



The Perfect Cup

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The History of Coffee, Part One— **COFFEE LEGENDS AND LORE**

Our three-part series about the history of coffee starts with legends, lore, and early landmarks in the history of coffee. The story of coffee and its discovery by different cultures is rich and varied, involving chance occurrences, political intrigue, and the pursuit of wealth and power. The story of how coffee-growing and coffee-drinking spread around the world starts in the Horn of Africa in Ethiopia, where the coffee tree probably originated as a wild-growing plant in the ancient kingdom of Kaffa.



The Kingdom of Kaffa (c.1390–1897) was an ancient state located in what is now Ethiopia. —Wikipedia

The Discovery of Coffee—Two Legends

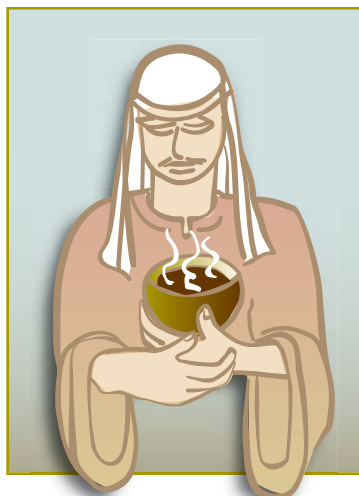
The legend of Kaldi



According to one story, the effect of coffee beans on behavior was first noticed by a sheep herder from Kaffa (in what is now Ethiopia) by the name of Kaldi. After moving his sheep to a fresh pasture, where they ate red “cherries” from a certain plant, Kaldi noticed that his animals were unusually active. He tried a few of the cherries himself, and was soon as exhilarated as his flock.

The legend of Mocha

Another legend gives us the origin of the name “mocha” for coffee. An Arabian named Omar was banished to the desert with his followers to die of starvation. In desperation, Omar had his friends boil and eat the fruit from a coffee tree—at that time an unknown plant. Not only did the broth save the exiles, but their survival was taken as a religious sign by the residents of the nearest town, Mocha, in what is now Yemen. The plant and its beverage were named Mocha to honor this event.



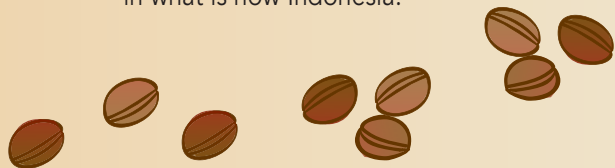
Did you know...

- Venetian traders first brought coffee to Europe in the early 1600s, and by 1683, the first European coffeehouse opened in Venice. The most famous of Venetian coffeehouses, Caffe Florian in Piazza San Marco, opened in 1720.
- In Europe, cafés became social gathering places—known as “penny universities” because customers could buy a cup of coffee for one penny and then enjoy hours of intellectual conversation.
- The Industrial Revolution was in a sense “stimulated” by coffee, which became a beverage of choice for the hardworking Protestant culture of the era.



A COFFEE TIMELINE

- Before 1000 A.D.* ▶ Members of the Galla tribe in Ethiopia notice that they get an energy boost when they eat a certain berry. They use it as a food, ground up and mixed with animal fat.
- 1000 A.D.* ▶ Arab traders bring coffee back to their homeland and cultivate the plant for the first time on plantations. They also began to boil the beans, creating a drink they call "qahwa" (literally, that which prevents sleep).
- 1453* ▶ Coffee is introduced to Constantinople by Ottoman Turks. The world's first coffee shop, Kiva Han, opens there in 1475. Turkish law makes it legal for a woman to divorce her husband if he fails to provide her with her daily quota of coffee.
- 1511* ▶ Khair Beg, the corrupt governor of Mecca, tries to ban coffee for fear that its energizing influence might foster opposition to his rule. The sultan sends word that coffee is sacred and has the governor executed.
- 1615* ▶ Venetian traders bring coffee to Europe.
- 1699* ▶ The Dutch introduce coffee to Batavia in Java, in what is now Indonesia.



Baba Budan Brings Coffee to India

Coffee was a long time arriving in countries beyond Arabia, where its unique properties made it precious and it was guarded like a secret weapon. Rulers forbade exportation of the plant outside the Moslem world. However, at one point an Arab named Baba Budan smuggled beans to some mountains near Mysore, India, and started a farm there. Early in this century, the descendants of those original plants were found still growing fruitfully in the region.

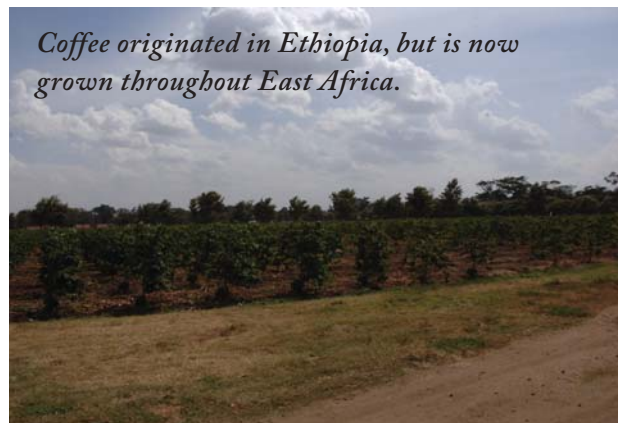
The First Flavored Coffee

The Turks were the first people to use coffee as a flavored drink, often adding spices such as cloves, cinnamon, cardamom, and anise to the brew.

The Devil's Drink?

Coffee was believed by some Christians to be the devil's drink. In the late 1500s, Pope Clement VIII was urged by his advisers to denounce the favorite drink of the Ottoman Empire as part of the infidel threat. He decided to taste it before he banished it and enjoyed it so much he baptized it, saying that "coffee is so delicious it would be a pity to let the infidels have exclusive use of it."

Coffee originated in Ethiopia, but is now grown throughout East Africa.



NEXT MONTH'S TOPIC: How Coffee Came to America

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