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Beer, Barbarism, and the Church from Late Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages

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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Joseph Wayne Strickland entitled "Beer, Barbarism, and the Church from Late Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages." I have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in History.

Michael Kulikowski, Major Professor

We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:

Christine Shepardson, Robert Bast

Accepted for the Council:

Dixie L. Thompson

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

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BEER, BARBARISM, AND THE CHURCH
FROM LATE ANTIQUITY TO THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES

A Thesis
Presented for the
Master of Arts
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Joseph Wayne Strickland
May 2007

Abstract

At the height of the Roman Empire, Roman citizens undoubtedly favored wine. As the Empire expanded into surrounding areas, increased exposure to beer even further solidified Romans' preference for wine, not just as a drink, but as a symbol of *Romanitas*. Beer, brewed mostly in the provincial regions not climatically suited for grapes and wine, quickly became associated with barbarians and therefore stood in opposition to Roman values. As Roman authority waned in the West through the fifth and sixth centuries, Christianity remained powerful, and Christian sources betray an acceptance of beer, tacitly and later more explicitly. This ecclesiastical presence in the thoroughly Romanized provinces of the West paralleled the disappearance of the "barbarian" stigma from beer. Beer made its way into the culture of western Christendom, and it became an acceptable drink. This eventual acknowledgement of the merits of beer is an important and all-too-often overlooked indicator of the transition from the Roman Empire to the Middle Ages.

Table of Contents

1. <i>The Study of Beer in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages</i>	1
2. <i>Roman Attitudes toward Beer and Wine</i>	6
3. <i>Changing Mindsets: Christianity and the De-Barbarization of Beer</i>	20
4. <i>Monasticism and Renewed Interest in Brewing</i>	33
5. <i>Saints, Hagiography, and Beer-Miracles</i>	55
6. <i>Conclusions and the Big Picture</i>	65

1. *The Study of Beer in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages.*

The role of beer in scholarship has to this point been largely inconsistent. Most do not think of beer as a valid pursuit in academia. Modern biases, rather, tend toward the anti-academic, a topic for college students trying to escape the rigors of university. It is unfortunate that the post-Prohibition world tends not to take beer very seriously, for anyone who takes the time to study it will find that the beverage has a rich and interesting history. Scholars of ancient Mesopotamia, Egypt, and the Near East, for example, have long recognized the importance of beer in these societies. Even into pre-history, archaeologists do not hesitate to examine in depth the various social implications of their beer-related findings.

When one looks at ancient Europe, though, studies on beer dramatically lose resolution. Classicists mention beer occasionally as an economic indicator, but more often than not the drink receives no attention beyond the fact that Greeks and Romans hated it and thought of it as “barbarian.” This observation, while generally true, is quite shallow. The historian should not disqualify something from further investigation merely on the grounds that a civilization seems to reject it. The few specific studies of beer in antiquity have a tendency toward the whimsical, treating the subject half-heartedly, trying to entertain as much as, if not more than, to enlighten.¹

¹ A prime example is Clarence A. Forbes, “Beer: A Sober Account,” *The Classical Journal*, vol. 46, no. 6 (Mar. 1951), 281-5, 300. Forbes does make some useful observations, but this paper is mostly in jest.

In contrast to the Greek and Roman disdain for beer, common perceptions of the early middle ages lean toward acceptance of beer as a component of medieval life, brewed in monasteries and enjoyed by kings. Once more this assessment is not inaccurate, but incomplete. Studies of the later middle ages and into the Renaissance, though, resume focus on beer. By this era, beer production had become a full-fledged industry, and its role in society is therefore unavoidable.

The factor that is lacking in scholarship on beer in antiquity and the early middle ages is the means by which the attitudes of one period progress into those of the other. Greeks and Romans, indeed, had a certain contempt for the beverage. It was the swill of barbarians—civilized people drank wine. By the Carolingian era, Charlemagne himself, while at the same time trying to revive Roman culture, employed only the best brewmasters.² The problem is how this change could have happened. The typical oversimplification in Western Civilization textbooks is that the Western Roman Empire fell in the fateful year 476, and the Middle Ages then began in Europe. This view is falling out of fashion, and modern scholarship almost unanimously rejects the immediacy it implies. Averil Cameron, as one among many, deems that year “one of the most famous non-events in history.”³ One civilization simply cannot shift into another in the course of only one year. It is more reasonable to envisage a slow transition of culture and social structures to adapt to changing conditions in the absence of official Roman authority. The end result would be the world later called “medieval.”

² Charlemagne, *Capitulare de Villis*, 61: “veniant magistri qui cervisam bonam ibidem [i.e., ad palatium] facere debeant.”

³ Averil Cameron, *The Mediterranean World in Late Antiquity, AD 395-600* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 33.

Attitudes toward beer, too, are a function of this transition. Europe did not suddenly decide that beer should be a socially acceptable drink. Rather, opinions changed over the course of a few centuries. Scholarship on beer to date, though, still gives the impression that prejudice against beer “fell” in the same way as the now-debunked portrayal of the Roman Empire. In the interest of properly understanding the reversal of dispositions toward beer, the scholar must address the topic within the prevalent paradigm of a long period of transition. And, conversely, pondering the changes surrounding beer over this period can contribute to a more complete picture of the period as a whole.

A small number of very recent works have begun to give beer in this period the attention it deserves. Richard Unger provided a useful point of departure in 2004 with his book, *Beer in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*.⁴ However, he is more interested in *le longue durée*, and he does not treat the early portion of the expanse of time he covers with as much care as the later centuries. To be fair, his main concern is the emergence of a brewing industry, so his business with late antiquity is little more than background and the roots of monasticism. But the book is a valuable one for beer in the later Middle Ages, and Unger’s treatment of beer in general is a step in the right direction.

A more recent volume, though, has put the foot in the proverbial door of examining beer between the ancient and early medieval worlds. In 2005, Max Nelson

⁴ Richard W. Unger, *Beer in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (Philadelphia: U Pennsylvania P, 2004).

published *The Barbarian's Beverage: A History of Beer in Ancient Europe*.⁵ The goal and primary value of this work is the amassing of source material, which Nelson documents thoroughly. The author also acknowledges the problem of beer's changing status, which he explains as a result of the rising importance of Germanic peoples.⁶ There are some problems in tying ethnicity to a preference for beer, but Nelson's very attention to it marks great progress. The author admits that "In many ways this has been a preliminary investigation . . . Certainly much of this material deserves far more careful analysis than I have been able to provide here and I hope that it will stimulate others on this path."⁷ The present study answers Nelson's challenge.

So, then, how does one explain the Roman barbarization of beer falling away entirely by the early Middle Ages? A truly complete answer would be an amalgamation of countless factors. But one factor in particular most reflects this change: the growth of Christianity in the West, especially in Gaul. Christianity's thorough penetration of the Roman Empire mirrored changes in several aspects of society. It often receives credit for the dissolution of Roman power in the West, but there will almost certainly never be consensus on the capacity to which this is true. One thing, though, is indisputable: Christianity transformed Europe.

How western Christianity was related to attitudes toward beer may not be entirely clear at first glance. Of course, no one issued a proclamation that henceforward beer should no longer be considered barbaric. The changes, especially in their initial phases,

⁵ Max Nelson, *The Barbarian's Beverage: A History of Beer in Ancient Europe* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

⁶ *Ibid.*, 7-8.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 116.

were very subtle. Snubbing beer as barbarian was tied to a fierce traditional sense of Roman identity in which every proper Roman drinks wine. Christianity, though, changed prevalent views of civilization, and the opposition of beer and wine was closely related to this shift. As Christianity settled in to stay, a desire to shun the worldly in favor of the sacred led to the foundation of monasteries throughout Europe where beer, still reeling from centuries of Roman ostracism, found a new home. With beer becoming a fact of monastic life, it even found its way into the miracles of certain saints. By the Carolingian era, western monks and saints, whose lives were to serve as examples of holiness, brewed and drank beer without question. The throngs who looked up to them did not cast them out as barbarians; beer had earned its place at the table.

2. Roman Attitudes toward Beer and Wine.

“But where can we better make a beginning than with the vine? Supremacy in respect of the vine is to such a degree the special distinction of Italy that even with this one possession she can be thought to have vanquished all the good things of the world, even in the department of scents,” wrote Pliny the Elder in his *Natural History*.⁸ It is no secret that wine was the drink of choice in ancient Italy and the Mediterranean coastal regions, and, therefore, as with Pliny, it earned a degree of reverence among Romans in antiquity. Seeing that the heart of the Roman Empire could boast such superior viticulture as Pliny points out, it is unsurprising that wine filled a role of immense importance, both economically and culturally.⁹

One only needs to skim Book Fourteen of Pliny’s *Natural History* to see how well-developed Italian wine culture was by the first century. He describes the history of wine, different types and vintages, diverse species of grapes, various methods of winemaking, proper storage, the favorite wines of important people (Augustus preferred Setinum because it was less harsh on his digestion¹⁰), and he even outlines numerous Italian estate wines, ranking them in order of quality.¹¹ Pliny was not alone. So profound

⁸ Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* (trans. H. Rackham), 14.2.8: “Unde autem potius incipiamus quam a vitibus? quarum principatus in tantum peculiaris Italiae est ut vel hoc uno omnia gentium vicisse etiam odorifera possit videri bona.”

⁹ John M. Wilkins and Shaun Hill, *Food in the Ancient World* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006), 166-7.

¹⁰ Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, 14.8.61: “Divus Augustus Setinum praetulit cunctis . . . confessa propter experimenta, non temere druditibus noxiis ab ea saliva nascentibus.”

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 14.2.8-27.136.

was the love of wine in the ancient world that even a “water-drinker” could be the subject of ridicule.¹²

The first century of the empire witnessed a vast expansion of viticulture. Both the supply and the demand for wine increased rapidly, thanks to agricultural advances of the period, and production had reached its zenith by the reign of Hadrian. These “years of boom” led to even wider distribution and appreciation of wine.¹³ By the later phases of the empire, wine had evolved into more than a privilege, but a right as a Roman and a symbol of one’s own *Romanitas*. Wine was so integral to Roman society that its distribution and handling often fell necessarily into the hands of the government. In the city of Rome itself, for example, municipal revenue from the sale of wine went into its very own treasury, the *arca vinaria*. This fund, in turn, had an official assigned to its oversight, the *rationalis vinorum*.¹⁴

The imperial administration went out of its way to make wine as available as possible to the citizens in the Eternal City. The *Historia Augusta*, an anonymous, early fourth-century collection of emperors’ biographies, describes an attempt by the emperor Aurelian to provide wine free of charge. Supposedly, though, his praetorian prefect talked him out of this decision, for fear of setting a dangerous precedent.¹⁵ While not

¹² Wilkins and Hill, 166.

¹³ N. Purcell, “Wine and Wealth in Ancient Italy,” *The Journal of Roman Studies*, vol. 75 (1985), 19.

¹⁴ A. H. M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire, 284-602: A Social, Economic, and Administrative Survey*, 2 vols. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1964), 691.

¹⁵ *Historia Augusta*, “The Deified Aurelian,” 48.1-5. The accuracy of accounts in the *Historia Augusta* is questionable, as it tends to become more sensationalized as it progresses. See T. D. Barnes, *The Sources of the Historia Augusta*, in *Collection Latomus*, vol. 155 (Bruxelles: Latomus Revue d’Études Latines, 1978). Even if the story is fabricated, though, it still supports the notion of wine as a necessity.

free, the price of public wine was, indeed, reduced dramatically by the fourth century. Valentinian passed an ordinance in 365 that the price of public wine be one fourth less than the market value of comparable wine.¹⁶ So by the later stages of the empire, the beverage, symbolic of the rich heritage of the Mediterranean coast, was readily available to those who held it in such high regard.

But through exposure to areas away from the coast (and therefore less suitable for viticulture), Romans met beer. While beer had not been entirely foreign to the vinocentric Romans, their contact with the beverage had come mostly through Egypt, where beer had been brewed in large quantities for millennia.¹⁷ Though Romans may not have enjoyed the beverage itself, they made little outcry against its consumption in Egypt, owing to its very antiquity. There was “a deep and traditional respect in the Graeco-Roman world for the primacy of Egyptian culture,” and the Roman empire made little attempt to impose its own culture on them.¹⁸ As the empire expanded into Western Europe, however, Romans encountered beer in a context much more outlandish to them. The peoples of these areas stood in contrast to the civilizations of the East, whose culture was steeped in thousands of years of tradition. Germans and Gauls were rugged and uncivilized in Roman eyes. But these people, too, had beer.

¹⁶ *Codex Theodosianus*, 11.2.2: “in tantumque populi usibus profutura provisionis nostrae emolumenta porreximus, ut etiam pretio laxamento tribuantur. Sanximus quippe, ut per vini singulas qualitates detracta Quarta pretiorum, quae habentur in foro rerum venalium, eadem species a mercantibus comparetur.”

¹⁷ For beer’s longstanding history in Egypt, see J. R. Geller, “From Prehistory to History: Beer in Egypt,” in *The Followers of Horus: Studies Dedicated to Michael Allen Hoffman 1944-1990*, eds. R. Friedman and B. Adams (Oxford: Oxbow, 1992), 19-26.

¹⁸ G. W. Bowersock, *Hellenism in Late Antiquity* (Ann Arbor: U Michigan P, 1990), 56.

The Greco-Sicilian historian Diodorus is among the first to specifically mention beer in Gaul. He published his work in the middle of the first century BCE, as Romans, no longer satisfied “playing around the edges of their private sea,” were turning their eyes toward Gaul.¹⁹ Though most of his history is set in the very distant past, the historian switches to the present tense during his Gallic excursus. If such “nonnarrative material” is a reflection of contemporary thought,²⁰ then Diodorus provides the first inkling of Roman familiarity with western beer. “Since temperateness of climate is destroyed by the excessive cold, the land produces neither wine nor oil,” complains Diodorus, “and as a consequence those Gauls who are deprived of these fruits make a drink out of barley which they call *zythos* or beer, and they also drink the water with which they cleanse their honeycombs.”²¹ Still, for Diodorus, the Gauls consume beer only as an alternative to the wine they lack, which they do crave and acquire from Italian traders whenever possible.²²

In the following century, as German expansion brought the “barbarians” closer to Roman borders,²³ the Roman historian Tacitus also noted the existence of beer in Germanic lands. “They have a beverage made from barley or wheat, fermented into

¹⁹ Thomas S. Burns, *Rome and the Barbarians, 100 B.C. – A.D. 400* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2003), 40.

²⁰ Kenneth S. Sacks, *Diodorus Siculus and the First Century* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1990), 5.

²¹ Diodorus Siculus (trans. C. H. Oldfather), 5.26.2: “διὰ δὲ τὴν ὑπερβολὴν τοῦ ψύχους διαφθειρομένης τῆς κατὰ τὸν ἀέρα κράσεως οὐτ’ οἶνον ἔλαιον φέρει· διόπερ τῶν Γαλατῶν οἱ τούτων τῶν καρπῶν στερισκόμενοι πόμα κατασκευάζουσιν ἐκ τῆς κριθῆς τὸ προσαγορευόμενον ζῦθος, καὶ τὰ κηρία πλύνοντες τῷ τούτων ἀποπλύματι χρῶνται.”

²² *Ibid.*, 5.26.3.

²³ J. B. Bury, *The Invasion of Europe by the Barbarians* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1967, repr. 2000), 7.

something like wine,” he observes.²⁴ The brewing espied by Diodorus, then, had obviously continued to be commonplace enough that visiting foreigners noticed it. At this point, late in the first century of the Common Era, the Western Germans whom Tacitus described had basically become settled and pastoral, no longer nomadic like those to whom Diodorus refers. Tacitus’ Germans could brew more regularly in more permanent facilities, which would have been necessary given the population growth associated with settlement.²⁵

Tacitus, too, like Diodorus, betrays his preference for wine to the unusual drink, distastefully calling beer *corruptus vini*.²⁶ The senator and historian was a Roman traditionalist, so such a stance should not come as a surprise. In his eyes, Roman civic virtue was waning while the Germans’ remained strong, the basis of what he perceived as an imminent threat.²⁷ So a definitively Roman palate is one of many connections to the former glory of the Roman Republic.

There is some question, though, whether or not Tacitus’ comments on German culture originated from first-hand observation. He could have visited (or been posted) in the area sometime shortly before writing *Germania*, but he seems to have relied mostly on literary research.²⁸ Of his sources, the most evident is a history of wars in Germany

²⁴ Tacitus, *Germania* (trans. H. W. Bernario), 23: “Potui umor ex hordeo aut frumento in quandam similitudinem vini corruptus.”

²⁵ Bury, 7-9.

²⁶ H. W. Bernario, *Tacitus: Germany* (Warminster: Aris & Phillips Ltd., 1999), 89.

²⁷ Ernst Breisach, *Historiography: Ancient, Medieval, & Modern*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: U Chicago P, 1994), 69.

²⁸ Bernario, 3.

by Pliny the Elder, who indeed wrote from personal experience.²⁹ Pliny preceded Tacitus by a mere generation, and wrote prolifically. Also, as mentioned above, he was quite a connoisseur of wine. Furthermore, after his lengthy chapter on wine in his *Natural History*, he gives a brief acknowledgement to beer in the western provinces. “The nations of the west,” Pliny specifies, “have their own intoxicant, made from grain soaked in water.”³⁰

Pliny, along with Diodorus and Tacitus, though all showing a distaste for the drink, do not explicitly condemn beer as barbaric. But they all three portray it as clearly non-Roman and are the seeds from which stems the complete ideological barbarization of beer over the next few centuries. As the empire crystallized, so did a rigid dichotomy “between Roman and barbarian, . . . Latin and Germanic, . . . wine and beer.”³¹

Such alienation was, of course, a long-standing idea. The Greeks of the ancient world had a strong sense of nationality, effectively coining the word “barbarian” (*βάρβαρος*) to denote those in any sense non-Hellenic. Authors established the alterity of a group (here, barbarians) in order to emphasize their own identity and presumably that of their audience. “For the modern reader, the habits of the writer, historian or otherwise, who engages in ethnographic discourse are identifiable through his assumption of disparity.”³² Barbarian and Greco-Roman are, therefore, mutually exclusive groups

²⁹ Ibid., 4.

³⁰ Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, 14.29.149: “Est et occidentis populis sua ebrietas e fruge madida.”

³¹ Richard Fletcher, *The Barbarian Conversion: From Paganism to Christianity* (Berkeley: U California P, 1997), 13.

³² Liv Maria Yarrow, *Historiography at the End of the Republic: Provincial Perspectives on Roman Rule* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2006), 186. Yarrow (186 fn. 30) actually criticizes the

with corresponding sets of traits. It so happens that beer had fallen for quite some time into the barbarian set.

One can even find some prejudicial denunciations of beer—usually brewed in more arid eastern regions—in some ancient Greek sources. Herodotus, the “Father of History” himself, makes brief mention of the beer brewed in Egypt. “For wine,” he observes, “[Egyptians] use a drink made of barley; for they have no vines in their country.”³³ This statement seems fairly objective, not judging the Egyptians too harshly for their beer consumption. It is still clearly a secondary beverage in Herodotus’ mind, though, made only as an alternative because the climate there does not allow viticulture. It has, of course, nothing to do with Herodotus’ claim that “the Egyptians are the healthiest of all men, next to the Libyans.”³⁴ Their diet is not the source of their health, but, somewhat ironically, the same climate that prevents them from cultivating the vine. “The reason [for the Egyptians’ health] to my thinking is that the climate in all seasons is the same; for change is the great cause of men’s falling sick, more especially changes of seasons.”³⁵ So their diet is not responsible for their good health. While Herodotus does not seem to be directly insulting beer or Egyptians for drinking it, he is clearly establishing that it is not a Greek beverage.

overuse of “otherness” in scholarship of the period, saying the concept is “approaching jargon.” The overuse, though, reflects overuse in Greco-Roman sources. The separation is clear enough in the minds of the ancients that it is of paramount importance in the present study.

³³ Herodotus, *Histories* (trans. A. D. Godley), 2.77: “οἶνω δὲ ἐκ κριθῶν πεποιημένω διαχρέωνται· οὐ γὰρ σφι εἰσὶ ἐν τῇ χώρῃ ἄμπελοι.”

³⁴ *Ibid.*: “Αἰγύπτιοι μετὰ Λίβυας ὑγιερέστατοι πάντων ἀνθρώπων τῶν ὠρέων.”

³⁵ *Ibid.*: “δοκέειν ἐμοὶ εἶνεκα, ὅτι οὐ μεταλλάσσουσι αἱ ὥραι· ἐν γὰρ τῇσι μεταβολῆσι τοῖσι ἀνθρώποισι αἱ νοῦσοι μάλιστα γίνονται τῶν τε ἄλλων πάντων καὶ δὴ καὶ τῶν ὠρέων μάλιστα.”

But the oldest known reference to beer from a Western source is by the Greek poet Archilochus, writing in the seventh century BCE. Archilochus was a product of the strong Greek notions of civilization and barbarism, and had himself encountered Thracian culture, held almost universally by ancient Greeks as barbaric. He was, too, no stranger to their drinking customs.³⁶ A very short fragment of a poem by Archilochus survives which mentions beer and barbarians. In a lewd metaphor, he writes of a woman who performs “just as a Thracian or Phrygian man sucks beer [here, *βρῦτον*] with a straw.”³⁷ Archilochus obviously intended this to evoke sexual imagery, but the importance here is in the actual wording. *βρῦτον* does not necessarily have to be beer in a strict sense. Athenaeus, the main source for the fragment, later defines it as beer, though,³⁸ and later sources place beer-drinkers in the same regions. Archilochus, then, was among the first to write of the association of beer with European barbarians.

Much later, as already mentioned, Diodorus describes the beer of Northwestern Europe. On a few occasions throughout his history, though, he also mentions beer in Egypt.³⁹ Interestingly, he is far more sympathetic to Egyptian beer. He even claims that Osiris himself brought the beverage to those whose climate did not allow viticulture.⁴⁰ In all of these passages, too, he claims that Egyptian beer is only slightly inferior to wine (*λειπόμενον οὐ πολὺ τῆς περὶ τὸν οἶνον*). There is only one exception, and it is an

³⁶ Nelson, 16.

³⁷ Archilochus, Fragment 46 (my trans.): “ὡσπερ ἀλφῶ βρῦτον ἢ Θρείξ ἀνήρ / ἢ Φρῦξ ἔμυξε· κύβδα δ’ ἦν πονευμένη.”

³⁸ Nelson, 16.

³⁹ Diodorus Siculus, 1.20.4; 1.34.10; 3.73.6; 4.2.5.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 1.20.4.

extremely important one: his description of beer in Gaul.⁴¹ Even if he has not learned the words for regional beers, calling that in Gaul by the Egyptian word, he obviously separated them in his mind, thinking much more highly of the brew of the Egyptians.

It is common knowledge that “Roman education was marked by strong traditionalism.”⁴² And, by late antiquity, that included the traditions of the Greek past as well as the Roman. The empire now had two parts, the Latin West and the Greek East. It was, therefore, commonplace for aristocratic Romans to receive an education in the Greek classics.⁴³ Similarly, the social climate was roughly consistent throughout the empire, in both the West and East. “A Roman citizen of the upper classes must have found himself at home wherever he travelled,” speculates A. H. M. Jones; “there is scarcely any sign of alienation between the Greek and Latin halves of the empire.”⁴⁴ Although Jones overstates this point, it makes sense that ancient Greek sentiments of barbarism and beer made their way into the Roman mindset as well.

The Greek association of beer with foreign cultures survived in the eastern half of the empire well into late antiquity. Ammianus Marcellinus provides a superb example in his history, written at the end of the fourth century. He describes the siege of the city of Chalcedon by the emperor Valens, who hailed from Pannonia and was therefore subject to some criticism because of his heritage. Ammianus reports that the besieged Chalcedonians stood at the city walls and heckled Valens, and among the shouts “he was

⁴¹ Ibid., 5.26.2.

⁴² Bertrand Lançon, *Rome in Late Antiquity: Everyday Life and Urban Change, AD 312-609*, trans. Antonia Nevill (New York: Routledge, 2001), 151.

⁴³ Jones, 986-7.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 1021-2.

derisively addressed as *Sabaiarius*.⁴⁵ *Sabaiarius* derives from the Pannonian word for beer, *sabaia*, and here is clearly intended as a slur roughly equivalent to “beer-guzzler.”⁴⁶ Ammianus elaborates for his readers, “Now *sabaia* is a drink of the poorer people in Illyricum, a liquor made from barley or some other grain.”⁴⁷ Undoubtedly this was an affront of some weight, to be hurled thus at an enemy.

The beer of Western Europe, however, gradually became anathematized to an even greater extent than that of the East. While technically some differences may have existed between beers of different areas,⁴⁸ the actual substances were essentially quite similar.⁴⁹ The more important distinction, both to contemporary Romans and to modern scholars, is an ideological one. Romans differentiated between the beverages less so by their ingredients than by the ethnicity of the peoples who brewed them.

Linguistic differentiation is the most clear method by which Western beers were set apart. Contrary to the etymologies given by Isidore of Seville,⁵⁰ there is, interestingly, no native Latin word for beer. Roman authors often use periphrastic, descriptive phrases instead, for instance the *umor ex hordeo aut frumento* which Tacitus relates.⁵¹ But, more

⁴⁵ Ammianus Marcellinus (trans. John C. Rolfe), 26.8.2: “e muris probra in eum iaciebantur, et irrisive compellebatur ut Sabaiarius.”

⁴⁶ Forbes, 283.

⁴⁷ Ammianus Marcellinus, 26.8.2: “Est autem sabaia ex ordeo vel frumento, in liquorem conversis, paupertinus in Illyrico potus.” Note the similarity to the verbiage in Tacitus, *Germania*, 23, where the beer is made “ex hordeo aut frumento.”

⁴⁸ Unger, 21.

⁴⁹ Some even hypothesize that beer and brewing knowledge from Babylonia and Egypt spread westward over time via a process of cultural diffusion, eventually reaching Northwest Europe, where it became quite popular. Ian S. Hornsey, *A History of Beer and Brewing* (Cambridge: Royal Society of Chemistry, 2003), 117.

⁵⁰ Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae*, 3.17-18, incorrectly derives *cervisia* from Ceres, goddess of agriculture, and *caelia* from *calefaciens*, “heating.” The scholar of beer history must be careful not to fall into the trap of taking Isidore at his word.

⁵¹ Tacitus, *Germania*, 23.

significantly, when a Latin author chooses a single word for beer, it tends to be a direct derivative of the language of the people whose beer is under discussion. Ammianus' example above is illustrative of this point; he uses the Pannonian word *sabaia* to indicate beer (or in this case an alleged drinker thereof) from Pannonia,⁵² where Cassius Dio notes “they cultivate no olives and produce no wine except to a very slight extent and a wretched quality at that, since the winter is very rigorous and occupies the greater part of their year, but drink as well as eat both barley and millet.”⁵³

The longest-standing Latin word for beer was *zythum* or *zythos*, in reference to the product of Egypt.⁵⁴ It is the cognate of the Greek *ζῦθος*, which was the usual Greek term for beer.⁵⁵ Greek authors supposedly adopted the term based on the foaming of fermentation they had witnessed in Egyptian breweries.⁵⁶ Diodorus, lacking the vocabulary to distinguish regional beers (though he does distinguish Western beer from Egyptian by other means), calls northwestern beer *ζῦθος*,⁵⁷ but the equation seems not to have made it into the *lingua Latina*.

Jerome, like Ammianus, borrows the word *sabaium* to refer to the beer of Pannonia.⁵⁸ The term *camum* shows up in Latin vocabulary occasionally, a word in

⁵² Ammianus Marcellinus, 26.8.2.

⁵³ Cassius Dio, *Roman History* (trans. Earnest Cary), 49.36.2-3: “οὐκ ἔλαιον, οὐκ οἶνον, πλὴν ἐλαχίστου καὶ τούτου κακίστου γεωργοῦσιν, ἅτε ἐν χειμῶνι τικροτάτῳ τὸ πλεῖστον διαιτῶμενοι, ἀλλὰ τὰς τε κριθὰς καὶ τοὺς κέγχρουσ καὶ ἐσθίουσιν ὁμοίως καὶ πίνουσιν.”

⁵⁴ Unger, 21.

⁵⁵ Forbes, 281.

⁵⁶ Hornsey, 36.

⁵⁷ Diodorus Siculus, 5.26.2.

⁵⁸ Jerome, *Commentarium in Isaiam*, Book 7: “quod genus est potionis ex frugibus aquaque confectum, et vulgo in Dalmatiae Pannoniaeque provinciis, gentili barbaroque sermone appellatur *sabaium*.”

Paeonian dialect that accordingly refers to Paeonian beer.⁵⁹ The word *celea* (or the more Latinized *caelia*) also appears from time to time, courtesy of the Celtic language.⁶⁰ Latin speakers frequently used the Gallic word for beer to indicate that brewed in western provinces.⁶¹ *Cervisa* (or *cervisia*, *cerevisa*, etc.) made its way from Gaul into the Romance tongue and seems to have stuck;⁶² for, after the barbarian association fell away, it is the word most commonly used for beer in Latin.

Language reflects the state of mind of those who speak it, and vice versa. So the beer of the Western provinces became linguistically, and as an extension ideologically, its own entity, separate from beers of other regions, wine, and all other forms of more socially acceptable drink. The division was quite thorough and distinct by the beginning of the fourth century. In 301, the emperor Diocletian passed a price edict fixing the prices of various commodities, which survives via numerous fragmentary inscriptions which modern scholars have reassembled. He sets prices for alcoholic beverages, setting the cost of different wines, *cervesia*, *camum*, and *zythum*.⁶³ This pronouncement is quite telling. Beer and wine are separate, as should be expected. Furthermore, he distinguishes between beers of different regions, using the appropriate local term for each. Not only are *cerevisa* and *zythum* conceptually distinct, Dioceltian even gives them completely different prices!

⁵⁹ Forbes, 283.

⁶⁰ Christine E. Fell, "Old English *Beor*," *Leeds Studies in English*, vol. 8 (1975), 89.

⁶¹ Forbes, 281.

⁶² Fell, 89.

⁶³ *Edictum Diocletiani de Pretiis Rerum Venalium*, 2.11-12: "cervesiae <sive> cami Italicum s. unum ж quatt<u>or ; zythi Italicum s. unum ж duobus."

With the separation of regional beers, Romans were free to condemn *cervisia* as barbaric without necessarily including *zythum*, thus letting Egyptians carry on *selon ses propres traditions*.⁶⁴ And condemn they did. One of the most colorful criticisms of western beer comes from the would-be emperor Julian, whom, in 355, the reigning emperor Constantius named Caesar and sent to Gaul “since the savages were ruinously devastating everything without opposition.”⁶⁵ Aggravated by the scarcity of wine in the area, he composed a poem, “On Wine Made from Barley”:

Who art thou and whence, O Dionysus? By the true Bacchus I recognize thee not; I know only the son of Zeus. He smells of nectar, but you smell of goat. Truly it was in their lack of grapes that the Celts brewed thee from corn-ears. So we should call thee Demetrius, not Dionysus, wheat-born not fire-born, barley god not boisterous god.⁶⁶

Julian was an aspiring philosopher and a devotee of classical culture, having spent time in Athens honing his education only shortly before politics took over his life.⁶⁷ As such he could be expected to demonstrate an appropriate level of *paideia*—an education in classical culture that served as a social currency among Greco-Roman elites.⁶⁸ Wine was

⁶⁴ P. Jouquet, *La Domination Romaine en Egypte aux Deux Premiers Siècles Après Jésus-Christ* (Publications de la Société Archéologique d’Alexandrie, 1976), 5.

⁶⁵ Ammianus Marcellinus, 15.8.1: “nullo renitente ad internecionem barbaris vastantibus universa.”

⁶⁶ Julian, Epigram 1 (trans. Wilmer Cave Wright): “τίς πρόθεν εἶς, Διόνυσε; μὰ γὰρ τὸν ἀλαθέα Βάκχον / οὐ σ’ ἐπιγιγνώσκω· τὸν Διὸς οἶδα μόνον. / κείνος νέκταρ ὄδωδε, σὺ δὲ τράγον. ἢ ῥά σε Κελτοὶ / τῆ πενίῃ βοτρύων τεύξαν ἀπ’ ἀσταχύων. / τῶ σε χρὴ καλέειν Δημήτριον, οὐ Διόνυσον, / πυρογενῆ μᾶλλον καὶ Βρόμον, οὐ Βρόμιον.”

Incidentally, the “smell of goat” which Julian describes is characteristic of beer brewed with yeast uniquely indigenous to the Senne River valley, precisely the area where he was. This traditional “Iambic” beer is still brewed in that region, bearing “barnyard” and “goat” aromas.

⁶⁷ Adrian Murdoch, *The Last Pagan: Julian the Apostate and the Death of the Ancient World* (Gloucestershire: Sutton, 2003), 34-6.

⁶⁸ Peter Brown, *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity: Towards a Christian Empire* (Madison: U Wisconsin P, 1992), 3-4. My treatment of the complex topic of *paideia* is oversimplified for the sake of brevity; for a more thorough, and very important, study, see Brown, *Power and Persuasion*, 35-70.

the beverage of Dionysus, one of antiquity and refinement. Beer was not. Whether Julian actually despised the taste of beer or not, it had become a symbol of barbarism, the diametric opposite of wine. Denouncing it showed his *paideia*, as did his poetic fervor for wine. Any other opinion would have lost the respect of his peers.

Julian was in line with a trend in Hellenistic circles in later centuries of the Roman Empire. By this time, Dionysus (or Bacchus, depending on locale), the god of wine himself, was seemingly the most revered god in the Greco-Roman pantheon.⁶⁹ This trend brings wine appreciation to the forefront of expressions of *paideia*, an absolute must to assert one's *Romanitas* or *Hellēnismos*.

As is often noted, Roman identity could not exist in a vacuum, for it defined itself by what it was not, by exclusion. Barbarism proved *Romanitas*.⁷⁰ Thus, to bolster the general Roman climate of enophilia, the beer of the western provinces must be relegated wholesale to things barbarian. So emerged an almost perfect analogy: wine is Roman, beer is barbarian. This strong dichotomy had the potential to suppress brewing for ages, but would actually not last long. It became weaker with the decentralization of Roman authority, which was increasingly apparent in the growing Christian communities all around western Europe.

⁶⁹ Bowersock, 41.

⁷⁰ Burns, 14.

3. *Changing Mindsets: Christianity and the De-Barbarization of Beer*

It is certainly unfair, though, to imagine Christianity as some cultural behemoth that rescued beer from the shackles of enophilic Romans, nor as preachers of both the Gospel and the value of ale. Indeed, conditions within the empire had by the fourth century already begun to veer in a direction of blurring the stark analogy between wine and beer and Roman and barbarian. The burst in viticulture through the centuries of the empire led not only to increased wine production in Italy; it also spurred expansion into the provinces. “Barbarians” had acquired a taste for the drink, which trade with Romans on the borders had brought them. Germans tried to keep a steady supply on hand, to the benefit of the wine merchants.⁷¹ Not just wine, but the craft of winemaking itself was exported to Gaul, especially to the area around Paris, in the middle of the fourth century.⁷² Apparently the Gauls had a talent for viticulture, if Ausonius is any indicator. In a poetic letter to a certain Paulus, the purpose of which is to praise Gallic oysters, he says that the oysters of Bordeaux are “no less renowned than are our famous wines.”⁷³ Bordeaux would, of course, become one of the premier wine-producing regions of the world.

⁷¹ Ibid., 215.

⁷² Gregory A. Austin, *Alcohol in Western Society from Antiquity to 1800: A Chronological History* (Santa Barbara: ABC-Clio, 1985), 47.

⁷³ Ausonius, Epistle 5 (trans. Hugh G. Evelyn White): “non laudata minus, nostri quam gloria vini.”

“So even the barbarians have wine,” observes Ambrose, bishop of Milan, before suggesting using it against them.⁷⁴ But Themistius, a philosopher and orator of some renown in the fourth century, suggested in 383 that barbarian viticulture could be an agent of peace rather than a weapon. Praising the role of *magister militum* Flavius Saturninus in a treaty with the Goths in the previous year, he speculates, “Was it, then, better to fill Thrace with corpses or with farmers? . . . I hear from those who have returned from there that they are now turning the metal of their swords and breastplates into hoes and pruning hooks, and that while paying distant respect to Ares, they offer prayers to Demeter and Dionysus.”⁷⁵ Whatever the grounds, viticulture was making its way into *barbaricum*.

While one may argue that this expansion was healthy for agricultural economics,⁷⁶ the philosophical implications were the most important. The symbolic Roman-ness of wine was the basis of beer’s barbarism, but how could the association be maintained with the emerging multitudes of foreign wines? The emperor Valentinian, the same who reduced the price of wine in Rome, with his co-Augusti Valens and Gratian, tried to ban export of wine into barbarian lands (*ad barbaricum*).⁷⁷ While such

⁷⁴ Ambrose, *De Helia et Ieiunio* (my tans.), 54: “habent ergo vinum et barbari.” He goes on to suggest letting the barbarians drink themselves into a stupor before attacking them.

⁷⁵ Themistius, Oration 16 (trans. Peter Heather and David Moncur), 211a-b. Themistius delivered the oration on the occasion of Saturninus’ consulship; he was trying to convince his audience that the peace with the Goths was not a defeat, but positive progress. Peter Heather and David Moncur, *Politics, Philosophy, and Empire in the Fourth Century: Select Orations of Themistius* (Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 2001), 259-64.

⁷⁶ Purcell, 19.

⁷⁷ *Codex Justinianus*, 4.41.1: “Ad barbaricum transferendi vini et olei et liquaminis nullam quisquam habeat facultatem ne gustus quidem causa aut usus commerciorum.”

prohibition, probably not enforced anyway,⁷⁸ arose “for a purely economic or military reason and certainly not for a moral one,”⁷⁹ one cannot help but think of it as an attempt at least to keep the empire’s own wines for itself. Perhaps the *Romanitas* of Italian wine in particular was salvageable.

Roman identity itself, though, was exported along with Roman goods into the provinces and beyond. Through the duration of the empire, “no subject divided the Germanic communities more deeply than the question of their relationship with the imperial government.”⁸⁰ Some stood as enemies of the empire, some were as loyal as any patrician. Accordingly, interest in Roman culture rose in outlying areas. Often the people of regions with Roman contact displayed “the wish or willingness to dress like a Roman, to own Roman objects, or to live in a Roman house,” and inspired continual socio-economic exchange.⁸¹ In this context, it is evident that not only did viticulture spread north, but so did its association with Roman culture.⁸² Barbarians adopted both. The line between barbarian and Roman became increasingly blurry, as did the matter of who drank what.

These expressions of *Romanitas*, though, and especially the cultivation of *paideia*, carried weight only with the upper strata of society. While aristocrats needed to express their inundation in classical learning to justify their place in society and their authority, those below them did not. “In each locality,” says Peter Brown, “[this high culture]

⁷⁸ Jones, 827.

⁷⁹ E. A. Thompson, *Romans and Barbarians: The Decline of the Western Empire* (Madison: U Wisconsin P, 1982), 245.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 233.

⁸¹ Ramsay MacMullen, “Rural Romanization,” *Phoenix*, vol. 22, no. 4 (Winter 1968), 337.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 340.

tended to be the possession of a few leading families.”⁸³ Lower classes could obviously not afford the formal education required, nor were they in any position to play games of persuasion with elites anyway. Needless to say, then, the stark definitions of *Romanitas*, including the traditional importance of wine, were less ingrained in the general populace.

Especially in the northwestern extent of the empire, the common folk continued to drink beer, “even if Romans in Italy,” and Romanized elites in their respective regions, “would not drink the stuff.”⁸⁴ It appears that beer even found a home among the ranks of the Roman military. Flavius Cerialis, a certain commander of Roman auxiliary troops stationed near Hadrian’s Wall in northern Britain, was apparently a consumer of beer. A tablet survives there showing an inventory of his household commodities, and it lists beer more than once. The troops in his unit apparently shared his tastes, too. Another tablet in the same location preserves their thirsty request that, having exhausted their existing supply, the commander secure more beer for them.⁸⁵ The same seems to be true on the Rhine frontier, also. An inscription in Trier survives in which a soldier guarding the Rhine titles himself *negotiator cervesarius*. Presumably he was involved in the acquisition of beer and distribution to his fellow troops.⁸⁶ It is no wonder that many later sources criticize the military “as debauched, ‘soft’ and undisciplined,”⁸⁷ when they partook of activities so distinctly barbarian from a Roman perspective. In fact, toward the later empire, the military indeed included increasing proportions of barbarians.

⁸³ Brown, *Power and Persuasion*, 37.

⁸⁴ Nelson, 71.

⁸⁵ Robert I. Curtis, *Ancient Food Technology* (Boston: Brill, 2001), 371.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 370-1.

⁸⁷ Cameron, 49.

Eventually they even formed a “crucial element” in the ranks, serving in a wide range of capacities.⁸⁸ So even an institution such as the Roman army was excluded from the dichotomy of beer and wine.

This dichotomy, then, was evidently rather fragile by the fourth century. It existed only in the minds of elites, and the divisions on which it depended became less and less distinct. Such social trends weakened the Roman ideological barbarization of beer, and the writings of many Christians, especially in the western provinces, provide evidence for its increasing appreciation.

Max Nelson has noted a “distaste for beer among patristic fathers,”⁸⁹ which he claims contributed to the suppression of beer in the empire. He blames a mistranslation of a passage in Isaiah in which “all who make *zūthos* will be grieved and will be distressed in their souls.”⁹⁰ From this translation stem derogatory comments of Eusebius, Cyril, and Theodoret.⁹¹ Nelson also cites Jerome, who corrects this reading of Isaiah without seeming judgmental about beer.⁹² These passages, to Nelson, constitute the use of “divine authority to attack beer while praising wine.”⁹³ This notion is not entirely accurate. First, the mistranslation of Isaiah uses the word ζῦθος, as do all of the Greek commentators Nelson cites. As previously discussed, this term applies exclusively to Egypt in the Roman mind, as does the biblical passage in question; one cannot use

⁸⁸ Ibid., 50-1.

⁸⁹ Nelson, 76.

⁹⁰ Isaiah 19:10. The *Septuagint* incorrectly reads: “καὶ πάντες οἱ τὸν ζῦθον ποιοῦντες λυπηθήσονται καὶ τὰς ψυχὰς πονέσουσιν.”

⁹¹ Nelson, 75-6; 153 fn. 24-5.

⁹² Jerome, *Commentarium in Isaiam Prophetam*, Book 7.

⁹³ Nelson, 75-6.

statements about *zythum* to extrapolate attitudes toward beer in general, for *caelia*, *sabaia*, and *cervisia* were understood as separate drinks. Furthermore, these patristic passages do not classify beer as barbaric in any way—only as unhealthy or unpleasant.

Now, admittedly, Jerome’s aforementioned reference to beer in his correction of Isaiah vaguely associates beer with barbarians.⁹⁴ But he is using the term “barbarian” to describe a language (Pannonian), not the beer. Furthermore, he is referring to the region from which he himself hails. One could hardly assume, then, that he meant to imply barbarism in the fullest sense. He was merely attempting to define beer (i.e., *zythum*, Egyptian beer) in terms with which he is more familiar.

The fact that the Church Fathers did not condemn beer, though, does not necessarily mean that they explicitly defended it. It was more so the changes in society coinciding with the emergence of Christian communities in the West that facilitated the initial steps toward acceptance of beer. The first of these changes were philosophical at root.

Not long after Constantine the Great acknowledged Christianity as a valid religion in the Roman Empire, Christians no longer needed to hide from potential persecutors. They could espouse their religion publicly without fear of official retribution. So they took the opportunity to wage a philosophical (and occasionally physical) war on paganism. This war included winning over the souls of as many people as possible, be it by persuasion, force, or otherwise. “As everyone knows, a tradition of advocacy of faith

⁹⁴ Jerome, *Commentarium in Isaiam*, Book 7: “quod genus est potionis ex frugibus aquaque confectum, et vulgo in Dalmatiae Pannoniaeque provinciis, gentili barbaroque sermone appellatur *sabaium*.”

and of drawing other people to the veneration of God was recognized in Judaism and taken over by and fortified in Christianity. The impulse to reach out from the inside was a part of belief itself.”⁹⁵

Eusebius, a bishop of Caesarea in the fourth century, was “one of the most prolific and important writers of the early Church.”⁹⁶ Among other works, he composed a distinctly pro-Christian biography of the emperor Constantine. In it, he describes (and praises) the ardent fourth-century campaigns against pagans made possible by Constantine’s patronage of the church. Christians seeking to rid the empire of blasphemy overtook or destroyed several temples dedicated to the Roman gods. “When all those who formerly were superstitious saw with their own eyes the exposure of what had deceived them,” Eusebius boasts, “and observed the actual desolation of shrines and establishments everywhere, some took refuge in the saving Word, while others, though they did not do that, still condemned the folly of their ancestors and laughed and mocked at those anciently held by them to be gods.”⁹⁷ Obviously Christians saw the time to make their move, and they intended that their victory would prove to pagans that the old ways were flawed. The Roman gods were obsolete according to Christians, and the destruction of their temples carried tremendous symbolic weight.

As Christianity grew, it replaced the old Roman gods with the Christian Trinity. Many Christians shunned the classical history and literature upon which Roman identity

⁹⁵ Ramsay MacMullen, *Christianizing the Roman Empire (A.D. 100-400)* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1984), 105.

⁹⁶ Averil Cameron and Stuart G. Hall, intro. to *Eusebius: Life of Constantine* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999), 2.

⁹⁷ Eusebius of Caesarea, *Life of Constantine* (trans. Averil Cameron and Stuart G. Hall), 3.57.1.

was constructed, preferring their own. Tertullian, a former teacher of rhetoric who was quite familiar with classical literature,⁹⁸ converted to Christianity around the turn of the third century and became one of its utmost advocates. Given his knowledge of classical learning, he advised against it. Christians, according to Tertullian, need not bother themselves with pagan literature, which is based on lies. Christians have their own literary basis, which is more wholesome and useful. Citation of this new literary base also helps identify them as Christians, for no one but Christians bother to read it.⁹⁹ In this way Christianity marginalized the paganism of the classics upon which Romans based their identity. Christ had figuratively usurped the throne formerly occupied by Dionysus. And with the dismissal of Dionysus, the Roman love of wine no longer had its mythological basis. Christianity had completely changed what it meant to be Roman.

The importance of being Christian superceded the importance of *paideia*. “*Paideia* and Christianity were presented as two separate accomplishments, one of which led, inevitably to the other,” elaborates Peter Brown. “*Paideia* was no longer treated as the all-embracing and supreme ideal of a gentleman’s life. It was seen, instead, as the necessary first stage in the life cycle of a Christian public man.”¹⁰⁰ Even Tertullian, in

⁹⁸ Harry Y. Gamble, *Books and Readers in the Early Church: A History of Early Christian Texts* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1995), 35.

⁹⁹ Tertullian, *De Testimonio Animae*, 1.4: “Jam igitur nihil nobis erit cum litteris et doctrina perversae felicitatis, cui in falso potius creditur, quam in vero. Viderint si qui de unico et solo deo pronuntiaverunt. Imo nihil omnino relatum fit, quod agnoscat christianus, ne exprobrare possit. Nam et quod relatum est, neque omnes sciunt; neque qui sciunt, constare confidunt. Tanto abest ut nostris litteris annuant homines, ad quas nemo venit nisi jam christianus.”

¹⁰⁰ Brown, *Power and Persuasion*, 123.

his religious rigor, wonders, “how could we reject the secular studies, which the divine studies cannot do without?”¹⁰¹ However, he quickly addresses this paradox:

But when a believer is instructed in these things [i.e., classical literature], if he already realizes who he is, he neither accepts nor receives them; if he does not yet realize it or is only beginning to realize it, all the more should he realize first what he has first learnt, that is, about God and the faith. Therefore he will loathe those things and not accept them, and he will be as safe as someone who wittingly accepts poison from a person ignorant of this fact, but does not drink it.¹⁰²

So while a classical education was not forbidden to the early Christians, they had to be careful not to take it to heart, for the heart should be reserved for Christian teaching. The literary precedents for wine, then, were set on the back burner in favor of higher pursuits of religion.

But beer’s acceptability in Europe benefitted not only from the struggle between Christians and pagans, but even from strife among Christians themselves. Early Christians lacked a fully standardized theology (though council after council tried to implement such a thing) and had its fair share of factionalism. Mainstream Christians, that is, those who had won to the title of “orthodoxy” at Nicaea, did not suffer well opposing “heretical” factions. The theological differences in sects, of which there were certainly many, and the dialogues between them, comprise a complex matter beyond the scope of the present study, but suffice it to say that “orthodox” Christians continually attempted to keep heresy out of the Church. One of the more radical groups is of special

¹⁰¹ Tertullian, *De Idolatria* (trans. J. H. Waszink and J. C. M. van Winden), 10.4: “Quomodo repudiamus saecularia studia, sine quibus divina non possunt?”

¹⁰² Ibid., 10.6: “At cum fidelix haec discit, si iam sapit, qui sit, neque recipit neque admittit; multo magis, si nondum sapit aut ubi coeperit sapere, prius sapiat oportet quod prius didicit, id est de deo et fide. Proinde illa respuet nec recipiet, et erit tam tutus quam qui sciens venenum ab ignaro accipit nec bibit.”

interest here. Manichaeism was a dualistic religion of Persian origin inspired by, but only loosely related to, Christianity. Mani, the religion's founder, encouraged extreme asceticism preached by wandering missionaries. His teachings were "deeply hated by other Christians," and as a result "checked by savage persecution within the Christian empire."¹⁰³ Unsurprisingly, an impressive amount of literature survives in which mainstream Christians both condemn Manichaeism and try as much as possible to distance themselves from it. For instance, Augustine of Hippo, who had once practiced Manichaeism himself,¹⁰⁴ argued vehemently against the sect, and numerous others followed suit.

Where Manichaeism (and the reactions against it) involves beer is its strict regimen of abstinence. A Manichaean should eat and drink only substances which they interpreted as full of godliness, "but what is devoid of God's characteristics should be avoided."¹⁰⁵ This categorization of food and drink into godly and ungodly, usually in terms of light and dark, and the repercussions of the consumption thereof especially drew the animosity of its opponents.¹⁰⁶ The *Kephalaia*, a lengthy compendium of Manichaean precepts, is unambiguous. "Know and understand that the first righteousness a person will do to make truly righteous is this: he can embrace continence and purity . . . and not

¹⁰³ Peter Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom: Triumph and Diversity, A.D. 200-1000*, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003), 81-2.

¹⁰⁴ See especially Augustine, *Confessions*, 3.6.10 ff.

¹⁰⁵ Jason David BeDuhn, *The Manichaean Body: In Discipline and Ritual* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2000), 35.

¹⁰⁶ Iain Gardner and Samuel N. C. Lieu, intro. to *Manichaean Texts from the Roman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004), 22.

take any taste at all of the ‘wine’ name, nor fermented drink.”¹⁰⁷ And orthodox Christians, while careful not to endorse drunkenness, opposed this stance so as to agree with Mani as little as possible.

This is the stance of a late fourth-century document, *Sermones ad Fratres in Eremo Commorantes*, which offers advice to wandering ascetics, a group susceptible to Manichaean tendencies because of some overlapping behaviors. It is appended to the works of Augustine in the *Patrologia Latina*, but is of uncertain authorship. If the author is not Augustine himself, he certainly composed the work in the spirit of Augustine. On the topic of abstinence, he cites Ephesians: “After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church—for we are members of his body.”¹⁰⁸ The author expounds upon this quotation. “Therefore we should nourish the body; we should not spoil it, but we should sustain it with food and drink, as much as good health allows. For such wills God as well as the Apostles, that it be prescribed thus for you, too, my brothers.”¹⁰⁹ Withholding nourishment from the body, then, is contrary to the teachings of the Bible. But the author gets even more specific, warning against the dangers of malnourishment. “For whenever I see certain ones among you being sixty, seventy, or a hundred years old, witnessing them boiling over with the love of God, torturing their bodies, not even drinking wine, I fear that they offend God rather than

¹⁰⁷ *Kephalaia*, 80.192.4-13, in *Manichaean Texts from the Roman Empire*, ed. Iain Gardner and Samuel N. C. Lieu (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004), 231.

¹⁰⁸ Ephesians 5:29-30. NIV translation.

¹⁰⁹ *Sermones ad Fratres in Eremo Commorantes* (my trans.), Sermon 28, “In Coena Domini”: “Ideo nutrire debemus corpus, nec ipsum occidere, sed sustentare debemus cibo et potu, quantum valetudo permittit. Sic enim vult Deus, sic vult Apostolus: sic et vobis, fratres mei, praecipit.”

please Him.”¹¹⁰ Here the author is on the edge of accusing those who would refuse wine of blasphemy, for they do so in order to harm themselves.

These admonitions lead up to a very important piece of advice from the author of the *Sermons*. “In Christ’s name, therefore,” he proclaims, “I prescribe that, at least on Sundays and feast days, they drink wine or beer.”¹¹¹ At the culmination of the passage, then, the author, a man of God, has endorsed the consumption of beer. He does so, of course, in order to justify a position opposite his theological enemies. Regardless, the net result is a Christian advising other Christians to drink beer, derived ultimately from a Biblical precedent.

Also, one should not overlook the equal weight of beer and wine in this prescription. The two are mentioned together, with no indication of which one might be preferable. There is certainly no mention of barbarism, for that would be an insult to the brothers to whom the sermon is addressed. This tract appears to be completely divorced from traditional Roman notions of wine and its importance, for such rhetoric would have had little clout with its intended audience. “Christian writers consistently presented them as men untouched by *paideia*. The monk was the antithesis of the philosopher, the representative of the educated upper classes.”¹¹² And these un-Romanized wanderers

¹¹⁰ Ibid.: “Nam cum videam inter vos quosdam sexagenarios, quosdam septuagenarios, quosdam centenarios, videns eos Dei amore ferventes, corpora eorum crucifigentes, vinum etiam non bibentes, timeo ne potius Deum offendant quam placent.”

¹¹¹ Ibid.: “Talibus in Christi nomine praecipio, ut saltem diebus dominicis et solemnibus vinum vel cervisiam bibant.” The choice of the word *cervisiam* is interesting here. It is a bit early for the generic use of the word, so it points to a Gallic connection in either the author or the audience.

¹¹² Brown, *Power and Persuasion*, 71. Brown actually qualifies this statement, pointing out that “monks, in reality, came from a wide variety of social backgrounds and were far from averse

earned the respect of fellow Christians, enough to warrant attempts to keep them away from Manichaeism and in the orthodox fold. So it happens that in the process the author betrays a certain level of acceptance of beer.

With the Church gaining power so quickly, the difference between Christian and pagan trumped that between Roman and barbarian. For traditional Romans were themselves pagans, and with them, the barbarians, too, were potential converts. It is worthy of note that in the early stages of the Christian empire, certain Christian writers equated *Romanitas* with *Christianitas*, and accordingly barbarian with pagan.¹¹³ But, as Christians converted as many people as possible, regardless of ethnicity, the conflation could not hold for long. This shifted the importance away from labelling things pejoratively as barbarian, including beer. This shift constitutes the first step in beer shrugging off the stigma that it had suffered. Christians wanted to bring barbarians into their numbers, not to exclude them. Even the Roman emperors “saw themselves as being responsible for the Christianization not only of the empire but of the whole world.”¹¹⁴

to reading and producing books.” But the actual practice is less important here than the perception of them and the influence they would eventually have.

¹¹³ Fletcher, 25.

¹¹⁴ Ralph W. Mathisen, “Barbarian Bishops and the Churches ‘in Barbaricis Gentibus’ During Late Antiquity,” *Speculum*, vol. 72, no. 3 (July 1997), 665.

4. *Monasticism and Renewed Interest in Brewing*

One of the most effective tools in the quest to Christianize the world was the arrival of monasteries in the largely heathen provinces. As the Roman Empire dissolved in Western Europe, this movement developed among Christians and would be important not only to the evolution of the religion, but also to the increasing acceptance of beer. Monasticism was a key factor in changing the Christianity of the “ancient” world into the Christianity of the Middle Ages. Over the fifth and sixth centuries, monasteries popped up throughout Gaul, Italy, and all the lands which were once under Roman rule.¹¹⁵ These monasteries not only cultivated piety, but they also adopted the burgeoning culture of beer in these regions. They would be the first centers of beer production of considerable volume in Western Europe, for brewing had hitherto usually been a domestic, private undertaking. In the centuries between the official end of Roman power in the West and the beginning of the Carolingian Renaissance, monasteries honed the whole process of brewing, establishing a veritable craft. Technique, equipment, and training all benefitted from the monastic brewing revival.¹¹⁶

So thanks to the decline in anti-beer rhetoric, monastic life could incorporate it more directly. Early medieval monasticism had part of its roots in the wandering ascetics discussed earlier. “By the end of the fourth century the role of the Christian church in the cities had been overshadowed by a radical new model of human nature and human

¹¹⁵ Brown, *Rise of Western Christendom*, 220-1.

¹¹⁶ Unger, 26.

society,” based on people’s awe of the solitary experiences of these new monks.¹¹⁷ As the *Sermones ad Fratres in Eremo Commorantes* illustrates, several Christians in the West had concerns about the implications of extreme asceticism. Isolated communities seemed a more appropriate course. Monks could be secluded from the sordid outside world, but still live safely in self-sustaining communities devoted to religious growth. Even by the early fourth century, Pachomius had begun applying his military training in the foundation of monasteries, basing their rules on strict discipline. He was the first to codify and employ such a rigid regulation of monastic behavior of this sort, and his followers and numerous others, especially in the West, would follow suit.¹¹⁸

The monastic movement reached Gaul—the region of origin of *cervisia*—during the fourth century. And with the efforts of Martin of Tours, the history of monasticism in Gaul began.¹¹⁹ Martin, like Pachomius, had a military background, and discipline reigned in his monastery at Ligugé. He eventually received the appointment to bishop of Tours, but he determinedly continued to observe a monastic life while in office. As such he “organised his disciples as a colony of hermits,” resembling those colonies of the East, in nearby Marmoutier.¹²⁰

At the beginning of the fifth century, monastic development escalated in earnest in Gaul as Honoratus founded the monastery of Lérins on an island off the Mediterranean

¹¹⁷ Peter Brown, *Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1998), 51.

¹¹⁸ J. E. Merdinger, *Rome and the African Church in the Time of Augustine* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1997), 24.

¹¹⁹ Friedrich Prinz, *Frühes Mönchtum im Frankenreich: Kultur und Gesellschaft in Gallien, den Rheinlanden und Bayern am Beispiel der monastischen Entwicklung (4. bis 8. Jahrhundert)* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1965), 19.

¹²⁰ C. H. Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism: Forms of Religious Life in Western Europe in the Middle Ages*, 3rd ed. (Harlow: Pearson Education, 2001), 12-13.

coast. Here, as well as in newly-sprung monasteries throughout the area, many Romanized aristocrats sought shelter from the turbulent events surrounding the decentralization of authority in the West.¹²¹ These aristocrats fled from the very culture that so readily dismissed beer as a mark of barbarism. Life in the monastery was dramatically different, though, from the life of a typical Roman aristocrat. These men, historically proud of their *Romanitas*, would learn to accept monastic discipline—and to accept beer.

From their monastic careers, both Martin and Honoratus became bishops, of Tours and Arles, respectively. This was not insignificant. They helped bridge the gap between the ascetic movement and the ecclesiastical hierarchy by being members of both. Monasticism was not intrinsically orthodox; some monks could just as easily have been condemned as members of radical sects begun by heretics. So “its authenticity as a divinely ordained paradigm of Christian life had to be recognized.”¹²² And thanks to the episcopates of Martin, Honoratus, and others, monasticism proved itself compatible with the institution and settled in the West to stay.¹²³

But how did the monastic movement in Western Europe show an interest in beer? The answer begins with the codes of discipline originating in some of these early monasteries. As monasticism took a foothold in the West, it became necessary to

¹²¹ Ian Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms, 450-751* (Harlow: Pearson, 1994), 22, 181-2. Romanized elites and the Roman form of aristocracy survived in Gaul, where they had made quite a foothold and become rather powerful, long past the withdrawal of imperial power. For an indispensable study of this phenomenon, see Karl Friedrich Stroheker, *Der senatorische Adel im spätantiken Gallien* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1970).

¹²² Lawrence, 16.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

compose strict regulations for a monastery in order to properly reflect its values and ensure a persistently holy community. Caesarius of Arles composed two such sets of rules, one for each gender, at the beginning of the sixth century. Caesarius was a product of an aristocratic upbringing who found refuge in the monastery at Lérins (where, as mentioned above, such aristocrats often did). Like Honoratus, the monastery's founder, Caesarius begrudgingly accepted appointment as bishop of Arles. From his episcopal seat he composed his Rules, keeping in touch with the monastic community.¹²⁴ He would most definitely not be the last to publish his regulations.

The most influential monastic rule for some time in Gaul, and for that matter in Western Europe, in fact, came from Italy. It was there that Benedict compiled the rules for his monastery at Monte Cassino in the mid-sixth century. There are a few points, in particular, in Benedict's Rule that lend themselves to the justification of inclusion of beer in the monastery. The first of these is that monks should keep busy and perform manual labor daily in order to sustain the self-sufficiency of the monastery. The production of beer is labor-intensive, from harvesting grain to malting it, mashing it, boiling it, and fermenting it, and could thus serve as monks' daily labor. A Benedictine monastery was also intended to be a safe stopping point for weary travellers. As such, the Rule dictates that these visitors be given all the hospitality at the brothers' disposal. Again, having a supply of beer on hand would allow monks to appease thirsty travellers in fulfillment of the Rule. And, as beer production proved useful to those in Gaul following the Rule of

¹²⁴ Ibid., 22.

Benedict, monks incorporated the fruits of their breweries into their own diets, as well.¹²⁵ It is prudent to break down each of these aspects of Benedict's Rule to see just how they relate to beer in Western monasteries and imply acceptance by both monks and society at large.

The forty-eighth chapter of the Rule, "De Opere Manuum Cotidiano" ("On Daily Work of the Hands"), elucidates the necessity that monks work tirelessly to sustain the monastery. "Idleness is the enemy of the soul," admonishes Benedict. "therefore, the brothers ought to be employed in manual labor at certain times, and at certain other hours with holy readings."¹²⁶ He goes on to detail, according to the season, at what times this work should be performed.¹²⁷ That the monks perform their prescribed labor is clearly very important to Benedict, as he informs the brothers that "they are true monks if they live by the labor of their own hands, as did our fathers and the Apostles."¹²⁸ Monks in Gaul and Ireland would come to appreciate the strenuous work of brewing. By the ninth century, Benedictine monks were specifically expected to work in the brewery, which apparently they enjoyed due to the pleasant aromas.¹²⁹

But much earlier than the ninth century, even women in convents performed manual tasks in the breweries. In the seventh century, an unknown author—or authors—composed a rule for nuns in the spirit of Saint Benedict. It appears mostly in a question

¹²⁵ Unger, 27.

¹²⁶ Benedict, *The Rule of St. Benedict* (my trans.), 48.1: "Otiositas inimica est animae, et ideo certis temporibus occupari debent fratres in labore manuum, certis iterum horis in lectione divina."

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 48.2-16.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 48.8: "tunc veri monachi sunt si labore manuum suarum vivunt sicut et patres nostri et apostoli."

¹²⁹ Unger, 29.

and answer format, presumably intended to provide advice on matters hitherto left vague. The twelfth chapter asks, “In what way should day-to-day work with the hands be carried out?” (*Quomodo quotidianis diebus manibus sit operandum?*). “Work is to be done at all times except on feast days,” begins the response.¹³⁰ The author(s) then break down what tasks are best performed at what times, including obligatory study of scripture, much like Benedict does in his Rule. In doing so, they advise that work in the bakery and brewery should be done by groups in turns to minimize the need for talking. “Similarly [to the rules for bakers],” the document affirms, “one elder from those who inhabit the brewery for the production of beer should be placed over them,” to supervise and keep the brewers on task.¹³¹ This statement makes it very clear that at least one convent was not only brewing beer regularly, but had a facility specifically for that purpose—a *braxatorium*. Furthermore, the author(s) of the tract give no indication that this fact is out of the ordinary, and they readily give advice regarding work in the *braxatorium*. It is safe to say, then, that relatively large scale brewing in monasteries was commonplace, if not widespread, by the seventh century. So already by this early date work in the brewery was a regular fulfillment of the Benedictine beckon to manual labor.

The beer that was the fruit of the monks’ and nuns’ labor was available to guests at monasteries. Receiving such guests with the utmost kindness and hospitality was a major principle in the *Rule of Saint Benedict*. The fifty-third chapter of his Rule is dedicated to “The Reception of Guests” (*De Hospitibus Suscipiendis*). It begins, “All

¹³⁰ *Regula Cujusdam Patris ad Virgines* (my trans.), 12.1: “Operandum namque est omni tempore, praeter dies festos.”

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 12.14: “Similiter et quae in braxatorium ad cervisiam faciendam inhabitaverint, una ex eis senior sit praeposita, quae secundum regulam pistricis omnia custodiat.”

guests who arrive should be received just as Christ, since he said, ‘I was a guest and you received me.’”¹³² After a guest arrives, Benedict insists that the monastic hosts give them due treatment. “And appropriate honor should be shown to them all,” he commands, “especially to those who belong to the faith, and also to travellers. Therefore, whenever a guest has been announced, he should be met readily by the abbot or by the brothers, with every courtesy of affection.”¹³³ These courtesies must, of course, include food and drink. Benedict even recommends a private kitchen for guests, since travellers may arrive at all manner of inconvenient times.¹³⁴ It is from this order that certain monasteries began to keep reserves of beer to quench the thirst of their guests.

But much more so than serving beer and brewing it, the sources portray monks drinking it themselves. Benedict’s Rule sets precedent by allowing monks to drink wine, though with some hesitation. “Nevertheless,” Benedict prescribes, “taking into consideration the state of the feeble, we believe that half of a bottle of wine each per day is sufficient.”¹³⁵ And this amount is flexible, for “it falls to the discretion of the abbot whether the need of a location, work, or the heat of the season warrants an increased portion, though keeping watch over everyone lest overindulgence or drunkenness creep

¹³² Benedict, 53.1: “Omnes supervenientes hospites tamquam Christus suscipiantur, quia ipse est dicturus, ‘Hospes fui et suscepistis me.’” Christ’s words are a reference to Matthew 25:35, the NIV translation of which reads, “For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in . . .”

¹³³ Ibid., 53.2-3: “Et omnibus congruus honor exhibeatur, maxime domesticis fidei et peregrinis. Ut ergo nuntiatus fuerit hospes, occurratur ei a priore vel a fratribus cum omni officio caritatis.”

¹³⁴ Ibid., 53.16: “Coquina abbatis et hospitem super se sit ut incertis horis supervenientes hospites qui numquam desunt monasterio, non inquietent fratres.”

¹³⁵ Ibid., 40.3: “Tamen infirmorum contuentes inbecillitatem credimus eminam vini per singulos sufficere per diem.”

in.”¹³⁶ Benedict is careful to qualify his wine allowance, however, so as not to appear to give wholesale endorsement to drinking. “But since in our times it is not possible to persuade the monks [against drinking],” Benedict concedes, “Let us at least agree upon this—that we not drink to the point of satiety but more moderately, for wine makes even wise men stray.”¹³⁷ But Benedict does not directly discuss beer. This should be expected, as he was in Italy, where grapes abounded.¹³⁸

His successors in other regions, though, would make the emendation for him. For instance, the nuns to whom the aforementioned *Regula Cujusdam Patris ad Virgines* is addressed were allowed to partake of the products of their brewery. The author(s) state to the sisters that “certainly a draught of strong drink, that is, the usual measure of beer, should be given out.”¹³⁹ So the sisters both brewed and consumed beer. This raised few eyebrows, apparently; beyond the Alps beer was attaining a socially-acceptable status.

At the beginning of the seventh century, though, another interesting piece of evidence of monks drinking beer comes from the *Rule of Saint Columbanus*. Columbanus was born in Leinster, Ireland, in the middle of the sixth century. By this time, the monastic movement had established a strong foothold in Ireland, where it had discovered a “peculiar enthusiasm to the disciplined life of community and learning.”¹⁴⁰

¹³⁶ Ibid., 40.5: “Quod si aut loci necessitas aut labor aut ardor aestatis amplius poposcerit, in arbitrio prioris consistat, considerans in omnibus ne subrepat satietas aut ebrietas.”

¹³⁷ Ibid., 40.6-7: “Sed quia nostris temporibus id monachis persuaderi non potest, saltem vel hoc consentiamus ut non usque ad satietatem bibamus sed parcius quia vinum apostatare facit etiam sapientes.”

¹³⁸ Nelson, 101.

¹³⁹ *Regula Cujusdam Patris ad Virgines*, 10.5: “Potus vero sicerae liquoris, id est, cervisiae mensura solita tribuatur.”

¹⁴⁰ G. S. M. Walker, Introduction to *Sancti Columbani Opera* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1970), xii.

Columbanus shared this enthusiasm and soon joined the monastery of Bangor, which was run according to the stern rules of its abbot, Comgall.¹⁴¹ The same “ferocious discipline” would later manifest itself in Columbanus’ own monastic rules.¹⁴² After years at Bangor, Columbanus begged Comgall to allow him to travel to Gaul as a self-imposed exile. This was one of the most extreme forms of penance, and his will to inflict it upon himself is a testament to his monastic discipline.¹⁴³ Comgall hesitantly granted the monk’s wish, and Columbanus set out for the continent sometime shortly before 590.¹⁴⁴ The Church in Merovingian Gaul “was initially unprepared to receive this new sort of [rigorous Irish] spirituality,” so Columbanus met some difficulties at first.¹⁴⁵ But he was able to establish monasteries of the Irish influence in Burgundy, perhaps the primary one being Luxeuil.¹⁴⁶ It was for these monasteries that Columbanus composed his Rule, which spread his influence throughout Western Europe and enjoyed inclusion and adaptation in numerous successive *regula*.¹⁴⁷

The *Rule of Saint Columbanus* is, in fact, the oldest Irish monastic rule known to modern scholars. In its very primacy, it betrays the ethos of the Irish monk. “For Columbanus, the life of the monk was a heroic and unremitting warfare to conquer his own self-will and sensuality.”¹⁴⁸ It may seem counterintuitive, then, that such a man

¹⁴¹ Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, 246.

¹⁴² Lawrence, 43.

¹⁴³ Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, 247.

¹⁴⁴ Fletcher, 94.

¹⁴⁵ Pierre Riché, “Columbanus, His Followers and the Merovingian Church,” in *Columbanus and Merovingian Monasticism*, eds. H. B. Clarke and Mary Brennan (Oxford: British Archaeological Reports, 1981), 59.

¹⁴⁶ Wood, 185.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 188.

¹⁴⁸ Lawrence, 43.

would fill his monasteries with beer. But beer was apparently not a thing to be reviled for Columbanus. A passage from his Rule not only testifies to beer's presence in his monasteries, but also its value. For spilling beer is more than just a "party foul," it is a transgression worthy of penance. Columbanus issues the proper punishments:

But if through negligence or forgetfulness or failure of care he has lost more than usual either of fluids or of solids, let him do penance with a long pardon in church by prostrating himself without moving any limb while they sing twelve psalms at the twelfth hour. Or certainly if it is much that is spilt, according to the measures of beer or portions of whatever things he has lost in spilling through the occurrence of neglect, let him supply for an equal number of days what he had been accustomed to receive lawfully for his own use, and know that he has lost them to his cost, so that he drink water in place of beer. For what is spilt on the table and runs off it, we say that it suffices to seek pardon in his place.¹⁴⁹

So a monk who spilled a pitcher of beer in a Columbanian monastery could find himself prostrate in the church and washing down his meals with water. Obviously, from this passage, beer was a regular drink at these Irish-inspired monasteries.

But perhaps the most important and direct indication of beer in western monasteries, and beyond into the clergy, is the Rule written by Chrodegang of Metz. Chrodegang was a relative of the Merovingian dynastic line, in particular to the Frankish king Pippin, if one should believe his "not very trustworthy" biography in Paul the

¹⁴⁹ Columbanus, *Regula Coenobialis* (trans. G. S. M. Walker), *Regula Coenobialis Fratrum*, 3: "Quod si ex neglegentia vel oblivione seu transgressione securitatis tam in liquidis quam in aridis amplius solito perdidit, longa venia in ecclesia dum duodecim psalmos ad duodecimam canunt prostratus nullum membrum movens paeniteat. Vel certe si multum est quod effudit, quantos metranos de cervisa aut mensuras qualiumcumque rerum intercidente neglegentia effundens perdidit, supputans tot diebus illud quod in sumptus proprios rite accipere consueverat, sibi ea perdidisse sciat, ut pro cervisa aquam bibat. De effuso super mensam decidentequae extra eam veniam in discubitu petere dicimus sufficere."

Deacon's *Deeds of the Bishops of Metz*.¹⁵⁰ As a member of a noble family (for he was clearly noble, even if not directly related to the royal line), he enjoyed a degree of favor, and received an appointment as bishop of Metz, a city in the east of Francia, "close to the newly converted mission fields of Germany," in 742.¹⁵¹ Less than a decade later, Pippin himself was anointed sole king of the Franks. He had already given a great deal of effort to reforming the Frankish church by his accession to the throne. In the years prior to his anointment, Pippin contributed to attempts to eliminate the last vestiges of paganism in the kingdom and to solidify the expectations of the monastic and clerical communities (according to the *Rule of Saint Benedict*). He continued his efforts upon receiving the kingship. From this high position he was able to promote Chrodegang to the level of archbishop in 754. Chrodegang "was to be the dominant force in the continuation of ecclesiastical reform during Pippin's reign."¹⁵² Chrodegang had received his education in the monastery of St. Trond, so, though it seems he was never a monk himself, he was quite familiar with Benedictine practice. He continued to support Benedictine monasticism throughout his episcopate and archepiscopate, himself founding a handful of abbeys, in one of which, at Gorze, he would eventually be buried. He also presided over several church councils in the expanse of his career.¹⁵³ But his contributions to the culture of beer come from his Rule.

¹⁵⁰ Prinz, 219. Of Chrodegang's origin, Paul the Deacon says in *Gesta Episcoporum Mettensium*, 267: "Chrodegangus antistes eligitur, ex pago Hasbaniensi oriundus, patre Sigamno, matre Landrada, Francorum ex genere primae nobilitatis progenitus."

¹⁵¹ Jerome Bertram, *The Chrodegang Rules: The Rules for the Common Life of the Secular Clergy from the Eighth and Ninth Centuries* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005), 12.

¹⁵² Wood, 304.

¹⁵³ Bertram, 12-14.

Chrodegang's Rule is not meant specifically for monasteries, though. It is directed toward regular clergy living in communities. These communities, thought Chrodegang, could benefit from the level of discipline expected in monasteries. So he essentially adapted monastic rules, primarily of the Benedictine variety, to be used by clergy. His opponents argued that he was either debasing the principles on which monasticism was founded or that he tried to turn his priests into monks. In reality, though, monks and secular clergy remained separate; Chrodegang meant only to fortify the discipline and religiosity of his priests. He composed the Rule for use by his own clergy in Metz, but its influence spread across Europe very quickly.¹⁵⁴

The importance of Chrodegang's Rule, then, in the history of beer is twofold. First, it is a testament to acceptable beer consumption within monasteries. And second, it is evidence of beer outside of the monastery and in the secular clergy. It seems that beer consumption was not unique to monasteries; the monasteries were just the most efficient at producing it. Men in various ecclesiastical positions in western Europe consumed beer like the rest of the population.

So what does Chrodegang say about beer? The twenty-third subheading of his Rule is dedicated to "the measure of drink" (*De Mensura Potus*) and is an elaboration upon the chapter of the same title in the *Rule of Saint Benedict*.¹⁵⁵ Chrodegang is much more detailed, though. He describes appropriate amounts of beverage according to the meal with which it is consumed and the rank of the cleric drinking it. "When they are to

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 1-3, 14-15.

¹⁵⁵ Benedict, 40.

eat twice a day, the priests should receive three cups at noon, and two at supper,” Chrodegang begins; “those of the rank of deacon should receive three at noon and two at supper; the subdeacons two at noon and two at supper; the other ranks two at noon and one at supper. When there is only one meal in the day,” the bishop qualifies, “they should receive the same number of cups as specified for the noon meal when they eat twice; and what they would have had to drink at supper should remain in the cellarer’s care.”¹⁵⁶ The attention to detail beyond that of Benedict is immediately noticeable. While to this point Chrodegang has not specified what beverage he is divying out, it is presumably wine. It is certainly alcoholic, for in the next line he warns, “At all times they should beware of drunkenness.”¹⁵⁷

It is when Chrodegang describes the beverages that fill these measures that beer comes into play. “If there is even less wine available, and the bishop is unable to make up the ration,” Chrodegang continues, “he should provide as much as he can, and console them with beer. The brethren should not complain, but give thanks to God and bear it with equanimity, for if it had been possible for them to have their ration, it would certainly not have been withheld.”¹⁵⁸ Wine seems to be the beverage of choice, but this very statement indicates that the abbey would have a supply of beer on hand, apparently

¹⁵⁶ Chrodegang, *The Rule of Saint Chrodegang* (trans. Jerome Bertram), 23: “Quand bis in die ebendum fuerit, presbiteri ad sextam tres calices accipiant, ad cenam duos; diaconi qui in gradu sunt, ad sextam tres, ad cenam duos; subdiaconi ad sextam ii, ad cenam ii; reliquos grados ad sextam ii, ad cenam i. Quando autem in die una refectio fuerit, sicut antea ora Sexta, quando bis manducabant, accipiebant, tantos calices accipiant; et quod ad cenam accipiebant de potu, hoc celerario remaneat.”

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.: “Et omnino caveant ebrietate.”

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.: “Si vero contigerit quod vinum minus fuerit, et ista mensura episcopus inplere non potest, iuxta quod prevalet, inpleat, et de cervisa consolacionem faciat; illi autem fratres non mormorent, sed Deo gratias agant et equanimiter tollerent, nam si esse potest ut tantum habeant, tunc nullo modo non remaneat.”

in equivalent or greater quantities. An expanded version of the *Rule of Saint Chrodegang* from a century later goes even further into detail on the amount of beer to be used in lieu of wine. Five pints is the recommended allotment of wine, but “if the full amount of wine cannot be produced, they should have three pints of wine and three of beer;” and if that is not possible, then use whatever wine there is and make up the difference with beer.¹⁵⁹

There may be some, though, who do not drink wine for whatever reason, be it health concerns or penance or general abstinence. Chrodegang is sure to provide for them. “For those who abstain from wine,” suggests the bishop of Metz, “the bishop or his representative should make sure that they have as much beer as they should have had wine.”¹⁶⁰ So even one that avoids wine may drink beer, even in the same quantities. Jerome Bertram, in his commentary on the Rule, astutely points out that “it is not envisaged that anyone would wish to abstain from beer as well.”¹⁶¹ Considering this fact, it seems that by this point beer was deeply integrated into clerical society, if in a different way than wine. Monks and churchmen may have preferred wine in general, but it was still a special beverage. The everyday drink, the default, was beer.

As Benedict did, Chrodegang allows some flexibility with the amounts he gives.

“If the bishop wishes to add somewhat to the above mentioned ration of drink, it lies

¹⁵⁹ *The Interpolated Rule of Saint Chrodegang* (trans. Jerome Bertram), 8: “Et si eadem regio vinifera fuerit, accipiant per singulos dies quinque libras vini, si tamen sterilitas impedimentum non fecerit temporis. Si vero vinifera plena non fuerit, tres libras vini et tres cervise: et caveant ebrietatem. Si vero contigerit quod vinum minus fuerit, et istam mensuram episcopus, vel qui sub eo est, implere non potest, iuxta quod prevalet, impleat de cervisa . . .”

¹⁶⁰ Chrodegang, 23: “Et illis qui se a vino abinent, provideat episcopus, vel qui sub eo sunt, ut tantum habeant de cervisa quantum de vino habere debuerant.”

¹⁶¹ Bertram, 70 fn. 99.

within his power. However, if it should happen for a good reason that an extra meal is granted, we still cannot allow them ever to receive more than the above mentioned ration, three cups, at a single meal.”¹⁶² But, again like Benedict, he is careful to warn against inebriation. “We admonish you that a cleric should always lead a sober life. Since nowadays they cannot be persuaded not to drink wine, let us at least agree upon this, that drunkenness should not overcome them, for St. Paul tells us that drunkards are excluded from the Kingdom of God, unless they reform through suitable penance.”¹⁶³ The very fact that the danger of drunkenness receives so much emphasis indicates that it had to have happened enough to warrant concern. Monks and clerics with access to such large supplies of beer and approval from the Church to consume inevitably overindulged from time to time. But the church had to frown on such excess.

Even those monasteries in Ireland, which, in the Columbanian tradition, were so friendly to beer, found it necessary to institute harsh penalties to assuage drunkenness. In the eighth century, two Irish abbots, Abedoc and Ethelwolf, compiled a list of addenda to monastic rules called the *Canones Hibernenses*. Among these, they prescribe punishments for certain specific transgressions. He includes, of course, overdrinking. “Whoever voluntarily defiles himself with indecent amounts of liquor to the point of passing out” in one of these monasteries could be forced to sing thirty psalms while

¹⁶² Chrodegang, 23: “Et si episcopus voluerit ad supra scriptam mensuram aliquid potus addere, in eius potestate consistat; nam quando aliqua refectio causis exigentibus venerit, non amplius consentimus ad unam refectionem, quam ut supra scriptam mensuram, tres calices, ut accipiant.”

¹⁶³ Ibid.: “Et hoc admonemus, ut clericus noster sobriam omnino ducant vitam. Et quia persuadere non possumus ut vinum non bibant, vel hoc consenciamus ut saltem in illis ebrietas non dominetur, quia ‘omnis ebriosus’ Apostolus ‘a regno Dei extraneos’ esse denuntiat, nisi per dignam penitentiam emendaverint.” Note how closely this passage echoes the *Rule of Saint Benedict*.

kneeling and also be assigned extra work.¹⁶⁴ This seems to be a case of the rule proving the problem. Monks becoming too comfortable with the abundance of beer in their monasteries probably generated the need to append such a clause to their rules. The especially rigid monastic attitudes of the Irish could not tolerate excess of any kind, so, while beer was still integral to their existence, inebriation was strictly anathema.

Apparently the problem of overconsumption made its way into the clergy, as well. The expanded version of the *Rule of Saint Chrodegang* goes into far more detail on the evils of drunkenness than the original, implying that it became a serious issue in the century interim. In fact, it adds a whole chapter on the topic, *De Ebrietate a Clero Devitanda atque Detestanda*. It even includes an interesting poem, whose origin is unknown, warning clerics of the repercussions of drunkenness.

O thou who wouldst fain be good,
Who wouldst discern the truth,
Flee from the bite of wine
As thou wouldst the company of death.
No fever is there for man
More dire than the fumes of the vine,
They that deafen the ears,
That cause the tongue to stumble.
Tell me, drunkard, say,
Dost thou live, art thou heavy with death?
See how sickly thou liest,
How thou fallest with never a thought.
Neither good nor ill canst thou feel,
Neither hard nor soft be thy bed.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁴ Abedoc and Ethelwolf, *Canones Hibernenses* (my trans.), De Poenitentia, 15,: “Qui voluntate obsceno liquore maculatus fuerit dormiendo; si cervisa et carne abundat; coenubium est. III noctis horis stando vigilet, si sanae virtutis est. Si vero pauperem victum habet, XXVIII aut XXX psalmos canet stando supplex, cum opere extraordinario pendat.”

¹⁶⁵ *The Interpolated Rule of Saint Chrodegang*, 42: “Qui cupis esse bonus, et vis dinoscere verum, / Ut mortis socium, sic mordax effuge vinum. / Nulla febris hominum maior quam viteus

Note, though, that neither this poem, nor the rest of this chapter, mention beer specifically. There are, however, numerous mentions of wine. “My dear brothers,” the author pleads, “do not befuddle yourselves with wine, do not blot your names out from before heaven by drinking to excess.”¹⁶⁶ His warning is on the edge of condemning overindulgence in wine without including other drinks such as beer. Drunkenness from beer was almost certainly just as despicable, for it is hinted at in the chapter “On the Measure of Drink.” But this tirade is essentially directed at wine. This leads to an interesting conclusion. Wine was a special beverage, one preferred for celebrations and serving to special guests. Because of its status, drinking it in excess was frivolous and, by extension, sinful. Beer, however, had become a common, everyday drink. It did not enjoy the elevated status that wine did (and had for quite some time). But it was a staple of the monastic diet. Intoxication from beer, then, while still an offense worthy of penance, was tantamount to overeating. In fact, it sometimes occurs in monastic rules alongside excessive meat consumption.¹⁶⁷ So beer had become something of an essential element of monastic life in western Europe.

The fundamental role of beer in the early-medieval western monastery is especially evident in the plan for the monastery of St. Gall. In the early seventh century, an Irish monk, Gallus, who had been a follower of Columbanus, went to the continent in

humor: / Surdescunt aures, balbutit denique lingua. / Dic mihi, dic, ebrie, vivis, an morte gravaris?
/ Pallidus ecce iaces, et sine mente quiescis. / Non bona, non mala, non dura, non mollia sentis.”

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.: “Fratres karissimi, nolite vos inebriari vino, nolite bibendo immoderate nomina vestra de caelo delere.”

¹⁶⁷ For example, Abedoc and Ethelwolf, *Canones Hibernenses*, De Poenitentia, 15: “. . . si cervisa et carne abundat . . .”

self-inflicted exile much like his mentor. He and his disciples dwelled in a small community along the Steinach. The cloister was only the most simple, but remained a site of pilgrimage after Gallus' death. In 720, some hundred years after Gallus settled on the site, a certain Otmar founded a monastery there in his name. Not long thereafter, the monastery adopted the *Rule of Saint Benedict* as its guiding principle.¹⁶⁸ Another century later, the current abbot of St. Gall monastery, Gozbert, received a letter and a blueprint from an admirer, whose identity is contested.¹⁶⁹ The draft originated from the monastery of Reichenau sometime in the 820s, but little else is known of its genesis. The blueprint constitutes a plan for some forty buildings in a large monastic community. It came at a time when Gozbert intended an overhaul building project for St. Gall. The plan speaks loudly to the contemporary ideals of what a monastic community should be, even if the project was never carried out to completion. The most common interpretation of the plan's purpose is that it "was intended to serve as a paradigmatic guide for all monastic construction in the Carolingian Empire."¹⁷⁰

Since by this time beer had become so deeply integrated into monasticism and wider society, one would expect the supposed epitome of monasteries to reflect that fact.

¹⁶⁸ Werner Vogler, "Historical Sketch of the Abbey of St. Gall," trans. James C. King, in *The Culture of the Abbey of St. Gall: An Overview*, ed. Werner Vogler (Zurich: Belser Verlag, 1991), 9.

¹⁶⁹ Originally, the author of the plan was thought to be Hatto, bishop of Basel. This claim, however, has come under attack, and the conflict has not yet been resolved.

¹⁷⁰ Richard E. Sullivan, "What Was Carolingian Monasticism? The Plan of St Gall and the History of Monasticism," in *After Rome's Fall: Narrators and Sources of Early Medieval History, Essays Presented to Walter Goffart*, ed. Alexander Callander Murray (Toronto: U Toronto P, 1998), 262-6. Sullivan, however, proposes alternate theories of the plan's intent, from "a menu of options from which abbots and their patrons might select when they decided to build or renovate a monastery," to a blueprint for an actual building project.

The plan of St. Gall¹⁷¹ does not disappoint. Not only does it contain a brewery, it shows three of them. One brewery serves the monks, one serves distinguished guests, and yet another one serves the poor. Whoever the author of the plan was, he certainly wanted to be sure that beer was available to anyone at all that associated with the monastery.

The brewery for the monks is the most elaborate in the plan. It is situated near the far right of the blueprint, just above a granary. This granary is actually one dedicated to the ingredients needed in the brewery (another one serves for baked goods and such). A label in the center of the cross-shaped building reads, “the granary where the washed grain is kept and where what is used for beer is prepared.”¹⁷² Around it are the store rooms for the treated grain.¹⁷³ It seems to be a rudimentary malting facility, really. But already it is clear that the brewing operation at St. Gall would be a serious one, if it required a whole building just for the preparation of the ingredients going into the beer.

The monks’ brewery is right above this granary, with convenient proximity to the stores of already-prepared malted grains. It adjoins a bakery, and over the two of them is written, “may the nourishment of the brothers here be attended to with a noble concern.”¹⁷⁴ The author of the plan, then, did think of beer as sustenance moreso than an intoxicant, here clumping it together with bread under the rubric of *victus*. The bottom half of the duplex is the intricate brewery. The room for brewing says simply, “let the

¹⁷¹ The blueprint itself is preserved in *Codex Sangellensis*, 1092, recto. A very useful digitized version of the original is available online, courtesy of the Institute for Advanced Technology in the Humanities at the University of Virginia, at <http://www.stgallplan.org/>.

¹⁷² Plan of the Monastery of St. Gall (my trans.): “granarium ubi mundatum frumentum servetur et quod ad cervisam praeparatur.”

¹⁷³ Ibid.: the rooms are labeled, “repositoria earundem rerum,” and “similiter.”

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.: “Hic victus fratrum cura tractetur honesta.”

beer for the brothers be brewed here.”¹⁷⁵ But the contents of the room lack description on the blueprint. Circles and squares arranged symmetrically throughout the brewing room must surely represent vessels for mashing, boiling, or fermenting. Straining of the beverage took place in a room to the right of this one, where the author proclaims, “let the brew be strained here.”¹⁷⁶ This room, too, has some unlabeled vessels in it, two rectangular and one circular. One can easily imagine that these represent a sort of medieval lauter tun. The renovated monastery of St. Gall would have the capacity to produce quite a large quantity of beer with such facilities. But remember that this is the brewery which serves only the monks—the abbey in the plan still has two more breweries.

On the other side of the blueprint, near the far left, is the brewery to accommodate guests. It is an area in a large building also housing guests’ kitchen and bakery, and is designated succinctly, “place for the preparation of beer.”¹⁷⁷ Its layout is quite similar to that of the brewery for the monks, but it is slightly smaller. This makes sense, seeing as how visitors, coming and going, would not have as much collective demand as the monks, all consuming beer regularly from day to day. Adjoining this brewing room is one that looks very similar to the room where beer is strained in the monks’ brewery. This one, however, has a slightly different purpose. “Here let the beer be cooled,” reads

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.: “hic fratribus conficiatur cervisa.”

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.: “hic coletur celia.” Note the choice of word here, *celia* rather than *cervisa*. From this example, the author seems to use *celia* to denote unfinished beer. However, he uses the two terms interchangeably throughout the plan. He seems simply to be avoiding redundancy.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.: “domus confaciendae celiae.”

the plan in this enclosure.¹⁷⁸ Perhaps the purpose is similar, letting the beer cool and settle, thus helping clarify it. Either way, guests at the proposed St. Gall would have beer handy to quench their thirst as needed.

Those who needed their thirst quenched most, though, were the poor and those arriving at the monastery on pilgrimage. And they, too, had their own brewing facility in the Plan of St. Gall. The buildings for their accomodation are near the center of the plan, drawn near the bottom end of the church. Connected to the lodgings is another duplex-style building with a bakery on one end and a brewery on the other. Again, the brewery layout resembles that of the two larger ones for the monks and guests, but is smaller. This one is simply labelled, “brewery.”¹⁷⁹ And, like the guests’ brewery, the one for pilgrims and paupers has a room “for cooling the beer.”¹⁸⁰ So they, too, would have their share of beer ready upon arrival.

It is quite apparent, then, that the Plan of St. Gall is the culmination of the relationship between Benedictine monasticism and increasing beer appreciation. Its three breweries would have taken tremendous labor to operate continuously, and it provided both for guests and the monks themselves. The author of the plan obviously thought of beer as a staple of life. Had the blueprint actually been followed and the ideal monastery constructed, its beer output would have been enormous. And since those in power in the West no longer considered the drink barbaric, St. Gall could have produced this output free of social repercussions. Beer was a source of nourishment for men of every status.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.: “hic refrigeratur cervisa.”

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.: “bracitorium.”

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.: “ad refrigerandum cervisam.”

Western monasticism, at its beginning, left doors open through which beer, long outcast by the Romans, could find a new home. Monks in Gaul quickly recognized the utility of beer and its application to the rules that governed their lives. So the art of brewing found its way into the monasteries of these regions, where it still remains.¹⁸¹ Society at large, by the Carolingian era thoroughly Christianized, had no qualms about drinking the same beverage that served as a dietary staple of so many highly religious men, in many cases saints. These most holy men, that is, those venerated by the title of “saint,” would, however, illustrate beer’s new status in other ways. Or, more accurately, their biographers would, by their very veneration of the saints.

¹⁸¹ Countless beers of high quality are still brewed in monasteries throughout Europe, especially in Belgium.

5. *Saints, Hagiography, and Beer-Miracles*

The monasteries that spread across Europe in the early middle ages produced men and women capable of great deeds in the name of Christ and their beliefs. Columbanus, for example, surrendered the familiar cloistered life to found monasteries on the continent under the strict rules he had learned. These saints also exhibited a willingness to suffer great discomfort to promote a more complete spirituality and emphasize their humility, even in the face of magnanimity. Saint Cuthbert was a product of the monastery, too. But eventually he gave up his life at Lindisfarne, where he had been a shining example of a monk, for a less comfortable life as a hermit on the island Farne. After some cajolery from his peers, he returned to Lindisfarne as a bishop. But he only served for two years, then returned to his hermetic existence on Farne.¹⁸² Figures such as these, placing the state of their spirituality above all else, became the objects of immense respect to western Christians. Their followers often wrote biographies of them to document their exemplary lives. Hagiography, though, had literary goals, not necessarily historical ones.¹⁸³ Its value is not so much as a narrative of events, but as a reflection of what the early-

¹⁸² Ted Johnson-South, "Changing Images of Sainthood: St. Cuthbert in the *Historia de Sancto Cuthberto*," in *Saints: Studies in Hagiography*, ed. Sandro Sticca (Binghamton, NY: Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies, 1996), 82.

¹⁸³ For a study on the value of hagiography of this period as a historical source, see Paul Fouracre, "Merovingian History and Merovingian Hagiography," in *Past and Present*, no. 127 (May 1990), 3-38.

medieval mind saw as holy. “Hagiography . . . was considered to be ethically rather than factually true.”¹⁸⁴

The element of early-medieval saints’ lives that concerns beer is the miracles performed by the saints. Miracles are prevalent in hagiographical writings, playing an important role in elevating the saint in the eyes of the reader.¹⁸⁵ Already in the late fourth century, Christians cited miracles as evidence of holiness. The first Christian emperors, their power “no longer presented as tethered by the silken ropes of an upper-class *paideia*,” were able to justify their rule and its heavenly endorsement with stories of miracles.¹⁸⁶ So, too, did later hagiographers recount miracles to show the divine favor of the saints about whom they wrote.

The miracles of most concern here are those in the lives of some of the early-medieval Irish saints. It is no coincidence that the examples of early saints at the beginning of this section, Columbanus and Cuthbert, are both from Ireland. Irish monasticism, as already shown, incorporated beer at an early stage. So, too, do the miracles in the lives of some Irish saints, particularly Columbanus and Brigid, hint at the Irish fondness of beer. The hagiographical tradition had deeper roots on the continent than in Ireland. By the time the literary form reached Ireland, in the seventh century, hagiography “was an already defined genre with its *topoi*, its rules and its

¹⁸⁴ Alison Goddard Elliott, *Roads to Paradise: Reading the Lives of the Early Saints* (Hanover: UP of New England, 1987), 6.

¹⁸⁵ Johnson-South, 83.

¹⁸⁶ Brown, *Power and Persuasion*, 134.

conventions.”¹⁸⁷ Miraculous events, some of which were highly standardized, found a comfortable home in Irish hagiography.

Miracles involving beer show not only the saint’s holiness, but, too, the relationship of beer to daily life. A logical starting point is with the *Vita Sancti Columbani* of Jonas of Bobbio. Columbanus had already done much to influence beer in the monastery, and his biographer would reflect the saint’s relationship to beer. Jonas was a disciple of Columbanus at the monastery of Bobbio, which Columbanus founded and was the place of his death. Jonas entered the monastery a mere two years after the master’s death, and was surrounded by those who knew him personally and respected him immensely. In this environment Jonas was able to produce his biography of Columbanus, which is one of the first glimpses at *die neue monastische Kulturepoche* of Irish-inspired monasticism on the continent.¹⁸⁸

Jonas lists numerous miracles that Columbanus supposedly performed in his lifetime. As one might expect, among these are miracles involving beer. Jonas begins the first of these stories, “I shall relate another miracle that took place, which was done by Columbanus and his cellarer.”¹⁸⁹ Already the cellarer is involved. He would have been in charge of the stores of beer in the monastery, an important asset, indeed. Jonas continues, “When the time for a meal was approaching, and the attendant was about to serve the beer . . . the cellarer brought a vessel called a *tybrum* down to the cellar and

¹⁸⁷ Jean-Michel Picard, “The Marvellous in Irish and Continental Saints’ Lives of the Merovingian Period,” in *Columbanus and Merovingian Monasticism*, eds. H. B. Clarke and Mary Brennan (Oxford: British Archaeological Reports, 1981), 91.

¹⁸⁸ Prinz, 487-8.

¹⁸⁹ Jonas of Bobbio, *Vita Sancti Columbani* (my trans.), 26.1: “Patratum est aliud miraculum, quod per B. Columbanum et ejus cellerarium factum fuit referam.”

placed it in front of the vat where the beer was brewed.”¹⁹⁰ At this point, Jonas feels the need to define beer (*cervisia*) for his readers. His definition is invaluable to understanding a Columbanian monk’s view of the beverage. Jonas writes that beer is a drink “which is boiled down from the juice of wheat or barley, and to which the people who live near the ocean—except Scots and barbarians—that is, Gaul, Britain, Ireland, Germany, and others who do not deviate from their ways, are accustomed before all other drinks in the world.”¹⁹¹ A few portions of this statement should stand out immediately. Most obviously, Jonas claims that barbarians do not drink beer. Given the attitude of the past millennium, this is astonishing. Not only is beer no longer barbaric, but barbarians no longer consume beer at all. At least that is how the monk at Bobbio saw it. Furthermore, among the now beer-drinking peoples, beer was the primary beverage. Jonas’ claims about beer are perhaps exaggerated in comparison to reality, but as an inhabitant of a Columbanian monastery in Gaul, beer would have been a part of his everyday life. He seems to understand it as a product of the cultures with which he is familiar, certainly not something inherited from the barbarians.

With the reader up to speed on the nature of beer, Jonas continues his story of Columbanus and his cellarer. The cellarer had just placed a container in front of the beer vat;

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 26.2: “Cum hora refectiois appropinquaret, et minister refectorii cervisiam administrare conaretur . . . vas quod tybrum nuncupant, minister ad cellarium deportat, et ante vas quo cervisia condita erat apponit.”

¹⁹¹ Ibid.: “quae ex frumenti vel hordei succo excoquitur, quamque prae caeteris in orbe terrarum gentibus, praeter Scoticas et barbaras gentes, quae Oceanum incolunt usitantur, id est Gallia, Britannia, Hibernia, Germania caeteraeque quae ab eorum moribus non desciscunt.”

having pulled the plug, he let the outpour flow into the *tybrum*. Another of the brethren called him suddenly, on the authority of the abbot. And he, burning with the fire of obedience, failed to stop the flow, and hastened on a swift course to the holy man, carrying the bung, called a *duciculum*, in his hand. After he had completed the tasks the man of God wanted of him, remembering his negligence, he returned quickly to the cellar, imagining that nothing would remain in the vat from which the beer had been pouring.¹⁹²

The cellarer was right to be afraid. Remember that according to Columbanus' *Regula Coenobialis*, spilling beer was a serious offense, especially in the quantity that the cellarer feared. He could be forced to lie prostrate for twelve psalms and drink nothing but water until he had made up for the loss.¹⁹³

The volume at risk here is unknown, but a vessel that served all of the brethren is certainly more waste than would have been tolerated. Fortunately, God's favor of Columbanus and those faithful to him solved the problem. According to Jonas, when the cellarer returned to the cellar, "he saw that the beer had filled the *tybrum* to the brim, and that not the slightest drop had fallen on the floor, such that you would believe the height of the *tybrum* to have doubled. . . . So much was the merit of the one giving orders, so much the obedience of the one following them, that thus the Lord wished to avert distress from them both."¹⁹⁴ Quite the miracle, this. God prevented the beer from spilling because the cellarer was busy obeying the orders of the abbot, as any good monk should.

¹⁹² Ibid., 26.2-5: "tractoque serraculo meatum in tybrum currere sinit. Quem subito Patris imperio alius e fratribus vocavit. At ille obedientiae igne ardens, oblitus meatum obserare, pernicipi cursu ad beatum pergit virum, serraculum quod duciculum vocant, manu deferens. Postquam sibi vir Dei quae voluerat imperata deprompsit, recordatus negligentiae, celer ad cellarium rediit, conjiciens nihil in vase de quo cervisia decurrebat remansisse."

¹⁹³ Columbanus, *Regula Coenobialis*, Regula Coenobialis Fratrum, 3.

¹⁹⁴ Jonas of Bobbio, *Vita Sancti Columbani*, 26.6-7: "Intuitusque supra tybrum cervisiam crevisse, et nec minimam stillam foris cecidisse, ut crederes in longitudinem tybrum geminatum esse . . . Quantum fuit imperantis meritum! quanta obedientia subsequens! ut sic utriusque tristitiam Dominus voluisset avertere."

The miracle as a whole restates the importance of beer in day-to-day life in the monastery. Furthermore, it shows that God himself, through at least one monk's eyes, has no ill-judgment of beer—he would not deprive the brothers of their drink.

Another beer-related miracle of Columbanus follows a well-established hagiographical trope. As hagiographers held up saints as examples to be imitated, so too did they show saints imitating the example of Christ. Miracles in saints' lives often mimic those in the New Testament. The relevant biblical passage here is a well-known one, from the Gospel of John. At a wedding in Cana, Jesus famously turned water into wine:

On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no more wine." "Why do you involve me?" Jesus replied, "My time has not yet come." His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons. Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water"; so they filled them to the brim. Then he told them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet." They did so, and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realize where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. Then he called the bridegroom aside and said, "Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now."¹⁹⁵

Multiplication of wine similar to Jesus at Cana is a recurring miracle in saints' lives. To give one example among many, Alcuin's *Life of Saint Willibrord* has three wine-multiplying miracles consecutively. First, he permanently fills a flask with wine to

¹⁹⁵ John 2:1-10, NIV trans.

quench the thirst of some beggars.¹⁹⁶ He then visits his monastery at Echternach, where “On going into the store-house, he found there only a small supply of wine in one cask, into which as a sign of his blessing, he thrust his staff, praying the while, then went out. The same night, the wine in the cask began to rise to the brim and then overflow.”¹⁹⁷

And, once more,

A further miracle of the same kind was wrought by Christ our God through Willibrord’s blessing. On one occasion the servant of God came with his companions to the house of a friend of his and wished to break the tedium of the long journey by taking a meal at his friend’s house. But it came to his ears that the head of the house had no wine. He gave orders that four small flasks, which were all that his companions carried with them for their needs on the journey, should be brought to him. Then he blessed them in the name of Him who at the marriage feast of Cana changed water into wine—and, remarkable to relate, after this gracious blessing about forty people drank their fill from these small bottles.¹⁹⁸

Alcuin relates this particular miracle specifically the one Jesus performed at Cana. It is a setpiece in hagiography. But this is still wine, not beer.

Jonas, too, uses this setpiece in his *Life of Saint Columbanus*. However, he alters it to be a multiplication of beer, not wine. The story takes place when Columbanus paid a

¹⁹⁶ Alcuin, *Vita Willibrordi*, 17: “Iterum sanctus Dei sacerdos in quodam loco iter agens, vidit mendicantes inopes XII, pariter postulantes sibi aliquid a praetereuntibus solacii. Quos, ut fuit mitissimus, benigno aspexit animo, unicum ex suis mandavit specialem suam flasconem sumere ac pauperibus miscere Christi. Ex qua omnes illi XII usque ad sacietatem bibebant, et mirum in modum, illis abeuntibus, ex optimo vino flasco, de qua tanti bibebant homines, inventa est plena ut ante.”

¹⁹⁷ Ibid. (trans. C. H. Talbot), 18: “intravit quoque in cellarium, in quo modicum vini in una repperit tunna, in qua suum benedictionis gratia cum oratione inmisit baculum, et exivit. Sed eadem nocte in eo ipso vasculo vinum crescere caepit et supereffundi vassis et margine.”

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 19: “Sed et aliud huic simile per eius benedictionem deus Christus operatus est miraculum. Pervenienti servo Dei sum sociis suis ad domum cuiusdam amici sui, paulisper cupiens in domo dilecti longi laborem itineris refectioe adlevare, sed patrem familias nihil vini habuisse comperit. Quatuor modicas flascones, quas tantum in inteneris solacium secum socii ferebant, iussit adferri easque in eius nomine benedixit, qui in convivio nuptiali aquas convertit in vinum. Et mirum in modum post benedictionis gratiam quasi XL viri ex illis parvis flasculis usque ad sacietatem bibebant.”

visit to the monastery at Fontaine, where upon his arrival the monks were working in the fields.

And when he saw them breaking up clumps of earth with great labor, he said: “May a meal be prepared for you, brothers, by the Lord.” Having heard this, the attendant said: “Father, believe me, we have no more than two loaves of bread and a little bit of beer. He [Columbanus] said, “Bring them.” He went with a quick step and brought back the two loaves and little bit of beer. Looking to the heavens, Columbanus said, “Jesus Christ, sole hope for the world, may you, who in the desert sated five thousand men with five loaves, multiply these loaves and this drink.” Miraculous Faith! All were satisfied, and took draughts of drink as they wanted.¹⁹⁹

This miracle bears a remarkable resemblance to those of both Jesus and Willibrord. The only difference is the beer. Jonas would have known the Bible well from his time in the monastery, so he had to have consciously changed the wine in the setpiece story to beer. Of course, there is always the possibility that there is a grain of truth to the story, that Columbanus managed to produce beer for the brothers at Fontaines. It seems more likely, though, that Jonas was combining two traditions. He injects beer, aware of its importance in Ireland and Columbanus’ Irish heritage, and having been exposed to it himself in Gaul, into the well-known multiplication miracle. Cogitosus corroborates this combination in his biography of another Irish saint, Brigid of Kildare.

The *Vita Sanctae Brigidae* is the oldest surviving example of Irish hagiography, dating around 640. Brigid’s biography, then, represents the early phases of Irish

¹⁹⁹ Jonas of Bobbio, *Vita Sancti Columbani*, 28.2-7: “Cumque vidisset eos magno labore glebas scindere, ait: Sit vobis, o fratres, a Domino collata refectio. Quo audito, minister ait: Pater, crede mihi, non sunt nobis amplius quam duo panes et paululum cervisiae. Ille, Vade, inquit, et defer huc. Concito ille gradu perrexit, duosque panes et parum cervisiae detulit. Intuens in coelos Columbanus ait: Christe Jesu, unica spes orbis, tu hos panes et hunc potum multiplica, qui de quinque panibus quinque millia hominum satiasti in eremo. Mira fides! satiati sunt omnes, potuque hausto prout voluntas cuique fuit.”

adaptation of continental hagiographic traditions. Brigid was supposedly the fifth-century founder of the monastery at Kildare, but some now believe that she never actually existed and that her reverence was a guised continuation of ancient Celtic cult.²⁰⁰ Cogitosus, then, with little ground in reality on which to build, could have constructed the character of Brigid from pre-existing elements, such as Irish folklore and the tropes of Christian hagiography. It is possible, then, that Brigid's miracles are entirely fabricated. That being said, the medieval readers of the *Vita Sanctae Brigidae* would have read it just as any other saint's life. So the mention of beer in it is rendered no less important by its uncertain origin. That mention of beer follows the same idea of multiplication. Cogitosus writes: "In another miraculous deed by the venerable Brigid, lepers were asking for beer, and when she had none, seeing water prepared for bathing and blessing it by the virtue of her faith, converted it into the best beer, and she generously pulled draughts from it for the thirsty."²⁰¹ So far this closely resembles the multiplication miracles above. Note especially that, like Jesus, she converts water intended to be used for washing. But the story concludes by associating itself directly with Jesus. "For He who in Cana in Galilee converted the water into wine," Cogitosus claims, "also through the faith of this blessed woman changed water into beer."²⁰² The tie to the story in the Gospels of John could not be more explicit. Jesus himself is imitating the miracle he had

²⁰⁰ Fletcher, 241.

²⁰¹ Cogitosus, *Vita Sanctae Brigidae* (my trans.): "Mirabili quoque eventu ab hac venerabili Brigida leprosi cervisiam petentes, cum non haberet illa, videns aquam ad balnea paratam, cum virtute fidei benedicens, in optimam convertit cervisiam, et abundanter sitientibus exhausit."

²⁰² Ibid.: "Ille enim, qui in Cana Galilaeae aquam convertit in vinum, per hujus quoque beatissimae feminae fidem aquam mutavit in cervisiam."

performed before, this time with Brigid as a medium. But again high-quality beer is the product of the miracle, not wine.

The lives of Irish saints, Brigid and Columbanus being the primary examples, illustrate that beer production can be just as miraculous as that of wine. Ireland never came under Roman *imperium*, so its Romanization, for what it is worth, came only through the vehicle of Christianity.²⁰³ It is probably the case, then, that the Irish were never really immersed in the Greco-Roman prejudice against beer. By the time they saw Roman culture regularly, it was Christianized and the barbarization of beer had diminished. So the Christians of Ireland had no tradition of wine's inherent superiority; they were among the beer-drinking "barbarians" the ancient Romans spurned in the first place. This full acceptance of beer showed itself in the miracles attributed to these saints, where it joined an influential body of literature read across the continent. Whatever association beer still had with barbarism had disappeared in the West, where it could be brewed even by saints.

²⁰³ Picard, 100.

6. *Conclusions and the Big Picture*

The popular perspective of beer in the West was, by this time, no longer as a barbarian drink. Rather, it was a form of sustenance which even monks and clergy could enjoy in moderation. By the early Middle Ages, beer enjoyed more or less widespread acceptance and an association with monasteries where it was brewed by holy men. This status was leaps and bounds beyond where it had been during the Roman Empire.

The Romans had been fond of their wine. Viticulture had a long history on the Mediterranean coast, where grapes could flourish in the climate. Roman elites were particularly in touch with their classical heritage, on which they based their identity. This Roman identity, therefore, included a respect, if not love, for wine. But the definition of *Romanitas* depended also upon a definition of what was not Roman—that is, what was barbarian. This discourse of inclusion and exclusion rendered materials and behaviors which Romans knew only in a foreign context as “barbarian” in their minds. This classification as a whole was beneath a Roman citizen, who should avoid all things barbarian. Unfortunately for brewers, beer fell into the barbarian category, since Romans knew of it primarily through the ethnographic works of Tacitus and his ilk. So beer made its way periodically into the intricate language of exclusion utilized by the Romans, who showed nothing but contempt for it.

But this attitude toward beer would change over the coming centuries. This change became most evident after the Christianization of the imperial government in the fourth century. Some aspects of classical culture, to be sure, survived into Christian

Europe, but the rigid opposition of beer and wine was not one of them. The stages in the social evolution of beer clearly indicate a slow, gradual change. Beer's bond with barbarism did not "fall" in 476, nor did the Roman Empire. Both phenomena were slow declines, probably unnoticeable to contemporaries. It took several generations for beer to traverse the distance from one pole to the other. This slow transition is characteristic of the period from late antiquity to the early Middle Ages. The transition defies the use of dates as neat bookends, and any study of change within it must necessarily extend to times both before and after the point of focus, as this one has. Small windows do not give broad views, and a dramatic change such as that of popular dispositions toward beer requires a panoramic view to understand it properly.

The final lesson to be learned here, though, is beer's role in history. The historian should be careful not to dismiss the beverage based on modern biases. Even moreso, the classicist should not do so based on Roman biases. Study of beer can result in valuable insights into European history and culture. Hopefully future scholars who encounter beer in antiquity and the early middle ages will take the time to think about what it means and consider its context. Then, perhaps, they may indulge in pints of their favorite brews and appreciate the profundity of beer's history.

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