

Coffee – Or "black wine"

The number one popular drink



It's a getter-upper in the morning and a keeper-upper at night. Aromatic and invigorating. Irresistible when it's freshly brewed. Coffee is one of the popular beverages around. In Germany – and not just there – it's the number one popular drink.

Coffee has one of the richest aromas of any food in the world. Everyone knows the invigorating effect of its aroma and the burst of energy that a cup of coffee can unleash. Caffeine is what's responsible for that. After around 30 to 45 minutes, it begins to affect the brain, the nervous system and the rest of the body: Among other things, it stimulates cardiac activity, elevates the blood pressure and body temperature, expands the bronchi and the blood vessels.

It was probably this inspirational effect that prompted French historian Jules Michelet (1798-1874) to gush thusly about what he called "black wine": "Coffee illuminates things with a flash of truth, dispels the clouds of illusion and its murky gravity."

So it's all the more surprising to learn that this popular beverage is said to

have begun its worldwide career as a food: African tribes used to crush the red, cherry-like fruit of the coffee plant, mix it with fat – and then eat the energizing and strengthening mush during major ceremonies and before going into battle.

As a beverage, coffee had initially only been known in the form of a wine: The fermented juice of the ripe cherries was mixed with cold water and drunk during rituals. Around the year 1000, African coffee-lovers also discovered the good taste of the plant's beans (the seeds of the red coffee cherries). They dried and crushed them, poured hot water over the grounds, and called the liquor "qahwa." On the other hand, coffee as we know it today – roasted beans that are ground up and then brewed with hot water – did not become known in Africa until the 14th century.

But did coffee really originate in Africa?



It had long been believed that Arab slave traders brought it to Arabia from there via the Yemenite port of Mocha, from where it later reached Europe. So researchers were all the more surprised to learn several years ago that coffee was already being roasted and drunk in the desert city of Yulfar – some 1,000 kilometers north of Yemen – around a thousand years ago.

As fabled as the origin of coffee may be, there's no question that this un-

assuming, dark beverage went on to conquer people's palates wherever it was consumed. For a long time, the Arabs held a monopoly on the cultivation of coffee; by the 17th century, the entire Muslim world had fallen in love with the "wine of Islam."



In Europe, by contrast, it was not until the end of the 17th century that coffee set out on its triumphal march throughout the continent.

Coffee plants are cultivated in around 80 countries throughout the world: From Burundi to Vietnam, from Angola to Costa Rica. Virtually every region in which coffee is cultivated grows its own variety. Ultimately, though, they're all derived from two species of the coffee plant: *Coffea arabica*, which is native to the Ethiopian highlands, and *Coffea canephora*, which is also called robusta, from Uganda.

Today, two thirds of the world's coffee bean production comes from Latin America, where Brazil is the main supplier, followed by Colombia.