



# Historically Speaking

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## Egyptian (and Nubian) Beer

In ancient Egypt and Nubia, beer was so essential it was treated principally as a type of food – it was consumed daily and in great quantities at religious festivals and celebrations. Beer was an essential for laborer's, like those who built the pyramids of Giza, who were provided with a daily ration of  $1\frac{1}{3}$  gallons. Yet it still had divine status, with several gods and goddesses associated with beer. Hathor, the goddess of love, dance and beauty, was also known as 'The Lady of Drunkenness'.

In the Museum's Egyptian galleries, you can see models excavated from tombs which show wooden figures of brewers straining mash through a cloth into ceramic vessels. This visual clue, alongside the research of Delwen Samuel, led to a two-stage mash, which was left to ferment in a vessel containing a harvested yeast culture. The advantage of a two-stage mash is its simplicity. The cold mash is made using ambient temperature water and a malted, ground grain. This mash will contain all the active enzymes required to convert starch to sugar. The second mash, which is processed at the same time, consists of ground, unmalted grain. This is mixed with hot water and further heated.

There is evidence of heat exposure on ceramic brewing vessels found in Egypt. It is unlikely that earthenware would be heated above 80 degrees (as it would compromise the material), so this was probably the temperature for the hot portion of the mash. Heating grain to this temperature allows the starches present to unravel, but kills the enzymes. By preparing the two mixtures separately and then combining them, both the accessible starches and the enzymes required to convert them are present in the final mix.

The hot mash and the cold mash were mixed together and left to cool, so that the enzymes could start to convert the starches in the grains to fermentable sugars. When cool, the mash was sieved of any residual grain, directly into the terracotta fermenting vessel, which had been pre-inoculated with a harvested yeast strain. More warm water was used to rinse remaining starches and sugars from the grains. The vessel was covered with a muslin cloth and left to ferment. The resulting beer would have been drunk while still actively fermenting from the ceramic vessel itself.

The above information and the picture are excerpted from an article found on the British Museum website with selective editing on my part.

<https://blog.britishmuseum.org/a-sip-of-history-ancient-egyptian-beer/>

In other research, it has been found that Nubian beer had a rich natural antibiotic content resulting from the brewing process using emmer wheat.



Painted wooden model of four figures preparing food and beer. From Sidmant, Egypt, 6th Dynasty (c. 2345–2181 BC).