Margaret's Mead

anthropological inquiries into the making and sharing of honey wine

a zine by Culture & Agriculture and friends
AL DAHWA
قهوة
2014

2015

OLD NO.
SOUTH-NINE

AL OAHAL OF HONEY
FERMENTED WITH
COPPER BERRIES
VANILLA & CUMIN
NEVADA CITY
CALIF.

A BARLEY MEAD
INFUSED WITH
SCOTCH BROOM
NEVADA
CITY
CA
mead labels illustrated by T. Turtlington

Blackberry Mead
VENA DA CITY, CA
2014

Bing Mead
Vega City, CA
2014

Just a little touch of...

NOS HAND
MOSCHAND
HAND

BREWS

SAFFERAS: COCA LEAF
THREGALAS: CATSCLAW
SHORRY GOAL

CLUTHERO ROOT

ALL BACK ON!
Assemblage

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Introduction - Fermentation is a Political Act

Jonathan Tanis

Why make mead in a time of war? Surely there are more important things to do with our time. Beset on all fronts by wars on immigration, drugs, open internet, civil rights - in Syria and Afghanistan and Yemen and the USA - the alcoholic fermentation of honey might seem an unnecessary luxury, or even an irresponsible distraction from more efficacious acts of resistance. Yet this zine has emerged from our suspicion that the slow, collaborative practices involved with crafting and sharing mead are not only something we’re fighting for, but also legitimate means of political action.

Mead making is democratizing in the same way as punk rock - at its simplest, almost anyone can brew a decent mead. Just add water to honey so it is no longer anti-microbial, then add yeast (or let the ambient yeast in the air do it for you). Leave it alone for a couple weeks to a couple months. No need for expensive equipment, trained sensitivities or particular ingredients. Like basic progressions of power chords, it provides easy entry to a form of production (of music, of alcoholic beverages) that has largely become the domain of specialists.

My attempts to cultivate a mead evoking the local piñon-juniper shrubland of southeastern Utah didn’t necessarily yield the most palatable results (too much sagebrush), but they did confront me with novel questions about place-making and place-tasting. Foraging for ingredients invited different attunements to a desert landscape predominantly appreciated for its visual beauty and topographic novelty. Mead
making has variously revealed what Anna Tsing calls *latent commons* - sites that “bubble with unrealized possibility” for more-than-human alliances. Commons latent in the herbaceous undergrowth, in the pollination of flowers by honeybees, in the honey and water and empty buckets, in the ambient yeast suspended in the atmosphere.

Who makes the mead? The producer is multiple, displaced into the weird, indifferent agency of fermentation.

This zine grew out of the anthropological and ethnobotanical scholarship of Marc Williams and Jim Veteto on mead circles in Southern Appalachia. Like mead, it has also fermented - inoculated over tall glasses of kombucha and propagated along mycelial threads of e-mail. Why a zine instead of opting for more traditional outlets of academic expression? As anthropologists we wanted to experiment with an alternate mode of publishing and distribution - less bound by convention and form, connoting grassroots (rhizomatic) redistribution of publishing power, encouraged to be photocopied, mashed-up, altered.

Making zines, making mead, making war. Who is drawn - willingly, indifferently, by force - into these circles of production? Mead circles are revolutionary politics, not only for democratizing the production of alcohol, but also for the quality of relationships they conceive - from the gathering of brewers around the campfire to the gatherings in public squares to the gathering of plants in the forager's pouch.
Mead in Historical Context

Jim Veteto and Marc Williams

The origins and development of fermented beverages are important to archaeologists and ethnobotanists, as alcohol is associated with the domestication of grains, increased social complexity, feasting societies, and intensification of ceramics. Honey is widely valued by different societies and is a common unprocessed simple sugar source in fermented beverages. Human beings have been using the byproducts of honeybees for at least 8500 years. There is strong evidence that the yeasts used in early fermentation either originated in honey or on acorn shells. Several early fermented beverages used honey to increase available sugars, to inoculate the drink, and for taste (Dozier 2016).

Ancient Egyptians were practicing beekeeping and fermentation as early as 2500 BC and were using honey as household sweetener as early as 4000 BC. In India, soma wine, which some historians have interpreted to be mead, was first brewed around 1500 BC and was the subject of a whole chapter in the Rig Veda. In ancient Greece, metheglin, medicinal mead, was considered a high beverage that the gods and the wealthy sipped on. The Greeks were fond of spicing meads with many of the Mediterranean herbs that were used for cooking and medicine. Romans liked their mead sweet and were known for making mulsum, a traditional grape wine sweetened with honey, and spicing it with a variety of floral Mediterranean herbs (Schramm 2003).

Mead is well known as a historical fermented beverage across northern Europe. The Welsh and Irish combined the Latin word for medicine, medicus, with the Old Irish word for liquor, Ilyn, to arrive at meddygllyn (in English, metheglin, or medicinal mead). Meddygllyn remains the Welsh word for medicine. Pre-Christian Northern European metheglins contained classic woodland herbs such as wild thyme, woodruff, and chamomile. Mead is the famous drink of ancient Scandinavian people and gods. Odin stole Oderrerir, the mead of poetry and source of the ability to speak and write beautifully and persuasively, from the giants and returned it to its rightful place among the gods, where he dispenses it to
beings he deems worthy. The Old English epic Beowulf, set in Scandinavia, first mentions mead in the fourth line and references the drink continuously throughout. Gatherings for diplomacy and celebration in Beowulf are always held in spacious mead halls and every major event—new alliances, battles, weddings, deaths—is accompanied by the consumption of copious amounts of mead (Schramm 2003, Zimmerman 2015).
Mead has been made historically in most locations where honey bees are found. There is a very old mead-making tradition in Africa, which is still current in central Africa from coast to coast. Taoist poets in China are famous for imbibing intoxicating and medicinal honey wines in bamboo grove poetry performances. After falling out of favor in Western Europe, mead has remained a popular drink in Eastern Europe and Russia from at least the Middle Ages forward. In the Americas, mead was made by various peoples, exemplified by the baalche tradition of the Lacandon Maya in Chiapas, Mexico. This brief overview illustrates the underappreciated importance of mead to diverse world cultures.

To make a prairie it takes a clover and one bee,
One clover, and a bee.
And revery.
The revery alone will do,
If bees are few.

- Emily Dickinson
We two form a multitude.

How bees give directions

A worker bee, returning to the hive, dances on the honeycomb to indicate where food can be found. The angle between the center of the figure and the vertical shows the angle between the food and the sun. If the food is near the hive, the bee circles on the comb. If the food is to be found more than about 100 yards from the hive, the bee dances in a figure-of-eight, waggling its body (right).
How to brew your own mead

"Reject the cult of expertise. Do not be afraid. Do not allow yourself to be intimidated...Fermentation is easy and exciting. Anyone can do it. Microorganisms are flexible and adaptable. Certainly there is considerable nuance to be learned about any of the fermentation processes, and if you stick with them, they will teach you. But the basic processes are simple and straightforward"

- Sandor Katz

Step One: Gather...

Stainless steel pot, glass jug, airlock
Water and honey (in 4:1 ratio; e.g. 12 cups water and 3 cups honey for a one gallon jug)
Other ingredients (per gallon of water/honey mix)
  - fruit (4 cups)
  - fresh herbs (1 cup)
  - dry herbs (1/2 cup)
  - roots (2.5oz)

Step Two: heat honey, water and any other ingredients until honey is dissolved
* mead can be brewed using either purchased packets of commercial yeast or the ambient yeasts that are always present in the air

Step 3a: if using **commercial yeast**, let mixture cool to about 90 degrees F (this may vary depending on the strain) and stir in yeast

Step 3b: to use **ambient yeast**, simply cover loosely with a cloth or towel and stir two or more times daily until bubbly

Step Four: pour mixture into glass jug, affix airlock and **wait** 2-4 weeks until bubbling slows. At this point you can either drink the mead right away or age it for improved flavor

To delve deeper into the brewing process, check out [www.cultureandagriculture.amanalthro.org/meadzine](http://www.cultureandagriculture.amanalthro.org/meadzine) for a list of resources
Bioregional Ingredients

More-than-human mead circles spiral outwards, drawing local ecologies into place-making projects of gathering, brewing and drinking. How might we learn to live together with other beings? Mead making is always already collaborative, but who collaborates and under what conditions is something that matters. Looking to which plants and fungi are close at hand is a good place to start...

*Sambucus nigra*

ELDERBERRIES.
Sassafras albidum

Main ingredient in (traditional, not commercial) root beer and filé powder (for gumbo) and a precursor to MDMA. Used by native peoples of the southeast for medicine, dye, meat curing and fire starting.

Taraxacum officinale

"The use of the flowers of Dandelion (Taraxacum officinale) in beverages is classic and traditional. The use of the roasted root as a coffee substitute is also becoming more and more popular. A few years ago I tried making a mead with the three parts separate (flowers, roots, leaves) and then a combination of the three. I found all of them to be pleasurable. Research mainly out of Canada has also shown the potential efficacy of aqueous extracts of Dandelion in fighting cancer" - Marc Williams
### Some plants used by Marc Williams in brewing mead between 2006-2016

Use only the part indicated! Other parts may be toxic! Harvest and use sustainably! When in doubt, leave it out...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family</th>
<th>Common Name</th>
<th>Scientific Name</th>
<th>Part Used</th>
<th>Uses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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| Asteraceae      | Eastern Elderberry              | Sambucus canadensis              | fruit                            | Vitamin C, anthocyanins, anthoxanthins, flavones, flavonols, sesquiterpenes, tannins, saponins, terpenoids, tannins, anthocyanins, anthoxanthins, flavones, flavonoids, terpenoids, tannins, anthocyanins, anthoxanthins, flavones, flavonoids, terpenoids, tannins, anthocyanins, anthoxanthins, flavones, flavonoids, terpenoids, tannins, anthocyanins, anthoxanthins, flavones, flavonoids, terpenoids, tannins, anthocyanins, anthoxanthins, flavones, flavonoids, terpenoids, tannins, anthocyanins, anthoxanthins, flavones, flavonoids, terpenoids, tannins, anthocyanins, anthoxanthins, flavones, flavonoids, terpenoids, tannins, anthocyanins, anthoxanthins, flavones, flavonoids, terpenoids, tannins, anthocyanins, anthoxanthins, flavones, flavonoids, terpenoids, tannins, anthocyanins, anthoxanthins, flavones, flavonoids, terpenoids, tannins, anthocyanins, anthoxanthins, flavones, 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Mead Manifesto

T. Turtlington

Isn’t it interesting, the bridge between the fermenting of a grain or fruit, and the fermenting of a crowd? One becomes a buzz inducing libation, and the other can become a riot or angry mob.

fer - ment

verb 1. (of a substance) undergo fermentation
    2. incite or stir up (trouble or disorder)
noun 1. agitation or excitement among a group of people, typically concerning major change and leading to trouble or violence

According to these definitions, “fermentation” is a process of transformation incited by an agent of some sort; a yeast, an ideal, a belief or revolutionary leader. Through its action (the activity of the “culture”) a change takes place and the result, for better or for worse is something new. Beer, bread, wine, kraut, yogurt, countries and political parties are all a result of this type of “alchemy.”

Mead, from sunlight to blossom, nectar, bee juice then honey, is the final result of many transformations, with fermentation just being one of them. In mead we find something different perhaps than what we feel when we imbibe some of the other fermented beverages. There is a reason that it is known as the “philosopher’s drink”, and has been associated with poets, bards, Nordic Gods and the Halls of Valhalla. The transformative properties that convert the sugar into alcohol continue in our beings as mercurial forces, that shift our vision, dreams and stories away from the simple mundane, into a rapturous desire to live up to a greater potential!

Inspiration move me brightly! Mead, because of the qualities that fermented honey imparts, has an effect upon the passion of those and the cultures that consume it. When we take up our pots and spoons, and brew with all of natures wonderful plants, we are that “fermenting” crowd of heretics taking back our traditions, bodies and minds!

Brew on heretics. The future is ours!
What else goes into ferments? What gets passed around with the sharing of ferments?

*Maya Hey and Emily Farr*

Below is a relayed narrative that alternates between two fermentistas and their shared stories.

Montreal, for all it's legacy and character, is a revolving door of people and restaurants. One of my chef friends moved to Hamilton, and I became the beneficiary of most of her commercial grade, industrial size odds-and-ends, including a 5 gallon bucket of honey. Having read the opening chapter to Sandor Katz' *Wild Fermentation*, I knew that mead was a relatively simple affair: honey, water, and time. I diluted the honey with water (making quite the goopy mess) and let the ambient yeasts do the rest. As I was tying off a piece of fabric to the bucket's opening, I thought about the rituals and environments that shape and surround fermentation. I started thinking about what else goes into ferments.

*Living in Vermont in the summer lends to endless fodder for fermentation experimentation. I came home one September afternoon after a morning spent apple-picking and decided to try my hand at cider. Putting on a fiddle tune, I got to work peeling and chopping and pressing. I tucked one jar in the shady corner next to the kombucha, set another in the sun beneath the windowsill, and crossed my fingers that the right yeasts would work their magic. I covered both jars with cheesecloth and promptly forgot about them. Perhaps two weeks later, I went to bottle the kombucha and found the shady cider had turned to something resembling vinegar, and the sunny cider had bits of mysterious mold floating on top...*

I recently had to save Gigi from a bout of mold after I’d left her unattended for a few weeks. You see, Gigi is the last living iteration of her human form; Gigi-the-human is no longer with us but lives on in kitchens like mine in her sourdough starter. Imbued with heightened stakes and a more grave sense of responsibility, I was keen on
saving Gigi. Like a patient recovering from surgery, I was continuously monitoring her stats with my nose and neurotically checking for any mysterious bits floating on top. Just this morning, I spotted another bloom of mold on the jar’s inside, so I transferred her to yet another container, refed, and re-aerated.

_**I was leading a group of students through my baking process at a sourdough workshop when, unbeknownst to me, the baker from my favorite local bakery made a guest appearance. I sheepishly explained my sourdough starter maintenance routine: scoop a little bit out of the glass jar; add flour and water in equal parts; mix. The baker clucked his tongue and shook his head. You need to transfer the starter to a clean jar each time you feed it, he said. Baking is a science, he added, with every detail figuring into the do’s and don’ts of sourdough maintenance. My sourdough upkeep is more laissez-faire. My starter crossed the Atlantic ocean with me in the toe of my snow boot after I had originally adopted her in northwestern Italy. I feed her sometimes with bread flour, other times with ground up rye berries, sometimes with warm water and other times cold. When I see any bit of white mold forming on the sides of the jar, I transfer her to a new one to take on the character of whatever might have passed through that jar in its past life. She is constantly evolving, but always maintains a sort of sweet apple-y smell.**_

Wide mouth jars in Italy are hard to come by, so when I was bequeathed one from an alumna of the program I was attending, I accepted without hesitation. Like an initiation ritual, I brought the jar to my face. I could sniff out remnants of fish... And the smell of green. But the aromas were not unpleasant—more along the lines of capers and baccala than gefilte fish. I thought about the umami compounds left behind as resins as I gathered ingredients. I sliced some turnips and tossed them together with ginger, garlic, scallions, and chili peppers in a makeshift kimchi that I ended up sharing as part of my thesis project at the completion of my degree. When I graduated some months thereafter, I looked back on this
wide-mouthed jar as a way to make the relay from one alumna to another, somehow bringing together full circles of food rituals.

When I inherited a beer brewing kit last winter, I couldn't wait to start playing with it. But I only had four small burners, three medium pots, some second-hand hops, a big bag of barley, and a friend eager to help. We put on some folky jazz, threw open the porch doors to let the sunlight stream in, and meticulously (stickily, messily, haphazardly) boiled the wort in three separate pots. Then came time to cool the wort down, and we balked because we hadn't thought that far ahead. We filled the small sink with ice and nestled the pots inside, laughing as the neighbor's pesky cat rubbed against our legs and demanded our attention.

The finished product—a sort-of-brown-ale—wasn't very good (first beers never are, I'm told), but it was beer. It was more than beer: it was wonder and laughter and curiosity in a bottle.
On top of the pristine, stainless steel countertops of the R&D food lab stood an unassuming ceramic vessel which, to my surprise, contained heaps of oily fish and flecks of grain. Turns out this was a modern rendition of the Roman-era garum, or fermented fish sauce, with sardines and koji-inoculated barley. In other words, this was a double substitution: barley koji for rice koji, and today’s techniques for ancient praxis. I caught on to the idea of substituting fermentable ingredients by function and have been experimenting since. When I finished at the lab and moved to Montreal, I liberally used maple syrup as a fermentable substrate, tossing it into tepache, kombucha, and the like to jumpstart yeasts. When someone asked about the bucket of mead I’d made after my chef friend moved to Hamilton, I immediately started on a maple version of mead…

_Pasta Madre Paradigm is a collective of women writing about food. It is a creative space for sharing stories, engaging in conversations, and exploring food as a lens to understand the complexities in our world. Come. Take a seat. Join our table._

_http://pastamadreparadigm.com  pastamadreparadigm@gmail.com_
Southern Appalachian Mead Circles

Jim Veteto and Marc Williams

In 2002, members of Earthaven Ecovillage invited ethnobotanist Frank Cook to teach a meadmaking workshop near Black Mountain, NC. Frank had been teaching mead fermentation for several years and had an intensive focus on gathering appropriate plants from Appalachian fields and forests to add as ingredients. He encouraged participants to label their meads with appropriate scientific and common names for the plants they gathered.

From this initial workshop at Earthaven, a tradition of mead circles has arisen in Western North Carolina and to a lesser extent in other bioregions. Mead circles can arise at any occasion, from birthdays to weddings, and have an annual tradition at events such as the Southeastern Permaculture Gathering, Firefly Primitive Skills Gathering, and Green Scene. Mead circles upwards of 50 people are a regular occurrence. At the beginning of each mead circle, there is often someone who will explain the general rules and expectations of the occasion: that the drinking is not to get drunk but rather has a sacramental social quality, sharing about
mead circle history, that individuals should take the tiniest sip possible—dubbed *sharis redicularis*—so everyone gets to try each mead (we have seen one 12 oz. bottle make it all the way around a circle of over 50 people on multiple occasions), and that everyone should be quiet and listen as each person who brought mead to the circle introduces their offering.

After someone in the circle typically says, *I have a mead*, information is given about the offering. Some people have very little besides a basic ingredient or two, but dedicated mazers typically have a story that goes

"213" is a mead made annually on Feb. 13th. The ingredients are Ginger root, Cardamon (pods), Rose Petals (dried), Star Anise, and just a touch of Cumin and Black Pepper (ground). This mead is made to honor the cosmic epicness of the Grateful Dead's performance of Dark Star at the Fillmore East in New York City on February 13th, 1970. (And of course the whole show is played while brewing!)

The aphrodisiacal "Mead de Amor" -
Damiana, Vanilla, Eagle Feather Farm ginseng, Ginger, Shisandra, Cinnamon Haw Creek Honey

"Skull & Roses" - a June mead to honor the Summer Solstice and the Yarrow and Roses that bloom at that time!

For the last trinumeral of our lifetimes - 12/12/12 - my formulation included 36 ingredients as that is 3 times 12. Each one was from a special place to me and it was bottled on my Dad's 75th birthday. 7 Fruits, 7 Leaves, 7 Roots, and 3 mushrooms with 12 types of honey!

along with their mead. Where and when the mead was made is usually shared first, and oftentimes they are brewed at special events or during special times such as solstices or equinoxes. Some mazers make efforts to incorporate sacred numerology; “Day out of Time” from the Mayan calendar is a favorite time to make mead, as are trinumerals (eg. 10-10-10 or 11-11-11). The vessel is also an important component. Some bottles
have been continuously used for making mead for over 10 years and have labels on them that describe each mead that has been bottled in it and all the people, places, times, and ingredients that were involved. Whoever was present when the mead was made is also ‘called into the circle’ whether they are present or not, as mead-making is often conducted by a group. Some mazers make ornate labels to adorn their bottles. Types of honey and where they were procured is communicated. The type of yeast that was used to ferment the mead is mentioned. This can vary from store bought yeasts to wild-caught yeasts. And finally, of primary importance to the ethnobotanically minded, the ingredient list is revealed (some people might introduce ingredients early on in the process), which typically includes a wide array of plant parts and/or mushrooms. The mead circle phenomenon in western North Carolina is now a 15-year tradition, fermenting ‘cultural topsoil’ among its many participants.
Make Mead Not War

Nick Kawa

Some of you might not know how this zine made it into your hands. Maybe a copy was left behind by a friend, or abandoned in a conference meeting room. Or maybe you found a digital version after getting lost in some 2 AM online rabbit hole. And there may be some of you, I suspect, who have looming concerns about the world today, which could make mead-making and mead circles seem quaint or irrelevant, or even frivolous.

So, this may come off as weirdly utopian, or down right naïve, but can we find something redemptive in mead? Can it help us shrug off some of the anxieties of the present? Can it push back against the idea that we live in a dog-eat-dog world and that anything else is delusional hippy bullshit?

And what do you think Margaret Mead, the champion of public anthropology, might have to say about all of this? How would she want us to proceed in this time that seems not just to be fermenting, but ready to bust apart at the seams?

In 1940, Margaret Mead published the essay “War Is Only an Invention – Not a Biological Necessity.” She resisted the idea that our biological make-up drives us inevitably to violent conflict. She also questioned the view that warfare is an unavoidable consequence of the development of the state or “the struggle for land and natural resources of class societies springing, not from the nature of man, but from the nature of history.” Instead, she urged us to consider war to be just another socio-cultural invention.

She then posed a tricky question:

“Grant that war is an invention, that it is not a biological necessity nor the outcome of certain special types of social forms, still, once the invention is made, what are we to do about it?”
At the conclusion of her essay, Mead offers us her solution: “A form of behavior becomes outdated only when something else takes its place, and in order to invent forms of behavior which will make war obsolete, it is a first requirement to believe that an invention is possible.”

Today, there are many battles to wage: against racism, gender discrimination, the ongoing ravishes of settler colonialism, Islamophobia, climate change denial, and hates of many different stripes. But we also have to find ways to bring people together and connect to others beyond our all-too-human world. We have to remind ourselves that invention is always possible, and not strictly of the techno-scientific variety. What are traditions that we can invigorate—ones that cultivate informal generosities? What types of care – of both people and land – might we want to model for others? And how do we extend these behaviors beyond our little bubbles and cloisters?

To say that mead is the answer sounds ridiculous. But then again, who knows, maybe mead might be just what we need. At the very least, it could be a good place to start. So, build a circle, invite some friends, make some new ones, and then, do it again.

How far might our circles extend?
It fills you with the soft
essence of vanished flowers, it becomes
a trickle sharp as a hair that you follow
from the honey pot over the table

and out the door and over the ground,
and all the while it thickens,

grows deeper and wilder, edged
with pine boughs and wet boulders,
pawprints of bobcat and bear, until

deep in the forest you
shuffle up some tree, you rip the bark,

you float into and swallow the dripping combs,
bits of the tree, crushed bees – – – a taste
composed of everything lost, in which everything lost is found.

- Mary Oliver
MAKE MEAD NOT WAR