



COFFEE

COFFEE (Ar. *qahwa*, Pers., *qahva*, etymology uncertain), a drink made by steeping in boiling water the dried, roasted, and ground berries (Pers., Ar. *bonn*) of the coffee tree (*Coffea arabica*); a related drink, sometimes confused with coffee in the early sources, is *qešr*, brewed from the husks of the coffee beans. The beverage probably originated in Ethiopia and was introduced in the 14th or 15th century to Yemen, whence it spread throughout the east and eventually to Latin America (Zargarī, pp. 58-61; Golgolāb, p. 257). 'Abd-al-Qāder Jazīrī (fl. 16th century; pp. 184-86) credited two different Sufi figures with having introduced coffee to Yemen. On the authority of Aḥmad 'Abd-al-Ġaffār (fl. 937/1530) he reported that Jamāl-al-Dīn Abū 'Abd-Allāh Moḥammad b. Sa'īd Ḍabḥānī (d. 875/1470), a jurist from Aden, had become acquainted with it during a period of exile in Africa and had observed its medicinal effects, subsequently introducing it in Sufi circles, where it was drunk during night vigils for prayer and *dekr*. Elsewhere, however (p. 189), he noted that it was Abu'l-Ḥasan 'Alī b. 'Omar Šāḍelī (d. 321/1418), a leading shaikh of the Šāḍeliya Sufi order who had lived for some time in Ethiopia, who had first popularized the drink, at Mocha. This second report is confirmed by 'Abd-al-Qāder b. 'Aydarūs (d. 1038/1628), who included the introduction of coffee among the wondrous deeds (*karāmāt*) performed by Šāḍelī, who became a kind of patron saint of coffee growers and coffeehouse owners; in Algeria *šāḍeliya* is still a synonym for coffee (van Arendonk, p. 450; Falsafī, 1333 Š./1954, p. 260; for a detailed discussion of the origin of coffee, see Hattox, pp. 12-26).

Coffee drinking soon spread to other parts of the Arabian peninsula (Hattox,



pp. 26-28). According to Jazīrī (pp. 189-90), before *qahva* was made from coffee seeds, it had been made from *kafta* (leaves of the shrub now called *qāt*); later the cheaper seeds were found to have similar properties, and people began to make *qahva* from these seeds and became accustomed to drinking it. Ebn Ḥajar Hayṭamī mentioned a drink prepared from the husks of the *bonn* tree and called *qahva*, which first appeared at Mecca toward the end of the 15th century (van Arendonk, p. 450; cf. Falsafī, 1333 Š./1954, pp. 259-60). In the Arab countries and Egypt coffee was at first offered as a substitute for wine to men unwilling to drink alcohol (Mazahery, p. 119), and it soon became so popular that it was served even in the holy mosque at Mecca, though not without arousing considerable opposition (Jazīrī, pp. 191, 194-96, 200-02; cf. Falsafī, 1333 Š./1954, pp. 260-61). [Coffeehouses](#) were opened, and people went there to drink coffee while conversing, listening to music, and playing chess and other games.

It is not known exactly when coffee was introduced to Persia, but it was probably brought by returning pilgrims and merchants in the 16th century; its first recorded appearance in Istanbul was during the reign of Solaymān I (926-74/1520-66), and the first coffeehouse was opened there in 962/1554. The earliest known Persian references to it are those of 'Emād-al-Dīn Maḥmūd Šīrāzī (fl. ca. 944/1537; Goushegir, p. 77). Like many of his successors, he was primarily concerned with the medicinal properties of coffee, although there was much disagreement over its benefits and harmful effects. Many physicians regarded its influence as hot and dry, others as cold and dry, and the latter tended to be opposed to drinking it (Jazīrī, pp. 182-83). Ebn Kāṣef-al-Dīn Yazdī, a physician and pupil of the renowned Sheikh [Bahā' al-Dīn 'Āmeli](#) who had personally conducted experiments on the effects of coffee, reckoned it to be cold and dry but found it more beneficial than tea (fols. 154, 155; cf. Elgood, p. 44). The work of Moḥammad-Ḥosayn 'Aqīlī exemplifies the contradictory views of the properties of coffee. On one hand, he reported that it was aperient, diuretic, antimoisture, beneficial to the stomach, and useful for lowering blood pressure and for relief of most headaches, as well as for treatment of smallpox, measles (*ḥaṣḥa*)—especially when mixed with pearls—and hemorrhoids ('Aqīlī, pp. 128, 249, 808; cf. 'Anqā, p. 314). Drinking coffee quenched thirst, and sprinkling it on wounds helped to heal them. On the other hand, the harmful effects attributed to drinking coffee included headaches, pallor, loss of libido, insomnia (cf. Ḥakīm-Mo'men, p. 697; Polak, II, p. 267; for a contrary view, cf. Ebn Kāṣef-al-Dīn, fols. 37-38), heart palpitations, melancholy, nightmares, dryness of the respiratory passages, and hemor-



rhoids (‘Aqīlī, pp. 128, 808). If drunk to excess it could even cause brain disorders (A.-M. Ḥosaynī, fol. 466), though ‘Aqīlī considered this result likely only if the beans were very stale and roasted black; in some people the fresh beans, and particularly the husks (*qešr*), might actually stimulate the libido and facilitate digestion. For persons with sanguine temperaments coffee was considered beneficial because of its coldness, but persons with melancholy temperaments were counseled to drink it mixed with tea (A.-M. Ḥosaynī, fol. 465). For a hangover from drinking wine Ebn Kāšef-al-Dīn recommended a lentil-sized pill of opium washed down by coffee (fol. 107). European travelers in the 17th and 18th centuries also reported on the supposed medical benefits of coffee; for example, Thomas Herbert had heard that it “comforts raw stomachs, helps digestion, expels wind, and dispells drowsiness, but of the greater repute from a tradition they have that it was prepared by Gabriel as a cordial for Musselmans” (p. 45; cf. p. 261). According to Engelbert Kaempfer, “this beverage dries up the liquids (*humores*) but has a beneficial effect on phlegmatics” (p. 115).

Coffee was served as part of normal Safavid court routine. At receptions for foreign ambassadors, in particular, it was always served with sweets before the meal (E‘temād-al-Salṭana, I, p. 311). According to his secretary, when the Dutch ambassador Joan Cunaeus visited the governor E‘temād-al-Dawla in 1061/1651, he was served coffee (Hotz, pp. 141, 182). Usually visitors were offered the choice of coffee, tea, or rosewater (Fryer, II, pp. 162, 167). According to Adam Olearius, coffee was also drunk at the end of a meal (p. 382; cf. Eskandar Beg, II, p. 774). It was still the standard ceremonial beverage during the visits of the Dutch ambassadors Johan van Leene (1691) and Jacobus Hoogkamer (1701), though at court tea was sometimes offered instead (Valentijn, V, pp. 250, 273, 277-78, 280-81). An official known as a *qahvačī-bāšī* was in charge of the coffee department (*qahva-kāna*) at the royal court and received an annual salary of 50 tomans plus an allowance of wheat (*Tadkeratal-molūk*, ed. Minorsky, pp. 68, 100; Mīrzā Rafī‘ā, p. 435).

According to a report by English merchants, coffee was imported from Mocha via “the Indies” at a price of 24-26 *šāhīs* a man (Ferrier, p. 208). Although the European East India companies also sold coffee to Persia, the main trade in this commodity was in the hands of Arab and Persian merchants sailing between Yemen and the Persian Gulf. In 1628, for example, 40 *bahārs* (see Hinz, pp. 8-10) arrived at the warehouse of the Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie (V.O.C., Dutch East Indies company) in Bandar-e ‘Abbās; the price



that year was 22-25 tomans per man (Dunlop, pp. 246, 277; cf. p. 361). Gradually in the next few years such shipments increased, reaching as high as 150,000 pounds from the V.O.C. factory in Surat in 1655 (van Dam, pp. 361-62; cf. Dunlop, p. 542). The trade was not very profitable, though coffee remained a regular item of foreign commerce into the 18th century (Dunlop, pp. 610-17; cf. Kaempfer, p. 149).

In Persia coffee was drunk black and strong, which met with mixed reactions from European travelers. For example, John Fryer reported: “Their Coffeehouses, where they sell Coho, better than any among us, which being boiled, has a Black Oil or Cream swimming at top, and when it is not, they refuse to drink it” (III, p. 34). On the other hand, according to Herbert, it was “much drunk, though it please neither the eye nor taste, being black and somewhat bitter (or rather relished like burnt crusts), more wholesome than toothsome” (p. 45). The preparation of coffee required boxes or containers (*qahvadān*), roasters, and either mortars and pestles or mills; the fireproof metal coffeepot (*qahvajūš*, *qahvarīz*) was used for steeping the ground coffee. In keeping with general practice in the period images of coffee-making apparatus appeared on tombstones, identifying the deceased as members of the guild of coffeehouse proprietors (Keyvani, pp. 201-02). Kaempfer (p. 115) observed the making of coffee in a public coffeehouse. The beans were roasted in a flat vessel over a charcoal fire and stirred frequently until they had become brownish black and had developed an aroma. They were ground warm or cold, “the longer the better” in a stone mortar fixed to a brick pedestal. The beverage was made by mixing a spoonful of ground coffee with hot water in a tinned-copper jar with a lid, on which burning charcoal was heaped, so that it came to the boil quickly, in about the time it took to say five paternosters. Two spoonfuls of cold water were then added to soften the effects of the oil, and the coffee was left on the fire for the time necessary for three paternosters. Then it was served in small cups and drunk very hot. According to Ebn Kāšef-al-Dīn (fol. 153), it was customary in some cities to roast the beans, add the husks, and boil the mixture; in others the beans were boiled in the husks. His own opinion was that roasting the beans with a small quantity of husks gave the better drink. He also believed that the beans should be ground before roasting; though difficult, this method ensured that all the coffee was uniformly browned. The decoction was made by boiling 5 *meṭqāls* of coffee in 75 *meṭqāls* of water until it was reduced to 30 *meṭqāls*; it was then strained and drunk while still hot (fol. 154)



The beverage was drunk from small ceramic cups (Ar. and Pers. *fanājīn*; sg. *fenjān* < Pers. *pengān*; cf. Olearius, p. 382; Kaempfer, p. 115), often set into metal holders (Ar. and Pers. *zorūf*; sg. *zarf*); a single *fenjān* is mentioned in the inventory of Chinese porcelains given to the Ardabīl shrine by Shah ‘Abbās in 1020/1611 (Pope, p. 10). In 1634 the V.O.C. in Persia received 5,000 cargoes of porcelain coffee cups, described as having round feet and straight sides; the cost per cargo was 8 larins (Dunlop, p. 480). Drinking cold or lukewarm (*fāter*) coffee was considered harmful, causing palpitations of the heart, which could be cured by taking saffron (‘Aqīlī, p. 809). Those who could afford to do so mixed their coffee with ambergris as it was being brewed, for ambergris was considered the most effective measure against the harmful effects of coffee, which was best not drunk on an empty stomach. It was recommended after a light breakfast known as *taht al-qahva* (“foundation for coffee”; ‘Aqīlī, pp. 128, 809).

The vogue for coffee and tea (see *čāy*) in the Safavid period prompted the composition of essays and poems about the two beverages. In the mid-17th century Ebn Kāšef-al-Dīn, in his *Resāla-ye čūb-e čīnī wa qahva wa čāy*, discussed aspects of the subject and included many descriptions and verses related to coffee (for manuscripts of this work, see Monzawī, *Noskahā* I, pp. 414-15; Dānešpažūh and Monzawī, IV, p. 133; Elgood, p. 44). Ḥakīm Nežām-al-Dīn Aḥmad Gilānī (d. 1059/1649), a pupil of Mīr-Dāmād, devoted a section of his encyclopedic work *Šajara-ye dāneš* to coffee and tobacco (Monzawī, *Noskahā* I, pp. 414-15; Mīr-‘Otmān ‘Alī, II, p. 478). Other works, some of which included discussion of the morality of drinking coffee, were *Resāla fi’l-qahva* by Ḥakīm Moḥammad-Bāqer Qomī (Dānešpažūh and Monzawī, V, p. 413), *Ādāb-e ‘alīya yā rafīq-e tawfiq* by Moḥammad-‘Alī Qazvīnī (dedicated to Shah Solaymān I, 1077-1105/1666-93; for extracts, see Falsafī, 1333 Š./1954). In general, denunciations of coffee drinking were not as strident in Persia as in Arabia and Egypt, though from time to time tracts arguing its unlawfulness were produced, for example, *Adellat ba’z ‘olamā’ wa ahl al-aḳbār ‘alā ḥormat al-toton wa’l-qahva* (probably written after the Safavid period; see Monzawī, *Noskahā* VIII, p. 25; cf. Hattox, pp. 29-45).

Coffee remained popular in Persia throughout the 18th century, “the usual mode of treatment . . . to visitors” (Francklin, p. 193; cf. p. 188; Gmélin, III, p. 276). In the early part of the century Mocha was still the main source of coffee for the Persian market; in 1138-39/1726, for example, Persian and Indian merchants together exported 617 bales (each weighing 280 pounds),



approximately 3 percent of total coffee exports from Yemen in that year (Chaudhuri, p. 452). According to the archives of the chamber of commerce of Marseilles, by 1152/1739 cheaper coffee imported by the French from the Antilles was reaching Persia overland through Aleppo and later Smyrna (Izmir), rapidly displacing the Yemeni variety (Paris, pp. 560-61, 448; cf. Raymond, I, p. 156; Sauvaget, p. 191). Merchants from Shiraz and Lār traded coffee in the *bāzār* at Isfahan. Although the Dutch attempted to sell Java coffee, it did not satisfy the palates of most Persians; only the Kurds would buy it. Some merchants mixed it with mocha in order to cheat their customers. (Wirth and Gaube, pp. 125, 268, 274; cf. Lycklama, II, p. 105).

In the early 19th century coffee remained a standard part of the reception for visitors at the Qajar court (Hollingberry, pp. 17, 30, 50, 78; Waring, p. 8; Brydges, p. 101; cf. Mostawfī, *Šarḥ-e zendagānī* I, p. 404). At that period Persians customarily roasted their coffee beans in a cast-iron pot set into a brick oven. The pot was first partially filled with fine sand and heated; then the coffee was added and stirred constantly with the sand, a procedure that ensured a uniform roast and preservation of the fragrant oils in the beans. After roasting the sand was sifted away through a coarse strainer, which retained the coffeebeans; they were then covered with wool cloth until they had cooled completely. The roasted beans were pulverized in a slightly warmed bronze mortar (Schlimmer, p. 144). Travelers customarily carried ground coffee mixed with honey and spices in leather pouches as a restorative (Perrin, 1841; cf. Drouville, I, pp. 77-78).

In the second half of the century, under English and Russian influence, tea replaced coffee as the favored drink in Persia (E'temād-al-Saltāna, p. 139); according to the Dutch traveler T. M. Lycklama a Nijholt (II, p. 105), in 1866 tea was more popular than coffee (cf. Brugsch, I, p. 201; Polak, I, pp. 125, 134, II, p. 267). By the last quarter of the century the beverage was rarely mentioned by travelers (Elgood, p. 169). The loss of popularity may also have resulted from high prices, partly owing to the imposition of multiple taxes by the Qajar authorities (Floor, pp. 80-81), which led to a gradual decline in imports; the introduction of tea cultivation in Gilān in 1320/1902 was decisive (Bazin, I, p. 157).

Nevertheless, coffee remained in use for ceremonial entertaining in the early 20th century, when both tea and coffee were customarily served at *rawzas* commemorating the martyrdom of Ḥasan and Ḥosayn (Massé, *Croyances*, p. 123). According to L. P. Elwell-Sutton (p. 170), it is served mainly in European-



style cafés, rather than in traditional “coffehouses,” where in fact tea is served. Today coffee is used in treatment of alcohol poisoning and especially opium addiction. Owing to its caffeine content, it quickens heart action and stimulates the nervous system, and thus it is sometimes also used in treatment of nervous complaints (Zargarī, pp. 65-66).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Šāh Maqṣūd Šādeq ‘Anqā, *Ṭebb-e sonnatī-e Īrān*, Tehran, 1355 Š./1976.
- Moḥammad Ḥosayn ‘Aqīlī Korāsānī Šīrāzī, *Maḵzan al-adwīa*, Tehran, n.d., pp. 1-442.
- C. van Arendonk, “Ḳahwa,” in *EI*² IV, pp. 449-53.
- Mīrzā ‘Alī-Akbar Khan Āšpazbāšī, *Sofra-ye aṭ‘ema*, Tehran, 1353 Š./1974, pp. 69, 75.
- Y. Āyenačī, *Mofradāt-e pezeškī wa gīāhān-e dārū‘ī-e Īrān*, Tehran, 1365 Š./1986, pp. 54, 591-94.
- M. Bazin, *Le Tâlech, une région ethnique au nord de l’Iran*, 2nd ed., 2 vols., Paris, 1980.
- H. Brugsch, *Reise der kaiserlichen preussischen Gesandtschaft nach Persien 1860 und 1861*, 2 vols., Leipzig, 1863.
- H. J. Brydges, *An Account of the Transactions of His Majesty’s Mission to the Court of Persia in the Years 1807-11*, London, 1834.
- J. Chardin, *Journal du chevalier Chardin en Perse*, 10 vols., Paris, 1723.
- K. N. Chaudhuri, “Ḳahwa. Trade with Europe,” *EI*² IV, pp. 453-55.
- P. van Dam, *Beschrijvinge van de Oostindische Compagnie*, ed. F. W. Stapel, II/3, Rijks Geschiedkundige Publicatiën 83, ‘s-Gravenhage, 1939.



M.-T. Dānešpažūh and 'A.-N. Monzawī, *Fehrest-e Ketāb-kāna-ye Masjed-e Sepahsālār*, Tehran, 1346 Š./1967.

G. Drouville, *Voyage en Perse fait en 1812 et 1813*, 2nd ed. 2 vols., Paris, 1925.

H. Dunlop, ed., *Bronnen tot de Geschiedenis der Oost Indische Compagnie in Perzie*, Rijks Geschiedkundige Publicatiën 72, the Hague, 1930.

Ebn Kāšef-al-Dīn Moḥammad Yazdī, *Jām-e jahān-nemā-ye 'Abbāsī*, ms. no. 1961, British Library, London (photocopy no. 694, central library of Tehran University), fols. 16, 37, 104.

Idem, *Resāla-ye čūb-e čīnī wa qahva wa čāy*, ms. no. 5138 Majles Library, Tehran, fols. 128-55. C. Elgood, *Safavid Medical Practice*, London, 1970. L. P. Elwell-Sutton, "Çay-khāna," *EI²*, Supp., p. 169-70.

Moḥammad-Ḥasan Khan E'temād-al-Salṭana, *Çehel sāl tāriḳ-e Īrān dar dawra-ye pādšāhī-e Nāṣer-al-Dīn Šāh (al-Ma'āṭer wa'l-āṭār)*, ed. Ī. Afšār, I, Tehran, 1363 Š./1984.

Idem, *Mer'āt al-boldān*, ed. 'A.-Ḥ. Navā'ī and M.-Ḥ. Moḥaddet, I, Tehran, 1368 Š./1989.

N. Falsafī, "Tāriḳ-e qahva wa qahva-kāna dar Īrān," *Sokan* 5/4 1333 Š./1954, pp. 258-68.

Idem, *Zendagānī-e Šāh 'Abbās-e Awwal*, II, Tehran, 1347 Š./1968, pp. 34-38.

R. W. Ferrier, "An English View of Persian Trade in 1618.

Reports from the Merchants Edward Pettus and Thomas Barker," *JESHO* 19, 1976, pp. 182-214.

W. Floor, "Le droit d'entreposage en Iran Qājār," *Studia Iranica* 17, 1988, pp. 57-91.

W. Francklin, *Observations Made on a Tour from Bengal to Persia in the Years 1786-7*, Calcutta, 1788.

J. Fryer, *A New Account of East India and Persia, Being 9 Years' Travels, 1672-1681*, ed. W. Crooke, 3 vols., London, 1909-15.



- H. Gaube and E. Wirth, *Der Bazar von Isfahan*, Wiesbaden, 1978.
- S. G. Gmélin, *Reise durch Russland, . . .*, 3 vols., St. Petersburg, 1774.
- Ḥ. Golgolāb, *Gīāh-šenāsī*, Tehran, n.d., p. 257.
- A. Goushegir, “Le café en Iran des Safavide et des Qājār à l’époque actuelle,” in H. Desmet-Grégoire, ed., *Contributions au thème du et des cafés dans les sociétés du Proche-Orient*, Aix-en-Provence, 1991, pp. 75-112.
- R. Hattox, *Coffee and Coffeeshouses. The Origin of a Social Beverage in the Medieval Near East*, Seattle, Wash., 1985.
- T. Herbert, *Travels in Persia*, ed. W. Foster, New York, 1929.
- W. Hinz, *Islamische Masse und Gewichte. Umgerechnet ins metrische System*, HO I, Ergänzungsband I/1, Leiden, 1970.
- W. Hollingberry, *A Journal of Observations Made during the British Embassy to the Court of Persia (1799-1801)*, Calcutta, 1814; repr. Tehran, 1976.
- A. Hotz, *Journaal der refs van den gezant der O.I. compagnie, Joan Cunaeus naar Perzie in 1651-52*, Amsterdam, 1908.
- Aḥmad-Motaṭabbab Ḥosaynī, *Badāye’ al-asrār*, in ms. no. 5138, Majles Library, Tehran. Moḥammad-Mo’men Ḥosaynī (Ḥakīm-Mo’men), *Toḥfa-ye Ḥakīm-Mo’men*, Tehran, n.d.
- ‘Abd-al-Qāder b. Moḥammad Jazīrī Anṣārī, ‘*Omdat al-ṣafwa fī ḥell al-qahva*, in S. de Sacy, ed., *al-Anīs al-mofīd le’l-ṭāleb al-mostafīd*, Paris, 1799, pp. 138-69, 177-224, 412-83.
- E. Kaempfer, *Die Reisetagebücher Engelbert Kaempfers*, ed. K. Meier-Lemgo, Wiesbaden, 1968.
- M. Keyvani, *Artisans and Guild Life in the Later Safavid Period. Contributions to the Social-Economic History of Persia*, Islamkundliche Untersuchungen 65, Berlin, 1982.
- B. Kīk, “Šadarāt fī aṣl al-qahva,” *al-Mašreq* 6/14, 1903, pp. 685-92.
- Komīsīūn-e mellī-e Yūnesco (UNESCO), *Īrānšahr*, 2 vols., Tehran, 1342-43



Š./1963-64.

T. M. Lycklama a Nijholt, *Voyage en Russie, au Caucase et en Perse en 1866-68*, 4 vols., Paris and Amsterdam, 1872-75.

F. Maier and R. Gramlich, "Drei moderne Texte zum persischen Wettreden," *ZDMG* 121, 1961, pp. 289-327.

J. A. Mandelsloh, *Voyages faits en Perse [1645]*, new ed., 2 vols., Leiden, 1719.

Mīr-'Oṭmān 'Alī, *Fehrest-e Āṣafīya II*, Hyderabad, 1333/1914-15.

Mīrzā Rafī'ā, *Dastūr al-molūk*, p. 4, *MDAT* 16/4, 1348 Š./1969, pp. 416-40.

A. Olearius, *Relation du voyage de Moscovie, Tartarie et de Perse . . .*, 2 vols., Paris, 1659.

R. Paris, *De 1660 à 1789. Le Levant*, Histoire du commerce de la ville de Marseille 5, Paris, 1957.

N. Perrin, *La Perse*, Paris, 1841.

J. E. Polak, *Persien. Das Land und seine Bewohner*, 2 vols., Leipzig, 1865.

J. A. Pope, *Chinese Porcelains from the Ardebil Shrine*, Washington, D.C., 1956.

A. Raymond, *Artisans et commerçants au Caire au XVIII^e siècle*, 2 vols., Damascus, 1973-74.

J. Sauvaget, *Alep. Essai sur le développement d'une grande ville syrienne, des origins au milieu du XIX^e siècle*, 2 vols., Paris, 1941.

J.-B. Tavernier, *Les six voyages . . .*, 10 vols., Paris. W. H. Ukers, *All about Coffee*, New York, 1922.

F. Valentijn, *Beschrijving van Nieuw en Oud-Indien*, 5 vols., Dordrecht and Amsterdam, 1726.

P. della Valle, *I viaggi di Pietro della Valle. Lettere della Persia*, ed. F. Gaeta and L. Lockhart, Rome, 1972.

E. S. Waring, *A Tour to Sheeraz*, London, 1807.



‘A. Zargarī, *Gīāhān-e dārū’ī*, II, Tehran, 1347 Š./1968.