



COFFEE TODAY

THE HISTORY OF COFFEE - 9th CENTURY AD



Kaldi, the Ethiopian
Goat Herder

**“The fanciful fable of how
coffee was discovered”**

*probably not exactly true, but a great
little story*

The alleged discovery of coffee

A 9th Century goat herder from Ethiopia, a boy by the name of Kaldi, was out tending his herd. He sat down to rest, near the brow of a hill, and his herd wandered around. Soon Kaldi noticed that his goats were making more noise than usual and he feared a predator may be scaring them. He jumped to his feet and ran over the brow of the hill to protect his herd. When he crossed the top he found the goats were 'dancing' around, excited but not fearful. Confused he went towards the herd and noticed they were munching on cherries from a shrub growing high on the hillside. Kaldi decided to try the cherries himself and soon he felt quite invigorated, his alertness was intensified and he felt remarkably energised.

Recognising the importance of his discovery, Kaldi decided to take some cherries to the local monastery. He was greeted by a friendly monk, and Kaldi relayed his tale of the dancing goats and how invigorated he felt when he tasted the fruit. The monk listened carefully then pronounced to Kaldi that the shrub was clearly a poisonous fruit and Kaldi should take care not to

allow his herd near such cherries. The monk then threw the fruit, Kaldi had brought, into the fire. As Kaldi was thanking the monk for his advice a strangely potent aroma filled the air, other monks from the monastery came to investigate the source of the pleasant smell, the head monk asked what was happening and Kaldi's monk explained the poisonous cherries being discarded in the fire. The head monk declared that they must save the fruit for cataloguing and further investigation. The monks desperately tried to rescue the fruit from the fire but the flesh had already been burned off and the seeds were very hot from roasting in the fire, one monk managed to scoop some seeds into a bucket of water to quench and cool them... and so the first pot of coffee was brewed.

This is, of course, likely just a fanciful tale. The first writings of Kaldi, and his coffee, are not known to have been recorded until 1671 (some 800 years after the alleged event), which make its authenticity quite dubious. Monks in the 9th century encouraged literacy and were well known to keep records. Such an important botanical find would not have gone unrecorded, but it is a great little story and well worth sharing.