Our primate ancestors enjoyed a nip, too

When we think about the origins of agriculture and crop domestication, alcohol isn't necessarily the first thing that comes to mind. But our forebears may well have been intentionally fermenting fruits and grains in parallel with the first Neolithic experiments in plant cultivation. Ethyl alcohol, the product of fermentation, is an attractive and psychoactively powerful inebriant, but fermentation is also a useful means of preserving food and of enhancing its digestibility.

Using spectroscopic analysis of chemical residues found in ceramic vessels unearthed by archaeologists, scientists know that the earliest evidence for intentional fermentation dates to about 7000 BCE. But if we look deeper into our evolutionary past, alcohol was a component of our ancestral primate diet for millions of years.

In my new book, The Drunken Monkey, I suggest that alcohol vapors and the flavors produced by fermentation stimulate modern humans because of our ancient tendencies to seek out and consume ripe, sugar-rich, and alcohol-containing fruits. Alcohol is present because of particular strains of yeasts that ferment sugars, and this process is most common in the tropics where fruit-eating primates originated and today remain most diverse.

Read the full, original story: Drunks and Monkeys