



MOKA, MOCCA, MOKHA, OR MOCHA *Facts and Clarification*

Moka, Mocca, Mokha and Mocha, have all been used to designate a specific coffee. It's confusing and misleading since the term has been used to distinguish varieties, blends and even flavors. Today, most people think of the word, "mocha," as the flavor combining chocolate and coffee. Yet, "mocha's" history traces back centuries ago to the port city named Al-Makha. Located on the Red Sea in the Republic of Yemen, Al-Makha was the export location for coffee and other spices traded from Asia. Since Yemen was the first country to cultivate and export coffee, the word Mocha was attached to all coffee imported into Europe. Hence Yemen Mocha has always been the distinctive variety from Yemen, known for its exceptional taste, rare availability and exotic location.

Through the end of the 17th century, Al-Makha was a wealthy port city, considered to be the gateway from east to west. But as Europe and the Americas began to open up markets for coffee cultivated from those first Yemen Mocha seedlings, competitive trade ports were opened. The port was eventually closed to trade and replaced by Hodeidah, located just north of Al-Makha. Hodeidah continues to be the primary export city for Yemeni coffee, followed by Aden on the southern coast.

Throughout the 1980's and early to mid 1990's, with the country divided into North Yemen and South Yemen, the U.S. did not receive much, if any, authentic Mocha coffee. Substitutions, some from Ethiopia, were used to simulate real Yemen Mocha, and carried names like Moka or Mocca. In addition, Mocha coffee has been characterized as having "chocolate-tasting undertones," however coffee experts have nixed that reference.

When Yemen Mocha was blended with coffee from Java, the first and most famous coffee blend, "Mocha-Java" was born. Still known for its bold aroma and full-bodied taste, this classic blend is still an international favorite. Over the years, when supplies of authentic Mocha and Java beans were limited due to political and economic distractions, other coffees were substituted, and consumers bought them under names like Mocca-Java, thinking they were purchasing the authentic Mocha-Java blend.

Although there is an old law that prohibits substitutions without appropriate labels, the rules don't apply to "outlaws." By adding the word "style" to a coffee's name, such as Mocha-Java Style, suppliers have been able to dupe both retailers and consumers, resulting in sales of disingenuous products.

Today, authenticity has become a priority, and transparency from farm to cup a necessity for selling high quality coffees that command a commensurate price. In Yemen, not only has there been a misrepresentation in semantics, but also the discombobulation found in the supply chain. From the farm, coffee cherries have been sold several times to collectors without regard to any standards. Often, unscrupulous handlers mix green coffees from other countries with the Yemeni coffee, ending with a mishmash of anything but Yemen Mocha.

Fortunately, there is one company, Al-Ezzi Industries, that has provided a new transparency program, documenting authenticity from farm to package. With the launch of the Haraaz brand of coffee, Shabbir A. Ezzi, managing director of Al-Ezzi Industries, is introducing authentic Mocha coffee grown in the Haraz Mountains of northwestern Yemen. The coffee is even being exported from the old port of Al-Makha (Hodeidah).

"With the launch of Haraaz Coffee, we are introducing the original taste of Yemen Mocha, the first cultivated coffee in the world. With the lack of control or standards applied to producing and exporting Yemen Mocha, the coffee industry lost the ability to discern the authenticity found in these remarkable beans," said Ezzi.

Importers concur with Shabbir and are supportive of the Haraaz project. Quality and flavor are the benchmarks for purchase. "Our aim is in finding the true, original Yemeni flavors and maintain them all the way up the supply chain to the roasters," said Menno Simons, owner of Trabocca importers in The Netherlands.

Maybe not all is lost in the absence of transparency. We have experienced a positive evolution in both, "Mocha" and "Java." Both words have become colloquialisms or nicknames for coffee. Ordering a cup of "Java" is the same as ordering a cup of coffee. Mocha also has new definitions. As a color, Mocha looks like a cup of coffee with a little added cream. And, as a flavor, Mocha is the marriage of coffee and chocolate together. One of the most popular specialty coffee drinks served in cafes is called Mocha, made with espresso, chocolate syrup and steamed milk. Mocha flavoring is very tricky because both coffee and chocolate contain similar chemistry. Being able to achieve the right balance of taste requires expertise as one can easily overpower the other.

Future developments inspired by a vernacular derivative of Mocha remain a mystery; its consistent contribution to world history is a testament to the historical roots of Yemeni coffee and its significance to international culture and tradition.

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For more information:

Suzanne Brown

Brown Marketing Communications LLC

suzanne@browncommunications.us

Ph. 1-770-377-3488

Sales inquiries:

Shabbir A. Ezzi

Managing Director

Al-Ezzi Industries

Sana'a, Yemen

s.ezzi@al-ezzi.com

Ph. +967-1-526-265