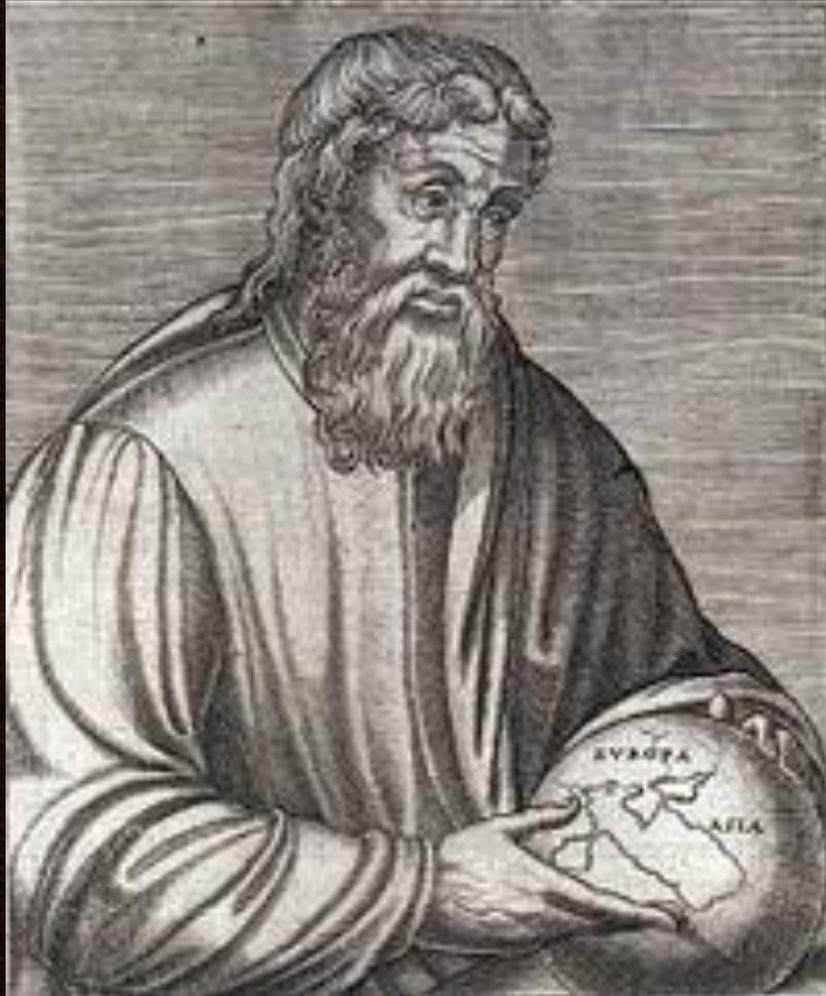


The History of Mead in Lithuania and Poland



ANDRIUS JANIONIS,
Mead Historian.
Presented at 1st EMMA
meeting in Poznan,
Poland
November 8-9, 2018

First mentioning of mead production by Strabo (64-24 BC)



He mentions a tribe at the Baltic coast that:

„...when they have honey and grain, they make a sort of drink...“

First mentioning of mead production by Strabo (64-24 BC)



Compare it with the archaeological finds from Heuneburg (Germany). The tumulus of the 7-5th century BC contained a cauldron with remains of beverage.

Analysis showed that the recipe of the mead contained:

Barley, honey, mint, meadowsweet, and yeast

Wulfstan of Hedeby, 9th century

...There is a great quantity of honey and fish; and even the king and the richest men drink mare's milk, whilst the poor and the slaves drink mead. There is a vast deal of war and contention amongst the different tribes of this nation. There is no ale brewed amongst the Aests, but they have MEAD in profusion....

Ibrahim Ibn Jakub, 10th century

„Slavic wines and exhilarating beverages of the Mieszko country - are meads“



14th century mead



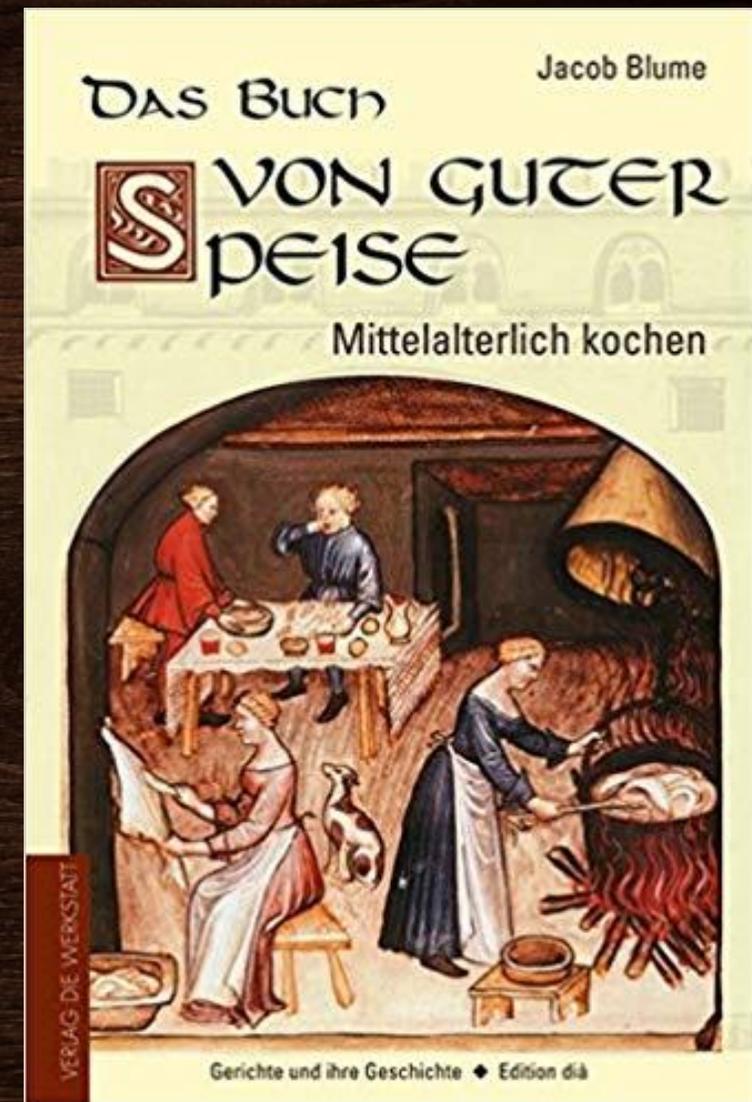
In 1377, a crusader army of 12 thousand besieges Vilnius, the capital of Lithuania. Grand duke Algirdas parleys with them and invites negotiators to discuss truce. He offers them mead and bread. The negotiations succeeded and crusaders retreated.

So mead becomes the drink of Kings and royalty... It helps in diplomacy and representation of wealth.

14th century mead

No Lithuanian recipes are known from the 14th century, but we can take a look at a German mead recipe of 1340, from the cook book „Ein Buch von guter Spise“

It contains honey, hops and sage. It was a semi-dry to dry mead.

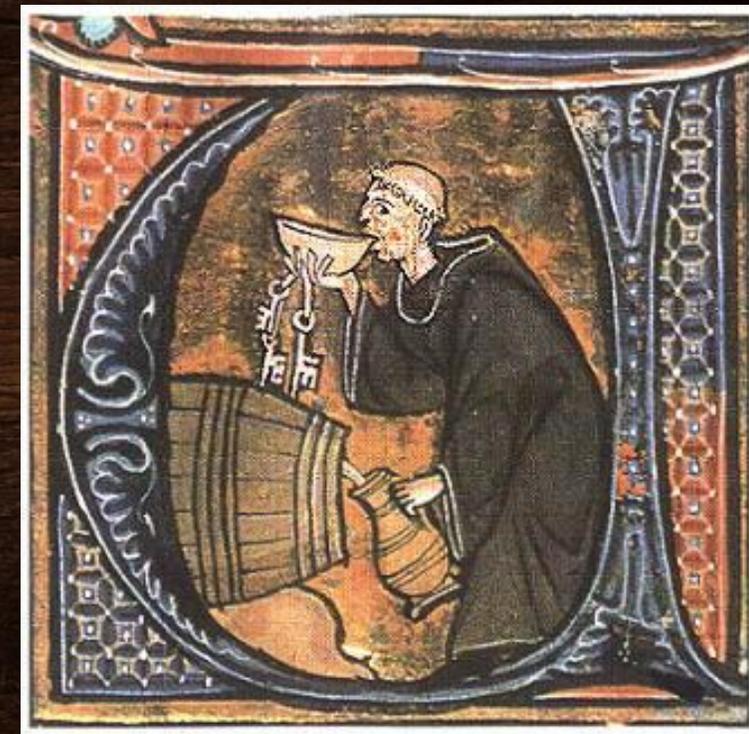


15th-16th century mead

Mead culture rises and mead gains popularity not only among the nobility, but also the townsfolk and merchants.

Mead was produced in two ways:

- Mixed with water or juice („stavlenyj“, rus. ставленный, медостав)
- Boiled („sytnyj“ , rus. сытный, медоварение)



15th-16th century mead

In 1429, Grand Duke Vytautas has invited the greatest rulers of Eastern and Central Europe to a gathering in Lutsk. It is said that about 700 barrels of mead were drunk every day of the meeting.

„700 barrels of mead, not to count the muscatel, vine and malvasia and other drinks“



In the picture: Lithuanian merchants are bringing an aurox and mead to Constance meeting. 15th century.

15th-16th century mead

In the 16th century boiled mead recipes prevail over the „stavlenyj“ and Polish mead making tradition heavily influences Lithuanian meads.

There were 4 grades of mead based on the honey and water ratio:

„półtorak“ (1 part of honey – 0,5 part of water),
„dwójniak“ (1 part of honey – 1 part of water),
„trójniak“ (1 part of honey – 2 parts of water),
„czwórniak“ (1 part of honey – 3 parts of water).



15th-16th century mead

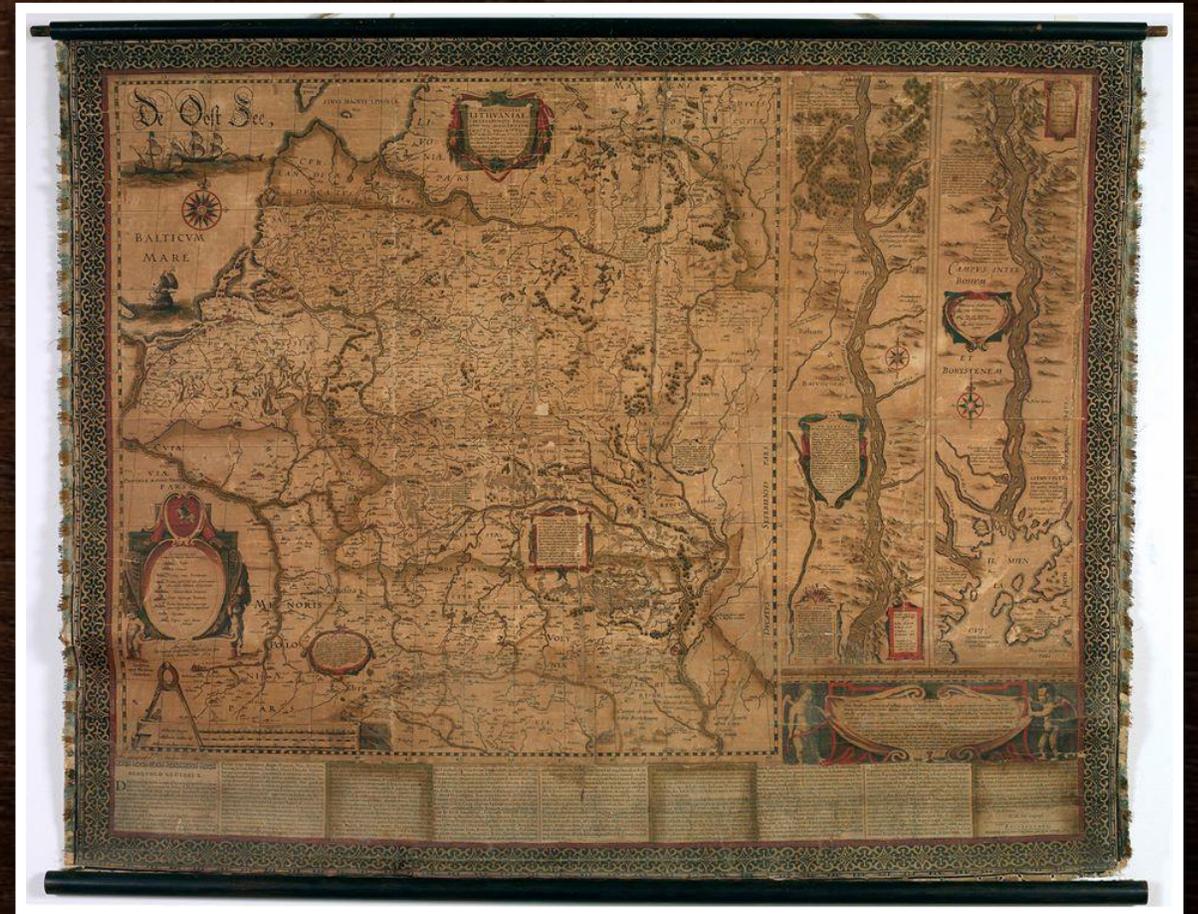
In the court of King of Poland and Grand Duke of Lithuania Žygimantas Augustas (Sigismund Augustus) 30 barrels of mead were drunk every single day.

Mead was used in diplomacy, to show respect to an honorific guest or to boast of one's treasure.



The first Lithuanian mead recipe is mentioned on the map of 1613

„They make a drink from honey, water and hops, cherry juice is added to it and various spices, in noble houses, they burry it under the earth and is kept for 100 years or more, which by its taste and aroma surpasses even malvasia...”



17th-18th century mead

So we see a specific character of Lithuanian mead forming. It is confirmed by another mentioning about buried barrels of mead.

In a cookbook, published in Copenhagen by Salomone Sartorio in 1616, there is a mentioning:

„Somewhere in Lithuania they have a habit of burrying mead in well plugged barrels in the ground under a big pile of earth and they keep them thus for a long time. It is said that mead becomes so strong and pottent that is better than wine...”



17th-18th century mead

In the 17th century vodka and beer starts gradually dominating in the public life.

With diminishing forest and bee hives, mead remains in the noble houses, while peasants and townsfolk consume it less and less...



A recipe is known from 1780, called „The White Mead“

It is dry mead infused with milk.

In the 19th century mead almost disappears. What we see is very simple recipes – merely beer made out of honey. Mead became a legend known from folk tales, until the 20th century, when this legend was brought back to life again.

However, in the 20th century, both in Poland and Lithuania, the mead is reborn and is produced on industrial scale.

First in Poland: After the I World War when Poland gain independence the mead production started to grow and people were keener to taste this traditional polish beverage. It was golden years for mead producers. However, all development stopped as another big war started. After World War II, considerable development of the meads, being produced on the basis of old recipes and ancient technology, is observed.

Then in Lithuania: Mead recipes were adapted for production by a well know brewer in Lithuania: Aleksandras Sinkevičius. First he wa a beer brewer and working in that industry, however, in 1950s he started adapting remaining traditional recipes of mead for industrial production and in 1959 the first batch (800 liters) of mead was produced in a company „Lietuviškas midus“ and in 1961 m. already 30 thousand liter batches were produced, now it produces up to 250 tons of mead every year.

And for the
end...

Mead Brother hoods

- A unique tradition is known from the 15th-17th centuries: mead brotherhoods, popular among Orthodox christian believers. However, these brotherhoods were secular, mostly related to craftsmen guilds.
- They were functioning in the towns where orthodox christians lived: Vilnius, Polock, Vitebsk, Minsk, Mogiliov, Dysna, Velizh. In Poland they functioned in towns that were given to Poland after 1569 Union of Lublin.

Mead Brother hoods

- Mead brotherhoods were exempt from taxes for mead production and trade.
- Women could not be members of these brotherhoods...
- At the end of the 16th century in Vilnius, 4 mead brotherhoods existed:
 - Pelt dressers
 - Noblemen
 - Tanners
 - Rasos (after the name of a suburb of Vilnius)

Mead Brother hoods

- Mead brotherhoods had their own house where they brewed mead 3 – 8 times a year and drank it. Also they could sell the mead without taxes.
- The elders of the brotherhoods were responsible for the funds. But also they looked after the etiquette of the brotherhood, especially during banquets:
 - „So that brothers would not talk nonsense, not to sleep on the table and not to spill mead...”

Mead Brother hoods

- If one of the brothers would spill mead that he could not cover it with his hand or foot, he was thrown out of the banquet.
- The liberties of these brotherhoods show that their main occupation was mead production, mead drinking and socialising...
- **SO I SEE A MEAD BROTHERHOOD REBORN HERE IN THIS CONFERENCE.**