

PRESENTS

Decided over a Glass: Drinking Spaces, Commensal Politics, and Social Negotiation

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Many of our everyday interactions with others involve food and drink. Over a cup of coffee or a glass of wine, we learn what old acquaintances have done recently, meet new colleagues, or try to secure a second date. Business negotiations often happen over lunch and marriage proposals often take place in fine restaurants. All of these familiar activities fall under the larger auspices of "commensal politics," defined as the structured sharing of food and drink with the goal of social negotiation. As long as there have been people with food and drink, there have been commensal politics. However, while current cultural anthropological work has examined contemporary feasting and commensality, much of the archaeological research into this topic has focused on periods in the deep human past and neglected the fact that feasting has continued through the Early Modern and Modern Periods – just as it persists today. The commensal politics of the early modern and modern periods in Western Europe and colonial North America took place within what I term the "alcosocial" environment of drinking spaces: taverns and saloons. Using data from two separate historical archaeological case studies, Smuttynose Islands, in the Isles of Shoals, Maine and Highland City, Montana, this talk invites you to peer through the bar window to find the further details within and to suggest that, whether landlocked or at sea, much of history has been decided over a pint.



Dr. Megan Rhodes Victor is an Anthropological Archaeologist with a specialization in Historical Archaeology. Their research focuses on historical archaeological examinations of North America, particularly the Atlantic and Gulf Coasts of the United States and in the Rocky Mountains, including Maine, Virginia, Montana, and Louisiana; they have excavated in northern California, the Midwest, and Alabama as well. While their work primarily examines the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries, they have excavated at sites dating from the Archaic period to the first half of the 20th century. Dr. Victor's archaeological research falls into several main categories: a.) the archaeology of alcohol, drinking spaces, and commensality; b.) the archaeology of the LGBTQ+ community in the English Colonial World; c.) the archaeology of frontier spaces; d.) digital archaeology; e.) archaeogaming; and f.) community-driven projects. They received their BA from University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, Michigan in 2010. They earned their MA (in 2012) and their PhD (in 2018), both from the College of William & Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia. They then had a postdoctoral scholarship at the Stanford Archaeology Center at Stanford University, in Stanford, California (2018-2020), where they directed the archaeological excavations of the Arboretum Chinese Labor Quarters (ACLQ). They are now an assistant professor here at Queens College in the Department of Anthropology, where they teach courses on Archaeology. Their current research project traces the nineteenth-century connection between New Orleans and the gold mining town of Highland City.