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## The Archaeology of Alcohol and Drinking

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## Book Review

**Frederick H. Smith** *The Archaeology of Alcohol and Drinking*.  
Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2008, 208 pps., \$24.95  
(paper), ISBN 13: 978-0-8130-3290-0.

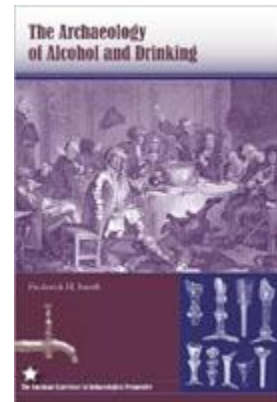
Reviewed for the African Diaspora Archaeology Newsletter by Aaron  
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This book is a continuation of Frederick H. Smith's earlier research (*Caribbean Rum: A Social and Economic History* 2005). In *The Archaeology of Alcohol and Drinking*, Frederick Smith synthesizes a wide body of research from the fields of cultural anthropology and social history in order to develop a framework that allows a better understanding of archaeological remains associated with alcohol. By developing a political-economic model similar to that utilized by Sidney Mintz in *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (1985) Smith is able to explain the diverse social, political, and economic behaviors related to drinking alcohol. This analytical system goes far beyond reinterpreting alcohol related material culture as simply another variable informing archaeologists of "foodways." Instead Smith's paradigm presents a set of unique social phenomena that are better interpreted with respect to world-wide economic and political systems.

The major themes that Smith individually addresses are the social functions and the material remains associated with the production, trade, and consumption of alcohol. Each chapter, which corresponds directly with one of these themes, explains a different aspect of the archaeological record and illuminates the social and economic reasons for the use and deposition of a variety of alcohol related artifact types.

In the introductory chapter, Smith explains both why historical archaeologists have avoided alcohol as a subject of study as well as the previous hindrance of this type of study caused by the temperance movement and its vestigial baggage. While not hiding the many harmful social and physical effects of alcohol, Smith advocates an objective critique of the role alcohol production, trade, and consumption played in past societies in order to properly assess the conscious choices made by individuals in the past. This critique aids in addressing the construction of identities associated with both secular and sacred uses of alcohol as well as total abstinence.

In Chapter 2, Smith provides a review of the material remains deposited through alcohol related cultural behaviors. By exploring a wide range of site types, Smith informs the reader of how analysis of alcohol specific artifacts such as glass and ceramic sherds, ethnobotanical remains, and a variety of distillation related metal objects can inform researchers about diachronic changes in production, trade, and consumption of alcoholic beverages.



Chapter 3 is a synthesis of previous archaeological research associated with the production of alcohol. In this chapter, Smith reviews a variety of studies ranging from pre-Incan beer production in Peru to late historic commercial distilleries in the former British colonies. The underlying thesis of this chapter is that colonial European expansion fostered a re-creation of European drinking patterns and simultaneously, through the impact to indigenous populations, transformed native drinking patterns. Smith closes the chapter by stating that historical archaeologists must question the economic and political forces that transformed the alcohol industry in order to make informed conclusions about the rise of world-wide trade patterns in the modern world.

Collectively, Chapters 4 and 5 address issues of social identity and interaction. By examining both the world-wide trade and associated social behavior of alcohol consumption these chapters reveal the nature of interaction between the producers, traders, and consumers of alcohol in the colonial world. Included in Chapter 5 is Smith's review of how South's artifact patterning (in *Method and Theory in Historical Archaeology* 1977) subsumes alcohol consumption into the "Kitchen Group" category, thereby obscuring the interpretive value of function based artifact enumerations. While South was well aware of this discrepancy, and used it to isolate soldier's alcohol-related behaviors at Fort Moultrie, most practitioners blindly categorize their recovered materials and, sadly, do very little to address the variability in behaviors beyond separating and tabulating the recovered materials.

The case study presented in Chapter 6 will be of particular interest to the readers of this publication and other African Diaspora Scholars. The case study is an examination of the archaeological remains that provide evidence of alcohol use in the Mapps Cave site in Barbados. Smith interprets the remains with respect to the 1816 slave uprising, the largest single revolt in Barbadian history. Smith's thesis is that Mapps Cave served as a refuge where the enslaved people at Mapps, Bayley's and other nearby sugar plantations could congregate.

Smith proposes that at Mapps Cave served as a sanctuary where the enslaved laborers could find relief from the strict social control and panoptic gaze of the planters. The consumption of alcohol allowed for a temporary respite and breakdown of otherwise rigid social barriers, and helped ease sociability between individuals. The conditional release from social pressures fostered by drinking alcohol likely facilitated the revolutionary planning and organization in Mapps Cave that culminated in the 1816 uprising.

As mentioned above, I found the explanatory power of Smith's framework most informative. Open-minded work, like that presented in this volume, will increase researcher's interpretive power and help scholars draw factual conclusions about past events. In addition to offering a synthesis of alcohol studies, and an intriguing case study, this volume also provides a more informed and nuanced view of artifact analysis than that offered by purely positivist thinkers. Possibly an update to both Hume's stodgy antiquarianism and Deetz's cold processualism, Smith's study incorporates human agency, action, and belief into the study of archaeologically recovered material. Rather than simply relying on documented trends, Smith attempts to explain how historical events transpired

**and offers an explanation that considers not only economic availability and social order, but also human choice and individual action.**

**This is a clearly written book. The book is targeted to an audience already familiar with the historic archaeology of the Caribbean, and a reader not particularly familiar with the subject would find much of the content clarified by more extensive discussions. The thirty figures included with the text aid the reader by clarifying the artifact and excavation descriptions. I did not notice any typographical or layout errors and the References Cited and Index sections are complete. This book would be a great addition to the library of anyone interested in colonial period archaeology, transatlantic trade, or the correlation of history with archaeologically derived data. Using history to inform interpretations of the archaeological record, Smith goes far to incorporate social history into archaeological research.**