

“A drink for the Soul”: the Coffee tree and Coffee as a Symbol of the Arab National Mentality¹

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Abstract. In the complex geopolitical situation of the beginning of the twenty-first century and with the change of the vector of interests towards the countries of the East, attention to all aspects of the life of the peoples of these states is increasing due to the urgent need to understand their cultures, lifestyle, and the world around them. These peoples are increasingly active in the international arena, their role in various fields is becoming more noticeable, and it is important to interact with them at various levels. To do this, it is necessary to know what this people live by, what their priorities are, what is important or secondary for them. The complexity of intercultural communication lies in the fact that the national character and mentality of representatives of different linguistic cultures is based on the existing realities of a particular people's life, its moral values and attitudes, through which various ethnic communities identify themselves and fix their place and purpose in this world. Symbols and images reflecting these ideas take either a material or verbal shell and convey an ethnic picture of the world of a particular people, which is completely different from the ideas of other ethnic groups about what surrounds them.

To understand a representative of another linguistic consciousness, it may not be enough to master the vocabulary and grammar of a foreign language. Significant elements of the language in their semantic part also contain an extra-linguistic component, so-called “background knowledge”, which can be gleaned from the history, mythology, literature, and folklore of the people with whom we are interacting. This extra-linguistic component, according to the author, is of great importance for understanding national mentality and national character. It helps to identify other driving forces of the actions of different peoples in the process of intercultural communication, along with their political and economic interests. In this article, the author considers one of the symbols of the national mentality of the Arabs – the coffee tree and its derivative – the coffee drink, which plays an important role in creating a national collective portrait of Arab society. She also attempts to show how and why they occupy such an important place in the Arab national consciousness.

Keywords: Arabs, Arabic language, mentality, customs and traditions, proverbs, sayings, symbol, ethics

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Living in a world surrounded by all manner of nature's creations, we only pay attention to those that have the biggest impact on our lives. We interact most with plants and animals, so it is no coincidence that they become spirit animals or symbols of the most significant character traits or moral norms for us.

In Arab-Muslim culture, palm, olive and coffee trees have earned the status of national symbols, while the cedar tree is the national symbol of a single country, namely Lebanon. These plants are represented in the traditions and customs of the Arab peoples – in their folklore, religious beliefs, myths, fairy tales, proverbs, sayings, and various other works.

The author of this article chose to write about the *coffee tree* – الشَّجَرَةُ [shadjarat al'bunni] – as a symbol of Yemen, and the *coffee drink* – قَهْوَةٌ [qahwa tun] – as a symbol of the Arab mentality as a whole. Using descriptive, cultural, historical and comparative methods to perform a linguistic analysis of various expressions and texts, the author seeks to highlight the connection of this plant with the mentality of the Arab peoples. The author is convinced that such a linguistic-cultural approach to the topic will help us move closer to understanding someone else's way of thinking, to developing the ability to quickly find common ground with representatives and natives of a different linguistic consciousness and mentality.

However, before proceeding to a consideration of the essence of the topic at hand – why coffee has become a symbol of the national mentality and character of the Arab peoples – we should, in our opinion, at least briefly touch upon the questions: What is a symbol? What is national mentality? What is national character? Further, how are they related and how do they correlate with the national characteristics of various Arab peoples?

The *Philosophical Encyclopedic Dictionary* describes a symbol as follows: “A symbol is an idea, image or object that has its own content and at the same time represents some other content in a generalized, non-expanded form”². To become a symbol and part of social and cultural life, an object or phenomenon of the surrounding world must be used for a specific purpose in the knowledge and understanding of the surrounding reality or in the person's activities.

In his work *Essays on Ancient Symbolism and Mythology*, the Russian and Soviet philosopher and researcher of antiquity Alexey Losev, discussing various concepts of ancient symbolism of Western philosophers and writers, German idealists in particular, posited his own vision of the symbol: “... the symbol is the indistinguishable identity of the general and the particular, the ideal and the real, the infinite and the finite” (Losev 1993: 13).

We can thus say that a symbol is a real object or phenomenon of the surrounding world, the natural characteristics of which become an ideal reflection of social phenomenon, personal qualities, and forms of human behaviour in society – that is,

² *Filosofskiy entsiklopedicheskiy slovar'* [Philosophical Encyclopedic Dictionary]. 2009. Moscow: INFRA-M.

it is imbued with “general and infinite other content” while remaining itself. Symbols emerge in the process of the historical development of a society, when clear ideas about the most important values and moral norms that reflect the main interests of this society are being formed. This is what underlies the formation of the national mentality and what is manifested in the national character.

The concept of “*national mentality*” has not yet been given a clear and unambiguous definition. Like the experts, dictionaries give close but not identical formulations. The *New Encyclopedic Dictionary* defined “*mentality*” as a “*way of thinking, a set of mental skills and spiritual attitudes inherent in an individual or social group*”³. Foreign dictionaries, for example the French explanatory dictionary *Le Petit Robert de la Langue Française*, describe mentality as “*a set of ideas and images that forms the basis of the way of thinking of a certain social group or individual associated with it*”⁴.

In his work *The National Mentality Phenomenon*, Jusup Balasagyn Kyrgyz National University professor A. A. Aytbayev offers his own definition of the phenomenon: “*National mentality is a form of national self-consciousness that has been conditioned by historical traditions, customs and social relations that corresponds to a certain level of material production and is an indicator of the viability and spiritual development of a nation, a combination of certain virtues and social and emotional qualities aimed at transforming reality*” (Ajtbaev 2022).

However, the definition of the phenomenon of mentality that most closely matches that of the author is the one given by E. A. Anufriev, who writes, “... *developing, forming and evolving historically and genetically, mentality is a stable set of socio-psychological, spiritual and moral qualities and traits that are difficult to change, taken in their organic integrity [...] that determine all aspects of the life of a given community and the individuals that make it up*” (Anufriev 1999: 450–451).

As for national character, this, according to the author, refers to the emotional and mental side (mental make-up) of the manifestation of national mentality, based, as we mentioned above, on the ideas, interests, feelings, and moral, religious and spiritual values of a particular people.

Vladimir Dal described character as “*a person’s disposition, his moral compass and qualities, the properties of his heart and soul*”⁵. Meanwhile, Russian Academy of Sciences member Dmitry Likhachev did not question the existence of national character, writing, “*National traits cannot be exaggerated or made exceptional. National features are nothing but characteristics that stand out, not qualities that others may lack [...] They become visible only when viewed from the outside and in comparison, and they must thus be understandable for other peoples, they must exist in some kind of arrange-*

³ *Novy entsiklopedicheskiy slovar'* [New Encyclopedic Dictionary]. 2002. Moscow: Bol'shaia Ros. Entsikl.: Ripol Klassik. P. 713.

⁴ *Le petit Robert* (Dictionnaire alphabétique & analogique de la langue française). Sec. gén. de la rédaction Alan Rey/Paris: Société Du Nouveau Littre, 1972. P. 1070.

⁵ Dal' V.I. (1801-1872). *Tolkovy slovar' zhivogo velikorusskogo iazyka* [Tekst]: [v 4-h t.] [Explanatory Dictionary of the Living Great Russian Language]. 8th ed. Moscow: Russkiy iaz., 1981–1982. P. 542.

ment among other peoples” (Likhachev 1984: 19–20). In other words, evaluating these national traits necessarily involves comparing them with how a representative of a different nation perceives the same phenomena.

The link that exists between national mentality and national character on the one hand and various phenomena and objects of nature, including trees, on the other, is reflected in myths, legends, religious beliefs and folklore, and has been studied in detail by A. N. Afanasiev (Afanas'ev 1982) and B. A. Ryabkov (Rybakov 1987; 2013). Russian historian and social commentator Nikolai Kostomarov (Kostomarov 2019) wrote about the role of trees in the beliefs of the ancient Slavs, while V. V. Usacheva (Usachyova 2008) devoted an entire tome to the spiritual connection between the culture of the Slavs and their existence alongside plant life.

The question of how plants, including trees, became symbols that reflect the national mentality and character of the Arab peoples remains a little-studied area among experts. The author has broached the subject in a number of articles, for example, “The Meaning of Linguistic and Extra-Linguistic Components of Arabic Paremic Units and Speech Turns in the Process of Communication on the Example of “Coffee Traditions” (Kukhareva 2010), “Culture of Agriculture in Arabic Proverbs and Phrases” (Kukhareva 2016), and “Linguistic and Cultural Significance of the Concepts ‘Palm’ and ‘Dates’ in Arabic Proverbs and Sayings” (Kukhareva 2015).

Yet this is an extremely promising and interesting topic. There are numerous Arabic proverbs, sayings and parables about various kinds of trees and their meaning in people’s lives. On the other hand, however, while there are dozens of proverbs about certain symbolic trees, others barely appear at all in folklore.

Coffee. The Coffee Tree

Having chosen the coffee tree as the symbolic tree for our research, we will draw attention to the fact that the tree itself is only depicted on the state flag and emblem of the Republic of Yemen in the form of a branch with berries growing from it. However, in Arabic folklore, including Yemeni folklore, we find passages that refer to a *drink* made from the beans of this tree – i.e. *coffee*. And while coffee trees grow in many countries that have a suitable climate, and some that are far from Yemen, such as Brazil, are far superior in terms of coffee bean production, the history of the cultivation and production of coffee will forever be inextricably linked with this Arab country.

The debate about where the coffee tree came from has not yet been fully resolved, although most researchers believe that Ethiopia is the birthplace of wild coffee. As for the coffee drink, legend has it that a shepherd in the town of Kaffa was the first to notice how his goats became playful and more active after chewing on the leaves of a certain tree. He told his fellow tribesman about what he had observed, and the priest of the local monastery then brewed the leaves and berries of this plant, after which he was

convinced of the invigorating effect of the resulting drink. The priest decided that the concoction would be useful for helping the monks get through long prayers. This story dates back to 850 AD, although there is no direct evidence to suggest it is actually true.

We do not know for sure, but some Arabic sources indicate that coffee trees were grown in Yemen as far back as 1100. Other sources state that the coffee beans were first brought from Ethiopia in the middle of the ninth century according to the Muslim calendar, which would make it the middle of the fifteenth century on the Christian calendar, by a certain Ali bin Omar al Shadhili. This is where the history of the drink on the Arabian Peninsula and in the Middle East begins. It would make sense that coffee first came to Yemen from Ethiopia as both a drink and a crop, since the ties between Ethiopia and South Arabia are known from biblical legends, as well as from Ethiopian and Arabic legends from the time of the Queen of Sheba and King Solomon. Moreover, the first Muslims, who were persecuted by their opponents when Islam was in its infancy, found refuge in Christian Ethiopia. And it was primarily the Ethiopians to whom the Prophet Muhammad addressed messages and proposals to convert to Islam.

As for the cultivation of coffee trees in Yemen, the person who is credited with this, according to various sources, is the Sufi Yemeni monk Jamaldin al-Nabhani from Aden, who began growing the plant after returning from a trip to Ethiopia. The ancient city of Mocha was known more than any other for cultivating coffee plantations.

Coffee as a drink first became popular in the highest circles of Yemeni society, and then became a favourite drink of all Yemenis. Peasants started to cultivate the coffee tree in the country's mountainous areas, carefully guarding their monopoly on the coffee bean trade, as well as the secrets of growing the plant. The export of seedlings and fertile coffee beans was strictly prohibited. It was thanks to this that Yemen became the first exporter of coffee beans.

While we are on the subject of coffee the drink, it is worth paying attention to the etymology of this word. In Arabic, coffee is called قَهْوَة [qahwa]. It comes from the verb قَهِيَ [qahiia], which means “to not want, to turn away from something”, for example, from food, “to not have an appetite”. The great Arab poet Abu Nuwas, who lived in the eighth- ninth centuries AD, used the word qahwa in his poems, even rhapsodizing about it. This led to the misconception that Abu Nuwas liked coffee. But the poet died long before people supposedly knew about what exactly was in this drink, in 816 AD. Abu Nuwas was famous for his drinking poems, glorifying feasts and the obligatory companion of these get-togethers – wine. Living in the era of strict Sharia rules established by the Abbasid rulers, Abu Nuwas hid the true hero of many of his works – wine – behind the screen of the euphemism “qahwa”: “a distraction from the food, something that gives pleasure even without it”. It is for this reason that wine was for a long time called “Abu Nuwas coffee”.

But back to Yemen. The people of this country have developed certain rituals for how to make and drink coffee. For example, before drinking coffee, you should wash your hands and rinse your mouth in order to feel the full taste of this magnificent drink. In some other Arab countries, it is customary to drink a glass of water before

coffee, rather than rinsing your mouth. The process of making Yemeni coffee is not very different from the well-known traditional method: the beans are roasted directly in their shells on a baking pan, and then crushed in a mortar with a special beater. The ground coffee is then brewed in a coffee pot (إبريق [ibruk] or دَلَّة [dalla] in Arabic), being brought to the boil twice. This makes the drink thick and gives it a strong flavour. But what gives Yemeni coffee its extraordinary taste is the seasonings used. These may include salt, ginger, cloves, butter and other spices, which are added to the coffee after it has been brewed. But there is one special type of coffee that is believed to be the most delicious in Yemen. It is called *qishr* (from the common Arabic قَشْرَة, قَشْر [qishr, qishra] meaning “skin” or “peel”). It is brewed from the dried pulp of the coffee berry, which makes the drink more of a fruit compote than coffee, although it contains just as much caffeine, if not more, than a cup of traditional coffee⁶.

The coffee drink then made its way from Yemen to Mecca, Syria and Egypt, before spreading throughout the Middle East. It landed in Turkey in the middle of the fifteenth century, and two centuries later, it started its victorious march around the world. In 1645, the people of Venice got their first taste of the drink. In 1650, it appeared in England, and in 1652, a native of Turkey opened London's first ever coffee shop. It is generally accepted that Yemen lost its monopoly on coffee production when enterprising Dutch traders and missionaries stole a few coffee seedlings and took them to Java and Sumatra, which were dependent on Holland at the time. It was from that moment that coffee started to be grown all over the world, climate permitting⁷.

However, we should note that coffee's road to world domination was not always a smooth one. In 1511, a fatwa (a legal ruling on a point of Islamic law) was issued in Mecca condemning coffee and those who drank it, and outlawing the drink, which, according to religious figures, had a similar effect to alcohol on the human body. Coffee lovers protested, however, and other fatwas repealing this order were issued after it was proven that coffee does not adversely affect the mind or senses⁸.

The place where coffee has traditionally been drunk is called قَهْوَة [qahwa] in Arabic, meaning “coffee,” or مَقْهَى [mhan], which means a place where coffee is served, a coffee house. It was usually creative folk, as well as lawyers, teachers, newspaper editors, etc. who got together there. It is no coincidence, for example, that in Egypt, well-known names are associated with these establishments, and with coffee itself. These include the nineteenth century Muslim reformer and politician Al-Afghani, the world-renowned Egyptian novelist and winner of the 1988 Nobel Prize in Literature Naguib Mahfouz, the politician Saad Zaghloul, who served as Prime Minister of Egypt in 1924, and others. What is more, the pride of place that coffee houses occupy in Arab

⁶ Chem znamenito proizvodstvo jemenskogo kofe? [What is the Yemeni Way of Making Coffee Famous For?]. URL: <http://cupstea.ru/vidy-kofe/jemenskij.html> (accessed 9.07.2022).

⁷ Istoriia kofe. Legendy o proiskhozhdenii kofe [The History of Coffee. Legends about the Origin of Coffee]. URL: http://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Istoriya_kofe (accessed 9.07.2022).

⁸ Al'-kahva fi t-tariih [Coffee in History] (Arab.). URL: <http://hjeen.com/coffee-in-history/> (accessed 28.06.2022).

society is additionally marked by the fact that many of them have proper names: *Kat-kut*, *Alliva*, *Alibaba*, *Cairo*, and so on. It is here where heated debates or discussions of the latest news take place, where punters play backgammon with abandon, or simply watch TV. You can often find musicians playing live at coffee shops, with the regulars joining in, and listen to folk songs. In other words, coffee houses have always been an important element of social life in Arab countries⁹. As such, coffee becomes a symbol of creative inspiration, open social and political dialogue, and the embodiment of the national spirit.

After our short digression into the history of how coffee appeared in and spread throughout Arab and other countries, let us now return to the question of why the coffee tree became a symbol of Yemen, and the coffee drink a symbol of hospitality in almost every single Arab country without exception.

In order to do this, we will investigate how the linguistic and extralinguistic content of Arabic expressions that refer to long-standing traditions associated with the preparation, serving and drinking of coffee interact with and influence each other as elements of the national consciousness and mentality of the Arab people.

Coffee is of great significance to Arabs. It symbolizes hospitality, nobility, generosity, and the true Arab character. The camel milk had once served as such a symbol, but it gradually gave way to coffee. Coffee is served anytime, anywhere. It is offered to guests at parties, and to customers in a shop if they have to wait in a queue.

Earlier in this article, we intimated that coffee has become a kind of symbol of belonging to the intelligentsia, and it is thus no coincidence that many representatives of creative professions in Arab countries have dedicated countless profound lines to the drink. For example, the famous Syrian poet Nizar Qabbani is known to have said, *"When I drink coffee with you, I feel that the first coffee tree was planted especially for us"*. He also authored the lines: *"Coffee is an old grandmother whose good-natured grandchildren come to greet her in the morning and in the evening, and I am her biggest admirer"*¹⁰. The famous Palestinian poet and public figure Mahmoud Darwish similarly described what he felt when he drank coffee: *"This is why coffee is the only thing that gives you that reflective silence in the early morning, when you lazily sip some water alone, lost in a creative world with only your thoughts and the things around you"*; *"I want (to breathe in) the smell of coffee; I want nothing but the smell of coffee; I want (to smell) the aroma of coffee every day"*; *"words desecrate the first cup of coffee, for she is the virgin of the early morning"*¹¹. It is clear from these statements that Arabs put coffee on the same level as a most cherished person, such as a grandmother or loved one. Coffee is an aura that surrounds a person who muses on both their inner world and

⁹ Al'-makahi at-tarihija l'-misrija... Sirr s-savrat va saniat s-skafat ash-shaabija [Egyptian Historical Coffee Shops. The Secret of Revolutions and the Workshop of Folk Culture] (Arab.). URL: <http://raseef22.net/article/15195-historical-egyptian-cafes> (accessed 9.07.2022)

¹⁰ Hikam ani l'-kahva va amsal' va akval' ani l'-kahva [Aphorisms, Proverbs and Sayings About Coffee] (Arab.). URL: <https://www.7srey.com//عن-الكهوه-امثال-واقوال-عن-الكهوه> (accessed 25.06.2022).

¹¹ Ibid.

the world around them. Coffee is a fresh start to a new day. Arab people are never in a hurry when they are enjoying a good cup of coffee. All this is closely connected with such moral and behavioural norms of the Arab mentality as “*not breaking family ties*” and deliberateness, which, according to the Arab ideas of dignity and nobility, come *from the Almighty*, in contrast to *fussiness* and *haste*, which come *from Satan*. In folklore, this attitude to coffee found its expression in the proverb: لَوَجْهٌ بَنِيَّضٌ لِّكُنْ سَمْرًا، لَقَهْوَةٌ [‘al-qahwa samra wa lyakin btubayyid l’wadjh] – “Black coffee makes people happy” (literally: “Black coffee turns your face white”) (Lyubani 1999: 610). This expression contains the phrase “to make the face white”, or “to whiten the face”, which means “his/her face lit up; he/she brightened up”. This very much reflects the feelings described by Mahmoud Darwish, who takes great pleasure in breathing in the aroma of coffee, which he drinks while relaxing.

Coffee has become such an important part of the lives of Arab people that they cannot imagine a world without it. According to Nizar Qabbani, most Arabs start and end their day with a cup of coffee. This is reflected in a number of Arabic proverbs اَلْقَهْوَةُ رَأْسُ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ [‘al-qahwa za’ima] – “Coffee is the head of everything” (Lyubani 1999: 610); الْعَصْرُ قَهْوَةٌ تُفَوِّتُ وَلَا مَصْرٌ رَحْلَةً فَوِّتَ [Fawwit rihlyat masr wi la tfawwit l’-asr] – “Better to miss a trip to the capital than a morning cup of coffee”; عَزِيمَةُ الْقَهْوَةِ [‘Al-qahwa ‘azima] – “Coffee is a reason for getting together” (Lyubani 1999: 610). A linguistic analysis of the first proverb tells us that it contains the word *za’im*, which means “leader” or “head”. This could be understood as a morning cup of coffee giving you strength, “leading you”, throughout the day. In the second proverb, a cup of coffee is more important than a trip to the capital city. At the end of the working day, Arabs prefer to take their time over a cup of coffee, rather than rush for a train leaving for the capital. Here, we again see the attitude of Arab people to the rhythm and flow of life: deliberateness and self-respect are virtues. In the third proverb, coffee is denoted by the word *‘azima*, which translates as “intention”, “determination”, or “invitation”. In other words, coffee is a good reason to meet up, have a chat, get to know someone, or just spend quality time with a loved one.

However, it is interesting that, unlike the palm, olive and cedar trees, neither the coffee tree, much less coffee as a drink, is mentioned even once in the Bible or the Quran, or the Hadith, which gives reason to believe that the peoples of the Middle East were not familiar with this plant, at least in the capacity that we know it today, until at least the ninth century AD, when, as legend has it, the tonic properties of the plant were first discovered, or perhaps even later.

The symbolism and significance of coffee formed the basis of traditions and customs that were entrenched in both speech and behaviour.

Such traditions include the obligatory triple serving of coffee to guests. There is a reason for this, and it is deeply symbolic. Coffee is an expensive product even today. And it was even more expensive in the past. It took a great deal of money and effort to cultivate, pick and transport the crop in ancient times. So, offering strong

black coffee to guests is a way to show respect for and deference to them. In ancient times, the serving of coffee carried a deep meaning, which is expressed in the proverb: *الْأَوَّلُ لِلْفَنَاجَانِ، وَالثَّانِي لِلضَّيْفِ، وَالثَّلَاثُ لِلْكَيْفِ* [Al'-finjan al'-awwal li-d-d eyf wa-s-sani li-l'-keyf wa-s-salis li-s-seyf] – “*The first cup of coffee is for the guest. The second is for pleasure, and the third is for the sword*”. It contains words that the Bedouins associated with each serving of coffee: “*For guests*” (li-d-d eyf); “*For pleasure*” (li-l'-keyf); and “*For the sword*” (li-s-seyf). The ceremony had its own unspoken, but extremely strict and symbolic rules that continue to this day. Refusing the first cup of coffee is seen as an insult to the host. It means that the guest is an enemy, someone who has not come with peaceful intentions¹². This interpretation of the *first* cup of coffee is consistent with the ancient perception of coffee as a symbol of confrontation and victory over the enemy, considering the high cost and significance of the drink. There was a tradition in Bedouin society whereby the leaders of warring tribes would ask their warriors before battle: *فَنَجَانُهُ يَشْرَبُ مَنْ فَنَاجَانِ فُلَانٍ؟* [Man yashrabu finjana fulanin] – “*Who will drink the coffee of ...?*” And the name of one of the tribe's most famous and powerful opponents would be used as the final word. Then, the warrior who would take this duty upon himself would say: *أَنَا أَشْرَبُ* [Ana 'ashrabu finjanahu] – “*I will drink his coffee*”. The symbolism of this custom lies in the fact that victory or defeat for the warrior who took this oath meant victory or defeat, and thus shame, not only for himself, but also for his entire family or tribe¹³. And honour, whether personal or tribal/familial – its preservation and protection – is one of the enduring values of Arab, and especially Bedouin, society. It is not without reason that they have the proverb:

أَلْتَارَ وَلَا أَلْعَارَ [An-nar wa la l'-aar]. – “*Better to burn in the fire than live in shame*”¹⁴.

In addition, it is customary to take, but not drink, the first cup immediately if the guest has come to host with a request or on business. The most common reason is to arrange a marriage. The guest, typically representing the groom, put the cup of coffee down and wait for the host to give an answer. The words *إِشْرَبُوا قَهْوَتَكُمْ حَيَّاكُمْ اللَّهُ* [Ishrabw qahwatakum hayyakum Alla] – “*Drink the coffee. May God bless you with a long life*” symbolize agreement to the proposal. The guest then drinks the coffee, after which the ritual continues as usual. Such customs are common in Jordan and parts of Syria (Egyptian. 2022).

Before moving onto a discussion of the symbolism behind the second and third cups of coffee, we should note that there was a fourth cup in the United Arab Emirates, *لِلْهَيْبِ* [li-l'-heyf] – “*for the torrid wind*”, which was not offered to guests. This was the *very first* cup, drank by the owner, to reassure guests that the coffee had not been poisoned.

¹² Asma fanadzhili l'-kahva ind al'-arab [Names of Arab Coffee Cups] (Arab.) URL: ratti-bha.com/thread/1276121159071944704 (accessed 8.07.2022)

¹³ Al'-kahva fi s-skafa l'-arabiya va sh-shaabija [Coffee in Arabic and Popular Culture] (Arab.). URL: www.folkculturebh.org/ar/index.php?issue=11&page=article&id=71 (accessed 10.07.2022)

¹⁴ Kudryavtsev Y. N. 1987. *Uchebnoe posobie po alzhirskomu dialektu* [Textbook on the Algerian dialect]. Moscow: MGIMO. P. 138.

The word *heyf* comes from the verb هَافَ [hafa], which means “to escape, to run away”. The symbolic meaning of this cup of coffee was evidently that, drinking it, the host sought to “avoid” the shame, as it were, that would inevitably haunt not only him, but his entire family, if something happened to the guest during his visit to him. A preserving one’s honour, as we noted above, is one of the pillars of the Arab mentality, a moral principle. Today, this cup is drunk by the host to ensure the quality of the coffee being served (Proverbs..2022).

The second cup of coffee is offered as a way to maintain communication, for a pleasant conversation – that is, “for pleasure” (li-l’-keyf). Here, the guest can refuse the cup of coffee without offending the host. This cup is truly for symbolic reasons only, an established tradition that does not carry any deeper meaning.

The *third* cup of coffee, however, “for the sword”, is imbued with deep meaning and symbolizes a close – almost blood – union between the host and guest. This is typically the strongest coffee, especially among the Bedouins. Drinking this coffee symbolizes the guest entering into an alliance of sorts with the host, whereby he agrees to be his ally both in peacetime and in war. This cup can be refused, however. Drinking “for the sword” meant that the guest and the host now had the same enemies and the same friends – even if the guest had relatives who were among the enemies– while his former enemies would become his friends. Of course, in modern Arab society, the third serving of coffee is no longer considered a symbol of the conclusion of a pact with binding obligations. It is a way to honour tradition that continues to this day. At the same time, we should note that serving coffee three times is a mandatory minimum, and more cups can be offered, although this typically happens when in the company of family and close friends (Egyptian..2022).

Arabs usually serve a good cup of strong black coffee to guests: مُرَّة [murra] – *bitter*, or سَادَة [sada] – simple (without sugar). *Murra* coffee is the privilege of men only, as the Arabic proverb says: وَالْحُلَّةُ لِلْسَيِّئَاتِ وَالسَّادَةُ لِلْسَّادَاتِ [‘As-sada li-s-sadat wa l’-hil’wa li-ssitat] – “*Black (coffee) for men, and sweet coffee for women*”¹⁵. This tradition is confirmed by the words of the Syrian writer and poet Nadir az-Zaabi, addressed to his beloved: “I implore you to not appear in my thoughts when I drink coffee, as I still love (to drink) it without sugar”¹⁶.

Serving *hilva* coffee (sweet, with sugar) among a group of men can be seen as a refusal to offer the guest coffee at all, or a manifestation of miserliness or disrespect towards a person, or a sign that the host was not raised properly. Only a person who does not respect tradition might say: لَاشْ بِالْمُرَّةِ قَهْوَةٌ جَلْوَةٌ وَلَا مُرَّةٌ وَلَا [Qahwi hilwa wila murra willa balash bil’marra] – “*If the coffee is weak, then what is the point?*” (Lyubani 1999:

¹⁵ Chem znamenito proizvodstvo jemenskogo kofe? [What is the Yemeni Way of Making Coffee Famous For?]. URL: <http://cupstea.ru/vidy-kofe/jemenskij.html> (accessed 9.07.2022)

¹⁶ Minha findzhal' l'-hejf va l'-kejf... Al'-kahva l'-arabija tahullu kadaja l'-madzhalis raiifija bi-Sina [The Cup of Avoidance and Pleasure. Arabic Coffee Solves Problems During Meetings in Sinai] (Arab.). URL: www.elbalad.news/5224298 (accessed 9.06.2022)

610). Why does the proverb symbolize miserliness and impoliteness? To begin with, as we have already said, coffee is not cheap. Offering black coffee (no milk or sugar) shows a respectful attitude towards the guest, as if to say that he has spared no expense welcoming him into his home. Conversely, offering coffee with milk and sugar shows that the host is somewhat dismissive of the visitor. Second, we explained that coffee with sugar is typically offered to women only. That is, a cup of weak, sweetened coffee can be seen as disrespectful and even an insult. However, Arabs do not tend to behave this way, as miserliness towards and neglect of guests are among the most deplorable human traits.

The Arab people believe that the only way to make a good-quality cup of coffee is to follow the traditional rules. Everything must be done by hand using time-honoured tools for roasting, grinding and brewing the drink. No matter how wealthy the household, the woman of the house must always have three necessary items for making coffee, which have retained their appearance, purpose and names for many centuries: a *pan* for roasting the coffee beans (مَحْمَصَة [mihmasa]); a *mortar* (طاحونة [tahwna]) and *mallet* (مِدْقَة [midaqqa]) for grinding them; and special *pot* for brewing the coffee (إبريق [ibruq] or دَلَّة [dallya]). Not for nothing do the Arabs have the proverb:

كَيْفَ الْقَهْوَةُ حَمَاصُهَا لَطِيفٌ وَدَقَاقُهَا خَفِيفٌ، وَشَرَابُهَا
[Al'-qahwa hamasha latif, daqaqha hafif
wa sharabha qeyif] – “*Good coffee is well-roasted, finely ground and drunk with pleasure*” (Lyubani 1999: 609). These days, of course, the pace of life means that people use modern coffee grinders and coffee machines, as well as pre-roasted beans.

Many proverbs and sayings about coffee reflect the different ways in which the drink can be prepared, and even the attitude of different social groups towards each other. For example, city dwellers look down their noses at how the Bedouins make their coffee, sardonically describing their method: الْقَهْوَةُ الْمُرَّةُ بِهَارِهَا نَارُهَا [Al'-qahwa l'murra bharha narha] – “*(For Bedouins) the strength of coffee depends on the flame*” (Lyubani 1999: 610). This is a reference to the fact that, as far as the Bedouin people are concerned, the longer that coffee is boiled over an open flame, the richer and stronger it becomes. However, most coffee lovers in Arab countries prefer a different approach: بِالرَّمِيشِ وَالنَّارِ بِالْحَرْفِيشِ الْقَهْوَةُ [Al'-qahwa bi-r-rmish wa-n-nar bi-l'harfish] – “*Ash for coffee, shavings for fire*” (Lyubani 1999: 609). That is, coffee should be prepared by placing a coffee pot or cezve on smoldering coals, rather than on an open flame, which gives too much heat.

In other words, the quality of the drink depends on the correctness of its preparation – from the choice of beans to the method of brewing. There is a saying in the United Arab Emirates that goes: الْقَهْوَةُ بِنْتُ حُمُّسَاتِهَا [Al'-qahwa bint hummusatiha] – “*Coffee (the drink) is the child of its grain*”¹⁷.

¹⁷ Al'-kahva l'-imaratija. Mazak al'-karam va s-samr [Coffee in the Emirates. The Taste of Generosity and CONVERSATION]. URL: <https://www.alkhaleej.ae/> “مذاق-الكرم-والسمر/ملحق” (accessed 15.05.2022).

Coffee serving traditions have not changed over the centuries, no matter whether you live in the city, a village, or the desert. As a rule, the guest of honour sits to the right of the host. The process of serving the coffee follows clear and strict rules: first to the guest on the right side, and then going around left. Sometimes coffee is offered to the guest of honour straight away, wherever he is sitting, although the coffee is always served from right to left. Thus, in order not to violate this rule, and in order to ensure that everyone is served, the coffee is brought out by several people. When serving coffee, the cup is **always** held in the *right hand*. The guest similarly takes the cup with his or her *right hand*. Why such a rule?

In Arabic culture – and Islamic culture in general – the right side is the privileged side. It is considered *pure*. Arabs eat using their right hand, drink using their right hand, dress right arm and leg first, and the Prophet Muhammad recommended entering rooms right foot first. The left side is seen as *impure*. Muslims believe that Satan is left-handed, and that all unclean activities (undressing, blowing one's nose, washing up after going to the toilet, exiting a room) should also be done with the left hand or from the left-hand side. Interestingly, the word يَمِين [yamin] – *right*, comes from the verb يَمُن [yamuna], which means “*to be happy, blessed*”. This is also the origin of the name of the country Yemen, which the Romans called Arabia Felix – “Happy, or fertile Arabia”. The verb يَمُن [yammana] means “*to go right*”. The meaning may also come from the fact that if you stand facing the east, looking at the countries of the Arab Mashriq, then, in order to get to Yemen, you need to go right, that is, south. The word يَمِين [yamin] can also mean an *oath* or vow. In the past, Arabs would grasp their partner's right hand when concluding a business deal. This understanding of the significant of the right-hand side is expressed in the proverb: [Al'-qahwa 'ani l'-yamin wa law ' Abu Zeyd 'ala sh-shimal'] – “*Coffee with the right hand, even if Abu Zayd¹⁸ is to the left*” (Lyubani 1999: 610). “Left” and “right” have similar connotations in the Russian tradition. For example, when someone is in a bad mood, a Russian might say “*He got out of bed left leg first*”. Any unseemly act can also be described using the word “left”: “*He went to the left*” (meaning he cheated on his wife); “*Drive the left*” (when talking about someone engaging in illegal activities), etc.

Not all the coffee traditions of Arab people are connected with how to prepare, serve and drink coffee. They are also connected with the activities one engages in whilst enjoying the drink. For example, in Egypt, Syria, Jordan and Lebanon, people typically smoke when they drink coffee. More often than not, they smoke hookah, or الشيشة [shusha] in Arabic. This passion for smoking is reflected in Arab proverbs: صُبْيَانُ قَهْوَةٍ بِلَا دُحَانٍ مِثْلُ الْبَيْتِ بِلَا [Qahwa bila duhan misl' l'-beyt bi-la sibyaan] – “*Coffee without smoking is like a home without children*” or دُحَانُ بِلَا قَهْوَةٍ كَرَاعِي بِلَا فَرْوَةٍ [Suhan bila qahwa

¹⁸ Abu Zayd Hilali is the hero of the epic of the Banu Hilal tribe, which moved to North Africa, finding a new home in the Maghreb. According to legend, Abu Zayd was a brave, generous and benevolent man. He was received warmly everywhere he went and treated as an honoured guest.

ka-ra'ii bi-la farwa] – “Smoking without coffee is like a shepherd without fur” (Lyubani 1999: 609). However, this tradition of drinking coffee and smoking is not observed everywhere. For example, in the Persian Gulf and Yemen, guests are typically offered dates instead of hookah to sweeten strong coffee. Yemenis drink *qahwa murra* (bitter coffee), for instance, with a date in their mouth. If the guest asks for some water to counter the bitter taste, then this will be seen as an insult to the host, a sign that his guest did not enjoy the offering. Water is typically served and drunk before coffee. This way, the guest can quench their thirst, and the water weakens the bitter taste of the coffee, making it more enjoyable, as we mentioned above.

The comparative analysis of the material presented here allows us to draw some conclusions:

- The coffee tree, unknown to the ancient Arabs of the pre-Islamic period until almost the fifteenth century AD, has become a symbol of Yemen, taking pride of place on the state flag and emblem of the Republic of Yemen in the form of a branch with berries growing from it. Yemen has become known as the birthplace of coffee as an agricultural crop, where humans first began to cultivate it, and as the place where it was first brewed as a drink – a drink that would go on to conquer the world, without which people could not imagine their lives, not only in Arab countries, but around the world.

- Coffee has become a symbol for Arabs in Yemen and other countries of the Middle East and North Africa of hospitality, generosity and benevolence, a way to establish and maintain relationships, and an excuse to have a good chat, which is reflected in numerous proverbs and sayings, as well as in quotes by famous people. However, neither the coffee tree itself, nor the process and methods of its cultivation are reflected in folklore.

- Proverbs and sayings about coffee usually span the entire Arabic world, although sometimes they have a regional colouring (for example, in Egypt or the Persian Gulf countries). However, most proverbs and sayings about coffee are found in Palestine and Syria.

- The main traditions associated with the preparation of coffee, from the selection and preparation of the beans to the brewing of the drink, serving it to guests, and the tools used for this, are present in all Arab countries. The most popular type of coffee drink in the Arab East is strong black, although each country has its own local variety (for example, *qishr* in Yemen), which gives coffee a national “flavour.” National character is manifested in the preferences that Arabs have when drinking coffee, such as smoking or eating dates.

* * *

As a conclusion, I would like to say once again that people, as a part of nature, seek to find support in it in order to help them make sense of the surrounding reality, their ideas about moral standards, personal qualities, traditions and customs. And such support is often found in those objects of nature with which we constantly inter-

act, or which become an important attribute of their daily life, a symbol of the main features of the national character and national mentality. Such a creation of nature and a national symbol appears in the minds of the Arab peoples – the coffee tree and its progeny – coffee.

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