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Journal**

2020

THE BRITISH-YEMENI SOCIETY

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BRITISH-YEMENI SOCIETY JOURNAL

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FROM THE EDITOR

The year 2020 has been a momentous one for all of us: for the first time ever, the entire population of the planet has been directly affected by the same crisis, but the responses of our governments has varied in degrees of incompetence, thus ensuring different levels of mortality and suffering between countries, with Yemen facing yet another tragedy from Covid-19, as if the war, cholera and hunger were not enough. In this context, the changes taking place in our small Society take a different dimension: maybe important for our members, but of rather less than earth shattering significance.

Prior to this crisis, our short-lived former chairman, Noel Guckian initiated an overall review of the B-YS strategy, a very welcome step. With respect to the journal, the focus was on cost cutting though I believe that it should take a broader approach. This led to the formation of a group which agreed that fundamental decisions on the journal as well as the overall B-YS communications policy, should be decided by the new committee and chair elected at the 2020 Annual General Meeting. Hence no final decision has been reached concerning the format which the journal might take in the future or how it will fit into the new B-YS strategy. Given this uncertainty, it was agreed that this year's journal should follow previous format and style. Members can look forward to a new approach, more in tune with 21st century technology, and responding to the different needs of members and others interested in Yemen.

Hence, this is the last edition of the journal under my editorship, and I take this opportunity for a few personal comments. In the eight years of my tenure as editor, the following have actively participated in the Journal's contents: Noel Brehony, Robert Wilson and Thanos Petouris. All three, alongside Hamdan Dammag form the group working on the future of the journal under Noel's chairmanship. I want to thank all the authors and reviewers who have provided material mostly of a very high standard. Above all, I want to thank Elspeth McPherson, our designer at Strathmore: although her name appears on the cover of each edition, this in no way represents the massive amount of work and dedication she has provided over the years, organising and selecting illustrations and pointing out the kind of issues important to a lay reader, always in a spirit of friendship and with extreme patience.

This year's journal includes articles which will remind readers that Yemen has not always been the source of such bad news. It covers different

aspects of a wide range of historical periods in Yemen, starting with Professor d'Ottone's discussion of Rasulid numismatics. It introduces a subject rarely discussed and explains why it has been neglected but also reveals new insights about the role of representations in Yemen's history. The review of Claudie Fayein's memoirs between the 1960s and late 1980s give a flavour of the cultural and material diversity of the country over three decades. Aiman al-Eryani's analysis of the YAR's economy in the 1970s recalls the early importance of remittances as well as the missed opportunities for a different approach to economic development. Publication of Yemeni poems in Arabic and English is a new venture, maybe a preview of what to expect under the new management of the journal, though it also continues the trend which has made the journal an outlet for the writings of its active members, something which might be subject to review.

The sadder aspects of today's Yemen are confirmed in Noel Brehony's political update, in this year's grantee's very personal interpretation of the 2013-14 National Dialogue Conference, as well as by the numerous obituaries though, thankfully, most of them died of old age rather than from the current pandemic. Given the nightmare of Yemen's humanitarian situation, the committee has decided to change the B-YS appeal to focus on Covid-19. The two organisations which have been recipient of its funds in previous years, Médecins sans Frontières and the Yemeni Red Crescent are both addressing this problem on a daily basis in a transparent manner and readers are most welcome to continue supporting these organisations. However the B-YS committee has decided that our limited funds will be directed towards three different smaller organisations with which B-YS active members have a stronger direct relationship.



CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

(Twenty-seventh Annual General Meeting, 19 June 2020)

Yemen Developments

The past year has seen hopes for a peaceful settlement to the Yemen's conflicts raised only to be later dashed. The UN-sponsored Stockholm Agreement of December 2018 successfully led to the calling off of the threatened attack on Hodeidah, the main port for food and aid into the populated parts of the country. But this failed in 2019 to lead to wider peace initiatives. In the south, the separatist Southern Transitional Council (STC), supported by the UAE, gained ground from the forces of the Internationally Recognised Government of Yemen (IRG). The Riyadh Agreement of November 2019 proposed power sharing between IRG and STC. It led to a pause in hostilities, but its main clauses were never implemented, and in April 2020, the STC declared 'self-governance' and took control of Aden, occupying all government institutions.

Meanwhile the war continues to take its toll on the civilian population, already facing mass displacement, loss of livelihoods, food shortages, malnutrition and a range of diseases. The recent outbreak of coronavirus in a vulnerable country with half of its health facilities out of action, has added a further layer to this suffering. Obstruction of aid and fuel remains a major problem. Economic problems faced by Saudi Arabia in particular are being felt inside the Yemen as remittances decline and Saudi support for the balance of payments is reviewed; the further collapse of the Yemeni Riyal is driving up the cost of essential items.

A detailed report on developments in Yemen is being prepared for the 2020 B-YS Journal.

The Committee

The main event was the tragic death of our Chairman, Dr Noel Guckian, after only six months in the role. Noel had taken the Chair at the last AGM and made his mark in the way the Society is to face the future but was taken ill quite unexpectedly and suffered cardiac arrest in Ipswich Hospital on 7 December 2019.

As Vice Chairman, Julian Lush then acted as interim Chairman. However, a new Chairman, James Firebrace, the only candidate, was nominated by the Committee and has taken on the role from 4 May. James is seeking election by the Membership at this AGM. He has had long-

standing interests in Yemen and will bring his experience and vision to the Society. Taher Qassim MBE has accepted nomination as Vice Chairman of the Society.

We are grateful to our painstaking treasurer, John Huggins, who had resigned for family reasons but has fortunately decided he can continue in the role. Robert Wilson continues to cast his meticulous eye on membership issues. Awssan Kamal has also done much to facilitate BYS communication but decided that other commitments do not leave him free to continue with our committee. We are most grateful for the contribution he has made. Ibrahim Zanta has acted as secretary for contacts with the Society's membership, but he too was facing other commitments. We are most fortunate that Louise Hosking, known to many from her time at the London Middle East Institute, has agreed to take on the role of secretary from July. We welcome Louise to this role.

We are most grateful to all members of the committee, especially the newcomers from last year, for their input into the running and future of the Society.

Membership

We have spent some time over the past months tidying up our membership records largely at the instigation of our late Chairman who hoped to launch a drive for new members. We thought that our membership was in the order of 280, but it has become clear that a number of these had allowed their membership – or at least their subscription payments – to lapse, and in early June this year we had 225 fully paid up members with about 15 payments still expected. Thanks to some energetic recruitment efforts by two of our new committee members, we have welcomed 10 new members in the past year.

B-YS activities

Events organised by the Society. These included:

20 June 2019 the B-YS organised a Cultural Evening at the Arab British Chamber of Commerce building to celebrate Yemeni music and culture and to raise funds for charities. It was a wonderful evening, well attended and successful in both entertaining the guests and raising money. Several of our members played key roles in organizing and running the event among them Muhammad bin Dohry, who developed the original idea, Ibrahim

Zanta for his organising skills and, above all, Safa Mubgar for arranging the music, the auction and much else. There are many more who should be thanked for helping and for donating gifts for the auction that were auctioned. The committee had hoped that it would become a regular annual event – and that this ambition can be achieved once the lock down is over.

21 November 2019 Walking the Longest Wadi in Arabia. Chris Bradley, a B-YS member, described his journey through the Wadi Hadhramaut, the longest wadi (valley) of the Arabian Peninsula, which he crossed in the 1990s. His talk was illustrated by many beautiful photographs taken during his expedition. Chris started by introducing the Hadhrami people, their culture, their legendary origins and the reasons that prompted him to write a guidebook about the Wadi Hadhramaut: the absence of such a book and the difficulty of finding any information on where and how to travel through the area.

16 December 2019 Samuel Ramani, who was just completing his D Phil at Oxford, discussed Russia's relationship with Yemen over the past few decades including its deep involvement in support of the PDRY and its role since 2011 as one of the permanent members of the UN Security Council.

11 February 2020 Tim Mackintosh-Smith discussed his book *Arabs: A 3000 year history of Peoples, Tribes and Empires* in a conversation between Tim and one of the reviewers, Ian Black, for many years *The Guardian's* Middle East editor and now a Visiting Fellow at LSE. Tim's book had been many years in the making. It was in part inspired by what he terms the "history outside my window" and was written mostly in 2017 when Sana'a was subject to aerial bombardments during the war. *Arabs* is a formidable piece of scholarship but told using anecdote, quotation, striking and original analogy and parallels between the past and the present which make it both a joy to read and utterly comprehensible in spite of the complex subject matter. The event attracted a large audience some of whom had travelled from outside the UK to attend.

B-YS Journal

The journal remains our jewel in the crown and we are enormously indebted to Helen Lackner who gives so much to editing it and to making

it such a high quality, informative and readable publication that members look forward to receiving each year, I am happy to report that the 2020 journal will be produced on schedule so that members will be able read it in the autumn.

Website and Facebook

The Society’s Facebook group is our most active media channel, and now has 1,615 members, with further applications being reviewed. The website itself is ready for a re-vamp. A number of our new and younger members of the Committee bring valuable ideas and experience and we hope to work on this in the coming months. Thanos Petouris who managed both virtually single handed for several years asked to step down from this in the course of the year but continues to provide invaluable support and advice.

B-YS Academic Award

The Committee has received one application for a grant to research south Yemeni music at the British Library. This has been approved conditional on the ability to carry out such research in the current circumstances. The application is from Gabriel Lavin, University of California, Los Angeles and will specifically examine Aden’s Early Recording Industry.



Devastating flood damage in Yemen in 2020.

POLITICAL UPDATE (UP TO MID-JULY 2020)

NOEL BREHONY

Yemen is among the countries worst-affected by Covid-19. As the British government has put it ‘Yemen is particularly vulnerable due to the country’s existing health vulnerabilities following years of conflict and humanitarian crisis, as well as the country’s depleted healthcare system’ which collapsed under the strain of Covid-19. Yemen was already facing the worst humanitarian crisis in the world. The war intensified in the last year and the signs are that it will not end in 2020 despite the efforts of the indefatigable UN Envoy Martin Griffiths and his team, who had hoped – in vain – to negotiate a ceasefire to enable all to focus on fighting Covid-19 and give a stimulus to resuming efforts to find a peace deal, building on the outcomes of the previous negotiations in Kuwait and the Stockholm deal of 2018.

A promising development has been the opening of a channel at senior level between the Saudis and the Huthis, in part as a result of British initiative. War weariness, the economic impact of Covid-19, the fall in oil revenues and a desire to focus more energy on internal issues are behind Saudi efforts to find a way out, albeit one which Riyadh can present as a victory or at least a justification for its decision to launch the war in 2015 and the enormous sums it has spent on fighting it. A greater burden of managing the war has fallen on Saudi Arabia following the withdrawal of UAE forces in the summer of 2019, limiting their presence to supporting counter-terrorism from Mukalla, protecting the vital Bal Haf LNG terminal and maintaining its apparent long term interest in Socotra. Saudi Arabia and the UAE shared similar objectives in 2015 but these have since diverged. The top leaderships in both countries are determined not to allow this to undermine their co-operation in the wider region and beyond but there has been friction at operational level in Yemen. As a result of the UAE drawdown, the costs to Saudi Arabia of the war have increased just as the government was cutting payments to public sector employees and raising VAT.

On the ground the Huthis have been able to take the initiative to seize territory in al-Jawf and threaten Mareb, the main centre now of the internationally recognised government of President Hadi and a power base of Vice President Ali Mohsen and the Islah party. Mareb is one of the few

places that has managed to prosper from the war thanks to an effective governor, support from the main tribes and an ability to generate income from oil (and the war economy). The Huthis are not strong enough to capture Mareb and the oil and gas fields around Safer in the face of coalition air power, but they are forcing their enemies to focus on defending it and thus relieving pressure on other fronts and keep coalition forces from threatening the Huthi homeland. Fighting is continuing albeit at a lower scale and Huthi forces have also been applying greater pressure in al-Baydha and on the borders of Lahej at a time when the Hadi regime is also having to contend with the activities of the Southern Transitional Council (STC). Huthi leaders also seek to apply pressure on the kingdom through missile and other attacks in the border areas. They claimed a major attack that damaged Saudi oil facilities at Abqaiq in September 2019; in fact, it was launched from Iran or Iraq but nevertheless carried a powerful message about the vulnerability of energy installations in the Gulf. It was probably not coincidental that Saudi-Huthi talks started after these attacks. Iranian support for the Huthis, economic and political, has increased as testified in report by the UN Panel of Experts. Iran and Saudi Arabia remain engaged in a region wide contest for influence. Iran, for a relatively small investment, can cause difficulties in Yemen, a country of major strategic interest to the Saudis.

The Huthis have shown in the last year that they are the strongest military force and are in firm control of much of north Yemen, where up to 60 percent of the population live and have the support of part of the former ruling General People's Congress (GPC) and part of the former northern political and tribal elite. However, they are under severe economic pressure caused by the war, the blockades of ports and airports and the struggle over control of the Central Bank and thus currency with Hadi. They cannot afford to pay salaries to state employees although Huthi leaders benefit from a war economy and appear to be enhancing the privileges enjoyed by Hashemite families allied with the Huthi leadership. Dissent is ruthlessly dealt with through repression in the cities and the use of force in tribal areas – as shown by the attack on the Hajour tribes in 2019.

On the other hand, the areas notionally controlled by President Hadi have fragmented even further in what one analyst calls 'militiadoms'.¹ Though the alliance with Islah remains strong and is of critical importance

¹ Eleonora Ardemagni , Beyond Yemen's Militiadoms: restarting from local agency available at file:///C:/Users/noelm/Downloads/Beyond_Yemens_Militiadoms._Restarting_fr.pdf

in Mareb (and Taiz) and within the armed forces, Hadi faces a major challenge from the STC which took de facto control in Aden, Dhali', Lahej and the western part of Abyan in August 2019. The Yemeni army prevented the STC from taking over Shabwa but when Hadi ordered the army to re-enter Aden it was stopped by the UAE air force with reports of up to 300 soldiers being killed. The Saudis, who had taken over from the UAE on the ground in Aden, negotiated the Riyadh Agreement in November 2019 which should have facilitated the return to Aden of the Hadi government in a power sharing deal with the STC and secured a place for the STC in negotiations about the future structure of Yemen. However, Saudi mediators have not been able to persuade the two sides to implement the Agreement – which provoked the STC announcement in April that it was taking administrative control of the south. It has since worked to consolidate that control including the seizure of revenues from the port and hijacking billions of riyals. The STC move was born out of frustration rather than strategy and it will sooner or later need to return to the Riyadh Agreement or a version of it. One major problem is that the Saudis lack the capacity to cajole Hadi and the STC to implement what they agree and lack the influence that the UAE was able to exert on the STC. Riyadh needs Islah for the war against the Huthis and is stuck with President Hadi since the war is being waged to restore his regime. Abu Dhabi supports the Saudis in public but has little time for Hadi and backs the STC whose de facto armed forces are the Security Belts and associated militias the UAE helped recruit, equip, train and support. Armed confrontation has been taking place in Abyan and parts of Shabwa between the Yemeni army and the STC and this could escalate further, exacerbated by the STC's strong opposition – shared by the UAE – to the influence of Islah in the Yemeni army units in Shabwa and Hadhramaut.

A further complication is that the influence of the STC is much weaker in Hadhramaut, where there are influential voices in the coastal areas that want to assert a much more local identity to decision making that affects them. In al-Mahra, the Saudis are in effective control through the presence of a military whose notional role is to prevent the smuggling of weapons, fuel, and other goods across the border with Oman or via al-Mahra's long seacoast. The smuggling still continues – organised by tribes in Mareb and is part of a war economy that benefits interests on both sides of the war.

In the Tihama south of Hodeida, forces associated with Tariq Saleh, a nephew of the last President, also trained and supported by the UAE

(which has maintained links to Saleh's family since 2011) are an increasingly important force linking up with elements of the General People's Congress (GPC) founded by Saleh and is independent of Hadi though nominally an ally and anti-Islah.

These fractures in the anti-Huthi forces will complicate any longer term peace deal since each of them has the ability to disrupt any agreement that is not in their interests. What it does seem to indicate is that the Huthis are likely to emerge from the war as the strongest political group and any settlement will require not just a Huthi-Saudi bargain (which is what the Huthi leadership wants) but a deal that acknowledges the interests of Islah (and of Vice-President Ali Mohsen), the STC, Tariq Saleh as well as that of Hadi himself and more localised 'militiadoms'.

If the potential catastrophe of Covid-19 was not enough to unite Yemenis in a search for peace, they are about to face the consequences of a steep fall in the amount of available foreign currency as remittances that have enabled so many to survive shrink by up to 70 percent as result of impact of Covid-19 on the economies of states hosting Yemeni workers. The \$2 billion deposited by the Saudis in the Central Bank to stabilise the riyal and finance imports will be exhausted soon; unless there is a further transfer Yemen will face major difficulties in importing food and other needs. The US is one country that has cut foreign assistance in response to the Huthi policy of taxing some assistance to sustain its economy. The World Food Programme announced food rations in Huthi areas were to be cut in half – impacting some 8.5 million people – while the WHO said it was cutting most of the services it provides in hospitals and care centres, including Covid-19 response operations. A virtual international donor conference on Yemen, hosted by Saudi Arabia and the UN on 2 June, attracted just 1.35 billion dollars in pledges — well short of the 2.41 billion dollar target that the UN had identified as necessary to sustain most of its humanitarian operations. The UN announced in May that it was heading for a 'fiscal cliff' in Yemen and that its funding deficit was causing three-quarters of its programs in the country to either close or reduce operations. In the process of retraction, these agencies will also shed thousands of Yemeni workers. Further cutbacks to food security and health programmes are now expected. The STC has been seizing government cash and diverting money but it is not clear how much of this is needed to pay its forces and how much can be spent on ensuring that limited services operate.

Prospects for Peace

Martin Griffiths has to operate under the framework of the UN Security Council and UNSC Resolution 2216, the GCC peace deal of 2011 and the outcomes of the National Dialogue Conference. 2216 is no longer a basis for an agreement. It requires that the Huthis leave the main cities and give up much of their weaponry to the legitimate government of President Hadi – and there is no way they will do that or can be forced to do so. The Huthi strategy is to seek to negotiate with the Saudis, side-lining the Hadi government. Any peace negotiation is now likely to have to involve the various armed factions in the anti-Huthi side which will mean that their interests will have to be satisfied. A recent report by the International Crisis Group sums up the problems well and offers ideas on possible ways forward. If Covid-19 cannot persuade the parties to abandon red lines and compromise, then the likelihood is that the suffering of Yemenis will get even worse in the year ahead.



Taiz: casual workers looking for work

MY ENCOUNTER WITH ARABIC NUMISMATICS AND SOME NEW THOUGHTS ON RASULID COINS

ARIANNA D'OTTONE RAMBACH¹
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Arabic numismatics is a field relatively neglected by scholarship and is very rarely included in university teaching programs in Europe and beyond. Both the lack of courses and the small number of Arabists researching the field – as well as an unstated but obvious rejection by classical numismatists who consider Arabic numismatics, and Oriental coins in general, as exotic oddities – have over time resulted in a lack of knowledge. Yes, there are many Arabists, but they are not numismatists, and there are many numismatists, but they do not know Arabic: to advance the knowledge of Arabic coins both competences are required.

Numismatics, and numismatic-related evidence, represents a proper field of research in itself encompassing the cataloguing of major collections, still without any printed record (D'Ottone Rambach 2017 and 2017b)² and the constitution of corpora of individual dynasties – and as source for many related fields. History, art history, archaeology, grammar, palaeography, political and religious studies, material studies, museum history and collecting history studies, are just a few disciplines that benefit from numismatics. Despite the extreme value of the numismatic evidence, Arabists have progressively lost their interests for coins: some of the major publications – such the ten volumes of the British Museum catalogue of oriental coins by Stanley Lane-Poole (1854-1931) – date back to end of the 19th century/early 20th century. This limited interest in coins has occasionally led to using distorted coin-like objects as decorative book-covers to convey a message that is unrelated to the numismatic evidence (Ahmed 2016)³.

¹ Arianna D'Ottone Rambach is professor of Arabic Language and Literature at the Sapienza – University of Rome, Junior Fellow of the Sapienza School for Advanced Studies and correspondent member of the Royal Academy for Overseas Sciences (Brussels). In the field of Arabic numismatics, she primarily works on archaeological finds and on museum collections in Italy and abroad.

² D'Ottone Rambach, A. (2017). *Collezione di Vittorio Emanuele III: Monete arabe*, Roma: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato; ead. (2017b). 'Fatimid coins in the National Museum of Damascus. An Overview': in *Bulletin du cercle d'études numismatiques* 54, 1, pp. 18-39.

³ Ahmed, Sh. (2016). *What is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic*, Princeton and Oxford:

I personally first encountered Arabic numismatics in 2003, when the Coin Cabinet of the Capitoline Museums in Rome re-opened to the public. This event was a turning point for my scientific interests: I was then a PhD student investigating the codicology of Yemeni manuscripts (D'Ottone 2006)⁴ and had no knowledge of Arabic coins or numismatics in general. However, the presence of a large and unpublished collection of Arabic coins in the Capitoline Museums gave me the chance to initiate numismatic research on the Stanzani collection. The collection formed by the Italian architect Ludovico Stanzani (d. Odessa 1872) – who had worked and collected coins in Russia in the 19th century includes approximately 9,250 coins of which 4,500 are Oriental. I started cataloguing and studying some dirhams that were most likely acquired in the Ukrainian region since they are typical of the many Viking-age hoards – made up of thousands of Arabic dirhams from the eastern lands of the Caliphate – attesting the link between the Islamic empire and the Scandinavian regions through the Volga-Bulgarians. Through the first results of my work, as an autodidact, on the Stanzani collection, I received the Nicholas Lowick Grant of the Royal Numismatic Society (London) that allowed me to travel to Stockholm and have the privilege to meet Gert Rispling of the Royal Coin Cabinet of Sweden. Rispling introduced me to the study of Viking-age hoards and to Arabic numismatics in general. This was the beginning, but I wanted to know more.

In 2006 as a post-doc grant holder I attended the course on Islamic numismatics given by Lutz Ilisch at the Forschungsstelle für Islamische Numismatik (FINT) in Tübingen, and I was given access to the rich library and coin collection of that institution. I was still working on the Stanzani collection – in particular on the Golden Horde coins – but my interest for Yemen and Yemeni culture was still alive. In the following years, in parallel to my work on Yemeni manuscripts (D'Ottone 2014 and 2015)⁵, I

Princeton University Press. Ahmed ignored the basic, and yet fundamental difference, between a coin and a medallion. In his erudite work, he neither read nor cited the only relevant numismatic reference (Whitehead 1929) though it would have helped him to understand the object he defines as a 'gold coin' (p. 72, fig. 2) and that is, in reality, a medallion: Whitehead, R.B. (1929). 'The Portrait Medals and Zodiacal Coins of the Emperor Jahanjir': *The Numismatic Chronicle and Journal of the Royal Numismatic Society 5th s.*, vol. 9, no. 33, pp. 1-25.

⁴ D'Ottone, A. (2006). *I manoscritti arabi dello Yemen: una ricerca codicologica*, Roma: Sapienza – Istituto Italiano di Studi Orientali

⁵ D'Ottone, A. (2014). 'Damascus-Sana'a: The Case of the Manuscript Sana'a, Dar al-mahtutat, Mustalah al-hadith 216': *Journal of Islamic Manuscripts 5*, pp. 154-169; ead. (2015). 'The

visited the FINT a number of times and, in agreement with L. Ilisch, I obtained the photos and the relevant data (such as weight and diameter) of the Rasulid coins preserved there in order to study them (D'Ottone 2015b)⁶. The project of a volume dedicated to the Rasulid capitals of Taiz and Tha'bat, pushed me to expand the study of the Rasulid specimens struck in those cities to include the specimens preserved in other major institutions such as the British Museum, the State Hermitage Museum (St Petersburg), and The Museum of Islamic Art of Doha (Qatar).

Beside the numismatic material, I also considered other relevant sources such as historical chronicles and literary texts, inscriptions, and manuscripts produced in Rasulid times, in order to have a wider view of the historical and cultural context linked to the coin production. This choice proved to be fruitful since it was possible to check, combine and complete information provided by different evidence and to shed light on some peculiarities linked to the Yemeni written culture in the widest sense. Here, I will update the results published in the *Rivista Italiana di Numismatica* (RIN) (D'Ottone Rambach 2020)⁷, with some new observations.

Yemeni coins in Rasulid times (626–858 AH/AD 1129–1454) and the monetary reform of al-Mujahid 'Ali

The Rasulid coinage is singled out in the wider context of the Arabic medieval numismatic issues by the pictorial devices that distinguish some of its types, ranging from human beings – knights with falcons in their hands and seated men, for example – to animals: fish, falcons catching ducks, birds, ostriches and peacocks – to objects: chalices and scimitars (Fig 1 overleaf).

The links between a particular iconographic choice and the town which is symbolised by the iconographic device depicted on coins have not been researched in depth and careful work on historical and literary sources is still necessary to understand the numismatic evidence. In this respect it is interesting to recall a puzzling case linked to the monetary reform

Pearl and the Ruby: Scribal Dicta and Other Metatextual Notes in Yemeni Medieval Manuscripts' in *The Yemeni Manuscript Tradition*. Leiden and Boston: Brill, pp. 82-100.

⁶ D'Ottone, A. (2015b). 'The Mint of Ta'izz in Rasulid Times' in *Per Enzo: Studi in memoria di Vincenzo Matera*. Firenze: Firenze University Press, pp. 93-103

⁷ D'Ottone Rambach, A. (2020). 'The Mints of Ta'izz and Tha'bat in Rasulid Times: Literary Sources and Numismatic Evidence': *Rivista italiana di numismatica* 121, pp. 213-268.



Figure 1

- a) Rasulid dirham struck in Aden with fish (cf. Nützel 1891/1987, no. 28) (Nützel, H. (1891/1987). *Coins of the Rasulids Comprising a Synopsis of the History of that Yemenite Dynasty*. Berlin: W. Pormetter 1891/Augmented by the description of a newly discovered (sic) *Rasulid dirham hoard*, translated by A. Kinzelbach. Mainz: D. Kinzelbach 1987.) – private collection
- b) Rasulid dirham struck in Zabid with bird (cf. Nützel 1891/1987, no. 27) – private collection
- c) Rasulid dirham struck in Aden with a chalice (cf. Nützel 1891/1987, no. 52) – private collection

promoted by al-Mujahid ‘Ali (r. 721-764/1322-1363) in the year 736/1335-36 that introduced a new coin type.

Al-Khazraji refers to this reform in his well-known work *al-‘Uqud al-lu’lu’iyya fi ta’rikh al-dawla al-rasuliyya* but his text mentions ‘the appearance (in circulation) of this new *riyahi* dirham’ (Redhouse ed. 1907).⁸ This raised more questions than it answered since this excerpt was given a number of interpretations and various hypotheses were made about the identification of the image(s) to which the text is believed to refer. The first editor of al-Khazraji’s text, James William Redhouse (1811-1892), suggested, for example, that the term *riyahi* was a surname of the die-sinker, i.e. someone who engraves the metal piece used for stamping the coins (die) (Redhouse ed. 1907, vol. III, 2, p. 264).

More recent editions offered a different understanding of this word and, thus, a different meaning for the term was brought into the discussion (al-Hibshi 2009). According to al-Hibshi the reading of the adjective qualifying the new dirhams was: *rawabasi*. Recalling al-Hamdani’s text *Kitab al-jawhratayn* al-Hibshi defines *rawabasi* as a worker of very low social status who dyes the metal in a melting pot (*man yasbighu al-fidda fi-l-*

⁸ Redhouse, J.W. ed. (1907). *The Pearl Strings: a history of the Resuliyy dynasty of Yemen*. Leiden: Brill, 4 vols: III, 2, p. 52.



Fig. 2 Private collection: Rasulid *riyabi* dirham struck in al-Mahjam 735/1334-35 – date recorded in numbers – on the reverse lion or baboon sitting to left with facing head

rawbas: al-Hibshi 2009, vol. II, p. 575, footnote 3).

A further reading of the very same word was suggested by Muhammad Qasim ‘Abdallah al-Duba’i. According to al-Duba’i the word in question must be read as *al-rubahi* – that is ape and, in particular a species of baboon native to the Horn of Africa. This reading would have been connected, following al-Duba’i’s hypothesis, with the animal depicted on the issues struck in the town of al-Majham in 735/1334-35 (fig. 2) – yet, that animal was considered until then to be a lion. Moreover, in connection with the reading *al-rubahi* Stephen Album proposed a different explanation suggesting that the reference to a baboon had to be a popular way for denoting the seated figure depicted on Tha‘bat issues (fig. 3).



Fig. 3 FINT, Inv. BD-10-F3: Rasulid *riyabi* dirham struck in Tha‘bat, 736 – on the reverse a seated man in the centre

To sum up: one word in al-Khazraji’s text offered three different possible readings (*riyahi*; *rawabasi* and *rubahi*) and an equal number of meanings (a *nisba*, a name related to a low-class job and a local species of baboon) linked to four different scenarios. The first two readings (*riyahi*; *rawabasi*) refer to people somehow involved in the minting process with different tasks whilst the third option (*rubahi*) is instead connected to two different coin types minted respectively in al-Mahjam and in Tha‘bat – one carrying the image of an animal (of questionable appearance) and the other one illustrated with a seated man.

However, as Daniel M. Varisco pointed out recently, the *nisba al-Riyahi* is a well-established one in the Rasulid era: al-Khazraji, for example, devotes a section of his *al-'Aqd al-fakbir* to the Qadi Muhammad b. 'Ali b. 'Umar b. Muhammad al-Riyahi (d. 682/1284), who was a prominent jurist and teacher in the Muzaffari madrasa in Taiz (al-'Abbadi ed. 2009)⁹. The question is, then, the nature of the connection between a new coin type and a religious judge.

The chronicle of the Rasulid dynasty, nowadays known as *al-Kitab al-zahiri fi ta'rikh al-dawla al-rasuliyya bi-l-Yaman*, only recently identified as the work of Jamal al-Din Muhammad b. 'Ali al-Hasib al-Misri al-Yamani (d. 840 AH/AD 1436) (al-Hibshi ed. 1431/2010), helps to elucidate this matter.

The chronicle informs us, for example, that new dies, created after the accession to power of a new sultan, were realized in the *Dar al-darb* / mint in Taiz and subsequently brought to the *Dar al-'adl* / House of Justice where they were examined. Moreover, the al-Hasib al-Misri refers to other moves of the dies from the mint to the House of Justice in Taiz: in one passage, for instance, we read that in the year 831/1428-29 al-Malik al-Zahir (r. 831-842/1428-1439), captured in Tha'bat, was rescued by the army and succeeded al-Ashraf Isma'il who was killed in a turmoil that took place in the *Dar al-'adl* / House of Justice in Taiz. After al-Malik al-Zahir's accession to power, the dies were carried from the *Dar al-darb* / mint to the *Dar al-'adl* / House of Justice, in a solemn, traditional parade in which the army, a prince and a religious judge were involved.

In the light of the central role of the *Dar al-'adl* / House of Justice in the process of production of new dies in Rasulid Yemen, it seems likely that the correct reading of al-Khazraji's text mentioning *al-Riyahi*, has to be understood as the *nisba* of a prominent *qadi*. This appears coherent with the meaningful presence of a religious judge / *qadi* in the official ceremony bringing the dies from the mint to the House of Justice.

One can wonder, in particular, if the judge *al-Riyahi* might have been responsible for giving his legal opinion regarding the lawfulness of use of

⁹ Al-'Abbadi, 'A. Q. ed. (2009): Al-Khazraji, *Al-'Aqd al-fakbir al-hasan fi tabaqat akabir abl al-Yaman*. San'a': Maktabat al-jil al-jadid. Moreover, Ibn al-Dayba' (866-944 AH/AD 1461-1537) in his work entitled *Qurraṭ al-'uyun bi-akbbar al-Yaman al-maymuun* (al-awali ed. 1971-1977) records that al-Malik al-Mansur minted the first dinars in his name in 630/1232-1233) after conquering several fortresses, including one in al-Harish al-Riyahi, near Kuhlaan 'Affar in the North of Yemen. Al-Awali, M. ed. (1971-1977): Ibn al-Dayba', *Kitab qurraṭ al-'uyun bi-akbbar al-Yaman al-maymuun*. Al-Qahira: al-Maktabat al-yamaniyya, 2 vols.: II, p. 6 –

images on dies / coins – since the *riyabi* dirhams are illustrated with human beings and animals. This would not have been an isolated case. It seems useful to recall, for example, the legal opinion of Ibn Hajar (d. 974/1567) about the use of western paper, with watermarks representing animals, circulating in Yemen between the end of the 15th and the 16th centuries as a product imported by Portuguese merchants (D'Ottone 2006, p. 45).

As for the link between the mint activity and the juridical-religious authority, Rasulid Yemen is not an exception since the connection between coins and judges is also attested in Marinid times (mid-13th-mid-15th century) in North Africa. In this case witnesses/notaries were present in the mint to control the use and the number of dies that were kept in a safe of which they had the key.

Bringing together the written sources with the numismatic evidence proves to be a win-win method since through coins it is possible to shed light on the meaning of a puzzling textual excerpt and through texts one is able to put the numismatic evidence in a wider, cultural perspective. Moreover, Rasulid Yemen offers interesting hints concerning the ceremonies linked to the creation of new dies, on the occasion of the accession to power of a new sultan, and this opens up new lines of research linked to the functioning of a medieval Arabic mint, the people involved in these ceremonies and, last but not least, the relation between political and religious power.



REMITTANCES, ABUNDANT CAPITAL, AND LABOUR SHORTAGES: THE NORTH YEMENI ECONOMY OF THE 1970s

AIMAN AL-ERYANI¹

Yemen has historically been a major supplier of labour for Arab Gulf countries. The oil boom of the 1970s turned what was a trickle to a torrent, as Yemeni workers flooded the underserved labour markets of the Arabian Peninsula. The exact number of workers from the Yemen Arab Republic (North Yemen)² that emigrated during this time is unknown. One estimate states that 40% of the North Yemeni labour force left the country to look for better opportunities abroad (Cohen et al. 1981:1). The estimate of the Yemeni government's own Central Planning Organisation (CPO) puts the number at 1,234,000 Yemenis outside of the country, amounting to 20% of the population, although this includes the workers and their families (CPO 1981:33).

The massive migration of Yemeni labour was accompanied by an equally massive increase in the funds remitted back to the country. According to the Central Planning Organisation, private transfers reached a peak of USD\$1.39 billion in 1977, around 77% of GDP (CPO 1981). See Figure 1.

By most accounts, economic policy in the YAR of the 1970s was relatively laissez-faire (Lackner 2017, Cohen 1980 & 1981, Ross 1980, Swanson 1979, Carapico 1981). That is, the state did not control the flow of goods, services, and capital that entered and left the country. The flood of capital that entered the country and the lack of policy to make use of these funds to diversify and structure the economy were a sorely missed opportunity.

The mass migration of Yemeni workers to the Gulf countries, and the funds they remitted, affected the direction of Yemen's economy for the next 50 years

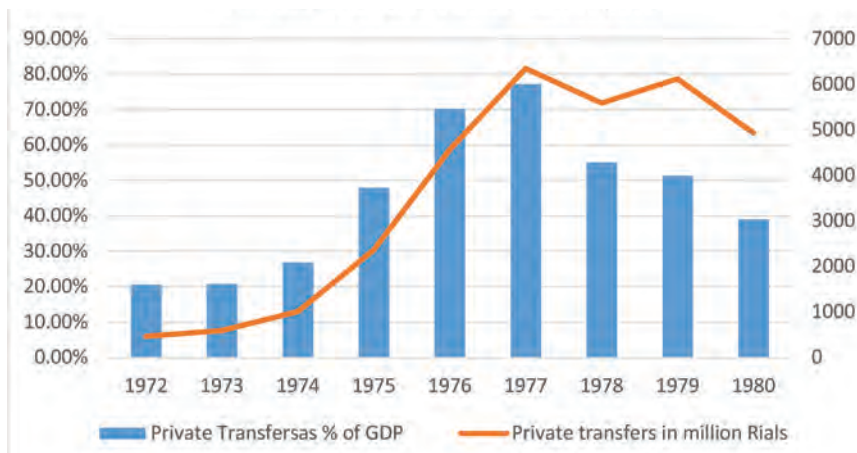
Remittance agents

Remittance agents played a fundamental role in the new economy that

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² All mentions of Yemen in this article refer to the Yemen Arab Republic .

Figure 1 Private transfers as percentage of GDP and in riyals (millions)



Source: CPO 1981, CPO 1975/1976. Taken from Al-Eryani 2019:33

emerged in the country. These agents not only acted as rural bankers, in places where banks did not exist and where people did not have bank accounts, but facilitated a variety of services to assist emigrants and their families in the country.

The remittance system was built on trust. I.O.U.s were issued against deposits (Ross 1981:3). A Yemeni working in Riyadh would deposit a sum in Saudi riyals at the local remittance office and be given a draft in Yemeni riyals. These drafts were then sent to Yemen, either through the mail, or with an acquaintance traveling back to Yemen. Meanwhile, the agent deposited the sum at the local bank, with the funds routed to the agent’s account in London or New York. The funds were then sent to the agent’s Yemeni riyal account in either the Yemen Commercial Bank (YCB) or the Yemen Bank for Reconstruction and Development (YBRD). The worker’s family was then able to exchange the draft for cash at the local agent’s office – which, according to Ross, was usually a local grocery store, tailor or other business whose owner acted as an agent as a sideline to his main business. When exchanged at the local office a fee was paid for the trouble when the local agent had to travel to the wholesale agent’s office in Sana’a, Taiz, or Hodeidah. It is apparent that while remittances were routed through informal means at the agent level, they did flow through the

formal banking system at one point.

As Islamic law prohibits charging interest, the agents invested the money deposited on behalf of those remitting the money from abroad; they charged commissions to manage those investments. They also lent funds to potential emigrants, financing their trips and the acquisition of the necessary paperwork, such as passports and travel fare. They charged between 2-6% depending on the services provided (Ross 1981:3). One service, for example, was to provide couriers to deliver the money if a family did not have the means to travel to the district center to pick up its remitted funds.

Most rural agents operated their remittance business alongside their main business, many owning grocery shops, travel agencies, clothes shops, or similar businesses, so their financial role was only part of their activities, by contrast with the 'wholesale' remittance agents who were involved in remittance related activities full time. They operated out of offices in larger cities such as Sana'a, Hodeidah, and Taiz, with branches in Gulf countries. The wholesale agents did not operate in rural areas as they were assisted by the retail agents. Ross states that only 8% of the remitted funds were transferred through the formal system. However, upon further examination, the remitting agents had built a complex system that relied fundamentally on the formal banking system.

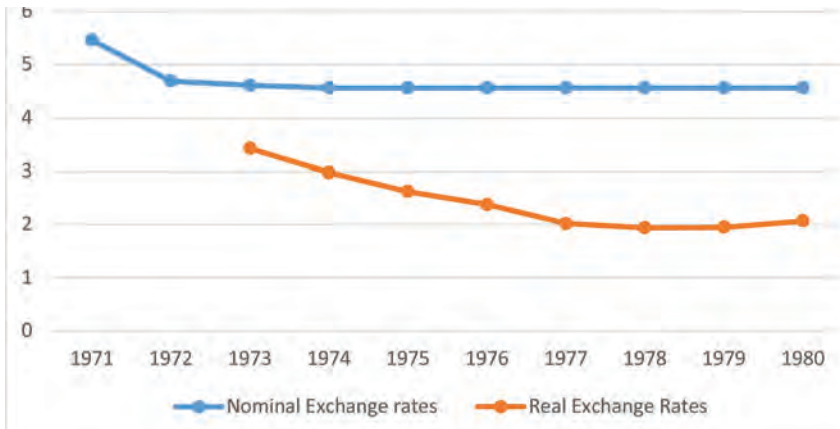
This system was not used through necessity. The borders between Saudi Arabia and Yemen were porous enough to allow transport of cash. The lack of currency exchange black-markets, which would have naturally emerged – with Yemenis being the most enterprising of peoples – indicates that there were other market forces at play.

Currency Pegs

Countries such as Ethiopia, Pakistan, and Venezuela, either directly or indirectly tax their remittances by mandating that all transfers into the country are converted into the local currency using an official exchange rate (World Bank 1999). This exchange rate is usually overvalued, which means that those receiving remittances get less in local currency for the foreign currency sent. Governments and their central banks do this to increase their reserves of foreign currency. This policy was ineffective in North Yemen of that era, as the official pegged rate undervalued the Yemeni Riyal against the US Dollar, effectively causing the government to subsidize remittances.

Figure 2 shows that as capital flows increased over time, the Yemeni

Figure 2 Real and nominal exchange rates (Yemeni riyal to one USD)



Source: prepared by the author using data from CPO 1981, 1975/1976, St. Louis Federal Reserve (FRED). Taken from Al-Eryani (2019)

riyal increased in value while the peg remained at the same rate.

This was perhaps a misguided attempt by the Central Bank to encourage exports, with currency devaluations inherently being an export subsidy. Perhaps this would have succeeded in increasing investment in agricultural capabilities and manufacturing, except for the fact that the government actually saw decreasing exports during this time as per table 1 overleaf.

Cotton production and export decreased over time until it vanished sometime around 1977. Cotton textile manufacturing and export also disappeared during this time. Coffee, along with many other crops, would eventually be edged out by *qat*. Yemeni coffee continues to be an underutilized potential export asset, but in the 2010s efforts have focused on changing that, with local institutions working to effectively increase productivity in the Yemeni economy³.

The massive influx of capital had a short term beneficial impact, but was also deeply harmful in the long run. Education rates increased, along with

³ One such example is the Small Micro Enterprise Promotion Service (SMEPS): <https://smeps.org.ye/smepsweb/world-bank-funding-helps-local-institution-exploit-critical-junctures-to-advance-better-market-systems-of-input-supplies-for-yemeni-farmers-is-there-a-bigger-lesson-from-this/>

Table 1 Coffee and cotton production/yield/area/exports

	Coffee				Cotton						
	prod (1000 tons)	yield (kg/h)	area (100 hectares)	exports (1000 riyals)	prod (1000 tons)	yield (kg/h)	area (100 hectares)	Cotton exports (1000 riyals)	Cotton exports tons	exports cotton fabrics (1000 riyals)	exports cotton fabrics yards
1970	4	400	10	---	10	1000	10	---	---	---	---
1971	3.5	389	9	---	15	1000	15	9912	---	---	---
1972	3.5	389	9	---	18.5	925	20	10785	---	---	---
1973	3.5	389	9	---	20	1000	20	35180	6603	---	---
1974	3	375	8	---	27	954	28.3	28188	4909	1193	370721
1975	3	429	7	---	13.5	900	15	24221	4521	775	142345
1976	3.4	453	7.5	---	5.3	841	6.3	24953	5363	165	53094
1977	3.9	506	7.7	---	3.9	830	4.7	---	---	29	7200
1978	3.6	468	7.7	---	4.8	857	5.6	---	---	---	---
1979	3.5	455	7.7	---	2.8	933	3	---	---	---	---
1980	3.6	468	7.7	879	5	943	5.3	56	---	---	---

Source: CPO (1981) Central Bank of Yemen (1981). Taken from Al-Eryani (2019)

other health and wealth indicators. This fundamental change in the Yemeni economy also had an unintended consequence, which continues to be a burden to this day, an increase in imports.

Between 1975 and 1980, imports more than doubled, from 3 billion riyals to 8.35 billion (see Figure 3). Whether this increase in imports was caused, or was a consequence of, the stagnating agricultural sector is unclear. A statistical exercise would surely show a correlation between increasing imports and decreasing agricultural output, but reality is rarely simple, and correlation and causation are not always concurrent.

Increasing incomes and higher wages in the country and abroad made agricultural work unattractive. While productivity increased, it concentrated on luxury crops such as *qat*. Furthermore, sharecroppers could access prime farmland, and terraces – which were usually rain-fed and more difficult to maintain – were left to deteriorate (Cohen et al 1981). This meant that local production was insufficient to meet the needs of the local population. Imports, while being cheap, were also needed to cover a gap in the market. This also indicates the government’s lack of any policy measures to restrict imports, employ import duties, or even invest in, and subsidize local agricultural production.

Figure 3 Imports/exports as a percentage of GDP



Source: CPO 1981, 1975/1976. Taken from Al-Eryani (2019)

However, this trend caused decades of endemic and systemic failure to utilize a valuable resource, namely agriculture in a country which needed to provide viable means of investment and future-looking policy to evolve its economy towards manufacturing, and later to make it viable for international competition.

The Yemeni government did not invest in infrastructure which would have created avenues for this newfound wealth to be invested for the long term economic development of the country and the benefit of the population as a whole. There were very few choices for the Yemeni investor, either to buy land, build a house, or open some type of business. Yemeni workers returning from abroad could not apply what they learned, with the underdeveloped Yemeni economy unable to absorb their skills. For example, Yemenis who had worked for years in the United States’ auto-manufacturing sector returned to Yemen unable to apply their considerable skills (Cohen et al. 1981).

Very little of this wealth was invested in the country’s most important asset – its agricultural capabilities. This could have been due to many reasons; land prices soared, including agricultural land, which means investors could not buy multiple parcels of land and invest in scaling up agricultural enterprise. Swanson states: ‘In the early 1960s good land was selling for between 100 to 200 Yemeni rials per *shakla* or *qasaba*, a unit of

land approximately 18.5 feet on a side. In 1974-1975 similar land was quoted at 1000 Yemeni Rials per *shakla* or about \$221 for 0.8% of an acre or slightly in excess of \$28,000 per acre. Furthermore, these prices are cheap when compared with current figures. In October of 1976 a friend of mine from a village just a few miles from village B paid 75,000 Yemeni rials for 30 *shakla* of prime irrigated land, that is nearly \$70,000 per acre' (Swanson 1979:71)

The inability to scale up agricultural activities presented a severe obstacle to agricultural development. Environmental factors presented the most difficult barrier to upscaling activities, Yemen's farms, especially in the central and northern highlands are usually terrace farms. Using farm machinery is close to impossible unless the plots are large enough. Mechanisation also needs vast resources in order to be implemented effectively, and the state did not expend enough effort to mobilize mechanization with any meaningful results.

Legal and social norms also hampered these activities. On the one hand legal disputes for water resources often mean that supplying water is complicated and expensive, never mind the lack of government investment in these resources. Social norms also make it shameful to sell family land to outsiders, even to distant relatives, as is the case for even this author's family and land.

The 1970s was a decade that resulted in massive changes in the dynamics of the Yemeni economy, both in its capital and labour. The massive influx of remittances and outflow of labour created a capital-abundant and labour-short country, an anomaly among most developing non-oil exporting countries. Yemeni labour and the enterprising efforts of Yemeni workers and merchants abroad resulted in a decade whose prosperity was seriously under-utilised. Poor policy and governance resulted in missing a real opportunity which could have prevented Yemen from becoming a victim of resource curse, and instead become a manufacturing and agricultural powerhouse in the region. Yemen's current state underlines the importance of a robust agricultural sector, and any plan for Yemen's future development must invest in its farmers and the infrastructure to commercialize their produce.

Today, 20 million Yemenis are food insecure and inching closer to famine. Before the current war, poverty affected half of the country's population – it now affects around 75% of all Yemenis. Yemen remains dependent on food imports to feed itself, and the repercussions of the

current war have destroyed the struggling economy. Since January of this year, remittances have dropped by 80%, and with 1 in 10 Yemenis wholly reliant on remittances to meet their basic needs this could spell disaster (Oxfam 2020).

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Dhamar governorate: *qat* terraces, Jabal al-Sharq

NATIONAL TOGETHERNESS AND THE NEGOTIATION OF PEACE IN YEMEN

SARAH CLOWRY¹

Introduction

The Yemeni civil war has claimed the lives of more than 100,000 people since its eruption in 2015.² Swept up by the revolutionary fervour of the Arab uprisings, the roots of Yemen's current conflict lie partially in the period between 2011 and 2014, a time when members of the international community attempted, or at least purported, to promote and oversee a peaceful transition in Yemen. Their efforts did not stave off war, and the persistent work of peacemakers since then has also failed to bring about peace. Research into conflict management in Yemen is thus urgently required; in addition, and more broadly, the influence of socially constructed collective identities upon peace mediation is yet to be comprehensively explored. This is despite identity having been argued to be a profoundly powerful force in both domestic and international politics, a social dynamic which can dictate the interests and actions of individuals and groups.

In this article, I will therefore assess the early years of the internationally-mediated peace process in Yemen by responding to the following question: within the recollections of those who participated, does Yemeni 'togetherness' appear to have found expression within, or to have shaped, the peace process? Here, the term 'togetherness' is intended to imply interconnectedness between a national collective: the ties between, and cohesion among, Yemenis as a group. It is therefore allied with the notion of national identity, commonly thought of as 'a cultural and political bond, uniting in a single political community all who share an historic culture

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² No author, 'ACLED Resources: War in Yemen', ACLED (2020), available from: <https://acled-data.com/2020/03/25/acled-resources-war-in-yemen/> [last accessed: 10 April 2020].

and homeland'.³ Through an exploration of 47 interviews conducted with both Yemenis and international officials involved in the early years of the Yemeni peace process, I will offer a glimpse into the potential weight of togetherness within third-party peace negotiations.

The Yemeni peace process, 2011–2014

In January 2011, tens of thousands of Yemenis took to the streets, demanding change; neither the promise of reform nor the indiscriminate massacre of protesters could deter the uprising⁴ and the international community converged on the state. The peace process began with the 'Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Initiative', a pact which recommended President Ali Abdullah Saleh's resignation, protected by an immunity agreement. In the referendum which followed, Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi was granted control of the country. He proved unable to manage the transition, creating a government of national unity which 'gained the reputation of being the most incompetent and corrupt in the country's history'.⁵ It was in this context, with key political factions within Yemen amassing an ever greater number of weapons,⁶ that the 2013–2014 National Dialogue Conference (NDC) was launched.

Operating under the auspices of the United Nations (UN) and the GCC, with additional funding provided by the 'Friends of Yemen',⁷ the NDC was designed and overseen by various committees, each of which encompassed a plethora of Yemeni political parties and sections of society.⁸ In addition to the UN and the GCC, Yemenis also found that international non-governmental organisations (NGOs), together with the various embassies which had remained in Yemen, were more than willing to intervene in events, persuading individuals and groups to participate, attending the

³ Anthony Smith, *National Identity* (Nevada: University of Nevada Press, 1991), pp. 14–15.

⁴ Helen Lackner, *Yemen in Crisis* (London: Saqi Books, 2017), pp. 35–36; Ginny Hill, *Yemen Endures* (London: C. Hurst & Co., 2017), pp. 204–206.

⁵ Lackner, *Yemen in Crisis*, p. 40.

⁶ Hill, *Yemen Endures*, p. 260.

⁷ No author, 'Friends of Yemen: Questions and Answers', UK Government (1 February 2013), available from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/friends-of-yemen-q-a> [last accessed: 10 April 2020].

⁸ No author, 'National Dialogue Conference', OSESGY: Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen (n.d.), available from: <https://osesgy.unmissions.org/national-dialogue-conference> [last accessed: 10 April 2020]; No author, National Dialogue Conference (n.d.), available from: <http://www.ndc.ye/default.aspx> [last accessed: 10 April 2020].

talks, offering ‘capacity building’ and lectures from ‘experts’, and conducting clandestine negotiations.⁹ Gathered within the opulent Mövenpick Hotel, perched above Sana‘a, 565 Yemeni delegates attended and were organised into nine Working Groups. These participants were drawn from the state’s political parties and factions together with sectors of civil society and, for eleven months, they grappled with an array of themes including transitional justice, the thorny question of the South of Yemen, and the challenges faced by the Sa‘da region.¹⁰ The conference eventually produced a report detailing 1,800 recommendations for reform,¹¹ and it was announced that a further body would be formed to deliberate the federalisation of Yemen, a notion which had received a great deal of scrutiny during the NDC. Within a few weeks, this ‘Region-Defining Committee’ proposed that the state would be divided into six districts.¹²

Just one year after the conclusion of the conference, the Huthis, an armed Northern movement spearheaded by Yemen’s Zaydi Shi‘a community, captured the presidential palace in Sana‘a and began to march further South. A fierce, regionalised civil war was triggered which persists to this day. While the ‘Yemen Model’ was suggested at the time as a possible blueprint for peacemaking, the words of the UN Special Envoy, Jamal Benomar, should have been more closely heeded: a few months after the conclusion of the conference, he gloomily intoned, ‘this could all fall apart at any time’.¹³

Togetherness among Yemenis within the peace process

The introduction mentioned the paucity of studies concerning the influence of collective identities upon internationally-mediated peace processes.

⁹ Details gathered from interviews conducted by the author with Yemeni and international participants in the NDC.

¹⁰ No author, ‘National Dialogue Conference Outcomes Document’ (2014), available from: PA-X Peace Agreements Database, <https://www.peaceagreements.org/> [last accessed: 10 April 2020].

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² No author, ‘Final Report of the Region-Defining Committee’ (10 February 2014), available from: PA-X Peace Agreements Database, <https://www.peaceagreements.org/> [last accessed: 10 April 2020].

¹³ Tik Root and Peter Salisbury, ‘Jamal Benomar and the Fine Art of Making Peace in Yemen’, Atlantic Council (17 June 2014), available from: <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/mena-source/jamal-benomar-and-the-fine-art-of-making-peace-in-yemen/> [last accessed: 10 April 2020].

By focusing upon articulations of ‘togetherness’ within 47 interviews I have conducted with participants in the Yemeni peace process, I will make a brief attempt to address this lacuna. The interviews were conducted either in person, in Amman, Istanbul, Geneva, Washington DC and London, or remotely, and I was able to hold conversations with delegates who participated in all nine Working Groups, members of the NDC’s Secretariat, UN officials, foreign diplomats and employees of international peacebuilding NGOs. The views of Yemenis with whom I spoke will be analysed first, then those of the international peacemakers, after which my conclusion will summarise the findings and highlight troubling divergences between my two groups of interviewees.

Reflections from Yemeni participants

A number of the Yemeni participants in the NDC alluded to, or mentioned, the notion of Yemeni ‘togetherness’. At times, this was starkly stated; the Vice Chair of the Southern Issue Working Group, a civil rights activist, made the argument that ‘in Yemen, we feel very coherent, we don’t feel these differences’. Other Yemeni participants with whom I spoke felt able to refer to ‘all Yemeni people’, or firmly proclaimed the existence of a ‘national identity’. Indeed, one participant in the Rights and Freedoms Working Group, a revolutionary youth, felt that he needed to accentuate the united character of Yemen and its people in order to defend the suggestion to federalise Yemen. He commented that, despite the move to federalise, ‘we believe in one citizenry, Yemen should be one’ and, later in the interview, in reference to other federal models to which the delegates were exposed during the NDC, he argued that ‘we could ‘Yemen-ise’ that system and then we can fit it to the Yemeni culture’.

At times, this idea of a bond connecting all Yemenis was discussed only in the context of the NDC, with one interlocutor, for instance, proposing that ‘the national identity existed in everyone in the National Dialogue’, and another member of the Rights and Freedoms Working Group commenting that ‘most of the parties, in the Conference, they [were] under the idea of national identity’. Indeed, the fostering of togetherness was occasionally attributed to the NDC. A few stressed the ‘one-ness’ within their diverse Working Groups: for instance, ‘we acted as a team’, while a representative of Yemen’s private sector spoke more broadly about the way in which, during the NDC, ‘the GPC [the General People’s Congress], civil society, the youth – they all came together’. Two further participants

mentioned the importance of the mediation effort in nurturing agreement across Yemenis but they also voiced the particular role played by international actors. Moreover, the precise wording of one interviewee implies that there was resistance, at times, from the Yemeni delegates; that these efforts were not necessarily wholly successful; and that external players were required to encourage this togetherness. Thus, she commented that ‘the international community, they tried to *make* all the members agree on a solution [emphasis added]’.

More implicitly, the notion of ‘harmony among Yemenis’ within the context of the NDC also appeared to be present across a number of my conversations. It would seem that several of my interviewees wished to make the argument that there existed many areas of agreement between the delegates, and that they primarily witnessed and experienced cooperation as opposed to conflict. I interpret this as being linked to the idea of togetherness, as being expressive of a purportedly united, national community, seeking common aims. Instances include the comment from the Chair of the Sustainable Development Working Group that ‘despite different backgrounds and political affiliations – in general, everyone was moving in the same direction’; the statement from a participant in the Rights and Freedoms Working Group that ‘we all had a deal and agreed with the outcomes’; the notion that we ‘worked together for the sake of the country’; and, as a final example, one youth activist described to me the close relationships which developed between delegates, mentioning how he had been invited to the wedding of a senior politician’s son, and to his father’s home. That this delegate felt as though he had been welcomed into the family of an individual whom he would not under normal circumstances have ever met, and certainly with whom he would never have entered into negotiations, demonstrates the closeness and intimacy of the bonds which appear to have been fostered during the mediation effort.

Nevertheless, a markedly strong theme which I detected within my conversations with Yemeni participants was the idea that the mediation attempt was corrupted from within, by members of the Yemeni political elite. This idea of division appears to contradict the notion that the NDC was an arena in which togetherness was both cultivated and expressed. It also undermines the argument that this period of the peace process was one in which the Yemeni national identity played a particular role. Participants mentioned ‘internal hijacking’ and disempowerment, driven by the Consensus Committee, with one interlocutor voicing the belief that ‘there

was a text already agreed, already ready' in relation to the final report. A second participant concurred, arguing that 'they [those Yemenis responsible for the organisation and management of the NDC] were trying to push the agendas they wanted – there was management from outside the Southern Issue Working Group'. A prominent notion in this refrain was the idea that traditional power-holders would conduct crucial negotiations outside the confines of the National Dialogue, thus circumventing the NDC and excluding the 'newcomers', the youth, women and civil society delegates, recruited to supposedly represent the diversity of Yemen as a whole. Indeed, one interviewee lamented that 'all my beliefs that I fought for during the Dialogue turned out to be not achievable – because the powerful people [did] not want to have a country for all Yemeni people'. For this participant to explicitly contrast the behaviour of members of the Yemeni elite with the desire to 'have a country for *all* Yemeni people [emphasis added]' aptly encapsulates the challenge to the relevance of togetherness, and thus national identity, within the mediation effort. Therefore, despite the apparent prominence of togetherness and harmony, an undercurrent of division also permeated my conversations.

Reflections from international peacemaking practitioners

In contrast to the observations explored in the previous sub-section, far fewer international officials acknowledged togetherness as having been cultivated within, or as having shaped, the mediation attempt. Nevertheless, a powerful ambassador to Yemen who was deeply involved in the early years of the transition would refer to 'the Yemenis' and purport to speak on behalf of the population as a whole; this implied his apparent belief that the sentiments of Yemenis were unified, thus suggesting both the presence and relevance of a national identity during this period of the peace process. While a facilitator employed by the UN commented that 'there is a unifying identity' within Yemen and one foreign diplomat expressed his belief that 'all Yemenis are comfortable with Yemeni-ness', there were no further mentions of the sense of unity which was clearly emphasised to me both directly and indirectly by many of the Yemenis with whom I held conversations. Indeed, one international actor expressed scepticism, affirming to not believe the Yemenis' claims of cohesion: 'Yemenis in meetings ... would say, 'we are not so diverse' ... they are so dogmatic ... We had a discussion about South Africa – the issues there with the black majority and white minority – Yemenis would say this was interesting but

‘nothing to do with us’, that there are no differences. Of course there are.’ This offers a clear example of a direct divergence between the perceptions of the international mediation community and the views of many of the Yemeni ‘disputants’ interviewed. The language used is notable in its force; the dismissal of Yemenis as ‘dogmatic’, and the emphatic insistence that, ‘of course’, differences were both prominent and pertinent indicates the depth of feeling expressed within this interview.

Harmony, too, was almost entirely absent from my interviews with international officials. Just three mentioned this idea, and all were referring only to congruence within the international actors working on the mediation attempt. This group of participants did, however, claim to have observed divisions within the Yemeni delegates and many expressed a sentiment similar to that of my Yemeni interlocutors, offering the view that members of the Yemeni elite had subverted the NDC. One mediation expert mentioned that the ‘old elites had problems giving up structures’; a European Union (EU) diplomat commented that ‘the problem was that, increasingly, the ‘Mövenpick Republic’ became synonymous with an elite exercise it precisely was not meant to be’; and, similarly, a consultant employed by an international organisation to support the NDC remarked that ‘the National Dialogue at large slowly deteriorated from a National Dialogue into an elite deal’. The EU diplomat also mentioned the way in which private, exclusive negotiations were convened outside the halls of the Conference – ‘talks continued in *qat* chewing sessions’ – while another interviewee described his sense that the traditional powers within Yemen did not permit the youth, in particular, to meaningfully participate in the process. In this belief that the peace process had been distorted ‘from above’, then, we can perceive one area of agreement between both the Yemenis interviewed and the international peacemakers.

Conclusion

To conclude, several Yemeni delegates to the NDC conveyed their sense that there existed a unified Yemeni collective on whose behalf many seemed to be implying that they were acting during the peace process. They also communicated the impression that the Yemeni participants in the negotiations moved as one in pursuit of interests and aspirations shared by all Yemenis. I also detected a theme of harmony running through a number of my conversations; the narrative often crafted was that, despite the diversity of the participants, the delegates agreed on a multitude of areas.

Nevertheless, in an apparent contradiction, several also characterised the mediation attempt as having been undermined by the members of the Yemeni elite, and argued that this took place both within and outside the confines of the negotiating halls. Of course, it should be emphasised that a number of those interviewed were leading figures in the revolution to overthrow the old regime, and that Yemen was facing, and indeed faces, myriad challenges which have eroded the unity of the state; nevertheless, the strength and hold of togetherness within the peace efforts must be questioned, and the role played by those perceived to be part of the country's higher classes should be appraised.

The analysis above also revealed notable differences between the Yemenis with whom I spoke and the international peacemaking practitioners interviewed. Far fewer members of the international community acknowledged the existence of Yemeni unity and, indeed, one foreign actor questioned the veracity of Yemenis' claims of togetherness. Unlike my Yemeni participants, none mentioned harmony within the environment of the NDC. These international practitioners did, however, draw my attention to divisions among the Yemeni delegates to the NDC and noted alleged corruption by traditional power-holders.

My analysis demonstrated that collective identity does indeed appear to be an influential dynamic within peacemaking. It would therefore seem to be crucial that both the mediators and those receiving mediation share an understanding of the identities relevant to a conflict, the ways in which these identities might be expressed, and their potential to shape and be shaped by the negotiations. However, within the Yemeni peace process between 2011 and 2014, this does not seem to have been the case, and I would argue that the apparent rift between the two groups of interviewees has worrying implications for the ongoing mediation efforts.



SELECTED POEMS

همدان دماج - قصائد مختارة

HAMDAN DAMMAG¹

On The Half of The Ship That Has Not Yet Sunk

On the half of the ship that has not yet sunk
I passed by the corpses of those who knew not they are dead
There was a poet smiling for the cameras at a boring book signing party,
A husband dreaming of the death of his brunette mistress,
A soldier lost his helmet somewhere in the long corridors,
And a lady in her cabin dreaming of a wider window.

I passed by a drunk Captain, shambling along with joy.
There was lightning penetrating the sorrow of the walls,
Some children sleeping on the edge of a black hole,
And a violinist not knowing where he was.

I passed by the corpses of the suicide genes,
Creatures I have not seen before,
A pile of meaningless withered flowers,
And some politicians
Fighting over a territorial map of waves...
The waves that were swallowing the ship's half...
The half that has not yet sunk.

¹ Hamdan Dammag is a poet and a prize-winning novelist with several publications.

في النصف الذي لم يغرق بعد من السفينة

في النصف الذي لم يغرق بعد من السفينة
مررتُ بجثثٍ من لم يعرفوا أنهم موتى
ثمة شاعرٌ يلتقطُ صوراً في حفل التوقيع
وامرأةٌ داخل غرفتها تحلمُ بنوافذٍ أكبر...
جنديٌّ أضع بيادته في الممر
وزوجٌ يحلم بموت عشيقته السمراء...
قبطانٌ يترنح في صبوته
وأطفالٌ ناموا في فوهة ثقوبٍ أسود...
ثمة برقٌ يخترق أنين الجدران
وعازفٌ كمانٍ لا يعرف أين هو...
مررتُ بأشلاء الجينات المنتحرة
وبكائناتٍ لم أعرفها من قبل
بركام زهورٍ ذابلة المعنى
وحمقى يتعاركون على طاولة حوارٍ أعرج
يتقاسمون خرائط موجٍ كان يبتلع
النصف الذي لم يغرق بعد من السفينة.

Nights and Tales

My head is overflowing
With nights and tales
And with black thoughts.

My vision is raided
By a whirlwind of time's sand
And the sobbing of a rabid brain.

My memory is churning the summer's illusions
And the farce of whims and wills.

I hear the footpaths of sorrow rumbling in my ears
And the whistles of the trains of exile whispering:
'Hey you! Traveller in the port of the dreams
Fiddling with the strings of desire
Do not play with colours!
Lest your fingers be burnt by amazement
And the ladies fill your head with mysteries'.

حكايات

جمجمتي مترعة
بلبلٍ وحكايات
وبأفكارٍ سوداء..
تنهال على الرؤيا
زوبعة لرمال الوقت
وأنيق دماغ مسعور...
تعصرُ ذاكرتي أوهام الصيف
ونشيح هراءٍ ووصايا
تدوي في سمعي
أرصفةُ الحزنِ
وصفيرُ قطاراتِ الغربة:
"يا أنتِ الراكض في ميناءِ الحلم
العابث بأوتار الرغبة
لا تلعب بالألوان
كي لا تحرق أصابعك الدهشةُ
أو كي لا تحشو النسوةُ
رأسك
بالألغاز".

But I Won't

Hey you! Yes you, the photographer
 Come closer and take your time!
 I won't spoil it, and I won't smile
Your shaky photo will be sold
And in tomorrow's front pages you may see my face
But I won't.

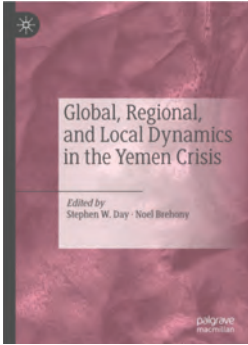
And you! Yes you, the pretty journalist
 Come closer, I am not that blind
 And I won't tell you what's in my mind
Your half story will be sold
And tonight – on TV – you may see your face
But I won't.

And you! Yes you, the perplexed poet
 Come closer and write me a song
 I won't last in your conscience for long
Your rubbish poem will be sold
And you may then feel the usual guilt
But I won't.

لكنني لن...!

أنتِ، أيها المصور!
اقترب قليلاً! لِمَ ترتعش يداك؟!
لستُ مبتسماً كما ترى،
ولن أتحرك إذا ما أردت...
وغداً، حين تراني في الصفحة الأولى،
ستبكي...
لكنني لن.
وأنتِ، أيتها المنبِعةُ الحسنة!
اقتربي قليلاً ولا تقلقي
فلن أنام، ولن أقول الحقيقة!
وغداً، حين ترين نفسك في برنامج المساء،
ستفرحين...
لكنني لن.
وأنتِ...
نعم، أنتِ أيها الشاعر!
اقترب قليلاً! مرتبكاً أراك
وضائعاً كما الكلمات!
زائفةٌ هو الدمع، وريئةٌ هي القصيدة،
وغداً، حين تقرأها في الكتاب،
ستندم...
لكنني لن.

BOOK REVIEWS



Global, Regional, and Local Dynamics in the Yemen Crisis, Stephen Day and Noel Brehony editors, Cham, Palgrave Macmillan 2020, pp 321 Hb ISBN 978 30 30355 77 7, ebook ISBN 978 3 030 355784 £89.99

Situated on the southwestern tip of the Arabian Peninsula, the land now known as the Republic of Yemen has long been the envy of outside forces. Indeed, from the very earliest of times, outsiders have often been intent on having control of Yemen, whether for its supposed riches or for its strategic location overlooking the lower Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden.

One thinks of an ancient Greek called Hippalus who managed to secure the secrets of the seasonal trade winds blowing between India and Yemen. One also thinks of the British who, in 1839, secured Aden as a way station on the route to that same India.

In a word, outside forces have long played a role in Yemeni history – a point Yemenis are well aware of. In fact, Yemenis have themselves long cultivated the interests of outside forces as a means of survival, often even playing them off against one another. Think of Washington DC and Moscow in the 1970s.

Years ago, one prominent Yemeni politician told me straight up that his country had ‘always had to look to the East and the West if it was to survive – and sometimes it looks both ways at once.’

That historical interaction between Yemen and the wider world is very much the essence of *Global, Regional, and Local Dynamics in the Yemen Crisis*. Edited by Stephen W. Day and Noel Brehony – two eminent authorities on Yemen – this book brings the work of other noted authorities to bear on the current situation in the country: the outrageous war that has engulfed the populace over much of the past decade, leaving tens of thousands dead, the land in ruins, and the economy in a shambles that will take decades, if ever, to fully repair. It is an unspeakable tragedy in a land that seems to have endured nothing but tragedy in its long history.

This book, however, is not about that long history. To the contrary, it is about a relatively short part of that history. As Stephen Day writes in his

introduction: ‘contributors were asked to address sequentially the same chronology of events from Yemen’s political crisis during and after 2011 to warfare between 2015 and 2019’. Not least, according to Mr Day, ‘no single chapter of the book offers a comprehensive explanation of what happened in Yemen’ during this period. That brings us to the very heart of what makes this book so interesting. Instead of attempting a single comprehensive explanation of what happened in Yemen during this brief period of history, the individual chapters in this book offer us the perspective of various players in the unfolding drama of the time: global players, regional players and local players. According to Mr Day, the authors of the chapters were asked to ‘review the interests, motives and actions of a designated actor(s), explaining how these interests, motives and actions impacted what transpired in Yemen.’ Another very useful innovation in this book is the decision of the editors to have contributors ‘rely, wherever possible, on personal interviews with key decision-makers.’

The result is a book of vivid individual chapters that essentially see the same sequence of events in Yemen from a multiplicity of viewpoints – the viewpoints of the various actors involved. The effect is much like an ophthalmologist adding one lens after another in order to reach the optimal vision for a patient. In the case of this book, the lenses start large with global players and move smaller through regional players down to the smallest local ones. In the end, one has a view of the same period though many lenses – a viewpoint that is at once highly complex, but also very clear.

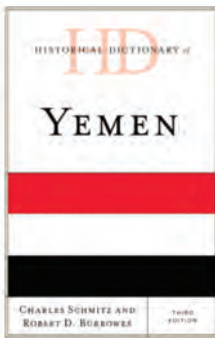
It’s an approach that meets the needs of Yemen’s complexity perfectly. Indeed, it was the editors’ intention ‘to allow the reader to form his or her own opinion of what happened in the country by considering these different points of view. The book’s greatest merit is its development of a more comprehensive analysis of how Yemen’s political crisis and war unfolded by presenting different interpretations of the same events.’ By applying the three main levels of analysis, the book – as the editors say – ‘offers the reader an optimal chance to understand Yemen’s tragic predicament’.

There is an old saying that ‘many stories come out of Sana’a’ – and they really do. One of the difficulties in understanding Yemen comes from the very fact that there are so many stories – more often than not, conflicting stories, too. As a journalist there years ago, I would often find myself trying to sort out the various stories I was given by people – global,

regional and local players – who each had an interest in the outcome of my writing.

At first, I found myself in a state of confusion from so many stories from so many different sources. In the end, though, I learned that one had to transcend the individual accounts to reach a view that accommodated them all while not exactly identified with any of them. That is the experience recreated in this book. The editors and authors have produced a volume of compelling stories, a collection that enables transcendent insight into the myriad political processes leading to the current horrors in this tragic land on the southwestern tip of the Arabian Peninsula.

ERIC WATKINS¹



Historical Dictionary of Yemen, (third edition) by Charles Schmitz and Robert Burrowes, Lanham, Bowman and Littlefield, 2018, pp 671, ISBN 978 15 38102 32 9 Hb \$153, ebook \$145

This monumental book attempts a very difficult approach to presenting many issues concerned with Yemeni history by using a ‘dictionary’ format. Indeed, it is a cross between a dictionary and an encyclopaedia. The two authors lived in Yemen at different times, and their personal experience is clearly reflected in the choice of entries. Starting with a very detailed 70 page chronology going as far back as 1200 BC and ending in April 2017, this suffers from the usual problems of chronologies, giving much more detail to the most recent periods, while remaining sketchy about earlier ones. The introduction also gives disproportionate attention to the most recent period but provides their analysis of the main events which have affected Yemen until early 2017. The book ends with a comprehensive bibliography or all important publications on Yemen up to early 2017.

The dictionary’s strengths include a number of long, encyclopaedic entries on aspects of the specific experience of one or the other author. They present their views and detailed analysis in what are essays, rather than dictionary entries. Examples of these are the articles on the Arab Spring, counter terrorism, the economy, ‘modernists,’ the National

¹ Eric Watkins served as the *Financial Times* Yemen Correspondent from 1990-94.

Dialogue Conference of 2013–14, oil and gas, PDRY and YAR, religion, Salafism, the Saleh regime and era, ending with the unification process and Zaydism. Some of these focus on Yemen, while others bring a broader perspective. Other longer entries are rather too sketchy and superficial as, for example, on money and currencies.

Another strength is found in the short descriptions of geographical areas, governorates and subsidiary political entities throughout the country. Biographies of numerous Yemeni personalities and political organisations of the past century are a really important and helpful contribution to researchers, as well as short entries on a range of incidents and events, some of which have been forgotten even by those closely involved with the country. There are, however, some notable absences concerning individuals, the following are only a few examples: Mohammed al Bukhayti is ignored while Ali, his less important brother, is included; a number of members of the Huthi family are mentioned but Husayn is not. Neither Ali Shaye Hadi (an important YSP leader killed in 1986) nor his son Shalal (a currently important members of a southern separatist organisation) are mentioned. Mohammed Abu Luhum and many other contemporary politicians are not included.

The choice of some titles is surprising, eg. ‘attack’ to deal with the 3 June 2011 explosion in Saleh’s mosque, ‘borders and border disputes’ bringing together a whole series of unrelated events, the inclusion of US presidents, or the discussion of religious issues under the ‘social structure’ entry, while Zaydism and Shafi‘ism are, correctly, given their own detailed entries. Others might question the merging of the Abdul Rahman al-Iryani and al-Hamdi regimes under a single heading.

The dictionary partly reflects what has turned out to be the authors’ unjustified optimism: their entry on federalism gives the impression that the six-region federation proposed by president Hadi in 2014 was implemented, something which by the time the work was completed in 2017 was already unlikely to be the case. The systematic description of the current civil war as being 2015–2017 is unfortunately also wrong, and others writing today normally just describe it as 2015– leaving the end date open, given the lack of prospects of it ending within a predictable time frame.

There are a number of small errors of fact, including the comical suggestion (to those of us who knew the PDRY) that Thamoud was the 7th governorate of the PDRY: the 7th governorate was the euphemism used to describe the country’s prisons, particularly for political detainees! Lack of

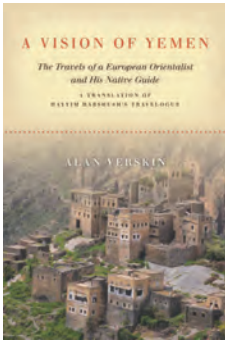
sufficient copy editing is clear in the conflicting information in the entries on the Hadhramaut Elite Forces and that on the Security Belts: the second correctly describes them as UAE creations whereas the first includes Saudi Arabia and other elements as founders. The suggestion that Salem Rubaya Ali disagreed with the Yemeni Socialist Party is correct, except that he was killed 4 months before its creation.

The following are minor quibbles, the absence of birth and death dates for some personalities eg Naji al-Ghadir, Abdu Rabbo Hadi, Haines, Muhammad al-Junayd, Muhsin, Ahmed Saeed and more; weak proof reading which mistakenly describes Shanfara as leader of the al-Baydah faction of Hiraq when clearly what is meant is the al-Beedh faction, al-Baydah being a northern governorate, certainly lacking a strong southern separatist movement. The authors' decision on the ordering of names allows for some confusion, but that is primarily because of the complex and unsystematic way Yemenis order their usual three names, something which is explained.

The most irritating feature of the volume is its physical hard binding: it is almost impossible to hold it open at any particular page, even towards the middle of the book, thus making consultation a frustrating double handed process, only partially assisted by the use of very heavy objects, certainly not the authors' mistake. This problem is most likely shared with other volumes in the series and should be addressed by the publishers in later editions.

Overall, despite its considerable cost, this dictionary is a major contribution to knowledge and understanding of Yemen, which should be helpful both to people who are just beginning to be involved with Yemen and to many experts, given its ability to cover a wide range of aspects in greater or lesser detail. Though it is clearly limited by the concentration on certain periods and the neglect others in the past century.

HELEN LACKNER



A Vision of Yemen: The Travels of a European Orientalist and His Native Guide, A Translation of Hayyim Habshush's Travelogue, by Alan Verskin, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2018, pp. xviii+258, Pb. ISBN: 978 15 03607 73 6, £ 23.99.

This is a translation into English from Hebrew and Judaeo-Arabic of a work by Hayyim Habshush about his journey with Joseph Halévy around much of northern Yemen in 1870. Habshush's account is preceded by Verskin's 36-page biographical introduction to the three main dramatis personae (Hayyim Habshush, Joseph Halévy, and Eduard Glaser, who years later encouraged Habshush to write his account).

There is then an 18-page overview of the People and Politics of Yemen, and a brief note on the text and translation. This is followed by the translation of Habshush's text itself.

The author of the text is Jewish, as is – presumably – the translator (or at least a Hebrew translator.) As such, he has access to a great deal of situational information that is otherwise functionally inaccessible to many who work on the wider Middle East. For that introduction into a neighbouring academic silo, the translator has done the cause of Yemenuca a great service. However, the translator's background in Judaica also limits his familiarity with more Arab-focused studies, such as Philby's *Arabian Highlands*, which covers much of the same ground (in sometimes tedious detail) only 50 years later. The translator's Judaic scholarship and focus sometimes makes it feel as if both Halévy and Habshush were apart from Yemen, rather than a Yemenite guiding a tourist around his homeland.

The translation is in a modern register (rather than a contemporaneous one), and informal, as Habshush's is for the most part. There may be differences between the Judaeo-Arabic and the 1992 Arabic versions of the text, but some of the details in the latter are missing from this translation. The translator's lack of familiarity with the locale sometimes results in an inadequate understanding of the context, leading to either vague or inaccurate renderings of Habshush's nuanced text (as with the criticism of Lewin's 'General Sketch of the Topography' of Jerusalem for a similar reason).

One key import of *A Vision of Yemen* which the translator seems to miss is that their journey was made in 1870, two years before the Ottoman (re)conquest of Yemen. It is thus a snapshot of Yemen as it had existed for

centuries, before much foreign-driven modernisation (both of the country and its languages). By the time Harris visited two decades later: ‘The shops are well supplied with European goods, and a large manufacture of silk, jewellery, and arms is carried on there. The quarter in which the Government buildings are situated presents almost a European appearance, with its large Turkish shops, its cafés, and its open places, on one of which, in front of the Governor-General’s official residence, a military band discourses anything but sweet music of an afternoon.’ (WB Harris, *A Journey Through Yemen* (1893), p.107)

There are the usual scatterings of typographic errors, omissions etc: Goitein’s English synopsis was first published in 1941, not 1983; as well as the other translations, Habshush is an important source for Piamenta’s wonderful *Dictionary of Post Classical Yemeni Arabic*; *sharif* and *sayyid* are not used interchangeably; about half of (then) Yemenis were Zaydis; etc. Surprisingly, there is no bibliography.

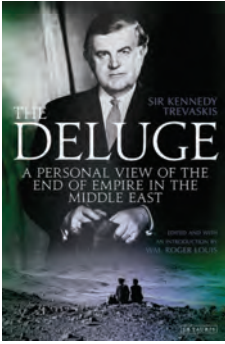
As almost customary in such works, the mapping is poor. Halévy’s large map is reproduced and reduced to a 5”x 6” dim square (p.xvi) that is, as a result, almost illegible without a magnifying glass. The following sketch map is equally small, with the ‘area in general’ insert carelessly placed to conceal Najran and the northern parts of al-Jawf – where some of the more interesting episodes occur. Unlike the Halévy map, there is no designation of the route taken by the travellers.

The work is exhaustively annotated – at times exhaustingly so – with references and explanatory notes, as well as Habshush’s own parenthetical notes, all collated as end notes. It would be a great improvement to the readability of the work – and save feverish page-turning back and forth – if the editor had set references as end notes, and explanatory content as footnotes – as indeed is the occasional asterisked case already.

A final point concerns the subtitle: the 1992 Markaz al-Dirasat edition *Vision of Yemen* has *Between Habshush and Halévy* as its subtitle. When describing a guide, ‘Dragoman’ would have been a period term (as in Lewin’s *The Siege of Jerusalem by Titus* (1863)), and ‘local guide’ a modern one. This book was published before the Black Lives Matter movement, but what Orientalist fetish possessed the publisher to describe Habshush as a ‘native guide’?

This is a work of passion and considerable scholarship, and is a valuable contribution to the study of Yemen as a whole. Highly recommended.

JAMES SPENCER



The Deluge: A Personal View of the End of Empire in the Middle East, by Sir Kennedy Trevaskis KCMG OBE (ed. by Wm. Roger Lewis), I.B. Tauris, London, 2019, pp. xxx+319. Intro. Foreword. Maps. Notes. Index. Hb. £ 27.50, ISBN: 978 17 84538 27 9, DOI: 10.5040/ 978 18 38600 89 1.

Kennedy Trevaskis (1915–1990) is a well-known personality among those who study the last decades of British colonial rule in Aden and the Protectorate of South Arabia. A controversial figure for many, he undeniably left an indelible mark in the historical and political trajectory of what became after independence the People’s Republic of South Yemen. Having spent a decade as the British Agent for the Western Aden Protectorate between 1953–1963, he rose to the position of High Commissioner for his brainchild, the Federation of South Arabia. Trevaskis recorded his memoirs of the fourteen years he spent in South Arabia in the monograph *Shades of Amber: A South Arabian Episode* (Hutchinson of London, 1968), which appeared on the immediate aftermath of Britain’s relinquishment of its last Middle Eastern colonial possession.

The book under review is Trevaskis’ hitherto unpublished autobiography, which he wrote after his retirement. Although his longstanding friend, the Conservative MP, known for his own involvement in the Yemeni civil war, Julian Amery, provided a foreword to the memoir shortly after the author’s death in 1990, the manuscript had remained in family hands until its current publication. And whilst *Shades of Amber* is entirely about the author’s South Arabian experience, in *The Deluge* the same events are covered in the second half of the book (Part VI: ‘The End of Aden and the Raj,’ pp. 175–311). In the first half Trevaskis recounts his earlier experiences as colonial district officer in Zambia, his wartime service in the Horn of Africa, during which he was captured by the Italians and spent time as prisoner of war in Eritrea, and his near decade-long work for the British Military Administration of Eritrea. It was after a short interlude in Zambia that in 1951 he achieved his goal to secure an appointment in the South Arabian colonial service. Even though the present review focuses on the South Arabian part of the book, his Eritrean background will also help the reader to understand how Trevaskis’ personal outlook

and opinions on what he considered viable solutions to the festering problems of South Arabia were shaped.

The appearance of *The Deluge* has coincided roughly with the 50th anniversary of the British expulsion from Aden in 1967. This occasion presented the opportunity for a re-evaluation of an episode in the British imperial venture that has been deemed by both the Yemenis and British involved in it as a traumatic affair. Furthermore, the current revival of southern secessionism in Yemen has reopened pertinent questions on the failure of the South Arabian federal project and the reasons for the ultimate success of the National Liberation Front. Unfortunately, Trevaskis' new autobiography does not offer any answers. At least none that cannot be already found in his earlier book. *The Deluge* reads rather as a supplement to *Shades of Amber* in that it presents the undiluted and usually unfavourable opinion the author had of most of his colleagues, superiors, and adversaries. It provides the author's honest thoughts behind the measured, diplomatic language he employs in *Shades of Amber*.

But Trevaskis' candour goes as far as his aim to change the historical record in his favour and to exonerate himself from every bad decision would allow him. In two characteristic examples he directly contradicts his own account in *Shades of Amber* to present a more favourable one in *The Deluge*. Thus, for example, the failed operation to install a military detachment in the village of Robat turns from being Trevaskis' actual decision and admitted 'lack of judgment' despite the Governor's qualms (*Shades*, pp. 51–52) into being the Governor's ironically described as 'helpful advice' (*Deluge*, p. 222). By the time he became High Commissioner in 1963 attacks on British targets had increased. As he was about to board a London-bound aeroplane at Aden airport a grenade explosion aimed at him claimed the lives of two members of the group around him and wounded several others. A suspect, member of the People's Socialist Party (PSP), was arrested but later freed due to lack of evidence. Trevaskis, intent on incriminating Abdallah al-Asnaj, the head of the PSP and trades union leader, but above all a thorn on the side of the British authorities for the better part of a decade, writes in *The Deluge* (p. 300) that he had telephoned him early that morning and he was uncharacteristically absent from home. He does not mention the arrested suspect, and leaves the readers to draw their own conclusions from al-Asnaj's suspect disappearance. In *Shades of Amber* by contrast, al-Asnaj answers the telephone and even wishes him 'a nice trip' to London (p. 198).

The above might not come as a surprise after the author's own admission (p. 260) that he used to write the weekly reports of the *Sunday Times*' Aden correspondent himself! It is unfortunate, therefore, that all these and a number of other discrepancies with his earlier book, whether deliberate or not, inevitably call to serious question the reliability and accuracy of his later autobiography. Writing decades after the events and with access to the published accounts of a significant number of other protagonists, not least his own, Trevaskis studiously avoids to engage with their opinions or even at least self-reflect and re-evaluate his own historical role. As a political officer he found it difficult to work with his superiors, Hickinbotham and Johnston. As an adviser his efforts were frustrated by local chiefs, three of whom were deposed and two defected during his tenure. As High Commissioner he failed to persuade Whitehall of the suitability of his policies. In this sense, if *The Deluge* does not offer any new insights into the history of South Arabia, it certainly does when it comes to its author. Commendable though it is that Trevaskis' family made available for publication his latent manuscript, those interested in that period will find *Shades of Amber* a much more useful and engaging read.

THANOS PETOURIS



Boy from the Moor: his life, adventures and sudden disappearance by Helen Balkwill, Elsie E.E. Publishing 2019. ISBN: 978 19 16137 60 8. 248pp. £16.99.

Many members of the British-Yemeni Society know Helen Balkwill as an active membership secretary who had lived in Aden as a young girl. A few might have been aware that her father Peter, the 'Boy from the Moor' had died in a hit-and run accident in Aden in December 1969. I arrived at the British Embassy in Aden a few weeks later and remember my colleagues discussing his death. Peter had been one of several Airworks personnel that had stayed on after the British departure on 30 November 1967 to help support what had been the South Arabian Air Force and was now part of the armed forces of the People's Republic of South Yemen (PRSY). As Helen relates, her family and the embassy were unable to confirm any details of his death and his grave has not been located: he had disappeared. Helen and her family were devastated, and this book is the fruit of Helen's

intrepid research into his life over a long period – including three visits to Aden – and her ability to write in such an engrossing and vivid style. There is much that is fascinating in this book: the life stories of Peter's friends and relatives; the insights into life in Aden in the first months of the new republic.

Helen lived in Aden through the turbulence and chaos of the first years of the PRSY as the National Liberation Front converted itself into a governing party. Aden's economy had been devastated by the closure of the Suez Canal in 1967 (it did not re-open till 1975), the loss of subsidies and jobs associated with the British presence, a mass exodus of those that were concerned about their possible fate under the new regime and attacks across the country's borders by the regime's many opponents. Between 1967 and 1970 there was an attempted coup, a left wing uprising and then, in June 1969, the Glorious Corrective Move which saw the ousting of the first President, Qahtan al-Sha'bi, and the takeover by the left wing of the National Liberation Front, which in 1970 changed the name to the PDRY.

The few Airworks personnel were part of the tiny British community in Aden (there were still quite a few working with BP in Little Aden). The National Liberation Front had only started to negotiate with the British nine days before its chaotic takeover on 30 November 1967. The Airworks personnel could see this happening and kept their bags packed in case they had to leave in a hurry. Nevertheless, Helen attended a convent school in Aden and her family tried to live as normal a life as possible. As she says: 'unless one personally experiences it, it is hard to truly know what it is like living the legacy of seismic global events, and how it affects ordinary people's everyday existence'. All this is vividly described from the point of view of a young girl in Chapter Nine.

Helen has searched everywhere and talked to everyone she could find that knew her father or of him. She takes us through that journey starting with the letter that devastated her family. The stories told by those she encountered paint vivid pictures of Peter as a much-loved boy surrounded by his aunts, a shy but dependable National Serviceman as well as his long courtship of Helen's mother Joan while he was leading a peripatetic life supporting crop spraying aircraft. She writes of the pain caused by the disappointments of not being able to find his final resting place.

There is much that is fascinating in this book, including photographs of Aden in the late 1960s that will bring back memories to all those living in Aden at the time. She gives an overview of developments since then,

enlivened by accounts of her subsequent visits to Aden. What comes out most strongly is the respect and love of the *Boy from the Moor*, his zest for life and the impact on the life of a young girl of eight losing a much-loved father. It is informative, interesting and poignant.

NOEL BREHONY



Le Yémen et les Yéménites tels que les a vus, décrits et aimés Claudie Fayein, French and Arabic, edited by Michel Tuchscherer and the Fayein family, Sana'a, Centre Français d'Archéologie et de Sciences Sociales de Sana'a (CEFAS), 2012, ISBN 978 29 09194 33 2 pp 214

This French and Arabic book was published in the early days of the Yemeni crisis, when CEFAS was closing, and therefore hard copies are unavailable which is unfortunate as colour photographs of people, objects, crafts, schools, archaeological sites and landscapes throughout Yemen in the 1970s are among the most attractive features of the book. Claudie Fayein was as famous among the Francophone community concerned with Yemen, as Freya Stark is for the British. Her book, *A French Doctor in Yemen* was published in many languages in the 1950s. She also published an introduction to Yemen in the *Petite Planète* series in 1975, as well as other writings on her anthropological and other work giving much focus to women. Her relationship with Yemen lasted to the end of her life, and she was even given Yemeni nationality at the time of unification in 1990, a photo of her Yemeni passport is in the book.

Throughout the travels recounted in this book, her practice of medicine contributed considerably in facilitating her access to people and both local information and knowledge. She always carried supplies of medication which she used and distributed as needed and some of her time was devoted exclusively to medical practice. Her descriptions of the main medical problems and working conditions in hospitals remain a unique record of the period. Her intimate discussions of women's circumstances owe much to the trust arising from the medical help she gave them.

In the course of the 1970s she visited most parts of Yemen, and this book focuses on the YAR with the exception of a chapter about her visit to the revolutionaries in Dhofar (Oman) in 1970, at a time when the movement against the Sultan was at the peak of its success. The seven other chapters give accounts of practical aspects of daily Yemeni life, the political issues of the day and her activities. Her jobs ranged from providing data and information on women for the anthropological work of the well-known French researcher Joseph Chelhod, to many journeys undertaken to build up the anthropological collection for the establishment of the Sana'a national museum. She also travelled and worked with French archaeological missions, and includes photos of numerous items discovered on those trips and later included in the Sana'a museum. Even description of work in the museum is enlivened with personal stories such as having to be rescued from the building by a ladder reaching a window when she found herself locked in by mistake.

Starting with her arrival in Taiz in late 1969, she returns to visit an old friend, one of the Imam's divorced wives who remained single till his death. She reconnects with former colleagues and friends with whom she had practised medicine in the early 1950s. These remained her companions in the following decades, often travelling with her; Nurse Naguiba joined most of the journeys discussed in the book. Their joint medical work was particularly helpful in collecting information on women's lives and circumstances in different parts of the country, and address many issues which are still relevant today, such as early marriage. One major asset of this book is the fact that she travelled everywhere from the far north in Sa'da and Shahara to al-Baydha in the east and the coastal Tihama plain, thus providing comparative details of living conditions and events covering most socio-cultural communities in Yemen.

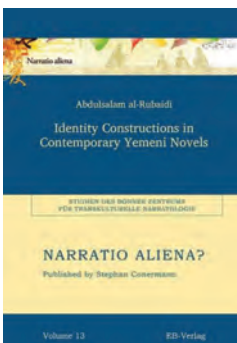
Throughout the book, she recounts anecdotes of her experiences, focusing on social life and politics, giving a highly detailed and intimate view of the conflicts and issues relevant to the particular area at that time of significant upheavals, including her encounters with senior Yemeni government and other important personalities. Her friendship with leading republican politicians contributed to some of her journeys, but she also had to deal with former royalists and others with whom she had less sympathy. The book thus reveals some of the details of the ongoing tensions between the political factions in the early 1970s, just after the end of the civil war when much was still in flux.

Chapter 2 focuses on her study of the Hashed area, her encounter with Shaykh Abdullah bin Husayn al Ahmar as his permission was essential to visit that area. She details her journey to Khamr, with descriptions of the town, its houses and, incidentally, the traditions of protected market towns where feuds are given a respite. Her description of meetings with officials and the way she negotiated her way through the still active tensions between republicans and former royalists give a clear flavour to her account.

In Tihama she photographed the outside and interior of local houses, providing unique information of their decorations, but also of rituals. She was present at the circumcision of a group of boys, and managed to also get information on the rarer practice of female excision, about which she accepts some of the justification.

In addition to its remarkable collection of photographs, the book is a treasure of information about the YAR in the first years of peace after the end of the civil war. Fayein's combined skills as anthropologist and doctor improve the quality of the insights and analyses of social and political phenomena, alongside daily life in many parts of the country. Despite the likely expense of reproducing the photos, it would be of interest to many readers of English. In addition to being a travelogue comparable to those of Freya Stark, an English edition would be of considerable use to historians, anthropologists and any others wanting a highly informative but easily accessible book about the country half a century ago.

HELEN LACKNER



Identity Constructions in Contemporary Yemeni Novels, by Abdulsalam al-Rubaidi, Berlin, EB Verlag, 2020, pp 204, ISBN 978 38 68933 25 3 Euro 34,80.

Arising from the author's doctorate dissertation, this book focuses on eight contemporary Yemeni novels, though its analysis includes other books by the same authors or about similar topics. As its frontispiece points out 'Literature is not a tool of prophecy, it is rather a tool for interpreting reality' and the author's objective is to demonstrate how the authors he analyses are attempting to promote a humanistic vision for a solution to some of

Yemen's major problems. He has selected books published between 2008 and 2017, written in the current period of upheavals in the country, including the 2011 popular uprisings and the early years of the current civil war. None of the books discussed directly addresses these problems and, indeed, some of them are situated during earlier centuries. All, however address contemporary underlying problems of Yemeni politics and society, problems which need to be addressed in a humanistic way if they are to be solved in the interests of a more humane society in the future.

Each major theme is preceded by the author's analysis of the relevant social and political background; as in all cases, these interpretations of history and events are highly personal and subject to challenge and although the author's bibliography is very comprehensive, it is noticeable that he has ignored some seminal writings and authors. His alignment with southern separatism, while not explicit, is strongly suggested by some of his interpretations and assertions.

The first main social problem he addresses is that of regional identities and in particular the representations of the cities of Aden and Sana'a, the first focusing on the city's more open and cosmopolitan features during British rule. *Steamer Point* presents a sympathetic view of the British colonial period, a view which certainly has been revived since unification in 1990 at the expense of the anti-colonial perception which dominated during the socialist period. This book also gives a positive perception of relations between southerners and northerners: its author, Ahmed Zayn's identity as a native of Hodeida, currently residing in Saudi Arabia, enables him to ignore the current major anti-northern discrimination prevailing in Aden and elsewhere in the South. The issue of regional identity is also addressed in Nadia Kawkabani's *My Sana'a* and *Ali Mohsen's Marketplace* the latter being the only one of these novels taking place in the contemporary setting. Here the main focus is the issue of social strata and the problems arising from the political discrimination based on regionalism and social status.

The second main theme is that of religious identities: after an introduction addressing the problems of Zaydism and Shafi'ism, as well as the important political introduction of Salafism in the north of the country, he covers some novels which address these issues. However, somewhat surprisingly, Rubaidi chooses to focus on novels discussing Jews in Yemen, in particular Ali al-Muqri's *The Sweet Jew*. Although Jews were a significant minority in earlier centuries, since the middle of the 20th century they

are a microscopic minority, and numerically less significant than even Christians or Hindus. This leaves the reader to wonder why this group has been given such a privileged position to represent religious identities at the expense, for example, of issues focused on Salafism or even the tensions existing between Zaydis and Shafi'is. The other religious identity discussed is that of Ismailis, focused on a novel set in the Sulayhi period, Muhammed al-Gharbi Amran's *Ya'il's Darkness*. While at that time the Sulayhis were dominant as they ruled the country, at least today Ismailis, although a small minority, are of both regional and numerical significance.

The third theme is that of ethnic identities: here again the novels selected are focused on exclusion issues: former slaves, *muwalladeen* (individuals whose father is Yemeni and mother from another country) and *akhdam* (very low status 'servant' dark skinned group, who prefer to be known as *muhamasheen* or marginalised). These novels focus on issues of social stratification and migration. The first author is, again, Ali al-Muqri, whose book *Black Taste, Black Smell* focuses on the relationship between *akhdam* and mainstream society in Taiz, while the second author, Ammar Baatawil, has two books discussed in this volume, *Salmin* and *Ekron 94*. *Salmin* discusses the issue of people of slave ancestry as well as those of 'mixed race' in Hadramaut, and the inability to change status despite economic success in Saudi Arabia. *Ekron 94* focuses on the political positions taken by the different villagers in Hadramaut during the 1994 civil war.

The author's conclusion focuses on the importance of humanism as a solution to Yemen's problems, including the acceptance of all as equals regardless of background or the various identities he has discussed throughout the book, a conclusion probably shared by most Yemenis. Overall this book presents an interesting analysis of Yemeni perceptions of some social issues and themes addressed by contemporary Yemeni novels but leaves the feeling that the author has focused primarily on marginal issues rather than those of priority concern to the overwhelming majority of Yemenis. It also leaves many questions open: given the nature of the current deep crisis affecting the country, why has the author ignored some of the main divides which are of greater significance for the country's future? These include the major religious divides such as the rise of Salafism, regional divides, rural-urban differences, or those within the 'north' or indeed political issues, such as those relating to the presence or lack of political allegiances, or the role of tribalism.

Sold at a reasonable price for an academic volume, it is unfortunate that it benefited from insufficient copy editing, leaving some English terminology doubtful, while the absence of proof-reading suggests carelessness. Still worth reading for those interested in Yemeni social stratification and its current incarnations.

EDITOR



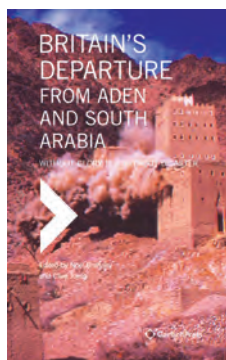
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BOOK NOTES



Ancient South Arabia through History, Kingdoms, Tribes and Traders, edited by George Hatke and Ronald Ruzicka, Newcastle upon Tyne, Cambridge Scholars Publications, 2019, ISBN 978 15 27530 55 3
Hb £64.99

This multi-lingual book (chapters in English, German, and French) provides detailed analysis of different elements of the Austrian Academy of Sciences collection of ‘squeezes and inscriptions’ of the Eduard Glaser collection. They range from descriptions of Glaser’s life (Elisabeth Monamy, Stefan Siennell) and how he came to collect all these items to a discussion of the digitization of the collection and development of the KALAM software programme (Ronald Ruzicka, George Hatke) to analyse the Sabaic language. Although some chapters of the book focused on linguistic issues (Peter Stein), some are also concerned with architecture, connecting it with epigraphy (Mounir Arbach, Christian Darles), while Daum’s article discusses the role of tithes and religion. Clearly a very specialised book, but one essential to those concerned with ancient Arabian epigraphy.



Britain’s Departure from Aden and South Arabia, without glory but without disaster, edited by Noel Brehony and Clive Jones, Berlin, 2020, Gerlach Press, pp 204, Hb £70 , ISBN 978 39 59940 82 5

Published in July, this book arises from discussions at a conference held at RUSI in London on 4 December 2017. As its title points out it focuses on the last years of the British period in Aden and the Protectorates. Its main contribution is the combination of memoirs by participants and recent analysis. It has chapters by officials who were directly involved in Aden’s last

British years, John Ducker, John Harding, and Oliver Miles, as well as by others who have researched the period in detail, the editors as well as Jonathan Walker, Martin Jerrett, Tore Petersen, James Worrall, Simon Smith and Helen Lackner, while Thanos Petouris and Joseph Higgins are working on their doctorates on the period. It will be reviewed in detail in

next year's journal. But interested members should not hesitate to buy copies without delay. They will find it a gripping read.



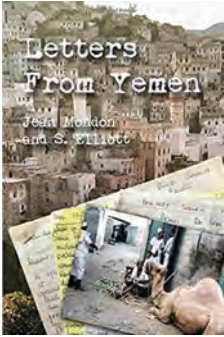
The Fox Hunt, a memoir of Yemen and my odyssey to America, by Mohammed al Samawi, New York, 2019 William Morrow paperback, pp 324, Pb £15, ISBN 978 00 62678 20 1

A young Sana'ani Zaydi developed considerable interest in inter-faith dialogue in about 2010, and initiated some serious exchanges of views on social media with Christians and Jews around the world, leading to him attending international conferences of like-minded people where he met youth from other countries. Holding and publicising such views in Yemen is difficult at the best of time. His timing was particularly unfortunate. When the full-scale war started and the Huthis took over Sana'a in 2015, he first moved to Aden, and worked for an international NGO. Threatened by jihadis, he tried to leave. The first part of this book recounts the details of his life and views, how he negotiated his open mindedness with parents and friends. The second part gives details of his difficulties in leaving Yemen and the help he got from his inter-faith colleagues in the US and elsewhere. Throughout the book is interspersed with clear basic information on the political and social situation about the Yemeni crisis at the different moments since 2010. This is an easy read, with many personal details about the friends who helped him as well as some details of the situation until the early days of the current war.



A winter in Arabia, a journey through Yemen, by Freya Stark, London, Tauris Parke, 2010, pp315, ISBN 978 07 55633 82 1 pb £11.99

This latest re-issue of Freya Stark's well known account of her travels in Hadramaut in the 1930s is a testament to her fame and the continued interest in her books. Most members will already have copies on their shelves, but newcomers to Yemen will enjoy this personal description of remote areas close to a century ago, and appreciate a vision of 'Arabia Felix', however romantic and remote it may seem today.



Letters from Yemen by Jean Mondon and S. Elliott, Santa Cruz, 2018, pp 105, pb £6.00, ISBN 978 19 83579 55 4

In the 1980s, the main British NGO operating in Yemen sent medical staff to train Yemeni women in health care in two main sites, the then isolated mountains of Raymah in the highlands and later in Abs on the foothills of northern Tihama. Volunteers went on two-year assignments to train future Yemeni midwives and local health workers. This long lasting project involved some current senior B-YS members,

and was perceived with a wide range of views by both participants and outsiders. This book, the edited letters of a midwife who worked in Abs between 1984 and 86, is particularly interesting and evocative for a number of reasons. She was probably the oldest of the volunteers, already in her sixties when she arrived. Also by contrast with many of her colleagues, she had a long career behind her in Africa: while she was familiar with the aid environment, she was less idealistic than many of her younger colleagues. In addition to providing a vision of Yemen from someone completely new to its culture and environment, and giving vivid descriptions of places which have changed enormously in the past three decades, her account also raises important issues about the project's development approach. Anyone involved in Yemen at that time will find it a worthwhile read and an opportunity to reminisce, while others will be interested in identifying differences and similarities with later periods in the development sector, whether from INGOs or other organisations.



The Camel's Neighbour, Travel and Travellers in Yemen, by Andrew Moscrop, Oxford, 2020, Signal Books, pp 352, Pb £12.99, ISBN 978 19 09930 89 6

Andrew Moscrop's account of daily life in Sana'a combines with details and quotes from 26 travellers who have visited the city since the sixteenth century, starting with Ludovico di Varthema and ending with Tim Mackintosh-Smith. Working as a medical researcher in 2005-6, he lived there at a time when the country's political crises were under the control of the Saleh regime, and Westerners could still travel

reasonably easily and establish friendships with Yemenis.

Alongside many other Europeans working in Sana'a, he chose to live in the old city, as its wealthier original inhabitants have moved to more modern accommodation beyond the city walls, leaving tourists and foreigners to enjoy its unique architecture. His description of ordinary routine aspects of life is precise and highly evocative, fitting neatly with his selection of events and adventures in the lives of the European travellers whose writings he discusses and quotes. Among them are Joseph Halévy, Freya Stark and Claudie Fayein (whom, incidentally, he misnames Claude) discussed in other book reviews in this year's journal: the details he mentions add new light and complement information found in these other texts. His contextualisation of the time-bound visions of earlier writers informs readers both about Yemen at these various times and the changing prejudices and perceptions during these six centuries.

Very definitely a travel book, it successfully combines personal experience with historical facts and analysis, also presenting a few elements to explain the present crisis. During his year in Yemen, Moscrop visited many places on the 'standard tourist circuit' when such a thing existed, and his accounts do not always avoid some of the clichés about either Sana'a or Yemen. To his credit, he recognises that 'latent orientalism, regrettably but nonetheless undoubtedly, imbues my own experiences and depictions of Sana'a; it is ... "almost unconscious" and to recognise and challenge it takes a determined effort.' (p 252)

Well written, with deep sympathy for Yemenis as well as refugees with whom he worked elsewhere, the book is an excellent complement to others examining Yemen as seen by outsiders, including Bonnefoy's *Yemen and the World*, Mondon's memoirs from the 1980s and the work of Mackintosh-Smith. For anyone interested in the experience of life in Yemen for a foreigner prior to the crisis as well as those focused on travel writing, this is an essential read, with many illustrations and at a very accessible price.

OBITUARIES

DR NOEL J. GUCKIAN CVO OBE (1955–2019)



When Noel Guckian was elected as Chairman of the British-Yemeni Society in June 2019 he brought a fresh eye to the Society, with ambitions to increase the membership, raise its profile, and take a critical look at all of its activities in order to see how it might maximise the value of its limited resources. He was keen to develop the Society, drawing on the historical and academic links between the two countries, building on the ideas that motivated Dr Abdulkarim al-Iryani to propose its establishment in 1993.

It was an enormous shock when Noel passed away at Ipswich Hospital on 7 December 2019 after a short but serious illness – but one which he fully expected to recover from. One of his last messages to the Society’s committee was to inform us that he was about to go into hospital, but hoped to be ‘back in harness soon’. A senior diplomat quite recently retired, he had served as HM Ambassador to the Sultanate of Oman for six years, from 2005 to 2011, having earlier served there as Deputy Head of Mission for 3 years in the 1990s. Born in Ireland into a Roman Catholic family he had a peripatetic education – his secondary school education was in Rome where his father then worked, and he then went on to Ulster University to study for his BA in the modern history of India, the Middle East, Japan and China. This was followed by an MA that focused on the last years of British rule in Aden and South Yemen and then a PhD on British relations with Trans-Jordan in the 1920s, both at Aberystwyth University in Wales.

From there he went on to join the Foreign and Commonwealth Office as a researcher and analyst of Middle Eastern affairs in the FCO’s Research

Department, the Foreign Office's 'corporate memory'. This proved an excellent springboard for further overseas experiences, and over a 32 year career he served in Saudi Arabia, Libya, Kuwait, Syria and Northern Iraq (where he was the UK's first Consul General for the Kurdistan Region in 2005, based in Kirkuk) as well as twice in Oman.

Noel was one of the FCO's Arabists – he had learned some Arabic in Yemen before joining the FCO, and studied further, doing the FCO's intensive Arabic course in 1982–83. His links with Yemen arose from his study for his Master's Degree, mentioned above, and perhaps more from a period spent as the Yemen analyst in King Charles Street, the home of the FCO. Colleagues recalled how he devoured the lengthy and detailed dispatches of Julian Walker, Ambassador to Yemen from 1979 to 1984, which were noted in Julian's obituary in the 2018 B-YS Journal. Noel's task was to digest them for those 'busy FCO officials [who] had time only to scan them' – a formidable task!

On retiring from the FCO he remained active with a range of consultancies in Oman and the UK, and shared his knowledge and experience lecturing on Middle Eastern issues at schools and universities, including helping PhD candidates and writers on the Middle East. He maintained his links with Oman as chairman of the Anglo-Omani Society until 2013 and later, in 2019, was elected as chairman of the British-Yemeni Society, a position he held at the time of his death.

Friends and colleagues saw in Noel a person of great ambition, sometimes exasperating, but at the same time loyal, generous, amiable and approachable: virtues recognised by many during his lifetime and after his decease.

He is survived by his three daughters and a son. His wife, Lorna predeceased him in 2012.

ROBERT WILSON

OLIVER MILES CMG (1936–2019)



Oliver Miles CMG, a distinguished British diplomat and noted Arabist, died on 10 November 2019 of pancreatic cancer. He was 83. Richard Oliver Miles was born in 1936 and educated at Ampleforth and at Merton College, Oxford, where he read Classics and Oriental Studies.

He did two years' national service in the Royal Navy training as a Russian interpreter and then in 1960 at the age of 24 he entered the Diplomatic Service. In 1965 he was lent by the Foreign Office to the Colonial Office as secretary-general of a constitutional commission which was to consider

the future of Aden and the Aden Protectorate. The previous October a Labour government had taken office and one of their headline policies was withdrawal from 'east of Suez'. Aden was a political hot potato, taking up a great deal of Prime Minister Harold Wilson's time and efforts, and also those of Denis Healey (Defence Secretary) and George Brown (Foreign Secretary).

Initially Oliver worked for Sir Evelyn Hone, leader of the constitutional commission, who had the use of an aircraft, and so the pair travelled all over Yemen and met all the political leaders, from the smooth city slickers of Aden, full of anti-colonialist jargon and pretty obviously in the pay of President Nasser of Egypt, to the unreformed tribal shaykhs of the protectorate, some of them very unreformed indeed. He lived in the picturesque but rundown Crescent Hotel and while he was there had time for a bit of personal exploration, getting to grips with the Aden dialect of Arabic well enough to make a few friends, among them the young man who was reputed to have thrown the grenade at the governor which triggered the emergency in 1963; he had been chosen to do it because he was an athlete, or rather a footballer (they had no cricketers). While in Aden Oliver also

observed some of the shadier aspects of colonial administration, such as distributing boxes of rifles (war surplus, very cheap) to friends ‘up country’, which had once been a matter of honour, but he wrote later had become a cheap bribe, neither moral nor prudent – sowing dragon’s teeth.

He went on to serve in Mukalla as private secretary to the High Commissioner Sir Humphrey Trevelyan, and later in the British Embassy to PDRY. His main job was dealing with the East Aden Protectorate (EAP). Mukalla was the capital of the Qu’aiti state, the largest of the three in the East Aden Protectorate. Many times he flew backwards and forwards along the coast between the Red Sea in the west and the border of Oman in the east, flying quite low in a small aircraft, a thousand miles nearly all desert, sometimes mountainous, sometimes rock, gravel or sand. Oliver would travel outside Mukalla with one tribal Arab soldier from the Hadhrami Bedouin Legion (the EAP’s British officered army) as body-guard, and usually a few more soldiers as drivers etc. with two land rovers. From Mukalla they would travel up 4,000 feet onto the Jol, a vast desert plateau, and from there to Wadi Hadhramaut, a gorge a couple of thousand feet deep, with a river bed with various tributaries from subsidiary gorges, and from there he was able to go on to the edge of the Empty Quarter.

During Ramadan they would time their journeys in the Empty Quarter to stop at the home (palace?) of each local notable at sunset, which meant that they were all invited in to break the fast at the *iftar* meal, which always involved killing at least a sheep or a goat, and then joining them for the long hours after the *iftar* eating sweets and drinking sweet drinks, and gossiping – an ideal opportunity to get to know people and their problems. During his stint in the Hadhramaut an official parade (*haflah*) and sporting event fell due and so, with consent from the Sultan, Oliver dressed up in uniform, making him the last British non-military official to do so in Hadhramaut. The practice had been disallowed by the higher-ups in the Foreign Office so he knew this would be his only opportunity.

While in Yemen Oliver took part in a spectacular military operation when in 1967 an airborne raid was launched on the island of Socotra involving two RAF Beverleys and two platoons of the HBL. Their mission was to apprehend the entire Mahra National Liberation Front hierarchy who had been trying to bully the Sultan of Socotra into abdicating. The raiders drove in from the air-strip three miles to the town and had to ford two rivers, achieving complete surprise because the airstrip, close to

Hadibu, the capital, was overgrown with brushwood and believed to be unusable, but Beverleys make light of brushwood. They went straight to the Sultan's council chamber, where his guard presented arms to salute and Oliver inspected them. Oliver acted as political adviser and interpreter – though he had to communicate with the Sultan through another interpreter, with Oliver speaking Arabic and the Sultan speaking Socotran.

After all the 'rebels' had been dragged out of their beds it fell to Oliver to tell them that they were all being taken back to the mainland. No one was hurt and only one shot was fired, by the British side through the ceiling while they were being disarmed. The most dangerous moment came when Oliver stepped out of the house in which they had been collected and found himself looking down the muzzles of twenty or so rifles shakily aimed at the door by the young Mahri soldiers. They took all the rebels back to the mainland where the problem soon emerged that no-one could be found who would willingly hold the prisoners and they were eventually sprung from the al-Mansurah Jail because no one could be found to try them.

In the final days of the British presence in Yemen the two rival independence movements, FLOS Y (the Front for the Liberation of South Yemen) and the NLF (National Liberation Front) literally fought it out to see who would take control when the British left. Up until that point Oliver had known much more about FLOS Y, and so when they were destroyed by the NLF he and his colleagues found themselves very much in the dark about the people they would be handing government over to. At independence talks in the Beau Rivage hotel in Geneva they were surprised to find some familiar faces on the other side of the table, a police brigadier and an army lieutenant colonel who they had imagined were on their side. Each party nominated an interpreter and Oliver was the British one. He soon got onto friendly terms with the Arab one, a well-educated young tribesman who Oliver said afterwards gave him the most coherent explanation he ever heard of the Maoist theory of permanent revolution.

Besides Yemen, Oliver also served in Abu Dhabi, Amman and Jeddah. In 1980 he became head of 'NENAD' – the Near East and North Africa Department in the Foreign Office and he went on to become one of the Diplomatic Service's leading experts on Arab and Middle East affairs. In 1984 he was appointed ambassador to Libya, a posting which lasted only a few months before diplomatic relations were cut following the murder of WPC Yvonne Fletcher in London. In 1984 Miles was appointed CMG in recognition of his services. In 1985 he served in a temporary post as an

ambassador to the UN for the Autumn Assembly. He went on to be posted as British ambassador to Luxembourg and Greece, as well as joint secretary of the Anglo-Irish standing conference in Northern Ireland.

In retirement he continued to follow Arab affairs closely, founding a leading newsletter on Middle Eastern affairs, now known as Arab Digest. In 2004 he organized an open letter to Tony Blair, signed by 52 former Ambassadors and other senior international officials criticizing what they saw as the prime minister's slavish adherence to American policy in Iraq and Palestine. He is survived by his wife Julia and their four children, Joe, Tom, Hugh and Lucy.

HUGH MILES¹

ABDUL-JABBAR NUMAN (1949–2019)



Abdul-Jabbar Numan, the celebrated Yemeni portrait artist, was one of Yemen's great art pioneers; a rare breed. Born in Taiz, in 1949, he moved to Aden to begin his primary education where he discovered a talent for drawing. The talented boy who moved back to Taiz to live and continue his studies had no idea that in a few years he would be a special guest at Gamal Abdel Nasser's house in Cairo. He recalled as he sat in the waiting room, gazing up in astonishment at his portrait of the great Arab leader which was hung on the wall opposite him.

It was 1964 when he learned that Nasser, who was in Sana'a on his historical visit to Yemen, had requested to see him personally, after admiring a portrait he drew

¹ Hugh Miles is an author and journalist.

of him. He was overwhelmed with joy as he embarked on his journey to Cairo to study Fine Arts the following year. Numan was clearly ambitious and devoted to his dreams and vocation, but he also understood the challenges he would face in order to succeed in a career that was not even recognised in Yemen at the time. Nonetheless, he did well, not only in becoming one of the most famous artists in Yemen, but also as a well-respected, inspirational figure for many young artists and portraitists. He also did something remarkable; I believe it made him stand out from other great portraitists. He decided to produce affordable commercial copies of his paintings so that everyone could buy them and hang them on the walls of their homes, and as a result, many Yemeni houses at some point were full of his paintings.

When he arrived in Cairo he was too young to be accepted in the Faculty of Fine Arts, so instead he went to study at the Italian Art College in Abbassia where he earned a bachelor's degree with distinction in 1973, becoming one of the very few Yemeni artists who had such qualification at that time. During his studies he launched his first public gallery in Cairo as his name began to become recognised.

Numan started as a realist portrait artist, and his early works were a vivid reflection of Yemen's local people, culture and landscapes. They depicted, with an impressive use of colours, the architecture of old cities, the green terraces, the high mountains, valleys, and the faces of old men, shepherds, craftsmen, and women with their traditional dress, reflecting different regions of Yemen. During this stage of his career, he was devoted to depicting Yemen's identity with the aesthetics of patriotic colours.

Despite the fact that his realist style was behind his success and fame, Numan did not seem content to stick with this, and was eager to move to expressionism and try other forms of painting. In one of his interviews he said, 'In the space of modern art, I freed myself from the constraints of traditional art, so I had more freedom to deal with tools, and the audacity to utilise colours, which all helped me to enhance the uniqueness of my paintings'. Hence, one can observe that in the late nineties his works reflected clearly a new disposition towards expressionism, which enabled him to portray faces, places and nature as they felt, or appeared, to him. 'Expressionism, which I adopted in the nineties, represented an important turning point in my experience', he later admitted.

My first memories of Numan's paintings go back to the mid-1980s when my father used to take me during summer breaks to his workplace at the



Inscriptions of Yemeni colours, acrylic
122cm x 98cm circa 2004

liance despite how people used to feel about it.

In 2004 Numan opened a public gallery exhibition, 'A Sky Made of Violet', which contained his famous paintings and exhibited his expressionism works. In 2016 he held his 40th and last exhibition, 'The Moon's Daughters', in which his artistic vision towards women and their place in society was displayed.

I met him many times in various events; he was a very humble man. He used to express his artistic opinions in a very simple but clear way. 'What I really seek, as I draw, is to stage a painting that does not bore the psyche of the viewers as they see it for the first time. Merging and overlapping the

Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which used to occupy an old beautiful building at Qa' al-Olofi in Sana'a.

At the main entrance of the building was a large mural by him (I would later discover that almost all government buildings in Sana'a featured a Numan mural in the lobby!) In front of this panoramic mural, I stood captivated, by the mountains, valleys, monuments, and numerous men, women and children with diverse facial expressions. My father would stand by my side pointing at one or two specific features of the mural and would start explaining, as I stood there spellbound, before losing his patience and promptly ushering me to follow him into his office!

Amongst dozens of beautiful paintings by Numan that I like, was an impressive portrait of the former Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh hung on the wall of the grand lobby at the Central Bank of Yemen. The portrait was a clear example of his artistic bril-

details of different scenes, using multiple colours, has opened up endless renewable prospects’, he once said. Numan received several awards, and many of his paintings were chosen by UNICEF and the UN among their collection of stamps and murals. He died in Sana‘a during the war after years of struggle with diabetes complications and had to sell most of his paintings and belongings in auctions to pay for his treatment.

HAMDAN DAMMAG

DR RADHIA IHSANULLAH ‘UMAR (1933–2020)



On 13 January 2020 Yemen lost one of the earliest pioneers of the country’s women’s movement, Dr Radhia Ihsanullah ‘Umar. Radhia’s family history and personal life trajectory epitomises that of a large segment of Aden’s cosmopolitan, nationalist elite that opposed British colonialism. In the case of women activists this was a dual struggle against both social oppression and the colonial order that supported it.² The post-independence socialist regime denigrated the role of the women’s movement because of its links to what it termed ‘reactionary political parties’ that were in opposition to the National Liberation Front (NLF).³ Nevertheless, the Arab Women’s Society, which Radhia led, was the primary vehicle for the politicisation of Adeni women, including those who later joined the NLF, and for their active participation in the anti-colonial struggle.

Radhia Ihsanullah was born in 1933 in Jedda, Saudi Arabia. She was the

² Maxine Molyneux (1979), “Women and Revolution in the People’s Democratic Republic of Yemen,” interview with Aida Yafai, *Feminist Review* no.1, p. 11.

³ General Union of Yemeni Women (1974), *Documents of the General Union of Yemeni Women: The First General Congress of Yemeni Women held in Saiun, Fifth Governorate, in the Period 15–16 July 1974*, 14th October Press, pp. 16.

daughter of Khan Bahadur Ihsanullah ‘Umar MBE (b. 1884), a Punjabi merchant who was at the time working there as Indian Vice-Consul responsible for Indian Muslim pilgrims to Mecca. Khan Bahadur Ihsanullah spent almost two decades between 1919 and 1937 in various positions at the British Legation in Jeddah during which time he had the ear of King Abd al-Aziz Ibn Saud on matters relating to the Hajj and the pilgrims’ welfare. It was, however, this influence that brought about his eventual downfall. Ihsanullah had challenged the interests of those who exploited unsuspecting pilgrims and had become a thorn on the side of those Saudis who wanted the nascent kingdom to take full control of the Muslim pilgrimage.⁴ Thus, with his family of eight children he turned up suddenly at Aden in October 1938, where his friend Basil Seager, British Agent at the Western Aden Protectorate, got his eldest son, ‘Umar, a job at the colonial Secretariat.⁵

In Aden Ihsanullah acquired land in Crater, where he built his family home and established the Ihsan Hotel. The hotel quickly became a focal point of political activity, which was aided by his personal friendships with Yemeni notables he would have hosted during their trips to Mecca. By the mid-1940s a number of Yemeni political exiles had established themselves in Aden, among whom Ahmad Muhammad Nu‘man, Sayf al-Haqq Ibrahim, and Muhammad Ali al-Aswadi used the Ihsan Hotel as a temporary headquarters. It was in this political environment that Radhia was brought up. As she would later concede, in spite of his conservatism and piety, her father encouraged her activism.⁶

The lack of education opportunities for girls in Aden meant that Radhia spent her high school years in Syria, followed by a Law degree at the University of Baghdad and a master’s in Islamic Studies at Punjab University in Pakistan. She subsequently returned to Aden where she took over the management of the family hotel. Her first foray into activism was as member of the Aden Women’s Club. The club had been founded by British women and their Adeni counterparts felt they were there only to stay in the background and ‘quietly sip juice.’⁷ Radhia and her contempo-

⁴ IOR/L/PS/12/2155; R. W. Bullard, British Legation Jeddah to Foreign Secretary of the Government of India, New Delhi (24.04.1937).

⁵ IOR/R/20/A/3895; Basil W. Seager, Aden Secretariat to A. C. Trott, British Legation Jeddah (14.10.1938).

⁶ Radhia Ihsanullah Umar; interview with the author. Sana a, 11.05.2010.

⁷ Radhia Ihsanullah, *op. cit.*

raries staged the slow takeover of the club in an effort to create a safe space for the women of Aden to discuss matters that really mattered to them, besides embroidery and cookery. The election of Nabihah Hasan Ali as the first Adeni woman chair in 1954, with Radhia as the deputy secretary-general, brought about the withdrawal of European women and some members of local elite families, who created two years later the rival Aden Women's Association. But it also meant that the club became more radicalised and attuned to the nationalist, anti-colonial political discourse of the time, especially in the wake of the Suez crisis. One of its major achievements was the 'hijab revolution' (*thawrat 'ala al-hijab*) of 1959, when six unveiled members marched through Aden to the offices of newspapers and gave statements against the condition of women in Aden.⁸ Eventually, in 1960 the club was renamed the Arab Women's Club reflecting its nationalist character.

During that time Radhia worked as a journalist for al-Ba'th newspaper, organ of the United National Front (UNF) and, after its closure by the British authorities, for *al-'Amil* (The Worker), the official publication of the Aden Trades Union Congress (ATUC). Like much of the ATUC leadership, including Abdallah al-Asnag, she was politicised in the ranks of the UNF, which was made up of the leftist faction of the traditionalist South Arabian League.⁹ She was also active in the trades union movement, and joined the ATUC via the Shops, Hotel, and Miscellaneous Industries Union. Throughout her political career she remained a close associate of al-Asnag's and became the leading female member in both his People's Socialist Party and in the militant Front for the Liberation of South Yemen (FLOSY). She would carry arms for FLOSY guerrillas in her car, or undertake missions to Arab capitals on behalf of al-Asnag, even though she was under constant British surveillance.

Radhia, who in official correspondence was termed 'rabidly anti-British and pro-Egyptian', was involved in a number of high profile anti-colonial activities during the 1960s.¹⁰ She was one of the organisers of the Girls' College strikes that lasted for eight months in 1961, and she also led the women's contingent during the demonstrations against Aden's merger

⁸ Radhia Ihsan Allah, *Kitab Mawlid al-Haraka al-Nisaiyya* [Book of the Birth of the Women's Movement] (Cairo: al-Ittihad al-Ishtiraki al-Arabi), pp. 54.

⁹ Vitaly V. Naumkin (2004), *Red Wolves of Yemen* (London: The Oleander Press), p. 44.

¹⁰ FO 371/168620; Sir Charles Johnston, Governor of Aden to Secretary of State for the Colonies (01.03.1963).

with the Federation of South Arabia in September 1962. For this, she was sentenced to ten weeks imprisonment. In spite of her harassment by the British, and their attempts to have her excluded from the colony on account of her foreign birth, she continued to represent Adeni women in international fora as far afield as Moscow and travel to northern Yemen in support of the republican revolution there. In fact, in 1965 she established a Yemeni Women's Association in Sana'a, which however did not last because of lack of local interest.¹¹ At her instigation behind prison bars after her second arrest, Adeni women, wives and mothers of political detainees, organised a sit-in at the 'Asqalani mosque in Crater, whilst Radhia went on hunger strike in allegiance.¹² The sit-in lasted fifteen days, elicited wide support in Aden, and publicity throughout the Arab world and more importantly united momentarily both of Aden's opposing women's associations. At the height of political activity both organisations had about three hundred members each.¹³

After independence and the victory of the NLF over its rival FLOSY, Radhia followed the fate of the latter's leadership to self-exile in North Yemen, and other parts of the Arab world. The Ihsan Hotel and home in Aden were appropriated as part of the 'nationalisation' policies under Salem Rubaya Ali, and the family's contribution to the national struggle was virtually erased from the official histories of the state. Although Yemen's 1990 unification created hopes for the rectification of these injustices, she was never given her property back and chose to spend the last years of her life in Sana'a. Speaking some time after unification, she presciently noted 'there are conservative forces who want to return Yemen to the times of the Imamate. They see a threat in the liberated, educated and self-confident woman to those women who still live subordinated in some parts of the country.'¹⁴ May her example continue to provide inspiration to Yemeni women who strive for a better future.

THANOS PETOURIS

¹¹ Amel Nejib al-Ashtal (2012), "A Long, Quiet, and Steady Struggle: The Women's Movement in Yemen," in Pernille Arenfeld and Nawar al-Hassan Golley (eds.) *Mapping Arab Women's Movements: A Century of Transformations from Within* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press), p. 212.

¹² Amel Nejib al-Ashtal, *op. cit.*, p. 210.

¹³ Susanne Dahlgren (2010), *Contesting Realities: The Public Sphere and Mortality in Southern Yemen* (New York: Syracuse), p. 151.

¹⁴ "After 20 Years, Radhia Ihsanullah has Woken up and Spoken," interview by Safa Ali Ibrahim, 14 *Uktubr* (20.04.1992) *cit.* in Susanne Dahlgren, *op. cit.*, p. 165.

ABD AL-AZIZ ABDUH MUHAMMED AL-DALI (1937–2020)



Abd al Aziz al-Dali, who died on 7 August 2020, was a leading figure in the National Liberation Front and then the Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP) in the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) for much of his adult life, serving as Minister of Health from 1969 to 1977 (and again briefly in 1981) and Minister of Foreign Affairs from 1982 to 1990; he was also Minister of State for Foreign Affairs in the Republic of Yemen (1990-1994). Both in and out of

office he was widely admired for his humanity, wisdom, learning and technical competence. Above all, he was one of the nicest of people, using charm and a smile as well as elegant arguments to win support for his case. Though I first met him in Aden in 1970, I only got to know him when researching my book, *Yemen Divided*, and built a friendship during his visits to London, mostly at his favourite restaurant in New Quebec Street near Marble Arch. It was then that I understood why he was universally liked and admired.

He was born in 1937 in Uganda to which his father had migrated from Aden in the 1920s. After studying in the Hadhrami community school in Uganda, he was sent to Cairo for his secondary education in 1954 and later to Alexandria University, qualifying as a dental surgeon in 1966. Whilst in Egypt he became one of the first members of the Yemeni branch of the Movement of Arab Nationalists (MAN) in part through his friendship with Faysal Abdul Latif al-Sha'bi, the most prominent Yemeni of the MAN at the time and Ali Salem al-Beedh. The MAN was the prime mover in the creation of the National Liberation Front (NLF) which was set up in 1963 to drive the British out of South Arabia/South Yemen. Dr al-Dali was for a time responsible for the NLF's Women's section which played an important role in Aden, one of whose leading figure later became his wife.

He started work in Aden in 1969 initially as a dentist but soon was appointed head of the Republican Hospital (previously known as the

Queen Elizabeth Hospital) before becoming Undersecretary at the Ministry of Health. Following the overthrow of the country's first president Qahtan al Sha'bi in the 'Corrective Move' of June 1969 he was appointed Minister of Health and oversaw the rapid expansion of South Yemeni health services, the setting up of the nursing school, and then the Faculty of Medicine at Aden University. He was active in politics throughout the 1970s but avoided getting embroiled in the factionalism that became an increasing problem. He focused on enhancing the capacity and delivery of government services. Two members of the British-Yemeni Society, Adel Aulaqi and Muhammad bin Dohry have spoken of the care and kindness he showed them during his time as Minister of Health.

He first demonstrated an interest in foreign affairs by heading an organisation that promoted friendly relations with PDRY like-minded regimes around the world. Nevertheless, it was a surprise when he was appointed to the critically important position of PDRY Ambassador to the Soviet Union in 1977. He was in Moscow during the period of Abdul Fattah Ismail's presidency which saw the formation of the YSP modelled on that of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, and the signing of a Treaty of Friendship between the USSR and the PDRY in 1979. He was still there when Ismail was exiled to the city following his forced resignation as President and Party Secretary in April 1980.

Ali Nasser Muhammad, who had had been instrumental in the ousting of Ismail, retained his post of Prime Minister (which he had held since 1970) and took over Ismail's functions, thus taking into his hands the three most powerful positions in the PDRY. He brought Abd al-Aziz al-Dali back to Aden initially as Minister of Health but then arranged for him to be appointed head of the Foreign Affairs Secretariat in the YSP. At that time, the party secretariat made policy and the foreign ministry implemented it. As others had done before him, he moved from the Secretariat to become Minister of Foreign Affairs in 1982, a position he held until the unification of the PDRY with the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR) in 1990. He helped implement the attempts in the early 1980s to build better relations with Saudi Arabia and the GCC states and to start reaching out to the West whilst maintaining the PDRY's close relations with the Soviet Union, East Germany, and Cuba. He played a role in ending the PDRY's support for the Dhofar rebellion which led to reconciliation between the PDRY and Oman.

The PDRY was at the peak of its achievements as a state in the first three years of Ali Nasser's leadership, but his insistence on holding so much

power in his own hands alienated other leading figures and eventually undermined his authority. Tensions came to a head on 13 January 1986 when a short civil war was fought between factions of the regime resulting in the death or exile of a number of PDRY leaders and the enforced exile of Ali Nasser Muhammad. Haydar al-Attas, who had become prime minister in 1985, and al-Dali, who were abroad at the time, travelled to Moscow and played a part in stabilising the situation and paving the way for a new leadership under Ali Salem al-Beedh as Party Secretary and al-Attas as head of state. They realised they needed Dr al-Dali's political skills and emollient personality to hold the new leadership together and his diplomatic touch in rebuilding the badly-damaged international reputation of the PDRY.

Throughout the life of the PDRY its leaders and those of the YAR made unification a central element in their policies. Although they had signed unity agreements in 1972 and 1979, they had done little to implement them. Both countries concluded in the late 1980s that the time had come to realise the dream even if they had different visions of what unity meant. There was much jubilation when Ali Abdullah Saleh and Ali Salem al-Beedh signed an agreement that led to unification on 22 May 1990. On unity Abd al Aziz al-Dali, who through his family had strong connections with the North, became minister of state for Foreign Affairs but like other ex-PDRY ministers felt betrayed by the way that President Ali Abdullah Saleh sought to impose his vision of unity on to the south. He joined his colleagues in resigning in 1994 and went into exile with them after southern forces were defeated in the 1994 civil war.

He remained outside his homeland in the UAE until 2005 when, along with several of his colleagues, he agreed to return to Yemen where he resumed dentistry and was an active member of the leadership of the YSP. More recently, he became an adviser to the Southern Transitional Council.

Tributes have been paid to him by an astonishing range of Yemeni figures, speaking of his charm, humanity, calmness, diplomatic skills, choice of the right words – qualities that are indispensable in finding a negotiated outcome to the current problems in Yemen. Ali Nasser Muhammad, who worked with him for many years said that 'with his death, the nation, the people, and his family lost an honest man and an honest human being.' All who knew him would agree.

NOEL BREHONY

WILLIAM (BILL) HEBER PERCY MBE (1939–2020)

Bill Heber Percy, who died on 2 August 2019, was the first Chairman of the British-Yemeni Society. Not only was he an inspirational choice but, with typical generosity, Bill accepted to spare time from his sheep farming to head a small group assembled to establish a society for Yemen in Britain. As Chairman from 1993 until 1998, with the support of others such as Jim and Joanna Ellis, Julian Paxton and myself, Bill steered the embryonic Society through its first, formative years. He was an outstanding Chairman, both in establishing the broad objectives of the Society and in organising its initial activities, thus setting the Society on track for its future.

One of the notable events he promoted was a painting exhibition of works by Yemeni artists (among them Amna al-Nasiri) hitherto not known in UK. He also arranged a musical tour for an *'oud* player, Hamoud al-Guneid, whose *'oud* was accidentally lost at the airport and had to be retrieved by Bill making a long drive north to collect it. He subsequently kept a close interest in the Society and also strong links with Yemen, in particular with Soqatra, of which more below.

Born in 1939 into a notable military family, Bill went to Eton College and followed his father into the Welsh Guards for his National Service. He volunteered to serve in the Aden Protectorate Levies from 1959 to 1961, serving in Abyan, Dhali', Ahwar and Ataq. Attracted to the region and perhaps following the example of fellow Welsh Guardsman Ralph Daly, Bill joined the Colonial Service in 1961 so as to remain in the Western Aden Protectorate (WAP). He was attached to the Advisory Service of the WAP working in Upper Aulaqi and Bayhan as the Political Officer and adviser to Sherif Hussain. In 1966 Bill was appointed Senior Adviser with responsibility for the Aulaqi, Bayhan and Wahidi states. John Ducker, in the EAP, recalls meeting Bill near Shabwa to discuss the aftermath of a tribal incident, and lunching under an *'ilb* tree. In 1966 Bill was awarded a MBE, and was described in his citation as Assistant Adviser, Aden. Bill continued to serve, no doubt with distinction, in WAP and Aden until the British withdrawal in 1967.

Keen to remain in southern Arabia, Bill was soon appointed Secretary General of the Planning and Development Board in the Sultanate of Oman where he served until 1970. In Oman he met Christine Gates whom he married in January 1969. Their daughter Robin was born in November. In



1970 Bill and Christine decided to retire and return to Clyro, Powys in Wales in order to farm sheep and to bring up their young family. Their son Peter was born in May 1971. Sheep farming, in particular Welsh badger-faced sheep, continued until 1984 when they decided to retire from farming. They moved to Talybont on Usk, to live on the banks of the River Usk (for fishing, of course) where he was much respected in the farming community.

In 1993 when the Yemen Republic was endeavouring to determine a mutual border with Saudi Arabia, Dr al-Eryani, Foreign Minister of Yemen invited a group of previous Political Officers including Bill Heber Percy to assist by indicating where, at the time when the Aden Protectorate still existed, the de facto boundary had actually lain.

Having handed over the B-YS chairmanship, Bill led a trip to Soqatra in 2005 for a group including John Mason and Julian Paxton. During this trip Bill met Dr Salem Muftah, a young Yemeni trained doctor, one of the few working on Soqatra. Arising from this, Bill was instrumental in raising more than £20,000 to support Salem's year long Masters degree course at the Liverpool School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, where he achieved a Distinction for studying Middle Ear Infection, a problem prevalent on the island. On return to Soqatra, Salem asked the B-YS to help train three young Soqatra women at the Mukalla Medical University – truly revolutionary at this time for Soqatra women to be allowed by their family to travel, let alone live away, from the island and study for qualifications. One completed her nursing course and another completed her seven year doctor's training despite the civil war in Yemen. Bill was extremely dedicated to this project and hence the goals were achieved.

Bill joined two memorable trips to Khyrgyzstan in the 1990s organised by John Ducker, and later trips to Sri Lanka and Myanmar.

Those of us who worked with him found Bill an outstanding man of exceptional abilities and modesty. Dr Abdullah Nasher, as past President of the Yemen-based Yemeni-British Friendship Association recalls working closely with Bill and the B-YS Committee during his Chairmanship to strengthen historic Yemeni-British ties. He notes that Bill will be remembered by all for his love and dedication to Yemen and its people.

JULIAN LUSH



Farmer in Utma, Dhamar governorate (Helen Lackner)

Designed and produced by Elspeth McPherson
(Strathmore Publishing, London)
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B-YS COVID-19 IN YEMEN APPEAL 2020

The humanitarian situation in Yemen remains extremely fragile, with high levels of malnutrition, rampant cholera and now the extra shock of the coronavirus pandemic. It has limited capacity to contain it or treat the victims. Health facilities, have been badly damaged by the war, now run at half pre-war capacity. Health workers often remain unpaid. Social distancing is often impossible, especially in poorer areas or in the crowded camps for internally displaced.

B-YS now supports three projects in the health field, all making a vital contribution to the Covid-19 response. Given the current fragmentation of Yemen, we ensure that our response is geographically spread. In Sana'a, we support the Yemen Education & Relief Organisation, run by the enterprising Nouria Nagi OBE, which looks after orphans, whose numbers are now swelled both by the war and the pandemic. B-YS is providing vital equipment to support their efforts in raising awareness on how best to avoid the virus. In Aden, we continue our support to the Ras Morbat Eye Clinic, providing an essential service to the local population in spite of insecurity and fighting. B-YS now supports the provision of PPE for staff and masks for patients. In Mukalla, the capital of the Hadhramaut region, B-YS supports the Al-Rahma clinic, one of the few operating in the oldest and poorest part of this city. The clinic relies largely on donations from locals and the Hadhrami diaspora.

We are asking you for your generous support for these projects. If you can pay online this would be most helpful. Our Royal Bank of Scotland Account is 'The British Yemeni Society', sort code 16-01-23, account no 14555021. Please make your reference your surname and postcode so that we can identify you. If you prefer, cheques can be written out to 'The British-Yemeni Society' with the envelope marked 'B-YS 2020 Appeal' and sent to The B-YS Treasurer, 44 Constitution Hill, Norwich, NR3 4BT. If you are a UK taxpayer please download and complete the Gift Aid form available on our website and send that at the same time – this increases your donation by a valuable 25%. A huge 'Thank You' from all those who will benefit from your support.

