Egyptian Arabic in the seventeenth century: a study and edition of Yusuf al-Magribi's 'Daf al-isr an kalam ahl Misr'

Zack, E.W.A.

Citation for published version (APA):
CHAPTER 5

Aspects of Daily life

Al-Mağribî describes many aspects of daily life in Egypt at the beginning of the seventeenth century. Amongst the other images he paints for us, the descriptions of food and drinks, clothes, medicinal plants and utensils really help us to form a picture of how Egyptians lived in this period. These aspects will, therefore, be highlighted in this chapter.

5.1 Food and drinks

5.1.1 Sweetmeats

It seems that Egyptian dietary habits have not changed much over the years. Like today, the Egyptians in al-Mağribî’s time seem to have had a sweet tooth. Al-Mağribî mentions a number of sweets, some of which are still well-known, such as the all-time favourites كنافة “pastry made of thin vermicelli-shaped dough” (32b, 33b), كحك العيد “cookies served at the religious holidays” (62a), قطائف “sweet pancakes” (32b), نقل “a dessert of dried fruit or nuts” (93a), مفتقة “jam made of molasses and other ingredients”, مربى “jam” (9a), عسل نحل “honey” (83b). We also find reference to some sweetmeats that are less familiar these days: مامونية “mamuniya” (109a), a kind of marzipan, apparently named after al-Mağribî’s al-Ma/mûn;253 a sweetmeat which al-Mağribî calls alternately حشمانك “hashmanak” (10a) and حشمان “hashman” (58a), which is a pastry filled with almond paste (عوجة “ajwa (128b)), a popular dish in the seventeenth century254 which was still known at the time of Aḥmad Taymûr Bâsâ255 but is now, apparently, forgotten; هيطليية “hyteleyya, a sweet dish made of wheat

253 I heard that it is a nisba to al-Ma’mûn, because he introduced it” (109a). Lane I 103a confirms this: مامونية “a certain kind of food; so called in relation to el-Ma-moon”. Al-Ma’mûn, Abû al-‘Abbâs ‘Abd Allâh b. Hârûn al-Râshîd (170/786-218/833) was the seventh ‘Abbâsid caliph, see EJ VI 331a ff.
Aspects of Daily Life

starch and milk (94a) and *ruhāmiyya* “marble sweet” (97b), so called because its colour resembles that of marble. *ruhāmiyya* is not found in dictionaries of modern Egyptian Arabic, but recipes are available on the internet. It consists of crumbled cookies covered with white cream. The “marble effect” is created by drawing dark lines on the cream with chocolate.

Nuts were eaten as well: Al-Maġribī mentions *fustuq* “pistachios” (53a), nowadays called *fuzdu* in Egypt; Bunduq “hazelnuts” (38a), which were called *funduq* (53b) by the Turks, and chestnuts, which were called *qaştāl / qaştal* (89a) or *abū fūrwa “the one with the little fur”* (89a), nowadays known as *abu farwa*.

5.1.2 Savory dishes

idad “gravy” (95a) was eaten with bread, like today, and was perhaps wiped up with a *qīšā “bread crust”* (32b). There were different types of bread: Al-Maġribī calls bread *bubz*, not *fēš*, in the context of the entries, but this is a classicism. The part of the book in which *fēš* was mentioned as an entry, is lost, but in *ił-Qıwl ılt-muqtı* p. 73 we find that the word *sāmil* was indeed included in *dıf*, so we know for certain that the Egyptians called their bread *fēš*.

This is written as *ıruzz* on fol. 88a, but as *ruzz* on fol. 10a.

---

56 Davies (1981) p. 486: “HYŦLY:H – ‘a dish made of wheat starch and milk; it is extremely delicious to eat and lighter than rice pudding, especially if honey is added to it’”.

57 This is probably in analogy to *bundu*, which has the same ending -u.

58 Al-Maģribī calls bread ḥubs, not ġūš, in the context of the entries, but this is a classicism. The part of the book in which ġūš was mentioned as an entry, is lost, but in al-Qawl al-muqtadab p. 73 we find that the word ġūš was indeed included in Daf’ al-ıpr, so we know for certain that the Egyptians called their bread ġūš.


261 This is written as *aż ruzz* on fol. 88a, but as *raz ruzz* on fol. 10a.
Aspects of Daily Life

“A dish of boiled rice (called “ruzz mufelfel”, the “piláv” of the Turks), mixed with a little butter, and seasoned with salt and pepper.”

Al-Maġribī also mentions a rice dish, خسكه فلاو “dry rice” (10a) (from the Persian خسكه hushka, “boiled rice without butter”264 and فلاو palāv, “a rice dish”265) which he ate in the homes of his Persian friends.

Food without salt was known as مكفن mukaffan (117b). Part of the basic diet were بصل “onions” (65b), توم “garlic” (96a) and سلمج “turnips” (101a). The clarified butter, nowadays called سمن samna, which is used in large quantities in Egyptian kitchens, was called سل سيلā (9a) in al-Maģribī’s time.266 Bouillon مقر maraq (55a) was used just as it is today. A type of cheese, حالون hālūm (96b),267 which is still available today, was also eaten.

Thin sheets of dough, called رقاق ruqāq (40b), were used in various dishes and are still eaten. Small savory pastries, such as بروك bəryk (56b), and the still popular triangular سبورية sanbūsak (60b), which is now filled with cheese, minced meat or spinach, are both mentioned in Daf’ al-ḫsr, as are كشك kišk (62a), a dish which is still popular and is prepared with wheat and milk,268 and ناقنيق naqānīq “small sausages” (56a). The latter dish is still known in Syria,269 but in Egypt is now called سعو suq’ı, from the Turkish sucuk.270 A dish which is no longer familiar in Egypt is عرابيّة “hare ragout”271 (11a).

265 Ibid. p. 254.
266 We still find مسلي “clarified butter” in Egypt nowadays, although Hinds-Badawi (1986) p. 428b mentions that it is not pure dialect.
267 From Coptic, see Crum (1972) p. 670a.
268 Its popularity is attested to by its use in the following proverbs: فلان اكل كشك عند فلان “so-and-so ate kišk at so-and-so’s house”, which meant “he ate a lot of food till his belly swelled up”, see Davies (1981) p. 458; and اهوووا فارحة ب-كيش “he is the favourite”, see HB 753a.
271 See Dozy (1927) I p. 19a.
5.1.3 Drinks

Red wine was called ǧiryāl (67b) due to its colour, because the word literally means “golden red”.272

A sweet drink called ʿsūbyā (9a), which is still popular today, is mentioned by al-Mağribī. It was originally a Turkish word: Redhouse (1992) p. 1086b ʿسوية 09a ʿsūbyā, a sweet drink prepared from pounded almonds, melon or cucumber seeds, etc.”. In Egypt these days, however, it is prepared in a different way, with fermented rice and sugar.

From coffee beans, or ʿbūn (110a) 0būn qahwa “coffee” was made. Coffee was first introduced to Cairo by ʿāfīs in the Yemeni quarters of al-Azhar, sometime in the first decade of the tenth century AH / sixteenth century AD.273 According to al-Mağribī, coffee sellers used to say ǧıbā “for free!” when pouring out the drink.274 He also explicitly mentions that an excellent type of coffee drunk in Egypt is made of ʿqīr, i.e. the husks, of the bean. This use of the husks is also mentioned in Hattox’s study about coffee in the Middle East:

“Some descriptions refer almost exclusively to using the husks. The description initially given Khāʾir Beg of coffee, that it is “cooked from the husks of the seed called ʿbūn that comes from the Yemen,” is one example.”275 Nowadays in Yemen, coffee is still made from the husks, see Behnstedt (2006) p. 996: “gišrin: Kaffeeschalen, ein Getränk, gebraut aus Kaffeeschalen, Ingwer und Zimt”.

Al-Mağribī quotes from a poem created by one of his teachers, ’Alī al-Maqdisī, in praise of coffee, and there is another about the same topic which al-Mağribī produced.276 He even mentions that when the value of the letters of the word qahwa is added up, it has the same numerical value as the word qawt.277 To him, this

---

274 See fols. 5b and 124b; al-Mağribī by mistake mentions the entry ǧabā twice, first in the chapter ʾalif and later in the chapter wāw/yāʾ. He actually has another explanation of the word, see the entry حرا in the Glossary.
275 Hattox (1991) p. 84.
276 Both on fol. 5b.
277 Every letter of the alphabet has a certain numerical value. Q = 100, H = 5, W = 6, Y = 10, see EI III p. 595 (T. Fahd).
QWH: 100+6+6+5=116.
QWY: 100+6+10=116.
Aspects of Daily Life

is proof of its positive qualities. It was the cause of some hilarity when, during a *mağlis*, a Turk who had apparently not mastered the Arabic language pointed out that when the word قهوه is inverted it reads حق “it is the truth”. As well as this passage on fols. 5b-6a, the word قهوه appears five more times in the context of entries in *Daf al-iṣṭ*, and is mentioned in seven poems in total. It is, therefore, clear that the drink had become important in Egyptian society since the time of its first appearance there.

5.2 Drugs and tobacco

Al-Maḡribī mentions the use of drugs on a few occasions. The people of Egypt said, for instance: يأكل من الكيف “he eats of the hashish”. The word *kyf* is a metonymy: it was first used to describe the state of pleasure caused by hashish, and therefore later also came to mean the drug itself. We can conclude from *يأكل* that the hashish was eaten, not smoked, as still happens today. Sometimes people mixed it (قتل الحشيش). Although al-Maḡribī does not mention with what, it could perhaps have been the innovation called tobacco (see below).

Al-Maḡribī mentions the word عيون “opium” (117a) as well, although he tells us no more than *يقولون* عيون, using a quotation from * İl-Qāmūs ıl-*mu/uni1E25ī/uni1E6D. He also comments that somebody can be مسطل “high or stoned, intoxicated” or can be في سطالة *fī satla* (same meaning). It is unclear, however,

---

278 See fol. 6a.
279 A social gathering. For more information about this cultural phenomenon, see §1.3.
280 See fol. 6a. See also §4.3.
281 On fols. 5b (twice), 6a, 11b, 76a, 99b, and 130b.
282 Fol. 33b.
283 See Dozy (1927) II p. 505b “... Proprement l’état de gaiété, d’ivresse, causé par le hachîch, et ensuite le hachîch meme”.
284 Prosper Alpin mentions in his *Médecine* (1980) I p. 255 that the Egyptians used opium very frequently. Alpin stayed in Egypt from 1581 to 1584.
285 Fol. 80b.
whether he means that such a person was drunk or high. He explicitly mentions
that these two words are used frequently by the people from the Ḥiḡāz.

Tobacco was a completely new phenomenon in al-Maḡribī’s time. He explicitly
mentions that in the year he wrote Dafʿ al-ʾīṣr, i.e. 1014/1606, a new phenomenon
called طبغة had come into fashion. This is correct, since we know that
tobacco was introduced to Egypt in 1603-1604, and it would be reasonable to
assume that it would take some time to become popular with the general public.
What al-Maḡribī tells us about it is extremely interesting. Shops which specialized
in tobacco were established, and there were even suggestions that other special
places should open for it, like coffee houses. He mentions in the margin that one
`
(around 443 gram) is sold for three gold coins (ثلاثة ذهب). This must be the gold coin called اشراقي (or شريف) muḥammadi, since this was the
only one in use in Cairo in the Ottoman period until the end of the 17th century. Its weight was 3,448 gram. Therefore, 1 `rafal of tobacco was worth 10,344 grams of
gold. The only thing al-Maḡribī can tell us about the origin of tobacco is that it
came from the West. He tried it once and did not like it at all because it made him
feel dizzy. He further mentions that people smoke it, and for this activity they use
the phrase `يشرون دخانها “they drink its smoke”. Moreover, he tells us that there was some question about whether it was permissible to
smoke while fasting during Ramaḍān. According to a certain `Sayyid called al-
Zayyādī it was actually allowed, which al-Maḡribī believed to be reprehensible.

---

288 Fol. 16b. Tobacco was first introduced in Europe by Columbus in 1493, although at that
time it stirred mostly botanical interest, see EI X 753a (R. Matthee). At the end of the 1580s,
smoking was made popular by Sir Walter Raleigh, who introduced it at the English court.
289 See EI X p. 753b (R. Matthee).
290 Note that the weights varied throughout the Ottoman period, and also depended on the
place and the commodity; this is therefore an estimation, see Raymond (1973) I p. ivii. The
`rafal remained commonly in use in Egypt until around the 70s of the last century, along with
the wiyya "ounce", in parallel with the metric system.
291 See Raymond (1973) I p. 28.
292 Ibid.
293 Also in Turkish, the word for “to drink”, içmek, is used for “to smoke”.
294 This is probably ʿAlī b. Yahyā Nūr al-Dīn al-Zayyādī al-Miṣrij al-Ṣāfī, d. 1024/1615. He was
originally from Mahballat Zayyād in al-Buḥayra, but lived and died in Cairo. He was a famous
fuqahāʾ and muftī. See Zirikli (1955) V p. 32 and al-Muhbībī (online version):
295 See fol. 75b.
It is natural that such an innovation caused some controversy, even though it nowadays seems incredible that some might have considered smoking during Ramaḍān to be acceptable. During the Ottoman rule smoking became common place, as was proven by archaeological finds. Ward and Baram (1999) p. 145 state that “archaeologists have noted that clay pipes are among the most plentiful artifacts studies from the era that the Ottoman Empire ruled over the Middle East.”

5.3 Medicine
In al-Qāmūs al-muḥīṭ, many herbs and vegetables are praised for their medicinal properties. These descriptions were copied by al-Maḡribī, showing that the belief in the healing power of these plants had not diminished since al-Qāmūs al-muḥīṭ was written in the fourteenth century. For instance, bāqillā “broad beans” were believed to relieve coughing (66a), while fiǧl “radishes” are almost a magical medicine, curing such various afflictions as “pain in the joints, jaundice, dropsy, and bites of snakes and scorpions” (86b).

Some of the complaints from which 17th century Egyptians suffered were:  šaqāq “a disease which causes cracks in the skin” (47a), šaqyqa “a splitting headache” (47a), fıtq “hernia, rupture” (51b), qasf “chapped skin” (32b).

296 The dilemma of Muslim scholars on this point is described in Ef’ X 754a (R. Matthee): “As in many places around the world, tobacco in the early stage of its introduction in the Middle East aroused suspicion on the part of clerics and bureaucrats alike. Muslim scholars, unable to find references to tobacco in the Qur’ān, resorted to analogical reasoning to determine whether smoking was permitted or should be condemned and banned as contrary to religion. As tobacco did not resemble any of the forbidden substances mentioned in the Qur’ān, proscribing it was not a simple matter. Nor was it easy to “prove” that tobacco in itself was bad, or harmful to one’s health. (...) Arguments for and against tobacco were often made in the context of the controversy between the representatives of orthodoxy, who rejected tobacco, and members of Şūfi orders, who took to smoking”. Apparently al-Maḡribī was an exception to the rule that  şifs took to smoking. Kātib Čelebi describes the way smoking was received in Istanbul and discusses whether it is permitted under Islamic law, see Ḥalifa (1957) pp. 50-59. Rosenthal (1971) p. 129 recounts an interesting anecdote narrated by Ibn al-Wakīl al-Milawī (see §2.1) about two men smoking in a park who are caught red-handed.

297 Still used nowadays in expressions like  ka’bī ma’a ‘a “the skin of my heel is cracked”.

298 Both fat’ and ʿasaf are still used in Egypt with the same meaning.
Aspects of Daily Life

or فهالة fahāqa “death rattle” (51a), a condition which once afflicted al-Maġribī. Anyone who became ill was normally dependent on the services of the barber, who could stitch up قطب qatāb a wound (20a), prescribe a مرحوم marham “ointment” (106a) or لعوق lu’āq “electuary” (54b). William Lane did not have a high opinion of them, finding that the Egyptian barbers were “miserably ignorant of the sciences which they profess, and unskilful in their practice.”

An antidote called تریاق فاروق tiryāq fārūq “distinguishing theriac” (52a) was used for snakebites. The Ottoman traveller Evliya Čelebi (1611-after 1683) gives us a detailed description of how it was manufactured in Egypt. In the month of July, specialist hunters used to catch a great number of snakes, which were then transported to the hospital of Qālāwūn, slaughtered, hung out to dry, and then used to prepare this special medicine.

5.4 Games
Al-Maġribī mentions some terminology connected with the game of chess. The word فرزان firzān (117a) is normally used for “queen” in chess, and is derived from the Persian فرزین farzin “wise man, counsellor”. دست (3a), another Persian word, means “game”. Less common are three other chess-terms used by al-Maġribī. When somebody loses a game, he says مدام marmād, meaning literally “affected by ophthalmia”, as if the loser wants to say ما رأیت ما هدست ra’ayt fi hādā al-dast “I did not see in this game”. Although at first sight it would be tempting to compare this to the “blind mate”, this would be inaccurate because the latter is “a mate which the winner does not see is mate”, while al-Maġribī

---

299 See §1.2.
300 Lane (2003) p. 218; “The Egyptian medical and surgical practitioners are mostly barbers”. This remained the case until recently, but barbers or mizayyīn have gradually lost their popularity after doctors reached almost every corner of Egypt. For instance, circumcision was always an exercise practiced by the mizayyīn.
301 These last three words are still in use in Egypt nowadays.
305 See Wieber (1972) p. 291.
306 Da‘ al-īṣr fol. 3a.
Aspects of Daily Life

mentions that in the case of *marmād*, it is the looser who did not see. This term is not found in this specific context in any dictionary, but it is mentioned with exactly the same meaning and explained in Ibn Tağrī Birdī’s *al-Nuğūm al-zāhira fi ʿulūm Miṣr wa-l-Qāhirā*:


“Between him" and the ‘judge of judges’ ʿIzz al-Dīn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz b. al-ʿizz al-Bağdādī al-Ḥanbālī, was a discussion in one of the Sultan’s mağālis about the meaning of a certain word. One of the things Ibn al-Saffāh said was the following: ‘rayyi al-waqf’ (‘the income resulting from a dedicated land for a purpose’), with a šadda on the yā. So, the aforementioned ʿIzz al-Dīn said: ‘Shut up you *marmād*’, leading to laughter from the Sultan and the other attendants, and al-Ḥanbali demanded justice (؟). So when they went down from the citadel, I asked ʿIzz al-Dīn about the meaning of the word *marmād*, and he said: ‘The Turks play chess often, and when it happens that there is somebody among them who is ignorant, they call him *marmād*, so I meant this word in the way they are using it in, and let them know that he doesn’t know a thing and that he is ignorant about what he said, and that is what I meant.”

So, although the term was unfamiliar to an Arabic speaker, it was well-known by the Turkish speaking courtiers. More mysterious is the term مرامد قفَّة (32b). The meaning of the word يدیدب (13a) is also not entirely clear, although it seems to be related to the noun *dadabān / didabān* “sentry” (see Hinds-

---

109 Ibn Tağrī Birdī (1963) XV pp. 174-175.
107 The meaning of *marmād* here is unclear. Dozy II p. 680a “demand justice d’un tel pour une personne; s’entend de quelqu’un comme de son égal, ne pas lui donner de titre”.

73
Badawi (1986) p. 282b, whose origin is the Persian didabān (see Steingass p. 552a). Neither of these words is mentioned by Wieber and Murray, two authorities on chess.

Another game described by al-Maġribī, although not in such detail, is the ṭāb (16b). It is still played today with four pieces of palm branch which are white on one side and green on the other, a board, and a few stones. It is described in detail in Lane’s Manners and customs (2003) pp. 346-349.

5.5 Clothing and jewellery
Al-Maġribī pays a great deal of attention to the different types of clothing worn by the Egyptians. In total, he mentions 27 types of garments or words related to clothing, from the 'amāma “turban” (103a) to the tarqīl “slipper” (75), and from the tabbūn “short under-pants” (110a) to the buhmūq “veil” (36b). People used to wear a širwāl “drawers” (80b), also called سروال (80a), which was kept up with a waistband, called dikka (57a) or نافق (56a). They wore a زبون “inner vest”, a قرطح (53b) qartq “tunic” or فا (130a) gabā “sleeved robe”, and when it was cold, a woollen cloak which was called داية abâ (9a) or عباية abāya (128b).

Two types of garment are particularly worth mentioning here because they are generally not well-documented. The first one is the حنى ُني (112b), which is described in Dozy I 330b as “semble être le nom d’un vêtement”, occurring once in 1001 Nights. Al-Maġribī does not take us closer to an understanding of what kind of garment this might be, since he only mentions that it is شي شمس "a thing that is worn". Unfortunately, it is the same with the second item, the کمليا "they say kāmiliyya to something that is worn, and it is not known [in Classical Arabic]”. This word, like ُني، is not found in any other source apart from Dozy II 489b, who does not specify it: “espèce de robe” (his source is ابن یاس).

To these items of clothing we can add some words for jewellery, all of which are well known today: دحّام “nose ring” (97a), دحلال "anklet" (72a), دبل "ring" (72b), طوق طوق "neckband" (47b), دوس "glass bracelets" (101a) (nowadays the diminutive چو تین is used) and َلا "jingling necklace" (115b).
Aspects of Daily Life

5.6 Kitchen utensils, tools, and other household items

There are 33 entries about the utensils used in daily life in Daf al-īṣr. Many of these are kitchen items, such as the عَكَّة 'akka “receptacle for clarified butter” (61a), صلاة salāya “mortar and pestle” (128b), معرفة madhra “ladle” (31b), مَحُوُّقَة luhūqī “small cooking pot” (54a), أبَرِيق abrīq “ever with a spout” (36b), مَاذُون mā‘ūn “kitchen pot” (119a), and هُنَّ hewn “mortar” (120a). We also find reference to different types of jugs: بَئْر bā′er “jug” (1.3b), فَل سَهْلāyya “vessel for water for washing one’s backside”, قَلْف qullā “earthenware water jar” (89b), and also the pad put under the jug when carried on the head: حَوْارِي hawāriya (125b). The mention of other items gives us some idea about the things found in the average household at that time: دَوْائِيّة dāwaya “inkwell” (127a), لَقَة liqa “bit of wool which is inserted in an inkwell” (55a), مَرْجُونة mūrgūna “basket” (114a), مِسْلَة misalla “thick needle” (91b), مِسْنَان misann “whetstone” (115b), مَقَالَة maqala “burnisher” (81a), جِلْب ilba “small container” (17a), حَوْق hawqq “small box” (38b), قَوْر qarwa “basket of palm leaves” (130a), قَفْف qaffa “basket made of palm stalks” (32b), قَمِيلīlīlīlī “basket made of palm leaves” (32b), قَمِيلīlīlīlī “basket made of palm leaves” (32b), and مَكَحْلِة mukhila “kohl-holder” (90b). The most important thing to note about these items is that they show that Yūsuf al-Maḡribī, an Azharite scholar and سُفِي ṣufī, did not believe it was beneath him to show an interest in such everyday things, which were mostly the domain of women. Indeed, that al-Maḡribī was interested in the world of women and children becomes apparent from the presence in Daf al-īṣr of several expressions used exclusively by them. For these, the reader is referred to §6.5.1.1.

---

311 For this translation of the word ِإِسْتِنَجَّة istinjā’ see Hinds-Badawi (1986) 851a and Hava (2001) 753b.

312 Al-Maḡribī also mentions that in the Maḡrib, مَكَحْلِة means “rifle”, because of the similarity between the kohl and gun powder. It is still used with this meaning in Morocco, see Harrell-Sobelman (2004) p. 81a.