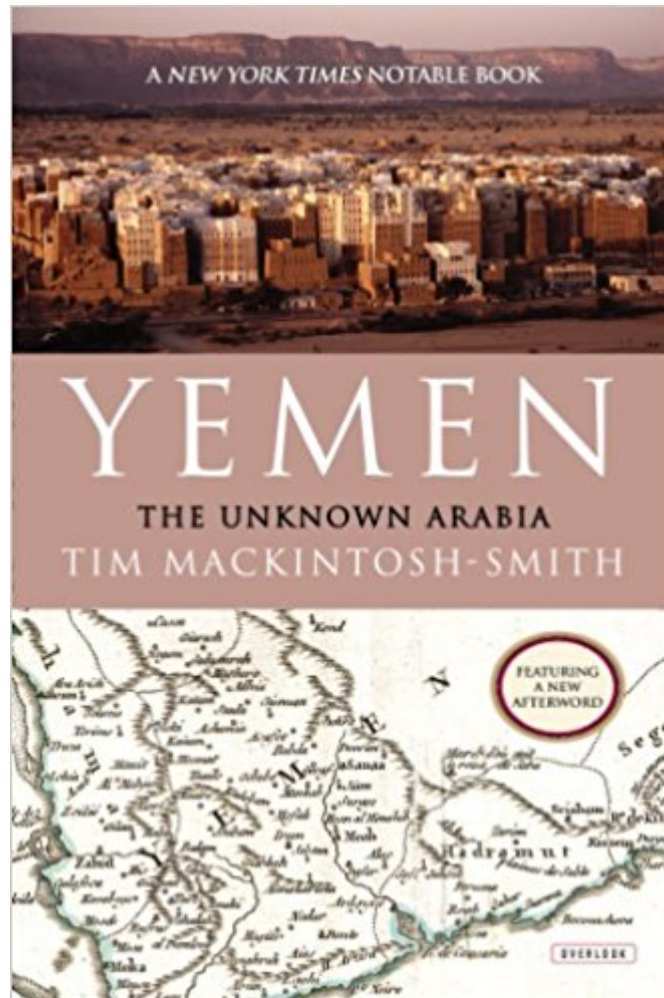




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# Yemen: The Unknown Arabia



## Synopsis

Arguably the most fascinating and least understood country in the Arab world, Yemen has a way of attracting comment that ranges from the superficial to the wildly fantastic. A country long regarded by classical geographers as a fabulous land where flying serpents guarded sacred incense groves, while medieval Arab visitors told tales of disappearing islands and menstruating mountains. Our current ideas of this country at the southern tip of the Arabian Peninsula have been hijacked by images of the terrorist strongholds, drone attacks, and diplomatic tensions. But, as Mackintosh-Smith reminds us in this newly updated book, there is another Arabia. Yemen may be a part of Arabia, but it is like no place on earth.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

“Mackintosh-Smith brings us to a place we don't know at all and lets us in . . . he seems incapable of writing a dull sentence, and in him the scholar, the linguist and the storyteller swap hats with marvelous speed.” —Jason Goodwin, The New York Times Book Review

Tim Mackintosh-Smith has lived in Yemen since 1982, earning the official title of Shaykh of Nazarenes. This, his first book, won the Thomas Cook Travel Book Award.

As author Tim Mackintosh-Smith's book is sub-titled in this edition, Yemen is the unknown Arabia, one that is in many respects, at least at the time this book was published (2000) least like its Arabic neighbors. The author is a long-standing resident of the capital San'a, and uses it as his base to

explore the language and culture of greater Yemen, including some memorable expeditions into deserts and mountains, visiting remote villages and ancient ruins. At times I found my attention straying when the narrative became bogged down in technicalities that held little interest for me, but in the main I was happy to travel along with Mackintosh-Smith, especially when he visited places like Aden and the island of Suqutra, themselves atypical of the rest of Yemen. His exploration of Aden came at a time when the place was notorious for its nightlife (the early nineties) and incurred the condemnation of traditional Arabs. Good enough reason to visit it, the author felt. Consequently he finds himself in a night club with a disco ball and dance floor, plus a band that covered everything from Lebanese hits to Queen classics. To this reader's delight, he witnessed a local phenomenon in the form of the *mutamaykalin*, "the Michaelaques - the fans of Michael Jackson" who filled the dance floor. Mackintosh-Smith's experiences in Yemen culminate in the political struggles of the early 1990's in the wake of the first Gulf War. I was left wishing for a sequel to find out what happened next for the qat-chewing, language-loving author. Never fear, "Yemen: The Unknown Arabia" was his first book (which, incidentally, won a Thomas Cook Travel Book Award) and three subsequent volumes sit in my stack of travel books, awaiting my attention: *Â Hall of a Thousand Columns* *Â Travels with a Tangerine: From Morocco to Turkey in the Footsteps of Islam's Greatest Traveler* *Â The Travels of Ibn Battutah*

Very thorough trip through Yemen with tons of historical info. I felt as though I really got a better understanding of the country and its people... men at least as there is hardly any commentary on women's issues. For those issues I Am Nujood gives some different insight. The author is quirky which I love! It made me want to visit and feel sad about current events.

I enjoyed this work. The author spends time focusing on most areas of Yemen- the Hawdramat, Sana'a, Aden, the mountains, and Suqutra. It would have been nice to have more detail on the coastal areas and the writing at times isn't excellent, but it is a very serviceable text.

Mackintosh-Smith writes from the perspective of someone who really got inside the culture- as much as a traveler can get. He retains an etic perspective, and does not live, grow, and die with the Yemeni. But this is one of the few travelogues where one can find information on qat, and even the author using it on a regular basis (though it remains classified as a drug at the same level as cocaine by the U.S. government). It is also one of the few places where you can find a modern description of travels in Suqutra, which is worth getting the book by itself. The chapter on Suqutra describes a land isolated biologically for millions of years, displaying evidence of gigantism as you

find in Hawaii, where few predators have controlled the growth of fauna and especially flora. There are cucumber trees there, and others that look like upside-down umbrellas. Much of the flora and fauna are unique to the island. Further, severe storms six months of the year prevent access to the island. So, while over the years there have been invasions on the coast of the island by different parties, it has largely grown up unscathed into modern times. The language diverged from South Arabian in about 750 BC, and the people seem to be a mixture of Arabic, Greek, Portuguese, and Indian- but no one knows for sure. While they do now have cars (301 of them), the cigarette lighter is still an unknown machine. And since the government severely limits non-Yemeni visitors to the island, this is a rare and exciting bit of a story of what the people are like. I only wish there was more about the island.

I have read this book several times over the past ten years or so and enjoyed it every time. Mackintosh-Smith is an excellent writer who describes his view of Yemen very well, as one who has lived there and been immersed in its culture and the Arabic language.

I really enjoyed this book although I purchased from a Market Place seller who said it was Very Good but it was only ACCEPTABLE with yellow pages and ugly. I don't want to take the stars away from the book though. The author also has a video of his adventures in Yemen done with a camcorder but I found it to be interesting as well. He's certainly a character who has followed his dream. I recommend for those interested in the Middle East and especially Yemen.

A long time resident of Yemen, the author combines his travel around this interesting country with a far longer historical account of this very interesting country. A little richer from reading about a corner of the Middle East

You can see Tim Mackintosh-Smith's style emerging, but not the equal of his Ibn Battuta trilogy, which I loved and am even re-reading in parts.

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