

COFFEE HISTORY: PART I

Though coffee is enjoyed worldwide today, the first records of its consumption date only to the late 1400s. In future issues, we will cover the confirmed history of coffee. In this issue, we will take a look at three legendary origin stories for coffee, passed down by oral tradition.

The first attributes the discovery of coffee to Omar, a disciple of a Yemeni sheikh involved in the early development of Sufism. Omar, exiled from Mecca to a desert cave near modern-day Wusab, chewed berries from a nearby bush to relieve his hunger, but found them bitter. Roasting them to improve their flavor, he found their seeds too hard. Boiling them to soften the seeds, he produced a fragrant brown liquid, revitalizing him and sustaining him for days. Stories of the miracle bush reached Mecca, and Omar was summoned home and made a saint.

The second account involves Abu al-Hasan al-Shadhili, the Moroccan Sufi who

later became Omar's sheikh. Traveling in Ethiopia, he observed birds of unusual speed and vitality eating berries. Trying the berries himself, he was greatly invigorated.

The final account also takes place in Ethiopia. Kaldi, a goatherd who lived in the 9th century, noticed that his flock became greatly agitated after eating the bright red berries of a certain bush. Chewing on the fruit himself, he noted its energizing effects and, exhilarated, brought more of the berries to a monk in a nearby monastery. The monk weighed Kaldi's testimony and disapproved of the fruit, throwing the berries into the fire. An enticing aroma arose, drawing the attention of the other monks, who quickly raked the beans from the embers, ground them, and steeped them in hot water, thus yielding the world's first cup of coffee.

THIS MONTH'S COFFEE

For May, we complete our lap of the world's four major coffee-growing regions

with a visit to Kenya (pictured below), represented by this Nyeri Rukira coffee.

Unfortunately, we at TLJ Coffee Co. were up against a deadline, and did not have time to taste this month's selection prior to sending it out. Our supplier's tasting notes say to expect hints of pomegranate and cranberry, a citrus-like acidity in the flavor, and herbs and baking spice in the finish. We put a City roast on the beans to highlight the delicate flavors common in Kenyan coffee.

Kenyan coffee cultivation revolves around four growing regions: Kirinyaga, near Mt. Kenya; Nyeri and Murang'a, to the west of Kirinyaga; and Kiambu, near Nairobi. This coffee comes from the Rukira mill in Nyeri, which contracts with smallholders in the surrounding area. The coffee cherries processed in this batch were grown by the mill's best partners and hand-sorted for proper ripeness.

