

S P H I N X F I N E A R T



J. Pavlikevitch (Russian, 20th Century)

Constantinople Street Café

signed and inscribed 'Constantinople/Pavlikevitch' (lower right)

watercolour over pencil on paper

30 x 20 cm (11 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 7 $\frac{7}{8}$ in)

Constantinople Street Café encapsulates the coffeehouse culture that epitomises Istanbul; the scene is bustling with social activity. In the shade of the trees and umbrellas, numerous clusters of customers sit talking and drinking. In the centre, a fez-wearing waiter makes his way through the street clutching a tray, whilst in the foreground, an empty chair and two stools wait to be occupied.

The drinking of coffee in a coffeehouse is fundamental to Turkish culture. The date when coffee first arrived in Istanbul is disputed, though most believe it was introduced by two Syrian traders in 1555, and the drink became known as the 'milk of chess players and thinkers'. The Ottoman historian İbrahim Peçevi chronicled that 'until the year 962 (1554-55), in the High, God-Guarded city of Constantinople, as well as in Ottoman lands generally, coffee and coffeehouses did not exist. About that year, a fellow called Hakam from Aleppo and a wag called Shams from Damascus came to the city: They each opened a large shop in the district called Tahtalkala, and began to purvey coffee.'¹ So ingrained in Turkish culture is the custom of coffee drinking, that that the Turkish word for breakfast, *kahvaltı*, is

translated literally as 'before coffee'.

¹ Lewis, B., *Istanbul and the Civilization of the Ottoman Empire* (University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, 1963) p. 132.