

The pursuit of intoxication is a universal feature of the human condition—as quintessential as dwelling houses, clothing, or means of exchange. But the connotations, rituals, and sociology of intoxication are always culturally and historically specific—they tell us what societies are like and invite comparative and cultural analysis. These essays are a response to this invitation.

This *Past and Present* Supplement accordingly recovers the configuration of factors—social, political, cultural, material—that have combined to shape and inform intoxication in the past, in the present, and over time. For some contributors this has meant hazarding the feelings and perceptions induced by intoxicants and the circumstances of their consumption: in the symposia of ancient Greece, for example, or the dance floors of contemporary San Francisco and Hong Kong. For others it has involved deconstructing the manner in which ‘experience’ and ‘cognition’ are themselves defined and represented, be it in the ‘countercultural’ theories of the 1960s, the virulent colour schemes of contemporary brain scans, the symbolism of Renaissance painting, or the conduct literature of early modern England. Three articles focus on the materiality and tacit rules of practice, exploring the artefacts of 17th century ‘political drinking’, the physical taste of opium during the Japanese occupation of Taiwan, and conventions of political patronage and sociability in eighteenth century Stockholm. Others narrate the remarkably ambiguous and complicated intersections between drinking, modernity, and power as witnessed in the Islamic Middle East, West and South Africa, and Spanish colonial and post-colonial America.

Moving beyond the tired and problematic paradigm of ‘drugs’, *Cultures of Intoxication* provides a multi-disciplinary and original perspective on a perennial human habit.

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