



# PRESS RELEASE

## BEER AND ITS HISTORY IN ITALY

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Barley, one of the key ingredients of beer, was introduced in Italy by the Etruscans who, at their banquets used to drink a moderately alcoholic fermented beverage they called “pevakh”, originally made with rye and emmer and then wheat and honey.

In ancient Greece beer was considered as highly as wine, even becoming the official beverage of the Olympic Games, while in Ancient Rome beer was much loved and drunk at banquets and feasts.

A recent archaeological discovery, moreover, provides direct evidence of the presence of beer in the northern Italian region of Piedmont, in the middle of the 6th century B.C. Archaeologists excavating a small necropolis at Pombia found an earthenware cinerary urn in a pit grave which, together with the cremated ashes of the deceased, also contained a pottery beaker with abundant traces of fermented sugars, which left no doubt as to their origin: they were what remained of an ancient beverage obtained by fermenting cereal grains with the addition of vegetable flavourings, in brief, a dark and very alcoholic beer.

In the Middle Ages, the art of producing beer was perfected in the monasteries, where the custom of using natural substances to add flavour to the beverage was introduced, and its consumption continued to grow, especially in the north of Italy, also due to the continuous incursions by the Landsknecht. Beer was consumed primarily by men, while women could only drink it for medicinal purposes.

It was in this period that Italy’s beer-making tradition registered a first time event. Various manuscripts, in fact, report that, between A.D. 529 and 543, while St. Benedict was founding the Abbey of Montecassino, in Lazio, beer was already being produced there. This was the first abbey beer to be made in Italy, indeed, in the entire world.

However, except for rare exceptions, the beer drunk in Italy thereafter was almost exclusively imported. Things started changing in the 18th century, when, in 1789, Giovanni Baldassarre Setter opened the first Italian brewery.

At the end of the 19th century there were 150 breweries in Italy, producing over 150,000 hectolitres of beer every year.

From then on, beer consumption in Italy no longer had to rely on imports and the brewers started growing their own beer barley crops and to build their own malthouses: the first was opened in Avezzano, in the Plain of Fucino, and was called “Le Malterie Italiane”.

Eventually, the first modern breweries appeared. They were mostly the result of enterprising beer brewers from North of the Alps, who began to see Italy as an interesting market for expanding their business (Ketter, Wuhrer, Dreher, Paskowski, Metzger, Caratch, Von Wunster, etc.); together with some Italian brewers, such as Peroni, Moretti and Poretta.

After over a century of history, today Italy ranks ninth, in Europe, for the production of beer, behind Germany (who is number one, of course, and the only country whose production stands at over 100 million hectolitres), Great Britain (56 million), Spain, Poland, Netherlands, Czech Republic, Belgium and France. However, Italy, does come before other countries traditionally associated with beer, such as Austria, Denmark and Eire, by a large amount.

As regards consumption, it must be said that, at present, our country lags far behind, in the Old Continent, for both cultural reasons – in Italy prevails the wine culture– and due to the high fiscal burden which discriminates beer versus its competitor beverages. Nevertheless, despite a sharp decrease in the overall alcohol consumption over the last three decades, beer is the only beverage whose consumption increases: from 13,9 litres per capita in 1977 to more than 30 litres in 2006.

Despite this, the brewing industry provides a considerable contribution to the nation's wealth, with 15 major breweries nationwide, of which 6 in the central and southern regions, and 2.500 employees, who increase to 133,000 with the supply industry, producing an added value for the country's economy of 275 million euros per year.

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