Title
The Pursuit of Pleasure Drugs and Stimulants in Iranian History (1500-1900).

Permalink
https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7914t49f

Journal
The Undergraduate Historical Journal at UC Merced, 2(1)

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Publication Date
2014

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Peer reviewed
Chapter five discusses the early spread of tobacco. While secular and religious authorities initially resisted tobacco, they both tempered their criticism when the Shah began to tax tobacco and the clerics began to use it.

Chapter six focuses on the coffee trade and the difficulty that foreign trading companies had in penetrating the Iranian market. It also emphasizes the role that coffeehouses played as social gathering places to discuss politics and culture.

Chapter seven details how the ruling Qajar dynasty attempted to portray an image of sobriety because their source of authority was the protection of the Islamic faith. It continues to show how despite this official attitude, drinking was still practiced and had in fact expanded to the urban poor and came to symbolize resistance to orthodoxy.

Chapter eight explores the role that tobacco and opium played in the Iranian economy, particularly in the conversion of farmland from cereals to cash crops, and in the role of a tobacco concession in the Tobacco Revolt. This chapter also contrasts the increasingly public nature of opium consumption versus the more private nature of tobacco consumption (235) revealing the difference that Iranians perceived between public and private space.

Chapter nine examines the worldwide economic and political changes that caused the Iranians to slowly shift from being a coffee drinking society to a tea drinking society. Matthee, puts special focus on the role that falling prices (due to increased production and competition between importers) played in turning tea from an elite drink to one that even the poor could enjoy.

Chapter ten chronicles the resurgence of coffee houses, which actually served tea at this period. It also details two periods in which the government decided to crack down on coffee houses as sources of...
immorality, as well as an entrance point for Western corruption.

Matthee’s work was thoroughly researched but it deserved better editing. The author also switches from western to Islamic dates without warning creating unnecessary confusion. Otherwise, this study was highly effective in using an analysis of intoxicants to reveal the deeper values social changes in early modern Iran.

Joshua Lourence

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1 The author, being also an editor, recused himself from the editing process regarding this article. It received no special treatment and was required to conform to all standard requirements.