

Background information for our presentation/lesson:

According to Ralph Hattox, author of *Coffee and Coffeehouses: The Origins of a Social Beverage in the Medieval Near East*, he states that many contradictions exist about who frequented Eastern coffeehouses. Some sources state that coffeehouses in Cairo and Aleppo in the 19th century may have drawn people exclusively from “the lower orders.” However, other sources are almost unanimous in portraying coffeehouses as magnets for a much broader spectrum of clientele, from elite nobles to the poor. Behavior may have been far from refined, but people from all levels of society frequented coffeehouses. Keep in mind that coffeehouses were for men only.

Just because all levels of society may have gone to coffeehouses, do not assume they socialized together. Not all classes went to the same coffeehouse, and if they did (ie the Grand Cafe in Damascus near the citadel) they would not necessarily have mingled across social lines/barriers. Thousands of urban coffeehouses existed, with most being quite humble and many just a coffee “stall.”

In the Near East, the coffeehouse was a “Muslim” establishment, as religiously, legally, and morally they were not to frequent taverns (which were typically run by Christians or Jews). The coffeehouse was a Muslim institution, and while imams may not have approved of the establishment as they took people away from the mosques and prayer, the coffeehouse was accepted within Muslim society. Not all Muslims respected the institution of the coffeehouse nor its frequenters, but it was not seen as against sharia. While many Jews and Christians went to coffeehouses, they would have frequented those with a small Muslim clientele as they probably would not have felt comfortable in a Muslim shop (nor overly welcomed).

Activities in the Coffeehouses:

With the advent of the coffeehouse, hosting guests at one’s house declined. Since not hosting at home any longer, the act of hospitality was transferred to a public place. As a result, one could be a “host” as he insisted on paying for someone’s coffee.

Above all else, the coffeehouse was a place for talk: serious or trivial, political or frivolous. Sometimes loose banter was seen as far from frivolous, as discussing women sexually was contrary to the sharia and was discouraged, but for the most part, men went to coffeehouses to “hang out.” Some conversation was quite literary in nature, and the coffeehouse became something of a literary forum; poets and writers would submit their latest compositions for assessment of a critical public. In some coffeehouses, there might be heated discussions on art, the sciences, or literature.

The coffeehouse quickly became the place to share news in the days before newspapers: word of mouth was very important. If you wanted to know what was going on, you went to a coffeehouse to find out. Some coups were plotted in coffeehouses, which was quite upsetting

to many political rulers, specifically Sultan Murat IV, who went so far as to shut down the coffeehouses. Government spies also frequented coffeehouses to find out who was saying what.

Gaming took place in the coffeehouse: chess, mancala, and backgammon (nard) were popular games. Not sure if cards were used in early times, and most sources do not mention cards. Gambling? Not much mention of hard-core dicing/games, although Chess was sometimes played for stakes.

Entertainment took place in coffeehouses: bringing live entertainment in the form of a storyteller, sometimes with a musical instrument, was common. Puppet shows were quite popular, specifically the Karagoz type of shadow-play. Some musicians were involved but it depended upon the size of the shop: mostly violins, flutes, or singers.

On the base side, some coffeehouses may have had "pretty boys" as servers, although not much writing exists about prostitution in the coffeehouses. Some houses may have also served drugs as well as coffee: water pipes for tobacco and hashish could be found and consumed. Opium could be found in certain coffee establishments as well.

The embeance has been described this way....

"The 17th century French traveler and writer Jean Chardin gave a lively description of the Persian coffeehouse scene:

People engage in conversation, for it is there that news is communicated and where those interested in politics criticize the government in all freedom and without being fearful, since the government does not heed what the people say. Innocent games ... resembling checkers, hopscotch, and chess, are played. In addition, mollas, dervishes, and poets take turns telling stories in verse or in prose. The narrations by the mollas and the dervishes are moral lessons, like our sermons, but it is not considered scandalous not to pay attention to them. No one is forced to give up his game or his conversation because of it. A molla will stand up in the middle, or at one end of the qahveh-khaneh, and begin to preach in a loud voice, or a dervish enters all of a sudden, and chastises the assembled on the vanity of the world and its material goods. It often happens that two or three people talk at the same time, one on one side, the other on the opposite, and sometimes one will be a preacher and the other a storyteller.^[18],"

¹⁸"Coffee – The Wine of Islam". Superluminal.com. Archived from the original on 11 June 2011. Retrieved 29 May 2011. On https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coffeehouse#Islamic_world

Here are some exemplars for our roles:

You are an Ottoman Janissary:

You are an Ottoman Janissary, and you serve the emperor as his elite bodyguard. The Janissaries began as an elite corps of slaves made up of kidnapped young Christian boys who were forcibly converted to Islam, and became famed for strict discipline and order. Most Janissaries are household troops, bodyguards, or members of the best army in Europe. Unlike typical slaves, you are paid a regular salary, which is quite good by the standards of the day. Forbidden to marry or engage in trade, your complete loyalty to the Sultan is expected. By the seventeenth century, due to a dramatic increase in the size of the Ottoman standing army, the corps' initial strict recruitment policy was relaxed. Civilians bought their way into it in order to benefit from the improved socioeconomic status it conferred upon them. Consequently, the corps gradually lost its military character, undergoing a process that has been described as 'civilianization'. You, however, are very loyal to the Sultan and expect others to be the same. You frequent coffee houses that are run by officers of the Sultan, and you hang out with other Janissaries while drinking the famed brew.

You are a Poet/storyteller:

You are an Ottoman poet and writer. You go from coffeehouse to coffeehouse to recite your poetry and get public opinion on your work. You do not get paid much for your work now, but you hope to get recognition as a good teller of tales and poet in hopes that your wages rise. The coffeehouse is really just a forum for your tales; if word spreads of your greatness, you may some day work at the palace as a storyteller! Sometimes customers spare you with a few coins, which is needed as you are just a part-time teller. While some storytellers are professional, and are even members of a guild, you have yet to be involved at such a professional level. Ramadan is an especially good time for you to tell your tales as the coffeehouse owners use you to draw in patrons. As an entertainer goes, your work is "wholesome," and therefore suited to most coffeehouses.

You are an Officer - regular military

You are a member of the officer corps for the Sultan's army.

You are a Trader / Merchant / Guild Member

You are a member of an artisan Guild, a local Trader or Merchant, bringing goods in from neighboring areas. You represent the entrepreneurial or skilled labor class of the Ottoman empire. You go to the coffeehouse to socialize and connect with others in your trades or artisan class. It is also a place to make arrangements for work, network with potential clients, find out the news of the day and share some ideas with other merchants or guild members. The coffee house is also a place to escape work and socialize with others sometimes across social and economic classes. A location to relax and enjoy, to share your everyday successes and triumphs with friends. It is also a place to vent your frustrations and possibly plan responses and reactions to lifes' frustrations and worries - government requirements, restrictions, and /or taxes.

You are an Imam

You are a local Imam responsible for your local mosque's community. You go to the coffee house for the social aspects of being visible and engaged with your congregation, and also to keep a watchful eye. While coffee and coffeehouses have a shared history with muslims and Islam, it stimulating effects are problematic for reaching a concensus on being Halal. The coffeehouse also provides you with an audience with your religious community, when they might not be coming to services at the mosque. So you can still work to reach them by going to them if they won't come to you. And maybe get them to come to the mosque as well.

You are a Kadi / Qadi - Judge

You are a judge in the Ottoman empire. Chosen from the Ulama, you are responsible for representing the Sultan's legal power. Under the Ottomans your jurisdiction has expanded from merely religious rulings and interpretations to include civil rulings following the laws and edicts

of the Sultans but able to keep some autonomy on their rulings. Your rulings apply to each particular case and do not carry over into more modern conceptions of setting broader legal precedent. So while you are not entirely independent as a judiciary, you are in an influential space to guide the development of civil law.

Your position on coffee shops will have to weigh the sultan's edict with operation in accordance with religious interpretations of the Ulama, Civic law and what appropriate punishment would be for violation.

You are a Suq / Souk / Souq seller

You are a merchant selling your wares in the local Souq, belonging to the merchants guild. The central market place is centered usually around caravanserai - the hubs of caravan travel for rest and recovery from their travels. Your shop stall in the Souq is a safe space for your goods - guarded by paid guards and locked at night, protected by imperial edicts. The souq is also one of the few, if not the only, places in town where women and men could easily be in the same public space. It is also one of the few spaces where classes commingled informally.

You may have mixed opinions about the coffee house and its influence upon Ottoman society depending on your feelings regarding public spaces, interests in access to commerce

You are an Ulama / Scholar / Teacher

You are an educator and scholar trained in the subtleties and details of Islamic practices, beliefs and law. Literally the term translates as one who knows or is aware of, in Sunnism..."they are regarded as the guardians, transmitters and interpreters of religious knowledge."* You will have

been educated in a Madrasa and are well versed in the Qur'an, Sunnah, and Islamic law and are part of a lineage of scholars who know both Arabic and Persian.

In a political role you help provide justification or challenges for various political decisions based on the way they follow Islamic laws, the general belief is that secular law is subordinate to religious law. So cultural and legal acceptance of coffee houses is heavily influenced by the Ulama and how they interpret coffee.

*Gilliot, Cl., Repp, R.C., Nizami, K.A., Hooker, M.B., Lin, Chang-Kuan and Hunwick, J.O., “ ‘Ulamā’ ”, in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Consulted online on 17 November 2019 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_1278>
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Sufi practitioner

You are a practitioner of the Sufi sect within Islam. There is a strong connection between coffee culture and Sufism. Many believe it was Sufi who brought Coffee from Ethiopia to Yemen. Coffee is popularly received by many in your practice as it is a stimulant that helps you be more alert, awake and energetic for the long prayer meetings and dervish meditations. Coffee is believed to help elevate the mystical feelings associated with the dervish. “*Sufi mystics claimed that coffee, when consumed with proper devotional intent, could lead to the experience of “qahwat al-Sufiyya,” translated as “the enjoyment which the people of God feel in beholding the hidden mysteries and attaining the wonderful disclosures and the great revelations.”*” (Singer)

Women's Roles in Ottoman Society

You are an Ottoman wife and mother. As a woman, you have no “role” or place in the coffeehouse as you are not allowed to enter the establishment. The coffeehouse is strictly a male domain (although a few “ladies of the night” might frequent the outside of the

coffeehouses, they did not have a place inside the house). However, even though you cannot frequent the coffeehouse, your life is still impacted by its establishment. Your husband is often gone at night or during the day frequenting the coffeehouse, so you are often by yourself (or with your children) while your husband is away. He makes great business and political connections at the coffeehouse, though, so that helps your household expenses in the long run.

Stations:

Coffee Making - grinder/pot, electric hot plate, extension cord, cups, spoons

Puppet - puppet making deb/ sandra

Story Telling - Tales of the Coffee House

Poetry - Writing, paper, ink, ink pens, paper towels

Gaming - Backgammon, Manqala

QFI Tile Making ?

Turkish coffee grounds "readings" ?

Additional Sources / Readings:

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Good additional resources linked at podcast page.

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