

# the RED CUP

Q&A



separating alcohol fact from fiction  
EVERY TUESDAY IN THE DAILY WILDCAT

## Q Where was beer first invented? Was it really in Egypt?

**A.** The history of beer goes back millennia to the birth of civilization. Hieroglyphics show Pharaohs drinking the cold stuff – make that the warm stuff – over 5,000 years ago, a gift befitting royalty and a worthy offering to the gods. They were certainly not alone. Historians and archaeologists have found evidence of beer and beer-making around the globe including Mesopotamia, Syria, Israel, China, Greece and more. The Babylonian Code of Hammurabi, etched in stone and clay around 1792 BC, even cites rules related to brewers and the ancient taverns they ran. As Christianity expanded into Europe, the popularity of beer surged, most notably due to monks whose monasteries doubled as breweries.

While ice beers, specially lined cans, and *krausening* came much later, beer in its basic form has been around for a very long time. Like many things, the first brews were probably happy accidents. Even before the rise of agriculture and the cultivation of barley, the principle grain associated with beer, we can imagine a curious *Homo sapien* drinking a groggy honey and rainwater mixture in a hollowed out tree that had fermented from wild, wind-blown yeasts. The result would have been a crude version of what we would today call mead, or honey wine.

All beers are the result of fermentation, the process by which carbohydrates, usually in the form of sugars or starches, are converted into ethanol (alcohol) and carbon dioxide gas. In most European brewing traditions, these carbohydrates are derived from malted barley, where grains are germinated in water then halted by drying them out. The *Saccharomyces* genus which brewing yeast belongs to are the most important and – until relatively recently – least understood aspect of the brewing process. Not until the rise of microbiology and Louis Pasteur in the 1850s were the connections between yeasts and fermentation explicitly made.

Believe it or not, the concept of moderation may be almost as old as beer itself. Sophocles, the ancient Greek playwright, spoke of the idea of balancing moderate amounts of drink with a well-rounded diet. Today, many people continue to enjoy beer for the same reasons earlier cultures did, and like them, understand that despite its benefits, it's also possible to have too much of a good thing.

Reference: Arnold, John P (2005). *Origin and History of Beer and Brewing*

wildfact

Moderate drinking is defined for men as no more than two drinks per day or one drink per day for women. (NIAAA)



Got a question about alcohol? Email it to [redcup@email.arizona.edu](mailto:redcup@email.arizona.edu)



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