

VENI, VIDI, VINUM

Just ask the lucky guests of the Marriage at Cana, who thought they were doomed to go thirsty until Jesus showed up: The ancient world—from Mesopotamia to the Mediterranean basin—was immersed in wine culture. But its origins may surprise you.



DR. VINNY

Dear Dr. Vinny,

What kind of wine might have been served at the Last Supper?

—Alex, Miami

Dear Alex,

While it's impossible to know what was served at a given meal that long ago, I checked with Patrick McGovern, author of numerous books on this topic, including *Ancient Wine: The Search for the Origins of Viniculture*.

"A range of wines were available, whether smoked, pressed from raisins, or laced with herbs, fruits and/or tree resins," McGovern said. The Last Supper wine "didn't have to be kosher, since that development came later." Given the hot climate of the Holy Land, it's likely that grape juice would have fermented into wine whether or not people wanted it to.

We know that the ancient Romans loved Falernian wine, grown on Mt. Massico, about 30 miles north of Naples. The wine was made from a grape known then as Aminea Gemina, though we don't even know if it was red or white. What we do know is that these were late-harvest wines, made from grapes that had been raisinated and fermented to 15 or 16 percent alcohol. They probably tasted a lot like Vin Santo or Amarone, but were also frequently cut with water. This may have been the sort of wine that Jesus and his Apostles imbibed.

—Dr. Vinny

Dr. Vinny provides answers to all sorts of wine questions, here and at winespectator.com. Submit your queries at www.winespectator.com/drvinny or on Twitter via @AskDrVinny.

THE BIRTH OF WINE

7000 B.C.
Earliest mixed drink: a beverage that contains fruit, honey and rice, in central China.



600 B.C.
Wine culture arrives in France, via the Etruscans, who dock near Marseille.

4000 B.C.
Earliest winery, in a cave in Armenia.

3000 B.C.
Earliest wine labels appear on wines from Egypt's Nile Delta. The "labels" include the name of the presiding pharaoh (which gives us a date) plus a hieroglyph of a trellised vine and an indication of where in the Nile Delta the grapes were grown.

5400–5000 B.C.
Earliest chemical evidence of wine: fermented grape juice stored in a pottery jar in a small village in the Zagros mountains of northern Iran, preserved with tree resin. Think of it as Neolithic Retsina!



3150 B.C.
Earliest wine exports, from the Jordan Valley to Egypt. Also the earliest wine cellar: King Scorpion I, of Egypt, is buried with 700 jugs containing about 4,500 liters of wine—left to age for eternity.

425 BC
First chemically verified wine press, found in southern France.

SOURCE: PATRICK MCGOVERN

BIBLICAL PROPORTIONS

Large-format wine bottles are a product of the 18th and 19th centuries, but their namesakes are much older.

Jeroboam
3 liters / 4 bottles

First king of Israel; served King Solomon but then overthrew him (circa 925 B.C.)

Methuselah
6 liters / 8 bottles

The oldest man in the Bible; his death at age 969 preceded the Great Flood (c. 2300 B.C.)

Balthazar
12 liters / 16 bottles

Babylonian king who drank wine out of holy chalices from a temple, incurring God's wrath. While Balthazar was partying, the Persians invaded. (c. 539 B.C.)

Nebuchadnezzar
15 liters / 20 bottles

Another king of Babylon. Built the Hanging Gardens of Babylon; destroyed Jerusalem's first temple (c. 587 B.C.)



"Wine ... is the cure for the crabbedness of old age, whereby we may renew our youth and enjoy forgetfulness of despair."

—Plato, *Laws*, circa 360 B.C.

