

## Getting Curious with Jonathan Van Ness & Dr. Sarah E. Bond

**JVN** [00:00:00] Welcome to Getting Curious. I'm Jonathan Van Ness and every week I sit down for a 40 minute conversation with a brilliant expert to learn all about something that makes me curious. On today's episode, I'm joined by Associate Professor of History at the University of Iowa and an expert on ancient drinking culture, Dr. Sarah E. Bond, where I ask her: Would I have been the toast of the ancient world? Welcome to "Getting Curious." This is Jonathan Van Ness. I'm so excited for our guest this week and for our topic, because it's so interesting. So without any further ado, welcome to the show Professor Sarah E. Bond, honey. So, but here's the question. How did we start drinking? Where did it come from? There's so many, like, layers to this question and I feel like you're really the leading person in this field to talk about. You just have, how you write about the history of drinking is just so interesting. Your work's incredible. And welcome to the show.

**DR. SARAH E. BOND** [00:01:02] Hi. Thank you. Thanks for having me. I think there are a lot of different people working at different angles on this. I think that one of the coolest things is that people are starting to reconstruct ancient alcohol and the recipes from it. So there are a lot of archeologists working at the University of Pennsylvania who work with, for instance, like, Dogfish Brewery, which is in Delaware. And they're remaking a lot of these ancient brews because they've been scraped off the bottom of ceramic vessels that have been found at archeological digs. So that's one way to kind of recreate the past. And for me, I like to look at the social aspects of drinking and particularly to think about the trade in alcohol throughout the ancient Roman Empire. So I specialize in, in ancient Rome, but actually drinking goes way back to ancient Mesopotamia and was really born there in the Fertile Crescent.

**JVN** [00:02:02] So what's modern day Mesopotamia?

**DR. SARAH E. BOND** [00:02:06] Modern day Mesopotamia it's, it's along the Euphrates River. But also Iraq, Iran. When we talk about this area of Mesopotamia, that's, that's generally the area where we're talking about and let me say the Levant, we generally mean this area of modern day Syria and Palestine. So ancient Mesopotamia, we would think of today as, as Iraqis and Iranians predominantly.

**JVN** [00:02:35] So that's kind of the first time in, like, archeology where we see, like, gorgeous, like, vases and stuff filled with alcohol.

**DR. SARAH E. BOND** [00:02:43] Yes. We get a lot of tablets that are inscribed and these tablets tell us about the selling of, of alcoholic beverages, predominantly a lot of beer. So

lots of beer drinkers in the ancient Near East, which we would call today, the Middle East. So Egyptians and people in Mesopotamia, it's incredibly hot and they're drinking oftentimes beer that is kind of, kind of akin to, to like a lighter pilsner.

**JVN** [00:03:15] Mmmm. A light pilsner. but really like that's kind of all happening like around like the Bible-y times. Right? And even earlier, because like Egypt is like before Bible-y times. But really the Bible was kind of like in Mesopotamia, like the Old Testament, isn't it because isn't like, Israel is all up in there, isn't it as well?

**DR. SARAH E. BOND** [00:03:34] Right. The Hebrew Bible predominantly takes place in what is modern day Israel. But if we think about the, when we think about the Book of Exodus. Right? That's Moses and that's taking place in Egypt during the time of Ramses the Second. So about halfway through the second millennium B.C.E. So that's about 3500 years from now. But before. So we're, we're going way back. So Egyptians loved beer. And they had a lot of brewers that, that made beer and it was heavily taxed by the Pharaoh. And so we have kind of a lighter barley beer oftentimes that is made in the area of Egypt and something that's not as, as heavy as, say, what a modern day stout or what a, a modern day heavy or darker beer would be. So we're thinking more of like a lager or a pilsner, in terms of lightness. But it's, it's a barley beer that, that is, it's quite nice when it's hot outside, as it most often is in Egypt.

**JVN** [00:04:44] And did they sell like little bottles or was it like huge vats? Like, you know, like was there bottles of beer, or was it like big jugs?

**DR. SARAH E. BOND** [00:04:52] Bottles are a much later invention because glass is incredibly expensive and is a luxury item within the world of ancient Egypt. A lot of the vessels that we're going to talk about today in ancient Greece, in ancient Egypt, and also in Rome are generally ceramics. So that means that they're made out of clay and they're fired in a kiln. So the ancient Solo cup is really more of a small ceramic cup.

**JVN** [00:05:20] Love, and it's reusable. So is there, like, a story in, of like ancient Mesopotamia that was like, that's widely seen as, like, the first invention of beer? Like the first time we're seeing someone like, someone's, like, walking along the road. Then they, like, took some hops and then we're like, "Oh, my gosh, if I put these in the-, like," how did they do it? Did they put some hops in the sun and mix it with water or something? Like?

**DR. SARAH E. BOND** [00:05:44] That's a good question. Actually, hops, they're not added until the Middle Ages, probably the early medieval period. So there are, the hoppy beers that are so popular today in places like Colorado and in Austin, Texas, for instance, IPAs

did not exist in the ancient world because hops were eaten kind of like brussel sprouts. I don't know if you've ever seen a hop before, but they kind of look like a green pine cone, like little teeny tiny, but you can eat them like a vegetable. And so all of the ancient recipes that we have from, from antiquity actually tell us that people ate them kind of steamed or cooked, rather than added to beer. So it's not until the early Middle Ages that we have recipes that actually add hops in order to make a beer preserved for long periods of time. So most of the beers from the ancient world, they don't have the same preservative power that the medieval beers had because hops helped to keep it fresh for a longer period of time. Which is why IPAs, which were India Pale Ales, had hops added so that British men could, could drink beer all the way in India.

**JVN** [00:06:59] India Pale Ales.

**DR. SARAH E. BOND** [00:07:01] Yeah, IPAs.

**JVN** [00:07:02] I didn't realize that's, inter-, OK wait. So then what were they based out of before then? What did they used to be made of?

**DR. SARAH E. BOND** [00:07:09] Well, you have the basic structures of beer that you have today. It's just they didn't have the hops, which are only really added for taste and preservatives. But you have barley beer, wheat beer, millet, rye, rice and honey beers. Right? And so you've got water, you've got fermentation. You've got all these different types of beers, but no hops that are being added. The things that preserve it are generally spices that are being added and various different types of herbs that are all stuffed into an amphora, at least during the Greek and Roman time.

**JVN** [00:07:47] What's an amphora?

**DR. SARAH E. BOND** [00:07:48] Oh, I should explain what an amphora is. An amphora is just a very fancy word for something that's held on both sides. That's what the word literally means. And it's a gigantic ceramic vase.

**JVN** [00:08:01] I've seen those in museums.

**DR. SARAH E. BOND** [00:08:04] So, yes, that that's what we're talking about here. And we have, a lot of them that exist today in places like the Getty. So if you go to the Getty Villa that is in Malibu, they have a number of them that have survived. We have hundreds of them from shipwrecks, but also from places like Pompeii and Rome and ceramic vessels were really all over the ancient world because plastic did not exist yet. And so people had

to come up with a rather disposable medium that they could use for dishes and for dinnerware. And also because when you get drunk, you tend to break dishes.

**JVN** [00:08:43] Oh, you do. Which wouldn't occur to me, that wasn't something that I was going to ask about, but that makes sense that if everything's more breakable and you're getting drunk. What about red wine versus white wine? Was there any like, when did that happen?

**DR. SARAH E. BOND** [00:08:57] There are lots of different types of wine that we have from an ancient cookbook. That is probably from the second century C.E. So probably about 150 years after Jesus. OK?

**JVN** [00:09:10] OK.

**DR. SARAH E. BOND** [00:09:11] We have a guy named Apicius who writes a cookbook, but it's actually a compilation of probably a lot of different recipes from all over.

**JVN** [00:09:20] Was that the first cookbook? That we know of?

**DR. SARAH E. BOND** [00:09:22] We have, we have tons of recipes from other people, but this is the first full cookbook of recipes that, that we have intact. He may not have been the first ever to write one, for sure, but it's, it's the one that really survived.

**JVN** [00:09:37] And it's on paper?

**DR. SARAH E. BOND** [00:09:38] No, it was written down originally, probably on papyrus, and then was copied later on, was copied down later on in the Middle Ages and then in the Renaissance. But probably originally it was on papyrus, on a papyrus roll. And so we have all of these different recipes for different types of wines. So we have a kind of absinthe wine, which is, Romans love infusions. And so we have wormwood that is infused with wine, and that's the absinthe wine. And it's, as you would guess, going to make your super loopy and crazy. 'Cause we've all seen "Moulin Rouge." And we know-.

**JVN** [00:10:20] Yes.

**DR. SARAH E. BOND** [00:10:21] Absinthe is going to cause you to have green fairies. And the absinthe we make in the US today is very, very different than the absinthe that is real, that you can still get in Paris or in various parts of the Netherlands. But, yes. So you have infusions of wormwood. You have honey infusions into wine. You also have mead. Mead is water, but also a honey, it's a honeyed water, that, that, I don't know if you've ever had

mead today, but it's very, very sweet. And because Romans don't have sugar, they have to use honey to sweeten everything. So, yeah, we have lots of different types of wine, but predominantly they're drinking red wine. And most of that wine, at least the Romans are drinking a lot of red wine that are grown within the Italic Peninsula, within what is modern day Italy, or importing it later on from Spain and from what is modern day France, but was in the ancient world called Gaul. So lots of red wines.

**JVN** [00:11:27] So. So much red wine, and so basically there's, like, lots of beer happening and like the, like two and three thousands like B.C.E. And then. And then Jesus comes. And then that nice Apicius man comes. And then, and then it's like 150 years later and he writes a cookbook. And then when does, and then Greece is what popularizes wine? More from beer?

**DR. SARAH E. BOND** [00:11:57] So I guess I should give the timeline that Mesopotamia, it lasts all the way into Roman antiquity. But kind of the period that we're talking about, this, this birth of beer and the, and the birth of, of alcohol consumption in general, Greeks are interacting with this area of Mesopotamia, but also focusing much more on wine in this time period that is, well, the one that I guess is probably best known is if you've seen the movie "300." That's the 5th century B.C.E. So that's the time of the Persian wars. And it is also the time that later on is called the Peloponnesian War. So this 5th century B.C.E. is also the time when we have a rise in a cultural drinking phenomenon within Greece called the "symposium." Right?

So that's where wine really plays a big focus is that Greeks tend to drink wine during the symposium. And they can drink it at other times, but that is really the most popular time to, to imbibe wine. And so Greeks begin to say that they believe that barbarians are the ones that drink beer and that civilized people, like Greeks, are the ones that drink wine. And then later on, the Romans will kind of inherit this prejudice against beer and say "it's only dirty Germans or, you know, people living in northern Europe who are drinking beer. Whereas us civilized people, we drink wine." So wine was seen as kind of the, the haute drink, like the drink that you wanted to have if you wanted to advertise that you were a wealthy, elite person that was into the intelligentsia and very civil.

**JVN** [00:13:57] That's so interesting, I always feel like I want those chronological times to be more clear cut, but a lot of them are really going on at the same time, which is what makes it so confusing to try to, like, think about that, that's fascinating. So what was the symposium?

**DR. SARAH E. BOND** [00:14:09] I think we use a shorthand a lot of times for just coming together as a group and talking about intellectual things. So we use a shorthand for people

talking about philosophy or a conference or something, when in fact it's, it's very much a set of standards. That was all male except for prostitutes who were called hetairai. So we're talking about all men in a symposium room and symposium just essentially means to come together. In the ancient Greek, it just means a place where people come together, but it's men and they're generally going to be drinking after a meal. And the only women there, as I said, are very educated prostitutes called hetairai that would perform poetry or music or play the, play the harp, which is called a lyre, a kind of small harp. And so it's very much about sharing philosophy and sharing ideas within the symposium, but everybody is reclining on couches that are kind of for one person, basically. And they have, they're leaning on their, they're leaning on their elbows with their left elbow. And then they're reaching for things with their right because they aren't sitting in chairs, they're on each individual couch and they're all kind of discussing things with the center left open. Right? So couches that are kind of in a square and everybody's lying on them and drinking from a cup, which in Greek we call a kylix. So these are just kind of little drinking cups that you can hold with one hand. And everybody's just talking about ideas and, and sharing their thoughts. But all the dudes except for a few women.

**JVN** [00:16:00] So what's like the Greek story of the inception of wine?

**DR. SARAH E. BOND** [00:16:04] I mean, this gets attributed back to the god of wine, Dionysus. So Dionysus is the only demigod really within the pantheon because he is born of Zeus, but his mom was not a God. And he really is the god of wine. But he's also the god, the god that is seen as responsible for agriculture and for fertility. So people remember him most for Dionysus's ties to wine and the bringing of wine. But in fact, he, he's a god that's associated with fertility and kind of anything that grows in general. So Dionysus is-

**JVN** [00:16:48] Interest.

**DR. SARAH E. BOND** [00:16:49] Also has a number of religious festivals that are tied to him, called like the Dionysia, which is the celebration of Dionysus. One interesting thing about the ancient world is that there were no weekends. And so there is no Saturday and Sunday until the first part of the weekend, Constantine, many hundreds of years later, Constantine will introduce Sunday. But there was no Saturday until I think about the 19th century, it was added. And so all of the days you have off are not dependent on a weekend, they're dependent on a religious festival calendar. Right? And so you go to a different festival maybe once or twice a week. And that's how you get your days off. And so the Dionysia was one, later on in Roman culture, it's the Bacchanalia. And so Bacchus who is the Roman version of Dionysus, you have a lot of drinking festivals that are connected to it that are not all that different from festivals in Milwaukee today. Or

Oktoberfest that goes on in Germany, right? And so because there's no weekends, you are enjoying things during religious festivals and drinking on those festival days.

**JVN** [00:18:07] So was there like a Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday?

**DR. SARAH E. BOND** [00:18:11] Yes. But they're all connected to planets. So the Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, all of those, many of the terms are actually connected to English. But all the days of the week in ancient Greece and ancient Rome are connected to Mars, to Jupiter, right? To different gods within the pantheon.

**JVN** [00:18:35] But there was only five?

**DR. SARAH E. BOND** [00:18:37] No, you have seven. There's seven days. It's just there's no Saturday.

**JVN** [00:18:42] Oh, you work all of them?

**DR. SARAH E. BOND** [00:18:44] Yeah. You work. You work unless there is a religious festival. But there's a religious festival every two, three days.

**JVN** [00:18:51] Oh, fierce. So it wasn't like there wasn't, like, a work-life balance.

**DR. SARAH E. BOND** [00:18:55] No, there, there was a lot of, there was a lot of time for, for going to the baths and, and for enjoying wine. And so. Yeah. Normally for Romans at least, you would go to the baths and then you would go to dinner right after you go to the baths around four or five o'clock, you come home for dinner and then it's time for wine.

**JVN** [00:19:17] if anyone needs to go get a snack right now, a little well, don't go get a sip of wine if you're like driving or if it's the morning when you're listening to this. But unless you can just, you know, stay home or, you know, whatever. But get yourself a snack-y. Get yourself a thing. We're gonna be right back with more Sarah Bond after this. So welcome back to "Getting Curious," this is Jonathan Van Ness. Was there like, was there a kind of like sommeliers of, like, ancient Greece, that were like, this is gross, or this is delicious? And was there different stories of how they made the wine? And also how do we know about the symposium? Like did we find like magazines about it or advertisements for it? Or little like, or just, like, was that on papyrus too? Like, like just little historical tellings of, of how the symposiums would go down?

**DR. SARAH E. BOND** [00:20:03] No, I think that's a really good question. How do we know about the ancient world, and predominantly, what we know about it, particularly things

about the symposium and in the Roman world, they were called "convivia," where we get conviviality, and convivial, and things like this. The symposium we know particularly about from a philosopher named Plato who wrote the "Symposium." And he, he presents a symposium as a setting for giving over Socratic thoughts and ideas. But we also have another Greek writer named Xenophon. And we had a lot of depictions of the symposium on ceramic vessels. So really fancy ceramic vessels that you might find at the Metropolitan Museum of Art or, say, the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. We have depictions of the symposium oftentimes on these actual clay vessels. Right? So we know about them from written sources like Plato or Xenophon, but we also know about them from ancient art. And within the Roman world in particular, oftentimes we have depictions of symposia and also conviva in mosaics.

So especially if you're going to have a Roman villa, you should have a special room just for drinking, oftentimes called a triclinium. It's a fancy name for a dining room. And oftentimes the mosaics in the middle would be focused on either depictions of drinking or a symposium or Bacchus or Dionysius, depending on where you were in the Roman Empire. So mosaics set the scene, ceramics set the scene and also text tell us all about it. But I should note that while in the symposium, they're sitting on separate couches, in the Roman Empire, when they have a convivium, they only have three couches and each couch has a different status in terms of high status, middle status person, lowest status person. So whatever couch you got on would be indicative of your status within the household.

**JVN** [00:22:19] How many people would be in a symposium or bac-y-, the other one? Conviva!

**DR. SARAH E. BOND** [00:22:25] Yeah. Convivium is a, is, they can be quite large or they can be quite small. But oftentimes you're having, a lot of elite wealthy people oftentimes that are in the symposium or the convivium, and then you're being served by slaves because one thing that we should always remember about Greece and Rome is that, while Greece and Rome had a lot of good points to their societies. They also were chattel slave societies so that there were slaves that oftentimes served the imperial family in ancient Rome or would serve the wine at the symposium or the convivium. So I think it's very nice to, to celebrate Greece and Rome for many reasons, but one thing we do have to remember is that they subjugated people and owned slaves. So those were oftentimes the ones that, that were bringing the wine in. But even slaves drank wine. They just weren't allowed to be part of the symposium or part of, part of these displays of, of elitism, especially within Greece.

**JVN** [00:23:40] I guess I just really didn't realize that those were both chattel slaves societies. So in the end, the slaves came from--



**DR. SARAH E. BOND** [00:23:48] Oh OK. This is a great question. So you've seen "Spartacus," right? So slaves come from all over the Roman Empire because as Rome expands, it takes slaves and then sends them oftentimes back to Italy, to either work agriculturally or to work in household. Slaves could be sent all over. But there was a huge market within Italy. But Spartacus was from Thrace. So this area near the Black Sea, as well. We have slaves that oftentimes come from Greece. When Rome took over Greece, they took thousands of slaves from the area of northern and southern Greece. So Rome doesn't enslave people based on race because biological race as a theory hadn't been invented yet. And it was not chattel slavery predicated on race. It was predicated on the areas that Rome expanded into. So you could have Greek slaves. You could have North African slaves. You could have Egyptian slaves.

And so even though it wasn't race based, it was still very oppressive. And so I think it is worthwhile to, to mention that it's all fun and games to talk about Rome, but in the movie "Gladiator," almost all gladiators, about 98 percent of all gladiators were actually enslaved. So Maximus, who is Russell Crowe in the movie, Maximus, he starts off as a free soldier. But remember, he's sold into servitude as a gladiator in a gladiatorial school. And so his citizenship is stripped from him and he becomes enslaved as a gladiator. So it is, I think, important to note that most gladiators were also owned by the person that owned the gladiatorial school or by the emperor himself. So, yeah, that's, I think a nice thing that we have to, not a nice thing to point out, but something that we have to remember always.

**JVN** [00:25:51] Important.

**DR. SARAH E. BOND** [00:25:52] Yeah.

**JVN** [00:25:52] Yeah, absolutely. And I think I know we're having such a reckoning with that in our country. And I think it's so important that, and I think that's really so much of, like, the healing is not romanticizing things and being able to, you know, speak about how things were, and too often, we do romanticize those things. So I really appreciate you bringing that up. And that should be on the forefront of this conversation. And just really thank you for, you know, for talking about that side of things, it's so important.

**DR. SARAH E. BOND** [00:26:20] Well, I think that you're, I think that you're pointing to something that that's really important about the Roman Empire generally, which is to say we're talking about millions of people from all different areas of the Roman Empire that are drinking alcohol, that are drinking predominantly beer and wine, because liquor hasn't been invented yet. That, that is much more-, distillation exists, but we're talking hard grain alcohol doesn't really come about, we think, until about maybe the 9th century, and so

we're talking in the Middle Ages. So we are having people drinking wine and beer all over the Roman Empire. But remember, there are North African Roman emperors. There are people with dark skin. There are people with light skin. That the Roman Empire is so multicultural, right? So this image that we have of the Roman Empire oftentimes is of British white dudes that play BBC roles. But in fact, who we have drinking wine and beer are all different types of people along different ethnic origins all across the Roman Empire. So there are places that like beer more and there are places that like wine more. But they aren't all white people.

**JVN** [00:27:36] I love that. And it's also, I like how, well, it's interesting how you're talking about how, the idea that like beer was weaponized in, in society to be like a lesser than, like, less civilized drink.

**DR. SARAH E. BOND** [00:27:49] Déclassé. And I think that we did that for a long time with beer until we had the microbrewery boom. Right? It's that, I mean, I used to live in Milwaukee and I used to use, I used to work at Marquette. And I know you're from Illinois. So people are drinking a whole lot of, like, Bush Lite and Miller Lite. Right? Because that's kind of the part of the country that loves these kind of, like, macro brewery beers. And that's always been tied very much to blue collar. Right? And in the ancient world, you get something similar is that those people living in Britain and Germany and kind of northern European areas, they were predominantly drinking beer oftentimes, and that was the preferred drink along the areas of say, the Rhine River in modern day Germany or in the areas of Northern England, near where Newcastle beer is made today. Right?

So they're drinking beer. And the snobby little Romans back in the city of Rome are essentially saying, oh, my God, déclassé barbarians drinking this beer. They must also drink milk. Because milk was seen as barbaric. Right? If you're a true civilized Roman, then you don't drink wine or water out in public. You don't even eat in public. That most of the time you're saving food and drink for specifically within a dining context. Right? So, yeah, I think that we attach an idea of class to, and also identity to the things we drink even today. So, you know, I've had, I've been to many conferences and been to many very fancy dinners where people ordered bottles of wine that were hundreds of dollars as a way of exemplifying their wealth. And Romans did that too. But honestly, at the end of the day, sometimes I just like a nice beer.

**JVN** [00:29:45] Yeah, I mean, same. Same. So what about keeping stuff cold? Like were we, were we drinking warm beer? Were we drinking co-, we are drinking warm beer.

**DR. SARAH E. BOND** [00:29:56] I'm sorry to tell you that, if you go to England even today, they're going to give you room temperature beer. That's one thing that Americans really hate about British beer is that-.

**JVN** [00:30:07] I feel like they don't do that anymore. I feel like I was just there in October and I feel like it was cold.

**DR. SARAH E. BOND** [00:30:11] That's, a lot of times Americans have modified this. But when you get a traditional pint in Ireland or you get a traditional pint in England of, like, a nut brown, so, like, a Newcastle beer. Usually it's served at room temperature historically. But cold beer is really a luxury of the 20th and 21st century, unless you were extremely wealthy in the ancient world. So in the ancient world, there are obviously no refrigerators because, in terms of electric refrigerators. So if you're gonna get something cold, you want to keep it down in a beer cave or a wine cave. Right? Because basements stay pretty cold.

And so if you go to the Miller Brewing Company, even today, you can get a tour of their, of their beer caves. The Midwest has hundreds of beer caves that kept things cold. And Romans have something similar. But if you're going to have snow and ice brought in, normally an elite ruler like Nero, right? Nero was alleged to have brought snow down from the mountains and used it to make a really cold wine. But yeah, generally in the wintertime and we're in the autumn. Right? And so a lot of people are going out to Starbucks and getting their pumpkin spice lattes or you're being really snobby and you're making fun of the people getting their pumpkin spice lattes. But for Romans right around now is when they started drinking something called Calda and Calda is just hot mulled wine. And if you've ever had mulled wine is delicious..

**JVN** [00:31:45] Yes.

**DR. SARAH E. BOND** [00:31:46] Hot wine is easiest because keeping things cold and bringing in snow is really expensive. I mean, the movie "Frozen" makes it look really easy. But remember, that he's buying and harvesting ice, in, like, the Norwegian forests. In the late medieval period, I think. But yeah. Keeping things cold is really expensive at this time. So a lot of people are drinking things hot. And so mull, mulling spices and adding things to wine was really popular, especially in the late autumn into the winter, because it keeps you nice and drunk and warm. But I haven't mentioned something that I really should say because I think sometimes I assume this all the time is that only barbarians drink unmixed wine. And when we say unmixed wine, we are saying wine that has water or mixed wine is, is wine that has water added to it. So usually it's three parts. Two to three parts water and one part wine. So I just want to say we're probably all barbarians who are drinking wine

straight out of the bottle or for all of us in quarantine, those of us who are drinking it straight out of the Franzia in the fridge.

**JVN** [00:32:57] So, so the Greeks and Romans felt like it had to be like all grape-based or whatever, like, there could be no mixing of water, but to, like, make it go farther, like people would like, add water to it to just make it last longer?

**DR. SARAH E. BOND** [00:33:11] No. I mean, Romans and Greeks add water, drinking wine that did not have water in it was seen as a quick way to get drunk and oftentimes did.

**JVN** [00:33:22] Oh, the reverse.

**DR. SARAH E. BOND** [00:33:24] So, yeah, you're al-, you're always, almost always adding water to the wine because there were very notorious stories of people who drank too much wine and got out of hand. Like Mark Antony was seen as one of the angriest drunks of all time. Right? He was seen as, he, he took part in something called the Lupercalia, which is what Valentine's Day is based on today. And he would oftentimes get very drunk during the Lupercalia and yell at people, get angry, hit people. But yeah, this history of people drinking way too much in part is cut down the more water you add to the wine.

**JVN** [00:34:06] Oh, I get it. I love that. Yes.

**DR. SARAH E. BOND** [00:34:11] Part wine. If you have more water added to it. So it's kind of like when you go to a wedding today and you don't want to get super drunk early. So you start making wine spritzers, which I guess is what I do. You just add a little soda water to it and then it lasts a little bit longer, you don't get drunk as fast because Romans do drink a lot of wine. And Greeks drink a lot of wine as well. And we know this from a lot of inscriptions and texts that tell us that that oftentimes gallons and gallons of wine are being consumed per month by each Roman and each Greek man. But at the same time, they're watered down. So.

**JVN** [00:34:53] Could women drink?

**DR. SARAH E. BOND** [00:34:55] Oh, this is a good question. Romans, in the early Roman Republic, which the Roman Republic is founded in 753 B.C.E. and it is founded by twins named Romulus and Remus. Romulus kills Remus. And that's, he gets to name Rome after himself. So it's called Rome. And, and so we have laws that go back pretty early that tell us that at least during most of the Roman Republic, that is to say most of, of the early Roman period into the later republic, so the 2nd century B.C.E., most of the time, women were not supposed to drink. There are always loopholes for prostitutes. Always loopholes for sex

workers who are both men and women. But generally, women who were elite matrons were not supposed to drink and oftentimes slaves were not supposed to drink as well. But we know that they did. It's just a lot of laws tried to keep women from drinking because they thought it led to adultery.

**JVN** [00:36:04] So what about alcoholism? Because that was one of the first things that I wrote down. Like when, when you first are you talking to me, and, like, did people ever, was the idea of addiction or alcoholism discussed?

**DR. SARAH E. BOND** [00:36:19] There is not an isolation of it as something that is a disease like it is today. Oftentimes alcohol is seen as leading to bad things. So when you have stoic philosophers, so the Stoics were philosophers like a man named Seneca, but probably the most famous is Marcus Aurelius, who is the emperor that dies at the beginning of "Gladiator." Right? He, he writes a book of stoic meditations. So the Stoics believe that everything in moderation is something that is very important to life. So a lot of the things we know about alcoholism in part come from stoic meditation that say you need to moderate your drinking, essentially. So anecdotes about Antony, or anecdotes about Cicero's son, who apparently got really drunk and angry all the time, that, they know that alcohol leads to anger and leads oftentimes to behavior that is criminal.

So in 186 B.C.E., the Romans outlawed the Bacchanalia, which is the celebration of Bacchus. And in part, they outlawed the Bacchanalia because people were getting drunk and just getting disorderly. Right? And so it's not a feeling that alcoholism is a disease. It's just that we get a lot of mentions that men and women who drink too much alcohol have problems with anger and can be seen, can be seen as going crazy. Oftentimes, it's linked to kind of what we might call today psychological disorders. Right? People who do things they normally would not do when they have been drinking. So Alexander the Great, for instance, he gets drunk and kills one of his best friends. So lots of examples from the ancient world of drinking contests and of alcoholism, what we call today, alcoholism. And the Romans really just recognized that maybe you need to have moderation. And that's a way of critiquing alcoholism, maybe today.

**JVN** [00:38:25] Did Greeks talk about moderation?

**DR. SARAH E. BOND** [00:38:29] Yeah, you have, especially in, in the writings that we have from philosophers in the 4th century B.C.E., we have a lot of people encouraging moderation as well. We, even in medical texts that we have, so Greek and Roman medical texts suggest that moderation be used for alcohol, even though alcohol could be used medicinally for things like antiseptic uses and also just to dull the pain, because remember,

they don't have oxycodone. They don't have anything really to dull the pain except for alcohol. So.

**JVN** [00:39:07] Yeah.

**DR. SARAH E. BOND** [00:39:08] It can lead people who are in chronic pain, so say, you've gone to war or you have lost a leg or you have a disease that causes a lot of pain, a lot of people self medicated with, with wine, in particular. And I'm sure that that caused a great amount of alcoholism within Roman society. But it was looked down upon, by the elites, for sure.

**JVN** [00:39:33] I was also curious about weed. Did they ever talk about weed or hash?

**DR. SARAH E. BOND** [00:39:39] No. But they did talk about hemp. I mean, they talk about the use of, of hemp and more as a, as a vegetable. Again. Romans do have narcotics. It's just not marijuana.

**JVN** [00:39:53] Oooh. Tell us about their narcotics.

**DR. SARAH E. BOND** [00:39:59] Well, I mean, opium exists. It comes from, from-

**JVN** [00:40:02] Oh, yeah.

**DR. SARAH E. BOND** [00:40:03] And so, yeah, Romans mostly just have herbs that they grow and things that they chew on that were seen as probably modern day hallucinogenics. Even the kind of wormwood wine that I talked to you before, probably had a hallucinogenic quality to it.

**JVN** [00:40:21] We're going to take a really quick break. We'll be right back with more after this. So welcome to "Getting Curious," this is Jonathan Van Ness. We have Sarah Bond, assistant professor of history at the University of Iowa. This is like one of the most fascinating episodes and aspects we've really ever got to talk about. I just, I love it so much. And I also think that, so I just, adopted a dog, like, a few months ago and one thing that I've been learning from our dog trainer is that we impart a lot of our like hu-, like our, like, you know, human love languages, like on dogs. But really for like dog culture, they're, like,

"You're a big, hairless, crazy dog, like, why are you-? Well, not crazy, but why acting like this, you big hairless dog?" And so I feel like one thing I'm kind of realizing is that, like, so much of our ideas of drinking now, in some ways they're, they're still similar. Like when you think of, like, well, we have a German Fest, and like we have festivals. But then in other

ways it's just so different because whether it was like, you know, medicinal use or religious use or who could drink and who couldn't drink, it's just not the same sort of ways that we, that we think about it now. And I think that's just fascinating. So what were some of, like, the cultural norms around drinking that we haven't covered?

**DR. SARAH E. BOND** [00:41:42] Well, I think one thing that might help us kind of think about drinking in specifically Roman society, since that's what I specialize in, is thinking about kind of a day in the life of the regular Romans.

**JVN** [00:41:55] Yes.

**DR. SARAH E. BOND** [00:41:56] Right? So thinking more about time, so when you wake up in the morning as a Roman, you weren't eating a very big breakfast and you are normally going out. If you're an elite, then you're going to the forum and you're speaking to people from about 10:00 in the morning, maybe until about 2:00 or so, and then you're going to the baths and that's when the drinking probably begins. We have a novel, a Roman novel that was written during the period of the Roman Emperor Nero, and it is called "The Satyricon" of Petronius. Later on, Fellini did a film about it, which is wonderful, although lots of naked people, because it's a Fellini film. It's wonderful, but "The Satyricon" gives a sense of kind of when the drinking happens and we have a lot of wine being brought into the baths. So you go to the baths, you take a cold bath, then you go and take the hot bath and you have a nice steam and then maybe around 4:00 or 5:00 o'clock, you head home and you go to dinner and you're eating inside a house and you probably have maybe 10 or 20 people that have been invited to dinner.

And men and women are in Roman dining rooms, eating and drinking on the couches that are surrounding, usually, a Mosaic in, in the middle. So people are eating and having a good time. They may be competing on who can drink the most and playing games. But, yeah, that's an elite scenario for somebody who's wealthy. But if we're talking about just a regular person living in the city of Pompeii, which is near modern day Naples, right there on the Bay of Naples in the shadow of, of Mount Vesuvius, Pompeians, there's only about 20,000 people at, at that time in Pompeii in the first century. And there's a 140 bars. So let us think about that. That is Midwestern levels of bars. I mean-

**JVN** [00:44:01] Yes.

**DR. SARAH E. BOND** [00:44:02] I live in Iowa City and I thought we had a lot of bars per person. Right? But 140 inns, taverns, brothels, places that serve predominantly wine, but, but also perhaps beer, in the city of Pompeii. And so that means it's something that's an everyday occurrence. If you're going and you're sleeping with a prostitute, male or female,

you're probably having a little bit of wine. You're going to the baths, you're having a little bit of wine, especially with dinner. But also, there were taverns in the ancient world, these taverns that serve hot food. And also, they were just bars. I mean, they're called "popina" or "taberna" where we get the modern word "tavern." And so you could get hot wine, you could get room temperature wine, you could get mulled wine, you could get mead oftentimes. And so bar culture was a big part of everyday life, especially for just regular people who were, say, working as leather workers or working on textiles or were working in any other capacity within a regular room in town.

So I think oftentimes you talk about wine as connected to the Roman Empire and to the symposium and to these elite dinner parties. But we shouldn't forget the fact that there was wine given out to Roman soldiers as part of their payment. So Roman soldiers drink a lot of beer, but they also had wine and port and, and various different things that were paid to them. And regular Romans on an everyday basis could afford what we might consider table wine. So there were super expensive wines, for sure. But there's also just a regular kind of table wine that people could drink on a, on a daily basis. It wasn't as though only really super rich people were drinking wine and beer.

**JVN** [00:45:55] But then, like, again, like all those bars, like for all the beginning of the Roman Empire, like ladies weren't there, like no. Was there special bars for, like, lady sex workers?

**DR. SARAH E. BOND** [00:46:07] There were brothels.

**JVN** [00:46:08] Or did they have to do it closet? Oh, they would drink in the, at the brothel.

**DR. SARAH E. BOND** [00:46:12] Yeah. I mean, the thing is that, that was what the law says and what the social reality actually was sometimes is in conflict in the same way that we have laws that say we shouldn't jaywalk. And at the same time, I jaywalked this morning. Right?

**JVN** [00:46:26] Yeah.

**DR. SARAH E. BOND** [00:46:27] So just because we have a law that tells us that women didn't drink doesn't mean the women weren't like at home having a little bit, or going out in public. It just was seen as very much something that elite women shouldn't do. So, you know, I guess the closest thing that we have today is, you know, women who are waspy, you know, and, and don't want to drink publicly. I think it's probably the parallel to the period of prohibition.



**JVN** [00:47:57] But there were probably blackouts. Like there was, like, blackouts soccer moms, I'm sure, like because there was like, there are ones now. But now I have another question. Was there like a black market, underground culture for beer because it was seen as a wine was the best thing, but what if you were like an elite person, you were like, well, I just love a Stella, but I can't be seen drinking Stella, like, what was there? Like, was there like a black market for beer?

**DR. SARAH E. BOND** [00:47:19] I think, we know that a lot of Roman men did drink beer. They just at least publicly preferred wine. And so I think that the shipping, the shipping records that we have about beer, we know that it can't travel super, super far without going bad. But we know, for instance, that was in super high demand all along what is modern day Germany and especially near Forts. So really, we have a high consumption of beer near military bases, which is the same today. If you go to Fort Bragg, North Carolina. Right? If you go to any of the military bases in Virginia and Norfolk, etc., there's a huge spike in the amount of beer that's being drank. But in terms of whether Romans like Cicero or Cesar are drinking beer, they probably are. They just probably aren't, they probably aren't writing about it. One of the things that's really hard is that we have archeology that tells us that people are drinking beer and wine. But then a lot of the elite writings, because there's a stigma attached to it, aren't telling us that they are. So it's just like anything else that oftentimes we do things in secret or without writing it down because we don't want other people to perceive us as below the station that we are.

**JVN** [00:48:39] So I also feel like I've heard about, like, vomitoriums. I feel like I have to ask about vomitorium.

**DR. SARAH E. BOND** [00:48:46] Yes. So this is something that really took off in, in the Renaissance and then in the Enlightenment and in later history is that people believe that there were special rooms just for Romans to throw up. And the thing is that Romans sometimes did drink too much and sometimes did throw up the food that they had. We have lots of records of people imbibing too much and then having to throw up in, say, an amphora or in, you know, what would be essentially just a bucket. But there weren't special rooms. That was something that was alluded to much later on, that people, it's a myth about ancient Rome, that vomitoria actually existed in houses. There was no special room just for people to essentially be what we would call today bulimic and make themselves throw up. Right? If you had to throw up and you ate too much, then you would throw up in just probably a ceramic vessel. So the vomitoria, the name actually comes from an ancient writer who tells us that people who were coming out of the Roman amphitheater were vomiting out of the doorways, like, there was so many thousands of people that were coming out of the doorways after gladiatorial games that it was like it was throwing up.

Right? And so that's where the word comes from. But, yeah, there's no archeological evidence or even literary evidence for special rooms just for throwing up your dinner.

**JVN** [00:50:19] I thought it was like a place where people to, people to go, like if they were just blackout and like throwing up everywhere because they drank too much. I didn't think it was like a bulimic thing. I thought it was like a, just, oh, like, your friend's blackout and you don't want to have her out at the bar anymore because she's, like, rolling around and, like, someone's going to call the police. So you just like take her over to the bar-, or like over someplace to go puke her guts out and like, someone keeps an eye on her or something, like gives her some water.

**DR. SARAH E. BOND** [00:50:41] Nice. That's no. I mean, we don't really, I mean, I would, I would assume that you have, if you're very wealthy, you probably have an enslaved man or woman that would walk somebody home from the dinner party. Yeah. Vomitoria kind of got out of hand in our modern retelling of this mythical idea of luxury. I think it goes, it goes hand-in-hand with this idea that Romans were luxurious, so luxurious that you could eat, like, a sumptuous meal that might give you gout and then throw it all up and then eat a new one. Right?

**JVN** [00:51:18] A meal could give you gout?

**DR. SARAH E. BOND** [00:51:20] Well, gout comes from too rich of food. Right? So, Henry, the 8th-

**JVN** [00:51:24] I thought gout was when you got like an infected cut?

**DR. SARAH E. BOND** [00:51:28] Oh no, I think that's gangrene.

**JVN** [00:51:30] Yes.

**DR. SARAH E. BOND** [00:51:31] Yeah.

**JVN** [00:51:31] So what's gout?

**DR. SARAH E. BOND** [00:51:32] Gout is, is I mean, Henry the 8th, I believe had gout. And there are lots of instances that in the ancient world, when you eat oftentimes food that is too rich--

**JVN** [00:51:42] Did I have gout from eating, like, Taco Bell at, like, 10:45 last night? Because-

**DR. SARAH E. BOND** [00:51:46] No, it's from long term eating of really rich foods.

**JVN** [00:51:50] Oh.

**DR. SARAH E. BOND** [00:51:50] So let's say you ate pâté every single day for every meal. That's-.

**JVN** [00:51:56] Oh, like duck fat or something?

**DR. SARAH E. BOND** [00:51:59] Yeah. A lot of hearty, duck fat. But I mean, every now and again, Taco Bell, I don't think will give you gout, but yeah.

**JVN** [00:52:06] Well, I ate, like, four Mexican pizzas last night, because they're discontinuing them. And they've been one of my favorite Taco Bell items forever. And it's like they're gone in like two weeks. So I did get four and I ate three. And I don't know what's the matter with me. But wait, I have another question.

**DR. SARAH E. BOND** [00:52:21] OK.

**JVN** [00:52:21] So, believe it or not, so let's say that someone that has, you know, listened to this and they were, like, "Jonathan, you have been so, like, just all over the place and I am obsessed with ancient drinking culture now and I have to learn more, but I'm just such a beginner and Sarah Bond is a genius. Like, how did, like what did you do?" So where is, like, the three or four things if like, what are the resources where people could go to start to learn about or more broaden their idea of like ancient Roman drinking culture. Like, is there like an Instagram you follow that you're like, oh, that is so fun how they take those, like, pictures of inscriptions? Or is there like someone on Twitter who you love? Or is there like a movie you watched? Or a book you read that you're like, oh, this is just so interesting about ancient drinking, ancient Roman drinking?

**DR. SARAH E. BOND** [00:53:10] I think probably the best book that I can recommend is actually by a guy named Max Nelson. It is a book that is called "The Barbarian's Beverage," and it focuses on beer, but also has a lot about wine. And basically it talks about this idea that beer was heavily associated with people who were seen as déclassé and uncivilized and wine was seen as much more of a cultured drink. I think one place to go to, to learn more about this is oftentimes the museums that are just in your backyard. So having scholars like Max Nelson or I would say that all of the scientists at the University of Pennsylvania who have helped to work with breweries like Dogfish Head, those are the places you really want to go, are local museums and, and talking to them about the

ceramic vessels they have, because oftentimes they will know an incredible amount about the actual liquids that got put into those ceramics. So the Metropolitan Museum of Art, for instance, has had a number of displays of these kylixes, which are the small little drinking cups that you have or the amphora, etcetera.

So I would say one big thing you can do is not just to read, which I think there are a number of books that you can consult, but to go to your local museums, if it's safe when you're masked up and to actually see them. So at the University of Texas at Austin, they have a wonderful museum and a number of classists that are experts on the ancient symposium, that you can go walk around the museum with. Or you could go to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, which just reopened and to take a tour there. So really seeing the objects that we're talking today I think is super worthwhile. Going to a local museum and talking to their ancient art curator is one of the best ways to learn about a lot of this, I think.

**JVN** [00:55:20] And then you were mentioning earlier about, like, how things were taxed. So, like, how did they find someone to tax them back then if there wasn't like the post office and stuff? Like, or was there just like tax collectors or how did they know how much wine you got? Like how did they track it all? And we still have those books?

**DR. SARAH E. BOND** [00:55:36] Yes. Yeah. So even if we think about the New Testament, right? That we have examples of tax collectors that go house to house and so a lot of tax assessors are a lot like census workers today. Right? They go house to house, and they go factory to factory, what we might call a factory. But we had wine presses and we have a lot of vineyards in the ancient world, and so oftentimes what happens is somebody comes to your property or they come to your small business, which might be processing wine or pressing the wine or growing it. And they assess how much you're making. And what percentage you need to pay to the government. So in Egypt, beer was taxed heavily and a portion of that had to go to the Pharaoh and then to the Egyptian state. But then we also have the taxing of, of wine as well, predominantly from vineyards and various different estates.

But yeah, there, there is a record for each locality of how big estates are and what they're growing and, and what their production rates are. So definitely taxes were paid in, in the ancient world and a lot of those taxes happen when you loaded that wine onto a ship or the beer onto a ship. Right? So the ship, when it comes into a port then has to be taken off the ship. And when that's done, that's oftentimes when the tax assessor is standing there counting how many amphorae of wine are coming or how many amphorae of oil and assessing how much tax you need to pay at the ports.

**JVN** [00:57:17] That is fascinating. I can't believe we still have those books. And so like what was like the tax range for like, was like, was Egyptian stuff like at 50 percent? And like other stuff was more like 20? Or did they, like, talk about it like that?

**DR. SARAH E. BOND** [00:57:30] Well yeah, lots of variable tax rates. But in the ancient world, we think it's between probably, a lot of times between 8 and 12 percent. And I pay around I think, 16 to 18 percent. So actually, tax rates are a lot higher today. But remember, there's not a set income tax in, in antiquity. So the income tax in the United States is only introduced during World War Two. So a lot of the taxes that we have today didn't exist in the ancient world. So they paid lower taxes. But they also don't have things like Social Security and Medicaid. So a lot of the, a lot of the things that we do to support people called the social welfare safety net didn't exist in the ancient world. So.

**JVN** [00:58:20] So, Dr. Sarah Bond, it has come to the time in our podcasts where I like to call it Yogi Recess, where it's like if I, you know, if you really were hoping that I was going to teach, like, triangle today or handstands, but then, like, we didn't even do it. And I was, like, just doing like Iyengar and just talking a lot and, like, not even doing, like, the poses that you really wanted to learn. This is, the floor is open. Is there anything that people need to know about you or ancient Roman drinking culture that we have missed? That you would be remiss with not sharing with us before we wrap things up?

**DR. SARAH E. BOND** [00:58:54] I think it is really important to say that a lot of this drinking culture carried into early Christianity and into the early Middle Ages, and that beer became much more acceptable and part of the medieval economy, especially when people like monks began to brew it in abbeys, especially in, in northern, what is today in northern Europe. So I guess I should say that there was a big dichotomy between beer and wine in the ancient world, but that beer starts to increase as something that is in demand during the early, early Middle Ages into the medieval period, and that some of the abbeys that began to brew beer in the Middle Ages are still open even today, Trappist monks that still make it. And so I think there is a lot of focus now on how things are made and the recipes that we are all making in quarantine, etcetera.

And I guess I would just really encourage people to start brewing beer on their own or to start to explore bitters and the adding of various things to wine and infusions, because alcohol history is really fascinating. But something that's even more fun is trying to recreate the recipes from the ancient world. So there's a lot of really great ways to, to explore history that's not just reading a book, but it's also about, you know, trying to get in touch with ancient people by eating the soup that they ate or by drinking the things that they did. So I'm really glad that you invited me on just because ancient history isn't all just kind of dried dates and battles and figures and Spartans. Right?

Sometimes we can have a good time and talk about ancient Rome. But at the same time, there, there is a way to learn about that history through food and through just talking to each other. And that's one thing that has been really hard about COVID-19. Right? Is that Romans loved bar culture and they loved getting together for dinner parties. And that's one thing that has really been missing, especially in the United States right now, is that coming together and sharing a drink and then sharing a toast was something that Romans often did. And so if we want to leave off the podcast today, maybe we can give a toast to each other and, and give a nice Latin, a nice Latin toast to focus on the fact that we all want each other to be safe and, and not to, to get sick.

**JVN** [01:01:36] What's that?

**DR. SARAH E. BOND** [01:01:37] Well, we have a number of different toasts that come on cups and come on graffiti and they tell us in text. So generally people say "bebe," which just means drink. Right? But sometimes they say things like "Bebe, vivas," "drink, may you live." Right? Or we have a Greek toast, that is [Greek], which just simply says, "drink me, live" as well. So a lot of this is telling people that you want them to have good health. Right? So toasting was a big part of dinner parties. And so you would oftentimes have multiple toasts, even though the word "toast" doesn't come around until the 17th century. You have a lot of people actually raising a glass and saying oftentimes, like "to your health," which Italians do even today when they say, "Salute." Right? So I think we are all missing getting together with our families and getting together with our friends and drinking together, whether that be mocktails or whether it be actual alcohol. But I think that, this has been really nice to get together and at least talk about the fact that, that community is a part of alcohol history. You know?

**JVN** [01:02:59] I have had such a fun time, Professor Sarah Bond, but I want you to pick our, our winding up toast because there were so many good ones. Do we do the Greek one? Do we, which one do you want do?

**DR. SARAH E. BOND** [01:03:09] I prefer Latin over Greek, even though I like both. I think we should just go with "Bebe, vivas."

**JVN** [01:03:18] OK. "Bebe, vivas." Ready? We'll do it on three.

**DR. SARAH E. BOND** [01:03:21] OK.

**JVN** [01:03:21] One, two, three. Bebe, vivas.

**DR. SARAH E. BOND** [01:03:23] Bebe, vivas.

**JVN** [01:03:26] Yay. Thank you. Professor Sarah Bond. This was such a pleasure.

**DR. SARAH E. BOND** [01:03:30] Thank you for having me.

**JVN** [01:03:32] Absolutely, it was our pleasure. And we'll provide links for, to follow you and we'll provide links to your work on the bio with this episode. So just thanks so much for your time. It was such a pleasure. I learned so much. You've been listening to Getting Curious with me, Jonathan Van Ness. My guest this week was Associate Professor of History at the University of Iowa and an expert on ancient drinking culture, Dr. Sarah E. Bond. You'll find links to her work in the episode description of whatever you're listening to the show on. Our theme music is "Freak" by Quiñ - thanks to her for letting us use it. If you enjoyed our show, introduce a friend - show them how to subscribe. Follow us on Instagram & Twitter @CuriousWithJVN. Our socials are run and curated by Emily Bossak. Getting Curious is produced by me, Erica Getto, Emily Bossak, Chelsea Jacobson, and Colin Anderson.