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THE CULTURAL CONSTRUCTION OF BEER
AMONG GREEKS AND ROMANS

MAX NELSON

Abstract: Although beer was a common beverage in practically all ancient societies, the wine-drinking Greeks and Romans mysteriously excluded it from their diet. It is too simplistic to state that they simply disliked the drink, since those who ventured to try some beer did not necessarily find it so distasteful. Rather, the very fact that beer was the beverage of others was enough to condemn it.

Anthropologists have long realized that cultural practices involving the fundamental elements of food and drink have more than simple nutritional or alimentary explanations; they also have important social and ideological functions. Recently, Peter Garnsey has shown how among Greeks and Romans, as among other societies, the comestible was indeed considered “a marker of ethnic and cultural difference.”¹ Although Garnsey makes scant mention of it, a striking marker of this type was the Greek and Roman use of wine instead of beer. Yet beer (fermented malted cereal in water) was a common beverage in practically all ancient societies.²

* Much of the material in this paper comes from my Ph.D. thesis (University of British Columbia 2001). I would like to thank all those who have commented upon my thesis, including especially Robert Todd, as well as Rob Cousland, Harry Edinger, Douglas Gerber, Phillip Harding, Richard Unger, and also Ralph Nelson, along with the editors and the anonymous referee of this publication. I further gratefully acknowledge the financial assistance of the Izaak Walton Killam memorial fund and of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

¹ Garnsey 6. For a summary of recent anthropological work on the cultural construction of drinking, see Gefou-Madianou.

² Strabo (17.2.5) said that beer was common among many peoples, though the methods of preparation differed from place to place (and see Plin. *HN* 18.13.71, which may refer to beer and its widespread use). For a full account of the history of beer in

In fact, it seems that although the pre-Greek inhabitants of Crete, that is the Minoans, and even perhaps those early inhabitants of Greece, the Mycenaeans, drank beer, the archaic Greeks not only excluded the beverage from their diet but seem to have lost all knowledge of it.³ The Greeks apparently only rediscovered beer in the seventh century B.C., when they began to undertake colonizing expeditions, since in our earliest sources beer is consistently associated with Thracians and Paeonians to the north and Phrygians to the east.⁴ By about 500 B.C. it was known that the Egyptians were beer-drinkers.⁵ Ctesias may have brought knowledge of beer from India, Xenophon from Armenia, and Pytheas from the far North.⁶ The Greeks must have also been aware of Iberian and Gallic beers from early on (about the sixth century B.C.), though the former is first mentioned only by Polybius and the latter by Posidonius.⁷ The Greeks and Romans also adopted some dozen or so native words for the beverage.⁸

ancient Europe and its widespread use elsewhere, see Nelson (forthcoming). For beer in Greco-Roman antiquity, see also Olck, Schulze-Besse, Forbes, André 177–78, Ruprechtsberger, Kramer, Both, Volke, Dayagi-Mendels, and Valiño.

³ Evans (1:414–15 and 4.2:622–29) already suspected as much, but only recently has this been supported by scientific analysis of vessels: see Tzedakis and Martlew 159–63 and 183 (Minoans); 166–74, 176, 207–08 (Mycenaeans); and Pain.

⁴ Thracians and Phrygians: Archil. fr. 42 West (Gerber takes this rightly as a sexual reference, unlike Medaglia); for Mesopotamian iconographical parallels, see West 498–99. Thracians: Aesch. *Lyc.* fr. 124 Radt. Thracians and an unknown peoples (Phrygians?): Hellenic., *FGrH* 4 F 66. Paeonians: Hecat., *FGrH* 1 F 154.

⁵ Hecat., *FGrH* 1 F 323, who seems to have influenced both Aeschylus (*Suppl.* 952–53) and Herodorus (2.77.4). For Ethiopian beer, see Strabo 17.2.2. Interestingly, Babylonian beer is only attested in the Greco-Roman material in Julius Africanus (*Cesti* 1.19.21 Vieillefond).

⁶ India: Strabo, 15.1.53; Plin. *HN* 18.13.71 (?); and Ael. *NA* 13.8, perhaps all ultimately from Ctesias's *Indica*. Armenia: Xen. *An.* 4.5.26–27. Far North: Pytheas, *De Oceano* fr. 7 Roseman.

⁷ Polyb. 34.9.15 and Posidon. frs. 169 and 170 Theiler. Posidonius also mentioned beer among the Lusitanians (fr. 22 Theiler) and perhaps the Ligurians (Strabo 4.6.2; Posidonius is known from Strabo's testimony [3.4.17] to have gone to Liguria, but this reference to Ligurian beer has not been attributed to him in the standard editions).

⁸ For the sake of brevity, I shall not distinguish between the various Greek and Latin terms for beverages made from fermented malted cereals, but shall translate all the

The great mystery of how Greeks came not to drink beer may be insoluble, at least with the evidence now available, but something can be said about why they, along with the Romans, continued to exclude the beverage from their diet.⁹ It is certainly not enough simply to state, as has been done recently, that "the Greeks and Romans on the whole clearly disliked beer."¹⁰ Most Greco-Roman references to beer occur in neutral descriptions of the drinking habits of foreign peoples: the Egyptians drink barley beer, the Celtiberians wheat beer, the Scythians millet beer, the Indians rice beer, and so forth.¹¹ Some of the allusions are undeniably negative. However, for each negative trait imputed to beer there almost invariably exists some further testimony to the contrary.

To begin with, the taste of many beers sometimes proved unappealing to Greek and Roman palates. Galen contrasts barley beers which are pungent and warming (δριμύ καὶ θερμαίνον) with those which are sour, watery, and cooling (ψυχρόν, ὑδατώδες, ὀξύ).¹² Beers are regularly described in terms of these two categories, that is, as either pungent (which could just as well describe odour as taste) or sour. The physician Aretaeus,

terms simply as "beer" (though it should be noted that there was no equivalent *vox propria* in either Greek or Latin).

⁹ Further suggestions concerning this issue will be found in Nelson (forthcoming).

¹⁰ James and Thorpe 335. See also, for instance, Yates and Flather 407 ("contempt felt by the Greeks and Romans for this barbarian drink"); Forbes 284 ("beer languished in the disfavor of Greeks and Romans"). Julian's epigram on beer (*Anth. Pal.* 9.368 = *Ep.* 1 Page) is often marshalled in support of such statements; however, this poem is hardly vituperative, but rather playful, relying, as it does, on numerous puns (see below).

¹¹ Egyptian barley beer: Hecat., FGrH 1 F 323; Aesch. *Suppl.* 952-53 with schol.; Hdt. 2.77.4; Theophr. *HP* 4.8.12; Dio Academ. *Symp.* (?) in Ath. 1.34b; Diod. Sic. 1.34.10; Aret. *SA* 1.9.4 (= *CMG* II, 11.24-26). Celtiberian wheat beer: Dsc. 2.88; Plin. *HN* 18.12.68; Florus, 1.34.12; Oros. 5.7.13 (= *PL* 31.933B) copied by Isid. *Etym.* 20.3.18 (= *PL* 82.713C-714A). Scythian millet beer: Anon. *Lex.* s.v. μελύγιον in *P.Oxy.* XV.1802.ii.41-42; and see Priscus, *Ecl. hist. goth.* fr. 11.2, ll. 278-280 Blockley. Indian rice beer: see the sources in n. 6 above. In what follows, I do not intend to cite all Greek and Latin references to beer, but only those bearing on the question of the Greek and Roman opinion on the beverage (and thus leave aside, for instance, much of the papyrological, epigraphic, archaeological, and archaeochemical evidence, as well as the lexicographical and alchemical sources, all of which bears little on this question).

¹² Gal. *De simpl. med. temper. ac facult.* 6.6.3 (= 11.882.7-8 Kühn) (later copied in many other authors).

also from the second century A.D., similarly speaks of pungent (δριμύ) Egyptian barley beers, while the Christian author Theodoret, some two hundred years later, speaks of beer not only as sour (ὀξύδες), and foul-smelling (δυσώδες), but adds that it is harmful, and really produces no enjoyment.¹³ Certainly a vinegar-like quality (resulting from the contamination of airborne bacteria and yeasts) would have made beers unappetizing to connoisseurs of good wine, for which the fermentation, arising as it does from yeast found naturally on the grape skins, could be better controlled. Beers were sweetened, probably to counteract the common sourness: Posidonius speaks of Gallic wheat beer prepared with honey, and Theophrastus says that in Egypt the leaves of the μαλιναθάλλη plant (apparently a type of sedge) were added in the boil to make sweeter beer.¹⁴ Surely the ancient beer-makers would not have commonly produced a *thoroughly* foul beverage. Xenophon had the occasion to drink Armenian barley beer; though he unfortunately does not describe the taste, he does note that it is extremely good once one gets used to it.¹⁵

Beer was further sometimes considered nothing more than fermented, impure water. Pliny, in a discussion of beer, marvels at the idea that even water can be made to intoxicate: "Oh, the wondrous ingenuity of vices!" he exclaims.¹⁶ Julius Africanus speaks of peoples without wine who refuse to drink plain water and who thus make beer, and Jerome, who believes that wine has to be avoided just as much as beer, states: "The Egyptians use beer the most since they do not allow plain water for drinking, but cloudy, and as if mixed with the dregs."¹⁷ The fermentation process in

¹³ Aret. *SA* 1.9.4 (= *CMG* II, 11.24–26); Theodoret, *Comm. in Isaiam* 6.285–86 Guinot (omitted in *PG* 81.351A). Sour beer is also mentioned by Jonas (*Vit. Sadalb. abbat.* 20 [= *MGH-SRMV* 61.8–10] or 3.19–20 [= *ASS* 46.527F–528A (not in *PL*)). Paulus Orosius (5.7.14 [= *PL* 31.934A]; copied by Isid. *Etym.* 20.3.18 [= *PL* 82.713C–714A]) speaks of the "harsh flavor" (*sapor austeritatis*) of Numantian beer.

¹⁴ Posidon. fr. 170 Theiler and Theophr. *HP* 4.8.12 (and see Plin. *HN* 21.52.88). I thank Eleanor Irwin for helping me with the latter passage. For other possible Greco-Roman mentions of beer additives, see Hecat., *FGrH* 1 F 154 (fleabane?) and Columella 10.114–16 (skirwort, a root, lupines, probably meant to be eaten with beer).

¹⁵ Xen. *An.* 4.5.27 (πάνυ ἤδὺν συμμαθόντι τὸ πῶμα ἦν).

¹⁶ Plin. *HN* 14.29.149 (*heu mira visiorum sollertia*).

¹⁷ Jul. Afric. *Cesti* 1.19.19–20 Vieillefond; Jerome, *Comm. in Isaiam* 7.19.5–11 (292) (= *PL* 24.253A): *hoc maxime utuntur Aegyptii, ut non puras aquas bibentibus tribuans*.

the production of beer was thought to make the water adulterated and cloudy, as Eusebius relates.¹⁸ However, the Roman physician Celsus claims that beer is more nutritious than water (which he calls *imbecillissima*), because of the cereals from which it is produced.¹⁹

Furthermore, the fermentation of beer is sometimes spoken of as a form of decomposition.²⁰ Theophrastus says: "They even turn into drinkable juices things which have departed from their nature and have somewhat rotted, such as those who make wines from barley and wheat and the so-called *zuthos* in Egypt."²¹ Dionysius of Halicarnassus claims that Celtic beer was a foul-smelling liquid, made from barley rotted in water.²² The Emperor Julian incidentally agrees about the stinkiness of Celtic barley beer, saying that the real Dionysus, wine, smells of nectar, while the fraudulent one, beer, smells of a billy-goat (τράγος); of course this is mainly said for the sake of a pun on τράγος meaning a type of cereal (exactly which is unknown).²³ Tacitus, like

sed turbidus, et commixtarum fecium similes. Jerome may have been making a pun on *faex* meaning both "dregs" and "excrement" (Isidore [*Etym.* 20.3.18 (= *PL* 82.714A)] defines *faex* as "that which is gathered from the overflowing vessels [of beer]" [*quod sese vasis emergendo adfigas*]); see further below on the uses to which beer dregs were put. Wine and beer to be avoided: most clearly in Jer. *Ep.* 52.11 (266) (= *PL* 22.536–537).

¹⁸ Euseb. *Comm. in Isaiam* 1.75 (= *PG* 24.227B). One glossary (*CGL* III 315.67 s.v. ζυθος) defines beer as *turbulentum* ("cloudy"), and Fortunatus speaks of the cloudiness of beer (*De vit. sanct. Radeg. reg.* 1.15 [= *PL* 72.657A and 88.504A = *MGH-SRM* II 369.24–25]). Charlemagne rightly emphasizes the necessity of cleanliness when making beer as well as other products (*Capit. de vill. imper.* 34 [= *PL* 97.353B–C = *MGH-CRF* I 32, 86.9–12]), and earlier Bede (?) had wisely advised that one should not drink beer with a dead mouse in it (*De remed. peccat.* [= *PL* 94.571B]).

¹⁹ Celsus, *Med.* 2.18.11.

²⁰ Since the process of malting involves allowing grain to germinate (that is, come to life), in order to convert the starches into sugars, and then stopping the sprouting by drying the grain (that is, killing it), the subsequent soaked malt could logically be thought to be decomposing.

²¹ Theophr. *Caus. pl.* 6.11.2: τοὺς δὲ καὶ ἐξίσταντες τῆς φύσεως καὶ ὑποσήποντες εἰς χυλοὺς ἄγουσι ποτίμους (οἷον ὡς οἱ τοὺς οἶνους ποιοῦντες ἐκ τῶν κριθῶν καὶ τῶν πυρῶν καὶ τὸ ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ καλούμενον ζυθος).

²² Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 13.11.1.

²³ Julian in *Anth. Pal.* 9.368.2–3 (= *Ep.* 1.2–3 Page); a number of other puns follow, none denoting a negative characteristic of beer.

Theophrastus and Dionysius, also equates the fermentation of beer with spoiled barley.²⁴ Again, there is a testimonial to the contrary. Diodorus Siculus states no less than four times that beer was not lacking in the good aroma of wine.²⁵

Galen says that because beer may arise from that which is rotten, it is bad for the humours (κακόχυμος).²⁶ On top of that, Galen, and Dioscorides before him, mention that beer causes flatulence; Julian's personal physician Oribasius later would add that this is especially true of the product from Cyrene.²⁷ Then as today, one would have been well advised to stay away from Libyan beers.

Medical authors occasionally remark upon the harmful effects of beer on the head, tonsils, stomach, liver, kidneys, sinews, and membranes.²⁸ Beer is also referred to as a diuretic and purgative,²⁹ traits which could actually be useful depending on one's particular circumstances. Cyril feels that beer is impure and harmful, that it causes unspecified incurable illnesses, and that it only rouses more thirst when drunk, while wine, as the *Psalms* note, "gladdens man's heart" (a biblical vindication for wine also quoted by Theodoret).³⁰ Oribasius also praises wine over

²⁴ Tac. *Germ.* 23.1.

²⁵ Diod. Sic. 1.20.4, 1.34.10, 3.73.6, and 4.2.5.

²⁶ Gal. *De simpl. med. temper. ac facult.* 6.6.3 (= 11.882.6 Kühn) (often later copied). Beer is bad for the humours already in Dsc. 2.87 and 88, though without the accompanying explanation.

²⁷ Dsc. 2.87 and Gal. *De simpl. med. temper. ac facult.* 6.6.3 (= 11.882.7 Kühn) (and later copied). Cyrene: Orib. *Coll. med.* 3.23.4 (= *CMG* VI.1.1, 83.13–14) = *Syn.* 4.22.4 (= *CMG* VI.3, 136.22). In the twelfth century, Petrus Blesensis wrote (*Compend. in Job* 1 [= *PL* 207.804A]): "beer produces winds" (*cerevisia ventos facit*).

²⁸ Dsc. 2.87 (kidneys, sinews, and membranes) and 88 (head and sinews); Aret. *SA* 1.9.4 (= *CMG* II, 11.24–26) (tonsils); [Gal.] *De affect. ven. insid. dign. et curat.* 7 (= 19.693.6–7 Kühn [not in *CMG*]) (stomach, liver, and sinews). Pliny, however, notes (*HN* 23.22.37) that beer helps the sinews. A beery old woman is given as medicine some ground root by a doctor (or Asclepius himself?) in Antiphanes, *Ascl.* fr. 47 Kassel-Austin.

²⁹ Diuretic: Dsc. 2.87. Purgative: Didymus fr. 14, no. 55 Schmidt in *Schol. in Ar. Pac.* 1254; *Schol. in Ar. Thesm.* 857; *Suda* s.v. μελανοσυρμαϊον (μ459).

³⁰ Cyril, *Comm. in Isaiam* 2.4 (287–288) (= *PG* 70.459CD) and Thd. *Comm. in Isaiam* 6.287–88 Guinot (not in *PG*), quoting *Psalms* 104:15: εὐφραίνοντὸ καρδίαν ἀνθρώπου.

beer, but wine is just as often spoken of negatively in the medical literature.³¹ Dioscorides makes the claim that beer, but also a variety of Cretan wine, produces elephantiasis.³² In a treatise falsely attributed to Galen, it is said that wine, beer, other alcoholic beverages, and even cold water harm the stomach, liver, and sinews.³³ Aristotle, in a fragment from his dialogue on drunkenness, remarks that wine makes one heavy-headed and when drunk excessively makes one fall onto one's face, while beer is rather stupefying and makes one turn upside down on one's head!³⁴

But along with the negative medical views of beer, there are many claims for its benefits. It is useful to ingest it (with other ingredients) for good and plentiful breast milk in women, or against coughs, worms, and asp venom, and it is recommended that it be applied with mustard on arrow wounds.³⁵ Beer dregs (*faeces*) mixed with leaves of dane-wort are thought to help against scrofulous tumours.³⁶ The foam (*spuma*) produced during the fermentation of beer (known today as the "krausen head") is "top-cropped" and used to make leavened bread and also as a facial cosmetic for women.³⁷ Pliny also says that beer is helpful for taming elephants, and there is also evi-

³¹ Orib. *Coll. med.* 5.31.12 (= *CMG* VI.1.1, 151.3–5). For the positive and negative assessments of wine in classical medicine, see McKinlay 1950.

³² *Dsc.* 2.87 (beer) and 5.32.2 (beer and wine).

³³ [Gal.] *De affect. ren. insid. dign. et curat.* 7 (= 19.693.3–8 Kühn [not in *CMG*]).

³⁴ Arist. *De ebriet.* fr. 106 Rose³ in Ath. 1.34b. When Athenaeus quotes this section of Aristotle later (10.447a–b) he says rather that beer makes one fall onto one's back while all other intoxicants make one fall any which way.

³⁵ Breast milk: Antyllus in Orib. *Coll. med.* 34.6–7 (= *CMG* VI.2.2, 128.28–35) and in Aëtius Amidenus, *Libr. med.* 4.6 (= *CMG* VIII.1, 362.30–363.9). Coughs: Marcellus Empiricus, *De med.* 16.33 (= *CML* V 126.40–127.2). Worms: Marcellus Empiricus, *De med.* 28.13 (= *CML* V 221.23–36), distorted in Cassius Felix, *De med.* 72 (175, n. Rose; not in *CML*); Aët. 1.285 s.v. *μυσοσώτης* (= *CMG* VIII.1, 112.17–18), 3.156 (= *CMG* VIII.1, 326.5–6), and 9.37 (= *CMG* VIII.1, 370.15–16). Asp venom: Philumenus, *De ven. anim. cor. remed.* 16.8 (= *CMG* X.1.1, 22.21–24), copied by Aët. 13.22 (= *CMG* VIII.1, 282.1–3). Arrow wounds: Aët. 13.12 (= *CMG* VIII.1, 269.20–21).

³⁶ Plin. *De med.* 3.6 (= *CML* III, 71.20–21).

³⁷ Bread: Plin. *HN.* 18.12.68. Cosmetic: Plin. *HN.* 22.82.164. I thank Iain Hill for discussing such details with me.

dence that beer was used to intoxicate elephants before going into battle.³⁸ Just like wine, beer thus held a precarious place on the ancient apothecary's shelf, now thought helpful, now harmful. In the sixth century A.D., while King Theodoric's physician Anthimus extolled the benefits of beer, his contemporary Fortunatus, Bishop of Poitiers, could speak of its impurity and it causing dropsy.³⁹ This of course is no arcane debate; even today physicians do not agree on whether moderate drinking is beneficial or not.

Whether good-tasting or bad-tasting, healthy or harmful, beer was unavoidably barbaric. Beer was the drink of the dissolute, uncultivated, and uneducated Emperor Valens (from Pannonia), and because of his penchant for it he was derided by the inhabitants of Chalcedon whom he was besieging.⁴⁰ Beer was barbaric because, for one, it was drunk undiluted with water, unlike the manner in which wine was drunk among Greeks and Romans, even though beer was, it seems, just as strong as wine, if we are to trust Diodorus Siculus.⁴¹ Another barbaric trait was drinking in large quantities, as opposed to the moderation expected at the symposium.⁴² Thor-

³⁸ Taming: Plin. *HN*. 8.24.8 (I owe this reference to Chris Epplett), and see Manuel Philes. *Exp. de eleph.* 139–42. For wine taming elephants, see Arist. *De ebriet.* fr. 107 Rose³ in Athen. 10.429d and Ael. *VH*. 2.40. Battle: Ael. *NA* 13.8 and Manuel Philes. *Exp. de eleph.* 145–51. Other sources mention intoxicating elephants with wine before battle: 3 Macc. 5:2, 10, 43 (with Joseph. *Ap.* 2.53), and see 1 Macc. 6:34–35. Beer was also used to soften ivory (Dsc. 2.87; Plut. *An vit. ad infelic. suff.* 4 [= *Mor.* 499e]) and to whiten pearls ([Zos.] 5.9.4 and 11 [2.368.18–23 and 370.8–9 Berthelot-Ruelle]).

³⁹ Anthim. *De observ. cib., epist. ad Theud. reg. Franc.* 15 (= *CML* VIII.1, 10.6.11); Fortun. *App. carm.* 9.15–18 (= *MGH-AA* IV.1 281–82 [not in *PL*]).

⁴⁰ Dissolute: Amm. Marc. 26.7.16; uncultivated and uneducated: 29.1.11, 30.4.2, and 31.14.5, 8; derided: 26.8.2. For Ammianus's treatment of Valens, see Tritle, esp. 142.

⁴¹ Beer undiluted: Xen. *An.* 4.5.27 with *Suda* s.v. ἀκρατος (a964); Pliny, *HN*. 14.29.149. Wine diluted: first found in Hom. *Od.* 9.203. Beer as strong as wine: Diod. Sic. 1.20.4. Monks would later drink "weak" (*tenuis*) beer; see Eigilus, *Vit. sanct. Sturmii* 13 (= *PL* 105.433B–C). The barbarians also drank wine undiluted: see, for instance, on the Gauls, Posidon. frs. 169 and 170 Theiler and Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 14.8.12; on the Germans, Posidon. fr. 188 Theiler; on the Scythians and Thracians, Pl. *Leg.* 637d, quoted in Ath. 10.432a (and see 427a–c).

⁴² For heavy-drinking Thracians, see Ath. 10.442e–f; Indians: 437a. The heavy-drinking Germans would often fight (Tac. *Germ.* 22.2). For moderation at the symposium, see, for instance, Pellizer.

oughly barbaric as well was the use of sieved vessels or filtered straws to drink beer, in order to avoid floating husks and sediment. This is a practice well known from near eastern depictions and archaeological finds, and it is mentioned by Archilochus and Xenophon.⁴³ Not only was this a barbaric habit, it was considered downright bizarre to the Greeks and Romans: Pomponius Mela and Pliny relate that straws were used by a certain people whose mouths were sealed except for a small opening under the nose.⁴⁴ Indeed, why else would one use such things?

Beer was not only unfit for the civilized, but even unfit for men, at least according to Aeschylus. He has King Pelasgos of Argos in his *Suppliants* sneer to the Egyptian herald, who is specifically said to be a "barbarian" (κάββαρος): "But, truly, you will find that the dwellers of this land are men, not drinkers of the inebriant [made] from barley."⁴⁵ Also, it seems that Lycurgus, in Aeschylus' eponymous satyr play, considered himself manly for drinking beer, for which he was certainly ridiculed.⁴⁶ Similarly, Julius Caesar notes that the Belgian tribe of the Nervii as well as the Germans in general did not allow wine to be imported into their respective territories because they believed that it would weaken their spirit and courage, and make them soft and effeminate; they evidently thought otherwise about beer.⁴⁷ Today we are squarely on the barbaric side of this ideological

⁴³ Depictions: Röllig passim. Finds: Maeir and Garfinkel. Phrygian sieve-spouted beer jugs are discussed by Sams; such vessels from Israel are discussed by Dayagi-Mendels 120 and 122–125; it has been tentatively suggested that similar jugs found in the sanctuary of Demeter and Kore in Corinth were used for beer (Bookidis 93). Archil. fr. 42 West; Xen. *An.* 4.5.26 with *Suda* s.v. (γόνατον (γ377) and s.v. μυζεις και μυζεις (μ1381). Posidonius (fr. 169 Theiler) says that the thick moustaches of the Celts acted as strainers for their drinks.

⁴⁴ Pomp. Mela *Chorogr.* 3.9.91 and Plin. *HN.* 6.35.188 (no mention is made of what sort of beverage these people drink).

⁴⁵ Aesch. *Suppl.* 914 and 952–953: ἀλλ' ἄρσενάς τοι τῆσδε γῆς οἰκῆτορας εὐρήσει', οὐ πίνοντα ἐκ κριθῶν μέθυ.

⁴⁶ Aesch. *Lyc.* fr. 124 Radt, with Sommerstein 59. Cratinus may have also considered beer effeminate (fr. 103 Kassel-Austin).

⁴⁷ Nervii: Caes. *BGall.* 2.15.4, with which see also 1.1.3; Germans: 4.2.6. For the lack of finds of Roman amphorae in northern Belgian Gaul and Germany, see Fitzpatrick, esp. 311–12, and Cunliffe 178–79. Beer among the Gauls/Celts: Posidon. frs. 169

debate: not only is beer enjoyed straight (and sometimes strong), but nothing is considered manlier.

Beer then, unlike wine, was thought to be barbaric and effeminate, and it was also apparently considered a lower class drink by Greeks and Romans. Thus Polybius said that a certain Iberian king could match the luxury of the Homeric Phaeacians except that in his gold and silver vessels there was beer, presumably rather than the wine only to be expected in such containers.⁴⁸ Similarly, Athenaeus also mentions beer as evidence for the modesty of the Egyptian diet.⁴⁹ Beer was much cheaper than wine, at least as far as we know from Diocletian's price edict of A.D. 301, in which an Italian sextarius (or pint) of Celtic barley or wheat beer costs four denarii and of Egyptian beer two denarii, as compared to eight denarii for the cheapest wine.⁵⁰ Although the production of wine can be more time-consuming and expensive than that of beer, it makes sense to see some ideological reasons behind such large differences in prices,⁵¹ and for European beers

and 170 Theiler; Dsc. 2.88; Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 13.11.1; Plin. *HN* 14.29.149, 18.12.68, and 22.82.164; Jul. Afric. *Cesti* 1.19.20–21 Vieillefond; Julian. *Ep.* 1 Page in *Anth. Pal.* 9.368.3–4; Jonas, *Vit. Columb.* 26 (= *PL* 87.1026B–C); Anon. *Vit. Columb. abb. disc. eius* 1.16 (= *MGH-SRM* IV 82.5–8); etc.; and see Pytheas fr. 7 Roseman and Ammian. Marc. 15.12.4. Beer among the Germans: Tac. *Germ.* 23.1; Jonas, *Vit. Columb.* 26 and 53 (= *PL* 87.1026B–C and 1040C–1041B); Anon. *Vit. Columb. abb. disc. eius* 1.16 and 27 (= *MGH-SRM* IV 82.5–8 and 102.12–103.2); and see below. Posidonius (fr. 188 Theiler) said that the Germans drank wine, which seems to contradict Caesar (*BGall.* 4.2.6).

⁴⁸ Polyb. 34.9.15. Some scholars have liked to restore Soph. *Tript.* fr. 610 Radt to read that beer is not even fit for pigs.

⁴⁹ Ath. 10.418e. Elsewhere, Athenaeus quotes Dio the Academic's statement that the rich drank wine and that the poor were forced to drink beer (1.34b).

⁵⁰ Diocl. *Ed.* 2.11–12 (beer) and 1–10, 13–19 (wine). In a text from A.D. 111 found in Vindolanda, beer is listed at only 8 asses per metretres (*Tab. Vindol.* II.186.11–12); no price for the wine there has yet been found (see the list of prices in Bowman and Thomas 306–07).

⁵¹ Though the cultivation of grapes is much more time-consuming and expensive than that of cereals, the production of beer requires more work than that of wine, since the sugar, water, and yeast are all present in the grape, whereas cereals must be malted and water and yeast supplied. Also, though aging certainly could contribute to a higher price, the cheapest wine listed by Diocletian does not even seem to have been aged;

being thought of more highly than Egyptian ones. In fact it was under the influence of the Greek and Roman preference for wine that upper class Celts and Egyptians took to drinking wine rather than beer.⁵² Even today one will be thought a little less sophisticated for drinking beer; we have the Greeks and Romans to thank for that.

Thus, what distinguished beer most from wine was the fact that beer was the drink of others. Hartog has usefully shown that cultural differences in general can be translated in two main ways: through a schema of inversion or of comparison.⁵³ As we have seen, descriptions of beer often followed both schemas simultaneously, in so far as, on the one hand, the primacy of wine was usually assumed and thus wine was used as a comparandum and, on the other hand, beer was marginalised and was thus described in inverse terms: wine was civilized and beer barbaric; wine manly and beer effeminate; wine upper class and beer lower class.

the cheapest aged wine is listed at 16 denarii (*Ed.* 2.9). Furthermore, there is evidence that beer was also sometimes aged. Pliny notes (*NH.* 14.29.149): "the Hispanians have even taught the aging of such types [of drinks, i.e. beers]" (*Hispaniae iam et vetustatem ferre ea genera docuerunt*). Also, Aeschylus (*Lyc.* fr. 124 Radt) may have referred to an aged beer if the manuscripts' "weakened by time" (ισχυαίωνων χρόνιο) is the correct reading. Certain beers today are aged in oak or chestnut casks or refermented in the bottle (most notably in Belgium).

⁵² Celts: Posidon. fr. 170 Theiler, with the archaeological confirmation cited by Tchernia, esp. 92–95. Posidonius (fr. 169 Theiler) even claims that Gauls would trade a slave for one jar of Italian wine. For the general Gallic fondness for wine, see the sources collected in Tchernia 97 n. 22. Ammianus Marcellinus notes of the Gauls in general (15.12.4): "It is a race fond of wine, disposed to numerous drinks resembling wine" (*vini avidum genus, affectans ad vini similitudinem multiplices potus*). Egyptians: Dio Academ. *Symp.* (?) in Ath. 1.34b, and see Garnsey 118. On the other hand, Strabo (17.1.14) says that most Alexandrians drink Libyan wine and beer, and both wine and beer were found at the riotous chariot races, according to Dio Chrys. (*Orat.* 32.82); Gal. (*Hipp. aph. comm.* 20 [= 17b.492.14–493.5 Kühn (not in *CMG*))] also speaks of beer as part of the Alexandrian diet. By late antiquity it seems that wine-drinking was more prevalent than beer-drinking in Egypt, see Bagnall 32 and also Drexhage 38–39. For Mesopotamia, see, for instance, Bottéro esp. 32. Some cultures which drank Italian wine did not normally exclude beer from their diet for ideological reasons as Greeks and Romans did. We similarly find later that the Ligurians drank barley beer, but also purchased Italian wine at Genoa in exchange for flocks (Strabo 4.6.2), and the Germani in Tacitus' day drank beer and also had a weakness for imported wine (*Germ.* 23.1). Indeed most cultures were not very choosy about their intoxicants.

⁵³ Hartog 213–24 (inversion) and 225–30 (comparison).

There are numerous other proofs of ancient Greek and Roman vinocentricity with respect to beer. Beer is often simply referred to as barley *wine* or wheat *wine*, and barbarians were said to make intoxicating beverages in *imitation* of wine, and to have recourse to beer when *wine* was wanting.⁵⁴ Plutarch says that “lovers of wine use barley drink when the vine is not available, and some ciders, and others make date-palm wine.”⁵⁵ In another passage, Plutarch is not very positive about such substitutes. He compares the sexual relationship of an adult man with a teenage boy rather than with another adult in a reciprocal relationship to drinking beer rather than wine: it is a fruitless, unfulfilling quick fix.⁵⁶

A vinocentric outlook, however, does not always imply that wine is necessarily considered a superior drink. This is well exemplified in the two stories relating to Dionysus' role of god, not only of wine, but of beer. Diodorus Siculus and Julius Africanus both explain that Dionysus taught certain people the making of wine, and where the vine could not grow, the making of beer. But while Julius treats beer as nothing less than a punishment from Dionysus, Diodorus takes both drinks as gifts

⁵⁴ Barley wine: Hdt. 2.77.4; Xen. *An.* 4.5.26 with *Suda* s.v. οἶνος (οι135); Theophr. *Caus. pl.* 6.11.2; Polyb. 34.9.15; Dio Academ. *Symp.* (?) in Ath. 1.34b; Aelius Herodianus, *De prosod. cath.* 6 s.v. ζῦθος (= *GrGr* III.1, 145.14); Ath. 10.447b; *Anth. Pal.* 9.368 lemma A; Orib. *Coll. med.* 5.31.12 (= *CMG* VI.1.1, 151.3–4); Hesych. *Lex.* s.v. ζῦθος (ζ202); Phot. *Lex. [Bibl.]* s.v. ζῦθος (ζ61); *Suda* s.v. ζῦθος (ζ196); etc. Wheat wine: Theophr. *Caus. pl.* 6.11.2; Orib. *Coll. med.* 5.31.12 (= *CMG* VI.1.1, 151.3–4); *CGL* V 177.25 s.v. *ceruesia*. Rice wine: Ael. *NA* 13.8. Beer was popularly considered *vinum* (*Dig.* 33.6.9) and is listed under the category “wine” in Diocl. *Ed.* 2.11–12. Strangely enough, Eustathius (*Ad Iliadem* 11.638 [= 871.57]) says that some call beer “Dionysiac wine” (Διονυσιακὸς οἶνος). Beer in imitation of wine: Verg. *G.* 3.379–80 with Serv. *Comm. ad Verg. Georg.* 3.380; Jul. Afric. *Cesti* 1.19.17–20 Vieillefond; and see Tac. *Germ.* 23.1 and Amm. Marc. 15.12.4. Beer as substitute for wine: Hdt. 2.77.4; Dio Academ. *Symp.* (?) in Athen. 1.34b; Posidon. frs. 22 and 169 Theiler; Dsc. 2.88; Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 13.11.1; Cass. Dio. 49.36.3; Julian in *Anth. Pal.* 9.368.3–4. However, in *Schol. in Aesch. Suppl.* 953 it is claimed that the Egyptians invented beer before wine was invented. Pliny, rather than continuing his discussion on beer at *NH* 22.82.164, says: “it is preferable to pass on to a discussion of wine” (*praestat ad vini transire mentionem*).

⁵⁵ Plut. *Quaest. conu.* 3.2 (= *Mor.* 648e): οἱ φίλοινοι μὴ παρόντος ἀμπελίνου κριθίνῃ χρώνται πώματι, καὶ μηλίτας τινάς, οἱ φοινικίνους οἶνους ποιοῦσιν.

⁵⁶ Plut. *Amat.* 5 (= *Mor.* 752b).

of the god, differing only in so far as climactic conditions would dictate which was to be made.⁵⁷

Christians tended to consider beer an invention of man, not a divine gift, but they nevertheless held conflicting views similar to those of the pagans about the relative value of beer and wine.⁵⁸ Church fathers, armed with a mistranslated passage of *Isaiah* in which the Egyptian beer-makers are foretold to perish, readily attack beer while praising wine on God's authority.⁵⁹ However, after the fifth century A.D., with the German dominance in Europe, general attacks on beer cease, and only pagan religious rituals involving beer are condemned. Monks are found drinking beer, while saints, and holy men and women, supposedly performed miracles involving beer through the intercession of God.

One Christian author advises that older ascetics should drink wine or beer (except on holy days) to take care of their bodies and not offend God.⁶⁰ In the sixth century A.D., the British author Gildas mentions in

⁵⁷ Diod. Sic. 1.20.4, 3.73.6, and 4.2.5 (copied by Euseb. *Praep. evang.* 2.2.4 [= PG 13.711A]); Jul. Afric. *Cesti* 1.19.21–24 Vieillefond.

⁵⁸ Thd. *Comm. in Isaiam* 6.284–85 Guinot (not in PG); Paulus Aegineta, *Epit. med.* 7.3.6 s.v. ζύθος (= CMG IX.1, 213.13), where a note as to its artificiality is added to Galen's account; Jonas, *Vit. Sadalb.* 20 (= MGH-SRMV 61.9–10 [not in PL]); Johannes Zonaras, *In can. sunct. apost.* 3 (= PG 137.40C). Beer, of course, can be naturally produced, if, for instance, grains of cereal detached from the living plant or unsown grains are soaked by rain or moistened because of poor storage conditions, sprout, then are dried by the sun and then soaked again, and finally ferment spontaneously through the action of airborne yeast.

⁵⁹ *Isaiah* 19.9–10 (LXX) with Euseb. *Comm. in Isaiam* 1.75 (= PG 24.227AB); Cyril, *Comm. in Isaiam* 24.287–288 (= PG 70.459CD); Thd. *Comm. in Isaiam* 6.283–88 Guinot (not in PG); Jer. *Comm. in Isaiam* 7.19.5–11 (292) (= PL 24.252C + 253A). It may have also been significant that Jesus dealt with wine (see Mt 9:2) but never beer in the New Testament.

⁶⁰ [August.] *Ad frat. in eremo sermo* (= PL 40.1286). There are also a number of Christian texts (from the sixth century A.D. on) which discuss fasts or penances in which beer is forbidden, pointing to the fact that beer was usually drunk: for instance, David, *Excerpta* 11 (= SLHV 70.33 + 72.1–2) or 5 (= PL 96.1318D), Anon. *Canon. Hibern.* 2.12 (= SLHV, 166.11–13, col. 1), and Theod. Cant. *Liber poenitentialis* 1 (= PL 99.935D, 936D, and 937B).

passing the presence of beer and meat in a monastery.⁶¹ Slightly later, the Irish Saint Columban, who founded the monasteries of Annegray, Luxeuil, and Fontaines in France, and Bobbio in Italy (and died in A.D. 615), devised a notoriously strict rule for them, in which, among much else, he punished severely the spilling of beer by monks.⁶² It should be noted, however, that he was after all not so strict as to completely forbid the consumption of alcohol, as was the case in some other rules.⁶³ In fact, Columban, whose rule was followed by many, seems to have spread Irish beer-drinking in the monasteries in Europe, where Benedict (founder of the Roman and Gallican custom in the early sixth century), who had known of those who considered wine not fit for monks, advised that it nevertheless could be drunk sparingly.⁶⁴ There were even certain monasteries which had both beer and wine; some served wine only on special days or for special guests, while others only served beer once the wine had run out, adhering rather well to the classical notion of beer as inferior to or as a mere substitute for wine.⁶⁵

Columban was also said to have been involved in a number of beery miracles. Most appropriate, considering his intolerance for spilled beer,

⁶¹ Gildas, *De poenit.* 22 (= *MGH-AA XIII.90* = *SLHV.62.29*) or 15 (= *PL 96.1316D*). Unfortunately, the monastic rule used by Gildas has not survived, though it is thought to have influenced Columban's (see Stevenson 208).

⁶² Columb. *Reg. coen. frat.* 3 (= *SLH II.146.25*) or 10 (= *PL 80.217A*).

⁶³ Beer was not allowed at the Irish monastery of Tallaght in the eighth century, even on feast days (Anon. *Monast. Tall.* 6 [edited in Gwynn and Purton 129–30; and see 40 at 142–43]). In a surviving rule for the monastery of Kilrose, Ireland (perhaps to be dated as late as the thirteenth century [Gougaud 777] and not the fifth [as assumed in the *PL*]) it is written that monks should not drink wine or beer (Anon. *Ordo monast. Kilrosi* [= *PL 59.563C*]). In an Old Irish penitential from the late eighth century, it is advised that even those who have vowed not to drink beer should have three sips of it each Easter and Christmas to stay healthy (14 [= *SLHV 261*]).

⁶⁴ Bened. *Reg.* 40 (= *PL 66.641C + 642C*); he makes no mention of beer. Benedictine monks today, however, brew beer, most notably those in Belgium.

⁶⁵ Both wine and beer: see, for instance, Bede, *Vit. sanct. Cuthb.* 35 (= *PL 94.774B–C*) or 53 (= *ASS 9.111E*). Wine served on special days or to special guests: Anon. *Regula cuisd. patr. ad virg.* 10 (= *PL 88.1062B–C*), copied by Bened. Anian. *De concord. Reg.* 48.10 (= *PL 103.1122B*). Beer served once wine has run out: Hlotharius, *Capitul. monast.* 22 (= *MGH-CRF I 345.18–19* [not in *PL*]); Amalarius, *Reg.* 122 (= *PL 105.917D–918A*).

his presence at a monastery ensured that a jug left unattended under the running tap of a keg did not overflow.⁶⁶ Also, just as Jesus had multiplied loaves and fish, Columban multiplied bread and beer.⁶⁷ Similarly, Saint Brigid of Kildare (from the seventh century A.D.) was not only able to multiply beer (which, it must be said, she had made herself), but more than once she was able to transform water into beer, just as Jesus had turned water into wine at the wedding in Cana.⁶⁸ Brigid's miracle beer-from-water even once cured her ailing wetnurse.⁶⁹ There were those, however, who were not even satisfied in having beer, let alone water, and who miraculously caused beer to turn into wine.⁷⁰

Indeed, even God did not sanction all brews: there were those that were thought to be possessed by the devil. Columban, encountering some

⁶⁶ Jonas, *Vit. Columb.* 26 (= *PL* 87.1026B-1027A) and Anon. *Vit. Columb. abb. disc. eius* 1.16 (= *MGH-SRM* IV 82.1-24). A similar miracle was recounted of the seventh century St. Bercharius by the tenth century Adso (*Vit. sanct. Berch.* 1.10 = *ASS* 55.1012D-E).

⁶⁷ Jonas, *Vit. Columb.* 28 (= *PL* 87.1028A) and Anon. *Vit. Columb. abb. disc. eius* 1.17 (= *MGH-SRM* IV 84.7-19), where it is explicitly compared with Jesus's feeding of the five thousand (for which, see Mt 14:15-21, Mk 6:35-44, Lk 9:12-17, and Jn 6:1-13; for the four thousand, see Mt 15:32-38 and Mk 8:1-9). Jonas also claims that the abbess Sadalberga multiplied beer on one occasion (*Vit. Sadalb. abbat.* 20 [= *MGH-SRM* V 61.6-25] or 3.19-20 [= *ASS* 46.527F-528A (not in *PL*)]). Around the same time, a certain farmer from Avernus was able, through prayer, to multiply beer for his thirsty workers (Greg. Tur. *De glor. conf.* 1 [= *PL* 71.829BC +830B = *MGH-SRM* I.2 748.25-749.12]). There are many other references to beery miracles in the hagiographies, which will have to be left aside.

⁶⁸ Multiplied: Anon. *Vit. sanct. Brig.* 3.18 (= *ASS* 4.121D), and for Old Irish sources, see Greene, *Transformed: Cogitosus*, *Vit. sanct. Brig.* 2.11 (= *PL* 72.780B-C = *ASS* 4.136E), who compares it explicitly with Jesus's miracle (for which, see John 2:1-11); see also, for example, Anon. *Vit. sanct. Brig.* 16.100 (= *ASS* 4.133C), Chilien. *Vit. sanct. Brig.* 1.4-5 (= *ASS* 4.142B-C), and Anon. *Vit. sanct. Brig.* 10.62 (= *ASS* 4.169E-F).

⁶⁹ Anon. *Vit. sanct. Brig.* 2.10 (= *ASS* 4.120D). Brigid once even accidentally turned water into beer, when, thinking that she was carrying a vessel of beer rather than water, she thanked God for it (Anon. *Vit. sanct. Brig.* 3.24 [= *ASS* 4.121F-122A]).

⁷⁰ Eginhardus, *Hist. transl. beat. Marc. et Petri* 4.44-45 (= *PL* 104.563D-564C) or Einhardus, *Transl. et mirac. sanct. Marc. et Petri* 4.11 (= *MGH-SXV*.1 251.43-53 and 252.2-6).

German Suevi in Brigantia (modern Bregenz, Austria) making an offering to "Vodanus" (that is Wodan) of a large keg of beer in which the devil was hidden, demonstrated the power of God by blowing the vessel to smithereens simply by breathing upon it.⁷¹ Similarly, when Saint Vedastus (in the early sixth century) once entered a room while making the sign of the cross, beer containers that had been polluted by demonic incantations likewise burst.⁷² Indeed, beer could never be fully accepted after the Greco-Roman verdict on the beverage had been cast.

From this wide-ranging collection of evidence, it can be clearly seen how the fundamental reason for beer's general exclusion from the Greek and Roman diet was really ideological. Greeks and Romans describe beer as a sour, foul-smelling, impure, cloudy, harmful, flatulence-causing, unmanly liquid made from rotten cereals, a divine punishment; but also as a sweet, good-tasting, nice-smelling, nutritious, healthy, useful, strong cereal beverage, a divine gift. The very fact that beer was the drink of others was enough to condemn it, and the actual intrinsic merits of the beverage probably had little influence on verdicts against it. Those who actually ventured to try some brew did not necessarily find it so bad.

CLASSICAL AND MODERN LANGUAGES
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⁷¹ Jonas, *Vit. Columb.* 53 (= PL 87.1040C-1041B) and Anon. *Vit. Columb. abb. disc. eius* 1.27 (= MGH-SRM IV 102.12-103.2).

⁷² Alcuin, *Vit. sanct. Vedasti* 3.17 (= PL 101.674A-B = ASS 4.806F-807A), and see the slightly different version in Jonas (?), *Vit. Vedasti* 7 (MGH-SRM III 410.15-411.10 = ASS 4.802C-D). Note also the story of miraculously bursting kegs in the Old Irish *Bretha Nemed* (translated in Koch and Carey 63-64). It is quite possible that such stories were told to explain the phenomenon of kegs bursting from excessive carbon dioxide pressure.

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- CCM Hallinger, K., et al., eds. *Corpus Consuetudinum Monasticarum*. Siegburg, Germany: F. Schmitt, 1963-.
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- CIL Deutsche Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin. *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*. Berlin: G. Reimer; W. de Gruyter, 1863-.
- CMG Preussische Akademie der Wissenschaften. *Corpus Medicorum Graecorum*. Leipzig: Teubner, 1908-.
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