

EDITOR'S PREFACE

There are few publications regarding Yemen that omit the phenomenon of *qāt*. Of the abundance of books and articles dedicated to this drug, not a small number address the question of whether *qāt* is in fact a 'drug'. Even within the European Union, until today this question is discussed controversially: In Germany *qāt* is banned, in Great Britain it is legal, and in the Netherlands a potential ban is debated fervently at present. Is not everything yet known about this substance that shapes the daily life of Yemen and of Yemenis to a greater extent than so many other things?

A closer analysis of the literature on *qāt* shows that we are very well informed about the history, pharmacology, biochemistry, the health effects as well as the social aspects of *qāt*. But a literature review soon reveals that little is thus far known on the economics, not to mention the politics, of *qāt*. The political dimension of the phenomenon – a pivotal topic – has so far been almost entirely neglected by scientific research: In what way is *qāt* an instrument of power in the political sense?

Peer Gatter presents a remarkable work hereto, based on his intensive knowledge of the subject matter: For many years he lived in Yemen and, at the periphery of his work for the United Nations and the World Bank and as an advisor in various Yemeni ministries and member of international committees, gathered an impressive material on *qāt* – always accompanied by participant observation and numerous field surveys.

He thereby gained deep insights into social, economic and political processes surrounding the *qāt* issue that had so far remained sealed even to the eyes of experts on the region. Peer Gatter was given access to materials that open entirely new perspectives on the "phenomenon of *qāt*".

The revolutionary movements that have held Yemen in their grip for the past year have lent the study further relevance, as the *qāt* problem plays a central role in this context. Indeed, it can be said without hesitation: power-plays, corruption, clientelism, and the personalized political system of Yemen become understandable only if the *qāt* factor is appropriately taken into account.

In this respect, the work in hand stimulates a deeper understanding of the functioning of Yemeni society. It not only encapsulates previous knowledge on *qāt*, but also embellishes it with a highly important component – the political dimension.

Horst Kopp, June 2012