

JOE SIXPACK

Chocolate beer: For Aztecs, not wusses

AS VALENTINE'S Day rears its head, it seems appropriate to examine the unmanly topic of chocolate and beer.

I say "unmanly" because of all the strange, new brews that are challenging our palates these days, it's chocolate-flavored beer that seems to draw the most viscerally negative response from the mainstream lager crowd. Offer a taste to one of these guys, and it's as if they'd been asked to wear pink underwear and sip their suds from Lennox tea-cups.



JOE SIXPACK

A new body of archeological and chemical research, however, provides a completely different image. Namely: Aztec warriors dragging their human sacrifice to the top of a pyramid, ripping his still-beating heart from his chest, then cooking up the beaten corpse for a festive orgy.

And what did they wash it all down with? Chocolate beer, of course.

That's right, the drink of choice in the Mesoamerican region was a fermented beverage made with the pulpy fruit surrounding the seeds of cacao trees. Researchers have discovered that the earliest inhabitants of Mexico and Central America were drinking something resembling chocolate beer at least 3,000 years ago.

"This was the most elite beverage in the Americas," said Patrick McGovern, senior research scientist at the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology. "It was made for the kings and the gods."

McGovern was one of five authors of a 2007 research article that reported that the earliest use of cacao was not for the production of chocolate, but for alcohol. Chemical analysis of residue from pottery found in Honduras showed cacao-based beverages were consumed before 1000 B.C.



Bottle from Honduras, used by ancients for chocolate beer.

If the research sounds familiar, that's because McGovern also was instrumental in the earlier discoveries of an ancient honey-grape-and-saffron beer in the 700 B.C. tomb of King Midas, as well as a rice-honey-and-fruit beer dating to Neolithic China.

Both were re-created as unique ales (**Midas Touch** and **Chateau Jiahu**) by Delaware's Dogfish Head Craft Brewery.

So will the cacao brew found in Honduras. Next month, during Philly Beer Week, Dogfish Head will unveil **Theobroma** at the annual Michael Jackson tutored tasting at the Penn Museum. The new, historic recreation is made with cocoa powder and cocoa nibs, honey, chilies, and a fragrant seed called annatto. (*Theobroma*, which means "food of the gods," is the name of the plant species that produces cocoa.)

According to McGovern, early Mesoamericans likely consumed the cacao tree's fruit because the seeds were too bitter. As they discovered how to brew with the bean, they added honey, chilies and spices to offset the bitterness.

Traces of cacao beverages were found in a curious assortment of vessels, including one with a high neck that was used for pouring, and another spouted bottle with a wider, flared

neck. Researchers theorize that the drink was poured back and forth between the vessels to produce an aromatic froth.

"The idea was to put a head on the drink so that you could breathe in the aroma while you were drinking," McGovern said.

Consumption of cacao beverages, the article's authors argue, "became a central dimension of social life in Mesoamerica." Over the centuries, they emerged as an important part of Aztec and Mayan ceremonies. By the 1500s, Cortez and Diaz, the Spanish conquistadors, would send word back to Europe of flavorful chocolate drinks served at ritual events — including, presumably, those human sacrificial orgies.

Yum! Not to be overly manly on this Valentine's Day, but I think we can all agree there's nothing like a nice, cold pint of chocolate beer after getting your heart ripped out.

Hearts and hops

For something considerably more romantic this holiday, head over to Nodding Head Brewery (1516 Sansom St., Center City) for a taste of **Chocolate Stout**, just tapped yesterday.

The generic style gets its name from the addition of chocolate malt, the roasted flavor of which is reminiscent of chocolate. **Brooklyn Black Chocolate Stout**, for example, contains no chocolate.

Nodding Head's version, however, uses the real thing. Brewer Gordon Grubb dunked more than 25 pounds of famous French-made Valrhona chocolate into a seven-barrel batch to produce a bitter, roasty dark beer.

"This is entirely unscientific," Grubb reported, "but based on my own observation, this stout will go over well with your girlfriend, and you are guaranteed to get laid." ★

"Joe Sixpack" by Don Russell appears weekly in Big Fat Friday. For more on the beer scene in Philly and beyond, visit www.joesixpack.net. Send email to joesixpack@phillynews.com.

PEARLSTEIN'S

Furniture **USED & NEW**

Thrifty Furniture for Every Room **Immediate Delivery**

7 Pc Living Room 4 Pc Bedroom 2 Pc Mattress Set Any Size 4 Pc Kitchen Set
\$399.00 \$299.00 \$39.95 \$99.00
 No Bull..

"Let PEARLSTEIN'S 'The Spot' Furnish Your Home."

2521 W. Girard Ave. • 215-765-2195

Visit Store For Details
 We accept all major credit cards
 Hours 9:30-6 M-F • Sat till 5



Join us at The **Crystal Tearoom** in Philadelphia **Friday, February 15th** 7pm to midnight

For a Night of Dinner, Drinks and Dancing To a live DJ
\$75 p.p. includes appetizers, dinner & Top shelf open Bar.

For Tickets* and information contact **Chris Swartz @ 610-888-4338** or visit www.valentinesparty.eventbrite.com

*All Tickets Must Be Purchased in Advance By 2/12/08

THE CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL FOUNDATION
www.giving.chop.edu/events

A portion of the proceeds from every ticket sold, will go to Childrens Hospital Charity Foundation

SIZE MATTERS!

3 months - \$99

*New Members only
 *Offer Expires 2/28/08

Gift Certificates Available

"Our Staff has over 100 years combined experience in personal training"

FREE CLASSES!
 ABS
 STEP
 SPINNING
 PILATES
 & MARTIAL ARTS!

Focused Intense Training

NO CONTRACTS

4415 Chestnut St.
 Philadelphia, PA 19104
215-386-3333
www.fifinphilly.com