An Invitation to the Exotic:

Ephemeral Art in Joseph Gilliers’s *Le Cannaméliste français*

Allison Elaine Klos

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Approved by:

Dr. Mary D. Sheriff

Dr. Eduardo de J. Douglas

Dr. Lyneise Williams
ABSTRACT

ALLISON KLOS: An Invitation to the Exotic:
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(Under the direction of Dr. Mary D. Sheriff, Dr. Eduardo de J. Douglas, and Dr. Lyneise Williams)

This thesis investigates the braid of ‘exotic’ elements presented in Joseph Gilliers’s *Le Cannaméliste français*, a confectionery dictionary published in Nancy, France in 1751. Using eighteenth-century definitions of the exotic as unknown or non-native, I analyze the thirteen illustrated plates within the context of decorative and ephemeral arts. These illustrations represent three different types of the exotic: the island exotic, the taxonomic exotic, and the rocaille exotic. The artist blurs these types of the exotic to heighten the curiosity of the eighteenth-century viewer. I analyze these confectionery plates and their relationship to the discursive formations of islands and empire, as well as to the classification of knowledge and the *rocaille* aesthetic. While the confectionery dictionary may appear as a mere how-to manual of sugar creations, the illustrations represent the complex designs and environments common to dining tables at the eighteenth-century courts of Europe.
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES...........................................................................................................vi

Chapter

I. INTRODUCTION...........................................................................................................1

II. THE ISLAND EXOTIC...............................................................................................9

III. THE TAXONOMIC EXOTIC..................................................................................18

IV. THE ROCAILLE EXOTIC.......................................................................................29

V. CONCLUSION..........................................................................................................40

REFERENCES..............................................................................................................43
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS


4. *A New Map of the Island of Jamaica in Hans Sloane’s Voyage to Jamaica, 1725* ………………………………………………………………………………………52

   Source: Sloane, Hans. *A Voyage to the Islands Madera, Barbados, Nieves, S. Christophers and Jamaica, with the Natural History ... of the Last of Those Islands; to Which Is Prefix’d an Introduction, Wherein Is an Account of the Inhabitants, Air, Waters, Diseases, Trade, &c. ... Illustrated with the Figures of the Things Describ’d, ... by Hans Sloane, ... in Two Volumes. ...* London: printed by B. M. for the author, 1707-25. (reprint courtesy of Davis Library, University of North Carolina—Chapel Hill, microfilm)


   Source: Gilliers, Sieur. *Le Cannaméliste français; ou, Nouvelle instruction pour ceux qui desirent d'apprendre l'office, rédigé en forme de dictionnaire*. Nancy, J.
7. *Sugar Mill with Vertical Rollers, French West Indies, 1665* .......................55

Source: Charles de Rochefort, *Histoire naturelle et morale des iles Antilles de l'Amerique.* Rotterdam: 1681, 332. (Courtesy of Special Collections Department, University of Virginia Library) (Photos courtesy of Jerome S. Handler and Michael L. Tuite Jr. at hitchcock.itc.virginia.edu/Slavery/)


9. *Sugar Canes* [1858-1860] ....................................................................................57

Source: Knight, Charles. *Pictorial Gallery of Arts.* London; New York: London Printing and Publishing: [1858-1860], 8. (Courtesy of The Rare Book Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Photo: A. Klos)


12. Two Salt Cellars from the service of Joseph I of Portugal, François-Thomas Germain ..........................................................60

13. Spice Carrier from the service of Joseph I of Portugal, François-Thomas Germain.……………………………………………………………………………………61


14. Pair of Decorative Bronzes, 1738-1745, Surface decoration attributed to Étienne-Simon Martin (French 1703-1770) and Guillaume Martin (French, 1689-1749)……………………………………………………………………………………62


15. Pair of Decorative Bronzes (detail), 1738-1745, Surface decoration attributed to Étienne-Simon Martin (French 1703-1770) and Guillaume Martin (French, 1689-1749)……………………………………………………………………………………62


16. Frontispiece (detail), Joseph Gilliers, Le Cannaméliste français, 1751…………63


17. Plate 1, Joseph Gilliers, Le Cannaméliste français, 1751.......................64


18. Plate 2, Joseph Gilliers, Le Cannaméliste français, 1751.......................65

19. **Plate I Confiseur, Encyclopédie, after 1751**…………………………………… ..66


20. **Plate II Confiseur, Encyclopédie, after 1751**…………………………………… .67


21. **Plate 7, Joseph Gilliers, Le Cannaméliste français, 1751**……………………….68


22. **Plate IV Confiseur, Encyclopédie, after 1751**…………………………………… 69


23. **Plate 6, Joseph Gilliers, Le Cannaméliste français, 1751**……………………….70


24. **Plate 8, Joseph Gilliers, Le Cannaméliste français, 1751**……………………….71

Source : Gilliers, Sieur. *Le Cannaméliste français; ou, Nouvelle instruction pour ceux qui desirent d'apprendre l'office, rédigé en forme de dictionnaire. Nancy, J.


27. **Title Page**, Works of Juste-Aurèle Meissonnier, 1748…………………………..74


Source: Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, Smithsonian Institution. (Photo: Matt Flynn)

28. Alexandre François Desportes, *Buffet avec pieces d’orfèvrerie et vases*, 1730…75


30. **Plate 5**, Joseph Gilliers, *Le Cannaméliste français*, 1751…………………………..77

31. Surtout de table (centerpiece). Bartolomeo Pagliani (Italian, active 1754-75). Turin, Italy, 1754-75. Silver, silver-gilt, mirror glass, wood. The Art Institute of Chicago……………………………………………………………………...…...78


32. *Plate 5 (detail), Joseph Gilliers, Le Cannaméliste français, 1751……………….79


33. *Plate 13 (detail), Joseph Gilliers, Le Cannaméliste français, 1751……………….80


34. *Plate 13 (detail), Joseph Gilliers, Le Cannaméliste français, 1751……………….81


35. *Plate 13 (detail), Joseph Gilliers, Le Cannaméliste français, 1751……………….82


36. *Plate 7 (detail), Joseph Gilliers, Le Cannaméliste français, 1751……………….83


37. *Plate 7 (detail), Joseph Gilliers, Le Cannaméliste français, 1751……………….84

38. Plate 7 (detail), Joseph Gilliers, Le Cannaméliste français, 1751...............85

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

For historians of the decorative arts, sugar sculptures pose a unique problem—they are ephemeral, and historians must speak for objects that no longer exist as well as for feasts and performances that are a by-gone moment in time. The art of the eighteenth-century French confectioner survives today in thirteen illustrated, pull-out plates from Joseph Gilliers’s confectionery dictionary entitled Le Cannaméliste français (Nancy, 1751). The illustrated plates are embedded within the densely written text that alphabetically lists topics on the subject ranging from kitchen definitions, utensils, ingredients, syrups, and fruits to table displays.1 Sugar, when used to mold and craft a sculpture, creates the most ephemeral of art forms; its impermanence as a medium is similar to that of ice. Both sweet and fragile and susceptible to changes in humidity, the delicate sugar sculptures and fruit pyramids that graced courtly life in eighteenth-century France were undoubtedly fleeting and short-lived; they were, however, complex and rich in rococo designs that were commensurate with other decorative arts of the period such as orfèvrerie (art of the silversmith) and ceramics.2

1 Joseph Gilliers, Le Cannaméliste français, ou, Nouvelle instruction pour ceux qui désirent d'apprendre l'office, rédigé en forme de dictionnaire, contenant les noms, les descriptions, les usages, les choix & les principes de tout ce qui se pratique dans l'office, l'explication de tous les termes dont on se sert ; avec la manière de dessiner, & de former toutes sortes de contours de tables & de dormants (Nancy: De l'impr. d'Echo. D. Cusson, 1751), 1. All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

2 I am grateful for the conversations I had concerning my topic at the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts (MESDA) conference in Winston-Salem, NC, in October 2008. Individuals include Edward S. Cooke from Yale University, Jr., Robert Leath at MESDA, Louis Nelson from the University of Virginia, Nicholas C.
The illustrated plates of *Le Cannaméliste français* blur notions of the exotic to heighten the *curiosité* of the eighteenth-century’s most important audience—the king and his court. In the *épître* (formal letter) that precedes his preface, Joseph Gilliers writes an elegant letter to *Monseigneur*, the deposed King Stanislaw I of Poland (who lived in France at the time), in which he is honored to dedicate the work to the king and to elevate his authorial presence by publishing his trade secrets and showcasing his confectionery knowledge. Gilliers signs the work as “the very humble and very obedient servant, Gilliers.”

I argue that to curry favor with the royal court, Gilliers uses differing elements of the exotic to cultivate the fashionable styles of the period represented in travel books, wallpaper, textiles, rococo designs, and book arts. Gilliers’s illustrated plates (figs. 1 and 2, frontispiece) are an invitation to the ‘exotic’ and are inextricably linked to the cultural context of French colonial sugar plantations on islands in the Atlantic and Pacific Rims. “Sweetness and power”—through this unique relationship of “fragile diplomacy”—were directly proportional to one another within the context of the eighteenth-century table.

Vincent from the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Brandy Culp at the Charleston Historic Foundation, and others whom I am very grateful for their insights. I am also thankful for the experience at the MESDA archives to research on the topic of confectionery, sugar, and travel.


5 For an anthropological background on sugar plantations in New World, see Sidney Mintz’s *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (New York: Viking, 1985); and for relationships of hybridity and landscaping practices tied to empire, see Jill Casid’s *Sowing Empire: Landscape and Colonization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005). For color illustrations and current decorative arts scholarship on biscuit figures and Meissen porcelain, see the Bard Graduate Center catalog, Maureen Cassidy-
paper will address the relationship of the confectionary plates to French colonial islands and sugar plantations, and the irregular, arabesque forms of rococo decorative arts, bringing ephemeral sugar sculptures into a more permanent place within art-historical discourse. This paper is divided into three sections that take up the three different but related notions of the exotic: the island exotic, the taxonomic exotic, and the rocaille exotic. I argue that the illustrated plates exhibit a blurring of these forms of the exotic; it is a blurring that, in effect, creates a hybrid of exotic elements. The detailed plates depict scenes that refer to the tropical island, quasi-anthropological depictions of utensils, east Asian “chinoiserie” influences, and the irregular, undulating forms of the rocaille.

Research on this distinctive subject remains primarily in culinary history, and those historians who focus on the practice, skills, utensils, and recipes of a kitchen—the process of cooking. Ivan Day, a culinary historian, is widely considered the preeminent source on the subject of the confectioner, sugar sculptures, and dining in eighteenth-century England and France. He is best known for the numerous exhibits for which he has recreated sugar sculptures and table displays following Gillier’s illustrated plates and Menon’s *La Science du maître d’hôtel confiseur* (Paris: 1750) to name just two. The Bard Graduate Center’s

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6 The most recent exhibit for which he recreated a table was *Fragile Diplomacy* held at the Bard Graduate Center in the fall 2007. An accompanying catalog was published under the same name and features significant work on Meissen porcelain. Day delivered a lecture entitled, “Conspicuous Consumption: Dining at Court in 18th-century Europe,” on Thursday, December 6, 2007 at the BGC, and according to the gallery attendant, the lecture was not recorded. In addition to *Fragile Diplomacy*, there was an exhibit at the Philadelphia Museum of Art entitled, Just Desserts, for which no publication was issued. I sincerely thank Donna Corbin, Associate Curator of European Decorative Arts at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, for her insights on this exhibit and ways in which to supplement my current research. Day has participated in other exhibits in Europe, at the Bowes Museum for example, for which the catalog, *Royal Sugar Sculpture: 600 Years of Splendor* was published in 2002. This is a singular and comprehensive source on the subject; he also maintains a personal website, www.historicfood.com, in which he posts his current projects, books, moulds, and research. For additional insight, see Peter Brown and Ivan Day, *Pleasures of the Table: Ritual and Display in the European Dining Room 1600-1900: an Exhibition at Fairfax House, York 1st September to 20th November 1997* (York:
exhibit, *Fragile Diplomacy*, in which Day helped to recreate a Russian Imperial dessert table, confirms the importance of bringing such areas as culinary history, courtly dining, and sugar sculptures into today’s emerging decorative arts—and art-historical—scholarship concerning diplomacy among the European royal courts. The need has arisen to analyze manuscripts such as Gilliers’s within an art-historical framework and especially within discursive formations such as those of empire and the island. In addition, the illustrated plates—and the elaborate dining tables that they represent—must be analyzed within the context of contemporaneous painting, ceramics, textiles, wallpaper, and interiors.

Culinary history and art history converge in Gilliers’s confectionery dictionary, yet why have art historians overlooked *Le Cannaméliste français* in their scholarship on eighteenth-century France? In fact, Day argues in his introduction to the catalog *Royal Sugar Sculpture: 600 Years of Splendor* that “art historians would probably hesitate before considering these culinary extravaganzas as works of art.”7 I argue that by seeing the text primarily through a culinary lens or mistakenly as a mere “how-to manual,” historians overlook the visual and aesthetic purpose for which the table was set and, therefore, for which the confectionery dictionary was created—the desserts contained significant visual dynamics to entice the eye and wet the palate. While the text is important from a cookery and culinary history viewpoint for the candied fruits, techniques, and instructions provided

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therein, the artistic skill taken to create a visually beautiful work of art on the dining table must not be overlooked. When Gilliers’s text was written, the dining table was set in the service à la française, which required that all the food and dishes be set before the diners sat at the table. The elaborate table display would have included desserts that remained on the table throughout the dinner or had been set up on a table in a nearby room.\(^8\) The desserts were therefore part of a visual curiosity and work of art first. Consumption as a food item was secondary.

Through detailed formal analysis, I will use examples from the thirteen illustrated plates to demonstrate the blurring of the exotic as it relates to islands, trade science, and the rocaille. A study concerning the eighteenth-century dining table is markedly interdisciplinary, ranging in topics from food history, consumption, material culture, fetishism, psychology of the senses, and design style to moral codes and behaviors. The challenge therefore is to bring Le Cannaméliste français into decorative arts and art-historical scholarship. Contemporaneous eighteenth-century art criticism lauded painting and sculpture as the high arts, as Diderot wrote, for example, about the Salon of 1765 and in his Notes on Painting.\(^9\) The dining table and its art did not fit within the ancien régime’s hierarchical understanding of art—though the dining table and confectioner’s art did affirm the

\(^8\) Schwartz, Selma, 'A Feast for the Eyes: Eighteenth Century Documents for the Creation of a Dessert Table'. International Ceramic Fair and Seminar (London, 2000), 29. See also Gilliers, 220, for his recommendation to provide thirty-seven dishes for twenty-four diners. It is illustrated on Plate 10 (p. 229) and 11 (p.230). For additional invaluable insights on sugar sculptures and table displays, see Barbara Wheaton, Savoring the Past: The French Kitchen and Table from 1300 to 1789 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983), Laura Mason, Sugar Plums and Sherbert: The Prehistory of Sweets (Totnes, Devon: Prospect Books, 1998), Laura Mason, Food and the Rites of Passage (Totnes: Prospect Books, 2002), and Barbara Norman Makanowitzky, Tales of the Table: A History of Western Cuisine (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1972).

fashionable styles of the exotic and the dining expectations of the court. Objects—and sugar sculptures—occupy a significantly different context, desire, and curiosity that merit historical distinction from the more highly praised painting and sculpture of the period.\textsuperscript{10}

This paper will address the visual context in which examples from \textit{Le Cannaméliste français} fit within discourses of the “exotic” or the “Other” in eighteenth-century France. According to Denis Diderot’s and Jean le Rond D’Alembert’s \textit{Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers}, the term \textit{exotique} is defined as a “foreign plant or a fruit” and falls under the heading of \textit{jardinage} (gardening).\textsuperscript{11} I use the eighteenth-century definition of the \textit{exotique} to denote not only the “foreign” elements of Gilliers’s physical table garden but also the metaphorical garden in which the sugar sculptures exist. According to the \textit{Encyclopédie}, \textit{jardinage} is the “art of planting, decorating, and cultivating all sorts of gardens” and is part of botanical study.\textsuperscript{12} According to these terms of the exotic and gardening, Gilliers is a gardener for the table, incorporating botanical curiosities and exotic elements to create an artistic garden. The pleasures of the table and the blurring of these exotic forms become a \textit{curiosité} in their newness and foreignness, one which is both material and metaphorical.


The three sections of this paper will mimic the metamorphosis of sugar: from sugarcane plant to tabletop sugar sculpture. The first section therefore explores visual iconography in Gilliers’ plates that harkens back to the islands where sugarcane is grown. The second section returns to the metropole [France] to highlight the emerging métier (trade) of the confiseur (confectioner) and the science of sugar. And lastly, the third section brings the sugar to the table where it manifests in rocaille designs, surtouts de table, and elaborate topography. This metamorphosis underscores the slave labor and manufacturing process by which sugar is produced and then brought to Europe. The dining table, however, masks the slave labor of sugar production and creates a blind spot in eighteenth-century court politics, creating an idealized and civilizing view of empire. As I will demonstrate in the third section, the rocaille elements, and specifically the chinoiserie sugar figures, create a diversion of amusement away from the economy based on slave labor.

Within the context of this paper, the term exotic is closely related to the idea of the unknown—and thus the idea that something is foreign or non-native, as the Encyclopédie suggests in its definition of *exotique*. I plan to use the methodology put forth by Julia V. Douthwaite in her study of *Exotic Women: Literary Heroines and Cultural Strategies in Ancien Régime France*. She begins her book with the definition of the unknown in the *Encyclopédie*.

*Unknown*, adj. It is not said of things that we do not know, because one does not say anything of what one does not know, but rather of things that one does know and the qualities that one expects to find.

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This definition provides a framework from which to view Gilliers’s illustrated plates. Douthwaite posits three literary ways in which to frame the unknown: “knowing the unknown,” “explaining the unknown,” and “showing the unknown.” A literary author achieves aesthetic modes of “showing the unknown” by utilizing strategic book illustrations. Gilliers’s illustrated plates show the unknown by representing visual elements of the exotic—from the island, to the tradesman, and finally on the table.

Lastly, I use the Douthwaite’s methodology and the *Encyclopédie*’s explanation of the unknown to frame a definition of the Other. Moreover, I borrow the term, “unknown,” to denote the exotic Other, or the exotic unknown—those non-European individuals depicted in Gilliers’s illustrations. According to Douthwaite, the rhetoric of exoticism is outer-directed in aiming to control and dominate non-European peoples. These conflicts or interactions are localized on Gilliers’s dining table as fictional encounters of the French and non-European peoples; these encounters highlight the eighteenth-century impression of the exotic Other.

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15 Douthwaite, *Exotic Women*, 1. See Douthwaite page 1 for definition of the “unknown” in the *Encyclopédie*. “Unknown, adj. It is not said of things that we do not know, because one does not say anything of what one does not know, but rather of things that one does know and the qualities that one expects to find. *Encyclopédie*”

CHAPTER 2
THE ISLAND EXOTIC

The frontispiece (fig. 2) of *Le Cannaméliste français* is an immediate invitation to the island exotic and the sugarcane fields. An elaborate grand cartouche greets the viewer, and it is divided into two smaller framed cartouches that present vignettes for the viewer while also presenting the title of the book itself. The architectural modeling and sense of physical presence suggest that it is part of a piece of furniture with two separate looking holes; most notably, at the top (fig. 3), the framed cartouche depicts a walled-in field with two men in a landscape. While the small cartouche at the top is somewhat sketchy in quality, it depicts a defined landscape perspective, in which the viewer is transported to an island setting. The framed cartouche functions as a proscenium arch in which the men act out the motion of a play; the round wall that surrounds them is shaped like a balcony and frames the action of their fieldwork. The illustration in the cartouche is an immediate depiction of the context in which sugar would have thrived in a tropical setting of the French Empire. The prominent position of the small looking-glass cartouche gives the viewer limited access to the exotic—the unknown—as if to stimulate and invite the viewer to see Otherness, but not to frighten or cause anxiety or uncertainty. It is therefore this feeling of exclusive discovery and

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17 I studied the copy of *Le Cannaméliste français* located at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. For this copy, the frontispiece is the very first image seen once the book is opened: the front folio.

18 Kay Dian Kriz, *Slavery, Sugar, and the Culture of Refinement: Picturing the British West Indies, 1700-1840* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 34. I found this text invaluable for the insights she offered within the visual culture of eighteenth-century sugar plantations. For information on the history of sugar and its growth...
invitation to the exotic that initiates the act of looking and suggests how the eye can travel throughout the dictionary.

The visual journey begins in the frontispiece (fig. 2) with a deliberate use of island motifs. Two sets of three female island figures are prominently displayed on both the apex of the grand cartouche and on a ledge of the mid-level cartouche just below the written title, *Le Cannaméliste français*. The female figures are semi-nude and wear feather skirts that suggest island wear that would have been seen on native figures of colonies in the French Empire—such as the figures seen on a map in Hans Sloane’s *Voyage to Jamaica* (fig. 4).

Gilliers’s visual vocabulary is therefore commensurate with depictions of the island exotica in map illustrations and travel books. The women on Gilliers’s frontispiece move and position themselves as if to dance or motion their arms in a gesture of welcome, as seen in the central female seated on shell forms of the top cartouche (fig. 5). Her companions to the left and right hold a bow and arrow respectively—a direct suggestion of the noble savage and island hunting practices. The lower group of figures below the title of the book (fig. 6) overlap the cartouche frame as one leg dangles off and another figure climbs up to the others—all positioning and readying themselves for the “welcome,” as if to hint that the viewer has just arrived by boat to their island. The subtle movements in the female bodies imply therefore an active, participatory arrival and point of cultural contact for the viewer and natives; the female figures are not static and as a result become prominent features of the frontispiece.

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The title itself, *Le Cannaméliste français*, is a notable reference to sugarcane and the island on which the tropical plants grow and appears prominently at the center of the frontispiece. The physical presence of the surrounding cartouche draws attention to the title of the work itself. Under the heading “sucre” (sugar), Gilliers writes generally on the subject as a commodity and about its biological characteristics and habitat. He more specifically writes about the “canne de sucre ou cannamelle” and footnotes information regarding “canna” and “mel,” in Latin, which mean reed and honey, referring to *canne à miel*, a botanical term for sugar. By adding the –iste ending to form a conglomerate French word—*cannaméliste*—Gilliers has proclaimed himself “the sugar maker.” As author of the text, he is directly aligning himself with the exotic nature of the sugarcane plant and the tropical places of sugar’s origin by using a seemingly exotic hybrid word—*cannaméliste*. Gilliers has used a self-referential title to denote both the confectionary dictionary and himself as “the sugar maker.” Gilliers’s authorial presence is therefore pronounced in the book as early as the frontispiece and the title. According to Émile Littré in the *Dictionnaire de la langue française* (1872-1877), the entry for ‘cannaméliste’ is defined as an old term to describe the office of the confectioner who makes crystallized fruit preserves, works made of sugar, refreshing liqueurs, pastillage candies, etc. The definition includes the title *Le Cannaméliste français* by Gilliers, and refers to chef Gilliers as the distiller to the King of Poland in 1751. The term *cannaméliste* was written into the late nineteenth-century dictionary and therefore into history.


As an instrument of empire, sugar is a commodity and spoils of empire involving a significant amount of manufacturing and therefore a considerable amount of physical slave labor. Gilliers’s frontispiece only hints at labor with the two individuals featured in the sugar fields of the top cartouche. Neither the frontispiece nor any following illustrated plates depict the significant labor required to operate the mill on sugar plantations such as those in figure 7, an image from a natural history volume of the century before. The numerous individuals depicted in the Sugar Mill highlights the challenges, physical labor, and management needed to operate the mill. As the image suggests, it is a situation “managed” by empire and the astutely-dressed colonists that appear in the bottom right corner.

Eighteenth-century colonial settlements and the establishment of sugar plantations on islands such as Jamaica in the West Indies, especially those founded by the French and British empires, provided the metropole [France] with an abundance of sugar. Gilliers’s frontispiece blurs the notion of empire by inserting small vignettes of feather-clad semi-nude women and sugarcane plants to lend an atmosphere of the island exotic—thereby avoiding any direct depiction of the manufacturing of sugar and the physical slave labor on which the empire is built.

While the illustrated plates do not depict the sugar mill, for example, they do display the abundance of sugar in the form of sugar sculptures and table topography. These spoils of empire most prominently appeared and thereby cultivated the dining table of courtly life, which sought to create a landscape fantasy of the “exotic” within the garden-like table decoration seen in Gilliers’s Plate 11, specifically the second register (fig. 8). The middle section depicts an intricate, curving, skirted tabletop with trees that rise from the table to create dramatic height for the space. The undulating forms of the table are detailed below in
the plan illustration of *Plate 11*; it is, however, in the middle drawing that a three-dimensional perspective creates a landscape topography. The irregular forms of the table beg a diner to move in and out of the undulating space, just as a traveler would who has arrived on an island or who is exploring an eighteenth-century garden such as those at Versailles. The spatial experience of the dining table creates a sense of discovery and travel for the viewer who is traveling in and out of the notions of the exotic and unknown within Gilliers’s dictionary.

Elaborately planned table settings transformed the landscape topography of the table into an exotic island, using silver, porcelain, mirrors, and enamel to blanket the table amongst an extravagant backdrop: sugar. The table, as depicted in the middle register of *Plate 11* (fig. 8), also suggests an important element of the island – sugar as similar aesthetically to the sand of an island. Gilliers writes of the *sable* technique under its own heading; the term denotes “sand” and a “sanding” or “sanded” technique of sugar display. The sugar is poured onto mirrored parterres in a natural meander pattern to imitate the look and feel of sand.\(^\text{21}\) Gilliers writes a dictionary entry that refers directly to the look of the island exotic, but relates it specifically to its use on the dining table to feature the dessert. Such an abundance of sugar, which has been poured onto the table for a natural effect, is an extravagance exploited by the ready supply of sugar from the plantations of the French colonies. The artist Gilliers not only creates the illusion of a voyage in his illustrated plates but also delivers a voyage in the experience of reading and traveling through the dictionary – to a curious, exotic place of the confectioner’s trade.

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\(^{21}\) Gilliers, *Le Cannaméliste français*, 213. “SABLE, se dit du sucre que l’on met en sable pour imiter le sable naturel pour garner des parterres, ou les fonds des plateaux.”
Gilliers uses the *sable* technique to create an environment of the island but also avoids direct reference to the manufacturing of sugar. The forced labor of slaves on sugar plantations is an inextricable backdrop to the dessert course put forth by Gilliers. The bodies and hardwork of such slaves (fig. 9) is obscured by the bucolic and Edenic exotic that is created in *Le Cannaméliste français*. In *Plate 11* (figs. 10 and 11), Gilliers shows a ballustraded centerpiece that would have been made of silver or more likely sugar. The bodies depicted are those of putti, whose legs dangle off the rocaille forms of the centerpiece. Alongside the putti are exotic servant figures who carry trays of filled wine glasses above their heads. They are semi-nude with naked torsos and draped mid-sections. The most suggestively exotic of this centerpiece are the highly modeled and detailed sugarcane plants—shown as reeds or *cannes* as described etymologically earlier in this section—that appear to grow from the top of the centerpiece. Putti flank the sugarcane plants at the left and right: one figure sitting frontal and holding a stalk of sugarcane and the other figure climbs up onto the centerpiece while holding a piece of sugarcane. These figures rise from the summit of the centerpiece, which acts like furniture on the dessert table. They seem to wave the sugarcane like a national flag as if to praise the power, wealth, and status from which such an abundant commodity arises.

Decorative arts of the table such as *orfèvrerie* exhibited putti figures of an exotic nature similar to those seen in Gilliers’s *Plate 11*. The two *salières* (salt cellars) from the service of Joseph I of Portugal (fig. 12) show an almost identical aesthetic to the figures that Gilliers depicts in his illustrations—and therefore presumably on his table. The silver putti

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22 Kriz, *Slavery, Sugar, and the Culture of Refinement*, 1-35. Kriz’s analysis of illustrated plates from Hans Sloane’s *Voyage to Jamaica* develops the notion of an obscured or “transplanted” slave body as represented in the sugarcane plants and natural history specimens. She unwraps this relationship by addressing how natural history specimens and the slave body became both curiosities and commodities.
figures wear highly-articulated feather skirts as they lean and pause in their efforts to carry the load on their backs; the figures serve as salt cellars on the dining table and demonstrate the common aesthetic of an island exotic. The richly-crafted porte-d’épices (spice carrier) from the same service (fig. 13) exhibits the matching aesthetic of feather headbands and skirts on two male putti figures. The boys sit atop a richly ornate rocaille form that shares common visual elements with those throughout Gilliers’s illustrated plates and specifically Plate 11.

Bronze figurine sugar castors (figs. 14 and 15) (1738-50) from the J. Paul Getty Museum exhibit a convergence of both the suggestion of the ‘exotic’ in the foreignness of Chinoiserie figures (which will be explored in the final chapter) and the real presence of sugar, extracted from slave labor of the French colonies. Sugar castors such as these might have been a part of a table display like Gilliers’s, and evidence suggests that these bronze figurines and specifically the bundles of sugarcane were once part of a surtout de table. The figurines are therefore primarily decorative because of their heavy weight; however, sugar may be inserted through open receptacles in the hollow bundles and then shaken through open piercings. The two figures lean forward as if to counterbalance and support the weight of the bundled sugarcane plants themselves; their execution therefore lends an atmosphere of the physical labor needed to overcome such heavy lifting. The shakers, approximately nine inches tall, suggest a more direct relation to the island’s manufacturing of sugar via the depiction of the body and man’s physical strength than Gilliers’s more blurred depiction of
the exotic. The bundles of sugarcane reeds or *canne à miel* provide a bronze example of contemporaneous decorative arts with an island exotic.\(^{23}\)

According to Mimi Hellman, eighteenth-century decorative arts reward the viewer with close scrutiny, especially for their formal complexity but also the complex environment in which they existed. Ceramic porcelain flowers, for example, for their size and cost exhibit remarkable craftsmanship—similar to that of Gilliers’s ephemeral sugar sculptures, known for the significant skill needed to create the fragile creations. The intensive aesthetic engagement that existed within the dining table—from *orfèvrerie* to mirrored parterres and biscuit figures—is no exception and provided a means of “socially meaningful scrutiny,” according to Hellman. Here, we legitimate the decorative arts of the table and sugar sculptures by acknowledging the social implications of sugar shakers (figs. 14 and 15) as well as the island connotations of empire in Gilliers’s frontispiece (fig. 2). While the problem of contextualizing these elements of the table is difficult because the table setting no longer exists, we can speculate that the ephemeral arts of the table were handled and passed around the dinner table—as mobile arts. Was it at the moment of the object’s delivery or at first arrival at the table that the object was scrutinized? The viewer had visual access to these objects—perhaps before, during, or after the meal—within the environment of the table. The social impact and suggestion of the island exotic is therefore palpable both in Gilliers’s work of table displays but also certain decorative arts of the period.\(^{24}\)


\(^{24}\) Mimi Hellman, “Forms of Distraction: Towards a Decorative Imagination” (lecture, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, NC, March 24, 2009). Thank you to Dr. Hellman for her insights on my topic and for sharing the following two sources with me that proved very valuable: Mimi Hellman, “The Nature of Artifice: French Porcelain Flowers and the Rhetoric of the Garnish” in Alden Cavanaugh and Michael Yonan, ed. *The Cultural Aesthetics of Eighteenth-Century Porcelain* (Ashagate, forthcoming), and Mimi Hellman, “The Joy of
CHAPTER 3

THE TAXONOMIC EXOTIC

Confectioner: one who preserves fruits and other things with sugar, honey, etc.

_Dictionnaire de L’Académie Française, 4th edition (1762)_

The frontispiece (fig. 2) to _Le Cannaméliste français_ is not only an invitation to the exotic in an island context but also an invitation to the "exotic" in its explanation of a new taxonomy—the métier (trade) of the confectioner after the sugar arrives in the metropole. The dictionary entry for the confectioner focuses on his use of sugar and honey and the way in which he creates and preserves food items. The lower cartouche of the frontispiece showcases the workshop of a confectioner, and it is clear from the front table that two men are working on sugar sculptures and arranging the table. Vanishing point perspective is exaggerated here by the pillars, which create a receding space and showcase the individuals who are primarily located along the central axis. The figures appear to be all men. The workshop is clearly delineated, and side structures along the walls indicate charcoal stoves for boiling sugar. The confectioner is therefore directing a workshop of individuals who work scientifically with sugar at all of its physical stages of chemical metamorphosis. The

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26 A gendered reading of this depiction is unclear, and further analysis is needed to determine if women worked in the confectioner’s workshop. Plate 7 does show children who watch the confectioner in amazement but do not seem to participate.
frontispiece serves as an initial vignette about the complexity involved in the science of sugar and other topics that are forthcoming in the confectionery dictionary. It is a visual rendering of the unknown, while the text of the dictionary is an explanation of the unknown.

The eighteenth-century philosophes brought a new, burgeoning organization of knowledge to French intellectual life; a glimpse into this new “method of reason” and rationalism provides important clues to understanding the contemporary intellectual climate of Le Cannaméliste français. Jean Le Rond d’Alembert’s Preliminary Discourse to the Encyclopédie explains the philosophical foundations of the natural history of the mind, and the summa of all the branches of knowledge; the organizational structure of the Encyclopédie focuses on a secular and naturalistic organization rather than the traditional theological teleology.27 By focusing on unity, simplicity, and continuity, the author organizes the encyclopedia into three faculties of the mind: Memory, Reason, and Imagination. D’Alembert argues for a hierarchy of needs in which pleasure and curiosity provide a restless desire to satisfy the mind and eagerness for all kinds of useful knowledge.28 In reference to the importance of the mechanical arts, the author writes that the artisan has the “most admirable evidences of the sagacity, the patience, and the resources of the mind.”29 Gilliers’s frontispiece is an affirmation of what D’Alembert argues is the ability to reduce complicated arts and sciences to simple notions;30 it is the ability to teach another the trade by using basic principles. The Encyclopédie has numerous entries regarding sugar and sugar manufacturing


28 D’Alembert, Preliminary Discourse, 15-16.

29 D’Alembert, Preliminary Discourse, 42.

30 D’Alembert, Preliminary Discourse, 31.
(under the heading *sucre*), and it is the entry for the confectioner where we learn the ordered classification of the trade that *Le Cannaméliste français* exhibits.

Five plates of the *Confiseur*, or confectioner, are located in the illustrated plates of the *Encyclopédie*, and the similarity of these plates to Gilliers’s in *Le Cannaméliste français* is striking. This section will investigate the taxonomy of the *confiseur* within both works, and a comparison between the two provides an understanding of the place of the mechanical arts of the sugar confectioner within the eighteenth-century context. While it may appear that the two publications were published contemporaneously in 1751, the illustrated plates of the *Encyclopédie* were added in later editions. Therefore, it is important to note that Gilliers’s illustrated plates preceded those of the *Encyclopédie*, and I can thus speculate on Gilliers’s potential influence or contribution to the volume. The *Encyclopédie* of Diderot and d’Alembert highlighted professional trades with the use of engravings and descriptions, and the mere inclusion of the confectioner within the manual is validation of the highly regarded trade of the culinary arts—and specifically the confectioner—in eighteenth-century France. The confectioner, therefore, is written into the organization of knowledge through the text entry of the *Encyclopédie* and its illustrated plates.

Gilliers’s Plate 1 (fig. 17) and Plate 2 (fig. 18) are the first two illustrated plates of the book, and they are separated by five pages of dense text. Plates 1 and 2 exhibit an abstract quality in the harsh, graphic, and specimen-like depictions of the tools that the *confiseur* uses.

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32. Gilliers, *Le Cannaméliste français*, 31, 36. Plate 1 is located on page 31, and Plate 2 is located on page 36.
in his workshop. The solitary objects here have become the “savage” objects, and objects such as these produce a powerful effect. The confectioner himself is notably absent in the image. *Confiseur* Plate 1 (fig. 19) and *Confiseur* Plate 2 (fig. 20) of the *Encyclopédie* exhibit a very similar approach in the depictions of the utensils. The funnels, boxes, bowls, and utensils in the illustrations are all separated by blank background space and suggest an ethnographic specimen reminiscent of eighteenth-century travel books from islands abroad.

According to Roland Barthes, the plates that involve some technological operation exist in an aesthetic of bareness; the almost naïve simplicity with which they are executed creates an artisanry of “the simple, the elementary, the essential, and the casual.” The object’s production (i.e. sugar confections) creates an image of “sacred simplicity.” The utensils of the *confiseur* lack a specific context because of the illustrations’ physical distance from the text that refers to it. Thus, the image-to-text relationship is not rooted in close juxtaposition, and the images do not exist on the same page as the text which describes it; the two-hundred-thirty-eight page dictionary has a mere thirteen folio illustrations which are foldout plates that measure approximately 30 inches by 20 inches.

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35 For valuable insight into the print culture of eighteenth-century travel books, see Elisabeth Fraser, “Books, Prints and Travel: Reading the Gaps of the Orientalist Archive,” *ART HISTORY* (June 2008): 342-67. A sincere thank you to Dr. Elisabeth Fraser for her valuable insights for my research avenues and for the insights her article gave me on how to formally analyze image-to-text relationship in book illustrations. Dr. Fraser also recommended the following insightful text: Beth Fowkes Tobin, *Colonizing Nature: The Tropics in British Arts and Letters, 1760-1820* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005).

The small number of images and the voluminous text of the *Le Cannaméliste français* heighten the reader’s curiosity when he/she arrives at such an abstract depiction of confectionery utensils as seen in Plate 1 and Plate 2. Gilliers’s agency is not only affirmed in the detailed plates that he created but also his understanding of the depicted tools and their use. He is therefore artist and tradesman, firmly rooted in his own scientific knowledge and applied art; his presence is implied. Gilliers’s expertise and knowledge separates him, the author, from the reader in a most distinct manner; he holds the superior knowledge and agency in the relationship. According to Roland Barthes, there exists a state of birth in the plates of the *Encyclopédie*, and the illustrated plates demonstrate how man produces things from nonexistence; man is then credited with the power of creation. The reader is therefore reliant upon Gilliers to decode the intricate and complicated particulars of the craft. Moreover, the detailed nature of the text may prove only slightly helpful to a reader or a novice confectioner. Plate 1 and Plate 2 suggest that the author holds the consummate ‘exotic’ knowledge but shares only what is necessary or perhaps what entices the reader. Culinary historian Ivan Day argues that Gilliers uses discretion and does not discuss his sculptural techniques in consummate detail. He is showcasing his trade skills but not divulging all his secrets and valuable information. The density and complexity of the text convey the expertise of the author; the confectionery dictionary is a showpiece of the author’s knowledge and a strategic marketing tool to curry favor from the court.

While Gilliers’s Plate 1 and Plate 2 and the Confiseur Plate 2 of the *Encyclopédie* do not visually depict the confiseur, other nearby plates bring a human presence to the kitchen with depictions of male figures at work. Gilliers’s Plate 7 (fig. 21) and *Confiseur* Plate IV of

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Diderot and d’Alembert’s *Encyclopédie* (fig. 22) have very similar vignette-style depictions of the confectioner’s work table, both depicted at the top of each illustrated plate. According to Barthes, the Encyclopedic object is usually depicted based on three levels of understanding: anthological (since it is isolated from context and presented in itself), anecdotic (when it is “naturalized” and placed within a vignette), and genetic (when the image offers us a trajectory from raw substance to finished object). Both illustrations are anchored by the hands of the central figure in the upper vignette, which humanize the image and lend a narrative quality to the otherwise mechanical and didactic plates. The central figures in each plate sit frontally at a table, delicately assembling flowers petal by petal, and the flat expanse of the table breaks the space between the artist and the viewer. Man’s hands have become a symbol of artisanal craft and of how man can produce things from nonexistence; they show man’s extraordinary power of creation. Peripheral figures who stand rolling out the sugar paste to be pressed into moulds or molded by hand contribute to the birth of the sugar sculptures; both plates highlight the art of *pastillage* (gum paste dough), a mixture of sugar and gum tragacanth. Gilliers’s *Plate 6* (fig. 23) depicts a variety of pewter and lead moulds of vegetables, fish and other animals that were made in two halves to ease

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39 “Confiseur” in *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, ed. Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond d’Alembert. University of Chicago : ARTFL Encyclopédie Projet (Winter 2008 Edition), Robert Morrissey (ed), [http://encyclopedie.uchicago.edu.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/](http://encyclopedie.uchicago.edu.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/). According to the image, it is entitled ‘Confiseur, Pastillage et Moules pour les Glaces’ and signed ‘Goussier Del.’ in left corner and ‘Provost Fecit’ in right corner. Various figures are numbered: Figure 1 uses ‘un mortier de marbre la gomme adragante,’ thus making the paste. Figure 2 cuts the paste into leaves while Figure 3 forms the leaves into flowers and Figure 4 molds a pastillage vase in order to hold the flowers. Also included are details of cutters or knives, a leaf mold for pastillage and a variety of confectionery implements.


the production,\(^{43}\) and each half was later joined to the other for a three-dimensional sugar-paste creation as seen in the strikingly similar Plate IV of the *Encyclopédie* and Plate 6 of Gilliers’s text. The format of the depictions is quite similar and suggests a ‘scientific’ knowledge held by the confectioner in his ability to manipulate sucrose; he was foremost a scientist and chemist of sugar and worked to perfect the various stages of caramelizing, melting, and cracking.\(^{44}\) The figures in the Plate IV of the *Encyclopédie* are numbered as if to suggest the classified, ordered process by which the sugar metamorphoses in episodic fashion in the kitchen. The text explains by number what each figure is doing.\(^{45}\)

Gilliers’s Plate 7 (fig. 21) is a striking example of the eighteenth-century organization of knowledge and suggests the “exotic”—and the unknown—linked to Linnaen biological specificity. According to Mary Louise Pratt, in 1735, Europe gained a “planetary consciousness” that was marked by an orientation toward interior exploration and specifically the descriptive classificatory system put forth by Carl Linné.\(^{46}\) Plate 7 suggests the work of an artisan who molds sugar flowers to Linnaean specificity. Below the depiction of the work table, the artist included drawings of detailed moulds for the creation of delicate petals. Once the petals have dried, the flowers are assembled as shown in the three stages of the middle register on Plate 7.\(^{47}\) The detail with which they are executed suggests a

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\(^{43}\) Brown and Day, *Pleasures of the Table*, 63. The two pieces made in the moulds dried separately and were then joined together. It is also known that wooden and plaster moulds existed as well.


biological accuracy, yet it ironically also suggests an intentional or accidental hybridity on the artists’ behalf. The eighteenth-century court favored natural history and biological science, yet the artist had liberty to alter the petals, stems, and sexual organs of the plant—as evidenced in Plate 7 with the step by step process from creation of the sugar petals to complete flower. Viewing the delicate flowers being assembled in juxtaposition with the completed sculptures below raises questions regarding the hybridity created by mixing biological flower specimens. It reminds the viewer of the biological processes needed for creation of flowers. Plate 7 is also a genetic image, and offers a trajectory from raw subject to finished sugar flowers; the episodes are emphasized by the tri-partite organization, emphasizing the simpler notions of man’s ability to teach another the science of confectionery.

Gilliers gives scientific and mathematical clarity to three of his thirteen pull-out illustrations, highlighting his intellectual role in crafting such a comprehensive table display. He demonstrates his cunning architectural abilities in Plate 8 (fig. 24), in which the confectioner depicts table furniture made of tiny wood pieces. The patience and acute sense of detail needed for constructing such elaborate furniture denote the author’s skill beyond just a decorative art, suggesting his utilitarian and applied techniques in building table structures. The gridded, quasi-mechanical illustration of Plate 9 (fig. 25) is understood by the author alone, and I argue that he uses illustrations like these to promote his own scientific

47 Peter B. Brown and Ivan Day, Pleasures of the Table, 41-65. Brown and Day explains that stems were often made with wire armatures and stamens fashioned by using little sprigs of saffron. To support very delicate work, the sugar petals were built up on eggshells and then hung to dry from wire frames. A little sugar was often added to make the color of the modeled creations shine, or a touch of sugar varnish was added as a seal.

48 I suggest here the use of hybridity as used in Jill H. Casid’s Sowing Empire (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), 2005.

skills. While these illustrations imply ‘how-to’ drawings to be understood by the reader, they are plates that promote and market Gilliers as the consummate table designer, as if to show what he is capable of executing in his work if hired. Lastly, Plate 10 (fig. 26) demonstrates both his mathematical mind in conceiving of the table and its shape and his three-dimensional planning of the space and the table as a diner would experience it. Each round shaded circle denotes a place setting, and he thus creates the ideal spacing between each person to allow for all plates to be set on the table prior to dining. These detailed depictions of the table demonstrate his ability to understand the table not only as a practical dining location but also as an avenue to showcase his art and intellectual abilities. The depth and complicated application of the external objects in creating the table has both revealed the unknown and created a myth. ⁵⁰

The illustrated plates of the taxonomic exotic both in Gilliers’s text and the Encyclopédie are heightened by the medium of book printing and engraving as well as the authorial presence of the confectioner. Engravings have a special effect in that their “copies” are circulated far more than the original. ⁵¹ The illustrated plates are complicated by the confectioner’s hidden presence in the images—his knowledge is present even if the body of the confectioner is not. Those plates where the confectioner is present serve as visual reminders of the man’s power of creation. This authorial presence calls into question derivatives and truth to the original; because the sugar sculptures are ephemeral, the viewer must rely on Gilliers to illustrate the truth or create a semblance of the truth. By Gilliers acting as designer, confectioner, artist, and tradesman, we must acknowledge that he may have taken liberties in depicting the truth, especially noting that the favor of the king and

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⁵⁰ Barthes, “The Plates of the Encyclopaedia,” 34.

other European courts was at stake. According to Claire Catterall, when considered from a food theory and design perspective, cooks are designers who blur both food and design. She posits that the cook’s relationship to the food is therefore a careful blend of choices revealing tastes and trends.\(^{52}\) Gilliers was foremost a tradesman and an artist, and his skills are evident in his relationship to sugar.\(^{53}\)

While the viewer is transported to a curious, exotic place within an island setting in the illustrated plates, a journey to the taxonomic exotic is exhibited in the practical and mechanical depictions of the *Le Cannaméliste français* through the use of trade skills, instructions, and materials. Gilliers takes the viewer on an intellectual and scientific journey to showcase the unknown of the eighteenth-century confectioner. The illustrations become an agent of the *officier* (confectioner) as tradesman and the codification of the knowledge pertaining to the trade. The plates become a simulacrum or physical likeness that suggests they are inferior to the original—but nonetheless still convey a sense of the original. With Gilliers’s dictionary, the art of the illustrated plates survives as long as the physical


\(^{53}\) For this general notion of the practitioner’s skill evident in the relationship to the food, see Claire Catterall, *Food: Design and Culture* (London: Laurence King in association with Glasgow, 1999). Thank you to Dr. Mary Pardo for her suggestion of the following source, which is helpful for the confectioners’s background in seventeenth-century: Jennifer Montagu, *Roman Baroque Sculpture: The Industry of Art* (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 1989). The last chapter in this book explains *trionfi di tavola* or “triumphs of the table” that were luxury food items and sugar sculptures in seventeenth-century Italy. The *trionfi* were not eaten but given to notable women to take home after the feast.
dictionary survives. The pages of a book have become a manner in which to overcome the impermanence of the sugar sculptures.\textsuperscript{54}

\textsuperscript{54} Dorothy Johnson, “The Origins of Romantic Hellenism: Myth and Meaning from David to Girodet” (lecture, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, NC, September 22, 2008). The notion of the simulacrum arose in Dorothy Johnson’s first lecture of the Rand Lecture Series held at the University of North Carolina. While Johnson referenced the simulacrum in relation to paintings of Jacques Louis David, I use the term here to denote the book’s physical stand-in for the original sugar sculpture.
CHAPTER 4
THE ROCAILLE EXOTIC

Rocaille: small pebbles, shells, and other things to be used for ornament in a grotto and to create rocks.

*Dictionnaire de L’Académie française*, 4th edition (1762)

In addition to the island exotic and the taxonomic exotic, the illustrated plates of Gilliers’s *Le Cannaméliste français* exhibit an exotic of the rocaille—rocky grottos, pebbles, shells, and dripping cascades—that creates a fantasy for the dining table. I deliberately use the term “rocaille” rather than rococo to describe this section and Gilliers’s dining table topography in order to refer to the exotic associated with grottos, gardens, and islands represented in the illustrated plates. The term rocaille and its eighteenth-century definitions more directly describe the rock, shell, and pebble forms used to create stones, dripping cascades, and organic material. Most notably, the term rocaille is common to eighteenth-century language and is defined by Gilliers as:

Rocaille: all types of small pieces of different colors of blown candied preserves that one puts together to form small rocks or to garnish water elements.\textsuperscript{56} Gilliers therefore uses the term to denote all sorts of small pieces of differently colored candied preserves and confections used to create small rocks and to garnish water elements such as cascades and ponds.\textsuperscript{57} Rococo is a retrospective term used by many scholars to denote the stylistic period of French history between the Regency (1715-1730) and the reign of Louis XV (1730-1774). While Gilliers’s illustrated plates fall into the stylistic period of the rococo, the term \textit{rococo} is unstable and slips into varied and vexed interpretations that only broadly define the period. Rococo is connected etymologically to rocaille, and rococo combines rocaille with \textit{barocco}, an adjective denoting the malformed, the misshapen, and the convoluted. It was a term of denigration used to describe works by seventeenth-century Italian artists such as Borromini and Bernini.\textsuperscript{58} Therefore, the origins of the term rococo derive from critical studies of style; it is a term used retrospectively to describe the eighteenth century. I will focus on the term rocaille as situated within Gilliers’s plates and the eighteenth-century French language; other contemporary terms used to describe the rocaille style are \textit{style moderne}, \textit{genre pittoresque}, \textit{goût nouveau}, or \textit{goût de ce siècle}.\textsuperscript{59} This

\textsuperscript{56} Gilliers, \textit{Le Cannaméliste Français}, 210-211. “Rocaille: On appelle rocaille toutes sortes de morceaux de conserves soufflés de differentes couleurs, que l’on arrange ensemble pour former des petits roucher, ou pour garnir des sujets d’eau.”

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{59} Ibid.
final section of the paper will address three aspects in which Gilliers’s illustrated plates relate to the eighteenth-century aesthetic of the rocaille, the fascination with chinoiserie, and the embrace of the grotesque and the bizarre.

Earlier we entered *Le Cannaméliste français* through the frontispiece (fig. 2), using it to explain both the island exotic and the taxonomic exotic. It is also the gateway through which we will discuss the rocaille forms of Gilliers’s work. The ornate sculptural forms of the frame represent a *cartouche*, which, according to the *Dictionnaire de L’Académie française* (1762), is a type of ornament in sculpture or painting that represents a carton or canvas that is rolled and twisted at the edges. It exhibits therefore a volute form like a scroll or map (*carte*) that has been rolled to create S-curves and counter curves. The organic forms and sense of physical presence of the frontispiece’s cartouche create a frame for the fantasy experience of viewing the confectionery dictionary—it operates as an entry to a grotto. This visual technique of framing such an experience is most notable in the *Oeuvre* by Juste-Aurèle Meissonnier (d. 1750), whose intricately detailed etchings, engravings, and silverwork inspired reproductions of the style in many decorative arts of the period. The *Oeuvre* contains 118 engravings on 74 folio sheets, exhibiting designs for silverware, interior

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decoration and furniture, memorial sculpture, illusionistic ceiling paintings, and architectural projects.62

Meissonnier’s influence on Gilliers’s confectionery dictionary is apparent in Gilliers’s frontispiece and its creation of illusionary space. Meissonnier’s frontispiece (fig. 27) shows a cartouche with a distinct overhanging, prow-like balcony that draws the eye upward. The perspective of the drawing situates the viewer at an angle to create space for the shells, flowing water and a ship at the right of the cartouche and to create a general sense of movement that permeates the entire design; while the cartouche is architectural and massive in quality, it is not static in appearance. The balcony therefore casts half shadows onto the flattened surface at the center of cartouche where the title appears.63 Meissonnier dissolves the boundary between the frame and the viewer, filling it with decorative arabesques.64 Gilliers borrows this technique to create a balcony at the top of his cartouche and to repeat the undulating, architectural forms of the cartouche to produce illusionary vignettes within the piece—one to showcase the island and workers above and one to showcase the confectioner’s trade below.

The rocaille cartouche in Gilliers’s frontispiece is both a frame, which creates an illusionary scene, and also a table-top piece of orfèvrerie (art of the silversmith), which creates a furniture-like quality for the dining table. The presence of this eighteenth-century table furniture is known through paintings by Francois Desportes (1661-1743) such as Buffet

62 Meissonnier and Nyberg, Œuvre De Juste Aurèle Meissonnier, 7.

63 Meissonnier and Nyberg, Œuvre De Juste Aurèle Meissonnier, 6-7.

avec pieces d’orfèvrerie et vases (1730) (fig. 28). The table sertout (made of silver) at the center of the painting is adorned with ripe peaches and fruits, like that of Gilliers’s Plate 12 (fig. 29). Gilliers’s style of ornament used to display fruit pyramids and silver table sertouts are commensurate therefore with those depicted in paintings such as those by Desportes. Just as Desportes used care and planning to create a fruit-filled sertout of specific color and proportions in his painting, Gilliers as a confectionery artist employed the same techniques through textual and visual explanation with Plate 12. By creating considerable height in the table displays, both Gilliers and Desportes are constructing physical masses in the form of pyramids and façades, using orfèvrerie to create dramatic cartouches to draw the viewer into a new illusionary dining and confectionery space.

According to John Whitehead, in the late seventeenth-century, there was a growing interest in anything exotic, and the eighteenth century rocaille style embraced chinoiserie elements in the decorative arts of interiors, textiles, and wallpapers. Gilliers’s Plate 5 (fig. 30) confirms the confectioner’s place amongst other commensurate decorative arts of the period in his use of chinoiserie figures. While Gilliers does not address the foreignness of the figures in his text, he does provide a definition for “chinoise.” According to the author, it is a small orange found abundantly in China, and its location thus explains the name. He also adds that the “chinoise” is the same crystallized form as cedar and lemons when they are


candied as fruits. Gilliers therefore focuses on the exotic ‘chinoise’ as a fruit and relates it to European candied preserves to draw a connection to the metropole.\textsuperscript{68} According to Diderot’s \textit{Encyclopédie}, the definition of “chinois” shows an admiration for the Chinese by proclaiming they are superior to all other nations of Asia and known for their seniority, mind, progress in the arts, wisdom, politics, and taste for the philosophy.\textsuperscript{69} The relationship of the chinoiserie figures to the French rocaille aesthetic seen in Gilliers’ illustrations is not the exotic associated with the island, empire, and the control of French colonies and slave plantations; it is an exotic associated with the amusement and amazement of the taste for chinoiserie and the admiration of the Chinese people, culture, and politic. The French are not controlling the chinoiserie elements as in the case of the island colonies; they are admiring and lauding the \textit{chinois}.\textsuperscript{70}

While Gilliers defines ‘chinoise’ in his text, he also creates a visual table display in which chinoiserie figures feature prominently. The illustration depicts a mirrored parterre on which sugar arabesque forms rest, a parterre similar to the one seen in figure 31; beneath the parterre, patterns for the arabesque sugar forms are irregularly placed along the page’s length. The flickering between the mirror and the sugar sculptures creates an interplay

\textsuperscript{68} Gilliers, \textit{Le Cannaméliste Français}, 36. “Chinoise: est une petite orange qui croît abondamment dans la Chine; c’est pourquoi on la nomme Chinoise: on a la confit de même que le cedra et le citron.”


\textsuperscript{70} Ibid.
between illusion and awareness on behalf of the viewer. Gilliers’s parterre includes six resting chinoiserie sugar figures (figs. 32). The chinoiserie figures located within Gilliers’s illustrated plates represent an encounter—a point of cultural contact between the East and the West, between “us” (the Europeans) and “them” (the Near Orient or Far Orient). The figures do not imply outright risk here for they are dwarfed by the elaborately planned rococo parterre on which they rest, and they are subdued by the French landscape in which they seem to frolic gently. Two figures hold trays suggestive of desserts while another figure stands erect holding an umbrella characteristic of those from East Asia. The pair of sugar figures to the left of center look at one another and have outreached arms, gestures that suggest they are storytelling or perhaps are the center of an amusement or entertainment.

According to Katie Scott, ‘playfulness’ has often been used to describe the *gout moderne* of the early eighteenth century, and ‘play’ is an aesthetic, historical condition and a social model. ‘At play’ also quite literally describes the state at which the social elite of the *ancien régime* lived out its life and its legal identity—‘game playing’ with and for their identities as well as transforming the rules by which status and power were attributed. Gilliers’s inclusion of chinoiserie figures in the dessert course and table display has become a game of playing with ‘otherness.’ In a game of charades, for example, Scott suggests that the ‘other’ assumed the nature of a performance, and the game itself hints at a comic element. While the chinoiserie figures may hint at a sense of comic amusement, European travelers since the 1600s had discovered the sophisticated material culture of China and Japan,

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importing and imitating decorative objects from porcelain wares to lacquer panels.

According to Madeleine Dobie, the European embrace of Chinese and Japanese techniques and material goods represented an implicit homage to these cultures and their respective rich decorative traditions. The attention lavished on the Orient contrasts with the underrepresented colonial world; Dobie argues that a ‘cultural displacement’ occurs as French economic interests in the Atlantic colonies were transposed into a fascination with Oriental decorative traditions and objects. Gilliers’s inclusion of the chinoiserie figures is a manner of amusement and homage that masks the slave economy on which France is built. According to Dobie, who refers to French furnishings in this context, the “east meets west” in ways that occluded rather than exposed the implication of the social elites who owned such furnishings in France’s slaveholding economy.

These figures exist in Gilliers’s rocaille aesthetic as a “creation of fantasies of the other.” Gilliers’s Plate 13 (fig. 33) contains 4 intricately depicted table surtouts in which the two situated at the top include repeated references to the Oriental and suggest a fantasy-like and almost grotto setting that mimics Meissonnier’s title page and Gilliers’s frontispiece.

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75 Dobie, “Orientalism,” 13. According to Dobie, by 1740, France dominated the world sugar market, producing sugar at less than half the price of the British Islands. By mid-century, French colonies also supplied 40 percent of the world’s coffee. The number rose to 60 percent for Saint Domingue alone by 1790. It is estimated that as many as one in eight French subjects earned a living in endeavors connected to colonial commerce.


The surtout (fig. 33 detail) appears almost organic; it is built of shell forms and dripping cascades that flow from grotesque masks. The figures also wear East Asian dress, which would have appeared foreign (or ‘exotic’) to the European diners; one holds out a bouquet of flowers while the other holds a tureen, both in a submissive and servile manner. Plate 13 has another surtout which directly highlights East Asian influences, as seen in figure 34 where chinoiserie figures flank a surtout which includes pagoda-like architectural structures that rise from the leafy vegetation and dripping cascades. According to Scott, the ‘oddity’ of the Siamese pagoda or Chinese figures mirrored the singularity of crystals or shells as artifacts and curiosities that were displayed in a Wunderkammer. The pagodas and the Chinese figures underlined the often abrupt connection between nature ‘wrought’ and nature ‘caught.’

The bronze figurine sugar castors (figs. 14 and 15) (1738-50) from the J. Paul Getty Museum are adorned with lacquered robes, which denote the Orient because of their loose style and gilt chrysanthemum quarter-blossom and butterfly decoration. Mentioned earlier in this thesis for their relation to island figures and the sugarcane reeds which they carry, the sugar castors attain a level of amusement because of their chinoiserie robes. They serve as a reminder of the material presence of the table topography and the multiple vehicles in which to create amusement or playfulness; the brightly-colored lacquer robes would have created a spectacle set amidst a backdrop of sugar sculptures, mirrored parterres, and sugar arabesque forms. The interplay of the table decoration created its own sense of amusement and wonder.

The illustrated plates of Gilliers’s confectionery dictionary are richly embedded with elements of the ‘exotic,’ and the grotesque forms often associated with rocaille design.

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78 Katie Scott, Rococo Interior, 175.
According to the Dictionnaire de l’Académie française, “grotesque” signifies the ridiculous, the bizarre, and the extravagant, and within the context of painting, it denotes imaginary figures created by the painter.\textsuperscript{79} According to Katie Scott, grotesques were a form of decoration that relates to its namesake, the word grotto, and the cavernous, partially excavated rooms in Roman palaces and villas that were first discovered during the Renaissance.\textsuperscript{80} Thus, the idea of the grotesque and its decorative elements is closely associated with the rocaille and its water and rockwork. The table surtout, such as figure 33, has grotesque, bearded heads and pronounced mouths from which cascades drip onto the table. We can speculate that this cascade effect may have been created through spun sugar or sugar strands.\textsuperscript{81} In effect, these grotesque forms offer an element of the bizarre or mythical and appear throughout the illustrated plates.

According to George Savage, the rocaille shell-work is a natural extension of landscape elements that are complementary to rocks and water. Eighteenth-century shells of all kinds were a passion among collectors who displayed such curiosities in cabinets.\textsuperscript{82} Two


\textsuperscript{80} Katie Scott, \textit{Rococo Interior}, 123.

\textsuperscript{81} For additional insight into sugar spun sculptures in domesticity of America, see Herman, Bernard L. \textit{Town House: Architecture and Material Life in the Early American City, 1780-1830}. Chapel Hill: Published for the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, Williamsburg, Virginia, by the University of North Carolina Press, 2005. Thank you to Louis Nelson of the University of Virginia for his suggestion of this resource.

\textsuperscript{82} George Savage, \textit{French Decorative Art, 1638-1793} (New York: Praeger, 1969), 37.
vases in *Plate 7* offer a juxtaposition of the natural and the artificial, aspects that would have appeared in cavernous grottos and gardens where man’s influence is juxtaposed with nature’s inherent beauty. The vase depicted at the right side of *Plate 7* (fig. 37) presents a concurrence of delicate, feminine flowers at the top and detailed grotesque faces that surround the vase at the bottom; marine-like dragons wrap around the top of the vase to further increase the curiosity and amusement that it provokes. In contrast, the nearby vase (fig. 38) depicts feminine, cherubic faces, which present the striking juxtaposition of style and elements that make up the ‘exotic’ of the rocaille. The putti figures and curving rocaille forms in *Plate 13* (fig. 35) exhibit an abundance of garlanded flowers and fruit, which flank the *coquillages* (shells). In addition, the tactile, undulating forms of the table surtout itself appeal to the senses in taste (sugar and sweetmeats), touch (variety of textures and surfaces), sight (visual dynamics of the rocaille forms), smell (the fragrant flowers and food items), and hearing (as there would have been music and entertainment at the table). Gilliers’s active appeal to the senses through his ‘exotic’ rocaille table designs and chinoiserie figures was an avenue into the amusement of eighteenth-century court diners.
CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSION

As demonstrated above, examples from the illustrated plates of Gilliers’s *Le Cannaméliste français* exhibit elements of the island exotic, the taxonomic exotic, and the rocaille exotic. The detailed, highly modeled plates are executed with line drawings, gradations, and shading that become simulacra and stand for the original sculptures and table displays, which perished shortly after creation; the illustrations memorialize both the sculptures and the confectioner’s trade through a braid of exotic elements. Though the confectionery dictionary and the illustrated plates exist today as examples of the decorative arts, we must consider what the originals might have looked like? What modifications or liberties were taken by the artist who was also confectioner? What, perhaps, has been omitted from the drawings? Embedded in the illustrations is the artist’s translation and interpretation of the original three-dimensional work of art—and his intention to showcase his talents. Thus, there is a complicated relationship between extant illustrated drawing and the perished original sugar sculpture and planned table display.

The chapters of this paper mimicked the metamorphosis of sugar as it grows and originates in the islands of the French empire and then travels to the metropole to the confectioner’s workshop to undergo stages of boiling and crystallization. The emerging taxonomy of the *confiseur* is catalogued and written into history via Diderot’s *Encyclopédie* and texts such as *Le Cannaméliste français*. The elaborate sugar sculptures, sanded sugar
crystals poured onto the table, and elaborate silver *surtout de table* become the final stage in sugar’s metamorphosis as it is tempted by fate—the culmination of a feast, the desire of a hungry court diner, or perhaps the increasing humidity that causes the sugar to get sticky, slippery, and susceptible to the elements. According to Ivan Day, there are edible and non-edible versions of the sugar sculptures that would have varied according to a high or low quality gum tragacanth; fine paste would have been used for delicate ornaments or flowers, such as those seen in figure 21. Non-edible ornaments, building structures, or larger sugar sculptures may have used powders of alabaster, plaster, and marble as binding agents that would have made the elements more structurally sound.\(^{83}\) While the eighteenth-century feast and court table no longer exists in authentic form, the pages of Gilliers’s confectionery dictionary provide clues that offer scholars a manner in which to reconstruct the social history of the past—using sugar as the structure.

The dictionary and its blurring of the exotic elements are a marketing tool and personal résumé of the confectioner’s trade and specifically Gilliers’s talents. Gilliers plumes himself on his skill and the table topography that results from much planning and precision. *Le Cannaméliste français* is a dictionary that through its illustrated plates of the exotic confirms and communicates the same messages of kingship, wealth, and diplomacy as other decorative arts such as silver and porcelain. The dictionary’s image-to-text relationship is based on a density of text and the interspersed surprises of elaborate pull-out illustrations. The book therefore calls the reader to participate actively in reading the text and then physically opening the images to interact with them. This book experience can be likened to a travel book or ‘exotic’ voyage—one with a beginning, middle, and end. The temporality of such an experience is ephemeral—just as the feasts, festivals, and court dining tables were

\(^{83}\) Day, *Royal Sugar Sculpture*, 12.
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Figure 1: Frontispiece, Joseph Gilliers, *Le Cannamélise*, 1751
Figure 2: Frontispiece, Joseph Gilliers, *Le Cannaméliste*, 1751
Figure 3: Frontispiece (detail), Joseph Gilliers, *Le Cannaméliste*, 1751
Figure 4: A New Map of the Island of Jamaica in Hans Sloane’s Voyage to Jamaica, 1725 (detail above and below)
Figure 5: Frontispiece (detail), Joseph Gilliers, *Le Cannaméliste*, 1751
Figure 6: Frontispiece (detail), Joseph Gilliers, *Le Cannaméliste*, 1751
Figure 7: Sugar Mill with Vertical Rollers, French West Indies, 1665
Figure 8: Plate 11, Gilliers, Le Cannaméliste, 1751
Figure 9: Sugar Cane [1858-1860] Knight, Charles. *Pictorial Gallery of Arts*. 
Figure 10: Plate 11 (detail), Gilliers, *Le Cannaméliste*, 1751
Figure 11: Plate 11 (detail), Gilliers, Le Cannaméliste, 1751
Figure 12: Salt cellars from the service of Joseph I of Portugal, 1756-1762
Figure 13: Spice carrier from the service of Joseph I of Portugal, 1756-1762
Figure 14: *Pair of Decorative Bronzes*, 1738-1745

Figure 15: *Pair of Decorative Bronzes* (detail), 1738-1745
Fig. 16: Frontispiece, Joseph Gilliers, *Le Cannaméliste*, 1751
Figure 17: Plate 1, Gilliers, *Le Cannaméliste*, 1751
Figure 19: Confiseur, Diderot Encyclopédie, Plate I, after 1751
Figure 20: Confiseur, Diderot Encyclopédie, Plate II, after 1751
Figure 21: Plate 7, Gilliers, *Le Cannaméliste*, 1751
Figure 22: Confiseur, Diderot Encyclopédie, Plate IV, after 1751
Figure 23: Plate 6, Gilliers, *Le Cannaméliste*, after 1751
Figure 24: Plate 8, Gilliers, Le Cannabéliste, 1751
Figure 25: Plate 9, Gilliers, *Le Cannaméliste*, 1751
Figure 26: Plate 10, Gilliers, *Le Cannaméliste*, 1751
Figure 27: *Title Page, Works of Juste-Aurèle Meissonnier*, 1748
Figure 28: Alexandre François Desportes, *Buffet avec pieces d'orfèvrerie et vases*, 1730
Figure 29: Plate 12, Gilliers, *Le Cannaméliste*, 1751
Figure 30: Plate 5, Gilliers, *Le Cannaméliste*, 1751.
Figure 31: *Surtout de table* (centerpiece). Bartolomeo Pagliani, 1754-75.
Figure 32: Plate 5 (detail above and below), Gilliers, *Le Cannaméliste*, 1751.
Figure 33: Plate 13 (detail at right), Gilliers, *Le Cannaméliste*, 1751.
Figure 34: Plate 13 (detail at right), Gilliers, *Le Cannaméliste*, 1751.
Figure 35: Plate 13 (detail), Gilliers, *Le Cannaméliste*, 1751.
Figure 36: Plate 7 (detail), Gilliers, *Le Cannaméliste*, 1751.
Figure 37: Plate 7 (detail), Gilliers, *Le Cannaméliste*, 1751.
Figure 38: Plate 7 (detail), Gilliers, *Le Cannaméliste*, 1751.