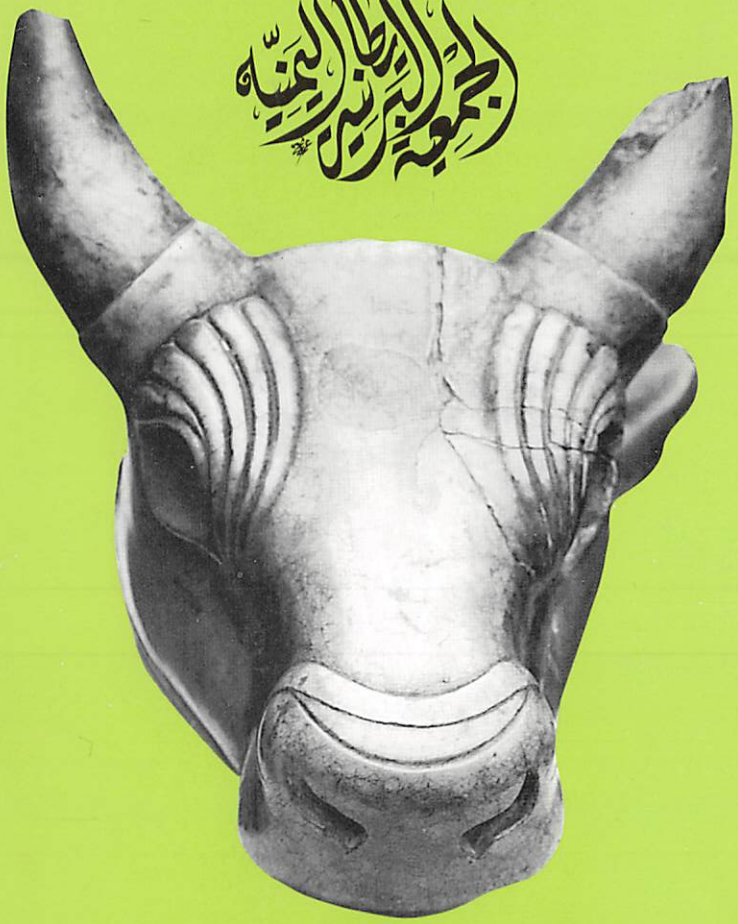

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2002-2003

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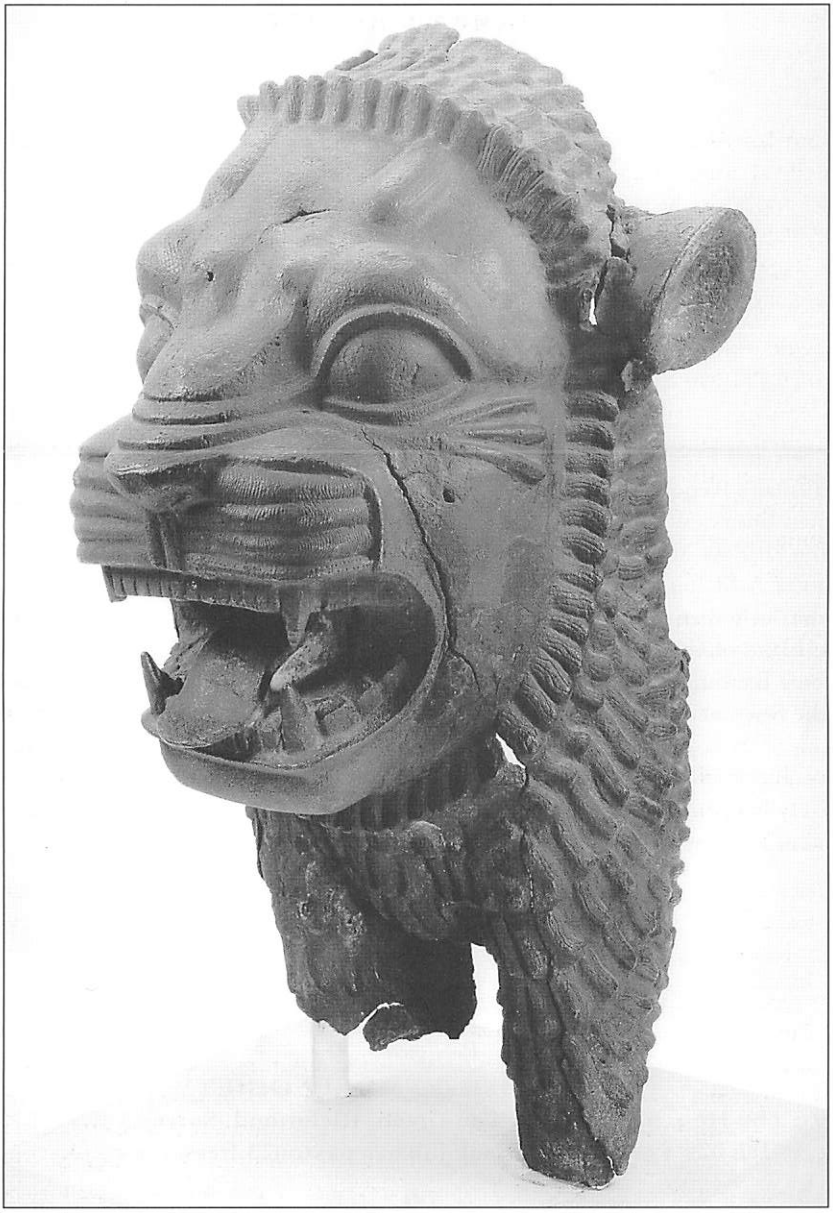


Bronze Lion, originally flanking a monumental entrance way, 5th–4th century BC.
Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge

This magnificent bronze, found near Shibam, Wadi Hadhramaut, and given by Sultan Ali bin Salah Al-Qu'aiti to Lt. Col. the Hon. M.T. Boscawen in 1932, can be seen at the British Museum's ***Queen of Sheba: Treasures from ancient Yemen*** exhibition, 9 June–13 October 2002.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

(Ninth Annual General Meeting, Tuesday, 25 June 2002)

At our last AGM we said goodbye as to our Honorary Co-President, H.E. Dr Hussain al-Amri., who has returned to Sana'a but remains an honorary member of the Society. In his place we are very pleased to welcome H.E. Dr Mutahar Abdullah Al-Saeede, who presented his credentials as the new ambassador of the Republic of Yemen at the end of October and subsequently became our Honorary Co-President.

After the summer holiday recess we resumed our lecture programme in October with an illustrated talk by Shelagh Weir on the 'Crafts of Yemen'. In November, Dr Trevor Marchand of the School of Oriental & African Studies described in his illustrated lecture to a joint meeting of our Society and the Society for Arabian Studies, how the distinctive shape and beauty of the Yemeni minaret was achieved and how the skills were passed down from master builder to apprentice. The autumn programme concluded in December with a presentation by Ian Harmond on the EC-funded Master Plan for Soqotra.

In the New Year, the Letchworth Museum Art Gallery arranged an exhibition to celebrate the life and work of Abdo Nagi whose obituary was published in the last edition of the Journal. Our first lecture of the year was given by Mohammed Almasyabi who introduced us to the work of the Yemeni Development Foundation, a charity that was launched in March 2000 to give advice and assistance to the Yemeni community in this country and in Yemen itself. Our Society has contributed to a project to provide Braille computers for the al-Aman Welfare Society in Sana'a to train blind girls.

In March, Marta Paluch introduced her book 'Yemeni Voices – Women tell their stories', giving a vivid insight into the changing lives of the women whom she had interviewed for a British Council project while she was working in Yemen.

Our next speaker was Caroline Singer, a member of the Society, who lectured to a joint meeting with the Anglo-Omani Society on 'The Frankincense Trail – travels in Oman & Yemen'. She delivered a fascinating talk illustrated with slides to a full house. The final lecture in our spring programme was a talk by Jane Diamond, who had just returned from visiting Yemen, on 'The Establishment & Management of a Family Planning Centre: organisational objectives versus local expectations'. She has worked for Marie Stopes International in Yemen and wrote an article for the journal in 1998 about her experiences in this important field. Unfortunately a personal misfortune prevented her from delivering the lecture, which has been postponed until next year.

Once again we are grateful for the co-operation of the Society for Arabian Studies and the Anglo-Omani Society in arranging joint meetings and avoiding clashes over lecture dates. Throughout the year under review we have been invited to several meetings about Yemen arranged by the Middle East Association (MEA). In October there was a discussion group meeting at which Mustafa Rajamanar, the British Vice-Consul (Commercial) in Aden, spoke about business opportunities. In January, Captain Roy Facey spoke once again about 'Aden Port Development', which is fast becoming an annual event in our calendar. In March the Yemeni Foreign Minister, Dr Abu Bakr al-Qirbi addressed a discussion group meeting at the MEA during his official visit to Britain. In early June, Ambassador Frances Guy, on a brief visit from Sana'a, also addressed the MEA. We are most grateful to the MEA's Director, Brian Constant, for inviting members of our Society to attend these events, and for the continued use of the MEA as a venue for some of our lectures.

On your behalf I should also like to thank the Committee for their support over the year. A major concern of the Committee has been to contribute to the side events connected with the British Museum 'Queen of Sheba' Exhibition which was launched on 5 June in the presence of a strong Yemeni delegation led by the Minister of Culture and several hundred guests. To this end we have co-sponsored with Dr Abdul Aziz al-Qua'iti, a member of our Society, an exhibition of Freya Stark's photographs taken during her travels in Southern Arabia, which opened earlier this month at Magdalen College, Oxford. We have also contributed to the projects bringing musicians from Yemen to perform at various venues in London from 27 to 30 June and in Cardiff on 2 July, and another smaller group of Yemeni players who will be performing in London from 18 to 21 July.

We are planning to have three more lecture meetings this year, details of which will be circulated to the membership with the forthcoming tenth anniversary issue of the Journal.

In view of the events of last year it was not possible to arrange a British-Yemeni Society Tour to Yemen, but Alan D'Arcy has worked tirelessly to arrange a tour this autumn. The Foreign Office Travel advice remains discouraging but several members of the Society have made private visits to Yemen; clearly a close eye must be kept on security with the continuing tension in the region. The latest FCO travel advice is available on the internet.

I congratulate the Embassy on the establishment of a web site, which will be much appreciated by those of our members with internet access:

www.yemenembassy.org.uk

In conclusion I should like to thank H.E. the Ambassador and his staff for hosting our AGM and for the generous hospitality shown to the Society.

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.

The last 10 months have witnessed the most challenging period for Yemen since the 1994 war. In the immediate aftermath of September 11 there were hints, at least from the more hawkish elements in the United States, that Yemen – along with Sudan and Somalia – could be targeted in a second wave of the 'war against terrorism'.

Fortunately, these fears have not been realised. This can be attributed in large part to the careful approach adopted by Yemeni leaders, faced with conflicting pressures to crack down on supporters of Usama bin Laden and to oppose American policies regarding Afghanistan and Israel.

It was inevitable, once bin Laden's involvement in September 11 became established, that the spotlight would turn on Yemen.

The problem dates back to the end of the Afghan war against the Soviet Union when unemployed mujahideen flocked to Yemen – one of the few countries where they could keep alive the spirit of jihad without much harassment from the authorities. According to the Yemeni authorities, more than 14,000 'Arab Afghans' (as the veteran mujahideen are known) were deported during the last five years.

At the same time, smaller numbers of Yemenis drifted off to Afghanistan to support the Taliban regime and/or bin Laden. It was reported in February that more than 20 Yemeni citizens had been captured in Afghanistan by the Americans and transferred to Guantanamo Bay prison camp, where they formed the second largest national group after the Saudi prisoners.

Yemen also has a historical connection with the bin Laden family, who originally came from Hadhramaut. Their modest ancestral home briefly became a focus of media attention, much to the chagrin of the Yemeni authorities. In November, a French film-maker who attempted to interview Usama bin Laden's Yemeni father-in-law was expelled for entering the country under false pretences, on a tourist visa.

The strain that September 11 initially placed on Yemeni-American relations eased gradually, and when President Ali Abdullah Salih visited Washington in late November, Yemen was officially described as a partner rather than a target in the 'war against terrorism'.

President Salih's visit was reciprocated in March, when Vice-President Dick Cheney included Yemen in his Middle East tour. For security reasons, Mr Cheney

did not venture beyond the terminal at Sana'a airport during his two-hour stay. Nevertheless, it was a sign of improving relations – the first trip by a high-ranking American since George Bush senior (then vice-president) visited Yemen in 1986.

In practical terms, Yemen's anti-terrorism efforts have centred on internal security and border controls. As the war against the Taliban and al-Qa'eda progressed, the primary aim was to prevent escapees from Afghanistan taking refuge in Yemen.

The visa system was tightened and work began (with American help) on a system of computers and cameras at airports and border crossings which will provide centralised monitoring of everyone who enters or leaves the country.

The possibility of unauthorised entry, particularly along Yemen's 1,200-mile coastline, remains a problem. To deal with this, the US is reportedly helping to set up a maritime police force and providing 15 patrol boats.

In the view of a European diplomat, security inside Yemen has improved considerably since September 11 and this has also helped to deter tribal kidnapping of foreigners. In apparent recognition of these efforts, the British Foreign Office dropped its stern travel warning, which has had a severe impact on tourism from the UK. Its current policy is to advise against independent travel to Yemen and to recommend 'that you should only do so as part of an organised tour and if you have business contacts, family or friends in the country'.

The difficulty of making arrests in Yemen was highlighted in December when security forces, armed with a list of suspects provided by Washington, tried to arrest three of them in Marib. The suspects escaped, but at least 18 soldiers and four tribesmen died in the ensuing gun and tank battle.

Nevertheless, large numbers of suspected al-Qa'eda sympathisers inside Yemen have been rounded up and there are unconfirmed claims that more than 170 are currently detained.

Events took a farcical turn in February when the FBI issued a world-wide alert for six Yemenis, claiming they were 'extremely dangerous and likely to carry out terrorist attacks within 24 hours'. All six, it was later discovered, were already in jail.

As in other Muslim countries, there was increased concern in Yemen about the misuse of education for spreading religious militancy. The government announced that the Islamic institutes associated with the opposition Islah party would be incorporated into the state educational system – though the move had been planned before September 11.

In November, al-Baihani school in Aden – owned by a charity – was forcibly closed. People living nearby told journalists that its classes began at 5 am after

morning prayers and included exercises which resembled military training. The private al-Iman university, run by Sheikh Abd al-Majid al-Zindani, a leader of the Islah party's radical wing, was also temporarily closed.

For several years Yemen has been a popular place for Muslims from abroad, including western converts, to study Arabic and/or Islam. A few of these students have eventually moved on into al-Qa'eda circles – among them John Walker Lindh, the 20-year-old American who studied in Yemen and was later arrested during the war in Afghanistan.

Following Lindh's arrest, large numbers of foreign students were sent home from Yemen, mainly on technical grounds connected with visas and residency permits.

One of the hazards faced by the Yemeni government in co-operating with the 'war on terrorism' was the possibility of an internal backlash – especially if security measures were perceived as complying with American demands rather than addressing Yemen's own needs.

This required a careful balancing act. Collaboration with the US, which now extends to American training of Yemeni special forces, has generally been kept at a discreet level. At the same time, Yemeni leaders have asserted their independence by espousing causes popular with the Yemeni public. Earlier this year, President Salih suspended his normal duties for a five-day 'sit-in' in his own office to protest at the situation in Palestine.

Even so, this policy has caused some problems, though nothing unduly serious. In October, there was a large demonstration against the bombing of Afghanistan. There have been a number of reported threats to the American embassy, including a harmless grenade attack, and several small explosions directed at people and buildings connected to Yemen's Political Security Organisation. Responsibility for the latter was claimed by a previously unknown group calling itself 'Sympathisers of al-Qa'eda'.

All this may sound like another grim year for Yemen but, given the magnitude of the difficulties, it might be argued that events have turned out reasonably well.

Threats to internal security have been a serious impediment to Yemen's economic development for many years, particularly in the tourism industry. Addressing the issue seriously as a result of September 11 can therefore bring practical benefits to Yemen. More effective monitoring of the coastline, for instance, may not only keep out al-Qa'eda fugitives but help local fisheries by keeping interlopers at bay.

The last year has certainly been a salutary experience and, if the current efforts are maintained, may even become a positive one. If that proves to be the case then Yemen will, for once, have something to thank bin Laden for.

IN THE SHADOW OF A MASTER

TREVOR H. J. MARCHAND

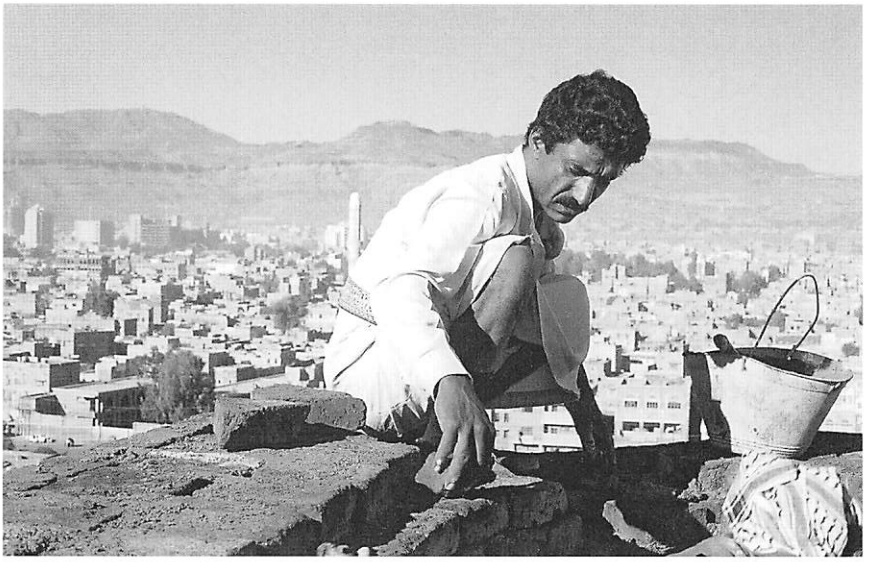
Dr Marchand is lecturer in the Department of Anthropology, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. He is the author of 'Minaret Building and Apprenticeship in Yemen' (Curzon Press, 2001) which was the subject of his talk to a joint meeting of the British-Yemeni Society and the Society for Arabian Studies on 9 November 2001.

My concentration was disrupted. 'What are you looking at?', the man asked with detectable suspicion in his voice. He had come up beside me unnoticed as I stood staring upwards, my attention absorbed in the activities of several builders labouring precariously at the top of a new minaret tower. 'Who are you working for?', he continued. He was an elderly man, with a distinguished greying goatee, and sharp, dark eyes. 'No one', I replied. 'I've come to Sana'a to study traditional builders'. His face softened a little, and he gestured to me to follow him.

We left the street to enter the forecourt of the mosque, and passed through the low doorway into the base of the free-standing minaret. Temporarily blinded in the darkness of the spiral stairwell, I groped the cool face of the curved outer wall with my right hand and climbed counter-clockwise along the uneven and debris-littered stairs, struggling all the while to keep pace with my interlocutor. I slowly grew accustomed to the dark, and intermittent slit windows enabled me to discern faces on the toiling bodies of labourers, strung-out along the winding staircase. They welcomed me as I passed, and some inquired anxiously where I was from, whether I spoke Arabic, and what was my religion. They amplified my brief and breathless responses with shouts that informed their work-mates on the stairs ahead about the nature of this foreign intruder.

The intensity of natural light grew stronger as we approached the top. In perfect form, my guide hopped from the last tread of the spiral staircase onto the perimeter edge of the tower's circumference wall. He advanced several cat-like paces in the same counter-clockwise direction, then paused and glanced back at me with anticipation. I followed with carefully composed confidence, suddenly finding myself astride a circular brick wall, sixty centimetres thick, with a drop into the stair-shaft on my left and a thirty-five metre drop on my right. A steady breeze cooled my perspiration-soaked T-shirt as I stood there gazing at the horizons around us, spell-bound by the views over sprawling Sana'a. It was incredibly exhilarating. Once again the master builder's face softened, and this time with a broad grin of satisfaction. It was clear that I was at ease with these heights: apparently I had passed a test.

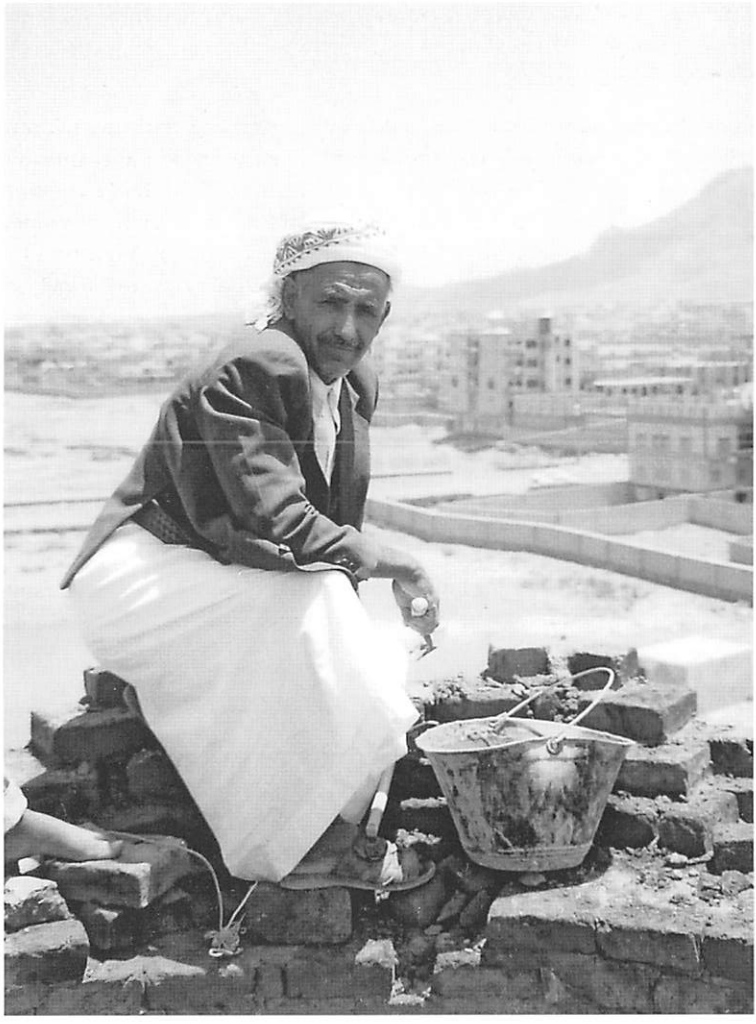
I was soon working for this renowned team of builders, and would remain in their service for the duration of my year-long field study. All the senior members were from the al-Maswari family, and Muhammad, the master mason who gave me my



Mason Abdullah al-Samawi setting bricks at the top of the 'Addil Minaret.
T. H. J. Marchand

initiation, was their respected patriarch. These craftsmen were the sons and grandsons of the master builder *(ustadh)* Ali Sa'id al-Maswari, who died in 1986. He had come to Sana'a as a boy in the 1930s from Maswar, a highland region west of the capital, and settled in the western suburb of Bir al-Azab where most of the family continue to live. Knowledge of the family genealogy prior to Ali Sa'id is sparse. Unlike many of the *sayyids* and *qadhis* who have cultivated elaborate genealogies tracing their origins back through individuals to the founders of Islam, members of the middle classes, to which the al-Maswaris belong, trace their origins to particular ancestral places, or associate their ancestry with specific professional occupations. These al-Maswaris unquestionably constructed their identity around their engagement in the building trade, and they carefully fostered a region-wide reputation as excellent craftsmen.

Ali Sa'id, the family's founding mason, began his career as a labourer working for several of the great master builders of his time, including *Ustadh* Aziz Mayyad and *Ustadh* Muhammad Muqbil Mayyad. The refined skills and important social connections that he earned during his apprenticeship eventually resulted in his promotion to the rank of *ustadh,* and he was soon directing and managing his own commissions. He trained his sons, born of his first wife, and all four worked under his supervision, building residences and mosques, and, later, minarets. In 1980, while constructing the Husayni Mosque in one of the newer city quarters, Ali



Muhammad al-Maswari, Chief Master Mason. *T. H. J. Marchand*

Sa'id was also commissioned to erect a free-standing minaret tower, the first such project undertaken by him and his sons. They derived stylistic inspiration and structural guidance from their observations of the city's historic minarets, particularly the celebrated Musa Mosque built in 1747–8 AD and considered by experts and laymen alike to be quintessentially 'Sana'ani' in its style and proportioning. Between the completion of the Husayni minaret and the time of my study in

1996, the *Bayt* al-Maswari were responsible for the construction of some twenty-five minarets in and around Sana'a, successfully cornering this specialised niche market in the building trade.

Undoubtedly, the skills of the *Bayt* al-Maswari combined with the patronage of their clients have been largely responsible for the renaissance of lofty minaret towers which pierce the skyline of the newer city quarters. With few exceptions, the funding for their commissions came from charitable trusts set up by prominent citizens of Sana'a, in some cases supplemented by grants from the Ministry of *Awqaf*. The choice of construction materials (i.e. kiln-baked brick or stone), stylistic details and the height of the towers was negotiated before the projects commenced, and was largely determined by the client's financial resources, as well as by the builders' aesthetic aim to achieve visually pleasing proportions. Design and the chewing of *qat*, an amphetamine-like stimulant, went hand-in-hand. Whenever I enquired about their creative processes, Yemeni craftsmen would cite the influence of *qat*. The master masons explained that design inspiration, especially for the complex patterns of decorative relief-style brickwork, came to them when they relaxed chewing *qat* in the evening.

Since Ali Sa'id's death in 1986, Muhammad has commanded the team, assisted by his younger brother, Ahmad. The brothers each have a son actively involved in the family trade, and one of Ahmad's grandsons represents the fourth generation of al-Maswari masons. A steady stream of contracts for prestigious projects has secured a comfortable middle class position for the family. Their relative affluence has enabled younger members of the *Bayt* to pursue a formal education, perhaps continue on to university, and to choose less physically demanding occupations which promise higher wages. A lack of interest shown by the younger generation has forced Muhammad and Ahmad to take on apprentices from outside the family, many of these coming from villages in the region of Dhamar, south of the capital. This has placed the brothers in a difficult predicament: Muhammad recognised that while striving to preserve and propagate his invaluable trade knowledge, he was engaged in a process which would undermine the basis of his family's fame.

Muhammad was born in 1943, and five years later was enrolled in the al-Islah School. His formal education was brief, and by the age of nine he was working alongside his father on building sites. In time, his father began training him as an apprentice, and after acquiring a great deal of learning and practical experience, Muhammad was made his assistant, and eventually was elevated to *ustadh* in charge of his own projects. Along with some of the most prominent craftsmen at the time, he participated in building the Presidential Palace, and he can boast of having played an important part in reviving techniques of, and popular interest in, traditional architecture which was under siege from imported ideals of modernity

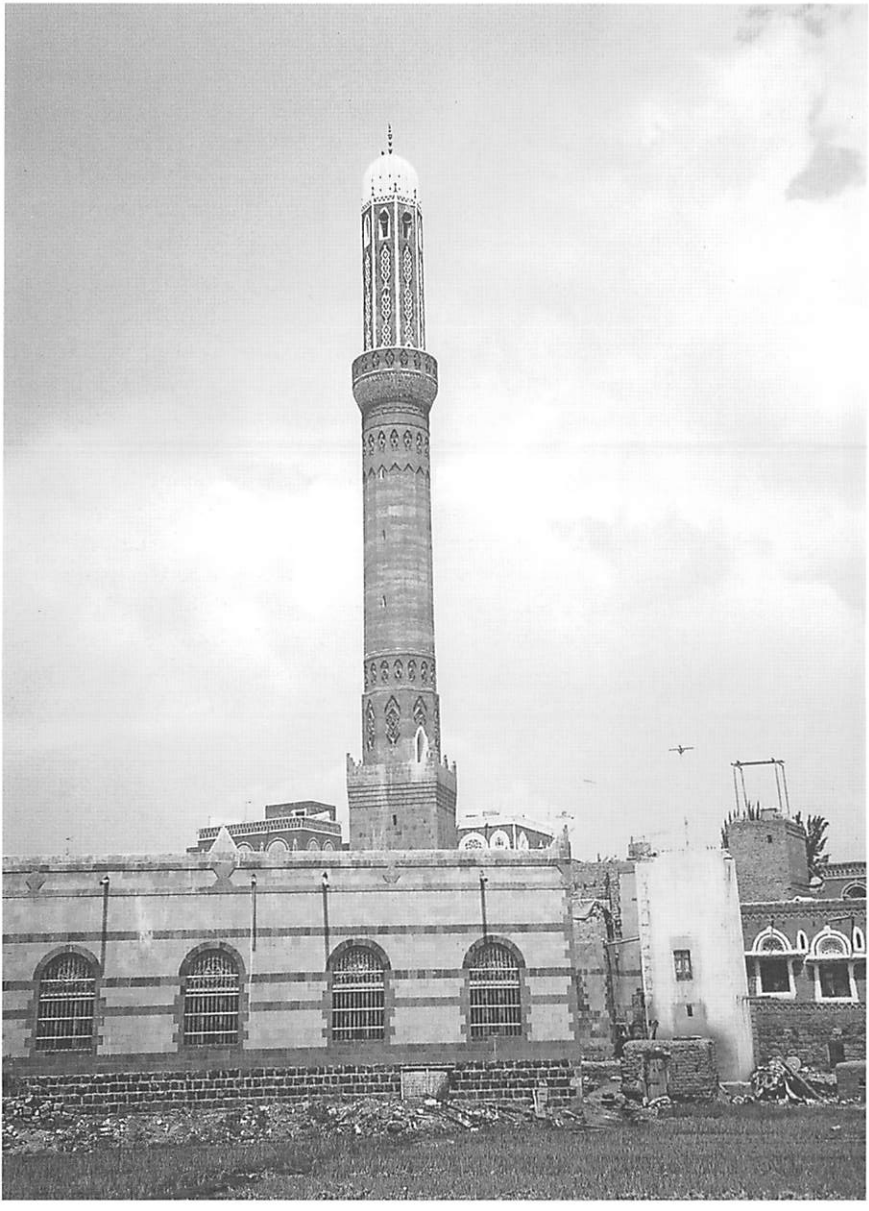
and large influxes of capital following the Revolution. His achievements were officially recognised by the Council for the Preservation of the Old City of Sana'a (now the General Organisation for the Preservation of Historic Cities in Yemen), and in the footsteps of Ali Sa'id, Muhammad gradually achieved the status of a great master mason.

Builders like the al-Maswaris play an active role in the competing discourse between the so-called traditional and modernist schools of architecture. Late one morning, resting with the two master builders at the top of the minaret which we were constructing for the 'Addil Mosque, I solicited their impressions of the new office towers being built in the city. Ahmad shrugged his shoulders and dismissed them as 'no good', and proceeded to sip his tea from a tin can. Muhammad turned his gaze towards the half-dozen or so concrete structures rising from Zubeiry Street and looming on the horizon to the southwest of us. He stared fixedly in their direction, remaining silent for a few moments before observing, 'This (the minaret) will be here for a long time after they've crumbled and disappeared. Our construction is *qawi jiddan* (very strong)... we use brick and stone, and we don't need architects and their plans.'

Of the two senior brothers, Muhammad, in particular, kept a close eye on the younger masons, as well as on the rest of the work team, guiding their practices and correcting their mistakes when necessary. Through years of experience he had acquired an astonishing ability to accomplish his own tasks while simultaneously monitoring the progress of his fellow workers. Once, I watched him turn quickly, while continuing to lay bricks, towards the youngest *ustadh*, Abdullah al-Samawi, and inform him that the course-work he was laying around the wall of the stair-shaft did not conform to the correct radius. Accustomed to his mentor's critical commentary, Abdullah didn't take issue with Muhammad's apparently off-hand judgement, but instead, with furrowed brow, he verified the curvature of his work with the radial rope attached to the metal post at the centre of the minaret. Muhammad had been right: the brickwork was leaning inwards by little more than a centimetre. Perfect alignment was not only an aesthetic hallmark of al-Maswari craftsmanship, but absolutely necessary if these towering edifices were to remain structurally stable.

In nearly all cases, a young builder remained under the tutelage of his seniors even after his responsibilities and wages had been augmented and his status as an *ustadh* had been confirmed by his master and recognised by his peers. In every practical sense, the teacher-student hierarchy of the apprenticeship persisted until the builder became the master of his own professional practice and secured his own clientele. There were numerous important skills to be acquired in addition to technical expertise. These included establishing and nurturing customer relations;

Ahmad al-Maswari, younger brother of Muhammad, carving a brick. *T. H. J. Marchand*



The 'Addil Minaret, Sana'a, newly completed. *T. H. J. Marchand*

estimating building costs and materials; managing physical and personal resources; and, most important of all, gaining a seemingly intuitive knowledge of all phases of the design and construction process, from the smallest day-to-day details to envisaging the project as a whole. All of these, and the last in particular, required a great deal of time and a full immersion in all aspects of the trade. Ultimately, a mason became a true and recognised master when he moved beyond simply 'understanding' what needed to be done, and his actions and thoughts became entirely absorbed in the pursuit of responsible professional practice.

This expert level of absorption and concentration was apparent when observing Muhammad al-Maswari at work. Like a symphonic conductor, he was continuously aware of all members of his building team, monitoring their performance and bringing them back into line with his own standards and vision, when this proved necessary. His demanding demeanour was tempered by a composure and fairness of judgement which earned him a great deal of respect from those who worked for him. All his actions were precisely calculated, enabling him to move with great economy and grace, maintaining a regular and even tempo in the rhythm of his work. For example, when assembling the exterior facing of the walls of the minaret base, he meticulously set each cut stone in perfect position by repeatedly verifying its horizontal and vertical alignment with his simple level and plumb-line, gently tapping it into place with the dull end of his adze. He then proceeded to finger the oozing grout around every joint, almost caressing the face of the stone with his other hand, while eyeing it intensely to check its position in relation to the other stones in the course-work.

Muhammad's approach to building materials seemed to transcend objective knowledge; he knew instinctively how to work *with* them, aware of their potential and limitations, not just generally, but of each individual brick and stone. Bricks of a certain quality were kept for carving, and others were relegated to the infill of walls; dressed stone was selected or rejected according to its colour, solidity, and grain. In *Islamic Art and Spirituality* (1987:56), Hossein Nasr observes that traditional Muslim craftsmen 'had a profound sense of the nature of materials... stone was always treated as stone and brick as brick', and the materials were masterfully integrated 'into a whole reflecting the ethos of Islamic art'. This characterised the work of Muhammad al-Maswari: his knowledge and craftsmanship transformed the 'act' of building into an 'art'.

SOQOTRA: A MASTER PLAN

I. G. Harmond

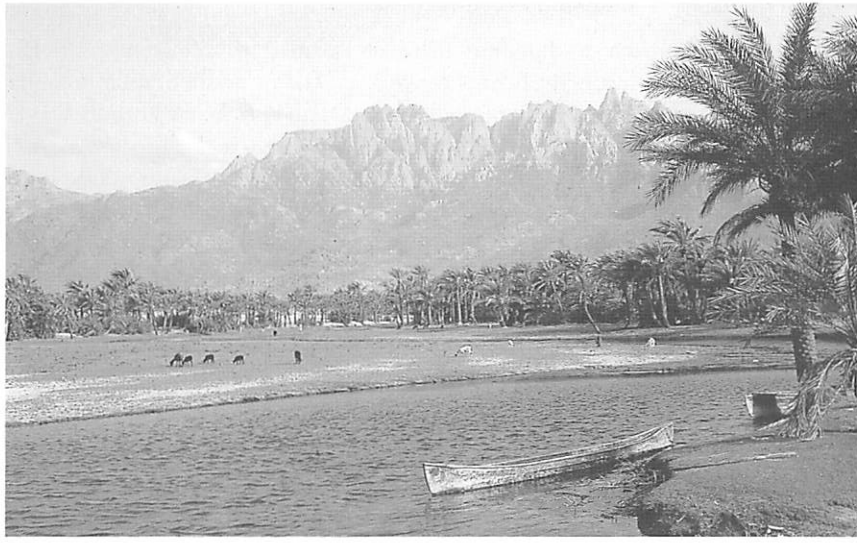
I. G. Harmond is a civil engineer with over 35 years' experience in consultancy. He has spent the past 15 years managing a small firm specialising in environmental and water engineering projects in the developing world. The following article is based on his lecture to the Society on 12 December 2001.

Introduction

The Soqotra archipelago is situated in the Gulf of Aden, some 400 km from Mukalla, and comprises four islands: Soqotra (125 km by 42 km), Abd Al Kuri, Samah and Darsa. The latter is uninhabited and Abd Al Kuri and Samah are sparsely populated. The archipelago's total population is believed to be about 40,000. The highest landfall is on Soqotra, reaching about 1,500 metres above sea level. The islands were administratively part of the Protectorate of South Arabia which attained independence in November 1967 as the People's Republic of South Yemen. With unification in May 1990, they became part of the Republic of Yemen and are administered by the Governor of Hadhramaut. Local government authority is exercised through Hadibo and Qalansiyah districts.

The Master Plan

To accommodate and manage future economic and social development on Soqotra, the European Commission, in January 2000, appointed a consortium of



View of the Haggier mountains from east of Hadibo.

international and Yemeni consultants to prepare a Master Plan. Its primary aim was to examine the current economic, social and environmental conditions on the island and determine how its resources could be sustainably exploited for the good of all.

Phase 1 of the Master Plan comprised a series of sectorial studies using existing data and drawing on the experience gained from past and current projects. These included improvements to Hadibo harbour, safety works for the newly constructed airport, and activity in several other development sectors. I. G. Harmond Associates Ltd were concerned with water resources. Priorities were selected in consultation with the European Commission and the Government, which were worked up in detail to form the basis of Phase 2 of the Master Plan. Surprisingly, water resources were not included in the Phase 2 sub-projects which concentrated on institutional support to local authorities, environmental management, zonal regulation, roads, fisheries, tourism, livestock and land-use mapping. The final workshop to present these has been put on hold as a result of international political uncertainties.

An important development initiative running in parallel with the Master Plan is the five year Global Environmental Facility (GEF) project. This was launched in October 1997 and is managed by the UNDP's Office for Project Services in close consultation with Yemen's Environmental Protection Council.

Maintaining the delicate balance between economic and social development, and the preservation of the island's natural vegetation poses serious challenges in the future. Ultimately lack of rainfall and poor agricultural soils may prove Soqotra's salvation; for these factors will certainly limit internal development such as crops and livestock production, and are likely to inhibit development from external sources such as tourism, light industry etc. The Master Plan took full account of these factors in the formulation of a development strategy.

Water Resources Overview

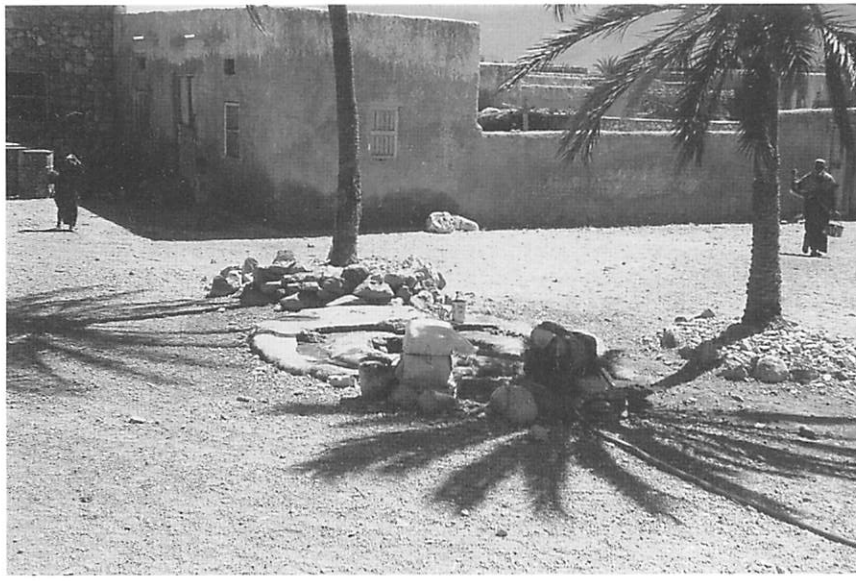
Along with all other natural resources, the water resources of the Soqotra archipelago are held in trust by Government on behalf of the people. Government has a duty to frame and implement laws which will ensure that people, agriculture and industry all have access to adequate supplies of water for the foreseeable future. But the challenges in meeting this goal are immense. It is a commonly held misconception of many who frame water policy that supply deficits can largely be met by building infrastructure such as dams and pipelines. But the only viable long term solution lies in water conservation, regulation and self-help. Rural water resources strategies, therefore, must focus and support this approach.

As regards agricultural output, there is a widely held belief that Soqotra could become the country's 'bread basket' (Vol. 2, First Scientific Symposium on Soqotra

Island, Aden, March 1996). This euphoric view could not be further from the truth. Rainfall which runs off to the sea, if dammed or diverted, could be used to irrigate substantial areas. But the engineering works needed to do this safely are considerable, and either uneconomic or unsustainable. And even if water in sufficient quantities could be delivered – at the right place and time – this is only part of the story, as soils, access to markets, and, not least of all, skilled farmers are needed to make irrigated agriculture cost-effective.

Spate diversion schemes, like those engineered and constructed on the mainland, are technically complex, and, again, skilled farmers/water user groups are needed to operate and maintain them. The same would apply on Soqotra.

In addition to water projects for drinking and agricultural use, there are other schemes which will have an impact on any future water development strategy. For example, the airport, when completed, will generate a considerable demand for water, as will any new tourist hotel, port facility, fisheries or commercial enterprise. They will all have to be catered for, either by enlarging existing resources or by identifying and developing new ones. There are pressures on Government to undertake large scale agricultural projects in Soqotra. However, unless markets can be found and a technology employed which takes account of poor soils and little rainfall, these are unlikely to prove economically viable. Nevertheless, this situation



Well-head, Qalansiyah, north-west corner of Soqotra. *I. G. Harmond*

could change in the future with the construction of a deep water port which allowed a high value irrigated cash crop, such as citrus or mangoes, to be grown and exported to the Gulf states.

There is little doubt that water has a high priority in the aspirations of the local population. A survey carried out for the Master Plan in 64 areas during November and December 1999 indicated that drinking water and facilities for the distribution of water were major popular concerns; only health ranked above them.

Water Resources and the Law

A new water law has been before Cabinet for some time – largely the work of the National Water Resources Authority. This is believed to stress the importance of water for economic, social and cultural development, and to emphasise the need to conserve and value the resource. Cost recovery – a vital ingredient – is thought to be the major 'sticking point'. The law will deal with licensing, abstraction, conservation and water transfer schemes. There are likely to be subsidiary guidelines on water sharing between agriculture, industry and potable use, asset management, water pricing and cost recovery. No charges are currently levied on the use of water for agriculture or drinking (except for the latter in certain urban centres on the mainland), but, in theory, official permission is required for abstraction and transfer schemes. A new Local Authority Law with a number of water-related clauses was passed in January 2000 but its impact on national water policy remains unclear.

The Department of Electricity and Water is responsible for water and power utilities, while the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources is responsible for broader water issues. Not surprisingly, these departments are understaffed and under-resourced; poor living and working conditions are said to be the primary reasons for their failure to attract qualified staff.

Water Resources: Facts and Figures

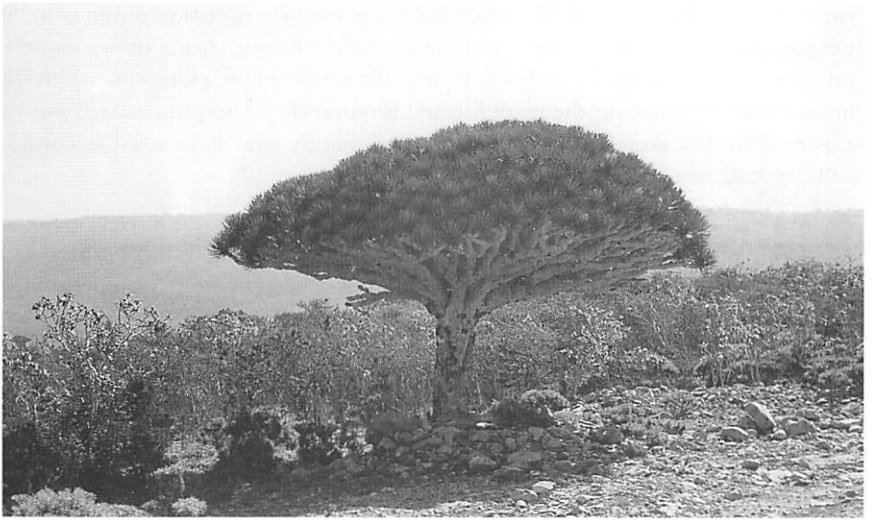
Weather on Soqotra is dominated by the north east winter monsoon (October to April) and the south west monsoon (May to September). Nobody has a clear idea of what the rainfall for Soqotra might be, and a figure of 170 mm per annum is widely quoted, based on northern coastal plain readings as there are no gauges on the southern side. The level of rainfall in the Haggier mountains (1,000 rising to 1,500 metres) and the western, central and eastern plateaux (100 rising to 1,000 metres) is unclear. It might be as high as 1,000 mm per annum; this is informed speculation, and logic suggests that it would be higher than the commonly cited figure of 170 mm per annum. Nevertheless, a study carried out in Dhofar – which is geographically and climatologically similar to Soqotra – indicated that rainfall actually reduced, the higher one travelled up the catchment.

Khawr Mityaf, south-east corner of Soqotra. *I. G. Harmond*

Exceptional rainfall in late 1999 and early 2000 caused prodigious damage to property and livestock. As could be expected, the impact was greatest in villages situated along the edge of wadis. 1999 is a good indication of how confusing meteorological data can be. The usually rainy months of May to June were, in fact, very dry, and severe drought was experienced across most of the island. Extension officers (32 in number) working with the GEF and constantly moving around the island, compiled a set of animal statistics which showed that some 70% of all livestock perished in the drought. But when one adds the equally catastrophic storms which occurred in November and December into the annual total (about 630 mm of rain fell in 22 days), 1999 was the wettest year on record for a long time.

Soqotra is said to be 'devoid of major aquifers capable of sustaining substantial development', and the limestone deposits are believed to provide very little water as the 'retention line is often short' and the rock makes excavation difficult. Water quality varies considerably around the island, and clearly the closer the resource is located to the sea, the more likely it is to be saline. Numerous water samples have been taken and analysed over the years and confirm that much of the ground water used on the island is saline. The further inland one travels, the greater the likelihood of finding potable water of reasonable quality.

There is ample evidence of perennial springs providing some communities with potable water, and, more often than not, its quality is good. But water from shallow



Dragon's Blood tree *(Dracaena cinnibari)*, Soqotra. *I. G. Harmond*

wells – common along the coast – is more problematic. Some hand-dug wells (2–4 metres deep) strung along the wadis provide inland communities with water, but this is mostly seasonal and for many months of the year the wells are dry. During periods of high rainfall, considerable run-off occurs along the wadis, and there would be ample scope for ground water recharge structures.

On Soqotra the soils are generally poor, as shown by the vegetation which has adapted itself to survive in semi-arid situations with low rainfall. The only exceptions are in wadis along the northern and southern coastal plains, which open out to form relatively fertile alluvial fans. Here date palms are often grown, supported by supplementary irrigation from ground water.

No data could be found on plateaux soils, which only support light grasses and some very special endemic tree species. These soils have little or no agricultural potential and are rapidly grazed off by livestock owned by pastoralists moving from one water point to another. It is debatable whether it was lack of grazing or lack of water which caused the disastrous loss of livestock in 1999, but most probably it was a combination of both. In the Haggier mountains there is little or no soil to speak of, and silts washed down and held in wadi depressions have limited agricultural potential.

The only conclusion to be drawn from examining the soils and observing the forms of agriculture practised on the island is that very little potential exists for

large scale development. On the other hand, the natural vegetation of the island is unique, and many plant species – long since extinct in other parts of the world – can only be found there. It has been studied and observed for a long time, with the most consistent work on the plant life and biodiversity of Soqotra carried out by experts from the Royal Botanic Gardens, Edinburgh, who have acted as consultants for both the UNDP's GEF and the Master Plan.

There are thirteen major wadi catchments on Soqotra and these were used to determine flood flows. The estimated area, stream length, maximum elevation and slope for all thirteen catchments were used to construct a computer model, which generated flood peak flows on the three main catchments (Wadi Demaleh, Wadi Rahmum and Wadi Diyada) of 37, 42 and 489 cubic metres per second respectively. This was a pilot exercise, and at some later stage a full computer run will be needed to calculate flows for all thirteen catchments.

Potential rain water yields from surface catchments, including kareefs and tanks, were analysed, and these systems can be effectively developed to meet animal and potable demands. But high evaporation and percolation rates from tanks will limit their application, unless a cost-effective covered and/or sealed unit can be designed. Small scale desalination systems were also considered but the cost of these would restrict their use to key demand centres such as hospitals, clinics and hotels.

Possible projects for renewable energy were examined: windmills, ram pumps, solar cells, turbine wheels for generating low voltage electricity and raising water, and low cost water desalination plants that use sunlight to evaporate and condense water vapour. However, most are costly and locally unsustainable. For a hospital or health centre where electricity is needed for keeping drugs, solar systems are possible, but in a rural context would offer few advantages.

Setting and implementing objectives

The Master Plan incorporates a time frame for implementing a set of principal objectives. In the context of water resources these include:

- Increasing living and health standards by identifying, utilising and conserving resources;
- Sustainable economic growth by providing secure and reliable water supplies;
- Protection of the island's unique biodiversity.

To implement these objectives ten water sub-projects were identified:

- Hydrometeorological data base network;
- Water resources master plan;

- Wadi basin management plan;
- Small weir and reticulation system for Wadi Airi;
- Water harvesting systems for agriculture and kareefs;
- Small spate irrigation schemes for agricultural production;
- Wadi canalisation and village flood protection works;
- Sand storage dams for agriculture and potable water supplies;
- Spring protection works for potable water supplies;
- Jetted ground water extraction in wadi beds for potable water supplies.

Conclusion

Water projects are only sustainable where communities are mobilised and a self-help approach is adopted. But implementing such projects through existing district departments will be difficult due to a lack of institutional capacity. Unless these departments are strengthened through training and the provision of additional resources, or by engaging the private sector, the inevitable outcome will be project failure and, worse still, popular disillusion.

Meanwhile, problems are likely to be experienced in reconciling potential water projects with the GEF zoning plan. The latter has been prepared by scientists, and takes little or no account of the need to accommodate a rapidly increasing population (estimated to double within 20 years) and the potential water deficit. Indeed, there is no mention of water resources projects in the nine development activities prescribed in the GEF zoning plan summary.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that on 25 August 2001 the inaugural meeting of 'The Friends of Soqotra' was held, attended by thirty two people. This is, essentially, an international gathering of technical experts and enthusiasts 'committed to balancing scientific investigation with bringing direct benefits to the Soqotri people'. It is a very commendable initiative which should be supported by all those with an interest in the social and environmental future of the Soqotra archipelago.

AURELIA IN YEMEN

I have fallen on my feet with some new acquaintances, Mr Tod… and his darling little Italian wife. I am going to stay with them when I come back from Babylon.

Gertrude Bell, Baghdad, 1914

Aurelia Lanzoni (1876–1965) was born in Kars, Turkey. Her father, Romolo Lanzoni, was a senior medical officer in the Ottoman Health Service. Her brother, Adriano (b.1869), trained as a doctor and was also employed by the Ottoman government. On being posted as Health Inspector to Hodaida, Adriano invited Aurelia, then still unmarried, to accompany him. She agreed with alacrity, and they sailed from Italy in late 1902, spending a week in Aden as the guests of the Italian Consul, Signor Sola, before embarking for Hodaida.

Aurelia was small and slight of stature, with a vivacity and charm that won her friends in all walks of life. But she was never physically robust, and six months in the damp heat of Hodaida, amid the town's pungent odours of fish oil and livestock, taxed her health and spirit. Adriano decided that she needed a change of air, and at the beginning of June 1903, they set off with a caravan of mules and a Turkish escort to visit Sana'a. From Hodaida they crossed the arid scrub of the Tihama plain to Bajil, travelling mainly by night to avoid the gruelling heat of the day. They then followed the route via Ubal and Hujaila into the foothills of the Jebel Haraz threading their way up through Wusil and Attara to the garrison town of Manakha. Villages clinging to precipitous mountain spurs reminded Aurelia of mediaeval castles in her native Italy. She was delighted by the changing and increasingly spectacular scenery; by the luxury of drinking fresh water from wadi 'streams; by the abundant and colourful birdlife; by the echoing clatter of their sure-footed mules along the rocky bed of steep-sided wadis; sunset behind the jagged peaks of Jebel Bura, and the cool, starlit nights.

During the initial leg of their journey, 'the post from Sana'a loaded on two camels passed us, silently, without for a moment hesitating in their long fast stride, racing ghostlike down to the coast... only the creak of the saddle and the rub of the camel's pad on the sand being heard and gone in the silent night'. Later, emerging from Wadi Hijan, they saw the village of Wusil, 'which seemed suspended on Jebel Masar. I drew my breath in fear that it might drop from the invisible thread which held it.'

Her fluency in Turkish enabled Aurelia to establish an immediate rapport with the Kaimakam of Bajil, a handsome bearded Circassian from Kars, named Ibrahim Bey; and she learned much about life in Yemen from their Turkish escorts who 'all came from Anatolia, many of them left home as youths and were now mature men... I was moved to see the simple and good soul of these men who could, in a moment, pass to the most barbaric ferocity.'

In the highlands, after leaving Mafhaq, the party were overtaken and buffeted by a huge swarm of locusts, and then caught in a violent rainstorm, from which they raced for shelter: 'When we went out we found the ground covered with green locusts about 3in long. The country folk were seated in front of their huts, crying and tearing their hair; the land was devastated.' Aurelia was appalled to see Yemenis removing the head, legs and wings of locusts and eating the body, but was assured by one of the soldiers that, when fried, they tasted like prawns. The Lanzonis had a further, highly uncomfortable encounter with insect life when they stopped for the night in Suq al-Khamis; they had to flee the building in which they had been lodged, disinfest their clothes and sleep out in the open countryside.

Shortly before sunset the following day, 'we reached the first fortifications of Sana'a. From far away we could see two forts on two mounds and at their feet, almost as if by magic, appeared the whole valley with the town and its graceful minarets reclining in luxuriant gardens... It was the only large town in the Arab world still untouched by European civilisation... the Arabs whom we met, shy and silent, looked at us with suspicion.' Adriano and Aurelia spent their first few days in the house of Giuseppe Caprotti, an Italian trader whom they had met in Ubal on his way down to Hodaida, and he had given them a note to his agent in the capital. He was the only European resident in Sana'a, having arrived in 1883 with his brother, Luigi, who had since died of typhoid. Caprotti also extended hospitality to Aubrey Herbert (the model for John Buchan's *Greenmantle)* during the latter's visit to Sana'a in 1905, and, five years later, to Arthur Wavell, author of *A Modern Pilgrim in Mecca and a Siege in Sanaa* (1912).

During their first attempt to call on the Turkish Governor (Vali), the Lanzonis were forced to turn back by a fanatical crowd shouting: 'infidels'. The Governor (whom Aurelia did not name) sent a message advising them not to venture out in European clothes, so Aurelia donned a black cloak and veil, and Adriano a fez. The Governor and his relatives received them warmly, and when the former heard that Aurelia did not like the location of Caprotti's house in the middle of the old city, he placed a 'splendid villa' at their disposal in the Turkish suburb [Bir al-Azab]. This was 'completely fitted out in Eastern fashion with carpets everywhere and low soft divans. Because of the lack of security, the house was surrounded by soldiers... At night, in the immense solitude of the place, I was often awakened by the sound of furious shooting. Afraid, I would run to Adriano's room and from his windows we could see that the insurgents were firing at the town from the surrounding mountains.'

The Lanzonis spent much of their two months in Sana'a socialising with their Turkish hosts. Aurelia, as the first European woman to visit Sana'a, aroused a good deal of friendly curiosity. The Governor's influential niece organised banquets, picnics, walks and, at Aurelia's specific request, a trip to Rawdha, 'a beautiful village

a few kilometres from Sana'a, famous for its fruits and gardens'. A party of about a hundred set out for Rawdha, led by the Governor and Adriano, 'mounted on two beautiful beasts with golden trappings', followed by members of the Governor's military and civil entourage, and carriages transporting the ladies. Half way to the village,

> 'the Arabs of Rawdha galloped up to meet the Governor. We saw some really beautiful animals with large saddles of velvet brocade of startling colours and ornamented by long fringes and tassels, all embellished with silver; [the Arabs] were fully armed; their handsome faces were framed by long black shining tresses, their magnificent silk cloaks elegantly cast over their shoulders. As soon as they saw us they fired a fusillade in the air... While the Shaikh made his salaams to the Governor, the galloping horde surrounded the whole group, and so we went on up to the village where, as soon as the Vali put foot to ground, an enormous sheep was slaughtered in honour of his visit...'

During her time in Sana'a, Aurelia had the opportunity to visit the home of a Jewish merchant:

> 'We found a poor and squalid house but were surprised at being offered a sumptuous meal served on gold and silver plate. Our host noticed my surprise and after lunch took me into a small room where in a large wooden chest... were heaped diamonds, pearls, rubies, sapphires, old and modern gold coins. It was an extraordinary sight reminiscent of "the thousand and one nights". Being unable to buy property, all their riches were in jewels...'

A telegram arrived recalling Adriano to Hodaida to help deal with an outbreak of plague. By now Aurelia was glad to return to the Red Sea coast, where conditions were more stable than in the capital and they enjoyed greater freedom of movement. They left Sana'a accompanied by the Governor's ADC, 'a fine and kind person, a true product of Constantinople, cultured, and educated in France'; and by the swashbuckling Ibrahim Bey whom they had first met in Bajil. Ibrahim beguiled the uncertainties of the return journey with stories of his previous life as a brigand chief. Eventually, tiring of being an outlaw, he had thrown himself on the mercy of Sultan Abdul Hamid, had been pardoned and co-opted into the Ottoman administration. Aurelia was also impressed by Ibrahim's account of the draconian methods he adopted to deter Yemeni tribesmen from sabotaging Sana'a's vital but vulnerable telegraph link with Hodaida (and Constantinople). The wire, she noted, was 'suspended on wooden poles distant from each other according to the caprice of topography... in soil rife with ants, [and] often held up by branches of trees or by a mound of stones.'

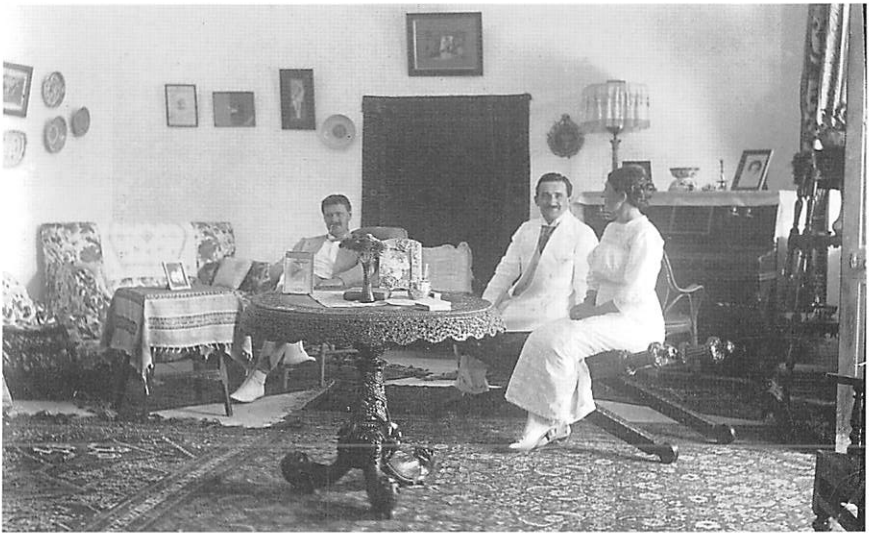
Aurelia's last excursion outside Hodaida was to the island of Kamaran, where the Turks had established a quarantine station and Adriano's services were needed to help cope with an increasing number of pilgrims.

On the dhow in which they sailed from Hodaida:

> 'camp beds were put under the huge sail which seemed to touch the sky and carried us... silently over the sea. I had never, as during that night, felt the immensity of the horizon; I was so happy that I could not sleep... we were between the sky and the sea, and I dreamt open-eyed until reminded of reality by the prayers of the sailors. At dawn they brought us a spiced coffee, and at eight o'clock we arrived at the island of Kamaran. The Inspector came to meet us, and we had breakfast with him before taking over our part of the lazaretto where there were 2000 pilgrims coming from the Indian Ocean, a mixture of races with their women and children. A camp held a small house for the doctor, with two rooms and a kitchen. For the pilgrims there were large huts in cane and matting; very clean and airy. As soon as they landed, they went straight to their camp; they had no communication with others, and they did not leave except to catch their ship, which in the meantime had been disinfected, and disinfested of rats. The pilgrims remained in the lazaretto for six days, unless of course they were infected. In Kamaran there were six camps, each under one doctor. There was also a village of very poor fishermen. The island is arid and of rocky 'marepora'... There was no drinking water but the quarantine stations had a distillation plant and an ice plant. In the early morning all the pilgrims had to line up for medical inspection, men on one side, and women and children on the other. Anyone sick was sent off to the clinic. Later on, water was distributed, also in perfect order. The pilgrims were busy all day preparing their food on their charcoal and wood braziers, which they carried with them throughout their journey, a journey full of hardships.
>
> We, Europeans, cannot imagine the degree of faith attained by Islam, and the greatness of the religion instituted by Muhammad. The pilgrim has to live a life of prayer and abstinence. I admired [the pilgrims] in the evening at sunset when, all in a line, with their faces turned to Mecca, they prayed with the most profound mental concentration. Among them was an Indian, a very handsome man, obviously of good family, who spent his days chanting: *La Allah illa Allah, Muhammad Rasoul Allah*. It was such a monotonous and continuous chant that I ended up by singing it myself.'

The only drama which occurred during their six week stay on the island was Adriano's narrow escape from being drowned at sea. Early one morning he had gone off in a dhow on a hunting trip with officers from a ship. They were due back at midday but failed to appear. Later that afternoon, Aurelia saw the dhow approaching, but then a storm blew up, blotting it entirely from view. Several hours passed; it was pitch dark and she became increasingly nervous:

> 'I wanted to cry, but I had to encourage the cook who was rolling on the ground covering his head with sand and ashes and crying: 'The Master is drowned'. Not very much comfort for me, but I knew the strength and courage of Adriano, and waited silently with a worried heart. I took the hurricane lamp, and, in the wind and rain, went near the sea; I was deafened by its fury... It was impossible to hear anything but the howl of the wind and the hiss of the sea... I crept back to the hut. The cook, after his convulsive scene, had taken a strong dose of opium, and to my great relief had



Aurelia with her husband, Arthur Tod (far left), and an unknown visitor, Baghdad, 1910.
Courtesy: Christina Thistlethwayte

> gone to sleep. He had made my vigil very irksome with his lamentations. I sat on the sill of the door mentally vacant and inert, afraid of every sound, imagining voices, and shivering in my uncertainty. I remained there until 3 o'clock without noticing that I was wet through and frozen. I was awakened from my reverie by the sight of a tall shadow in front of me, dripping with water... It was Adriano... He had fought with the waves from 4 in the afternoon till 3 in the morning. Unable to arrive by boat, he had leapt into the sea and had fought his way to safety. His face was blue, his clothes were in tatters, and his hands were badly torn by the rocks. The boat and its other occupants were lost...'

Aurelia was to accompany Adriano on his next overseas posting, to Basra. There, in 1907, she met Arthur Tod, Manager of the Tigris Navigation Company (part of the Lynch family's business empire) and they married in 1909. The Tods later moved to Baghdad, where Aurelia became a close friend and confidante of Gertrude Bell.

JOHN SHIPMAN

Aurelia Lanzoni's account of her visit to Yemen was written for her family; her son, George Tod, translated it from the original Italian. The Editor is most grateful to Mrs Christina Thistlethwayte, Aurelia's granddaughter, for permitting extracts from the manuscript to be published in the Journal, and for providing additional information about Aurelia and the Lanzoni family. Thanks are also due to Wendy Funnell for alerting the Society to the existence of the manuscript.

THE ISLAND OF TWO MOONS: KAMARAN 1954

NIGEL GROOM

Nigel Groom, OBE, served in the Colony and Protectorate of Aden from 1946–57, and then in the Colonial Administration in East Africa. From 1962 until his retirement in 1984 he worked in the Ministry of Defence, London. His publications include, 'An Archaeological Map of South-West Arabia' (1976), 'Frankincense and Myrrh: A Study of the Arabian Incense Trade' (1981), 'A Dictionary of Arabic Topography and Place Names' (1983), and 'Sheba Revealed: A Posting to Bayhan in the Yemen' (2002).

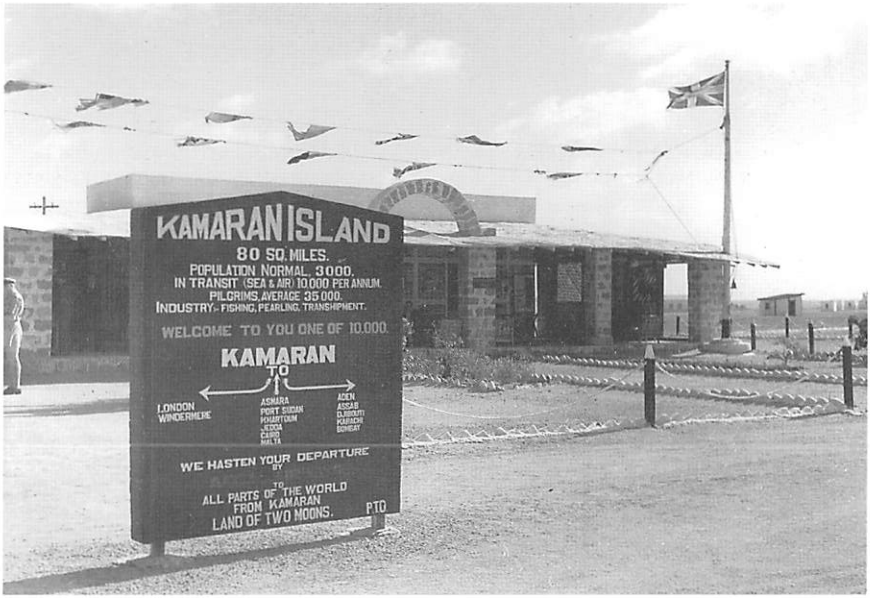
Two hours out from Aden, the weekly Aden Airways Dakota touches down at Kamaran for thirty minutes on its way to Eritrea. Its passengers disembark hesitantly into the furnace-like heat and scurry towards a patch of shade offered by the wide verandah in front of Kamaran's tiny airport building. Iced squash and tattered magazines are handed round while an Arab hawker tries to sell scallop shells, and a mountain of tins and bulging sacks containing the personal belongings of a bearded Yemeni merchant, is weighed and labelled.

Some of the passengers cluster round the airport's famous notice board with its cryptic series of answers to questions that may come to mind. Kamaran, they learn, means 'the island of two moons', the second moon being reflected by the Red Sea which surrounds it.[1] To those who will see no more of the place, there is nothing else romantic about it. The encircling desert of broken yellow coral shimmers in the heat with a burning glare. The wind kicks up sheets of salty, stinging dust. There is not a house nor a tree in sight.

The Commissioner, in khaki shorts and a topee, scuds across the plain in a battered truck to collect his supplies and mail.[2] One feels admiration for this retired colonel, struggling against sandflies, heat and loneliness to uphold, in so remote an outpost, some of the withered glories of our former Indian Empire. With a small Government staff of Arabs and Indians, he sees that taxes are collected, a school and a dispensary run, water distilled, electricity generated, law and order maintained. A posse of Armed Police from Aden hauls in offenders, but they are few.

The finest thing on the island is its road system, for the construction of a road necessitates no more than marking out its course with cairns of stones. Although only two vehicles exist on the whole of Kamaran to use them, broad highways sweep across the desert in every direction, provided as a result of the eccentric humour (or was it nostalgia) of a previous Commissioner, with a complete set of British road signs and signposts.[3] 'Steep hill' is the sign that first greets one as one leaves the airport, and the gentle dip of fifteen feet which follows reminds one how valuable is a sense of humour in such surroundings.

The highest point of Kamaran is little over fifty feet above the sea and it was here



Kamaran airport and its famous notice board.

that the Commissioner took us to see the earliest traces of Kamaran's history – an empty Persian tomb cut into the coral. This grave, surrounded by disintegrating fortifications and well over a thousand years old, demonstrated how tenuously but stubbornly man can cling to the most barren corners of the earth. Being strategically sited near the southern gates of the Red Sea, possessing a safe anchorage and a brackish supply of drinking water, Kamaran has been occupied continuously ever since the Persians placed their garrison on it, and perhaps for long before.

The Portuguese have come and gone, leaving behind a fine, but now crumbling, sixteenth century fort. However, the Turks who followed contributed most to the island's well-being, not only with the wells cut deep through the coral in an inland depression, but also with the conception which gave Kamaran a heyday of prosperity – its use as a quarantine station for Muslims on the pilgrimage to Mecca.

From late in the nineteenth century, ships jammed tight with Muslims from India, Africa and all the countries of the Far East, crowded into the Kamaran anchorage during the pilgrimage season. Their human cargoes were off-loaded into camps, medically inspected, disinfested and disinfected before being allowed to proceed to the sacred soil which began at Jeddah, a little further up the coast, and ended before the Kaaba of Mecca.

Kamaran islander and two members of the Aden Armed Police.

When the Turks were defeated in the First World War, an international control was exercised over the Quarantine Station, but it was placed under British administration. In anticipation of a vast increase in the number of the faithful who would make the pilgrimage the camp was greatly extended. Long lines of barrack-like sleeping quarters were constructed where the Turks had provided only wattle huts. Big disinfecting plants were installed where the pilgrims went through an ordeal of cleansing on a production line basis. A power station was built worthy of a small town. The local water supply was inadequate, so a massive distillation plant was introduced to make sea water fit for drinking. There were carpenters' shops, machine shops, a small railway to transport fuel and stores, a wireless station, a fine landing stage, a cantonment of officials' bungalows. Lastly, but by no means least in the eyes of all who worked on Kamaran, there was the ice factory, which produced the only means of keeping cool.

The islanders, born to be fishermen and sailors, prospered exceedingly on this trade in potential disease among the devout, and the population grew. In the village of Kamaran, the only settlement apart from a few isolated groups of fishermen's huts, fine houses and a magnificent mosque went up, and a lively trade in pilgrim requirements was conducted with the mainland. This, on top of the wealth that the

The Commissioner's Office.

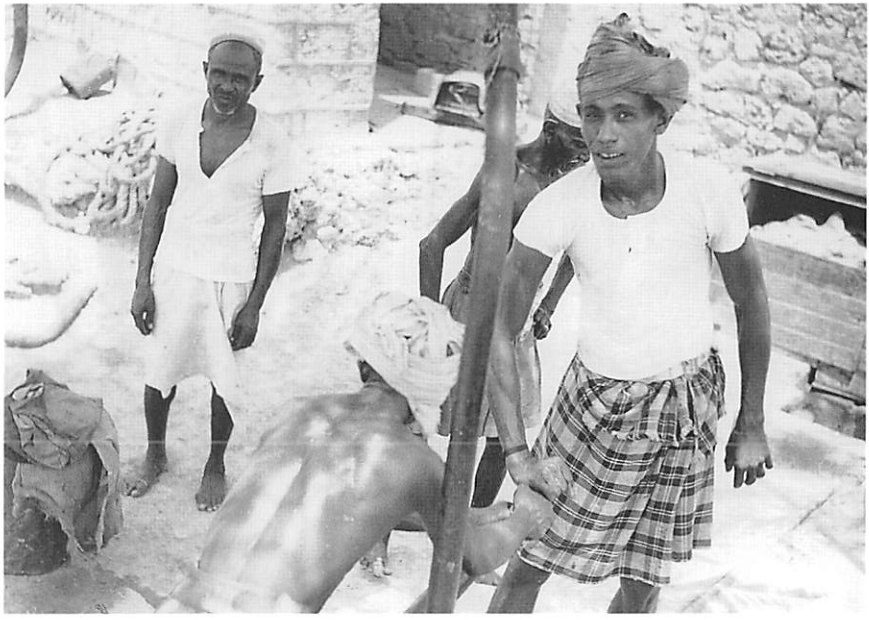
Kamaran mosque built during the Turkish occupation.

more hardy could derive by diving for pearls from the coral reefs, gave the inhabitants a glimpse of previously unimagined wealth.

But their prosperity was short-lived. Anxious to control the pilgrimage in all its aspects (for even in these days of oil royalties it is still a very lucrative traffic), the Saudi Arabian Government decided to construct its own Quarantine Station and to insist that Kamaran be by-passed.

Today, the long lines of buildings in the camps lie empty and deserted and a handful of men maintain a ghost town while arrangements are debated for its breaking up and disposal. Kamaran has become a museum and it was to the exhibits in this museum, illustrating the final chapters of its history, that the Commissioner led us.

We walked through the house that had once belonged to the Turkish Commander containing, incongruously enough, a spiral iron fire-escape staircase leading straight up from the middle of the drawing room on to the roof. It was much as the Turks had left it. On opening a cupboard, the top of a stack of stationary slipped on to the floor – a wad of unused yellowed envelopes, still in their wrapper, with the printed address: 'To the Sublime Porte, Constantinople'.



Islanders pumping water by hand.

We moved through the thousands of rusting items in the Stores; we paused before the dispensary – its shelves bulging with drugs enough to last a lifetime; and we admired the ancient though no longer used wireless transmitter, with its valves in great balloons of glass nearly eighteen inches long.

We looked at the fire engine, a manual pump of early Victorian vintage, and probed into a cupboard jammed full of disintegrating 'lungis' held in reserve for the pilgrims whose clothes were beyond cleansing.

Part of the 'museum' was working still. The huge distillation plant, with its massive fly-wheel nearly ten feet in diameter, was hissing and grunting slowly; it had been built in 1870. In the power house, one of the three DC generators was still being coaxed by an Arab electrician into giving light until such time as the new machines on order can be installed. In keeping this aged machinery going, they have worked miracles – these half dozen Arab technicians of the Commissioner's staff. Unable to call for assistance at anything less than a week's notice, their adroitness in dealing with an emergency is uncanny. We learned that shortly before our visit, the blacksmith had forged a complete new rear axle for the Commissioner's truck out of old drain-pipes.

The Quarantine Station and the administrative area, topped by the high roof of

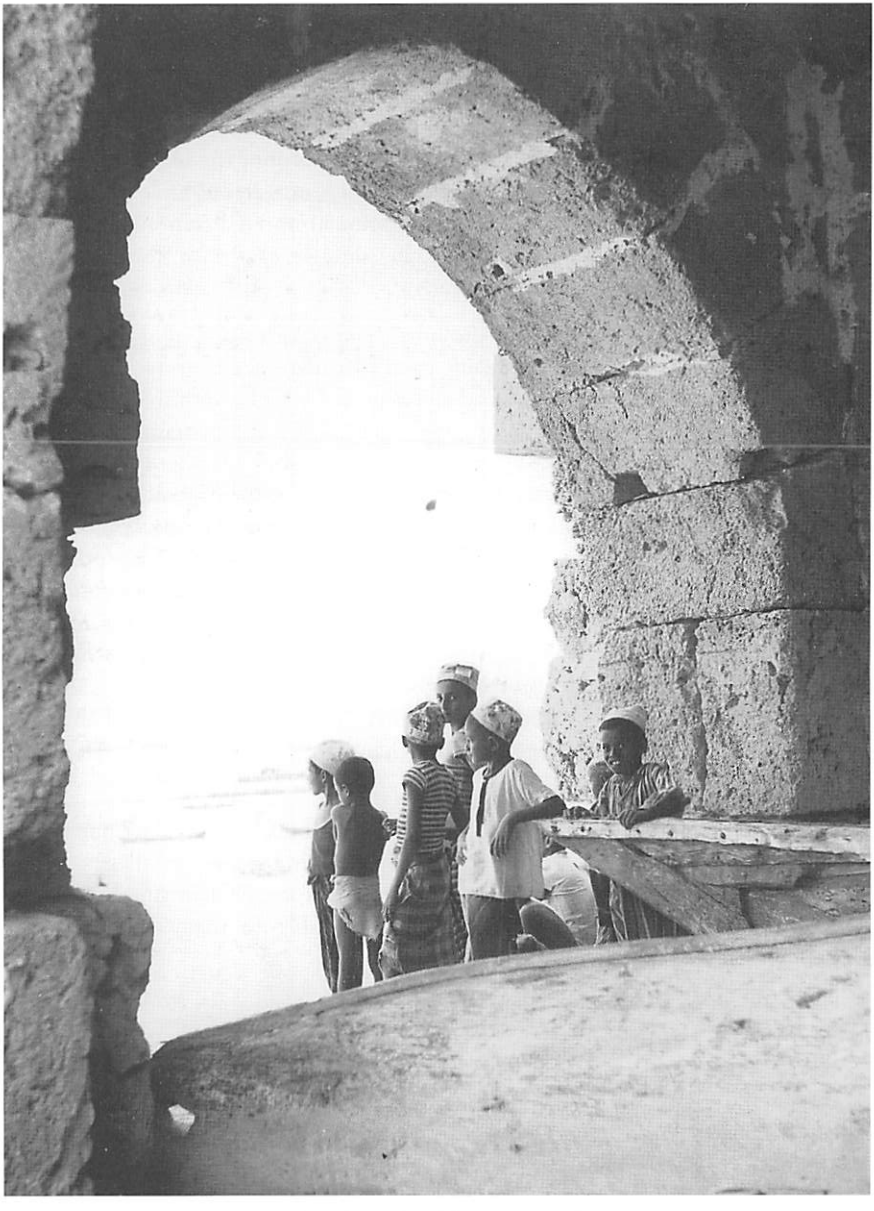
the Commissioner's bungalow with its sentinels of ancient cannon, are half a mile from the village, where all but ten per cent of the island's population live.

There must be few places so sleepy and empty as Kamaran village. The wealth brought in by the Quarantine Station having ceased to flow, half the men-folk of the place have had to leave the island for Aden or Jeddah or the high seas in search of work. Today, about two thousand people live in Kamaran but fifteen hundred of these are women and children. The men who remain run a dozen small shops, sail the few dhows that still trade from Kamaran, smuggle, catch fish from small sambuks and, during the season, dive for pearls.

We visited the pearling beaches at the north end of the island after a run in the truck over flat coral and sand, past salty tracts that had once been profitable mangrove swamps until the mangroves had all been cut for fuel and timber. Flamingoes and pelicans fluttered aimlessly among the scanty bushes that remain. The pearling beaches were soon discernible by the stench of millions of empty oyster shells, piled in a continuous bank stretching for miles just above the high water mark. The season for pearls was over, but we learned something of the hazards of this occupation; of the terrible menace from sharks and barracuda to men diving overboard among the reefs; of the frustration of opening perhaps a hundred oysters, gleaned from the ocean bed with straining lungs, before a single pearl would be found; and of the glee with which a fully grown pearl would be extracted after days in which only a hundred minute seed pearls had been discovered. Kamaran provided the Colony of Aden with its wedding present to the Queen – a necklace of large and perfectly matched pearls. In terms of sheer hard labour alone it was a gift almost beyond price.

Pearling enriches a few, but it does little to help the bulk of Kamaran's population in their poverty. Housing is no problem, for half the houses in the village are now empty, but the question of finding enough money to pay for their simple food in a land where nothing will grow has proved insoluble to many of the island's inhabitants.

Faced with the need to dispense charity to a large proportion of his people, the Commissioner has formed a Charitable Trust, which hands out weekly grants to several hundred poor and needy. The funds come from a nest egg preserved from the Quarantine Station days, but they are severely limited and Government assistance has had to be sought. Democratically, the Commissioner handed over the administration of this Trust to a committee elected from the island's inhabitants. It was their first election but it was no success for democracy; the bulk of the island's electors stood to one side and refused to participate. 'These things', they said, 'are better left in the hands of Government, which knows how to run them'.



Looking out towards Kamaran bay from the old Portuguese fort.

Our confidence in Britain's colonial policy fortified by their simple faith, we returned that evening to drink iced squash under the fan on the Commissioner's veranda. How different it might have been, we thought. How different it nearly was, the Commissioner reminded us.

An Italian had come to Kamaran a few months before the last war, a refugee – he had stated – from the oppressions of Mussolini. He was received with courtesy and allowed to occupy one of the empty houses, built for the Quarantine Station's doctor. He had kept to himself and behaved well, never apparently short of money. He had only drawn attention to himself by installing the island's first and only flush cistern in his bathroom. The day before Italy entered the war, however, he disappeared without trace, leaving behind him a wireless transmitter and the full dress uniform and regalia of Italy's first Governor of Kamaran.

That the course of the war would have been much altered had he not taken fright was unlikely, but Kamaran's history might have been different and the story gave new meaning to the plaintive bugle calls echoing into the dusk as a red-turbaned Armed Policeman sounded the Last Post and the Union Jack slowly fluttered down from its mast head. Gazing out beyond the huge silhouette of a cannon, and the flickering lanterns of the village and the dhows anchored in front of it, we could faintly discern the lights on the mainland of Yemen. Five miles of sea separated us from the shores of Arabia. In this strait Kamaran's second moon bobbed and swayed on the rippling surface of the dark ocean.

Notes

1. This interpretation needs to be treated with caution, since the initial letter of the Arabic place name is 'kaf', not 'qaf' (qamaran: 'two moons'). Another explanation is that the daughter of a king of Yemen, having fallen gravely sick, was sent to the island to recuperate; she did so and asked the King to give her name, Kamaran, to the island to commemorate her recovery.

2. Colonel R. G. E. W. Alban, who between 1925–1942 had served intermittently as assistant and acting Political Agent, Muscat.

3. The previous Commissioner was Major David Thompson who spent 17 years on the island from the early 1930s. The travel writer Norman Lewis recounts meeting Thompson and his 'charming young wife' when he visited Kamaran in 1937 (*A Voyage By Dhow*, Jonathan Cape, 2001, pp.45–48).

AUBREY RICKARDS: WINGED PIONEER

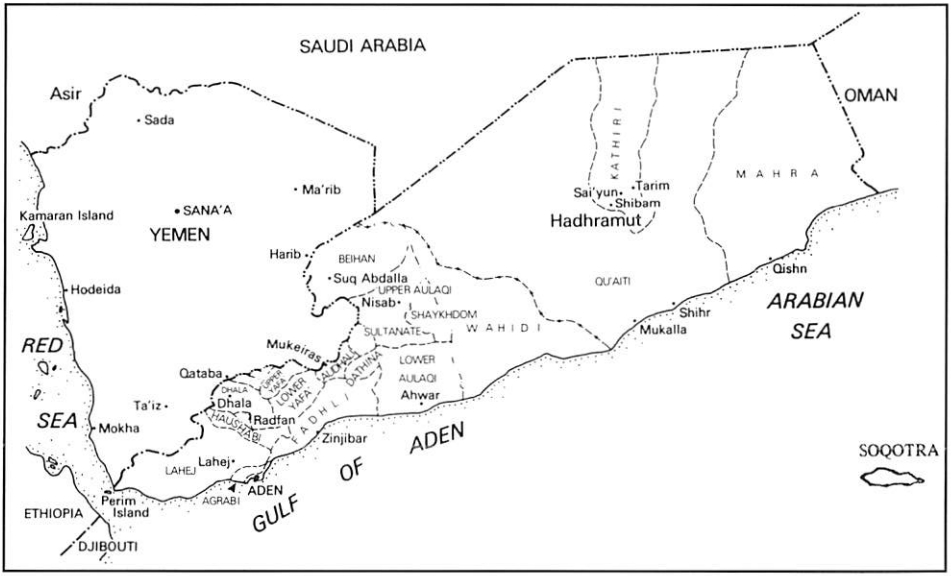
Wing Commander Aubrey Rickards (1898–1937) holds a distinctive place in the annals of British penetration of southern Arabia. But his role is not widely known; he did not live to tell the tale. In 1937 he was killed in an air crash in southern Oman. He was 39, and had already had an eventful career, winning the Air Force Cross for gallantry in Transjordan, and, as we shall see, the O.B.E. for services in Aden.

Rickards was the son of a Gloucestershire farmer, and was a student at the Royal Agricultural College, Cirencester, when the First World War broke out. He enlisted in the Royal Flying Corps and, after training as a pilot, was sent to France in 1917; a fortnight later his plane was shot down and he spent the rest of the war as a prisoner in Germany.

His post-war service in the Royal Air Force was spent mainly in the Middle East, including seven years in Aden, and three years in Iraq and the Gulf.

Rickards' initial posting to Aden, as a Flight Lieutenant, was from 1922–23. It whetted his interest in Aden's little known hinterland, and also in the Horn of Africa where he spent several weeks on safari in Somaliland. In 1922, Ras Tafari, later Emperor Haile Selassie, visited Aden, and it fell to Rickards to give him his first experience of flying. The young Prince Regent invited Rickards to visit Abyssinia. Three years later Rickards found the opportunity to do so, organising and leading a six month hunting and filming expedition through western Abyssinia to the Sudan. He wrote a lively account of this for *The Sphere*, which included a graphic description of his close and nearly fatal encounter with a bull elephant.

In March 1928 Rickards returned to Aden as RAF Intelligence Officer and was to remain there for the next five years. His arrival coincided with the assumption by the RAF of responsibility for the defence of Aden and its Protectorate. Since 1919, Imam Yahya, who claimed sovereignty over the whole area, had refused to recognise the boundary between Yemen and the Protectorate delimited by an Anglo-Turkish Commission in 1903–5, and his forces had steadily encroached on territory claimed by the British. In the Dhala area, Zaidi encroachment had reached a depth of 30 miles, bringing the nearest Zaidi post to within 50 miles of Aden. Without massive military reinforcements, the British in Aden were powerless to repel this intrusion. However, the air power provided by the increased RAF presence in 1928 (a squadron of 12 aircraft instead of a 'flight' of six) was soon to reverse the tide of Zaidi encroachment. In February that year, the commander of the Zaidi garrison in Qa'taba contrived the abduction of two shaikhs from within the Protectorate. The British retaliated by bombing Zaidi border garrisons until, in



March, the two captives were released. A temporary truce with the Imam followed, and Major (later Sir Trenchard) Fowle, the Assistant British Resident, accompanied by Sultan Abdul Karim Fadhl of Lahej, travelled overland to Taiz to discuss a possible basis for a political settlement. Rickards went with them as far as Musaimir on the border; Fowle had wanted to take him all the way but thought that the presence of an RAF officer might prove unwelcome to the Taiz garrison commander, Ali al-Wazir. Later, the Imam asked for the truce to be extended until the middle of July, to which the British agreed on condition that the Imam's forces evacuated Dhala by 20 June. The deadline passed, and warning leaflets dropped by the RAF over Yemeni towns went unheeded. Bombing of Zaidi border garrisons was resumed, and later extended to include military targets in Taiz, Dhamar, Ibb and Yarim. This activity spurred Qutaibi tribesmen to attack and expel the Zaidi post at Sulaik, south of Dhala. Their success raised morale within the Protectorate where previously panic had reigned due to rumours of an imminent Zaidi advance on Lahej.

On 7 July Rickards was instructed to proceed to Sulaik to set up a forward intelligence post and make contact with the Amir of Dhala, Nasr bin Shaif. The latter had spent the past eight years in exile in Lahej but was now mobilising a force of Amiri and Radfani tribesmen to advance on Dhala under cover of the RAF. On 14 July the Amir, at the head of his improvised and turbulent army of some thousand tribesmen, accompanied by Rickards with an escort of fifty Lahej troops under the command of Ahmad Fadhl Al-Abdali, succeeded in capturing Dhala.

From right to left: Aubrey Rickards, Aircraftman A. Smith, Hassan Muhammad and local tribesman, Dhala Fort, 1928. *Courtesy: James Offer*

Rickards and his W/T operator, Aircraftman Smith, installed themselves in Dhala fort, where they were later joined by Hassan Muhammad, a Residency interpreter sent up by Fowle to assist Rickards in his intelligence and liaison role. By the end of August, following the fall of Awabil to a mixed force of Shaibi and Yafai irregulars, Zaidi forces had withdrawn from almost all territory in and adjacent to Dhala. They had fought with tenacity and resource, but could do little against the *force majeure* of British air power.

Major Fowle (in his acting capacity as Resident) wrote to the RAF Commander in Aden, Group-Captain Mitchell, on 15 July to record his appreciation of Rickards' services. Fowle noted that 'in addition to the Intelligence duties which he performed for you, his W/T messages have been of great assistance to me in keeping in touch with the political situation, while his presence with the tribes, and his driving power in getting them forward, have been very material factors in their taking the town'. And in a letter to the Colonial Secretary dated 8 September 1928, Sir Stewart Symes, the newly arrived Resident, referred to the 'remarkable daring and discernment' which Rickards had displayed during the Dhala campaign, 'ably helped' by Hassan Muhammad. Rickards was awarded the

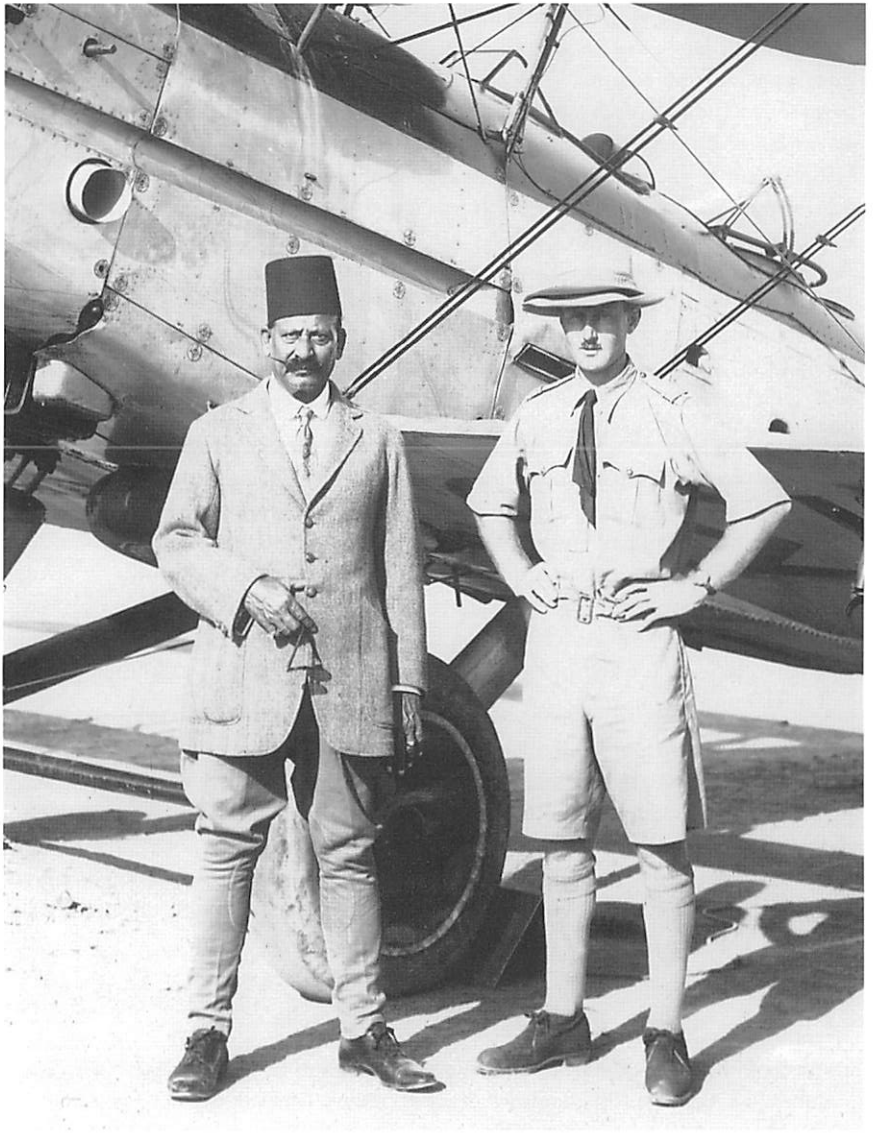
The Amir of Dhala (centre front row), H. H. Sultan Abdul Karim Fadhl between him and the British Resident, Sir Stewart Symes, Lahej, 1930. *Courtesy: James Offer*

O.B.E., and among the few papers surviving from his years in Aden are letters of congratulation from two leading Adeni merchants: Karim Hasanali and F.[Cowasjee] Dinshaw, both of whom had interests on either side of the disputed border.

The Tiger Moth in which Rickards flew many sorties into the hinterland of Aden.
A. R. M. Rickards
Courtesy: James Offer

The air defence of Aden, and the strategic need for an air link between Aden and Iraq, created a requirement for a multiplicity of landing grounds to serve the comparatively short range aircraft of those days. It was a requirement which Rickards, harnessing his professional skills to his innate love of travel and exploration, was well equipped to fulfil. He had constructed a landing ground in Dhala in July 1928, and during the next few years, travelling by air and overland to different parts of the Protectorate, he surveyed and constructed most of the 35 landing grounds used, or required for future use, by the RAF. An allied objective of his surveys was to fill in blank spaces on the map. As George Rentz wrote in *The Middle East Journal* in 1951, 'he sketched maps of what he saw from the cockpit and quietly made notable contributions to geography'. One of several sketch maps which Rickards made during his time in Aden appeared in *The Geographical Journal* of March 1931, as an appendix to Squadron-Leader R. A. Cochrane's account of an air reconnaissance of Hadhramaut which he and Rickards had undertaken in November 1929. Cochrane's paper was illustrated with photographs, taken by Rickards, of the region's striking lunar landscape. The Dutch traveller, Van Der Meulen, acknowledged the help – air photographs, sketches and other data – which he and Von Wissman had received from Rickards during their first visit to southern Arabia in 1931, and Von Wissman drew on this material in preparing his own celebrated map of the region.

Towards the end of 1929, Rickards travelled by dhow from Mukalla along the Mahra coast to Dhofar, and he is believed to have made a further voyage along the



Rickards with H. H. Sultan Umar bin Awadh Al-Qu'aiti, Ruler of the Hadhrami State of Shihr and Mukalla, c. 1930. *Courtesy: James Offer*

coast the following year, this time from Aden, to deliver a cargo of aviation fuel to Salalah. In an article on Soqotra published in *The Field* in May 1937, he refers to a journey which he had made to that island on board a Suri *badan;* he revealed neither the date nor other details of the voyage, but the article illuminates his interest in local history and ethnography. In 1932 he travelled from the coast of Hadhramaut to the interior to construct a landing ground at Shibam; his film of this journey was later shown at the Royal Geographical Society (RGS) but has yet to be traced. The new landing ground at Shibam enabled the Resident in Aden, Sir Bernard Reilly, to make an historic first visit to Wadi Hadhramaut in 1933. Freya Stark also had reason to be grateful to Rickards, for it was from Shibam that the RAF flew her to hospital in Aden, after she had fallen seriously ill during her travels in 1935. These were the subject of her lecture to the RGS in December that year, which Rickards attended, joining Cochrane and others in congratulating her during the discussion afterwards.

According to Philby, who visited the region in 1936, Rickards also explored Wadi Duhr and Wadi 'Irma, at the western end of Wadi Hadhramaut, before proceeding south of Shabwa and westwards to Nisab. Philby added that Rickards' death in 1937 had left 'a regrettable gap in the ranks of Arabian exploration: the airman has but slender opportunities of constructive work in Arabia, but he [Rickards] was certainly one who made the most of such chances as came his way and fully earned a place on the roll of those who have contributed to our knowledge of a still little-known country'.

In 1931 Rickards accompanied Lord Belhaven and Colonel M. C. Lake on a journey from Nisab to Beihan. This was Belhaven's first meeting 'with a remarkable personality... his knowledge of the country and of its customs was encyclopaedic...' Belhaven reproduced several of Rickards' photographic studies of Beihani tribesmen in his *Kingdom of Melchior* (1949), and in this and his later memoir, *The Uneven Road* (1955), he has left us with a vivid portrait of a man he greatly admired:

> 'he was of medium height and capable of great physical endurance. I shall not forget his reddish hair and bright blue eyes, his sharp sense of humour, and the easy confident carriage of his shoulders... he had the trust of the Arabs to a degree which I have not seen surpassed, despite his lack of Arabic, which he spoke with a minute vocabulary and a confusing disregard for grammar. It was hard to tell which, between him and Lake, had a better knowledge of the country. Rickards had method in finding and retaining information, while Lake was unmethodical and reluctant to impart what he had learned... With Rickards all was shared. He never failed to visit me on his return from his many expeditions, bringing with him maps and photographs and all his official reports... When Rickards died in an air accident, what fire and light perished!'

The poignant story of the death of Rickards and his two companions, Pilot Officer

McClatchey and Aircraftman O'Leary, when their RAF Vincent crashed at Khor Gharim in October 1937; of their makeshift burial beside that desolate creek on the southern coast of Oman; of their reburial in Muscat some sixty years later, has been told in detail by Colin Richardson in his book *Masirah: Tales from a Desert Island* (2001). The accident occurred during Rickards' second posting to Iraq after leaving Aden, this time attached to RAF, Basra, but based in Bahrain, with liaison duties covering the Gulf. Suffice it to say here that Rickards' two daughters, who had lost their father in childhood, his nephew, niece and grandson were able to attend the reburial service held at the Christian Cemetery, Muscat, in May 1998.

When news of Rickards' death reached Sultan Abdul Karim Fadhl of Lahej, ruler of the most influential state in the western half of the Protectorate, he wrote to the Governor of Aden asking for his condolences to be conveyed to Rickards' family. These were gratefully acknowledged by Rickards' widow, Anna, and his father, Robert. The Sultan's regard for Rickards, and regret at his passing, will have been shared by many others in southern Arabia and beyond.

JOHN SHIPMAN

The Editor is grateful to Mr James Offer, nephew of the late Wing Commander Rickards and trustee of his papers, for his invaluable assistance, and for permitting publication of the photographs which appear above and on the back cover of the Journal.

IN THE STEPS OF CARSTEN NIEBUHR

JULIAN LUSH

On 29 December 1762 the six members of the King of Denmark's scientific expedition to Arabia were rowed ashore at the port of Luhayyah. Almost two years since leaving Copenhagen, with lengthy delays in Constantinople and Egypt, they finally set foot in *Arabia Felix*, the first Europeans to come in search of mere enlightenment, rather than trade or conquest.

The ill-matched party, representing a range of academic disciplines, comprised two Danes, Frederik Christian von Haven, a philologist, and Dr Carl Kramer, a physician; a Swedish botanist, Pehr Forsskal, who had been a pupil of Linnaeus; two Germans, Carsten Niebuhr, an astronomer/surveyor, and Georg Wilhelm Baurenfeind, an artist and engraver; and the party's Swedish servant, Berggren.

The party had no designated leader, and cooperation between its members was complicated by a personality clash between the self-opinionated but phlegmatic Von Haven, and the highly energetic, if temperamental Forsskal. It had thus fallen to Niebuhr, whose quiet, self-effacing nature belied his exceptional diligence and versatility, to shoulder much of the administrative responsibility; and it was Niebuhr who made the most complete and informative record of the expedition that has become so closely linked with his name.

Little did these six young men foresee that two of them, struck down by malarial fever (then still unknown to Western medical science), would never leave Yemen; that of the four who did, two would die at sea and two would reach India; but that only Niebuhr would recover and make his long return journey home.

This year's 'expedition' to travel round Yemen in the footsteps of Niebuhr was the brain-child of Mary Morgan and Christine Heber Percy; the detailed planning was done by Bill Heber Percy. But Fate intervened at the last minute to prevent them from enjoying the fruit of their industry, and the planned party of six was reduced to a rump of three – Sarah and Julian Lush and John Shipman, accompanied by *Universal*'s stalwart guide, Sa'id Sharyan, and the company's longest serving driver, Saleh. We set out from the Taj Talha hotel in the old city of Sana'a on 25 January.

We took the quickest route to Tihama via Hajjah, stopping in Wadi Mawr to see the Bait al-Sharif at Mu'taridh, one of the first places visited by Niebuhr and Forsskal from Luhayyah. Perhaps it was on this trip that Niebuhr established his distance measure: 1750 double donkey paces in 30 minutes. Using this yardstick and his astrolabe, he was able to produce an astonishingly accurate map of Yemen, which we used and showed to Yemenis whom we met along our route.

Old Luhayyah. *Julian Lush*

In 1762 Luhayyah was thriving as a port for trans-shipment of pilgrims en route to Mecca; today the old town is in a state of serious dilapidation. But life continues with an industry of boat building (and fishing), and we saw at least six craft under construction along the creek. We camped outside the town, just within view of the Turkish fort on the hill, and beside huge middens of *terrebralia* shells, gathered from the mangroves as sustenance for an unknown people long ago.

Next day, departing from Niebuhr's tracks, we set off down the coast for Salif, past Al-Khawbah (where the tradition of splitting, salting, and smoking garfish on palm-frond skewers continues) and Ibn Abbas, with its attractive little mosque and fort on the sea shore. From Salif we embarked on the 4-mile crossing to Kamaran. We judged the island worthy of a visit because of its past importance as a quarantine station for Mecca pilgrims, and its long history of foreign occupation ending with British withdrawal in 1967.

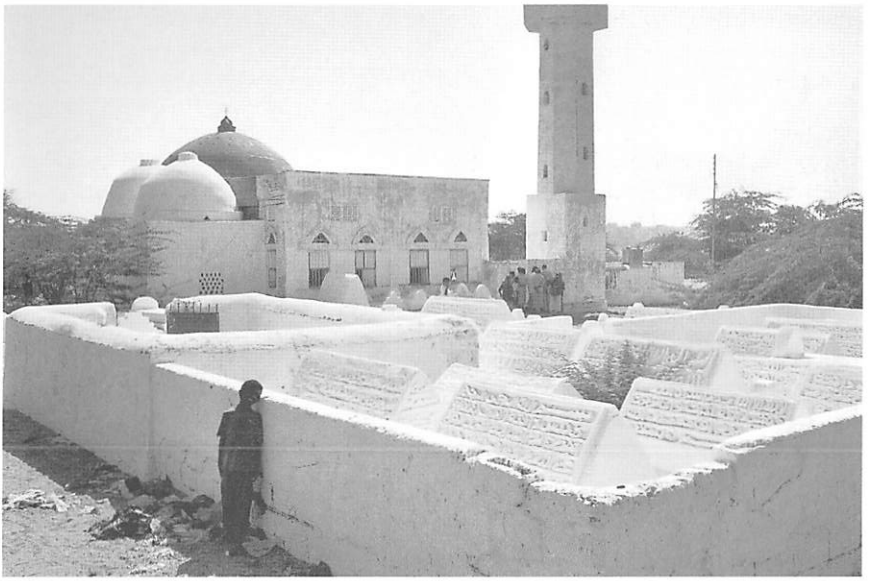
The outward crossing, in a fibre-glass launch, took us swiftly to a pleasant little resort of beehive huts, running water and plentiful food. The island's only taxi, a rickety Toyota truck, was duly summoned to drive us across the arid coastal plain to see some local landmarks: the mosque, the crumbling Portuguese/Arab fort, the desalination plant, and across the small bay, the decaying complex of buildings which used to house the British Commissioner and his Arab and Indian staff.

Before returning to the mainland next morning, against a drenching southerly wind, we had the opportunity to meet Shaikh Muhammad Musawa, the island's charming headman.

We took up Niebuhr's tracks again at Bait al-Faqih, the 1763 expedition's base for many weeks and hub of their radial sorties to survey and botanise. The town is probably less salubrious today than it was then. We had an introduction to the resident historian, Abdulla Khadim al-'Umri, and called on him at his crowded, qat-strewn majlis to ask if there was any folk memory of Niebuhr's local travels. It appeared not, and although al-'Umri had heard of the Danish expedition, his historical focus was confined to Tihama personalities, notably the Faqih himself, Shaikh Ahmad bin Musa al-'Ujaili, whose much venerated shrine across the main road we later visited, as Niebuhr had surely also done. Thence we followed one of Niebuhr's radial journeys to Jebel Qahmah, where we camped in a dusty patch below the crystalline basalt hill, pock-marked with numerous working quarries. Niebuhr had recorded an early tomb in the vicinity but all trace of this has disappeared.

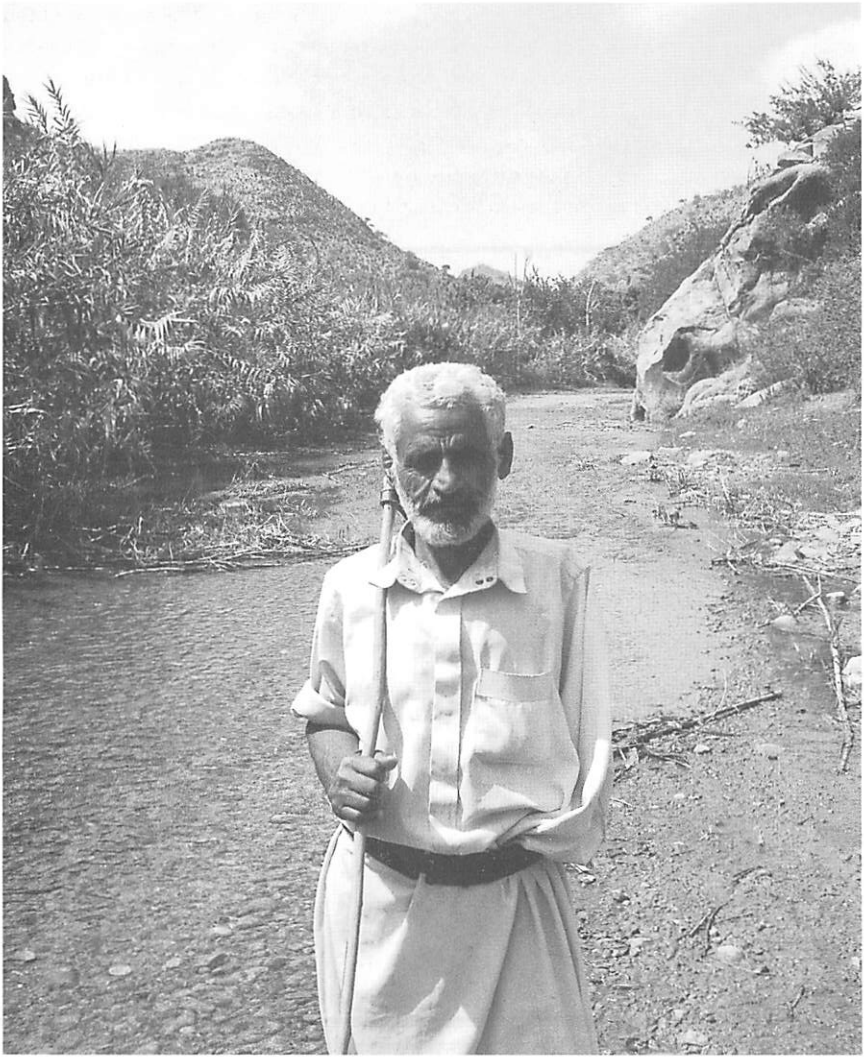
Our historian had wanted to accompany us to Al-Ghulaifiqa, a once thriving but now vestigial port some distance west of Bait al-Faqih, but when we arrived to make the trip, he was absent in Zabid. So we changed tack and made for Al-Duraihimi, a village half way to the coast, to see the elegant, triple-domed mosque of Abdullah bin Ali, drawn by John Nankivell during the Tihamah Expedition of 1982. In the heat and dust we failed to find it among the several fine mosques which we did see. Near the coast, we turned north to Hodaida, skirting pools of rainwater, and soft mud, until we reached the tarmac. Invigorated by the comforts of the Ambassador Hotel, we visited the imposing 19th-century merchant's house which is being carefully restored, using traditional materials and techniques, to serve as a museum; it already houses a large basalt Sabaean altar block.

Next day we proceeded south again in quest of Niebuhr's 'Bulgosa', which Tim Mackintosh-Smith, in discussion with us in Sana'a, believed was a garble of 'Bani al-Ghuzzi' in Jebel Raimah. Finding someone who had heard of the village and could direct us there proved difficult until we were lucky enough to encounter a truck-driver, a native of Bani al-Ghuzzi, who told us that it lay on the slopes of Jebel Raimah above Hadiyyah. After bumping across the rich agricultural plain east of Bait al-Faqih we climbed through wooded foothills into a wadi green with terraced cultivation. Spring water piped down the rockside filled a pool beside a little mosque; hornbills flapped among banana groves; and the sweet scent of coffee blossom lifted on the breeze. The road, now hardly more than a hairpin track of levelled rock, rose steeply to its end at Hadiyyah. School was just finishing, so we were mobbed by excited children until a figure of some authority emerged, the



Tomb of the Faqih and adjoining cemetery. *Julian Lush*

Bani al-Ghuzzi, Jebel Raimah.



Wadi Annah. *Julian Lush*

young English teacher, Daoud Muhammad Mahdi, who instantly befriended us and pressed us to spend the night in his apartment, an invitation which we accepted gratefully.

This left us the afternoon to climb on foot to the hamlet of Bani al-Ghuzzi. The ancient paving wound up through the same crystalline basalt that we had seen at

Jebel Qahmah, past coffee terraces and scattered homesteads until it gave way to a steep boulder-strewn gully. Our knot of merry young companions, homeward bound, did this walk daily to and from school; but it took us three hours just to reach Bani al-Ghuzzi, although this did include pauses for breath and chats with other wayfarers. The hamlet is typically perched on a precipitous slope, while far above we could see others wreathed in cloud. We pictured Niebuhr also standing here to marvel at the landscape and the ingenuity of its inhabitants.

It was now time to retrace Niebuhr's route from Tihama to the central highlands. Just as he had done, we followed Wadi Annah, finding an idyllic spot to camp above the grassy bank of a perennial stream. We walked whenever possible: first through crop fields and banana groves, then ankle-deep through flowing water, and, later, through a tunnel of green formed by dense thickets of overhanging cane: a path to Paradise! At the head of a tributary wadi we came to hot-water springs: a veritable spa, with a complex of bath houses, and a tented camp where many families had assembled to take the waters. It was ladies' hour, and Sarah was ushered inside the *hammam* where she found her Yemeni sisters happily immersed, in an uncustomary state of nature.

We reached Al-Udayn, half way up the great escarpment; this was on Niebuhr's route to find relief from the humidity and debilitating fever that had claimed Von Haven's life in Mocha. The road, now asphalt, takes one up to Al-Mashwara and a splendid panorama which attracts Yemeni tourists from far afield and is a favoured

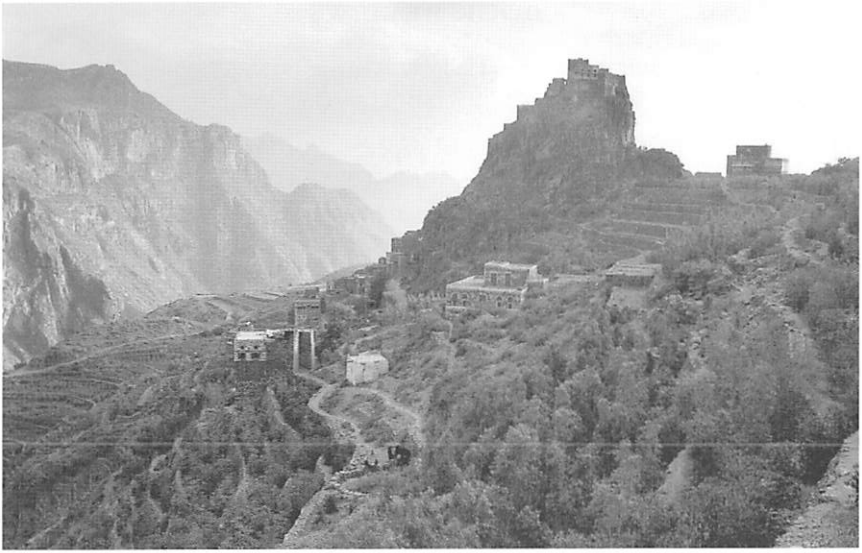
Yarim. The cemetery and mountain ridge sketched by Niebuhr. *Julian Lush*

venue for wedding parties. Thence to Ibb, vastly expanded from the austere citadel which Niebuhr's sick and weary party will have seen in 1763; and on to Yarim, where Forsskal finally succumbed to malaria and, as a non-Muslim, was buried in an unmarked grave at a site unknown. In Yarim, Niebuhr sketched a view of the Muslim cemetery, mosque and distant mountain ridge; and we spent an hour or so trying to align his published drawing with today's landscape, concluding that he had exercised a degree of artistic licence.

A kind offer from the Yemeni Ambassador, Dr Mutahar Al-Saeede, of hospitality in his village, Ribat Al-Saeede, 30 km from Yarim, was too tempting to decline. He had delegated to Qadhi Muhammad Al-Saeede, his uncle and father-in-law, the responsibility of looking after us. Although changes in our itinerary brought forward the date of our arrival by several days, and he only received a few hours' notice of this, the Qadhi could not have done more for our comfort: we were welcomed like members of the family, accommodated in the Ambassador's spacious new house, and fed sumptuously from the Qadhi's nearby kitchen. The next day Dr Mutahar's younger brother, Qais, arrived from Sana'a, and we toured the village with him, Qadhi Muhammad, and Mahmoud, headmaster of Ribat's mixed school of boys and girls. Above the village lies Husn al-Iryan, dramatically situated on the lip of the escarpment, and here we saw the now derelict family home of Qadhi Abdul Rahman al-Iryani, President of republican Yemen from 1967–74. The following morning we left for Sana'a, accompanied by Qais and our indefatigable host. On the way we stopped to see the cave reputed to be the burial chamber of the last Himyari king, As'ad Al-Kamil; later, on the pass overlooking Yarim, we visited ancient Sarhah, whose historic mosque boasts a richly painted wooden ceiling which cries out for restoration; the *Awqaf* is, however, restoring the domed shrine nearby of Muhi-al-Din Abu Sa'ud.

Imagining Niebuhr and his three companions in audience with Imam al-Mahdi Abbas, we had a two day stopover in Sana'a before embarking on the last stage of our trip – back to Tihama via Mafhaq and Hajjarah. Niebuhr, in a race against time to catch a boat from Mocha, had taken the shortest route from Mafhaq via Wadi Siham and Bait al-Faqih. We, however, took a more northerly route, through the more populous region of Jebel Haraz.

We walked up from Manakha to Hajjarah, where Sa'id Sharyan handed us into the care of a young local guide, No'man al-Arassi, for our walk down to Tihama. No'man, who appeared in Western trekking gear acquired in France, proved not only a pleasant and lively companion but a highly professional guide, familiar with every track and village, and on terms with every passer-by. We were in supremely spectacular surroundings: on every pinnacle perched a fort; fields fanned and shelved in a cataract of terraces; a spring-fed waterfall plunged over a cliff face; and,



In the Jebel Haraz. *Julian Lush*

as a means of locomotion, the donkey still reigned supreme. We spent the night at Attarah, being surrounded on arrival by eager and curious school children, and we remained a focus of their attention until long after nightfall. We pitched our tents on the only flat piece of ground, a short distance from the school, but it was too close to the local cemetery for comfort – as a young man who came to pray at his father's grave the following morning, pointed out to us.

Our last day was long and exhausting for we covered over 20 km on foot, and were still five km from Ubal when, shortly before sunset, Saleh came out to look for us. The day had begun with the expert massage of a twisted ankle by a kindly matriarch collecting firewood, who recommended aloe juice as further treatment. We had a late breakfast of millet cakes, eggs and Yemeni coffee in Wusil with friends of No'man, before dropping down through acres of spreading prickly-pear to the sultry wilderness of Wadi Hijan, haunt of baboon, and, in its lower reaches, of *hamerkop* and a diversity of other birdlife. Then followed a long, hot walk to Hajaylah, a village at the junction with Wadi Siham, which Niebuhr had probably passed through on his way to Mocha. And it was here that we finally took our leave of Niemuhr, for this, sadly, was our last evening in Tihama; our last supper of tuna and tomato cooked by the faithful Saleh; our last night under the stars.

BOOK REVIEWS

Arabia without Sultans by Fred Halliday. Reprint by Saqi Books, 2002. Pp.540. Illus. Maps. Figures. Index. Pb. £17.95. ISBN 0-86356-381-3.

Does the cover say it all? The original paperback of Professor Halliday's *Arabia without Sultans* – as I remember it – featured a caricature of an Arabian shaikh (cruelly resembling the late King Faisal) being poached in a vat of oil. The cover of this reprinted version has a colour photograph of a middle-aged Gulf Arab, at the door of his brightly painted cement house, with the portly figure and thoughtful air of a stakeholder in the market economy.

Poets tend to be shy of their juvenilia, but Professor Halliday has reprinted his first work, written when he was 28, in all its pristine fervour and with a surprisingly brief introduction. Much has changed in the 28 years since *Arabia without Sultans* first appeared, but with the exception of the Shah (not of course an Arab, but included and receiving almost indulgent treatment by the young Halliday's standards), the King, the Sultan and the Shaikhs still lord it over non-Yemeni Arabia. Only the young Halliday's favourite state, the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, has passed away, lacerated by tribal strife and orphaned by the collapse of the Soviet Union, while the various revolutionary popular fronts have fallen silent. The threat to traditional rule in Arabia now comes from the Islamists rather than the Leninists.

In fairness, the author in his introduction admits to being surprised by the 'surprises' of history, but he selects themes from the original text which are still relevant: the impact of oil on Arabian societies and the need for transparency in discovering where oil revenues have gone; the importance of the Saudi-Yemeni relationship; the impact of internal politics on national policy; and finally the need for a secular non-Islamic approach to society and politics. These are certainly important and enduring themes, but history might have been less surprising if the young historian himself had been less blinkered.

The original text has some virtues – a very wide range of sources, from the pamphlets and periodicals of the revolutionary groups to British regimental journals, and the footnotes offer a *mezzeh* of fascinating facts, distortions and opinions. (The hot chilli must be his praise for Albania's 'short but intense history' of socialism as a model for Yemeni socialists). Accounts of the young Halliday's visits to South Yemen and Dhofar in 1970 and 1973 are interesting as is the oral history he collected from some of the principal actors in Aden. In 1974 the amount of material in English gathered in his pages was certainly impressive.

But the relentlessly partisan approach of the author, the Marxist spectacles through which he views Arabia and his rigid categorisation of the various protagonists

(feudal/ bourgeois/ proletarian; progressive/reactionary) present a cartoon world, already far from reality in 1974 and one which has drifted further into fantasy as the years have passed. The acid cynicism with which he describes the traditional rulers and their imperialist masters is in stark contrast to his suspension of disbelief when he visits Aden and Dhofar. Did he not notice – on his second visit to Dhofar – that the revolution was already in retreat? He can be forgiven for not forecasting the collapse of the Soviet Union, but did he not discern the tribal fissures which underlay and finally destroyed the Communist regime in Aden?

Of course it is a book of its time as the author acknowledges in his introduction, but its value today is more as an exhibit in a museum of political attitudes than a work of measured analysis. Yet it may stand as a salutary counterweight to the memoirs of senior British officials and to Foreign Office papers in the Public Records Office, access to which must now have reached 1972.

The story which I should like to read is an account of the long march which transformed the young militant into the mellow and perceptive academic who lectured to the British-Yemeni and Anglo-Omani Societies in October 1999, before proceeding to Oman to speak to the Sultan's diplomats.

DAVID TATHAM

Yemeni Voices: Women tell their stories edited by Marta Paluch, with illustrations by Amnah Al-Nassiri. British Council, Yemen, 2001. Pp. 319. Pb. £8.95. ISBN 0-86355-468-7.

This is a fascinating book. The idea is deceptively simple: women talk about their lives. The individual interviews are framed with brief sections on general background and the circumstances of each interview. A short epilogue gives the comments of the women who had been interviewed on the finished book. The aim is to enable an English readership to find out more about women's lives in Yemen and get away from stereotypes.

I spent twenty months in the early 1980s living in the western highlands, doing anthropological research into the lives of women in a small mountain town. The women of this book are staggeringly far removed from those I knew, and far from typical of women in Yemen. They are (mostly) from a tiny highly-educated minority. Many have studied abroad, they have professional careers; they include one of the first two women MPs and the first woman ambassador, as well as workers in education, health and development.

Some common themes emerge. One is the vital importance of education for girls. Several struggled to be educated, including one who went to school without her father's knowledge. Both conflict with fathers, and the importance of support

from them and other family members, are prominent. As one interviewee says, 'in Yemen, if you have a father who supports you, you can do a lot of things that society does not easily accept.'

We get a sense of massive achievement, and a massive amount remaining to be done. There are striking examples of what individuals have achieved: 'I feel that I have positively influenced the women of the region. Each father who previously took his daughter out of school, has now brought her back. Mothers use me as an example to encourage their daughters to continue their education'; and also of the constraints that come with achievement: 'being the model of the educated girl, I have to be very careful in my behaviour.' Some have combined the roles of wife and mother with a professional career. Another says that sadly 'women still have to make a choice between marriage and work'.

The interviews show the huge gulf between women in villages and in cities, between past and present, rich and poor, north and south. There is a strong sense of steps forward and back, with heartrending accounts of gains made and lost: 'When we compare the situation of the women in the north and south today we see that women in the north are moving forward... But in the south we feel we are retreating.' Women who could go out or travel alone unchallenged are now expected to be always accompanied by a husband or brother.

One interviewee expresses the risk of increasing polarisation: 'As for the future of women, I think the situation of my generation is better than my mother's and my grandmother's... Now we have education, we have the opportunity to study... Young women drive cars, they work with men, they travel... This is particularly true for families with a good economic situation... But poor women, I don't see much hope for them. I think their situation will get worse. If there is a lobby from women to do something about this, maybe it will change.'

Another makes the point that there are women in powerful positions, but they are a mere handful: 'What about the women at the grassroots? There is no doubt that they are oppressed by men whose behaviour is based on the backward customs of a male dominated society, but has nothing to do with Islam.'

While not representative or typical, women like these are pivotal for the future. They have pushed at boundaries. Although the book focuses on entirely exceptional women, it carries an awareness of all the others; these women struggled, consciously, on behalf of all: 'We have to fight for our rights and even if I cannot enjoy the fruit of my struggle, the next generation will.'

The editorial framework is beautifully done, clear and elegantly restrained, mostly leaving women to speak for themselves. It deserves the comment from one interviewee: 'this kind of book, where you have interviews and you do not

interfere in the interviews, is really what I call democratic and it respects the readers themselves, because in this way you let each reader analyse for himself or herself rather than give them in advance your own analysis.' The atmospheric illustrations bring the book to life.

When I first opened this book, I was a little put off to see that the interviewer and editor didn't speak fluent Arabic, and that the women interviewed were so unrepresentative. But the book transcends these constraints. Marta Paluch has assembled elements which add up to something greater: a rich and moving document, where a vanguard of women hold the possibility of change for all in their struggles. Their honesty about their own development is inspiring and moving. We are lucky to have this record. I felt privileged to be reading it.

I can't do better than end by quoting from the comments the women who were interviewed made on the final book:

'I don't know what it's like in your part of the world but here history is always written from the side of the men. Maybe this will be a start so that history will be written from the point of view of women.'... 'I think this book will change the way people think about Yemeni women.'... 'What attracts me most about this book is that it can be considered as an encouragement to determined women to stand against any difficulties they face in their lives.'

IANTHE MCLAGAN

A Legislature in Transition: The Yemeni Parliament by Ahmed A. Saif, Ashgate Publishing Ltd, Aldershot, 2001. Pp. xii + 273. Figures. Tables. Glossary. Bibliog. Index. Hb. £45. ISBN 0-7546-1702-5.

This book, based on the Yemeni author's doctoral thesis at the Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies, University of Exeter, examines the development of Yemen's parliament since unification in 1990. It draws on field surveys and interviews conducted during 1998–99, on primary documentary sources, and on Yemeni/Arab media reporting. The core of the book is contained in six chapters discussing the formal and informal political structures of unified Yemen; the institutions of parliament; the theory and practice of Yemeni-style multi-party democracy; the composition and performance of the 1990, 1993 and 1997 legislatures and their mixed success in influencing the executive. A final chapter summarises the author's conclusions: parliament plays an important role in legitimising both government and opposition; in limiting the state's capacity for repression; in bringing together disparate interest groups within a forum where bargaining and compromise are possible; it has thus been a force for national stability in critical economic times and is vital to the survival of Yemen's democratic experiment.

The author's historical introduction draws on wide reading, judging from the end-notes and bibliography, but it leans unduly and uncritically on sources with time-worn ideological axes to grind, particularly in its treatment of South Yemen. And there are inconsistencies: for example, on p.31 the 1962 revolution in the north is said to have involved 'nationwide participation in eradicating the existing regime', while on p.40 we are told that the Egyptian-backed coup by Abdullah al-Sallal was 'a revolution only in the limited sense of replacing the institutions of the Imamate with largely ill-conceived and hastily executed institutions', against the background of 'a long and costly civil war'. The index is based on key-words such as 'attendance', 'dispute' and 'power', from which all reference to named personalities or specific events is excluded: an arrangement likely to tax any reader's spirit of enquiry. Nevertheless, in its detailed exposition of Yemen's relatively short history of political pluralism, Ahmed Saif's study breaks new ground, and those seeking to understand the complexities of the country's domestic political scene will find much to enlighten them.

JS

Fifty Years in Shifting Sands: My story and the building of the modern state in Yemen by Muhsin al-Aini, Dar al-Nahar, Beirut, 2000. Arabic. Pp.367. Illus. Pb. £16.90 (available from Al Saqi Bookshop, 26 Westbourne Grove, London W2 5RH). ISBN 2-84289-296-8.

Muhsin al-Aini, born in 1932 in a village a few miles from Sana'a and orphaned at the age of seven, rose from humble beginnings to be Prime Minister of the Yemen Arab Republic during the first decade of its history. He later served as Yemeni Ambassador in Paris, Bonn, London and Moscow before his transfer to the UN; he spent the final years of his diplomatic career in Washington during the presidencies of Reagan, Bush and Clinton.

Before the 1962 revolution he was closely involved with the Free Yemenis, with links to the Arab Nationalist Movement, and as Foreign and Prime Minister he was on terms with most Arab leaders and eminent figures of the time. Evidence of his wide range of contacts lies not only in the anecdotal text but in the many photographs which illustrate it.

As a student in Paris in the late 1950s, al-Aini met and was befriended by a Marxist intellectual, Claudie Fayein, whose book, *A French Doctor in Yemen* (1957), he soon embarked on translating into Arabic. He did so because he felt that Fayein's portrayal of conditions of life under Imam Ahmad would help to sensitise Arab opinion to Yemen's plight.

Al-Aini deprecates the notion that his book is the story of the Yemeni national

movement, or of the revolution and republic; or of Yemeni relations with Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the Eastern Bloc and the West; or of Yemeni and Arab unity; or the Gulf war. But his disclaimer is partly rhetorical for his memoir is interwoven with all these issues.

Few incidents seem to have ruffled his composure, but he appears not to have forgiven Ali Salim al-Bidh, when Vice-President of recently unified Yemen, for slipping into Washington, making appointments with the State Department behind his back, and then accusing him of dereliction of duty. Al-Aini writes well and with a light touch; his assessment of US–Yemeni relations in a letter to President Saleh dated 1986 (pp.342–7) is a model of clarity. His story ends in 1993 but on the last page he promises a further instalment. Readers of this elder statesman's memoir will look forward to his next.

JS

Sheba Revealed: A Posting to Bayhan in the Yemen by Nigel Groom. The London Centre of Arab Studies (63 Great Cumberland Place, London W1H 7LJ), 2002. Pp.xii + 292. 40 b/w photographs. 3 Maps. Appendix. Glossary. Bibliog. Index. Hb. £24.95. ISBN 1-900404-31-1.

The pacification of Aden's Western Protectorate in the period immediately after the Second World War, is poorly documented. With its long and uncontrolled frontier with the Imam's Yemen, and its plethora of little States, each with its own Treaty of Protection, the area had been largely ignored by the British authorities, who maintained only a tenuous influence there through a modest outlay of rifles, ammunition and Maria Theresa dollars. In the aftermath of the war this policy began to change. Nigel Groom's book records this period of change in Bayhan, the most far-flung of the Western Aden Protectorate (WAP) States.

In 1948 Groom, aged 23, was posted to Bayhan which was ruled (nominally on behalf of his son Amir Salih) by Sharif Hussain bin Ahmad al-Habili, one of the most ambitious and enigmatic of the Protectorate rulers, who later became Minister of the Interior in the Federal Government of South Arabia. Groom's immediate task on arrival was to persuade the Bal Harith, one of the main tribal groupings which made up the State of Bayhan, of the desirability of accepting Sharifian rule which they were rebelling against. How he managed this is graphically described.

Once peace had been established, Groom had to turn his attention to delineating the borders of the State which in 1903 Her Majesty's Government had solemnly promised to protect, and, at the same time, to dealing with the Imam's representative in nearby Harib. His area of responsibility stretched beyond Bayhan to Wadi Markha and the Upper Awlaqi States where inter-tribal feuding was an almost

daily occurrence. In addition to all this, he was given the thankless task of persuading Sharif Hussain of the advantages of representative government and of having a 'constitution'. This finally stretched the relationship between Ruler and Political Officer to breaking point, while it demonstrated the limitations of a political officer's powers, despite the theoretical obligations of the Advisory Treaty signed in 1944. The introduction of accepted methods of accounting in the State treasury was another challenging task which met with only limited success (the writer of this review can testify that the treasury books were still a fine example of creative accounting in 1966!).

Groom covered his extensive territory either on foot or on horseback (there was only one jeep in the whole State); and as well as mapping its borders he recorded its many pre-Islamic sites and inscriptions, some of which have since been destroyed. It was Groom's reports which inspired the Wendell Phillips' expeditions to Bayhan and Marib in 1950 and 1951.

This is an enthralling snapshot by a young political officer of the State for which he was responsible, at a time when British policy was moving hesitantly from neglect to parsimonious involvement. He records the first steps towards the introduction of an educational system, and the first mention of 'federation'; and he illustrates the considerable problems of dealing with a ruler who was ambitious, autocratic and very jealous of his 'sharaf'. One is left with the impression that the support which Groom received from his taskmasters in the WAP Office was less than wholehearted.

A traveller to Bayhan will see few horses and camel convoys today, but with the help of the excellent photographs included in the book, he or she will still be able to find many of the places described by the author. For those interested in the first stirrings of economic and political development that finally culminated in the Federation of South Arabia, of which Sharif Hussain was a major architect, this eloquently written and handsomely printed book is required reading.

BILL HEBER PERCY

Yemen: Evenements Vecus: Medecine Cooperative Francaise sur fond de revolution by Lucile Fevrier. Les Editions de la Dyle [Pontstraat, 80 B-9831 Sint-Martens-Latem (Deurle), Belgique tel: +32(0)92810058], 2002. Pp.160. 39 b/w photos. Map. Glossary. Pb. 19 Eur/125 FF. ISBN 90-76526-14-1.

At the end of June 1947, Dr Pierre Fevrier, arrived in Sana'a to join a French medical mission headed by an officer whom the author identifies only as 'le Médecin Colonel'. Fevrier was accompanied by his wife, Louise; their daughter, Lucile aged 17; and their two sons, Lucien aged 21, and Pierre aged 13. Within four months

Fevrier was dead. Imam Yahya, who had been his patient, allowed the family to stay on in their house in Bir al-Azab until arrangements could be made for their return to France. In February 1948 the Imam was assassinated, and the family remained in the Yemeni capital until the following July.

Lucile Fevrier prefaces her story of their time in Sana'a with an account of their voyage from Tangier to Aden, and their overland journey to Hodaida and the highlands via Taiz, where parents and children had the intriguing experience of being received by Crown Prince Ahmad.

The Fevriers were a close and happy family; the children relished the opportunity to explore the antique and picturesque world around them. But their happiness was blighted by the death of their father from an enteric complaint aggravated by the machinations of 'le Médecin Colonel'. Louise Fevrier and the children had to turn elsewhere within the tiny European community for support in their bereavement - to Alphonse Lippmann, a former colleague of the celebrated Henri de Montfreid, to John Hewitt of the Desert Locust Survey, and to the eccentric but kindly Marcus Danzker, the Imam's Engineer-in-Chief.

The author's two chapters on the assassination of Imam Yahya and the short-lived 'revolution' led by Abdullah al-Wazir, ending in the siege, capture and looting of Sana'a by forces loyal to Imam Ahmad, are based on the detailed journal which she kept during those five turbulent weeks. As a day-to-day commentary by a remarkably cool-headed teenager, her account is a unique and fascinating footnote of history. The book's many photographs (of variable quality) include a gruesome one of the heads of the executed conspirators on public display, which her two brothers could not resist going to see.

Imam Yahya had given permission for Dr Fevrier to be buried by a hillside a few kilometres outside Sana'a, with a stone cross marking his grave. Lucile Fevrier returned to Sana'a in 1981 to visit the grave, not without apprehension of the changes that she would find after an absence of thirty three years. But she was quickly reassured by the warmth and friendliness of her reception, and happy to note that the streets of the city were no longer cleaned by prisoners in leg-irons!

This personal account of life in Yemen during the late 1940s complements that of Claudie Fayein *(A French Doctor in Yemen)*, who joined the French Medical Mission in 1950. Rich in anecdote, local colour and youthful spirit, Lucile Fevrier's book will interest and entertain all those who share her affection for Yemen and its people.

On a point of detail, it is odd to see the historic place name 'Zabid' rendered 'Zabib' on the map and in the text, and to see 'Bir al-Azab' shorn of its initial consonant.

JS

Letters from Oman by David Gwynne-James. Blackwater Books (BwB), 2001. Pp. 288. Illus. with 92 photographs, 8 maps. Glossary, Notes, References. Bibliog. Hb. £22.50. ISBN 0-9539206-1-5.

The title of this book belies the fact that its first two chapters (29 pages) relate to Aden. The book, well produced and handsomely illustrated, is based on letters from the author, then a young British Army officer, to his fiancée whom he was to marry in 1965; they were written during his three months' Arabic language training in Aden, November 1962–January 1963, and during the following two years which he spent in Oman on secondment to the Sultan's Armed Forces. The book is largely concerned with the author's service in Oman.

This review focuses on the two Aden chapters. In his introductory remarks the author reveals that he spent 'an exciting six months' as a rifle platoon commander in operations in Dhala in 1958. These culminated in an assault on Jebel Jihaf – the *massif* overlooking Dhala – to relieve the Government fort at Assarir which, with its small garrison and a visiting British political officer, had been besieged by local and north Yemeni tribesmen. Readers may share this reviewer's regret that the author did not meet his fiancée – the inspiration of his letters – until after this tour of military service, otherwise he might have added substantively to his Aden narrative. Perhaps the most interesting part of this are his descriptions of the topography and bustling multi-ethnic life of the colony, and his visit to the Federal Regular Army (FRA) camp at Mukeiras, near the border with the fledgeling Yemen Arab Republic, to practise his Arabic language skills on friendly and amused FRA soldiers, some displaying photographs of President Nasser inside their tents.

The author was bold to attempt to distil from three disparate sources a summary of Aden's history in twelve pages; but he lacks the sureness of touch to escape certain pitfalls. Readers conversant with the area will question some of his judgements of cause and effect e.g. 'by the early 1930s fresh water from wells in Sheikh Othman made possible Aden's recovery into a flourishing town'; 'the new state of Saudi Arabia, clearly intent on extending its frontiers... prompted Britain to appoint Political Agents to approach the rulers of the various tribes throughout the Eastern and Western Protectorates as ambassadors and advisers...' And there are some factual errors: the Tahirid dynasty not 'the Mongols' succeeded the Rasulids (p.11); British ships first arrived at Aden not in 1551 but in the early seventeenth century (p.12); the British wanted and took Aden in 1839 because of its prime location as a coaling station on the Suez–Bombay route; they occupied Perim (in 1857) to pre-empt perceived French designs on the island; no steamer was coaled there until 1889.

Part of the appeal of letters written with no thought to future publication lies in their spontaneity, and these convey, in a lively and readable manner, the detail and

atmosphere of a young man's encounter with an area of the Arab world which he, like many others, found of absorbing interest.

JS

Yemen: Land and People by Sarah Searight; photography by Jane Taylor; Miranda Morris on Soqotra; foreword by Tim Mackintosh-Smith. Pallas Athene, 2002. Pp.160. Over 300 colour photographs. Map. Chronology. Glossary. Notes. Bibliog. Index. Pb. £19.99. ISBN 1-873429-82-7.

The publication of *Yemen: Land and People* coincides with the opening of the British Museum's 'Queen of Sheba' exhibition, and those whom the exhibition inspires to visit Yemen will find this book an instructive, entertaining and visually appealing companion.

Sarah Searight writes modestly that her aim 'is to introduce newcomers succinctly to the history and scenery of this remarkable country...' But *aficionados* of Yemen will find much that is new to enjoy in the fascinating mix of history and anecdote, seasoned by her own observations and those of earlier travellers, which she recounts as she takes the reader on a brisk and invigorating tour of the country. She writes with evident affection for the 'land and people', and one of the strengths of the book is her ability to communicate a mass of information – historical, academic and practical – in a style which is relaxed and readable; her two chapters on the ancient kingdoms, for example, are notable for the fluency with which they unravel the complex archaeology and history of the early inhabitants of South Arabia.

In his Foreword, Tim Mackintosh-Smith describes Yemen as 'inexhaustibly photogenic'. In any new illustrated publication on Yemen it is difficult to be original. Yet Jane Taylor has managed to achieve this by photographing familiar scenes from a different angle and with a different emphasis. The full page picture of the famous Shaharah bridge is a case in point: instead of showing the bridge itself in close-up, she has emphasised the audacity of its construction over the chasm which it spans, by bringing the rugged mountain scenery on each side into prominence.

It is always difficult to achieve a balance between pictures and text in a work of this kind. Some may feel that many of the pictures are too small, others that the colour reproduction does not always do justice to the photographer's skills; but the general layout and design of the book are pleasing, and a number of old photographs, prints and sketches have also been included from sources such as P & O and, not surprisingly, the Searight Collection at the V & A.

In recent years the island of Soqotra has aroused international interest because of its unique flora and fauna. In 1996 the Government of Yemen ratified the International Convention on Biodiversity, and declared the Soqotra archipelago a

special area in need of protection. In the chapter which she has contributed to the book, Dr Miranda Morris offers a compelling account of the people and their struggle for survival in a harsh environment. She provides an illustrated survey of important species of plants, and describes the island's wildlife down to insect level: a fly lurking under trees, which spits at its victims, is harmless, the islanders say, if you cover your mouth and face. This and other denizens of the insect and reptile world which she mentions may discourage all but the most intrepid travellers from visiting Soqotra!

The text and photographs are fully supported by notes, a glossary and suggestions for further reading. There are two minor misprints in the useful map provided at the front of the book: the town of Qa'taba is spelt 'Qataban' (as in the ancient kingdom of that name centred on Timna), and Nuqub (Bayhan) is spelt 'Nuqul'. Meanwhile, those of us familiar with a *kalashnikov* will note that the small boy pictured on p.79 is (despite the caption) actually carrying a rifle; while those who have climbed Jebel Shamsan for a marvellous view over Aden, will recognise the error in 'Shamshan' (p.122).

Both Sarah Searight and Jane Taylor acknowledge that their book owes a great deal to the interest and encouragement of many Yemeni officials and friends, but especially to the generous sponsorship of two leading Yemeni family businesses. All concerned can justly celebrate the result, which is a significant addition to Pallas Athene's portfolio of specialist guides and travel books.

JULIAN PAXTON

City of Divine and Earthly Joys: The Description of San'a by Sayyid Jamal al-Din Ali al-Shahari, translated and introduced by Tim Mackintosh-Smith. American Institute for Yemeni Studies (AIYS), 2001. Yemen Translation Series 3. Pp. xii + 34. Notes. Bibliog. Pb. ISBN 1-882557-07-7. Distributed by The Middle East Studies Association of North America, 1643 Helen Street, Tucson, AZ 85721, USA.

This slim volume contains a vivid account of the social and economic life and architectural richness of Sana'a in the mid-18th century, a time of relative peace and prosperity for Yemen under Imam al-Mahdi Abbas. It might not have been written if the author, a fourth generation descendant of Imam al-Qasim the Great, had not been imprisoned in 1753 for threatening the life of an elderly preacher in the city's Great Mosque. Jamal al-Din's sensitivity to detail and atmosphere is that of a man seeking to relive on paper cherished scenes of city life from which imprisonment has debarred him: Quranic recitations in lamplit mosques; poolside *qat* gatherings; sunlight gleaming on freshly plastered walls; bustling crowds at the

city gates 'like a huge multitude of ants at the entrances to their ant-hill when fair weather follows rain'.

The Description of San'a, written between 1757–58, is translated from the Arabic text edited by Abdullah bin Muhammad al-Hibshi and published in 1993 by the Centre Francais d'Etudes Yemenites. It forms part of a much longer manuscript work held in the library of the Great Mosque. This translated extract is, essentially, a personal account of the city's mosques and mosque gardens, houses, building materials and techniques, goods traded in the *suqs,* public baths, the garden suburbs, the Jewish community, and the social role of the *mafraj.* It also discusses arrangements for the disposal and recycling of waste, with the author remarking: 'as for the cleanliness of this city, it is a matter which the tongue could not find words enough to describe'. If not in this respect, in many other respects the picture which Jamal al-Din Ali presents will be familiar to those who have had the opportunity to visit old Sana'a. What draws him still closer to us is his humanity – the affection and pride which inform his portrayal of an historic and flourishing city.

Tim Mackintosh-Smith's scholarly introduction and notes add substantively to the value and interest of the text.

JS

The Sultan's Yemen: Nineteenth-Century Challenges to Ottoman Rule by Caesar E. Farah, I. B. Tauris, 2002. Pp. xxii + 392. Maps. Annex. Notes. Glossary. Bibliog. Index. Hb. £39.50. ISBN 1-86064-767-7.

The author is Professor of Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Minnesota. His book, which is the fruit of many years' research, deserves particular attention because Ottoman Yemen has hitherto been the subject of limited study, and Professor Farah has drawn on a wealth of previously untapped material in Ottoman archives.

The main focus of his work is on Ottoman efforts to maintain sovereignty over Yemen in face of constant challenges from within and without. The book chronicles in considerable detail the whole range of Ottoman concerns, from the incursions of British and then Italian forces in the south and Red Sea, domestic rebellions (more often abetted by the Italians than the British), to the Ottoman navy's desperate attempts to stop the smuggling of weapons into the highlands via the powerful and defiant Zaraniq tribes of Tihamah. All the while the cost of pacifying Yemen in economic and physical terms kept mounting. Eventually it became unsustainable, which led the Ottomans to negotiate a settlement with Imam Yahya in 1911, thus securing his passive support during the First World War.

Professor Farah's book is more for the specialist than the general reader, but his chapter, for example, on 'Smuggling and International Politics in the Red Sea' will certainly interest both.

The book's colour jacket depicts the western facade of the Kathiri Palace in Seiyun, with the tall minaret of the adjacent modern mosque dominating the foreground. One wonders why the designer chose architecture which owes nothing to Ottoman influence (Hadhramaut was never under Ottoman occupation) instead of a scene from the Ottoman north (Zabid or Sana'a). But the picture catches the eye, which perhaps these days is all that matters.

JS

Arabia Felix: An Exploration of the Archaeological History of Yemen by Alessandro de Maigret. Stacey International, London 2002. Pp 384. Maps, Plans, Tables, Charts, B & W illus, Index. Hb. £22.50. ISBN 1-900988-070.

Travellers in the Yemen who have managed to reach Baraqish will know of Professor de Maigret as the archaeologist who, starting in 1992, excavated the Minaean temple just inside the entrance gate of that splendid ruined city. The more initiated will also know of him as the Director of the Italian Archaeological Mission which, from 1983 onwards, made a series of important discoveries concerning the Yemen's prehistory and protohistory and the origins of the Early South Arabian culture – the civilisation of the Sabaeans, Minaeans, Qatabanians, and the rest. Any work by a scholar with such a record of achievement demands our attention.

This book, an English translation by Rebecca Thompson of the Italian edition first published in 1996, describes these investigations clearly and precisely. Skilfully choosing the right places from which to start their search, the Mission found traces of the palaeolithic period both on the Yemen plateau south-west of Marib and in western stretches of the Ramlat Sabatayn, together with neolithic sites on the plateau and on the Red Sea Tihama. In the basin of the Wadi Dhana, which feeds the plains of Marib, the team then located a pre-Sabaean Bronze Age site from the 2nd/3rd millennium BC, a period previously unknown to Yemen archaeology. By 1985 it was focussing its attention on Yala, a very early Sabaean settlement south-west of Marib which had been abandoned in the 6th/7th century BC and had never been re-occupied. Carefully calibrated radio carbon tests from here have produced dates from the lowest levels of between 1395 and 795 BC, a finding which not only conformed with the American dating at Hajar bin Humayd, in Bayhan but also firmly disposed of any remaining arguments for Dr Pirenne's 'short' chronology for the origin of South Arabian writing, which she believed derived from classical Greece. A Sabaean boustrophedon inscription found at Yala

(illustrated on page 182) and attributed to the 7th century BC is written in a remarkably elegant and mature style for its date. De Maigret sees the Early South Arabian culture as stretching back to the 14th century BC or even earlier, but with a gap between then and the recognisably very different culture of the Bronze Age which preceded it; the inference is that the South Arabians may perhaps have originally been nomads from the north who intruded on the Bronze Age inhabitants.

The importance of the findings of de Maigret and his team to those studying the Yemen's early history goes without saying, but the book encompasses a much wider field, as its sub-title reveals. Most of the first hundred pages summarize the story of the archaeological and epigraphical explorations in the country up to the American expedition under Wendell Phillips (who visited Bayhan on his first reconnaissance in 1949, not 1947 as stated). These are described in some detail and sources are quoted meticulously, making this part a valuable point of reference. A major section on 'The Kingdoms of Arabia Felix' then discusses the early historical period and contains useful elucidations of issues which had for long proved perplexing – the difference between kings and *mukarribs,* the arguments about 'long', 'middle' and 'short' chronologies, and the significance of 'dhu-Raydan' in the royal titles, for example. Chapters on 'Religion', 'The City', 'The Temples' (which includes a description of de Maigret's excavations in Baraqish) and 'The Tombs' lead to an interesting review of the figurative arts, although here he is a purist with little time for the local art of the later period, which reflected the fashions of ancient Greece and Rome and which he regards in consequence as decadent. Each chapter is fully supported with footnotes detailing sources, but the book has no bibliography.

It will be apparent that *Arabia Felix* is not a comprehensive guide to the Yemen's archaeological sites such as, in respect of South Yemen, was Brian Doe's *Southern Arabia* when published in 1971. Both books were written in the days before Yemeni unification, and just as Doe could not enter North Yemen (although his *Monuments of South Arabia* (1983) did reproduce some published information about some of the major North Yemeni sites) neither could de Maigret in his time enter the South. 'Crossing [the northern reaches of] Wadi Harib', de Maigret writes, 'I couldn't help thinking that only a few kilometres to the south in the inaccessible (for us) PDRY lay the heart of Qataban, the glorious capital of Timna'. I could empathise with that sense of frustration utterly, having on many occasions in much earlier years, with free access to Timna, stood in the *southern* parts of Wadi Harib and thought how tantalisingly close but equally inaccessible lay the heart of Saba, the glorious but still mysterious capital of Marib!

Accordingly, de Maigret sticks to the places he knows personally, which are all in the former North Yemen. He acknowledges the contemporaneous work of other archaeologists but, although drawing on their discoveries to reach his conclusions,

he does not describe it in any detail. Unfortunately this approach leads to a sense of imbalance in the book as a whole; for instance, in the first section, two pages on what Philby saw at Sbabwa during his short visit there in 1936 whet the appetite, but there is almost nothing at all in the later pages about what the French discovered there during several seasons of excavation starting in 1976. Nor for that matter are there more than brief references, if any, to the American excavations in Wadi Jubah, Russian work in Hadramawt and Qana, German investigations in Marib, or the various British, German and Canadian operations in the western and southern Tihamas. Markha, the homeland of the ancient kingdom of Awsan, is mentioned only obliquely, although the French had examined its considerable archaeological traces long before de Maigret reached the Yemen. Some of these omissions arise from the fact that *Arabia Felix* was first published in 1996. A very short Publisher's Note has been added to cover the missing period, but some of de Maigret's comments on the chronology demonstrate that they were written before much of Robin's work was concluded and before Kitchen's king-lists had seen the light of day. His book nevertheless provides an authoritative and scholarly overview of the South Arabian civilisation as a whole.

The book has been nicely produced and is lavishly illustrated with maps, drawings, plans, tables and photographs, although the referencing of the photographs by plate numbers without stating on what pages they appear is irritating, as one often has to trawl extensively to find a picture mentioned in the text. There are a few editorial failures too, most noticeably the loss of the plan of Qarnaw, which should be on page 77 but has somehow been replaced there by a stratigraphic drawing of Yala already reproduced two pages earlier. But this is still a very readable and informative book, which fills a long-standing gap for both students and travellers, and everyone with any interest in South Arabia's ancient past will certainly want a copy of it on his or her bookshelves.

Oh yes! What about the Queen of Sheba? Professor de Maigret offers an ingenious new solution, but I will not queer his pitch by relating it here.

NIGEL GROOM

Queen of Sheba: Treasures from ancient Yemen edited by St John Simpson, The British Museum Press, 2002. Pp. 224. 260 colour and 50 b/w photographs. Notes. Index. Bibliog. Pb. £24.99. ISBN 0-7141-1151-1.

Some five years ago, members of the British-Yemeni Society enjoyed the privilege of visiting the British Museum's (unexhibited) reserve collection of South Arabian antiquities. Some of these are now, at last, on display in the 'Queen of Sheba' exhibition which opened at the Museum on 9 June 2002.

This beautifully illustrated, finely printed publication from the British Museum Press is more than a just a catalogue of exhibits: it contains twelve essays by leading scholars from Britain, the USA, Canada and Europe on subjects ranging from 'The Queen of Sheba in Western Popular Culture' (Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones); 'Saba and the Sabaeans' (Christian Robin); 'Kings, Kingdoms and Chronology' (Robert Hoyland); 'Trade, Incense and Perfume' (Nigel Groom) to 'Arts, Crafts and Industries' (William Glanzman); 'Architecture' (Francois Breton); and 'Death and Funerary Practices' (Burkhard Vogt).

With its wealth of scholarship, historical background and descriptive detail, this is a work to savour between visits to the exhibition; it will add greatly to the visitor's appreciation of what is on display: for example new archaeological discoveries (bronze objects from Jebel al-Lawdh in Ibb province unearthed in 1996) as well many items in the British Museum and private collections never previously exhibited in this country, including an exceptional bronze head of a male figure presented by Imam Yahya as a coronation gift to King George VI in 1936 (p.128).

Anomalies of one kind or another are almost bound to occur in a work of this scope. But it is hard to understand why Colonel (later Brigadier-General Sir William) Coghlan, British Resident in Aden between 1854 and 1863 and a major donor to the British Museum's collection, should be referred to throughout as 'Brigadier-Colonel', a rank which never existed in the British Army. The Museum's registration note at the top of the bronze plaque from Shabwa illustrated at Fig. 52 on p.154, clearly and correctly identifies Coghlan as 'Colonel'. Meanwhile, some readers may flinch at the mutation of time-honoured 'Qana' (Husn al-Ghurab) – the transliteration still espoused by Professor de Maigret in his *Arabia Felix: An Exploration of the Archaeological History of Yemen* (2002) – into 'Qani". It may also be worth mentioning that the highland village pictured at Fig. 34 on p.103, in Tony Wilkinson's article on 'Agriculture and the Countryside', is not 'near Dhamar' but north-west of Sana'a, between Tawila and Shibam; a photograph of the same village (taken by Mary Morgan) was published in the Journal in July 2000. But these are very minor points, and this finely produced 'catalogue' does more than justice to a major and memorable cultural event.

Studies in the Archaeology of Yemen: Results of American and Canadian Expeditions translated by Dr Yasin Mahmud Al-Khalesi and edited and introduced by Dr Noha Sadek. American Institute for Yemeni Studies (AIYS/Yemen: P.O. Box 2658, Sana'a), Yemen Research Series: translation of Western-language research into Arabic, Vol.4, 2001. Pp. 365. Illus. Plans. Tables. Maps. Notes. Pb. ISBN: 1-882557-08-5.

In recent years several American and Canadian archaeological teams have excavated

in different parts of Yemen – Marib, Hadhramaut, Tihama and the central highlands. Reports on their work which have appeared in various learned journals between 1992–98 have now been translated into Arabic and brought together in this paperback. Contributors include: C. Edens, T. J. Wilkinson, M. Gibson, Joy McCorriston, William Glanzman, E. J. Keall and Ingrid Hehmeyer; articles by the last three were originally published in *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies.*

The purpose of the AIYS translation series is the commendable one of making Western research in and on Yemen more accessible to Arab students and scholars. In this publication most parenthetical references and explanatory notes necessarily remain in the original English, subject to occasional lapses of orthography which are also apparent in the English translation of the Arabic title page.

Al-Musnad: Journal of Antiquities: History & Cultural Heritage of Yemen edited by Dr Yusuf Muhammad Abdullah and Dr Hussain Abdullah Al-Amri, Al-Mustaqbal Press, Beirut (for the General Organisation for Antiquities, Museums and Manuscripts, P.O. Box 1136, Sana'a), 2001. Pp.96. Illus. Pb. $20.

This glossy, A4 sized Arabic publication is the journal's first annual issue. It is introduced by the former Minister of Culture, Abdul Malik Mansur, with an article entitled 'Archaeology is the Heritage of all'. Dr Yusuf Abdullah contributes two articles: 'Letter from a Woman', discussing a letter in pre-Islamic cursive script incised on a palm-leaf stick found in Wadi Jawf; and a more philosophical piece entitled 'The Unity of Archaeology and Civilisation'. Other contributors include Dr Abdo Othman Ghalib ('The Culture of Bronze Age communities in Yemen'), Dr Zaidan Abd al-Kafi Kafafi ('Sites and Implements from the Stone Age in Yemen'), Abdul Rahman Hassan al-Saqqaf ('The Seiyun Museum'), and Professor Walter Muller ('Religion in Ancient Yemen').

There are also (unattributed) articles on the 1998–2003 development plan for the National Museum in Sana'a (copiously illustrated); on the activities of the General Organisation of Antiquities, Museums and Manuscripts (GOAMM) between 1998 and 1999, and its programme for 2000; and the full text of 'The Statute of Archaeology' issued in 1994. In addition, there are two articles in English: the first on excavations in the mediaeval Islamic city of Zabid and on the restoration of the Zabid Citadel Mosque, both sponsored by the Royal Ontario Museum, Canada; and the second, a commentary by Dr Hussain Al-Amri on the more contemporary subject of Yemen's National Charters of 1947–48 and 1982, originally printed in *New Arabian Studies 5*, University of Exeter.

There should be no shortage of material for the next issue of this journal which is in preparation.

JS

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Young tribesman, coast of Hadhramaut, c. 1930.

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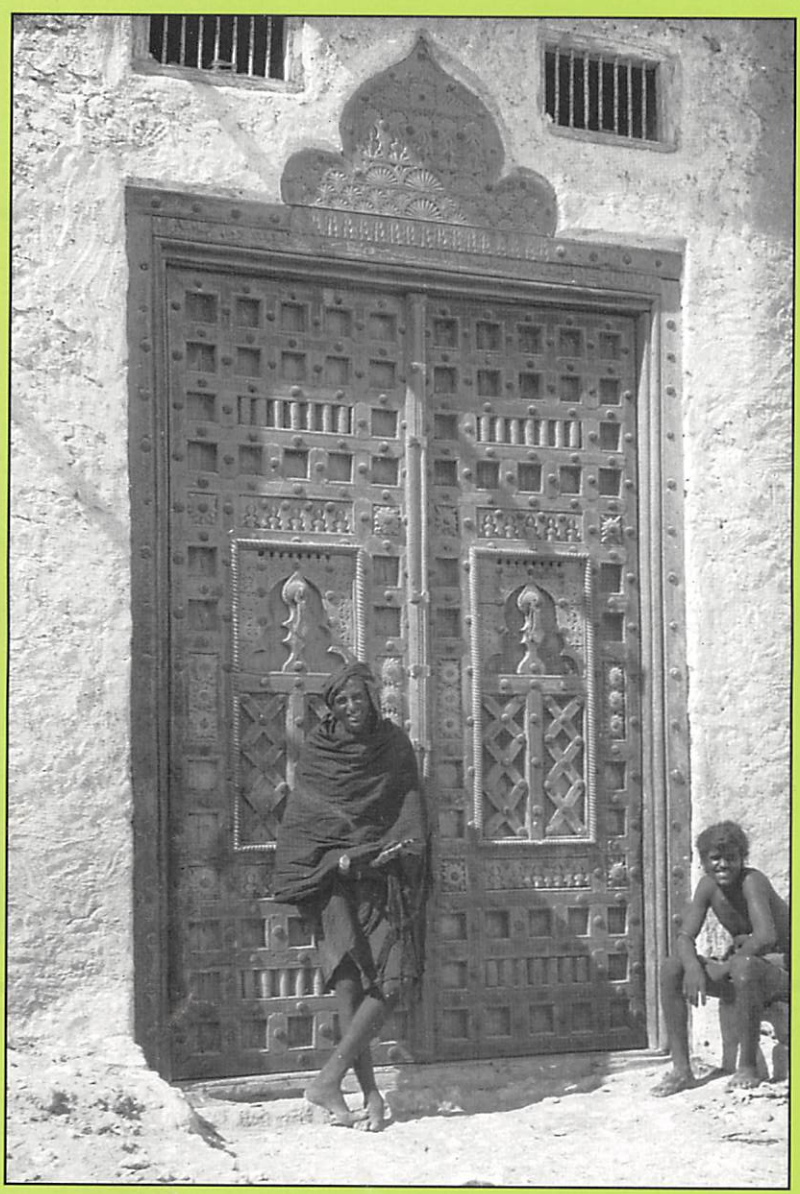

Shihr, c. 1930.

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