

# A BRIEF HISTORY OF CAFFEA ARABICA IN THE DAR-UL-ISLAM AND CHRISTIAN EUROPE: A HERITAGE OF ISLAMIC CIVILIZATION AND ITS CONTRIBUTION TO THE MODERN LIFESTYLE

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*Bir kahve fincanin kirk yıl hatiri vardır.*

*(If someone offer you coffee, respect him for 40 years for his gift)*

*(Old Turkish dictum)*

**F**or Westerners coffee is only three hundred years old, but in the Muslim East it was widespread as a refreshment, in every level of society, since the Prophet Muhammad's (saw) Mission. The first definite dates of the plantation and consumption of coffee in Arabia go back to the years of the Coptic viceroy Abraha, who invaded and occupied Yemen. His army failed to capture Makkah and was miraculously destroyed in the year of the Prophet's birth (570 CE). In the year 1000 CE, Ibn Sina (referred to in the Latin West as Avicenna) recommended coffee as a medicine which "fortifies limbs, cleans the skin, dries up humidity that are under it and suppresses bad odor of human body". Also Rhazi recognized coffee as a panacea against pain, bad humor and headaches. There is a legend dating from 1400 CE, about Kaldi or Khalid, an Ethiopian goatherd who observed his goats cropping reddish berries from a bush and subsequently became unusually restless and excited. He ate the berries himself and discovered that these small fruits gave him renewed energy. He had reported the incident to a local Coptic monk. Initially, the Christian hermits did not share Kaldi/Khalid's enthusiasm,

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rather he prematurely declared the berries “the beans of the devil” and flung them into the fire. Quickly his cell filled with the delicious aroma of the roasting berries and attracted other eremites from the monastery whose abbot retrieved the smoldering coffee beans and cooled them in a jar with water. When he drank this brew he experienced an unusual coherence of his thought. In result of his sensation he proclaimed the berries a miracle and a gift of heaven. The Ethiopians call the coffee *bunn*. Rhazi also used the term *bunchum* rather than *qahwah*. For sure, coffee like the other stimulant *qat* was brought to the *Arabia Felix* (Yemen) and *Arabia Deserta* by the merchants and vagrants from the Ethiopian plateau of Kaffa, where bellicose Oromo warriors fought against Bonga, a Nilotic tribe of slave hunters. Both tribes rather ate balls of the crushed coffee beans mixed with an animal fat rather than drinking it. Some historians believe that the land of Kaffa (Kefa) gave the name for coffee. Others believe that the word coffee is derived from Arabic *qihwy* (to make something undesirable). According to another Arabian tale, a certain Muslim sage called Sheikh Omar, known for his piety and medical knowledge, was forced by his envious foes to retreat into a desert near the port of Mocha in Yemen. Exhausted, hungry and dangerously dehydrated he stumbled upon a bush in the arid land. He tried to eat the berries but found them too bitter to swallow. So he roasted them in fire. Finding them still too hard to eat, he mixed them with boiled water which he then drank. Sheikh Omar immediately recovered his strength and was able to march on for several days. In Mocha he was declared a blessed man and his elixir became very popular among the Yemenis.

Abd al-Qadir al-Jaziri, the author of *Umdat al safwa fi hill al-qahwah* (1687 CE) informs that Sheikh Jamaluddin al-Dhabhani, the mufti of Aden was the pioneer of drinking coffee in Yemen. He popularized *qahwah* in 1454 CE. The Happy Arabia coffee was first used as a remedy against exhaustion which evolved into a helpful stimulant. The pious Muslims valued *qahwah's* ability to keep them attentive and vigilant during nighttime prayers. From Mocha and Makkah, *hajjis* had introduced coffee Arabica throughout the whole Islamic world. In the 15th century CE, there were numerous coffee houses in Damascus, Cairo, Alexandria, Baghdad, Tunis, Algiers, Edirne and Istanbul. Khair Beg, a young governor of Makkah outlawed drinking *kahwah* in 1511 because many un-orthodox sufi

dervishes abused it in the form of *qishr*, a beverage outlawed by the Holy Qur'an, during their ecstatic frenzies. But the Mamluk Sultan who liked coffee reversed the fatwa. The famous Albanian-native Wezir Ahmed Küprülü ordered closed kahve-hane's for the same reason as that of Khair Beg. His edict was immediately ignored after his death. In 1534, 1570 and 1580 CE, several massive street demonstrations against gambling and playing *mancalah*, singing obscene songs and playing musical instruments in coffee houses in Cairo forced the authorities to close many such places identified as dens of lewdness. But it was not coffee which demoralized clients but wine, which is forbidden in Islam, that was often supplied by the local Jews and Christians to unscrupulous owners of crypto-taverns camouflaged as "coffee-houses".

From Yemen and Makkah, *qahwah* rapidly reached every corner of the Islamic Ummah. Coffee made its debut in the Christian realm of the West when it was traded in Europe in the late 1500's. Most of the coffee exported to the European markets came from the ports of the Levant and Alexandria. It was retailed by the Venetian and Dutch traders in 1615 and 1616. The Puritan colonists from Plymouth and Leiden brought along guidebooks for coffee makers on the deck of the *Mayflower* when they crossed the Atlantic Ocean in 1620. But in Boston the first bales of coffee were sold almost fifty years later. Even Francis Bacon described coffee in his *Historia Vitae et Mortis* (History of Life and Death) and *Sylva Sylvarum* (Forest of Forests) written between 1623 and 1627. In 1727, coffee growing started in the Portuguese colony of Brazil, but the poor climatic conditions gradually shifted the crops, first to Rio de Janeiro and finally (1800 – 1850) to the States of San Paolo and Minas, where coffee found its ideal environment. The Dutch East India Company brought the plant to Java.

Transplanted to the Caribbean island of Martinique by a French infantry officer, who nurtured one small plant on his maritime journey across the Atlantic, the coffee berries became the progenitors of more than 20 million trees on the island in the 19th century. From Martinique, the coffee plant found its way to the rest of Central America. Coffee was declared by the Continental Congress as the national drink of the anti-British insurgents in the North America in the initial period of mass rebellion initiated by the excessive tax on tea levied by the British Crown.

After the Boston Tea Party, the patriotic “terrorists, bandits, outlaws, highwaymen and fugitives” led by Francis Marion in swampy South Carolina and George Washington in the native lands of the Iroquois, became ardent coffee-drinkers.

Espresso coffee had its origin in 1822, with the invention of the first primitive espresso machine in France. The Italians improved this crude machine and were the first manufacturers of it. It was via this machine, the Muslim “devil’s brew” became an essential component of the Italian lifestyle and gastronomic culture.

Definitely, the diffusion of coffee was facilitated by the spread of Islam in North Africa, Europe and South Asia. In 1570, it was known in Venice along with the North American tobacco. The merit of its introduction into Italy is ascribed to the Paduan Prospero Alpino, a botanist and physician, who brought with him some sacks from the East and, having observed the plant’s characteristics, described it in his book *De Planetis Aegyptii et de Medicina Aegyptiorum*, printed between 1591 and 1592. Venice was the main market of Oriental goods in Europe. Venetians were the first, to learn to appreciate this black beverage referred to as “Devil’s brew” by Christian clerics. At the beginning, however, the price of coffee was very high, and only the rich people could afford to buy it since it was sold only in apothecaries. In 1581, G. Francesco Morosini, the High Judge of the Doge, and Ambassador of the Venetian Republic to the Sublime Porte (*Bab-I ali*), reported from Istanbul that the Muslims met each other several times a day in *kahve-hanes* where they sipped a dark and boiling hot beverage. Thus, coffee became the object of trade and commerce. In 1640, the first “coffee shop” had been opened in Venice. Turin, Genoa, Milan, Florence, Rome and Naples quickly followed the Venetian example. In Venice alone, no less than 218 “coffee-houses” served Turkish coffee, condemned by the Catholic priests as the “devil’s brew”, to the increasingly orientalized citizens of the *Serenissima*. Some Christian fanatics urged Pope Clement VIII to declare coffee drinkers as heretics and to burn them alive at the stake. The Pontiff, before giving judgment, asked for a cup of the black aromatic beverage. After the first gulp, he allegedly cried out: “This beverage is so delicious that it would be a sin to let only misbelievers drink it! Let’s defeat Satan by blessing this beverage,

which contains nothing objectionable to a Christian!" (Pendergrast, 2000:8) And the "infallible" Pontiff baptized coffee. After the Battle of Vienna in 1683, Francis Kulezycki, a Polish soldier-cum-orientalist who translated Turkish documents into the Polish language for the Kin Jan III Sobieski, penetrated the captured tents of the defeated Kara Mustafa and had stolen several sacks of "Turkish wine in a black powder". Subsequently, he opened the first Turkish-style *kahve-hane* or *caffe-house* in Vienna. The Hungarians, especially the urbanites of Buda, who had lived under Osmanli rule since August 29, 1526 (the victorious battle of Sultan Suleiman Kanuni the Magnificent over the crusading coalition of the Habsburgs and their allies), already knew such places of discourse and refreshment. But in 18th century Poland, where aqua vita or alcoholic booze made the majority of the Christian population vodka-addict junkies, coffee was still demonized by humanists and fanatical clergymen: Andrzej (Andrew) Morsztyn, a Turcophobe wrote in his poem:

<i>W Malciesmy, pomne, kosztowali kaffy</i>	(In Malta, I remember, we tasted coffee)
<i>Trunku dla Baszy, Murata, Mustafy</i>	(a liquor for Pasha, Murat, Mustafa)
<i>I co jest Turków. Ale tak szkarady</i>	(and what is for Turks. But such obnoxious)
<i>Napój, tak brzydka trucizna i jady</i>	(Beverage, such ugly poison and venom)
<i>Co _ adnej sliny nie puszcza na zeby,</i>	(Which dries saliva on the teeth)
<i>Niech chrze cija skiej nie plugawi gby.</i>	(Should not corrupt the Christian face)

(Reychman, 1959:34)

Jan Potocki, a Polish aristocrat and writer who traveled to Spain, Egypt, Morocco and Turkey at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, described the elegant Turkish *kahve-hanes* as "the houses of meeting of lazybones and loiters of all classes; viziers, captain-pashas, and where even the sultan comes incognito to spy and know what people talk about him. These are places of gossipers whose main concern is to talk about the private of others". (Potocki, 1789:23). The first coffeehouse in London opened in 1652. In Lyons in 1672 and in Paris one year later.

However, eighteenth century highbrows declared this Muslim beverage as an "intellectual beverage". Jonathan Swift wrote in 1722, that "coffee makes us severe and grave, and philosophical". (Pendergrast, 2000:1). Coffee aroused interest not only as a "refreshing infusion" but also for its healing powers; so that in a leaflet, printed in Milan in 1801, high credit was given by some physicians to coffee as a "remedy for illnesses". Johann Sebastian Bach the famous composer, (1685 – 1750) confessed that "without my morning coffee I'm just like a dried up piece of roast goat". In the 20th century, "politicians who drink coffee cup after cup and by this abuse are inspired to profound wisdom on all earthly events" – wrote Lewis Levin in his *Phantastica: Narcotics and Stimulating Drugs* (1931). I disagree. It was the century of the worst ideas and deeds perpetuated by the ruling elites.

Today, Café Florian in the Piazza San Marco in Venice, Caffè Greco in Rome, the Pedrocchi in Padua, the Michelangelo in Florence and the Baratti in Turin testify to the current splendor of the old "coffee shrines. There are hundreds of coffee-houses in every European and American capital. In Italy alone there are 200 000 espresso bars. Coffee is therefore a great contribution of the Muslims to the western modern way of life. Based on the Arabic and Turkish art of processing and blending, it has become a specialty which is typically European and American! Linnaeus classified the coffee plant in the Rubiaceae family, to which also belongs the gardenia. The name given to it by the great naturalist was "Coffee Arabica". There are some sixty species of it growing spontaneously in the subtropical areas of Africa, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Madagascar, but they are without any commercial importance. Only ten species are cultivated in different parts of the world. While the wild plant can reach even ten or twelve metres in height, the height plantation one reaches in height varying between three and five metres, except in Colombia where it rarely exceeds two metres. This makes the harvest and flowering easier, and cultivation more economical.

The leaves are, depending on the growth stage, a deep green, light green and bronze yellow. The flowers are white, in clusters, and are sweet-scented like the Spanish jasmine. The flowers soon give way to red berries, more or less dark, depending on the plant variety. At first sight,

the fruit is like a big cherry both in size and colour. The berry is coated with a thin *epicarp* and an *escorapo* containing a sugary flesh, *mescorap*. Inside the pulp are the seeds in the form of two beans coupled at their flat surface. The beans in turn are coated with a kind of parchment, very resistant, and a golden yellow sheath (called endocarp or pergamino). When peeled, the real bean appears, coated-with another very thin silvery film. The bean is bluish green verging on bronze, depending on the species. For each species there are several varieties, each one distinguished by its own size.

The principal coffee species grown commercially are the high quality Arabica and the ordinary Robusta. From their graftings have been obtained several subtypes differently indicated with the names of the producing countries. Green Arabica Beans Coffee Arabica, a valuable species, has been grown and selected for several centuries, and represents three-quarters of the world is coffee production. As the name suggests, it comes from Arabia, and thrives in lands rich in minerals. Its better-known sub-varieties are the Moka, Maragogipe, San Ramon, Columnaris, and Bourbon. The Arabica coffees produced in Brazil take the collective name of Brazilian Coffees; those from Colombia, Venezuela, Peru, Guatemala, Salvador, Haiti and Santo Domingo are called 'Milds'. There are also the best Arabica coffees that come from Kenya and Uganda. The Arabica makes the "real" coffee, sharp in taste, with a rather low caffeine content. There are, however, different tastes, due to the different crop varieties. Arabica beans look slightly elongated, with greenish-blue shades.

The trees of Coffee Robusta can be over 12 metres high. They grow quickly in altitudes up to 600 metres, and is more resistant to parasites. Discovered in the Congo in 1898, this hardy species is widespread, especially in Africa, Asia and Indonesia, where the climate is unsuitable for Coffee Arabica. It represents about one quarter of the total world production. Due to its higher content of caffeine (about twice as much as Arabica) and strong character, Robustas is used mostly in specialty blends. Overuse and/or improper processing can result in cheap bitter-tasting coffee, with a pronounced "woodiness", a typical characteristic of natural Robustas from Africa. Washed varieties from Indonesia are rare and particularly prized for use in certain blends. The beans are typically small, rounded and brownish-yellow in appearance.

Coffee plants need special conditions if they are to thrive and give a satisfactory crop. These are: A Favorable climate; areas with hot-wet or hot-temperate climate, with frequent rains and temperatures varying from 15 to 25 ° C; The best land for coffee plantations are slopes of the volcanic hills. The perfect altitude is between 600 and 1200 meters, though some varieties thrive at 2000 – 2200 metres, and others at under 400 meters.

Treated and protected in a correct way, the plants will start to yield fruit only when three or four years old. Hand-picking is the most selective method of harvesting. Ripe fruits can be plucked by hand, or picked with small rakes, or else brought down to earth with poles. The two first methods are used where low-cost labor (like in Brasil, Colombia and Uganda) is available, and they are more selective; the pole system is quicker, but less careful and calls for further operations of berry-cleaning. Where the terrain allows it, harvesting today can be affected with special automatic machines. Only when the plant is five years old can it be counted upon to give a regular yield. This is between 400 grams and two kilos of "arabica" beans for each plant, and 600 grams and two kilos of "robusta" beans; one may say that for 500 grams of beans, one will need 2.5 kilos of berries. Since coffee is a very delicate product, the beans must be extracted within a few days after the harvesting. This is to prevent the pulp and surrounding films from fermenting. Seed extraction can be carried out in two ways. The "dry" process, producing so-called "Natural" coffee is adopted mostly in Brazil and Western Africa. Desiccation takes place via exposure to the sun on lands reserved for that purpose, and the berries are continuously stirred to expose them evenly to the rays of for a period of 15 to 20 days. Alternatively, after two or three days, coffee can be put in drying rooms, where it is dried by the heat of a burner at 45 – 60 °C. Whereas, the "wet process", is difficult and expensive. This process produces the so-called "washed" or "Mild" coffees. This method is popular in Central America, Mexico, Colombia, Kenya and Tanzania. After the harvest, the coffee beans are put into sacks, generally weighing 60 kilos (approx. 132 lbs.), and stored in special sheltered rooms, where they are ready to start their journey – from sack to package –towards the consuming countries. Recently, the appalling poverty of coffee farmers contrasts with the wealth of coffee dealers united in the powerful Interna-



tional Coffee Organization (ICO) which has a very low-profile office in Berners Street, London. In the last years almost 600 000 coffee farmers and workers lost their source of income because the prices fell almost 80%. But international coffee companies like Starbucks, Procter & Gamble, Nestle, Sara Lee and Philip Morris have made huge profits. Sara Lee made \$500 millions in 2003, the year of record sales (Wild, 2005:3)

The Coffee industry is the second global enterprise after the oil trade, employing more than 20 million men and women. With over 400 billion cups consumed every year in America, Asia, Africa, Europe and Australia, coffee is the most popular beverage. More than 5 million people are employed in Brazil alone in the farming and harvesting of over 3 billion coffee trees.

In the mid 1990s, Vietnam became the second largest coffee producer (after Brasil) in the world. Having massively defoliated the land with chemical weapons of mass destruction – the infamous Agent Orange which killed and poisoned hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese peasants and American soldiers – the US government has promoted, through the World Bank, the refoiliation of the poisoned soil of Vietnam with low-quality Robusta coffee bushes. In 2000, Vietnam produced 9 million bags (60 kg each) of low class Robusta harvested by machines. The flood of Vietnamese coffee severely depressed the prices of all kinds of coffee, including the high-grade Arabica beans. It is a devastating blow to the coffee exports of Brasil, Kenya, Uganda, Yemen, Mexico, Indonesia and Bolivia, already harmed by stock exchange manipulators. This is the latest Western and Communist regimes' contribution to the modern globalized civilization of Mammon, based on the greed of the few plutocrats and mass misery of the "Others". It will be a very hard job for the most Islamophobic modern neo-crusaders to prove that Muslim "extremists" and "terrorists" are guilty of this mass destruction of economies in South America, Africa and Asia.

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