



## Alcohol In Ancient Mexico

*Henry Bruman, Henry J. Bruman*

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The art of distillation arrived in Mexico with the Spaniards in the sixteenth century. Even before that time native skills and available resources had contributed to a well-developed tradition of intoxicating beverages, many of which are still produced and consumed. Henry Bruman visited various Mexican and Central American Indian tribes to reconstruct the variety and extent of these ancient traditions. He discerned five distinct areas that he defined by their culturally most significant beverages and superimposed these over the great mescal wine region. In these regions he noted wines from cactus, cactus fruit, cornstalks, and mesquite pods, beer from sprouted maize, and fermented sap from pulque agaves. Outside of the mescal region he observed widespread consumption in the Yucatan of a wine made from fermented honey and balch bark and lesser known beverages in other regions. He also observed the frequent inclusion in the fermentation process of alkaloid-bearing ingredients such as peyote and tobacco, plants whose roots or bark contain saponins-which act as cardiac poisons-and even poisons from certain toads! Alcohol in Ancient Mexico describes in detail the various plants and processes used to make such beverages, their prevalence, and their significance for local culture. It also considers the relative absence of alcoholic drink in the southwestern United States, the introduction of stills following the Spanish conquest, and possible sources for the introduction of coconut wine. Although this book is based on research conducted in the 1930s, this never-before-published material retains its relevance today. Bruman's photographs offer a fascinating glimpse at a traditional world that was vanishing even then.

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