

# Priest's coffee fame is dubious

Controversy brews over cappuccino's invention

John Thavis/CNS

VATICAN CITY — When Father Marco d'Aviano took his preaching ministry to Vienna in 1683 and inspired the city to turn back the Turkish invasion of Europe, he surely never dreamed that he'd be remembered four centuries later — as the patron saint of cappuccino.

Pope John Paul II beatified Father d'Aviano April 27. In the post-Sept. 11 world, advancing the priest's sainthood cause was supposed to be controversial because it spotlighted a historic standoff between Christianity and Islam, which Christianity won.

Dire predictions were made about the beatification: Muslims would be incensed. European pacifists would boycott the papal Mass. Vatican security would be beefed up against potential terrorist attack during the ceremony.

All that turned out to be a tempest in a coffee pot.

Instead, controversy was brewing over a dubious cappuccino claim. Some newspapers began to credit Blessed d'Aviano with adding frothy milk to Turkish coffee, thus inventing the drink that fuels millions of people each morning.

The evidence? Well, the Italian word "cappuccino" was thought to

have originated from the brown color of the Capuchin religious habit worn by Father d'Aviano and others of his Franciscan order. If the friar didn't mix the first cappuccino himself, maybe it was named in his honor.

But the story owes more to journalistic creativity than to tradition.

According to historians, the retreating Turkish soldiers abandoned several hundred bags of coffee beans when they left the Vienna battlefield. The Austrians found the drink too bitter, so they added milk and sugar. The result was so popular that the first Austrian coffeehouses soon sprang up.

What did Blessed d'Aviano have to do with all this?

"Absolutely nothing," said the postulator of his sainthood cause in Rome, Capuchin Father Vincenzo Criscuolo. "It's a story that was invented after the fact. Which is too bad, because it's generated a lot of interest."

Most reliable sources say it was a Polish army officer, Franz Georg Kolschitzky, who gathered the abandoned Turkish coffee and devised a way to filter out the grounds, sweeten the infusion and make it a lighter beverage with milk.

The history of coffee is mostly legend, and the church plays its part. Coffee supposedly was first brewed by a shepherd who noticed that his flock became hyperactive after



Alessia Giuliani/CNS

Capuchin friars Sisto Zarpellon and Blazej Strzechminski enjoy cups of cappuccino in Rome. The beatification April 27 of Capuchin Father Marco d'Aviano revived mythical tales about the monk's supposed role in inventing the classic drink made from espresso and foamed milk.

eating coffee beans; soon enough, he was enjoying a caffeine buzz, too.

The shepherd was scolded by local monks. But the monks discovered the drink helped them stay awake during evening prayers.

Still, most Christians called coffee the "devil's drink" and when its popularity grew in Europe some priests wanted it banned. In 1600, Pope Clement VIII decided to try it and was pleasantly surprised.

"Coffee is so delicious it would be a shame to let the infidels have exclusive use of it," is the famous line

attributed to the pontiff.

But coffee's use as a stimulant and the social role of coffeehouses continued to prompt a religious backlash.

These days, however, most Vatican employees jump-start their day with an Italian espresso or cappuccino. Among those who enjoy coffee is Pope John Paul II. For years, the pope was told by doctors not to drink it because of his neurological illness. But last fall, he happily told dinner guests that the ban was off, and he had an aide pour him a cup.

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