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**Irene Fattacciu: *Empire, Political Economy and the Diffusion of Chocolate in the Atlantic World (Early Modern Iberian History in Global Contexts: Connexions)*, London: Routledge, 2021, 220 pp.**

Reviewed by  
Emma Robertson, Melbourne

*Empire, Political Economy and the Diffusion of Chocolate in the Atlantic World* is a detailed history of the complex economic, social, cultural, and political processes by which chocolate took hold as a distinctly “Spanish” commodity in eighteenth-century Spain. Irene Fattacciu addresses the fascinating, but perhaps ultimately impossible, question of precisely how consumption of a “new” foodstuff is able to spread across geographical and social spaces. In doing so, she brings together, in innovative ways, cultural histories of representation, with economic analysis and the study of material culture.

The diffusion of “exotic” foods and drinks in Europe in the wake of the so-called Columbian Exchange, especially the adoption of medicinal discourses around early modern consumption practices, is well established in existing literature. However, Fattacciu’s specific focus on Spain, and her obvious language skills in translating Span-

ish sources into English, brings to light the particular significance of Spain in this dynamic process. Some of the familiar texts such as Philippe Dufour’s *Traitez nouveaux et curieux du café, du thé et du chocolate* (New and curious treatises on coffee, tea, and chocolate, 1693) are linked to earlier Spanish sources. Fattacciu stresses the construction of “chocolate Spanishness” and illuminates how foodstuffs from the Spanish Empire were key to the formation of national identities in the Bourbon era.

There are five central chapters. The first examines the nature of Atlantic trade, especially the creation of Spanish monopolistic companies and their relationship to increasing chocolate consumption. In this part, Fattacciu specifically draws on the history of the Guipuzcoan Company (1728–1785), being the organization that held the monopoly over the cocoa trade. She argues that the economic structure of the industry at this time was “both the product and the agent of chocolate’s demand”. The focus is not solely on European markets for “New World” goods; discussions in this chapter also focus on cocoa as an “everyday reality” within “New Spain”.

Much of the book is devoted to changing practices of chocolate consumption through the development of rituals of sociability and associated material culture in an increasingly secularized Spanish society. Gender and public sociability are key themes. Chapter 2 explores the cultural appropriation of chocolate in the Spanish imperial context and the ways in which cocoa consumption became divorced from the practices of Mesoamerican elites. Chapter 4 and chapter 5 pick up this story of the spread of consumption,

shifting the focus to Europe. The role of the Bourbon regime in determining, even prescribing, new forms of sociability (and the position of chocolate in these debates) is the focus of chapter 4. Chapter 5 details the ways in which chocolate consumption in Spain spread to all social classes during the eighteenth century (certainly earlier than it did in the British context). The democratization of chocolate, despite its continued relatively high cost, is linked to its increasingly important place in everyday ritualized routines. These chapters do not always feel clearly delineated; it is sometimes hard to determine in terms of chocolate consumption exactly what was changing and when, and the way in which such consumption was understood. The epilogue provides a useful overview and moves the story clearly forward to the end of the eighteenth century.

Chapter 3, “The Making of a Spanish Artisanal Industry (1720s–1770s)”, is one of the most original sections of the book. It provides a fascinating discussion of the development of chocolate manufacturing in the region, comparing the differing fates of trade guilds in Madrid and Barcelona. It is particularly interesting to learn of the Spanish women requesting licences to sell cocoa. Fattacciu makes a number of key points here about the nature of urban society, the particular regional characteristics of Madrid and Barcelona, and the distinction from provincial Spain. This allows for a more nuanced analysis of the position of chocolate across Spanish society.

The book makes helpful comparisons with the fate of linked commodities – tea, coffee, and sugar – across eighteenth-century Europe. This will be especially useful for anyone teaching food history survey

courses; however, the book may be challenging for some undergraduates due to its heavy use of theory. For scholars of chocolate in particular, this book pays attention to the fates of the different cocoa varieties in specific geographical and historical contexts: particularly *criollo* and *forastero*. The type of cocoa did have implications for its production, trade, and consumption, and this is mapped out in the case of a “well-differentiated market” in Spain. Fattacciu positions chocolate as an especially significant commodity – the first, for example, to have sugar added. There are some strident claims about chocolate’s overall importance: for instance, “chocolate was at the heart of the restructuring of sociability” (p. 111). Nevertheless, Fattacciu presents some compelling evidence – in particular, the volumes of chocolate being consumed. One disappointing element of the book is that the publisher has not provided better quality images and tables to illustrate the detailed quantitative analysis. It may have been the ebook format, but these were hard to decipher.

Underpinning this history of the diffusion of chocolate in eighteenth-century Spain is the broader shift from mercantile capitalism to free trade capitalism. Fattacciu argues that free trade should not be given credit for the spread of chocolate consumption. Rather, it was earlier monopolistic conditions that laid the groundwork for chocolate’s hold on Spanish society and culture. The role of the Spanish state in controlling both trade and consumption, even down to people’s behaviour in cafes, was highly influential in determining the particular character of “chocolate Spanishness”. Unfortunately, the overarching mechanisms of political economy

sometimes lead to an absence of individual human agents in the story presented here. Chocolate effectively becomes an actor in its own right. Ordinary people are briefly seen as consumers (through the household inventories of chocolate pots), and as workers in the early manufacturing industry, but individual human agency is often invisible.

Through her detailed case study of the dramatic economic, cultural, and political fortunes of chocolate in early modern Spain and the Spanish Empire, triangulating a range of different primary documents, Fattacciu recounts a fascinating national and transnational story of an imperial commodity that has maintained its appeal up to the present day. Her work is extremely valuable in making Spanish language sources accessible to a new audience. *Empire, Political Economy and the Diffusion of Chocolate in the Atlantic World* is a welcome addition to food history scholarship.

**Janet M. Hartley: *The Volga.***

**A History, New Haven, CT/London:**

**Yale University Press, 2021, 379 S.**

Rezensiert von

Lutz Häfner, Bielefeld

Die Überschrift ist ein Etikettenschwindel: Die vorliegende Darstellung ist keine Geschichte eines Stromes, geschweige denn eine Flussbiographie, wie sie beispielsweise Terje Tvedt unlängst über

den Nil oder vor wenigen Jahren bereits Roman A. Cybriwsky über den Dnepr vorgelegt haben. Der Titel rückt – offenbar aus marktstrategischen Gründen – die Wolga in den Mittelpunkt, die sich aber in der dann präsentierten Story nicht als gestaltendes Subjekt erweist, die Leben und Räume strukturierte, an die sich die Menschen anpassten, lernten, mit ihr zu leben, sie als Transportarterie oder Ressource des alltäglichen Bedarfes zu nutzen. Die Wolga ist vielmehr, sofern sie überhaupt thematisiert wird, bloßes Objekt, das die Menschen „eroberten“ oder mit spezifischen Wasserinfrastrukturen „kolonisierten“. Das Buch trägt „wasserlandschaftlichen“ Praktiken und Projekten wie Begradigung, Vertiefung, Bewässerung, Trinkwasserversorgung und Kanalisation der an der Wolga gelegenen Siedlungen, Kanal- oder Staudammbauten nur in geringem Maße Rechnung.

Welches Ziel verfolgt Janet Hartley, Emerita an der London School of Economics, eine durch zahlreiche Monographien ausgewiesene Spezialistin der Russländischen Geschichte des 18. und frühen 19. Jahrhunderts mit ihrer Untersuchung?

Die Einleitung gibt nur bedingt Auskunft. Sie beginnt gefällig mit einem längeren Zitat aus einer 1839 erschienenen englischen Reisebeschreibung über die Wolga bei der Stadt Nižnij Novgorod, formuliert aber weder eine Fragestellung noch eine Arbeitshypothese. Rückschlüsse auf die Intentionen der Verfasserin erlauben der „Waschzettel“ und vor allem – und in dieser Klarheit einzig – die Homepage des Verlages, auf der es heißt: „Janet Hartley explores the history of Russia through the Volga from the seventh century to the present day“.[1] Hartley gibt an, in ihrer Syn-