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When a shared meal is formalized. Observations on Arabic "table manners" manuals of the Middle Ages

Generally, Arabic medieval texts related to the etiquette of eating are of two categories: one includes those written by authors of theological background, and the other includes secular texts, composed by men motivated by their literary passion and civility rather than Islamic education. Thus, "Arabic" texts were not always identical with "Islamic." The terms "Arabic-Islamic" (to designate works written by religious scholars) and "Arabic/Islamic" (when both categories are referred to) used in the present essay, are meant to mark the difference.

All the compendia of Arabic/Islamic table manners (with one exception) that are of significance for the present study are spread throughout volumes that belong to various genres of literary output. It is not possible to present all the authors or their works here, as the discussed texts are too numerous and too diversified: they were written at various times between X-XV centuries by authors of different geographical, social and professional proveniences. A short presentation is, however, indispensable.

The "religious" category includes, above all, *Kitāb ādāb al-akl* by Abū Ḥāmid al-Ġazālī (d. 505/1111),[1] a paragon of reason and the balanced approach. The influence of Al-Ġazālī upon Arabic-Islamic "table" manners (*ādāb al-mā'ida*) literature was immense—his work on food etiquette was studied and quoted by most of the later authors. Another religiously motivated text was written by Ibn al-Ḥāǧǧ (d. 737/1336-7), a Maghribi orthodox Malikite scholar living in Cairo. His *Ādāb al-akl* (*Manners Related to Eating*) forms a part of a four-volume treaty explaining the proper Islamic conduct and denouncing non-Islamic innovations[2] and, like the rest of Ibn al-Ḥāğğ’s literary output, reflects the author’s anger at the sinful society that behaved in a way that was not in accordance with his unique, if simple, perception of the proper Islamic behavior.

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[1] Engl. translation in: *Al-Ghazālī on the Manners Relating to Eating. Kitāb Ādāb al-Akl, Book XI of the Revival of the Religious Sciences,* Transl., intr. and notes by D. Johnson-Davies, Cambridge 2000.

[2] *Al-Madḫal ilā tanmiyat al-a'māl bi-taḥsīn an-niyya,* Cairo 1929, I, pp. 216-237.

Then there is also *Muḫtaṣar minhāğ al-qāḍiyyīn* by imam Ibn Qudāma al-Muqaddasī (d. 742/1341) where *ādāb al-akl* is covered in a very short chapter (the work itself is an abridgement of Al-Ġazālī’s *Iḥyā’ ‘ulūm ad-dīn*).[3] The most detailed of the table manners compendia is *Šarḥ manẓūmat ādāb al-akl wa-aš-šurb wa-aḍ-ḍiyāfa* by Ibn al-‘Imād al-Aqfahsī (750-808/ 1349-1406), an Egyptian theologian of Šāfi‘ī school.[4] *Šarḥ*, the only complete separate book relating to the etiquette of eating, was apparently meant to be a solid, reliable compendium devoid of any scholarly, preaching or intellectual pretensions. And, finally, there is *Da‘ā’im al-islām*, a pioneer work on Ismā‘īlī law designed for reading by the initiated circle of the Fatimid elites. Its author, the famous Fatimid legislator, the qāḍī Abū Ḥanīfa an-Nu‘mān (d. 363/974) devoted some pages of it to *ādāb al-akl*, table manners—as seen from the Ismā‘īlī perspective.[5]

One of the oldest of the Arabic “secular” texts on table manners known to us is Ibn Sayyār al-Warrāq’s *Kitāb aṭ-ṭabīḫ* (Book of Cooked Food). Compiled, most probably, in the second half of IV/X century,[6] the book ends with chapters on washing hands, using toothpicks, and the etiquette of eating and drinking at the table of noblemen.[7] True, *Kitāb aṭ-ṭabīḫ*’s chapters were written for *nudamā*’, the Abbasid-era kings’ drinking and eating companions whose function was to entertain the rulers and other prominent persons in their pastime and recreation. Obviously enough, the lifestyles of Al-Warrāq’s *nudamā*’ did not have much in common with the ways of “ordinary” Muslims. Nevertheless, Al-Warrāq’s instructions for courtiers are in many aspects comparable and sometimes similar—the question of exceptionally strong influences of the Persian etiquette notwithstanding[8]—to those written for the Islamic urban upper classes.

[3] Damascus 1394 h.

[4] Hims 1994.

[5] Cairo, II, p. 102-106; see also A.A.A. Fyzee, *Compendium of Fatimid Law*, Simla 1969, pp. 129-130.

[6] Ed. by K. Öhrnberg and S. Mroueh, *Studia Orientalia* 60, Helsinki 1987.

[7] See K. Öhrnberg, *Ibn Sattār al-Warrāq’s* Kitāb al-Wuṣla ilà al-Ḥabīb / Kitāb al-Ṭabbākh, *Another MS of Ibn Sayyār al-Warrāq’s* Kitāb al-Ṭabīkh, in: M. Marín, D. Waines (eds.), *La alimentación en las culturas islámicas. Una colección de estudios editados por Manuela Marín y David Waines,* Madrid 1994, pp. 23-35.

[8] For more on the Persian courtly influences on the manners of the Arab *nudamā*’ or kings’ and princes’ banqueting companions see J. Sadan, *Nadīm,* EI, VII.

From much later times comes an interesting chapter “On Food and the Manners Relating to It, and on Hospitality and the Manners of the Host, and on the Eaters and What Was Reported about Them, etc.” that an Egyptian writer Šihāb ad-Dīn al-Ibšīhī (ca. 790-850/ca. 1387-1446)[9] included in his famous anthology of Arabic literature titled *Al-Mustaṭraf fī kull fann mustaẓraf.*[10] Though the author names many sources that he used to compose his chapter, he fails to name the one on which relied most heavily, that is a food etiquette manual written by Yaḥyā b. ‘Abd al-‘Aẓīm al-Ǧazzār (d. 669/1270 or 679/1281). The work, titled *Fawā’id al-mawā’id*, or *Morals of the Tables*[11], is preserved in seven copies in various European libraries.[12]

The Arabic-Islamic medieval food etiquette manuals have a number of thought-provoking aspects. One of them concerns a comparison between them and the European savoir-vivre compendia from the same period. Juxtaposing the two cultures, as represented by the literary genre under discussion, cannot be of much help in reconstructing the eating behavior of medieval Islamic city dwellers. It may constitute, however, a convenient point of reference that would allow us to look at those people's ways from a more distant perspective, and to make a number of observations regarding the spirit that governed their tables.

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[9] For biographical data see J.-C. Vadet, *Al-Ibšīhī,* EI, III.

[10] Cairo n.d., pp. 176-187.

[11] G. van Gelder translates the title as “Useful Information on Meals;” G.J. van Gelder, *Arabic Banqueters: Literature, Lexicography and Reality*, in: *Res Orientales* IV: *Banquets d’Orient*, 1992, pp. 85-93.

[12] All seven are described by R. Traini in: *Un tratatello di galateo ed etica convivale: le Fawā’id al-mawā’id di Ibn al-Ǧazzār,* in: idem (ed.)*, Studi in onore di Francesco Gabrieli nel suo ottantesimo compleano, II,* Roma 1984, p. 783-806. In the present study the British Library Ms Or 6388A was used.Apart from the above-quoted titles, there is also a number of works that deserve mentioning and that were—though to a lesser degree—considered by the present author: thus there is the oldest and famous manual, *Al-Muwaššā aw aẓ-ẓarf wa-aẓ-ẓurafā’* by Abū Ṭayyib al-Waššā (ca. 246-325/ca. 860-936), Beirut 1965. Due to its character, however, it is suitable for studying courtly manners in the early Abbasid caliphate exclusively and not the daily practices of the more ordinary medieval Muslims. There is also *Al-Īṯīqūn. Falsafat al-ādāb al-ḫulqiyya*, Qamishli 1967, with its chapters on table manners, written by Barhebraeus (VII/XIII); due to the author’s religion (Barhebraeus was the Catholicos of the East), his work cannot constitute a subject of the present essay. Though Barhebraeus’s recommendations, quite often identical with the Islamic ones, should not be neglected. The unpublished *Kitāb ādāb al-akl wa-aš-šurb wa-al-malbas* by a Cairene author, ‘Abd ar-Ra’ūf al-Munāwī, a religious scholar and a ṣūfī, is dealt with here because the times of Al-Munāwī’s were too distant from the Middle Ages (he lived in XVI-XVII century). The Arabic “table manners” literature is also discussed by M.M. Ahsan, *Social Life Under the Abbasids,* London-New York 1979, pp. 157-158; and G. van Gelder, *Arabic Banqueters* and *idem, Ṭa‘ām,* in EI, X.

As for general features of the manuals, one of the most distinctive differences between the Arabic-Islamic and the European ones was the religious nature of the majority of the former and the secular character of the latter. From XIII century on, most of the Western texts relating to the etiquette originated in the chivalrous and courtly circles. But even if some of the earlier works were written down by the Latin-speaking clergy, they still constituted a record of the prevailing social standard rather than a set of religiously-inspired ordinances.[13] The substance of Arabic/Islamic table manners manuals, on the other hand, usually densely interwoven with the food-related quotations from the Sunna of the Prophet and the Qur'ān, was never free of the religious context. Naturally enough, the style of religiously educated authors varied at this point from "secular" ones. But even though the latter were more fond of using "secular" anecdotes rather than "religious" stories to illustrate their narratives, they, too, quoted Qur'ānic verses and Prophetic traditions, and mentioned Islamic heroes.[14]

Whatever kind of anecdotes or stories the authors used to strengthen the ordinances they discussed, these are only anecdotes and stories. Arab authors—unlike their European counterparts—did not base their works on the observation of the individuals' daily behavior (save a few exceptions). May be that is why we (somewhat unintentionally?) tend to read the Arabic/Islamic and European manuals in different and, to a degree, contradictory ways.

When we consider a French or German ordinance that reads, for instance, "Do not spit under the table" or "Do not pick your teeth with the knife," we assume that many people actually acted in the disapproved way.[15] When, however, the Arab author recommends: "One should wash his hands before the meal" or "One should not stare at others while eating," we are likely to understand that everybody actually acted accordingly. Which, of course, is a misunderstanding, as it is easy to forget that the manuals are not much more than compilations of instructions of how a Muslim or, in other cases, an Islamic ruler's table companion, should eat properly. It is easy to forget that the instructions were not always compatible with how ordinary members of the society behaved at home, and it is equally easy to mistake these instructions for true records of everyday practices. True, in many instances the behavior corresponded to the regulations, many of which simply confirmed the customary, local forms. But not all of them. In fact the Arabic manuals, and particularly the Islamic ones, though conservative in their attitudes to tradition, were handbooks promoting certain new knowledge and some particular ways of behavior. And as such they must have reflected—to a certain degree at least—the unattainable ideal and wishful thinking of the authors rather than a picture of reality.

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[13] Cf. N. Elias, *The History of Manners. The Civilizing Process: Volume I*, New York 1978, p. 60. The set of certain norms of behavior known as "*civilité*" gained a Christian religious basis in XVIII century. Apparently, it was only then that the Church came to play a role of a propagator of forms of behavior among lower strata of the society (ibid., pp. 101-2).

[14] True, Al-Ǧazzār's *Fawā'id al-mawā'id* includes not more than four Qur'anic quotations and not more than three of Muhammad's sayings, but Al-Ibšīhī relies heavily on quotations from religious sources.

[15] Moreover, it seems that the recommendations repeated to the Europeans did not affect them for ages; it was not before XVI-XVII century that the establishment of any lasting habits could be noticed. See N. Elias, *Civilizing Process*, pp. 79-80.

This was so for a number of reasons. First, because ordinary human boorishness, impoliteness or lack of education had their share in the resistance to the correct forms. Second, because the reality was not always as Islamic as it was meant to be—too often an old local tradition or popular common sense proved stronger than strict and sophisticated rules recommended by the new religion.[16] Furthermore, the promoted ideal itself was not altogether obvious—the truths preached in the compendia did not appear to be coherent at all. In some cases, the instructions might have even been contradictory. While, for example, one theologian assured us that there was nothing abhorrent about eating at the table, an object invented, after all, to make the life easier, the other argued that using the table was a forbidden thing—for the Prophet used to eat on the ground.[17] While one manual allowed drinking while standing, the other defined such behavior as hateful.[18] While one of the authors denounced conversation at the table giving the behavior of Persian kings as an example to follow, others recommended not to remain silent over the food exactly for the same reason: "eating in silence was the custom of the Persians," and their practices should never be imitated.[19] But this should not be surprising: as already said, authors were coming from various social, political and geographical environments, belonged to various epochs and various schools of Islamic law, and thus the philosophies behind their writings were different, too.

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[16] Though in the domain of table manners, where Islam was often identical with the pre-Islamic forms, the non-Islamic innovations were not as obviously at odds with the new religion as, for instance, in the case of grave visiting or celebration of ancient, pre-Islamic feasts.

[17] Al-Ḡazālī, in: *Al-Ghaẓālī,* pp. 4-5; Ibn al-Ḥāǧǧ, *Madẖal,* I, p. 226.

[18] See, e.g., Al-Aqfahšī, *Šarḥ, p. 80;* Ibn al-Ḥāǧǧ, *Madẖal,* I, p. 230.

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The religious attributes of the Arabic-Islamic etiquette manuals constitute the main and the most obvious feature that differentiates them from similar works written in Europe. But, in fact, Islam alone does not make these compendia. What their construction really rests upon is a framework made of a very subtle philosophy of host-guest relations, whose nature was never handled in similar way by the medieval European authors. What was expected from the host, and how the guest was supposed to behave, were the questions that made the coordinates of most of the Arabic/Islamic manuals' construction. And this is, in fact, one of the most distinctive indicators to attest to the fact that the two systems of table manners were shaped by different priorities.

Having analyzed current and historical "rituals of dinner" in the Western and non-Western cultures, Margaret Visser, a renown authority on table manners and eating behavior, came to an interesting conclusion. According to her, "eating is aggressive by nature" and table manners are "designed to reduce tension and protect people from one another," "because violence could so easily erupt at dinner."[20] Whatever is the true value of this argument for the Western culture (or any other developed or prosperous culture), it probably should not be recklessly applied to the Arabic-Islamic culture. Nor, in fact, to the Arabian pre-Islamic culture to which most of the later Arabic/Islamic table regulations can be traced. If table manners, in their Western variation, indeed came into existence as means for controlling possible human violence, there are arguments to prove that the origins of Near Eastern table manners were different.

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[19] Al-Waššā, *Muwaššā,* p. 113; Al-Warrāq, *Kitāb aṭ-ṭabīẖ,* p. 336; Al-Warrāq is the only one of the discussed authors who explicitly presents the Persian ways as an example to follow. See also Al-Ḡazālī, in: *Al-Ghazālī,* p. 13; Ibn al-Ḥāǧǧ, *Madẖal,* I, p. 223; Al-Aqfahšī, *Šarḥ*, p. 64.

[20] M. Visser, *Rituals*, pp. xii, 92. Cf. also A. Beardsworth, T. Keil, *Sociology on the Menu*, London 1997, p. 102.

True, some of the Near Eastern regulations may appear as proving the validity of the Visser's thesis for this part of the world (as, for instance "do not stare at the co-eater in a persistent manner," "do not throw kernels or peels behind for it might result in harming your companion's head," or "do not steal food from the host's table").[21] This, however, is somewhat misleading, and the fact that the Near Eastern homo sapiens had founded culture and abandoned the etiquette of the lions long before his Western counterpart came across this idea should not be underestimated here. What further and more definitely widened the gap between the two styles of eating behavior were the particularities of the Bedouin environment. If people starved for days in the middle of the desert, the violence would have erupted anyway, table etiquette notwithstanding, as it would erupt, by the way, anytime and anywhere over any other missing consumer goods, if only the tension grew high enough. And extreme conditions of the pre-Islamic Arab life constantly generated tensions and violence.

Nonetheless, eating at the pre-Islamic Arab, and later at the Arabic/Islamic, "table," involved positive and encouraging attitude towards the co-eater. True, the Bedouin Arab might have slurped his broth and tear at his meat with his teeth, a manner that met with scorn of his neighboring sedentary contemporaries.[22] But, at the same time, he shared his bowl according to the rules of hospitality and generosity, for the Near Eastern philosophy behind eating together was to give, and not to hide food from the guest.[23] Such an approach had a simple but strong motivation, namely, the "public opinion": concern with how one appears to others was what counted above all. Reputation was not only a value in itself. It also set the rules of reciprocity and allowed one to expect from others what he knew he deserved. "Once," as a medieval Cairene author wrote in his table manners manual, "a noble man told his son: 'O my son, you know, you can have a house, a servant and a slave-girl in every country.' The son asked: 'And how is that?' 'You maintain friendship with men from every country and then, when they visit you, you treat them hospitably. And when they go back to their people, they tell them about your favors and nice behavior towards them, so that finally there is no one left among their kinsmen who would not look forward to your visit at their place.'"[24]

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[21] Al-Aqfahšī, *Šarḥ*, pp. 60, 63, 68; Al-Ǧazzār, *Fawā'id*, fol. 14a; Al-Ibšīhī, *Mustaṭraf,* p. 186; Ibn al-Ḥāǧǧ, *Madẖal,* I, pp. 225, 227; cf. Sirach, XXXI, 13: "No creature was greedier than the eye"; or: "Toward what he eyes, do not put out a hand; nor reach when he does for the same dish" (XXXI, 15).

[22] Cf., e.g., a record of the Arab-Coptic encounters in 20/641 as reported by Aṭ-Ṭabarī, ***Tārīẖ,*** IV, Cairo n.d., p. 110.

[23] The minor modifications (aimed, above all, at ostentatious affectation and unreasonable generosity), notwithstanding, the new religion validated the hospitable way, either promoting or only confirming it where it has already prevailed.

This *adab* anecdote is not only a perfect illustration of the thesis claiming that "in traditional societies, there is no explicit calculation of cost or notion of payment, but there is a recognition of reciprocal obligation."[25] It also demonstrates that in a society such as that of the pre-Islamic Arabs, where the public opinion was *the* sanction, there was no need to oblige anybody to show his non-aggression by imposing special table regulations on him. It also demonstrates that in a society where the rule of reciprocity was the guardian of the social order, it was this very rule that guaranteed a safe meal: a guest was not only expected to become host in his turn, but could also be sure that his possible aggression would be repaid in kind by the victim's cousins. Moreover, unlike in many other societies which pressure guests to become hosts in turn, in the desert environment of the Arabs, hosting a guest, even if he were an enemy, was almost a biological imperative. Inherited and implemented in nearly unchanged form from generation to generation all over the Arabic-Islamic world, it became a carefully cultured phenomenon only much later, in cities like Cairo, where one's life did not depend as much on the assistance of others.

In reality, things were not so simple—the tricks of host-guest relations were not what the idea of Arabic-Islamic art of paying a visit or receiving a guest was solely about. The essence of it was the philosophy of food- or, more precisely, bowl-sharing. Sharing a common bowl requires—much more than sharing a table—a significant degree of mutual acceptance. Sharing a common bowl is, in fact—much more than sharing a table—a highly intimate experience, in which sensitivity and being considerate of others both play an important part. While, then, one manner or another was recommended in medieval Europe just because it was *the* manner, or because it was *courtois* to act in a given way, such an approach was rather rare among Muslim authors. At the Arabic-Islamic table, things were not done just for the sake of behaving—or of not behaving—in a given way. If anybody asked: "why one should do it this way?" the answer usually (save the cases that required acting in accordance with the Sunna of the Prophet) involved a requirement to act in such a way so as not to offend the Muslim co-eater. Clearly, the Biblical “Recognize that your neighbor feels as you do, and keep in mind your own dislikes”[26] echoed not only Jewish, but broader ancient Near Eastern, may be Semitic, approach.

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[24] Al-Ğazzār, *Fawā'id,* fol. 4b. Which is, in other words, nothing else than Biblical "winning praise for one's hospitality" (Sirach XXXII: 1, 2).

[25] A. Beardsworth, *Sociology*, p. 101.

What is interesting, the problem of co-eaters’ feelings, brought up in all the works of Arabic/Islamic medieval etiquette literature, was “discovered” in Europe relatively late. While as early as in XI century Al-Ġazālī recommended not to do anything “which others hold to be unclean” (“he should not immerse in the broth or the vinegar what is left of any morsel he has cut with his teeth”)[27], it was not before XVII century that the *délicatesse* appeared as a justification of certain regulations in the West. But even as late as in XVIII century it was still the requirement of being *courtois*, and not of being mindful of the feelings of others, that justified most of the ordinances and bans.[28] In 1672 Antoine de Courtin recommended to always wipe one’s spoon before dipping it into the common dish, for the reason of “there being people so delicate they would not wish to eat soup in which you had dipped it after putting it in your mouth." Interestingly enough, in medieval Europe manuals also discouraged to bite off a slice of bread and then dip it in the common bowl; the recommendation was backed up, however, by the explanation that this was "the conduct of peasants" and not by disgust such behavior might cause.[29]

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[26] Sirach, XXXI: 15.

[27] Al-Ġazālī, in: *Al-Ghazālī,* pp. 16-17; or, e.g., *Muwaššā* by Al-Waššā (X century), pp. 192, 193. The most peculiar example of Arabic/Islamic “délicatesse” is, however, that represented by the 14th-century theologian Ibn al-Ḥāǧǧ commenting on someone’s saliva possibly getting into the common bowl and on the aversion this would cause. Blowing into the drinking vessel was hateful for similar reasons; Ibn al-Ḥāǧǧ, *Madḫal,* I, pp. 230, 235; Al-Ġazālī, in: *Al-Ghazālī,* p. 8; see also *Da‘ā’im,* p. 116, by qāḍī an-Nu‘mān (Engl. transl. in A. Fyzee, *Compendium,* p. 133) who permitted to blow over food and drink only if no other persons participated in the meal; Barhebraeus recommends not to blow but be patient and wait until it gets cold (*Al-Īṯīqūn*, p. 178).

[28] Cf. N. Elias, *Civilizing Process*, p. 115; see also p. 80. Those varying attitudes to what might be called the problem of “caring for others” as represented by the two medieval “schools” of table manners were one of the most significant reasons that made the gap between them so immense. As far as “caring for others” is concerned, the Arabic/Islamic manuals may be compared to Erasmus’s *De civilitate morum puerilium* written in XVI century, or to the compendia produced in the 17th- and 18th-century Europe rather than to those of the medieval times. M. Visser (*Rituals*, p. 63) considers it “questionable that care for other people’s opinions, ability to see ourselves as others must see us (...)” began to develop only in XVI century.

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As far as the rules themselves are concerned, it is in fact impossible to unequivocally assert whether manners recommended by the Arabic-Islamic culture were similar to those recommended in Western Europe of that time or not. Both the Western and the Arab compendia cover a rather wide range of problems, from absolutely elementary instructions ("do not spit on the table," "do wash your hands before the meal") to more sophisticated ones ("do not criticize the food you are offered"). In some cases they are indeed parallel, if not identical, but in some others—significantly different. While, for instance, Islam recommended to lick one's stained fingers after the meal, Europe found it improper. While the West suggested to vomit in case of overfeeding, Islam never mentioned such an "option." And while the West seems to have not cared for washing hands after the meal,[30] most of the Arabic-Islamic compendia suggested it (neither of the two cultures, however, followed the way of the Romans, who used to wipe their stained fingers on the hair of male or female slaves).[31]There is also a wide area of recommendations in the Arabic-Islamic works that do not have their counterparts in European compendia. These include, for example, the problem of the table's shape and its use or, which is more important, the sophisticated problem of the host-guest relations. The similarities are sometimes striking—both cultures prescribed to wash hands before eating (though the Europeans, unlike the

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[29] Cf. Tannhäuser's *Hofzucht* as quoted in N. Elias, *Civilizing Process*, pp. 63-64. According to Elias, the medieval world of courtesy and chivalry did not know the "invisible wall" that today makes people ashamed or embarrassed when witnessing certain bodily functions of others (ibid, pp. 69-70).

[30] For the European "standard eating technique" see N. Elias, *Civilizing Process*, pp. 56-7; 66-67.

[31] E.g. Al-Warrāq, *Kitāb,* p. 333; Al-Ḡazālī, in: *Al-Ghazālī,* p. 12; Ibn al-Ḥāǧǧ, *Madhal,* I, p. 231; also Barhebraeus, *Al-Īṯīqūn,* p. 179. For the Roman way see P. Faas, *Around the Table of the Romans: Food and Feasting in Ancient Rome*, New York 2003, p. 74.

Arabs, rarely used soap; they also scented water with camomile or rosemary, while the Arabs did it with rose water), to seat at a designated place, to pray before eating; both recommended to give precedence to those of higher rank, to use three fingers for eating (in Europe this was an extremely refined way and a mark that distinguished the upper strata from the lower ones),[32] to have a cheerful face. Both disapproved blowing one's nose at the table, searching through the dish to choose the best part, dipping what was already bitten, eating too much, going for food with greed, or putting the bones or kernels into the common bowl. Also, they both ordained not to criticize the served food and not to pick one's teeth; while the West, however, suggested not to do it with the knife, Islam said not to do it with one's nails.

As for the addressees of these ordinances, in principle there was not much difference, either. On the surface, the European medieval manuals were written for a limited circle of nobles and courtiers, and the Arabic-Islamic ones were binding for every Muslim. True, they were written to guide the members of the Islamic community. But we should not delude ourselves—neither the "secular," nor the "religious" Arabic authors meant their manuals just for any Muslim. They wrote about, and for, people of means (or, more precisely, for urbanites of means)—the "secular" for *al-kuramā',* decent, respected, and well-mannered nobles, the "religious" ones mostly for the *'ulamā'*, religiously educated learned men. In other words, they wrote for those who, when invited to a banquet, came riding, assisted by their retinues, for those who enjoyed large houses with large reception halls, numerous households, and armies of servants who cared for the guests and kept the flies away at meal time.

All the similarities notwithstanding, the two schools of table manners, being products of their own cultures, can hardly be considered as "coming from the same basket." Apart from what was said above, there was one more significant difference between them. From the Arabic and Islamic point of view, it was the adherence and devotion to the tradition that counted above all, and that was valued most highly; it was the continuance, and not the evolution and change that characterized people's attitudes and constituted the motive behind day-to-day activities. Therefore, the Arabic-Islamic table manners compendia were not—again, unlike the European ones—the vanguard carriers of the courtly *civilité*.[33] Rather, they acted as custodians of ancient refinement, custodians that in the multiethnic metropolises of the medieval Islamic world guarded and saved the ageless rules of the local standard and from time to time reminded people of them.

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[32] N. Elias, *Civilizing Process*, p. 57.

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[33] Though in XI century apparently a more conservative attitude prevailed: when a Byzantine wife of a Venetian doge tried use her little golden two-prong fork to eat her food, her behavior caused a scandal in Venice; she was rebuked by the clergy who also called down divine wrath upon her (N. Elias, *Civilizing Process*, pp. 68-69. It took over five hundred years for the Europeans to accept the fork.