The Indian Slave Trade
Captives

The Westo Indians: Slave Traders of the Early Colonial South
Eric E. Bowne
University of Alabama Press, Tuscaloosa, 2005. 144 pp., 5 figs., index. $24.95 paper.

In this short, readable, and eye-opening volume, Eric Bowne relates the rise and fall of the Westo Indians, a small but powerfully disruptive slaving group that migrated into the Southeast from the Northeast in the mid- to late-17th century. Scholars have long known that when Europeans settled North America they engaged American Indians in a trade in furs and Indian slaves. This trade was a force for change in American Indian life as well as fundamental to the American and Canadian colonial economies. Until recently, scholarship has focused on the trade in furs and skins rather than on the trade in slaves. Recent publications by Alan Gallay (The Indian Slave Trade, Yale University Press, New Haven, CT, 2002) and James Brooks (Captives and Cousins, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 2002) have pulled back the curtain on Indian slavery and effectively charted a new field of scholarly inquiry. Bowne’s book, one of the first generation in this new field, takes readers inside the colonial Indian slave trade through the short history of the Westos’ involvement in it.

Bowne opens his book with a discussion of the source material on the Westos. His points, that the documentary evidence is scanty and that the archaeological evidence is practically nonexistent, are well taken. Even so, Bowne argues that by placing the Westos in a broad social history context of the first hundred or so years after European contact, one can use the available evidence to reconstruct something of Westo origins and history and impact on other Southern Indians. Bowne’s central question is “how did a small group of armed migrants manage to not only monopolize the Southern colonial trade, but also to militarily dominate the Southeastern Indian geopolitical landscape to such a point that the very name of Westo struck fear in the heart of Southern Indians for hundreds of miles?” Throughout the book, Bowne explores what he proposes to be the primary factors for this—the Westos’ experience in the Beaver Wars and their forced migration south; their early involvement with the European trade system; their experience with firearms and the paucity of guns available to the Southeastern Indians at the time; European unfamiliarity with the interior southern landscape and people; and the steady demand for Indian slaves generated by the incipient British plantation economy of the South.

Bowne begins the story of the Westos with their origins in the Northeast. Scholars recognized early on that the Westos were originally Eries, and Bowne further substantiates these assertions with a brief history of the Eries. The Erie Nation formed in the early-17th century as an alliance of people from various Northeastern Indian groups pushed together for mutual defense against the Iroquois during the Beaver Wars. Bowne then recounts how the Eries forged a partnership with the Susquahannocks to control the European trade in the Ohio River valley. The Iroquois challenged this control and, in 1654, they dealt the Erie a disastrous blow. The survivors dispersed in all directions and began the Westos migration into the deep South.

In 1656, 500 to 600 Westos settled on the James River in Virginia (where they were known as Richahecrians), and soon after they brokered a trade deal with some Jamestown traders who were interested in both furs and slaves. The Westos started slaving in present-day central Georgia and north Florida. The survivors of these raids fled into Spanish Florida, seeking protection against the Chichimecos, the name by which the Westos were known in La Florida. For reasons unknown, the Westos left Virginia and moved into present-day Georgia where they built the town of Hickauaugau on the Savannah River in 1663. When the Westos...

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Official attempts to protect native peoples by establishing reserves are the subject of Martha McCartney’s insightful contribution. Populist squatters and other petty criminals, and even members of the government, contravened these protective legislations in Virginia, as in all of the colonies, dooming the efforts of the enlightened legislators. McCartney also points out how the foraging needs of the peoples in these chiefdoms rendered inadequate the circumscribed tracts provided for each group. Parallels to these conflicts can be seen throughout the colonies, with inevitable results.

T. Davidson offers a focused study on the Indian bowls commonly inventoried in colonial Maryland and known elsewhere in the colonies. Davidson believes that these bowls represent ceramic vessels, identified by some archaeologists as colonoware pottery (p. 245), a topic extensively reviewed in the literature. This is unconvincing. Davidson’s use of quotation marks in reference to an “inventory that lists ‘Indian’ bowls and ‘wooden’ bowls as separate entries” (p. 247) suggests that readers need to see more of the document. A listing of Indians bowls near some “presumably wooden ‘cooper’s hollow ware’” on another inventory (p. 247) also suggests that these Indian bowls were wooden. Perhaps these bowls, often “simply called ‘boles’” (p. 259) were cut and fashioned by Indians from tree boles. The tradition of using treen, or household items cut from trees, came from Europe with the colonists. These examples may have been purchased from Indians.

P. Levy closes the collection with a review of information about the 1634 palisade (6 mi. long) at the Middle Plantation erected to delineate English lands from those of their native neighbors. His welcome observations point the way to conducting further research.

Each of these papers summarizes the existing data, sets it within a theoretical framework, and looks towards new means of improving the data to further refine understanding. The extensive bibliography and extraordinary index significantly augment the value of this book. Blanton and King provide an important volume, filled with perceptive insights. Their discussion of shell beads (p. 210–211; also Klein and Sanford p. 52,59) demonstrates that this subject needs special treatment. Blanton and King provide an important volume, filled with perceptive insights. Their discussion of shell beads (p. 210–211; also Klein and Sanford p. 52,59) demonstrates that this subject needs special treatment.
settled Hickauhaugau they were fully armed with European guns and, after commanding Carolina’s Lord Proprietors for a sole license, they were well on their way to monopolizing the southern trade.

Bowne documents the effects of Westo aggression on the social geography throughout present-day Georgia, Florida, and South Carolina. Here Bowne not only gives an inside glimpse of the depredations and terrorizing that was part and parcel of trafficking in human commodities, but he also persuasively argues that the Westos were in large part responsible for the upheavals, dislocations, and migrations that occurred in this area in the late-17th century. For example, Bowne suggests that the fall of the famous paramount chiefdom of Cofiticheche occurred because the Westos slaved them out and that the refugees, along with others, eventually coalesced to form the Catawbas. The Westos hold on the southern trade did not last long. Other Indians and ambitious Carolina slave traders, known as the Goose Creek Men, combined their efforts to break the Westo monopoly. In 1680, the Goose Creek Men contracted some Savannah Indians in a secret military campaign against the Westos, which ended in the dispersal of the Westos, the abandonment of Hickauhaugau, and the decline of their influence in the South.

Some historians no doubt will be dissatisfied with the dearth of direct documentary evidence for Bowne’s tale of the Westos. Bowne’s device of patching fragmentary documentary and archaeological evidence into the larger social history of the Southeastern Indians in order to make sense of the Westos’ presence in the Southeast is a wondrous alternative to letting the Westos and this fascinating and grisly time linger in historical obscurity. Over the past 15 years or so scholars have been sketching out the long social history of the Southeastern Indians, and they have come to recognize the fundamental transformation that Native lives underwent from the Mississippian period to the colonial era. Bowne’s is one of the first books to take advantage of the broad social history context that is now available for the Southeastern Indians, and The Westo Indians is a stunning example of what a creative and adroit scholar can do with it.

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Technology and Gender: Fabrics of Power in Late Imperial China
Francesca Bray
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The role of women in recent Chinese history has been largely stereotyped, portraying wives and daughters as prisoners of their male relatives. Images of bound feet and titilial women abound in the literature and art pertaining to China, especially since the expansion of Europe from the 15th century onwards. Francesca Bray sets an impressive goal for herself by tracing the changing social status of women for the past millennium (specifically from A.D. 1000–1800) by drawing upon historic materials from China, ethnohistorical studies, and archaeological investigations, all of which are framed from a history of technology standpoint.

Bray’s central theme focuses on recovering an accurate history of women in China. She first draws upon Joseph Needham’s monumental study of Chinese history, Science and Civilization in China. Bray states that its success in extending the definition of the history of technology beyond that of Europe and its colonies was an important step in understanding the long history of China. She believes that Needham’s work fell short in two important respects. His work disembodies the growth of technology from its native (Chinese) position by using western classification systems and imposing a European idea of the “natural” outcome of technological progress. Needham considers technological progress as the creation of an industrial economy based on capitalist ideas and the birth of Western-style science. Bray frames her study by investigating how the Chinese relationships with technology evolved in situ.

The book is divided into three sections. The first section discusses the evolution of house forms from prehistoric times. It is important to remember that the historical period of China is a deeper one than most other countries, extending back to the time of the Qin Shihuang Di (the First Emperor) in approximately 200 B.C. Bray brings her discussion into a comfortably modern context by tracing the structural development of housing up through the Qing Dynasty (A.D. 1616 – 1911). She looks at archaeological investigations of cultures and sites throughout China, such as the Neolithic Longshan pottery culture from north/northeast China and the site of Hemudu (near modern-day Shanghai). In order to trace house development into modern times, she draws upon Chinese construction manuals from late Imperial China. Typically, the Chinese divided their homes into male/female spheres. The altar room, often used to receive important guests, was a male-dominated space and place of ancestor worship rituals. The kitchen, or stove room, was a woman’s space, where, according to Bray, women were in charge and moderated behavior and rituals associated with stove and other household deities.

The second section introduces the role of women as more intricate than previously understood. This section begins in the Song Dynasty (A.D. 960–1279) and focuses on the production of textiles. In this time period weaving was still the domain of women, often completed during the day in a woman’s chambers (for the elite) or bedroom (among the peasant class). Bray contends that as work is an expression of identity, women began to lose this self-definition as the gender role attached to weaving gradually became male. This process resulted from a combination of tax increases and technological advancement. As loom technology grew in both complexity and size, and cottage industry-style textile production increasingly failed to meet the new taxes, weaving was consolidated into large-scale operations, factories. As England discovered several centuries later, the factory system often requires a seasonal or mobile workforce. Because of social attitudes towards women, specifically that they should not loiter outside, this growing workforce consisted of men. The effect on a woman’s role that resulted from this gender redefinition of textile production was an increased importance placed on a woman’s reproductive role. This is not to suggest that