



Free *qat* handouts secure a high voter turnout in Yemen's elections

For Imam Yahya, one of Yemen's last kings, *qat* was a delight that he praised in poems. For his adversary, the revolutionary al-Zubayri, the plant was the "devil in the shape of a tree".

Still today the views on *qat* greatly diverge. For some, *qat* farming is the *perpetuum mobile* of Yemen's rural economy and *qat* chewing an age-old social pursuit that has helped to preserve Yemeni identity in a rapidly changing world. For others, *qat* is the main inhibitor of human and economic development in Yemen and is to blame for poverty and corruption, the depletion of Yemen's water resources and the country's sloppy approach to fighting Islamist terror.

While some believe that *qat* chewing was the very motor of Yemen's "Arab Spring", others hold it responsible for Yemen's muddled revolution with its high blood toll. In internet blogs even *al-Qaeda*, its affiliates, and sympathizers discuss the pros and cons of the drug, and a number of Yemeni suicide bombers have met their fate with *qat*-filled cheeks. A final decision of *al-Qaeda* on what stance to adopt towards the drug has seemingly been postponed. The Jihadists want to avoid alienating Yemen's population with a premature ban of the popular stimulant before having gained firm control over the country. *Al-Qaeda* has learned from the mistakes of its Islamist sister organization, the al-Shabab militia in war-torn Somalia.

With Yemen's 2011 "Youth Revolution", a decade of half-hearted *qat* policies and missed opportunities has come to an end – a decade, however, that has succeeded in lifting the veil of silence that was cast over *qat* in media and politics after President Ali Abdullah Salih came to power in 1978. This whitewash had been part of a ruling bargain between the Salih regime and the unruly tribes that had imparted highland Yemen several decades of relative stability and Salih a 33-year rule.

With the forecast depletion of Yemen's oil and gas reserves within the next decade, the economic importance of *qat* will further increase and will bring about an important shift in the balance of power from the central government towards the *qat* producing highland tribes. The challenge of addressing the *qat* problem is thus tremendous for Yemen's policy makers. While the transitional government is hesitant about its future *qat* course and anxious not to open a "war" on yet another front, Yemen's anti-*qat* activists have seized the current, favorable climate of change. Emboldened by Yemen's revolution and the ouster of President Salih they have recently launched a series of campaigns against the drug, dubbed a "revolution on one's self".

# Politics of Qat

The Role of a Drug in Ruling Yemen

Peer Gatter



Jemen-Studien Band 20.1 · Peer Gatter · Politics of Qat



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Band 20.1

Peer Gatter

Politics of Qat

The Role of a Drug in Ruling Yemen

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Front cover: A *qāt* merchant in the highland village  
of al-Jabīn in Rayma governorate.

Back cover: Free *qāt* handouts secured a high voter turnout  
in Yemen's first direct presidential elections in 1999.

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### D. Socotra, a Changing Island

The Socotra archipelago is a treasure chest for naturalists, a Galapagos of the Indian Ocean, with rich biodiversity and very high levels of endemism. Until unification of the two Yemens in 1990, the islands were largely isolated and neglected by government planning. As many remote regions that open up to the outside world, Socotra today suffers from a number of undesirable civilizing side effects. These include an upsurge in solid waste, the introduction of new species that endanger the endemic flora and fauna<sup>247</sup>, the steadily growing immigration of mainland workers, introduction of firearms, rampant land speculation, and the Arabization of society associated with a marginalization of the native *Suquṭrī* language. These also include the propagation of an aggressive Salafi Islam by north Yemeni preachers, who declare local customs and the relative liberty of women as un-Islamic – and last but not least, the rapid proliferation of *qāt* chewing.

As unique Socotra may be for the botanist or ornithologist, as unique it is also for the researcher of *qāt*, given that before unification the habit was virtually unknown here. It was only when a handful of northern soldiers were stationed on Socotra in 1992, that *qāt* found its way aboard military aircraft to the archipelago's main island and consumption of the drug has been steadily rising since then. Today, Socotra can be considered a vast open air laboratory for observing how the *qāt* habit ensnares a traditional society if unregulated by the government. Socotra is also an example for just how difficult it is for local and central authorities to control the *qāt* trade even in a place where it is only just beginning to take root. What also makes Socotra a thankful object of research is the fact that *qāt* supplies reach the islands only by air. This makes it relatively easy to determine and document trade volumes and trends in *qāt* import and consumption.

The archipelago, which prior to unification was part of the socialist PDRY, is located some 400 km off the Arabian Peninsula in the Indian Ocean. Geologically, the archipelago is an extension of the Horn of Africa and consists of the main island of Socotra (3,625 km<sup>2</sup>) and the three islets of ‘Abd al-Kūrī, Samḥa and Darsa.<sup>248</sup> Administratively Socotra forms two districts of Ḥaḍramawt governorate: Ḥaḍībū District, consisting of the main island's mountainous eastern part, and Qalansiyya wa ‘Abd al-Kūrī District, comprising the arid and hilly western portion of the main island as well as the islets of ‘Abd al-Kūrī, Samḥa and Darsa.<sup>249</sup> According to Yemen's 2004 census, the islands support a population of 42,842 of which a quarter is concentrated in the two main coastal settlements – Ḥaḍībū, the island's capital with 8,545 inhabitants, and Qalansiyya with a population of 3,862.

Apart from date cultivation and small scale vegetable gardening in the *wādī* plains, agriculture is largely unknown in Socotra today. Cereal farming in the highlands was abandoned a few decades ago due to the highly subsidized rice and flour imports of socialist times and land use is mostly limited to animal husbandry (goats and cows), wood gathering and the collection of frankincense and ‘dragon blood’.<sup>250</sup> By far the most important economic activity, however, is fishing. Fish also constitutes – besides milk, ghee, dates, and an occasional meat dish complemented by imported rice – the most important part of the local diet.

Socotra is situated in the sphere of influence of seasonal monsoon winds. These blow from the north-east during October/November to May and from the south-west during June to September/October. Apart from some strong summer rains, the island is characterized by a rather arid climate (102.9 mm per annum at Mūrī airport<sup>251</sup>). Due to high seas and strong winds that create a true barrier around the archipelago, Socotra is accessible during the summer monsoon only by plane.<sup>252</sup> Fishing becomes extremely perilous during this time of year. To escape the winds, many of the locals move from the northern coast to the mountains and *wādīs* where they pasture their herds and tend their date palm groves. While temperatures in the higher mountain areas (up to 1,525 m a.s.l.) are well comparable to those of Yemen's highlands, low precipitation, shallow soils and lack of ground and surface water in the extremely karstic underground restrict highland agriculture to very few areas. Apart from some unsuccessful attempts during the past decade, *qāt* has never been cultivated on the island (see below).

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With rapid population growth and continued immigration from the mainland, local agricultural production has long ceased to suffice to feed Socotra. Consignments of staple food reach the ports of Ḥadībū and Qalansiyya during the spring and winter months from Yemen and Oman. Since the construction of a proper airport with paved runway in 1999, vegetables and fruits are also brought by commercial aircraft from Ṣan‘ā’. In order to receive some additional earnings, many airline passengers traveling to Socotra fill their bags with cucumbers, onions, tomatoes – and of course with *qāt* – and sell these at a small profit to Ḥadībū merchants.

Socotra’s population today comprises four distinct groups:

- (a) The mountains, *wādīs* and inner plains are inhabited by a native Semitic pastoral population that is grouped into several tribes that speak an own southern Arabian language, *Suquṭrī* (ca. 32% of total population).
- (b) The population of the coastal settlements (often Socotri-Arabic bilingual) is of mixed origin. It includes descendants of Arabian traders and Mahrī tribes that had come to the island during the past centuries, as well as descendants of East African slaves and fishermen. Some Asian influence is also noticed (ca. 56%).
- (c) In the northern and western coastal settlements male migrant workers, traders, teachers and administrators originating from mainland Yemen have established themselves. Most are from the northern governorates of Ta‘izz, Ibb, Dhamār, Ṣan‘ā’ and al-Bayḍā’ who came to the island after the war of secession. This group also comprises some migrants from Aden and mainland Ḥaḍramawt, some of whom have been living on Socotra since the 1960s (ca. 5% of the population).
- (d) Scattered on small outposts across the island, but living mainly at the army headquarters around the Mūrī airport are members of the armed forces. They originate entirely from Yemen’s northern governorates and have been dispatched here without dependants after Yemen’s war of secession (ca. 7%).<sup>253</sup>



Picture 257: Socotra with its many endemic species of animals and plants (here the dragon blood tree) is a treasure chest for zoologists. But also for the researcher of *qāt* the archipelago is fascinating as the chewing habit has only recently evolved here and is in full expansion.

### Rising *Qāt* Imports

Just as in Yemen's eastern governorates of Ḥaḍramawt and al-Mahra, *qāt* consumption was proscribed on Socotra prior to unification (see map 6 for chewing zones in the PDRY and annex 18 for the relevant legislation). With the abrogation of the PDRY's 1976 *qāt* law following Yemen's unification, the *qāt* habit gradually found its way aboard military aircraft to these strategically important islands. During the early 1990s, when just a few hundred soldiers were based on the remote archipelago, *qāt* shipments were then rather small and erratic. This dramatically changed with the war of secession. After northern forces had quelled the rebellion in the renegade governorates in July 1994, the southern military contingent on Socotra was replaced entirely by northern troops, the latter for the most part passionate *qāt* chewers. Also military presence on the island was considerably reinforced due to fears of secessionist tendencies among the natives and the rather far-fetched concerns that former southern leaders, such as 'Alī Sālim al-Bīḍ, who had taken refuge in nearby Oman, could use Socotra as a basis for attacks on the mainland. Reliable figures on the actual number of soldiers stationed on Socotra after 1994 are kept a state secret, but rumors put them at around 3,000 men. A senior military officer speaking on condition of anonymity reported that prior to the war the Yemeni air force supplied the main military base at Mūrī with 150 bunches of *qāt* bi-weekly. During the latter part of 1994, shipments of the drug exploded, reaching over 2,000 bunches per week – despite a mid 1970s ban on transporting *qāt* by military aircraft.<sup>254</sup>

In the wake of the secession war, increasing numbers of northern administrators and businessmen settled on Socotra and thus the demand for *qāt* outside the military camps grew. As merchant and fishing vessels take 50 to 60 hours to reach Socotra from mainland Yemen, military flights at the time were the only means of transport for delivering fresh *qāt* leaves to the island. By 1995, two soldiers started selling surplus *qāt* from the Mūrī military camp in Ḥaḍībū's streets and in the following year Aḥmad 'Umar al-Maṭarī, a north Yemeni lieutenant, opened the first regular sales place for *qāt* in the island's capital. *Qāt* deliveries, however, remained highly erratic during the second half of the 1990s. Military flight schedules were unreliable and violent turbulences as well as poor visibility during the summer monsoon made air traffic with the relatively small military planes challenging, if not even to come to a complete standstill for weeks at a time.

With the inauguration of Socotra International Airport in July 1999 and the onset of regular *Yemenia* flights to the island, Socotra experienced an unprecedented development boom.<sup>255</sup> In Ḥaḍībū and Qalansiyya many small businesses were established by newcomers from the mainland and *qāt* deliveries for the first time became regular and swiftly soared up. With support of the Arab Fund President Ṣāliḥ initiated a gigantic road building project. A fish canning factory was put up and an oversized community college was built with a Kuwaiti grant, creating along the northern coast hundreds of well paid jobs in the construction sector. Contracts were for the most part awarded to north Yemeni service providers – clients of the Ṣāliḥ regime – mainly employing migrant laborers from the northern governorates. Also, the efforts of the UNDP/GEF-funded biodiversity project to protect Socotra's unique flora and fauna and classify the archipelago as a UNESCO biosphere reserve (2003) and world heritage site (2008) led to further investments on the island. A number of hotels and tourist camps were set up to accommodate naturalists and travelers from all around the world. UNDP alone created employment for around a hundred locals acting as researchers, extension workers, drivers, cleaners and guards and thus became, besides the armed forces and the road building companies, the biggest employer on the island. This led to the emergence of a cash economy and a class of wage earners, both of which were practically unknown on the archipelago, whose population had until then largely subsisted on barter trade. In particular along the northern coast and in the island's two main population centers, these changes also led to a rapid increase in the consumption of non-essential food items and commodities, above all *qāt*.

It is impossible to determine what share of the estimated US\$ 200 million that was channeled as wages into the development of Socotra in the decade between 1999 and 2009, flowed into *qāt* consumption. Putting it at around 15-20% is certainly not too low.<sup>256</sup>

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Pictures 258 & 259: Top: *Qāt* consignments are distributed after the arrival of the plane at Socotra airport. Bottom: Pioneer *qāt* merchants from the mainland in front of their Ḥadībū *qāt* shop.

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An increased demand for *qāt* – initially only among the some 2,000 migrant workers, traders, teachers and administrators – led to an explosion in the number of *qāt* sellers since the late 1990s. While in 1998 just three individuals sold *qāt* on Socotra, the number had risen to 12 by 2001 and soared to 58 in 2005.<sup>257</sup> Without exception they were either active members of the armed forces based on Socotra, former Socotra-based servicemen who had ‘retired’ on the island, or their close relatives who had followed them here. In 2005, all *qāt* sellers on the island originated from Yemen’s north, namely from the areas of Radā‘ (18 sellers), Dhamār (15), Ibb (12), al-Bayḍā’ (7), Ṣan‘ā’ (4), and Ta‘izz (2).<sup>258</sup>

Since 1999, *Yemenia* services Socotra twice weekly from Ṣan‘ā’ – on Fridays via al-Mukallā and on Mondays via Aden. In November 2001, *Yemenia* delivered on average 7,000 *qāt* bunches to the island each Friday and another 9,500 bunches each Monday (ca. 600 and 800 kg respectively).<sup>259</sup> These were complemented by some 6,000-7,000 *qāt* portions arriving every Thursday by military plane, given partly for free and sold otherwise at relatively modest prices as an incentive for soldiers based in this forlorn duty station.<sup>260</sup> The weekly commercial turnover of *qāt* on Socotra in late 2001 is estimated at YR 5 million or US\$ 30,000 (without military deliveries). Per annum this would amount to around YR 260 million or about US\$ 1.6 million.<sup>261</sup>

Owing to the building boom on Socotra, but also to increasing chewing levels among the native population, *Yemenia*’s *qāt* deliveries to the archipelago doubled within just three years. By April 2005, about 12,500 *qāt* bunches arrived on the island every Friday and some 19,000 each Monday (ca. 1,200 and 1,800 kg respectively) with a weekly value of about YR 13.4 million (ca. US\$ 75,000). Military deliveries remained relatively stable at around 7,000-7,500 bunches per week.<sup>262</sup> The non-military turnover of *qāt* on Socotra would thus have been around YR 700 million or US\$ 3.8 million per annum (2005).<sup>263</sup> This upwards trend is holding, disrupted only by the short-lived *qāt* ban in the summer of 2009 (see below). By 2010 the annual (non-military) turnover of *qāt* on the archipelago is believed to have surpassed US\$ 10 million.

### *Qāt* Marketing on Socotra

With profit margins of around 10% of the sales price the *qāt* trade on Socotra is highly lucrative. In 2001, the average monthly net income of a *qāt* seller on the island was YR 194,000 (ca. US\$ 1150). Due to rapidly increasing numbers of *qāt* merchants in the boomtowns of Ḥadībū and Qalansiyya during the following years and a comparatively slower increase in *qāt* consumption on the island, the average net income of *qāt* sellers dropped to an average YR 114,000 (ca. US\$ 610) by April 2005.<sup>264</sup> Despite this sharp decline in earnings, *qāt* marketing on Socotra remained a most lucrative business. An average *qāt* seller in Ḥadībū earned in 2005 more than 15 times the salary of a security guard after 20 years in government service and six times the remuneration of a deputy minister of the highest seniority.<sup>265</sup>

Table 41 illustrates the profitability of the *qāt* commerce on Socotra in November 2001 and depicts the costs incurred for a Ḥadībū *qāt* seller receiving deliveries of 800 bunches of *Hamdānī qāt* per flight. An agent purchases the merchandise on the mainland and arranges for dispatch to Socotra for a fee of YR 7,000 per shipment (3.5% of the final retail price on Socotra). From a *Hamdān* farmer he buys the *qāt* leaves on the tree at a price of YR 170 per bunch and has them picked and packed by his own harvest crew (three men, each receiving YR 1,000 for their services - 1.5% of retail price). The lion’s share of the proceeds (68.0%) remains with the farmer, who has in turn to cover the cost of irrigation, farm labor, pesticides and fertilizer. Taxes levied on the *qāt* leaves at al-Azraqayn checkpoint north of Ṣan‘ā’ are with an effective 4.3% of the retail price relatively low (by law the *qāt* tax was set at 25% of the retail value at that time). Since *qāt* transport by plane has been officially banned in 1999 (but never enforced until 2009), bribes to pay off airline officials and security personnel are required at both Ṣan‘ā’ and Socotra airports (3.8% of retail price), reducing merchants’

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profits by about a quarter. Specific to the *qāt* trade on Socotra are also the relatively high costs for transport (5%) and for electricity needed for running a cooler in which the *qāt* leaves can be kept fresh for several days (1.7% of retail price).

**Table 41: Profit Calculation of a *Qāt* Merchant in Ḥadībū (Nov. 2001)<sup>266</sup>**

Item	Price / Cost (YR)	US\$ Equivalent	Percent
Purchase price of <i>qāt</i> (on tree) in Hamdān for 64 kg or 800 <i>ḥabba</i> (unit price YR 170)	136,000	809.50	68.0%
Harvesting and packaging (harvest crew of 3 men)	3,000	17.90	1.5%
Taxes at al-Azraqayn checkpoint (Hamdān)	8,500	50.60	4.3%
Transport to Ṣan‘ā’ airport	1,200	7.10	0.6%
Bribes at Ṣan‘ā’ airport	6,000	35.70	3.0%
<i>Yemenia</i> airfreight (YR 156/kg of <i>qāt</i> )	10,000	59.50	5.0%
Bribes at Socotra airport	1,500	8.90	0.8%
Transport from Socotra airport to Ḥadībū	400	2.40	0.2%
Profit of Ṣan‘ā’ agent or partner	7,000	41.70	3.5%
Rent for a small shop (1/2 week)	1,100	6.60	0.6%
Generator running cost for cooling (1/2 week)	3,400	20.20	1.7%
Packing materials	1,600	9.50	0.8%
Net profit of seller	20,300	120.80	10.2%
<b>Sales price in Socotra (unit price 250 YR)</b>	<b>YR 200,000</b>	<b>\$ 1,190.50</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

However lucrative, *qāt* marketing on Socotra underlies a number of risks unknown to the mainland trade. As Socotra is not a profitable destination for *Yemenia* and planes are rarely booked out, it is not uncommon that flights are cancelled last minute. This is especially true when a plane on a more important air link is down due to repairs and the Socotra plane must serve as a substitute. Also during the pilgrimage season when the aircraft are needed on the busy and rewarding Ṣan‘ā’-Jidda route the Socotra flight plan is often changed. Ordering the right quantity of *qāt* is thus a constant challenge for merchants on the island. If they order too little and the next plane fails to appear, they are out of business for several days while more daring and far-seeing sellers can make handsome profits. If they however order too much, and the next plane arrives on schedule, the several-day-old surplus *qāt* can only be sold at a great loss. Another risk when flights are cancelled last-minute is that merchants on Socotra are liable to pay for *qāt* consignments ordered even if these are not shipped. In such cases mainland agents or partners try to sell the leaves as fast as they can to Ṣan‘ā’ wholesalers, but depending on *qāt* supply and demand in Yemen’s capital that day, this can imply painful losses.

A particularity of *qāt* marketing in Socotra is also that the island is the only place in Yemen where *qāt* becomes more expensive the older it gets, provided that there is no oversupply: as there is no local production, the *qāt* stocks on the island are ever more depleting with each passing day. Until the next plane arrives with new merchandise the leaves are consequently becoming more and more precious. A bunch sold for YR 300 on the arrival day of the plane will thus cost YR 350 on the next day and YR 400 or more on the following days. The storage of *qāt* in the hot and arid Socotran climate is also a logistical challenge. In 2005, only eight of Ḥadībū’s 47 *qāt* merchants sold their wares from a permanent shop operating large coolers that could keep *qāt* fresh for several days. The remaining retailers who were selling their *qāt* leaves from shady sidewalks (28 merchants) or from the platforms of pickups (11 sellers) had either to rent cooler space from established *qāt* retailers or from grocers.<sup>267</sup>

Well-heeled customers able to afford several-days worth of *qāt* on the arrival day of the plane try to avoid paying the daily increasing prices. On the day *qāt* arrives from the mainland they supply

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themselves with some good bunches and store them in the ice boxes of Ḥadībū's grocers at a fee of YR 10 or 15 per day. As the overwhelming majority of Socotra residents do not own cooling facilities, a number of grocers run fridges just as a lucrative service for residents of the neighborhood. Also in the military camp at Mūrī reportedly several fridges are run just for keeping *qāt* leaves fresh.



Picture 260: Wrapped in banana leaves, *qāt* is protected from drying out during the long trip from the highlands to Socotra. On the island the precious *qāt* leaves can be stored in refrigerators for several days and kept fresh.

In the small western fishing town of Qalansiyya no *qāt* seller had taken up permanent residence by 2005. Sellers commuted there on the arrival days of the plane and would return the same evening or the next morning after having sold the remainder of their *qāt*. *Qāt* was thus not available throughout the week. Bunch prices were YR 50-100 more expensive here than in Ḥadībū as transport cost on Socotra is relatively high. There are still few cars on the island: in 2005, only eight vehicles were owned by Qalansiyya residents and only two to three cars reached Qalansiyya from other parts of the island each day. Charter prices for cars commuting from Mūrī airport to the fishing town were, at YR 7,000 (ca. US\$ 38) in 2005, rather high. Since Qalansiyya did not profit from the development boom as much as Ḥadībū, and much fewer mainland migrants live here, *qāt* sales in the town remained relatively low. In November 2001, some 300 *ḥabba* of *qāt* were sold in Qalansiyya twice a week – a number that had increased by April 2005 only to around twice 420 bunches.

Apart from Ḥadībū, Qalansiyya, and the Mūrī military camp, the only other location where *qāt* is sold on the island is Socotra airport. In the aerodrome's parking lot small quantities of *qāt* are marketed upon arrival of the Ṣan'ā' plane (around 200 bunches in April 2005).

*Qāt* varieties sold on Socotra are relatively few compared to mainland markets and portions are considerably smaller than those found in Yemen's highlands. Most *qāt* bunches on Socotra can be clasped between thumb and index finger and weigh just between 70-100 grams. A single bunch is thus not sufficient for the habitual *qāt* user, who will require between two to four such *ḥabba* for an

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afternoon chew. Only bunches of the *Ḍāli'ī* cultivar are bigger with over 200 grams, but their price is also considerably higher than that of other varieties (see table 42). Prices for *qāt* are also determined by demand. When *qāt* sellers learn of an important social event such as a wedding or a funeral in a well to do Socotran family, prices immediately escalate. Weddings that have traditionally been held on Thursdays in Socotra, have in recent years been shifted to Fridays, as only on the arrival day of the *ṭayārat al-qāt*, the '*qāt* plane', fresh and relatively cheap *qāt* is to be had.

**Table 42: *Qāt* Shipments Arriving at Mūrī Airport on the Friday Plane (Number of Bunches, Share of Varieties) and Retail Price in Ḥadībū Including Weight**

<i>Qāt</i> variety (provenance)	November 2001		April 2003		April 2005		
	No. of bunches (share)	Price (YR)	No. of bunches (share)	Price (YR)	No. of bunches (share)	Price (YR)	Average weight <sup>268</sup>
<i>Radā'ī</i> (al-Bayḍā')	1,300 (18.6%)	400	1,600 (16.3%)	400	2,600 (20.8%)	450	97.2
<i>Sawtī</i> ('Amrān)	2,500 (35.7%)	300	3,300 (33.7%)	300	3,700 (29.6%)	350	76.4
<i>al-Ḍāli'ī</i> (al-Ḍāli')	-	-	1,100 (11.2%)	900	900 (7.2%)	1,000	242.7
' <i>Ansī</i> (Dhamār)	-	-	-	-	400 (3.2%)	500	87.8
<i>Hamḍānī</i> (Ṣan'ā')	2,800 (40.0%)	250	3,800 (38.8%)	350	4,300 (34.4%)	350	79.1
<i>Baladī</i> (Ibb)	400 (5.7%)	350	-	-	600 (4.8%)	400	94.3
<b>Total number, average bunch price and weight<sup>269</sup></b>	<b>7,000 (100%)</b>	<b>YR 301</b>	<b>9,800 (100%)</b>	<b>YR 403</b>	<b>12,500 (100%)</b>	<b>YR 425</b>	<b>94.9 grams</b>
<b>Ḥadībū retail value</b>	<b>YR 2,110,000</b>		<b>YR 3,950,000</b>		<b>YR 5,310,000</b>		

### Trends in *Qāt* Chewing on the Archipelago

Mainland immigrants remain today the main source of income for *qāt* sellers on Socotra, but the chewing habit is also increasingly spreading among the island's original population. *Qāt* merchants relate that in 1995 neither the Socotran dwellers of the coastal plain nor the tribesmen of the interior purchased *qāt*. By 2001, Ḥadībū *qāt* sellers had around 40 regular native customers and by 2005, this figure had risen to around 350 individuals. Many of these were adolescents and young adults.

Chewing frequency varies widely among the four population groups that inhabit the island today. To document this, the author carried out a small survey in Ḥadībū and the Mūrī military camp in April 2005. With the assistance of local extension workers of the UNDP/GEF Socotra Biodiversity Project, 645 individuals above the age of 18 (among them 191 women) were questioned on their origins and on their levels of *qāt* use.<sup>270</sup>

As expected, *qāt* use was most marked among members of the armed forces and among mainland migrants. The majority of the questioned of both groups had developed the chewing habit on mainland Yemen (98.3 and 91.0% respectively). Of 115 interviewed soldiers all were found chewing and 76.5% used *qāt* on four days or more per week. For mainland migrants the picture was a similar one and only slightly less marked with 2.0% of non-chewers and 71.6% of respondents chewing at least four days per week. A surprising 25.2% of males of the coastal population had taken up the habit over the past decade and a half since unification. Most of them can be classed as occasional chewers. Also among females belonging to the coastal population group, *qāt* chewing was documented – 2.6% were found to be occasional users. Entirely different were the findings among the Socotran tribal population: just 3.8% of males were found to be sporadic chewers, while among tribal females no *qāt* use was recorded at all.<sup>271</sup>

**Table 43: Weekly Chewing Frequencies Among Different Population Groups on Socotra in April 2005 (in Percent and Numbers; Survey Sample n=645).**

	Chewing frequency/week	Tribal origins <sup>272</sup>	Coastal population	Mainland migrants	Soldiers <sup>273</sup> (mainland)	Total no. of interviewed
<b>Male</b>	<b>Total no.</b>	<b>106</b>	<b>131</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>454</b>
	Non-chewing	96.2% (102)	74.8% (98)	2.0% (2)	0% (0)	202
	1 day/week	3.8% (4)	14.5% (19)	7.8% (8)	5.2% (6)	37
	2-3 days	0% (0)	8.4% (11)	18.6% (19)	18.3% (21)	51
	4 days and above	0% (0)	2.3% (3)	71.6% (73)	76.5% (88)	164
<b>Female</b>	<b>Total no.</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>117</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>191</b>
	Non-chewing	100% (74)	97.4% (114)	-	-	188
	1 day/week	0% (0)	2.6% (3)	-	-	3
	2-3 days	0% (0)	0% (0)	-	-	0
	4 days and above	0% (0)	0% (0)	-	-	0

Amongst Socotra's native population, chewing is spread widest among the fishing community. Of 47 fishermen interviewed in April 2005 on *qāt* chewing, 38 (80.9%) reported *qāt* use at least once a week.<sup>274</sup> Yemen's Minister of Water and Environment, 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Iryānī (formerly Deputy Chairman of Yemen's Island Authority), observed that many Socotran fishermen would spend most of the proceeds of their catch on *qāt*: "After having been at sea for two or three full days they sell their fish and the head directly to the *qāt* market with their proceeds. The next 24 hours they will chew non-stop, before going out to sea again. I don't know when they sleep".<sup>275</sup>

Generally, *qāt* use on Socotra is restricted to Ḥadībū and Qalansiyya (the island's two main population centers), to Mūrī military camp, and to a number of fishing communities on the northern coast. The habit has so far spread very little to rural areas of the hinterland. A reason for this is that the island's road infrastructure is still fairly underdeveloped and that due to the lack of cars, transportation costs to areas beyond the main road linking Ḥadībū with Qalansiyya are prohibitive. This makes it difficult for *qāt* traders to venture inland and also limits the contact of the tribes with the urban centers of the coastline to rare 'shopping tours' (see below). Another factor constraining the spread of *qāt* is certainly also that Socotra's economy beyond the northern shoreline is still very little monetarized and depends until today essentially on barter deals.

As observations suggest, the proliferation of *qāt* chewing among the tribal population also in rural areas has begun and it is only a question of time before the habit has taken hold of the entire population. In Humhil, a small pastoral community located 25 km southeast of Ḥadībū at around 500 m a.s.l., local Bedouins make a living off goat and cattle herding, cheese production, the collection of wood and resin, and very rudimentary garden agriculture (mostly vegetables; finger millet cultivation has long ceased). Since a few years this is complemented by modest seasonal incomes from tourism, as a campsite has been set up here with the assistance of the UNDP/GEF Biodiversity Project. The village with its 46 families (352 individuals in 2001) is situated at a three hour drive from the island's capital on an extremely bad dirt road and has neither electricity, running water, nor any health facilities. In 2001, only one of the community's 89 men above the age of 15 occasionally chewed *qāt*. When travelling once a month on foot to Ḥadībū in order to sell a goat, some cheese and frankincense to buy essentials such as rice, medication, clothes and kerosene in return, he would also buy a bunch of *qāt* and chew it the next day to make the walk back into his mountain hamlet easier and more diverting. By 2005, the number of men chewing in Humhil had increased to seven family heads and two of their teenage sons.<sup>276</sup> Wives of chewers complained that their husbands would now stay away

for two nights instead of one, just in order to chew *qāt* in the town. They also voiced their discontent that their husbands now sold more livestock than before in order to buy *qāt* and were wasting the meager family resources on their newly acquired habit.

### Growing Resistance to *Qāt*

Socotran women early on rebelled against the drug. In March 2004, the wives of four extension workers of the UNDP/GEF biodiversity program approached the author, then managing the program, to complain that their husbands spent more than half of their earnings on *qāt*. They demanded to henceforth disburse salaries directly to them and whatever remained at the end of the month they would agree to pay out to their husbands for *qāt*. After lengthy discussions the employees agreed – and were never seen chewing again. This success caught on and by April 2005 some 20 Socotran women had approached ministerial branch offices on the island, the district council, and the Ḥadībū chief of police to demand the ‘seizure’ of their husband’s salaries for the good of the family. In all cases authorities complied with the requests.<sup>277</sup>

Worried about the increasing incidence of chewing among native Socotrans and the threat the habit poses to Socotri culture, local politicians took action against the drug in late 2007. On December 3<sup>rd</sup>, the district council of Ḥadībū unanimously voted for a prohibition of *qāt* imports and sales in its jurisdiction in order to obviate societal degeneration. It was agreed to confiscate any *qāt* found entering the island and penalize those carrying it. The councilors hoped that a ban would be easy to enforce, as at the time the only means of *qāt* supply to Socotra were the two weekly *Yemenia* flights and the military plane arriving once a week. On December 9, 2007 the council convened a meeting with the chief of the Socotran military brigade, the customs director, the civil and military airport managers, the island’s port manager, the head of Socotran security, and the *Yemenia* director in order to devise a mechanism for enforcing the decree (see annex 21).<sup>278</sup> As of January 1, 2008, the ban was to be implemented and *qāt* sellers were asked to sign pledges not to attempt bringing *qāt* to the island. The sellers rejected the request outright, unless *qāt* were banned nationwide, pointing out that the island was a part of Yemen and was not ruled by independent laws.<sup>279</sup> By this they indirectly accused Socotran councilmen of separatism. With the debate on unity and secession having made headlines again since mid 2007 and demonstrations against unity having been brutally subdued by security forces (see chapter VIII. C), the councilors realized that they were treading of thin ice. “*Instigating national feuds*”, “*instigating the spirit of separatism*”, and “*harming national unity*” had become punishable crimes in Yemen since the late 1990s.<sup>280</sup>

Ṭaha ‘Abd Allāh Ḥājir, the Governor of Ḥaḍramawt in whose jurisdiction Socotra lies, did not come to the aid of his subordinates. Ḥaḍramawt had just experienced the bloodiest demonstrations against the Ṣāliḥ regime and against unity in a decade. Policy makers were thin-skinned and a further escalation of the situation or a spread of the disturbances to the hitherto calm Socotra archipelago was to be avoided by all means.<sup>281</sup> The Governor did thus not sanction the decree. He let the island’s council know that the provisions of the 1999 agricultural quarantine law were sufficient to prevent any *qāt* imports to Socotra. This law which regulates the importation of plants and plant materials into Yemen was until then however neither efficiently enforced on the mainland nor on Socotra. Given the heavy dependence of the archipelago on food imports (besides processed food especially cereals and vegetables), its enforcement in the Socotri context was simply not feasible.<sup>282</sup>

The Governor’s rejection of the petition sparked discontent on Socotra. A majority of Ḥadībū district councilors were persuaded that the real reason behind this refusal was simply government nepotism. Socotra’s principal *qāt* importer was then reportedly Brigadier General Ḥusayn Khayrān, commander of the first naval infantry brigade and ultimate authority on the archipelago. He was said to be a confidant of President Ṣāliḥ and entrusted with keeping a close watch over any secessionist tendencies on the island. Repeated calls by Socotrans to replace him have gone unheard. On the quiet,

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Pictures 261 & 262: Top: Downtown Ḥadībū with the Haghir mountains rising up to 1,525 meters above sea level. Bottom: A small settlement on the northern coast of Socotra. Mūrī airport can be perceived on the upper left.

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Socotran community leaders accused the government of willingly accepting the loss of their culture and of local customs in order to create a national Yemeni identity defined by *qāt*. “*Qāt is an effective tool to counteract any efforts of local self-determination and to muzzle our calls for higher levels of decentralization*” a local representative told the author.<sup>283</sup>

Support for the Socotran cause was received from Yemen’s anti-*qāt* associations. On February 16, 2008 an anti-*qāt* festival was held in Ḥadībū which aimed at raising greater awareness on the detrimental effects of *qāt* and at rallying support from among the population for implementing the local council decision.<sup>284</sup> Also ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Iryānī, the Minister of Water and Environment, commended Socotra’s local politicians for their initiative: “... we’re proud to see these local councilors unanimously deciding that *qāt* may negatively impact economic conditions for its citizens, whether they are rich or poor, educated or uneducated. Unfortunately, other concerned agencies nationwide are still waiting for the Yemeni government to enact a law banning the entry of *qāt* into main cities; however, thus far, they’ve never made an initiative like that of Socotra’s local councilors.”<sup>285</sup>



Picture 263: Fishing is the main trade on Socotra and fish the most important part of the local diet. Ḥadībū fishermen bring in their nocturnal catch at sunrise.

The concerns of Socotran councilmen were also shared by Yemeni development workers, agronomists and environmentalists participating in a June 2008 symposium in Ṣan‘ā’. The event entitled “*Towards Practical Policies for Limiting the Expansion of Qāt Cultivation*” was organized by the Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation and held under the patronage of Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs, ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Arḥabī. Participants unanimously recommended an outlawing of *qāt* marketing and use on Socotra and voted for addressing a petition to President Ṣāliḥ in this regard.<sup>286</sup> For the soldiers stationed on Socotra they called for the provision of recreational facilities such as swimming pools, basketball courts and body building studios.

When in May 2008 Governor Hājir – a northerner with military background – was voted out of office in the country’s first free gubernatorial elections, the *qāt* debate on Socotra gained new momentum. With Salīm Aḥmad al-Khānbāshī the first native Ḥaḍramī had become governor since the civil war.<sup>287</sup> Al-Khānbāshī, himself a confirmed non-chewer from Wādī Daw‘an, advised the Ḥaḍībū council not to ban the sale of *qāt*, as this did indeed conflict with national laws, but to rather enforce existing, but so far disregarded legislation on *qāt* transport aboard aircraft: a 1999 cabinet decision had prohibited *qāt* cargos and chewing on Yemen’s national carrier *Yemenia*.<sup>288</sup> In early 2009, al-Khānbāshī lobbied in the cabinet for an enforcement of this 1999 resolution, to no avail.<sup>289</sup>

### President Ṣāliḥ’s ‘Polite’ Ban on *Qāt*

It was ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Iryānī, Yemen’s Minister of Water and Environment, who finally secured President Ṣāliḥ’s support for a ban. On March 15, 2009 the president visited the island and received the minister and local councilors in his large Syrian-style tent set up among the dragon blood trees of the Dīksām plateau. The councilors particularized how *qāt* ravaged their culture and implored Ṣāliḥ to deliver them from the drug. But the president did not take the matter seriously. Al-Iryānī came to their aid and insisted that a ban was desirable to protect the local population. Despite not being truly convinced, Ṣāliḥ spontaneously scribbled a few words on a paper, a presidential decree “*to prohibit the entrance of qāt to the Socotra archipelago effective from 15/3/2009.*” Ṣāliḥ made clear that this ban would apply only to aircraft and not to ships carrying *qāt*.<sup>290</sup> It was a day of joy for most native Socotris and as of April 10, 2009, the ban was enforced by local authorities. Baggage and cargo on Socotra flights were controlled both at departure in Ṣan‘ā’ and Aden as well as upon arrival at the island’s airport. At the entrance of Ḥaḍībū, police had set up yet another point of control and searched all cars for *qāt* bunches that may have been overlooked.<sup>291</sup> On April 12, 2009, Muḥammad Aḥmad al-Nāṭarī, *Yemenia* Director for Yemen and Saudi Arabia, informed the company’s regional managers that “*in accordance with the President’s directions, in addition to correspondence from the Ministry of Local Administration at Ḥaḍībū district in Ḥaḍramawt Governorate [...] it is now prohibited to transport shipments of qāt on all Yemenia flights destined for Socotra. If any amount of qāt is transported there, it will be returned on the same carrier on which it arrived, and the parties involved will be held responsible.*”<sup>292</sup> Two days later, Aḥmad Ḥamūd Ṭarīsh, Director General of Socotra’s International Airport informed political and airport security as well as managers of *Yemenia* and the newly founded *Felix Airways*<sup>293</sup> that “*it is fully prohibited to transport any qāt shipments to the Socotra archipelago. If any shipment of qāt does arrive, a violation will be cited and the transport company will be obligated to return it to the airport from which it was shipped and will be fined according to the law on the assumption that the shipment is considered a type that is forbidden to be transported to the Socotra archipelago. Accordingly, this directive is legally binding from this day, Tuesday, 14/04/2009, and we lay upon you the responsibility of any delinquency in such.*”<sup>294</sup>

While *Yemenia* strictly implemented the ban, *Felix Airways* had a more loose approach. This made the airline more attractive to *qāt* retailers and chewers than its government-run competitor. By calling for a boycott of the airline, Socotran anti-*qāt* lobbyists however dissuaded *Felix Airways* within just a few weeks time from tolerating *qāt* on its flights and made it impose stricter controls.<sup>295</sup> By May 2009, passengers of *Felix Airways* reported intensive searches for *qāt* on Socotra flights. *Qāt* consignments from Ṣan‘ā’ that were detected at al-Mukallā’s Rayan airport were thrown off the plane under heavy protests of passengers.<sup>296</sup> From Ḥaḍībū itself, visitors reported in May 2009 that sociable afternoon gatherings in the shady lanes off the town’s main street had ceased and that the general atmosphere in the island’s capital was that of profound depression. Tradespeople, drivers and craftsmen alike were described as brusque and ill tempered, suffering quite apparently from withdrawal symptoms.<sup>297</sup> Already in mid April first groups of laborers native to Yemen’s highlands had left Socotra, saying that without *qāt* it was too hard to bear life on this remote island.<sup>298</sup> Unable to

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cope with the new situation, an estimated 400 migrant workers turned their backs on Socotra within just two months of implementing the ban, among them many *qāt* sellers.<sup>299</sup>

Yemen's Minister of Water and Environment, 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Iryānī, who visited Socotra in early June 2009, reported that the island's *qāt* trade had plummeted and ceased to be lucrative. By then, Ṣan'ā' and Aden airports had put in place efficient controls, but some *qāt* kept still trickling in through Rayyān airport at al-Mukallā.<sup>300</sup> As airport officials at Rayyān demanded high bribes for turning a blind eye to the trade, the smuggled *qāt* was sold at exorbitant prices on the island. Reportedly, a number of security officers at Socotra airport were also reselling confiscated *qāt* portions for up to YR 5,000 (US\$ 25) as compared to prices in the Ḥadībū market of around YR 600/bunch before the ban. Ḥadībū councilors complained about this subversion of the ban to Governor al-Khānbāshī and to the Minister of Water and Environment, accusing the director of al-Mukallā airport of bribery.<sup>301</sup>



Picture 264: Socotra's infrastructure is developing at a tremendous pace. Here a road building crew on the Ḥadībū-Qalansiyya highway. "No *qāt* – no work" may well be their motto in this remote and hot location.

Al-Iryānī successfully intervened with the Minister of Transport to tighten controls in Rayyān and by mid June 2009, *qāt* reportedly no longer reached the island. Minister al-Iryānī was optimistic that the enforcement of the ban was also in the interest of the mainlanders living on Socotra. "The soldiers I met on the island thanked me for advocating the *qāt* ban since it enabled them to save the little money they have." With a smile the Minister said that merchants were of course free to bring *qāt* to Socotra by boat as only the transport by air had been banned, "but even with speedy boats this takes at least 36 hours to reach the island and the transport cost would be extremely high. *Qāt* would thus become very expensive and the leaves would no longer be fresh."<sup>302</sup>

There were indeed some successful attempts during the summer of 2009 to bring *qāt* aboard boats to Socotra. As the south-west monsoon with its fierce winds had set in already in late May that year, high seas off Socotra's north coast made this endeavor however an extremely perilous one. Only

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by late September when winds had died down, a more regular *qāt* supply set in by small trade vessels. But *qāt* consignments coming across the Arabian Sea remained largely insufficient to cover the island's demand.<sup>303</sup>



Picture 265: UNDP is trying to develop eco-tourism to make locals understand that protecting the island's biodiversity is in their own interest. Here a UNDP-Dutch-Italian mission camping at Humhil in the island's east.

The ban also triggered the clandestine import of *qāt* seedlings to Socotra in mid 2009 – a venture that met with no success. In order to protect the island's unique biodiversity, the Socotra Archipelago Conservation and Development Programme launched a campaign to locate and destroy the crops.<sup>304</sup> The Ministry of Water and Environment backed the operation, as the entry of seeds, seedlings, pesticides and fertilizers to Socotra was subject to licensing by the Environment Protection Authority as stipulated in the Archipelago Conservation Zoning Plan (Republican Resolution Nr. 275 of 2000). The plan explicitly prohibits the introduction of “*qāt* seedlings for the purpose of planting or growing in all the areas of the archipelago”.<sup>305</sup> Also a number of earlier attempts to grow *qāt* on Socotra had failed. Either the *qāt* plants were deliberately destroyed by discontented islanders, or they did not thrive as irrigation proved too expensive and challenging in the inaccessible karstic mountains.<sup>306</sup>

Despite an encouraging start, over time it proved rather difficult for Ḥadībū's local council to uphold the *qāt* flight ban. Its enforcement was entrusted to security forces originating mostly from Yemen's highlands. As all of these men were habitual *qāt* chewers it was as trusting the cat to keep the cream. After the first euphoria over having ridded themselves of the scourge of *qāt* had vanished, the remoteness of their duty station was felt even more bitterly. The motivation of members of the armed forces to monitor the ban quickly volatilized. When only weeks after soldiers had politely thanked Minister al-Iryānī for supporting the *qāt* ban, highway construction workers threatened to go on strike if *qāt* did not return to Socotra's markets, political pressure on the Socotra councilors began to mount. Soldiers quickly followed suit and there was rumor of revolt. “*What shall we do here? Watch the stars?*” one soldier summed up the frustrations.<sup>307</sup> Before long security personnel at Socotra

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airport was instructed by Brigadier General Khayrān to abandon their searches for *qāt*. When Minister al-Iryānī confronted Khayrān regarding his defiance of the ban, the latter shrugged his shoulders and replied: “*The president was anyhow never serious about this ban, he was just trying to be polite to the Socotrans*”.<sup>308</sup>

As a consequence *qāt* exports to Socotra resumed in late October 2009 and signs promoting *qāt* shops returned to Ḥadībū’s townscape.<sup>309</sup> The subversion of the ban caused much frustration among Socotra’s councilors. Their anger was directed mostly at Brigadier General Khayrān, whom they suspected of profiting from a dilution of the ban in several respects: He could resume his lucrative *qāt* imports, exercise a more effective control over his soldiers, and keep Socotrans lulled into *qāt* dreams.<sup>310</sup>

On December 23, 2010, President Ṣāliḥ once again visited Socotra where a mass festival was held in his honor. The president inspected the progress of development and tourism projects and informed himself about the living conditions on the island.<sup>311</sup> Delegates of Socotra’s Women’s Union complained to him about the unmitigated spread of *qāt* and implored to him for help. One lady related that more and more adolescents succumbed to the habit, stealing their mother’s dowry gold in order to buy *qāt*. In another spontaneous and generous gesture, President Ṣāliḥ issued a directive that *qāt* sales to minors were prohibited with immediate effect. As visitors to the island report, the directive remained however without any consequence.<sup>312</sup>

Theft has greatly increased on Socotra during the past years. It had been nearly unknown on the archipelago before the introduction of *qāt* and commercial flights to the island. Many of these cases are believed to be *qāt*-related. As it is difficult to resell stolen goods on this small island, it is mostly cash or jewelry that is stolen.<sup>313</sup>

The case of Socotra has amply shown just how hard it is to strive against *qāt*, even with the vigilance and resolve of Socotra’s district councilors and the highest levels of political patronage. The example has also shown that apart from paying lip service, President Ṣāliḥ was not ready to consistently act against *qāt*. The regime’s strategic and military interest in south Yemen as well as the interests of providing for its cronies plainly outweigh considerations of public welfare.

Future success of communities in their fight against *qāt* will largely depend on constitutional amendments regarding the role and the powers of local authorities. Such amendments were proposed by central government in June 2009, but have so far not been implemented. Also the administrative status of the archipelago will be crucial in the struggle against *qāt*. In May 2009, the local councils and shaykhs of Socotra had requested President Ṣāliḥ to declare the archipelago a governorate of its own.<sup>314</sup> Since then there have been reflections of making the islands a sub-governorate as has previously been effectuated in the case of the inner Ḥaḍramawt. The governorate’s interior is today no longer administrated from al-Mukallā, but from Say’ūn, the main town of Wādī Ḥaḍramawt.

Success of the southern governorates in fighting *qāt* will also heavily depend on the political future of Yemen’s south and on the role the northern-dominated military will play there after the current state of turmoil has come to an end.

In particular on Socotra, the developments in the transportation sector and prospective national transport policies will also strongly impact the future role of *qāt*. This does not only concern air traffic to Socotra but also road building and infrastructure development on the island itself that will strongly impact the spread of the habit among the native population and be crucial for the feasibility and profitability of prospective *qāt* farming on the island.

With assistance of the Kuwaiti Fund for Arab Economic Development, a modern port is currently being built on Socotra that is to receive ships of up to 7,000 tons. The US\$ 50 million project is expected to become operational in 2013 and is believed to significantly increase trade between the archipelago and the mainland.<sup>315</sup> This will allow ships to anchor off Socotra even during

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the turbulent monsoon season and could allow regular – but admittedly time intensive – deliveries of *qāt* to the island by ship.

Also future deliveries of Ethiopian *qāt* through Somalia are conceivable. Cape Guardafui on the Horn of Africa is just 250 kilometers by sea from the Socotran port of Qalansiyya and around 100 km from the archipelago's westernmost isle of 'Abd al-Kūrī. Besides, Puntland's large port city of Bosaso (Bawsāsū) with its thriving *qāt* market is slightly closer to Socotra than al-Mukallā.<sup>316</sup> *Qāt* merchants in Puntland and the pirates operating in the Indian Ocean are known for their close links and for sharing the same organizational structures. It is also believed that the enormous windfalls from piracy are profitably reinvested in the *qāt* trade.<sup>317</sup> Somali pirates are also loyal customers of the Bosaso *qāt* sellers and have often been found using considerable amounts of *qāt* during their long forays.<sup>318</sup> A future ban on *qāt* deliveries from Yemen's mainland to Socotra could trigger the establishment of lucrative trade links between Puntland's *qāt* wholesalers and Yemeni *qāt* retailers on the archipelago. Pirates could well serve as intermediaries and as transporters. Already today, Ḥadibū residents assert that Somali pirates regularly frequent the archipelago to fill up their stocks of water, gasoline and *qāt*, claiming to be fishermen.



Picture 266: A Socotri herder near Humhil is gathering fire wood. *Qāt* chewing has reached Socotra's ancient mountain population.

- 241 *National Yemen*, Sept. 23, 2011 (“*Al-Qaeda militants cut off boy’s hand*”).
- 242 See e.g. *The Economist*, June 30, 2011 (“*The southerners flex their muscles: A power vacuum is enabling Yemen’s southerners to do what they like*”).
- 243 *Gulf News*, Jan. 25, 2012 (“*Al Qaida militants withdraw from Rada’a town*”).
- 244 Personal communications with Aḥmad Nāṣir BāShu‘ayb of the Industrial Technical Institute in al-Ma‘allā, Aden, Feb. 7, 2011.
- 245 *Yemen Observer*, May 4, 2011 (“*Al-Qaeda kills Yemen soldiers to avenge Bin Laden*”).
- 246 Bin Lādin had been killed just a few days earlier in Pakistan and the AQAP had vowed to avenge his death.
- 247 Namely goats, Nile Cabbage (*Pistia stratiotus*) and the Indian House Crow (*Corvus splendens*). After ten years of in part fruitless efforts, the crow has been successfully eradicated by the Socotra Development and Conservation Programme in 2009 (a German sniper was flown in to kill the last remaining birds).
- 248 ‘Abd al-Kūrī has a surface 133 km<sup>2</sup> and about 300 inhabitants, Samḥa is 40 km<sup>2</sup> in size with about 100 inhabitants, and Darsa with its 10 km<sup>2</sup> is uninhabited. The western tip of ‘Abd al-Kūrī is just around 100 km east of Cape Guardafui (Horn of Africa).
- 249 When using the term ‘island’ in the following, it refers to the main island of Socotra only.
- 250 The red resin of the Socotra “Dragon Blood” Tree (*Dracaena cinnabari*) is an important traditional export product of the island. It is used by Yemeni women for blood stalling during menstruation and after child birth.
- 251 Mean annual rainfall for the years 1978-1989 (WRAY 1995, annex 3.2-12).
- 252 As these intercontinental stratospheric winds pass over Socotra they are caught by the over 1,500 meter high Ḥajjihir mountains and pushed fiercely down over the northern coast. “*The wind blows on the north coast, non-stop, day and night, for three months at approximately 90 kilometers per hour with some gusts at 180 kph, in the area of Hadibo, between Howlaf and Mori [...]. Even during the calmer months sea landings may still be difficult due to a combination of logistical problems, including the absence of adequate harbor facilities*” (Socotra Development and Conservation Programme (SDCP), leaflet “*Protecting Socotra*”, Ṣan‘ā’, April 2003).
- 253 Population shares are estimates by the author based on UNDP assessments for the formulation of the Socotra Biodiversity Project (YEM/96/G32) that was managed by the author from 2001-2004.
- 254 Personal communications at Socotra airport, Nov. 10, 2001.
- 255 At the site of an unpaved British colonial airstrip Yemen’s longest paved runway was built.
- 256 Besides salaries of locals who have found employment in the development and construction sector this includes also the salaries of migrant laborers who have taken permanent residence on Socotra and of temporary construction workers who come for specific assignments for short periods from the mainland (author’s estimates).
- 257 In November 2001 there were ten *qāt* sellers in Ḥadībū and two in Qalansiyya. In April 2005, 47 merchants were selling *qāt* in Ḥadībū and another eleven in Qalansiyya.
- 258 Author’s *qāt* seller interviews and market surveys on Socotra between Nov. 2001 and Apr. 2005.
- 259 On Fridays 20 and on Mondays 27 boxes of *qāt* (mostly reused *Kamarān* cigarette boxes - 40x50x60 cm) with each 350 *ḥabba* of *qāt* arrive on the island (November 2001). *Qāt* is mostly wrapped up into moist alfalfa and sowed into small jute sacks (*bandal*) or is wrapped into banana leaves or hollow banana stems.
- 260 An unknown amount of the ‘military *qāt*’ is resold by soldiers at a small profit outside the military camps.
- 261 Author’s estimate (see also calculation in table 42): ca. YR 2.1 million on the Friday plane and YR 2.9 million on the Monday plane. The average exchange rate in 2001 was YR 168 to the US dollar.
- 262 Figures are based on counts by the author at Socotra airport and in the Ḥadībū and Qalansiyya *qāt* markets, as well as on informal interviews with military personnel at Ṣan‘ā’ military airport and at Mūrī camp on Socotra during Nov. 2001 and Apr. 2005).
- 263 Author’s estimate (see also calculation in table 42). Weekly *qāt* deliveries represent an estimated YR 13.4 per week (around YR 5.3 million on the Friday plane and YR 8.1 million on the Monday plane). The average exchange rate in 2005 was YR 185 to the US dollar.
- 264 Author’s interviews with *qāt* sellers in Ḥadībū (27 persons) and in Qalansiyya (8) during Nov. 2001 and Apr. 2005. This included *qāt* sellers with established shops and such selling from sidewalks or cars.
- 265 For salary levels of civil servants and government employees see *Gatter, al-Haziāzi, al-Hakimi & Detalle* 2002 (Annex III: Employment Categories in the Yemeni Civil Service and Salary Grades).
- 266 Author’s interview with ‘Abd Allāh Sālim al-Nihmī, a *qāt* seller from Bayt al-Qāḍī in Ṣan‘ā’ governorate who has been selling *qāt* on Socotra since 1998 (Ḥadībū, Nov. 14, 2001) with his mainland partner, his brother ‘Alī Sālim al-Nihmī ( Ṣan‘ā’, Nov. 24, 2001).
- 267 To keep the *qāt* leaves from molding or becoming too dry in the fridges, the bunches are wrapped into paper tissues and are then carefully rolled into aluminum foil.

- 268 Ten bunches of each variety were weighed. The *qāt* bunches arriving on April 1, 2005 had a total projected weight of 1,186 kilograms (*Radā'ī* 253 kilos, *Sawṭī* 283, *al-Dāli'ī* 218, *'Ansī* 35, *Hamdānī* 340, and *Baladī* 57 kilos).
- 269 The calculation for average bunch weight and price respects the share of the different *qāt* cultivars in total *qāt* sales on Socotra.
- 270 The survey was carried out during April 2-7, 2005. 13 extension workers participated in the survey questioning 654 individuals. Of the latter, only nine did not want to answer the questions on either their background or their *qāt* habit. They were consequently excluded from the evaluation presented in the above table (these were seven soldiers and two women of tribal background). In Ḥadībū the survey was carried out in the central market quarter, the fishermen's quarter located where Wādī Ḥadībū empties into the sea, in upper Wādī Ḥadībū with its small gardens, and in the fairly new quarter inland at the foot of the Ḥajjhir mountains. In Mūrī the interviews did not take place in the military camp itself, as access was not granted, but on the road along the camp and in the shanty town erected by soldiers in the vicinity of the camp. This is a settlement of small scattered huts that are built out of rusty iron sheets (reused and flattened fuel barrels).
- 271 The survey is least representative for the tribal population that lives until today mostly in rural Socotra. As the survey included only the Ḥadībū and the Mūrī area, members of the tribal group where either urbanized individuals who had moved to Ḥadībū during the past decades and had partly taken up urban habits, but were still identifying themselves as tribal, or mountain dwellers who were on a short 'shopping tour' in Ḥadībū.
- 272 This category included temporary visitors from rural areas to Ḥadībū market as well as families of a tribal background that have recently taken up residence in Ḥadībū.
- 273 Soldiers were questioned in Ḥadībū as well as in the vicinity of Mūrī military camp, as no access to the camp itself was granted by military authorities. No female soldiers were stationed on Socotra in 2005 and none of the male soldiers interviewed had brought their families to the island.
- 274 This was a spontaneous questioning by the author in the fishing village at the estuary of Wādī Ḥadībū on April 6, 2005.
- 275 Personal communications in Ṣan'ā' on June 18, 2009. He was formerly National Programme Director of UNDP's Socotra Biodiversity Project.
- 276 Between 2001 and 2005, the total population of the village had remained relatively stable with 23 births, 15 deaths, and two incidents of emigration occurring during this period.
- 277 Personal communications with Shaykha Aḥmad, Head of the Women's Union, Qalansiyya, April 7, 2005.
- 278 Handwritten decree by the Ḥadībū local council in Arabic ("Republic of Yemen, Ministry of Local Administration Ḥaḍramawt, District of Ḥadībū, outgoing, date: 3/12/2007 (57), Subject: Prohibition of transporting *qāt* to Socotra island starting from 1-1-2008").
- 279 *Saba News Agency*, Jan. 5, 2008 ("Local Council of Socotra island has approved a ban...") and *Yemen Times*, Feb. 18, 2008 ("In Brief... Ban on transporting qat into Socotra").
- 280 *Yemen Times*, Apr. 10, 2000 ("Text of the annual report on Yemen of the Committee to Protect Journalists").
- 281 *Yemen Observer*, Nov 6, 2007 ("Bloody protests in Yemen").
- 282 The law seems also not to apply to imports from mainland Yemen, but just to foreign imports.
- 283 Personal communic. with a Socotran local politician, speaking on condition of anonymity, Ṣan'ā', June 14, 2009.
- 284 *Saba News Agency*, Feb. 17, 2008 ("Anti-qat festival was held on Saturday in Socotra island...").
- 285 Until 2007 al-Iryānī was National Programme Director of UNDP's Biodiversity Project on Socotra. See also *Yemen Times*, Mar. 24, 2008 (*Minister of Water and Environment to the Yemen Times: Water and environment are major concerns in Yemen*).
- 286 *Gatter & al-Asbahi* 2008 b, p. 13.
- 287 *Yemen Times*, May 19, 2008 ("Ruling party wins majority of governor seats amid absent rivalry").
- 288 For the ban see e.g. *Middle East International*, Oct. 14, 1999 ("Yemen - new resolve?").
- 289 Personal communications with Qaḥṭān Yaḥyā 'Abd al-Malik al-Aṣbaḥī, National Water Resources Authority (NWRA), June 16, 2009.
- 290 Letter addressed to the Governor of Ḥaḍramawt (in Arabic, dated June 22, 2009, Ref. No. 1470) from the Office of the President of the Republic, Bureau of Public Facilities and Services, signed 'Alī Muḥammad al-Ānisī, Chairman, National Security Agency and Director of Presidential Office. Enclosed was a memorandum sent earlier to the Director General of Ḥadībū district, requesting the enforcement of the president's directives. The governor was asked to "take the consequent measures in accordance with the directions"; and personal communications with 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Iryānī, Minister of Water and Environment (Ṣan'ā', Feb. 15, 2011 and by telephone on March 29, 2011).
- 291 Personal communications with Gerhard Lichtenthäler, GTZ Water Programme, Ṣan'ā', June 18, 2009.

- 292 Letter of *Yemenia* to its regional managers and regional sales managers on the “*Prohibition of Transporting Qat to Socotra*”, in Arabic, dated April 12, 2009.
- 293 *Felix Airways* started its operations in October 2008 and started servicing Socotra with its relatively small Bombardier CRJ200 aircraft (50 seats) in December 2008.
- 294 Civil Aviation and Meteorology Authority, Socotra International Airport, dated 14/04/2009, No.: 77, File: m/sh/a/d, Subject: General Circular No. 3 for the year 2009 addressed to airport security officer, political security officer, administrative staff, manager of local office of *Yemenia* airlines, and manager of local office of Felix (*al-Sa’ida*) airlines (in Arabic).
- 295 Personal communic. with ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Iryānī, Minister of Water & Environment, Ṣan‘ā’, June 18, 2009.
- 296 Personal communications with Qaḥṭān al-Aṣḥabī of NWRA, June 16, 2009.
- 297 Personal communications with Malik ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, Socotra Conservation & Development Programme (by telephone, May 21, 2009).
- 298 Personal communications with Gerhard Lichtenthäler, GTZ Water Programme, Ṣan‘ā’, June 18, 2009.
- 299 Personal communications with Malik ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, Socotra Conservation & Development Programme (Ṣan‘ā’, Feb. 16, 2011).
- 300 Personal communications with the Minister of Water and Environment, Ṣan‘ā’, June 18, 2009.
- 301 Personal communications with Qaḥṭān al-Aṣḥabī, NWRA, June 16, 2009.
- 302 Personal communications with the Minister of Water and Environment, Ṣan‘ā’, June 18, 2009.
- 303 Personal communications with ‘Abd Allāh ‘Alī, Socotra Conservation & Development Programme, Head of the Protected Area Management Unit (Ṣan‘ā’, Feb. 16, 2011) and ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Iryānī, Minister of Water and Environment (Ṣan‘ā’, Feb. 15, 2011 and by telephone on March 29, 2011).
- 304 Personal communications with Qaḥṭān al-Aṣḥabī, NWRA, Feb. 12, 2011.
- 305 Article 3 of the *Republican Resolution No (275) of 2000* (see literature list: *Republic of Yemen 2000c*).
- 306 Personal communications with Tāriq ‘Abū al-Hawā’, UNDP Programme for Poverty Alleviation and Biodiversity Conservation on Socotra (Ḥadībū, March 26, 2004). See also *The Guardian*, Apr. 28, 2001 (“*Tomorrow’s world: Socotra - is this the next Caribbean?*”). Introduction of pesticides for qat cultivation would constitute a serious threat to the health of Socotra’s population as the islands extremely karstic underground would conduct the substances for the most part unfiltered into the groundwater.
- 307 Personal communications with Qaḥṭān al-Aṣḥabī, NWRA, Feb. 12, 2011.
- 308 Personal communications with ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Iryānī, Minister of Water and Environment (Ṣan‘ā’, Feb. 15, 2011 and by telephone on March 29, 2011).
- 309 While airport authorities in Ṣan‘ā’ continue screening baggage for *qāt* until today, authorities in al-Mukallā once again began to close both eyes on the trade as early as October 2009 (personal communications with Malik ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, Socotra Conservation & Development Programme (Ṣan‘ā’, Feb. 16, 2011). See also *Yemen Times*, Jan. 10, 2011 (“*Socotra’s economic needs clash with environmental protection*”) and *Yemen Observer*, Jan 16, 2010 (“*Qat banned in Socotra*”). According to Gerhard Lichtenthäler (GIZ Water Programme), who visited the island in Jan./Feb. 2011, *qāt* was sold openly in downtown Ḥadībū where one shop operated with a large “*qāt*” sign (personal communications in Ṣan‘ā’, Feb. 14, 2011).
- 310 Personal communications with the director of a ministerial branch office on Socotra, speaking on condition of anonymity (Ṣan‘ā’, Feb. 16, 2011).
- 311 *Saba News Agency*, Dec. 23, 2010 (“*President visits Socotra Archipelago*”).
- 312 Personal communications with Qaḥṭān al-Aṣḥabī of NWRA (Ṣan‘ā’, Feb. 12, 2011) and with Malik ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, Socotra Conservation & Development Programme (Ṣan‘ā’, Feb. 16, 2011).
- 313 Personal communications with Gerhard Lichtenthäler, GIZ Water Programme, Eschborn (Germany), April 7, 2011.
- 314 *Yemen Observer*, June 15, 2009 (“*Constitutional amendments proposed to give more power to local authorities in Yemen*”) and *Yemen Times*, May 28, 2009 (“*When will Socotra archipelago become a governorate?*”).
- 315 *Yemen Observer*, Mar. 16, 2010 (“*Socotra connects to the world*”).
- 316 Socotra is 500 km from the Somali port of Bosaso as compared to 530 km from al-Mukallā. While from al-Mukallā ships have to travel across the open sea, ships from Bosaso can follow the Somali coast for 250 kilometers and then do ‘island hopping’ to Socotra via ‘Abd al-Kūrī, Samḥa and Darsa – a potentially much safer trade route, of course only when ruling out pirates.
- 317 Personal communications with Michael Odenwald, University of Konstanz, April 6, 2011.
- 318 E.g. *The Guardian*, June 12, 2007 (“*Guns, grenades and GPS: the brutal reality of Somalia’s hi-tech pirates*”).