



Transcript

Episode 7: Drinking Culture in Iron Age Europe, Joshua Driscoll (University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee)

Lauren Dogaer

Have you ever found yourself asking why alcohol plays such a big role across so many cultures? Striking a balance between moderation and excess isn't just a modern struggle. It goes back to ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, and the Roman Empire. I'm Lauren, and I'm a postdoctoral fellow in Egyptology at the University of Oxford. I'm fascinated by how today's issues mirror the past, from ancient health warnings to peer pressure at Greek symposia. We're exploring it all. Join me as we get Drunk on History and uncover the timeless truth behind our drinking habits. Hi there, and welcome to another episode of Drunk on History. We're going to have a look at the alcohol consumption of the Celts, or more broadly, Iron Age Europe. And for this, we are joined by Joshua Driscoll. He's an archaeologist in cultural resource management at the Archaeological Research Laboratory Center of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, and an adjunct lecturer in Celtic studies at the same university. He's a specialist in the archaeology of beer and alcohol as a social signifier and is mainly working on alcohol from Iron Age European sites, including Celtic sites. So Joshua, welcome to the podcast.

Joshua Driscoll

Thanks for having me.

Lauren Dogaer

To start, what is the Iron Age in Europe? We have different people living in Europe during these periods. We have the Celts in more central period, with first the proto-Celtic culture of the Hallstatt people. Then we have the Latène period. But we of course also have the Germanic tribes, the Nordic tribes more in the north of Europe. We also have Celts on the British Isles at some point. So can you give some background to like the different tribes that we have living in various regions in Europe during the Iron Age and give some background also into which centuries we're actually talking about?

Joshua Driscoll



Yeah, so the Iron Age goes for a pretty long time. So it starts usually somewhere around the 9th or 8th century BC and then just sort of continues until whenever the Romans show up. So depending on where you are in space, it can be late 2nd century BC or the 1st century CE. And then in some areas, they never quite get to. So if we're talking about certain areas north of the Danube, then the Iron Age just sort of continues on until the early Middle Ages, that would also be true in parts of Scandinavia or in parts of sort of northern, the northern UK. So northern parts of Scotland, and then also Ireland as well. This sort of earlier time period, the early Iron Age, one of the most well-known groups would be, as you talked about, the folks from the sort of West Hallstatt core. And so That culture sort of spread over a large area, but there's a core central part of it that's going to be in France, Germany, and northern Switzerland. And there's a lot of sort of really interesting sites there, some of maybe sort of the first cities and towns north of the Alps. And then later on, the Celts are going to end up sort of spreading across Europe. That's going to be during that La Tène period and the early centuries BC and then into AD. And at that point, we're going to start to hear more about these groups from the Greeks and the Romans. And so we'll get some textual sources that way. At the same time, as you mentioned, we'll have Celtic folks that are in the British Isles during this sort of first millennia BC. We'll get some sources from Romans about them as well. And then once we get sort of into the early Middle Ages, we get sources that are written in actual Celtic languages that we can use, especially Irish and Welsh. Those are really actually written down and formed after the Iron Age, but a lot of times can give us some hints to what was going on during the Iron Age. And that's also going to be true of Germanic folks as well, where we can use some Norse sources or old Icelandic sources to get an idea of what types of cultural formations they had.

Lauren Dogaer

Thank you so much for giving us this overview. But what about the political structure of the Iron Age? We're more talking about all smaller tribes with chieftains, I assume, rather than the Celtic society and the Germanic society and so on.

Joshua Driscoll

Yeah, so it would range sort of the whole gamut. So you would have had folks living on sort of isolated farmsteads. You would have had folks in sort of basic villages. There were regions that were probably pretty egalitarian during the Iron Age for particular time periods. So especially sort of early Iron Age, Southern French Celts would have been in a more sort of egalitarian type of society. And then you have other areas where you're getting a lot more sort of social hierarchy forming in some of these first cities and towns.



And that's when we start sort of talking about things like chieftains and it's still sort of debated exactly how large some of these areas would have been that would have been controlled by different individuals. But a place like the Heuneburg, we're talking about 5,000 people or more maybe coming together at certain areas. So there would've been some larger political groups spread across. And then once we get to the late Iron Age, I think we can really confidently talk about states, early states amongst the Celts, maybe even in the early Iron Age, to be honest. But once we get to the later Iron Age, there's even larger groups, cities and towns and political units. And we hear about those from sources like Caesar and some of the Roman sources. So it would run the whole gamut, it all depends where you are.

Lauren Dogaer

It really depends on the time and place you are. And it's really, I think, a very fascinating but also rather difficult culture to study because you have all of these different levels at the same time. So let's now maybe dive into the alcohol. So which kinds of alcohol would have been consumed in Iron Age Europe? We of course have beer, but also imported Roman wine. I assume there was also mead. And I've also read that Nordic people, especially originating from what is currently Denmark and Sweden, had this hybrid beverage called grog, which I found really interesting. So what are these kinds of different drinks and what is the relationship between the beer, the wine, the mead, the grog? Are they all equally consumed or does it differ over time? Tell me more.

Joshua Driscoll

By the time we're talking about the Iron Age, we've got to think that all of these folks are coming from traditions where they've already had different forms of alcohol for millennia. So they've had a lot of time to really sort of hone their skills and to create a lot of different beverages and different regional traditions. So we're probably talking about all sorts of different types of beer. We've got evidence for barley beer, wheat beer, and also millet beer. At this point in time, these beverages would have been unhopped. So a lot of times we associate hops as a main beer component, but those really aren't going to come into play until early Middle Ages. 822 is the first good written source, and archeology suggests maybe a little bit earlier. So these are all unhopped. Some of them would be flavored with different types of herbs, and they might have that same bittering balance. But others probably wouldn't even use any different flavoring herbs at all. You can make a great balanced beer without adding hops or any extra flavorants. Some would have been sour styles or tart styles. There would have probably been a lot more of those in the past because just in general, foods for preservation reasons relied on lactic acid bacteria to



ferment things a little bit more. If we're talking about ABV, it's probably everything from a near beer, so maybe 1%, all the way up to something as high as maybe 12%. They would have had the technology to make a pretty potent beer. That type of beer would be something that was really resource intensive, so it would probably be very limited for special occasions for people that were a little bit more wealthy. One thing that might sort of come as a surprise as far as beer goes is that it probably could have been storable for long periods of time, at least some of it, not all of it, but they would have had the technology to do that. So we do hear like Pliny talks about the Spanish having storable beer and then Justinian in talking about sort of last will and testaments talks about these wine cellars and what falls under the category of vinum. And he lists a number of different types of beers there as well. And so those must have been storable beers, too. Part of my dissertation work was actually to re-brew some ancient-style beers, which was quite fun. And I was able to show that they could be stored for very long periods of time. So they could have gotten pretty large amounts of different types of beer in the Iron Age. They also would have had mead. So mead is an alcoholic beverage made from honey. It's oftentimes a little bit higher alcohol, so anywhere from maybe 12 to 18%. But you can also make a lower alcohol content mead, too, if you want to use the same amount of honey and spread it over a larger amount of feasting participants. And we know that mead was really important in the Iron Age because we find lots of mead residues in all sorts of fancy vessels, especially things like cauldrons or flagons. And once we get to the Middle Ages, we hear a lot of Celtic folks and Norse folks talking about the importance of mead. They also would have had wine. Wine would have been quite important in the Iron Age. And this is one of the beverages that is sort of the most interesting currently as far as academic developments, because we've started to be able to chemically test a lot more pottery sherds, and we're finding a lot more wine in places a lot earlier. So it's still a little bit debated, but I think it's probably reasonable to think that even by the late Bronze Age there was actually wine being produced all across Europe, probably in most places on a very small scale. So the grapevine actually grows all across Europe, especially along floodplains. And you can use wild grapes to make wine. So a lot of these folks probably would have been familiar with wine and sort of this smaller like farmhouse style scale, where if you have a good wild harvest, then you can make a decent amount of wine that some might have actually been cultivating wild vines before they were even introduced to some of the domestic varieties that came in a little bit later. So there's evidence for wine in like late Bronze Age Portugal and a bunch in Northern Italy and even actually in north central and northeastern France, which is sort of a surprising type of thing. So I think by the time we get to even the early Iron Age, it's not really just the Greeks that are making wine and importing wine or the Etruscans, it's also going to be some of the sort of



the local Celts across the Mediterranean and then also a number of different folks as well. So there's some evidence for it being produced in Valais, Switzerland, as far as pollen goes, some evidence for Austrian Hungary around the Danube having sort of late Bronze Age, early Iron Age wine as well, and a number of different places besides Those kind of top three, so you've got beer, mead, and wine. You're also gonna have some other different types of beverages, but that must've been probably on a smaller scale, or they were produced on a smaller scale. So things like birch wines, so made by boiling down birch sap and fermenting it. Those were pretty common ethno-historically recently, and now have sort of fallen out of fashion. You might've even had, especially in the eastern parts of Europe, some things like kumis, which is a fermented mare's milk. At some point we would have had cider and perry. It's sort of a little bit hard to get an idea of exactly when those were produced. We have some archaeochemical evidence from both the Heuneberg and Mont Lassois that suggests that maybe there's some non grapefruit wine being produced but we can't really get any more specific than that currently. And then as you mentioned, there's also this idea of grog, which is really interesting. It's mixing all of these different things together. There probably were a couple places where there were these true grogs, where it really was everything in the kitchen sink. But I think a lot of those residues, when you really look at them and break them down, what we're talking about is something like a fruited beer with some honey added, or maybe a mulsum, so they used to add honey to It was a really type of common process, or maybe like a spiced mead. So some of these things, I think when you first read about them, they can sound, especially under the title grog, sounds really sort of outlandish. But nowadays with all the different craft breweries and craft meaderies, I think we have a better understanding of just how you can mix these ingredients. And if you do it in the right proportions, you can make some really interesting beverages.

Lauren Dogaer

Thank you so much for presenting us with this, this overview. I think it's very interesting to see that they already were making wine on such a, such a scale because it's very often assumed that it's, oh, it's always the Romans bringing it everywhere, but it seems to be a lot more complex than that. And to stay a little bit in connection with, with the Romans, I think Celtic drinking definitely seems to have been linked also to the Etruscan and Greek drinking culture in a way during the Hallstatt period and then more with the Roman drinking culture during the La Tène period. Is it like a one way thing? Is it the Greeks and the Romans influencing the Celtic drinking culture or is there more, more crossover, so to say?



Joshua Driscoll

So I think there, there'd be a lot of crossover. And this, I think we're starting to learn more about, especially as we do more archaeochemistry. And as we sort of look more at some of these older reports about different pollen analyses, so we get an idea of where vineyards were and things like that. And we can get a better sense of these cultures that sort of would have had their own localized wine producing traditions. They're harder to get at because we don't have those textual sources, but they definitely seem to be there. So for example, Latara, on the coast of France was a Celtic settlement and the evidence for wine production there at the same time as Massalia, which is the major Greek city there that's always known for wine production, the evidence that the Celtic site is even better for wine production. So there certainly would have been a lot of different crossover. As far as how folks were interacting, probably both with the technology to sort of make wine and then also the actual local, the actual grapes. So it does seem like the domestic varieties were probably brought from the East. So the Greeks and the Romans and Etruscans probably were a big part of that. But those varieties were hybridized with a lot of local Western, Western European grape vines. And that probably would have happened in a number of different places and probably would have involved some local knowledge of those existing varieties. And then as far as drinking traditions go, I think in the early Iron Age, it's pretty likely that there was trade and wine was being brought up. There were definitely all sorts of really interesting Greek materials. and Greek vessels that were being brought from the Mediterranean sort of up into central France and Southwest Germany. And they would have been used in elite feasting rituals, but I think those would have been very sort of local traditions. And they wouldn't be emulating the symposium, as sometimes folks find a single kylix somewhere and automatically think there's a whole symposium going on. And there were lots of drinking horns, lots of really fancy local vessels, and frankly, some of the vessels that might have been the most important at these sites would have actually been metal, and we just no longer have them. They would have been melted down. Once we get to the Roman time period, there's probably a little bit more emulation that ends up happening, especially as the Romans start to conquer the areas. Because once the Romans come in, if you're going to be part of a new elite, you're probably going to need to learn to drink like the new elite so that you can interface with them properly. By that time, there would be more of an incentive, I think, for more emulation in drinking culture. But there also would have been a lot of given force. The Romans recruited a lot of soldiers from somewhere of these traditional beer drinking areas, and they would have been learning beer drinking customs



and probably different ways to make beer as well through time. So there's a lot of give and take, I think.

Lauren Dogaer

A lot of give and take and a lot of learning to drink like the elite if you want to be a part of it. And yeah, there's clearly a lot of booze in Iron Age Europe and in the Celtic world in particular. But I want to ask you a little bit more about when it would actually have been consumed. Like you already mentioned, like feasting practices, I read that they were feasting at some point in a circle around a beverage vessel and a food cauldron, sometimes also on like a plateau like the one in Vix. So would this have all been more like religious gatherings, religious feasts, or do we need to see this more as a kind of social gathering, like an elite member organizing something and a lot of people coming together and drinking?

Joshua Driscoll

Yeah, so again, I think it would probably be a mix. So in areas where you produced enough grain, you probably would have a very low alcohol content beer. Or if you're producing enough grapes, you're sort of able to do that lower alcohol content wine. And you'd use that for different types of work. So haymaking or harvest time, work party feast as well. They're constructing all of these really large sort of ramparts and walls at different time periods, these really large tumuli. And all that's really hard work. And nobody really has loved to just drink water in the past. So oftentimes you'd have these sort of lower alcohol content beverages that would serve for both sort of hydration and bringing people together. The sort of higher alcohol content beverages would probably be reserved for most people for special occasions. So we could be talking about sort of calendrical festivals having to do with the turning over of the new year, things like that. Certainly weddings for a very long time have been associated with alcohol because it's sort of your chance to bring everybody in the community together. Also any sort of inheritance issues would have probably involved drinking as well to sort of publicize now this property has sort of passed to another person. And that probably would have happened at sort of a smaller scale, but it would have been very important for the elite. It would have been very important for anyone who's sort of in charge of these larger centers. So the folks, like you mentioned, the Mont Lassois that has this really large building on top of this plateau that may have been a place people lived, it may have been a feasting hall. It was likely used for feasting at some point. They found some amphorae from Massalia there, so we know they were drinking wine there, and they found some really interesting other vessels outside of the building. So that probably would have been used for any sort of changes of



power, weddings, and then any sort of calendrical festivals that they could do. It's a good way to bring people together.

Lauren Dogaer

Alcohol is always a good way to bring people together, but I wasn't aware that you can sort of make this distinction between the lower and higher alcohol content beverages. So I think that's very, very interesting. And after this, yeah, broader social cultural discussion of alcohol in Iron Age Europe, we can maybe now dive a little bit more into the scientific part of things of which you are an expert looking at what you can actually do with the archaeobotanical remains of the beer. So how does this work? Because you have like the remains of beer or malt or barley or whatever in a cup. You take a sample and then what? You do residue analysis to analyze which kind of residue is left. But how do you know it's beer, for example, and not bread?

Joshua Driscoll

There's a couple of different ways to go about it and some are a little bit easier than others. As far as looking for beer, the most compelling evidence right now is archaeobotanical. So that's sort of looking at tiny pieces of plants. We've got a couple really interesting instances of malt kilns. And so malt is a really important ingredient to make beer. You have to take the cereal, you turn it into malt, and then you basically put that in sort of hot water, it draws out the sugars, and then you're able to ferment it. And so there's a really neat site called Hochdorf, Hochdorfpreps in Southwest Germany where they found this really large malting area. And it must have been a really terrible day for whoever was trying to do the malting. Great day for archaeologists, not good for him because things caught fire. And it carbonized the grains, which is good for us because that means that then they didn't degrade. And so we could tell that they were malt because they had sprouted. And there was enough there to make about 750 to 1,000 liters of 5% beer. So it gives you an idea of the scale of sort of feasting events that could have been put on. And so that's a good example of sort of us knowing that there was barley beer being brewed there. Also, sometimes when we look at different vessels, there can be some sort of gunk in the bottom. And if that gunk has little pieces of plant matter in there, you can determine whether that's barley or wheat, depending on sort of what's left. You can also look at the starches that are left, because during that process of sort of putting the malt in the hot water and extracting the sugars, there's a bunch of enzymes that come in and they cut up those starches in very particular ways. And by looking at those starches, you can sort of see if they've undergone that enzymatic attack. And that's actually our best way to determine whether beer was brewed. And it's something that's



been being looked at for quite a long period of time. There was actually a German by the name of Johannes Gruss in the 1920s and '30s who was already looking at some of these residues and made all sorts of really beautiful scientific drawings of what he saw under the microscope, which was pretty interesting. And so if you find those, that can give you an idea of what's in that vessel. And then the other thing that we can do is we can do chemical analysis. Archaeochemical analysis is a little bit easier for wine because tartaric acid is a pretty good marker. Not perfect, but it's pretty good. Whereas beer, it's a little bit harder to find. So we look for a whole bunch of different compounds. There's a few that are sort of more likely to indicate beer than others. So right now, milliocin is a compound that indicates millet, at least most likely. And if you find that in a vessel that probably held liquid, then we can suggest that it likely was something that was used to make beer. Hopefully we can do both the chemical testing and the sort of microscopic testing at the same time. Sometimes we can also look at some other suites of compounds. But for beer right now, it's pretty complicated. So you might run across people suggesting that calcium oxalate is something that's sort of a beer marker. If you find lots of calcium oxalate on a vessel that looks like it could have stored beer, a fermentation vessel, not a drinking vessel, and you do proteomic analysis and you find evidence for barley and wheat in there, then you probably have found beer stone and it probably is beer. But if you just find calcium oxalate in like a cup that's somewhere, it's really not going to be an appropriate indicator of beer. So a lot of these are fields that are sort of progressing through time and we're sort of looking at different types of markers. In some rare situations, we can even find things like ADNA and we can determine that there was actually yeast there, even brewer's yeast, so there's interesting study on coprolites from a cave in Hallstatt, and they found some yeast there that would have been good at fermenting beer, which was pretty neat.

Lauren Dogaer

There are really a lot of different options in order to study the residue, but I'm wondering about how you can actually date the residue. So if you don't have like a decent archaeological context where you know from which layer a cup or whatever is coming, how do you then know that the residue is Iron Age beer and not dating to the Middle Ages, for example?

Joshua Driscoll

So in most cases where people have looked at this, they've used relative dating. So they have used the whatever vessel the residue is in usually compares similarly to other vessels that were produced around the same time, and so that gives them a time range.



In theory, if you have enough of that residue, you could do carbon-14 analysis on it. I haven't really seen folks do that that much because a lot of these contexts are specific enough that we can get a range from where they came from or when they came from. The biggest question is, about contamination and just making sure that we've looked at sort of enough different places in the vessel, looked at residue in enough different places in the vessel, and then looked at maybe soil next to the vessel or things outside of the vessel to rule out that it's just not some sort of contamination, maybe pollen coming in afterwards or something like that. It's really important for all of these to use sort of an interdisciplinary analysis. So you want to try to use botanical analysis, chemical analysis, and then you're also making sort of functional arguments by looking at the types of forms that these vessels have.

Lauren Dogaer

You really need to use all of the different types of analysis together. And you already mentioned this at the beginning, but the use of hops only started really in the Middle Ages in Europe. And of course, the hops is what gives our modern beers the rather distinctive taste. So keeping this in mind, what can you tell us about how Celtic beers or other beers in Iron Age Europe would have tasted?

Joshua Driscoll

So again, I think there would have been quite a range. We know from ethnographic sources and historic sources that people even just in a town over would have a beer that might be slightly different. In general, we do know that these would have all had sort of lower carbonation levels. They might have ranged, and they might have even ranged during a celebration. So if you have a giant cask that's filled with beer, when you first broach that cask, it might actually have a reasonable carbonation level. And then as you're sort of drinking through the party, that carbonation level is going to slowly lower and lower until it's sort of a flat type of beer. We know from the Middle Ages that people actually were sort of concerned about those casks even exploding if they were stoppered too tightly. We usually hear about that in terms of miracles. They come from Christian sources, and the ones that were brewed for Wodan or any of these pagan gods are the ones that just explode when the saint walks by, and then the other beer is fine. But those at least tell us that there would have been the ability to accrue a lot of carbonation in there. So probably a range of carbonation, but a lot lower than what we're used to today, even at that upper end. It also would have been a warmer type of beverage. They wouldn't have refrigeration in the colder seasons, you could have gotten colder beer, but that would have ranged quite a bit. You could have had both bitter beer and sweet beer,



depending on how you choose to use your ingredients. You could have had both smoky beer and non-smoky beer. So a lot of malt would have had to be dried using sort of an open wood fire, and that would lend sort of a smoky flavor to it. If you can age the beer long enough, you can sort of age out some of that smoky flavor. But we also know that even from Mesopotamia, they were actually sort of air drying malts. So it's likely that in Iron Age Europe, they would have done the same. We know that once we get historic sources, they talk about that as well. So you could have had pale non-smoky beer. You would have had beer that was sweet. You could have had also beer that was sour. So I don't know if anyone's tried sort of a lambic beer. There probably would have been a lot of different types sort of like that. Yeah, the whole range, the key is trying to find enough residues from one area to figure out exactly what their range was.

Lauren Dogaer

Well, I'm really interested in the smoky beer, something I would like to try out. So the Celts are clearly drinking quite a bit, but I'm wondering, or I'm hoping that there might have also been some attempts at moderating the alcohol usage. And you already mentioned the textual sources that we have about the Celts and the Germanic tribes. Well, from like actual Celtic and Nordic sources are actually dating a little bit to a later period. So the sources that we can use the most are actually the classical sources from Greece and Rome. And these classical sources are not always that kind about the Celts, basically describing them all as binge drinking barbarians. But it must have hopefully been a little bit more complex. Do we have any Celtic textual sources or any other indications that the situation might have been a little bit less intense?

Joshua Driscoll

So I think if you take sort of a broad ethnographic view of this, it seems pretty clear that the Celts probably were drinking similarly to everybody else at that time period as far as, you know, some drinking to excess and some not. And in many ways it was probably more of sort of a class distinction and availability of alcohol that would've allowed to drink into excess. So you probably would've had more drinking to excess among some of these elites, which you also would have had in the Greek world and the Roman world. So yeah, there's the Greeks pretty much always say that the Romans just, or I mean, the Celts just drink this unmixed wine and they're sort of binge drinkers. But I think that actually says a lot more about how the Greeks think about themselves and how they think about constructing themselves against someone that they consider other. We know that the, the Greeks also drank plenty. So there's a number of, uh, kelix, uh, kelices and, uh, craters that actually show folks that are vomiting from overconsumption. Sometimes



they actually show those at sort of the base of the vessel. So I guess once you finish your wine, you realize that you've made a mistake. We also have texts from them that talk about, there's one that talks about being in Sicily and this group of young men that are drinking that basically gets so inebriated that they think they're on a boat and they start throwing chairs out because they think it's sinking. So I think the Greeks and the Romans would have been drinking quite a bit too, and it might have looked relatively similar as far as episodes of immoderation versus moderation. Unfortunately, archaeologically, it's really hard to get a handle on when people are sort of over drinking or under drinking, and it's easier to see those episodes of drinking because, you know, you can look at large vessels and things like that, then examples of temperance.

Lauren Dogaer

Yeah, I'm also wondering, like, if we have any idea about how intoxication would have been perceived in the Celtic culture? Would it have been seen as people being influenced by the gods that someone who would crave wine is actually wishing the god to communicate with them? Do we have anything in the textual sources from the later Celtic period then that tells us anything about how they would have seen the act of being intoxicated?

Joshua Driscoll

So we know from archaeological evidence and later textual evidence that being intoxicated would be very linked with different sort of festivals and things like that. So it probably was important to consume alcohol as part of a social event with others, especially on the things like New Year's, which could have a religious dimension and there could be that sort of link to spirituality. I don't think it would be that dissimilar to how it would have been in the Greek or Etruscan or Roman world. We do hear about once we get to the Middle Ages and if we're talking about sort of Nordic folks, we hear about like the mead of inspiration amongst a number of Germanic cultures. And that seems to be related to sort of poetry and boasting and things like that and linking the ability to talk about sagas and great deeds with the gods of course those are written by folks whose job it is to talk about sagas and great deeds and so there was probably some relationship between alcohol and the gods there. I think any of the more sort of specific or extreme examples of intoxicating relating to religion would probably have involved either other types of intoxicants, so things like hallucinogens or ascetic behaviors that can sort of result in that same type of outcome. I think beer and wine and mead were probably used as sort of a more mundane type of level.



Lauren Dogaer

And I've also read that, yeah, we do have some, in some of the Celtic sources from the British Isles, they sort of describe these more violent events that happened during banquets. So banquets mainly organized by the chieftains of the tribes, but would also have been like an excellent moment to plan a coup or kill the chieftain and become the new chieftain. So I was wondering if you, if you think that stories like this would have been yeah, used as a urge for moderation in a way, like don't drink too much because you might be killed.

Joshua Driscoll

Yeah, I think that certainly could have been the case. And it certainly would be a moral to get from some of these different stories. A lot of them, I think, are more focused on sort of overarching types of issues. So one particular text that talks about this would be Brick Rue's Feast. And so here there's this big concern about this sort of agitator who's trying to put all of these folks at odds because there's only one champions portion, which is both your sort of best feasting meal, but also your best feasting alcohol. And so if you have three great warriors, who's going to get it? And this story sort of pits them against each other. It also pits their wives against each other, which is really interesting because the women in the story are also drinking. They're also sort of at this feast and they sort of have their own location, but it's also really important to them that they have this particular ranking. That interest in ranking definitely could have led to some conflicts. I think there were a lot of stories that probably helped prompt people to think that through and try to avoid it. There were a lot of traditions in both Celtic and Germanic sources of boasting at these events and sort of talking about your battle prowess and just how important you were. In reality, a lot of that likely would've been a way to vent these types of ideas in a socially appropriate situation where people knew that alcohol was involved and that gave people an excuse to talk maybe a little bit more boldly than they should have. Certainly that might have occasionally resulted in a little bit of violence dealing with the issues, but you wouldn't have a war band for very long if everyone just fought themselves to the death at every meeting.

Lauren Dogaer

I think this is really fascinating and I'm happy to hear that there at least would have been some moderation as well, and that they would not have just been all consuming that much. And I think this is also an excellent way to end the episode here. I think we learned from the Celts that you can feast around a cauldron, but you can also mix it up and create

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your own kind of grog if you want. But always be careful because the Romans might think that you are a binge drinking barbarian. Joshua, thank you so much for getting drunk on Iron Age alcohol with me.

Joshua Driscoll

Thanks for having me.

Lauren Dogaer

We hope you enjoyed this episode of Drunk on History. If you're thirsty for more tales from the ancient world, don't miss our next episode. It's full of even more drinking stories from past civilizations. Drunk on History is made in cooperation with the New Media Center of the University of Basel.