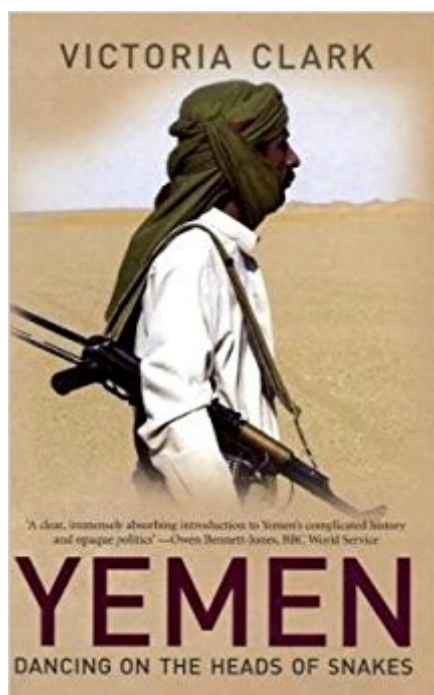


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# Yemen: Dancing On The Heads Of Snakes



## Synopsis

Yemen is the dark horse of the Middle East. Every so often it enters the headlines for one alarming reason or another—links with al-Qaeda, kidnapped Westerners, explosive population growth—then sinks into obscurity again. But, as Victoria Clark argues in this riveting book, we ignore Yemen at our peril. The poorest state in the Arab world, it is still dominated by its tribal makeup and has become a perfect breeding ground for insurgent and terrorist movements. Clark returns to the country where she was born to discover a perilously fragile state that deserves more of our understanding and attention. On a series of visits to Yemen between 2004 and 2009, she meets politicians, influential tribesmen, oil workers and jihadists as well as ordinary Yemenis. Untangling Yemen's history before examining the country's role in both al-Qaeda and the wider jihadist movement today, Clark presents a lively, clear, and up-to-date account of a little-known state whose chronic instability is increasingly engaging the general reader.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"The West would do well to take one precaution and read Victoria Clark's excellent new book on the country, part history and part travelogue. Clark leads the reader through Yemen's turbulent past with humor and perception." —Richard Beeston, London Times "Her book is a lively mix of politics, travelogue and history . . . Easily the best and most readable account of Yemen's current problems and their daunting complexity. Clark brings the story right up to date." —Brian Whitaker, The Guardian "Ms. Clark paints a more nuanced picture . . . The author illustrates her analysis with a string of vignettes drawn from her intrepid

journeys into the remotest parts of the country . . . This book is compulsory reading for anyone who wants to get to grips with Yemen's pit of slithering serpents." •The Economist"An experienced foreign correspondent casts a timely light on the complex fissiparous, impoverished country now seen as a haven for Al-Qaeda." •Harry Eyres, Financial Times"Dancing on the Heads of Snakes makes Yemen's history and contemporary affairs accessible to the general reader. Clark tracks Yemen's turbulent past and unstable present with a light touch, combining historical travelogue with investigative reportage. . . . Dancing on the Heads of Snakes is a commendable addition to the canon of literature on Yemen and does what many previous books have failed to do: open up knowledge of a complex and often forgotten country to a much wider audience." • Philip McCrum, Middle East International"Untangling Yemen's history before examining the country's role in both Al Qaeda and the wider jihadist movement today, [Victoria Clark] presents an up-to-date account of a state that ought to be better known." •Fred Rhodes, Middle East"Skillful political analysis . . . The text, backed by numerous references and an excellent bibliography, will engage even those readers who are unacquainted with Yemen, its history and today's complexities. . . . an entertaining masterpiece of reportage and analysis." •Michael Crouch, Melbourne Historical Journal"A clear, immensely absorbing introduction to Yemen's complicated history and opaque politics." •Owen Bennett-Jones, BBC World Service

Victoria Clark is a former correspondent and Moscow bureau chief for the Observer. She now works as a freelance journalist and writer, contributing to the Independent, Prospect magazine, and the Tablet.

Great book - All that have an interest in the Arabian Peninsula should read this book. It helps the reader to understand current events and how the society became what it is. I lived and worked in the region for 30 years and this book helped me focus on the cause of the current societal challenges of the Yemen and Saudi Arabia.

Yemen has sporadically drawn the attention of the West in recent years. While adventurous tourists remember it as the land where the ruins of the Palace of the Queen of Sheba lie and where local men spend a good portion of the day chewing enormous wads of semi-narcotic Qat leaves, it is also where the USS Cole was attacked by Al Qaeda suicide bombers in the 1990's, claiming the life of 17 American sailors. What we in the West has failed to focus on is that Yemen has long been a

violently tribal land that is now running out of natural resources such as water and oil and in its place is becoming an incubator for a new generation of terrorist planning and activity - a third generation of Jihad. And, as importantly, Yemen is geographically poised to wreak havoc on two of the most critical aspects of the global economy (namely, Saudi oil and all shipping coming and going through the Suez Canal - which comprises more than 60 percent of all shipping globally). Moreover, it is increasingly clear it is drifting into what foreign policy experts refer to as a "failed state" with remarkable similarities to Afghanistan and even Pakistan in terms of tribal and intra-regional rebellions. In her penetrating and quite fascinating new book, Victoria Clark, offers a number of unique perspectives of this centuries-long troubled land. A former foreign correspondent for the Observer and the daughter of the BBC's former South Arabian Correspondent, the late Noel Clark. She was born in what was Britain's colonial city of Aden, Yemen. Clark divides up the book into several parts, all of which weave into a rich and multifaceted portrait of Yemen. The first half of her book presents the history of the country, century upon century of which was consumed in tribal fighting when not at war with the outside world. Clark points out, since the earliest days of the Ottoman Empire and advance of "Frankish" invaders up to and including British colonization, Yemenis have, in essence, been fighting foreign intrusion almost literally forever. But this is not to say Yemen does not have its charms and a unique cultural heritage. It is from Yemen, Clark reminds us, that coffee was first cultivated and grown. Where the ancient (and now crumbling) city of Mocha once served as the greatest exporter of this most addictive bean to the rest of the world. But the romantic memories are in large part drowned out as Clark takes us through Yemen's bizarre civil war 30 years ago the resulting splintering into two states, one of them the Marxist Peoples Democratic Republic of Yemen - the only predominantly Muslim country aside from Afghanistan to turn Marxist since the end of World War II. Clark then takes us into the current "reunified" Yemen: A corrupt, confused and qat-addicted state struggling with at least two significant tribal/regional insurrections as well as a revived Al Qaeda branch (Al Qaeda of the Arabian Peninsula - AQAP. We forget Osama bin Laden is a Yemeni and a surprising number of Al Qaeda members are of Yemeni heritage). All the while with Saudi Arabia hovering over the country as it increasingly sees Yemen as a potentially significantly destabilizing force for them as well as the rest of the region. As we watch the continued chaotic free-fall and Islamic radicalization of Somalia just across the Gulf of Aden with their growing piracy activity, Clark's book is an important and highly instructive primer on a nation and a region we cannot continue to ignore. And we can only hope it returns to a time - albeit a very brief time in Yemen's history - where peace and tourism returns.

I bought this book because i wanted to know about the country vilified in the press as a Al Qaeda hornet nest. In this, Clark delivers the goods. It is packed with information, starting from the time the country was a backwater Ottoman territory, progressing through the periods when it was a British colony and Yemen's Cold War status when it was separated into two states, until the current unification and rule of Saleh. Although written before the current political upheaval in Yemen and the wider Middle East, Clark's treatment of the Al Qaeda/Jihadi threat, the North/South divide and the attempts by South Yemeni secessionists to break up the country demonstrates that even back then it was known that this was a timebomb waiting to explode. One particular strong point is the fact that she relays personal anecdotes she has experienced in travelling around the country as a literary tool to describe Yemeni society, thus making it less academic and impersonal. If you want to learn about Yemen's history, culture, tribes and its role in regional and global politics, then this book is required reading.

This is a very good book for those willing to have a better view on social, cultural and business environment within the Middle East with Yemen representing probably one of the extreme sides in a number of areas. Coming from Europe, I felt that this book helped me to have more understanding on the drivers of aggression from this region against the West, which appear to be rather logical and justified from the angle of people living there, while being illogical and punishable from the Western point of view.

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