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Francesca Bray, Barbara Hahn, John Bosco Lourdasamy & Tiago Saraiva, *Moving Crops and the Scales of History*. Yale University Press, 2023. 352 pp. ISBN 9780300257250.

Moving Crops and the Scales of History combines a variety of approaches to take a refreshing look at the history of plants. It reimagines the agrarian history genre using the new framework of the “cropscape.” The cropscape is “an assemblage or coalition of human and nonhuman” (3) that considers how plants, various elements of their ecosystem, and humans interact. In this way, we can consider the environment, social interrelations, cultural forms, economic trends, and scientific ideas side by side. Instead of focusing on historical genres, the authors use whatever tools are at their disposal to understand the constellations of different ideas and practices which surround the production of certain crops.

The theoretical underpinnings of this wide-ranging volume draw on the Annales School’s ideas of *paysage* and *longue durée*, the cultural Marxist critique of how power relations influence our treatment of the environment, and newer landscape studies since the 1990s that challenge teleological conceptualizations of space and attribute greater agency to our environments. Cropscales are not simple environmental histories, since crops are not only “life-forms literally rooted in their local environment” but “artifacts with attitude, plants subjected to intense human discipline but with an irrepressible propensity to slip free.” (p. 1) As such, plants are treated in this volume as complex things that can have multiple or changing meanings ascribed to them, in a similar vein to Arjun Appadurai’s treatment of commodities in *The Social Life of Things* (1986).

Another unusual method of this book is that it is a co-written volume that deftly combines the authors’ expertise in multiple regions. Each chapter is organized around a theme and uses illustrations from different regions and time periods to illuminate that theme. Chapter 1 challenges “timescales, periodization, and temporalities”. Chapter 2 investigates the interactions between crops and places. Chapter 3 looks further at changing conceptions of size and scale within cropscales. Chapter 4 examines the role of different “actants” which can help build or change cropscales, whether they be nonhuman or human. Chapter 5 looks at “compositions,” that is, questioning the perceived homogeneity of cropscales. Even the most rigid monocrop plantations contain patchworks of other plants within them. Lastly, chapter 6

looks at how the reproduction of plants has shaped the different technologies used in cropscaapes in sometimes surprising ways.

In an effort to provincialize “the West,” these thematic studies consider multiple visions of plants outside the colonial capitalist model, such as those of Islamic scholars, Chinese officials, and Japanese theorists. The authors’ varied specialisms help put this agenda into practice (China, the United States, Portugal, and South Asia). This includes some consideration, though limited, of primary sources in original languages, such as Chinese, Spanish, Portuguese and French. Nevertheless, the primary methodology is “deep engagements with different historiographies” rather than the long list of archives and primary sources used by typical tomes of global history. This is meant to provide a more “inclusive history” by opening up the genre of wide-ranging global histories to those without the funding or resources to engage with large numbers of archives (pp. 249-250). This will no doubt cause some consternation amongst specialists who will want to see the insights that can only be provided by primary sources in original languages. And indeed, I hope many scholars investigate the swirling worlds of cropscaapes in other regions and from other perspectives using primary sources.

That being said, the authors do make good use of historiography. For example, they use archaeological and historical studies as well as an English translation of Ibn Khaldun to provide a background of date palm cultivation in North Africa and the Arabian peninsula (in chapter 1). When California farmers imported these trees, they also imported the “whole commercial method...[of] Arab oases” (pp. 33-37), creating a new industry that replicated some aspects of these cropscaapes. This longer background challenges the assumption that societies “evolve from nomadic into settled ones,” by discussing the murky boundaries between wild and domesticated trees, and mixed nomadic practices and settled agriculture across the region. Additionally, since the California industry used (and uses) so many cultivation practices of the Arab oases, the division between the supposedly “pre-modern” practices of date cultivation in the Muslim world and the “modern” practices of global agriculture loses its meaning (p. 26). The spread of date agriculture and its commerce across the Muslim world is connected to its replication in California through shared cropscaapes rather than periodization.

The cropscaapes in this volume range from the yam gardens of the Pacific islands and small cocoa farmers in Ghana, to the capitalist tobacco industry in North America and violent rubber monopolies of the Amazon. It likewise introduces some alternative histories to those of coercive European-dominated global agriculture, like the Ottoman production of tulips (chapter 2). Through these diverse case studies, the reader is able to envision the multitude of ways that human beings live with plants. We can see, for example, how human time can link to plant time and challenge narratives of progressive modernity. While these stories help us see the agency of different subaltern actors, both human and nonhuman, they do not shy away from the very real effects of power relations on the cultivation of plants. For example, chapter 1 discusses how the Green Revolution created new “time disciplines” in the promotion of higher-producing short season varieties of rice that inadvertently favored wealthier farmers over small farmers who then exited farming and moved to cities (pp. 45-46).

Besides including some histories of cropscales in Latin America (particularly plantations in Brazil), this book provides a novel approach that will be of interest to other historians of the region. It includes more global, social, cultural, and environmental dimensions that can help invigorate Latin American agrarian history and the history of plant sciences. But it also encourages us to bring the history of plants into cultural, intellectual, and economic history. The vision of the cropscale allows for the simultaneous study of global and local interactions between humans and plants that will both deepen and extend Latin American agrarian history.

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