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Members of the public are encouraged to submit their contributions for consideration or comments to the Journal Editor at the e-mail address: editor@britishyemenisociety.org.uk.

The British Yemeni Society Journal

Vol. 31/32 (2023/24)

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EDITOR'S NOTE

NOEL BREHONY

Dear Reader,
the Society is pleased to present the 31st issue of its Journal. It is unusual in covering two years: the Society decided that because of unexpected delays in producing the 2023 issue it would be better to combine the issues for 2023 and 2024. A new editorial team was put in place in May 2024 and thus had to commission and edit material in a much shorter period than normal to ensure publication by 31 October. I am incredibly grateful for the support and hard work of the Editorial Committee and to the authors who responded to our calls for contributions. Warm thanks also to the BYS Committee which has been so supportive. As you will see we have stuck with the new format introduced in 2021.

The political update will already be out of date by the time you read this as the deadline for delivery for completion was 15 September just as the crisis initiated by conflict over Gaza seemed likely to extend into southern Lebanon and possibly generate a wider regional war with potentially devastating consequences. Ansar Allah has fired over 200 missiles towards Israel. Israel responded with air attacks on Yemen in July and September 2024. Huthi action in the Red Sea against shipping linked to Israel (and the US and UK) has disrupted world trade and provoked the US and UK to attack launch facilities. The crisis has also halted progress on the peace process within Yemen and that will only extend and exacerbate the profound problems that so many Yemenis have faced daily for far too long.

I am delighted that Ekaterina (Kate) Pukhovaia was able to contribute an article on the history of Yemen. I felt when chair of the BYS that few of our non-Yemeni members are aware of the depth and richness of Yemeni history and Kate has drawn attention to an Imam whose influence played such an important role in the 16th century. I hope in future years we will see articles on topics such as the Rasulids and their rich architectural legacy.

I am grateful to Sam Bollier for suggesting that we should include extracts from his translation (with Shifa Askari) of Zayd Mutee Dammag one of Yemen's best-known writers, on his early memories of life in Taʿizz in the 1950s at a time when Imam Ahmad governed Yemen from that city. Zayd's son, Hamdan Dammaj, a member of the BYS Committee, responded to our request to write an obituary for Abdul Aziz al Maqaleh, the doyen of Yemeni writers.

Similarly, Huda Luqman Wildy has written a short review of a book on the role of Yemeni women in Aden from the 1950s and has offered an article on the role of her mother, who played a prominent role in the 1950s and 1960s. It is good that the journal can highlight the contribution from some remarkable women to a history dominated by men – and there are now many autobiographies by politicians from that era. .

In complete contrast is a short piece by Helga Graham, a well-known journalist and member of the BYS, on a visit she made with her husband, the late Robert Stephens, to Shibam in the 1970s. She recaptures those days that many of us remember well.

Daryl Barker, whose account of being caught up in the violent events in Aden of January 1986 was published in the 2022 journal, gives some background on one of the important agricultural projects initiated by the government of the PDRY that is still in operation today. We are grateful to Helen Lackner for assisting with the editing of this article and providing additional material.

Mohsin Alaini was one of the most significant figures in Yemeni politics from the late 1950s until the early 1997. His autobiography, *50 Years in Shifting Sands*, was reviewed in BYSJ 10/2002 (Arabic edition) and in BYSJ 13/2005 (English edition). We asked Ali Muhsen Hamid, a former head of the Arab League Office in London, and a friend of Alaini, to give his personal reflections on his life.

The fact that there are fifteen book reviews reflects the pace of publication of books on Yemen in the last three years. They cover a very wide range and I want to thank those who responded to our requests for reviews. As always, we are greatly indebted to Werner Daum for his rigorous reviews which throw light on aspects of Yemen's cultural legacy enriching the critiques through his erudition. Helen Lackner, whose advice has been invaluable, provided no less than three reviews. I hope you will enjoy reading the many excellent reviews this year.

Once again, many thanks to Jane Taylor for providing some stunning images for the covers of the journal.

The Editorial Committee will start planning for the 2025 journal before the end of 2024. We welcome proposals or suggestions for authors and topics.

CHAIRS' REPORTS FOR 2023 AND 2024

JAMES FIREBRACE AND TAHER QASSIM

We are combining the report for the 2023 AGM delivered on 9 November 2023 by James Firebrace and that for the 2024 AGM delivered on 27 June 2024 by Taher Qassim MBE on the British Yemeni Society's activities, omitting comment on the political situation as this is being covered by the Yemen Political Update which follows.

Report for 2023 By James Firebrace

We are now at the end of our three-year cycle of Committee elections, so this is a time to reflect briefly on this last period for the British Yemeni Society. As I stand down, we now have, since our recent AGM, a new and highly experienced Chair, Taher Qassim MBE, who has previously served as Vice Chair and led on a number of important BYS initiatives. 2023 is also our 30th Anniversary, which we celebrated at a packed event at the House of Commons in June 2023. So, this is also a time to recognise how we have adapted to very different conditions over three decades.

Inevitably, the war (and yet-elusive peace) has dominated the British Yemeni Society and its activities over this period. In the absence of new members from among Brits returning from a spell of work in Yemen, we made a push to attract three categories of new members – Yemenis living in this country including recent arrivals; younger people often with some Yemeni parentage; and people from outside the UK usually introduced to the BYS through our events programme which, thanks to Zoom, is now available internationally. This replenishment is vital in the context of a Society established 30 years ago with an ageing original membership. In spite of the headwinds, we saw a modest net increase in numbers and hopefully the stage is now set for further increases ahead.

Our key activity for attracting new people is now the events we put on, averaging around eight a year and open to all. Some, especially the panel events, have attracted large audiences of well over 100, using new technology expertly managed by Ibrahim Zanta. There is of course great interest in developments in the war, the intricate political web and range of conflicting ideologies that fuel it, and prospects for its resolution. We have so far convened seven events in our Winding Down Yemen's War series, and more are in the pipeline.

Our events programme has also explored different aspects of the humanitarian crisis and the hardships created for ordinary Yemenis. A further strand has examined specific periods of Yemeni history, including the earliest trading links across the Red Sea, the various phases of the Imamate, Yemen's Age of Coffee, the civil war of the 1960s in the North, and the PDRY years in the South.

But the younger generation, now represented by a new category of Youth membership with discounted rates, has stressed how it values the cultural link to Yemen, and some eight events in this period have focused on and celebrated a broad array of Yemeni culture. Three highlights here stand out in my mind: our Academic Award winner, Gabriel Lavin, discussing the diverse roots of Adeni music in the 1950s and 1960s, playing quintessential tracks that transported us back to another age; Kamal Abu Deeb's



James Firebrace speaking at the 30th Anniversary celebrations (© Asma Hamdi)

emotive tribute to Yemen's unique architecture; and resonant poetry, including its anti-war voices. Finally, at our 2023 AGM evening, Asma Ibrahim, the youngest member of our committee, organised the screening of two short films by young Yemeni filmmakers. One of these, about a young boy endlessly distracted from his errand of buying bread for the family lunch, was a welcome reminder of the day-to-day Yemen many of us fell in love with during our time living there.

Our annual Journal, edited by Thanos Petouris, has been redesigned in a new format and, as you will see, now covers a much wider range of material. Feedback on the changes has been most encouraging. Our Academic Award programme continues, run by Noel Brehony, with an increased award to reflect rising costs. The 2023 Award was made to Adnan Jayash, a young Yemeni from the Universities of Ibb and Tunis, who is conducting a comparative study of acculturation between the Yemeni diasporas in the UK and US. Our support for numerous small Yemeni projects received an enormous boost in 2023 thanks to a young London staff member of the Hayel Saeed Group who ran the Paris Marathon, raising over £10,000 which we allocated to the Yemen Education & Relief Organization (YERO). Founded by Nouria Nagi, YERO supports women and orphans in Sana'a with education and skills.

I hope this period of the BYS will be most remembered for the Committee's efforts to modernise the Society. Aside from those already mentioned, this has been driven by the tireless efforts of, among others: Robert Wilson, our Treasurer, who oversaw the complex switch to a new and easier bank; Louise Hosking, our Secretary, who started and edits our new quarterly Newsletter; and Taher Qassim, who led the efforts to revamp our website and helped simplify how people join the Society and pay their membership fees.

Our finances remain healthy, with a good buffer in the bank even after investing in key improvements. Membership fees remain the bedrock of the Society, underpinning our financial security.

Ultimately, the success and health of our Society depends on the sum of the energies of all those working for it – essentially the Committee – in a voluntary capacity. Only a few have been named in this short report. On top of their direct efforts on behalf of the Society, each brings a range of contacts, who in turn generate ideas for speakers and topics. This is why, in our case, in addition to a small governing board of Trustees, it makes such sense to harness the energies of a larger group of Executive Members, as now allowed by the revised Constitution following the Extraordinary General Meeting held in Liverpool this summer.

Looking ahead, we have a strong combination of Chair and Committee members, with Frances Guy, former Ambassador, taking on the position of Vice Chair. I look forward to watching how the BYS now evolves, albeit from a distance.

Report for 2024 by Taher Qassim

This report covers a shorter period than is normal as we brought the 2024 AGM forward to June, in order to report more effectively on our annual accounts. Since the previous AGM in November 2023, the society has held one event: *Echoes of Yemen: Maps, Manuscripts & Memories*. Convened at the Royal Geographical Society (RGS) in London on 26th March 2024, this well-attended, in-person event gave attendants the opportunity to engage directly with Yemen-related artefacts in its collection and ask the curators questions. This year's AGM has, billed alongside it, an exhibition of photography from *Bittersweet* (Medina Publishing) with a food reception to be provided by Queen of Sheba. Sincere thanks are due to the Events Team for all their hard work in putting these events together, and to Liverpool Arab Arts Festival for partnering with BYS in this endeavour.

The committee would like to reiterate its apologies for the delay in publishing a journal for 2023. As you have been informed, with the kind help of Noel Brehony, who is leading a small editorial committee which includes Ibrahim Zanta, Michael Burns, Martin Jerrett, Robert Wilson, Thanos Petouris, and the existing deputy editor Luca Nevola, we are now working on producing a joint 2023/24 edition which we aim to publish in October. Sincere thanks are due to Noel for his hard work and patience in putting this together and thanks to Thanos for his valuable support.

We welcome the treasurer's report, which informs us that the society continues to have a satisfactory amount of funds in the bank.

I would like to ask for a vote of thanks to a number of the committee members who have offered their time and effort to keep the BYS going.

- Louise Hosking, Hon. Secretary and newsletter lead
- Frances Guy, Vice Chair
- Dr. Noel Brehony for his continuous support with the journal, constitution, and other numerous tasks when we need him
- Robert Wilson, for his continued support as acting Treasurer, and for supporting me as the temporary membership secretary

- Ibrahim Zanta, Paddy Coulter, Michael Burns for all their hard work on the events team
- Hamdan Dammag, Feras and Shehab Dammag for their work on the website and Facebook.

One committee member has resigned: Faisal Saeed who was appointed Hon. Treasurer at the last AGM. Our thanks go to Faisal Saeed who took the post for a short period of time. All existing members of the committee were asked if they would like to continue on the committee. The majority agreed with the following changes.

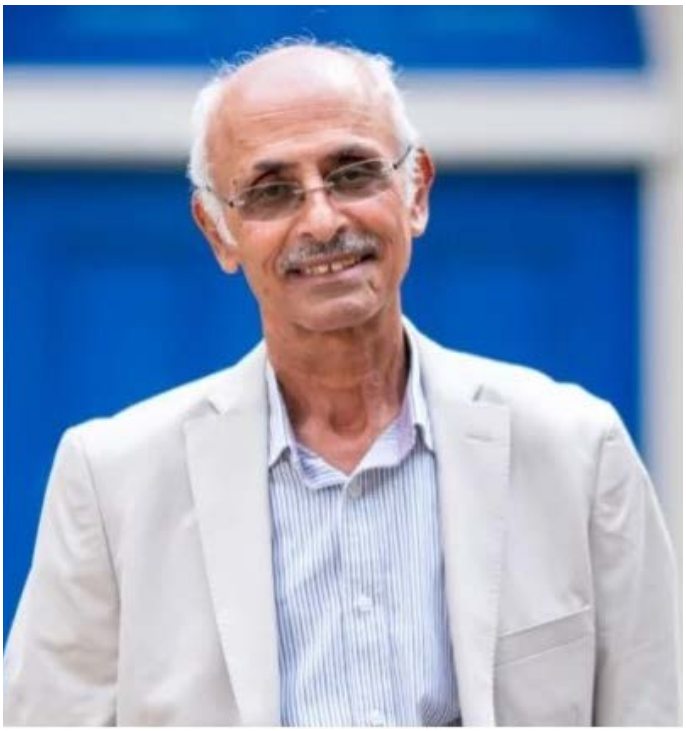
Moneef Alazraki is our Hon. Treasurer. Dr. Noel Brehony is an officer and the chair of the Editorial Committee. Thanos Petouris is unable to continue as a trustee but will remain as a member of the Editorial Committee. Paddy Coulter is a trustee and an event advisor. Sam Bollier is co-opted to the committee to support the Editorial Committee.

There seems to be a health phenomenon emerging which no one knows what the causes exactly are. I attended Professor Najla Al-Sonboli's lecture last Thursday 20th June 24. It was part of Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine's (LSTM) prestigious Leverhulme Lecture as part of its 125th anniversary public lecture series.

Professor Al-Sonboli is a LSTM alumna. She is the head of the Paediatric Department at Al-Sabeen Hospital for Maternity and Children in the city of Sanaʿa. For the last eight years, she has led a team to deliver essential healthcare for extremely vulnerable children and babies amid ongoing war, disease outbreaks and severe food shortages. The title of her lecture was 'Tragedy of War.'

She illustrated in her lecture numerous images of children attending Al-Sabeen Hospital with unusual deformities. These were horrific images of babies who were either born dead or were born with serious abnormalities e.g. babies were born with black eyes or no eyes, growth on their forehead or faces, round infected mouths, missing limbs, and two babies in one body. These are a few examples from the lecture. She also talked about children who tried to kill themselves, or babies who were left by their parents at the hospital's gate, a behaviour that's unusual in Yemenis. These observations were only in one hospital that documented the cases.

There is some good news from Yemen for this AGM; it is about the opening of some of the main roads. On Sunday 9th June, we read on social media and a TV Channel that the roads Sanaʿa – Marib, al-Bayda – Lawder, and Taʿizz's city were about to be open. Less than a week later we saw hundreds of cars entering Taʿizz City from al-Hawban area, a journey that takes 30 minutes by car. When the crossing was closed it took people more than eight hours to reach the same point from Taʿizz City centre.



Taher Ali Qassim MBE

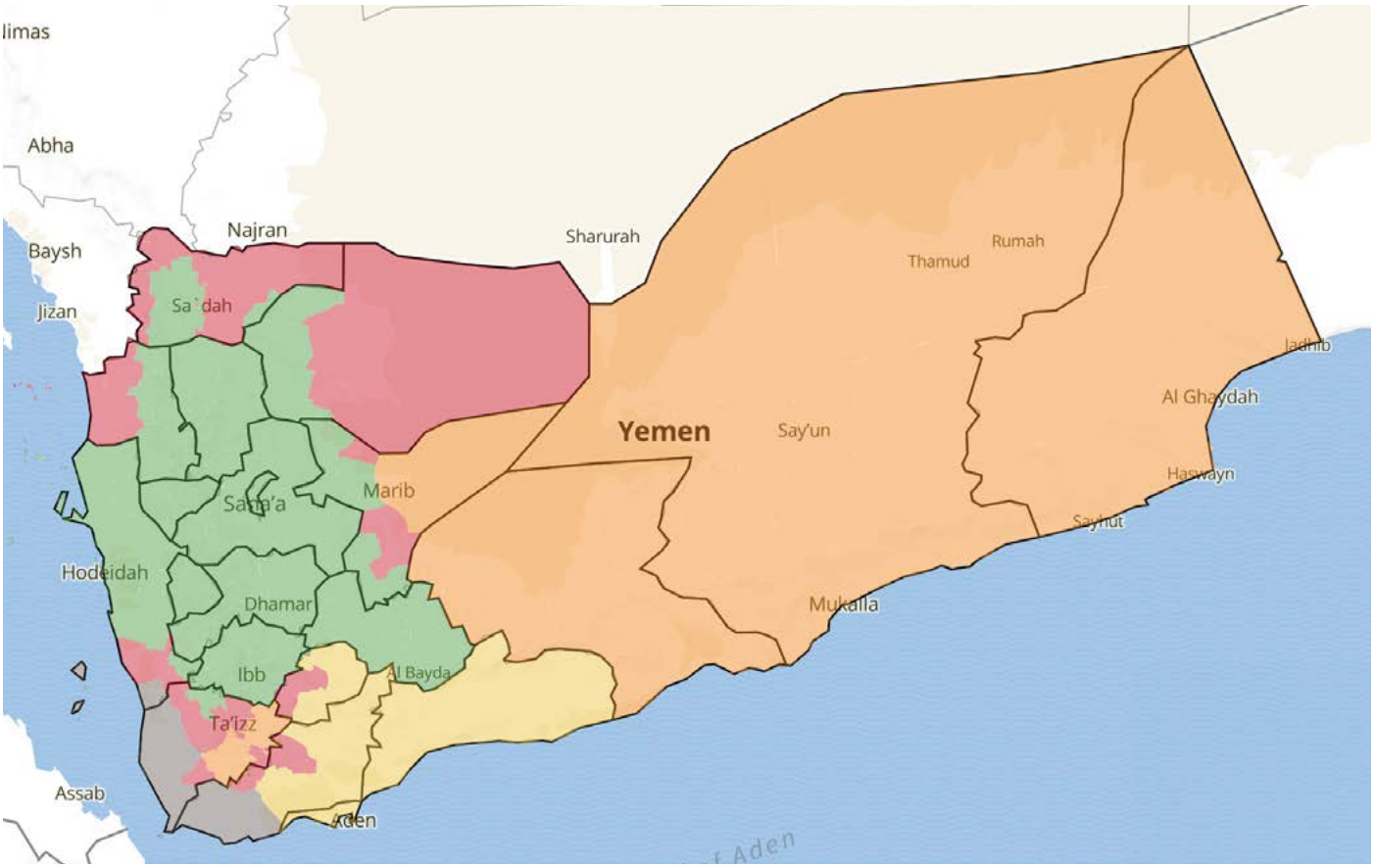
YEMEN POLITICAL UPDATE FOR 2023-2024

NOEL BREHONY

The truce first agreed in April 2022 has been largely respected as the combatants, exhausted after seven years of fighting, pursued their objectives through politics.

Saudi leaders needed a settlement to enable them to focus on transforming their economy and society. In the spring of 2022, Riyadh had orchestrated the replacement of President Abd Rabbu Mansour Hadi as head of the internationally recognised Yemeni government by the Presidential Leadership Council (PLC), bringing together the key anti-Huthi factions under Rashad al-Alimi. Ansar Allah, having failed in a two year-long attempt to seize Marib's energy resources, was offered the direct negotiations with the Saudis that they had long demanded. Enough progress had been made by April 2023 (helped by a formal reconciliation between Saudi Arabia and Iran in March 2023) for Muhammad al-Jaber, whose role is far greater than his title of Saudi ambassador to Yemen implies, to meet in Sana'a with Mahdi al-Mashat, the head of the Supreme Political Council (SPC) – the official political body of the Huthi regime. In September 2023, a Huthi delegation to Riyadh led by its chief negotiator, Mohammed Abdulsalam, met the Saudi defence minister, Prince Khalid bin Salman.

In December 2023, Hans Grundberg, the UN Special Envoy, welcomed "the parties' commitment to a



Areas of Control in Yemen as of February 2024.
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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 was to help negotiate a roadmap to a future, peaceful Yemen. He indicated that, as part of that plan, Riyadh would pay all Yemeni government staff salaries for a year, including those of the Huthi military and security forces. The Huthis were also given concessions which had the effect of easing the flow of traffic to Hudayda, and providing for more flights from Sanaʿa airport. The Huthis agreed to "allow" the PLC to resume oil exports from Hadhramaut and Shabwah that were stopped in November 2022 by Huthi threats to attack export infrastructure and tankers – but the Huthis had not implemented this by September 2024, ten years after they took control of Sanaʿa. Details of the roadmap have not been announced but are thought to involve a three-stage process which would culminate in negotiations on the form of the future state of Yemen, taking into account the southern issue.

Impact of the Huthi attacks in the Red Sea and its approaches

Negotiations on the deal have been in abeyance since the start of the war in Gaza on 7 October 2023. In support of Hamas, the Huthis began launching attacks on 19 November against Israel and Israeli or Israel-bound ships passing through the Red Sea, many of which were directed at merchant vessels with no apparent connection to Israel. The US responded by organising a limited international coalition, Operation Prosperity Guardian, that included the UK, with the stated purpose of protecting freedom of navigation in an area through which approximately 12% of world trade flowed in 2023. When the attacks continued into 2024, Washington and London – following the adoption of a UN Security Council Resolution demanding the end of the Huthi action (Russia and China abstained) – launched air strikes to deter the Huthis and degrade their military capacity in Operation Poseidon Archer.

The Huthis have clearly not been deterred, despite the US-UK launching 245 strike incidents with up to 523 munitions over 233 days, as of 31 August 2024, according to the Yemen Data Project. The Huthis have targeted over 80 vessels in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden since October 2023 in attacks that have killed four sailors, sunk two ships, hijacked another, and set on fire an oil tanker that threatened to lead to extensive environmental damage. Using a variety of weapons including ballistic and cruise missiles, drones, and drone boats, they expanded the number of attacks and extended these into the Gulf of Aden and parts of the Indian Ocean. A statement made by Ansar Allah on 13 June 2024 claimed that the group is co-ordinating some of its attacks on Israel with Iraqi groups. Very few of the claimed attacks are successful but the threat is enough to force major shipping lines to divert traffic around Africa, disrupting global supply chains and imposing extra costs (which have hit the revenues of shippers and the Suez Canal authority). Saudi Arabia has called for restraint in the Red Sea but has not publicly supported the US and UK action. Ansar Allah reminds the Saudis from time to time that the kingdom is within the range of Huthi missiles and drones, which have improved in lethality and accuracy in recent months.

When one Huthi drone penetrated Israeli defences and struck Tel Aviv on 19 July (some 200 projectiles have been sent towards Israel since November 2023) the Israeli Defence Forces bombed Hudayda, hitting warehouses and two non-operational gantry cranes, a power plant, and fuel storage facilities of the Yemen Petroleum Company – a serious attack that will disrupt Yemen's supply of fuel. The leader of the Huthis, Abd al-Malik al-Huthi, appeared to welcome the Israeli action, as it showed Ansar Allah's capabilities and its "principled stand" against Israel, the US, and the UK. Others think the Huthis just want to divert attention away from growing domestic discontent with their rule. Mass demonstrations in favour of the Red Sea operations have been organised in Huthi-controlled areas, and the Huthi action has been widely applauded by many in the region. Huthi leaders speak of their "coordination and cooperation with other support fronts." Huthi missiles and drones are local variations of Iranian-developed weapons with key parts such as guidance systems continuing to be smuggled from Iran despite increased US-led attempts to prevent them. The Huthis are now firmly part of the Iranian "Axis of Resistance."

Ansar Allah has used the Gaza crisis to recruit more soldiers, ostensibly to take the battle to Israel, yet the PLC suspects that these will be used against it. The PLC and, separately, the Southern Transitional Council (STC), have been lobbying the international community for military training and support to build enough capacity to dissuade the Huthis from their actions in the Red Sea. Neither Washington nor London has the appetite to back a weak and divided PLC.

The economic war between Ansar Allah and the PLC

Grundberg reported to the UN Security Council in June 2024 that instead of finalising the roadmap "the parties have reverted to a zero-sum game" and

"have opted for measures they believe will strengthen their own position" which "risks jeopardising the limited progress already made."

A central concern is the economy. The PLC has suffered from the loss of revenues that followed Huthi attacks on oil export facilities in October 2022. These accounted for over half of the PLC's revenues, according to the IMF. The Huthis, on the other hand, not only benefited from the greater flow of imports to Hudayda and the expansion of flights from Sanaʿa airport but also from imposing taxes on goods entering its territory from Aden, forcing importers to use Hudayda and thus depriving the PLC of another major source of income.

The PLC and the Huthis have operated what are de facto separate central banks and currencies since October 2016, when President Hadi ordered the bank to transfer its headquarters from Sanaʿa to Aden. Ansar Allah on 31 March 2024 issued new 100 Riyal coins to replace some of the crumbling banknotes. In response, the Central Bank in Aden demanded that commercial banks relocate their headquarters from Sanaʿa to Aden and threatened punitive measures for failure to obey. These measures would have cut off Huthi banks from Swift international payments and international money transfer services like Western Union and MoneyGram. There would have been grave consequences for the Huthi regime but also on the 20 million Yemenis living in Huthi-controlled areas. The Ansar Allah Central Bank retaliated by banning all banks with headquarters in Aden from operating in the PLC area. Huthi leaders accused Saudi Arabia of being behind the moves and threatened to resume drone attacks against Saudi targets. As Grundberg put it "the longer-term damage being done by having two competing monetary authorities and two currencies was already unsustainable, but it



"With knowledge we rise, and with morals we prevail," mural outside a school in Tawahi, Aden (© 2024 Thanos Petouris)

has become even more complicated due to a cycle of escalatory actions."

On 23 July, Grundberg announced an agreement which had strong support from Saudi Arabia (and no doubt pressure from the US and international aid agencies) whereby both sides cancelled "all the recent decisions and procedures against banks" and refrained "from any similar decisions or procedures in future." Grundberg told the UN Security Council that there was a need for "dialogue aimed at addressing the economic issues including the need for monetary policy coordination, and progressing towards a unified central bank and currency, and guarantees to ensure the independence of the central bank from political interference. Stopgap measures could serve as a band aid. But being serious about building an economy that benefits all Yemenis means that the parties also have to engage on underlying, longer-term issues."

Grundberg also had a hand in dealing with a separate row over control of the Yemenia Airline. The two sides implemented an earlier agreement to open two roads: one connecting Marib city to Sanaʿa via Juba district, and the other, between Taiz city and to the important manufacturing centre of al-Hawban area, enabling for the first time in over nine years civilian movements across the frontline running through the city.

Concern in the PLC

The outcome was rational, pragmatic, in the best interests of the wider Yemeni population, and welcomed by the international community. However, it caused consternation and a feeling of humiliation within the PLC which had been prevented by its principal patron from using its most effective economic weapon against the Huthis. Though the Huthis cancelled their proposed retaliatory measures, they have maintained their threats against oil shipments from the PLC and to tax imports arriving from PLC-controlled ports.

Al-Alimi's colleagues openly admit to fears that their interests might now be sacrificed by a Saudi government that just wants to end the war. They hear the chilling rhetoric of the Huthi leader, Abd al-Malik al-Huthi, observe what is happening in Huthi-controlled Yemen, and note the demonstrations of Huthi military capability. They suspect that Ansar Allah is intent on securing the withdrawal of coalition military support as a step to taking control of all Yemen.

In 2022, when Riyadh masterminded the setting up of the PLC, its key aim was to make it a viable negotiating partner with the Huthis but also one with the military capacity to prevent the Huthis from taking control of the whole of Yemen. Saudi Arabia presented itself as a "mediator" and not a participant in the war, albeit whilst doing what it could to bolster the position of al-Alimi. The Saudi leaders concluded that they have to live with the reality of Huthi power on their southern border. Riyadh seems to be reverting to a more traditional approach of managing to cope with Yemen rather than trying to shape its future. The PLC will need to adjust to a Saudi Arabia that is putting its own security and economic interests first. It cannot do so unless its constituent elements put together an agreed strategy and programme and make itself into an organisation that has the ability to confront or negotiate with the Huthis.

PLC divisions

The Southern Transition Council (STC), which is the strongest component in the PLC, was reorganised in mid-2023. Some smaller south Yemeni nationalist groups came under its wing. Aidarus al-Zubaidi, the STC leader, recruited as his deputies two Vice Presidents of the PLC: Faraj al-Bahsani, an ex-general and former Governor of Hadhramaut (where the STC has been weaker) and Abdul Rahman al-Mahrami, the Commander of the Southern Giants Brigades, a well-armed UAE-backed force that in 2022 prevented the Huthis from expanding from Marib into Shabwah. A new national charter reaffirmed the goal of an independent state within the boundaries of the former People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY). The STC may like to present itself as an all-embracing organisation that welcomes all southerners, but there are substantial numbers of southerners who want independence but are not under STC leadership as well as others who want Yemen to remain united. The STC is also facing difficulties in Abyan where there has long been opposition not so much to the STC but to its current leadership.

Saudi Arabia has been bolstering the position of Al-Alimi. Fighters from existing and new militias have been collected into the National Shield Forces (which includes some fighters from the Giants Brigades drawn from tribes in Lahj that are not linked to the STC) under Al-Alimi's political control and deployed to key areas, in particular the al-Wadia border crossing between Yemen and Saudi Arabia. Saudi military commanders held meetings in most of the governorates under PLC control in a show of support.

Situation in Hadhramaut

In June 2023, the STC organised a meeting of its consultative forum (a sort of parliament in waiting) in Mukalla protected by a military force that seemed larger than necessary, intended to demonstrate the STC's influence in the governorate. At the same time, Saudi Arabia was behind a meeting in Riyadh to which many leading Hadhramis were invited to set up a Hadhramaut National Council. Muhammad al-Jaber made an appearance, and funds were promised for numerous projects in Hadhramaut. Saudi Arabia appeared to be signalling that it has a major security interest in the Wadi Hadhramaut and the largely empty region to the north, as this has a long border with Saudi Arabia which Riyadh wants to be in friendly hands. The Saudis are backing those Hadhramis in the Wadi that are opposed to the STC and have been attempting to deploy the National Shield Forces to the coast. Al-Alimi has the support of two Yemeni military units loyal to Islah located there. Other groups in Hadhramaut demand that the governorate have greater control of its oil resources. There is also a contest for influence in al-Mahra, where Saudi Arabia has a military presence and the STC is relatively weak, and some attempt in Shabwa to push back against a dominating STC influence.

The UAE is not a party to the current Saudi-Huthi negotiations, still finances the STC, and remains in contact with the southern militias which it helped recruit, train, and mentor. Emirati leaders may have reservations about the current Saudi strategy but have been advising the STC to avoid provoking Riyadh. If the PLC is to be a convincing negotiating partner for the Huthis, the Saudis and Emiratis need the forces they support in the PLC to work together. It seems that the UAE leaders do not want to openly differ with the Saudi Crown Prince.

Governance

Ahmad Awad bin Mubarak, the foreign minister, succeeded Maeen Abdulmalik Saeed as prime minister on 5 February 2024. He is an experienced and energetic politician, but he leads a government that lacks the resources to tackle the daily problems and dilapidated public services that spark protests in Aden and Mukalla. PLC revenues have been reduced by the suspension of oil exports, little though these were, and the loss of income from Aden port caused by Huthi measures forcing imports to their territory to be made via Hudayda. Saudi financial aid is important, but delivery is slow. The PLC has yet to agree on its governing structure and there are open divisions within its leadership.

The PLC and the STC have also been facing criticism over electricity supply in Aden in a period of intense heat as well as the unacceptably poor level of government services. The government appointed by the PLC is responsible, but the STC feels it has insufficient influence over what the government does. It thus faces the choice of accepting the situation or trying to take effective control of Aden which it knows would exacerbate rather than solve the problem. Financial pressures are also exacerbating current tensions in Hadhramaut and these in turn add to the divisions between PLC leaders and the STC.

The Huthi-led SPC has also appointed a new government under a prime minister (Ahmad Ghaleb Nasser al-Rahawi) who, like his predecessor, is a south Yemeni. This Change and Development Government (as it is called) appears to be dominated by Huthi hardliners, but includes some ministers with proven administrative experience. Ansar Allar says that the change of government is a first step in what will be a significant reform of the administration ordered by Abd al-Malik al-Huthi, but he also sees it as "confronting aggression against Yemen at the economic, military, and political levels." The signs are that Ansar Allah, whilst continuing to repress dissent and use its actions against Israel to deflect criticism, knows it must deliver better governance to the citizens it controls. There is substantial opposition to Huthi rule – visible in widespread demonstrations on 26 September 2023 to mark the anniversary of the overthrow of the Imamate in 1962 – but the Huthis repress any protest ruthlessly and since November 2023 can use the attacks in the Red Sea to divert attention.

Humanitarian situation

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) warned the UN Security Council in August about the disastrous impact of torrential rains and flooding as well as that 147,000 cases of cholera in early August could rise to 250,000 "unless response efforts were immediately bolstered." Food security remains a major concern: UNICEF and the World Food Programme (WFP) noted that Yemen was facing some of the highest malnutrition rates in the world: "severe food deprivation in Huthi-controlled areas more than doubled since last year, rising from 17 to 36 percent. Yemen remains one of the world's largest humanitarian crises despite the truce bringing a measure of relief. The Yemen Humanitarian Response plans for 2023 and 2024 have been seriously underfunded." The situation is going from bad to worse and will continue to do so over the next year.

13 Yemeni national staff belonging to several UN agencies and offices, as well as over 50 workers of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and civil society, were detained by the Huthi authorities and accused of involvement in espionage in June 2024. The Huthis warned international organisations against implementing "a foreign agenda." The charges seem baseless and undermine the work of international organisations seeking to bring relief to ordinary Yemenis.



Monument to the support of the Saudi-led coalition to southern Yemen in al-Mukalla (© 2024 Thanos Petouris)

Looking ahead

The Huthis say they will cease Red Sea attacks when the Gaza crisis ends. They will probably do so, at least for a time, but seem likely to use what has proved to be a powerful weapon to make political points in the future and perhaps extract payments from vessels using the Red Sea. They have used the Gaza crisis to recruit tens of thousands of new fighters ostensibly to support Gazans but are more likely to be used to enhance their military position in Yemen. Grundberg continues to warn that both Ansar Allah and the PLC are making military preparations and deploying reinforcements in key front lines and threatening to return to war.

The peace process and road map will remain on hold until the Gaza crisis ends. The Huthis see themselves as much stronger domestically and internationally as a result of their actions in the Red Sea. They know the Saudis want to focus on domestic objectives. A divided and weak PLC remains dependent on Saudi and Emirati backing, though may hope – in vain – for greater military support from the US and others. The highly confident Ansar Allah leadership will be much more demanding in negotiations and less willing to compromise. However, Ansar Allah lacks the resources to finance war, governance, and salary payments – offering incentives to reach a deal. The UN-led peace process is better for all concerned than a return to conflict or prolonged instability.

RESHAPING EARLY MODERN YEMENI POLITICS: IMAM SHARAF AL-DIN YAHYA AND THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY IMAMATE

KATE PUKHOVAIA

To the modern observer Yemen appears to be a failed state torn apart by religious differences. It seems logical to imagine a path-dependent trajectory, in which certain denominations of Islam, such as the Huthis (a religious group taking its origin in Zaydism, a branch of Shiʿism) appear to bear a greater responsibility than others for the resulting situation. However, this was not always the case. In the past, various Muslim and non-Muslim communities were able to coexist and collaborate in Yemen. The case of Imam Sharaf al-Din Yahya, a Zaydi ruler (imam) from the sixteenth century, is particularly illustrative of this capacity for coexistence.

The Zaydi community started as an oppositional group in the Abbasid Empire. Recognising their inability to unseat the caliph in Baghdad, they focused their attention on the margins of the empire. In the late ninth century, a descendant of the Prophet, Yahya b. Husayn, came to the city of Saʿada and became the founder of a Zaydi imamate – a state led by a ruler who combined worldly power and legal authority – and its first ruler, imam, with the title al-Hadi ila-l-haqq (Guide to the Truth).

Our knowledge about the development of the Yemeni Zaydi state remains patchy. How did the Zaydi imamate succeed in surviving for more than a thousand years, from its founding in 897 till the ousting of the last Yemeni Zaydi ruler in 1962? What enabled it to remain resilient in the face of competition against powerful, prosperous dynasties, such as the Rasulids (1229-1454) and the Tahirids (1454-1517) and survive Ottoman conquests in the sixteenth and the nineteenth centuries?

One factor that enabled this was the ability of Zaydi leaders and elites to adapt to new conditions. It was no easy task: the Zaydis were competing not only against Shafiʿi Sunnis in the region, but also against Sufis known for their notions of religiously inspired charismatic leadership, and Ismaʿilis, who, similarly to the Zaydis, promoted the rule of descendants of the Prophet. The ability of Zaydi imams to not only fight against their neighbours but also to co-opt them played a central role in this process.

The fifteenth-century Zaydi ruler Imam al-Mutawakkil Sharaf al-Din Yahya faced these problems on a greater scale than any of his predecessors and came up with solutions that none of them had used before. They were imitated not only by the subsequent Zaydi imams but also by later Ottoman conquerors of Yemen. How did he achieve this?

The development of a political innovator

One part of Sharaf al-Din Yahya's success was certainly related to his family and upbringing. Like any Zaydi imam he was a sayyid – a member of the Ahl al-Bayt, the community of descendants of the Prophet. As a young man he set out on an ambitious educational trajectory. He started studying where he resided, in a *hijra*, a scholarly centre and refuge, called Zafir, founded by his paternal grandfather Imam al-Mahdi Ahmad ibn al-Murtada (d. 1436), an influential legal scholar. This *hijra* was in Hajjah, a region straddling the mountains between the Tihama and Sanaʿa. Over the centuries Zaydis, Ismaʿilis, and Sunnis competed for control over this region by forming alliances with local tribes. It was here, in this contact zone, that the future Imam studied with people who vividly remembered his deceased grandfather.

The biographies of Sharaf al-Din Yahya tell us that when he reached the age of sixteen, he felt that it was time to move on from the *hijra*. The story goes that he asked his parents for permission to continue his studies in Sanaʿa. Unwilling to be separated from their son, his parents travelled with him to the great capital of Yemen. At the time, Sanaʿa was controlled by the Zaydi Imam al-Mansur Muhammad al-Siraji but remained a meeting point for Yemen's different religious groups. Scholars from Yemen, Hijaz, and India mingled in the mosques and madrasas. Pilgrims travelling to Mecca stopped on their way. It was a place of interaction, when Sharaf al-Din Yahya arrived in Sanaʿa, he relied on distant relatives and

scholars with connections to his family to navigate the city. He started developing new networks and soon came to the notice of Imam al-Mansur. With this encounter his career and fortunes lifted off. Feeling more settled, he married Fatima bint Abdallah, a cousin and sayyida from Sanaʿa. Soon after the birth of their son Muhammad, the Imam appointed Sharaf al-Din Yahya governor (*ʿāmil*) of Hajjah. He would have to collect taxes and assemble armies for the Imam, a responsibility that required advanced negotiation skills in the tribal regions. The Imam believed that Sharaf al-Din Yahya, who boasted strong ties to the area, had exactly what it took to do that. What made Sharaf al-Din Yahya stand out was his eloquence and vast knowledge of Arabic poetry – he was famed as a skilful poet in his own right.

Laying the foundation of a new state

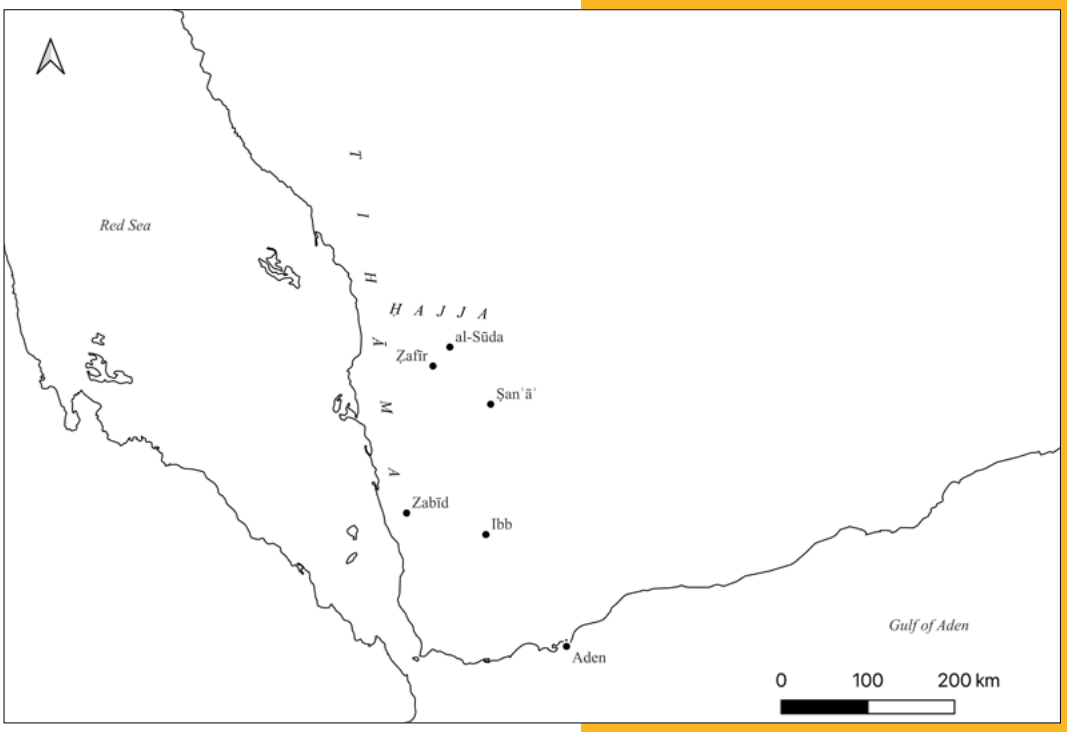
As Sharaf al-Din Yahya set out for his posting in Hajjah, the skies were darkening over Sanaʿa. The Tahirid dynasty of southern Yemen was preparing to besiege the city. It is unclear why Sharaf al-Din Yahya did not return to Sanaʿa to rescue his wife and son or to help the Imam. While this turned out to be the right political calculation, it came at a high price. When the Tahirids captured the city, they arrested many sayyids, including Imam al-Mansur and his family, as well as relatives of Sharaf al-Din Yahya. Among those held by the Tahirids were also Fatima and Muhammad. They did not survive captivity.

Despite the tragic end of his connection to the ancient city, the years in Sanaʿa must have affected the way Sharaf al-Din Yahya viewed the world. Early intermixing with Muslims of other denominations must have inspired him to take a more flexible stance regarding his own Zaydi identity. He appears to have learned the importance of seeking common ground. These skills served him well as he went on to build the most extensive Zaydi imamate in Yemen's history.

It was an arduous task to rebuild the Zaydi state after the Tahirid onslaught. Zaydi sayyids were forcibly relocated to southern Yemen, and former allies among the tribes turned away from the Zaydis. Nevertheless, in 1506, two years after Imam al-Mansur's death in captivity, Sharaf al-Din Yahya issued his own call (*daʿwa*) to become Zaydi imam. He swiftly received support from the Hajjah region but was not yet able to consolidate his control over the northern highlands. In addition to the Tahirids, he had to face competition from the Muʿayyadi family of sayyids. They had been ruling Saʿada during the fifteenth century, claimed the title of Zaydi imam for themselves, and were not interested in handing over their gains to someone they perceived as an outsider.



Sīrat al-Imām Šaraf ad-Dīn Yaḥyā Ibn Šams ad-Dīn Austrian National Library Cod. Gl. 39 fol. 2r ÖNB Digital / Austrian National Library *https://onb.digital//result/117C47FF*
This is one of several contemporaneous biographies of Imam Sharaf al-Din Yahya that remain unpublished. Manuscripts like these provide unique insights into the history of Yemen



Outline Map of Yemen at the time of Imam Sharaf al-Din Yahya

The turning point

Perhaps, this standoff between Imam Sharaf al-Din Yahya and his opponents to the north and south could have continued unresolved; perhaps, he would have eventually lost ground. However, in 1517 an event took place that reshaped the region. That year, a force of Egyptian Mamluks, who were travelling to the Indian Ocean to fight the Portuguese, diverted their expedition to Yemen. The *casus belli* was a suspicion that the Tahirid rulers were opening their ports, Aden particularly, to Portuguese ships. Armed with gunpowder weapons, an innovative technology unknown in South Arabia at the time, the Egyptian Mamluks swept through Yemen and conquered Sanaʿa, removing the Tahirids from power.

It was clear that the Mamluks were an unsurpassable military force in South Arabia, but they had a weakness: they were a military expedition that was not equipped to govern. And then, in that very same year, Egypt was conquered by the Ottomans, leaving the expeditionary group cut off from its homeland. In the chaos of power transition in Egypt, no reinforcement – be it military or administrative – was forthcoming. Left to their own devices, the Mamluks considered pledging loyalty to the Ottomans. They named the Ottoman sultan in the Friday prayer, but this did not lead to any material support.

It was at this point that Imam Sharaf al-Din Yahya found himself well-placed to enter the political arena. Hajjah was, after all, very close to Sanaʿa, and the ambitious Imam knew the city and its surroundings well. He besieged the Mamluks in Sanaʿa and within a year captured the city and their gunpowder weapons, and even co-opted some of the Mamluks to join his army. Having gained control over the city and expanded his army, Imam Sharaf al-Din Yahya became the most powerful regional leader in Yemen.

And he wielded that power effectively. Over the course of the next two decades, Imam Sharaf al-Din Yahya combined force and co-option to integrate lands and elites that had been in the orbit of the surviving Tahirids and the Ismaʿilis, as well as the allies of the Muʾayyadi family of Saʿada. His court became the meeting place for Sufis, Sunni legal scholars, and Zaydis, as well as visitors from distant lands. By 1535, Imam Sharaf al-Din Yahya found himself in control of both south and north Yemen, a feat that no previous Zaydi imam had accomplished.

The Sharaf al-Din state

In the years following the ousting of the Mamluks, the Imam was not only expanding his territorial control, but also developing a new institutional framework for the Zaydi imamate. The task was to design such institutions and administrative practices that would fit with the expectations of not only the Zaydi supporters of the Imam but also of his new Sunni subjects. It is in this area that Imam Sharaf al-Din Yahya's previous exposure to communal coexistence in Sanaʿa appears to have played an important role.

Unlike previous Zaydi imams, Imam Sharaf al-Din Yahya relied on a wider elite and was open to Sunnis joining his administration. Among his courtiers were judges and governors of different backgrounds. Knowledge exchange between Sunni and Zaydi scholars was encouraged. It appears to have been more than a ritualistic practice. In fact, these intellectual encounters influenced the legal code composed by this imam and intended to be used across his realm.

However, there were also limitations to this reliance on those who had previously been seen as outsiders by the Zaydis. At the heart of a successful administration in this period were networks of trusted individuals. Building trust was easier with members of one's own community or family than with representatives of other communities. Thus, we should not be surprised that openness in the Sharaf al-Din state was combined with a reliance on the Imam's family. During his years in power, his many sons – more than a dozen in total – joined his administration in different capacities. As governors, military leaders, and tax collectors, they played a key role in ensuring coherence of the Sharaf al-Din state.

These practical changes in the administration eventually needed to be given a legal framework. A key document formulating it was composed in the year of the 1527 plague and postulated that in the case of the Imam's death, power would be handed over to one of his sons. This son would then rule, not as a Zaydi imam, but as a placeholder, with the consent and support of the bureaucratic elite. After his death, power could pass on to another son of the imam, but eventually, after the death of all the imam's sons, the elite was to decide upon the next imam. Thus, the development of the Zaydi imamate under Imam Sharaf al-Din Yahya laid the foundation for a radical constitutional innovation – the formation of a consultative dynastic monarchy.

The crisis

On paper this looked like a reasonable solution. However, acknowledging the role of the Imam's sons and the power of the elites created cracks in the façade of the Sharaf al-Din imamate. A decade after the production of the document, the imam faced a political crisis.

The crisis developed slowly. It started with the Imam designating his eldest son, al-Mutahhar, as his heir in the 1527 document. Al-Mutahhar was an unusual figure for a Zaydi leader. His mother was the daughter of a great tribal chief, so he enjoyed easy popularity among the northern Yemeni tribes. Unlike his father, he had not received a religious education. He was certainly literate, but we do not have evidence of him being an expert in any of the classical Islamic sciences. The lack of such an education meant that he did not qualify to become a Zaydi imam, who had to be able to provide legal guidance to the community. His real expertise was in matters of war: he was a talented military leader and had headed the campaigns across Yemen on behalf of his father from a tender age of fourteen.

Al-Mutahhar was ambitious and believed that he had the right to inherit the imamate. He was, therefore, profoundly displeased when he heard his father had picked another son in place of him. This happened in 1541, when Imam Sharaf al-Din Yahya had started losing his sight. The newly designated heir, Ali, was twenty years al-Mutahhar's junior. In many ways, he was his complete opposite – known for Sufi leanings and poetry. He was a city child and son of a sayyida. Imam Sharaf al-Din Yahya felt that he was a better choice, because unlike al-Mutahhar he had a well-rounded education, giving him a higher chance of pleasing the more conservative members of the Zaydi elite.

In response to the revised succession plan, al-Mutahhar rose in revolt against his father. The deep irony of the situation was that Ali, the newly designated heir, sided with his half-brother. The Imam, however, did not wish to yield, since surrendering to al-Mutahhar's demands would mean that he would lose all power in the imamate he had built. The internal conflict lasted five long years. In their mutual hostility, the Imam and al-Mutahhar failed to recognise the danger posed to their state by a new power – the Ottomans.

The Ottomans started their expansion in Yemen in 1538. Their initial expansion was limited to

the maritime region that they sought to control for trade and to ensure the security of the Red Sea. The squabbles in the Sharaf al-Din imamate were exactly the kind of opportunity they were seeking for a push into the highlands. The enterprising governor Özdemir (Uzdamir) Pasha exploited the situation and in 1547 captured Sanaʿa. The divided family of the Imam failed to immediately recapture the city and Imam Sharaf al-Din Yahya, who died ten years later, would never set foot in the city again.

Sharaf al-Din Yahya's legacy

The loss of the city where Imam Sharaf al-Din Yahya's career began marked the end of his political project. The year after the Ottomans captured Sanaʿa, he reached an agreement with al-Mutahhar and his other sons. The new political situation required new solutions. It was clear that, with the Ottomans in control, the odds for the survival of a Zaydi state were slim. The final will of the Imam did not designate the next ruler. Instead, the imamate was cut up into dominions, and each brother received one to lead.

Following this, Imam Sharaf al-Din Yahya effectively retired from power. By then, he had gone blind, and moved in with one of his sons, Shams al-Din, in the fortress city of Kawkaban, not far from Sanaʿa. There he spent the last years of his life and died in 1558. He was buried in Zafir, the *hijra*, where his life's journey began.

Imam Sharaf al-Din Yahya's decision to break up the state he had built could not have been easy. He had to choose between preserving the state or his family. The Imam chose to ensure his family's survival as the only way to protect his legacy. By making each son lord over a small area of the former Sharaf al-Din imamate, Sharaf al-Din Yahya gave his progeny the prestige and flexibility that allowed them to navigate the complex politics of Yemen in subsequent centuries.

As local potentates, Al Sharaf al-Din, the family of the imam's descendants, became important political players whose support was sought by regional powers. They joined the Ottomans while those held sway, and they abandoned them when a new Zaydi imam launched a campaign to oust them. Throughout, by setting aside larger ambitions to rule all of Yemen, the descendants of Imam Sharaf al-Din Yahya continued to influence Yemeni politics, keeping their ancestor's legacy alive.

This pattern of family dominions was later employed by the Qasimid Zaydi imams and their Hamid al-Din descendants, who ruled Yemen between 1602 and 1962. The Qasimid rulers also followed the example of Sharaf al-Din Yahya's inclusive politics, co-opting non-Zaydi elites and scholars.

Modern Yemeni historiography tends to view the imamate negatively. While the criticisms of the imamate are not unfounded, they obscure the political resilience and cultural continuity that enabled its long existence. In a time when Yemen's present appears gloomy, reconsidering lessons of the past can yield new hopes for the future.

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Kawkaban

ASTONISHMENT AND AMAZEMENT

ZAYD MUTEE DAMMAJ
Introduced and translated by
Samuel Bollier and Shifa Askari

As a young boy in the 1950s, Zayd Mutee Dammaj visited an imposing castle to see his cousin. His relative was being held hostage to ensure their family's loyalty to Imam Ahmad, the absolute monarch ruling Yemen. It was an unnerving experience. "The hostages in the castle would sit on top of the walls," Dammaj recalled in his memoir *Astonishment and Amazement*, "their shackled legs dangling over the edge as they squinted into the distance, each one searching for his faraway village."

The visit left a mark on the young Dammaj, whose renowned novel *The Hostage* (1984) depicted this hostage system practised by Yemen's ruling imams before the 1962 revolution.

This anecdote is one of many childhood memories Dammaj recollects in *Astonishment and Amazement* (2000), which he wrote at the end of his long struggle with cancer. One of few memoirs describing everyday life in Yemen during this era, the book sketches the personalities and cityscape of Taʿizz, where Dammaj spent much of his boyhood, as well as the stirrings of change that would lead to the imamate's downfall.

After the Ottoman Empire's collapse, much of northern and western Yemen was ruled by Imam Yahya, who kept his kingdom deeply isolated, suspicious of outside influence. Following his assassination in 1948, Yahya's son Ahmad succeeded him as imam, mobilising tribal fighters to secure his grip on power – and letting them sack Sanaʿa in exchange. He then moved Yemen's capital to Taʿizz, a city in the mountains of southwestern Yemen. Like his father, Ahmad ruled despotically, dealing harshly with dissent.

A nationalist group called the Free Yemeni Movement emerged in the 1930s and 40s, calling variously for reforms or the abolition of the imamate. Dammaj's father was among its founding members. By the 1950s, a growing number of young Yemenis were travelling to Egypt to study, among them Zayd Mutee Dammaj. The star of Arab nationalism was at its apex, and many of these students would later participate in the 1962 revolution that toppled the imamate and ushered in a republic. Dammaj's Egyptian sojourn was a seminal experience for him, and his memoir describes his astonishment at the contrasts he found between provincial Taʿizz and dynamic Cairo.

The late poet Abdulaziz al-Maqaleh, a friend and contemporary of Dammaj, wrote that the memoir "manages to transform his personal memories into a collective memory" and succeeds in capturing the zeitgeist of their generation, "striving for a decent life free from oppression, hatred, and backwardness."

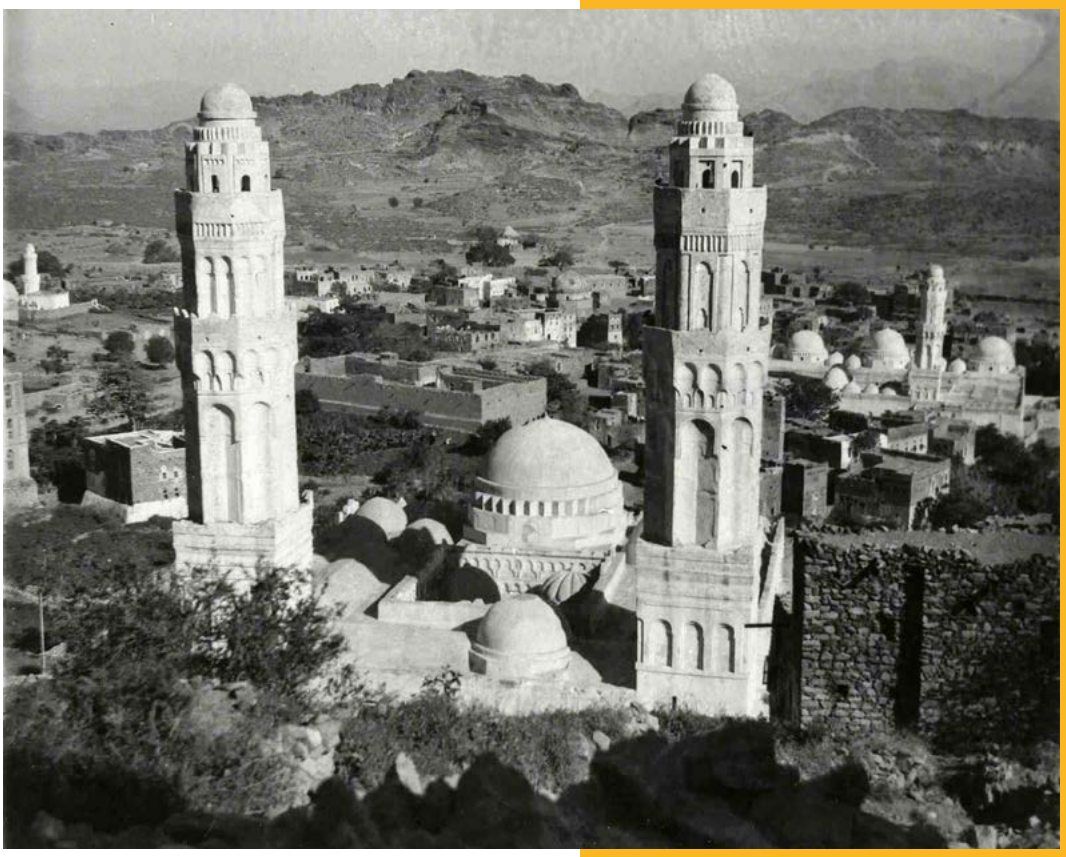
The following is an excerpt from Astonishment and Amazement, translated into English for the first time.

Taʿizz holds a special place in my memory: that marvellous city with its great old buildings, the likes of which do not exist anywhere else in Yemen. The city is filled with Islamic schools and mosques, domes and holy men. Throughout its history, Taʿizz was a centre for kings, sultans, and great reformers. Its vigour only diminished after Imam Yahya and his sons took over from the Ottoman Turks, in the beginning of the 20th century. Its markets buzzed with people and farmers coming from the villages, or down from Mount Sabir.

Imam Ahmad made Taʿizz the capital of his kingdom after the failed revolution of 1948, when he allowed the city of Sanaʿa, the previous capital, to be sacked. That era was characterised by pestilence, illness, and poverty. Because I was a child from the countryside, I was of course amazed by things I had never even imagined when I came to the bigger city of Taʿizz.

Taʿizz was home to people like Ali Khalid the sorcerer, who shaded himself beneath a giant *tolqa* tree; and Muawiya the insane, shouting his catchphrase at the top of his lungs: "I'm a mountain leaning on a mountain!" The only cafe in town was packed with truck drivers surrounding a legendary driver named Rosabi, consoling him and suggesting ways to fix his broken truck. In al-Urdi, the central square, the executioner al-Wishah's sword swooped down to behead members of the Free Yemenis.

Above it all loomed al-Qahira Castle, whose huge walls looked out over the city, the mountains, and the sad villages in the countryside. The hostages in



Al-Ashrafiya in the 1950s

the castle would sit on top of the walls, their shackled legs dangling over the edge as they squinted into the distance, each one searching for his faraway village.

Taʿizz is a legendary city, and since childhood it has nested in my memory like a gentle dove. The city contains stories that are inexhaustible to this day.

Al-Qahira Castle

Al-Qahira Castle was strategically located on the slopes of Mount Sabir, its northern side overlooking the city of Taʿizz. The castle's location enabled it to fulfil its duty of defending the city. Imam Ahmad, from the time he was the crown prince and ruler of Taʿizz province, and even after he became the imam, used it as a fearsome prison for his hostages.

At the start of every month my late father, who at that time was living and working in exile, sent money to me and my cousin, Ahmed Qasim Dammaj, who was being held hostage in the castle. I received the money from the postman, who arrived each month at al-Mansur Dome, about 60 metres away from Bab Musa. The dome, with its gigantic *tolqa* tree and its ancient fountain coated in lime plaster, was used as a border checkpoint for Imam Ahmad's capital, Taʿizz. The money my father sent came in the form of silver Maria Theresa *thalers*, which felt very heavy on my skinny body. He sent me five riyals each month, and 30 riyals for me to deliver to my cousin, the hostage.

I first became acquainted with this castle when I climbed up to it on a cobblestone path. The path took me by the Shabazi Shrine, which many Yemenis visited, men and women and children alike.

The shrine was a kind of small cave, whose door was coated with lime plaster. Around the cave were seats made of carved rock for visitors to sit on. At this point in my childhood, I didn't know anything about this "Shabazi," about his literature and poetry or his Jewish heritage.

The cobblestone path ended at this shrine, and after that I had to climb up a gravel path, which over time had become rough from all the people walking up and down. Recently an opening had been made in the castle wall through which people could enter and leave, called "Ain al-Dima" ("The Cat's Eye"). The path, now paved with smooth stones, switched back and forth up the mountain to the castle's main gate. People climbed up this path, as well as mules that carried supplies and dragged up artillery carriages. The path was tortuous, and people had to rest at every switchback.

I remember arriving at the castle's impenetrable gate, its wood inlaid with sheets of iron and copper so that enemies couldn't burn it down. A big double door allowed caravans to bring supplies, artillery, and vehicles carrying ammunition. The hostages' parents, visiting to give them support, cake or bread, or essential supplies, could enter through a small, arched door. This small door could be opened from one of the leaves of the double door. In the middle of this small door was a tiny window, which guards opened to confirm the identity of the person knocking on the door, and whom they intended to visit.

This tiny window was opened, which was fortified by thick iron bars – even though it was so small that a dog or cat wouldn't have been able to fit its head through, let alone a person!

"Who do you want?"

"I want to visit my cousin, the hostage."

The guard spat his chewing tobacco out of the tiny window at me, making my dirty clothes even dirtier, then shut the window in my face. After a long wait, the small, arched door opened, making a grating sound.

I was the first to enter, and behind me were a group of men visiting their sons, who nearly pushed me to the ground in their rush to enter. But the boorish guard was able, with his thick legs, to precisely regulate our entrance, as if the door were a camel's rear, regularly excreting pieces of dung! The guard inspected me quickly and thoroughly, and took two riyals of the money meant for my cousin. When I lingered to try to object, the person behind me hit me. He whispered in my ear that I shouldn't protest, and should walk quickly.

Five metres ahead, I found myself in front of another door, the others following behind me, and another tiny window like the first one was opened. After another long wait, the small, arched door opened – and another guard, thick-bodied and thick-headed too, grabbed us and took two more riyals from me. I didn't protest this time, and the others hurried eagerly behind me, but we were shocked when we came to a third door. The tiny window was opened, then we waited for yet another long period of time, until the small, arched door opened from above – and yet another beefy guard grabbed us and took two more riyals from me. Again, I did not object.

I rushed forward, with the others following behind me. I was anguished, afraid that my cousin, the hostage, would think that I had taken his money. So I thanked God when I passed through that fearsome door to see that my cousin was happy, and embracing me.

The hostages were standing at a distance, all of them trying to spot their relatives. An imposing man standing amongst them and wearing clean, white clothes caught my gaze. The castle guard ordered us to stand in lines until Sheikh al-Mihjani, who was in charge of the fortress, came out to allow us to meet with the hostages.

I was the youngest visitor. When Sheikh al-Mihjani came and walked by us, he asked everyone who they were visiting and what their connection was to the hostage. When he saw me, he stopped and looked at me for a while, then turned to the guards and shouted, demanding an explanation: "Is this boy a visitor or a hostage?" He was told that I was visiting my cousin Dammaj, the hostage. I was terrified and shaking with fear, like a bird or a frightened rabbit.

When Sheikh al-Mihjani allowed us to meet with the hostages, I was disturbed by the clanging of the iron shackles on their legs. I don't remember anything about my cousin's appearance, nor him, but our blood ties brought us together. I rushed to him, and he tried to hurry towards me despite his thick shackles. When we got close to each other and embraced, I started shaking and crying loudly.



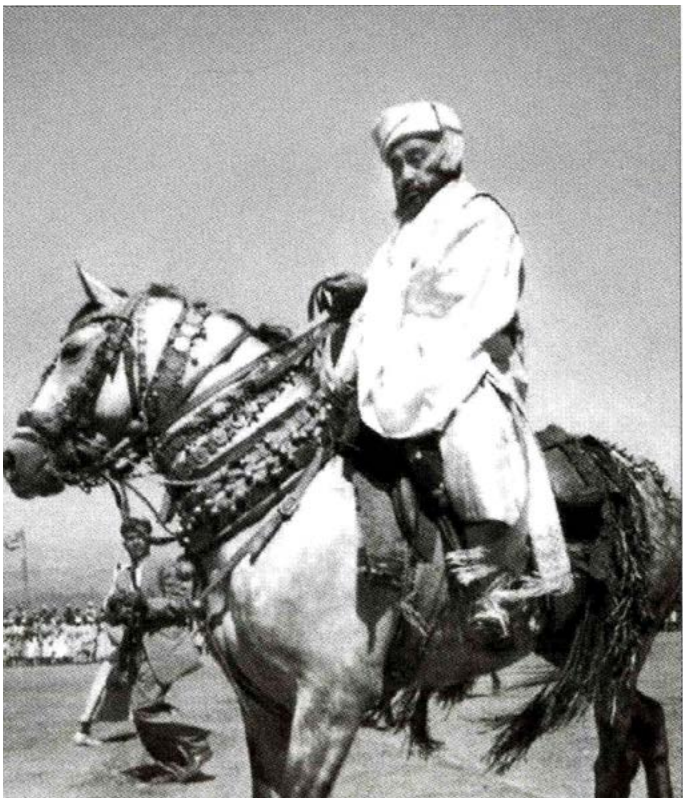
Walls of Taʿizz in the 1950s

He tried to slowly remove me from clinging to him, and started whispering some reassuring, encouraging words in my ear. He told me everything was fine, and took me by my hand, to show me the sights of the castle with his companions. He smiled, trying to create a joyful mood, to make me feel better and stop me from crying.

That imposing man in the clean white clothes came towards us, wearing a white turban like the religious scholars at Al-Azhar. He patted our shoulders tenderly, asking my cousin, "Is this your cousin, the son of 'the first revolutionary'? The son of 'the Shaykh of the Writers, and the Writer of the Shaykhs'? God bless you both!"

He left us, and I asked my cousin about what he had said. He replied, "That man is the only prisoner here among the hostages. He is a distinguished teacher, Qasim Ghalib, and devotes all his time to teaching us language, history, geography, logic, morals, and maths. He is more learned than any of the teachers at the Ahmadiyya School."

My cousin said this with pride, then introduced me to his fellow hostages. "This is my cousin! And this is Al-Anbari, from the Dhubab region. And he is Amin Noman al-Baadani, and here is Ibn Nasr from Mawiya. He is Ibn al-Hayajim from Sharab, and this is the son of Muhammad Abdallah Jabir from Al-Bukarah in Al-Waziyah district, and this is Sultan Ahmed Bajjash from al-Muhawila," et cetera.



Imam Ahmad

He took me around to see all the sights of the castle and its artillery, and the walls surrounding it. We looked out from the heights to see the city of Taʿizz – and indeed, all of Yemen, as I thought at the time. He pointed out Mount al-Taʿkar, where our sleepy village lay in the mountain's folds. I was amazed by the castle's impregnability, and how its builders had been able to construct its walls on those heights without suffering from vertigo, panicking, or falling off the cliffs. I don't think any other castle or fortress in the world was ever as unassailable as this one. All other castles had their defences penetrated at some point, and all of them had people escape.

Later, after I had the opportunity to study and travel abroad, I was able to see many castles and fortresses in most of the Arab and European countries, East and West. When I started reading novels about Islamic history by the late great writer Jurji Zaydan, like his novel *The Fugitive Mamluk*, I imagined his description of that Mamluk who was able to save himself from slaughter, by jumping with his horse from the walls of Salahuddin Fortress (the castle of Muhammad Ali Pasha) and fleeing towards southern Egypt. I recall that during high school in Beni Suef, in Egypt, we had to read *The Prisoner of Zenda* as part of our English studies. The hero of that novel was able to jump from the window of a forbidding castle into the surrounding moat to save himself.

I don't think anyone could have jumped with his horse from the walls of al-Qahira Castle like that fugitive Mamluk did, because he and his horse would have died before even reaching the ground. Nor do I think anyone would have risked jumping from one of the windows as in *The Prisoner of Zenda*, because the fall would shatter his body into small pieces, scattered everywhere.

Muawiya: "A Mountain Leaning on a Mountain!"

Taʿizz always had dozens of insane people wandering its streets and disgusting alleyways. Most of them behaved aggressively and wore filthy clothes (if they wore anything at all) on their bodies, which were covered in Taʿizz's endless grime. But Muawiya was more put-together than the rest of them. He was distinguished from the others by his cleanliness and dignity during the era of Imam Ahmad, the craziest one of them all, who was nicknamed "Ahmad the Djinn."

No one knew when Muawiya – the insane, the enigma – arrived in Taʿizz. I only knew him during my childhood, because I lived in Taʿizz at various intervals, the most important of which was my time at the Ahmadiyya School. Taʿizz was one of the greatest cities in Yemen, as well as its most famous, steeped in a rich and magnificent history. The city was unlike any other in the country. Muawiya was one of its landmarks, one of its shrines, and his fame even exceeded that of Imam Ahmad "The Djinn"!

My classmates and I strolled every afternoon from Bab al-Kabeer towards his favourite spot. He would be reclining against the steps leading to the gates of one of the ancient shrines, which were coated with lime plaster. He would chew his *qat* there with a jug of cold water in front of him, looking over the canal that, when dry, served as a road for the few cars in the city.

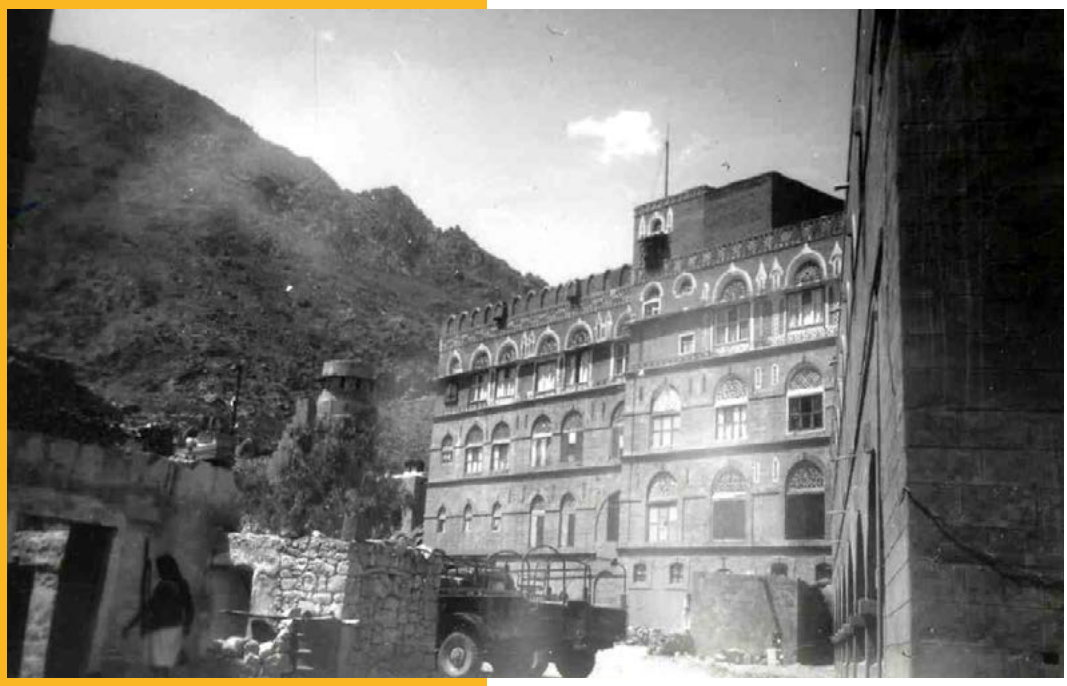
Muawiya's attire was strange but dignified: he wore an Indian silk turban on his head as if he were a maharaja, and all his robes were elegant despite their age. He had an almost brown face, a straight nose, a moustache, and a thick beard, as if he were Al-Zeer Salem or Abu Zayd al-Halali. He smiled with joy when we shouted, "How are you, Muawiya?" He would reply in a loud, ecstatic voice with his catchphrase: "I'm a mountain leaning on a mountain!"

We would stay gathered in front of him every day, listening to his strange words and replies, until he got up in the late afternoon and drove us away. He had a weird temperament. He would do as he wanted, breaking taboos as he pleased. When he was provoked, he would shout: "What's permitted is clear, and what's forbidden is clear ... you sons of ..."

Then he would get up suddenly and everyone would run away!

Imam Ahmad was annoyed by Muawiya, whom he passed every day in his car, with his bodyguard and his bugler, on his way from the palace at Dar al-Nasr (which he had seized by force from the oldest family in Taʿizz, the Mujahid family), to his palaces in al-Urdi, or to his new palace in the village of Sala. When Imam Ahmad passed by, Muawiya would go back and forth shouting at him: "I am Muawiya, a mountain leaning on a mountain!"

Imam Ahmad decided to leave Dar al-Nasr and settle in his palace in al-Urdi, fleeing from this crazy Muawiya.



Sala Palace from the east



Lions at Sala Palace

Nobody knows how Muawiya came to learn that Imam Ahmad had relocated to one of his palaces in al-Urdi. When Imam Ahmad exited the palace gate one day, he was surprised to see Muawiya, reclining as usual under a small tree and shouting: "I am Muawiya, a mountain leaning on a mountain!"

My friend and I, and some of our classmates, loved seeing the small military parade every afternoon, when a detachment of the army came out, barefoot and wearing their traditional clothes. In front of them was a small military band. Age and drink had eaten away the band's musicians, who were remnants of the Ottoman Turks. Behind them were some of the Imam's Barbary sheep, which the soldiers were tending. The soldiers faced towards the palaces' windows to loudly shout three times, so that the Imam was sure to hear: "God save the Imam!"

Then as the detachment turned back, with the worn-out band and the Imam's sheep behind them, Muawiya would drown out their voices as he yelled: "I am Muawiya, a mountain leaning on a mountain!"

Imam Ahmad became annoyed yet again. He could have had Muawiya killed or cut up into pieces, or fed to his lions, tigers, or ravenous hyenas, which he kept in metal cages in a yard inside the palace. How many of the Imam's opponents had been devoured there, their names disappearing from history! But this time history was watching, and Imam Ahmad, with his cruel intelligence, knew that. So he fled from Muawiya, leaving his palaces in al-Urdi, and settled in his big new palace in the village of Sala.

Sala was a beautiful, enchanting region. Anyone would dream of living there for his whole life. The Imam had taken it for himself: all its houses, land, springs, fruit trees, and boulders. And he had even taken its people! The village of Sala was, in Imam Ahmad's opinion, a healthy resort, far from the complaints and grievances of his wretched subjects. His move to Sala was also motivated by material gain: he could impose tariffs on goods brought by the feeble trucks that struggled to make their way from Aden to Ta'izz, along a road that passed by the new palace. A checkpoint made of wood was set up on the road there to collect customs.

Nobody knows how Muawiya discovered that Imam Ahmad had moved again, this time to his big new palace in Sala. The people found him reclining, as usual, in front of the palace gate, throwing the remnants of his *qat* to a rare oryx that Imam Ahmad owned. When the Imam left the palace gate, he was distressed and depressed to see Muawiya shouting: "I am Muawiya, a mountain leaning on a mountain!"

One day, when "time fell asleep," this Muawiya – this "mountain leaning on a mountain" – suddenly disappeared.

Sam Bollier *translates prose from Arabic, with a focus on Yemeni literature, and has previously worked as a journalist and editor in the Middle East.*

Shifa Askari *is a qualified translator and media researcher.*

A STRANGE GIFT IN THE WADI HADHRAMAUT

HELGA GRAHAM

It was a warm March morning in the Wadi Hadhramaut, around the mid-1970s. We were waiting for the small DC-3 plane of Yemen Airways to take us back to Aden after spending a week in the Wadi. The plane was late, as usual. My husband, Bob, had settled in the shade of the small airport shelter to read *As You Like It*. A few camels who should not have been there wandered around. I, too, wandered restlessly, aimlessly, and unhappy at the thought I would most likely not come back to this magical place.

(An unfounded fear, as it happened, as I was back in 1977 for the tenth anniversary of independence from the British. The big brass of the regime then was all there, including the then-Prime Minister Ali Nasser on a podium listening to bagpipes playing distinctly Scottish tunes opposite a small store with the large painted sign: Victory Company for Free Trade.)

Back in the Hadhramaut, from our position on the wide open and mainly empty space that called itself Seiyun Airport in those distant days, surrounded by the massive high stone ramparts of the Wadi and with the elegant mudbrick skyscrapers of Shibam close by, it felt as if nothing had changed in millennia and never would. This was not entirely true. The Soviets in the mid-1970s were the local overlords in Aden and the Wadi, an outcome of Cold War manoeuvres and the end of the colonial era. And while generally very ungenerous to the PDRY, the Soviets had actually donated a tomato paste factory here. It was mercifully out of sight. There were electric pylons, but they too were unobtrusive.

Perhaps because they were relatively few as were cars and lorries. One Rolls Royce, though, had made it: it had actually been dismembered and carried physically to the Wadi in the 1920s.

Back in the mid-1970s it was seriously difficult to get a permit to enter this famed, far-flung corner of Arabia and Yemen. The Cold War didn't help. We somehow managed because Bob (Robert Stephens) had written a well-received Penguin biography of Gamal Abdel Nasser – well-received, that is, by the then-broadly progressive forces in the Arab world, and not so well-received by the retreating colonial authorities. Ali Nasser was an admirer of his Egyptian leader, so we were permitted to roam where we wanted. (The British embassy staff had no such permit and grilled us mercilessly on our return to Aden.)

For now, we were on our way back to Aden but, there being no plane, had time to spare. I started to walk in the direction of Shibam, partly because I thought I heard very distant wisps of music in the stillness. I was heading into a semi-fertile area of vegetable allotments, dotted with smallish fields of wheat, corn, and mini palm groves. The music was now plainly audible. Haunting human voices singing and swaying. I could begin to make out six or seven black-clad women scything rhythmically, meditatively, while one small man dressed in blue seemed to be conducting from the end of their line, while also leaping up and down. It felt quite eerie, partly because of the silence and emptiness otherwise all around, and partly because of the curious pitch and tone of the music.

By now the small group of singers had seen me and were directing their song towards me. I was hiding behind protective sunglasses somewhat, but also moving towards them.

I thought I could discern Arabic words like 'Allah' quite frequently. Could they be Sufis, of the mystical movement in Islam? This was quite likely. Tarim was less than 30 kilometres down the road. With its shrines and libraries, it was a well-known Sufi centre both locally and regionally. We had spent time there and also interviewed Sufis.

But it was difficult to bring up the subject – *Are you Sufi?* – because the relations between the pro-Soviet authorities and the local Sufi leadership were particularly strained at the time. And of course, the Soviets had little time for religion.

By now the singing had stopped. The tension created by the music had momentarily dissipated. The ladies were anxious to communicate and crowded around my Jaeger dress with its unusual patterns – unusual, that is, for the Wadi Hadhramaut.



Aerial view of Shibam (© 1995 Jane Taylor)



Shibam (© 1995 Jane Taylor)

It was clear that I was expected to offer explanations: *who was I, what was I doing here?*

I tried to oblige.

Ana sahafiyya wa jabaliyya min Iscutlanda. I am a journalist and Scottish highlander.

Zawji fi-l-matar wa ma fi tayyara. My husband's at the airport but there's no plane.

Al-yawm safarna ila Adan. We travelled to Aden today.

Then suddenly, from the left, the man in blue came rapidly, unexpectedly towards me. As I tried to back off, he pressed into my arms a huge bundle of sweet-smelling hay studded like jewels with a few flowers.

I had nothing to give, not even chocolates for the plane. Nothing at all.

A sad almost-end to the magic.

The group started to sing again, beautifully, as the small man in blue to prance – or whatever it was he was doing. The tension was back as I made my way carefully for the airport with a haystack in my line of vision. After all, I couldn't just abandon a present.

Back at the airport, nothing was happening. No sign of the little plane buzzing around the top of the cliffs like a hornet. No sign of other passengers or lunch.

Bob was still reading *As You Like It*.

Without looking up at me or my acquisition, he said: "That should make some camel happy."

And so, it did.

Dr. Helga Graham *is a journalist for The Observer (formerly); a writer (Arabian Time Machine: Self-Portrait of an Oil State) and a historian.*

RUQAIA MOHAMMED NASSER, WIFE OF MOHAMMED ALI LUQMAN

HUDA LUQMAN WILDY

For many years, since leaving Aden in 1967, I have thought of writing about my mother and her life in Aden. The opportunity arose when Su'ad Aqlan al-Alas, whose book in Arabic, *Women of Aden: Enlightenment and Liberation* is briefly reviewed in this issue of the BYS Journal, approached me to talk about my mother's role in Aden.

Aden had been under British occupation for over 80 years when my mother was born. It became a Crown Colony in 1937. The British persuaded most rulers of the Aden Protectorate states to merge with the Aden colony to form the Federation of South Arabia in 1962. Demands for an end to British occupation grew after the Second World War and, following the overthrow of the Imamate in Yemen in 1962, there was escalating conflict in South Arabia between British troops and the nationalist organisations determined to win independence: the National Liberation Front (NLF) and the Front for the Liberation of Occupied South Yemen (FLOSY). In 1967, these two organisations fought each other for control of what, on 30 November, became the Peoples' Republic of South Yemen (PRSY), renamed the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) in 1970.

Her early life

Ruqaia Mohamed Naser al-Nawaseri, or Umm Salah, as she liked to be called, was born in Tawahi (Steamer Point), Aden in 1917 into a well-to-do family. Her father was the Aden harbour master and a formidable and widely respected personality. He owned the first car in Aden which was quite a spectacle in the early 1920s.

She was the youngest of a large family. She had no formal education apart from learning the Qur'an at the age of seven, and from an early age she was given the responsibility of caring for her grandmother. The family looked after many orphans, for whom she helped cook meals and sew clothes. As was the norm in those days, she married very young. Her husband, my father, Muhammad Ali Luqman, was a well-known lawyer and pioneer in education, literature, and journalism. He helped Ruqaia to learn and develop so that, with his support, she became a feminist leader in addition to being a loving mother to eight children of her own and seven stepchildren from my father's first wife. Ruqaia was very loyal to her extended family and took under her wing many of her nephews and nieces, helping them with their own education and welfare.

She travelled the world with my father. In the early years of her marriage, she lived with him in India while he studied law, and later in Somalia (then under British rule), where my father was acting as a lawyer for the Somali government. She also accompanied him to the USA in the early 1960s and was the first woman from Yemen to enter the United Nations, when he gave his famous speech requesting the withdrawal of the British from Aden. She visited many established charities during her travels, learning how to conduct and manage associations and charities.

During the Second World War, she tended to the wounded and their families with food, medicine, and clothes. Her efforts were recognised by the Red Cross Society, appointing her Deputy Chair and later Chairwoman of the Society in Aden.

Aden Women's Association

In 1943, the British administration established a club for the women of Aden. The members were mostly British or Indians (Aden had been under the control of British India before 1937). My mother was one of the first Adeni women to join the club, which was initially a big success and attracted a huge number of women as members. However, differences in the members' backgrounds and aspirations led to conflict as Adeni women rejected foreign control. Disgruntled members wanted to elect an Arab Adeni to be Chairwoman, but the club management rejected this. The majority of the members, including my mother, walked out in protest and later set up a new organisation in 1956: the Adeni Women's Association.

Ruqaia, who had become a pioneer of the feminist movement in Aden in the early 1950s, was voted as chair of the new organisation. Initially, its meetings took place at our house in Crater. Ruqaia was supported by two active members: her nieces Mahia and Saeeda Girgrah. Mahia, also known as Mahia Nageeb, was secretary and became my mother's right hand, representing her and the association at many women's conferences and forums in London, Beirut, and Cairo. Saeeda was the wife of Muhammad Ali Bashraheel, the owner of *Al-Ayyam* newspaper. She was appointed as the deputy chair of the association and sometimes would accompany Mahia on Ruqaia's behalf to represent the association in meetings and conferences held outside Aden. The group worked tirelessly to gather donations. Ruqaia, with my father's support and guidance, became a much-respected leader.

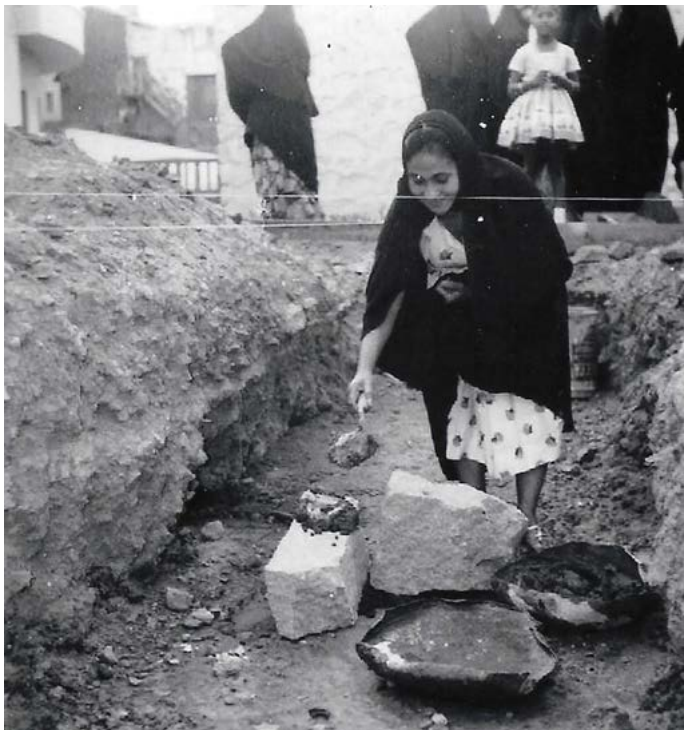
There were many movements and protests with which the association was involved. In 1959, there was a protest led by Safinaz Khaleifa to remove the Hijab, called the 'Chadar revolt'. A march was organised by the Legislative Council calling for women's right to vote. Women also occupied the famous Al-Asqalani Mosque for the same cause. Ruqaia herself played a leading role in supporting demonstrations by female students over a range of issues, as did Mahia as a journalist and owner of the *Fatat Shamsan* (The Maiden of Mount Shamsan) newspaper, which covered the protests.

A plot of land (23,179 sq. feet) situated in the front bay Sira Crater was donated by the British Governor of Aden to the association, which then needed to raise the requisite funds to construct a suitable building. These were covered by a donation from an anonymous lady, who in 1963 had read an article in the Kuwaiti magazine, Al-Arabi – at the time a leading publication in the Arab world with a wide readership – about the association's financial shortfall. The building was purpose-built: fully equipped with a large stage, cinema screen, and nursery school. It had 500 chairs donated by the Indian Government. Other donations included furniture, sewing machines, handicrafts, educational tools, books, costumes, and much more.

In 1965, the association set up the first nursery or prep school in Aden for children of working mothers. It enrolled 87 children between the ages of three and seven in its first year. Ruqaia recruited one of the first qualified teachers, Nageeba Ahmed Yagoob, as head of the nursery school and the association's adult education programme. The aim was to teach the principles of reading and writing as well as professional crafts such as sewing, embroidery, and cooking. A trust fund was created to support many poor families, paying for their children's schooling, uniforms, and books.

In addition, the association arranged visits to prisons: it delivered cooked food, clothes, and medicine to the prisoners and raised concerns over their welfare and health issues with the authorities. Among its other activities were education, competitions, cultural trips, musical performances and plays.

Muhammad Ali Luqman campaigned for women's freedom and equal rights to men. He called for the establishment of new educational institutions,



Laying the foundation for the Aden Women's Association building 1964

which formed the basis of educational institutions today. He inspired Ruqaia to fight for the rights of Yemeni women in achieving equality in education and work, and freedom in social, parliamentary, and political life. In her book *Eternal Aden – A Free Global Port*, Radia Ehsanulla writes: "Muhammad Ali Luqman, the pioneer of the national movement, literature, and journalism, gave Ruqaia the ability and strength to transform her into a feminist leader, a lady of high society, an excellent housewife, and a happy woman whose smile never left her until a few hours before her death on Wednesday, November 24, 1993.

Aftermath

My mother left Aden in July 1967 for London. She feared for her life, especially after the loss of my father who had died in Makkah a year prior to the British departure from Aden. The riots, fighting, and killings in Aden in 1967 led her – and many others – to take the sad decision to leave.

Following the withdrawal of the British in November 1967, she lost her home and all her belongings. Her house was occupied by families who were given the right by the new regime to live there, rent free at first then later for a pittance. Sadly, after 1967, the building of the Adeni Women's Association was raided and occupied by a family who rented out the building as a wedding venue. Later, the building was demolished, and a four-storey block of flats was built and sold privately.

Ruqaia passed away in 1993. Ten years later, she received an honorary award from the former President of Yemen, the late Ali Abdullah Salih, for her efforts and leadership in the development and advancement of the women's movement in Yemen. More recently, she was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honour by the Chairman of the Southern Transitional Council in recognition of her exceptional contributions.

Huda Luqman Wildy *is a Legal Translator / Interpreter and member Chartered Institute of Linguists.*



The Obituary of Ruqaia published by the Yemeni Women's Union

DEALING WITH POST-HARVEST LOSSES IN YEMENI AGRICULTURE

DARYL BARKER

Yemen is far from being self-sufficient in food production, particularly staple grain crops. As is the case in many other countries, much of the production is lost post-harvesting, at all stages from transport to household storage. This is an issue which has not received sufficient attention over the decades, despite its importance. The PDRY attempted to address this, and since then it has received intermittent attention through various projects.

The post-Harvest Centre, Ministry of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform, Aden

In the 1980s, the PDRY got more support from international organisations, some of it focused on agriculture, with projects financed by the World Bank, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and others. The idea of a post-harvest centre started within the framework of the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO)'s Programme for the Prevention of Food Losses. Its main objective "was to construct and equip a centre and train a cadre of post-harvest technologists to be permanently integrated into the advisory services of the Ministry of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform." Between 1980 and 1984, three projects concerned with the reduction of foodgrain losses were completed focused on grain crops. These can be stored in large silos, and the technology required for this is quite different from that needed for more perishable crops. A number of co-operatives and state farms in Aden, Lahj and Abyan were equipped with new or modified silos for grains and were operational by the time of unification. On its establishment the National Post-Harvest Centre would assume full responsibility for technical assistance to the post-harvest sector of agricultural production and provide technical advice to the parastatal entities and food aid organisations. It would help increase the quantity and quality of food available to the population by minimising the losses of agricultural products which occur after harvest; by the strengthening and expanding existing post -harvest training and extension capability; and would lead to the development of improved technology and management systems for handling, transport, storage and processing food crops.

The proposal was presented in October 1983 and was positively received by officials of the PDRY Ministry of Agricultural and Agrarian Reform and PDRY Ministry of Planning in Aden.

In 1984, the PDRY government decided to expand the activities for the reduction of post- harvest food losses to perishable fruits and vegetables. It concluded a project agreement with FAO, financed by the Arab Gulf Fund for the United Nations Development to build the Post-Harvest Centre in Aden which would be used as a base for these activities, including research and development of locally suitable protection mechanisms. Training was provided to some staff who were in a position to use their skills later.

The Evaluation Mission of November 1989 concluded the following:

"The Post Harvest Centre project in PDRY has boosted capacity in the area of post-harvest technology and has increased awareness of post-harvest losses at the top administrative and technical levels in both government and parastatal organisations. The project was completed at relatively low cost. It has created a new cadre of nationals trained in post-harvest technology of agricultural commodities. The Centre should serve as a model to similar facilities which may be established in other countries."

Post-unification developments

With unification in 1990, the ministry of agriculture's main offices were moved to Sana'a and the technical elements in Aden and elsewhere received less importance. Projects focused on locally produced staple crops were given less attention as the import of staples was a source of considerable benefit to the big traders who controlled the trade.

The Aden post-harvest centre was put under the authority and management of the Agricultural Research and Extension Authority (AREA) based in Dhamar. Always short of financing, AREA also sought help with the centre. It followed the original PDRY decision to change focus to give its main at-

tention to the preservation of fruits and vegetables. In particular, it tried to get household post-harvest technologies included into projects funded by the international agencies. This was done on a small scale through the women's development components of a few projects, encouraging the drying of fruit and vegetables at the household level, a few home-based fish smoking initiatives and the like. None were given significant funding, and the AREA staff themselves did not have the funding or support necessary to expand the ideas and skills throughout the country.

AREA has been primarily dependent on international project funding, which has more or less dried up since the war started in 2015. In the current decade many of its staff are trying to work with international and other agencies on the few agricultural projects which exist. According to Dr. Hussein Gadain, the FAO Representative in Yemen in April 2023 the Post-harvest Centre in Aden is still operating but is affiliated to AREA with the name "Food and Post-Harvest Research Centre" (see Center for Food Research and Post-Harvest Technologies | Agriculture Research & Extension Authority (area.gov.ye)). It covered the whole country until 2015 when because of the war its role was restricted to the governorates under the control of the internationally recognised government. No post-harvest centre is operating in Sana'a for the time being, but AREA is carrying out some activities in parts of north Yemen.

Daryl Barker *served with the UN/FAO in the PDRY between 1983 and 1990 to establish the Post Harvest Centre in the Ministry of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform.*



Post-Harvest Centre Project Staff in 1988

FRIENDS OF HADHRAMAUT

SULTANA AL-QUʿAITI MBE

Friends of Hadhramaut (FOH) was founded in 1997 by Sultana al-Quʿaiti MBE and Brian Fyfield-Shayler BEM, as a result of a visit to the area in 1996 organised by the late Jim Ellis OBE as part of a British Yemeni Society tour. The work of FOH is purely humanitarian and strictly non-political. When the founders came up with the idea of setting up FOH as a sort of association of "old timers", little did they realise that nearly three decades on, it would become a full-fledged registered British charity with over 500 members worldwide.

FOH favours community-based projects and self-help development and, as far as possible, using local resources and indigenous materials. Since its inception, FOH has completed 120 small to medium projects.

As a charitable organisation, FOH works to relieve poverty in the country's largest governorate, concentrating on improving health and education, two crucial determinants of welfare. FOH has been hugely impressed and inspired by the resilience and enthusiasm of the women we have encountered and who have co-operated with us.

Helping those of all ages who are visually, speech and hearing-impaired has always been one of our priorities. One of our first projects was to send three blind sisters from a very poor family in Wadi Hadhramaut to Amman for examination and treatment. FOH also helped Al-Noor Centre for the Blind in al-Mukalla and for several years worked closely with the members of the Women's Sewing Centre in Fuwwa. These women were mostly divorced or widowed, with many coming from deprived backgrounds. FOH provided brand-new premises, sewing machines, material and a mini-bus for transportation. FOH was able to help midwives with medical equipment in various hospitals and clinics across the length and breadth of the Hadhramaut; midwifery is regarded as a valued and honourable profession.

FOH has tried to improve and advance the education of girls and women by constructing classrooms, school facilities, playground canopies, outdoor stages and much needed lavatories, as well as providing sanitary equipment, school furniture and educational aids for autism centres. The palpable sense of joy felt by staff and pupils was very moving: they found it hard to believe that somebody really cared for them to such a degree halfway across the world. Once a project has started, it is supervised and monitored by the FOH team on the ground and the eight trustees to ensure that bottlenecks and unforeseen impediments are overcome.



FOH installed a brand new X-ray machine at Al-Jahi Hospital, Wadi Leisar

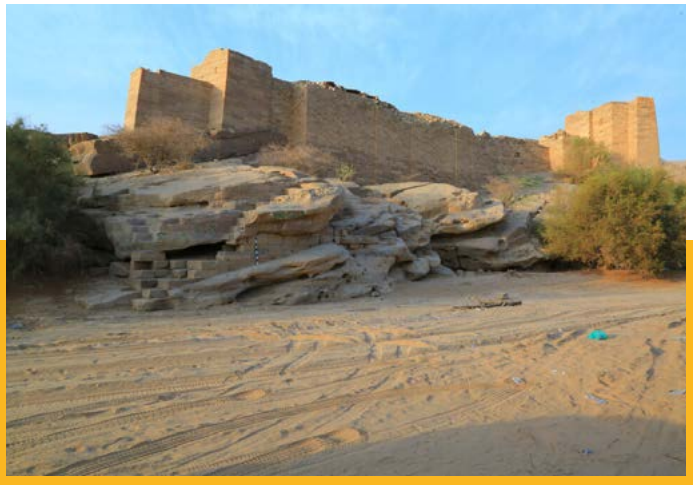
Although FOH continues to implement its projects in the educational and health sectors, it has recently redirected its efforts, due to the dire situation Post-Covid and the war in Yemen, to purchasing food and bulk dry rations for distribution amongst the poorest sections of society.

FOH publishes an annual newsletter which is available to subscriber Friends. Please visit the FOH website: www.hadhramaut.co.uk

Sultana al-Quʿaiti MBE *is a founding trustee and treasurer of the Friends of Hadhramaut.*

A NEW UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE SITE IN YEMEN

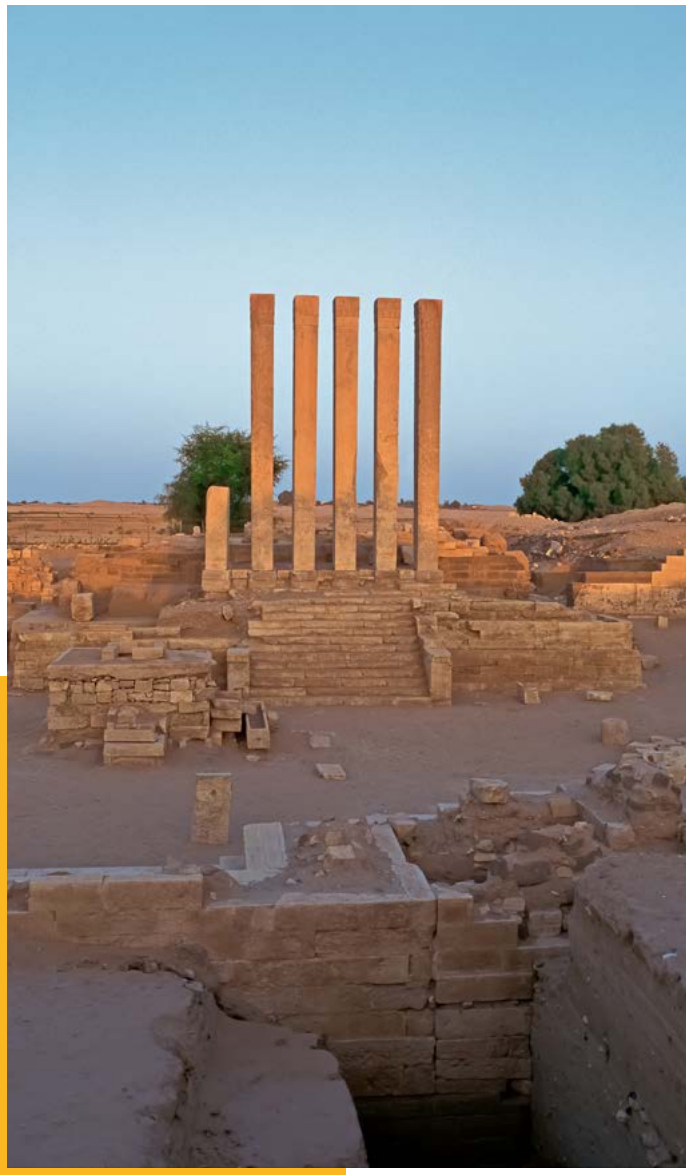
Landmarks of the Ancient Kingdom of Saba, Marib was inscribed by UNESCO as Yemen's fifth World Heritage Site. The site was immediately added to UNESCO's *List of World Heritage* in Danger, joining Yemen's three other mainland World Heritage Sites: *Historic Town of Zabid*, *Old City of Sana'a* and *Old Walled City of Shibam*. The Socotra Archipelago is a natural World Heritage Site.



Ancient dam of Marib in 2021. Author: Ebrahim Abdallah (© Nomination Team of the Landmarks of the Ancient Kingdom of Saba in Marib Governorate)



Zabid, interior of Great Mosque (© 1986 Jane Taylor)



Marib, Ash Bilqis Temple (© 1995 Jane Taylor)



Old City of Sana'a, Author: Maria Gropa (© UNESCO)

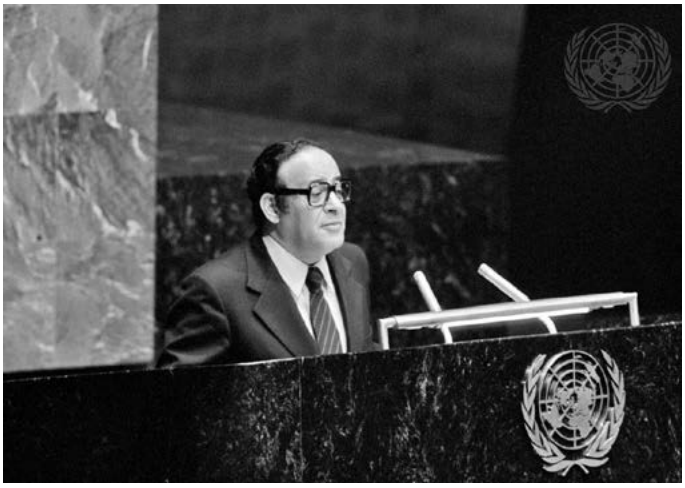


Historic Town of Zabid. Author Veronique Dauge (© UNESCO)



Soqotra, Dragon's Blood Trees (Draecena Cinnabari) at Momi (© 1995 Jane Taylor)

Mohsin Alaini
(1932–2021)



Mohsin Alaini addressing UN General Assembly in 1980 (UN photo)

Mohsin Ahmad Alaini was born in 1932 in al-Hamami village near Sanaʿa. Orphaned at the age of seven, he was taken in by the Bureau of Orphans and educated at its elementary school and thereafter at newly-opened government schools. He was sent abroad in 1947 to study, first in Lebanon and then in Egypt, as one of the Famous Forty. In 1955, Imam Ahmad sent him abroad to study again, this time in Paris. These early experiences inspired his first book, *Battles and Conspiracies Against the Cause of Yemen*. Published in Damascus in 1957, he severely criticised Yemen's social and political stagnation. He wrote "We are in the 20th century and our people don't know anything about paved roads, ports, machines, factories, workers, businessmen and projects." When he attended the commemoration of Imam Ahmad's vanquishing of the 1948 coup which killed his father, Imam Yahya, a well-known orator called Ali Aqabat (whose name in Arabic literally means 'obstacles') criticised "those who wear trousers and eat with spoons and forks." In response, Alaini took the podium and said: "Yemen is backward because of such obstacles to the road to progress which the Imam wants to undertake." This was typical of Alaini's determination to do what he could to modernise Yemen and overcome those who were opposed to change.

Early activism

Alaini's political activism impaired his studies at the Sorbonne. Losing his scholarship, he returned to Cairo to study law. After graduating, he chose to work in Aden rather than in Sanaʿa or Taʿizz, the seat of government in the time of Imam Ahmad (r. 1948-62 AD). He taught at the Islamic Scientific Institute, the only educational institution in Aden to admit North Yemenis during the era of British colonisation. His intelligence and activism led him to become the Secretary General of the Adeni Teachers Union and an elected member of the Executive Council of the Pan-Arab Labour Union, but also led to his expulsion by the British governor. He returned to Cairo where he was active with the Free Yemeni Movement, joining the Baʿth Party in 1958.

Marriage

In 1961 he married Aziza Abdullah Abu Luhum in traditional fashion: she travelled from Sanaʿa to marry a man she had never seen. Aziza was the sister of Shaykh Sinan Abu Luhum, one of Imam Ahmad's important tribal opponents and a principal shaykh of the Bakil tribal confederation. Her basic education in Sanaʿa was not to the satisfaction of an ambitious husband. He told me that he realised that it was not possible at her age either to join a school in Cairo or, as a shaykha, to have a private tutor. He employed an Egyptian lady as a domestic helper, but her real duty was to teach the bride. Aziza became a novelist, whose books have been translated into many languages.

The foundation of the republic

When the 26 September 1962 revolution in Sanaʿa took place, Alaini was in Baghdad with a mission from the Pan-Arab Labour Union. He was unaware of what had happened until the evening, when he was summoned by the Iraqi President Abd al-Karim Qasim who informed him of the end of the imamate, the declaration of the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR), and Alaini's nomination as Yemen's foreign minister.

Flying to Cairo (where he met Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser) and then Sanaʿa, he was shocked by the chaotic situation and the revolutionary leaders' lack of a vision for the future governance of Yemen. One of his first foreign missions was to attend the General Assembly of the United Nations (UN). On his way to New York, he again met President Nasser and briefed him on the chaos in Sanaʿa. Nasser gave him $10,000 to spend on public

relations at the UN to facilitate Yemen's admission to membership. That was achieved in December after the recognition of the YAR by the United States (US) despite the vehement opposition of Saudi Arabia and the United Kingdom. Alaini fell victim to the chaos in Yemen and lost his position as foreign minister in November 1962 but was appointed the republic's first ambassador to the US the following February.

Throughout his diplomatic career he felt free to express his own views even if they were not in harmony with government policy. For example, he was not in favour of a military solution to the civil war of the 1960s but refrained from publicly championing the cause of peace and reconciliation. On the sensitive issue of the relationship between Yemen and Egypt, he backed the camp which wanted to restrict the latter's role to providing military assistance only.

Despite his concern about aspects of Egypt's policy in Yemen, until his dying day he acknowledged that without Cairo's tremendous aid the republic would have been defeated. I noticed he kept a portrait of President Nasser on his desk while he was ambassador to the UN in 1980.

Alaini as prime minister

When Ahmad Muhammad Numan formed a new government in 1966, Alaini was appointed foreign minister, but Egypt withheld its "vote of confidence" in the new cabinet because it included Baʿthists. Numan and Alaini had an exasperating discussion with President Nasser trying to convince him that there were no Baʿthists ministers in the government, to no avail. Nasser candidly remarked "the one who is accused of Baʿthism is here and he can't defend himself." He was referring to Alaini. A famous phrase uttered at that meeting is attributed to Nasser: "O Numan, you cannot convince me either in prose or in poetry." Alaini, who had resigned from the Baʿth Party in 1962, left for Syria while the vetoed Numan and some of his ministers were imprisoned in Cairo from June 1966 until August 1967.

On 5 November 1967, President Abdullah al-Sallal (the YAR's first) was overthrown in a bloodless coup. Alaini was appointed prime minister for the first time but was only in the post for two weeks, as there was a need for a premier with military experience to lead the defence of Sanaʿa, then under siege by Royalist forces that threatened the republic's very existence.

Alaini was appointed prime minister once again in 1970, at a time when the sparsely resourced government had to tackle long awaited economic and political reforms and establish for the first time in Yemeni history a state of law and order. His dedication could not be faulted – he even participated in cleaning a street in Sanaʿa – but his reforms were blocked by the opposition of conservative politicians led by the Muslim Brotherhood. His historic initiative to control the chewing of *qat* and to prohibit its cultivation on waqf and state lands came to naught, due to the resistance of Shaykh Abdullah al-Ahmar (who later regretted his stance).

His premiership did make significant achievements, including the reconciliation between the republicans and the royalists in Jeddah in March 1970, the Saudi recognition of the republic in July 1970, and the resumption of diplomatic relations between Yemen and the US. However, the YAR became a de-facto Saudi satellite. Yemen's weakness, fragility, and lack of resources enabled Riyadh to interfere in Yemeni affairs by releasing or withholding financial aid to the government and by the activities of the Special Committee for Yemen which openly assisted the conservative forces who gradually consolidated their hegemony over the republic.

War and unity between north and south

Alaini was prime minister in September 1972 when the YAR and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) fought a brief border war that was ended by the diplomatic intervention of the Arab League despite Saudi objections. At peace talks in Cairo, Alaini and his opposite number in the PDRY, Ali Nasser Muhammad, were the formal negotiators, but the true homework was done at the hotel where both delegations were staying, allowing Abd al-Fattah Ismail, the Secretary General of the National Liberation Front (NLF), then one of the most influential southern politicians, to take part. The three leaders agreed that neither part of Yemen would ever be stable as long as they remained divided. However, unification was opposed both by the tribal and conservative elites in the YAR and by the many southerners who had fled to the north after independence. Alaini never publicly advocated the formation of political parties but believed that it was almost impossible to reach unification between the two Yemens without a common ideology and a political organisation – whatever its name might be: "there is no Muhammad in Sanaʿa and there is no Marx in Aden." The Cairo agreement provided for a summit between the two Yemeni presidents in Tripoli in November 1972. They endorsed the agreement, but it spelled the end of Alaini's government. He was once again appointed ambassador, prompting the comment by Abd al-Rahman al-Iryani, the Head of the Presidential Council 1967-74, that Alaini was fond of two things: being prime minister and living abroad.

In June 1974, al-Iryani's regime was overthrown

by a coalition of shaykhs and military officers under the leadership of Colonel Ibrahim al-Hamdi. Shaykh Sinan Abu Luhum (Alaini's brother-in-law) and three military officers from the Abu Luhum family were pillars of that coup. It was said that their final goal was to replace al-Hamdi with Alaini with the help of Iraq. Alaini became prime minister in what was called the "Corrective Movement of 13 June". However, his honeymoon with al-Hamdi was short lived: in January 1975, Alaini was forced to resign.

Baghdad and Saddam Hussein

Alaini accepted an invitation to reside in Baghdad on the condition (which he himself stipulated) that he was not to be involved in politics. Despite that – as he told me privately – President Saddam Husain invited him to attend a meeting of the leadership of the Yemeni Baʿth Party which discussed the launching of a coup against President Ali Abdullah Salih who had come to power in 1978. The Yemeni Baʿth leadership assured the participants that conditions in Yemen favoured a successful coup. Alaini, when asked by Saddam to express his opinion, spoke of the grave risks involved and its likely negative impact on Iraq politically and economically, citing Egypt's bitter experiences in Yemen in the 1960s. Saudi Arabia would not accept such interference in its backyard and would fiercely defend its own interests and those of its tribal allies. Saddam postponed a decision pending further deliberations. A few days later he phoned Alaini to inform him that the comrades were now holidaying in London!

Diplomacy

Following the 1979 unity agreement between the two Yemens, Salih appointed Alaini ambassador to Germany and later to the US, a post he held for the next 13 years. In 1989, Alaini personally fought a fierce battle against the heavy pressure on Yemen to allow Yemeni Jews to migrate to Israel. I met him during a visit to the US and heard his complaint about the lack of cooperation from Sanaʿa on this issue. He asked me to inform officials at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs about his repeated requests and the urgent need to appoint qualified diplomats and allocate resources to assist him in confronting the lobbying. I discussed the issue with the undersecretary but to my dismay he ignored Alaini's demands. He briefed me that the Ministry of Information had produced a film about the life of the Yemeni Jews and had sent it to Amman where it was to be broadcast on Jordanian television. He explained that the production of the film was predicated on the assumption that when it would be watched in Israel, Yemeni Jews would be envied for their prosperous life. However, according to the undersecretary the film backfired. The Jordanians were shocked by the miserable life of the Yemeni Jews which was, in fact, no different from the life of most Yemenis living under the Salih regime. The Jordanians advised that it was not in Yemen's interest to show such a film in Jordan.

Final years

Alaini ended his diplomatic career in 1997 and spent most of his last years in Egypt. When the Saudis launched Operation Decisive Storm on 26 March 2015, he called for an end to the war and for national reconciliation, stressing the need for the formation of a presidential council composed of all those who were engaged in the conflict, without exception.

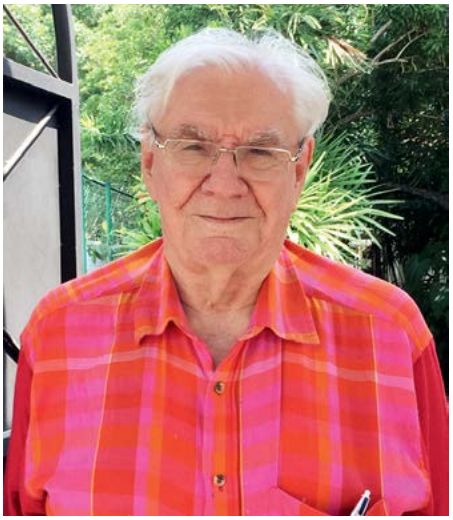
Alaini among others tried his best in a difficult environment to modernise Yemen, despite all the odds, Alaini never gave up, continuing the struggle even in his autobiography.

Alaini died on 25 August 2021 in Cairo of COVID and was buried in his birthplace of al-Hamami. He is survived by his wife, two daughters and two sons.

ALI MUHSEN HAMID

Ali Muhsen Hamid *is a former Yemeni diplomat and former head of the Arab League Bureau in London.*

Ronald B. Lewcock (1924–2022)



Ron Lewcock

In the 1970s students interested in pursuing research in what was then North Yemen had two favoured reference points: architect Ron Lewcock and Arabist Rex Smith – both had been heavily involved in the historical and anthropological study of Sanaʿa culminating in the 1976 World of Islam Festival staged in London and the handsome volume on Sanaʿa in 1983. Both were extremely generous with their knowledge and advice. Who can ever forget the ethnographic displays and a section of the *suq* in the Museum of Mankind, then in Burlington House? My obsession with Yemen stemmed from a first visit in 1973, before commencing my archaeological studies. Ron held a professorship at Cambridge at the time and I recall visiting him at Clare College when in Cambridge to investigate Gertrude Caton-Thompson's Hurayda finds, then housed in the Archaeology Faculty. He kindly gave me lunch and some invaluable advice as to how to navigate the vagaries of Yemen's Antiquities Department. He had the easy knack of treating one as an equal rather than acting like the archetypal remote professor.

By 1978, after several funded fieldwork research visits, I found myself employed by the Overseas Development Assistance (ODA), now part of the FCDO, at the request of the Yemeni authorities, and firmly installed in the National Museum principally to advise on that and archaeological sites, but increasingly on the rapidly deteriorating Old City of Sanaʿa. This coincided with the 1978 UNESCO vote declaring Sanaʿa to be one of the most deserving Islamic cities for an international campaign for its protection and preservation. But it took two years for Ron to be commissioned by UNESCO to prepare the first report on the conservation of the Old City. Over the next two years he made frequent visits to work on this and I accompanied him around all the ministries involved. His convivial presence always put even the trickiest officials at ease, and it was evident he commanded respect through his thorough knowledge of their traditions and the organisation within the Old City. In 1983 the magnificent magnum opus on Sanaʿa, jointly edited by the late Professor Serjeant and Ron, was published and revealed the depth of his knowledge and thorough understanding of Yemeni traditions.

The December 1982 earthquake did not have any disastrous effects on Sanaʿa's ancient structures, but it did put a hold on potential government funding. It was impossible to prioritise conserving traditional buildings over villages that had been severely damaged in the Dhamar area. All major conservation plans were put on hold for the time being. While Ron had been working on his Sanaʿa report in Cambridge, I had been assigned to set up a low budget conservation project for the Madrasa al-Ashrafiya, Taʿizz, a 14th century structure in the Old City that had been badly 'conserved' by the Ministry of Awqaf. By then I was living in Taʿizz and yet again needed Ron's advice. He suggested to the Yemeni authorities that with help of my Yemeni colleague, Ali Gumeiri, we should supervise this work, and he would serve as consultant architect by Fax – I was to send him regular reports. Ron stipulated that Step 1 was to establish whether the building was structurally sound; Step 2 was to clean the whole area, principally by unblocking the simple yet sophisticated drainage system that had kept it stable for centuries; and Step 3 repair the roof using traditional methods, definitely not cement! He outlined a work plan as to how to keep costs to the minimum – glass slides were obtained from the British Veterinary Project and mounted over cracks with gypsum to check for any movement; a scaffolding frame on wheels was acquired from some British engineers to facilitate access to the domes; and the Yemeni authorities provided a few workmen to as-

sist in this work. Ron proved to be the most attentive consultant and answered all questions by return.

Sanaʿa hosted a conference organised by the Aga Khan Award for Architecture in the May of 1983 which brought the great and the good in both contemporary and conservation architecture to the city. It was evident that Ron was highly respected by his peers, the Yemeni authorities and His Highness the Aga Khan. Fortunately, Taʿizz was also on the itinerary, so we had a chance to discuss our work on site. Since then, the Ashrafiya has been fully restored by the same Italian team from the Istituto Veneto that has subsequently restored the Great Mosque of Sanaʿa, both financed through the Yemen Fund for Social Development. I last saw Ron in 2017 at the launch of Trevor Marchand's *Architectural History of Yemen* which includes two articles by him. He had already been in touch by email enquiring about the painted wooden material from Samarra in museum collections that I had been working on. I could see that he still had an active enquiring and encyclopaedic mind which was a joy to see. I will always be grateful to him for guiding so many of us through the intricate web and layers of history in Yemen's magnificent buildings. In one of his chapters on the architectural decoration of the Great Mosque in the 2022 publication *The Great Mosque of Ṣanʿā': Conservation and Intervention* edited by Renzo Ravagnan and Maurizio Merlo, he concludes:

"The proposals for the environs of the mosque include the provision for a museum in which the many fragments that have been found hidden may be displayed – together with the archaeological finds. Part of the preparation of the maintenance plans for the mosque after the completion of the program of conservation is ensuring that every measure may be taken to ensure the permanent protection and preservation of the mosque's decoration."

This sums up his approach to these venerable buildings and Yemen is fortunate in having had Ron's expertise over a prolonged period. It was a privilege to have worked with him.

ROSALIND WADE HADDON

For a fuller account of RBL'S professional life see:



***Rosalind Wade Haddon**, PhD, is currently chair of the Trustees of the British Institute for the study of Iraq and between 1977-1983 was an advisor to the Yemeni General Organisation of Antiquities and Manuscripts.*

Stephen Day CMG (1938–2023)



Stephen Day with his Fadhili bodyguards c. 1965

Stephen Day CMG, who died on 14 March 2023, was initially a Colonial Office Overseas Civil Servant in South Arabia, predominantly an Advisor to the Fadhili Sultans. Following the Colonial Office's amalgamation with the Foreign Office, he had a distinguished career in HM Diplomatic Service – mostly in the Middle East – with appointments as ambassador in Doha, and Tunis as well as Head of the Middle East Department at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO).

Stephen Peter Day was born on 19 January 1938 in Ilford, Essex to Frank William and Mary Elizabeth (Franklin) Day. After Cambridge University, Stephen joined the Colonial Office, and was sent to the Government of Aden in 1961. There, he was posted as Assistant Advisor at Jaʿar, then Political Advisor to the Fadhili Sultanate at Zinjibar.

One of the last to have seen colonial service, like many of his generation Stephen was charged with extraordinary responsibility and independent action – but few resources – when barely out of his teens. This required resourcefulness and integrity, as well as physical and mental robustness, such as when there had been a murder within the Dawla (ruling family), for which the Colonial Government required the perpetrator to be executed. Aged 23, it was Stephen's job to see that it was done, navigating his way around tribal politics and blood feuds to do so.

Long before Islamic State was trafficking antiquities, the ruins of South Arabia were being pilfered for cash. Being in charge of Customs for the Sultanate, Stephen confiscated more than a few of these artefacts, which he had displayed in a museum first in Zinjibar, then – when chaos loomed – packed them up and sent them to Brian Doe, Director of the Department of Antiquities in Aden. Doe took them back to the UK, and – after a formal intervention by Stephen – presented most of them to the British Museum. As well as the ancient history of South Arabia, Stephen was also keen that as many records of the British period in Aden should be preserved, "warts and all". Thus, while many of his peers were burning records or scuttling them at sea, Stephen was boxing them up and sending them back to the UK for archiving.

As someone who was so deeply immersed in Protectorate politics and culture, he had a unique take on events: he attributed the 1965 National Liberation Front's Aden Airport grenade attack on the Governor of Aden to a feud over land: part of the airport being built on Fadhili ground. Towards the end of British rule, life upcountry became more dangerous, so the Fadhili Sultan provided him with a protective security detail, including Nasser Mansur Hadi al-Marmi– the brother of the now ex-President of Yemen – as a bodyguard, to whom they owed their lives. When the Days left Aden, Nasser Mansur provided Stephen with a reference, which Stephen hung framed over his desk.

Stephen continued as an informal (unpaid!) Advisor to the Fadhili Sultans while they were in exile, mostly in Saudi Arabia.

After the independence of Aden, Stephen joined the FCO on 10 October 1968. He became First Secretary at the British High Commission in Singapore (1970-1971) followed by a similar position at the British Embassy in Beirut (1977-1979.) After a tour as HM Consul-General in Edmonton, Canada (1979-1981), Stephen was appointed HM Ambassador to Qatar on 17th September 1981, when it was not the fabulously wealthy state that it is now.

After leaving Doha in 1984, Stephen was Head of the Middle East Department before being attached to the Household of the Prince and Princess of Wales (1986-1987), as emissary of His Royal Highness The Prince of Wales. During that time, Stephen accompanied them on their tour of the Gulf. He was

also appointed guardian to Shaykh Tamim al-Thani, now Emir of Qatar, while he was at school in the UK.

Stephen's final tour in the FCO was as HM Ambassador at Tunis (1987-1993). He had been offered the choice of Rabat or Tunis, and chose the latter for its residence with a wonderful garden, which his dog could enjoy. This was at a time when President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali had just taken over from Habib Bourguiba, and was regarded as a breath of fresh air in the country. Stephen was much involved in returning to prominence the immense role of the UK in Tunis over several centuries, including writing a book on the subject, *At Home in Carthage, The British in Tunisia*, in aid of St George's Church, Tunis; and placing a "blue plaque" on the former British Legation at Bab al-Bahr – the mouth of the medina. In great measure due to these sterling efforts, Stephen was appointed CMG in the 1989 New Year's Honours.

At that time, the exiled Palestine Liberation Organisation was based in Tunis and Stephen was also responsible for informal contact with the organisation and its Chair Yasser Arafat. William Waldegrave had the first meeting between its chairman, Yasser Arafat, and a UK minister in 1988.

Stephen left Tunis and the FCO to enjoy family life and pursue his hobbies of walking and reading. Round the edge of those, he had a busy portfolio career as a consultant – Claremont Associates, with a Fadhili *janbiyya* as its logo – engaged mainly with Arabia. He was Advisor to the Emir of Qatar, Advisor to British Gas Tunisia, and President of the Tunisian-British Chamber of Commerce. In 2001, he was awarded Tunisia's highest honour open to a foreign national, for his contribution to UK-Tunisian trade ties.

Stephen was caught up in a minor controversy in 2011, when a private letter he had written to William Hague, the Foreign Secretary, about Prince Andrew's role as "Trade Ambassador" was leaked. With his hallmark courteous, discreet but honest advice, Stephen had noted the limitations of royal trade ambassadors, and suggested that an "entirely new role should be found for [Prince Andrew] as soon as possible." In neo-tabloid terms, the Daily Telegraph cast this as Stephen "call[ing] for Prince Andrew to be sacked as trade envoy."

In addition to his more commercial roles, Stephen devoted great time and effort to civil society, being Chair of the British Yemeni Society (1998–1999), and Director of CAABU (1994-1995) taking over from Bernard Mills. Together with Dr. Noel Brehony, Stephen helped raise funds for and set up the London Middle East Institute at SOAS, hoping it would be the focus for all SOAS outreach on the Middle East. He was chair of the MBI Al Jaber Foundation at SOAS 2002-6 which offered scholarships and support for academic and educational activities concerned with the Middle East. He was a non-executive Director of the Qatar Foundation UK (2013 – 2017). He would also speak about his experience, both of diplomacy in general but in particular of his time in Aden.

Stephen met Angela Waudby in Aden, where she was a Civil Servant. They were married on 26th February 1965 in Christ Church, Aden; among the guests at their wedding was Lionel Folkard, author of The Sky and the Desert. Stephen and Angela had three children together: Belinda, Philippa and Richard.

Stephen came of age during the (mostly managed) decline of the British Empire, with the additional challenge of working alongside people who had served through the Second World War. He spent much of the rest of his career trying to re-engage the UK with the Middle East on a different basis. A charming and professional diplomat with a core of



Angela Day (seated 4th from right) at target practise; Nasser Mansur Hadi in pink ghutrah (2nd left) c. 1966

integrity too often lacking in modern times, a colleague remembered "Stephen's great strength [being] his ability to come up with brilliant solutions for apparently intractable problems." Stephen Day CMG surely filled "the unforgiving minute with sixty seconds worth of distance run."

JAMES SPENCER

James Spencer *is a member of the BYS committee.*

Shaykh Abd al-Majid al-Zindani (1942–2024)



Abd al-Majid al-Zindani (Associated Press / Alamy Stock Photo)

On 22 April 2024, Shaykh Abd al-Majid al-Zindani passed away in Istanbul at the age of 82, following an extended period of poor health.

Born in the central province of Ibb in 1942 to a family with roots in Sanaʿa province's Arhab tribe, al-Zindani studied pharmacy and Islamic law in Cairo, where he came into contact with key Cairo-based Yemenis like revolutionary Mohamed Mahmoud al-Zubairy and Muslim Brotherhood founding father Abdo Mohamed al-Mikhlafi. Following his return to Yemen, he served in a series of positions – largely in the field of education – in the early days of the Yemeni republic. For much of the 1970s and 1980s, he assumed a variety of roles: he taught Islamic studies in schools and universities in Saudi Arabia; founded the Commission on Scientific Signs in the Quran and Sunnah, a body that seeks to demonstrate that the Qur'an prophesied modern scientific discoveries (a development that brought him attention throughout the Muslim world); and, notoriously, served as a key node in the recruitment of Arab fighters to the battle against the communists in Afghanistan.

It is this dichotomy that would characterise the bulk of al-Zindani's career: like many Yemeni Islamist figures at the time – but arguably more than any other – al-Zindani had one foot in mainstream politics and one in the world of *jihad*. A founding figure in the al-Islah party and, despite his preaching against the country's new constitution, its representative in Yemen's post-unification Presidential Council, he boasted close ties with the most powerful figures in the country at the time, including Parliament Speaker and all-powerful tribal leader Abdullah al-Ahmar, and then-President Ali Abdullah Salih. Even as his ties to and alleged fundraising for Osama bin Laden saw him named a "Specially Designated Global Terrorist" by the US Treasury Department in 2004, his relationships with key Yemeni figures allowed him to consolidate his influence over Yemen's educational system and social discourse, largely through his position in al-Islah and leadership of Sanaʿa's Iman university, a Sunni religious school often accused of being an extremist incubator.

A hardline, charismatic and outspoken figure with a henna-dyed beard red enough to stop traffic, al-Zindani seemed to effortlessly attract attention, whether through his lawsuits against publishers of the notorious Jyllands-Posten cartoons in 2005 or his alleged discovery of an herbal cure for AIDS. All the while, he remained deeply controversial in Yemen itself. Mocked by most secularists and hated by many Southerners for his alleged role in inciting jihadi reprisals in Aden during Yemen's 1994 civil war, he was increasingly quietly resented even by some in the al-Islah party, who came to see him as an anchor holding back their efforts to modernise and moderate the party's image, if not its policies – particularly in the wake of his declaration of support to Yemen's Arab Spring-inspired uprising in 2011.

Often viewed as a potential harbinger of a radical Islamist takeover of Yemen, al-Zindani was instead forced into exile by one. Targeting adversaries, particularly those tied to al-Islah, following their takeover of Sanaʿa in September, Zaydi Shiʿa Huthis and their then-ally, former-President Salih quickly moved to close Iman University, forcing al-Zindani to flee Sanaʿa and escape to Saudi Arabia, before moving to Istanbul to join members of his family a few years later.

While the ageing cleric was comparatively quiet in his final years, his funeral saw scores of mourners, largely pulled by Istanbul's disproportionately al-Islah-sympathetic Yemeni community, taking to the streets. The question, of course, remains as to the cleric's broader legacy, and whether the ascendance of the Huthis will reduce a man who played a key role in shifting the country's religious and educational landscape into a mere footnote in the country's recent history.

ADAM BARON

Adam Baron *is a writer and political analyst focusing on the Arab World with an emphasis on Yemen and the Gulf.*

Alan D'Arcy (1930–2024)



Alan next to Muhammad bin Awadh Al-Awlaqi



Alan on extreme right on a BYS field trip he led to Yemen in 2002 (courtesy of John Mason)

Alan D'Arcy's link with Yemen stemmed from 1953-56 when, as an RAF Wing Commander, he served with the Aden Protectorate Levies. Friendship with Godfrey Meynell and Bill Heber-Percy in Aden led Alan to join the Western Aden Protectorate service, becoming a political officer in Nisab, Upper Awlaqi Sultanate from 1963 to 1967. His ensuing friendship with the Awlaqi family led to Alan adopting Muhammad bin Awadh al-Wazir al-Awlaqi, grandson of the former Sultan, as his ward for years to come.

Muhammad described his memories of Alan in picturesque terms. Alan, he said, brought him and his father pictures of his grandfathers from when he worked in Nisab in the 1960's:

"People whose names we knew but whose faces we had never seen. Alan was the bridge from a lost generation to their children and grandchildren. Without him we would have lost so much, not just the lives of our grandfathers but also the traditions, and the sport they played. His pictures recreated their daily lives and is something that oral history cannot replace. These memories were lost to us because when the National Liberation Front took over South Yemen in 1967, they tried to cancel our name and our history."

Alan generously donated hundreds of historical books about Yemen, many of them very rare. These were presented to the state in the Bayt al-Thaqafah in Sanaʿa in 2007. At that time the library had around 2,500 volumes in English and non-Arabic languages. Alan's donation amounted to 1,400 volumes. In recognition of his donation, the then president, Ali Abdallah Salih, awarded him a state medal.

In May 2006 Alan and Julian Lush went to Sanaʿa to attend the ceremonial opening of the Sands of Time exhibition of early photographs of Bayhan taken by Nigel Groom in 1948-50 which were destined to be displayed in Bayhan. This opportunity enabled Alan to meet up again with his ward and Shaikh Saleh Farid al-Awlaqi (see BYS Journal 14 of 2006).

Alan had made a considerable, positive mark with the previous hierarchy of the Awlaqi Sultanate and tried to keep up these contacts on the tours he ran to Yemen. He encouraged Muhammad bin Awadh to go to the UK to learn English and later he arranged for him to do the International Baccalaureate programme in Canada. Perhaps the last word should go to Muhammad who said "I owe him so much. My academic success was because of him. He was my grandfather. He always pushed me to try and never to stop. He would always tell me, "If we don't try, we will never know." This is my strongest memory of him."

He was one of the Society's more active early members in that he devoted time to organising several BYS tours to Yemen in the late 1990s. He was BYS Treasurer from 1998 to 2003. In recent years he spoke to many civil servants before they were posted to Sanaʿa and in 2012 made many robust contributions to a Foreign Office roundtable event on Yemen.

Alan D'Arcy died in a care home in Torquay, his home town, on 15 December 2022.

JULIAN LUSH AND MARTIN JERRETT

Martin Jerrett *and* ***Julian Lush*** *are members of the BYS Committee.*

Abdulaziz al-Maqaleh: The Great Yemeni River (1937–2022)



Abdulaziz al-Maqaleh (courtesy of Hamdan Dammaj)

Writing about Abdulaziz al-Maqaleh is an incredible challenge as he was, without a doubt, an extraordinary figure in the history of modern Yemen and, arguably, the nation's entire historical tapestry. In various articles, I have made bold assertions about his enduring legacy, suggesting that "we stand before a Yemeni figure whose legacy transcends centuries, and that even after hundreds or perhaps a thousand of years, his name will remain at the forefront of the greatest figures in Yemen's rich history." I have also highlighted that there is not a single well-known poet or writer in contemporary Yemen who has not, at some point, been supported, written about, or encouraged by al-Maqaleh in some manner.

Such assertions might typically invite criticism, yet in al-Maqaleh's case have never been met with reproach. This speaks volumes about his stature not only as a great poet, scholar, and intellectual but also as a revolutionary and an exemplary figure of enlightenment in modern Yemen. For over fifty years, he has served as a spiritual father to at least three generations of Yemeni creatives, significantly shaping the cultural scene as we know it today.

Mohammed Hussein Haitham, a prominent contemporary Yemeni poet (1958-2007), once described him by saying: "Yemen may not have a great river like the Nile, but it certainly has al-Maqaleh. He is our river."

Born in 1937 in the village of al-Maqaleh (Ibb Governorate), Abdulaziz al-Maqaleh grew up in poverty and amidst disease, common to many Yemeni children of his era. His survival and subsequent intellectual journey were shaped early by adversity. His father, Shaykh Saleh al-Maqaleh, an early opponent of the Imam, was imprisoned rather than executed, a fate not uncommon to revolutionaries of the time. It was during visits to his father in prison that al-Maqaleh encountered the transformative power of poetry and knowledge, learning from scholars and poets who shared the same cells.

He continued his education in Sanaʿa, where he began writing poetry at the age of fourteen. Within a few years, he had become a recognised figure in literary and poetic circles, a teacher of Arabic and English (which he had learned independently), and aligned himself with revolutionary movements. His voice was introduced to the Yemeni people when he read aloud the declaration of the 1962 revolution on Radio Sanaʿa, marking the overthrow of the Imamate regime and the establishment of the republic. For sixty years, his writings and his voice were a staple on the radio, in books, newspapers, magazines, within educational and academic institutions, and through his television and social media cultural programs that continued until his death on 28 November 2022.

Al-Maqaleh became synonymous with Yemeni culture, known for bridging Yemen to the wider world and vice versa. After obtaining his PhD in Arabic literature from Cairo's Ain Shams University in 1978, he chose to stay in Sanaʿa (never leaving it even for a day) and contribute to the cultural and intellectual life of Yemen. His name became as familiar in the Arab world as in Yemen. An anecdote from a prominent Yemeni politician, then a diplomat in Algeria during the early 1980s, illustrates this: A taxi driver in Oran once asked him where he was from. Upon hearing "Yemen," the driver warmly responded, "From the land of al-Maqaleh!"

Among his poetic works is a beloved poem that captures his deep connection to Yemen:

In my tongue lies Yemen,
In my conscience lies Yemen,
Under my skin Yemen lives,
Behind my eyelids Yemen sleeps and awakens,
I can no longer tell the difference between us...
My country, which one of us is Yemen?!

Al-Maqaleh's contributions to modernising Arabic poetry establish him as a peer among such luminaries as Mahmoud Darwish, Nizar Qabbani, Badr Shakir al-Sayyab, and Adonis. He authored over forty books on literary criticism and composed thousands of articles and research papers that have significantly influenced literary and intellectual thought both within and beyond the Arab world. Indeed, no one in Yemen has written more than he has – a fact I state unequivocally and without hesitation.

Yet perhaps his most distinguishing role was his unwavering support for Yemeni creatives, amplifying their voices and inviting global talents to contribute to Yemen's educational and cultural sectors. This was especially evident during his roles as President of Sanaʿa University, Chair of the Yemeni Centre for Studies and Research (YCSR), President of the Yemeni Scientific Linguistic Council, and other leading intellectual positions.

Al-Maqaleh was a fixture in my life from childhood, a friend of my father's, and a frequent visitor to our home. His encouragement and support shaped my own literary endeavours. After completing my PhD at the University of Reading in 2005, I was fortunate enough to work closely with him for over a decade. Writing about al-Maqaleh, his unique personality, extensive history, numerous achievements, and profound impact on Yemeni consciousness indeed requires volumes.

To all who knew him or knew of him, Abdulaziz al-Maqaleh was "the father of Yemeni contemporary culture," much as Geoffrey Chaucer is to English literature or Charles Babbage to computing. This obituary is but a humble tribute to his monumental legacy.

DR. HAMDAN DAMMAG

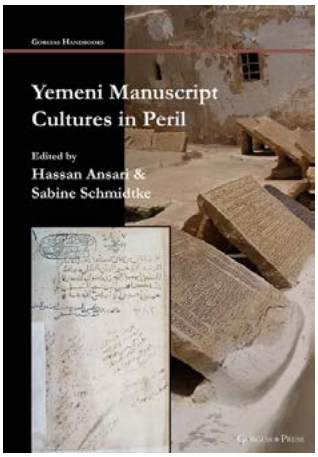


AbdulAziz al-Maqaleh with Hamdan Dammaj
(courtesy of Hamdan Dammaj)

***Dr. Hamdan Dammag**, a BYS member, is a researcher, prize-winning novelist, poet, and peace advocate with several publications. He is currently the Vice Chair of the Liverpool Arab Arts Festival.*

Yemeni Manuscript Cultures in Peril

Hassan Ansari and Sabine Schmidtke (eds.)



Gorgias Press
Piscataway NJ, 2022
pp. 535
£48 .00
ISBN 978 1 4632 4202 2

This finely produced and solidly bound book by two Princeton scholars is monumental in quality and quantity (253 colour photographs!). It brings together almost everybody with a name in the field of Yemeni manuscript (MSS) studies. Its subject: Zaydi religious and juridical literature in manuscript form and the peregrinations of many MSS from Yemen to libraries in Europe, Istanbul, and India. I will give an overview of the book's contents and briefly mention Yemeni MSS resources in two other fields: economic history and the genesis of the Qur'an.

The extensive introduction by the two editors is a quasi-monograph on book collecting and libraries in Yemen (119 pages, including 85 photos). While Zaydi Imams needed to be descendants of the Prophet via Caliph Ali and Mohammed's daughter Fatima, rulership was not inherited from father to son but subject to specific prerequisites: a candidate was required to be in excellent physical condition, to be of sound mind, and to have proved his religious knowledge and his capacity for legal and doctrinal reasoning. Many Imams, therefore, authored treatises in these fields and collected books. These libraries were not institutionalised: at the death of an Imam – if not before – they were dispersed.

It was only in 1925 that Imam Yahya established the *al-Khizana al-Mutawakkiliyya* (today *Maktabat al-Awqaf*, Library of Endowments), housed in the Great Mosque. Ansari/Schmidtke retrace the history of many of these books through ownership notes, colophons, etc., and provide an overview of Yemeni MSS in Cairo, Najaf, Istanbul, Hyderabad, Lucknow, Berlin, Leiden, Riyadh and others.

Two more substantial collections of Zaydi-Ismaili books are now housed at the Isma'ili centre in London (the Hamdani collection and the Zahid Ali collection). Neither, unfortunately, are accessible.

Gabriele vom Bruck speaks in vivid detail of the looting and dismemberment of libraries of certain prominent Yemeni families (al-Wazir, al-Iryani, Bayt Zayd). Brinkley Messick puts the establishment of the Imam's library in 1925 into its political and practical context (i.e., tools for the jurist, including the non-Zaydi *madhabs* in Yemen). Zaid bin Ali al-Wazir describes in detail the 800-year tradition of his family's library and its scattered remains.

Anne Regourd, the well-known specialist on Yemeni MSS, details the history of the various institutions dealing with antiquities and libraries established in the last few decades. She also notes how precious MSS have again and again disappeared from these treasures.

Daniel Martin Varisco gives a survey (the first in English) of *"Nur al-ma'arif,"* the unique medieval (691/693-1292/1294) trade, taxes, customs duties, productions, prices, etc. register of Rasulid Yemen. For a detailed analysis of this unique economic compendium, which, as far as I know, is without parallel in other medieval Arab societies, Eric Vallet's *L'Arabie marchande*, 2010, should be consulted. Unfortunately, the finely edited Arabic text (by Muhammad Jazim, see my review in BYSJ 14/2006) is still unavailable in translation. I have used its extensive descriptions of jewellery and metalworking in my article in the *Rodionov Festschrift*, 2016.

Then follows the definitive scholarly study (by the two editors) of Abdallah al-Ansi's (13th c.) writings on the doctrinal developments of Yemeni Zaydism, especially against its origins in the Caspian Zaydi state and his arguing against the Mutarrifiya and other currents. A beautiful MS of al-Bukhari, filled with owners and "borrowers" remarks, allows a glimpse into the process of the "Sunnisation of Zaydism," which culminated in the works of Muhammad al-Shawkani, in the 19th century.

Christoph Rauch, head of the Oriental Collection at the Staatsbibliothek Berlin, describes the history of their conspicuous Yemeni holdings (Eduard Glaser, Count Landberg). Highlights include the earliest copy of the *Kitab al-Azhar* (dated 806/1404), the foundational text of Zaydi doctrine, parts of al-Hamdani's *Iklil*, a recently discovered poem by Imam Yahya, and a Hebrew poem by Shalom Shabazi.

V. Sagaria Rossi writes about the Caprotti brothers, merchants in Yemen around 1900, who procured MSS for the Ambrosiana, the Vatican Library, and the Staatsbibliothek München. One of the Caprotti vol-

umes (now in Naples), a medical treatise, proved to be an autograph of the Rasulid Sultan al-Malik al-Afdal al-Abbas.

Scheper and Vrolijk describe the Yemeni MSS at Leiden. I liked their accent on the material aspects of the Leiden books: the bindings, the repairs, and the *fata* of the *libelli* through ownership remarks.

The last chapter, about Yemeni MSS in Saudi Arabia, is by Bernard Haykel, to whom we owe the definitive study on Muhammad al-Shawkani.

The Ansari/Schmidtke book is a comprehensive historical presentation of the history of the Zaydi MSS tradition. Its incredible quantity of photographs makes for a rare aesthetic pleasure and (almost) an immersion into the real thing. The documentation of the losses is saddening. Still, as many texts have ended up in libraries abroad (in Europe, India, and recently in Saudi Arabia), they are secure and available to scholars.

Scholars working in more general fields might find Yemeni MSS on economic history (such as *Nur al-ma'arif*) and the vast corpus of historical and scientific writing of the Rasulid period (including such things as the unique *Hexaglot*, an Arabic, Persian, Turkic, Greek, Armenian, and Mongolian dictionary) of broader interest. Unfortunately, editorial work in these fields is still in its beginning stages.

The special issue vol. 98 (2021) of DER ISLAM is the nearest thing to it. My highlight there is Varisco's paper on yet another recently edited tax ledger (for Sultan al-Malik al-Muayyad Dawud, d. 1321) that contains 17 maps of Rasulid Yemen (southern highlands, South Yemen, and Tihama).

The other field where I would wish to see a comprehensive study of the quality of the Ansari/Schmidtke book is the epic tale of the discovery of what is now acknowledged as the oldest MS of the Qur'an, the so-called codex Sanaʿa I, a *palimpsest* (= a sheet with an erased but still recognisable lower text). Its *scriptio inferior* dates to the mid-first c. AH, or even earlier. Pages of codex Sanaʿa I were among the Qur'anic MSS that surfaced in 1972, during restoration work in the Great Mosque where they had been stored in a secluded place, a *jenaza* in Yemeni parlance, similar to a Hebrew *genizah*. The enormous quantities of parchments found in 1972 were put in ca. 20 big sacks and shown by Qadi Ismail to every visiting scholar who inevitably exclaimed: "that something must be done." These pious wishes did, of course, not materialise into concrete action. When I was shown this treasure in its miserable state in 1976, I was determined to find a way to finance a preservation project. I submitted it to my superiors at the German Foreign Office. I followed it up after I was transferred to Aden and was no longer responsible for matters connected with Sanaʿa. I continued even after Aden, when I worked as a cultural attaché in Paris. My superiors were well-meaning. They recognised the importance of the parchments, but motivating a government to spend millions on a cultural project is not easy.

At last, my obstinacy succeeded. Getting rid of my nagging (Luke 11, 5-8) undoubtedly played a role. The photographs made by the German project are now accessible at the Staatsbibliothek Berlin.

Some of the parchments of the palimpsest disappeared and surfaced in London. When I pointed out to one of the famous auction houses that a folio corresponded in measurements and writing style to Sanaʿa I, I was met with harsh denial. On the other hand, this peregrination enabled detailed studies, including carbon 14 tests. The best discussion of codex Sanaʿa I is available online (*Islamic-awareness.org/quran/text/mss/soth.html*). In the early 2000s, an additional trove of 40 folios from this codex was identified, bringing the preserved total to 81 folios, ca. 41% of the text of the Holy Book.

Codex Sanaʿa I shows only very minor differences with the *textus receptus*. An initially partial commitment to writing can explain the different order of the *surahs*. Sanaʿa I proves that the Qur'an, as we have it, really originates from the time of Prophet Muhammad. I hope a critical edition of Yemen's most important manuscript will soon be available.

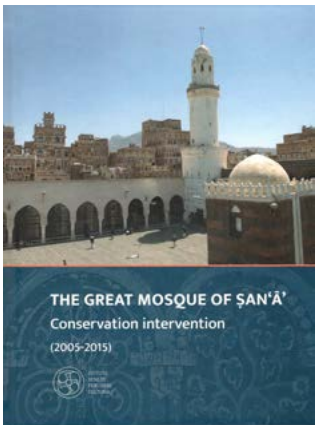
I do not wish to end without mentioning that pre-Islamic Yemen was already a land of writing, not only of monumental inscriptions on stone and bronze but also in cursive. The best introduction to this material is Peter Stein's two volumes (my review in JRAS 22/2012, pp. 466-468). The Sabaeans also invented the rhyme (my article in AAE 34/2023), which entered the Quran and Arab poetry.

WERNER DAUM

Prof. Dr. Werner Daum *was Deputy Head of Mission at the German embassy in Sanaʿa, and, subsequently, chargé d'Affaires en pied in Aden; later, as a museum curator in Munich, he organised two exhibitions on Yemen.*

The Great Mosque of Sanʿa – Conservation Intervention (2005-2015)

Renzo Ravagnan and Maurizio Merlo (eds.)



Venezia, 2022
ISBN 978 8 8943 6010 3
(Not distributed commercially, order from Maurizio Merlo: *laboratorio@pivbc.it*)

This book describes the results of the ten-year Italian restoration project (Istituto Veneto per i Beni Culturali), financed by the Yemeni (-UN) Social Fund for Development and the Yemeni Antiquities and Historic Cities institutions. It comprised strengthening the mosque's endangered walls, securing damaged beams and rafters, and cleaning and stabilising the coffers and their painted decoration (ca. 3,000 square metres!). It also included a training programme for young Yemenis. The lavishly illustrated and finely printed book (supported by the ALIPH Foundation) is a clear and readable presentation of an exemplary restoration; it greatly enriches our understanding of this magnificent building. An extensive study of the building's history by the project's archaeologists, Christopher Edens and Bakiye Yükmen Edens, and a well-illustrated description, translation, and interpretation of the mosque's inscriptions on stone and timber by Giovanni Canova complement the technical aspects. An introduction by the late Ronald Lewcock, the coeditor of the still-indispensable 1983 manual on Sanaʿa (Serjeant & Lewcock), makes pleasant reading. Lewcock also contributed an interesting chapter on Sasanian influences on the painted elements of the mosque, some of which I find very convincing. While the results of the Italian restorers (Ravagnan, Merlo, & Muradore) and the inscriptions chapter by Canova leave no *desiderata*, the contribution by Edens & Edens necessitates a few reservations.

According to tradition, the first mosque in Sanaʿa was erected in 6 AH (627/8 AD), on the order of the Prophet. This no-doubt makeshift structure stood at the northern edge of the Sanaʿa cathedral, built by king Abraha in ca. 540 AD (Robin, 2015: ca. 560). The church was where the southern colonnades are today, and not, as Edens/Edens and Lewcock still assume, in the eastern part of the old town, where a popular tradition not earlier than the late 19th century (Robin, 2015) locates it. The church had, however, not been the first holy place there: It was preceded by a small sanctuary of the old Arabian (and Yemeni) water and fertility religion, consisting of a small square building (2nd c. AD) and two poles, symbolising a sacred marriage. The cubicle is preserved to this day, forming the ground floor of the Western minaret. The two "pagan" poles had been integrated into the church. When the church was demolished, they were sold as timber, but their location was preserved in the mosque, in the third row of the southern arcade (al-Wasiʿi, p. 12). It may be mentioned that the famous palace of Ghumdan was on the eastern side of the mosque (and the church).

The Umayyad governor Ayyub b. Yahya al-Thaqafi made the mosque's first substantive modification on orders by caliph al-Walid (r. 86-96 AH / 705-715 AD). Al-Thaqafi extended the mosque northwards, "from its first *qibla* to where it is today" (al-Razi, 11th c. AD, p. 85), building the western and northern walls we still see today. The new southern wall went along the north edges of the two (later) minarets. Edens/Edens argue that the northward extension included the northern and the western colonnades, but this cannot be so. While it is true that the carbon dates taken by the Italians are very old (even pre-Islamic), most columns in the northern "riwaq" clearly come from the church, which was only demolished half a century later: Four capitals bore crosses (two erased); three foliate capitals are of Ethiopian style (photographs p. 363; Serjeant/Lewcock, p. 336), the latter being identical with a capital from St. Mary Zion in the museum of Aksum (Deutsche Aksum-Expedition, II, p. 106). Many more columns are Himyarite or Sabaean and must also come from the church (the sources tell us that Abraha plundered temples and palaces). As for the painted decoration of the ceilings, the Italian team distinguishes two phases: an earlier one, which includes motifs reminiscent of Sasanian or Christian models, and a later one, which might either still be pre-Islamic or inspired by sixth/seventh century AD Mediterranean influences. The earlier decoration was already on the timbers and coffers when they were re-used; the latter was applied after the beams and coffers had been installed. The conclusion seems inevitable that these columns, the

beams, and the ceilings had been transferred from the church after its demolition in the mid-eighth century. and that the Umayyad building had only been a courtyard surrounded by a wall, similar to the equally very early Sanaʿa mosque of al-Jabbana.

We now arrive in 136 AH (754 AD), when the governor, al-ʿAbbas b. al-Rabiʿ b. ʿUbaydallah al-Harithi (so al-Azraqi, other versions of the name have also been recorded) proclaimed in a beautiful Kufic inscription (in the courtyard, colour photograph p. 145), where he calls himself simply ʿAli b. al-Rabiʿ, to have "rebuilt the mosque complexes [of Sanaʿa]" [*islah al-masajid wa ʿimaratiha*]. He demolished the church; its columns and coffered ceilings were reused as spolia, and the mosque was extended southwards. Al-Azraqi informs us in detail about the demolition of the church. A few years earlier (742 AD), a powerful earthquake that is said to have been felt as far as Constantinople severely damaged the building.

The only significant change after that was shifting the Eastern colonnade further east. It happened under the Yuʿfirides and is commemorated in two inscriptions giving 265 AH as the beginning of the work and 270 AH for its completion: "he ordered its work, the Emir [*amara bi-ʿamalihi al-amir*] Ibrahim ibn Muhammad b. Yuʿfir in the year 265 [AH]... ."

Tourist guides and the Yemenis often attribute the shifting and rebuilding of the Eastern wing to al-Sayyida al-Hurra, the famous Queen Arwa. Indeed, two inscriptions in foliate Kufic bear her name (photographs pp. 155 ss), but do not refer to building activity: "This stone was transported from the Seat of the Emirate ... on the order of al-Hurra al-Sayyida, the Queen [possibly, 'the Exalted']" [*nuqilat hadhihi al-hijara min Dar al-Imara ... ʿan amr al-Hurra al-Sayyida al-Malika*]. This text, therefore, does not commemorate building activity; it may refer to some repair work. Early sources do not mention the queen's involvement; the legend only emerged in the 15th century AD (for details, see Canova, p. 155; Serjeant/Lewcock, p. 347).

The two minarets were built (or rebuilt?) under the Ayyubids in 603 AH (1206/07 AD) by governor Wardassan (this is how I read the inscription, not Wurdashar). The domed construction ("the qubba"), built by Sinan Pasha in 1603 AD, in the middle of the courtyard, dates to the first Turkish occupation. In 1936/37 AD, Imam Yahya extended the southern arcades by one colonnade (on the northern side) to create, on the first floor, room for the two libraries of the mosque.

In the roof above the *mihrab*, the Italian restoration made a group of five "skylights" visible for the first time in many centuries. These are five small false cupolas containing intricately carved alabaster plaques. The soot of almost a millennium and a half had covered the alabasters so that neither could their decoration be seen nor did they let the light through (pp. 322-335). After their temporary removal and cleaning, the most beautiful carvings appeared, which I assign to a Justinian workshop. At the recent Seminar for Arabian Studies (2024), I argued that these alabasters came from Abraha's church and are the "cupola" described by al-Azraqi.

Note: The Italian team also worked on the Ashrafiya mosque in Taʿizz (1397 AD), undoubtedly the most outstanding architectural masterpiece of the Rasulids. A lavishly illustrated volume, similar to the one here reviewed, was edited by Ravagnan and Merlo, Venezia, 2022.



Main dome of the al-Ashrafiya Mosque



Carved wooden brackets in one of the four raised ceiling bays on the northern side of the prayer hall

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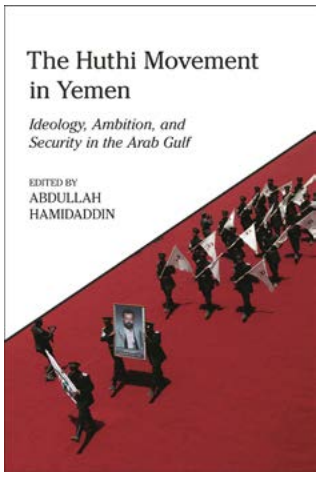
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WERNER DAUM

Prof. Dr. Werner Daum *was Deputy Head of Mission at the German embassy in Sanaʿa, and, subsequently, chargé d'Affaires en pied in Aden; later, as a museum curator in Munich, he organised two exhibitions on Yemen.*

The Huthi Movement in Yemen: Ideology, Ambition, and Security in the Arab Gulf

Abdullah Hamidaddin (ed.)



I.B. Tauris
London, 2022
pp. xiv+291
£21.99
ISBN 978 0 7556 4428 5

The Huthis' rise to power over the past decade has been spectacular, yet to many observers they still appear elusive. This book aims to provide "a holistic view on the movement and the way it is changing Yemen and influencing the region" (p.4). Its fourteen chapters are organised within four sections dealing with the Huthis' ideology and belief system, the ways they have reconfigured Yemeni society and re-engineered the state, and their regional impact. As the editor explains, like other Zaydi elites the Huthis, scions of a prominent family of *ʿulama*, saw themselves as effectively excluded from the republican state. After Yemen's unification in 1990 their political and economic disfranchisement along with the Salih regime's "Salafization policy" (Haykel, p. 19) provoked a Zaydi revival movement in which the Huthis (who refer to themselves as Ansar Allah) played an important role.

The book's early chapters by Haykel and Almahfali represent their emergence as a political force as the outcome of poor governance and the abuse of power by the Salih regime. Haykel describes Husayn al-Huthi's lectures, the *Malazim*, as a break with Zaydi teachings and indeed the overall Islamic body of knowledge.

Porter's chapter explores radio stations, newspapers, poetry (especially *zawamil*; see also the fascinating chapter by Sumner), and Al-Masirah TV, one of twenty Yemeni channels currently in operation. Porter provides a nuanced analysis of how the Huthis have reshaped the media and used them to their advantage. Criticising those who portray the Huthi movement as seeking to revive the imamate, she uses her data to show that it is "a distinctly modern"

phenomenon (p. 140). Thus, styling themselves as defenders of the homeland, the Huthis praise the contribution made by the dark-skinned *muhammashin* to the war effort, which is considered in relation to the global BLM movement, contrasting claimed ethnic inclusivity in Huthi-controlled areas with the racial politics in the United States.

In similar vein Weissenburger takes up the Huthis' deployment of historical narratives to "normalise" their rule (p. 66-7), arguing that they are weaponised in their fight against what they depict as the "soft war" waged against them by the West. Against the backdrop of the revival of stereotypes depicting the Ahl al-Bayt as "foreigners," the Huthi leadership (the majority of whom do not claim descent from the Prophet) attempt to endow their rule with historical legitimacy by, for example, establishing a genealogical bond between Muhammad's family and the "Qahtani lineage."

Several chapters discuss how Ansar Allah's claimed transformative politics might be negotiated in practice. Foregrounding politics of gender, Strzelecka's contribution demonstrates the interrelated attempts by political elites to fashion the "second republic" (neither imamate nor shaykhs' republic) and to recruit revolutionary womanhood during a particularly formative era of Yemeni history. Thus, women's mobilisation and state-building are intersecting processes. The first government formed by Ansar Allah included three women who held ministerial portfolios, a policy the author interprets as a quest for regime legitimacy. Strzelecka argues that a female police force, first set up by Yahya Salih (former deputy Head of Security) and now called Zaynabiyyat, facilitates the authorities' control of women's bodies as part of the (re)production of "national identity."

Issues of governance are also taken up by other authors, notably Chimente who argues that following the current deterioration of the Weberian state construct – which did not apply to Salih's rule either – several non-state actors are vying for control. The "sub-communalization of violence" (p. 194) has generated a "tribal-sectarian field" (p. 191) within which the process of state formation occurs, formed around tribal, religious, or political loyalties. (This "field" had already emerged during the Saʿdah wars in 2007 in the form of the *jaysh shaʿbi* [People's Army] who fought the Huthis.) Schmitz's thoughtful chapter centres on a revolutionary model of republican government on which Ansar Allah's vision of the state is based. It incorporates religious leadership which however is bereft of institutionalised authority – an institution that potentially undermines state integrity.

Rogers's well-informed essay on Ansar Allah's state-in-the-making shows how they seek to legitimate greater centralisation and central oversight of local authorities in response to the requirements of an ongoing war. He argues that this policy aims both to dissolve the patronage system established by Salih and to shore up the finances of the Sanaʿa authorities. Spencer presents an excellent analysis of the Huthis' defence – eventually withstanding the Coalition forces – in the framework of asymmetric conventional warfare that is also relevant to other theatres of war. He notes that whereas they developed their military capabilities to great effect, they did less well in the field of jurisdiction, e.g., by failing to exploit the legal vulnerability of the Hadi government whose mandate covered two years only.

While this timely book enriches our knowledge of the Huthi movement and their "quasi-state" (p. 1), I have concerns about the lack of critical engagement with the sources, some of which were produced during the war and are polemical in nature. Equally problematic is the frequent use of primordial categories that are treated as ontological rather than ideological constructs – not to mention undefined terms such as "Hashemite tribes" and "Huthism."

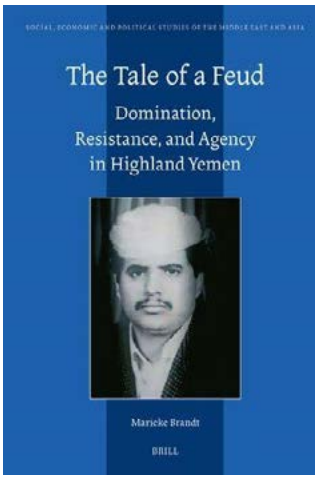
Furthermore, by asserting that al-Huthi abandoned the Zaydi tradition and that the movement founded by him epitomises "an extreme form of revolutionary activism" (p. 30), Haykel and other contributors are cutting too many corners. Al-Huthi's critique of aspects of *ʿilm al-kalam* (theology) and *usul al-fiqh* ("roots" of the law) was legitimate in accordance with the Zaydi dictum *kull mujtahid musib* (every *mujtahid* is correct). The imam's obligation to call for 'rising' against illegitimate tyrants, as enshrined in classical Zaydi teachings, represents 'activism' par excellence. Almahfali's claim that al-Huthi discusses political concepts in the context of religious discourse disregards the fact that the Zaydi doctrine is inherently political i.e., "political Zaydism" (Schmitz, p. 200) is almost a tautology.

GABRIELE VOM BRUCK

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The Tale of a Feud: Domination, Resistance, and Agency in Highland Yemen.

Marieke Brandt



Brill, Leiden
Boston, 2023
pp. XVII+323
€125
Available as open access at https://brill.com/display/title/64934?
ISBN 978 90 04 54698 1 (hb)
ISBN 978 90 04 54699 8 (ebook)

Marieke Brandt covered the background to the emergence of the Huthi movement and its struggle against the Ali Abdullah Salih regime in her book *Tribes and Politics in Yemen* (Hurst, 2017). During her research, she came across the family histories of tribal leaders who helped shape the politics and modern history of Yemen's northern highlands. Her new book narrows the focus to look at the life and actions of a single individual: Mujahid ibn Ahmad ibn Qaid ibn Haydar, born in 1974 and a son of one of the two principal shaykhs of the Sufyan in the northern part of Amran governorate. Dr. Brandt conducted a dialogue with Mujahid over ten years, initially by social media and later in person. Her narrative around his life story deals with his relationships with Shaykh Abdullah al-Ahmar, President Ali Abdullah Salih, the leadership of the Yemeni Socialist Party in the PDRY in the 1970s and 1980s, the Republic of Yemen after 1990, and finally Ansar Allah (the Huthis).

The Sufyan control the critical narrow al-Mudarrij gap on the key route connecting the two power centres of Sanaʿa and Saʿada and thus was of strategic significance to the Imams before 1962, the Royalists in the 1960s civil war, and the Huthis and the Salih regime in the 2000s. The Sufyan are part of the Bakil, one of the two major Yemeni tribal confederations, and had a long-standing rivalry with the al-Usaymat tribe, to the south of the Sufyan, and its leading family, the al-Ahmar – notably Shaikh Abdullah al-Ahmar, who was the acknowledged leader of the Hashid confederation until his death in 2007. The Haydar supported the royalists in the civil war, remained aloof from the post-war republican regime, and resisted Salih's attempts both to co-opt willing tribal shaykhs through patronage and to marginalise and weaken those that would not succumb. Shaykh Abdullah al-Ahmar became Salih's most powerful supporter, the head of Islah, and the dominant figure within the Hashid. Longstanding rivalry between the al-Ahmar and al-Haydar turned into a deadly blood feud around 1980, leading to many deaths, including the father and three brothers of Mujahid.

The personalities of individual leaders are an indispensable element in all these entangled relationships. Mujahid, an effective communicator despite his youth (he was only 14 when he took over from his father), can come across as an uncompromising figure driven to pursue an unrelenting blood feud with the al-Ahmar. But he is steeped in tribal concepts and traditions of leadership, solidarity, chivalry, honour, and revenge. He understood when it was in the best interests of the Sufyan to fight the growing power of the Salih regime and its allies, and when it was better for his tribe that he withdraw and go into exile. Dr. Brandt has the knack of putting the reader in the room when Salih is using blandishments to bend Mujahid and his father to his will and, when that failed, threatening violence in the form of the well-armed First Armoured Division (Firqat), commanded by Ali Mohsen.

There is so much in this book. For example, when Sanaʿa was hostile to the interests of the Sufyan (and other tribes in the Bakil) in the 1970s and 1980s, they looked for support from the Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP) in Aden which had fostered the emergence of the National Democratic Front (NDF) in an effort to extend its control into North Yemen. That led to a border war in 1979 and the so-called War of the Central Areas in the 1980s, pitting the NDF against the Yemeni army and militias loyal to Abdullah al-Ahmar. In the civil war of 1994, Mujahid assisted the YSP and southern military in what he saw as a war against Salih and Abdullah al-Ahmar. It is a vivid example of how relations between the two parts of Yemen, north and south, are intertwined whether there is one Yemeni state or two.

Mujahid went into exile in 1995 when he was still in his early twenties. He remained in touch with his tribe during the 2000s as the Huthis established themselves in the Sufyan and made it one of their northern strongholds – aided by the way that the Salih regime had treated the tribe and the "scorched earth" tactics of Salih and the Firqat in the Huthi wars of the 2000s. Mujahid returned briefly in 2004, angering Salih when he blocked the al-Mudarrij pass to Abdullah al-Ahmar and impeded an attack by the Firqat on the Huthis. Lured to Sanaʿa by Salih, he

found himself a hostage. Quickly understanding that he could not challenge the power of the president, he returned to Syria. However, Salih, al-Ahmar, and Ali Mohsen could stop neither the Huthis' advance nor the blowing up of what had been Abdullah al-Ahmar's house in Amran – the symbolic demise of this enemy of Mujahid and the Sufyan. Mujahid, however, came to dislike the Huthis because of the way they privileged the sayyids and sought to subdue tribes to their will.

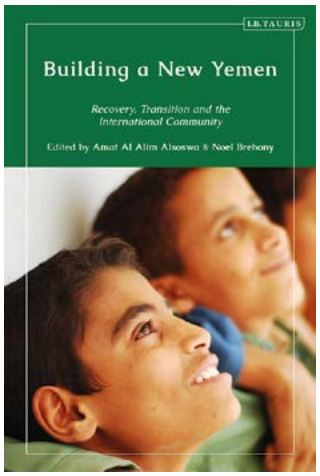
Dr. Brandt reminds the reader that this is one view of the major events in which Mujahid is caught up. It is not an objective history but an account of how events are seen – or remembered – by one of their players. The focus on the story of a single individual makes this a compelling read – almost a thriller that is difficult to put down. Yet, it reveals so much about power, tribes, and politics, and shows what ethnography and anthropology can contribute to understanding history. The book is essential reading for anyone interested in the tribal politics of northern Yemen – and is a joy to read.

NOEL BREHONY

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Building a New Yemen: Recovery, Transition, and the International Community

Amat Al Alim Alsoswa and Noel Brehony (eds.)



I.B. Tauris
London, 2021
pp. xiv+248
Contributors.
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ISBN 978 0 7556 4026 3

The truce agreed upon in April 2022 has opened a new phase in Yemen's nine-year war. Active hostilities between the Huthis and the heterogeneous anti-Huthi front have largely subsided, opening space to long-awaited negotiations. Restrictions on the entry of commercial goods – many of which had had disastrous consequences for Yemen's population – were either eased or lifted. The reopening of Sanaʿa International Airport to commercial flights has likewise brought benefits to thousands of Yemenis seeking treatment abroad.

Yet, the absence of war does not mean that peace has come to Yemen yet. Tit-for-tat clashes, economic warfare, and internecine fighting have persisted through 2023. Months of behind-the-scenes negotiations have not translated into a concrete roadmap for peace, and political and economic reconciliation remain elusive at the time of writing. Indeed, Yemen's parasitic wartime economy continues to thrive, benefitting a select number of corrupt warlords. For the life of millions of Yemenis, there were ultimately no or few genuine improvements.

In light of these transformations, *Building a New Yemen: Recovery, Transition and the International Community* is an essential reading for all Yemen watchers. In this collective volume, edited by Amat Al Alim Alsoswa and Noel Brehony, a group of Yemeni and non-Yemeni authors reflect on the challenges Yemen faces at present, and how they can influence the country's exit from a perennial cycle of conflict. Published in 2022, it remains as relevant today as ever.

The book is not intended to provide a comprehensive blueprint for Yemen's post-war trajectory, nor a ready-made policy plan. It instead makes a compelling case that Yemen's post-war future needs planning, and that imagining what the editors term "a new Yemen" should not wait until a peace settlement is unveiled. Indeed, planning for a future Yemen requires learning from the mistakes of the past and unlocking untapped potential to encourage and sustain long-term peace and development.

Across the book, it is possible to identify some of the founding principles that define this "new Yemen." A first principle is the inclusionary nature of the future Yemeni state. The degradation of state institutions has bolstered sectarian affiliations, drawing Yemenis towards exclusionary forms of governance. Moreover, a foreign-led peace process, driven by Yemeni interests less than regional security concerns, risks crystallising sectarian identities into a future political agreement. To avoid this outcome, some authors call for new approaches to security and peace-building, which can meaningfully engage women, civil society, youth, and other key stakeholders to ensure broad societal participation in the rebuilding of Yemen.

A second founding principle of the "new Yemen" is autonomy. The structure of the future Yemeni state is a common thread among the contributions, and the consensus is that a return to a centralised state is unlikely. In fact, today's fragmentation is the function of a flawed unification process, which has exacerbated the domestic drivers of Yemen's conflicts. The post-conflict institutional arrangement may seek to maintain a limited central government capable of generating revenues and delivering basic services to Yemen's growing population, while recognising and supporting the *de facto* autonomy of its regional administrations. A federal structure granting greater autonomy to regional governments could not just help stimulate economic growth and maintain security but is likely the only alternative to Yemen's disintegration.

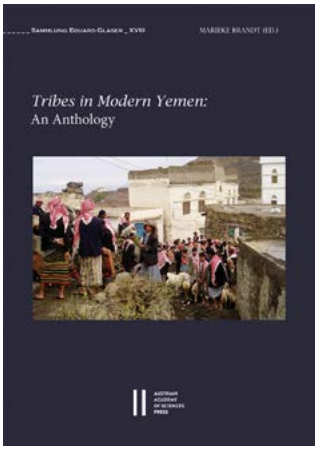
A third founding principle is economic diversification. While Yemen's economic woes predate the war, the conflict has created incentives for the emergence of several "parasitical" political economies across the country. Any effort to dismantle these economies is likely to be as hard as ending the war. Post-conflict recovery will require prioritising economic growth over short-term relief – something that can only be enabled in the presence of a functioning state. Yet, to preserve peace, it is essential to develop the private economy, reduce its dependence on hydrocarbons, and ensure a sustainable use of natural resources, among other measures aimed at generating new economic opportunities.

Building a New Yemen is also a call to action for the international community. For too long, international donors and partners have applied incoherent approaches to Yemen. International fixation on short-term humanitarian aid has exacerbated Yemen's dependence on relief and generated incentives for corruption. Flawed narratives, often obfuscating Yemenis' interests over regional politics, have likewise hampered alternative approaches to peace-making. Yet, international support remains critical to restore security and nurture economic development. The authors therefore call Yemen's international partners to embrace the founding principles of a "new Yemen," accompanying the country into a more peaceful and prosperous future.

ANDREA CARBONI

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Tribes in Yemen: An Anthology
Marieke Brandt (ed.)



Austrian Academy of Science Press
Vienna, 2021
pp. 169
€59 (print edition)
Ebook Open access: *https://www.austriaca.at/0xc1aa5576%200x003cbe54.pdf*
ISBN 978 3 7001 8619 9

Tribes in Yemen: An Anthology, based on a workshop organised by Dr. Marieke Brandt in 2018, aims to rethink and update research on tribes and tribalism, reconnect the scholarly discourse with the present situation in Yemen, and provide new input to the discussion of tribalism in the Middle East, more broadly. It has achieved these objectives thanks to the distinguished scholars whose research has contributed so much to understanding tribalism in Yemen.

Dr. Brandt introduces the book with a brief discussion of the term "*qabilah*" or "tribe" as a social concept in the western context and how that applies to a country like Yemen with a predominantly tribal society. Elaborating on this theme, Najwa Adra explores specific aspects of Yemen's tribalism (*qabyalah*), synthesising multiple local understandings of tribal customary law, ethics and concepts of honour, and gender dynamics, while also addressing how modernity has affected these concepts.

Steve Caton recalls his experiences in Khawlan al-Tayal that led him to develop his theory about how tribal power is used to build consensus and resolve disputes through discussion and engagement, in contrast to the use of power to coerce alone. Looking at the current situation it seems that unchecked coercive power is employed by all sides. Caton reminds us, however, that there was an even bloodier civil war in the 1960s which was ended through mediation. As coercion fails, his ideas, here refined, offer hope that the current conflict might be resolved through peaceful mechanisms, despite its complexity.

Paul Dresch illustrates the richness of Yemeni customary law and the extent of the diversity and flexibility which make it so enduring. Tribal law, which varies from place to place, may change according to circumstance but exhibits principles that have remained consistent for centuries.

Dr. Brandt addresses the significant issue of blood vengeance, which is challenging to manage, fuels long-lasting conflicts between the tribes, and can influence tribes' political positions. Yet, the author also draws attention to the negative development of "freelance vengeance," unconstrained by tribal rules and ethics when tribal authority falters, leading to the breaking of such taboos as the targeting of women and children. She also stresses the significance of blood vengeance in understanding part of the socio-political mechanisms of the current conflict.

Daniel Varisco writes about the historical importance and persistence of customary laws in regulating agriculture and sharing land and water in the northern highlands. These are now subject to the strains and stresses of the turbulence and conflict that have been affecting tribal areas since 2011, exacerbated by ecological issues such as falling water tables. This is of critical concern to the economy, both locally and nationally, and Dr. Varisco is to be commended for drawing attention to a sector that is crucial to the future of Yemen. As he notes "*qabyalah* can help to sustain Yemen's agricultural system and social peace."

Andre Gingrich reviews his and others' research on the Munebbih tribe's northwestern borders, which extend to the international Saudi-Yemeni border, during the critical period of establishing the modern states in the region. There was little cooperation between the state and tribes early on, but that changed as modern states needed to define and protect their international borders. His research illustrates the importance of trying to understand to what extent tribalism and tribal norms can be reconciled with the state's interests. Managing this tribal-political relationship has undoubtedly been complicated by the fact that distinct parts of the tribe are under the control of different contending forces – one of the many drastic consequences of the war.

An interesting chapter on the Saudi-Yemeni border is written by Lisa Lenz-Ayoub, who takes a more political approach. She explores the transformation of the Yemen-Saudi border, focusing on Yemen's northwest to illustrate the shift from a policy of engaging with local communities on both sides of the border to a more institutionalised one introduced after the Treaty of Jeddah (2000) and the militarisation of the border since 2015. Today, the traditional system of border protection is close to collapse.

Alexander Weissenburger deals with another significant issue at the centre of the recent Yemeni conflict: the position of Ahl al-Bayt descendants within the tribal context after the rise to power of the Huthis, and how this contrasts with the system

under the republic. He analyses Huthi attempts to restore this hierarchy and legitimise their rule. The outcome will decide whether the tribes are willing to support the Huthis on a permanent basis.

The sole chapter that deals with a social structure outside the northern highlands is by Mikhail Rodionov, which discusses hierarchy in Hadhramaut society, especially with regard to sayyids. It analyses the political mechanisms that led first to the demolition of this hierarchy by the PDRY and then to its re-stratification after unity.

Helen Lackner with her deep knowledge and experience in Yemen rejects the oversimplification and generalisation of the term "tribes," emphasising that a focus on tribal identity alone means ignoring other professional and political affiliations. Lackner analyses economic and development factors that drove social change and led to the 2011 uprising. Studying the economy as a driving factor in Yemen's social and political change is crucial to understanding the essence of these changes.

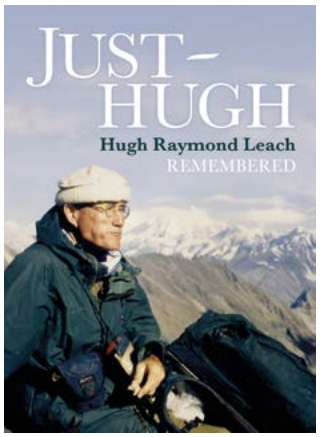
The anthology succeeds within the theoretical and geographic parameters it sets for itself, yet illuminates how more scholarly attention is needed on regions in Yemen other than its northern highlands. Such an expanded scope will be able to better qualify or refine the explanatory power of the terms 'tribe' and 'tribalism' as they pertain to Middle Yemen, the Tihama, and the south, as well as the social structures of major urban centres such as Aden and Sanaʿa.

MAYSAA SHUJAA AL-DEEN

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Just Hugh: Hugh Raymond Leach Remembered

Susan Maria Farrington and Norman J M Cameron



Arabian Publishing
Cowes, 2022
pp. xv+144
Illust. Maps
Appendices. Index. Hb
£25
ISBN 978 1 911487 74 6

Just Hugh is the story of a much loved and interesting man of many parts. His life has been well documented in this book; compiled sympathetically with memories of Hugh from his many friends and colleagues. Sue Farrington and Norman Cameron have done an excellent job of setting out a colourful scrapbook of memories of a colourful man.

The pictures are evocative of a varied life, both in England and in Asia, and of people and of his other great love, machines, cameras, bicycles, motorbikes and cars. It describes the outline of a man from another era; he himself was often nostalgic for a time before his, of desert explorers and TE Lawrence with whom he deeply identified and, in a way, emulated as a traveller.

The book is not a biography but a weave of memories from his many friends and their anecdotes. It deftly sets out a life full of adventure and fun that gives the reader who never knew Hugh a flavour of his character and interests though never delves too deeply under the surface of a man of many parts.

Hugh led an interesting and varied life. He was born as one of a twin in Berkshire and brought up with his siblings by his widowed father. After leaving Abingdon School, Hugh went to Sandhurst and was commissioned into 6th Royal Tank Regiment. He served in Suez (1956) and later in Libya. It was during his time in Libya that he acquired a taste for the desert and the Arab world. He was sent to the Middle East Centre for Arab Studies (MECAS) to learn Arabic – after which he spent time in Oman as a Desert Intelligence Officer in operations against the insurgency.

After another stint at MECAS he was posted to South Arabia and to the frontier outpost of Mukairis where he led efforts to stop Egyptian-backed infiltration by the National Liberation Front. For such an

important piece of his life he seldom spoke about it. Perhaps it lacked the isolation and spell of the desert. The book fills in some of his time there, but it is almost a footnote of detail compared to many other periods of his life that are covered. There is at least a delightful photograph of his small unit of bodyguards dressed in glorious Coldstream Guard tunics he had somehow procured.

The book does a worthy job of expressing Hugh's often unconventional approach to life. He was quite eccentric but in a nice way, he enjoyed being the centre of attention, and this is on full view in the section on Captain Leopold Lazard.

He joined the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) in 1967 and served in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, Yemen and Sudan. It was when he was on leave from Egypt in 1973 that Hugh saw an advertisement for a half share in a circus. This he could not resist, having a lifetime love of circuses. He took the circus to Cairo under the title 'Circus Britannica' where it stayed for a month and Hugh took on the role of ringmaster.

He was always interested in other religions, particularly Islam, and Early and Eastern Christianity. In 1971, Hugh journeyed into a remote part of Yemen and encountered a Jewish community in Saʿada and published *Seen in the Yemen* with his friend and great desert traveller Freya Stark.

In 1962 when Hugh was still in the army, he became a member of the Royal Society for Asian Affairs (RSAA). He later became a member of the RSAA council and also took on the roles of Honorary Vice President and Honorary Historian.

He took an active part in the society's activities, writing articles, travelling and taking young people on expeditions to the Himalayas. A year after Hugh's death, an annual Hugh Leach memorial lecture was founded by the society. Hugh also wrote, *Strolling About on the Roof of the World* to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the RSAA. *Just Hugh* is very much a product of the RSAA and is a fitting tribute to one of its more colourful members.

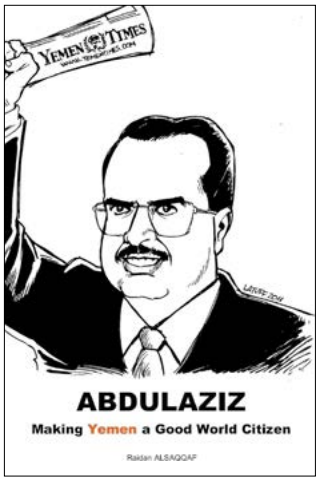
Hugh had a great gift of getting on with people: nomads in the desert, army officers, NCO's, tribal shaykhs, colleagues, and a wide variety of friends. Through the pictures reproduced here we get that flavour of his delight in the company of a variety of people. He was a sort of Michael Palin figure, the celebrated television personality and traveller, in that he was just as much at ease with street cleaners in Cairo as he was with the ruler of Dubai.

PIXIE CAMPBELL

Pixie Campbell *MBE was a member of the FCO for 16 years and was a colleague and friend of Hugh Leach.*

Abdulaziz: Making Yemen a Good World Citizen

Raidan AlSaqqaf



Self-published via Amazon, 2022
pp. 206
Illust. Pb.
£11.95
ISBN 978 1 7388 2010 8

Abdulaziz al-Saqqaf is best remembered as the founder and editor of the first English language newspaper, the *Yemen Times*. Indeed, the cover of the book has his image holding a copy of the paper, which first came out in March 1991. This book, by his youngest son Raidan, is "part memoir and part literary fiction based on the memoir," a literary device which complicates any assessment of the book. The text is in the first person, supposedly expressing the views of Abdulaziz himself. Despite this significant weakness, the book describes two interesting episodes of Yemen's recent history.

The first part of the book presents Abdulaziz's family history, born in Ethiopia of a Yemeni father and a mother from the Hejaz, settled as traders. Like many Yemeni men in the 1950s and 1960s, Abdulaziz started working as a casual labourer in Aden, then in Taʿizz, attending school while working and eventually settling in Sanaʿa where he attended university. Thanks to his determination and intelligence, alongside a dose of luck, he won a scholarship to the US in the 1970s at a time the US was promoting itself through a generous scholarship programme in the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR); he eventually obtained a PhD from Harvard. Committed to Yemen as a nation, and indeed struggling to turn Yemen into a "good world citizen," the subtitle of the book, he believed the democratic slogans promoted by the US in the context of the Cold War.

The unification of the YAR and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) in the Republic of Yemen (ROY) in 1990 was followed by a period of opportunities for the free expression of a multiplicity of political views. This time is remembered today as a unique 'golden moment' which existed neither before nor since, with a short interlude during the 2011 uprisings. One illustration of this is the fact that

by April 1991, 88 newspapers had been given licences to publish (p. 98). The second, longer, part of the book focuses on Abdulaziz's involvement with the promotion of democracy and human rights and the foundation and early years of the *Yemen Times*. It ends with his 'accidental' death in 1999 which can be perceived as a symbol of the ending of that period and return to autocracy.

Throughout the decade, and particularly after 1993, the Salih regime gradually and increasingly restricted freedom of speech, through arrests, beatings and ill-treatment of journalists, increasing constraints on the press by regulations and other methods. The latter included the creation of 'clone' organisations and papers to 'compete' with the independent ones: in the case of the press, the Salih regime created the *Yemen Observer* with a similar layout and appearance but following official lines and lacking any critical investigative journalism of the type engaged in by the *Yemen Times*.

One of Salih's strategies was to co-opt opponents, by appointing them to positions and providing benefits ranging from vehicles to scholarships. In the case of the *Yemen Times*, this strategy failed as, having been appointed to the Majlis al-Shura, al-Saqqaf successfully established a Committee on Human Rights within the council, which remained independent and criticised regime abuse. The Committee issued a report on prisoners in Yemen; when it was ignored, he resigned.

His last challenge was corruption. Abdulaziz published an article questioning the use of USD 22.5 billion of state revenue from oil and aid. This turned out to be the proverbial drop which made the cup overflow. Taken to court, alongside a number of other newspapers, and in anticipation of the Emerging Democracies Forum, which he was actively preparing and took place a few months later, al-Saqqaf ignored warnings about his safety. On the day of his first court appearance, leaving a lunch with colleagues he was killed by a fast-moving vehicle as he crossed the road towards his parked car. Most people at the time, and since, believed that this was a targeted killing by Yemeni security agencies, with or without President Salih's knowledge.

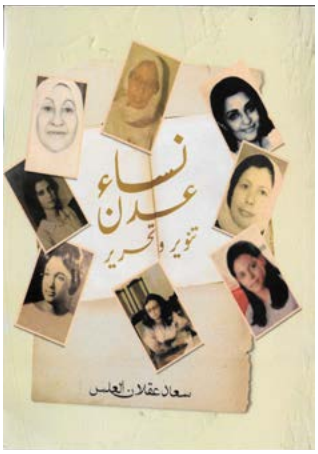
The book is an interesting account of this important decade of Yemen's history, combining a mix of positive and negative elements. Its first part is also a reminder of the way ordinary rural Yemenis could, in the 1960s and 1970s, achieve much through education. Self-published, it lacks the benefit of an editing process which would have avoided many typos and grammatical errors in English, but it remains an easily readable volume of interest. Footnotes or an introduction explaining background facts and details would have been useful additions for readers less familiar with the period.

HELEN LACKNER

Helen Lackner *has been involved with Yemen for more than half a century and her two recent books are Yemen In Crisis: Devastating Conflict, Fragile Hope (Saqi, 2023) and Yemen, Poverty and Conflict (Routledge, 2023).*

Women of Aden: Enlightenment and Liberation

Su'ad Aqlan al-Alas



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Su'ad al-Alas, educated in Aden and the University of Dresden in Germany, has long been determined to investigate the contributions made by women to the national movement in various political and social fields. Most autobiographies and biographies about the period have been written by and about men and thus, with a few notable exceptions, do not highlight the role played by women. Central to her study are interviews with surviving relatives and friends of the portrayed women. The outcome is an exceptional, richly sourced, historical account that will long stand as an indispensable resource for anyone interested in the events of Aden since the 1920s, and how women helped shape them. The author offers a panoramic view of such women and their unique personalities, starting from the 1920s and progressing to independence and the post-independence period. She begins with an analysis of the historical and strategic importance of Aden over centuries and its role as an entry point to the Red Sea both before and after the construction of the Suez Canal.

Women of Aden covers the early tremors of the national and liberation movements, leading to civil unrest. The role played by women started with the demand for girls' schools, led by Noor Haider in 1925; the primary school in Sheikh Othman carries her name to this day. The author highlights the role of women in journalism, particularly in the two leading newspapers *Fatat Al-Jazeera* (Girl of the Peninsula), launched in 1940, and *Al-Ayyam* (The Days), in 1958, both of which provided a platform to voice issues around education for women. She discusses the *hijab*, its history, and its presence in schools as a social phenomenon. One of the book's unique features is its profiles of women leaders in the national and liberation movement, such as Radia Ehsanulla, one of the most prominent women opponents of the British administration. Safi Naz Khalifa accompanied Ehsanullah on many demonstrations, the most important of which was the popular march to prevent the signing of the agreement that merged Aden with the Federation of South Arabia in 1962.

There is a detailed list of the leaders of the National Liberation Front and the Front for the Liberation of the Arabian Peninsula in Lahj, Abyan, and Aden, along with the names of their members, the structures of the two organisations, and some of their activities in preparing for the struggle for independence.

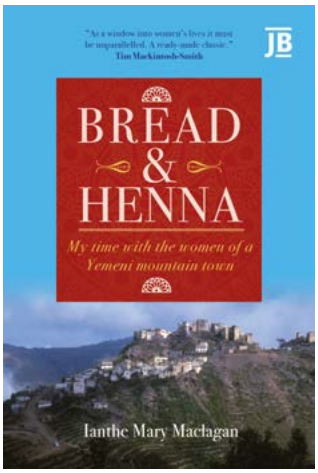
The book concludes with the role of women in the PDRY, a period in which women enjoyed greater rights than anywhere else in the region, with the exception of Tunisia.

HUDA LUQMAN WILDY

Huda Luqman Wildy *is a Legal Translator / Interpreter and member Chartered Institute of Linguists.*

Bread and Henna: My Time with the Women of a Yemeni Mountain Town

Ianthe Mary Maclagan



Journey Books (imprint of Bradt Guides)
Chesham, 2023
pp. viii+343
Illust. Gloss. Pb.
£9.99
ISBN 978 1 7847 7975 7

Drafted four decades after the experience, Maclagan describes women's lives in a small town in the Yemeni Highlands in the early 1980s where she spent 18 months doing field work for her doctorate, a standard *rite de passage* for social anthropologists at the time. It is based on her diaries and, although not explicitly, her account follows a chronological order of her evolving perceptions and details of her experiences. Part three focuses on a number of activities and institutions, cattle husbandry, the school, the clinic, photography, and the 1982 earthquake. This approach results in the same topics being covered in slightly different ways in the course of the book.

The early 1980s were a particularly prosperous time for ordinary citizens in the then Yemen Arab Republic. The dramatic rise in oil prices after 1975 led to a construction boom in Saudi Arabia, enabling a very high rate of male migration to the Kingdom where Yemenis could travel and work without administrative constraints. This had a dramatic impact on daily life in rural Yemeni highlands, which affected women's lifestyles considerably. Although the book does not directly discuss this, it presents a very realistic and detailed picture of the difficulties of women's daily activities.

Maclagan describes the tasks which took women's time and energies, in particular those most exhausting and demanding, such as collecting water (p. 57, 126-140), preparing bread, looking after cattle, grinding grains (p. 81). These urban women collected water from remote sites, a very gruelling task. However, they were spared the strenuous fuel collection as this was bought and gas canisters were beginning to replace fire wood in the town.

Interestingly, the women's lives she describes only slightly differed from rural life: the main difference being that the townswomen spent their afternoons in socialising with each other, rather than working in the fields and collecting fuel. Forty years later, regardless of the war, thousands of rural women face these same difficulties, including hours collecting water and firewood when gas is unavailable, as well as carrying out the numerous household tasks described in the book.

In addition to the clear description of the physical infrastructure of highland houses, including the types of bathrooms/toilets, kitchens (p. 92-3) and *mafraj* (sitting room) furnishings, she provides details of practices from cooking [sometimes in sufficient detail to act as recipes, such as tea making (p. 11), coffee preparation (p. 22), *helba*/fenugreek preparation (p. 23), bread (p. 77, 93-4, 98) to expected behaviour and norms about clothing, greetings at meetings, the application process for henna, etc. She focuses on the main events which mark women's lives, the rituals around childbirth, marriages, separation, divorce and even death and the related social events and rituals.

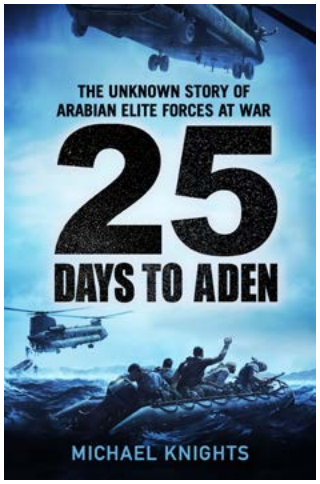
Her visits to the market where, unlike local women, she could visit without loss of status are the opportunity to inform readers about the goods available to ordinary Yemenis. She also describes the different trades and crafts found locally. Her descriptions of the landscapes and the (too few) photos illustrate the extraordinary beauty of the highlands, while the text is a reminder, to those who had the opportunity of visiting Yemen for whatever reason, that behind this beauty, living conditions were, and remain, extremely tough for its majority of poorer people away from the main cities.

Maclagan rarely, but occasionally, refers to some of what must have been the more difficult and stressful aspects of her life in the town: the constant loud presence of children, the lack of privacy, the occasional suspicion of her motives for being in the town, her lack of children, overcharging by various providers (p. 38) and cultural isolation (p. 56). The details and the updating from her later visits show the close relationships she developed with some of the women she met.

A few quibbles deserve mention: the book's too brief introduction mentions migration, but more general background about the period would have been welcome. The liberal use of Yemeni Arabic words to describe things which have English equivalents is presumably intended to add 'local colour' to the book, but probably does not add much for those readers unfamiliar with Arabic. Similarly, it would

25 Days to Aden: The Unknown Story of Arabian Elite Forces at War

Michael Knights



Profile Editions
London, 2023
Maps. Glossary. Index. Hb
£15.65
ISBN 978 1 80081 510 0

have been nice to read more about issues relating to the different and evolving social structure, such as the meaning of wearing of *janbiyas* (p. 48), the changing social hierarchy including, in particular, men's and women's different perception of its importance in daily life (p. 239-246).

This book will be enjoyed by people who knew the Yemeni highlands then and others who want to learn about women's daily lives in the country, much of which is still relevant today.

HELEN LACKNER

Helen Lackner *has been involved with Yemen for more than half a century and her two recent books are Yemen In Crisis: Devastating Conflict, Fragile Hope (Saqi, 2023) and Yemen, Poverty and Conflict (Routledge, 2023).*

Knights, a scholar of military tactics and the Middle East, is mostly known for his work on Iraq but he engages with Yemen from time to time. He has spent much time embedded with Emirati forces on the Red Sea coast and Aden over the past few years and has gained the trust of the men on the ground. He has acquired an intimate knowledge of these forces, their weaponry, their training and doctrine, and now has brought that all together in an account of how these forces performed on the battlefield.

He provides a wealth of detail on Iran's involvement in the war and in Aden. The nature of the Huthi relationship with Iran is an under-researched area, primarily because of the lack of sources in English. Here Knights succinctly sets out the dependence of the Huthi military in their campaign to take and hold the city of Aden on Iranian logistics chains for fuel, training, weapons supply, and also military planning.

The book is accessible and an easy read for the non-military expert. In making it so fluid and readable Knights decided to take out nearly all references. Scholars will be frustrated by the lack of footnotes and references to the source material. But as someone who was there in Aden in the weeks preceding the start of the war, I am impressed by the author's ability to name all the neighbourhood Hirak commanders. Those men would later play a key role in defence of the city, even though many of them were not politically aligned with the Emiratis. Their role has not been airbrushed out of history.

It is the breadth and depth of detail that really stands out. Chapter VI is an incredibly detailed history of the various battles with fascinating insight around how the Huthi forces learned to time their

attacks when the Saudi-led coalition aircraft were heading back to base for rearmament. We get an inside view of how the Joint Terminal Attack Controllers sat in various homes, before finally settling on the large villa of Saleh bin Farid Al-Awlaqi, a name familiar to many British Yemeni Society members as the Awlaqi leader, who was an officer in the Federal Regular Army up until 1967.

Other remarkable details include the fact that Abu Zaraʿa al-Mahrami, now a member of the Presidential Leadership Council, started off his career as the intelligence officer for Hani bin Brayk (a previous deputy head of the Southern Transitional Council) during the war in Aden. Then there are the many informative military campaign maps.

It might be easy to dismiss the book as an effort at whitewashing Emirati involvement in the war. Also, there is not enough criticism of their military performance. However, Knights has leaned on his personal relationships in the UAE military, to interview his subjects, and to delve into the details of the campaign. He does not omit any names of Yemeni commanders who took part in the battle, many of whom subsequently parted ways with their Emirati backers over political differences. This remarkable level of detail and comprehensive narrative will enable scholars to critique the performance of the Emirati military.

I believe that this book will stand the test of time as a baseline for the military history of the Aden war in 2015. Of course, we may criticise the portrayal of the UAE as the saviour of Aden. But the truth of the matter is that without the Emirati military actions the Huthis would still occupy Aden today.

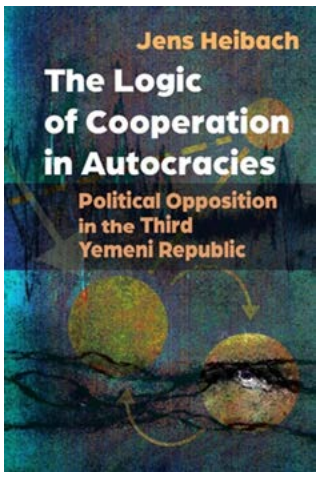
The account by its nature relies on Emirati sources rather than local Adeni accounts and this understandably gives us the primary perspective of the war from the Emirati angle. Perhaps in time we will read Adeni accounts of their role and the Huthis will write their histories. But until then this account will remain the most authoritative.

MARTIN JERRETT

Martin Jerrett *is a member of the BYS committee and the Journal Editorial Committee.*

The Logic of Cooperation in Autocracies: Political Opposition in the Third Yemeni Republic

Jens Heibach



Syracuse University Press
2024
pp. xviii + 312
Index. Bibliography. Hb £75.98.
Available in pb and ebook
ISBN 978 0 81563 839 1

"The JMP died and no one threw a funeral," I remember myself saying a few years ago.

Nearly ten years into Yemen's ongoing, devastating, and epoch-shifting civil war, the joint disintegration of the bulk of the Joint Meeting Parties' (JMP) architecture and the evaporation of whatever remained have led to the virtual disappearance of what was once arguably the country's most notable partisan alliance on the scene. That's not to say that the leaders – aside from the unfortunate number of key JMP figures who have died – and components of the JMP have simply disappeared. But – like almost everything else in Yemen – they have fundamentally been reshaped by the ongoing conflict, divided by new political faultlines and subsumed into new political realities. Save a rump-JMP based in Sanaʿa that broadly functions as little more than a rubber stamp for Ansar Allah (AA; 'the Huthis'), it would seem that the coalition has little presence outside the nostalgia-tinged reminiscences of largely exile-based politicians.

It may not be meant as such, but Jens Heibach's recently published book functions as a solid post-mortem for the JMP. Considering the dominant role of the JMP and its pivotal role in Yemen's politics, it is surprising that such a book has taken so long – indeed until the arguable demise of the alliance itself – to be written. That's not to dismiss the work of those who have touched on the unique dynamics of mainstream Yemeni politics, of course. Indeed, Heibach's work is ultimately well-situated within three decades of scholarship on Yemen's post-1994 civil war political structures, building upon the work on Yemen's partisan positions and political rules of the

game carried out by academics like Stacey Philbrick Yadav, Sarah Phillips, and Lisa Wedeen.

Heibach's work presents a crucial addition to literature on Yemen in four key aspects. Firstly, it fills the glaring gap of an extended history of the rise and fall of the JMP. Secondly, it provides an important, in depth look at the dynamics of pre-conflict Yemen. In many regards – as Heibach subtly and, perhaps inadvertently, reveals – the history of the JMP is a history of the consolidation and collapse of Yemen's post-1994 order itself. As an essentially reactive phenomenon, the emergence of the JMP represents a useful prism for understanding the evolution of Yemeni establishment politics and the system formed under former President Ali Abdullah Salih writ large. Had the time frame of the study been extended further, it could have equally illuminated the flaws and eventual collapse of the post-Arab Spring transitional period. Thirdly, through its primary source interviews, it provides a salient glimpse into the personal nature of – and personalities behind – Yemeni politics, something that has grown all the more crucial considering, alternately, their deaths, increasing age, and relative inaccessibility. Finally, the detailed examination of the internal dynamics of the JMP provides greater insight into how and why it (and, for that matter, Yemen's broader political order) fell apart, something that will undoubtedly provide fertile ground for reflection for the architects of Yemen's eventual post-war order. Overall, in a context where the vast majority of those working on Yemen have little experience of the country outside of the prism of the current conflict – and in which the realities of the previous order are deeply contested, if not wilfully manipulated – a sober retelling of a recent past that often feels as if occurred a lifetime ago is deeply useful.

The book's greatest gap – owing, one would imagine, to the timing of its drafting rather than any fault of the author – is the lack of attention paid to the JMP's time as a coalition partner with Yemen's former ruling party during the transitional period and this period's broader intersection with Yemen's ongoing conflict. While the work tends to focus on the more positive aspects and potential of the JMP, the past decade and a half has largely revealed its flaws and weaknesses. Deprived of a common goal, if not a common adversary, during the transitional period, the JMP's fault lines deepened as its effectiveness decreased – manifesting in everything from disputes over appointments to radically different reactions by the coalition's constituent parties to Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi's overthrow. These divides only grew more dire with the ascendance of AA, the ensuing war, and its internationalisation. Confronted with a devastating conflict that has divided Yemen on sectarian and regional lines, the JMP and its components proved unable – whether due to lack of will or sheer capacity – to offer any viable alternative, their fate fundamentally being shaped by wider forces seemingly far outside of their control.

This is not to say that the era of consensus-based, big-tent politics in Yemen has ended – if anything it appears as strong as ever. Yemen's duelling governments both seek to frame themselves as backed by coalitions of differing partisan and ideological groups. This holds even for emergent groups like the Southern Transitional Council (STC) – notwithstanding its guiding focus on the separatist struggle for independence – to say nothing of grand coalitions like the internationally recognised, government-aligned National Alliance of Yemeni Political Parties, which could easily be framed as a reworked JMP.

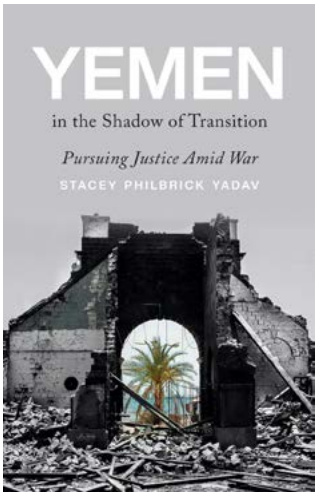
But does an aim to project pluralism equate to an adherence to the values of political pluralism? And can largely elite-dominated, increasingly exile-based politics often overshadowed by the influence of regional actors carve out any position of relevance to Yemenis based on the ground? It is no coincidence that the city of Ta'izz – oft referred to by Heibach as a sort of unofficial birthplace of the JMP – continues to offer the rare remaining shreds of hope in this regard, epitomised, perhaps, by the cross-partisan Ta'izz Reconciliation Committee. One can scarcely predict the future of Yemeni politics but, if what's coming is to bare any connection to the more positive aspects of the JMP's legacy, one would hope that such locally-rooted efforts may beat the odds to serve as the nexus for a better, if distant, new order.

ADAM BARON

Adam Baron *is a writer and political analyst focusing on the Arab World with an emphasis on Yemen and the Gulf.*

Yemen in the shadow of transition: pursuing justice amid war

Stacey Philbrick Yadav



Hurst
London, 2022
pp. 1-V and 1 -288
Preface. Abbr.
Bibl. Index. Hb
£50
Available as ebook
ISBN 978 1 78738 813 0

This book stands as one of the most significant contributions to understanding contemporary Yemen, offering a dense analysis of events from the 1990s to the present and a grounded examination of the day-to-day challenges of peacebuilding in the context of a protracted war. As Yemen undergoes a radical reshaping of its sociopolitical dynamics, with escalating violence and unresolved historical grievances, the author argues convincingly that justice – broadly defined – is not a luxury to be deferred until after a political settlement but a crucial precondition for any enduring peace.

When the book was first published, the mere mention of transitional justice provoked anxiety among conflict parties and international peace brokers alike. The prevailing UN-led peace approach in Yemen, divided into three tracks, prioritises Track I, which is largely autonomous and involves direct negotiations between belligerents to reach a political settlement. In contrast, Tracks II and III – focused on national-to-local mid-tier political representatives and civil actors – are considered subservient to Track I. This hierarchy not only hampers efforts to advance justice claims, often deemed too risky before a settlement is reached, but also fails to account for the invaluable peace work taking root *despite* the absence of a negotiated settlement or peace process.

The book comprises five chapters and a concluding chapter following somewhat a chronological order. The first establishes a solid analytical framework that guides the reader through the subsequent chapters covering Yemen's unification in 1990, the 1994 civil war and regime consolidation between 1997 and 2003. The author then deals with the intensifying partisan politics and civil society work leading up to the deadlock between the Joint Meeting Parties and ruling party over electoral reforms in 2009. This period seems – in retrospect – to be a contradictory environment of political repression on the one hand and political pluralism and a thriving civil society on the other. The book then shifts from an examination of partisan and formal politics to extra-partisan mobilisation, which was gaining strength as partisan politics were increasingly perceived as ineffective or even complicit with the regime.

Movements like the Southern Hirak, the Zaydi Believing Youth in the north, and Sunni militant groups drew legitimacy from notions of what is referred to in the book as "past sovereignties" combined with cultural and/or religious nostalgia and economic injustices. Heavy-handed repression further radicalised these movements making way for sectarian and regional sentiments to seep in as republican ideals continued to erode under a self-serving regime.

The fourth chapter chronicles the events from the 2011 uprising through the transitional period that culminated in the National Dialogue Conference (NDC) and the lead-up to the war. It offers a profound analysis of the transitional framework's critical fault lines, such as the blanket amnesties granted to Salih and his associates – widely regarded as a blatant affront to justice – and was pivotal in plunging the country into full-scale war. It is also critical of narrow notions of representation that undermined the process, as well as of the entrenched paranoia of the domestic political elite and Yemen's powerful neighbours, who felt they needed to put a lid on the unabating youth dissent, especially as neighbouring countries barely evaded such a spillover themselves. However, one of the most significant failures of the transitional period was its myopic focus on formal politics centred around NDC proceedings, neglecting the deteriorating security and economic situations across the country. This oversight proved perilous, leading to the Huthi takeover of Sanaʿa and the subsequent events. Yet, this chapter also highlights breakthroughs in transitional justice, including the pressure that led to a presidential decree in 2013 to form investigation commissions for the 1994 civil war, as well as the remarkable work of the justice team in the NDC, which continues to shape current justice discourse in Yemen.

Chapter Five analyses the landscape of civil work characterised not just by non-violence but by inclusionary approaches that allow for disagreements while maintaining a minimum level of recognition of adversaries' rights; a civility that operates against all odds. Taking us through the intricacies of practices such as Yemeni-led knowledge production, new forms of collaborations in hybrid research and advocacy organisations, and local peace initiatives that create pockets of stability and foster a notion of "effective citizenship" under extremely challenging war conditions. The empowering effect of narrating experiences, what the author calls "perspective justice," and the exercise of Yemeni agency by using this

work to influence policymakers and shape thinking on Yemen are thoroughly examined in this chapter. The book also addresses questions of narrow and essentialising representation structures, the gendered impact of the war on political action and the repositioning of minorities within justice claims as new solidarities are formed.

Finally, the book critiques four oppressive paradigms that dominate approaches to Yemen – securitisation, fragmentation, polarisation, and humanitarianisation – and vividly illustrates how civil actors creatively navigate these restrictive frameworks. It highlights the ongoing challenge of building peace from the ground up, emphasising the limited willingness of international peace brokers to genuinely learn from successful local peace practices. This reluctance often reduces Yemen's rich and diverse peacebuilding landscape to a mere advisory role.

One area where the book could have provided a deeper analysis is in its exploration of regional powers' engagement with justice claims and how the UN-led process responds to that. Although this topic is briefly addressed in the context of the Gulf Cooperation Council Initiative and a few high-profile incidents, it warrants a more thorough examination. Given the war's significant regional dimension and the widespread neglect of justice claims across the region, these issues will ultimately need to be negotiated within a broader regional framework. This is particularly crucial as we observe a troubling trend towards exclusive elite bargains, a rushed political settlement, and a faltering UN-led process.

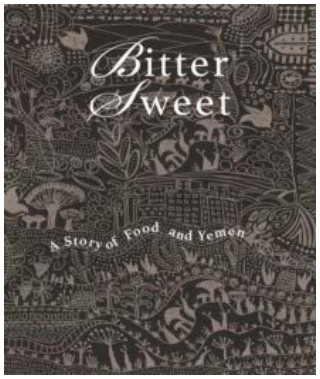
Yemen in the Shadow of Transition is a meticulously crafted book that makes an outstanding contribution to Yemen and broader peace research.

YASMEEN AL-ERYANI

Yasmeen Al-Eryani *is the Co-Executive Director for Knowledge Production at the Sanaʿa Center for Strategic Studies, a Yemeni research centre focusing on mediation and peacebuilding, and a Ph.D. candidate in Social Anthropology at Tampere University.*

Bittersweet: A story of Food and Yemen

Photography Sayed Asif Mahmud, Text Marta Colburn and Jessica Olney



Full Line Press
Atlanta, Georgia, 2024
Medina Publishing
Cowes
UK, 2024
Editions Caurette
Buhl, France, 2024
Masa
Istanbul, Turkey, 2024
pp. 288
£30
ISBN 978 8 9876258 4 2
ISBN 978 1 911487 93 7
ISBN 978 2 38289 122 3
978 605 9194 74 7

Photographs take the overwhelming majority of the book's pages, and will first draw the attention of most people finding it on a coffee table. The few colour photographs give good ideas of what they show, whether sceneries or portraits. They are a welcome break from the grim darkness of the black and white ones which form the majority and are, presumably, the predilection of the photographer. The darkness is certainly appropriate for some of the images, but not all, and gives a pervasive aura of gloom to the entire book. Obviously due to the travel plan of the photographer, photographs are also restricted to a small number of sites and people, with sometimes too many of a single site or action. Many of them were taken in one of the large camps for internally displaced people in Marib, others in Hadhramaut (both the wadi and the coast), Soqotra, and the rest mostly in Taʿizz governorate and Aden.

Some of the photos of people, locations and activities illustrate the text, for example images of kitchens and cooking, coffee beans, sorghum (mis-labelled as maize, p. 74), honey production, and other food consumption or agricultural activities. The relevance of others to the theme of the book is less obvious.

The text is divided between an introduction which presents an extremely brief and selective history of the country focused on its natural resources, wildlife, and flora. This is followed by a presentation of the kitchen and the role of eating in society and then a few pages on each of the regions, roughly following standard agro-ecological zones. Each has a few paragraphs on early history and more on the local types of food and their preparation. Some sections also have architectural and landscape details.

This organisation of the text allows for listing of the different dishes, with their local names. Given that many food preparations are found throughout the country, but sometimes with different names, there is here scope for repetition, and also for some confusion. Bread which is found everywhere is described in detail but somehow the authors seem to have left out the most common highland bread *muluj* which does not feature at all in the text or in the glossary but only as an unillustrated caption to a photo (p. 78). There are many types of food which are found in most places (the great variety of breads, various spice mixtures, vegetable preparations) and are simply local or individual modifications of a specific recipe. Here the experience of the authors and the numerous people whose help is acknowledged at the end of the book are used to generalise and assert as systematic what may well only be individual cases or others that might apply to a single village or town. Some descriptions of houses or facilities refer to situations which were prevalent in the 1970s and 1980s but are now rarities, for example the description of cooking methods on p. 39.

Another point which does not come out clearly in the text or the photos is the impact of improved communications in the country in the past century which has ensured the spread of a more uniform 'yemeni cuisine' particularly in restaurants which tend to be staffed by people from certain areas (Dhamar, Taʿizz) throughout the country and prepare 'standard' dishes such as *salta*. Greater mobility has also increased availability throughout the country of items which were previously difficult to find, such as spices, fresh vegetables, or fish which has largely replaced the dried shark (*lakham*) they write about. Twenty years ago, when asked to bring some by a friend, I discovered it could only be found with difficulty in Seiyun market, and has almost completely vanished today.

The text, as well as the photos, give place names which are mostly (but not always) clear to readers who know Yemen very well but will be lost to those who do not. Some dishes are the same but have different local names, and their preparation varies according to personal preference, seasonally, or availability, usually of vegetables.

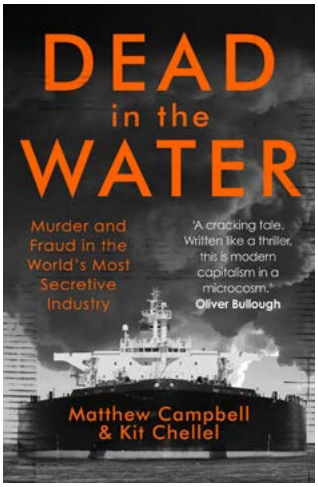
This coffee table style book is a fund-raising project by the World Food Programme (WFP), the main UN organisation involved in addressing food insecurity in Yemen in recent years. While 'a share of the proceeds' from sales will be donated to WFP, it is unclear how big this share is likely to be and also, of course, will depend on sales. Certainly, a surprise venture for the WFP which might be expected to have more urgent priorities in a year when it is struggling to help feed 152 million people worldwide.

Overall, as an introduction to Yemen, *Bittersweet* certainly stands out from the usual political, social and economic analyses of the country and gives a different picture, covering at least some aspects of the country's culture. Thus, it is a welcome addition to people's collections.

HELEN LACKNER

Helen Lackner *has been involved with Yemen for more than half a century and her two recent books are Yemen In Crisis: Devastating Conflict, Fragile Hope (Saqi, 2023) and Yemen, Poverty and Conflict (Routledge, 2023).*

Dead in the Water
Matthew Campbell and Kit Chellel



Atlantic Books, 2022
pp. 288
Bb. Pb. E-book
£18.09
ISBN: 9781838952556

Aden in July 2011 was a turbulent place. The Arab Spring in Yemen had captured headlines for over six months while Aden witnessed demonstrations and near nightly gun battles between separatist militants and the Yemen army. Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) had taken over the governorate of Abyan and their gunmen manned checkpoints less than an hour's drive along the coast. Members of the security services in Aden were shot in gangland-style killings, while protestors were arrested and tortured in jails. Out to sea, Somali piracy was still a common occurrence.

When David Mockett was murdered on 20 July 2011 in Aden by a car bomb placed beneath his seat, his death initially appeared to be one more random and tragic incident within a city wracked by violence, revolution and AQAP's menacing presence nearby. However, as *Dead in the Water* sets out, his murder was far from being a local event and instead was plotted in one European capital, Athens, in order to make a fraudulent insurance claim for $100 million in another, London. Mockett was charged with investigating the background to the boarding in the Gulf of Aden in July 2011 of Brillante Virtuoso, an elderly oil tanker, by "pirates" who set off a fire that wrecked the vessel. He found more questions than answers.

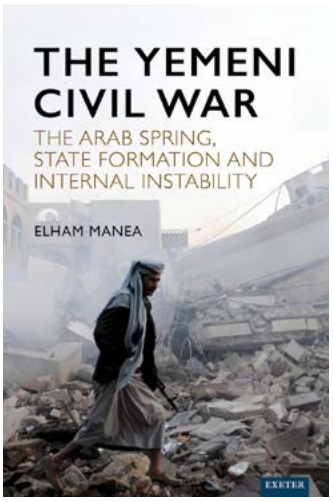
The authors brilliantly show that Yemen was simply the arena for international corruption within shipping finance and insurance. The owners of the vessel chose Yemen but equally it could have been Somalia or in any lawless region or failing state. The book demonstrates that the Greek owners of the vessel used Aden as a convenient place to get their fraudulent business done – a place without competent law enforcement, a substantive court system and beyond the reach of international legal jurisdiction.

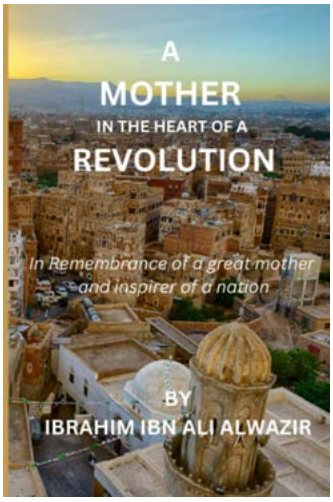
Dead in the Water, which was one of the "Books of the Year" for 2022 by *The Economist*, *The Financial Times*, and *The Times*, is written as a thriller and is the better for it. It is a fine example of investigative journalism and the extent to which a dogged determination to get at the details of a story can yield extraordinary results.

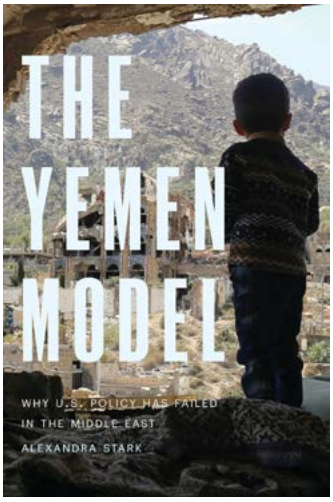
It is somewhat disquieting that despite the passing of 13 years since David's murder, there has been little advance in finding out who killed him. David spent ten years of his life in Aden and loved it and its people. One hopes that with time people will feel safer to come forward and point the finger and that the British courts will be able to prosecute his murderers and bring closure to David's family.

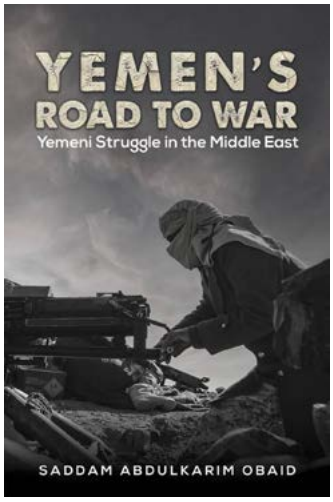
MARTIN JERRETT

Martin Jerrett *is a member of the BYS committee and the Journal Editorial Committee.*


THE YEMENI CIVIL WAR
THE ARAB SPRING, STATE FORMATION AND INTERNAL INSTABILITY
ELHAM MANEA
EXETER

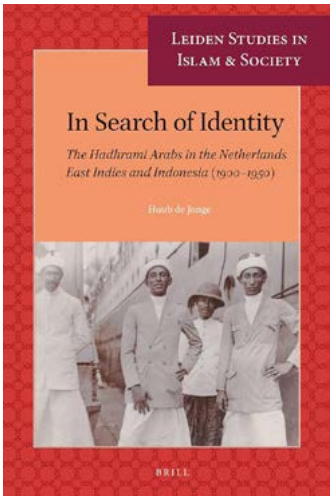

A MOTHER IN THE HEART OF A REVOLUTION
In Remembrance of a great mother and inspirer of a nation
BY
IBRAHIM IBN ALI ALWAZIR

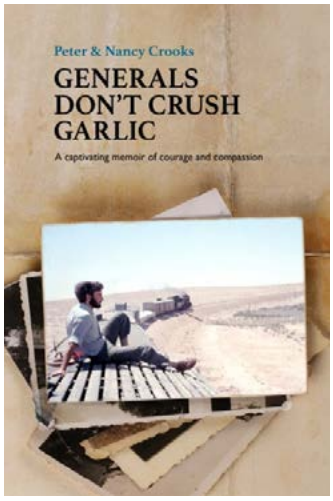

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ALEXANDRA STARK

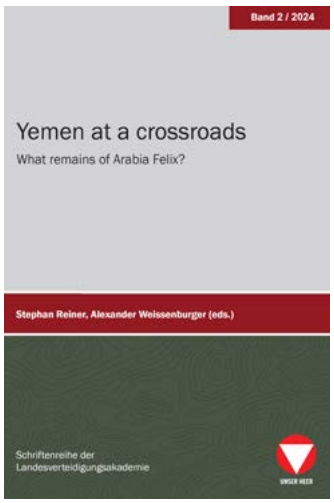

YEMEN'S ROAD TO WAR
Yemeni Struggle in the Middle East
SADDAM ABDULKARIM OBAID

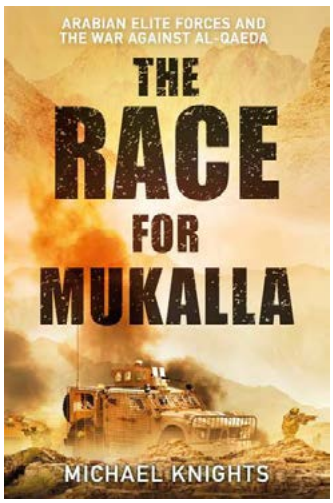

DE GRUYTER
Kerstin Hünefeld
DHIMMA IM KONTEXT DES ZAIDITISCHEN JEMEN
IMAM YAHYĀ ḤAMĪD AL-DĪN (1869–1948), DIE JUDEN:JÜDINNEN VON SANAA UND DIE AUSHANDLUNG ISLAMRECHTLICH LEGITIMIERTER REGIERUNGSFÜHRUNG
STUDIES ON MODERN YEMEN
EDITION KLAUS SCHWARZ

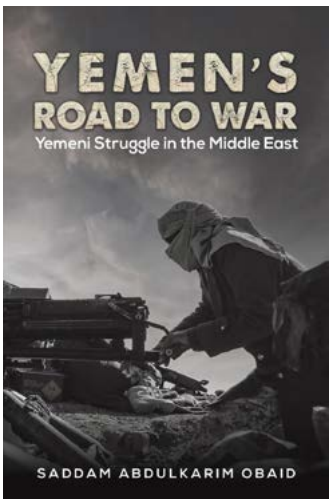

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Les Belles Lettres • Mémoires de Guerre


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UNFINISHED WAR
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