

An Arab Mead (Pyment)



By H.L. Barat FitzWalter Reynolds

Introduction

This recipe for Pyment (fermented honey with grape juice) is based on a redaction by Forester Nigel FitzMaurice of a 9th century CE medicinal formulary – the Aqrabadhin of Al-Kindi, written by Abu Yusuf Ya'qub ibn Ishaq al-Kindi (c. 800-870). Abu Yusuf Ya'qub ibn Ishaq al-Kindi was an eminent Baghdad philosopher who wrote on a wide range of subjects from astrology, medicine, cooking, mathematics, swordsmithing, sorcery, and the making of alcoholic beverages.

While The Holy Qur'an includes a very strict, unambiguous restriction on the imbibing of intoxicants by the faithful, it appears that during Abu Yusuf Ya'qub ibn Ishaq al-Kindi's time some production and imbibing of intoxicants was allowed. Several similar recipes for meads and mead variants appear in other medicinal formularies from the Islamic world. This would indicate that the imbibing of intoxicants was allowed in at least some parts of the Islamic world if consumed for medicinal purposes.

Original Recipe

The measurements have been converted to modern units.

Five gallons of the best juice from pulp of the grape is taken. It is cooked over a low fire until its foam disappears. Then eight pounds of the best genuine honey is put in. It is boiled over a low fire until its foam also disappears. One half of it evaporates. Then .22 ounce is taken of, Cardamom, and .10 ounce each of Ceylonese cinnamon, clove, and long pepper.

(They are) well pulverized and put into a fine linen cloth. Then it is thrown into the decoction after the froth has been removed. When the cooking is over, it is possible to introduce the hand into it. The powder is macerated into it strongly. It is taken out and .33 ounce of Saffron put into (the liquid). It is put into flasks and the tops are stoppered. After a little sun is allowed on it, one may use it. The older it gets, the better, Allah willing.

This recipe will produce approximately 3 gallons.

My Recipe:

The pyment presented here was made by dissolving 36 lbs. of wildflower honey in 5 gallons of water. This mixture was simmered over low heat. The simmering process causes the serum albumin in the honey to rise as a white to tan colored foam. The serum albumin foam was skimmed off and discarded. Removing the serum albumin in this way produces a clearer mead. Simmering the honey/water mixture (called must) also ensures that the wild yeast in the honey is killed.

Heating of the must was common in period mead recipes (see examples below). While the action of yeast in fermentation was not known until Louis Pasteur demonstrated it in the 1860's, many period mead makers must have observed from empirical evidence that simmering or boiling the must then introducing the cooled must to a fermenter that had been used previously for mead or beer production (thereby propagating the strain of yeast(s) in the fermenter) produced a more consistent product.

Examples of simmering/boiling meads:

From *Le Menagier de Paris*, c. 1393

“BEVERAGES FOR THE SICK - BOCHET

To make six sesters of bochet take six pints of very soft honey and set it in a cauldron on the fire, and boil it and stir it for as long as it goes on rising and as long as you see it throwing up liquid in little bubbles which burst and in bursting give off a little blackish steam; and then move it, and put in seven sesters of water and boil them until it is reduced to six sesters, always stirring. And then put it in a tub to cool until it be just warm, and then run it through a sieve, and afterwards put it in a cask and add half a pint of leaven of beer, for it is this which makes it piquant (and if you put in leaven of bread, it is as good for the taste, but the colour will be duller), and cover it warmly and well when you prepare it. And if you would make it very good, add thereto an ounce of ginger, long pepper, grain of Paradise and cloves, as much of the one as of the other, save that there shall be less of the cloves, and put them in a linen bag and cast it therein. And when it hath been therein for two or three days, and the bochet tastes enough of the spices and is sufficiently piquant, take out the bag and squeeze it and put it in the other barrel that you are making. And thus this powder will serve you well two or three times over.”

(Translation found in Eileen Power's *The Goodman of Paris*, 1928, pp. 293-4)

Ein Buch von Guter Spise (German, c. 1350)

Wilt du guten met machen
(How you want to make good mead)

Der guten mete machen wil, der werme reinen brunnen, daz er die hant dor inne liden kÿnne. und neme zwei maz wazzers und eine honiges. daz rÿere man mit eime stecken, und laz ez ein wile hangen. und sihe ez denne durch ein rein tuch oder durch ein harsip in ein rein vaz. und siede denne die selben wirtz gein eime acker lane hin und wider und schume die wirtz mit einer vensterehten schÿzzeln. da der schume inne blibe und niht die wirtz. dor noch giuz den mete in ein rein vaz und bedecke in, daz der bradem niht uz mÿge, als lange daz man die hant dor inne geliden mÿge. So nim denne ein halp mezzigen hafn und tu in halp vol hoppfen und ein hant vol salbey und siede daz mit der wirtz gein einer halben mile. und giuz ez denne in die wirtz, und nim frischer hoven ein halp n zzeln und giuz ez dor in. und giuz ez under ein ander daz ez geschende werde. so decke zu, daz der bradem iht uz mÿge einen tae und eine naht. So seige denne den mete durch ein reyn tuch oder durch ein harsip. und vazze in in ein reyn vaz und lazze in iern drie tac und drie naht und fÿlle in alle abende, dar nach lazze man in aber abe und hÿete daz iht hefen dor in kumme und laz in aht tage ligen daz er valle. und fÿlle in alle abende. dar nach loz in abe in ein gehertztez vas und laz in ligen aht tage vol und trinke in denne erst sechs wucher oder ehte. so ist er allerbeste.

He, who wants to make good mead, warms clean water, so that he can just stand to put the hand in. And take two maz water and one honey. One stirs that with a stick and lets it set a while and then strains it through a clean cloth or through a hairsieve into a clean barrel. And boil then the same wort against an acre long there and back (as long as it takes to walk this distance and back) and remove the foam from the wort with a bowl with holes. The foam stays in the bowl and the wort does not. Next pour the mead in a clean barrel and cover it, so that vapor can not get out, until one can bear the hand there in. So take then a half maz pot and add until half full hops and a hand of sage and boil that with the wort against a half mile (as long as it takes to walk this distance) and give it then in the wort and take a half nut of fresh yeast (the amount that could be held in a nutshell) and give it there in and mix it together so that it will ferment. So cover also, so that the vapor can get out, a day and a night. So strain then the mead through a clean cloth or through a hairsieve and pour (it) in a clean barrel and let it ferment

three days and three nights and fill (it) in all evenings. There after one lets it go down and looks that yeast comes therein. And let it lay for eight days, so that it falls and fill in all evenings. There after let it down in a resined barrel and let it lay eight days full and drink in the first six weeks or eight. So is it the best.

A 15 gallon glass fermentation vessel was filled with 286 oz. of grape concentrate (a quantity of concentrate sufficient to produce 9 gallons of juice), along with 3 gallons of cold water. Once the must stopped producing foam it was added to the fermentation vessel.

The temperature of the resulting mixture is sufficiently high to pasteurize the grape juice, but not so high as to cause the pectin in the grape juice to set. This is the rationale for not simmering the grape juice as the original recipe calls for. If the grape juice had been simmered, the pectin in the juice would set and cause the resulting drink to be cloudy. This would not have affected the flavor of the mead, only its appearance. The must is allowed to sit at this temperature for approximately 20 minutes to ensure complete pasteurization of the grape juice.

After the 20-minute pasteurization, sufficient cold water was added to bring the total volume of liquid to 15 gallons.

Fermentation

Lalvin 71B-1122 yeast was pitched (added) to the fermenter and the pyment was allowed to ferment at room temperature for 3 months. This yeast is used commercially and by home vintners as one of the yeasts of choice for red wines. As this pyment was produced using purple/red grape concentrate, this red wine yeast was chosen.

Fermentation was allowed to continue until it was complete. The pyment was allowed to sit for several weeks to clear. No clarifying agents were used. Once the pyment cleared it was bottled.

Variations from the Original

I have in the past produced this pyment both with, and without spices. This particular batch was made without the spices listed in the original recipe. The spices as listed in the original recipe are in such small quantities (less than 1 oz. for all the spices combined), very little flavor is added to the pyment. If either a larger quantity of spices are used, or if a white grape juice is used in place of a purple/red grape juice, the flavor of the spices is more prominent in the finished pyment. I have

speculated that the spices were added to the original recipe simply to have the resulting pyment qualify as a medicinal drink.

The red wine characteristics of this pyment are evident in the color, aroma, and flavor. The finish (aftertaste) has a tannin bite that is a desired characteristic of red wines, balanced by the residual sweetness of the strong, dark honey.

This recipe will produce approximately 15 gallons.

To make a 5 gallon batch of pyment use:

- * 15 lbs. Honey
- * 96 oz. Concord Grape Concentrate
- * 1 package Lalvin 71B-1122 yeast

Bibliography:

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Le Menagier de Paris, c. 1393: Translation found in Eileen Power's *The Goodman of Paris*, 1928, pp. 293-4

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