Rice: Global Networks and New Histories. Bray, Francesca, Peter A. Coclanis, Edda L. Fields-Black, and Dagmar Schäfer, eds. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015. IBSN: 9781107044395

In recent years, historians have increasingly come to recognize the value of studies of commodities, with particular emphasis being placed upon foodstuffs. Beyond the academy, this trend can be traced through the popularity of publications for a general readership, including Mark Kurlansky's *Salt: A World History* (Penguin Books, 2003), Jack Turner's *Spice: The History of a Temptation* (Vintage, 2005), and Elizabeth Abbott's *Sugar: A Bittersweet History* (Overlook, 2011). As a central food staple for roughly half of the world's population, rice is a topic ripe for historical exploration, linked as it is with the dynamics of global economics, the legacies of colonialism, and the rise of industrial capitalism. *Rice: Global Networks and New Histories,* a new volume from Cambridge University Press, seeks to elucidate these connections and present the first truly global history of rice. While targeted toward an audience of specialists, there is also much in this study of interest to lay readers, as its contributors illuminate the manner in which rice – as food, global crop, and trade commodity – directed the course of both local and transregional histories.

Spanning fifteen chapters, this edited volume addresses the history of rice via a variety of localized case studies encompassing regions including Asia, Africa, and the Americas. Bringing together the work of fourteen contributors and four co-editors – Francesca Bray (University of Edinburgh), Peter Coclanis (University of North Carolina Chapel Hill), Edda Fields-Black (Carnegie Mellon) and Dagmar Schäefer (Max Planck Institute for the History of Science) – *Rice* provides a discursive space in which variant disciplines and approaches to the historiography of rice engage one another in compelling ways. In undertaking this ambitious interdisciplinary

study, the authors employ innovative techniques in approaching the comparative and global history of rice. The book is organized into three thematic groupings of chapters. The first of these, "Purity and Promiscuity," juxtaposes themes of genetic purity against the threat of pollution in an examination of how levels of adherence to or departures from standards of biodiversity have impacted rice cultivation in various geographic contexts. In chapter 1, Jonathan Hardwood places these concerns in historical perspective, contrasting the late nineteenth-century abandonment of local varieties of rice for high-yield commercial varieties in Germany to the later "Green Revolution" of the 1960s and 1970s. Highlighting the historical friction between urban and local breeders of rice, Hardwood's chapter alludes to the larger economic tensions between small-scale and industrialized agriculture.

Further connections between rice and the marketplace arise in chapter 3, in which Sui-Wai Cheung considers the case of pre-modern China, tracing the manner in which eighteenth-century farmers responded to market forces in determining what kind, and how much, rice to grow. Cheung shows that the Chinese of this period distinguished between local varieties of rice considered desirable in terms of quality, and imported varieties that were cheaper but perceived to be inferior to the local product. Claiming that the rice trade only became truly global in the nineteenth century, Cheung identifies the advent of steamship transport as one factor in creating a global market for rice, a theme echoed in chapter 4 by Seung-Joon Lee's exploration of the maritime rice trade in the South China Sea.

Part II, "Environmental Matters," shifts the focus to the manner in which interactions between rice cultivators and their environments influence social histories. Arguing that "environment matters" regardless of in what sort of climate or topography cultivation occurs (rain-fed or irrigated, coastal lowlands or terraced hillsides), the five chapters in this section of

the text address the unique challenges posed to environmental historians. These include the need to find new methods for the analysis of historical encounters in instances where the textual accounts of colonizers dominate the historical narrative at the expense of indigenous voices. Editor Edda L. Fields-Black argues that historians must thus "read against the grain" to highlight the working dynamics of complex power relationships which exist in cases such as that of the Guinea Coast, which Fields-Black addresses in the following chapter.

In chapter 9, Erik Gilbert explores the spread of Asian rice in Africa, concluding that the diffusion of rice was governed by a combination of climate, technology, topography, and socio-economic conditions. The impacts of drought and other adverse climatic conditions upon production levels and consumption patterns in Senegal articulated by Olga F. Linares in chapter 10 expand the scope of this conversation to include factors such as gendered labor division and the role of governments in guiding both agricultural trends and rice markets. The final chapter in Part II moves the focus to South Asia and the "lived health experiences" of rice growers in the Punjab and Bengal regions of India. Lauren Minsky makes the compelling assertion that the producers of the world's staple food grains often found themselves at an elevated risk of hunger, malnutrition and disease. Tracing patterns of morbidity and mortality in the Indo-Gangetic plain across the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Minsky challenges the notion that global distribution of disease accurately reflects ecological characteristics, illustrating that, contrary to expectations, increasing commercial production has historically often been accompanied by a worsening of social inequality and health conditions among producer populations.

Part III, "Power and Control," highlights rice as a commodity particularly prone to high levels of "manipulation and machination." The final four chapters illustrate how the themes of power and control have played out in the United States, Brazil, Indonesia, and Japan. In chapter

13, Peter A. Coclanis traces the history of risiculture in the United States to origins that he claims are overwhelmingly Midwestern and white. Looking at Japan in the next chapter, Penelope Francks ties rice cultivation directly to the path of that nation's historical development, arguing that the crop's status as a key marker of Japanese civilization and identity persists with even greater force in the face of modern threats to the sustainability of traditional small-scale rice farming.

The global scope of *Rice: Global Networks and New Histories* does have drawbacks. To a nonspecialist reader, the volume can feel disjointed, shifting as it does in time and place, one chapter to the next. The editors have ensured that contributors define key terms and debates in the field, but explanations are sometimes diffused across several chapters (as is the case with the "Black Rice" thesis referenced below), or definitions may be lacking altogether (the recurrent term "anticommodities" is one salient example).

Despite the unavoidable geographic hopscotch that results from the book's global scope, *Rice: Global Networks and New Histories* largely succeeds in its stated goal of incorporating previously isolated historical debates into a more unified conversation. This heightened engagement is most clearly demonstrated by the text's sustained engagement with ongoing historiographical debates such as the "Black Rice" thesis advanced by Judith Carney in her 2001 book of the same title, and revisited in several chapters of this study. The "Black Rice" thesis argues that skilled rice cultivators from Africa first introduced the agricultural technology which supported the later cultivation of rice on plantations in slave-era South Carolina and Georgia during the eighteenth century, and thus, the African role in creating "rice regimes" should receive proper historical attribution and recognition.

The four co-authors of chapter 6 (Bruce Mouser, Edwin Nuijten, Florent Okry, and Paul Richards) examine the export of slave-produced rice from South Carolina to the abolitionist settlement at Freetown in the West African nation of Sierra Leone during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The authors find that in Sierra Leone, white varieties of the Carolina rice were rejected in favor of red japonica varieties of rice, becoming in effect an "anticommodity, shaped by the peasant selection energy released by emancipation." Hayden R. Smith's analysis of the water management strategies adopted by the slave labor working inland colonial rice plantations in South Carolina in chapter 8 provides an interesting counterpoint to the earlier discussion in chapter 6. And finally, the theme of "Black Rice" emerges for a third time in Walter Hawthorne's reframing of the debate in the context of West African and Brazilian rice fields in chapter 12.

Offering a multiplicity of voices on the "Black Rice" debate, these chapters elucidate key historical intersections between rice cultivation and slave labor, and furthermore, illustrate the potential for volumes such as this one to bring together the work of disparate scholars in such a way that the sum of the parts yields something new and valuable to the field. One hopes that other global commodities will merit a similarly thorough, and instructive, scholarly treatment to the one advanced in this text.

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