

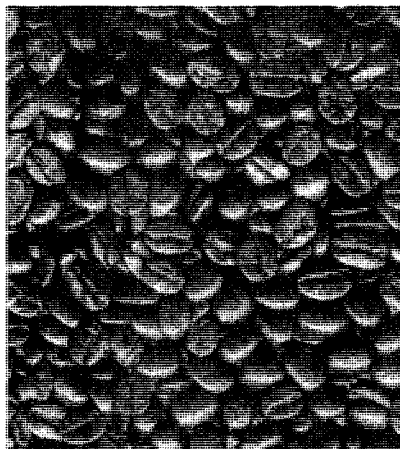
A Coffee Frontier

Land, Society, and Politics in Duaca, Venezuela,
1830–1936



Doug Yarrington

A Coffee Frontier



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A Coffee Frontier

L A N D,
S O C I E T Y,
A N D
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V E N E Z U E L A,
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Doug Yarrington

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Preface

BETWEEN THE MIDDLE of the nineteenth century and the Great Depression, two interrelated processes—an export boom and the consolidation of national states—fundamentally reshaped Latin American society. Taken together, the transformations of this era constituted the most profound changes in the region since the European conquest. In seeking to comprehend this critical period, historians have often turned to local studies, for it has become clear that no two areas experienced the developments of these years in exactly the same way. The present book contributes to this scholarly process by examining the changes that accompanied the coffee boom and state building in Duaca, a district in the state of Lara, in west-central Venezuela.

Even Venezuelanists may be surprised at the notion of a book-length study of coffee and politics in Duaca. Regarding coffee, the nation's leading export during most of this period, it is true that some Venezuelan districts produced more than Duaca. A few districts in the Andes, in the far west of the nation, produced considerably more. But as one examines the fragmented statistics on local coffee production in Venezuela, it becomes apparent that a great deal of the nation's annual crop—probably a majority—came from districts all across northern Venezuela with yields in the general range of Duaca's, which is to say up to 3 million kilograms at the height of the boom. A search for the

“typical” coffee district would be fruitless, but Duaca was, by this one standard, clearly more typical of Venezuelan coffee zones than the few districts that became famous for their unusually large harvests.

In the political realm, Duaca acquired considerable importance around the turn of the century, as the construction of a railroad through the region added to its strategic significance, and as some members of the local elite gained a reputation as skilled guerrilla leaders capable of controlling the railroad during times of civil conflict. As a result, Duaca’s local elite found itself able to bargain with the men who consolidated the national state in Venezuela in the early twentieth century. The experience of Duaca allows us to explore the nature of the new political order from a local perspective, and thus to make an original contribution to historical studies of Venezuela.

In addition, Duaca merits attention for the richness and variety of its historical documentation. Notary records, including sales, mortgages, and wills, are virtually complete for the period since the early 1870s. Because no agricultural census was conducted in Venezuela until the late 1930s, these documents are indispensable for understanding the structure of land tenure in the period under study and also offer detailed information on topics such as credit relationships and the economy of peasant households. Judicial documents from Duaca recount dozens of conflicts between landlords and peasants, providing insight into changing systems of land tenure and peasants’ perception of these changes. Sources for the analysis of local politics, though sparse for much of the nineteenth century, are unusually plentiful for the period beginning in the late 1890s. They shed light on topics such as the relationship between the local elite and the central state, the interplay between politics and changing agrarian structures, and the peasant protests that exploded following a change of political regime in late 1935. Few regions in the entire republic offer such a range of sources for the study of social and political transformations during this critical period.

Finally, readers should be aware that the region I refer to as Duaca has been officially known as Distrito Crespo since 1899, when its administrative status was elevated from that of a municipality to that of a district. But most people in the vicinity continue to refer to the entire jurisdiction simply as Duaca, after the town of Duaca, which has been the local administrative center ever since its creation by the Spaniards in the early seventeenth century. By adopting this local usage and referring to the entire area as Duaca throughout the book, I avoid the confusion of using different names in different time periods for the same region.

MANY PEOPLE HAVE contributed to my work on this project, and it is a pleasure to acknowledge their assistance. Indeed, as I near the completion of this book, I see more clearly than ever how much I owe to those who helped me along the way. I would never have undertaken this project at all if not for Judy Ewell, who first encouraged me to study Venezuela during my undergraduate days at the College of William and Mary. In graduate school at the University of Texas, I had the good fortune to study with Jonathan Brown, Susan Deans-Smith, Richard Graham, and Alan Knight, all of whom commented on the dissertation that served as the basis for the present study. One could not ask for a better group of mentors. I owe a particular debt to Alan Knight for graciously agreeing to supervise a dissertation outside his primary area of interest, and for his perceptive comments and questions. While at Texas, I also benefited greatly from conversations with Peter Linder, who generously shared with me insights from his own research in the state of Zulia, and who convinced me that Venezuelan archives were an underutilized treasure trove for those wishing to pursue regional history.

In Venezuela, I met a number of scholars who assisted me as I went about my research. In Caracas, Susan Berglund, Marie Price, and Mark Zelmer oriented me to various libraries and archives. Early conversations with Marie, who was engaged in a ground-breaking study of Andean coffee zones, helped me to interpret the information I found regarding peasants, land tenure, and migration. In Barquisimeto and Duaca, I received vital assistance and counsel from Octavio Galíndez, Carlos Giménez, Luisa Rodríguez Marrufo, Taylor Rodríguez, and Reinaldo Rojas. I am especially grateful to Reinaldo and Luisa for sharing with me their research on colonial Duaca and on peasant protest in the state of Lara during the 1930s (respectively), which contributed greatly to my understanding of the region. I also wish to thank the staff of the Registro Principal del Estado Lara, in Barquisimeto, where I carried out most of my research, for their patience and good humor when confronted with the unaccustomed requests of a foreign scholar. My stay in Barquisimeto was greatly enriched by the hospitality and friendship of the Rodríguez Lugo family—Cecilia, Iraida, Luis Alberto, Ghysnil, Edilio, and Francisco—who welcomed my wife and me into their home for a year and a half.

As I began to prepare material for publication, a number of scholars took the time to respond to my ideas and offer their encouragement, including Susan Berglund, Elizabeth Dore, Steve Ellner, Judy Ewell, Mary Floyd, Peter Linder, John Lombardi, and Winthrop Wright. I am especially grateful to two anonymous reviewers for the University of Pittsburgh Press, for comments and suggestions that greatly improved the final draft.

I also wish to acknowledge my debt to William Roseberry for his pioneering studies of frontier peasantries. Readers will notice that I do not always agree with Roseberry's ideas, but his influence has marked my thinking nonetheless. The questions we choose to address as we write history are often more important than the answers we propose, and in this regard my debt to him is a large one. Of course, I alone am responsible for the use that I have made of the suggestions and ideas provided by others, and thus I bear sole responsibility for any errors of interpretation or fact in the pages that follow.

Acknowledgment is due also to the Institute for International Education, for a research grant provided under the auspices of the Fulbright Program; to the University of Texas at Austin for a graduate fellowship that supported a year of work after my return from Venezuela; to the interlibrary loan staff at Adams State College in Alamosa, Colorado; and to Duke University Press for permission to reprint material that originally appeared in "Public Land Settlement, Privatization, and Peasant Protest in Duaca, Venezuela, 1870-1936," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 74.1 (1994): 33-62.

Turning to debts of a more personal nature, it is difficult to know where to begin or end. I cannot put into words what I have received from those closest to me, who offered their love and support during the years of research and writing. I can only offer heartfelt thanks to my parents, Roger and Lynda Yarrington, to Forrest and Donna Swall, and most of all to my wife, Maria Swall-Yarrington, and our son, Ben.

A Coffee Frontier

1 Introduction

THIS STUDY EXAMINES agrarian change and politics in Duaca during the years when Venezuela was a major producer of coffee for the world market. I argue that the expansion of Venezuela's export economy in the middle of the nineteenth century led to the emergence of a prosperous and relatively autonomous peasantry in Duaca. Peasant families continued to flourish into the early twentieth century largely because of the availability of land on Duaca's extensive frontier of public lands (*terrenos baldíos*) and Indian community lands (*resguardos*), which they could freely occupy and cultivate. These advantageous conditions, I contend, came to an abrupt end in the 1910s and 1920s, when Duaca's elite restructured local society in their own interest, seizing control of public and Indian lands, and imposing on the peasantry a more exploitative set of relationships than had existed in the early decades of the coffee economy. Moreover, I argue that the fundamental impetus behind this process of social transformation came from alterations in the structure of political power, both nationally and locally, for the new agrarian order imposed by Duaca's elite was made possible by their alliance with the centralized state created by two national strongmen, Cipriano Castro (in power 1899–1908) and Juan Vicente Gómez (in power 1908–1935).

Such an argument touches upon a number of broader issues embedded in Venezuelan history, the history of Latin American coffee zones, and more general theoretical debates regarding social and political transformations. To place Duaca's peasantry in these larger contexts, I have found William Roseberry's concept of "precipitate" peasantries to be a useful category of analysis. Roseberry uses this term to refer to peasant populations composed of migrants who colonized frontiers of previously vacant land to produce commercial crops for the expanding global market of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.¹ Precipitate peasantries, unlike peasants who resided in villages that could trace their history hundreds of years into the past, only came into being during the great expansion of world demand for tropical and subtropical products that began in the latter half of the nineteenth century. As migrants from different locales, they shared neither a common ethnic identity nor a long-established network of community institutions—traits generally associated with village peasantries. Thus precipitate peasantries (or, as I also refer to them, frontier peasantries) constitute a distinct group within the broader field of peasant studies.

Coffee, Latin America's leading agricultural export in the century between independence and the Great Depression, was often produced in frontier regions and thus is intertwined with the history of precipitate peasantries in several areas of Latin America. To be sure, some coffee frontiers, such as São Paulo, Brazil, came to be dominated by a planter class that succeeded in monopolizing land, creating a dependent labor force, and preventing the rise of an independent peasantry. But in other settings, such as Costa Rica, Puerto Rico, and parts of Colombia, peasant migrants to the frontier enjoyed relatively free access to land and became the backbone of the coffee economy during its early decades. In these regions, as in Duaca and other areas of western Venezuela, the creation of an export economy based on coffee involved the creation of a peasantry in areas hitherto unoccupied or only lightly populated.² Moreover, the precipitate peasantries who came into being on these coffee frontiers (unlike peasants in some parts of Latin America) participated in the export economy because they chose to do so, and on the whole they seemed to benefit from coffee as long as they had relatively unfettered access to land.

In the long run, however, peasant prosperity based on coffee production proved impossible to sustain. For reasons that varied from one region to the next, the dynamism and autonomy that marked the formative years of frontier peasantries came to an end. In Costa Rica, peasant households that had

flourished on the frontier in the nineteenth century fell victim to land shortages and population pressure after about 1900, forcing the subdivision of family farms into smaller, uneconomical units once the frontier of good land was occupied. In other areas, such as the Colombian frontier, the decline of the peasantry engaged in coffee production resulted from the elite's use of political influence to appropriate lands occupied by peasant settlers. Meanwhile, in the interior highlands of Puerto Rico, demographic trends and the coercive power of the state each played a role in the demise of small coffee producers.³ In sum, the decline of frontier peasantries, like the transformation of agrarian structures in preindustrial Europe, can be explained by reference either to demographic forces or to patterns of class conflict mediated by the state, depending on the region involved or, in some cases, the preconceptions of the historian.⁴

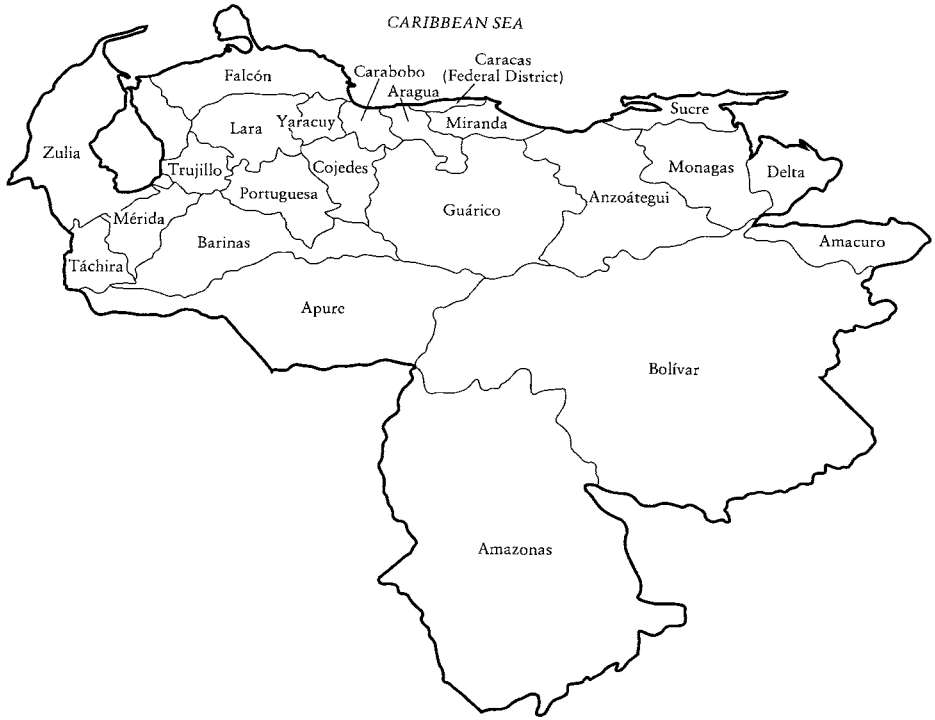
Despite a growing interest in Latin American agrarian history in general and coffee regions in particular over the past twenty years or so, and despite Venezuela's status as a major exporter of coffee before the Great Depression, rural Venezuela has received comparatively little attention from scholars. This neglect almost surely results from the widely held image of Venezuela as a nation shaped so thoroughly by petroleum that all other influences may be relegated to secondary importance. Although few would dispute the importance of oil, the economic and political crises of the 1980s and 1990s suggest that petroleum has not given Venezuela a society or polity as distinct from those of other Latin American nations as was once thought. By the same token, as the years of oil-based "prosperity" recede into the past, they appear to have been a rather brief and exceptional period in the nation's history rather than a time of permanent and fundamental change. Thus one may ask whether other realities in Venezuela's history—such as a social structure divided along racial lines, a political culture dominated by an ethic of patronage, and an economy dependent on a narrow range of exports since the seventeenth century—have molded Venezuela at least as much as oil. As these questions acquire greater urgency, perhaps increased attention will be given to the similarities rather than the differences between Venezuela and other Latin American nations, especially those nations where coffee has been a critical export.

Scholars who have written about Venezuelan rural history often emphasize continuity rather than change, seeing no fundamental alteration of agrarian structure since the colonial period. Pioneering studies by Miguel Acosta Saignes and Federico Brito Figueroa, for example, emphasize landowners'

control over a dependent rural working class throughout the period between independence and the Great Depression.⁵ Although Acosta and Brito argue that the Gómez dictatorship (1908–1935) brought an intensification of Venezuela’s “feudal” system of large estates and debt peonage, they identify no basic change in land tenure or rural class structure during his long rule. Likewise, these scholars devote little attention to the question of regional variation within Venezuela, or to the place of small, independent cultivators in the nation’s agrarian history. On the whole, they stress a uniformly oppressive agrarian structure across regions, just as they emphasize its continuity through time.

Recent studies by younger scholars give greater attention to the importance of regional variations in Venezuelan rural history, however, and focus more directly on coffee, the nation’s leading export from 1830 until 1925, when it was displaced by oil. Recent works have confirmed the prevalence of large estates and debt peonage in the central coastal zone surrounding Caracas, while they also emphasize the importance of small peasant farms in the Andean states of Táchira, Mérida, and Trujillo (see map 1). Studies by Alicia Ardao, Arturo Muñoz, Marie Price, and William Roseberry have confirmed the importance of peasant production in the Andes, which became the center of Venezuela’s coffee economy in the late nineteenth century.⁶ Composed primarily of thinly populated frontier areas through the mid-nineteenth century, Andean coffee zones attracted large numbers of migrants after the Federal War of 1859–1863. By the 1890s the Andes produced more than half of Venezuela’s coffee, making the nation the third-largest exporter in the world. Although opportunities for peasant settlers began to fade in the early twentieth century as the supply of vacant land was exhausted, the presence of a large peasantry has continued to distinguish the Andean states from the rest of Venezuela.

Duaca, the focus of the present study, is located in west-central Venezuela, a region encompassing the states of Lara, Yaracuy, and Falcón. This region lies between the Andean states and the central coastal zone of Miranda, Aragua, Carabobo, and the Federal District. Thus the west-central region is bordered to the east by an area historically dominated by large estates, and to the west by a region characterized primarily by peasant holdings. Little research has been done on the agrarian systems of the west-central zone during the national period, but it seems clear that the region included a variety of land tenure and labor systems. Locales such as Guarico (in southwestern Lara) and Nirgua (in eastern Yaracuy)—both important centers of coffee pro-



Map 1. Venezuela

duction during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—contained sizable concentrations of peasant cultivators, while large estates controlled much of the land around Carora (western Lara), Barquisimeto (eastern Lara), and San Felipe (central Yaracuy). (See map 2.)

Because Roseberry developed the concept of a precipitate peasantry in his study of the coffee-producing district of Boconó, in the state of Trujillo, my use of the concept highlights the similarities between Duaca's early history and that of the Venezuelan Andes. Like many parishes established by Spanish colonists in the Andes, Duaca was founded as a center of enforced Indian settlement, but over the course of the nineteenth century it attracted an ethnically mixed population of migrants who fanned out across the landscape, cleared new land, and planted coffee. In Duaca, as in the Andes, the peasant economy was most prosperous in the nineteenth century when the availability of land allowed the spatial expansion of peasant production.

The history of the two areas diverged in the twentieth century, however. Whereas the decline of household economies in Duaca resulted from the

MAP 2 THE STATE OF LARA



Map 2. The State of Lara

elite's sudden, wholesale appropriation of public and Indian lands, the peasantry in Boconón (and apparently in the Andes generally) experienced a more gradual decline as growing population pressure eroded the small holder economy and sharpened the differentiation between rich and poor peasant families. Thus while the decline of Duaca's precipitate peasantry suggests parallels with the expropriation of peasants on the Colombian frontier, the Andean experience is much closer to the demographically driven transition typified by Costa Rican coffee zones.

Although I agree with Roseberry's notion of precipitate peasantries as a distinct social group created in the context of an expanding global market, I should make clear at the outset that I disagree with some of his conclusions about the nature of such groups. In particular, Roseberry emphasizes merchant domination of peasants from the time that they began to produce coffee, and more broadly, he stresses the manner in which the formation of a frontier peasantry served the needs of the global economy. In short, he portrays peasant society as weakened, even doomed, from the beginning by its place in the world capitalist system. Such a conceptualization seems to me to concentrate too heavily on peasants' relationship to an all-powerful commercial system, while slighting the importance of other factors that shaped peasant life just as profoundly, and which produced variation in peasant fortunes over time.⁷



Map 3. Distrito Crespo (Duaca)

By contrast, I find it more useful to draw a sharp distinction between the favorable conditions available to frontier peasants in the nineteenth century, when land was plentiful, and the increasingly dire situation they confronted in the twentieth. To be sure, peasants in the nineteenth century were already subject to exploitation in their relationships with merchants and with hacienda owners who employed them as seasonal labor. Nevertheless, the nineteenth-century coffee frontier offered opportunities as well as risks, as peasants themselves seemed to know. Studies of peasant migration to coffee zones in the Venezuelan Andes and in Costa Rica indicate that peasants saw the possibility of commercial production as a good thing, and this perception, rather than fading after a few years' experience with coffee, continued as long as land remained available for colonization.⁸ At least in the nineteenth century, there seemed to be no fundamental contradiction between the prosperity of frontier peasantries and production for the global market.

Reasoning further along these lines, I differ with Roseberry on whether the

concept of “moral economy” is useful in the study of frontier peasantries. This concept, which has dominated discussion of peasant resistance and revolt over the last two decades, highlights the conservative, backward-looking nature of peasant protest; more specifically, it emphasizes peasants’ propensity to defend established, “traditional,” or “noncapitalist” systems of production that served the peasantry well until they were undermined by the pressure of capitalist development or intrusion by the state. Roseberry suggests that moral economy analysis is largely irrelevant to precipitate peasantries because such groups have been enmeshed in capitalism, by virtue of their links to merchants, from the moment of their formation as a class and thus have no precapitalist traditions to defend.⁹

Although I do not wish to delve into the old question of whether a society is “capitalist” from the time it enters production for the world market or only following the proletarianization of the workforce, much less initiate a sterile debate over whether frontier peasant societies are the ethical equals of the village societies commonly featured in the moral economy literature, I do think the concept may be more relevant to frontier peasantries than Roseberry suggests. As I argue in chapter 9, the peasant protests that erupted in Duaca following the death of Juan Vicente Gómez in late 1935 (as well as the less dramatic, “everyday” resistance of the previous two decades) closely parallel the dynamics outlined in the moral economy literature. Peasants who resisted the oppressive conditions imposed during the last twenty years of the Gómez regime measured these changes against their collective memory of an earlier (perhaps romanticized) period, when most land in Duaca was public or controlled by the Indian community, when families relied on usufruct rights to guarantee their access to land, and when rents on the few private estates that existed were quite low. In short, because I believe that precipitate peasantries tended to be formed under relatively favorable conditions in the nineteenth century, I find it quite plausible that peasant rebels at a later date fought to return to those conditions that had benefited their class in the past. Whether one chooses to apply the label of moral economy or not, this argument concerning the backward-looking nature of peasant protest in Duaca seems important to our understanding of political consciousness among peasantries who trace their origins to commercial production in a frontier setting.

Because agrarian change in Duaca was driven more by political factors than by market or demographic forces, I have found myself obliged to consider theoretical questions relating to the nature of the state. Simply put, I see the Venezuelan state primarily as a clientelistic network, composed of fac-

tions of the well-to-do who participate in politics largely as a means of extending their influence within society, and especially as a means of advancing their economic interests. Moreover, I agree with those who see clientelism as an enduring feature of Latin America's politics, rather than a "stage" in political development.¹⁰ That is, I do not see political structures characterized by clientelism as a prelude to the emergence of a more "rational" bureaucratic state that separates itself from the interests of economic elites and becomes "modern." This point is all the more important because of the significance I attach to the centralization of state power, a process often highlighted in modernization paradigms.

As it occurred in Venezuela under Castro and Gómez, political centralization merely meant that the clientelist network of the dominant elite faction became more effective at subjugating competing factions. Whereas, before Castro and Gómez, regional caudillos (that is, strongmen commanding personal armies) could make or break a national government, the two Andean leaders imposed the authority of the center and demanded the personal loyalty of all those allowed to hold positions of influence. Thus regional factions answering to regional bosses gave way to a more integrated, nationwide network of patrons and clients, all of whom recognized a single, central authority. Centralization involved a reorganization of clientelism but did not signal its demise.

By focusing so intently on clientelism in my discussion of politics, I do not claim to have an answer to the long-standing riddle of how to define "the state." I only point toward the conceptualization of politics that seems most useful for understanding the processes at the heart of Duaca's history in the early twentieth century. Other scholars seeking to illuminate other questions may be right to focus on the fiscal, ideological, or bureaucratic aspects of state power, but such approaches would throw little light on the time and place I have chosen to study.¹¹

Venezuelanists will recognize my reliance on scholars who have discussed centralization under Castro and Gómez and who have argued that these two leaders fundamentally altered the national state.¹² But whereas historians such as Ramón J. Velásquez, Elías Pino Iturrieta, and Inés Quintero have looked at political change primarily on a nationwide basis, this study examines a single locality. In doing so, it modifies our understanding of the relationship between local elites and power holders at the center. The accepted view of centralization under Castro and Gómez posits the complete triumph of the center over regional and local elites. The history of Duaca, however,

demonstrates that local elites could turn centralization to their own advantage. Although Duaca's elite initially resisted the centralizing impulse, they later made their peace with the center and became integrated into the new national state. Prominent Duaqueños went on to use their ties to the center to carry out the transformation of agrarian structures during the Gómez regime; their political connections proved especially important in the privatization of national lands (*terrenos baldíos*) between 1919 and 1923.

Thus, in Duaca, members of the local elite successfully allied themselves to the national state in a way that consolidated their power over local society. By making themselves faithful and useful clients of national leaders, Duaca's elite eventually gained more than they lost from centralization. In the bargain, peasants who had participated in the coffee economy from a relatively advantageous position found themselves reduced to dependency and greater exploitation. While the present study is revisionist in several aspects, then, it is thoroughly traditional in its presentation of the Gómez era as an especially dark chapter in the history of Venezuelan working people.

2 The Early History of Duaca

*From the Spanish Conquest to the
Origins of Coffee Production, 1620–1863*

IN LATE 1673, the Capuchin friar Miguel de Madrid led a group of men northward out of the city of Barquisimeto, in what is now the eastern part of the state of Lara. After some forty kilometers of travel on a hot, gradually climbing road, they entered the valley of San Juan Bautista de Duaca. The party undoubtedly proceeded with some apprehension, for their mission in the valley was to pacify the Gayones Indians who had violently resisted Spanish control since the beginning of the century. But like most travelers entering the valley from Barquisimeto, Friar Miguel and his companions probably welcomed the cool air and the vistas of green rolling mountains to the east, west, and north. They soon entered the town of Duaca, the principal focus of their mission. Created by the Spaniards over fifty years earlier as a place to congregate the local Indian population, it consisted of two or three dozen houses and a small church. No one greeted de Madrid and his companions, and as they approached the church they found that the roof had caved in and the walls were beginning to crumble. The town itself was deserted. De Madrid encountered only one adult in Duaca, Juan Berós, who informed him that some of the town's "residents" were living in the surrounding mountains, but that most had migrated to Aroa, a settlement forty kilometers to the northeast.¹

The abandoned village discovered by de Madrid characterized the limited success of Spanish attempts to establish a colonial society in the parish of Duaca. Never an economic center of consequence during the period of Spanish rule, Duaca remained outside the booming cacao economy that developed to the east, in the mountains and valleys fanning outward from the capital city of Caracas. As a result, Duaca was still a sparsely populated frontier area when Venezuela became an independent nation in 1830. Sustained economic and demographic growth began only during the decades following independence, when the expansion of Venezuela's coffee economy began to draw migrants to Duaca's vast expanses of vacant land. Even then, the lack of transportation and commercial credit restrained the growth of the local export economy, so that the region retained large amounts of open land when the coffee boom began in earnest after the conclusion of the Federal War in 1863.

Conquest, Encomienda, and Conflict

Spanish settlement in what is now the state of Lara began over a century before the Capuchin mission to Duaca when, in 1545, a group of settlers from the northern port of Coro established the town of El Tocuyo. Located at the eastern edge of the Andes, El Tocuyo served as a base for expeditions into the mountains rising to the west and to the lowlands stretching eastward. One such expedition set out in 1551 to search for gold, traveling eastward until a deposit was found along the Buría River. The city that the miners founded, which came to be known as Barquisimeto, was moved no less than three times before arriving at its permanent site along the Turbio River, on the edge of a lush, fertile valley.² As the gold was soon depleted, colonists turned their attention to the development of agricultural and livestock haciendas along the Turbio and in the mountains nearby.

Spaniards established their enterprises by imposing a regime of forced labor on the region's native people, the Gayones, Jirajaras, Ayamanes, and Axaguas.³ Through this system, known as the *encomienda*, the Spanish crown authorized prominent colonists throughout the empire to exact labor and tribute from designated indigenous villages. The *encomienda* had a much longer life in Venezuela than in more densely populated "core" areas of the empire. Although the crown ended *encomenderos'* claim to indigenous labor and tribute in central Mexico and Peru in the mid-sixteenth century, the insti-