
G. Roger Knight. *Trade and Empire in Early Nineteenth-Century Southeast Asia: Gillian Maclaine and His Business Network*. Roydon, UK: Boydell Press, 2015. xiv + 193 pp. ISBN 978-1-78327-069-9, £65 (cloth).

This fine-grained study by an accomplished economic historian of Southeast Asia will be most welcome to all those interested in the way nineteenth-century commerce operated. Knight is the kind of careful scholar to leave no archival stone unturned, and he has consulted the usual archives in the Netherlands and London as well as the published literature on British commerce of the period. The additional treasure is the voluminous private correspondence of his principal subject, surprisingly preserved in the state archives of Scotland and of Gloucestershire, as well as in private family hands.

Gillian Maclaine was unique in his role in Java, and yet beautifully representative of the kind of pioneering enterprise that several generations of educated Scotsmen brought to Asia. His roots were firmly Scottish Highlands and Presbyterian, although his career was extremely cosmopolitan. He exemplifies the working trust among his fellow Scots in London and later in Batavia, much as Weber described it in nineteenth-century American chapel-goers, or more modern analysts in the networks of same-village and same-surname associations in the Chinese merchant diaspora. In reassuring his mother about his risky credit arrangements with other Scots traders, Maclaine praises one as “a regular Highlander” in his common sense and warm heart, while another “maintains his strict Presbyterian principles” (65). His coffee concession in the Javanese princely districts (*vorstenlanden*) survived amid the storms of the Java–Dutch War, because his Javanese patron and landlord, Pangeran Buminata, was “perfectly Highland” in his warmth and straightforward honesty. Maclaine’s letters are, fortunately, all in English, although Gaelic formed an emotive bond among these enterprising Scots far from home.

Born on the west coast island of Mull in 1798, Maclaine benefitted from the superior Scottish education system and his gentry status to reach the University of Glasgow. The good offices of his uncle found him a place with the equally Scottish firm of MacLachlan Brothers, trading to Calcutta and beyond. His letters show initial excitement giving way to increasing frustration because he was not given responsibility. His quest, then and later, was for “an independency,” meaning enough capital to trade on his own. He leapt at the chance to sail to Asia on behalf of the firm. In July 1820, he arrived in Batavia in charge of a consignment of cottons produced in the Glasgow area (then second only to Lancashire as a production center) and of some Turkish opium outside the monopoly control of Bengal

opium by the East India Company. The goods were to be immediately sold to a Scottish firm in Batavia, Menzies and Anderson, for sale to Indies Chinese intermediary merchants. However, Menzies was away and Anderson had broken his arm, so Maclaine had to negotiate customs and find a sale on his own. The Batavia Scottish community came to his rescue in disposing of the opium, but within weeks he rejoined the same ship that had brought him from Calcutta, hoping to sell the cloth in Semarang. There he appears to have done well, quickly making £12,000 on sales to the “long-que’d Chinamen” (60).

It was the lure of growing coffee at a frontier outside the control of English or Dutch authorities that led Maclaine to break his links to the McLachlans. Several European planters had already leased land from one of the Javanese rulers to grow coffee. Maclaine enthused to his long-suffering uncle (and involuntary provider of credit) that it was one of the “easiest, safest ... and most rapid modes of realising a fortune that possibly exists (63).

He continued, “The expense of labor is so trifling and the advance of capital so little, there being no Sink of money for an Estate, slaves etc. as in the West Indies, that coffee can actually be raised for 8 or 10 shillings per cwt” (64). By 1822, however, the partnership he had entered with fellow Scots and a Walloon manager to run the estate was insolvent, and the Indies government was increasingly hostile to these private planters. Maclaine was rescued by the very McLachlan brothers with whom he had acrimoniously parted company. He was to transfer his interest in the estate to a new entity, Gillian Maclaine & Co. of Batavia, under which name the London McLachlans would effectively control Maclaine again. They thereby extended their interests into Java and into coffee.

The tiny share of the profits that Maclaine received from this new relationship continued to deny him hope of eventual “independency.” In 1826 he again terminated the relationship, and set up the independent firm of Maclaine Watson, based on his own trading in Batavia and John Maxwell’s in newly founded Singapore. The new firm evidently made some profits by again importing British cottons and exporting coffee, but these were mostly siphoned back to repay his debts to the McLachlan Brothers. Knight uses Maclaine’s correspondence to take the reader through various challenges to the trade: the London financial crisis of 1825, the Java War, Dutch determination from 1824 to replace British with Netherlands cotton imports, and the falling price of coffee as production expanded in Brazil. From 1830 to 1832, ill health—perhaps induced by “boisterous’ [his word] bachelor parties among his fellow Scots expatriates in Batavia” (107)—drove Maclaine back to Britain. He returned with much better financial

support from well-placed contacts in Scotland, and the great advantage of a wife he met on the outward voyage and whose family was very well connected in Dutch official circles in Batavia. Thus armed, the firm finally flourished. It profited first from the temporary collapse of Dutch cotton exports, with the loss of the southern Netherlands, and later from diversification into trade throughout the archipelago. By 1840 he had sufficiently made his fortune to return to Scotland with the capital needed to obtain his long-sought “independence” as a land-owning laird. Sadly, his ship foundered in a storm near Mauritius, and all on board perished.

Knight has delivered an engaging canter through some complex economic history. The many quotations from Maclaine’s letters reveal how financial trust and obligation worked, and often bitterly failed, among a remarkable Scottish commercial diaspora. Though the prose can be a little labored, this book is a very welcome addition to the knowledge of both Java’s nineteenth-century commerce and the habits of the Scottish trading diaspora.

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R. W. Sandwell (ed.). *Powering Up Canada: A History of Power, Fuel, and Energy from 1600*. Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2016. x + 482 pp. ISBN 978-0773547858, \$120. (cloth); ISBN 978-0-7735-4786-5, \$37.95 (paper).

R. W. Sandwell’s edited volume, *Powering Up Canada*, is the first comprehensive overview of Canada’s energy history. It covers nearly all energy resources and carriers, and discusses their various uses over time while addressing the roles of individuals, society, industry, and government. The volume is structured chronologically. Using E. A. Wrigley’s (*Continuity, Chance & Change: The Character of the Industrial Revolution in England*, Cambridge: Press Syndicate, 1988) distinction between organic and mineral regimes, it is subdivided into two parts, with six chapters each. In addition to an introduction and conclusion, an extensive forty-two-page “Primer on Technology,” by Colin A. M. Duncan, is provided. Statistical appendices, figures, images, and maps further complement this book.