



THE NEW YORK BOTANICAL GARDEN



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The biggest problem in the book is the lack of an index. I spent considerable time cross referencing important discussions of *Lagenaria*, maize, AMS dates, etc. This is especially needed because the book is loosely structured and is fairly redundant. For sunflower, *Iva*, pepo, and *Chenopodium* there are discussions by three or more authors.

When there is so much emphasis on the timing of cultigen introduction and development, one expects a clear overview of chronology, explaining the Archaic-Woodland-Mississippian sequence and how it varies by region. A brief phase chart by Watson is all there is. Though there are many fine illustrations, many more would have been appreciated, replacing redundant paragraphs.

Although there is careful attribution of maize to its proper archaeological context by many of these authors, there is no presentation of cupule or glume data, which would allow a careful understanding of morphological changes in the last 7,000 years. Such data for the Tehuacan maize indicate a situation quite different from that portrayed by Galinat's figures and text. Data are critical: newly found material can be quantitatively compared to the available models. If the fit is poor, then AMS dates can be obtained. Patterns among present-day populations and species can only be linked to the past using careful comparisons to archaeological or geological specimens, as was done for several cultigens in this volume.

Someday a companion volume may be written to cover areas in North America not treated by this one: most of Mexico, Canada, and the northwest, northeast and southeast U.S., reflecting the rapidly expanding interests, capabilities, and roles of archaeobotanists.

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Primer Seminario Internacional sobre Platano. Publicaciones Universidad de Caldas, Apartado Aereo 275, Caldas, Manizales, Colombia. n.d.[1985]. 331 pp. No price given.

This paperbound volume documents a meeting on plantains held in Manizales, Colombia in June 6–10, 1983. It is an important publication because it represents the outcome of the first recently held meeting anywhere—national, regional or international—on this very important crop.

Statistics on cooking bananas are usually obscured or subsumed under the heading “bananas,” i.e., primarily dessert bananas, but this volume underscores the critical importance of non-dessert bananas in Latin America. The same could be said of the crop in other regions of the globe. Starchy bananas or plantains are important as food for humans and animals, as shade crops for coffee and cacao, and as sources of specialty items such as chips. The seminar volume covers cultivation, pathology, physiology, improvement, agronomy, marketing and commercial aspects, and uses.

Although the seminar proceedings is termed “International,” it is in fact Latin American with, understandably, emphasis on Colombia. Since the approach is broad, however, those interested in the genus *Musa* in general will find the volume of use and interest. The volume lacks a conventional index, but it is provided with a detailed table of contents which is labelled index.

ABRAHAM D. KRİKORIAN, STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK, STONY BROOK, NY 11794

Ritual Enemas and Snuffs in the Americas. Peter A. G. M. de Smet. Latin American Studies. FORIS Publications, USA, P.O. Box C-50, Cinnaminson, NJ 08077. 1985. 276 pp. \$24.75 (paper).

It is difficult for me to name an ethnobotanical publication more interdisciplinary, more widely oriented and more scientifically sound than de Smet's doctoral thesis, just published.

Dr. de Smet has approached the use of enemas and snuffs in the Americas in an extraordinarily meticulous manner: he has insisted on absolutely reliable literature or herbarium authentication of reports; on chemical, biochemical and pharmacological support for ethnobotanical information; and these interdisciplinary data are presented against an historical background. Some 15 different plant preparations are considered as ritual snuffs, while nine genera are discussed from the point of view of their ceremonial use as enemas.

It will be a long time before there appears such an interdisciplinary approach, backed up with such a breadth of a widely scattered literature search and presented in as thorough an analysis of the use of the snuffs and enemas of the Americas.

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The Staffs of Life. E. J. Kahn, Jr. Little, Brown & Co., 200 West St., Waltham, MA 02154. 1985. 310 pp. \$19.95.

It is difficult avoiding superlatives while reviewing *The Staffs of Life*, for it is superlative. The author, a staff writer with the *New Yorker*, describes in five chapters the interdependence and intertwining of human welfare and culture with the five most important crops: maize, potatoes, wheat, rice, and soybeans. Each chapter commences with an apt and often ironic quote, followed by a nearly seamless interweaving of mythology (mostly Indo-European), philology, literature, anecdotes, botany, reports in the contemporary media, and personal interviews with prominent scientists, into a cogent and lucid narrative. The book is an education not only in plants and human affairs, but also in writing style. There is not a wasted sentence nor word: it is packed with information gleaned from often obscure references. It is hoped that the publisher will soon release a paperback version, as it would be a most useful supplementary text for introductory botany courses.

Maize appears in the first and longest chapter (I certainly applaud Kahn's scale of priorities!). It is extremely doubtful that we will soon read a better treatment of the often eccentric, frequently cantankerous, and always fascinating small band of zealots that are responsible for the pre-eminence of maize as a crop in the U.S. and as the paramount organism for genetic research. They are all here: Mangelsdorf ("I suppose you might say I had a precocious affinity for plants," p. 19), Galinat ("Corn is my religion and this laboratory is my church," p. 28), Iltis ("dreaming botanical dreams," p. 32), and so on. My only criticism of this chapter is that the remarkable gladiators in the "Corn Wars" overshadow maize, the much more remarkable subject of their combat.

Each chapter, while focusing upon a crop plant, also provides précis of other, related topics. In the chapter on potato and its advocates, from Parmentier to the indefatigable Carlos Ochoa, Kahn manages to deal with Vavilov centers, sweet potatoes, and manioc. The sad details of the Irish potato famine are related, as are anecdotes and quotes from the 13th century up to Mao Tse-Tung, and the fact that Jefferson, otherwise of impeccable taste, was the first President to serve French fries in the White House.

The chapter on wheat also touches on oats, barley, rye, sorghum, international agriculture, the Rockefeller Foundation, food and politics, and Norman Borlaug (avid amateur wrestler, successful baseball manager, wheat breeder, and Nobel Prize winner). The vitally important international organizations CGIAR, CIMMYT, IRRI, ICRISAT, IBPGR, are warmly praised, and receive some of the "media attention" they deserve.

The role of rice in Oriental culture comprises most of the chapter on that crop, but Sturtevant's 1919 opinion that "the finest rice in the world is that raised in North and South Carolina" is not omitted, much to our delight. Coconuts are also briefly mentioned in the rice chapter. Perhaps in the future we will be treated to a more lengthy account by Kahn of this very important tropical crop.