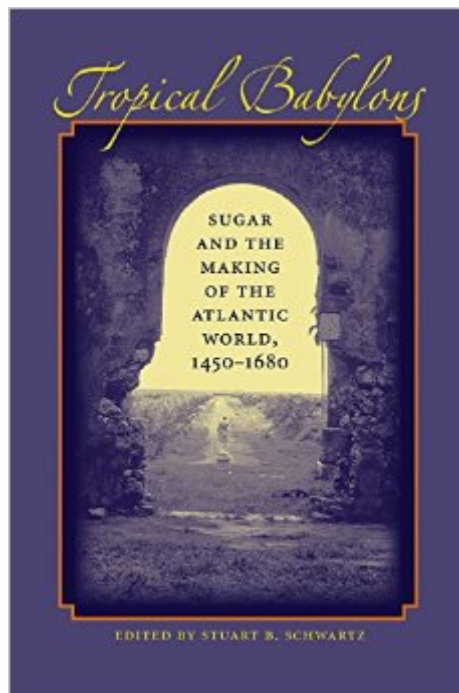


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Tropical Babylons: Sugar And The Making Of The Atlantic World, 1450-1680



Synopsis

The idea that sugar, plantations, slavery, and capitalism were all present at the birth of the Atlantic world has long dominated scholarly thinking. In nine original essays by a multinational group of top scholars, *Tropical Babylons* re-evaluates this so-called "sugar revolution." The most comprehensive comparative study to date of early Atlantic sugar economies, this collection presents a revisionist examination of the origins of society and economy in the Atlantic world. Focusing on areas colonized by Spain and Portugal (before the emergence of the Caribbean sugar colonies of England, France, and Holland), these essays show that despite reliance on common knowledge and technology, there were considerable variations in the way sugar was produced. With studies of Iberia, Madeira and the Canary Islands, Hispaniola, Cuba, Brazil, and Barbados, this volume demonstrates the similarities and differences between the plantation colonies, questions the very idea of a sugar revolution, and shows how the specific conditions in each colony influenced the way sugar was produced and the impact of that crop on the formation of "tropical Babylons--multiracial societies of great oppression. Contributors: Alejandro de la Fuente, University of Pittsburgh; Herbert Klein, Columbia University; John J. McCusker, Trinity University; Russell R. Menard, University of Minnesota; William D. Phillips Jr., University of Minnesota; Genaro Rodriguez Morel, Seville, Spain; Stuart B. Schwartz, Yale University; Eddy Stols, Leuven University, Belgium; Alberto Vieira, Centro de Estudos Atlanticos, Madeira

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Customer Reviews

Sugar is grown in more than 100 countries today, and its history is, in some sense, the history of the

expansion toward globalism. It took thousands of years to migrate from (probably) New Guinea to India, hundreds to then reach the Mediterranean, only scores to traverse the Atlantic, first hopping to the islands of Madeira and the Canaries, then, on to the Caribbean and the Mainland. For readers in the United States, sugar shows up in the late 17th century or even later. England's richest American colony, Barbados, was not settled until 1630, did not start producing sugar for a generation after that. Barbadians later moved to South Carolina, bringing ideas of slavery and agriculture that influenced American history profoundly. However, sugar had been in the New World (if you count the previously unknown islands like Madeira) for two centuries before English-speaking people became intimately concerned. The history of those two centuries is Spanish, Portuguese and African, and most of the essayists in 'Tropical Babylon' are in the Latin tradition. The Barbadians learned about sugar from the Portuguese or perhaps the Dutch, who seized Portugal's sugar plantations in Brazil for a while. As the essayists show here, there were several sugar traditions for the English (and roughly simultaneously the French) to learn from. The approach of 'Tropical Babylons' is primarily economic, but there is a great deal of social and even some architectural history here. These essays are pitched to scholars and students, and fairly specialized ones at that, yet the story of sugar is rewarding in itself, so much so that a reader who 'likes history' will find a lot of miscellaneous facts, perhaps an 'ah ha!' moment or two that illuminates his understanding of better known (to readers of early American) history.

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