

Beer and wine in ancient Egypt life and dead

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Beer and wine in ancient Egypt life and dead



Beer making

A beer strainer being used like a straw, straight from the beer jar! Beer, called hqt by the ancients and zythus by the Greeks, was a very important Egyptian drink. It was a drink for adults and children alike. It was the staple drink of the poor (wages were sometimes paid in beer), it was a drink of the rich and wealthy, and a drink offered to the gods and placed in the tombs of the dead.

Beer 

Beer in the morning, beer in the afternoon and beer at night. A little wine thrown in for good measure. And after a hard day of cutting stones for the pharaoh, time and energy left for a bit of hanky-panky.



strainer

Workmen at the pyramids of the Giza Plateau were given beer, thrice daily - five kinds of beer and four kinds of wine were found by archaeologists "poking through dumps, examining skeletons, probing texts and studying remains of beer jars, and wine vats" at Giza.

In 1990, the Egyptian Exploration Society approached Scottish and Newcastle Breweries for help. This was the beginning of a partnership which, over the past five years, has considerably increased the understanding of the brewing process as it was at the time of Tutankhamen.

Beer was depicted on the walls of the tombs, as were scenes of the ancient Egyptian brewery. It was probably very similar to the way beer is still produced in Sudan today.



Traditionally, beer was regarded as a female activity as it was an off-shoot of bread making - the basis of the beer were loaves of specially made bread.

Most likely, the beer was not very intoxicating, nutritious, sweet, without bubbles, and thick (the beer had to be strained with wooden syphons, used as a straw, because it was filled with impurities). Though the later Greek accounts suggest that the beer, instead, was as intoxicating as the strongest wine, and it is clear that the worshipers of Bast, Sekhmet and Hathor got drunk on beer as part of their worship of these goddesses, because of their aspect of the Eye of Ra. Tenenit was another ancient Egyptian goddess of beer.

Broadly speaking, the established view of ancient Egyptian brewing, drawn from tomb scenes, is as follows. Beer loaves were made from a richly yeasted dough. Malt may or may not have been used. This dough was lightly baked and the resulting bread was crumbled and strained through a sieve with water. Ingredients like dates or extra yeast might have been added. The dissolved mixture was fermented in large vats and then the liquid was decanted into jars which were sealed for storage or transport.

There is a lot missing, but an important question is what did the beer taste like? Thanks to the work done by the Egyptian Exploration Society and the Scottish and Newcastle Breweries, the ancient beer was probably "strongly influenced by the addition of fruit or spices as flavouring." The word 'bnr' bnr sweet-tasting unknown food determinative causes some problem - it is usually translated as 'date', but it may have referred to a different (or to any other) sweet-tasting food the Egyptians used in their beer. Although the dregs from ancient beer jars do show what ingredients were used, further work is needed before the exact flavour of the different beers can be established. In hieroglyphs, the determinative of the beer jug (jar determinative) were used in words associated with beer - short for 'beer', 'tribute', 'to be drunk', 'food and drink' and 'butler'. The importance of beer in ancient Egypt can not be overlooked.

Model of People Making Beer 9 February 1996, the Herald-Sun reported that 'Tutankhamon Ale' will be based on sediment from jars found in a brewery housed in

the Sun Temple of Nefertiti, and the team involved has gathered enough of the correct raw materials to produce "just 1000 bottles of the ale".

"We are about to unveil a great Tutankhamen secret," said Jim Merrington, commercial director at Newcastle Breweries, "The liquid gold of the pharaohs. It's a really amazing inheritance they have left us, the origins of beer itself."

The beer was reported to have an alcoholic content of between 5 and 6 percent and was to be produced in April, 1996. They were sold at Harrods for £50 per bottle, the proceeds going towards further research into Egyptian beer making.

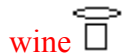
Want to try brewing your own Ancient Egyptian inspired beer? Have a look at The Egyptian Beer Experiment for some recipes!

Although the word for beer was written with the hieroglyphs hqtjar determinative - hqt with the determinative for a beer jar - another way of writing the word is hnqt due to 'defective writing' by the ancient Egyptians, mentioned in Die Defektivschreibungen in den Pyramidentexten, Lingua Aegyptia 2 by Jochem Kahl:

After defining what is understood here as a defective writing and how to recognize them, the author lists the evidence in the P.T. for unwritten consonants, either in initial, middle or final position... the defectively written consonant must belong to the group of i, w, a, m, n, r, and then only in certain word forms... Two factors of importance for defective writing are calligraphy, such as with hnqt, "beer" and lack of room. At the end the author remarks that the hieroglyphic writings are strongly influenced by the pronunciation.

Wine in ancient Egypt

A preferred drink for rich, gods and to the dead



Wine, known as *yrp* to the Egyptians, was very expensive. It was drunk by those who could afford it, used as offerings to the gods and to the dead. The resurrected pharaoh was known as one "one of the four gods ... who live on figs and who drink wine." Even in later times, the Greek tourists report that wine was confined to the wealthy. Though wine, too, was occasionally given out as pay - the workmen at the pyramids at Giza had four kinds of wine to drink, along with five kinds of beer.

Ancient Egyptian Wine Jar with Stopper The word wine, funnily enough, predates the word for vine, so it seems that the Egyptians imported wine long before they imported grapes to the Nile valley.



Wnie making

The Egyptians has several different kinds of wine, some of which have been commended by ancient authors for their excellent qualities. That of Mareotis was the most esteemed, and in the greatest quantity.

Athenæus tells us that the Mareotic wine was "white, its quality excellent, and it is sweet and light with a fragrant bouquet; it is by no means astringent, nor does it affect the head." Strabo wrote that the wine was also known for its long shelf-life.

Other wines of note to the Greeks were Teniotic, Thebiad, Sebennyitic, Thasian, Manfesian, Ecbolada (forbidden to newly married brides!) This was only a small sample of wines made throughout Egypt. It seems, though, that the favourite wine from the Old Kingdom onwards was red wine. The white wine that the Greeks favoured was only produced from the Middle Kingdom onwards.



Wine jarwithlid

In ancient party scenes on the tomb walls, wine is seen offered to the guests. It seems that a lot of wine was consumed at the banquets, because there are a number of

images depicting the guests throwing up or being carried home because of their drunken state - drunkenness was seen as an amusement to the ancient Egyptians!

At celebrations of drunkenness to the Eye of Ra, wine was also drunk by those who could afford it. The temples associated with the goddesses had their own vineyards to make sure that the celebrants had enough wine for the rituals. Wine was also an acceptable offering to the gods.

The search for the recipes and wine types of the Egyptians have yielded mixed results within the delta region of the Nile. Due to the climatic changes since the time of ancient Egypt, quests for the right vine, the right mixture of materials, and other factors, have left the modern renditions of ancient Egyptian wine with something to be desired ... It was not until 1931 that the first modern rendition of ancient Egyptian wine was produced. This rendition of the ancient wine continues to be made in the present day, however, many wine connoisseurs consider it of poor taste. Regardless, the taste of the ancients is still present 3,500 years later.



Trading on grapes to make wine Egypt had vineyards all over the country, though most of them were in the Nile delta. Grapes were hand picked, then placed in a vat for traditional treading on the grapes, or in special wine presses. The resultant juice was captured in open jars, where the fermentation process took place. When ready, these jugs were sealed and marked with the date, name of the vineyard and the person in charge of the wine. Aged in these earthenware jars, they had to be broken when it was time to decant the wine, and then poured into yet another earthen jar. When the wine was ready to be served, it was poured into shallow vessels with a short stem.

In the Pyramid Texts the god Shesmu brings the king grape juice for wine production. Although he was a god of wine and of the wine press, he was also a vengeful god - in a papyrus from the 21st Dynasty, Shesmu his cruel side was shown by two hawk deities twisting the net of the wine press which contains three human heads instead of grapes. Hathor, also a goddess of wine (and beer), was also both a goddess of love and a goddess of destruction.