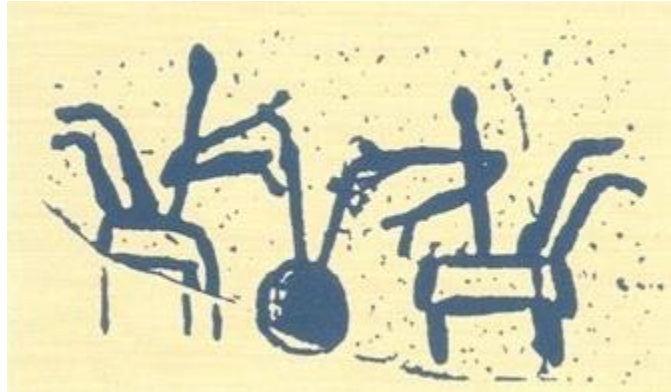


## כשדים ותירוש

### אבנר רמו



**A piece of ceramic, from the Early Bronze Age was found during the excavations in İmamoğlu Tumulus in Malatya. In this drinking scene, the person on the left is holding a straw and drinking something from a large container. (Buchholz 1999, 407 Picture 72b).**

Wine making and beer brewing began in the Neolithic period, and the names of these beverages in many languages are loan-words or derivatives of the ancient names of these drinks. For example, the Hebrew word for wine: יַיִן (*yain*) is most likely related to the much older Hittite word for wine - *wiyana*.

The centrality of beer and wine in the ancient world cultures is attested by the facts that in their spoken languages these beverages had multiple names. However, it is not certain if these were mostly interchangeable names, or whether some of them referred to specific varieties of these products. For example, in the records of Old Sumerian culture, nine names of different types of beer have been identified (1). It was estimated that about 10% of the 100,000 documents that survived from the Neo-Sumerian period (Third dynasty of Ur; at the end of the third millennium BC), deal with beer or its components, its production, distribution and consumption (2).

The types of beer mentioned in these documents are *kas saga* - “good beer”, an expensive beer used mainly by the rich, and *kas du* - “ordinary beer”, a cheaper variety consumed by the ordinary man. It would not be surprising if the centrality of beer in the economics and culture of the Mesopotamians caused other nations to refer to them (mainly derogatorily) as the “beer drinking” people, or *kasdu* which in biblical Hebrew will be spelled as כַּשְׁדִּים (*kasdim*), a term that was translated to Greek (and English) as “Chaldeans.”

In chapter ten of the Book of Genesis we find the “Generations of Noah” which lists seventy nations arranged in “families” apparently according to the knowledge, concepts and/or beliefs of the writer of this book. It is rather peculiar that while the Assyrians and the city of Babylon are mentioned in this list, the כַּשְׁדִּים - “Chaldeans” do not appear there. We speculate that if indeed the Mesopotamians were referred to as: “beer drinking” people, the degrading nickname כַּשְׁדִּים - “Chaldeans” would not be included among the roster of real nation names.

The conventional opinion is that the biblical Hebrew word **תירוש** (*thirosh*) is a type of beverage made of unfermented grapes. To assess this theory we reviewed all the biblical verses that contain this word.

In the Book of Isaiah we read:

נשבע יהוה בימינו ובזרוע עזו: אם-אתן את-דגנך עוד מאכל לאיביך, ואם-ישתו בני-נכר תירושך אשר יגעת בו.

“*YHWH* had sworn by His right hand, and by the arm of His strength: Surely I will no more give your corn to be food for your enemies; and strangers shall not drink your wine, for which you had labored” (Is 62:8).

This verse indicates that if **תירוש** (*thirosh*) is a beverage made of grapes, it is unlikely that its meaning is restricted to an unfermented type. Furthermore, we may wonder why of all the foods and drinks, only **דגן** -“corn” and **תירוש** (*thirosh*) are mentioned here. Yet the specific association between **דגן** -“corn” and **תירוש** (*thirosh*) suggests that they are closely related.

The word **תירוש** (*thirosh*) appears in 38 biblical verses and in 29 of them it is in association with **דגן** -“corn” (Gen 27:28, 37; Num 18:12; Deu 7:13; 11:14; 12:17; 14:23; 18:4; 28:51; 33:28; 2 Ki 18:32; Is 36:17; 62:8; Jer 31:11; Hos 2:10, 11, 24; 7:14; Joel 1:10; 2:19; Hag 1:11; Zec 9:17; Ps 4:8; Neh 5:11; 10:40; 13:5, 12; 2 Ch 31:5; 32:28).

On the other hand, unlike **יין** - “wine”, there is not even a single biblical verse that indicates that **תירוש** (*thirosh*) is a beverage made of grapes (or that its production involves compressing by foot).



**Cylinder seal (left) and modern rolling (right), showing the consumption of beer through long, reed straws. Early Dynastic period (c. 2600–2350 BCE). Khafajeh, Iraq. (Courtesy of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago)**

It was indicated by Damerow (2), that one of the goddesses worshiped by the Sumerians was Ninkasu, the goddess of brewing beer. The Akkadians believed that her daughter - Sirash

replaced her as the patron of beer. It is not unlikely that **תירוש** (*thirosh*) is a modified form of her name.

**References:**

1. Englund R K. Grain accounting practices in archaic Mesopotamia. In: Hoyrup J and Damerow P (eds.). Changing views on ancient Near Eastern Mathematics. BBVO 19. Berlin. Reimer Verlags. Pp. 1-36.
2. Damerow P: Sumerian Beer: The origin of brewing technology in ancient Mesopotamia. Cuneiform Digital Library Journal 2012:2, pp1-20.