ÇUKULATAHistory of Chocolate

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CUKULATA, A TURKISH HISTORY OF CHOCOLATE

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To my nephew, Kemal Arpad; the only child I know who likes green peppers as much as chocolate,

to my sister Sema and to Istvan, his mother and father who buy him chocolate and books,

to my sister Seda, his aunt responsible for pranks and cartoon films, and to his grandmother and grandfather, my mother and father who used never to leave me without chocolate either...

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ABBREVIATIONS

Archives

Archives Historiques Nestlé (Nestlé Historical Archives): AHN
Archives de la Ville de Neuchâtel (Archives of City of Neuchâtel): AVN
Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi (Prime Ministerial Ottoman Archives): BOA
Musée d'art et d'histoire, Département historique, Neuchâtel (Museum of Art
and History, Department of History): MAHN
Nestlé Türkiye Arşivi (Archives of Nestlé Turkey): NTA
Türk Kızılayı Arşivi (Red Crescent Archives): TKA

Private Collections

Cengiz Kahraman collection: C.K. Murat Özmemiş collection: Murat Özmemiş Saadet Özen collection: S.Ö.

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View towards Tünel looking from St. Antoine Church on today's Istiklâl Avenue, Beyoğlu, Istanbul. The Nestlé advertisement on the wall can clearly be seen. In the details of the photograph another advertisement with the wording, "Çukulat Mönye" strikes the eye. 1911. **C.K.**



Introduction: A Delicious History of Chocolate

Childhood! Tears fill my eyes and the taste of chocolate mingles with the taste of my happiness, my lost childhood, and I cling voluptuously to that sweet pain. The simplicity of this ritual tasting does not detract from the solemnity of the occasion.

The Book of Disquiet, Fernando Pessoa

Even though writing a book on an object as much loved as chocolate might at first glance seem very appealing and entertaining, one quickly understands that forming even one sentence on the subject is not easy. In our lives today, chocolate occupies a very special place rich in positive meanings. When you delve a little to understand the reason, you realise how difficult it is to apprehend how it reached this position. It is fair to say that just as mankind has survived for thousands of years, we could all end our lives without ever having tasted chocolate – the lack would probably not affect us physically. After all, Europe has known about chocolate for only five centuries, and chocolate in the form we know it today goes back no further than one hundred and fifty years. When we consider chocolate as merely a food, it clearly does not play an essential role in our lives. It is enjoyable to eat, and has nutritional benefits, but we can also live without ever consuming it.

This being the case, could it be the social and cultural meanings imposed on chocolate over time, rather than a physical need, which have transformed chocolate into a token of both happiness and deprivation? How have we come to regard chocolate not only as a food but also as an object of pleasure? It was these questions that determined the focus of my book, in which I shall look at how chocolate arrived in the Ottoman lands, the uses it was put to, the ways in which it was presented, how it was perceived, the manner in which it evolved during the Republican Era (after 1923), the path it followed up until the 1960s and how it attained its present, respected status.

The retrospective reconstruction of the cultural history of chocolate requires us to consider how it is represented and perceived today. That is another difficulty because of course there is no single answer to this. Chocolate is a product that is enormously popular, familiar and an integral part of everyday life. Consequently, almost every consumer has an individual notion and experience, in short a unique





A confectioner selling European food. "Manioğlu Yorgi" is written on the sign. Before 1928. C.K.

opinion concerning chocolate. Chocolate currently enters our lives at a much earlier age than many other food products that are inventions of modern times. We generally taste our first chocolate before we ever consumer our first fizzy drink, or eat our first hamburger. Our taste in chocolate develops over time, and our choices of brand and variety are shaped. We also accumulate many chocolaterelated memories, starting with who gave us our first chocolate as a child, where and when that took place. What's more, the precious memories we associate with chocolate can last a lifetime; indeed, chocolate has different resonances according to age. The relationship to chocolate is intensely personal. If we just consider the urban areas in Turkey, we find people who like chocolate with whiskey, and only with whiskey, those who expect to receive chocolates in heart-shaped boxes, and who are sad if they do not, and any number of grownups who will fall upon a jar of chocolate spread in a frenzy. There are people who struggle for three days to choose the appropriate ritual chocolate gift when going to ask a family for the hand of their daughter in marriage. And what about the 90% cacao chocolates wolfed down, with a grimace, each day as a cure for wrinkles? Or the gourmet snobs who regard any chocolate that isn't "bitter" as being quite unworthy of the name? Or

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Large packets with the wording "a Nestlé product", a Baylan chocolate and a box of Ülker biscuits can be made out on the shelf behind the vendor and in the window. There are other bars in the case in front that cannot be seen clearly.

1950s. S.Ö.

those who argue the contrary? We all have our own knowledge, preferences, beliefs and opinions about chocolate.

And we have expectations, too, of this "wholesome" thing that surpasses its role as a food, with all its promises on which we have reached a silent understanding, one that consequently triggers marketing strategies. There is a song by Turkish rock group Zakkum that gets straight to the point:

Chocolate, salve my wound
Chocolate, make me forget her
Chocolate make me forget myself
Chocolate, come keep your promise.

As one might guess, the song contains a tale of separation. Transporting us to the realms of pleasure, and, when the end of the road is in sight, making us forget the pain of separation, are just some of chocolate's tasks, as is curing our wrinkles.

Of course, such a connection to chocolate is not the case for everyone, for despite its omnipresence there is great injustice when it comes to chocolate. Only those with a certain purchasing power are able to try enough varieties to develop their taste. And not everyone can spend time thumbing through specialist books, or be fortunate enough to attend patisserie courses. It takes a certain knack and budget to adequately appreciate the quality difference between a certain brand produced abroad and a local product. But still, chocolate is a universal object of desire, so much so that its absence constitutes an irregularity, an injustice, even a violation of rights.

I should like to relate an alchemy tale that I once heard from Mr Selahattin Duman, an eminent journalist, and an amateur but ambitious historian of the city of Afyon, in southwest Turkey, where he lived in his childhood. An extremely incredible story, and as distant as Before the Common Era for those who are today in their twenties. This was in the 1960s, when chocolate appeared only on special days, such as national holidays, when children did not eat the chocolates offered when visiting but were instructed to bring them home, where the same chocolates would be offered to other guests, and when housewives would then identify their own chocolates arranged on presentation dishes in other houses... Back to Selahattin Duman's tale. "Just imagine," he said, "one of the older boys in the neighbourhood claimed that the seed of the loquat fruit could turn into chocolate, and we, like the first companions of the prophet, believed it. After peeling the dark brown skin off the fruit, we would take the snow-white loquat seed, which was the size of a nut, toss it into our mouths, place it carefully in our cheeks and keep it there for days. After a while, the white seed in contact with our saliva would darken, turn brown and achieve the consistency of chocolate. When the impatient among us started chewing it too soon and hurt their teeth, the smartarses in the neighbourhood

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would say: 'Well, that's what happens if you chew it before it becomes chocolate.' The fathers who slapped their children when they were trying to eat their food with the seed in their mouths were chocolate unbelievers."

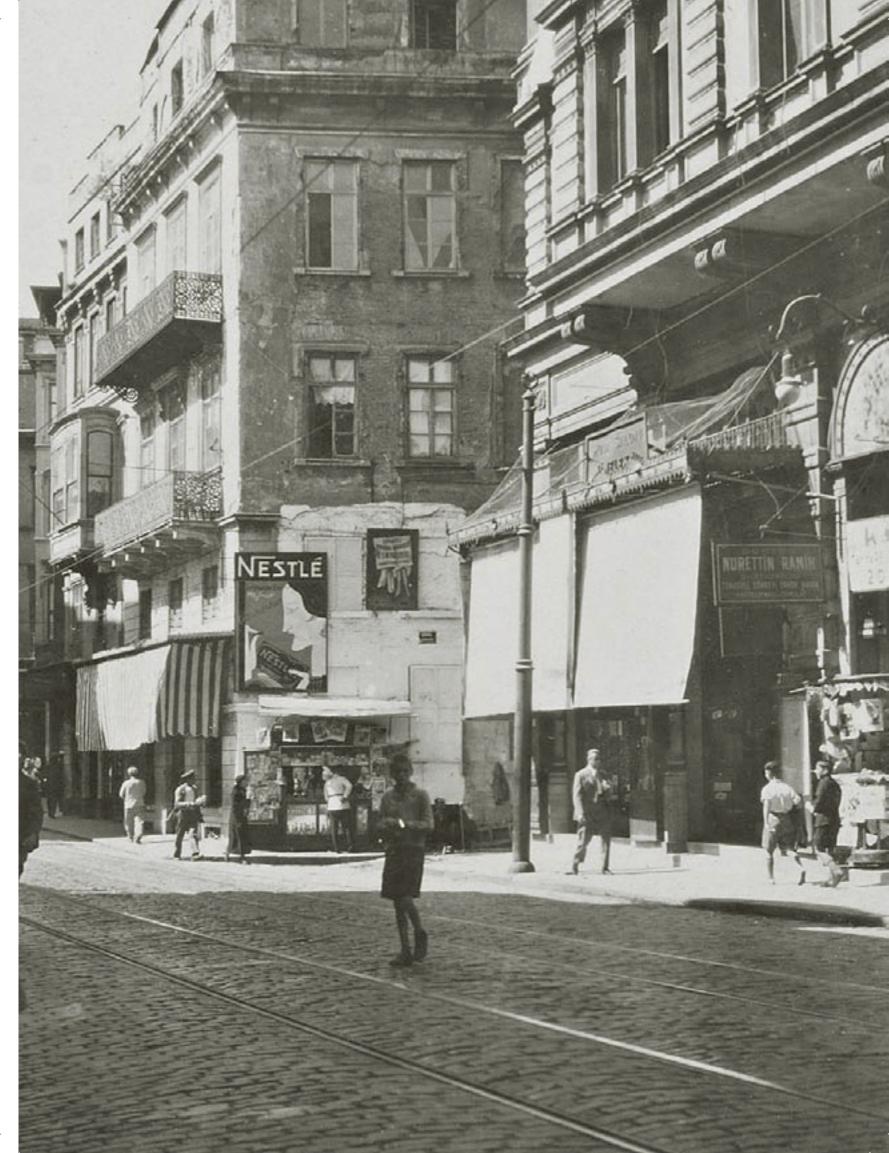
If there were those who were so deprived of chocolate they were forced to try alchemy, there were also those who had plenty of chocolate or candies "like chocolate" to hand but could not eat it. An example of this is the famous scene in Safa Önal's 1971

film My Little One (with Ayhan Işık and Hülya Koçyiğit). Those who have seen the film will remember. Sezercik (Sezer İnanoğlu) sells sweets and tries to prove the quality of his merchandise by using chocolate as a reference: "I have sweets just like chocolate!" However he cannot eat what he sells. Swallowing hungrily, he looks at the "cheeky child" wolfing down the sweets with gusto and asks: "Are they very sweet?" The child answers, still chewing: "Even sweeter than honey!" And we all realise, deep down, that despite this being fiction, Sezercik speaks from a place of real life, and this moves us: "One day I'll eat them too!"

Modern-day Turkey is no longer a place where chocolate is scarce. But it is still possible to be deprived of chocolate, and the great trauma of being "chocolateless", which is maybe even greater in our era of chocolate abundance, can become a political issue. In 2011, Devlet Bahçeli, Chairman of the Nationalist Movement Party, made a famous speech. "Children sit in a row in front of the television at home. The children in the advertisements offer their chocolates and biscuits to each other. They eat them and joke together. That children watching think, 'If only I had some chocolate, if only I had a biscuit. And they ask: 'Mum, why don't you buy me some? Why don't we have any?'"

When we consider all this, the question we posed at the start springs to mind: what is it that makes chocolate so desirable, but not bread or water? What lies at the root of the desire that made the most destitute of Orhan Kemal's fictional child heroes, each poorer than the next, timidly and furtively eat the pieces of chocolate thrown on the ground in their wrapper a street away? What new elements can historical research bring to this great accumulation of data, perceptions, beliefs and experiences about the meanings of chocolate and how it arrived at this point?

There is plenty of collective, historical knowledge regarding the notions we have embraced unthinkingly, our intrinsic beliefs, without really knowing how it happened. Yet when we probe them a little, we come up with some surprising results. In this respect, the history of chocolate is extremely rich. As we go back into the past, to consider the history of chocolate, we gradually move away from



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Stands selling chocolate and sweets by the kilo, most probably for a festival. On the left, confectionery is being sold, and on the right, Royal chocolates.

the product as we know it today, as regards both its shape and its significance. There was no white chocolate until the 1930s. Milk chocolate did not arrive until the 1890s. Even bars of chocolate – at least with their current taste and form – were rare. In the nineteenth century, chocolate was one of the standard medicines in chemist shops, as well as a breakfast drink. If we go back even further, to the eighteenth century, we find a drink called chocolate, that was very different from the one we know today, and quite difficult to prepare, to which spices such as black pepper and chillies were added, and sometimes wine and beer. Let us not forget either that the first cultivators of chocolate, the peoples of Central and South America, used the cocoa bean as money. In fact, archaeologists have even discovered fake cocoa beans – apparently used as counterfeit cash! Based on consumption patterns and market circulation, it is not difficult to surmise that, in the past, chocolate had different functions and meanings than it does today.

Chocolate history clearly shows us that some of the experiences, tastes and perceptions that we assume to be universal have in fact been constructed over a long period of time. For example, today we consider chocolate to be a universal product, accessible to all, yet when it first arrived in Europe, it was considered therapeutic and became the drink of aristocrats, remaining so for hundreds of

years. In the nineteenth century, industrial production saw the price of chocolate fall, and it became popular, although it was not until the early twentieth century that it became the children's favourite. Advertisements associated chocolate with sensual pleasure quite early on in Europe, but this is relatively new in Turkey. There are many possible reasons for these changes in presentation and perception: technical advances, innovations, cultural changes, interaction between countries, politics and new discoveries in the field of medicine.

So let us explore the different guises of chocolate, which we in Turkey have been consuming since the Ottoman period, how they have changed over time and the reasons for those changes. We shall also attempt to understand what aspects have remained constant, by focusing on chocolate's cultural aspects, as well as making comparisons, where necessary, with the global history of chocolate.

The story begins in the seventeenth century, where we find the first records regarding the existence of chocolate in the Ottoman Empire. But we shall focus on the period commencing in the second half of the nineteenth century, which witnessed the constitution of the chocolate market, through the late Ottoman era, which technically ended in 1923 with the proclamation of the Turkish Republic, and on into the 1960s, when urban transformation projects caused the destruction or closure of the confectioners who had been based in Istanbul's Eminönü neighbourhood since Ottoman times, as well as most of the chocolate factories in the area. In the same decade, some Greek manufacturers, who had been very active in the chocolate market since the early days of the Republic, left Turkey for Greece because of political conflict, and they either closed their businesses or sold them. Symbolically, this was the end of an era. After the troubled 1970s, the liberal economic policies of the 1980s brought a new competitive atmosphere to the market, with a spectacular increase in production volume. Most of the old brand names disappeared, and new ones took their place. This era, in which chocolate was ascribed new meanings, new economic and cultural significance, might make the subject of another book.

I have endeavoured as much as possible to create a chronology. But although this is necessary in order to comprehend the past, it is doomed to uncertainty, not to mention that reducing history to the construction of a chronology is also extremely boring! Chronologies usually include events and discoveries that are considered turning points, but when we look closely, we notice that some of those events were not at all influential when they occurred, and only became so decades later. The same problem arises with the chronology of chocolate. Is it possible to accurately identify the date when a hydraulic press was first used to grind cocoa, and was it really such an immediate turning point for the production of "cocoa powder" it engendered? Or can we really know who made the first chocolate bar? Rather than individual events or inventions, the interaction of technical developments with

cultural demands have, since the nineteenth century, considerably influenced the transformation of chocolate as a modern object of consumption.

Chocolate, as a consumer good rich in cultural meaning, is the outcome of a long production chain. When we hear the word "chocolate", a rough shape is conjured up in our minds and a taste on our tongues. We can list a few varieties and brands without thinking. Perhaps we have favourites, and we know the difference between dark and milk chocolate. In our lifelong relationship with chocolate, we rarely feel the need for more. If we wish to delve a little beyond this, and explore what processes a normal bar of chocolate has undergone to reach the supermarket shelf, then suddenly a crowded room of experts is required to provide a suitable answer. Some of them would explain where and how cocoa was grown, and the differences in quality. Others would start with the transportation of cocoa and the problems in storing it, while the rest would dwell on the finer details of the roasting of cocoa beans. If we continue yet further, and manage to set foot in a chocolate factory, all kinds of extra details will be mentioned, from the balance of cocoa butter and sugar to the merits of mixing the chocolate paste at length. Lining up to have their say will be food engineers, dieticians, businessmen, gourmets and advertisers, as well as the engineers who design the machines, and even shipping agents. It is highly likely that they will have heated arguments, and fail to agree on the answers to many questions, especially if you ask, with the courage of ignorance, a question such as: "What is good chocolate?"

Fortunately, this book is not about the recipe for chocolate, its production techniques and its economics, but its history in Turkey, starting from the Ottoman period. Of course, however gently we try to push aside the imaginary room full of experts, the technicalities and commerce of chocolate, as well as the development of the machines, necessarily crop up as part of chocolate history. To remedy this, and with a view to not to losing sight of our focus, I have made use of existing studies in areas outside of this book's main theme, and in most cases consulted the experts whose names appear in the acknowledgements section.

The historical aspect reminds us that chocolate, or any other product we know well, develops changes over time. In the future, chocolate may take on quite different meanings and functions, life might be enriched by being aware of this fact. But the aim of examining what chocolate used to be is certainly not to prove that everything we know and love about it today is wrong. To look to the past and see the differences, and realise that the bases of some of our unquestioned beliefs are fictional, does not mean that today we are living in an illusion. In fact, the truth is whatever we experience today, and it is composed of a sophisticated blend that includes subjective perceptions and fictions.







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