

«Sweet as Love»: Brazilian Coffee in Iceland, 1900–1940

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Evgeni S. Pankov, junior research fellow at the Institute for International Studies, Ph.D. Fellow at MGIMO University
119454, Russia, Moscow, Prospect Vernadskogo, 76
ORCID: 0009-0003-6889-9083 E-mail: panckovv.eug@gmail.com



Abstract. The article focuses on the history of Brazilian–Icelandic coffee trade in the first half of the 20th century by putting the issue into a broader context of globalization and transatlantic trade. Based on official trade reports and newspapers of the time, it explores not only the economic dimension of the issue, but also its cultural aspects to answer the following question: what was the role of Brazil — the leading coffee producer and supplier in 1900–1940 — in the formation of a unique Icelandic coffee culture? To begin with, the article finds the reciprocal influence of trade and culture, as coffee brought new forms of social interaction and new social conflicts to Iceland, whose inhabitants witnessed new phenomena in their daily lives. Besides, it reveals new links in the transatlantic trade system, as Brazil and Iceland, both previously having been on the margins of the postcolonial trade system, gradually es-

tablished direct trade ties which, in turn, led to more mutually beneficial sales conditions. Moreover, the increasing bilateral trade caused a spillover of economic cooperation into culture, as new *images* — both literally and figuratively — of Brazil spread among Icelandic intellectuals and photo enthusiasts. The article also presents new datasets on annual imports of unroasted coffee into Iceland in 1912–1945, on average annual prices of coffee imports into Iceland in 1914–1945, and on shares of leading coffee importers in the Icelandic market — all these can be used for further research into the issue of transatlantic coffee trade.

Key words: coffee, Iceland, Brazil, the history of everyday life, transatlantic trade, postcolonial studies, Thor Thors

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«Сладкий, как любовь»: бразильский кофе в Исландии, 1900–1940

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Евгений Сергеевич Панков, младший научный сотрудник Института международных исследований, аспирант, МГИМО МИД России.
119454, Москва, проспект Вернадского, 76
ORCID: 0009-0003-6889-9083 E-mail: panckov.eug@gmail.com

Аннотация. В статье рассматривается история бразильско-исландской торговли кофе в первой половине XX в. При этом данная проблема помещена в широкий контекст трансатлантической торговли и «первой волны» глобализации. На основе официальных торговых отчётов и публикаций в периодических изданиях рассматриваются не только экономическое измерение проблемы, но и её культурные аспекты с целью ответить на вопрос о том, какова была роль Бразилии (ведущего производителя и поставщика кофе в 1900–1940 гг.) в формировании уникальной кофейной культуры Исландии. Прежде всего, прослеживается *взаимовлияние* торговли и культуры, поскольку кофе принёс в Исландию новые формы социального взаимодействия и новые социальные конфликты, а жители страны стали сталкиваться с принципиально новыми явлениями в своей повседневной жизни. Помимо этого, возникли новые звенья в системе трансатлантической торговли первой половины XX в., поскольку Бразилия и Исландия — государства, ранее находившиеся на периферии постколониальной торговой системы, постепенно установили прямые торговые связи, что, в свою очередь, привело к формированию более взаимовыгодных условий продажи кофе. Кроме того, рост объёмов неопосредованной торговли привёл к «переливу» экономического сотрудничества в сферу культуры, так как образы Бразилии стали активнее распространяться среди исландских интеллектуалов и любителей фотографии. В работе также представлены три новых массива статистических данных (см. приложения): 1) о ежегодном объёме импорта необжаренного кофе в Исландию в 1912–1945 гг.; 2) о среднегодовых закупочных ценах импортируемого в Исландию кофе в 1914–1945 гг.; 3) о страновой структуре импорта кофе на исландский рынок. Они, в свою очередь, могут быть использованы для дальнейших исследований трансатлантической торговли кофе.

Ключевые слова: кофе, Исландия, Бразилия, история повседневности, трансатлантическая торговля, постколониальные исследования, Тор Торс

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Конфликт интересов: Автор заявляет об отсутствии потенциального конфликта интересов.

«Dulce como el amor»: café brasileño en Islandia, 1900–1940

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Evgeni S. Pankov, investigador junior del Instituto de Investigaciones Internacionales, doctorando en la Universidad MGIMO.

119454, Rusia, Moscú, Avenida Vernadskogo, 76

ORCID: 0009-0003-6889-9083

E-mail: panckovv.eug@gmail.com

Resumen. El artículo explora la historia del comercio de café entre Brasil e Islandia en la primera mitad del siglo XX, situando la cuestión en un contexto más amplio de globalización y comercio transatlántico. Basándose en informes comerciales oficiales y en periódicos de la época, se centra no solo en la dimensión económica del tema, sino también en sus aspectos culturales para responder a la siguiente pregunta: ¿cuál fue el papel de Brasil —el principal productor y proveedor de café en 1900–1940— en la formación de una cultura cafetera única en Islandia? En primer lugar, había influencia recíproca entre el comercio y la cultura, ya que el café trajo nuevas formas de interacción social y nuevos conflictos sociales a Islandia, cuyos habitantes vieron nuevos fenómenos en su vida cotidiana. Además, surgieron nuevos vínculos en el sistema comercial transatlántico, ya que Brasil e Islandia, que antes se hallaban al margen del sistema comercial poscolonial, establecieron gradualmente lazos comerciales directos que, a su vez, propiciaron condiciones de venta más beneficiosas para ambas partes. Además, el incremento del comercio hizo que la cooperación económica impactara en la cultura, ya que nuevas imágenes de Brasil —tanto literal como figurativamente— se difundieron entre los intelectuales islandeses y los aficionados a la fotografía. El artículo presenta también nuevos conjuntos de datos sobre importaciones anuales de café verde en Islandia en 1912–1945, sobre los precios medios anuales de las importaciones de café en Islandia en 1914–1945 y sobre las cuotas de los principales importadores de café en el mercado islandés. Todos estos datos pueden utilizarse para seguir investigando la cuestión del comercio transatlántico del café.

Palabras clave: café, Islandia, Brasil, historia de la vida cotidiana, comercio transatlántico, estudios postcoloniales, Thor Thors

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«Good coffee, Brazilians say, must be black as night, hot as hell, and sweet as love», reads the *Tækifærissréttir*, a 1936 Icelandic brochure on food and cookery¹. This meeting of Icelandic and Brazilian cultures, divided by the Atlantic, seems extraordinary: every two straight lines meet only once and it was coffee that put the two remote societies together in the early 20th century. Thus, the quotation indicates the influence of Brazilian culture on the «silent majority» of Icelanders through their daily lives.

Now, the Nordic countries are known for their unique coffee cultures, as they are traditionally among the biggest per capita coffee consumers in the world². Being no exception, Iceland annually consumes about 7 kg of the product per capita³. Therefore, Brazil, the leading coffee producer, matters in terms of studying how Iceland's coffee culture was shaped and, vice versa, how Latin American countries spread their cultural influence over the Atlantic in the early 20th century.

The transatlantic coffee trade in the early 20th century has been studied from several perspectives. In their chronologically broader study of international coffee markets, Daviron and Ponte scrutinize the role of leading suppliers in the formation of the global trading regime [Daviron, Ponte, 2005: 83–95]. Curtin discusses ethical aspects of coffee production in Latin America in the colonial and postcolonial context [Curtin, 1998: 173–207]. Pereira de Melo analyzes the influence of the *fluminense* (Rio de Janeiro state) coffee production and trade on the general economic development of Rio de Janeiro in 1888–1920 [Pereira de Melo, 2003].

The phenomenon of Iceland's coffee culture has already been a matter of research, too. Based on the food supply data from 1770 to 1940, Guðmundur Jonsson estimated total food consumption in Iceland and showed how important coffee was in a «monotonous diet» of ordinary Icelanders [Jonsson, 1998: 40]. Halldor Bjarnason scrutinized the key trends of coffee trade in the North European market in 1870–1914 [Bjarnason, 2001]. Sigurður Högni Sigurðsson scrupulously analyzed how coffee was perceived among other «luxury goods» in the cultural context of the 18–19th centuries and demonstrated that the progressive coffee culture clashed with centuries-old traditions and encountered opposition from conservative social groups [Sigurðsson, 2010]. Jón Bjarni Kristinsson researched profiles and reputations of leading Icelandic coffee brands and determined what their perception depends on [Kristinsson, 2017].

¹ *Tækifærissréttir*, 01.01.1936. Bls. 3.

² Per-capita volume sales in the coffee market worldwide, by country in 2023 (in kilograms). Statista, 26.09.2024. URL: <https://www.statista.com/forecasts/758734/per-capita-volume-sales-in-the-coffee-market-worldwide-by-country> (accessed: 31.12.2024).

³ *Dánarbu sýna útbreiðslu kaffimenningar á Íslandi*. Háskoli Íslands. URL: https://www.hi.is/visindin/danarbu_syna_utbreidslu_kaffimenningar_a_islandi (accessed: 31.12.2024).

However, the international — mostly transatlantic — dimension of how Iceland's coffee culture was shaped is still scientifically underrepresented, although it may help reexamine several *loci communes* in how Europe and Latin America interacted with each other, commercially and culturally, in the first half of the 20th century, as coffee — the main Brazilian *Kulturträger* at that time — significantly shaped the image of this remote country in Europe. Moreover, being a symbol of many Ibero-American cultures [Astakhova, 2023: 136, 149], coffee was an everyday driving force behind globalization in the cultural sphere. So, being put into the context of *Globalization Studies*, «the coffee issue» may also shed light on how the Atlantic was «shrinking» under the influence of new technologies that made Baldwin and Martin's «first wave of globalisation»⁴ possible [Baldwin, Martin, 1999: 1–2].

Accordingly, this article aims to put imports of Brazilian coffee into a broader international context and show how this context influenced the Atlantic trade flows, with special attention paid to Brazilian coffee as an element of Iceland's *Alltagsgeschichte* — «history of the everyday» — in 1914–1940. The study is based on regular official foreign trade reports (*Hagskýrslur um utanríkisverslun*), travel reports of Icelandic trade emissaries to South America, newspapers published in the first half of the 20th century⁵, and biographical reference books. The paper also presents three novel datasets on (1) annual imports of unroasted coffee into Iceland in 1912–1945, (2) average annual prices of coffee⁶ imports into Iceland in 1914–1945, and (3) shares of leading coffee importers in the Icelandic market (see Appendices 1–3). The article consists of two parts: the first one focuses on Brazilian coffee trade flows to Iceland and the second part scrutinizes some social implications of coffee culture.

Imports of Coffee into Iceland

Iceland was on the margins of the international coffee trade in the early 20th century — contrary to what could apparently look like a favourable position in the Atlantic. Coffee was brought to Iceland through mainland Europe and the United Kingdom, which is evidenced by statistical reports. Denmark⁷, Germany and the United Kingdom were the leading suppliers of coffee into Iceland in 1913 (see Table 1). Icelandic merchants purchased coffee in the harbours of Copenhagen, Hamburg and Liverpool and transported it westwards, as the island itself was geographically far from the coffee-producing regions of Brazil, Java, and the Red Sea. The costs of buying coffee directly from Brazil were too high, while Iceland, a remote and sparsely populated island, was not lucrative for Latin American producers.

⁴ Roughly 1870–1914. — [AN].

⁵ All newspapers and trade reports mentioned hereinafter can be found on www.timarit.is. — [AN].

⁶ Hereinafter, the term *coffee* means *unroasted coffee* unless otherwise stated. — [AN].

⁷ In 1918, Iceland gained independence from Denmark but remained in personal union with the Danish monarch. — [AN].

Table 1: Denmark, UK, Germany — Share in Unroasted Coffee Imports into Iceland (per cent), 1912–1913

Year	Denmark	UK	Germany
1912	58.6	12.4	28.4
1913	59	10.2	30.3

Source: compiled by the author according to *Hagskýrslur um utanríkisverslun. Verslunarskýrslur árið 1912 (1914)*. Reykjavík: Prentsmiðjan Gutenberg, 1914. Bls. 4–5 (*Töflur*); *Hagskýrslur um utanríkisverslun. Verslunarskýrslur árið 1913 (1915)*. Reykjavík: Prentsmiðjan Gutenberg, 1915. Bls. 4–5 (*Töflur*). For the whole database on coffee imports into Iceland see Appendix 1.

During the period known as the «First Republic» (1889–1930), Brazil was the undisputed leader of the global coffee market. In this regard, Daviron and Ponte even speak of the Brazilian monopoly period stretching from 1906 to 1937 [Daviron, Ponte, 2005: 84]. In 1906, the country produced almost five times as much coffee as the rest of the world — about 82 per cent of global production [Topik, 1998: 56]. Culturally, the saying «God is Brazilian» symbolized the favourable natural conditions for the cultivation of coffee, which «fell from heaven» [Clarence-Smith, Topik, 2003: 8]. The coffee economy brought substantial benefits to Brazil and coffee was its paramount export commodity (Table 2).

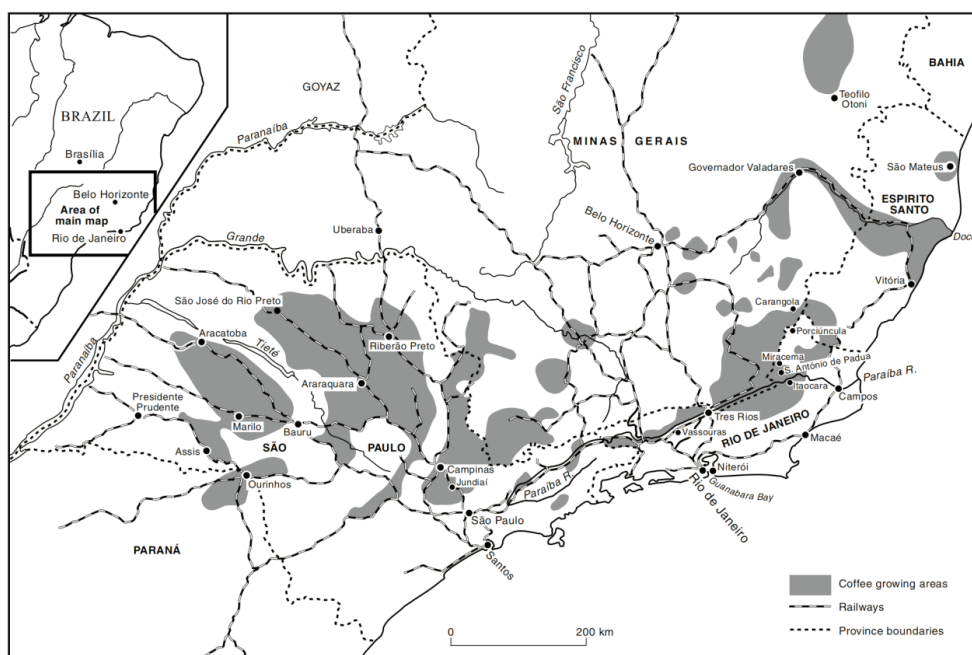
Table 2: Commodity export shares in Brazil (% of total) – 1870–1919

Year	Coffee	Sugar	Cotton	Rubber	Total
1870–79	56.3	11.8	9.7	5.5	83.3
1880–89	60.5	10.6	4.4	7.6	83.1
1890–99	65.4	6.1	2.5	14.2	88.2
1900–09	53.1	1.5	2.3	25.6	82.6
1910–19	52.1	2.4	1.7	16.4	72.6

Source: Kisling W. (2020) A microanalysis of trade finance: German bank entry and coffee exports in Brazil, 1880–1913. *European Review of Economic History*, vol. 24, no. 2. [Kisling, 2020: 361].

Internationally, coffee sorts were named not after the region of production but rather after the name of the exporting port. Rio de Janeiro and Santos were the main hubs for exporting Brazilian coffee to the Old World (see Pic. 1), so the Icelanders were familiar with «Rio-Coffee» (*Río-kaffi*) and «Santos-Coffee» (*Santos-Kaffi*) in the 1910s. «Brasil-kaffe» and «Rio-kaffe» (*kaffe* is the Danish spelling of the word) appear in Icelandic newspapers at the latest in 1858⁸.

⁸ Þjóðólfur, 01.05.1858. Bls. 84; Þjóðólfur, 20.03.1862. Bls. 59.



Areas of coffee production in Brazil in the early 20th century⁹

According to the *Verslunartíðindi*, a monthly review of Iceland's trade, *Santos-Kaffi* made up about 69 per cent of coffee shipped from Brazil into Iceland in 1923–24, while 26 per cent of Brazilian coffee went through Rio¹⁰. Rio-Coffee adverts often appeared in Icelandic newspapers¹¹. Paradoxically, the vast majority of Brazilian coffee in Europe originated neither in Rio de Janeiro nor in Santos, but in the states of São Paulo and Minas Gerais, which by a wide margin exceeded the amount of coffee grown elsewhere in the country (see Table 3).

Table 3: Brazil — Principal Coffee Producing States in 1920

State	Production in million sacks ¹² (average 1917–20)
São Paulo	7,873
Minas Gerais	2,473
Rio de Janeiro	820
Espírito Santo	772
Bahia	148

Source: Pereira de Melo H. (2003) Coffee and Development of the Rio de Janeiro Economy, 1888–1920 in W.G. Clarence-Smith, S. Topik (eds.) *The Global Coffee Economy in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, 1500–1989*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press [Pereira de Melo, 2003: 366].

⁹ Source: Clarence-Smith W.G., Topik S. (2003) *The Global Coffee Economy in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, 1500–1989*, Cambridge University Press, p. IX. [Clarence-Smith, Topik, 2003: XII].

¹⁰ *Verslunartíðindi*, 01.11.1924. Bls. 130.

¹¹ *Verslunartíðindi*, 01.02.1918. Bls. 31.

¹² One sack weighed about 60 kg. — [AN].

Although Denmark, the metropolis of Iceland, remained neutral during World War I, the outbreak of hostilities disrupted the supply chains that passed through continental and British ports. As the unrestricted submarine warfare broke out in 1917 and German warships sank not only British but also Danish ships, coffee imports from Copenhagen, Liverpool, and Hamburg declined rapidly (see Table 4). However, the temporarily broken chains were replaced by imports from the United States: American merchants began to supply Brazilian coffee directly to Iceland in 1914, and almost monopolized the Icelandic market by the end of the war.

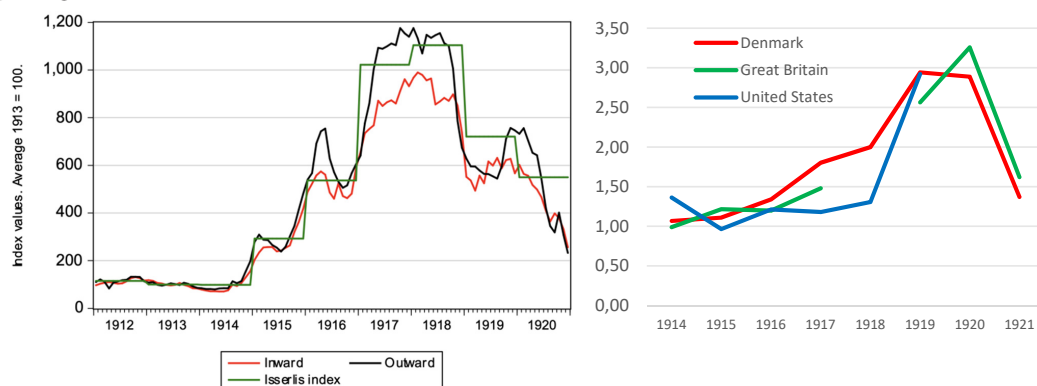
Table 4: Denmark, Great Britain, Germany, US — Share in Coffee Imports into Iceland (per cent), 1914–1918

Year	Denmark	USA	UK	Germany
1914	56.8	12.0	13.4	17.4
1915	56.8	29.1	9.0	0.1
1916	47.5	40.8	11.7	0
1917	4.1	95.0	0.5	0
1918	0.2	99.8	0	0

Source: compiled by the author according to *Hagskýrslur um utanríkisverslun. Reykjavík: Prentsmiðjan Gutenberg; several years*

As the commodity was shipped during the war, it became more expensive in Iceland. Among other factors, it was rising freight rates that pushed up the prices at which Icelandic merchants bought coffee from US and Danish counterparts (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Aggregate Nominal Freight Rate Indices, 1912–1920, and Annual Average Current Prices of Coffee Imports into Iceland by Country, 1914–1921, Icelandic kronas per kg.



Sources: Klovland J.T. (2017) *Navigating through torpedo attacks and enemy raiders: Merchant shipping and freight rates during World War I*. Norwegian School of Economics, Department of Economics. Discussion Paper No. 7/2017. [Klovland, 2017: 4]; *Hagskýrslur um utanríkisverslun. Reykjavík: Prentsmiðjan Gutenberg, several issues.*

The American company *Arbuckle*, a large exporter of Brazilian coffee to the global market, was among the leading suppliers of the commodity to Iceland. In 1915, a merchant from Akureyri, an Icelandic port town, advised the *Arbuckle* as a reliable company for those who were looking for new trade partners¹³.

Sporadic trade links between Iceland and Brazil were established during the temporary reorientation of trade flows from Europe to the Americas amid World War I. The first large shipment arrived in Iceland in 1915: 7,343 kg of coffee¹⁴ were shipped directly from Brazil¹⁵. Then, the average annual price of Brazilian coffee was equal to the average annual price of coffee of the same origin shipped from the United States and was significantly lower than the price of coffee from other countries (see Table 5).

Table 5: Annual Average Prices of Coffee Imports into Iceland by Country, 1914–1918, in Icelandic kronas per kg

Year	Average price	Denmark	UK	USA	Brazil	Norway	Germany
1914	1.09	1.07	0.99	1.36		1.29	1.07
1915	1.07	1.11	1.22	0.96	0.96	1.03	0.59 ¹⁶
1916	1.27	1.34	1.20	1.21		2.16	
1917	1.21	1.80	1.48	1.18			
1918	1.31	2.00		1.31			

Source: compiled by the author according to *Hagskýrslur um utanríkisverslun. Reykjavík: Prentsmiðjan Gutenberg*, several years. For the whole database on annual average prices of coffee imports into Iceland see Appendix 2.

After the end of World War I, the pre-war patterns of coffee supplies to Iceland were restored: Danish and British ports became the biggest transit points again. However, from 1923 onwards, Icelandic merchants began to reorient themselves towards direct trade with Brazilian counterparts, so Danish, British, American, and German intermediaries were almost completely abandoned by 1937 (see Figure 2). The advantageous geographic location provided Icelandic traders with a high degree of flexibility in changing import destinations.

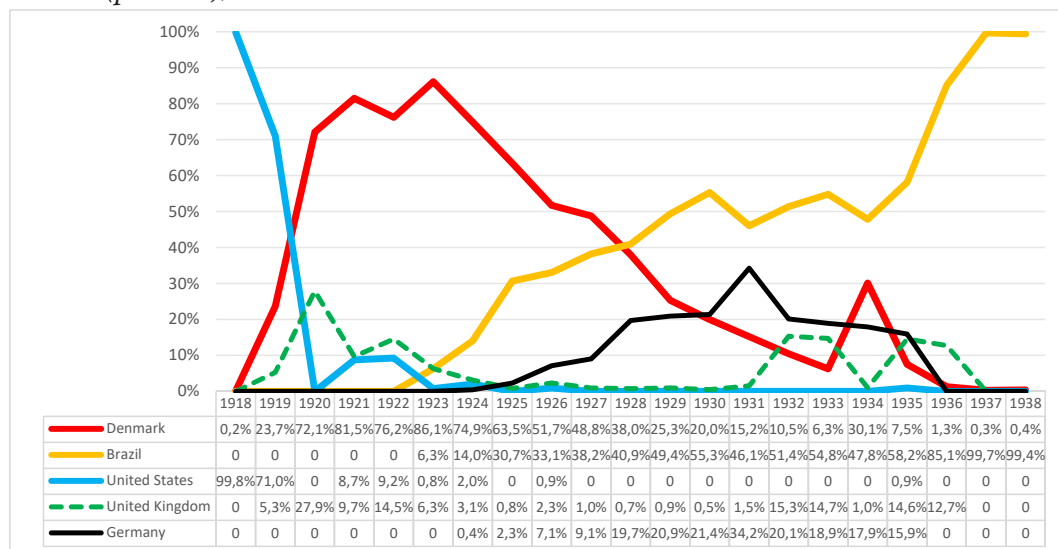
¹³ Íslendingur, 11.06.1915. Bls. 1.

¹⁴ Likely, about 120 bags by 60 kg that were in use at the time. — [AN].

¹⁵ Hagskýrslur um utanríkisverslun. Verslunarskýrslur árið 1915 (1917). Reykjavík: Prentsmiðjan Gutenberg, 1914. Bls. 4–5 (Töflur).

¹⁶ In 1915, several bags of coffee (543 kg in total) were bought in Germany at an extremely low cost. The circumstances of this deal are unknown. — [AN].

Figure 2: Denmark, Brazil, the UK, Germany, the US — Share in Coffee Imports into Iceland (per cent), 1918–1938



Source: compiled by the author according to *Hagskýrslur um utanríkisverslun*. Reykjavík: Prentsmiðjan Gutenberg, several years.

In 1922, Pjetur A. Ólafsson (1870–1949) visited Brazil during his tour of Latin America where he represented the Fishing Company of Iceland (*Fiskefélag Íslands*) to look for new markets for Icelandic fish. Icelandic entrepreneurs usually travelled to Brazil via Great Britain, where they sailed from Iceland on the *Gullfoss*, a ship built in 1915¹⁷. Pjetur A. Ólafsson visited Rio de Janeiro when the World Expo — The Independence Centenary International Exposition — was held there. Before arriving in Rio, he sent letters in Portuguese to the city's twenty-two largest fish buying companies. After dealing with local traders, the envoy reported to the Icelandic government that merchants in Rio had a poor understanding of fish and its merits¹⁸. However, Rio de Janeiro and Santos made a great impression on him: «There are many cities, like Rio de Janeiro and Santos, that were absolute hotbeds of dangerous diseases (*pestarbæli*) 15–20 years ago, but now are among the cleanest and healthiest places in the world»¹⁹.

¹⁷ Thors Th. Á leið til Brasilíu. Samtíðin, 1938. 6. Hefti. Bls. 11.

¹⁸ Skýrsla til ríkisstjórnarinnar frá Pjetri A. Ólafssyni. Ægir, 01.03.1923. Bls. 40–47.

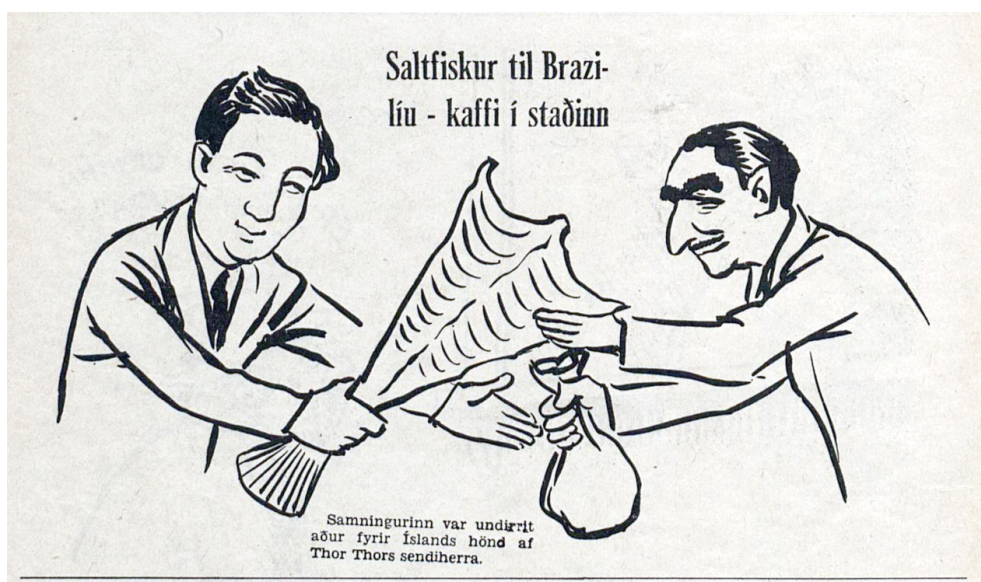
¹⁹ Verslunartíðindi, 01.06.1923. Bls. 68.

Later, from 1923 to 1933, Pjetur A. Ólafsson was the consul²¹ of Brazil in Iceland. He was known as one of the first photo enthusiasts, so his business trips contributed to the cultural dialogue between Brazil and Iceland. During one of his trips to Brazil, Pjetur A. Ólafsson made photographs and they were shown during a meeting of the Reykjavik Trade Society²². Thus, the intensification of bilateral trade caused a spillover of cooperation into the cultural sphere and cultivated a favourable image of Brazil in Iceland.



Pjetur A. Ólafsson²⁰

Trade links between Brazil and Iceland were stimulated by the general decline in ocean freight rates and port charges — an important dimension of «the first wave of globalisation» (roughly 1870–1914) [Baldwin, Martin, 1999: 1, 13]. The increase in coffee crops in Brazil in 1890–1940 also favoured the establishment of new trade links between the two countries [Topik, 2003: 36]. So, the interaction between the two countries was primarily based on «fish-for-coffee» diplomacy.



An Icelandic Cartoon: «Fish-for-Coffee» Diplomacy of Brazil and Iceland

²⁰ Source: Morgunblaðið, 02.06.1949. Bls. 11.

²¹ At that time, consuls were traditionally chosen from the local population to advocate the commercial and financial interests and facilitate any kind of bilateral cooperation. — [AN].

²² Morgunblaðið, 13.04.1928. Bls. 1.

In 1933, Garðar Gíslason became Brazil's consul in Iceland [Kristjánsson, Guðnason, 1976: 136–137]. Two years later, Thor Thors (1903–1965), Iceland's future first ambassador to the United Nations, an influential businessman and member of parliament from the Independence Party in the 1930s, stayed in Brazil for three weeks.

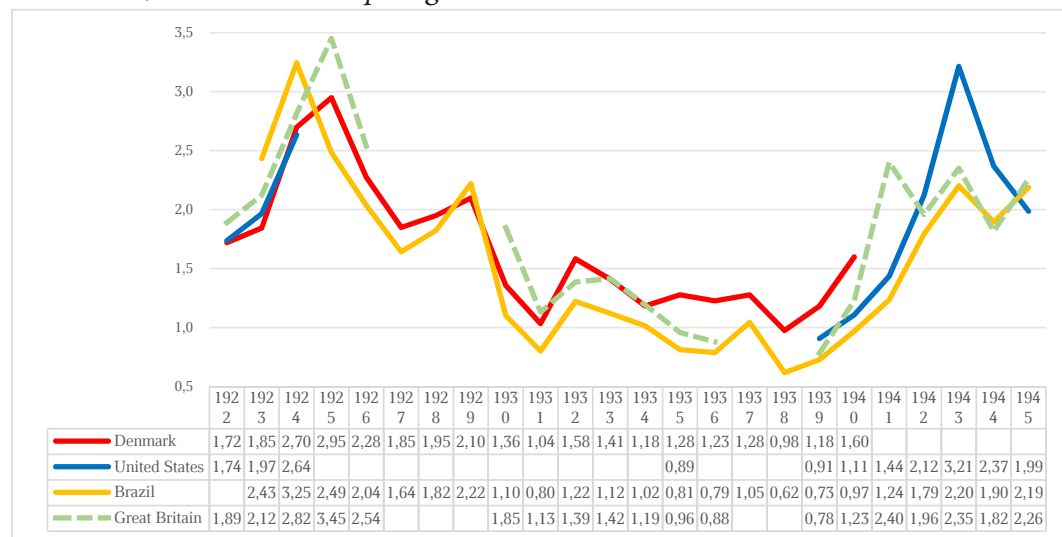
After visiting Santos and talking to local entrepreneurs, Thor Thors wrote an article for the *Morgunblaðið* which stated that «coffee is as important to Brazil as salted fish is to us Icelanders»²³. From this trip he particularly remembered the vast coffee fields and the beauty of Brazilian nature²⁴.

Apart from opening up new markets, the switch to direct trade with Brazil was also favourable for Icelanders because the average price of coffee bought directly from Brazil was lower than that from Denmark and the USA (see Figure 2).



Thor Thors

Figure 2: Annual Average Current Prices of Coffee Imports into Iceland by Country, 1922–1945, Icelandic kronas per kg



Source: compiled by the author according to *Hagskýrslur um utanríkisverslun*. Reykjavík: Prentsmiðjan Gutenberg, several issues

²³ Morgunblaðið, 17.11.1935. Bls. 6–7.

²⁴ Ibidem.

The difference in wholesale prices also led to corresponding trends in retail sales. As the press adverts show, Icelandic shops sold different sorts of coffee at different prices, with Brazilian coffee being the cheapest (see Table 6).

Table 6: *Prices of several coffee sorts in Reykjavík — September 1929 (Silli og Valdi shop) and June 1933 (Kaffilindin), Icelandic kronas*²⁵

September 1929		June 1933	
Sort	Price	Sort	Price
Pure Java, 250 g	1.80	Mocca, 500 g	3.05
Blended Java, 250 g	1.65	Java, 500 g	2.75
Campina, 250 g	1.45	Brazil, 500 g	2.35
Brazil, 250 g	1.05		

Thus, coffee facilitated the establishment of new links between the two societies and the «spillover» of cooperation into other spheres. Through this commodity, the two societies got to know each other and the favorable image of Brazil spread in the culture of the European country. At the same time, through globalization, Brazil was able to establish direct trade relations with Iceland and open up new markets. The «shrinking» Atlantic facilitated direct links between the two peripheral spaces of the global colonial system. Consequently, coffee culture even became a driving force behind decolonization, as it indirectly strengthened foreign trade and, as a consequence, political agency of Brazil and Iceland.

Coffee as a Social Phenomenon

However, the «silent majority» of Icelanders initially perceived coffee as a luxury good. Accordingly, official statistical reports put coffee into the group of luxury commodities until the 1920s²⁶. Besides, court rulings documented several cases of coffee thefts in the late 19th century²⁷.

Discussions about the social meaning of coffee drinking intensified in the early 20th century. In a 1900 article for the *Plógur*, a priest emotionally stated that coffee was detrimental to the nervous system, insistently posited that it was prohibitively expensive, and rhetorically asked: «Isn't it healthier for a child to drink a glass of milk instead of a cup of coffee?»²⁸ Guðrún Lárusdóttir also appealed to the health of children in her *Mother and Child* (1932): «Children are often made to drink coffee instead of milk for breakfast, but it would be better if they had milk instead. Coffee is nutrient-free while milk has all the substances that every body needs»²⁹.

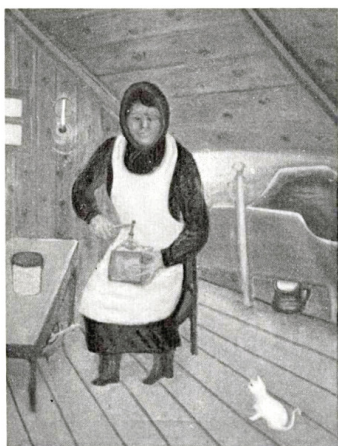
²⁵ Vísir, 12.09.1929. Bls. 1; Alþýðublaðið, 07.06.1933. Bls. 1.

²⁶ Landshagsskýrslur fyrir Ísland. Verslunarskýrslur 1907. Reykjavík: Prentsmiðjan Gutenberg, 1914. Bls. 10 (X); Vaka, 01.07.1927 (3. Tölublað). Bls. 257.

²⁷ Landsyfirjettardómar og hæstarjettardómar í íslenskum málum 2.bindi (1881–1885). Reykjavík: Kristján Ó. Þorgrímsson, Sigmundur Guðmunðsson, 1886. Bls. 489; Landsyfirjettardómar og hæstarjettardómar í íslenskum málum 3.bindi (1886–1889). Reykjavík: Ísafoldarprentsmiðja, 1890. Bls. 368.

²⁸ Plógur, 21.02.1900 (2. tölublað). Bls. 11–12.

²⁹ Lárusdóttir G. Móðir og barn. Reykjavík: Kristilegt Bókmenntafélag, 1932. Bls. 74.



An Icelandic peasant grinding coffee³²

On the other hand, Bríet Bjarnhéðinsdóttir, an influential feminist, made a statement in favour of coffee in 1894: «I know nothing which makes people more willing and happy than good coffee»³⁰. At the same time, coffee is increasingly perceived as an element of hospitality, while «coffee evenings» became a means of socialisation for the students who wanted to establish new social links [Jónson et al., 1981: 295]. As a result, coffee became an attribute of urban life and spread to rural areas, too. Stopping for a cup of coffee became normal for those travelling from one Icelandic town to another³¹. In poor peasant families, coffee was usually served once a week, on Sunday morning, and the burden of grinding was actively shared by children [Sigurðardóttir, 2007: 10–17].

There was also a gender dimension to the process. After coffee beans were shipped, it was usually women who ground and brewed them — a daily routine of many Icelandic women in the early 20th century.

Women from wealthy backgrounds could afford to visit specialized establishments where large quantities of coffee were ground, roasted and sold [Alfredsson, 2016]. Ground, roasted and packaged coffee gradually became more and more popular.

In 1930, sellers already confidently referred to the imported product as «the national drink of the Icelanders»³⁴. Moreover, the *Stormur* somewhat presumptuously reported: «It is now known that Icelanders drink more coffee than many other nations. Some people, both men and



An advertisement for roasted and ground coffee calling it «Iceland's national drink»³³

³⁰ Bjarnhéðinsdóttir B. Sveitalífið og Reykjavíkrlífið. Reykjavík: Félagsprentsmiðjuna, 1894. Bls. 15.

³¹ Ísafold, 16.03.1910. Bls. 1.

³² Source: Sigurðardóttir A. (1985) *Vinna kvenna á Íslandi í 1100 ár*. [Women's work in Iceland for 1100 years], Reykjavík, Kvennasögusafn Íslands [Sigurðardóttir, 1985: 100].

³³ Fálkinn, 16.06.1944. Bls. 16.

³⁴ Norðlingur, 29.01.1930. Bls. 1.

women, drink 10–20 cups a day»³⁵. Whether or not these accounts are true, one thing is certain: coffee became an integral part of Icelanders' everyday life by the 1930s.

Moreover, newspaper adverts for six- and twelve-person coffee sets can be seen: in January 1934 they could be bought for 12–18 kronas at the *Edinborg shop*³⁶. Some shops offered to buy them as a Christmas gift for friends and acquaintances³⁷.

Accordingly, Iceland's coffee culture was a challenge for some foreign visitors. As Nikolai Kolli (1894–1966), the famous Soviet architect, visited the country in 1958, he was surprised by the frequency of coffee breaks during his meetings with local intellectuals. In his diary, the architect wrote of the «inevitable coffee» noting that it could be served even two times during the same meal³⁸.

Coffee not only brought enjoyment and relaxation, energising for the work that followed, but also created new problems for housewives. In 1936, the *Alþýðublaðið* published an advertisement of a stain remover that is particularly good for coffee and chocolate stains³⁹. Accordingly, the *Spegillinn*, a satirical magazine, published a «letter to the editor» in 1970:

Dear Spegillinn! What can be done about coffee stains on carpets? We bought a white carpet for the living room and now we stopped drinking coffee there. First, when my husband coughed, with his mouth full of freshly brewed coffee, one square meter of the carpet was stained. We solved this problem by pulling the piano and placing it over the stain. The next coffee stain came when the coffee pot fell of the table. Then, we pulled the sofa to cover the second stain. The third stain came yesterday when we were drinking our evening coffee. A farmer was going to take a seat on the sofa but he forgot that it had been pulled and placed over the second stain. <...> The arrangement in our living room became so strange that we decided to seek your advice.

*Answer: This is an easy problem. Buy a small bag of limes and a jar of strawberry jam. Spread the jam over the stains and cover them all. Then sprinkle the lime over the stains. If there is still a color difference between the lime and the carpet, sprinkle this lime over the whole carpet. After that, the stains are not going to be visible anymore <...>*⁴⁰.

Thus, the intensification of trade between Iceland and Brazil in the first half of the 20th century led to a change in the attitude of ordinary Icelanders towards the everyday consumption of coffee. While in the 19th century coffee was mainly a

³⁵ Stormur, 01.02.1930. Bls. 2.

³⁶ Morgunblaðið, 31.01.1934. Bls. 1.

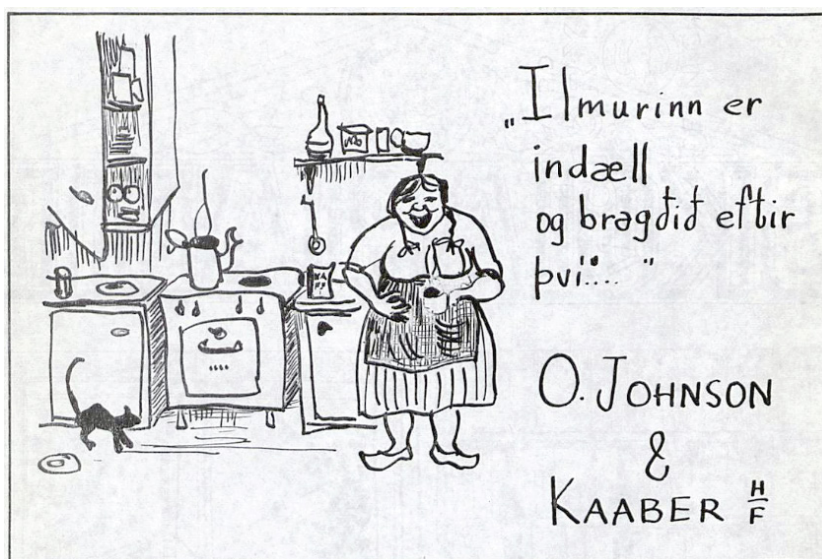
³⁷ Pósturinn, 01.12.1930. Bls. 18.

³⁸ RGALI (Russian State Archive of Literature and Art), f. 2773. op. 1. d. 73, l. 6, 9, 25, 62.

³⁹ Alþýðublaðið, 18.01.1936. Bls. 2.

⁴⁰ Spegillinn, 01.02.1970. Bls. 22. — Translated by the author of this article. — [EN].

luxury item, the consumption of which was often condemned and stigmatized, in the first half of the 20th century it became an important part not only of the usual diet of Icelanders, but also of their everyday life.



An advertisement for coffee in an Icelandic newspaper. 1961

* * *

Thus, this study indicates the emergence of a new link in the international transatlantic trade in the 1920s. After 1928, Brazil became the largest direct supplier of coffee to the Icelandic market. This fact largely shaped Iceland's coffee culture and had far-reaching consequences as it affected the daily lives of Iceland's inhabitants. Like any element of a foreign culture, coffee in Iceland was initially viewed with hostility. Conservative social institutions (the church) championed the resistance, while more liberal social groups (young people and feminists) had a positive attitude towards coffee. Gradually it was integrated into the national cultural canon.

In addition, it was globalization that dramatically facilitated direct trade between the two parts of the global periphery, which in turn strengthened their political and economic actorness. Moreover, the establishment of unmediated trade links contributed to lowering the price of coffee on the Icelandic domestic market by reducing transportation costs.

To a large extent, all this was possible due to the countries' sectoral specialization and mutual interest in their principal commodities: coffee and fish. In turn, economic cooperation flowed into the first cultural and societal ties, which provided for the familiarization of the two societies and the transfer of cultures across the Atlantic.

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Appendix 1. Annual imports of unroasted coffee into Iceland by Country, 1912–1945, kg

	Denmark	UK	US	Norway	Germany	Netherlands	Brazil	Other countries	Total
1912	170,100	35900	-	-	82400	-	-	100	290100
1913	202,100	34900	-	-	103800	-	-	600	342400
1914	186,253	44061	39205	1000	56851	292	-	-	327662
1915	222,142	35337	113798	12060	543	-	7343	-	391223
1916	202085	49936	173419	125	-	-	-	-	425565
1917	23898	2838	551245	-	-	-	-	-	579981
1918	300	-	152800	-	-	-	-	-	153100
1919	175538	39240	526630	-	-	-	-	-	741408
1920	143176	55331	-	-	-	-	-	-	198507
1921	270849	32219	29050	-	-	-	-	180	332298
1922	344457	65747	41704	138	-	-	-	-	452046
1923	321480	23598	2969	1704	-	-	23506	40	373297
1924	271970	11372	7403	12675	1478	7205	50997	-	363100
1925	247237	3127	-	3566	8968	7188	119506	-	389616
1926	225140	10230	3937	4969	31060	16164	143946	-	435446
1927	207560	4098	-	3405	38544	9233	162799	-	425639
1928	171601	3363	-	110	89144	2721	185070	-	452009
1929	102400	3792	-	-	84640	13318	199494	553	404197
1930	86427	2051	-	-	92432	12354	239380	129	432773
1931	75478	7685	-	600	169987	12653	228695	1450	496548
1932	45649	66796	-	2450	87789	5969	224135	3500	436288
1933	31162	73129	-	8363	93989	4451	272510	13631	497235
1934	129949	4450	-	9145	77401	1671	206504	7265	431585
1935	44134	85425	5500	-	93457	6459	341194	5773	586742
1936	6882	66360	-	-	-	3600	443026	720	520588
1937	1699	-	-	-	-	120	540353	-	542172
1938	2510	-	-	-	-	1440	639500	-	643389
1939	7352	900	9036	-	180	-	477945	-	495413
1940	60	51224	115010	-	-	-	316515	2940	482809
1941	-	400	2970	-	-	-	616864	-	623174
1942	-	35400	39701	-	-	-	178651	-	253752
1943	-	16640	182202	-	-	-	1174859	-	1373701

	Denmark	UK	US	Norway	Germany	Netherlands	Brazil	Other countries	Total
1944	-	43574	204513	-	-	-	617684	-	865771
1945	-	32269	207310	-	-	-	646931	-	886510*

*Apparently, the official foreign trade report erroneously sums up annual coffee imports for 1945: 866,510 is written instead of 886,510⁴¹.

Source: compiled by the author based on *Hagskýrslur um utanríkisverslun*. Reykjavík: Prentsmiðjan Gutenberg, several years.

Appendix 2. Average annual current prices of coffee imports into Iceland by country, 1914–1945, Icelandic krona per 1 kg

	Average	Denmark	UK	US	Brazil	Norway	Germany	Netherlands	Java	Uruguay
1914	1.09	1.07	0.99	1.36	-	1.29	1.07	1.03	-	-
1915	1.07	1.11	1.22	0.96	0.96	1.03	0.59	-	-	-
1916	1.27	1.34	1.2	1.21	-	2.16	-	-	-	-
1917	1.21	1.8	1.48	1.18	-	-	-	-	-	-
1918	1.31	2	-	1.31	-	-	-	-	-	-
1919	2.92	2.94	2.56	2.92	-	-	-	-	-	-
1920	2.99	2.89	3.26		-	-	-	-	-	-
1921	1.38	1.37	1.62	1.24	-	-	-	-	-	-
1922	1.75	1.72	1.89	1.74	-	?	-	-	-	-
1923	1.9	1.85	2.12	1.97	2.43	?	-	-	-	-
1924	2.8	2.7	2.82	2.64	3.25	3.2	?	2.85	-	-
1925	2.8	2.95	3.45	-	2.49	3.03	2.70	2.57	-	-
1926	2.18	2.28	2.54	?	2.04	2.24	2.05	2.15	-	-
1927	1.77	1.85	?	-	1.64	?	1.81	1.7	-	-
1928	1.86	1.95	?	-	1.82	?	?	?	-	-
1929	2.13	2.1	?	-	2.22	?	1.98	1.99	-	-
1930	1.18	1.36	1.85	-	1.1	-	1.2	1.20	-	-
1931	0.88	1.04	1.13	-	0.8	0.98	0.9	0.92	0.84	-
1932	1.34	1.58	1.39	-	1.22	1.39	1.45	1.43	1.24	-
1933	1.22	1.41	1.42	-	1.12	1.37	1.24	1.41	1.39	-
1934	1.11	1.18	1.19	-	1.02	1.47	1.2	1.31	1.21	-
1935	0.91	1.28	0.96	0.89	0.81	-	-	1.04	-	-
1936	0.81	1.23	0.88	-	0.79	-	-	0.78	-	-
1937	1.05	1.28	-	-	1.05	-	-	1.05	-	-
1938	0.62	0.98	-	-	0.62	-	-	0.68	-	-
1939	0.74	1.18	0.78	0.91	0.73	-	0.72	-	-	-
1940	1.03	1.6	1.23	1.11	0.97	-	-	-	-	-
1941	1.24	-	2.4	1.44	1.24	-	-	-	-	1.27
1942	1.87	-	1.96	2.12	1.79	-	-	-	-	-
1943	2.34	-	2.35	3.21	2.2	-	-	-	-	-
1944	2	-	1.82	2.37	1.9	-	-	-	-	-
1945	2.19	-	2.26	1.99	2.19	-	-	-	-	-

Source: compiled on the basis of *Hagskýrslur um utanríkisverslun*. Reykjavík: Prentsmiðjan Gutenberg, several years.

⁴¹ Hagskýrslur um utanríkisverslun. Reykjavík: Prentsmiðjan Gutenberg, 1946. Bls. 56.

Appendix 3. Annual shares of leading coffee importers in the Icelandic market, per cent

	Denmark	Brazil	United States	Great Britain	Germany
1912	58.6	0	0	12.4	28.4
1913	59	0	0	10.2	30.3
1914	56.8	0	12	13.4	17.4
1915	56.8	1.9	29.1	9	0.1
1916	47.5	0	40.8	11.7	0
1917	4.1	0	95	0.5	0
1918	0.2	0	99.8	0	0
1919	23.7	0	71	5.3	0
1920	72.1	0	0	27.9	0
1921	81.5	0	8.7	9.7	0
1922	76.2	0	9.2	14.5	0
1923	86.1	6.3	0.8	6.3	0
1924	74.9	14	2	3.1	0.4
1925	63.5	30.7	0	0.8	2.3
1926	51.7	33.1	0.9	2.3	7.1
1927	48.8	38.2	0	1	9.1
1928	38	40.9	0	0.7	19.7
1929	25.3	49.4	0	0.9	20.9
1930	20	55.3	0	0.5	21.4
1931	15.2	46.1	0	1.5	34.2
1932	10.5	51.4	0	15.3	20.1
1933	6.3	54.8	0	14.7	18.9
1934	30.1	47.8	0	1	17.9
1935	7.5	58.2	0.9	14.6	15.9
1936	1.3	85.1	0	12.7	0
1937	0.3	99.7	0	0	0
1938	0.4	99.4	0	0	0
1939	1.5	96.5	1.8	0.2	0
1940	0	65.6	23.8	10.6	0
1941	0	99	0.5	0.1	0
1942	0	70.4	15.6	14	0
1943	0	85.5	13.3	1.2	0
1944	0	71.3	23.6	5	0
1945	0	73	23.4	3.6	0

Source: compiled by the author based on *Hagskýrslur um utanríkisverslun*. Reykjavík: Prentsmiðjan Gutenberg, relevant years.

Иллюстрации к исследовательской статье Е.С. Панкова
«Сладкий, как любовь»: бразильский кофе в Исландии, 1900–1940»



Candido Portinari. Coffee. 1935



Candido Portinari. Coffee Harvesting. 1958