

سوق الحب في المدينة القديمة – تصوير نبيل المقالح
Al-Habb Market in the Old City
(Photograph by Nabil Almakaleh)

The Old City

The Old City was divided into three main parts, one of which was situated on the feet of Mount Nuqum and was known as Old Sana'a. It was surrounded by a well-fortified wall made from *zabur* (raw clay), most of the larger pieces of which can still be seen. The wall had nearly 128 guard towers, as mentioned by the explorer Scott, which were distributed in order. The wall also had eight gates, the most famous and magnificently designed of which was the south gate known as the Yemen Gate. The gates would close at sunset and open after dawn prayers, facilitating the entrance and exit of people. The second division of the city was Bir al-Azab and the third was al-Qa', also known as Qa' al-Yahud, situated outside the main wall to the west.

The Old City is today divided into around twenty-seven quarters, accommodating buildings with all facilities including houses, mosques, orchards (*maqashim*), public squares and wells. The city is characterised by its unique modern developmental planning, taking into account all such architectural considerations as isolating the housing areas from those of the markets and providing green areas as well as white areas (public squares) to meet the needs of different social activities. Moreover, it contains narrow streets and lanes of various lengths and zig-zagged directions that are the veins of life for the city as well as the main routes for its defence. These routes also bring in fresh air and provide shade for pedestrians.

The city can be singled out for its beautiful

houses with their several floors, sometimes reaching up to seven elevations. The lower floors are built of stone and the rest from bricks (burnt clay). The miracle of Yemeni architecture is manifested in the verses composed by the builders on the house façades. These are so amazingly decorated that one might well perceive that the Yemeni builder possesses a delicate sense and deep awareness of the building sciences and arts which have enabled him to make use of them, and employ them, to match his own attitude and needs simultaneously.

Other landmarks of the Old City include the *samsarats* (*khans*, or centres), steam baths, oil presses, parks and squares (the largest of

which is Midan Square where the Arms Palace - the main military citadel - has played an important role throughout Yemeni history), several Turkish military buildings, The Great Mosque of al-Bakiriyyah, al-Milh (salt) Market, for which Sana'a was named, and the market of Great Yemen which is like the Arabic and Islamic markets of olde, containing so many specialised bazaars within its walls.

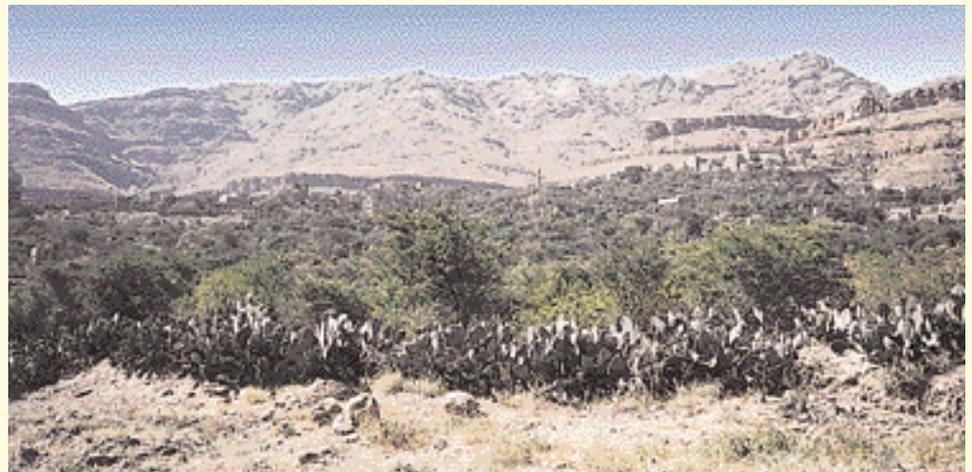
Arguably the most important building in the city is the Great Mosque which was built upon the orders of the Holy Messenger (Peace be upon him). It is a unique historical and Islamic landmark for the people of Yemen for this very reason of its direct association with the Holy Prophet. The mosque has been periodically subject to extension and improvement. Today, it is distinguished by its fantastic wooden *musandaqaat* (bay windows) that decorate its rich ceilings with Islamic ornaments and inscriptions. It is also outstanding for its library which houses rare Islamic texts and manuscripts, including some of the first original manuscripts of the Holy Qur'an.

Areas around the Old City

These are Lajraf, Ruhbah and al-Rawdhah in the north; Nuqum in the east; Bustan al-Sultan and Bir al-Azab in the west; and al-Safiyah and al-Qa' in the south.

Main Streets

These are Ali ibn al-Mughni Street, al-Zubayri Street, al-Qiadah Street, Ta'izz ➤



منطقة سناع جنوب مدينة صنعاء – تصوير نبيل المقالح

The area of Sina' in the South of Sana'a (Photograph by Nabil Almakaleh)

Street, Muhammad a-Hasan ibn Ahmad al-Hamadani Street, Ring Street, al-Sitteen Street, Algeria Street, Ibn al-Amir Street, and al-Masna' Street.

Main Historical Mosques and Religious Establishments

In the Old City these include: The Great Mosque, al-Abhar Mosque, Qubbat al-Baqirriyah Mosque, Qubbat al-Mahdi Mosque, al-Flayhi Mosque, al-Madrassah Mosque, the Mosque of the Companion Farwah ibn Musayk, the Mosque of Qubbat Talhah, and Handhal Mosque.

In the modern city they include al-Shuhada' Mosque, and the Mosque of President Ali Abdullah Salih (under construction).

Religious Universities, Schools and Libraries

These include Sana'a University, The University of Sciences and Technology, Queen Arwa University, Saba' University, The University of Social and Applied Sciences, and Al-Iman University.

Most religious schools can generally be found within the mosques of the Old City and have played an important cultural and religious role in Yemeni society as well in the judicial system throughout the ages.

The libraries are: The Great Mosque Library, Dar a-Qutub Library, Studies and Research Library, Cultural Centre Library, and the libraries belonging to the universities.

Old Palaces and Traditional Houses

The Ghumdan Palace, which is located to the east of the Great Mosque, may well be the most famous building in Sana'a. Many historians believe that its builder was Ham the son of Noah, while others claim that Ya'rub ibn Qahtan and, after him, Wa'il ibn Himyar ibn Saba' ibn Ya'rub completed its construction. It is also stated that Azal ibn Qahtan built it by the order of his brother, Ya'rub ibn Qahtan.

However, Yaqut al-Himyari tells us that the Prophet Solomon built the palace when he ordered the devils to construct for the Queen of Sheba three palaces in Sana'a - Ghumdan, Selhin and Baynun. Of all these, Ghumdan is singled out for its luxury and magnificence, having twenty ceilings, the last of these being made of transparent marble.

There are, of course, other palaces here: The Palace of al-Mutawakkil, Dar al-Sa'dah Palace, al-Rawdhah Palace, al-Hajar Palace in Dhuhur plain, and Dar al-Rawdh in al-Qabil village.

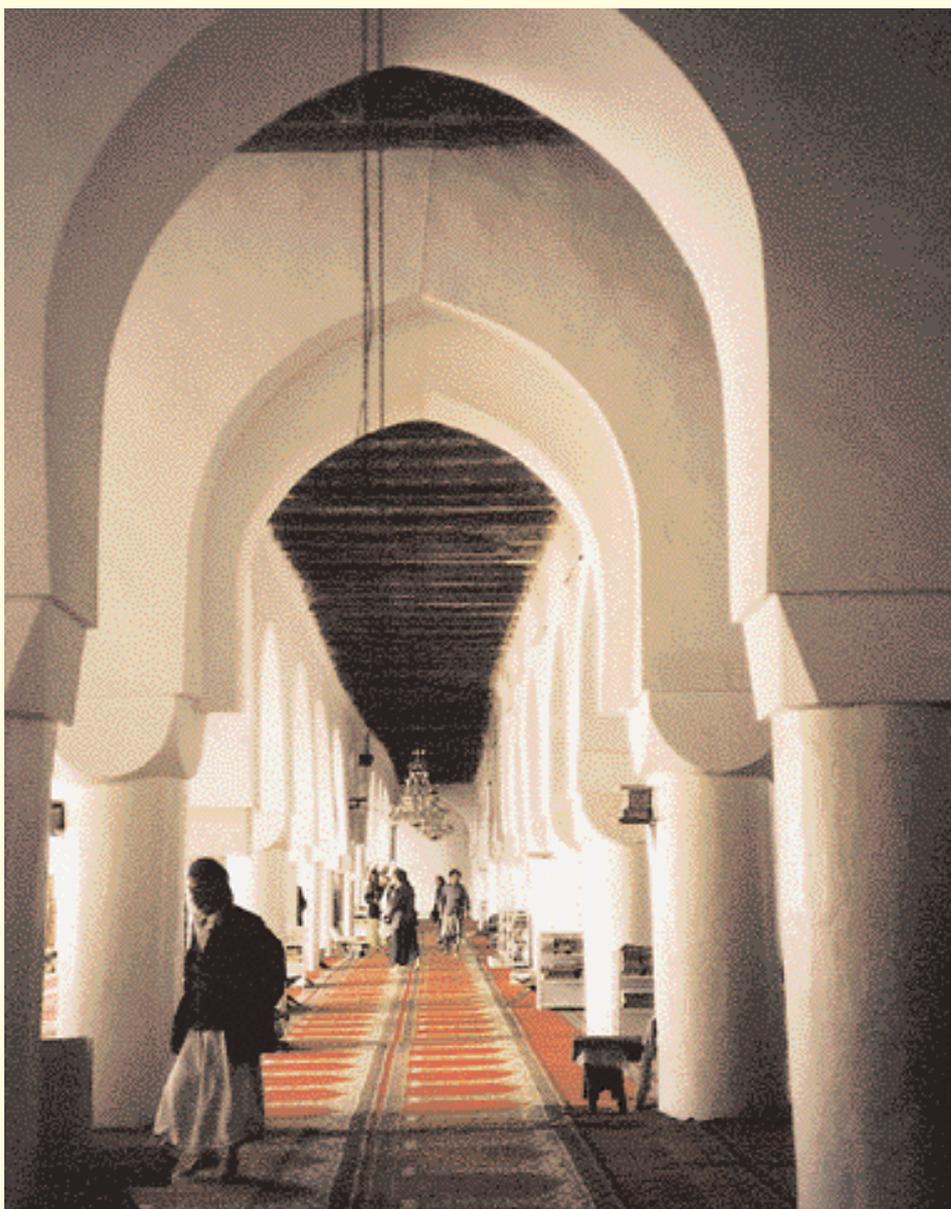
Citadels

The Arms Palace Citadel, not unlike the Citadel at Damascus, was given up to the Ministry of Culture according to Presidential Decree enabling it to be utilised as a cultural centre. The other citadel is al-Qishlah, situated atop Mount Nuqum.

Markets

More than forty specialised markets existed in the city, twenty-eight of which continue to be situated in the al-Milh (salt) market. This latter market is similar to the traditional Arabic and Islamic bazaars incorporating specialist souqs, among which can be found stalls for cloth, ➤

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منظور داخلي للجامع الكبير في صنعاء - تصوير محمد السمه
Interior of the Great Mosque in Sana'a

Besides the infrastructure, there is remarkable progress in the context of services in local and international communications, the internet, mobile cellular phones as well as express post.

grain, blacksmiths, carpenters, groceries, dyeing, gold and silver, jade, *al-Nadharah* (oil and kerosene), *al-Manqalah* (cobblers), and *al-Habbaqeen* (bookbinding), to name but a few. There are also factories and shops dealing in traditional handicrafts.

In the modern city, street shopping areas include those on Jamal Abdul Nasir Street, Republican Palace Street, Hadda Street, al-Qa' Street, Mujahid Street, and al-Riyadh Street. Modern commercial complexes were established more recently throughout the capital. Public markets include al-Dhumr Market, Bab al-Salam, Dallal Market, Bab al-Sabeh Market in the Old City, and the markets of Ta'izz Street in the modern city.

Khans, or Commercial Centres

All the *khans* are located in the Old City and are known as *samsarats*. These include the Samsarat al-Nuhas (copper), traditional handicrafts centre, Samsarat al-Mansourah (centre of fine arts), *Samsarat al-Dhamari* (the factory of lanterns and the centre of traditional iron crafts), *Samsarat ibn al-Hasan* (*Dar al-Mal*, where gold and silver coins used to be exchanged and where money and cheques are kept – currently undergoing renovation), Samsarat al-Majjah, and *Samsarat al-Jumruk* (raisins). Most of these are also awaiting renovation.

Public Baths (Hammams)

There are several baths, most of which are located in the Old City. Among these are the Hammam Yasir, 'built before the arrival of Islam to Yemen; Hammam Saba'; Hammam al-Midan; Hammam al-Abher; Hammam Shukur; and Hammam al-Tawashi.

Museums

In the National Museum the visitor can learn about the history of Yemen throughout the ages. The museum is a complex of royal



أحد محلات صناعة العقيق اليمني المشهور في خان النحاس - تصوير نبيل المكاله

A shop selling semi-precious stones in the Khan al-Nuhas. (Photograph by Nabil Almakaleh)

buildings and palaces that are now being renovated for the purpose of imparting a knowledge and appreciation of the country's history and culture. It is located in the northern part of the Old City in the area of Bab al-Sabeh.

Other notable museums in Yemen are the Museum of Public Heritage and the Military Museum.

Trades and Crafts

Most of the trades in Sana'a are centred in and around the Old City. These include the craft of jade-making, which is unique to Yemen; silversmithing; textiles; the making of *al-nisal* (a special dagger); crafting traditional planting tools; cobblery; pottery; bookbinding; the construction of *qameriyats*, which are the round element above windows found on many of Sana'a's buildings, made from gypsum and ornately decorated with stained glass; ornamenting bricks; and sculpturing stones.

Public Service Establishments and Tourist Resorts

Besides the infrastructure, there is remarkable progress in the context of services in local and international communications, the internet, mobile cellular phones as well as express post. Banking

services are provided by local banks in addition to the branches of Arab and international banks in Sana'a, as well as money exchange bureaus all over the capital. There are also many luxury restaurants where one can savour Lebanese, Chinese, Korean, Italian, American and other dishes, and a host of fast-food places to eat.

Entertainment services in the city include social, cultural and sport clubs. Popular physical pursuits available include tennis, netball, and football, horse racing, shooting and swimming.

Other leisure activities catered for include chess, snooker and table tennis. The most prominent clubs are the Army Officers' Club, Police Officers' Club, and the Horse Racing Club, as well as several older clubs such as Ahli (civil) Sana'a and al-Wahda (Unity). There are also clubs catering to family needs, such as the Happy Land Club.

Remarkable Sites

There are two areas of Sana'a that are particularly distinguished and which are characterised by their greenery and water. In the north of the city are the valley of Wadi Dhahar (Dar al-Hajar), the town of al-Rawdhah and the region of al-Sirr. These are renowned for around thirty different ➤



مبنى وزارة المواصلات في صنعاء - تصوير نبيل المقالح
Ministry of Transport, Sana'a
(Photograph by Nabil Almakaleh)

types of original Yemeni grape. The second area is located in the south of the city and is known as Bilad al-Bustan.

It includes the villages of Hadda, Sina', Bayt Zabtān, Bayt Boos and Artīl. On the eastern side is the city of Shibam al-Ghiras (home to the Fort of Dhi Marmer, and the Reman Palace), situated on the outskirts, approximately 25 kilometres from the capital.

Popular destinations for visitors are the parks at the foot of Mount Ayban in the area of Asr, and Shallal Bani Matr, Qahazah, al-Kharid, and al-Ahjer where there are springs and other fascinating sites of natural wonder. Other sites of tourist and archaeological interest are the cities of Dhula', Shibam and Qawqaban.

Main Hotels

There are many hotels in the city of Sana'a. Listed below are the names of some of these along with their telephone numbers. There are also suites and modern furnished flats suitable for families, as well as other hotels throughout the Old City and its outskirts, not listed here. In addition, there is a modern resort in Sana'a known as the Tourist City.

This complex has two hundred apartments in fifty blocks, along with sixty-four apartments in sixteen buildings. Each apartment is equipped with modern furniture and facilities.

There also many travel agencies in the city, the most familiar being the IATA and International agencies. There are car-hire firms such as the International Ritz Agency, in addition to specialised local agencies that rent out vehicles. ➔

Hotels in Sana'a and their Telephone Numbers

(International Dialling Code: 00 96 71)

1 - Sheraton Sana'a	5 stars	237 500 / 8
2 - Taj Sheba	5 stars	272 372
3 - Hadda	4 stars	415 215
4 - al-Saeed Mercure Hotel	4 stars	212 544
5- Hill Town Hotel	4 stars	278 429-8-9-30
6 - Plaza Suites Hotel	4 stars	402 072-3-4-7
7 - Hadda Tower Hotel	3 stars	410 9000
8 - Asia Hotel	3 stars	272 290-278 443
9 - Dreamland Hotel	3 stars	224 942
10- Saba' Towers Hotel	4 stars	253 155
11- Shahrān Hotel	4 stars	418 320 / 1 / 2
12- Intercontinental	4 stars	226 3094



أحد المباني الحديثة في صنعاء - تصوير نبيل المقالح
A Modern building in Sana'a
(Photograph by Nabil Almakaleh)