

provided her with fresh greens growing in earthenware containers carried on the backs of camels. He also brought dairy cows, and these stayed with her for the whole journey so that she could have fresh milk and a supply of cheese.

But al-Maqrizi, the historian who recorded the anecdote, was unimpressed by the sultana's food-to-go:

She had fried cheese every single day, for lunch and dinner—and what more can one say about someone whose daily diet is greens and cheese, the two vilest things one can eat? What, pray, might the consequences be?

The consequences weren't fatal. Tughay Khatun lived another quarter century and died in the Black Death of 1349, having founded a khanqah, or religious hospice, and emancipating in her will 1000 slave girls and 80 eunuchs.

To round off her mobile lunches (for, as an old Arabic proverb says, "On lunch and a pudding, you can raise a high building"), the

cheese-loving sultana might have enjoyed *mujabbanah*, a type of cheese-filled confection lovingly described by a Spanish contemporary of hers:

The word may have gone through a copyist's version of the game of "Chinese whispers" or "Telephone," in which misunderstandings accumulate. My guess is that sakh is a mistake for shaj, and that it arrived via a Persian form, sha, which is about as close as Arabic script gets to the Chinese cha.

You sweetie-pie with yellow cheek,
Whose inmost parts conceal ripe cheese,
I fear your outlook may be bleak—
Your jaundiced look suggests unease.
Quite right, too, for your yellow face,
As lovely as the rising sun,
Is doomed to set, and set apace—
Deep in the darkness of my tum!

Abu 'l-Barakat al-Balafiqi, a distinguished judge of Granada.

But perhaps the overdose of fried cheese and greens (not to mention the rest of this motley banquet from my bookshelves) is better followed by a digestive beverage. Tea, though it wasn't to become widespread in the Arab world until long after Tughay

Khatun's time, was mentioned in an Arabic book 700 years before its first appearance in European works. According to Sulayman the Merchant in his mid-ninth-century *Accounts of China and India*, the ruler of China

has a monopoly on a plant which they drink with hot water. It is sold in every city, and huge sums are spent on it. It is called "sakh". It is leafier than alfalfa and a little more aromatic, and there is a bitterness to it. They boil water, then sprinkle it on, and it serves them as an antidote to all ailments.

Then again, to quote the concluding decision on a whimsical literary sparring-match, *The Cheering and Consoling Tale of a Disputation Between Coffee and Tea*, "Coffee is the sultan of the

drinking-places, tea its prince and deputy." So what better way to end than with a verse on *Coffea arabica*, from its home in the mountains of southern Arabia?

Given that the author was a Hadrami (Ahmad ibn Abdallah Barakat, d. 1929), the decision is surprising—the people of Hadramawt are famously fond of tea, and few households lack a well-used samovar.

How fine they look, these coffee beans, when first
They ripen on the leafy bough! Red hung
Among the green, as if, with emeralds strung,
We see bright beads of coral interspersed.

Quoted without ascription in a 19th-century work on coffee by a native of the Yemeni coffee-growing region of Utamah.

"Treasure," as a homelier folk-song puts it, "on a tree."