



**DOSSIÊ DO BRASIL AÇUCAREIRO (SÉCS. XVI-XIX)**  
**DOSSIER OF SUGARCANE BRAZIL (16th–19th CENTURIES)**

## PRESENTATION: DOSSIER – ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL HISTORY OF SUGARCANE BRAZIL (16th–19th CENTURIES)

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It is with a strong sense of satisfaction and great responsibility that we present to the academic community the dossier *Economic and Social History of Sugarcane Brazil (16th–19th Centuries)*. This issue brings together five articles and one book review that cover different regions of the country—from the Amazon Valley, through Sergipe and Bahia, to Minas Gerais—and address both the colonial period and the nineteenth century. The collection highlights the multiplicity of spaces and modes of sugar production and contributes to reflections on the enduring relevance of sugar in the Brazilian economy, especially during the nineteenth century.

In the first article, *Sugar, Mills, and Small-Scale Sugar Works in Nineteenth-Century Amazonia: A Historical Account*, José Maia Bezerra Neto and Juliana Nascimento Medeiros, drawing on a wide range of sources, produce a detailed panorama of sugar production in Grão-Pará, presenting its main characteristics, such as the typologies of rural properties, their values, and the number of enslaved people per productive unit. The article shows, for example, the construction of hydraulic mills that made use of local hydrographic potential, as well as production carried out within a polycultural system, in which sugarcane shared space with extractive activities, food crops, and livestock raising, especially cattle. With regard to sugar by-products, the text demonstrates that sugarcane spirits were widely produced in the Province of Grão-Pará and enjoyed strong internal demand. At the same time, although regional sugar production had little impact on Brazil's overall export agenda, it appeared regularly among exports throughout the nineteenth century, consistently occupying eighth place. Finally, the authors challenge a tacit assumption in the historiography that sugar-producing units in the Amazon region relied on only a small number of enslaved Africans, demonstrating instead, through documentary evidence, that production—especially of export-oriented goods—was carried out through the labor of enslaved Africans and Indigenous peoples.

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In the second article of the dossier, *Transformations in the Sugar Sector in the Zona da Mata of Minas Gerais and the Construction of the Rio Branco Central Mill in the Late Nineteenth Century*, Lincoln Gonçalves Rodrigues analyzes the context of expansion in the installation of sugar mills in Brazil during the late nineteenth century, focusing on the case study of the Rio Branco Mill, founded in 1885. This initiative is examined within the broader effort by the Brazilian state to modernize the sugar sector in order to recover at least part of its position in the world market. The author emphasizes the importance of small and medium-sized mills in the process of revitalizing sugar production and relates these enterprises to the spillover effects generated by their expansion, such as state-subsidized transportation infrastructure. Rodrigues also establishes a connection between the history of the Rio Branco Mill and the history of sugar production in the Zona da Mata of Minas Gerais, which by the end of the nineteenth century had become the largest sugar-producing region in the state.

The third article, *Family Networks, Seigneurial Authority, and Property Rights: The Disputes of Dona Antônia de Vera Cruz Braque (Sergipe, 1826–1828)*, by Fernanda Carolina Pereira dos Santos and Nathiely Feitosa Farias, highlights the exercise of seigneurial authority by a woman figure within a patriarchal structure. According to the authors, this authority operated on two levels: one symbolic, acquired through family networks and “immaterial inheritance,” and another derived from the effective management of the material inheritance left by her deceased husbands. The authors show that Antônia de Vera Cruz Braque was able to protect and strengthen her seigneurial authority by defending and expanding her assets through legal disputes centered on land tenure and property rights. Through marriages and networks of relationships, occupying and using the patriarchal structure to her advantage, she significantly multiplied her wealth, increasing her holdings in a relatively short period from one to three sugar mills, from approximately thirty enslaved people to around one hundred and fifty, and from a fortune of a few contos to more than thirty-five contos de réis.

Also focusing on the Province of Sergipe in the nineteenth century, Lucas Oliveira de Jesus and Carlos de Oliveira Malaquias authored the fourth article of the dossier, “*To the North, the Heirs...*”: *Undivided Lands, Social Networks, and the Transmission of Sugar Mills in the Vaza-Barris River Basin (São Cristóvão, Sergipe, Nineteenth Century)*. As in the previous article, the central issue is the right to and transmission of landed

property. Using a wide range of sources and the methodology of Social Network Analysis—combining sociometry and graph theory—the authors argue that sugarcane lands in the Vaza-Barris River region were subject, during the nineteenth century, to non-economic mechanisms of control and transmission, in which social relations and kinship ties played a fundamental role. According to the authors, regional seigneurial elites diversified their strategies to ensure the maintenance of family patrimony, through practices such as advances on inheritance, selective choice of heirs, dowries, donations, and the purchase of neighboring land parcels. The article further demonstrates that the legal status of undivided land was skillfully exploited by elite families in the Sergipe capital to control land transmission systems. By acquiring land without formal demarcation, mill owners expanded their sphere of power over previously restricted areas. Through social networks and family cohesion, the authors argue that the recognition of neighborhood relations among the Vaza-Barris mills was a political decision and that co-ownership of mills was a widespread practice among seigneurial families.

The fifth article in the dossier is Cândido Domingues's *The Sugar Notarial Office: Sources for the Study of Sugar in Colonial Bahia*, the author transcribes a letter written in 1735 by the Jesuit priest Luís da Rocha at the Sergipe do Conde Mill and highlights the wide range of thematic possibilities offered by the *Jesuit Registry* of the National Archive of the Torre do Tombo (ANTT). According to Domingues, beyond well-known themes such as production, circulation, consumption, accounting (costs and profits), and slavery, the Jesuit Cabinet of the ANTT allows researchers to explore topics including religious life, godparenthood relations, dietary habits, hunger, and geographical issues—such as soil typologies and rainfall levels—that directly affected sugar production.

Moreover, blending appeal and provocation, the author explicitly calls on established historians, and especially on early-career scholars and students, to devote greater attention to the History of Sugar, given its many underexplored possibilities. These include themes that are central to current debates and crucial for understanding contemporary Brazilian issues, such as Environmental History, Ecological History, and inequalities in their various dimensions.

Finally, in *The Trajectory of Sugarcane in Brazil: An Interdisciplinary Analysis of Territorial Expansion and Socio-Environmental Impacts*, Jaciane Aparecida Jesus da

Cruz reviews the book *The Trajectory of Sugarcane in Brazil: Geographic, Historical, and Environmental Perspectives*, by Gelze Serrat de Souza Campos Rodrigues and Jurandyr Luciano Sanches Ross. Published by EDUFU in 2020, the work brings together approaches from Geography, History, and Ecology to analyze the history of sugar production from the colonial period to the twenty-first century and its effects on different dimensions of Brazilian society.

Taken together, the contributions assembled in this dossier reveal the complex dynamics of the sugar sector during the colonial period and the nineteenth century, addressing themes such as mill typologies, the relevance of African and Indigenous enslaved labor, strategies of female seigneurial authority and land transmission, and the still underexplored potential of documentary sources, particularly for Environmental History and the study of contemporary inequalities. The bilingual publication, with translation into English made possible by the dedication of the Editorial Team of *Baraúnas: Journal of History*, will undoubtedly contribute to the dissemination and broader reach of the works presented here. We invite all interested readers to engage with this dossier, which revisits and advances new and significant perspectives on the Economic and Social History of Sugarcane Brazil.