

The most famous story about the discovery of coffee takes place in what is now Ethiopia. It tells of a goat herder who noticed that after eating the berries of a certain bush, his goats became energized. He tasted the berries, and they had the same effect on him. Then a local monk joined in the experiment and ended up in a similar state of excitement. The berries became a regular part of the diet at the nearby monastery and were considered a gift from heaven because they helped keep the brothers awake during their evening prayers.

The nomadic people of Ethiopia have been using the fruits, seeds and leaves of the coffee tree for more than 1,000 years. But it wasn't a major part of their diet, and they didn't make what we think of as coffee. They used the leaves and the dried husks of the berries to make a tea-like drink. They also crushed the seeds of the plant and rolled them into balls with animal fat, creating a mentally stimulating fast food that could be carried on long journeys.

HOUSES OF EXCITATION

The word "coffee" comes from an Arabic word for wine. Islamic law forbids wine's consumption, and in many ways



the Islamic world has chosen coffee to take its place. Its first serious cultivation as a cash crop took place in Yemen during the 1400s. Religious pilgrims visiting Mecca spread the news about coffee, and by the 1500s, coffeehouses were opening all over the Islamic world.

At first coffee's adoption was questioned by conservative Koranic scholars, who argued that coffee should be treated as wine and prohibited. But coffee's intoxicating effects were the opposite of wine's, and a much larger group of scholars defended the beverage. They were enthusiastic about coffee's ability to sharpen the mind, loosen the tongue, and keep a person awake through long hours of study and prayer.

A Dutch traveler described Middle Eastern coffeehouses as

"large halls, with floors covered with straw mats. Customers are served with smoking pipes and cups of coffee. Scholars sit in these establishments and tell tales, deliver speeches on various subjects and receive small contributions from the audience for their efforts."

The caffeine in coffee is a stimulant, and in these coffeehouses it stimulated original thought, a sense of freedom, and a desire to discuss politics and social change. In a world without newspapers, magazines, radio or television, coffeehouses quickly became centers for travelers and locals to exchange news, stories and opinions. The ruling classes, however, were threatened by this development.

"Coffeehouses were centers for gaming and writing fantastically funny, satirical verses about Cayar Beg, the Governor of Mecca. He'd heard about some of these things, and he didn't like them, so he decided he was going to close the coffeehouses. But his superiors in Cairo said, 'Forget that. I like coffee.' It was the first time a coffeehouse was closed, but it wasn't going to be the last, because people tend to become irreverent when they drink coffee."

—Mark Pendergrast

When the Turks occupied Yemen in 1536, they learned about coffee and coffeehouses and brought both back to Constantinople. They became so popular among the Ottomans that by the end of the 1500s, European visitors to Constantinople reported that there were 600 coffeehouses in the city and that they served the same function as the taverns in Europe.

TRANSFORMING EUROPE

The Ottoman Turks introduced coffee to Europe and were the first to make coffee a commodity. They guarded their monopoly and forbade any shipment of fertile coffee fruit to their European or Asian customers. But during the early 1600s, a Muslim pilgrim from India taped a few seeds to his chest, returned home without having them discovered, and started a coffee farm in Mysore. He didn't have much commercial success, but he did prove that it was possible to grow coffee outside of the Middle East.

In 1616 a Dutch trader managed to smuggle a coffee tree out of the Yemeni port of Aden, and by the 1650s the Dutch were growing coffee commercially in Ceylon. During the early

1700s, the Dutch East India company dominated the world coffee markets with harvests from its coffee plantations in Java.

Europe was, at that time, beginning a cultural transformation, and as European society modernized, coffee became the drink of choice for the emerging middle class.

Up to the 1600s, most of what we think of as big business was done by governments—most small businesses were run out of people's homes. Coffeehouses provided homes away from home for the new breed of capitalist, busy building private industry. Lloyd's of London, until recently the largest insurance company in the world, began life in 1688 as a coffeehouse which just happened to be popular with insurance brokers. Other coffeehouses gave rise to holding companies, stock exchanges, and newspapers. In England, coffeehouses became known as the place where businessmen did business.

In the early decades of the 1600s, coffee also became a fad among English college students, and in 1650 a group of students at Oxford opened the first coffeehouse in England.

In 1652, Pasqua Rosée, an Armenian immigrant, opened the first coffeehouse in London. It was an instant success, and within 50 years coffeehouses had cropped up all over the city. They were a hit with writers, artists and critics. They were called the "penny university," because you paid your penny and could listen to the main orators of the day holding forth on their pet subject.

The acceptance of coffee on the European continent did not take place as quickly as it had in England. In France, coffee was nowhere until 1669, when Ottoman ambassador Suleiman Aga's arrival in Paris sparked a wave of Turkomania, leading to the establishment of cafés all over the country.

Coffee was a regular part of the Turkish diet, but almost unknown



to the Viennese. Beer drinking was a matter of national pride, and there was heavy resistance to the new drink. The event that began to change Austria's attitude was the siege of Vienna in 1683. The city

was attacked and surrounded by a Turkish army. Eventually, the siege was broken and the Turks retreated, leaving behind hundreds of sacks filled with coffee beans. The army thought the sacks contained animal fodder, but Franz Kolschitsky, a war hero who had lived in Arab countries, knew about coffee. He smelled the burning beans, and offered to take them.

As a reward for his wartime efforts, Kolschitsky was given a building, which he turned into Vienna's first coffeehouse. Since then, the Viennese have really taken to coffee.

Coffeehouses in Europe served the same function as they had in the Arab world: they provided a place for scholars, artists, journalists and political activists to socialize and do business.

The coffeehouse also played its part in the 1700s, the Age of Enlightenment. It was a time when philosophers believed in the reasonable mind of man, in natural law, and in universal

order. People were beginning to question the divine right of kings, and the coffeehouse became the popular spot to ask and answer those questions.

The idea of man as an essentially rational being set the stage for the economic policies of Adam Smith and the political ideas of Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin. Plans for both the French Revolution and the American Revolution were discussed and developed during meetings that were held in coffeehouses.

Several European leaders, including Frederick the Great of Prussia, banned coffeehouses as hotbeds of sedition but, as the mayor of Mecca had found out 400 years earlier, even a royal edict is no match for the public's love of coffee.

TO THE AMERICAS

By the middle 1700s, there were tens of thousands of coffeehouses throughout Europe. Eager to capitalize on the demand for coffee, European entrepreneurs were always on the lookout for new sources of the bean. The Dutch, like the Turks



before them, did their best to prevent other interests from getting their hands on live coffee plants. But in 1723, a French officer, Gabriel Mathieu de Clieu, smuggled a single coffee plant across the Atlantic and planted it in Martinique in the West Indies—the first coffee plant in the Americas, and probably the parent of most of the coffee grown in the New World today.

The Portuguese government desperately wanted to plant coffee in Brazil, but they had a difficult time getting hold of any living plants. In 1727, a Portuguese official in Brazil was called in to broker a land dispute between the governors of French and Dutch Guiana. The representative resolved the conflict, and at the same time conducted a secret love affair with the wife of the French governor. As he departed for his return trip to Brazil she presented him with a large bouquet of flowers. Hidden in the center was a coffee bush, ready to be planted and establish the Brazilian coffee industry. Coffee soon spread throughout Central and South America.

COFFEE IN THE COLONIES

The British colonists in North America arrived with a taste for coffee. John Smith, who led the settlers at Jamestown, had traveled in Turkey and was a coffee aficionado. Coffeehouses also crossed the Atlantic with the colonists; in 1689 Boston opened its first coffeehouse.

Coffee in the American colonies was expensive in comparison to tea, which is why the early settlers were tea drinkers. When King George III's tax on tea caused the patriots of Boston to stage the Boston Tea Party, the protest was financial and political, but totally unrelated to gastronomy. During the

Revolutionary War, American colonists drank coffee because tea was not readily available. When the war was over they went right back to drinking tea, which was considerably cheaper.

When the newly formed United States of America went into battle with England for a second time during the War of 1812, the supply of English tea was once again greatly reduced. Americans returned to drinking coffee, but this time the coffee came from Latin America. It was inexpensive, and of the best quality.

After that war, Americans stopped purchasing their tea from the great English tea companies, buying it instead from American shippers. Unfortunately, the knowledge and skills necessary to purchase top-quality tea in the growing areas was not part of the American tradition, and the quality of the tea coming into the United States declined significantly. It was this reduction in excellence that caused most Americans to turn to coffee. The choice was simple: inferior, high-priced tea or superior, inexpensive coffee.

The history of how people really eat and drink clearly shows that politics play a small role in our food selection. Price, however, significantly alters the way we eat and drink.

The United States became the world's largest consumer of coffee, and South and Central America its biggest suppliers.

Increased production in Latin America drove coffee bean prices down, making coffee accessible to more and more people, both in Europe and the United States. American firms were developing high-capacity roasters, and a huge coffee roasting industry grew up in New York. By 1845, New York City was roasting as many beans as all of Great Britain.

Before the Civil War most American consumers bought green coffee beans, roasted them at home in a frying pan, then ground and brewed the beans.

"During the War, the South couldn't get any coffee at all. They had to make fake coffee out of everything from acorns to figs to little roadside weeds, so after the War, everyone in the South wanted coffee more than you could possibly imagine. An Atlanta jeweler got hold of a real coffee bean and set it."

—Mark Pendergrast

Meanwhile, the Union army, was fueled by coffee: soldiers received a ration of 36 pounds a year and they brought home their taste for coffee when the war was over. Industrial roasters, which had been supplying beans to coffeehouses, hotels, and the Army, began to package roasted coffee beans for home use, and branded coffees began to appear. Maxwell House, Folgers, and Chase and Sanborn all got started in the mid-1800s.

TAKE A BREAK

As the United States industrialized, coffee found a new role. For workers who had to be at the factory or office early in the morning, and often for round-the-clock shift work, coffee became a necessity.

On March 17, 1930, at three-thirty in the afternoon, the owners of the Mississippi Steamship Company in New Orleans called all their employees into the company's main office and held the first company-sponsored coffee break in the United States. Executives of the steamship line had seen something like a coffee break in Brazil, and they liked the effect it had on the morale of the workers. It also improved the morale of the workers in New Orleans, so they made the coffee break a permanent part of their operations. Even without corporate sponsorship, the coffee break has become a central part of the American workday.

FEDERAL ESPRESSO

In Turkey and Arabia, coffee had been brewed by repeatedly boiling ground coffee in a brass or copper pot called an *ibrik*. It was served (as it still is today) along with the grounds. Early European drinkers adopted a similar method. But by the early 1800s, various drip coffee methods were being devised, and a primitive form of filtered coffee evolved. It required wrapping the grounds in a cloth bag before boiling them in water, but it worked.

By the turn of the 20th century, Europe was a hotpot of coffee innovation. In 1901, Italian inventor Luigi Bezzera built a steam-driven machine that could make single cups of coffee to order—and espresso was born. Espresso and the espresso bar, manned by a knowledgeable *barista*, became popular throughout Italy, and after World War I, quickly spread across the Continent.

Because of its caffeine content, some people were beginning to have concerns about coffee's effect on good health. In 1906, Ludwig Roselius, a German coffee merchant, found a way to extract caffeine from coffee beans. Roselius' coffee was a success, and the brands he established, Kaffe Hag and Sanka, are still around.



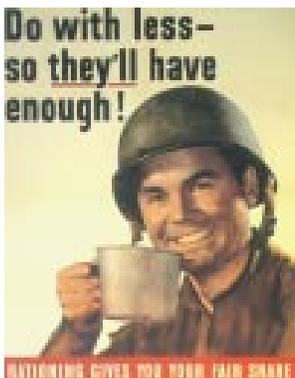
IT'S ALL IN THE BEAN

Traditionally, coffee had been made from a variety of the bean known as *arabica*. It was the plant that was first discovered in Ethiopia, cultivated in Yemen and spread around the world by European coffee traders. But *arabica* matures slowly, will only grow properly at high elevations, and is susceptible to disease. At the beginning of the 1900s, a variety known as *robusta* was found in the African Congo. It was a much tougher plant, able to grow in a wider range of environments, and it packed twice the caffeine punch of *arabica*. The taste was not up to the standard set by *arabica*, but the economics of using *robusta* were too great for the coffee producers to ignore.

Consumers in the United States became accustomed to the harsher taste of the new beans. So did the Europeans, though the French and Italians developed much darker roasts in order to compensate. The large manufacturers began to put together blends in pursuit of the perfect coffee. They'd pick one for acidity, one for body, one for flavor, and so on.

Soldiers serving in World War I had a great thirst for coffee. But transporting the beans was a logistical nightmare. G. Washington, a Brooklyn-based coffee roaster, responded to the problem by developing the first successful instant coffee. Washington's crystallized coffee was a huge success with the troops, and by 1918 the U.S. Army had requisitioned the firm's entire output. During the war they consumed over 75 million pounds of coffee.

"During the war, all kinds of names were made up for the coffee that the GIs were getting in their foxholes. Many of them pejorative, such as mud, but it was also known as a "cuppa joe" because of G.I. Joe. This was his coffee, and that's



the origin of why coffee is called cuppa joe."

—Mark Pendergrast

Back home instant coffee, often of questionable quality, joined dozens of brands on store shelves. Coffee firms relied on the cheap, plentiful, and low-quality *robusta* beans as they fought for market share. For most of the 20th century, Americans learned to drink what coffee they were served—and that was often weak and watery.

In 1966, Alfred Peet, a Dutch immigrant living in Berkeley, California, was fed up with the coffee available in the United States. Peet, a former coffee trader himself, whose father had been a coffee importer in the Netherlands, started a premium coffee business. He liked the dark roasts popular in France and Italy—roasts that were developed to cover up the taste of low-quality beans—but he decided to use the technique with high-quality beans. Peet's Coffee soon developed a cult following, and inspired a generation of coffee roasters to produce a quality coffee boom that is still seeping across the United States.

Peet's most successful disciples were a group of Seattle coffee merchants who, in 1971, founded a firm they called Starbucks. The company has played a major role in creating—and then capitalizing on—a taste for espresso and cappuccino drinks. Starbucks also introduced Americans to the modern coffeehouse.

Unknown for most of human history, coffee has changed the world. Currently it is the world's leading cash crop, the second most actively-traded commodity after oil, and the most widely used psychoactive substance on the planet.

TO LEARN MORE

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