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**BEER IN EARLY ISLAM
A *HADİT* PERSPECTIVE**

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[...] That abstinence from Malt
Has always struck me as extremely curious.
The Greek mind must have had some vital fault,
That they should stick to liquors so injurious –
(Wine, water, tempered p'raps with Attic salt) –
And not at once invent that mild, luxurious,
And artful beverage, Beer. [...]

Charles Stuart Calverley (1831–1884)

D1666



05 Haziran 2024

MADDE YAYIMLANDIKTAN
SONRA GELEN DOKÜMAN

Beer: a neglected beverage

Indeed, the amazement of this 19th century English poet – student at Oxford (from where he was expelled), and student and scholar at Cambridge (where his *Ode to Tobacco* is eternalized in a bronze plaque in Rose Crescent) –, his bewilderment and implicit criticism could easily be transferred from Greek culture, so obsessed with wine, to medieval Arabic–Islamic cultural expressions, as well as to the scholarship dedicated to it. It is wine, mainly grape wine that dominates poetry and *adab an-nadīm* literature, it is wine and viticulture that attracts attention as symbol-laden beverage, as prestigious drink, and as high art of agriculture.

It was wine that became a symbol for the cyclic life of death, birth and growth, a symbol for intoxication and gnostic insight. The poor beer could not – and still cannot – compete on these grounds. Even though some beers, especially when fortified with honey or sweet dates to reach higher alcohol rates, could age to a certain extent, it seems likely that most beers had, compared to wine, a lower alcohol strength. With an alcohol level of maybe 3 % (and lower) to 8 % on the average, they therefore had to be drunk relatively young. There was much less charm of ageing, and being one of the many daily products of grain, beer and the spike of barley could never match with wine and grape. It remained a drink, at its best intoxicating, for the average population (*'awāmm*). There are vague attempts to praise beer in Arabic verses, as has been done in numerous poems on wine, but

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'Umar II and the Prohibition of *Ṭilā'* and *Nabīdh*

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Abstract

Following a brief introduction, this article has two parts and an appendix. In the first part, I examine the passage prohibiting intoxicating *ṭilā'* (cooked grape juice) in the "fiscal rescript" attributed to 'Umar II (d. 101/720) by Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam (d. 214/829). I argue that this passage's core goes back to an edict of 'Umar II that is no longer extant. I suggest that 'Umar II issued the prohibition following an earthquake that devastated Syria because he feared that the drinkers of intoxicants would cause a similar catastrophe to befall all Muslims. I situate 'Umar II's prohibition within the early legal discussions about *ṭilā'*. In the second part, I analyze a group of edicts prohibiting *nabīdh* (date wine) that are attributed to 'Umar II. I conclude that the edicts are pseudepigraphical. In the appendix, I trace the transmission history of a tradition attributed to al-Sha'bī about a missive of Umar I concerning *ṭilā'*.

Keywords

'Umar I – 'Umar II – *ṭilā'* – *nabīdh* – alcohol – Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam – fiscal rescript – *riḍā'* – earthquake – Christian chroniclers – *isnād* analysis

1 Introduction

In a recent article in *ILS*, Matthieu Tillier and Naïm Vanthieghem call attention to the pivotal role of the Umayyad Caliph 'Umar II in promoting an Islamic prohibition of intoxicants other than *khamr* (grape wine). In their article, they examine a wide range of literary, documentary, and archeological data, including both Muslim and Christian primary sources, many of which have not