

Drugs in the Greco-Roman period and Modern Day

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Introduction

Drugs have been prevalent in history well before even the Greco-Roman era, and drug use has recently become a hot topic on the news. Since there has been drugs, people have attempted to abuse their powers over the human body. The question being explored during the course of this research is when were drugs abused more, Modern day or in the Classical era?

Looking through a microscope at the more advanced portions of civilization, those that would have easier access to such mind-altering chemicals, modern-day presents the challenge of stress to provide for oneself and family. However, in ancient times, H. sapiens was challenged constantly with stress, environmental factors, and war at the home front. Life was considerably harder physically 2000 years ago without the numerous technological advancements that modern society possesses.

This paper will present the most common drugs used in ancient times (Opium, wormwood, mushrooms, alcohol, and gynecology drugs) and compare them to drugs in the modern-day. Through sources such as Pliny the Elder and Soranus, a better idea of drug knowledge and use in the Greco-Roman era will be formulated and then compared with the science and stats of recreational drugs in the first world countries of the modern era.

Opium

- Opium is derived from the Opium Poppy (Papaver) somniferum). [1]
- Opium was first cultivated around 3400 BCE along the banks of the Tigris and Euphrates River in lower Mesopotamia. [2]
- It was not until 40 CE that the ability to extract the opium oils from the pod was discovered. Originally the pods were crushed and soaked in a liquid such as wine.
- The uses of opium extended far and wide from a relaxant to a sleep aid to even a courage boost for warriors.[2]



Figure 1. Hypnos portrayed holding an opium horn with poppy juice. [6]

- Pliny the Elder writes the sections about poppy flowers and opium into Book XX, titled, "Remedies derived from the garden plants." [3]
- Thus Opium was grown in ancient home gardens. [3]
- One of the primary ingredients in many medical treatments Celsus provides is poppy tears, also known as opium. [4]
- Americans in 2010, almost 2% of them were addicted to prescribed pain killers. [5]











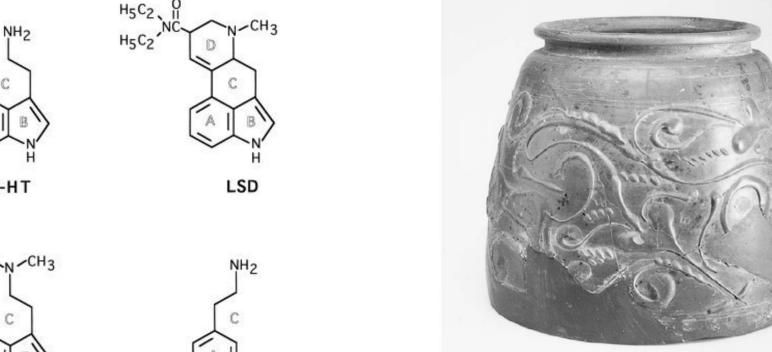
Figure 2. Coins depicting opium poppies from ancient Rome. [7]

Wormwood

- The three main chemicals in wormwood are thujone, anabasine, and absinthine. [8]
- Of the three, thujone is responsible for the hallucinogenic effects of wormwood. [9]
- The user usually experiences both auditory and visual hallucinations, as well as excitation and other symptoms common when in a psychedelic state. [10]
- The earliest recorded use of wormwood was from the Ebers Papyrus, which date back to 1550 B.C.E. and include writings from 3550 B.C.E. [11]
- Pliny the Elder devotes a section of his The Natural History to remedies made from wormwood. [3]
 - It is never the main ingredient.
- One of the main ingredient in absinthe, a popular drink in ancient Rome. [12]
- The modern version calls for more wormwood than he ancont version. [12,13]
- 27 g (ancient) vs 2.5 Kg (modern)
- Also, modern used ethanol while the ancient used wine, which is far less in alcohol content.
- Modern hallucinogenic (LSD, psilocin, and mescaline) are far stronger, interact with the serotonin uptake receptors. [8]



Figure 3. Wormwood leaves. [27]



wine. [3]

Figure 9. A Gallic beer cup found in Germany with the Latin inscription "Waitress, fill up the pot from the good wheat beer!" [20] Figure 4. The major chemicals of wormwood. [14]



Beer

Figure 10. A Gallic flask found in Germany with the Latin inscription "Waitress, fill up the pot from the good wheat beer!" [20]

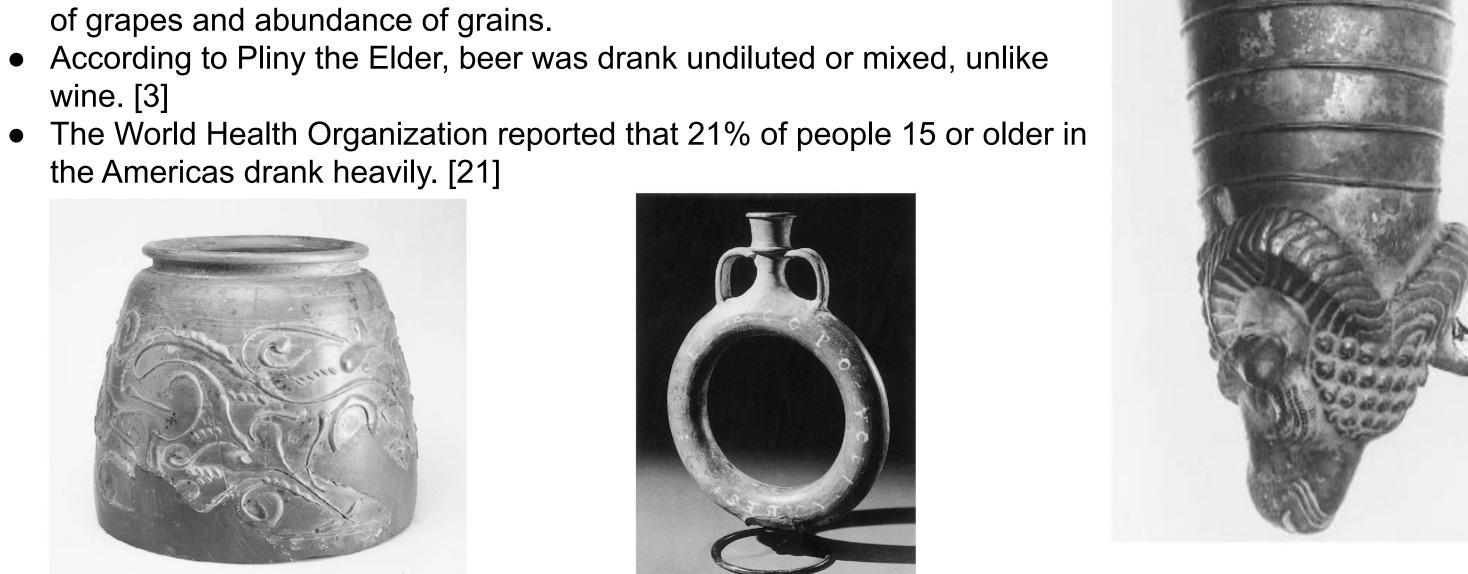


Figure 7. The chemical structures of serotonin (5-HT), LSD, psilocin, mescaline. [11]

Figure 8. The major chemicals of wormwood. [14]

Figure 11. A ram's head vessel claimed to contain beer from King Midas' tomb.[20]

Absinthine

Mushrooms

- Mushrooms causes both hallucinations as well as sedates the
- Most mushrooms found were poisonous due to the chemical psilocybin, which causes hallucinations in small amounts. [16]
- Claudius used mushrooms to declare himself as a god. [17] Caused him to feel like is was a god.
- Used in religious ceremonies to communicate with the gods.
 - Followers of Dionysus took mushrooms to cause crazy partying, referred to as mania. [18]
- The Ambrosia festival in march, the moth of the mushrooms. [18]
- Psilocybin, or magic mushrooms, are used in modern times.
- In 2015, 9.2% of Americans over the age of 18 had tried psilocybin. [19]

γ-aminobutyric acid

Beer is the most consumed form of alcohol in modern day. [20]

the alcoholic drink of choice for millennia. [20]

of grapes and abundance of grains.

the Americas drank heavily. [21]

• It is believed that beer was first made in Mesopotamia where it became

Trace amounts of beer has also been found in pots from the Egyptians

Many ancient Greeks and Romans associated Beer with "barbarians".

and Minoans, as well as areas in present day United Kingdom, France

Commonly made by people outside of Greece and Rome due to the lack

Figure 6. The common chemicals in psychedelic mushrooms and fungi.

Tryptamine derivatives

Similar neurotransmitter

Ibotenic acid derivatives

Similar neurotransmitter

Psilocybin

 R^1 R^2 R^3 R^4

H H H OPO(OH)2

CH3 CH3 OH H

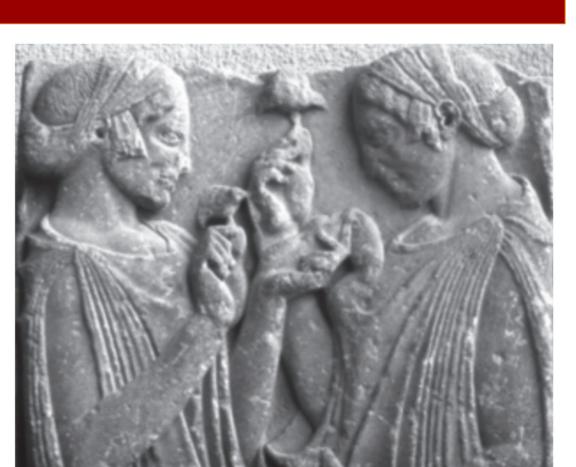


Figure 5. The bas-relief of Demeter and Persephon holding a mushroom.[17]

Wine

- Wine was the most popular alcoholic beverage in the classical civilization. [3]
- It was not only used for drinking but also in many remedies. [3]
- Relatively cheap in the ancient world due to high abundance. [20]
- The Greeks frowned upon over drinking in public and showing traits of intoxication spoken both by Plato and Aristotle.
 - Plato speaks about it in Laws. [22]

Figure 13. A reconstruction of an ancient Roman wine press.[26]

 Aristotle is quoted Athenaeus in the Deipnosophists Book 1. [23]

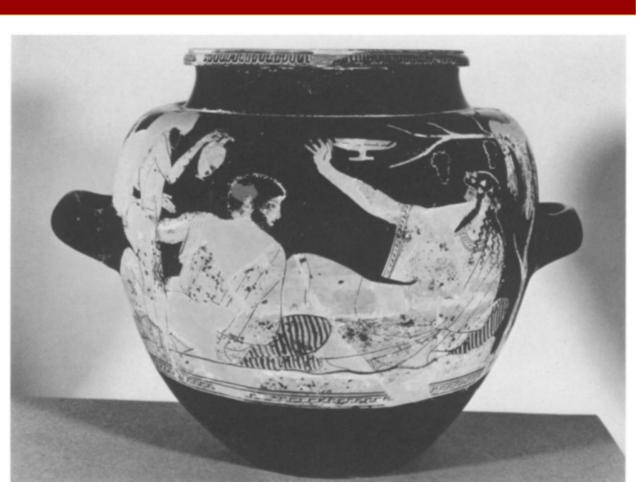


Figure 12. A pot with a painting of people playing kottabos.[25]

- There are few ways in which the Greeks were okay getting drunk:
 - Festivals [22]
- Drinking Parties [22] They had various drinking games as well:
- Kottabos [24]
- Hanging game [24]
- Comparing the views on beer and wine shows the difference in cultures of the Greeks and "Barbarians".
- However, no sources from the "Barbarians".

Conclusions

- When a drug could be abused by an individual, it more often was in modern times.
- Due to the lack of knowledge of many drugs, doctors who prescribed drugs in the ancient world abused their patients' lack of knowledge of the substance more than modern doctors do.
- Although the citizens in the Greco-Roman era may have endured more physically, they did not turn to drugs to solve their problems as much as modern America does from the sources available.
- Due to the lack of knowledge of many of the prescribed drugs by doctors in the ancient world, it seems that many of the cultural norms in the Greco-Roman era were to avoid being in a state where a drug has taken over one's mind.
- A clear reason why the mind-altering drugs discussed were used less in the ancient world under more physically demanding circumstances is not clear.

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