

Coffee Consumption in Mexico

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Introduction

The economic history of Latin America has concentrated on the export sector since the time of the Iberian conquest. Initially, this was seen through the lens of mercantilism—the riches of the colonies were to benefit the colonial metropolis. But this euro-centric view persisted even after independence. Most leaders in the newly sovereign American states -- with a few notable exception such as Paraguay's Francia-- believed that supplying Europe's markets was the path to prosperity. Thus to a considerable extent what was valued in the Americas was what was treasured (and paid for) in Europe. Latin Americans voluntarily entered what Victor Bulmer-Thomas has called the "commodity lottery" of the world economy.¹

Coffee certainly has been embraced by the popular imagination as a tropical export. A popular song in the 1940's reminded North American caffeine addicts that "they have an awful lot of coffee in Brazil." And coffee, at one time or another, was the first or second leading exports of most of the countries of Latin America. However this chapter will demonstrate that not only did coffee begin its life in Latin America as a *domestic* consumption good rather than an export, but that Latin American coffee drinking, and particularly Mexican, has continued to be important and, indeed, has grown. This has significant implications for our view of Latin America's dependence on foreign markets.

For colonial or national officials prior to the middle of the nineteenth century, the internal market in the Americas was valued mostly for the taxes it provided the state or the goods which it furnished which were used to attract indigenous workers into the export sector. The notion was that Latin American production for

¹ Victor Bulmer-Thomas, *The Economic History of Latin America since Independence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

domestic markets was on the margin of the money economy and hence archaic, i.e. backward and unimportant. Most of the goods that were widely consumed in the Americas, e.g., corn, beans, quinoa, coca, manioc, gourds, tomatoes, llama and alpaca wool were little exported. High transport costs for the bulky, low-value goods and easy spoilage were partially responsible for their export failure. But European cultural reluctance to consume American foods also figured in greatly. After all, the main foods eventually exported from Latin America had begun as imports from Europe such as wheat and cattle and these only late in the nineteenth century when transport technology permitted.. Since development, according to this view, came only with the exports which were oriented to capitalist markets with the attendant efficiencies and linkages they implied, native plants were generally accorded little value.² As a result, little attention has been given to domestic consumption or what many economists now call “non-traded” goods between the pre-Columbian years of natural (or at least modestly monetarized) economies and the start of ISI, beginning say in the 1930s. Of course the concept “non-traded” reinforces the notion that there was no or little domestic market. Trade--which was understood as commerce with Europe-- was foreign trade while the domestic sector was thought of as subsistence or at least autarkic. This point of view was something of a self-fulfilling prophecy because the importance put on international trade both by state agents and European investors and traders, meant that little data was collected on domestic consumption and production after the end of the colonial regime.

The lack of domestic consumption data resulted not just from a philosophic point of view, but also from the neglect of infrastructure for internal trade, the weakness of new states, and the underdeveloped nature of commodity markets. Coffee sprang up in newly-born states that had little domestic penetration. They collected taxes at the ports because that required a much smaller corps of taxmen and much less record keeping than property or income taxes. Sales taxes existed but they were usually collected at the municipal

² There were some exceptions such as cacao, indigo and cochineal, but they were fairly limited in their production and transoceanic exports.

level so there were no provincial or national level standardized records and purchases in the countryside went uncounted. Barter exchanges and self-sufficient production were entirely ignored. Moreover, smuggling and other forms of tax evasion were massive. In addition, coffee exchanges were very late to arise in Latin America so statistics on sales were mostly kept in the overseas consuming countries³. Indeed it was to the advantage of the coffee factors to retain their personalist monopoly on local data so they could better manipulate prices. It is probably the case that a considerable share of coffee was consumed on the finca or nearby by agriculturalists who were very suspicious of government officials' intrusions. A coffee expert, Joseph M. Walsh, wrote in 1902 "The real fact being that the difficulties in the way of forming accurate agricultural statistics are in the coffee producing countries almost insuperable...there is no means whatever of estimating the product."⁴

In the case of coffee, the great majority of studies that do consider Latin American consumption in the nineteenth century are concerned with the sites, the coffeehouses. They are more intellectual studies of café culture and snap biographies of various cafes and their clientele than discussions of how much or what was drunk. The very few investigations of drinking focus on alcohol.⁵ Studies on political culture in England or France certainly inspect coffeehouses; Latin American studies ignore them.⁶ Thus, the lack of data and literature on domestic consumption is not necessarily an indication of modest levels of coffee drinking in the Americas but probably reflects a low level of institutionalization. It is no surprise that the literature on

³ For most of the nineteenth century in most Latin American coffee producing countries, no distinction is made between production and export data. See: Mario Samper and Radin Fernanddo, "Historical Statistics of Coffee Production and Trade from 1700 to 1960" in *The Global Coffee Economy in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, 1500-1989* edited by William Clarence-Smith and Steven Topik (NY: Cambridge University Press, 2003) pp. 417-419

⁴ Joseph M. Walsh, *Coffee: Its History, Classification and Description* (Philadelphia: Henry T. Coates & Co., 1902), p. 101.

⁵ For example William Taylor, *Drinking, Homicide and Rebellion in Colonial Mexican Villages* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1979) and for Brazil, Sidney Chaloub, *Trabalho, lar e botequim. O cotidiano dos trabalhadores no Rio de Janeiro da Belle Epoque* (SP: Brasiliense, 1986).

⁶ Hilda Sabato in *The Many and the Few, Political Participation in Republican Buenos Aires* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001) notes several very large political gatherings in Buenos Aires coffeehouses in the nineteenth century but does not consider them as sites of socialization or politicization. Anecdotal studies include: Clementina Díaz y de Ovando, "Los Cafes del Siglo XIX en Mexico" *Artes de Mexico* 22:19215-32. Vicente Gesualdo, "De Fondas, Cafes, Restaurantes y Hotels en el Antiguo Buenos Aires *Todo es Historia* *;220 (August 1985), Danilo Gomes, *Antigos Cafés do Rio de Janeiro* (Rio: Livraria Kosmos Ed., 1989).

domestic consumption leans to the pre-colonial, colonial, and post 1930 periods when data, or at least reports, are more prevalent. The state and its taxing power in these periods were much stronger .

This paper concentrates on American consumption during the data-impooverished period of 1850 to 1930 in an almost perverse way: by discussing coffee drinking *in the Americas*, particularly in Mexico. Ironically, although there are a number of thoughtful studies about coffee consumption in Austria, England, France, Germany, Italy, and the Middle East there are virtually none about coffee consumption in Latin America (and many about production) ⁷ .

This paper is part of an exploratory essay on coffee consumption in Latin America that seeks to shed light on the following questions:

- 1) Did coffee begin in the Americas as an export crop?
- 2) How important was coffee consumption compared to exportation and how did that relationship change over time?
- 3) What were the sites of consumption and what social, gender, national and racial cachet did it have?
- 4) How much value was added in producing countries for internal consumption, i.e., what were the multiplier effects?
- 5) To what extent did coffee displace other indigenous drinks?

I hope to show that coffee drinking by the end of the nineteenth century was fairly widespread. However the rural settlement pattern, poor transport, weak institutionalization, and prior cultural preferences meant that coffee played a different social role in Latin America than it did in the Middle East, in Europe or in the United States. The urban coffeehouse was of limited scope; it was not so much associated with the

⁷ The most thorough study I have found is a dissertation at the Universidad Nacional in Costa Rica by Patricia Vega Jimenez, "Surgimiento y Difusion del Consumo Interno de Café Tostado y Molido en Costa Rica (1840-1900), Heredia, 2001.

bourgeois public space. And coffee itself was not so much associated with Europeanization or modernization. Latin Americans adapted coffee to their own culture rather than imitating European urban culture. Indeed, investigating Latin American coffee drinking in the nineteenth century suggests that the urban male-dominated version of European coffee history is quite possibly in need of revision.

Coffee Comes to the Americas

Coffee is indigenous to Africa but it was in the Middle East that it became a popular beverage in the fifteenth century. Europeans began importing it from Yemen in the 1600s and brought it to their American colonies in the 1720s, initially planted on relatively small islands or enclaves. Although the Dutch played a key role in coercing the Javanese to grow coffee in their Asian colony, the VOC preferred to serve as intermediaries in the slave and sugar trades in the New World. They were little engaged in coffee production except a bit in Guyana though they continued to be a leading continental importer and have continued to be in per capita terms one of the world's leading consumers of coffee⁸. Producing coffee and consuming coffee were not closely linked.

The British were perhaps the first Europeans to bring coffee to the Americas. It is possible that John Smith, who had been in the Turkish service before crossing to the Jamestown colony in Virginia, was the first. In any case, we have William Penn complaining of the high cost of coffee in Pennsylvania already in 1683. But the British were not much interested in coffee as an export crop. London's booming coffeehouse culture whet the appetite of the few colonials who could afford to imitate Johnson, Defoe, Pepys and Dryden. But North Americans would have to wait for independence to become a coffee-drinking country and

⁸ Ann McCants showed in "Global Trade brought Home: the Consumption of Tea, Coffee and Porcelain in Middling and Poor Households in 18th Century Amsterdam" presented at the All-UC Economic History Conference "Government and Governance in Historical Perspective" UC Berkeley April 27-29, 2001 that coffee was already a mass consumption good in eighteenth century Amsterdam.

for Starbucks for a widespread coffeehouse culture⁹. Until then, the British saw the mercantilist possibilities in exploiting the Chinese and then the Indian tea trades. They were the only western European power to reduce per capita coffee consumption rather than exploiting the coffee-growing potential of colonial Jamaica, Ceylon, or India.¹⁰ The reason for the decline in British coffee drinking is controverted--Wolfgang Schivelbusch claims the greater domesticity of bourgeois England lent itself better to tea, drunk in the home, than the coffeehouse beverage, Sidney Mintz credits the vast growth of inexpensive sugar for sweetening the British taste for tea; and others cite British taxation policy intended to aid East Indian planters and the East Indian Company's tea monopoly.¹¹

St. Domingue

The French were the principal purveyors of coffee in the Americas in the eighteenth century. But they did not begin with a plot to integrate production and consumption within the colonial system.¹² On the contrary, the French at first attempted to prohibit production in their colonies of Martinique and St Domingue (Haiti) because the Levant Company's interest in its Middle Eastern monopoly. The probably apocryphal tale of the French officer, de Clieu, surreptitiously spirited seedlings out of the royal botanical garden and husbanding them across the Atlantic to Martinique against pirates, Dutch intrigue, and foul weather stresses individual heroism, not French imperial foresight. The soldier did seem to want to bring a

⁹ Jane Kamensky has a fascinating account of a monumental attempt to build a huge coffeehouse and public space in Boston in :Dexter's Folly: The Boston Exchange Coffee House and Its World", presented at "New World Orders" Conference, McNeil Center for Early American Studies, October, 2001.

¹⁰ Francis B.Thurber, *Coffee, From Plantation to Cup* (NY: American Grocer Publication Association, 1881), p. 212 notes that British consumption declined, from 1.25 pounds per capita in 1846-1860 to .96 pounds in 1880. Edward Bramah in *Tea and Coffee: A Modern View of Three Hundred years of Tradition* (London: Hutchinson & Co. 1972) p. 50 charts the decline to .74 pounds in 1921. All this while (1886-1821) tea consumption jumped from 3.42 pounds of tea per capita to 8.51 pounds. India did produce coffee, according to Walsh *Coffee*, p. 23, Mysore had some 500,000 acres of coffee under cultivation. Not much of this found its way to England, however.

¹¹ Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *Tastes of Paradise: A Social History of Spices, Stimulants, and Intoxicants* (NY: Pantheon, 1992); Sidney Mintz, *Sweetness and Power, The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (NY: Viking, 1985); Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* ; S.D. Smith, "Accounting for Taste: British Coffee Consumption in Historical Perspective," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* xxvii:2 (Autumn, 1996), 183-214.

¹² Joel, David and KarlSchpira, *The Book of Coffee and Tea* (NY: St. Martins Press, 1982), p. 11.

valuable commodity to the Caribbean colony but Louis XV seems to have been initially opposed to the spread of the coffee.

In St. Domingue it was not the aristocratic and bourgeois elite of the empire, the sugar planters, who cultivated coffee on the remote hills, but *affranchise*, modest people of color.¹³ Initially, their market was the prosperous colonial community on the island that sought to emulate Parisian fashion and drink coffee in coffeehouses. Aristocratic and then bourgeois fashion were as instrumental in stimulating demand for coffee as the taste or pharmacological effects. From the mid-1700s on coffee production became increasingly export-oriented and slave-driven. Whereas St. Domingue's coffee exports in 1767 were worth one quarter the value of sugar exports, by 1787-89 they almost equaled sugar exports to be by far the largest coffee exports in the world.¹⁴ French colonies supplied two-thirds of the world's coffee in the years immediately before the French Revolution.¹⁵ But the massive concentration of African slaves led to the most successful slave rebellion in the world. Haiti ceased being the leading producer; production dropped from 88,360 pounds in 1789 to 20,280 in 1818 so world prices for coffee rose quickly in the first decades of the nineteenth century.¹⁶ Haiti returned to exporting coffee by the middle of the century but even more than a century later, its exports were 40 percent less than at the time of the French Revolution¹⁷. Ex-slaves generally refused to work on plantations, instead taking out small plots for themselves in the remote mountains where they hid as "maroons" though some "gens de colour" who formed the new elite after independence, established large plantations worked by debt peons. Visitors to Haiti complained that the

¹³Carolyn Fick, *The Making of Haiti*, (Knoxville Tenn. University of Tennessee Press, 1990)pp. 19,22. Michel-Rolph Trouillot, "Motion in the System: Coffee, Color, and Slavery in eighteenth-Century Saint-Domingue"."*Review* 3 (winter 1982), 331-388.

¹⁴ Auberteure, *San Domingo*, p. 55; Bryan Edwards, *Histoire de l'ile St. Domingue*, (Paris: G. du Four, 1802) pp. 55, 135

¹⁵José Antonio Ocampo, *Colombia y la economia mundial, 1830-1910* (Bogota: Siglo Ventiuno, 1984) , p. 303.

¹⁶Spenser Buckingham St. John., **Hayti**; (London, Smith, Elder, & co., 1884). , p. 321 gives data on "coffee production." In the nineteenth century when this was written this was usually meant to entail exports since domestic production was ignored but it is unclear what was meant here.

cultivation technique declined sharply. Indeed, rather than coffee cultivation it fell more to a natural economy in which residents picked coffee from trees planted earlier¹⁸. My guess is that this meant a good deal greater internal consumption of coffee. With coffee already established as an elite beverage and the trees already planted during the colonial period the disappearance of the moneyed elite on Haiti brought coffee much more within the reach of the island's peasants. With rudimentary transport and the merchant class mostly departed, Haiti probably turned inwards. Peasants were not able to export much and once Brazilian production drove down the world price for coffee, they had little incentive to do so. That which left the island went mostly to France. The fact that coffee production grew through the nineteenth century demonstrates that Haitians did not abandon it despite its association with a cruel slavery. A new black elite returned to coffee exports. However, much coffee growing, perhaps most, consisted of the harvest of wild-growing trees, rather than cultivation. But coffee became a Haitian drink rather than an ancillary of Parisian café society.

Other Caribbean

Other parts of the Caribbean suffered the same involution as Haiti, Jamaica, and Guyana. The French colonies of Martinique, Dominica, Guadeloupe and the other Antilles, which had been among the world's largest coffee exporters in the 18th century, almost ceased exports, having barely enough for their own consumption. Guadeloupe, for instance, fell from 8million pounds exported in 1800 to under .5 million pounds in 1900. Cuba did not grow enough for its home demand and Puerto Rico also turned primarily to sugar and tobacco.¹⁹ Even integration into the United States empire, the world's greatest coffee consumers, did not expand Puerto Rican exports in good part because vicious hurricanes in 1899, 1926 and again in 1928

¹⁷ Walsh, *Coffee*, p. 160.

¹⁸ Frédéric Mauro, *Histoire du Café* Paris: Editions Desjonquères, 1991), pp. 138-.

¹⁹ Walsh, *Coffee*, pp. 160-162.

destroyed most of the crop. Low world prices after that relegated the island's production to domestic consumption.²⁰

Coffee spread in substantial scale to the American mainland only later. The Spanish and Portuguese preferred cacao or tea so that Latin America had to wait for independence to become a significant coffee producer.²¹ This is surprising because the Portuguese had been the first European power in the Red Sea when they aided the Abyssinians against Muslim adversaries and traded in Yemen. They had a tradition of transporting cultivars from one continent to another as they did with sugar. The Spanish, who were the first to introduce sugar into the Americas also were botanical adventurers with other “spices” such as cacao. But they were very slow to bring coffee. This is probably because the Spanish American elite preferred to imitate Madrid fashion, cacao, not Parisian coffee. This was a European fashion that had originated in the Americas; cacao was drunk already by the Aztecs. Coffee plants seem to have come to the mainland only after Haiti’s freedmen drove up its world price. Still, it is not clear that the urge to export was the primary motivation for planting the exotic Arabica. Rough terrain, poor transport facilities, and bloody drawn-out civil wars retarded Spanish American exports. Indeed, there was generally a fifty to sixty year lag between coffee's introduction and its rise as an export.

Mexico

Mexico was an early Spanish American producer as the seedlings were likely brought from Cuba where Haitian émigrés had transplanted them at the end of the eighteenth century. Exact dates of origins, while pleasing to the curious reader, are completely unreliable for a good that was diffused haphazardly by random agents. Apparently some coffee had reached Chiapas and Tehuantepec already in the eighteenth

²⁰ *Spice Mill*, January 1911, p. 30; Joel, David and Karl Schapira, *The Book of Coffee and Tea. A Guide to the Appreciation of Fine Coffees, Teas, and Herbal Beverages* (NY: St. Martin's Press, 1982), p.32.

²¹In 1909 the *Spice Mill* reported on p. 174 that Spanish and Portuguese per capita coffee consumption at .7 and .5 kilos was a fifth to a tenth of that of northern European countries and the U.S..

century but consumption was at a low level.²² Still, it is significant that coffee in Central America was associated with both indigenous and urbane European cultures. Mexico City was not a magnet for coffee imports and center for diffusion the way that London and Paris were in Europe. One study puts 1785 as the date of the first coffee in Mexico while another cites 1789 as the founding year of the Café de Manrique in Mexico City.²³ The European name “café” was adopted in Spanish but it was also supposedly given an indigenous name “acoxcapolli” which means “without sleep.” Nonetheless, as with almost all of the rest of the world, the word used is similar to “café” or “coffee.” [Ironically, two major exceptions are its birthplaces, Ethiopia and Yemen].

But unlike the Middle East, France and England, where coffee drinking and coffeehouses rapidly expanded after their introduction from outside and became vital institutions, the coffee drinking habit grew quite slowly in the Americas. Probably the prior presence of indigenous hot drinks such as cocoa, and atole reduced the impact of the introduction of coffee. Also, the rural settlement pattern after the Iberian defeat of indigenous city-states limited the appeal and possibilities of coffeehouses.

There was a distinction between the two types of “cafes”: the coffee beverage and the coffeehouse. In the cities the site seems to have been more attractive than the beverage. There clearly were “cafés,” a name and concept borrowed from Europe. The most elegant ones were sites of leisure: billiards, chess, dominos and centers of intellectual activity: lecture halls and reading rooms (what A. Ellis called “penny universities” in seventeenth and eighteenth century England).²⁴ But despite the fact that the word came from the coffeehouses of France, in Mexico they served native drinks: cocoa and atole.²⁵ Mexico City, which was the

²² Personal correspondence, Jan Gasco, who has done archeological work on colonial Chiapas, Irvine, 1992. Von Humboldt said “el uso de Café todavía es muy raro en Mexico.” He estimated that the French drank almost 100 times more per capita in E. Deshamps R. “Desde Mexico y en busca de la biografía del cafeto” in *Artes de Mexico* (22:192):9-

²³ E. Deshamps R. “Desde Mexico y en busca de la biografía del cafeto” in *Artes de Mexico* (22:192):9-10; Clementina Diaz y de Ovando, “Los cafes del siglo xix en Mexico in *Artes de Mexico* (22:102)L15,

²⁴ *ibid*, p. 15 citing Guillermo Prieto, *Memorias de mi tiempo*

largest and richest city in the Americas in 1800, had a dynamic literary culture, but early on it did not revolve around coffee .

By the time that Emperor Maximilian came to Mexico in 1863 coffee had arrived in Veracruz where it was grown in small gardens together with many other crops.²⁶ Veracruz had the ideal climate and soil for coffee and, being on the path from Mexico City to the main port and thence the outside world, was one of Mexico's most market-oriented, monetized and populated areas. It appears that coffee was a locally-consumed product before much demand came from Mexico City however. Sartorius reports coffee in Jalapa and Orizaba at the middle of the nineteenth century.²⁷ Coffee was already growing in Oaxaca, the area with the least Spanish influence, in 1809.²⁸ Coffee was a relatively new introduction and not exported. Nor was it just an elite drink; people purchased it in plaza marketplaces and drank it at home. Sartorius reported that at the grocery stores in Veracruz women came early in the morning to buy bread, chocolate, coffee and sugar.²⁹ This was not only in the capital. Coffee, along with maize, beans, sugar, and meats "one finds exposed for sale on Sunday in every large village."³⁰ Many peasants grew their own, presumably for their own consumption: "in the neighborhood of Cordova alone, most of the cottages of the natives are built in coffee-gardens, topped by orange, banana and mango trees."³¹ Although the coffee bean was an exotic, it was not so much a European introduction as a Mexican adoption.

Drinking sociability was quite different from European coffeehouses reflecting the Mexican cultural adaption. Sartorius asserted that "In Spanish America sitting and drinking together is something entirely

²⁵ Renato Leduc, "Café Porfiriano" *Artes de Mexico* (22:102):37. Sartorius noted on page 117 that at mid-19th century : "the vesper bell calls the families home, the bachelors to the coffee-houses to enjoy their chocolate."

²⁶ Sartorius, *Mexico About 1850*, passim. His book was first published in 1858 at which point the author had already lived in Mexico for 34 years.

²⁷ *ibid*, p. 103: "Shops, coffee and drinking houses are moreover the magnets which everywhere exercise their power of attraction.

²⁸ Deshamps R., "El Café", p.9. Francie Chassen describes how integrated coffee cultivation was into Oaxaca's indigenous communities in: Heather Fowler-Salamini and Mary Kay Vaughn eds. *Women of the Mexican Countryside, 1850-1990* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1994).

²⁹ Deshamps R., "El Café, p. 123.

³⁰ Sartorius, p. 84.

³¹ *Ibid*, p. 175.

unknown.” People drank standing.³² On the other hand, men and women sat in a circle to drink pulque together apparently in the open.³³ The café or coffee-drinking site in provincial Mexico, especially the marketplace, was a center of commerce, diffusion of news, and intellectual exchange. Coffee was integrated into the daily lives of common people though clearly not as central as atole, pulque, and aguardiente. Combining them, adding aguardiente to coffee was common in some areas.

The French courtiers who accompanied Emperor Maximilian in 1863 were dismayed with the quality of the coffee they encountered in Mexico. Countess Paula Kollonitz complained that “coffee, which grows here of the best kind, is so badly prepared that it is almost impossible to drink it.” But she found the native chocolate “highly spiced with cinnamon” “very good, and much drunk.”³⁴ Since we know from printed menus that Maximilian did serve coffee at state banquets, there must have been some good quality coffee available.

By the time of the late Porfiriato coffee became a much more popular Mexican drink.. Already in 1882 the *Nueva Guia de Mexico* listed 44 cafes in Mexico City as coffee began to replace atole and chocolate as the modern drink of sociability, taking that honor from tea as well.³⁵ Yet it was just starting to take hold. Matias Romero, who owned a coffee plantation in Chiapas, which in 1872 was a wild, sparsely populated area noted that “a few years ago coffee was hardly used in the Republic, while now it begins to compete with cocoa and even with the national drink made of Indian corn.” The Maya of the area having supplied the Aztecs with their cacao, it is not surprising that Soconusco would quickly expand coffee production though not much under indigenous production.³⁶ Mexico’s production was well below that of

³² Sartorius, *Mexico about 1850*, p. 94.

³³ *Ibid*, p. 24.

³⁴ Countess Paula Kollonitz (Lady in Waiting to the Empress Charlotte) *The Court of Mexico* trans. By J.E. Ollivant (London: Otley and Co, 1867), p. 161. I thank Robert Duncan for this reference.

³⁵ Diaz y Ovano, “Los cafes del siglo xix en Mexico” pp. 28,29.

³⁶ Carlos Helbig, *Soconusco y su zona cafetalera en Chiapas* (Tuxtla Gutierrez: Instituto de Ciencias y Artes de Chiapas, 1964), pp. 15-18.

neighboring Guatemala at that point.³⁷ Only in the last decades of the 1800s did Chiapas' Soconusco coffee-growing area expand rapidly. But unlike the domestic focus of Veracruz or Oaxaca, production was more oriented to foreign markets. It was directed by foreigners, North Americans from San Francisco first, then many Germans. Labor was attracted from the neighboring Chapanecan and Guatemalan highlands with transitory and often coerced Mayan and Mam and a failed attempt at Polynesian laborers. In Soconusco coffee was something of an enclave.

Although Chapanecan coffee was intended for foreign markets, there was internal consumption. It was mostly restricted to the coffee growing region itself because transportation was rudimentary and the local population short on currency. Elsewhere it served as a ceremonial drink rather than a common beverage. Helen Seargeant, who grew up on a finca in Soconusco, reported that the Tacaneca Indians who came from the north of the state, reserved coffee, chocolate, atole, posol and liquor for festivals in their home villages. They integrated coffee into their native celebrations to the point that they quite reasonably enough used comal coals to toast tortillas *and* roast coffee. The coffee was ground into powder, boiling water and sugar were added. Their method of making a thick coffee syrup, (coffee essence) so thick it was supposed to stick to the side of its bottle, to be added to hot water or milk foretold the instant coffee that would first be invented in Guatemala.³⁸

Mexican consumption grew rapidly during the Porfiriato driven by the export-oriented growers of Veracruz and Chiapas and in the North by the assimilated habit of low-cost coffee in the mines and towns on both sides of the US-Mexican border. Mexican track workers in the US were given coffee as part of their pay.³⁹ The timing and nature of the introduction of coffee, thus, differed in three parts of the country: in the east it entered from the Caribbean after the Haitian Revolution mostly among the population of mestizo

³⁷ Matias Romero, *Coffee and Rubber in Mexico*, pp. 284,285. Martinez Velasco, *Plantaciones e trabajo en Guatemala*, p. 68.

³⁸ Seargeant, *Nexapa*, pp. 36, 194,294,394, 399. She added on page 54 that not all coffee was drunk. "Los piscadores de café" sucked the sweet layer of honey that covered ripe coffee cherries.

³⁹ Jeff Garcilaso dissertation, UC Santa Barbara.

smallholders; in the south, Guatemala's success in the last decades of the nineteenth century encouraged foreign and Mexican plantation growers to spread the caffeinated habit with indigenous peoples adopting it; and in the north, proletarian workers accepted the habit as an extension of the United States culture of mass, home-oriented, coffee drinking.

The historiography of the Porfiriato has stressed the export economy and hence has neglected the spread of new consumption items. Mexican coffee production shot up from 10 million kilos to 45 million kilos from 1901 to 1911. However exports remained stable at 20 million kilos after 1905 demonstrating that internal consumption overshadowed exports. Joseph Walsh reported in 1902 that internal transport problems had hindered Mexico's coffee exports "so much so that the production of coffee in Mexico has been almost limited to supplying the home demand."⁴⁰ Coffee (often with aguardiente added) or manzanilla tea became accepted parts of the peon's breakfast while the most comfortable classes also enjoyed coffee with the "almuerzo", the afternoon "merienda" and with the "comida" often with imported cognac or "native brandy" poured in.⁴¹ Unfortunately, the internal transport system was woefully underdeveloped with enormous differentials in price even in adjoining areas so that consumers were mostly self-sufficient in food and drink. In 1921 W. Thompson found that peons only sold at market when they needed money and "even hacendados are often more likely to consult their own convenience in such matters than to follow even the demands of a rising market."⁴² This was because: "the fresh food system of Mexico is largely independent of that helpful adjunct of civilization—the middleman. Except for meat in the capital and a few of the larger cities, your cook buys you food from the hands only once removed from the producer."⁴³ At the same time in the United States highly-capitalized, enormous vertically-integrated roasters with as many as 500 workers in a single factory were establishing coffee trademarks, building a network of retail outlets such as the A & P chain of

⁴⁰ Joseph Walsh, *Coffee Its History, Classification and Description* (Philadelphia: Henry T. Coates & Co., 1902), p. 30.

⁴¹ Rodriguez Centeno, *Café en Mexico*, pp. 92-93.. W. Thompson, *The People of Mexico*, pp. 259-260.

stores and a fleet of trucks to service them. An ever smaller number of roasters were consolidating the trade and hence claiming a growing share of the final price⁴⁴. Meanwhile in Mexico processing, roasting, grinding and distributing were done artisanly at home, as was the case for all of Latin America with the partial exception of Brazil, Costa Rica and the Southern Cone (which imported coffee). Nonetheless, Mexico City social life turned more to coffeehouses. Sanborns Café became a center of social and political life, later playing an important role in the Mexican Revolution.

Conclusions

This cursory and preliminary review of coffee consumption in Latin America has led to some surprising conclusions.

- 1) Coffee consumption in Latin America spread not so much because of colonial imposition; initially the export orientation was not strong. Only over time did exports dominate production but even then there were important regional differences within Latin American producers. The emphasis between the home market and the international one have shifted cyclically.
- 2) Coffee consumption did not reflect the received wisdom that it was urban, male-dominated, and European-oriented. Mesoamerican Indians consumed coffee and integrated it into their village festivals. It came to overshadow indigenous drinks such as cacao, atole, agua dulce, and mate, particularly in ladino society, but did not completely displace them. Indigenous drinks continue to be much consumed to this day with some of them such as mate substantially expanding their internal consumption. African slaves also drank coffee in the nineteenth century.

Home consumption in the interior which no doubt was substantially done by females was initially more important than coffeehouse conviviality. The national vector also varied. The French were

⁴², W. Thompson, *The People of Mexico* p. 280. There seems to have been little change from the colonial system described by Enrique Florescano, *Los precios de maíz*.

⁴³ Thompson, *The People of Mexico*, p. 273.

⁴⁴ Morris Adelman, *A & P. A Study in Price-Cost Behavior and Public Policy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959)

instrumental in the beginning in introducing coffee drinking; the British provided the services for the export crop even though they themselves were tea drinkers (ironically in Argentina, the U.K.'s main Latin American trade partner, coffee drinking far outweighed tea consumption, though it trailed mate)⁴⁵; the United States influenced Mexican and Mesoamerican habits and of course came to be the world's largest market.

3) Little value was added for domestic consumption until after World War I because it was mostly bought green and processed by the consumer. Only the expansion of state involvement in the market through price controls and quality regulation, growing institutionalization in the home market, and technological improvements led to large Latin American processing plants. But this is the subject for further research.. The study of coffee consumption leads us to question some of the received assumptions about the organization of society, the role of the market, and Latin American dependency.

⁴⁵ I thank Fernando Rochi for this data. Also see: Jorge Alberto Bossio, *Las Cafés de Buenos Aires. REportaje a la Nostalgia* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Plus Ultra, 1995). I thank Chris Topik for this source.