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To cite this article: Simon Leese (2022) Connoisseurs of the senses: tobacco smoking, poetic pleasures, and homoerotic masculinity in Ottoman Damascus, *The Senses and Society*, 17:1, 90-108, DOI: [10.1080/17458927.2021.2020616](https://doi.org/10.1080/17458927.2021.2020616)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17458927.2021.2020616>



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Published online: 22 Feb 2022.



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Connoisseurs of the senses: tobacco smoking, poetic pleasures, and homoerotic masculinity in Ottoman Damascus

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ABSTRACT

In seventeenth-century Damascus and other Ottoman cities, a number of Arabic poets wrote about tobacco smoking, suggesting that this relatively new habit was not only a question of law and social mores for scholarly communities but also pleasure and connoisseurship. Focussing on *The Wafting Scent of Fragrant Herbs and a Splash of Liquor in the Tavern*, an anthology by the Damascene Muḥammad al-Muḥibbī (d. 1699 CE), this article examines how these poets incorporated tobacco into their poetic world through intertextuality, drawing analogies with other desirable sensory experiences such as wine drinking, and putting tobacco pipes center stage in poetic scenes of homoerotic love. More broadly, it argues that multisensorial perception provided metaphors for literary connoisseurship and sociability in the Ottoman period. This “sensory connoisseurship” – and the incorporation of tobacco as an object of its attention – contributed to articulations of masculinity among poets and audiences who shared poetic and sensory pleasures.

KEYWORDS

Arabic poetry; Ottoman society; tobacco; literary taste; gender; visuality

Introduction

In the early decades of the seventeenth century, a perfumer of Damascus named Abū Bakr al-‘Umarī (d. 1638 or 1639) wrote a pithy two-verse poem that opens with familiar themes of Arabic poetic love. The poet speaks of the burning pain in his lovesick heart and alludes to the harsh words of onlookers who berate him for the hopeless folly of pining for a beloved who is either unattainable or uninterested. But in a curious turn of direction, the second verse introduces a new element that was entirely unusual in the world of Arabic poetry: the poet’s tobacco pipe. This pipe proves crucial, for it is only by smoking that the poet can counter his naysayers:

mudh aḥraqat nāru l-ṣabābati muḥjati // wa-atá l-‘adhūlu yasallu ‘aḍba lisānihi
bādartu bi’l-ghalyūni tamwihan lahu // wa-satartu ‘anhu dukhānahā bi-dukhānihi
Tender desire’s fire has scorched my heart
And censurers have let loose their caustic tongues.
Since then, I have taken to the pipe to dilute their words,
Veiling from them my heart’s smoke
With smoke of a different kind.¹
(al-Muḥibbī 1967-71, 1:34)

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The image of one type of smoke veiling another suggests various possible layers of meaning. It could be that the pipe's smoke not only serves to mask the poet's plight from critical onlookers but also to distract the poet from their unwelcome words. Perhaps the mention of censors is also a satirical nod toward real people in society who might frown upon his tobacco smoking just as much as the imaginary censors in the poem disapprove of love. What is more, the veiling qualities of tobacco smoke seem to offer solace to the poet-lover by dulling the pain of his burning desire.

The interplay of desire, censure, and concealment produced by these verses is premised on the visual and olfactory properties of tobacco smoke but also the multisensorial pleasure of smoking: heat, taste, and the flush of bodily sensation induced by a substance that both stimulates and intoxicates. Strikingly, the poet hints that tobacco smoking brings both pleasure and pain; he presumably chooses to smoke because it is a gratifying diversion, but at the same time only tobacco smoking can obscure the scorching pain in his heart. This pleasurable pain brought about by smoking is a fitting sensory experience to mirror – and conceal – the emotional and bodily responses of erotic desire in Arabic poetry. Through playing with and upturning poetic associations in this way, al-ʿUmarī injects the poetic world with the new material object, sensory experience, and social habit of the tobacco pipe. At the same time, by drawing equivalences between the physical act of smoking and the embodied experience of love, he transforms tobacco smoking itself into something poetic.

This article examines seventeenth-century Arabic poetry on the subject of tobacco smoking to argue that tobacco was not only a question of law and social mores in Ottoman society, but poetic pleasure and connoisseurship. It focuses on poems included in *Nafḥat al-rayḥānah wa-rashḥat ṭilāʾ al-ḥānah* (*The Wafting Scent of Fragrant Herbs and a Splash of Liquor in the Tavern*), a geographically-arranged Arabic literary anthology by the Damascene scholar and poet Muḥammad Amīn al-Muḥibbī (d. 1699). Writing poetry about tobacco was a relatively new and unusual phenomenon since the plant had only been introduced to Ottoman society from the second half of the sixteenth century. Like coffee before it, it caused some controversy, attracting the concern and disdain of some jurists and the more delicate corners of respectable society, and even triggering violence on the streets (Grehan 2006, 1352–1353). According to some scholars, smoking could potentially cloud the mind and intoxicate, and posed a risk to ritual purity (Grehan 2006, 1359–1362; Berger 2001, 270–288). Yet despite ripples of moral panic, this seemingly unrefined habit was taken up with increasing enthusiasm by intellectual and social elites, and a number of poets including al-ʿUmarī took tobacco up as a subject of their poetry to be recited and appreciated in their literary gatherings in Damascus and other Ottoman cities.

By incorporating smoking into their poetic world, Arabic poets in the seventeenth century positioned themselves as arbiters of the senses and of sensory experiences, cultivating a repertoire of poetic and embodied sensory knowledge in new ways to establish their credentials as connoisseurs. Drawing on critical approaches to sensory history and sociability, I propose the notion of “sensory connoisseurship” to describe this interplay of the senses and Arabic poetic culture of the Ottoman period. For poets, anthologists, and audiences, the sensory world was not only theirs to perceive passively as individuals but to structure and curate as an object of their poetic gaze. This gaze was multisensorial, an activation of all the senses (sight, smell, hearing, taste, touch) and their

orientation toward a variety of objects to be perceived, described, admired, and loved. Poets like al-ʿUmarī turned their poetic gaze to tobacco smoking to make sense of and celebrate this new experience. As I demonstrate over the course of this article, they expanded their sensory repertoire by repurposing well-established themes and motifs of the Arabic tradition and drawing analogies along two main axes: between smoking and (homo)erotic love, and between smoking and the intoxicating experience of drinking wine. These dynamics of poetic meaning making and accommodation had a precedent not only with coffee but also hashish, which Arabic poets in the Mamluk period had incorporated into their poetic repertoire by reworking imagery from the long-established tradition of Arabic wine-poetry (Marino 2020).

More broadly, I argue that Arabic literati in the Ottoman period negotiated and articulated their sensory connoisseurship communally; they shared knowledge of sensory repertoires with male peers through embodied social practices such as getting together, conversing, reciting poetry, sharing literary allusions, drinking coffee, and smoking. Since Ottoman-period texts such as *The Wafting Scent of Fragrant Herbs* have received little critical attention, this is an aspect of Arabic literary history that invites more research, all the more so as literature from what has controversially been termed the “post-classical” period has been denigrated and maligned on the basis of perceived esthetic and even moral shortcomings (Bauer 2005, 105–107). But the social and sensory aspects to literary taste are palpable in Ottoman-period Arabic literary anthologies. The title of *The Wafting Scent of Fragrant Herbs and a Splash of Liquor in the Tavern*, like other anthologies of its time, evokes the broad sensory palette of poetry, and the anthology is also structured by male friendships, sociability, and travel between different regions and cities. Al-Muḥibbī cites al-ʿUmarī’s poem about smoking not only because he presumably thought it worth recording, but because his own father had known al-ʿUmarī personally (al-Muḥibbī 1967–71, 1:23). As we shall see, al-Muḥibbī also devotes space to his relative and shaykh ʿAbd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī (d. 1731), a prominent scholar and Sufi of Damascus who penned one of the most important treatises in defense of tobacco that included a final section dedicated to poetry. The links between these men and the ways they derived mutual pleasure from poetry by sharing in its sensory repertoires and idioms of (homo)erotic love point toward close connections between poetic culture and constructions of masculinity, a point to which I return at the end of this article. More specifically, by making tobacco smoking an object of their poetic gaze, Arabic poets in Damascus and other Ottoman cities incorporated the habit into their self-image as refined men of taste.

Tobacco in law and poetry

For Arabic poets and connoisseurs, tobacco smoking was a new sensory experience that joined others that had long been part of the poetic repertoire such as intoxicating wines, redolent perfumes, and the sights and scents of beautiful flora. Tobacco was a transregional phenomenon made possible by an increasingly connected globe. After being introduced from the New World, it gained popularity in England, Holland, and Spain from the second half of the sixteenth century and then quickly spread across the Eastern Mediterranean (Grehan 2006, 1354–1355; al-Nābulusī 1682, 26a). Together with coffee, it became an integral feature of Ottoman social life and soon became a subject of poetry.

One poet named Māmayyah al-Rūmī (d. 1577 or 1579), who was born in Istanbul but who lived in Damascus for most of his life, wrote a poem about tobacco as early as 1575 or before (Masarwa 2017, 186).

The growing popularity of tobacco smoking triggered responses from scholarly communities in the form of dedicated treatises and legal opinions (sg. *fatwā*), and the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries also saw various moments of regulation imposed by Ottoman authorities. In 1633, coffee houses in Istanbul were closed and smoking prohibited, and a ban on smoking was attempted in Damascus as late as 1749 (Grehan 2006, 1362–1367). But the opinions of jurists on the harms, benefits, and overall permissibility of tobacco differed. One Egyptian scholar, Ibrāhīm al-Lāqānī (d. 1631), wrote a vehemently anti-tobacco treatise where he argued that the substance was not only harmful to the body but also troubling due to its associations with European trade; he saw tobacco as a religiously unacceptable innovation (*bid'ah*) and even a potential threat to ritual purity due to contact with non-Muslims (Grehan 2006, 1361–1362; Berger 2001, 279). Al-Lāqānī wrote at a time when Europeans were the principal importers of tobacco into the Middle East, but over the coming decades, new sources of production, including from within the Ottoman empire, resulted in tobacco becoming more readily and cheaply available than coffee (Grehan 2006, 1355).

A generation later, al-Nābulusī was altogether more positive about tobacco. In his lengthy 1682 treatise *al-Ṣulḥ bayn al-ikhwān fī ḥukm ibāḥat al-dukhān* (*The Reconciliation among Brothers on a Judgment to Permit Smoking*), he gives short shrift to common objections raised against the habit and categorically states that it does not muddle the mind or senses (*lā yushawwish al-'aql wa'l-ḥawāss*), nor does it cause harm to the body (1682, 92b). Those who argued for total prohibition, he believed, were even more stubborn than those who claimed it causes intoxication (*iskār*), since experience and observation (*tajribah* and *mushāhadah*) demonstrated that long-term smokers remained healthy in mind, body, and faculties (33b–34a). Al-Nābulusī also believed that the notion that tobacco smoke was ritually unclean (*najis*) on account of its smell was a gross exaggeration (11a–11b). Later on, when pointing out that such judgments were a matter of individual temperament, he states that some even likened tobacco smoke to a pleasant perfume and thus it was, like other perfumes, an unsuitable adornment when going on Hajj or Umrah (69b–71a).

Al-Nābulusī's careful study of tobacco's sensory and bodily effects serves his broader claims that tobacco is fine in moderation in line with principles of balance in humoral medicine, and that it falls under the legal category of *mubāḥ* (permitted) like a number of other controversial consumables including coffee (e.g. al-Nābulusī 1682, 41b–44b). But he was also motivated to speak out against the overzealousness (*ta'aṣṣub*) of religious scholars who, in fervently arguing for prohibition, had displayed poor ethical conduct in matters of God's law (*'adam adab fī al-sharī'ah*) and provoked widespread societal unrest (*fitnah*) resulting in deaths, destruction of property, and slander against the faith of fellow Muslims (44b–45a, 11b). As I discuss in more detail below, al-Nābulusī challenged tobacco's negative associations with social and sexual impropriety by speaking positively of elite groups of men who smoked in convivial gatherings. His enthusiasm for smoking as a distinctly *male* pastime is apparent in some of his own poetry that he includes at the end of *The Reconciliation* even if he apparently only took to smoking regularly during a later trip to Egypt and the Hejaz (al-Nābulusī 1682, 119a–127b; Grehan 2006, 1364).

The case of al-Nābulusī makes clear that makers of law could also be poets and connoisseurs of poetry. Religious scholars (*‘ulamā*) and litterateurs (*udabā*) were overlapping rather than distinct groups in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, just as Thomas Bauer has observed for the Mamluk period (2005, 108–111). That being said, different forms of knowledge produced by scholarly communities and the written genres associated with them followed distinct protocols that were often blind to each other. Al-Nābulusī’s treatise on tobacco is somewhat of an exception, since it incorporates various discursive lenses for the same subject including natural science, humoral medicine, jurisprudence, and finally the section dedicated to poetry.

Some of the poems about tobacco that al-Nābulusī cites do engage directly with the other branches of learning that constitute the backbone of the treatise, particularly a long – and rather unpoetic – poem that al-Nābulusī indicates was likely written by an Egyptian scholar. This poem narrates the history of tobacco trade and production, catalogs its health benefits, suggests that it is a desirable alternative to both opium and wine, and calls into question legal judgments against it (al-Nābulusī 1682, 119b-120). But many of the remaining poems cited by al-Nābulusī and those that al-Muḥibbī later incorporated into *The Wafting Scent of Fragrant Herbs*, including several of their own epigrams, look toward tobacco smoking through the language and logic of poetic love. While a number do allude to tobacco’s religious permissibility (al-Muḥibbī 1967-71, 4:588) or its perceived harms such as addictiveness (al-Muḥibbī 1967-71, 1:194; cf. Ibn Ma‘ṣūm 2009, 2:533), they often do so humorously or in service of drawing associations between smoking and erotic desire. Al-Muḥibbī himself makes no explicit reference to legal debates surrounding the habit in *The Wafting Scent of Fragrant Herbs*. He does, however, mark out tobacco smoking as a noteworthy phenomenon in a number of ways. He introduces al-‘Umarī’s poem, for instance, with the heading “on the subject of tobacco smoke” (*fī dukhān al-tabghh*) and he also interrupts the basic organizational structure of region and author to group together verses by two further authors about smoking (al-Muḥibbī 1967-71, 1:34).

New words for new pleasures

Tobacco was still a relatively new phenomenon in the later decades of the seventeenth century, and scholars and poets active in Damascus and other Ottoman cities were well aware that the words they employed to describe the plant and the tools for smoking it were new to the Arabic lexicon. Al-Nābulusī catalogs the range of vocabulary used in Arabic to describe tobacco, such as *tutun* (i.e. *tütün*) and *dukhān*, which literally mean “smoke” in Turkish and Arabic respectively, and other words for the plant such as *tabghh*, *tunbāk* and *tubbāq* (al-Nābulusī 1682, 26a-26b). He also describes the *ghalyūn*, a clay pipe popularly used to smoke tobacco that he contrasts with the water pipes more commonly used in Iran and India to smoke tobacco mixed with molasses (al-Nābulusī 1682, 27a-27b; cf. Matthee 2005, 124–127). Al-Muḥibbī draws attention to the lexical novelty of this word; immediately after citing a poem about smoking with a clay pipe in *The Wafting Scent of Fragrant Herbs*, he comments that *ghalyūn* also popularly denoted a ship (i.e. galleon) (al-Muḥibbī 1967-71, 3:71).

The *ghalyūn* is an object that features prominently in seventeenth-century Arabic poems about tobacco smoking, a reflection of its popularity in the Levant, Egypt, and the Arabian Peninsula. The clay pipe heads or bowls denoted by the word were originally

inspired by English models, but workshops in Anatolia and the Levant soon developed their own styles (François 2012, 488–489). The pipe would be attached to the end of a bored-out wooden stem (*qaṣabah*) consisting of one of more parts (al-Nābulūsī 1682, 27a), which, according to a Scottish physician and naturalist in mid-eighteenth century Aleppo, would be decorated with silver and used for years in contrast to the more disposable clay attachment itself (Russell 1756, 82). The length of these stems depended on which setting they were used but also came to be a marker of social standing (François 2012, 490).

The remarkably phallic appearance of some of these clay pipes together with their wooden stems (Figures 1 and 2) is suggestive, particularly in light of poems that intimate acts of touch and erotic exchange brought about by smoking them. As I argue below, the haptic experience of smoking pipes was both a physical manipulation of the material object and, simultaneously, a poetic enactment of sensory contact for the purposes of partially or fully satisfying erotic desire. This haptic contact was more than a question of touch, but entailed taste, smell, and even the distal faculty of vision that had the effect of bringing onlookers and the object of their gaze into proximity with each other (cf. “haptic visibility” in Marks 2000, 129–132, 162–165). What is more, we cannot discount that possibility that erotic contact between smokers and the objects of their desire went beyond the metaphorical.



Figure 1. Seventeenth- and eighteenth-century clay smoking pipes (sg. *ghalyūn*) without stems found in the Citadel of Damascus (François 2012, 505).



Figure 2. A mid-eighteenth -century engraving showing a man sitting in a gathering at a home in Aleppo smoking a clay pipe with a long stem. Studio of James Mynde, London (Russell 1756, Plate XV).

This multisensorial mode of looking toward, interpreting, and enjoying tobacco was a distinctively masculine one, a point to which I return at the end of the article. This is not to say that women and social groups beyond Arabic-literate connoisseurs did not smoke tobacco. James Grehan has argued that the popularity of tobacco in the Ottoman Middle East was part of a “public culture of fun” that expanded across wide swathes of society and that constituted a distinctly early modern moment connecting the region with the rest of the world (2006, 1375). But concerns that smoking, along with coffee drinking and the coffee house, could be a source of social discord sometimes had a gendered dimension. One later observer in Damascus, the eighteenth-century chronicler Ibn Budayr, was disturbed to see women smoking and drinking coffee in public “just as the men were doing” (cited in Grehan 2006, 1356). Tellingly, al-Nābulusī’s defense of tobacco smoking was also implicitly gendered by virtue of his focus on men. Objecting to claims that smoking was the exclusive preserve of the debauched and depraved (*ahl al-fujūr wa’l-fisq*), terms that typically imply sexual impropriety, he not only points out that diverse sections of society

including women across different regions of the world smoked, but emphasizes that respected men of society such as scholars of law (*ṭalabat al-‘ilm*), governors, judges, imams, preachers, muezzins, and state officials (*arbāb al-dawlah*) were among them (48b-49b).

The poets featured in al-Nābulusī’s treatise and in *The Wafting Scent of Fragrant Herbs* were exclusively men, and their poetry represented a restricted gaze that served to articulate elite connoisseurship, distinction, and masculinity. Although it is difficult to determine exactly where they recited and exchanged poetry with other connoisseurs, we might imagine they did so in all-male gatherings at each other’s homes, coffee houses, and perhaps even commercial spaces owned or frequented by traders and artisans such as the perfumer al-‘Umarī; presumably those present would have smoked at the same time. Al-Nābulusī even explicitly mentions that tobacco was smoked openly in scholarly assemblies (*maḥāfil al-‘ulamā’*) where judges were present (49a), pointing to an intersection of gendered space, male conviviality, shared sensory experiences, and the sonic exchange of words and ideas.

A community of sensory connoisseurs

The world that *The Wafting Scent of Fragrant Herbs* constructs is not only male but almost exclusively Arabic, despite the fact that many individuals featured in it would have been multilingual. The extensive anthology is arranged into eight overarching geographical chapters that represent an itinerary through the world of Arabic poets, starting with individuals from the author’s home of Damascus, then moving in succession through Aleppo, Anatolia (*al-Rūm*), Iraq and Bahrain, Yemen, the Hejaz, Egypt, and finally the Maghrib. This scheme was partially structured by al-Muḥibbī’s own travels, since he spent a significant period of time in Istanbul, but was also explicitly modeled on a series of geographically arranged anthologies that had originated with *Yatimat al-dahr* by Abū Maṣṣūr al-Tha‘ālibī (d. 1038) (Hamori and Bauer 2007). Al-Muḥibbī quotes extensively from two more recent inspirations of the same sort by Shihāb al-Dīn al-Khafājī (d. 1659) and Ibn Ma‘ṣūm al-Madanī (d. 1708). Like these precursors, al-Muḥibbī focuses on contemporary scholars and those he directly or indirectly had contact with through study, travel, and letter writing, and he also represents Arabic literary sociability to the near-complete exclusion of Persian and Ottoman Turkish.² Although tobacco found representation across these interrelated poetic cultures within the Ottoman Empire and beyond, for instance in Safavid Iran (see Matthee 2005, 117–143), poetry cited in *The Wafting Scent of Fragrant Herbs* explored the relationship between tobacco and poetic love through a restricted Arabic lens embedded in exclusive – and excluding – Arabic-literate scholarly and friendship networks.

Even a cursory examination of anthologies such as *The Wafting Scent of Fragrant Herbs* reveals that multisensory perception provided metaphors for literary esthetics, connoisseurship, and sociability among Ottoman-period Arabic poets and audiences. Metaphors of the senses abound in *The Wafting Scent of Fragrant Herbs*, with copious references to senses, such as sight, smell, and taste; and the objects of those senses, such as gardens, fruits, breezes, wafting fragrances, and flashes of lightening. In the work’s introduction, al-Muḥibbī describes *adab* – ethically ameliorating literary arts – as the highest aspiration of

his eye (*nāzir*) and intellect (*fikr*) before elaborating a multisensorial and bodily conception of literary esthetics mediated first through the distal senses of sight and smell and then through processes of taste and ingestion:

ashīm min āfāqihi bawāriq al-sihr wa-ashamm min ardāfihi rawā'ih al-shiḥr fa-artashif minhu mā huwa ashaff min al-mā' fī zujājihi wa-ashtaffu mā huwa aladdh min al-raḥiq fī mizājihi
From [*adab's*] distant horizons I behold gleaming flashes of sorcery, and in its trail I smell fragrances from Yemen's ocean shores.³ I then sip something with greater glasslike clarity than water, and imbibe something more deliciously blended than a heavenly wine.
(*al-Muḥibbī* 1967-71, 1:4)

Such descriptions of literary beauty, which echo the sensory idioms found in erotic and wine poetry, are common throughout *The Wafting Scent of Fragrant Herbs* and other contemporary anthologies. I propose “sensory connoisseurship” as a frame of analysis to explore how Arabic poets and anthologists such as al-Muḥibbī cultivated sensory experience in this way. This concept is informed by the sensory turn in anthropology and cultural history, which has witnessed a growing appreciation that sensory experiences are inflected by cultural codes and social practices (Howes 2003). The meta-sensory discourse surrounding literary beauty illustrated above, which drew on much older sensory idioms in Arabic poetry, is one such culturally constructed and socially mediated code. I also take the lead from cultural historians of South Asia in their approach to connoisseurship, which Katherine Schofield has defined as “the cultivation of the emotions and senses through specific aesthetic practices that also engage the intellect, and in which the aim is experiential transcendence” (2015, 409). As a “sensory community” (cf. “emotional community” in Rosenwein 2006), Arabic connoisseurs of the Ottoman period curated the senses for each other and for their audiences. This was both an esthetic practice and a strategy of cultural and social distinction through delineating, sharing, and enjoying an authoritative body of sensory and poetic knowledge.

Arabic connoisseurs in the Ottoman period not only used sensory metaphors to encode literary esthetics but also practices of literary sociability and homosocial friendship in the world outside texts. Of one Damascene scholar, Ibrāhīm al-Akramī al-Ṣāliḥī (d. 1637–8), al-Muḥibbī states:

shā'ir al-zamān wa-shammāmat al-nudmān wa-man ilayhi yaṣbū al-qalb wa-yaḥinn wa-bi-tadhakkurihi yanthanī ghuṣn al-barā'ah wa-yarjahinn fa-fī awṣāfihi mashamm li'l-rūḥ 'abiq wa-lutf yurawwiq bihi ka'sahu al-muṣṭabīḥ wa'l-muḡṭabiq
[His is] the poet of the age and a sweet aroma for drinking companions. The heart desires and yearns for him. The bough of excellence tilts and bends when it recalls him. His qualities contain a fragrant scent for one's soul, and a tenderness with which morning and evening drinkers refine their cups.
(*al-Muḥibbī* 1967-71,1:40)

Al-Muḥibbī's description of his fellow scholar illustrates two fundamental features of *The Wafting Scent of Fragrant Herbs* and similar anthologies that recorded poetry while giving representation to homosociability. The first is the normalized eroticization of male-male friendships, a phenomenon that became common in literary culture of the Mamluk period (cf. Bauer 2013, 11). The second is the layering and convergence of coded sensory worlds:

the erotic and sensory encounters found in poetry itself constitute a base level; at the second level, the beauty of that poetry is imagined through sensory metaphors; and the third level sees relationships between men who composed and shared that poetry couched with a sensory charge. These layered codes of sensory connoisseurship invite us to interrogate more deeply the significance of tobacco smoking for Arabic poets and audiences in Ottoman Damascus and elsewhere. Poetry about smoking the pipe not only described an immediate material and bodily sensory experience; it also constituted a pursuit of literary beauty and an exploration of connoisseurs' relationships with each other in the social world.

Making tobacco poetic: intertextuality and sensory analogies

Poets who took up the theme of tobacco in their poetry, including the Damascene perfumer al-'Umarī whose poem this article began with, accounted for its material and sensory novelty by repurposing the sensory and erotic idioms of Arabic poetry. In doing so, they produced an intertextual poetic discourse about tobacco that was distinct from the legalistic debates of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries discussed above even if they sometimes shared common themes such as intoxication. Poets not only incorporated new words such as *ghalyūn* (clay pipe) and *tabgh* (tobacco) into their poetry, but often quoted verses or partial verses by older revered poets to repurpose them for this new topic. This form of self-conscious and overt intertextuality, known in Arabic as *taḍmīn* (incorporation), pays homage to earlier revered poets and also serves to display the erudition of both the contemporary poet in question and his audience, who are able to recognize the excerpt and appreciate the skill and sometimes humor with which it has been reworked. In *The Wafting Scent of Fragrant Herbs*, al-Muḥibbī often draws attention to *taḍmīn* and sometimes cites the original verse that is alluded to. One such instance comes alongside his remarks on the etymology of *ghalyūn* with two verses by a poet named 'Alī "Riḍā'ī" (d. 1629), the grandson of the famous scholar and mufti of Istanbul Zakariyyā b. Bayram (d. 1593), and a relation of al-Muḥibbī's own shaykh and teacher Muḥammad b. Lutf Allāh (d. 1681). 'Alī's poem, which speaks of the appeal of the tobacco pipe, incorporates a well-known half-verse by the seventh-century poet al-Khansā' taken from an elegy for her deceased brother Ṣakhr. This older poem would seem to have no immediate connection to smoking, yet the original motif of Ṣakhr being a flame-topped waymark to guide the way (*'alam fi ra'sihi nār*) is readily yet creatively applied to a tobacco pipe that attracts the Ottoman poet toward smoking (*shurb al-dukhān*) (al-Muḥibbī 1967-71, 3:71).

Another example of *taḍmīn* comes in a poem about tobacco by a poet from Aleppo called Muḥammad b. 'Umar al-'Urḍī (d. 1660 or 1661). As al-Muḥibbī points out, the poem incorporates a verse from the famed early-Islamic poet al-Farazdaq (d. 732). This verse had originally appeared in a longer poem where al-Farazdaq describes a nighttime encounter and conversation with a hungry wolf, and refers to the poet sharing provisions with the wolf around the campfire (cf. al-Farazdaq 1987, 628). But when Muḥammad al-'Urḍī adapted it as the last verse of his new poem (here the last two lines in my English

translation), he overturned the original motif of a campfire to create an intimate scene where the tobacco pipe not only produces its own fire and smoke but becomes an integral vehicle of erotic exchange:

*wa-zabyun gharīrun bāta ‘aşran mu ‘ānisī // wa-laysa siwāhu min jalīsin wa-nadmāni
fa-qaḍ aşbaha l-ghalyūnu qā’ida jawharin // bi-thaghrin lahu yahkī ‘uqūda jumāni
yaqūdu liya l-rīqa l-burāda l-ladhi bihi // ghadat tantafi law ‘ātu qalbī wa-nīrāni
wa-uḍrimuhu hīnan bi-nāri huṣhāshatī // fa-li-llāhi min ḍiddāyni ya ‘talijāni
wa-bittu ufaddī al-zāda baynī wa-baynahu // ‘alā ḍaw’i nārin baynanā wa-dukhāni*

As evening falls, a guileless gazelle becomes my companion;
I sit and drink with no other.

By morning, the pipe draws out jewels
From a mouth resembling a string of pearls.
It draws cool saliva to me

By which my heart’s torment and my fire die down.
And at times I ignite it with my spirit’s last fire;
What beauty there is in two opposites wrestling!

“As night falls, I give myself to the provisions among us both
By the light of fire and smoke between us.”

(al-Muḥibbī 1967-71, 2:505)

The success of this intertextual allusion rests on the ability of the poet’s fellow connoisseurs to recognize the older verse and enjoy how their contemporary upturns and repurposes its original associations. The fire and smoke of al-Farazdaq’s poem no longer signify hospitality shown toward a dangerous wild animal; provisions shared by the fire’s light become something more than food. Instead, the source of fire and smoke is a tobacco pipe that mediates an erotic encounter between the poet and animal. Antagonistic forces are at play, since smoking provides relief from a painful response in the heart that the poet himself seeks to inflame. And rather than a dangerous wolf, the poet’s companion is a gazelle, a desirable animal that can stand in for either a male or female beloved. The tobacco pipe’s central role in the encounter insinuates a phallic function parallel to the phallic appearance of actual clay pipes and their stems; the pipe is an erotic vessel that mediates the poet’s devotion, allowing him to taste the saliva upon the beloved’s mouth and pearl-like teeth through secondary contact.

In the example above, Muḥammad al-‘Urḍī makes tobacco poetic by way of analogies along two axes: between the heat of smoke and the erotic response, and between smoking and the imbibing of liquid – in this case the saliva of the beloved’s kiss. Other poets drew more explicit analogies between tobacco smoking and another liquid central to the Arabic poetic tradition: wine. The relationship between tobacco and wine was also a recurring theme in legal treatises about tobacco, with some jurists arguing that tobacco was, like wine, an intoxicant (*muskir*) and therefore not just undesirable but illicit (Berger 2001, 283–286). Jurists who permitted tobacco challenged this same analogy; al-Nābulusī likens tobacco to coffee and quotes extensively from an earlier treatise on coffee by the sixteenth-century Maliki jurist ‘Abd al-Ghaffār, who in turn refers to the opinion of the Yemeni Ahmad b. ‘Umar about the effects and permissibility of a range of substances. This earlier Yemeni author contrasts coffee and *qāt* to more ambiguous substances such as opium, nutmeg, and hashish that might alter the mind in larger amounts (93a–93b). Coffee, he states, causes liveliness (*nashāt*), spiritual vigor (*rawḥanah*) and good will (*tīb khātir*) in the one who drinks it due to its drying effect on the wet humors. It therefore

helps the drinker to overcome laziness and fatigue and provides energy for going about worldly and spiritual matters both in word (including Sufi recollection, recitation of the Qur'an, and evening discourses) and deed (including prayer, writing, and sewing). Those who drink coffee may experience an expansive joy (*inbisāt*) but this is normally with the help of male companions (*ikhwān*) who participate in Sufi recollection and audition, composing poetry, and convivial evening conversation (*musāmarah*). While this state might figuratively be called intoxication (*sukr*), it is categorically not so, even if in some cases it might lead to a loss of decorum (*ih̄tishām*) and the composition of explicitly obscene poetry (*inshād shi'r al-mujūn min ghayr kināyah*) (98b–100b).

By placing tobacco in this same category, al-Nābulusī steps beyond claiming that tobacco is merely permissible. Instead, he seems to indicate that smoking, like drinking coffee, might even be praiseworthy on account of the fact that it stimulates convivial conversation, encourages an enthusiastic discharge of religious devotions, and even inspires the composition of poetry – provided, of course, that the behavior of those who smoke remains within the bounds of decency. But while al-Nābulusī's position depended on rejecting an analogy between tobacco and wine – since, legally speaking, wine was unambiguously illicit due to its intoxicating properties – the poetry that he and his contemporaries composed and exchanged more often than not celebrated wine *because* it was an intoxicating sensory experience intimately associated with erotic encounters with the beloved. And so when they turned their poetic gaze toward tobacco smoking by way of intertextual poetic gestures and by skillfully manipulating the sensory and erotic repertoires of Arabic poetry, they inevitably tended to make positive comparisons with wine that would be unthinkable in legal writing. This parallel and sometimes contradictory dynamic of meaning making and accommodation through both legal and poetic analogies had a precedence with coffee, and indeed coffee took its name (*qahwā*) through analogy to wine (Mahamid and Nissim 2018, 141–142, 162). Earlier still, Mamluk poets from the thirteenth century onwards had integrated hashish as an element of their homoerotic poetry by drawing upon long established imagery and conventions of wine poetry (Marino 2020).

The following poems explore the relationship between tobacco and wine in various ways. They are all two-verse epigrams (*maqātī*), a poetic form that became hugely popular in the Mamluk period and whose formal and rhetorical features made it well suited for making pithy statements about smoking and other sensory experiences celebrated by al-Muḥibbī and his contemporaries. As Adam Talib has argued, the form is often characterized by a “premise-exposition-resolution” thematic progression on a single subject; what appear to be an unexpected or humorous turns in such poems actually progress in line with the audience's expectations established by the provocative or rhetorically stated premise set up in the poem's opening verse (2017, 23–24). What is more, epigrams from the Mamluk period often eroticized individuals from diverse corners of society, and “let you smell the odours of the market and the quarters of the craftsmen” (Bauer 2013, 11). This tendency to poeticize and eroticize a range of sensory experiences was also clearly true of the seventeenth century, as is abundantly clear from the array of epigrams in *The Wafting Scent of Fragrant Herbs* not only about tobacco, but camphor (*kāfūr*), pomegranate flowers (*jullanār*), cloves (*qurunful*), bitter orange (*nāranj*), and almond sweetmeats (*lawzīnaj*) (al-Muḥibbī 1967–71, 6:262, 6:43, 6:40, 6:40, 5:71).

Al-ʿUmariʿs poem discussed at the beginning of this article was one such epigram, and immediately afterward al-Muḥibbī cites another by a Syrian poet named Muḥammad b. ʿAlī al-Ḥarfūshī (d. 1649). Although al-Ḥarfūshī has his own entry later in *The Wafting Scent of Fragrant Herbs* (al-Muḥibbī 1967-71, 1:189), another logic of anthologizing is at play here. Al-Ḥarfūshī's poem is not just on the subject of tobacco but conjures a similar image to al-ʿUmariʿs: tobacco smoke veiling a burning heart. Al-Ḥarfūshī, however, makes explicit references to other bodily states: intoxication (*nash`ah*) and ecstasy (*taṭarrub*). While he denies that these are his motivations for smoking tobacco, the implication is that they are among its potential bodily and poetic effects:

*la-ʿumruka lam ahwa l-dukhāna wa-lam amil // ilayhi li-alqā nash`atan wa-taṭarrubā
wa-lākinnanī ukhfī bihi ʿan mujālisī // dukhāna fu`ādin bi'l-gharāmi talahhabā*
It is not for intoxication or ecstatic thrill
That I love and lean toward smoking.
Instead, I use it to conceal from my comrade
The smoke of a heart aflame with passion.
(al-Muḥibbī 1967-71, 1:34; cf. Ibn Ma`šūm 2009, 2:533)

The implied analogy with wine is spelled out more explicitly in an unattributed epigram cited in Ibn Ma`šūm's *Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr fī maḥāsin ahl al-ʿaṣr* (*The Choicest Wine of the Press on the Merits of People of the Age*). The poem opens with the poet apparently denying that he derives any pleasures from tobacco before drawing a comparison between the heat of smoking and the burning pain of love. The "resolution," however, draws a second-level comparison between the affective and curative efficacies of tobacco and wine:

*wa-mā shurbiya l-tunbāka min ajli ladhdatin // bihi lā wa-lā riḥun yafūḥu kamā l-ʿitri
wa-lākin udāwī nāra qalbī bi-mithlihā // kamā yatadāwā shāribu l-khamri bi'l-khamri*
I do not drink tobacco for pleasure's sake,
Nor for any scent that wafts like fragrant perfume.
No, I cure my heart's fire with a comparable fire,
Just as wine drinkers find cure in wine itself.
(Ibn Ma`šūm 2009, 2:918–919)

The sense of treating the ailment with its root cause insinuated here, and more specifically of treating a hangover with another drink – what in English is known as "hair of the dog" – recalls the famous verse by Abū Nuwās (d. 814 or 815) about wine:

da` anka lawmī fa-inna l-lawma ighrā`u // wa-dāwinī bi'l-lati kānat hiya l-dā`u
Leave aside your censure,
For censure is but temptation;
Cure me instead with the ailment itself.
(Abū Nuwās 1953, 6)

This allusion inevitably accentuates associations between poetic pleasure, suffering, and intoxication. Together, the verses cited above also enact a matrix of sensory, erotic, and affective relations between three substances: tobacco, wine, and the saliva of the beloved. Indeed, the very notion of *drinking* tobacco – a linguistic collocation also commonly used in Arabic today – immediately suggests an affinity with the pleasure and intoxication of imbibing other desirable liquids that were common in much older Arabic poetry.⁴ The final poet's suggestion that tobacco smoke might not entirely resemble fragrance is also noteworthy because it is a rare mention of scent among the poems I have examined. We

might expect poets to have paid more attention to tobacco's smell or to have drawn analogies with perfume more frequently; perhaps they did not because opponents of tobacco believed it to be a source of foul smells (see above), or perhaps analogies with wine were simply more intuitive – and logical – for poets. Tobacco smoking, like wine, involved direct contact with the mouth, and like poetic wine, tobacco could be a source of biting pain as well as pleasant intoxication.

A later continuation (*dhayl*) of *The Wafting Scent of Fragrant Herbs* contains material that reflects how sensory connoisseurship and poetic interpretations of tobacco smoking were negotiated, performed, and enjoyed within male-male scholarly and friendship networks. This continuation was based on al-Muḥibbī's notes but completed by his student Muḥammad al-Su'ālātī (death date unknown) some five months after he died, and contains biographies of contemporaries in Damascus, Medina, and Aleppo along with al-Su'ālātī's additions. It includes a striking series of epigrams by different poets that all incorporate and rework the same final half-verse in a process of playful one-upmanship. Together, these poems play on the relationship between wine, saliva, and tobacco, which reveals how sensory analogies could be enacted both by poetic allusions and by dynamics of literary sociability such as exchanging and performing verses in social gatherings.

Various themes are picked up and echoed throughout this series of poems, but the two elements they have in common are the notion of one substance attempting to imitate another (with the verb *ḥakā*), and a quality of lustre, coolness, delicacy and sweetness denoted by the Arabic word *shanab*. These two elements both feature in the quoted half-verse, which I have translated in the following examples as "You put on a good show, but sweet lustre eluded you." Al-Muḥibbī's circle of friends were not the first to pass around this specific half-verse and incorporate it into epigrams. One source attributes the original to the thirteenth-century Egyptian Sufi Ibn al-Khiyamī (d. 1286) and states that it was so effective that it quickly became a proverb among Egyptians (Ibn al-Qāḍī 1970, 2:12). The Mamluk poet and anthologist Ibn Hījāh al-Ḥamawī (d. 1434) cites an early precedent of the half verse being quoted (as *taḍmīn*) by Mujīr al-Dīn b. Tamīm (d. 1285), and states that others subsequently took to doing the same (Ibn Hījāh 2005, 4:145). The common thread of these poems lay in the word *shanab*'s connotation of directly tasting the saliva of the beloved; as Ibn Hījāh argued, since *shanab* was an inherent quality of the beloved's mouth (*min lawāzim al-thaḡhr*), tasting it was just as incompatible with themes of coquetry (*dalāl*) as licking (Ibn Hījāh 2005, 2:339).

When poets of Ottoman Syria took up and responded to this intertextual genealogy to incorporate tobacco into their poetic world, they competed in imitating and reworking the poetic past while enacting a symbolic rivalry between the three liquid substances of wine, saliva, and tobacco smoke. The following series of epigrams are all cited in succession within the biography of a Damascus scholar named Sa'ūdī b. Yaḥyá "al-Mutanabbī al-'Abbāsī" (d. 1715) in the continuation (*dhayl*) of *The Wafting Scent of Fragrant Herbs*. I will return to the first epigram by Sa'ūdī b. Yaḥyá himself below. The second, also by Sa'ūdī, sees the wine cup failing to fully mimic the pleasurable sensory qualities of saliva found in the kiss of a full moon, which is a conventional metaphor for the beloved's fair and radiant face:

*wa-ka'si durrin bi-shamsi l-rāḥi yaltahibu // jalāhu badrun bihi l-arwāḥu tuntahabu
fa-qultu mudh rāma yahkī khamra rīqatīhi // la-qad ḥakayta wa-lākin fātaka l-shanabu*
A cup of pearl aflame with sunshine's wine

Was outshone by a full moon
 By whom souls are snatched away.
 The winecup desired to mimic the wine of his liquid kiss.
 So I said:
 "You put on a good show, but sweet lustre eluded you."

In the third epigram, by al-Nābulusī, the wine fails to mimic those same qualities of the pipe's smoke:

*rāma l-mudāmu bi-an yaḥkiya bi-uk`usihi // dawra l-ghalāyini lammā muddati l-quḍubu
 fa-habba nafḥu dukhāni l-tabghi yunshiduhu // la-qad ḥakayta wa-lākin fātaka l-shanabu*
 With its cups, the wine desired to mimic
 The rounds of pipe heads with stems extended.
 So wafts of tobacco smoke puffed forth and sung to the wine:
 "You put on a good show, but sweet lustre eluded you."
 (al-Muḥibbī 1967-71, 6:262)

It is unclear which epigram was composed first – and indeed al-Nābulusī cited his own epigram in *The Reconciliation*, which was completed some 20 years before *The Wafting Scent of Fragrant Herbs* (al-Nābulusī 1682, 126b). Nevertheless, al-Muḥibbī's arrangement of these two epigrams suggests an apparent progression in competitive imitation whereby tobacco smoke outdoes wine, a sentiment echoed in another of al-Nābulusī's epigrams where he speaks of God blessing his servants with tobacco and the pipe *in lieu* of the forbidden wine cup (al-Nābulusī 1682, 126a). By the same token, the order is not entirely pivotal, since any new intertextual poem of this sort preserves rather than effaces its predecessors. Together, by enacting the intertextual journey of "sweet lustre," these poets took up the quality as an object of connoisseurship and transferred it by analogy from one sensory experience to another. Not only does this connect smoking with the saliva of the beloved's kiss and with wine, it creates a thread between these substances and between the poetic past and present. Making this kind of sensory "quote" was one way that connoisseurs interpreted and enjoyed the novelty of tobacco smoking as a sensory and social experience, and in doing so made it poetic. At the same time, the image of wafts of tobacco smoke singing out in verse to wine underscores the social and sonic dimensions of how this connoisseurship was practiced: through the echoing of shared verses and even repeated words such as *shanab* in convivial gatherings of male peers.

The masculinity of smoking and looking toward the beloved

It is clear that smoking a tobacco pipe was more than a matter of simply interacting with the object for seventeenth-century Arabic connoisseurs; it could simultaneously be both an embodied experience and a poetic one that brought about a symbolic fulfillment of sensory contact with the beloved. But what was the nature – and gender – of this beloved, and how did poetic love map onto human relationships? In his epigram about tobacco smoke's "sweet lustre" cited above, al-Nābulusī's description of rounded pipe heads and extended stems seems unambiguously homoerotic, with the "stem" of the pipe (*qaḍīb* pl. *quḍub*) constituting not a double but a triple entendre. Beyond its surface level meaning of bored-out wooden stems attached to clay tobacco pipes, it also commonly refers to an attractively swaying tree branch resembling a lithe torso. It also seems suggestive of a man's penis. This multivalence of al-Nābulusī's pipe stems rests on the knowledge of

erotic motifs he shared with fellow connoisseurs, but there was a more immediate intertextual allusion with the first epigram by Sa'ūdī b. Yaḥyá cited in the same section of *The Wafting Scent of Fragrant Herbs*. In this five-verse poem, Sa'ūdī paints an intimate garden scene where a nightingale's song, dancing branch stems (*quḍub*), and the redolent scent of roses offer up pleasures to the onlooker. Here, the mouths of chamomile flowers (*thaghrū l-aqāhī*) attempt to imitate the "sweet lustre" found in the mouth of an enraptured handsome youth (*malīḥun hazzahu l-ṭarabu*), but they fall short (al-Muḥibbī 1967-71, 6:262). These poetic convergences between the tobacco pipe and homoerotic love are made even more explicit by al-Nābulusī's reference to extended pipe stems, a phallic innuendo that is inevitably suggestive of haptic erotic contact analogous to the touching of the tobacco pipe (cf. Figure 2).

In the fourth and final poem about "sweet lustre" in the same section of *The Wafting Scent of Fragrant Herbs*, an acquaintance of al-Muḥibbī's named Ḥasan al-Darzī al-'Aylabūnī (d. 1674 or 1675) paints a playfully suggestive picture and deploys a complex simile (*tamthīl*) as the epigram's central subject: a comparison of clouds of smoke rising away from the beautiful cheeks of a pipe smoker with clouds breaking away to reveal a full moon:

*ḥaká dukhānan samā min fawqī wajnati man // qad maṣṣa ghalyūnahu idh hazzahu l-ṭarabu
ghaymun 'alā badra timmin qad taqaṭṭa 'a min // aydī l-nasīmi fa-wallá wa-hwa yansaḥibu
fa-qultu wa'l-nāru fī qalbī lahā lahabun // la-qad ḥakayta wa-lākin fātaka l-shanabu*

A cloud mimics smoke rising from the cheeks of one

Who sucks his pipe when shaken by rapture.

This cloud rises from a full moon,

Breaking away at the hands of the breeze;

So it turns and withdraws.

I said, with the fire in my heart ablaze:

"You put on a good show, but sweet lustre eluded you."

(al-Muḥibbī 1967-71, 6:263)

This motif's success lies in an implied third point of a metaphorical triangle that unambiguously identifies the pipe-sucking beloved as male, since by poetic convention both clouds around a full moon *and* smoke resemble the downy-hair on the radiant cheek of a youthful boy. Earlier in *The Wafting Scent of Fragrant Herbs*, al-Muḥibbī expresses admiration for this "fine motif" (*ma'ná laṭīf*) and cites one of his own epigrams about tobacco smoking that features a similar comparison (al-Muḥibbī 1967-71, 2:275–276). Some earlier poetry about hashish by Mamluk poets had also deployed similar homoerotic imagery; Ibn al-Wardī (d. 1348), for instance, likened hashish – that is the green plant – to the sprouting hair on the cheek of a youth. In another poem, he insinuated an erotic association between hashish as an edible substance and saliva by describing a piece of hashish in his beloved's mouth that was more delicious than wine; when his beloved smiles, he reveals his pearl-like teeth and the quality of *shanab* – a cool, sweet lustre (Marino 2020, 315–319).

The convergences between tobacco smoking and the poetic beauty of youthful males in the poems above, along with their insinuations of erotic contact through the exchange of saliva, suggest how smoking a tobacco pipe might also constitute an act of haptic looking toward an object of desire. This was an act that served to articulate the masculinity of the smoker-onlooker. In his wide-ranging study of male-male love in the early-

modern Arabic literature culture of the Ottoman Middle East (2005), Khaled El-Rouayheb has demonstrated that homoerotic desire felt by a mature man toward a youthful “passive” partner was an important constitutive element of normative masculinity among learned elites. That is not to say that the bounds of this desire and the way it was acted upon were uncontested; al-Nābulusī himself wrote a tract dedicated to defending the practice of gazing toward beautiful youths, where he criticized more generally religious scholars who made moralistic prohibitions against such desire as well as against music, coffee, and – of course – tobacco (El-Rouayheb 2005, 102–104, 114). But this underscores the fact that many considered tobacco smoking and at least some modes of homoerotic love to be within the bounds of decorum. Notably, while poetry about tobacco recorded by al-Muḥibbī in *The Wafting Scent of Fragrant Herbs and a Splash of Liquor in the Tavern* was playful and suggestive, it cannot be said to fall under the category of provocative, hedonistic, or “obscene” *mujūn* poetry like some poems about hashish from the Mamluk period (Marino 2020, 305–312).

The enthusiasm with which seventeenth-century poets took to incorporating tobacco smoking into the world of Arabic poetry alongside idioms of homoerotic desire demonstrates how new sensory experiences could be celebrated and normalized as objects of connoisseurship. Grehan has described such enthusiasm for tobacco as an “openness toward pleasure” that heralded a loosening of societal structures in the early-modern Ottoman world (2006, 1374). It is true that smoking spread across diverse sections of society, including women of different social classes. But poetry about tobacco smoking by al-Nābulusī, al-Muḥibbī, and their acquaintances suggests that they objectified and experienced tobacco according to the specific and restricted poetic and sensory idioms they shared as an elite male group of connoisseurs. When they smoked – and when they composed, recited, and listened to poetry about smoking – they did something beyond merely touching the real tobacco pipe and experiencing the smoke it produced with their bodily senses. Smoking, it seems, was also an act through which they related to each other as connoisseurs of sensory experience and literary beauty. What is more, the physical act of smoking was also a symbolic act of multisensorial looking toward an object of love, which like other objects of their poetic desire, was central to their sense of distinctiveness and masculinity as a community of sensory connoisseurs.

Notes

1. All translations are my own.
2. Ibn Maʿṣūm includes a very small body of untranslated Persian poetry in his *Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr fi maḥāsin ahl al-ʿaṣr* (*The Choicest Wine of the Press on the Merits of People of the Age*) (Ibn Maʿṣūm 2009, 2:775–96). In *The Wafting Scent of Fragrant Herbs*, al-Muḥibbī includes some of these poems along with additions but translated into Arabic (al-Muḥibbī 1967-71, 3:213–38).
3. Al-Shiḥr is a coastal town in Yemen well known for ambergris and frankincense production and trade.
4. Al-Nābulusī comments on the linguistic construction of “drinking tobacco smoke” (*shurb al-tutun*) in *The Reconciliation*. He cites the following definition of drinking in the famous work of Hanafi jurisprudence *Tanwīr al-abṣār*: “Drinking is the transferal of liquids (*māʾiʾāt*) that cannot be chewed into the [inner] hollow (*jawf*).” Al-Nābulusī comments that although

smoke does not enter the *jawf*, it cannot be chewed and so partially resembles liquids (al-Nābulusī 1682, 28a).

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

This work was supported by the European Research Council Consolidator Grant project “The Senses of Islam: A Cultural History of Perception in the Muslim World” (project no. 724951).

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