

Very Good Bochet

Recipe from Le Menagier de Paris, 1393

Introduction

Presented here is a drink I have created is a recipe pulled from the above mentioned book, *Le Menagier de Paris*. My version includes the instructions to create the Very Good bochet. This drink is young, and was begun three weeks ago at the end of August.

I created this recipe scaled down to only two gallons and kept the proportions indicated in the book. The details will be explained below, as the recipe uses non-modern measurements in addition to my use of modern techniques.

In my attempt to keep some of the attitude and mystery of the bochet creation process intact, I refrained from checking the gravity, temperature too closely, or any other variable save for the sanitation steps usually included in modern brewing techniques. I also have let the bochet ferment as it wills and have taken a bottle straight from the carboy to deliver to this paneling.

Procedure

The following is the translated text from the book's instruction:

" 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 brochet 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."

In essence, the following procedure is executed:

1. Place an amount of honey into a cauldron and bring it to a boil
2. After sufficient time has elapsed that causes the honey to puff black steam, add water and boil that down
3. Cool the mixture, filter it, add it to a cask, and add yeast.
4. Finally, add an amount of the spices indicated until sufficient flavor has been imparted, and remove the bag.

I followed a similar procedure, and the details are thus:

Ingredients:

28oz of honey measured by water volume (In order to keep the 1:9 honey water ratio)

2 gallons of water

1oz ginger, 1 clove

Safale S-04 ale yeast

I first used a fire pit to make a fairly substantial fire, and placed a grill over it. I added the honey to the pot and placed the pot over the fire. The honey cooked until it was blackened and puffed black smoke from the bubbles. Then, the water plus one extra quart was added to the pot and it was cooked until the extra quart was boiled off. Afterward, the mixture was cooled and placed into two one gallon carboys and further cooled until room temperature. The spices were added and the yeast was pitched. Three weeks later, I placed some of it into a wine bottle to be paneled.

Variance and Explanations

Though I intended to make this drink as close as possible to the original, several limitations and considerations had to be made.

First, the measurements indicate to use sesters (or sextiers , or sestiers) of honey and water. In Jerome Pichon, in his publication of the book, indicates that a sester is eight pints of volume. Therefore, six pints of honey mixed with seven total sesters of water brings the ratio of honey to water at about 1:9. Considering that Digby instructs us to make a mead with a similar ratio, it doesn't seem too far off to make this drink in a similar proportion.

Further, Mead from this time period was fermented and stored in wooden barrels. My technique, however, followed modern sanitation procedures and modern equipment. This includes the following: Star-San sanitizer, glass gallon carboys with airlocks, and modern yeast. Since I do not have access to an appropriate cask, I intended to simulate it by adding a half ounce of light oak chips to either carboy. According to the writers of the Compleat Anachronist publication *Mead Before Digby*, the addition of the spices seems like an awfully large amount, but it is likely that spices in the time period this beverage was produced would not be as potent as they are now, and thus it seems that this drink is not as spicy as it would appear, and a smaller amount of modern spices will suffice.

Medieval fermented beverages would typically, as far as I understand, use yeast from a previous batch of brew or even from bread, and would be something passed from one drink to the next. This recipe suggests using either "leaven of bread" or "leaven of beer," which would have likely been used as just described. Lacking this capability, I used one packet of the yeast mentioned above split between the two carboys and let the drink ferment.

Lastly, cauldrons in this time period would likely have been made out of an alloy of metals (tin or copper, maybe even lead) or ceramic. However, I instead used a stainless steel pot and placed it over a fire.

References

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