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Digitization of contemporary Yemeni archives in exile. The “Ahmad Muhammad Nu‘mân’s papers” challenge

Numérisation des archives yéménites contemporaines en exil. Le défi des « papiers d’Ahmad Muhammad Nu‘mân »

«رقمنة المحفوظات اليمنية المعاصرة في المنفى. التحدي المتمثل في أوراق أحمد محمد نعمان»

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JULIETTE HONVAULT

**DIGITIZATION OF CONTEMPORARY YEMENI
ARCHIVES IN EXILE. THE “AHMAD MUHAMMAD
NU‘MÂN’S PAPERS” CHALLENGE**

SUMMARY

In 2009, the archives of Ahmad Muhammad Nu‘mân (1909-1996), a professor and leader of the modernization and national movement in Yemen, joined the IREMAM, a French scientific laboratory in the south of France, where they are now stored. They are waiting to be shared – as Ahmad Nu‘mân himself wished – among academics in Yemen and elsewhere in the world. This objective implies a digital provision of the archives on Internet which comes up against financial and geopolitical constraints and which imposes the elaboration of a communication strategy to support its realization, around other archives concerning Yemen. The current war in Yemen has an impact on the choices that have to be made when presenting the archives and when selecting the most urgent documents to be diffused online. The angle adopted in the communication strategy for the Ahmad Nu‘mân archives – the struggle for education in contemporary Yemen as a political tool for mobilization and state construction – strongly defines their identity, but it also gives impetus to specific networks around them, with a view to the future reconstruction of peace in Yemen.

In 2009, the archives of the leader for modernization and national movement in Yemen Ahmad Muhammad Nu'mân (1909-1996) joined a French national scientific center for research dedicated to the Arab World in the south of France, the IREMAM, where they are now stored.¹ They are waiting to be shared – as Ahmad Nu'mân himself wished – among academics, in Yemen and elsewhere in the world. Ahmad Muhammad Nu'mân is a central figure on the Yemeni political and intellectual scene of the twentieth century. He fought against the politics of isolation and the arbitrariness of the Hamid al-Din family Imamate (Imam Yahyâ until 1948, and then his son Ahmad until 1962) by advocating for education, considered as the indispensable tool to guarantee his fellow citizens not only survival, but also a place in the modern world. His archives, of course, are devoted to serve Yemeni history and Yemeni historians and researchers, and their digitizing (full or partial) is essential for their preservation and diffusion.

This paper aims at showing how this digitization process meets private papers constraints related to preservation and financing issues, and how new digital services have changed the approach and the very definition of this archive. The first part will introduce Ahmad Nu'mân's life and itinerary, as well as the way his archives were constructed, and how they were altered by the needs of preservation and communication. The second part will concentrate on the meeting of the Nu'mân archives with the teams of the *Maison méditerranéenne des sciences de l'homme* (MMSH – Mediterranean House for Social Sciences), which hosts the IREMAM. A new institutional context, with particular programs of research and digitization, is going to change the itinerary of the collection in a time when Yemen needs to construct a new future, and, somehow, to enhance some aspects of Ahmad Nu'mân's political life.

THE NU'MÂN ARCHIVES: A SOURCE FOR THE CONTEMPORARY YEMENI HISTORY

The political life of Ahmad Muhammad Nu'mân

According to our sources,² Ahmad Muhammad Nu'mân was born in 1909 near Dhubbân, located in the region of Hugariyya, in the then Ottoman Liwâ of Taiz, on the top of the last mountains of Lower Yemen that goes down to the Adeni region, which was at that time under British rule (1839-1967). Ahmad

1 Institut de recherches et d'études sur les mondes arabes et musulmans. The institute is a "Joint Research Unit" (UMR) between the French National Center for Scientific Research (CNRS) and Aix-Marseille University.

2 Ahmad Muhammad Nu'mân, 2003; Douglas, 1987; Personal interview with Ahmad-Kamal Nu'mân (grandson of Ahmad Nu'mân) in Cairo, 16 December 2016; Burgat, 2007.

Nu'mân, whose family was allied with the Ottomans, went to school at the Turkish *maktab* (secularized school), and then decided, aged 14, to broaden his education in the famous Sunni school of Zabîd, on the Red Sea coast. In 1930, the death of his father pushed him to return to his village and he became a tax collector of the Taiz province. In 1934, he also decided to open a primary school, *al-madrasa al-ahliyya* (local school), which is considered the first modern school in Yemen, at a time when Imam Yahyâ (1904-1948), who had taken control of the country after the Ottoman withdrawal in 1918, had closed all Ottoman schools. In 1937, 'Alî al-Wazîr, the strong Wâlî of Taiz who is said by Nu'mân to have imposed a harsh fiscal policy on the region's villagers and to have rejected all forms of criticism, closed *al-madrasa al-ahliyya* after Ahmad Nu'mân tried to complain to the Imam. Ahmad, who would be known from this period onwards as "*al-Ustâdh*" ('the Professor'), escaped to Cairo, where he met some other young Yemenis, but also some notorious Arab nationalist and Arab-Islamist leaders and thinkers like Shakîb Arslân, or the Algerian Muslim Brother al-Fudayl al-Wartilânî.

From Cairo, Ahmad Nu'mân collected the complaints of people from Yemen and of exiled Yemenis (in Aden, Africa, Maghreb and even America), and published them in *al-Shabâb* (The Youth) and in *al-Âlam* (The World), the newspapers held by Palestinian Muhammad Alî al-Tâhir³, and later in *al-Râbîta al-'Arabiyya* (The Arabic Link), created by 'Abd al-Ghanî al-Rifâ'î. He also wrote some pamphlets and stressed out in some articles the lack of communication between the Imam and the people, social and political injustice, oppressive taxation, and the values of political (and Islamic) reformism in order to convince Imam Yahyâ to open and modernize the country. He also held a correspondence with Prince Ahmad, whose culture and wisdom let him hope that he could influence the Imam, his father. In 1941, with the launching of the world war and the appointment of Prince Ahmad as Wâlî of Taiz in place of 'Alî al-Wazîr, Ahmad Nu'mân decided to return to his village, and accepted to serve as Inspector of Primary schools for the Province of Taiz.

But at a time of political unrest facing the Imam's inflexibility, and because of his links with the most important contesting Zaydi faction in Sanaa (Shabâb al-Amr), Ahmad Nu'mân soon fled to Aden with his friend Muhammad Mahmûd al-Zubayrî. From 1944 to 1947, they formed the core of the Free Yemeni movement (Hizb al-Ahrâr al-Yamaniyyîn), which benefited from the existence of numerous Yemeni politicized merchants, Adeni journals, associations and clubs. Al-Ahrâr (the "Free" Yemenis), who were calling for democratic reforms and a constitutional imamate in Yemen, created in January 1946 the Grand Yemeni Association in order to attract support of the Yemeni

3 *Al-Shabâb* was known under the name of *al-Shûrâ*, the newspaper created in 1931 by Muhammad Alî al-Tâhir, after the later was closed by the British in 1937. See http://eltaher.org/publications/newspapers/english/newspaper_alshabab_en.html.

communities overseas⁴, as well as a weekly newspaper called *Sawt al-Yaman* (Voice of Yemen).

After Imam Yahyâ's assassination in 1948, Ahmad Nu'mân (who never approved the Coup attempt) crossed the Yemeni border from Aden in order to participate to the expected new constitutional regime (he was himself expected to be Minister of Agriculture in the Sacred National Pact which the Free Yemenis had adopted as a program in 1947). Instead, he was arrested and jailed for seven years in the prison of Hajja, North Yemen. During this period, and thanks to his privileged relationship with the new Imam Ahmad and with the director of the prison, Ahmad Nu'mân managed to correspond with his political comrades. He was eventually appointed instructor for some of the children of Hajja, before being released and appointed by Imam Ahmad as Director of Instruction for the Taiz Province in 1955. He then fled with his family to Cairo in 1956: he was eager to meet the new hero of the Arab world, Gamal Abdel Nasser. From there, in 1960, he traveled one year in North Africa and England to meet the Yemeni communities, to encourage their education in favor of Yemen, and to collect funds in order to build, in Aden, the first school dedicated to all young Yemenis, be they from Aden or from the Imamate. The *Kulliyat* (college) Balqîs opened in 1961, and transformed the educational landscape of the colony, which was until then reserved to foreigners and the natives of Aden.

After the launching of the republican revolution in 1962 and in the context of the civil war backed by Nasser and King Faysal of Saudi Arabia, Ahmad Nu'mân obtained different and ephemeral positions at the head of the Yemeni republic: member of the first Cabinet of President Abdallah al-Sallâl in 1962 as Minister of Local Government, permanent member of the Arab League in Cairo in 1963, first President of the Consultative Council of the Revolution in 1964, and finally, first Minister of al-Sallâl in 1965 (from 20 April to 6 June). Seeking for peace and political stability (fig. 1), he formed a Cabinet with an equal number of Zaydis and Shafi'is, organized a national peace conference at Khamir in May 1965 and proposed a new Constitution limiting the President's powers. His persistent refusal of military rule brought him into conflict with al-Sallâl, but also with the Egyptian regime. He resigned in July 1965, and in September 1966, he was jailed in Cairo with the entire Yemeni government for one year and ten days. After the Egyptian defeat against Israel in October 1967, and the consecutive Egyptian military retreat from Yemen, he fled to Beirut where his oldest son Muhammad (born in 1933), a writer and a political activist who had been appointed State minister after the 1962 revolution, had settled. Deprived from his Yemeni nationality for a while, Ahmad

4 According to al-Attar, there were approximately one million Yemenis living overseas in the 1950s (25% of the entire Yemeni population). Al-Attar, 1964, p. 66, cited by Douglas, 1987, p. 100.



Figure 1. Ahmad Nu'mân, Imam al-Badr and Nasser in the middle of the 1960's

returned to Yemen in 1970, to join the moderate (and civilian) President 'Abd al-Rahmân al-Iryânî as his Prime minister. He did not last long though: after the assassination of his son Muhammad in Beirut in 1974 by an Iraqi agent of the Baath, he retired in Jidda. Twelve years later, in 1987, he moved for medical reasons to Switzerland (Geneva and Gstad), where he died in 1996. President 'Alî Abdallah Sâlih, who had honored his memory a couple of months earlier by paying him a visit in Geneva, had his body repatriated to Sanaa where a state funeral was held to celebrate his central role in the modernization of Yemen (fig. 2).



Figure 2. The funerals of Ahmad Nu'mân's in Sanaa, 1996. © Ahmad Muhammad Nu'mân archives

A brief history of the Ahmad Nu'mân's archives

From his early years of activity as a teacher in the 1930s to the last years of his life, Ahmad Nu'mân kept with him a considerable number of documents related to his activity. He added them to the family papers assembled by his father, a Shaykh and a tax collector, notably the papers of his uncle 'Abd al-Wahhâb Nu'mân, who used to be a *qâ'im maqâm* (District supervisor) under the Ottoman rule, and a great opponent to Imam Yahyâ.

The total number of documents amounts to about 80,000 pages, and combine different kinds of material: letters from and to other political figures in Yemen and abroad, speeches, personal notebooks, manifestos, articles, working documents, memoirs, diaries and notebooks, account books, receipts, newspapers clippings, books, medical reports, or photographs (fig. 3). Ahmad Nu'mân received, collected and produced documents in all the different places he lived, and used to gather them regularly within the main archival collection.

After Ahmad Nu'mân was released from the Egyptian jail in 1967 and joined his son Muhammad in Beirut, where he recovered all of his documents, which Muhammad had taken with him when he managed to flee from Cairo in 1966. This shared refuge in Beirut was a key moment in Ahmad Nu'mân's life, during which he decided to protect and classify his documents and papers. There, he met Yusuf Kamâl Ibish, a professor of Arabic History at

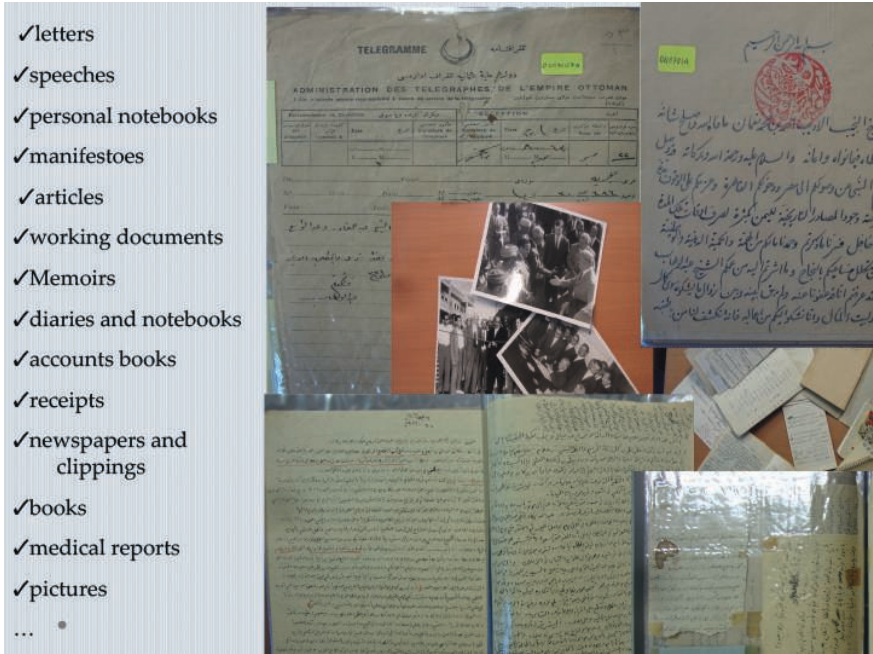


Figure 3. The Ahmad Nu'mân archives contents. © Ahmad Muhammad Nu'mân archives

the American University of Beirut (AUB), who probably incited him to do so.⁵ Besides the classification and storage of the documents in a hanging file cabinet, around 30,000 pages of documents were copied onto 16 microfilms – one of the two master microfilms was kept by the Jafet Library of AUB, where they have been conserved until now. A general summary was made, which followed the chronological order of the papers' production, by periods of Ahmad's residence in different cities.

After the assassination of Muhammad in 1974, the archives followed Ahmad Nu'mân to Jidda, and then to Switzerland, where he died.⁶ In 2000, Ahmad-Kamal, his grandson and son of Muhammad (born 1953), had a digital copy made from the microfilm, and decided to store the pre-1969 papers in plastic files according to a new – and quite unclear – classification, and the post-1969 one's in large sending envelopes (fig. 4). If the 1969 original

5 See the document signed by Ahmad Nu'mân issued from the "Documentation" file of his archives in Aix-en-Provence, where he thanks Yusuf Ibish for putting him in touch with the AUB staff who helped him file his archives. On Yusuf Ibish, see Hunwick, Driouche, 2003.

6 During this whole period, however (that is to say between 1975 and 1996), relatives and friends came to consult the papers. If some of them have completely disappeared, others have been added, and many others have been moved.



Figure 4. The Ahmad Muhammad Nu'mân archives in the IREMAM, Aix-en-Provence

classification of the papers was lost, a trace of its existence remains in the microfilms and, consequently, in the digital copy of them – a last resort to recover the loss, although the documents are not identified within the films, which makes it extremely difficult to locate them. In 2005, with no place to be stored, the whole collection was put into boxes, and kept in a furniture store in Geneva, from where it was extracted to the shelves of the IREMAM in Aix-en-Provence in 2009. The deposit of the Nu'mân Archives at the IREMAM was intended to guarantee better conservation conditions, to check their classification, to digitalize the papers in order to conserve a copy of them and allow their communication, with the authorization of the Nu'mân's representatives, and with respect for personal data.

RESPECTING AHMAD NU'MÂN'S TESTAMENT CONCERNING HIS ARCHIVES: A CHALLENGE FOR THEIR DIGITIZATION

Archives dedicated to academic research

On September 15, 1969, during the filing and inventory of his archives, Ahmad Nu'mân wrote a short testament. After thanking those who had participated in their constitution, preservation and classification, he gave a function and a direction to the archives: they were to be dedicated to scientific research in Yemen. More than twenty years before the UNESCO Program Memory of the World, which supports the idea that “the world's documentary heritage belongs

to all, should be fully preserved and protected for all and, with due recognition of cultural mores and practicalities, should be permanently accessible to all without hindrance”⁷, Ahmad Nu‘mân (who had then just been released from jail) seemed aware of the necessity of preserving his archives from politically oriented interests. The AUB was at that time a center of student protest against all forms of oppression,⁸ and it is there that Ahmad met Professor Yusuf Ibish, who also proposed him to share his memories as part of an oral history program. He accepted, provided that the recording would not be made public before his death⁹, as a sign of his desire to avoid any possible political use of his testimony.¹⁰ Scientific research and university appeared to ensure the guaranty of neutrality and political peace.

The transmission of the archives to academics only took place after Ahmad’s death. They were mobilized for research by a Yemeni student enrolled at ‘Ayn Shams University in Cairo during the 2000’s, Sâdiq al-Safwânî, who did his PhD investigation on “The Yemeni opposition movement in Egypt during the Hamîd al-Dîn rule, 1918-1962”.¹¹ He actually did not have access to the original documents, and worked on the digital copy provided by Ahmad-Kamal in Cairo, despite its very poor quality, which could only allow a laborious and partial exploitation of the documents. Al-Safwânî was one of the very few researchers to have used the digital document when the commemoration of the centenary of Ahmad Nu‘mân’s birth was celebrated during a national academic conference at Aden University in 2009.¹²

Unfortunately, now that they are stored in Aix-en-Provence, the whole records remain unexplored. In 2011, an attempt was carried out to identify the state of the documents and their classification¹³. The loss of the 1969 classification was experienced as a disaster. The entire interpretation of Nu‘mân’s life by himself had disappeared with it, as well as the order and layout in

7 Memory of the World, Programme Objectives, URL: <https://en.unesco.org/programme/mow>, consulted on 02/11/2020.

8 Rabah, 2009.

9 The Oral History program was developed by Joseph Malone, Professor of History at the Center of Arab and Middle Eastern Studies (CAMES). See AUB Website: <https://web.aub.edu.lb/libraries/asc/Common%20Documents/CAMES%20oral%20history%20project%201960s-1970s%20final.pdf> and https://www.aub.edu.lb/main/gate/Documents/Maingate_Summer2010.pdf. (accessed 02/11/2020)

10 Ahmad Muhammad Nu‘mân, 2003 (2004), p. 11.

11 Sâdiq al-Safwânî, 2018. The dissertation was defended in 2010.

12 See the Proceedings of the *Nadwat ihyâ’ al-dhikrâ al-mi’awiyya li-milâd al-ustâdh al-mufakkir Ahmad Muhammad Nu‘mân, ahad ruwwâd al-nahda wa-l-tahdîth fî-l-Yaman*, 2009.

13 Thanks to a collective mission, including a French archivist (Isabelle Weiland), Sâdiq al-Safwânî and myself, with the financial support of the IREMAM and the CEFAS.

which the documents had made sense regarding one another at that time. The reconstitution of the original classification proved to be as indispensable as it was complex. In order to allow the digitization of the original documents (and to identify those that were possibly added or deleted from the original records), the only available strategy then seemed to reconstitute the original order of the papers by making careful comparisons with the microfilms, which, in the absence of numeration, had the disadvantage of not allowing the photographed documents to be finely tracked inside the reels. The re-digitization of the microfilms, which could have included a numbering of documents from which to work, was seriously considered. But it was the financial resources to cover the costs of reconstituting the initial order of the papers (through the long and tedious work of comparison between the documents in their different supports) that stopped the project. The method was considered too expensive to be carried out, especially in a context where research funding (French or European) was not very favorable to projects involving contemporary archives (less valuable than old manuscripts) that are not absolutely endangered, and a country as remote, poor and understudied (from a Western point of view) as Yemen¹⁴.

The quest for funding the digitization: a pooling of archives on Yemen and a multi-media communication strategy

Ultimately, personal archives may drain only individual involvements, but these would remain vain if isolated. In 2017 and in 2019, Ahmad-Kamal, the grandson of Ahmad Nu'mân, was invited for two one-month missions in Aix-en-Provence¹⁵ in order to work with me on the re-classification project, and to help me, as a researcher, to reconstruct what I now consider to be the "fabulous history" of the Nu'mân archives. This historical reconstruction is carried out as a way to shed light on the political history of modern Yemen through the prism of the multiple journeys of these archives in a globalized world. It is also devoted to making them known in the academic field of digital humanities, in order to facilitate the quest of funding that will help to make them available online to researchers.

In the meantime, the MMSH, which hosts the IREMAM (and the Nu'mân archives) has developed a new program to digitize the numerous archives (mostly researchers' archives)¹⁶ of its media library. The program first took shape in a still under construction archival resources portal of the library

14 Three applications for calls for projects were unsuccessfully constituted in 2012, 2013 and 2017, respectively for the French National Research Agency, the European Commission and the British Library (Endangered Archives Program).

15 With the financial support of the IREMAM and the CEFAS.

16 See <http://www.mmsch.univ-aix.fr/mediatheque/Pages/iconographie-archives.aspx>

called Archimede¹⁷, which gives access to archives inventories and descriptions of archival documents, or directly to some digitized documents dealing with Mediterranean countries and their neighborhood. Archimede was recently connected, as one of the content providers of the library, to a platform – also under construction – called Cinumed, the Digital City of the Mediterranean, which has been developed by the MMSH's digital resources service as a super aggregator of contents, for the pooling and sharing of knowledge in the field of Mediterranean studies in humanities and social sciences.¹⁸

Like other archive collections or resources of the MMSH, the Nu'mân archives have been integrated to Archimede since 2018. This hosting consists of a presentation of the 1969 inventory made in Beirut by Ahmad Nu'mân and his relatives (which corresponds to the microfilm), with “fonds” and “sub-fonds”, and a part (to be completed) of the existing paper files as they were deposited in 2009 at the IREMAM. It is accompanied by a manual which presents the identification and order of the entire collection, its “context area” (Ahmad Muhammad Nu'mân's biography, his political and social role in Yemen), its related material (publications by or about Ahmad Nu'mân), related information about the archive processing, as well as a list of themes to which the archives refer to (keywords).

The integration to Cinumed, which is still in progress, aims to create a virtual – and online – hub for Yemeni studies, which will bring together several archival collections directly or indirectly dealing with Yemen. With a number of French researchers from different disciplines (anthropologists, historians, political scientists) who worked in Yemen from the 1970s to 2011 (the French center for Archeology and Social Science research in Sanaa, CEFAS, had to move out the country after the “Yemeni Spring”), the library of the MMSH has created an important book collection on Yemen, but also an interesting collection of individual archives of researchers, such as Paul Bonnenfant, Marceau Gast or Eric Rouleau. In addition to these collections, historian Michel Tuchscherer, who was Director of the CEFAS between 2010 and 2014, facilitated the deposit of Claudie Fayein's archives in the media library, following the publication of a book on the experience of this first French doctor in Yemen in the late 1950s (Tuchscherer 2012). Last but not least, Yemeni collector Fatima al-Zawiya al-Baydani, who found refuge in 2016 at the IREMAM, deposited copies of the important and very well documented “sound collection” she had built up over more than 15 years by recording tales and songs throughout Yemen. Both Archimede and Cinumed will enhance the visibility of the Nu'mân archives and help re-connect the country's culture and history

17 Archimede, Archival Resources for the Mediterranean: <http://archimede.mmsh.univ-aix.fr/>

18 <https://cinumed.mmsh.univ-aix.fr/en/>; the platform, created by Abdelmajid Arrif, also operates in French and Arabic.

to the wider world. Through Cinumed, the archives will join “a common taxonomic treatment: a semantic framework which enables users to cross-reference and create a dialogue, link by link”, between the sources.¹⁹ Thanks to “the Cube” instrument of the platform, the geo-referencing of documents will enable users to view and read the Nu’ mân archives in relation to other documents dealing with or coming from Yemen, as well as with others documents whose themes invite comparative analysis and re-situation in other regional contexts in the Mediterranean.²⁰

With the digitization projects developed at the MMSH, and the project to open up Yemeni studies, a new strategy towards the Nu’ mân archives had to be defined. Its digital referencing is a great opportunity to increase the visibility of the collection in the academic field, to initiate new research on Yemen, and to make them eligible for calls for projects, with the hope that they would bring funds for the archives’ treatment. It invites its archivists (including me, although I am a researcher) to select documents to be digitized and put online in order to feed the presentation of the collection in Archimede and Cinumed.

These new steps, once again, raise the question of the protection of personal data, and make it necessary to contact the individuals mentioned in the selected documents, or their heirs, to obtain their authorization before dissemination. Sometimes, for sure, people mentioned by their forename in some papers will be unidentifiable, while other documents, such as letters, are not always signed. Their identification requires the intervention of an expert of Yemeni history who would be able to recognize handwritings and very local actors. Fortunately, the limited number of online documents that will be selected should limit the problem of authorship among a few people in Yemen.

More seriously, digitization and open access dissemination through Archimede and Cinumed raise the question of the selection of the documents to be presented, which proceeds from a classification, and, as such, from an identification process that might change or at least over-determine Ahmad Nu’ mân’s biography and its archives. The selection is being complicated by the fact that Cinumed invites to value both Yemeni culture and history by assembling all the Yemeni collections of the MMSH. The Nu’ mân archives allow research on a wide range of historical topics: reformism and modernization, political struggles and the Zaydi imamate, colonial studies, Arab nationalism and regional politics, civil war, exile and transnational movements, etc. But Nu’ mân’s action is also identified by some Yemeni parties as an effort to introduce the tribes into the republican regime, a very sensitive issue in Yemen that calls for caution. The fact is that the IREMAM, as an academic institution, must maintain a neutral position in the Yemeni political

19 “A collaborative portal that is rich in multimedia content”, URL: <https://cinumed.mmsch.univ-aix.fr/en>, consulted on 02/11/2020.

20 URL: <https://cinumed.mmsch.univ-aix.fr/en/cube>, consulted on 02/11/2020.

debate. Of course, we do not want to discard Ahmad Nu'mân's political position, but we refuse to reduce him to this particular orientation in a time of intense political dispute in Yemen.

Eventually, the angle adopted in the communication strategy concerning these archives is the struggle for education in contemporary Yemen. The theme presents the advantage of both respecting an important part of Ahmad Nu'mân's biography (which actually constitutes my own research interest as a historian), and aiming at (and contributing to) post-war reconstruction in Yemen. Indeed, as was the case for Ahmad Nu'mân during his struggle against Imam Yahyâ and Imâm Ahmad's rules, education appears to be a privileged political tool for mobilization and State (re)construction. Since 2015 and the war in Yemen, education (after food and health), has become a matter of primary importance for Yemeni families, whether they are still in Yemen or dispersed outside the country.²¹ In addition, the growing interest of Yemeni individuals in sharing editorial (and educational) or historical documents via internet and social networks (including Facebook),²² shows that the Yemeni civil society could be interested in learning more about Ahmad Muhammad Nu'mân and his personal struggle for education in Yemen as a constructive and peaceful way to think the country's future.

CONCLUSION

Archives are never neutral. They proceed from a series of selections during the lifetime of their author, but also of his descendants, and finally of the archivists who have the collection in charge. Digitization is another key issue, particularly when the online diffusion of documents is related to the search for funding. Despite the fact that Ahmad Nu'mân was called "*al-Ustâdh*" (the Professor) until the end of his life, the thematic choice of education which was made for his collection is not only politically oriented towards peace, but risks to over-identify the archives. In the long term, this could divert the researchers' interest in these archives. But this is the price to pay for a digital strategy based on the financial situation of an institution (MMSH) that certifies the integrity of documents as well as their confidentiality, a perennial and secure archiving, and the principle of interoperability of documents that is crucial to open up Yemeni studies.

21 As an example, the Yemen International School in Cairo, which has developed according to Yemeni curricula, references, and national culture, hosts more than 1200 children.

22 See for example the Facebook list "*Suwwâr Yaman al-qadîma*" (traduction), which number of followers, currently 100,000, continues to grow; or the website <https://yemenarchive.com/>.

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