

REVIEW OF IRENE FATTACCIU, *EMPIRE, POLITICAL ECONOMY,
AND THE DIFFUSION OF CHOCOLATE IN THE ATLANTIC WORLD*,
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This book provides a rich and stimulating overview of the commercialization, production and European consumption of an American commodity (cocoa), a transnational story which traces the history of an Atlantic good. Fattacciu blends economic history and the history of political economy together with cultural and intellectual history, weaving different literatures into a fruitful example of interdisciplinarity, a characteristic reflected in the vast array of sources deployed (ecclesiastical and administrative reports, scientific literature, travel accounts, literature on fashion and customs, as well as inventories and other quantitative sources).

The main goal of the book is to offer a nuanced account of chocolate's introduction to Europe, considering commercial policies and economic forces as necessary but not sufficient conditions for the establishment of new patterns of consumption. The arrival of exotic goods in Europe was accompanied by a proliferation of discourses aimed at regulating the cultural appropriation of new products, as consumption was based on different perceptions and forms of representation. The adoption of chocolate in different European and Spanish contexts was thus shaped by changing commercialization circuits, which determined the material availability of cocoa, as well as by different meanings attached to its consumption, which influenced the product's perception and hence its acceptance.

The narrative is divided into five chapters, each focusing on a specific topic. Chapter 1 sets the stage for the story, describing the changing political economies of cocoa. While during the 17th century Dutch merchants were the main agents smuggling cocoa from the shores of Nueva Granada to European markets, Bourbon commercial reforms helped to regain the cocoa trade from foreign hands. The Guipuzcoan Company (1728-1785)

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proved successful in defending the Spanish monopoly on American trade, in fostering cocoa production in different regions (mainly Caracas and Guayaquil), and in providing a massive stream of cocoa for the Spanish market. Chapter 2 turns to the European cultural appropriation of chocolate. Spain became the main mediator of this process, producing discourses that disentangled chocolate consumption from American local practices, in order to justify its consumption by the Spanish Catholic population. This debate involved all of Europe, and it is interesting how the author shows the extent to which European-wide imperial competition shaped the representations attached to chocolate consumption. Chapter 3 deals with chocolate production in Spanish cities. The increasing availability of cocoa fueled Spanish demand for chocolate, and soon production was organized in urban-based guilds. The comparison between the guilds of Madrid and Barcelona demonstrates how demand patterns influenced the development of production techniques and regulation, which might differ considerably from town to town. Chapter 4 goes back to intellectual history, and describes how discourses changed alongside chocolate's gradual appropriation as a European product. Literary sources reveal the rich performative dimension of consumption, as a lively debate was sparked around the correct and appropriate ways to have chocolate, changing practices affected by social emulation. While this chapter mainly focuses on elite consumption, the following and final one provides a study on the social geography of chocolate's diffusion, as it turned into a semi-luxury good around the end of the 18th century. Here, Fattacciu proves that chocolate spread among the middle classes earlier than other perishable consumer goods, thus paving the way for the establishment of modern patterns of consumption.

Besides offering a compelling narrative, this work suggests a number of further reflections concerning the Atlantic history of chocolate, and the imperial relationship between Spain and the Americas. While Fattacciu mostly describes the European end of the chocolate commodity chain, the American end receives less attention, although it might amply repay investigation. We are told that during the 17th century New Spain was the widest consumer market for Caracas cocoa, and the diversion of this production to Spain after 1728 resulted in a new configuration of American markets to meet New Spain's constant demand. Indeed, a new production area (Guayaquil) grew in prominence, as its cocoa yield was higher than in Caracas, though quality was lower. The cheaper Guayaquil cocoa fed Novohispanic markets, while the Caracas production was almost entirely shipped to Europe. What can the importance of American cocoa markets reveal if we view it through the lens of the new literature on Spanish imperial political economy? Scholars no longer consider Spanish rule as purely extractive in character, but have begun to show a greater appreciation of

the amount of autonomy from the king and bargaining power that the different kingdoms making up the monarchy were able to enjoy. If New Spain had the purchasing power to attract huge quantities of cocoa, it means that its consumer markets were well developed, and that the market for chocolate had developed earlier than in mainland Spain. Studies of this market might contribute to the overall re-evaluation of the degree of economic extractivism of Spanish rule, extractivism that was directed more toward specific segments of the population (indigenous people, or enslaved workers) rather than toward a region as a whole.

Similarly, the history of the Guipuzcoan Company reveals the contradictory success of Bourbon reformism, as long as it was based on negotiation with local American elites. In fact, the company increased cocoa production in Caracas, allowing greater rates of profit for merchants and the Crown. At the same time, this innovation stressed loyalty to Spanish rule for some segments of the Creole population, who saw their existence endangered by the suppression of previous ways of economic life based on commercial independence and smuggling. After two minor revolts, Juan Francisco de Leon, a merchant and landowner, led a rebellion against the Company's commercial privileges (1749-1752) that threatened the existence of the Guipuzcoana. Spanish forces suppressed the upheaval, but the commercial statute of the Company was reformed, partially meeting the American demands. The new modes of chocolate commodity chain management were part of Bourbon attempts to increase overall imperial economic profitability, often favoring Spanish interests over American ones. For the American markets, however, one of the unintended consequences of the establishment of Guipuzcoana was to stimulate the cocoa trade between New Granada and New Spain, a trade firmly in the hands of Creole merchants. Fattacciu mentions this development only in passing, and its implications would deserve further study, providing a fresh vantage point for considering the nature of Spanish imperialism in America, and the reasons for Creole support or opposition.

This cultural history of chocolate consumption sits comfortably among recent works that have reintroduced social and cultural factors in the study of economic phenomena. Pure economic forces cannot fully explain the complexity of the ecological and cultural interchange that was fueled by the contact between European and American regions, as the introduction of new products and the adoption of new patterns of consumption was shaped by local social context, both in Europe and in America. Chocolate spread among Madrid's middle classes thanks to its availability and thanks to new forms of sociability that fostered social emulation among different groups. However, emulation pushed distinction, and middle-class chocolate consumption was seen as an expression of a "culture of decency"

(p. 121), that promoted the pursuit of a comfortable life, far from the excesses of both the aristocracy and the popular classes. Those processes were similar though different on the other side of the Atlantic. There, local populations might adopt European consumer habits in the attempt to be recognized as part of the more privileged *castas* that were forming the racially segmented society created by the encounter of Spaniards and American societies. Given the widespread diffusion of chocolate in New Spain, it would be interesting to take a closer look at how processes of social distinction shaped American chocolate consumption.

Lastly, Fattacciu's book is highly recommended for anyone interested in commodity history, Atlantic and imperial history and the history of consumption, as it combines a detailed case study together with reflections on wider processes that can be applied to other research areas. In addition to offering a compelling account of the history of chocolate consumption, this work offers stimulating insights into the early creation of a world connected by crisscrossing commodity chains, shaped by imperial competition, merchants' thirst for profit and consumers' desires for social recognition.