Nasser Al-Hamdi

Decay and Abandonment of the Old Villages in the Western Highlands of Yemen

MA Thesis in Cultural Heritage Studies: Academic Research, Policy, Management

Central European University Private University

Vienna

May 2022

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by

Nasser Al-Hamdi

(Yemen)

Thesis submitted to the Department of Medieval Studies,

Central European University Private University, Vienna, in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Master of Arts degree in Cultural Heritage Studies: Academic Research, Policy, Management.

Accepted in conformance with the standards of the CEU.

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Chair, Examination Committee

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Thesis Supervisor

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Author's declaration

I, the undersigned, **Nasser Al-Hamdi**, candidate for the MA degree in Cultural Heritage Studies: Academic Research, Policy, Management declare herewith that the present thesis is exclusively my own work, based on my research and only such external information as properly credited in notes and bibliography. I declare that no unidentified and illegitimate use was made of the work of others, and no part of the thesis infringes on any person's or institution's copyright. I also declare that no part of the thesis has been submitted in this form to any other institution of higher education for an academic degree.

Vienna, 27 May 2022

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Signature

Abstract

Hundreds of abandoned villages are scattered on mountain summits in the western highlands region of Yemen, together with the terracing and other material reflections of agricultural traditions and customs from the Yemeni rural landscape. These abandoned villages represent a long and continuous settlement process since their emergence in the Bronze Age. From this period onwards, the birth of such settlements and the continuous cycle of decay, abandonment and rebirth continue to the present day. These on-going processes greatly contributed to the formation and preservation of rural landscapes, including abandoned villages.

With the emergence of heritage preservation in the nineteenth century West, the traditional practice of material preservation of the past witnessed an accumulation crisis, driven by the fear of losing material cultural memory and its meanings. Some practitioners of heritage preservation now suggest finding new ways to replace some traditional practices by allowing the processes of decay and change to take their course with limited intervention in preserving the work of the cultural memory of heritage objects. This research adopts a post-preservation practice approach to the physical heritage of the old abandoned villages since these villages succumbed to entropic forces represented in natural as well as social and political factors, which produced the current rural landscape with its abandoned villages in the western highlands region of Yemen. This research proposes documenting the inherited knowledge that formed these villages by conducting further studies related to tangible and intangible cultural heritage in the region and establishing documentation projects for these abandoned villages before their physical disappearance in the near future in order to preserve and continue the cultural memory for future generations.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my deep gratitude to Professor Alice Choyke and Professor József Laszlovszky, my research supervisors, for their patient guidance, enthusiastic encouragement, and valuable critiques of this research work. I would also like to thank Professor Zsuzsanna Reed and Dr. Dóra Mérai for their advice and assistance in suggesting ideas and topics related to my research project. My grateful thanks are also extended to Dr. Ali Al-Hamdi, my father, for his help in conducting the interviews and collecting the data from Yemen as well as to Mr. Mujahid Al-Humaidah and Mr. Mujahid Zayed, who provided me with images from Hijrat al-Sha'aybah village.

I would also like to extend my thanks to the cultural heritage program staff for their help in offering me the resources and assistance during my research and thesis writing.

Finally, I wish to thank my parents, family, and friends in Yemen for their support and encouragement throughout my study.

In loving memory, my grandmother…

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Introduction

In the early 2000s, my cousin and I used to visit a mountainous area overlooking Sana'a city, where the bright sunshine reflects off the rooftops. Near this place stood the ruins of an abandoned village built of mud on a hilltop. My cousin and I always unleashed our imaginations by asking questions and then answering in the form of storytelling and recounting events in this village and about its people. I did not know at the time that someday I would write about this abandoned village.

In 2008, I went to college to study architecture. Only one subject dealt with architectural heritage in a simple and narrow way. It often only discusses the restorations of some major cities in Yemen carried out by UNESCO and some international organizations concerned with heritage. Immediately after I graduated from the faculty of engineering, in 2015, the war in Yemen was launched by Saudi Arabia. The Saudis lead a coalition of nine countries from West Asia and North Africa known as the Arabian Coalition against Houthi rebels, supported by Iran.[1] Life totally froze except for the sounds of explosions and bombing of planes. In periods of truce between the warring parties, I spent time with my friends, looking for ways to occupy ourselves in these difficult circumstances.

Thus, in 2015, I visited the famous village of “Bayt Baws” or “The Village of Jews” near Sana’a, where most houses were abandoned although some families still inhabited few houses (Figure 1). This village used to attract many tourists and visitors from inside and outside Yemen. When I entered the village, the silence of the abandoned buildings and ruins surrounded me. Several of the houses were partially destroyed due to decay, neglect, and

[1]An Islamist political group and armed movement emerged in the 1990s from Sa’dah in north Yemen, the Zaidi sect’s stronghold city. The Houthi movement is a predominately Zaidi Shia force, whose leadership is drawn mainly from the Houthi tribe.

aftershocks of airstrikes. The village's buildings have become dangerous for visitors due to the possibility of sudden collapse. Old carved inscriptions can be seen on the walls of some buildings, reflecting the long history behind the decay. I also noticed that people near the village came to quarry some stones from the abandoned buildings to reuse to build new houses.

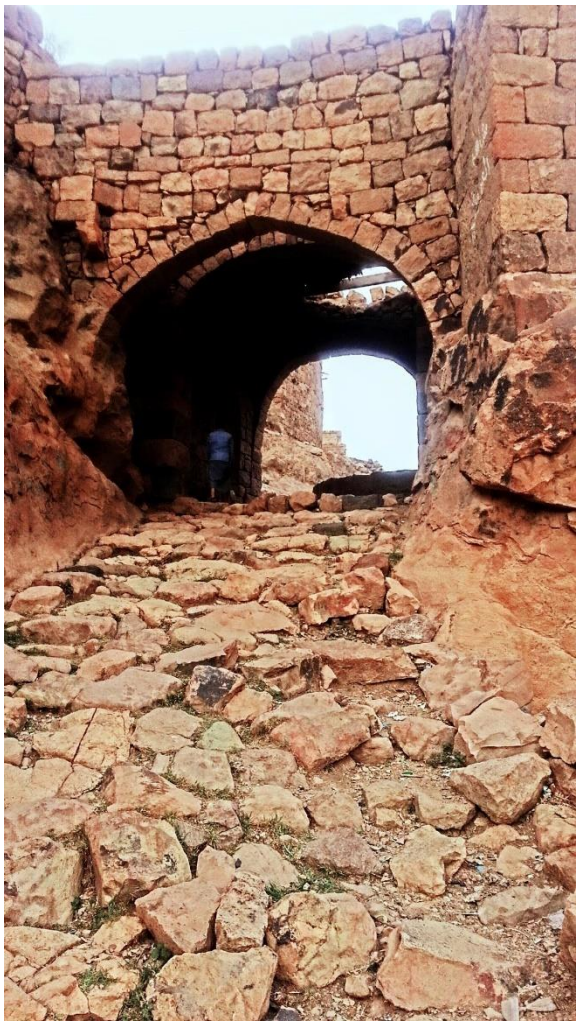


Figure 1: The deteriorated gate of Bait Baws village. The image was taken by Shehab Al-Masri while visiting the village in July 2015. Source: https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10154017318763765&set=pb.662538764.-2207520000..&type=3, accessed December 13, 2021

Driven by what I observed in this village, I was motivated to research the historical background of this abandoned village. Unfortunately, I did not find a single book or archaeological or historical study that addressed the village's history; I only found an ancient Yemeni historian and geographer Abu Muhammad al-Hasan al-Hamdani (954 CE),[2] who indicated that the village was established during the time of the Himyarite Kingdom (110 BCE -525 CE).[3] Along this line, al-Hamdani traveled and documented the Antique constructions across Yemen, in an attempt to preserve the cultural identity of Yemenis threatened by the dynastic Islamic sect from North Yemen (today's Saudi Arabia), which is known historically and today in Yemen as the sectarian Zaidi Islamic group.[4]

For more than three millennia, the rural landscape in western highlands of Yemen has been marked by sustainable agricultural practices harnessing the available water and land resources. Thus, through a myriad of mountain terraces, elaborate water harvesting techniques, and community-managed spate and spring irrigation systems, the country was, thus, able to support a relatively large population. Besides, the tops and foothills of the mountains are dotted with hundreds of small villages. The density of these villages varies between one area and the next depending on the availability of land and water. Crossing by these villages, I noticed that there is an abandoned settlement built into the fabric of the new villages. Driven by architecture interests, I came up with the idea of architectural documentation for these decaying villages in the western highlands of Yemen. These villages face the danger of rapid physical eradication in the near future. I could not develop a proposal to implement this idea when I was in Yemen for security reasons. However, the scholarship opportunity provided by the Central European

[2] A tenth century politian, historian, geographer, writer, and poet. Two of his extant works are of particular interest: his geography (*Siifat jazirat al-'arab* – Description of Arabian Peninsula) and the tenth volume of (al-Iklil) a genealogical compendium of Hashid and Bakil.
[3] Late Himyarite kings (the date remains uncertain) adopted Judaism as their religion, which may explain the name, the village of Jews.
[4] Paul Dresch, *Tribes, Government, and History in Yemen* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 121.

University - Cultural Heritage Studies Program allowed me to present the research proposal idea, an idea that has gone through several turns and changes until this current form:

Through my studies in the field of cultural heritage, I realized that the desire to document or preserve hundreds of abandoned and decaying villages in western highlands of Yemen is unrealistic. Instead, through frequent discussions with my supervisors, I decided to implement a new approach in heritage practice, relying primarily on ideas and insights by Caitlin DeSilvey.[5] She advocates for allowing the processes of decay and change (the inevitability of becoming) to take their course without interference in terms of restoring their cultural material. Hence, new post-preservation cultural heritage studies and practices (through preservation without intervention) are an optimal approach that can be applied to the Yemeni context.

Here is the hypothesis: the villages' decay and loss, along with other related traditions, is also a form of cultural heritage preservation approach that manifests itself in a long process of natural and social interactions. The following descriptive chapters of this thesis address these natural and social processes considered within the historical framework that produced the current rural landscapes of the western highlands region of Yemen. Thus, the emergence, decay, loss, and rebirth of settlements in the western highlands of Yemen represent material transformations connected to on-going natural and social processes over the past three thousand years. The villages, both abandoned and still inhabited, form the rural landscape of the present-day western highlands of Yemen. Their presence generates the meaning of endings that are beginnings and beginnings that resemble endings and this is consistent with DeSilvey's proposition about adopting a new approach to heritage preservation.

Finally, I would like to point out that the outcomes of this thesis in chapter 5 are an attempt to suggest some ideas based on DeSilvey's approach in post-preservation cultural heritage

[5] Caitlin DeSilvey, *Curated Decay: Heritage Beyond Saving* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017).

practice (care without conservation). My investigation found that there is no actual local cultural heritage practice in today's Yemen, whether practical or theoretical, despite the existence of some relevant institutions. However, there are some programs offered by external international organizations such as UNESCO to support unemployed youth who have been affected by the current war in Yemen. Therefore, my proposals and recommendations in the last chapter are intended as a kind of seed or a source of inspiration in the midst of the war-torn situation prevailing in Yemen today. By enriching cultural heritage studies in the Yemeni higher education system or cooperating with the international cultural heritage institutions post-war projects adopting the idea of care without material intervention have a realistic chance of being adopted. The aim of such projects, rather than preservation and reconstruction would be to preserve through documentation knowledge of the past and present of the abandoned villages dotted throughout the rural landscapes of the western highlands of Yemen.

The political geography of Yemen before unification

It is necessary to clarify some nomenclature of geographical borders related to the political situation prevailing in Yemen before the unification in 1990 (Figure 2). First, most of the western highlands are located in North Yemen (Yemen Arab Republic), founded after the 1962 revolution that overthrew the thousand-year Rule of the Imams.[6] Feudal sultanates ruled South Yemen, and due to topographic and geographic differences, no internal forces (imams or sultans) or external forces (successive Islamic Caliphates) could unite Yemen under the rule of a central government.[7]

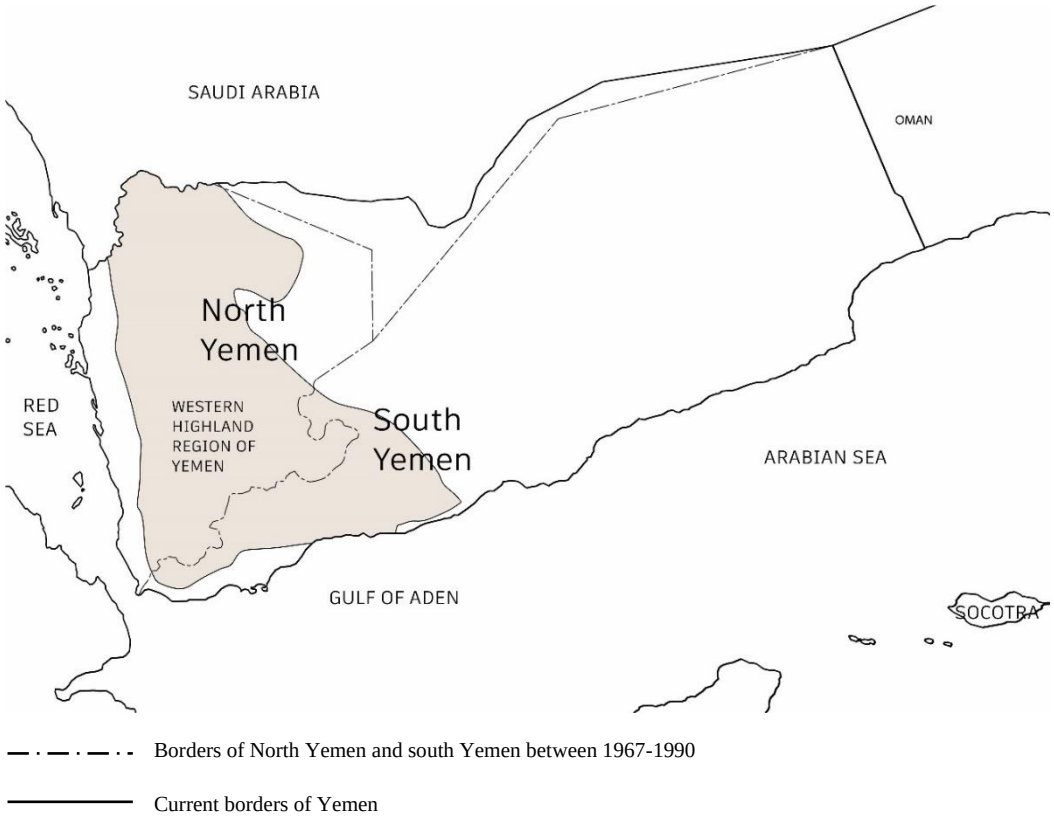


Figure 2: Western highlands of Yemen and the two Yemeni states before the unification in 1990. Source: https://www.edmaps.com/html/yemen_crisis_in_five_maps.html. Accessed December 14, 2021, illustration by Nasser Al-Hamdi

[6] The Imams of Yemen—and later also the Kings of Yemen—were religious leaders belonging to the Zaidiyyah branch of Shia Islam in Yemen. They claim that their descendants are descended from Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib, the cousin of the Prophet Muhammad. They established a blend of religious and political rule in parts of Yemen since 897 CE, and their rule endured under varying circumstances until the republican revolution in 1962.
[7] From the Umayyad Caliphate until the Ottoman Caliphate, which tried to control Yemen over the past thousand years.

North Yemen, the subject of this research project, was divided into two hypothetical territories; the north-east part was called *Upper Yemen*, and the south-west part was called *Lower Yemen* (Figure 3). These designations are very important for readers to understand the cultural, social, and political context of the western highlands region of Yemen.

Figure 3: An imaginary division of the northern and southern tribal regions in the north of Yemen. Source: Paul Dresch, Tribes, Government, and History in Yemen. p.4, illustration by Nasser Al-Hamdi

Research Aims and Questions

The aims of this thesis are: 1) Providing a comprehensive study within the environmental, historical, and socio-political context concerning the story of abandoned villages in the western highlands of Yemen, 2) exploring the reasons for the decay and eventual abandonment of villages by presenting my family's ancestral village as a case study, 3) Determine the appropriate approach for formulating a future proposal to preserve the material memory of the abandoned villages in western highlands of Yemen. Thus, the research seeks answers to the following questions:

1. What is the proposed approach to finding new practices that save energy in preserving cultural heritage, especially under unfavorable wartime circumstances such as in the Yemeni context?

2. What are the environmental and social factors that have influenced the establishment, decay, abandonment and reuse of settlements as well as site selection over the last four thousand years?

3. How have the Yemeni socio-political factors over the last thousand years contributed to the formation of the current rural landscape, including the decay and abandonment processes characteristic of the villages in the western highlands of Yemen?

4. What is the extent of the impact of the economic and political changes, modernization, and natural factors that afflicted Yemen in the twentieth century on the decay process in the villages of the western highlands of Yemen? Have the processes of village decay accelerated?

Methodology

The research methods used in this thesis focus on:

A. Desktop based research related to the reasons and processes that have led to the decay and abandonment of the villages in the western highlands of Yemen. In particular, I want to understand the environmental, social, political, and ecumenical factors that contributed to the abandonment process. Also, books and journal articles related to

cultural heritage have been explored to look for new heritage approaches toward certain heritage entities that extend beyond conservation, such as the case of Yemeni abandoned villages.

B. Documenting social and economic changes during the 1970s and 1980s by conducting five semi structured interviews with members of al-Sha'aybah village. These data are also considered primary sources of data.

C. Visual materials—crowdsourced old photographs created and circulated by community members on social media—are also considered sources of primary data, which help document and display the time-lapse elements in the abandonment process of villages over the last six decades. Also, collecting old and recent satellite imagery data effectively contributed to documenting the changes in habitation development around the villages.

Challenges and limitations

The current, forever, war crisis in Yemen creates a challenging environment for collecting sufficient data sources, especially concerning the history of the abandoned villages in the western highlands of Yemen. A poor internet connection and the absence of security in Yemen impeded me from collecting data or conducting in-depth interviews. Also, the lack of literature on these villages has partly limited my research. Using crowdsourcing and contact with the scholars and visitors who have been in Yemen was an alternative solution, but, unfortunately, I have not received any response for a meeting or answers to my emails. In terms of mobility, I was not able to carry out a field research trip back to Yemen because of war and my personal safety.

Chapter 1 – A new heritage conversation: Approaches for invisible heritage and care without conservation

This chapter delves into the following question: What is the best approach among the various western cultural heritage preservation practices that could be reasonably and practically adopted in the context of the abandoned villages in the western highlands of Yemen? This approach incorporates new practices that save time, money and energy and are aimed at preserving memory of the material cultural heritage represented by these abandoned villages.

To answer these questions, I need to describe the resistance to entropy and decay that drive peoples' desires to physically preserve the objects through which meaning or past connections are created. DeSilvey's post-conservation heritage approach aligns with the Yemeni context where it has been unintentionally adopted for the abandoned villages in western highlands of Yemen through a long dynamic process, on-going today, of establishing, destruction, re-establishing, and decay.

Cultural heritage management in Yemen

I tried to get data about the cultural heritage management in Yemen, the lack of information on the internet, and the difficulties communicating with people in Yemen who have dealt with the cultural heritage institutions due to the current war prevent me to investigate more about the performance of cultural heritage intuitions in Yemen before the political turmoil in 2011. However, the results of the desktop research that I have done—through my studying at CEU—show that during the 1990s and 2000s, which I presume Yemen was relatively stable, the heritage in Yemen lacks a genuine national effort towards its heritage.

There is no clear picture of the institution's performance and practice that is related to cultural heritage management in Yemen. However, The Culture and Tourism Ministry, presumably, is responsible for the heritage aspects, and it consists of General Authorities that deal with several cultural and heritage issues. For example, in 2002, the ministry of culture and tourism established the Heritage and Cultural Development Fund, which its fields of interest are the problems and issues related to building cultural and artistic heritage, cultural development, archaeological and historical heritage, and national museums and manuscripts.

There has been a cooperation between the governmental institutions in Yemen and international organizations such as UNESCO, EMENA, and the British council related to cultural heritage safeguarding and preservation. The local civil society such as Social Fund Development has limited contribution to safeguarding the main historical cities and some cultural heritage aspects. Unfortunately, the role of higher education is absent in terms of cultural heritage protection, many fields such as architecture, archaeology, and history do not have any contribution to developing or improving the cultural heritage studies projects and management plans.

Finally, the corruption of governmental institutions in Yemen has significantly contributed to the weak performance of institutions concerned with the Yemeni cultural heritage. For example, most of the conservation and protection projects for the most important historical cities and archaeological sites were largely carried out by international bodies concerned with cultural heritage, and a very small part was carried out by national authorities despite spending tremendous budgets for these institutions.

In the following sections, I will review the new criticism of traditional western practices of cultural heritage. In addition, the new approach proposed by some heritage experts such as

DeSilvey to heritage beyond saving, which is consistent with the topic of this research, the abandoned villages in the western highlands of Yemen.

The influences of entropy and decay on orthodox heritage practices

Rudolf Clausius coined the term "entropy" from the Greek *entropein*, which means transformation and change.[8] In physics, scientists defined entropy as a measure of the multiplicity of potential arrangements (disordered arraignments) of matter within a given system.[9] It also defines human striving: deploying energy and knowledge to fight against the tide of entropy and carve out refuges of beneficial order. In other words, as Steven Pinker wrote, "organisms' use of energy to maintain their integrity against the press of entropy is a modern explanation of the principle of *conatus* (effort or striving)."[10] This resistance to "becoming"—caused by entropy—drives us to protect and conserve ourselves, the culture we created, and the natural elements around us.

Entropy is closely related to decay. Decay occurs when a combination of physical, chemical, and biological factors combines to transform and threaten the integrity of a physical entity. The structure of a heritage building that is caught up in active processes of decay and neglect has a wide variety of configurations such as paint on trim, masonry pointed, damaged roof, and so on.[11] Therefore, the measure of entropy in this structure is the multiplicity of damages resulting from the absence of maintenance and repair, which is inherently unpredictable and uncertain.

[8] Joshua S. Martin, N. Adam Smith, and Clinton D. Francis, "Removing the Entropy from the Definition of Entropy: Clarifying the Relationship between Evolution, Entropy, and the Second Law of Thermodynamics," *Evolution: Education and Outreach* 6, no. 1 (October 31, 2013): 30, https://doi.org/10.1186/1936-6434-6-30.
[9] DeSilvey, *Curated Decay*, 10.
[10] Steven Pinker, *Enlightenment Now: The Case for Reason, Science, Humanism, and Progress* (New York: Viking, 2018), 37.
[11] DeSilvey, *Curated Decay*, 10.

In this sense, another standard definition of entropy is that: "the amount of energy in a physical system that cannot be used to do work."[12]

"Cultural Preservation Work" is linked to "Cultural Memory" work, and both are subject to the laws of entropy. DeSilvey criticizes the orthodox practice concerning the way material heritage is traditionally preserved: "Massive amounts of energy are invested in keeping heritage systems in a steady state so that the matter contained within them will continue to function as a cultural mnemonic device… In an entropic system, however, matter continually degrades, energy is lost, and an element of chance enters into the equation."[13]

Heritage conservation practices context: cultural memory work and cultural amnesia in light of inevitable processes of decay

We find ourselves surrounded by numerous things that our ancestors left behind but devote attention and care to only some of these things. We require old buildings, landscapes, and objects to work as mnemonic devices to remember a constructed past produced by our ancestors in order to feel a temporal connection as if to fulfill their desire for immortality or to give us a sense of identity associated with self-esteem.[14]

The anxiety produced by threat and loss are always related to the cultural memory work inherent to a particular object or structure.[15] Therefore, we try to suppress this anxiety by taking measures to restore or preserve the physical integrity of the threatened object and to ensure its survival.[16] Treatments through interventions aim to protect objects from direct destruction or outright neglect, or the indirect processes of entropy such as erosion, weathering, decay, and

[12] DeSilvey, 11.
[13] DeSilvey, 11.
[14] DeSilvey, 3.
[15] DeSilvey, 3.
[16] DeSilvey, 3.

decomposition. However, as DeSilvery suggests, there is also a choice not to intervene, to disassociate the work of memory from the burden of material stasis, and to discover the possibilities that emerge when change is adopted, even embraced, rather than resisted.[17]

In fact, there have been debates between restoration and anti-restoration proponents throughout the nineteenth century.[18] However, the model of preservation that we see today, which states that particular objects must be preserved for the benefit of future generations, only emerged at the end of the nineteenth century.[19] These presumed objects with heritage value became subject to new standards of classification, recording, and documentation for the organization of knowledge and expertise in the West.[20] While a series of legislation passed at the beginning of the twentieth century mandated that attempts be made to protect designated entities in perpetuity, other perspectives that consider material transience and change of objects were silenced or marginalized.[21] As a result, current heritage practices lead to a crisis of accumulation. There is, therefore, an urgent need to delist or cease the preservation of certain forms of heritage.[22]

Material erasure does not necessarily mean cultural amnesia: "encroaching absence may paradoxically facilitate the persistence of memory and significance."[23] In fact, as Cornelius Holtorf asserts, the processes of change and creative transformation may help maintain a

[17] DeSilvey, 4.
[18] Caitlin DeSilvey, "Palliative Curation," in *Ruin Memories* (Routledge, 2012), *87*, https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315778211.ch5.
[19] Cornelius Holtorf, "The Heritage of Heritage," *Heritage and Society* 5, no. 2 (2012): 153–74. Accessed: July 7, 2021.
[20] Tim Winter, "Clarifying the Critical in Critical Heritage Studies," *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 19, no. 6 (2013): 532–45.
[21] DeSilvey, *Curated Decay*, 4.
[22] Rodney Harrison, "Forgetting to Remember, Remembering to Forget: Late Modern Heritage Practices, Sustainability and the Crisis of Accumulation of the Past," *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 19, no. 6 (2012): 1–17.
[23] DeSilvey, *Curated Decay*, 5.

connection to the past rather than sever it.[24] DeSilvey adopted a set of unorthodox premises in new heritage practices based on this statement:

> …the disintegration of structural integrity does not necessarily lead to the evacuation of meaning; processes of decay and disintegration can be culturally (as well as eco-logically) productive; and, in certain contexts, it is possible to look beyond loss to conceive other ways of understanding and acknowledging material change.[25]

DeSilvey also suggests a reasonable rationale for experimental heritage practice, which holds that the objects of our attention are only temporary arrangements of matter that shuttle between durability and vulnerability.[26] Returning to entropy again, these objects considered for preservation are subject to the Second Law of Thermodynamics as well as the socio-political factors often outside our control. Thus, instead of treating objects of heritage as eternal entities, stochastic heritage practices would be better understood: "If we frame "heritage" as a verb, a continual achievement rather than a fixed object, then we are perhaps better able to explore the mismatch between rhetoric and reality produced through messy practices of managing and making do."[27]

Unlike other related terms such as "historic preservation," heritage as a concept does not assume that its relationship to the past must include actions necessarily aimed at material stabilization in order to satisfy society's desire to protect a particular meaning or to stabilize memory in material form and associated identity formations.[28] Instead, this concept may create other possibilities and ideas in heritage practices: "the term retains within it the potential for

[24] Cornelius Holtorf, "Averting Loss Aversion in Cultural Heritage," *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 21, no. 4 (2014): 1–17.
[25] DeSilvey, *Curated Decay*, 5.
[26] DeSilvey, 8.
[27] DeSilvey, 9.
[28] DeSilvey, 13.

redefinition and reorientation, as well as critical reflection on the choices that we make in its name."[29]

Practitioners of heritage preservation often ignore or deny the inevitable forces of physical transformation. This ignorance and denial are, in part, driven by resistance to the forces of entropy that I referred to in the introduction to this chapter, determining heritage practitioners' actions towards things. Therefore, acknowledging vulnerability and accepting the inevitability of change and demise provides an opportunity for heritage practitioners to engage in experimental methods in practicing heritage. The archaeologist Siân Jones describes this focus on heritage practices in Western contexts as "material fossilization," which blinds us to how meanings can be produced by engaging in the active social and organic lives of heritage objects. She suggests that we need to be more open to the processes by which "things grow, change, rejuvenate, collapse and decay," and we should pay attention to the meanings and values produced by these inevitable natural processes that occur to things, including us.[30]

Conservation and maintenance work may sometimes lead to obscuring or eliminating some historical meanings in order to secure others. Therefore, adopting the approach of accepting change in preserving heritage objects may also contribute to the continuity of memory.

However, anxiety about decay and loss is difficult to resist. Allowing the processes of change to progress without interference is against human nature, and we constantly attempt to limit this change, especially in the last moments of material disintegration. Michael Shanks writes

[29] DeSilvey, 8.
[30] Siân Jones, "'They Made It a Living Thing Didn't They ….': The Growth of Things and The Fossilization of Heritage," in *Future for Archaeology*, ed. Robert Layton and Stephen Shennan (London: UCL Press/Left Coast Press, 2006), 107–26. https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/77611801.pdf, Accessed: July, 9 2021.

"The seduction of conservation is one of gratification—ridding the self of this nausea of loss and decay."[31] Thus, we endeavor with drastic intervention to keep things alive as long possible.

In sum, the approach suggested by DeSilvey is that accepting change regarding heritage objects does not require a position of acquiescence and indifference in the face of change. Instead, it is necessary to reconsider different ways to accommodate change. Evaluating the material past that does not necessarily include accumulation and preservation. Cultural Heritage practitioners must find ways to allow forces in some of the things we care about to change while moving towards other systems of significance: "Our minds tend to establish these as cultural things, and it takes extra effort to see them as temporary assemblies of matter, on their way to becoming something else ...even in states of near collapse ... ruination does not signal the 'absolute annihilation of building and organization' but instead opens out into radically different forms of organization and organizing."[32]

Care without conservation: letting things be

DeSilvey examines several case studies of heritage sites in danger of decay and the heritage practices at these sites. Some sites required immediate intervention for environmental and safety reasons while the desire to save and preserve heritage required either palliative intervention in direct and indirect ways, simply letting the change take its course. The last approach is based on "entropic heritage practice," which allows entropy to operate under certain conditions.

As mentioned earlier, it is not easy to quell the urge to conserve and care rooted in human nature; even when the decision is made to accept the ruination of the heritage, it is difficult in

[31] Michael Shanks, "The Life of An Artifact in An Interpretive Archaeology," *Fennoscandia Archeologica* 15 (1998): 16.
[32] DeSilvey, *Curated Decay*, 19.

moments of threat to step back and allow physical disintegration to continue. Letting nature take its course is always more feasible in theory than in heritage practical practice. Therefore, if we need alternatives and new models of heritage preservation, we may need to develop modes of care that help us negotiate the transition between presence and absence.

Drawing on both Heidegger and Buddhist teachings, Greg Kennedy distinguishes between care that imposes its will on an external world of things and beings and care that establishes a relationship with those being cared for, the latter allowing that relationship to act again on the self in unexpected ways.[33] His use of the term "neediness" is consistent with the recognition of the finitude of existence, the anxiety about death, and constant becoming processes faced by humanity, especially in war-torn places such as Yemen, and reflected in non-human subjects. He says, "Authentic care senses the truth of death and discloses it accordingly."[34] Based on Kennedy's argument (although his argument is geared toward rethinking our relationship with objects that can be disposed of), DeSilvey suggests that this relationship between us and objects can provide useful resources for founding an entropic heritage practice: "…the withholding of physical care does not have to mean withdrawal of a careful attitude toward the objects of the past that we engage with."[35]

Heritage is constantly renewed if social relations and practices persist in heritage subjects, which give it meaning over time, even if the physical fabric associated with it is significantly altered or erased. Therefore, the process of transformation may itself be productive as a response to the natural and social changes governed by the becoming process.[36]

[33] "Things are disclosed as things only by our taking care of them in a manner that allows them to refer their being back to our essential embodied neediness." Greg Kennedy, *An Ontology of Trash: The Disposable and Its Problematic Nature* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), 136.
[34] Kennedy, 131.
[35] DeSilvey, *Curated Decay*, 179.
[36] DeSilvey, 185.

The shift towards curated decay or a post-preservation model of heritage through the use of the heritage ideas and practices mentioned by DeSilvey in her book aims at an active rather than a passive mode of engagement.[37] In this chapter, I share some of DeSilvey's insights that aligned with the context of abandoned villages in the western highlands of Yemen. Although traditional heritage practices in the West for preservation of heritage were implemented on a very small scale in Yemen, the approach presented by DeSilvey can be easily adapted to the Yemeni context, where transition, transience, transformation and uncertainty have actually always characterized the fate of villages in western highlands of Yemeni context, which I will describe and discuss in detail in the next chapters.

Thus, the old abandoned villages in Yemen reflecting material continuity and cultural memory—which has not been interfered with by extensive heritage practices so far—since time immemorial. These settlements have been subject to change and deterioration brought about through recurring cycles of social upheaval and natural processes of decay caused by the dynamics of entropy.

On the other hand, given Yemen's neglect of development and the population's lack of knowledge about these old villages from which they are increasingly alienated, completely ignoring what is happening to these villages may lead inevitably to cultural heritage oblivion.

[37] DeSilvey, 187.

Chapter 2 – An overview of the physical and archaeological context in the Western Highlands of Yemen

This chapter presents a general picture of the physical, environmental, and social characteristics that clearly appear in the cultural landscapes of the western highlands of Yemen. These characteristics played an essential role in the formation of the landscape that we see today. These characteristics and factors have contributed significantly to settlement continuity from the Bronze Age in Yemen (2800 and 1200/1000 BCE) to the present day. Several foreign expeditions have mainly conducted several archaeological studies in the western highlands of Yemen although local academic institutions in Yemen have also contributed a small part to these studies. These studies help ensure the continuity of the material memory of the ruins of old settlements and abandoned villages within a complex and lengthy process of environmental and social factors to be discussed later. Also, these studies provide us with background and important information about the layers in the cultural landscape, which will benefit specialists in archaeology, architecture, cultural heritage, and other related disciplines in conducting future studies or documenting projects. Finally, studies conducting such as these—which unfortunately the Yemeni higher education system and related research centers lack—but presented in this chapter, shows how important it is to establish multidisciplinary studies programs and projects. These new approaches in cultural heritage practices (care without any material intervention) represent a different kind of preservation.

The physical setting

Millions of years of geological activity have led to the formation of the western highlands region in Yemen,[38] located on the western-southwestern edge of the Arabian Peninsula (Figure 4). This section provides a summary of the geological formation, geography, and climate of the western highlands of Yemen. These features of the region's physical environment contributed to the process of settlements establishment, decay and abandonment over millennia.

Figure 4: Map of the western highlands region of Yemen. Source: Jac Van Der Gun and Abdul Aziz Ahmed, "The Water Resources of Yemen. A Summary and Digest of Available Information," 1995, https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.1.2616.1362., accessed April 14,2020, illustration by Nasser Al-Hamdi

The geologic emergence of the western highlands region began around 100 million years ago, when the *African–Arabian Plate* collided with the *Eurasian Plate*, exposing the *Precambrian Basement*, splitting it into blocks. The south and west of the Arabian Peninsula were lifted up,

[38] It is also known as the Yemen Mountain Massif region.

forming the *Arabian shield* and its steep topography in the western sides. Then, 65–30 million years ago, the Arabian Plate drifted north-eastwards, separating from African Plate, opening the rift valleys, known today as the *Red Sea* and *Gulf of Aden*. This drifting resulted from continuous tectonic movement and interaction (until the present day), the leading cause of earthquakes in Yemen,[39] causing many deaths and widespread destruction, often displacing people from their settlements. Seismic activity is also one of the environmental reasons leading to the continuous abandonment of old villages (inhabited ones), and the further decay of other ancient settlements (already abandoned).

One result of the drift of the African and Arabian plates is a huge geologic pressure north and east that folded the Precambrian Basement, including a large variety of rocks. Consequently, the mountains of Yemen suffered intensive block faulting, with vertical displacement of up to 2,000 m. Finally, during the Quaternary, new volcanic activity began (and continues to this day), producing basaltic eruptions and, importantly, creating the present-day "wadis" water drainage systems that play such an important part in the traditional water management system in the region.

The geological formations contribute to the way settlements are distributed within the highlands, where human geography follows hydrogeography.[40,41] Thus, population centers of any size could only develop where water was available. However, when the natural water resources were scarce because settlement sites were primarily selected for defensive reasons, people adapted aspects of the natural topography to develop a unique rainwater harvesting technology to support irrigation and cultivation. In the worst-case scenario, during droughts,

[39] Rakesh Mohindra et al., "Probabilistic Seismic Hazard Analysis for Yemen," *International Journal of Geophysics* 2012 (2012): 1–14, https://doi.org/10.1155/2012/304235.
[40] With some exceptions due to political reasons and security, which I will review in the next chapters.
[41] Christopher Ward, *The Water Crisis in Yemen: Managing Extreme Water Scarcity in the Middle East* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2015), 10.

people usually migrated from the affected areas to other regions where water resources were still available.[42]

Today, the western highlands of Yemen comprise a very irregular and rugged topography, dissected deeply by numerous wadis and with intermontane plateaus. Accordingly, the region can be divided into three geographical subregions shown in (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Geographical subzones in Western highlands of Yemen. Source: Gun and Ahmed, accessed April 14,2020, illustration by Nasser Al-Hamdi

While Precambrian rock outcrops are widely dispersed in the eastern part of the region, the central-west and the southern subregions are topped by thick blankets of Tertiary and Quaternary volcanic rocks.[43] Thus, the architecture of ancient structures in the western

[42] Dresch, *Tribes, Government, and History in Yemen*, 13.
[43] Jac Van Der Gun and Abdul Aziz Ahmed, "The Water Resources of Yemen: A Summary and Digest of Available Information," Water Resources Assessment Yemen, technical report, 1995, https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.1.2616.1362.

highlands region such as towns, villages, water structures, temples, forts, and mosques are mainly comprised of a variety of stone building material. The strength of the building material is one of the factors contributing to the physical longevity of some settlements, as their inhabitants deliberately selected more the robust rocks that preserve well even today.

The western and southern slopes of the highlands region are the steepest and enjoy moderate to relatively high rainfall, on average some 300-500 mm/year. On a local level, however, rainfall can even exceed 1000 mm/year depending on the movement of moist air masses. This physical environment provided agricultural stability for rain-fed agriculture systems (springs and rainwater harvesting), practiced widely on the numerous artificially terraced mountain slopes, supporting a relatively high population density for the Arabian Peninsula.[44] My family's village, examined in a case study in Chapter 4, is located in the heart of this part of western highlands of Yemen region.

In contrast, the eastern slopes have a smoother topography varying between some 3000 meters (in the west) and 1000 meters above sea level (in the east) (Figure 6). Thus, the eastern slopes lie farther from sources of moisture, affecting the quantity of rainfall which decreases rapidly from west to east (less than 300 mm/year). Population density decreases on the eastern slopes in the direction of the Arabian desert. These eastern slopes merge gradually into the well-developed areas of the Ma'rib, Shabwa, and Wadi Hadramawt, ancient centers of the spice trade in Antiquity.[45] These sites were well preserved due to the dry climate.[46]

[44] Ward, *The Water Crisis in Yemen: Managing Extreme Water Scarcity in the Middle East*, 10.
[45] New archaeological studies suggested that some strong, ancient states developed in the western highlands of Yemen.
[46] Unlike some regions in the western highlands region of Yemen, the desert region and eastern plateau of Yemen were ideal for conducting excavations. Here, archaeological studies and expeditions could be conducted intensively due to the dry environment.

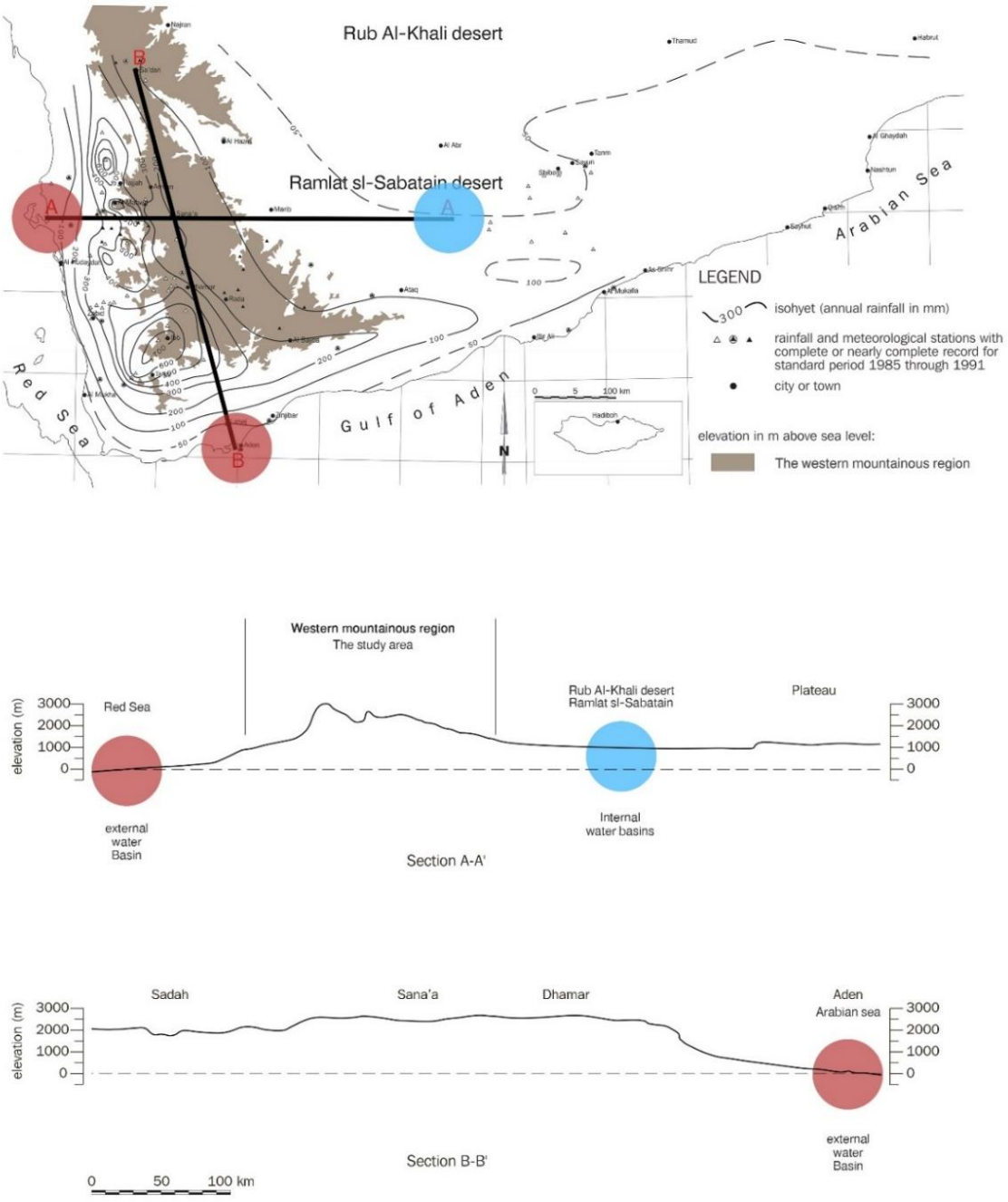


Figure 6: Topographic map of Yemen. Source: 'Gun and Ahmed., accessed April 18,2020, illustration by Nasser Al-Hamdi

The considerable climatic complexity of the western highlands of Yemen contributes to the variable preservation of the archaeological record. The western and southern areas are classified as sub-humid and have attracted intense settlement activity. Water resources and precipitation are more available than in other parts of the western highlands. Thus, agricultural fields and subsequent settlements were built at the expense of pre-existing sites, characterizing

a long settlement process that also meant fewer chances for ancient sites or associated landscape elements to survive, making it difficult to understand the chronology of the cultural landscape in these areas.[47]

Christopher Edens and T. J. Wilkinson argue that the continuous attrition of early landscape elements by later communities is a major biasing factor in archaeology.[48] Thus, the archaeological record is better preserved in areas close to arid climatic zones (desert and the eastern plateau region), where conditions are more favorable.

The eastern part of the western highlands region of Yemen is classified as a semiarid area, where the population was high, but where successive human activity did not result in the landscape being covered by signs of agricultural activity.[49] Preservation in this area is optimal, helping scholars understand the development of settlement patterns and continuity through the ages as well as the abandonment process. In contrast, the more humid highlands farther west and south of the western highlands of Yemen provided ideal environments for cultivation. As a result, extensive agricultural terraces led to large-scale destruction of previous settlements and ancient archaeological sites,[50] except for the most durable sites that somehow withstood climatic factors and settlement location dynamics.[51]

[47] Christopher Edens and Tony Wilkinson, "Southwest Arabia During the Holocene: Recent Archaeological Developments," *Journal of World Prehistory* 12, no. 1 (1998): 61.
[48] Edens and Wilkinson, 61.
[49] Edens and Wilkinson, 61.
[50] Agricultural terraces are an ancient farming practice dating back to the Bronze Age in the western highlands of Yemen. Terracing work is still practiced to this day over large areas of Yemen.
[51] Edens and Wilkinson, "Southwest Arabia During the Holocene: Recent Archaeological Developments," 61.

Environmental sequence and cultural landscape background: The becoming process

As described above, the physical environmental variations in the western highlands of Yemen have always influenced the settlement development and abandonment processes. In addition, differences in topography and rainfall are strong predictors of the selection of settlement location and distribution through history along with the environmental, social, and political changes discussed in the following. In contrast to the eastern part of Yemen, which has been studied since the mid-twentieth century, the western highlands of Yemen have been relatively neglected. However, in the last four decades, the region has received increasing attention from archaeological studies that have taken the first steps in outlining the cultural landscape in Yemen. The findings of these studies and aerial maps will be used to understand the settlement location dynamics, re-use, the possible processes of abandonment, and damage over millennia from natural factors and stone quarrying by people in later settlements.

The chronology of the cultural landscape in Yemen was ambiguous until the late twentieth century

Until the early 1980s, the cultural sequence and archaeological chronology of Yemen, particularly in the western highlands, was obscure.[52] In the last four decades, however, archaeologists were able to establish a tentative archaeological and cultural chronology in the

[52] Before the 1980s, archaeologists faced a cultural sequence gap in Yemen. The missing link was the Chalcolithic or Early Middle Bronze Age stage of cultural development. Sites that were known were either pre-Neolithic or Neolithic in character, or alternatively, dated from the Late Bronze Age merging into Iron Age or post-Iron Age. In the early 1980s, Alessandro de Maigret recognized and defined the Bronze Age elements in southwest Arabia for the first time (Alessandro de Maigret, "A Bronze Age for Southern Arabia." East and West, 34, no. 1/3 (1984): 75–106, http://www.jstor.org/stable/29756677, accessed on January 24, 2021.). Moreover, the gap was balanced by an equivalent gap in geographical knowledge of the archaeology of early communities in the Yemeni highlands, issues resolved by teams from archaeological Italian, French, German, Canadian, and American institute missions.

western highlands of Yemen.[53] This sequence reveals human activities and settlements dispersal over different periods.[54] In this vein, various factors such as environmental, economic, political, and social changes have been shown to have influenced the development of landscape and settlement dynamics from the late fourth millennium BCE up to the recent past.[55]

Environmental change has played a big role in terms of the development of settlements and landscapes in the western highlands of Yemen

Earlier, increased rainfall from the Indian Ocean monsoon started to expand rapidly between 7000 and 3000 BCE, leading to the growth of dense woodlands.[56] Thus, in these areas of the western highlands, Neolithic settlements developed due to climatic conditions suitable for settlement and cultivation. This increased rainfall appears to have continued into the late fourth millennium BCE, when the Indian monsoon weakened, and rainfall decreased.[57]

[53] Most of the archaeological expeditions were conducted in the eastern region of the western highlands of Yemen. For example, the American archaeological mission conducted six missions to uncover the urban and environmental development in the eastern region of the western highlands, specifically, Dhamar Governorate, an area rich in earlier settlements. I assume that these ancient settlements also influenced the distribution of old abandoned villages as well as the modern villages, and perhaps some of these archaeological sites represent a continuation of settlement by the current residents.

[54] Namely, Neolithic age, Bronze age, Iron age, Himyarite age, and Islamic period.

[55] Tony Wilkinson, "The Organization of Settlement in Highlands Yemen during the Bronze and Iron Ages," *Durham Research Online*, Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies, 2003, 157.

[56] Tony Wilkinson and McGuire Gibson, "Dhamar Project," The Oriental Institute - Annual Report, 1998, https://oi.uchicago.edu/about/annual-reports/oriental-institute-1997-1998-annual-report. 43., accessed January 26, 2021. Some forested areas existed until the nineteenth century while other woodland areas still survive in the western highlands including Jabal Bura, Utmah, and Raymah. F N Hepper and J R I Wood, "Were There Forests in the Yemen?" Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies, 9 (1979): 65.

[57] Tony Wilkinson, "Project for the Archaeology of Yemeni Terraced Agriculture," The Oriental Institute - Annual Report (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 2002), 99, https://oi.uchicago.edu/about/annual-reports/oriental-institute-2001-2002-annual-report, accessed on January 27, 2021.

These favorable climatic conditions did not last long. The region became drier during the third millennium BCE. Surprisingly, although it seems counter-intuitive, increasing aridity in the early third millennium BCE (Early Bronze Age) resulted in a sudden increase in dense settlement in the western highlands of Yemen (Figure 7).[58] Thus, some parts of the western highlands of Yemen were settled by a large number of communities living in villages and small towns, suggesting that the human population in the region increased, even in the face of a drying climate.[59]

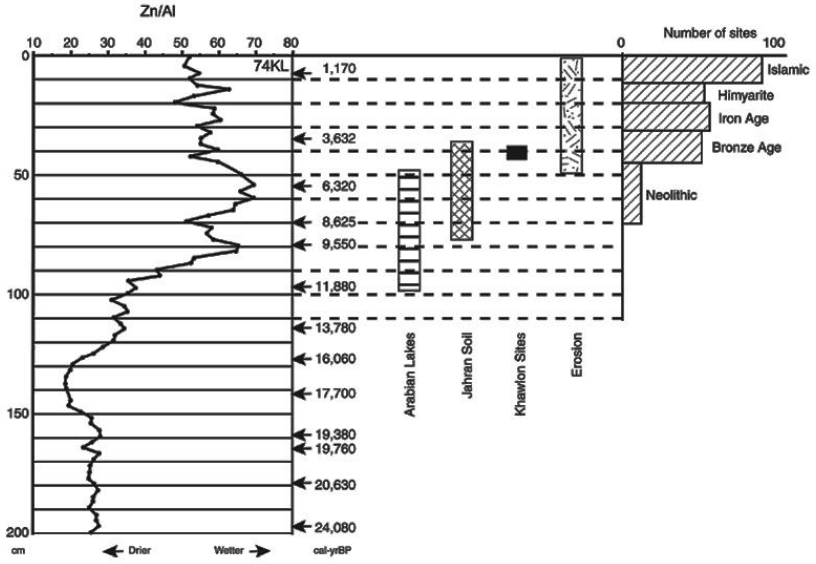


Figure 7: The left-hand graph indicates wetter monsoon conditions (to the right) and drier monsoon conditions (to left). To right: the number of archaeological sites in various periods. Source: Tony Wilkinson, "The Organization of Settlement in Highlands Yemen during the Bronze and Iron Ages," Durham Research Online, Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies, 2003, 33. 157-168.

Moreover, despite the climatic changes that made the western highlands of Yemen less green during its main period of settlement growth (third and second millennia BCE), the region continued to be attractive for later long-term settlements compared to other areas in Yemen,

[58] Bronze Age occupation of the western highlands of Yemen has been documented for over nearly two millennia roughly 2800 and 1200/1000 BC. Christopher Edens, "The Bronze Age of Highlands Yemen: Chronological and Spatial Variability of Pottery and Settlement," *Paléorient* 25, no. 2 (1999): 105, https://doi.org/10.3406/paleo.1999.4690.
[59] Wilkinson, "Project for the Archaeology of Yemeni Terraced Agriculture," 99.

especially, the prosperous centers of the ancient states in eastern Yemen.[60] Also, it may explain the current high population density in the western highlands compared to other regions in Yemen today.[61]

Along ancient trade routes

Settlements were established in the western highlands of Yemen on a steady base of living, promising trade routes that linked ancient Yemen with the ancient outside world after centuries of separate and independent development and brought the economy to prosperity.[62]

Schmidt suggests that "architectonic archetypes" originated, as far back as the third millennium BC, in areas far away from the cities that later developed on the eastern mountain fringes of the desert, that is, in high valleys as remote as the interior of the mountainous region of Yemen.[63] Thus, the dense pattern of settlements and cultivation terraces established at the beginning of the third millennium BCE (and indeed at the end of the fourth millennium) indicates that the highlands may have formed a core region around the kingdoms of the incense trade or what De Maigret calls the "Era of the Caravan Kingdoms."[64]

Ancient Yemen became much more closely tied through trading to the Hijaz and civilizations in the north of the Fertile Crescent. These trade links seem to have covered a longitudinal axis

[60] Wilkinson, "The Organization of Settlement in Highlands Yemen during the Bronze and Iron Ages.", 167.
[61] According to the World Bank, the western highlands represent the most densely populated part of the country and account for nearly 60 percent (90 percent in 1970) of Yemen's population World Bank, "Republic of Yemen Country Social Analysis" (Sustainable Development Department Middle East and North Africa Region, 2007), https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/664561468345850280/undefined., 22, accessed May 8, 2021.
[62] T. J. Wilkinson, Christopher Edens, and M. Gibson, "The Archaeology of the Yemen High Plains: A Preliminary Chronology," Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy, 8, no. 1 (1997): 99–142., 131.
[63] Jurgen Schmidt, "Ancient South Arabian Sacred Buildings," in *Yemen: 3000 Years of Art and Civilization in Arabia Felix*, ed. Werner Daum (Innsbruck, Frankfurt/ Main: Pinguin-Verlag, Umschau-Verlag, 1988)., 78.
[64] De Maigret wrote, "The power and richness of Arabia Felix did not derive from commercial activities as the classical literature simplistically suggests but is oriented rather in the fact that its people were skilled farmers, exceptionally gifted in creating and managing highly specialized irrigation systems. Saba, Ḥaḍramawt, Qatabān, Awsan, Qatabān, Ma'in, and Ḥimyar (Nigel Groom, *Frankincense and Myrrh: A Study of the Arabian Incense Trade*, Arab Background Series (London; New York: Longman, 1981), 36.

that historically has been called the Khaṭ al-Yaman (Arabic: road line of Yemen), a principal route for commerce and travel.[65] In this vein, architectural experience and know-how may have been transferred between these civilizations through economic cooperation between the ancient Yemeni states and the contemporary civilizations in the north of Arabian Peninsula.

Settlements in the highlands of Yemen may have developed along with the ancient inter-regional trade routes

The presence of the (inter-regional trade routes) may relate to the further strengthening of trade links that developed throughout ancient Yemen, providing a glimpse into the distribution of settlements in the period. For example,[66] in the Dhamar region, some Bronze Age settlements appear along with one of these old trade routes. The evidence for this route at this early date is not particularly strong. However, that the settlements aligned with these roads became increasingly clear during the Iron Age (1200 BCE) and the Himyarite period (110 EC -525 CE). Therefore, Iron Age and Himyarite settlements may have developed along with the previously mentioned Khaṭ al-Yaman, a long-distance system of routes running north-south through the highlands region (Figure 8).

[65] Caesar E. Farah, "Yemeni Fortification and The Second Ottoman Conquest," *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies*, 20 (1990): 33.

[66] Due to the lack of archaeological and historical studies in other regions in the western highlands of Yemen, this example may demonstrate the distribution of settlements along old trade routes (maybe dated to 2000 years previously), one of these routes is currently in use as a highway between Dhamar city and Sana'a city. Further information: Wilkinson, "The Organization of Settlement in Highlands Yemen during the Bronze and Iron Ages," 165-167.

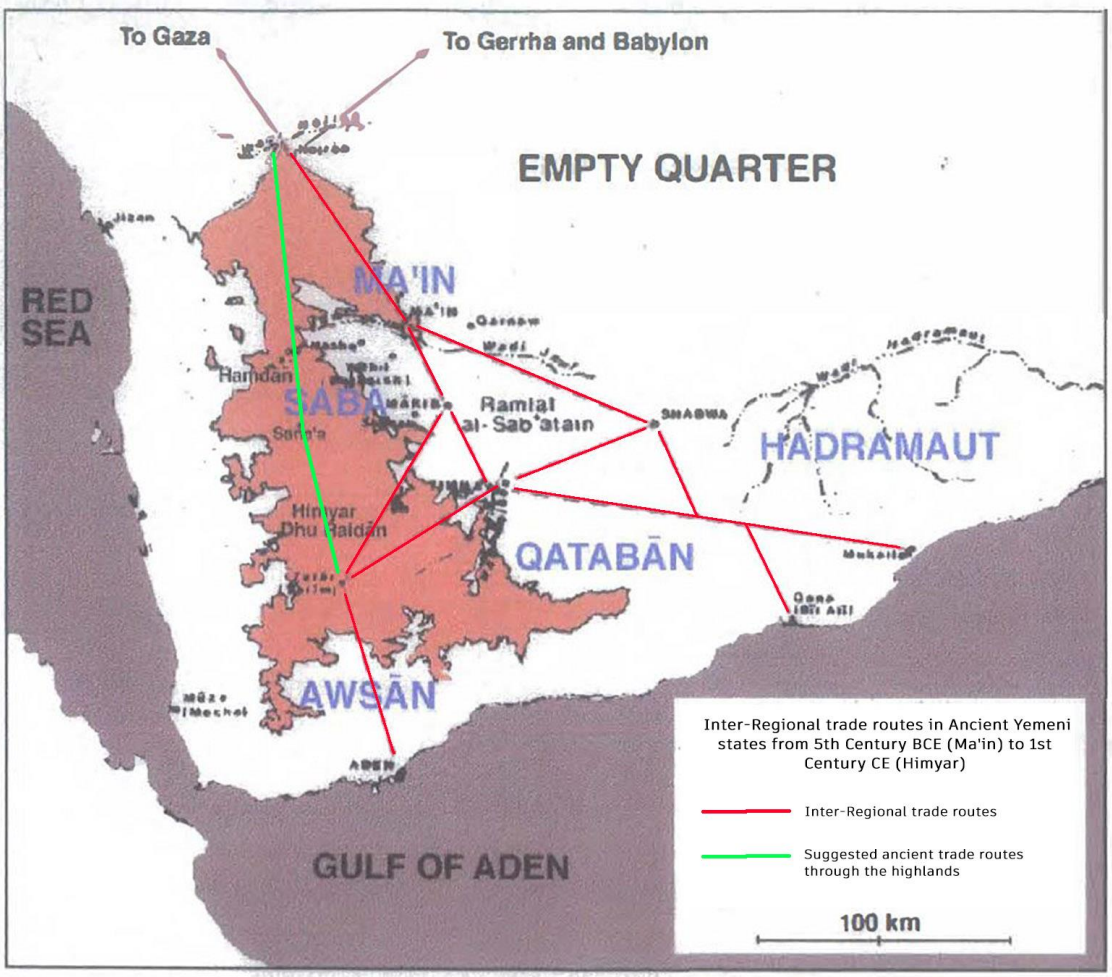


Figure 8: Map of inter-regional trade routes and ancient Yemeni states operating between the ninth century BC and the first century AD. Source: Fernando Varanda, "Tradition and Change in the Built Space of Yemen: The Description of a Process as Observed in the Former Yemen Arab Republic between 1970 and 1990" [67]

For the most part, the sites of Bronze Age and Iron age settlements were carefully selected for purposes of defense in high locations

In general, there was a characteristic preference for locating settlements on hilltops, plateaus, and rocky outcrops in the western highlands of Yemen. While most Bronze Age settlements were situated on rocky hilltops or plateaus for defensive purposes and visual control of the territory,[68] some Iron Age settlements had better access to low-lying lands than the Bronze age settlements. Nevertheless, although some Iron age sites were built on lower ground, several

[67] Fernando Varanda, "Tradition and Change in the Built Space of Yemen: The Description of a Process as Observed in the Former Yemen Arab Republic between 1970 and 1990," Ph.D. diss. (University of Durham, 1994), 13, http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/5093/.
[68] Fernando Varanda, "Twenty Years of Change in the Built Environment of Yemen," *International Association for the Study of Traditional Environments*, Traditional Dwellings and Settlements Review, 9, no. 2 (1998): 67.

sites were naturally fortified by virtue of their position on top of high rocky outcrops. For example, the site located at the greatest altitude recorded during the Dhamar survey is a hilltop Iron Age site located 3000 m above sea level (Figure 9). The site lies 5.5 km east of the famous Himyarite capital of Dhafar.[69] This tendency to establish settlements on hilltops continued in the Iron, Himyarite, and Islamic period (Figure 10 and Figure 11).

Figure 9: Remains of an Iron age fortress, surrounded by present day terraces. Source: Google Earth 2020, Ibb Governorate, Yemen, 14°13'07.2"N 44°27'12.8"E, illustration by Nasser Al-Hamdi.

[69] Tony Wilkinson and Christopher Edens, "Survey and Excavation in the Central Highlands of Yemen: Results of the Dhamār Survey Project, 1996 and 1998," *Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy* 10, no. 1 (1999): 7, //doi.org/10.1111/j.1600-0471.1999.tb00124.x.

Figure 10: This Iron Age-Himyarite site was transformed into later settlements (including abandoned and recent villages) Source: Google Earth 2020, Dhamar Governorate, Yemen, 14°30'20.1"N 44°24'33.3"E, illustration by Nasser Al-Hamdi.

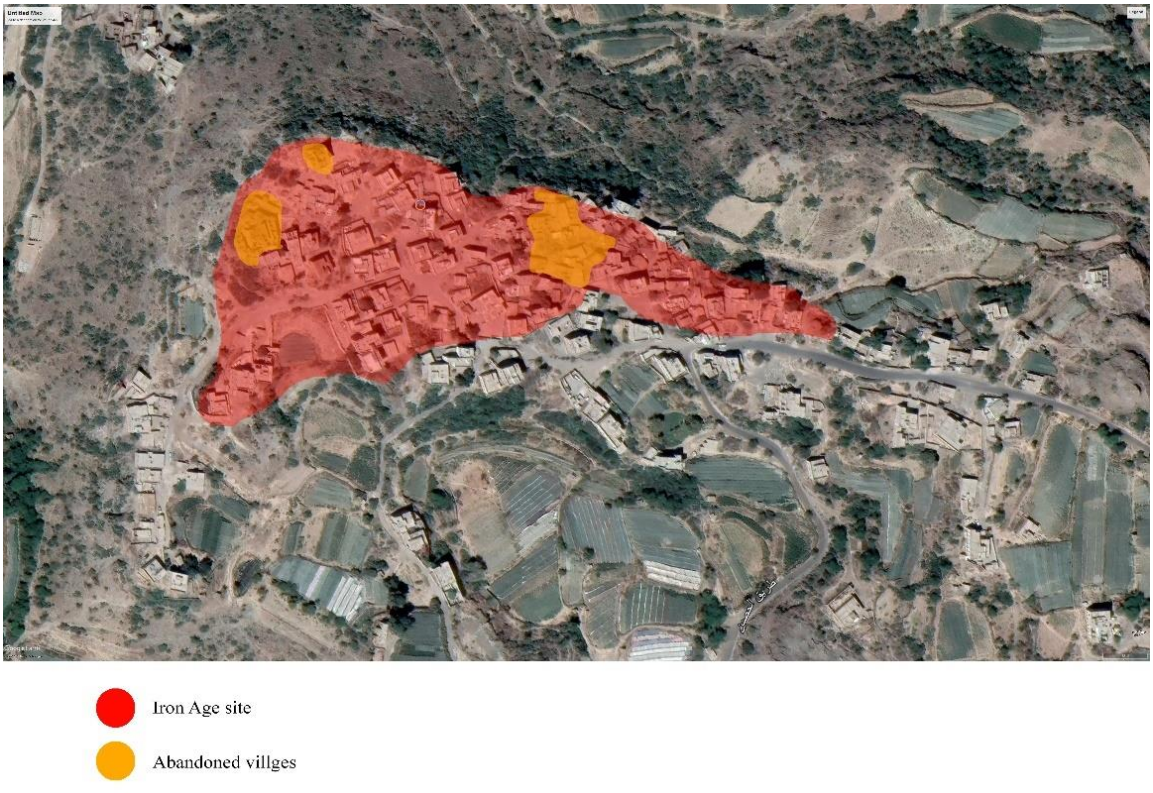


Figure 11: Iron age fortress, as it continued to be used during the later Himyarite and Islamic ages. Source: Google Earth, 2020, Dhamar Governorate, Yemen, 14°24'36.6"N 44°24'36.1"E, illustration by Nasser Al-Hamdi.

Continuity and change: Adapting the landscape for irrigation and agriculture

The archeological evidence suggests that the Iron Age sites continued to be occupied into the Himyarite period,[70] following the same patterns for establishing settlements on hilltops and rocky outcrops for the same defensive reasons. Nevertheless, several site locations of Himyarite settlements appeared to have moved into the lowland areas and were carefully chosen to be close or connected to natural rainwater drains (wadi). Thus, water structures such as large and small dams were constructed to retain and control water flows. The farmlands could, thus, be watered by irrigation water systems derived from these water structures.[71] There was a new shift in irrigation and agricultural technologies based on a complex system of water management that may have replaced a more *ad hoc* system of terraced agriculture and run-off farming that existed in the Iron age and probably the Bronze age.[72]

Although archaeological inscriptions indicating the presence of sophisticated states in ancient Yemen and extending earlier to the pre- Himyarite period have been found, the Himyarite state still represents the height of formal "civilization" in the region with more monumental architecture, dams, and other landscape features, concentrated mostly in the western highlands region of Yemen.[73]

[70] Wilkinson and Edens., 8.
[71] Julien Charbonnier, "Dams in the Western Mountains of Yemen: A Ḥimyarite Model of Water Management," *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies*, 39 (2009): 81–93.
[72] Wilkinson and Edens, "Survey and Excavation in the Central Highlands of Yemen.", 10.
[73] Wilkinson and Edens., 12.

Continuity in abandonment and reuse

There is strong continuity in the process of abandonment and re-use of settlements in the Islamic and modern eras due to political and demographic changes.

The fall of the Himyarite state in the sixth century CE marked the end of large-scale cooperative civic development in ancient Yemen and ushered in the so-called medieval period.[74] The failure of the administration and construction of water supply projects had social and political impacts. Although the unstable political conditions that characterized the end of the Himyarite period and the beginning of the emergence of Islam in Yemen (630 CE) continued, the population still increased with people moving to more isolated and remote areas in the western highlands of Yemen seeking autonomy, fortification possibilities, and protection (Figure 12).

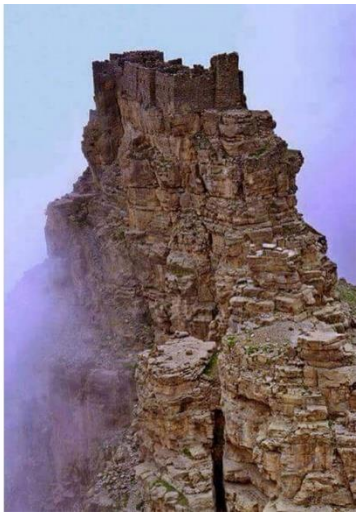


Figure 12: Left: An Islamic fortified village (Al-zaya'ah fortification)[75] in the Hararz mountains (near Bani Morah village), Sana'a. Source: https://twitter.com/Alsakaniali/status/1276702672591167489/photo/1., accessed January 28,2021.
Right: An abandoned fortification in Amran dating to the Middle Islamic period (Bani Harasi village). Sources: https://www.facebook.com/tgbrfved/posts/2699884723614731., accessed January 28,2021.

Thus, the middle and late Islamic period is distinguished by denser settlement compared to earlier times. The villages are scattered in almost all topographic locations in the western

[74] Kipp Cozad, "Yemeni Mobility: Utilizing A Longue Durée and Oral History Approach to Understand Yemeni-American Migration," MA thesis (University of Missouri-Kansas City, 2015). 42.
[75] حصن الزياح، بالقرب من قرية بني مرة، حراز، صنعاء. (al-zaya'ah fortress, near the village of Bani Morah, Haraz, Sana'a governorate).

highlands. The results from archeological surveys suggest that many existing villages today were probably occupied for several centuries, based on the current pattern of villages that can be seen today, merged with villages from the Middle Ages in Yemen (sixth–sixteenth centuries CE) and modern Yemen (sixteenth–twentieth centuries CE).[76] In addition, continued population pressure lead to the extremely densely settled landscape that is now evident, with (in some areas) terraced slopes and fully cultivated valley floors (Figure 13 and Figure 14).

Figure 13: Qadaha A'ala village, Al-Mahweet Governorate, terraces are still cultivated with cereals. Source: https://www.facebook.com/Yemenpicturesandstories/photos/a.100808385184264/145450430720059/ , accessed January 28, 2021.

[76] Wilkinson and Edens, "*Survey and Excavation in the Central Highlands of Yemen.*", 10.

Figure 14: 5.35 km wide and 2.95 km long, terraces are covering the slopes and valley floors, which is located east of Ibb Governorate. Source: https://www.google.com/maps/@13.9987915,44.2303025,6445m/data=!3m1!1e3 accessed December 22, 2018.

Discussion

In this chapter, I have tried to present current understandings concerning the establishment and development of villages within their environmental, historical, and archaeological contexts, based on an analysis of the archaeological mission's results from the past four decades. These surveys indicate a strong continuity of settlement in the western highlands region during the second and first millennium BC into the Himyarite period, the Middle Ages period, and the modern period in Yemen.

At this time, dispersed settlements were later incorporated into local water management and field systems to promote cultivation activity and defense, especially during political and tribal unrest. In other words, the settlement pattern in the western highlands appeared to reflect notions of refuge or resistance in times of war along with the potentials of a particular environment. Thus, increased competition for land was also connected to increases in the

population resulting in moves to more accessibly defensible positions, where people lived with only the possessions required for survival and satisfying basic needs. The hypothesis that there is continuity of settlement by the later inhabitants on the pre-Islamic sites requires more archeological evidence through future fieldwork. From the short review above, key findings emerge:

Settlement patterns

Most settlement sites represent the remains of a single period of occupation. However, several sites were occupied over several periods. For example, *Masna'at Maryah* was settled from the Bronze Age until the Himyarite period.[77] Moreover, the surrounding old and new villages are distributed in the surroundings of the site; some modern period villages are abandoned (Figure 15).

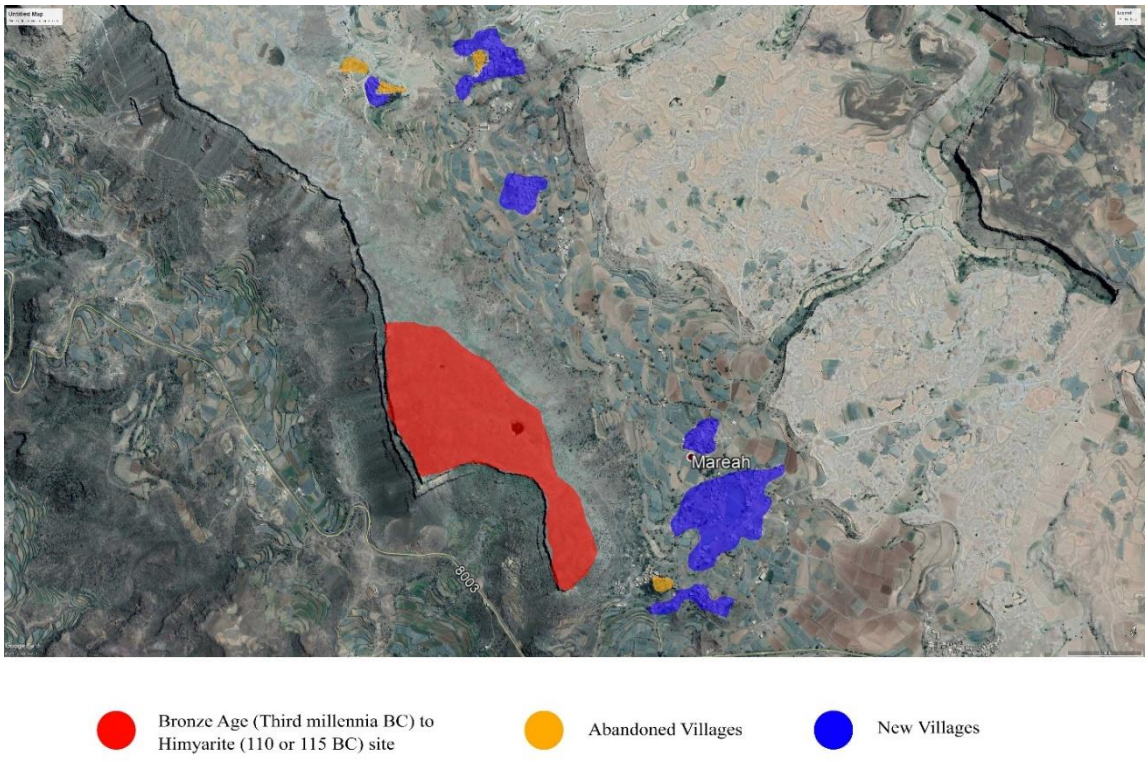


Figure 15: Masna'at Maryah. Source: https://www.google.com/maps/place/Mareah,+Yemen/@14.5023716,44.260676,3483m/data=!3m1!1e3!4m5!3m4!1s0x1603236736e81043:0x2952296841c93869!8m2!3d14.5041571!4d44.2692196, accessed January 30, 2021, illustration by Nasser Al-Hamdi.

[77] Krista Lewis and Lamya Khalidi, "From Prehistoric Landscapes to Urban Sprawl: The Masna'at Māryah Region of Highlands Yemen," *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies*, 38 (2008): 215.

Some old villages (both abandoned and still inhabited ones) adjacent to the older settlement were quarried from the ancient archaeological sites' stones (Mostly from the Himyarite period) (Figure 16 and Figure 17). These villages also contain a large number of *spolia*, which may have been reused over many periods (Figure 18).

Figure 16: (left) Abandoned village at Masna'at Maryah from the top of the ancient archeological site. Source: http://www.almotamar.net/pda/44610.htm, accessed January 30, 2021
Figure 17: (right) Stones were taken from the ancient archeological site and were reused into new village buildings. Source: http://dhamaronline.com/?p=811, accessed January 30, 2021

Figure 18: Spolia incorporated into modern buildings in a village near Masna'at Maryah. Source: http://dhamaronline.com/?p=811, accessed January 30, 2021

There is also another pattern of settlement distribution in the same area in which these settlements belong to different cultural landscape layers but are located close together. For example, in the Nunah area, most of the settlements dating back to the Bronze and Iron Ages are concentrated on plateaus. However, a Himyarite settlement is situated on low rocky land,

more specifically, near the wadis and the edge of the valley to control the floodwaters for agricultural irrigation. The remnants of two dams dating back to the Himyarite period in this region represent evidence for a further shift in settlement location (Figure 19).[78] Because the Himyarite site lies within the areas of modern villages, the only evidence of Himyarite occupation consisted of re-used stones within present-day village buildings and scatters of sherds within the old and modern villages in the Nunah area.[79] Climate change gave impetus to the development of rainwater control techniques, which led to further shifts in the locations of settlements in the same area. These shifts in settlement continued in this region after the fall of the Himyarite state down to the present.

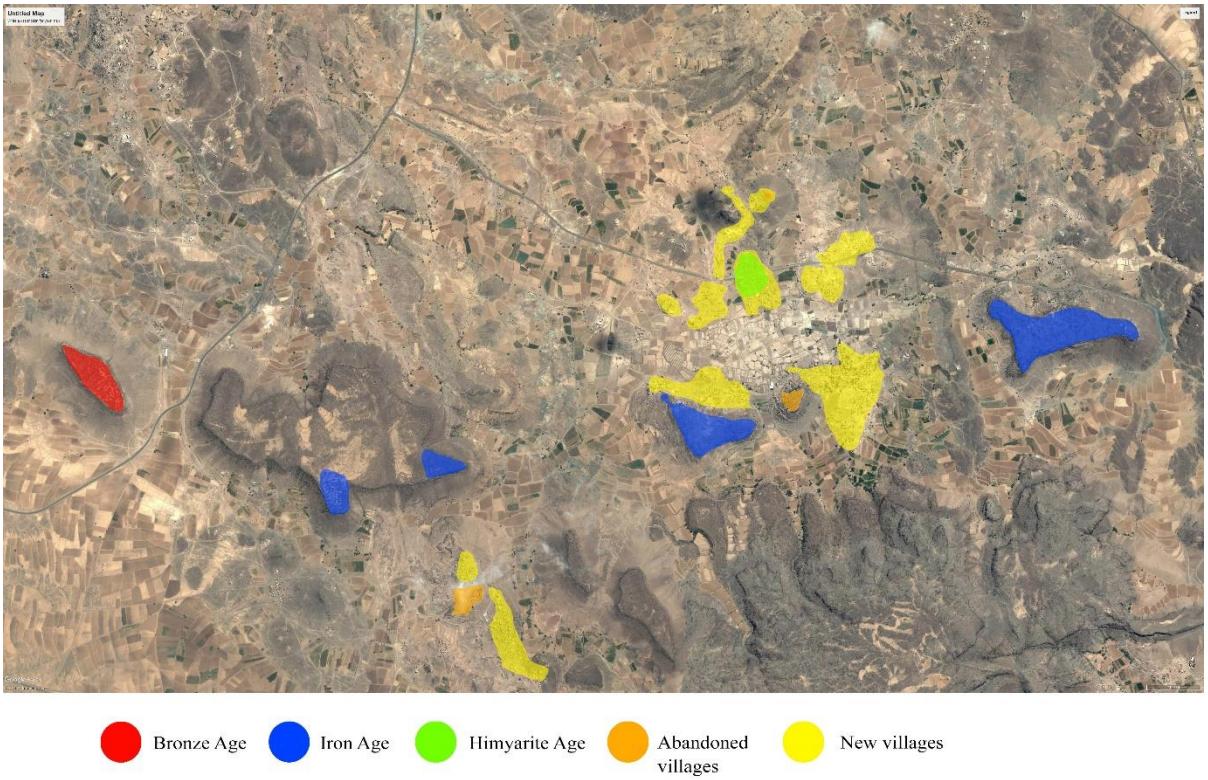


Figure 19: Settlements from different periods around Nunah. Source: https://www.google.com/maps/@14.8116357,44.3950755,3479m/data=!3m1!1e3, accessed January 30, 2021, illustration by Nasser Al-Hamdi.

[78] Wilkinson and Gibson, "Dhamar Project," 47.
[79] Wilkinson and Gibson, 48.

Fortified, clustered dwellings, and secluded settlements

Due to political turmoil and external interference in medieval Yemen (820–1823 CE), and with the fall of the last of the ancient Yemeni states, Yemen entered periods marked by political and ideological conflicts.[80] Thus, societies tried to preserve their autonomy from regional hegemony associated with the conflicts between various empires at that time, and then to resist the entry of Islam and the successive Islamic caliphates that were to significantly impact the political identity of Yemenis.

All this political tumult led to the emergence of the most isolated settlements, concentrated on peaks and rock outcrops where populations characterized by withdrew to protect themselves from frequent invasions and political conflicts between different opposing religious and political ideologies. In addition, during middle and late Islamic periods, tribal alliances (historically self-governing) with the Imamate-Zaydi rulers or the Shafi'i rulers led to constant conflicts over the capitals and major cities in the western highlands of Yemen. As a result, fortified villages were established mainly around the ancient capitals of Yemen, acting as sanctuaries for the rulers. For example, numerous defensive villages and clustered dwellings were constructed around the historic capital Sana'a and al-Mahwit, Sad'ah, Amran, Hajjah, and Dhamar, representing the main line of defense or protection for rulers—from tribal-supported political rebellions or Ottoman invasions (Figure 20 and Figure 21

Figure 20: Neglected fortified village (Al-Zakateen). Source: Google Earth,2020, Amran Governorate, Yemen, 15°32'18.1"N 43°50'43.6"E, illustration by Nasser Al-Hamdi.

[80] Since the Abbasids (mid-eighth century CE), governors in Yemen were appointed by the caliph in central regions' towns. However, as the caliphate weakened, central control became increasingly ineffectual, especially in the western highlands, with its rugged geography and turbulent tribes. It became fertile ground for the development of separatist dynasties, both colonial and indigenous as well as of sectarian versions. Varanda, "Tradition and Change in the Built Space of Yemen," 20.

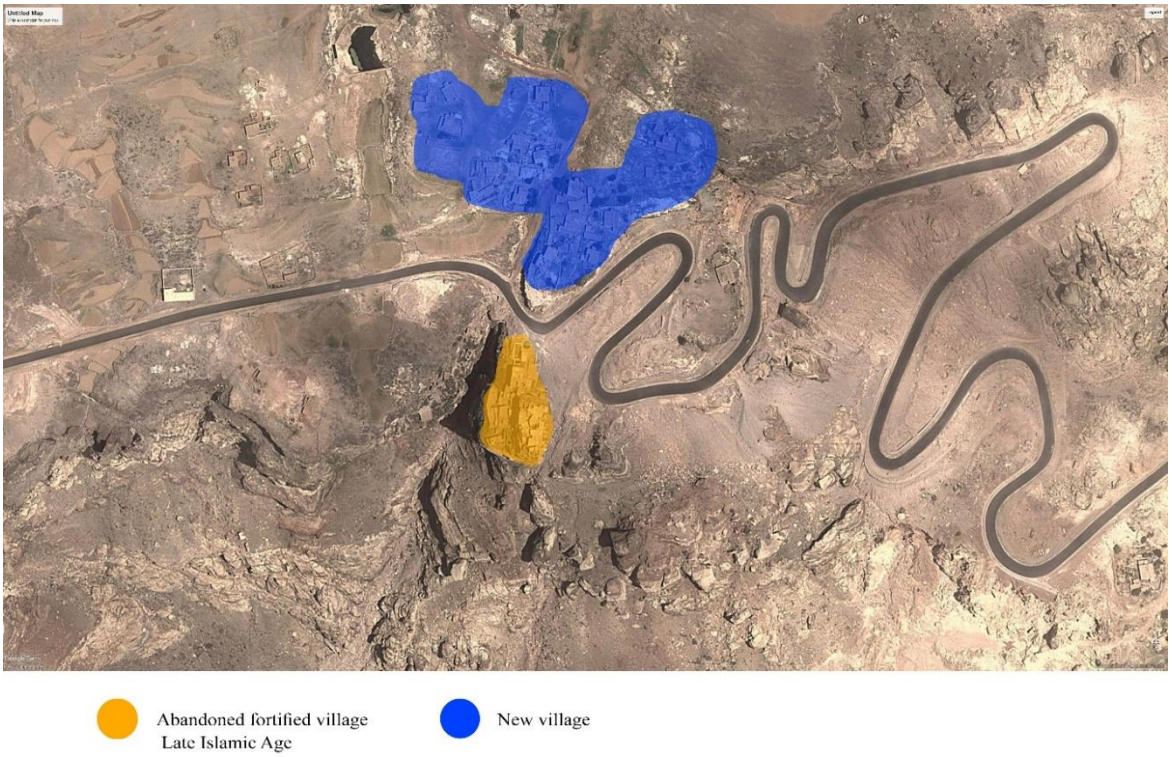


Figure 20: Neglected fortified village (Al-Zakateen). Source: Google Earth,2020, Amran Governorate, Yemen, 15°32'18.1"N 43°50'43.6"E, illustration by Nasser Al-Hamdi.

Figure 21: Al-Zakateen abandoned village on the top of a rocky formation. Source: https://twitter.com/Smi72343198/status/1211341907953147905, accessed February 2, 2021,

Unfortified villages

There are also old unfortified villages, which date back to the late Middle Ages in Yemen.[81] These villages—along with the fortified villages colloquially called *kharaba*—were abandoned. Some of them fell into ruin due to natural and human factors such as quarrying for dressed stones, thus, contributing to the further decay of these ancient villages. In addition, some abandoned villages are still in good condition but are in danger of disappearing due to serious neglect and the current political conflict.

As we saw in this chapter, the western highlands of Yemen represent continuity of establishment, re-use, and abandonment settlements dating back to the Bronze Age until today. Thus, in order to develop a documenting methodology or conduct survey projects for a site (in the future) researchers must be aware of the possible cultural landscape layers that might be hidden under or incorporated into currently abandoned villages.

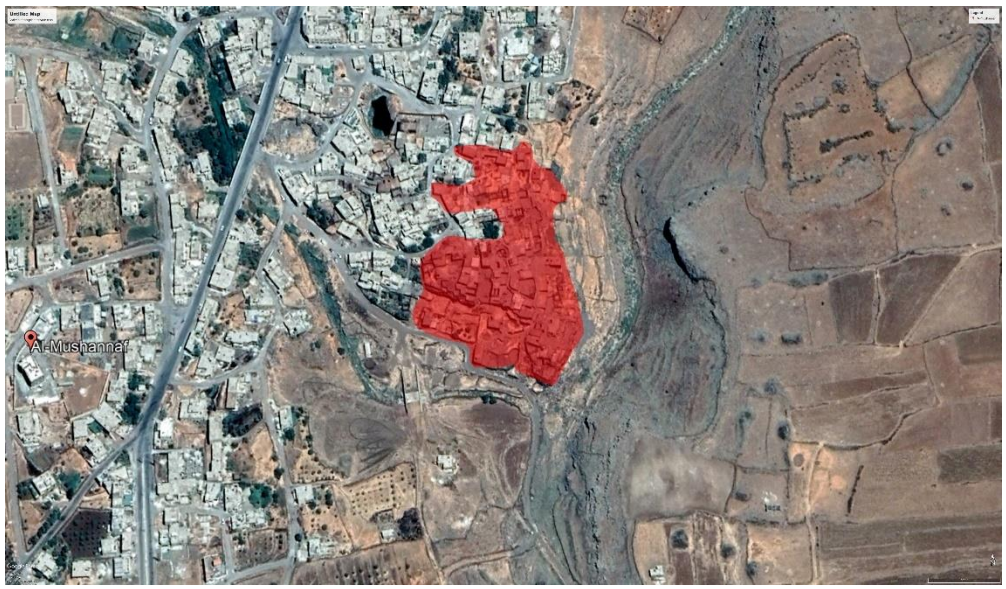
There has been relatively very little archaeological research carried out in the western highlands (except for the Dhamar region). Therefore, establishing the cultural landscape layers must rely on interdisciplinary studies to create a coherent historical background for these settlements in other areas of the western highlands region. In addition, due to the large size of this area and the complexity and ruggedness of the terrain, there are difficulties involved in conducting these studies as well as developing certain methodologies or surveys even in normal conditions. Also, security impediments and lawlessness in government institutions are among the most important

[81] There are no studies on abandoned villages in Yemen, so I can only assume that they date to this period.

stumbling blocks in the progress of archaeological research and studies related to cultural heritage issues in Yemen.

Kharabah definition

The word of *kharabah* in the Arabic language refers to a place (town, village, building) that has collapsed (as the result of natural factors to some extent but especially through human action) and become abandoned.[82] Likewise, another similar name, ***khirbet,*** can be found in Levantine countries' villages and small towns such as Israel, Palestine, Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon. In this region, the term *khirbet* refers to certain archaeological sites or the villages were built on the sites of ancient settlements where older ruins are still extant (Figure 22).[83] Although this name indicates the presence of ruins or the results of abandonment, some recent,



inhabited towns and villages still bear this name. This can be explained by the fact that these new villages may be built on the ruins of old settlements.

Figure 22: Settlements ruins at Al-Mushannaf in Syria. Source: Google Earth 2021, 32°44'28.2"N 36°46'40.4"E, illustration by Nasser Al-Hamdi.

[82] "Kharaba," in *Maajim: Online Arabic Dictionary*, accessed June 11, 2021, https://www.maajim.com/dictionary/%D8%AE%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%A9.

[83] "أنماط العمران في فلسطين | مركز المعلومات الوطني الفلسطيني" [Urban Patterns in Palestine: Palestinian National Information Center], Wafa, accessed June 11, 2021, https://info.wafa.ps/ar_page.aspx?id=5159.

Settlement continuity in comparable contexts

The continuation of the settlement patterns similar to those characteristics of Yemen through the ages is also a phenomenon found in Levant countries.

As with villages in the west highlands, some villages in Levantine countries demonstrate a similar, continuous process of abandonment and re-use. Many of these settlements date back to before the time of the Nabataean Kingdom (fourth century BCE–106 CE),[84] the Roman

Empire in Arabia (Arabia Petraea 106 CE–630 CE) (Figure 23),[85] and during the Ottoman Empire (Figure 24).[86]

[84] tarek2012, "مجدل الشور.. موقع أثري حصين يعود للعصر النبطي (Majdal Al-Shour..a fortified archaeological site dating back to the Nabataean era)," *S A N A* (blog), accessed June 16, 2021, https://sana.sy/?p=1073288.
[85] "Al-Mushannaf | Archiqoo," accessed June 16, 2021, https://archiqoo.com/locations/al-mushannaf.php.
[86] "Khirbet Ghazaleh," in Wikipedia, January 18, 2021, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Khirbet_Ghazaleh&oldid=1001224904. It appeared in the Ottoman tax registers (1596) under the name of Kutaybit Tamir, accessed June 16, 2021.

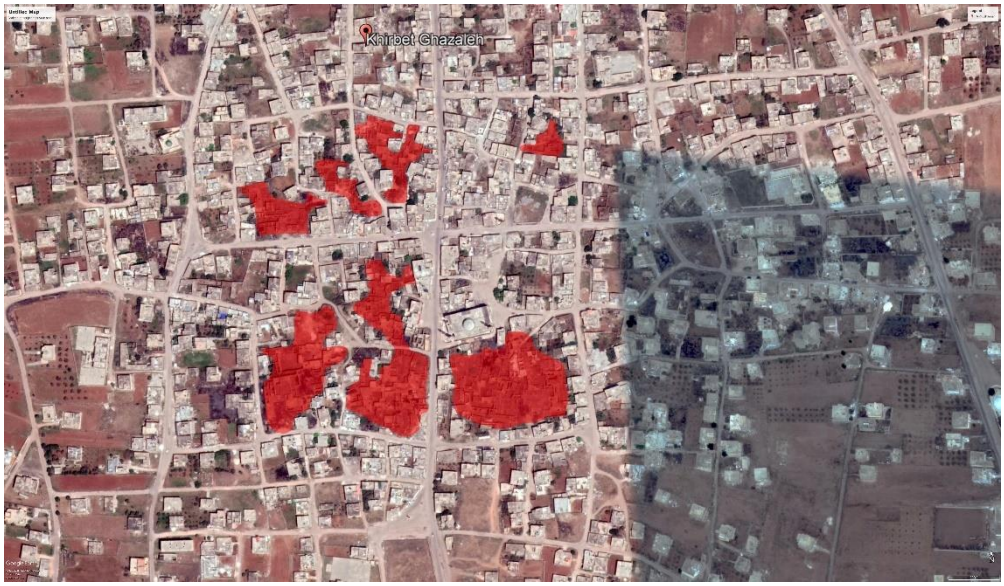


Figure 23: Parts of a Roman temple from the first century BCE, re-used maybe as a house at Al-Mushannaf in Syria. Source: Gianfranco Gazzetti / GAR; https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/e/ed/Mushennef_-_GAR_-_8-01.jpg, accessed June 2, 2021

Figure 24: Abandoned settlements in a modern urban fabric (Khirbet Ghazaleh) in Syria dating back to the sixteenth century during the presence of the Ottoman tax registers. Source: Google Earth 2021, 32°43'51.0"N 36°12'16.8"E, illustration by Nasser Al-Hamdi.

Isolation of Yemen

In Yemen, there are some terms that refer to the abandoned villages such as, the old village, the upper village, but the term *kharabah* is the most common. In this sense, *kharabah* is part of an urban fabric associated with the modern small villages in the Yemeni countryside, which are only a few meters or a few kilometers far from the living settlement. The difference between the villages in western highlands of Yemen and those in Levantine countries is that the villages in Yemen and those in the Fertile Crescent are abundant in the urban fabric, whether in large cities, small towns, or remote areas. Looking at maps and images via Google Earth, incredibly, almost all small towns and villages have such abandoned settlements. This can be explained by the fact that the topographical nature and dry climate as well as social, economic and political movements, all contributed to their preservation, or at least to the preservation of the process of establishing, abandoning, and reusing these villages for at least a thousand years until the end of the twentieth century. In the following chapter, I will present the social and

political context of these villages in order to understand the factors that contributed to the resilience of these villages and then their deterioration today.

Chapter 3 – Social and political contexts: a thousand years of isolation and inner turmoil

Throughout history, geography and the environment played significant roles in Yemeni social and political formation, characterized by its independent development far from the surrounding cultures, except for some cultural convergences that took place as the result of ancient trade and regional interventions over the past thousand years. This separate and independent social and political development of tribal society has preserved the legacy of Yemeni cultural heritage, which is manifested, for example, in unique customs and traditions. This relative isolation is also connected to the survival of abandoned villages, which reflect isolated political and social interactions throughout the second millennium CE.

In this chapter I demonstrate the argument I have made before: along with natural process, the specificity of Yemeni social and political interactions—especially over the last thousand years—has created the present abandoned villages phenomena that can be seen throughout the western highlands of Yemen. In other words, these villages have survived, in part, through a long complex process of social and political dynamics. Based on that, since the abandoned villages represent heritage beyond saving, I would suggest allowing the political and social processes—that have contributed to the destruction and abandonment of old villages as well as the continuity of settlement in the vicinity of the abandoned—to take its course during the current turmoil in Yemen.

Also, it sets the scene for the social and political development of the western highlands until the beginning of modernization in Yemen in 1962. It outlines the historical circumstances in which the tribe as an organizing principal emerged as an essential part of Yemeni society, affecting the political, social and cultural organization of Yemen up to the present day.

The influence of tribalism on the on the processes of survival villages and traditions

Tribalism in the west Yemeni highlands of today first appeared in the late pre-Islamic period.[87] Mikhail Piotrovsky suggests that the period of transition from Antiquity to the Middle Ages in Yemen was notable for the increasing role played by nomads in Yemeni history.[88] He argues the traditional social stratification of present-day Yemeni society, which characterizes the distinct classes of tribesmen within the tribe, is a reminder of the process when the incoming Bedouins (both nomadic and semi-nomadic) became part of the ruling class as they infiltrated *en masse* into the agricultural regions and the city environs.[89]

The fall of the last ancient state, fifth century CE, led to a new era of social and political insecurity and leading to the isolation of tribal communities who sought autonomy and established strict customs.

There is an inverse relationship between tribalism and the state: as the centralized state weakened, the influence of the tribal areas increased and vice versa. Thus, when the strong

[87] Dresch, *Tribes, Government, and History in Yemen*, 3.
[88] Mikhail B. Piotrovsky, "Late Ancient and Early Mediaeval Yemen: Settlement Traditions and Innovations," in *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East, vol. 2: Land Use and Settlement Patterns; Papers of the Second Workshop on Late Antiquity and Early Islam*, ed. G. R. D. King and Averil Cameron (Princeton, NJ: The Darwin Press 2014), 216.
[89] Piotrovsky, 216.

state collapsed, the tribe remained cohesive, closer to an autonomous state in which they controlled and managed their own affairs.

The fall of the last ancient state (the Himyarite Kingdom) in the middle of the sixth century CE ushered in the absence of a centralized state.[90] Together with periods of conflict and turmoil, it may have pushed the peasants (the majority of whom were tribesmen) to return to the autonomy of the tribe, seek tribal fanaticism and resort to a set of tribal laws to resolve their daily issues, whether within the same tribe or with other tribes. These tribal laws are valid to the present day.

The sixth century CE might well have marked the beginning of tribalism as it appears today in Yemen as well as to the emergence of social stratification within the tribes. In addition, the continuity of political and social insecurity in the following millennium (except for intermittent periods of relative peace) has contributed significantly to the isolation of these tribal communities in the western Yemeni highlands, determining the distribution patterns of settlements located in the most isolated areas, and also contributing to the preservation of architecture patterns in many regions as a result of the internal political and economic dynamics mentioned above. Hence, constant conflicts between tribal alliances and political groups played their part in the process of destruction and abandonment of villages and settlements in the western highlands region, and this process is itself an essential element that formed the current cultural heritage of Yemen.

[90] The religious conflict in Himyar between Christianity and Judaism was one of the main reasons that led to the fall of the Himyarite kingdom.

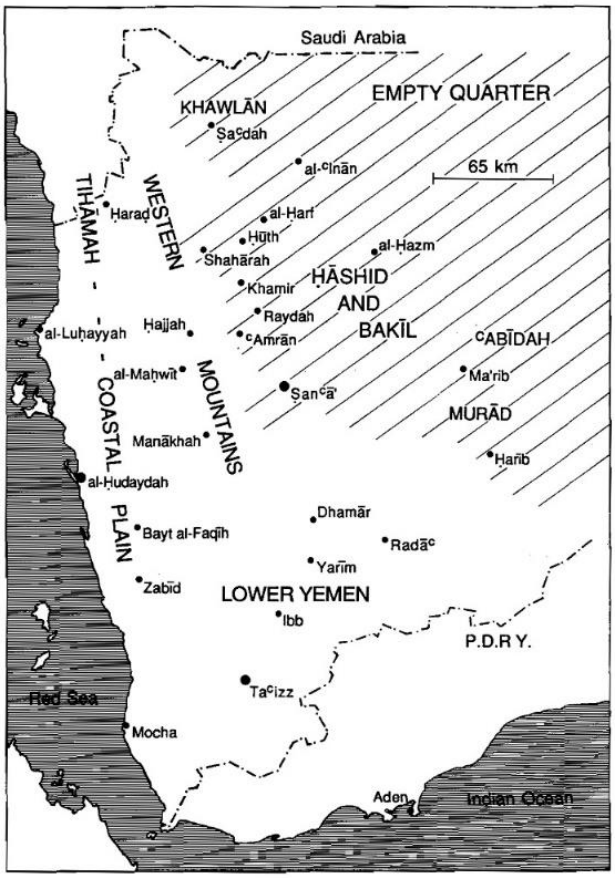
North Yemen: Upper Yemen and Lower Yemen

Historically, the western highlands or North Yemen, can be divided into two major territories. Upper Yemen, is the home of the great tribal confederations.[91] These tribal confederations occupied poorer, semi-arid plateau and mountain lands toward the north-east quadrant of the Western Highlands region. In contrast, communities in Lower Yemen live by less intense tribal values than those in Upper Yemen, and some scholars actually consider this region non-tribal territory. It is located to the west and south of the western highlands area and is considered agriculturally more prosperous than Upper Yemen. The two main regions have thus been shaped by environment, culture, and politics over the last millennium, producing the

[91] Before unification, the Arab Republic of Yemen occupied most of the western highlands of Yemen. It was also known as Northern Yemen.

present state of affairs, in which the relation between the country's two poles is conceived as an opposition between Upper and Lower Yemen (Figure 25).[92]

Figure 25: Hypothetical territories of Upper Yemen (northern tribes) and Lower Yemen. Source: Paul Dresch, Tribes, Government, and History in Yemen (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989). 4.



The cultural and political history of Northern Yemen

The opposition between Upper Yemen (Zaydis and tribesmen) in opposition with Lower Yemen (Shafi'is, leaders and landlords/peasants) left its mark on the region's history in many

[92] Dresch, Tribes, Government, and History in Yemen, 8.

respects, including settlement patterns and architecture—and their destruction.[93] From the end of the ninth century CE until 1962, the tribes of Upper Yemen were associated with the caliphate of the Zaydi imams, direct descendants of the Prophet Muhammad. The tribe was pragmatic and autonomous so that tribal conflicts because of economic matters and to secure tribal interests remained a priority for the tribe among the northern tribes. The long relationship of the tribes with the imams was once of mutual advantage as described by Christopher Ward:

> The pre-republican system was a government of conditional consent, comparable to the kingdoms in Europe in the Middle Ages, when local control was maintained by feudal lords who owed allegiance to kings and provided them with military support, conditional on a flow of benefits from the monarchy – treasure and loot, protection under secular and religious rules, respect for local autonomy and jurisdiction. The imam's government was a balancing act between the secular and religious powers of the centre and the tribes. Depending on shifting ascendancies and alliances, the imam shared power with local political, military and legal structures and sometimes dominated them, but never supplanted them.[94]

Thus, this conditional relationship between the Zaydis and the tribes formed a mainstay for the Zaydi rulers in consolidating their power and subjugating the remainder of the groups in Yemeni regions, especially in the southern Shafi'i regions.[95]

The southern mountains and Western Highlands parts were pre-dominantly Shafi'i (Sunni) for almost as long as Zaydi has existed. The tribal conglomerations were ruled by a succession of powerful states and sometimes raided or dominated by Zaydi imams supported by tribes from Upper Yemen.[96] In this vein, the tribal organization in Lower Yemen lacked the same strong structure and tribal bonds as that found in the tribes of Upper Yemen because of the establishment of the Himyarite state, which favored the formation of small fiefs, ruled by

[93] The Zaydi idea (of Shiite origin) developed early in northern Yemen independently of Shiite ideas in other countries such as Iran and Iraq. Shafi'i sect is one of the four major traditional schools of Islamic law in the branch of Sunni Islam.
[94] Ward, *The Water Crisis in Yemen: Managing Extreme Water Scarcity in the Middle East*, 29.
[95] Mohammed A. al-Himyari, "في تاريخية العلاقة بين الدولة والقبيلة في اليمن " [In the history of the relationship between the state and the tribe in Yemen], 4, accessed April 7, 2021, https://www.academia.edu/36618292.
[96] Dresch, *Tribes, Government, and History in Yemen*, 11.

aristocratic families with a seat near the central power, and the land worked by peasants.[97] Ensuing rulers in Lower Yemen (the Ayyubids twelfth–thirteenth century CE, particularly the Rasulids thirteenth–sixteenth century CE) continued and refined the feudal system (co-dependency between the aristocratic layer and the peasants working their lands) and created an efficient direct administration.

Shafi'is (Sunni) had more tolerance for diverse religious practices and rituals, and most importantly, there has been less association between religious doctrine and temporal power than in the Zaydism of Upper Yemen. Zaydi religious scholars were usually against undisciplined rituals such as the veneration of saints or millenarian longings. They were eager to promote a sober religious style which is still practiced by most tribesmen today.[98]

Although the doctrinal differences between the Zaydi and Shafi'i schools are not very marked, there have been points in their history that both groups have attempted to suppress religious practices and landmarks. But this illiberal attitude is most evident today in the Zaydi destruction of Shafi'i religious buildings, characterized by decorated architecture. Zaydi rulers considered the style of these buildings to be heretical and overly luxurious, and that distracted worshippers. For example, the Zaydi imams demolished many Shafi'i shrines and mosques, the most important of which was the Al-Amiriya complex, an act which was fortunately opposed by scholars from both Sunni and Shiite schools.[99] Eventually, the complex was partly destroyed

[97] Himyarite state has ruled much of the southern and central of the western highlands of Yemen. Varanda, "Tradition and Change in the Built Space of Yemen," 52.
[98] Dresch, Tribes, Government, and History in Yemen, 11.
[99] A large religious school building was built in 1504 by Az-Zafir Amir II bin Abd al-Wahhab.

and neglected for five centuries until its renovation at the end of the twentieth century (Figure 26).[100]

Figure 26: The Amiriya complex was neglected and partially destroyed by Zaydi imams at the beginning of the twentieth century CE. Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amiriya_Madrasa#/media/File:3amiriya_school2.jpg, accessed July 12, 2021.

A fragile environment and increasing population

Naturally, the division between the tribesmen in the north and the peasants in the south was not a matter of choice, but rather, it was a product of the land itself.[101] The infertile earth produced tribal farmers in Upper Yemen retaining some Bedouin traits while the green lands (fertile land) permitted the agriculture and trade supporting the Lower Yemeni landlords and their peasants. In this way, when the area for farming and grazing in the north and east was reduced

[100] The situation is not much different today. On February 16, 2020, the Houthis authorities (affiliated with the Zaydi sect) demolished a mosque dating back to the thirteenth century for unknown reasons.
[101] Dresch, 12.

by scarce rainfall while the population grew year after year, there was migration from the arid homelands to the fertile plains of the west and south.

In fact, one of the striking characteristics of Yemen's history is that the northern tribes consistently lose population.[102] When the northerners moved permanently to the west or south, they usually ceased to be tribesmen and became landlords or peasants like those around them. Another pattern of moving from the arid areas takes the form of temporary migration, often in raids, usually connected to poor farm yields connected to drought.

There is no reason to suppose that migration and mobility in the last millennium—caused by a drier climate—significantly contributed to the abandonment of the villages in the north and east of the west highlands. There is good evidence that the abandoned villages today are surrounded by new villages still inhabited by people. Tony Wilkinson points out that the surviving archaeological sites are ones located towards the north and east of the West highlands area. In contrast, in the moist western and southern regions, the chances for settlements to exist or survive are low due to population and agricultural pressure on this region throughout Yemen's history.[103] However, my observation of social media platforms and websites shows that looters of antiquities are also particularly active in these humid areas of the western highlands in Yemen, and this confirms that these abandoned settlements may hide many valuable monuments, which would be very important for later archaeological and other studies related to the region.

Historical events are highly repetitive in North Yemen, as can be seen through the historiography of Zaydism and tribalism, as well as two Ottoman campaigns in Yemen, all of which followed surprisingly similar patterns. Thus, the slow dynamic social and political

[102] Dresch, 13.
[103] Christopher Edens and Tony Wilkinson, "Southwest Arabia During the Holocene: Recent Archaeological Developments," *Journal of World Prehistory* 12, no. 1 (1998): 61.

processes over during the last millennium have served to sustain intangible aspects of cultural heritage such as customs, traditions, and traditional tribal laws (*aurf*) The isolated social and political development of the western highlands has also produced the process of establishment and abandonment of villages that is the subject of this thesis.

Political and economic changes in the 1960s – 1970s

Until the 1960s, the economic system in North Yemen was fundamentally unchanged from medieval times. Agriculture was essentially subsistence production of basic grains, with some cash crops such as sesame, groundnuts, and coffee. Farming systems depended on traditional tools and animal draught power. Industry was limited but provided the inhabitants (major towns or villages) with the essential tools for cultivation, construction, domestic use, and gold and silver crafting.[104] Commerce was small scale.[105]

Changes during the 1960s and 1970s brought a rapid pace of change to Yemen. The political changes following the 1962 revolution and the end of the civil war between republicans and royalists in the late1970s paved the way for economic changes and openness to modernization. During the republic's golden age in the 1970s, North Yemen witnessed considerable modern political development, market economy growth, urbanization, emigration, and education. As Ward points out, all of these factors brought serious changes to the old social polities and to the social contracts which underlay it, to the traditional hierarchy of alliances between houses, regional groupings, and national leadership.[106]

[104] A Jewish minority dominated crafts in Yemen because of tribal values which held all other professions except construction and farming in contempt.
[105] Ward, *The Water Crisis in Yemen: Managing Extreme Water Scarcity in the Middle East*, 35.
[106] Ward, 26.

The economic causes of social and cultural change

The economic changes occurred in conjunction with the economic boom in neighboring oil-based economies (Gulf States, especially Saudi Arabia), led to significant shifts in Yemeni society and its traditional culture.[107] Yemeni laborers immigrated to the Gulf countries in great numbers.[108] As a result, Yemen was flooded with remittances from its emigrant laborers. In contrast, Dresch mentions that the northern tribal areas received fewer remittances from migrants. Instead, large political subventions, which the tribal leaders and their close circles received, usually came from external powers and sometimes from the government, which acquired outside funding.[109]

All the factors mentioned above, on the one hand, resulted in declines in the old agricultural economy as new wealth that came flooding in from government salaries and bribes, remittances, and the increased foreign trade. On the other hand, it drove social mobility in Yemeni society, in which new social types became important—bureaucrats, migrant workers, and traders. Thus, a new generation from different classes emerged with no interest in the tribal and traditional social system (although some values remain an essential factor in Yemeni life), and they became more dependent on the market economy for a chance to establish status through wealth, enabling them to move within the social hierarchy.[110]

In general, unlike many countries in the region, remittances and the development of the market economy have not helped mass migration from villages in rural areas to the major cities. Locals

[107] Although these abrupt changes, some aspects of social and cultural life still maintain their continuity to this day. For example, the traditional and tribal customs such as marriage and problems resolutions are still in practice in both cities and rural areas.
[108] The census in 1981 put the total population at more than 8.5 million, of whom almost 1.4 million were emigrants (Dresch, Tribes, Government, and History in Yemen, 16).
[109] Dresch, 19.
[110] Ward, The Water Crisis in Yemen: Managing Extreme Water Scarcity in the Middle East, 26.

primarily invested remittances in developing the agricultural economy in the rural areas, so that Yemen remained to some degree, a rural country.[111]

Immigration and villages, and reverse immigration

As mentioned earlier, the economic boom and its consequences led to migration from rural areas either to major Yemeni cities or to rich countries neighboring Yemen. Most of the immigrants were poor farmers in remote villages. Those who moved into the main cities and towns sustained links with their relatives and frequently returned to their ancestral village. The emigrants in neighboring areas also returned after a spell abroad to the country to their villages where they started out from, especially in wartime.

For example, during the Gulf crisis in the 1990s, the large influx of Yemeni migrants was obliged to leave their host countries.[112] Consequently, 880,000 returnees had to go back to their home villages.[113] In 2015, a reverse migration occurred from urban areas to rural areas due to airstrikes led by the Arab coalition. The relatives and land properties in rural represent a point of return for people and sanctuary from the risk of conflicts and economic deterioration.

All of these aspects of the social and economic changes during the mid-twentieth century have affected aspects of cultural heritage in these rural settlements, especially, abandonment of the villages in the western highlands.

It seems that Yemen is a land that resists any sudden changes in traditional practice and politics. However, during the 1960s–1970s, modern political and economic forces have dramatically changed many aspects of Yemeni culture and society. Over the last five decades, these changes

[111] Ward, 39.
[112] The Yemeni government stance pro-Iraq during the first Gulf war. In fact, Saudi Arabia did not deport the Yemeni laborers but changed some policies related to the residence of Yemeni immigrants in response to unwise Yemeni foreign policy at the time towards the Gulf crisis. Thus, most immigrants left Saudi Arabia due to prejudice and sympathy with Iraq and objection to laws related to work residence for Yemenis.
[113] Ward, The Water Crisis in Yemen: Managing Extreme Water Scarcity in the Middle East, 39.

have accelerated the decay process of abandoned villages—through neglect, destruction, and looting. The conflicts have weakened the related traditions and systems of livelihood. The next chapter presents a case study of a village in the central western highlands to highlight the reasons that led to the decline of the ancient villages as well as some of the traditions associated with them.

Chapter 4 – Process of decay: The case study of an abandoned village at Al-Sha'aybah

Figure 27: The abandoned old settlement at Al-Sha'aybah village, photograph courtesy: Mujahid Al-Humaidah

This present chapter intends to answer two main research questions:

What were the social structures, modes of production, and traditional practices in the abandoned villages before the political and economic changes between 1960 -1970? And how have these changes contributed to the decay of the rural landscape and related traditions over the last fifty years? This chapter is mainly based on interviews and literature review. After a brief description of my research methods, I present a time-lapse picture, not only of the decay of the old villages generally, but also the decay of the traditions that, together with abandoned villages, formed the present rural landscapes in this region.

There has been a reciprocal effect between declining rural traditions and the old processes of village abandonment in the western highlands of Yemen, especially during the dramatic political changes that took place in the country in the 1960s - 1970s. Thus, my case study, the village of Al-Sha'aybah, will document and demonstrate the reasons for the decay process that

has taken place there over the last fifty years. In addition, due to the geographical difference to which the villages belong, this chapter will present other abandoned traditions from previous studies that scholars and researchers have investigated during the last forty years.

Methods of data collection

Due to the lack of contextual information about Al-Sha'aybah village, I conducted interviews in order to understand the reasons behind the gradual decay of this particular old village which is also my ancestral village. I also collected information from my father's diary. He spent several years in the village during the political and economic changes of the 1980s. The additional necessary information was collected from books, articles, and online data related to this chapter; these secondary data will contribute some missing aspects that also led to the decline of villages in the western highlands of Yemen. Moreover, while the secondary literature has been carefully selected to match the case study of Al-Sha'aybah village, the collected data can be applied to most villages in the western highlands, with slight variations in the geographical and social contexts explained in the first chapter.

Interviews

The qualitative content analysis method comprised data from transcripts, diaries, books, articles, and online data. That means the main aim of the analysis was to provide a better understanding of the processes of decline and decay in the old villages and their traditions through either interviewing locals or information provided by scholars and travelers who visited Yemen during the last fifty years.

Ali Al-Hamdi conducted semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions on specific topics. The respondents are my family members, born in and having formerly lived in Al-

Sha'aybah village. They moved to the cities at the beginning of the 1990s. Ali Al-Hamdi conducted four individual interviews on September 15 and 25, 2021, in Sana'a city. Mujahid Al-Humaidah and Mujahid Zayed provided me with images of the abandoned buildings and information about some of the traditions of Al-Sha'aybah village and some information related to the earthquake in 1982. The interviews aimed at documenting the traditions that were still practiced during the 1970s and 1980s in order to understand the traditions that formed the rural landscape in the region which ultimately led to the village's decline and subsequent decay.

One of the main limitations of this case study is that I could not travel back to Yemen to conduct the field study due to security issues, and online interviews were difficult due to the poor internet connection in Yemen. As a result, I formulated the interview questions and asked my father, Ali Al-Hamdi, to conduct the interviews. Also, among the subjective limitations I encountered are the psychological status, social constraint, and security obstacles of people living in wartime circumstances. Conducting these interviews requires a great deal of effort and time to obtain accurate information. It is not easy to ask questions about the history of an abandoned village and traditions or know the reasons for abandonment while people struggle to live on a daily basis. Therefore, I contented myself with conducting interviews with members of my close family who were born and raised in Al-Sha'aybah village.

This chapter will present a short overview of the village types in their social and political context, as Al-Sha'aybah belongs to one of these types, which is called *Hijrat*. Finally, considering that this is the first research carried out on the abandoned villages in western highlands of Yemen, it opens several questions to be addressed by further research. Some of these questions will be raised in the concluding chapter.

Rural settlement types in the western highlands

The current settlement pattern in the western highlands corresponds to the hierarchy of tribal leadership.[114] However, there is no dominant village surrounded by smaller ones but rather settlements are dotted evenly across the mountains and plateau of each area.[115] With a few hundred people, hamlets (*mahal*) and villages (*qaryia*) represent the nucleus of the tribal structure. The use of the terms *qaryia* and *mahall* varies with the tribal context and region. However, it is generally for settlements that display a specific size and spatial organization. In 1975, more than one-third of the country's population lived in villages of 100 to 250 people, the village being the "urban center" of a tribal entity.[116]

In some areas, the village constitutes several hamlets. The smallest settlements lie in the western highlands, appearing as tight clusters of buildings belonging to one or more separate units but each connected to a nuclear family. The term *bayt* meaning both house and a smaller unit of co-resident descendants of a living grandfather, and the term *badana*[117] was further subdivided into several *buyūt*. Thus, the *mahal* is inhabited by members from the same family or lineage while the *qaryia* embraces different families from the same tribe. Villages occasionally, dispersed among several neighboring hamlets.

The last type of village in the western highlands of Yemen is the *hijra*, an ancient institution associated with places of mediation where "the infliction of bodily *haram* is strictly forbidden".[118] It is also a term that conventionally describes a sort of sanctuary, an enclave in

[114] Varanda, "Tradition and Change in the Built Space of Yemen," 54.
[115] *Dresch, Tribes, Government, and History in Yemen*, 21.
[116] Varanda, "Tradition and Change in the Built Space of Yemen," 66.
[117] Luca Nevola, "Houthis in the Making: Nostalgia, Populism, and the Politicization of Hashemite Descent," *Arabian Humanities. Revue Internationale d'archéologie et de Sciences Sociales Sur La Péninsule Arabique/International Journal of Archaeology and Social Sciences in the Arabian Peninsula*, no. 13 (March 27, 2020), https://doi.org/10.4000/cy.5917.
[118] Varanda, "Tradition and Change in the Built Space of Yemen: The Description of a Process as Observed in the Former Yemen Arab Republic between 1970 and 1990," 54.

a tribal territory that became, over the last millennium, a sanctuary for protected Hashemite families (i.e. descended from Mohammed), religious scholars, pupils, and other minorities.

The historical and physical character of the Hijrat al-Sha'aybah

The Hijrat of Al-Sha'aybah is historically famous as a sanctuary for religious scholars and students. Ali Al-Hamdi, my father and one of the inhabitants of the village, still remembers his early childhood in the early 1960s:

> A small *madrasa*, adjoining village's mosque, was a central place of education for other religious scholars and students, attracting them from different surrounding villages. In this small school, we learned only reading, writing, and religious subjects. It was an old and traditional education.[119]

Najibah Al-Humaidah also heard her mother saying:

> Most of the hosted students lived with the owners of the house (they allocated a place for them in the kitchen, stairs, and courtyards) in the old village before the abandonment. Also, they lived in the second houses of the owners, and some students lived in the streets and alleys.[120]

Bayt Al-Hishaibri —religiously and historically recognized as of the Shafi'ites saints—owned extensive agricultural lands around the village.[121] As Fatima Al-Moa'lmi explains:

> A sizeable agricultural plot of Bayt Al-Hishaibri property was allocated for benevolent purposes. Poor families and orphans used to frequently come to the village to receive food supplies from the produce of the land. Thus, the village also was a sanctuary for poor people from other villages.[122]

Al-Sha'aybah is located in the central region of the western uplands of the western highlands of Yemen, more specifically, south of the Dhamar Governorate (

[119] Personal Diary of Ali Al-Hamdi.
[120] Interview with Najibah Al-Humaidah.
[121] One of the most prominent three families in the village.
[122] Interview with Fatima al-Moa'mli, a previous inhabitant in Al-Sha'aybah.

Figure 28). Like most Yemeni villages, Al-Sha'aybah is situated on one of the hill tops, surrounded by high mountains. Two valleys are located on each side of the village (Figure 29). Al-Sha'aybah enjoys moderate and occasionally heavy rainfall, especially during the summer.

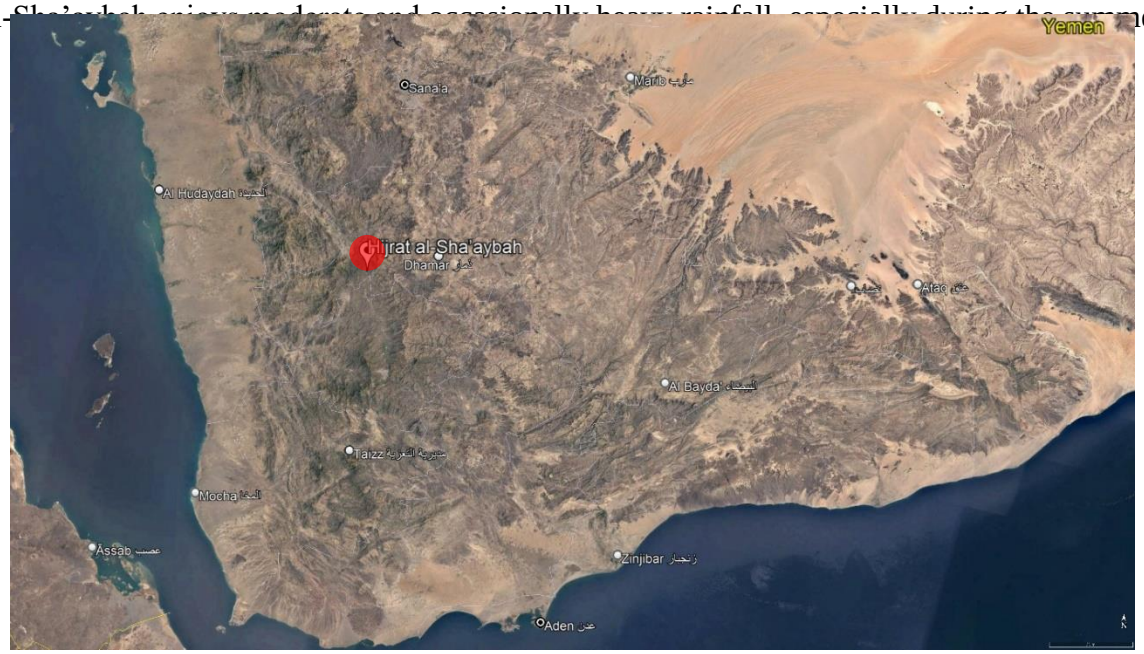


Figure 28: Al-Sha'aybah location on Google Earth satellite photo. Source: Google Earth 2021

Figure 29: The village is situated on a hilltop, surrounded by rugged wadis and terrain. Source: Google Earth 2021, Magreb Anns, Yemen, 14°27'15.3"N 44°03'17.3"E

A nearly 400-year-old Sahafi shrine, al-Hishaibri Cupola (Figure 30) still stands in the village as witness to the territorial divisions between the Zaidi and Sahafi religious movements in the central areas as well as Northern and Lower Yemen.[123] However, it became a Zaidi territory in the last two centuries. The shrine has been well conserved by the same family living in the village over the centuries. Historical narratives indicate that the village was the seat of Saleh al-Hamdi, the appointed ruler during the reign of the imams and the Ottomans, who ran the directorate at the end of the eighteenth century.[124] The family house (Bait al-Hamdi), stands three stories high and is still inhabited by my family members. The ownership of the property is shown in a land ownership document which dates to the same time as his rule (Figure 31).

Figure 30: The Shafi'i shrine is distinguished by its glossy white color made from traditional clay plastering (Nora), contrasting sharply with the surrounding buildings and landscape. Photograph courtesy: Mujahid Zayed

[123] Alwan Ahmed Al Jilani, *بنو حشبير إرث العلم وبذخ الولاية* [Banu Hashebar, the legacy of knowledge and the luxury of guardianship] (Cairo: Arweqh Foundation for Studies, Translation and Publishing, 2018), 271.
[124] Lutf-Allah Jahaf, *درر نحور العين بسيرة الإمام المنصور علي وأعلام دولته الميامين* [Durr Nahur Aleayn Bisirat Al-Imam Almansur Ali Wa'aelam Dawlatih Almayamin] (Sana'a: Maktabat Al-Arshad, 2005), 530.

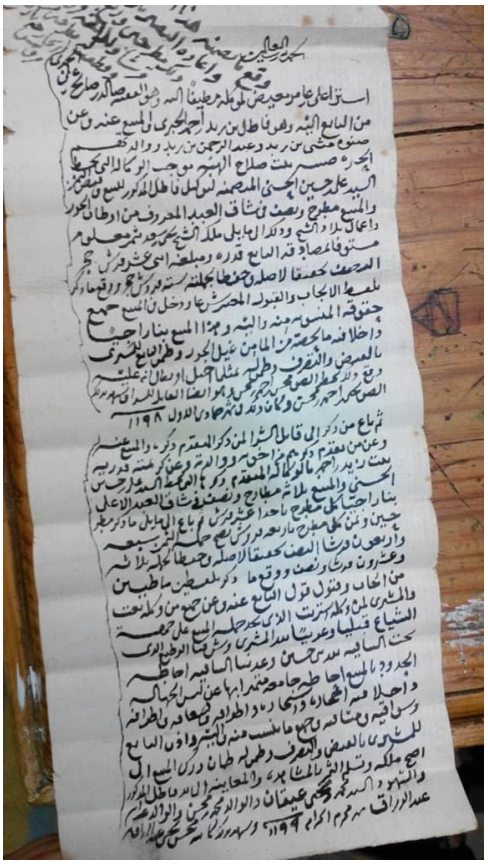


Figure 31: An eighteenth-century document concerning the land property owned by my ancestors. Photograph courtesy: Ali Al-Hamdi

On the one hand, due to its religious and symbolic value, the family associated with the shrine has maintained the shrine throughout history. Al-Hamdi's house remained in good condition (with some renovations) as it has been continuously inhabited and connected to the family property inherited by its owners. On the other hand, the old village has been abandoned and neglected, and eventually fell into ruins (Figure 32 and Figure 33). No documents are known that indicate the date of the village's construction or even represent it as the first settlement to be built on that site. Thus, the village needs further field studies in the future to document these historical aspects.

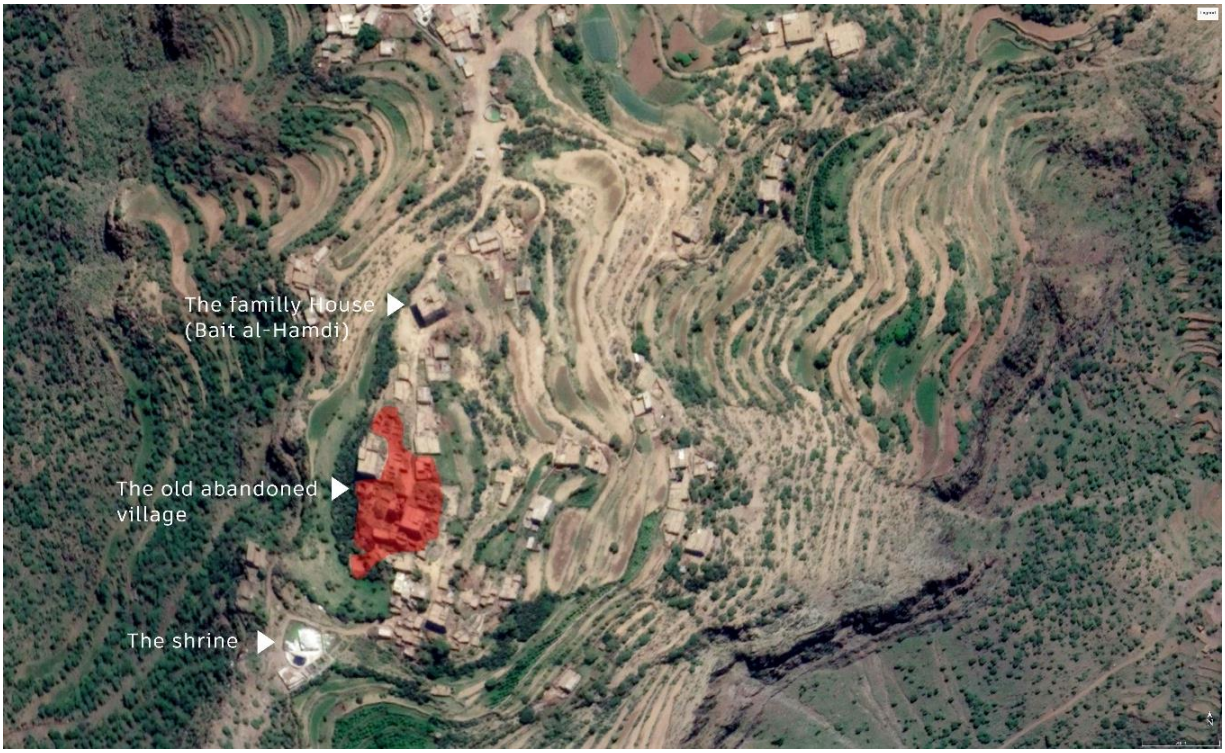


Figure 32: Abandoned parts of the village s are highlighted in red. Source: Google Earth 2021, Magreb Anns, Yemen, 14°27'15.3"N 44°03'17.3"E, illustration by Nasser Al-Hamdi


Figure 33: The abandoned buildings in front of the Bait al-Hamdi three story house. The stones bear witness to the nature of old building traditions in most remote and isolated places in western highlands of Yemen. Photograph courtesy: Mujahid Zayed

Economic and social construction in Al-Sha'aybah during the 1960s

The economic pattern in al-Sha'aybah was a household model, the primary production and consumption unit. It was based on the division of labor between the sexes and the hierarchical relationships between generations. Also, the economic life of the village depended fundamentally on agriculture and pastoralism.

The agricultural land type in al-Sha'aybah comprised the large landholdings belonging to a few landowners and worked by sharecroppers (*sharīk, pl. shurakā or Ajeīr pl. Ojarā*), who lived on the outskirts of the village. Each household also worked small plots of land, herded flocks of sheep, and kept a cow. Water channels, cisterns, and ponds were privately owned. The common property entailed pastureland, a common pond, a large water reservoir (*Majil al-Selm*), roads, access routes, and the mosque.[125]

Although Al-Sha'aybah became an enclave in the tribal-Zaidi territory, tribal affiliation remained part of the individual claim for status. Thus, the representation of the leadership in Al-Sha'aybah required an economic and social status from the person as well as his capabilities, and personal traits. Class stratification resulted from the inherited hierarchical social structure. According to the local sources, the social structure consisted of two classes: People who have family roots (*asl*) such as religious families,[126] and well-known tribal families; and the people

[125] People were allowed to graze on private agricultural lands after harvest season or where undesirable trees and grasses were growing, and it is called *rahaq*, *asha'af*, or *atraf*. The pond was in the centre of the village and was used for animal consumption, laundry, and cooking.

[126] Such as the *Sadah* (families decent from prophet Mohammed), the *Qudah* (who work in the judiciary and this enabled them to became major landowners in the village, and the tribal leaders may be included in this class), and the *Fuqaha* (religious scholars).

without family roots (*bedon asl*) providing cultural and social services (*mazayana*),[127] and servants.[128]

The term *naqayil* refers to a person of a family who immigrated to another village, and they are usually classified within the lower social hierarchy in Yemen. However, this did not apply to the social structure of Al-Sha'aybah since most of its inhabitants originally immigrated and moved to the settlement from different places in the region. In terms of marriage, the higher social classes are allowed to marry exclusively from the same class and vice versa.

Until the 1960s, the traditions, system of livelihood, and production were well maintained. However, due to the economic and political changes during the 1970s, Al- Sha'aybah entered a period of severe change, affecting these social traditions and the system of livelihood. The village's architectural heritage and rural landscape was neglected and fell into decline.

Declining traditions and systems of livelihood

> "The hand of man and woman has carved a viable economy and a picturesque countryside out of Yemen's unpromising terrain"[129]

> "The Yemeni farmers spares no effort to gain maximum profit from the scanty rainfall for the cultivation of his crops on the most difficult terrain … Ploughing, levelling, manuring, breaking clods of soil with a wooden hammer, removing crop residues, sowing, conducting additional irrigation water to the fields, harvesting, repairing the retaining walls of the terraces, transporting mould from the fields of the lowest terraces to those laying in the upper part, etc, are some of the operations which are carried out by the farmers by hand, using only simple tools and domestic animals".[130]

Ward and Steffen's descriptions of Yemeni land above indicate the huge effort that people invested in maintaining agricultural traditions. This process also can be expressed by "labor-

[127] Butchers, barbers, coffee makers, beauticians, and instrument players.
[128] Interview with Abdulrahman Al-Moa'lmi and the personal diary of Ali Al-Hamdi.
[129] Ward, *The Water Crisis in Yemen*, 12.
[130] H. Steffen, et al., *Final Report on the Airphoto Interpretation Project of the Swiss Technical Cooperation Service, Berne, Carried out for the Central Planning Organization, Sana'a, Y.A.R.* (Zurich: 1978). Cited in Varanda, "Tradition and Change in the Built Space of Yemen," 42.

intensive", "subsistence fanning", "effort and ingenuity" when describing agriculture in Yemen. Despite the rugged terrain, men and women of the household who worked side-by-side were adept at terracing steep mountain slopes, creating fertile agricultural plots through intensive labor and old technical knowledge inputs.[131]

This technique made the most of minimal rainfall and created "an extremely effective farming technology closely adapted to the ecological conditions of the area".[132]

In this process of building agricultural landscapes, the inhabitants of the western highlands used the framework of a hereditary system that was reflected in the form and construction of the more elaborate buildings and villages.[133]

Abandoning Agriculture tradition production

In Al-Sha'aybah, people cultivated main crops including Yemeni corn *dharuh yamania* (white, yellow, red), Shami corn *dharah shamih* (maize), wheat, barley, and Black-eyed pea *aldejrah* (Figure 34). They stored these crops in deep pits under the ground called *almadfn* (pl.: *almadafin*). These structures are similar to wells but can be tightly sealed. To preserve maize, they employed large baskets *almuqasham* (pl.: *almaqashim*), using ash as a preservative. Also, they cultivated cash crops such as coffee and sesame they created small wells and cisterns for irrigating small garden plots of tomatoes *tamatis,* onions *basal*, chives *karath*, white radishes *baql*, garlic *thum*, green peas *bazalya*, chili pepper *bisbas*, mission fig *bls rumi*, Barbary fig *bls or tin*, and sweet potato *aljezar*. Bananas and oranges were grown on a small scale.

[131] World Bank, "Republic of Yemen Country Social Analysis," 22.
[132] Horst Kopp, "Agriculture in Yemen from Mocha to Qat," in *Yemen- 3000 Years of Art and Civilization in Arabia Felix*, ed. Werner Daum (Innsbruck, Frankfurt/ Main: Pinguin-Verlag, Umschau-Verlag, 1988), 368.
[133] Varanda, "Tradition and Change in the Built Space of Yemen," 42.

Figure 34: Crops fields in Al-Sha'aybah. Photograph courtesy: Mujahid Zayed

The inhabitants in Al-Sha'aybah maintained a modest level of animal husbandry. They raised cows *baqar*, goats (*tys* for the young goat and *jazur* for the adult one), sheep *kibash or atla*, and donkeys *hameer*, all fed by grazing, especially in the rainy season. At the end of the summer season, farmers collected hay grass in large quantities for feeding livestock during the dry seasons.

The number of animals *mashiah* in each farming unit was only to assist as draught and beasts of burden and to provide the household needs of milk *haleeb*, yogurt *laban*, smoked yogurt[134] *haqiyn* ghee *samn*, meat *shirkah*, and eggs. While milk and yogurt were the primary daily diet for all families in the village, ghee, honey *asal*, and meat represented the weekly diet for more affluent families. Therefore, it was customary in Al-Sha'aybah to help impoverished families by providing them with high-quality products. Also, among the side benefits of animals was manure *dhebil* to fertilize the land, which played a significant role in both agricultural soil reclamation and producing more nutritious fruit, vegetables.

[134] Squash is used as a bowl for curdling milk before using wood smoke.

The lack of roads and the rugged terrain caused transportation difficulties to the village. Thus, they distributed the agricultural production was sold in a weekly market system in nearby the villages. Additionally, tribal conflict was frequent, and these weekly markets were classed as safe zones by tribal custom and considered essential spaces for social interaction and exchanging information and news.

The impacts of demography and land fragmentation on traditional agriculture

The interview question about the reason for agriculture abandonment in some agricultural lands in Al-Sha'aybah received different answers. However, one of the interesting answers concerned disputes over land property between heirs. One explanation for that is the increasing demographic growth after the revolution in 1962.

Until the 1960s, medical services were utterly non-existent in al-Sha'aybah. Folk medicine, such as herbs and natural materials represented the only possibility for people to confront waves of diseases and epidemics. A high death rate characterized individual lives. Thus, after the death of the head of the family, property tended to be split up. A few individuals inherited the property, which became privately owned.[135]

However, with the demographic growth abruptly escalating in the 1970s and 1980s, land became dramatically fragmented, causing disputes between the heirs. Ali Al-Hamdi describes his efforts to obtain his share of the land that he inherited from his father:

> Obtaining patrimony is a complex issue due to the weakness of the judicial institution in Yemen and the lack of human conscience in society. Some heirs lay hands on the entire patrimony, and others agree but without fairness in dividing. For example, despite the court's decision to divide my family properties, it has unresolved for forty-six years, and the share allocated to family members has not been handed over, including to me.

[135] Unlike other Middle Eastern contexts where the property is associated with genealogies, the property in Yemen was privately owned by individuals.

Consequently, agricultural lands became neglected and abandoned (Figure 35), negatively affecting the traditional mode of production.

Figure 35: Neglected agricultural areas due to ownership dispute and the economic change impacts. Photograph courtesy: Mujahid Zayed

The impact of new public services expansion, government salaries, and market economy

The new regimes after 1962 provided the rural areas in Yemen with public services and government salaries opportunities in education and healthcare. As a result, the population increased, and a new generation emerged with no interest in agriculture. In other words, it created a rupture between the routine apprenticeship process of farming practices and the school education, which offered a vision for a different lifestyle in the future. The mandatory education system also indirectly contributed to a decline of support labor by which children helped their families according to their capabilities. Thus, raising livestock decreased in Al-Sha'aybah, and whoever raised livestock it was considered to be at the expense of their children's education.

The sharp increase in foreign trade also had an enormous impact on old agricultural tradition. Some villagers in Al-Sha'aybah are dependent on the market economy for any chance they might have to establish status through wealth. They invested the remittance from their

immigrant relatives in establishing modern businesses, and the expansion of the road network paved the way for low-priced imported foodstuffs to infiltrate the villages, replacing the traditional agricultural products. As a result, inhabitants opened small shops, and households increasingly relied on imported and highly processed, starchy, and sugary foods with low nutritional content at the expense of nutritious whole grain. In addition, people in Al-Sha'aybah relied on imported chemical fertilizer, contributing to abandonment of traditional manure as a fertilizer, and negatively affecting the quality of the soil.

Abandoning old buildings and traditional construction methods

The abandoned buildings in Al-Sha'aybah were constructed from materials found in the surrounding area (Figure 36 and

Figure 37). Thus, people used basalt stone, wood, clay, and *Qadad*; the latter was quite famous as a mortar and plaster material used to cover the walls and roofs to prevent leakage of water either from inside or outside the constructions, especially the tanks and cisterns (Figure 38).[136]

Figure 36: Abandoned houses are built from stones and wood. Photograph courtesy: Mujahid Al-Humaidah

[136] Nasser Al-Hamdi, "Conceptual Framework for Integrating Green Technologies with Traditional Water Management, Case Study on Western Highlands of Yemen" (Veszprém, University of Pannonia, 2018), 54.

Figure 37: Abandoned houses. Photograph courtesy: Mujahid Al-Humaidah

Figure 38: Cistern plastered with the traditional material *qadad*. Photograph courtesy: Mujahid Al-Humaidah

Respondents reported several reasons that had led to the old village abandonment, among which were that the buildings became old and uninhabitable but their renovation was too expensive. Thus, people built new houses a few meters away from the old village.

Nevertheless, with the economic changes in the 1970s that led to an increase in the population, the construction process expanded, and one of its impacts was the use of modern materials such as concrete masonry units, which significantly distorted the look of the rural landscape (Figure 39 and Figure 40). In addition, people have migrated to the cities, one of the significant factors contributing to the abandonment of the old houses.

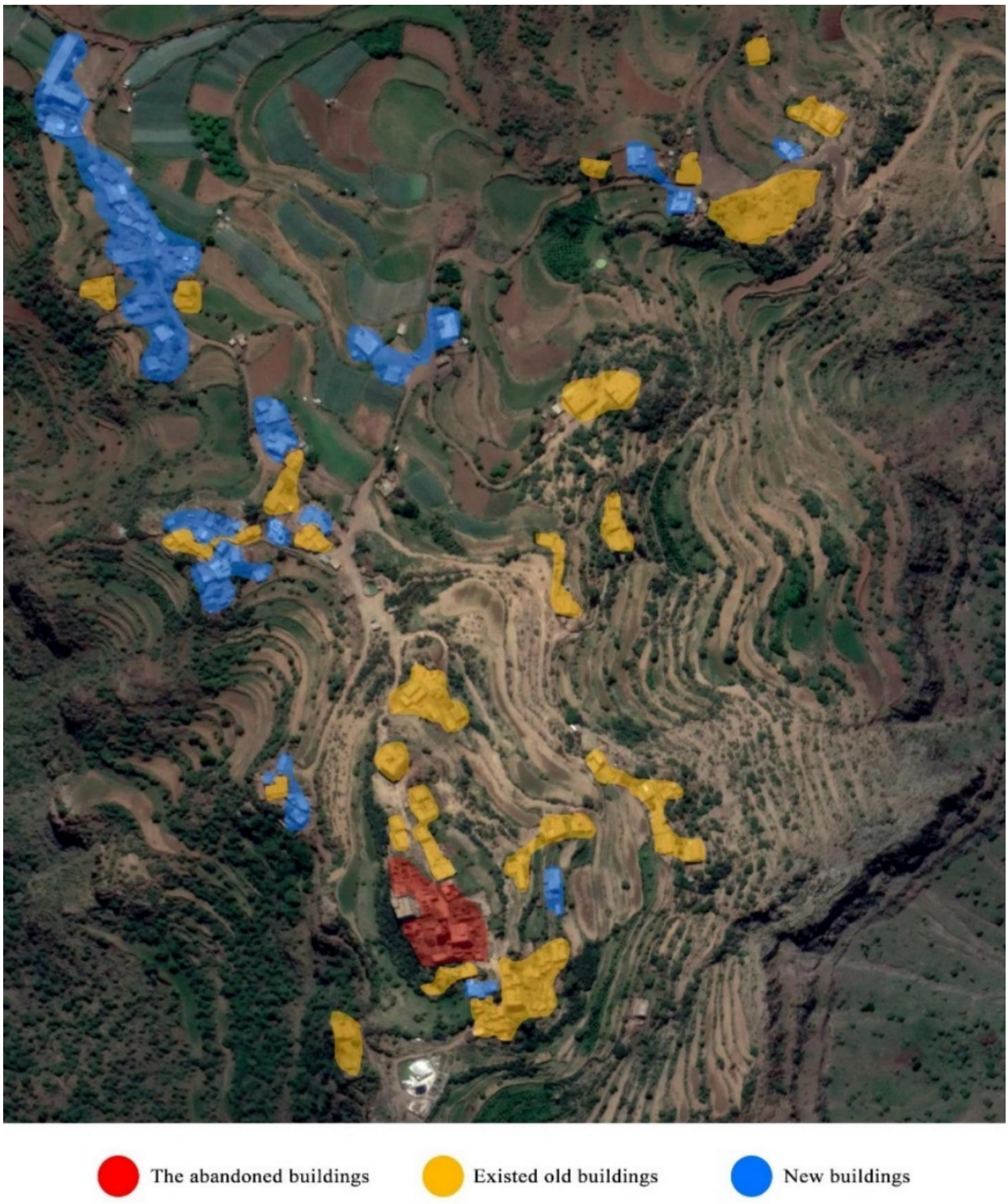


Figure 39: The abandoned village (known as the old village or the high village at Al-Sha'aybah village) surrounded by later and new buildings. Source: Google Earth 2019, Magreb Anns, Yemen, 14°27'15.3"N 44°03'17.3"E, illustration by Nasser Al-Hamdi

Figure 40: New CMU houses, marked by the red circle color. Photograph courtesy: Mujahid Zayed, illustration by Nasser Al-Hamdi

Regarding the ownership of abandoned buildings, no answer could be obtained from the respondents. Presumably these abandoned buildings do not belong to the families living today in the village, however, this should be clarified in future field studies. It is notable that there is only one old house still inhabited by a family today.

The earthquake of 1982

The earthquake in 1982 hit the central mountainous region of Yemen, causing 2800 deaths and 1500 injuries. Hundreds of buildings were destroyed, some partially damaged, including several old villages (Figure 41 and Figure 42).

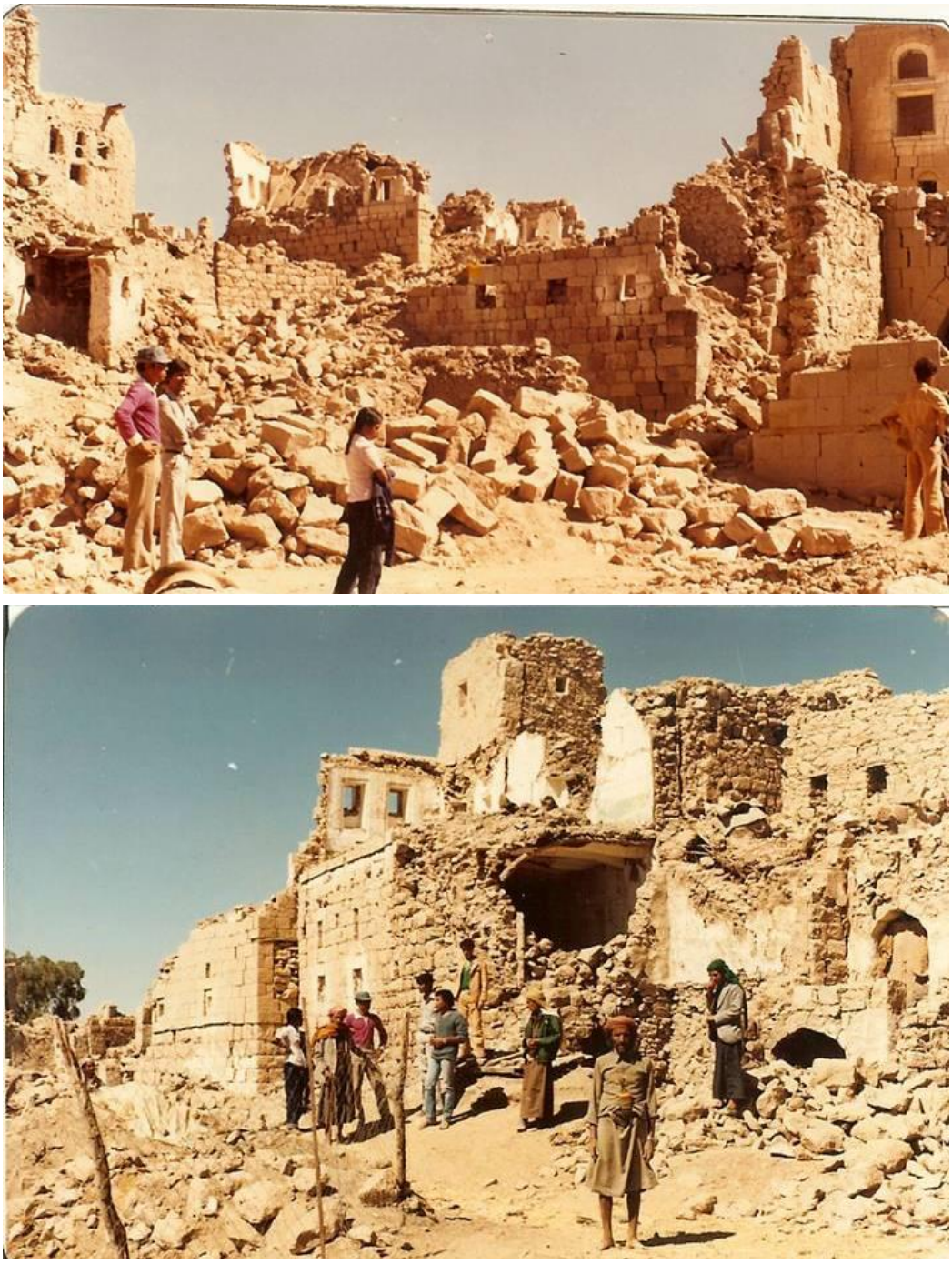


Figure 41: Damaged and destroyed buildings due to the 1982 Dhamar earthquake. Source: https://www.facebook.com/Structural.Analysis.FOE.SU/photos/277147855740474, accessed April 28, 2021

Figure 42: Thi Hawlan village in 1976 taken by Fernando Varanda[137] (Left). Same village after the destruction by 1982 earthquake taken by Adnan al-Mahaqari (right)[138]

In Al-Sha'aybah, the buildings remained standing even though the village is located in the epicenter area. However, cracks appeared in some buildings, and the ruins in the abandoned village partly collapsed. Mujahid Al-Humaidah narrates about the incident:

> Yes, I still remember the day the earthquake struck. I was in the sixth grade at the time, and it happened at half-past ten in the morning during break time. When the earthquake occurred, I was selling in my shop to the students, then we all rushed towards the door, with the help of God, we were barely able to get out the door of my shop, I went out and saw the houses wobble right and left while they were in place, and the mountains were shaking and moving in their place, in addition to explosions and cracks in the distant mountains around us. Fortunately, there was no loss of life, but many houses were cracked, and some abandoned buildings in the old village were collapsed.

The seismic history of Yemen indicates the occurrence of large earthquakes at 20-30-year intervals[139]; most of them occurred in the western mountain ranges of Yemen, where the population is high. Thus, earthquakes in Yemen contributed to the abandonment of villages in

[137] https://www.facebook.com/groups/269252359873109/posts/2081668595298134, accessed June 16, 2021.
[138] *Adnan al- Mahaqari* posted on the Facebook group created by the researcher to crowdsourcing the old images of the abandoned villages in the western highlands of Yemen. https://www.facebook.com/groups/501130117908975, accessed June 16, 2021.
[139] Mohindra et al., "Probabilistic Seismic Hazard Analysis for Yemen."

mountainous areas and represent a future danger to humans and the extinction of the intangible heritage of these old villages.

Conflicts

Over the past thousand years, Yemen has experienced endless internal conflicts. However, besides the environmental and economic factors, these conflicts contributed significantly to defining the rural landscape in the western highlands of Yemen. The settlements were built on for security, situated in most high mountains as strategic and fortification sites to protect against raids during the wars. Accordingly, this thesis project considers political conflict to be one of the factors contributing to maintaining the continuity of the settlement pattern in the western highlands of Yemen.

However, the invasion and regional interventions, accompanied by the technological development of weapons, have also contributed severely to the ancient villages' rapid decline and destruction. For instance, in the 1960s, the British Forces of Aden destroyed many historical villages (in which people were still living) in the southern part of the western highlands (Figure 43 and Figure 44). Also, the Yemeni civil war in northern Yemen between the republic and the royalists from 1962-1970, in which modern weapons such as bombing from planes and heavy artillery were used for the first time destroyed many historical villages (Figure 45).

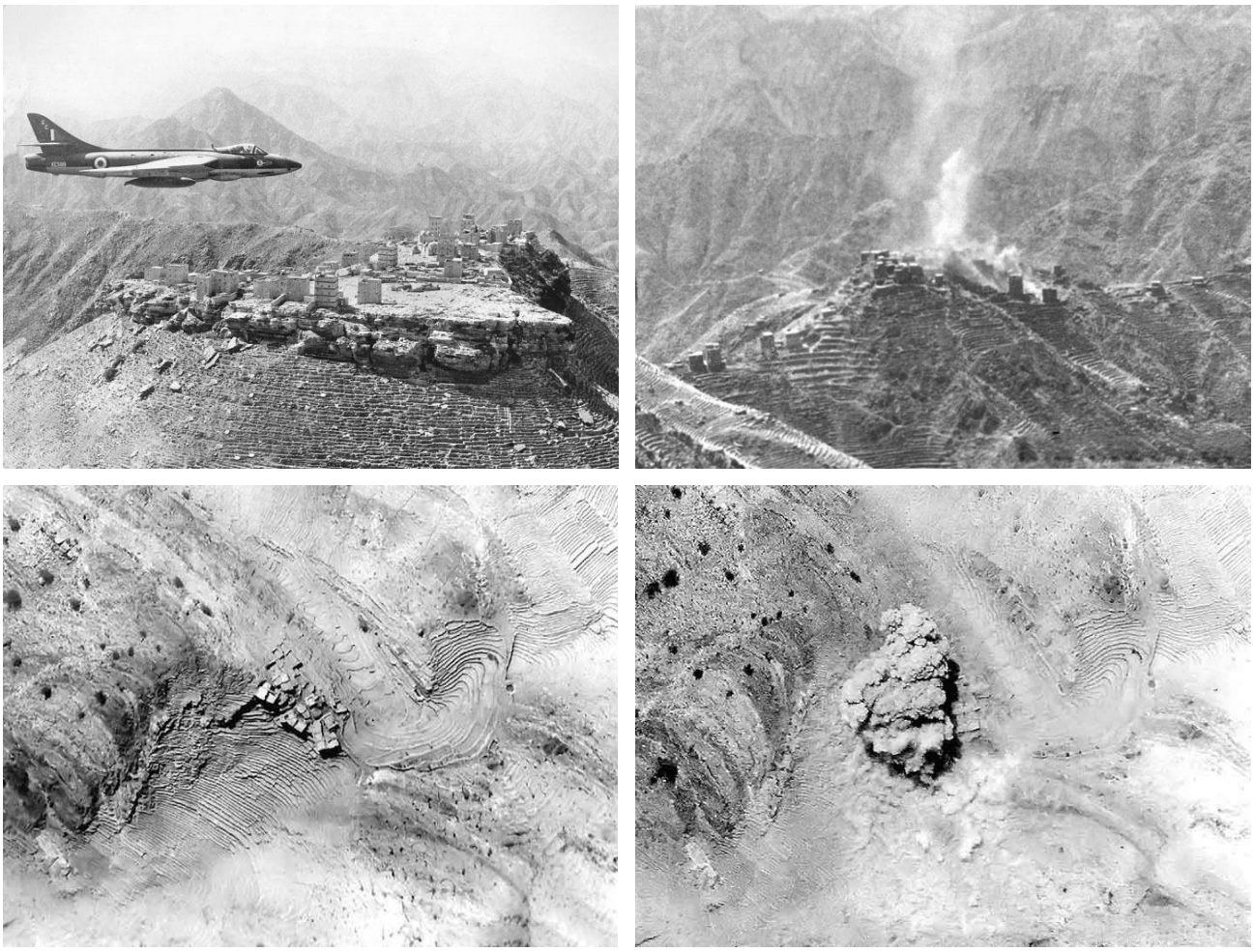


Figure 43: The Royal Air Force took these photographs during the 1960s bombing of villages in southern Yemen. source: http://alamree.net/alboum-OLD-yafa1.htm, accessed June 28, 2021

Figure 44: One of the villages damaged by the bombing of British forces, which were then abandoned. Source: http://alamree.net/YAFA'_OLD_031.htm, accessed June 28, 2021

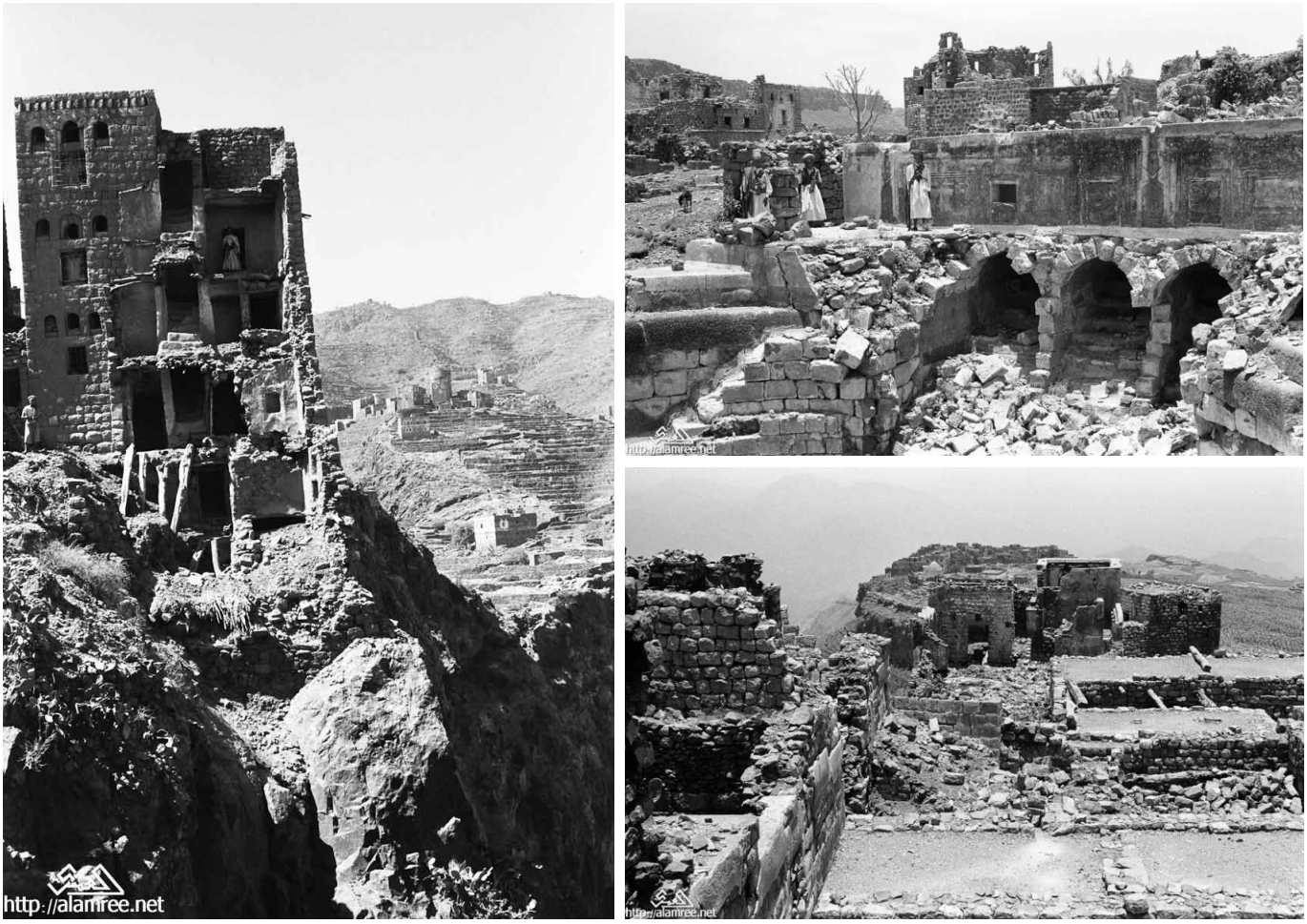


Figure 45: Damaged villages during the civil war 1962-1970 in northern eastern area of western highlands of Yemen. Source: http://alamree.net/alboum-hashed_udhr_8.htm, accessed June 28, 2021

Currently, the political conflict in Yemen is no different from what it was five decades ago. In 2015, an Arab coalition, led by Saudi Arabia and the UAE, conducted a military intervention in Yemen, supporting several partisan militias. This intervention caused massive destruction of many of the remaining historical villages (Figure 46). With the continuation of this war, Yemen will also lose its tangible and intangible cultural heritage, as it will become a war of attrition for the Yemeni people and their collective heritage. The individual in Yemen only values survival.

Figure 46: The fortress of Kawkaban survived the thirteenth century AD wars fought by the Ayyubids in Yemen and the Ottoman campaigns, and it remained steadfast until February 2016, when missiles destroyed the front wall and the watchtower. Source: https://www.masrawy.com/news/news_press/details/2016/12/20/1002614/[140]

The hypothesis put forward by this chapter is that the process of settlement, abandonment, and re-settlement was the result of responses to internal political and economic changes, which contributed significantly to the preservation of old villages and cultural heritage in the western Yemeni highlands over the past thousand years. It is clear from this chapter that processes of modernization in the middle of the last century contributed significantly to the decline, deterioration and decay of the old villages. The next chapter will answer questions about the possible responses towards the abandoned villages in the western highlands during the current war.

[140] "لماذا يصمت العالم على تدمير حضارة اليمن؟" [Why is the world silent about the destruction of Yemen's civilization?], Masrawy News, accessed October 4, 2021, https://www.masrawy.com/news/news_press/details/2016/12/20/1002614/.

Chapter 5 – Suggestions and ideas for preserving knowledge

A YouTube channel called *Invisible People* presents homeless people suffering from harsh conditions of life and neglect. In 2018, the channel had an interview with Michael, who had lost his two children, his fiancé, his house, and ended up homeless in the street, and on top of that, he was suffering from stage four pancreatic cancer, with one year to live. He said: "I am happy … I've had a good run, 43 years, good run … I am not going to be sick for the last year of my life going through chemo, I am not doing it, I am okay with it, I am fine with it."[141] Michael realized the inevitability of death, and his imminent death, and that the best way for him was to spend his last moments without interventions to prolong his life. Second, this is not the end; his material presence will undoubtedly persist in legible forms. Much like the video about Michael's last decision, invisible people, places, and objects that we cannot help and rescue need to be able to tell their life stories.

As Desilvey writes "Yet on the other side of loss, there is always the possibility that new relations, and new subjects, will emerge."[142] As indicated in the introduction, when I submitted my thesis proposal for CEU, I was excited to formulate a plan for an architectural and historical documentation project in western highlands of Yemen, with which I could apply to national and international cultural heritage institutions for support to launch the project. But the ongoing war and the rapidly deteriorating economic and humanitarian situation in Yemen prevented me from writing my plan to document these abandoned villages. However, these unfavorable circumstances allowed me to re-think and reflect on the cultural heritage aspects of the

[141] Invisible People, *Homeless Man Shares Heartbreaking Story of Family Tragedy and Cancer.*, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J5djHKXkc6E., accessed 5 October, 2021
[142] DeSilvey, *Curated Decay*, 171.

processes of decay, loss, and re-birth of these villages throughout history and review new heritage practices that can be adapted to the context of the abandoned villages in the western highlands of Yemen.

Therefore, the suggestions and recommendations that I will present in this chapter are based on a "curated decay" approach, care without material intervention, an approach I believe to be applicable to isolated and neglected regions globally. A country like Yemen that suffers from endless conflicts, has created an invisible heritage of birth, decline and abandonment of settlements. Despite all these obstacles Yemen still needs to write its own story and as part of that re-writing, I will suggest ideas for future planning and inspiration for, at least, preserving Yemeni knowledge of the past and present for the future.

Adopting the non-interventionist conservation approach

The heritage in Yemen has suffered from the neglect of cultural heritage institutions during times of peace. For instance, the 2011 uprisings in Yemen toppled the regime yet also revealed the fragility and vulnerability of the governmental institutions in general and the cultural heritage institutions in particular. However, the question is how we can think about measures and suggestions for a post-war heritage recovery, in the same way as the heritage in Yemen had survived through the various natural and social transformation processes described in chapters 2 and 3 above.

Sultan Barkat argued that "conflict and recovery [are] highly mutable and interlinked social transformation processes."[143] The cultural heritage recovery is more complex than generally recognized. He writes: "it is imperative to realize there are no quick fixes. Post-war recovery

[143] Sultan Barakat, "Necessary Conditions for Integrated Approaches to the Post-Conflict Recovery of Cultural Heritage in the Arab World," *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 27, no. 5 (2021): 433–48, https://doi.org/10.1080/13527258.2020.1799061.

is a long and arduous process, particularly in restoring cultural heritage; in contrast, international community attention spans are notoriously short."[144]

Traditional cultural heritage solutions or measures for the abandoned villages during or after the war would be far from reality because Yemen throughout history been a politically and economically unstable country due to the environmental, geographical, and demographic diversity. The complexity of Yemen in this respect is further compounded by the location of settlements described in Chapters 2 and 3 above, and the difficulty in involving communities in raising awareness of the importance of heritage. As the Yemeni consciousness suffers from the damages of political and religious ideologies and war, the development of the education, tourism, and cultural heritage sectors has become a luxury.

Adapting to the realities of present and foreseeable future, this study suggests adopting the heritage post preservation approach, allowing natural and social processes to continue. As shown in Chapter 2, the settlement continuity in abandoned village locations resulted from natural and social processes. Settlements have been continuously established, abandoned, and re-created. This processes of becoming and uncertainty have always characterized the rural landscapes in the western highlands of Yemen, and this confirms that there is always the possibility of the emergence of new relations and new subjects "on the other side of the loss."

This is the first ever study on abandoned villages in the western Yemeni highlands, so it is likely that these villages will soon wither, decay, and die. The main issue here is whether the cultural memory of these villages will be lost forever, as these abandoned villages do not have any previous documentation that guarantees the continuity of cultural memory work. Nevertheless, the recent villages and the traditions around the abandoned villages (see Chapter 4) may represent a continuity of the cultural memory of these abandoned villages. Thus, I

[144] Barakat, n.p.

propose that for researchers and scholars who may be interested in dealing with this kind of invisible heritage—such as the abandoned villages—further studies and documentation projects carried out through the international organizations in Yemen will be useful.[145] Such projects have a chance of ensuring some form of cultural memory continuity for the abandoned villages in the western highlands.

Enriching cultural heritage studies in the Yemeni higher education system

During my studies at Sana'a University, one of our assignments was to rehabilitate a well-known heritage site as part of the urban design subject. We were not instructed to consider the old urban fabric of the village, nor the heritage value, and we did not conduct a preliminary study to learn the historical or cultural background of the historical town. Instead, as is evident in the image below, the proposed new urban fabric was merged into the old urban fabric, and other new urban elements were added without respecting the heritage value of the buildings and the old fabric of the historical village (Figure 47). The supervisor of this course intended to submit proposals to the national and international agencies to improve and develop this historical site, but fortunately and tragically at the same time, the war prevented the proposed project.

[145] I intend to write a documentation proposal for the abandoned villages based on the outcomes of this research project in cooperation with architects, archeologists, and historians in Yemen.

Figure 47: A proposal to rehabilitate the historic city of Kawkaban by students of Sana'a University - Department of Architecture, Source: Haitham Al-Afif's Portfolio. An aerial image of the Kawkaban city, source: Google earth 2021, Al Mahwit Governorate, Yemen, 15°29'56.4"N 43°54'08.7"E

As I reviewed the various courses, curricula, and study plans in the governmental and private university departments related to the themes of cultural heritage, I noted the lack of interest in cultural heritage studies in higher education institutions in Yemen. Regarding preparation and training students who are interested in cultural heritage issues, I also reviewed the academic activities and practical aspects offered during the courses, and I found that the students are not given experience or training in heritage practices or activities during their studies. Thus,

graduate students interested in cultural heritage studies must get a higher education in further multi-disciplinary fields related to heritage to engage and contribute to national and international organizations in the heritage of Yemen. This situation strongly warrants the recommendation that higher education institutions establish, improve, develop, and update the disciplines related to heritage studies and grant students' scholarships to acquire knowledge of cultural heritage practice.

As the current war in Yemen prevents the establishment of new departments for cultural heritage aspects within the current higher education system, it will initially need reformation and improvement in the general quality of education. At this stage, higher education institutions, universities, and faculty departments that deal with cultural heritage would need to find resources to make the first structural changes to integrate presently absent cultural heritage approaches into the available education and training for future experts:

- Update the curricula, including the questions concerning cultural heritage aspects such as the latest cultural heritage theoretical trends and practices.
- Enable students to study the subjects in English so that they can keep up with recent studies related to cultural heritage in different fields.
- Improve and update scientific research skills and methods in cultural heritage studies.
- Set up different scientific activities such as seminars, conferences, field trips, summer camps, and internships. These activities should not only connect to one discipline but reflect cooperation with other disciplines related to cultural heritage. Also, these activities should have updated goals and outcomes, to document and study the cultural heritage in Yemen, in particular. These tenets also hold for conflict zones worldwide.

- Coordinate between national and international organizations and other related-heritage institutions with higher education institutions to receive graduate students, to train them, and encourage work in the cultural heritage sector.
- Supply the universities with the necessary equipment and educational tools, with a plan to for continuous technological updates, to implement the practical parts of documentation of the cultural heritage.

Building an international network of heritage conservation projects outside Yemen

One of the aims of the thesis is to develop international network concerned with the preservation of cultural heritage after war. Due to the existence of international contact with civil society organizations[146] in Yemen, it is possible to establish a project plan by initiatives or foundations or even individuals who have research or actual plan in the domain of cultural heritage studies or preservation practices to document the traditions and collect through crowdsourcing the images for the abandoned buildings in western highlands villages. Such a crowdsourcing initiative would be very significant resource for preserving the knowledge of the past and present for future generations. Having international networks of heritage conservation may be considered a source of technical and financial support for creating more opportunities in maintaining cultural heritage work in Yemen in cooperation with a) the heritage institutions in Yemen; b) academics from various disciplines connected to various aspects of heritage in Yemen such as archeologists, architects as well as through research

[146]The heritage institutions carry out social and economic development work on a small scale. Recently, during this war, some small social, development and charitable projects were established in order to create job opportunities for unemployed youth, who represent the largest age group in Yemen.

centers and universities; and c) interested individuals in the cultural heritage of Yemen both outside and inside Yemen.

In order to access the community's readiness to engage with such a project, I reached out to individuals inside and outside Yemen in order to collect old photographs of the Yemeni rural landscape and the abandoned villages. Since most of them did not respond to my correspondence, I created a Facebook group in order to motivate people to get to know their villages and heritage and publish images in their possession (Figure 48 and Figure 49). I have also begun to accumulate images from other groups on Facebook, which include photographs of foreigners who visited Yemen during the past four decades. Thus, this idea is a first attempt to create future data base or photograph archive based on crowdsourcing from social platforms or to create an open-source content management system for online digital collections such as Omeka. The goal is to make this archive systematically accessible for documentation or research purposes in a systematic way.

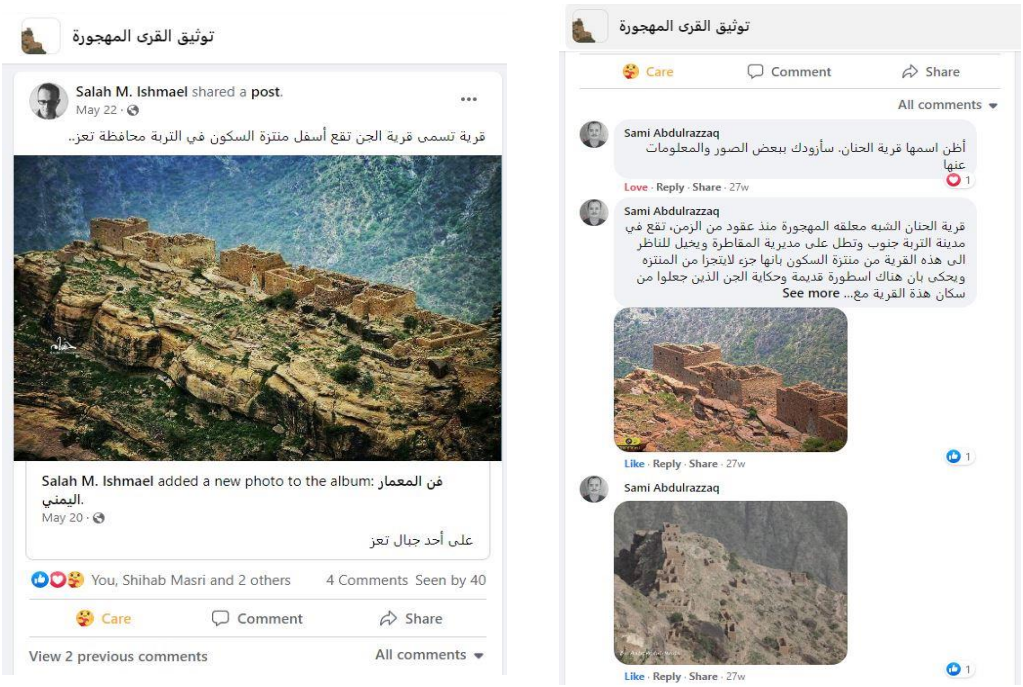


Figure 48: Images for ruins of villages in Taiz posted by a group member on Facebook (Documenting the abandoned villages). Source: https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=10215023250974110&set=a.10215023073209666, accessed December 12, 2021

Figure 49: Various images that I collected from other Facebook pages for some abandoned villages. Source: https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=4518921121475918&set=pcb.520954489259871, accessed December 12, 2021

For visiting the Facebook group: https://www.facebook.com/groups/501130117908975

Conclusion

The process of birth, transformation, decline and decay reviewed in this paper are natural and social processes that have always shaped the past and current rural landscape in the western highlands regions of Yemen. When we find ourselves in this region, we cannot separate the abandoned villages, and the process of decline and decay from the rural landscape or its agricultural and social traditions. Any intervention in the form of conservation will lose meaning because these processes have been going on for thousands of years. There is still, however, a need to at least document the knowledge and experiences of local populations that formed these abandoned villages and the traditions they still practice around them—also, documenting historical information about these villages by conducting field studies for and by the people of these villages, in the hope of obtaining some information through oral history or oral traditions.

In the first chapter, I reviewed a critique of traditional practices, which led to a crisis of accumulation of heritage entities due to the natural resistance by people to entropy, decay, and loss of these practices and physical constructions. I advocate for a no-intervention approach to the material preservation of the abandoned villages in the western highlands of Yemen. My justification is that entropic processes have preserved the abandoned villages in their current form since their emergence without any heritage intervention for conservation during the past fifty years. But this does not mean indifference to letting these processes take their course completely, at least. New ways should be found to take care of these villages through documentation or future studies to preserve the work of cultural memory of the abandoned villages' material existence and the traditions it embodies.

In the second chapter, I review settlement continuity in the western highlands region of Yemen, from its beginnings in the Bronze age of the region (and maybe earlier) to the present day. This continuity demonstrates the process of establishment, transformation, and decay over time, affected by environmental and social factors, which are the same ones that formed the current villages scattered in remote and high-altitude mountain areas for security, political, economic, and maybe cultural reasons. The sites of these villages and the cultural landscape they contain will benefit scholars and heritage institutions in the future in the documentation process, knowing in advance that these abandoned areas and villages may hide earlier cultural layers, which must also be considered even if direct knowledge of them has been lost by living populations. Further post-war archaeological and other related field survey studies therefore can play a significant role in preserving archaeological and cultural material memory in Yemen when, if ever, the hostilities finally come to an end.

The third chapter focused on the social and political factors of the western highlands region of Yemen as part of a process that contributed to the villages' formation in their current form. More precisely, during the last thousand years, events in Yemeni political history are incredibly repetitive, and contributed in particular to the isolation of Yemen from the rest of the world. Despite its negative impact on building a developed nation, which Yemen still suffers from today, it has significantly preserved parts of Yemen's cultural heritage, which explains the survival of many abandoned defensive villages, some of which were in use until the middle of the twentieth century.

In the fourth chapter, I created a case study of my ancestral village (Al-Sha'aybah) during the social and economic changes of the mid-twentieth century. At that point of history, Yemen opened up for the first time to modernization, which again contributed to the abandonment of villages and local traditions such as old agriculture practices and traditional water management.

However, there is no doubt that the damages resulting from the wars of the past seventy years, especially the current war, threaten Yemeni architectural heritage.

Chapter five advocates a non-interference approach in the material preservation of abandoned villages in Yemen, allowing for the processes of decay and change in heritage practice, especially during periods of decline, and collapse. Management of these village though restoration is no longer manageable, especially given the difficult times Yemen is experience due to war. Other factors also contributed to selecting this approach: a) the Yemeni context is too complex (politically and geographically) to sustain any traditional heritage practices in the current or post-war situation; b) there are hundreds of old abandoned villages located in the rugged terrains, submits of the mountains, and valleys of western highlands of Yemen. Thus, any restoration, preservation or even documenting programs are economically very costly; and c) any material preservation or intervention will damage the primary meaning of this rural landscape since the process of decay and change lies at core of the settlement continuity and tradition in this region. Therefore, research suggests that studies and documentation of certain villages be conducted through post-war improvements to the higher education system including the creation of research centers in universities, linking them to cultural heritage studies a subject the Yemeni higher education system explicitly lacks. In addition, building an international research network outside Yemen is critical in order to deliver a message for outsiders that such rural landscapes need to be considered for future projects, including heritage documentation of these abandoned villages.

Finally, I cannot end the thesis without acknowledging the research issues related to the murkiness of the Yemeni context. Nevertheless, this research marks a first attempt to explore proper preservation approaches for abandoned villages in the western highlands of Yemen.

Further questions will require future explorations related to practical issues and methods related to documentation and preservation of cultural memory.

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Appendix 1 – Interview questions

(Village's history and society)

1) You have mentioned that some of the poor and orphans used to live in al-Sha'aybah (a small village) who later had to leave the village for economic reasons. Could you tell me where they used to live exactly in that village?
2) Do you think the social stratification was a result of feudal differentiation?
3) How many generations did each house in the village use to have?

Coffee cultivation

4) Could you please tell me about the history of coffee farming?
5) Did coffee farming deteriorate in the village?
6) What were the reasons behind that?
7) Was there a period in which coffee farming deteriorated?

Agricultural terraces, water resources

8) Have agricultural terraces been deteriorated?
9) What were the water resources in al-Sha'aybah village?
10) How were agricultural crops such as vegetables watered?

Land, water resources, and other resources ownership

11) Was there a part of those resources that belonged to the public properties or were they private ones?
12) Is it true that roads, water resources, homes were all private properties, except for farming lands and the mosque?
13) Are the properties could be passed down to children to become their own properties?
14) How did the land use to be divided after the death of the landlord?
15) What are the ways used to make the process of passing down properties?
16) You have mentioned in your notes that people who are called "Nqail" moved to live in the village and became either partners or workers in the lands (which means immigration used to be controlled by the economic sector), the question is what about the cattle and its products, did it belong to the workers or the landlords?

Information about the abandoned buildings

17) When the abandoned buildings were built?
18) What were the reasons for them to be abandoned?
19) Which families used to live in those abandoned old villages?
20) To whom did the abandoned buildings belong to?
21) Are there any families that still live there nowadays?
22) Were the old stones of the village used in building the new ones?

Immigration

23) What are the reasons that led people to migrate to cities?
24) And is there any migration from cities to villages?

25) Did that play a role in abandoning the abandoned old villages?
26) What is the percentage of expatriates from al-Sha'aybah in Saudi Arabia? For example, how many men in each family left the village for working in Saudi Arabia?
27) When men in the village had left for working in Saudi Arabia, how did that affect the village women, especially in the agriculture business that requires physical strength?
28) Did that contribute in neglecting lands, namely, the agricultural terraces?
29) How was the effect of the imported goods on the local ones?
30) As for the shops in the village, what was the source of the money to have those shops?
31) Were they funded by the immigrants working in Saudi Arabia?
32) When the gulf crisis took place, did immigrants there go back to the city or the village directly?

Earthquake

33) Were the buildings in the village get any serious damage when the earthquake in 1982 took place?

Al-Hishaibri Cupola

34) When was Al-Hishaibri Cupola built?
35) Has the Cupola regularly been renovated?
36) What are the materials used to restore it (I am asking this because I was intrigued by how well-restored it was and its bight white color?

New material building

37) Were there any new houses in which concrete masonry units used to build those houses?
38) Were certain kind of stones had to be brought form remote areas?
39) Did the village witness more new houses built after the revolution?

Dams

40) Were there any old dams in the village?

Weekly markets

41) How many markets were in the village?
42) Were they chosen to be located in the center of the village?

Appendix 2 - The individual interviewees

Name	Surname	Gender	Occupation/profession	Date of the interview
Abdulrahman	Al-Moa'lmi	Male	religion teacher	September 15, 2021
Ahmed	Al-Hamdi	Male	Farmer	September 25, 2021
Ali	Al-Hamdi	Male	Professor	September 25, 2021
Fatima	Al-Moa'lmi	Female	House wife	September 15, 2021
Mujahid	Al-Humaidah	Male	Teacher	July 03, 2021
Najibah	Al-Humaidah	Female	House wife	September 25, 2021

Appendix 3 – Ali Al-Hamdi's Diary[147]

الناحية التاريخية

اشتهرت عزلة الشعيبة تاريخياً بالتالي:

1) مقر للحكومة: ذلك لناحيتي مغرب عنس وعتمة تبعاً للتقسيم الإداري المتعارف عليه تاريخياً (عهد الأئمة والعثمانيين) حيث عين الفقيه صالح بن على الحمدي عاملاً عليهما حسب ما ترويه الرواية. أما من ناحية التوثيق، ففقد كان الحمدي عاملاً على مغرب عنس نهاية القرن الثاني عشر الهجري وبداية القرن الثالث عشر ولم يحدد مقر الحكومة وذلك حسب كتاب المؤلف جحاف. الأمر يحتاج إلى بحث للتأكد من قول الرواية.

2) ملجأ للفقراء والمساكين والايتام: الذين يفدون على العزلة من مختلف العزل والنواحي المجاورة طلباً للطعام الذي كان تشرف عليه أحد أسر العزلة (بيت الحشيبري) والذي كان يمثل محصول زراعي لأرض وقف مساحتها شاسعة وتقع كلها في ناحية القفر التابعة لمحافظة اب.

3) مقر للتعلم: نتيجة لما ذكر أعلاه، كانت العزلة مقراً للتعليم لكل من أبناء العزلة، الوافدين إليها، ومن بعض العزل المحيطة بها. المدرسة كانت عبارة عن غرفتين ملتصقة بمسجد القرية حيث كان التعليم تقليدي حصراً على القراءة والكتابة والامور الدينية، وكاتب هذه السطور كان أحد مرتاديها في بداية حياته في حدود السنة الخامسة من عمره.

الناحية الاجتماعية

من الناحية التركيبة السكانية، عزلة الشعيبة يسكنها العديد من الأسر ذات النسب المتنوع. من ناحية المرتبة الاجتماعية ينقسمون إلى ما يسمونه أصل وغير أصل. الأصل هم الفقهاء أو القضاة، السادة والقبائل. تمثيل الشيخ في الشعيبة يعتمد على الحالة الاقتصادية للشخص وقدراته

[147] Sana'a, 2009

وملكاته الشخصية : قوة الرأي، اللباقة في الكلام والمشاركة في القتال. غير الأصل وهو الذين يقدمون الخدمات مثل الجزارة، الحلاقة، اعداد القهوة والمداعة، تزيين العروس ومرافقتها إلى بيت زوجها. في أطراف القرية معظم سكانها يسمون شركاء أو اجراء والذي يستأجرون الأرض من ملاكها وهم خليط من الأصل وغير الأصل .

في الشعيبة لا ينتشر غالباً مصطلح نقائل كون معظم سكانها أصلاً نقائل ومن أماكن مختلفة من اليمن، وإن وجد فهو في حدوده الضيقة جداً. وبالتالي نستطيع القول أن عزلة الشعيبة هي اقرب إلى المدنية منه إلى القبلية والبدوية. من ناحية التزاوج، الأصل يزوج ويتزوج من الأصل وغير الأصل من غير الأصل.

حياة الناس الاقتصادية والخدمية

المتابع لحياة الناس في العزلة قبل الثورة وبعدها والتي تعتبر حالة عامة في معظم الريف اليمني يلاحظ تناقض في سلوك الإنسان اليمني. ففيما كان أكثر انتاجاً واعتماداً على ذاته في زمن عدم توفر وسائل تسهيل الحياة، أصبح حين توفرها اقل انتاجاً واعتمادا على الغير.

كانت حياة الناس في عهدي الأئمة والعثمانيين وحتى بعد الثورة بعدة سنوات جداً بدائية حيث كانوا يعتمدون في قوتهم على ما يحصدونه من مزارعهم. وكانت المحصولات التي يحصدونها تشمل الذرة اليمنية (بأنواعها البيضاء، الصفرا، الحمراء) والذرة الشامية (الرومية)، البن، السمسم، الدجر، وكانوا يحفظون محصول الذرة تحت سطح الأرض في حفرة عميقة على شكل بئر تسمى المدفن (الجمع مدافن) وفي سلال كبيرة يسمى المفرد منها المقشم (الجمع مقاشم) لحفظ الذرة الشامية مستخدمين الرماد كمادة حافظة. فيما يتعلق بالخضار والفاكهة، فكان يزرع البصل، والكراث، والفجل، والثوم، البسباس، والتين الشوكي والتين الأسود، والبطاط الحالي (يسمى محلياً الجزر) وعلى نطاق ضيق الموز، والبرتقال. ونظراً لارتباط الزراعية بالحيوان، فقد كان السكان يربون كل من الأبقار، المعز، الضأن، والحمير والتي كانت تتغذى على الرعي خاصة في موسم هطول الأمطار وعلى الحشائش التي كان المزارعون يجمعونه في نهاية الموسم وبكميات كبيرة ويقدم لها خلال فصول الجفاف . ايضاً كان الأهالي يربون الدجاج في منازلهم حيث كان يعطى لها الحبوب ومن بقايا الأكل، إن تبقى! ومن تلك الحيوانات كان يحصل السكان على بالنسبة الصبغ الحليب، اللبن، السمن، واللحم، والبيض. ففيما كان الحليب واللبن يمثلان الصبغ الرئيسي اليومي لدى جميع الأسر، فإن السمن والعسل واللحم يمثلان الصبغ الاسبوعي لدى الأسر الغنية وكانوا يتفقدون معهم الأسر الفقيرة. ومن فوائد الحيوانات ايضاً استخدام مخلفاتها (يسمى الذبل) كسماد لتخصيب الأرض والذي له يلعب دور كبير في انتاج ثمرة أكثر فائدة في الكم والنوع. ماء الشرب والطبخ كان من منبع على مقربة من القرية والذي كان يجلبه النساء إلى البيوت في أوعية فخارية تسمى المفرد منها جرة (الجمع جرات)، ماء الغسيل كان مما يتجمع من مياه الأمطار في البرك التي تتبع مسجد القرية. فيما يتعلق بالوسائل المختلفة/ فقد كان السكان يستخدمون الحيوانات (حمير بشكل عام ونادراً الخيل مع شخص من أحد الأسر الغنية) وسائل للنقل والمواصلات، ذكور البقر (الأثوار) في حرث الأرض. لم يكن هناك خدمات صحية وكانت الأمراض منتشرة وتفتك بالناس وتودي بحياتهم خاصة في موجات الأوبئة. وكانوا يتداوون لمعظم الأمراض عن طريق الطب الشعبي باستخدام الأعشاب والزيوت والدهون والعسل والكي وغيرها. فيما يتعلق بعلمية البناء (البيوت، المساجد) فقد كانت جميع مواد البناء الأساسية مما يتوفر في العزلة مثل الخشب (للابواب والشبابيك)، والطين، والحجر، والقضاض (مادة تشبه الاسمنت وتقوم بوظيفته كمادة ربط وتجميل),

منذ اواخر الستينات وبعد التحول السياسي (عهد الانتقال من نظام الحكم الإمامي إلى النظام الجمهوري) شهدت العزلة تراجعاً من حيث توافد الفقراء والمساكين والايتام بل ومغادرة بعض من كان يقيم في العزلة منهم نظراً لتمنع من يزرعون أرض الوقف وتحت أيديهم من دفع محصول الوقف وايضاً من توافد الطلبة إليها من خارجها. في المقابل هاجر معظم سكان العزلة إلى المدن داخل البلد وإلى العربية السعودية. كما شهدت العزلة تطوراً ملحوظاً حيث انشئت مدرسة تعليم حديث، شقت فيها الطرق لوصول السيارات ووحدة صحية حكومية ومخازن أدوية خاصة وبالتالي أصبحت لها مكانة كباقي العزل التي تحيط بها.

نتيجة الهجرة الداخلية والخارجية وتوفر بعض الخدمات ازداد عدد السكان ونتج جيل جديد غير مهتم كثيراً بالزراعة التي تعتبر المصدر الرئيسي إن لم يكن الوحيد في السابق. وبالتالي تراجع الاهتمام بالزراعة حيث قل المحصول السنوي نتيجة الاعتماد على المنتجات الزراعية وخاصة القمح المستورد من الخارج وبكميات كبيرة. كذلك لم يعد السكان يهتمون بتربية المواشي كالسابق حيث تراجع الناس عن ذلك نظراً للالتحاق ابنائهم بالمدارس ومن لديه مواشي فهو على حساب تعليم ابنائهم. من الملاحظ ايضاً أنه تم الاعتماد على السماد الكيماوي المستورد وتخلى الأهالي عن السماد التقليدي رغم الفارق بين النوعين: فالسماد الكيماوي له مردود على الثمرة لكنه يعمل على افساد التربة وهذا بعكس السماد البلدي الذي اصلاح التربة.

من جوانب تراجع الاهتمام بالزراعة وتربية المواشي ممارية بعض سكان العزلة أعمال حديثة كالتجارة حيث فتحت دكاكين صغيرة والبعض التحق بوظائف حكومية مثل التعليم، الصحة، والبعض الآخر يعملون كسائقين للسيارات (الدفع الرباعي فقط) ومؤخراً الدراجات النارية (تسمى محلياً بالموترات) والتي تنطلق بسرعة فائقة في الطرق الجبلية الوعرة، وهذا ما يتعجب منه!! فيما يتعلق بالعمران، فقد شهدت العزلة توسعاً نوعاً ما في بناء البيوت والمساجد ومدرسة كبيرة والملاحظ في ذلك أنه تراجع الاعتماد على بعض مواد البناء المحلية حيث اختفت مادة القضاض وحل محلها مادة الاسمنت وكذلك تم الاعتماد على الخشب المستورد والحديد. من الجوانب التي شهدتها العزلة والتي سهلت ربطها بباقي العزل وعملية النقل والتنقل شقت الطرق لكنها تتعرض للانجراف والخراب جراء السيول حيث يعمل الأهالي بما يستطيعون عمله من صيانة المهم جداً منها.

لم تكن العزلة تعرف زراعة شجرة القات إلا بعد قيام النظام الجمهوري حيث زرعت أماكن جداً محدودة. لكن في منتصف العقد الثاني من هذا القرن تقريباً انتشرت زراعته بصورة مضطردة مستغلين مياه الغيل الجارية في الوادي (وادي الجور) وكذلك السطحية التي يستخرجونها من باطن الأرض بواسطة مضخات الديزل. يجدر الإشارة ايضاً من المنتجات الزراعية التي لم تكن معروفة في الماضي ثمرة المنقة والتي يتم زراعتها في الأرض القريبة من الغيول والبعض حول البيوت ويتن ريها من الماء الذي يحصد في خزانات حديثة من الحديد والبلاستيك.

English translation

The government headquarters: Based on the administrative division of (the Imamate and Ottoman era) throughout history, Alfaqieh Saleh Bin Ali al-Hamdi was designated as a governor of Maghrab Ans and Uttuma, as told. As for the documentation, al-Hamdi was designated to rule Maghrab Ans by the end of the twelfth century and the beginning of thirteenth century, and it was not mentioned if there was a government headquarters there, according to its writer.

Sha'aybah was a refuge for those who had fled from the neighboring areas to the village in looking for food. There used to be a huge tract of agricultural land which was dedicated to the feeding of the poor by one of the Al-Hishaibri family, one of the Al-Sha'aybah families.

Educational center: As mentioned above, people either used to live in the village or would come from the neighboring areas to have the chance to study at the religious school in the village. The school consists of two rooms, connected to the mosque, and people received a classic education including reading, writing and religious teachings. The writer of those lines joined the school at the age of five.

As for the social aspect, people who used to live in the village came from different social classes: people who had family roots there and people who did not. The upper class usually comprised judges, masters and tribesmen. The second classes usually comprised butchers, barbers, waiters, and maids. As for the Sheikh (the ruler) of the village, choosing him depended on his financial situation, his abilities, and skills such as having a strong will, fighting skills and wisdom. Those who lived on the outskirts of the village were a mixture of the two classes.

In Al-Sha'aybah, most people who lived there come from different areas and cities in Yemen. Therefore, the word (*naqilah*) is not used in the village. This means that Al-Sha'aybah's governing system was closer to that found in a city rather than characteristic of tribes or Bedouins. As for marriage, those who come from the upper class married into similar upper-class families and members of lower-class families married into families of equal class.

Like most villages in Yemen, most people in Al-Sha'aybah village have become more dependent on outside, store bought products and less agriculturally productive after the revolution. People were described as being more independent and more productive before the 1962 revolution.

Like the lifestyle during the Ottoman era and even some early years after the revolution, people in the village used to depend fully on their own harvest and crops such as wheat in different colors (white, yellow, and red), coffee, sesame seed and so on. They used to keep wheat in big baskets in very deep, closed pits in the ground called *mdfan*.

As for fruits and vegetables, different types were planted such as onions, leek, radish, garlic, chilies, black figs and sweet potatoes. A very few banana and orange trees were also grown. Since agriculture is connected to animal husbandry people used to raise cows, goats, sheep, and donkeys for home consumption and work. All those animals were pastured during the rainy season and foddered on grass collected and stored by farmers for the dry seasons.

Furthermore, people also raised chickens in their houses, feeding them on grains and leftovers. From all those animals mentioned above, people would get milk, yogurt, meat, and eggs. In past times, milk and yogurt used to be the main staple dish for many people whereas ghee, honey and meat were traditionally the main staples for rich families, who in turn, were required to share what they had with poor families.

Animals were also used for different purposes other than feeding people. For example, animal manure was used to fertilize the soil, playing an important the source of the village where women used to go there to bring water back to their houses using jars. As for washing, people used rain water from the pond.

Village people used animals to move from one place to another. For example, common people used donkeys and richer families used horses. They also used oxen for cultivation. As for the health sector, there were no health services and people used to die soon due to some diseases and even epidemics. People used herbs, oils, honey, and traditional medicine to treat themselves.

Most of the basic building materials for houses and mosques comprised ones available in the village. For instance, they used wood for making doors and windows, and mud and stones for constructing walls and ceilings.

Since the late sixties, right after the political transformation as Yemen became a republic, many poor people and orphans were no longer received in the village because the owners of lands designated for charitable work stopped giving alms. Also, many people left the village for the city or Saudi Arabia as migrant workers. At that time, the village developed noticeably as a modern school was established there. Roads, clinics, pharmacies were also built, which made the village like other villages around it.

As a result of local and international immigration, overpopulation, and the availability of some new services, the younger generation was not interested in agricultural work, which led to less productivity every year as most people depended on imported products, especially wheat, which was imported in big amounts. Similarly, people were no longer as interested in animal farming as before since most people preferred to send their children to schools instead.

It is worth mentioning that villagers also tended to depend on the imported fertilizers instead of the traditional manuring despite its good quality not only for the crop but also the soil.

Other reasons behind the deterioration of traditional agricultural practice are the increased availability of different job opportunities such as trade, shops, public jobs in different sectors such as education and health. Other men worked as drivers of cars and motorbikes. As for architecture, the village has witnessed the construction of many new buildings such as houses, mosques, and a big school. Those buildings were now built using cement instead of the traditional material people used for building their old ones; the same thing goes for other materials such as wood and steel. Moreover, the village has finally been connected to other areas around it as many roads were paved although those roads are subjected to damage due to heavy rain.

The village had never witnessed planting the qat tree until the revolution when limited areas started planting qat, used for its narcotic leaves. Later, during the middle of the second decade of this century, planting qat has spread quickly, using water from the springs to water the qat trees. It is worth mentioning that another kind of new fruit has been planted and grown in the village. Mango trees are being planted in areas near the rivers or around houses using water people keep in plastic or steel tanks.