

# Penn Museum's B.C. Breweriana

Collectors of pre-Prohibition trays and lithographs can brag about the beauty and rarity of their collections. However, a visit to the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology (3260 South St. in West Philadelphia) can allow you to experience breweriana from the dawn of civilization!

The museum first came on our radar in the 1990s, when Dr. Solomon Katz's translation of the *Hymn to Ninkasi* (basically a 3,800-year-old beer recipe in poetry form) was used by Anchor Brewing and the Brewers Association to reproduce an ancient Sumerian beer. (Only the professor who translated the poem was part of the Penn Museum; the clay tablet that it's etched on is at the British Museum.)

Later on, I first became aware of the museum's Dr. Patrick McGovern (aka the "Indiana Jones of Beer") when one of his associates climbed into a fermenter at the original Dock Street brewpub to collect beerstone. This residue (also called calcium oxalate) would become the key to determining which ancient vessels held beer.

Dr. Pat is well-known for his book *Ancient Brews* and his collaborations with Dogfish Head's Sam Calagione (the late Michael Jackson introduced the two at the Penn Museum). Most recently, he chemically identified the oldest (circa 3400 BC) barley beer jar in the world: a wide-mouthed jug, unearthed at Godin Tepe in Iran, that resides in the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto.

"Museums are really just great repositories of ancient drinking vessels," observed Dr. Pat as we began to wend our way through the exhibits at Penn.

Currently, Dr. Pat pointed out, "There is a splendid exhibit on the Puabi tomb at Ur with its gold and lapis



**Molecular archaeologist Dr. Patrick McGovern points to a frieze, part of a harp, depicting ancient imbibers under the figure of Gilgamesh.**

PHOTO BY GEORGE HUMMEL

drinking-tubes and the silver jar of the queen's daily allotment of beer." (That daily allotment measured five liters!)

The exhibit contains many jars that once held beer, as well as many depictions of brewing and imbibing, such as on a Philistine beer jug. One other stunning example is the golden head of a harp, with a figure of Gilgamesh and a group of animal-headed gods sipping Sumerian beer through long tubes in a frieze below. The long tubes helped to remove the beer from its chunky dregs—I guess Sumerian ale was brewed in the New England style.

You can work up quite a thirst touring the museum with its dry air (necessarily kept free of humidity for the sake of preservation)—all the better for the city's breweries and pubs!

—George Hummel