



## **THE BRITISH-YEMENI SOCIETY**

The activities and policies of the British-Yemeni Society are determined by its membership, represented by its annually-elected Executive Committee. The Society is independent of any government or political party.

### **OFFICERS 2021-2022**

#### **Executive Committee and Trustees of the Society**

<b>Chairman</b>	James Firebrace
<b>Vice Chairman</b>	Taher Ali Qassim MBE
<b>Secretary</b>	Louise Hosking
<b>Treasurer &amp; Membership</b>	Dr Robert Wilson OBE
<b>Events Secretary</b>	Ibrahim Zanta

<b>Ordinary Members</b>	Marwa Baabbad Dr Noel Brehony CMG Sarah Clowry Hamdan Dammag Martin Jerrett Julian Lush Nawal al Maghafi Dirhem Abdo Saeed James Spencer
-------------------------	--

<b>Journal Editor</b>	Thanos Petouris
-----------------------	-----------------

<b>Honorary Vice Presidents</b>	Dr Abdulla Abdul Wali Nasher Dirhem Abdo Saeed Dr Noel Brehony CMG
---------------------------------	--

#### **Journal Editorial Committee**

<b>Editor</b>	Thanos Petouris
<b>Deputy Editor</b>	Dr Luca Nevola

<b>Members</b>	Hamdan Dammag Martin Jerrett Safa Mubgar Dr Robert Wilson OBE
----------------	--

**[www.b-ys.org.uk](http://www.b-ys.org.uk)**

Please note that all articles are the intellectual property of their respective authors and represent their personal views. They are not positions held by The British-Yemeni Society as an organisation.



# The British-Yemeni Society Journal

Vol. 29 (2021)

## CONTENTS

OFFICERS, EXECUTIVE, AND EDITORIAL COMMITTEES 2021–22	Inside front cover
EDITOR'S NOTE	2
CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 2021 James Firebrace	3
YEMEN POLITICAL UPDATE Noel Brehony	7
MUSIC IN COLONIAL ADEN: GLOBALISATION, CULTURAL POLITICS, AND THE RECORD INDUSTRY IN AN INDIAN OCEAN PORT CITY Gabriel W. Lavin	12
YEMEN AND THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: FROM THE FIRST WAVE TO VACCINATIONS Luca Nevola & Thanos Petouris	21
ABDUL RAZAK MOSSA (1962–2020): AN APPRECIATION Emmeli Sundqvist, Safa Mubgar, Hamdan Dammag	28
LOOKING FOR A SOVIET MILITARY BASE ON SOQOTRA Noel Brehony	31
FREYA STARK IN HADHRAMAUT: A RE-APPRAISAL John Harding	34
BOOK REVIEWS	42
OBITUARIES	49
NEW PUBLICATIONS ON YEMEN	59

Published by

### THE BRITISH-YEMENI SOCIETY

The Gateway | 85–101 Sankey Street | Warrington | WA1 1SR  
Telephone: 01925 246800 | E-mail: sec@b-ys.org.uk

ISSN: 1363–0229

The British-Yemeni Society Journal © 2021 by The British-Yemeni Society and Contributors is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 4.0.



# EDITOR'S NOTE

THANOS PETOURIS

**D**ear members and friends of *The British-Yemeni Society*,

You are holding in your hands the long-awaited 29th volume of *The British-Yemeni Society Journal*. Assuming the editorship of such a publication comes with its own set of challenges. Doing so at the same time as trying to redesign it from scratch, just as the ongoing pandemic was taking its inevitable toll on our individual and collective circumstances, I now come to realise was clearly imprudent on my part. Although, I hope that the quality of the result has been well worth the wait, I cannot but take personal responsibility and apologise unreservedly to our members for this delay in presenting the 2021 Journal issue.

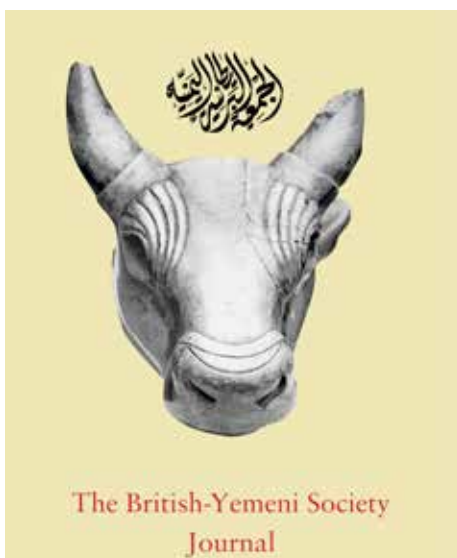
The launch this year of a new Journal design is particularly poignant as our Society marks the passing of its first Editor and originator, James Nash. It is to James that we owe the characteristic Sabaean bull's head that has adorned twenty-eight consecutive front covers of the BYS Journal. And although the time has come to introduce some much-needed changes to both its shape and contents, it is equally important to recognise that the Journal has enjoyed over the years a dedicated readership and has made some high-quality contributions to Yemeni scholarship thanks to the indefatigable efforts of my two predecessors. John Shipman worked assiduously for fifteen years (1998–2012) to bring the Journal up to the high standard of academic and empirical rigour that characterised his own knowledge of Yemen. Helen Lackner then took up the baton with equal enthusiasm and for the next eight years (2013–2020) introduced the Journal's readership to a host of topics relating to the country's modern existence. We

remain infinitely grateful to both for the service they rendered to this Society.

I, as the new Editor, the Deputy Editor Luca Nevola, and the Editorial Committee that supports us aspire to build on these achievements and present you every year with a selection of subjects that reflect current developments in Yemen, as well as illustrate the results of new research in a variety of fields relevant to the Society's members and beyond. As the country and its people are experiencing perhaps the worst period in modern Yemeni history, it has become even more pertinent to continue learning from the past, without losing sight of the currently unfolding multi-layered disaster.

It is through the efforts of many people that the BYS Journal has continued to be published, especially in these trying times of the pandemic. I would therefore like to sincerely thank all authors for their contributions. Luca Nevola and WNDR designers for the attentiveness with which they approached the development of the Journal's design. Louise Hosking for lending us her copy editing skills. And the BYS Executive Committee for their unwavering support at every step of the process of putting the Journal together.

I truly hope you enjoy the new look and feel of the revamped BYS Journal as it prepares to enter the fourth decade of its existence.





# CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

## (Twenty-eighth Annual General Meeting, 9 September 2021)

JAMES FIREBRACE

This will be a longer than normal Chairman's report this year. There has been a lot happening in the Society as we seek to address our role in building awareness about Yemen and the situation of the Yemeni population. With the terrible humanitarian situation faced by the country during the war, we have felt the need to step up and meet this challenge as best we can. I would like to do justice to all the efforts put in to achieve so much this year.

This can only be achieved by tapping the energies and skills of our BYJ Committee members, all working entirely in their own time. We have a strongly committed team with a wide range of skills, with varied backgrounds well distributed between Yemenis and non-Yemenis, and with a good gender and age diversity. As you will read below, this has worked well over this last year and we have achieved much — eight events most with over 100 attending, four important Yemeni projects now supported, and a revamped and expanded Journal are some of the key highlights.

### The State of the Society

#### The BYJ Committee and its Officers: Meeting Changing Needs and a New Workload

The membership of the Committee remains as elected at the last AGM and no changes are proposed looking forward. We are fortunate to have a highly committed Committee whose members are prepared to devote sometimes considerable time to Society business. Meetings have been held by Zoom and an attendance of around 80% has been achieved throughout the year.

There have been several important changes to the Society's Officers. Louise Hosking took over from Audrey Allfree and has brought new skills and energy to the pivotal role of Secretary. John Huggins stood down as Treasurer halfway through this last period, having steered us with great perseverance through a change of bank to the Clydesdale. He is replaced by Robert Wilson, who continues also to act as our Membership Secretary. We are grateful for him taking on this combined workload. This combination makes sense as tracking membership fee payments previously straddled both roles.

Thanos Petouris took over as Editor of the Journal after Helen Lackner put to bed her eighth Journal last autumn. The editorship is a labour of love, highly time consuming and requiring multiple skills of selecting articles, reviews and obituaries, editing

them and ensuring all fits within the space allocated while meeting multiple deadlines. The BYJ Journal would not be the respected publication it is today without Helen's earlier tireless efforts. Thanos now has a BYJ Journal Editorial Committee to advise on content and support decision-making on production issues, and his first Journal is eagerly awaited.

We have adapted to the changing format of BYJ events, which are now held online but to much larger audiences since lockdown forced this way of operating on us. Ibrahim Zanta now acts as our Events Secretary, allowing us to build on his advanced digital experience and skills and handle increasingly complex webinars with panel speakers. To spread the workload, each BYJ event now has a Champion who liaises with speakers and ensures all goes according to plan. We also have a Champion for each project supported by the Society (see later for details) and for the BYJ Scholarship Programme.

#### Membership

Joining the roles of Treasurer and Membership Secretary has made it possible to get a much clearer idea of our paid-up membership. Our records had accumulated a number of names whose membership had become dormant, sometimes for several years, and of individuals who had, perhaps, joined at one of our live meetings (it seems such a long time ago!) but not renewed their subscription the following year.

We currently have 231 members on our list of paid-up members. These include 17 new members since the AGM last year and a very small number whose subscription payments are still awaited, or who continue to pay at the old rate of £15 per annum. Members will recall that at the last 'live' AGM it was agreed that a modest increase in subscription to £25 would be acceptable. This increase was postponed while we were in the process of moving our account to a new bank, but the Committee has not yet decided to move forward on this. Happily, we are attracting more younger members and more members of Yemeni descent.

## Membership Review

During the year we conducted an internal review of our membership to give us a clearer idea of the composition of the membership, building largely on the personal knowledge of members from the Society's four Secretaries since our foundation. We are enormously grateful for all the time and effort they each put in. The key findings from this exercise (percentages are significant but approximate as not all details were available):

- **Age profile.** 66% over 60; 20% between 40 and 60; and 14% under 40. This is changing quite fast with our main growth in the 40 to 60 age range.
- **Year of joining BYS.** This was analysed by the dates of tenancy of our successive past Secretaries. 45% joined pre-2006; 24% joined 2006-13; 23% joined 2013-mid 2019; and 8% joined since mid-2019. In fact, with the 17 new members who have joined since the last AGM this last figure is now much larger. These results also show that the Society has been successful at keeping the loyalty of older members.
- **Yemeni origin members.** This is now up to 15% and growing, with many Yemeni-origin Brits joining the organisation in the last two years.
- **Original prime interest in Yemen** (for non-Yemenis). 31% had a diplomatic or military background, 27% had an academic or linguistic interest; 9% were aid or development workers; 7% had a specific cultural, archaeological or environmental interest; 7% were journalists or film makers; and 6% had a business interest. Clearly these categories overlap as most members had multiple interests in Yemen.

- **Location.** 61% live outside London; 33% had a London postcode; and 6% lived outside the UK.
- **Gender.** 64% of members were male with 36% female. This percentage is changing fast with proportionately more women applying.

## Finances

As noted above, we completed the transfer of our bank account from RBS to the Clydesdale Bank (now trading as Virgin Money) during the year since the last AGM. Although this was technically completed in the 2020 calendar year, much of the detailed work of amending mandates etc carried on into this year, and it took until this August to have full control of the bank and PayPal accounts. This would not have been possible without the tireless work of John Huggins who has kept the account in such excellent order for the past few years, moved our account over to a new bank and continued to carry out his Treasurer tasks until after the bulk of our subscriptions had come in by mid-January.

The Accounts for 2020 have now been approved at the September 2021 AGM, after being accepted by the Trustees in January. We started 2021 with £24,600 in the current account and £19 in the PayPal account, and we have continued with a stable balance sheet and bank account. Current balances in fact show a rather significant increase in our assets since, at the time of writing, we have £33,155 in our current account (but with large project transfers pending) and £36 in the PayPal account.

We are particularly grateful for donations to our appeal totalling almost £2,250, and for a legacy of £2,000 from the estate of one of BYS's founding members. Outgoings include £2,000 as a further donation to the al-Rahma Hospital in Mukalla; and we have committed, but not yet paid out, similar sums to the YERO Orphans charity in Sana'a and to the Ras Morbat clinic in Aden. Another expense that will show by the end of the year will be the production of this year's Journal in its new format.

## BYS Activities

### Events organised by the Society since the last AGM.

We held eight events during this period and, thanks to the online format and advertising our events to non-members, six of these achieved attendances of over 100. The events are generally recorded and then made available on our website. Three of the events related to peace and the current political situation, two were on cultural issues, two on history and one on health.

19 June 2020. Panel event on COVID-19 in Yemen immediately following our last AGM. Two of the panel spoke from Yemen (a first for BYS) — from Sana'a, Dr Sahl Aleryani, head of the team establishing Yemen's national strategy and Executive Director for the Medical Mercy Foundation, and from Aden, Samah Gameel, Executive Director of the Yemen Centre for Human Rights. The other two panellists



The tonometer ('air puffer') installed at the Ras Morbat Eye Clinic in Aden

were Iona Craig, the British investigative journalist then recently returned from a four-month trip to Aden and Marib, and Dr Luca Nevola, Researcher at the University of Sussex and foremost analyst of the Huthi movement. This event was championed by our Vice-Chairman Taher Qassim.

28 September 2020. Dr Julian Jansen van Rensburg, the leading expert on the cultural heritage of Soqatra who has led numerous research projects and expeditions to the island, spoke on Soqatra's Forgotten and Endangered Heritage. The event was held jointly with the International Association for the Study of Arabia (IASA) and the MBI Al Jaber Foundation.

8 October 2020. Professor Clive Jones, Professor of Regional Security for the Middle East at Durham University and author of numerous books, including Britain and the Yemen Civil War 1962-1965, works on Israel and the Gulf monarchies and, most recently, *The Clandestine Lives of Colonel David Smiley, Codename 'Grin'*, which was the subject of this October event. The talk sparked a lively discussion of this little-known foreign intervention in Yemen's civil war of the 1960s and the book is reviewed in the present volume.

10 December 2020. Helen Lackner, visiting fellow at the European Centre for Foreign Relations, Research Associate at SOAS and former Editor of the *BYS Journal* spoke on *The PDRY in its Historical Context*, with the event chaired by former *BYS* Chairman Noel Brehony, himself an expert on PDRY history.

4 March 2021. This was the first of our series on *Winding Down Yemen's War* with a panel discussing *What it Would Take to Achieve Peace* and whether the Biden Administration's first steps were likely to prove successful. A high-level panel gave their views from a range of perspectives, followed by a wide-ranging discussion. The panel, following the format of two Yemenis and two outside commentators, consisted of Rt Hon Alistair Burt, former long-standing Middle East and North Africa Minister at the Foreign Office, Amat Al-Soswa, former Minister and Head of the Executive Bureau in Sana'a, Abdulghani Al-Iryani, a highly respected political analyst and Associate of the Sana'a Centre, and Jonathan Powell, who played a key role in the Northern Ireland peace talks that led to the Good Friday Agreement.

25 March 2021. A panel event organised and moderated by our Vice-Chairman, Taher Qassim, examined the Current Situation in al-Mahra. The four panellists were Saeed Al-Mahri, Researcher at the Leverhulme Trust, Ahmed Naji from the Malcolm Kerr Carnegie Centre in Beirut, Elena De Lozier from the Washington Institute for Near East Policy and Dr Noel Brehony former diplomat and author.

12 April 2021. A highly entertaining event organised by Committee member Hamdan Dammag in which Professor Kamal Abu-Deeb, one of the foremost Arab literature critics and researchers of the modern era and Emeritus Professor of Arabic at the University of London gave an illustrated talk on Cul-

tural Politics and the Symbolic Power of Art and Architecture: A Contemplation of the Art and Political History of Yemen.

27 May 2021. The second in our *Winding Down the Yemen War* series, entitled *Negotiating Peace in Yemen at the Local Level*. This event looked at the range of unofficial dialogues and moves to rebuild damaged relationships between Yemenis at the grassroots. It was organised by Committee member Sarah Clowry with a panel consisting of Marwa Baabad, Associate Fellow at RUSI and *BYS* Committee member, Shoqi Al-Maqtari, Senior Advisor at Search for Common Ground, Kawkab Al-Thaibani co-founder of Women4Yemen, a network of Yemeni activists advocating for peace and security in Yemen, and Dr Thania Paffenholz, Executive Director of Inclusive Peace, a Swiss organisation that supports peace processes.

### **The *BYS Journal***

The *Journal* is now taking on a new larger A4 format with a redesigned cover. Content has been selected by our new Editor, Thanos Petouris, who has been supported by an Editorial Committee. In redesigning the *Journal* the Committee agreed on two aims: to re-connect the *Journal* with the activities of the Society (events, awards, and projects) and to create links between *BYS* and the Yemeni communities across the UK. The new format allows for a significantly more substantial *Journal* than in the past, with around twice the number of articles that have been included in previous years.

We look forward to hearing reactions from the membership on our new-look *Journal* once it is out. Thanos is keen to receive ideas for articles from the membership and he can be contacted directly at [editor@b-ys.org.uk](mailto:editor@b-ys.org.uk).



Muhammad Bin-Dohry on a visit to al-Rahma Co-operative Hospital to deliver *BYS* funds





Air puffer in use at Ras Morbat Eye Clinic

### **BYS-supported Projects in Yemen**

We are currently supporting four projects in Yemen and have deliberately aimed to ensure a spread across Yemen's different regions. We have faced the challenge of needing to transfer funds to UK bank accounts given all the complications of transferring money to Yemen, but in each case we have found ways of doing this. Our Yemen Appeal continues to attract substantial funds and remains open for donations.

- **Ras Morbat Eye Clinic** in Aden. BYS has long supported the essential work of this clinic, which managed to keep going through all recent conflict and insecurity. Recent grants have been for essential equipment. Champion: John Huggins.
- **Al-Rahma Co-operative Hospital** in Mukalla, which we are supporting for the second year running with contributions towards essential equipment. Champion: Dr Noel Brehony.
- **Yemen Education and Relief Organisation (YERO)** in Sana'a. This organisation, run by Nouria Nagi OBE whom many of you will know, supports orphaned and abandoned children, whose number has increased dramatically with the war. We are making our second grant this year. Champion: James Spencer
- **Action for Child Trauma (ACT)** has recently

begun operations in Yemen. It provides expert training, delivered by highly experienced women from the Arab world. The traumatising of Yemeni children has become a major issue during the war and ACT works to address anxiety and to build resilience. BYS will be making its first grant this year, directed at their work in Ta'izz and Hadhramaut. Champion: Julian Lush

### **Website and Facebook**

The Society's Facebook Group is our most active media channel, and now has 1,719 members, over 100 more than last year, and further applications being reviewed. The website itself ([www.b-ys.org.uk](http://www.b-ys.org.uk)) has benefitted from a number of improvements but we are conscious it needs a more fundamental refresh as soon as time can be found from within our Committee. New and younger members of the Committee continue to bring valuable ideas and experience.

### **BYS Academic Award**

The Committee made a grant in late 2020 to Gabriel Lavin of the University of California Los Angeles to enable him to research South Yemeni music at the British Library, specifically examining Aden's early recording industry. Gabriel's research was delayed by the restrictions of the pandemic, but he was able to come to London and spend time researching at the British Library this summer. We are grateful that he was able to give an online lecture to the Society on Aden's Music Industry and he has also contributed a very interesting article on the same topic in this journal. We will be advertising these awards more widely within academic institutions and hope this way to gain more Yemeni applicants.



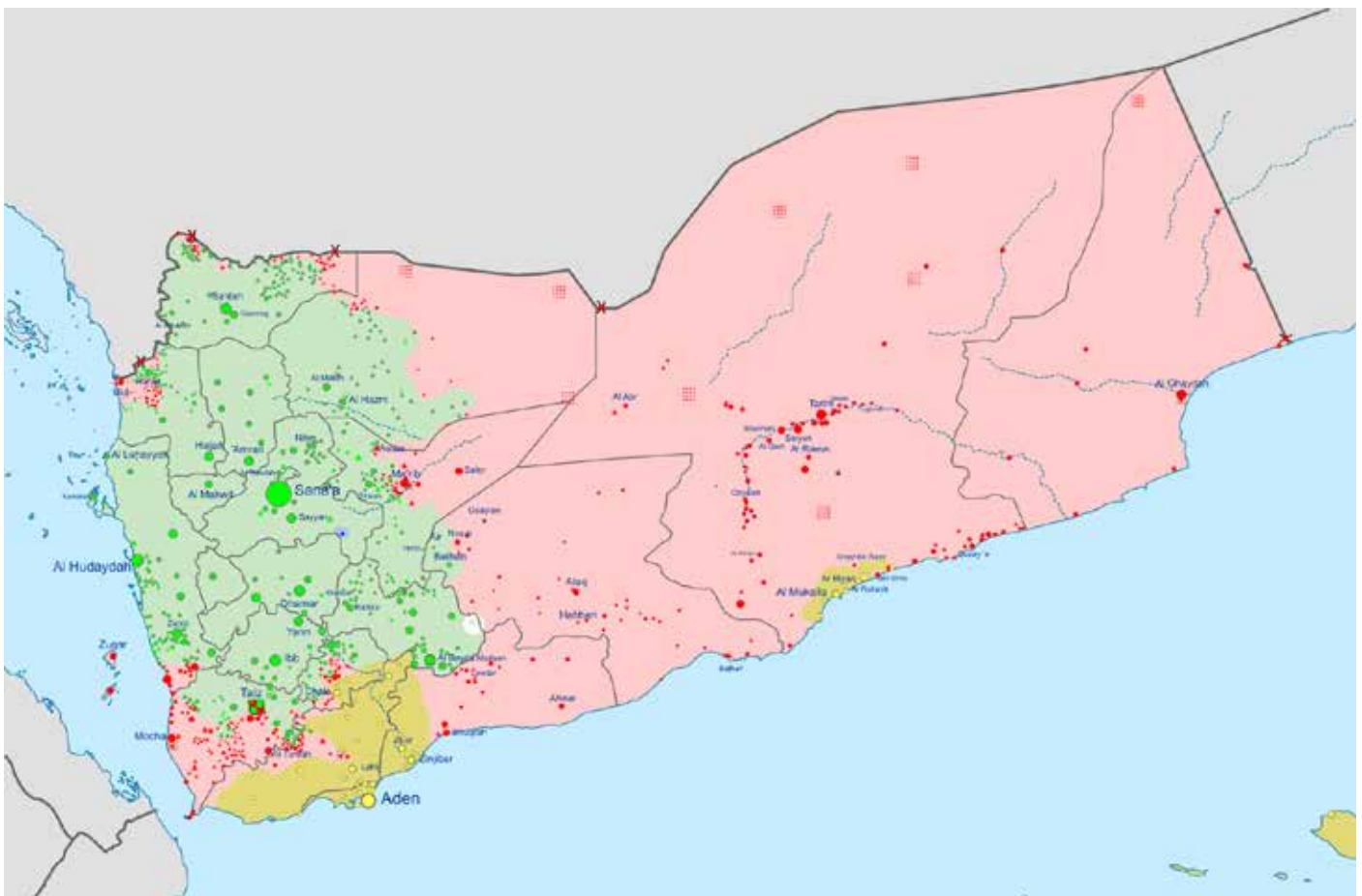
# YEMEN POLITICAL UPDATE

NOEL BREHONY

concluded the 2020 Political update by saying: *'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.'* In fact, it got a lot worse in 2021 with heavy casualties on the battlefields, further fragmentation of the country, a currency crisis and an intensified humanitarian crisis.

## The War

The Huthis (whose political party is Ansar Allah) renewed their operation to take Marib in February 2021 — it had begun a year earlier. They made significant progress, but Marib tribal militias and Yemeni government troops supported by coalition aircraft have prevented them taking Marib city, the oil and gas fields, and the electricity station. In March 2021, the Hadi-appointed governor of Marib, Sultan al-Arada, estimated that 18,000 government fighters had died in the fighting since the previous March. Huthi casualties were almost certainly higher because of their battlefield tactics and vulnerability to air strikes. By the end of 2021, Emirati-trained ground forces (the *'Amaliqa* or Giants Brigades) provided vital support to the anti-Huthi camp, succeeding in pushing away



Areas of Control:

- Internationally Recognised Government
- Supreme Political Council (Huthis or Ansar Allah)
- Southern Transitional Council
- AQAP

Areas of Control in Yemen as of November 2021  
 (By Ali Zifan — The map image is based on Template: Yemeni Civil War detailed map. CC BY-SA 4.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=47087541>.)

the Huthis from parts of northern Shabwa, Harib, and parts of Marib governorate. This constituted a major setback to the Huthi side, and accounts for the latter's drone and missile attack against UAE territory — a rare occurrence during the course of the current conflict.

For the Huthis, victory in Marib would secure their control over most of the former North Yemen and Marib's valuable resources. Its loss would be a major blow to the Internationally Recognised Government (IRG) led by President Hadi and the coalition, and potentially expose Yemen's south to a Huthi offensive. It is thus vital strategically and financially to both sides apart from also housing hundreds of thousands of people displaced from other parts of Yemen.<sup>1</sup>

Periodic fighting in al-Jawf and al-Bayda is mostly related to the situation in Marib, though there are long-standing local rivalries in al-Bayda that complicate the situation. Other fronts are in a relative stalemate with occasional rounds of fighting. It is expected that the Huthis might try to compensate for their recent losses in the Marib front by engaging coalition forces elsewhere along the frontline. The Huthis took territory just south of Hudayda when the *'Amaliqa* withdrew to redeploy to Shabwa. The Stockholm Agreement of 2018 remains only partially implemented. The IRG has gained some territory on the Yemeni side of the Saudi border and Huthi forces make temporary incursions into Saudi Arabia. Huthi missile and drone attacks on more distant Saudi targets have increased in frequency and range. Saudi defences bring most of them down, but political leaders know that one unlucky strike against a vital target or large city could damage confidence in

the Saudi regime. UN Inspectors report higher levels of Iranian support for the Huthis, both financial and operational, in a country that is vital to Saudi Arabia but of marginal importance to Iran.

### **Huthi Power**

Ansar Allah is the most powerful political force in Yemen, controlling through the Supreme Political Council the major government institutions, a quarter of Yemen's territory and at least two-thirds of its population. The Huthis have switched from exercising power through networks of 'supervisors' to appointing loyalists, many of them from Sa'ada and adjoining governorates and from Hashemite families to key ministerial, administrative and governorate posts, including the military and the security services. They pay for the war and governance by imposing taxes, including taxes on food imports and even humanitarian support. Many state employees receive only small proportions of their salaries intermittently. Though there are reports of tensions within the political and military leadership, the Huthis are the most cohesive grouping in Yemen and have the support of parts of the traditional northern Yemeni elites. They mobilise popular support by asserting that they are defending Yemen against Saudi, Emirati and US aggression, presenting the forces of the IRG as Saudi-backed mercenaries. When tribal opposition has appeared — as it did in the Hajour in 2019 — the Huthis have dealt with it ruthlessly.

### **The Internationally Recognised Government**

The IRG is unable to exercise authority in large parts of the area it notionally controls. Within the IRG, the al-Islah party is the dominant political influence through its organisational capacity and preponderance in the military, particularly in Marib, Ta'izz city and eastern area of Abyan, the northern parts of Hadhramaut and Shabwa. Openly proclaiming its aim of restoring an independent southern state, the Southern Transitional Council (STC) controls Aden, Lahj, Dhala', western Abyan and the island of Soqatra as well as the coastal area of Hadhramaut and has the loyalty of mostly UAE-trained militias that include the Security Belt and other 'Elite' forces. Aydarus al-Zubaydi, the STC leader, presents himself as a southern Yemeni president in waiting. The Riyadh Agreement, negotiated under Saudi auspices in 2019 in an attempt to create a power-sharing arrangement that would allow the return of the Hadi

<sup>1</sup> For a detailed analysis of the impact of victory or defeat in Marib see: ACAPS (2021) 'Yemen: Escalation in Marib and Potential Humanitarian and Economic Impacts Scenario', accessed in: [https://www.acaps.org/special-report/yemen-escalation-marib-and-potential-humanitarian-and-economic-impacts?acaps\\_mode=advanced](https://www.acaps.org/special-report/yemen-escalation-marib-and-potential-humanitarian-and-economic-impacts?acaps_mode=advanced)



A Friday prayer in Sana'a (©Luca Nevola, 2011)

government to Aden, has only been partially implemented and has failed to unite the anti-Huthi forces and deliver effective government to the south. A new cabinet including STC ministers was announced in late 2020 but when the aircraft carrying the ministers from Riyadh landed in Aden it was attacked by missiles fired from Huthi-controlled territory. No ministers were injured but 28 people died. Disputes and armed clashes between IRG and STC forces soon broke out in and around Aden and many ministers left Aden. Saudi attempts to persuade the two sides to compromise have been met with stubborn resistance, indicating the limit of Riyadh's ability to persuade even its own allies to cooperate.

### **Fragmentation**

Although the UAE withdrew the bulk of its forces from Yemen in 2019, it continues to finance the STC which shares the UAE's antipathy to al-Islah. After the latest attack by the Huthis on Emirati territory, the latter has upgraded its participation in the conflict indirectly through loyal local forces, notably the *'Amaliqa*, and directly by successfully attacking Huthi infrastructure in an attempt to curtail their ability to launch further attacks. At the same time, Saudi Arabia relies on al-Islah for the ground war on key frontlines. Other UAE-supported forces led by Tariq Salih, a nephew of the late Ali Abdallah Salih, are based in the West Coast and southern Tihama and have recently moved to support in the defence of Marib. Tariq Salih has also opened a political bureau in an effort to position himself — and potentially other Salih family members — to have a say in the future of Yemen. The core of his forces are former members of the Yemeni Republican Guard in an uneasy alliance of convenience with the *'Amaliqa*,

which are mostly southern troops and Salafis, and the Tihama militias. There are thus potential centres of power in Marib, Ta'izz, Aden and the West Coast whilst elsewhere in Hadhramaut and Shabwa, for example, local leaders seem determined to run their own affairs and not take orders from regimes based in Sana'a, Aden or Riyadh.

### **Saudi, Omani and UAE Relations**

Saudi-UAE relations have been under strain — for reasons unrelated to Yemen — and they continue to pursue different strategies except in areas like Bab al-Mandab, where both appear to be involved in building military facilities on Mayun (Perim) island. Riyadh is frustrated that the UAE does not use its influence on the STC to make the Riyadh Agreement work. The Saudis keep few troops in the IRG area. A small force helps protect the presidential palace in Aden and another remains on Soqatra, where the STC and UAE are in *de facto* control. Al-Mahra is the one area where the Saudis have a significant presence, ostensibly to combat the smuggling of Iranian weapons, but creating suspicions in al-Mahra and Oman that Riyadh might never leave — in part to facilitate an oil pipeline into the Arabian Sea bypassing the Straits of Hormuz. However, Saudi-Omani relations have greatly improved since the accession of Sultan Haytham, leading to the revival of a plan to build a pipeline to carry Saudi crude oil to Duqm — a safer and shorter pipeline than one through Yemen.

### **The Scale of the Humanitarian Crisis**

A dramatic fall in the exchange rate of the Yemen riyal in use in IRG-controlled areas that peaked at 1,700 to the US dollar in December 2021 has meant that even greater numbers of Yemeni families cannot afford food and basic commodities.<sup>2</sup> Yemen remains the world's worst humanitarian crisis with nearly 21 million people (out of a population of 30 million) needing some form of humanitarian assistance. There are no reliable statistics on the impact of Covid-19, but according to the WHO a little more than 1% of Yemenis had received a first dose of the vaccine by January 2022.<sup>3</sup> The UN Humanitarian Response Plan for 2021, which seeks \$3.85 billion, had received only \$1.63 billion by the end of June 2021.

Britain has provided generous support, both to the UN Special Envoy's team and humanitarian relief, but the decision to reduce the size of its contribution to overseas aid temporarily has had a disproportionate impact on Yemen according to international humanitarian agencies. The latter argue that there should be a combined world effort to reopen Hudayda port, especially for the regular and predictable flow of fuel, and to reopen Sana'a Airport for commercial flights to serve Yemeni civilians. Tragically, both sides use these issues as bargaining chips, as they prioritise war over humanitarian relief.

### **No Negotiations**

Martin Griffiths, who has since been replaced as UN Special Envoy by Sweden's Hans Grundberg but remains involved in Yemen as the UN Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, and his team have had the almost impossible task of finding a route to a peace deal. Ansar Allah thinks it can win the war — or not be defeated — and is in no mood yet to compromise, although its recent military losses in Marib might compel it to reconsider its stance. The IRG supported by the coalition insists that any deal must be based on the implementation of UNSC resolution 2216 of 2015, which in practice requires that the Huthis give up most of their gains and restores the IRG to the status quo of 2014. Huthi leaders demand that they should negotiate with Saudi Arabia, which fits with their narrative that they are defending Yemen against foreign aggression. However, despite its weakness on the ground, the IRG seems able to sustain the current level of fighting and can use its international legitimacy to limit Huthi interaction with international financial institutions.

There are some glimmers of hope. Saudi and Huthi officials have been talking to (or past) each other for many months, mostly in Oman, and Saudi and Iranian intelligence officials have been meeting in Iraq. Saudi Arabia clearly wants to end the war, but not at the price the Huthis appear to be demand-

<sup>2</sup> See: Yemen Economy Tracking Initiative (<https://yemen.yeti.acaps.org>)

<sup>3</sup> WHO COVID-19 Situation Dashboard (<https://covid19.who.int>)



ing. The change in administration in Washington DC has led to the US injecting more energy into finding a way forward with the appointment of its own Special Envoy: the experienced and energetic diplomat Tim Lenderking. President Biden has reduced US support for the coalition but stopped short of withdrawing military assistance to Saudi Arabia fully, concluding that action weakening one side in the conflict is likely to strengthen the intransigence of the other. Lenderking has publicly recognised that the Huthi control of much of the former North Yemen is a reality that cannot be ignored but has castigated their campaign in Marib and rejection of offers of a ceasefire. It remains to be seen whether the US administration will be pushed by Huthi attacks on the Emirates, where there is significant US military presence, to reconsider the lifting of its designation of the Huthis as a terrorist organisation.

### **Time for Compromise**

No significant change is likely until the Huthis (and the IRG and coalition) acknowledge the stalemate in Marib and elsewhere and put the suffering of millions of Yemenis ahead of their own political and economic interests. That might enable the start of what will be a lengthy and difficult period of negotiation, perhaps beginning with a ceasefire between at least the main protagonists that would allow a greater flow of humanitarian relief and basic supplies. In parallel, the new UN Special Envoy will need to find the combination of carrots and sticks to persuade not just the Huthis and the IRG but also other powerful and resourced actors including the STC and Tariq Salih's forces to end the war and make new governing arrangements, which might be a confederal or federal state or more than one state. One of the most hopeful developments has been the multitude of local peacebuilding initiatives (in which women have played a prominent role) that have enabled communities to deliver some stability and support to their areas. Many argue that a top-down approach to state building can no longer work in Yemen and that peace should be built from the local to the national.<sup>4</sup> However, that cannot happen until the main protagonists recognise that the time has come to negotiate and compromise. That does not appear to be imminent.

<sup>4</sup>See the recent European Institute for Peace report: 'Pathways for Reconciliation in Yemen' in: <https://www.eip.org/pathwaysforreconciliation>

# MUSIC IN COLONIAL ADEN: GLOBALISATION, CULTURAL POLITICS, AND THE RECORD INDUSTRY IN AN INDIAN OCEAN PORT CITY c. 1937–1960

GABRIEL W. LAVIN\*

## Introduction

In 1980, the eminent Adeni intellectual, author, musician and poet, Muhammad Abduh Ghanim, published the second edition of his groundbreaking book, *Sung Poetry of Sana'a*. Based on a doctoral dissertation completed at the University of London in 1969 that included ethnography and archival research conducted throughout Europe and North and South Yemen, Egyptian literary critic Shawqi Daif did not exaggerate when he claimed that, at the time, it was one of the most comprehensive studies of a musical tradition in the Arab world. Writing from the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY), Ghanim's book provides a unique snapshot into Yemen's history, when support for unification between North and South was becoming increasingly popular during the 1970s and 1980s, which eventually led to formal unification in 1990. Yet, over ten years before official unification, Ghanim sketched the grounds for the cultural unification of all Yemenis under the flag of Sana'ani song and poetry, centred around the historic political capital of northern Yemen. As a home-grown Adeni cultural figure from the South, Ghanim's gaze Northwards to Sana'a as the heart of Yemeni culture is reflected in the book's dedication, "From the Port of Yemen to its Capital."<sup>1</sup>

Synthesising modernisation theory with pan-Arab ideas of culture, Ghanim contrasted the multicultural musical landscape of southern Yemen centred in the historic port city of Aden with the music of Sana'a situated in the relatively secluded northern

highlands. With Aden's history of British colonisation, which extended well over a century (1839–1967), and historically prevalent media outlets like movie theatres, radio stations and record companies, Ghanim suggested that the Egyptian, Kuwaiti and Indian influences that characterised Adeni music would be less practical in culturally uniting all Yemenis. More appropriate would be Sana'ani music and poetry, which were historically cultivated in feudal or tribal regions of Yemen that were relatively untouched by global capitalism and colonisation, and thus more connected to the Yemeni land and its traditional music. Yet as a poet and artist who was a founding figure of Aden's music scene in the decades leading up to Aden's decolonisation, Muhammad Abduh Ghanim did not look down upon the cosmopolitan music scene that he played a fundamental role in creating, a scene that was an important source of cultural identity for Adenis. In fact, he praised Aden for keeping Sana'ani music alive, noting that artists like the father and son Muhammad and Ibrahim al-Mas made some of the earliest Sana'ani music recordings in Aden during the late 1930s with the Odeon and Aden Crown labels. This was at a time when they would have been unable to perform in the conservative Northern Zaydi Imamate, which had formally outlawed this type of music.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ghanim, Muhammad Abduh, *Sha'ir al-Ghina' al-Sana'ani* [*Sung Poetry of Sana'a*], 2nd ed. (Beirut: Dar al-'Uwdah, 1980)

<sup>2</sup> Ghanim (1980), pp. 27–46

\* Gabriel Lavin gave an online lecture to the Society in December 2021 on Adeni music. You can watch his lecture on the Society's YouTube channel, where you can listen to samples of musical recordings mentioned in this article: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lbIqNO5SXC8>

## Aden's Musical Identity

If Aden's historic record industry played an important role in the history of Sana'ani song, then its commercial music production between the 1930s and the 1960s was equally influential to the development of popular music throughout southern Yemen, the Gulf and even East Africa.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, the historical influence of global Indian Ocean exchange is observable in the internal development of Aden's music industry, with musicians, recordings and musical styles being imported from the Gulf, East Africa, Egypt, India and even Southeast Asia. In the decades before sentiment for unification around Sana'a gained traction, the cultural, economic and political dynamics of Aden's colonial civil society had already established a long tradition of discussion and debate about musical authenticity and identity, harkening back to the beginning of the commercial music industry in the late 1930s.

Building on Jean Lambert and Rafik al-Akouri's (2020) recent groundbreaking survey of Aden's early recording industry, I suggest further study of early

Adeni record industry, and particularly the gramophone era of the 78rpm record, should consider the socio-political circumstances that shaped the climate of music-making in Aden during a time before there was widespread enthusiasm for cultural unification with the North.<sup>4</sup> To start, this article explores how people contemporarily discussed and debated the cosmopolitan musical scene of Aden during the 1930s to the 1950s, and how these debates marked a confluence between cultural industries and the dynamic socio-political atmosphere in southern Yemen during that time. Similarly, it suggests that this confluence was inseparable from the global circulation of people and commodities. Through a globally oriented and historically focused approach, the study of commercial music in colonial Aden, and Yemen more broadly, can be sensitive to not only pre-unification contexts, but also account for how the historical influence of Aden's record industry extends well beyond the borders of modern-day Yemen, including to East Africa and especially to the Gulf region. Similarly, and instead of labelling certain historic commercial recordings from Aden that reflect Somali, Indian, Egyptian, or Kuwaiti musical influences as 'not Yemeni', we can rather lend an ear to the historic struggles and debates that made such claims about Yemeni musical identity possible. Certainly, Ghanim's vision of a pan-Yemeni music based on Sana'ani song and poetry was not a call to exclude South Yemeni or foreign musical cultures, but a call to unite Yemenis of North and South despite their differences and diversity.<sup>5</sup> In other words, it was a conscious proposal to mend cultural and political

<sup>3</sup> See the recent essay by Jonathan Ward for *Excavated Shellac on the importance of the Adeni record industry to early Somalian popular music*:

<https://excavatedshellac.com/2020/07/15/somali-music-in-the-78-rpm-era>

<sup>4</sup> Lambert, Jean and Rafik al-Akouri, 'Patrimonialisation 'sauvage' et archéologie industrielle de la musique yéménite: les premiers enregistrements commerciaux à Aden (1935-1960)', *Annales islamologiques* 53 (2020). Also known as a 'gramophone' or 'phonograph' record, the 78rpm disc technology was invented by the German-American Emile Berliner in the late nineteenth century. Soon after, it surpassed Thomas Edison's wax cylinder technology in popularity and practicality for the commercial production of music. Gramophone discs were made from shellac and were the dominant global format for mass-produced music until the innovation and popularisation of vinyl during the 1950s. In most general terms then, the global 78rpm era roughly occurred from 1900 to 1960.

<sup>5</sup> Ghanim (1980), p. 35

divides generated during the colonial era.

A look at historical written sources provides a window into the various contours that divisions over music production may have taken during the colonial period. These sources also reveal how the record industry was enabling contestation over musical culture by providing a means to discuss authenticity and identity through genre categorisations like 'Somali', 'Sana'ani', 'Hadhrami', 'Swahili', 'Kuwaiti', 'Lahji' and other regional labels written on commercial recordings. Particularly revealing in this regard is the book *Our Popular Songs* (1959) written by Muhammad Murshid Naji, the late oud player, song writer and singer who has left a considerable legacy throughout the Arabian Peninsula.<sup>6</sup> The leftist public intellectual and novelist Muhammad Said Miswat wrote the introduction for *Our Popular Songs* and outlined what he considered to be a crisis of musical identity in the South during the 1950s caused by three different waves of foreign influences. The first was Kuwaiti music, enabled by cultural and economic connections between Aden and the Gulf and the importation of Kuwaiti recordings produced earlier in Iraq during the 1920s and 1930s. The second was Indian music, the result of a long history of colonisation from British India that initiated labour migrations from the subcontinent and the importation of Indian media, including film, recordings and

musical instruments. The third and most recent influence was Egyptian music, which was caused by the importation of pan-Arab music and film to Aden from the United Arab Republic.<sup>7</sup>

### The Lahji Song

Within this intercultural mayhem, Miswat argued that music from the Sultanate of Lahj that surrounded Aden, rather than Sana'ani music, was a beacon of authenticity that more accurately reflected the cultural sentiments of southern Yemen. For him, the pure Lahji song stood in contrast to Adeni song, which to him was a hodgepodge of foreign musical styles. Later on in the book, Muhammad Murshid Naji explained how the Adeni Musician's Club (*Nadi al-Musiqa al-'Adaniyya*) established their own record label, Kayaphone, to propagate a cultural and musical vision for the South. He pointed out that many of their songs were composed by Muhammad Abduh Ghanim, the later proponent of the Sana'ani song.<sup>8</sup> As Jean Lambert has noted, the Adeni Musician's Club was a formative cultural movement in the history of Adeni civil society, which simultaneously embraced multiculturalism and pan-Arabism in an attempt to construct a local musical identity.<sup>9</sup> But as a movement that appears to have predated the self-conscious Adeni musical styling of the 1940s and 50s, Lahji songs, for Miswat, were more authentic because they were based on popular (*sha'bi*) and local musical themes. Indeed, it was in part thanks to the early Adeni record industry, which propagated Lahji music from the 1930s, that the Lahji style could have such an established *sha'bi* appeal in the 1950s.

Musicians from Lahj, often listed on record labels with the title 'Lahji', are particularly prominent in the early catalogues printed by some of the first record companies to set up shop in Aden around 1937 and 1938.<sup>10</sup> Two of these were a local label called Aden Crown Record that printed its records at the Decca company plant in New Malden, England, and a branch of the international Odeon firm that printed its records at the Lindstrom plant in Berlin, Germany. Both endeavours were owned by brothers Husayn and Ali al-Safi, two prominent Adeni merchants.<sup>11</sup> The prominence of Lahji musicians in their early

<sup>6</sup> Aulqi, Adel, 'Mohammad Murshed Naji: A Major Yemeni Musician', *The British-Yemeni Society Journal* 21 (2013), pp. 40–46

<sup>7</sup> Naji, Muhammad Murshid, *Aghanina al-Sha'biyya [Our Popular Songs]* (Aden: al-Jamahir, 1959), pp. 3–16

<sup>8</sup> Naji (1959), pp. 59–60; also see: Lambert and al-Akouri (2020), p. 79

<sup>9</sup> Lambert, Jean, 'Musiques régionales et identité nationale', *Revue du Monde Musulman et de la Méditerranée* 67 (1993), pp. 171–186

<sup>10</sup> Lambert and al-Akouri (2020), p. 64, suggest that the Parlophone company could have set up shop in Aden as early as 1934–35, a statement ostensibly supported by R. B. Serjeant's (1951) comments on the early Adeni record industry during the early 1950s (see below). They also note that another Adeni label Jafferphon, had set up shop in Aden before the Second World War

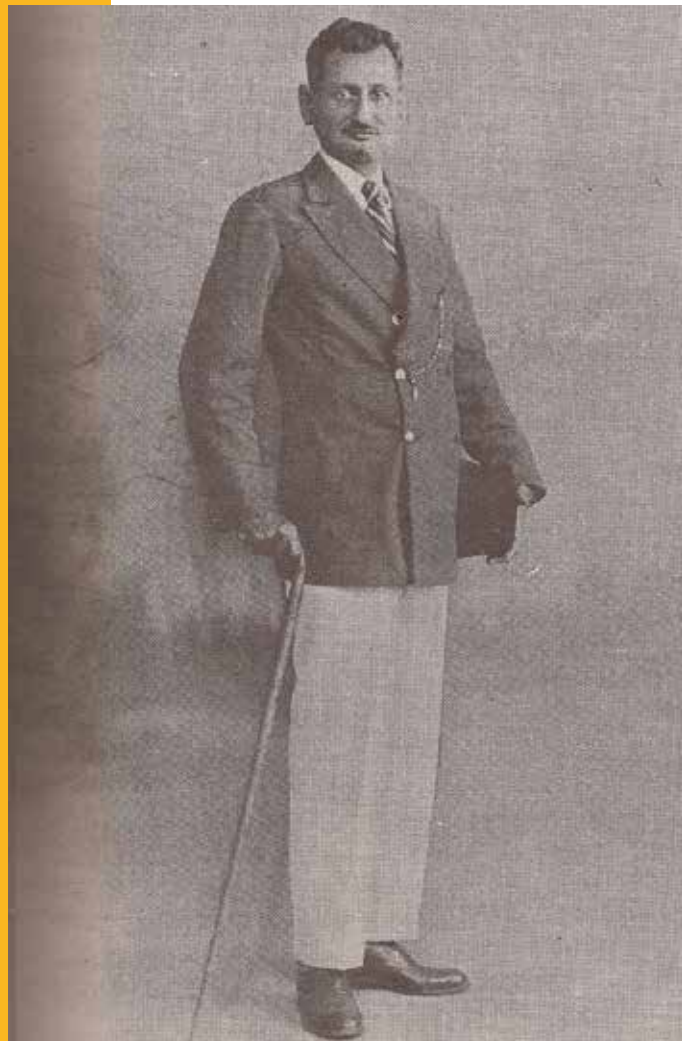
<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 59–69

<sup>12</sup> Willis, John M, 'Making Yemen Indian: Rewriting the Boundaries of Imperial Arabia', *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 41 (2009), pp. 23–38



catalogues was connected to the ruling al-Abdali family of Lahj, who were historically supported by the British colonial system in South Arabia and were great patrons of music.<sup>12</sup>

The Lahji Sultan Abd al-Karim Fadhl al-Abdali's brother, Prince Ahmad Fadhl al-Abdali, more commonly known as 'The Commander' or al-Qumandan, was a prolific lyricist whose poems were almost exclusively featured in songs recorded by early Lahji artists like Fadhl Muhammad al-Lahji. As a popular music propagated by the Adeni industry, and whose cultivation pivoted around the Lahji aristocracy, the Lahji musical movement appears to have been a part of a wider cultural movement emanating from the colonial political structure in southwestern Arabia. This is reflected in a collection of al-Qumandan's lyrics called *Diwan of Lahji Songs*, which was compiled and published by Ibrahim al-Rasim in 1938 and praised in its introduction written by the eminent Adeni lawyer, political reformer and author Muhammad Ali Luqman. He noted that, by that point, Lahji songs written by al-Qumandan comprised most of what was performed by singers in Aden at the time, and that they were equally loved throughout the Aden colony and the Lahj Sultanate since they were written in a simple and accessible manner, catering to populist sentiments.<sup>13</sup> Ahmad Fadhl al-Qumandan himself seems to have considered his musical movement as a cultural pillar of Lahji and South Yemeni political autonomy, explicitly stating in one of his poems in *Diwan of Lahji Songs* a desire to keep the Northern Sana'ani song out of vogue in the South.<sup>14</sup>



Prince Ahmad Fadhl al-Abdali (c. 1930s)  
(Photo: Muhammad Murshid Naji, *Al-ghina' al-yamani al-qadim wa-mashahiruhu* [The Old Yemeni Song and its Famous Representatives] (Mataba' al-Tal'ia, 1983), p. 106)

<sup>13</sup> Al-'Abdali, Ahmad Fadhl b. 'Ali, *Diwan al-Aghani al-Lahjiyya* [Diwan of Lahji Songs] (Aden: Matba'a al-Hilal, 1938?), see introduction

<sup>14</sup> Ghanim (1980), p. 35

## Global Influences

Yet early Lahji music, while a possible symbol of political autonomy, was certainly not an autonomous musical milieu, experiencing influences from commercial enterprises that transcended global political boundaries during the 1930s and 1940s. In particular, the global Latin American rumba craze of the 1930s was influential to the development of rhythmic style and musical instrumentation in Lahji and Adeni music, elements which have become defining features of modern music throughout the Arabian Peninsula.<sup>15</sup> One musician responsible for the popularisation of rumba in southern Yemen during the 1930s and 1940s was a Hadhrami musician born and raised in the Dutch East Indies, Shaykh al-Bar. Although never setting foot in his ancestral homeland, Shaykh al-Bar produced a vast corpus of recordings in Surabaya during the 1930s with the Chinese-owned Canary label, featuring a cosmopolitan mix of Latin, Hawaiian, American, Egyptian and Hadhrami musical styles.<sup>16</sup>

According to R. B. Serjeant, Shaykh al-Bar's records featuring jazzy foxtrots, rumbas and tangos were quite popular in southern Yemen during the 1940s, while he predicted al-Bar's music would have a lasting influence on modern Hadhrami poetry.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, their copyrights were later purchased by a Hadhrami business man Aydarus al-Hamid and reprinted in Bahrain by Western Studios for export to markets back in southern Yemen.<sup>18</sup> The importance of rumba to early Lahji music is reflected in a reissue of *Diwan of Lahji Songs* published in 1943, in which the Adeni intellectual Abd al-Rahman Jurjura invoked the rumba rhythm as a metaphor for the social advancement that Prince Ahmad Fadhl al-Abdali's musical movement inspired. 'Music points to the progress of the umma and the elevation of its people's feelings. The prince's music is overflowing with dancing ecstatic joy, like the rumba, stirring the emotions of us Yemenis, Hadhramis, and our Arab brothers'.<sup>19</sup>



An 'Arabic Rumba' recording by Sheikh al-Bar (pictured on label) (Photo courtesy of Muhammad al-Mughni)

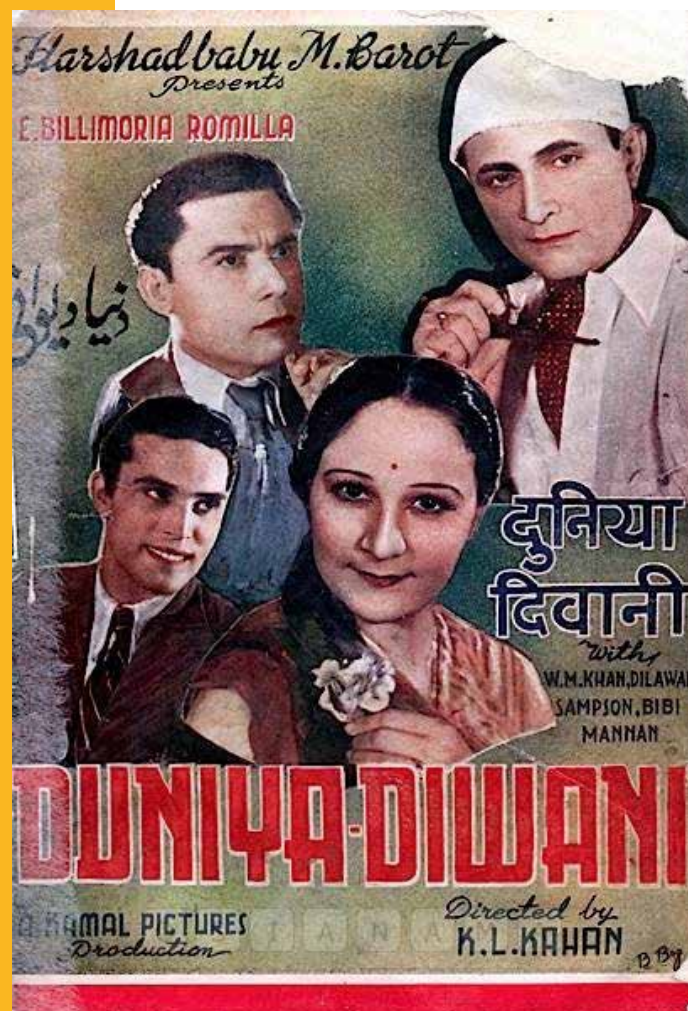
<sup>15</sup> In large part thanks to the historic activity of musicians in southern Yemen, the rumba is a common rhythm in popular music throughout the Arabian Peninsula, while the Afro-Cuban percussion instrument the bongos or bingus in Arabic, has become an integral instrument to percussion ensembles and bands throughout the region

<sup>16</sup> Yampolsky, Philip B., *Music and Media in the Dutch East Indies: Gramophone Records and Radio in the Late Colonial Era, 1903-1942* (Ph.D Dissertation: University of Washington, 2013); Al-'Aydarus, 'Umar 'Abd al-Rahman, *Muqadamat fi al-'Ughaniyya al-Hadhramiyya* [Introductions to Hadhrami Song] (Mukalla: Matba'a Wahadin al-Haditha li-l-Awfast, 2011)

<sup>17</sup> Serjeant, R. B., *Prose and Poetry from Hadramawt* (London: Taylor's Foreign Press, 1951), p. 51

<sup>18</sup> I thank Ahmad al-Salhi for letting me view the original Canary recordings and their South Arabian Record reprints in Kuwait during Spring 2020. The information given here about the rights purchase and reprint is listed on the South Arabian record labels. Also, a special thanks to Muhammad al-Mughni for granting me access to his records collection in Kuwait during 2018, which contained numerous Shaykh al-Bar recordings

<sup>19</sup> A 14 January 1943 article in *Fatat al-Jazira* (p. 10) indicates that the reissue was first published that year. The edition consulted here was the third edition: al-'Abdali, Ahmad Fadhl b. 'Ali, *Al-Masdar al-Mufid fi al-Ghina Lahj al-Jadid* [The Complete Source for New Lahji Song], 3rd ed. (Aden: Dar al-Hamdani, 1983), p. 11



Duniya Divani (1943), one of the Indian films that influenced Adeni music according to Luqman (Photo courtesy of <https://bombaymann2.blogspot.com>, accessed 03/09/2021)

### Indian Ocean Connections

Another written source that gives contextual insight into the early Adeni record industry is the newspaper *Fatat al-Jazira*, *The Peninsula's Maiden*, the first independent newspaper on the Arabian Peninsula founded in 1940 by Muhammad Ali Luqman. Its articles shed light on the colonial context of early music production and media industries in Aden, including columns about music and poetry written by individuals like Prince Ahmad Fadhl and Muhammad Abduh Ghanim. Until 1937, the Aden colony and its environs were considered an appendage of Britain's Indian empire, with the ruling families of Lahj and other regions subsumed into the 'durbar' system and courtly ceremonies of the British Raj.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, most of Aden's colonial administration was composed of officers and bureaucrats from India, while Indian expats made a powerful backbone of Aden's trade and commercial sector, especially the Parsi firm of Cowasjee Dinshaw & Bros. Muhammad Luqman even received his legal education in Bombay before establishing a practice back home, where he became the first locally-born Arab lawyer in Aden.

Depicting a social and musical microcosm of the Arab world and Indian Ocean arena of the British Indian Empire, a September 1942 article from *Fatat al-Jazira* described a wedding for the son of the Adeni historian Abdallah Yaqub Khan. It stated that the event was 'unlike any other, banding together Arab, Indian, and European customs. You could see Arabs with their qat, nargilehs, oud, and daf, and next to them Indian musicians with their harmonium and the party's host serving almond beverages (*sharab al-lawz*)'.<sup>21</sup> The article noted that a group of British guests made a rare appearance at the party, and even joined the Indian singer leading the band composed of Arab and Indian instruments performing various songs and anthems, including some popular Egyptian tunes. Yet a year later in December of 1943,

<sup>20</sup> Willis (2009)

<sup>21</sup> "Adan fi usbu'an [Aden in a Week] *Fatat al-Jazira*, September 13, 1942, p. 5



and even though he was a prominent Adeni figure educated in India, Luqman lambasted the influence of popular Indian music in a *Fatat al-Jazira* article entitled 'Adeni Music and Song'.

Echoing the enlightenment idea that musical art reflects the progress and 'psychology' of a nation, Luqman stated that Adeni songs were 'petty' and 'expressed nothing', indicating this reflected Aden's confused national character. Much of his criticism revolved around the influence of Indian media industries, and particularly how artists would write Arabic poems or qasida (pl. *qasaid*) to musical themes appropriated from Indian films. Like later critics, Luqman contrasted the cultural *mélanges* that defined Adeni composition with the more locally grown Lahji musical style revolving around the personality of Ahmad Fadhl.

As we noted earlier, Muhammad Murshid Naji and Muhammad Said Miswat were also concerned about India's influence on Adeni music a decade later. Naji (1959) singled out a singer named Ahmad Abid al-Qatabi, who was particularly influenced by both Kuwaiti musical genres and music from Indian films like *Kisi Se Na Kehna* (1942) and *Duniya Divani* (1943).<sup>22</sup> As early as 1935 in Tawahi, a diverse group of 'Arabs, Indians, Somalis, Parsis, Jews, and Hindus' petitioned the colonial government to establish a movie theatre that would feature Indian and Arabic talkie films.<sup>23</sup> By 1938, there were no less than four talkie cinemas in Aden alone. Two of them — the M. C. C. Talkies and New Theatre — were owned by media giants Messers Syed Jaffer & Brothers, who at the time had also established a record company for commercial music production, Jafferphone.<sup>24</sup> The firm also contracted the Shree Ranjit Movietone production company in Bombay to import the latest Indian pictures, while also importing gramophone records made by the Sodwa and Baidaphone companies in Syria and Lebanon.<sup>25</sup>

## South Arabia's Musical Pluralism

Yet the musical soundtracks of Indian cinema were not the only way Indian cultural industries influenced South Yemen's musical scene, especially given the large number of Indian citizens living in Aden during the dawn of cinemas and record industry. Adeni historian Bilal Ghulam Husayn has recently given an informative outline of the Indian music groups, called *jamat*, active in Aden during the mid-twentieth century. While starting as a form of entertainment for the Indian expat community in Aden, Husayn stated that eventually these musical groups became more mixed with local Arab artists during the 1940s and 1950s, leading to the creation of bi-lingual poems in Hindi (or perhaps Urdu) and Arabic, or Arabic poems sung to music and instrumentation that was purely 'Indian', including the harmonium instrument mentioned in *Fatat al-Jazira*. He claims that there was hardly a wedding in Aden during this time that did not hire a *jamat*, indicating the popularity of this mixed Indian-Arab musical style. This musical atmosphere influenced many prominent twentieth-century musicians from the South who had associated with the *jamat* groups, including Lahji musician Muhammad Saad Abdallah and the Hadhrami brothers of Punjabi decent, Ahmad and Muhammad Jumah Khan.<sup>26</sup>

The careers of Ahmad and Muhammad Jumah Khan are another example of how Aden both attracted and exported a cosmopolitan mix of people and musical styles throughout the western Indian Ocean region: a web of movements that were inseparable from the city's status as a hub of commercial recording during the 1930s, 40s and 50s. They also further reveal the complex ways Aden was plugged into the circulation of people and commodities throughout the Indian Ocean milieu of the British Indian Empire, and even after 1937 when the Aden colony was formally severed from Indian administration. Particularly, the careers of the Khan brothers reveal that diverse 'Indian' musical elements did not always enter Aden directly from India but could also come from its neighbour the Qu'ayti Sultanate in Hadhramaut.

In his intellectual and cultural history of Hadhramaut published in 1961, historian Said Awadh BaWazir praised the musical innovations of Muhammad and Ahmad Jumah Khan, whose father was a Punjabi military conscript in the Qu'ayti military during the nineteenth century. He stated that Ahmad Jumah expertly weaved classical and colloquial Arabic poetry together with Indian melodies played on the harmonium, an instrument he had learned

<sup>22</sup> Naji (1959), pp. 48–50

<sup>23</sup> IOR/R/20/A/2766, 'Request by Mr. A. G. Khat' (1935)

<sup>24</sup> IOR/R/20/B/286, 'Regarding enquiry from the Department of Overseas Trade' (1938)

<sup>25</sup> IOR/R/20/B/288, pp. 38–58

<sup>26</sup> Ghulam Hussein, Bilal, *Zawiyat min tarikh wilayat 'Adan: tarikh watan wa-hikayat insan, 1839–1967 [History of the Aden State, 1839–1967] (Aden: Jarafik li-l-tiba'a wa-l-i'alan, 2014), pp. 520–526*





Two of Muhammad Jumah Khan's recordings spanning his 20-year career. Top: 'Hadhrami' song entitled Ya bu 'Ali al-khatir minawar, recorded for Odeon in Aden (c.1938). Bottom: 'Adani' song entitled Najat 'ayuni bi-'ayunihi, recorded for Bou Zaid Phone in Kuwait (c.1960) (Photos courtesy of Ahmad al-Salhi)

from an Indian music teacher named Azim al-Din while growing up in Mukalla. BaWazir also pointed to Ahmad Jumah's recording career which, while not as prolific as Muhammad's, resulted in a few releases with South Arabia Records during the 1940s or 1950s featuring the harmonium, Indian tabla and the *riqq*, a percussion instrument resembling the tambourine commonly used throughout the Arab world.<sup>27</sup> The older of the two, Muhammad Jumah Khan, learned to play Western instruments like the clarinet, apparently during his service with the Qu'ayti Sultanate's 'Indian' band, and learned to play the Arabic oud later on. He developed a personalised style of oud playing and singing during a vibrant upbringing in Mukalla, where he enjoyed the company of many poets and other musicians. Muhammad also began his almost twenty-year recording career just before the outbreak of the Second World War with the Adeni branch of the German recording firm Odeon (Figure 4), and soon after travelled to East Africa on a Kuwaiti dhow performing for prominent members of the Hadhrami diaspora in Kenya, Somalia and Ethiopia.<sup>28</sup> Although he was influenced by Indian musical instruments and styles like his brother, BaWazir considered Muhammad Jumah's musical innovations and recording career the herald of modern Hadhrami song, inspired by Hadhrami folklore and Egyptian as much as Indian music.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>27</sup> BaWazir, Sa'id 'Awadh, *al-Fikr wa-l-thaqafa fi al-tarikh al-Hadhrami* (Hadhramaut: Maktabat al-Salihyya li-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzia', 2011 [1961]) pp. 253-254. I thank Mohammad al-Mughni for letting me examine and listen to one of Ahmad Jumah's South Arabia recordings in his private collection, Kuwait 2018  
<sup>28</sup> Lambert and al-Akouri (2020), pp. 61-62; Lavin, Gabriel, "A Case Study in Indian Ocean Globalization: 'Adaniyyat in Kuwait" (MA Thesis: University of California, Los Angeles, 2017)  
<sup>29</sup> BaWazir (1961), pp. 249-253

## 'Adaniyyat in the Gulf

After record labels were well established locally in the Gulf during the 1950s, Muhammad Jumah Khan made a historic recording session with the early Kuwaiti record company, Bou Zaid Phone.<sup>30</sup> Thanks to these recordings and his performances in the Gulf, as well as his long-time musical partner and violinist Said Abdulillah settling in Kuwait, Muhammad Jumah Khan is widely considered the founding figure of the 'Adaniyyat musical repertoire in Kuwait today, which is a modern continuation of the Arab-Indian music blends that defined Aden's music scene earlier in the twentieth century — hence the name 'Adaniyyat.<sup>31</sup>

Many other artists from southern Yemen who made records in Aden also went on to pursue commercial success in the Gulf from the 1960s onwards. Such labour migrations led to the proliferation of Hadhrami, Adeni and other Southern Yemeni musical genres throughout the Gulf, and particularly in Kuwait as it became the regional powerhouse of music and media industry during the 1960s and 1970s, which paralleled the rise of its petroleum industries. Early Emirati singers like Said Salim al-Malimi and Jumah al-Baqishi reported learning to sing these Adeni and 'southern' (*janubi*) song styles after migrating to Kuwait to work in the 1960s, where they interacted with many other artists from the region who admired and performed music from southern Yemen.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, the career of Muhammad Jumah Khan is just one testament to the influence of Aden's record industry, and more broadly the entire South and especially regions like Hadhramaut, on the development of popular commercial music outside Yemen during the latter half of the twentieth century.

## Conclusion

To conclude, the early decades of Adeni commercial recordings were situated within a socio-political atmosphere that contained notable anxiety over musical authenticity, and particularly a perceived contrast on the part of some public intellectuals between imported music and more locally cultivated Lahji music. Yet despite such rifts, and particularly regarding 'Indian colonisation' (to employ a term used in 1959 by the late Muhammad Murshid Naji), the Lahji aristocracy and the influence enjoyed by Ahmad Fadhl al-Abdali al-Qumandan historically derived their legitimacy from the British Indian Em-

pire.<sup>33</sup> Nonetheless, in an era before there was widespread enthusiasm for unification with the North, Lahji song and poetry seems to have stood out for many as a unifying symbol of cultural authenticity. In part, this was because it was a genre widely propagated by the early Adeni recording industry, thus embedding its *sha'bi* (popular) appeal and its status as one of the earliest locally generated styles of commercial popular music in South Arabia.

Still, the forces behind the confluence of commercial industry and cultural politics in colonial civil society were inherently global. This was reflected in business contracts with factories and entertainment firms in Europe, the Middle East, and India, as well as in the music itself, which was influenced by everything from Indian cinema to the global Latin rumba craze and Hadhrami musicians like Shaykh al-Bar based in the Dutch East Indies. Furthermore, the circulation of people, musical instruments, and media throughout the Indian Ocean networks informed much of the contested music making in Aden. Even though looked down upon by some, the blending of what was broadly defined as 'Indian' music and instruments, whether inspired by Indian cinema or the local *jamat*, was hugely influential to the musical styles cultivated at Adeni recording studios, concerts and wedding parties during this time. This musical blending was perhaps more often embraced and celebrated, a fact highlighted in the way the cosmopolitan musical culture of Aden, Lahj and Hadhramaut was exported to the Gulf by people like Muhammad Jumah Khan and played a significant role in the founding of modern Gulf music.<sup>34</sup>

It is important to recognise the hardships and conflict in southern Yemen during the 1960s and '70s that caused many to move elsewhere, including to the Gulf, and to also look elsewhere for inspiration. In a time when the colonial aristocracies of South Arabia and the British Indian Empire became history, and their legacy perhaps a source of disunity, Aden's poet Muhammad Abduh Ghanim was inspired to look toward new horizons: northward to Sana'a, and to a new beacon of cultural authenticity that he hoped would inspire a renewed sense of political and social unity for all Yemenis.

<sup>30</sup> According to experts in early Kuwaiti recordings like ethnomusicologist Ahmad al-Salhi, this recording session probably occurred in the early 1960s, just a few years before Muhammad Jumah's death

<sup>31</sup> see: Lavin (2017)

<sup>32</sup> Al-'Abdan, 'Ali, *Hirf wa-'azif: maqalat 'an al-tarab al-sha'bi fi al-Imarat: al-tarikh wa-l-rawad wa-l-aghani* [Essays on Popular Music in the United Arab Emirates] (Sharjah: Sharjah Institute for Heritage, 2018)

<sup>33</sup> Willis (2009)

<sup>34</sup> Urkevich, Lisa, "The Development of Khaliji Popular Music in the Arabian Peninsula: Kuwait, Yemen, and Egyptian Influences," *Academia.edu*, Accessed Sept 7, 2021

# YEMEN AND THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: FROM THE FIRST WAVE TO VACCINATIONS

LUCA NEVOLA & THANOS PETOURIS

Just as the world discusses the opportunity of administering a third dose of the Covid-19 vaccine, by February 2022 only around 768,480 vaccine doses of various types have been administered in Yemen, covering roughly 1.3% of the population.<sup>1</sup> Official records seem to suggest that Yemen was largely spared by the pandemic. By February 2022, around 11,500 coronavirus cases were officially recorded in the country and Yemen ranked 183<sup>rd</sup> for number of cases worldwide.

Such numbers do, however, greatly misrepresent reality. On the one hand, since the beginning of the pandemic, the Huthi authorities — which are in control of most northern areas of the country — have engaged in a systematic cover-up of the infections. On the other hand, the Internationally Recognised Government (IRG) — which mostly controls the southern governorates of Yemen — does not possess the logistical, technical, and political means to engage in a systematic monitoring of the pandemic.<sup>2</sup> The overall result is a dramatic underestimation of the impact of Covid-19 on the Yemeni population.

## Between the Waves

### The First Wave: Huthi Narratives and Policies

During the first wave of the coronavirus pandemic the Huthi authorities adopted a twofold approach. While they acknowledged that the coronavirus constituted a threat, they denied the presence of Covid-19 cases in territories under their control. Huthi narratives mainly described Covid-19 as a politico-military threat. The movement's leader, Abd al-Malik al-Huthi interpreted the pandemic as an act of 'biological warfare' plotted by the US and Israel. He conceived of Covid-19 as a weapon in the hands of the Saudi-led coalition and warned the population to stay alert and fight against the 'actual disease', namely the 'aggression' (i.e. the war waged by the Saudi-led coalition against the Huthis).<sup>3</sup> The rationale of this narrative was clear: blaming the enemy for the potential spread of the pandemic and keeping the population focused on the war, avoiding the spread of panic and massive defections from the frontlines.

In terms of health policies, the Huthi Ministry of Health announced the implementation of several preventive measures and restrictions, including: the creation of quarantine facilities and monitoring teams, the shutting down of public services, shops and markets, the limitation of work activities and the creation of a dedicated hotline. However, when cases eventually appeared in Yemen, the Ministry adopted no serious tracking strategy, only reporting a handful of infections. In addition, it purposefully concealed the actual number of positive cases under the pretext of dealing with the sick ones 'as human beings and not numbers'.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See: *REUTERS COVID-19 TRACKER* at:

<https://graphics.reuters.com/world-coronavirus-tracker-and-maps/countries-and-territories/yemen>

<sup>2</sup> For the latest update on the conflict in Yemen and the various areas of control see Noel Brehony's 'Yemen Political Update' in this journal

<sup>3</sup> Speech by Abd al-Malik al-Huthi reported in the *Thaqafa Quraniyya* website on 21/03/2020, accessed at: <http://www.thagafaqurania.com/archives/36520>

<sup>4</sup> Press Conference by Minister of Health, Taha al-Mutawakkil on 3 June 2020; accessed at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ibuumpSoa1A>

**Stay Healthily to avoid COVID-19**  
التزم بالممارسات الصحيحة لتتجنب فيروس كورونا



Contact information:  
Yemen, Sana'a  
01255992 / 01255942 / 195  
Yemen, Aden  
02358000 / 195



UNICEF & WHO bi-lingual poster with health advice to protect from coronavirus infection

Regarding communicative strategies and outreach, the Huthi authorities endeavoured to promote the implementation of public health measures. Sanitation campaigns targeted the main public areas. Political leaders sponsored the usage of masks and gloves. Information campaigns educated the population on social distancing and health precautions. Overall, the population proved to be aware of Covid-19 symptoms and preventive measures. Official communications about Covid-19 did, however, remain their monopoly and Huthi authorities actively discouraged people from spreading rumours or information about the virus.

**The First Wave: Social Perceptions and Health-Seeking Behaviour**

During the first Covid-19 wave, most people in Huthi areas proved to be relatively unconcerned about the pandemic. This attitude was driven by two main considerations. On the one hand, people saw the pandemic threat as less pressing than everyday survival. Accordingly, they prioritised making their livelihood over respecting social distancing measures. On the other hand, they felt helpless in countering Covid-19, being deeply aware of the dire situation of the Yemeni health system. To face the virus, they mainly resorted to religion and traditional remedies. This resigned attitude notwithstanding, risk perception was moderate. Many people adopted some basic precautions, out of fear. For example, wearing masks and gloves, avoiding large gatherings of people, or isolating those who were ill. People's trust in the authorities was extremely low. Indeed, patients infected by Covid-19 tended to isolate themselves at home, in order to avoid entering the Huthi-run isolation centres.

## The Second Wave: What Changed?

The Covid-19 second wave had impacted Yemen by the end of February 2021 and reached its peak by April the same year.<sup>5</sup> The Huthi administration's approach to this new pandemic wave differed in one major respect: Covid-19 was no longer considered as a threat. Muhammad Ali al-Huthi, member of the Supreme Political Council (SPC), articulated this position: 'The Yemeni people have overcome corona, thanks to God Almighty and His grace, and there is no harm for us from this virus, and God willing, there will be nothing to worry about the health of our country and our people.'<sup>6</sup> Since the first Covid-19 cases were recorded in April 2020, the Huthi authorities have not reported any further cases of infection in the areas under their control.

This approach has had several direct consequences for local health policy. At the time of writing, no measures have been announced to counter successive Covid-19 waves of infections. Neither restrictive, nor preventive, measures have been enforced and no information campaign has been conducted to promote health guidelines and social distancing. People are still not allowed to comment on Covid-19 publicly and information about the dangers of the pandemic is suppressed.<sup>7</sup>

Despite the lack of reported cases, most informants believe that the second wave of Covid-19 hit Huthi-controlled areas harder than the first one. The few Covid-19 facilities were overwhelmed. According to testimonies, doctors in public hospitals were afraid to admit patients with Covid-19. Consequently, access was subjected to a preliminary screening aimed at detecting potential Covid-19 cases. This screening was reported to be highly ineffective. In broader terms, besides the political will, there is no capacity for conducting testing and tracking campaigns. A Covid-19 test in Huthi areas can cost up to YER 60,000.<sup>8</sup>

As a result, Covid-19 patients tended to downplay their symptoms, pretending to have contracted flu or diarrhoea. They mostly resorted to traditional remedies or to the private health sector. Private clinics and hospitals had arranged Covid-19 wards, but hospitalisation remains unaffordable for the av-

erage Yemeni, the price being around YER 1 million. Private doctors also offer home visits at seemingly high prices. Medical prescriptions are often inadequate and too expensive for the average person. This means that most patients who arrive at health facilities with Covid-19 symptoms tend to do so as a last resort. Consequently, they seek treatment at a stage when the illness is already advanced and often irreversible.<sup>9</sup>

## Areas Under the Control of the Internationally Recognised Government

The first case of Covid-19 in Yemen was detected in the IRG-controlled areas, more specifically in the Hadhrami port of al-Shihr, on 10 April 2020. Over the subsequent two months the virus was detected in all governorates under the control of the government, apart from Soqatra, where no cases have yet been reported. The period between May and June 2020 is conventionally considered to constitute the first wave of Covid-19 infections in Yemen.

The temporary capital city of Aden was particularly affected by this first wave. Multiple sources described at the time how overstretched health facilities quickly became in the city. The use of new satellite technologies to estimate excess deaths during the peak of the first wave of the pandemic by observing burials across Aden's cemeteries has confirmed, estimating that there were about 1,500 excess deaths in the city during that period.<sup>10</sup> Although data provided by the Yemeni Ministry of Health and local governorates on daily Covid-19 cases in the IRG-controlled areas are not reliable, they can offer an indication of the trajectory of the pandemic in that part of the country in comparison to the total absence of data from the Huthi side.

<sup>5</sup> Mahmoud, Mariam and Ammar Derwish, "The Pandemic: A View from Yemen," POMED 06/04/2021, accessed at:

<https://tinyurl.com/5n7x6ydu>

<sup>6</sup> Sputnik Arabic, accessed on 2 March 2021;

<https://tinyurl.com/2rbkudka>

<sup>7</sup> Mahmoud (2021) and Human Rights Watch, "Yemen: Huthis Risk Civilians' Health in Covid-19," 01/06/2021, accessed at:

<https://tinyurl.com/2jhx2ntj>

<sup>8</sup> Information collected during personal communications between June - July 2021 with humanitarian workers based in Yemen, some of whom worked for INGOs such as MSF, UNICEF, Care International etc.

<sup>9</sup> Personal communication, MSF staff

<sup>10</sup> Koum Besson, Emilie et al. "Excess Mortality during the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Geospatial and Statistical Analysis in Aden Governorate, Yemen," *BMJ Global Health* vol. 6, Issue 3 (2021)



The main challenge in dealing with the first wave of Covid-19 in IRG areas was political competition between the government and the Southern Transitional Council (STC) which had in the meantime declared self-rule in Aden and the territories under its control. As a consequence, there were significant delays in the arrival and release of critical hospital equipment provided by the WHO.<sup>11</sup> Although both authorities followed advice from the WHO and tried to model their early response to the onset of the pandemic according to the policies adopted by most countries, they failed to coordinate their policies, which often resulted in unilateral and sometimes even opposing actions. In the face of this, some local governors took the lead in spearheading Covid-19 policies within their governorates. Hadhramaut is a

notable example where local health authorities prepared isolation centres, ran awareness campaigns, conducted public disinfection, continued to report cases daily and even imposed a local lockdown when the first infection was detected in al-Shihr. After the end of the first wave, life generally returned to normal just as Covid-19 treatment centres were starting to close for lack of patients to treat.

### **Social Perceptions and Health-Seeking Behaviour in the IRG Areas**

What defined local responses during the first Covid-19 wave in most of the areas controlled by the IRG was the active participation of civil society organisations in raising awareness about the pandemic: a host of civil society actors, women's organisations, medical faculty students, radio presenters who disseminated accurate public health messages and encouraged the population to adhere to safe hygiene practices such as were seen across the rest of the world. Notwithstanding the broad attempts at communicating reliable messages about the virus and influencing people's health behaviours, a set of perceptions and misconceptions about the pandemic remained prevalent in IRG-controlled areas in much the same way as happened in the Huthi-controlled areas. More importantly, misinformation among medical staff, ignorance of how Covid-19 symptoms presented, and the lack of adequate protective equipment led to several suspected cases being turned away from public health facilities in Aden and Mukalla.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Nagi, Ahmed, "Yemen and Coronavirus," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace* 14/03/2021, accessed at: <https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/04/14/yemen-and-coronavirus-pub-81534>

<sup>12</sup> Characteristically, in Aden a four-year-old girl suffering from an asthma attack was refused treatment on suspicion of being infected by Covid-19 and as a result died; see Twitter post here: <https://tinyurl.com/mvm4hcsd>



Aerial view of newly dug graves for victims of the pandemic in Aden, May 2020



Yemeni youth disseminating information about Covid-19 and advice on personal hygiene measures

## The Covid-19 Vaccination Campaign in Yemen

### Vaccine Rollout in Huthi-controlled Areas

By the end of April 2021, the WHO had allocated 10,000 doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine to northern Yemen. Huthi authorities did not, however, cooperate to secure the allocated doses and demanded to administer the vaccine autonomously, with no supervision from WHO.<sup>13</sup> As a result, the vaccine was not delivered. Information around the alleged delivery of 10,000 doses of vaccine to the Huthis started circulating again around 14 May. According to interviewees, the doses were administered to health workers, away from media coverage. Also away from the spotlight, humanitarian operators in Huthi areas are reported as having received the vaccine from international organisations.<sup>14</sup> A small number of well-off Yemenis even travelled to southern governorates in order to receive the vaccine. They are mostly male migrants wishing to return to Saudi Arabia.

### Huthi Narratives on the Covid-19 Vaccines

The Huthi approach towards immunisation campaigns is more nuanced than it appears at first glance, and it somehow reflects different sensibilities within the movement's leadership.<sup>15</sup> The Minister of Health, Taha al-Mutawakkil, is a moderate character and a supporter of vaccination campaigns. In the past, he has sponsored the polio vaccine personally<sup>16</sup> and by the end of May 2021 his ministry

<sup>13</sup> Human Rights Watch (2021)

<sup>14</sup> Personal communication, UNICEF staff

<sup>15</sup> Personal communication MSF staff

<sup>16</sup> Announcement by Minister of Health Taha al-Mutawakkil on 25th November 2018, accessed at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LQbi0jbuzRk>

had launched a new anti-polio campaign in Sana'a.

However, the prevailing position within the Huthi leadership is to refuse the AstraZeneca vaccine. When the UK pledged to send Covid-19 vaccines to Yemen, Muhammad Ali al-Huthi urged Britain to rather stop arms' exports to the Gulf countries, defining them as 'more lethal' than Covid-19, 'since they kill the Yemeni people'.<sup>17</sup>

### **The Covid-19 Vaccination Campaign in the IRG-controlled Areas**

On 21 April 2021 the Covid-19 vaccination campaign officially started in those parts of Yemen under the control of the IRG, which includes the governorates claimed by the STC. The rollout was made possible by the first batch of vaccines that had already been sent to Yemen through the COVAX vaccine-sharing scheme by 31 March 2021. This first batch consisted of 360,000 doses of the AstraZeneca double-dose vaccine.<sup>18</sup> The first phase of the campaign aimed to target three main categories of individuals: health workers, people above 60 years of age and vulnerable individuals with medical conditions.

The rollout initially stalled, for several reasons. In Ta'izz, out of 70,000 available doses, only 500 were effectively administered during the first two weeks of the campaign.<sup>19</sup> On 5 May 2021, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) began its support for the vaccine rollout by offering its health centres and doctors to administer jabs in Aden, Ta'izz, Marib, Shabwa and Lahj governorates with the declared aim to reach vulnerable communities and migrants in need. By then, 18,500 health workers and individuals with medical conditions had been vaccinated across the IRG-controlled part of Yemen.<sup>20</sup> In the same period, the Emirates Red Crescent despatched a batch of 60,000 doses to the Soqatra governorate in June, enough to inoculate half the island's population. Although it is not clear which vaccine type was sent to Soqatra, reports have claimed that they were doses of the Chinese-made vaccine, Sinopharm.<sup>21</sup>

As of August 2021, the country was expected to receive a second batch of Covid-19 vaccines via the COVAX facility amounting to 504,000 doses. Of these, 151,000 doses are of the single-shot Johnson & Johnson vaccine, with the remaining covered by AstraZeneca.<sup>22</sup> The inclusion of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine in Yemen's immunisation drive will allow for a quicker pace at achieving full vaccinated status for

a larger number of people and is perhaps better suited to the particular conditions in the country. The COVAX pledge for a total of about 2 million doses for Yemen does, however, fall well short of the overall needs of the country. Moreover, the World Bank recently approved a further \$20 million package in support of Yemen's vaccination campaign, which will be enough to cover vaccine administration to an additional 1.3 million people.<sup>23</sup> According to WHO, a total of 758,500 vaccine doses were administered by early February 2022, with about 360,000 Yemenis being fully vaccinated against Covid-19.<sup>24</sup>

### **How is the Vaccine Administered?**

Thus far the areas of the country under the control of the IRG are the only ones where the Covid-19 immunisation programme has been rolled out. The programme is under the direct control of the Yemeni Ministry of Health in association with the GAVI Alliance with the support of IOM and the World Bank. Although the original planning was for the first batch of doses to be administered to health workers and vulnerable individuals, there have been consistent reports that this has not been the case. The reason for this divergence has been the low uptake of the vaccine by the people it was intended for, including health workers, and the announcement by Saudi Arabia on 7 May 2021 that vaccination was mandatory for workers to return to their workplace after the Ramadan and Eid holidays.<sup>25</sup> This resulted in a rush among Yemenis, mostly men, who had visited their country for the holiday from their workplaces in Saudi Arabia. An unintended consequence of the need for documentation has been the emergence of an illicit trade in forged certificates, prompting the Yemeni Ministry of Health to move to an online system of registration which was also eventually hacked.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Twitter Announcement by Muhammad al-Houthi on 5 February 2021, accessed at: <https://tinyurl.com/yfn3dbvy>

<sup>18</sup> 'Yemen Starts Covid-19 Vaccination Campaign', REUTERS 20/04/2021, accessed at: <https://tinyurl.com/ym8fzh4h>

<sup>19</sup> 'War and Doubts Slow Covid-19 Vaccination in Disputed Yemen City', REUTERS 03/05/2021, accessed at: <https://tinyurl.com/bdfjtm2c>

<sup>20</sup> 'IOM Supports the UN COVID-19 Vaccination Rollout in Yemen', IOM 12/05/2021, accessed at: <https://tinyurl.com/2p86r7ac>

<sup>21</sup> 'UAE Delivers 60,000 COVID-19 Vaccine Doses to Yemen's Strategic Island: Gov't Source', XINHUA 17/06/2021, accessed at: <https://tinyurl.com/kc7h6vj2>

<sup>22</sup> 'Yemen to get More COVID-19 Vaccines by End of Month', REUTERS 18/07/2021, accessed at: <https://tinyurl.com/2p9hxvpx>

<sup>23</sup> 'World Bank Approves \$20 Million in Grants to Support COVID-19 Vaccination Rollout in Yemen', WORLD BANK 17/06/2021, accessed at: <https://tinyurl.com/5cd5hk8d>

<sup>24</sup> See WHO Coronavirus (COVID-19) Dashboard at: <https://covid19.who.int/region/emro/country/ye>

<sup>25</sup> 'Workers in Saudi Arabia will Need COVID-19 Vaccine to Return to Workplace, HR Ministry Says', ARAB NEWS 07/05/2021, accessed at: <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1855231/saudi-arabia>

## Women and the Covid-19 Vaccination

The coronavirus vaccine roll-out has highlighted some peculiar gender dynamics in Yemen. A significant boost in vaccine administration was recorded in Yemen after Saudi Arabia announced the closure of its borders to unvaccinated migrant workers. As most Yemeni migrants to Saudi Arabia are men, it is plausible to assume that the uptick in vaccine administration was comprised almost exclusively of a male, young, healthy population that needed to return to their workplaces in the kingdom.<sup>27</sup>

Moreover, the logistics of vaccine administration did not consider that Yemeni society is characterised by strict gender segregation. Separated vaccination centres for men and women could have enhanced women's inclination to receive the jab. According to interviewees, to avoid gender-mixing in the queues, women were allowed to jump the line and skip ahead of men. Although positive in its purpose, this logistical strategy has given rise to a different set of practices. Exploiting women's preferential access to the vaccination centres, male migrants were reportedly encouraging women relatives to receive the jab so that they could then fraudulently use their Covid-19 certificate.<sup>28</sup>

In addition, a number of studies have shown how in Yemen men are usually prioritised within the household when it comes to access to healthcare.<sup>29</sup> This has also been the case even when multiple members of the same household might have been infected with Covid-19. Women are the primary care providers to family members and will often continue to do so even if they themselves are ill. It is therefore likely that when it comes to decisions within the household as to who can get vaccinated first, the needs of female members of the family will come last.

<sup>26</sup> Qasem, Najm Aldain, 'In Search of a Covid-19 Vaccine in Yemen', *OpenDemocracy* 07/10/2021, accessed at:

<https://tinyurl.com/dzy54jwt>

<sup>27</sup> Personal communication with Yemeni humanitarian workers in Ta'izz and Aden

<sup>28</sup> Personal communication with a Yemeni humanitarian worker in Aden

<sup>29</sup> Mugahed, Rim, 'The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Yemeni Women', *Sanaa Centre for Strategic Studies*, 20/07/2021



# ABDUL RAZAK MOSSA (1962–2020): AN APPRECIATION

---

## Abdul Razak and Liverpool

EMMELI SUNDQVIST

**A**bdul Razak Mossa was born in 1962 in a small village called Naawah in Yemen. In 1985, Abdul Razak applied for a scholarship in the UK to study electrical engineering at the University of Liverpool. He had only intended to complete his studies in Liverpool then go back to Yemen. However, he stayed and made Liverpool his home.

After graduating, he decided to take a master's degree in social work at the University of Liverpool during which he discovered a passion for supporting Liverpool's Yemeni community. He subsequently thrived, participating in a wide range of events and exhibitions, drawing on skills and experiences he gained while studying.

In 1993, Abdul Razak started to work as a trainee social worker at the Liverpool City Council. He worked in a wide range of hospitals and care settings across the city. He progressed his career and became the Head of the Adult Social Care within Careline at Liverpool City Council. He was a well-respected and much-loved manager; however, it was for his contributions to the Arab community and voluntary sector that he gained the admiration of so many across the city. He was a great role model and advocate for integration and community cohesion.

In addition to his full-time work at Liverpool City Council, Abdul Razak was one of the founders of the Liverpool Arabic Centre, the Liverpool Arabic Arts Festival, the UK Yemeni Community Coordinating Council and the UK Labour Friends of Yemen, as well as serving as a board member of many other organisations across the city. Abdul Razak made a huge impact within the Arab community in Liverpool as well as gaining respect for his dedication in supporting working families and communities. For Abdul Razak, understanding the roots of Liverpool's Arab community was a key part in bringing about a sense of social cohesion. His sustained drive of positive community change and building stronger, more integrated communities in Liverpool, was one of his greatest achievements.

As the Arab community grew in Liverpool due to the city's opportunities for employment and study and as more people fled conflict and war in the Middle East, the Liverpool Arabic Centre became a crucial resource in helping families gain an understanding of the city's life and integration within the wider community.

Abdul Razak helped countless families of Arab descent with accessing services, education and becoming part of the city's civic life. He dedicated his life to serving the Arabic community in Liverpool — a far cry from his original career path in electrical engineering.

Abdul Razak Mossa passed away on 2 November 2020, he is deeply missed by his family, colleagues and the wider community.



## Abdul Razak and The Arab Spring

SAFA MUBGAR

'Where there's a will, there's a way', Abdul Razak beamed at me when we first met back on 19 March 2011 — more than ten years ago. It was at a demonstration outside the Embassy of the Republic of Yemen, the day after *Jumma'a al-karama*, the 'Friday of Dignity', when security forces opened fire on peaceful protesters in Sana'a, brutally killing over 50 Yemenis.

From the start it was obvious: I was the doomed pessimist to his boundless optimism. He found it unconscionable that I did not fully appreciate the importance of determination and resolve, and the will to carry on in the face of adversity. I admired his wholesome tenacity and sheer grit; I played the contrarian to solicit more of his strength of conviction. "*Al-'azima, ya Safa, aham shay!*" (determination is the

most important thing) he continued to stress, and I cheekily responded "Ya akh Abdul Razak, *al-'azima* is a tattoo on the arm of the likes of Angelina Jolie!". He laughed his hearty, kind laugh, and I glanced over at him and thought how awesome!

It was a chilly, British spring day, but we decided to continue our vigil outside the Embassy until late in the evening that night. Abdul Razak's positive energy and stamina enveloped and warmed our spirits. A strong sense of hope and camaraderie bound us for the next ten years. Our audacious hopes for the Arab Spring(s) and democratic change held firm, in spite of the relentless destructive force of counter-revolutions and the war in Yemen. Despite the bitterness and divisions that ensued, Abdul Razak remained a stabilising force of unity and reflection. He was a man for ALL Yemenis, quite unstoppable in his positivity.

We talked often and worked together on several projects; he rallied the troops and was one of the finest facilitators I had ever worked with. He kept and maintained his calm and fabulous smile in the face of just about anything. Abdul Razak was open and honest, a straight arrow, the kind of man that one could talk freely to and even intimately, without ever feeling judged or misunderstood. He was a rare breed, we miss his Midas touch; his cheerfulness, charm and, most of all, his "*azima!*"



Holding the Yemeni flag, Abdul Razak and his son Haitham display their support for Liverpool at Anfield.

## The Reassurance of a Courageous Smile

HAMDAN DAMMAG

I was on my way back from Yemen, where war had just broken out, when I first met Abdul Razak Mossa six years ago in Liverpool. I had been deeply distressed ever since the day I managed to leave Sana'a on a badly damaged IOM (International Organization of Migration) aeroplane until my arrival in Sheffield. Weeks later, my friend Mahmood Alazani told me that I should accompany him to Liverpool to be introduced to and meet a group of friends he called the 'Liverpool Band', among whom was Abdul Razak. It was an autumn day, the rays of the sun reflected on the dense leaves all the way to Liverpool, creating a painting brimming with colour and serenity.

On that day, from our first meeting, I realised that Abdul Razak and I had many things in common, and our view on many issues was largely the same, even in our favourite traditional Yemeni songs, which we enjoyed listening to at Taher Qassim's beautiful home overlooking the river Mersey. Over time, after multiple visits to Liverpool, my friendship with him deepened, and we soon shared many joint projects that I had the pleasure of working on closely with him. One of these projects was the establishment of the Labour Friends of Yemen group more than two years ago. Abdul Razak was a burning torch of activity, diligent and meticulous in what he did, but more importantly, he was open in his ideas, listening to the opinions of others with the same enthusiasm that accompanied his many initiatives.

When we, his friends, learnt of his illness two years ago, we felt incredibly saddened and anxious. But he talked to us about it, and we got to know yet another interesting feature of his personality: an inherent courage that was a source of inspiration and reassurance to his family, friends and loved ones. During the journey of his treatment, his spirit was always high, and his activity was not affected or altered, neither his cheerful personality, nor that wonderful smile that was barely absent from his face. To the point that we almost forgot that he was sick, and none of us came to realise that he would actually leave us so suddenly. But he did. He departed surprisingly swiftly, without warning. He passed away two days after the last time he spoke with his friends, having exchanged amusing jokes and tales with them, assuring them that he was in good health to relieve them of any feeling of anxiety or grief for him.

We will always remember Abdul Razak, that great spirit, we will cherish the legacy he left behind, the fantastic achievements he made in Liverpool, the extensive and celebrated connections he accomplished with friends and community alike.

# LOOKING FOR A SOVIET MILITARY BASE ON SOQOTRA

NOEL BREHONY

**R**ecent rumours that the UAE — and even Israel — has established a base on Soqatra reminded me of a search for a Russian base on the island 50 years ago.

On 2 January 1971 I was invited with other members of the diplomatic corps in Aden and some foreign journalists, including one from *The Times*, to travel to Soqatra at the invitation of the government of the then People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) and the ambassador of the Soviet Union. Our mission was to find the Soviet military base whose presence had been widely reported in the international media at the time.

A group of about 40 men, without any women included in the mission, of different sizes, ages and levels of fitness were surprised to find at Khormaksar airport that we were to be flown to the island in a Soviet air force transport with bench seats around the inside of the fuselage. Once the diplomats had been assured they would not have to parachute onto the island, the aircraft set off and landed on a rough airstrip several kilometres from Hadiboh, where we were to spend the night.

We were invited to walk to the coast, where a PDRY naval vessel — in fact one of three elderly ex-British minesweepers left to the PDRY by Britain in 1967 as part of its 'generous assistance' to the new state — would take us by sea to Hadiboh, where lunch would be provided.

When we reached the rendezvous, led by the Commander of the PDRY navy, there was no sign of the ship. It transpired that on leaving Mukalla it had hit an obstruction and been damaged. We would thus miss our transport — and lunch. Our PDRY hosts quickly improvised a solution. An enormous sack of bananas was produced, and donkeys were requisitioned to carry the less fit diplomats to Hadiboh. The others would walk as there was no road at the time.

An outraged French ambassador protested. It was beneath the dignity of a French plenipotentiary to eat a banana, or several bananas, for lunch. It was not possible to convey an ambassador on a donkey.



Remnants of Soviet tanks on Soqatra's northern coast (© Felix Wu, 2013)





Loading donkeys in Soqotra  
(John Shipman collection, 1964)



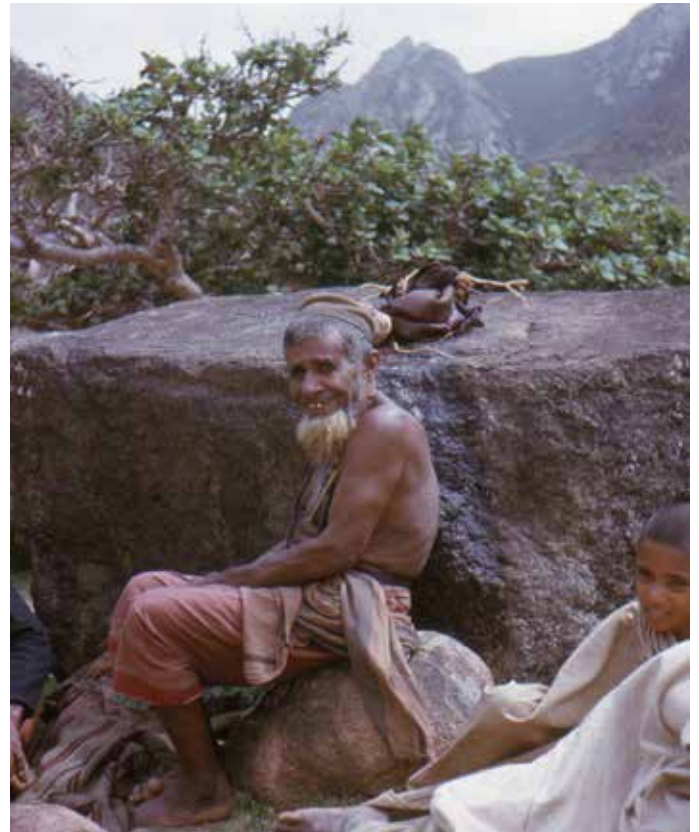
Soqotri tribesman observing a landing aircraft  
with the towering Haggeher mountains in the  
background (John Shipman collection, 1964)

He was wise, as the one provided to him did not look strong enough to manage even half the distance. He insisted on returning to the aircraft, and most of the other diplomats followed him. The angry Soviet ambassador had no option but to accompany them and spend an uncomfortable and cold night with his diplomatic colleagues on the aircraft.

A small party decided to walk to Hadiboh: the British, Indian, Pakistani and Chinese ambassadors, another Chinese diplomat, the Times correspondent (on a donkey with his typewriter), a PDRY government official and me. As we set off, we noticed the forlorn PDRY Naval Commander sitting on a rock staring out to sea.

It was a hugely enjoyable walk allowing us to see some of the extraordinary flora and fauna of Soqotra. This was followed by a delightful meal with Soqotris in Hadiboh. The Indian and Pakistani ambassadors were less than happy when they found they were to share a room for the night. The two countries were at war at the time and the ambassadors had spent the trip carefully avoiding each other. The next day we walked back to the aircraft. It was again a pleasant amble despite the insistence of the Chinese ambassador and his colleague on chanting quotations from the 'little red book', very much de rigueur for Chinese officials in that era of Mao. Each evening in Aden a group of about 40 people from the Chinese embassy would jog around the city holding the little red book and chanting the sayings of Chairman Mao, much to the bemusement of Adenis.

On reaching the aircraft it was clear that the night had not eased tensions, though the French ambassador was mollified when he was told he would get a hot lunch in Mukalla later that day. We then took off to make a slow circuit of the island at low altitude with the Soviet ambassador asking us to help him find the Russian base, as he would like to visit it. We were not successful — but we were given an excellent lunch in Mukalla by the Governor of Hadhramaut (then known as the Fifth Governorate), before returning to Aden with a now content French ambassador.



Soqotri man and boy (John Shipman collection, 1964)



The road between the airport and Hadiboh (© Felix Wu, 2013)



# FREYA STARK IN HADHRAMAUT: A RE-APPRAISAL

JOHN HARDING

**T**he deaths of Bill Heber-Percy, James Nash and Hugh Walker in 2020 reduced what remains of the cadre of British political officers who served in the Aden Protectorate during the 1960s to barely half a dozen. Their passing brought to mind the lives of Harold Ingrams and Robert Hamilton, pioneering political officers of the 1930s, whose unique experiences were chronicled in Ingrams's magisterial *Arabia and the Isles* (1942) and in Hamilton's lyrical *The Kingdom of Melchior* (1945). Since then, many books have been written about South Arabia's troubled post Second World War years, particularly the insurgency and Britain's 1967 withdrawal. Second-hand copies of those books by Ingrams and Hamilton (later the 12<sup>th</sup> Lord Belhaven) are still available, but few today would recognise their names or appreciate the significant roles they played in the brief history of the British in South Arabia.

Yet while the achievements of Ingrams and Hamilton are largely forgotten, the reputation of Freya Stark as an intrepid traveller whose journeys to the South Arabian hinterland were, according to her Wikipedia entry, those to which 'no other European had ventured' is virtually undimmed, and her name instantly recognisable even for those who have never read a single word of her 23 books of travel and autobiography that she intended as her epitaph.

Dame Freya Stark, who died in 1993 aged 100, was unquestionably a writer of genius and an exceptional photographer. During her lifetime, she was showered with honours and medals from learned societies; awarded the CBE in 1953 and created a dame



Sayun, the Kathiri Sultans' Palace, August 1960 (all photographs courtesy of the author)

in 1972. Latterly, she became a friend of the Queen Mother and achieved national treasure status. To the general public, her main claim to fame was as a traveller — ‘an intrepid solitary Englishwoman exploring the far-flung corners of the East’. Certainly, from the age of 35 until her eighth decade, she travelled incessantly, went pony trekking in Nepal aged 77, and in 1984 returned there with a BBC television team when aged 91. Her name is often linked with an earlier generation of outstanding women explorers of Arabia such as Hester Stanhope, Jane Digby al-Mezrab and Anne Blunt. Her nearest female contemporaries cast in that heroic mould were Evelyn Cobbold (the first British woman to make the pilgrimage to Mecca in 1935) and Gertrude Bell.

However, Sir Ronald Storrs’s puff that Stark was ‘at least the equal of Gertrude Bell as a traveller’, is palpable nonsense. Bell’s initial reputation was secured by some half-dozen, self-funded journeys of archaeological exploration through the little-trammelled and mostly lawless reaches of Lebanon, Syria, Turkey and Mesopotamia between 1900 and 1913 when she covered some 20,000 miles in the saddle. Of the five years in aggregate that Stark spent in the Middle East, barely six months involved genuinely demanding travel. Furthermore, by far her most original and important journeys were made not in Arabia but in Persia, and her most significant adventures were in the mountains not the desert. Freya Stark’s life was remarkable, and in most respects successful. Her burning ambition and force of character enabled her to achieve the fame she craved, but her reputation as a pioneer traveller requires critical re-examination.

Freya’s early life was a struggle. Born in Paris in 1893 to Bohemian, artistic parents, their peripatetic lifestyle and unhappy marriage ended in a separation that left Freya confused, rootless and miserable. Her teenage years, spent mainly in provincial Italy, were blighted by the ill health that dogged her throughout life and an accident that permanently disfigured her face. Shy, gauche and awkward, she suffered the humiliation of being jilted. Yet, these inauspicious beginnings only steeled her resolve, strengthened her instinct for self-preservation and developed in her a highly competitive, ruthless streak buttressed by a sublime egotism.

Youthful setbacks were largely set aside when, in 1911, she enrolled as a student at Bedford College and indulged in London’s cultural life. She was taken under the wing of W. P. Ker, later Professor of Poetry at Oxford, who recognised her unusual qualities and became her friend, mentor and adopted godfather. Freya’s childhood upbringing, which had involved long tramps through the alpine foothills of Piedmont with her father, had imbued in her a love of mountains that remained throughout her life. Ker, a member of the Alpine Club, took this interest a stage further in 1913 by introducing her to serious alpine climbing in the Gran Paradiso range. During the First World War Freya joined G. M. Trevelyan’s Italian Ambulance Unit in which she served as a frontline nurse and witnessed the Italian Army’s disastrous retreat at Caparetto in 1917. After the war, she joined Ker for more demanding climbs in the Pennine Alps and in 1923 was invited to join his party at the village of Macugnaga under Monte Rosa’s south face. Disaster struck on the minor peak of Pizzo Blanco when Ker had a heart attack and died instantly. As soon after his funeral as was decent, Freya decamped to Zermatt with Ker’s guide Tofi from where they traversed the Matterhorn to Italy and then back across the Theodole Pass in the fast time of 17 hours.

Emboldened by this success, Freya returned to Macugnaga the following year in order to achieve her ambition of climbing Monte Rosa by its greatest route: the Marinelli Couloir. Notorious for its length and avalanche danger, this climb strikes a direct line up the mountain’s awesome south face, the biggest in the Alps. Guided by Tofi, their successful twelve-hour ascent was the second ever by a woman and an exceptional achievement. Freya later acknowledged it as ‘the only really big climb in my life’. Sadly, it was also her last as lingering illness prematurely ended her climbing career leaving her to repine ‘the loss of mountaineering more than most things’.

In 1927, Freya enrolled at the School of Oriental & African Studies to advance her Arabic and the following year teamed up with Venetia Buddicombe, an adventurous aristocrat, to embark on her first Middle Eastern venture. This hapless pair’s insouciant wanderings through Syria’s Hauran Plateau (now Golan Heights) might easily have ended in disaster. Blithely disregarding official warnings that this dangerous Druze territory was under strict martial law, they were arrested as spies and lucky to be released after only three days’ detention. Venetia described





Shibam in 2007

this as 'a grim little journey'. For Freya it was a magical entrée to the Orient.

In 1930, Freya looked further eastwards to Persia with the aim of exploring the Assassins' castles secreted in the remotest recesses of the Elburz range. She duly achieved her ambition to become the first European woman to reach Alamut, the allegedly inaccessible castle where the 'King of the Mountains' Hassan-i-Sabah trained his *Hashishin* in the deadly arts of assassination with the promise of after-life in a paradisaical garden where lubricious *houris* would gratify every fleshly need. She then undertook a hazardous 1,500 metres climb to attain the ruins of another legendary Assassin castle, Nevisar Shah, and become the first European to do so. Now heading north across the Elburz watershed bound for the Caspian shore, she paused at the Salambar Pass from where she espied a striking cluster of snow-clad peaks to the east. Correctly identifying one of these as Takht-i-Sulaiman, the Throne of Solomon, Freya was as much seized by the ancient legend of how the wily King Solomon had lured Bilqis, the Queen of Sheba, to share his bivouac on its icy summit or freeze to death as she was by the Throne's fanciful resemblance to Switzerland's Weisshorn 'The Queen of the Alps'. The Throne was reputedly unclimbed. Freya was determined to be the first to do so.

Freya's quest to climb Solomon's Throne was to involve the most arduous and important journey of her life. Setting out from Qaswin in August the following year to retrace the early stages of her 1930 route, she had chosen the hottest and unhealthiest travelling months to do so and thus exposed herself to illness that twice forced her to rest and recuperate for a week. Despite suffering from malaria, dysentery, and heart trouble, she crossed the Salambar Pass and then approached the Throne from the

north. From her camp high up the Sehzar Valley, the mountain was only five kilometres distant and compared with the Marinelli Couloir, its ascent should have been a breeze. But severely weakened by illness and with only her muleteer for support, she estimated that the climb would take at least ten hours, so sensibly concluded that it was a peak too far. To have this rare first ascent snatched from her grasp was a bitter blow. But Freya, ever resilient, now carried on eastwards to end her 150-mile Elburz trek after re-crossing the range before finishing up in Tehran.

Freya was not finished with Persia yet. Early the next year, 1932, she came up from Baghdad to the Persian frontier with the twin aims of making a covert, unauthorised journey on horseback amongst the wild, anarchic nomadic tribesmen of Luristan to pick up 'useful political information' with the excuse of excavating Bronze Age figurines. This venture was probably her most daring and was certainly chancy since her Lur guide Keram Khan had come without a passport. In the event, the treasure hunt yielded nothing and when the Persian mounted police eventually caught up with them, Freya was escorted ignominiously to the Iraqi border and deported as an illegal entrant. The fate of Keram is not recorded.

Freya's Persian travels made her name. In 1934, her book *The Valleys of the Assassins*, which de-

scribes the three journeys, was published by the impressionable, 22-year-old Jock Murray. An immediate bestseller, it marked the turning-point of her career. Arguably her best book, it has a freshness and clarity that in her later works tend to get submerged in an over-worked tapestry of language and historical allusion. For her cartographical work, the Royal Geographical Society awarded her the Back Memorial Prize and the Royal Asiatic Society the Burton Memorial Medal. The following year, she was elected to the Ladies Alpine Club as an Honorary Member, a well-deserved honour which 'could not have given me more pleasure'.

Flushed with success, Freya now turned her attentions to South Arabia's Wadi Hadhramaut, that marvel of nature and civilisation. Freya's objectives were to investigate the skein of incense routes that converged on the Hadhramaut's great cities and to be the first European to reach Shabwa, the City of Sheba, once famous for its 60 temples. However, as a traveller to Hadhramaut, she had long been preceded by two Spanish Jesuits who passed that way in 1590 and since when several Europeans had fol-



The feast at Meshhed, 1960



lowed, including the British husband and wife duo Theodore and Mabel Bent in 1894 and, most recently, Harold and Doreen Ingrams.

The Wadi Hadhramaut was in no sense *terra incognita*, but Shabwa would be a rare prize. Adept at ingratiating herself with the great and good, a letter from Lord Halifax addressed to Antonin Besse in Aden paved the way. Besse, the brilliant French merchant/entrepreneur whose commercial empire embraced South Arabia, the Red Sea and Horn of Africa and who later founded St. Antony's College, Oxford, could fix almost anything. On Freya's arrival in Aden in December 1934, he arranged for her free passage to Mukalla on his steamship *Amin*. Comfortably ensconced in the Quayti Sultan's guesthouse, Freya lost no time photographing and recording the local scene before clambering up Jebel Qarat, the bur-nished mountain that overlooks Mukalla. Meantime, Besse's agents and the Sultan's officials made all the necessary arrangements to guarantee her safe pas-sage to the Wadi by a well-worn trade route across the *jol*.

Taking heart from the Song of Solomon's 'I will get to the mountains of myrrh', Freya's travelling party consisted of a 'Black Nizami slave soldier', four Bedouin of the Murshidi tribe; three donkeys to carry her baggage and one on which she rode. Their six-day journey was uneventful, but her descriptions of scenery, insights into the lives of the people she met, and her encyclopaedic knowledge of natural history

invite wonder. After 90 jarring miles across the *jol*'s flinty wasteland, a dizzying 400-metre descent into the bowels of the Wadi al-Aysar brought them to the safety of the Wadi Daw'an and journey's end.

Over the next few weeks, Freya received gener-ous hospitality from sayyids, grandees, the Wadi's merchant community and humbler folk alike. She occupied herself assiduously, meeting the people and attending local events in Shibam, Sayun and Tarim. Her book *The Southern Gates of Arabia* re-cords an unrivalled portrait of the Wadi's domestic life. Unfortunately, at Huraydha in the Wadi 'Amd she was again struck down with illness and 'inde-scribable paroxysms'. Transported by car to Shibam, her condition so worsened that after three days she feared for her life. After summoning a doctor from Aden, she was evacuated by RAF plane to hospital at considerable cost to the Aden government which reluctantly paid her repatriation expenses.

So ended Freya's bid to become the first Euro-pean visitor to Shabwa. It was another major dis-appointment. Yet, to have undertaken the 100-mile journey from Huraydha, mainly through desert in-fested by the rapacious Sa'ar tribe, was hazardous and would have tested her fragile health to the lim-it. And anyway, to her disgust, she had already been



Mukalla, the harbour and al-Bilad, 1960



Mukalla street scene, 1960

forestalled earlier that year by the German adventurer Hans Helfritz. At least she had the satisfaction of learning that he had only managed half a morning's sightseeing before being chased away by Shabwa's irate denizens. Shabwa's ruins were first explored by St John Philby on the 1936 covert spying mission he undertook for Ibn Saud. Supported by motorised transport, local guides, a dozen camels, an armed Saudi escort and his personal servant, this was definitely not Thesiger-style exploration. In 1938, Robert Hamilton had first to scotch a Yemeni incursion before settling down himself for several weeks of archaeological research at Shabwa.

Freya was seldom deterred. Her second and last Hadhramaut venture in 1938 was an elaborate affair sponsored by the rich philanthropist Lord Wakefield. Its principal object was archaeological excavation to substantiate the theory that South Arabia's Sabaean civilisation and culture was closely linked with that of Greater Zimbabwe. Appointed as the expedition's leader was Gertrude Caton Thompson (1888–1985) an outstanding archaeologist educated at University College, London and Newnham, Cambridge. As a senior civil servant, she had attended the 1919 Paris Peace Conference as a delegate. In the early 1920s she had assisted Flinders Petrie in his Egyptian excavations and in 1928 had been sponsored by the British Academy to investigate the ruins of Greater Zimbabwe — previously excavated by Theodore Bent in 1891. Against fierce academic opposition, she had correctly concluded that these ruins were properly attributable to the indigenous Shona civilisation. Tall and elegant, fearless and fastidious, Gertrude Caton Thompson rode to hounds, attended balls at Cliveden and had crewed Cresta runs. Renowned for her meticulous working methods, her forceful personality did not lack arrogance. To make up her scientific party she had recruited Elinor Gardiner, a



close friend, professional colleague and noted geologist.

Freya had eased herself onto this expedition on the coat tails of an introduction given her by the formidable feminist Margaret Haig Thomas, Lady Rhondda, the owner and editor of *Time and Tide*. Her precise role was never defined for she had neither the experience nor aptitude to organise this type of undertaking, let alone undertake the rigorous physical fieldwork it entailed. Things began badly when Freya haphazardly went to Suez rather than Port Said as previously arranged to join the main party and only caught up with the P&O liner after a frantic overnight taxi drive. They berthed at Aden in early November 1937 in the middle of Ramadan, a bad time for positive action. Freya's *laissez-faire* attitude and failure to make any meaningful contribution to the administrative arrangements did not impress Gertrude, but the party eventually flew off to Mukalla where they spent five days with the British Agent Harold Ingrams and his wife Doreen before hiring a lorry to Tarim.

Thereafter, the expedition's chronology becomes confused as relations between Freya and Gertrude deteriorated. On 12 December, Freya had to return to Aden suffering from quinsy, exhaustion, fainting fits and heart problems and spent a week in hospital. On 26 December, she re-joined the party at their Huray-

dha base where excavations had already begun. After a couple of days, she retired to her room and remained there for most of the next five weeks, receiving a stream of visitors but taking no active part in the excavations. By now, all three ladies were suffering from various ailments though Caton Thompson and Gardiner battled on. On 27 January, Freya put in a health SOS call to Ingrams who arrived in an American geologist party's charter plane, only to find her miraculously recovered. Thereafter, things went from bad to worse. The personalities and objectives of Freya and Gertrude were worlds apart and they barely spoke to each other. Gertrude eventually made it clear to Freya that she had made no useful contribution to the expedition and decried her aspirations as a historical geographer. Freya never forgave her. In her *A Winter in Arabia*, she disparaged Caton Thompson for her inadequate Arabic and arrogance, never mentioned her by name and referred to her only as 'the Archaeologist'.

On 3 March 1938, Caton Thompson decided to close the dig having discovered no evidence of significant ancient cultural links between Arabia and East Africa, though establishing that Huraydha's temple and tomb date back to the 5/4<sup>th</sup> centuries BC.



Mukalla harbour scene, 1960

Freya quit the expedition prematurely on 5 March to make her own way back to the coast. Deliberately disregarding Ingrams's specific instructions not to create political trouble by travelling down the Wadi Mayfa'a alone, she did precisely this and after reaching 'Azzan succumbed to another bout of illness necessitating a week's rest. She then joined an armed camel caravan travelling mainly by night to avoid brigandage and completed the journey to the coast mounted on either donkey or camel.

A description of this three-week journey occupies a quarter of *A Winter in Arabia* and is the only one of significance she ever made in Arabia. Gertrude Caton Thompson later became the first female president of the Prehistoric Society, an Honorary Fellow of Newnham and Vice President of the Royal Anthropological Society. Awarded both the Huxley and Pitt Rivers medals, her account of the Wakefield expedition in her autobiography *Mixed Memoirs* (1983) is a model of objectivity and restraint. She died in 1985 aged 97.

Freya's first Hadhramaut venture was little short of a fiasco and her second fatally compromised by her vitriolic clash with Caton Thompson. Yet, her two books recording these visits — *The Southern Gates of Arabia* and *A Winter in Arabia*, supplemented by a superb volume of photographs *Seen in the Hadhramaut* — only enhanced her reputation as a traveller and resulted in the Royal Geographical Society awarding her the Founders' Medal in 1942. At the outbreak of the war, she had been posted to Aden as assistant to Stewart Perowne, a former Western Aden Protectorate (WAP) Political Officer and distinguished classical historian then in charge of the Aden Government's Information Service. Perowne despatched Freya to Yemen on a seven-week mission to counter Italian pro-axis propaganda.

Thereafter, she was sent to Cairo where she established an anti-Axis organisation, the *Brotherhood of Freedom*. She continued doing useful intelligence work for the Foreign Office in Baghdad and Iraq until 1943, when an invitation from Lord Wavell, then Viceroy of India, set in train the events that effectively terminated her career. Tasked to deliver an official government car from Quetta to the Embassy carpool in Baghdad, she enlisted Johnny Hawtrey, a former Inspector of the Iraq Air Force, as chauffeur before embarking on a circuitous sightseeing swan around Iran. On reaching Tehran, she sold the car at a vast profit which she kept for herself. On learning this, Sir Redvers Bullard made it abundantly clear that he never wanted her about his Embassy again.

In 1947, she married her erstwhile boss, Stewart Perowne. She was 54 and he 46. Intellectually, their marriage might have been made in heaven, but it only lasted five years. Freya later maintained that she had not realised that Stewart was a homosexual. On entering her seventh decade, she switched her main travelling interest to Turkey's southern shore, making three successive journeys along that magical coast, including one by boat. Her final Turkish journey was to ride westwards from the mountains

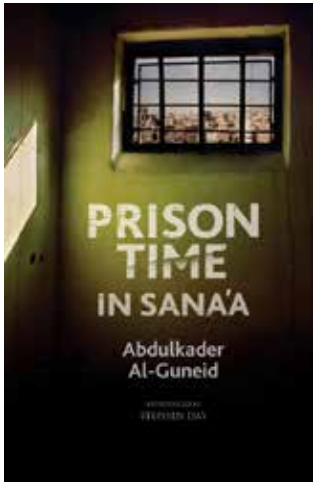
of Hakkari in Turkish Kurdistan to the Tigris. This 100-mile journey shadowing the outliers of the Taurus, must have been a poignant reminder of past mountain adventures. Recorded in her *Riding to the Tigris* (1959), it ranks as one of her bravest and was also the last serious journey she undertook.

Yet Freya's springs of adventure never dried up. She continued to travel as a distinguished tourist with latter-day visits to the Yemen in 1975 and 1976 accompanied by Hugh Leach and John Shipman. In his superbly illustrated retrospective *Seen in the Yemen*, dedicated to Freya to emulate her own *Seen in the Hadhramaut*, Hugh recalls that throughout their time together she was invariably 'companionable, considerate and grateful'.

Freya's last years were spent peacefully at her villa above Asolo, whose citizens had bestowed on her the town's freedom. Her reputation as 'one of the most famous of all Arab and Asian travellers' seemed unassailable until 1993, her centenary year, when Molly Izzard's critical biography *Freya Stark: A Biography* burst the bubble. Izzard, a well-known journalist long resident in the Middle East, had originally been commissioned by Jock Murray to write Freya's biography. However, the deeper Izzard delved into Freya's life, the less she liked her subject and concluded that Freya was a sly, hypochondriac, snobbish and selfish woman, ruthlessly manipulative and self-centred. On receipt of the draft, Murray insisted that changes be made. Izzard refused and switched publishers to Hodders.

On publication, Freya's friends and admirers rose up in anger, damning the book as spiteful, nit-picking and debunking. Patrick Leigh-Fermor's gushing obituary occupied a full page of *The Daily Telegraph*, but others, including Colin Thubron, were impressed by Izzard's clinical assessment and Wilfred Thesiger cruelly dismissed her journeys as no more than those of 'any moderately enterprising embassy secretary'. This was ungallant and wide of the mark. Freya's Persian travels and her ride to the Tigris were original, plucky ventures. In essence, she was an observer and chronicler who immortalised her travels with inimitable prose which illuminated the landscape and brought to life all those with whom she empathised. She was not a genuine explorer and certainly no saint, but she was a brave, determined, and imaginative traveller with what Colin Thubron once described as having 'a jewelled way with words'.

## Prison Time in Sana'a Abdulkader Al-Guneid



With an Introduction by Dr  
Stephen Day  
Arabian Publishing,  
Cowes, 2021  
pp. xiv+194  
Maps. Hb. £15.99  
ISBN 978 0 9929808 7 0

For those interested in anthropology and the social conventions of Yemen this book is an endless delight. It is much more than a record of a brutal prison experience. One BYS member remarked that the account could have been written about any other prison in the Arab world. This is true, but the prison is simply the canvas on which the author sketches out the story of the recent history of Yemen. The structure of the prison carries news from outside, new arrivals and rumours inside the prison via its network of plumbing and pipes. There is even someone who interprets dreams via the pipes and who holds that dreams of Mecca are particularly auspicious, heralding potential news of release.

There is a delight in the details of social habits and constructions that sit next to waspish descriptions of the inmates. The people of Sa'ada have a fondness for sprinkling a little bit of tobacco into their qat to add to their *bilshama*, that state of mild euphoria. The al-Qaeda members who manufacture home brew from dates in their cell, declaring it *halal*, as it is only fermented for three days. The popular rhyming description applied to the Huthis of *qandil wa-zanbil* to distinguish between the Hashemite 'lamps' as guiding lights, and the mere followers as the *zanbil* 'straw baskets', used by fishermen to carry the small fry that they are.

The prison is a melting-pot for Yemenis of all stripes, religious and secular, the sayyid and the bedouin, the Zaydi and the Shafa'i, and they serve as metaphors for the different mindsets and cultures of Yemen. These people are intense characters, many of them seem possessed, and, along with the naïve, there are many who are wilfully ignorant. There is even room for an incongruent Hungarian opera-loving convert to Islam. Like the Hungarian, Al-Guneid is an accidental prisoner. Finding himself, in the last place, an intellectual, a doctor, a man over 70 and talking to men who prefer explanations

involving *jinn* and the supernatural, to common sense. He is threatened by a 16-year-old religious fanatic from al-Qaeda with whom he shares a cell. Such small-minded people, in particular, he finds a 'suffocating presence'. Even his conversations with an American evangelical Christian offer no solace, a man whose views he finds bigoted and judgemental.

We are left in no doubt about the author's political affiliations and particularly his stance against the Huthis. He strips them naked, reveals their mindsets as little more than suspicious tribal men obsessed with power. Even so, he doesn't demonise them. In the same vein, he gives equal treatment to the al-Qaeda inmates he shares his cells with, men who radiate anger towards others who do not share their world view. Displays of excessive piety, praying more than five times a day, fasting on Mondays and Thursdays, are all to signal the superiority of their group.

There are stories of tragedies: the death of the American security manager of the Sheraton Hotel, the miserable existence of the paralysed and mentally ill prisoners. Many of the stories are intimate as well as deeply sad. These are men thrown together in the squalor of the prison with only their memories and the act of sharing them for comfort. But there is also room for the absurd and for comedy, often combining both. The man who constantly infuriates his less literate cell mates by passing wind while reading the Quran out loud to them.

If there is one criticism of the book it is the structure. It feels clunky with its three parts while in fact it is one main section with two short annexes; one on the uprising in 2011 and the other a short coda of two pages where the author finds himself in Canada, exiled from his home. These sections could have been subsumed into the main text. But this is a small, technical criticism around the style rather than the substance.

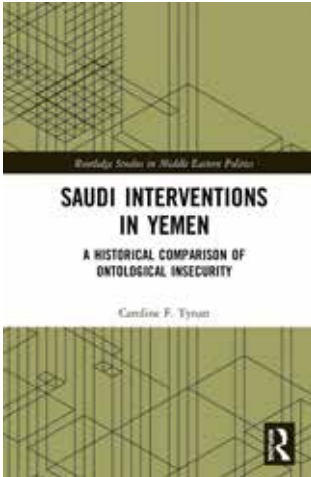
In the end the impression left is that more is needed of this kind of book. There is a dearth of Yemeni writers in English, and we are all the poorer for it. This book is an easy read and its contents a delight, despite the dark nature of the subject. It is clearly a metaphor for the Yemeni spirit.

MARTIN JERRETT



# Saudi Interventions in Yemen: A Historical Comparison of Ontological Insecurity

Caroline F. Tynan



Routledge, London, 2020  
pp. 164  
Hb. £120.00,  
ISBN 978 0 367 45638 2

Seven years have passed since Saudi Arabia and its Arab allies launched 'Operation Decisive Storm'; a military campaign aimed at reinstating the ousted Yemeni President Hadi. Burdened by increasing political and financial costs, Riyadh has meanwhile reconsidered its engagement in Yemen, exposing the need to find an honourable way out from a protracted war of attrition that has tarnished the reputation of its main architect, the Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. Appointed Minister of Defence after King Salman ascended the throne in January 2015, the young prince has worked his way up the House of Saud promoting military interventionism, political repression and economic liberalisation.

This interaction between Saudi foreign policy choices and domestic politics is at the core of Caroline Tynan's book. The volume compares the Saudi-led intervention of March 2015 in Yemen with the kingdom's response to the Egyptian military adventure of 1962 in what was then the Mutawakkilite Kingdom of Yemen. Both interventions occurred during periods marked by domestic instability arising from succession crises in Saudi Arabia, and regional upheaval linked to the revolutionary pan-Arab ideology of the 1950s to 1960s and the more recent Arab youth uprisings. The author argues that the non-ideological nature incarnated by the Arab youth uprisings poses a more existential threat to the Saudi regime's legitimacy than pan-Arabism ever did, neutralised as it was through a mix of co-optation and repression. Instead, the aggressive foreign policy turn of 2015 reflects the kingdom's attempt to construct external threats in order to bolster its domestic legitimacy and secure its survival.

The book constitutes an updated and more succinct version of Tynan's doctoral dissertation. The first part provides an overview of the theoretical framework underpinning the work. It introduces the notion of ontological security — that is, a state's ability to generate a distinctive narrative about its identity — as a key tool to legitimise a regime's survival. Authoritarian regimes facing legitimacy crises domestically, like the Saudi monarchy in the wake of the Arab uprisings of 2011, can inflate minor security risks into existential threats 'as a strategy to reinforce the regime's own legitimacy' (p. 12).

The second part of the book is a two-stage exploration of Saudi Arabia's response to Nasserism. In the 1950s and 1960s, the monarchy faced a fierce struggle between the successors of King ibn Saud, his sons Saud and Faisal, and a regional threat from Arab nationalism. Internally, King Faisal suppressed dissent but strengthened the regime by gathering support among moderate Arab nationalists and the religious establishment. By presenting itself as an Islamic bulwark against secular Arab nationalism, the Saudi monarchy succeeded in developing an effective ideological response to Nasserism and in securing the support of the West. By this strategy, Nasserism ceased to present an ontological threat to the Saudi monarchy and its constituent identity. Hence, Saudi Arabia could afford to pursue a pragmatic foreign policy and avoid direct confrontation with Egypt during the latter's intervention in Yemen in 1962.

The third part of the book deals with the Saudi reaction to the Arab uprisings of 2011. Tynan argues that Saudi Arabia's aggressive foreign policy turn 'is not simply a product of a new leader's personality but the culmination of changes within the kingdom itself, which facilitated the rise of a more reckless leadership' (p. 76). Unlike its response to 'foreign-imported' Nasserism, the Saudi monarchy failed to formulate an effective discursive narrative to counter opposition movements in the post-2011 context. Amidst a looming succession crisis and a hostile regional environment, the monarchy's emphasis on Saudi nationalism resulted in heightened domestic repression and an aggressive foreign policy. The Saudi regime's legitimacy is thus shored up by constructing existential foreign threats — including Iran, the Muslim Brotherhood and Yemen's Huthis — that justify disproportionate military intervention abroad.



## Socotra: The Bradt Travel Guide

Hilary Bradt and Janice Booth

In contrast with the cautious foreign policy of the 1960s, the Saudi decision to intervene in Yemen in 2015 was not dictated by a physical security threat. Instead, the military adventurism of King Salman and his son Mohammed reflected increasing Saudi ontological insecurity following 2011. Interestingly, the author notes that Saudi Arabia shifted away from its aggressive approach towards seeking de-escalation with the Huthis following military attacks on Saudi territory in 2019, over growing fears for its domestic security. In other words, 'its quest for ontological security [...] had ultimately provoked greater physical and economic insecurity' (p. 122).

Tynan's book is an original exploration of Saudi foreign policy through a domestic lens. Despite overlooking the decades-long marginalisation of Zaydi communities in northern Yemen, and the appeal of the Zaydi revivalist message across southern Saudi Arabia — which arguably makes the Huthis' threat to Saudi security more substantial than it is presented in the book — the author makes a compelling argument in support of her thesis that the Saudi intervention in Yemen is linked to the legitimacy crisis spurred by the Arab uprisings. Altogether, the book provides an important contribution to understanding Saudi policy towards Yemen and is recommended to readers wishing to place recent events in Yemen into a broader historical perspective.

ANDREA CARBONI



Bradt Travel Guides,  
Chesham, 2020 (First  
Edition)  
pp. xvi + 160  
Maps. Illust. Index. Pb.  
£16.99  
ISBN 978 1 78477 6770

The height of an infectious disease pandemic that has sent most of the world into physical distancing and lockdowns and caused immeasurable damage to the global travel and tourism industries is an odd time for the launch of a new guidebook. But the publication at hand is no ordinary travel guide and the place it describes no ordinary tourist destination. The latest addition to the Bradt Travel Guides covers the Soqotra Archipelago, Yemen's jewel in a crown replete with monuments of both mankind and nature, and since 2008 a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Bradt is no stranger to Yemen, as its 2007 Yemen Travel Guide remains even today a rare resource to those intrepid enough to plan a trip to the country, which for the past seven years has been experiencing the dire effects of protracted civil unrest. Indeed, the Yemen edition does include nine pages on Soqotra, but the island's uniqueness and the fact that it has been spared the worst effects of both the pandemic and the mainland conflict mean that it merits its own separate publication as a relatively more accessible part of the country. As the authors admit, it is nigh to impossible to offer practical advice on flights, visas, itineraries, and all basic information the usual traveller needs before embarking due to the uncertainty caused both by the pandemic and the political situation. However, after one manages to get oneself on the island, the guidebook becomes an inexhaustible source of information anticipating every conceivable query a traveller might have.

The quality of writing and the detail and accuracy of the Soqotra guidebook is no accident as it has been authored by veteran travel writers Hilary Bradt, founder of the eponymous travel guides series, and Janice Booth, who at 81 relished the idea of one more adventure to a place she had not visited before. In

compiling the guide, they were both assisted by a group of seven expert advisers all associated with the *Friends of Soqotra*, a sister Society to the British Yemeni Society. The result is a publication that contains enough scientific knowledge to satisfy those who visit the island with an interest in its biodiversity — second only to the Galapagos — interspersed with an abundance of historical, linguistic, anthropological and mere touristic sketches that will whet the curiosity of prospective visitors.

The guide is divided into two roughly equal parts. Part One provides detailed information on all forms of life on Soqotra, both endemic and introduced. Lavishly illustrated, it is a who's who of the island's fauna and flora offering quick reference to the various species one will almost certainly encounter during a stay on Soqotra. This is followed by historical and anthropological information before practical advice on how best a traveller can prepare before embarking on their adventure. Since the local population and its cultural heritage are as much under threat by tourism as the natural environment, hints on customs and appropriate social etiquette are helpfully included here and can be also found interspersed across the text of the book. Compiled with Soqotris in mind, but also attuned to the needs and expectations of the modern traveller, the authors' suggestions will save many a visitor to the island from avoidable pitfalls and misunderstandings.

Part Two of the guide is a more straightforward description of places and routes on the coastline and the interior of Soqotra peppered with historical anecdotes and information on conservation projects, local initiatives, and what not to miss in a particular area. To someone like the author of this review, who joined two of this Society's tours of the island in 2010 and 2013, however evocative the guide's descriptions of Soqotra are, they also seem to point out with worrying regularity to issues of overcrowding in popular spots and the scourge of plastics pollution in parts of the island that would have been pristine five or ten years ago. Although the reasons behind these phenomena are not given, one would be right to assume that years of political turmoil in the mainland and the contest to control the island among local and regional actors has led to a change in its demography and perhaps to an influx of visitors and permanent residents from conflict-ridden parts of Yemen and beyond, whose presence has placed extra pressures on its fragile social and environmental conditions.

This new Bradt publication on Soqotra is more than a typical guidebook. To the prospective visi-

tor, it is admittedly the best resource one can find now offering a well-balanced mix of scientific and empirical narrative. Those who want to learn more about this part of Yemen will find it an informative, well-written and authoritative introduction that covers all aspects of life on the island. And to the travellers who have already been, apart from the plentiful colour photographs, the authors' own descriptions of places and experiences will provide a nostalgic reminder of fond memories and perhaps even spur them on to plan their next trip there.

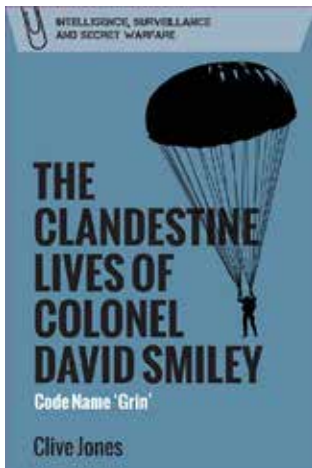
THANOS PETOURIS



Soqotri man fishing in Shu'ub beach  
(© Felix Wu, 2013)

# The Clandestine Lives of Colonel David Smiley: Code Name 'Grin'

Clive Jones



Edinburgh University Press,  
Edinburgh, 2020  
pp. xvii+384  
Preface. Abbr. Maps. Illust.  
Bibl. Index. Pb.  
£24.99  
ISBN 978 1 47444 116 2

While this is a book about the life of a remarkable and gallant British officer it is also a book about conflict — mostly in the Middle East, and Yemen in particular. As with other accounts chronicling the beginning of the end of the British Empire, this book hints at many parallels with the current decline of the US imperium. The description of the politics and politicking of the British and Egyptian withdrawals from South Arabia (p. 311) is particularly resonant.

Clive Jones is Professor of Regional Security at Durham University's School of Government and International Affairs, and this volume complements his previous *Britain and the Yemen Civil War, 1962–1965: Ministers, Mercenaries and Mandarins* (reviewed in *BYSJ 13* by Peter Hinchcliffe). The latter delved deeply into the activities of the British Mercenary Organisation over three years; this book covers Smiley's life in its entirety over several campaigns. It is interesting from a Middle East regional perspective, from a military history point of view, and as a forerunner of the 'new' type of conflict which Western forces have experienced over the past two decades.

Many of the situations in which Smiley found himself would not be out of place today: frictions when working with local forces, the competing political agendas of allied nations and factions within the force. Many of the locations in which Smiley soldiered are in the news now, too: geo-strategic issues, ethnic complications and complex terrain endure, no matter the flag that flies over them. Often the recurrent locations are replete with recurrent notable families as allies or enemies, and sometimes both.

The work is structured chronologically around discrete phases of Smiley's life: regimental duty, both before the Second World War and on operations in Abyssinia, Palestine, Iraq and Iran; service with the

Commandos and then with the Special Operations Executive in Albania and Siam; his post-military service in the Mediterranean, Oman and Yemen and, finally, a valedictory chapter. Throughout, there are interesting details about the various campaigns, which — as well as echoing the current conflicts — illuminate hitherto unexplained aspects, such as the price for Israeli logistical support to the Royalists in Yemen being political recognition of Israel (as well as tying down and degrading Nasser's army in Yemen: 'At the time of [the 6 Day War] Egypt still had over 50,000 troops in Yemen', p. 314).

While Jones is an academic, this is not solely an academic's book. It is written in fluid English and annotated adequately but not excessively. Jones draws upon primary and secondary documentary sources, as well as interviews with many of those involved, including with Smiley himself. In particular, Jones has had access to Smiley's unpublished diaries and contemporaneous papers which provide unusual and unparalleled detail not only on the events, but on the intentions and assessments behind them.

Inevitably, there are a couple of minor mistakes: most Sana'anis are Zaydi, not Shafa'i (p. 315). There are also the usual issues of transliteration from Arabic such as Shaffei for Shafa'i etc. One marginally more important confusion is the description of Yemen being divided by sect, with the Zaydi tribes firmly in control in the mountains and the Egyptians and the Republicans controlling the lowlands where the Shafa'i tribes held sway (p. 295.) While this is true (and sadly paralleled by the current conflict), it masks a split among the Zaydi tribes, with several Hashid tribes — led by Shaykh Abdallah b. Husayn al-Ahmar, whose hostage elder brother had been murdered at Imam Ahmad's behest — fighting for the Republicans.

As too often, a major issue is with the quality of the maps, and in particular the lack of detail about terrain on those that are included. In Albania, Oman and Yemen, the immensely complex terrain ('the brutally rugged mountain terrain where the fighting was taking place', p. 290) greatly favours asymmetric forces. Yet from the book's sketch maps, the reader is encouraged to presume that the terrain of mountainous areas closely resembles Norfolk's. The other major issue is the extortionate price: at £80 in hardback, the book is clearly aimed at university libraries with lavish budgets (and still lacks decent mapping despite that iniquitous price). The recently published paperback is a much more reasonable £24.99.

The 1960s Yemen Civil War is unusual in that



## Britain's Departure from Aden and South Arabia: Without Glory but Without Disaster

Noel Brehony and Clive Jones (eds.)

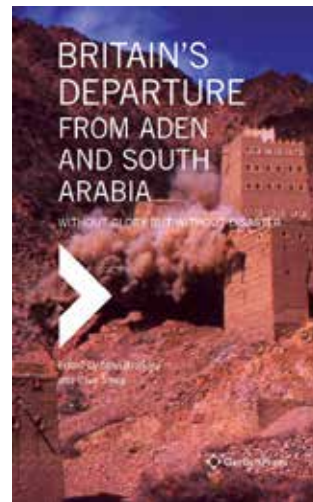
there are first-hand accounts in English by many of those involved on all the various sides, be that Somerville-Large's *Tribes and Tribulations* (Robert Hale, 1967) from the Republican side, von Horn's *Soldiering for Peace* (McKay, 1967) for the UN perspective, Adams Schmidt's *Yemen the Unknown War* (Holt, 1968) from a mostly Royalist standpoint, or O'Ballance's military analysis, *War in the Yemen* (Faber, 1971). Now, as the conflict transitions from being International Relations into the realm of History (albeit resonating in the current civil war), and as government records are being released, the subject is finally beginning to get the serious academic treatment it deserves, to which this is a valuable contribution.

This is a readable and engaging book about a swashbuckling British officer who never received in life the full recognition from his country that he deserved. This book goes a considerable way to righting that wrong, as well as being an interesting window on relevant, if forgotten, campaigns. Highly recommended.

JAMES SPENCER



David Smiley with Amir Hasan b. Hasan b. Yahya on the rooftop of the latter's HQ on Jabal al-Ahnum in Hajja, 1963 (see: *BYSJ 17*)



Gerlach Press, Berlin, 2020  
pp. ix + 204  
Abbr. Notes. Bibl. Notes on Contributors. Hb.  
£70  
ISBN: 978 3 95994 082 5

As British troops pulled out of Aden in 1967, the band of the Royal Marines struck up a tune to send them on their way — not *Rule Britannia* or *Land of Hope and Glory*, but a Cockney song, *Fings Ain't Wot They Used To Be*. It was an ironic choice but, in the circumstances, probably the right one. 'Fings' had certainly changed for Britain, and they were about to change for Yemen too. In London, Aden had long been viewed as the linchpin of British power projection east of Suez, but now it was about to be abandoned, thus ending a presence that had lasted for well over a century. In Aden, meanwhile, Britain's undignified exit would shortly be followed by the installation of a Marxist government.

This volume emerged out of a conference held at the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) in December 2017 to mark fifty years since the British departure from Aden. Edited by Noel Brehony and Clive Jones, it explores the context of the British retreat along with its aftermath.

Jones, a professor in the School of Government and International Affairs at Durham University, sets the scene in an introductory chapter. Reviewing previous analyses of the withdrawal, he highlights unrest fuelled by external powers and failure to establish a collaborative relationship with the local Yemeni elite as its immediate causes. He also notes factors at play in Britain: changes in defence policy as a result of technological developments; an economic situation which cast doubt on the wisdom of maintaining bases east of Suez; and challenges to Britain's self-perception as a great power. Recalling



the words of Sir Humphrey Trevelyan, the last High Commissioner of the Federation and Protectorate of South Arabia, that the retreat from Aden was 'without glory' but also 'without disaster', Jones ends his introduction by asking whether that assessment has stood the test of time.

The eleven chapters that follow are by a variety of authors, some with an academic focus, others writing from first-hand experience having served as British officials in South Arabia during the 1960s. The latter provide a ground-level picture of Britain's flawed efforts at colonial management — in particular policymakers' failure to understand the differences between Aden Colony itself and the tribal hinterland which in turn brought a failure to appreciate the growing influence of Nasser and Arab nationalism. These personal accounts also enrich the historical analysis with a close-up view of everyday interactions between the British and Yemenis.

Having joined the Colonial Service in 1959, John Harding held a series of posts until 1965: as an adviser in the Eastern Aden Protectorate, an administrator in Aden, and a political officer in Lahj and Radfan. One picture that emerges from his account is of Britain's misplaced sense of security, even when Nasser sent 30,000 Egyptian troops to join North Yemen's civil war on the Republican side. In the south, meanwhile, Aden's vaunted prosperity came at a price, drawing in migrant workers whose makeshift camps became breeding grounds not only for disease, but also political disaffection.

Oliver Miles served as private secretary to the High Commissioner and later in the British Embassy following independence. In a chapter written shortly before his death (obit. in *BYSJ* 28), he gives a wry account of life in Aden at the time. Like others, he notes Britain's attempt to grapple with differences be-

tween the Crown Colony of Aden and the surrounding Protectorates. One of the shadier aspects of this, he says, was the British habit of bribing 'up country' Yemenis with boxes of surplus rifles — 'which even I could see was going to add to our troubles'. Many of the tribesmen, he adds, would spend six months of the year living and fighting in their mountains and the other six driving forklift trucks in Cardiff docks.

In another chapter, Thanos Petouris presents substantial extracts from private correspondence by the late John Shipman (former editor of this *Journal*, obit. in *BYSJ* 25). Joining the Overseas Civil Service at the age of 23, Shipman worked in the Eastern Aden Protectorate and sent letters home to his family which convey the atmosphere of uncertainty and frustration during the last five years of Britain's presence.

While the Suez crisis of 1956 has entered British consciousness as the proverbial example of a foreign policy disaster, the subsequent Aden debacle is less remembered. In the book's concluding chapter, though, Helen Lackner sees its reverberations continuing in Yemen today. Tracing the country's political history since 1967, she suggests the current fragmentation in southern Yemen and the growth of separatism are partly the result of Britain's reluctance to establish a single centralised state during the colonial period.

BRIAN WHITAKER



The Qu'ayti Armed Constabulary in al-Qatn, Wadi Hadhramaut, 1964  
(John Shipman Collection, courtesy of the editor)

## Shaykh Sinan Abu Lahum (1922–2021)

---



On 9 January 2021, Shaykh Sinan b. Abdallah b. Salih Abu Lahum passed away in Cairo at the age of 99 after roughly a decade of ill health. Born in 1922 in his family's native area of Wadi al-Malah in Niham, to the east of Sana'a, Abu Lahum grew up mostly in his mother's native Waraf in Ibb. Abu Lahum's grandfather, like many other northern Yemeni tribesmen, had settled in Ibb owing to its abundance of fertile land. This dual identity, founded in his childhood, was seen as key by many for understanding Abu Lahum — split between the groundings of a tribal shaykh and a gentleman farmer — even as he consolidated a position as one of the most important leading figures within the Bakil tribal confederation.

Along with his counterpart, Shaykh Abdallah b. Husayn al-Ahmar, the paramount shaykh of the Hashid tribal confederation, Abu Lahum played an outsized role in the dramatic events of modern Yemen's emergence, seen as offering decisive backing for the revolution against the Imamate in 1962. Appointed Vice President of the Shura Council of the republican government, he participated in military campaigns against the royalists on various fronts, eventually being invited to serve in the 30-member Presidency Council of 1964.

In 1967 he was appointed Governor of Hudayda province, purportedly choosing the position himself in an effort to distance himself from political intrigues at the centre of political power. This was his last official position, in which he remained for seven years. But even during this period, his most significant influence was outside of the formal organs of power. Abu Lahum was among those who helped plot the coup that removed the Yemen Arab Republic's founding president, Abdallah al-Sallal, from power. Ironically, he would later play a decisive role in pushing Ibrahim al-Hamdi to turn against al-Sallal's successor, Abd al-Rahman al-Iryani, paving the way for the so-called corrective step — though

Hamdi's subsequent efforts to decrease the power of tribal shaykhs would see them part ways as well.

Shaykh Sinan and President Ali Abdallah Salih had an uneasy alliance. On the one hand, Salih relied on the tribal leader as a mediator, both with the Bakil confederation and regional powers, while on the other hand, he bolstered rivals to the late tribal leader, most notably Shaykh Najji al-Shayf, while resenting many of his more maverick moves. Indeed, it was Abu Lahum's opposition to the 1994 Civil War, which he is arguably most known for. He defended this decision in his memoirs, expressing opposition to the concept of preserving Yemen's unity by force. Among his final public political decisions was to declare his backing for the 2011 uprising against Salih, a movement in which many of his relatives took key leadership roles.

The death of Abu Lahum marks the virtual end of an era in Yemen's history, particularly in conjunction with the recent death of his political partner and eventual brother-in-law, Muhsin al-Ayni, some months later. One of the final remaining leaders of Yemen's foundational period, Abu Lahum died as the country remains in a deep impasse, perched on the abyss of a continuing humanitarian crisis and an ongoing civil war that has dramatically reshaped the country's socio-political status quo. The wisdom of Yemen's late elder statesmen, as the common lament goes, is likely to continue to be missed.

ADAM BARON

## James Gardiner Nash MBE (1934–2020)



James Nash in Mukayras, Audhali Sultanate (© John Harding, 1962)

James Nash, who died on 24 August 2020, was born at Saint Paul's Cray in Kent on 30 July 1934. From 1959 to 1965 he served in the Overseas Civil Service as a Political Officer in the Western Aden Protectorate (WAP), fondly remembered by both British and Arab colleagues for his enthusiasm, courage and undying affection for the peoples he served. He was also an adventurer, poet, aesthete, gourmet and scholar in the cast of a latter-day Richard Francis Burton, 'Ruffian Dick', the multi-faceted Victorian explorer and orientalist.

Having completed four years at Stowe, he left before his 17<sup>th</sup> birthday without taking A Levels and the prospect of university — a decision he always regretted. A spell in the family's 200-years-long-established paper manufacturing business preceded National Service. There he opted for the 12<sup>th</sup> Royal Lancers serving mainly in Malaya during the Emergency between 1953 and 1955, followed by twelve years in the Derbyshire Yeomanry. A military career might have beckoned, but in 1956 he embarked on a two-year solo walk from Venice to Addis Ababa when he fell under the spell of Arabia.

James's South Arabian service was spent as a trouble-shooter and political adviser to a succession of frontline WAP chiefdoms. Bayhan, his first posting (1959–60), was so plagued by Yemeni attacks that Amir Salih presented him with a kalashnikov. Moving on to Audhali (1961–62), a sultanate which had suffered sorely from subversion and Yemeni incursions ever since the end of the First World War, the political situation was yet more complicated. Its ruler, Sultan Salih, was pro-British and one of the few Protectorate chiefs who genuinely supported the nascent South Arabian Federation. As the Federal Minister for Internal Affairs, the sultan was pre-occupied with business at the Federation's capital, al-Ittihad (today called Madina al-Sha'ab), leaving the sultanate's day-to-day administration to his brother

Naib Ja'abil. Any meaningful advice proffered by Nash was diminished by the Naib's republican sympathies and the covert peace deal he had already brokered with the Yemen. Ja'abil's subsequent defection to the North in 1964 marked a turning-point in British and Federal fortunes.

When in August 1961 I stayed with James at his three-foot-thick walled redoubt in the Audhali capital, Lawdar ('rifle but not bazooka proof, dear boy'), we supped on prawns in aspic and drank champagne by the light of silver candlesticks. Next day, he arranged for an Aden Protectorate Levy (APL) escort to take me to inspect its remotest garrison at Mukayras. At 7,000 feet the highest village in the WAP, it was only accessible by land up a newly built road of innumerable hairpin bends that wound up the magnificent 3,000 feet, 70 mile-long Audhali Escarpment. The air was like James's champagne, but with the Yemen in rifle range the APL garrison was on permanent high alert.

James's next posting to Dathina followed at the heels of its renegade Prime Minister absconding to the Yemen. Aden's High Commissioner, Sir Kennedy Trevaskis, had tasked James to 'give them a constitution and make them a republic.' Dathina's *Iajna* (assembly) were so impressed that its members suggested that James be appointed the defector's replacement. A more serious challenge arose when a seemingly trivial Qutaibi tribal skirmish in Radfan in October 1963 precipitated the Egyptian-backed National Liberation Front (NLF) insurrection. In the ensuing 1964 Radfan military campaign, James was responsible in situ for the campaign's political direction. The military outcome was superficially successful, but failure to back it up with generous reconstruction aid left a legacy of bitterness and did nothing to stem NLF guerrilla incursions from across the border against the Dhala' and Habilayn garrisons.

After the campaign's inconclusive cessation in July 1964, James was posted to Dhala' and given the unenviable task of conducting covert counter-terrorist operations against Egyptian-trained dissidents based in Qa'taba. He converted his bazooka-scarred house, a target for regular attacks, into an armoury for weaponry and mines and as an HQ for his gang of tribal 'heavies' who dished out retaliation in kind. Both James and Hugh Leach (1934–2015; see *BYSJ* 24) were named by *Sawt al-'Arab* as being personally responsible for British counter-insurgency operations. But it was the misdirected friendly fire brought down on his house by an overzealous Royal Marines detachment, wounding eight of James's tribal guards and nearly causing mutiny in the process, that most nearly did for James. His operations were as meagrely funded as development aid, and, when in 1964 the British Government proscribed offensive military action against NLF dissidents, such operations became pointless leaving a whiff of perfidy hanging in the air.

James's ebullient personality got free rein on rare visits to Aden. At one Aden Club's New Year's party he arrived with a cartridge belt slung across his bare, dyed-in-wood chest, and a *janbiyya* stuck into his *futa*. As the evening deteriorated, James became embroiled in an inebriated *mêlée* which necessitated an emergency visit to hospital where he chased the nurses around the ward brandishing his *janbiyya* and yelling Aulaqi tribal war cries.

He resigned from the Colonial Service in 1965, transferred to the Foreign Service and served therein for two years, including one in Bahrain. But this was not his style, so he made a brave career switch by qualifying as a chartered surveyor, working mainly in the City of London from 1969 to 1988, with a three-year spell in Cairo selling flats to rich Egyptians and befriending a neighbouring tennis champion who had previously commanded the Egyptian Air Force in Yemen.

Retirement did not assuage his thirst for adventure and in 1988, aged 54, he completed a Turkish language course at Oxford University before riding 1,100 miles from Istanbul to Jerusalem to raise money for the Knights of Saint John's Eye Hospital. In the course of this eight-month-long journey, described in his book *Quixote in a Cart* (Matador, 2018), he endured frequent changes of horses, boltings, absconding grooms, quagmires, arrests, a hazardous crossing of the Taurus with a couple of broken ribs and a broken wrist.

James had two sons, Tom and Matthew, by his marriage in 1965 to Sally Randall. Dissolved in 1984, his second marriage in 1991 to Ann Allen, whose family had long Middle East military connections,

brought great happiness to both. They settled at Hinton Saint George, Crewkerne in an apartment adjacent to Hugh Leach. With James writing verse and prose and riding his horse and cart around the leafy lanes of Somerset, he achieved a measure of tranquillity.

James was the originator of the *British-Yemeni Society Journal*, devising its bull's head cover emblem and editing its first five volumes. He was a loyal supporter of *Friends of Hadhramaut*, and his public offices included appointments as Governor of the Alexandria Schools Trust; Secretary to the City Ward of Cheap; Liveryman of the Worshipful Company of Broderers; Freeman of the City of London, and Knight of the Order of Saint John. His two slim volumes of poetry, and particularly his poignantly evocative *Aden*, reveal the artistic sensibilities of this Renaissance Man.

During his declining years of illness, he never lost his robust sense of humour and over a glass or more, would recall his days in South Arabia, the land he 'loved with passion'. In our garden bower, 'James Grove' commemorates the trees we once planted together. The memory of this gallant warrior will always be revered by those who knew him.

JOHN HARDING

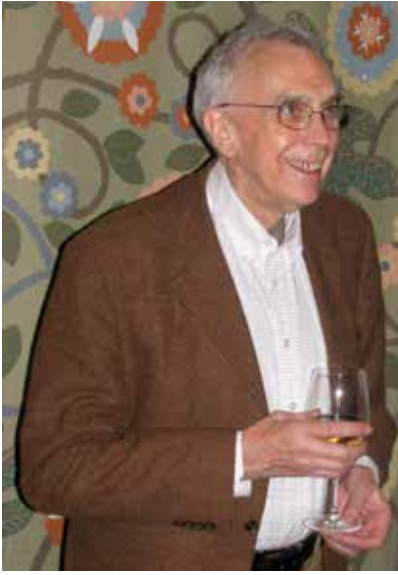
*\* In compiling this obituary, I am indebted to the contributions of Thanos Petouris and Stephen Day.*



Nash on the Habilayn to Dhala' Road (© John Harding, 1964)



## John Anthony (Tony) Allan (1937–2021)



Courtesy of Dr Naho  
Mirumachi, King's  
College London

I first met Tony Allan in the 1950s when we were both studying Geography at Durham University together with our friend the late Professor Keith McLachlan. I remember Tony for his extraordinary intellect and his intellectual curiosity — always challenging the accepted, albeit with great courtesy. He seemed to be on a different level from the rest of us and destined for a distinguished career in whatever might eventually interest him. However, on graduation he did not — like Keith and I — take up the chance to do a PhD on Libya. Instead he became one of the last people to do National Service, which in his case was two years in the Royal Engineers. This proved to be his first involvement in Yemen, where he was map-making in South Arabia.

A little later Keith asked me to apply for a Research Fellowship at SOAS, University of London, but I had to decline as I was about to join the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Keith encouraged Tony to apply. That launched Tony's astonishing career as a leading expert on water, developing the concept of Virtual Water. At its most basic level, Virtual Water is defined as the 'water embedded in a product, that is, the water consumed during its process of production'. I still have a bookmark that Tony would distribute listing the water content value of everyday items. It is a way of measuring value by water content rather than price.

Tony developed the idea in the Middle East, noting, for example, that countries in the Gulf Cooperation Council were using large quantities of water from rapidly declining aquifers, when they could import water in the form of American and Asian cereals and conserve their own supply. His idea took off and transformed the way that countries and governments measured trade by the amount of water

consumed or saved, winning Tony the Stockholm Water Prize, which is arguably the equivalent of an environmental Nobel Prize, and other international prizes for his pioneering thinking.

I remained in intermittent touch with Tony after our days in Durham. At times it seemed like having a conversation lasting decades, where Tony would take up the thread exactly where we had left off weeks, months, even years earlier. That extraordinary memory, that willingness to challenge the accepted remained with him throughout his life as did his intense interest in what people said to him — I have never known anyone with his innate quality of listening.

NOEL BREHONY

Tony and I first crossed tracks some 12 years ago when I was involved in looking into the future of the city of Ta'izz in Yemen, then judged to be the world's most water-stressed city, racked by conflicts over water use between the providers for the city and agricultural users in the hinterland. Tony quickly became an invaluable adviser, giving his time freely and with characteristic generosity, while bringing fresh insights and approaches to a complex and multi-layered challenge. He also introduced me to a range of his former students, who now represent the cutting edge of water analysis. In the Yemen context, two stand out. Chris Handley's thesis in 2001, supervised by Tony, was the first early warning of the depth of the water crisis facing Ta'izz. Gerhard Lichtenthaler's early work on water and agriculture in the Sa'ada basin has led to influential thinking on the potential of water-users' groups. Chris Ward's seminal 2015 book (reviewed in *BYSJ* 22) on Yemen's water crisis benefitted from Tony's insights and the time they spent together at SOAS. More recently, as Yemen's war began with food blockades and attacks against farming assets, Tony became a solid supporter of the Yemen Safe Passage Group, offering advice and encouragement. His generosity of spirit and fresh thinking will be sorely missed.

JAMES FIREBRACE

## John Evans (1932–2021)



Long-time BYS member John Evans passed away in August 2021 at the age of 89. He had had a long career with the Directorate of Overseas Surveys and later the Ordnance Survey, a career which took him to many countries and continents. In 1981 he was seconded to the government of the Yemen Arab Republic (North Yemen) as Survey Adviser and remained in that post until his retirement at the end of 1989. His particular gift to Yemeni scholarship, which he started during his time there, was two beautifully and meticulously hand-drawn, or hand-traced, maps of the old city of Sana'a as it had been when photographed from the air in 1959. He continued refining the maps until prevented by declining health from doing more. Barbara, his wife, asked the BYS what might be done with the maps — a work of art as much as of scholarship — and on the advice of Oxford's EAMENA (Endangered Archaeology in the Middle East and North Africa) this wonderful piece of work now rests in the Bodleian Library.

ROBERT WILSON

## Prof Dr Yusuf Muhammad Abdallah (1943–2021)



Yusuf Muhammad Abdallah, one of Yemen's foremost scholars in a range of fields, but specifically in archaeology and the study of epigraphic South Arabian (the pre-Arabic south Arabian languages), passed away in April 2021. He was born in Ta'izz governorate in 1943. (Many of the obituaries that have appeared on his life give 1934 as his year of birth, but that date seems to be incorrect). He began his higher education at the American University in Beirut where he gained his master's degree in 1970. From there he went on to study for his doctorate in Tübingen, Germany, under the great expert in the field of ancient South Arabian and Semitic epigraphy, Professor Walter Müller.

Prof Abdallah went on to play a key role in developing the study of Yemen's archaeology and ancient languages as a lecturer and later professor at the University of Sana'a, as well as becoming deputy head of the General Authority of Antiquities and Museums. Latterly he was a senior advisor to the Yemeni president's office with the rank of Minister.

He was among the first in the 1980s to decipher and analyse the South Arabian script used on wooden sticks to record accounts and contracts, offering insights into trade, currency and daily life quite different from the formal inscriptions in stone and brief graffiti found on rocks. His publications, mainly articles in Arabic or German, betray his deep fascination with the continuities between the Yemen of the pre-Arabic inscriptions and the early Yemeni Arabic works of scholars such as al-Hamdani several centuries later. Above all, it is as the teacher of a whole generation of students that Professor Yusuf Abdallah will be mourned. A great number of affectionate tributes have marked his passing, highlighting the appreciation of Yemen's history, archaeology and cultural treasures that he inspired.

ROBERT WILSON

## Peter Hugh Walker MBE (1931–2020)



Hugh Walker, who died on 15 September 2020 aged 89, served with distinction as a Political Officer in the Western Aden Protectorate from 1964 to 1967 having already completed ten years' colonial service in Kenya. Adopted as a child by Violet Walker of Wadhurst, Sussex, Hugh was educated at Tonbridge before being commissioned for National Service (1949–51) with the Somali Scouts Regiment, becoming a fluent Somali speaker in the process. After spending a year at Oxford on the Devonshire Training Course for prospective Colonial Service officers, he was posted to Kenya in 1953 as a District Officer.

Hugh's years in Kenya were the most fulfilling of his professional career. Military service had given him an abiding love and respect for its peoples, particularly the Maasai (who presented him a lion cub which he promptly adopted) and the Somalis. His posting to Kenya's Northern Frontier District (NFD) — harsh, desert country almost exclusively inhabited by ethnic Somalis — well suited his talents and temperament and he was later appointed as the area's District Commissioner. Here loyalty to Somali interests and unswerving adherence to his own precepts and principles sometimes set him at odds with higher authority's decisions. Carved out of what had formerly been British Somaliland, the NFD's Somali population had overwhelmingly supported integration into the Republic of Somalia (created in 1962) by an 88% plebiscite and Hugh was strongly opposed to the British Government's refusal to honour such popular Somali sentiment. When in 1963, the NFD was formally incorporated into the nascent Republic of Kenya, Somalia severed diplomatic relations with Britain and Kenyan Somalis became subject to the new Kenyan government's increasingly repressive measures to stifle irredentist dissent. Hugh had

earlier voiced his objections to British Mau Mau policies and when Kenyan independence was granted in December 1963, he resigned from the newly created Kenyan Civil Service.

Hugh's long experience in both tribal affairs and political issues qualified him for transfer to South Arabia's colonial administration in July 1964, though it was always on the cards that potential conflicts might lie ahead for this independently-minded idealist. His six-month induction at the Western Aden Protectorate (WAP) Office in al-Ittihad with Lionel Folkard, a former RAF wartime hero, gave Hugh some forewarning of the complexities of South Arabia's politics and the difficulties of its administration. At this time, he forged a close friendship with another unconventional colonial officer, Tom Heaton, who was the Federal Chief Inspector of Schools, an outstanding Arabist and a key intelligence operative. Heaton, though less outspoken, had long been as critical of certain aspects of British South Arabian policy as Hugh Walker was to become. Hugh's posting to Dhala' (labelled the Political Officers' 'graveyard') in early 1965 came after the official termination of the Radfan campaign the year before, but with no cessation in dissident militant activity.

This was an imaginative but probably misconceived appointment. Like Roy Somerset (obit. *BYSJ* 27), a wartime soldier who had once described his transfer from Nigeria's efficiently run colonial administration to the WAP as 'descent from order to chaos', Hugh was appalled to find what awaited him in Dhala'. There were no handing-over notes, accounts, inventories and no filing. Yet more disconcerting was that the policies and practices he was now expected to implement went diametrically against his own principles. In a personal letter he wrote to Dennis

Healey, the British Defence Minister, he spelled out in 27 paragraphs a welter of objections, including his disagreement with the federal project in general; the scandal that 'feudal' federal rulers were being bribed with hand-outs of arms and ammunition; that British counter-terrorism measures were ineffective and much else. Apparently, Healey had initially shown interest but never replied to this heartfelt missive.

Many of Hugh's objections were understandable and some justifiable. However, many other fine men had spent the best part of their lives giving devoted service to promote the interests and well-being of the peoples of this unforgettable, but unforgiving land. At bottom, the fundamental problems facing any administration were obscurantist tribalism, inadequate development funding due to Britain's inability to provide it, failures of political leadership at several levels, and an incoherent and ultimately ineffective defence policy.

In the event, Hugh did much valuable work in Dhala' as well as in Wahidi and Mukalla in the Eastern Aden Protectorate, with a stint as Personal Secretary to the High Commissioner Sir Richard Turnbull, himself an NFD veteran. Like several other Political Officers, he resigned from the Colonial Service in 1967 and, on return to England, worked initially as a language supervisor in the BBC's Somali Service before being promoted as its Head. But this was never really his style and after re-joining the Colonial Service in 1970, he served with the Government of Hong Kong until 1992, successively working in the Department of Trade and Industry; as Clerk to Hong Kong's Executive Council and finally as Civil Secretary of the Fire Brigade Department. For his long and distinguished service Hugh was awarded the MBE.

On retirement, Hugh moved to Sherborne where,

albeit belatedly, he married Anne Morse, formerly the wife of Brian Doe, Aden's Director of Antiquities. Hugh had been in love with Anne ever since they had met in Aden many years before. Their 28 years of married life, shared with Anne's extended family and later enhanced by Hugh's reunification with his own birth mother and her family, were joyous times. Sadly, Anne passed away a few months after Hugh, on 4 December 2020, aged 90. She was a prolific watercolourist recording life in South Arabia during her time there between the years 1955 and 1967. Her art illustrates an article she contributed to *BYSJ 15* (2007) under the title 'From a Wayfarer's Sketchbook'. In the last year of his life, Hugh published his autobiography *Kenya's Northern Frontier and Far Beyond* (Story Terrace, 2020) and Anne hers: *The Life that Shaped an Artist* (Story Terrace, 2018). I shall always remember him for his unflappable sterling character, good humour, kindness and the unstinting support he gave to get the Dhala' Development Scheme off the ground.

JOHN HARDING



## Anthony Brian (Tony) Ingledow (1928–2021)



Tony Ingledow in  
Government House,  
Aden (courtesy of  
Richard Eberlie)

To those who met him, Tony was a naturally engaging and affable man who delighted in people and was genuinely interested in their lives. His friends described him as someone who wore his wisdom lightly, entirely non-threatening, and infinitely patient.

Tony joined the Foreign Service in 1961, serving first in Khartoum, then posted to Aden from April 1966 until August 1967, a relatively short sojourn, but one that would leave an indelible mark. He arrived in a place he saw as a chaotic, unholy mess and it proceeded to get worse throughout his time there. He described the British departure from Aden as a political shambles, going as far as to characterise it as 'a disgusting exhibition of cowardice where we were too bloody idle and too bloody cowardly to do anything about it'.

Aden almost claimed his life and that of his wife and young children. In one of the more infamous episodes carried out by the Egyptian-backed opposition, the Ingledows' young houseboy was intimidated and forced to place a Czech 'jumping jack' anti-personnel mine inside a bookcase. The mine was timed to explode during a party that the Ingledows threw for their friends and colleagues in Aden. By good fortune, at the last moment Monica, Tony's wife, decided to move the bookcase from the middle of the room to the side wall so there was more room for the guests to mingle. This tipped the mine out of position and meant that the full force of the blast was miraculously directed out of the window. His children were asleep in the room next door and were covered in glass and debris. Less fortunate was the wife of the local MI5 representative who was killed,

along with another woman, wife of a major in the Intelligence Corps she'd been chatting to. At least ten others were wounded.

The blast left Tony with damaged ear drums and later in life caused him to lose much of his hearing. After a period of convalescence, Tony returned to Aden but even in the few weeks he was away the situation was by now unsalvageable and he was recalled to London. From there, he was posted back to Nigeria in 1968 where he found himself absorbed in another war, this time it was the civil war caused by the secession of Biafra. Despite the constant dangers to his life, he felt he had returned home and rekindled his connection to the country, language and his deep fondness for the people, something he retained to the end of his life.

Tony began his career as an officer in the Loyal (North Lancashire) Regiment in 1947, serving for two and a half years in Palestine, Mogadishu and Cyprus. He then joined the Colonial Office in 1950 and served for 10 years in Nigeria as a district officer. Reflecting on his time in Aden, like many who had witnessed the hurried departure, he felt a sense of betrayal for the people and structures that Britain had so easily abandoned. The people deserved a better fate than the one they had been left with. Tony loved people and he took from Aden a number of friendships, not least of which was with Hugh Leach, a man he described as 'devoid of ambition' as well as Dickie Bird and John (later Viscount) Slim.

MARTIN JERRETT

## Ian William Ruthven ('John') Malcolm (1933–2021)



(Left to right): Peter de la Billière, Godfrey Meynell, John Malcolm, David Armstrong, Mohamed Deria, and John Harding on the summit of Aden's Jabal Shamsan immediately after the finish of the 'Shamsan Scramble' on 2 May 1963. (Courtesy of Skander Malcolm)

In the course of a multi-faceted life, John Malcolm spent over two years in Aden between 1962 and 1964 as Shell's Yemen representative together with his wife Bini, whose 'Glimpses of Republican Yemen, 1962/3' appeared in *BYSJ 13* (2005). During this time, John established a warm, professional relationship with Aden's business community and adroitly navigated his way through the political and commercial complexities of trade in Republican Yemen. An outstanding athlete, who had represented England in the 120 yard hurdles in the 1958 Empire Games, John's recipe for keeping fit in hot climates was strenuous physical exercise. He played rugby for the BP Bureika Rugby XV and organised a five-man team to challenge the Royal Marines to a 2,300 yards/1,740 ft race up Jabal Shamsan in May 1963 — as hot as it gets. The winner was an Aden College schoolboy, Mohamed Deria, recently runner-up in the Middle East Cross Country Championships. We got the runner-up, but the Royal Marines won on aggregate.

After Eton, John followed his family's tradition of service with the Welsh Guards, in which he did his National Service (1952–53) with postings to Egypt and Berlin and at 6' 5" was a shoo-in to carry the Regimental Colour at the Queen's Coronation parade. Going up to Magdalene College, Cambridge in 1954 he read history and as a member of the Oxford and Cambridge athletics team beat the much-fancied Harvard and Yale squad, after pretending to stay up all night carousing. In 1957, he attended the Moscow Youth Festival and harangued the comrades on the failings of communism.

Having worked some 14 years for Shell in Malaysia, East Africa, Yemen and Iran, John set on a new

career path in 1972 by emigrating with Bini as '£10 Poms' to Australia, his mother Mary's birthplace. Settling in Melbourne initially and then Sydney in 1977, John was employed by Burns Philp to undertake roving missions to the South Pacific and then by Australia's national telecoms provider Telstra to lead support in building infrastructure in Vietnam, Cambodia, Georgia and Kyrgyzstan.

On retirement, he began the daunting task of writing the definitive biography of his forebear Sir John Malcolm, who played a significant role as a soldier and administrator in early 19th century India and made Britain's first formal embassy to Persia in 1804, for which the Shah subsequently awarded him Persia's highest honour: the Order of the Lion and the Sun. Research for his book *Malcolm: Soldier, Diplomat & Ideologue* (2014) took him to national libraries in both Britain and India, where he and Bini based themselves in a specially reserved suite at the former Raj club at Mahabaleshwar, the 3,000-foot-high hill station on the Deccan plateau, founded by Sir John when Governor of Bombay. John's *Malcolm* remains a monument to his dedicated scholarship and formidable literary gifts.

In his 83<sup>rd</sup> year, John ran the last 24km lap of a 100 km relay with his three sons along Victoria's surf coast. In December 2020 he was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer but decided against treatment: a decision typical of this exceptionally gifted man whose memory will always be cherished.

JOHN HARDING

## Ali Abdul Hameed Ghaleb (1945–2021)



Ali Hameed Ghaleb

Ali Hameed was a respected and well-known figure in the Yemeni fisheries sector, having successfully managed the productive Coastal Fishing Corporation (CFC), including the spiny lobster fisheries, in the Ministry of Fish Wealth in the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, and continuing to work with fishing communities in all parts of Yemen after unification.

Ali began work in the fisheries sector in 1969 in the then Public Corporation for Fish Wealth. He rose in the corporation's ranks from the supervision of cold stores to liaison with Japanese fishing companies, to director of the lobster department and eventually to the position of General Director and Chairman of the CFC. He spent 17 years in this position, developing shellfish management systems in all fishing communities of the Gulf of Aden, creating lobster processing facilities and opening international markets for quality local shellfish. He developed CFC as an institution and its staff through national and international training programmes to manage all elements of the fishing, handling, processing and export of production. Ali Hameed pioneered the use of fibreglass for fishing boat construction, setting up the first construction unit in Yemen that made low-cost safe fishing boats available throughout the country and procured and operated a fleet of multi-purpose fishing vessels in all waters of the Republic of Yemen. In 1994 Ali was severely injured as he was mediating a land dispute near Aden, losing an eye and suffering gunshot wounds, from which he was treated in the UK and made a full recovery.

Ali had long been an advocate of participatory approaches to the management of fisheries, increasing the capacity of all members of fishing communities, including marginalised groups, to understand and engage with development interventions. He had

witnessed the successes and failures of numerous policy interventions in Yemen's fisheries over recent decades and had a unique understanding of the opportunities and risks these presented for the sector in Yemen. Ali was instrumental in the long-running data collection programme on fisheries around oil and gas installations, training data collectors and survey enumerators and overseeing the installation of fixed Fish Aggregation Devices that dramatically increased economic opportunities for fishing communities and, where fisheries infrastructure was designed to aggregate marine life, to diversify fishing opportunities. More recently, Ali managed the Pontus investment in Somaliland, where he was based, training Somali fishermen and fisheries managers. Ali's reputation, contacts and ability to communicate respectfully with fishers, community leaders and government representatives will long be remembered.

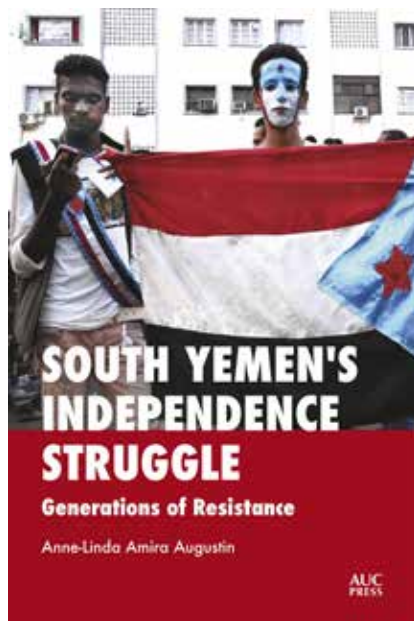
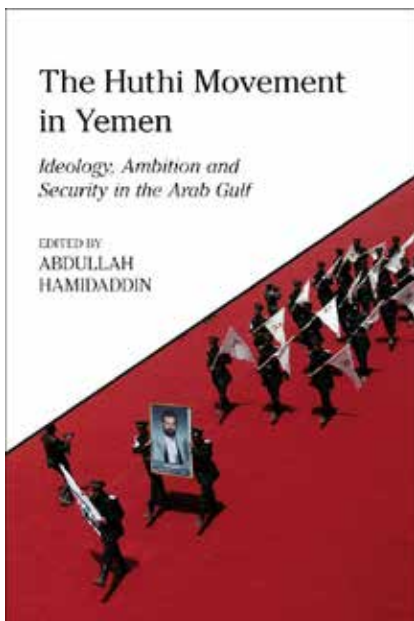
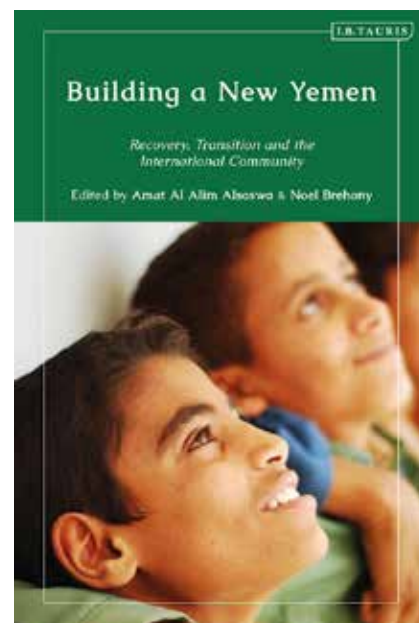
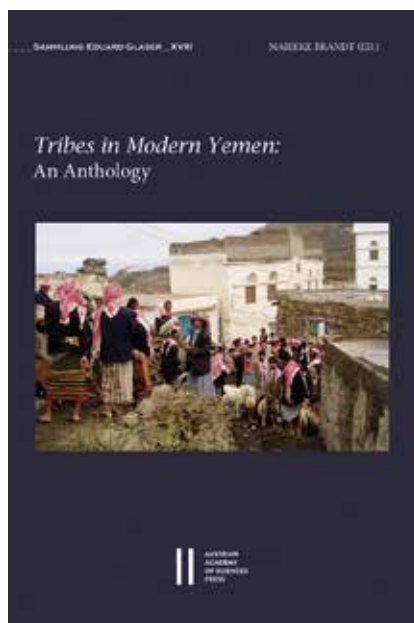
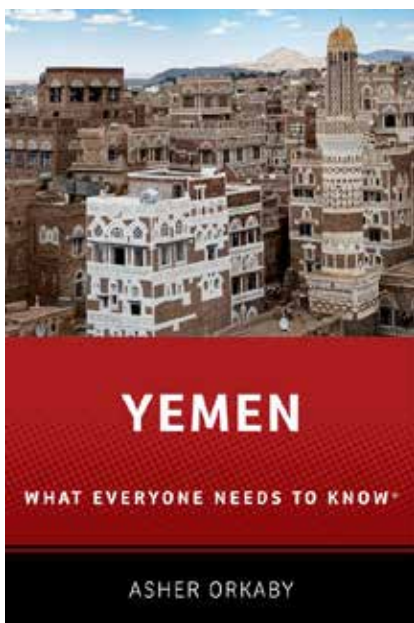
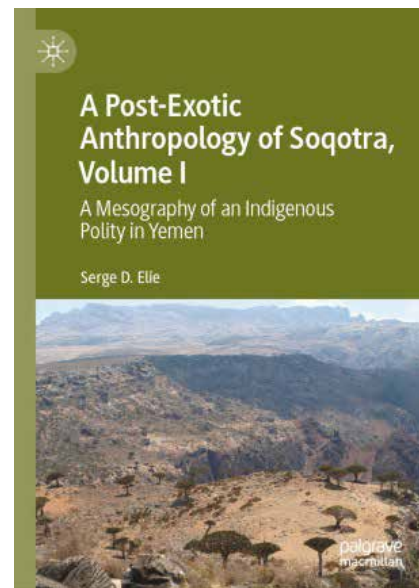
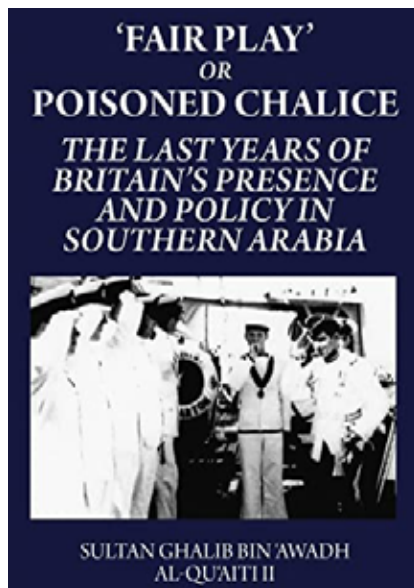
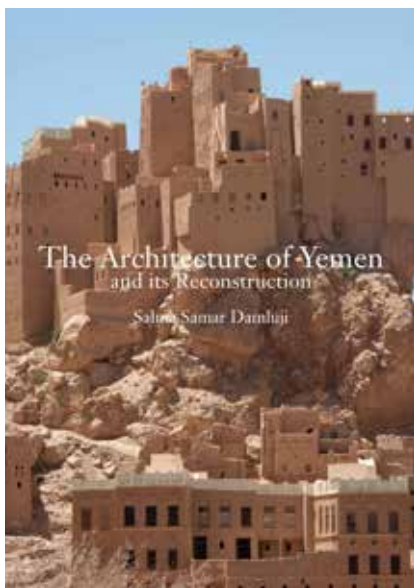
Ali's outgoing temperament, quiet wisdom and language abilities made him a friend to all those who worked in the various attempts to assist fisheries management and economic development for Yemen. His fortitude as the current crisis deepened and his willingness to maintain optimism have been admirable and give hope that the strong Yemeni spirit he demonstrated and shared so selflessly will eventually bear new fruit. Ali Hameed is survived by his wife, five sons, and their families.

STEPHEN AKESTER

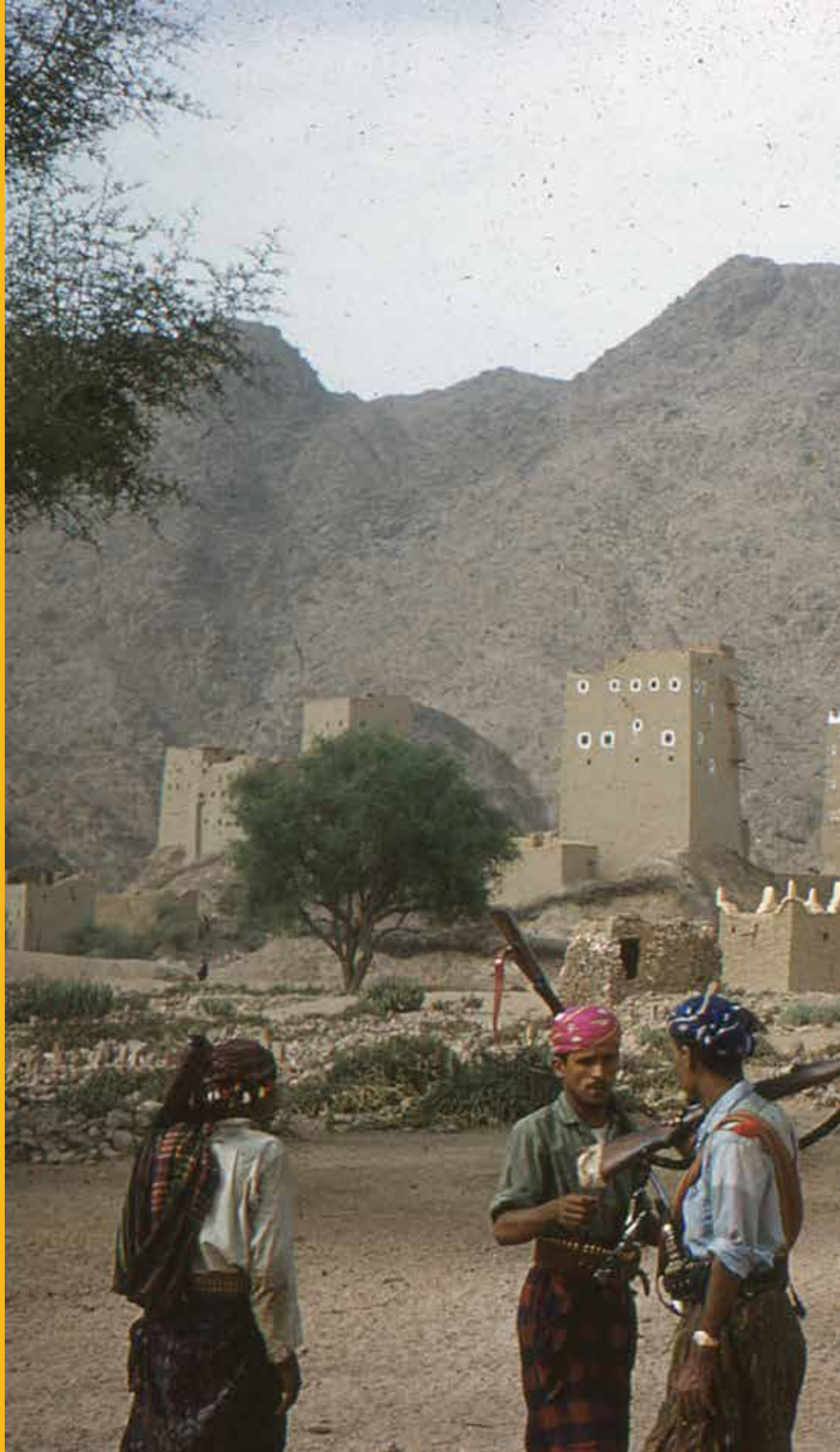


Ali with Captain Roy Facey and members of his team









Aulqi village in the 1960s  
(Jim Ellis collection, courtesy of the editor)





Front cover: The Wadi of al-Qalis village in Bani Matar  
(courtesy of Luca Nevola, 2009)

Back cover: Al Nasser Hotel, Wadi Daw'an, Hadhramaut  
(courtesy of John Mason; BYS tour of Yemen 2002)

W Designed by wndr.it





ALNSR

HOTEL

مبنى النصر

ما شاء الله كان  
عندنا أفضل

ما شاء الله كان  
عندنا أفضل

فندق  
النصر

مبنى النصر  
AL NSSER HOTEL