

The Atlantic Economy during the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries: Organization, Operation, Practice, and Personnel. *Edited by Peter A. Coclanis*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2005. xix + 377 pp. Index, notes, figures, tables. Cloth, \$49.95. ISBN: 1-570-03554-7.

Reviewed by Michelle Craig McDonald

Harvard University's International Seminar on the History of the Atlantic World held its tenth anniversary conference in July 2006. Founded by Bernard Bailyn, the seminar has created a global community of scholars considering social, economic, political, and cultural developments of the seventeenth through twentieth centuries in an Atlantic world context. Among the most recent publications from seminar participants are: Robert Appelbaum and John Wood Sweet, editors, *Envisioning an English Empire: Jamestown and the Making of a North Atlantic World* (2005); Eliga Gould and Peter Onuf, editors, *Empire and Nation: The American Revolution in the Atlantic World* (2005); Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra and Erik R. Seeman, editors, *The Atlantic in Global History, 1500–2000* (2005); Wim Klooster and Alfred Padula, editors, *The Atlantic World: Essays on Slavery, Migration, and Imagination* (2005); Elizabeth Mancke and Carole Shammas, editors, *The Creation of the British Atlantic World* (2005), and, of course, Bernard Bailyn, *Atlantic History: Concept and Contours* (2005). Peter Coclanis's edited volume, *The Atlantic Economy during the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, follows this scholarly trajectory, ironic in light of Coclanis's more recent critiques of "Bailynesque" Atlantic frameworks. Indeed, two-thirds of the contributors to this collection are former Harvard seminar participants.

The Atlantic Economy began as a series of papers for a conference entitled "The Emergence of the Atlantic Economy" held in Charleston, South Carolina, in October 1999. Coclanis, one of the conference conveners, was struck by presenters' repeated emphasis on "the fluidity of the Atlantic economy, its casual borders, and its blurred lines," rather than on traditional links or metropolitan-driven narratives (p. xiii). In the resultant volume, Coclanis maintains this focus, as authors use legal structures, merchant networks, commodities, and illegal pursuits to understand commercial activity of the

region. A picture emerges of competing and intersecting economies, rather than a single economic system, a vibrant model that not only reinforces the validity of Atlantic studies but also emphasizes its fragmented and dynamic nature.

Four essays deal with business networks. Two, Jan de Vries's analysis of the commercial flexibility of the Dutch West India Company and R. C. Nash's assessment of the commission system's role in British commercial development, retain a largely nationalist approach. The other two essays, however, use goods to track economic activity across imperial lines. David Hancock's discussion of the transformation of Madeira from "cheap, simple table wine" to "expensive, complex, highly processed luxury" is a rare exploration of exchanges between producers, distributors, and consumers (p. 32). Correspondence between Portuguese merchants and their American customers demonstrates that social acceptance of commodities and how they were used was an organic, local process rather than one based on European norms. Robert DuPlessis, meanwhile, argues that consumer preferences in North America reveal the materialization of "an Atlantic economy rather than an assemblage of empire-specific Atlantic economies" (p. xv). Local exigencies, such as frontier settlements' use of woolens to conduct business with Native Americans, rather than national imperatives shaped early trends in textile exportation.

The next four essays consider the malleability of the Atlantic system when national interests confronted regional or individual concerns. Daviken Studnicki-Gizbert asks how Spanish Atlantic activity might have differed if political factions spearheaded by Portuguese merchants, many of Jewish descent, had prevailed in liberalizing Spanish commercial policies in the early seventeenth century. Claudia Schnurmann and April Lee Hatfield both note that neither laws nor sanctions effectively curtailed trade between British colonists in the Chesapeake and Barbados and Britain's mercantile nemesis, the Dutch. And Kenneth Banks, unsatisfied with other authors' ambiguity about the ability to channel or curb colonial smuggling, questions the definition of smuggling itself in an Atlantic arena where illegality was often a matter of perspective. In this especially engaging essay, Banks proposes a model of "official duplicity," in which colonial officials, motivated by labor shortages and market conditions rather than personal

enrichment, allowed—and even encouraged—unofficial slave trading in the French Caribbean colony of Martinique.

The last five essays are less thematically cohesive, but they address seldom studied aspects of the Atlantic economy and point scholars in new directions. Laura Náter's analysis of Cuba's tobacco industry—which dominated Spanish conceptions of the island for two centuries before sugar—complicates our image of Cuban production. Ty M. Reese's close examination of the Cape Coast Castle slaving station details the daily workings of the slave trade and introduces a wider cast of characters—free and captive—who participated in the system. The collaborative essay by Peter C. Mancall, Joshua L. Rosenbloom, and Thomas Weiss demonstrates that Native Americans in South Carolina were active members of a growing consumer network, rather than passive recipients of European trade goods. And Laura Croghan Kamoie uses the records of Virginia planter John Tayloe II to establish the importance of domestic trade to commercial development in the Chesapeake. In the final essay, S. Max Edelson creatively recasts commodities as more than products, showing how they not only contributed to their own reputations as articles of desire but also influenced the standing of merchants who trafficked in them. Edelson's work builds on the scholarship of Canadian political economist Harold Innes, who argued through his staples theory of production that dominant exports shaped colonial development and social transformation. Edelson, however, goes one step further to propose that Atlantic goods created new concepts of self-perception and character judgment as well.

As a collection, *The Atlantic Economy* offers a varied and nuanced picture of a region in constant motion. It is geographically comprehensive, with essays on Dutch, French, Portuguese, Spanish, African, and North American mercantile systems. It is also methodologically varied. De Vries and Nash provide overarching narratives of two of the Atlantic world's dominant empires. Hancock and DuPlessis narrow the focus to specific commodities and attendant systems of supply and demand. Náter and Reese explore the systems of labor upon which both plantation production and imperial expansion depended. And Banks and Edelson challenge historians to rethink key concepts, such as smuggling and commodities, and ask how actions and objects reflect larger phenomena. What sets this book apart from other Atlantic scholarship is its effort to look

simultaneously for factors that both challenge and support the Atlantic framework as a model for study. As a result, Coclanis's collection anticipates the central argument of Atlantic-world critics who argue that regional studies, like their imperial and national predecessors, define the boundaries of historical phenomena too narrowly. This book, however, with its breadth of topics and new scholarship says otherwise. The Atlantic world is still very much under historiographical construction, and these authors—whose work buttresses the existence and operation of Atlantic economies—strengthen its pedagogical foundation.

Michelle Craig McDonald is assistant professor of Atlantic history at Richard Stockton College of New Jersey. She is the author of "The Chance of the Moment: Coffee and the New West Indies Commodities Trade," which was published in the William and Mary Quarterly (2005), and she is currently working on a book manuscript that uses the history of the coffee industry to understand the importance of the Caribbean in the economic development of British North America and the early United States.