A Penny For Your Cuppa:

How Coffeehouses Revolutionized Coffee Consumption in England's Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries

Megan Macasaet

There is no beverage, other than water, that is more consumed than coffee.[1] Yet, coffee did not always hold such rampant popularity. In England, coffee's rise can be traced to the late seventeenth century; wherein, coffee had a humble beginning as a foreign, disparaging drink mainly sourced from Turkey. Impelled by Turkish xenophobia, England's perceptions of the Ottoman Empire as a barbaric state contributed to their initial reluctance to adopt any Turkish custom, including coffee consumption. These prejudices were rectified through several factors that allowed coffeehouses, and their wares, to rule the social sphere. The first change was in England's increased wages and decreased import prices during the late seventeenth century. Coffeehouses capitalized on this opportunity and began selling coffee for pennies, vastly cheaper than the traditional social beverage, alcohol. In addition to becoming financially accessible, coffeehouses also welcomed patrons of all genders and stations, further distinguishing them from classically popular taverns. Their inclusivity contributed to forming a rare, unified environment where patrons of varying backgrounds and educations could exchange knowledge, news, and engage in political debates, founding the basis of coffeehouses' characteristic scholarly ambiance. Thus, by connecting the ideas of inclusivity, economic accessibility, sobriety, and intellectual company to the coffeehouse, this institution radically adopted a respectable connotation that would culminate to overshadow initial predispositions and increase English coffee consumption.

In the seventeenth century, England was hesitant to embrace the Turkish habit of coffee consumption. The primary influence for England's uncertainty diverged from ideological tension, as England held contempt towards the Ottoman Empire's authoritarianism, formidable

[1] Marino Petracco, "Technology IV: Beverage Preparation: Brewing Trends for the New Millennium," in *Coffee: Recent Developments*, ed. Ronald Clarke and O.G. Vitzthum (Berlin: Blackwell Science, 2001), 140. DOI: 10.1002/9780470690499.ch7.

militia, slavery, and barbaric opposition to traditional English Anglican views.[2] These reservations are reflected in an account from Paul Rycaut, a seventeenth-century diplomat working in Turkey, who writes that "tyranny [is a] requisite for [the Turkish] people …by an unknown liberty they grow mutinous and unruly."[3] Many English historians of the time period displayed similar sentiments; Turkey was often portrayed as a grave, unyielding threat to England and its ideals.[4] Particularly, England was concerned that coffee consumption would be akin to supporting the Ottoman Empire and losing English identity through adopting foreign, barbarous habits.[5] These negative perceptions developed from recorded accounts of Turkish coffee consumption by English travellers. One such account comes from seventeenth-century English traveller and historian, Thomas Herbert, who reports Turkish "Coffa" consumption with "tobacco suckt [*sic*] through water by long canes or pipes" and describes it as "a drinke [*sic*] brewed out of the Stygian Lake, blacke [*sic*], thicke [*sic*] and bitter;" in the subsequent paragraph, he also details Turkish opium consumption indicating that "they are always chawing [*sic*] it."[6] While Herbert does not state that both substances were eaten together, contemporary historian, Brian Cowan, believes that Turkish coffeehouse users would also indulge in opium.[7] These observations would cast a stark alienation of Turkish coffee and its consumers within

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[2] Brian W. Cowan, *The Social Life of Coffee: The Emergence of the British Coffeehouse* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 6. EBSCO Academic Collection; Anders Ingram, *Writing the Ottomans: Turkish History in Early Modern England* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 3 and 76. DOI: 10.1057/9781137401533.
[3] Paul Rycaut, *Present State of the Ottoman Empire* (London: Printed for John Starket and Henry Brome, 1668), 3. https://archive.org/details/presentstateofot00ryca/page/2/mode/2up.
[4] Ingram, *Writing the Ottomans: Turkish History in Early Modern England*, 4 and 6; Emily M. N. Kugler, *Sway of the Ottoman Empire on English Identity in the Long Eighteenth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 21. DOI: 10.1163/9789004225435.
[5] Kugler, *Sway of the Ottoman Empire on English Identity in the Long Eighteenth Century*, 21, 28 and 183.
[6] Thomas Herbert*, A Relation of Some Yeares Travaile, begvnne anno 1626* (London: Printed by William Stansby and Jacob Bloome, 1634), 150-151. https://archive.org/details/b30326825/page/n9/mode/2up.
[7] Cowan, *The Social Life of Coffee*, 18.

England. However, a shift in England's economy would alter the large-scale demand for this commodity in the late seventeenth century.

During the late seventeenth century, the combination of lowered import prices and increased wages in England stimulated the middle class' enhanced demand for luxury imports, like coffee.[8] The desire was made more alluring with coffee's inexpensiveness compared to alcohol.[9] One 1675 supporter asserts that "in an ale-house, you must gorge yourself with pot after pot… but here for penny or two, you may spend 2 to 3 hours [in a coffeehouse], have the shelter of a house, the warmth of a fire, the diversion of company and conveniency."[10] Because coffee could be purchased for pennies, English society soon converted from alcohol to coffee consumption. As a result, England's per capita coffee consumption rose from 0.04 in 1693-1700 to 0.07 in 1701-1710.[11] Following coffee consumption's near doubling in per capita within a decade, the need emerged for more social consumption institutions. Though some coffeehouses had existed before this rise, the industry significantly expanded with hundreds of English coffeehouses opening by the early 1700s.[12] It is estimated that London had more than two thousand coffeehouses by the eighteenth century.[13] The immense proliferation of coffeehouses in England would be the start of coffee's dominion within the social sphere.

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[8] de Vries, Jan, *Economy of Europe In an Age of Crisis*, *1600-175* (Cambridge, [Eng.]: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 187, quoted in B. Cowan, *The Social Life of Coffee*, 7.
[9] Cowan, *The Social Life of Coffee*, 52.
[10] *Coffee-Houses Vindicated in Answer to the Late Published Character of a Coffee-House Asserting from Reason, Experience, and Good Authours, the Excellent use and Physical Vertues of that Liquor: With the Grand Conveniency of such Civil Places of Resort and Ingenious Conversation* (London: Printed by J. Lock for J. Clarke, 1673), 3. ProQuest.
[11] Phil Withington, "Where Was the Coffee in Early Modern England?" *Journal of Modern History* 92, no. 1 (2020): 48, doi: 10.1086/707339.
[12] Withington, "Where Was the Coffee in early Modern England?" 48; Cowan, *The Social Life of Coffee*, 30.
[13] Aytoun Ellis, *The Penny Universities: A History of the Coffee-houses* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1956), xiv.

Coffeehouses' popularity can be accredited to their uniquely progressive environment that welcomed all proprietors, including women.[14] Some historians, like Steve Pincus and Brian Cowan, believe coffeehouses enabled women to indulge in relative safety with some becoming owners of these establishments, allowing newfound pursuit of economic advancement.[15] As patrons, women particularly preferred coffeehouses over taverns due to coffeehouses' brightly lit rooms and intellectual setting, which promised more safety than the decrepit taverns that supposedly attracted prostitutes and drunkards.[16] Yet, some historical disagreement persists about women's acceptance within coffeehouses. Contemporary historian, Ross Jamieson, suggests that all men were received in coffeehouse regardless of station, a distinction that did not apply to women, and Aytoun Ellis indicates that coffeehouses did not permit women at all.[17] However, Pincus affirms that women were known to visit coffeehouses, a notion that is supported by histography.[18] In a monograph detailing the letters and life of Martha Lady Giffard, the sister of philosopher and diplomat, Sir William Temple, one letter denotes "a gentlewomen from Lady Giffard's house had been at the Coffee House [*sic*] to inquire [and look] for her."[19] Likewise, Robert Hooke wrote in his 1675 diary that he "dind [*sic*] with Mr. Boyle and Lady Ranelagh," at the "Mans" coffeehouse, which references Robert Boyle and his sister.[20] It stands

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[14] Steve Pincus, "'Coffee Politicians Does Create': Coffeehouses and Restoration Political Culture," *Journal of Modern History* 62, no.1 (1995): 814-815, doi: 10.1086/245229.
[15] Pincus, "'Coffee Politicians Does Create,'" 816; Cowan, *The Social Life of Coffee,* 80.
[16] Pincus, "'Coffee Politicians Does Create,'" 834; Cowan, *The Social Life of Coffee*, 104.
[17] Ross W. Jamieson, "The Essence of Commodification: Caffeine Dependencies in the Early Modern World," *Journal of Social History* 35, no. 2 (2001): 282, doi: 10.1353/jsh.2001.0125; Ellis, *The Penny Universities: A History of the Coffee-houses*, 88
[18] Pincus, "'Coffee Politicians Does Create,'" 814.
[19] Dorothy Osborne, *Martha Lady Giffard: Her Life and Correspondence (1664-1722): A Sequel to the Letters of Dorothy Osborne*, ed. Julia G. Longe (London: George Allen & Sons, 1911), 250-251. Nineteenth Century Collections Online.
[20] Robert Hooke, *The Diary of Robert Hooke 1672-1680*: *Transcribed From the Original In the Possession of the Corporation of the City of London (Guildhall Library),* ed. Henry W. Robinson and Walter Adams (London: Taylor & Francis, 1935), 184.

that these two women were not the sole female coffeehouse proprietors, and as more respectable women added to the volume of coffee consumers, they considerably influenced coffeehouses' widespread appeal.

Conversely, not everyone in English society accepted coffeehouses' perceivably non-threatening nature. Pamphlets like "Women's Petition Against Coffee" claim that "this pittiful [*sic*] drink is enough to bewitch Men of two and twenty… It renders them… Lean as Famine, as Rivvel'd [*sic*] as Envy, or an old meager Hagg over-ridden by an Incubus."[21] Though as Pincus asserts, the pamphlet is misleading, as the author is "a well-willer" and not explicitly credited to a female voice.[22] "Women's Petition Against Coffee" and similar pamphlets likely developed from latent Turkish xenophobia. An earlier tract from 1661 displays contempt for Turkey and criticizes English coffee drinkers stating "Like Apes, the English imitate all other people in their ridiculous fashions. As slaves, they submit to the customes [*sic*] even of Turky [*sic*]...With the Barbarous Indian he smoaks [*sic*] Tobacco. With the Turk he drinks Coffee… [coffee is] thick as puddle-water, and so ugly in colour and tast [*sic*]."[23] Contemptuous plays also emerged, like *Knavery in All Trades: Or, the Coffee-House: A Comedy* by John Tatham; as Cowan summarizes, through Tathman's Turkish merchant protagonist who sells diluted coffee made in a bedpan, coffee's Turkish origins are satirized to discourage coffee consumption.[24] But despite the vulgar, aggressive contention towards coffeehouses, these approaches yielded little effect because coffee had become less foreign via coffeehouses' reputable and sober environment.[25]

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[21] A Well-Willer, *The Women's Petition against Coffee, Representing to Publick Consideration the Grand Inconveniences Accruing to Their Sex from the Excessive Use of That Drying, Enfeebling Liquor* (London: [s.n.], 1674), 2, quoted in S. Pincus, "'Coffee Politicians Does Create,'" *Journal of Modern History* 62, no.1 (1995): 815.
[22] Pincus, "'Coffee Politicians Does Create,'" 815.
[23] M.P., *A Character of Coffee and Coffee-Houses* (London: Printed for John Starkey, 1661), 1-2. ProQuest.
[24] John Tatham*, Knavery in All Trades: Or, The Coffee-house: A Comedy* (London: Printed by J.B, 1664), quoted in B. Cowan, *The Social Life of Coffee,* 131.
[25] Cowan, *The Social Life of Coffee,* 132.

Sobriety was particularly favoured within coffeehouses, as these institutions were habitual places for business transactions.[26] *Coffeehouses Vindicated,* a 1673 pamphlet, indicates that "no bargain can be drove, or business concluded between man and man, but it must be conducted at some public house."[27] Although the traditional public houses were alehouses or inns, the preference later transitioned to coffeehouses, replacing the custom formerly held by alcohol consumption in taverns.[28] Unlike alcohol, which could intoxicate an individual and diminish their business reputation, coffee was associated with civility. James Howell, a seventeenth-century English historian, wrote in a letter to W. Rumsey that some "[took] their morning draught in ale, beer, or wine, which by the dizziness they cause in the brain, make many unfit for business, they use now… this wakeful and civil drink [coffee]."[29] Howell's statement suggests that English workers shifted from alehouse to coffeehouse patronage because of coffee's sobering effects, naturally increasing coffee consumption.

These working-class citizens would often frequent coffeehouses for other purposes as well because coffeehouses crafted such an ideal atmosphere for sharing political news. Newspapers were a novelty reserved for the wealthiest of classes, and thus, news was more commonly and cheaply distributed through conversations in coffeehouses.[30] A 1673 tract explains that coffeehouse patrons can "[save] two pence a week in Gazets [*sic*.], and [have their] news and [their] coffee for the same charge."[31] When verbal discussions became a primary

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[26] Pincus, "'Coffee Politicians Does Create,'" 818; Cowan, *The Social Life of Coffee*, 44.
[27] *Coffee-Houses Vindicated,* 4.
[28] Cowan, *The Social Life of Coffee,* 44.
[29] James Howell, letter to Walter Rumsey, n.d., quoted in W. Rumsey, *Organon salutis: an instrument to cleanse the stomach: as also divers new experiments of the virtue of tobacco and coffee, how much they conduce to preserve humane health* (London: Printed by R. Hodgkinsonne for D. Pakeman, 1657), b3. ProQuest.
[30] Sandra Peter and Lesley Farrell, "From Learning in Coffee Houses to Learning with Open Educational Resources," *E–Learning and Digital Media* 10, no. 2 (2013): 181, doi: 10.2304/elea.2013.10.2.174.
[31] *The Character of a Coffee-House with the Symtomes of a Town-Wit*, (London: Printed for Jonathan Edwin, 1673), 1. ProQuest.

avenue for news consumption, coffeehouses became integral institutions. Political news was of particular interest, and men would often visit coffeehouses to discuss their government's activities, gossip, or gather information.[32] Robert Hooke was one such patron and his 1672-1680 diary, as charted in Phil Withington's article, details Hooke's two-hundred forty-six trips to various coffeehouses between 1672-1677.[33] Similarly, politicians frequented English coffeehouses or sent representatives to gather opinions from citizens about current politics.[34] Thus, the coffeehouse transcended unfavorable perceptions by coupling coffee with knowledge exchange and political discussion to bolster consumption rates.[35]

This novel way to transmit knowledge extended to other spheres of information as well. With coffeehouses' close association with intellectual freedom, average patrons obtained better access to knowledge that was previously restricted to post-secondary institutions.[36] Educated coffeehouse patrons would sometimes host informal lessons on astronomy, arithmetic, poetry composition, languages, and more within coffeehouses, enabling citizens to glean advanced knowledge for the price of pennies.[37] The term "penny universities" was coined to describe this center for informal instruction, as many coffeehouses advertised that one penny would allow patrons to indulge in coffee, company, and information.[38] Coffeehouses were soon held in high regard by the general public, as this learning was effective. The educational barriers from illiteracy and financial shortcomings were circumvented by the penny universities' innate inclusivity, and the less educated would often enter coffeehouses to have others read information

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[32] Pincus, "'Coffee Politicians Does Create,'" 821 and 822.
[33] Robert Hooke, *The Diary of Robert Hooke, 1672-1680,* ed. Henry W. Robinson and Walter Adams (London, [s.n.],1968), 55, 256, 301, quoted in P. Withington, "Where Was the Coffee in early Modern England?" *Journal of Modern History* 92, no. 1 (2020): 52-53.
[34] Pincus, "'Coffee Politicians Does Create,'" 821.
[35] Peter and Farrell, "From Learning in Coffee Houses to Learning with Open Educational Resources," 183-184.
[36] Cowan, *The Social Life of Coffee,* 99-100.
[37] Cowan, *The Social Life of Coffee*, 99; Withington, "Where Was the Coffee in early Modern England?" 57.
[38] Cowan, *The Social Life of Coffee*, 52 and 87.

to them.[39] As paraphrased by Sandra Peter and Lesley Farrell, books were a staple in many penny universities with estimated collections nearing two thousand tomes in more than five-hundred coffeehouses.[40] Additionally, John Houghton, a seventeenth-century writer and English apothecary, states "Coffeehouses make all sorts of people sociable, the rich and the poor meet together, as also do the learned and unlearned. It improves arts, merchandise, and all other knowledge; for here an inquisitive man… may get more in an evening than he shall by books in a month… coffeehouses had improved useful knowledge, as much as [the universities] have."[41] The pursuit of knowledge significantly contributed to coffeehouse patronage and coffee consumption, as these establishments offered equal educational liberty to all classes, a luxury that had never before existed to this magnitude.

Penny universities' positive reception, however, was not absolute. *A Character of Coffee and Coffee-Houses* emphasizes that penny universities are "a school…without a master. Education is here taught without discipline. Learning (if it is possible) is here insinuated without method."[42] These derisive opinions persisted for the remaining seventeenth century.[43] But, the critics did little to influence coffee's overall appeal because coffeehouses were social establishments at their core and did not intend to replace formal university education.[44] Nonetheless, coffeehouses thrived in England's public sphere, whether for their novelty or inherent liberalized nature by becoming havens for debate, learning, and intellectual company.

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[39] Peter and Farrell, "From Learning in Coffee Houses to Learning with Open Educational Resources,"180-181; Ellis, *The Penny Universities: A History of the Coffee-houses*, 46.
[40] Thomas Kelly, *A History of Adult Education in Great Britain, 3rd edition*, quoted in S. Peter and L. Farrell, "From Learning in Coffee Houses to Learning with Open Educational Resources," 181.
[41] John Houghton, *Collection for the Improvement of Husbandry and Trade*, *no. 461* (London: Randal Taylor, 1692-1703), quoted in B. Cowan, *The Social Life of Coffee* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 99.
[42] M.P., *A Character of Coffee and Coffee-Houses*, 9.
[43] Cowan, *The Social Life of Coffee*, 101.
[44] Cowan, *The Social Life of Coffee*, 91 and 104.

Coffeehouses also successfully challenged the then current elitist education system led by the state and church, making them a preferred avenue for gaining knowledge.[45] The ability to share news and intelligence enticed many to visit coffeehouses, largely fuelling coffee's acceptability during England's seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Coffeehouses augmented coffee consumption in England's seventeenth and eighteenth centuries through their inclusivity, accessibility, sober environments, and intellectual premise. These economic and social factors would forever transform the English coffee trade, despite coffee's initial stigmatization due to its Turkish origins. Though some xenophobia remained in the form of tracts and plays, late seventeenth-century economic shifts in England lowered coffee's price, enabling more classes to form their own opinions on the beverage. Soon, coffee replaced alcohol as the preferred social beverage, a feat credited to coffeehouses. These institutions excelled in the social sphere by offering women, businessmen, and intellectuals a sobering drink in an amiable atmosphere. Sobriety enabled coffeehouses to become popular places for informal instruction, sharing news, and debating politics, which challenged societal norms for information distribution. Therefore, England's coffeehouse not only introduced a novel beverage to the market, but it also opened new opportunities for sociability, fiscal stimulus, and knowledge acquisition, revolutionizing xenophobic reservations and amplifying coffee's mass consumption in England's seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

[45] Cowan, *The Social Life of Coffee*, 91.

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