

must take down the black flag and leave the white one flying by itself for a time as a token that his demands have been honourably met. If the demands are not met within the period of "choice," however, so that the white is taken down and the black flag flies by itself, then the claimant can "place the blame" (*yaḍa' al-malām*). Usually this takes the form of a wooden stake, blackened over a fire and often dressed in (black) women's clothing. The common name for the object, as opposed to the intention or act, is *jidhn* (pl. *judhūn*).

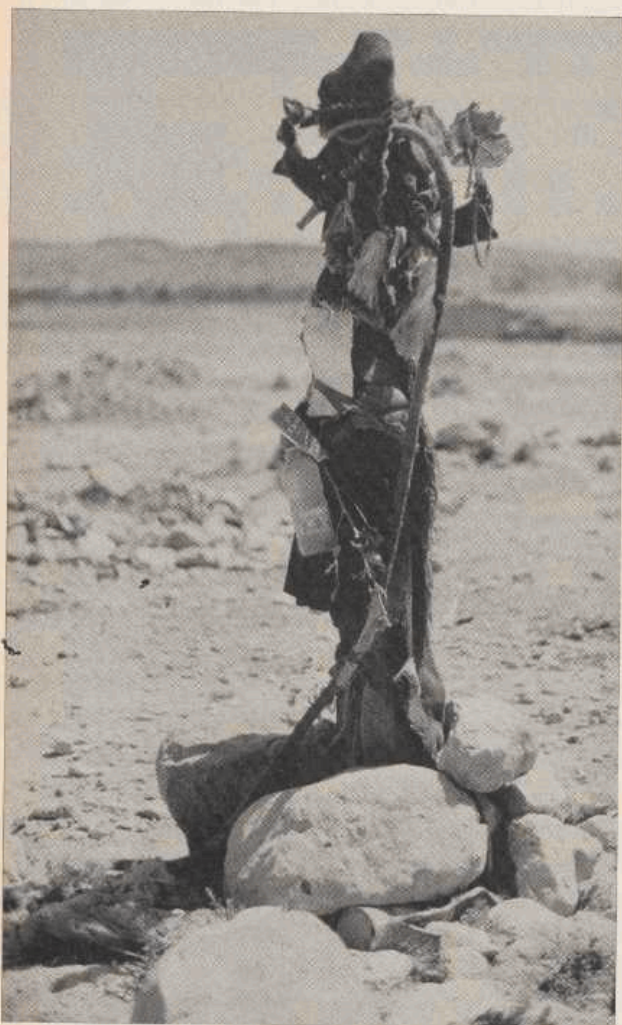


Fig.: *jidhn*

The figure shows a particular specimen of a *jidhn*. It has been decked out quite elaborately to represent a person: the hose of a water-pipe or *madā'ah* is wound around the body; a sprig

of *qāt*, an empty mineral water bottle, and a Pepsi tin are wedged in where the hands would be; and a tuft of grass represents the man's beard. The whole thing, including the pile of stones to hold it upright, stood about 170 cm. high. It was placed in Al 'Ammar's market, right beside the main San'a' to Sa'dah road where its insulting mockery was as public as possible. We shall return below to the case that occasioned it.

The term *jidhn* occurs in none of the Arabic dictionaries I have consulted, nor do informants offer any explanation of its origin. An obvious possibility is that it derives from *jidhm*, a "stump," since it is usually a stump of wood that is used. Furthermore, *jidhmī* is a term often used in Yemen to refer to a leper, one whose limbs are reduced to stumps. This loathsome disease would accord well enough with the disgust that "placing the blame" expresses as a public insult, and the disease itself, once quite common in Yemen (see Zabarah 1941: 535), is itself spoken of as occurring in black and white forms (Burton 1885/5: 294 n. 1). The blackness of leprosy would then match that of the burned stake of wood, which itself may be related to the imagery of honour touched on earlier.¹² The use of women's clothing on an object designed to insult men needs no comment.

It should be noted, however, that *jidhns* can be very simple. Their representational aspect can be much reduced (perhaps even absent altogether) while the insult is just as

¹² Lane's *Lexicon* gives *jadhm* as "a man whose extremities have fallen off in pieces . . . in consequence of the disease termed *judhām*" and *jidhmah* as the "defect, or deficiency, of him who has had his arm, or hand, amputated, or who has lost the end joints of his fingers." Interestingly, severing the end joint of one's own finger is cited among some of the eastern tribes as a means of declaring oneself grossly dishonoured and thus forcing support from one's tribe in desperate circumstances. Lane also gives *jidhmah* as equivalent to *jidhwah*, "a thick stick, one end of which is a live coal." The *jidhn* is said often to be prepared precisely by blackening over a fire. — None of these possible associations is offered as explanation by Yemeni informants, and I have come across no other clue to the term's etymology. However, the *Lexicon* suggests a series of possible connections that deserve study, particularly those of physical wholeness with honour.