

Save Ancient Studies Alliance

January 2024 Texts-in-Translation Master Class

Bar Hopping BCE

Lead by Molly Anderson Stevens

Life in the ancient world is hard and stressful, so why not relax with a big cup of something refreshing and intoxicating? In this class we will explore both what alcohol people in the ancient world drank as well as how they drank it. We will visit rowdy Roman popinae, have a quiet night in with Tang Dynasty poet Li Bai, and meet Siduri, the goddess of bartenders.

Participants will, along with knowledge of culinary history, hopefully find common ground with ancient people in the shared activity of having a drink.

Your SASA Educational Ambassadors:



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The Readings

The Bar/*Thermopolium*/ *Popina*/ *Caupona*

The bloated Lateranus whirls past the bones and ashes of his ancestors in a rapid car; with his own hands this muleteer Consul locks the wheel with the drag. It is by night, indeed: but the moon looks on; the stars strain their eyes to see. When his time of office is over, Lateranus will take up his whip in broad daylight; not shrinking to meet a now-aged friend, he will be the first to salute him with his whip; he will unbind the trusses of hay, and deal out the fodder to his weary cattle. Meanwhile, though he slays woolly victims and tawny steers after Numa's fashion, he swears by no other deity before Jove's high altar than the Goddess of horseflesh, and the images painted on the reeking stables. And when it pleases him to go back to the all-night tavern, a Syro-Phoenician runs forth to meet him----a denizen of the Idumaeen gate perpetually drenched in perfumes----and salutes him as lord and prince with all the airs of a host; and with him comes Cyane, her dress tucked up, carrying a flagon of wine for sale.

An apologist will say to me, "We too did the same as boys." Perhaps: but then you ceased from your follies and let them drop. Let your evil days be short; let some of your misdoings be cut off with your first beard. Boys may be pardoned; but when Lateranus frequented those hot liquor shops with their inscribed linen awnings, he was of ripe age, fit to guard in arms the Armenian and Syrian rivers, the Danube and the Rhine; fit to protect the person of his Emperor. Send your Legate to Ostia, O Caesar, but search for him in some big cookshop! There you will find him, lying cheek-by-jowl beside a cut-throat, in the company of bargees, thieves, and runaway slaves, beside hangmen and coffin-makers, or of some eunuch priest lying drunk with idle timbrels. Here is Liberty Hall! One cup serves for everybody; no one has a bed to himself, nor a table apart from the rest. What would you do, friend Ponticus, if you chanced upon a slave like this? You would send him to your Lucanian or Tuscan bridewell. But you gentlemen of Trojan blood find excuses for yourselves; what would disgrace a huckster sits gracefully on a Volusus or a Brutus!

-Juvenal, Satire 8 trans. G. G. Ramsay. c.110 CE

Some Commentary from the Bar Patrons of Pompeii

All the late drinkers ask you to elect Marcus Cerrinius Vatia aedile. Florus and Fructus wrote this! - CIL VI 581, Taberna Hedones, vii.2.44

Whoever wants to serve themselves can go drink from the sea! - CIL IV 3494 Bar of Salvius vi.14.36

What a lot of tricks you use to deceive, innkeeper. You sell water but drink unmixed wine! - CIL IV 3498 Workshop of Potitus vi.14.37

I fucked the barmaid! - CIL IV 8442 Caupona of Sotericus i.12.3

The Bartender: Siduri

The tavern-keeper Siduri who lives by the seashore,
she lives...
the pot-stand was made for her, the golden fermenting vat was made for her.
She is covered with a veil ...
Gilgamesh was roving about...
wearing a skin,...
having the flesh of the gods in his body,
but sadness deep within him,
looking like one who has been traveling a long distance.
The tavern-keeper was gazing off into the distance,
puzzling to herself, she said,
wondering to herself:
"That fellow is surely a murderer(!)
Where is he heading! ..."
As soon as the tavern-keeper saw him, she bolted her door,
bolted her gate, bolted the lock.
But at her noise Gilgamesh pricked up his ears,
lifted his chin (to look about) and then laid his eyes on her.
Gilgamesh spoke to the tavern-keeper, saying:
"Tavern-keeper, what have you seen that made you bolt
your door,
bolt your gate, bolt the lock!
if you do not let me in I will break your door, and smash
the lock!
... the wilderness."
... Gilgamesh
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... Gilgamesh

... gate

Gilgamesh said to the tavern-keeper:

"I am Gilgamesh, I killed the Guardian!

I destroyed Humbaba who lived in the Cedar Forest,

I slew lions in the mountain passes!

I grappled with the Bull that came down from heaven, and
killed him."

The tavern-keeper spoke to Gilgamesh, saying:

"If you are Gilgamesh, who killed the Guardian,
who destroyed Humbaba who lived in the Cedar Forest,
who slew lions in the mountain passes,
who grappled with the Bull that came down from heaven, and
killed him,

why are your cheeks emaciated, your expression desolate!

Why is your heart so wretched, your features so haggard!

Why is there such sadness deep within you!

Why do you look like one who has been traveling a long
distance

so that ice and heat have seared your face!

... you roam the wilderness!"

Gilgamesh spoke to her, to the tavern-keeper he said:
"Tavern-keeper, should not my cheeks be emaciated?
Should my heart not be wretched, my features not haggard?
Should there not be sadness deep within me!
Should I not look like one who has been traveling a long
distance,
and should ice and heat not have seared my face!
..., should I not roam the wilderness?
My friend, the wild ass who chased the wild donkey, panther of
the wilderness,
Enkidu, the wild ass who chased the wild donkey, panther of
the wilderness,
we joined together, and went up into the mountain.
We grappled with and killed the Bull of Heaven,
we destroyed Humbaba who lived in the Cedar Forest,
we slew lions in the mountain passes!
My friend, whom I love deeply, who went through every hard-
ship with me,
Enkidu, whom I love deeply, who went through every hardship
with me,
the fate of mankind has overtaken him.
Six days and seven nights I mourned over him
and would not allow him to be buried
until a maggot fell out of his nose.
I was terrified by his appearance(!),
I began to fear death, and so roam the wilderness.
The issue of my friend oppresses me,
so I have been roaming long trails through the wilderness.
The issue of Enkidu, my friend, oppresses me,
so I have been roaming long roads through the wilderness.
How can I stay silent, how can I be still!
My friend whom I love has turned to clay.
Am I not like him? Will I lie down, never to get up again?"
Gilgamesh spoke to the tavern-keeper, saying:
"So now, tavern-keeper, what is the way to Utanapishtim!
What are its markers? Give them to me! Give me the markers!
If possible, I will cross the sea;
if not, I will roam through the wilderness."
The tavern-keeper spoke to Gilgamesh, saying:
"There has never been, Gilgamesh, any passage whatever,

there has never been anyone since days of yore who crossed
the sea.

The (only) one who crosses the sea is valiant Shamash, except
for him who can cross!

The crossing is difficult, its ways are treacherous--
and in between are the Waters of Death that bar its approaches!
And even if, Gilgamesh, you should cross the sea,
when you reach the Waters of Death what would you do!
Gilgamesh, over there is Urshanabi, the ferryman of Utanapishtim.
'The stone things' are with him, he is in the woods picking
mint(!).

Go on, let him see your face.

If possible, cross with him;
if not, you should turn back."

-trans. Maureen Gallery Kovacs From the Akkadian edition (mostly), 18th c. BCE

A Regular: Li Bai 李白 (701-762 CE)

It was at a wine party—
I lay in a drowse, knowing it not.
The blown flowers fell and filled my lap.
When I arose, still drunken,
The birds had all gone to their nests,
And there remained but few of my comrades.
I went along the river—alone in the moonlight.

-trans. Shigeyoshi Obata

A cup of wine, under the flowering trees;
I drink alone, for no friend is near.
Raising my cup I beckon the bright moon,
For he, with my shadow, will make three men.
The moon, alas, is no drinker of wine;
Listless, my shadow creeps about at my side.
Yet with the moon as friend and the shadow as slave
I must make merry before the Spring is spent.
To the songs I sing the moon flickers her beams;
In the dance I weave my shadow tangles and breaks.
While we were sober, three shared the fun;

Now we are drunk, each goes his way.
May we long share our odd, inanimate feast,
And meet at last on the Cloudy River of the sky.

-trans. Arthur Waley

From “Exhile’s Letter”

So-Kin of Rakuho, ancient friend, I now remember
That you built me a special tavern,
By the south side of the bridge at Ten-Shin.
With yellow gold and white jewels
 we paid for the songs and laughter,
And we were drunk for month after month,
 forgetting the kings and princes.
Intelligent men came drifting in, from the sea
 and from the west border,
And with them, and with you especially,
 there was nothing at cross-purpose;
And they made nothing of sea-crossing
 or of mountain-crossing,
If only they could be of that fellowship.
And we all spoke out our hearts and minds ...
 and without regret.
And then I was sent off to South Wei,
 smothered in laurel groves,
And you to the north of Raku-hoku,
Till we had nothing but thoughts and memories between us.

-trans. Ezra Pound