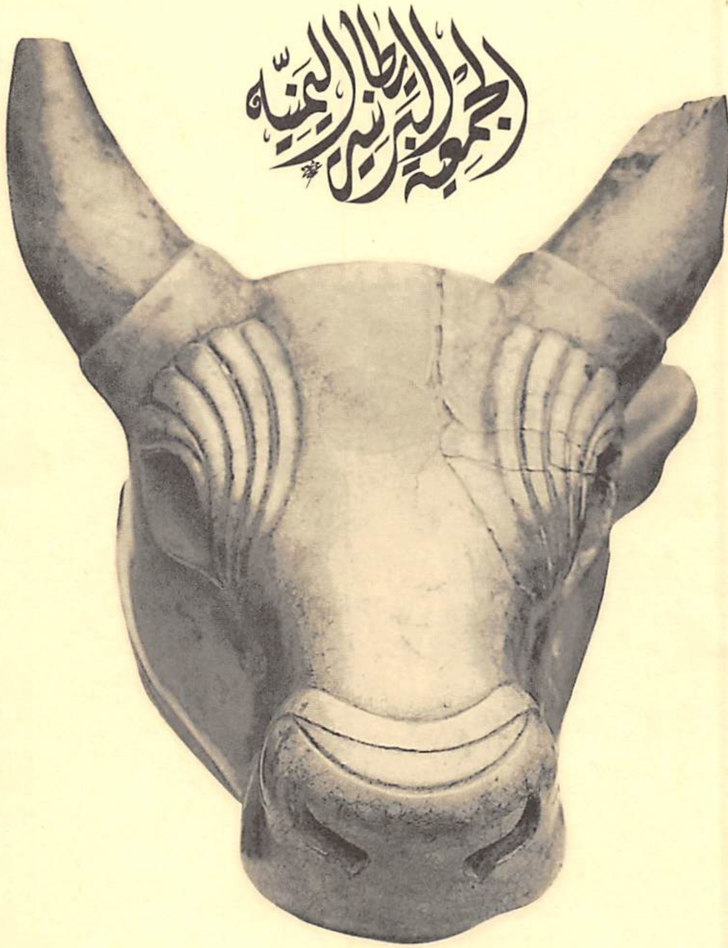

The British-Yemeni Society Journal

2004

THE BRITISH-YEMENI SOCIETY

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2004-2005

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CONTENTS

Officers and Executive Committee 2004–2005		Inside front cover
Chairman's Report	*Douglas Gordon*	3
Yemen Overview	*Brian Whitaker*	6
First Footsteps in Yemen – 1947	*John Hewitt*	10
Mapping the Coast of Mahra – 1957	*Colin Richardson*	18
Better late than never	*Louise Tickle*	27
Soqotra Revisited	*Neil Orr*	31
'By the beaches of Socotra and the pink Arabian Sea'	*Georgina Harding*	37
Book Reviews		40
In Memoriam:		
John Baldry	*Shelagh Weir*	57
Janet Stoltzfus	*Ginna Vogt*	60

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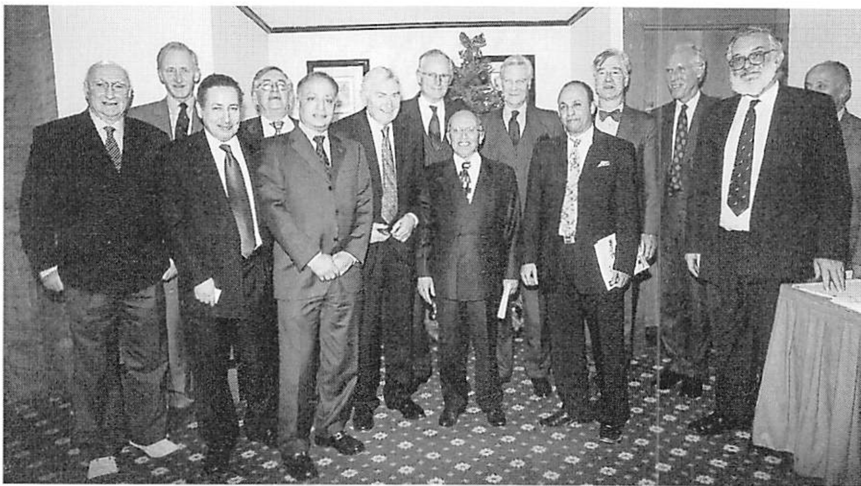


H. E. Dr Abdul Karim Al-Iryani (centre) with members of the Society's committee and the Ambassador of Yemen, Dr Mutahar Alsaeede, on the occasion of the Society's tenth anniversary luncheon, December 2003, at which Dr Al-Iryani was the guest of honour.
Hampar Narguizian

The Al-Ahmady Group of musicians and singers from Mukalla, Yemen, pictured at the William Goodenough College, London, where they performed on 2 July 2004 to raise funds for a Mukalla charity.
Julian Lush

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

(Eleventh Annual General Meeting, Wednesday 9 June 2004)

The highlight of last year's Autumn programme was the Society's Tenth Anniversary Luncheon held at the Royal Garden Hotel on Monday 8 December. This was attended by over a hundred members and their guests. We are most grateful to Dr Abdul Karim Al-Iryani, Adviser to the President and Secretary-General of the ruling General People's Conference Party, for accepting the Society's invitation to attend this event as principal guest and speaker.

I am glad to report that the photographs taken by Freya Stark during her visits to southern Arabia in the 1930s – which were exhibited in Oxford in 2002 and in Exeter at the beginning of 2003 – were delivered to the Seiyun Museum last September for permanent display there. Thanks to the co-operation of 'Friends of Hadhramaut' we were able to airfreight the pictures out to Yemen at a very reasonable rate. The Society also hopes to find a suitable home in Yemen for Nigel Groom's photographs which date from the late 1940s, and many of which were reproduced in his book *Sheba Revisited* (2002).

Looking ahead a little, I am sure that those of you who recall the successful performances given by the Seiyun Popular Arts Group in Britain two summers ago will be glad to know that the Society is once again supporting the International Music Village Festival. This year a group from Mukalla, comprising seven musicians led by Ahmad Al-Ahmady, will be performing in Cardiff and Regent's Park from 23 June until 3 July. On 2 July beginning at 7.30pm they will be giving a special performance at Goodenough College, Mecklenburgh Square, for the Yemeni Community in London and 'Friends of Hadhramaut', and I hope that many of you will find the time to attend that event. Paul Hughes-Smith has been very closely involved in arranging this visit, as he was, of course, in the previous visit by Yemeni musicians; and once again he deserves our warmest thanks for his sterling efforts. I should also like to thank Pat Aithie and Leila Ingrams for the support which they have given in arranging aspects of the Al-Ahmady Group's programme; and both Paul and Leila may wish to say a few words about the programme a little later.

In my report last year I mentioned that Alan D'Arcy was unable to lead the Society's seventh annual tour to Yemen due to ill health. With the feeling generated by the war in Iraq and its unfortunate aftermath, Foreign Office Travel Advice would probably have prevented such a visit taking place in any case. Nevertheless, I am pleased to say that Alan, who recently resigned as Hon. Treasurer of the Society, is feeling fit enough to plan two tours with twelve persons participating in each. The first in November this year, and the second in January next year. I would like to express my sincere thanks to Alan for all he has done and continues to do for the Society. We are delighted that he has agreed to remain on our Committee.

In his place as Hon. Treasurer I warmly welcome John Mason who will present the 2002 and 2003 accounts to this Meeting. Your Committee once again apologises for being unable to present a full set of accounts for 2002 at last year's AGM.

We remain convinced that, with sensible planning, travel to Yemen poses no greater threat than travel to other destinations not subject to similar restrictions but where foreign tourists have been manifestly at risk. As individuals we have always received a most warm and hospitable welcome on our visits to Yemen, despite recurrent political tensions. We are therefore optimistic that the Society's seventh tour to Yemen planned for this autumn will prove as successful as our previous tours. We welcome the recent change of emphasis in Foreign Office Travel Advice, but look forward to a substantive relaxation of current restrictions, in the light of the strenuous efforts which the Yemeni authorities have made to contain and counter the threat of political violence. So far as I know, there have been no serious security incidents during the past eighteen months. Recent revelations of the deplorable behaviour of the coalition forces in Iraq have done nothing to improve relations between the Arab World and this country. It is therefore all the more important that the Society continues to pursue its objectives as a charitable organisation devoted to propagating a positive message to a wider audience about the history and culture of Yemen; it is a message which we hope may help to counter negative publicity and alarmist reporting in the media. In this context we were delighted to see such a large number of people at the Yemen Day reception hosted in the House of Commons on 26 May by Keith Vaz. The principal guest and speaker was Yemen's Foreign Minister, Dr Abubakr Al-Qirbi. The crowd of between two and three hundred present included Baroness Symons, Minister of State at the Foreign Office, MPs and Arab Ambassadors.

Turning to our lecture programme, the first of our autumn lectures was given in October by Aidan Hartley on 'The life and death of Peter Davey', the subject of an article by Aidan Hartley in last year's issue of the Journal. A review of Aidan's acclaimed book *The Zanzibar Chest* will appear in the next issue. In November Mrs Khadija al-Salami, Press Counsellor at the Yemen Embassy in Paris showed a documentary film entitled 'Yemen's Thousand Faces' which she herself had scripted and directed. The film looked at the lives of the few remaining Jews in Yemen, and at another little known community in the remote mountainous north: the 'flower men' of al-Munaibah. The film is a fascinating record of a way of life which is fast disappearing. A review of Mrs al-Salami's autobiography, *The Tears of Sheba*, will also appear in the Journal.

In February this year we were indebted to the Middle East Association for inviting Society members to attend a presentation on the Port of Aden by Captain Roy Facey, and in March we joined the Society for Arabian Studies for a fascinating lecture by Clara Semple on the Maria Theresa Dollar, the subject of her forthcoming book. The programme for the rest of the year will be distributed with the next issue of the Journal in August.

On an historical note, I would like to mention that this year is the fiftieth anniversary of Her Majesty The Queen's visit to Aden in 1954 when she opened 'The Queen Elizabeth Hospital', whose name was changed to the 'Jumhouriya' or Republic Hospital after independence. And 1954 also saw the completion of the Aden Refinery which, like the Jumhouriya Hospital, is still in service.

The British Ambassador in Yemen, Frances Guy, will be leaving Sana'a in July. Her successor is Michael Gifford who is expected to take up his appointment later that month. We extend our best wishes to them both, and we hope that there will be an opportunity later in the year for Frances Guy to give members of the Society her valedictory impressions.

Many of you will have heard the sad news of the death in April of Christine Heber Percy who played an active part in organising the exhibition of paintings by Yemeni artists, which the Society sponsored in 2000; we extend our heartfelt condolences to Bill and his family on their tragic loss.

The famous explorer and travel writer Sir Wilfred Thesiger, who died last August at the age of 93, visited Yemen several times during his journeys in southern Arabia. His Excellency Dr Mutahar Alsaeede represented Yemen at the Memorial Service for Sir Wilfred held at Eton College Chapel last October. This was in the middle of Ramadhan, so the Ambassador's presence at the Service was particularly appreciated.

I am very glad to welcome to our AGM today Professor Roderic Dutton from the University of Durham. He is present in two capacities: as a member of the Society and as Chairman of 'Friends of Soqotra'. Before I invite him to say a few words about the major exhibition on Soqotra which is planned to be held in Edinburgh next year, I would like to thank His Excellency the Ambassador and his staff for welcoming the Society once again to the Embassy this evening and for their generous hospitality.

DOUGLAS GORDON

YEMEN OVERVIEW 2003–4

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 high point of the year for President Ali Abdullah Salih was surely his attendance at the G-8 summit of industrialised countries in June. Despite extraordinary security precautions he was even allowed to wear his jambiyya for a photograph with President Bush.

Yemen's inclusion as a guest at the summit set the seal on a foreign policy which has developed out of sheer necessity and may not be popular on the streets of Sana'a but is nevertheless proving effective. After a rocky period in its relations with the United States – over the 1991 war with Iraq, for example, the bombing of USS Cole in 2000, and military threats from Washington hawks – Yemen is now clearly in the American camp.

In some respects Yemen's position is similar to that of Pakistan. Events have made it a key player in the 'war on terror' and its government has no option but to co-operate with the US, though it can elicit some rewards for doing so.

On a visit to Britain last December, former prime minister Abd al-Karim al-Iryani claimed that 'up to 90%' of al-Qaeda cells in the country have now been rooted out and dismantled. 'I believe that Yemen has been the most successful country in the Middle East fighting terrorism,' he said. There is some evidence to support this view: in contrast to the horrific attacks in neighbouring Saudi Arabia and previous events in Yemen, the country has witnessed remarkably little activity by al-Qaeda supporters during the last 12 months.

In September, however, Amnesty International reported that the 'war on terror' was having a detrimental effect on human rights in Yemen and that almost 200 people were held in detention without trial. It said the authorities acknowledged that some of the security measures they had taken breached Yemeni laws but felt this was unavoidable in their efforts to stave off American pressure.

Partly to address complaints about the detentions, Yemen embarked on a programme to 're-educate' Islamists and then release them. The theological dialogue committee, chaired by Hamoud Abdulhamid al-Hitar, a high court judge, focuses on 'correcting' two widespread beliefs among the militants: that they are entitled to kill non-Muslims in the name of jihad, and that Yemen's political system is contrary to Islam.

The scheme applies only to detainees who have not committed actual acts of terrorism. Those who accept the teaching are asked to sign repentance documents before they can be released. They are also told they will be kept under surveillance and their families must act as guarantors of their future good behaviour.

Judge Hitar, who travelled to Britain to explain the pioneering scheme to the Foreign Office, the police and several Muslim organisations, said the success rate with the first 100 released detainees was about 90%. Whether this is entirely the result of theological dialogue is unclear: as a further incentive, many of the former detainees have been given jobs in the army, since Yemeni officials believe unemployment is a major cause of Islamist militancy.

Extensive co-operation on the terrorism front has also been reported between Yemen and neighbouring Saudi Arabia, with each side arresting and handing over suspects wanted by the other. In February it emerged that the Saudis had begun constructing a barrier along the 1,500-mile frontier to stop weapons and militants being smuggled into the kingdom.

Saudi newspapers said border patrols were intercepting weapons from Yemen almost every day. These included 90,000 rounds of ammunition and 2,000 sticks of dynamite seized since the suicide attacks on housing compounds in Riyadh in May 2003. A Yemeni official later disputed the extent of the problem, saying that most of the illicit weapons in the kingdom have come from Iraq. Yemen does, however, admit to a lucrative trade – believed to be worth $200 million a year – smuggling qat into Saudi Arabia.

Yemen complained that the barrier – 25 miles of which had reportedly been completed – was a breach of the border treaty signed in 2000. The treaty created a 13-mile demilitarised zone on either side of the frontier, within which shepherds from both countries would have cross-border grazing rights. It was these rights that the barrier allegedly infringed. Subsequent negotiations appear to have resulted in agreement on alternative ways to monitor the border.

In March Yemen hosted an international conference on democracy, human rights and the International Criminal Court. Supported by the EU, it was attended by more than 800 delegates from 52 countries and passed off successfully, despite continued warnings from the British government that 'all but the most essential travel' to Yemen should be avoided. In a keynote speech, President Salih hailed democracy as 'the choice of the modern age for all people of the world and the life-raft for political regimes, particularly in the Third World'.

A document issued at the end of the conference, known as the Sana'a Declaration, highlighted the importance of free elections, the rule of law, independent media, rights of women, civil society and a flourishing private sector. Some observers felt that airing such issues was a positive step in its own right, while others doubted that it would change much, pointing out that even in Yemen – which has gone further down the democratic road than many Arab countries – there is still a substantial gap between the theory and the practice.

In May British police arrested Abu Hamza al-Masri, the London-based preacher, following an extradition request from the United States. He is wanted for trial on a number of charges which include conspiring to take hostages in Yemen.

This relates to a tragic affair in 1998 that began when 10 young Muslims with links to Abu Hamza's Supporters of Sharia organisation travelled from Britain to Yemen and made contact with the Islamic Army of Aden-Abyan, regarded as a local affiliate of al-Qaeda, which had a training camp at Huttat in Abyan.

According to the Yemeni authorities, the young men were planning a series of attacks on western interests in Aden – the Anglican church, a restaurant popular with foreigners, and a top-class hotel – but the plan failed when six of them were arrested. The Islamic Army then kidnapped a party of 16 western tourists (12 Britons, two Australians, two Americans, plus four Yemeni drivers) in the hope of exchanging them for the arrested men. The kidnap ended disastrously when four of the hostages and two of the kidnappers died during a rescue attempt by the Yemen army.

About an hour after seizing the hostages, the leader of the Islamic Army used a satellite phone to call Abu Hamza in London and discuss the kidnapping. Abu Hamza admits that he received the call. The American charges say that Abu Hamza also received three calls from the satellite phone on the day before the kidnapping, that he provided the Islamic Army with its phone and that he paid £500 in advance towards the cost of calls.

Britain has previously turned down requests from Sana'a to hand over Abu Hamza for trial in Yemen. The American extradition request will take several months to process through the British courts and in the meantime Abu Hamza is held in a top-security prison.

The long-delayed USS *Cole* trial opened in Sana'a in July and is likely to continue for some time. The guided-missile destroyer was refuelling in Aden harbour in October 2000 when two men sailed an explosives-laden dinghy alongside it and blew themselves up, killing 17 American sailors and blasting a 40-ft hole in the warship.

Six suspects were formally charged with planning the attack, belonging to Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda network, forming an armed group and carrying out various criminal acts. Only five appeared in court. The sixth man, Abd al-Rahim al-Nashiri – also known as Mohammed Omer al-Harazi – is described as the mastermind. He left Yemen a few days before the explosion and disappeared but was captured in the United Arab Emirates two years later and is currently held by the US at an undisclosed location. Nashiri is the cousin of a suicide bomber who blew up the American embassy in Nairobi in 1998, according to the US.

June saw the outbreak of Yemen's bloodiest internal conflict since the war of secession in 1994, with tanks, warplanes and possibly as many as 10,000 troops deployed against a rebel cleric and his supporters in Saada province. By mid-July 135 civilians and 49 members of the security forces had been killed, according to official sources.

The cleric at the centre of the conflict, Hussein al-Houthi (a Zaidi and a former

member of parliament for the Haqq party) was accused of multiple crimes by the government: highway robbery, setting up unauthorised religious schools, raising the Hizbullah flag, damaging a water project, urging citizens to withhold taxes, attacking mosques and declaring himself Imam – a title not used in Yemen since the 1962 republican revolution.

For once, there was no suggestion of a link to al-Qaeda, nor did the roots of the trouble appear to be sectarian strife, since a number of prominent Zaidis had disowned Houthi. The truth, or otherwise, of the allegations against him was difficult to establish, but he was known to be in charge of Believing Youth (Shabab al-Mu'min), an organisation whose teenage members caused disruption at mosques by chanting 'Death to America, Death to Israel' after Friday prayers. The youths had often been often arrested, only to return later and do it again.

Though the government clearly feared that Houthi's anti-American campaign might spread and get out of hand, sections of the Yemeni press criticised what they saw as an excessive use of force by the military. The conflict was still continuing in late July.

FIRST FOOTSTEPS IN YEMEN - 1947

JOHN HEWITT

After military service in India during the Second World War, Major J. S. Hewitt MBE joined the regional headquarters in Cairo of the Middle East Anti-Locust Unit. He paid his first visit to Yemen in 1947, and made a further journey there overland from Jedda in 1950. He was later posted to the Aden Protectorate where his field of operations included the southern fringes of the Empty Quarter. His anti-locust work in the area continued until 1954. He returned to Yemen on private visits, accompanied by his wife, in 1982 and 1996.

After a year in northern Arabia as a locust control officer with the Middle East Anti-Locust Unit (MEALU), based in Cairo, I was delighted to be told that I was to visit Yemen in August 1947 to find out whether the Yemeni authorities would agree to an extension of our locust reporting work to include the eastern provinces of Marib and Jauf. Large swarms of locusts had been known to emerge unexpectedly from Yemen's eastern desert, flying westwards across the Tihama and the Red Sea to Somalia. In 1946, one of MEALU's senior entomologists, Roger Waterston, accompanied by a medical officer, David Milnes, had paid an exploratory visit to the Tihama. During their reconnaissance they had laid down stocks of locust bait in Hodeidah, Zabid and Bait al-Faqih in preparation for future locust control work in Yemen. They had left their two vehicles and other equipment with the Agricultural Department in Aden, which I was to take over when I arrived. The journey by air from Cairo to Aden in those days was a long and circuitous one, involving stops at Asmara, Jedda and Kamaran island.

The two MEALU vehicles parked in Aden were a somewhat aged wartime Chevrolet 15 cwt box wagon, and an even older Dodge 15 cwt truck. Both were in a very poor state of repair and were to give me constant trouble. I struggled for some weeks to get the vehicles fit for the road and to recruit staff to accompany me. Meanwhile, cables were sent to Sana'a seeking clearance from Imam Yahya for my proposed visit, and I also enlisted the help of the Yemeni government agent in Aden, Ali Muhammad Jabali. By the time the requisite 'rukhsa' for my visit arrived, I had assembled a team comprising a Sudanese who had worked with the locust control unit in Saudi Arabia, two local drivers, a garage hand and a cook. I had to take with me large amounts of Maria Theresa dollars which were still the basic currency in Yemen (one dollar was at that time worth about two rupees).

We set off via Shaikh Othman and Lahej, and, after some difficulties in the sandy tracks leading inland, we climbed steadily towards Kirsh and the frontier village of Rahida. We reached Taiz just before sunset, and made our way to the government Guest House (dar al-dhiyafa) above the city, where we were welcomed by its custodian, Ra'is Ghalib Jurmosi who was in charge of arrangements for foreign visitors.

Two days later I had my first meeting with the Crown Prince, Saif al-Islam Ahmad. He was wearing a heavily brocaded robe with a white headdress. He

John Hewitt's Chevrolet and Dodge at the Aden/Yemen frontier, en route to Taiz.

was very welcoming, appeared interested in our work in the Middle East generally, and anxious for me to proceed to the Tihamah as soon as possible to review the situation there. We talked for a time about his own local agricultural project at Usaifirah, a fertile spot about a mile north of the city wall, where a small dam was being built to irrigate some 500 acres of previously barren land. He urged me to go and see it during my stay.

At this time there only two permanent foreign residents in Taiz: Dr Carlo Toffolon, the Crown Prince's doctor; and Josef Hansen, a German from Hamburg who was supervising the dam project. Toffolon, as Hansen explained to me, was known as 'Daniel' because he worked in the 'Lion's Den' (i.e. the Crown Prince's entourage)! But Toffolon was away in Egypt when I arrived and his place had been temporarily taken by another member of the Italian Medical Mission in Yemen, Dr Luigi Merucci. Merucci, who was to become a good friend of mine, was normally resident in Hodeidah. I duly visited Usaifirah, where a work force of about 600 labourers were building the Crown Prince's dam entirely by hand. Hansen's site manager was another German, a splendid character called Karl Schlatholt. Karl had been a merchant navy seaman who had managed to enter Yemen as a refugee early in the War. He later became a Muslim and married a local girl. He was a man of many skills and remained in Yemen for several years before taking up similar work in the Aden Protectorate.

Two days later a party of Arab visitors arrived at the Guest House on their way to Sana'a, led by al-Fudhail al-Wartalani who described himself as 'Secretary-

Muhammad Ali Murshid, Aden's unofficial representative in Hodeida, on the far left; and right of centre in the white jacket is the Besse Company's local agent, Ali Ridha.

General of the North African Defence League'. This was his second visit to Yemen, where he was apparently seeking to negotiate the exclusive right to import sugar and kerosene into the country. I later learned that Wartalani was an Algerian member of the Muslim Brotherhood, who used his business activities as a cover to maintain contact between the 'Free Yemenis' in Aden and fellow dissidents in Sana'a. I was to meet Wartalani's party again in Hodeidah and later in Sana'a.[1]

We finally left Taiz en route to Zabid at the end of August. We had to temporarily abandon the Dodge near Hais when its front wheel brake system failed, and did not reach Zabid until after dark. We were warmly welcomed by the 'Amil, or local government representative, Shaikh Sa'id Abubakr. Next morning, having checked the locust store established the previous year by Roger Waterston, we went on to Bait al-Faqih where I called on the 'Amil there, Sayyid Abdullah bin Zaid al-Dailami. He warned me that the Makdasha sands on the road to Hodeidah were likely to prove difficult. He was right, but in the absence of any sort of tarmac road or graded track there was no alternative route. So we spent most of the day getting stuck and digging ourselves out under a hostile sun.

The Guest House in Hodeidah faced the harbour which consisted of a small pier

enclosing some very shallow water. The two small steamers, 'Africa' and 'Velho', which were the main users of the harbour and were owned by the Aden shipping firm of Cowasjee Dinshaw, had to anchor some two miles out at sea; all loading and unloading (mainly the export of coffee and the import of fuel) were done by small *sanbuqs* from the pier. In Hodeidah I managed to find a German mechanic, a refugee like Karl Schlatholt, to send to Hais to repair and recover the Dodge.

The Governor of Hodeida, Qadhi Hussain bin Ali al-Hilali, was indisposed when we arrived but I later had several useful meetings with him; he seemed well aware of the locust threat. Meanwhile, I was fortunate to find the Imam's Foreign Minister, Qadhi Muhammad Raghib, in town. He had come down from Sana'a to supervise repairs to his wife's house which had been damaged in a recent storm. Of Turkish origin, he was a delightful man, well educated, cultured, with fluent French in addition to Arabic and his native Turkish.

At this time the only Aden government representative in Yemen was an assistant political officer, Muhammad Ali Murshid, whose movements were restricted to Hodeidah, where he had already spent five years. He was a likeable fellow in his early thirties, whose languid temperament was well suited to his undemanding role and Hodeidah's enervating climate. There were few Europeans: Dr Luigi Merucci, who had temporarily replaced his Italian counterpart in Taiz; and three Greeks: Lifteri and Tassi who worked for a coffee trading company, Livierato & Co.; and Dmitri who represented the Aden Tobacco Co.

Another visitor who had arrived in Hodeidah at this time was Jamil Jamal, the father of Ra'is Jamal Jamil, an Iraqi artillery officer who was on indefinite secondment to the army in Sana'a. The son was apparently wanted in Baghdad for his involvement in the Golden Carpet revolution in Iraq in 1940. However, Qadhi Muhammad Raghib, the Yemeni Foreign Minister, was said to be doing his best to obtain a pardon for him. On the evening before my departure for Sana'a, Raghib and al-Hilali both came to the Guest House to ask me whether I could give their Iraqi visitor a lift, which I was very happy to do.

On 11 September we set off hopefully on the long road to Sana'a. But just beyond Bajil the Dodge once again broke down. I had to cable Qadhi Hussain al-Hilali from Bajil to ask for help in getting the vehicle back to Hodeidah. We then pressed on and managed to reach Madinat al-'Abid by nightfall. Next morning we continued to Ma'bar and thence to Sana'a, where Jamil Jamal and his son, Ra'is Jamal Jamil, had an emotional reunion, not having seen each other for the past seven years. Jamal Jamil was later implicated in the attempted coup against the Imam's regime in February 1948. He and other conspirators were sentenced to death and beheaded. I still have a letter from him written in January 1948, a few weeks before these events, warmly thanking me for sending him photographs which I had taken of his father and two children.[2]

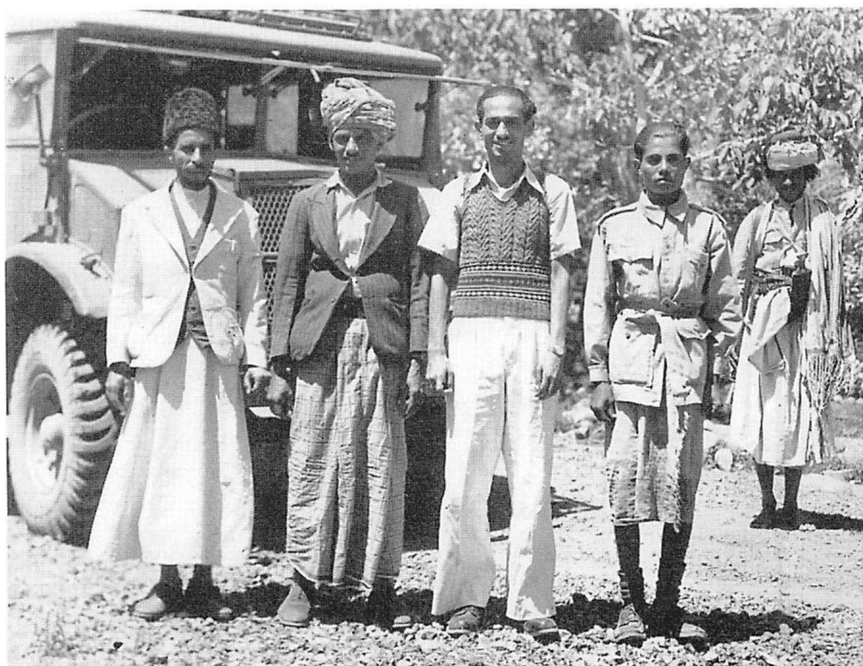
I was conducted to a comfortable and well-equipped guest house in Bir al-Azab

John Hewitt standing in front of the Polish monoplane in Danzzker's mud-walled garden, Bir al-Azab, Sana'a.

which had previously been the residence of Dr Adnan Tarcici, the Lebanese adviser to Saif al-Islam Abdullah and currently with him in America.

Having obtained a black lambskin 'kalpak' which was then the obligatory headgear for visits to His Majesty, I had my first meeting with the Imam at the Raudha Palace on 28 September. He was accompanied by his Prime Minister Qadhi Abdullah al-Amri. Imam Yahya seemed remarkably active for a man of more than 80 years, and kept a series of clerks busy as he answered letters and petitions from all over the country. These ranged from a draft treaty with the Netherlands to a piece of paper from one of the Princes requesting five gallons of petrol! The Imam received me kindly and asked about my journey to Sana'a and my impressions of the capital. I mentioned that we were concerned by reports of locust activity in the eastern provinces and asked him for permission to visit the Marib area. But he refused to countenance the idea, insisting that there were no locusts in the area and that nothing would be gained from a visit. Qadhi Raghib, who came with me for this first meeting, advised me to repeat my request in a letter to the Imam; but this, too, proved unsuccessful although the Imam did promise to send me some bedouin for training in locust control work.

At this time there were about twenty foreigners in the capital. There was a French Medical Mission which included Surgeon-Colonel Ribollet, Dr Pierre Fevrier, who had recently arrived with his family from a tour of duty in Tangier, and a lady doctor named Lansoy. An Italian Medical Mission, which had been in Sana'a for some years, was led by Dr Rossi assisted by Colonel Audisio, and, as already mentioned, was represented in Taiz and Hodeidah by Drs Toffolon and Merucci. The expatriate community included several eccentrics, not least of whom was Marcus Danzzker, the self-styled 'Ingénieur en Chef au Gouvernement Yemenite'. Little was known of his origins as he appeared to change his nationality with each new



John Hewitt's team of four pictured in Hadda, Sana'a.

foreign visitor. A few weeks after we first met, his professional status came under challenge when a party of Egyptian engineers arrived who reckoned that they were all 'Ingénieurs en Chef'. But Danzzker managed to preserve his position – at least to his own satisfaction – by re-styling himself 'Chef des Ingénieurs en Chef'! He lived in the Bir al-Azab quarter and, astonishingly, had in his small, mud-walled garden a high wing monoplane of Polish manufacture. He told me that he couldn't fly but had an instruction book which had come with the plane. He said that he hoped to be able to make use of the plane in the event of a major emergency. But this was pure fantasy: not only was the aircraft walled up inside his garden, there was no open space nearby which could conceivably have been used as a runway! [3]

Other expatriates included a Lebanese Dr Mirouwa with his family, a Lebanese pharmacist, Albert Hatem, two Italian mechanics and a mysterious Frenchman, Alphonse Lippman, who had spent many years in the Red Sea area. Alphonse had been an associate of the celebrated French adventurer (and arms smuggler) Henri de Monfreid, and was now in Sana'a chasing a contract.[4] We all met regularly and were kept going by gossip from either Danzzker or Hatem.

The Dodge which had broken down near Bajil was repaired and eventually arrived in Sana'a. Meanwhile, I had been waiting patiently for the promised

bedouin trainees from Marib when, during my second week in the capital, a party from Ghail in the Jauf turned up: Ali Sa'id Sirman, Sharif Aboud bin Abdullah, Sharif Yahya bin Muhammad Namiz, Shaikh Hassan bin Hadi Musallam and Shaikh Hussain Haidar. They had been sent by the Imam principally to confirm that there were no locusts in their area; but they were very interested in the possibility of locust control work and promised to let me know if any swarms appeared. In due course some bedouin trainees did arrive, sent by the Governor of Marib, Saif al-Islam Hussain, who later visited me in Sana'a.

During this period I had a number of meetings with Qadhi Muhammad Raghib. He had had a remarkable career spent mainly in the Ottoman diplomatic service. Starting as a junior secretary in Vienna, he later served in consular posts in Constanza and Montenegro before transfer to more senior appointments at the Ottoman Legations in Bucharest and St Petersburg; he next served in the Vilayets of Basra and Hejaz (where he was deputy to Hussain Hilmy Pasha) and was later appointed Governor of Tripoli. After the War he entered the service of Imam Yahya as the latter's de facto Foreign Minister, and his wide experience and understanding of the world outside Yemen made him a great asset to the government.

At this time Yemen had begun a weekly radio programme each

27 · 9 · 47.

Mon Cher Honorable Monsieur,

Je viens de recevoir réponse de mon télégramme par Sa Majesté l'Imam qu'Il m'invite de vous communiquer qu'Elle sera enchantée de vous recevoir à demain « dimanche » (Sunday) à 10. heures arabes (4. europ) à Rawda.

Demain après midi à 9½ hrs arabes je viendrai chez-vous pour vous prendre à l'auto de mon beau-fils et nous allons ensemble à Rawda.

Agréez, Mon très Cher Monsieur, mes affections très distinguées.

M. Raghib

P.S.
Je vous demande pardon si je n'avais pas appris jusqu'ici votre nom.

Letter from Qadhi Muhammad Raghib confirming arrangements for the author's first audience with H. M. The Imam Yahya on 28 September 1947.

Thursday on the 20-metre band, which was very popular. At the invitation of Prince Qasim who was then Minister of Health and Communications, I attended one of these broadcasts. The programme's operational scope was hampered by the fact that there was only one microphone which had to be moved from room to room. But it was a welcome development, and the Director, Ahmad al-Marwani, later came to visit me to discuss future plans for the radio station and its broadcasts.

At the beginning of October Dr Pierre Fevrier fell ill, but the necessary drugs to treat him were not available and he died at the end of that month. He was buried at a site on the edge of the old aerodrome where two German pilots and a British nurse from Dr Petrie's medical team were said to have been previously buried.[5]

It was now almost time for me to return to my Cairo headquarters. On 1 November 1947 I had a final glimpse of the Imam during the 'Id celebrations held on the lower slopes of Jebel Nuqum, where, having disembarked from his carriage and taken his seat, he threw sweet limes to the assembled crowd. Three and a half months later Imam Yahya, who had been on the throne since 1904, was to be assassinated in the short-lived uprising led by Sayyid Abdullah al-Wazir.

Rumours of a locust swarm near Zaidiyah in the northern Tihamah hastened my departure to Hodeidah; but the rumours turned out to be false, so I and my team went straight on to Taiz, negotiating the Makdasha sands, this time, without mishap. Dr Toffolon had now returned to Taiz from Egypt, where an epidemic of cholera had broken out, and he kindly gave me an injection to facilitate my passage back to Cairo.

My four months in Yemen had been a fascinating experience; but I little realised at the time that I was witnessing the beginning of a period of major change.

Notes

1 At the end of 1947 Wartalani helped to draft the Yemeni Opposition's 'Sacred National Pact' which stipulated that Sayyid Abdullah Al-Wazir should succeed Imam Yahya as a 'constitutional and consultative' ruler.

2 Jamal Jamil's family remained in Yemen and were well treated. The writer visited Jamal's widow in Sana'a in 1982.

3 See also *A French Doctor in Yemen* by Claudie Fayein, Robert Hale, 1957, pp. 43–44. Oddly, Fayein only refers to Danzzker as 'D', but identifies him by function.

4 A book by Lippmann, *Guerriers et Sorciers en Somalie*, was published by Librairie Hachette in 1953. Born in 1899, he served in the colonial administration of French Somaliland 1921–30.

5 See also Lucile Fevrier's *Yemen: Evenements Vecus*, Editions de la Dyle, 2002. Dr Petrie headed a British medical team in Sana'a 1937–43, on secondment from the Church of Scotland Medical Mission at Shaikh Othman, Aden.

MAPPING THE COAST OF MAHRA IN DECEMBER 1957

COLIN RICHARDSON

Squadron-Leader Richardson served with the RAF in Aden and Oman in the late 1950s. After retiring from the RAF in 1973 he returned to Oman to serve as a ground attack pilot with the Sultan's Air Force. Later, he was stationed for many years on Masirah, and is the author of 'Masirah: Tales from a Desert Island', Pentland Press, 2001 (reprinted 2004 by Midland Counties Publications, 4 Watling Drive, Hinckley, LE10 3EY).

Background

In 1957, Mahra country, although depicted on the map as part of the Eastern Aden Protectorate (EAP), was unadministered; and due to its harsh topography and the fiercely independent spirit of its people it was largely inaccessible to foreign visitors. The main townships were Saihut, Qishn and Ghaidha on the coast. Its economy depended on fishing (and the export of fish oil and dried shark), on the rearing of camels and goats, and on a little subsistence agriculture. The region was inhabited by a patchwork of scattered tribal entities: proud, predatory, and trigger-happy; united only in their hostility to outside interference. Their titular ruler, the Sultan of Qishn and Soqotra, was in treaty relations with the British but resided on the island of Soqotra, some 300 miles south of the Mahra mainland. A branch of his clan, the Bin Afrar, was settled in Qishn, exercising limited influence but no control over the local tribes. Following his accession in 1953, Sultan 'Isa bin Ali bin Afrar, paid a brief visit to the mainland and returned there in 1955. During his second visit Mahra tribal leaders agreed to recognise him as suzerain in return for his undertaking not to bring the British into their territory. Although absolute ruler of his island kingdom, the Sultan lacked the will and resources to assert his position on the mainland. Until 1963, British penetration of Mahra was confined to the Northern Deserts, and was largely dictated by considerations of border security and the need to protect geological survey parties exploring for oil. By 1957, military posts had been established in the north at Sanau and Habarut. These were manned by the Hadhrami Bedouin Legion (HBL), a lightly armed force recruited from the EAP tribes and under British control. Modelled on Jordan's Arab Legion, the HBL was initially trained and led by Jordanian officers. Between 1949–1958, the EAP was in the charge of Colonel (later Sir Hugh) Boustead who won renown as soldier and administrator in Sudan. In his capacity as Resident Adviser and British Agent, Mukalla (capital of the Qu'aiti Sultanate in Hadhramaut), Boustead devoted his paternalist energies to the welfare and development of the EAP states.[1] His political staff included Major I.E. (Jock) Snell who was responsible for Mahra affairs until his appointment as Commandant of the HBL in 1957. Snell's several visits by sea to the Mahra mainland (Saihut, Qishn and Ghaidha) in the early 1950s, his more extended trips to Soqotra, and his tribal contacts in the Northern Deserts gave him an unrivalled knowledge of the Mahra and their leading personalities.

Editor

In 1957 I was a pilot with the RAF's Venom ground attack squadron based in Aden. We spent about a third of our time detached to Sharjah for the Jebel Akhdar Campaign, and another third doing forward air control (FAC) work up-country with the Aden Protectorate Levies.

One day I was told that I was required for a FAC assignment in the Eastern Aden Protectorate (EAP), and that I was to be put ashore there from the survey ship HMS *Owen*. I was to board the ship at Mukalla, together with a Royal Engineers (RE) survey team and a Hadhrami Bedouin Legion (HBL) escort. The landings were all to be done at night for 'astro' position fixes.

Astro-fixes had been carried out along much of the south Arabian coastline but not along the 200 miles immediately south-west of Dhofar: the coast of Mahra as far as the border with Hadhramaut. Detailed vertical photographs had been taken from a photo-reconnaissance aircraft, but identifiable features had to be determined in latitude and longitude. Mukalla, where the British Resident Adviser, Colonel Hugh Boustead, and his staff were based, was situated some 260 miles up the coast north-east of Aden. For the past eight years Boustead had advised that it was too dangerous to carry out landings on the Mahra coast, but he now judged it safe enough provided our survey party had appropriate air cover; he had asked for a Shackleton. I was told that no Shackleton would be available but that cover would be provided by a pair of Venom jets at RAF Salalah, the closest airfield to where the survey party would be put ashore.

I was instructed to fly to RAF Riyan, about 14 miles east of Mukalla, on the weekly Riyan/Salalah/Masirah resupply transport aircraft, and to take FAC equipment with me. Like Salalah, RAF Riyan was a small staging post with natural surface runways.

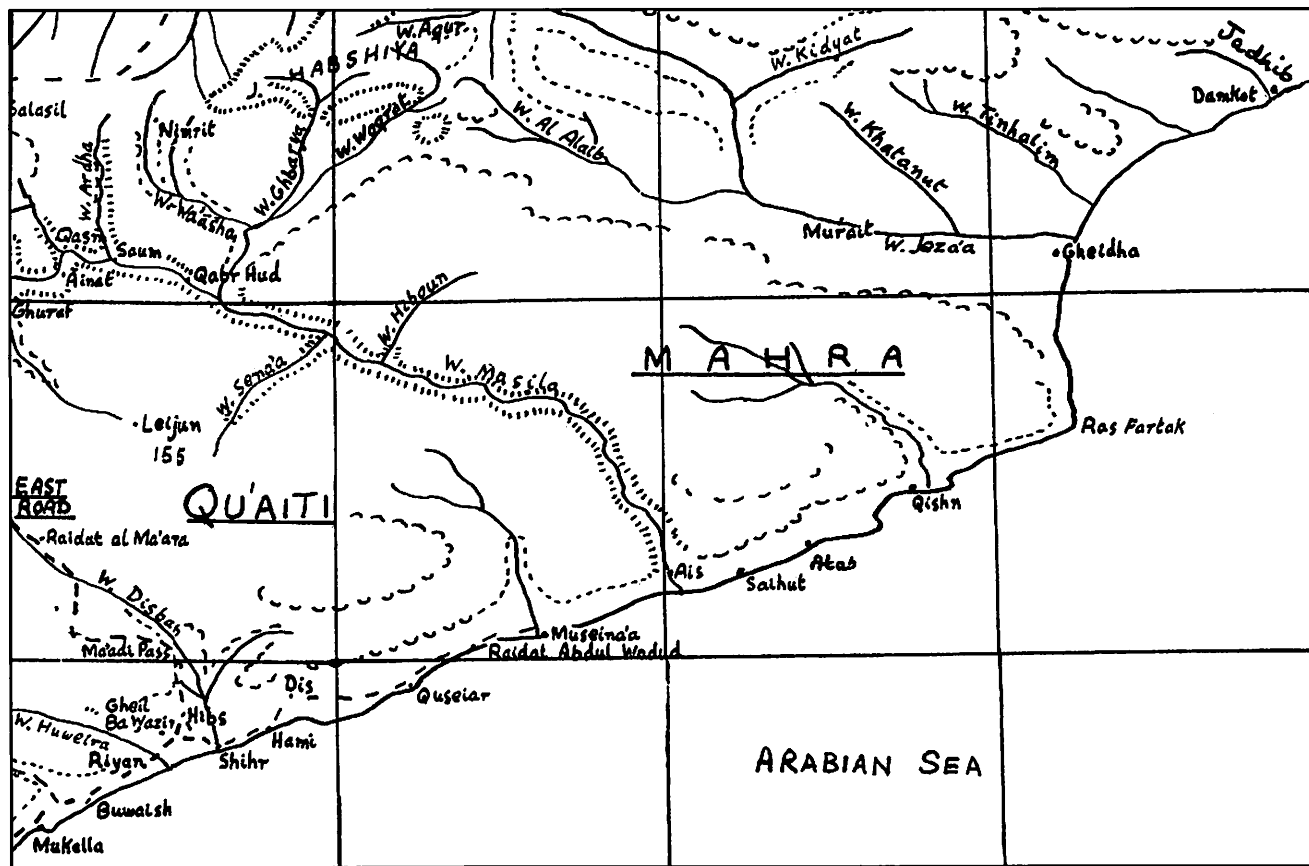
HMS *Owen* had sailed to Soqotra to obtain permission from the Mahra Sultan for the proposed survey landings. While waiting at Riyan for the ship to return, I happened to be in the air traffic control tower when I noticed a trail of dust on the track from Mukalla. A Land Rover was approaching. The vehicle stopped on the far side of the airfield, and through binoculars I saw several retainers jump out and set up two chairs and a table under a sun umbrella. The Land Rover then drove over to the camp with the message that Colonel Boustead would like to see Flying Officer Richardson. So I climbed in and was driven to where Colonel Boustead was sitting. He motioned to me to sit down. 'Richardson', he said, 'Do I get my Shackleton?'

I had to explain that a Shackleton could only do pre-planned bombing from an altitude of 8000 feet above the target, a ponderous operation without any guarantee of an accurate strike. I told the Colonel that, instead, two Venom jets, which had more appropriate fire power than a Shackleton, would be on standby at Salalah. This seemed to satisfy him, and he generously invited me to stay at the Residency in Mukalla until HMS *Owen* arrived from Soqotra.

My FAC kit consisted of ground marker panels, a couple of small Pye VHF sets, and some flares which were extremely bright and emitted plenty of coloured smoke to show the FAC's position. A day or two later HMS *Owen* [2] arrived and we all embarked; the RE survey team comprising four sappers and a sergeant was led by a Captain Mills. The Commandant of the HBL, Jock Snell, who had expert knowledge of the Mahra tribes, and Colonel Boustead's Bedouin Affairs Assistant, Major Abdullah Sulaiman (a Jordanian), had gone with the ship to Soqotra and were already on board. We sailed east towards the Mahra coast on 10 December.

It was decided to do the first astro-fix at Jadhib, a village just west of Hauf, close to the Dhofar border. Colonel Snell and Major Abdullah Sulaiman were rowed ashore on 11 December to contact the local headman and village elders, and ask if we could land that evening. The headman told them that he himself had no objection but that he could not answer for the Bait Bra'afit tribe in the hills behind

Colonel Hugh Boustead sitting with members of his Arab staff in the compound of the British Residency, Mukalla, c.1958. Jock Snell is seated in the middle distance, left of centre. Partially visible behind the compound wall is the sea-front palace of the Qu'aiti Sultan. *Courtesy: John Harding*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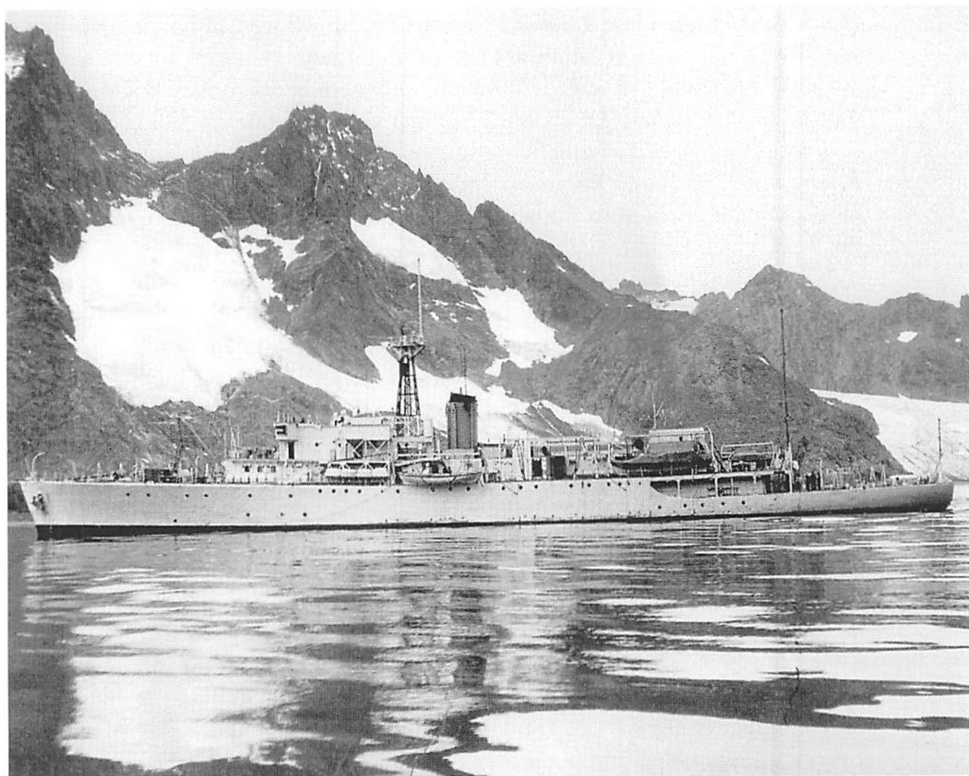
Riyan
Shihr
ARABIAN SEA
Buwaish
Mukella

the village, and that he would first need to consult them. He requested Snell and Abdullah Suleiman to return the following morning for an answer. I was keen to go with them, and this was agreed. We were met on the beach by the headman and taken to his house. Dark passages and a flight of steps brought us to an upper room where some 30 Mahra were sitting on the carpeted floor, with their backs against the walls. In deference to their host, they had left their rifles outside. After removing our shoes we sat down opposite the headman. The first half hour was spent chatting about fishing and the weather over tiny glasses of syrupy tea and a communal bowl of camel's milk. Colonel Snell told me that a few years previously a British frigate had tracked a pirate dhow to Jadhib and had arrested its owner, Shaikh Sa'ad bin Sa'id bin Ali Muqaddam. Sa'ad had been tried in Aden and sentenced to five years imprisonment. His appeal had been rejected and he had been imprisoned in Crater, Aden. This had caused a storm of protest in Mahra, where he was a prominent and respected figure. Both the Sultan and Colonel Boustead had taken up his case with the Aden authorities. Finally, in January 1955, the Governor of Aden had been persuaded to order Sa'ad's release. Sa'ad had returned to Mahra that same month amid much local rejoicing. Snell added that Sa'ad was the village headman's brother and was sitting next to him.

Snell had chosen Jadhib as the survey's starting point because he was on friendly terms with the Bin Ali Muqaddam clan, and had a letter of recommendation from the Mahra Sultan. I knew no Arabic, let alone Mahri which no European then spoke, but it soon became apparent from the chorus of angry voices and the menacing gestures of some of the tribesmen present that the mood of the discussions was becoming increasingly tense. Snell told me to look unconcerned and to keep smiling. I later learnt that much of the anger was directed at Sultan 'Isa for breaking his undertaking to the Mahra at Ghaidha in 1955 not to bring the British into their territory. They resented the fact that the British had recently established an HBL post in Habarut, and suspected that the mapping survey was a pretext for further intrusion into their affairs. Snell failed in his attempts to reassure the sceptics, and the Sultan's letter was brushed aside. Finally, Snell was told that although the villagers did not object to the proposed survey, the Bait Bra'afit tribe, who were already manning the heights above the beach, would strongly oppose it. So we returned to the ship. It was now clear that we would need to select deserted sites for our survey landings, and that these should be carried out in as stealthy a manner as possible.

We now sailed south-west towards Ras Fartak, the prominent cape between Qishn and Ghaidha, where the ship took offshore depth soundings throughout the night. The following day (13 December) it was decided to do a landing on the rocky tip of Ras Fartak, but as we steamed close inshore we saw a village there which had not been noticed on the aerial photograph. So we proceeded north up the cliff-bound coast for seven miles until we spotted a small shingle beach at the



HMS *Owen*, South Georgia, 1961. *Reproduced by permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office and the UK Hydrographic Office (www.ukho.gov.uk).*

mouth of a wadi, which looked deserted. A small reconnaissance party went ashore and judged it to be suitable for the survey. I signalled the Venoms at Salalah to stand by and went ashore at dusk with the RE and naval survey teams and our HBL escort. The next morning (14 December) we left shortly after dawn without incident, although very soon afterwards a dhow sailed into the cove. Back at the ship I sent a signal to the Venoms telling them to stand down. Meanwhile, the ship continued to take depth soundings. In the evening the RE and naval survey teams returned to the cove for the second night's astro-fix. Unfortunately a dhow observed our landings, so we decided to pull out before dawn, immediately after the survey was completed. We left at 0300 hours helped by the light of a half moon. I again signalled the Venoms to stand down. This was the first signal that they had received from me. They thought it meant that the survey had ended, and, unbeknown to me, flew back to Aden. Thus, for the remainder of the survey, in the

event of our being pinned down by hostile tribesmen, we had no air cover, but I was blissfully unaware of this until I returned to Aden.

On 15 December we sailed 70 miles west where between Saihut and Atab we spotted another isolated beach. Snell had first visited this area in 1953.[3] We landed at dusk, this time without the naval survey team. As usual the HEL piqueted the nearby hills. The Royal Engineers completed their astro-fix by 2200 hours. The moon had not yet risen, so the surf boats were loaded by the strong orange light of the flares which I had brought with me.

We returned to the beach the following day (16 December), but that afternoon a party of tribesmen from Saihut arrived led by Sultan Sa'id bin Sa'ad bin Afrar who ordered us to leave. So we sailed on further west, stopping near the village of Musaina'a on the border between Mahra and the Qu'aiti state. Musaina'a was not on the original list of points to be surveyed but there was an HBL fort there and it was a safe haven. The survey team was landed shortly before midnight. We remained anchored off Musaina'a during 17 December. The ship's doctor was taken ashore to treat, amongst other ailments, four cases of gunshot wounds which had occurred during a *feu de joie* at a wedding. At dusk we sailed east again and the following afternoon (18 December) we spotted a suitable beach to the immediate west of Damqut. As Damqut was not many miles distant from Jadhib, where we had been refused permission to land nearly a week earlier, it was sensible to assume that its inhabitants had heard about our visit and would be on the alert. So to disguise our intentions the ship turned and headed out to sea. At dusk the ship, having been completely blacked out, crept back towards the beach which we had selected. Everybody assembled on the offshore side of the ship with no light showing; not even the glow of cigarettes. There was no moon. Two surf boats were lowered into the sea, and despite the heavy swell and the need to operate in complete darkness, the crews managed to take safe delivery of the delicate equipment handed down to them. At last the two surf boats, heavily laden, rowed towards the coast, their oars creating pools of phosphorescence as they dipped in the water. It was nearly half an hour before we reached the line of breakers offshore. We now had to grapple with the worst surf that we had yet encountered. My boat nearly turned over; men and equipment were drenched. Once beached, the crews only just managed to hold the boats down and prevent them from being carried away by the pounding waves while we were unloading them.

Miraculously all the equipment worked, and the survey was finished by 0200 hours. The ship was informed by radio and the surf boats soon returned to collect us. This proved a difficult operation and a painful one for crew members who cut their feet and legs on the underwater coral. Everyone suffered total immersion as they floundered out to the boats with armfuls of expensive equipment. By the time we had got beyond the breakers, the boats were so full of water that only their buoyancy chambers kept us afloat. The steering oar of my boat had been broken

on the rocks, and our course back to the ship was correspondingly erratic.

On 19 December the ship completed its depth soundings off Ras Fartak. That evening we once again blacked out before approaching the beach near Saihut where on 16 December we had been warned off by Sultan Sa'id bin Sa'ad. The swell was almost as heavy as it had been at Damqut the previous night. The survey team reached the shore completely soaked, and it was some time before the radio and timing apparatus could be made to work. We were all frozen to the marrow when the surf boats came to pick us up at 0200 hours. We suffered another drenching on the way back to the ship and were glad to change into dry clothes and get warm.

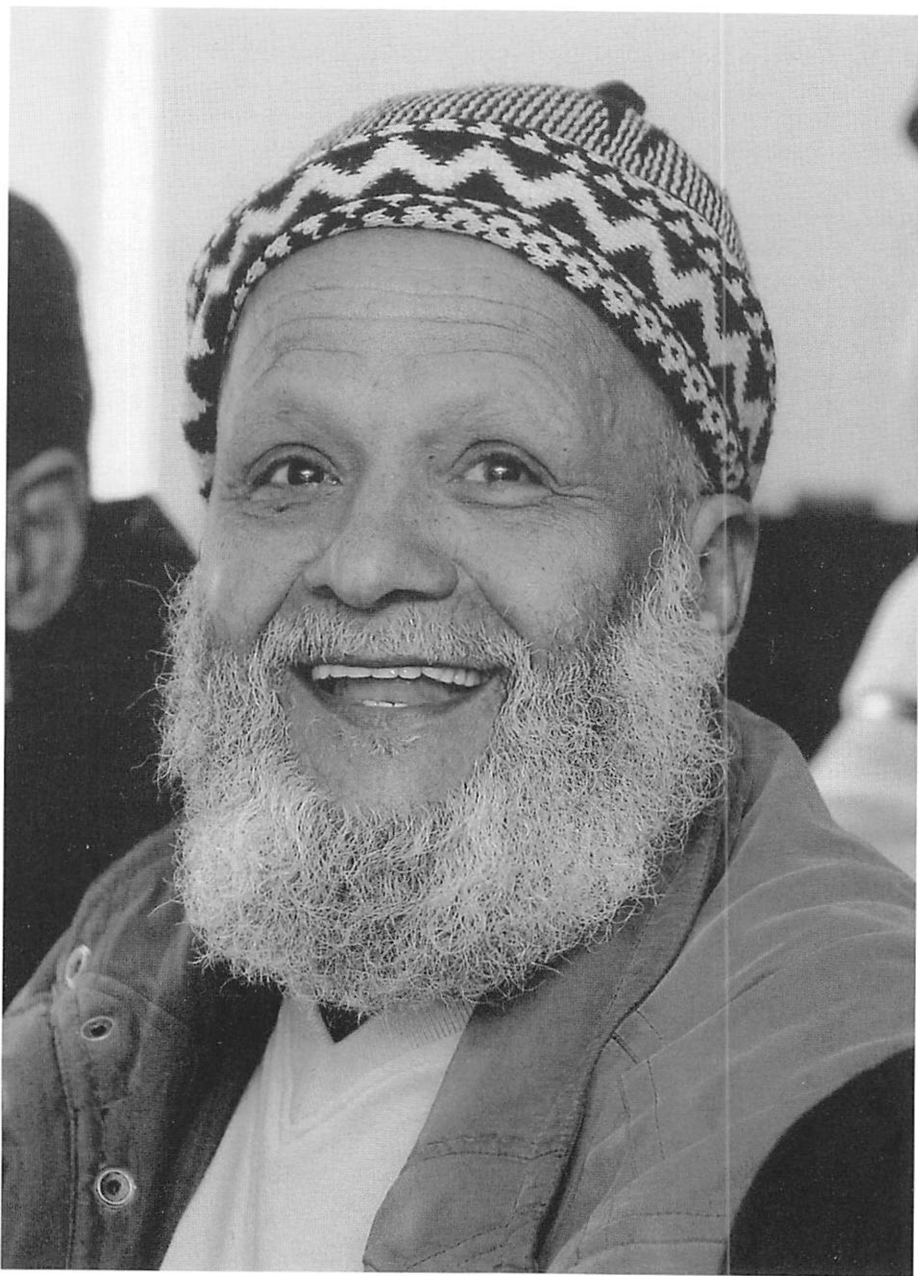
On 20 December a Shackleton arrived to drop the ship's mail, and we then headed back to Musaina'a to carry out a second night's astro-fix near the HBL fort there. This completed the survey, and the morning of 21 December found us anchored off Mukalla, our voyage over. For a young airman of twenty-three, it was an exhilarating experience, which I have enjoyed re-living in writing this account from the notes I recorded so long ago.

Notes

1 For an account of Sir Hugh Boustead's remarkable life, see his autobiography, *The Wind of Morning*, Chatto & Windus, 1971, reprinted in paperback by Craven Street Books, 2002.

2 HMS *Owen* was commanded by Captain (later Rear Admiral) Geoffrey Hall. He gives an account of the vessel's visit to Soqotra and survey of the Mahra coast in pp.137–140 of his book, *Sailor's Luck: At Sea & Ashore in Peace & War*, The Memoir Club, Durham, 1999.

3 Harold and Doreen Ingrams made a pioneering journey from Hadhramaut to Saihut via Wadi Masila in 1934. In late 1946 Major T. (Tony) Altounyan, a British officer of Syrian/Armenian origin, made another pioneering trip through Mahra country, travelling by camel along the coast from Raidat Abdul Wadud to Saihut; by sea from Saihut to Qishn; thence by camel to Ghaidha, and inland via Mur'ait to Tarim. He travelled unarmed, with local guides and letters of introduction from Sultan Ahmad bin Abdullah bin Afrar of Qishn to the tribes through whose territory he planned to travel. This reconnaissance was commissioned by Petroleum Concessions Ltd (PCL), a subsidiary of the Iraq Petroleum Company. Altounyan returned to Mahra with a small PCL geological survey party in 1947.



Qassim Muthenna Obadi, 81: 'We want to know everything!' *Trevor Smith*

BETTER LATE THAN NEVER

Louise Tickle

The following article – about a group of retired Yemeni steelworkers in Sheffield enjoying the opportunity to learn English in their old age – was published in 'Guardian Education' on 20 April 2004. It is reproduced in this Journal by kind permission of 'Guardian News Services'.

In a narrow room at the top of a large terraced house, 20 students are squeezing amiably past one another to their seats, chattering noisily, jostling the teacher, handing in homework and settling down ready for an English class. So far, it might seem, so ordinary.

These students, however, are an extraordinary group of individuals. They hold memories of a unique moment in industrial history back in the 1950s that brought them as young men thousands of miles from rural villages in Yemen to look for jobs in the Sheffield steelworks.

For three decades they laboured in the dirtiest jobs the steel industry had to offer. Now, in their retirement, each individual in this class has decided to become a student of a language they were never able to learn because, in most cases, no tuition was offered by their employer nor by the state.

With an average age of 75, this must be one of the oldest classes in the country. Mastering English is clearly not an easy task for any of these men. Saleh Ali Ahmed – at 81, the oldest student here today in the headquarters of Sheffield's Yemeni Community Association – smiles and shakes his head when asked how it's going. 'It's not so bad. I've been coming here four months now, but it's difficult when you're older.'

But the intense yearning to understand other people in their adopted city is almost tangible, and it is a feeling that has kept these students coming to class four days a week, every week since last September. Mohammed Alwy Omairat, 79, was 31 when he arrived in the UK in 1956. For many years, he worked in the local steelworks as the 'spare man' – a highly valued employee who was skilled at every job and could fill in for absent or sick colleagues in all areas of the factory. Dapper and dignified in a bright blue shirt, he has just gained a distinction in English for speakers of other languages.

'When I went at first to the employment office in Attercliffe [location of the steelworks] I asked the manager if we could go to English classes. 'We must learn English', I tried to say to him. He looked at me and said: 'Listen to me! You are not here to learn, you' re in England to work, only work!' And that is what it was like. They did not give us any classes in English: we had to learn words in the foundries and rolling mills and try to understand what the gaffers said to us.'

Working in a dangerous industry without the ability to speak or understand English was particularly hazardous. Many of today's students point out that terrible

accidents occurred because they could not read safety instructions or warning notices, or even follow English instructions, when they arrived at the factories.

Chris Searle, the group's teacher for the past six months, was astonished when he first heard the speech rhythms that had been picked up on the factory floor. 'One of the things that interested me as a teacher of English for many years was that theirs is a unique type of English, learnt almost entirely in a busy and dangerous industrial setting,' he says.

'They use the imperative mode all the time, and that's because they're used to having orders given to them. I had to get used to that – it's startling, because they talk in commands'. Of course, they only spoke English in the factory, and when they left, after long shifts of up to 16 hours sometimes, they would go to Yemeni cafés and to their houses where they would have spoken only Arabic.'

Ensuring that these students can learn to become more self-reliant in the language of their adopted country is clearly a passion for this teacher, who takes pains to acknowledge the contribution his students made as young men to the industrial wealth of the north of England.

'Being able to communicate is something that's been denied them and I can see what an injustice that's been in their lives', he says. 'They've given so much to England. Basically, Yemenis kept the steel industry going for the last 30 years of its life.'

In a class of such differing abilities, though, teaching the language can clearly be a challenge. 'This is just about the most differentiated group in terms of ability I've ever taught,' adds Searle with a grin, 'and I've had to use a lot of different methods. Some people have no experience of being literate in any language, so you're starting from the beginning to teach them literacy in English. With some, you just try to get them to shape the letters. But others, who are dedicated students, can be quite advanced. You have to give people tasks according to their ability, and, at the same time, you have to use the strength of their community experience to invigorate classes.'

Motivation comes from the chance to communicate the students' life histories and working experiences; all are committed Muslims and are keenly interested in the situation in the Middle East, which often furnishes discussion. Local issues, too, will frequently provoke debate, and by making the lessons relevant to each member of his class, Searle has created a learning environment which his students find satisfying both socially and educationally.

The question remains: why exactly should 20 retired, elderly men be taking the trouble to learn English when they have lived, worked and supported their families successfully for 50 years without being fluent in the language?

Mohammed Alwy Omairat answers this question with absolute clarity. 'I want to learn. I want to know how to speak. I want to know English grammar. There is shame not to speak English with good grammar when somebody has been in this

country for 40 years. Some people ask me why I bother, but I just close my ears. I come to this class because I want to learn to communicate.'

He is backed up by Qassim Muthenna Obadi, 81. 'We want to know everything. When I see my doctor, when I sign my insurance, I want to know how to speak. When I was in the factory, I go from house to work, from work to house, and there is no time to learn. Because of coming here, because of Chris our teacher, sometimes life is easier.'

These are not men who are used to an easy life, and perhaps it is characteristic of their tenacity that in taking this opportunity, they are not choosing the easy option now.

'They're an example to anybody who wants to learn', says Searle. 'That a group of 20 men with an average age of 75 can study and improve their English, and do so with keenness and good humour, is an example to all students in this country. In that sense, they make a nonsense of old age, because their spirit is full of youth and fire.'

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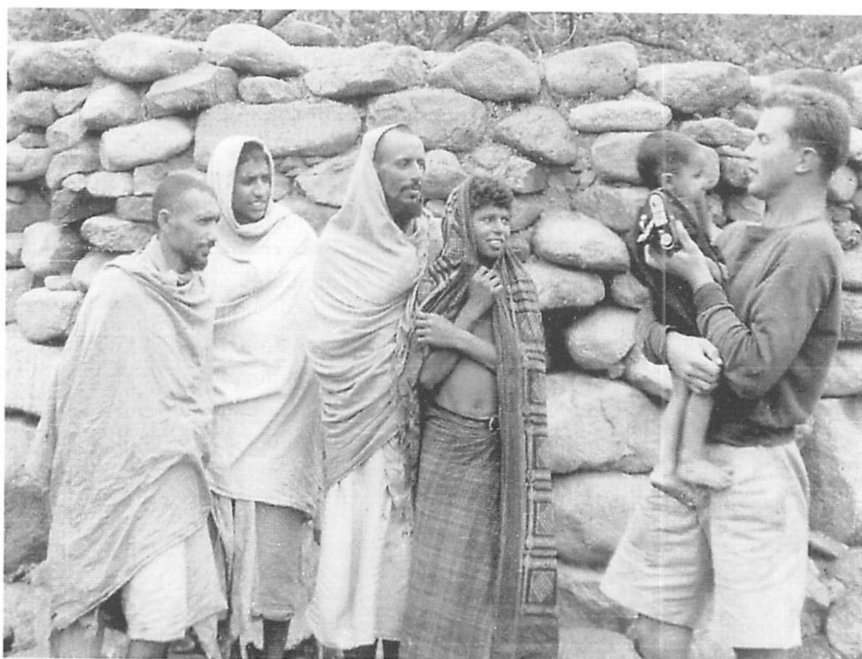
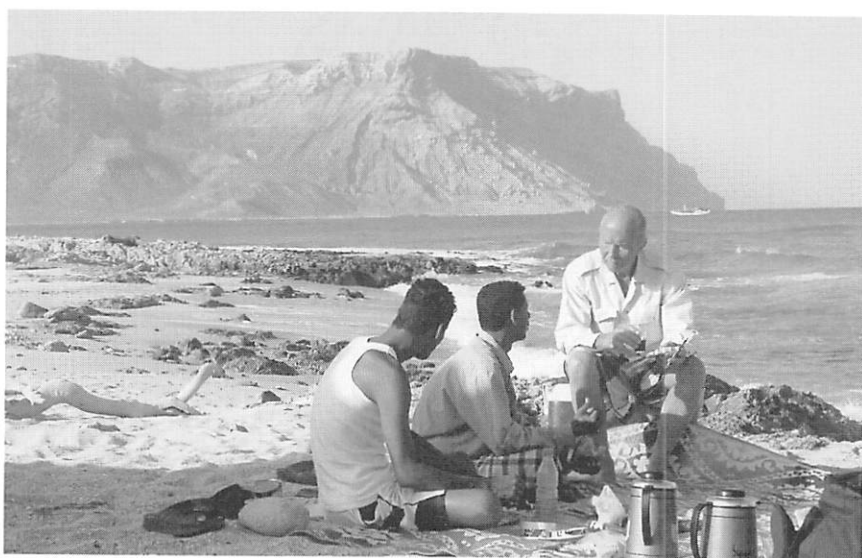


Dr Neil Orr with a young patient in the Haggier mountains, 1956. *Douglas Botting*



Neil Orr at Qalansiyah in conversation with Ahmad bin 'Isa, January 2004. *John Vaughan*

SOQOTRA REVISITED

NEIL ORR

The author was one of two doctors who accompanied the Oxford University Expedition to Soqotra in 1956. He made his first return visit to the island in January this year.

Having first visited Soqotra with the Oxford University Expedition in 1956, I was anxious that the magic of this unique island might have been tarnished. Within a day of arriving, I could see that although there was cause for concern, the magic still prevailed.

A dawn flight from Sana'a brought us to Soqotra by mid-morning. We were a party of four, travelling under the auspices of the British-Yemeni Society and accompanied during our first week by Ali al-Egry of Universal Touring Company. A slick, modern airport now stood in the desert plain where 47 years ago an RAF Valetta had landed the Oxford Expedition. A tarmac road took us over the spur where in 1956 we had toiled with 30 camels. Old Hadibo had been allowed to decay, and was being replaced by a sprawl of unmade roads and unfinished suburbs to house its 8000 inhabitants. But the Haggier mountains still rose majestic and mysterious into their clouds, and the rollers still thundered out of a turquoise sea.

The Summerland Hotel had the lino up and the painters in, but the rooms were spacious, if sparsely furnished; and there was cold running water and a very warm welcome. The hotel supplied the only restaurant on the island, and very good it was too.

We had scarcely drawn breath before we were whisked away, along a tarmac dual carriage way, towards the east of the island. Just beyond Suq the tarmac stopped. It had been hoped to develop the tiny fishing port at Hulaf into a harbour for cruise liners! But when experts came to assess the meteorology, 18 hurricane force gusts were recorded in 24 hours, and the project was diverted westwards to Mouri. This was another testimony to misdirected 'aid'.

Beyond the beach at Deleisha was the purest white sand, and great leisurely rollers tumbled in from the Indian Ocean. White dunes were sucked hundreds of feet up into the limestone cliffs. The shells were spectacular, and the swimming superb.

In the afternoon, we were driven to the western Haggier, up into Wadi Ayhaft, rich in the island's unique flora. The unmade road climbed steeply between rock cliffs. There were crotons, japropha, adeniums, dragon's blood, frankincense, and cucumber trees, and so many of the wonders which only Soqotra has to offer. Huge rock pools high in the wadi offered delightful swimming, and an hour and a half's walk downhill helped one appreciate the majesty and diversity of this remnant of paradise. Soqotra still worked her magic.

Our local entourage comprised Ahmad bin 'Isa, the youngest son of the last Sultan and head of botanical conservation on the island; Salim and Ahmad, our two drivers; and Muhammad our cook. They were congenial travelling companions and became very good friends.

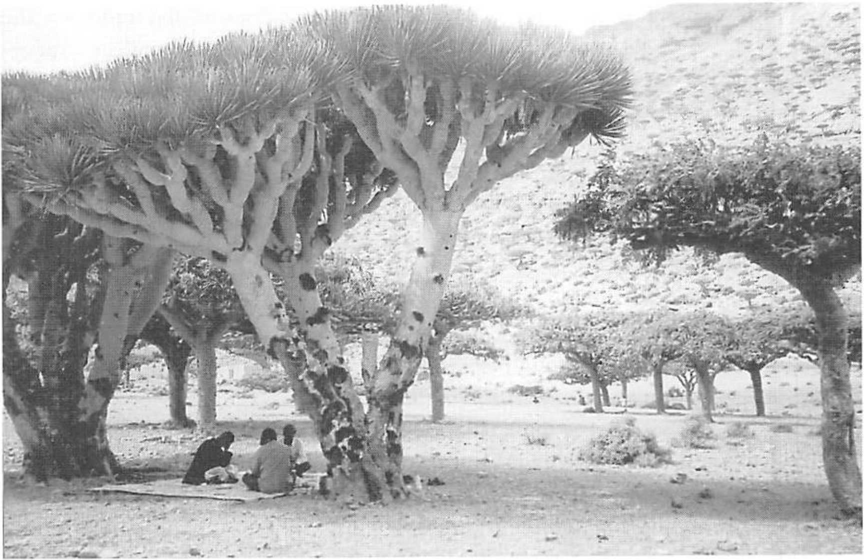
For the next four days we explored the limestone plateaux surrounding the Haggier mountains, and the extensive Noged plain to the south. We climbed first to Diksam and Shebehan, west of Hadibo, negotiating hair-raising tracks and deep canyons; we camped in one such canyon (De'Hur) near shady date palms and pink flowering adeniums which clung to the rock walls like so many birthday candles. We bathed in pools deep enough to dive into, and walked for a couple of hours on the plateau, among dragon's blood trees, adeniums and aloes. We had lunched off fish brought from the Hadibo market and cooked to perfection in the embers of Muhammad's fire. Towards evening we watched nimble bedu boys chasing our supper (a goat) up and down the precipitous slopes.

We climbed back onto the plateau the following day, memorable for the brilliance of tiny flowers among the rocks and the occasional bedu carrying wild honey. Our vehicles then negotiated a precipitous hairpin descent, where even full brakes barely slowed our headlong progress, to the Noged plain. We lunched in the shade of the immense Danud cave which commanded vistas of sand that seemed unending.

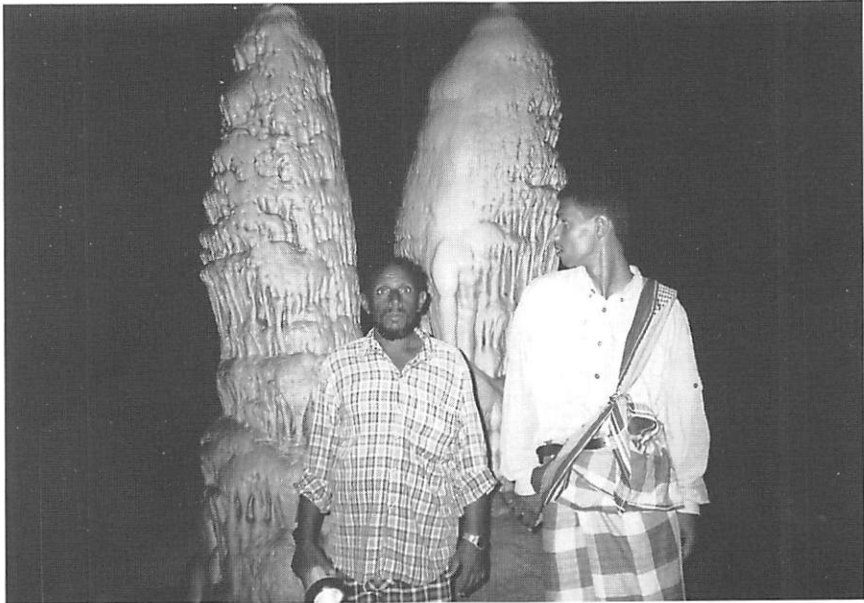
Later we camped at Amek on a beach of soft, white sand, lulled to sleep by the sound of surf. The nearby village made and sold the colourful woven rugs which are characteristic of the island. These seemed remarkably cheap, in contrast to the price of wild honey. The local pawpaws were delicious.

The third day took us onto the Momi plateau at the eastern end of the island. Here we visited the frankincense forest in the Homhil valley at the foot of Jebel Hamidero. A large pool in the limestone would have offered the most spectacular bathing if it had been full, because it overflows to the plain many hundreds of feet below. We descended to another campsite on soft, white sand, this one with the bonus of a freshwater spring which ran to the sea between grassy banks. Here we saw once again spectacular dunes piled for hundreds of feet into and against the limestone cliffs.

We climbed steeply on foot the following day for two hours through dense and varied undergrowth, through thickets of myrrh and capers, with their exquisite pure white, myrtle-like flowers. Here we were grateful for the services of a local guide to take us to the Hoq cave, another of Soqotra's little known secrets. From an unspectacular entrance the cave stretches for four kilometres into the rock. Head torches did little to dispel the gloom. Huge stalactites and stalagmites led us from what seemed like one cathedral space to another. A Belgian team had left a well marked trail, but it was not until we had returned to Hadibo that we learned that some of their archaeological finds dated back two or more millennia.



Dragon's Blood and frankincense trees in the valley of Homhil. *Neil Orr*



Stalagtites in the Hoq cave. *Neil Orr*

We headed north to the Dehemri beach, passing a flock of flamingos on the Qariyah lagoon. Dehemri is a maritime conservation site and its coral and underwater life attract divers world wide.

As darkness fell, a full monsoon storm developed. Rain battered our tents, and our drivers and guides ran for cover in the local fishing village. By morning, with the sun once again shining, there was considerable anxiety about four fishing boats still unaccounted for. However, over the next couple of hours they came in, looking too frail to have survived such turbulent conditions. Snorkling was out of the question, so we returned to Hadibo and made a further trip to Wadi Ayhaft in the afternoon.

Later, we dined in civilised comfort with Len and Wendy Pierce who have been teaching in Hadibo for a number of years and were a mine of information. They showed us a video of the film which Douglas Botting had made during the Oxford expedition in 1956. This is apparently a source of great interest on the island, although today it would strike a Western audience as being very dated.

The next two days took us west to Qalansiyah, a picturesque town nestling among palms by the sea. We were taken for a trip in the bay, the experience of the previous night's storm keeping us fairly close inshore. Again we camped by the sound of breakers, and found ourselves hosting a number of friendly locals.

On the other side of the headland, the tarmac road comes to an inconclusive halt where ecological integrity and economic development have reached deadlock. Kadarma has been abandoned for lack of water, but 14 kilometres of pristine white beach remain, and the shells are again spectacular.

On our return to Hadibo I was privileged to dine with Ahmad bin 'Isa. He lives with his wife, children and mother, the Sultan's last wife, in one of the old houses near the decaying palace and nearby mosque. Ahmad's house, although old, retained a fresh and tasteful simplicity. I was introduced to a number of his friends and relatives, all of whom wanted to hear about life on the island during my first visit and to see old photographs.

We spent the next four days in the mountains with three camels, two camel drivers and Muhammad, the cook. During the Marxist regime, an attempt had been made to bulldoze a road up to Adho Dimellus, but the monsoon rains had soon washed it out and the track was, if anything, even worse than it had been in 1956. We were in Kishin by lunchtime. Being back at the campsite which had been my home 47 years ago was a truly magical moment: the same terraces with their breathtaking view; the same shady trees; the same bathing pool inhabited by descendants of the same orange and purple crabs! We camped, in fact, at Adho on a cool meadow, as the little cows came in for milking and the local bedu youth gathered to gossip. No longer barefoot and in dun-coloured togas, they now sport plastic flip-flops, coloured futahs and designer football shirts. Some speak English.

We all misjudged the temperature that night, and woke cold and wet.

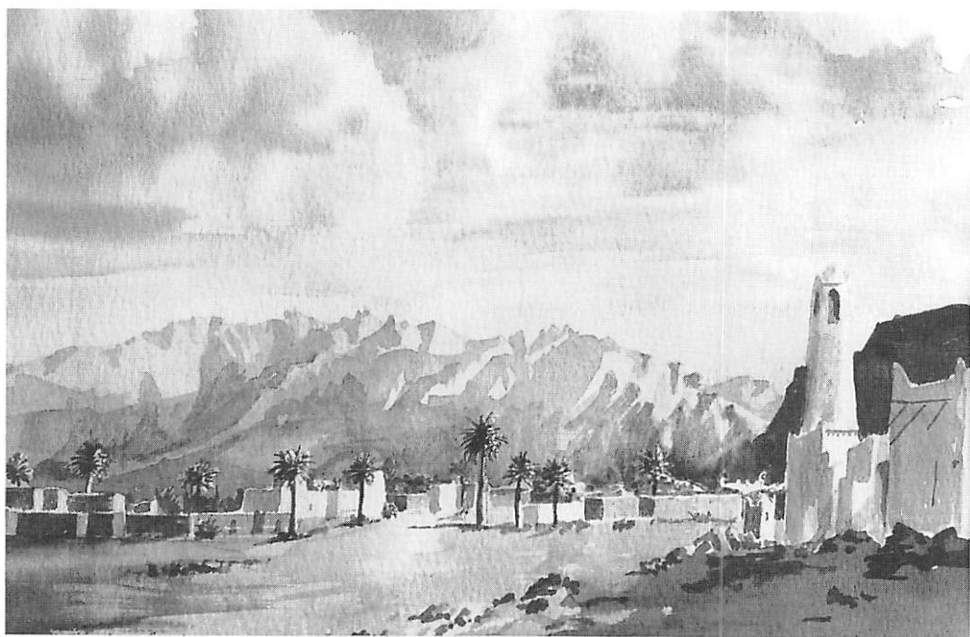
Haggier meadows. *Neil Orr*

Our camel driver, Sa'ad, lived just over the hill and acted as our guide as we roamed through meadows and headed up into the mountains. He could not understand why we should even consider trying to climb the second highest peak, Shehaili. The density of the undergrowth meant that we had to content ourselves with a lesser peak but the views and the flowers made the climb infinitely worthwhile. Sa'ad led us to mountain caves which I had visited nearly half a century ago to treat sick troglodytes, many of whom I had persuaded to give me blood samples for grouping analysis. Not many caves were now inhabited, but we were asked into little stone dwellings to drink tea, goat's curds or milk fresh from the cow. The tracks through the dense undergrowth still smelt of myrtle, mint and thyme: the ferns were shyly cool and the orange groves a tempting diversion from a stiff climb to explore the best of the caves, with their shady fig trees and precipitous terraces.

I did not revisit the caves from which I had taken ancient bones and where, during the night, spirits of the dead had pelted me with stones. None of the film I took of that particular trip came out, and the relevant pages of my diary have faded almost beyond reading. I recently visited the bones in their neatly labelled cardboard boxes in the Natural History Museum, and wondered whether they should be repatriated. The ghosts are no doubt still restless.

The third night we moved our camp down to Kishin. Our tents were pitched on the same terrace where I had camped in 1956, and we bathed in the same pool. After dark we sat round a fragrant blaze to consume a delicious stew of young kid.

We spent another day driving westward across the flat, featureless Meyhah and



Watercolour of old Hadibo and the Haggier mountains by Neil Orr.

the Wadi Ayay: a terrain of red rock interspersd with the smooth white cobbles of dry river beds. We saw some curious sawn-off conical hills but little else apart from some japropha, croton and occasional yellow hibiscus. There is a complicated system of irrigation to widely scattered dwellings: a welcome example of sensibly directed 'aid'.

The last morning was spent snorkling at Dehemri and walking on the glorious white beach beyond the coral reef. In the evening we all dined with Ahmad bin 'Isa, and said farewell to our two drivers, our guides, camel men and other friends.

When dawn broke the following morning the mountains above Hadibo were still wreathed in cloud: as timeless and mysterious as when I first glimpsed them nearly half a century ago.

'BY THE BEACHES OF SOCOTRA AND THE PINK ARABIAN SEA'

GEORGINA HARDING

Georgina Harding and her husband, John, travelled to Soqotra with Neil Orr in January 2004. This was their first visit to the island memorialised by Kipling in his 'Just so Stories'. Here she records a few personal impressions.

Long before the end of our two week visit, I had fallen in love with this strange and beautiful island: a limestone plateau, some 75 miles long and 25 miles wide, intersected by volcanic eruptions and surmounted by the granite peaks of the Haggier range. These rise to a height of nearly 5000 ft and are the refuge of flora and fauna from one of the earliest periods of the world's history. Soqotra was part of the incense route of ancient times, is steeped in myth and legend, and has its own unwritten language.

The north-east monsoon blows from November to March bringing rain. May is hot and torrid, then follows the south-west monsoon from June to September, making life on the coastal plain almost unbearable and putting an end to fishing, shipping and trading. During the rainy season the rivers become raging torrents with spectacular waterfalls. The sands whip up the sides of the cliffs creating monstrous dunes. Nomadic hunter-gatherer tribes move into caves, as do the bees, while traders return to mainland Yemen and Somalia.

There are 900 or so plant species, the most famous being dragon's blood, myrrh, frankincense, pomegranate, cucumber and aloes. All provide pollen and nourishment for bees throughout the year. Dense thickets of hibiscus cordon the mountains, strange forests march across the plateaux, the ravines are full of every garden flower or fern you can think of, but delicate and hidden. Date palms and bananas grow beside the riverbeds, lime and orange groves nestle higher up the ravines. Through every season something is flowering, from orchids to crab-apples.

There are no domestic pets, and over most of the island only camels and donkeys are used for transport. During our travels in the interior, when we arrived at a spot to camp, eager little boys would be sent off to catch a goat for our supper (which would of course be shared with everyone). They would scamper up the mountainside, shouting with glee as they surrounded a startled goat and carried it down to us. Then a seven or eight-year-old would produce an enormous knife and cut the creature's throat expertly. We carried rice with us, which was a treat for the highland bedu, and in return they offered us squashed dates and bitter oranges. The children walk for miles to stone or palm huts to learn to read the Quran; a plastic bottle of goat's milk mixed with a little ground up maize or millet is all they take for food.

We saw healthy looking bees on the coast, on the desert plateaux and in the

John and Georgina Harding with Sa'ad Abdullah, the party's guide and camelman, Haggier mountains, January 2004. *Neil Orr*

forests, but no one would tell us anything about them. Then one day, bumping along a rocky track in our Toyota, we saw a man squatting under the shade of a tree, next to two large plastic oil cans. Our driver stopped to speak to him, and then motioned to him to climb on to the roof of the vehicle. As he did so, the driver grabbed the plastic cans and put them firmly on the seat beside us. An altercation followed. The smell of honey was overwhelming. I opened the top of one of the cans and dipped a finger into the dirty, richly coloured honey; it was delicious. We drove for about half an hour, and our passenger descended. Pocketing the few dollars which our driver pressed into his hand, he strode off without a backward glance. Later, in Hadibo, the honey changed hands at an exorbitant price. Our English-speaking guide assured me that our driver was from the same tribe as the honey-man and that he would pay the balance due to the latter when he was next in his area.

Thereafter the word got around that we liked honey, and urchins would offer us some on their way down to the suq, but they were asking huge prices and when we refused them, they would run off laughing. One day towards the end of our visit a young girl pointed out to me a swarm of bees above a cave in the limestone rock. She even showed me how the boys climbed up a vertical rockface, knocked away the entrance to the hive with a sharp stone and then put their hand in to scoop out the honey! Honey seemed to be the only traditional cure for many illnesses, and was a much prized sweetener, and could only be sold by tribal consent. No wonder bees and honey were such a closely guarded resource.

The jargon of sustainable environmental development fell from the lips of every official we met in Hadibo; and technical experts, funded by the European Union, prowled around like hungry wolves, discussing road and electricity projects, oil depots, hotels, and even the commercial development of local herbal remedies. It all seemed so alien to these friendly, small, delicately built people, roaming the mountains and plateaux with their goats and their herds of miniature cows, and fishing when the monsoons permitted: the last living hunter-gatherers. How privileged I felt to have been among them.

BOOK REVIEWS

Studies on Arabia in Honour of G. Rex Smith edited by J. F. Healey and V. Porter, OUP, on behalf of the University of Manchester, 2002 (Journal of Semitic Studies Supplement 14). Pp. xiv + 363. Illus. Maps. Hb. £40. ISBN 0-19-851064-0.

This book is a collection of 21 articles written in honour of G. Rex Smith who retired a few years ago from his post as Professor of Arabic at the University of Manchester. About half have been contributed by former post-graduate students of his and the remainder are the work of friends and former colleagues.

Professor Smith has a wide range of academic interests which is splendidly reflected in the diversity and, in many cases, the specialised nature of the articles presented: for example Professor John F. Healey on a Nabataeo-Arabic inscription; Khaleel al-Muaikel on two pre-Islamic inscriptions from Sakaka in northern Saudi Arabia; Solaiman al-Theeb on Nabataean inscriptions from Qa' al-Mu'atadal, a mountain north-east of Mada'in Salih; and, at much greater length, Yasir Suleiman on some linguistic elements in the work of the 8–9th century polymath, al-Jahiz

Professor Smith's principal field of research has been the Yemen, so it is not surprising that most of the articles are related in some way to that country. In the material on pre-Islamic Yemen pride of place must be given to Christian Robin's article on the little kingdom of Kaminahu and its capital, Kamna, in the Jawf, which draws on the evidence of three inscriptions. This study, clearly written for the specialist, is copiously illustrated with photographs and is one of two contributions in French, the other being by Marie-Claude Simeone-Senelle.

Daniel M. Varisco provides an extremely informative account of agriculture in Rasulid Zabid based on a 14th-century *taqwim*; while Noha Sadek discusses the architectural formation of Zabid: its walls, gates and towers with particular reference to Ibn al-Mujawir's *tarikh al-mustabsir* and the plan of the city included in his account. Tihama also figures in Dr Venetia Porter's authoritative and carefully sourced study on Yemeni ports and Indian Ocean trade during the Tahirid dynasty; and Ahmad al-Zayla'i discusses an inscription discovered in the remains of Jizan al-'Ulya, just over the border into Saudi Arabia, which he dates to the time of Durayb b. Khalid of the ashraf of Banu Qutb al-Din who ruled there during the 15th and early 16th centuries.

Moving east, architecture and building design in Wadi Hajr, west of al-Mukalla, are the subject of a thorough study by Dr Salma Damluji, excellently supported by sketches, plans and photographs. Marie-Claude Simeone-Senelle contributes an intriguing paper on a Socotran version of the Abu Shawarib legend, with a transcription of the Socotran text; and Walter Dostal provides an anthropological treatise on the Say'ar who live in the northern reaches of Wadi Hadhramaut.

Readers interested in the jurisprudence (*fiqh*) of share-cropping as practised in Yemen will find much of value in William Donaldson's detailed contribution. Meanwhile, Paolo Costa, in his article on ancient trade routes and the South Arabian coast, defends the reliability of the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*, insisting that the site of a harbour named Moscha Limen has yet to be identified. Clive Smith, in a piece entitled 'Suleyman Pasha's lost opportunity in India', contributes an annotated translation of chapters 1–8 of *al-barq al-yamani fi 'l-fath al-'uthmani* by the 16th-century pro-Ottoman historian, Nahrawali. Calling at Aden on his way to India, Suleyman has the last of the Tahirids treacherously murdered; and on his return in 1539 succeeds, again by treachery, in putting an end to Tahirid influence in Yemen.

Muhammed al-Thenayian takes the reader back seven centuries to the Yu'firid dynasty in his study of two rock-inscriptions, but his full-page map does not seem to include the site where he found them. Husayn al-'Amri's article is much closer to the present, being a biographical study of the last Zaydi imam of Yemen, Muhammad al-Badr.

Articles with an Arabian but no distinct Yemeni connection include 'The Prophet Muhammad and the breaking of the *Jahiliyyah* idols' by Geoffrey King; an article by Abdul Rahman al-Ansary discussing the possibility that the pre-Islamic city of Qaryat al-Fau had a port on the Gulf called al-Gerrha; and one by Moshalleh al-Moraekhi on two rock-inscriptions in Saudi Arabia (from Tayma, and from Jebel Hanakiyya between al-Qasim and Medina) and the phenomenon of mirror-image writing in Arabic calligraphy. David Morray brings us back to the 20th century with a thorough survey of the selection, instruction and examination of student interpreters of the Levant Consular Service (1877–1916).

The two editors are to be congratulated on bringing together such an interesting variety of papers in one volume. But the absence of an index is regrettable, and it is a pity that transliteration of the names of Arab contributors so often departs from accepted usage.

A.B.D.R.EAGLE

Playing the Game: Western Women in Arabia by Penelope Tuson, I. B.Tauris, 2003. Pp. xx + 266. Illus. Map. Bibliog. Index. Notes. Hb. £25. ISBN 1-86064-933-5.

Compared to the mass of material published over the last quarter of the century on British women in the Indian subcontinent, there has been very little on such women in the Middle East, and specifically in Arabia. An obvious reason is the great disparity in numbers. While thousands went to find, or join, husbands working in India, to teach and to nurse, there were no more than a handful who visited

the Arabian peninsula before the late 1920s when Imperial Airways began flying to out of the way places. The very few women, like Emily Lorimer and Violet Dickson, who did find themselves here during the 19th and early 20th centuries, came as the wives of political officers, or like Amy Zwemer, as a missionary from America. Occasionally there were independent women travellers, drawn by an invisible but powerful magnet, who became experts on the region, of whom Gertrude Bell and Freya Stark are of course the best known.

A posting to the little ports of Dubai, Bahrain, Kuwait, Aden, Muscat or Sharjah was regarded as a poor second to an Indian service appointment. There was none of the familiar colonial infrastructure of the subcontinent, built up over the previous three hundred years, none of the comforting network of old 'Anglo-Indian' families, and, as it appears from Penelope Tuson's book, very little intellectual interest in Arabia itself. Servants were brought from India, which provided a buffer between the British wives and the small, desert-surrounded towns. Indeed, Lady Cox, whose husband spent most of his diplomatic career in Arabia, spoke 'wonderful Hindustani... a mongrel servant jargon', but during eight years spent in Bushire had not learnt to speak Persian.

The American missionaries, on the other hand, many of whom came from farming families in the mid-West, and who were sponsored by the University of Michigan, were not allowed 'out into the field' until they had undergone a two year course of study that included spoken and written Arabic and 'Islamics'. Setting up hospitals, dispensaries, clinics and roving medical programmes, they proved so successful that sheikhs and tribal leaders would invite them to travel inland and treat their own people. This led to a degree of envy and annoyance among British officials, jealous of the Americans' rapport with the rulers, and hostile to their geographical penetration of the peninsula.

The author. as former Curator of the Middle East Archives in the British Library, should be in a good position to write of this select band of westerners, and in fact her careful analysis of relations between the Political Agents and the missionaries is the best chapter. But this is ultimately an unsatisfactory book. If Tuson had offered a history of western intervention in Arabia, constructed from the writings of both women and men, and the wealth of official papers, it would have provided a good introduction to this still little-known subject. Instead she has generally sought to subject her women to the pervasive doctrine of post-feminist thought which is so intensely annoying to the historian. How one's heart sinks to see the words 'gender' and 'imperialism' in the same sentence, to be followed shortly by 'orientalist'! This leads to ridiculous statements like that on page 78 where she criticises the scholar Emily Lorimer for 'Her letters [which] are suffused with the imperial and racial attitudes and the social and domestic conventions of her time.' Unless Lorimer was a time-traveller, it is difficult to see how she could have written otherwise, given her position as the wife of a British officer posted to

Arabia during the early 20th century. What Tuson doesn't seem able to see is that her own narrow, androphobic, anti-colonial views are just as much a straitjacket as the supposed attitudes she derides in her subjects.

Her selection of women in Arabia has been skewed to fit her theories. Lady Mary Curzon, wife of the Viceroy of India, is an odd choice with which to begin this book. Touring the Gulf by sea in 1903, with a large naval escort, Lady Mary seems not to have gone ashore at all, being pregnant at the time. What she writes in her journal comes mostly second-hand from her husband's day-to-day accounts of his onshore meetings with the local sheikhs, although Tuson describes her journal as 'subtly subversive'. Too much of this chapter is taken up with irrelevant material, when it could have been used to tell us about more interesting women like Mabel Bent, the archaeologist, who travelled with her husband through the present day Gulf States and into southern Arabia, and who only merits a paragraph here. And the omission of the redoubtable Lady Evelyn Zeinab Cobbold, daughter of the 7th Earl of Dunmore, who converted to Islam and who travelled to Mecca in 1933 at the age of sixty-six is quite inexplicable. Too subversive perhaps?

ROSIE LLEWELLYN-JONES

Political Ecology and the Role of Water: Environment, Society and Economy in Northern Yemen by Gerhard Lichtenthäler, Ashgate Publishing, 2003. Pp. 274. Plates. Maps. Diagrams. Charts. Bibliog. Index. Hb. £55. ISBN 0-7546-09081.

During the past two decades amazing changes have taken place on the far northern plateau of Yemen. Until the 1980s the region was mostly arid grazing land for goats and sheep, and had a sparse population living in the small walled town of Saʿdah, and scattered in hundreds of tiny hamlets in the surrounding plains and mountains. Low rainfall meant cultivation was only possible along a few wadis and in small walled gardens where crops could be irrigated from shallow wells or rainfall run-off. Life was hard, and many left to seek a better living in the more productive western mountains and Lower Yemen – especially during droughts.

Since the 1980s this picture has been transformed. The bleak plateau is now adorned with large orchards and farms. Towns and villages have expanded. And the historical out-migration of the poor has abated or even reversed. The people of the fertile western mountain of Jabal Razih, for example, where I did my fieldwork, have a disdainful saying about the Saʿdah region: 'The East (*al-mashriq*) doesn't even provide breakfast.' Yet during the past two decades a growing number of Razihis have moved there in order to make a better living. Even more surprisingly, Razih – a famous qat-growing region which used to export qat to the *mashriq* (where it could never previously be grown) – now sometimes *imports* it from there.

How has this switch in fortunes come about? This book provides the answers.

The book is based on Lichtenthäler's Phd thesis for the Geography Department at the School of Oriental and African Studies, London. The author did his fieldwork between 1996 and 1999, but first visited the northern region in 1984, and already knew it well from his long association with the Republican Hospital in Saᶜdah. He also speaks fluent Arabic, and has good relationships with leading figures. He has therefore been able to provide a more complex and satisfyingly contextualized account of the economic and infrastructural changes and their causes and consequences, than a geographer less familiar with the local scene.

Like all highland North Yemen, the Saᶜdah region is a patchwork of small polities or 'tribes' which adhere to the same corpus of 'tribal law'. Until the 1970s much of the land and water was communally 'owned' and managed by tribes or their sub-groups, subject to certain mutually-agreed rules about exploitation rights. One of the most important of these rules was that a downstream group had the right to the seasonal spates which flowed off land communally owned by an upstream group. These factors – communal ownership, and the control over run-off rights exercised by downstream groups – combined to deter or prevent capital investment in agriculture.

Lichtenthäler describes how a landmark legal ruling of 1972 was the first step towards changing this situation. Tribes quarrelled over water rights, and invited an esteemed religious scholar to arbitrate a solution. His revolutionary ruling, which all the tribes accepted, was that a downstream group should have the right, if they wanted, to claim ownership of half the grazing land of an upstream group – meaning half the land over which the water they harvested flowed. This settlement changed tribal law, and opened the way to the parcelling-out of communal lands into individually-owned holdings.

While the 1972 ruling helped enable this radical change in ownership patterns, Lichtenthäler explains, the main impetus was political. The people of the Saᶜdah region wanted to maintain their precious local autonomy against a government which they distrusted, and whose desire and ability to control the far north was manifestly increasing. The completion of the Sana'a – Saᶜdah highway in the late 1970s had made the region more accessible. The northern border with Saudi Arabia was in contention. Smuggling was rife. And especially during the oil-fuelled consumer boom of the late 1970s and early 1980s, huge volumes of imported goods were evading taxation. Local people therefore feared that the government would find a security or military pretext to appropriate their communally-owned grazing-lands, so – in short – they privatized them. Individual ownership then provided the incentive to invest in, and develop, holdings. Many of the major landowners were hereditary shaykhs of local tribes, so one interesting consequence of these developments was that they bolstered 'traditional' leadership.

The dramatic expansion of agricultural activity in the Saᶜdah region was also

facilitated by modern technology, which many landowners – rich from smuggling and other sources – could afford. They drilled deep tube wells, and using powerful pumps extracted water from ever-increasing depths to irrigate their farms and orchards. As elsewhere in Yemen, this severely depleted the water table. It also caused a rash of new problems and disputes as people realised that one man's gain was another's loss – or was at the expense of whole communities, whose shallower wells dried up. A range of crops were grown, but the government ban on imported fruit in 1984 made citrus and apple production particularly attractive; later, qat became more profitable. Orchards have great prestige value to powerful shaykhs, however, so they often maintained them as show-pieces despite diminishing economic returns.

This book is mainly directed at specialists in water management, and in Yemen's dire water problems and their possible solutions, and therefore contains much technical data. However, it also includes much to interest a more general reader about tribal groups, local politics and tribal leadership, and on tribal and religious law – including, importantly, those aspects of shari'ah law which pertain to water rights and consumption. It also tells a fascinating story of an extraordinary period in recent Yemeni history. Although this is, in many ways, a sad tale of greed, and the over-exploitation of a precious natural resource, Lichtenthäler sees some hope for the future in the communal ideals of tribal society, in the cultural disposition to discuss and resolve conflicts of interest, and in religious maxims which prioritize the common good. If these can be built upon, he suggests, disaster might be averted.

SHELAGH WEIR

Red Wolves of Yemen: The Struggle for Independence by Vitaly Naumkin, The Oleander Press Ltd, 2004. Pp. xix + 393. Illus. Notes. Bibliog. Index. Map. Hb. £30. ISBN 0-906672-70-8.

For someone who worked for the British government in the ill-fated South Arabian Federation this is an especially fascinating book. Professor Naumkin has produced an insider's account of the last years of British Aden focusing on the activities of the main nationalist movements, particularly the National Liberation Front (NLF). It was this highly successful guerrilla group which, having defeated its main rival, The Front for the Liberation of South Yemen (FLOSY), formed the first indigenous government in South Yemen following the British withdrawal on 30 November 1967. Naumkin also deals with the first two years of post independence rule by the government of the People's Republic of South Yemen (PRSY) up to the so called 'Corrective Move' (Marxist-speak for extreme left wing internal coup) which put in place the Arab World's only Marxist regime. Professor

Naumkin should know. His own political credentials were impeccable. And he was there. He was director of Aden's Lenin Institute in 1968 and was on seemingly close terms with many of the NLF leadership who had so successfully harried the Colonial administration and then indulged in (often bloody) state building after they had come to power.

Although the tale he tells of increasingly effective nationalist armed opposition to British and Federation of South Arabian rule is a familiar one, it is extensively sourced (more so than any other work in English) from the nationalist viewpoint. The great preponderance of his Arab source material is from the archives of the NLF, or NF as Naumkin insists. This has its fascinating aspects. Certainly the British authorities knew very little about this organisation. It was underestimated as far as its discipline, training and armaments were concerned as the SAS found to its cost in the early stages of the Radfan operation in April/May 1964. It was at this time that the Radfani rebels earned their tabloid epithet: 'Red Wolves' and they quickly earned the respect of British troops and were more than a match for the indigenous Federal Regular Army (FRA) whom they outgunned in terms of modern and sophisticated light weapons. The NLF was eventually defeated militarily in the Radfan Mountains but it needed British military involvement to achieve this. An unsatisfactory feature of this book is the over-reliance put on NLF sources for claims of military success. Casualty figures for the 'Colonial Authorities' are breathtakingly exaggerated when compared, for example, with my own personal records of the incidents described. A mine explosion in Dhala under a military vehicle in 1964 led to claims by the NLF of 14 soldiers (including 4 officers) killed. In fact, and I was in Dhala at the time, the true figures was one soldier (FRA) slightly injured!

The NLF and other guerrilla organisations such as FLOSY had greater success in Aden itself where they effectively neutralised the government counter-terrorist organisations by assassinating key officials and eliminating agents, making it too dangerous for would-be informants. Here there was no need for Naumkin to exaggerate the effectiveness of the NLF in particular, although some of his statistics are again a trifle suspect when compared with official British sources.

This book makes an important and fresh contribution to the detailed history of the 'liberation' of Aden and is particularly illuminating on the period immediately following the establishment of the NF government of Qahtan al-Sha'bi as Britain pulled out. The inter-factional manoeuvres, the battle for power between left and right culminating in success for the Marxists as Al-Sha'bi was forced to resign in 1969 are recounted in minute detail obviously with the benefit of close personal knowledge. What a treasure trove of original research for future historians.

It is a shame that Professor Naumkin felt obliged to write such an important book in his quaint, at times archaic and generally imperfect English. Or having done so, did not ask a native English speaker to edit it. Descriptions of the Radfan

rebels as 'mutineers' grate, as do literal translations of nationalist political jargon. Marxist terminology: 'internal contradictions', 'bourgeoisie', 'reactionary elements' also detract from the flow of the narrative. It's only when Naumkin is summarising from his many British sources (an impressive bibliography) that he seems comfortable in our tongue and therefore more readable. The photographs from both British and nationalist sources are well chosen and adorn the text.

Minor blemishes apart, I strongly recommend 'Red Wolves' as essential reading for any serious scholar of this period of great drama in the Arabian Peninsula. Anyone there at the time will have memories rekindled. But the more general reader looking for easily absorbed enlightenment might prefer to pass.

PETER HINCHCLIFFE

The Gaysh: A History of the Aden Protectorate Levies 1927–61 and the Federal Regular Army of South Arabia 1961–67 by Frank Edwards, Helion & Co., Solihull, 2004. Pp. ix + 180. Illus. Maps. Bibliog. Index. Glossary. Append. Hb. £29.95. ISBN 1-874622-96-5.

In the foreword to his book Frank Edwards modestly denies any pretensions to scholarship; his account, he insists, is 'a story told in a personal way and full of personal opinion.' Personal it is, in that the author was an officer in the Federal Regular Army (FRA). Nevertheless, I, with my own South Arabian background, found it an extremely good read, giving a fresh and entertaining insight into the development of an important instrument of attempted colonial and, later, neo-colonial control over the ultimately doomed South Arabian Federation. This book is, in effect, a companion volume to *Armed Forces of Aden 1839–1967* by Cliff Lord and (the late) David Birtles (Helion, 2000), which is a comprehensive account of all the military and paramilitary units which existed in Aden and the Protectorates throughout the British period.

Frank Edwards does not draw directly upon Lord and Birtles (but acknowledges the latter's research), as his book was originally written in 1967/68 and has only now been published at a time of intense interest in the Middle East. Nor does he bring the story of the FRA right up to the time of British withdrawal in November 1967. As the Aden Protectorate Levies (APL) metamorphosed into the FRA, the latter, in its turn, was transformed in early 1967 into the South Arabian Army (SAA), incorporating the former Federal Guard 1 (a national gendarmerie) in preparation for the emergence of the South Arabian Federation as a sovereign, independent state. But the Federation collapsed, leaving control of the new state in the hands of the neo-Marxists of the National Liberation Front (NLF), as the British pulled out, precipitately abandoning their usual practice of ordered and measured de-colonisation. The book ends with the formation of the SAA, and in

his preface Frank Edwards regrets that he never got round to narrating how the army fared in the tumultuous months of 1967 and what happened to it after independence. One man who is well-qualified for this task is Major-General Jack Dye, the first and only British Commander of the SAA. Frank Edwards sent Dye the manuscript of his work, but the latter, in his reply dated May 1969 (reproduced at the front of the book), felt that as a serving officer his lips should remain sealed.

The strength of this book is in its vivid, atmospheric account of the early days of the APL, the descendant of the 1st Yemen Infantry commanded by the legendary Lt. Col. M. C. Lake, an early Glubb Pasha-like personage. The Infantry, confined to Aden Colony, was subsequently replaced, on primarily financial grounds, by a smaller force of levies (still under Lake) deployed on mostly static guard duties in Aden Settlement and the two dependent islands of Perim and Kamaran. The wider defence of the Protectorates and the security of trade routes were covered from the air (in accordance with the Trenchard philosophy of Imperial Policing), with troops rarely committed on the ground. But as HMG became, however reluctantly, involved in a more informed approach to tribal affairs when these seemed to threaten the security of Aden itself, the APL was founded to deal with outbreaks of 'dissidence' where air power provided a blunt and inefficient remedy. As Political Officers began to operate in the hinterland, the APL provided the necessary muscle in the long arm of the Raj. But the RAF was always there in support. Later still, the APL was bloodied in a series of up-country engagements and other internal security operations (very few in Aden itself), which culminated in quite fierce fighting in the 1950s against well-armed tribesmen encouraged in their subversive activities by the Imam of Yemen; the latter, like his predecessors, never abandoned Yemeni claims to the whole of South-West Arabia.

The formation of the Federation saw the APL transformed into the FRA. Frank Edwards served as a seconded officer with the FRA in the 1960s, including in Radfan. Here British troops were in support of, and at times in command of, Federal forces facing Egyptian-funded and trained revolutionaries who in many cases bore arms more modern and more effective than those at the disposal of the FRA. Although the author records the murder of a British officer by a FRA soldier in 1965, there is little in his account about how he perceived the loyalty of the Arab soldiers. Faced with the raucous and persistent volume of anti-British and anti-Federal propaganda from Sana'a Radio and Nasser's 'Sawt al-Arab', and given the generally unimpressive performance of the Federal rulers and of a Federal structure which, from the outset, had little sense of permanence, it is a wonder how loyal the FRA remained: the more so after the British announced that they would withdraw from Aden in 1968 – without a treaty of defence and abandoning their base. In the end the British dropped the mask of political

neutrality and weighed in on the side of the NLF during the final showdown with its main rival for control of post-British South Arabia.

This is an important contribution to the history of those times. I agree with Frank Edwards that the story of the FRA needs to be completed, but his is an excellent and highly readable account on which future historians can build.

PETER HINCHCLIFFE

A Voyage to Arabia Felix by Jean de La Roque. First published in French in 1715; facsimile reprint of the 1732 English translation with an introduction by Carl Phillips, The Oleander Press, Cambridge, 2004. Pp. xxiv + 396. Illus. Map. Bibliog. Hb. £45/US$67.50/₵67.50. ISBN 0-906672-50-3.

Jean de La Roque (1661–1743) inherited an interest in the Orient from his father, a Marseilles merchant, who had travelled to Constantinople and the Levant in 1644 and brought back with him, in his son's words, 'not only some coffee but also the little moveables and equipage which he kept for his own use in Turkey [and which] passed then for a real curiosity in France...' But by the end of 17th century coffee-drinking had become an increasingly popular pastime in Europe, and there was a growing demand for the commodity. La Roque's orientalist studies took him to the Levant but never to Arabia, and his interest in the coffee trade and Yemen was sparked one day by a short report which he read in a local newspaper about a voyage to Mocha (1708–10). This had been organised by merchants from the Breton port of Saint-Malo with a view to purchasing coffee directly from its country of origin, by-passing the Ottoman and Indian middlemen who still dominated the trade. La Roque's eagerness to learn more about this first French voyage to Yemen (by the *Curieux* and *Diligent*) led him to contact and debrief Godefroy de la Merveille who had taken part in it. The coffee was grown in the highlands and the main town where the harvested coffee was brought for sale was Bait al-Faqih, a two-day journey north-east of Mocha, where the French established a temporary business base before rejoining the crews in Mocha. The expedition proved a commercial success, and in 1711 a second voyage was organised (by the *Diligent* and *Paix*), returning to Saint-Malo two years later.

La Roque's *Voyage de l'Arabie Heureuse*, first published in 1715, provides an account of both expeditions: the first for the most part as narrated by de la Merveille; the second drawing largely on the testimony of two Frenchmen (Major de la Grelaudiere and M. Barbier, the surgeon on board the *Diligent*) who, in response to a request from the Imam al-Mahdi Muhammad bin Ahmad (1687–1718) for the services of a doctor (a request which the French were quick to turn to their economic advantage), travelled from Mocha via Taiz and Jiblah to the Imam's palace at al-Mawahib near Dhamar. They remained there for three

memorable weeks (rendered on p.203 as 'three whole years'!) before returning to Mocha.

La Roque includes a chapter on 'the tree and fruit of coffee' based on the observations of members of the first voyage, and an 'historical treatise' on the spread of coffee-drinking in Asia and Europe based on his own copious studies of the subject.

Such was the interest aroused by the book that English translations appeared in 1726, 1732 and 1742. The reprint under review is a facsimile of the English edition of 1732 which includes an account of the detention by the Turks of Sir Henry Middleton in December 1610 (not 1612 as in the title page) and his involuntary journey to Sana'a. The anonymous translator added this to the text to make the point that the English had travelled into the interior of Yemen a century before the French first arrived, and had penetrated further inland.

Yemen gradually lost its monopoly of the coffee trade as the coffee bush was successfully transplanted to Reunion, Java and Brazil. Nevertheless, a niche market for Yemeni coffee persisted and the publishers have therefore included a specially commissioned translation of a report on the coffee trade and other economic activity in Yemen by M. Cloupet, a French trader who visited Mocha and Bait al-Faqih in 1788. Cloupet mentions *en passant* his romantic interest in the sister of a rich merchant of Bait al-Faqih with whom he was on friendly terms; somewhat to his relief (at not having to undergo the rituals of conversion), the girl declined his proposal of marriage on the grounds that his beard was too short! De la Merveille, in his account of the first French voyage to Mocha, also digresses, at greater length, on his own 'gallantries with the Arabian ladies.

In his authoritative introduction Carl Phillips assesses the importance of La Roque's contribution to the historiography of Yemen and the Red Sea trade. He also presents new and interesting material gleaned from French archives on the men who sailed from Saint-Malo and the travails which they experienced in addition to those already recorded by La Roque's informants.

The Oleander Press's initiative in making La Roque's classic work accessible to the general reader is to be warmly welcomed. Their edition has been printed and bound in India where the technique of facsimile reproduction has been brought to a fine art.

JOHN SHIPMAN

The Zanzibar Chest: A Memoir of Love and War by Aidan Hartley, HarperCollins, 2003. Pp. xii + 446. Illus. Hb. £20. ISBN 0-00-257059-9. Pb. £8.99. ISBN 0-00-653121.

To all those with experience of East Africa and South Arabia this book is a 'must',

but it will also interest a far wider readership. It is both a family biography and the autobiography of a front-line war correspondent. It has been praised in many reviews and deservedly so.

Aidan Hartley was born in East Africa in 1965. His father, Brian Hartley, was the fourth of four generations of his family to have served as colonial officers over two centuries: 'a typical British story', the author writes, ' ...in which men, women and their children sank in ships on faraway oceans, succumbed to fevers in tropical [graveyards] and died in small wars, mutinies and rebellions fought across the crimson atlas of the British Empire. A chronicle of tragedy and conquest'.

Aidan Hartley describes his father as an Old Testament, patriarchal figure of immense vitality, 'Our Father who art in Africa', who joined the Colonial Service in 1928 as an Agricultural Officer in Tanganyika. Ten years later he went to Aden where he became Director of Agriculture and pioneered the Abyan Cotton Scheme. Leaving Aden in 1954, he bought a farm near Mount Kenya. This was burned down during the Mau Mau Emergency, so he moved to another farm in Tanganyika on the slopes of Kilimanjaro: a paradise which only Nyerere's voracious socialism later forced him to leave.

However, the book is less about the father than the son, whose life as a journalist was even more nomadic. After the end of the Cold War there seemed new hope for Africa, but again and again in Ethiopia, Somalia, Rwanda and the Congo, violence and bloodshed prevailed. The author's graphic account of his on-the-spot experiences makes compelling reading. He also tells of other journalists who, like him, chased dramatic stories in perilous places; and of the friendships which grew out of the dangers and fear, as well as the shared sense of purpose in getting the news out to the world.

Into this narrative he weaves the story of Peter Davey, his father's best friend in Aden. From 1938 Davey served as a political officer on the frontier between Yemen and the Aden Protectorate, where Brian Hartley was Director of Agriculture. In 1945 Davey became a Muslim in order to marry a local Beihani girl, but a year later was obliged to divorce her rather than lose his job. In 1947 he was shot dead in an unconnected incident. Davey's diaries were retrieved by Brian Hartley who kept them in his old Zanzibar chest: hence the title of the book. The author vividly describes his own visit to Aden and Yemen in the late 1990s to reconstruct Davey's story.

Aidan Hartley's book is much more than a young war correspondent's account of a continent's pain and despair. He writes with unusual candour of the tensions and emotional turbulence which he himself experienced and from which the fleshpots of Mombasa and elsewhere offered only fugitive release. It is beautifully written and deserves to become a classic. Let us hope that, happily settled with wife and two children in Kenya, he will soon be inspired to write another.

HUGH WALKER

Tears Of Sheba: Tales of Survival and Intrigue in Arabia by Khadija Al-Salami with Charles Hoots, John Wiley & Sons Ltd., 2003. Pp. viii + 386. Illus. Chronology. Glossary. Bibliog. Index. Hb. £16.99. ISBN 0-470-86725-6.

This is the inspirational account of a remarkable woman, who has survived all odds to educate herself and pursue a career in the media, which has led to her current position as the Press and Cultural Attaché at the Yemen Embassy in Paris. The story of her life is set against the background of civil war and family strife in Yemen. Her earliest memory is of the siege of Sana'a by Royalist forces in 1968. There followed family tragedy when her father who had served with the Republican Army as a medical officer returned home deeply disturbed by 'shell shock' from which he never really recovered. Her parents were divorced and her mother remarried. At a tender age she witnessed a public execution outside her school and was married at the age of eleven against her will, She attempted suicide, but in spite of her traumatic early life she resolved to study hard, She obtained work at the local television station and earned enough not only to keep her family but also to study in America, where she met her husband, Charles Hoots, who encouraged her to write about herself

Khadija writes not only about her immediate family but also about three key figures in the Republican movement, Muhammad Abu Lahum, Mujahid Abu Shawareb and Yahya al-Mutawakkil (whose obituary appeared in the Society's Journal in 2003). She describes the influence they had upon her and the encouragement they gave her in her career. It must have been painful for her to tell her story in such vivid and intimate detail. In the Arab World it is unusual to lay bare one's family life in conversation with strangers let alone publish a book about it. No doubt some will criticise her for doing so, but she has shown great courage and determination to project a new face for Yemen where democracy and human rights are now being accepted by much of society as an integral part of nation building.

The past cannot be ignored and the major political and historical events are skilfully woven into her personal life with many interesting anecdotes. Those readers, who are already familiar with the ancient history of Yemen, may wish to omit the first chapter and move on to her 'Earliest Memories'. The family background in the following chapters is fascinating but to some extent gets in the way of the narrative. Moreover it is quite difficult to follow who's who, but the reader can refer to a family tree and cast of characters at the beginning of the book. Their relationships bring out the importance of the family background in the Arab world and show how it influences the lives of individuals. There is a simple map for those unfamiliar with the geography of Yemen and copious interesting footnotes and a glossary. The sixteen pages of black and white photographs, which are taken from the collections of family and friends, provide an interesting record of personalities over the last forty years.

The final chapter of the book describes the efforts to ward off the conflict between North and South, which resulted in the war of secession in 1994. At the time Khadija was handling press relations in the embassy in Paris, where the staff were divided by the war. In the epilogue she describes her present work as very enjoyable and ends on a note of optimism: 'While I carry many painful memories of my childhood, I have come to see the positive aspects of these hardships... overcoming the barriers put in place by tradition and contributing to, even to a tiny extent, to the notion that a person can be both different and accepted at the same time are what I believe I will look back on as the most worthwhile in my life.'

JULIAN PAXTON

Daniel van der Meulen in Arabia Felix: Travels and Photographs of a Dutch Diplomat in Yemen, 1931–1944 by Steven Vink, Kit Publishers, Amsterdam, in co-operation with the Embassy of the Republic of Yemen in the Netherlands and the Royal Netherlands Embassy in Sana'a, 2003. Pp. 128. 100 b/w photographs. Text in English and Arabic. Select bibliog. Hb. £22. ISBN 90-6832-193-5.

After the great Snouck Hurgronje, Daniel van der Meulen (1894–1989) was perhaps the most effective and experienced interpreter of Arabia to the outside world that Holland produced. Much of what he wrote was published in English, and at least three of his books are fixtures in the general literature on the Peninsula. These are *Aden to the Hadhramaut: A Journey in South Arabia* (1947); *The Wells of Ibn Saud* (1952); and *Faces in Shem* (1961). As a devout Christian deeply interested in Islam, Van der Meulen moved among Muslim leaders with ease and sympathy for their desire for statehood and independence. He made life-long friendships in Arabia and continued to travel there long after his retirement.

These sympathies were first aroused in the Far East. The son of a country school teacher, Van der Meulen began his career as a colonial administrator in the Netherlands East Indies in 1915. He was expecting to build a career there, but in 1923 decided instead to apply for the post of consul in Jiddah. Young though he was and without Arabic, he had been earmarked as the right man for the job by Hurgronje, who advised the Dutch Colonial Department to appoint 'this man and no other; if he knows nothing of Islam or the Muslims, it will be my task to instruct him'. Hurgronje, having himself lived in Mecca during 1885, knew that the rigours of life in Arabia demanded youth and fitness. After three years of intensive study of Islam and Arabic under his supervision, Van der Meulen arrived in Jiddah in 1926, at the very time that Ibn Saud was taking control of the Hijaz.

From then on, Van der Meulen's career alternated between Arabia (1926–31, 1939, 1941–44) and the East Indies. He retired from officialdom when Indonesia

became independent in 1949; but he remained actively interested in the Arab and Islamic worlds, as writer, broadcaster and traveller, for the rest of his exceptionally long life.

Steven Vink opens his account with a handy potted biography of his subject, and follows it up with a chapter on Van der Meulen's five journeys in Yemen and Hadhramaut. These journeys were made in 1931 (two), 1939, 1942 and 1944. The Dutch government was keen to develop relations with Yemen, and also to know more about the mysterious South Arabian enclave from which so many of its colonial subjects in the Far East hailed; many Hadhramis held Netherlands East Indies passports, kept the Hadhrami economy going with remittances from overseas, and aspired to retire to Hadhramaut. Van der Meulen and Herrmann von Wissmann also had scientific reasons to investigate this little-known region. The first of their two journeys to the strife-torn valley in 1931 was pioneering exploration, and resulted in the publication of *Hadhramaut: Some of its Mysteries Unveiled* (1932). It earned Van der Meulen the affectionate taunt as 'the Dutchman who added a province to the British Empire' He and Von Wissmann returned to complete unfinished business there in 1939, the journey recorded in *Aden to the Hadhramaut.*

The bulk of the book under review consists of one hundred photographs presented in geographical order. All are by Van der Meulen himself, save three by the Royal Air Force in 1929, and those from the 1931 journey to Hadhramaut ascribed jointly to Van der Meulen and Von Wissmann. We start on the Red Sea coast at Luhayyah and Hudaydah, and ascend to Sana'a and Wadi Dhahr. Then we go to Mukalla and the settlements of Hadhramaut. Where possible, each place is shown in a range of images in chronological order.

Yemen is visually so arresting that it would be hard to take dull photographs of it; and these pictures of its life, topography and architecture do not disappoint. However, one cannot help feeling that the very light sepia used in the two-colour reproduction process has weakened the original images and diminished their impact. Moreover, many of them are too small for details to be clearly discernible. It is an irony of progress that photographic reproduction has not always kept pace with improving print technology. For sheer visual impact one would do better to go back to books produced in the 1930s and 1940s, such as Freya Stark's *Seen in the Hadhramaut* (1938) and *The Southern Gates of Arabia* (1936); Harold Ingrams' *Arabia and the Isles* (1942); or, indeed, the works of Van der Meulen himself.

The English text of the chapters would have benefited from a competent English editor, and the captions, though laid out with care, are somewhat terse; it would have been good to plunder Van der Meulen's own writings for telling quotations. But these are cavils. This volume is a valuable addition to the literature on Yemen, and a timely memorial of a remarkable builder of bridges between Islam and the West.

WILLIAM FACEY

The Wind of Morning: An Autobioqraphy by Colonel Sir Hugh Boustead KBE, CMG, DSO, MC. Foreword by The Lord Luce, GCVO, DL. Published by Craven Street Books, Fresno, California, 2002. Pp. xii + 240. Illus. Maps. Index. Pb. £18.99/$21.95. ISBN 0-941936-70-8.

Hugh Boustead (1895–1980), the son of a tea planter in Ceylon, lived a life of remarkable adventure. During the First World War he fought in France, winning his Military Cross at the Battle of Arras; and then in Russia, roaming the steppes with Cossacks fighting the Bolsheviks. He captained the British Pentathlon team at the 1920 Olympics; was given command of the Sudan Camel Corps in 1931; took part in the Mount Everest expedition of 1933; explored the Libyan desert with Ralph Bagnold (who was later to found the Long Range Desert Group); helped Haile Selassie to recover his throne; and served in a variety of administrative posts in Sudan, Yemen, Oman and Abu Dhabi. Knighted in 1965, Boustead was recalled from retirement three years later by the Ruler of Abu Dhabi, Shaikh Zaid bin Sultan, to look after his stable of horses in Al-Ain. 'I believe', Sir Hugh wrote, 'that to attain happiness you should remain in harness so long as you can carry it'.

His vivid and entertaining memoir was first published by Chatto & Windus in 1971, and this reprint by Craven Street Books, at a time of increasing public interest in the former British Empire, is most welcome; for Sir Hugh was born at the height of the Empire, represented all that was best in it, and lived to see its rapid decline. Although his first love was always the Sudan, his second was Hadhramaut in the Aden Protectorate, where he spent nine years 1949–1958 as Resident Adviser and British Agent, based in Mukalla; and two chapters of his book are devoted to that period. It was as an administrator and adviser in both the Sudan and southern Arabia that he spent the most fulfilling years of his extraordinary life. And the words with which he concludes his autobiography would fittingly serve as his epitaph:

'There can be few deeper satisfactions than to have played a part in helping a country or a people forward – to a life of peace, with agriculture and commerce prospering, under an honest government with justice administered under the rule of law, with education for the young, with medical care for the sick.. .As I said to the people of Mukalla when I bade them farewell [in 1958], . . our works live after us and by their fruits we should be judged in days to come.'

JOHN SHIPMAN

Visitor's Complete Guide to Yemen edited by Archie D'Cruz, Arab World Tours, Bahrain; A Type of Magic, Canada; 2004. Pp. 224. Illus. Available from Kate Lawson-Statham, Overy House, Dorchester-on-Thames, Oxon OX10 7JU. Tel/Fax: Int + (44)1865 340347. E-mail: kls3@btopenworld.com

This is the second publication in Arab World Tours' *Visitor's Complete Guide* series which was launched in 1996 with an information handbook on Bahrain. This guide is an attractive publication, with well reproduced colour plates on nearly every page. Many of the photographs will be familiar to anyone who has already purchased a book about Yemen, but there are also up-to-date and interesting pictures of activities for tourists.

The very high standard of printing and colour has been achieved by sponsorship through advertising to defray the cost. The lavish production gives the impression that it is an oil company publication, hotel brochure or in-flight magazine rather than a serious guide in the Baedeker sense of the word. The A4 format means that it is not a suitable traveller's companion to be carried on tour, but should be read before departure. The strength of the publication lies in the variety of articles written by a dozen contributors. As the reader would expect, the history and heritage of Yemen are covered in several chapters, and a whole section is devoted to Soqotra. There is an article by Michael Crouch entitled 'Living in dangerous times' about the period before and during British withdrawal from Aden, which he wrote about in his book, *An Element of Luck* (The Radciffe Press, 1993). His sepia-tinted photographs and highly personal reminiscences of those distant times sit rather oddly with the rest of the guide. More relevant today are the biographies of leading Yemenis, which illustrate some of the success stories since the upheavals of the 1962 revolution and the 1994 civil war. For the visitor to Yemen, the chapter, 'Where to stay', is an extremely well presented description of the range of hotels, and there is much useful information in the 'Visitor's Directory', including a map of major tourist sites. There are also 'tips for tourists' and facts about Yemen in the margins of each page. A note in the margin of the chapter on *qat* claims that during British rule in South Yemen *qat*-chewing was forbidden, but this reviewer does not remember any ban in Dhala, which was one of the few areas in the south where *qat* was grown and chewed extensively!

The enthusiasm of the publisher and the affection of the contributors for Yemen mean that the guide achieves its aim of encouraging tourism, particularly at a time when any positive publicity for Yemen is more than welcome after the many negative attitudes expressed in recent years.

JULIAN PAXTON

IN MEMORIAM

JOHN BALDRY
(1939–2001)

Those who knew John Baldry during his Arabian days, but who lost touch with him thereafter, will be sad to hear that he died three years ago in Thailand. John earned his living as an English-language teacher, mostly for the British Council, but latterly for other employers. After working in Tunisia, Algeria and Libya, he was posted to Jizan in Saudi Arabia. There he pursued his interest in the Idrisi of 'Asir, which had started while he was in Libya, and fell in love with the Tihamah. The Yemeni Civil War was then in full swing, and among John's acquaintances in Jizan was an eccentric American, Bruce Condé, who had converted to Islam. Styling himself Prince Abdulrahman de Bourbon-Condé, he supported the Royalist cause, and raised money by printing and selling royalist stamps, some of which John bought for his stamp collection.

After the Civil War, John moved to Sana'a. Soon after, in 1973, I met him at the Arabian Seminar in Cambridge. I was planning my first short visit to Yemen that winter, and he kindly invited me to stay. His laissez-faire hospitality and rather disorganized household might not have been to everyone's taste, but it suited me fine. All John's friends will remember his extrovert housekeeper, Hasan. John was shy and never learnt Arabic, so Hasan played a vital role in John's explorations. Whenever John had leave, off they would speed on hair-raising motor-bike trips into the mountains (this was before there were roads). When John moved to his wonderful old timbered house in Hodeidah, Hasan accompanied him, leaving his wife and children in Sana'a, and the two enthusiastically adventured all over the Tihamah together.

After his employment in Yemen ended, John found a job on a military base in Saudi Arabia, which he hated. Soon after, Hasan tracked him down there, and they entered a newspaper competition, sponsored by Lux toilet soap, which helped change the direction of his life. The newspaper had printed a picture of a plane above an airfield, and competitors were invited to put a cross where they thought it would land. John and Hasan bought dozens of copies of the newspaper, submitted multiple entries with the cross in every conceivable position, and won! The prize was a trip for two to Thailand, so off they went. They had a whale of a time, though Hasan wondered why non-Muslims should be rewarded with so much rain and greenery. Perhaps this is when John realised that there was another culture where he could feel at home. He took jobs in Thailand and Seoul, Korea, and met his Thai wife Lamai with whom he had a son Wasant, now sixteen. John and his new family returned to the Middle East for a while, and worked in Abu Dhabi, but in his latter years he stayed in south-east Asia, shifted from country to country, and only

occasionally came back to Britain. During this time he stopped writing his long, informative letters to his former friends, and most of us lost touch with him apart from receiving the occasional Christmas card. One of the last times I saw him was when he rang one day from his mother's house in Hertfordshire to offer me all his books and notes – provided I could collect them the following day from his mother's garage, which had to be cleared; otherwise, he said, he would have to throw them all away. I leapt into my mini-van, raced out to Sawbridgeworth, and loaded everything I could. I felt sad that John was putting the Middle East behind him, and told him that I would take care of everything in case he ever changed his mind and returned to his studies, but he never did.

During the years John lived in North Africa, 'Asir and Yemen, he spent all his home leave assiduously researching the history of the Idrisi emirate of 'Asir, and other aspects of Tihamah and Yemeni history, at the Public Record Office and the India Office Library. Out of this came over twenty articles and longer pieces, some of which are often quoted, but others virtually unknown. I have therefore compiled what I hope is a comprehensive bibliography of John's works (see below). His major work was his voluminous account of the Idrisi emirate, which he laboured over for at least six years, but which is far too dense and detailed to be published in its present form. Many readers assumed, from John's scholarly writings, that he must have a history degree, but he only had his teaching qualification, and was a self-taught historian. John's articles comprise a major contribution to the history of Yemen from the nineteenth century. For this reason, I have long thought that they should be pulled together and published in one volume. It was in the course of trying to trace him to ask whether he would like to pursue this idea that I discovered that he had died.

SHELAGH WEIR

Works by John Baldry

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1985c. 'The history of the Tihamah from 1800 to the present,' in *Studies on the Tihamah: the report of the Tihamah expedition, 1982.* pp 45–50

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?? 'The commercial activity of Hudaydah, Yaman, in 1897', *American Journal of Arabic Research* Vol IV: 1–14

Janet Sorg Stoltzfus
(1931–2004)

Janet Stoltzfus, who established the first non-religious school in north Yemen, died on 5 March 2004 at the age of 73. She was married to William A. Stoltzfus Jr., who served as US Ambassador in all the Gulf states except Saudi Arabia. They had met in Beirut in 1953. He was there studying Arabic; she had come to teach English, hired by Bill's father, then president of Beirut College for Women. While the father was assessing Janet's professional qualifications, his wife, Ethel, privately determined that Janet was the perfect match for their son, Bill. 'In true Middle Eastern style, ours was an arranged marriage', Janet would often joke. It was to become a strong and devoted partnership.

During the course of their career, the Stoltzfuses served in Aden, Ethiopia, Kuwait (twice), Saudi Arabia (twice), Syria and Yemen. Of all their postings in the Arab world, Yemen, where they lived from 1959–1961, remained their favourite. Bill recalled that 'it was a challenge every day. It was like the 13th century... When we had a dinner party, I'd go out before and shoot a guinea fowl...'

Janet approached the challenges of running a household and raising small children with pragmatism and a sense of adventure. She relied on her courageous cat to keep her garden free of poisonous snakes. Everywhere she found allies, including the British Chargé d'Affaires, Christopher Pirie-Gordon. Once, on a trip to Aden, Janet and Bill came upon the British Legation's vehicle abandoned in the middle of the road, every tyre punctured. 'We stopped and searched about and soon discovered Christopher sitting on a pillow on the side of the road with rain pouring down, engrossed in a volume of classical Italian poetry!'

On the day of Kennedy's defeat of Nixon in the 1960 election, Ronald Bailey, Pirie-Gordon's successor, kindly monitored the incoming results on his short-wave radio, one of the few links with the outside world in Yemen at that time, and sent hourly updates to Janet, teaching at her school.

Janet made many Yemeni friends. She once wrote to me, saying, 'I spent a lot of time visiting Ta 'iz women, hunkering down on my haunches (I was pretty flexible in those days!), while they smoked their hubbly-bubblies, and we talked about husbands and kids and life'. Often in the evening she would accompany Bill on visits to Yemeni men, from ordinary citizens to members of the royal family. Unlike in some parts of the Arab world, in Yemen her gender was no obstacle to conversation; the men welcomed her full participation in lively discussions of politics, history and culture.

It was typical of Janet that she looked for an opportunity to do something for the local community into which she became comfortably settled. She decided to start an elementary school for the children of diplomatic families, named the Ta'iz Cooperative School. Almost immediately the Yemeni foreign minister and local

chief of police asked that their children should also be allowed to attend. Janet and Bill had not envisaged including Yemeni children for fear of upsetting Imam Ahmad, who was notoriously opposed to foreign influence. But once asked, they did not want to exclude anyone. Within days, the Imam summoned Bill to account for this cultural incursion. After careful questioning, however, the Imam agreed to the school, with the proviso that only Janet would be the teacher. She instructed about twenty-five pupils of different ages in a single classroom. Surprisingly, no one objected to the co-educational nature of the school. The Imam even tolerated some bending of his proviso when Joan Bailey, wife of the British Chargé d'Affaires, started teaching the girls how to knit and sew. By the time Bill and Janet were transferred to their next post, the students were predominantly Yemeni. The school still existed when I myself visited Yemen in 1977, although it had undergone numerous transmutations and had moved to Sana'a.

A former student at the school, who eventually became a doctor, recently wrote to Janet's eldest son, 'I cannot tell you how much I loved your mother... Your mother took me under her wing, making me feel like her adopted son. She was always there for me both at school and at home whenever I got sick and missed school. She was my first teacher in life and had such an impact on the rest of my life whereby I fell in love with everything American. I loved school and books because of her and I've never forgotten her caring generosity to me'.

Janet enjoyed her later posts and found a way to contribute to each new community. For example, she developed and was head teacher of a pre-school enrichment programme for low-income families in Ethiopia. In the Gulf, she served as volunteer coordinator for an enrichment programme for children with cerebral palsy, which was managed by the Kuwait Handicapped Society. When Bill retired from the foreign service in 1976, the Stoltzfuses moved to Princeton, New Jersey, where Janet taught English and Religion at the local independent school. For four happy years, from 1986–1990, they lived in London. There Janet founded and edited the Ellesmere Gazette, a newsletter by and for senior citizens. Thereafter they returned to Princeton, and Janet taught again until retiring in 1994.

Janet possessed a natural beauty and elegance to the end of her life, even after years of living with breast cancer. She was intelligent, well-read and an astute judge

of character. Although not an ebullient person, she had strong opinions which she could express forcefully: she was a powerful and devoted ally of those she loved and befriended.

Yemen always remained close to her heart. Following her only return visit to the country in 1971 she wrote, 'I had thought that by going back I would find everything changed, and that the present would erase my nostalgic view of our nearly two years in Ta'iz, but not so. Changes we found aplenty, but physical changes. The people are just as spontaneous, friendly and captivating as ever, the Ta'iz region as beautiful as ever. In just a few days you feel total involvement in their problems and their hopes.

GINNA VOGT

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Ahmad al-Ahmady, leader of a Yemeni group of musicians and singers from Mukalla, Hadhramaut, who performed at the National Theatre, South Bank, London, on 28 June, in association with the Diaspora Music Village Festival. *Paul Hughes-Smith*

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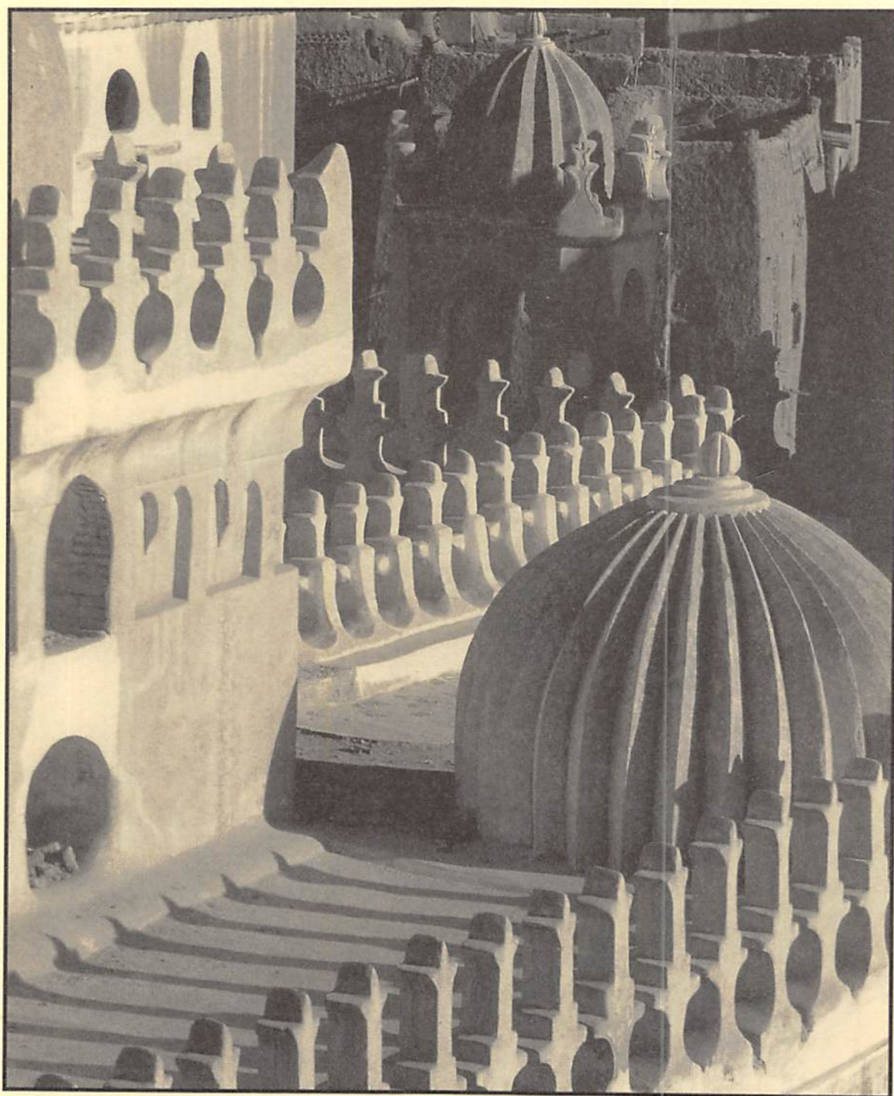

A corner of the recently restored 'Amiriyyah madrasah in Rada'a, completed in 910 AH/1504 AD by the last Tahirid Sultan, 'Amir ibn 'Abd al-Wahab. *Jane Taylor*