

**The British-Yemeni Society
Journal**

2011

THE BRITISH-YEMENI SOCIETY

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Ambassador Abdulla Ali Al-Radhi pictured with his wife on the occasion of presenting his credentials to HM Queen Elizabeth on 8 December 2010

Ikhlas al-Kurashi

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

(Eighteenth Annual General Meeting, Thursday 23 June 2011)

It has been an eventful year for Yemen, especially since January when the Arab Spring reached Yemen and generated the same sort of youth demonstrations that have taken place in Tunis, Cairo and many other Arab capitals since then – and in the case of Yemen continue. There has been a prolonged political crisis as Yemenis try to resolve their differences over the future shape of their government. This seemed on the point of reaching a violent climax at the beginning of June when President Saleh was injured but the main actors have since reverted – with international assistance – to seeking a peaceful solution in the interests of all Yemenis. Meanwhile, many Yemenis are finding great difficulty in their daily lives with shortages of fuel and basic commodities and parts of the country appear to be slipping out of central government control. All this makes the need for a solution more urgent.

The British Yemeni Society (BYS) is bound by its constitution which defines the objectives of the society as 'to advance public education and knowledge concerning the republic of Yemen, its history, geography, economy and culture'. It does not comment on political matters but it cannot ignore events in Yemen that affect the daily lives of many Yemenis including relatives of our members. We can only urge that those involved in the political process in Yemen and outside redouble their efforts to find a solution and find it quickly.

The BYS has been planning with the London Middle East Institute at SOAS to organise a conference on Yemen on 30 and 31 March 2011. A planning committee has been set up and we are ready to issue a call for papers. We need to raise at least £10,000 to get it going and have received indications that we should be able to obtain this, but it is difficult to take the project forward in the current circumstances. It remains our aim to hold the conference in 2012 even if we cannot do it in March. It will discuss the broad range of economic and social development needs of Yemen and address cultural issues.

Yemen and the UK

There has, of course, been an enormous amount of press coverage on Yemen, mostly about the political situation. One possible benefit in the long term is that it has increased British public awareness of Yemen. The

media has shown much greater understanding of the complexities of Yemen and the quality of reporting and analysis has improved, albeit not always consistently. The Yemen Forum programme at Chatham House has organised a steady stream of conferences, discussions and papers on Yemen, and I am delighted that its work will continue.

Members of the British-Yemeni Society have been active in the media, speaking as individuals and not in the name of the BYS, notably Ginny Hill and her colleagues at Chatham House. Stephen Day and James Spencer have made notable contributions, and even I have done a Pod cast for the Economist and briefed some outlets unattributably. Tom Finn has produced some excellent first hand reports in the Guardian from Sana'a.

On 24th February 2011 – BBC3 aired a television documentary *A Dangerous Place to Meet My Family* – an account of Sheffield-born Dean Whitney's journey to Yemen to meet his extended family.

There have been three new books on Yemen by BYS members:

- *Seen in the Yemen: Travelling with Freya Stark and Others* by Hugh Leach.
- *Yemen Divided...* My modest contribution to the history of the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen.
- *A Quarter-Century in Diplomacy 1994–1969* (Arabic: *rub' qarn fi al-diplomasiya*) by Dr Abdulaziz Ali Al-Qu'aiti.

There have been several others by non-BYS members, and I know of at least three more that will be published over the next year.

The BYS remains active in the decorative arts:

- Gillian Hills continues to develop her Yemeni mosaics and has generously offered her large one of Sana'a as a gift to the Embassy of Yemen
- British-Yemeni Tasleem Mulhall had another exhibition of paintings and sculpture in Isleworth in November 2010.

In addition, there has been the exhibition at the Royal Geographical Society in London: *The Artist's View – 7 Artists in Yemen*. This followed a similar artists' exhibition at l'Institut du Monde Arabe in Paris in February which some members were able to attend. Members of the BYS were invited to a lecture on 4th April 2011 at the Italian Cultural Institute

about Amedeo Guillet who had featured in the 2008 Journal.

In conjunction with an exhibition of photos of Yemen by Pat and Charles Aithie at the National Library of Wales in Aberystwyth, Pat Aithie gave a lecture on 23 March 2011 entitled *Yemen: From Aden's Steamer Point to Cardiff's Tiger Bay*. Pat had also had an exhibition of her work in Cardiff in July–August 2010.

The award-winning Yemeni/US film *The Oath* was screened in London cinemas in March 2011 and a Yemeni participant, Boushra Almutawakil, featured in an exhibition (*My Father's House*) at the Brunei Gallery at SOAS in late 2010.

Essay Competition 2010 & BYS Grant 2011

The first prize for the essay was awarded to Warda Eissadi for *Smile! You are in Yemen* and second prize to Fernando Carvajal for *Decentralization through Dialogue*. Warda's essay will be published in the 2011 Journal.

This year's academic grant has been awarded to Benedict Wilkinson for fieldwork towards his PhD on counter-extremism strategies operated by the governments of Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Yemen.

BYS events

We organized a number of events during the past year:

14 October 2010

Screening of the documentary film *Humanitarian Citadel* which tells the story of the ICRC's humanitarian mission to Yemen in the 1960s.

2 November 2010

Donna Kennedy-Glans gave a talk entitled *Wielding Hope like an Axe: How to recognise and support Yemeni Youth as positive change leaders* – which focused on her work with Yemeni youth leaders.

23 November 2010

Musicologist Samir Mokrani talked about UNESCO's 'Intangible Heritage' project: *Safeguarding the Song of Sana'a* .

8 December 2010

Belhaven of Arabia: The Scottish Lord who loved the mountain Arabs – a joint lecture with the Society for Arabian Studies by BYS member, Trevor Mostyn .

24 March 2011

General discussion on Yemen (in lieu of HM Ambassador Jonathan Wilks' talk which was postponed at the last minute).

14 April 2011

Helen Lackner gave a thought-provoking talk on *Daily Life in Rural Yemen*.

3 May 2011

HMA Jonathan Wilks gave his perspective on Yemen after his first few months in post there.

18 May 2011

In association with the Royal Society for Asian Affairs and the Society for Arabian Studies (now the British Foundation for the Study of Arabia), BYS member Hugh Leach gave a lecture *Seen in the Yemen: Travelling with Freya Stark and Others* followed by the launch of his book under the same title.

Forthcoming events

The full autumn programme will be sent out with the 2011 Journal at the end of the summer. One of our speakers will be Thanos Petouris – awarded the BYS academic grant in January 2010 – to talk about the results of his research.

BYS member Dr Salma Samar Damluji will be speaking on the Restoration of the mosques of Sah and 'Aynat in Wadi Hadhramaut at the July 2011 Seminar for Arabian Studies (to be held at the British Museum).

Donations

Christmas appeal for Dr Salem Youssr was very successful. We are delighted to have been able to support his fieldwork in Soqatra and that he has been able to attend the AGM. He has presented the BYS with a delightful wooden artefact in the shape of Soqotra, which we will display at future events.

Membership

We are delighted to welcome new members to the Society – 18 since last year. We regret to have learned of the death of three members in the last year: Marjorie Fleming, Robin Allen and Alawi Barakat.

New Committee Members

The committee co-opted Thanos Petouris during the year to provide representation for our younger members. He has been very active on our behalf and has established our presence on Facebook.

I would like to thank all members of the committee for their support, in particular Rebecca Johnson for all her work as our secretary, and John Mason for so calmly keeping our finances in line.

Constitution

The BYS will need to change and that I would like to present the 2012 AGM with our ideas on how we can take the Society forward. I don't want to pre-empt this but it seems to me that:

- The BYS needs to recruit younger members and ideally more from the British Yemeni community in the UK.
- The BYS should have an events secretary who has the time to build a programme that will attract and hold new (and existing) members and relieve the load on Rebecca.
- We should organise a conference on Yemen (as proposed for 2012) if we can raise the funds.
- We may need to revise the constitution to take into account the changes but also make sure it fits existing as well as any new activities.

I would like to invite anyone with ideas to put them forward to the Committee or join a small ad hoc group that will look at how we should develop the Society.

I would also like to let members know that the Committee has decided that we should request all BYS members to make a voluntary donation (suggested £5) towards the cost of future events, that guests of members make the same donation but that other non-members attending events should donate £10. Unfortunately, the cost of events continues to rise and is not covered by the subscriptions.

Finally I would to thank His Excellency Abdulla Ali al-Radhi, our joint honorary president, for his generous support for the BYS and for hosting the reception that will follow.

NOEL BREHONY

SAFEGUARDING THE SONG OF SANA'A: CHALLENGES AND ISSUES

SAMIR MOKRANI

This article is based on an address to the Society by the author, a musicologist, at Goodenough College, London, on 23 November 2010

The Song of Sana'a: a brief introduction

The Song of Sana'a or *ghinā' san 'ānī*, is one of the main kinds of Yemeni music. It can be described as a traditional urban genre, derived from various poetic traditions dating from the 14th century, which constitutes an integral part of social events, such as the *samra* (night-long wedding celebrations), and the *magyal*, the daily afternoon gathering of friends and colleagues at which the mildly narcotic leaf *qat* is chewed. Thus, the Song of Sana'a is a major component of the traditional urban elite's culture, made up of musicians, poets, writers or just connoisseurs. More than a kind of music, it represents a whole micro culture, with its own social codes, aesthetic and vision of the world.

The *ghinā' san 'ānī* is performed by a solo singer who accompanies himself on the Yemeni lute *qanbūs/ turbī* or the Arabic lute *'ūd*. He is sometimes also accompanied by a traditional copper plate player (*sahn mīmyie/nuhāstī*).

The UNESCO Action Plan and its implementation

Mostly as a result of Jean Lambert's efforts, the Song of Sana'a was proclaimed by UNESCO as a Masterpiece of the World Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity in 2003. Dr. Lambert was then in charge of writing an Action Plan proposal, helped in this task by Sabrina Kadri and myself; both of us were then trainee researchers at CEFAS (The French Centre for Archaeology and Social Sciences in Sana'a), where Jean Lambert had become the new director, and were studying for our masters. The proposal benefitted from a UNESCO/ Japanese Trust Fund which supported the project from 2006 to 2009, in cooperation with the Yemen Social Fund for Development (SFD), the Ministry of Culture and CEFAS.

It was logical that the Yemeni Centre for Musical Heritage (YCMH) was chosen as the official implementing agency of the UNESCO Action Plan, and its director, Mr. Jaber Ali Ahmed, was appointed as the National Coordinator, while I was the the Administrative and Scientific Coordinator.



Sound Training Workshop



Hasan al-Ajami

The project's activities encompassed the following:

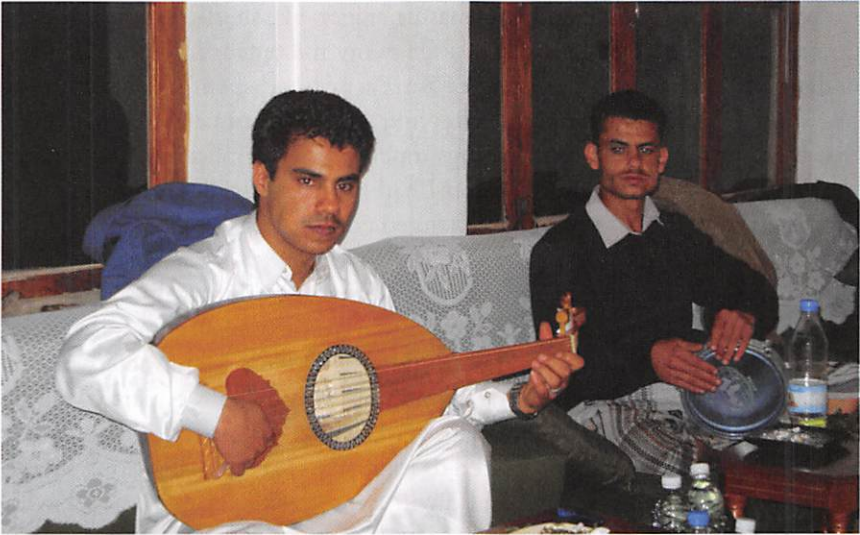
- preparation and development of an inventory of the Song of Sana'a;
- establishment of archives within the institutional infrastructure of the YCMH and the training of researchers in the techniques of field survey and data collection;
- encouraging the transmission of the Song of Sana'a, through the establishment of master classes and scholarships for students;
- preservation of the musical instruments through lute-making workshops, with scholarships for students;
- awareness-raising campaign and dissemination of recordings, together with the production of promotional documentation such as CDs, DVDs and books.

Mixed results: Issues and problems faced by the executive team

The archiving constituent can be considered as a success, as we managed to build a computer database with more than 300 melodies. We also released an official CD of archive recordings, and a history of the Song of Sana'a is due to be published in a few months. However, the results we obtained concerning the other aspects of the project, namely the recording of living masters and musicians, and the setting up of musical and instrument making skills transmission workshops were much less positive, and this for the reasons that are discussed below. Thus, we only managed to record a group of traditional religious chanters (*munshidîn* or *nashshâdîn*) and two living masters of the Song of Sana'a. On the transmission side, the musical workshops were, to be honest, a complete failure, while only two young men benefitted to a certain degree from the lute making workshops.

Work & personal relations

First of all, and as a preliminary remark, I would like to explain my personal position. When I was appointed as the Administrative and Scientific Coordinator, I built up a close friendship with two men who were supposed to play a major role in the transmission activities, namely the lute



Samir and Marwan, trainee musicians



Muhammad al-Juma

maker Fu'ad al-Qu'turî and the master singer Hasan al-'Ajamî. Up to a point, I was even considering the latter as my master for learning the very demanding tradition of the Song of Sana'a, as I had spent several hours at his house singing, learning and chewing *qât*. Unfortunately, I discovered that these personal links made things much more complicated, particularly in regard to financial matters, than if I had been an outsider; unfortunately, my relations with these two men changed considerably.

Music and musicians in Yemen, a still ambiguous status

As to the failure of the recording and the transmission activities, it is clear that the still negative status of music and musicians in Yemeni society played a major part. The dubious moral reputation of musicians is partly due to religious factors (the Zaydi Imamate was always quite strict on this issue), but also to a code of honour related to the tribal social organisation specific to Yemen, which, in our case, had direct consequences: the musician who can be considered the last real traditional *qanbûs* player and singer simply refused to be recorded or teach his music to young musicians. For him, it was not music in itself that appeared to be the cause of the problem, but his appearance in public as a musician. He once told me an anecdote, which, despite the fact that it relates to 20 years ago, is still relevant today: 'My father once told me: my son, this music which I play and which my father played before me and his father before him is a treasure, and I would be glad to teach it to you. But if I hear that you have played it outside the house, I will kill you!'

Transmission and competition

Regarding the tradition of lute making, we were confronted with a very practical problem. Mr. Fu'ad al-Qu'turî (al-Gudaymî), identified as the last of the old-style Yemeni lute makers, was quite happy when he first heard that our project would support him by employing him as a lute-making teacher. But after a while, as he considered that the amount we could pay him for teaching was not enough, he told me: 'OK, if I teach three or four young people, then they will be able to make *turbî* by themselves...and to sell them as well. So in the long term, they will become competitors to my own business...No, the only solution is that you pay me a big amount in compensation for revealing my skills.' Here we can see all the dilemmas and limitations of our project.



Fuad al-Qu'turi, Sana'a instrument maker, working on a *qanbus*

Yemen, social changes and globalization: an evolution of musical tastes

As a matter of fact and like most traditional societies in the world, Yemen has been facing huge socio-cultural changes for about 30 years, with a particular peak in the urban areas from the 90's up to now. These violent upheavals, of course, also occurred in the musical field, resulting in notable changes in the younger generation's musical tastes. Anyone who has spent some time in Sana'a, Aden, Taiz or any other urban area in Yemen would immediately notice that many young people, let us say between 10 and 40 years old, frequently listen to Lebanese, Egyptian or *Khalijī* (Gulf) pop music. Certainly, this phenomenon increased with the spread of television and more general use of the internet.

Despite this, however, local musical styles still seem to enjoy quite a large success, with a well-defined variety of characteristics or 'colours' (*alwan*) according to the person's origins and/or the place where he was born and grew up. As for the Song of Sana'a, I would say that the issue is much more related to the internal formal changes that happened in the repertoire

itself. What I mean here is that the *ghindá' san 'ání* that is sung today is not the same as the one former generations used to listen to. From a highly sophisticated music that can almost be compared to a kind of initiatory tradition, it has become a popular music. The best example is the adoption of the large Arabic *'úd* in place of the earlier, smaller *qanbúls/turbí*. Thus, many young Yemenis told me: 'yes, *the turbí* is nice, but the *'úd* sounds stronger and better...'

Conclusion

It seems obvious that the global conditions now confronting the Song of Sana'a are unlikely to favour its preservation. However, although the implementation of our Action Plan has been unable to avoid the Song's progressive disappearance, the process has at least stimulated a debate, and opened up new opportunities for action. But only a genuine political will on behalf of those concerned among the Yemeni authorities will achieve a real safeguarding and promotion of this unique tradition.



**THE RESTORATION OF MASJID AL-FAQIH
IN 'AYNAT, WADI HADRAMUT
SALMA SAMAR DAMLUJI**

Dr S.S.Damluji is an architect who has spent many years working in Yemen. She is Chief Architect and founding member of the Daw'an Mud Brick Architecture Foundation (DMBAF) based in Mukalla since 2007. She was project partner with The Prince Claus Fund in the restoration of the sites mentioned in this article. Her most recent publication on the country is 'The Architecture of Yemen: From Yafi' to Hadramut' (2007).

In October 2008, following the floods that devastated large sections of Hadramut and neighbouring Wadi Sah, the Cultural Emergency Response (CER) of The Prince Claus Fund (PCF) asked if I could assist with reporting the damage inflicted on 'cultural' or heritage landmarks of importance to the community. A survey and damage assessment of a number of architectural and historical sites on the coast and in the interior of Hadramut was conducted, with the support of the Daw'an Mud Brick Architecture Foundationⁱ. The report submitted to the PCF in December identifies some key buildings and sites including: al-Ghuwazi Fort in Mukalla, Siddat al-'Aydarus in Shihr, Qal'at al-Hidhyah near al-Qatin, Shaykh 'Umar Bawazir Mosque in Ghayl 'Umar, *Wali* domes in Sah and Siqat al-Sadah Cemeteries, and the Mosque of al-Faqih in 'Aynat.

Funding was approved for Sah and 'Aynat projects in Spring 2009. This comprised the two aforementioned mosques and 7 *Wali* tombs in Sah. Work started in June 2009 and was completed by September 2010.

'Aynat

Often described as a beautiful village, it is positioned 8km to the east of Tarim. The original town of 'Aynat, founded in the C. 7th/13th, was demolished and the establishment of the new town is attributed to the renowned Shaykh Abu Bakr bin Salim (919–992/1513–1584) in the middle of the C. 10th/16th. A Sufi sage of wide repute, Shaykh Abu Bakr had students from Samarqand to the Maghrib, and maintains a following to this day in Hadramut, east Africa, and south east Asia. R.B. Serjeantⁱⁱ mentions the town as '...one of the most famous enclaves founded by Saiyids ...[which] has played a great part in recent Hadrami history'. Under Shaykh Abu Bakr's aegis 'Aynat became a cultural centre and its reputation flourished. He built his house, a mosque (circa 946/1538–9) and the cemetery that is the most attractive and well preserved architectural

site in town (*'Adam Al Qut fi Dhikr Buldan Hadramut, Al-Saqqaf*).

'Aynat displays a unique disposition due to the prominent location of this cemetery with the voluptuous white domes perched over saint or *wali*, and tombs of pious men. Until the 1980s the famous original 'seven domes', the burial chambers of Shaykh Abu Bakr and his descendants, were a dominant sight in the city, seen from a distance. Over the last three decades the Cemetery has expanded immensely with a proliferation of attractive white domes adorning the landscape of the Wadi, accompanied by the sprawling urban fabric (mostly residential) that wraps around the south and eastern border. Like the cemetery of Tarim, it is one of the exceptionally well maintained and cared for sites in the Wadi.

Al-Faqih Mosque is the earliest mosque built in 'Aynat and attributed to al-Faqih al-Muqaddam Muhammad bin 'Ali Ba 'Alawi (574-653/1178-9-1255) founder of the Hadrami 'Alawi school. He died and was buried in Tarim. On an architectural level, the design which was renewed in the late 1920s or early 1930s (elders report it was 100 years ago, however renovation dates are always documented), carries the same classical features that for over a hundred years were associated with the architectural style of mosques in Tarim (in plan, court, arcades with horse shoe arches, vaults, and slender minaret)ⁱⁱⁱ. After Daniel Van der Meulen visited 'Aynat in the 1930s he published a picture of a mosque very similar to this, which he described as 'a glittering white masterpiece of Hadrami architecture'^{iv}.

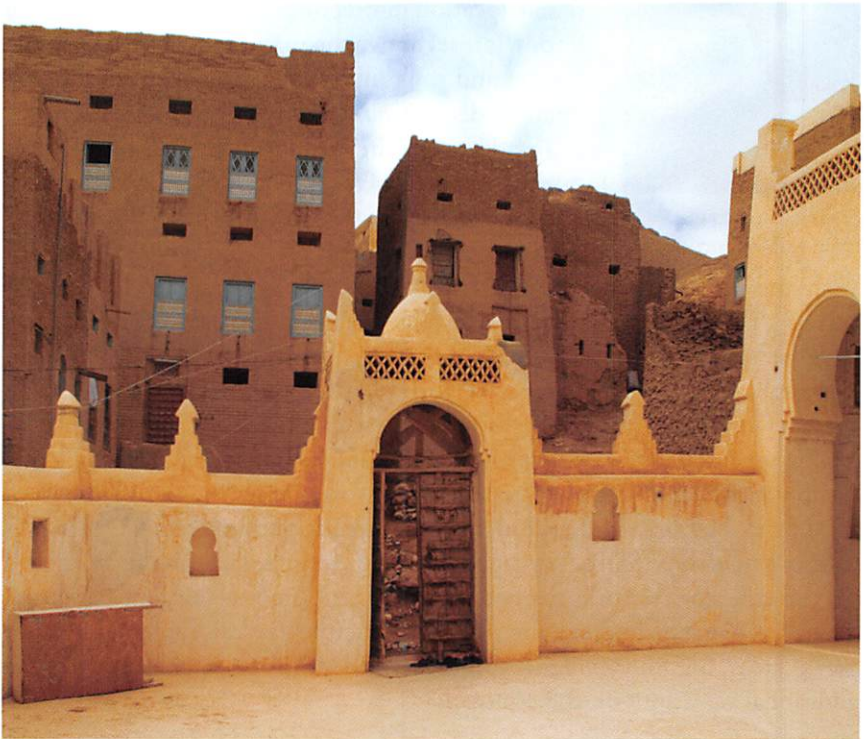
Architecturally, the heritage value lies in the fact that these are buildings that are not getting built any longer, and are an integral part of the urban and heritage landscape. Carrying out the emergency works at 'Aynat was very important since this reversed the possible decision of pulling down the mosque to rebuild or extend it in a different, unattractive style using cement (a popular measure since the early 1990s).

To estimate the costs, we prepared a bill of quantities with the specifications. We were working with the local community there, and the original quote they submitted for the emergency works, was 5 million Yemeni Riyal (\$ 25,000) over and above the budget we had estimated and submitted in our proposal! When they revised their quote they attached a letter with a touching plea to assist them in restoring this mosque which they consider an important historic landmark.

On our first survey there was no particular or evident structural collapse, but the floods that demolished several buildings at the entrance of the town, affected the state and condition of the building. Rains and lack of



View showing the courtyard and prayer hall



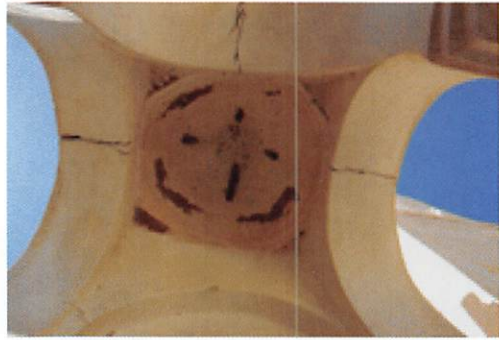
South-facing side entrance



The ablution area.



Steps leading to the main eastern entrance.

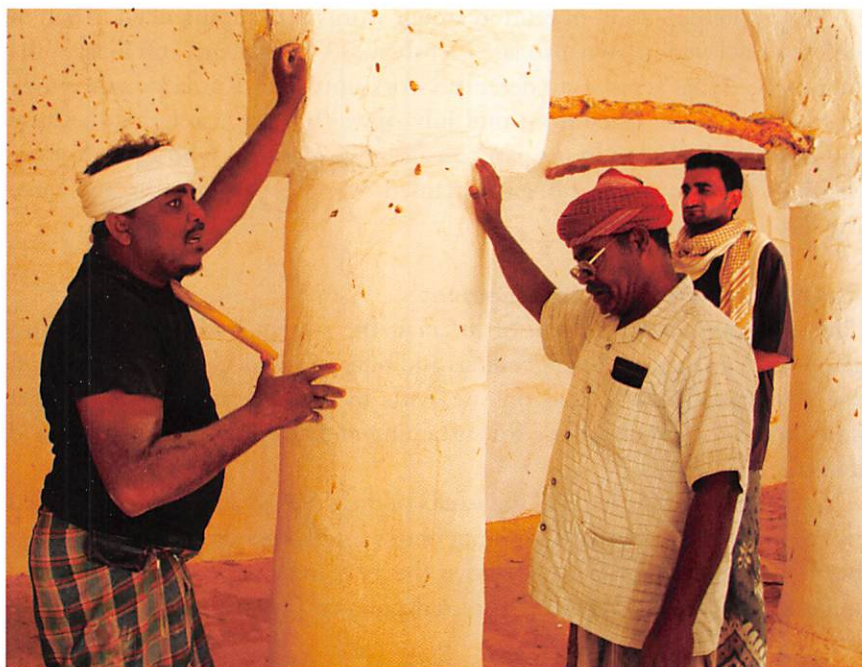


'Aynat Mosque of Al-Faqih: looking up into a damaged dome at the entrance to the Mosque. (May 2009)

maintenance had caused partial damage to the structure and walls as well. Unlike the new housing that was demolished by the spate floods, at Thibi or Sah, this, being one of the earlier buildings, enjoys a raised location protecting the structure from the floods. It is set above the main wadi course with the market and town main square, adjacent to the vast open shaded *rahbah*.

To address further damage that had set in since our first report in December 2009 after the floods, a second survey of the sites in Sah and 'Aynat was carried out. A visit in late May 2009 took place with the Tarimi master builders Salih Brayyik & Karamah 'Ubaid and Daw'an Foundation site architect Abdul Rahman Ba Baqi. Both builders have been working with us at Masna'at 'Urah in Daw'an since early 2008. New specifications were prepared, with bills of quantities, and the damage re-assessed. New plans and elevations of the mosque were also drawn.

The specifications were approved at the end of June and contracts drawn up for Salih Brayyik and his team. Salih is specialised in the recovery of mud brick buildings only, through strengthening and stabilising techniques to shore up and reinforce damaged building sections. He separately advised on the emergency works needed to implement the most urgent stabilising measures. During treating the internal structure for reinforcement, other weak areas became evident and this needed to be accommodated in additional variations on the contracts^v.



Master builders Salih Brayyik and Karamah 'Ubaid, with Abdul Rahman Ba Baqi in the background, during reinforcement works at Sah, Ghayl Umar Mosque, October 2009.



Meeting at Masjid al-Faqih in 'Aynat with (left to right): Keeper of the Mosque, Sayyid Abu Bakr al-Hamid, myself, Mansab 'Aynat 'Umar al-Hamid, 'Umar Ba Sa'd (our driver) and Karamah 'Ubayd 'Ulaywah (November 2009). Abu Bakr and the Mansab acted on behalf of 'Aynat community.

The implementation of reinforcement works that commenced in Sah in June, was delayed in ‘Aynat to late October 2009. Residents and local community of ‘Aynat asked us to defer the work until after Ramadan, since they needed to use the space from mid July onwards. Fortunately, and because this building had been in use, with an attentive guardian who lives close by, much of the damage had been contained over the past months, and since the flood rains occurred.

Phase I Structural Reinforcement

The method, known as *rami* or *ta‘ziz* is the system traditionally used to reinforce damaged walls and ceilings and replace any decayed membrane in the structure. Work started on site with the reinforcement process that constituted the crucial phase for sustaining and stabilising all the damaged and threatened areas.

At the Interior Prayer Hall the vaults of the three arcades were reinforced by inserting 3in steel pipes, running below and across the vault, with double hollow steel pipes placed above the two middle *rukab* columns, and building up the area from the inserted pipes to the inner vault with mud bricks (see photo).

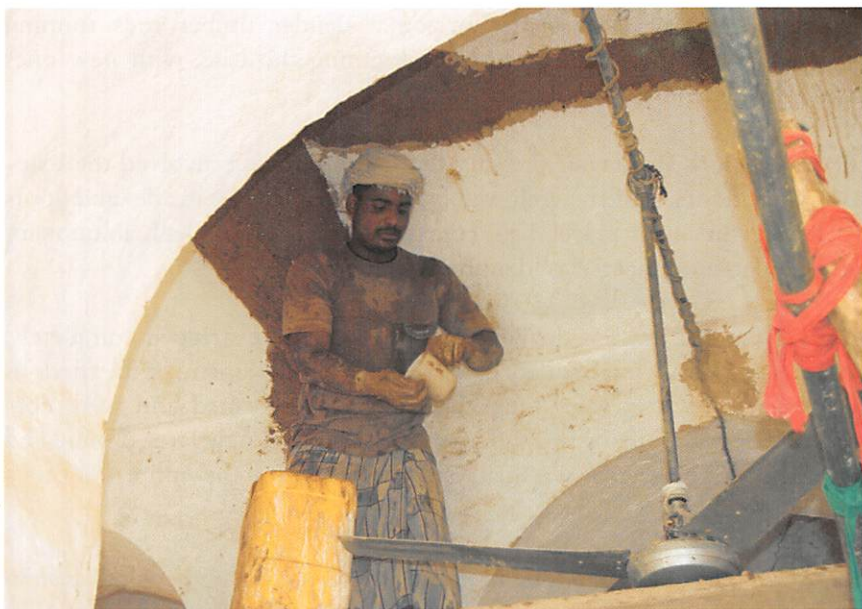
The same treatment was applied at the Courtyard Arcades (the western, central and eastern vaults) and in the Ladies’ Prayer Hall (below the main central arch) where additional work was also required. This included the replacement of 6 purlins of the original local *Sidr* wood (*zizyphus spina christi*), a wall tie was inserted in the fissure along the southern wall and two new *Sidr* lintels were inserted above the entrance. These interventions involve surgical incisions and are rendered over with mud plaster.



View of east facing arcade from courtyard with scaffolding to reinforce the vaults.

The same method applied to all other areas that needed strengthening in critical structural sections, throughout the building: The minaret, Ladies’ and Men’s ablutions, and the eastern mosque entrance.

The reinforcement works were completed in December 2009. Master Builder Karamah ‘Ubayd was responsible for the second stage of works.



Work taking place on reinforcing the prayer arcade.

Phase II Renovation: Exterior & Interior Proofing & Plaster Works

This stage entails first stripping the worn out or damaged layers of mud plaster, known as *mahdah*, and *nurah* followed by the application of new courses and coating of mud render, lime plaster and wash in different layers, processes, and finishes (3–5 layers), to dress and water proof the building.

Due to the drying intervals for each of the applied external courses, this process often takes considerably longer than originally scheduled. Another factor that affects the time and cost, lies in spotting other defects or rot lying beneath the surface, that become apparent after stripping the mud plaster layers. It is at this later stage when any unseen defects in the structure are detected. This invariably calls for additional reinforcement, exposing damaged sections that had escaped Salih's eye.

Additional works were needed at the East Entrance where the door jambs were reinforced by inserting two stone pillars, one on either side, along the entire height of the sides, and the lintel replaced with two steel pipes. The second area was the prayer hall arches where we replaced twenty missing or damaged *maghasi* (horizontal slender timber rods running between the arches) acting as braces spanning the base, with new ones using the same local wood.

Protection & Renewal: dressing the entire building involved the exterior walls, floors, roof area followed by the interior walls, arcades and floors including the main prayer hall, courtyard, ladies prayer hall, ablutionary areas, toilets and minaret, as identified below:

(1) Roof area known as the *Riyum*: The floors were stripped completely, and cleaned removing the debris. During this process many of the merlons or parapet crests were found damaged or deformed and were corrected. The water drains and spouts were replaced. A new layer of mud and chaff, known as *ghassah* was made and applied over the entire floor area and left to dry.

This was followed with a layer of *nurah* mixed with rough pebbles *haslah* in two layers, the *tarqah* process, followed by *rawk*, and the final spraying finish. Specially made spouts of carved palm tree trunk or fired clay were also fitted.

(2) External Walls: The outer render plaster surfaces of the exterior walls was completely removed and stripped.

A new *mahdah* , traditional mud and chaff plaster, was applied to the exterior walls and then left to dry out. The rendered surfaces are then coated, as in the *riyum* area, with a *nurah* mixture (with *haslah* rough sand) in a process called *tarqah*, working it into the surface to bond and blend well. The *nurah* polishing process called *rawk*, comes next forming a brilliant, glossy and almost marbleised surface. Finally the walls are finished with another two (or three in the interior) light coats of sprayed *nurah*.

In the Courtyard the walls were thoroughly cleaned and in the areas that required to be made good, were corrected or stripped. Complete spray coating was applied to the arcade vaults, columns and to the walls of the courtyard twice.

(3) Interior Walls (Main Prayer Hall, Ladies Prayer hall, Ablutionary areas)

This included stripping only the wall surfaces that required to be renovated or restored, and the application of *tarqah* to zones that needed new coating. The same plaster and render process was used in the interior area (without coarse sand). The surfaces of walls that required stripping down were corrected and levelled. All the interior walls including the Ladies hall and the ablutionary areas required the application of three coats of sprayed *nurah*.

(4) Floors & Other Features

The floor levels were corrected and the zones that require to be dug out were stripped and renewed, removing any cement coating that was applied over the years, and replaced with *nurah* lime coating as a damp proofing course, also providing a smooth cool white area to walk comfortably on. The wooden screens and windows were repaired and cleaned separately.

A cement block wall at the eastern section of the entrance was covered with mud plaster.

By the end of April all the mud plaster render work was nearly completed, apart from the Minaret (see below). In May the application of *nurah* protective plaster was started over the dry freshly mud plaster render. By

late June the work on the exterior and interior were completed, following the process described above.

The Minaret:

While stripping the minaret during April a crack was found and treated by inserting wall ties. The builders alerted us to the condition of the structure and weak sections that had made the minaret unsafe to work on. Originally the minaret was included in the external works but then we had to have a separate contract and seek additional funding to carry out the reinforcement. Restoration of the body also required correcting the inclination, before any external works could be implemented. The external surfaces were removed and stripped and the walls cleaned and levels corrected.

A new *mahdah* was then applied rendering the exterior walls after which it was left to dry completely. Another coat of *nurah* and sand layer, was applied, as *rawk*. Finally the walls were sprayed with a light coat for finish.

The work on the ‘Aynat mosque was completed by the end of July 2010. A plaque was fitted to document this renovation, the fourth in the history of the Mosque according to the Mansab.

The troubled political situation in Yemen over that period of time (2008–2010) did not help. Without the hospitality and logistical support provided by Shaykh Abdullah Ahmad Bugshan, I doubt if I would have been able to continue. Economic conditions, exacerbated by the floods, were dire because insufficient relief and assistance had reached local communities. The roads to Sah and ‘Aynat were still damaged, which made access slower and more difficult. The builders, however, were content because based in Tarim they were quite close to both sites.

We worked quietly without drawing much attention. While we were restoring the Shaykh ‘Umar Ba Wazir mosque in Ghayl ‘Umar, the builders would arrive after dawn prayers. People would drive by and find them working on this monument, while the debris of housing and fallen palm trees since the floods were still left unattended to. My master



The interior prayer hall after completion.

builder later told me that when they asked the community to provide access to water to use for building, the inhabitants refused to talk to them, convinced they must be ‘of the jinn’.

In that part of the world, restoring public buildings, mosques or tombs, in particular, is a benevolent act. I was repeatedly reminded by the builders that my reward points would be doubled in



West facing façade of Al- Faqih Mosque, white washed and work on the minaret near completion, July 2010.

heaven because I had renovated and restored the Mosques, and the mausoleums of saints. I replied: ‘those of you who charged us more than you should have done, will be left pleading for entry at the gate’!

Acknowledgements:

Shaykh Abdullah A.S. Bugshan (Chairman, DMBAF), Dr Saleh Ali Ba Surrah (Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research), Mansab ‘Aynat ‘Umar B. ‘Abdul Qadir Al-Hamid, Ahmad Junayd al-Junayd, (Deputy Governor, Hadramut Governorate) and Sayyid Abu Bakr al-Hamid (Say’un & ‘Aynat). Special thanks are due to The Prince Claus Fund, the Hague, and Deborah Stolk at the Cultural Emergency Response; Dr Abdullah Ba Ghamayyan (Director DMBAF) and to architects Ali Ba Sa’ad and Abdul Rahman Ba Baqi.

Notes

- ⁱ The Daw’an Mud Brick Architecture Foundation was founded in 2007 with the mission to work with the mud brick architecture and the rehabilitation of the building heritage of Hadramut. The writer is founding member and Chief Architect of the Foundation.
- ⁱⁱ *The Saiyids of Hadramaut*, (1956 p.17). Also see his ‘... Tribes and Saiyids’; ‘The Al Shaykh Bu Bakr b. Salim, Mansabs of ‘Inat’-
- ⁱⁱⁱ See the mosques of Tarim in *The Valley of Mud Brick Architecture*, Damluji, SS (1992)
- ^{iv} van der Meulen, D. *Hadramaut Some of its Mysteries Unveiled*, (1964) pp180-181.
- ^v Damluji, SS. *Final Report On Activities- Masna’at ‘Urah, Wadi Daw’an Hadramut, Yemen*, Prince Claus Fund, CER, July 2008.



SMILE, YOU ARE IN YEMEN (abtesem, anta fi al-Yaman)!

WARDA EISSADI

The author won first prize in the Society's essay competition for 2010. This year she is due to commence a degree course in Arabic at SOAS, University of London.

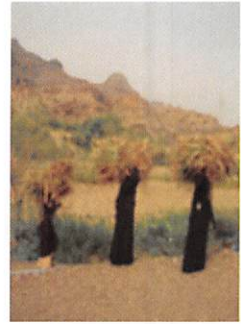
The time had come, and the moment I had been so eagerly waiting for had finally arrived.

I sat in the airport recalling those very same moments five years earlier. My trip to Yemen in 2005 was a life turning experience, and one which had ever since made me eager to go back again and again. With my studies finally over and about to venture on a gap year, I was determined to explore Yemen as fully as I could. I left behind friends who were shocked, worried and confused by my decision; they could not comprehend the idea of me *wanting* to go to this foreign country; a land portrayed in the media as a terrorist haven, where pretty much the only coverage on the news was when fighting occurred. I understood their perplexity. It was no wonder that they could not relate to all the beautiful things I have seen and experienced in Yemen. By living amongst Yemenis, I began to view Yemen from a different angle. The further I allowed myself to engage with the country and culture, the more I learned and the deeper I fell in love with it. I started to appreciate that Yemen was more than just simply 'the poorest country in the Middle East'.

Apart from my historical and geographical fascination for the country, one of my main interests lay in the children and young people of Yemen. Being young myself, I wanted to find out how far the lifestyle of a Yemeni youth living in Yemen was different to the way of life of somebody like me who was brought up in Britain.

Looking back on my visit in 2005, nothing could have prepared me for what I was about to experience. I was aware of the poverty and the simple life that they lived. But there was so much more! Initially, my stay in the

city of Aden, in southern Yemen, was supposed to be for the longer duration, and I intended to only visit Al-Baitha village for no more than one or two weeks. But, as so often with life, quite the opposite happened and I found myself reluctant to depart from this rural community and its people. Thus, I spent my whole time there and only returned to Aden a few days before my flight.

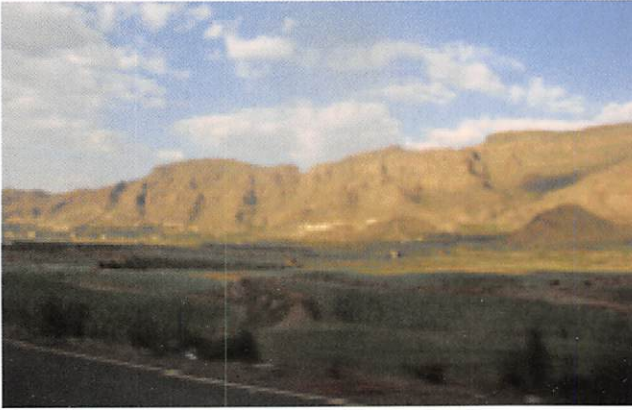


What possessed me to stay in a remote village where people lived very simple lives, herding the animals and harvesting their crops? I don't know, but what I am sure about is that every single day I spent there was beautiful! Yes I know, it's not a very convincing answer when you consider the attractions of Aden with its large modern shopping mall, hot sunny days, miles of glistening beaches with the warm blue sea brushing up against the golden sands... but it's one of those things you'll never appreciate enough until you experience the simplicity of rural life and feel its satisfaction. Perhaps it was the new and contrasting way of life in the village which intrigued me.

Living with Baithanis opened my eyes and has taught me a lot of things. It was very interesting to learn about their social interaction, segregation, the roles of individuals within the community and their mutual respect in dealings with one another. In addition to that, what really fascinated me



was their daily routine. Unlike my busy lifestyle back in London where I would be very dependent on my watch or the clock on my phone, people in Yemen (particularly in the village) rarely referred to the two-hand instrument on the wall. Yemen is predominantly a Muslim country, so it comes



as no surprise that their day revolves around the 5 daily prayer times. This is further assisted by the *athaan* (call to prayer) from the *masjids*, amplified by large speakers to reach hundreds of homes.

Some of the children I met were perhaps only 10 or 11

years old. Yet their maturity was astonishing and really made me question mine! To me, it seemed as though Yemeni children were very mature for their age... Or could it be, perhaps, that it is I and other youngsters in Britain who were immature at that stage in our life?

I was impressed with how the girls managed to balance their day; having fun, playing, enjoying themselves as any other child would, yet were almost instantly prepared for a 'mature mode' at the right times. I believe that the responsibilities and expectations characteristic of their society play a major part in this. For example, children – particularly girls – are taught to partake in 'womanly' activities and house chores from an early age. What was puzzling, however, was seeing 7 and 8 year old little girls *wanting* to participate in the cooking, cleaning etc. Typically, whilst growing up in London I would have come up with as many excuses as I possibly could in order to avoid doing the cleaning! So being amongst younger girls who did the job without having to be told was a little strange.

I also met Afraah and Fatima – dedicated learners who inspired me to continue with my education. It was a refreshing change from being surrounded by students in the West who frequently dropped out of school or college. Afraah, Fatima and I would normally spend our afternoons under the sun in the fields with a book and pen in hand whilst I taught them English.

How far had the girls moved on in life? How much has the country changed/developed 5 years on? How is life for the Youth in Yemen today? And what opportunities does this country offer to its young people? These were questions I set out to find an answer to.

On my recent visit to Aden, whilst visiting the different areas I noticed a large proportion of young people filled the streets. A popular spot was Aden Mall where people could shop, eat, or play a game or two of bowling.

As I walked along the roads and passed old-style buildings of homes and flats, I saw large numbers of children playing freely in their neighbourhoods whilst men were scattered on the pavements in little groups chewing the nation's popular leaf, *qat*. At first I found this strange and shocking. But at the same time it was intriguing to witness very old men sitting alongside middle aged and young teenage boys, all happily socialising and chewing away.

But why are they on the streets?! All this to me was unusual because I would associate sitting on the ground, with beggars and poor people; but it was normal for them, and also for men from middle class and well-off families. I asked a few people why they hung around on the streets and I got answers varying from 'because the ladies are in the house' to 'there's nothing else to do'. One young teenager laughed and replied 'where else am I going to go?'

And that was a very interesting question.

With the help of a Yemeni friend living in Aden, I started to look into existing activities, clubs and organisations that run programmes for the youth. Firstly, I found out that 'Shabaab', the Arabic for 'Youth', was used to refer to anyone between the ages of 18 – 30. This is in contrast to the 11–19 years old range generally used in Britain's youth service. Secondly, I found it hard to find an equivalence of youth clubs that existed in the UK. However, there were fee paying clubs ('nadis') offering mainly sports activities to members, and not young people specifically. It is generally agreed that over 50% of Yemenis live under poverty. Therefore, leisure activities and joining clubs would be beyond the resources of





many youths. The limited availability of public parks meant that children played football in abandoned open space around the neighbourhoods. In Sana'a, however, I saw 'Hadeeqat Asab'een' (Park 70) filled with families and children enjoying themselves. I visited it once on a Tuesday and to my surprise there were officers at the entrance refusing entry to men. When I enquired about this, I discovered that Tuesday was a women-only day; a restriction to cater for women's needs and comforts. And indeed, the whole atmosphere inside the park was very different.

Women were more relaxed, their niqaab (veil) was off, girls were playing on rides and chasing one another freely. Also whilst in Sana'a, I had come to learn that Afraah whom I had met 5 years earlier, was now married and living in Sana'a. She was very happy, although a little disappointed as she had hoped to go on to university and later teach.

Continuing my search, I visited slums and neighbourhoods as well as institutes in Aden such as the UP Center and the National Institute of Administration and Sciences, where young people could sign up for a range of courses. From interviewing and speaking to young people, a passion for learning was evident in many Yemenis. I asked them what they believed to be the major issue which youths in Yemen faced today, and almost all echoed the same answer. Unemployment. When I asked what they did in their spare time, I generally received 'chew *qat*'/'go out', from the boys, and 'watch soaps/ TV' or 'go to a friend's house', from the girls.

However, I did come across some active and inspiring youths such as Samar who is part of 'Da'imoon' in Sana'a – an organisation founded by young people which provides voluntary services. Others were members of the Youth Union in Aden, who invited me along to spend Eid Day in

hospital celebrating it with children suffering from cancer and liver failure, and putting on a party for them.

During my research, I have come across various kinds of young people in Yemen, from the purely lazy to others who were simply stuck in unfortunate circumstances. However, I personally could not see many opportunities that were being offered by the Yemeni government to its youth. And this was something many Yemenis have expressed concerns about. However, despite that, I am pleased to be able to say that I could definitely see the presence of hope and passion driving dedicated young Yemeni individuals to achieve their best in the situation and country they are in.

Recalling what a Yemeni youth once told me...‘Smile, You are in Yemen!’



View of Crater, Aden, from Sirah Island.



The author (in headscarf) with children.

SOQOTRA: A STUDY OF EAR INFECTION AND ASSOCIATED HEARING IMPAIRMENT AMONG SCHOOL CHILDREN

DR SALEM YOUSR MUFTAH

The author was born on the island of Soqatra in 1979. After graduating in medicine from the University of Hadhramaut he joined the island's nascent health service. In 2010 he was awarded a scholarship funded through the British-Yemeni Society to study for a Master's Degree in tropical paediatrics at the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine. His year's course in Liverpool involved a field survey which is the subject of the following article.

Chronic suppurative otitis media (CSOM) is a common public health problem in the world and a major cause of hearing impairment among children in developing countries. The disease and its association with disabled hearing impairment (DHI) is a hidden disability (Mackenzie and Smith 2009), and children are at risk of poor school performance, delayed language and speech development, and poor cognition.

The British-Yemeni Society in conjunction with the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine (LSTM) and others sponsored a survey on Soqatra Island to determine the prevalence of chronic suppurative otitis media in relation to DHI, age, sex, urban or rural settings and other factors. The cross-sectional, community-based survey was conducted from 20 April to 20 June 2011.

36 schools were approached and a total of 686 school age children aged 6–16 years were interviewed and examined for CSOM, and associated DHI and bacterial aetiologies.

The topic of this research was proposed to me by my supervisor, Dr Ian Mackenzie, from the WHO Collaborating Centre for Prevention of Deafness, and the Child & Reproductive Health Group at the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine (LSTM). Its importance arises from the fact that chronic suppurative otitis media and its relation to the level of hearing impairment is a hidden disability of childhood which has received increased international attention during the last ten years. It is a disease of poverty. Children suffering from the disease are more vulnerable to hearing impairment because they cannot afford the preventive and routine care required to avoid hearing loss nor the hearing aids to make the disability manageable. Hearing impairment also makes it more difficult for them to escape poverty by hindering progress in school or in the workplace and by

Dr Salem Yousr
testing child at
Hafj school,
Hadibo



isolating them socially (WHO, 2010). CSOM contributes significantly to the incidence of disease in children in many developing countries. The WHO recommends early detection and management of ear diseases through school based intervention programmes. In addition to meeting the Millennium Development Goal of improving child survival, early detection and treatment will enhance the learning capacity of schoolchildren who no longer suffer such disabilities. In Yemen, there is evidence of conductive deafness in children with CSOM (Elemraid et al 2007).

Although Soqatra Island, which was listed by UNESCO in 2008 as a World Natural Heritage site, has received some international aid for health, education and the environment, information on the prevalence of CSOM and the level of hearing impairment in children in the area has been lacking. This was the first survey to collect such information as an essential basis for planning future developmental interventions.

The Soqatra Archipelago lies in the north-western part of the Indian Ocean, at the entrance of the Gulf of Aden. It is part of the Republic of Yemen and comes under the provincial administration of Hadhramaut, based in Al Mukalla on the mainland. The Archipelago comprises four Islands: Soqatra, Abd al Kuri, Samha and Darsa (which is uninhabited). It lies about 340km south of the Yemeni mainland, and 250 km east of the Somali coast. Soqatra is the largest island, making up about 95% of the landmass of the Archipelago. It stretches 135km from east to west and is

Children in
Dehamdh school,
Soqatra



42km at its widest point. The population is estimated to be at least 59,700 (1994 census). Most people live in the coastal plains and engage mainly in fishing, date cultivation and local trading, while the mountain people of the interior are engaged in livestock production and traditional handicrafts (rug weaving, basket making and pottery). The main towns are Hadibo (the capital), Qalansiya, Nojed and Sharqia. The long isolation from the mainland and the rest of the world makes the Archipelago unique in its culture and biodiversity.

686 children aged between 6 and 16, out of a total school population of 12000, were recruited to participate in this survey as a representative sample of the targeted group. Data collection in the field was carried out by myself. Interviews, the completion of questionnaires, auditory assessment, and the collection of swab samples from discharging ears were undertaken



Rural school, Nojed,
Soqatra



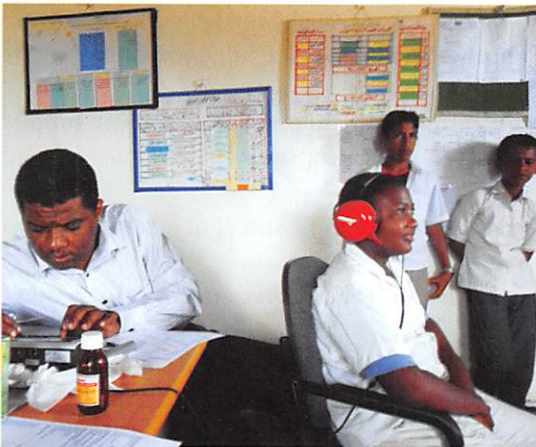
Dr Salem at work in Qadib school

with the help of four study assistants provided by Hadibo General Hospital.

The swab samples were sent to the mainland for laboratory analysis, and each test took 2 to 5 days to complete. Sick children in all the schools we visited received medical advice and treatment free of charge.

In Yemen, there has been no information on the prevalence of hearing impairment and its association with CSOM. The survey which I and my assistants conducted – at an extremely difficult time in Yemen – is the first study of its kind and has yielded information essential in planning better ear care for the children of Soqatra Island and Yemen.

It is noteworthy that the epidemiology of CSOM in the current study belongs to the highest category with an overall prevalence of 7.4%. . According to WHO, a prevalence of 1% of CSOM in children in a defined



Qadib school

community indicates that the issue is manageable, while a prevalence of 4% indicates a massive public health problem needing urgent attention (WHO/CIBA,1996).The Saudi prevalence of CSOM at 1.3% belongs to the low rate category (Zakzouk and Hajjaj 2002).The wide variation in the rates of CSOM between Soqatra and Saudi Arabia is probably

due to the far better access to health care enjoyed by Saudi children, while in the case of Soqatra, access to medical facilities is very limited, and most children live in very poor conditions.

The study found significant hearing impairment among children with CSOM, which is consistent with reports from other parts of the world (WHO 2004). The strongest predicting factors were the presence of ear discharge, recurrent upper respiratory tract infections and the co-habitation of more than three families in a single dwelling. Evidence from other studies supports this finding (Jacoby et al 2011).

The commonest isolated pathogens were *proteus spp* (39.2%), *staphylococcus aureus* (23.5%), and *pseudomonas spp* (19.6%). The current findings are in agreement with many reports about the developing world (Adoga et al 2010).

Conclusions and recommendations

Before undertaking this survey I was under the impression that hearing impairment and CSOM would not be a major problem, but the results of my research have shown otherwise:

- The incidence of CSOM on Soqatra Island is found to be high measured by WHO criteria;
- Conductive hearing impairment is significantly high among children with CSOM;
- The level of hearing impairment ranged from mild to moderate ;
- The main predicting factors for CSOM are the presence of ear discharge, recurrent upper respiratory tract infection and the co-habitation of more than three families;
- Commonly isolated organisms from children with chronic suppurative otitis media are: *proteus spp*, *staphylococcus aureus*, and *pseudomonas aeruginosa*.
- *Ciprofloxacin* and *cefuroxime* are the most susceptible antibiotics to the causative pathogens.
- There is a need for better ear care, early detection and management of CSOM.
- There is a need for the research on the long term efficacy of *ciprofloxacin* and other antibiotics in the management of CSOM.



Local football team advertising the Field Survey

Acknowledgments:

This work is due to the help of many people, but I owe especial thanks for their generous support and sponsorship to the British-Yemeni Society, the Hadhramaut East Fund for Human Development, and the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine. My profound gratitude goes to my supervisor, Dr Ian Mackenzie, and to Professor Bernard Brabin.

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**FIELDWORK NOTES:
A YEAR OF RESEARCH IN SOUTHERN YEMEN**

THANOS PETOURIS

The author, a Committee member of the Society, is a PhD candidate at the Department of Politics, SOAS, University of London. He spent his fieldwork year (2009–2010) in Yemen, and partly Egypt, interviewing former activists in the Anti-Colonial Movement in South Arabia and researching local archives.

For any doctoral student, the fieldwork year is perhaps the most exciting and meaningful part of his or her study. It is the time when one has the opportunity to break free from the constraints of one's academic establishment, leave behind the heavy stacks of books in the university library and see for oneself what one's object of study has to reveal. Despite having lived in Yemen in the recent past, mingled emotions of apprehension, excitement, expectation, and fear were difficult to overcome as once again I was touching down in Sana'a, armed this time with a few local contacts, and a copy of Flagg-Miller's unique article on research centres in Aden.¹

The aim of my doctoral study has been to map the origins and development of a distinct South Arabian and later South Yemeni identity from the time Aden became a Crown Colony in 1937 until the end of British occupation in 1967. This I proposed to achieve by studying the emergence, activities, political programmes, and ideological bases of the various nationalist, anti-colonial organisations which appeared in South Arabia during this period. My working assumption is that colonial policies coupled with regional and international political processes, the emergence of an Adeni educated merchant middle class, and the institutionalisation of tribal forms of political organisation had combined to produce a distinct Adeni/South Arabian/South Yemeni form of national identification which has ebbed and flowed to this day.

The goal of my fieldwork year was to meet and interview as many as possible of the old anti-colonial activists, and former local rulers, and examine local archives both in Aden and Hadhramawt for the pamphlets and political manifestos which the different nationalist groups published, and for documents pertaining to the British presence and influence in South Arabia. As interviews tended to take place on an *ad hoc* basis, perhaps the greatest challenge was to try and retain a certain balance in terms of the gender, political background, and geographical origin of the interviewees. One of the

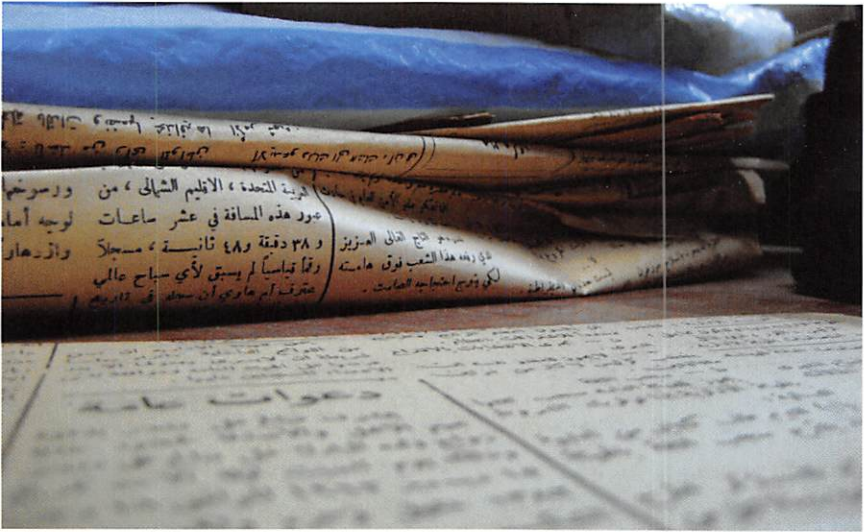
¹ Miller, Flagg. 'Ten Neglected Treasures in the Heart of Aden'. *Yemen Update* 40 (1998); this is the only work dedicated to a thorough description of working libraries and archives in Aden, and is indispensable to any Yemen researcher.

strengths of my research has been my attempt to paint a fuller picture of political processes, including the little known phenomenon of Adeni feminist activism, in parts of South Arabia as far afield as Yafa' and Soqotra.

Perhaps the greatest surprise my fieldwork had to offer was the existing number of archival and research centres which safeguard a substantial amount of hitherto unseen and understudied documents spanning a period of time which sometimes goes beyond the establishment of the British presence in the area. For example, the *Hanbala Archival Centre*, in Shaykh Uthman, which houses the papers of the late trade unionist, educationalist, and poet, Idris Ahmad Hanbala (1922–1991), proved to be a real treasure trove of nationalist literature. The Centre is run by Hanbala's political and literary friends who have selflessly preserved and keep expanding an unique collection of historical documents, newspapers, and books. It remains an important focus of local cultural activity, and was always a pleasure to visit, if only to find there an impromptu *majlis* organised for the recitation of Yemeni poetry to the rhythmic accompaniment of an 'ud. But



The author being offered *qat* leaves during a visit to the former Ion Keith-Falconer Hospital in Shaykh Othman.



A pile of copies of *Fatat al-Jazirah* newspapers in the Hanbala Archive Centre.

what enthral the imagination of the researcher are the possible treasures to be found among the Centre's uncatalogued papers!

Although the staff in both the *Yemen Centre for Studies and Research*, which is housed in the former palace of the Sultan of Lahej, and the *National Library of Aden* are equally enthusiastic and helpful to researchers, the materials held there have suffered considerably from the many political changes which the country has experienced. Archives, as the repositories of historical memory, are usually the first victims of political change; however, what is found missing from their files can often be as suggestive as what has been left behind. Similarly, in the *Women's Centre for Research and Training* of the University of Aden, one finds a very hospitable and active academic community supported by a library rich in publications on the role of Yemeni women in history as well as in contemporary development.

If political turmoil has depleted Adeni public archives, leaving private collections as the major sources of historical documents, the same does not apply to Hadhramawt, where the role of mosques as centres of learning, the early existence of a basic state bureaucracy, and the relative isolation of the area have contributed to the preservation of a vast collection of documentary material. The *National Archival Centre* in Say'un providing access to the correspondence of the Hadhrami sultans, the *Ibn 'Ubaidillah al-Saqqaf*



The author with (from left to right) Muhammad Mubarak Bin Dohry, Sayyid Ja'afar bin Muhammad al-Saqqaf (scholar and historian) and Khamis Ali Hamdan in Say'un.

Centre preserving the papers of its eponymous Imam, and the *Sultanic Library* in the 'Umar Mosque of Mukalla were instrumental in supplementing my research with information and sources that can shed light on certain aspects of the anti-colonial struggle in this part of South Arabia.

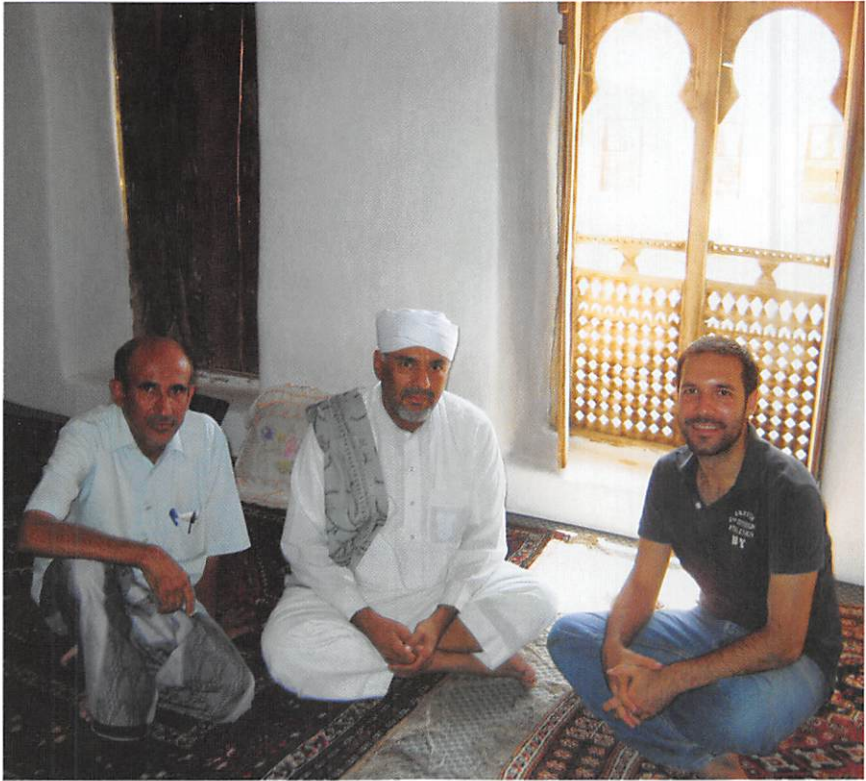
Equally important, fieldwork provides a unique opportunity for the researcher to connect his work with ongoing similar studies within Yemen. Although, one finds a stimulating academic debate taking place there, coupled with large numbers of new publications, the distribution of the latter within the country, and even more so outside it, remains quite limited. Nevertheless, a considerable number of autobiographies and memoirs have been published in recent years and there appears to be a growing trend among local historians to revisit the recent past. Given that the history of Southern Yemen has been largely told from a British perspective, such publications are invaluable for a more global understanding of the period under study. The fact, also, that many books were only available via their authors or in local circulation, was another reason for travelling to different parts of the country.

In the field I was able to put to the test the hypothesis that people would

be disinclined to talk about the past, given the country's internal political tensions. What I actually found was quite the opposite: because of these tensions and the organised efforts to falsify the past, my interviewees were rather keen to share their memories, and set the record right. However, it remains analytically challenging for the researcher to assess the information received. One has always to be wary of the particular background of interviewees, and of the perspective from which they tend to view the past, and to try to filter latent attitudes and perceptions which have been shaped and sometimes distorted by their individual experiences.

In practical terms, the greatest challenge regarding personal interviews was locating the interviewees, as well as establishing a trusting relationship with them, that would allow for meetings to materialise. As it became obvious to me from the very beginning, the Yemeni middle class, and political elite are highly mobile, due to connections in the other Gulf states, Egypt, Syria, and occasionally the UK. Thus a first task, which often proved futile, was to be able to pin people down in the country in between their travels to visit relatives, or supervise business projects in the Gulf, or get health treatment in Cairo, or Damascus. Another peculiarity that determined the success of these meetings was the need for an appropriate intermediary, who could liaise between the 'target' personalities, and the researcher. In most cases a familiarisation lunch would precede the actual interview, which would take place at a later time. It is indicative that promises of meetings, which would not materialise for months, would be instantly honoured after a phone call by the appropriate middleman. In other words, it was essential to choose a different contact for approaching different people, as the reputation, political convictions, and history of the former reflected directly on those of the researcher. I also found that conducting interviews in Arabic (although with some assistance) allowed for an uninterrupted narrative from the interviewee, and yielded more historical information.

One aspect of field research that tends to become obscured by the project itself, and the constant pursuit of historical records and information, is the very role of the researcher as a representative of academia on the ground, and his ability to shape the ways in which the subjects of his study, in this case the Yemenis, perceive their heritage, their social and political organisation, and their position vis a vis the rest of the world. What I found was that certain aspects of Yemeni history and society such as the tribe, the diaspora, the biodiversity of Soqatra, or the ancient history of Sheba have



The author with (from left to right) Najib Sa'ïd Ba Wazir (writer and poet) and Sayyid Muhammad bin Hassan al-Saqqaf, Director, at the Ibn Ubaidillah al-Saqqaf Centre, Say'un.

become markers of the modern Yemeni identity because they have been so exhaustively studied by Western scholars. Thus, not only did the theme of my research arouse surprise and doubt that this particular era of Yemen's past would be of interest to anyone, but I also found myself interviewing people who had already developed their pre-set collection of answers to questions I never intended to ask.

In other words, the importance Western scholarship places on the study of specific topics has a significant bearing on people's perceptions of themselves. Likewise, as Yemen became the focus of negative media reports, I found that the presence of foreign researchers was seen by the Yemenis as a reassuring indicator that the country had not been forsaken by the rest of the world; that the situation was not as portrayed in the Western media. In



FLOSY slogan ('Liberation Front...Revolution for the Poor') preserved on a building in Aydarus Street, Crater, Aden.

such instances the scholar finds himself in the invidious position of being expected by the locals to inform or shape Western perceptions of Yemen.

In any event, the ability to conduct research on the ground, to record people's memories of events which they experienced, and to access sources of documentary material whose availability depends heavily on unstable political circumstances, is vital as much for the success of the specific research project, as it is for the furtherance of our knowledge of the country, and for the documentation of voices that are being slowly silenced by the passage of time. Thus the significant grants offered by the British-Yemeni Society, the Society for Arabian Studies and the Leigh Douglas Memorial Fund towards academic studies in Yemen and the Middle East in general are indispensable to the researcher, and, in my case, enabled me to travel to most parts of Yemen. For this and for the unreserved support given me by numerous Yemeni and British friends in the course of my fieldwork I will always be grateful.

SELMA AL-RADI: An Appreciation

(23 July 1939 – 7 October 2010)

'All is well here, life carries on as normal with chaos reigning supreme... the laying down of the water system, holes everywhere, streets torn up, traffic chaos and Yemenis and sundries falling into the trenches. Drought was upon us, then the deluge with my ceilings leaking like the day of judgement, locusts breeding in the Jawf, presidents being blown up, and tribals in all shapes and colours rushing around in flashy Toyotas with plastic interiors gay with flowers and machine guns.' (Letter from Sana'a, 13 July 1978)

The Iraqi archaeologist Selma al-Radi found herself in her element when she arrived in Yemen in 1977 to become special adviser to the National Museum in Sana'a. The intelligence and humour of the Yemenis, the energy and optimism that was in the air of their post-revolution country, the rich heritage that expressed itself in exuberant language and architecture, the promise of countless important ancient sites with insights into the civilisations of South Arabian antiquity; all conspired to create the perfect setting in which to live her artful life to the full and, ultimately, make her greatest contribution.

Selma's original role was to organise and display South Arabian antiquities in the first National Museum – a challenging task in itself, still her storeroom full of fakes seemed to amuse her as much as the genuine statues on display. She also was charged with surveying sites around the country, but her brief soon expanded to include Yemen's cultural heritage generally. She was involved in an early campaign to save the Ashrafiyah mosque in Ta'izz, but discovered her true *metier*, that of a conservatrix, after she encountered the early 16th century 'Amiriya madrasa and mosque in Rada'a. Appalled by the near derelict state of this exceptional building, she pitched herself into what was to become a personal crusade devoted to not only making the building structurally sound, but restoring it both externally and internally to its former glory. She recounted hilariously how she was on the rickety roof when the catastrophic earthquake of 1982 hit and she was forced to cling on to one of the domes for dear life as it swayed wildly against her.

The project – danger, frustrations and all – offered Selma the opportunity to engage her refined aesthetic and organisational capabilities, and allowed, or even demanded, the full exploitation of her considerable skills of persuasion. She managed to convince all responsible that the restoration

of the 'Amiriya was not only necessary, but essential to keep alive indigenous Yemeni skills that were in danger of being lost.

Selma worked tirelessly, repairing stucco decorations and restoring thousands of square metres of tempera wall paintings. She took the most pride in working alongside a master stonemason and builders to revive traditional skills and materials, applying herself to the rediscovery of the recipe and application of the pliant but waterproof plaster, *qudad*, to which she developed an almost mystical attachment.

She dedicated herself to the project for the next 24 years and her efforts were handsomely acknowledged in 2007 by an Aga Khan Award for Architecture in the restoration and conservation category.

The restoration of the 'Amiriya was in a sense a fulfilment of destiny, for Selma was really its embodiment. Rather like this expression of the prolific Tahirid dynasty, she was a rare jewel, an harmonious amalgam of diverse cultural influences from Anatolia, Syria and Iraq to Egypt and, especially, India, with Beirut, France and Manhattan thrown into her personal mix.

She was born in Baghdad to Muhammad Salim al-Radi, a diplomat, and Su'ad Abbas, whose family, though ethnically Kurdish, were Ottomans through and through (her Baghdad-born great uncle, Mahmud Sevket Pasha, was one of last Grand Viziers of the Ottoman empire). Many of Selma's formative early years were spent abroad, in Iran and India, where she attended the Loreto Convent in Simla and acquired her precise, clipped English. She was subsequently sent to Alexandria ('to learn Arabic' as she put it) and went on to Girton College, Cambridge and subsequently for graduate studies in archaeology of the ancient Near East at Columbia University and the University of Amsterdam.

As a professional Selma was involved in Nimrud, Nippur and Abu Salabikh (Iraq), Mendes (Egypt), Phlamoudhi (Cyprus), Failaka (Kuwait) and Shams al-din (Syria) as well as numerous surveys in Yemen (undertaken in her notoriously uncooperative Series I Landrover, 'Bilius'). The scope of her archaeological interests was reflected in a foundation course she offered while lecturer at the American University of Beirut, notoriously entitled 'From the Stone Age to Christianity'.

As a private person she was renowned for her friendships, her hospitality, her unrivalled collection of Yemeni silver jewellery, her way with words, her cooking and her love of melody. Selma's life was lived against the background of music (she professed to detest anything contemporary from Ravel onward, or 'ethnic'), and it was opera with which she was most

temperamentally aligned. The image endures of her in her decorative home in Sana'a, singing along to arias from 'Fidelio' or 'Aida' at full blast as she prepares an Indo-Middle Eastern feast for her many friends and admirers. Her quick mind expressed itself in highly entertaining and skilful storytelling, one of the best loved being the saga of the absconding hyena brought to the Museum by a tribesman who thought she was assembling a zoo. Selma's wit could disarm anyone from ministers to farmers but none so utterly as soldiers at irksome checkpoints when her trenchant streams of Arabic invective would reduce them to fits of giggles and the barrier would swing open. But what so impressed all who came into contact with her was an unpretentious directness that was infused with a warmth and compassion which somehow turned even an insult into a compliment.

Selma's *joie de vivre* was maintained through what to many would have been unbearable upheavals: revolution in Iraq had meant exile in Beirut, civil war in Lebanon led to relocation to New York, where the United States then proceeded to wage war on her beloved Iraq not once, but twice.

A late postcard ended with a searching question, tinged with exasperation, 'Do you think one can keep this up for ever'? With great sadness, not.

ANDERSON BAKEWELL
with FRANCINE STONE

Special thanks to Liz Davis, Qais al-Awqati, John Nankivell, Antonin and Christiane Besse and colleagues Rémy Audouin and Marylène Barret for their reminiscences and heartfelt tribute to a dear friend and companion who became a part of Yemen and a part of their lives.



BOOK REVIEWS

Yemen Divided: The Story of a Failed State in South Arabia by Noel Brehony, I.B. Tauris, 2011. Pp. xxii + 257. Preface. Maps. Chronology. Abbreviations. Illus. Notes. Select Bibliog. Index. Hb. £25. ISBN 978-1-84885-635-6.

South Yemen, as a distinctive political entity separate from the remainder of Yemen in modern times, lasted roughly for one and a quarter centuries. For most of this period, it fell under British control, although the extent of that control varied between Aden and the hinterland, and from one part of the protectorate to another. Few countries could have been worse prepared for emergence as an independent state with a revolutionary leftist regime. Independence lasted for only 22½ years when it merged with, or, more accurately, was absorbed into North Yemen.

Noel Brehony, in this thorough and engaging account of that period of less than a quarter of a century, poses the intriguing question, 'could an independent South Yemen return?' The answer of course lies in present developments as much as in the past. But a useful response to that question requires delving deeply into the circumstances that led to the birth and the fall of the South Yemeni experiment. This Dr Brehony does admirably. In connection with his diplomatic career, he served in Aden in the early years of the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) and kept in close touch with developments there until unity in 1990.

Thus, one of the major strengths of the book is his long familiarity with his subject. This familiarity has enabled him to conduct extensive interviews with members of the former PDRY government and other principal players. In addition, the value of his story is enhanced considerably by reliance on a thorough examination of published sources in Arabic, in addition to materials published in Western languages.

Dr Brehony begins by describing the circumstances that led to the fall of the British-inspired Federation of South Arabia, the emergence of the National Liberation Front as the dominant opposition movement, and the uneasy coalition of leaders that established the People's Republic of Southern Yemen in late 1967. The right wing (but only in relative terms) were forced out by 1969 and the new alliance between centrists and leftists (or should it be said, leftists and far leftists?) restyled the country the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) This change in nomenclature

signified two things. First, the 'Democratic' (as in, for example, Democratic Republic of Germany) displayed the growing ideological tilt of the regime. Second, Aden began to assert itself as the rightful government of all Yemen, particularly as the North Yemeni state expunged itself of its leftist wing and reconciled with the royalists from its just-concluded civil war.

But even this new PDRY order was marked by tension between two wings of the party, one led by the president, Salim Rubayya Ali (aka Salmin) and the other by the head of the party, Abd al-Fattah Isma'il. The friction was based on clashes in personalities but also in a struggle for control between party and state, reliance on regional or tribal affiliations and origins, and, to some extent, differences over whether primary collaboration should be with Moscow or Beijing. The far left seemed to have won when Salmin was accused of involvement with the bizarre assassination of the North Yemeni president and was executed. But the game was proven to be far from over even though Abd al-Fattah was forced subsequently to go into exile. His return a few years later sparked new tensions that culminated in the bloody shootout between rival factions in January 1986. At a stroke, many of the historic leaders of the National Front/Socialist Party – including Abd al-Fattah – were dead, the head of the centrist/leftist faction was forced into permanent exile, and a new leadership – less radical, less experienced – took over.

The experiment, however, was on its last legs. The crisis in leadership and ideological direction was underscored by the continuing poverty of the country. The collapse of the Soviet Union, the country's principal backer by far, spelled economic catastrophe. This spurred the impetus for unity at all costs. 'The PDRY's decision to end its existence was a voluntary act by its leaders, who did not view their move as a form of state suicide but as the achievement of a long-desired unified Yemen, in which they would play a leading role' (p. 203). But in fact the southern leadership soon discovered that it had surrendered to the power of the North Yemeni president, Ali Abdullah Salih (who may well find his reign ended by the time of publication of this review).

As of May 1990, independent South Yemen was no more. But its former ruling party, the Yemeni Socialist Party, soon became the voice of the south in its subjection to rule by the north. An attempt at secession in 1994 was crushed by force, and a renewed Southern Movement in recent years has been resisted harshly by Sana'a. Nevertheless, the southern sense of injustice is real and not about to diminish. As Dr Brehony puts it, 'There is a

southern identity based on the shared experiences of the PDRY, and a feeling that the grievances that all Yemenis suffer are particularly severe in the south' (p. 203).

The PDRY experiment generally is considered a failure today. But as Dr Brehony points out, it suffered from serendipitously negative factors beyond its control. The new state would have enjoyed a far more prosperous economy if the closure of the Suez Canal in 1967 hadn't robbed the port of Aden of its key role. At the same time, if the PDRY had survived beyond 1990, the economy would have been buoyed by subsequent oil discoveries within South Yemeni territory.

In answer to the question posted above – 'could an independent South Yemen return?' – Dr Brehony points out that leadership of the Southern Movement remains fragmented, most southerners fear a return to the old PDRY state (a product of the extreme ideology of the time), and North Yemeni rule has strengthened regionalism and tribalism. The Southern Movement, he contends, conforms broadly to the reformed PDRY model that some activists were advocating in the 1980s. In conclusion, he feels that the 'majority [of southerners] believe that the 'southern personality' should have expression in a new south, though they disagree on what form it should take: decentralized southern provinces, confederation, federation or secession' (p. 212).

The book contains two maps, one of the old 'South Arabia's' chequered existence in 1965 and the other of the PDRY in 1985, both well drawn and clear. There are also four photographs of the South Yemeni leadership, which leaves the reviewer wishing more had been included. Another useful addition is a three-page list of prominent personalities, essential for keeping track with the many historical figures with confusingly similar names (which is often compounded by their reluctance to use tribal names). There have been a few other studies on the old PDRY but none were as comprehensive or – of course – as up to date as this one.

JOHN PETERSON

Chaos in Yemen: Societal Collapse and the New Authoritarianism
by Isa Blumi, Routledge (Middle East and Islamic Studies), 2010. Pp.xv + 208. Maps. Preface. Abbreviations. Notes. Bibliog. Index. Hb. \$125. ISBN 978-0-415-7807

Isa Blumi is a scholar who has written on aspects of late Ottoman history but acquired a strong interest in, and knowledge of, Yemen through periods of residence there and study in the 1990s. It is from this background that he argues that it is essential for analysts and policy makers who want to avert the threatened chaos of the title to have a fuller understanding of the past and use methods of analysis that refrain 'from the reductionisms all too often found in the media today'. He wants greater attention to be given to the motivations of local actors. Terms such as tribalism are too often used to reduce problems to nebulous and often misunderstood concepts. He rejects policies inherited from the Colonial era which can be too concerned with fighting terrorism and fail to look at the factors driving the emergence of extremism and terrorism. He argues that Western governments may be propping up regimes which themselves foment the very instability which they are alleged to be combating. He fears state collapse and a repetition of the mistakes that have contributed to the chaos in the Horn of Africa

Many of those who know Yemen may agree with many of his arguments but may be put off by his somewhat didactic and repetitive language. (He seems to have a particular dislike for Think Tanks). It would be a pity if this were to happen because his book provides important lessons for the present and future through his analysis of the past. He wants to change the way that people think about Yemen. Despite the campaigning style it is a scholarly work written by someone who has a full command of the sources, including the Ottoman archives. Many of his footnotes give fascinating additions to what is in the text, and the bibliography will be greatly appreciated by his fellow scholars.

Professor Blumi discusses events in the Sa'ada region, notably the Huthi rebellion in the light of what took place after the second Ottoman occupation of Yemen at a time when the Imam's authority extended to the Asir region of what has been part of Saudi Arabia since 1934. He looks at how Muhammad al-Idrisi seized authority in this region in the early part of the twentieth century and how he, the Ottomans and the Imam interacted with each other and with external powers in their struggle for the control of Yemen. There is an interesting chapter giving the background to the

reluctant recognition of the current Yemen-Saudi border and of the 1904 border agreement (negotiated by the Porte and the British) which divided the important Hujuriya region, creating local problems that still resound.

The Ottomans, Imams and al-Idrisi mobilised groups of local actors with motives that do not fit into stereotypes of tribal or even sectarian loyalty. One example is the way that tribes within the Hashid and Bakil confederations supported the different contenders and did not act – as many current analysts might expect – as coherent units. As Blumi puts it, within such entities, ‘authority is unendingly negotiated and remains a reflection of the constant recalibration of local power through temporary political commercial alliance’. He suggests that a closer examination of the motives of those supporting the Huthis would help explain why their rebellion has been so persistent and difficult to repress.

He then jumps to an examination of Yemen since unification. There is an excellent discussion of the problems in the 1990–1994 period and he shows how the gap in perception and aims of the leaders of the two Yemens led to the civil war of 1994 and contributed to the problems of southern Yemen today. This section of the book is slightly marred by the author making the very mistake he accuses many others of making. He is not sufficiently aware of what was happening in the PDRY in the 1980s and the full range of motives that drove its leaders towards unity. He underestimates the weakness of the Yemeni Socialist Party after the internecine bloodbath of January 1986 and the way that President Saleh was able to use the divisions within the southern leadership to persuade them to accept a deal they would later come to see as flawed.

This book gives a somewhat lop-sided view of Yemen focussing on events before 1934 and those mostly after the late 1980s, leaving a rather large gap in the middle which saw for example, the overthrow of the Imamate, the civil war of the late 1960s and the turbulent events of the 1970s, when three presidents (two in the north and one in the south) were killed. The regime after 1978 set out to build up its power to avoid dependence on local actors or meddling neighbours. The inflow of oil and gas revenues after 1990 was a further factor in building up the power of the regime and its ability to provide patronage. This replaced a state where a weak centre was continually forced to temporise.

His argument gathers greater force when looking at likely future trajectories for Yemen. He sees a ‘slide towards greater state violence at the expense of pursuing traditional strategies of conflict resolution will only

result in a dramatic increase in regional instability'. He fears state collapse and a repetition of the mistakes that have contributed to the chaos in the Horn of Africa. The local and the marginalised have been neglected for too long and demand more of a state than the provision of 'stability' and 'security'. Blumi rightly points to the many well-known problems in Yemen – poverty, unemployment, population growth, lack of water to name only four. The tumultuous events in the Arab world in 2011 have inspired the marginalised to use the power of street protest to make their voice heard. If this book had been written a few months later, Blumi would have had even more grounds for his main argument.

NOEL BREHONY

The War that Never Was: The True Story of the Men who fought Britain's most secret battle by Duff Hart-Davis, Century (Random House), 2011. Pp.xviii + 382. Select Bibliog. Notes. Index. Illus. Map. Hb. £14.99. ISBN 978-1846058257.

This is a story from another age, when mercenaries fought for patriotism not million dollar contracts, when explosives could travel in airline baggage unimpeded, and when there were Tory MPs in Scotland. A story it is, though, rather than an academic tome; and as such it is accessible to the general reader, whether a Middle East amateur or a military history buff. It tells the tale of a small group of soldiers – some on furlough, most retired – predominately British, but with a scattering of Frenchmen, who helped the Yemeni Royalists tie Gamal Abdul-Nasser down in what became his Vietnam. As well as being an historical curio, the subject has contemporary relevance given current operations in Afghanistan/Pakistan – and potentially even in Yemen itself.

Mr Hart-Davis is not the sole author, as he mentions in his Note; and regrettably this shows. While differences in style have been smoothed over for the most part, there remain issues of continuity and repetition – presumably because Hart-Davis was working from Tony Boyle's draft. There is also a decided limpness to the last few chapters, as if the tale had run out of steam.

There are errors of fact, unimportant for the general reader, but worth mentioning if this is to add to the understanding of an important – if largely forgotten – campaign:

- 'A British Crown Colony since 1838, Aden' (p.5) Aden was captured by the East India Company in 1839, and became a Crown Colony in 1937;
- 'King Saud's air adviser, Squadron Leader Bennett' (p.30); Sqn Ldr Bennett was Air Adviser to King Hussein of Jordan;
- 'Ronald Bailey, until 1962 the British Consul in Taiz' (p.40) Bailey was Head of Mission (*vide* BYSJ 1994);
- 'the pass 6 miles from Hodeidah' (p.58); the town is Manakha. (W.B. Harris notes the same pass in his 1893 account);
- Chapter 4, Note 9: while *siasi* was used for 'intelligence', it is Arabic for 'political'. The Swahili description of a snake's movement is *kee-nie-meenie*;
- 'Egyptian outposts near Amran, a few miles north west of Sana'a' (p.127) Amran is 28 miles away – a day's journey for reinforcements, given the going.
- 'Sultan Saleh al-Qu'aiti in the Federal Supreme Council' (p.248) should read 'Sultan Saleh bin Hussain al-Audhali...';
- The 'Hamid ud-Din family' did not rule Yemen for 8 centuries (ps. 5 & 340); Hashemite Imams ruled Yemen for much of that time, but the Hamid al-Din were only one of several families to do so.

The endnotes comprise a mixture of vague primary documentary references, some useful explanatory information, but far too many superfluous *bon mots* which the author(s) could not bear to omit. The notes are so poorly edited as to be confusing: Chapter 4, Note 9 precedes Note 3. Chapter 2, Note 30 is detailed and interesting, but seems unconnected to the point it is trying to explain, as is Chapter 4, Note 13.

Errors in the text are as nothing compared to the mistakes in the pre-publicity. Had the marketing department bothered to read the book, they would never have described the BFLF as being 'at the head of a ragtag force of tribal warriors'. Had they dipped into the brief bibliography and seen David Smiley's *Arabian Assignment*, or Clive Jones's magisterial *Britain and the Yemen Civil War, 1962–1965* (which mysteriously loses its subtitle *Ministers, Mercenaries and Mandarins: Foreign Policy and the Limits of Covert Action*) they would not have written 'For the very first time, 'The War That Never Was' tells the fascinating story of a secret war fought by British mercenaries in the Yemen in the early 1960s'.

All stories have heroes, and Lt Col (Jim) Johnson is clearly the author's –

probably Tony Boyle's. Many stories have villains, and Nasser should fulfil this role. Yet the subplot running through most of this book is attempted score settling in regard to David Smiley. Incidences of this are too numerous to mention, but broadly, where Smiley's action can be meanly interpreted or disparaged, it is. By contrast, Johnson's own significant lapses, such as his lack of grip resulting in near-mutinies by the deployed BFLF personnel (pp. 197, 267 and 277.), and his human failings (particularly in his dealings with the Sa'udis) are mostly glossed over.

Two passages explain much about the tenor of the book: that relating a generational schism, between Stirling/McLean/Smiley vs Johnson/Boyle (p.130/131); and the unusually revealing paragraph remarking on McLean's and Smiley's extensive travels within Yemen, and their long experience of diplomacy outside Europe. 'Compared with them, Jim was a beginner at diplomacy, and perhaps was a little jealous of the comfortable relationship that the other two enjoyed with Feisal, Sultan, and various prominent Sa'udis' (pp.319/320.) While two charismatic and gallant men naturally attract partisans, in such a posthumous work they both deserve to rest in honoured peace.

The cover illustration is striking, with a cinematic feel reminiscent of Kurosawa's 'Seven Samurai', but is spoilt by the inclusion of a spatter of blood/sealing wax. When this device is unnecessarily repeated in black and white on the title pages, it looks merely like a printing error. For the rest, the book is well laid-out and easily readable, with illustrative photographs (although none of Smiley and the French mercenaries.) There is what might have been a useful *Dramatis Personae*, yet it lacks logical order and omits many of the BFLF, particularly those from the later stages. With the exceptions cited above, the notes are relatively clear, but fall off dramatically in quality and quantity in the later chapters. Indeed, many of the most interesting snippets of information are unreferenced throughout; for example, it would be particularly useful to know where Col Woodhouse's POR could be found. The bibliography is accurately described as select: while the omission of Salah al-Din al-Hadidi's *Shahid 'ala Harb al-Yaman* is understandable, the exclusion of Somerville-Large's and O'Balance's works is less so. (Hinchcliffe et al's book on the retreat from Aden in 1967 was published in 2006, not 1966!). The index is adequate.

The sole map is of even worse quality than usual: while the BFLF may not have had access to good maps in the 1960s, that is not the case now. A reasonable map might help those who have not visited Yemen understand

how complex terrain 'favours the defender sitting back on a steep hill' (p.114.) If Dresch, an anthropologist writing in 1993, can produce not only better maps but even a revealing cross-section, there is no excuse for failing to do so in a book where Ground forms such a key element. Similarly, the inclusion of an overlay denoting the sectarian geography of the country (Zaydi, Shafa'i and Isma'ili) would have been helpful.

There are other niggling features that detract from the enjoyment of the book: for example the mention of paddy fields (p.115), but more especially the recurrent lack of consistency and accuracy in transliterating Arabic (p.337).

The extract from Col Woodhouse's POR (p.341-3) comprises the best military analysis in the book, and more of the same would have been welcome. Strategically, Sudairi's remarks (p.244) that the Sa'udis wished to rule Yemen through the tribal shaikhs (bypassing the Imam) goes little analysed, yet explains perfectly their infuriating balancing act over support to the Royalists. The Sa'udis' scorned use of money over more kinetic means (p.337) predates General Petraeus's articulation of this as a 'weapon system' by 40 years.

If Mr Hart-Davis had written 'The War That Never Was' from scratch, then many of the errors identified above would never have occurred to detract from it, in particular the score-settling. However the chief fault lies with the editor: had the red pen been wielded with more gusto, a much better book might have emerged. As it stands, it advances only a little our understanding of a previous (and, sadly, perhaps future) battleground.

JAMES SPENCER

Seen in the Yemen: Travelling with Freya Stark and Others by Hugh Leach, Arabian Publishing, 2011. Pp. 320. Maps. Illus. (148 duotone photographs). Glossary. Bibliog. Index. Hb. £45. ISBN: 978-0-9558894-5-5.

'Cold voices whisper and say – he is crazed with the spell of far Arabia, they have stolen his wits away.'

The closing line of Walter de la Mare's poem, *Arabia*, is an apposite opening for Hugh Leach's mesmerizing book about Yemen. An OBE and eminent Arabist who spent a long career serving as a soldier and diplomat in the Middle East, Leach was not the first, and is unlikely to be the last, to have his wits 'stolen by the spell of Arabia'. But he is, perhaps, one of the

few to have channelled his derangement into the form of a beautiful book.

Seen in the Yemen is an interesting amalgamation of three elements: the author's fascination for Yemen (from his time there in the 1970s), his passion for photography, and his travels with the intrepid explorer Dame Freya Stark (1893–1993). The plan had originally been to publish the book in the 1970s as a companion to Stark's *Seen in the Hadhramaut* (1938). Although the project fell through, Leach kept the idea alive and, now, some forty years later, has pulled together his thoughts, photos and memories of his travels with the Dame and other intrepid travellers across the wild and rugged terrain of Northern Yemen. In doing so he gives us a unique picture of faces and places – many of which, for unfortunate reasons, are no longer accessible either to foreigners or Yemenis themselves.

Freya Stark had last been in Yemen in 1940 at the behest of the British government which had sent her on a colonial mission to counter Fascist propaganda. Armed only with four rolls of film and a projector, she had toured the harems of various notables in Sana'a, showing her bewildered audience grainy films of 'everyday life in Edinburgh' and 'army manoeuvres at Aldershot.' Her assignment took her as far as the lairs of the wife of Imam Yahya whom, although she had never met him in person (The Imam had sworn never to set eyes on a European woman), she saw peeping at the films through a slit in the curtains.

Forty years later Stark returned to Yemen, though this time on a less formal mission: to explore the country's weathered central highlands. The author's portraits show an elderly woman (by then in her early eighties) yet one still full of life; with a walking cane in her hand and white cotton bonnet perched neatly on her head, she is seen in lively conversation with Yemeni men and women or snapping shots of grubby-faced children on her camera. Leach talks of her 'unfailing good humour, unremitting equability,' and describes her as 'uncomplaining of the hardships of travel and ability to make the most of every waking hour,' crucial ingredients perhaps for any traveller of this calibre.

Before unveiling his images, the author gives us a brief survey of Yemen's history – from pre-Islamic times to the twentieth century – in order to set the stage. Those with a thirst for photography will find interest in his short chapter on 'the world of Leica cameras,' the legendary German-made model favoured by famous travellers such as William Thesiger and Ella Maillart. (The 'two well-travelled ladies,' referred to by the author are in fact his two 1930s 'screw-thread' Leicas.)



Cover illustration from *Seen in the Yemen*.

Capturing the intensity and beauty of Yemen's landscapes and people is no easy task for a writer or photographer. But Leach, with his stalwart belief in the power of black and white photography, shows that his Leicas are up to the job. His pictures may miss out on some of Yemen's many startling colours but in foregoing these, he is as able to capture light and shade in a dramatic manner, which make for an intense montage of shots. He talks of how the 'ease and promiscuity' of modern automatic cameras has sapped the discipline required to compose in those classic 'golden thirds.'

The first set of shots is of Yemen's ancient capital. Those who have frequented Old Sana'a will no doubt take great pleasure in recognising the familiar sights of the old town, with its iconic skyline packed with soaring minarets and tottering gingerbread tower-houses. Photos of many another city taken forty years ago might be harder to recognise, but not Sana'a. The bright-faced children peeping out of wooden-shuttered windows, the smiling grandfather carrying a sheep across his shoulders, the two veiled women shuffling down a narrow cobbled alleyway their *sitarahs* billowing behind them – all these sights remain to be seen even today and remind us that, aside from satellite dishes, mobile phones and sputtering motorbikes, little else has altered the majestic old town.

Next we are whisked off to Yemen's central highlands for a glimpse into the lives of those inhabiting some of the country's extraordinary sky-scraping villages, clinging to precipitous mountain spurs and peeping through wisps of cloud. We are taken from Bait Baws, Jabal al-Nabi Shu'ayb

(at 12,000 ft, the highest point in the Arabian peninsula) and Kawkaban (two planets), to the crumbling ruins and cylinder-shaped defensive burjs (towers) of old Rawdah. The next chapter brings us down from 'the hard men on the hills' into the sand dunes, towns and scorching plains of the Tihamah, Yemen's narrow coastal region, which clings to the Red Sea. The home of palm trees, rope-strung beds, Sufi poets, keyhole-shaped doorways, crumbling Shafi'i mosques, sweaty camels and some of the hottest temperatures on earth.

The final, and perhaps most intriguing, collection of photographs record a journey by the author to the remote northern province of Sa'adah in 1971, which he visited with the consent of the then Prime Minister, aiming to rediscover the remaining Jewish families still living there. That very few outsiders, particularly Europeans, had visited in recent times can be seen by the expressions of astonishment on the local people's faces. Leach gives a fascinating insight into the looks and habits of this small yet ancient minority, who believe their roots in Yemen stretch back to the invasion of Judaea by Nebuchadnezzar, with their shoulder-length hair ringlets, (*zinnar*), potent red wine and strict adherence to the Jewish calendar. He notes with regret their steady exodus from Yemen in the second half of the twentieth century. (The Jewish community in Yemen is thought to have shrunk from around 60,000 in the 1940s to around only 300 people today.)

One can easily spend hours leafing through the thick pages of this book, taking in the sights of this striking land. The photographs have a strange way of transfixing you. Spend some time with them and you, too, will feel yourself succumbing to the spell of Arabia.

TOM FINN

The Lost World of Socotra: Yemen's Island of Bliss by Richard Boggs, Stacey International, 2009. Pp. 172. 100 colour photographs. Map. Bibliog. Index. Pb. £16.95. ISBN: 978-1-905-299959.

'You come from a land where apples grow. What brings you to a land where all we have is a bit of bread and fish?' Richard Boggs is asked by an old lady at the beginning of his book. The next 150 pages clearly explain why. I had already visited Socotra once in September 2010, yet within the first ten pages of this book, I wanted to hop, two kilos of fresh tomatoes in my bag, on the first flight back.

I hadn't experienced the island at all! For one thing I hadn't met a poet. Nor had I come upon a beached whale being prised open for its ambergris. I had been swept clean off my feet trying to take a photo in a strong wind, but I had never seen an air-conditioning unit blown right out of its hole in the wall! Forget about the dragon blood trees! I had poetry matches at weddings to attend, magicians to hear about, and sea cucumbers to watch being boiled on the beach. Where was the number for the Felix Airways office?

Boggs' lost world of Socotra is a magical land that has long resisted outside influences, but also one on the verge of destruction by consumerism and tourism. As such, his book reads as an urgent compilation of fun facts about the island, backed up by research and peppered with short anecdotes from his personal experience as an English teacher and eco-guide trainer there for two years. There are lessons in Socotri, stories of butter-smothered church altars, and, courtesy of scholar Miranda Morris, extracts from Socotri poems. All are illustrated by his own photographs of plants, landscapes, and, most sensationally, the Socotri people – men, women, children, African and Arab Socotris, as well as Yemeni settlers. The reader follows the author up the mountains to a wedding where the women have covered their faces in turmeric, and laughs when his determination to dine on a can of tuna in order not to be a burden on his bedouin hosts fails miserably, and, after he has eaten, he is made to dig in to a second, much more elaborate meal with them all over again.

Anecdotes are told with colour and humour, but tangible throughout, especially in the last chapter, is a sense of despair that all that the author describes might soon truly be lost: Socotri susceptibility to the newly-imported qat leaf, the pristine beaches to non-biodegradable plastic, the poetry of Socotri language to Arabic public life and education. In a particularly poignant plea to the reader in the book's last pages, Boggs describes the cultural impact of long-bare-legged tourists on the island, and cautions against Socotra's rugged beauty being sanitised, glossed over to fit the ideals of a five star holiday brochure in which his friends would become guides in flood-lit caves and caddies on a golf course.

Back to the island then, but on an eco-tourism tour that seeks to benefit the Socotri community long-term. With two kilos of tomatoes and Boggs' book to read by the camp fire. Oh, and a scarf to wrap around my face.

ALICE HACKMAN

Alice Hackman is a freelance journalist who blogs on aliceauyemen.blogspot.com

Life of Major-General Saleh Yislam Bin Sumaida', Commander of the Qu'aiti Armed Forces by Muhammad Mahfoudh Saleh bin Sumaida', Wahdain Press, Mukalla, 2011. Arabic. Pp. 224. Illus. Appendix. References.

This book on one of the key indigenous military figures to play a role in Hadhrami affairs during its recent modern history, is long overdue. His career began with the accession of Sultan Saleh bin Ghalib Al-Qu'aiti in 1936, and the immediate initiation of reform in all fields with British help, following the signing of the Treaty of Advice with that great power. His role, always increasing in importance with the passage of time, was to last until after the fall of the Qu'aiti State on 17 September 1967, to be followed a little later by his dismissal, then incarceration and, ultimately, by his execution on 13 February 1973.

The book, published as a tribute to Bin Sumaida's memory to coincide with the centennial anniversary of his birth in 1911, has been written by his grandson with the assistance and guidance of the latter's uncle, Faiz Saleh bin Sumaida', who, despite repeated house searches, had managed to save and conceal the copious documentary and photographic material illustrated in its pages. What is regrettable is that the photographs have not been reproduced as well as they deserve to have been, for they are the life of the book, which is otherwise more or less a simple factual essay. Introduced by the amiable and soft spoken Qadhi Abdullah Muhammad Ba Huwairith, a former adviser on tribal affairs to the Qu'aiti Minister (Wazir), whose official role brought him into close contact with Bin Sumaida' over two decades, the book is divided into six chapters containing a diversity of material on various aspects of his life contributed by those who knew him.

The most critical of these is Chapter 3 which devotes 64 of the book's 145 pages of written text to the 'Palace Incident' of 27 December 1950. This involved a demonstration which broke into the Sultan's Palace to demand the appointment of an indigenous Wazir, regardless of professional suitability. The crowd were fired at on the orders of Bin Sumaida' after refusing to heed warning volleys and attacking the palace guard. The Sultan had initially agreed to the appointment of the then Deputy Wazir, Salim Ahmad bin Sadeeq, but was later obliged, in keeping with the terms of his Advisory Treaty, to reconsider his decision in the light of the formal advice offered by the Resident Adviser and British Agent, Colonel Hugh

Boustead. This favoured the appointment of the Qu'aiti State's Sudanese Director of Education, Shaykh Sa'id al-Qaddal. Boustead's partiality towards al-Qaddal seems to have been influenced by his own years of service in the Sudan. It is pertinent to mention here that the employment of expatriates (however loyal and competent) by the Qu'aiti State in the absence of qualified locals, tended to arouse resentment.

Sultan Saleh is accused by detractors in the pages of this book of having yielded to British advice on the grounds that at the advanced age of 67 he wanted a pliant Wazir who would give priority to the administration of the Sultan's household and properties. But the accusation ignores the fact that provision for this was made from the Sultan's own, if meagre, Civil List. It also ignores the fact that thirty years earlier Sultan Saleh had donated most of the family's assets, purchased with funds from abroad, for the State's use; and that the costs of administration in Hadhramaut were underwritten to the tune of 50% with income from assets in India. One of the Sultan's early wazirs (and brother-in-law), Sayyid Hamid al-Mihdhar, whom the Sultan was obliged to dismiss on the advice of Harold Ingrams, considered that the Civil List accepted by the Sultan reduced him and his family to a status of virtual impoverishment.

Again, it is surprising that one of the Sultan's major critics and detractors in Chapter 3 is Muhammad Abdul Qader Ba Matraf, a former Residency official, who, with British support, rose to the rank of Deputy Wazir and exploited the opportunity this gave him to feather his own nest.

It was Sultan Saleh's policy to give priority to recruiting suitable Hadhramis wherever and whenever possible. Bin Sumaida', who had received early military training in Hyderabad, starting as a 'line boy', was just such an example. His story is also that of the typical enterprising itinerant Hadhrami, who had visited all parts of the Hadhrami diaspora – in Africa, the Far East, and India – to be recruited by Sultan Saleh and sent back home. In Bin Sumaida's case, for a bedouin youth born in a hamlet in Saut al-'Ali to rise from the rank of second lieutenant to major-general and the office of Military Secretary, a post specially created for him after it had become defunct, was no mean achievement.

Later, when the State's Wazir, Sayyid Ahmad al-Attas, had terminated the functions of the State Council, the country's legislative body, on the pretext of having a new constitution prepared to hold elections, Bin Sumaida' became a member of the triumvirate (along with Al-Attas and Badr bin Ahmad al-Kasadi, the Governor of Mukalla) responsible for internal policy

and administration. In 1964 the trio visited Saudi Arabia to congratulate King Faisal on his accession; Bin Sumaida' also visited Britain the following year as an official guest of the Ministry of Defence.

Bin Sumaida' was awarded the Qu'aiti Medal of Merit and the Medal of Distinction, and an MBE from the British Government in 1959. His career exemplifies how an enterprising Hadhrami, despite a lack of formal education, could make it to the top through innate intelligence and drive. A man of such stature certainly deserves a proper academic study, in addition to the extensive photographic record presented in this book. May his soul rest in peace.

GHALIB BIN AWADH AL-QU'AITI

Undercover Muslim: A Journey into Yemen by Theo Padnos, The Bodley Head, London, 2011. Pp. 293. £12.99. ISBN 978-1-847-92084-3.

This is a book of ignorance: the author's ignorance and that of his fellow *tulab* (students); ignorance about Islam, about reality, about the human condition. Those hoping that the book's subtitle might reward with an account of Yemen will be disappointed: Yemen is but the backdrop to the book, and imperfectly drawn at that, with Yemenis having a few, cameo roles, and the tale mostly unfolds in two small bubbles: Sana'a and Dammaj.

'Undercover Muslim', however, offers an unusual insight into the shallowness of a network of soi-disant colleges, affecting an aura of Salafi sanctity without the substance of disciplined study. The schools he attends seem to resemble the second floor colleges which dot London's streets: a framework curriculum, poor instructors, but impressive fees. Most of the information acquired seems to be through conversations or debates with other, equally ignorant, students, rather than with an *'alim*. A telling witness to the standard of tuition is the bald statement that 'Prayer is the second pillar of Islam, after monotheism' (p.29), by which latter Padnos presumably means the *Shahada*, or public profession of belief in monotheism and of Muhammad's Prophethood.

Most of the characters in the tale are foreign: zealous 'born again Muslims' and converts, as well as the flotsam and jetsam of the West. But all are seeking some fabled place where 'real' Islam is practised, usually over the brow of the next hill. Their quest has led to Yemen, but in Sana'a, too, Islam is sullied so they make a further pilgrimage to Dammaj. Yet even when they

reach the storied Dar al-Hadith, reality, and venality, intrude. Students self-certify, which is probably for the best, as there is little formal curriculum, and many of the teachers are ill-educated and unqualified. Above all, there is none of the intellectual rigour that would be found in other theological colleges, such as Tarim's well known Dar al-Mustafa (which the author does not mention). Instead, many live (and some die) the dream of the Wild East (p.260), replete with AK-47s.

Often, the author claims, these (mostly) men are also seeking wives, the Orientalist's dream of a religious, submissive bride (p.114.) The only description of such a hoped-for union reveals not only the tawdry actuality of life, but a two-fold clash – between Eastern and Western cultures, and between fantasy and reality.

The few Yemenis who make an entrance are accurately sketched, but – to the disappointment of many *tulab* – are as sinful as the rest of humanity. More revealing are the chapters describing the author's time on the staff of the Yemen Observer, with which Padnos eventually becomes disenchanted.

Yemen itself comes off particularly badly: while Tarim is described as a 'rarely visited but storied village' (p.15), Ta'iz (pop. 500,000) is 'a small city to the south of Sana'a' (p.149.) The tribes, apparently, are 'anxious for respect' to which end they 'kidnap tourists, blow up oil pipelines and periodically ambush units of the Yemeni army' (p.42.). The emptiness of the land on the journey north (during a Ramadhan morning) is ascribed to desertification caused by emigration in the 1970s (p.214), rather than the shift in working hours. Similarly, most of the Jews 'fled in the 1949 airlift called Operation Magic Carpet' (p.40), which is probably news to the many who made the journey ('*aliyeh*') willingly, although Padnos's driver does point out the presence of the few remaining, intensely patriotic (and very Yemeni) Jews in Amran (p.278.)

The most extraordinary issue of the entire book is his (and presumably his fellows') dismissal of much of the Yemeni population as 'the Shia', whom he numbers at 5% of the population (p.217) rather than 40%. Padnos seems to believe (from his references to 'Rafsanjani, Muqtada al-Sadr, Hassan Nasrallah and so forth', p.270) that these 'Shia' are Ja'afari (rather than Zaydi and Isma'ili), and confined to 'an enclave' in the Governorate of Sa'ada (p.25). (Padnos seems equally unaware of the different *madhahib* within Sunni Islam as well, although he briefly mentions (p.128.) the 'Sufi, a mystical occasionally heretical branch of Islam'.) Despite noting that Dammaj is 'a world of Saudi standardisation and

orthodoxy' (p.211), Padnos writes of Dar al-Hadith being 'in a war zone among hostile Shia' (p.238), failing to wonder why Zaydi tribes might feel animosity towards an outpost of their invasive northern neighbours. Rather (subliminally echoing GW Bush's equally ignorant 'They hate us because' speech) Padnos ascribes this to the Shia being 'hostile to our kind of Islam' (p.22). Yet he makes no comment when 'near a Shia village we ran out of petrol and had to ask the locals to supply us which they did, generously' (p.277/8.)

For a former teacher, and one who was supposed to be learning Qur'anic Arabic, Padnos's transliteration is as idiosyncratic as the book, which has the feel of a typed up journal rather than a structured work (it makes no pretence to being an academic work, lacking even an index.) The introduction, mentioning Awlaki and Mutallab [sic] is written in a different register (it is remarkably similar to an article 'Anwar Awlaki's Blog' in the January 2010 London Review of Books) – and seems to have been tacked on, almost as if to justify the reference to 'al-Qaeda' on the back cover.

The book is part Don Quixote, and part L'Etranger: venturing on an imagined quest, while emotionally detached from the events of the narrative; this rings hollow in a book about religion. While the title is 'Undercover Muslim', both the tenor of the book and the author's name on the front cover suggest that 'Undecided Muslim' would be more accurate. Indeed, there is some doubt as to the genuineness of his conversion: not only does Padnos's first name translate from the Greek as 'God', but after his 'conversion' he takes an Arab, rather than overtly Muslim, name. More revealing still is the use of the third person to describe his fellows during his time at Dar al-Hadith; he does not seem to have felt sufficiently part of the movement to use the term 'us'.

One is left with the feeling that for Padnos – and probably for many of his fellows – this is a physical journey to be re-told to an admiring audience back home, rather than a spiritual *hijra* to develop and nourish the soul. While the book accurately portrays the aimless (and often unrequited) search for meaning by some on the fringes of society, those wishing a more substantive account of religious study in Yemen would do better to read Ethar El-Katatney's 'Forty Days and Forty Nights in Yemen: A Journey to Tarim, the City of Light', or even the New York Times' *Crossroads of Islam, Past and Present* (14 October 2009). So would Mr Padnos.

JAMES SPENCER

OBITUARIES

SHEIKH SA'ID HASSAN ISMAIL (1930 – 2011)

Sheikh Sa'id Hassan Ismail who died on 23 March 2011 at the age of 81, was the Imam and leader of the Yemeni Community in Cardiff, where he lived for more than sixty years. Of the many tributes to him published in the Welsh media, that of the former First Minister, Rhodri Morgan, recalling his unique role in local public life, would serve as a fitting epitaph:

'His wise counsel at times of crisis has made him a truly significant figure in the shaping of modern Wales...'

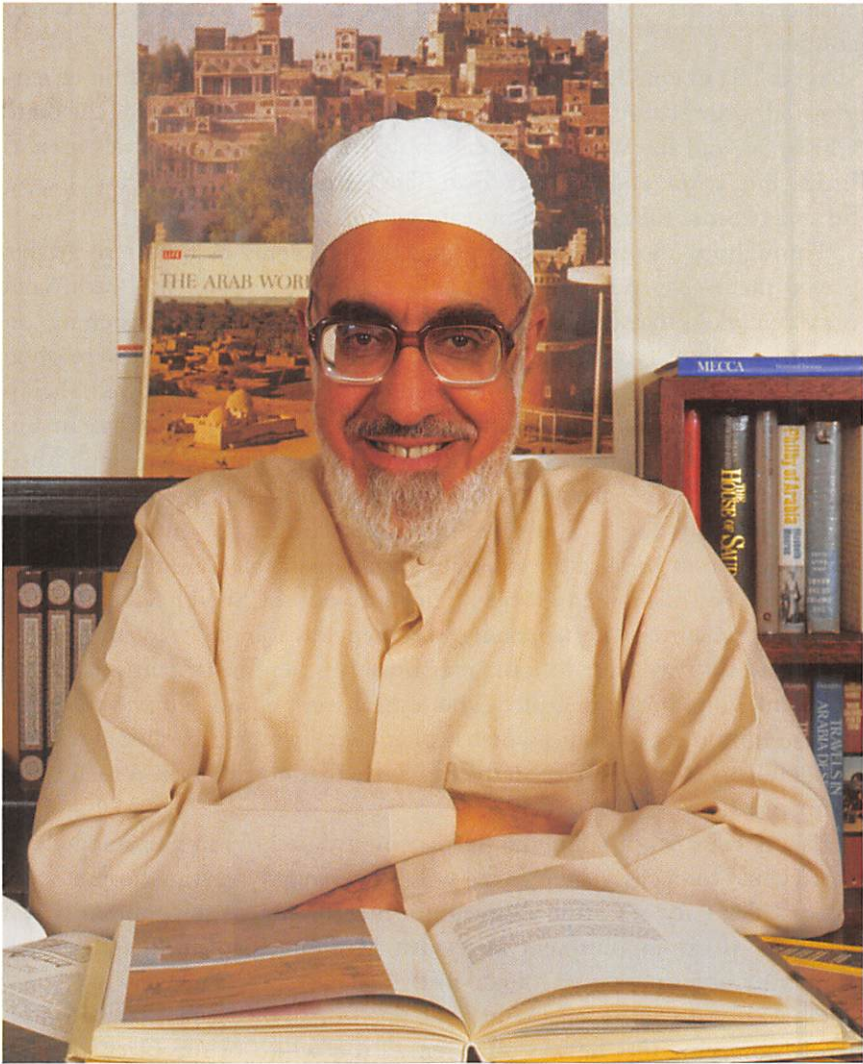
He was born in South Shields in 1930 to a Welsh mother, with part Italian roots, and a Yemeni father from the region around Dhala. At the beginning of the Second World War, his father, then serving as a stoker on board the SS Stanhope, died when his ship was attacked by an enemy aircraft in the Bristol Channel and sunk.

Hearing that the boy had lost his father, Sheikh Hassan Ismail, a leading Yemeni cleric, offered to take him back with him to Cardiff, and bring him up in the knowledge and understanding of Islam. Sheikh Sa'id recalled that his mother was not happy with this arrangement, but that 'the men persuaded her.'

Sheikh Sa'id remained in Cardiff from that time onwards, except for a few years spent in his adopted father's village outside Taiz, immersing himself in the language and culture of the region. He claimed that without this period in Yemen, he would not have been able to accomplish much of his later work, preaching and teaching in the mosque and acting as arbiter in local disputes. During his time in Yemen, Sheikh Sa'id had the memorable experience of meeting Imam Ahmad whom he described as heavily built with great piercing eyes, holding court on cushions and carpets, surrounded by sacks of correspondence.

Sheikh Sa'id later travelled widely in the Arab world to raise money to build the new South Wales Islamic Mosque and Community Centre in Alice Street, Cardiff, a project which he counted as one of the great achievements of his life.

It was in Cardiff, once the largest coal exporting port in the world, that Yemenis often arrived to find work on the ships. 'The work of a stoker', Sheikh Sa'id recalled 'was always well paid'; indeed Yemeni seamen were



Sheikh Sa'id in his office at the South Wales Islamic Centre, Cardiff, 1990.

Charles and Patricia Aithie

paid enough to support whole villages back home where the cost of living was so much lower than in Britain. Men from many different regions of Yemen lived in the Butetown area of Cardiff, which in those days was like an independent township with a completely different

character to the rest of the city, and few Yemenis ventured outside its confines.

Sheikh Sa'id could not remember any instances of ethnic tension or religious discrimination during his childhood; Muslims would celebrate Christmas, and the Welsh children would join in Muslim festivals such as Eid al-Fitr, at the end of Ramadhan. The Yemeni community were happy, he said, because they were a 'minority within a minority'.

Throughout the twentieth century, the problems of Southern Arabia played themselves out within Cardiff's Yemeni community. Sheikh Sa'id once remarked that the latter knew more about what was happening 'on the other side of Taiz, than they did of Cardiff.' Welsh-Yemenis were often divided in their political opinions. There were those who followed Sheikh Hassan Ismail, Sheikh Sa'id's adoptive father, who supported the Imam, and those who followed Sheikh Abdullah Ali al-Hakimi, who published an Arabic newspaper harshly critical of the Imam and his feudal regime.

It was largely due to Sheikh Sa'id's influence that the outbreak of civil war in Yemen in 1994 did not disrupt arrangements in Cardiff for a festival which the British-Yemeni Society helped to sponsor. Sheikh Sa'id took the view that whatever was happening in Yemen was a problem for the people there, and that 'we have to look after ourselves here in Britain.' His astute and gentle diplomacy prevailed. The festival went ahead and was recorded in a television programme which, coincidentally, was broadcast by MBC (Middle East Broadcasting) on the same day that hostilities in Yemen came to an end.

As a devout Muslim, Sheikh Sa'id demonstrated the importance which he attached to deeds as much as to words by regularly visiting hospitals and prisons. The City of Cardiff's esteem for his services to the community was reflected in his appointment as its first Muslim Chaplain, the first such appointment by any City Council in Britain.

He was aware of the sensitivities of being from a mixed race background, wryly observing that he was often 'either too white, or too black'. British since birth, he recalled the irony of being asked, during a visit to Aden, to leave the beach at Gold Mohur 'because he was not British.' Although he declined the offer of dual nationality, he was at heart both British and Yemeni, subject to his impish proviso that 'if Yemen ever starts playing Rugby, I will have problems!'

The physical fitness which Sheikh Sa'id enjoyed as a younger man and a one time boxer did not last all his life, for he was later troubled by a kidney

condition which in his last years compelled him to spend several days a week on dialysis.

His met his first wife Gallila in Aden, following her abandonment and divorce by her then husband. They were childless so Sheikh Sa'id took a second wife, Wilaya, who bore him three children and survives him.

PATRICIA AITHIE

NAJLA ABU-TALIB
(20 April 1972 – 12 August 2011)

Najla Abu-Talib came from two highly cultured and respected families descended from a long line of religious scholars: on her father's side from the Abu-Talib, from the Rawdha district of Sana'a, and on her mother's side from the Zabarah, from the old city of Sana'a; the late Mufti of Yemen, Sheikh Ahmad Zabarah, was Najla's uncle.

In March 1978, Najla's father, Abdulkarim Abu-Talib, was appointed Economic Counsellor at the Yemen Embassy, London, and took with him to Britain his wife and two young children. London has been their home ever since. Najla first attended Oxford Gardens School in Notting Hill and then King Fahad Academy, Acton. She later graduated with a BA in Politics, Government & Law; and later obtained a Diploma in Information Systems and an MA in International Relations/Conflict analysis.

Najla's mother, Khadija, and the writer have been friends for over thirty years, and I first met Najla when she was nine years old. She was an intelligent, vibrant, positive person, with a warm personality and a great sense of humour. She involved herself with many charitable causes aimed at improving the lives of disadvantaged people – Yemenis in particular. She served in a variety of fields such as the Peabody Trust (Energy Cooperation) and 'Action for Children', but the work which she most enjoyed and where she excelled herself was with Amnesty International (AI). Her posts with AI included Assistant Records Manager, International Information Coordinator, European Information Officer, Middle East Development Assistant, and Middle East Information Officer.

Najla worked voluntarily for various organisations. She was a founder member of the Women's Network Committee and Sustainability Ambassador; she supported 'A' level English students (City Circle); Business

Continuity Steering Committees (British Quality Foundation); she was Trustee and Secretary of Muslim Youth Helpline; Executive Committee Member of the British-Yemeni Society; and Festival Cultural Consultant (Arts World Wide). Najla will be especially remembered by the 'Yemenis In Britain' (YIB) e-mail group, which she formed in 2005 to give Yemenis the opportunity to discuss any issues that arose regarding the Yemeni community at large.

Najla was very close to her immediate family, particularly to her mother and brother after the death of her father in July 2002.

Najla and I had a great deal in common, and I will always remember her with great affection. She had friends in all walks of life, who really loved the person she was. Of the many tributes to Najla's memory let me quote the moving words of her brother, Muhammad Abu-Talib:

'Najla played a very large part in a lot of people's lives and hopefully some of her inspiration will have left an impression on those surrounding her. Ya Najla, we will all miss you very dearly and pray that you rest in peace...'

Najla, you will indeed be greatly missed. Rahmatu Allah a'alaik .

ASSIYA AL-HAJ YOUSEF

ABDUL AZIZ ABDUL GHANI – a personal view (1939 – 2011)

Abdul Aziz Abdul Ghani died in Riyadh on 22 August 2011 of the wounds he suffered in the attack on President Ali Abdullah Saleh's compound in Sana'a on 3 June. No man who acted as Prime Minister for a total of fifteen years – 12 in the old Yemen Arab Republic and three in the unified Republic of Yemen – could have been other than a figure of great importance in the modern history of his country. Since his sad demise the official media and Yemeni government spokesmen routinely refer to him as 'the nation's martyr' [Shahid al-Watan]. But, although he was a great survivor and – ipso facto – a man who must have possessed some inner steel, I do not believe that Abdul Aziz Abdul Ghani sought struggle or martyrdom. He was a peacemaker, a conciliator. He did his good work without confrontation or rancour.

Born in 1939, Abdul Ghani was one of the stars of his generation of



Abdul Aziz Abdul Ghani.

Ikhlas al-Kurashi

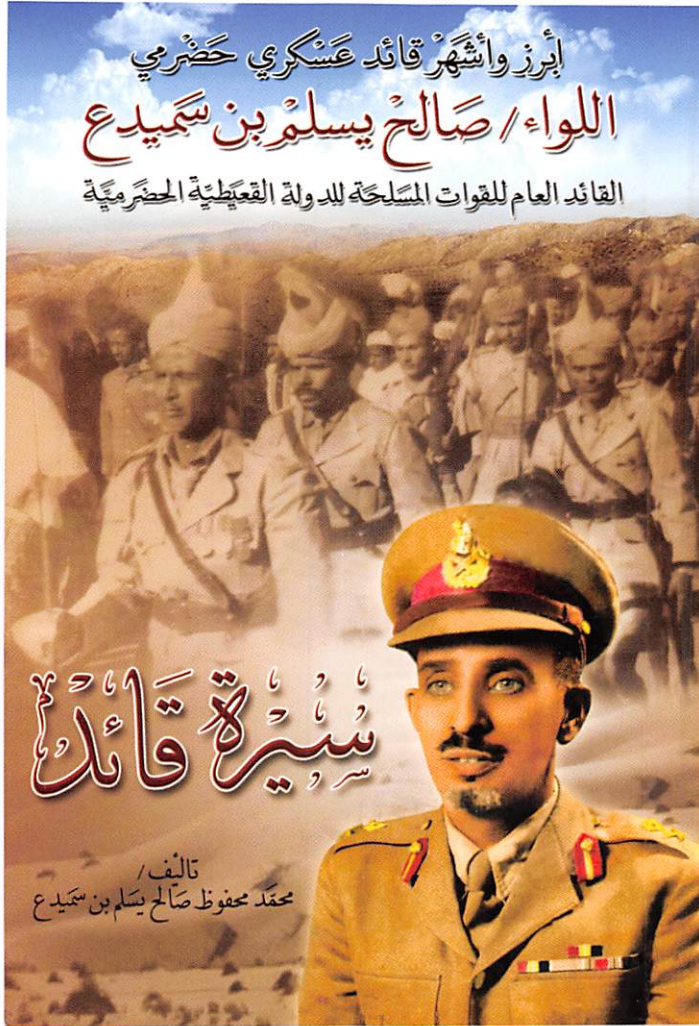
Yemenis. Like several others, he was sent for higher education in the USA in the 1960s. Although four years younger, Abdul Ghani graduated in the same year – 1962 – as Abdul Karim al-Iryani, the other leading figure among Yemenis born in the 1930s. Abdul Ghani and Iryani also were awarded their Master's degrees in the same year – 1964. Abdul Ghani did not have Iryani's intellectual capacity or his breadth of vision. However, given his long experience of public life, he was important as a source of advice to Ali Abdullah Saleh.

Some will criticise Abdul Ghani for being too much the President's loyal servant. But others would say that his natural inclination towards conciliation, and his skill as a conciliator, helped to keep the President on the straight and narrow, at least some of the time. I leave it to history to judge whether Abdul Ghani and Iryani could have done more to restrain Saleh from some of his wilder actions, such as the opposition to UN Security Council resolution no. 678 of 29 November 1990, which authorised military action to remove Iraqi forces from Kuwait. As for the events of this turbulent year, 2011, I think it is too early to assess the parts played by the various Yemeni protagonists. Although educated in the USA, Abdul Aziz

Abdul Ghani had a soft spot for Britain. He was a frequent visitor to London, where he tended to stay for weeks – or even months – in private rented accommodation. He was also delighted to be able to make an official visit to Britain as Prime Minister in the mid-90s. Abdul Ghani, by then a member of the Consultative Council (which he was later to chair), was a good friend to me as HM Ambassador in Sana'a (1997–2001). When the FCO chose to allow our relations with Yemen to be governed by a consular problem, I needed a back channel to ensure that the fundamentals of that relationship were not damaged. Abdul Ghani's wise advice and sympathetic mediation saved the day for me – and, more importantly, for the UK. I shall be eternally thankful to him for that.

VICTOR HENDERSON





*Life of Major-General Saleh Yislam Bin Sumaida',
Commander of the Qu'aiti Armed Forces (see pp 61–3).*

Designed and produced by David McLean, London
Printed by Portland Print, Kettering, England



Minaret and east-facing main entrance of the Al-Faqih Mosque, 'Aynat.
Salma Samar Damluji