

Get it Done Quicke:

Short Meads, Wines, and Small Ales

Believe It or Not!
Canton of Lindenwood

A.S. XXXXI

Lord Tadhg macAedain uiChonchobhair

Introduction

Meads, wines, and beers typically fall into two categories: short and long (or small and great--though, they are almost all great by my estimation). Unfortunately, very few are exposed to the former type of beverage--and those almost exclusively meads. This course some of these more common drinks. Additionally, some recipes are included.

Short (or small) meads, as the name implies, took a much shorter brewing time--typically, less than a week before bottling. These drinks were low in alcohol (typically 2% to 3% by volume) and were drunk on a daily basis. They were the period equivalent of a soft drink. Long meads took somewhat longer to brew--typically, several weeks to several months. In addition, the long meads tended to be aged for a good deal longer. The alcoholic content of these meads tends to be in the 7% to 15% range, and were drunk more in the manner of wines.

The same can be said of wines and small ales. They were produced to be consumed on a daily basis--often referred to as "the ordinary drink". Today, little evidence of them remains. Within the SCA, you will find quick meads--but period wines and small ales are virtually nonexistent. In the mundane marketplace, I know of no examples. The only evidence I have seen of any such potable is in Germany. In Bavaria, steel workers (and other heavy laborers) are allowed beer on the job--however, they can only drink a low-alcohol version. From what I can determine, this may be the last remaining vestige of medieval small ales in the modern world.

Methods

Since we are discussing the general art of brewing, I feel I should probably make a few notes on the process itself. In general, brewing (whether meads, wines, or beers) has a minimum of cardinal rules to ensure good results:

- (1) Keep everything as clean as possible.
- (2) When you sanitize glassware, nothing beats bleaching and boiling.
- (3) Learn a little patience--brewing is not fast but well worth any wait.
- (4) Don't brew or bottle when you're ill--it will come back to haunt you.
- (5) Take good notes.

In addition, brewing requires a minimum of basic equipment to get started:

- (1) Large cooking pot (3 to 6 gallons);
- (2) Large glass or food-grade plastic jug, which can be made airtight (a 5 to 6 gallon jug can be had for \$10 to \$20);
- (3) 6 feet of siphon tube;

- (4) rubber stopper with hole;
- (5) bubbler;
- (6) some household strainers;
- (7) suitable space for the fermenter to sit undisturbed for the duration of the brewing process.

The first two items can be obtained at a discount department store, like K-Mart or WalMart. The remainder (in fact, all of these items) can be obtained at a brewing supplies store.

Aside from this, the overall process involves 10 simple steps:

- (1) Boil honey and water;
- (2) Skim dross;
- (3) Add flavoring elements (herbs, spices, juices, peels, etc.);
- (4) Continue cooking for appropriate amount of time;
- (5) Strain into fermenter and allow to cool;
- (6) Pitch yeast;
- (7) Allow to ferment for a while;
- (8) Bottle mead;
- (9) Allow mead to condition in bottle;
- (10) Serve.

As you might guess, there are infinite possibilities for variety within these steps. I have included some recipes for long and short meads to give you a jumping off point. I have also included a Finnish May Day drink, *sima*. (I know, I know, you thought it was spelled with a Z. Madison Ave. misspelled it--and it doesn't use malt!) While my source for this recipe only goes back to 1924, I found the recipe for *stepponi* given by Digbie (also included) to be extremely close.

Period Sources

For this exercise, I have drawn exclusively from two valuable period sources, The Queens Closet Opened by W. M. (1655) and The Closet Of the Eminently Learned Sir Kenelme Digbie Kt. Opened: Whereby is Discovered Several Ways for Making of Metheglin, Sider, Cherry-Wine, etc. (1669). Each of these works has various discussions of meads, wines, and beers. Certainly, the work of Sir Kenelme Digbie is unequalled with its vast array of recipes for mead, metheglin, wine, and ale--over 140 recipes in all! The mead recipes below draw heavily from his work--commonly referred to as The Closet Opened.

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A Closer Look

Let's examine some of the statistics:

	Total	<1 week	1-2 weeks	3-4 weeks
Digbie	25			
Mead	20	6*	7*	6*
Cider	2	1	1	
Wine	1		1*	
Ale	1	1		
Other	1	1*		
W. M.	4			
Wine	4	2	1	1*

* - indicates that recipe and redaction from this group are included in this paper.

Sir William Paston's Mead

Recipe:

5	gal	water
7 1/2	lbs	honey (about 5 pt.)
2 1/2	Tbsp	rosemary
2 1/2	Tbsp	bay leaves (about 40-45 leaves)
2		lemons
		ale yeast (Edme)

Process:

Scrape lemons with serrated knife to remove peel--no pith (white part) as it will give the mead a bitter taste. Place 2 gallons of hot water in pot. Bring to a boil. Add honey and skim dross. Add rosemary, bay, and lemon peel. Cook for 30 minutes. Remove from heat. Pour 3 gallons of cold water into fermenter. Strain wort into fermenter. Top off with remaining water to 5 gallons. Allow to cool. During cooling, close container or cover mouth with a bleach-soaked rag. Pitch yeast and shake well. Let work for 3 to 5 days, and bottle or keg. Ready to serve in about 10 days. Alcohol content is approximately 2%.

If any remains after 3 weeks, refrigerate!

Source:

SIR WILLIAM PASTON'S MEATHE, The Closet Of the Eminently Learned Sir Kenelme Digbie Opened, pg. 41-42.

Take ten Gallons of Spring-water, and put therein ten Pints of the best honey. Let this boil half an hour, and scum it very well; then put in one handful of Rosemary, and as much of Bayleaves; with a little Limon-peel. Boil this half an hour longer, then take it off the fire, and put it into a clean Tub; and when it is cool, work it up with yest, as you do Beer. When it is wrought, put it into your vessel, and stop it very close. Within three days you may Bottle it, and in ten days after it will be fit to drink.

Angel's Short Mead

Recipe:

5	gal	water
7 1/2	lbs	honey (about 5 pt.)
1/2	hand	ginger, sliced
1	Tbsp	balm (lemon balm or balm mint)
2	Tbsp	spearmint
2	Tbsp	elderflowers
4		cloves
2		lemons
		ale yeast (Edme)

Process:

Scrape lemons with serrated knife to remove peel--no pith (white part) as it will give the mead a bitter taste. Place 2 gallons of hot water in pot. Bring to a boil. Add honey and skim dross. Add ginger, balm, spearmint, elderflowers, and lemon peel. Cook until ginger is limp and various flavors are evident (usually 30-35 minutes to bring out elderflowers in color and bouquet). Add cloves. Cook until cloves appear in bouquet--about 5 minutes. Remove from heat. Pour 3 gallons of cold water into fermenter. Strain wort into fermenter. Top off to 5 gallons. Allow to cool to about 100°F. During cooling, close container or cover mouth with a bleach-soaked rag. Pitch yeast and shake well. Let work for 3 to 5 days, and bottle or keg. Ready to serve in about 10 days. Alcohol content is approximately 2%.

If any remains after 3 weeks, refrigerate!

Source:

SEVERAL SORTS OF MEATH, SMALL & STRONG, 2. Small, The Closet Of the Eminently Learned Sir Kenelme Digbie Opened, pg. 56.

Take ten quarts of water, and and one of honey, Balm a little; Minth, Cloves, Limon-peel, Elder-flowers, a little Ginger; wrought with a little yest, bottle it after a night working.

Malted Mead

Recipe:

5	lb	clover honey (for 3 gallons)
4	oz	dry dark malt extract (see note 1)
1/2		nutmeg, quartered
		ale yeast (Whitbread)

Process:

Place 1 1/2 gallon of hot water in pot. Bring to a boil. Add honey and skim dross. Add nutmeg and cook for 1 hour. Add malt and cook for 5 minutes. Remove from heat. Skim once again. Pour 1 1/2 gallons of cold water into fermenter. Pour wort into fermenter. Top off to 3 gallons. Allow to cool to about 100°F. Pitch yeast and shake well. Rack off once a month until the mead has completely cleared--"until you can read newsprint through the carboy"--and fermentation has all but stopped (usually 6 to 8 weeks).

Notes:

- 1) Dry malt extract was used rather than whole grains because they are more economical in terms of time and money. The extracts are derived by cooking malted barleys and dehydrating the resulting wort to a powder. I selected dark malt as a matter of personal preference. To date, I can find no sources describing the use of different grades of malted barley. Barleys are commonly malted and then roasted to stop the process. Varying roasting times and temperatures are used to give a variety of barleys. While these techniques were probably used and closely guarded by the guilds, I can find no documentation to this effect.
- 2) Starting specific gravity: 1.059 @ 95°F
- 3) Finishing specific gravity: 0.993 @ 70°F
- 4) Brewing period: 14 May to 23 June 1992
- 5) Estimated alcohol content at bottling: >7.25%
- 6) Conditioned with 1/2 cup of clover honey

Sources:

TO MAKE METHEGLIN, The Closet Of the Eminently Learned Sir Kenelme Digbie Opened, pg. 58.

Take eight Gallons of water, and set it over a clear fire in a Kettle; and when it is warm, put into it sixteen pounds of very good honey; stir it well together till it be all mixed; and when it boileth, take off the scum, and put in two large Nutmegs cut into quarters, and so let it boil at least an hour. Then take it off, and put into it two good handfuls of grinded Malt, and with a white staff keep beating it together, till it be almost cold; then strain it through a hair sieve into a tub, and put to it a wine pint of Ale-yest, and stir it very well together; and when it is cold, you may, if you please, Tun it up presently in a vessel fit for it, or else let it stand, and work a day. And when it hath done working in your vessel, stop it up very close. It will be three weeks or a month, before it will be ready to drink.

Small Ale

Notes (or Apologies):

I have not included a redacted recipe for this drink because I have not yet attempted one. I would refer you to the earlier work to make an estimate of quantities and remand you to your own good judgement. Perhaps sometime soon I will attempt this, for now I offer it for your consideration and encourage your experiments.

Sources:

SMALL ALE FOR THE STONE, The Closet Of the Eminently Learned Sir Kenelme Digbie Opened, pg. 105-6.

The Ale, that I used to drink constantly of, was made in these proportions. Take fourteen Gallons of Water, and half an Ounce of Hops; boil them near an hour together. Then pour it upon a peck of Malt Have a care the Malt be not too small ground; for then it will never make clear Ale. Let it soak so near two hours. Then let it run from the Malt, and boil it only one walm or two. Let it stand cooling till it be cool enough to work with barm, which let be of Beer rather than Ale, about half a pint.

After it hath wrought some hours, when you see it come to it's height, and is near beginning to fall in working, Tun it into a barrel of eight Gallons; and in four or five dayus it will be fit to broach to drink. Since I have caused the wort to be boiled a good half hour; since again I boil it a good hour, and it is much the better; because the former Ale tasted a little Raw. Now because it consumes in boiling, and woud be too strong, if this Malt made a less proportion of Ale; I have added a Gallon of water at the first, taking fifteen Gallons instead of fourteen. Since I have added half a peck of Malt to the former proportions, to make it a little stronger in Winter.

Raisin Wine

Recipe:

1	lb	raisins
1/2	lb	sugar (see note 1)
1		lemon
1	tbsp	elderflowers (see note 2)
		ale yeast (Edme)

Process:

Scrape the lemon with a serrated knife to remove peel. Be careful to leave the pith! Half the lemon and squeeze thoroughly. Set aside peel and juice.

Place 1/2 gallon of hot water in pot. Bring to a boil. Add lemon peel, lemon juice, sugar, and elderflowers. Cook for 30 minutes. Remove from heat. Pour 1/2 gallon of cold water and raisins into fermenter. Pour wort into fermenter. Allow to cool to about 100° F. Pitch yeast and shake well. Let work for 3-5 days--stirring twice daily. Strain into bottles. Ready to drink in 2 to 3 weeks. Self-conditioning.

Notes:

- 1) In period, sugar was a rare commodity. Note, that it is specifically called out for this recipe in The Queens Closet Opened!
- 2) The recipe calls for Clove Gillyflowers or Cowslips. I was unable to obtain either, so I substituted elderflowers.
- 3) Brewing period: 22 April to 25 May 1993.

Sources:

To make Rasin Wine, The Queens Closet Opened, pp. 20-21

Take two pound of Raisins of the Sun shred, a pound of good powdered Sugar, the juice of two Lemons, one pill, put these into an earthen Pot with a top, then take two gallons of water, let it boil half an hour, then take it hot from the fire, and put it into the pot, and cover it close for three or four dayes, stirring it twice a day, being strained put it into bottles, and stop it more close, in a fortnight or three weeks it may be drunk, you may put in Clove Gilly flowers, or Cowslips, as the time of the year is when you make it; and when you have drawn this from the Raisins, and bottles it up, heat two quarts of water more, put it to the ingredients, and let it stand as aforesaid. This will be good, but smaller than the other, the water must be boiled as the other.

Currant Wine

Recipe:

1	lb	currants
3	qt	water
		ale yeast (Edme)

Process:

In a 1 gallon jug, place 2 quarts of cold water and currants. Add 1 quart of hot water (scalding to boiling). Check temperature. Let mixture cool to about 100° F. Pitch yeast. Let work 3-5 days and bottle. Ready to drink in 1 week. Self-conditioning.

Notes:

- 1) Used about 12 oz. currants and the remainder were golden raisins.
- 2) Checked after 2 days--already at the point of spewing. Returned to fermenter.
- 3) Brewing period: 17 to 30 March 1995

Sources:

CURRANTS WINE, The Closet Of the Eminently Learned Sir Kenelme Digbie Opened, pg. 98.

Take a pound of the best Currants clean picked, and pour upon them in a deep straight mouthed earthen vessel six pounds or pints of hot water, in which you have dissolved three spoonfuls of the purest and newest Ale-yest. Stop it very close till it ferment, then give such vent as is necessary, and keep it warm for about three days, it will work and ferment. Taste it after two days, to see if it be grown to your liking. As soon as you find it so, let it run through a strainer, to leave behind all the exhausted currants and the yest, and so bottle it up. It will be exceeding quick and pleasant, and is admirable good to cool the Liver, and cleanse the blood. It will be ready to drink in five or six days after it is bottled; And you may drink safely large draughts of it.

Sima

Recipe:

3	gal	water
3	cp	sugar
3	cp	brown sugar
2/3	cp	raisins
6		lemons
		ale yeast (Edme)

Process:

Scrape lemons with serrated knife to remove peel--no pith (white part) as it will give the mead a bitter taste. Squeeze lemons. Set juice and peel aside. Place 1 gallon of hot water in pot. Bring to a boil. Add sugar, brown sugar, lemon juice, and lemon peel. Remove from heat and steep for 10 minutes. Add remaining 2 gallons of cold water. Strain wort into fermenter. Allow to cool to about 100°F (with these proportions, there is usually no waiting period.) Pitch yeast and shake well. Let work overnight--or at least 8-10 hours--in a warm place under a bubble. Add raisins and bottle. Let stand until raisins float. Chill and store in a cool place until ready to serve. Self-conditioning. Alcohol content is approximately 2%.

Source:

This recipe was translated for me by a dear friend in An Tir. The recipe was from his grandmother's cookbook, Finnish Holiday Cookbook, 1924. Not exactly period, I confess, but quite traditional. I am still looking for a period citation.

Stepponi

Recipe:

1	gal	water
1	lb	raisins
1/2	lb	sugar
2		lemons

Process:

Boil water. Place raisins and sugar in an earthen pot. Squeeze lemons over raisins and sugar. Slice rinds and throw into pot. Pour boiling water over mixture. Let stand for 24 hours. Filter into bottles and chill.

Source:

TO MAKE STEPPONI, The Closet Of the Eminently Learned Sir Kenelme Digbie Opened, pg. 106.

Take a Gallon of Conduit-water, one pound of blew Raisins of the Sun stoned, and half a pound of Sugar. Squeeze the juyce of two Limons upon the Raisins and Sugar, and slice the rindes upon them. Boil the water, and pour it so hot upon the ingredients in an earthen pot, and stir them well together. So let it stand twenty four hours. Then put it into bottles (having first let it run through a strainer) and set them in a Cellar or other cool place.