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**Dinah Jung. *An Ethnography of Fragrance: the Perfumery Arts of 'Adan / Lahj*. Islamic History and Civilization. Studies and Texts. Ed. board S. Günther, W. Kadi. Vol. 84. Leiden — Boston: Brill, 2011. 284 pp.**

After such works as *The Renaissance of Islam* by Adam Metz<sup>1</sup> and *The Influence of Islam on Medieval Europe* by Montgomery Watt<sup>2</sup> were published, the notion of absolute superiority of the everyday life culture of the Islamic world over their European analogues in the Middle Ages, and of the borrowing of a number of key cultural achievements by Europe became commonplace. At the same time we do not have that many researches at our disposal that would speak of historical destinies of the most important aspects of the everyday culture of the Muslim world under conditions of European civilization hegemony. The research by Dr. Dinah Jung, currently working at the University of Heidelberg (Institute of East Asian Art History, SFB Ritualdynamik) over the topic “Perfumery traditions of Asia — cultural flows and exchange”<sup>3</sup>, recently published by the Brill publishing house, belongs to this type of works. She was one of the organizers of the International Scientific Meeting “Perfumery and Ritual — The Use of Incense, Flowers, Distillates and Aromatic Objects in Asia” (University of Heidelberg, November 28—30, 2010), is involved in the research of international markets and the perfumery business and has rich field in anthropological fieldwork (West Asia, Central Asia, Southeast Asia, East Asia). The presented work is the result of the field work in South Yemen (2002—2004). Its main purpose is the description of the perfumery arts of ‘Adan / Lahj in their cultural context and the explanation of its historical significance, development and typical peculiarities. “Oriental” perfumery tradition, which has a rich history and is represented by various cultures at the vast territories between Africa and Asia, usually was considered to be just a historical stepping stone in the evolution of the modern western perfumery art. The need for its detailed study was never consid-

ered and / or recognized. Nevertheless, researchers address the meaning of smells in the socio-cultural life more and more over the course of the last decades. According to the opinion of Claude Lévi-Strauss, “smells simultaneously belong to the natural and social worlds”<sup>4</sup>, therefore signs related to smells play a particular role in structuring the image of the world. Smells make up an important part of “its own” picture of the world; they have special significance in the intercultural communication and are perceived as an inalienable part of the semiotic field of a foreign culture. The study of olfactory senses, the disclosure of the fragrances’ symbolic meanings, the explanation of connections between smells and memory, intuition and imagination enable one to learn a great deal about the society as a whole. The anthropology of smell and olfaction examines four directions, which overlap in many cases: the instability of smell perception, olfactory skills, the use of smell and its representations<sup>5</sup>, and the study of these very aspects in the context of the Yemeni perfumery tradition underlies the work of the researcher. The difficulty of determining the olfactory phenomenon in its relation to perfumery, however, calls for the establishment of the terminological foundation for scientific discourse. Examining perfumery as a cultural craft, the goal of which is to create olfactory phenomena — “fragrances” (pp. 50—51), the author reviews the meaning of the key perfumery terms. For instance, in accordance with her vocabulary “aromatic” means “a material of potential olfactory qualities”, “perfume” — “any material which is valued specifically for the capacity of creating a fragrance with it”. And a neutral term “odour” means “the olfactory phenomenon which exists simply because of a material’s natural olfactory quality” (pp. 209—210). The anthropological approach offered by the author suggests equal attention for the common foundations, similarities and differences of cultures, and theoretical discussion of the perfumery arts as such. All of that is reflected in the structure, style and content of the reviewed book.

The main merits of this book have first of all to do with the fact that the author introduces the outcome of

<sup>1</sup> A. Metz, *Die Renaissance des Islams* (Heidelberg, 1922).

<sup>2</sup> W. M. Watt, *The Influence of Islam on Medieval Europe* (Edinburgh, 1972).

<sup>3</sup> See also: D. Jung, “The Value of Agarwood. Reflections upon its Use and Pistory in South Yemen” (Heidelberg, 2011), *Der Heidelberger Dokumentenserver — the Open Access Platform of Heidelberg University*: <http://www.ub.uni-heidelberg.de>.

<sup>4</sup> Cited from Russian edition: C. Lévi-Strauss, *Put' masok* (La Voie des masques) (Moscow, 2000), p. 163.

<sup>5</sup> J. Candau, “The Olfactory Experience: Constants and Cultural Variables”, *Water Science & Technology* XLIX/9 (2004), p. 12.