

A Memoir of Kassala, Sudan <Part 6>

Life with delicious coffee

The town of Kassala in eastern Sudan is “painted” with coffee. It is close to the origin of coffee, Ethiopia, and people enjoy drinking coffee even more in Kassala than they do in Khartoum. All over the town one can see people pouring coffee while burning incense. Simple cafes are everywhere in town and laughter echoes from here and there.



Fired clay pot – Jabana



Having a cup at a tree café

The original traditional coffee making equipment is a bottle gourd-shaped clay container called Jabana. People use their favorite Jabana set to offer coffee to their guests. It starts slowly with firing charcoals using a hand-held fan. The strong coffee, derived from the deeply roasted coffee beans comes with plenty of ginger. Depending on peoples’ tastes, spices such as black pepper, cloves, cardamom, and cinnamon are added. A lot of sugar is added as if trying to neutralize the spiciness. At first, one gets bewildered by the spicy ingredients such as the ginger. However once one becomes used to drinking the brew, without these extra ingredients, one feels something is missing.



Coffee making ceremony to offer hospitality



Blending spices according to taste

Coffee trees are not grown in Kassala. Fresh coffee beans are imported from Ethiopia and South Sudan. When dropping by at one of the cafés under a tree before going to work, colleagues start gathering and early morning information exchanges start. After taking breakfast at the canteen, there is also another relaxing

cup. After field work in the heat of the day, when dropping by in a village for a rest, villagers’ coffee is served and tiny coffee cups are passed around.



Making coffee in the open field



Deep roasted coffee



Jabanas at a tourist spot



Burning frankincense

Colorful cafes line up at the foot of rocky mountains where tourists visit. When water flows in Gash River, seasonal café terraces emerge offering people cooling sanctuaries. During the evening hours when day time temperatures are softening, I would invite myself to some coffee brewed by the Hadendoa guard. As usual, he would use fibers from Doum palm fronds as a filter, stuffing them in the spout of his Jabana, conducting silent rather ceremonial maneuvers with his wrinkly hands. Calm moments pass by while he pours 2nd and 3rd helpings of coffee. These are gentle times in a day full of busy working hours.



Samurai coffee



By a Gash (ephemeral river)

I like drinking coffee in an air-conditioned café in Japan with internet facilities with a book in one hand. However, I feel blissfully happy when I spend time slowly chatting besides a Jabana. If I have an opportunity to visit Kassala again I will, above all, definitely go on a serious “café crawl.”