

# Ancient Yemen: Toast of the World

The 4th International Conference on the Civilization of Ancient Yemen was held during 10-13 March at the Cultural Center in Sanaa. A large number of Yemeni, Arab and international researchers took part in the conference with papers on various topics related to the Ancient Yemeni civilization and its links to other civilizations in the region.

Ismail Al-Ghabiri of Yemen Times interviewed a number of the participants.

Dr. Salma Al-Rawi is an archaeologist from New York University, USA. She has been doing excavations in Wadi Hadhramaut and in Jooja near Shibam. She has been working on the restoration of the Amariah Madrasa for the last 15 years and hopes to complete it within the next 3 years.

**Q: How is your work in Yemen coordinated?**

**A:** There is a bilateral agreement between the Dutch and Yemeni governments. I work with the General Director of Antiquities, who deals with the Yemeni budget. I deal with the Dutch budget. We've been working like this for the last 15 years.

**Q: How do you see the future of your work here?**

**A:** The more we work, the more we find out about the heritage of Yemen. Every bit of work that happens in this country adds to the knowledge we have of the rich Yemeni culture.

**Q: How is Yemen's culture viewed in the US?**

**A:** Yemeni culture is not present in the US, no one really teaches

it. A little bit is taught here and there, but not very much. In the field of Islamic architecture and art much more should be done in US universities. I've talked a lot in different universities and tried to tell students that they should do Ph.D.'s about topics from Yemeni culture.

**Q: How can Yemen become known in the rest of the world?**

**A:** The more people write about it, the more articles deal with it, the more TV programs present it will help make the country known by the rest of the world. So I think the Yemeni government should encourage television programs and more newspaper articles. There are wonderful pictures and paintings about Yemen. One has to build up a better image of Yemen for the outside world to see.

**Dr. Willian D. Glanzman - University of British Columbia, Canada - has been in Yemen since 1983, conducting archeological research. In one month time he will begin an expedition to Mahram Bilquis. The expedition is the fruit of cooperation between the Dutch Archeologists Institute, the German mission and the American Foundation for the Study of Man.**

**Q: What is your impression about this conference?**

**A:** It is the most fantastic collection of scholars, Yemeni, Arab, and from all the western communities. It is a great opportunity for all of us to exchange our ideas and findings.

**Q: How do you see the Yemeni**

**heritage?**

**A:** It is probably the world's richest heritage. The history of Yemen is still unknown to us. Every day we make fantastic discoveries. But we know now that the civilization that existed here in South Arabia was the greatest of all antiquities from all over 2000 years before the birth of the prophet.

**Q: What should be done to preserve Yemen's heritage?**

**A:** There are many things that archeological researchers can do for Yemen, each according to his own interests. Some are working on looking at Islamic settlements in Tihama. Others are very interested in pre-historic research. Others like myself are interested in the historic period before Islam. We are all able to contribute in some small way to the great heritage of Yemen. I think every Yemeni should be proud of Yemen's culture and heritage. It extends back to thousands of years and it is very unique.

**Q: Do you think this conference will help Yemeni archeology?**

**A:** This conference, as I said, is a great opportunity for all of us to exchange ideas about Yemen's archeology. I'm looking forward to the day when we shall all be using Arabic and English, completely bilingual. So that the world community will be able to understand. Some who came can understand a little bit of Arabic, others come for the first time. This will be the beginning for many other international conferences.

**Q: What will you be doing in Mahram Bilquis?**

**A:** The German mission is

already there working in Mahram Bilquis. The French mission involved many lovers of research, especially in the rich biography of the country. The Italian mission also has a contribution. A great deal of research is being made into the pre-historical and into the early historical periods of Yemen. The Canadian mission is very active in the Islamic heritage of Yemen around Zabeed and Tihama.

The most important thing is to see is Yemeni scholars giving papers on such diverse issues from ancient history all the way into the architectural restoration of several landmarks.

The world's focus will be on Yemen.

**Dr. Alessandro De Maigret - Naples University**

**Q: What are your impressions about this conference?**

**A:** It is important because it is the first time in the world that we have a complete conference about Yemen.

**Q: What is the research you presented at this conference?**

**A:** My research is a lecture paper about the relationship between ancient Yemen and ancient Ethiopia. We went together with the French mission to Ethiopia where we discovered an ancient temple that is quite similar to the temples here, especially the temple of Barakish, which the Italian mission is studying now.

**Q: What do you think about the history of Yemen?**

**A:** The history of Yemen is very old. I think that the archeological heritage of Yemen is one of the richest in the world. The problem is that we are in the beginning of the process of finding out more about it. There are very good relationships between the foreign missions working in Yemen. We want to increase the work. I think that you will have very important discoveries about Yemen in the future. Only in the desert, you

have about 30 ancient cities not yet excavated.

**Q: How do you evaluate the cooperation between the Yemeni and the Italian authorities concerning Yemen's archeology?**

**A:** We have many problems in Italy about corporation. The department which finances the work in the project of Barakish stopped the money not because they don't want to give the money, but because things are going very slowly.

Now we have another campaign of cooperation we are starting in these 12 months to end our restoration work in Barakish. After this, we want to start other projects.

**Dr. Hellena Kirchner, Barcelona - Spain.**

**Q: What do you think of this conference?**

**A:** It is very good. It is the first time that we come here to Yemen. It is a very nice opportunity to meet a lot of researchers. The communication has been very interesting to us.

**Q: Have you been to Mareb?**

**A:** Yes, I went to Mareb for the first time last Monday with the delegation.

**Q: how do you find the Yemeni history?**

**A:** I cannot tell because we still don't know much. We have very good corporation with Dr. Al-Tala'a and the specialist who come with us Khaled Al-Ansi.

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**Q: In Barcelona University, do you conduct any studies about Yemen?**

**A:** Yes, in many departments of the university we have semantic studies and Arabic studies. There is a new institute on international studies which have a section for oriental and Magreb studies.

**Q: Have you presented a research at the conference?**

**A:** Yes, the title of my paper is "The State of Art." So, we have presented the project of research we want to do in the future. We have just began, so there are no real results at the moment.

**Q: Is there any corporation between your university and Yemeni universities concerning Yemen's heritage?**

**A:** Not yet. But we are looking forward to establishing collaboration.