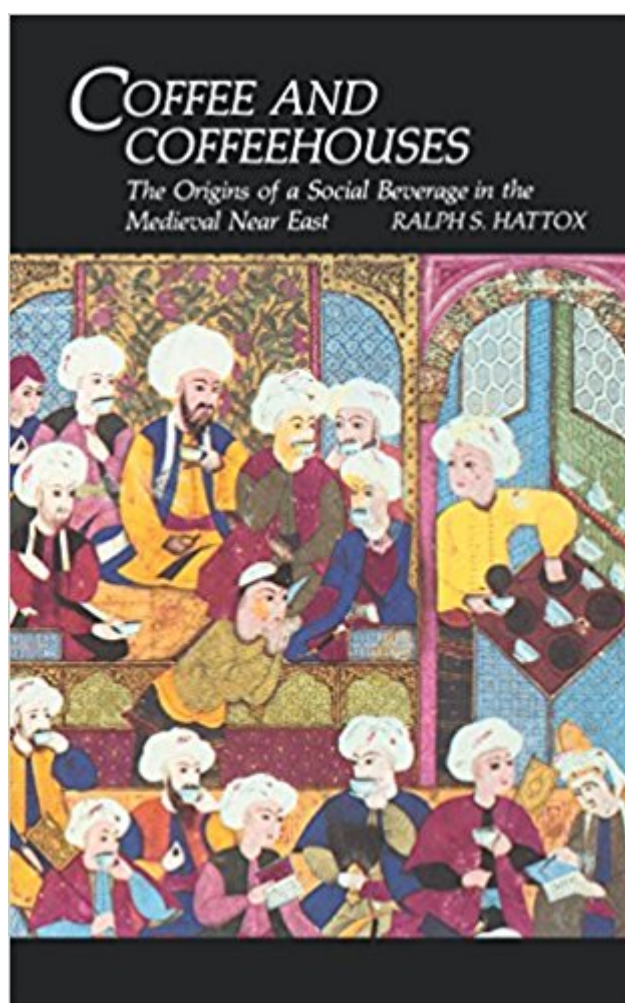


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# Coffee And Coffeehouses: The Origins Of A Social Beverage In The Medieval Near East (Publications On The Near East)



## Synopsis

Drawing on the accounts of early European travelers, original Arabic sources on jurisprudence and etiquette, and treatises on coffee from the period, the author recounts the colorful early history of the spread of coffee and the influence of coffeehouses in the medieval Near East. Detailed descriptions of the design, atmosphere, management, and patrons of early coffeehouses make fascinating reading for anyone interested in the history of coffee and the unique institution of the coffeehouse in urban Muslim society

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Coffee and its 'house' became a noticeable and long-lasting fixture in Muslim society and arguably a historical force to be reckoned with..How it all began can be learned from this short book, which is written with great care and full, reliable documentation." •American Historical Review

The early history of coffee, from its use in Sufi rituals to its widespread consumption in medieval Muslim coffeehouses, makes fascinating reading. Drawing on original Arabic sources and the accounts of early European travelers, Hattox describes the colorful history of coffee and the birth of the unique institution of the coffeehouse in urban Muslim society.

If you are a coffee enthusiast and history-buff, this book will make you squeal in delight. As a historian and coffee snob, I sat down with a cup of coffee and read this book cover to cover in one sitting. It's exciting, informative, and very well-written. I plan to buy more copies for other coffee-loving friends.

Coffee is so commonplace today that most of its avid consumers are unaware of just how controversial a beverage it was in its early years. Yet its initial appearance in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries was opposed by several legal and medical figures, some of whom even attempted to ban coffee from consumption by Muslims. This controversy serves as the starting point for Ralph Hattox's book, which describes the emergence of coffee in the region by using these efforts and the debates they spawned to examine the beverage and the social institutions that developed around it. To accomplish this, Hattox faces two interrelated challenges: the relative scarcity of sources and the contradictions between them. Sifting through them, he makes a convincing case for the origins of coffee as a beverage in the use of it by Sufi mystics in Yemen as a stimulus during their night-long devotional ceremonies. Coffee drinking spread quickly to the broader Muslim society, where it soon grew in popularity. Hattox argues that it was not coffee itself that engendered the initial controversy so much as the gathering of people to drink it, an action which raised concerns for some in authority. Yet their efforts to ban coffee as an intoxicating beverage ultimately failed, as it soon became a common part of Muslim life. The key to this, according to the author, was the emergence of the coffeehouse. Though modeled after wine taverns, unlike those disreputable institutions coffeehouses offered a respectable place for people to enjoy the beverage - and in doing so, transformed urban Muslim society by offering a new social forum where Muslims could interact with each other. With its fascinating analysis of the legal debate over coffee and its colorful description of the development of coffeehouses in the Middle East, this book is a must-read for anyone interested in the rise of coffee as a social beverage. Hattox makes good use of his limited sources to provide the reader with a history of its sometimes tumultuous origins, supplementing his description of the various legal debates and cases with insightful and well-reasoned observations. Though some may find his focus to be a little too narrow, he nonetheless succeeds in offering an excellent introduction to the history of coffee's origins, one that leaves its readers enjoying their morning cup with deeper appreciation and insight.

This book presents a history of coffee and controversies related to it within the Arab world, especially the Arabian peninsula, Egypt, and Turkey. It includes 16 historical illustrations, depicting

various serving implements for coffee and coffee establishments covering approximately 300 years. The scholarly style of the text may not be easy to follow for the general reader, especially readers who are not familiar with some basic Arabic naming conventions and structure. However, the research seems to be exceedingly well done and documented. The focus on coffee-related controversies can be somewhat disorienting, since the author assumes from the beginning that the reader will have some idea of the extent of the controversies and may even be able to speculate on their causes. The description of the legal opinions concerning coffee is quite clear, and could even help readers develop an understanding of more general questions of Islamic law. The author's comments on social change are also very lucid and worth reading for anyone interested in material culture.

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