The centennial celebration of the 1902 conquest of Riyadh by the founder of the modern Saudi state triggered major, ongoing initiatives to document the country's nascent history. The attendant multi-billion dollar archives, museums, historical monuments, and urban redevelopment plans were among the many efforts to institutionalize and memorialize an officially sanctioned secular discourse based on Al Saud's past. This belated turn to secular historiography and commemoration, and the creation of a heritage industry in Riyadh, is all the more paradoxical given the Saudi regime's active neglect of historical space outside the capital, and specifically, its wholesale destruction of historical and religious sites in Mecca. This talk explores this dissonance through a genealogical reading of the material and spatial politics that have been central to Saudi modernity.

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