A Handbook and Reader of Ottoman Arabic

EDITED BY ESTHER-MIRIAM WAGNER
13. QAHWA ‘COFFEE’
(16TH–17TH CENTURIES)

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Transcription

"قهوة" من دفع الأصر عن كلام أهل مصر للمغربي: 1

يقولون قهوة للمستخرج من البن وليس في اللغة قال (القهوة الخمرة والشبعة المحمكة واللبن المخض كالقهوة كعدد والرائحة والقهوان النسيض السمسم وافقهي دام على شرب القهوة وأطاع السلطان) انتهى ولم ينص على القهوة المستعملة الآن حتى أن البن الذي هو اصلها ليس له ذكر في كتاب الطب وانظر عدد ذكر صاحب القاموس لها هل حددت بعده ذكر لي شيخنا الشيخ الحاكمي ان صاحبه المرحوم أبو السعود الذي كان يكتب تقرير شيخه الشيخ القدسي الواعظ وهو على الكسري وعذب يوما في بعض المجدع وكان الشيخ الحاكمي هناك فسمعه يقول وهذه القهوة التي ابتلت الخلائق بها وورد في الحديث النهي عنها لأنه ورد النهي عن القهوة وهي هذه قهامة الشيخ الحاكمي وكانه لا يعرفه أصلا فقال يا شيخ الجمهور ما تقول فقال له كانك ممن انتموا健康发展ية اقتبل بها فقال تأمل ما تقول فكليب على النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم ما تعريف الخمر اليس انه عصير العنب فقال قل فان القهوة منه فسكت وخشى انتي أعلم الأستاذ البكري بذلك فارسل بعض الأصحاب للصلح وإنه من الآن لا يذكر القهوة بشي فرضيت ولم أخبر الأستاذ ولاستاذ مرحلي كثير فيها وللمشيخ أبي الفتح المالكي وقلت في قهوة القشر ارى فضيلة اذ ناى من ليس فيه مرحمة حكمتها من أجل صالح بينا فيها لها من قهوة محكمة.

1 Zack (2009, 202–3). My transcription here follows that of Zack’s edition, leaving orthographical particularities from the manuscript source uncorrected.
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3 Muḥammad al-Bakrî, Dīwān (MS 59 Bibliothèque Nationale du Royaume du Maroc, 1586, fols 99b–100a). It is important to note the coincidence of the manuscript’s copy date and the death of its author. Also, the first three stanzas appear in Kīlānī (1965, 194–95). My thanks to Adam Sabra for providing me with the manuscript source.

شعر قهوة البن لأبراهيم ابن المنفدر من الكوؤوس السائرة بأعيان المئة العاشرة للغزي:ِ

إبراهيم الشيخ الفاضل الأديب الشاعر برزان الدين ابن المنفدر الفاخري شاعر القاهرة من شعره:

في قهوة البن:

يقول عفوني قهوة البن مرّة وشربة حلو الماء ليس لها مثل

فقلت على ما عنيها بمرارة قد اختبرتها فأخبر لنفسك ما يحلو

وقال:

أرى قهوة البن في عصراً على شربها الناس قد اجتمعوا

وصارت لشرابها عادة فليس تضر ولا تنفع

وقال وهو مشهور عنه:

يا عائباً لشراب قهوتنا التي تشفي شفاء النفس من أمراضها

أو ما تراها وهي في فنجانها تحكى سواد العين وسط بيضها

ولبعضهم في هذا المعنى:

اشرب هنيئاً قهوة البن التي تحلم مع الأخوان والخلان

سواء في النبض من فنجانها تحكى سواد العين للإنسان

قلت أحسن منه قولتي:

إشرب من القهوة صاعين ولو بذل الوق العين

سواء في بيض فنجانها كأنها الإنسان من عين

موشح قهوة البن من ديوان محمد البكري:

أدر القهوة في كأس البها

قهوة البن وناهيك بها
Translation

‘Coffee’ from Dafʿ al-iṣr ‘an kalām ahl Miṣr by al-Maghribī:

[The Egyptians] say: coffee (qahwa) for the extract of the bean, but this usage is not in the standardised language [according to
al-Fayruzabadi], who says, "qahwa is wine, a thoroughly\textsuperscript{4} satiating drink, and a froth-less, clear\textsuperscript{5} yogurt. It is like qiha/qaha (one of the names of the narcissus) [?] and it is an aroma. The word qahwān means a large aged goat with two horns. The verb aqhi\textsuperscript{6} means to persist in drinking qahwa and to obey the sovereign." These definitions don’t indicate coffee used today, and even the bean, which is its source, has no mention in the medical textbooks, so bear in mind their lack of mention by the author of al-Qāmūs—did it occur after him? Shaykh al-Ḥākimī\textsuperscript{7} gave me an account of his deceased companion, Abū al-Ṣāʿūd,\textsuperscript{8} who was writing down the statements of his master, the preacher Shaykh al-Qudsī one day when he was preaching in one of the mosques.\textsuperscript{9} Shaykh al-Ḥākimī was there, and heard him say, “Coffee (qahwa) is that with which the people are afflicted, and its prohibition appears in the Ḥadīth. This is so because of the prohibition against qahwa (i.e., khamr).” Then Shaykh al-Ḥākimī stood as if he did not know this already, and said, “O Shaykh, take note of what you’re saying.” So, Shaykh al-Qudsī said to him, “It is as though you are of those who are afflicted by qahwa.” So, al-Ḥākimī replied, “Contemplate what you are saying.” And because

\textsuperscript{4}While the original reads muhmaka, this is likely an error on al-Maghribi’s part, as the edition of al-Qāmūs al-muḥīṭ shows muhkama. See al-Shami and Ahmad (2008, 1378).

\textsuperscript{5}Makhḍ (sic – read maḥḍ).

\textsuperscript{6}Sic – read aqhā.

\textsuperscript{7}As in Zack’s study, this figure remains unidentified.

\textsuperscript{8}As in Zack’s study, this figure remains unidentified.

\textsuperscript{9}Mājid (sic – read masājīd).
it seemed that he was lying about the Prophet [he added,] “What is the definition of wine (khamr)? Is it not the juice of grapes?” Shaykh al-Qudsī said, “Yes.” So, al-Ḥākimī said, “So, where does coffee fit in this?” He was then speechless and feared that I would inform al-Ustādh al-Bakrī of this. So, he sent some companions to make peace over the matter, and to this day he doesn’t mention coffee in anything. So, I was pleased, and didn’t inform al-Ustādh [al-Bakrī], who has many poems in praise of coffee—as does Shaykh Abū al-Fath al-Mālikī. I wrote the following:

I witnessed a virtue in the coffee husk
when he who is without compassion is far
I judged it fairly to make peace between us
as this virtue from coffee is a just arbiter

Entry for Ibrāhīm ibn al-Muballāṭ from al-Kawākib al-sā’ira bi-aʿyān al-mi’a al-ʿāshira by Najm al-Dīn al-Ghazzī:

The Eminent Shaykh, litterateur, poet Ibrāhīm Burhān al-Dīn ibn al-Muballāṭ al-Qāhirī, poet of Cairo. The following comes from his poetry on the coffee bean:

My critic says, “coffee is a bitter drink
water is the sweet beverage without equal”
So, I replied, “what you disparage with bitterness
I’ve chosen—So, chose for yourself that which is sweet”

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10 Given the prominence of the Bakrī family during this period it is difficult to ascertain to which member this reference is made. Al-Maghribī died nearly a quarter century after Muḥammad al-Bakrī, author of the below mentioned muwashshah. It is possible but improbable that al-Maghribī’s reference is being made to the same al-Bakrī.

11 Muftī and poet who lived in Damascus, died 1567/8.
He has also said:

These days, I see the coffee bean
is what people have agreed upon drinking
Drinking it became a custom
it neither hurts nor helps

He is also noted for these lines:

O critic of the imbibing of our coffee which
cures the soul of what ails it
Or you do not see it, when in its cup
it speaks the eye amidst its white

Another poet has a verse with the same motif:

Drink, savoring the coffee bean
that is sweet with brothers and friends
A blackness within the whiteness of the cup
speaks of the man’s eyeball

I [al-Ghazzī] have said even better than this, here:

Drink two cups of coffee
even if it costs an extra coin, silver or gold
A blackness in the white of its cups
as though they were of the man’s eyes

Coffee *Muwashshah* from the *Dīwān* of Muḥammad al-Bakrī:¹²

Pass the coffee in the glass at hand
of the coffee bean, how excellent, how grand
What sound reason considers contraband

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¹² For commentary on the first three stanzas of this *muwashshah* see Larkin (2006, 231). Note my translation here departs selectively from the literal text in order to retain the rhyme scheme of the poem.
So, friend, for me have a drink poured

Adorn the cups, hear what I disperse
it’s the drink of the masters of verse
Allah’s privileged, endowed with his forthcoming force
for the protection of the lord

Upon us is an ignorant censor
who with invalid speech is a lie dispenser
a fleeting death, a memory obscure
he has gone with wine, poured

It’s said at the slightest drink hearts grow intoxicated
just as the brave of the unseen get inebriated
the matter now finished, the hearts morally obligated
But surely, the glasses I’ve scored.

Though he denies what he nears
there’s nothing better than these frontiers
people’s most joyous practice, they’re the best, it appears,
at drawing out the wine, poured.

**Commentary**

The role of coffee in early modern Ottoman society has been addressed from many historiographical perspectives, from its importance as a traded commodity to the religious-legal debates surrounding its illicit status in Islamic law. What is less understood, perhaps, is the intellectual and literary impact of coffee. Presented here are three samples from the linguistic and literary corpus of 16th- and 17th-century Ottoman Arabic. First, an abridged version of Yūsuf al-Maghrībī’s (d. 1019/1610), entry on
coffee (*qahwa*) in his dictionary of colloquial Egyptian Arabic, followed by a few verses of coffee poetry from Najm al-Dīn al-Ghazzi’s (d. 1060/1650) centenary biographical dictionary. Lastly, a *muwashshah* (strophic poem) by Muḥammad al-Bakrī (d. 994/1586), in which the subject of coffee merges into that of wine, demonstrating the generic link in between the two substances in Arabic literature. While these samples have primarily been translated here for readers’ enjoyment, they also invite us to think of coffee as a linguistic and literary problematic during the Ottoman period.