

**DEMYTHOLOGISING THE HISTORY OF COFFEE IN
LIPA, BATANGAS IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY**

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**Dissertation submitted in fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of**

Master of Arts

in Gastronomy

Department of History

University of Adelaide

December 2003

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ABSTRACT

DEMYTHOLOGISING THE HISTORY OF COFFEE IN LIPA, BATANGAS IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

by Maria Rita Isabel Santos Castro

There is no article dealing with the history of Philippine coffee that does not mention 'the grandeur that was Lipa', a prosperous period that began with a coffee boom in the late 1800's and ended with the coffee blight of c1889. Most references adopt a monocausal approach to the rise and fall of coffee in Lipa, Batangas in the end of the nineteenth century. That is, c1886-87, an airborne fungus having attacked and destroyed all the coffee plantations in the neighbouring Southeast Asian coffee regions, supposedly left Lipa as the sole supplier of coffee beans to the world. Lipa is said to have profited greatly from this alleged coffee monopoly until c1889 when the same fungus finally infected even the Lipa plantations, bringing the hugely lucrative coffee industry to an abrupt end. This view has remained unchallenged for almost a century.

By casting a wider net to include primary sources such as travelogues and government reports, plus several key historical studies, this research subjects the arrival, rise and decline of coffee in Lipa to scrutiny and concludes that what currently passes for history is more apocryphal than it is factual, dominated as it is by myths and half-truths. Viewing coffee in the broader context of the world economy, this paper dismisses the supposed c1886 monopoly as myth and argues that the coffee boom towards the end of the Spanish colonial era can be attributed to a complex series of events and antecedents and was ultimately a response to the pressures of global demand. It also argues that the seeds of the collapse of the industry were planted long before the coffee crisis of 1889-1892. Other factors such as diminishing virgin forest, monoculture, the lack of investments, and competition with other products, were probably more to blame. Possibly, the arrival of the coffee blight may have accelerated the inevitable, but was not the prime cause. This new approach to the rise and decline of coffee in Lipa reveals a history more complex than was previously thought and is a dramatic demonstration of the transforming power of gourmandism and nineteenth century globalisation.

DECLARATION

This work contains no material which has been accepted for award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

I give consent to the copy of my dissertation when deposited in the University Library, being available for loan and photocopying.

Signed

Date

SUPERVISOR'S CERTIFICATION

I, Dr. Nancy J. Pollock, certify that I have read the final draft of the dissertation of Maria Rita Isabel Santos Castro and am satisfied that, on the basis of technical presentation, the thesis is worthy of examination.

Signed _____ Date _____