‘Iffat al Thunayan: An Arabian Queen

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(King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies)

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‘Iffat Al Thunayan, spouse of the late King Faysal bin ‘Abdul ‘Aziz Al Sa’ud (r. 1964–1975), was a pillar of the ruling Al Sa’ud family. Born and raised in Istanbul to an uprooted Sa’udi family, she returned to the Kingdom in 1932, a few months before the founder ruler, ‘Abdul ‘Aziz bin ‘Abdul Rahman, reinstituted the monarchy. ‘Iffat used her influence to infiltrate many progressive ideas into the Kingdom, including significant strides in education for both boys and girls as well as major advances in health care. She raised a formidable family, listened carefully, guided conversations as necessary, spoke with moderation, and recommended policies to her husband and, after he was assassinated, to her brothers-in-law who succeeded him. A politically conscious spouse, Queen ‘Iffat played the leading role in Sa’udi female society, attended many state functions, and received female state guests. She traveled extensively, especially in Europe and the United States, supported myriad charities, and cajoled many to invest in the Kingdom. Universally respected, many people sought her advice for she shared her ambitions and ideas to benefit the entire country. Based on multiple interviews conducted with members of the al-Faysal family, friends, and acquaintances of the late queen, Joseph A. Kéchichian offers the first political biography of a Sa’udi monarch’s spouse. This work is an important resource for social scientists and political analysts, and of interest to all who wish to learn about Arab women in general, and Sa’udi women in particular.

Joseph A Kéchichian is a Senior Fellow at the King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies (KFCRIS), in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia; the CEO of Kéchichian & Associates, LLC, a consulting partnership that provides analysis on the Arabian/Persian Gulf region; and a Senior Writer with the Dubai-based Gulf News. He served as the Honorary Consul of the Sultanate of Oman in Los Angeles, California between 2006 and 2011.

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