

## **Winemaking in Ancient Egypt**

### **2000 Years Before the Birth of Christ**

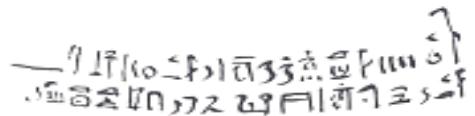
Professor Leonard Lesko is a winemaker and Egyptologist who has prepared a book which reconstructs the wine drinking and wine making culture of ancient Egypt in the time of the pharaohs. This book, which goes by the title King Tut's Wine Cellar, documents winemaking practices which are remarkably similar to contemporary enological techniques – especially as practiced by the home winemaker.

In the pages that follow, I have prepared a synopsis of this short but fascinating book.



Two “bottles” of wine recovered from King Tut’s Tomb  
(Photo courtesy of The Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, UK)

Archeologists recovered numerous bottles of wine from the burial chambers of Egypt. Although the wine is long gone, many of the “labels” have survived in the form of inscriptions in the clay urns used to store and transport the wine. These labels are remarkably familiar to the modern wine drinker.



Inscription from wine jug found in Tut's Tomb. Reading from left-to-right it translates as:

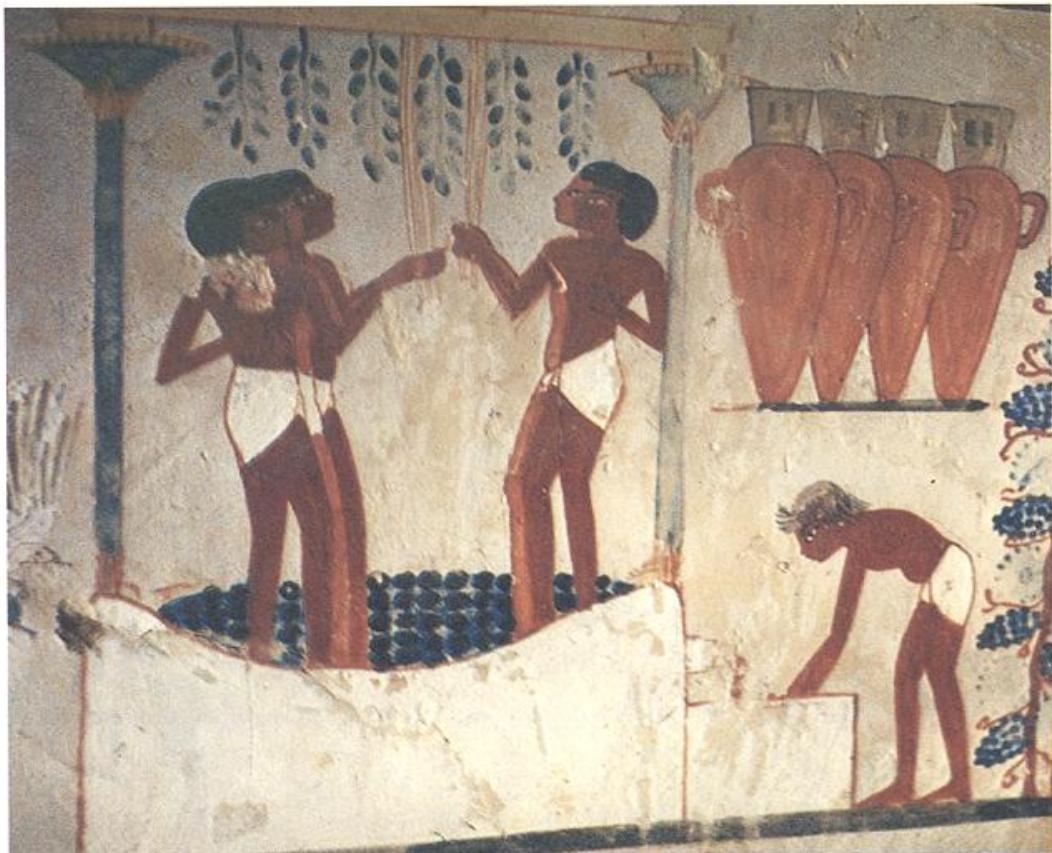
"Year 4. Sweet wine from the House-of-Aton of the Western River  
(Life, Prosperity and Health) Chief vintner: Aperershop"

Most of the inscriptions on the wine bottles recovered from ancient Egyptian tombs identified the date of the pressing in terms of the year of the current king's reign (modern equivalent: vintage), the geographical locale (modern equivalent: Appellation), the vineyard ownership (modern equivalent: chateau) and the chief vintner (modern equivalent: none).



A painting from the wall of an ancient tomb (shown above) clearly depicts the harvest and care of grapes in the vineyard. The hieroglyph for "vine" (shown below) clearly captures the trellis work so familiar to modern-day wine growers (The trellis even has an end post "anchor").

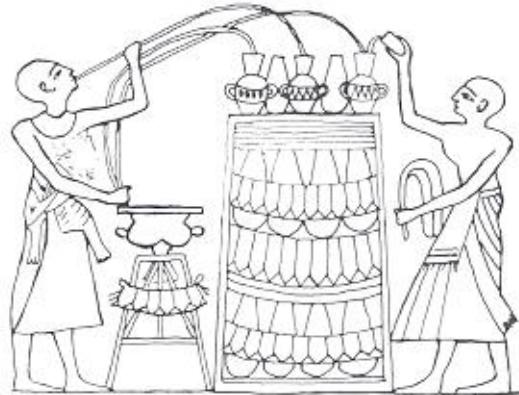




Ancient Egyptian equivalent of “the crush”.

Pressing scene from a recently discovered tomb at Saqqara.

This stone relief captures the Egyptian equivalent of a basket press. Leonard Lesko suggests that they used a large, porous “sack” woven from reeds to hold the must. The sack was then stretched and/or twisted by several men to extract the wine from the fermented must.



Finally, we see that ancient Egyptian winemakers also used the gravity siphoning method to “rack” their wines. Looks like the fellows depicted above are not only racking the wine, but blending and sweetening it as well. To date, no evidence for the use of sulfites or sorbate has yet to be found!

Lesko’s book draws many parallels linking the wine drinking and wine making practices of ancient Egypt to activities familiar to every home winemaker. It’s remarkable to see how much we share with humans who lived over 3000 year ago. By the way, the ancient Egyptians were also famous for brewing copious amounts of beer. But that’s a story for other archeologists to tell.

Although Lesko’s book appears to be out of print, paperback copies can be found at online bookshops, Amazon.com and on eBay.

### **Bibliography**

Lesko, L.H. (1977). King Tut’s Wine Cellar. Berkeley, CA: B.C. Scribe Publications. (paperback; 50 pages)  
ISBN 0-9305-48-0-0