

4-24-2015

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Recommended Citation

Lowman, Nathan, "The 8th Wonder of the World: Deutsch Bier" (2015). *History Class Publications*. 15.
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Medieval Europe

Dr. Hicks

April 24, 2015

The 8th Wonder of the World: Deutsch Bier

The definition of beer is an alcoholic beverage usually made from malted cereal grain (as barley), flavored with hops, and brewed by slow fermentation.¹ Today in modern culture beer has become a major part of our society. Beer has become an art form than to some type of liquid you drink to get drunk off of. People have become so infatuated with brewing that people develop their own beer or known as craft beers. Well during the medieval ages the substance known as beer became huge in monasteries. Beer culture was a prevalent thing in society back during the medieval ages the culture of beer became very popular thing in monasteries, so popular that purity laws would be developed in Germany in the making and selling of beer.

(Artifact) Weihenstephaner Brewery

The artifact that was chosen for this medieval project is the Weihenstephaner Monastery Brewery. To set beginning of this monastery brewery we must go back to the medieval ages. During the medieval ages the church would send monks into wilderness of Europe to set up monasteries and spread the word of God. There is a legend of how a Saint name of Corbinian got to Freising, Germany to set up the monastery; which would later be known as the Weihenstephaner monastery. It would also explain how the town of Freising got their coat of arms. The legend is this “French Bishop Corbinian first arrived in Freising in 724 on his way to Rome. According to legend, a hungry bear ate his mule. Having, now, no animal to carry his pack, the bishop tamed the bear, which then carried Corbinian’s baggage to Rome, where it was

¹ Webster dictionary

released. Freising's coat of arms depicts the bear with Corbinian's pack. Corbinian was the first bishop of Freising."² In the year 725 A.D. the history of Weihenstephaner would be clearer. In this year it would be a "decisive turning point for Weihenstephan"³; in this year of 725 the Saint Corbinian and with twelve companions (probably monks) would become the founders of the Benedictine monastery on the Nährberg Hill.⁴ According to the brewery's main website they say that also during 725 the monks "consciously or unconsciously founded the art of brewing at Weihenstephaner."⁵

In the year 768 A.D. the first historical reference to hops was at Weihenstephaner. Now that is a very important thing to beer because hops: it adds flavor, contributes the bitterness that will counteract to the sweetness to barley, and most essential contribution of hops as it helps preserve the beer itself. At that time (around 768) "there was a hop garden in the vicinity of the Weihenstephan Monastery, whose owner was obligated to pay a tithe of 10 per cent to the monastery. It is an obvious conclusion that these hops were brewed in the monastery."⁶ In 955 A.D. it was that the Hungarians or the "Huns" plundered and would bring about the destruction of Weihenstephan Monastery; therefore it would lay the foundation for "a long-standing tradition that condemned the Benedictine monks" to repeat the rebuilding of their monastery.⁷

Finally in 1040 A.D. the beer brewing at Weihenstephaner would officially begin. In that same year a man named Abbot Arnold succeeded in obtaining from the city of Freising a license to brew and sell beer; unfortunately there is nothing else known about this man.⁸ With Weihenstephaner monastery now with a license it would mark the true beginning of the brewery.

² "Technische Universität München"

³ Cynthia Bertelsen, "Weihenstephan, the Oldest Brewery in the World?"

⁴ Weihenstephaner

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Cynthia Bertelsen, "Weihenstephan, the Oldest Brewery in the World?"

⁷ Weihenstephaner

⁸ Ibid

There is an interesting anecdote that has been taken from the brewery's website, which has been found to be humorous. The Pope during that time wanted to know why the Bavarian monks liked to drink so much strong beer during Lent⁹. So he would order samples; well by the time the beer made it to Rome it had lengthy trip over the Alps and the beer had become "unpalatable." The beer must have been so strong and bitter that it had to have tasted awful. The Pope would have full respect for these Bavarian monks, and continued to let the monks enjoy their such strong beer.¹⁰

Then later between 1085 and 1463 the Weihenstephan monastery would be burned down completely four times and the monastery was also destroyed and plundered by the Swedes and French in the Thirty Year War and then by the Austrians in the War of the Spanish Succession.¹¹ The Weihenstephan monastery was destroyed and the city of Freising was depopulated "by three plagues, and by a great earthquake."¹² But every time the brewery was destroyed or plundered the Bavarian monks were always determined to rebuild and make the beer even better.

Later in 1516 an eventful milestone surfaced on the art of brewing; because in the year 1516 Duke Wilhelm IV of Bavaria issued a Bavarian Purity Law; this Purity Law entailed that beer must be brewed only with barley, hops and water.¹³ Later in 1895 a school would be place at or near the brewery. The "school became an academy, and was elevated in 1919 to the University for Agriculture and Brewing which was incorporated in the Technical University of Munich in 1930. Thus Weihenstephan developed into the center of world brewing technology. The fact that much for the outstanding reputation of the Bavarian State Brewery was of Weihenstephan. After all, here the naïve brewing students from countries all over the world are

⁹ It is a type of Catholic Tradition

¹⁰ Cynthia Bertelsen, "Weihenstephan, the Oldest Brewery in the World?"

¹¹ Weihenstephaner

¹² Ibid

¹³ Ibid

turned into the world's best brewers."¹⁴ Today the Weihenstephaner Monastery Brewery is considered the oldest still running brewery in the whole world.

The Weihenstephaner brewery has many beers that they produce they have: Hefeweissbier, Hefeweissbier Dunkel, Korbinian, Kristall Weissbier, Pilsner, Vitus, Original Premium, Oktoberfestbier, Josefi Bock, Pale Ale, White Hoplosion, and Fresh Hops Finest.¹⁵ The brewing is nearly 1,000 years old, of course with new technology being added into the process; but they have "300 hands working" on the brewing process.¹⁶ The stages of brewing these beers a general five step method: Mashhouse, Fermenting Cellar, Storage Cellar, Filter System, and last Barrelling and Bottling Cellar. The first step the Mashhouse, is where they first make the beer by mashing the barley/wheat malt and brewing water; from there it turns into wort the basic component of beer.¹⁷ Still in the mashhouse they will boil the wort and add hops, which will determines how the beer will taste.¹⁸ The second step is the Fermenting Cellar; this is where "after brewing, the solid hops and protein components are removed from the wort, which is then cooled to 10 degrees Celsius, before the cultured yeast is added. The wort then ferments for one week, producing alcohol and carbon dioxide. When it is finished we have so-called new or green beer."¹⁹ The third step is the storage cellar, this cellar is 15 meters beneath the monastery garden; it is where they put the beer to give it an opportunity to recover from the rigors of being brewed.²⁰ After 30 days the beer will not become old but mature beer.²¹ The fourth step is the filter system; this is where it filters out all the impurities until it is ready for

¹⁴ Weihenstephaner

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ Ibid

²¹ Ibid

bottling.²² The last step is the barreling and bottleing cellar, which is where they just package their beer for shipment.

Alcohol/Beer Context History

So how did alcohol and/or beer get to the point where monasteries like Weihenstephaner come to the point of developing beer for their selves; and why did beer become a major part of cultural society? Well it is not certain when mankind started developing the substance known as alcohol. Alcohol started off with diluted wine in the Ancient B.C. period. There are also findings of late Stone Age beer jugs establishing the fact that of intentional fermented beverages existing far back as the Neolithic period.²³ Beer did not become significant until the Egyptians began creating is in their civilization. “The Egyptians believed that this important god also invented beer, a beverage that was considered a necessity of life; it was brewed in the home on an everyday basis.”²⁴ Then finally into Europe the culture of beer explodes across the lands and become very popular with the Celts, Anglo-Saxons, Germans, and Scandinavians. “With the collapse of the Roman Empire and decline of urban life, religious institutions, particularly monasteries, became the repositories of the brewing and winemaking techniques that had been earlier developed.”²⁵ The monks in these monasteries would brew all the good quality beer, but around the thirteenth century the development of a new ingredient called hops would come into the picture; which give both flavor and preserves. Beers would come in different forms such as mead, ale, and lager; giving beers a “thick nutritious soupy beverage, soured quickly and was made for local consumption.”²⁶ Beer would become known as some times as liquid bread, because for some beer wheat was a major ingredient. If harvest was low that year on wheat they

²² Weihenstephaner

²³ David Hanson, "History of Alcohol and Drinking around the World"

²⁴ Ibid

²⁵ Ibid

²⁶ David Hanson, "History of Alcohol and Drinking around the World"

would turn it into beer instead of bread because you could get more out of beer than bread with same harvest.²⁷ As the medieval ages started to come to an end the popularity of beer would spread to England, France, and Scotland.²⁸ The form of crafting or brewing beer would turn away from monasteries and more towards guilds and be more officially recognized that way.²⁹ That is going on before, in-between, and after Weihenstephan, context wise.

Importance of the Artifact

The importance on this artifact shows how the development of beer became a large part of society's culture, economics, and feeding the people in liquid form. One reason that this artifact is so important is because the city of Freising became very wealthy during the medieval ages because of the Weihenstephaner Monastery Brewery. The Weihenstephaner Monastery Brewery shows how other monasteries got through the medieval ages and why they brewed. The monasteries would brew beer in order to be self-sustaining. They would use their beer to barter or to trade with other merchants. They also would sell their beer to the community, which was sometimes used to pay taxes; and the monks would also just drink the beer some sources say that monks could only drink four liters a-day.

The enlargement of brewing beer and the advancement of how to the beer in monasteries would cause laws to be made, especially in areas that are today Germany. One major law that was made in 1516 is The German Beer Purity Decree of 1516 or also known as the Das Reinheitsgebot.³⁰ The Reinheitsgebot Law was first proclaimed by the Bavarian King Wilhelm IV in the town of Ingolstadt.³¹ The Law stated:

²⁷ David Hanson, "History of Alcohol and Drinking around the World"

²⁸ Ibid

²⁹ Ibid

³⁰ "Das Reinheitsgebot: The German Beer Purity Decree of 1516"

³¹ Ibid

“By authority of our land, that henceforth everywhere in the Principality of Bavaria, in the country, as well as in our cities and marketplaces that have no such special ordinance for it: From Michaelmas [Sept. 29] until the Feast of St. George [April 23], a mug [1] or one head [2] of beer is not to be dispensed for more than one Munich penny, and from the Feast of St. George to Michaelmas, the liter mug shall not be dispensed for more than two pennies of the same currency, the head for not more than three Heller [3], by threat of the penalties spelled out below.”³²

“However, when one brews any beer (other than *Märzenbier*), it will under no circumstances be dispensed and sold for more than one penny per mug. Furthermore, we especially decree that henceforth in all our towns, marketplaces and the whole of the countryside, that for no beer shall any ingredients other than barley, hops, and water be used and employed. Anyone who knowingly ignores our threat and violates it shall be punished by the court of his jurisdiction by having said barrel of beer summarily confiscated, each time it happens.”³³

That is the bases of it, the rest gets into innkeepers buying and selling of the monastery beer. This law had two forms in Germany; the difference depended weather you were in Northern or Southern Germany. In Northern Germany during the medieval ages was established as a basic staple food for the city’s citizens.³⁴ It was regulated by civil laws and would be heavily defended by the nobles and the church. “Beer production regulations were determined by the city government and the guilds.³⁵ In Southern Germany local rulers had more influential power over

³² “Das Reinheitsgebot: The German Beer Purity Decree of 1516”

³³ Ibid

³⁴ Jennifer McGavin, "All About German Beer Law - Reinheitsgebot - Biergesetz"

³⁵ Ibid

the beer regulations.³⁶ According to Jennifer McGavin “this was good for the purity law, because it went into immediate effect over all of Bavaria.”³⁷

This artifact was very interesting but it could be researched further. More research needs to be on the Weihenstephaner Monastery itself and on the monastery brewing culture as well. Something that would have been useful if there was more information on alcohol and the culture surrounding it throughout time. It would of also help it have maybe some first or second hand accounts of the peoples experience with monasteries and the way they sold beer to the citizens of the towns, or just how they felt about beer in general. There also needs to be more historical context written about how alcohol entered into society and where it all did really start; there are really no academic articles on the subject matter. I would probably sway someone away from doing this topic until there is more information on this subject.

Conclusion

The Weihenstephaner Monastery Brewery shows to be not just the oldest still running/brewing brewery in the whole world; it also shows a piece of important culture during the medieval ages. The culture provides a look at why monasteries start to develop beer for reasons such as self-sustaining and all while worshiping and spread the word of God. While the Weihenstephaner Monastery Brewery was just one out of multiple monasteries in German developing beer, it shows how the influence of the beer culture can spread especially towards the end of the medieval ages.

³⁶ Jennifer McGavin, "All About German Beer Law - Reinheitsgebot - Biergesetz"

³⁷ Ibid

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