As historian Ralph Hattox states in the opening to his seminal 1985 book on the history of one of the world’s most wildly successful and highly-consumed drugs, “coffee has never been a mere beverage.” Coffee, in past and present, is a means of communication – a vehicle through which we converse, study, lounge, plot, and, perhaps most importantly, stay up late. Deeply connected to Sufism, it has always been political: Juan E. Campo’s *Encyclopedia of Islam* defines coffee as “a stimulating drink… [whose] story is woven with the history of Islamic religion” and describes the fear of political and religious authorities that “coffee was an intoxicating beverage and that it should therefore be banned like alcoholic drinks.” Coffee was and is important not only because of its powers as a stimulant but even more importantly because of the places in which the beverage is consumed. To quote Hattox, “the single most striking and significant result of the growing use of coffee in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries … was its effect on the social life within the city, town, or village, for around the preparation and sale of this commodity was born a hitherto unknown social institution, the coffeehouse.”

If coffee has never been a mere beverage, coffeehouses have never been mere places for caffeine consumption. Coffee was an extremely successful drug, and there are records of its existence in even the most remote corners of the Ottoman Empire: according to wills and lists of

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3 Hattox, *Coffee and Coffeehouses*, p. 73.
affects, by the 1700s most peasant households contained coffee utensils. Since coffee was, truly, everywhere, there needed to be places for the new, stimulating beverage to be consumed. It makes sense that a drug seemingly discovered (and certainly spread) by Sufis within an increasingly strictly Sunni Empire would be consumed in places of non-conformity: coffeehouses. These places of pleasure, leisure, conversation and social mixing are vital to understanding the social and revolutionary shifts in the Ottoman Empire after the turn of the 17th century. Ottoman coffeehouses, exemplary not only of the lives of those who imbibed the intoxicating bidʿat – the Sufi beverage – but more broadly of the new, heterogeneous urban populations that arose in the late 1500s, posed a constant and enduring threat to Ottoman authority because of their inherent promotion and embodiment of the crumbling of social hierarchy, social and political discourse, and, most importantly, dissent and revolution.

By all accounts, the coffee bean was introduced to the Ottoman Empire in the middle of the sixteenth century and was highly associated with Sufi orders and traditions. Though the exact date of coffee’s entrance is slightly disputed (the famed Ottoman chronicler Katip Çelebi claims it appeared in 1543 while Ibrahim Peçievi places it slightly later, in 1554, which is the [slightly debated] date of the opening of the first coffeehouse in Istanbul) there is a general consensus in Ottoman scholarship that the coffee-drinking was a phenomenon in the Ottoman Empire by the 1550s and had originated in Yemen among Sufi Brotherhoods. In his dissertation

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titled “The Struggle Over Space: Coffeehouses of Ottoman Istanbul, 1780-1845,” Cengiz Kirli asserts that “it is almost certain that coffee was originally consumed by Sufis for piety… turning the coffee around signified the mystical unity and solidarity of the brotherhood.” Coffee was a devotional aid, a drug able to promote meditation and prayer through its ability to ward off sleep. Coffee, then, is inextricably linked to Sufism and from its arrival in the Ottoman Empire in the mid 1500s was thus associated with mysticism and dissidence. The Ottoman state in this period was strongly aligned with Sunni orthodoxy, and thus directly opposed to the heterodox Sufis and their new, mind-altering drug.

Sufis were also associated with the growing nightlife and evening culture that formed as a result of the rise of coffee in the Ottoman Empire. In his article on coffee, leisure and “the history of the night,” Ottoman historian Cemal Kafadar asserts that coffeehouses, a “widespread social institution … dedicated to leisure, chatter, and the politically charged formation and circulation of public culture,” merely used the beverage of coffee as the “excuse” to meet, converse, lounge, and take up the night. This sentiment is best expressed in a couplet from the time:

gönül ne kahve ister ne kahvehane

gönül sohbet ister kahve bahane

Modern Studies (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2014), p. 246, https://doi.org/10.1484/M.LMEMS-EB.1.102271; Kirli, “The Struggle Over Space: Coffeehouses of Ottoman Istanbul, 1780-1845,” p 26-27. This is the consensus within earlier Ottoman scholarship: Hattox, Kafadar and Kiril also invoke the story of coffee originating in Ethiopia, a story not mentioned by Peçevi or Çelebi (each writing in the 17th century). Additionally, I tried to find a copy of Peçevi’s primary source (his book on history, written between 1874-67, which is quoted from and cited by Kirli) but was not able to locate it in English

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8 Kirli.
10 Kafadar, p. 246.
the heart fancies neither coffee nor coffeehouse
the heart fancies companionship [or, conversation], coffee is an excuse

From their conception in Istanbul, coffeehouses were meant for leisure and intellectual stimulation: Peçevi describes early patrons as “gentlemen of leisure, wits and literary men seeking distraction and amusement.” Their existence both prompted and exemplified the new conceptions of leisure, socialization and time that began to emerge in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. However, this portrait of the people imbibing coffee – and the places in which those people imbibed the new, intoxicating beverage – was not as high-minded for every Ottoman writer, and certainly not for those in seats of governmental and religious authority.

The Ottoman state’s disdain for coffee and those who imbibed it can be seen in the seventeenth century writings of the Ottoman chronicler Kâtip Çelebi. In his article on coffee, Çelibi writes that coffee was “suggestive of loose living” and was consumed by drug addicts “willing to die for a cup.” The chronicler also describes fatwâs (non-binding legal decisions grounded in Islamic law) against coffee and even relates a tale that depicts the Seyhülislam Ebusuud Efendi sinking ships carrying coffee as their cargo. It is important to note, however, that Çelebi wrote these words around a century after he claims these events occurred, and recent scholarship has begun to question whether Çelebi was relaying truth or instead interpreting older tales, as there is no certainty over whether Ebusuud Efendi immediately placed fatwâs, against

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13 Çelebi, The Balance of Truth, p 60.
coffee during its introduction to Istanbul, though he certainly did issue fatwās on coffee later, as will be discussed.\(^{14}\)

A thorough investigation of the rise of coffee in the Ottoman Empire cannot be made without a conversation about the concept of bid’at (or bi’dat, or bid’a), or innovation. Unlike the modern conception of change and innovation, which often carries the positive connotation of progress, bid’at was considered negative, especially in the eyes of the ulema, or religious elite. Çelebi defines bid’at as “sinful innovation,” and has a chapter about the concept in which he writes “by ‘innovation’ (bid’a) is meant any new development in matters sacred or mundane, appearing during or after the second age; that is, anything which did not exist in the time of the Prophet… and his noble Companions… and of which there is no trace in any of the three categories of Sunna and concerning which there is no tradition.”\(^{15}\) In short, bid’at is harmful because it is “not explicitly permitted by the Quran and Hadith.”\(^{16}\) Coffee itself was widely seen as bid’at\(^ {17}\) — as Ralph Hattox puts it, “coffee was rejected by the ultrapious simply because it was an innovation, bid’a.”\(^ {18}\)

The Ottoman state, however, was even more interested in cracking down on coffeehouses than on the bid’at of coffee itself: as Kirli states, “it was more the coffeehouses that were the


\(^{15}\) Çelebi, The Balance of Truth, 89. According to Çelebi, good innovation was possible, but most innovation was not good. This essentially stems from the idea that innovation implies that the Prophet did not have the ability to think of the innovation before, and thus innovation is itself a sin against the Prophet because it doubts his power. This concept is strangely reminiscent of American jurisprudence and our aversion to qualifying or updating (amending) the Constitution – there is an idea that the founding fathers got everything right the first time, so there is no need to innovate past their words.


\(^{18}\) Hattox, Coffee and Coffeehouses, p. 6.
targets than coffee-drinking.” In Colin Imber’s book on the Islamic legal tradition, he argues that Ebusuud’s legal decisions related to the new drug represented “a fear that coffee-shops, like wine-shops, would lead to a collapse of public order.” In a fatwā issued by Ebusuud, he rhetorically asks of coffee “How can anyone consume this reprehensible [substance], which dissolute men drink when engaged in games and debauchery?”

In fact, spurred by Ebusuud, Sultan Süleyman I banned coffeehouses, citing an extension of his ban on wine-shops and consumption and closing all of Istanbul’s coffeehouses in 1568. This would in no way be the last time coffeehouses were banned in the Ottoman empire. Hattox refers to coffeehouses as “taverns without wine,” and Ottoman authorities would most likely have agreed: bans on coffeehouse were religiously motivated with the legal reasoning being that “coffee, like wine, is an intoxicant,” and thus both morally reprehensible and anti-Islamic – wine-shops had themselves been dubbed ‘tokens of unbelief.’ It is important to make clear that coffee was viewed as a drug in a very literal sense, placed in the same category as not only alcohol but also as opium and hashish. It was also strongly connected to tobacco; according to Alexander Fotić’s article on both coffee and tobacco in the Ottoman Empire’s Baltic regions, coffee “came to be inextricably associated with tobacco consumption.” The drugs of tobacco, opium, coffee and hashish were often considered to be similar by means of their intoxicating nature, and thus the places in which these drugs were consumed were also linked: as Caroline

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21 Quoted in Imber, p. 93.
Finkle writes in her overview of the Ottoman Empire, “tobacco, taverns and coffee-houses were inextricably linked” and a 1633 “ban on tobacco … can be seen as an attack on the unregulated life of the coffee-houses and taverns,” rather than merely on tobacco itself.27

Bans on coffeehouses, however, were often ineffectual, and, as is mentioned by Çelebi, “these strictures and prohibitions availed nothing… the fetwas, the talk, made no impression on the people… one coffee-house was opened after another, and men would gather together, with great eagerness, to drink.” By the 1650s, when Çelebi was writing, Istanbul coffeehouses numbered in the 600s. Coffeehouses had become “the focus for the public life of men.” Eventually, the government reversed its bans with a fatwā which stated that “coffee-drinking is not against shar’ia,” and Çelebi remarked that “on every street-corner a coffee-house appeared.” The banning and permitting of coffeehouses would be a factor in Ottoman governance for centuries to come.

The prevalence of these coffeehouses is a boon for historians partially because it gave rise to writings about the phenomenon, from previously mentioned chroniclers Çelebi and Peçeyi as well as Mustafa Ali, among others. Ali, a bureaucrat, prolific author and highly astute social critic was critical of coffeehouses themselves, writing that, though some who frequent the spaces go with the aim to “see each other and converse, and to quickly drink their coffee,” others, specifically “the lonely and the poor” and “sipahis and janissaries” linger around the coffeehouses “both to do evil acts and gossip.”

janissaries (armymen and bodyguards of the sultan who began in the devşirme, or child levy, system) is indicative of the esnaficati33 of guild as well as military members moving amongst each other and into urban life – soldiers, as well as peasants, were moving and integrating themselves into cities, and the line between soldier and civilian (as well as between upper and lower class) began to blur.34 As Kafadar writes, in summation, Ali was “clearly disturbed by the democratizing impact of coffeehouses on social life.”35 This concept of coffeehouses as a place not just for conversation and leisure but also for idleness and even evilness is important, as it shows how coffeehouses were seen (not just by Ali but by many thinkers and most of the Ottoman state) as threatening: they were places in which classes could mingle and revolutionary thought could be fostered.36

The Ottoman fear of coffeehouses was deeply informed by their fear of those who were coffee drinkers and what the coffeehouses therefore represented: people of all classes gathered to drink coffee but more importantly to converse and mingle regardless of status: in short, coffeehouses “represented the breakdown of social hierarchy and thus served as a metaphor for urban disorder.”37 By the seventeenth century the Ottoman Empire had endured a number of small crises that led to the reworking of urban life and populations, specifically in the capital of Istanbul. Between 1550 and 1600 the Ottoman Empire saw a great rise in population, which coincided with a replacement of the tax collecting system (the timar system) with a tax farming system (the iltizam system). These two factors led to an influx of peasant migrants into cities –

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33 Esnaf means guild
34 Kafadar, “Janissaries and Other Riffraff of Ottoman Istanbul: Rebels Without a Cause?,” p. 116-117.
36 Kirli writes that “not only the state itself, but also virtually all thinkers of the time saw the coffeehouse as a negative institution.” (47) I believe he here means the chroniclers whose texts he quotes: the thinkers, too, were in the coffeehouses.
and into coffeehouses. This created what Kafadar calls a “peculiar social fabric” in cities, particularly Istanbul, with new, “heterogeneous urban crowds.” This growth and reworking of the urban landscape led class lines to become more blurred as the cities filled with prior-peasant workers – the reaya, or flock of tax-paying peasants, had entered urban life – and the elite responded with agitation and fear, imposing sumptuary laws and emphasizing the importance of social hierarchy. This new social order was most visible in the spaces where the new urban population went to relax, talk and imbibe: coffeehouses. Kafadar directly links the new urban society that developed in the second half of the 16th century with coffeehouses, writing that the institutions of coffeehouses had become ubiquitous just as “the rights of order … and disorder [took] shape.”

The level of fear that the coffeehouses (and coffeehouse culture) instilled in the Ottoman state is best seen in its incendiary reaction and re-prohibition of coffeehouses (as well as tobacco, taverns, and alcohol consumption) in 1633. Sultan Murat IV not only prohibited coffeehouses (as previous sultans had tried to in the 1550s, and as, indeed, most sultans did until the end of the 1600s) but additionally enforced his treatise with violent suppression. Going to or running a coffeehouse was punishable by drowning, and violators were sewn in leather bags and thrown into the Bosporus river. This extreme reaction is both an indication of Ottoman anxiety about

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38 Kirli, p. 39.
39 Kafadar, “Janissaries and Other Riffraff of Ottoman Istanbul: Rebels Without a Cause?” p. 119.
40 Kirli, p. 66.
42 Strangely enough, I found perhaps the most interesting modern-day comparison of this new social order inside of coffeehouses in a rather fantastic blog from UC Santa Cruz Professor Benjamin Breen. In an post about the Women’s Petition Against Coffee and coffeehouses in Europe, which were in many ways similar to those sprouting up in the Ottoman Empire in the 1600s, Breen writes that “the seventeenth century coffee shop was an experimental social space whose closest correlate in the modern world is not a place at all: it’s the Internet.”
43 Kafadar, “Janissaries and Other Riffraff of Ottoman Istanbul: Rebels Without a Cause?” p. 119.
44 Kirli, p. 56.
45 Kafadar, “Janissaries and Other Riffraff of Ottoman Istanbul,” p. 133; Kirli, p. 50-51. Kirli quotes an anonymous poem about this punishment which I think bears repeating here: They were heavy sacks, whence came the sobs.
coffeehouses and the rumor and political conversations – “devlet sohbeti” – that they bred and a reaction to what authorities saw as an intense increase in moral depravity and decay, caused in part by this new reorientation of the social order, that was considered to be one of the reasons for the devastating fire of 1633.46

One interesting element of the history of coffeehouses, and an element closely related to the concept of rumor,47 is the gendered nature of the space – and of coffee itself. Though the coffeehouse was truly seen as a place for mingling between people of all walks of life – this was, as mentioned, one of the most salient reasons for the threat it posed to the state – it was segregated by gender: “the coffeehouse was a world strictly of men.”48 As Kafadar writes, “coffeehouses were, with respect to gender, exclusivist bastions of homosociality for men in the Ottoman world” into which women would only enter if the space of the coffeehouse was putting on some sort of performance to which families were invited;49 even when women came to perform in coffeehouses as musicians, it was speculated that they were really just prostitutes appearing to sell their wares.50 This is particularly interesting given early writings on coffee’s ‘essential nature’ and apparent connection to women, specifically those from Çelebi, writings which further allude to the global backdrop of colonialism at the time of coffee’s rise in the Ottoman world.

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Scanning the sea that carried them away,
One might see something like human strength moving within them.
The moon was serene, playing on the waves.
46 Kirli, “The Struggle Over Space: Coffeehouses of Ottoman Istanbul, 1780-1845,” p. 49-51. The Sultan’s prohibition of tobacco and coffeehouses was a direct reaction to the fire.
47 Rumor and gossip both have connotations of the female gender (or, at least, effeminacy), partially because, I would argue, women’s access to more formal methods of communication (specifically, reading and writing) were curtailed for longer than men’s were.
48 Hattox, p. 108.
50 Hattox, Coffee and Coffeehouses, p. 108.
Even in early accounts of coffee from Çelebi, the backdrop of global colonialism is present. When discussing the temperament of coffee and those who should or should not drink it, Çelebi mentions that, if melancholic men were to consume coffee at all, “it must be drunk with sugar.” Çelebi’s offhanded remark about sugar – a substance also new to Europe and the Ottomans – is indicative of how colonialism and globalization shaped even the most fundamental elements 17th century life: people not only now had coffeehouses, but also coffee to drink, and sugar to sweeten it (or, according to Çelebi’s understanding of temperaments and humors, wet it). Çelebi strongly believed that coffee was “a cold dry food” – “indubitably cold and dry” – and was thus was a beverage “highly suited” to “those of moist temperament, and especially to women.” Thus, though coffeehouses were exclusively for men, coffee was frequently drunk by women.

One wonderful example of female consumption of coffee can be found in the so-called “Turkish Embassy Letters” of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu. Montagu was a celebrated writer and traveler who operated in literary circles with the likes of Alexander Pope and to whom an editor of her letters, Robert Halsband, claims “the social historian [turns] for her analysis of religion, customs, and morality in Ottoman Turkey.” Coffee is a commodity present in one of Montagu’s letters written in April of 1717 in which Montagu describes her experience in a

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52 Çelebi, *The Balance of Truth*, p. 60.
53 Çelebi, p. 61.
54 Çelebi, p. 62. Also, something I found absolutely fascinating was that the 1674 “Women’s Petition Against Coffee” claimed that coffee was a “drying, enfeebling liquor,” seemingly agreeing with Çelebi’s gendered reading of the beverage (although I doubt these very Christian women - or, perhaps, ever, men pretending to be very Christian women - in London were necessarily reading the work of a Muslim Ottoman chronicler). It is also interesting that they call it a liquor, just like many of the Ottoman disparagements of coffee as an alcohol-like intoxicant.
55 Lady Mary Montagu, *The Complete Letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, ed. Robert Halsband, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), p v-vii. The introduction to this three volume set of letters is really quite glowing, and these letters (and Lady Montagu) are fascinating. I also found some interesting articles around how her writings influenced art at the time – specifically, how the section of her letters which I quote influenced European paintings of Turkish bathhouses – but their contents were extremely tangentially related to the topic of this essay.
Turkish bathhouse. In the bathhouse, she observed “fine Women naked in different postures, some in conversation, some working, others drinking Coffee or sherbert.”\(^{56}\) As Montagu writes in the same letter, the bathhouse “tis the Women’s coffee house, where all the news of the Town is told, Scandal invented, etc.”\(^{57}\) Through this letter, it is clear not only that coffee had become ubiquitous enough to be consumed by women in a public sphere, but also that coffee had a strong connection with conversation, news and scandal. For Montagu, the bathhouse was not the woman’s coffeehouse because women imbibed coffee there: the bathhouse was the woman’s coffeehouse because women engaged in the same activities as men in coffeehouses: mainly, conversing.\(^{58}\) The idea of “Scandal invented” is also integral to understanding these public spheres of conversations: coffeehouses were seen as the main site for brewing gossip, which could also mean revolutionary fervor.

Just as coffee revolutionized the concept of the night, coffeehouses revolutionized rumor. In the previously referenced passage of Mustafa Ali, the writer claims that those who gather in coffeehouses go there “to gossip and to tittle-tattle.”\(^{59}\) This is not just a description of Ali’s disdain for the “ignorant and destitutes”\(^{60}\) who frequented these new public spaces, but moreover an example of how coffeehouses could, as spreaders of ‘tittle-tattle,’ be dangerous for Ottoman authority. As Kirli asserts, “rumor constituted the single most important medium in the Ottoman Empire.”\(^{61}\) Given the lack of written communication in the Ottoman Empire in this period, there

\(^{57}\) Montagu, p. 314.
\(^{58}\) Another connection I found between coffeehouses and bathhouses was the connotation of each being spaces for homosexuality. When perusing the index of Hattox’s book, I found something a little surprising and very revealing: “Homosexuality” had only two qualifications in Hattox’s book: “in coffeehouses” and “among women in public baths.”
\(^{60}\) Ibid, p. 57.
were not written publications or places to find news; thus, reliance on verbal communication was vital and, consequentially, just as repressive governments feel the need to control the written press, the Ottomans knew they had to regulate verbal communication that so often occurred in coffeehouses. This was one of the crucial reasons why coffeehouses posed such a threat to Ottoman authority: if they could not control the coffeehouses, they could not control what was said in them, and if they could not control what was said in coffeehouses, they had no way of squashing revolutionary fervor and seditious talk. As Kirli puts it, “the authorities perceived coffeehouses as places of sedition” as they were not only “the culprit of social breakdown with their heterogeneous clientele” but moreover “a venue for subversive words.”

Ottoman fear of this rumor that emanated from coffeehouses can be seen in the first sentence of a ferman (or royal decree) from 1798 that calls for the closing of coffeehouses and barber shops:

“It has been reported that lies and fabrications are being invented and spread by fomenters of strife and mischief, and malicious and devilish sort, and that some ignorant and half-witted people, who are unable to differentiate good from evil and benefit from harm, dare to utter words about the state and impertinently tell these fabrications to each other in coffeehouses and barber shops.”

This was, of course, far from the only ban issued against coffeehouses and similar, rumor-producing social gathering spaces.

The Ottomans were right to be scared: the Janissaries that Mustafa Ali had observed lingering around the coffeehouses in the late 1500s were also deeply connected to revolution and

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62 Kirli, p. 55.
63 Although this is from 1798, I believe it is a relevant sentiment for the breadth of the time period covered in this paper (the 1550s-mid 19th century) as there was an extensive pattern of the banning of coffeehouses, not just after or before revolution – I previously discussed the ban in 1633 and mention others over this period of around 300 years. 64 Barbershops are also very important places of gossip – similar to salons for women – and remain places of communication even today. I am thinking specifically of Black barbershops in urban America.
revolutionary coffeehouses during their 18th and 19th century revolts. In the 1703, the empire experienced its first civilian-led uprising, the Edirne Incident. The Edirne incident was a violent, somewhat successful, civilian uprising that led to the killing of Feyzullah Efendi and the deposition of Sultan Mustafa II.66 A civilian uprising of this scale – and one which included Janissary support and fighting – was moreover indicative of the social turbulence and unrest that coffeehouses had come to signify.

Although much remains to be written about the connection between coffeehouses and the Patrona Halil rebellion in 1730, what is clear is that both the rebellion and the persistence of coffeehouses are examples of the integration and change of urban life over the course of the 17th century. This aforementioned esnafication was one of the direct causes both of the demonization of coffeehouses and the 1730 rebellion itself, which historian Robert Olson calls “the largest and most influential rebellion of eighteenth century Ottoman history.”67 This revolution culminated in the deposition of Sultan Ahmet III and execution of many top officials including Ibrahim Paşa and the Grand Vizier. Eventually, Patrona Halil, the civilian face of the dastardly uprising, was killed. It is vital to note that members and leaders of the esnaf alike – like Patrona Halil himself – were at the front lines of this revolution.68 Their involvement – indeed, any involvement of civilians banding together and rising against authority – is proof that social mingling that had begun in the late 16th century, and was represented by the prevalence of coffeehouses, was deeply dangerous to the state. The Patrona Halil Rebellion signified that this sort of social heterogeneity could have dire consequences for the Ottoman State.

68 Olson, p. 339.
The “collapse of public order” that Ebusuud had, over a century and a half earlier, predicted would occur as a result of wine and coffee houses did in fact take place: contemporary writers considered the Halil rebellion to be “an almost complete, though temporary, breakdown of order.” In a sign that the peasant migration to urban centers and subsequent reworking of social systems was a grave threat to the empire and the reason for this breakdown, a fermand was issued to “take the strictest measures to prevent peasants from abandoning their plots of ground and immigrating to Istanbul.” In the war’s aftermath (which included a related outbreak in 1740), Janissaries gained newfound power as they became more likely to shift allegiances depending on the strength of the Sultan. Thus, Janissaries gained more power within the spheres of Ottoman authority as they simultaneously tightened their grip on broader urban society and culture through their ownership of and participation in coffeehouses.

By the second half of the eighteenth century, the Janissaries were no longer just “the backbone of the Ottoman empire’s armed forces,” a contained group of converted Christians who rose to military heights through the devşirme system. They were deeply ingrained in urban, and coffeehouse, culture. The true numbers of Janissaries at this time is unclear, but what is known is that there was, along with actual soldiers, a large group of taslakçı (“pretenders”) who associated themselves with the Janissaries for social standing and protection. These

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71 Olson, "Jews, Janissaries, Esnaf and the Revolt of 1740 in Istanbul: Social Upheaval and Political Realignment in the Ottoman Empire," p. 191; Olson, "The Esnaf and the Patrona Halil Rebellion of 1730: A Realignment in Ottoman Politics?" p. 332.


73 Kafadar, “Janissaries and Other Riffraff of Ottoman Istanbul: Rebels Without a Cause?” p. 117-118.
“pretenders” were, however, integrated amongst the true Janissaries (largely in Istanbul), and often benefitted from their protection. By the 1800s, the Janissaries, real and pretend, had lost their centuries-old military character and had been firmly established in the urban (and coffeehouse) community. In fact, Janissaries were deeply connected to coffeehouses: in his analysis of an early nineteenth century esnaf register Kirli asserts that there was an “overwhelming presence of the Janissaries in the coffeehouse business.” In fact, around a third of the coffeehouses in the registers were run by Janissaries, and, even more importantly, almost half of esnaf Janissaries were themselves in the coffeehouse business. This undeniable link between Janissaries and coffeehouses – as well as between Janissaries and revolution, and, moreover, between coffeehouses and revolution – bears examination.

As Ali Çasku states in his 2007 chapter on Janissary coffeehouses in Dana Sajdi’s Ottoman Tulips, Ottoman Coffee: Leisure and Lifestyle in the Eighteenth Century, “it is not enough to understand the role of the coffee shop without looking into its uses by the Janissaries.” The previously mentioned 1633 crackdown on coffeehouses – by pain of drowning in the Bosphorus – was mainly meant for soldiers in Istanbul coffeehouses, further underlying how the combination of the revolutionary Janissaries and the revolution-breeding coffeehouses posed a doubly frightening threat to Ottoman authority.

The Ottoman rebellions most clearly connected to coffeehouses are the Janissary revolts of the early 1800s. As has been previously discussed, the social stratification and overall population of urban centers like Istanbul changed drastically during the time of coffee’s rise in

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74 Kirli cannot give an exact date for the register – it is itself undated – but is certain, through the guidance of Professor Mehmet Genç, that the register was created sometime between 1800 and 1825.
75 Kirli, “The Struggle Over Space: Coffeehouses of Ottoman Istanbul, 1780-1845,” p. 120.
76 Kirli, p. 120.
77 Çaksu, “Janissary Coffee Houses in Late Eighteenth-Century Istanbul,” p. 117.
78 Kafadar, “Janissaries and Other Riffraff of Ottoman Istanbul: Rebels Without a Cause?” p. 133.
the empire. The Janissaries, too, experienced a change, specifically after the Patrona Halil Rebellion and its aftermath, which saw the Janissaries moving more in opposition to the government as the esnafs realigned themselves with the Sultan after 1731. This realignment was unstable, but, as has been mentioned, the Janissaries in effect had the power to choose whether they sided with or against the Sultan. The threats that the Janissaries posed, specifically throughout the beginning of the nineteenth century, became most clear in what is referred to as the “Auspicious Incident” of 1826. Kafadar calls this event – the backlash to Janissary revolt – “a true massacre, a bloody annihilation of thousands of men who were literally blasted away by the forces of modernism.” Though the Ottomans never really succeeded in abolishing coffeehouses, they did succeed in abolishing one of the groups that represented them: the Janissaries. After the brutal repression in 1826 the Janissaries were no more. The coffeehouses in which they drank, plotted, and were part of “the spectacular presence of rebellious urban crowds in Ottoman social life,” however, endured.

As important as coffeehouses (and, by extension, the introduction of coffee) were to revolution and social change in the Ottoman Empire, the global consequences of coffee should not go overlooked. Most drugs, because of their addictive nature, are successful. Coffee is perhaps the most dominating of them all. British women (perhaps somewhat satirically) petitioned against the drug in the 1670s, citing its ubiquity and stronghold over British men – and its rendering of their husbands unable to satisfy them sexually. Just a few years after the

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80 Kafadar, “Janissaries and Other Riffraff of Ottoman Istanbul: Rebels Without a Cause?” p. 133.
81 Kafadar. p. 115.
82 Along with tobacco, but I would argue coffee is more successful than even that drug.
83 Benjamin Breen, “On the Women’s Petition Against Coffee of 1674,” Res Obscura: A Catalogue of Obscure Things (blog), April 8, 2017, https://resobscura.blogspot.com/2017/04/that-newfangled-abominable-heathenish.html. This ‘blog post’ (really, the musings of a professor), which I quote in an earlier footnote, is quite incredible. The petition was also linked to “Venus,” which is particularly relevant because of a slightly later 1680s women’s’ sex
Patrona Halil Rebelion, J.S. Bach’s 1735 *Coffee Cantata* sings jokingly about a daughter who has become coffee obsessed – “be still, stop chattering!”84 T.S. Eliot’s J. Alfred Prufrock “measured out [his] life with coffee spoons,”85 and Sherlock Holmes consumes the drug along with cocaine and opium in the famed flat on 221 B. Baker Street. Coffee is the reason why we are able to wake up early and stay up late: it fuels conversation, revolution, and it is one of the driving forces behind the creation of this essay in more ways than one. Without it, who knows where academics would be.

The coffeeshop, too, is absolutely enduring. Although our modern conceptions of cafés are different from the Ottoman male public spheres, they still serve a similar purpose. Cafés are for lounging, spying on strangers, talking with friends, going on dates, writing papers about the history of coffee – in short, just as coffeehouses were representations of urban social diversity in Ottoman Istanbul, cafés are representations of our own modern-day society. Perhaps it is putting too much on one beverage – one commodity, one drug, one bean – to say that it transformed and helped to invent modern life and leisure. But it is certainly no exaggeration to say that coffee itself stimulated the creation of social spaces that led directly to revolutionary discourse and revolt.

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**Bibliography**

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85 This is one of my favorite lines from one of my favorite poems.


