

The logo for the Anthropology Book Forum, featuring a stylized blue and white circular design on the left side of a dark blue header bar.

Anthropology Book Forum

Open Access Book Reviews

An American Obsession

Review by Brittany Brown

The Archaeology of Smoking and Tobacco

by Georgia L. Fox

University Press of Florida, 2015

For thousands of years, Indigenous peoples across the Americas cultivated and consumed tobacco. In some Indigenous communities, tobacco was ingested by chewing, in others tobacco was consumed by pipe and cigar smoking (p. 19-20). Native communities from the coast of South America to the North American Chesapeake have, for the greater part of their histories, reserved the use of this crop for sacred rituals (p. 19-20). Today, tobacco is one of the most highly sought after and commonly consumed stimulants in the modern world. Within American society, tobacco smoking in particular has come to symbolize power, sexuality, and wealth. These associations have been constantly reiterated by widely celebrated public figures like Audrey Hepburn, Albert Einstein, James Dean, Tyga, and Beyoncé (p. 133). Whether its smoking pipes, Black and Milds, Cuban cigars, cigarettes, or hookah, tobacco smoking transcends American categories of class, gender, ‘race’, and ethnicity while simultaneously connoting gender roles, social standings, and economic success (p. 2). Despite the growing awareness of the health risks involved in consuming tobacco, smoking this “weed” remains one of America’s favorite obsessions. So how exactly did this sacred plant become a commercialized American cash crop? In seven chapters, Georgia Fox’s new book, *The Archaeology of Smoking and Tobacco* (2015), charts the global expansion of tobacco consumption and explores the many roles this Indigenous American crop played in shaping American social life, culture, and economy. The purpose of this book is to demonstrate how essential the field of historical archaeology is to the study of smoking and tobacco. Moreover, the author seeks to demonstrate the ways in which tobacco consumption can be used as a catalyst for culture change and identity formation (p. 23).

Fox begins this book by providing the reader with a unique perspective: the idea that tobacco and pipe smoking has been embedded within the fabric of American social life, culture, and economy since the nation's inception. According to the author, tobacco's commercialization began with the arrival of Europeans in the Americas (p. 19). Following Indigenous American contact with Europeans, samples of tobacco were brought back to Europe and for a short period of time, tobacco was grown in England (p. 20). Tobacco production was later moved to the English colonies in North America and the Caribbean. However, cultivation in both England and the British Caribbean was soon upstaged by tobacco production in the Chesapeake colonies of Maryland and Virginia (p. 133). Here, small scale tobacco production quickly snowballed into a major agricultural operation, turning unimaginable profits for England. In the New World, large scale production of crops like tobacco for export and distribution on a global market required captive African labor. The widespread popularity of tobacco in combination with England's (and later America's) participation in buying and selling captive Africans firmly established tobacco and the Chesapeake region in the pre-industrial global economy. These intersecting economic networks are the crux of Fox's study. Collectively, the interactions between Indigenous, African, and European communities during the colonial period laid the foundation for contemporary American social relations and uses of tobacco. The material culture left behind by these past communities has the power to reveal social and cultural interactions that are often missed in the historical record. As Fox points out, historical archaeology is uniquely equipped with the tools necessary for investigating such material assemblages and capturing these interactions.

Rarely have historical archaeologists taken on the task of exploring the complex social history of tobacco consumption in North America and beyond, despite how frequently practitioners encounter the material remnants of tobacco production, consumption, and distribution in the archaeological record. Colonial period smoking pipes are recovered from historical sites more so than any other materials indicative of tobacco use (p. 6). According to Fox, the frequency with which smoking pipes are recovered from archaeological sites demonstrates the popularity of this particular method of tobacco consumption among Indigenous Americans, early Euro-American settler, immigrant, and captive African communities. Nevertheless, historical archaeologists have primarily used tobacco pipes as diagnostic tools for dating historical sites, burials, and archaeological features (p. 2). Fox's book has innovatively taken pipe studies beyond diagnostics adding to a rather small but growing body of anthropological literature on the cultural and global impact of pre-industrial consumable goods (p. 2). Rather than restricting the contributive possibilities of smoking pipes to the field by using and viewing

smoking pipes merely as dating tools, the author investigates the cross-cultural functionality of these objects.

Fox takes a multidisciplinary approach to examining the ways in which Indigenous, captive African, and settler communities altered and adapted their customs in a post-contact New World environment. Fox's methodology primarily relies on historical archaeology and bioarcheology. The author also draws on art, advertisement, ethnohistory and historical documentation in order to explore identity formation and cultural change within these communities. Fox frames this interdisciplinary approach using a unique theoretical orientation that combines consumer theory and world-system analysis, while viewing the "desire" to consume tobacco as the nexus between these two perspectives (p. 5). Much of the analysis of cultural change and identity formation articulated in Fox's book also points to an additional theoretical influence, although the author does not state this influence explicitly. By employing the concept of transculturation, Fox's framework draws influence from anthropologist Fernando Ortiz's early twentieth century study, *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar* (1947), which both introduces and outlines the concept of transculturation (p. 105).

Transculturation as Ortiz sets forth, describes culture contact and outlines the process of culture change that occurred between various ethnic groups in the New World including Europeans, Natives, and Africans. For Ortiz, this process encompassed cultural appropriation, cultural formation or neoculturation, and to some degree, cultural loss which he refers to as deculturation. Furthermore, Ortiz viewed these cultural exchanges as mutual transactions. The influence of this concept is illustrated throughout the text, but is most apparent in Fox's discussion of Native and European interactions, specifically in chapters three and five. In chapter three, Fox outlines the introduction of tobacco to European settlers by Indigenous American communities as a result of culture contact between these groups in the fifteenth century. Additionally, the author interrogates the appropriation of tobacco consumption by Europeans for recreational use both in the colonies and Europe. Lastly, in chapter five, Fox discusses tobacco's commodification and "reintroduction" into Indigenous communities "through trade and gift exchange" with European settlers, effectively outlining tobacco smoking's transition from ritual to secular within Native communities (p. 105).

While Native and European interactions are a central part of Fox's narrative, the author explores pipe smoking within a much wider range of social, cultural, and temporal contexts. Some of these include seventeenth century Swiss, Dutch, and New England women, Victorian women, American frontier

soldiers, nineteenth century Prostitutes, nineteenth century Irish and German immigrants, Captive Africans, and Chinese businessmen. Within these brief case studies, Fox explores a wide variety of topics including burial practices, consumerism, gender, gardening, class, and escapism (p. 27, 83, 69). The inclusion of such a vast breadth of literature helps to place the author's own case study of seventeenth century Port Royal, Jamaica, in conversation with a plethora of anthropological studies. This includes but is not limited to studies that center on tobacco, pipes, private and public space, culture contact, gardening, African Diasporic burial practices, Native burial practices, women's studies, and economic studies. Through these case studies, Fox's work demonstrates that tobacco consumption assumed many roles simultaneously that varied according to temporal, social, and cultural contexts. Additionally, the author brings to the forefront the ways in which marginalized groups throughout history have actively participated in shaping their cultural landscapes. In essence, tobacco is a transformative substance that speaks to the varying degrees to which socially constructed categories are enforced, participated in, negotiated, and negated within American communities both past and present.

By expanding the academic discourse on pipes beyond diagnostics and dating methods, Fox's book enhances anthropological understandings of the impact of tobacco on American social life and culture. The author contextualizes this study of tobacco consumption within the context of broader economic networks like Indigenous trade networks, the Transatlantic 'slave' trade, and the English economy. Consequently, Fox has couched the American evolution of tobacco consumption within a global narrative. Moreover, by employing historical archaeology as her primary tool of investigation, Fox makes clear that historical archaeology is particularly useful for examining the cross-cultural functionality of tobacco consumption in North America and the Caribbean. Fox's work is in tandem with some recently produced studies that have focused on similar substances like sugar, coffee, and alcohol. Her nuanced approach to the multifaceted history of smoking pipes and tobacco consumption successfully demonstrates that smoking pipes have far more to contribute to archaeological understandings of the American experience than previously assumed. Fox's study of tobacco and smoking is perhaps the most comprehensive study of its kind and would make a great addition to any syllabus. The variety of case studies that Fox has included are both informative and entertaining which makes this book well suited for scholars and the general public alike. Furthermore, Fox's expansive knowledge of tobacco and smoking pipes makes this a must read for anyone interested in tobacco consumption or smoking pipes.

Brittany Brown is a doctoral candidate in the anthropology department at The College of William and

Mary. Her areas of specialization include the British Caribbean and the African American Southeast.



© 2016 Brittany Brown