works, each of which reflects prior selection, organisation, and framing processes. Even where a published compilation reproduces documents with minimal editorial narration, the act of compiling, translating, and ordering material still shapes salience and visibility, particularly by foregrounding certain events, actors, or categories of correspondence over others. This matters because the thesis makes pattern based claims about stabilisation roles and mechanisms, and pattern strength depends on whether a theme is replicated across streams rather than produced by the affordances of one stream.

The British documentary stream illustrates both the value and the interpretive constraints of published access. British materials were initially accessed through a published compilation that presents archival documents with brief descriptions and without analytical commentary, and

provenance was strengthened through an independent verification step against the archival originals using the same document identifiers.

This increases confidence that the documents used correspond to identifiable originals, yet it does not remove selection effects inherent in the compilation format or the standpoint effects embedded in colonial administrative reporting. The interpretive approach therefore treats these records as institutionally situated texts rather than neutral observation and reads them comparatively alongside non British corpora.

A similar logic applies to the French stream. French materials accessed through a published documentary collection were corroborated through Saudi institutional holdings, supporting traceability and consistency with source copies.

At the same time, French diplomatic documentation carries its own institutional priorities and representational logic, which can shape the visibility of actors and the language used to describe brokerage, security concerns, and regional dynamics. This is handled through cross stream comparison rather than assuming that any single foreign archive provides a comprehensive view.

The Ottoman stream adds a further standpoint that is non European, yet interpretive caution remains necessary because Ottoman materials enter the analysis through a translation workflow and multi stage language transfer. Translation is treated as an interpretive stage and managed through documented procedures, with triangulation used where possible to reduce the risk that meaning shifts are mistaken for substantive differences.

Saudi institutional documents provide a locally curated record and anchor interpretation in domestic archival logics, yet institutional archives can also reflect selection and framing effects associated with repository purpose, cataloguing practices, and the kinds of records that are preserved as “state relevant”. For this reason, provenance checks are treated as a baseline, while

interpretation also relies on internal criticism and cross source comparison to identify how institutional standpoint shapes representation of actors, events, and legitimacy claims.

Across these streams, source criticism and triangulation function as interpretive safeguards, not simply as procedural steps. Where corpora converge, convergence strengthens confidence in the pattern. Where they diverge, divergence is treated as analytically meaningful evidence of competing institutional logics, information constraints, or strategic framing, and conclusions are framed with appropriate caution.

Local documentary visibility introduces a distinct, but parallel, set of interpretive implications. The Dictionary of Buraydah families comprises 22 volumes and was used as a published documentary corpus to identify locally grounded references to Al-Aqilat individuals and associated networks. The extraction strategy was systematic, based on reading across volumes and selecting reproduced documentary materials that align with the study aims and inclusion criteria.

***Two interpretive risks arise when a family-based publication contains both narrative description and documentary reproduction**:*

1. First, quotation clarity must be protected so that citations cannot be mistaken for editorial narration. The study's citation practice therefore distinguishes reproduced documents from any narrative framing by specifying the relevant volume and location and, where available, the document identifier inside the family entry. This ensures that claims about brokerage, mediation, intelligence exchange, or strategic advice remain traceable to documentary extracts rather than to commemorative narration.
2. Second, selective inclusion and reputational framing can shape local compilations, even when documents are reproduced. This risk does not invalidate the Dictionary as a source, but it does shape how it is used. The Dictionary is treated as a published reference work with possible celebratory tendencies, and actor leads and documentary traces drawn from it are corroborated against British, French, Ottoman, and Saudi institutional materials wherever possible.

Where corroboration is available, local and foreign streams together strengthen confidence that a pattern is not an artefact of any one compilation. Where corroboration is not available, the material is used as contextual evidence and the interpretive claim is framed more cautiously, avoiding sole source inference for central mechanism claims.

This calibration has direct consequences for the thesis arguments advanced in the discussion chapter. The classification of Al-Aqilat as an epistemic community rests on cross stream visibility of competence, credibility, and networked intermediation. The strongest claims therefore sit on convergent documentary representation across multiple corpora rather than on any single local or foreign stream.

Future research directions

These directions extend the thesis beyond its deliberately bounded temporal scope, evidentiary design, and explanatory focus. They therefore represent next stage research rather than elements required to answer the research questions addressed for 1902–1932.

1. Temporal extension beyond 1932 as a scope condition test; the first future research direction is to examine whether the stabilisation pathways identified for 1902–1932 remain visible, transform, or decline after 1932 as the institutional form of the state changes. This should be framed as a scope condition test rather than as an assumption of continuity. Post-proclamation centralisation, administrative expansion, and shifts in revenue structures are likely to reshape the opportunity structure for intermediary influence. The research task is therefore to identify whether epistemic authority, brokerage-based coordination, and embedded reliance continue to operate, whether they are absorbed into formal institutional channels, or whether they are displaced by bureaucratic professionalisation. Periodised designs can avoid over-claim by treating post-1932 phases as analytically distinct rather than as a simple continuation of the consolidation period.

2. Comparative historical designs to assess portability: A second direction is comparative historical research that tests whether the stabilisation repertoire observed in this case appears in other consolidation settings characterised by uncertainty, fragmented authority, and uneven institutional penetration. Comparative work can be designed as most similar systems comparisons that vary the presence, density, or positioning of intermediary communities, or as most different systems comparisons that test whether similar influence pathways appear despite differing material conditions. Such studies would strengthen cautious generalisability by identifying which elements of the repertoire are context specific and which operate as recurrent governance solutions under comparable constraints.
3. Prosopography and network reconstruction as a systematic extension: A third direction is systematic prosopography and network reconstruction. The thesis identifies brokerage as governance capacity, but historical archives impose limits on tie visibility and on the granularity of network measurement. A next stage project could build actor-level datasets from the archival corpus, coding individuals, affiliations, routes, and relational ties, and then modelling change over time. This would allow more explicit testing of whether stabilisation depended on high centrality nodes, whether brokerage was distributed or bottlenecked, and how information and credibility travelled across arenas. Importantly, this direction extends depth rather than altering the thesis claims, because it refines the transmission pathway rather than redefining the research question.
4. Source expansion and archive politics as an explicit research programme: A fourth direction is targeted source expansion to deepen visibility of under-documented practices and to refine source criticism about selection, translation, and framing. This can include additional local corpora, private correspondence collections, commercial records where accessible, and institutional series that shed light on dispute settlement and credibility repair. The analytic aim is to strengthen understanding of micro processes, how credibility was built, contested, and repaired, and how mediation produced closure or failed to do so. A related research programme can also treat archive making itself as an object of inquiry, analysing how compilation, translation, and publication decisions shape what becomes

visible to historians and how those processes interact with political interests and commemorative incentives.

5. Theoretical directions within the existing framework: A fifth direction is theoretical refinement that remains within the integrated framework employed in the thesis. Three lines of refinement are particularly promising. First, boundary conditions for epistemic authority can be specified more precisely by identifying when recognised competence fails to produce influence. This includes situations of competing epistemic claimants, fractured credibility, or strong alternative validation channels. Second, the interaction between epistemic authority and brokerage can be theorised more explicitly. The case suggests that brokerage becomes governance capacity when credibility is high, but future work can examine whether credibility can substitute for network position, or whether brokerage can sometimes compensate for limited credibility through institutional sponsorship. Third, durability can be theorised with greater granularity by distinguishing persistence through dependency from persistence through institutional incorporation. This would clarify whether intermediaries remain influential because the state continues to rely on them as external capacities or because their functions become internalised within emergent offices and routines.
6. Theoretical directions beyond the current framework: A sixth direction is conceptual extension beyond the thesis framework, especially for periods or contexts where different dynamics become decisive. Post 1932 analysis may require stronger attention to bureaucratic professionalisation, shifting legitimacy strategies, and the changing political economy of state capacity. Future work can therefore treat the integrated ECT, network, and institutional account as one explanatory layer among others and examine when alternative lenses provide higher leverage. This can be done without contradicting the thesis by framing it as a new research problem, focused on how intermediary governance capacities are transformed, displaced, or incorporated as formal institutions deepen.
7. Negative cases, internal variation, and external perception: Finally, three extensions follow directly from the limitations of historical reconstruction. First, systematic analysis of

negative cases, episodes where coordination failed, mediation did not produce closure, or credibility was damaged, would strengthen causal inference by clarifying the conditions under which stabilisation pathways weaken. Second, internal variation within Al-Aqilat warrants deeper study. Treating the community as an epistemic collective is justified at the level of shared practices and recognised competence, but future work can examine differentiation, competing brokerage positions, and divergent reputations within the community to refine understanding of how epistemic authority is distributed and contested. Third, further research can examine external perception more directly. British and French materials capture external evaluations of credibility and risk. A systematic focus on external perceptions could clarify how reputation travelled across jurisdictions and how intermediary credibility was constructed, challenged, or strategically leveraged beyond local arenas.

Together, these future directions extend the thesis in a way that respects its bounded claims. They treat the present study as a structured explanation anchored in 1902–1932, while identifying how the argument can be tested, refined, and expanded through comparative designs, deeper network reconstruction, expanded source bases, and targeted theoretical development.

6.4 Conclusion

This thesis set out to explain how Al-Aqilat contributed to the consolidation of the Third Saudi State between 1902 and 1932 and to evaluate how their influence can be understood when knowledge, credibility, and coordination are treated as analytically consequential to state building. The thesis aimed to move beyond descriptive references to merchants as economic background by demonstrating, through systematic archival analysis, that intermediary communities can contribute to stabilisation in ways that are visible across governance arenas and explainable through a coherent theoretical framework. The study also aimed to address gaps in epistemic communities scholarship by extending the concept to a historical setting in which expertise is practical and

relational rather than technocratic, while maintaining theoretical discipline through clearly specified influence pathways.

The findings presented in Chapter 5 and interpreted in this chapter provide a consistent answer to these aims. Evidence across the four role arenas demonstrates that stabilisation was assembled through a repertoire of practices that addressed core consolidation constraints, particularly uncertainty, uneven administrative penetration, and high coordination costs. Financial reliability contributed to political stability by making resource mobilisation and confidence more predictable under volatility. Defence enabling work contributed by strengthening the practical capacity for mobilisation and responsiveness, thereby reducing vulnerability at moments when consolidation required rapid coordination across dispersed actors. Dispute management contributed by producing negotiated closure that reduced enforcement burdens and limited escalation risks, allowing governance to remain workable without constant resort to coercion. Trade diplomacy and external commercial governance contributed by sustaining credible representation and predictable cross-border commercial order, which fed back into internal consolidation through reputational and resource effects. Considered together, these arenas indicate that Al-Aqilat were not peripheral commercial actors but stabilising intermediaries whose contributions travelled across domains commonly treated separately in conventional narratives.

The discussion has also shown why this stabilisation repertoire is best explained through an integrated account that separates authority, transmission, and durability rather than collapsing them into a single factor such as wealth, status, or coercion. Authority is clarified through the recognition of competence under uncertainty, which explains why certain judgements became decision relevant in environments where validation was constrained and political stakes were high. Transmission is clarified through the coordination capacity created by bridging positions across fragmented arenas, which explains how influence travelled and became operational rather than remaining local or episodic. Durability is clarified through the embedding of stabilisation practices into repeated reliance and expectations, which explains persistence without equating persistence with formal office holding or bureaucratic incorporation. This integrated structure does not

displace established consolidation drivers such as leadership, coercive capacity, and coalition management. Instead, it clarifies the stabilising infrastructure that helped make those drivers workable under constraint and therefore improves explanatory completeness.

The thesis therefore makes three linked scholarly contributions. Empirically, it reconstructs Al-Aqilat's stabilising role across multiple arenas and demonstrates cross arena coherence using systematic archival analysis rather than anecdotal attribution. Theoretically, it extends epistemic communities reasoning to a historical merchant intermediary setting while retaining the core logic of authority under uncertainty, and it strengthens explanation by integrating networked transmission and institutional durability to specify how knowledge becomes influence and how influence persists. Historiographically, it revises the explanatory balance of Third Saudi State formation narratives by demonstrating that stabilisation cannot be fully understood through coercion and institution building alone, because governance under uneven penetration also depended on intermediary capacities that reduced uncertainty, enabled coordination, and stabilised compliance through credible settlement and representation.

These conclusions remain bounded by the constraints of historical evidence and the limits of reconstructing network structures from dispersed archival traces, and the thesis has therefore treated inference with disciplinary caution. Nonetheless, the convergence of evidence across arenas and the coherence of the mechanism pathway provide a defensible basis for the main claim of the study. The most important finding to emerge is that Al-Aqilat can be analytically identified as an epistemic community in the context of Saudi state building: a knowledge bearing intermediary collective whose recognised competence under uncertainty, credible transmission across networks, and durable embedding in stabilisation practices made them governance relevant contributors to consolidation. In International Relations terms, the thesis therefore links knowledge power and networked politics to state formation by demonstrating how credible intermediaries can shape cross border governance routines and coordination under uncertainty. Naming Al-Aqilat as an epistemic community is not a rhetorical label. It is a theoretically grounded conclusion that captures the study's central contribution, namely that state building in this period was stabilised

not only through coercion and institutional expansion, but also through knowledge-based intermediation that made consolidation workable across finance, defence, dispute management, and external commercial governance.

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Coding Index

CodeBook Nvivo

Coding Index

Name	Description	Sources	References
Epistemic Diplomats and ambassadors		25	26
Al-Aqilat as Early Political Representatives	Al-Aqilat as Early Political Representatives of Saudi Arabia → Assisted Ibn Saud in diplomatic exchanges. Symbolic & Strategic Political Messaging in Arabian Leadership → Used gestures such as gifting horses to convey political intentions.	1	1
Al-Aqilat as Trusted Political & Strategic Advisors	Al-Aqilat as Trusted Political & Strategic Advisors → Played a key role in maintaining political stability. Coordination Between Military & Political Leadership → Ensured support for the Saudi state's survival & legitimacy.	1	1
Diplomatic & Political Roles		12	13
Al-Aqilat & Saudi Diplomacy		1	1
Al-Aqilat as Diplomatic		1	1

Stabilizers in Saudi-British Relations			
Al-Aqilat as Diplomats & Economic Leaders vs. Ikhwan as Military Opponents	Saudi Military Campaign Against Ikhwan Extremism → "Ibn Saud mobilized 40,000 troops to suppress the Ikhwan uprising." Ikhwan's Military Power & Continued Resistance → "Despite heavy losses, Ikhwan factions continued their insurgency." Foreign Intelligence Monitoring Saudi Internal Conflicts → "French intelligence tracked Saudi efforts to neutralize Ikhwan militarily."	3	3
Al-Aqilat as Secret Diplomatic Messengers for State Relations		2	2
Al-Aqilat's Political and Diplomatic Role	Trusted with state negotiations and tribal alignments.	5	5
Changing country name		1	1
Law and Governance		2	2
Al-Aqilat's Role in Law Enforcement & Governance	Al-Aqilat's Influence in Early Saudi Law Enforcement → Involvement in the establishment of police structures. Governance Roles Beyond Trade & Diplomacy → Shows expansion of their responsibilities into security management.	1	1

demonstration of control and legitimacy	Saudi Leadership's Strategic Messaging to the British → Highlighted local governance as a demonstration of control and legitimacy.	1	1
Religious Legitimacy vs. Political Power		3	3
soft power stabilizers		4	4
Trade & Governance	Saudi Leadership's Integration of Trade & Governance → Ensured economic networks remained aligned with state interests.	2	2
MRQ1- T1 - Al-Aqilat's Roles in State Building	MRQ1: How did Al-Aqilat function as an epistemic community in shaping the economic, political, and military stability of Saudi Arabia between 1902 and 1932?	181	463
Political Representation		18	21
Political Climate and Influence		4	4
impact of political climate on cultural evolution		2	2
Important Political Climate		0	0
Influential traders		2	2
Political Influence		6	7

Al-Aqilat as Cultural & Political Promoters of Saudi Leadership		1	1
Al-Aqilat as Guardians of Economic & Political Stability	Al-Aqilat as Guardians of Economic & Political Stability → Used community power to ensure fair governance. Early Participatory Governance in Saudi State-Building → Demonstrated Al-Aqilat's direct influence in policy & administration.	1	1
Al-Aqilat as Political Influencers in Anti-Colonial Movements	Al-Aqilat as Political Influencers in Anti-Colonial Movements → Used diplomatic engagement to expand Saudi influence in Syria. Saudi Leadership's Expansion Strategy Through Regional Alliances → Positioned Ibn Saud as the leader of Arab nationalist aspirations.	1	1
Al-Aqilat as Political Targets of Ottoman Legal Suppression	Al-Aqilat as Political Targets of Ottoman Legal Suppression → Faced legal and political pressure despite geographical relocation. Ottoman Authorities' Expansion of Control Over Al-Aqilat Traders → Used royal decrees to restrict their movements and activities.	1	1
Al-Aqilat's Role in Foundational Alliances	Strategic Alliances and State Building → Al-Dakhil's actions highlight how Al-Aqilat played a crucial role in territorial control and economic stability. Influence and Diplomacy → Showcases Al-Aqilat's foresight in forging regional alliances.	1	1

Al-Aqilat's Role in Political Alliances		2	2
Power Dynamics & Leadership in Governance		5	5
Al-Aqilat as Influential Merchants & Covert State Agents	They spread revolutionary pamphlets and political propaganda across the region	3	3
Ibn Saud’s Reliance on Al-Aqilat	Unlike Ikhwan’s militant expansion, Al-Aqilat provided stability through economic and political intelligence.	1	1
Ibn Saud’s Strategic Use of Al-Aqilat	Unlike Ikhwan’s aggressive expansion, Al-Aqilat secured political stability through diplomacy	1	1
Regional & Foreign Political Representation		5	5
Al-Aqilat as International Political Representatives	Al-Aqilat as International Political Representatives → Highlights their established networks in the Levant & beyond. Trust in Their Diplomatic & Trade Abilities → Shows Ibn Saud relied on them for critical foreign representation.	1	1

Al-Aqilat as State Representatives in Foreign Affairs	Al-Aqilat as State Representatives in Foreign Affairs → Acted as Saudi diplomatic and trade envoys in Syria. Saudi Leadership's Integration of Al-Aqilat into State Bureaucracy → Used trusted merchants for geopolitical expansion.	1	1
Al-Aqilat as State Representatives in Regional Diplomacy.		3	3
SRQ1 - Financial Networks & Political Stability	How did Al-Aqilat's economic expertise and trade networks serve as political leverage in Saudi Arabia's state formation and diplomacy?	107	150
Diplomatic merchants		10	15
Al-Aqilat as Diplomats in Syria	Fawzan Al-Sabiq engaged in diplomatic discussions with French authorities.	0	0
Camel Exchange treaty		0	0
Ikhwan's Exapnsion power	The archive describes their influential power to spread and conquer Hejaz. That is why Britishers acknowledge and informed French to control the Ikhwan through other force such as Al-Aqilat who weren't militants but merchants	1	1
Political and Trade Stability	Political and Trade Stability → Their diplomatic negotiations with France ensured economic security.	3	3

Proof of Secret communication between Abdulaziz and Merchants		1	1
Strategic Use of Trade Networks	Ensuring safe passage for Saudi trade caravans from Damascus.	1	1
Trade & Political Influence	Ensuring safe passage for Saudi trade caravans from Damascus. Trade & Political Influence → Ensured Saudi trade security via diplomatic channels.	2	2
Trade Correspondence	Mention of a 'Prince Yusuf Kamal' (a non-existent figure) as a hidden message.	1	1
Trade restrictions as a political tool		1	1
Use of Trade Networks for Diplomatic Leverage	Use of Trade Networks for Diplomatic Leverage → Their financial independence made them loyal state actors rather than mercenaries.	1	1
Financial Support through Economic Policy-making		8	8
Al-Aqilat as Economic & Diplomatic Facilitators		1	1

Al-Aqilat as Economic & Diplomatic Mediators in British-Saudi Relations		1	1
Al-Aqilat as Economic & Political Stabilizers in Saudi-British Tensions		1	1
Al-Aqilat as Economic & Religious Stabilizers in Saudi Politics		1	1
Al-Aqilat as Economic Buffers Against Foreign Financial Influence	Al-Aqilat as Economic Buffers Against Foreign Financial Influence → Ensured state resilience despite external aid reductions. Saudi Leadership's Diplomatic Management of Financial Cutbacks → Framed British aid termination as a non-issue to maintain diplomatic relations.	1	1
Al-Aqilat as Economic Stabilizers Amid	Al-Aqilat as Economic Stabilizers Amid British Financial Constraints → Provided economic alternatives to reduce reliance on British funds. Saudi Leadership's Struggle to Secure Financial Aid from Britain →	1	1

British Financial Constraints	Navigated foreign policy challenges while maintaining economic stability.		
Al-Aqilat as Economic Stabilizers Amid British Policy Shifts		1	1
Al-Aqilat's Support in Religious Diplomacy	Al-Aqilat's Support in Religious Diplomacy → Assisted Ibn Saud's non-violent approaches before military action. Failed Religious Mediation Leads to Conflict → Highlights the necessity of Al-Aqilat's continued political support.	1	1
Financial Support through political Advisory		62	66
Al-Aqilat as Consistent Financial Supporters of Saudi Expansion	Al-Aqilat as Consistent Financial Supporters of Saudi Expansion → Helped finance multiple key battles. Strategic Investment in the New Saudi State → Used wealth to ensure political dominance.	1	1
Al-Aqilat as Financial & Political Supporters of Ibn Saud's Rule	Al-Aqilat as Financial & Political Supporters of Ibn Saud's Rule → Played a major role in ensuring his political and economic strength. Ottoman Authorities' Efforts to Weaken Saudi Independence → Targeted financial supporters to restrict Ibn Saud's influence.	1	1

Al-Aqilat as Financial Administrators of British-Saudi Economic Relations		1	1
Al-Aqilat as Financial Advisors in British-Saudi Economic Agreements.		2	2
Al-Aqilat as Financial Backbone of the Saudi State	Al-Aqilat as Financial Backbone of the Saudi State → Continuously supported Ibn Saud's logistical needs. Economic & Humanitarian Support for Governance → Used resources to ensure smooth governance operations.	1	1
Al-Aqilat as Financial Backers of Saudi State Formation	Al-Aqilat as Financial Backers of Saudi State Formation → Their funding of Ibn Saud was significant enough to trigger Ottoman scrutiny. Ottoman Authorities' Attempt to Weaken Saudi Support Networks → Initially detained key financiers but later dropped the charges.	2	2
Al-Aqilat as Financial Diplomats in British-Saudi Relations.	Al-Aqilat as Financial Diplomats in British-Saudi Relations → Managed negotiations to ensure Saudi sovereignty despite financial conditions. Saudi Leadership's Strategic Approach to Conditional Foreign Aid → Balanced economic assistance with political independence.	1	1

Al-Aqilat as Financial Intermediaries in British-Saudi Relations		1	1
Al-Aqilat as Financial Pillars of Ibn Saud's Expansion	Al-Aqilat as Financial Pillars of Ibn Saud's Expansion → Provided direct economic backing for state consolidation. Strategic Allocation of Financial Resources for State Formation → Ensured military and administrative funding for unification efforts.	3	3
Al-Aqilat as Financial Stabilizers in Saudi Economic Competition		1	1
Al-Aqilat as Key Advisors in Saudi National Formation		1	1
Al-Aqilat as Key Figures in Saudi Arabia's Internal Stability		1	1
Al-Aqilat as Key Figures in Saudi	Al-Aqilat's Role in Saudi Foreign Policy Strategy → "Ibn Saud planned diplomatic representation in Europe while keeping Al-Aqilat in Syria & Egypt." Saudi Diplomatic	1	1

Diplomatic Expansion	Presence in European Capitals → "Planned to establish Saudi diplomatic posts in Britain, France, and Belgium." Al-Aqilat's Continued Role in Diplomatic Networks → "Managed Saudi consular affairs in key regions."		
Al-Aqilat as Key Players in Diplomatic Intelligence	Al-Aqilat in Diplomatic Intelligence → Documents suggest French surveillance of Al-Aqilat's involvement in state matters. Secret Correspondence Between Saudi & Foreign Powers → Al-Aqilat's role in handling covert diplomatic messages.	4	4
Al-Aqilat as Political & Economic Informants	Al-Aqilat as Political & Economic Informants → Played a role in gathering and disseminating intelligence across regions. Al-Aqilat's Regional Trade Networks & Diplomatic Influence → Maintained economic ties with Kuwaiti and Gulf traders.	1	1
Al-Aqilat as Political & Financial Advisors in British-Saudi Relations	Al-Aqilat as Political & Financial Advisors in British-Saudi Relations → Helped navigate between financial dependencies and military strategies. Saudi Leadership's Tactics in Balancing Economic Support & Military Goals → Ensured British aid was utilized without compromising Saudi autonomy.	1	1
Al-Aqilat as Political and Financial Backers of Ibn Saud's Expansion	Unlike Ikhwan's militant approach, Al-Aqilat used their financial and political influence to stabilize Najd. Their role in Qassim's alliance against Ibn Rashid highlights their embedded influence in state formation. Ibn Saud's tribute payment negotiations likely involved Al-Aqilat's financial backing.	0	0

Al-Aqilat as Political and Financial Backers of Ibn Saud's Expansion (2)	Unlike Ikhwan's militant approach, Al-Aqilat used their financial and political influence to stabilize Najd. Their role in Qassim's alliance against Ibn Rashid highlights their embedded influence in state formation. Ibn Saud's tribute payment negotiations likely involved Al-Aqilat's financial backing.	0	0
Al-Aqilat as Political Defenders of Ibn Saud's State-Building	Al-Aqilat as Political Defenders of Ibn Saud's State-Building → Supported Saudi leadership against Ottoman opposition. Ottoman Administration's Use of Imprisonment as a Political Weapon → Suppressed key figures aligned with Ibn Saud.	1	1
Al-Aqilat as Political Negotiators & Intelligence Brokers		1	1
Al-Aqilat as Political Negotiators in British-Saudi Relations		1	1
Al-Aqilat as Political Refugees & Transnational Influencers		1	1

Al-Aqilat as State Governors		1	1
Al-Aqilat as Strategic Political Advisors & Intelligence Assets		1	1
Al-Aqilat as Unofficial Economic Policymakers		5	5
Al-Aqilat's financial backing		2	2
Al-Aqilat's Role in Mediating Financial Aid		1	1
Al-Aqilat's Role in Negotiating Financial Terms for Ibn Saud	Al-Aqilat as Financial Negotiators in Saudi-British Relations → Facilitated ongoing diplomatic talks on economic support. Saudi Leadership's Strategic Argument for Increased Financial Aid → Used state expenses as justification for greater British backing.	1	1
Al-Aqilat's financial connection with King		1	1

Authorized agents		9	9
British Strategy of Using Loans as Political Leverage		1	1
Diplomatic Policy formation		4	4
Economic Influence		3	3
Economic Negotiators		1	1
Influence on Economic conditions through strategic planning		2	2
Influential ambassadors	Internally and externally	5	5
Foreign agreements with internal economic realities		1	1
Regional Economic Conditions		1	1

Financial Support through Trade and networks		41	61
Al-Aqilat as Controllers of Strategic Trade Routes		2	2
Al-Aqilat as Cross-Border Trade Agents & Economic Strategists	Al-Aqilat as Cross-Border Trade Agents & Economic Strategists → Controlled large-scale trade despite British concerns. British Authorities' Efforts to Monitor & Restrict Al-Aqilat's Influence → Considered their activities politically sensitive.	1	1
Al-Aqilat as Early Investors in Saudi Oil & Gas	Al-Aqilat as Early Investors in Saudi Oil & Gas → Highlights their pivotal role in the country's economic future. State Recognition of Their Financial Expertise → Reinforces Al-Aqilat's influence in trade, investment, & infrastructure.	1	1
Al-Aqilat as Economic Powerhouses & State Allies in Saudi Trade Security		6	6
Al-Aqilat as Key Players in	Al-Aqilat as Key Players in Regional Trade Policy → Controlled critical trade routes and impacted economic decisions. Saudi Leadership's Use of Economic Measures	2	2

Regional Trade Policy	for Political Leverage → Used trade restrictions to weaken rival economies.		
Al-Aqilat as Pragmatic Traders vs. Ikhwan as Religious Extremists		1	1
Al-Aqilat as Security & Trade Policy Advocates		2	2
Al-Aqilat as Trade & Diplomatic Intermediaries		1	1
Al-Aqilat as Trade Diplomats		7	7
Al-Aqilat as Trade Diplomats & Economic Stabilizers		3	3
Al-Aqilat as Trade-Based Intelligence Operators	Al-Aqilat as Trade-Based Intelligence Operators → Managed trade routes that were critical to Saudi intelligence gathering. Saudi Leadership's Dependence on Al-Aqilat for Strategic Trade Control → Ensured trade routes aligned with political stability.	1	1

Al-Aqilat as Trade-Based Political Negotiators		1	1
Al-Aqilat's international trade networks		5	5
Camel Trade		2	2
dual role of Suleiman Al Mushaiqah		2	2
impact of trade on political environment		5	5
Influential merchants	British-Saudi Diplomacy → "British Commissioner Percy Cox met Abdulaziz Al Saud in Al-Uqair." Presence in diplomatic discussions with British officials.	7	7
Influential traders		2	2
International Trade and Migration	Highlights Al-Qassim's extensive trade with India, Egypt, the Levant, London, and America.	1	1
Strong merhants		5	5
Trade & Governance	Saudi Leadership's Integration of Trade & Governance → Ensured economic networks remained aligned with state interests.	2	2

Trade and Political Influence	Trade and Political Influence → Their participation suggests they were crucial in shaping Saudi-British relations.	2	2
SRQ2 - Military Contrubutions and State Defense	How did Al-Aqilat contribute to military logistics, resource mobilization, and border security, and how did this shape Saudi military strategy?	65	108
Border Security & Intelligence Operations	Codes related to Al-Aqilat's role in securing territorial borders and gathering military intelligence for Ibn Saud	18	21
Advisors in war trajectories		2	2
Al-Aqilat as Economic & Military Pillars of Saudi Arabia.		2	2
Al-Aqilat as Military Leaders in Saudi State Security		3	3
Al-Aqilat as State Agents		5	5
Al-Aqilat as State Agents in Damascus	Envoys of Abdulaziz Al Saud (Al-Aqilat) were recruiting officers and doctors."	2	2

Al-Aqilat's Influence in Military & Political Power Struggles	Al-Aqilat's Influence in Military & Political Power Struggles → Played a direct role in conflicts shaping Saudi rule. Consequences of Political Loyalty in Tribal Alliances → Showed how alliances impacted leadership within Al-Aqilat.	2	2
Bilateral Relations and nagotiations		1	1
Border conflict		1	1
Diplomatic & Military Negotiations		2	2
Political Security & Strategic Alliances	Political Security & Strategic Alliances → Advocated for clear communication to prevent diplomatic incidents.	0	0
Saudi Border & Immigration Coordinators		1	1
Economic Influence in Military Contributions	Codes that highlight how Al-Aqilat leveraged their economic power to support military efforts)	13	15
Al-Aqilat as Military Financiers in Saudi Conquests	Al-Aqilat as Military Financiers → Ensured funding for key military victories. Coordination Between Financial & Political Actors → Reinforced the direct link between Al-Aqilat and Saudi leadership.	1	1

Economic & Political Administrators		4	4
economic stability		3	3
role beyond commerce		1	1
Strong businessmen rather than militants		2	2
Strong Merchants not Militants	See people list from EC plan (40 Abdullah Al issa) and connect dot. We have to make connection to make Al-Agailat are strong business men not miltants. Analyze In the battle of Al-Khurma a number of female wives participated in the battle with Al-Sharif against the IKHWAN, including: Muhammad Abdullah Abdulaziz Al-Issa, and it was mentioned that when he saw Al-Sharif's forces heading towards defeat, he withdrew.	4	4
Military Diplomacy & Strategic Alliances	Codes that highlight how Al-Aqilat built military alliances and political stability through diplomacy rather than warfare	23	25
Al-Aqilat as Cross-Border Trade Agents & Economic Strategists	Al-Aqilat as Cross-Border Trade Agents & Economic Strategists → Controlled large-scale trade despite British concerns. British Authorities' Efforts to Monitor & Restrict Al-Aqilat's Influence → Considered their activities politically sensitive.	1	1

Al-Aqilat as Economic Stabilizers vs. Ikhwan as Military Aggressors		9	9
Al-Aqilat as Political Defenders of Ibn Saud's State-Building	Al-Aqilat as Political Defenders of Ibn Saud's State-Building → Supported Saudi leadership against Ottoman opposition. Ottoman Administration's Use of Imprisonment as a Political Weapon → Suppressed key figures aligned with Ibn Saud.	1	1
Al-Aqilat as Strategic Allies		2	2
Balance of power		1	1
Delegation of Political & Economic Power to Al-Aqilat	Ibn Saud's Delegation of Political & Economic Power to Al-Aqilat → "Suleiman Al Mushaiqah appointed to oversee state affairs in Damascus."	0	0
Diplomatic Consequences of Military Actions		1	1
Influential ambassadors	Skilled and educated workers creating strong relations with community of Syria	3	3

Ikhwan-Al-Aqilat Alliance against Ibn Saud's Enemy		1	1
Marital Alliance	Ibn Saud's marriage to Lulwa, daughter of Saleh bin Dakhil Al-Jarallah, strengthened strategic alliances through familial ties	2	2
Military Alliances and Strategic Marriages	Political-Military Coordination → Demonstrates Al-Aqilat's involvement in strategic warfare planning. Alliance Through Marriages → Al-Rabadi's marriage strengthened political bonds	1	1
Military allies and regional supremacy		1	1
Military Diplomats		1	1
Political Allies	Al-Aqilat as Political Allies in State Formation → Shifted loyalties to align with emerging power structures. Strategic Communication & Psychological Warfare → Used messaging to reinforce Saudi rule & undermine opponents.	1	1
Military Logistics & Resource Mobilization	Codes that highlight Al-Aqilat's role in supplying and supporting military operations through logistics and economic means	13	26
Al-Aqilat as Economic &		1	1

Military Coordinators in British-Saudi Relations			
Al-Aqilat as Economic Stabilizers Amid Military & Political Negotiations		1	1
Al-Aqilat as Facilitators of Military Support	Used global trade networks to secure arms for Saudi Arabia. Their Role in Strengthening Saudi Military Capabilities → Engaged in high-level international arms negotiations.	3	3
Al-Aqilat as Military Logistics Coordinators in Saudi Defense Strategy.		2	2
Al-Aqilat as strategic recruiters	Involved in military and political structuring for Ibn Saud.	0	0
Dual Role in State-Building & Military Supplies	Managed official & unofficial weapons logistics.	4	4

Economic vs. Military Power Struggles		3	3
Military Logistics	Weapons and supplies were sent from Al-Jawf to Qurayyat Al-Milh, not to Syrian rebels." Al-Aqilat as Military Logistics Coordinators → Managed arms supply chains for Saudi border defense. French Misinterpretations of Saudi Defense Strategy → Western intelligence misunderstood Saudi military operations.	3	3
Military support		7	7
Qassimi People's support to Al Saud		1	1
Weapon Support		1	1
Military Strategy & Defense Contributions	Codes related to Al-Aqilat's direct engagement in Saudi Arabia's military strategies, planning, and defense measures	11	13
Al-Aqilat as Contributors to Saudi Security & Military Affairs	Al-Aqilat as Contributors to Saudi Security & Military Affairs → Assisted in state security beyond trade & finance. Institutionalization of Military & Police Systems → Helped formalize Saudi law enforcement structures.	2	2
Al-Aqilat as Defenders of Qassim's Political		1	1

& Economic Autonomy			
Al-Aqilat as Military and Political Recruiters for Saudi Expansion		2	2
Al-Aqilat as Military Contributors to Saudi State-Building	Al-Aqilat as Military Contributors to Saudi State-Building → Provided organized & loyal forces to Ibn Saud's campaigns. Strategic Differentiation from Ikhwan Militancy → Maintained disciplined support without causing state instability.	2	2
Al-Aqilat as Military Governors of Qassim		1	1
Al-Aqilat as Military Strategists in Saudi Conquests	Al-Aqilat as Military Strategists in Saudi Conquests → Provided key advice on war tactics. Strategic Resilience & Regrouping → Demonstrates how Al-Aqilat's political wisdom influenced battles.	1	1
Al-Aqilat as Military Supporters in Saudi State Formation	Al-Aqilat as Military Supporters in Saudi State Formation → Provided critical reinforcements in suppressing the Ikhwan rebellion. Saudi Leadership's Military Approach to Internal Conflicts → Used loyal regional forces to secure territorial control.	2	2

Battle of Al-Khurma & Military Operations		0	0
Saudi Military Preparedness for War	the Kingdom's army, led by Ibn Aqeel and Ibn Zaher, was equipped with modern weapons	1	1
Strategic military planner		1	1
Political & Strategic Influence in Military Affairs	(Codes emphasizing Al-Aqilat's political and diplomatic role in military stability)	8	8
Al-Aqilat's Role in Security Infrastructure	contributed to Makkah's military-police coordination."	1	1
Al-Aqilat's strategic Support		1	1
Geo-political Tensions	King Hussein opposed reconciliation between King Faisal and Abdulaziz Al Saud	2	2
Influential impacts on political decision		2	2
Political Challenges Due to Ikhwan Militancy		1	1

Role of Al-Aqilat in National Unity and Defense	Active Military Role in Ibn Saud's Army → "Participated in major battles: Al-Widia, Conquest of Mecca, Siege of Jeddah, & Battle of Badr." Comparison to Ikhwan's Role in Saudi Military → "Al-Aqilat's structured support was more stable compared to Ikhwan's later disruptions."	1	1
SRQ3 - Strategic Conflict Mediation	How did Al-Aqilat act as conflict mediators and stabilizers, countering Ikhwan's military disruptions while maintaining diplomatic relations?	37	83
Al-Aqilat as Conflict Mediators & Political Stabilizers	Codes highlighting Al-Aqilat's role in diplomacy, conflict resolution, and political mediation	8	8
Al-Aqilat as Conflict Mediators in Regional Trade Negotiations		1	1
Al-Aqilat as Diplomatic Mediators Between Saudi State & Wahhabi Leadership		1	1
Al-Aqilat as Political Strategists &	Al-Aqilat as Political Strategists & Conflict Mediators → Used wisdom & diplomacy to prevent further internal strife. Preventing Unnecessary Military Engagements →	1	1

Conflict Mediators	Supported Ibn Saud's rule through non-violent conflict resolution.		
Al-Aqilat as Political Strategists in Conflict Management	Al-Aqilat as Political Strategists in Conflict Management → Played a decisive role in shaping military-political responses. Managing Ikhwan's Challenge to Saudi Authority → Used political foresight to neutralize threats.	1	1
Border conflict negotiators	Abdullah AlMisfir	3	3
conflicts with other tribes		0	0
Inter-group conflicts and management		1	1
Al-Aqilat vs. Ikhwan - A Contrast in Governance & State Formation		14	14
Al-Aqilat as Neutral Power Brokers in Arabian Politics		3	3
Al-Aqilat as Political Stabilizers vs.		3	3

Ikhwan as Aggressors			
Al-Aqilat as Pragmatic Diplomats vs. Ikhwan as Religious Extremists	Al-Aqilat as Pragmatic Diplomats vs. Ikhwan as Religious Extremists → Used political influence instead of religious coercion. Saudi Leadership's Dual Approach: Religious & Diplomatic Expansion → Balanced Ikhwan's militancy with Al-Aqilat's diplomacy.	1	1
Al-Aqilat as Pragmatic Traders vs. Ikhwan as Religious Extremists		1	1
Al-Aqilat as State-Builders vs. Ikhwan		3	3
Al-Aqilat's Role in State Formation	Al-Aqilat's Role in State Formation → "They worked as ambassadors without financial incentive, prioritizing state-building."	2	2
Conflict resolution efforts by Al-Aqilat		1	1
de-escalate conflicts	Al-Aqilat as Political Diplomats in Crisis Management → Worked to de-escalate conflicts between Saudi Arabia and colonial powers.	0	0

Ikhwan as a Destabilizing Force	Their actions led to diplomatic crises and British intervention. Al-Aqilat as Stabilizers vs. Ikhwan as Instigators → While Ikhwan caused regional tensions, Al-Aqilat strengthened Saudi diplomacy.	21	52
Al-Aqilat Stabilized State Relations While Ikhwan Created Diplomatic Crises		5	5
Dominance over Ikhwan through advisory		1	1
Ikhwan as a Source of Political Problems	Ikhwan as a Source of Political Problems → "Ibn Saud had to apologize for Wahhabi (Ikhwan) attacks on Kuwait."	7	7
Ikhwan as Military Radicals		4	4
Ikhwan as Political instigators		6	6
Ikhwan caused delays in state-building		4	4
Ikhwan rebellion	Saudi Political & Military Response to Ikhwan's Actions → Ibn Saud had to suppress their rebellion to maintain	8	8

	state unity.		
Ikhwan's Rejection of Peace Talks & Continued Rebellion		1	1
Ikhwan's Uncontrolled Raids Leading to Foreign Military Action	British Air Force bombed Ikhwan camps after Faisal Al-Duwaish's attacks on Iraq & Kuwait."	3	3
Maintained trade diplomacy while Ikhwan escalated conflicts.		2	2
Najd's Rejection of the Arab Revolt & Sharif Hussein		1	1
Saudi Military & Political Strategy to Contain Ikhwan	Codes related to Saudi Arabia's efforts to counterbalance Ikhwan's military disruptions	7	9
Al-Aqilat's Contrast to Ikhwan's Disruptive Behavior	Al-Aqilat's Contrast to Ikhwan's Disruptive Behavior → "Ikhwan caused problems, while Al-Aqilat supported Ibn Saud's state-building."	3	3

Neutralizing the Ikhwan Threat		1	1
Saudi Political & Military Strategy to Contain Ikhwan	Ibn Saud held a tribal conference in Riyadh to consolidate control.	3	3
Saudi Political Challenges Due to Ikhwan		2	2
SRQ4 - Trade Diplomacy		53	101
Economic Networks & Cross-Border Trade	Al-Aqilat's financial power, transnational trade, and role in economic stability.	4	4
Al-Aqilat as Cross-Border Trade Agents & Economic Strategists	Al-Aqilat as Cross-Border Trade Agents & Economic Strategists → Controlled large-scale trade despite British concerns. British Authorities' Efforts to Monitor & Restrict Al-Aqilat's Influence → Considered their activities politically sensitive.	1	1
Al-Aqilat as Economic Stakeholders in Ottoman Trade Networks	Al-Aqilat as Economic Stakeholders in Ottoman Trade Networks → Their business activities spanned multiple regions under Ottoman control. Ottoman Government's Role in Managing Trade Security → Faced political pressure from influential merchant groups.	1	1

International Trade and Migration	Highlights Al-Qassim's extensive trade with India, Egypt, the Levant, London, and America.	1	1
Role of Merchant Communities in Nation-Building	illustrates the critical role that merchant communities like Al-Aqilat played in the financial and socio-economic foundations of the modern Saudi state, contributing to its development through religiously mandated economic practices.	1	1
Strategic and Diplomatic Traders	Trade used as a tool for diplomacy, mediation, and international influence.	31	57
Abdullah Al-Issa's presence in key events		1	1
Al-Aqilat as Conflict Mediators in Regional Trade Negotiations		1	1
Al-Aqilat as Intermediaries in Trade Diplomacy	A Najdi merchant (Al-Aqilat) was used to deliver Abdulaziz's message to French authorities	3	3
Al-Aqilat as Intermediaries in Trade Diplomacy (2)	A Najdi merchant (Al-Aqilat) was used to deliver Abdulaziz's message to French authorities	3	3

Al-Aqilat as International Trade Diplomats		1	1
Al-Aqilat as International Trade Diplomats (2)		1	1
Al-Aqilat as Key Players in Regional Trade Policy	Al-Aqilat as Key Players in Regional Trade Policy → Controlled critical trade routes and impacted economic decisions. Saudi Leadership's Use of Economic Measures for Political Leverage → Used trade restrictions to weaken rival economies.	2	2
Al-Aqilat as Neutral Trade Diplomats Across Tribal & Political Lines	Al-Aqilat as Neutral Trade Diplomats Across Tribal & Political Lines → Maintained independence while facilitating commerce. Al-Aqilat's Strong Economic Network Across Arabian Trade Hubs → Developed trans-regional trade alliances.	1	1
Al-Aqilat as Neutral Trade Diplomats Across Tribal & Political Lines (2)	Al-Aqilat as Neutral Trade Diplomats Across Tribal & Political Lines → Maintained independence while facilitating commerce. Al-Aqilat's Strong Economic Network Across Arabian Trade Hubs → Developed trans-regional trade alliances.	1	1
Al-Aqilat as Political Advisors & Economic Patrons	Al-Aqilat as Political Advisors & Economic Patrons → Used financial influence to support Saudi expansion. Intermediary Roles in Gulf-Saudi Diplomacy → Strengthened ties between Saudi leadership & Kuwaiti	2	2

	elites.		
Al-Aqilat as Trade & Diplomatic Intermediaries		1	1
Al-Aqilat as Trade Diplomats		7	7
Al-Aqilat as Trade Diplomats & Economic Stabilizers		3	3
Al-Aqilat as Trade-Based Intelligence Operators	Al-Aqilat as Trade-Based Intelligence Operators → Managed trade routes that were critical to Saudi intelligence gathering. Saudi Leadership's Dependence on Al-Aqilat for Strategic Trade Control → Ensured trade routes aligned with political stability.	1	1
Al-Aqilat as Trade-Based Political Negotiators		1	1
Al-Aqilat as Trade-Based Political Negotiators (2)		1	1
Al-Aqilat as Transnational	Al-Aqilat as Transnational Trade Entrepreneurs → Expanded business operations beyond the Arabian	1	1

Trade Entrepreneurs	Peninsula. Economic Diplomacy Through Commerce → Integrated into Indian & Gulf economies, strengthening regional connections.		
Al-Aqilat as Transnational Trade Entrepreneurs (2)	Al-Aqilat as Transnational Trade Entrepreneurs → Expanded business operations beyond the Arabian Peninsula. Economic Diplomacy Through Commerce → Integrated into Indian & Gulf economies, strengthening regional connections.	1	1
Al-Aqilat's international trade networks		5	5
Balanced weapons trade with diplomatic relations		1	1
Ikhwan's Exapnsion power	The archive describes their influential power to spread and conquer Hejaz. That is why Britishers acknowledge and informed French to control the Ikhwan through other force such as Al-Aqilat who weren't militants but merchants	1	1
Maintained trade diplomacy while Ikhwan escalated conflicts.		2	2
Political and Trade Stability	Political and Trade Stability → Their diplomatic negotiations with France ensured economic security.	3	3

Trade & Political Influence	Ensuring safe passage for Saudi trade caravans from Damascus. Trade & Political Influence → Ensured Saudi trade security via diplomatic channels.	2	2
Trade and Political Influence	Trade and Political Influence → Their participation suggests they were crucial in shaping Saudi-British relations.	2	2
trade as a tool for political stability and state-building		1	1
Trade as a tool for political stability and state-building (2)		1	1
Trade Correspondence	Mention of a 'Prince Yusuf Kamal' (a non-existent figure) as a hidden message.	1	1
Trade diplomacy		4	4
trade restrictions as a political tool		1	1
Use of Trade Networks for Diplomatic Leverage	Use of Trade Networks for Diplomatic Leverage → Their financial independence made them loyal state actors rather than mercenaries.	1	1
Trade Intelligence & Security	Trade networks leveraged for intelligence, covert operations, and security policies.	17	18

Al-Aqilat as Gatekeepers in Diplomatic Intelligence		2	2
Al-Aqilat as Security & Trade Policy Advocates		2	2
Al-Aqilat as Trade-Based Intelligence Operators	Al-Aqilat as Trade-Based Intelligence Operators → Managed trade routes that were critical to Saudi intelligence gathering. Saudi Leadership's Dependence on Al-Aqilat for Strategic Trade Control → Ensured trade routes aligned with political stability.	1	1
Balanced weapons trade with diplomatic relations		1	1
Business Leaders	Al-Aqilat's Contribution to Egypt's Horse Racing Industry → "They played a key role as horse trainers & stable owners under Khedive Abbas Hilmi II." Economic & Cultural Expansion of Al-Aqilat Beyond Arabia → "Their influence extended to Egypt & the broader Levant region."	1	1
influential diplomacy	Al-Aqilat as Key Figures in International Intelligence & Diplomacy.	4	4

International Trade and Migration	Highlights Al-Qassim's extensive trade with India, Egypt, the Levant, London, and America.	1	1
Proof of Secret communication between Abdulaziz and Merchants		1	1
Strategic Use of Trade Networks	Ensuring safe passage for Saudi trade caravans from Damascus.	1	1
Strong Merchants not Militants	See people list from EC plan (40 Abdullah Al issa) and connect dot. We have to make connection to make Al-Aqilat are strong business men not miltants. Analyze In the battle of Al-Khurma a number of female wives participated in the battle with Al-Sharif against the IKHWAN, including: Muhammad Abdullah Abdulaziz Al-Issa, and it was mentioned that when he saw Al-Sharif's forces heading towards defeat, he withdrew.	4	4
Trade Mechanisms & Merchant Operations	Codes focusing on trade logistics, exchange agreements, and merchant-led trade functions	16	22
Al-Aqilat as Diplomatic Negotiators in Trade Access.	Al-Aqilat as Diplomatic Negotiators in Trade Access → Used high-level mediation to secure trading rights. Al-Aqilat's Strategic Relations with Gulf & Arabian Leaders → Maintained cross-regional alliances for economic security.	1	1

Al-Aqilat as Diplomats in Syria	Fawzan Al-Sabiq engaged in diplomatic discussions with French authorities.	0	0
Al-Aqilat as Influential Merchants & Covert State Agents	They spread revolutionary pamphlets and political propaganda across the region	3	3
Al-Aqilat's Role in Business and Political Influence		0	0
Camel Exchange treaty		0	0
Camel Trade		2	2
dual role of Suleiman Al Mushaiqah		2	2
dual role of Suleiman Al Mushaiqah (2)		2	2
Influential merchants	British-Saudi Diplomacy → "British Commissioner Percy Cox met Abdulaziz Al Saud in Al-Uqair." Presence in diplomatic discussions with British officials.	7	7
Strong merhants		5	5
MRQ2- T2- Epistemic Attributes of Al-Aqilat	What epistemic attributes (economic expertise, intelligence gathering, diplomacy, and military logistics)	167	322

	positioned Al-Aqilat as a stabilizing force in contrast to Ikhwan's militant disruption?		
Regional Powers and geo-political deligence		49	63
Al-Aqilat as Controllers of Strategic Trade Routes		2	2
Al-Aqilat as Cultural & Political Ambassadors of Qassim		2	2
Al-Aqilat as Political Influencers in State Propaganda.	Al-Aqilat in Propaganda & Political Influence → "Mr. Al-Shibili, Najd's chargé d'affaires in Bombay (Al-Aqilat), was active in influencing public opinion.	1	3
Al-Aqilat as Secret State Diplomats vs. Ikhwan's Expansionist Threat		0	0
Al-Aqilat's international trade networks		5	5
Al-Aqilat's Role in Diplomacy Over Ikhwan's Aggression		3	3

Al-Aqilat's Role in Tribal Leadership & Influence	Fawzan Al-Sabeq played a crucial role in securing French-Saudi relations.	2	2
Al-Aqilat's Socio-Cultural Influence in State-Building	tribal relations influenced political stability."	3	3
British Recognition of Threats & Stability Actors		0	0
Expansion of Ikhwan		2	3
geo-political alignment		1	1
Geopolitical Importance of Saudi-France Relations		0	0
Geopolitical Influence of Al-Aqilat	Their role extended beyond trade to handling confidential diplomatic communications	1	1
Ikhwan's unchecked expansion		1	1
International balance of power		7	7

Political Alignments of Tribes	Political Alignment of tribes in Al Jawf	2	2
Political Mediation	Al-Aqilat's Role in Political Mediation → "France asked Fawzan Al-Sabeq to act as a liaison for Saudi-France communication."	2	2
Political problems and massive migration		0	0
Power struggles		4	4
Power struggles between French and British	Al-Aqilat involved in negotiations linked to colonial strategies.	1	1
Qassim's Strategic Importance		1	1
Regional Economic Conditions		1	1
regional political power		2	2
regional politics		3	3
Regional Power Struggles & Shifting Loyalties	Qassim's victory proved their loyalty to Ibn Saud, shaping his rise to power	1	1
Religious Legitimacy vs. Political Power		3	3

Role of Merchant Communities in Nation-Building	illustrates the critical role that merchant communities like Al-Aqilat played in the financial and socio-economic foundations of the modern Saudi state, contributing to its development through religiously mandated economic practices.	1	1
Saudi Border & Immigration Coordinators		0	0
Saudi-British Treaty & Political Perceptions	British-Najdi treaty damaged Abdulaziz Al Saud's reputation, leading to propaganda efforts	0	0
soft power stabilizers		4	4
Strategic Region for Political Alliances	Al-Jouf as a Strategic Region for Political Alliances → "France sought to maintain influence in Al-Jouf by engaging with Saudi representatives."	3	3
Trade & Governance	Saudi Leadership's Integration of Trade & Governance → Ensured economic networks remained aligned with state interests.	2	2
SRQ5 - Economic Expertise	In what ways did Al-Aqilat's economic strategies and transnational trade knowledge contribute to their role as key political stabilizers in Saudi Arabia?	44	54
Al-Aqilat as Early Investors in Saudi Oil & Gas	Al-Aqilat as Early Investors in Saudi Oil & Gas → Highlights their pivotal role in the country's economic future. State Recognition of Their Financial Expertise →	1	1

	Reinforces Al-Aqilat's influence in trade, investment, & infrastructure.		
Al-Aqilat as Economic & Religious Stabilizers in Saudi Politics		1	1
Al-Aqilat as Economic Buffers Against Foreign Financial Influence	Al-Aqilat as Economic Buffers Against Foreign Financial Influence → Ensured state resilience despite external aid reductions. Saudi Leadership's Diplomatic Management of Financial Cutbacks → Framed British aid termination as a non-issue to maintain diplomatic relations.	1	1
Al-Aqilat as Economic Powerhouses & State Allies in Saudi Trade Security		6	6
Al-Aqilat as Economic Stabilizers Amid British Financial Constraints	Al-Aqilat as Economic Stabilizers Amid British Financial Constraints → Provided economic alternatives to reduce reliance on British funds. Saudi Leadership's Struggle to Secure Financial Aid from Britain → Navigated foreign policy challenges while maintaining economic stability.	1	1
Al-Aqilat as Economic Stabilizers Amid British Policy Shifts		1	1

Al-Aqilat as Economic Stakeholders in Ottoman Trade Networks	Al-Aqilat as Economic Stakeholders in Ottoman Trade Networks → Their business activities spanned multiple regions under Ottoman control. Ottoman Government's Role in Managing Trade Security → Faced political pressure from influential merchant groups.	1	1
Al-Aqilat as Financial Advisors in British-Saudi Economic Agreements.		2	2
Al-Aqilat as Financial Backers of Saudi Arabia's State Formation.		2	2
Al-Aqilat as Financial Backers of Saudi State Formation	Al-Aqilat as Financial Backers of Saudi State Formation → Their funding of Ibn Saud was significant enough to trigger Ottoman scrutiny. Ottoman Authorities' Attempt to Weaken Saudi Support Networks → Initially detained key financiers but later dropped the charges.	2	2
Al-Aqilat as Financial Diplomats in British-Saudi Relations.	Al-Aqilat as Financial Diplomats in British-Saudi Relations → Managed negotiations to ensure Saudi sovereignty despite financial conditions. Saudi Leadership's Strategic Approach to Conditional Foreign Aid → Balanced economic assistance with political independence.	1	1

Al-Aqilat as Financial Intermediaries in British-Saudi Relations		1	1
Al-Aqilat as Financial Negotiators in Saudi Debt Management	Al-Aqilat as Financial Negotiators in Saudi Debt Management → Assisted Ibn Saud in structuring and negotiating external financial support. Saudi Leadership's Dependence on External Loans for Political Stability → Leveraged foreign economic support to maintain governance.	1	1
Al-Aqilat as Financial Supporters of Saudi State Formation		1	1
Al-Aqilat as Religious & Economic Brokers		3	3
Al-Aqilat as Trade Diplomats & Economic Stabilizers		3	3
Al-Aqilat as Unofficial Economic Policymakers		5	5
Al-Aqilat's Role in Navigating		2	2

Economic Hardships for Saudi Arabia			
Al-Aqilat's strategy of economic mediation		4	4
Economic blockade		1	1
Economic Negotiators		1	1
financial support from British		1	1
Foreign agreements with internal economic realities		1	1
Influence on Economic conditions through strategic planning		2	2
International Negotiations & Economic Influence	Ibn Saud relied on trade and political agreements to manage state relations.	2	2
Law and Governance		7	7
Al-Aqilat as State Governors		1	1

Al-Aqilat's Contrast as Pragmatic Diplomats		1	1
Al-Aqilat's Role in Internal Political Stability		3	3
Al-Aqilat's Role in Law Enforcement & Governance	Al-Aqilat's Influence in Early Saudi Law Enforcement → Involvement in the establishment of police structures. Governance Roles Beyond Trade & Diplomacy → Shows expansion of their responsibilities into security management.	1	1
demonstration of control and legitimacy	Saudi Leadership's Strategic Messaging to the British → Highlighted local governance as a demonstration of control and legitimacy.	1	1
SRQ6 - Strategic Intelligence & Security	What role did Al-Aqilat play in intelligence gathering and covert diplomacy, and how did this contribute to Ibn Saud's governance strategies?	25	35
Al-Aqilat as Contributors to Saudi Security & Military Affairs	Al-Aqilat as Contributors to Saudi Security & Military Affairs → Assisted in state security beyond trade & finance. Institutionalization of Military & Police Systems → Helped formalize Saudi law enforcement structures.	2	2
Al-Aqilat as Covert Intelligence		3	3

Operators for Saudi Arabia			
Al-Aqilat as Diplomatic Representatives in Information Security	Al-Aqilat as Trusted State Representatives in Diplomacy → Handled Saudi diplomatic communications across regions. French-Saudi Political Disputes Over Information Security → Their letters contained strategic intelligence valuable to both sides.	3	3
Al-Aqilat as Gatekeepers in Diplomatic Intelligence		3	3
Al-Aqilat as Intelligence Agents	Fawzan Al-Sabiq	3	3
Al-Aqilat as Intelligence Agents Monitoring British-Ottoman Rivalry		1	1
Al-Aqilat as Intelligence Agents Monitoring Regional Political Sentiments		1	1
Al-Aqilat as Security Administrators in Saudi State-Building		1	1

Al-Aqilat as Skilled Fighters & Economic Actors in Saudi Warfare		1	1
Al-Aqilat as Strategic Political Advisors & Intelligence Assets		1	1
Al-Aqilat as Trade-Based Intelligence Operators	Al-Aqilat as Trade-Based Intelligence Operators → Managed trade routes that were critical to Saudi intelligence gathering. Saudi Leadership's Dependence on Al-Aqilat for Strategic Trade Control → Ensured trade routes aligned with political stability.	1	1
Al-Aqilat's Role in Intelligence & Secrecy	Coded information indicates trust in Al-Aqilat merchants.	2	2
covert diplomats		1	1
exchnage of secret messages between Ibn Saud and French gov		0	0
importance of state actors	Suleiman Al Mushaiqah was being bypassed due to his sincerity and loyalty to Ibn Saud. This gives a perspective that he was considered important ally of Ibn Saud.	0	0

Political Utilization of Al-Aqilat's Networks		1	1
Proof of Secret communication between Abdulaziz and Merchants		1	1
Secret diplomatic affairs		2	2
Secret Messengers	"Al-Aqilat as Secret Messengers in Diplomatic Negotiations."	5	5
Secret State Agents		2	2
trade routes crucial for wartime commerce		1	1
Trusted Messengers		0	0
SRQ7 - epistemic military expertise	How did Al-Aqilat's expertise in military logistics and strategic resource allocation provide a tactical advantage for Ibn Saud in securing state power?	12	15
Al-Aqilat as Defenders of Qassim's Political & Economic Autonomy		1	1

Al-Aqilat as Economic & Military Coordinators in British-Saudi Relations		1	1
Al-Aqilat as Facilitators of Military Support	Used global trade networks to secure arms for Saudi Arabia. Their Role in Strengthening Saudi Military Capabilities → Engaged in high-level international arms negotiations.	3	3
Al-Aqilat as Military and Political Recruiters for Saudi Expansion		2	2
Al-Aqilat as Military Contributors to Saudi State-Building	Al-Aqilat as Military Contributors to Saudi State-Building → Provided organized & loyal forces to Ibn Saud's campaigns. Strategic Differentiation from Ikhwan Militancy → Maintained disciplined support without causing state instability.	2	2
Al-Aqilat as Military Financiers in Saudi Conquests	Al-Aqilat as Military Financiers → Ensured funding for key military victories. Coordination Between Financial & Political Actors → Reinforced the direct link between Al-Aqilat and Saudi leadership.	1	1
Al-Aqilat as Military Strategists in Saudi Conquests	Al-Aqilat as Military Strategists in Saudi Conquests → Provided key advice on war tactics. Strategic Resilience & Regrouping → Demonstrates how Al-Aqilat's political	1	1

	wisdom influenced battles.		
Saudi Political & Military Strategy to Contain Ikhwan	Ibn Saud held a tribal conference in Riyadh to consolidate control.	3	3
Strategic military planner		1	1
SRQ8 - Diplomatic Expertise & Political Mediation	How did Al-Aqilat's diplomatic expertise and political mediation strategies contribute to their role as an epistemic community in Saudi Arabia?	94	139
Al-Aqilat as Diplomatic Negotiators for Saudi-French Relations	Saudi representatives sought mediation to improve relations with France.	2	2
Al-Aqilat as Diplomatic Negotiators in Trade Access.	Al-Aqilat as Diplomatic Negotiators in Trade Access → Used high-level mediation to secure trading rights. Al-Aqilat's Strategic Relations with Gulf & Arabian Leaders → Maintained cross-regional alliances for economic security.	1	1
Al-Aqilat as Diplomatic Strategists in Saudi Foreign Policy		1	1
Al-Aqilat as Economic &		1	1

Diplomatic Facilitators			
Al-Aqilat as Economic & Diplomatic Mediators in British-Saudi Relations		1	1
Al-Aqilat as Religious Diplomats		2	2
Al-Aqilat as Secret Diplomatic Messengers	Trusted with sensitive communicate	5	5
Al-Aqilat as State-Building Diplomats	Engaged in trade, negotiations, and diplomacy to secure Saudi interests. Handled tribal alliances and international discussions (British & French).	2	2
Al-Aqilat as Trade & Diplomatic Intermediaries		1	1
Al-Aqilat's Role in Diplomacy & Media Strategy	Al-Aqilat's Role in Diplomacy & Media Strategy → "Al-Mushaiqah used local newspapers to strengthen Saudi influence."	0	0
Al-Aqilat's Role in Diplomacy & Representation	Al-Aqilat's Role in Diplomacy & Representation → "Suleiman Ali Al Mashaiqah was the true representative of Ibn Saud in Syria."	5	5

Control Diplomatic Representation		3	3
Diplomacy influence over international French authorities		4	4
Diplomatic Alliances	Fawzan Al-Sabiq negotiated Saudi-French agreements."	2	2
Diplomatic Appointments		3	3
Diplomatic Efforts to Overcome Internal Conflict	Ibn Saud had to balance Ikhwan's influence with modernization goals.	1	1
diplomatic interactions and transformations		1	1
Diplomatic Maneuvering		1	1
Diplomatic Negotiators	"Al-Aqilat Acted as Ibn Saud's Diplomatic Negotiators While Ikhwan Caused Friction."	3	3
Diplomatic Policy formation		4	4
Diplomatic Power Struggles	"British Consul confirmed the strategic importance of Al-Aqilat representatives."	2	2

diplomatic representatives		2	2
Diplomatic ties	XYZ	1	1
economic and diplomatic maneuvering	Ikhwan's battle engagement contrasts with Al-Aqilat's economic and diplomatic maneuvering.	4	4
Foreign diplomacy of al-Aqilat		1	1
French Awareness of Saudi Diplomatic Networks	Recognized importance of correspondence involving Al-Aqilat."	1	1
Geopolitical diplomacy		2	2
Hajj Affairs		1	1
influential diplomacy	Al-Aqilat as Key Figures in International Intelligence & Diplomacy.	4	4
Influential diplomats	Al-Aqilat's Recognition as Political & Military Leaders → "Ibn Saud referred to his commanders in Al Qassim as governors." Al-Aqilat's Status in Saudi Governance → "Their military leadership solidified their role as influential state actors." Ibn Saud's Intent to Impress the British with Local Support → "He emphasized his control over local leaders to the British."	2	2

international relation and diplomacy		13	13
Political Agents		2	2
Political alignment of inter group conflicts		1	1
political communication protection		2	2
regional power dynamics	Saudi Efforts to Establish Strong International Relations → Key role in maintaining alliances to balance regional power dynamics.	8	8
Religious and Political Legitimacy		2	2
Role in Diplomatic Networks	Al-Aqilat's Continued Role in Diplomatic Networks → "Managed Saudi consular affairs in key regions."	1	1
Saudi Diplomatic Transformations		1	1
Saudi Tribal Diplomacy		3	3
smart diplomatic capabilities		1	1
State Ambassador	Suleiman Al Mushaiqah appointed as the official representative of Najd in Damascus."	3	3

State Image Management	State Image Management & Political Alliances → Ensured Ibn Saud's reputation remained strong internationally.	0	0
State Stability Through Economic Support		2	2
State-Appointed Political Representatives		2	2
strategic advisors		3	3
Strategic alliance through Marriages	Ibn Saud Aziz married Daughter of Jarallah Al Dakhil's daughter Lulwa Aldakhil to secure and maintain strategic alliance.	1	1
strategic decision making for state formation		2	2
Strategic diplomacy		7	7
Strategic Diplomacy and British Mediation		2	2
Strategic Diplomatic Policy		2	2
Strong Diplomats	Al-Aqilat as Key Diplomats in Border Control & Immigration → "Suleiman Al Mushaiqah instructed to manage Saudi passport affairs.	2	2

Territorial nagotiations		1	1
Trades related to Najd and Syria		1	1
Travel Administrators		1	1
Treaty of Al-Mauhmarh	The crisis led to a ministerial crisis in Baghdad, prompting British intervention	1	1
Tribal Diplomacy & State Stability	Tribal Diplomacy & State Stability → Their knowledge of regional power dynamics strengthened Saudi geopolitical positioning.	4	4
tribute payment negotiations		1	1
Unofficial Ambassadors		3	3
unofficial state representatives		3	3
Use of Horses as Diplomatic Symbols		1	1
SRQ9 - Media & Communication Strategies	How did Al-Aqilat utilize media, state communications, and information control as part of their diplomatic, intelligence, and political strategies?	16	16
Al-Aqilat as Cautious Media	Al-Aqilat as Cautious Media Operators Under Ottoman Rule → Complied with legal restrictions while strategically shaping public narratives. Ottoman	1	1

Operators Under Ottoman Rule	Authorities' Efforts to Control Political Media Through Legal Pledges → Required written commitments from media figures to prevent dissent.		
Al-Aqilat as Media Agents for Political Influence	Al-Aqilat as Media Agents for Political Influence → Utilized newspapers to shape public perception and counter Ottoman influence. Ottoman Authorities' Efforts to Suppress Ibn Saud's Ideological Expansion → Proposed censorship of Al-Riyadh newspaper.	1	1
Al-Aqilat as Media Strategists Within Ottoman Censorship Laws	Al-Aqilat as Media Strategists Within Ottoman Censorship Laws → Managed to establish press influence while respecting regulatory restrictions. Ottoman Government's Attempt to Control Political Messaging → Required strict adherence to press laws for political compliance.	1	1
Al-Aqilat as Mobilizers of Public Support for State-Building	Al-Aqilat as Mobilizers of Public Support for State-Building → Managed narratives to align public sentiment with Saudi rule. Saudi Leadership's Use of Al-Aqilat to Legitimize Authority → Used regional influence to rally support for political transitions.	1	1
Al-Aqilat as Political & Economic Informants	Al-Aqilat as Political & Economic Informants → Played a role in gathering and disseminating intelligence across regions. Al-Aqilat's Regional Trade Networks & Diplomatic Influence → Maintained economic ties with Kuwaiti and Gulf traders.	1	1

Al-Aqilat as Political Advisors & Media Influencers	Al-Aqilat as Political Advisors & Media Influencers → Played a key role in shaping political narratives through press. State Monitoring of Media to Maintain Political Stability → The Ottoman administration conducted thorough investigations before allowing publication.	1	1
Al-Aqilat as Skilled Media Operators in Ottoman Bureaucracy.	Al-Aqilat as Skilled Media Operators in Ottoman Bureaucracy → Used legal compliance as a tool for expanding media influence. Ottoman Regulation of the Press to Maintain Political Stability → Enforced pre-publication scrutiny to limit dissent.	1	1
Al-Aqilat as Strategists in Media Expansion & Political Messaging		1	1
Al-Aqilat's Role in Anti-Ottoman Movements		1	1
Al-Aqilat's Role in Controlling State Communications	Al-Aqilat's Role in Controlling State Communications → "Foreign powers acknowledged their influence in relaying messages to Saudi leadership."	2	2
Building Alliances through Communication	Political Engagement & Information Sharing → Ibn Saud ensured Al-Aqilat leaders were informed of critical matters. Struggle and Solidarity → Reinforces the loyalty of influential families to Ibn Saud's cause.	1	1
cross intelligencer		2	2

l-Aqilat as Legally Recognized Media Figures in the Ottoman State	Al-Aqilat as Legally Recognized Media Figures in the Ottoman State → Successfully navigated legal hurdles to establish media influence. Ottoman Authorities' Cautious Approach to Allowing Political Media → Enforced rigorous background checks before granting media licenses.	1	1
Regulation of Media to Control Political Narratives	Al-Aqilat as Business & Media Entrepreneurs in the Ottoman Era → Expanded commercial and ideological influence through media enterprises. Ottoman Authorities' Regulation of Media to Control Political Narratives → Required strict oversight of newspaper publications.	1	1
social dominance		6	3

Coding Index 2