

FACULTY OF MEDICINE  
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ALCOHOLISM AND RELATED PROBLEMS  
A REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND ESTIMATION OF  
THE PROBLEM IN EGYPT.

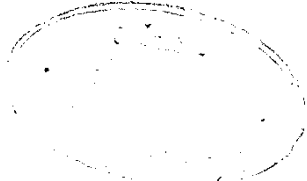
Thesis  
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بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

"سبحانك لا علم لنا إلا ما علمتنا إنك أنت العليم الحكيم..."

صدق الله العظيم



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## *Introduction*

## INTRODUCTION

### From King Tut to Islam :

The 5,000 year history of alcohol use in Egypt - from the time of the earliest surviving records and artifacts, to the imposition of Islamic abstinence - gives historical perspectives to current understanding of alcohol.

It shows that, in some ways, things haven't changed much, says Nady El-Geubaly (1981), head of psychiatry, St. Boniface General Hospital, and associate professor of psychiatry, University of Manitoba.

For starters, possibly the world's oldest alcoholic drink can be traced back to pre-dynastic Egypt.

During the first Egyptian dynasties (3,400 - 2,900 BC), barley beer became a national drink, along with a beer made from spelt (a primitive form of wheat). However, available evidence indicates that temperance was the rule. Viticulture thrived, but use of wine was restricted, primarily to the highest levels of Egyptian society.

During the succeeding period, (the 800-year-long Old Kingdom 2,980-2,160 BC), intoxicants were considered "an occasional source of harmless pleasure," and beer shops are believed to have existed throughout Egypt.

The beer was made from grain which was kept wet until it began to sprout; it was then ground, made into past, and fashioned into partly - baked cakes. To prepare the beer, the cakes were broken up into pots filled with water and left to ferment. Once ready, the beer would last only a few days before going sour.

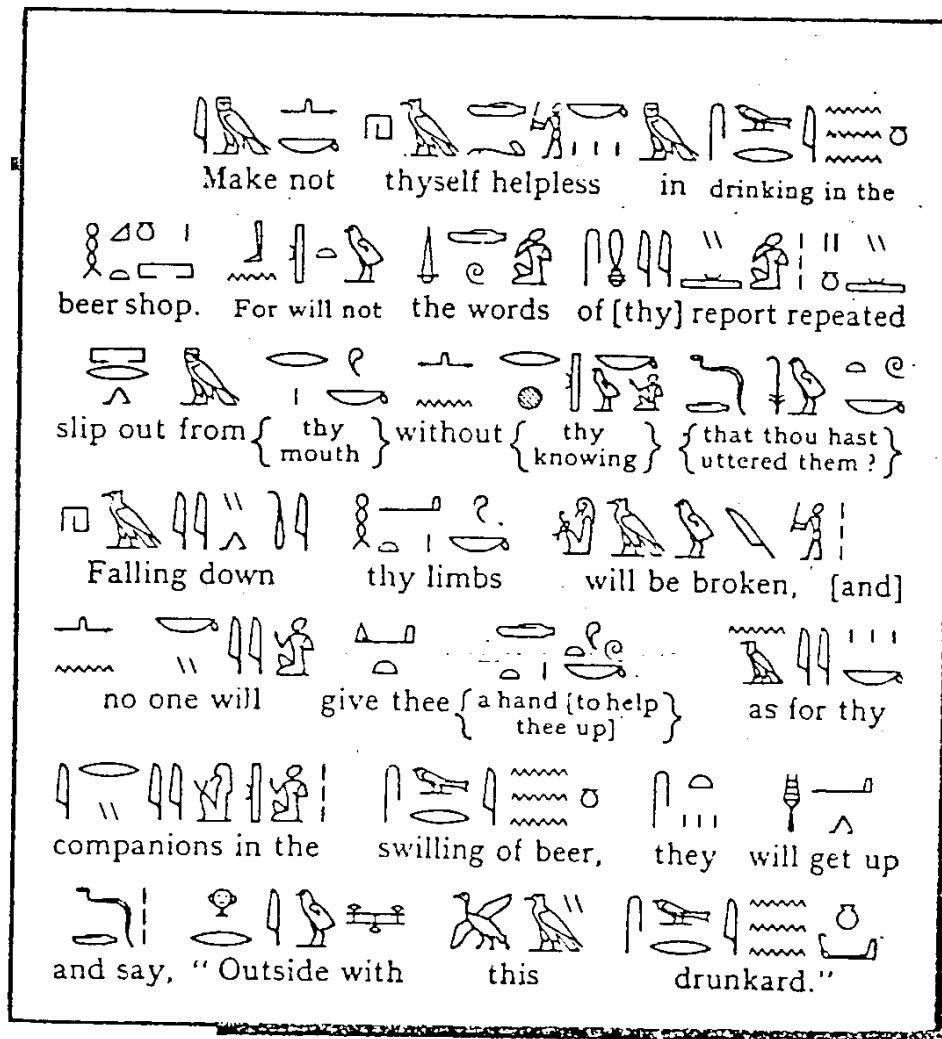
The next two periods, the Middle Kingdom (2,160 - 1,580 BC), and the New Kingdom (1,580 - 1,090 BC), which included the reigns of Queen Hatshepsut and the young King Tutankhamen represented the apogee of Egyptian power.

"As the Kingdom became more and more powerful, there was also an increasing acceptance of drinking. During this period, there are many references to the 'Day of Intoxication,' a monthly occurrence which was a culturally - accepted and delineated time when (Egyptians) could let go," says Dr. El-Guebaly (1981).

From the New Kingdom period there is also evidence of concern about alcohol abuse, and attempts to control alcohol sales by imposition of taxes: "the governmental practice of drawing important revenues from man's drugs is not new." comments Dr. El-Guebaly (1981).

A book of etiquette from that period, called The Making of the Scribe Ani, warns about the effects of excessive drinking. Drinking was common among students.

Here is an example of such warnings from the precepts of Ani:



The scribe Ani, history relates, was accustomed to receiving "three loaves of bread and two jars of beer daily" from his doting mother during the time that he was in school.

The medical use of beer and wine also contributed to increased consumption. All of the major medical papyri of the the time mention such uses, for everything from indigestion to "female troubles." One papyrus, containing 250 prescriptions for practising physicians, listed no less than 27 in which beer was the method of delivering the medicine and 12 which were based on wine.

The succeeding period, from 1,090 to 525 BC, is regarded as the beginning of Egyptian decadence, Says Dr. El-Guebaly (1981). Widespread alcohol abuse is remarked on in surviving historical sources, and drinking is believed to have been an important part of a society-wide hedonism, although most of the material refers to the upper groups or classes.

Women, particularly in the upper classes, seemed to have had easy access to alcohol, and there are banquet descriptions which indicate they were encouraged to join in and "not spoil the entertainment."

A famous wall-painting from the period, Dr. El-Guebaly (1981) notes, shows a lady "overcome by too much wine; vomiting, and being helped by her servant." Over the lady's arm is bent a lotus flower, symbolizing intoxication.

"It is important to remember that women in Egyptian society of this time had access to position of power. It is not surprising if there was access to other things too, such as alcohol," comments Dr. El-Guebaly (1981).

After 525 BC, Egypt came under the control and cultural influence of a number of invaders, including the Persians, Greeks, and finally, in 30 BC, the Romans. Drinking practices blended with those of the conquerors and there is extensive evidence of widespread, heavy alcohol use.

Roman control of Egypt came to an end in the 7<sup>th</sup> century AD. In 638 AD. Islam arrived in Egypt with its general taboo on alcohol consumption, leading to declining alcohol use after 4,000 years of general, and increasing, consumption.

Dr. Azayem (1978) adds that, Islam followed a step-by-step containment of the problem, while effecting a social reform policy. The first step was quite effective in

cases where Moslems followed the example of their prophet, who never tasted wine or attended meetings where drinks were served. Moslems are asked by the Koran to follow the exemplary behaviour of the prophet:

"Ye have indeed in the Apostle of God an exemplary pattern of behaviour to follow"<sup>1</sup> The second stage began when Moslems asked the Prophet about alcohol and the answer as stated by the Koran was, "They ask thee concerning wine and gambling, say in them is great sin and some profit for people but the sin is greater than the profit"<sup>2</sup>. Thus an additional group of Moslems abstained, although some others did not find in this verse a clear - cut prohibition.

A further step was when the Moslems were ordered not to attend prayer when they were under the effect of alcohol. The Koran says, "Oh ye who believe, approach not prayers with a confused intoxicated mind, until ye can understand all that ye say"<sup>3</sup>. Moslems had to stop drinking by day, during which they joined group prayers five times daily. They limited their drinking to evenings.

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- 1: The Koran, The Holy Book of the Moslems, Chapter 33 verse 20.
  - 2: The Koran, The Holy Book of the Moslems, Chapter 1 verse 21 &
  - 3: The Koran, The Holy Book of the Moslems, Chapter 4 verse 43.

Thus came the final step, thirteen years after the beginning of Mohamed's message. An absolute prohibition of drinking was ordered. The Koran says, "Oh ye who believe, Intoxication and gambling...are an abomination of Satan's handiwork. Eschew such abomination that ye may prosper".<sup>1</sup>

No sooner had this verse been revealed to the Prophet than all Moslems who were still using alcohol put a quick end to their drinking habits.

Baasher shows how, the questions of sin and harm attached to the use of wine was raised, after distinction was made first between strong drink and good nourishment. But the decision to abstain was still a matter for personal decision. A next major step was partial prohibition to ensure sobriety during prayers (five times a day). The stage was thus set for complete prohibition, involving not only abstinence but also banning of production and trade. As pointed out by Baasher (1981), these injunctions are embedded in the Koran which, "besides being a religious doctrine, constitutes a code of civil and criminal law as well as social and behaviour codes".

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1: The Koran, the Holy Book of the Moslems, Chapter 5 verse 89.

Azayem (1970) points out that; History books refer to the fact that the first temperance society to combat alcoholism started at the end of the Dynasties. Azayem, adds that during 19<sup>th</sup> Century, continuous and growing interaction with western world, together with the French and English occupation in Egypt, paved the way for the ever growing appearance of drink shops - at first in big cities - in public place. The 1<sup>st</sup> wide public temperance movement took place at 1904 and resulted in the imposition of Law No. 13 of 1904 that restricted drink shops to districts full of foreigners; but it was of no avail. Another, public temperance movement resulted in the enforcement of Law No. 38 of 1941, which stipulated the ways of licensing places of opening and running drink shops.

Now alcoholism is a major problem worldwide, in many developing countries, rapid cultural, social, and economic change challenges traditional defences against alcohol and related problems and creating new opportunities and stimuli for drinking.

Since there is no single cause of alcoholism, any explanation of alcoholism needs to take into account the particular properties of the alcohol, the constitution of and personality of the individual consuming it, and

the social and cultural milieu in which alcohol use and abuse occur. All play a role in its development, and stressful events sometimes serve as catalysts of drinking behaviour. Increased alcohol use can lead to both psychologic and physical dependence, which result in a number of important medical, psychologic and social sequelae such as cirrhosis, depression, marital problems and occupational problems. These sequelae themselves are stressful and lead to more drinking, further dependence, and additional sequelae - and the cycle continues.

The development of alcohol problems can be viewed in the perspective of the public health model of complex interaction between the agent (alcohol), the host (drinker), and the environment (physical, psychological, and socio-cultural conditions). Any preventive action would involve concern with the links between these three factors. Control measures focus mainly on limiting the amounts of alcohol available to the drinker. Educational measures concentrate on building up the host's resistance and reducing demand for alcohol. A number of additional measures might be developed from consideration of the links between the drinker and his environment. An improved understanding not only of sociocultural factors, such as local drinking habits and customs promoting or restricting heavy drinking,