



THE NEW YORK BOTANICAL GARDEN



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Review

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photographs from the 1930s detailing indigenous beverage production. Bruman explores the etymology of beverage names to discuss the antiquity of these preparations and to link the use of plants between regions. Attention is also given to chemical properties of many of the plants used in the preparation of beverages. The endnotes add considerable detail to the text, and the bibliography contains a wealth of original sources, including many obscure and rarely cited Spanish and German references.

Absent from this book is a detailed discussion of the ritual use of these beverages. It has been long known that intoxicants were, and are today, an important part of indigenous ceremonial life. Bruman's accounts of preparation and consumption of alcoholic beverages would have been much more enlightening if they had been framed in the context of how and why they were an important part of indigenous social life. Bruman does mention that peyote and tobacco were occasionally mixed with alcoholic beverages, but does not delve into the reasons for the preparation of these libations.

Overall, this book is a fascinating glimpse into a very important aspect of pre-Columbian and historical indigenous life. Much of the data Bruman collected could not be obtained today, with almost 70 years of modernization having passed since he conducted his fieldwork. This book should have a place on the shelves of scholars of ancient Mexico.

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**Arboles Tropicales Comunes del Area Maya. Sistema de Identificación Taxonómica.** Ogata, N., Gómez-Pompa, Arturo, Aguilar-Meléndez, A., Castro-Cortés, R., Plummer, O. E. 2000. CONABIO, con Consejo Nacional para la Enseñanza de la Biología, A.C., Gestión de Ecosistemas, A.C., Instituto de Ecología, A.C., Smithsonian Institution, University of California, Riverside, World Wildlife Fund. CD-ROM, PC with Windows 95, 98. U.S. \$24.00 (plus shipment costs). ISBN: 970-92916-1-0.

This CD-rom is an excellent "manual" for neotropical trees. Although it is focused on Central America

and Mexico, it gives one an impression of most of the trees in the neotropics. Some 26 000 plants are known in Mexico, and 52% are considered endemic. Although this is only about half of what is known in Brazil (50 000 plant species), the richness in Mexico is still impressive. This CD-ROM covers 248 genera and 59 families. That is a considerable amount of information for the Neotropics, especially because the distribution of each plant is given. Plants are ordered by genera and species and many types of data are given, such as: distribution, synonymy, uses, vegetation types, common names, and a bibliography.

The system is easily installed and easy to use so long as one stays on the same genus. To examine the different species alternatively, one is forced to go back to the general menu. This makes the operation a little troublesome.

Distribution of species is well organized, and for any area or region mentioned, there is a list of the assemblage of trees living there. No detailed description of the methodology adopted for primary or secondary distributions of plant, or for vegetational assemblages is given. Perhaps its absence was an attempt to provide a simple empirical tool.

Uses are sometimes very simplistic, and few in-depth analyses are made to allow users to learn about medicinal, magical, or uses as food in different areas. The illustrations are derived, for most plants, from dried herbarium specimens. As such they are not attractive for beginners or field workers, but good enough for senior botanists or educated researchers and technicians that frequent herbaria.

There are several problems that need to be improved in a new upgraded edition. The identification part is far from being user friendly. It needs a complete reorganization to be more easily consulted. The "Uses" segment also has to be improved. For instance, *Euterpe precatoria* (the only *Euterpe* mentioned) has no use mentioned. When uses are given, in most cases they are simplistic, generic assumptions. This part needs more work and should be revised and expanded.

The CD-ROM, in spite of some limitations, is a very useful tool that can help people, including students and scientists, to deal with a reliable and authoritative database.

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