

one inside and outside of Timor-Leste who has thought about and cares for democracy as a universal but threatened concept will learn from this book.

Guy Cumes

MARTIN KRIEGER, *Kaffee. Geschichte eines Genussmittels*. Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 2011. 307 pages, €24.90. ISBN 978-3-412-20786-1

*Coffee. History of a Luxury Food*, is a coffee-table book in more than one sense: it discusses coffee in all its aspects and facets, including its botanical characteristics, areas and methods of cultivation, and its role as a trade commodity and lifestyle (and luxury) product.

In an overview in the first chapter the author traces the path of coffee from its origins in the highlands of Eastern Africa through the Arabic peninsula to modern plantations in all parts of the world, particularly Latin America and Southeast Asia, as well as its development from a local “health” drink to a world-wide consumer good. He then dedicates each of the remaining chapters to one aspect of coffee respectively, working both synchronically and diachronically, and ending with a discussion of the German coffee landscape.

The second chapter outlines the botanical properties of the coffee plant and its stimulating and stamina-aiding qualities, and presents – as also later in the book – some of the legends surrounding the coffee plant and its discovery. From there the author turns to the original home of the coffee plant: Kaffa in the Ethiopian highlands, from where the name might possibly have come. Here he also outlines methods of cultivation and harvesting as well as of consumption.

This is continued in the next chapter, aptly entitled Arabia Felix, although, as the author also mentions, current-day Yemen is anything but happy. This was different from the first centuries A.D. until at least early modern times, when some of the best coffee was cultivated, consumed and traded from the area’s ports, not least because of the safety and security provided for the travellers. The port of Mocha here stands for the product in general, though today it is more or less a ghost town. From Yemen, coffee conquered not only Arabia, but eventually also the Ottoman Empire and from there, Europe.

What is interesting, and is outlined by the author in considerable detail, is the role of coffee as a commodity, traded early on not only within Arabia, but to South Asia and back to Africa as well. Traders from the west coast of India played a prominent role in the intermediate trade and were soon joined by Europeans who had begun to expand their trade interests to South and Southeast Asia, leading to considerable interregional trade between Arabia and

Asia. The same chapter also outlines the public and private socio-cultural role of coffee in Arabia, where coffee houses became centres of social life and exchange. He also describes the method of preparing, fermenting and roasting coffee beans and their preparation as a beverage. It is interesting that not only the roasted beans were consumed but the peels and the flesh as well, on occasion, and an early variant of “coffee paste” was taken as a stimulant by traders and pilgrims on long journeys.

This socio-cultural role of coffee was exported together with the beans to Europe from the 16th/17th centuries, a process the author describes in detail. From this time onwards coffee also became an important trade commodity for the European trading companies and agencies in Asia. A coffee drinking culture sprang up in Europe, particularly in coffee houses, in which not only coffee was drunk, but business deals were finalised as well; Lloyds of London, for example, started out as a coffee house. In Asia coffee was bought and sold for vast, albeit volatile profits. To escape the monopoly of traders and the customs duties in Yemen, European companies started to cultivate coffee bushes in their colonies, viz. the Dutch in the Dutch East Indies and Ceylon, and the British in India. The problem was the very narrow genetic base from which all coffee plants originated and which was responsible for periodical coffee blights of various kinds, which wiped out vast properties. In this connection Martin Krieger also outlines the questionable and cruel methods of cultivation and marketing that accompanied this expansion: slavery, forced labour, *cuulturstelsel*, and the cartelisation of production and marketing.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries Latin America and especially Brazil became the foremost producers of coffee worldwide, though with decolonisation traditional growers in Africa – Kenya and Tanzania as well as Ethiopia – tried to take up coffee production in a fairer way again and produced, like Yemen, small but qualitatively excellent coffee beans. Since World War II and the abolition of customs duties, coffee has become a trade commodity consumed all over the world, but also dominated by a handful of large food conglomerates. The author discusses the impact on coffee cultivation and trade of the two world wars, which gave rise to coffee substitutes, decaffeinated coffee and instant coffee powders. The final chapters outline the development of coffee bars and coffee chains that span the world and show Germany as one of the foremost coffee-marketing and -consuming countries.

The account places coffee into the context of world trade, monopolisation, colonisation and slavery. It is thus, as the author states, a part of world history and represents this history in all its facets – definitely something that this coffee-addicted reviewer will contemplate when she brews her next cup.

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