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School papers in Yemen. Critical presentation, summaries and translations of "Umm al-Madāris. The Construction of the School of Banī 'Alī, Yemen, 1956" by Muḥammad 'Abd al-Rahīm Jāzīm (2018)

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School papers in Yemen. Critical presentation, summaries and translations of “Umm al-Madāris. The Construction of the School of Banī ‘Alī, Yemen, 1956¹” by Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Rahīm Jāzim (2018)²

Juliette Honvault

- ¹ At the end of the summer of 2018, my colleague Muḥammad Jāzim, a Yemeni researcher at the French Centre for Archaeology and Social Sciences, sent me the first pages of an autobiographical manuscript entitled “Wahaj al-dhākira” — “Spark of Memory” — written in 2017. Yemen was then, and has been for the past four years, the scene of a violent and murderous civil war, exacerbated for almost three years by the bombings of the Arab coalition led by Saudi Arabia. M. Jāzim is “confined” at home, i.e., isolated from the world he shared until 2012 with his fellow researchers in France, Yemen and elsewhere. While others seek to bear witness to life in Yemen in times of war and publish articles in the Arab press³, he decided to write his Memoirs. In remembrance of our wanderings in Aden in 2009, when he introduced me to the stalls in the Crater district where he had lived part of his youth, he suggested that I read the beginning of this work, which deals with this happy period. The story certainly does not lack interest. Written in a literary way, and in a pleasant style, it also aims to “reflect a part of the city of Crater Aden’s political and social history”. Muḥammad Jāzim is a historian, and he skillfully stages the elements of his memory depicting life in Aden in the 1970s. Born in 1956 in Hub, in the village of Banī ‘Alī A’būs, in the mountainous region of Ḥugarriyya, he lived the first years of his life under the Imamate regime, not far from the border that separated Yemen from the territories occupied by

the British since 1839: Aden, the South Arabia protectorates and, further east, those of Hadramaut. Educated at the school of his village, Banī ‘Alī, he left to continue his high school studies in 1969 in Aden, which had become independent two years earlier.

- 2 It was a joyous time, although disrupted by violent conflicts within the national movement. Above all, M. Jāzim remembers his freedom as a young man wandering through Aden’s streets, where he enjoyed the affection of some of his uncles who ran shops there. He then went to study history at the University of Sanaa, which was built in 1971 with Kuwaiti funding.
- 3 Much to my regret⁴, M. Jāzim's story had very little to do with his memories at the village school. In preparation for this issue dedicated to education in the Arabian Peninsula, whose editorial work I had already begun with my Kuwaiti colleague Talāl al-Rashoud, I asked M. Jāzim if he could go back over this episode in his life. The answer promptly came. Before the end of 2018, he sent me the text we are publishing here on the Madrasat al-Ba‘th (“Resurrection School”), which, after the 1962 republican revolution became the Madrasat al-Ḥurriyya (“Freedom School”).
- 4 While written in response to a request — mine, actually —, this text is no less to be placed in the context of its own production. “I didn’t expect to write about it [the school] at a time like this,” M. Jāzim says in the first sentence of the short paragraph he wrote as an introduction. It’s not a good time because war is a major constraint:

I am caught in the war trap in Sanaa, and even my village has not been spared: the warring parties are fighting each other there on a permanent basis. There is a great deal of documentary material on the school — everyone’s Mother in the village — because our fathers’ generation, thanks to whom education found its place there, wrote about it, and documented and collected everything about the school. However, due to the present circumstances, the distance that separates me from it is now greater than the distance between Sana’a and Shi‘b Bawān⁵. However, when my colleague Juliette Honvault asked me to write about education in my village, a dormant yearning awakened in me. I rushed to retrieve all the material I had at home, and found something to write about the Mother of Schools, which was founded at a tragic time, and after a terrible tragedy struck our village of Banī ‘Alī A‘būs, located today in the district of Ḥayfān, in the region of Ḥugarriyya, south of the city of Ta‘iz. The strength, determination and awareness of those who created it and stood up for it have made it one of the most successful educational and cultural experiences in the Arabian Peninsula.
- 5 M. Jāzim’s account is based on testimonies from works he collected at his home in Sana’a, or brought back by people around him and which he has kept in mind. The most important of these is that of a ‘Abd al-Wāḥid ‘Abduḥ ‘Uthmān, who was a teacher and later al-Ba‘th School headmaster⁶. It has been included in the unpublished book by Khālīd ‘Abd al-Jabbār ‘Abduḥ and ‘Alī ‘Abd al-Fattāḥ al-Murīsh, *Al-ta‘līm fī qarīyat Banī ‘Alī A‘būs* (Teaching in the village of Banī ‘Alī A‘būs). In addition, there are direct testimonies and the work of a Palestinian director Ḥusayn al-Asmar, *Al-masrah fī al-Yaman, tajarruba wa humūḥ* (Drama in Yemen. Experience and Ambition), published in 1991 in Cairo⁷.
- 6 This corpus of documentary and memoir research enabled M. Jāzim to chart a school history of Banī ‘Alī from the mid-1940s to 2010. It focuses not so much on the school institution itself as on the history of local educational activism. Its links with the political world were strengthened at the time of South Yemen’s independence and the exacerbation of tensions between the political and ideological groups that formed on both sides of the border between the two Yemen countries until 1990.

- 7 The geographical location of the village of Banī ‘Alī is an essential element of this history: situated on the heights of the Ḥuḡarriyya overlooking Aden and its hinterland, it is administratively attached to the northern country, governed by the imamate until 1962, then by the Arabian Peninsula’s first republican system, imposed with the help of Egypt and at the cost of a five-year civil war. Its natural economic outlets are located on the other side of a border that crosses unhindered, in Aden. The city and its hinterland, which extends administratively to the Ḥadramaut region, had been under British rule since 1839, which ended in 1967 under pressure from a determined nationalist movement. It is in Aden that the people of the al-A‘būs area, established as small traders (like some of M. Jāzim’s uncles) or port workers, were initiated into local militancy in the 1930s.
- 8 Tracing the history of the al-Ba‘th school by making an inroad into the personal testimony gives a local and lively insight into a more general movement, namely the emergence of civil society in Yemen, which historical and anthropological literature has already dealt with copiously, mainly in Arabic and English⁸. In Imami Yemen, where the authority and influence of State power is exercised mainly in the cities, collective survival in rural areas has traditionally relied on solidarity and cooperation mechanisms, in the form of the State’s *laissez-faire* approach. Tribal ideology, which values honor, generosity, loyalty and piety, is shared by all village communities, even when they are not part of tribal organizations, and is very much present in rural Yemeni culture in the form of poetry, stories and songs⁹. Thanks to an ever-increasing emigration of workers to Aden (there were 80,000 North Yemenis out of a total of 220,000 inhabitants in 1965¹⁰), the village community’s “self-help” culture intersects in a decisive way, from the 1930s onwards, with the cultural and trade union openness granted by the colonial authorities in order to limit local dissent. It also intersects with the important development of commercial and educational structures in the Ḥadramaut sultanates, thanks to the investments made by the local market elite, which draws its financial and political power from ancient and profitable commercial businesses in India, Singapore, Indonesia and East Africa¹¹. Literary and cultural clubs, as well as the press, relay news from the Arab and anti-colonial world as well as private initiatives in favor of Yemenis who, in Imami Yemen or Aden, remain subject to extremely limited means of subsistence and the absence of political rights.
- 9 In Aden, the “seduction of capitalism” is in full swing, valuing “self-help”¹². Since the 1930s, Islamic community mutual aid has been deployed on the model of the village association (which often takes the name *nādī*, or ‘club’) to facilitate the villagers’ financial, cultural and even educational integration in the city: in the 1950s¹³, these associations represented more than 50 villages in the Ta‘iz region. In this movement, education, not only a religious one, became an essential means of collective survival. There were only four government-run primary schools in Aden in the 1930s, exclusively for native Adenis or foreigners, and the first British-supported school for local Arab children up to the baccalaureate was not established until 1935 — and then only for the local elite’s sons (Aden Protectorate College for the Sons of Chiefs). The Directorate of Education, established in 1938 — a year after Aden’s detachment from the Bombay administration and its attachment to the British Crown as a colony — only developed with the creation of a teachers’ training school, a technical institute and a school for girls. The education of Adeni and Yemeni immigrant children was therefore left to the private sector, either in Aden or in Yemeni villages close to the border.

Associative or private schools very quickly became places of political mobilization in the context of the anti-colonial and national struggle. It is in this very particular melting pot that the school attended by M. Jāzim developed, as did other schools, more or less well known¹⁴.

The al-Ḥaṣḥaṣ school

- 10 At the start of the first part of the narrative, ‘Abd al-Wāḥid ‘Abduh ‘Uthmān’s testimony collected by ‘Abduh et al-Murīsh traces the arrival at Banī ‘Alī, in 1944, of teacher ‘Abd al-Ḥāfiẓ Muḥammad Ṭāhir al-Hitārī who, coming from a neighbouring village (al-Hitārī), created the first school in al-A‘būs which was open to non-religious education curricula, the school of al-Ḥaṣḥaṣ.

1. From right: Professor ‘Abd al-Ḥāfiẓ Muḥammad Ṭāhir al-Hitārī; Professor Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Wahhāb Bishr; and an uncle of Professor Amīn Aḥmad Muḥammad Muḥammad Sa‘īd (Archives ‘Abd al-Wāḥid ‘Abduh ‘Uthmān).



2. Professor ‘Abd al-Wāḥid ‘Abduh ‘Uthmān (Archives ‘Abd al-Wāḥid ‘Abduh ‘Uthmān).



- 11 ‘Abd al-Wāḥid ‘Uthmān reports that ‘Abd al-Ḥāfiẓ came from a large Sufi family and received quality education in religious studies in schools and mosques in Aden. Al-Ḥaṣḥaṣ was the name of the place where he taught his lessons, outside the village and close to a mountain path used by travelers, under a large rock forming a cave, the upper part of which had been dug out to serve as a water reservoir for the local herders’ sheep. The children of this troglodyte school also benefited from a reservoir built for them, and soon after its opening the place was enlarged to accommodate older pupils and was rigged with a platform for the teacher.

4. Commemorative table of the founders of the Al-A'būs Union Club in Aden (Archives of the Charity Association of the people of al-A'būs).



5. Hājj 'Alī Jāzīm Muḥammad Hādī Sinān al-'Absī, President of the Union Club of al-A'būs (Family archives of Muḥammad Jāzīm).



- 14 Alī Jāzīm was appointed president, and a “constitution” was drawn up, specifying its organization, spirit and objectives. The club’s so-called “statutes” were printed shortly thereafter, and M. Jāzīm, who has a copy of them in his Sana’a home, reproduces them in full in his account.

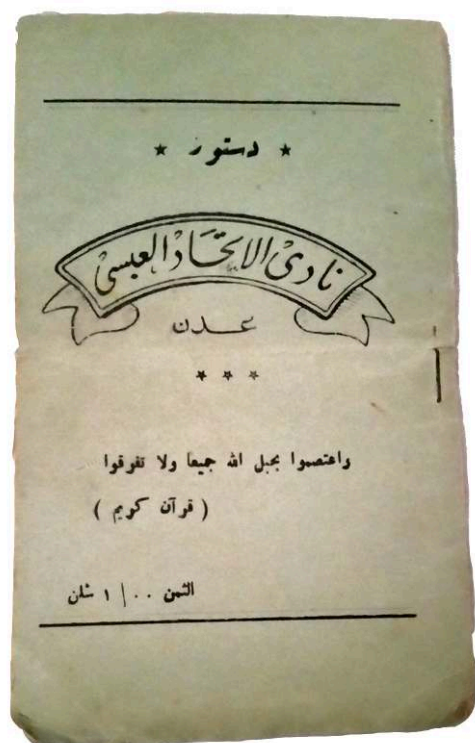
6. Al-Ḥuriyya school for girls in Banī 'Alī A'būs (Archives Muḥammad Jāzim).



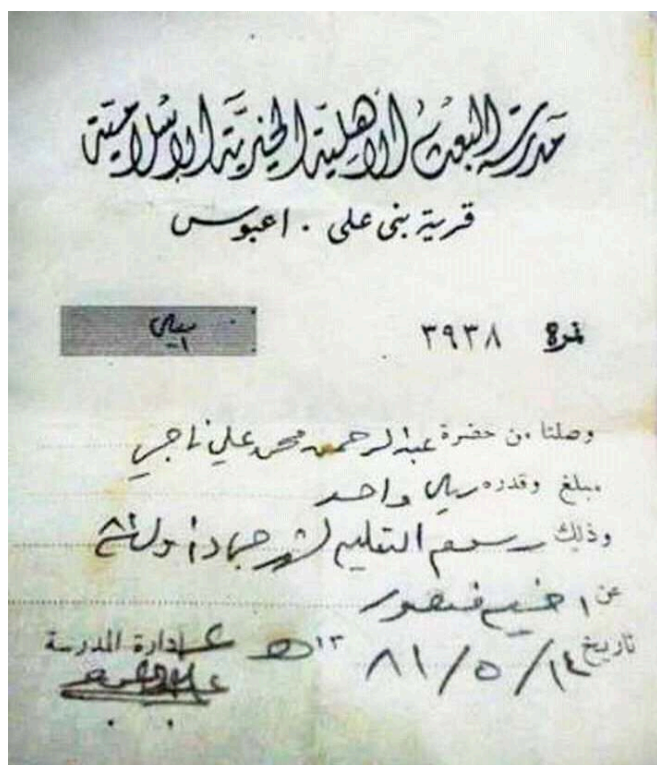
7. Al-Ḥuriyya school for girls in Banī 'Alī A'būs (Archives Muḥammad Jāzim).



8. Cover picture of the Constitution of the Union Club of al-A'būs (Archives Muḥammad Jāzim).



9. Deed of registration of a pupil "at al-Ba'th Islamic and Private Charitable School", dated 14 May 1981. "Abd al-Raḥman Muḥammad 'Alī Nājī, a citizen of al-A'būs, enrolled his brother in al-Ba'th school, and kept the document of the enrolment, which was photographed and widely distributed by the people of al-A'būs" (Copyright-free archive).

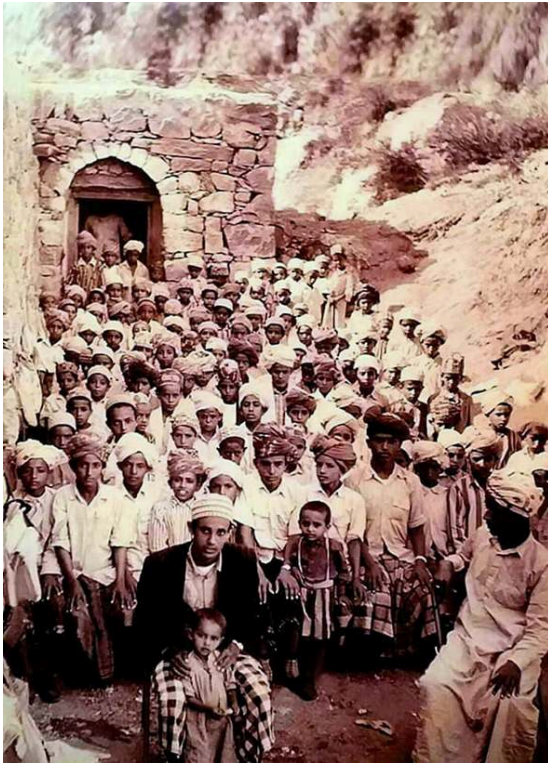


- 15 These are typically those of an association, such as there were many in Aden: the Aden Association (al-Jamī'īya al-'Adaniyya), founded in 1950, which brought together 3000 members of an elite demanding "Aden to Adenis", had a "constitution", as did the Aden Conference of Unions (Mu'tamar 'Adan lil-niqābāt), founded in 1956¹⁵.
- 16 The al-A'būs Union Club was a charitable organization that dedicated a large part of its projects to education. While the first of its four "objectives" listed in the first paragraph of the "constitution" aims at "strengthening the teachings of the true religion" (*al-tamassuk bi-ta 'ālīm al-dīn al-ḥanīf*), the second is indeed dedicated to "raising the level of education and culture within the homeland and among the emigrants" (namely the Yemenis). Then comes the development of "*charitable projects in the country of al-A'būs, such as the opening of one or more schools, the digging of wells, the construction of water reservoirs and water tanks to provide assistance to the needy and destitute, provided that the miserable state in which they find themselves is not the result of a fault or behavior reproved by the sharia, in terms of morality and respect for local law*".
- 17 Although central, education does not seem to have been an end in itself, but a means to improve al-A'būs men's living conditions, wherever they may be. The club's first expenditure was indeed dedicated to the construction of housing in Aden. It was meant to accommodate those who, coming from al-A'būs, were unemployed, and it was only after five years that it was decided to build a school in the al-A'būs area. This school is, of course, the school of Banī 'Alī, the Madrasat al-Ba'th.
- 18 To retrace its beginnings, M. Jāzim goes on to read 'Abd al-Wāḥid 'Abduḥ 'Uthmān's testimony. At the time of the creation of the Union Club, he was working in his father's shop, a coffee and incense seller in Shaykh 'Uthmān, on the outskirts of Aden. In his self-portrait, 'Abd al-Wāḥid says he was deeply affected by the school accident at al-Ḥaṣḥaṣ, which he had witnessed. He decided to write an account of it for the local press. It was published on 27 October 1955 in the *Ṣaḥīfat al-Naḥḍa* (Resurrection Press), under the title "History of the village school of Banī 'Alī A'būs". In this article (transcribed by M. Jāzim), 'Abd al-Wāḥid began his account with an open criticism of the Imamate's government, which had appointed 'Abd al-Ḥāfiẓ Muḥammad Ṭāhir as a teacher in the village without making sure he had a place to teach in, other than the cave, "as if [the government's] duty was to stop there, and that it was normal there should be a teacher without a school". At least two inspections by the Ministry of Education were carried out, he explains, but no report was ever made of the squalid conditions in which teaching took place. The final accident is not fully documented, replaced as it is by an ellipse that lends weight to it ("*the history of this school has spawned many misfortunes, which are difficult to discuss here*"), and 'Abd al-Wāḥid concludes his account with an address to Banī 'Alī's inhabitants, inviting them to join hands and build a school for their children together, "*because knowledge has become crucial for human beings today, just as water and air are indispensable*".
- 19 According to 'Abd al-Wāḥid 'Uthmān, the article "jolted people's consciences" and "confronted everyone with their responsibilities". Within the al-A'būs Union Club, a six-personality committee came together to set up a school at Banī 'Alī, including M. Jāzim's grandfather and a maternal uncle, who owned a large 'men's and women's clothing' shop in Crater. Following a new article published by 'Abd al-Wāḥid in the *Ṣaḥīfat al-Naḥḍa*, sufficient funds were raised to build a school with three classrooms for 40 students each. In 1956, the Madrasat al-Ba'th was the region's first private school, and, as 'Abd al-Wāḥid points out in his testimony, it was also the first school designed on the

model of a “modern system, equipped with chairs and tables”, modeled on the Aden schools.

- 20 M. Jāzim completes this story by recounting that his maternal uncle and grandfather brought the village *shaykh* (the one who had lost his son in the school accident) to Aden, where they provided accommodation for him for a month. To ensure he would defend the school’s work against the Yemeni authorities, they took special care to make him feel welcome, organizing tours of the city in a chauffeured car. The school was built unhindered.

10. Pupils of al-Ba’t̤h School with Professor ‘Abd al-Ḥāfiẓ and Professor ‘Abd al-Wāḥid (on the right and left respectively) in the courtyard of the school after its opening in 1957 (Archives ‘Abd al-Wāḥid ‘Abduḥ ‘Uthmān).



11. Al-Ba'th (al-Ḥuriyya) school in Banī 'Alī A'būs in the 1970s (Archives 'Abd al-Wāḥid 'Abduh 'Uthmān).



The al-Ba'th school's spirit and methods

- 21 The third part of the narrative, dedicated to the contents and organization of the education provided at the Banī 'Alī school, begins with the story of the school's opening in 1957, under the name of Madrasat al-Ba'th al-Ahliyya al-Khayriyya al-Islāmiyya (Private Islamic Charitable School of Regeneration). 'Abd al-Ḥāfiẓ Muḥammad Ṭāhir, the teacher who had been banned from Banī 'Alī, was reappointed as headmaster and teacher, and he recruited one of his former students, 'Abd al-Wāḥid 'Uthmān. The program offered to students was, according to M. Jāzim, again referring to his account, a 'modern program', spread over four years. In addition to the classical subjects (learning the Koran, recitation principles, monotheisms fundamentals, the study of *Safīnat al-Najat* — *The Ship of Salvation*, a book on the principles of the Shafi'i school, Arabic language, calligraphy, dictation, reading and grammar), were added elements of geography, 'technical education', arithmetic and physical exercise. English was not taught, certainly so as not to offend the Yemeni authorities, but the school began to admit girls at preparatory level in 1960. Enrolments were gradually distributed according to pupils' ages, and school time was organized over six school days and six daily hours of classes, beginning with religious songs (then Republican ones after 1962) and the inspection of bodily cleanliness, then interspersed with recess and line-ups.
- 22 An honor roll drawn up by Professor 'Abd al-Ḥāfiẓ honored not only the school's patrons (especially those who bought equipment and books), but also the first teachers the school had managed to train. The link with Aden and its higher educational institutions (secondary level or higher) was secured, and the school students could easily, if they wished, continue their studies at the Institute of Commerce, opened in 1951, or, after its creation in 1961, at Kulliyat Bilqīs, an institution created for Yemeni children (regardless of origins) from kindergarten to the baccalaureate thanks to a fund-raising campaign carried out by Aḥmad Muḥammad Nu'mān among the North African and English Yemeni diaspora¹⁶.

- 23 The al-Ba'th school was a rapid success. Three classes were filled in a short period of time, and even faced a large influx of pupils from eight different villages in the al-A'būs region: from 93 in the first year (started in August 1957), enrollment rose to 170 at the beginning of the following school year (end of July 1958), before stabilizing at between 140 and 165 pupils for the next four years (including fourteen girls at the beginning of the school year in June 1962, three months before the outbreak of the Republican revolution and the establishment of the principle of 'school for all').
- 24 According to M. Jāzim, who enrolled in the school in 1963 (the school was now called al-Ḥurriyya), the new spirit brought by the school and the way it was run can account for a large part of this success. The annual festival, organized at the beginning of the school year, was opened to all villagers, and other elements of the school's daily life ensured the school enjoyed a special status in the social arena, emphasizing the modernity it represented. M. Jāzim pointed out that access to water was provided by a cistern; that trees provided shade and a pleasant, changing landscape in the courtyard; and that pupils had toilets on the school premises, even though the wealthiest villagers had only had them installed in their homes since 1955. The school had been endowed with a 'bell', a metal gong the headmaster would ring at various times during the day, as M. Jāzim recalls. Its melody, which imitated Big Ben's chimes (heard on Aden's English radio station), spread all over the mountains, and also served as a time marker for villagers in their daily activities.

12. Picture of the pupil Muḥammad Jāzim on the elementary school graduation diploma form in 1969 (Archives Muḥammad Jāzim).



13. “Big Ben”, the famous “bell” of the al-Ba‘th (al-Ḥurriyya) school in Banī ‘Alī A‘būs (Archives Muḥammad Jāzim).



The cultural, sporting and charitable life of the al-Ba‘th / al-Ḥurriyya school

- 25 Among the school’s sports, cultural and charitable activities, detailed in the fourth part of M. Jāzim’s work, drama held a special position. It was considered by ‘Abd al-Wāḥid ‘Uthmān as a means of “influencing social life, raising people’s awareness as to what was happening around them and developing personal insights; just as drama was a means of exposing many social problems and proposing solutions”. A few years earlier, in 1958, the teacher had followed an incident in the Adeni press brought about at Ghayl Bā Wazīr in Ḥadramaut adraḥby a play performed by pupils of a school very critical of the pro-British local authorities. The headmaster and teachers involved in the theatrical activity were dismissed, stirring the anger of pupils’ parents against British authorities¹⁷. Impressed by the mobilization that the play had generated, ‘Abd al-Wāḥid ‘Uthmān decided to stage a play in al-Ba‘th school in July 1958, with the support of headmaster ‘Abd al-Ḥāfiẓ Muḥammad Ṭāhir. They marveled at the large number of parents present at the time of the performance:

Darkness had only just begun to dim when large lights began to shine in all directions, those of the German Petromax lamps. We were so impressed. Groups of people spread out, joining other individuals and groups, covering their heads with blankets to protect them from the rain, while some opened umbrellas to protect them from both rain and sun [...]. The gala had been scheduled to start at seven o’clock on the invitation cards, but because of the state of roads flooded by the rains, we postponed it until half past seven, when people continued to stream down to us in the light rain.

Then the rain stopped. The atmosphere relaxed, spirits rejoiced, and the space

filled with spectators. Seats were stormed, students climbed up onto the roof of the school and on the shelves that surrounded the room, while others stood behind the seats. The school roofs and courtyard turned into a glowing flame, filled with lights. [...] the party, which began at 8 p.m. after the 'ishā' prayer, lasted more than two hours, with speeches, poems, songs and plays by students. There were two performances: "The Passion for Gold"¹⁸, and another, written by Professor 'Abd al-Ḥāfiẓ, entitled "Dependence on Qat". The people were full of admiration and were extremely satisfied with what they had seen.

- 26 Muḥammad Jāzim remembers vividly the magical effect these theatrical performances had on him, some of the young actors' talent, the costumes and props kept in a school safe and accumulated year after year. But he quickly skips over his childhood emotions, and chooses to convene the research work of the Palestinian director Ḥusayn al-Asmar on drama in Yemen¹⁹. It gives the names of young student actors of the time, for whom M. Jāzim gives short biographies in footnotes: most of them are personalities who, after studying abroad, had successful careers in the commercial, banking and medical sectors of the Yemen Arab Republic, the Democratic Republic of Yemen constituted from 1967 onwards, and the Yemen after the unification of 1990.
- 27 Drama fulfilled a moral role the villagers were not insensitive to (the plays were mostly inspired by the history of Islam), and it invited them to observe the society around them. Ḥusayn al-Asmar bears witness to the particular success of "The Dreaming Hermit", performed after the 1962 revolution. The play, composed of a single act, was performed by a single actor, and humorously combined the exaltation of education and the condemnation of laziness and dreaming: the character of the hermit is a poor man, whose only treasure is a honey-pot hanging from his ceiling. He regularly dreams of being able to sell it to buy a hen and see it reproduce, to sell new hens and buy a piece of land, then build a big house and marry a "beautiful woman" who would give him a son. The latter, thanks to "instructors and teachers", would become a model of politeness and knowledge — the acme of this fantasy. Carried away by his imagination, the man gets excited, fiddles, wiggles and waves his cane in the air... hitting the honey-pot, which shatters on the ground. The dream fades away forever, as does his educated son, who could have assured him a decent future for the rest of his life.
- 28 Ḥusayn al-Asmar reports that, full of admiration for Maṣṣūr An'am Sayf's acting performance, a spectator came to him to offer him his watch as an encouragement to pursue a theatrical career. Muḥammad Jāzim, who always takes a back seat to Ḥusayn al-Asmar, states in a footnote that he attended the performance. He remembers the episode of the watch perfectly, identifying the donor as "one of the pioneers of education in the al-A'būs region", who taught at the Banī 'Alī school before and after the revolution, then moved to Aden as a ready-to-wear retailer, then became known as an important patron of the school. Wearing a watch, he adds, "was reserved only for the rich at that time, and I still remember the role played by Maṣṣūr in that play, sitting, telling his dreams and striking, in a gesture that became famous, the pot that then poured over his head, as well as his sobbing voice, which still echoes in my ears after so many years".
- 29 Muḥammad Jāzim also later experimented with drama at school, but he is more explicit about sport, which was apparently no less important than acting in patrons' and principals' pedagogical arsenal. The annual celebrations were an opportunity to showcase the pupils' sports performances, shortly before the play, and "before *Maghrib*'s prayer". They illustrated the work carried out throughout the year in the school

yard: running and speed running, tug-of-war, high and long jumping, hand walking, shot put, weight lifting and, above all, football. Soon, as Jāzim points out, “the football team had their own outfit, with shoes and socks, black shorts and a short green (flannel) T-shirt.”

14. Members of the sports team of al-Ḥurriyya school. “The picture probably dates back to 1969. As a member of the reserve team, I was present at this match, which took place at the al-Irshād school stadium in Zabī A'būs. It was the al-Ḥurriyya school team that won the victory, and its first school cup, which is still preserved in its museum today. The person on the far right, in civilian clothes, is the headmaster of the al-Irshād school, his name is 'Abd al-Ra'ūf (I don't remember his last name).” (Archives Tāhir Aḥmad Jāzim).



- 30 Football matches became an attraction for the people of al-A'būs, and a real field was eventually built, in the village of al-Namla, adjacent to the school of Banī 'Alī, and on the site of an old cemetery covered in thorn trees. Once again, a team of volunteers set about clearing and cleaning the pitch, which was surrounded by a 2-metre high wall, “in the style of modern stadiums”, with metal cages boasting nets brought from Aden. The stadium was used for all sports matches between the village teams in the area until 1980, when the site was requisitioned to build the al-Ḥurriyya school for boys. It was never replaced.

15. Al-Ḥurriyya school for boys, built in 1980 on the site of the football field and with Kuwaiti funding (Archives Muḥammad Jāzim).



- 31 In addition to the drama club and the football team, the school also hosted a Scouts centre, which was set up in the first year of the school. M. Jāzim remembers, again, that as a youngster he used to look with envy at the boys in suits (short-sleeved shirts, brown shorts above the knees, and blue scarves tied around the neck), before he could join a team, the leopard team.
- 32 The Scouts group's missions included "assisting inhabitants in the event of natural disasters or fires, helping sick students or the elderly, as well as training in rope making using local plants, organizing a number of tasks, such as building and repairing agricultural terraces damaged by torrents formed by the rains, among others". But the Scouts also gathered around fun activities, such as "drawing, singing (individually or collectively), reciting speeches and free reading". Finally, there was the school library, an essential place for al-A'būs young people:

It played a major role in broadening pupils' perspectives and making them aware of the presence of a vast and new world that deserved to be seen, far from their village, through wonderful stories and illustrations found in magazines such as *Bisāṭ al-rīḥ* (Flying Carpet), *Samīr* and *Mikī Māus* (Mickey Mouse)²⁰, the Green Library collection stories, etc. By making it possible to borrow and read, it has instilled sustainable passions in all the students, forcing them to register on a waiting list with the library manager to get the [long-awaited] magazine.

The success of the school and its regional influence in the Republican context

- 33 The school and pedagogical model of the al-Ba'th school was emulated. Five years after its creation, the al-A'būs Union Club decided to build two more schools in two villages

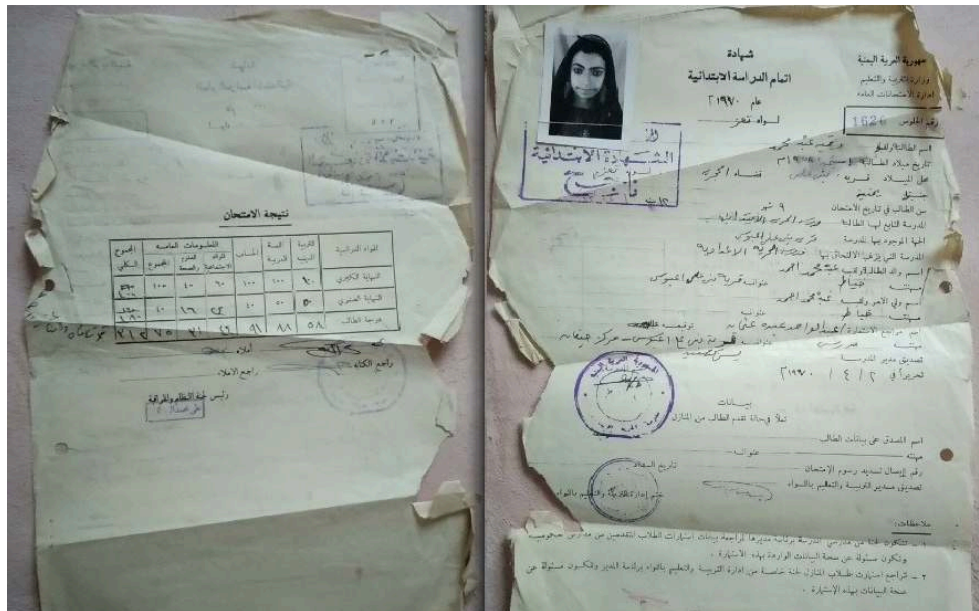
in the region, the first one four months before the outbreak of the 26 September 1962 revolution, and the second one a year later. The names given to these new schools, the Madrasat al-Irshād (School of Guidance) and the Madrasat al-Nūr (School of Light), testify to the Islamic spirit that guided their promoters. Under the impulse of their common director, ‘Abd al-Ḥāfiẓ (the director of the al-Ba‘th school), they all sided with the revolution. He encouraged his fellow citizens “to make donations for the revolution and to join it; he himself rushed to Sana’a in the first week, taking with him the donations of the citizens of the al-Qabayta district, and gave a brilliant speech at Radio Sana’a on their behalf”.

- 34 According to Jāzim, members of the al-A‘būs Union Club also sent representatives to Sana’a to bring a 60,000-shilling donation, ignoring Aḥmad Muḥammad Nu‘mān’s advice, who would have instead...

...advised them to use the money to build more schools or a hospital in their area, because the leaders of the revolution were likely to spend the money to buy apartments for themselves in Cairo. Al-A‘būs people became angry with him for breaking their momentum in favor of the revolution in this way, and handed over the money, as we have said. Two years later, they realized that Professor Nu‘mān was right, and apologized to him.

- 35 The rest of M. Jāzim’s presentation continues with a list of schools built in the al-A‘būs area until 2012. All of them — 19 in all — were built with private funds, with the exception of the school of al-Namla, which was built on the football field managed by the Banī ‘Alī school in 1980, and which also received Kuwaiti funds. So, in the end, the republic did little for its children in this southern region.
- 36 The al-Ḥurriyya school, on the other hand, continued to develop without public support and was reorganized. Going beyond the basic education hitherto provided, it opened a primary level in 1963, a preparatory level in 1967, and a secondary level in 1974. The latter was taught in the new buildings built by the Kuwaitis in 1980, which also housed a school for the training of teachers. It was not until 1995 that an all-levels school for girls was opened, which made it possible to reinforce girls’ education, provided since 1960 at preparatory level and since 1966 at elementary level. As M. Jāzim points out, it had already made it possible to eradicate illiteracy from the region.

16. Form of the certificate of completion of primary school of Ruqiyya, wife of M. Jāzim, in 1970, with the transcript of grades (left) and the stamp of the provincial authority of Taiz (under the picture). (Family archives Muḥammad Jāzim).



- 37 The al-Ḥurriyya school centre has now become a centre for an end of secondary school examinations center for the entire region, and it trains teachers for the Ḥayfān district. The boys' school directors were proud of their history of putting children's needs first, and boasted as well of the link that teachers had maintained between school and families to better integrate children into school life. They made sure the boys' school was eligible to be part of the UNICEF-supported and funded 'Child Friendly Schools' program over the years 2007-2010²¹.
- 38 The school has carefully preserved its archives, which 'Abd al-Wāḥid 'Abduh 'Uthmān used in his testimony. It is from the figures he provides that M. Jāzim reports on the evolution of enrolment between 1963 and 1982 (from 303 pupils to 744 between those dates). According to them, all the students who graduated from secondary school went on to study at university, in Yemen or elsewhere, and took up managerial posts in the public sector or as entrepreneurs.
- 39 Finally, Muḥammad Jāzim underlines the importance of the creation of the al-Ba'th school in the development of a culture of modernity in the al-A'būs region. Almost overnight, the local youth had access to buildings made of cement, supported by long wooden beams "made in Europe", allowing the construction of spacious rooms:

There was no known comfortable dwelling before the schools were built. Moreover, the introduction of cement and its use for the school water supply, on a permanent basis, made it possible to avoid using the expensive *qadaḍ*²² to build the houses, and to introduce water pipes for each of them. After that, the novelty of taps (closed water tanks) in each house became widespread, and it became the indispensable material for true domestic comfort.

The school's social and political life in the context of the Yemeni revolutions

- 40 The construction of the school has not merely changed the local villagers' comfort requirements. Muḥammad Jāzim also highlights the role it has played in shaping social and political consciousness. After the 1962 Republican Revolution, the al-Ḥurriyya school became a gathering place for Banī 'Alī villagers and the surrounding villages, who wondered "what to do with the region's *shaykh*-s and dignitaries, who until then had represented the region in the royal system [...]. In the end, after long rounds of discussion and deliberation, it was decided the notables would officially abandon the *mashyakha*²³, and become citizens like everyone else, in the service of the revolution and the republic. The *shaykh*-s and notables present agreed." The school was also the place consecrating the republic among pupils and inhabitants. Every morning, pupils, standing in rows, sang the new national anthems, and the teachers explained the revolution to the pupils, in class or in the courtyard. M. Jāzim still remembers the time when students were gathered in a row in the courtyard so that all the students could touch the currency of the new regime with their hands:

The new riyal shone and glittered in the sun, as did the *buqsha* coins. Our teachers were very happy with the event that day, and so were we, although we were too young to understand all that it entailed. We were also shown pictures of the Yemeni revolution men, Gamal Abdel Nasser and the officers of the revolution in Egypt, and 'Abd al-Raḥman 'Ārif, the leader of the Iraqi revolution. We were given free brochures with these leaders' photos on the cover and the multiplication table on the back cover, as well as photos of the new institutions that had been created, such as banks, factories, schools and post offices.

- 41 The anti-colonial struggle in Aden from October 1963 until the departure of the British in 1967, and then the conflicts between the two main nationalist groups also made their way into the school-life in a very direct way. The al-A'būs region, and beyond that the area around Ḥayfān, was both an important centre of the republican movement in the North, and the backyard of the anti-colonial movement in the South, led by the National Liberation Front. It used to advocate an Arab nationalist ideology at its beginnings, but was swept away in 1965 by a strong Marxist tendency, though some of its members were opposed to it, to form the Front for the Liberation of the Occupation of South Yemen²⁴. M. Jāzim describes the al-Ḥurriyya school in the 1960s as a forum for the debates that accompanied these political developments but also, very concretely, a place of retreat for republican and socialist militants from both North and South:

On the occasion of the school's annual celebration, soldiers and officers from the region and surrounding areas were welcomed. Sitting in the front row, they wore military clothing and, although most of them were almost illiterate, they were asked to address from the stage an audience that kept applauding them at length. The al-Ḥurriyya school continued throughout the terrible 1960s²⁵ to support the revolution and the republic and then to oppose the colonizer in the south. [...]

And, just before 1967, 'Abd al-Raqīb Muḥammad al-Ḥarbī, who came from the village of al-Ghalayba²⁶, and was a great military leader specializing in military cartography, graduated in Egypt in the 1950s, and Muḥammad 'Abduḥ Nāshir, nicknamed 'Shaykh Allah", also from al-Ghalayba, and who led the Ṣā'iqa²⁷ in Sana'a forces, met at al-Ḥurriyya school with the Education Committee and the residents. They told them that the Egyptian army and the Egyptians in Yemen overstepped their role of supporting the revolution and the republic, and that they had begun to change their ways and behavior towards the Yemenis, to the point of acting as

occupiers; that everyone should prepare themselves to face this reality and strive to get rid of the Egyptian hegemony. At that time, no one among the people of the region felt delighted with such words, because they viewed Gamal Abdel Nasser as a *za'im* and a leader for the nation. But soon after Arab countries armies were defeated by Israel on November 5, 1967, the Egyptian army left Yemen²⁸.

The schools mobilized again to defend the revolution and the republic, led by the one in al-Ḥurriyya. Many people from al-A'būs went to enlist in the ranks of the Defence of the Republic, in the Ṣā'iqa, in the parachutists, in the armored corps or the engineers' corps, or then again in the supply corps. The young people who had studied at the al-Ḥurriyya school joined the ranks of the resistance, in Sanaa, Ta'iz and Hodeida, and played an important role during the siege of the Seventy in Sanaa²⁹.

When teacher Yāsin Muḥammad Sa'id took over the direction of the al-Ḥurriyya school, he was very much left-wing. He was all about change and modernity [...]. Together with the Ḥugarriyya inhabitants, he led a revolution for change initiated from the schools, under the name of "Reformation Charity Committees". The al-Ḥurriyya school was one of them. People stopped going to district courts and, after school hours, came to schools to solve their personal problems, inheritance issues, marital disputes, theft, and ancient revenge. They had hired experienced people from among the old *shaykh*-s who had renounced the *mashyakha* in writing a few years before.... They also saw to it that some projects were carried out to expand schools and their facilities, to create dispensaries and to build carriage roads to serve villages. The State and its representatives at district level, whose interests were disrupted and whom no one came to see or communicate with, were alerted to the danger that was brewing and to the spread of the leftist and revolutionary movement that had been suppressed in Sanaa, Ta'iz and Hodeida after 1967. They launched a fierce campaign against the Reformation Charity Committees and their members. Many of them were thrown into prison, [...] and the Reformation Charity Committee that operated from the al-Ḥurriyya school came to an end.

At the same time, the left of the National Front of the Sons of the South, along with other groups, made contact with the al-A'būs nationalists who had left Aden to retreat to their villages, outraged by the Qaḥṭān Muḥammad al-Sha'bī administration in the South. It was precisely the moment when the al-Ḥurriyya school scout group, led by Amīn Aḥmad Muḥammad (I was a member of it) was experiencing a conflict between, on the one hand, Sālim Rubayyi' 'Alī³⁰ and Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ Muṭī', and on the other, the al-'Asqa village inhabitants. We had just put Sālim Rubayyi' and his companion under cover in the school third grade classroom, and had been on guard all night. In the morning, [...] Yāsin Muḥammad Sa'id and the religious education teacher [...] realized who they were and they honored them. They asked two young scouts to take them to the Maṣṣūr al-Ṣarāri's house, in the Ḍabī village, and after a few months they [Sālim Rubayyi' 'Alī and Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ Muṭī'] took part in the overthrow of Qaḥṭān al-Sha'bī, during the coup lead by 'Abd al-Fattāḥ Ismā'il (a man from al-A'būs). Sālim Rubayyi' 'Alī became President of the People's Republic of South Yemen and Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ Muṭī' was made Foreign Affairs Minister. In the years 1973-1974, a military campaign was launched against several of al-A'būs schools, including the al-Ḥurriyya school, over the alleged presence of partisan elements among the students. Some of them were arrested, and many others fled to the South, while still others went to study in the Soviet Union and Socialist Union countries. They returned with university degrees in various specialties, and became active members of many public institutions and establishments in the south.

The al-Ḥurriyya school experienced many rounds of political disputes and democratic debates among the region's people. Competitors were divided into three progressive parties: the Socialists, the Nasserists, and the Iraqi Ba'th Party Ba'thists. As for the Muslim Brotherhood, they were and still are numerically negligible. The

conflict concerned the allocation of leadership functions to each of the local councils, the al- A'būs Inhabitants Association, the parents' councils, as well as the appointment of the delegates to the District House of Representatives. It also broke down when it came to deciding who would provide the best service in his or her field and to carrying out projects designed to serve the region and its inhabitants. Each case gave rise to a quarrel between the three parties, which, incidentally, succeeded in carrying out many projects, including expanding schools, improving the content of education, meeting all school needs, building and developing asphalt roads for each village, opening and equipping many health clinics in several villages to care for the sick, and bringing serious cases to city hospitals on an emergency basis; to open postal service offices, telephone communication booths; set up rationing centers linked to the State's economic services; deliver public electricity lines and connect them to every household, or build a network of healthy pipes to bring drinking water to homes (the latter is not yet completed and is not yet operational, though). All this was done in response to the objectives enshrined in the 1950s al-A'būs Union Club Constitution, and whose banner has been carried to the present day by the al-A'būs Benevolent Association, with its relays in the main Yemeni cities.

17. Picture of some graduates of al-Hurriyya school in the 1970s (with Muḥammad Jāzīm in the third place from the left), in the school square. "I believe this picture was taken with my camera, and I have distributed it widely among the people of al-A'būs, because it captures our youth, the influences of the 1970s in our clothing, the hippie movement and the fashion of the Saint Laurent group and others in France and Europe, characterized by narrow shirts and wide trousers at the bottom." (Archives Muḥammad Jāzīm).



- 42 The novelty of the al-Ba'th / al-Ḥurriyya school history became an element of pride, and events were organized to celebrate it. After the exhibition of the first commemorative table of the al-A'būs Union Club members, during one of the school's first annual celebrations — it has been mentioned above — there was an exhibition for the school's twentieth anniversary in 1977. The teacher and headmaster 'Abd al-Wāhid collected photographs, but also all kinds of school life objects: "student registration and teacher recruitment registers, timetable files, curricula, wall posters, model

certificates, financial documents, plays transcripts, etc.”. The exhibition was a great success. In addition to the concern for the archive and its preservation, it also reflected the concern for its exhibition and the desire to inscribe the school experience in the al-A‘būs regional history. A history in which girls’ education and teachers’ training play an important role, ensuring the region’s social cohesion, since the poor inhabitants, unable to keep up with the better-off who sent their children to Aden, were able to ensure their children were educated in the village.

18. Teachers of the al-Ḥurriyya school in the 1970s (Family archives of Muḥammad Jāzim).



19. Female teachers of the al-Ḥurriyya school in the 1970s. “They are all women in my family, cousins, whose children have become doctors, engineers, researchers, etc.” (Family archives Muḥammad Jāzim).



- 43 For his part, and to conclude his work on “Umm al-madāris” (the “Mother of Schools”), M. Jāzim completes the description of the leading role of schools in the development of political commitment and reflection in Yemen:

The al-Ḥurriyya school is also distinguished in that it hosts a museum in a dedicated classroom in the boys’ school. It contains pieces dating from the pre-Islamic period, and a collection of objects related to the region’s heritage: clothing, jewellery, work tools, food and drink utensils, weapons, etc.

It was also the first school in which most of those who worked there, both teachers and students, combined instruction and educational work with political activism, despite its prohibition until 1990 [...]. The pioneers of the al-Ḥurriyya school played an important role in demanding democracy and party authorization. Many pupils were thrown into prison, and some of them even paid for it with their lives. It is surprising to see that souls and minds have been marked by this experience up to the present day, as evidenced by all those who have written about the al-Ḥurriyya school and its educational role. They have, however, neglected these pioneers and students’ role in the militant and political activity of the Yemeni scene in both the North and the South.

- 44 By concluding his school memories with the significance the Banī ‘Alī school has taken in the collective memory, Muḥammad Jāzim invites us to invigorate the driving function of its history, and even of the narrative of that history. His text itself is a choral text, which has been nourished by other written and oral narratives, thanks to which the mobilizing function of the school constitutes a projection of memory. This is not only his own, but that of the Yemenis “from the North as well as from the South”. Through what seems to be a practical representation of the memorial narrative functions, mixing, in sociological terms, public justification and strategy logics³¹, M. Jāzim implicitly gives an insight into his expectations regarding his own narrative in the context of the civil war it is set in. More than in any other narrative form, M. Jāzim suggests — with his readings and memories where nostalgia for a happy childhood is palpable — reconfiguring a present destroyed by war. By reactivating the values of solidarity, resourcefulness, open-mindedness and the adventure spirit that gave birth to the modern school and citizenship in Yemen, he gives directions for the national (re)construction of the country, starting from the local level.

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NOTES

1. <https://journals.openedition.org/cy/5719> in this issue.
2. This article has been translated by Dominique Macabiès from its reduced version in French.
3. See MERMIER, 2018.

4. For several years, I have been interested in education issues and school narratives, as part of a line of research I have been coordinating since 2016 with my colleague Christine Mussard at IREMAM on “Educational policies, pedagogical practices and social interactions in Muslim societies in Europe and the Arab world”.
5. Mythical valley in the Arabic literary tradition, which stands for a kind of lost paradise.
6. See the blog by the Heritage, cultural and social network of the Yemeni inhabitants of al-A'būs, “Al-ustādh ‘Abd al-Wāhid ‘Abduh ‘Uthmān”, https://alaaboos.blogspot.com/2012/06/blog-post_9287.html?m=0. ‘Abd al-Wāhid ‘Abduh ‘Uthmān was born and died at al-A'būs (1930–2006).
7. A third book is mentioned, but it is only a reference for further information on the history of schools in Aden: see the book by Bilāl Ghulām Ḥusayn – no place nor date of publication have been given.
8. See, first of all, CARAPICO, 1998. The book is the result of a long fieldwork in Yemen, and is also an admirable synthesis of the work carried out by Yemeni and foreign researchers on political and civic movements in Yemen between 1930 and 1990. In French, it is worth reading the book by BEN NEFISSA, GRABUNDZIJA & LAMBERT, 2008.
9. CARAPICO, *op. cit.*, p. 60-78.
10. *Idem*, p. 87.
11. *Idem*, p. 26-27; see also FREITAG, 2003.
12. CARAPICO, *op. cit.*, p. 79.
13. *Idem*, p. 94.
14. The political beginnings of the great leader of the reformist and modernizing protest of the imamate, Aḥmad Muḥammad Nu'mān, were made in the framework of the school he created in 1935 in his village of Dhuhbān, in Ḥugarriyya. See DOUGLAS, 1968.
15. CARAPICO, *op. cit.*, p. 88-99.
16. See in this issue the elements provided by Ṣādiq al-Safwānī about the religious institutes of the Shaykh al-Bayḥānī and the Kulliyat Bilqīs created by Aḥmad Nu'mān.
17. This incident is reported by CARAPICO, *op. cit.*, p. 97. The author specifies that it has marked the regional memory under the name “Intifādā of the students of Ghayl Bā Wazīr”, as reported by Ṣālih ‘Alī Bā Surra in the October 4, 1988, *Sabā* newspaper, p. 222.
18. “‘Āshiq al-dhahab”, a poem by ‘Abd al-‘Azīz ‘Atīq (1906 - 1976), poet, specialist in Arabic literature and Egyptian teacher. See *al-Maktaba al-Shāmila*, <https://shamela.ws/index.php/author/1573>. Staging the character of a miser, the poem has been adapted many times for the theater until today, especially in school workshops.
19. Ḥusayn AL-ASMAR, *op. cit.*, 1991.
20. *Bisāṭ al-rīh* is a weekly illustrated Lebanese magazine created in 1962, which published plates from other magazines such as *Tintin* or *Tarzan*, created in France in 1941 (http://bandedessinee-lions.blogspot.com/2018/11/blog-post_29.html). In 1956, Dār al-Hilāl in Cairo launched the magazine *Samīr*, an illustrated weekly that introduced the Arabic-speaking public to comic strips such as Popeye and Bugs Bunny. In 1959, the Arabic-language *Mickey Mouse* magazine was launched, popularising Walt

Disney's drawings in the Middle East. On Arabic literature for children, see CHÈVRE, 2015.

21. UNICEF's 'child-friendly school' model is built on the partnership between schools and communities. See https://www.unicef.org/french/education/index_focus_schools.html.

22. The *qaḍaḍ* is a mixture of lime and volcanic stone. See SUTTER, 2006.

23. Or "council of *shaykh*-s" which could be translated as "Council of Elders".

24. See DOUGLAS, *op.cit.*; KOSTINER, 1984; for a synthesis in French, see LACKNER, 2017, and for more detail on the 1963–1967 period, TOMICHE, 1968, p. 356-362.

25. After the revolution, from 1962 to 1970, Yemen was embroiled in a civil war between Republicans, supported by the Egyptian army, and Imam-loyal "royalists", supported by Saudi Arabia, in what was then called the "Arab Cold War".

26. A village close to Banī 'Alī.

27. The Ṣā'iqā (Lightning) is (was?) the special forces unit of the Republican Army.

28. The Egyptian withdrawal began on 1 December.

29. The "Seventy" is the name given to the 70-day siege (from November 1967 to February 1968) of Sanaa by the royalists encouraged by the withdrawal of Egyptian troops from Yemen in the aftermath of the Six Day War. The siege, which was finally broken by the Republican opposition from all over the country, was decisive for the continuation of the Civil War, since at this end, in 1970, Saudi Arabia, which supported the royalist party, finally recognized the Yemen Arab Republic.

30. Sālīm Rubayyi' 'Alī (1935–1978), who led the left wing of the National Liberation Front of South Yemen until the British withdrawal in 1967, was opposed to Qaḥṭān Muḥammad al-Sha'bī, a more moderate member of the National Front, who was appointed the first President of the Republic of South Yemen on 30 November, 1967. Sālīm Rubayyi' 'Alī seized power from him in June 1969, and became head of the Marxist state of the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (South Yemen), until his execution in June 1978.

31. See CORCUFF and SANIER, 2000, p. 845-869; this reference resulted from reading DUTERCQ and LAFAYE, 2003, p. 469-495.

INDEX

Keywords: education, Aden, Yemen, history 20th century, association, charity, school, theatre, sport, scouting, children's literature, architecture, revolution, memories, war

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