

“Excellent Vertues” and Virtuositic Speculations: Medical and Historical Knowledge about
Coffee in England, 1650-1730
Thomas Ladendorf

A crucial element in the development of the English coffeehouse and coffee-drinking habit in the seventeenth century was the social acceptance of coffee as both a beverage and a drug. Though it may seem safe to assume that coffee was perceived as a “harmless entertainment of good fellowship” (as virtuoso Henry Blount saw it) that would have thus been uncontroversially accepted, this was hardly a universal attitude toward the drink.¹ Rather, there were anxieties and even fears about the new beverage’s role in society, manifest most notably in a 1672 royal proclamation that enjoined the closing of the coffeehouses.² Of course, the ban did not last and the coffeehouses prevailed; but anxieties about the beverage would remain a part of English culture. For instance, Thomas Curteis’ 1704 *Essays on the Preservation & Recovery of Health* warned readers that “By the too liberal Use of this charming Liquore, the Blood is apt to acquire an unusual acrimony, [...] the Nervous Systeme weaken’d, and a Trembling very often ensues.”³ The unease betrayed by this quote was expressed by foreign doctors as well: French physician Simon Pauli, for instance, thought the abuse of coffee posed a great danger to “both the body and understanding.”⁴ Both medical and social concerns about the use of coffee were ongoing, constituting a threat to the positive image of the substance. The eager acceptance of coffee into the English diet and pharmacopoeia was therefore not a given, but an outcome that depended on a socially constructed acceptance of the new drug and beverage.

Other published works resounded the many virtues of coffee, counterbalancing tensions about the new substance and facilitating coffee’s acceptance outside of the “rarefied circles” of the virtuosi.⁵ Many of these virtues were medical: indeed, many early publications about coffee seem to have almost unbounded optimism in regard to coffee’s curative potential. Social and historical aspects of the drink were important as well: for instance, historian Brian Cowan specifically sees the establishment of coffee as a “civil” and “respectable” beverage as key to the prevalence of the English coffeehouse.⁶ But all the

positive associations that became attached to coffee were not givens either; rather, they had to be established as valid claims to knowledge. As coffee's acceptance into English culture was aided by popular belief of these claims, examining the bases of early understandings of coffee provide insight into the cultural history of the English coffeehouse while also illuminating the social acceptability of different kinds of knowledge. In exploring the epistemological foundations of the positive associations coffee had, I will be primarily concerned with asking *how* claims were able to be justified and *what* the origins of different claims were. Specifically, I will explore early claims about coffee's medicinal properties and its history to argue that early understandings of coffee comprised a diverse array of different kinds of knowledge, including empirical knowledge, knowledge based on authoritative sources, and "knowledge" originating from hearsay. Finally, I will explore early eighteenth-century criticisms of the many dubious early claims of knowledge about coffee to show how later scholars challenged the most popular ways of understanding coffee, while maintaining that knowledge about coffee in this period still retained its early diversity.

Coffee as Medicine

*To raise our Coffee in a Verse or two,
Is more then all peopled World can do;
Whose rare transcendent Vertues so extend,
It cannot be within a Poem penn'd
Let this suffice (though many it displeases)
Our wholesome Liquor helpeth most Diseases.⁷*

So ends one of the foremost early trade handbills about the curative properties of coffee.⁸ The handbill, authored by Robert Morton, is perhaps a bit more enthusiastic than most early publications about the beverage's "vertues": Morton claims coffee is an efficacious treatment for more than fifty diseases, while also insisting that it "very much strengthenth the Liver" and "mightily refresheth the Heart and Vitals."⁹ Yet Morton's optimism, and even his sense that "Our wholesome Liquor helpeth most Diseases," was rather characteristic of early advertisements for the beverage: early historian of coffee James Douglas, for instance, claims that early bills circulated by coffeehouses generally touted coffee "as being good for all

Distempers.”¹⁰ Thus, advertisers would claim coffee could help anything from digestive problems, to ear-pains, to cholera.¹¹ The wide circulation of advertisements means that potentially large audiences would have come into contact with a vigorous optimism regarding coffee’s potential as a curative substance. Surely, early advertisements like Morton’s would have then helped construct a positive image of coffee by projecting a promising picture of its potential as a drug to a wide readership.

Scholarly estimates of the beverage’s virtues were generally more conservative, but to the modern reader, they still seem rather Panglossian: some safely focused on its laxative and diuretic properties, but others thought that coffee could “fortifie the sight with its steem, and prevent Dropsies, Gouts,” and “the Scurvie.”¹² And while scholarly coffee enthusiasts and virtuosi saw multifarious curative possibilities in the new drug, even critics like Curteis conceded that coffee could help in cases of “Rheums, Catarrhs, Head-ach, Flushings,” and “Drouziness.”¹³ Even critics, then, thought coffee could have significant medical uses. Advertisements, virtuosic eulogies, medical criticisms: all these different publications praised the medicinal potential of the new beverage and drug coffee, thus promoting a positive image of the substance. Whether one read advertisements published by coffee-men or tracts published by Fellows of the Royal Society, one would consistently find coffee’s medicinal virtues being extolled.

While early publications were united by their praise of coffee’s virtues, they were divided by the variety of ways they arrived at knowledge of coffee’s medicinal properties. The positive image the press gave coffee derived its supposed validity from a variety of forms of knowledge, ranging from writings of foreign scholars and travel accounts to experimental trials of coffee as a medicine. Examining these means of knowledge offers insight into early modern understandings of not just coffee, but also medicine in general.

One of the more common sources of early knowledge about coffee was the observation of the Turkish use of coffee. In Morton’s handbill, for instance, he “observed that the *Turks* do feed much upon Fruits and food which breedeth much Crudities, which by their common use of this Drink those humors

are very much corrected, so that they are not troubled with many Diseases which we are subject unto; as *the Stone, Scurvey, Gout, nor Dropsie, &c.*”¹⁴ If Turks do not have typical English diseases, Morton and others reasoned, their distinctive coffee habit must play some role in keeping them healthy. Of course, this logic is not quite solid: an absence of disease does not indicate the presence of a preventative substance, and it is not quite clear what role “Fruits and food which breedeth much Crudities” would have in the development of the diseases Morton mentions. Yet, this sort of reasoning, relying as it did on written sources and flawed logic, could seem appealing at a time when coffee was yet new to the English diet and pharmacopoeia. Turks, readers would have known, were the source of the coffee-habit, and for want of English authorities on the beverage’s virtues, Turkish authority could be appealed to successfully.

Medical claims of this sort probably had their origin in travel accounts published earlier in the century, which provided some of the first European exposures to coffee and its use.¹⁵ Among the published travels of the early seventeenth century are those of Henry Blount, who, like many other English and foreign scholars, would claim Turkish habits as a source of medicinal knowledge.¹⁶ For Blount, this knowledge was empirical, serving as part of the fulfillment of his avowed purpose of traveling to distant lands to gain understanding through experience.¹⁷ But even in Blount’s case, this way of understanding coffee’s virtues was ultimately derived from another nation’s culture and experiences. And while Blount’s knowledge relied on the credibility of the Turks, advertisers and scholars who gleaned this knowledge from Blount were removed from the source of this knowledge by another degree, meaning that the validity of their knowledge depended on Blount’s honesty and accuracy in assessing Turkish culture. Understanding coffee through Turkish habits was thus a tenuous form of knowledge that relied on a number of factors. Not only did such justifications rely on shaky reasoning, but they were dependent on the credibility of both travelers and the Turks those travelers encountered. Still, at a time when the coffee-drinking habit was rather new to England, appeals to Turkish knowledge could seem attractive, in spite of their fragility.

Citing learned opinions on coffee was another prevalent derivation of early medical knowledge about coffee. For example, a 1663 pamphlet of obscure authorship¹⁸ titled *The Vertues of Coffee* is simply a compilation of earlier written snippets about coffee's medical virtues, cultural origins, and botanical properties by authors including Francis Bacon and travel writer George Sandys. Similarly to the 1682 *Natural History of Coffee, Thee, Chocolate, Tobacco*, which was "Collected from the Writings of the best Physicians, and Modern Travellers" so that the author might provide "an Essay, or Topick, for Men to reason upon, when they meet together at Publick-Houses," the editor of this work avows that his work is written to satisfy the curiosity of laypeople who lack easy access to knowledge of coffee's "vertues."¹⁹ Both of these works provide citations that include author and publication information, allowing readers to search out the works of the "eminent Authors" who represent some of the first English understandings of the new beverage and drug.²⁰ Works of this type thus aimed to fill in a perceived lack of knowledge in the literate urban population, while at the same time ostensibly providing readers with the tools to verify the authenticity of the virtues being claimed. The veracity of knowledge was based solely on the credibility of the authors being cited, hence the importance of drawing on the knowledge of writers like Bacon and Sandys. Like appeals to Turkish coffee habits, the appeal to the scholarly credibility of early authors is hardly rigorous, but fulfills a need to inform a lay population that lacks easy access to information about coffee. Even if this means of knowledge did not provide adequate justification, it created greater access to knowledge by organizing earlier claims and presenting them in a convenient format.

John Chamberlayne's 1685 *The Manner of Making Coffee, Tea, and Chocolate* represents a rather different approach to deriving knowledge from earlier scholarly works. Chamberlayne's book is a translation of an immensely popular compilation of coffee scholarship by French doctor Jacob Spon, which was itself a work of translation.²¹ Whereas other early compilations of scholarship relied mainly on English authors, Chamberlayne's work was a translation of a translation: the knowledge provided therein was therefore not merely second-hand, but rather third-, fourth-, and fifth-hand. And as an added

boundary to the original sources of knowledge, Chamberlayne does not include citations in his work and removes some details of the French and Latin source texts.²² While Chamberlayne's work fulfilled the same need as other compilations of scholarship, he made much less of an effort to establish credulity and offer readers access to source material. In this case, then, readers had to take knowledge on faith and hope they were not misled.

Compilations of earlier coffee scholarship thus fulfilled a supposed gap in the understanding of the literate lay population by drawing on earlier publications. In Chamberlayne's text, the sources are difficult to trace to their origin, perhaps weakening the foundation of the claims he advances; but even in other similar texts, the extent to which a reader could use citations to verify claims was very limited. After all, seeing that Francis Bacon did indeed claim that coffee "comforteth the *Brain*, and *Heart*, and helpeth Digestion" provides a reader with a reason to trust these claims only inasmuch as that reader considers Bacon a medical authority.²³ Such texts, then, relied heavily on appeals to scholarly authority; and the outlandishness of some of these scholars' claims illustrates just how problematic this sort of knowledge is. Yet, especially in virtuosic circles, appeals to the authority of an author like Bacon might have seemed sufficient; and it is not inconceivable that some virtuosi might have eagerly checked in-text citations against their own volumes of Bacon in order to "verify" the claims about coffee they read.²⁴ In the present era of thorough medical trials, appeals to scholarly authority are an insufficient basis for medical claims; but in the seventeenth century, these appeals might have seemed a rather solid foundation of knowledge. As such, they would have served the social function of promoting a positive image of the beverage and drug coffee. Seventeenth-century compilations of scholarship are, to the modern reader, all examples of poorly justified claims to knowledge; but appealing to the right scholars and providing citations might have helped writers gain the credulity of readers of a learned or virtuosic bent.

However, not all readers accepted knowledge about coffee on faith or the authority of others. Barrister and judge Walter Rumsey, for instance, invested himself in gaining medical knowledge through experimentation.²⁵ He avows his commitment to this means of knowledge in the introduction to his 1657

book *Organon Salutis*, writing that the infirmities of old age caused him “to remember what I learned in my youth at School, [...] (that is) after taking notice of my own body, to observe what did doe me good, or harm, before I should use the help of Physitians.”²⁶ The main product of Rumsey’s experimentation was an instrument designed to help users induce vomiting; but his book also contains recipes for coffee- and tobacco-based remedies.²⁷ Rumsey correctly labels coffee as a laxative, but he also offers dubious claims that his “Electuary of Cophy” could help “the Stone” and draw “waterish and falt humors” out of the stomach.²⁸ Correctness aside, Rumsey’s efforts offered another form of knowledge about coffee, and his recipes encouraged readers to experiment on their own. Rumsey himself was not a professional physician, but a hobbyist: readers could then feel encouraged to test the validity of his claims, which he chose to “leave” to “every mans age and experience.”²⁹ ³⁰ In Rumsey’s *Organon Salutis*, do-it-yourself empiricism functioned as an alternative to second-hand sources of knowledge.

Still, experimental remedies and empirical knowledge were not very dominant in the early discourse on coffee: among early publications, Rumsey’s work stands out as the only available example of this means of medical knowledge about coffee.³¹ And Rumsey’s work, like earlier compilations of coffee scholarship, relies heavily on appeals to authority in the form of the published letters between Rumsey, James Howell, and Henry Blount that make up the introduction of his work.³² In addition, Rumsey’s work is as much theoretical as it is experimental, devoting whole chapters to speculations based on Rumsey’s knowledge of Galenic medicine.³³ While Rumsey’s pamphlet provides an instance of experimental knowledge about coffee’s medicinal properties, this knowledge is diluted by a substantial attempts to establish Rumsey’s credibility and a heavy reliance on the humoral theory of medicine.

Contrasting both Rumsey’s claims and appeals to the authority of past scholars were a great number of completely unfounded claims to knowledge of coffee’s medicinal properties. Morton’s trade handbill is again an excellent example: his observation of Turkish health and habits might offer some justification for his claims to coffee’s effectiveness in preventing “the *Stone*, *Scurvy*, *Gout*,” and dropsie,

but the bulk of his myriad claims are supported neither by experimental evidence nor by the testimony of others.³⁴ His unreliability and possibly his deceitfulness are made apparent by his rather absurd claim that coffee is “excellent good to prevent Miscarriage.”³⁵ Advertisers thus disseminated unjustified and unattributed misinformation in support of coffee’s virtues. But advertisers were not the only purveyors of misinformation: for example, Richard Bradley, botanist and Fellow of the Royal Society,³⁶ opportunistically published a tract during the 1720-1 plague scare that claimed coffee was efficacious in preventing pestilence.^{37 38} Bradley’s case illustrates how the driving force of self-interest could bring deliberately fraudulent medical information into the written discourse about coffee. And there is little doubt these incorrect medical claims saw wide circulation: while Bradley’s timing probably assured his tract would have a substantial readership, we know that there were at least five different version of Morton’s handbill.³⁹ Misinformation might then have constituted a considerable part of the public consciousness of coffee’s medicinal properties; indeed, it is possible that utterly unfounded knowledge and even lies played an important role in the acceptance of coffee into the English pharmacopoeia and diet.

In order for this misinformation to gain currency, it was critical that it not be censored or punished. By examining seventeenth-century England’s medical environment, we can understand why misinformation was able to spread freely, unchecked by institutional authorities. Significantly, there were considerable barriers to the detection of medical fraud: as Andrew Wear points out, early modern England lacked rigorous medical trials to test the efficacy of remedies.⁴⁰ And even if trials took place, misinformation would still likely have gone unpunished, as an absence of a uniform medical licensing system and laxity in prosecution meant that, as Wear puts it, “there was no rigid uniformity in medical knowledge and practice.”⁴¹ Early modern medicine did not have a “top-down” regulatory structure that could ensure the validity of the multitudinous remedy receipts being published; and a system that struggled to eliminate fraudulent practitioners could hardly be expected to take on the additional task of censoring printed misinformation. It was in such a medically anarchistic climate that coffee’s many

supposed curative properties were touted. A lack of institutional power on the part of groups like the London College of Physicians meant that dubious medical claims could be made with impunity and that baseless medical misinformation could circulate widely.

At first, medically fraudulent claims seem to be self-serving, deceitful, and opportunistic; however, I want to suggest that perhaps there is a more complicated story behind the proliferation of misinformation. Consider, for instance, that Morton's claim about coffee's efficacy in cases of miscarriage can be found in another early advertisement of coffee's many "virtues";⁴² also, review early coffee historian James Douglas' observation that many early coffee houses printed "Bills, extolling the Virtues of that Liquor, as being good for all Distempers, especially the Scurvey, Dropsy, Stone, and Gout."⁴³ Different advertisers made the same specific dubious medical claims about coffee, suggesting that there was a circulation of information between advertisers. The sharing of information these correspondences suggest could potentially have allowed advertisers to maintain a coherent picture of what coffee's virtues were. By referring to other advertisements, writers could avoid contradicting other claims of coffee's medicinal properties and instead reproduce them, thus spreading the currency of dubious understandings of coffee's medicinal value and planting them more firmly in the literate public's imagination.

But the sharing of medical information was not strictly the domain of physicians and advertisers; rather, in a time when preparing remedies was as much a domestic enterprise as it was a professional one, the sharing of remedy receipts in the literate lay population was a well-established cultural phenomenon.⁴⁴ And significantly, the coffeehouse was first and foremost a place of socialization and oral communication, making it an ideal locale for the sharing of remedy recipes. Certainly, coffee-based remedies would be of particular interest to the coffeehouse milieu, and each remedy of this sort would imply coffee's efficacy in treating a certain disease or condition. Thus, medical information and misinformation about coffee could easily have originated in the recipe books of the literate public.

Advertisers may have been part of this interaction as well: it is not hard to imagine that coffeehouse owners and publishers would pick up on what was being said about coffee's use as a drug and then incorporate this information into advertisements. Perhaps, then, advertisers "crowd-sourced" some of the misinformation that abounds in early coffee advertisements.

The foundations of socially transmitted "knowledge" about coffee will remain inherently obscure, as most medical claims about coffee that seem to have this origin are not explained or defended in any detail. In addition to this difficulty, we cannot establish with any certainty how information and misinformation about coffee was communicated, as we obviously lack comprehensive records of coffeehouse conversations and the correspondences of most London coffee-men. Still, social transmission of medical knowledge clearly played a role in the spread of early claims about coffee. A dearth of evidence precludes any certainty on this point, but it seems probable that a good deal of medical "knowledge" about coffee was generated not by professional physicians or scholars, but instead by a lay population that took an interest in concocting and sharing remedies, as well as by advertisers who had an interest in attaching as many virtues to coffee as possible.

Early understandings of how coffee could function as a curative substance were thus based on a variety of different kinds of knowledge of several distinct origins. Much of this knowledge came from other sources, including English and foreign scholars, Turkish customs, advertisements, and word of mouth. Some of this knowledge was partly empirical in basis: Henry Blount's knowledge, for example, came from his observation of Turkish customs and habits; but generally speaking, this knowledge was justified not by experimental evidence, but by the credibility of the sources of information. Lack of medical regulation allowed many dubious claims regarding coffee's medicinal properties to proliferate, perhaps contributing to the popularity of the beverage and certainly shaping early medical understandings of the beverage and drug among laypeople. Meanwhile, Walter Rumsey and unpublished others attempted to ascertain coffee's medicinal properties through experiment. However, experimental trials would not be the dominant means of medical knowledge of the medical community for some years; and despite

virtuosic interest in empiricism, Rumsey's brand of do-it-yourself experimental medicine was an outlier in the medical discourse on coffee.⁴⁵ Medical understandings of coffee were thus primarily rooted in the trust of supposed authorities, most of whom were not even physicians by profession. Far from demanding scientific rigor, early knowledge of coffee's medicinal properties were, in the main, either baseless or based almost entirely on the credibility of scholars.

Coffee History and Critiques of Earlier Claims to Knowledge

Of course, English perceptions of coffee did not just comprise the medicinal properties the new beverage and drug was thought to have. Rather, there were many other aspects of coffee that were integral to early modern understandings of the substance. Social and historical understandings of the drug in particular were key to coffee's success: after all, it was the social understanding of coffee's role in facilitating seditious political discourse that led to the 1672 attempt to ban the coffeehouses, and were it not for the coffeehouse's more positive social associations, the ban might not have been lifted. Brian Cowan specifically places importance on the construction of an image of coffee as a "polite" and "civil" beverage – these associations in particular would have been coffee's saving grace at a time when the coffeehouse was practically synonymous with treasonous behavior.⁴⁶ Social understandings of coffee thus played a key role in the English acceptance of coffee and the coffeehouse. And like apprehensions of coffee's medicinal properties, social and historical understandings of the beverage were dependent on justification – and again, these justifications offer an interesting view into the construction of a positive image of coffee.

Perhaps the oddest of the associations made in early writings about coffee is the connection between coffee and the famed black broth of Sparta.⁴⁷ This association appears as early as 1621 in George Sandys' account of his travels to the Ottoman Empire, in which he writes that coffee is black "as soot, tasting not much unlike it (why not that black Broth which was used amongst the *Lacedemonians*)."⁴⁸

Traveller Peter Mundy provides some foundation for what was just speculation to Sandys, noting that “the *Persians* at this day do tipple as much *Coffee* off as the *Turks* themselves,” implying that the Greek influence on Persian culture might have endowed them with the Spartan “black broth” in the form of the coffee-drinking habit.⁴⁹ This is, of course, a very tenuous explanation, and in this regard it is similar to other claims that coffee might have originated in antiquity: for instance, Italian traveller Peter de Valle cited coffee’s property of being “an Entertainment and agreeable Pastime for the *Turks*” as a justification for his claim that mixing coffee and wine would yield the *nepenthe* of Homeric myth.⁵⁰ Early attempts to place coffee’s origin in antiquity and imbue it with an ancient mystique were thus based on fragile reasonings and wishful thinking.

Later virtuosi, including James Howell and Henry Blount, add their approval to the “black broth” hypothesis.^{51 52} Interestingly, neither of these writers attempt to ground the claim in historical analysis or even simple reasoning; and it is perhaps telling that Blount specifically writes, “it is thought to be the old Black Broth.”⁵³ Blount’s wording conveys a sense that there is some kind of general agreement among the learned that coffee is indeed the Spartan black broth. Perhaps Blount and Howell are then merely voicing the common opinion held in virtuosic circles, adding no analysis or qualification because they had been socially conditioned to accept the validity of the claim. That the “black broth” conjecture would appeal to virtuosic curiosity stands to reason, as before they became closely associated with science, the antiquities were among the main intellectual concerns of English virtuosi.⁵⁴ A fascination with coffee’s possible association with antiquity could have thus led virtuosi like Blount and Howell to the uncritical acceptance of what now seems a rather dubious claim. It is not unthinkable, then, that in learned circles, historical misinformation about coffee was able to spread just as medical information about it did in coffeehouses or in the press. With regard to knowledge about coffee, a lack of intellectual rigor seems to have plagued the learned as much as it did laypeople.

The “black broth” hypothesis was conclusively rejected by James Douglas in his 1727

Supplement to the Description of the Coffee-Tree, a landmark piece of coffee-history scholarship that

offers a substantial critique of much that had been written about the subject.^{55 56} Douglas complains that the “only Foundation they [i.e. Sandys, Howell, etc.] go upon” for the “black broth” conjecture “is the Colour, which at any rate would be a very weak Argument,” especially in light of Douglas’ citation of Greek scholars who claimed that black broth was “eaten, not drank.”⁵⁷ By also striking down the *nepenthe* hypothesis, Douglas puts an end to speculation about coffee’s possible origin in antiquity. Significantly, Douglas founds his criticisms on his scholastically rigorous knowledge of Greek texts by using authoritative source material to counter historical speculations.

Douglas also dismisses many of the other early stories about coffee’s history, including a popular Turkish fable several writers had recorded and the idea that Persian philosopher and physician Avicenna had written about coffee.^{58 59} In writing his own history of coffee, he uses sixteenth-century Arabic manuscripts to trace the origin of the coffee-drinking habit to the Arabian Peninsula in the fifteenth century.^{60 61} Douglas’ work is then both a critique of earlier historical knowledge about coffee, and an attempt to establish a history of coffee by using authoritative primary sources. By being a vocal critic of past claims to knowledge about coffee, Douglas’ work contrasts earlier coffee scholarship, which was all but bereft of criticism. His knowledge is quite different from medical knowledge in that, by its very nature, it cannot be empirical; but Douglas’ work nevertheless represents a more thorough historicism that is written to be accurate rather than to entertain. As such, his work illustrates that scholars of coffee in the eighteenth century sought to provide more foundationally solid knowledge of coffee.

Criticism of earlier medical discourse on coffee also appeared after the initial enthusiasm for coffee’s curative properties. For example, in his 1699 *Discourse on Coffee*, apothecary and Fellow of the Royal Society John Houghton wrote that “as for its [i.e. coffee’s] Virtues, I think no body has Published any thing considerable about it,” before going on to venture that because, as a drink, coffee is so diluted with water, it probably promotes health strictly in the same way that other hot liquids do.⁶² Thus, it would be a mistake to think that early suggestions of coffee’s manifold medicinal properties were uncritically

accepted by all. Among the learned, at least some were wary of the dubious claims of coffee's efficacy in treating certain diseases; probably, a number of laypeople also had doubts about coffee's value as a remedy. Still, these doubts did not find voice until after the initial flurry of publications about coffee.

Based on the timing of these critical sources, it is tempting to think that the story of early coffee scholarship is a narrative that starts with spurious claims and gradually becomes more critical and rigorous; however, this rosy vision is belied by the continued appearance of misinformation about coffee in the eighteenth century. As I mentioned earlier, Richard Bradley advocated the use of coffee to prevent the plague in a tract published in 1721,⁶³ and in 1722, a free book about the uses of various exotic substances claimed that coffee is "an excellent Liquor for the Head," while also noting that its virtues would be spoiled by the addition of milk,⁶⁴ and probably a number of now lost pamphlets and advertisements continued to echo earlier claims made about coffee's efficacy in treating "Scurvey, Dropsy, Stone, and Gout."⁶⁵ Scholastic rigor did not extirpate and replace misinformation and opportunism in publications about coffee; rather, it existed alongside a continuing flow of medically ill-founded publications about coffee intended for a lay readership. Knowledge about coffee, then, did not see sudden "progress" and transformation in the eighteenth century. Pregnant women may well have been taking coffee-based remedies to prevent miscarriage at the same time that the Royal Society was publishing more scientifically and historically rigorous works about the beverage.

The story of early knowledge about coffee is thus not one of intellectual advancement, but of continued diversity. Experiment, medical texts, advertisements, and hearsay all functioned as sources of medical knowledge about coffee. Meanwhile, a culture of virtuosic curiosity ensured that coffee historiography would be more informed by a love of the antiquities and a fascination with exotic specimens than it was by historical scholarship. In the case of the "black broth" myth, social interaction seems to have established a strange and dubious bit of "knowledge" in the collective consciousness of the virtuosi, providing a parallel for the way sharing of information played a role in early medical understandings of coffee. The precise role of oral communication and exchange of recipe receipts in the

role of these early understandings is unknowable, but the character of early coffeehouse culture suggests that the occurrence of such interactions is not unlikely. And even if popular culture played only a minimal role in the creation of early medical understandings of coffee, it still seems likely that early advertisers had a social awareness of what was being written and said about coffee. Later scholarship would dismiss the misinformation that was disseminated in these early years, but by no means did intellectual rigor transform public understandings of coffee. At a time when medical authority was decentralized, and when the beverage and mediator of social interaction coffee was yet quite new, claims of knowledge about coffee and their corresponding justifications would continue to exhibit a diversity that owed as much to social learning on the one hand as it did to scholarship on the other.

¹ From a letter Blount wrote to Walter Rumsey. Published in Walter 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 humance health* (London: R. Hodgkinsonne for D. Pakeman, 1657), in *Coffee-House Culture Volume 4: Science and History Writings*, ed. Markman Ellis (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2006), 83.

² *A Proclamation to Restrain the Spreading of False News, and Licentious Talking of Matter of State and Government* (London: John Bill and Christopher Barker, 1672), in *Eighteenth-Century Coffee-House Culture Volume 4: Science and History Writings*, ed. Markman Ellis (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2006), 91.

³ Thomas Curteis, *Essays on the Preservation & Recovery of Health: In Two Parts* (London: Richard Wilkin and Henry Bonwick, 1704), 99.

⁴ John Chamberlayne, *The Manner of Making Coffee, Tea, and Chocolate. As it is used In most parts of Europe, Asia, Africa, and America. With their Vertues. Newly done out of French and Spanish* (London: printed for William Crook at the Green Dragon without Temple Bar near Devereux Court, 1685), in *Eighteenth-Century Coffee-House Culture Volume 4: Science and History Writings*, ed. Markman Ellis (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2006), 130.

⁵ Brian Cowan, *The Social Life of Coffee: The Emergence of the British Coffeehouse* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 54.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁷ Robert Morton, *The nature, quality, and most excellent vertues of coffee*, (London: n.p., c. 1670), in *Eighteenth-Century Coffee-House Culture Volume 4: Science and History Writings*, ed. Markman Ellis (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2006), 88.

⁸ Markman Ellis notes that this handbill was printed no less than five times; he also notes that it was probably given out for free. Thus, this publication probably reached quite a large audience. See Ellis, *Coffee-House Culture*, 85-6.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 87-8.

¹⁰ James Douglas, *A Supplement to the Description of the Coffee-Tree, lately published by Dr. Douglas* (London: Thomas Woodward, 1727), in *Eighteenth-Century Coffee-House Culture Volume 4: Science and History Writings*, ed. Markman Ellis (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2006), 254.

¹¹ Morton, *Vertues*, 87. Douglas, *Supplement*, 254

¹² From a letter James Howell wrote to Walter Rumsey. Published in Walter 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 humance health* (London: R. Hodgkinsonne for D. Pakeman, 1657), in *Eighteenth-Century Coffee-House Culture Volume 4: Science and History Writings*, ed. Markman Ellis (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2006), 22.

¹³ Curteis, *Essays*, 99.

¹⁴ Morton, *Vertues*, 87.

¹⁵ Brian Cowan notes that many early seventeenth-century travelers wrote about coffee in their accounts, with the result that “Europeans first learned about coffee in travel narratives that described the exotic customs of the people living in the large ‘oriental’ empires of Asia.” See Cowan, *The Social Life of Coffee*, 17.

¹⁶ Blount, letter to Rumsey published in *Organon Salutis*, 14. Richard Bradley, *The Virtue and Use of Coffee, with Regard to the Plague, and other Infectious Distempers* (London: Eman. Matthews and W. Mears, 1721), in *Eighteenth-Century Coffee-House Culture Volume 4: Science and History Writings*, ed. Markman Ellis (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2006), 192. Chamberlayne, *Coffee, Tea, and Chocolate*, 123, 138.

¹⁷ Blount’s travel account begins: “Intellectual Complexions have no desire so strong, as that of knowledge; nor is any knowledge unto man so certain, and pertinent, as that of humane affaires: This experience advances best, in observing of people, whose institutions much differ from ours.” See Henry Blount, *A Voyage Into the Levant*, 4th ed. (London: Printed by R.C. for Andrew Croke, 1650), 3.

¹⁸ The author gives his name as “N.D.” Ellis notes that “N.D.” also wrote a collection of songs titled *An Antidote Against Melancholy*. See Markman Ellis, ed, *Eighteenth-Century Coffee-House Culture Volume 4: Science and History Writings* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2006), 75.

¹⁹ *The Natural History of Coffee, Tea, Chocolate, Tobacco, with a Tract of Elder, and Juniper-Berries, shewing how useful they may be in our Coffee-houses, and also the way of making Mum, with some Remarks upon that Liquor. Collected from the Writings of the best Physicians, and Modern Travellers* (London: Christopher Wilkinson, 1682), in *Eighteenth-Century Coffee-House Culture Volume 4: Science and History Writings*, ed. Markman Ellis (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2006), 105. N.D. *The Vertues of Coffee. Set forth in the Works of Lord Bacon his Natural Hist., Mr Parkinson his Herbal, Sir George Sandys his Travails, James Howel Esq; his Epistles. Collected and Published for the Satisfaction of the Drinkers Thereof* (London: William Godbid, 1663), in *Eighteenth-Century Coffee-House Culture Volume 4: Science and History Writings*, ed. Markman Ellis (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2006), 77.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 79.

²¹ Ellis, *Coffee-House Culture*, 113-4.

²² *Ibid.*, 113.

²³ From Bacon’s *Natural History*, quoted in N.D., *The Vertues of Coffee*, 81.

²⁴ See Cowan, *The Social Life of Coffee*, 21 for information about virtuosic fascination with Bacon’s writings.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.

²⁶ Rumsey, *Organon Salutis*, 8.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 25, 39.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 54, 58, 63.

²⁹ “Rumsey, Walter (1583/4–1660),” D. A. Orr in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, see online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman, Oxford: OUP, 2004, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/24273> (accessed April 30, 2012).

³⁰ Rumsey, *Organon Salutis*, 38.

³¹ Strictly speaking, this is in reference to the ten sources I was able to find that treated of the medical properties of coffee, all of which are listed in my bibliography. As I mentioned, some of these sources reproduced earlier writings.

³² Blount’s letter begins: “Sir, I Present you with many thanks for your excellent Physick Treatise, and for your favour in the direction of it to me; But for your printing of it, all mankind is to give you thanks.” And

- more tellingly, Howell's letter compares Rumsey's work, which he calls "The Instrument of Health," with Aristotle's *Organon*, which he calls "The Instrument of Logick." See Rumsey, *Organon Salutis*, 10, 18.
- ³³ See Chapter I, in which he posits that "superfluous matters" left over from digestion "are the principall Causes of all diseases which cannot be absolutely helped.": Rumsey, *Organon Salutis*, 27. For information about the Galenic paradigm, see the section titled "The Humoral Theory of Health and Illness" in Andrew Wear, *Knowledge & Practice in English Medicine, 1550-1680* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 37.
- ³⁴ Morton, *Vertues*, 87-88.
- ³⁵ *Ibid.*, 88.
- ³⁶ Ellis, *Coffee-House Culture*, 165-6.
- ³⁷ *Ibid.*, 165.
- ³⁸ Bradley, *The Virtue and Use of Coffee*, 177.
- ³⁹ Ellis, *Coffee-House Culture*, 85.
- ⁴⁰ Andrew Wear, *Knowledge & Practice in English Medicine, 1550-1680* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 17, 49.
- ⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 27.
- ⁴² From a pamphlet titled *The Admirable Vertues of the Coffee-Drink*, excerpted in Douglas, *Supplement*, 254.
- ⁴³ Douglas, *Supplement*, 254.
- ⁴⁴ Wear, *Knowledge & Practice*, 49.
- ⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 17.
- ⁴⁶ Cowan, *The Social Life of Coffee*, 32.
- ⁴⁷ See John Langhorne and William Langhorne, trans., *Plutarch's Lives* (Cincinnati: H.S. & J. Applegate, 1850), 51. Available online at <http://books.google.com/books?id=PpgxAQAAMAAJ&lpg=PA51&ots=-Bq72r0bWz&dq=plutarch%20greek%20lives%20black%20broth&pg=PA51#v=onepage&q&f=false>
- ⁴⁸ Quoted in N.D., *The Vertues of Coffee*, 82.
- ⁴⁹ Quoted in N.D., *The Vertues of Coffee*, 108.
- ⁵⁰ Douglas, *Supplement*, 225-6.
- ⁵¹ Howell's letter to Rumsey in *Organon Salutis*, 21-2.
- ⁵² Henry Blount, *Voyage to the Levant*, quoted in N.D., *Vertues of Coffee*, 83.
- ⁵³ *Ibid.*, 83.
- ⁵⁴ Walter E. Houghton, "The English Virtuoso in the Seventeenth Century: Part I," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 3.1 (Jan. 1942), 67-8.
- ⁵⁵ Ellis, *Coffee-House Culture*, 219.
- ⁵⁶ Douglas, *Supplement*, 226.
- ⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 226.
- ⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 228, 233.
- ⁵⁹ *Encyclopedia of World Biography*, s.v. "Avicenna."
- ⁶⁰ Douglas, *Supplement*, 234.
- ⁶¹ Douglas refers to this area as *Arabia Felix*, using the terminology Ptolemy came up with for the main part of the Arabian peninsula. See *Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*, s.v. "Arabia," accessed April 30, 2012, <http://ezproxy.lib.indiana.edu/login?qurl=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.credoreference.com/entry/brewerphrase/arabia>
- ⁶² Houghton, "A Discourse of Coffee," 159, 161.
- ⁶³ Bradley, *The Virtue and Use of Coffee*, 172.
- ⁶⁴ *Of the Use of Tobacco, Tea, Coffee, Chocolate, and Drams* (London: H. Parker in Goswell-Street, 1722), 10.
- ⁶⁵ Douglas, *Supplement*, 254.

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