



## The British-Yemeni Society

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BYS Newsletter 2024 No. 1

January 2024

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### CHAIR'S INTRODUCTION

This newsletter comes at a time when we are embracing the new year, 2024. Last year under the chairmanship of James Firebrace was full of Society activities. I would like to thank James for all that he did for the Society during his three years as Chair. I would also like to thank all the committee members who worked tirelessly on the areas they lead to make the British Yemeni Society vibrant, relevant and informative.

As you can see from the contents of this newsletter, BYS provides you with varied updates on different subjects and the projects we work on or have links to what we do. If you have any question or suggestions regarding the contents, please contact our secretary Louise Hosking [secretary@britishyemenisociety.org.uk](mailto:secretary@britishyemenisociety.org.uk), who is editor of the newsletter and will welcome your contributions.

Two articles in this newsletter reflect the realities of Yemen as we write: first, the political update on Yemen and the second entitled 'The Red Sea'. Both subjects illustrate the consequences of the civil war on the daily life of ordinary Yemenis. They demonstrate how the political situation in Yemen is very uncertain, and we are obliged to guess whether there will be 'peace or continued war in Yemen'.

Finally, BYS welcomes new members both inside and outside the UK. We encourage young people and women to join us and play an active role in making a difference in what we do. Please look at our website or contact our membership secretary [membership@britishyemenisociety.org.uk](mailto:membership@britishyemenisociety.org.uk) if you have any queries.

We apologise for the delay of publishing the journal this year. It is on its way and we will email or post it to you as soon as it is published.

With my best wishes for 2024

Taher Qassim MBE, Chair  
4<sup>th</sup> January 2024

### BYS NEWS

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#### A NEW WEBSITE FOR THE SOCIETY

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We are in the process of updating BYS's website. In designing the new website, our priority has been to focus on a new system that will enable members to manage their registration. As a result of the changes all new members are now able to join the society and pay their annual

subscription through the website. You will also be able to download past journals. In the coming weeks we plan to update the section about the Society's committee with details of individuals' roles and profiles.

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## **BYS COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

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Dr Robert Wilson OBE, who has served the Society in many capacities over the years, has stepped down as Treasurer and Membership Secretary. The Society presented Dr Wilson with a beautiful photograph of Yemen by Jane Taylor as a token of its gratitude for his many contributions. Mr Faisal Said will assume all the duties of Treasurer at the end of January 2024 while Taher Qassim, our new Chair, will also act as Membership Secretary for the immediate future.



*The Society presented Dr Wilson a beautiful photograph of Yemen by Jane Taylor as a token of its gratitude for his support over many years.*

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## **BRITISH YEMENI SOCIETY RESEARCH GRANT**

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As part of its educational mission, the British Yemeni Society offers a grant of up to £1,000 annually to assist with academic study related to Yemen.

### **Who Can Apply**

Applications are invited from anyone carrying out research in, or on, Yemen at a university, preferably one that is based in Britain or Yemen. (An applicant's nationality is irrelevant.) Applications may be made to assist with study in any subject or field, so long as it is concerned with Yemen, and is for a specific qualification (e.g., BA, MA, PhD etc.). Post-doctoral researchers may apply but will only be considered should no more junior applicant approach the Committee.

## **How to Apply**

Applicants should write to the Secretary of the Society, Louise Hosking, at the e-mail: [Secretary@britishyemenisociety.org](mailto:Secretary@britishyemenisociety.org) and provide:

- a 300-word abstract of the study
- a recommendation from the applicant's supervisor.
- A brief CV.

## **When to Apply**

The normal deadline for applications is 31 May. However, because of the variability in the number of applications received every year and current conditions in Yemen anyone interested is encouraged to contact the Secretary in the first instance, even after the annual deadline.

## **Conditions**

Successful applicants will be required to make an acknowledgment of the grant in their thesis or dissertation. They will also be expected to make a presentation to the Society and/or contribute an article to the BYS Journal on the results of the research assisted by the grant.

## **Further information**

If you require any further information or wish to discuss an application, please contact the Secretary. For information about past awards please go to <http://https://britishyemenisociety.org.uk/what-we-do/>

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## **FINANCIAL MATTERS**

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### **Membership Matters**

A very warm welcome to the ten new members who joined the Society through the BYS's website since the last Newsletter: Dr Harry Cross, Captain Philip Holihead, Ambassador Dr Fadhl AlMaghafi, Yusuf Ibrahim, Asma Hamdi, Fiona McKay, Adra El Azzouzi, Jack Lister, Dr Mohammed Swileh and Anthony Berry.

May I remind those members who haven't yet paid their subscriptions for 2023 that they should do so as soon as possible. As for subscriptions for the new year, you will receive an email reminder sometime in January 2024 from the membership secretary. It would be very helpful if those members who haven't yet provided their email addresses, could kindly send them as soon as possible to the secretary so that we can contact them by email too.

### **Disbursement of Funds to YENOF**

BYS has now disbursed the entirety of the funds raised by Oxana Mayorova's sterling efforts in the Paris Marathon this Spring. Readers may wish to note that the name of the recipient organisation YERO has recently been changed to YENOF (the Yemen Noor Society for Education & Relief).

## CONNECTING WITH YEMEN

### **New Publications on Yemen**

Dr Ekaterina Pukhovaia, Assistant Professor of Ottoman Studies, Islam and Arabic programme in the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, Utrecht University has recently published an article on the intertwined tribal and sayyid genealogies in early modern Yemen in a special issue of the *Journal of Medieval Encounters*.

The article, entitled 'Sayyids, Tribal Kinship, and the Imamate in Zaydi Yemen under Imam Yaḥyā Sharaf al-Dīn (d. 965/1558)', is available in open access on the publisher's website through this link: [https://brill.com/view/journals/me/29/5-6/article-p442\\_4.xml?ebody=pdf-89805](https://brill.com/view/journals/me/29/5-6/article-p442_4.xml?ebody=pdf-89805). Dr Pukhovaia welcomes any comments or suggestions you may have on the article. Her e-mail address is: [e.d.pukhovaia@uu.nl](mailto:e.d.pukhovaia@uu.nl), [e.pukhovaia@hum.leidenuniv.nl](mailto:e.pukhovaia@hum.leidenuniv.nl)

### **The Oriental Rug and Textile Society**

The Oriental Rug and Textile Society, based in London, is looking for someone interested in giving a talk or writing an illustrated article for their journal on the subject of textile traditions or costumes of Yemen.

If you are able to help, please contact the editor, Fiona Kerlogue, on [editor.orts@gmail.com](mailto:editor.orts@gmail.com).

### **Royal Society for Asian Affairs Travel Awards**

These awards, of up to £2,000, are intended to support practical projects and research that have the potential to contribute to advances in scholarly or other public knowledge including, but not limited to, undergraduate degrees, journalism and travel writing. Applicants must be aged between 21 and 28 at the time of application and may be of any nationality, though they should be normally resident in the UK. The awards are intended to support individual travel and may not be used for commercial purposes or to fund participation in activities arranged by another organisation.

The RSAA's focus is on contemporary Asia and its recent history. Travel Award applications may relate to any aspect of this remit but, in the current round, the Society will particularly welcome applications relating to: Colonialism and its Legacies; Exploration or Technology and the State.

Applications can be made online at [rsaa.org.uk/awards/the-rsaa-travel-awards](https://rsaa.org.uk/awards/the-rsaa-travel-awards). Applications must be received by the RSAA no later than 31 January 2024. The Society expects to inform candidates of the outcome of their applications by 28 February 2024.

For further information on the awards, please email [travelawards@rsaa.org.uk](mailto:travelawards@rsaa.org.uk).

### **V&A Culture in Crisis**

The V&A museum is committed to protecting the world's cultural heritage and supporting communities that suffer cultural loss, whether through conflict, criminal acts or the impacts of the climate crisis. Its Culture in Crisis programme brings together those with a shared interest in protecting cultural heritage, providing a forum for sharing information, inspiring and supporting action and raising public awareness. Members might be interested to know that Yemeni culture is included in this research.

## YEMEN

### Political Update

Hopes of peace...

With attention focused on Israel's war on Gaza and Huthi attacks on shipping in the Red Sea few took note that Saudi Arabia and Ansar Allah have finally reached a deal to end the Yemen war. It has not yet been signed but the UN Special Envoy, Hans Grundberg, has welcomed 'the parties' commitment to a set of measures to implement a nation-wide ceasefire, improve living conditions in Yemen, and engage in preparations for the resumption of an inclusive political process under UN auspices'. Grundberg will help to establish a roadmap towards implementation that will include a commitment to pay all public sector salaries, resume oil exports, open roads and further ease restrictions on Sana'a Airport and the Hodeida ports. Most significantly this will 'prepare for a Yemeni-owned political process under UN auspices'.

Riyadh will pay all Yemeni government staff salaries for a year including Huthi military and security forces. Ansar Allah will 'allow' the IRG to resume oil exports from Hadhramaut and Shabwah that were stopped in November 2022 by Huthi threats to attack export infrastructure and tankers. The Huthis may have conceded (one Huthi leader denied this) that the Saudis are acting as mediators, which would potentially free Riyadh from any legal and human rights consequences for its actions in Yemen over the past nine years. Demands for reparations seem to have been dropped as the Saudi government knows that it will need to contribute generously to reconstruction and development in Yemen. For Muhammad bin Salman (MBS), the Saudi crown prince, the deal will end a disastrous war that distracts from his ambitions for the economic and social transformation of the kingdom.

Grundberg will face the daunting task of devising a road map for a future Yemeni political structure. Ansar Allah believes it has won the war and will take the toughest negotiating stance. Saudi negotiators have been briefing Rashad al-Alimi in outline on progress but have not involved the leaders of the political and military groups that make up the Political Leadership Council (PLC). These leaders do not trust Ansar Allah, which they fear will see the deal as a stepping stone to extending Huthi control over the whole of Yemen. PLC members lack a shared vision of a future Yemen. Leaders of the Southern Transition Council (STC) will insist on a separate seat at the negotiating table which they will use to demand the restoration of an independent south even though other southern groups, especially in Hadhramaut and Al-Mahra, want the power to take their own decisions in any future

Yemeni or south Yemeni state. Recent Saudi actions in Hadhramaut and Shabwah signal that Riyadh has a vital interest in ensuring that its border with Hadhramaut is controlled by its closest Yemeni allies. The UAE retains its influence over the STC, and the forces associated with Tariq Saleh but has never publicly expressed support for an independent south and has not been a party to the Saudi-Huthi negotiations. Grundberg will thus need all his skills and strong backing from the UN Security Council and regional states as well as the active cooperation of Yemeni political leaders.

... dashed by the Gaza crisis.

Ansar Allah missiles and drones launched at Israel in response to its operations in Gaza were ineffective or intercepted and it switched to targeting shipping using the Red Sea (20% of world container volumes, 10% of seaborne trade and 8–10% of seaborne gas and oil pass through the Bab al Mandab). Sana'a claimed that the targets were ships connected to Israel,

but their attacks soon became indiscriminate. Several major shipping companies have stopped using the Bab al Mandab causing delays and significant costs worldwide and exacerbating Egypt's severe financial problem because of lower Suez Canal revenues. In response, the USA launched a coalition to make the Red Sea secure. It had a faltering start but on 31 December helicopters from a US destroyer prevented an attack on a large container ship, killing ten Huthis. Ansar Allah threatened to retaliate against any US attacks and to continue their operations until the war in Gaza ended. On 3 January, the US and UK governments and ten others issued a strong warning to the Huthis against further attacks. UK ministers have spoken of possible military action. Iran has sent at least one destroyer to the Red Sea (it has had a naval presence there for some years and the US has accused Teheran of providing intelligence on ship movements to the Huthis).

Despite bellicose rhetoric and possessing a powerful arsenal – mostly of Iranian origin or design – of anti-ship missiles, drones and attack boats as well as mines, the Huthis had been taking a calculated approach: doing enough to win popular support in Yemen and the region by those appalled by what is happening in Gaza but avoiding action that might provoke an armed response. On 31 December they went too far and crossed a red line. Much will now depend on how the Huthis react to the 3 January warning. Their actions will be influenced by events in Gaza – Israeli generals say that the war may last months that are likely to result in much more death and destruction - and on the growing risk of a widening of the war to involve Hizbullah in Lebanon, which could draw Iran and its allies in the Axis of Resistance, including the Huthis, into a much wider regional conflict.

Saudi Arabia has not criticised the Huthi actions in the Red Sea, a sign of the importance it attaches to the peace deal (and its better relations with Iran) but the deal is unlikely to be signed until the current regional crisis ends, if even then. A desperate situation for the millions of Yemenis whose hopes of relief have been dashed yet again.

### **The Red Sea**

At the beginning of December 2023, Panos Pieri, Trading Director of the Longulf international trading company, provided the report reproduced below on the difficulties experienced by international shipping using the Red Sea and, in particular, Hodeida port. Longulf is a frequent and continuous shipper of food, raw materials, packaging and engineering items and spare parts to this destination so the Society is very grateful for Longulf's assistance and Mr Pieri's detailed and timely comments.

Up until March 2023, most shipments to Yemen were being made to Aden port as Hodeida port had experienced considerable damage during the civil war which started in 2014. Hodeida was limited to break-bulk shipments of wheat and other staple commodities, mainly under the auspices of international food aid. Operations were limited and were restricted to vessels with self-discharge facilities, i.e. cranes and similar equipment. No container vessels were able to call into Hodeida as its shore cranes and other equipment had been substantively destroyed or put out of commission. All commercial shipments therefore went to Aden port and were transhipped via Jeddah port for operational reasons. Occasionally spot checks by the MOT (the Ministry of Trade in Saudi Arabia) might require shippers to declare the contents of specific container cargo in order to be issued with a certificate for onward movement to Aden.

In March 2023, the Huthi administration which controlled the territory around and above Taiz (the main industrial and manufacturing region in Yemen), declared that any cargo which arrived in Aden port would not be allowed to travel onwards to Taiz or further north. Essentially a blockade was put in place. As a result, many shippers and receivers in Yemen were being forced to use Hodeida. As part of this arrangement all cargo to Hodeida would be discharged, inspected and scanned in Djibouti by UNVIM (United Nations Inspectors) before it could be reloaded on a feeder vessel to Hodeida. At the time, cargo on route to Aden had to be turned



back to Jeddah and then shipped to Djibouti, discharged, scanned and reloaded for its new destination: Hodeida. Apart from the huge costs incurred, chaos and extraordinary delays ensued. Receivers in Yemen (manufacturing and distribution companies) were left to mop up the mess.

As a result, there are now delays and congestion in the Red Sea ports of Djibouti and Hodeida, which, in some extreme cases, has stretched transit time from origin to Hodeida to 120 days (a period that, under normal circumstances, would average 35 days).

Congestion at Djibouti port is primarily attributed to several factors.

- Yemen is desperately trying to keep pace with rising demand and the current infrastructure challenges resulting in very poor port productivity combined with limited berth quay access at Hodeida.
- In addition, the service to Hodeida is entirely dependent on Djibouti transshipment, a feeder-operated trade lane. There is no direct service available via Jeddah connecting to Hodeida.
- All containers via Djibouti are subject to inspection and scan from UNVIM. This inspection process is very stringent and can take at least two weeks for the load list and several days for the vessel to clear the inspection and recommence its export voyage.
- In the case of shipments from India, these are planned via Jeddah > Djibouti > Hodeida, due to the above-mentioned challenges in Djibouti where shipping lines are forced to idle boxes in Jeddah to avoid overstocking at Djibouti.

There are currently only three shipping lines serving Hodeida: CMA, Maersk (both primarily from Europe) and PIL (from the East). Shipping lines are restricting the number of containers being released to individual shippers at any one time, as they need to control the quantity of empty containers on the way back. Djibouti port is unable to cope with the additional traffic. As for Hodeida, all vessel arriving must be self-discharges given the port's very inadequate facilities. Recently (at the end of November 2023), there were 12 vessels waiting to berth, resulting in delays of up to 15 days. These combined operational inefficiencies caused by delays and multiple handling add considerable cost to getting cargo to Yemen (estimated to increase the shipping costs up to three times what they would otherwise be). Manufacturers and distributors are having to factor in these delays to their stock holding which is affecting cash flow and ultimately the final cost of goods at a time when the consumer is stretched even for very basic necessities.

It is very clear that an alternative solution is needed, be it controlled inspections at origin before goods are shipped and or inspection facilities in or alongside Hodeida port itself. The UN and the international powers with vested interest must do something as the situation is not going to get better unless such action being taken.

**BLOG ON YEMEN by Taher Qassim and Dr Ann Hoskins**

**Mentoring Programme in War Zone Yemen; Opportunities and challenges, the Yemen Special Interest Group (SIG)** You can read the whole blog [here](https://betterhealthforall.org/2023/10/06/mentoring-programme-in-war-zone-yemen-opportunities-and-challenges-fph-yemen-sig/)<sup>1</sup>.

**The current situation in Yemen**

<sup>1</sup> <https://betterhealthforall.org/2023/10/06/mentoring-programme-in-war-zone-yemen-opportunities-and-challenges-fph-yemen-sig/>

Yemen is almostly in its ninth year of war, a war which has destroyed much of the infrastructure in the country including its health facilities. After eight years of prolonged conflict in Yemen, the country's [health system](#)<sup>2</sup> continues to fall short of meeting the population's needs. Only 54% of health facilities are fully functioning, while 46% are only partially operating or entirely out of service. Some of the health facilities have been used either as shelters by Internally Displaced People (IDP) or by the warring factions as military bases<sup>3</sup>. This has resulted in many of the [health workforce](#)<sup>4</sup> either leaving the country, moving to a new area or taking other jobs to support themselves and their families.

### **Mentoring programme**

Three partners were involved in this project: the [Yemen Special Interest Group](#)<sup>5</sup> (SIG) of the Faculty of Public Health UK, Peoples-Praxis and the Health Professionals for Yemen (HPY–UK). The latter is a newly registered charity in the UK.

The programme had two aims:

- \* to offer mentoring support for public health professionals in Yemen who are either studying or working in public health and need support to develop their careers in public health
- \* to encourage applicants to use the public health resources free of charge on the Peoples Praxis' [website](#)<sup>6</sup>.

A leaflet was produced in both Arabic and English announcing the programme launch on the 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2023. It was sent to individuals through WhatsApp networks inside and outside Yemen. Interested practitioners were encouraged to apply online via Peoples Praxis website. All applications were added to the Peoples-Praxis' 'Mentor City' platform database. Two weeks later more than 60 people had applied for the programme. This took all the partners by surprise, and they had to figure out how to handle the situation and who to include in the programme or be put on hold. The vacancies in the Mentor City platform were only five!

The Yemen Public Health Praxis group was set up and a lead coordinator identified. To manage the large number of applicants a traffic light system was created: a Green group: ready to join the mentoring programme, (comprising strong candidates as judged by their profiles and areas of interest), an Amber group of applicants not quite ready who would therefore have to wait until there were vacancies in the programme (whose profiles were not completed fully or were not clear on their areas of interest for mentoring) and a Red group of individuals who were either not eligible or who need to provide further information before a further decision was made.

Additional funding was secured and we were able to increase the number of places on MentorCity for the Yemen group to 10.

Mentor City Platform is an online facility it has a dashboard where you can see what groups exist, mentors, mentees and who is matched with whom. It also has the capability to send individual emails to mentors and mentees or organising Zoom meetings individually and in groups. The whole Mentoring City Platform system was new to partners, mentors and mentees alike so there was a lot of learning for all concerned as outlined below.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.emro.who.int/pdf/media/news/eight-years-of-prolonged-conflict-in-yemen-leave-over-20-million-people-in-need-of-urgent-health-assistance.pdf?ua=1>

<sup>3</sup> Taiz visit, Yemen SIG, 5.6.23

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7938221/pdf/main.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.fph.org.uk/policy-advocacy/special-interest-groups/special-interest-groups-list/yemen-sig/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.peoples-praxis.org/>