

Agate replaces rhino horn in Yemen's new dagger handles

Conservationists have been urging each other to come up with a substitute for rhino horn in the making of new daggers (*jambiyya*) in Yemen. At last, a Yemeni has produced dagger handles of locally quarried agate, which are both beautiful and durable.

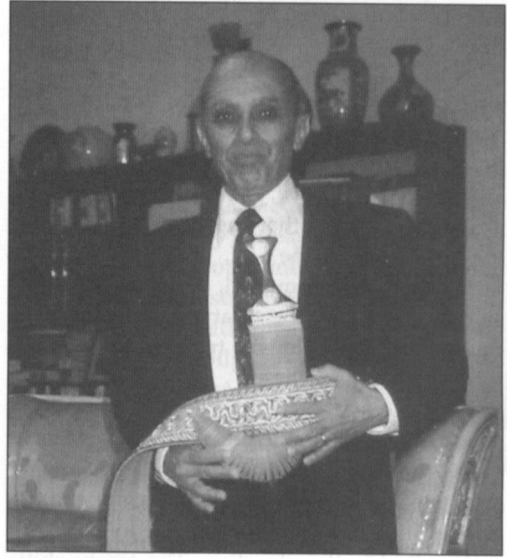
Often, when a substitute for an endangered wildlife product is introduced, especially a valuable one, it takes years to convince customers to use it. However, when the manufacturer of the agate handles, Ahmed al-Wazir, presented one to President Ali Abdullah Saleh of Yemen in 1994, he won instant acclaim. The President was delighted with it, as were the Yemeni ministers who also received them.

Agate and other attractive stones have been mined in Yemen for centuries, mainly for use in the jewellery that is part of Yemen's cultural tradition. Early in 1995 Yemen's President visited Europe and gave several of Ahmed al-Wazir's daggers with agate handles to senior dignitaries, as examples of the finest Yemeni craftsmanship.

In 1994 Ahmed al-Wazir made 35 daggers with stone handles, including some with jasper. He wanted to test their popularity with Yemen's elite, some of whom previously would accept only daggers with rhino horn handles. The ready acceptance of the new handles may be due to the fact that they are not made from artificial substances or materials newly introduced to Yemen. Now, Ahmed al-Wazir wants to manufacture them commercially at a retail price of around \$US1700, slightly higher than the price of the best new daggers with rhino-horn handles.

The timing could not be better. At least 70 kg of raw rhino horn was smuggled into Yemen last year, representing the death of a minimum of 24 rhinos. The horns were imported illegally from Kenya, Sudan and Ethiopia, via Djibouti and Oman, by boat and overland. Close to 175 dagger handles were made from the 70 kg of horn.

With Africa's black rhino population of 2500 now stable for the first time in decades and



Dr Abdul Karim al-Iryani, Yemen's Foreign Minister, holds his new agate-handled *jambiyya* (Esmond Bradley Martin).

the 6800 white rhinos slightly increasing in number, any upsurge in the demand for rhino horn in Yemen would turn the tide again. It is thus imperative that the demand for illegal supplies of rhino horn be quelled as quickly as possible. The most effective way to do this is to encourage the richer Yemenis to buy stone-handled daggers instead of new ones made with rhino horn.

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Cubatão – an important Brazilian mangrove swamp under threat

One of the largest mangrove areas remaining in south-eastern Brazil, Cubatão, lies in the estuarine area between the Serra do Mar massif and São Vincent island in the state of São Paulo. The estuary receives the waters of many rivers – including Cubatão, Piassaguera, Mogi and Onças – that drain the Serra do Mar