

# The British-Yemeni Society Journal

Vol. 9

JULY 2001

# THE BRITISH-YEMENI SOCIETY

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**BRITISH-YEMENI SOCIETY JOURNAL**  
Vol. 9. July 2001

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President Salih eyeing a badge with the Society's logo, which was presented to him during his brief visit to London last autumn by the Chairman, Douglas Gordon.

*Courtesy: Alan D'Arcy*

## CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

(Eighth Annual General Meeting, Thursday, 21 June 2001)

Since the last AGM held exactly a year ago to the day, the Society has been active with a full programme of meetings and events. The autumn programme last year began with a lecture by Christopher Ward of the World Bank's Rural Development, Water and Environment Department, on the water crisis in Yemen. In October, Dr Salma Samar Damluji gave an illustrated talk to a joint meeting of our Society and the Society for Arabian Studies (SAS) on her return visit the previous February to Hadhramaut and Yafa'. We are grateful to SAS for their continued cooperation in arranging joint events.

Starting in late October an exhibition of paintings by Yemeni artists was held in Cardiff, London, where a number of British artists who had visited Yemen were invited to exhibit alongside them, and in Birmingham. Bill Heber Percy, who played a major role in organising this successful and rewarding event, has written a detailed account for the Journal. But I should like to take this opportunity of expressing our warm thanks both to him and to the other volunteers involved, to our financial sponsors who helped make the event possible, and to H. E. Dr Hussain al-Amri for his enthusiastic support.

The year ended with a well attended lecture by Carl Phillips on the archaeological work which he and his team continue to carry out in the Tihama.

Thanks are due to Alan D'Arcy for once again leading a Society tour to Yemen last October. This was the fifth such tour. It was arranged at shorter notice than we would have wished because of developments earlier in the year; it was a great success and I know that Alan, undaunted by a long spell of ill health – now happily behind him – is planning a sixth tour. The timing of it and notice to members will again be subject to local factors. I sometimes think that the wild men of Marib and elsewhere have prior knowledge of the date of our AGMs! Shortly before our meeting last year two kidnapping incidents occurred; last month a young German Arabic language student was kidnapped; he was released last week fit and well. I suspect that his unexpected immersion in the dialect and oral traditions of tribal society in Marib province, where he was detained for some three weeks, will have aroused the envy of not a few of his fellow students. But even 'benign' kidnappings can cast a long shadow, pulling the rug from under the feet of those of us who have lobbied for a relaxation of FCO travel advice. The Society's October tour did not, of course, start auspiciously: on the morning of the party's arrival in Sana'a USS *Cole* was attacked in the Port of Aden, and early the following day a bomb exploded in the British Embassy compound in Sana'a. Nevertheless, after consulting the Embassy, Alan D'Arcy and his party decided to go ahead with



On 18 July 2000 our Vice-President, Dr Abdulla Abdul Wali Nasher, received an honorary doctorate from the University of Southampton in recognition of his outstanding services to medicine. He is pictured above, after the ceremony, with Mrs Ilham Nasher and their daughter, and H. E. Dr Hussain al-Amri.

what proved to be a very successful and enjoyable tour. Their decision was influenced by the knowledge that the Yemeni security authorities have always taken very good care of organised groups of our members. But it was also made easier by the fact that as a Society and individually we have many friends in Yemen, and that between us we have considerable local knowledge of the country. For these reasons, while always bearing FCO travel advice in mind, we feel able to exercise a certain latitude in interpreting and applying it.

Before turning to this year's activities, I should like to mention two events in last year's social calendar: on 18 July our Vice-President, Dr Abdulla Abdul Wali Nasher, received an honorary doctorate from the University of Southampton in recognition of his exceptional services to medicine; and in late September, I and four other members of the Committee had the pleasure and privilege of calling on President Ali Abdullah Salih during his brief visit to London on his way to New York. We had a lively discussion with the President immediately before his own meeting with the Foreign and Home Secretaries. We are most grateful to Dr Hussain al-Amri for proposing and arranging this call.

In January we once again had the opportunity to listen to Captain Roy Facey address the Middle East Association on Aden Port development and the Free Zone. In February we joined with the Anglo-Omani Society to hear a talk by Sa'id el-Gheithy on 'The Life and Writings of Sayyida Salme', whose connection with Aden was described in last year's Journal.

In March Dr Dionisius Agius gave an illustrated talk on 'The Language of the Dhow' to the Society for Arabian Studies, to which the Anglo-Omani Society and our own Society were invited. In April we showed the film 'Only I returned', a documentary about the life and achievement of the 18th century German surveyor and explorer, Carsten Niebuhr; we are grateful to the Royal Danish Embassy for making the film available to us. In May, Victor Henderson, who has now retired after completing his term as HM Ambassador in Sana'a, gave us the benefit of his experiences in a valedictory talk at the Middle East Association. We are most grateful to him for the support he has given us during his term as Ambassador and as co-President of our Society; many of our members have warm memories of the hospitality extended to them in Sana'a by Victor and his wife, Heather. As most of you will know, Victor Henderson has been succeeded in Sana'a by Frances Guy, and I should now like to read out a message which she has sent accepting our invitation to become the Society's new co-President:

'Thank you for inviting me to become co-President of the British-Yemeni Society. It is an honour and a privilege. My first few weeks in Sana'a have been marked by the very kind hospitality shown to me by everyone, most notably by the Yemeni-British Friendship Association. The change in government has permitted a fresh look at some of the issues which have complicated our bilateral relations. While I cannot promise miracles for the immediate future, I hope we can build on the goodwill created by some recent visits, to gradually improve our relations. I have been struck by the genuine warmth felt by many Yemenis towards the United Kingdom, despite recent events, and I can but undertake to do my best to build on that, and try and create some new areas of co-operation between our two countries. I wish you well with the AGM and look forward to meeting you all soon.'

Last year we said farewell to Sa'id Hadi following his appointment as Yemen's Ambassador in Kuwait, and we were grateful to Raid Salim for taking his place on the Committee until the arrival of the Embassy's new Minister, Mr Ahmad Hajar.

As in all societies, our membership ebbs and flows but remains stable around the 225 mark. We have three corporate members and would like to increase the corporate element in our membership. But unfortunately few British companies are actively involved in Yemen at the present time. Inevitably, as members of our Society get older we lose some of them, and this year we were sad to see the passing of Gavin Young, Colonel 'Bill' Bowen, and, perhaps saddest of all because so unexpected, of Abdo Nagi.

Our next meeting will be on 10 October when Shelagh Weir will speak about the Crafts of Yemen, and on 7 November Dr T. Marchand has promised to give us an illustrated talk on the Minarets of Sana'a. The autumn programme will be sent out with the Journal in early August.

A very significant cultural event to which we can look forward next year will be an exhibition of Yemeni antiquities to be held at the British Museum between June and October. The exhibition follows those held in Paris, Vienna, Munich, Rome, Turin, Rotterdam and Madrid during the past three years, but will include material in British and other collections not previously displayed.

After the conclusion of our business this evening, we are very glad to welcome Charles and Patricia Aithie and to congratulate them on the publication of their book, 'Yemen: Jewel of Arabia', which they will be introducing to us to later. I would like to thank them very warmly for coming all the way from Cardiff to tell us something of the background to the book, and of their experiences in gathering the wealth of beautiful photographs which lies therein.

Finally, I should like to thank H. E. the Ambassador and his staff for hosting this meeting and for entertaining us here this evening. A few weeks ago His Excellency told us the sad news that he would be leaving London shortly to return to Sana'a. I hardly need say how sorry we will be to see him go; we will remember him very warmly; those of us travelling to Sana'a will hope to catch a glimpse of him there; meanwhile we offer him and his family our very best wishes for the future.

DOUGLAS GORDON



## YEMEN OVERVIEW

BRIAN WHITAKER

*Brian Whitaker is Middle East Editor of the Guardian newspaper. He writes regularly on Yemeni affairs and is a member of the Society.*

Looking back at the news agency reports from Yemen over the last 18 months it would be easy to conclude that the country is in turmoil. Gun battles, explosions – both large and small, deliberate and accidental – plus, of course, the usual kidnappings and an aircraft hijacking, dominate the picture.

This is not, however, a picture that most visitors to Yemen would instantly recognise from their own experience, nor is it one that most Yemenis, from the tranquility of their mafraj, would accept as reality.

The events themselves are real enough and are a matter of practical concern to investors, tourists and anyone who does business in Yemen. But Yemen, in news terms, is in danger of becoming typecast and we should be careful not to draw the wrong conclusions.

Although these events are troubling, they pose no significant threat to the regime. They occur for a variety of reasons, some of which are non-political. The only common factor is the availability of weapons and a readiness to use them.

By far the most serious incident was the suicide bomb attack on USS *Cole* as it refuelled in Aden harbour on October 12 last year. Seventeen sailors died and 39 were injured when a small dinghy with two men on board sailed close to the \$1 billion guided missile destroyer and exploded, blowing a 40-foot hole in its side.

It is still unclear who was responsible for the attack. Local Islamists were certainly involved, and a number have been arrested. There are also indications that some of the technical expertise at least came from outside Yemen – possibly from people associated with ‘Usama bin Laden. So far, no evidence pointing to bin Laden himself has been disclosed.

The attack on USS *Cole* could easily have caused serious damage to Yemeni-American relations – indeed, that may have been part of the bombers’ intentions. The ensuing investigation raised issues of sovereignty for Yemen as well as highlighting differences in detective methods, with the Yemenis eager to secure speedy convictions based on confessions and the Americans demanding evidence of a quality that would stand up in US courts. Despite these initial problems, both sides seem to have reached a sensible working arrangement.

On the morning after the *Cole* attack a small bomb was thrown into the compound of the British embassy in Sana’a where it hit the fuel tank supplying an emergency

generator. There were no casualties but damage was described as 'considerable'. At the time of writing four people were on trial in connection with the attack.

The number of foreigners kidnapped showed a marked decline in 2000. Eight foreigners were taken hostage in six separate incidents and, although one hostage (a Norwegian) died in a shoot-out with security forces, this was by far the lowest hostage total for at least five years. Twenty-seven foreigners were kidnapped in 1999, 42 in 1998, 50 in 1997 and 23 in 1996. During the first half of 2001, five foreigners were kidnapped in four separate incidents.

The decline is probably due more to a lack of opportunity than a lack of inclination among kidnappers: there are fewer foreigners in the country, they are more aware of the risks, and tourists are restricted to areas considered safe.

On the other hand, there are signs that kidnappers may be adapting to the new situation. Last January, the Bani Dhabyan tribe abducted the son of the mayor of Sana'a, complaining that there were no suitable foreigners available. In May, another tribe, apparently unable to find a victim on the country roads, abducted a German student near Tahrir Square in the centre of the capital.

In January, a Yemenia plane on an internal flight from Sana'a to Ta'izz was hijacked by a man who demanded to be taken to Baghdad. The hijacker appears to have been unaware that the passengers included the US ambassador, Barbara Bodine, and several American diplomats as well as the Yemeni ambassador to Washington and a protocol official from President Salih's office.

The plane landed at Djibouti on the pretext of refuelling and the 95 passengers escaped down the emergency chutes. Yemeni journalists noted with some admiration that Ms Bodine was the only one who followed safety instructions to the letter, by coolly removing her shoes so as not to damage the inflatable slide.

The hijacker, like several suspects in the *Cole* bombing, had managed to obtain a Yemeni identity card under a false name, according to the *Yemen Times*. He had smuggled his gun on to the plane by placing it along with other items in a tray at the side of the airport metal detector, the paper said.

In another mid-air incident, a Yemenia flight to Damascus turned back to Sana'a when a monkey escaped from a passenger's hand baggage. Five more monkeys were discovered on board when it landed.

An unusually large number of executions – 31 – was reported in the first six months of 2001. This may reflect either an increase in the rate of executions or more systematic disclosure of them. All the reported executions were for murder.

Among those executed was Mohammad Adam Omar, a Sudanese mortuary

assistant at Sana'a university's medical school who, in a particularly gruesome and confusing case, had been convicted of raping and murdering two female students. He was shot on June 20 in front of a crowd of 50,000.

This sad catalogue of events somewhat overshadowed the most far-reaching development of the last 18 months: the thaw in Yemeni–Saudi relations after more than 65 years of mutual suspicion and un-neighbourly strife.

In May 2000, Crown Prince Abdullah attended celebrations to mark the tenth anniversary of Yemeni unification – a move that would have been unthinkable only a few years earlier, given the kingdom's hostile attitude to the union.

Three weeks after the prince's visit, both countries signed an agreement which defined, for the first time, the whole of their shared border.

Parallel with this, the exiled opposition group, Mowj, which had been set up in the wake of the 1994 war of secession and had continued to operate under Saudi sponsorship, ceased its activities.

Although there are still some loose ends to be tied up – a German company, charged with the technical work of marking the border, has met hostility from local tribes – there is no doubt that Yemen and Saudi Arabia have made a long-term commitment to warmer and mutually beneficial relations.

The first local government elections since unification, held in February this year, were intended as a further step in the process of democratisation which already includes an elected lower house of parliament and direct presidential elections. In the event, they turned into a shambles.

With 26,000 candidates competing for 7,000 seats, the organisational task was on a different scale from the last parliamentary election, where a mere 1,557 candidates contested 301 seats. The potential for quarrels between candidates and complaints of malpractice was thus proportionally increased.

More than 100 violent incidents were reported around the country and, although the precise death toll was disputed, news agency reports indicated that at least 45 people had died on election day or during the prolonged and turbulent counting of votes.

Several candidates were among the dead. In al-Baydah, a Nasserite candidate was killed in a counting centre as he was leading by 700 votes with the last ballot box being counted. In Ibb, an Islah party candidate was dragged away and killed after being declared the winner.

Voting was prevented from taking place in 200 polling stations, either by violence or technical problems such as the non-arrival of ballot boxes.

A referendum held on the same day was officially declared to have given 70 per cent approval to constitutional changes which will extend the president's term from five years to seven, and that of parliament from four years to six.

On March 31, President Ali Abdullah Salih appointed Abd al-Qader Bagammal as prime minister.

Mr Bagammal, a 55-year-old Hadrami who had previously served as foreign minister, was regarded as a safe and pragmatic choice to succeed Dr Abd al-Karim al-Iryani.

He began his political career in the marxist People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, where he served as planning and oil minister during the 1980s. Following the 1986 coup he was imprisoned for 'working against the principles of socialism'. When north and south Yemen were unified in 1990, he joined Salih's party, the General People's Congress, and began a steady rise to the top.

Mr Bagammal's appointment was followed within a few days by the most dramatic cabinet reshuffle in Yemen's recent history. Seventeen ministers lost their jobs and were replaced by 22 newcomers – a move which, in the words of the official media, heralded 'change and modernisation', to be brought about by capable and qualified young men.

The new government included Yemen's first woman minister – Professor Waheeba Fare'e, Rector of Queen Arwa University – who was put in charge of human rights. Another progressive sign was the creation of new portfolios for the environment and population, but this was dismissed by one writer in the *Yemen Times* as a marketing ploy, intended merely to present a 'modern and civilised' image to the outside world.

At the swearing-in ceremony President Salih impressed upon the new ministers the need to curb corruption and fulfil the people's aspirations in education, development and industry. The ministers' performance, he said, would be subject to continuous evaluation.

As often happens in Yemen, these changes brought a ray of hope during a period of gloom surrounding the local elections. But it's too early to say whether the optimists or the sceptics will be proved right.

## YEMEN'S WATER CRISIS

*Christopher Ward, who is Principal Operations Officer for the Middle East and North Africa in the Rural Development, Water and Environment Department of the World Bank, lectured to the Society on this subject last September. The following article draws on his lecture and on published material which he kindly made available.*

### Introduction

Since time immemorial, Yemenis have been adept at making the best use of scarce water through technology and careful husbandry. Their terraces, elaborate water harvesting structures, and skilful management of springs and flood flows allowed the country to support a large population and a sustainable agricultural economy. But since the creation of the modern state the country has fallen into a water crisis characterised by the very rapid mining of groundwater, extreme water supply shortages in the major cities, and limited access of the population to safe drinking water. The main causes of the crisis include rising demand for water as the population grows and market-led agriculture develops; the unregulated exploitation of groundwater resources; and policies which have promoted expansion rather than efficient use and sustainable management. These problems are by no means unique to Yemen, but in no other country in the Middle East is the rate of exhaustion of aquifers proceeding so fast; no other capital city, for example, faces the dire prospect of running out of water within the next decade.

Yemen's total annually renewable water resources are estimated at 2.5 billion cubic metres (cm). Thus, with a population of around 18 million, these amount to little



Rain-fed tank at Hababa.

*Courtesy: ffotogaff (Patricia Aithie).*



Cistern at Kuhlan, a casualty of road construction.

*Courtesy: fphotograff (Patricia Aithie)*

more than 140 cm per person each year, compared with the Middle East and North Africa average of 1,250 cm per person. The problem in Yemen is made more acute by the fact that water resources are unevenly distributed and that 90% of the population has under 90 cm annually for domestic uses (10% below the worldwide norm). It is estimated that only 44% of the population have access to mains water supply and only 12% to safe sanitation. In general, all surface water resources are harnessed and exploited, and in most areas groundwater (which accounts for 60% of the country's renewable resources) is already being exploited beyond the level of recharge. This very rapid development has brought with it major problems. Groundwater is being mined at such a rate that parts of the rural economy could disappear within a generation. There are thought to be about 45,000 private wells in the country and about 200 drilling rigs. Areas of the country under greatest pressure are the central highlands, western escarpment and coastal plains, where most of the population is concentrated. In the Sana'a basin, where 10% of the population live, it was estimated in the mid-1990s that water extraction (224 million cm) exceeded the level of recharge (42 million cm) by over 400%. Groundwater is expected to be pumped dry in the Sana'a basin within the next decade. In Amran water levels have dropped 60 metres during the last twenty years – 30 metres in the last five years. Meanwhile by 2005, consumer demand in the country is expected to rise to 3.42 billion cm, posing a shortfall of 920 million cm.

## Causes of the Crisis

Since the 1970s, Yemen has witnessed rapid social and economic changes, often outpacing the government's ability to control or manage them. Many of these changes have had a profound effect on water use. In the last twenty years the population has doubled, and Yemen has one of the highest rates of population increase in the world (3.5%). Demographic changes have increased demand for water and for commodities whose production requires water, particularly agricultural produce. With the flow of remittances from Yemenis working in nearby oil-exporting countries, and the growth of market opportunities, agriculture developed rapidly. The advent of tractors, chemical inputs and – above all – tubewell technology weaned Yemen away from the traditional farming practices and systems of water management which had hitherto enabled the country to live in balance with its natural resources. The government has lacked the technical means, the legal instruments, and the political will to regulate the sinking of wells and groundwater extraction. At the same time it pursued policies which actively encouraged water use: low-interest loans, cheap diesel pricing, and public investment in surface or spate irrigation. As a result, over the past two decades, groundwater and surface irrigation have been priced at well below their economic cost. A government ban on the import of fruit and vegetables gave further impetus to groundwater development by making local cultivation of such produce far more profitable. Finally, the government's supportive attitude towards the booming production and use of *qat*, the country's most profitable cash crop, has accelerated trends towards overpumping: *qat* is estimated to consume 30% of all irrigation water, and its cultivation has been encouraged by a government ban on imports of cheaper Ethiopian *qat*.

Between 1970 and 1996 areas irrigated from wells expanded from 37,000 to 368,000 hectares, 32% of Yemen's farmed land. Today groundwater extraction has passed well beyond the limit of sustainability. Aquifers are being depleted throughout the country; wells are constantly being deepened; and the costs are rising while yields and quality are deteriorating. The explosion of groundwater use has often been at the expense of traditional spring-fed systems, and as the water table declines, hill springs are early casualties. On farms, low groundwater prices have encouraged waste. Meanwhile, deforestation, the abandonment of terraces and the neglect of traditional water harvesting systems (partly due to the government's policy of importing grain for distribution at heavily subsidised prices) have led to widespread soil erosion, increasing the risk of floods and reducing the recharge of aquifers. Finally, the government, in partnership with international donors and development agencies, embarked on a number of large-scale, public sector spate irrigation schemes in the coastal plains, whose operation and maintenance it can no longer afford. Viewed internally, however, government policy can be said to have substantially modernised the agricultural sector, bringing self-sufficiency in

higher-value food products such as fruit and vegetables. The resulting increase in incomes has been spread across a large segment of the rural population. Important interest groups have benefited, not least those involved in the multi-million dollar *qat* industry, and this has helped the government to consolidate its authority. However, after 20 years of holding down irrigation water prices, the government is now increasing them. Groundwater prices have been affected as the price of diesel shot up between 1996–1999 from the equivalent of \$0.02 to \$0.10 per litre; it is set to rise further by 2001 to about \$0.16 per litre. Meanwhile, the supply of cheap credit has dwindled and interest rates have increased. Controls on fruit and vegetable imports are being dismantled. All these actions will bring the price of groundwater closer to its economic cost. The government is considering involving user groups in the operation and maintenance of spate irrigation schemes with a view to ultimately handing over to users full responsibility for them.

### **Impact of Structural Adjustment**

For 20 years, with the support of international donors, the government was able to cultivate key constituencies with the help of low-priced or free water. What has changed? First, Yemen has been grappling with a severe economic crisis. Since 1995, with the encouragement of international donors, the government has been implementing a structural adjustment programme aimed at reducing the role of the state in economic activity. As a result, the diesel and credit subsidies for groundwater irrigation, the operation and maintenance subsidy for spate irrigation, and the distribution of subsidised cereals are all being phased out. This is



Pumping groundwater near Thula for irrigation, with the help of an Isuzu engine.

*Courtesy: fphotograff (Patricia Aithie)*



driving up water prices. Meanwhile, government officials have become increasingly concerned about environmental degradation, particularly groundwater depletion and damage to traditional rain-fed agriculture and terrace systems. Donors who had supported the old policies are now keen to promote sustainability, a reduced government role in the economy and more participation at the community level. They are also encouraging the use of pricing mechanisms to manage water demand. Officials recognise that the need now is for better management of existing projects. Most farmers will benefit more, or suffer less, from investment in water conservation and irrigation efficiency. But better management involves visible and unpopular changes such as price increases and regulation. And the devolution of power to user groups means that the government loses a source of patronage while running the risk of provoking social unrest and strengthening the centrifugal tendencies ever-present in Yemeni politics. In 1995 the government's announcement of a tripling of diesel prices triggered violent demonstrations. Other price increases provoked further violence in 1998.

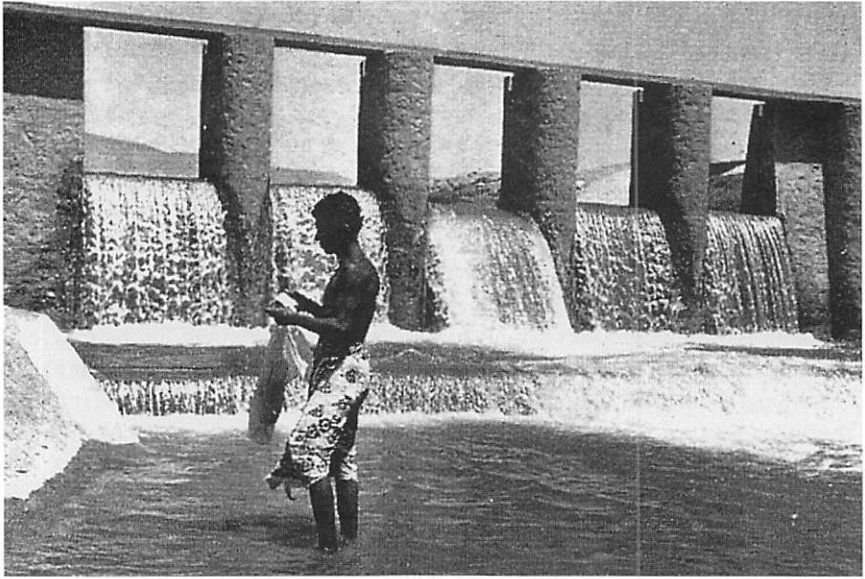
### **The Challenge**

Yemen cannot continue to live off its water capital. But the country's fragmented geography and hydrology, and the predominance of dispersed rural water users makes centralised control problematic. Moreover, the mismatch between population and water resources reduces planning options; most of the population and economic activity is concentrated in the water-depleted western highlands,



Sparte water in Tihama.

*Courtesy: fffotograf (Patricia Aithie)*



A control gate near Abyan.

making it difficult to explore alternative sources of supply such as the Hadhramaut aquifer, let alone desalination. Growing water shortages have led to competition between town and country for access to dwindling resources. Since all groundwater around cities is effectively harnessed and over-exploited for agricultural use, the cost of new supplies of water for cities is likely to rise sharply as water has to be brought from further afield and from greater depth. In Sana'a, the urban utility, the National Water and Sanitation Authority (NWSA), is unable to keep pace with new housing and industrial development. Taiz faces similar problems. There the city authorities negotiated for ten years with the nearby rural area of Habir before an agreement was reached, with support from the IDA-financed Taiz Pilot Water Supply Project, whereby Taiz will be allowed to extract water from a previously untapped deep aquifer in exchange for investments in village water supply, schools and women's centres, and the joint monitoring of water extraction to ensure a sustainable flow.

Water markets are already well established in Yemen, ranging from opportunistic tanker sales by well owners to supply schemes for urban communities. Indeed, several towns (e.g. Zabid and Bajil) are wholly supplied by private sector utilities. But markets give no incentives to groundwater conservation. Steps need to be taken to promote the sustainable development of private supply, with the concurrent aims of increasing mains access and reducing costs.

## Conclusion

The challenge facing the government is to bring about a major adjustment in the behaviour and economy of a nation. This will require a level of national consensus and self-regulation which can only be achieved through public awareness campaigns, clear and realistic priorities, and close partnership with water users. Meanwhile, the increase in water prices resulting from the removal of diesel subsidies will encourage farmers to adopt water-efficient technologies, which will help to relieve pressure on groundwater. The transfer of responsibility to local farmers for spate irrigation systems should also provide incentives for improved husbandry and sustainability. Similarly, a policy of renewed support for traditional water control systems has the potential to increase agricultural production and boost the incomes of small farmers. Nevertheless, decentralisation and the partnership approach can only be viewed as elements of a damage limitation exercise aimed at slowing the rate of resource depletion, to allow Yemen time to develop patterns of economic activity less dependent on water mining.



## VISIONS OF YEMEN

BILL HEBER PERCY

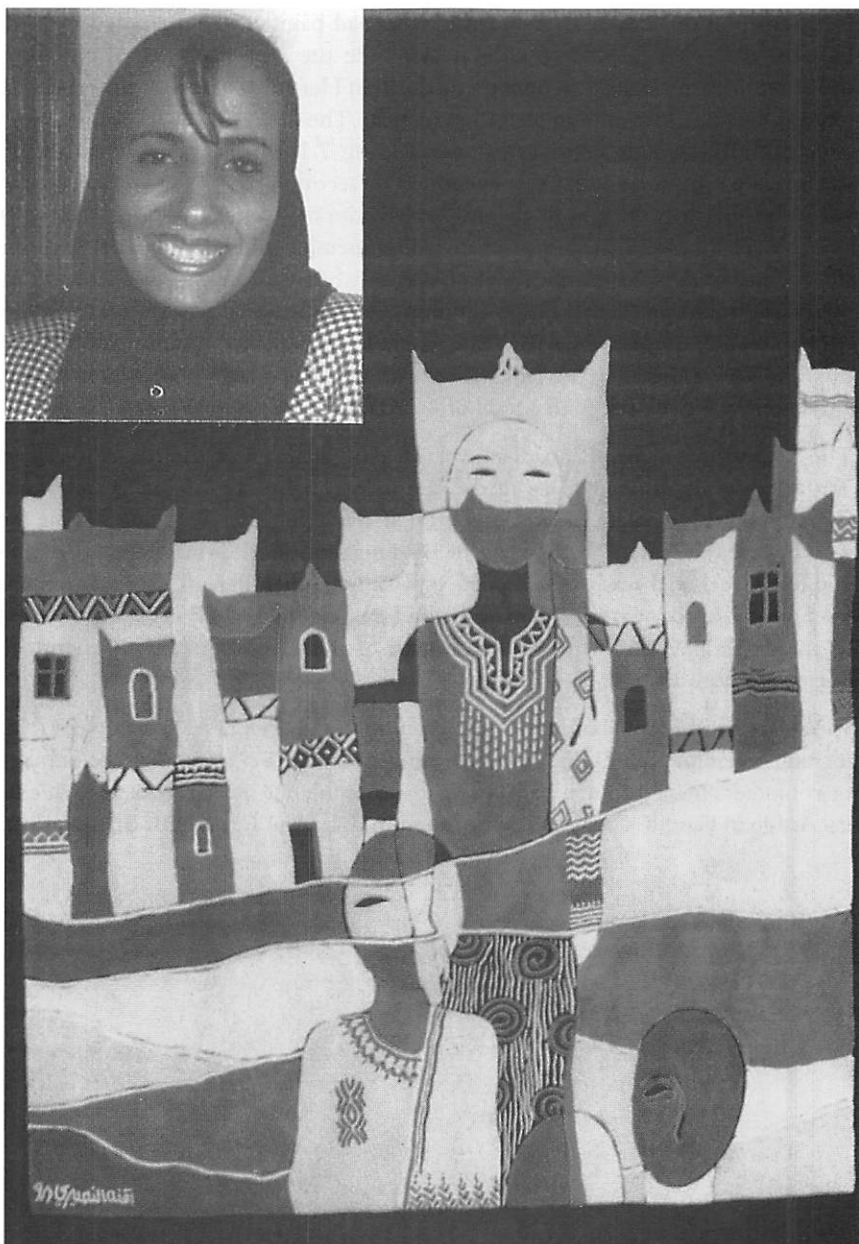
The seed was sown when I accompanied three artists and one or two other friends to Yemen in early 2000. During our visit we saw numerous examples of the work of contemporary Yemeni artists. We also made contact with *Halaqa*, an organisation set up by Dr Jacques Veerman, with help from the Netherlands-based Prince Claus Fund for Culture and Development, to encourage contemporary art in Yemen.

On our return, and with Dr Veerman's enthusiastic support, a plan took shape to introduce the work of Yemeni artists to the British public by holding exhibitions in London, Cardiff and Birmingham. Generous sponsorship and support were received from H. E. the Ambassador of Yemen, the Seven Pillars of Wisdom Trust, Longulf Trading (UK) Ltd, the Nimir Petroleum Company, Thabet International Ltd, Visiting Arts, Al-Tajir World of Islam Trust, and Yemenia.

During the summer paintings started to arrive from Yemen, and at the end of August, Caroline Lees's home in Fulham took on the aspect of the Royal Academy before the Summer Exhibition! Paintings filled every available space, awaiting inspection by the Framing Committee consisting of Caroline, Rose Issa, Douglas Gordon and John Shipman. There was a wealth of talent to choose from in varied media – from large oils to delicate blockprints, from the brooding sculptural imagery of Kamal al-Maqrami to the vibrant interplay of design and colour in the work of Amnah al-Nassiri. Difficult decisions were made and the framers put to work.

The Norwegian Church in Cardiff Docks, which is now an art gallery and was the first view which many Yemenis had of Britain as they arrived on coal freighters from Aden at the beginning of the 20th century, became available in October and was chosen for the inaugural exhibition. Pat Aithie worked miracles in a very short time to arrange printing, publicity and hanging. The exhibition was opened by Rhodri Morgan MP, First Minister of the Welsh Assembly, on 23 October in the presence of over 200 people, and received coverage in *The Western Mail* and on Harlech television. Both Mazher Nizar and Kamal al-Maqrami, whose work was on show, had flown from Sana'a to attend the event. During their stay in Wales they visited the College of Art, the National Gallery of Wales, the Glynn Vivian Art Gallery, and the Centre for Stained Glass in Swansea. The possibility of arranging a three month exchange for two art students was discussed. 11 paintings were sold before the exhibition closed on 2 November.

The Kufa Gallery was hired for the London exhibition, and Dr Makkiyah and the Gallery Director, Walid Attiya, were very supportive. In order to broaden interest



Amnah al-Nassiri – inset. In addition to other influences, her work draws inspiration from Yemen's landscape and decorative art.

in the exhibition, eleven British artists who had painted in Yemen, led by Ken Howard RA, were invited to exhibit alongside the Yemeni artists. Abdo Nagi, the Yemeni-born ceramist (whose tragic death in Hertfordshire in April this year is reported on p. 32) was also invited to participate. The first private view, in the presence of H. E. Dr Hussain al-Amri, was held on 7 November, and a total of 25 works were sold during that first evening. The second private view took place at noon the following day, again in the Ambassador's presence, when a further 10 works were sold. Amnah al-Nassiri, a leading member of *Halaga* (and lecturer in the Faculty of Arts, Sana'a University), whose work was on display, arrived from Sana'a to attend the event. The exhibition was reported in the Arabic press and Amnah was interviewed by MBC. She gave a lecture (in Arabic) on the history of the Fine Arts in Yemen at the Kufa Gallery on the last evening of the exhibition; it closed on 15 November with a total of 44 pictures sold.

The final venue, before Ramadhan, was Birmingham where the Mu'ath Welfare Trust had kindly offered space in the Bordesley Centre. With considerable help from the Director, Salem Ahmad, and his staff, the exhibition was hung in time for it to be opened by the Lord Mayor of Birmingham on 19 November. It continued for a week and was well attended, especially by members of the local Yemeni community. An oil painting of Mukalla by Dr Abdul Jalil Al-Saruri was presented to the Mu'ath Welfare Trust as a memento of the exhibition and token of the Society's gratitude for their help.

15 Yemeni artists contributed to the exhibition, and a total of 55 works were sold, including ceramics by Abdo Nagi and paintings by British artists. A large number of volunteers helped to make this project successful, but special thanks are due to Pat Aithie in Cardiff, Caroline Lees in London, and Shan Egerton in Birmingham.

## THE CLAYTON MISSION TO SANA'A OF 1926

The archive of the Royal Society for Asian Affairs (RSAA) contains six photographs taken during the Mission to Sana'a led by Sir Gilbert Clayton (1875–1929) in 1926. Five of these are reproduced below by kind permission of the RSAA. The photographs are mounted on board and captioned in fine copperplate script – possibly the hand of the Mission's stenographer, R.V. Kaikini (on loan from Bombay), from notes drafted by the photographer who was a member of the Mission but unnamed.

I am grateful to H. E. Dr Hussain al-Amri, son of Imam Yahya's Chief Minister, Qadhi Abdullah al-Amri, for his help in relating the photographs to the map of Sana'a as it was, and is today. I am also indebted to Soraya Antonius for allowing me to see photographs of Sir Gilbert Clayton and her father, George Antonius, taken during their visits to Jeddah in 1925 and 1927, and for kindly permitting two of the photographs to be reproduced in this article. And thanks are due to St John Armitage for his good offices in this respect.

Clayton's Mission took place against the background of Imam Yahya's invasion and occupation of various parts of the Aden Protectorate. The Imam claimed



Sir Gilbert Clayton and Saudi artilleryman, Jeddah c.1925.

*Courtesy: Soraya Antonius*

sovereignty over the whole of south-western Arabia and had refused to recognise the Anglo-Turkish Convention of 1914 defining the border between Ottoman Yemen and the British Protectorate. In 1920 he had occupied a large part of the Amirate of Dhala, and having taken Beidha in 1923, his forces penetrated deep into Audhali territory in 1924. The British authorities in Aden were unable to provide much assistance to the Protectorate rulers until 1928, when Aden became an Air Command and it was possible to deploy the RAF in operations to expel Yemeni forces from most of the territory which they had occupied. In the meantime the British had little option but to attempt a diplomatic settlement of the disputed frontier. This, and the negotiation of a treaty of friendship with Yemen, was the aim of Clayton's Mission.

Clayton, Director of Military Intelligence in Egypt during the First World War and later Chief Secretary in Palestine, was an experienced negotiator. T. E. Lawrence, who worked closely with him in Cairo, described him as 'calm, detached, clear-sighted, of unconscious courage in assuming responsibility. He gave an open run to his subordinates... he worked by influence rather than by loud direction... he impressed men by his sobriety, and by a certain quiet and stately moderation of



Sir Gilbert Clayton and George Antonius (in white suit) with King Abdul Aziz ibn Saud (centre), Jeddah c.1925.

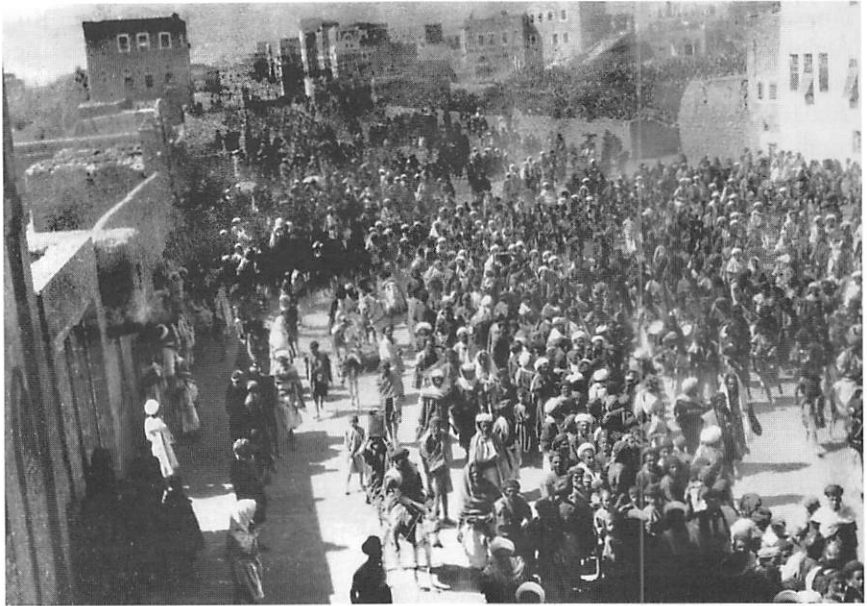
*Courtesy: Soraya Antonius*



hope...’ In 1925 Clayton had successfully concluded two agreements with King Abdul Aziz ibn Saud (demarcating the border between Najd and Transjordan, and regulating Saudi tribal migrations into Iraq and Transjordan), and was to return to the Hejaz in 1927 to conclude the Treaty of Jeddah, whereby Britain recognised the Saudi King as a sovereign and independent ruler. Clayton’s principal assistant in these negotiations was George Antonius (1892–1942), a member of an ethnic Greek family settled in Egypt, and a fluent Arabic speaker, who had been educated at Victoria College, Alexandria, and at King’s College, Cambridge. In the 1920s Antonius was serving with the British Administration in Palestine; he was later to make a name for himself as author of a history of the Arab National Movement, *The Arab Awakening* (1938).

Clayton arranged for Antonius to be appointed Secretary to his Sana’a Mission; other members included Lieut.-Colonel M. C. Lake and Shaikh Muhammad Salim from the Aden Residency; Lieut.-Colonel M. S. Irani from the Indian Medical Service; Shaikh Yislam Ba Ruwais, transport officer; and four servants. Lake, who played no direct part in the Mission’s negotiations, probably took the photographs of Sana’a.

The party arrived at Hodeida by sea from Aden on 17 January. The following day they proceeded by motor to Bajil where they stayed the night. On 19 January, they continued their journey to Sana’a on mule-back, in five stages, accompanied by an escort of 44 Yemeni soldiers led by Muhammad al-Muta’, their heavy baggage being loaded onto camels. They reached Sana’a on 24 January and about five miles outside the city were met by a fifty strong escort of Yemeni cavalry and a horse-drawn carriage sent for Clayton’s use by the Imam. Outside the western gate of Sana’a (Bab al-Qa’a), a battalion of Yemeni infantry was drawn up as a guard of honour. Also gathered there was a large crowd – which followed the visitors into the city, along the road leading to, as Clayton recorded, ‘a commodious stone-built house in Bir el-’Azab (the residential quarter), which had been prepared for our accommodation.’ This was the Government Guest-house where the Imam housed foreign delegations and which is now the Military Museum. Half an hour later, four senior Yemeni officials arrived with a message of welcome from the Imam. In conversation with one of them, Raghیب Bey, a former Ottoman diplomat who served for many years as the Imam’s Chamberlain and Foreign Secretary, Clayton learned that ‘the Imam was anxious to organise a display on the occasion of my first visit, and asked that I should postpone it so as to give time for arrangements to be made.’ Accordingly, he and Antonius waited until the morning of 26 January to pay their first formal call on the Imam; from the Guest-house they were driven in the Imam’s car across Maidan al-Shararah (now Tahrir Square), through Bab al-Saba (the ‘Sabaeen’ Gate demolished in the 1960s), into the street (today’s Ali Abdulmoghni Street) running north along the Palace precincts towards Bab



The crowd following the Mission into the Bir al-Azab district of Sana'a.



The Guest-house overlooking Maidan al-Shararah (Tahrir Square), which is now the Military Museum. In the foreground two members of the Mission's permanent guard.

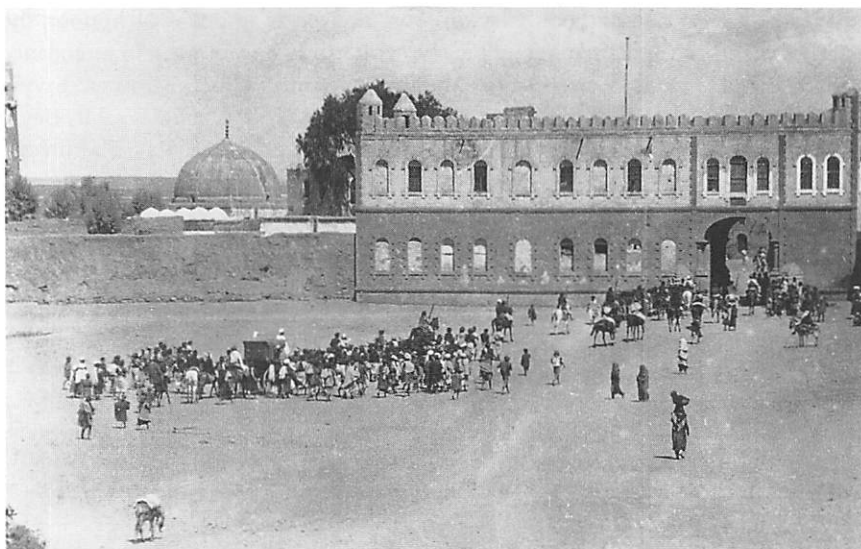
al-Shaqadif (also demolished). Clayton 'was received by a guard of honour, the street leading to the Palace being lined on either side by troops... In attendance upon His Highness were Qadhi Abdullah al-Amri, Chief Minister, Sayyid Abdullah ibn Ibrahim, President of the Theological College, and Raghیب Bey. I read my letter of appointment which was then translated into Arabic. The Imam's reply was then read out by Raghیب Bey. Its purport... was as follows:

'We note the contents of His Majesty's letter with extreme satisfaction and are particularly gratified that His Majesty should have seen fit to send so experienced and tried a person as yourself... We believe in the fullest manner in the goodwill of His Majesty's Government towards us and in their desire to recognise the rights and independence of our nation whose existence, for over one thousand years, has spread itself over all those territories which form its inheritance... You have been invested with wide powers enabling you to establish our clear rights, and we confidently hope that you will be successful in your mission. We believe that an Agreement between us will pave the way for friendly sentiments in Yemen towards Great Britain... We extend to you a more cordial welcome than is dictated by official custom...'

After a further exchange of courtesies the Imam withdrew; Clayton's first substantive discussion with him took place two days later. Sixteen further meetings were held between the British and Yemeni sides; nine of these were attended by the Imam; the other seven were 'working' sessions between his officials and



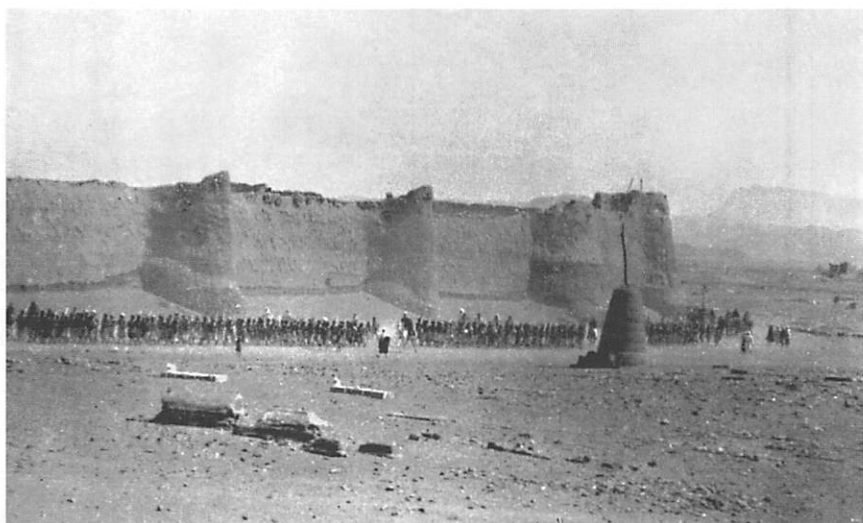
Troops lining the street leading to the Palace, on the occasion of Sir Gilbert Clayton's first formal call on the Imam. The Bab al-Shaqadif Gate is visible in the distance.



The Imam (in carriage) approaching the Bab al-Saba Gate, after visiting the Theological College (al-madrassah al-'ilmiyyah) on the north western side of Maidan al-Shararah. His Palace is on the left of the domed Mutawakkilite Mosque. This picture was taken with a tele-lens from the Guest-house.

Antonius, except on one occasion when the latter was ill with fever and Clayton took over.

At their second meeting on 28 January, Imam Yahya had urged Clayton 'to look upon his [the Imam's] country as an ailing body and on myself [Clayton] as its physician, and he was willing to leave it to me, to my knowledge and sense of justice, to apply the proper remedy.' Qadhi Abdullah al-Amri used the same metaphor in later discussion with Antonius. But the Yemenis, skilled in the arts of evasion and tergiversation (skills which the Imam, in early conversation with Clayton, had admonished the British for exercising in their dealings with the Arabs over Palestine), proved unwilling to accept any prescription put forward by their British 'physician'. The sticking point was the Imam's refusal to contemplate any renunciation of his claims to sovereignty over the whole of south-west Arabia, which a commitment to withdraw Yemeni forces from Protectorate territory would have implied. Despite the breakdown of their negotiations, Clayton and Imam Yahya parted cordially, and on 21 February the Mission left Sana'a to return to Aden overland. Clayton was convinced that the Imam, partly in deference to



The south-western wall of the old city. The Imam, escorted by units of his army, returning from Friday prayers at the Great Mosque. Cemetery in the foreground.

local public opinion, had acted against his better judgement; and Clayton was right in believing that the Imam would, in time, be ready to reach an accommodation. In 1934 Britain and Yemen concluded the Treaty of Sana'a. In the negotiations leading up to this the British revived a proposal made by Clayton in 1926, namely that both sides should shelve the issue of sovereignty, without prejudice to their respective claims, to facilitate agreement on more immediate and practical concerns. By 1933 the Imam was under pressure from the Saudis on his northern border, and his forces had been ejected from most of the territory in the Aden Protectorate which they had occupied. He thus had more incentive to reach a *modus vivendi* with the British in 1934 than was the case in 1926.

Although the Treaty of Sana'a led to a temporary improvement in Anglo-Yemeni relations, border incursions and cross-border raiding continued intermittently. Matters were not helped by the assassination of Imam Yahya and Qadhi Abdullah al-Amri in 1948; and the accession of Imam Ahmad, who as Crown Prince and Governor of Taiz had taken a harder line on border issues than his father, marked the beginning of a period of increasing tension.



Michael Jacomb in diplomatic uniform, Ambassador Hermann Eilts (then U.S. Consul in Aden) and Mrs Eilts seated on his right, attending celebrations in Taiz marking the anniversary of Imam Ahmad's accession. *Courtesy: John Hewitt*

Nevertheless, some twenty five years after Clayton's abortive Mission, the two countries, following bilateral talks in London led on the Yemeni side by the Imam's Foreign Minister, Qadhi Muhammad Abdullah al-Amri, agreed to exchange diplomatic relations. In 1951 Michael Jacomb, Britain's first Chargé d'Affaires in Yemen, arrived to take up his new post in Taiz, while Sayyid Hassan Ibrahim was appointed to represent Yemen in London.

JOHN SHIPMAN

## BEE-KEEPING IN YEMEN

JULIAN LUSH

These are just some observations by an amateur bee-keeper travelling with the Society's three week tour of Yemen in October 2000; they are by no means a comprehensive account of what is becoming an important industry and source of wealth in the rural economy.

One thing manifest over the whole route was the burgeoning of bee-keeping in Yemen. Stacks of bee-hives appear by the roadside all over the country, from small banks of half a dozen or so to large arrays of dozens – veritable apiaries. Clearly the profitable niche market traditionally held by the Wadi Du'an and Tihama honey producers is being tapped by a great many others; why not, when the bees, who do the essential work, are free to all? We saw hives on the road to Manakha, in the plains east of Sana'a and in Marib, in Wadis Beihan, Yashbum, Hadhramaut and Du'an, and in the Hujjariyah and Tihama; and they are doubtless to be seen elsewhere.

Bees have been social insects for 10–20 million years and have had time to develop varieties adapted to many localities. The variety of honey-bee endemic to Yemen is



Log and box hives in Wadi Surdud.

*Julian Lush*



Pottery tube hives, Seiyun market.

*Julian Lush*



the *apis yemenitica* – a small, dark bee which thrives in the hot, dry conditions. Traditional bee-keeping methods using a long, thin hive-box hollowed from a log, can still be seen. Modern hive-boxes, based on the same principle, are wooden, 80–100 cm long and 12 x 12 cm in cross-section. The front has a hinged door with a V-shaped bee entrance, and the rear closure is plugged and sealed with mud. Alternatively, as we observed in the *sug* at Seiyun, hives can be of pottery pipe, made in three sections and supported on a metal frame, enabling the hive to be opened at two points in its length.

In all these long hives, the queen and brood generally inhabit the front of the hive, while the honeycombs, naturally built by the bees in parabolic shape, are suspended longitudinally for maximum ventilation and cooling. The honeycomb is extracted through the rear of the hive which is sealed with mud and thus easily opened, causing minimum disturbance to the brood (larvae and developing bees) inside.

Apiaries are in banks of 10–100 hives, stacked 3–4 rows high on a metal stand, covered by grass or similar cooling material, which in turn is covered over with a blue plastic sheet. One is struck by the extreme proximity of the hives to one another, and by the amazing ability of bees to know which is home.

The favourite forage of the *yemenitica* bee is from the flowering *al-sidr* tree or *ziziphus spina-christi*, the *kasas*, a Euphorbia, and from acacia trees, all of which are



Box hives in Wadi Yashbum.

Julian Lush



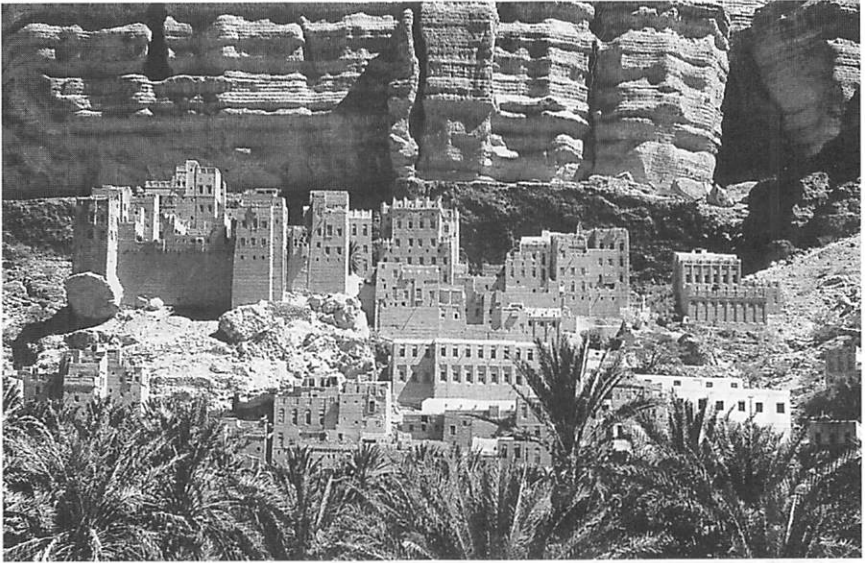
Jars of honey on sale near Haurah.

*Courtesy: Jill Hammans*

found throughout the country. But the bees are not particularly choosy and will glean pollen and nectar from a surprising range of plants even in arid regions. However, their forage may not be plentiful at all seasons, and Yemeni bee-keepers supplement their diet with sugar. Water also has to be available at all times, for this is essential for the bees' health and the honey-making process.

To gauge the pace of bee-keeping development, I asked a hive maker in Bait al-Faqih what his production and sales rates were. He said that he was selling 700–800 box-hives per month at a price of YR 600 (₹3) each; by contrast, log hives cost YR 2000 each. His market covered just one part of the Tihama. If the rates which he quoted are extrapolated over the rest of the country, one can see the likely scale of the growing industry.

A timely local press article provided some statistics on Yemeni honey production, stating that Hadhrami honey led the field (as expected) with 35 tons per year, a large proportion of which is exported to other Arab countries (where it commands huge prices). Next comes Shabwa Governorate with 29 tons annually, followed by Mahwit with 15 tons, Tihama with 13 tons, Hajjah with 8 tons, Osaimat, Ibb and Taiz with 4–5 tons each, and around 35 tons from other areas, making a total production of some 150 tons a year. The article adds that a kilogram of good honey sells for \$150 – hence the real attraction of bee-keeping in Yemen: no amateurs there!



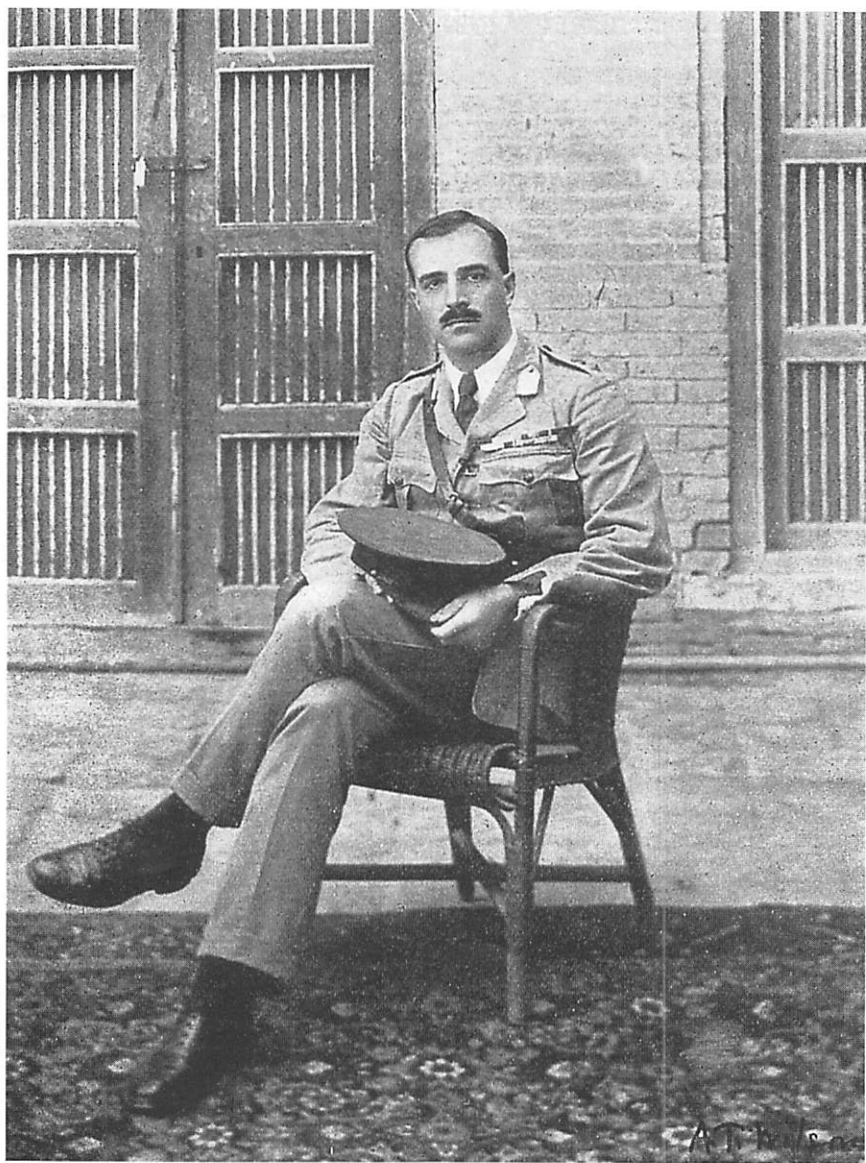
Wadi Du'an, October 2000.

*Courtesy: Howard Meadowcroft*



Drummers and dancer, Zabid, October 2000.

*Courtesy: Nicholas Hammans*



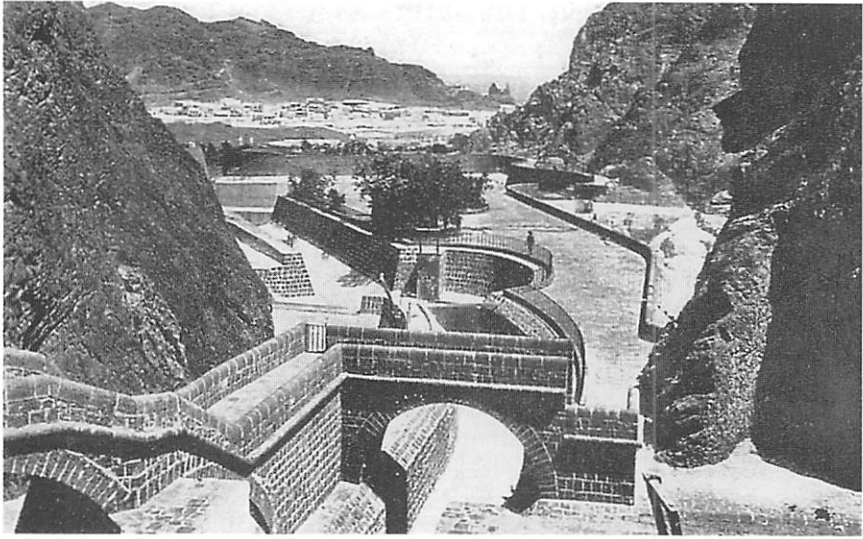
Sir Arnold Wilson c.1916.

## WINNING HIS SPURS AS A STOKER

Economic necessity obliged many Yemenis at the turn of the last century to make their living below deck in the steamships of foreign merchant navies. Few Europeans stationed East of Suez and familiar with the comforts of travelling on the passenger deck of P & O, would have dreamed of sharing that harsh existence, even temporarily. But Lieutenant (later Lieut.-Colonel Sir Arnold) Wilson was an exception.

In 1907, returning to India to rejoin his regiment, the 32nd Sikh Pioneers, after a spell of leave in England, the twenty-three year old Wilson disembarked in Aden to transfer to the P & O liner SS *Peninsular* for the final five day voyage to Bombay. It was during this leg of his journey that Wilson's curiosity in the hidden world below the passenger deck led him to spend 'several hours in the engine-room and stoke-hold with a young Engineer from Bristol who was full of enthusiasm for his profession and took me, in an old boiler suit, to every part of his domain.'

In a letter home from Aden, Wilson had commented that his fellow passengers were 'more interesting and less blasé, less rich but just as intelligent as those in the first class who dress for dinner and need a band to keep them from getting bored with each other's company. I sit at table with a Wesleyan Minister from New Zealand... Between us are an actor and actress on their way to... Calcutta. The man is a simple-hearted Rabelaisian, the woman, about 24, unduly apprehensive of the intentions of young male passengers such as I. I had long talks with an English missionary going back to China and a batch of juniors in commercial houses who between them have quartered the East... The best of the lot are Australians and New Zealanders returning from the grand tour of England... They have made their own way in the world, and are rightly proud of it.' Wilson had sufficient time on shore to visit Aden's tanks. 'The great rainwater tanks are the only local monument of antiquity. They are hewn out of solid rock and lined with superb lime cement. The rainfall seldom suffices to fill them and the troops are supplied from a condenser. I climbed one of the barren hills... for a bird's eye view more desolate than anything I have seen elsewhere: not a plant or a living bird or beast. The work of Aden is done by camels and Somalis, the hinterland is occupied by Arabs of whom we know nothing, though we have held Aden for the best part of a century. This is unlike us. We have taken steps to find out all we can of the language and ways of life of all our neighbours on the frontiers of India but anyone who tries to do the same here is rebuked or removed because, I gathered at the Club from an officer I knew, the government is anxious not to extend its responsibilities. They (the Arabs) come to Aden, but we do not go to them and, I am bound to add, they do not want us to come, lest "incidents" should end in "punitive operations". Aden is a bad station: there are more graves in the cemetery than beds in the barracks.

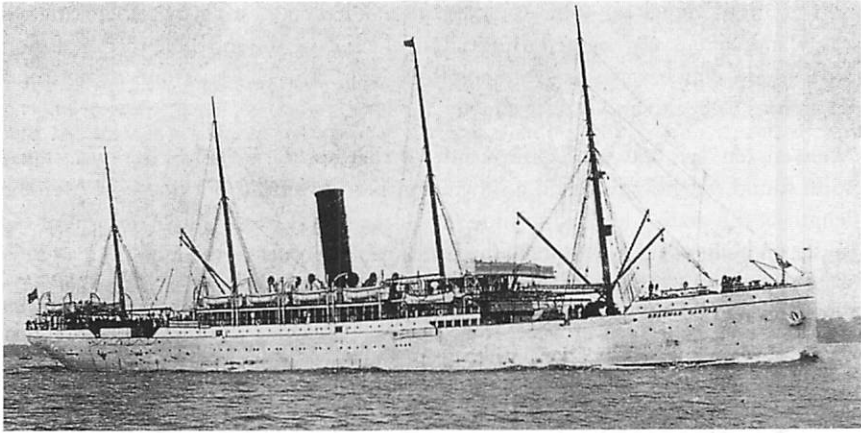


The Aden Tanks, looking towards Crater.

There is nothing for the men to do and not much for the officers. I suppose we must keep troops here, but I should have thought Arab levies would have sufficed to hold the place till reinforcements came. And there is always the Navy. It is a good coaling station, and a convenient port of call for liners and was essential to us once the Suez Canal was built. I wish, like Palmerston, that it [the canal] had never been dug, for then our position in the Mediterranean and in the Indian Ocean would be more unchallenged than it is.'

Towards the end of 1907 Wilson was transferred to the Indian Political Department and sent to the Persian Gulf where he was to serve as political officer, soldier and senior administrator until 1920. He then took early retirement to join the Anglo-Persian Oil Company as resident director in the Gulf. In 1913, having the previous year achieved the unusual distinction of being awarded a CMG at the age of 28, Wilson departed for some long postponed leave in England:

'After a busy fortnight at Bushire I regretfully said farewell to Sir Percy and Lady Cox, but gladly saw, from the deck of the mail steamer, the sandy wastes of Persia fade on the horizon. On my way down the Gulf I talked much with one of the ship's engineers, a young Englishman from Oldham, whose broad Lancashire accent had attracted me when we first met some years before. I was full of super-abundant physical energy. He suggested, laughingly, that I should stoke a ship home from Bombay, in order to try my strength to the limit. The idea took possession of me. It would save me the cost of my passage by P. & O. and put some



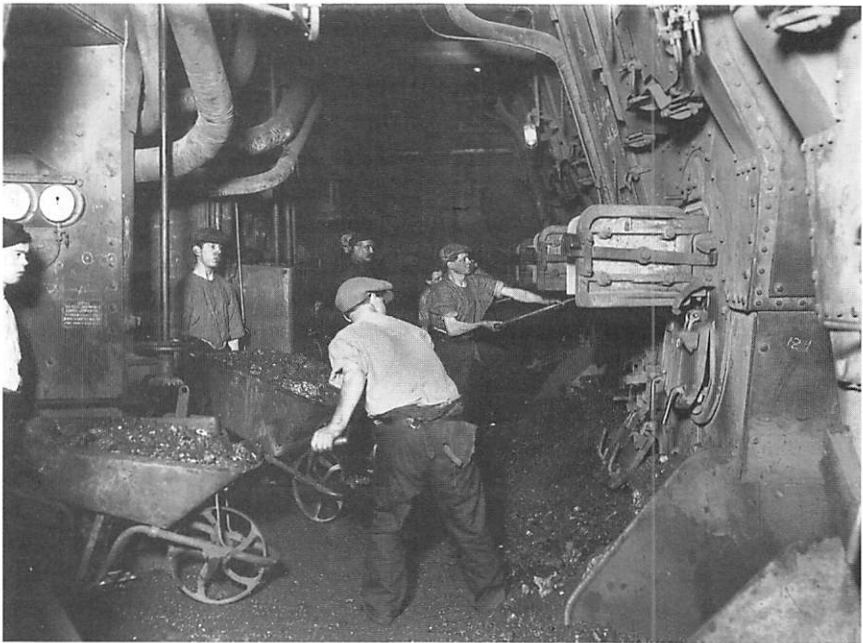
A 6266-ton British merchant vessel, commissioned in 1898.

money in my pocket – for I wanted to have something to spend when I got home. I induced him to help me to carry out this plan and swore him to secrecy. He fitted me out with a stoker's overalls and clothes. I sent all my baggage home by long sea route through a shipmate of his... and took with me only a haversack. He found a tramp steamer of 6,000 tons or so about to leave Bombay for Marseilles via Suez, with a crew of British stokers who were short of one of their complement. The Chief Engineer was a friend of his and signed me on, understanding me to be 'a young officer who was hard up and would not shirk the work', which was bound to be severe as the monsoon had just started. I have kept no written record of this trip. I have even forgotten the name of the ship, but some details are vividly present to my mind nearly thirty years later. The quarters were rough and evil-smelling: no amount of labour on our part could improve them... We had to keep the portholes closed from Bombay to Aden, owing to the rough weather which added to our discomfort... The men were a rough lot, given to the use of words which are conventionally regarded as obscene, though nothing they said or thought was half so foul as the sort of chatter one may sometimes hear in the smoking-room of the first-class saloon. Their physique was not good: few of them were really physically capable of the strain which the work entailed... Exhaustion, increased by the unappetising food which was their lot whether at sea or on land, brought in its train a desire for strong drink. The seemingly endless routine of shifts and rest-periods, four hours on and eight hours off, night and day, seven days a week for seven weeks or more, predisposed them to seek solace, when they set foot on shore, in the temples of Venus and Bacchus... They were all under 40, most of them under 30, for a stoker's working life was short. I did not blame them for living for the present hour nor did their

conversation...repel me. They worked, and did their best to live: they laughed easily, and were easily angered. But each of them bore the indelible marks of their harsh trade which was then recognised, in Mortality Tables, as one of the most dangerous to health and least insurable.

We were ten days between Bombay and Aden; it was the height of the monsoon. I soon found out how to wield a shovel and how to spread the fine coal over the length of the grate. I learned to time my stroke to follow the pitch and roll of the vessel, and when and how to rake the bars. I took my turn at the ash-shoot and my watch with three other men, clad only in a pair of rope shoes to save the feet from being burned by hot ashes.

At first my mates would not believe me capable of standing the heavy work: they 'knew my sort' – we always ended by going sick and having others to do our work. One man picked a quarrel with me, as a blackleg with a white collar, which ended in blows. I retorted that I would do a double shift to decide the question. That settled it: the others separated us and I did my double shift under the watchful eye of the charge-hand whose job it was to see that steam was kept up.



In the stoke-hold of a British merchant vessel c.1914.

Neg. No. Q 18550

*Photograph courtesy of the Imperial War Museum*



At Aden a stoker went sick and had to be sent to hospital. The spirit of emulation was strong upon me: I would show them that I could beat them for once at their own dread and dreary trade. I asked the Chief Engineer to let me do double shifts to Suez, and to draw double pay for the extra shift. This would spare the other stokers and would avoid disorganising our regular shifts. He laughed me to scorn: I should do well if I could do single shifts up the Red Sea, for there would be a following wind, than which none is more trying in the stokehold. I retorted that if I failed to do double shifts to Suez I was willing to forgo the extra pay and would take the ordinary hourly rate for all overtime worked. He offered me pay and a half for the extra shift. This I refused: I would not be a blackleg. He laughed and agreed. I went back to tell my mates, some of whom offered to lay me four to one sovereigns I could not do it. I took the bets and gave the cook £1 to provide me with extra meat and a double help of whatever was going if I needed it, for I should have to work 16 hours a day – 8 on and 4 off twice the first day, and 4 on and 4 off the second day alternately till we reached the Canal.

It was the hardest ten days I have ever spent: I could not have stood the strain had not my mates, who had wagered four to one against me, made things easy for me when I was off duty. They put my mat under the wind-sail and made it easier to rest upon by laying two of their own mats below it. They brought me food into the stokehold when I was on the eight-hour shift and water as cool as the wind would make it. I stoked and ate and stoked again, went to doze or sleep and went down to the stifling damp heat of the boiler room, forgetful of nights or days but spurred on by the sight of a chalked calendar on which we marked our progress. We reached Suez exactly on time: the Chief Engineer sent for me and shook hands. The Captain came off the bridge and said I was ‘a tough bugger’ – a word I reproduce without apologies for, in good English (or French), it is, as in Johnson’s day, a term of endearment. My brother stokers insisted on taking both my shifts through the Canal so that I might sleep undisturbed – in the Third Engineer’s bunk! At Port Said our bunkers were filled afresh and most of us had a night on shore. My mates declared they would stand me dinner, ‘and the rest’ on shore to celebrate the occasion. I had thought of trying to leave the ship here, but after this touching tribute I put the idea aside. It was my first complimentary dinner. None other has given me quite so much gratification.

Stokers, even when as clean in body as soap and the hose could make them, were not welcome in the hotels and restaurants of Port Said, but one stoker ‘knew a good place’ – it was a brothel with a veranda on the ground floor, brightly lit with oil lamps. We were served with the best food we had tasted since we left Bombay... by a genial bevy of friendly young women whose lot was not more unfortunate than that of those whom they served. There was music... and song, though in languages which none of us could follow, from damsels in costumes which would

have done no discredit to *Les Folies Bergères* of Paris, beloved of staid matrons, fathers of families, and tourists... T. E. Brown has described the scene as I remember it, in one of his poems:

*Ah, naughty little girl,  
With teeth of pearl  
You exquisite little brute  
So young, so dissolute –  
Ripe orange, brushed  
From an o'erladen tree, chance-crushed  
And bruised and battered on the street,  
And yet so merry and so sweet!  
Ah, child, don't scoff –  
Yes, yes, I see – you lovely wretch, be off!*

We left Port Said with a few headaches, but feeling that life was worth living a little longer. My mates offered to settle their wagers at four to one. I accepted two to one plus the dinner, and we parted good friends at Marseilles, where, after a roistering night on shore, I took my discharge, bought a cheap suit and a second-hand bicycle and rode across France to Le Havre, and from Southampton to my parents' home in the Cathedral Close at Worcester.'

Within a few days of his return, Wilson was donning a tail coat and top hat to call on officials at the India and Foreign Offices in Whitehall. Having so recently won his spurs as a temporary stoker, he doubtless relished the irony of being back in a world entirely alien to his 'mates'.

On the outbreak of the Second World War Sir Arnold Wilson (who had served in parliament as MP for Hitchin since 1933) joined the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve. An air gunner in Bomber Command, he was killed in action over northern France in 1940 shortly before publication of his book, *S. W. Persia: Letters and Diary of a Young Political Officer 1907–1914* (1941). The personality which emerges from the book, extracts from which have been quoted above, is that of a versatile, fearless and exceptionally gifted man who was at home in all walks of life, and in all circumstances.

JOHN SHIPMAN

## BOOK REVIEWS

**A History of Modern Yemen** by Paul Dresch. Cambridge University Press, 2000. Pp. 285. Illus. Maps. Appendices. Glossary. Notes. Bibliog. Index. Hb.& Pb. ISBN 0 521 79482 X.

Having thoroughly enjoyed Dr Dresch's previous, primarily anthropological book, *Tribes, Government and History in Yemen* (1989), I expected good things of his work on the modern country. I was not disappointed. This is an attractive and readable publication, with photographs, maps and other useful illustrations. Above all, it is well written and as appealing to the general reader as to the specialist academic. In some ways it could be described as an updated version of Robin Bidwell's *The Two Yemens* (1983), but presentationally, organisationally and stylistically, I prefer Paul Dresch's approach.

The book concentrates on the Yemen of the twentieth century (Bidwell delved into the earlier history more extensively) and is part of a Cambridge University Press series on the modern Middle East. I particularly enjoyed Dresch's treatment of Imam Yahya's time and his stormy relationship with the British. Given my own involvement with the last years of British rule in South Arabia ('rule' may have been something of a misnomer towards the end!), I tended to concentrate on the author's coverage of the late 1950s and 1960s. Here he has done well although hampered by a lack of reliable primary source material from the Arab nationalist 'side' in South Arabia, as opposed to extensive English language accounts. Someone needs to persuade the chief actors in the National Liberation Front to come forward with an objective first hand version of their activities before the surviving main players leave the stage altogether. Inevitably in a book spanning a century, this short if traumatic decade marking the twilight of Empire is covered somewhat superficially. But the sense is clear enough. The sad history of muddle, lack of vision, indecision and, in the end, a fatal loss of will by HMG, emerges starkly from the thirty or so pages dealing with the 1962 revolution in the north, entanglement of the Egyptians, and the demise of the British in the south.

Perhaps the most valuable feature of this excellent volume is Dresch's account of the post-colonial period – especially when he carries on from where Bidwell stopped and explains how the two Yemens, neo-Marxist in the south, inherently conservative in the north (despite years of 'republicanism'), finally merged. As a young political officer in the 1960s, I would have wagered my entire (albeit modest) gratuity against unity in my lifetime, dismissing the prospect as a chimera induced by fleeting anti-colonial sentiment rather than anything more substantial and enduring. The post-imperial road to scenes of crowds chanting on both sides of the former border: 'ba'd al yawm ma'ad baramil' ('after today no more barrels' i.e. concrete filled drums marking the frontier checkpoints) was a rocky one.

Obstacles included the unequal balance of populations – 11 million in the north overwhelming the 2.5 million in the south; opposition from Saudi Arabia; the conflicting ambitions of politicians and tribal leaders; the divisive effect of the dying years of the cold war on Arab regional development. But against all odds union came about, in the shadow of Saddam's adventure in Kuwait and the emergence of the United States as sole superpower in the so-called 'New World Order'.

PETER HINCHCLIFFE

**Yemen: Jewel of Arabia** by Charles & Patricia Aithie, with an introduction by Mark Marshall, CMG, Stacey International (128 Kensington Church Street, London W8 4BH), 2001. Pp. 215. 500 colour photographs and 16 maps. Index. Bibliog. Hb. £35. ISBN 1 900988 151.

Lavish colour publications have been produced for all other countries in Arabia; now Yemen, more photogenic than most of them, has received the same treatment. This book is truly a pictorial gem. Some of the places and scenes will be familiar from other publications about Yemen, many of which are listed in the bibliography, but few, if any, can match the quality of the photographs in *Yemen: Jewel of Arabia*. Other books have treated only one aspect or one area of Yemen, but during their extensive travels Charles and Patricia Aithie have taken pictures of people and places which display the many different characteristics of the country, its customs and way of life.

The book is beautifully produced with an introduction by Mark Marshall, a former British Ambassador to Yemen. He provides a brief historical résumé for the general reader, which is followed by a chronology stretching from 5000 BC to the present day – the final entry reading: '2000 Northern border agreed with Saudi Arabia'. The book is divided into three sections entitled 'The Highlands', 'The Tihama' and 'The Hadramaut, the South Coast and Aden'. Block captions complement and elucidate the photographs and there are 16 maps distributed throughout the text, which are particularly useful in illustrating aspects of the country such as communications, markets, geology and land use.

The text contains many useful facts for the non-Yemeni reader, but it does not pretend to be an academic treatise. The flora and fauna are discussed in some detail, and a whole page is devoted to termites. But there are no pictures of Soqatra, which is included with the section on Aden. Although the book is not about modern industry and commerce, the photographs of Aden, Yemen's economic capital, are well chosen. The writing is condensed to give weight to the illustrations which

are really what carry the publication; for a work of this kind precludes discussion of social, political or economic issues, such as the shortage of water. Instead, the reader is transported into the Garden of Eden and the book is a delight for the armchair visitor to Yemen. Although it does not pretend to be a guide-book, anyone intending to travel to Yemen would be well advised to make a journey through its pages.

There are a few quibbles to be mentioned, particularly with some transliteration of the Arabic. There is also confusion over the name of Crown Prince, later Imam, Mohammed al-Badr, who on one line in the chronology is referred to as Prince Badr, and two lines further on as Imam Mohammed al-Bada (sic); Wadi Tiban in Lahej is captioned 'Wadi Turban'; some photographs are repeated without captions: having read the section on Sana'a, it is a little disconcerting to encounter a fine yet uncaptioned picture of Bab al-Yemen when one has already moved north and crossed the Shaharah bridge! However, such minor blemishes do not detract from the excellence of the photography and the quality of its reproduction in this book.

JULIAN PAXTON

**The Hadrami Awakening: Community and Identity in the Netherlands East Indies, 1900–1942** by Natalie Mobini-Kesheh. SEAP, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York, 1999. Pp. 174. Illus. Notes. Glossary. Bibliog. Pb. £17. ISBN 0 87727 727 3.

From the late eighteenth century Hadhramis started to migrate in significant numbers to Southeast Asia, adding a new dimension to their existing diaspora along the Red Sea and East African coast. During the following century Hadhrami settlements emerged throughout the Malay-Indonesian archipelago, especially in the major trading centres along the north coast of Java. By 1900 there were some 27000 Arabs (mostly Hadhrami) in the Dutch East Indies, and by 1942, on the eve of Japanese occupation, the Arab population of the colony is thought to have numbered about 80000.

Migration to the East Indies involved a transition from a largely barren land, bedevilled by tribal warfare, to a flourishing plantation economy. Hadhramis were ever resilient, but several factors facilitated their integration with local society: almost all migrants were men, so there was a high rate of intermarriage with indigenous women; they professed the same religion as the local population, and not a few of them were *sayyids* claiming descent from the Prophet.

This study examines the issues of identity and community which confronted Hadhramis in the Indies during the first half of the 20th century. The onset of

modernity raised urgent and complex questions. Did traditional social status matter? How could the religion of Islam be made relevant to the modern world? What kind of education would best equip Hadhrami children to succeed in that world? Were Hadhramis to identify themselves as Muslims or Arabs; with their homeland or with their host country? Hadhrami responses to these questions during the period known to contemporary writers as *al-nahdhah al-hadhramiyyah*, or the Hadhrami 'awakening', form the substance of this work. Hadhrami identity helped to shape and was itself shaped by shifting patterns of identification in the host society: the emergence, for example, of an ethnically defined nationalism among Indonesians from the mid-1910s meant that Hadhramis were now seen more as 'foreigners' than as fellow Muslims. This sharpened Hadhramis' sense of separateness (already institutionalised by the Dutch colonial policy of segregating and imposing travel restrictions on Arabs and Chinese) and was a decisive factor in compelling them to turn to their homeland as a source of identity. This pattern was reversed in the 1930s, when a group of young Hadhrami *muwalladin* (locally-born and usually of mixed parentage) chose to proclaim Indonesia as their homeland, thus winning acceptance by Indonesian nationalists.

The *nahdhah*, led by the newly emergent elite, embodied newspapers, journals, and a rapidly expanding network of voluntary associations and modern schools. But it also gave rise to a protracted ideological dispute – the 'Alawi-Irshadi conflict – centred on the social status and religious authority claimed by the 'Alawis (*sayyids*) but disputed by the Irshadis as a perverse anomaly (their view being influenced by the Egyptian-led movement of Islamic Reformism with its emphasis on Muslim equality). Despite this dispute, the core achievement of the *nahdhah* was the establishment of an educational system aimed at turning a new generation of Hadhramis into devout, self-reliant Muslims with a knowledge of both Arabic and European languages, and with the basic vocational skills that they would need as traders and businessmen. The system (modelled closely on the example of the pace-setting Chinese) also inculcated a territorial patriotism (*wataniyyah*) focused on the Hadhrami homeland, whose welfare and development it was the community's moral duty to support; and the wealth remitted from South-east Asia between the wars is still manifest in the mud-brick palaces and tower houses of Wadi Hadhramaut. When Indonesia achieved independence most people of Hadhrami descent accepted Indonesian nationality, and Hadhramaut was relegated to the 'land of the ancestors'.

This thoughtful, richly informed study is the fruit of wide reading and painstaking research. It is written with assurance and refreshing lucidity, and is a valuable addition to existing studies on the Hadhrami diaspora. It incorporates the author's paper in *Hadhrami Scholars, Traders and Statesmen in the Indian Ocean 1750s-1960s* (edited by U. Freitag and W. G. Clarence-Smith, Brill, 1997) but not, alas, a map of

the Malay-Indonesian archipelago which would have been helpful to readers less familiar with this region. Lastly, two minor points: the first European to enter Tarim since Leo Hirsch in 1893 was Lieut.-Colonel the Hon. M. T. Boscawen (who visited Shibam and Tarim in 1929) not Van der Meulen as stated on p.108; and Salih Bin 'Abdat's son who ruled al-Ghurfaḥ from 1939 was Ubayd, not Salih as stated in note 55, p.118.

JOHN SHIPMAN

**An Element of Luck: To South Arabia and Return** by Michael Crouch, with a foreword by General Sir Charles Guthrie. Revised second edition. Rowlhouse Publishing Ltd, Western Australia, 2000. Pp. 281. Illus. Appendix. Index. Pb. ISBN 0 95874064 X.

This is a revised and updated edition of his book first published by the Radcliffe Press in 1993 and briefly reviewed in the November 1994 issue of this Journal. I thoroughly enjoyed re-reading what is basically an autobiography heavily weighted towards the author's time in South Arabia from 1958 until just before British withdrawal in 1967.

It is clear that Michael Crouch disagreed strongly with British policy towards the ill-fated South Arabian Federation and has strong views as to why it was such a spectacular failure. He also felt (and expresses) a lack of empathy towards a number of his erstwhile colleagues – especially some of those in senior positions within the establishment primarily concerned with managing the affairs of the Western Aden Protectorate (WAP). I could take issue with some of his sentiments, but I prefer to see the book as a highly readable account of an adventurous life in a service struggling to do its best in very trying circumstances. The atmospherics are authentic, and he records the minutiae of daily life in both Protectorates and in Aden colony, where he had a brief sojourn in the Secretariat. Often exciting and frequently dangerous, life for the up-country political officer was always challenging against the background of a deteriorating situation as the Federation lurched towards inevitable extinction. Down country was exciting enough too. There is a vivid account of a bazooka attack on the Crouches' house (with his wife Lynette and baby Charles in residence) in Al-Ittiḥad, the Federal capital, now Madinat al-Sha'ab; they escaped with their lives but it must have been a horrific experience.

The last chapter brings his story up to date with accounts of his return to Yemen in 1993 and of his visits since, including an (amiable) encounter with a former would-be assassin. An appendix contains a suggested itinerary for the modern traveller to Yemen. There are many interesting illustrations with personal snapshots

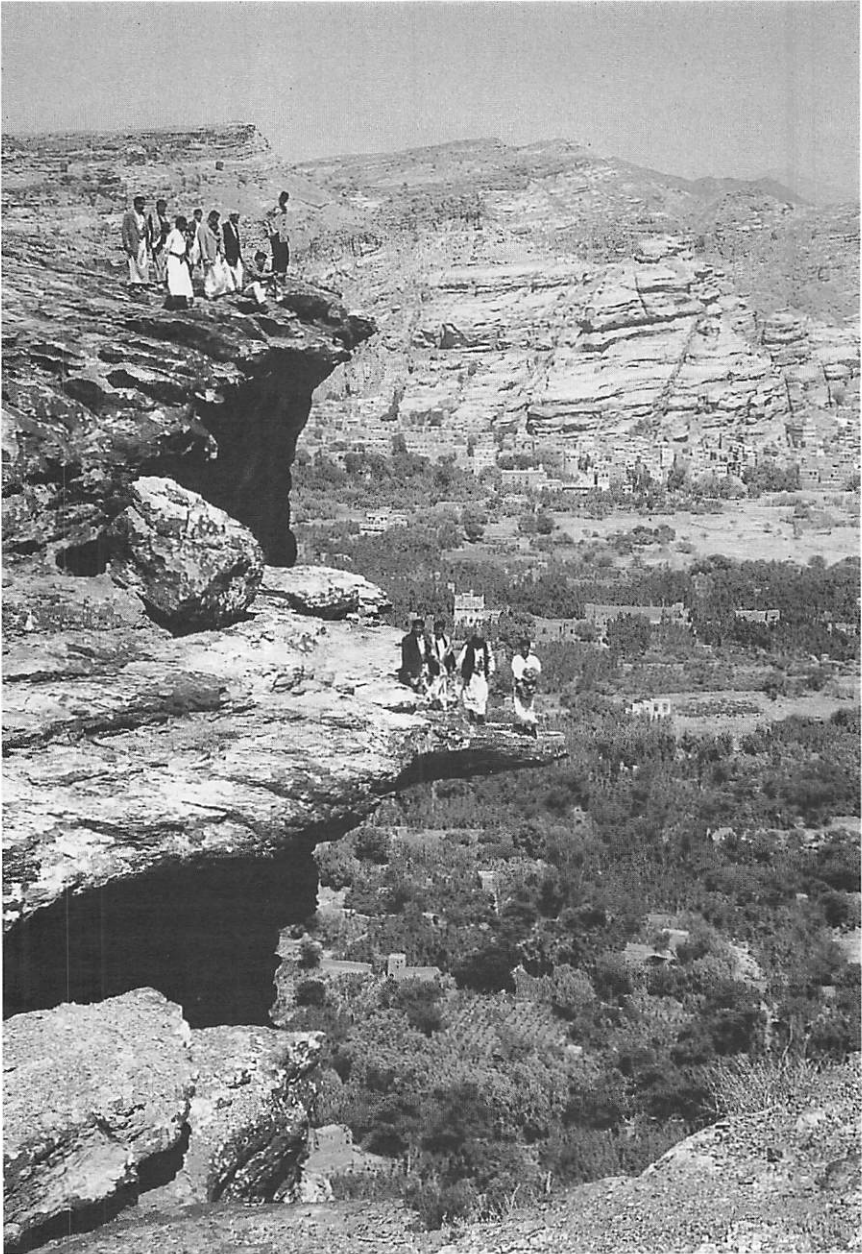
from the Crouch family album. A rattling good yarn and a book which stands on its own account while meriting the particular attention of anyone interested in the region during the last years of British involvement. The book is not widely available in UK but can easily be obtained from Amazon, the on-line book shop ([www.amazon.co.uk](http://www.amazon.co.uk)).

PETER HINCHCLIFFE

### **About the Society ...**

The British-Yemeni Society was inaugurated in February 1993. Its objectives are to promote friendship and understanding between the peoples of the two countries and to advance public knowledge in Britain about the Republic of Yemen, its history, political economy and culture. The Society is a registered charity and its membership is open to all who have an interest in Yemen. It holds regular meetings and lectures and has been involved in sponsoring visits of Yemeni musicians and artists to Britain, supporting publications and exhibitions, notably the Yemen Festival of 1997, and assisting medical and other charitable projects in Yemen. It also provides a focus for contact between individuals of both countries for the development of cultural and humanitarian activities.





Wedding party above Wadi Dhahr, October 2000.

*Courtesy: Howard Meadowcroft*



The Mufti during his visit to Durham University, 1992.

*Courtesy: A. B. D. R. Eagle*

## OBITUARIES

### **The Mufti of Yemen:** SAYYID AHMAD ZABARA (1908–2000)

Sayyid Ahmad bin Muhammad Zabara, Mufti of the Yemen Republic, who died in San'a' on 23 July 2000 at the age of 92, was a member of one of the most prominent *sayyid* families in Yemen. His line extended back to al-Hadi Yahya bin al-Husain bin al-Qasim (a scion of Imam al-Hasan, grandson of the Prophet) who, at Sa'da, in the last decade of the 9th century, founded the Zaydi imamate which survived until the revolution of 1962.

Sayyid Ahmad, like the great majority of inhabitants of the northern regions of Yemen, was a Zaydi, a branch of Shi'a Islam which derives its name from Zayd bin Ali Zayn al-'Abidin who was killed in battle outside Kufa in Iraq in 740. His forebears had for centuries served the Zaydi imams as provincial governors and judges, and many members of the family were outstanding scholars of Islamic law and the Arabic language. The family name of Zabara dates back to Sayyid Ahmad's ancestor Amir al-Husayn bin Ali, a military commander under the 16th century Imam Yahya Sharaf al-Din, who came from Zabara, a hamlet between the villages of Jahana and Dar al-Sharif, in the upper reaches of Wadi Maswar, in the tribal region of Khawlan al-'Aliya south-east of San'a'. Al-Husayn's son Ahmad was a prominent supporter of Imam al-Mansur bi'llah al-Qasim bin Muhammad (ancestor of the 20th century Imams) in his campaigns against the Ottomans who had invaded and occupied much of Yemen in the 16th century.

Sayyid Ahmad's father, Muhammad bin Muhammad Zabara, was a renowned historian and man of letters who compiled histories of the Zaydi imams and biographical dictionaries of prominent Yemenis, most of which have been published.

Sayyid Ahmad (the oldest of his father's 11 children) was born on 25 January 1908 in the village of al-Kibs, south of Jahana, some three years after the accession of Imam Yahya. At that time the Ottomans, who had invaded Yemen for a second time in the 1880s, occupied San'a' and the main towns. When Zabara was still a boy, his family moved to Jahana where his father had been appointed '*amil* (governor); here he received a traditional education in Arabic grammar, religion and *fiqh* (jurisprudence). In the late 1930s he accompanied his father to San'a', now the capital of the independent Mutawakkilite Kingdom of Yemen, and there embarked on a course of advanced studies in theology and *fiqh* under some of the leading Yemeni ulema (scholars) of his day, such as Qadi 'Abd al-Wahhab al-Shamahi, Qadi Husayn bin Ali al-'Amri, and Sayyid Ahmad bin Abdullah al-Kibsi. A few years later he was summoned by the Crown Prince, Sayf al-Islam Ahmad, to Ta'izz, where he taught at the Theological College (al-madrassa al-'ilmiyya) and became tutor to the Crown Prince's son, Muhammad al-Badr, whose sister, Amira

Khadija, he subsequently married. Later, Imam Yahya appointed him head of the Shari'a Higher Appeal Board, a post which he held for 20 years; in August 1955 Imam Ahmad appointed him member of the 10-man Consultative Council headed by Muhammad al-Badr, now Crown Prince.

On the outbreak of the September 1962 revolution and the overthrow of Imam al-Badr, Zabara was fortunate not to have suffered execution, the fate of many who had held official positions under the Zaydi imamate. Nevertheless, he was imprisoned for over a year before being allowed to leave Yemen for Egypt. He eventually settled in Beirut and remained there until late 1967 when Qadi 'Abd al-Rahman al-Iryani, now President of the Yemen Arab Republic (as it was then called), invited him back to San'a' to assume the new post of *mufti* (which had never existed under the imams). This, in effect, made Zabara chief religious authority in the land. Many believe that Zabara was instrumental in saving Iryani's life in 1948 (following the assassination of Imam Yahya in the abortive coup led by Sayyid Abdullah al-Wazir) by interceding with Imam Ahmad on Iryani's behalf.

From the mid-1970s, Zabara taught Shari'a law and jurisprudence at the newly established University of San'a'. As Mufti, he represented Yemen at numerous Islamic conferences throughout the world. He maintained close links with Muslim communities in the former Soviet Union, and also visited those in China and Korea. His official visit to Britain in 1992 included calls at the Middle Eastern Department of Durham University, the Centre for the Study of Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations in Birmingham, and on the Archbishop of Canterbury at Lambeth Palace. He also visited Yemeni communities in South Shields, Birmingham and Cardiff.

Although Sayyid Ahmad added to the historical and biographical work of his father, his literary output was mainly poetry. This included a composition (1987) of 360 verses covering the history of Yemen from the time of Imam Yahya's father, Imam al-Mansur Muhammad (1890–1904), through the revolutionary period, up to the current presidency of Ali Abdullah Salih.

Zabara worked from his home in the Filayhi quarter of old San'a', and was accessible to all who needed advice or a *fatwa* (religious edict), including women who would come personally, or telephone. Often when out for a walk (and he attributed his longevity partly to his love of exercise) he would sit by the roadside dealing with requests for advice, and stamping his written replies with his seal. He detested any fanaticism in religion; once when there were complaints about women bathing at Al-Hudayda on the Red Sea, Sayyid Ahmad ruled that the sea belonged to God, and that those who feared for their morals should avoid it! He was also adamant in his view that women should not be forced into a marriage contract. In a newspaper interview in February 1997, he described

Islam as a religion of tolerance which 'accepts and respects all other teachings brought to humanity by messengers of God who came before the last Prophet, Muhammad...' The latter, he added, was the supreme example of 'tolerance and avoiding prejudice which is a mark of ignorance'. The Mufti enthusiastically supported and worked for dialogue not only among Muslims of various schools of thought, but also between Islam and other faiths. It was his intervention which greatly assisted the Bishop in Cyprus and the Gulf to negotiate the restoration of Christ Church, Aden, as a place of worship in the early 1990s; in 1996 the Mufti had an audience with the Pope in Rome.

Although very much a traditionalist in dress and life-style, Sayyid Ahmad held some radical ideas; he believed, for instance, that the Zaydi imamate should not be restricted to the sayyids (Ahl al-Bayt), which was the traditional Zaydi viewpoint, but should be open to any Muslim with the necessary qualities and learning. Meanwhile, he encouraged young sayyids to study for technical and scientific careers rather than confine themselves to the judiciary, administration and teaching, which had hitherto been the general custom. A grandson of his was an engineer and one of his daughters was trained as a mid-wife.

The Mufti's funeral, which was marked by prayers at the ancient Grand Mosque of San'a', was attended by the President, senior members of the government, and 'ulema from all over Yemen. He was buried at Majil al-Dimma, east of Bab al-Yaman, where his father had been interred forty years previously. He is survived by 4 sons and 3 daughters from three marriages (his first wife dying in the 1940s).

A. B. D. R. EAGLE



Abdo Nagi in his studio.

*Courtesy: John Ireland*

#### ABDO NAGI (1941–2001)

Abdo Nagi Abdullah Kaid was born in the village of Shuhali, Ibb Province, during the reign of Imam Yahya; his father owned a terraced farm and made traditional wooden locks. From early childhood Abdo spent many long days on rugged hill-sides watching over his father's goats, fascinated by the shapes, colours and textures of the rock-strewn landscape. Sent one day on an errand to Jibla, he marvelled at the architecture and the busy commercial life of the town, realising for the first time that there was a wider world of which no-one had spoken to him before. Shortly after his 12th birthday, his urge to receive education proved overwhelming and, having failed to persuade his father to release him from working the farm, he packed a few belongings and set out alone for Aden, arriving a few weeks before the visit of H. M. The Queen in 1954.

Working long hours for Arab families, he had no opportunity for schooling until in 1959 he began work for British expatriates who encouraged his studies. In 1962 he journeyed home to marry Nadia, his childhood sweetheart, but had to return

alone to Aden, leaving her behind with her parents. Between 1959 and 1965 he worked for five different families, all of whom spoke very highly of his character and ability, and to whom he was extremely loyal. As British withdrawal drew closer he pressed me, as his employer since 1965, to take him back to England when the time came for me to leave Aden. I pointed out all the possible drawbacks but was impressed by his determination, so, with help from the British High Commission, we travelled on a BOAC flight to England on 22 October 1967. Thus he came to Letchworth in Hertfordshire and was installed in the garden flat at the rear of my house. Within a few weeks he saw snow for the first time.

The following spring we went to see the Spalding tulip fields in full bloom, and his obvious delight with their colour led to the purchase of a box of watercolour paints which he began to use to good effect. Thus his latent artistic talent found expression for the first time at the age of 27.

In 1970, having worked part-time in a Wimpy Bar and at a small local hotel, he decided to visit Yemen to persuade his wife to join him in the UK. By early 1971 they were back and their daughter was born some months later. Between 1971 and 1973 Abdo passed a Catering Course at Letchworth College of Technology and an Art Course at Hitchin College of Further Education, obtaining 'O' and 'A' levels in Art. Having then spent a year working full-time in an engineering factory, he was appointed Assistant Technician in the Art Department at North Herts College, which at last gave him the artistic environment he needed. Still painting, he soon found himself working in the Pottery Section and realised that clay could help him reproduce the forms, textures and colours recalled from his childhood. So he set out to learn all he could about ceramics, obtaining 'A' level in Pottery in 1976.

Two years later his work was shown publicly for the first time at Hitchin Museum, to be followed by Letchworth Museum in 1979, and later by The Gallery, Wellingborough. Meanwhile in 1978 he had moved with his wife and daughter to a house of their own, and his son was born in November that year. The garden flat was then turned into his studio.

From 1984 to 1988 he studied for his BA(Hons) Degree at Middlesex, and, following his Degree Show at The Mall Galleries, London, was invited to exhibit by private galleries in London, Alresford, Great Bircham and Ashwell. Shows mounted by The Crafts Council (1991), The Contemporary Art Society (1992) and The Craft Potters' Association (1993) were followed by 'A Celebration of Art' at St. Alban's Abbey (1993), The Arab Fine Art Exhibition, London (1995) and 'Decorative Arts Today' at Bonhams, London (1995, 1996 and 1998); these led to further exhibitions in London, Leeds, Canterbury and Beverley. In 1995, as a member of the Hertfordshire Arts Forum, he exhibited in an International Crafts Festival in Hungary and his work won First Prize 'Keramia'.

During the Yemen Festival in London in 1997, five of his pieces were shown at The British Museum, and retained there on 'indefinite loan'. In 1998 his work was included in 'Interiors', an exhibition at the British Ambassador's Residence in Paris, and in 1999 was also shown at the third Arab Communities Conference at the University of Westminster.

Members of the British-Yemeni Society and others who attended the Art Exhibition sponsored by the Society at The Kufa Gallery, London, last November, will recall the purity of form and beautiful individual colourings which characterised Abdo's glazes. Very self-critical and always looking to develop further, he was full of ideas during the last six months of his life for new glazes and shapes.

A loyal British citizen, Abdo remained proud of his Yemeni origins; his last visit to Yemen was with the tour organised by the Society in 1998, when his brother, Sa'ud, and other Yemeni friends entertained the whole group to a delightful supper party in Ta'iz.

Abdo's untimely death in hospital on 9 April, following a devastating heart attack the previous day, has taken from us a significant ceramic artist and a modest, caring, and charismatic man whose friendship was cherished by all who knew him; I feel it a great privilege to have been one of their number; in his ceramics he speaks to us still.

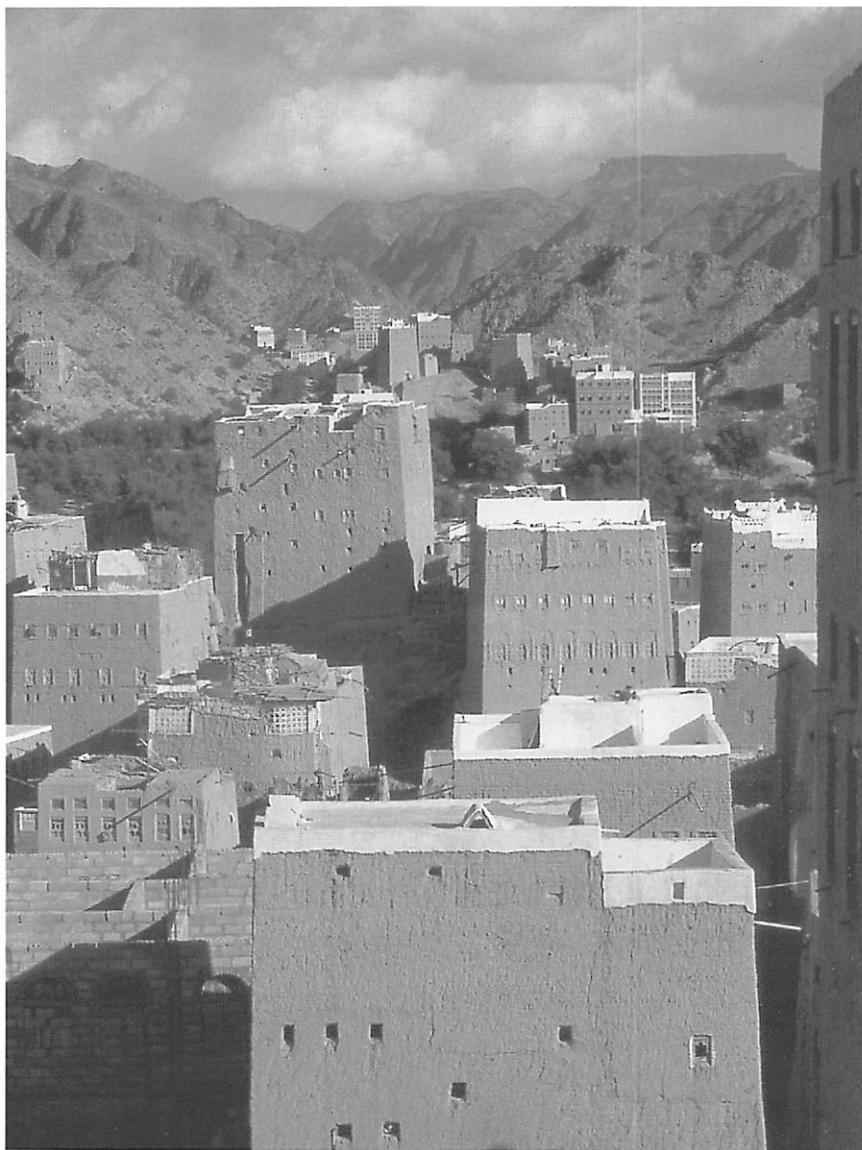
JOHN IRELAND





Date seller, Hodeidah market, October 2000.

*Courtesy: Howard Meadowcroft*



Wadi Yeshbum, October 2000.

*Courtesy: Howard Meadowcroft*

Designed and typeset by David McLean  
Printed by Battley Brothers, Clapham, London

# *The Queen of Sheba: Treasures of Ancient Yemen*

5 June – 13 October 2002



Incense burner. Ht.32cm. Shabwa. 3rd century A.D. ANE 125682

*Reproduced by courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum*

The venue for this exhibition will be the Hotung Gallery within the Great Court of the **BRITISH MUSEUM**. The exhibition will feature artworks from UK collections, including the Department of Prints & Drawings, and archaeological finds drawn principally from national collections in Yemen. Most of the latter have featured in a travelling exhibition of the same name but they will be supplemented by important pieces from the British Museum and other collections. A new catalogue containing newly commissioned essays by leading scholars and edited by Dr St John Simpson, the lead-curator for this exhibition, will be published by the British Museum Press. A significant part of the Museum's public programme will also be linked to the exhibition. Planned events, catering for a wide range of audiences, will include separate Study Days on The Queen of Sheba (15 June), Archaeology and the Incense Route (29 June), Traditional Yemen (21 September), and Trade and Travel in the Red Sea (5 October). Further details on these and other events can be obtained from the Museum's website [www.thebritishmuseum.ac.uk](http://www.thebritishmuseum.ac.uk) and/or Education Department.