

“Tavern” by the Saltpan: New England Seafarers and the Politics of Punch on La Tortuga Island, Venezuela, 1682–1781

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Abstract New England seafarers from small merchant ships visited the natural salt pans of the Venezuelan island of La Tortuga from the late seventeenth century up until 1781. The liminal space of the island set the stage for the creation of an improvised “tavern” where the communalism of shipboard life was suddenly changed to more markedly vertical relations. Drawing from archaeological excavations and original documentary sources it is argued that, while on land, captains no longer worked alongside their crews who now labored extracting salt. With leisure time available to them, punch drinking offered captains a means of discursive practice through the manipulation of fashionable material culture and an opportunity to negotiate their social position among peers. When given to the crew, punch served as a labor incentive and a way of obfuscating the sudden change in customary captain-crew relations while on the island.

Keywords Punch bowls • Drinking • Seafarers • Caribbean salt exploitation

Introduction

La Tortuga, an unassuming Venezuelan island, became the scenario for intensive salt exploitation during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This uninhabited and peripheral Spanish island was a one-of-a-kind space within the Anglo-American sphere of commerce in the Caribbean. Its unique characteristics set the stage for the creation of the ephemeral equivalent of the taverns that were the most common meeting places for sailors in the main Caribbean ports. The La Tortuga “tavern” was a specific place where the captains of small New England ships would gather annually while their crews were collecting salt on the adjacent salt pans. This paper proposes that in this “tavern” by the saltpan, 142 archaeologically recovered punch bowls—the receptacles of

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punch—became key players in the social politics and material discourses of the New England captains.

The methods used here include the formal analysis of the bowls, the analysis of their archaeological contexts and the reconstruction of the social context of their use, all juxtaposed with comprehensive research in primary documentary sources. It will be argued that for the captains, punch bowls and punch were a means of displaying fashionable tastes, negotiating social status and creating strategic social alliances. Captains employed punch as an incentive for their crews laboring on the saltpans and as a safety valve to assure productive and efficient salt exploitation. Moreover, the material entanglements of the exotic punch and the fashionable punch bowls—brought from the far reaches of the Anglo-American sphere of commerce—reflected the cosmopolitan sensibility of captains and seamen in the burgeoning Atlantic world economy. The historical archaeology research on La Tortuga opens a new window onto the often elusive social and material lives of eighteenth-century New England seafarers.

Geographical Setting and Historical Background

The Venezuelan island of La Tortuga, 100 km northwest from the modern-day port of Puerto la Cruz (Fig. 1), is approximately 24 km long and 10 km wide (Fig. 2). It is predominantly flat, with the exception of a calcareous terrace running along the southern coast rising to nearly 45m above sea level (Maloney and Macsotay 1967, p. 267). This semi-arid island largely supports xeric



Fig. 1 Map of the Caribbean



Fig. 2 La Tortuga Island and the site of Punta Salinas in the southeastern corner

scrubs, bushes and cacti that sparsely dot its hostile landscape. Feral rabbits and wild goats (now rarely seen) are the only mammals on the island, most probably introduced in the early years of Spanish colonization of South America (Pimentel 1578 in María 1979, pp. 331–351; Wright and Van Dam 1934, p. 121). Only a few coastal areas have mangrove communities, one of them being the Los Mogotes Lagoon on the island's southeastern corner. There, the mangroves border the salt pans and the adjacent Punta Salinas archaeological site (Fig. 3). The island has no permanent sources of fresh water, and there are only a few seasonal pools of rainwater. These conditions, uninviting to seventeenth- and eighteenth-century seafarers, were dwarfed in significance by La Tortuga's salty riches. Between 1624 and 1638 the Dutch, having been denied access to the salt from the Araya Peninsula on the mainland of the Province of Venezuela, set up a short-lived salt enterprise on La Tortuga. They were definitively ousted from the island following a brisk battle with the Spaniards in 1638. The salt pans of this Spanish island increasingly drew enterprising New England merchants during the second half of the seventeenth century. By 1682, when the English naturalist, explorer and privateer William Dampier paid a visit to the salt pans, they were already "much frequented [...] by Merchant Ships, that come thither to lade Salt" (Dampier 1699, p. 56). Although larger salt pans existed on the Caribbean islands (e.g., St. Martin, Anguilla, Curaçao, and Grand Turk and Salt Cay in the Turks Islands), one aspect set La Tortuga apart (Huntley 1948) (see Fig. 1). La Tortuga was uninhabited and thus unique among salt-producing islands of the Caribbean in its complete lack of tenure rights, taxes and a local labor source (Gregory 1978, pp. 58–64; Jarvis 2010a, pp. 196–199). According to documentary sources, annually and for more than a hundred years, only the crews of New England merchant ships raked and bagged the salt on the island, resulting in higher profit margins than a salt-run to other Caribbean islands could yield (Antczak et al. 2011; Council of Trade and Plantations to Lord Bolingbroke, 1714).

The treaties of 1667, 1670, 1715, and 1750 between Spain and Great Britain allowed and ratified Anglo-American salt exploitation on La Tortuga (Headlam 1926, p. 244; Hertslet 1878, pp. 82, 87). La Tortuga salt was not indispensable to the economy of the Province of Venezuela (after 1777 the Captaincy General of Venezuela) as abundant salt-producing areas were available



Fig. 3 Punta Salinas with the salt pans at the *top* and Los Mogotes Lagoon to the *right* (photo: José Miguel Pérez Gómez)

on the adjacent mainland, especially on the Araya Peninsula. No treaty could, however, impede Spanish corsair ships—*guarda costas* hailing from Venezuela—from intercepting English vessels at La Tortuga, under the pretense that these were engaging in illicit trade and contraband. In response to this threat, the earliest known La Tortuga Fleet—or Saltertuda Fleet as it was called in documentary sources—was arranged under the governorship of Sir Edmund Andros (1687) during his short tenure as Governor of the Dominion of New England in 1687. The merchant population of New England also petitioned the British Crown for an armed escort of at least one British Navy ship to convoy their ships to and from La Tortuga (Governor, Council and Assembly of the Massachusetts Bay to the Queen, 1713). From 1687 to 1768, there is documentary evidence that the fleet, escorted by a Navy vessel, sailed at least 30 times. In 1781, Spanish corsair Vicente Antonio de Icuza appeared on the island and confiscated the salt from an American salt fleet (Amezaga Aresti 1966, p. 94). The salt pans of Punta Salinas were not exploited by foreigners again after this incident, producing a reliable *terminus ante quem* of 1781 for the archaeological deposits there.

According to documentary sources, the fishing port of Salem, Massachusetts, dominated the late seventeenth-century salt fleets to La Tortuga. Boston became the main center of salt exploitation on the island at the turn of the eighteenth century, resulting in more than double the number of ships coming to Boston from La Tortuga than from Salem. Soon many other ports of the Anglo-American Atlantic world, such as New York, Philadelphia, Newport, Piscataqua (now Portsmouth, New Hampshire), New London, Connecticut, and Bermuda were involved in the La Tortuga salt exploitation and trade. Analysis of the eighteenth-century Naval Officers' Lists of Shipping for Boston, Salem, Piscataqua, and New York as well as Anglo-American newspapers

from the same period shows that between 1700 and 1775 at least 918 ships came to the aforementioned ports of the Eastern Seaboard, loaded with salt from La Tortuga (Antczak et al. 2011).

Merchant ships headed to La Tortuga usually left the New England coast in early December and would congregate on Barbados between December and January. Once the Saltertuda Fleet had gathered, and a British Navy ship was ready for escort, they set sail for La Tortuga in mid-January. Upon arrival at the island, the salt pans were divided up according to ship tonnage and, depending on the weather, the crews could rake salt for more than a month, often waiting for it to crystallize on the pans multiple times (Brownrigg 1748, pp. 24–28). Once the holds of the ships were filled up with salt, the fleet would sail up through the Windward Passage and north of Bermuda disperse, each ship to its home port (see Fig. 1). In late April and early May of nearly every year, these ships arrived from La Tortuga with the salt necessary for the New England spring fisheries (Pares 1963, p. 631). This salt was used to cure refuse cod which was shipped back to the Lesser Antilles to feed the enslaved Africans on sugar plantations, primarily on Barbados, providing them with a staple source of protein (Innis 1940, pp. 76–78; Publications of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts 1927, p. 241).

Power Relations Onboard Small Eighteenth-Century New England Merchant Ships

The merchant ships that came to La Tortuga to load salt were relatively small vessels. Tonnage figures derived from analysis of the abovementioned Naval Officers' Lists of Shipping indicate that the average burden of the ships that are recorded to have arrived to New England from La Tortuga between 1700 and 1775 was 55 tons. In comparison to the much larger three-masted ocean-going vessels—upwards of 150 tons—crossing the Atlantic frequently, the majority of ships arriving at La Tortuga were small schooners, sloops, and brigantines. The Naval Officers' Lists of Shipping indicate that most had seven seafarers onboard, including the captain and mate. These small crew sizes played a significant role in creating a division of labor that was not as clear-cut as on larger ships of the English merchant marine and the British Navy, which sailed with hundreds of men arrayed in a taut hierarchy (Rodger 1986).

On small ships, the captain was the sole commander. Captains were responsible directly to the merchant(s) who had hired them to manage the navigation, voyage, cargo, and seamen (Rediker 1987, p. 84). They assigned labor and imposed discipline, but also had the obligation of provisioning the crew with food and drink and exercising due care for their welfare (Jarvis 2010b, p. 90; Vickers 2007, p. 222). The mate was an officer who marshaled significantly less power onboard than the captain and occupied the position of second in command. His duty was to set the men to work, keep them in good order, keep the ship functioning properly, and oversee the second of the two watches (Rediker 1987, p. 84). The common seaman was at the bottom rung of labor division of the ship. Seamen were divided into the two shifts and carried out physical labor at sea as well as in ports during the loading and unloading of cargoes. When off duty, the seaman had free time he could dedicate to recreational activities such as drinking, eating, and storytelling as well as to mending clothes, and sleeping (Vickers 2007, p. 91).

In order to understand the power relations between ship captains and their crews once they disembarked at the Punta Salinas site, it is important to further discuss the ship hierarchy and

captain/crew relations on the small ships that brought these seafarers to the island. Considerable debate among maritime scholars centers on the figure of the captain, his power and authority and his social and economic distancing from the crew. Marcus Rediker (1987, pp. 84, 241) insists that the system of maritime authority was largely based on coercion and violence. Rediker (1987, p. 209) does, however, concede that crew size affected relations of authority and small American ships had less necessity for physical discipline. Other maritime scholars such as Peter Earle (1998), Michael Jarvis (2010b), and Daniel Vickers (2007) place less emphasis on violence and conflict, although they recognize that chastisement and corporal punishment were legal and part of life and work on the deep, as long as these were communally accepted. They suggest that tyranny onboard was not universal and the powers of a captain over his crew were primarily circumscribed by scale—the lesser the size of the ship and the smaller the number of seamen, the stronger the communal and familial affiliations amongst the crew and the less physical violence a captain could apply (Earle 1998, p. 163; Jarvis 2010b, p. 81; Vickers 2007, p. 225). Captains on these small ships would indeed have exercised their authority in alternative ways that were not necessarily violent. One of these ways might have been the paternalistic distribution of alcohol, especially to their crews laboring on the saltpans of La Tortuga.

Living in close quarters, a small crew and shared common tasks, activities and dangers all contributed to the general collectivism onboard most ships sailing to La Tortuga. Outside of the menial seaman's tasks such as pumping the bilge, knotting yarns for rope or scrubbing the deck, captains often worked together with the crew in tasks that accompanied regular shiphandling such as "setting, reefing, trimming and taking in sails, steering the vessel, as well as repairing rigging and canvas" (Vickers 2007, p. 90). Moreover, captains not only shared many of the manual tasks with their crews, but also the same or similar leisure activities, rations and general living space (Jarvis 2010b, p. 86). The captain and mate probably had their own cabins on the ships visiting La Tortuga, but these were cramped and offered limited privacy. It is probable that at times captains and mates did not partake in regular manual tasks, yet it would be a stretch of the imagination to posit that a rigid hierarchy developed on board these small ships, where captains became exclusively commanders and managers, aloof from any physical work (Jarvis 2010b, p. 86; Vickers 2007, pp. 90–91).

According to Rediker (1987, p. 243), collectivism on board merchant ships in the eighteenth century was separated into two broad categories. The first was a vertical collectivism of the entire ship, created by a shared confrontation with nature and the need for survival. The second was a horizontal collectivism amongst the crew arising from the conflict caused by the social relations of wage labor. This class conflict, however, is fully applicable to much larger ships, where social distinction, rank and hierarchy could be understood through considerable spatial distinctions on ship (the quarterdeck and the forecastle) and a greater division of labor and thus a greater separation of the captain and seamen (Vickers 2007, p. 225). As Jarvis (2002, p. 605) argues, Rediker dwells on the tension and sharp social distinctions between officers and seamen that existed on large merchant and navy ships, unlike the small merchant ships "where the highly personal level of constant interaction and considerable potential for advancement worked against such differentiation."

On board small ships, vertical collectivism in many ways merged with the horizontal. Once the captains anchored in the bay of Punta Salinas and disembarked for their multiple-week-long

stay, this spatially enforced integration and collectivism onboard would be translated into more distanced spatial segregation of the working seamen and the captains managing their labor. Captains would probably no longer partake in manual labor but primarily manage the labor of their crews; they now had sufficient time on their hands for a certain degree of leisure. It is uncertain what role the mate played in this new scenario. Nevertheless, perhaps as the trusted subordinate to whom the captain delegated much of the responsibility for the crew's work and organization, he was the person more directly involved in overseeing the labor on the salt pans and thus did not partake in all of the leisure activities of captains (Jarvis 2010b, p. 82). I argue that it was in the liminal space of Punta Salinas that the captains of these small vessels, accustomed to collectivism onboard, consciously changed the customary social relations of shipboard work and became exclusively commanders and managers, distancing themselves from the arduous and backbreaking manual labor of salt exploitation.

La Tortuga as a Liminal Space

The anthropological concept of liminality was defined by Arnold Van Gennep (1960) and further developed by Victor Turner (1967, 1969, 1974) as a transitional period—a moment in limbo where in rites of passage an individual or group passes from one established social position to another. In recent years the concept of liminality has been re-evaluated and applied more broadly to landscapes, seeking to expand its application beyond ritual practices and psychosocial processes (Andrews and Roberts 2012, p. 6). In 2012 a session at the Society for Historical Archaeology meeting in Baltimore was dedicated to the historical archaeology of liminal spaces (Gary 2012), places (Deetz et al. 2012), and statuses (Lee 2012). Drawing from these more recent conceptualizations of liminality as it relates to space, I consider that La Tortuga was a liminal and transformative space in the Atlantic world and furthermore that its liminal character structured the activities that the New England seafarers developed there.

La Tortuga, then, was a liminal space situated on the borderland of the Anglo-American sphere of commerce in the Caribbean. As literary scholars Hein Viljoen, et al. (2004, p. 18) explain, “the liminal space ties in strongly with the concept of boundaries, because the liminal space comes into existence at the border of that which is found at the center and that which belongs to the periphery.” Peripheral La Tortuga, which was a Spanish possession, was also the southernmost Caribbean island to which Anglo-Americans sailed for the purposes of salt exploitation. The Anglo-American seafarers arrived at La Tortuga, after a stopover on English Barbados, to find a vast but uninhabited island. The 400mi (644km) passage westward from Barbados to La Tortuga brought the seamen into waters patrolled by Spanish corsairs and, even though they might have been escorted by a British Navy ship, when the seafarers disembarked on La Tortuga they entered a dangerous space. Here, threat constantly loomed in the air as the physically absent Spanish could arrive on ships at any moment of the day or night. Indeed, the *guarda costas* continued to attack the salt fleets—even if they had an escorting warship—under the pretension that the Anglo-Americans were engaging in contraband with the Spanish (Vivas Pineda 2006).

The geopolitical particularities of this liminal island were combined with the phenomenologically traceable hostile environmental factors of the sojourn and work. During the dry season months when the seafarers arrived at La Tortuga, the strong sun reflecting off of the

white sands, the sweltering heat and the constant torment of mosquitoes and sand flies affected both the captains and crews (for contemporaneous accounts of seafarers suffering from insect bites see Atkins 1735, p. 227 and Dow and Edmonds 1923, p. 248). Seamen raked the saltpans, bagged the salt and loaded it onto the ships in the bay, toiling and laboring under aggressive environmental conditions that were exacerbated by the burning effects of exposure to salt. This experience was shared by salt rakers in other parts of the Caribbean (Jarvis 2010a, p. 198; Kennedy 2007, p. 215) as well as logwood and mahogany cutters in the British Bay Settlement (present-day Belize) (Finamore 1994). Combined, these factors would have furthered the shared notion that La Tortuga was indeed a no-man's-land—the final frontier of Anglo-American maritime incursion in the Caribbean.

La Tortuga was not only a peripheral space on the frontier of the Anglo-American sphere of commerce, it was also a borderland of the Spanish Province of Venezuela. Being liminal in spatial, political, and economic terms, La Tortuga also figured as an ambiguous space in social and ideological terms—one that had to be reconstituted by the captains and crews of New England vessels. The ambiguity of Spanish La Tortuga to them is perhaps best reflected by its more than 132 English exonyms in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Anglo-American documentary sources (e.g., *Saltertuda*, *Salt Tatuga*, and *Saltatoodos*) most of which derive from “Salt Tortuga”—the combined English and Spanish toponym for the island. Philip Sheldrake (2001, p. 91) argues that, “living on some kind of physical boundary symbolizes a state of liminality—of living between two worlds.” Although in this case Sheldrake uses liminality to describe the boundaries between the two worlds of the material and the spiritual, when this conception of a binary opposition is transposed to the liminal space of La Tortuga, a series of site-specific oppositions arises. The Punta Salinas site occupied the ambivalent border between land and sea, and the island was a borderland, betwixt and between the Spanish and English spheres of influence—politically belonging to the former, but economically being exploited by the latter.

The seafarers, caught in between these oppositions on the liminal space of Punta Salinas, had to improvise, innovate and create their own temporary world. The lack of a built environment, one tamed and constructed by humans, amplified La Tortuga's liminal character. According to human geographer Yi-Fu Tuan (1977, p. 102) the built environment—as opposed to nature's raw stage—clarifies social roles and relations. The social roles of the constrained wooden environment of the ship were suddenly exposed on the naked and raw stage of Punta Salinas, where there was no built environment, and more pressingly for the seafarer—there was no tavern.

Social anthropologist John Mack (2011, p. 165) elaborates on the behavior-changing potential of liminal spaces and considers ports as the scene of behaviors that are distinctively different from those practiced on board ships or further inland. La Tortuga was, however, no ordinary port of call. The Anglo-American social actors that disembarked onto the liminal and ambiguous space of Punta Salinas were placed in a liminal state and engaged in this setting in social relations that were distinctively different from those practiced aboard ship and in any typical Atlantic world tavern. Unlike onboard their small ships, the captains did not work here for weeks, but rather leisurely oversaw and managed the labor of their crews on the saltpans. In this setting



Fig. 4. Map of the Punta Salinas site (TR/S)

the many captains who yearly visited the island sought to set up a temporary “tavern” on Punta Salinas, where on one hand the social relations and the politics of material discourse—specifically punch bowls—were used for their purposes of sociability and, on the other hand, alcohol was used to attenuate the now apparent rift in what had only recently been a collectivism of captain and crew.

The Punch Bowls and Their Archaeological Context

The Punta Salinas archaeological site (TR/S) is approximately 5.6ha in area (ca. 200x280m). The saltpans extend to the site’s north and run more than 1km eastward towards the coast (see Fig. 3). The site comprises an area of sandy plain with the maximum elevation in low sand dunes rising to

some 1.4m above sea level on the north (Fig. 4). A survey was conducted in 1992, extensive shovel and test pit excavation was carried out in 1993 and systematic trench excavations in 2009 and twice in 2010. During the five field seasons at Punta Salinas 41 (1x1m) test pits were non-arbitrarily selected and then excavated, primarily where surface scatters of artifacts and ecofacts were identified. These pits helped delimit the boundaries of three activity areas: the Dunes (TR/S/D), Fringe (TR/S/F) and Barracks (TR/S/B) (see Fig. 4). Trenches excavated in these activity areas contained a high density and wide array of eighteenth-century ceramics, glass, metal artifacts, and zooarchaeological remains suggesting that throughout the eighteenth-century, seafarers concentrated their leisurely activities here. Outside of these activity areas, the Punta Salinas site exhibits a remarkable horizontal dispersion and very low density of objects per square meter, making it unrewarding to conducting extensive open-area excavations.

The excavations at Punta Salinas revealed a minimum number of 142 punch bowls. These were defined according to the Potomac Typological System, where the definition of a punch bowl as a “hemispherical vessel with a plain rim” extends beyond the seventeenth-century scope of the typology (Beaudry et al. 1988, p. 63). Some of the smaller bowls from Punta Salinas (primarily in delft and Chinese porcelain) may have been tea bowls (tea cups), since six teapots in various wares were recovered (Table 1). Delft bowls from archaeological assemblages identified as tea bowls have diameters that range 6–8cm (Austin 1994, pp. 122–125; Brown et al. 1990, p. 185; Leskovec 2007, p. 191; A. Noël Hume 1969; John Austin pers. comm.). An analysis of delft tea bowls from published collections suggests their diameters range 6–8cm. One delft tea bowl in the Bristol Collection has a diameter of 6.8cm (Britton 1982, p. 252, fig. 15.58). Three delft tea bowls with matching saucers illustrated by Michael Archer (1997, p. 351, figs. H.7, H.8; Archer and Poole 2013, p. 284, fig. H.2) have diameters ranging from 7.4 to 7.8cm. Nonetheless, one has a diameter of 12.1cm (Archer and Poole 2013, p. 284, fig. H.1), and is the largest such delft tea bowl in published sources. A fine delft “duck-egg-blue” tea bowl with matching saucer from Punta Salinas has a diameter of 11.5cm. As regards other English ceramic wares, two scratch blue tea bowls from collections have similar dimensions of 7.6cm (Noël I. Hume 1969, p. 117, fig. 36; Mountford 1971, fig. 159) and two English white salt-glazed tea bowls fall within the same range of diameters (Mountford 1971, fig. 109; Skerry and Hood 2009, p. 123). Taking into account the abovementioned largest published delft tea bowl (12.1cm in diameter), an arbitrary cut-off diameter of 12.5cm was set, above which, for purposes of categorization, bowls from Punta Salinas were categorized as punch bowls.

Fifty-four of the punch bowls from Punta Salinas are creamware. Of these, two are peculiar examples dating to the 1760s (David Barker, pers. comm.) with rouletted cable bands on the rim and on the foot ring and vertical fluting on the body, possibly skeuomorphs of similarly decorated fine silver punchbowls (Fig. 5) (Connell 1957, p. 10). One creamware punch bowl is a polychrome hand-painted example. There are a minimum number of 43 English delft (delftware) punch bowls. Many of these punch bowls originated in London, several in Bristol and at least two in Liverpool,

Table 1 Ceramic tablewares recovered from Punta Salinas

Ceramic Origin and Type	Form	Number of Sherds	Minimum Number of Vessels
English creamware	Punch bowl	206	53
	Plate	184	34
	Mug, cup	83	13
	Soup-dish	13	2
	Tea bowl	2	2
	Saucer	5	1
	Teapot	3	1
	Platter	3	1
	TOTAL	499	107
English delft	Punch bowl	336	43
	Plate	217	36
	Wide-rimmed dashed bowl	156	16
	Tea bowl	19	8
	Saucer	7	1
	Jug	1	1
	TOTAL	736	105
English white salt-glazed stoneware	Plate	164	17
	Punch bowl	94	23
	Mug	29	6
	Jug	11	2
	Teapot	10	2
	Platter	2	1
	Porringer	10	1
	Unidentified	51	0
	TOTAL	371	52
Chinese Porcelain	Tea bowl/punch bowl*	71	17
	Punch bowl	6	6
	Tea bowl	5	2
	Dish	11	2
	TOTAL	93	27
New Hampshire black lead-glazed red earthenware	Punch bowl	48	7
	Jar, jug, and/or pitcher	30	4
	Mug	31	2
	TOTAL	109	13
Scratch blue white salt-glazed stoneware	Punch bowl	21	4
	Tea bowl	8	1
	TOTAL	29	5
English slipware	Cup	15	3
	Jug	34	1
	TOTAL	34	4
Whieldon-type clouded /tortoiseshell-ware	Coffee pot/chocolate pot	8	1
	Plate	5	1
	TOTAL	13	2
English brown stoneware, Derbyshire or Nottingham	Punch bowl	69	5
	Mug	1	1
	TOTAL	70	6
Debased "scratch blue" white salt-glazed stoneware	Mug	37	7

English sgraffito slipware	Cup	5	2
English agate-like ware	Dish	3	1
English hand-painted creamware	Punch bowl	2	1
English pearlware	Cup	2	1
English black salt-glazed stoneware	Teapot	10	1
Whieldon-type Melon ware	Teapot	30	1
Whieldon-type Cauliflower ware	Teapot	1	1
Poss. New Hampshire lead-glazed red earthenware	Pitcher/coffee/chocolate pot	12	1
Albisola-type black trailed red earthenware	Plate	15	3
French Faience Blanche, Provence blue on white	Plate	7	1
French Faience Blanche, Provence yellow on white	Plate	1	1
French Faience brune, Rouen blue on white	Dish, platter	17	2
French Faience brune, Rouen plain	Jug	4	1
French Faience Blanche, Brittany blue on white (poss. delft)	Plate	27	4
Rheinish stoneware, Westerwald	Tankard	4	1

*The diameters of these rim fragments could not be determined.

and most of them date to between 1720 or 1730 and 1750 (Fig. 6) (Archer 1997; Austin 1994; Britton 1982; John Austin, pers. comm.; Lipski and Archer 1984). The forms of the bowls are characteristic of this period of greatest delft production in the English

factories. They are deeper and less broad at the rim, with shorter foot rings than examples from the later 1760s and 1770s (Archer 1997, p. 9; I. Noël Hume 1969, pp. 107, 125; Shlasko 1989, p. 84). Only one bowl is datable to the later production phase (post-1760) and is probably from Liverpool.

Further punch bowls are represented by English white salt-glazed stoneware (23 minimum vessels), Chinese porcelain (6 minimum vessels), New Hampshire black lead-glazed red earthenware (7 minimum vessels), Derbyshire /Nottingham brown stoneware (5 minimum vessels), and “scratch blue” (4 minimum vessels) (see Fig. 5). Punch bowls represent 40.5 percent of the ceramic tableware assemblage of a minimum 350 vessels recovered at Punta Salinas. This percentage from La Tortuga stands out as unusually high when compared to Eleanor Breen’s (2012, p. 86–87) analysis of 38 archaeological sites from the east coast of the United States and the Caribbean where punch bowls were recovered. Of these, the highest percentage figure comes from the late phase of Shields Tavern in Williamsburg, Virginia (1738–51), where 54 punch bowls, represented 29.8% of the ceramic tableware assemblage (181 minimum vessels) (Brown et al. 1990, p. 99). Punta Salinas falls amply within Kathleen Bragdon’s (1988) characterization of a tavern by having a high percentage of drinking vessels (punch bowls, mugs, tea bowls, drinking glasses, glass tumblers and glass mugs)—with a minimum number of 273—comprising 67.1% of the minimum total 407 ceramic and glass tablewares.

The punch bowls from the Punta Salinas site are relatively small and portable, perfectly suited for stowing in a sea chest—a characteristic indispensable to a seafarer’s mobile lifestyle. They fall within Anne Yentsch’s (1991, p. 65) category of small bowls used for consumption (as opposed to larger bowls used for serving). Such small handheld punch bowls were commonly termed “sneakers” in the eighteenth century, and could be found in various taverns around the



Fig. 5 Punch bowls from Punta Salinas (from *left to right, top to bottom*): English white salt-glazed (diam. 20.5 cm), creamware (diam. 14.7 cm), scratch blue (diam. 17 cm), New Hampshire black lead-glazed red earthenware (diam. 15.5 cm) and two Derbyshire/ Nottingham brown stoneware (diam. 15.4 cm and 18 cm)

Atlantic among those drinkers who did not have the money or company to share a larger bowl with (Harvey 2008, pp. 207, 219). The total average diameter of the punch bowl fragments from Punta Salinas that could be measured is 15.5cm, compared to the average diameter of more standard delft punch bowls studied by Michael Archer (1997, p. 283) which is 30.5cm. The smallest punch bowl was 12.6cm in diameter and the largest 24cm. (Ten delft punch bowls found at the Rumney West



Fig. 6 English delft punch bowls from the Dunes activity area, Punta Salinas (from *top*): probably London (diam. 13 cm), London or Bristol (diam. 19.6 cm), probably Liverpool (diam. 24 cm)

Tavern in London Town, Maryland, fall within a similar range of diameters; Luckenbach 2002, p. 146.)

The volumes of punch bowls at Punta Salinas also reflects their use not as communal bowls, but as individual drinking vessels, from which punch was probably directly consumed; and this evokes the growing individualism with the advent of the Georgian worldview in the mid-

eighteenth century (Deetz 1996; Leone and Potter 1999; Leone 1988; Rice 1983, p. 98). The largest punch bowl has an approximate volume of 420ml and the smallest 221ml, with an average of the measurable bowls being a volume of 273ml. Four quarts of punch (almost four l) was required to fill a large communal punch bowl in an Anglo-American tavern (Rice 1983, p. 95). On La Tortuga the punch bowls, on average, held close to half a pint (237ml; Ross 1983, p. 39) when filled to near the brim. These small bowls are paltry compared to the multi-liter behemoths often used at elite merchant parties in the eighteenth century, where punch was often ladled from the bowls into smaller stemware (Archer 1997, p. 283; Gollanek 2008, pp. 202–203).

So far, I have referred to these vessels as punch bowls, but it can be plausibly suggested that they might have been multi-purpose vessels used for the consumption of soups and pottages as well as drink. To reflect on this issue, we must return to the archaeological assemblage of which these punch bowls are a part. The delft assemblage from Punta Salinas consists of a minimum number of 105 vessels; 34% of these vessels are plates, 25% include wide-rimmed dashed bowls, tea bowls, a saucer, and a jug and the remaining 41% are punch bowls. The creamware assemblage consists of a minimum number of 107 vessels of which 32% are plates, 18% are mugs, a tea bowl, a saucer, and a teapot and the remaining 50% are punch bowls (Table 1). These percentages, and the variety of vessel types, make it highly probable that vessel form indeed defined function in most cases at the Punta Salinas site. Assuming this is correct, then plates were used for eating, the wide-rimmed bowls probably for consumption of stews and soups and the mugs, tea bowls and punch bowls for drinking. Some of the punch bowls might have also been slop bowls (used for the discard of tea dregs) that were a traditional component of tea services. It is important to underline that as Harvey (2012, p. 177) suggests, “the material culture of punch drinking crossed these material lines of demarcation” and punch could have also been poured from punch pots, ladled from bowls and drunk from glass tumblers (46 minimum vessels) and stem glasses (2 minimum vessels) found at Punta Salinas. Furthermore, as noted by Royal Navy Officer John Mitford (1819, p. 11), the unconventional adaptation of teacups for alcohol consumption during long voyages when glass tumblers broke was not uncommon.

The Dunes activity area stands out as the richest archaeological context at Punta Salinas in which 23 delft, 26 creamware, 14 English white salt-glazed and 2 scratch blue punch bowls were recovered. The two large trenches (TR/S/D-1 and D-2) excavated here yielded a breadth and variety of material culture that suggests that the temporary occupants of this area repeatedly brought to and used in this place artifacts of economic, personal and social value, among them objects used for leisure activities. Three lead die, a fighting cock tarsometatarsus with spur, and 47 silver Spanish cobs suggest that the typical eighteenth-century tavern activities of gambling and cockfighting were occurring within the Dunes activity area (Brown et al. 1990; Rice 1983). A wide array of tablewares including English white salt-glazed and creamware plates, Chinese porcelain tea bowls, Whieldon melon- and cauliflower-ware teapots and copper-wheel engraved Bohemian glass tumblers were also recovered here (Fig. 7).

A brick-lined fire pit, the only permanent feature contextually attributable to the Anglo-American period at Punta Salinas, was found at the northeastern end of trench TR/S/D-1 in the Dunes activity area (see Fig. 4). It consisted of a bed of bricks and coral stones placed directly on the sand with a semicircle of coral stones forming a protective wall from the wind. The sand at the base of the fire pit was darkened with charcoal and carbonized organic matter. To the south of the



Fig. 7. Other artifacts from the Dunes activity area, Punta Salinas (from left to right, top to bottom): German stoneware mineral water jug (H. 29 cm), melon-ware teapot from Staffordshire (H. 8.7 cm), glass tumbler (H. 7.05 cm), Chinese porcelain dish (D. 24 cm), English delft plate (D. 22 cm), English white salt-glazed stoneware plate (D. 23 cm), lead dice (L. 1.3 cm), Spanish silver cob (L. 1.9 cm), pewter sundial (D. 8 cm)

fire pit a deposit of faunal remains was recovered, including local species such as West Indian top shell (*Cittarium pica*), porgies (*Calamus* sp.), snappers (*Lutjanidae*), groupers (*Epinephelidae*),

grunts (Haemulidae), jacks (Carangidae), parrotfish (Scaridae) and bones of allochthonous animals such as pigs and cows. Various fragments of the inferior maxilla of pigs suggest that the people gathered on the Dunes might have been consuming pork jowl—pig head and cheek were prized pieces of meat in the eighteenth century (Glasse 1774). Faunal remains and punch bowl fragments were lying in the sand of the dune at a depth between 20 and 40 cm, while the base of the fire pit lay 45–50cm deep. It can be reasonably assumed that the cooking activities that were taking place here were functionally associated with the discarding of the punch bowls and other artifacts and ecofacts.

Documentary evidence suggests that sitting on land might have been customary for the captains at Punta Salinas. A letter relating the arrival of the *Scarborough* Man of War, commanded by Capt. Gregory in March of 1768 recounts, “Captain Gregory then sent his lieutenant on shore, to acquaint all the captains of the vessels, that all their salt should be taken from them [...] About two o’clock Captain Gregory, with one of the masters under his convoy, came on shore himself and repeated to us the same things” (*Political Register and Impartial Review of New Books* 1768, p. 90). The Dunes activity area, situated on the most elevated portion of the Punta Salinas site, would have offered its occupants the best vantage point from which to view and oversee the crews working on the saltpans and the surrounding areas and also enjoy the best sea breeze. A small pewter sundial, a gilded key from a mechanical pocket watch, and two bottles from what was possibly a sand hourglass may indicate that the captains spending their leisure time on the Dunes were interested in timekeeping for the purposes of managing their crews’ labor (see Fig. 7). These findings echo Mark Leone’s (1988, p. 242) interpretation of clocks and watches in the eighteenth century as elements of the “Georgian conceptual order,” segregating, subdividing and focusing on order and social control. Also, the recovery of two lead sheets with circular token pre-forms stamped into them, along with various circular lead tokens, may suggest that these were either temporary substitutes for future payments, stand-ins for money to purchase alcohol or gaming pieces. This concentration of items of economic and personal value, and artifacts and ecofacts associated with gaming and gambling at the Dunes, suggests that the activity area was largely and repeatedly occupied by the most economically adventurous members of New England ships—namely captains.

Outside of taverns (Bragdon 1988; Brown et al. 1990; King and Miller 1987; Leskovec 2007; Luckenbach 2002; Rockman and Rothschild 1984; Victor 2012), historical archaeologists have mostly studied punch bowls from the households and plantation homes of the elite and the wealthy in the Atlantic world (Beaudry 2010; Goodwin 1999; Smith 2001; Smith 2008; Yentsch 1990, 1994). The archaeology of punch drinking among people of middle and lower socio-economic status has not received the same attention. Ship captains would have had greater access than regular crewmembers to resources and goods at ports, and would have been, in many ways, arbiters of fashionable taste, always “in the know” and aware of the latest trends in England. Moreover, while on land on La Tortuga, the captain would interact with many of his peers—captains of ships much like himself—in a setting of close interaction that might have spurred the need to distinguish himself from the rest of his crew (and other crews), and also assert his position among the masters of the other vessels. The people using the punch bowls and imbibing punch on La Tortuga were non-elite—they were captains and crews of small ships. Indeed, in terms of social

interactions, *something* different was occurring on La Tortuga, something that was not commonly replicable in any other city, town, port or household in the Anglo-American Atlantic world.

Captains and the Punch They Imbided

On La Tortuga, seafarers had no permanent physical tavern in which they could spend their leisure time as they did in other Caribbean and Atlantic world ports. I argue that constrained and enabled by the liminality of the island's space, captains repeatedly improvised and recreated an open-air "tavern" on Punta Salinas. The port in Bridgetown, Barbados, from which the ships sailed directly to La Tortuga had more than one tavern for every 30 residents (Smith and Watson 2008, p. 79). In 1682, English privateer and naturalist William Dampier (1699, p. 56) recounted the popularity of punch drinking on La Tortuga:

I have seen above 20 Sail at a time in this Road [La Tortuga] come to lade Salt; and these ships coming from some of the *Caribbe Islands*, are always well stored with Rum, Sugar and Limejuice to make Punch, to hearten their Men when they are at work, getting and bringing aboard the Salt; and they commonly provide the more, in hopes to meet with Privateers, who resort hither in the aforesaid Months, purposely to keep a *Christmas*, as they call it; being sure to meet with Liquor enough to be merry with, and are very liberal to those that treat them.

Punch was a cornerstone of the later seventeenth- and eighteenth-century seafarer's drinking practice (Harvey 2012, p. 194). It is a mixed drink consisting of five ingredients; in fact, the name "punch" most probably derives from the Hindustani *panch* meaning five (Connell 1957, p. 1; Grigsby 2002, p. 176; Smith 2005, pp. 80–81). The ingredients varied among the many seventeenth- and eighteenth-century recipes, but generally included spirit (rum, brandy and arrack) or wine, fruit (limes, lemons or oranges), sugar, spices (usually nutmeg) and water (Goodwin 1999, p. 131; Rice 1983, p. 95). Punch has been traditionally ascribed an Asian origin. Nonetheless, there is a strong claim that it was actually an English creation, having originated onboard seventeenth-century ships travelling to Asia and traversing the vast Pacific, Indian, and Atlantic oceans (Gollanek 2008, p. 164; Harvey 2012, p. 173–174; Kimball 1945; Wondrich 2010, p. 37).

For the wealthy, punch could contain rare grated nutmeg, exotic pineapples, and fine French brandy or Madeira wines (Nathan 2006, p. 32). There were also various forms of sugar that could be used in punch, from simple and unrefined brown *muscovado* to a highly refined and expensive white powdery sugar (Gollanek 2008, p. 189). Moreover, large delft and porcelain punch bowls and their accompanying accessories such as elaborate silver punch ladles, fancy nutmeg graters and fine glass stemware made punch a preferred showy drink among the gentility, whether Barbadian planters or New England merchants (Connell 1957; Goodwin 1999; Smith 2005, p. 123). Nonetheless, many of these items might have been easily available to seafarers, as they were the very people who made them accessible to the gentility by way of their ships (Harvey 2012, p. 194). But, fresh drinking water would have been a luxury aboard ship and while some of the vessels may have been reused for other liquids, the 91 German stoneware mineral water jugs

(minimum number) recovered at Punta Salinas are a prime example that even water, the most inconspicuous ingredient in the making of punch, could be exotic on La Tortuga where no fresh water could be found.

Punch, that “quintessential Atlantic world beverage” as art historian Eric Gollanek (2008, p. 164) terms it, grew greatly in popularity in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and became a drink of which people of all social classes came to partake (Harvey 2012, p. 180). The maritime origins of punch were evident in multiple ways. In the mid-eighteenth century in Britain, decorated “success” or “presentation” punch bowls in delft, salt-glazed stoneware, and other wares were commissioned by captains as testimonials of business friendships and often had the recipient’s ship and name painted on the interior (Archer 1997, pp. 308–309; Rudolph 1985, pp. 42–43). Clearly, punch was popular among the seafarers (both captains and crews) on La Tortuga when Dampier visited the island in 1682. Indeed, punch was primarily consumed by the middle classes, of which seafarers were a large portion in the late seventeenth and eighteenth century (Harvey 2012, p. 180). This popularity of punch was also noted by Dampier in 1675–76 amongst the logwood-cutters in the Bay of Campeche whom he described as very “frolicsome” (Dampier 1700, pp. 18, 80), as well as at the punch houses on the island of St. Helena in 1691 that, in Dampier’s (1699, p. 548) words, were “never empty.”

Rum punch offered a distinct local option to those who could not purchase finer imported spirits. It was made with the rum that was plentiful in the Caribbean and New England and, especially, in the case of the *Saltertuda* Fleet, readily available on Barbados, the gathering point for the last leg of the Fleet’s voyage to La Tortuga (Smith 2005) (see Fig. 1). Limes were also plentiful on Barbados, and were renowned for producing abundant juice (Singleton 2010 [1767], pp. 23–24). Lime juice in punch supplemented the mariner’s miserable and nutrient-deficient diet by providing him with an essential source of vitamin C to counter the threat of scurvy on long voyages (Dampier 1699, p. 296; Watt 1981, pp. 57–58). Sugar, Barbados’ prime export, was also readily available to the ships sailing from the island to La Tortuga.

The 1766 inventories of three Bermudian ships apprehended by Spanish corsairs while raking salt on La Tortuga clearly show that at least two of the ingredients for punch were carried onboard. The brigantine *Porgey* had 40gal (151 liters) of rum (enough to fill 640½ pint punch bowls!), 4 gal (15 liters) of “old spirit” (presumably old rum), a keg of brandy, 4 dozen bottles of porter, 1 dozen of wine, 40lb (18kg) of white sugar and 2 punch ladles (Minutes of His Majesty’s Council, Bermuda, 1996, pp. 206–207). The brigantine *Roach* had similar stores, including a “China Bowle,” the eighteenth-century term associated with punch bowls (Minutes of His Majesty’s Council, Bermuda, p. 209). Two ships arriving at Piscataqua via Barbados and *Saltertuda* (La Tortuga) on May 25 and 28, 1765, carried salt, rum and 50gal (189 liters) of lime juice each, which the naval officer describes as stores (Naval Officers’ Lists of Shipping 1765). In spite of the naval officer’s description it is doubtful that such a large quantity of lime juice was solely ship stores. Nonetheless, it is possible that it was put to good use in the making of punch while on La Tortuga.

The fluidity of movement of New England captains to ports in the circum-Atlantic was a contributing factor to the presence of fashionable objects—among them punch bowls—at the Punta Salinas site as has also been noted by Steven Pendery (1992, p. 64) for Charlestown, Massachusetts. Barbados was also a prime port for acquiring fine goods. Traveler and clergyman

of the Dominican order Jean-Baptiste Labat (1979, pp. 207–208) noted by the end of the seventeenth century that “the traders’ shops and warehouses [in Barbados] are filled with desirous items from all parts of the world” (author’s translation). The access to the various ports and their goods may also have created the possibility to acquire commodities associated with punch consumption which left no trace in the archaeological record, such as fine spices, aromatic bitters and various exotic spirits.

Punch bowls as Receptacles of Social Lubricant

Unhindered by the four walls of a traditional tavern, the captains—who had to supply their own crockery—had a unique opportunity on La Tortuga to display their possessions and exotic goods, whether they were punch bowls, plates and teapots, or spices, fine liquors and even fighting cocks. Through the manipulation of this material culture the captains, who had the most purchasing power of those onboard, could underscore their individuality. A greater emphasis on the individual, as evidenced by the portable and personal—not communal—punch bowls, was, as previously mentioned, a part of the expanding Georgian worldview. It also echoed the changes in individual drinking preferences in New England taverns of the second half of the eighteenth century (Garvin and Garvin 1988, pp. 157–158; Rice 1983, p. 98). I maintain that on La Tortuga these bowls were portable status markers. A delft punch bowl glazed and painted in bright colors and exotic Chinese motifs (see Fig. 6) or a finely incised scratch blue punch bowl (see Fig. 5) would have been an eye-catching and conversation-starting piece.

Although the crockery that the captains brought underscored their individuality, punch drinking was still a thoroughly communal affair. Punta Salinas offered a prime setting for both alcohol-based masculine sociability and material culture discourse. The punch itself in the bowls was a social lubricant. Alcohol is commonly believed to function as an agent in fostering social interaction, communication, companionship, camaraderie, conviviality and sociability (Hawdon 2005, p. 177; Marshall 1979, p. 453). Gollanek (2008, p. 213) describes the socially “magnetic” role of the punch bowl and its contents as a social lubricant around which strangers felt at ease. The role of punch on La Tortuga was no different. For the captains there, it facilitated leisure activities and reduced the monotony of waiting weeks on end for enough salt to sail.

These leisurely weeks of tropical tedium on La Tortuga would also have served as moments to create future social networks and strategic alliances, as well as build friendships that might lead to greater social mobility for particular individuals. Although the populations of New England port cities varied, many captains from particular cities would probably know each other and could coincide in the future in New England or the Caribbean. To Michael Dietler (2010, pp. 222–223) the performative aspects of alcohol consumption, which have been discussed above in relation to punch bowls and the paraphernalia of punch drinking, serve to construct social and personal identities and to create and maintain social relationships and politics—something that would have been of great importance to the captains carousing on La Tortuga. Furthermore, suggesting their social mobility, at least 11 of the captains of the small ships that arrived at the island in the

eighteenth century—identified in the very fragmentary Naval Officers' Lists of Shipping—were owners of the vessels they managed.

The convivial gathering of captains on the Punta Salinas site would have involved exchanges of information, news and gossip. The captains indeed exhibited great solidarity and camaraderie in the face of a common threat, as the account of the confiscation of their salt by Captain Robert Gregory of the *Scarborough* Man of War in March of 1768 exemplifies. The captains rallied to stop the “illegal” confiscation of their salt. However, upon failing to do so, they promised to prosecute Captain Gregory in court in New England (*Political Register and Impartial Review of New Books* 1768, pp. 90–93; *Boston News-Letter*, 1768). As has been evidenced by the aforementioned archaeological evidence from the Dunes activity area, besides drinking, captains were probably also engaging in the typical tavern activities of gambling and cock-fighting (Brown et al. 1990, p. 53; Rice 1983, p. 111). Toasting and health-drinking, important rituals in Anglo-American taverns, were most probably also occurring on the site, further fostering the sense of temporary community among the captains (Goodwin 1999, pp. 131, 137; Rice 1983, p. 98).

The fashionable tastes of many captains and their access to the new-fangled goods from England, the Atlantic world and beyond were most certainly driving factors for the acquisitive desire of the rest of the captains to seek and emulate the collections of their peers. Ian Woodward (2007, p. 158) summarizes that the tastes of one person are only meaningful in relation to those of others, where the force of these tastes at once becomes socially integrative and differentiating. The captains most surely found this a unique opportunity to engage in material discourse with the objects they brought—especially the punch bowls—in order to differentiate themselves from one another and their crews. On Punta Salinas, the captains could set themselves apart from their crews and engage in a horizontal verbal and material discourse with their peers. The suppressed and attenuated desires of social distinction onboard the small merchant ships—where a generalized communalism prevailed—were temporarily set loose on the saltpans. Captains, however, knew they would inescapably return to life at sea.

As Lorinda Goodwin (1999, p. 119) argues, the “craze for novelty might have arisen from a desire to stand out (in a favorable sense) from a crowd of dedicated consumers.” To Goodwin (1999, p. 119) refinement required the use of luxuries, which elevate the status of the practitioner. On Punta Salinas a captain’s knowledge and possession of fashionable and novel things as well as the display of accompanying manners of handling and use (including expressions, gestures and poses) would be essential to demonstrating knowledge and wealth through material culture. All those who were similarly versed in these dealings became part of a group exhibiting a competitive yet convivial fraternal atmosphere. Consumption and shopping were important social acts in the hands of particular actors with particular agendas, and among these agendas were group politics (Cook et al. 1996, p. 60). A telling account in 1814 of the shopping impulses of captains comes from a captain from Holstein by the name of Smidt upon his visit to Newcastle:

I stopped at each store to admire the splendid goods which were displayed. Nothing can be more seductive than this kind of rich shop-windows [...] With difficulty I resisted the temptation to spend my all of seven half-crowns on some of this colorful bric-a-brac; however, a portion of my hoard was sacrificed and I became the owner of a few decorated mugs and cups. My purchases were knotted into my

kerchief and I resumed my promenade up and down the streets, bearing my treasure most gingerly. (quoted in Rudolph 1985, p. 73)

Ashley Bowen, an eighteenth-century seaman from Marblehead, Massachusetts, recounts that his captain, Peter Hall “was a man so well acquainted in luxury [...] he must make as grand show as possible of his abilities” (Vickers 2007, p. 47). Although probably Smidt and, certainly, Hall were captains of considerably larger and more hierarchically structured ships than those that arrived at Punta Salinas, their taste for luxurious goods was probably shared by other captains of the seventeenth-, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Atlantic world. The captains who had access to these goods were emulating the mannerly behavior of the merchant elite in New England and the affluent drinking parties those figures hosted with fine delft drinking wares and accompanying paraphernalia (Goodwin 1999, pp. 135–138). However, as Goodwin (1999, p. 134) suggests, perhaps the mannerliness of the captains consisted in setting aside the polite distance and detachment of elite society and replacing it with communal drunkenness.

In New England, beginning in the early seventeenth century, sea captains who were a part of the middle wealth group in Charlestown, Massachusetts, began to acquire ceramics of diverse quality and to consume exotic goods—a trend that only increased as the eighteenth century unfolded (Pendery 1987). Many also possessed large homes such as captain John Foster, who is recorded to have been on La Tortuga (*Boston News-Letter*, 1716) and was probably the same person whose sizeable six-room Boston house was inventoried in 1720 (Pendery 1987, pp. 97–98). Detailed and diachronic historical archaeological research of the households of captains James Garrett, Jonathan Carey and Captain Robert Ball, in Charlestown, revealed these men’s self-fulfilling social strategies of consumption and the long-term investment in those material goods that facilitated social interaction (Pendery 1987, pp. 281–282). New England sea captains, many of whom travelled to La Tortuga, sought to emulate wealthy merchants and the English gentry through acquisition of fine and quality goods. Thus they were, paradoxically, some of the people who were moving the colonies towards economic and political independence from Britain (Pendery 1986, p. 77). Many such captains from New England ports found La Tortuga as an alternative place to their homes where they could refine, adjust and transform their individual social strategies among a group of captains with similar aspirations.

The punch bowl then, was an object of eighteenth-century material culture that metaphorically synthesized the Atlantic world. These eye-catching objects filled with exotic punch became the foci of sea captains’ social gatherings. Their materiality, however, transcended their role as integral components of discursive practice in the mediation of social relations at Punta Salinas. Punch itself—the blend of alcohol, fruit, water, spice and sugar—suggested as well the coming together of disparate people in the convivial act of drinking (Harvey 2012, p. 191). Punch bowls and punch became a potent metaphor of the far-reaching tentacles of the growing British mercantile capitalist world order; they became, as Gollanek (2008, p. 220) describes them, “supercharged space[s] for the sensory consumption of empire.” It was through these fashionable objects that the captains could underscore their cosmopolitan identities and their connections to far-flung places of the Atlantic world and even beyond.

Punch for the Laboring Crews

While consumption of alcohol was primarily based on relaxation and sociability for the captains, for the ordinary laboring men, it was a source of strength for their punishing labor (Garvin and Garvin 1988, p. 154). The role of alcohol as a labor incentive and enhancer has been studied by various authors (e.g., Dietler 1990; Dove 1988; Jankowiak and Bradburg 2003; Karp 1980; Suggs and Lewis 2003). However, the cases addressed by these authors do not relate to situations where the laborers were paid wages, but rather to the mobilizing, enticing and incentivizing of labor through the distribution of alcohol in feasts. I hypothesize that on La Tortuga the alcohol given by captains to their crews—who were wage laborers—did not function within such a framework of feasting but was rather an act of paternalism.

Crews performed better under toilsome conditions when they had the incentive of alcohol and captains capitalized on this knowledge. English cook Richard Briggs (1788, p. 646) noted, “A great piece of aeconomy is the good management of small beer; for if that is not good, the drinkers of it will be feeble in summer time, incapable of strong work, and will be very subject to distempers.” Thus as Dampier (1699, p. 56) recounted, many captains gave punch to their crews in hopes that it would “hearten” their men in the arduous process of salt exploitation and transportation to the ships, and thus exercised a form of power through alcohol distribution that was more subliminal than the outright employment of violence to control their men. This disbursement was indeed a widespread phenomenon at sea, most evidenced by the British Navy’s daily rum ration for seamen that began around 1655 in the Caribbean and continued for more than 300 years (Pack 1996).

Some of the common notions of health and humoral medicine in the eighteenth century may have further spurred alcohol (especially rum) drinking in hot conditions such as those on La Tortuga. As British author Richard Ligon (1673, p. 27) reasoned, “certain strong drinks are very requisite, where so much heat is; for the spirits being exhausted with much sweating, the inner parts are left cold and faint, and shall need comforting, and reviving [with more strong drinks].” Philadelphian Daniel Roberdeau (Rice 1983, p. 96) wrote in 1763, “In our extream Hot weather we cant do well with out Punch.” Neville Connell (1957, p. 1) argues that the tropical climate accounts for there being fewer seventeenth- and eighteenth-century accounts of drunkenness in the Caribbean, relative to the Atlantic world as a whole, and that by sweating in the hot sun, drinkers were less prone to becoming intoxicated. This is certainly true on La Tortuga where the sweltering heat diminishes the effects of excessive alcohol intake, as the author has observed among temporary fishermen during the fieldwork campaigns on the island.

On La Tortuga the workday of seamen was probably not constant. The arduous environmental conditions would have dictated a truncated workday, with the crews raking, bagging and transporting salt to the shore and then to the ships in the bay during the early mornings, late afternoons and nights. In the late sixteenth century, Spanish military architect Juan Bautista Antonelli (the Elder) noticed that the Dutchmen exploiting salt on the northeastern Venezuelan salt pans of Araya only worked during the early mornings and moonlit nights in order to avoid the fatigue that came with working in the full tropical sun (Varela Marcos 1980, p. 77). The midday and other moments in the day when the seamen were not working offered an opportunity to drink and eat those rations that were allotted to them by their captains, and forage for those local resources they could collect from the sea and shoreline, including lobsters (Easton 1748).

The material evidence for punch consumption by crews on the Punta Salinas site still needs further analysis and discussion. The current study focuses on the Dunes activity area; however, the evidence from the remainder of the site needs to be drawn into this panorama. It can be preliminarily suggested that during the eighteenth century, crews were gathered by more than 20 small fire pits on the sandy plain in between the delineated activity areas (see Fig. 4). What remains of these small fire pits is only dark sand with carbonized matter and scatters of West Indian topshell. Broadly, the artifacts associated with these features are, among others, German stoneware mineral water jugs, cylindrical and case glass bottles, and English white salt-glazed stoneware and creamware punch bowls, plates and mugs. Because the Punta Salinas site was visited over more than a century by hundreds of seafarers and because the shifting sand strata have left very little stratigraphic information, it is impossible to separate particular artifact scatters from each other and determine their synchronicity with the better-delineated activity areas.

I hypothesize that by incentivizing the work of the crews, alcohol also functioned as a safety valve—a means of veiling the now-blattant line of labor division and social distinction drawn between the captains and crews on Punta Salinas. Indeed, as recipients of punch distributed by captains, many seamen might have been diverted from understanding their new social situation on the island. This situation contrasts markedly to that argued for by James Finamore (1994, pp. 78, 229) in the British Bay Settlement where the wood-cutters and baymen were primarily renegade and opportunistic seafarers and pirates. They all periodically engaged in bouts of copious communal drinking (primarily rum punch) that reinforced their social cohesion and horizontal collectivism, and accentuated their antiauthoritarianism. With the incentive of alcohol, on La Tortuga salt-raking crews were deployed and maintained by their captains in the context of precisely the strict and paternalistic maritime labor relations against which the renegade baymen were rebelling through uncontrolled communal drunkenness in their isolated and autonomous world on the wood-cutting frontier (Finamore 2007, p. 76).

The “stage set” of the La Tortuga “tavern” was, nonetheless, a temporary one, and the captains, “actors” together with their “props” would soon find themselves on their small ships in their routine social milieu. Only during the few weeks that the salt-raking enterprise on La Tortuga was underway could the captains engage in this “theatrical” display of their material possessions, with their crews laboring and being appeased with alcohol—primarily in the form of punch.

Conclusion

La Tortuga was a uniquely liminal space in the late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Anglo-American sphere of commerce in the Caribbean. The creation of a “tavern” place on the Punta Salinas site, specifically the Dunes activity area, responded to the needs of the captains overseeing their crews laboring on the saltpans (Fig. 8). Punch, a quintessentially maritime and English drink, became the focus of the drinking politics in the Punta Salinas “tavern.” The temporality of the effects of punch as a social lubricant had to be capitalized by captains, for the horizontal social networks and strategic alliances that they formed while drinking and toasting together on La Tortuga would endure beyond the salt-run and into the future. Furthermore, this “tavern” gave enterprising captains a unique opportunity to show off their purchasing power through personal

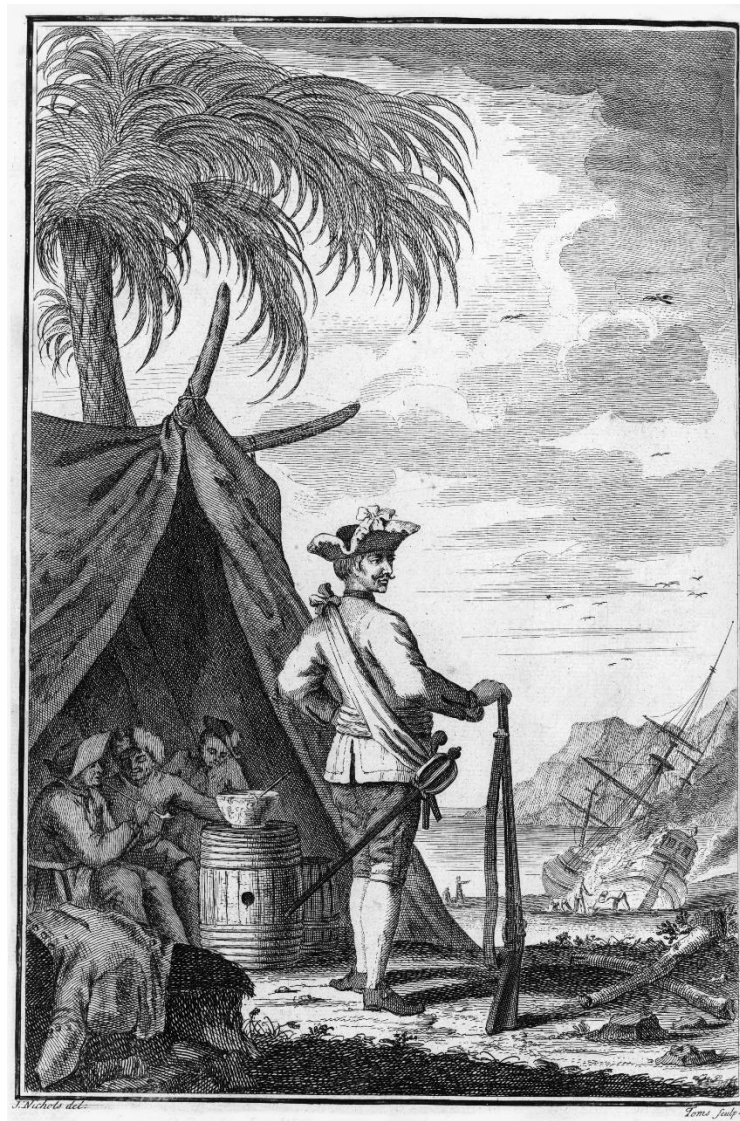


Fig 8. Capt. George Lowther and his Company at Port Mayo in the Gulph of Matique. Early eighteenth century. Officers of pirate captain Lowther drink punch in the shade of a tarp, while their crew labours careening a ship in the background—a labor division very much like that on La Tortuga. Courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library at Brown University, Providence, RI

belongings—among them fashionable punch bowls filled with exotic ingredients—and in such a way negotiate their status among the many other captains gathered in this one place on La Tortuga.

When captains put punch into circulation among the crew, it also helped lessen the evident vertical and hierarchical distinctions between those with authority (captains) and those laboring (crews) that surfaced while on La Tortuga. Further, this consumption decreased the possibilities of any irregularities, such as work stoppages, strikes and mutinies. It was after all in the captains' best interest that their crews perform optimally on the pans and rake salt as efficiently as possible. Alcohol in the form of punch was thus a key safety valve that assured that the crews would comply with the captains and do their jobs as expected. It also obfuscated the true nature (now otherwise

bluntly evident) of the power relations operating on the island, and limited the capacity of the crews to achieve conscious awareness of their social situation.

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