

The Global Coffee Economy in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, 1500–1989. *Edited by William Gervase Clarence-Smith and Steven Topik*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003. viii + 486 pp. Tables, maps, figures, appendix, notes, index. Cloth, \$80.00. ISBN 0-521-81851-6.

Reviewed by Cyrus Veese

The fifteen chapters that make up this path-breaking collection originated in the first international conference on the history of coffee, held at St. Antony's College, Oxford, in 1998. As edited by William Gervase Clarence-Smith, a specialist in African history, and Steven Topik, a Latin Americanist, the volume brings together new research on the global coffee market and on coffee-producing societies in Latin America, Africa, and Asia over several centuries. Moving between overviews of coffee commodity chains and detailed regional studies, the volume explores how the expanding global coffee market reshaped societies that were drawn, or more often pushed, into it.

The collection is not a concise history of coffee. Rather than focus on major producers—only one essay is devoted to Brazil, which dominated world output after 1850—it also embraces regions where coffee once reigned but later faded to insignificance. Local studies examine Guatemala, Nicaragua, Mexico, Costa Rica, and Brazil in the New World and Cameroon, Tanganyika, Madagascar, Indonesia, and Ceylon in the Old. Looking at failure as well as success, peripheral zones as well as leading exporters, these essays contest earlier generalizations based on “the success of New World coffee producers in the late nineteenth century” (p. 100). That “received wisdom,” taken from developmental and dependency work on Latin America, assumed the defining importance of large landholdings, monoculture, and a male workforce. Nevertheless, this is not an assault on the *dependentistas* along the lines of Stephen Haber's edited volume, *How Latin America Fell Behind* (1997). *The Global Coffee Economy* is beyond rather than against both modernization and dependency. The editors are not hostile to quantitative methods—indeed, they urge historians to embrace statistics and include a fifty-page statistical appendix to whet their appetites. Few of the essays are

econometric, however. Most combine social and economic history and show greater concern for the lives of peasants than for incremental growth in gross domestic product.

The volume begins with five essays on the origins and expansion of the world coffee economy, tracing its evolution from an early Arab monopoly, through European colonial production in Asia and the Caribbean and the boom in Latin American exports after independence, to coffee's current status as a multinational commodity. These fascinating chapters examine why leading producers—Yemen, St. Domingue, Jamaica, and Java—have come and gone. Contributors discuss grading, pricing, credit, and labor, but this remains narrative, rather than quantitative, history.

The remaining essays examine the social and political impact of coffee production in specific countries and colonies after the mid-1800s, when drinking coffee became a morning ritual for Europeans and North Americans. One repeating theme is the diversity of labor systems used to raise coffee, from slavery, debt peonage, and *corvée* labor to peasant smallholding and immigrant wage work. Many contributors conclude that, contrary to the belief of colonial officials in Africa and Asia, “liberal” politicians in Latin America, and many historians since, large estates did not enjoy economies of scale. Kenneth Curtis writes that “African farmers were more efficient producers than European settlers” on large landholdings (p. 315), and essays on Latin America make the same point. Nevertheless, both colonial and “republican” officials used coercion to guarantee a labor force for large estates. As Jan Rus writes on Chiapas (Mexico), “Only the superabundance of subject, unpaid labor” made large estates profitable. Rus claims that “by any normal economic standard . . . most of the export crops . . . should never have been planted” (p. 268). The volume makes clear that official coercion prevailed over market forces in many places and for many years. Forced labor continued on French coffee estates in colonial Madagascar and Côte d’Ivoire into the 1940s, and in Portuguese Angola into the 1960s.

Although the volume documents the use of coerced labor on large estates, one central theme is, in fact, the resilience of small producers, “even in the cases long thought paradigmatic of estate-based coffee development,” as Lowell W. Gudmundson argues for Central America. Here, the admirable heterodoxy of the collection points to a dilemma, most evident in essays by Julie Charlip and Elizabeth Dore on nearly contiguous regions

of Nicaragua. Dore describes how the ideology of patriarchy shared by peasants and large landowners “gave men the authority to sign up wives and children for debt peonage and appropriate their wages,” leading to a lifetime of unbreakable servitude on coffee estates (p. 233). For the nearby province she studies, Charlip concludes that coffee did not cause proletarianization, asserting that family farmers willingly grew coffee and had ongoing access to land and credit. Females owned 10 percent of coffee *fincas*, leading Charlip to conclude that women “found opportunities in the coffee economy” (p. 249).

These divergent views of one small zone are in part the product of different primary sources—Dore uses court records that document conflicts between peons and *latifundistas*, while Charlip relies on cadastral surveys reporting land sales. Still, the finding of savage exploitation in one province and peasant agency in another may leave readers staggering before the “bewildering variety” of subregional responses to the coffee economy (p. 118).

The editors clearly recognize the danger of replacing “grand theories” and “metanarratives” with microtopics that tend toward “the nihilistic belief that every case is unique” (p. 385). Their thoughtful conclusion offers a set of “bounded generalizations” in the form of ten propositions based on the new research in this volume and elsewhere. These insights include a new recognition of the ways that race and patriarchy structured the coffee economy, the protagonistic role of smallholders in many regions, the importance of mixed cropping as against monoculture, and the significance of labor by women and children. The importance of this new research agenda is not, the editors suggest, merely academic. Julius Nyerere in Tanzania and the Sandinistas in Nicaragua came to power assuming that a rural coffee proletariat awaited liberation from capitalism, but instead found smallholding farmers hostile to socialism. In the end, this impressive collaboration succeeds in explaining individual cases without losing sight of the larger historical picture.

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