

United Cultures of Coffee

“Drink of brightness” or an other fuel that drives the world

I would like to start with the pure economic facts that overshadow the glorious history of the beverage that can be traced back to the Arab genius.

As Remko Caprio says in his article:

“These days coffee is second only to oil as the most valuable (legally) traded good in the world with a total trade value of \$70 billion. Interestingly, only \$6 billion reaches coffee producing countries. The remaining \$64 billion is generated as surplus value in the consumption countries.”

I do not want to be blind either to the critical argumentation of coffee historian , Antony Wild, who states that although coffee consumption is rising, the income paid to producers is showing a decreasing tendency, pushing many to poverty and destroying already fragile economies.

He depicts a history with an uncertain start in East Africa as a stimulant in religious ceremonies and concludes to an imperial commodity describing the close relation of coffee culture to the rise of capitalism and its institutions. These are facts, but the same can be proved when speaking about the history of other commodities like cotton, sugar, oil or tea – not to forget the biggest competitor from the list.

According to an other historian Pendergrast, who is the author of „Uncommon Grounds: The History of Coffee and How It

Transformed Our World” - over the years, this beverage has nurtured revolutions, resulted deforestation, enriched a few while impoverishing the many, and addicted millions with its psychoactive caffeine. But he also admits that a “good cup of coffee can turn the worst day tolerable, can provide an all-important moment of contemplation and can rekindle a romance.”

How many times have we heard, “I can’t get started without my morning coffee.”? This is the most basic establishment of ritual—simple comfort.

It is a small yet luxurious ritual that anybody can turn to for warmth, recreation and meditation. It holds no social standings and it is seen the world over as an egalitarian beverage.

It has occurred in every other culture, and there is no difference - only alteration - as to the consumption. This drink can teach us to acknowledge our diversity while calling our attention not to allow our diversity to control us.

Having said that, I agree with the opinion that it is a shame to drink Coffee and not knowing its history.

Let’s go now back to the roots tracing the bean as it makes its way from Africa to the Middle East (it was once known as the "wine of Arabia") to the West, and the rise in cafe culture across Europe and eventually the New World – the whole World.

Most probably Coffee’s earliest human use – prior to 1000 A.D. - may have been as a food; a ball of the crushed fruit molded with fat was a day’s ration for certain African nomads in Ethiopia in Galla tribe – due to the energy boost they recognized after consumption.

As to unproved sources Arab traders brought coffee back to their homeland and cultivated the plant for the first time on plantations.

They have cooked coffee beans in boiling water since as far back as the 9th century and drank the stimulating extract as an alternative to the Muslims' forbidden alcohol as we can read in Aly Mazahery's work. Arabs gave it the name "qahwa" – literally, that which prevents sleep. There is also a meaningful proverb, which defines coffee as the "drink of brightness".

Coffee was well known in the 15th-century Arabia; from there it spread to Egypt and Turkey, overcoming religious and political oppositions to become popular among them.

In 1453 coffee was introduced to Constantinople by the Ottoman Turks and the first known coffee shop, Kiva Han was opened there in 1475. The first proof of lady consumers is driven from the Turkish law, that makes legal for a woman to divorce her husband if he fail to provide her with daily quota of coffee.

In 1511 the corrupt governor of Mecca, a certain Khair Beg, introduced prohibition for coffee for the fear that the stimulating influence might give birth to an opposition against his rule. The sultan sent word that coffee is a sacred drink and the poor governor lost his head.

Despite all these measures coffee drinking spread like wildfire, and by the reign of Murat III (1574-1595) there were over six hundred "schools of the wise" as they called the coffee-houses in Turkey.

Coffee houses were generally constructed in the form of pavilions commanding an attractive view, and most had verandas and sometimes an ornamental pool in the centre. Low platforms for customers to sit upon surrounded the interior walls. Water pipes or the long slender pipes were also provided. Fashionable Turkish coffee houses served as gentlemen's clubs, whose members discussed literature and listened to music and as such are regarded as the forerunners of the later cafes of Europe.

There is a nice quotation in Sheik Abd-al-Kadir's manual *In Praise of Coffee* /from 1587/ - "Coffee is the common man's gold, and like gold, it brings to every person the feeling of luxury and nobility.

In the early 1600 Italian traders introduced it to the West. The first European coffee was sold in pharmacies in 1615 as a medicinal remedy.

In Italy, Pope Clement VIII was urged by his advisers to consider that favorite drink of the Ottoman Empire part of the infidel threat. However – after tasting - he decides to "baptize" it instead, making it an acceptable Christian beverage.

Being approved by the Pope by the mid-17th cent. coffee had reached most of Europe and the New World.

It is believed that Captain John Smith, who helped to found the colony of Virginia at Jamestown, was the pioneer - as early as 1607 - to introduce Coffee to North America. But it was only much later that coffee became a favorite American beverage - after the Boston Tea Party /1773/made tea unfashionable.

In Europe the first known coffehouse was opened in 1645 in Italy and it was followed quickly in England /1652/ and multiplied over there to such a high extent that they became the forum for learned and not so learned and gained the nickname "penny universities" – a penny being the price of a cup of coffee.

The year 1668 is famous for opening Edward Lloyd's coffeehouse in England, which became frequented by merchants and maritime insurance agents. Eventually it becomes Lloyd's of London, the best-known insurance company in the world - just to give one example of

the respected institutions and societies having their roots in coffeehouses.

The northern spread in Europe was effected by the fact that from the early 17th century Amsterdam took over the leading position of international maritime trade and we know that in the second decade Dutch merchants managed to smuggle out the plant from Aden. They transported it to their colonies and the second half of the century already witness imports from Ceylon and Java in big quantities - and for lower price.

We know that the French king was almost an addict to this drink in 1644 - his doctor had to prohibit since he could not sleep from it. But the price was 250 franks per kilo - and it was the beverage of the highest nobility only. Some 20 year later the Turkish Ambassador, Soliman Mustafa, made efforts to make the consumption a fashion and we also hear the firts opening of a coffehouse in Marseilles in 1671.

Paris was grateful to Soliman and in a few years Le Procope, the first high style and still working coffehouse opened and in 1703 /almost 30 year before Bach !/a whole series of Coffee Cantata was published.

And this might bring us to the spread in Germany where the first historically registered sample is shown up in Merseburg in May of teh year 1637, as a first lot from Amsterdam. Due to the improper instructions or just a simple misunderstanding the coffe was boiled in meat soup and the consumption resulted some stomach problems.

Can this be reason why we hear of selling the new product mainly in pharmacies like in Dresden in 1685? Nevertheless with a jump of almost a century we have to report that Johann Sebastian Bach composes his Kaffee-Kantate. Partly an ode to coffee and partly a stab at the movement in Germany to prevent women from drinking coffee (it was thought to make them sterile), the cantata includes the aria,

"Ah! How sweet coffee taste! Lovelier than a thousand kisses, sweeter far than muscatel wine! I must have my coffee."

Coming closer to Hungary I would recall the story from 1675: The Turkish Army surrounds Vienna. Franz Georg Kolschitzky, a Viennese who had lived in Turkey, slips through the enemy lines to lead relief forces to the city. The fleeing Turks leave behind sacks of "dry black fodder" that Kolschitzky recognizes as coffee. He claims it as his reward and opens central Europe's first coffee house. He also establishes the habit of refining the brew by filtering out the grounds, sweetening it, and adding a dash of milk.

After this round trip from Mecca to Vienna I do not think that it should be my task to reveal a more detailed spread of coffee in West and South Europe, but the same in the Carpathian Basin or mainly in Hungary is naturally the duty of the researchers who work in the Hungarian Museum of Commerce and Hospitality.

Hungary had his first lessons in this respect due to the Turkish invasion that lasted more than 150 years. The wine-drinker Hungarians had to swallow the "black soup" several times when captured by the invaders – it is still a proverb in Hungary: "and now comes the black soup". The Turks most probably had their coffee shops on the invaded territory and the first mentioning of a Turkish coffee shop in Buda by Vűdsűdi Mehmed /died in 1643/ praises the good society of the poets and sages.

We know some economic diary notes on buying coffee /1681/ and asking for sending the beans in private letters – but this is so scattered that can only be taken as exceptions.

As soon as the Turks left - right at the beginning of the 18th century - more and more data can be traced that show the habit of drinking coffee – but still only in the upper strata. Aristocrats and soldiers who visit Vienna and travellers relate their experiences with coffee / and chocolate sometime together./ The first poem by György Palocsay /as early as 1704/ against this new style clearly shows that this is something we have to pay attention to.

But we can read in the auto- biography of Miklós Bethlen /1711/ that he is ready to send sugar to his wife from Vienna to Transilvania, so that she could give coffee with sugar to their son, who should drink this new beverage instead of wine. This shows evidently that coffee was available over there, while sugar not. An other proof of regular coffee supply in that corner of Hungary can be read in “Vectigal Transilvanicum” in 1714, where the list of taxable products includes coffee with other merchandise that is coming from East.

It is also very interesting to study the naming history of coffee culture in Hungary. There are several spellings for coffee, coffee house and even for the cups. Let me only quote an early example created by a traveller to London in 1694, who mention the coffeehouse as “coffipolium”. I like this, because it means – the meeting point where you can drink coffee – and as such stresses the most important aspects of the site.

The second part of the 18th century is quite rich in “tractati” against coffee consumption both from medical and social point of views. We have no time to quote them here, but the statistics shows that most of them are cursing the addiction of the ladies.

The appearance of the first coffee shops is clearly showing a threefold direction of impacts in the Carpathian Basin.

The first known ones were run by Serbian entrepreneurs: one unknown coffee maker in 1696 at Szentendre and a certain

“Cavesiedler Blasius, ein Ratz-Catholik” in 1714 at Pest. This South-Eastern impact embodied in the so called “**smoking houses**” where the drinking of the smoke and the coffee were in close relation. /The Arabs use the phrase to the drink -sharaba- for smoking even today./

The South-Western impact, that is “**associated with games**” can be represented by the Italian Francesco Bellieno, who is mentioned in the books of Pest in 1734, but interestingly he moved there from the Northern part of Hungary , from Kassa. He was also a chocolate maker and run a grocery as well. At those day this mix was quite normal and gave possibility for severe disputes – minutes of these quarrels are readable form 1717 at Pressburg, the present Bratislava or Pozsony in Slovakia.

For the Western impact, we can mention the German Johann Starkh and Franz Reschfellner, who represent the “**talking**” coffeehouse, where one could have a chat and read the latest news.

This typology of Bevilaqua Borsody Béla might simplify the colorful reality, but very well reflects the three main influences that created the most democratic institution of 19th century Hungary. We can also say - like in other parts of the world - that a coffeehouse /PILVAX/ nurtured the revolution of 1848 and served as a nest of the developing middle classes or better to say the citizens.

To draw the complete sociological map of “coffeehouse life” is far beyond the scope of this presentation, but the fact that Budapest had almost six hundred /591/ coffee shops and houses by 1896 - shows that it was a basic meeting point of the modern civil publicity. Developed together with the press, newspapers were written and read at the marble tables with coffee vapour. Served as a kind of an adult kindergarden – being the arena of informal dispute, games and entertainment, but also that of political and business life, not to speak about the blessed literature.

Everyone had his or her own favourite coffehouse and it was characteristic: who visited which one. It was said that “ Better than at home”, and we cannot be surprised that mail was addressed to the coffee house they visited. The place itself developed to be a special mutation between the openness of the street and the intimacy of the home.

At this point I have to quote again the aforementioned Antony Wild to match the different - social, intellectual and health – aspects of the story:

"It is almost impossible to distinguish the cultural effects of the coffee house from the physical effects of the coffee served in it. The environment of the 'Penny University' undoubtedly encouraged a degree of association between men who might otherwise never have met, but would they have formed societies without the intellectually stimulating nature of the beverage? It has been argued that, until the arrival of coffee, the population of Europe had existed in a constant state of mild intoxication, since the quality of water was such that many people drank the weak beers of the time morning, noon, and night. By switching to coffee, they were not only reducing the muddle-headedness resulting from alcohol consumption, but also ingesting a powerful new drug. Indeed, it could be said that the introduction of coffee to England led to a . . . 'brain explosion.' "

This new "Coffee House Man" – as he calls - “energetic, self-motivated, political, practical, reformist, well-connected, cultured, and philanthropic," - and changed much more than England.

And now at the end of my presentation let me come to the meaning and message of the title.

The less what I wanted to do is to allude with the title to the overwhelming culture of the US with all its positive and negative effects. It was much more on my mind to reflect to the genius slogan of Benetton with its philosophy of marketing that is taking social responsibility so seriously.

My intent was to call our attention to a relatively modern / some 500 years old/ phenomenon what we call COFFEE and what could be taken as a **symbol of re-unification** of the European and Mediterranean cultures. We cannot aspect from the people to remember all the wisdom and cultural results that Arabs transferred to the rest of the world, but this simply everyday drink could easily be put on our common flag.

Contrary to its basic black colour the emanation and the feeling around it is quite positive - being the most important drink what we offer to our guests first of all. As to an old Arabic saying : “The first cup is for the guest, the second for enjoyment, the third for the sword.” Let’s stop after the second.

Even though the world is going another direction with all the recent clashes in France for example, let me close this presentation with the words of a German friend of mine, Wilhelm Droste, who runs coffee shops both in Hamburg and Budapest:

“We should work out /create/ Europe like a coffee shop. It cannot either become a closed club of selected and chosen people, or even less an armed empire that is - being afraid of the dark fringes of the world – tries to terrorize them with technical superiority. Europe should be a territory that is opening widely her borders to embrace foreigners and digging for her roots equally in order to stay healthy and vital. The entrance is free!”

After reading through this presentation I decided that I will suggest him to open his third coffee shop in Ankara.

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