

## COMMODITIES AND TASTE

*Substance and Seduction: Ingested Commodities in Early Mesoamerica*. Edited by Stacey Schwartzkopf and Katherine Sampeck. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2017. Pp. 220. \$27.95 paper.  
doi:10.1017/tam.2018.61

When Rebecca Earle published the article “If you eat their food . . . ?”: Diets and Bodies in Early Colonial Spanish America” in the *American Historical Review* in 2010, it was one of the first interventions made to explore the intersection of food studies and colonial Latin American history. Since then an entire field has emerged, in which a number of long-standing concerns—caste systems, colonial economies, questions of cultural and other forms of exchange—are approached through a focus on what the editors of this volume classify as “ingested commodities.” The term is necessarily capacious, as it includes much more than food, and links the spiritual economy to the more mundane world of bodily nourishment, but by taking on this enlarged view the field has moved the study of material history in novel and important directions. This volume, which runs the gamut from peyote to chocolate, represents an important contribution.

To be sure, this collection of essays is focused on commodities that would typically be excluded from the category “food.” Whereas the latter includes maize, wheat, chiles, squash, and a series of European imports, this volume focuses on commodities that range from the explicitly religious (peyote, though as Martin Nesvig shows, this categorization may be too limiting) to those more closely linked with drunkenness (pulque, aguardiente, cane alcohol). Others seem to exist in multiple frames, as medicine, sacrament, and source of gustatory pleasure (chocolate, sugar, tobacco), though none of these substances was linked to nourishment in the way that other commodities (say, maize) were. Still, even if these commodities can be roughly classified in these ways, the very point of the volume is to break down these forms of classification and demonstrate how each was rooted in specific historical contexts, and how each was attributed powers that shifted over time and space. Collectively, we wind up with an impression of the ways in which local meanings and practices of consumption were integrated into and ultimately shaped by (and for that matter shaped) global commodity flows.

Methodologically, this is also a rich example of the kinds of sources and approaches one might take in commodity history. Nesvig’s reliance on Inquisition trials introduces us to a complex history of contested meaning as non-natives adopted peyote for a variety of ends. Stacey Schwartzkopf’s long-view approach to understanding the gradual shift from mead to aguardiente in the Guatemalan highlands provides an excellent case study of the role that agricultural innovation and conquest played in shifting patterns of consumption. Kathryn Sampeck and Jonathan Thayne take an entirely different approach to studying the history of chocolate, tracing recipes from

Mesoamerica and Peru over a long period in order to create a sense of how both tastes and ingredients moved within and between the Americas and Europe. Joel Palka demonstrates the agency and independence that Mayan highlanders have maintained into the present in his study of tobacco. Joan Bristol's chapter on pulque uses controversies over impurity and corruption to explore colonial anxieties about racial mixing. Guido Pezzarossi explores the labor system tied to colonial sugar production in Guatemala through a focus on the ways in which the bodily effects of sugar were said to be health threats. He situates sugar and alcohol within humoral medicine and shows how they were in turn linked to efforts to differentiate indigenous from Spanish bodies.

The essays are fascinating in and of themselves, but it is also the authors' shared interest in what the editors call the "thingyness" of the objects of study that makes this book a valuable contribution. In part an effort to consider insights drawn from the history of emotions, but more clearly drawing on affect theory, this concept takes us beyond simple material culture and into a world of bodies, ingestions, seduction, and desire—into a world where the question of how we come to know these substances is just as critical as what we know about them. The different authors in the collection pursue these goals in different ways. Some produce work that resembles intellectual and cultural history more closely, while others take novel approaches to the subjects of study. The collective result is a laudable example of how this concept might be deployed in thinking about both the circulation of these goods in the colonial world and how they shaped meanings, practice, and everyday life.

*University at Albany*  
*Albany, New York*  
[asdawson@albany.edu](mailto:asdawson@albany.edu)

ALEXANDER DAWSON

## LATE COLONIAL CITIES

*Urban Space as Heritage in Late Colonial Cuba: Classicism and Dissonance on the Plaza de Armas of Havana, 1754–1828.* By Paul Niell. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2015. Pp. 362. \$55.00 cloth.  
 doi:10.1017/tam.2018.62

In the second half of the eighteenth and early part of the nineteenth century, Spanish authorities carried out the Bourbon reforms, a reorganization of the imperial system aimed at increasing income from colonial possessions. Urban transformations were important to these reforms, and were materialized in a series of similar, and nearly simultaneous, changes to different cities of Spanish America. These included the official alteration of the uses of the main square (*Plaza Mayor/Plaza de Armas*) and the establishment of general cemeteries in the urban periphery.