ALCOHOL IN THE BIBLE

Paul Haupt
Johns Hopkins University

The attempt has often been made to prove that the wine referred to in the Bible was non-alcoholic (DB 2, 34; EB 5306, n. 1; 5321, § 32). The story of Noah’s first experience with the wine he had made shows that it was intoxicating: the patriarch lay in a drunken stupor (Gen. 9:21). Böhmer pointed out long ago that the statement after the name of Noah

in Gen. 5:29, This will make us forget our work, and the toil of our hands, and the ground which Jahveh has cursed, was a misplaced subsequent addition to the passage Noah, the husbandman, began to plant a vineyard (Gen. 9:20; cf. Pur. 2, 42). If a man wants to drown his cares he cannot do it in plain water or unfermented grape-juice. At the reunion of the gods, which is the primordial prototype of the Babylonian New Year’s festival, all were full of food and liquor, so that they were crazed and stupefied. New Year is still observed in this ancient Babylonian fashion, and Rabbinical authorities say that in celebrating Purim, which is an adaptation of the Persian New Year’s festival, you must drink till you cannot tell the cursing of Haman from the blessing of Mordecai.

Prohibitionists often emphasize the fact that the wine made by Jesus at the wedding at Cana was made of water. The


Lit. cause us to stop sighing from our work (see Pur. n. 22; cf. WF 223, l. 6; AJSL 32, 65, l. 2). Also Arab. salâ, āfâlû, to be comforted over a thing and forget it (AJSL 33, 48), is construed either with the accusative or with the preposition ‘an, from. Similarly Arab. ‘āzâdû, to comfort, is construed with ‘an.

Cf. Pur. 3; Rogers, Religion of Babylonia and Assyria (New York, 1908) p. 120; Megill. 7b (BT 3, 557): אסר רבא כי חיינו לבקש בה>fזרא ירהו; see also Lagarde, Purim (Göttingen, 1887) p. 50. For ḫâṣû (cf. Syr. ḫâsâSIM, he refreshed himself) see Margolià’s grammar, p. 95, and for īnâš = īnâš: Levian’s grammar, § 69, and BA 1, 7. Also Assyr. nîšû, people (HW 483) is not a biconsonantal noun, but stands for nîšû = īnâš = īnâšu. Nor is there a biconsonantal noun īnâšû, being, spirit, person (AI 171b): this īnâšu stands for nîšû; see GB 507 n.v.在同一。Assyr. nîššārimû nîšû (ASKT 67; JBL 19, 68, n. 40) is equivalent to Arab. râf‘ū’sa ma likihim (cf. Pm. 16: 4b) while Assyr. nîšê dî, the people of the city, corresponds to Syr. (f) mîkîtu. For Assyr. nîšû, people (written ni-ē-su), see Delitzscher, Sumerisch-akkadisch-ketittische Vokubularfragmente (Berlin, 1914) p. 12.
strongest drinks may be made of water. But the miracle at Cana must be interpreted allegorically: Jesus turned the water of the old dispensation into wine, the blood of the new covenant (cf. JBL 35, 206, n. 67). Similarly the raising of Lazarus symbolizes the revivification of the defunct church (EB11 15, 454b).

I have shown in my paper on Beer and Brandy in Babylonia (JHUC, No. 287, p. 33) that the wines of the ancients were stronger than our modern wines, and this may be the reason why they were mixed with water. In the Odyssey (9, 209) we read that the Maronean wine, three cups of which made the cyclops Polyphemus so drunk that Odysseus could blind him by plunging a burning stake into his single eye, was, as a rule, diluted with twenty parts of water. Some of the ancient wines seem to have been more like brandy: Pliny (14, 63) says that the Falernian district produced a wine which could be ignited. Brandy is inflammable, but wine will refuse to deflagrate.

The strongly alcoholic character of the wines of the ancient Hebrews is evident in a number of Biblical passages, but several of them have been misinterpreted. In Prov. 23:20/1 e. g. AV renders:

20 Be not among winebibbers,
    among riotous eaters of flesh;
21 For the drunkard and the glutton shall come to poverty,
    and drowsiness shall clothe a man in rags.

This couplet should be translated:

20 Be not among winebibbers,
    among those who indulge in meat;
21 For bibber and gormand may be robbed,
    and stupor clothes in tatters.

I Heb. n̄ûmā does not refer to sleepiness on the day following the revelry, but denotes the profound slumber of alcoholic coma (EB11 8, 602b). Excessive indulgence in alcohol may terminate in stupor with partial paralysis of the muscles. Umbreit (1826) said: N̄ûmā drückt den taumeligen Zustand des Be-
rauschten aus. The verb nūm is used of the sleep of death in Nah. 3:18; Ps. 76:6 (Nah. 12. 36; ZDMG 61, 281, 15; 286, 20; 287, 13; cf. also 2 Macc. 4:25, 5:11). Thieves who rob dead-drunk persons are called in German Leichenfledderer. A university student overcome with beer is a Bierleiche. A man in the state of dead-drunkenness may be robbed; his clothes may be torn either by a fall or in a brawl. Prov. 20:1 says: Leq-haï-iâîn, hôme haš-šekâr, Wine is wanton, brandy is brawling (see my paper on Heb. leq, wanton, and melîc, spokesman, in BA 10, 2; contrast JBL 29, 106, n. 81). Many a tippler comes home with his clothing torn and tattered. A rich drunkard may occasionally look like a raggamuffin or tatterdemalion, and he may be robbed, but he is not impoverished. There is not a single passage in OT where itqarâš means he is impoverished.

In my Book of Micah (Chicago, 1910) p. 79 (cf. GB 321a) I have shown that Heb. īråš, from which the noun tirôš, must, is derived, means originally to press, squeeze, extort, rob, bereave. The primary connotation of Heb. īråš, he inherits, is he is bereft. German Erbe, heir, is connected with Lat. orbus, bereft, orphan. I have discussed this question more fully in my paper on Assyr. ablu, mourner, heir (BA 10, 2).

For gormands the Hebrew has those who indulge in meat for themselves, who gorge themselves with meat. Meat was regarded as a luxury; as a rule, it was served only in honor of a guest or at a festival.

Horton, Proverbs (p. 285) in The Expositor’s Bible (1891) refers to the torn clothes and the empty pockets of the wine-bibber in the comments on the four couplets in Prov. 23:29-35 describing the danger of wine bibbing. AV renders this passage:

29 Who hath woe? who hath sorrow?
   Who hath contentions? who hath babbling?
   Who hath wounds without cause?
   Who hath redness of eyes?
30 They that tarry long at the wine;
   They that go to seek mixed wine.
31 Look not thou upon the wine when it is red,

*See Rabben, Gaunersprache (Halle, 1906) p. 82; cf. Pur. n. 150.

*Cf. Syr. izdallâl, to be luxurious, extravagant, unrestrained; also modern Arab. zidd, to bolt one’s food. TH render: asôfâ (= dowot).
When it giveth his color in the cup,
When it moveth itself aright.

32 At the last it biteth like a serpent,
And stingeth like an adder.

33 Thine eyes shall behold strange women,
And thine heart shall utter perverse things.

34 Yea, thou shalt be as he that lieth down in the midst
Or as he that lieth upon the top of a mast. [of the sea,

35 They have stricken me, shalt thou say, and I was not
They have beaten me, and I felt it not: [sick;
When shall I awake?
I will seek it yet again.

Some of these lines are preposterous, especially the statement. Yea, thou shalt be as he that lieth down in the midst of the sea, or as he that lieth upon the top of the mast. If lying down in the midst of the sea means lying down in your bunk when the ship is on the high seas, this is not so uncomfortable; but lying upon the top of the mast is a more difficult proposition which a wine-bibber in the final stage of dead-drunkenness could hardly negotiate. Top of the mast, of course, can only refer to the highest or uppermost part of the mast, not to a sort of platform surrounding the head of the lower mast on all sides.

According to Grotius (1644) Et erit sicut dormiens in medio maris significat in insula fluctibus undique concussa: but thou wilt be like one riding in the midst of the sea means simply: Thou wilt suffer from nausea and vomiting due to the irritation of the gastric mucous membrane. Vomiting (Jer. 25:27, 48:26; Is. 19:14, 28:8) is preceded by a feeling of nausea. To sicut jacens in summo mali Grotius adds: id est, ut nunc loquuntur, in galea navis, ubi maxima est agitatio. J. D. Michaelis (1778) rendered: wie ein Steuermann, der beim Sturm einschläf, following ἐστιν καυσαρνήτης ἐν τολῶ ὀλίσθων(Σ ἁ μάλα ἥ-μαθσόλα ῥάββα; but Τ ἡ κ ἁ μάλα ἡμ-δαμέκ ἢ-βῆ-ιλά, and Ἰ quasi sopitus gubernator amiso clavo). Ἕ did not read ra-ς, instead of ρως, but took ρως-καβέλ in the sense of top (acme) of destruction (ruin). Κλίδων often denotes disaster, just as κατακλυσμός, cataclysm, may signify destruction, annihilation (cf. AJSL 23, 228, n. 17, and p. 163 of my paper on Jonah’s Whale in PAPS 46). In the same way Μ μαθσόλα may mean peril;
cf. Assyrd xašālu, to smash, crush, destroy (ZDMG 64, 709, 10). Also Graec. Ven. (ὁς καθεύδων ἐν κρατὶ νέως) read rōs, head, top.

The generally accepted rendering of this passage is almost as absurd as the translation of Ps. 76:11 which I discussed in my paper on an OT liturgy for Nicanor’s Day (ZDMG 61, 286, 24): Thou girdest Thyself with the residue of the gall (see also ZAT 35, 105). I often reassure some of my candidates for the degree of Ph.D. who feel a little nervous before the final examination in the presence of the Faculty, by pointing out to them that, even if they give the most ridiculous answers, there are generally some distinguished OT scholars who have led the way.

Everything is perfectly clear if we correct the traditional misunderstanding of rōs hōbēl and the erroneous repetition of the term lying down due to scribal carelessness which we find in a great many passages (cf. JBL 34, 65, l. 7; 35, 288). Heb. hōbēl at the end of the line, which is supposed to mean mast, is the part. Qal of hibbēl, to corrupt, to ruin; it corresponds to Arab. xābū, noxious, disastrous. Arab. xābala means especially to craze and to paralyze. In Assyrian we have xablu and xabbīlu, pernicious (Proverbs, SBOT, 57, 53). The addition of the epithet hōbēl, noxious, was necessary in order to show that rōs, head, in this connection referred to the head of the opium-poppy. Similar combinations are common in Chinese; a great many Chinese words would not be clear unless they were combined with another word (EB11 6, 217b).

A ṣōkēḥ bē-rōs hōbēl is one who lies in a stupor produced by the noxious poppy-juice. I have shown in my paper on Opium in the Bible, which I presented at the General Meeting of the American Philosophical Society in Philadelphia on April 24, 1915,7 that the gall (i. e. bitter fluid) with wine (not vinegar) in the account of Christ’s crucifixion (Matt. 27:34) and the myrrh in Mark 15:23 denote opium (ZA 30, 64; GB16 xixb, 1. 5 and 418b: mé-rōs, poppy-juice; cf. also DB 3, 408a, l. 6; 2,

* Cf. the special meanings of haut mal, or grand mal, and petit mal. In certain parts of Germany Schaden is used for hernia, rupture, and Ubelkeit for nausea, qualm, just as our sick has the special meaning affected with nausea, qualmish. Note also the special meaning of Heb. dayād.

7 An abstract was published in the programme of the General Meeting and in a great many daily papers, e. g. in the Philadelphia Ledger of April 25, 1915; cf. also p. 2 of Dr. Mauch’s paper The History of Opium = Journal of the American Medical Association, Feb. 6, 1915, p. 478.
It was entirely different from the Roman *potio myrrhina* or *murrata*, which was a sweet wine and a favorite beverage of the Roman ladies (EB 5320, below; RE² 21, 61, 53). Jesus refused to drink the wine with gall or myrrh, *i.e.* opium, just as a soldier who is to be shot may decline to be blindfolded. The Talmud states that a cup of wine with *lēbônâ* was given to criminals before their execution. *Lēbônâ* means *incense*, but in this case it is used for a bitter aromatic drug, *i.e.* opium. Frankincense and myrrh are used for *opium* because all three are bitter and aromatic. The primary connotation of both *mērōrâ*, gall, and *môr*, myrrh, is *bitterness*. In the OT *rōš*, the bitter poison of the poppy-head, is repeatedly mentioned in connection with *la'ânâ*, wormwood, absinthe. Poppy was no doubt cultivated from remote antiquity for the sake of the juice of the heads, or capsules, which is generally conceded to be the most important of all medicines. In the cuneiform texts it is called *irrâ*, *i.e.* intestinal medicine (ZA 30, 64). I explained *rōš hôbél* as *noxious poison* sixteen years ago in *Proverbs* (SBOT) 57, 52. *Tomyris* (Herod. 1, 212) calls wine *poison* (*φάρμακον*).

The answer to the question in the first couplet of Prov. 23:29-35, *Who has wounds without cause, who has dimness of eyes*, which we find in the following verse, *Those who linger long o'er the wine, who come to try the mixture*, is evidently a gloss. The hemistich *ki-ittén bak-kōs 'ēnō* in the second couplet cannot mean *when it sparkles in the cup*; the ancient Hebrews had no sparkling wines; the phrase must be rendered: *when it gives its gleam in the cup*, *i.e.* reflects the light. We may say *when it glances in the cup*, just as Whittier says in *The Norsemen*: *The waters of my native stream are glancing in the sun's warm beams*. The *ki* in the first hemistich of v. 31 should be omitted; it is dittography of the *ki* in the second hemistich; *iṭ'addām* is a relative clause, as is also *jafrīš* at the end of the next verse (GK § 155, g). On the other hand, *hikkûnî* and *hālamûnî* in v. 35 are conditional clauses (GK § 159, c). The verb *jafrīš* must be connected with Aram. *pērašâ*, ox-goad; *cf.* Syr. *afriš lībbâ*, to cause compunction, *lit. to prick the heart*, and Assyrr. *paruššu maxxilânnî*, the p. pierced me (HW 546*). Umbreit (1826) compared Syr. *afriš*; contrast Delitzsch's commentary, p. 378, n. 2.
The i appended to גיסון before יאפריש may be due to dittography, and the final i in Is. 11:8, 59:5 may be derived from the present passage. In post-Biblical Hebrew we have גיסון without the final i. The אָפָאְיָתְוֶהוֹנָו אֹבֶז (for אבֵי) is not an interjection, but a noun connected with אֹבֶז = אֹבֶז, woeful, afflicted, wretched, miserable (AJSL 32, 141). The Syriac interjection נֶבֶכֶנֶה, compared in Brown’s lexicon is, according to Duval, the Greek ὥβα (cf. König’s Lehrgeb. 2, 339). The primary connotation of שילה is attention (WF 216). Then it means care, concern, trouble, grief, complaint. It may also signify contemplation, religious meditation, devotion. In 2 K 9:11 it denotes occupation, profession, vocation, trade, calling (French métier, German Beruf). גָּדוֹלַכַּלַח, יֵאֶלֶת, אֵלַכֲלַה are guesswork. Klostermann’s emendation שלַע𝕴, his sender, is gratuitous. Sanda, Die Bücher der Könige (Münster, 1912) 2, 94 says: Am besten passt Geschäft wie 1, 18, 27; but Gewerbe or Handwerk would be a more suitable rendering.

The beginning of the fourth couplet must not be translated Thine eyes shall behold strange women; but Thine eyes will see strange things: objects will appear double; he will also be troubled with visual hallucinations in the form of disagreeable animals or insects; he will see snakes or mice; these visions may appear also in the form of flames, goblins, or fairies (EB11 12, 859b, l. 6; 14, 609b). For חֶלִילַל, dimness (not redness) see OL3 16, 492. Al-kuhl, kohl, from which the term alcohol is derived, is a transposition of this stem.

The last couplet is not the addition of an antiprohibitionist, but describes, in dramatic style, the irresistible hold alcohol has on its victims. A man may have been hit and hurt in a drunken brawl, he may have lain in a drunken stupor for half a day, but he will drink again as soon as he has slept off his drunkenness. He may cry Oh! and feel miserable for some time, yet he will sin again.

In the last hemistich but one we must insert after אֹגֶכ, 1 awake: מיע-יֵעִינוּ, from my wine, as in Gen. 9:24. This, it may be supposed, was afterwards regarded as an unseemly allusion to the patriarch Noah, and therefore it was suppressed; cf. BL 47, l. 7, and my remarks on suppressed passages in the OT on

*Cf. Syr. אָנַא which means originally attention, heed, then meditation, anxiety, care; also Syr. יָאֵכַ Redemption, attention, care, anxiety, and İן יָכֶף, to be troubled, grieved.
p. 75 of the *Actes du Seizième Congrès International des Orientalistes*, Athens, 1912; see also Mic. 31, n. 6.

The Hebrew text should be read as follows:


This may be translated as follows:

29 Who has woe? and who has misery? who has brawls? and who has grief? Who has wounds without any cause? and who has dimness of eyes?

31 Look not on the wine that is red, when it gives its gleam in the cup;

32 It glides down smoothly, but at last it is like a viper that stings.

34 Thine eyes will see strange things, thy heart will blab queer things;

34 Thou’lt feel as one sailing the high seas or as one put to sleep by poppy.

35 If they hit me, I was not sore; if they struck me, I did not feel it.

As soon as I wake from my wine, I shall surely try it again.

(a) 30 Those who linger long o’er the wine, who come to try the mixture. (b) 31 when (γ) 32 like a snake that bites and

*This reading was suggested by Budde; see 57, 50.*