

## BEER AND WINE IN ANTIQUITY: BENEFICIAL REMEDY OR PUNISHMENT IMPOSED BY THE GODS?

### PIVO I VINO U ANTICI – BLAGOTVORAN LIJEK ILI BOŽJA KAZNA?

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*In memoriam of Dr Guillermo Zanniello,  
expert support and qualified guide in my medicine works*

#### SUMMARY

*Different types of alcoholic beverages such as wine and beer were used in ancient times for various medicinal purposes. Being the oldest and probably the most widely used drugs, they were known to have some therapeutic value, in addition to the vital part they played in the daily life of people.*

*Ethanol is produced by fermentation of a variety of plants and consumed either in a diluted form or concentrated by distillation to concoct alcoholic beverages. Beer made of fermented barley is an alcoholic drink that was believed to contain a spirit or a god. It is a drink of relatively low alcohol content with supernatural properties. The same was believed for wine. Considered to be divine, these beverages were the long-sought elixirs of life and appeared in religious ceremonies, in mythology, and in social meals, such as the Greek symposia.*

*In addition, these alcoholic drinks were considered to be a remedy for practically every disease and, therefore, were a common ingredient in ancient prescriptions. They were used as anaesthetics that dull the pain, as stimulants, as analgesics, as antiseptics to cleanse wounds and relieve pain, as emetics, as digestives, as antidotes for plant poisoning, for bites and stings, and as purifiers. However, we should not overlook the harmful effects of alcohol abuse such as drunkenness, chronic liver disease and, in modern terminology, infirmities that included pancreatitis, cardiomyopathy, peripheral neuropathy, dementia, and central nervous system disorders.*

**Key words:** *beer, wine, antiquity, supernatural properties, remedies, alcohol abuse*

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## INTRODUCTION

Since antiquity, different types of alcoholic beverages have played a vital part in everyday life; they were used as important meal ingredients, for religious ceremonies, for enjoyment, and for various medicinal purposes. Archaeological evidence suggests that the origin of alcohol goes back to the Neolithic period, about ten thousand years ago, and that they are all related to deities because of their mysterious powers. People also believed that these beverages were the long-sought elixir of life, and thus they were present in religious ceremonies, in mythology, and in social meals.

Hydromel (honey and water) and oxymel (honey acidified with vinegar) were probably the most primitive ways to obtain alcohol, since honey was considered to drip from heaven as the food of the Gods <sup>1</sup>. In the *Hearst Papyrus* (XIV-7-10) it always provided protection against diseases. Grapevine later took over as the favourite plant to obtain alcohol from.

Ethanol can be obtained by fermenting sugar of different plants. Beer made of fermented barley, apparently the earliest alcoholic drink consumed by man, was considered to contain a spirit or a god. It has probably been brewed since the 6<sup>th</sup> millennium B.C. and involved steeping a cereal grain (often malted barley) in water and fermenting this mix with yeast to produce alcohol. As beer brewing was a household craft, we might guess that it was also women's chore until the Late Period <sup>2</sup>.

### BEER: DAILY FOOD WITH MOOD-ALTERING PROPERTIES

In ancient Egypt, beer and bread were staple food for both adults and children. It was equally consumed by the poor and wealthy Egyptians, although the latter mixed it with aromatic substances to make a more elaborate kind of the brew. Both types were considered healthy nourishment with broad medicinal application. Tomb builders would receive a jar

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<sup>1</sup> PORPHYRE, *L'antre des Nymphes dans l'Odyssée*, XVI, 8 ; W. RÖSCHER, "Nektar und Ambrosia", Leipzig, 1883 and in *Lexicon der Mythologie*. In Egypt the water of the Sun's Eye fell to the earth and there was changed into a bee. See also the difference between the food of the Gods and men and their relationship to immortality in A. ROSSO, "Le regime alimentaire carnée et la société civilisée dans l'Antiquité", 40th. International Congress of the History of Medicine, Budapest, Hungary, 26-30 August 2006 and "Civilización y barbarie, la alimentación carnívora en la Antigüedad", 41st. International Congress of the History of Medicine, México-Puebla, 7-12 September 2008.

<sup>2</sup> B. KEMP, *El antiguo Egipto*, Barcelona, Crítica, 1998, p. 282.



Figure 1 - Black Granite statue of the Lioness Goddess Sekhmet of Thebes, 14<sup>th</sup> century B.C. (G. Pinch, *Magic in Ancient Egypt*, p. 139)

*Slika 1. Statua lavlje božice Sekhmet od Tebe od crnoga granita, 14. st. pr. n. e. (G. Pinch, Magic in Ancient Egypt – Čarolija starog Egipta, str. 139. i 117.)*



Figure 2 - Lioness Goddess Sekhmet, amulet in dark blue glass, late 10<sup>th</sup> century B. C. (G. Pinch, *Magic in Ancient Egypt*, p. 117)

*Slika 2. Lavlja božica Sekhmet, amulet od tamnoplavoga stakla, kasno 10. st. pr. n. e. (G. Pinch, Magic in Ancient Egypt – Čarolija starog Egipta, str. 139. i 117.)*

three times a day as a part of their rations, and these vessels were also placed in tombs for the afterlife.

During the Middle Ages beer remained the most common drink consumed daily by all the social classes in the northern and eastern parts of Europe, where grape cultivation became difficult or impossible. This beverage of relatively low alcohol content was thought to have supernatural and mood-altering properties, and this state of intoxication was considered divine. In fact, beer and wine do provoke pleasant sensations and euphoria. Ancient cultures used to brew beer for religious ceremonies, and by drinking it the worshippers sought to achieve religious ecstasy. For the Sumerians it made people feel 'exhilarated, wonderful and blissful' and the

world's oldest, great Mesopotamian epic *Gilgamesh* highlighted its importance for the primitive ancestors of the human race. After having drunk seven cups of beer, Gilgamesh's friend Enkidu, a bestial primitive man, became a human being and a 'cultured man'. Even the Finnish saga *Kalewala* <sup>3</sup> has 400 verses devoted to beer, and only 200 to the creation of the Earth.

In addition, the popular Egyptian myth *Hathor's Rage and the Destruction of Mankind* <sup>4</sup> tells us how beer saved the mankind. Hathor, becoming a fierce lion-headed goddess Sekhmet, decided to slaughter the plotters against her father Ra, the sun god, and drink their red blood that tasted sweet. To calm her fury and save men, Ra conceived a plan. He poured her beer mixed with an ochre-based red dye and, in her rage, the goddess saw a great pool of blood. She consumed a large amount of red-coloured beer and became so drunk that she gave up slaughtering altogether and became docile as Hathor. Men remembered their escape from her fury by drinking red strong beer at festivals and, from then on Hathor was known as 'The Lady of Drunkenness'. Beside this ritual beer, where residues of seeds and stems were also common, the Egyptians consumed the fruit of *tekh*-plant, perhaps ryegrass (*Lolium temulentum* L.) or *zizania* in Greek, that was mixed with wheat crops. It contains powerful narcotics, *loliine* and *temuline*, and a fungus which in small amounts provides pleasant visions and dreams <sup>5</sup>.

According to another ancient Egyptian belief, Osiris taught men the art of brewing beer and was worshiped throughout the country. Known before wine, beer dates back to the Predynastic period, over 3400 years B.C. <sup>6</sup> and it became the national drink. Mentioned for the first time in the Unas' Pyramid, there were more than 17 types of beer  (*hnt*) with different qualities. It was made of dates or barley (*Hordeum exasti-*

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<sup>3</sup> It is a folk song retained first as oral tradition and its oldest themes could be as old as 3.000 years.

<sup>4</sup> "Book of the heavenly cow" in M. LICHTHEIM, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, vol. II: the New Kingdom, University of California Press, 1976 p. 197-199.

<sup>5</sup> J-C. GOYON, "Hathor, l'ivraie et l'ivresse", *Cercle Lyonnais d'Égyptologie Victor Loret, Bulletin* N° 6, Lyon, 1992, p. 7-16, p. 9. The earliest written references indicating to be noxious and toxic weeds may be found in the Gospel of Matthew (13, 36-43) and in authors such as Plautus (*The Braggart soldier*), Virgil (*Georgic* I, 125) Ovid (*Fasti* I, 691-692) and Dioscorides (II, 122).

<sup>6</sup> Archaeological excavations at Hierakonpolis have uncovered a Predynastic bakery and brewery situated next to each other. D. BREWER, D. REDFORD, S. REDFORD, *Domestic plants and animals: The Egyptian Origins*, Warminster, England, Aris & Phillips Ltd., 1994, p. 29.

chum)  (it) or spelt-wheat (*Triticum dicoccum*),  (*bdt* or *bty*). These usually had a lower alcohol content than wine except for a strong

beer, called using a masculine noun *Dsrt*   since the times of the New Kingdom. As reported by Hornung <sup>9</sup>, the noun means ‘Helles Bier’ or a lager; according to Lefebvre <sup>10</sup> it may have been a medical beverage made with milk, while it is a strong ale for Caminos <sup>11</sup> and Helck <sup>12</sup>. For the last it comes from the plant *Dsrt*. The main ingredient of beer at that time was bread made of a rich yeasty dough that possibly included malt. The bread, lightly baked, leaving the enzymes and yeast still active, was crumbled into small pieces before being strained and mixed with sweet fruit water <sup>13</sup>. Flavour was added in the form of dates, the mixture was then left to ferment in a large vat, and the final product was passed through a sieve. Finally, it was stored in big jars that were sealed and placed on wooden shelves <sup>14</sup>. However, there is also evidence that beer was brewed from barley and emmer <sup>15</sup>, a cereal heated and mixed with yeast

<sup>7</sup> This cereal *bdt* appears initially in Dynasty I, but during the Old and Middle Kingdoms the leading corn was barley, emmer was second and in New Kingdom the relative importance of two grains was reversed and the preeminence of emmer is attested from XXV Dynasty through the Persian Period. D. DIXON, “A Note on Cereals in Ancient Egypt”, in P. UCKO, G. DIMBLEBY (eds.), *The Domestication and Exploitation of Plants and Animals*, Chicago, Aldine Publishing Co., 1969, p. 131-142, p. 138; W. EMERY, *Great Tombs of the First Dynasty III*, London, 1958; A. GARDINER, *Ancient Egyptian Onomastica II*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1947; F. GRIFFITH, “Catalogue of the Demotic Papyri in the John Rylands Library” III, Manchester, John Rylands Library, 1909.

<sup>8</sup> B. ABADIR, “*Dsr(t)*, the plant and the drink”, *Discussions in Egyptology* 45, 1999, p. 7-22, p. 7. In page 22 he infers that: “*Dsrt* is an ale with anise flavor due to its containing anise oil, which turns into a milky appearance when adequate amount of water is available to it”.

<sup>9</sup> See this discussion about the meanings in the book by A. EGBERT, *In quest of meaning ; a study of ancient Egyptian rites of consecrating the meret-chests and driving the calves*, Leiden, 1995, p. 142, n 11.

<sup>10</sup> G. LEFEBVRE, *Essai sur la médecine Égyptienne de l'époque pharaonique*, Vendôme, 1956, p. 106, n 9, 107, 121.

<sup>11</sup> R. CAMINOS, *Late Egyptian Miscellanies*, London, Oxford University Press, 1954, p. 425.

<sup>12</sup> W. HELCK, “Das Bier im alten Ägypten”, in *Jahrbuch der Gesellschaft für Geschichte und Bibliographie des Brauwesens*, Berlin, Institut für Gärungsgewerbe, 1972, p. 9-120, p. 18 s. and p. 105 n 3, about different expressions of the word.

<sup>13</sup> Hecateus and Athanaeus (X, 418e and 447d) quoted also that “the Egyptians grind barley for a beverage”.

<sup>14</sup> B. KEMP, *op. cit.*, p. 152.

<sup>15</sup> Emmer, a type of wheat (*Triticum dicoccum*), is a plant of the grass family used principally for its grain as human food and livestock feed.

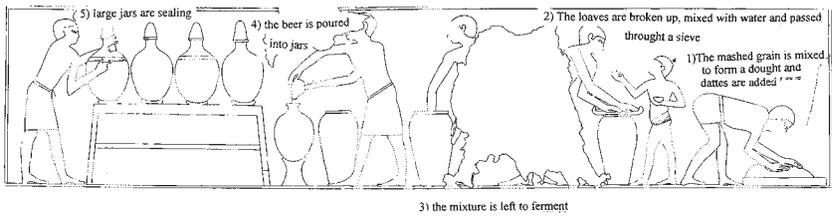


Figure 3 - Process of brewing, Theban Tomb of Intef-iker, D. XII. (Kemp, B., *El antiguo Egipto*, p. 155).

Slika 3. Postupak vrenja, grobnica Intef-ikera u Tebi, 12. dinastija (B. Kemp, *El antiguo Egipto – Stari Egipat*, str. 155.)

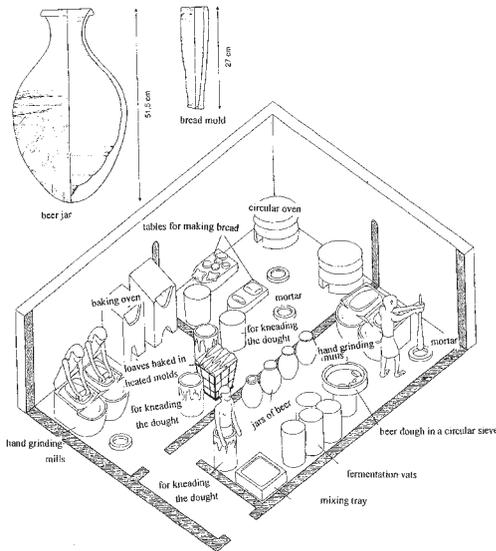


Figure 4 - A model of bakery and brewery, Theban Tomb of Meket-re, D. XI (Kemp, B., *El antiguo Egipto*, p. 153).

Slika 4. Maketa pekare i pivovare, grobnica Meket-rea u Tebi, 12. dinastija (B. Kemp, *El antiguo Egipto – Stari Egipat*, str. 153.)

and uncooked malt before being fermented<sup>16</sup>. This process is described in a scene from the Fifth Dynasty Tomb of Ti at Saqqara and in the Tomb of Intef-iker at Thebes, a vizier of the early Twelfth Dynasty. A model of bakery and brewery, two integrated activities, appears in the Eleventh Dynasty Tomb of Meket-re, also at Thebes<sup>17</sup>.

<sup>16</sup> Dried residues of 'beer' jars have provided information about ingredients: various cereals including grains of barley or emmer, yeast cells of a wild species, molds, bacteria and small proportions of different impurities.

<sup>17</sup> B. KEMP, *op. cit.*, p. 153-156.

## MAKING WINE IN ANCIENT EGYPT

Wine grapes have been cultivated in the Mediterranean since antiquity. Grapevines and the making of wine in Egypt go back to the Predynastic and early Dynastic periods (ca 3.100 B.C.), and vineyards were grown for Egyptian rulers and nobles<sup>18</sup>. Grapevines were introduced as part of gardens or orchards with other fruit and vegetables, while some were cultivated separately in vineyards as are today.

Harvest time brought joy and merriment; men, women, and children took to the vineyards, often accompanied by music and songs. Wine makers would select grapes for crushing and place them in big vats, later transfer them into smaller vats and then pour the liquid for primary fermentation into pottery jars. In the production of red wine, this process occurs in the skin, to preserve the pigment into its cells, and immersed in the juice to facilitate the extraction of colour and aroma<sup>19</sup>. Fermentation started within six to twelve hours after pressing or treading grapes and took only two to four days to obtain thin, watery, and flavourless wine. The resulting ethanol



Figure 5 - A vigorous vine. Relief from the temple of Aten at el-Amarna; D. XVIII. Schimmel collection New York (*L. Manniche, An Ancient Egyptian Herbal*, p. 155)

*Slika 5. Stamena loza. Reljef iz Atenova hrama u el-Amarni; D. XVIII. Schimmelova kolekcija u New Yorku (L. Manniche, An Ancient Egyptian Herbal – Staroegipatski biljni čajevi, str. 155.)*

<sup>18</sup> The oldest and more extensive documentation about viticulture and winemaking comes from Egypt and documents and painting related to it comes from walls of Egyptian tombs. See J. GUASH, *Wine in Ancient Egypt: a cultural and analytical study*, Oxford, British Archaeological Reports International Series, vol. 1851, oct. 2008.

<sup>19</sup> D. BREWER, D. REDFORD, S. REDFORD, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

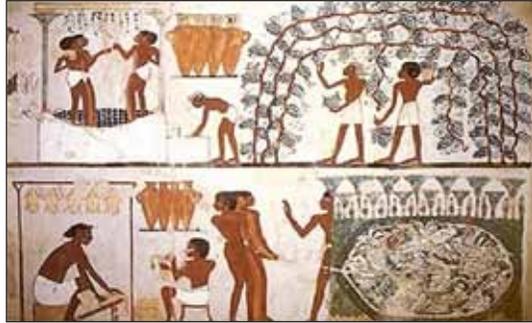
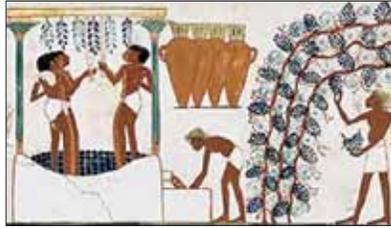


Figure 6 - Egyptian tomb paintings depicting grape cultivation, Tomb of Nakht, (Theban Tomb 52) D. XVIII, c.1400 B. C., now in British Museum.

Slika 6. Egipatske grobnice oslikane prizorima uzgoja vinove loze, Nakhtova grobnica (Tebanska gorbica 52), 18. dinastija, oko 1400. pr. n. e., sada u Britanskome muzeju

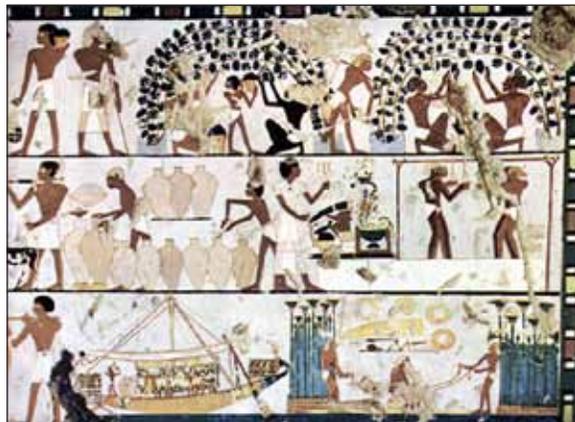


Figure 7. Theban Tomb of Khaemweset, D. XX, c. 1150, allotment of wine with food (J. Fletcher, *El rey sol de Egipto*, p. 97).

Slika 7. Tebanska grobnica Khaemweseta, 20. dinastija, oko 1150. n. e., dijeljenje vina s hranom (J. Fletcher, *El rey sol de Egipto – Egipatski kralj sunce*, str. 97.).

was consumed in this diluted form or was concentrated by distillation to concoct other alcoholic beverages. It should have been possible to attain an alcohol concentration of 10-20 per cent, sufficient for the extraction of alkaloids. Spices and scents were often added in order to hide wine's 'defects', and vinegar was also produced for dipping bread, among other uses.

Egyptian wines  (*irp*) were graded good  (*nfr*), three times as good, and genuine, sweet, merrymaking (not so good). The best ones were from the Nile delta and the Canopic branch of the river, known as 'northern wines'. There were five basic groups: those made of grapes, palm dates, pomegranates, or other fruit, that were blended with herbs, honey, or other flavouring. Ancient Egyptians made at least 24 types of wine, including white, red, and black <sup>20</sup>. A type of the latest was served for funeral ceremonies in the Old Kingdom <sup>21</sup>. They were left to age 'for as long as two decades according to the type', in tall amphorae with pointed bases, carefully sealed with a coat of plaster or mud that included the name of the officer in charge<sup>22</sup>.

Seth and Hathor of Imau were wine deities and the patrons of the two main wine-producing regions, famous for the high quality of their beverages, which were a special offering for the gods. At Bubastis, Egyptians celebrated the *Festival of Bastet*, when Hathor appeared in her peaceful and domesticated form, during the *Rituals of Pure Water*. More wine was drunk at this feast than over the whole year (Herodotus, II, 60) <sup>23</sup>. Bastet's devotees celebrated their lady with processions of flower-laden barges and orgiastic ceremonies. According to Herodotus (II, 37, 39), the priests were given a daily allotment of wine with their food, but they had certain restrictions in this respect, and Plutarch (*On Isis and Osiris*, 6) stated that some of them avoided wine altogether.

At funeral 'banquets', where nobody ate, cups with inebriant drinks, often with an allegedly aphrodisiac effect, were usually offered to the guests. Wine jars in tomb paintings were wrapped or draped in lotus flowers suggesting that wine was mixed with blue lotus <sup>24</sup> and mandrake, the first with

<sup>20</sup> H. KAMAL, *Dictionary of Pharaonic Medicine*, Cairo, The National Publication House, 1967, p. 498.

<sup>21</sup> D. BREWER, D. REDFORD, S. REDFORD, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

<sup>22</sup> G. POSENER, *A Dictionary of Egyptian Civilization*, London, Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1962, p. 300.

<sup>23</sup> P. GERMER, *Sekhmet et la protection du monde*, Genève, Belles Lettres, 1982, pp. 258-59.

<sup>24</sup> W. HARER, "Pharmacological and Biological Properties of the Egyptian Lotus", *JARCE* 22, 1985, p. 49-55.



Figure 8 - The cat goddess Bastet with a litter of kittens, amulet in green and black faience, c. VII–VI century B.C. (G. Pinch, *Magic in Ancient Egypt*, p. 117).

*Slika 8. Božica mačka Bastet s leglom mačića, amulet od zelene i crne gline, oko 7. do 8. st. pr. n. e. (G. Pinch, *Magic in Ancient Egypt – Magija u starome Egiptu*, str. 117.).*

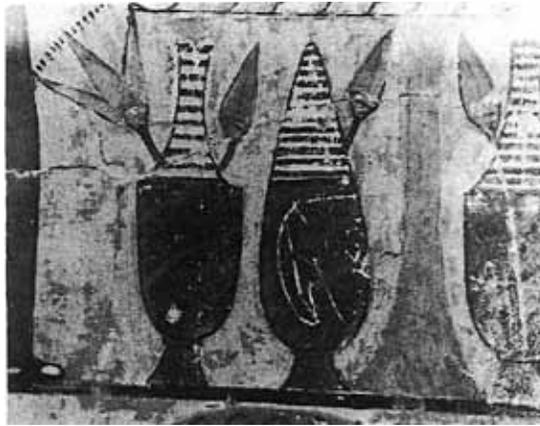


Figure 9 - Banquet wine jars wrapped in blue lotus. Unknown Theban Tomb, New Kingdom (D. Brewer, D. Redford, S. Redford, *Domestic plants and animals: The Egyptian Origins*, p. 60).

*Slika 9. Vinski ćupovi za bankete, omotani plavim lotosom. Nepoznata tebanska grobnica iz doba Novoga kraljevstva (D. Brewer, D. Redford, S. Redford, *Domestic plants and animals: The Egyptian Origins – Domaće bilje i životinje egiptaskoga podrijetla*, str. 60.).*

narcotic properties and the other with hallucinogenic ones. These concoctions were very potent <sup>25</sup>. Instead of a festive dinner among friends, these ceremonies, that ended up as Dionysiac episodes, were a way of encouraging procreation, which would give the dead the force to survive <sup>26</sup>.

<sup>25</sup> D. BREWER, D. REDFORD, S. REDFORD, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

<sup>26</sup> N. CHERPION, «Le 'cône d'onguent', gage de survie», *BIFAO* 94, 1994, p.79-106, p. 88-9.

## WINE IN ANCIENT GREECE

In Greece, the god of wine and winemaking was Dionysus. In mythology, he was the god of mystery religions, fertility, ritual madness and ecstasy, always assisted by his attendants: satyrs, centaurs, and Sileni. In Rome, he was known as Bacchus the Liberator, whose wine, music, and ecstatic dances freed the followers from self-conscious fear and worries and subverted the oppressive restraints of the powerful <sup>27</sup>. Those who partook in his mysteries were possessed and empowered by the god himself. Tymothy (year 78 AD) calls wine the blood of Bacchus and in the rituals it was drunk in a sacrificial sense <sup>28</sup>. But sometimes wine caused people to go insane, do crazy things in Dionysus' name and kill themselves. As a 'cult of the souls', his maenads fed the dead through blood-offerings, and Dionysus acted as a divine medium between the living and the dead. Wine became very popular and played an important role in Greek religious life and hospitality customs, as Bacchus gave it to humanity in two ways: the ritual madness (the delirium of pure wine) and the social and civilising function (the banquet with wine glass) <sup>29</sup>.

In ancient Greece, *symposium*, (from *sympnein*, *συμπνενν*, to drink together), also very popular and a key Hellenic social institution, was not only a male aristocratic activity where men drank together but also a forum of men to debate, plot, boast, or simply to enjoy themselves. It would be held in the *andrōn* (*Ἀνδρών*), the men's quarter of the household, and the participants would be reclined on a limited number of pillow couches. Considered a social affair shared with close friends, a symposium would count from three to nine men (to correspond to the number of Graces or the number of Muses, respectively). Food and wine were served, and entertainment included games, songs, flute-girls or boys, dancers, slave performances, and courtesans, who were allowed to drink, while other women were denied alcohol, except at Dionysian festivals. Jokes and story telling constituted a lively part of dinner conversations, and certain guests were invited because of their wit.

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<sup>27</sup> A. ROSSO, «La maladie sacrée et la santé mentale, des l'Antiquité à la Renaissance», *Proceedings of 36th. International Congress of the History of Medicine*, Carthage, Tunis, 6-11 Sept. 1998, Tunis, Société Tunisienne d'Histoire de la Médecine et de la Pharmacie, 2001, p. 427-29.

<sup>28</sup> E. DODDS, *Los griegos y lo irracional*, Madrid, Alianza, 1985.

<sup>29</sup> M. DETIENNE, *Dionysos à ciel ouvert*, Paris, Hachette, 1986.

Figure 10 - Dionysus or Bacchus, god of wine, II century Roman statue of Dionysus, after a Hellenistic model, ex-collection Cardinal Richelieu, Louvre (Marie-Lan Nguyen).

Slika 10. Dioniz, odnosno Bakho, bog vina. Rimska statua Dioniza iz 2. stoljeća, prema helenskome modelu, bivša kolekcija kardinala Richelieua, Louvre (Marie-Lan Nguyen)



The Ancients appreciated good conversationalists and offered advice on how to improve one's skills. These types of banquets had time allotted to drink (πότος, *potos*) and often ended in orgies. As this beverage could affect the head and the stomach, Athenaeus<sup>30</sup> advised against exaggeration. Still, wine was perceived as a drink of fire, akin to the Sun<sup>31</sup>, with invigorating virtues. Word has it that it was a hot and pure beverage, while beer was corrupted by the use of yeast. Greeks believed that cultivated fruit of the vineyard could rejuvenate and prolong life; for them it was a life water, a real fountain of youth<sup>32</sup>, even though its strength and alcohol content was higher than now and actually shortened life expectancy, which was no more than 30 years.

They drank wine diluted with water, perhaps warm and spiced, as the drinking of pure wine (ἄκράτον, *akraton*) was thought a vulgar habit of uncivilised people, which made the spirit weak and led to intoxication or madness. Nor did they consume *zythos*<sup>33</sup>, a sort of barley beer of a sour and

<sup>30</sup> Athenaeus of Naucratis lived in Egypt and was a Greek rhetorician and grammarian flourished between II and III century. He wrote fifteen volumes of a treatise, *Deipnosophistae*, which means 'dinner-table philosophers' and belongs to the literary tradition inspired by the use of the Greek banquet. He included a meticulous catalogue of the various eating and drinking customs of various peoples and precious little about Greek attitudes towards beer in classical times.

<sup>31</sup> The Homeric epithet of wine is *aithops*, the name of one of the horses of the Sun. Aithiops rips the god Bacchus' autumn strains and is flowers friend. ATHENAEUS, *Deipnosophistae* XI, 465 b; EURIPIDES, *Andromache*, fr. 896.

<sup>32</sup> J.-P. VERNANT, "Manger aux pays du Soleil", in M. DETIENNE, J.-P. VERNANT, *La cuisine du sacrifice en pays grec*, Millau, Gallimard, 2001, p. 239- 269, p. 247.

<sup>33</sup> The first attestation of this genuinely Greek word applied to the Egyptian product, perhaps the Egyptian *Dsrt*, is in THEOPHRASTUS, *History of plants* IV, 8, 12.



Figure 11 - Banqueters playing the *kottabos* game while a girl plays the *aulos* and entertains men at a symposium, Attic red-figure-style krater ca. 420 B.C. decorated by the artist Nicias (Salamanca collection, National Archaeological Museum, Marie-Lan Nguyen).

Slika 11. Djevojka svira *aulos* i zabavlja muškarce na simpoziju, koji igraju *kottabos*; crvene figure na tamnoj podlozi posude za vino, oko 420. pr. n. e. slikara Nicias (kolekcija iz Salamance, Nacionalni arheološki muzej, Marie-Lan Nguyen)

harsh flavour, imported from Egypt, because they found it barbaric and suitable only for ordinary people and not for aristocrats. Common people, and especially the Thracians, drank a more diluted and yeasty beer of malted barley than Egyptians did. As soon as 600 years B. C., the famous Greek poet Archilochus, (fr. 42) reported that Phrygians and Thracians<sup>34</sup> prepared a kind of barley beer called *bryton* (βῤῥυτος)<sup>35</sup> flavoured with bitter roots of fleabane or conyza (*Inula conizae*). It is the first mention of beer in Western Europe<sup>36</sup>. Aeschylus considered it their native drink, although Thracians were also wine drinkers.

However, the accounts of archaic and classical Greek upper classes fail to mention beer, save as a foreign or second-class beverage. These beliefs rejected beer particularly because of its cold qualities and claimed that people drinking beer would 'weaken with time' and show effeminate traits. This prejudice was probably an Athenian contribution from comedies or dramas of the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C.<sup>37</sup>. *Zyθος* (in Egyptian strong barley beer) was later softened by honey, mead, and other sweet fruit juices (Diodorus, I, 15, 8; III, 70, 8; IV, 3, 4-5) and its consumption increased in the Hellenic period (Strabo, XVII, 1, 4), especially among the Greeks of Alexandria.

<sup>34</sup> It is quite possible that Thracians and Phrygians shared the worship of Dionysus as Sabazius from an early time, whose rites resembled those for Dionysus, and also identified both. It is tempting to think that worshipers of Sabazius drank beer, but at least under Roman influences Sabazius was worshipped with wine, although in later Roman time at least in Illyria (a region near Thrace) Sabazius was connected to beer (E. LANE, *Corpus Cultus Iovis Sabazii III: Conclusions*, Leiden, 1989).

<sup>35</sup> See ATHENAEUS, *Deipnosophistae* X, 447b.

<sup>36</sup> M. NELSON, *The Barbarian's beverage. A history of beer in ancient Europe*, Oxon- New York, Routledge, 2005, p. 16.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 32.

Figure 12 - Icelandic Snorri's Edda, Codex Regius, 13<sup>th</sup> century, Corbie.

Slika 12. Mlađa ili Prozna Edda prema Snorriju, 13. stoljeće, Corbie



A symposiarch (master of ceremonies) would determine the strength of the wine mixture and the quantity to be drunk. Homer attributes to Thracians the Greek practice of mixing wine and water: “Maron (a rustic-god of Maroneia) had given Odysseus twelve jars of dark, red, sweet, unmixed wine along with a silver mixing bowl; Maron himself mixed the wine at a rate of one portion wine to twenty water”<sup>38</sup>. In fact, the Greek *oinómeli* was a special kind of wine mixed with honey, while *kondition* was also spiced with pepper and honey<sup>39</sup>. Plato (*Laws*, 639a- 640d) commanded severe discipline in the symposia; a good and sober leader had to restrain from chaotic and wild elements that would mislead man’s thought from the real cosmos.

The symposia included *libations*, the pouring of a small amount of wine in honour of various deities or the mourned dead. Wine was drunk to certain persons’ health, mentioned by their names, and this practice would sometimes lead to alcoholism. Plato (*Laws*, 641b) believed instincts should be overcome by training young people at symposia how to control themselves, as in the training of a choir. When they would finished libations, men would converse among them about specific topics. The use of wine was probably a subject of philosophical discussions at these convivial parties and formal meetings. Moreover, Hycesius wrote a book about the conservation of wine (*De conditura vini*)<sup>40</sup>. A well-conducted agape was considered “a

<sup>38</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 27.

<sup>39</sup> S. KOTTEK, “Selected Elements of Talmudic medical Terminology, with special consideration to Greco-Latin influences and sources”, in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Roemischen Welt (ANRW)*, Teil II: Principat, Band 37.3, 1996, p. 2912-2932, p. 2928.

<sup>40</sup> M. WELLMANN, “Zur Geschichte der Medicin im Alterthume” *Hermes* 35, 1900, p 349- 370, p. 361.

centre for the transmission of traditional values, as well as an event that provided liberation from every day restraints within a carefully regulated environment”<sup>41</sup>. However, the participants frequently drank an emetic wine, *Apiqtvisin*, not intended as a remedy but for those who indulged in overeating to vomit in order to be able to proceed with the banquet (Oribasius V, 27, 9).

Despite this, in the Edda<sup>42</sup>, the great Nordic epic and our best source of information about the use of alcohol in the Nordic nations, wine was reserved for the gods, beer belonged to mortals, and mead (the oldest drink made of fermented honey and water) to the inhabitants of the realm of the dead.

### MEDICAL AND OTHER USES OF ALCOHOL IN ANTIQUITY

In ancient times, alcoholic beverages were also used for various therapeutic purposes. They were a common ingredient in medicinal preparations and, together with honey and oil, were considered a remedy for virtually every disease, because of their properties as anaesthetics or painkillers, as stimulants, as antiseptics to cleanse and heal wounds, as emetics, as regulators of digestion, as purifiers, and as antidotes against poisonous plants, bites and stings.

In Egypt and Greece, alcoholic beverages were recommended as drug solvents and ingredients of oenological remedies. There are many instances of beer *henqet* being prescribed ‘to spend the night’ with other components (*Ebers* 6, 18, 32, 43, 46, 54), which probably resulted in the extraction of alkaloids. ‘Beer which has perished’ or dregs (*Ebers* 84, 85) were often prescribed for blood vessels, ‘sweet beer’<sup>43</sup> as an excipient, beer-*Dsrt* of Horus or thick beer (*Ebers* 22 and 20) for intestinal parasites, and froth of excellent quality (*Ebers* 92) or ‘beer of special offerings’ for ear secretion. In *Ebers* 287, a medicinal drug for the heart requires that wine and wheat groats also ‘spend the night’ before being consumed<sup>44</sup>. Sometimes

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<sup>41</sup> Departement of Greek and Roman Art. “The symposium in ancient Greece”, in *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*, New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000.

<sup>42</sup> Iceland epic Edda is also know as the Younger Edda or Snorri’s Edda because it was written by the Icelander scholar and historian Snorri Sturlosson around 1220, collecting poetically narrated folktales relating to Norse mythology or Norse heroes.

<sup>43</sup> “You shall then prepare from him to drink: figs, 1/8, milk 1/16; notched sycamore fruit 1/8 ; which have ‘spent the night’ in sweet beer, 1/10. Strain and drink much so that he get well immediately”. (*Ebers* 210).

<sup>44</sup> J. NUN, *Ancient Egyptian medicine*, London, British Museum Press, 1996, p. 140.



Figure 13. Ebers Papyrus (D. Montecchiarini, *El Papiro Ebers, registro de la medicina egipcia*)

Slika 13. Ebers Papyrus (D. Montecchiarini, *El Papiro Ebers, registro de la medicina egipcia* (Ebers Papyrus – egipatska knjiga lijekova)

the dregs or lees (*tahet*) were specified and these must contain yeast <sup>45</sup>. Out of ten recipes in the *Ebers Papyrus* (50-51) prescribed for anorexia, four contained wine and the other four beer <sup>46</sup>. Both were often prescribed to treat internal diseases related to the heart (*Hearst* 7, *Chester Beatty* IV, 7), blood vessels (*Berlin* 4, 12), intestinal parasites (*Berlin* 1), or putrefying matter or *uxdw* <sup>47</sup> (*Hearst* 3 and 4; *Berlin* 13, 14, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20), urinary problems (*Hearst* 4), and pathological secretions or infections (*Berlin* 3, 4), but not for any external disease of the eyes, skin, tongue, hair, or head. For gynaecological applications, beer had to be of higher quality (*Ebers* 93, 95). It is also noted that the heart in this culture is the centre of the blood supply, with vessels leading into every member of the body.

Special dietary preparations were part of the *materia medica*. *Zyθος*, a barley beer common in Egypt (*zȳthos* in Greek), was also used as a medi-

<sup>45</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>46</sup> W. DARBY, P. GHALIOUNGIU, L. GRIVETTE, *Food: the gift of Osiris*, London, New York, San Francisco, Academic Press, 1977, vol. II, p. 574.

<sup>47</sup> A. ROSSO, "An example of the influences and transferences of the Ancient Egyptian to Greek medicine; the *uxdw* theory", XXth Nordic Medical History Congress, August 10-13 2005, Reyjavik, Iceland, published in an Spanish version, "Un ejemplo de las influencias y transferencias de la medicina egipcia a la griega: la teoría de los *uxdw*", C. VIESCA, J.-P. TRICOT (ed.), *Analecta Histórico Médica* V, Año V, Mexico, 2007, p. 159-174.

cine, whose formula is given in the Talmud: 'one third barley, one third safflower – *Carthamus tinctorius*, one third salt'. It was believed to regulate digestion: for those suffering from constipation it loosened the stool, and for those with diarrhoea it stopped it. However, it was dangerous for pregnant women <sup>48</sup>. According references by classical authors, in Egypt beer was probably used as a laxative/purgative <sup>49</sup>.

It is also thought that an antibiotic <sup>50</sup> was formed in the brewing process as a result of contamination with airborne streptomycete, and then ingested with drink. Beer might therefore have been an unintentional vehicle for the delivery of a curative preparation in those early times. Since it was staple food, its constant intake might have influenced the pattern of bacterial infection <sup>51</sup>.

Beer is not mentioned in the early Greek medical texts and seems to be entirely ignored by the Hippocratic Corpus, probably due to prejudice against its effeminising qualities. Instead, various types of wine, vinegar, and mead are discussed in his work on harmful comestibles <sup>52</sup>.

In addition, alcohol has always played a vital role in controlling pain. Although not efficient enough to qualify as an anaesthetic in its true sense, it does have a valuable place in the history of medicine. Alcohol was also used to extract active substances from herbal preparations, depending on their relative solubility in this medium. In many cases, this drug is an alkaloid, a chemical group which includes atropine and morphine. The best way to extract these substances in ancient Egypt was with wine or beer, because they could provide the strongest concentration of alcohol available <sup>53</sup>. Other herbal remedies were often mixed with ethanol and administered for pain relief, as it certainly improved the potency of these ancient medicines. For example, *laudanum* <sup>54</sup>, a fragrant and mucilaginous resin and an alcoholic terpene, which was very popular and was considered one of the few reliable painkillers of antiquity, was obtained by

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<sup>48</sup> S. KOTTEK, *op. cit.*, p. 2929.

<sup>49</sup> M. NELSON, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

<sup>50</sup> Probably tetracycline, because Debra Martin detected the antibiotic tetracycline by serendipity, while examining a thin section of bone from the Roman Period. See G. ARMELAGOS, J. MILLS, "Palaeopathology as science: the contribution of Egyptology" in W. DAVIES, R. WALKER (eds.), *Biological Anthropology and the Study of Ancient Egypt*, London, British Museum Press, 1993, p. 1-18.

<sup>51</sup> J. NUN, *op. cit.*, p. 145.

<sup>52</sup> M. NELSON, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 139.

<sup>54</sup> It is an erroneous derivation from the Latin *ladanum* and the Greek λήδανον or *ladanon*,

simply mixing opium with white wine and saffron, among other substances. Apart from this, taking one glass of *Asparagus* (transcription of the Greek word), a wine made with cabbage sprouts, in the morning on an empty stomach became excellent for the bowels and for the eyes, as long as one did not get intoxicated by it <sup>55</sup>. The advice to drink not only water but to use a little wine for the sake of the stomach and frequent infirmities was useful for purifying the low quality drinking water, or for helping digestion and general sickliness.

In the Pharaonic Egypt wine became a vehicle for medicines; however, it could well have been considered an active drug in its own right. As an important and beneficial food it was consumed alone or with other medicaments and it was a pleasant ingredient to offset other disagreeable components. Herbalists realized the importance of this beverage mixed with other substances or drunk alone, because it became a sedative with relaxing effects and its narcotic and somniferous properties inducing sleep.

Taken alone orally or applied locally, it was an efficient antiseptic that helped kill all pathogens and remove swellings on legs (Berlin 11). Oil mixed with wine was a common remedy in the ancient world to cleanse wounds and assuage their irritation. Raisins were useful for bladder, gall bladder and bowel disorders, swollen belly and other illnesses. Hippocrates (*On Diet*, 52) explained the benefits of wine in view of the effects produced on the human body. He recommended it to heal wounds, ulcers, and sores (*On affections* II, 14), to calm down fevers (*On Diet* 66, *On affections* II 38, 39, 42, 44), as a purge and diuretic (*On Diet* 52), and for different jaundices (*On Internal affections*, 35-38). A lot of oenological prescriptions were employed as urine regulators, for female troubles, as antiseptics <sup>56</sup>, and as local sedatives for the rheumatic knee. *Cyceon*, (*On Diet* 41) a ritual drink <sup>57</sup> heavily used by Greek physicians, contained barley flour, wine, water, honey, and cheese or milk. Prepared with wine, it would give heat, feed and act as an astringent.

Considered a panacea by Dioscorides (*De Materia Medica*, V) <sup>58</sup> and the majority of rhizotomists, (he highlighted its virtues). Wine including tar was good for digestion, as it warmed the stomach, and worked as an emetic

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<sup>55</sup> S. KOTTEK, *op. cit.*, p. 2928.

<sup>56</sup> *On the use of liquid*, V.

<sup>57</sup> A. DELATTE, *Le cyceon, breuvage rituel des mystères d'Eleusis*, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 1955.

<sup>58</sup> He includes a variety of different fruit production and according to its different kinds he points out many advantages and disadvantages,



Figure 14 - Dioscorides, Grapevine (*Vitis vinifera*) (Dioscōrides, *Plantas y remedios medicinales*, p. 149).

Slika 14. D – Ljekovite biljke i priprawni, str. 149.).

(*kathartikos kathartikos*). In afebrile persons, it was also indicated for the chest, liver, belly, spleen, chronic rheumatism and ulcerations of the lower abdomen. It was also convenient for colds, slow digestion, flatulences, asthma, fractures and strains if a wooden greased compress was applied in the affected place (*oisypērōn eriōn oisuphērōn eriōn*), as well as against poisons.

Moses Maimonides (1135-1204) emphasizes its anaesthetic properties in prisoners sentenced to death, who received “a cup of wine with powder of incense to anesthetize him.... The dulling of the senses is an act of pity to lessen the anxiety of the accused during the execution”<sup>59</sup> (*Sanhedrin* 13.2). In Talmud, wine is the best of all medicines and is beneficial for health. This tradition proved that, taken in moderation, it developed the appetite, gladdened human heart (*Psalms* 104, 15), and encouraged blood movement. Old wine produced favourable results to stimulate the intestines, while table wine improved health. Its use was essential to move drugs to a distance because they were necessary when simple wine was insufficient (*Treatise Baba Bathra* 58b)<sup>60</sup>. In his *Medical Aphorisms*, Maimonides explained the advantageous effects of this alcoholic drink; mixed with water, it calmed the malaise of a difficult evacuation (*Medical Aphorisms*, 8.34), neutralised bad humours, overheated and moistened the stomach and the whole system, and stimulated the motility of the limbs, facilitated digestion, dissolved cold gas, and worked against chills (*Medical Aphorisms*, 9.42). For him, even pure wine invigorated those who were weak or wasted (*Medical Aphorisms*, 20.27); its overheating effect calmed strong headaches, diminished head gas when a

<sup>59</sup> See F. ROSNER, *La médecine tirée du Misene Torah de Maimonide*, Paris, Bibleurope et Britt International, 1992, p. 329

<sup>60</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 325-30.



Figure 15 - Moses Maimonides, Arabic manuscripts in Hebrew alphabet (Jewish Encyclopedia 1901-1906).

Slika 15. Moses Maimonides, arapski rukopisi u židovskome pismu (Židovska enciklopedija, 1901. – 1906.)

person felt stunned and appeased the blood or internal colds. But really, when it is consumed in large quantities, it also provoked dizziness, headache and thirst (*Medical Aphorisms*, 20.24).

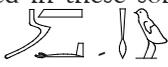
Spiced wine was recommended for those who had a fit (*Medical Aphorisms*, 9.49); dark and sweet wines produced a thick substance in the vessels and blood became black, whereas light wine dissolved dense chymes, purified the blood, and helped digestion while white wine stimulated urination (*Medical Aphorisms*, 20.29). The essential functions of certain varieties were to improve blood and digestion, recover constitution of the body, and eliminate all superfluous fluids from the organs (*Medical Aphorisms*, 21.6).

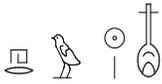
### SIN OF DRUNKENNESS

The medicinal usage of drugs containing alcohol seems to have contributed to increasing alcohol consumption in Egypt around 1600-1500 B.C. The availability of beverages must have stimulated the proportion of population able to indulge in excessive alcohol abuse. There is evidence that beer was not particularly harmful, but rather nutritious, thick and sweet. However,

it was clear that beer could also be as toxic as Egyptian wine, although mild intoxication would have eased the burden of many complaints.

Drunkenness was apparently not uncommon and seems to have occurred in all strata of the Egyptian society. Women, especially the upper classes, freely took part in drinking at banquets and were encouraged ‘not to spoil the entertainment’<sup>61</sup>. For instance, in the tomb of Paheri an elegant lady is shown presenting her empty cup to a servant and saying “*give me eighteen measures of wine, behold I should love [to drink] to drunkenness*”<sup>62</sup>. Some wall-paintings depict scenes of a rich man’s banquet in which a sick lady is vomiting probably from drinking too much alcohol<sup>63</sup> and other in which a manservant is asleep behind the cellar door because he is drunk with wine and the slaves are carrying away their master and a guest, who are both totally sottish<sup>64</sup>. This demonstrates that the Egyptians enjoyed wine even at the expense of losing sobriety.

According to Plutarch (*On Isis and Osiris*, 17) Egyptians used to bring to feasts a representation of a dead man in his coffin to exhibit it among the guests; this was not a reminder of the mourning of Osiris, as some interpreted it, but an encouragement to live in the present, to drink and enjoy, because very soon they too would be dead (Herodotus II, 78). This idea passed directly to the Romans (Petronius, *Satyricon* 34) in their encouragement of *carpe diem*. The songs of blind harpists are depicted in the most ancient stelae or chapels of Middle Kingdom tombs because they were played at funerals. According to banquet scenes, they conveyed the ‘idea’ of a feast. The deceased in these songs was referred to using the osiriatic title of the ‘justified’  (*mAA-xrw*). The underlying intention of playing music was to glorify the dead and invoke their rebirth in the great beyond on the one hand, and to celebrate the pleasures of life

in a ‘gay day’  (*hrw nfr*) on the other. Musical ensembles reproduced the joyful life of eternity, and people drank and danced with music around a pool and a kiosk see Deiter Arnold, *Encyclopaedia of*

<sup>61</sup> N. and A. EL GUEBALY, “Alcohol abuse in ancient Egypt. The recorded evidence”. *The International Journal of the Addictions* 16 (7), 1982, p. 1207-1221.

<sup>62</sup> D. BREWER, E. TEETER, *Egypt and the Egyptians*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001, chap. 7, “Ancient Egyptian Society and family life”.

<sup>63</sup> N. EBED, *Egyptian medicine in the days of the Pharaohs*, General Egyptian Book organization Press, 1999,

<sup>64</sup> H. LUTZ, *Viticulture and brewing in the Ancient Orient*, Leipzig, Heinrich, 1922, p. 85.



Figure 16 - Excessive consumption in Ancient Egypt, Theban Tomb, New Kingdom (D. Brewer, D. Redford, S. Redford, *Domestic plants and animals: The Egyptian Origins*, p. 60)

Slika 16. Prekomjerno uživanje alkohola u starome Egiptu, grobnica u Tebi, Novo egipatsko kraljevstvo (D. Brewer, D. Redford, S. Redford, *Domestic plants and animals: The Egyptian Origin – Domaće bilje i životinje egipatskoga podrijetla*, str. 60.)

*Ancient Egyptian Architecture*, p. 130 decorated with tendrils and shaded by vines, similar to a scented barrel-shaped construction, whose ceiling was lighted by stars. In the *Feast of tendrils and of drunkenness*, an annual festival celebrated at Dendera, Osiris is depicted in a kiosk flanked by tendrils and overgrown with vines. The Jubilees or Heb Sed of the Pharaoh became too Osiriac and according to W. Kristensen <sup>65</sup> were at first held under a barrel, later aboard a ship <sup>66</sup>, and finally in a palace courtyard. Cults devoted to Hathor, also a sky deity, had a Bacchic aspect, as she was a goddess of physical love, beauty, music, and intoxication <sup>67</sup>.

Evoking the *ka* or spirit <sup>U</sup> (kA) of the deceased or living people in their Bacchic songs, Egyptian harpists invite them to get drunk and raise a cup of wine 'for his ka', as we saw in the symposia. The Egyptian word *kanw*,

<sup>65</sup> W. KRISTENSEN, *De loofhut en het loofhuttenfeest in dem egyptischen cultus*, Amsterdam, 1923, p. 20.

<sup>66</sup> A. ROSSO, "Les bateaux et le sacré dans l'Ancienne Egypte", *Proceedings of Evolving Egypt : innovation, appropriation and reinterpretation in Ancient Egypt*, Brigham Young University- Hawaii, USA, 2012.

<sup>67</sup> A. ROBERTS, *Hathor rising, (the serpent power of Ancient Egypt)*, Wiltshire, Redwood Books, 1995), p. 9.


 (k)Anw) or kam(u)
 
 (k)Am(w), derived from ka, in turn, means a vineyard.

Negative effects of alcohol could also harm social relationships, because Seth's partisans would become infuriated and lose control, which would often result in quarrels and conflicts with other persons. According to the *Chester Beatty Dream Book* (BM 10683 N<sup>o</sup> III), an inebriated person, acquires the Thyponic <sup>68</sup> characteristics of the beast Seth, god of confusion. Moreover, alcohol was restricted to Egyptian soldiers, who had to wait until the end of a campaign to get their ration, contrary to the uses of other cultures where drunkenness gave strength and courage, as much in war as in love. For example, Vedic god Indra, a great warrior and a dragon slayer, was a great drunkard who consumed the yellow Soma juice <sup>69</sup> to gain courage in combat and love prowess in erotic adventures. Plato (Laws I, 648a-649c) too recorded that wine drinking among Greek soldiers, as well Thracian who went into battle <sup>70</sup>, was acceptable because it drew away fear and inspired exceptional valour and boldness in battle. The man who drank would suddenly become joyful and full of beautiful illusions. Convinced of his wisdom, he'd become more sincere. Roman legionnaires also drank before they entered a battle <sup>71</sup>, not only to become more courageous and audacious, but also to avoid contamination because wine sometimes mitigated the bad effects of impure water.

*“The Greeks considered wine and beer to be two sorts of intoxicating substances, in different ways. But the typical Greek drinking ideology, at least as far as it can be reconstructed from the writings of elite Athenians of the V and IV century B.C. did not end with the supposition of the superiority of wine over beer. It also involved two other important notions: moderation and discrimination”* <sup>72</sup>. They thought that wine was pure, hot, with particular effects on

<sup>68</sup> Typhonic or Typhon, from the Greek word *thuphon*, make reference to the name of the father of the winds and to a common noun meaning ‘whirlwing’. It is applied to the totemic animal of the god Seth, a dog-like creature native to desert regions, renowned for its intelligence and its hostility to human beings.

<sup>69</sup> It is a strong intoxicating drink deified, made with the Soma Plant, and its exhilarating juice was identified with the Moon who containing the celestial nectar, the drink of gods. The Mon-God pour down his ambrosia rain through the sieve of heaven, the Soma Juice.

<sup>70</sup> M. NELSON, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

<sup>71</sup> V. SINGLETON, “An enologist’s commentary on Ancient wines” in P. MCGOVERN, S. FLEMING, S. KATZ(ed.), *The origins and ancient history of wine*, Luxembourg, Gordon and Breach, 1995, p. 67-77, p 75; T. UNWIN, *Wine and the vine: an historical geography of viticulture and wine trade*, London, Routledge, 1991, p. 179.

<sup>72</sup> M. NELSON, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

the drinker (heavy-headedness according to Aristotle (*De somnis* III, 436 b), while beer was corrupt, cold, effeminate, and stupefying<sup>73</sup>. It was considered inferior to wine because the processes of fermentation was misunderstood, assumed that wine was unaffected by the ‘corrupting’ power of yeast. They did not know that in both substances the interaction of yeast and sugar produced alcohol.

Plato (*Laws* II, 655 d ss.), however, also admitted that wine could unchain uncontrollable passions and bad habits, which had always been condemned in Egypt. In Greece, instead, ethical values remained fluctuant because men liked new sensations. Plato examined banquets and presented (*Laws* I, 637 c) them as inciting a variety of pleasures. Drunkards were always prone to losing their temper and going crazy. This is why Dionysiac festivals were forbidden in ancient Sparta; they were irreverent and made men to become crazy by getting drunk. In Athens, however, they were accepted. Plato concluded that such celebrations were agreeable and attractive, but did not lead to happiness or justice. On the contrary, this could even encourage evil disposition, and moderation was essential. Moreover, according to Matthew (58, 564), alcoholism was criticized in the Ancient Greek world, when Christianity expanded, since the excess of wine and drink led to the sin of madness.

Around 1500 B.C., the Egyptian society started to reject excessive drinking, as shown in “The making of the scribe Ani” in Papyrus Anastasi IV: “*Make not thyself helpless in drinking in the beer shop*”. *As for thy companions in the swilling of beer, they will get up and say: ‘Outside with this drunkard’*”<sup>74</sup>. An economic preventive measure against the abuse of alcohol was raising taxes<sup>75</sup>. In Egypt, aphorisms related to temperance were well known, as we see in a demotic text of *The Book of Proverbs* (P. Insinger, 6, 13)<sup>76</sup>: “*Qui de trop de vin se remplira, le mal aux cheveux, au lit, le tiendra*” (*He who drinks too much wine, lies down in stupor with the head lost*).<sup>77</sup>

Numerous moralising poems and pieces of advice of wise men and scribes describe the dubious joy of drinking and warn against consuming alcoholic beverages. To paraphrase one: beer robs you of all human respect;

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<sup>73</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>74</sup> W. BUDGE, *The Dwellers on the Nile*, New York, Bloom, 1926.

<sup>75</sup> N. and A. EL GUEBALY, *op. cit.*

<sup>76</sup> A. VOLTEN, *Das demotische Weisheitsbuch, Studien und Bearbeitung*, Kopenhagen, Einar Munksgaard, 1941, *Analecta Aegyptica* v. II.

<sup>77</sup> F. JONCKHEERE, “Le monde des malades”, *CdE* 50, 1950, p. 213-232, p. 224-5.

it affects your mind and here you are like a broken rudder, good for nothing <sup>78</sup>. However, these proverbs seem to ignore other harmful effects of alcohol abuse such as chronic liver disease, pancreatitis, cardiomyopathy, peripheral neuropathy, dementia and central nervous system disorders.

In the Late Period, both beer and wine were consumed again in excess at the Pharaonic court, according to a demotic source <sup>79</sup>. King Amasis of the Saite Dynasty XXVI, 8<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> century B.C., used to drink so heavily that he was drunk at all times and could not handle state matters to the point of raising complaints among his entourage. “*It could be said, from a general perspective, that these kinds of vices might have contributed to the decline of the Egyptian Empire*” <sup>80</sup>.

In the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C., the Egyptian society deepened this tendency towards degradation, as shown in two texts at the tomb of Petosiris that encouraged the dead and the living to fall down in sacred drunkenness procured by wine: “*Come in ! (to the living), I will guide you to the path of life... Drink, get drunk, do no stop feasting, follow the dictates of your heart during the time that you are on earth*” and speaking to the deceased: “*Drink till drunk, do no stop doing what you love*”. The Lefevbre’s version in French is: « *Venez (les vivants), je vous guiderai vers le chemin de la vie ... Buvez, enivrez-vous, ne cessez de faire la fête, suivez les inspirations de vos coeurs, dans les temps que vous êtes sur terre* » <sup>81</sup> et s’adressent au mort lui conseille: « ... *Bois, enivre-toi, ne cesse pas de faire ce que tu aimes...* » <sup>82</sup>.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Beer and wine were the oldest and probably the most widely used drugs in antiquity, and people believed that they had supernatural and mood-altering properties. These beverages were also considered the long-sought elixir of life and were used in religious and social ceremonies to achieve pleasant sensations, ecstasy and euphoria. They also played a vital part in the daily life in Ancient Egypt. Beer was enjoyed by both adults and children

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<sup>78</sup> G. POSENER, *A Dictionary of Egyptian civilization*, London, 1962, p. 69.

<sup>79</sup> “Story of a mariner”, *Great demotic papyrus of the Bibliothèque Nationale de Paris*, Ptolemaic Period, recto 11-12.

<sup>80</sup> A. ROSSO, “Poppy and opium in ancient times, remedy or narcotic?”, *Biomedicine International* Vol.I, N° 2, 2010, p. 81-87, p. 87.

<sup>81</sup> G. LEFÉVRE, *Le tombeau de Pétoiris*, Le Caire, IFAO, 1923, t. I, p. 161 and 60.

<sup>82</sup> Sur l’intoxicación divine voir M. STRACMANS, “Osiris-Dyonisos et les chants de harpistes égyptiens”, Louvain, Imprimerie Orientaliste Durbecq, 1946, p. 207-14 and G. PINCH, *Votive offerings to Hathor*, Oxford, 1993, p. 198 and 245.

as a healthy nourishment. In addition, beer and wine were considered to have some therapeutic value and were common ingredients in medical preparations. Considered virtually panaceae, they became useful as anaesthetics, as stimulants, as painkillers, as antiseptics, and as antidotes.

However, the high level of alcohol consumption could lead to the sin of drunkenness and the harmful effects of alcohol abuse. Even though there was a tendency to live in the present, to drink, and enjoy the pleasures of life and feasting, wise men rejected excessive drinking and preferred preserving human dignity.

To sum up, we can say that two views prevailed about alcohol drinking in antiquity: one negative, because of the sin of drunkenness that could ruin men's life and the other positive, because of the beneficial effects for all types of illnesses, if taken in small doses. In the first case it was advisable to exercise self-control, as moderation was essential for a person to live wisely and to get respect.

All things considered, wine was the ambiguous gift of Dionysus to humanity because excessive alcohol drinking made men mad, and the mankind had to learn to avoid its pitfalls and use it in moderation to thwart the actions of envious gods.

#### SAŽETAK

*U antička su se vremena različite vrste alkoholnih pića poput piva i vina koristile u medicinske svrhe. Za njih se znalo da imaju terapijska svojstva, a usto su imale važnu ulogu u svakodnevnom životu ljudi.*

*Etanol nastaje fermentacijom različitih vrsta biljaka, a konzumira se razvodnjen ili koncentriran destilacijom te pripremljen u obliku alkoholnih pića. Ječmeno pivo najstarije je znano alkoholno piće za koje se smatralo da ga nastanjuje duh ili božansko biće. Riječ je o piću s razmjerno niskom količinom alkohola i nadnaravnim svojstvima. Slično se vjerovalo i za vino. Ta su se pića smatrala božanskim eliksirima života te su se pojavljivala u religijskim ceremonijama, mitologiji, i gozabama poput grčkih symposia.*

*Osim toga, smatralo se da mogu liječiti gotovo svaku bolest, pa su bila česti sastojci antičkih recepata. Rabila su se kao anestetici da se umrtvi bol, kao stimulansi, analgetici, antiseptici za čišćenje rana i ublažavanje bolova, kao emetici, digestivi, protuotrovi kod trovanja biljkama, za ugrize i ubode te kao pročišćivači. Ne smije se, međutim, zanemariti štetno djelovanje zbog njihove zlorabe, poput pijanstva, kroničnoga oštećenja jetre te, rabeći modernu terminologiju, bolesti poput pankreatitisa, kardiomiopatije, periferne neuropatije, demencije i poremećaja središnjega živčanog sustava.*

**Ključne riječi:** pivo, vino, antička vremena, nadnaravna svojstva, ljekoviti pripravci, zloraba alkohola