

The attached document was submitted in support of an entry into the SCA Arts & Sciences competition known as “Ice Dragon” held April 13, 2019, in the Barony of the Rhydderich Hael (see <http://www.ice-dragon.info/>).

Many thanks to the individuals who judged this and all entries and provided feedback on them, as well as to those who organized and staffed the event.

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Dw i Ice Dragot: A Herbed, Smoked Bragot

Making historical beverages has been of interest to me for a couple of years now. This one incorporates honey in order to produce a type of Welsh ale or bragot. Thus its name, **Dw i Ice Dragot**, where the Welsh phrase *dw i*, pronounced as “dew ee,” means “I am (a)” and “Ice Dragot” as a pun on the name of this concoction in reference to the Ice Dragon competition event.



This project used whole-grain malts, home-grown hops, family-produced honey, and cask-aging to produce a dark, strong bragot.

Brewed March 15, 2019; casked March 28, 2019; aged 16 days.

Ingredients

Barley: whole-grain 6 lbs. Maris Otter malt, 2 lbs. caramel 120 malt to increase depth of flavor and add character, and 2 oz. British peat-smoked malt, also for flavor and as a historical facet. (My earlier experiments with smoking malts has not proved too effective, so for this batch I decided to try already smoked malt, and of a flavor that I could not make in any case).

Honey: Three pounds. Produced mostly from goldenrod with some other local fall-flowering plants by our eight hives during autumn 2018. Included for additional sweetness and fortification, and, of course, as the defining ingredient for this style of drink.

Adjuncts: for flavor, ½ oz. crushed, dried bog myrtle leaves harvested by a friend in 2017. Also, ½ teaspoon of ground long pepper for a bit of zing. See Hornsey (2003: 258) for mention of such additives.

Hops: 2 oz. Saaz. Planted, grown and harvested by myself. Picked and frozen in Sept. 2018, then used whole during the brew. I chose this variety of hops because it's European. (I have a couple of European varieties planted, but this is only one to produce many flowers so far.) I have not been able to document Saaz's use in Wales, but that goes for any specific variety. I have not yet been able to determine what wild varieties of hops might have been used, nevermind their bittering and flavoring characteristics. Depending on the time in question, Saaz are plausible because they could have been brought to Wales by the Dutch (Hornsey, 2003).

Yeast: White Labs Edinburgh Scotch Ale, chosen for flavor and desired alcohol level.

Process

As with most grain-based beverages, this one started with whole grains. These were ground and then boiled for 120 minutes as mash, along with the bog myrtle and hops, for flavoring and bittering. The honey was also boiled during this time because it was included primarily for adding sweetness and yeast nutrients rather than flavor or aroma to the end product.

The hot wort was put into a glass carboy and allowed to cool in a basement until reaching a temperature suitable for the yeast, which was then added and allowed to do its work for 10 days.

After fermenting for 12 days, the liquid was drawn off the lees (dead yeast and settled-out solid remains of plant material) and put into a small cask. White sugar, at a ratio of 1/2 tsp. per 16 oz., was added during this step in order to ensure cask conditioning while it aged for 16 days.

Almost certainly it should age for a few months, rather than the mere two weeks it's had so far. Thus it may taste young but improve with over time.

A Wee Cask

Before the advent of glass bottles, bragot may have been served in stoneware bottles, jugs, pitchers, cisterns, or wooden vessels. It would have been fermented in barrels, kegs, or casks, and similar containers consisting of bent wooden staves bound with withies or iron hoops. Larger vessels of this type would be difficult to move and therefore tapped in place, with drink being dispensed from a valve after a hole was punched into the top of vessel, though now lying on its side.

Dispensing from a large barrel would not likely occur directly into a personal drinking vessel, but rather into a larger serving container, such as a cistern. Also known as bunghole jars or bunghole pitchers, cisterns were large jugs with handles and had a bung hole at their base, wherein a wooden tap controlled the flow of the liquid. Households used cisterns to store and dispense liquids, especially ale (Adkins et al., 2017: ch. 8).



It's also plausible that small casks could be purchased directly and used as a serving vessel in their own right. "Casks and kegs for carrying your beer or wine were a complex business in medieval England. There were lots of different sizes and capacities... There was a cask of almost any size you could think of ready to help you get your beer home" (Payne: 4).

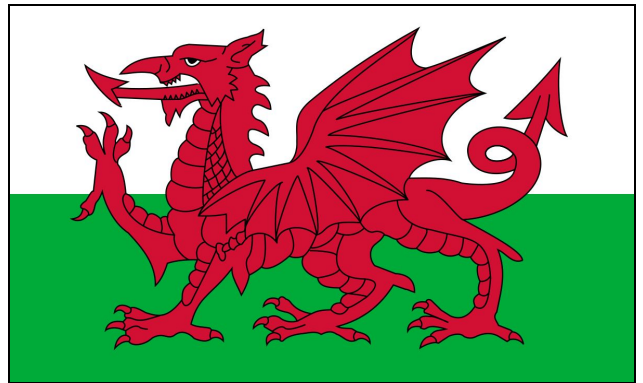
For conditioning, aging, presenting, and serving this brew, I purchased a small, charred, white oak cask. Making it myself, as a brewer, would have been illegal under the statute of 1531 (Payne: 45). The cask had been used for aging a previous ale as well as a mead, with no drying between them, so some flavor transfer may have taken place during aging.

Whether or not the charred oak has imparted any flavor also remains to be determined during the competition tasting, where it will be sampled for the first time by anyone. Note: if you wish to compare this to a bottle-conditioned version, a nearby small red cooler contains a few bottles for your sampling pleasure.

[Previous image from British Library manuscript Sloane MS. 2435 f. 44v., late 13th century.
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Monk_sneaking_a_drink.jpg]

Art Thou a True Bragot?

When I started this project, I believed that the term *bragot* meant a strong, dark, sweet ale made with a lot of honey, which could either be incorporated during brewing or added later. However, after making the brew, I was informed that the term covered something more precise: a beverage made from existing ale that had honey added later for a secondary fermentation.



Desiring to either verify or refute this claim, I set out to ascertain whether or not a bragot can include honey during primary fermentation or only during secondary. This journey can start with a definition of *bragot*, which has numerous alternative spellings.

The Oxford English Dictionary gives the following:

bragget, n.

Pronunciation: Brit. /¹bragɪt/, U.S. /¹bræget/, Welsh English /¹brag:ct/

Forms: ME–16 braggat, bragat, braget (t, ME–18 bragg-, bragot (te, ME–16 braket, 15 brogat, 17–18 bracket, 15– bragget; 18 (*Scottish*) bragwort, bregwort.

Etymology: < Welsh *bragawd*, earlier *bracaut* = Irish *bracát* < Old Celtic **brācāta*, < the Old Celtic word given by Pliny and Columella, in the accusative *bracem*, as the Gaulish name of a kind of grain, whence Welsh *brag*, Old Irish *brac*, modern Irish *braich* malt. The forms *brackwoort*, *bragwort*, *bragwort* indicate an association with wort; a late Scots form is *bragwud*; see also bragoes.

A drink made of honey and ale fermented together; latterly the honey has been replaced by sugar and spice. Also *attributive* in Braggot Sunday. See also brackwoort.

c1405 (→c1390) Chaucer *Miller's Tale* (Hengwrt) (2003) l. 75 Hir mouth was sweete as Bragot [v.r. braket] or the meeth.

c1420 *Pallad. on Husb.* iii. 812 In bragot then or wyne or meeth hem kepe.

1584 T. Cogan *Hauen of Health* ccxxxviii. 235 To make Bragget. Take three or foure galons of good Ale or more.

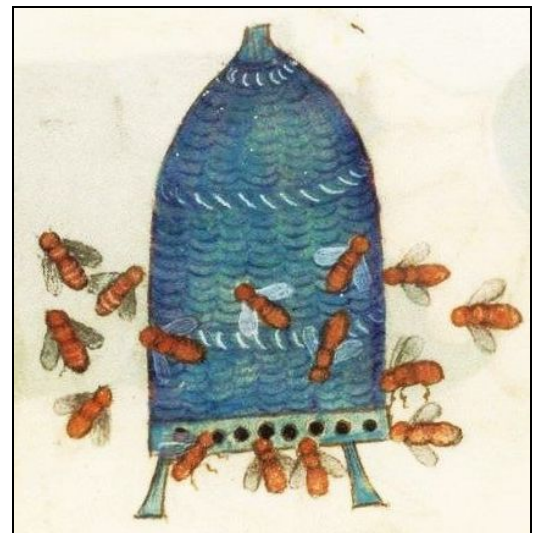
This authoritative source does not really take a side. The ale and honey are fermented together, but that could be done in either primary or secondary.

The OED goes back to only 1405, but “Bragget was known in Britain from early Christian times; it was a prestige drink; it formed part of foodrent and foodgift; it was more valuable and potent than ordinary ale, as the quantities in Welsh legal records show; it was ... dark in colour; and it contained ale, as its etymology shows....

In early Anglo-Saxon records, Welsh Ale figures as a royal landdue; the quantities set out imply that it was more powerful and expensive than ordinary ale; and the contrast of it with mild ale and clear ale suggests it was strong and dark. In the light of this, there appears good reason to take bragget as the ‘Welsh Ale’ of Anglo-Saxon records.” (Breeze, 2004: 299-300).

Moving forward, we find some late-period recipes that indicate bragot is made from ale with honey added:

To make braggot. Take 14 gallons of good fine ale that the wort thereof be twice used, & put it into a stone vessel. & let it stand 3 days or 4, until it is stale. Afterwards take a quart of fine wort, half a quart of live honey; & set it over the fire, & let it simmer, & skim well until it is clear. & put thereto a pennyworth of powder of pepper, & 1 pennyworth of powder of cloves, & simmer it well together until it boils. Take it down, & let it cool, & pour out the clear [liquid] thereof [decant] into the previously mentioned vessel [stone vessel], & the settlement thereof into a bag, into the mentioned pot [stone vessel], & close it well with a linen cloth that no air comes out; & put thereto new berm, & close it 3 days or 4 before you drink of it. Add aqua ardente to it. [Verberg referencing *Curye on Inglysch*, 14th century. Part V Goud Kokery, MS Royal 17. A.]



Followed by another:

For Braket. Take a pott of good ale and put therto a porcion of hony and peper in this maner, when thou hast good ale let it stone in a pot ij. Daies and thā drawe out a quarte or a potell of that ale and put to the hony and set it ouer the fire and lete it seethe well and take it of the fire and scinne it clene and than put thertoo the peper and thē set hē on the fire and lete hem boyle wel togedur with esy fir; but peper take iiij. gallons of good ale a pynte of fyn tried hony and the mountenaunce off saucer full of poud' of pepper, &ct. [Verberg referencing *Curye on Inglysch*, 14th century. Part V Goud Kokery, MS Royal 17. A.]

Other recipes from 1584 and 1594 agree about adding honey to ale.

Clearly, then, a bragots *can* be made by adding honey to an existing ale and letting secondary fermentation do its thing. But whether a bragot *must* be made this way is not necessarily decided yet.

Not all modern writers agree, though, that a bragot necessarily resulted from adding honey to the wort rather than adding it later. “The basic definition of a bragot is an alcohol made from honey and some sort of grain. It can be fermented with honey added to the wort, an ale blended with an already fermented mead (or vice versa), or an ale brewed with honey and spices” (Zimmerman, 2015). “In medieval England, bragot was brewed by flavoring and enriching ale wort with spices and honey, a mixture that was then fermented” (Hornsey, 259).

One can also find support for this broader definition in the Oxford Companion to Beer under its bragot entry (emphasis mine):

[I]t is a beverage produced from both malt and honey and is in essence a mixed drink, part beer part mead. Historic references suggest braggot is a Celtic drink from at least the 12th century; it is mentioned in *The Canterbury Tales*. In such times honey was the major source of sugar and braggot would have been a common and distinctive drink in medieval Europe.

Various options are possible depending on the balance of malt and honey used, but in strict terms there should be more honey than malt to distinguish braggot from a honey beer. **Braggots may be made by combining separately fermented beer and mead, or the combination may be made at the outset of brewing, with the honey added to the kettle.** In addition hops and spices may be included to give the drink various flavor characteristics.



Ideally hop character and bitterness should balance any residual sweetness of the honey. The source of honey also contributes to the specific character, which varies with different types of flowers frequented by the bees, and also during the year according to the seasonal nectar they gather. Historically specific versions of braggot were also distinguished by the range of hops, herbs, and spices added...

In the end, then, one more quotation seems to be worth noting: "To define braggot with any degree of preciseness would be as difficult as to give an accurate definition of 'soup'." This quip is attributed to John Bickerdyke of 1880 who apparently did a lot of research into the matter (Mosher, 274).

At least some people in the Middle Ages thought braggots should be made by adding honey to an existing ale. In all likelihood, people made and drank what they liked, and some would have put the honey into the wort as a single-process beverage. Others added it later, some as a way of reviving and saving a flat stale ale.

What matters in the end, though, is whether you like this drink, and whether it might get better with age.

Teched Da!

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