

## Perspectives on coffee culture: Ge'ez conundrums

Ethiopia is the cradle of coffee culture, yet early evidence for it is scant. Does the Ge'ez word for coffee reveal clues? I propose an etymological link to the Zoroastrian Emperor of Persia, Khosrow I (or II), reflecting contemporaneous Aksumite 'anti-coffee' sentiments.

Ge'ez, used in Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo liturgy since the fourth century, is traced to the first century emergence of Aksum<sup>(1)</sup>. Ge'ez for coffee is *Etse Kusra/Khusra* (Etse=plant)<sup>(2)</sup>. Few early manuscripts exist<sup>(1)</sup>. The fifteenth century *Dārsanä Şəyon* probably reflects earlier traditions: coffee is described as 'a devilish evil tree'; *kusra* as traded with Moslems but strictly forbidden for Christians<sup>(3)</sup>.

Tadesse<sup>(2)</sup> links *kusra* to Asian words, including eunuch. In Persian, *kusra* can mean 'the habit of drinking much wine'<sup>(4)</sup>. Semantic shifts from 'wine' to 'coffee' are noted in other languages. Alternatively, or concomitantly, the origin could be a name. Likely an enemy: *kusra* shares the Ge'ez consonants of 'abominable'<sup>(3)</sup>.

Khosrow I 'Anushirvan' was a powerful enemy in the sixth century, so was his grandson Khosrow II 'Parviz' in the seventh. Transliterations of Khosrow include 'Khusrau'<sup>(5)</sup> and 'Khusra'<sup>(6)</sup>. Furthermore, Anushirvan likely knew of coffee. He ousted Aksum from Yemen, and actively sought out medical knowledge from other cultures<sup>(5)</sup>.

### References:

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