

Jean Meyer — *Histoire du sucre*. Paris: Éditions Desjonquères, 1989. Pp. 335.

Cane sugar, which appears to have originated in prehistoric New Guinea, spread slowly throughout ancient South Asia and migrated to Persia as the Roman Empire neared its end, after which it was carried by Islamic expansion throughout the Mediterranean world. Its protean uses as a spice, medicine, fermenting agent, and preservative — and, above all, as a sweetener — made it a choice item for human consumption and established its superiority over its predecessor, honey; but the limitations of Asian and Mediterranean sugar production meant that in medieval and Renaissance Europe, it was an article for the luxury trade, albeit a very profitable one. The potential for profits and its status as a tropical plant ensured that sugar cane would be among the early migrants to the Atlantic world, once the age of exploration got underway, and the fact that it flourished in the new world, notably in Brazil and the Caribbean, ensured the success of one European empire after another.

The revolutionary upheavals of the late-eighteenth century handed Caribbean sugar a real setback, but this in turn stimulated the development of European beet sugar, with which sugar cane has been in contention almost to this day. Meanwhile, the seemingly universal human penchant for sugar stimulated production from the eighteenth through the twentieth centuries, not only in the tropical Atlantic and in Europe but also once gain in Asia, where cane sugar of course originated, thus in a way closing the circuit opened so long ago and at the same time converting sugar from a luxury to a popular commodity in Europe, America, and increasingly in the world at large.

This brief overview does scant justice to the new synthesis of the history of sugar by Jean Meyer, one of the distinguished practitioners of the *Annales* school of French historiography. Primarily known for his more than one dozen books on the economy and society of early modern Europe, Meyer has also produced studies of European expansion and its consequences. This book owes something to both these interests, but it also goes well beyond them. Meyer crosses cultural and national boundaries (virtually all of them), moves confidently through traditional historical periods (from the ancient to the contemporary world), and applies an array of academic disciplines (notably history, economics, and geography) to write the global history of what he regards as almost as personality, his “vieux héros”, sugar.

The main theme is the overall though irregular growth of worldwide sugar production, and that would seem to classify the book as economic history; but it is indeed a social history in the broadest sense of the term. Along with production, the author evokes consumption and sets these two aspects alongside cultural particularities, geographical determinants, technological innovation and transmission, and most dramatically of all, the population shifts and human costs of the pursuit of sugar as reflected in indentured labor, migrant labor, and especially the adoption in America of native and then African slavery. With regard to the latter, Meyer has produced some of the finest pages of ethnically driven historical analysis now in print.

The freshest chapters are devoted to the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century sugar empires and, more particularly, to the French sugar islands in the Antilles, with which the author is most familiar from his own as well as more recent research in France. The productive superiority of the French over the British sugar empire is most convincingly told; and there are new population figures for the French islands, showing unexpected indigenous strength, as well as a revisionist argument that the racism of the French sugar empire was imposed by metropolitan administrators upon

a colonial society that was through intermarriage becoming interracial and tolerant, a radical reversal of the classical view.

Another welcome emphasis is the role of sugar in engendering great power conflicts, not only in the eighteenth-century struggle between France and Britain but in the nineteenth- and twentieth-century politics as well. American readers will note with interest chapter xii, "Le rôle du sucre dans la politique extérieure des U.S.A. : le cas de Cuba", which can also be cited as an example of the range of the author's reading and analysis.

With regard to beet sugar, the cane's principal modern rival, Meyer's figures show a much slower and more tenuous nineteenth-century triumph than has previously been allowed.

This book will not altogether replace Noel Deerr's *The History of Sugar*, 2 vols., London, 1949-1950, with its great wealth of technical and economic information; but it is much more of an historical study than Deerr's volumes are and a much better example of real historical synthesis. Given the renewed interest in the history of sugar, as shown in the recent books of Sidney Mintz, Robert Stein and J.H. Galloway, an updated synthesis is all the more welcome.

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J.R. Miller — *Skyscrapers Hide the Heavens: A History of Indian-White Relations in Canada*. Toronto : University of Toronto Press, 1989, 329 p.

En rassemblant, de seconde main mais puisés aux meilleures sources, les acquis des spécialistes, historiens, ethno-historiens, anthropologues et ethnologues, J.R. Miller a tenté d'écrire un livre de synthèse avec *Skyscrapers Hide the Heavens: A History of Indian-White Relations in Canada*. L'auteur démêle, de manière assez vivante, l'écheveau de l'histoire des relations entre les Indiens et les Européens au Canada.

Dans une première partie, J.R. Miller décrit la diversité culturelle des nations autochtones. Les contacts initiaux avec les Vikings, puis avec les Français, sont résumés avec sérieux et éclairent la nature des relations entre les groupes.

Le 18^e siècle est une période d'alliances militaires entre Européens et Autochtones associée à l'implacable compétition de la traite des fourrures et à la préservation des territoires français et anglais. Les relations avec les Amérindiens étaient alors vitales. Sans le soutien de la confédération iroquoise aux Anglais, quel aurait-été le destin colonial du Canada ?

Cependant, la coopération entre Européens et Amérindiens se termina après 1812 lorsque ces derniers n'eurent plus de rôle militaire à jouer au Canada.

Dans une deuxième partie, l'auteur insiste sur les événements de 1870 au Manitoba et sur ceux de 1885 en Saskatchewan. Ensuite, les politiques gouvernementales se succéderont afin de tenter d'assimiler les Indiens et les Métis. Traités, réserves, *Loi sur les indiens* et écoles résidentielles ne sont que quelques exemples de