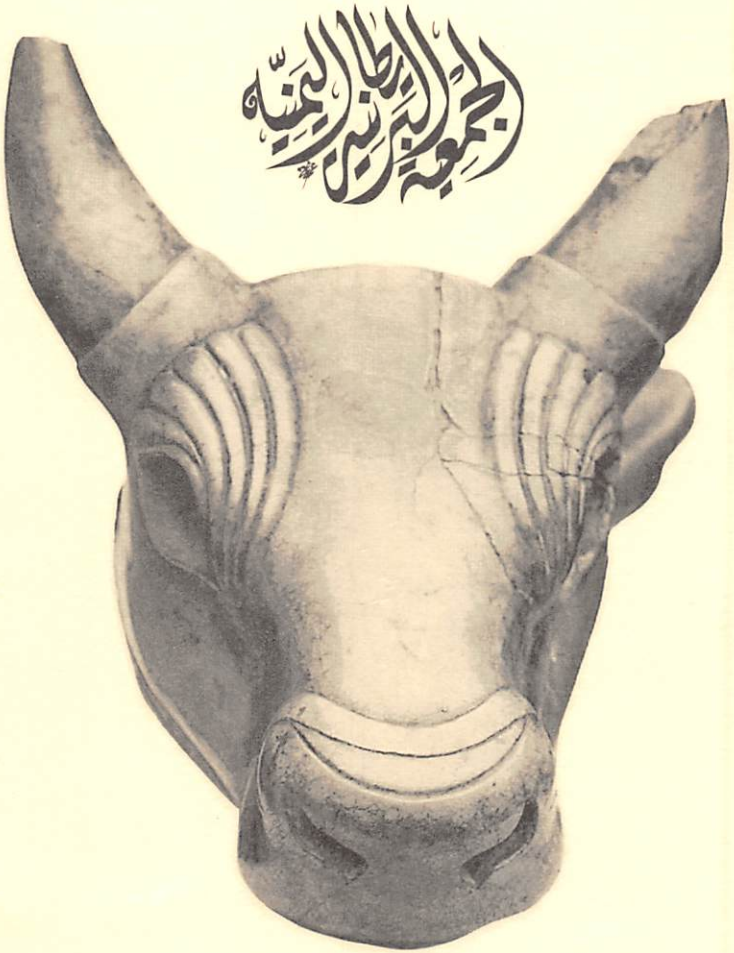

The British-Yemeni Society Journal

2007

THE BRITISH-YEMENI SOCIETY

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2007-2008

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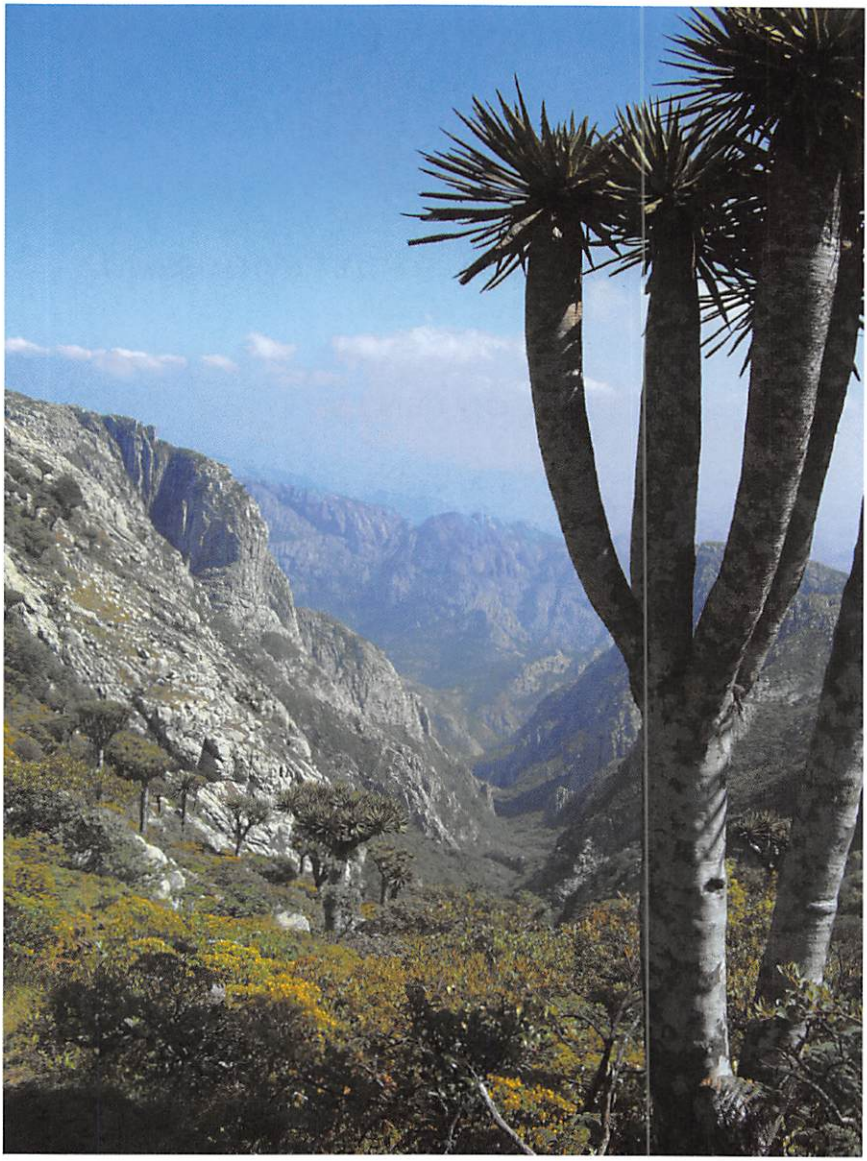


View from Skand in the Haggeher range, Soqotra *John Mason*

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

(Fourteenth Annual General Meeting, Wednesday 20 June 2007)

It is customary for the Chairman to begin his report by saying that the Society has had an active year. This indeed has been the case but I do believe that it could have been even more active, and this is a theme which I shall return to later.

Before I review the past year, let me say that the essential backdrop to the Society's activity is of course news about Yemen – political, economic, cultural and social – and the development of bilateral links between Britain and Yemen. We need to keep abreast of the news, whether it be about floods in the rainy season or the lethal effect of soaring temperatures in Aden at a time of intermittent power cuts, as has occurred in the last couple of days; or about Ministerial visits to London or Sana'a; or about conferences and other subjects exercising *The Yemen Times* or *The Yemen Observer*, both informative papers from which we can learn a lot about Yemen. We are also fortunate in having the Yemen Gateway website as a link into what the world media are reporting on Yemen, and Brian Whitaker deserves our thanks for keeping it going.

In my report last year, I said that there were signs that the British government was putting more effort into developing bilateral links. I am glad to say that that process still continues – a process to which the efforts of HE the Yemeni Ambassador, sitting here beside me, and the outgoing British Ambassador in Sana'a, Mike Gifford, have made a notable contribution. Meanwhile, I am delighted that the British Ambassador-designate, Tim Torlot, has been able to join us this evening, and to take this opportunity to invite him in his future capacity to become co-President of the Society.

There have been increasing high-level contacts between our two countries. I shall mention only two here. The first was the visit of newly-elected President Ali Abdullah Saleh to London last November – I was glad to see that he was re-elected with only 76% of the popular vote rather than the fantastic 97% he won during the last election seven years ago. President Saleh played a major role in the aid donors conference held in London that same month, organised jointly by the World Bank and the Yemeni government. The conference was an enormous success, with multilateral and bilateral donors pledging $4.73 billion to assist Yemen. Shortly before the conference, the British government announced that it was increasing its own annual aid to Yemen from £10 million to reach £50 million by 2011. My only sadness about this is that I could not lay my hands on even the present annual amount of aid when I was serving as Ambassador in Sana'a. The planned increase over the next 4-5 years is the best possible indication of a change for the better in HMG's attitude towards Yemen.

The second visit which I want to highlight was that by my good friend, Foreign

Minister Abu Bakr al-Qirbi, who was here in London only last week. It was gratifying to see that such a prestigious institution as Chatham House gave Dr al-Qirbi a platform from which to present a Yemeni view of what is happening in the Middle East, including of course his own country.

I want to say just a few words here about trade and tourism. The Middle East Association is looking again at the possibility of sending a trade mission to Yemen in the next year or so, and I have confirmed that I am ready, willing and available to lead it, if the project takes off. As for tourism, what Yemen has to offer goes without saying to this gathering of committed friends. But there are a lot of people who need to be made aware of Yemen's potential, and I am glad to see continuing coverage of Yemen in travel supplements of the major newspapers. The FCO Travel Advice for Yemen still dwells overmuch, in my view, on kidnappings and bombings and so on; I wish, for example, that it would say that no Briton has been kidnapped in Yemen since January 1999 (when I was Ambassador in Sana'a), which is not, I hope, giving a hostage to fortune! But although the Travel Advice contains much to put off the timorous, it is, nevertheless, better than it used to be, and the only place to which it advises against all but essential travel is the Governorate of Sa'ada in the north. Who knows whether even this prohibition will endure for long if the present ceasefire in the area holds and peace returns to it.

Those of you who managed to get to Edinburgh last summer to see the magnificent exhibition on Soqotra at the Royal Botanic Garden, will know what a stimulus the exhibition must have been to people to go and see one of the world's unique wonders. And in a Soqotran context I would like to thank Bill Heber Percy, on your behalf, for the substantial funds which he has continued to raise under the umbrella of our Society in support of the Computer and English Language Training Centre in Soqotra. Finally, on the subject of tourism to Yemen, let me mention two more points: first that a novel such as the unpromising-sounding but amazingly successful *Salmon Fishing in Yemen* should play a part in creating the right climate; and, secondly, let me again pay tribute to my fellow Committee member, Alan D'Arcy, for having arranged yet another Society tour to Yemen last autumn. Earlier this year Alan, having kindly donated his valuable collection of books on southern Arabia to the National Library in Sana'a, was received and decorated by President Saleh, and has thus become something of a celebrity in Yemen. I should also mention that there are periodic events in the UK with a strong Yemeni element, such as the participation last summer of a group of Yemeni musician/singers and dancers in the *Salaam* Music Village Festival in London. One forthcoming event of this nature is the Liverpool Arabic Arts Festival which is to be held during the first half of July, and which I commend to your attention.

Yemeni communities in major British population centres play an important role in strengthening the links of which I have been speaking. I should like to invite a

representative of these communities to speak about their institutional activities at one of our future meetings. Meanwhile, I shall just mention that the community centre in Sandwell, West Midlands, celebrates its tenth anniversary on 13 July; and that the community in Cardiff was very much involved in an event at the Welsh Assembly in February this year. The latter, which was attended by First Minister Rhodri Morgan, was to launch *The Enchanted Lake* and was the culmination of two years' work by Pat Aithie and Bill Heber Percy, amongst others. We owe them a great debt of thanks. The book, to whose costs the Society contributed, was part of the children's section at the recent Hay-on-Wye literary festival. It has now sold 489 copies in English and 238 copies in Welsh. I hope to see those numbers increase after the reception kindly hosted later this evening by HE the Yemeni Ambassador, at which copies of *The Enchanted Lake* will be on sale.

The event in Cardiff was an example of a British-Yemeni Society (BYS) event outside London, something we must try and do more of in future. Other BYS events during the twelve months under review – all in London – were: the launch last September of the book, *Without Glory in Arabia: The British Retreat from Aden* by Peter Hinchcliffe, John Ducker and Maria Holt – a joint event with the Royal Society for Asian Affairs (RSAA); a lecture in November on Yemen's fisheries by Stephen Akester of MacAlister Elliott & Partners – an excellent lecture, and anyone who missed it may care to go to the RSAA at lunchtime on 4 July when Stephen will be speaking on the same subject; Roy Facey's annual update in January on the development of Aden Port; a lecture by Carl Phillips on the archaeologist Olga Tufnell (who took a special interest in Yemeni pottery) at a joint meeting with the Society for Arabian Studies and Palestine Exploration Fund; a richly illustrated lecture at the beginning of March by Kay Van Damme (of Ghent University) to launch the book which he edited, *Socotra: A Natural History of the Islands and Their People;* and a lecture in April by Dr Miranda Morris on *The Pre-literate languages of Oman and Yemen: their current situation and uncertain future,* which was a joint event with the Anglo-Omani Society.

I would like to have been able to add to that list an address by Keith Vaz MP, Chairman of the Yemen Group in the Houses of Parliament, who had hoped to speak to us in May, but in the event was unable to do so, and now hopes to talk to us later in the year. The programme for the autumn will be sent out during the summer, together with the Society's 2007 Journal, but one date for your diaries is 24 October, when my fellow committee member, Shelagh Weir, will deliver a lecture at SOAS to launch her book, *A Tribal Order: Politics and Law in the Mountains of Yemen,* of which a few advance copies are available here today. Looking even further forward, I hope that Tim Torlot may have the time next year, once he has got his feet well under the table in the splendid new Embassy in Sana'a, to give us his impressions of Yemen in the first decade of the 21st century.

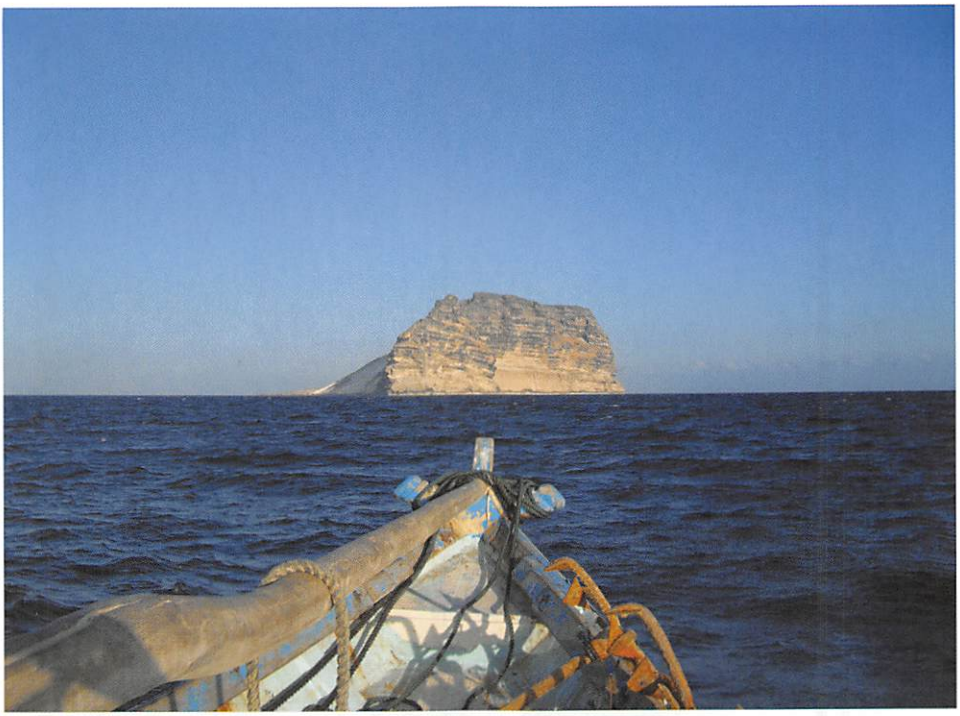
Let me now return to the theme I mentioned in my opening remarks: that the

Society could have been even more active than it was during the period under review. I am conscious that this is a rather top-down organisation, with initiatives from my Committee colleagues being handed down, so to speak, but not much in the way of ideas coming up to us from the body of the membership, apart from the efforts by the members whom I have mentioned. The Society could, I believe, become more active if it were more *interactive*. So please, do let us have your suggestions for events, lecturees and suitable recipients of donations from the Society's very limited funds. I say this in particular to new members of the Society, of whom I am glad to report there have been 37 since last year. This is *your* society, and we want it to be something that you feel is really worth your while belonging to.

Finally, some of you will remember that I said in my last report that we urgently needed to find a successor to Julian Paxton, who had soldiered on as Honorary Secretary for a year beyond his constitutional duty. Well, cometh the hour, cometh the woman. Rebecca Johnson answered our prayers and is now a tower of strength, and rapidly making herself indispensable. Thank you, Rebecca, very much indeed!

It only remains for me to thank HE the Yemeni Ambassador once again for the hospitality extended to us on this occasion. I look forward, as I am sure you all do, to sampling the culinary delights which, thanks to the Ambassador and his staff, await us outside [in the Baden-Powell Institute].

VICTOR HENDERSON



Darsa island in the Soqotra archipelago *John Mason*

The main entrance to the Embassy.

Consular and Visa Section; the slot windows are of coloured glass within 'weathering' steel panels. The wall to the right is of *habash* volcanic stone.

THE NEW BRITISH EMBASSY IN SANA'A

MICHAEL GIFFORD

The author served as British Ambassador to the Republic of Yemen from July 2004 until June 2007. This is a slightly abridged version of an article published in 'The Architects' Journal' in February this year.

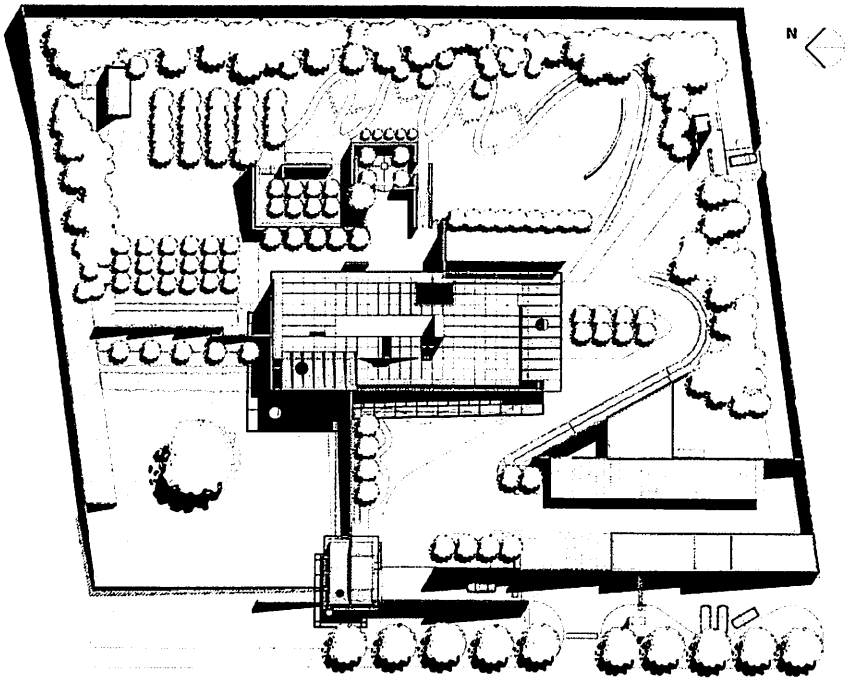
One of the first things I noticed in the office on taking up my post as British Ambassador to Yemen in July 2004 was a rather grim set of framed photographs showing the embassy with all the windows blown in, and rooms littered with smashed furniture and broken glass – the result of a satchel bomb casually thrown over the compound wall in October 2000.

Luckily no one was hurt in that attack. However it was a clear indication that the two ramshackle villas built in the 1970s in the busy heart of Hadda (once an outlying suburb of Sana'a, now a crowded commercial district), which we had been renting as our offices for nearly ten years, were no longer tenable as a secure base from which to work. Before my arrival, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) had been obliged to reduce staff numbers to a minimum, which drastically affected our ability to operate effectively. The lack of secure facilities in which to interview visa applicants, for example, meant that we were unable to offer a full visa-issuing service – a source of much discontent to our Yemeni customers.

Meanwhile, the FCO had purchased a large site to the north-east of Sana'a, in an area of the capital which was beginning to attract development in the form of other embassies, government buildings and, most notably, the new Movenpick Hotel. The site, near the imposing bulk of Jebel Nuqum, would give us the space we needed for effective security, yet would also be within reach of the main parts of the city. Following the appointment of the Winchester-based firm, *Design Engine*, as project architects, of *Gleeds Gulf* as project managers, and of *Gibs* as the main contractor, work started in March 2005 under the vigilant eye of an experienced resident Clerk of Works from the FCO and visiting experts. Over the next 21 months Embassy staff watched with close interest and mounting anticipation the new building taking shape in its stark and barren landscape.

The Republic of Yemen tends to hit the headlines for the wrong reasons, like the satchel-bomb attack in 2000, or when unlucky tourists are kidnapped by tribesmen with a grievance. One of the poorest countries in the Middle East, with a *per capita* GDP of less than $600, Yemen faces a number of serious developmental and economic challenges over the next few years as the population expands, the country's limited oil reserves dwindle, and the government attempts to reform its political and economic systems. Presidential and local elections were held in September 2006, which resulted in a further seven-year term for President Ali Abdullah Saleh who has ruled the country since 1978.

Against this background, and given Yemen's important role in the fight against

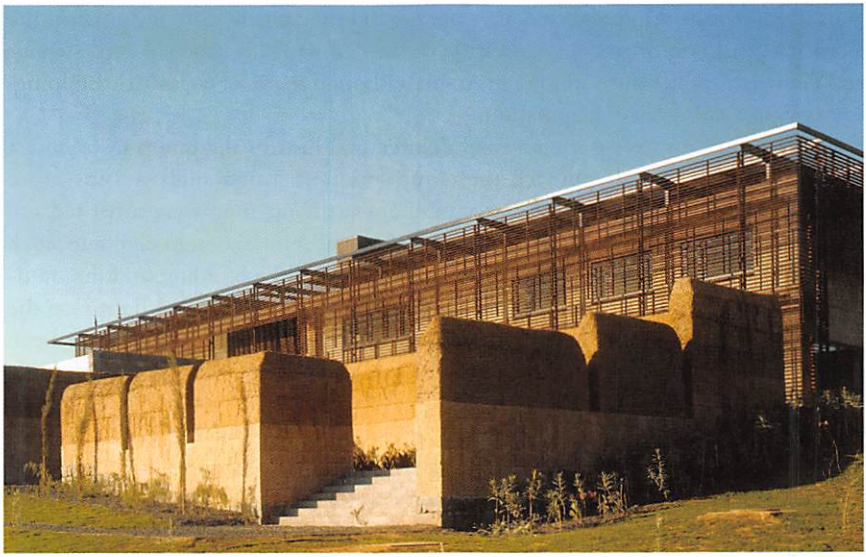


Site Plan. The main entrance is at the right (southern side) of the building; consular and visa section is at the left hand corner of the western front.

international terrorism, the UK is today more deeply engaged with the Government of Yemen in terms of aid and security cooperation than it was three years ago. So one of the immediate issues we faced as the new embassy took shape was the need to provide space for our increasing numbers of staff. This meant changing various aspects of the internal layout of the building to provide additional office accommodation, which was generally achieved without too much cost or difficulty.

The building process was a challenging one, and not just because of the inherent difficulties in any construction process. Few governments represented in Yemen had attempted to build a new embassy from scratch. Such a task required Embassy staff, in addition to their other duties, to liaise closely with Yemeni government departments with regard to work permits for expatriate staff and customs clearances, and to ensure the supply of water and electricity to the site.

The new embassy was designed and built to the highest British security standards. It had to be capable not only of providing a modern working environment for our staff, but also of protecting us from the sort of attack that claimed so



Part of the eastern side of the Embassy. The concrete structure is veiled by a brise-soleil of slatted 'weathering' steel. The upper part of the outer walls are of mud using the traditional zabur technique.

many lives in Istanbul in December 2003. The contractor and architect faced many practical challenges in achieving these objectives. At the same time they were clearly committed to implementing the second part of the FCO's competition brief which required them to demonstrate the very best of British architectural and engineering design. An embassy makes a statement about the country which it represents, and the clean lines and vibrant colours of the new British Embassy in Sana'a clearly project the UK as a country at the cutting edge of professional excellence in many fields.

The embassy was opened formally on 10 January 2007 by Dr Kim Howells, the FCO's Minister of State for the Middle East and North Africa, who described the building as a statement of the UK's commitment to its bilateral relationship with Yemen and of the UK's wish to see that relationship develop further. The building also embodies other values: it provides for disabled access, it demonstrates respect for the environment (by using plants from the old embassy site for landscaping, and by recycling waste water for the gardens), and it is structured to promote energy efficiency.

Yemen's enormously rich architectural history is a wonder to visitors and a source of pride to Yemenis. UNESCO has named three locations in Yemen as world heritage sites: the old city of Sana'a; Shibam to the east in Wadi Hadhramaut

with its 300 year old mud-brick 'skyscapers'; and the ancient city of Zabid on the Red Sea coast. A more recent expression of the country's heritage is Aden's surviving Victorian architecture, unique in Arabia, although many of its historic buildings are now in a sad state of dilapidation.

In a country displaying such a rich architectural history, the question of how a British architect would approach the construction of a new embassy was of no small interest locally. Many of the guests present at the opening were surprised and pleased, as I had been, by the inclusion of traditional Yemeni design elements, such as mud-brick walls in the private gardens to the rear of the building, and the modern interpretation of Yemeni *qamariyyah* windows, letting coloured light into the building from the east. Reactions of embassy staff to the new building have been overwhelmingly positive; and the ability to bring all staff together in one building has certainly increased our efficiency.

I have sometimes wondered how easy it is to satisfy the demands of the FCO which, if not contradictory, sometimes appear to be mutually exclusive: we want top-level security but do not want our embassy buildings to look like fortresses. We demand openness to the public but want to be able to restrict access when it suits us. Meanwhile, we often have to satisfy the needs of many different government departments whose members work with us overseas. And we want our buildings to reflect the best of Britain, while being sympathetic to the environment of the host country and to the needs and expectations of its government.

I believe that the new British Embassy in Sana'a successfully meets all these separate objectives. We now have improved security in a building whose innovative and aesthetically pleasing architecture combines modern British design with traditional Yemeni elements – in short, we have a building of which we can all be proud.

YEMEN'S FISHERIES: THE NEED FOR MANAGEMENT

STEPHEN AKESTER

This article is based on an illustrated lecture given to the Society, at The Middle East Association, on 7 November 2006. The author is Director of MacAlister Elliott & Partners who advise on fisheries conservation and development, and have been working in Yemen since 1985.

After oil and water, fish constitutes Yemen's third most important natural resource. With a coastline of 2230 km, Yemen benefits substantially from the fish wealth in its Exclusive Economic Zone, particularly in the Gulf of Aden. Fishing is a major source of employment and income in some of the country's poorest rural areas, and the industry currently employs about 400,000 people. Fish has become a significant source of protein nutrition in the national diet, while fish exports have become an increasingly important source of foreign exchange: in 2002 export earnings totalled an estimated $35–45 million; fisheries contribute an estimated 2–3% to the country's Gross Domestic Product.

Fish are landed at 49 locations on the Gulf of Aden coast, and at 31 locations along the Red Sea, but, nationally, facilities for the landing and processing of fish are inadequate. Yemen's institutional capacity to plan development and investment programmes in the fisheries sector, and to implement policy are also limited. There is a serious lack of reliable data on which to build a strategy, and a lack of human resources to monitor the fishing industry and to enforce quality control.

The decline in marine research and in the collection of statistics means that the status of Yemen's fish resources and fish catches can only be estimated. For example, the degree to which the country's most valuable fish stocks such as cuttlefish, lobster, shrimp and demersal (sea bottom) fish have been exploited/depleted is unknown. Whilst the official cessation of industrial fishing in 2003, and the imposition of seasonal fishing limits on shrimp and cuttlefish have probably assisted the recovery of these stocks, there remains a vital requirement for data collection on fish landings, and for the effective management of the country's fish resources, including the enforcement of fishing regulations.

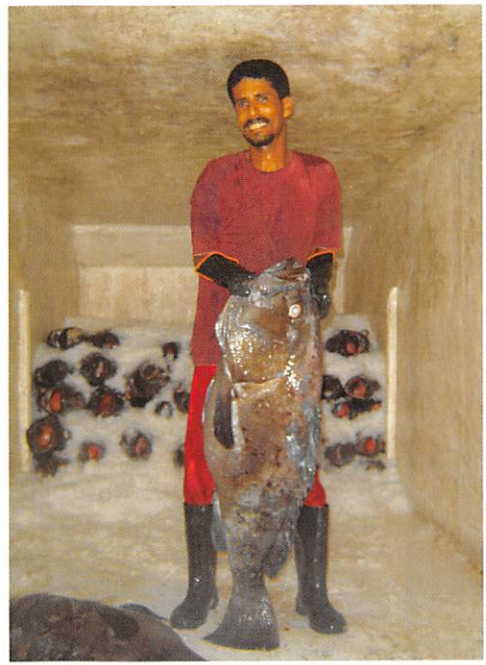
Methods employed in the catching, landing, auctioning and marketing of fish in Yemen fall well below international standards. Inadequate quality control is a threat to the competitiveness and expansion of fish exports as well as to public health. The problem arises partly from the lack of coastal infrastructure and basic services, but also from the fact that smaller boats are not properly equipped to preserve fish catches; fishermen along the Red Sea coast regularly use ice, but those along the Gulf of Aden use it much less.

The Ministry of Fish Wealth and the Marine Science Resources and Research Centre (MSRRC), let alone fisheries cooperatives, do not have the institutional structure, senior management or experienced staff to plan sector development.

Landing and marketing fish at Hodeidah, Red Sea coast *Julian Lush*

Moreover, the respective roles of the Ministry and MSRRC are ill-defined, and funding arrangements no longer reflect requirements.

Recently two major developments have taken place which create opportunities to help the Government of Yemen's poverty reduction strategy: the cancellation of all foreign industrial fishing licences, and the rapid growth in the quantity and value of fish catches in the Governorates of Hadhramaut, Mahra and Hodeidah. This growth has been reflected in the increase in the number of fishing boats and in local employment.



Cold-storage of pelagic fish.

Changes which have caused growth in fisheries include increased investment in private sector transport, an increase in fish processing facilities, and an increase in boat-building and the number of fishing vessels, especially in Hadhramaut and along the Red Sea coast. These changes have been driven by strong demand for fish within Yemen and by export opportunities abroad (e.g. in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf, Jordan and Europe). Other factors are the import of modern fishing nets and ropes, and of larger outboard engines with more range and fishing power. However, it is probable that a large part of the increase in fish landings at Hodeidah and Mukalla results from Yemeni vessels buying in fish from Somalia, Djibouti and Eritrea.

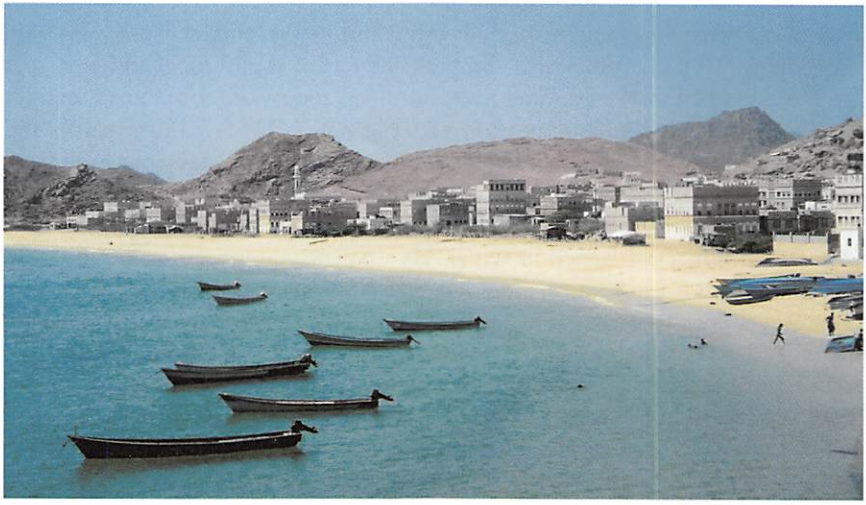
In the past, most of the catch of an industrial fleet was processed on board for export, and was never landed in Yemen. By immediately processing and freezing freshly caught fish, the fleet was able to market a top quality product. The disappearance of the industrial fleet has inevitably raised questions about current and future quality control. Without improvement, the export of fish will be increasingly constrained by Yemen's inability to meet the standards required by importing countries.

Most of the boats operating in the Gulf of Aden still keep the fresh catch on the bottom of the boat without ice. But fishermen operating in the Red Sea, in response to persistent pressure from fish traders exporting to Saudi Arabia, generally use insulated boxes to keep their catch on ice. Most local markets are not yet

quality conscious and do not pay premium prices for preserved fish, which explains why few fishermen in the Gulf of Aden use ice and insulated boxes.

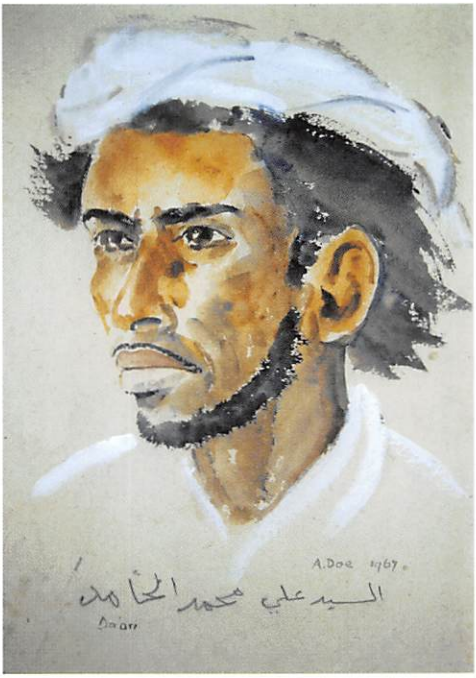
To satisfy the current and future requirements of export markets, it will be necessary for prevailing methods of landing and auctioning fish to be fundamentally changed. Fish should be landed in ice boxes directly onto a fixed platform and then moved swiftly to a nearby auction floor (eventually the auction process should be executed in a temperature-controlled environment). Having been auctioned, fish should be quickly moved to waiting trucks or to temporary storage facilities operated by private traders.

The lack of actual data on fish landings and the low numbers of fishing vessels registered with cooperatives means that the monitoring of catch per unit of effort is not possible at a national level. However, data provided by the Yemeni Fish Exporters' Association shows that catch per landing is decreasing, and discussion with local fishermen confirms this. Increasing numbers of fishing boats and the availability of modern fishing gear are reducing the benefits to each individual. Along the Red Sea this increased activity has been partly due to the fact that as the highlands dry out people have migrated down to the coast to earn a living from the sea. Yet the situation is not static. In 2003 there was a strong tuna migration and a substantial harvest of cuttlefish which enabled fishermen to reduce their dependence on coastal demersal fish. Since 2003, however, tuna and cuttlefish have been in short supply, forcing fishermen to concentrate on already over-exploited coastal demersal stocks, with diminishing returns. So long as there is no effective fisheries management and Yemen's marine resources remain unpoliced, this situation can only deteriorate.



Coastal fishing craft at Buroom, Hadhramaut, Gulf of Aden

Mukalla crayfish in palmier days *Bini Malcolm*



Sayyid Ali Muhammad al-Hamed, Dhala'.

Yahya Hussain 'Atif al-Yafa'i, Lahej.

FROM A WAYFARER'S SKETCHBOOK

ANNE WALKER

The author is a self-taught artist whose interest in painting was inspired by her time in Aden and the opportunities which came her way to travel up-country.

I lived in Aden from 1955 to 1967, where I was married to Brian Doe, the Chief Architect and, later, Director of Antiquities. During this time I was able to accompany him on some of his trips inland. I went several times to Abyan and Zinjibar; the main highway was along the Khormaksar beach, and one had to be wary of the incoming tides. Lahej was also a day trip from Aden, and I think it was there that I met and drew Yahya Hussain Ali, a dignified Yafa'i tribesman.

During these visits I started to draw and paint our escorting guards and sometimes the townsfolk as well. I was learning Arabic with Christiane Besse, our tutor being Hamza Luqman whose family published *The Aden Gazette*. This enabled me to do voluntary work among Arab women in the maternity unit in Crater. The *suq* there offered many fascinating subjects to draw, as did the dhow

repair and shipbuilding yards on Slave Island. Best of all were the trips which I was able to make up-country. I was invited by Peter and Archie Hinchcliffe to visit them in Dhala and was lucky enough to be taken up in a helicopter. The Amir's palace perched on the top of the hill overlooking the town made a good focal point for a painting. While sketching in the *suq* below, I approached a bystander and asked if I could paint his portrait. I offered a small remuneration and he agreed. I got him to sign his name – Sayyid Ali Muhammad al-Hamed – at the bottom of the portrait, and later discovered that he was from the Da'ari tribe, many of whom were considered 'dissidents'. It was then that I decided to try to paint portraits wherever I went, often having to sit on the ground while my subject sat cross-legged in front of me.

I also visited Beihan at the request of the military to do some drawings for them, and was again taken up by helicopter. My husband had asked me to take a message to the renowned Sharif of Beihan about a certain copper bowl in the Aden Museum. I was invited to take tea with him – an unusual honour for a European woman – and found him charming. What a splendid portrait he would have made if only I had had the courage to seek his permission! While in Beihan I noticed the

Federal National Guardsman, Beihan.

Sa'id Muhammad Muhsin from Habban.

The 'indigo bedouin' who accompanied the author to Mukalla.

smart and handsome figure of a young soldier from the Federal National Guard and asked him if I could paint his portrait. He was surprised, and possibly a little flattered, but he agreed. He declined my offer of a small fee.

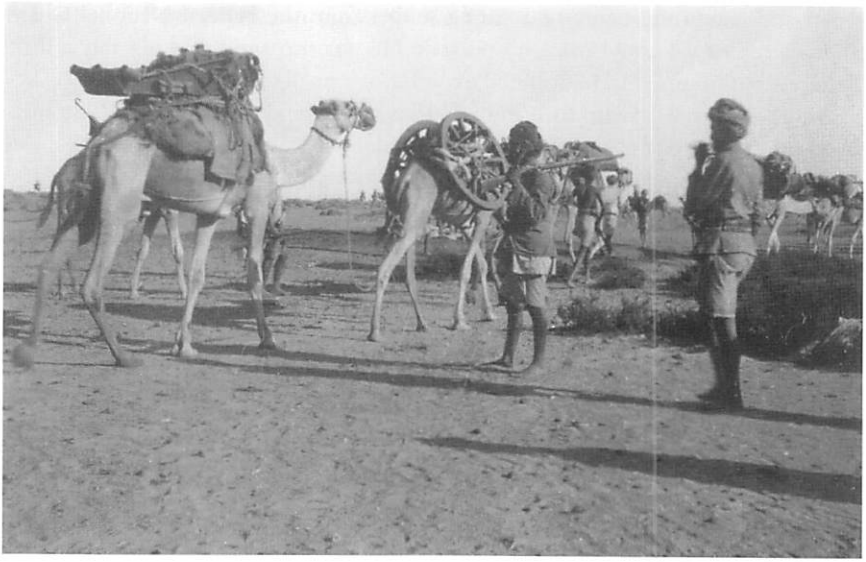
Another time I flew up to Wahidi State with a friend, Joan Duirs, whose husband piloted the Aden Airways Dakota in which we travelled. He allowed us into his cockpit as we flew up to Maifa'ah, the Wahidi capital, where we stayed in the house of the absent Agricultural Officer. A few days later Joan had to return to Aden and I was left to paint by myself. My Arabic was quite enough get by in all the places I visited, and as a woman I always felt safe. I went down to the *suq* in Maifa'ah to explore and to do some drawing, and incurred the displeasure of the local political officer, Hugh Walker, for not telling him where I was going!

Wherever I went I was greeted with courtesy and curiosity, and surrounded by a mass of people when I sat down to paint. Some of the bystanders were only too willing to be models for a small fee. I even heard myself described as 'al-nasraniya al-majnuna', 'the mad European woman'; my reputation had preceded me!

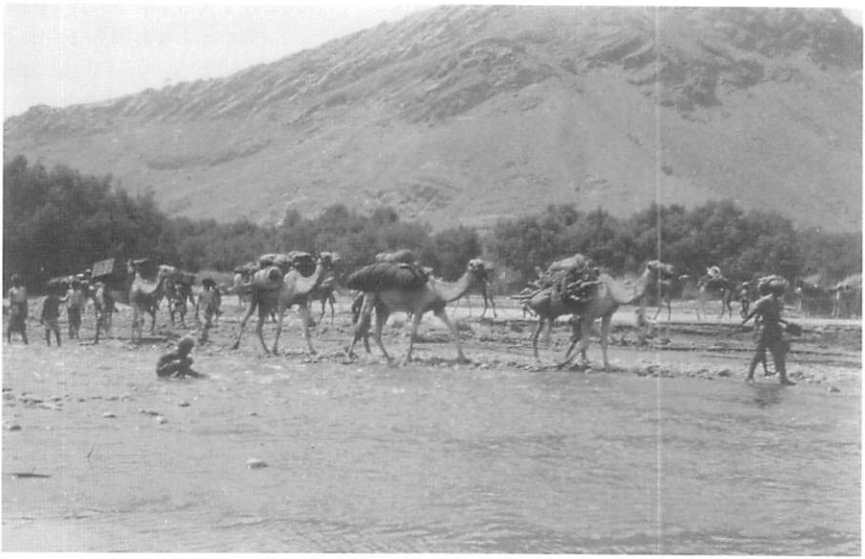
Men from the surrounding tribes in Wahidi used to come into Maifa'ah to see the Sultan, the State Secretary or the political officer. I noticed one man with a striking yellow turban, and learnt that his name was Sa'id Muhammad Muhsin, who hailed from the town of Habban. I asked him if I could draw him, and he graciously agreed.

Perhaps the most memorable of my painting excursions was my visit to Hadhramaut. Mukalla, on the coast, was most picturesque but the area which I particularly wanted to visit was Wadi Hadhramaut. Fortunately I was able to fly up to Tarim where I stayed in the comfortable Al-Kaff Guest House. I was able to visit Seiyun with its beautiful palace and mosques, and Shibam with its mud skyscrapers. When the time came to return to Mukalla, instead of flying, I had to go by road. The only vehicle available at the time was a lorry carrying sand, and the only space available was on top of the sand in the back of the lorry, which I shared with an 'indigo' bedouin! Our driver was a very young man who drove the old lorry at a frightening speed, and we careered round many a hairpin bend in the mountains behind Mukalla. At a rest stop I was able to persuade my bedouin companion to let me paint his portrait, whereupon several other bedouin appeared from nowhere and offered to sit for me. But we had to move on. What fun it all was!

(For limited edition 'giclee' colour prints of the portraits illustrated above, email: hughwalker@talk-talk.net)



Cannon requested by Sultan Aidrous bin Muhsin being transported on camelback to Lower Yafa'.



Colonel Lake's caravan crossing Wadi Bana.

PASSAGE TO YAFA' (1891–1967)

All but one of the photographs illustrating this article were taken by Lieut-Colonel M. C. Lake (or with his camera) in November 1925, and are published here by kind permission of The National Archives, Kew.

Throughout the period of British rule in South West Arabia, the highlands of Yafa' were closed to all but a handful of European visitors. The Yafa'is were a confederation of hardy, warlike tribes who, although weakened by internal dissension, tended to close ranks in guarding their independence against any threat of foreign intrusion. Many Yafa'is travelled abroad to earn a living as mercenaries in the armies of Arab and Asian potentates: Hadhramaut, whose ruling Qu'aiti dynasty were of Yafa'i origin, being historically the principal focus of Yafa'i migration. But contact with the outside world did not diminish the Yafa'i people's distaste for any interference in their internal affairs.

This reality was scarcely reflected on paper, for Yafa' was officially part of Britain's Aden Protectorate and neatly divided into two sultanates. The British had signed a treaty of Protection with the Lower Yafa' Sultan in 1895, and one with the Upper Yafa' Sultan in 1903; but they also paid subsidies to a number of Upper Yafa' tribal chiefs, in tacit recognition that the latter had as much if not more influence than their titular Sultan. So power in Yafa' was fragmented, and ebbed and flowed according to the personality and economic means of local tribal leaders. Of the two Sultans, only the Sultan of Lower Yafa' was in a position to exert significant influence beyond his own clan, the Bani 'Afif. Claiming descent from a line of pre-Islamic priest-kings, the Sultan was the hereditary keeper of a drum said to embody the spirit of the Yafa'is' ancient tribal god, and he was also credited with powers of rain-making. These attributes conferred a mystique which underpinned his ability to act as mediator in local disputes. Mediation was, in fact, his primary role. There was no tradition in Yafa', or elsewhere in the region, of a Sultan exercising executive power; in Lower Yafa' he exerted influence through judicious present-giving and hospitality; all visiting notables expected to be tipped and fed by him, while unruly tribesmen had to be bribed to keep the peace. The Lower Yafa' Sultan's income from customary tithes and from his family's extensive agricultural lands enabled him to bear the considerable expense of maintaining little more than a tenuous authority.

The highlands of Lower Yafa' rise above the northern Abyan plain, some twenty miles from the sea. Skirted by Wadi Bana to the west and by Wadi Hassan to the south, they stretch northwards into the mountains of Upper Yafa' to a height of some 8000 feet. Lower Yafa' had two capitals: al-Husn in the lowland plain, and al-Qara, the Sultan's mountain retreat several days' march north of al-Husn.

In 1891/92 Captain R. A. Wahab RE, from the Survey of India, undertook a geographical study of 'all territory having political relations with the Aden

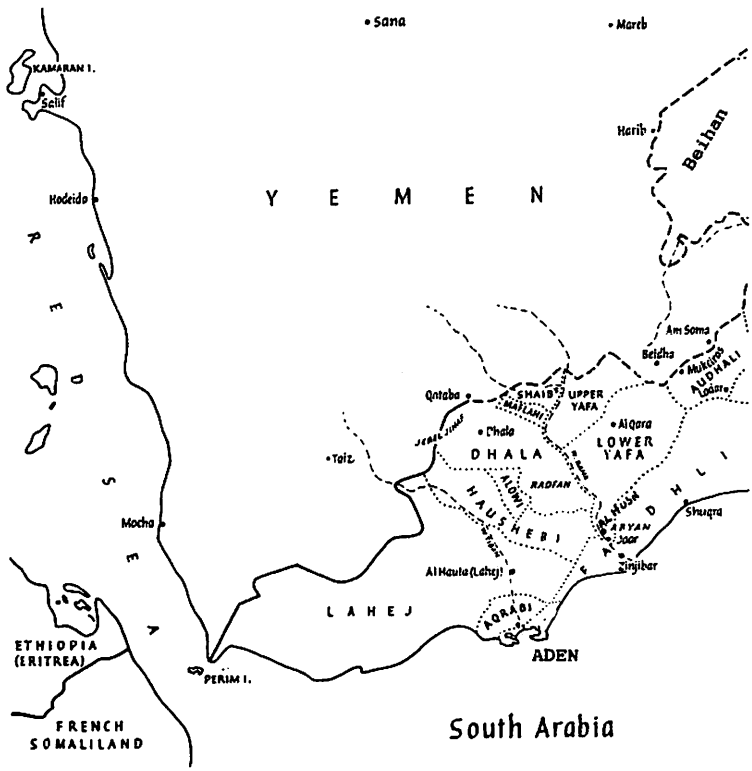
Sultan Ali Abdullah with Yafa'i tribal guards who escorted Colonel Lake from al-Husn to al-Qara.

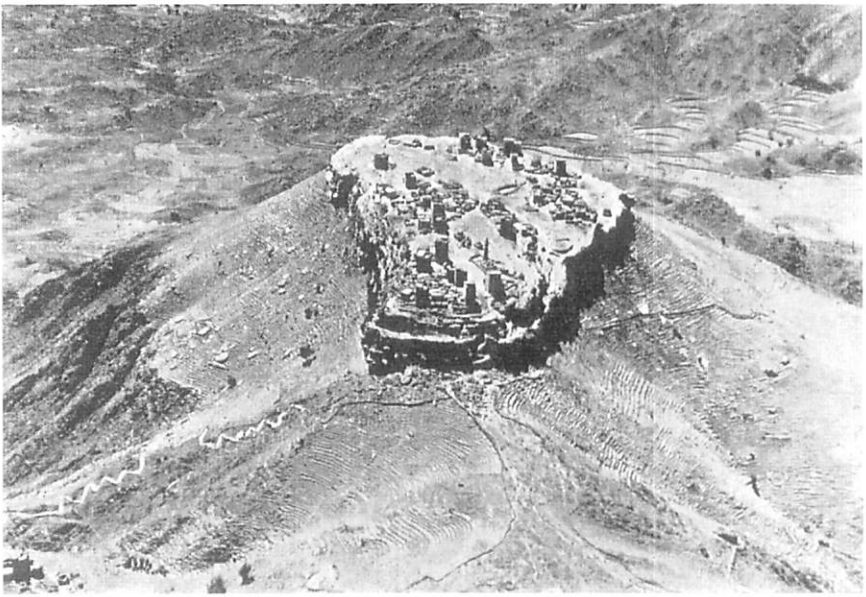
Residency within a radius of seventy miles'. However, Wahab was only able to include the lowland fringe of Yafa' in his survey 'owing', as Brigadier-General John Jopp, the British Resident in Aden, reported to Bombay, 'to some misunderstanding between the newly elected Yafi'i Sultan and the detached survey party'. It seems fair to speculate that this 'misunderstanding' arose from the price demanded by the Yafa'is for permitting the party to travel inland. A few years later the ambition of Theodore and Mabel Bent to visit al-Qara foundered on the extortionate demands (as the Bents considered) made by the then Sultan for granting them access to his highland capital.

In 1902 R.A. Wahab (now Colonel) returned to Aden to head the British side of the Anglo-Turkish Boundary Commission which had been charged with delimiting the disputed frontier between Ottoman Yemen and the Aden Protectorate. Wahab's hopes of including Upper Yafa' in this exercise were also frustrated. But in 1904 he did succeed in sending a survey team into Sha'ibi territory (which, although lying west of Wadi Bana, was initially lumped by the British with Upper Yafa'). The team's military escort, while encamped at Awabil, the Sha'ibi capital, was attacked by the Sultan of Upper Yafa', Salih bin Omar, who had recently ousted his brother, Qahtan, and was said to be under Turkish influence. Salih's attack was soon repulsed and he was forced to retreat eastwards across Wadi Bana to his ancestral fastness at al-Mahjaba.

The first European to visit Lower and Upper Yafa' was Lieut-Colonel M. C. Lake in November 1925. Seconded to Aden from the Indian Army during the First World War, Lake (1886–1943) raised and trained a tribal force for local guard duties, curiously named the First Yemen Infantry. Following its disbandment in 1924, Lake was given the more fulfilling task of establishing and commanding the Aden Protectorate Levies (APL). In the 1930s he transferred to Aden's political staff, serving as Protectorate Secretary (and later as acting Resident and Governor) until his retirement in 1940.

An austere and generally reserved man (except in Arab company), Lake enjoyed travelling in unexplored parts of the hinterland and relished the opportunity to visit Yafa'. The opportunity arose because the Yafa'is feared that the Imam of Yemen's forces, which had already occupied swathes of territory inside the Protectorate to the west and east of Yafa' (in Dhala'/Sha'ib and on the Audhali plateau), might be tempted to encroach upon their own lands. They wanted the RAF to undertake a flag-waving exercise to deter the Zaidis (as they were wont to call the Yemenis) from advancing south. In an unusual spate of correspondence



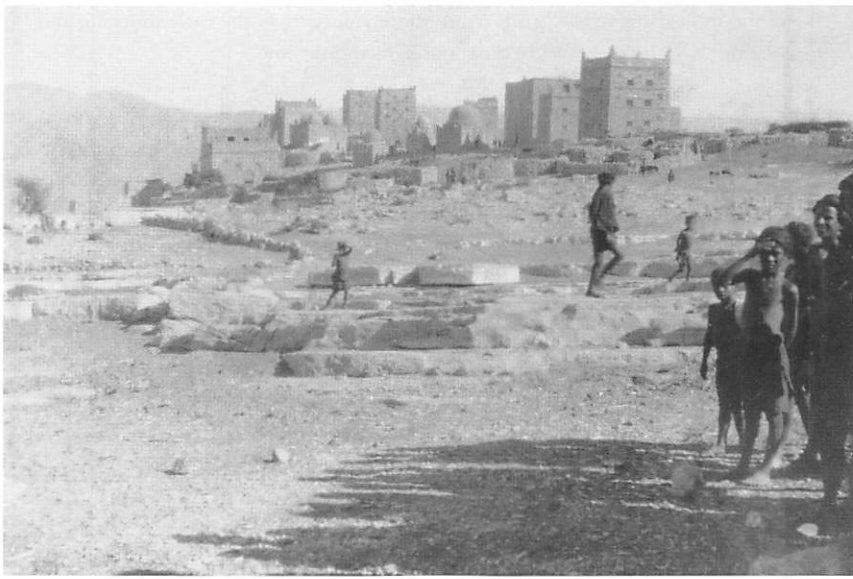


Aerial view of al-Qara c.1950. The minaret near the centre was built after Lake's visit in 1925.

between the British Resident in Aden and Yafa'i chiefs, the former pointed out that a necessary precondition of arranging an overflight would be to identify and prepare suitable landing grounds; to this end he would need to send a mission to Yafa', for which tribal escorts and assurances of safe passage would be required. In a rare display of inter-tribal harmony, and swallowing for the moment their notorious distrust of foreigners, the Yafa'is accepted these terms. Meanwhile, the Sultan of Lower Yafa', Aidrous bin Muhsin, a young man in his mid-twenties who had just succeeded his deceased father, asked to be supplied with a cannon to defend al-Qara. The Resident undertook to send him a ten-pounder, and in due course this, having been dismantled into its component parts, was loaded onto camels for onward delivery. Such, then, was the background to Colonel Lake's journey to Yafa'.

Lake was accompanied by Pilot Officer H. Walker, Muhammad Salim, a Residency interpreter who also acted as Lake's political assistant, and, from al-Husn onwards, by an escort of Yafa'i tribal guards led by Sultan Ali bin Abdulla. Lake also took with him 10,000 rupees in two steel trunks to distribute as *douceurs* to tribal chiefs, and to cover hospitality expenses and payments to camelmen. Ten days after leaving Aden Lake's party arrived in al-Qara to a gratifyingly warm welcome.

Lake's account of the journey includes a vivid description of local topography:



View of al-Qara taken by Lake. The town's four-domed rectangular mosque and three (domed) shrines lie in front and to the side of the tower houses in the background.

'Al-Qara stands on a hill rising almost straight up out of the surrounding valleys to a height above them of about 800ft and is approached from below by a winding stony path...A wonderful panorama is disclosed from the top...To the south one looks across Wadi Am Hadara to Jebel Maufaja, from the [summit] of which Jebel Shamsan and Aden harbour can be viewed on a clear day. To the west, far away in the distance, one can see the Radfan range, and beyond that, a little further west, the Amiri country with Jebel Dhubiyat. West-north-west, the lofty ridges of Muflahi territory stand out in all their rugged nakedness, and further north lies Jebel Ahl Yazid, crowned all along with stone *dars* silhouetted against the sky and beyond which lie the ranges of Upper Yafa' ...A little to the east of north may be seen the range of Jebel al-Ur, which we were refused permission to visit and so still remains untrodden by a European, with Nasaba Kasad to its east standing out like a hump in a camel's back... East-north-east and far in the distance the wall of mountains ends abruptly in a steep drop down on to the Kaur and the plains of Dathina... To the east and south-east the view becomes more restricted, being cut short by the slopes of Jebel ash-Shaab and the hills to the south of Wadi Sarrar. The intervening country all round consists of a series of ridges and valleys, the ridges terraced for the cultivation of *dukhn* [sorghum], and the valleys green with coffee plantations and wheat and barley. It is a view not easily forgotten, and of its kind, in its wild grandeur, must be

one of the most magnificent in all Arabia, more especially in the early morning and the evening with the wonderful changes of light and shadow.'

During his two and a half week sojourn at al-Qara, Lake managed to organise some training in the use and maintenance of the now re-assembled cannon. 'It was quite time', he wrote to the Assistant Resident, Bernard Reilly, 'as the gun was full of sand from the journey up, and that, mixed with the oil and grease from the [Aden] arsenal, made it quite unworkable...I have also explained to Aidrous what it costs to fire off a single shell...' Aidrous promptly asked for a free gift of 400 shells! Lake was accompanied everywhere by the young Sultan, even to Hanakat al-Marshad on the border with Upper Yafa'. There the chiefs of Upper Yafa', having temporarily put aside their differences, had gathered to welcome Lake. The old Muflahi Shaikh, Abdulrahman, was represented by his son, but the titular Sultan of Upper Yafa', Salih bin Omar al-Harhara, who had attacked the British survey

Al-Qara. Colonel Lake with the Lower Yafa' Sultan, Aidrous bin Muhsin (centre), and Muhammad Salim, Residency interpreter.

Al-Qara. Servicing the re-assembled cannon.

Sultan Aidrous bin Muhsin (centre) with the Dhubi Shaikh of Di Sura, Salim bin Salih (right), and Muhammad Salim (left) at Hanakat al-Marshad on the border between Lower and Upper Yafa'.

Upper Yafa'. Shaikh Abdulraham, the Muflahi chief, with (on his left) his son, and (to his far right) his nephew.

party's escort at Awabil in 1904, stayed away and his attitude to Lake's visit was to prove somewhat disobliging. Lake formed the impression that Salih bin Omar had little authority outside his fort in al-Mahjaba, and that the chiefs who exerted most influence in Upper Yafa' were the Naqibs of Mausatta. Lake's tour of the region included Lab'us, Qudma, Jurba, Masjid al-Nur, and Bani Baq; the latter, with its 200 *dars,* being 'the largest town in the whole of Yafa' '. The coffee plantations in Wadi Hatib were the finest Lake had seen. He climbed Jebel al-Shibr from where he had a view of the Yemeni borderland. He was accompanied back to Lower Yafa' by the Dhubi Shaikh of Di Sura, Salim bin Salih, and Muhammad Ali Askar, one of the five Naqibs of Mausatta, whose father, Ali Muhsin Askar, featured in Wyman Bury's book, *The Land of Uz* (1911).

Al-Qara's next European visitor was Sir Stewart Symes in 1929. Symes, who was Resident in Aden between 1928 and 1931, reported that he was 'very hospitably entertained'. This was doubtless because he brought news of the increased stipend which Sultan Aidrous had requested during Lake's visit in 1925. Symes was followed in 1938 by Stewart Perowne, a political officer whose purpose in visiting is

Upper Yafa'. Three of the five Naqibs of Mausatta. Naqib Muhammid Ali Askar is in the middle.

unclear; but it seems likely that he was sent to wave the Imperial British flag at a time of increasing international tension.

It was not until 1950 that Sultan Aidrous received his next European visitor. This was Malcolm Milne (d.2006) who had a brief tour of duty in Aden (1950–51) before resuming his Colonial Service career in West Africa. As Senior Political Officer based in Zinjibar (in the southern Fadhli segment of the Abyan delta), Milne's responsibilities included the lowland fringe of Lower Yafa' – the only part of Yafa' open to the British – where Sultan Aidrous' authority centred on al-Husn and Ja'ar. Milne was sent to al-Qara to settle outstanding claims to 'blood money' lodged against the Protectorate authorities by the Yafa'i tribe of Bani Qasid. Milne

took with him a box of freshly minted Maria Theresa dollars to distribute, through Sultan Aidrous, to the 'blood money' claimants. Milne includes a spirited account of his journey to al-Qara in his autobiography, *No telephone* to *Heaven* (1999). Of his arrival he wrote:

> 'Rounding a low hill we saw the citadel of al-Qara 1,500 feet above us, the fortified *dars* white against the sky beyond. The twisting, mile-long path to the citadel was black with tribesmen. Hassan Muhsin [a lowland notable] estimated that three thousand armed men awaited us... The Sultan himself, surrounded by a party of retainers brandishing swords, came slowly down the path to greet us. Tribesmen, bare chests rubbed with indigo and oil of sesame, pressed forward. As the parties met the saluting began: a cannon from the heights above fired twelve times, every tribesman lining the route [discharged his rifle] from the hip as they approached... That night the skies opened and the rain fell amid crash after crash of thunder...'

Milne's visit foreshadowed that of the Governor of Aden, Sir Tom Hickinbotham, in 1952. In his memoirs *(Aden,* 1958) Hickinbotham recorded:

> '[al-Qara] is quite the most extraordinary [town] that I have seen anywhere in the world. It is built on a circular limestone cap of a very steep hill which looks like a truncated cone, and the town can be reached only by two very rough tracks, up which camels and donkeys can, with difficulty, make their way. I was determined to visit al-Qara partly out of curiosity and partly because I was anxious to increase our influence in even the remote areas of the Protectorate...The Sultan...had left his eldest son, Sultan Muhammad, to act as our escort. [Muhammad] led the cavalcade on a horse with a motley assortment of tribesmen running at his stirrup, while I followed on my donkey...We could see al-Qara gleaming white far above us on its hilltop...and on the flat ground immediately below the hill thousands of tribesmen were drawn up in lines awaiting our arrival. Blue kilts, indigo-dyed bodies, bobbed hair, rough leather sandals and the inevitable armoury of rifle, cartridge belt and silver sheathed dagger; they were as splendid as they were unexpected in that wild and seemingly sparsely populated country. Sultan Muhammad and I moved forward on foot to greet the Sultan [Aidrous] who, dressed in a purple plush frockcoat, a blue and yellow striped kilt and a head cloth of the same colours, was busily engaged acting as ringmaster in the midst of this amazing scene... All afternoon the mass of tribesmen swarmed through the town, where they were fed by the Sultan, shouting and singing. It was not until nightfall that they dispersed back to their villages in the surrounding mountains...'

Commenting in August 1953 on the visits to Lower Yafa' by Milne and Hickinbotham, David Treffry, who had been posted to Abyan, and had himself

visited al-Qara a few weeks earlier, noted in a secret memorandum:

> 'The attitude of the tribes on each [occasion] remained fundamentally antagonistic...I have been made aware of the vigour of the opposition to HE's visit in conversation with [members of his party], with the Lower Yafa' Naib [Sultan Muhammad] who was responsible for his safety, and with the Tribal Guards who provided the escort...The unfriendliness of public sentiment on my recent visit was quite unconcealed. My party was insulted by wayfarers met on the road and in the fields...Some 1000 armed Kalad tribesmen, seen in Wadi Sarrar, had by their own admission assembled to hold the Maskaba Pass against the invading army that [they had] expected. The coffee plants of the Sultan were cut down by Saadi tribesmen in protest at his pro-government proclivities...Their opposition springs from their traditional hostility to government, their fear of change and their passionate independence...' Treffry added that visits to al-Qara by British officials had only been possible because Sultan Aidrous bin Muhsin had spent heavily on buying off tribal opposition.

Treffry's visit in June 1953 was the last to be made by a European before independence in 1967. In the intervening years relations between the British and the Sultan deteriorated. This was partly due to Aidrous bin Muhsin's increasing eccentricities of behaviour, which were thought to be a symptom of insanity brought about by chronic inbreeding. Aidrous eventually went into seclusion, as his father had done before him, leaving his eldest son, Muhammad, to act on his behalf.

Handsome in an austere way, Muhammad bin Aidrous impressed his British mentors with his quiet dignity and enquiring mind, and as Naib of lowland Yafa' he made a promising start in local administration. But he was to develop a distrust of British intentions, fuelled by Arab nationalist sentiment, which led to a growing estrangement, and in the mid-1950s he decamped to al-Qara. Muhammad then turned to Yemen for support, became the mainspring of Yafa'i dissidence, and was thrust into the title role of demon prince, or national hero, according to ideological viewpoint. Thus it was that in the twilight of British paramountcy, al-Qara became the target of several punitive air strikes aimed at forcing Muhammad to abandon his base in the Yafa'i highlands and move to Yemen.

The only journey into Upper Yafa' by a European since Lake's tour of the area in 1925 was an unexpected one made in mid-1952 by Nigel Groom who was then serving as Political Officer in Dhala. Drawing largely on long buried memories of that journey, Nigel Groom has kindly recorded the following account:

'One morning a Tribal Guard arrived with a message from the Naib of Sha'ib that an aeroplane had crash-landed in a wadi in an extremely remote part of Upper Yafa' close to the Sha'ibi and Yemeni borders. This was followed a little later by a similar message from the Muflahi Shaikh and then from the Amir of Dhala, and

over the next day or two from several other notables. Their reports were all consistent and plausible. I signalled Aden who confirmed, after contacting Taiz, that no British nor Yemeni aircraft had been reported missing. The RAF undertook a systematic air search but the area in which the crash was reported to have occurred was so wild, mountainous and unmapped that it was hardly surprising that nothing was seen.

I was ordered to go on an urgent search and rescue mission and to take with me a strong enough escort to counter any tribal resistance. My wife, Lorna, who was with me in Dhala at the time, recorded that I departed with 15 Government Guards and about 60 Aden Protectorate Levies (APL) including two medical orderlies with medical supplies and two stretchers. They all came from the garrison in Dhala.

I have little doubt that we started by driving in trucks to Khalla which was as far as vehicles could go on the main route to Awabil. Pack animals were always readily available at Khalla, and we took some thirty camels and donkeys for the baggage – boxes of ammunition, rations etc. We did not go through Awabil, but marched roughly due east of Khalla, climbing down and round the mountain slopes. Eventually we reached the narrow, steep-sided gorge of Wadi Bana. Here the Wadi roughly follows a north to south course, providing a boundary between Sha'ib and Upper Yafa'. We proceeded north for several miles, and as we went we could hear and sometimes see the search planes. In the very north of Sha'ib, Wadi Bana bends sharply to the west. At precisely this point Wadi Sih, flowing north to south, joins Wadi Bana. Instead of turning left we marched straight on up Wadi Sih whose west bank on our left formed the undemarcated boundary with Yemen, with Upper Yafa' on our right. We were now traveling through the territory of the (five) Naqibs of Mausatta, perhaps the most remote of the Protectorate chiefs.

Wadi Sih was much like the Bana, narrow and twisted, with high cliffs on either side and a perennial stream of water providing shrubs, small trees and grass. But a few miles up the wadi we were brought to a halt by a tumbled mass of huge rocks and boulders, ten to fifteen feet high, which completely blocked the gorge. I was told there was a footpath skirting this obstruction which led up into the Yemeni hills to our west and came back into the wadi a few miles further on. But this diversion was, of course, all in the territory of the Imam, and was, moreover, impassable for baggage camels. My only choice was to leave my APL escort where they were and to go through with my lightly burdened Government Guards. I sent a messenger off with a letter to the Shaikh of the local Yemeni tribe seeking permission to use the path on our mission of mercy. His *dar* was some miles away to the west, so we did not receive a reply until next morning. Meanwhile, we pitched camp. It was a pleasant spot, with plenty of running water and fodder for the animals, but full of mosquitoes once darkness fell. We had hardly met a soul on the journey; the whole area seemed to be devoid of population.

The Shaikh replied that he would like to help us but there were difficulties which he felt he would need to come and talk over with us first. He did not want to be seen at our camp nor in our company, so the meeting would have to be after dark and he would send one of his men to take me and my entourage to the spot where he would meet us.

The Shaikh, who had three or four armed henchmen with him, said that he would be glad to help us but he had received a message from Taiz warning him that a search party was being sent to the area, and that the Imam had ordered that under no circumstances should any officer or military force from the Protectorate be permitted to pass through Yemeni territory. He dared not disobey such an order. Given the Imam's propensity for beheading people for the slightest disobedience, I could respect his feelings. We talked for a while and the Shaikh eventually agreed that I could send four Government Guards in civilian clothing through to search the upper part of Wadi Sih for any signs of a crashed aircraft. The Guards left at dawn the next day and returned in the evening having found no physical signs, nor anecdotal evidence from local goatherds, of the reported crash. By this time we were quite satisfied that the whole story was an unfounded rumour, and early next morning we began our journey back to Dhala. We were away on this wild goose chase for about a week. But for me it was an exciting adventure, and at least I can claim to be the only British officer, since Lake's trip to Upper Yafa' in 1925, to have entered the realm of the Naqibs of Mausatta!'

EDITOR

A TOURIST IN YEMEN: Comparing impressions

ALAN RUSHWORTH

This is an abridged version of an article published in 'The Yemen Times' on 26 February 2007. The author, a long-standing member of the Society, is a metallurgical engineer who has specialised in methods of quality control in the engineering industry.

Every year the British-Yemeni Society usually arranges a three-week tour of Yemen. This takes place in the autumn with a maximum of 16 participants split between four Land Cruisers. Starting from Sana'a, the itinerary generally includes Mahweet, Hodeida, Taiz, Aden, Mukalla, Seiyun, Ataq and Marib. There are variations each year, so now Upper Jawf and Baraqish have been added, which did not feature in earlier years.

I have made the tour three times: in 1998, 2002 and 2006, and I would like to record some of the changes that I have observed during this period.

By far the most obvious change is the tremendous improvement in the quality and network of roads. This has resulted in shorter travel times and fewer early starts, and has given us the chance to see even more of this diverse and beautiful country. But I rather regret no longer seeing the sun rise over the dunes between Marib and Shabwa, the casualty of a later morning start from Marib along a tarmac road skirting the sands.

Construction is visible everywhere, indicating significant investment. Inevitably, this has resulted in the emergence of numerous cement buildings with unsightly reinforcing rods protruding from their roofs. The same is a common phenomenon in North Africa, and the reason there, so I was told, is that tax is not fully payable until a building is completed; perhaps this also applies in Yemen. Many towns seem to be exploding outwards, doubling or trebling in size since my first visit: Mukalla is just one example of this rapid process of urban growth, and new roads have led to swathes of ribbon development and of land demarcated or walled off for future building. Eight years ago I noticed few schools but now they are everywhere, even in the most remote places. One attractive feature, which is new, are the corniches which have been built along the coast at Hodeida, Aden and Mukalla. Street cleanliness has markedly improved (although Bait al-Faqih is a notable exception) and where rubbish bins are installed these are well used.

I read in *The Yemen Times* some years ago that an edict had been issued prohibiting the chewing of *qat* by public employees whilst on duty. Presumably this has now been rescinded because the consumption of *qat* seems to have hugely increased amongst the police and army, as well as among civilians, including the very young. In the highlands the cultivation of *qat* appears to have all but supplanted that of cereal crops.

Despite indicators of increased national prosperity, such as new roads and

Members of the British-Yemeni Society tour being entertained in Nisab.

buildings, and the large number of new vehicles, begging has greatly increased. During our recent visit I was asked for money on almost every occasion that we stopped. Young women with babies were especially persistent. The worst occasion was near Sheikh Othman when we stopped at a restaurant to eat, where it took three restaurant employees to keep the beggars away from our table. It was noticeable that Yemeni customers were not troubled in the same way.

On my first visit to Yemen, I had no particular expectations of its cuisine. I enjoy food, and Yemeni dishes have been a very agreeable revelation whether eaten at a simple roadside hostelry or at a grand banquet. My favourites include lamb soup, saltah, kibda, baked and grilled fish and *ful*. And they are as good, if not better, now as they were when I first tried them.

Today the *hijab* appears to be worn far more than previously, even in Aden. At the same time an increasing number of women are to be seen working in museums, hotels and offices. Indeed, it was thanks to some young ladies that my

problems with the internet were solved after fruitless attempts to help by their male colleagues.

Security was more relaxed; we had fewer escorts and visited places previously closed to tourists. Security personnel who accompanied us were less demanding of unofficial 'perks' such as food and *qat* than during previous tours. I have never felt unsafe in Yemen and I can well believe that crime levels are low, in contrast to my experience, for example, as a tourist in South America.

Our party thoroughly enjoyed visiting the re-furbished National Museum with its improved layout and presentation. It was noticeable that in all the museums which we visited, there were always many local visitors. This is not always the case in Europe, and surely reflects the Yemeni people's pride and interest in their own culture.

However, some things have not changed. Most of the hotels at which we stayed were in need of maintenance (especially plumbing) and redecoration. In some cases rooms had not been cleaned nor the linen changed, although corrective action was generally prompt when this was pointed out to hotel staff.

Such deficiencies pale into insignificance against the major attraction of visiting a country whose people remain just as friendly and hospitable as I remember from my first visit; a memorable occasion during our recent tour being a banquet given for us in Nisab. As a visitor, it is delightful and refreshing to be invited to share a meal with somebody you have only just met. Other enduring attractions are, of course, the natural beauty and variety of the landscape, the country's unique architecture, and its rich culture of music, dance and poetry.

I greatly enjoyed my third tour of the country, and look forward to my next and to seeing many more visitors there from Britain.

THE PRE-LITERATE, NON-ARABIC LANGUAGES OF OMAN AND YEMEN: Their Current Situation and Uncertain Future

MIRANDA MORRIS

Dr Miranda Morris is a distinguished linguist and ethnographer who has done extensive fieldwork in Oman and Yemen. She gave the following talk to a joint meeting of the Anglo-Omani and British-Yemeni Societies on 19 April 2007.

A group of languages known as the Modern South Arabian (MSA), once heard all over southern Arabia, are now restricted to parts of southern Yemen and southern Oman (Dhufar). Even here they are steadily falling into disuse, stifled by the ever-increasing spread of Arabic. The reasons for this decay are many, but a major factor is the (admirable) development of schooling – in Arabic. As more girls attend school, the conservative effect of women and the home on language is also eroded. Today, most of those who would once have spoken an MSA language also speak Arabic. More significantly, they also read and write Arabic. And here we have the main cause of the collapse of these languages: they are purely oral, lacking any written form. This means that with the death of their speakers they cease to exist.

History [1]

The MSA belong to the Semitic group of languages, a category which includes various languages of the Middle East, some of which are no longer extant. In southern Arabia and in Ethiopia a number of Semitic languages were spoken in the pre- and early Christian era. The Semitic group includes the MSA, the Old South Arabian (OSA) and the Semitic languages of Ethiopia and are generally classed as Southern Semitic. The MSA are a remnant of a pre-Arabic substratum which is believed to have once stretched from Oman to the highlands of Yemen. Across the Red Sea, Southern Semitic extended into the highlands and littoral of East Africa, giving rise to the Ethiosemitic languages such as Ge'ez, modern Amharic and Tigrina.

The speakers of these Southern Semitic languages were able to evolve in virtual social and linguistic independence. Sand deserts to the north inhibited the encroachment of Arabic (a Central/Northern Semitic language); the mountains of Dhufar protected the eastern flank; to the west and north lay the high plateaus and mountains of the Yemeni massif. Further west, the Red Sea and the coastal lowlands allowed the Ethiosemitic languages to develop with little interference from other Semitic languages. Separated by some 300 km. from the nearest point on the Arabian mainland, the MSA language of the island of Soqotra developed in almost complete isolation; all but the most recent efforts from the mainland to incorporate Soqotra have been ephemeral and largely limited to the coast.

The MSA are called this to differentiate them from the OSA (or Epigraphic South Arabian languages, as they are also called). The latter were the languages of the inscriptions of the famous Minaean, Sabaean and Qatabanian kingdoms of South Arabia which flourished between the 8th century BC and 6th century AD. There are thought to have been a number of dialects or languages which died out soon after the Islamic conquests, but so far it has only been possible to distinguish five in southern Arabia: Minaean, Sabaean, Qatabanian, Hadhrami and ancient Arabic. Unfortunately the OSA are essentially limited in attestation to monumental inscriptions whose form and content do not go far beyond solemn formulaic dedications. The inscriptions tend to be short, containing almost exclusively proper names, and tell us tantalizingly little about the structure of the language. Supplementing these inscriptions, the discovery in 1970 of inscribed palm-leaf sticks has taught us a little more about the OSA lexicon and morphology.

The well-known 10th century Yemeni writer, Al-Hamdani, describing the linguistic situation in the Arabian peninsula, characterised the OSA group of languages as *ghatamm*, meaning 'incorrect or incomprehensible'.(2) He distinguished them from those varieties of Arabic which were spoken in southern Arabia at that time (still today, the MSA languages are quite incomprehensible to an Arabic speaker).

For many Arabs the term 'Himyar' came to represent all things 'South Arabian'. Thus they commonly refer to the MSA as 'Himyari', and believe them to be a continuation of the OSA, also called 'Himyari'. However, the position is not so straightforward. From Al-Hamdani's description and from the comments of other Arab writers, 'Himyari' seems to have been the name given to the language spoken by those Arabs who settled in southern Arabia probably as immigrants from the north. They appear to have spoken a North Arabic dialect, but, over time, their speech became heavily influenced by the OSA languages, in particular Sabaean.(3) Significantly, *their* speech was described as *comprehensible* to Arabic speakers. So 'Himyari' cannot refer to those South Arabian languages which Al-Hamdani did characterise as *ghatamm* (incomprehensible). As for the Himyaris, they were an important tribe in the Sabaean kingdom of south-western Arabia who later became the powerful rulers of much of southern Arabia. They wrote principally in Sabaean, and this was the only language which continued to be used for writing until the end of the South Arabian civilisations in the 6th century AD.

Regardless of their precise classification, it seems that by the earliest centuries of the common era the OSA languages had been replaced by a variant of Arabic and had effectively ceased to exist apart from some pre-Arabic features surviving in a few dialects of Yemeni Arabic.

The MSA languages

The exact relationship between the MSA, the OSA and the Semitic languages of Ethiopia remains unclear. The problem in determining such relationships arises from the fact that the MSA have no written form. Nor do many of the Ethiosemitic languages of Ethiopia, or, where they do, this is a recent development. However, isolated in the deserts, coasts and mountains of southern Yemen and Oman, and on islands in the Arabian Sea, the precursors of the MSA languages avoided replacement by Arabic, and evolved to become contemporary Bat'hari, Jibbali, Harsusi, Hobyot, Mahri and Soqotri.

Mahri, called *mehreyyet* by its speakers, the Mahra people, has various dialects of its own, notably a southern dialect spoken in the south of the Mahra governorate of Yemen, and a northern dialect whose focal point is the Nejd desert, which extends both sides of the Yemen/Dhufar border. Traditionally the Mahra people were semi-nomadic, rearing camels and goats, while along the coast they were also fishermen, especially of shark, and famous as sailors. The Mahra took control of the Soqotra archipelago in the latter half of the 15th century, and in the 16th century a Mahri pilot, Sulayman al-Mahri, wrote a famous guide to the waters of the region.

Harsusi, called *harsiyyet* by its speakers, was the language of the Harasis tribe, most of whom live in the area named after them in central Oman, the Jiddat al-Harasis. They, too, are semi-nomadic, rearing camels and goats, though the majority of men nowadays are also wage-earners, many employed in the oil industry. Harsusi is closely related to Mahri.

Bat'hari, called *bitahreyt* by its speakers, was spoken by the Batahira tribe, who live in Dhufar along a strip of coast opposite the al-Hallaniyah islands (where Jibbali is spoken). The Batahira are principally fishermen, though they also raise goats and a few camels. They are believed to be descended from the indigenous or aboriginal inhabitants of the plateau above, who were forced out by more powerful incomers. They were regarded by those who came to dominate them as *dha'if*, that is weak or subordinate. Given their relative lack of influence, they did not enjoy the same success as the other tribes of the area in obtaining jobs with the oil industry. Like Harsusi, Bat'hari is closely related to Mahri.

Hobyot, called *hobyot* or *weheybyot* by its speakers, was spoken by people of different origins on both sides of the Dhufar/Yemen border. It was not the language of a specific community or tribal confederation but of a geographical area. Although it was mainly spoken in the monsoon-affected mountains on both sides of the border, there were also Hobyot-speakers in the desert areas to the north and west, and in fishing communities along the coast. This language combines elements of both Mahri and Jibbali, and thus stands in a class of its own.

The language of what might be called Dhufar proper, namely the monsoon-affected mountains and adjacent area is called in Omani Arabic, 'Jibbali'. Its speakers

used to call it *sheret*. (The /s/ is a sibilant consonant spoken through one side of the mouth, sounding to us rather like the Welsh /ll/; this lateral sibilant is common to all languages of the group, as well as to many of the Semitic languages of Ethiopia, and to Hebrew, for instance). Both Jibbali and *sheret* have the same meaning: 'of the mountains', the Arabic from 'jabal', and *sheret* from *sher,* also meaning mountain area. However, *sheri* (plural *shero* and meaning 'of the mountains') was also a term once applied, often pejoratively, to a particular group of people in Dhufar considered to represent the area's indigenous inhabitants. They were subjugated by incoming groups who then came to control the Dhufar mountains. Like the Batahirah along the coast they were regarded as *dha'if,* weak or subordinate, and were forbidden to bear arms. Because of these potentially undesirable connotations, many Jibbali speakers themselves call the language *Ahkili* instead (the name commonly given to the language when spoken by tribal, i.e. non-*dha'if,* people), or, increasingly, Jibbali, as I shall call it here. Traditionally, Jibbali speakers were seminomadic pastoralists, breeding an unique species of small European-type cattle, as well as managing herds of goats and camels. Along the coast they also fished. Like Hobyot, Jibbali is not a language of a specific community or tribal confederation, but of a geographical area. Within this area most, if not all, speak Jibbali as their first or second language. Jibbali is very distinct from Mahri and the two are not mutually comprehensible. Like Mahri, Jibbali also has dialects of its own.

Soqotri, called by its speakers *saqatari,* is spoken only in the islands of the Soqotra archipelago in Yemen (and by the first generation emigrés in the Gulf, mainly in 'Ajman), and also has regional dialects. The islanders are fishermen and pastoralists. They raise sheep, goats and the same unique, small, European breed of cattle as in the Dhufar mountains, and breed camels and donkeys as pack animals. Where there is sufficient water, they also cultivate date palms. The inhabitants of the smaller islands of Samha and Abd al-Kuri (in 2000, Samha had less than 150 inhabitants, and Abd al-Kuri just under 400) [4] rely on fishing and the rearing of sheep and goats for their livelihood. They, too, speak Soqotri: the people on Samha speak the dialect of the southern coast of Soqotra, while those on Abd al-Kuri, who used to speak a dialect which was difficult for many Soqotrans to understand, now mainly speak the Arabic of the Yemeni coast opposite. The fourth island, Darsa, is not inhabited.

While clearly related to the other MSA languages, Soqotri is the least comprehensible to the speakers of the other five. If anything, it is closer to Jibbali than to any of the others (not to Mahri as has appeared in various publications whose authors are presumably influenced by the long years of Mahra domination of the islands). Thus the six MSA languages fall into two main groupings: a 'Mahri group', which includes Mahri, Bat'hari and Harsusi; and a second group of much less closely related languages: Jibbali and Soqotri, with Hobyot falling somewhere between the two groups.

Intra-comprehensibility

While Soqotri remains unintelligible to speakers of the other five languages, intra-comprehensibility was more common amongst the MSA languages of the mainland. This was due largely to proximity, intermarriage and shared interests. Physical proximity was a major factor. For example, the Batahira on the coastal plain interacted with Mahri and Harsusi bedouin groups of the plateau above. I was able to observe the results when working in the area in the 1970s and 1980s: there was a high degree of intra-comprehensibility between the three groups. I noted, too, that Bat'hari was considerably interpenetrated by the Arabic dialect spoken by their neighbours and co-fishermen from the large Jeneba tribe to the east. Likewise, Hobyot speakers came into regular contact with Jibbali speakers in the mountains, and with Mahra along the coast and in the desert interior. Indeed, much of the Hobyot lexicon was borrowed from the more socially prestigious Mahri language (Sam Liebhaber noted that people of African origin living in Hawf were more wiling to speak Hobyot in public than Arab Hobyot speakers).

Intermarriage between groups was another factor contributing to intra-comprehensibility. While Harsusi and Mahri men freely married Bat'hari women, Bat'hari men were not usually permitted to marry Harsusi and Mahri women. The same was the case for the *shero* men, who would not be given the women of the dominant tribe. Of course the children of such marriages spoke their mother's language as well as that of the dominant group to which their father belonged. Consequently fluency in more than one MSA language was not uncommon. Shared interests were another factor. Speakers of these languages lived similar lives as pastoralists or fishermen. The need to determine water use, or grazing and fishing rights, and to settle boundary disputes or to co-ordinate transhumance obliged them to work together and to make themselves understood.

Until fairly recently, the central importance of the frankincense trade meant that people from different language groups travelled to harvest the trees, spending months at a time living and working together. The Harsusi and Batahira were not involved in this trade in the same way, and it was very noticeable in the late 1970s, when ordinary people from both these groups first began to visit Salalah (the capital of Dhufar), that they were completely unable to communicate with Jibbali speakers.[5] (Their tribal shaikhs had always travelled to Salalah to pay their respects to the Sultan or to represent their tribes, and used to talk amusingly on their return about the oddities of language or behaviour of the other groups which they had observed on their travels).

In addition, mutual intelligibility was reinforced by the continual cycle of barter and trade between the triad of desert, mountain and coast. As indeed was mutual mockery. It was quite common to hear Mahra in the east mocking the 'appalling Mahri' of Harsusi and Bat'hari speakers, or Jibbali speakers ridiculing the 'infantile Jibbali' spoken on the Al-Hallaniyah islands or by Arab merchants in the towns.

And both enjoyed making fun of speakers of Hobyot, that disconcerting language which was neither one nor the other. The Batahira and the *shero* would console themselves with their conviction that they were the true, indigenous inhabitants of Dhufar, and that theirs was the original language. Meanwhile, speakers of Hobyot would claim that theirs was the original Ahkili from which both Mahri and Jibbali were derived. And, of course, *all* joined in poking fun at the gibberish spoken on Soqotra by people who were little known except for their fame as sorcerers, and who, anyway, were too far away to retaliate.

Earliest publications on the MSA languages

Lexical data for the MSA languages first appeared in 1835 when Lieutenant James Wellsted of the British Indian Navy visited Soqotra; he collected around 250 words in Soqotri. In 1840 he published 37 words in Mahri. In the same period Fulgence Fresnel, the French Consul in Jidda, recorded grammatical information about Jibbali, a language he called 'Ehhkili'. Bat'hari and Harsusi were not documented until much later. They first appeared in 1937 in an article written by Bertram Thomas: 'Four Strange Tongues from South Arabia'. Here he lists Mahri, Harsusi and Bat'hari as belonging to one group of closely related languages, and another language, which he calls 'Shahri', as the sole constituent of a second group. The discovery of Hobyot would have to wait even longer. Tom Johnstone first mentioned it in a publication in 1981, where he wrote that he believed it to be a mixture of Mahri and Jibbali and not a distinct language. It would not definitively be described as a separate language – not a dialect of either Mahri or Jibbali – until 1985, when Marie-Claude Simeone-Senelle of the Mission Francaise collected enough data to establish that it was a language in its own right. The first full texts of Mahri and Soqotri (rather than lexical lists or grammars) were collected in 1898 by the Sudarabische Expedition from Vienna, and published by Jahn, Muller and Hein between 1902 and 1909. In 1936 Wolf Leslau published a comparative dictionary of Soqotri based on materials which they had collected. The study of MSA philology and linguistics had taken off.

The early 20th century

I think we can assume that all six MSA languages were in a healthy state at this time: that is, they were spoken as first languages by a significant number of people. Schooling in the areas where these languages were spoken was, for all practical purposes, non-existent. Religious education was available, in Hadhramaut especially, and, in the larger coastal settlements, there were small Qur'anic schools. However, these schools were principally for the children, usually the sons, of the merchant classes (primarily Arabic speaking), or of those close to the rulers and their courts. Indeed, in both Salalah and Soqotra, for example, it was expressly forbidden for children from the interior and the mountains to attend such schools. In

south Yemen, a small number of schools had been established by the British and some of the more enlightened Sultans, but these were accessible either only to people near or in Aden, or were for the sons of shaikhs and the wealthier families. Only emigration to the Gulf or Saudi Arabia offered any chance of education or training for the other male members of the population. Then, within a single decade all this began to change. The British left Aden and were succeeded by a Socialist government with an almost evangelical attitude to education; and in Oman, Sultan Qaboos took over from his father and showed no less zeal in offering his people every opportunity to become literate. From this point, the MSA languages were bound to undergo modification.

Later published studies of the MSA languages

Tom Johnstone of S.O.A.S. led the field in major publications in this later period: in 1977 he published a lexicon of Harsusi; then in 1981 a lexicon of Jibbali in which he distinguished three dialect groups – eastern (including the dialect of the Al-Hallaniyah islands), central and western. In 1987, after his death in 1983, his lexicon on the Negd dialect of Mahri was published.(6) Published work on Bat'hari remained restricted to the material gathered by Bertram Thomas, and a few words mentioned in Johnstone's Mahri and Jibbali lexicons.(7) Hobyot remained poorly represented: some words in Johnstone's lexicons, and in articles written by the members of the Mission Francaise.

Current research

Most research in recent years has been carried out by European researchers, in particular the Russian-Yemeni Mission in the 1980s and 1990s, and the Mission Francaise from 1982 to 1991: the former's best known members in terms of MSA languages being Vitaly Naumkin and Victor Porkhomovsky; the latter's being Antoine Lonnet and Marie-Claude Simeone-Senelle. Mention should also be made of Dr Alexander Sima of the University of Heidelberg who was preparing a Mahri grammar and studying Hobyot when he was tragically killed in a road accident in Yemen recently.

To turn to work being carried out by Omanis and Yemenis themselves, in Oman, while there is no specific programme to study or preserve the country's five MSA languages, a few speakers of Jibbali or Mahri are presently carrying out research on their language or are planning to do so. Similarly, a handful of Yemenis are engaged in writing about either the Mahri or Soqotri language or culture. I have certainly not read everything written in Arabic by such researchers, but what I have read leads me to conclude that they are writing to promote a specific – and usually non-linguistic – point such as the antiquity or greater historical importance of their own linguistic group. If writing specifically about language, they tend to do so with the intention of demonstrating the close relationship between

their particular tongue (i.e. Mahri or Jibbali or Soqotri) and that most prestigious language of all, the Arabic of the Qur'an. Since all languages concerned are related Semitic ones, there are indeed equations to be found, but this alone is of little linguistic significance. And the absence of an index or reliable bibliography makes such studies less useful. However, these are still early days for such research in the two countries. Moreover, the problem of obtaining relevant publications from Europe and the USA is a serious one, and even when available these require a high level of fluency in European languages to be intelligible, as well as training in the terminology and methodology used. Most interesting, perhaps, for linguists is the fact that a Dhufari, Ali Ahmad Mahash al-Shahri, has for some years been collecting graffiti in a South Arabian script painted on cave walls, or sometimes scratched or pecked onto rock. Similar graffiti have been found in the Mahra governorate of Yemen, as well as on Soqotra. But their overall number has so far been insufficient to make a reliable interpretation possible.

Language survival and writing

Unless MSA languages develop a written form they are surely doomed. Languages can be revived and re-invented: we have only to look at the case of modern Hebrew (though of course in this case the relevant alphabet already existed).

MSA languages are transcribed in one of two ways: using the Arabic alphabet, or a modified version of the Latin alphabet. The former is problematical in that the number of consonantal forms is inadequate; nor is the limited Arabic vowel system able to cope with the more complex vowel system of the MSA languages. Where the Arabic alphabet is modified (with additional diacritics) to extend the range of consonants, there is still the problem of insufficient vowelling. And, most problematic of all, no standardised system for modifying the Arabic alphabet has yet been devised, and each writer invents his or her own. Consequently, these various transcriptions are hard for a reader to interpret, and their value is thereby lessened.

The system based on the Latin alphabet has been standardised, and is called the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA). Using this system, the whole range of speech-sounds that the human voice can produce can, in theory, be reproduced on paper. Conventions have long been established for transliterating Semitic languages, and these can be understood and applied by anyone who has had the necessary training.

The likelihood of encouraging the survival of the MSA languages by introducing a study of basic phonetics and transliteration into the school curricula of Oman and Yemen seems small at present. But let us hope that at some time in the not too distant future a system of transcribing these languaages in a modified Arabic script will be seriously discussed in both countries, and a standardised system devised. There is a precedent, and not too geographically distant: a standardised

system for writing the dialect of Swahili, referred to as Standard Swahili, was established and adopted in 1930 by the Inter Territorial Language Committee.

The oral art of Soqotra

I am currently working on a project on the oral poetry and song of Soqotra.[8] I believe that, more than any of the other MSA languages, Soqotra had an extremely rich poetic tradition. Most everyday tasks were accompanied by song, and jokes were made, secret messages sent, and puzzles set in poetry. Herders sang to guide and control their livestock, and no animal was slaughtered without an introductory and lengthy poetic invocation chanted by the men present. Poetry recorded island history and was the medium for communication with the divine. Men and women sitting around a fire in the evening would engage in poetic contests, and the island-wide poetry competitions were a regular event, where different poets competed to interpret and respond to a poetic challenge set by one of their number.

However, under the influence of a rather unbending form of Islam propagated from Saudi Arabia and the Gulf, this tradition has come under criticism. Consequently, both the poets and those who transmit the poetry have become increasingly reticent, with the result that this valuable heritage is being eroded even more rapidly than the language itself. Other factors have also contributed to the decline of the poetic oral tradition. Among these are: the increasing penetration of the island by the Arabic language; the arrival of new types of poetry from the Arabian mainland whose form and language, even subject matter, are not native to Soqotra; the influence of strict Islamic norms of separation of the sexes (thus, for example, it is no longer acceptable for men and women to gather together in public to challenge one another in evening-long poetry sessions); the decline and transformation of the major celebrations at which poetry played a major role, in particular the feasting and ceremony formerly associated with circumcisions and weddings (circumcision is now largely a private family affair, and at weddings the sexes are separated and often sing the types of Arabic song popular on the mainland).

While the new developments are undoubtedly of interest in themselves, they can only accelerate the impoverishment of Soqotran poetry. Yet this oral art is an unique storehouse of the language and culture. Many of the poets and those skilled in memorising and transmitting the poetic corpus are becoming increasingly aware of what they are losing. Some want to record the poetry in a more permanent way, and are keen to document and preserve for posterity what their poetic tradition represents in terms of language, cultural reference and traditional island expertise.

Much of the vocabulary and many of the allusions are now opaque to the younger generation, and detailed discussion with older members of the community is necessary to reveal the many layers of meaning which are a striking characteristic of this cryptic and allusive poetry.

I also believe that a wider knowledge and understanding of the singular culture

of Soqotra has a relevance and value beyond the archipelago. One of the aspects of its unique nature is that, in contrast to that of the Arab mainland opposite, the islanders have traditionally been unarmed and non-violent. The archetypical Arab tribesman values himself as a warrior, and has expected and been proud to fight, and to train his sons to take up arms to defend their honour. On Soqotra, however, there is little tradition of glory through the use or force of arms (although there are references to the subject in some of the poems and songs). Instead, individuals were praised for their verbal skills and their powers of persuasion, and particularly for their ability to defuse tension before it flared into anger. Here, children are brought up to be sensitive to atmosphere and to become adroit at diverting potential combatants. We surely all have something to learn from this.

With support from the British Academy and the American Institute of Yemeni Studies I have been working with Soqotran islanders and poets to gather a sample of what remains in the island memory. The book will be accompanied by a CD of some of the sung and recited material. I decided at the outset to concentrate on poetry and song composed in Soqotri for the book (though there is a lot of material available today composed in a mixture of Arabic and Soqotri; I have collected many of these and some will appear in the book). Together we have assembled a corpus of material what includes poems, prayers, lullabies, work-songs, messages in code, riddles, island wisdom enshrined in poetic couplets, and stories centred on a short poem or an exchange of poems. The original plan was to produce this corpus transcribed in the International Phonetic Alphabet which would then be translated (in a severely literal fashion) into English by me and into Arabic by the islanders. The more complex footnotes, glossary and introductory chapter would be translated by a specialist. However, it became clear during fieldwork sessions in 2005 that there was strong feeling on the part of those working with me that the material should also be presented in Soqotri transcribed in Arabic characters. This was the only way, they said, that their children and children's children would be able to read and learn something of their own poetic inheritance.

However, as we have seen, there is no agreed standardised system for transcribing Soqotri using the Arabic alphabet. Many versions have been used: on the island itself, in Yemen and in the Gulf. There was certainly no time now to try and establish an acceptable system for doing this, nor indeed was it appropriate for this important and major task to be undertaken by our small group. It was therefore decided that each translator should use his or her preferred system. In the final publication each translation would appear under the name of its Soqotri translator, so it would be clear that the method used represented an individual preference rather than a standardised system. This is an unsatisfactory compromise and has already thrown up some interesting variants, with individual sounds and even elements of morphology being transcribed differently by different translators.

My first job was to convince the poets and those with the skill and memory to

transmit poetry that it was indeed possible for me to reliably reproduce their work on paper. They were very doubtful but intrigued, and many were the tests they contrived for me. However, once they were convinced that it was indeed possible to record the material in this way, they seemed to be genuinely pleased.

When working on this project I live in a coral-rag house in the fishing quarter of Hadibo beside the sea. I work with the poetry experts and the translators under the shade of date-palm matting at a large home-made table in the courtyard. Before and after work, and during the break for lunch, a stream of visitors comes and goes, each keen to give his or her view about the work in progress. Anyone can sit in on our work sessions, as long as he or she does not interrupt too often or for too long. Reactions to the project – seen as highly unusual, if not downright peculiar – on the island have been mixed, and have changed over time.

Some Soqotrans, including a few of the poets whose poetry is more influenced by Arabic, feel that the Soqotri language and culture are embarrassingly primitive and backward. Worse, they believe both to be un-Islamic. They think that it is much more important for Soqotrans to strive to join the wider, modern Arab and Muslim community, and that all Soqotrans should be glad to turn their backs on their dubious past. Others feel that, whereas a lot of my material is acceptable, many pieces are most definitely not: pieces which allude to earlier belief systems, for example, or to witchcraft, or to much looser relations between the sexes. While they are on the whole keen that the project should continue, they would prefer a more sanitised version, and are quick to propose what they consider to be more suitable material. And then there are the growing number of Soqotrans who are proud of their heritage and keen to preserve what remains of their vanishing past. Though some were initially uneasy about the appearance of tribal names in some satirical pieces, nervous of possible unpleasantness which this might provoke, they were reassured by others pointing out that tribes from all over the island were subject to the same treatment; that such poems existed and had given enjoyment and entertainment to many; and to ignore them would be to misrepresent the island's poetic tradition. Soqotrans such as these are keen that the world reflected in their oral art is recorded accurately, warts and all.

Over time, I am pleased to say, the numbers of those encouraging the work has grown. Best of all, our project seems to have played a part in starting a renewed enthusiasm for poetry in general. There is now talk of a special poets' club, and officially sponsored poetry events and competitions. A group of enthusiasts are keen to try and work out an agreed system for transcribing Soqotri. All this is encouraging, and suggests that some cautious optimism about the future of the Soqotri language and its poetry might be permissible.

The work has thrown up other problems, some of which should have been foreseen by me. For example, whereas I had little trouble finding Soqotran men and women prepared to translate the material into Arabic, the quality of their Arabic

has varied alarmingly. A second language for all of them, they have learned what Arabic they know under different educational systems and to different standards. The older ones learned theirs under the previous socialist government of the PDRY, the younger ones under the present government. However, the schooling available on Soqotra has always been of varying quality and availability, and the only secondary school has been in the capital, Hadibo. This lack of fluency has meant that the extensive and nuanced vocabulary possessed by the translators in Soqotri is in no way matched by that which they possess in Arabic. The myriad different Soqotri terms used to describe markings of livestock, for instance, or to capture distinct shades and density of raincloud, different types of vegetation or verticality of slope, are simply not available to them in Arabic. As a result, the Arabic version of a poem has none of the vibrancy or subtlety of the original. It seems to me now that it will be necessary to leave specific or many-layered terms like this in their original Soqotri, and supplement translations with an explanatory glossary at the back. I have also decided that I shall need the assistance of an Arabic editor to smooth the rough edges of some of the translations, and hope I have found one in the daughter of an old Soqotran friend now living in Oman. She has completed her degree in Arabic literature and is now starting her PhD on the work of a Zanzibari poet.

The future of the MSA languages

Sam Liebhaber, who is working on a *diwan* (poetry collection) of the Mahri poet Haag Daakone (who is unusual in his determination to publish his *diwan* in Mahri transcribed in Arabic characters, in a system he has devised himself) is pessimistic. He has written: 'In terms of prospects for the future of MSA languages, the presence or absence of poetry is a good measure of a language's vitality. When a minority language is used for higher register expressions, it maintains the prestige necessary to ensure its retention amongst native speakers. By this measure, Hobyot is clearly at the cusp of language death since my attempts to elicit poetry in Hobyot were answered with Mahri poetry or shrugged off entirely. Jibbali may remain vital for some time yet since young Jibbali speakers are proud of their oral traditions and would occasionally try to draw me away from Mahri sources in favour of their own poetry. Though Mahri-language poetry is still being composed, I am not optimistic about the future prospects of Mahri, since talented young Mahri poets and performers prefer Arabic over Mahri, even denying the capacity of Mahri to handle modern poetic modes and themes'.

The intimate relation between language and culture, and the importance of maintaining a healthy diversity in both is increasingly appreciated. UNESCO, in recognition of this, has established the UNESCO Endangered Languages Program. Its website states: 'Linguistic diversity is the store of knowledge about how to maintain and use sustainably some of the most diverse, but also vulnerable

environments. With the death of each language our knowledge dies too'. Depressingly, it goes on to say: '50% are predicted to disappear by the end of the century, as are 50% of our plant and animal species, and so our ability to sustain life on earth. There are six or seven thousand languages: every week or two, one small language dies. It dies because it has become irrelevant, only a few people speak it. 95% of languages have less than one million speakers, while Mandarin Chinese has 874 million native speakers and English 341 million'.

In Oman, Bat'hari could be said to be a dead language. Even when I was living with Bat'hari families in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the older members of the family would often sit around their own, separate fire at night. The younger ones, whose Bat'hari was now largely confined to everyday phrases and snippets of humorous poetry would sit at another fire nearby, chattering away in Arabic. They were no longer capable of – or interested in – joining the elderly in their trips down memory lane.

Harsusi is moribund, despite being a higher prestige language than Bat'hari. Some observers believed that the delay in sending children to school until they were 8 or 9 meant that they would still speak Harsusi at home with their uneducated mothers. But nearly all the girls have attended school for some years now, and the children of these literate young women will surely not still be speaking Harsusi at home. The geographical position of Jiddat al-Harasis also means that they are surrounded by Arabic speaking tribes, and the jobs available to Harsusi men are in an Arabic-speaking environment. Hobyot in both Oman and Yemen is struggling. From my own experience, all the children of those with whom I worked on the Hobyot language speak fluent Arabic. Jibbali (in Oman) and Mahri (in both Yemen and Oman), even though much interpenetrated by Arabic, continue to survive. Soqotri continues to be spoken by nearly all the inhabitants of the archipelago, partly because active schools here are still few, partly because the islands have remained isolated from outside influence until relatively recently.

The continued survival of those MSA languages which are still spoken depends on their ability to hold their own against the Arabic which dominates their societies, and to do so with little or no official support. It also depends on the enthusiasm of those who speak these languages to use them amongst themselves and in the home, and on the interest and will of enough native speakers, both men and women, to study and record them. School, the media, and the drift towards the towns where Arabic is the lingua franca, have already weakened these preconditions for survival. Any useful linguistic research will have to be done soon while the older generation who speak the relevant tongue as their first language are still alive. I have been struck by how quickly Soqotri, for instance, has lost ground to Arabic since I first began to visit the islands in the late 1980s.

Language is principally a tool, and people will, of course, use whichever tool they find the most effective. Nevertheless, in Oman and Yemen interest in these

languages is growing among native and non-native speakers alike. Under pressure of rapid change, with all the accompanying feelings of dislocation which follow, added to uncertainty about what the future holds, there is a growing (nostalgic?) interest in the cultural heritage of MSA language speakers. However, if this renewed interest is to result in anything solid and enduring, the necessary training needs to be available, and there have to be students willing to undergo it. For, while there is a certain amount of rushing around with tape recorders and video cameras, and even the commercial production of cassettes (cassettes of Mahri and Jibbali poetry and song can be bought in the market, and tapes of Soqotri poetry cross back and forth between Soqotra and the Gulf), the willingness and the ability to embark on the hard slog of collating and accurately transcribing the material is not visible; indeed the very necessity for doing so is not yet sufficiently appreciated. Making the necessary linguistic training available is not a priority in either Oman or Yemen, but without it the value of the cassettes and tapes is limited, and they will not last for ever.

From a rather more selfish, academic point of view, this group of languages is of great interest. They are important for the study of the Semitic language: phonetically and phonologically, in syntax morphology and lexicon, they have preserved elements which have disappeared from other Semitic languages. Further research will contribute to a better understanding of the relation between the South Semitic languages and the historical development of the earliest Semitic languages. For many scholars it will be interesting, too, to observe how the MSA are changing and evolving under the influence of Arabic.

Personally, I believe that the loss of the MSA languages and of the particular and idiosyncratic view of the world that each embodies is equivalent to the loss of biodiversity which we regularly deplore. As long as these oral languages are still spoken by someone, a certain amount of material can be recorded. But such recordings are never more than an extremely limited sample of that vast spectrum which is the living language. I have a recording of an old Bat'hari man making mouth music and chanting a poem whose purpose is to entice cormorants to roost near him so that hungry fellow tribesmen can climb the cliffs to catch them. The old man is long gone, the recording remains. But the knowledge and understanding of the context in which he performed this song has also gone and is irrecoverable. There is no longer any need to enchant the birds: the desperate poverty of the Batahira that made such a song necessary is thankfully at an end, and has been replaced by a time of plenty. This does not stop us regretting the fact that a purely oral language such as this, once lost, can never be replaced.

Notes

(1) This section on History is heavily indebted to the masterly first chapter (Linguistic Overview: The Modern South Arabian Languages: Background, Discovery and Sources) of Dr Sam Liebhaber's (unpublished) thesis entitled *Bedouins Without Arabic: Language, Poetry and the Mahra of Southeast Yemen*, 2007. Dr Liebhaber is Assistant Professor, Middlebury College (slieb@berkeley.edu), and I am grateful to him for his generous permission to quote from his summary in this way.

(2) I was rather taken aback when an old and illiterate Bat'hari, Zifena, used the same term with the same meaning to describe the languages spoken in India: *'ai-hind: diyret alghatamm, herba'athen hawil ghatamm'*, 'India: the land unintelligibility, the people there used to be quite incomprehensible'.

(3) Unfortunately for us, for a variety of historical, cultural and religious reasons, the earliest Arab scholars and linguists were principally interested in studying the language of the Qur'an rather than any other languages spoken in the south of the Arabian peninsula.

(4) Figures collected by me on the islands when working on the EU project *Socotra Archipelago Masterplan* 2000–2010YEM/B7/3000/IB/97/0787.

(5) The Batahira at this time even discovered a branch apparently of their tribe living in the Dhufar mountains who called themselves the Bit Bit'ha. Although they were Jibbali speakers and not able to speak or understand Bat'hari, representatives later went to visit the Batahira and relations were established.

(6) Unpublished but significant works include the 1997 PhD thesis of a Jibbali, Salim Bakhait Taboo, on the culture of Dhofar, which contains some poems; and the following year the PhD thesis of Anda Hofstede on the syntax of Jibbali.

(7) Two articles on Jibbali poetry were published: Johnstone (1972) and Morris (1985), and one on Bat'hari poetry (Morris 1983).

(8) I shall hereafter mainly refer to 'poetry', though most poetry was in fact sung, except where it was part of a story. This is in contrast to the more modern Arabic-influenced poetry which is recited.

BOOK REVIEWS

Islam, Memory, and Morality in Yemen: Ruling Families in Transition by Gabriele vom Bruck, Palgrave Macmillan (Contemporary Anthropology of Religion), 2005. Foreword by Fred Halliday. Pp.xix + 348. Illus. Appendices. Notes. Bibliog. Glossary. Index. Hb.£42. Pb.£14.99. ISBN 1-4039-6665-6.

Any traveller in the Islamic world from Morocco to Indonesia will inevitably come across *sayyids,* whose historic role and changing status in Yemen is the subject of this book.

Although *sayyid* is used in modern Arabic to translate the English 'mister', the word was originally used in a genealogical sense to mean a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad through his daughter Fatima. In all Muslim societies, Shi'a and Sunni alike, *sayyids* (Arabic: *sada*) are given respect because of their august lineage. In Yemen they have taken on a special significance because for over a thousand years the ruler, the Imam, was recruited exclusively from within their ranks. He headed the Zaydiyya, a branch of Shi'a Islam which believed in an imam who was visible to all and who ruled territory. So the Zaydis differ fundamentally from the 'Twelver' Shi'a, the majority branch of Shi'ism, who maintain that the last imam, al-Mahdi, although alive on earth, has been in occultation since the late ninth century. Zaydis also differ in other respects: their imam is neither sinless nor infallible although he is chosen for his piety and knowledge, amongst other attributes; and the presence of an imam at any particular time is not deemed a necessity. This clashes with the dogma of both 'Twelver' and Isma'ili Shi'a.

The Zaydi imamate was established in Yemen in the last decade of the ninth century by a *sayyid,* Yahya b.al-Husayn b.al-Qasim, who arrived in Sa'da from Medina and declared himself Imam with the honorific al-Hadi (rightly guided). Historically, Zaydi Shi'ism has only flourished in Yemen, but it was also found in Iran before the emergence of the 'Twelver' Shi'a Safavids in the early 16th century.

The September Revolution in Yemen put an abrupt end to the Zaydi imamate with the deposition of the last Imam, Muhammad al-Badr. In Yemen today there are thousands of *sayyids* who claim descent from one imam or another. How have they adjusted to life in republican Yemen without an imam? This, in a nutshell, is the question which the author seeks to address. She is no armchair orientalist. Possessing an innate fondness for Yemenis and their culture, she has, over the years, made friends in Yemen with many families: she has lived in their houses and has discussed with them every aspect of their lives. These factors give a rare flavour of authenticity to her research. Moreover, as a woman she had access to the intimate family detail so copiously recorded in her book, which, in Yemen's conservative society, would have been denied to a man attempting to cover similar ground.

The complex status of the *sayyids,* who continue to exist at every social level, is well brought out. Not every *sayyid* sided with al-Badr in the Civil War in the 1960s; many supported the Republic and rose to high office. Only male descendants of Imam Yahya were banned from returning home after the reconciliation between republicans and royalists in 1970. The prevailing atmosphere of tolerance, which this reviewer remembers from his travels in Yemen in the early 1970s, changed dramatically in the 1980s with the growing influence of extreme *salafi* (or Wahhabi) doctrines propagated through the recently founded religious colleges known as *ma'ahid 'ilmiyya.* Previously such influence had made little inroad in Yemen. In the North around half the population were Sunni, while South Yemen was overwhelmingly Sunni. Zaydis and Sunnis prayed in each other's mosques and often intermarried. But even *sayyids* in Hadramawt (who are Sunni not Zaydi, and it should be emphasised that this book is about Zaydi *sayyids)* became the target of *salafi* abuse.

Marriage is an issue which is discussed in detail. In Imam Yahya's time women of *sayyid* descent, namely *sharifas* (Arabic: *shara'if)* could not marry non-*sayyids.* But since the Revolution such marriages have increasingly taken place, although there are still *sada* who cannot accept that their grandchildren should be other than members of the Prophet's house and who therefore refuse to 'marry their daughters out'. Similarly, there are some *shara'if* who would prefer to remain spinsters rather than marry a non-*sayyid.* Even a well-to-do Yemeni but one lacking the appropriate lineage would have great difficulty in marrying a *sharifa.*

A particularly interesting section is that dealing with the professional history of two *sayyid* families, Bayt Zabara and Bayt al-Wazir, spanning some three generations. The details are carefully set out in more than ten pages of Appendix II. They show how the *sayyids,* despite their loss of political and social status, are determined to excel in every field of modern life. For example, their willingness to seek careers in trade and commerce is in marked contrast to attitudes prevailing in pre-Revolution days when such occupations were usually shunned as unbecoming. A chapter entitled 'Snapshots of Childhood' poignantly relates the memories of a member of the al-Wazir family going back to the 1940s and 50s, and those of two *sharifas* who were among the first girls in Yemen to go to school; it shows how these children 'learnt about their social location, the diversity of religious affiliation and notions of righteousness'.

The above are just some of the many facets to this important and truly fascinating book. But the author's recourse to dense anthropological jargon is a sad blemish; there are passages in this book which will be unintelligible to the non-specialist and difficult even for the specialist to fathom. And the book's lack of a consistent system of transliteration involving macrons and diacritics is regrettable when its pages are so laden with proper names and toponyms.

Many of the minor errors of fact which litter the text could have been avoided

with more careful attention to historical detail on the part of the author. For example, the founder of the Zaydi imamate, al-Hadi, was not descended from 'Abdullah b. al-Hasan (p.32) who was the brother, not the father of al-Hadi's ancestor, Ibrahim b.al-Hasan [al-Muthanna]. The words *muharram 'urfi* (p.148) are translated as 'habitually unlawful', instead of 'unlawful according to custom', their correct meaning. Vom Bruck states (p.106) that the Prophet grew up in 'Ali's household, whereas the opposite of course is the case. 'Ya Sin' and 'Tabarak' cannot be described as 'verses' of the Qur'an (p.100); they are chapters (*suras*), respectively nos.36 and 25 (which is also known as al-Furqan).

The author's choice of photograph for the front cover, showing the historian Sayyid Muhammad b. Muhammad Zabara with his son, the late Mufti Sayyid Ahmad, was an inspired one, and there are several delightful illustrations enriching the text. But a map of the Zaydi areas of Yemen, including towns (e.g. Shahara, al-Suda, Kawkaban and Mahwit) and tribal areas (such as Hashid and Bani Matar) which are mentioned, would have been welcome.

Vom Bruck admits that the position of the *sayyids* within republican society remains 'fraught with tension'. Indeed some Yemenis regard the *sayyids* as foreigners, overlooking the fact that most in North Yemen are descended directly from Imam al-Hadi, or close kin of his, who arrived in the country more than a thousand years ago! Historically, the Zaydi branch of Islam has been distinguished by its intellectual diversity and dynamism. It embraces within its ranks intellectual giants who are by no means of one mind, for instance Imam al-Hadi himself, the 14th/15th century Sayyid Muhammad b. Ibrahim al-Wazir, the (17th century) Salih al-Maqbali, and al-Shawkani. The late Mufti, Sayyid Ahmad Zabara, once told me that he did not believe that the imamate should be restricted to the descendants of the Prophet. And I sense a cautious optimism when Vom Bruck notes that certain *sayyids* of eminent families seek to reconcile Zaydi concepts of the imamate with the Republican constitution, while many others have been involved in efforts 'towards building a prosperous democracy'. These points are well made and deserve wider recognition.

A. B. D. R. EAGLE

A Tribal Order: Politics and Law in the Mountains of Yemen by Shelagh Weir, British Museum Press, London, and University of Texas Press, Austin, 2007. Pp.xviii + 390. Notes. Glossary. Bibliog. Appendices. Tables. Maps. Illus. Hb. £26.99. ISBN 978-0-7141-2579-4.

This is an excellent book. Much of the fieldwork which it rests on was done almost thirty years ago, and the author has evidently spent a long time considering her documentary evidence. The result is a rich historical ethnography. The work is

clearly presented and admirably written so that anyone with an interest in Arabia will enjoy reading it, and indeed enjoy coming back to it. The photographs (many in colour) are appealing, the maps and tables are clear and relevant. This is definitely a book to buy, not borrow.

The subject of *A Tribal Order* is Razih, a heavily-terraced region to the west of Sa'dah, marginal thus far to academic literature but hardly to Yemen's history. The importance of Sa'dah is obvious; so is that of the Mikhlaf Sulaymani a little north and west, or, later, that of the 'Asir Sharifs. This is the terrain of, for instance, Wahhabi politics early in the nineteenth century. Weir places a particular stress on the eighteenth century Qasimi imamate, when Razih became a principality, and on the presence later of what, in effect, are two hereditary statelets. At several points we have mention of the Huthi family, who have been prominent in Razih since the late nineteenth century (pp.60, 168, 191, 259). A very full account of markets and trade-routes allows us to understand Razih's place in a broader history.

The 'tribal order' of the title refers to ten named units, each with its subdivisions – and, of course, to a way of doing things. The opening pages of the book worry somewhat over 'what is a tribe?' where surely it need be only a conventional gloss for *qabilah*, and the point is to trace how the Arabic word is used. That, however, is not easy. Not only does usage vary, but anthropologists have their problems describing it: 'Dresch even explicitly denies the relevance of ecology for understanding Yemeni tribes' (p.2). This is not quite what Dresch said. He gave some attention, in fact, to how the relation of section territories to tribal territories (sometimes the former exhaust the latter, sometimes not) varies with the terrain and average rainfall. What he did say, with the plateau north of San'a in mind, was that one cannot reduce tribes to ecological units: borders do not match hydrology. Weir is concerned to avoid reducing the tribes of mountainous Razih to economic facts (p.3). Perhaps oddly, given the diversity of Yemen, both authors seem to be on the right track.

Razih is at first easier to conceive than some cases: 'each tribe occupies a discrete mountain or mountainside with cultivable slopes and water sources, and is bounded on most sides by divisive natural features such as precipitous slopes...' (p.86). But there is still the puzzle of why, for instance, Bani Munabbih, the largest of the Razih tribes, which contains quite a spread of varying terrain, should persist as a spatial unit over centuries. Weir sees tribes as 'politics created, maintained or changed by people acting, individually or collectively, in their own interests' (p.3); they are 'constituted by a contractual relation between hereditary shaykhs and their constituents' (p.95) – but presumably a contract as peculiar as that invoked by Locke. Dominant families do not change every time a shaykh dies. People can change tribes, even without moving (p.113): 'clans' or sections of tribes can change allegiance, yet 'are, overall, remarkably stable structures' (p.75); and tribes themselves 'are not...units of territorial expansion' (p.86), not even where that would

mean taking the other side of a mountain, one of whose slopes they occupy already. These are not simply 'groups' that wax and wane.

Like countries and cantons elsewhere on earth, tribes may somehow be historical products but they also embody assumptions that produce a certain type of history. We are all agreed roughly what the evidence in Yemen shows. We are none of us clear how best to conceive this, and personally I doubt whether contractual language will provide our answer. Anthropologists still have much thinking to do.

Others will be drawn to the rich account of Razih's political history, others to the detail provided on the workings of property and land. Part II of the book, which deals with customary law, deserves everyone's attention. This is the best account by far that we have of arbitration and settlement in rural Yemen. Again the shaykhly families prove central in Razih's case. Tribal leaders are 'accorded by their constituents, and by the leaders of other tribes, exclusive jurisdiction within their respective territorial domains...(p.79). It was unclear to this reviewer whether that either implies a hierarchy of legal competence or excludes seeking arbitration elsewhere. (Does some secondary rule, in Hart's sense, mean that private settlement is unlawful?). The legal process itself, however, is richly documented from the author's collection of photocopied pacts and judgements, mostly from the early nineteenth through the late twentieth centuries. Several terms and phrases occur that we know from elsewhere in Yemen; others appear, I think, for the first time. Weir helps here to re-open an enormous subject which has been lingering at the margins of Yemeni studies since Rossi's classic article of the late 1940s on 'Diritto consuetudinario'. One hopes that she can soon get her documentary material into print. For the moment, rest assured that her presentation of treaties and disputes will engage non-academic readers as fully as it will the specialists. One gets a compelling and thoroughly immediate idea of what non-domestic life in the mountains near Sa'dah may actually be about.

Sadly, Jabal Razih is implicated at present in a conflict known to most as the Huthi affair. The government of Yemen has claimed at various points that its al-Huthi opponents are friends of al-Qa'idah, whatever that is nowadays, or of reactionary Zaydis with an eye on the Imamate, perhaps in league, never mind the conflicting ideology, with Iran. This is rather like saying on one day that people are dangerous Trotskyists and on another that they intend restoring the Hapsburg monarchy. Weir takes the politics down to the early 1990s. The tensions between factions are well described, as too are the importance of economic changes and trade-routes made vulnerable by recent agreement on the Yemeni-Saudi border. Those involved with the political world would do well to read *A Tribal Order*. The sheer implausibility of claims about grand geo-politics, pan-Shi'ism, and global (Salafi?) terrorism should be apparent.

A handy chronology at the end of the book takes us from the sixteenth century to the present. A catalogue of documents suggests riches to come. The presentation

of Arabic terms, in the glossary as elsewhere, is clear and scrupulous. Razih dialect is notoriously odd, and Weir has wisely avoided extravagant transcriptions which could easily confuse the reader. But is it really *hukum* not *hukm* for judgement (pp.177,204,205) and *shamil* not *shaml* for gathering, as in *shaykh al-shaml* (p.131)? By the author's own account (pp.177, 356) it must surely be *muhakkam*, not *muhakkim*, for someone asked to judge others' claims, and the fact that they are asked – hence the passive participle – suggests something about the nature of 'jurisdiction'.

Anyone who has grappled with transliteration knows how difficult it is to standardise and proof-read. The author has done this awfully well. In passing, the University of Texas and the British Museum Press deserve praise also for an elegant and accurate production-job, carried through to a standard few publishers maintain at present, and delivered at a low shelf-price. Everything works, from the layout of the pages to the headings of a useful index. Weir's *A Tribal Order* is a first-rate piece of work, and the author deserves congratulation not only for completing a complex analysis drawn out over many years but for giving us an extremely well written monograph. This should be a model and inspiration for people concerned particularly with the western mountains and with far-off Dali' and Yafi'. For all of us it provides a fine example of how to do historical anthropology.

PAUL DRESCH

Without Glory In Arabia: The British Retreat From Aden by Peter Hinchcliffe, John Ducker & Maria Holt, I. B. Tauris, 2006. Pp.xxiii + 327. Illus. Maps. Notes. Appendices. Bibliog. Index. Hb. £29.50. ISBN 10:1-84511-140-0.

Perhaps the most important distinction to be considered in discussing the growing literature on the end of British imperial rule in Aden is between those authors who were there, and those who were not. From the former, readers expect detailed knowledge, local colour and a sense of passionate engagement with the issues which the British confronted as they plotted their retreat from empire. Two of the authors of *Without Glory in Arabia* have extensive experience of the last years of British rule in the region, while the third, Maria Holt, has interviewed members of both the British community and the local population with memories of this period in their country's history. The result is a captivating and kaleidoscopic overview of some key events which fulfils expectations, in general, while leaving those readers who were not there, with some slight sense of frustration at a small number of missed opportunities.

All three authors make distinctive contributions to our understanding of the end of empire in Aden. John Ducker delivers calm, precise discussions of the historical background, the international context, the Eastern Aden Protectorate and

the hugely controversial 1966 Defence White Paper. The last had perilous consequences for Britain's allies in the region, and these are explained with great lucidity. Elsewhere, Ducker identifies a number of other failings of British policy, including the handling of the South Arabian League and the suspension of the constitution in 1965. These sections form a valuable contribution to the ongoing debate about the reasons why British policy ended in such an ignominious manner. Peter Hinchcliffe draws on his own experience, on that of other political officers, and on the fascinating Robin Young diaries to provide a series of vivid portrayals of what life was like for the British in Aden and the Protectorates during the 1960s. These sections have the great merit of preserving some vitally important first hand accounts of the period, and give a genuine sense of what the texture of day to day life was like for those who were called upon to implement policy on the ground. The preservation of these memories is also an interest of Maria Holt whose Oral History Project seeks to encapsulate the experiences of British and Arabs in Aden. Her chapters are based on extensive research, and the careful handling of sensitive interviews has produced important results: in particular the chapter on Arab reactions to the development of British policy which is significant in balancing the overwhelming concentration on British experiences in the broader historiography. What these reactions reveal is precisely how diverse the Arab experience was and how significant the British legacy remains; its ramifications still have some influence over the lives of modern Yemenis.

Shared authorship of this kind inevitably raises issues pertaining to the editing of the different voices and the use made of a range of sources. The organisation of the disparate matter does appear somewhat unsystematic; and the ordering of the material between appendices, the main body of the text and the separate chapters perhaps needed more rigorous editorial direction. Additionally, professional historians may be somewhat frustrated by the manner in which some of the documents are presented. Robin Young's diaries are the subject of a fascinating chapter which makes the lack of wider access to them seem rather more unfortunate, although there are, of course, many sensitivities surrounding material of this kind. In the absence of a detailed memoir by the late Sir Richard Turnbull, a synopsis of his views is presented in the first appendix without any clear indication of which portions of the text constitute direct quotation and which represent a précis of his thinking.

But whatever the cavils of a professional historian, more significant is one's sense of gratitude to the authors for providing a lively and entertaining book which also contributes important new insights to our understanding of the end of empire in Aden.

SPENCER MAWBY

In the Heart of the Desert by Michael Quentin Morton, Green Mountain Press, 2006 and 2007. Pp.xvi + 266. Maps, colour and b/w photographs. Appendices. Bibliog. Glossary. Index. Hb.£20 ISBN 978-0-9552212-0-0.

This thoroughly researched book is a biography of Mike Morton, an exploration geologist, written by his son who has used his father's journals, correspondence, notes, sketches and photographs to give a fascinating account of the early days in the search for oil.

Geologists were among the first westerners to explore the remote areas of the Middle East. As a result of their efforts oil had been discovered before the Great War, but just as exciting finds were about to be made, the outbreak of the Second World War called a halt to all exploration activity. In his early chapters the author describes the first steps taken in the search for oil, but his story really begins with his father's appointment as a geologist with the Iraq Petroleum Company (IPC) in 1945. Few of Mike Morton's generation were to travel so widely in the Middle East at a time when communications were rudimentary and air travel was the exception rather than the rule. However, his career with IPC, lasting 26 years, enabled him to visit all the major sites and cities of the region, as well as penetrating the deserts of Arabia where few foreigners had trod before. His experiences in the Arab world cast a spell over him that would last until his death in 2003.

Leaving aside a review of his many exploits elsewhere, the main interest for readers of the Society's Journal lies in the exploration of the uncharted territories that are now part of the Republic of Yemen. In 1947 Mike Morton was part of a small team led by Tony Altounyan which was tasked to explore Hadhramaut and Mahra territory. IPC had obtained a concession just before the War and had in fact sent two geologists to carry out a preliminary ground and aerial reconnaissance. It was the task of Morton and his party to obtain more detailed geological information that would help in assessing the oil bearing potential of the region. The party travelled by car and camel on an expedition that was clearly a great adventure for a young geologist. The travel through Mahra territory was particularly gruelling, and shortly afterwards Morton went down with malaria. This did not deter him from further travels and in 1948 we find him in neighbouring Dhofar. In 1949 Morton returned to Hadhramaut and travelled across the desert via Bir Asakir to Beihan. Once again the party was led by Tony Altounyan whom Mike Morton highly regarded for his ability to deal with the political and tribal problems facing the party. Inevitably there were tensions at times between the geologists and political liaison officers, but without the experience and skills of Edward Henderson, Stuart Watt, Dick Bird and others like them, the geologists would not have been able to enter tribal territory, let alone prospect for oil.

Mike Morton records meeting many personalities whose names will be familiar to readers of the Journal: Hugh Boustead, Jim Ellis and Wilfred Thesiger amongst

others. Thesiger's relations with IPC were strained and Morton writes that he (Thesiger) 'is doing a mad scheme in the great sand desert north of here. He gave so many presents in previous years that it is rather difficult for us this time'. All the bedu talked of Thesiger whose activities IPC regarded with suspicion. Thesiger was, of course, afraid that the discovery of oil would corrupt the bedu way of life that he so much admired.

Although IPC never found any oil in Yemen, Michael Quentin Morton describes in his Epilogue a visit there by his father and a colleague in 1982 when they were working as consultants for Hunt Oil – the American company which made the first commercial discovery at Afif in 1984 and went on to develop eleven fields. The author also notes the interesting career of Hazim El-Khalidi, a famine control officer whom his father had met at Bir Asakir when he returned to Wadi Hadhramaut in 1949. In 2004 with the help of Robert Fisk, the author managed to track down Hazim's son, Sa'ad El-Khalidi, and was able to record the life of yet another intriguing personality whose career took him to this once remote part of the world.

At the end of the book there is a selection of colour photographs, and the author has also included many interesting b/w pictures of people and places mentioned in the text. All the journeys are well illustrated with maps; and there is an impressive bibliography and a useful glossary of Arabic and geological terms.

JULIAN PAXTON

Abu Bakr bin Sheikh Al-Kaff: al-za'im al-hakim by Ja'far bin Muhammad al-Saqqaf and Ali bin Anis bin Hassan al-Kaff. Arabic. Published by Tarim lil-dirasat wa al-nishr, Hadhramaut, 2007 (tel: 418888). Pp.302. Illus. Appendices. Pb.

This book celebrates the life and achievements of Sayyid Abu Bakr bin Sheikh al-Kaff (1887–1965) whose personal prestige and influence greatly assisted the efforts of a British Political Officer, W. H. Ingrams, and the rulers of the Qu'aiti and Kathiri States of Hadhramaut to bring peace and security to the region in the late 1930s. Sayyid Abu Bakr spent most of his share of the al-Kaff family's fortune (derived from trade and property in Singapore and Java) on charitable projects in and beyond Wadi Hadhramaut. His reputation as a public benefactor, coupled with his financial ability to reward compliance, proved indispensable in persuading a myriad predatory and warring tribes to shelve their differences and sign a truce. The truce, sometimes known as Ingrams' Peace, brought to an end the anarchy which for many years had bedevilled the social and economic life of the Hadhrami hinterland.

The book is divided into five chapters. The first three cover Sayyid Abu Bakr's life and career and his relations with the Kathiri and Qu'aiti Sultans. The fourth

chapter cites comments on Sayyid Abu Bakr made by contemporary Arab historians and observers, and by European visitors. The latter, in addition to Harold Ingrams, include travellers to Hadhramaut such as Daniel Van Der Meulen, Freya Stark, Hans Helfritz and H. St. J. Philby, all of whom enjoyed Sayyid Abu Bakr's proverbial hospitality. The fifth chapter comprises poems written in praise of Sayyid Abu Bakr's statesmanship and philanthropy. The final chapter consists of copies of documents largely relating to Sayyid Abu Bakr's efforts as peace-maker, and numerous photographs of him either alone or in the company of relations, other Arab personalities, and British officials.

No one is better qualified than Ja'far al-Saqqaf, himself a well-known Hadhrami historian and writer, to introduce the reader to the life and work of Sayyid Abu Bakr. As a young man, Ja'far acted as Abu Bakr's personal secretary and aide, and he has had access to al-Kaff files and family papers. This book, a *festschrift* of prose and poetry as much as a biographical memoir, has been in gestation for many years. It is fortunate indeed that Ja'far, now in his late eighties, was able to find a younger scholar in Ali bin Anis al-Kaff to help him complete the project.

In 2004, on the fiftieth anniversary of Sayyid Abu Bakr's investiture in Aden as a Knight of the British Empire by HM Queen Elizabeth, this Journal published a special tribute to his memory. It is gratifying to see that an Arabic translation of the text has been included in chapter four of the book.

Recognition of Sayyid Abu Bakr's great contribution to the welfare of his homeland (a taboo subject during the revisionist era of Marxist rule in South Yemen) is long overdue in the Arabic historiography of Yemen. With the publication of this book, Ja'far al-Saqqaf and Ali bin Anis al-Kaff have laid the foundation for a detailed study of Sayyid Abu Bakr's life and times. Let us hope that their initiative will inspire other Yemeni scholars to undertake such a study.

JOHN SHIPMAN

Yemen into the Twenty-First Century: Continuity and Change edited by Kamil Mahdi, Anna Wurth and Helen Lackner, Ithaca Press, 2007. Pp.xxviii + 464. Tables & Figures. Maps. Acronyms. Bibliog. Notes. Index. Hb.£35. ISBN: 978-0-86372-290-5.

This book contains a selection of papers which were originally presented at an international conference on Yemen convened at the University of Exeter in April 1998. The aim of the conference was to consider the major issues influencing Yemen's development during the years following the country's unification in 1990. From a total of some forty contributions presented at the 1998 conference the editors of this volume have selected 18 papers, relating primarily to economic, social and legal issues, some of which have been revised to take account of recent

developments. The editors offer no explanation for the long delay in producing the book; they do however express gratitude for the financial and moral support which the project received from the government of Yemen.

The book is divided into four parts, with its component papers grouped under the following four headings: (1) Structural Adjustment and the Political Economy of Yemen; (2) The Legal System; (3) Environment, Water and Agricultural Land Tenure; and (4) Social and Regional Issues. The book includes an introduction summarising the main points of each paper and offering a thoughtful overview of post-unity Yemen in its domestic and international context. This overview underlines the relevance to contemporary Yemen of the issues discussed in 1998.

Anyone aspiring to an informed understanding of the factors likely to determine Yemen's prospects in the years ahead should read this book. It may seem invidious to highlight particular contributions but one which is of crucial importance is Christopher Ward's paper on Yemen's water crisis. In terms of its water resources Yemen is considered to be a 'dry' country. Yet groundwater continues to be mined at such a rate, estimated at five times the rate of replenishment, that parts of the rural economy (which sustains 70% of the country's population) could well disappear within a generation. Major cities are already suffering acute water shortages; Sana'a's main sources of supply are drying up. A majority of the urban and rural population, which is already over 20 million and is due to double within the next twenty years, do not have access to safe water. This stark fact has obvious implications for public health, human development and poverty reduction – all issues tackled in detail in other papers. In terms of water alone, Yemen faces an existential challenge, yet the gravity of this challenge seems not to be widely recognised and has yet to be effectively addressed, not least by international donors. In fact, as the editors point out in their introduction, the West's current 'security first' approach to Yemen is diverting energy and attention from fundamental problems of political economy, natural resource management and institutional development. And some observers would argue that this myopic approach has encouraged the Yemeni leadership to take a sledgehammer to crack nuts of domestic dissent. Meanwhile, poverty and unemployment, exacerbated by the economic reform programme sponsored by the World Bank and IMF, continue to rise at a time when oil production has peaked.

The overall message of this book is a sombre one: Yemen is living on borrowed time, and the country's long term viability as a state and society is in increasing jeopardy.

JOHN SHIPMAN

Socotra: A Natural History of the Islands and their People by Catherine Cheung and Lyndon DeVantier; Science Editor: Kay Van Damme. Forewords by

Dr Abdelkareem Al Eryani and Dr Edoardo Zandri. Published for the Socotra Conservation Fund by Odyssey Books & Guides, Hong Kong, 2006. Pp.404. Illus. Index. Glossary. Annex. Hb. £39.50. ISBN-13: 978-962-217-770-3.

As leader of the Oxford Expedition to Socotra in 1956, I awaited the publication of this book with eager anticipation. When an advance copy finally arrived at my door, I was quite frankly spellbound by what the authors, who spent three years on the island with the Socotra Biodiversity Project, had achieved. I had not expected such a magnificently presented, richly illustrated and so wide-ranging and exhaustively researched a volume as this. A notable feature is the inclusion of Arabic abstracts for each of its ten chapters covering the geology, flora, fauna, birds, marine world, history, people, culture and case studies. It is without doubt the definitive study of the unique natural history of this extraordinary island: whether at ground level, above ground, below ground, or in the depths of the surrounding sea. And the range of its illustrations – from close-ups of widow spiders and paper wasps to wide-angle panoramas of the ancient landscape and its oceanic setting, together with pictures of Socotrans past and present – is unsurpassed. But the book is not only the definitive study of the Socotra archipelago, it is a synthesis and treasure house of the combined knowledge of various researchers during the last decade, whose contribution Catherine Cheung and Lyndon DeVantier fully and warmly acknowledge. The book is also unsurpassed as a celebration of Socotra's uniquely precious heritage, and as a rallying cry for its understanding and conservation.

Perhaps only two other books are comparable as milestones in Western scholarship on Socotra, and as volumes to prize for their invaluable text and superb illustrations: Dr Henry Forbes' pioneering *The Natural History of Sokotra and Abd el-Kuri* (1903) and, more recently, Dr Anthony Miller's and Dr Miranda Morris's *Ethnoflora of the Soqotra Archipelago* (2004). If you value Socotra's unique biodiversity, you will treasure this book, which is available in the UK from the NHBS Environment Bookshop (tel: 01803 865913; www.nhbs.com).

DOUGLAS BOTTING

Island of Dragon's Blood by Douglas Botting. First published in 1958, reprinted in 2006 by Steve Savage, London & Edinburgh. Pp.287. Maps. Illus. Glossary. Bibliog. Pb. £12.50. ISBN 1-904246-21-4.

This is the story of the Oxford Expedition to Soqotra in 1956, which the author organised and led. The aim was to make a reconnaissance of the island, observing and recording as much of scientific interest as a period of two months (August and September) would allow. The last scientific expedition to Soqotra had taken place

in 1898, and in 1956 the island remained almost as remote and inaccessible as it had been at the end of the previous century.

Botting's party of six included an archaeologist, two doctors, a biologist, and a quartermaster (an undergraduate of sterling resource), with Botting himself combining the roles of scribe and film-maker. Arriving in Soqotra by courtesy of the RAF, the party embarked on their survey of the island's botany, zoology, ethnology and archaeology (the doctors collecting blood samples from their numerous patients for later analysis). The party set up two base camps – one in the capital, Hadibo, whence they could study the life of the coastal plain, and the other in the mountains to survey the more abundant plant and animal life to be found there, and to study the aboriginal bedouin of the interior.

When he wrote this book Botting was an undergraduate in his mid-twenties, and its text reflects his youthful humour, zest and assurance, as well as his natural talent as a writer. It is a lively and entertaining account of the party's exploration of the island and their interaction with its inhabitants, and also, drawing on Botting's exhaustive preparatory reading, an invaluable guide to the island's fascinating history.

The reprint of *Island of Dragon's Blood* happily coincided with the Oxford Expedition's fiftieth anniversary and with two other events: a major exhibition on Soqotra at the Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh, and the publication of a definitive study of the island's natural history which is also reviewed in the pages of this journal. In his Foreword to the reprint, Botting lists the several expeditions to the island which followed his own in 1956, and notes the many specialist researches that have been possible in recent years due to greatly improved communications with mainland Yemen. He has also updated his original bibliography to include recent publications of scientific interest.

This book remains the only general study of a little known area of Yemen which is still emerging from the time capsule so vividly described by the author. As an introduction to the island and its people and as a modern classic of Arabian travel literature, the book, in this handy paperback edition, will attract a new generation of readers.

JOHN SHIPMAN

The Arab Chest by Sheila Unwin, Arabian Publishing, London, 2006. Foreword by Sir Terence Clark. Illus. Glossary. Bibliog. Appendices. Index. Maps. Hb.£25. ISBN-10: 0-9544792-6-2.

This book is a treasure. Its pages conjure up a dreamlike procession of exotic places, objects and memories.

Brassbound and decorated 'Arab' chests are found throughout the Gulf region

and Indian Ocean littoral where Arabs settled and traded over the centuries. It is generally assumed that the chests were made by Arabs, but until relatively recent times they came mainly from India, and even bore stylistic influences traceable to the Dutch and Portuguese.

For colonial administrators, diplomats, and other expatriates working in the region, the 'Arab' chest conveyed a strong sense of place and atmosphere, and represented a prized link with a vanishing culture. Possession of such a chest was a 'must' as a souvenir of time spent south and east of Suez; and by the mid-20th century in the West, the 'Arab' chest had become a collector's item. But no detailed research was ever done on this very distinctive piece of furniture until Sheila Unwin embarked upon her study.

Her book is the fruit of a lifetime of research and travel. She seeks to set the chests in their true geographical and historical context: to map the origins and to dispel the myths, such as the belief that chests were made on board dhows, in the sailors' spare time, for sale in their ports of call.

The book is an invaluable guide, but it is much more than a collector's guidebook. Sheila Unwin, who was first introduced to the Arab chest in East Africa, gently invites us to accompany her on a journey around the shores of the Indian Ocean with their history of invasion, settlement, trading and colonisation, to enable us to understand the influences behind the evolution of the 'Arab' chest. We learn that it was made in many different places, that it is not Arab in origin, and that its evolution over the centuries should be seen as a material part of a broad confluence of cultural influences embracing the Indian Ocean and the Gulf.

The author traces the origins of the 'Arab' chest to three basic models: the teak chest from Shiraz, Surat and Bombay; the carved chest from the Malabar coast; and the rosewood or Shisham chest from South India. The wealth of factual and pictorial detail which she provides will allow those fortunate enough to possess a chest to identify its likely provenance. But as Sheila Unwin concludes, the precise origins of any particular chest must remain conjectural.

The book is lavishly illustrated and will appeal to the armchair traveller as well as to the collector. The pleasure of reading it is enhanced by the fine quality of the printing and paper, not to mention the skilful editing.

WERNER DAUM

Ralph Daly offering advice on pump irrigation to a date farmer, Wadi Hadhramaut, *c* 1956

OBITUARY

RALPH HINSHELWOOD DALY O.B.E.
(1924–2006)

Ralph Daly, who died in Muscat where he and his wife, Elizabeth, had retired, spent most of his adult life in the Arab world, and a memorable part of it in what was then called the Aden Protectorate.

Born in Glasgow and educated at Sherborne, he was commissioned into the Welsh Guards, and fought with the Guards Armoured Division in the allied advance into Northern Europe. After leaving the army, he joined the Sudan Political Service and was posted to Khartoum as an Assistant District Commissioner. He later went to the Middle East Centre for Arab Studies in the Lebanon to learn Arabic. On his return to the Sudan he was sent to Kordofan where he remained until 1954 when, on the approach of independence, he transferred to the Colonial Service. Daly was then posted to Seiyun in the Eastern Aden Protectorate (EAP) where Colonel Hugh Boustead, who had also served in the Sudan, was British Resident Adviser. Daly's abilities as an administrator and his command of Arabic greatly assisted him in his task of fostering development in Wadi Hadhramaut and keeping the peace in the hinterland. He built up a close friendship with Sayyid Abubakr bin Shaikh al-Kaff who had played an important part in bringing to an end the tribal feuds and lawlessness which had bedevilled the area for so long. It was in Hadhramaut that Daly's interest in the wildlife of Arabia was aroused, especially in the rapidly disappearing Arabian Oryx.

Daly's next posting was to the Western Aden Protectorate (WAP), where he became Senior Adviser to a number of states including Baihan, the Upper Aulaqi Sultanate, the Upper Aulaqi Shaikhdom, the Lower Aulaqi Sultanate and, finally, a virtually unknown area inhabited by the Illahin tribe. The latter's leader, Salih bin Ali bin Muhammad al-Illahi, shared Daly's formidable abilities as a raconteur, and when rehearsing details of a blood feud which had started a century or more ago, was the only person who could drive Daly into an exhausted silence. To the challenges of settling tribal disputes, encouraging grass-roots development and the establishment of rudimentary administrations in each state, were added problems caused by a long and porous border with Yemen. In all these tasks Daly was ably supported by Mubarak as-Saham Towsali and Aidrus Ali Sulaimani, both of whom had an encyclopaedic knowledge of the tribes and the myriad feuds which beset them. It was at this time that Daly met and married Elizabeth who travelled with him widely and made an unique visit to Harib, just over the Yemeni border from Baihan, when it was still in royalist hands.

In 1963 Daly returned to the EAP as acting Resident Adviser, with responsibility for relations with the Qu'aiti and Kathiri States and the Sultanate of Mahra and Soqotra. This was when the recent revolution in Yemen and the birth pangs of the

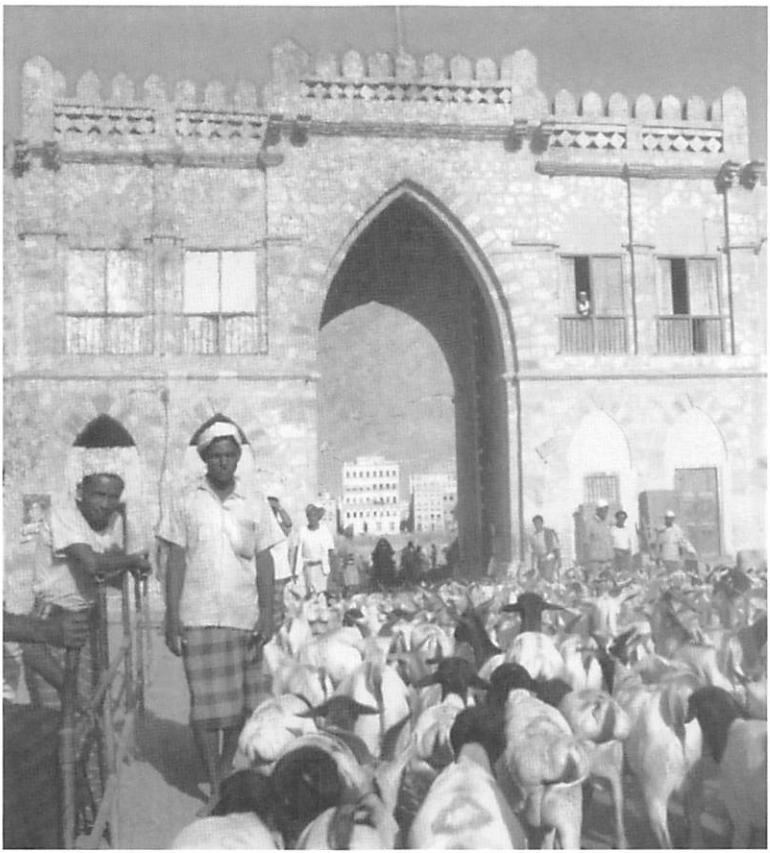
Federation of South Arabia were awakening political consciousness in the area. Daly's attempt to visit the island of Soqotra where the Mahra Sultan resided, nearly ended in disaster when the dugout transferring him from ship to shore overturned in the surf, and a very bedraggled Resident Adviser had to be hauled out of the sea. Daly was next seconded to the embryonic Federation of South Arabia as Permanent Secretary to the Ministry of Internal Security, and quickly built up a rapport with his Minister, Sultan Salih bin Hussain al-Audhali, whose honesty, fairness and courage Daly deeply admired. At that time, the arranged marriage between the states which had joined the Federation and Aden Colony was being forced through; the civil war in Yemen between royalist and republican factions was causing instability along the border, especially in Baihan; and an anti-British/anti-Federal insurgency, encouraged by the Egyptians in Yemen, was starting. A change of government in Britain and London's subsequent decision to abrogate unilaterally not only the treaties made with the individual states of the Protectorate but also the recently signed agreements with the Federation for its financial and defence support, dealt a mortal blow to the latter.

Daly worked zealously to try to change this decision, and supported his Minister, Sultan Salih, loyally through the tense negotiations which followed. When it became clear that all hope of an honourable outcome was lost, and the Federal government collapsed, Daly resigned. Following his departure from Aden in 1967, Daly received an OBE for his services there.

The final, and possibly the most personally rewarding stage of Daly's life was spent in Oman. After initially serving in the Government Relations Department of Petroleum Development (Oman), his interest in local flora and fauna, particularly the fate of the Arabian Oryx, came to the attention of Sultan Qaboos, and in 1974 he was appointed Adviser on Conservation of the Environment in the Diwan of the Royal Court, a post he held for the next 28 years until his retirement in 2002. By 1974 the Arabian Oryx had become extinct in the wild, and Daly was responsible for Oman's reintroduction programme which eventually saw over 450 Oryx roaming free in the Jiddat al-Harasis. For his work in the Sultanate, Daly received the Order of Oman (Civil) in 1980, the Order of the Golden Ark in 1985, and was later honoured by the Royal Geographical Society, the FFI and the University of Durham.

Ralph Daly had a great love for Arabia. He was a capable administrator, a man of principle and a fine raconteur (an attribute prized in Arab society). His love of the natural world, which started when, as a boy, he fished the lochs of Scotland, persisted throughout his life. His annual visits to England to fish the Nadder in Wiltshire in the company of friends continued until his death. I still cherish my edition of Meinertzhagen's *Birds of Arabia*, in which, in his neat handwriting, Ralph confirms the sighting of a family of Hammerkop in Wadi Baihan, a grey-headed Kingfisher in Wadi Yeshbum, and a Lammergeier soaring over the Aulaqi Kaur.

BILL HEBER PERCY



The old West Gate of Mukalla before its demolition

Bini Malcolm Collection,
Middle East Centre Archive,
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Oxford OX2 6JF

Designed and typeset by David McLean
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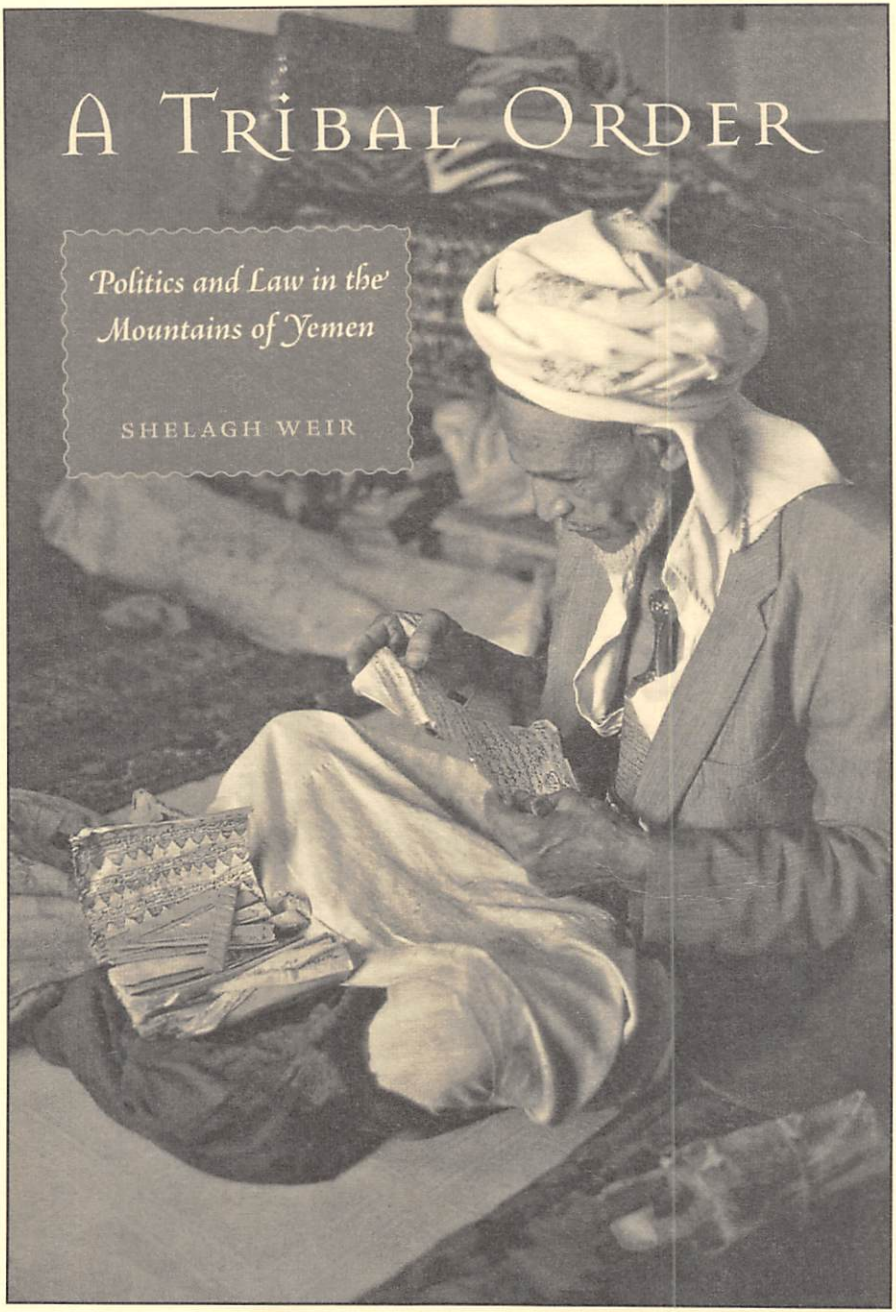

This book is reviewed on pp.56–59 of the Journal