

Restrictions upon alcohol.

When one examines the way that alcohol was consumed in antiquity, it is important to bear in mind that, in certain ways, it differed greatly from other ingested goods. Firstly, it could be argued that it was not a product that it was strictly necessary to consume in order to survive.¹ By this is meant that the actual calorific and vitamin content of alcoholic beverages may render them a negligible source of nutrition.² However, as modern studies have indicated the health benefits of moderate amounts of alcohol (in particular wine), it could also be argued the other way: that alcohol is, in fact, a necessary part of diet. It is a subject for debate whether one gives to alcohol an equivalent status to that of meat or cereal as part of quotidian diet. Secondly, it is a toxic substance that was utilised not as a means of extinguishing life but as a way of enhancing it, and, conceivably, even prolonging it. Lastly, it is a psychotropic material that, dependant upon the quantity and strength that is consumed, may radically alter sensory perception.³ Alcoholic beverages may then, in some sense, be regarded as a nonessential foodstuff.⁴ Their absence from quotidian diet would not necessarily be injurious to health, depriving the individual neither of vital vitamins nor minerals.⁵ Yet, the consumption of alcohol occupies a central position in many diverse cultures, both ancient and modern.⁶ In some cases, particularly in the modern cultures of the

¹ Although it could be argued that, as with beer in the medieval period, alcoholic beverages were actually safer to drink than water.

² Schmidt (1980), 25-40.

³ I accept that an alteration of mental and physical faculties was not an exclusive property of alcohol; the taboo surrounding the broad bean was sometimes attributed to its powers to interfere with corporeal functions, in particular the dreaming process. Also, numerous studies today have sought to link sugars and preservatives in food to the mental processes and behaviour of children.

⁴ The categorisation of alcohol as a foodstuff may be problematic to some cultures, although rather less so to others. See Engs (1995), 228-229 for differences in drinking patterns between Northern and Southern Europe.

⁵ This is not to negate the medical studies that have found numerous health benefits in drinking certain types of alcohol in moderation, merely to assert that its removal from diet would be unlikely to imperil life, or to pose a serious threat to health.

⁶ For variations in cultural attitudes to alcohol, see Mandelbaum (1965), 281-288 & 289-293. Also Douglas (1987).

Mediterranean, alcohol may serve as an essential accompaniment to meals, with wines being specifically selected to complement particular foodstuffs, and *aperitifs* and *digestifs* chosen to awaken the palate and to aid the digestive process. In this instance, alcohol and food combine to form a symbiosis as part of the complete culinary experience. This model of gastronomic behaviour has escaped geographical restrictions and has been embraced in cultures spread across the globe. Northern European drinking patterns are somewhat different. Here, often the consumption of alcohol is not concomitant with the ingestion of food. The act of drinking is regarded as important in itself, not necessarily as an accompaniment to food.

Thus, alcohol may also be ingested outside the sphere of culinary experience. In these circumstances, some level of intoxication may be the precise intention when alcohol is consumed. The lowering of inhibitions and the rituals of commensality and reciprocity that surround group activities serve to promote social interaction and collective cohesion. The ritual of friends meeting up in the pub, bar or café is a long established ritual of life in many parts of Europe. In this context, alcohol consumption may give rise to intense feelings of *camaraderie* and *esprit de corps*. It may also lead to a greater level of interaction between the sexes and also with those outside the social group. In this case, alcohol may be said to perform the role of a social lubricant, easing feelings of awkwardness, introversion and insularity and facilitating communication in a convivial atmosphere.⁷ It can enable the barriers between genders and social hierarchies (I am wary of using the word ‘classes’ here) to be blurred and sometimes effectively dissolved. The rosy glow of inebriation allows a temporary spirit of egalitarianism to prevail amongst disparate and diverse social and cultural groups. Conversely, alcohol consumption may also serve to reinforce these hierarchical structures that base themselves around systems of inclusion and exclusion.⁸ One may think of formal dining

⁷ See Gusfield in Douglas (1987), 78. Gusfield refers to this as ‘cultural remission’: ‘the conventionalised relaxation of social controls over behaviour’. He goes on to suggest that alcohol permits greater freedom of word and deed, because if verbal and behavioural *faux-pas* occur, these may be blamed upon excessive alcohol intake: ‘by shifting the burden of explaining embarrassing moments from reflection of the self to the effects of alcohol, drinking provides an excuse for lapses of responsibility, for unmannerly behaviour; for gaucheries, for immoral and improper actions’, 79.

⁸ See Mars in Douglas (1987), 91-101, for the strictly controlled hierarchical drinking rituals of

occasions in which, when the appointed time arrives for post-prandial drinking, the men and the women separate.⁹ The males of the group (perhaps also the females, although this may be less likely) will perhaps regard this separation, not merely as the observance of a time-honoured tradition, but also as an opportunity for bonding that they perceive may only take place within an exclusively male context, accompanied by alcohol, tobacco or other forms of opiates or stimulants. Similarly, one may think of other types of drinking practice marked by rituals that strive towards the establishment or maintenance of group identity. The initiation ceremonies of American college fraternities (and, increasingly frequently, sororities) may involve the intake of copious amounts of alcohol, as do the antics of stag and hen parties within British culture.¹⁰ In the case of the latter, a state of drunkenness may be seen as providing the justification for the transitory abnegation of individual and collective responsibility. The fact that, increasingly, these activities are taking place on foreign soil seems to spur the participants on to ever more extreme acts of drunken behaviour. Geographical distance from quotidian cultural norms may clearly act as a significant element in this frantic pursuit of inebriated hedonism.¹¹ This ephemeral abandonment of some of the moral principles that govern our lives permits acts of licentiousness and various forms of horseplay to occur.

Anthropologists have seen alcohol usage, at least in some modern western societies, as a significant marker that works to separate the worlds of work and leisure. The consumption of alcoholic beverages can act as a signal to denote a change in behaviour.¹² The strict, organised and hierarchical demeanour that is often deemed as being appropriate for the work environment gives way to less formal modes of behaviour. Gusfield employs the term 'keying' in order to denote this modification of

longshoremen in Newfoundland. These drinking arrangements, according to Mars, effectively control and strengthen the rules that govern who possesses greatest economic power within this industry.

⁹ It is tempting to view such social practices as being a dusty relic of the Victorian period and beyond, but formal dining, with its highly ritualised forms of costume and behaviour, remains a firmly established tradition in many countries, particularly in educational and military establishments.

¹⁰ Leemon (1972).

¹¹ Perhaps comparable with the orgiastic rites of the followers of Dionysus. See Burkert (1985), 161-167; Seaford (1981).

¹² Gusfield in Douglas (1987), 73-90.

perception.¹³ This ideological shift may also involve a change of clothes, or a move to a different physical location, which serves further to emphasise the distinction between the spheres of work and play.¹⁴ This perhaps may explain the anxieties that arise with regards to the ideological minefield that is the office Christmas party, when alcohol and its effects invade the work environment. Gusfield's research interests lie in the field of modern American society, and he points to the significant rites connected with the drinking of alcohol that contribute to the effective transition from one state of being to another: the 'happy hour', social networking in bars after work has finished, the first drink that is consumed upon entering the home.¹⁵ The notion of appropriate physical and temporal (as well as ideological) contexts for drinking may be of some use when attempting to consider how alcohol was used in the cultures of antiquity.

The use (and abuse) of alcohol is currently a subject that holds a great interest for modern cultural and social commentators. The repeated hysterical headlines of newspapers warn of a 'binge-drinking' epidemic, fuelled by low alcohol prices and extended licensing hours for public houses, which is likely to be characterised by violence, public disorder and general criminality on a vast scale. Medical experts forewarn of the long-term perils of excessive alcohol consumption (such as cirrhosis of the liver) and frequently decry the resources that are spent upon the stream of battered and bruised individuals that flow through many hospital departments on a Friday and Saturday night (the result of drunken violence, alcohol poisoning or self-sustained wounds by the chronically inebriated). The police and judiciary will complain about the ethos of anarchy that is engendered by drunken revellers as they fight, publicly fornicate, vandalise, intimidate and attack each other. Moralists wag the collective finger as teenage pregnancies soar, sexually transmitted diseases proliferate and absence from work through sickness increases. In terms of media coverage (not always remarkable for their sensitivity to the subtleties and nuances of a situation), alcohol is a corrosive poison, persistently gnawing away at social structures, damaging health and leading people into a maelstrom of moral degeneracy.

It would be imprudent to dismiss completely the above observations as mere

¹³ Gusfield in Douglas (1987), 79-81.

¹⁴ See page 201, note 11.

¹⁵ Gusfield in Douglas (1987), 80-81.

paranoia, scare-mongering or media hyperbole. Nonetheless, it is intriguing to note that the targets of press and television criticism in this regard tend not to be the wealthier or more powerful sections of society. The consumers of expensive wines or single-malt whiskies may be as prone to physiological and mental injury from alcohol as any other social demographic, but the damage they inflict is generally considered to be upon themselves alone (or at least upon a relatively small circle of family and acquaintances). The social and cultural ramifications of their consumption are apparently few. The ‘working classes’ relationship with alcohol, however, has long been a favourite theme for middle-class and aristocratic moralists, and is usually characterised by the latter as the deprived and the ill-educated drinking themselves into oblivion and penury. The perceived result is ever-increasing levels of crime and disease. The elite, naturally, regarding themselves as being constituted of a somewhat higher moral fibre, feel themselves to be able to regulate their own alcohol intake adequately and are able to drink in a suitably responsible manner. They habitually regard themselves as being connoisseurs of alcohol, appreciating a beverage for its ‘palate’ or ‘bouquet’, rather than for its intoxicating qualities. The masses are perceived as drinking solely in order to get drunk and apparently care little for matters of taste. They are willing to consume the cheapest and most potent brews in order to propel themselves into alcoholic oblivion. Of course, such crude stereotypes are inevitably inaccurate, and very often point to a strong element of self-delusion (one may even say hypocrisy). The elite may attempt to define its supposed social and economic superiority by the food and drink to which it has access, but the lines between elite and mass practice are frequently not clear-cut. For example, gin (usually served with tonic water) has acquired the reputation of a drink that is associated with the British middle-classes and aristocracy. This is a relatively recent phenomenon, as gin, at one time, was synonymous with Hogarthian visions of tenement squalor and the physical and moral ruin of the poor.

The reality may be somewhat different. If one of the ways in which alcohol manifests its effects is the blurring of social boundaries, clearly this will have great implications for those who wish to maintain the rigidity and immobility of societal hierarchical structures. One of the targets for moral censure is young women, whose increased capacity for alcohol is seen as an emulation of male drinking habits. Thus, the concerns voiced about drinking may mask anxieties not merely about social mobility or shifts in the balance of economic power, but also about the potential threat to patriarchal

systems within society. As Garnsey notes:

the withholding of wine from women, as recommended by physicians, is a product of the way women were perceived, in a male-dominated society, as weak and fickle, a prey to their emotions, and easily tempted and led astray by the sins of the flesh.¹⁶

The urge to curb and control the drinking proclivities of certain sections of the population may reflect an authoritarian impulse to maintain the *status quo*. Perhaps the apprehension about the putative relationship between alcohol and crime, health and morality represents a severe dose of cultural angst on the part of the elite about the access to both greater financial resources and increased leisure time by the masses. The concentrated pleasures of the privileged few have become diluted to the masses and the elite definitely resent it.

These arguments concerning the social effects of alcohol, who has access to it and its potential significance for cultural and social mutation within a modern context are certainly not irrelevant to our investigations into the way in which alcohol was used in Graeco-Roman antiquity. There are striking similarities that may be observed in both drinking customs and an awareness of both the benefits and dangers that alcohol presented to the individual and to society as a whole. Before proceeding, however, it will be necessary to clarify one or two points. Firstly, the term ‘alcohol’ has been used extensively so far. By this, modern readers will understand the noun as encompassing a wide range of distilled, fortified and fermented liquids, varying between countries and cultures. In a Graeco-Roman context, when we refer to ‘alcohol’, we shall almost certainly signify wine. The consumption of wine was felt to be a characteristic of Graeco-Roman civilisation, and is contrasted with the alcoholic concoctions of other ‘less sophisticated’ races: the beer of the Egyptians or the Celts being one such example.¹⁷ In Euripides’ *Bacchae*, Tiresias asserts that the two greatest gifts from the gods to man were grain and wine, the former providing man with physical sustenance,

¹⁶ Garnsey (1999), 109. See page 217 for restricted access to alcohol for women in antiquity.

¹⁷ See Forbes (1951), 281-285; 300. See Wilkins and Hill (2006), 131-132 for beer in Greek and Roman territories.

the latter spiritual nourishment, and consolation in the face of life's tribulations.¹⁸ Thus, wine was felt to possess a religious sanctity, with both wine production and ingestion inextricably linked with Dionysus/Bacchus.¹⁹ Wine was regularly used as a form of religious libation, although this was not always the case.²⁰ Of course, the centrality of wine to these cultures was based upon the existence of environments that were conducive to successful grape cultivation. It is for this reason that it has been posited (by Engs) that, because much of Britain, northern Germany and Scandinavia are climatically unsuited to grape cultivation, preferring to rely on the fermentation of grain, rather than fruit, for such drinks as beer, whisk(e)y or vodka, these countries have evolved a radically different drinking culture to those countries that are able to successfully sustain grape cultivation.²¹ The perceived superiority of the grape appears to have been as much a result of topography as it was of culture. As Forbes notes:

It has been observed that the limits of the Graeco-Roman world approximated the limits of the vine-growing or olive-producing area.²²

It should also be noted that, whilst it is possible to read in many of the ancient sources about the effects of excessive wine ingestion, and the crippling hangovers and nausea that tended to follow extended bouts of drinking, it is more problematic to detect

¹⁸ Eur. *Bacch.* 274-283; Lissarrague (1990), 3-5.

¹⁹ Of course, the fusion of wine with the rites of worship of a deity is not a phenomenon that was exclusive to Greco-Roman religions. Wine performs a pivotal function in the celebration of Communion within Christian worship, although in this context it has become transformed entirely into a symbolic element.

²⁰ Perhaps the most notable recipients of wineless libations were the Eumenides. See Henrichs (1983), 87-100.

²¹ It has also been suggested that the relative lack of daylight in some of the countries of northern Europe (as compared with the sunnier climes of many Mediterranean lands) may also have some impact upon attitudes to alcohol (see Engs (1995), 230). This argument is not without its flaws. It proposes a model of drinking that defines countries or cultures as being essentially homogeneous in character. This definition ignores the many variations of drinking behaviour. For example, many countries that produce wine in sizeable quantities are not characterised as being populated by people who drink wine *and nothing else*. They may drink a wide variety of other alcoholic drinks, such as beer or spirits.

²² Forbes (1951), 281. See Horden and Purcell (2000), 209-220.

evidence for knowledge of the effects of long-term alcohol abuse: what in modern parlance would be referred to as chronic alcoholism. Evidence for this condition often has to be extrapolated from anecdotal evidence about heavy drinkers in antiquity. To this end one may cite the tales of the drinking excesses of Alexander the Great. Humboldt links Suetonius' reference to Domitian's red facial complexion (*Domitian* 18) with possible alcoholism.²³ This is not borne out by Suetonius' text, which claims that Domitian drank little wine, nor allowed his banquets to turn into drinking bouts.²⁴ The writings of Aristotle (or possibly pseudo-Aristotle) on wine and drunkenness are revealing. He talks of the incessant trembling of the drunkard, which he attributes to the cold, but which sounds to the modern reader as if *delirium tremens* is being described.²⁵

This is partly the result of a lack of medical knowledge at the time, and partly because many of the effects of alcoholism may often only become apparent after many years of heavy drinking. In an age where the human life span was far shorter than our own, other causes may have brought about death before the symptoms of liver or brain damage caused by alcohol became manifest.²⁶ Our greater medical knowledge means that we are more aware of the perils of *regular* excessive alcohol consumption (as opposed to the rather more dramatic symptoms of a single drinking binge). Concomitant with this is the current medical advice to drink a large amount of water each day (at least two litres is recommended) in order to ensure that the body remains sufficiently hydrated, replacing the fluid lost through sweat, urination and other forms of bodily excretion.²⁷ Water has become a panacea: it is promoted as combating fatigue, being an aid to digestion, and assisting in the maintenance of bodily weight (and may even promote weight loss) It also aspires to vague cultural notions of purity and cleanliness. The persistent drip of advertising has helped to convince many people that water from the tap is, in some way, not good enough for them. Water has to come from deep underground wells, and have been filtered through many strata of volcanic rock. The

²³ Humboldt (1950), 338-339.

²⁴ Suet. *Dom.* 21.

²⁵ Arist. *Pr.* III,26.

²⁶ Some, such as Garnsey, would argue that the zenith of mortality was infancy; see Garnsey (1999), 52. Such deaths were equally common among rich as well as poor.

²⁷ For sweating in antiquity, see Rose (1927), 97-105. For wine mixed with water, see 208, note 31.

toting of a bottle of mineral water has become part of the iconography of the well-heeled and the famous. Some restaurants have been known to offer a selection of waters to customers, mimicking the more familiar wine lists. Certain people even claim to be able to distinguish between various types of water, grading them according to taste and bouquet.²⁸

Water may have been regarded somewhat differently in an ancient context. The significance of water will be examined in greater detail a little later on. It will suffice to state at present that although ancient ideologies tend to (in some ways, although not all) mirror modern attitudes about the purificatory properties of water, it seems likely that of more pressing concern would have been the procurement of a constant supply of water, and on successful completion of this task, ensuring that the water was safe to drink. Modern techniques of water purification in the industrialised nations have perhaps inured many of us to the dangers of disease that plague the poorer nations of this planet. One only has to consider the vast numbers of people who are killed every year by malaria, cholera, typhoid and dysentery to be reminded of the hazards that may arise from a contaminated water supply. However, as will become apparent, some ancient sources point to an interest not merely in the prosaic realities of water supply and the mechanics of irrigation, aqueducts and piping, but also in the properties of water *per se*, and its cultural, religious and medicinal import. The tension between a Pindaric advocacy of the supremacy of water, and a stigmatisation of water-drinkers as appallingly drab characters only capable of pedestrian thought helps us to frame the ancient debates about the benefits and risks of alcohol.²⁹ This tension strives to achieve

a balance, through moderation (*metron*) in drinking, between the extremes of complete abstinence (*nephein*) and harmful drunkenness (*methyesthai*, *paroinein*, *kraipalan*), between the tedious and bland behaviour of the sober man and the irrational and violent behaviour of the drunkard.³⁰

²⁸ A recent publication reflects this trend: Mascha, M. (2006) *Fine Waters: A Connoisseur's Guide to the World's Most Distinctive Bottled Waters*, Philadelphia.

²⁹ Pind. *Ol.* 1,1.

³⁰ Pellizer (1990), 178.

In some ways, there are faint antecedent echoes of the rhetoric of the Victorian temperance movement and prohibitionists in the United States of the early twentieth century.³¹

Lissarrague, whilst recognising the sanctified status of wine, notes that its standing in Greek culture was very far from being unproblematic:

All city-states took care to pass laws on its use, some very few-like Sparta-to proscribe its use by citizens, most to regulate...Such control was necessary because, in the Greek imagination, wine is an ambiguous drink, like liquid fire, at once dangerous and beneficial.³²

There is still some debate over whether there was, in fact, an absolute prohibition upon the consumption of wine within Spartan society. Plutarch records that, at their collective mess meals, the drinking of wine did, in fact, take place, but notes that it only occurred in moderation.³³ Drinking to excess was frowned upon, although inebriation could occasionally take on a didactic function:

τοῖς παισὶν ἐπεδείκνυον τοὺς εἰλώτας μεθύσαντες εἰς ἀποτροπὴν πολυοινίας.³⁴

It is clear that Plutarch is talking of *restraint* in drinking, not a complete embargo. Xenophon, too, comments that, whilst there was some control exercised over the intake of wine, there was by no means an absolute interdiction. He notes that other Greek states

³¹ Of course, any pejorative remarks about water drinking in antiquity have to be tempered with the knowledge that when wine was consumed, invariably (although not always) the greater part of the beverage consisted of water. This wine/water ratio will be examined in greater detail later in this chapter.

³² Lissarrague (1990), 5.

³³ Plut, *Inst. Lac.* 237. The phrase ‘ Πιόντες...μετρώως’ does not make explicit that it was wine that was being consumed, but it seems likely that this was meant. Plutarch’s pro-Spartan bias and his chronological distance from the period he describes makes this an unreliable source for the actual drinking habits of the Spartans.

³⁴ Plut, *Inst. Lac.* 239A: ‘They used to display the Helots who were drunk to the children to prevent them from drinking too much wine’.

(and his implication here is that Sparta is *not* included amongst them) made strenuous endeavours to regulate access to wine for females:

οἴνου γε μὴν ἢ πάμπαν ἀπεχομένης ἢ ὕδαρὶ χρωμένης διάγουσιν'.³⁵

It is manifest that wine was permitted to Spartan males. However, drunkenness was severely condemned, and it was the *compulsion* to drink, so noticeable in Athenian *symposia*, that is removed from the Spartan dining experience:

καὶ μὴν τοῦ πότου ἀποπαύσας τὰς ἀναγκαίης πόσεις αἱ σφάλλουσι
μὲν σώματα, σφάλλουσι δὲ γνώμας, ἐφῆκεν ὅποτε διψῶν ἕκαστος
πίνειν, οὕτω νομίζων ἀβλαβέστατον, τε καὶ ἥδιστον ποτὸν
γίγνεσθαι.³⁶

It appears that, in the culture of the Spartans, in spite of the ethos of extreme authoritarianism that pervaded much of life, the matter of wine drinking was deemed to be subject to the judgement of the individual. Since intoxication was viewed by other Spartiates as a sign of moral and physical feebleness and as a source of great shame (as it often is in many modern Mediterranean cultures), it was possibly assumed that collective disapprobation would serve as sufficient discouragement to those tempted to alcoholic overindulgence. As Murray notes:

Spartan rituals are indeed designed to display the proper use of alcohol
and to relate its power to the distinction between citizen-equal and
slave-unequal, as in the curious custom of humiliating helots by making

³⁵ Xen. *Lac* I.3: 'Wine is either withheld altogether, or, if allowed them, is diluted with water'. This comment is misleading; most wine consumed in the Greek world was watered down. See 208; 221-222.

³⁶ Xen. *Lac* V.4: 'And indeed he [Lycurgus] removed compulsory drink, which undoes both body and mind. He declared that whoever was thirsty could drink, believing drink to be then most harmless and most pleasurable'. It is debateable whether there were drastic differences between the Spartan and Athenian drinking experiences. Davidson calls attention to a remark of Diogenes the Cynic in a fragment of Aristotle's *Rhetoric* that makes an ironic comparison between the messes of Sparta and the bars of Athens; Arist. *Rhet.* 3.10.4, 1411a24. Davidson (1997a), 392.

them drunk on unmixed wine.³⁷

Thomas Figueira notes the inconsistency of the anecdotal material about Spartan drinking provided by Xenophon and Plutarch.³⁸ Indeed, he sees discrepancies between this, and figures for mess contributions derived from Plutarch's *Life of Lycurgus*, and a fragment of the *Tripolitikos* of Dicaearchus of Messene contained in the *Deipnosophistae*.³⁹ From these figures, Figueira reaches the following conclusion:

At 12 *khoes* a month, the Spartiate would be consuming wine at a rate approaching the highest levels attested for healthy adult males in military contexts.⁴⁰

However, he believes that the wine was not consumed solely by the Spartiates, but was partially distributed to the Helots (he bases his argument on the anecdote that the Helots were made to drink until intoxicated to serve as a warning against drunkenness to Spartiates).⁴¹ However, even with this distribution, the low levels of Spartan drinking related by Xenophon and Plutarch do not seem to correspond with the data.

It was certainly recognised that wine was able to present certain physiological, as well as moral, threats to humanity. For instance, Philo regarded wine, at least in its undiluted state, as a noxious substance:

φάρμακον δέ, εἰ καὶ οὐ θανάτου, μανίας γοῦν ἄκρατον εἶναι
αἴτιον συμβέβηκε.⁴²

The term ἄκρατος is of great significance in Greek (although to a much lesser extent in Roman) culture. In contrast to modern practices with wine consumption, Greeks tended

³⁷ Murray (1991), 91.

³⁸ Figueira (1984).

³⁹ Fr. 72 Wherli; Ath. *Deip.* 141c.

⁴⁰ Figueira (1984), 94.

⁴¹ Plut. *Lyc.* 28.8-9; *Inst. Lac.* 239B.

⁴² Philo *Noah* 147: 'Strong drink is a poison, resulting if not in death, at least in madness'.

to drink their wine heavily diluted with water (a little like French children). They believed that drinking wine in its unadulterated form was not just potentially extremely dangerous, but was also the custom of savage and barbarous races.⁴³ The ratio of wine to water was, if the texts reflect actual practice, carefully considered when arranging a symposiastic gathering.⁴⁴ Yet, curiously, Plutarch endeavours to make an etymological connection between ἄκρατος and the term for ‘breakfast’ (ἀκράτισμα) by asserting that, in the past, breakfast had consisted of bread dipped in undiluted wine:

φασί γὰρ ἐκεῖνους, ἐργατικούς ἄμα καὶ σώφρονας ὄντας, ἔωθεν
ἐσθίειν ἄρτον ἐν ἀκράτῳ, καὶ μήθ' ἄλλο.⁴⁵

It is intriguing that Athenaeus remarks that the use of the adjective ἄκρατος could also be used with reference to water (presumably meaning ‘water unmixed with wine’, rather than vice-versa):

“ Ὅτι καὶ ἐπὶ τοῦ ὕδατος ἔταπτον οἱ παλαιοὶ ἄκρατον.
Σώφρων: “ὕδωρ ἄκρατον εἰς τὸν κύλικα ”.⁴⁶

Galen could point to the properties of wine that could bring cheer to men’s souls and aided the digestive process, and yet, at the same time, could emphasise wine’s potential dangers by remarking on Homeric warnings against its excessive ingestion, and noting Plato’s proposed restrictions upon its use.⁴⁷ Latin literature, too, is replete with ambivalent musings about the fruits of the vine, with endless paeans to wine and its role in the delights of the *convivium* sharply contrasted with frequent castigation of excessive drinking. The intoxicated debauchery of statesmen in antiquity is a familiar *topos*, with a

⁴³ Although neat wine *was* used for libations to the gods; Wilkins and Hill (2006), 176.

⁴⁴ Plut. *Quaest. conviv.* III.9.

⁴⁵ Plut. *Quaest. conviv.* VIII.6, 726C: ‘It is said that in those days, being hardworking and sober, at the break of day they used to eat bread dipped in undiluted wine, and nothing else’. Athenaeus states that this was still the practice at the time that he was writing; *Deip.* 11c.

⁴⁶ Fr. 94 in Ath. *Deip.* 44b: ‘The ancients used to say ‘unmixed’ even of water. Sophron : ‘unmixed water into the cup’.

⁴⁷ Gal. *QAM.* ; Hom. *Od.* xxi. 293-8; Pl. *Leg.* II, 666a-c.

strong emphasis upon the putative relationship between drunkenness and tyrannical or aberrant behaviour.⁴⁸ This does not necessarily mean that opinion was polarised between the two extremes of those who loved wine and those who abhorred it. Those who warned of the dangers of wine were frequently just as aware of its potential benefits. The essential question was one of vigilance and control: who consumed wine, the amount that was imbibed, the pace of drinking and the context in which the drinking took place. As Lissarrague comments, regulation was crucial and was widely acknowledged as being absolutely necessary in order to preserve both moral and social stability.⁴⁹ What seems strange is that such control does not seem to have been imposed from above, and was rather a matter of self-regulation.

It would be a grave mistake to make the assumption that the characteristics of drinking practices were uniform across the Graeco-Roman world, or that they remained static and unchanging over time. The Greek *symposium* was, as far as we are aware, an exclusively male affair (with the exception of the female entertainment), with drinking following the meal and involving a highly organised pattern that constituted poetry recitation and composition, the singing of songs, and games of manual dexterity (such as *kottabos*).⁵⁰ Although this drinking would have been a post-prandial affair, it seems likely that some form of snack or dessert (τράγηματτα), perhaps nuts or fruits, served as an accompaniment to the sympotic drinking.⁵¹ The Roman drinking environment seems less likely to have physically excluded women (although they may not have been permitted to drink wine) and drinking would seem to have occurred with the meal, rather than after it. Oddly, then, the latter phenomenon seems to correspond more closely to what one may think of as ‘Mediterranean drinking’, whilst Greek practice superficially seems to be approximate to the drinking cultures of modern Northern Europe.

As frequently occurs today, those who choose to abstain completely from

⁴⁸ Suet. *Tib.* 42; *Claud.* 33; Plut. *Alex.*; Cic. *Phil.* II. Also *SHA: Verus* 10.9; *M. Ant.* 9.3. Often, the virtuous ruler is characterised by his abstemiousness in both food and drink; Suet. *Iul.* 53; *Aug.* 87. See Scott (1929), 133-141; MacUrdu (1930), 294-297; McKinlay (1939), 51-61.

⁴⁹ Lissarrague (1990), 9-10.

⁵⁰ See Pellizer (1990), 181 for presence of women at Greek symposia.

⁵¹ See pages 115-116. It seems unlikely that no drinking at all would have taken place during eating.

alcohol are sometimes regarded as somewhat puritanical and joyless.⁵² The objections to alcohol usage may stem (and very often do) from religious stipulations that prohibit its use: one may think of the Islamic interdiction on alcohol, and also the Mormons' avoidance of it. Those who shun alcohol and proffer reasons that are unconnected to piety, or from medical reasons, may be seen as, in some way, rejecting human conviviality. In many modern cultures, the giving and receiving of alcohol may suggest a multiplicity of sentiments: hospitality, celebration, commemoration. Teetotalism may imply a complete rejection of these values. The ancient texts seem to suggest that this suspicion of teetotalers was shared by at least some in antiquity. Plutarch regarded them as essentially tedious characters that constituted mediocre company.⁵³ Horace thought that those who did not drink wine should not be permitted to compose poetry, as they lacked the necessary poetic inspiration that wine may provide.⁵⁴ This is not necessarily to say that water was a stigmatised substance, merely that those who drank it in preference to wine were sometimes viewed as bland and fatuous. It is true, however, that water was not without its dangers. Vitruvius may have lauded water as something that was indispensable to human existence

est enim maxime necessaria et ad vitam et ad delectiones et ad usum
cotidianum

but he knew that not all water tasted the same nor possessed identical properties.⁵⁵ Some sources produced water that was pleasant to drink, but from others seeped liquid death.⁵⁶ Other waters had acidic qualities, caused intoxication, stupidity, or even made one's

⁵² Plaut. *Aul.* 572-574. Megadorus's invitation to Euclio to drink water is rebuffed by the latter, who insists that he is only drinking water. This is met with incredulity. For modern temperance, see Carlson (1998), 659-691; Schneider (1978), 361-372.

⁵³ Plut. *Quaest. Conviv.* I.iv.2. Dodds (1933), 101: 'Teetotalers are offensive people (ἀηδέϊς): they make better nursemaids than symposiarchs'.

⁵⁴ Hor. *Epist.* i.19.8-9. See Smith (1984), 255-71; McKinlay (1946), 161-7. See also Cratinus, *Anth. Pal.* xiii.29, Kock i.74, Ath. *Deip.* II, 39c: 'You who drink water can never produce anything good (ὕδωρ δὲ πίνων χρηστὸν οὐδὲν ἂν τέκοις)'. See Wilkins (2000), 243-256.

⁵⁵ Vitr. *De arch.* VIII, I, 1: 'It is indeed of the greatest necessity for life, for pleasure, for everyday use'.

⁵⁶ Vitr. *De arch.* VIII, III, 1; VIII, III, 15-17.

teeth fall out.⁵⁷ Athenaeus, too, was keen to make a survey of the diverse types of water that were available and their various attributes.⁵⁸ Cicero, in the *Pro Caelio*, alludes to water that was being used for prostitutes to wash themselves after sexual intercourse.⁵⁹ It may be imprudent to extrapolate from this that water was somehow commonly connected in the popular imagination with both prostitution and intimate hygienic maintenance, although it is plausible that water may have been thought of as being particularly (but not exclusively) associated with washing and, in particular, the experience of the baths.⁶⁰ Thus, water in this context may have been considered as a good and useful thing, although not as something that one should drink. Of course, water was considered essential in antiquity, not just for the cleansing physical filth from the body (especially before meals), but was also used to achieve spiritual cleanliness in some rites of purification.⁶¹

Those who abstained from wine have, as has been asserted, received short shrift from ancient commentators. Even those who escape direct censure for their sobriety are damned with faint praise. Seneca, in a letter, discusses the problems of drunkenness, citing such notorious examples as Alexander the Great and Marcus Antonius. He talks of Zeno's argument that one cannot entrust an argument to a drunken man, countering it with the observation that soldiers may often be given covert orders when they are intoxicated:

cogita enim quam multis militibus non semper sobriis et imperator et
tribunus et centurio tacenda mandaverint⁶²

⁵⁷ Vitruvius, *De arch.* VIII,III,17-23.

⁵⁸ Athenaeus, *Deip.* 40-46.

⁵⁹ Cicero, *Cael.* 34. Also Bruun (1997), 364-73; Butrica (1999a), 136-9, Butrica (1999b), 336. In the latter, the author points to 'a special connection between prostitutes and the use of water. This is the word *aquariolus*, defined in the *OLD* as "a servant who supplied washing-water for prostitutes"', 336.

⁶⁰ I say 'not exclusively' as I am aware that the rural and urban attitudes to water in the Roman world may have been very different. If the urban experience of water centred around the baths, beyond the limits of the city, water may have been conceptualised in terms of agriculture, particularly the irrigation of crops.

⁶¹ Burkert (1985), 70-73; Parker (1983), 226ff.

⁶² Seneca, *Ep.* 83: 'Consider indeed how often generals and tribunes and centurions give concealed orders to soldiers who are not always sober?.'

He refers to an infamous drunkard, Tillius Cimber, part of the conspiracy to assassinate Julius Caesar, and compares him with Cassius who *tota vita aquam bibit*. It is unclear whether Seneca is attempting to link sobriety with heroic tyrannicide or treachery; either way, Cassius makes an unlikely poster boy for the moral benefits of drinking water. These water-drinkers hail from no particular socio-political or economic class. They are geographically diffuse, as Athenaeus' catalogue of noted water imbibers makes evident: Theodorus of Larissa; rather oddly, all of the Iberian people; the musician Lamprias.⁶³ It is purported (by himself) that the orator Demosthenes was a water drinker, at least temporarily.⁶⁴ His sobriety is used not to castigate him as tedious and pedantic. Here, instead, it is associated with hard work and diligent study, as is made clear in this comparison with a fellow orator Demades:

καὶ Πυθέας γοῦν φησιν· “ἀλλὰ τοὺς νῦν δημαγωγούς ὀράτε
 Δημοσθένη καὶ Δημάδην ὡς ἐναντίως τοῖς βίοις διάκεινται.
 Ὁ μὲν γὰρ ὑδροποτῶν καὶ μεριμνῶν τὰς νύκτας, ὡς φασιν,
 ὁ δὲ πορνοβοσκῶν καὶ μεθυσκόμενος κατὰ τὴν ἡμέραν
 ἐκάστην προγάζτωρ ἡμῖν ἐν ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις ἀνακαλεῖ.”⁶⁵

It should come as little surprise that it was supposed that Pythagoras was reputed to have abstained from wine. John of Stobaeus credits the philosopher with the maxim that τὴν μέθην μανίας εἶναι μελέτην.⁶⁶ He goes on to add:

Πυθαγόρας ἐρωτηθεὶς πῶς ἂν οἰνόφλυξ τοῦ μεθύειν παύσαιτο,
 ‘εἰ συνεχῶς’ ἔφη ‘θεωροίη τὰ ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ πρασσόμενα’.⁶⁷

⁶³ Ath. *Deip.* 44b-d.

⁶⁴ Ath. *Deip.* 44e.

⁶⁵ Fr. III.2 Baier-Sauppe in Ath. *Deip.* 44f: ‘And Pytheas at least says: “Also you now see the demagogues Demosthenes and Demades and how they are opposite in lifestyles. For one, so they say, drinks water and thinks earnestly during the nights, whilst the other keeps prostitutes and gets drunk every day, and with his fat paunch appeals to us in the Assembly meetings”’.

⁶⁶ Stob. *Flor.* XVIII.23.

⁶⁷ Stob. *Flor.* XVIII.33: ‘Pythagoras, having been asked how a drunkard may be cured of intoxication, said ‘if he frequently considers what his actions were when he was drunk’.

Pythagoras, of course, is a rather interesting case, in that, generally, no two sources tend to agree on reportage of his life or Pythagorean ideology. Iamblichus believed that those who aspired to the highest levels of Pythagorean philosophy were urged to abstain from wine.⁶⁸ Diogenes Laertius seems equivocal upon the subject. He asserts that it was the Pythagorean belief that, for mental and physical well-being, one should drink only water (καὶ λιτόν ὕδωρ πίνουσιν).⁶⁹ However, he goes on to mention that Pythagoras was reputed to have never consumed wine *during the day* (οἴνου δὲ μεθ' ἡμέραν μὴ γευέσθαι).⁷⁰ The inference here is that he did in fact drink wine at other times (although this is unsupported in other texts). The figure of Pythagoras is significant when studying issues of abstinence in antiquity as it appears that regulation over the types of food that were permissible (meats, beans) to the Pythagorean sect may be linked with systems of control, both of who could become part of this community and of the mind and body for the purposes of purity and spiritual discipline. Wine clearly presented itself as a potential threat to self-control, and this is echoed in the way in which cultures have sought to control who has access to alcohol. An equilibrium is sought between the pleasures and benefits of alcohol, and its potential to shatter the social order.

It would be wrong to assume that these attitudes to alcohol were concrete and absolute. Alcohol could be deemed appropriate or not, dependent on time and context. There would undoubtedly have been occasions when a temporary interdiction on alcohol would have been obligatory or, at least, desirable. It has already been noted that certain foods became prohibited for a short period within the context of a particular religious festival or ritual. Plutarch, in a discussion concerning the origins of the Homeric appellation of salt as divine (θεῖον) remarks that certain religious considerations may require temporary abstinence from particular practices.⁷¹ This may include the drinking of wine:

αἱ γὰρ ἀγνεῖαι καὶ παιδοποιίαν καὶ γέλωτα καὶ οἶνον καὶ πολλὰ

⁶⁸ Iambl. *VP* 15.69; 17.78; 24.107-8.

⁶⁹ Diog. Laert. *Pythag.* VIII.13

⁷⁰ Diog. Laert. *Pythag.* VIII.19.

⁷¹ Plut. *Quaest. Conviv.* V.10

τῶν ἄλλως ἀξίων σπουδῆς ἀφαιροῦσι.⁷²

Alcohol consumption may be considered as acceptable to some members of the community but not to others. Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazusa* deals extensively with male concerns about female drinking.⁷³ Aelian claims that there was a law in place at Massilia that prohibited women from drinking wine, limiting them to water only.⁷⁴ He also alludes to a similarly stringent item of Roman legislation that forbade wine to women, slaves and men between adolescence and the age of thirty-five.⁷⁵ The elder Pliny, too, remarks upon famous examples of draconian measures taken against women if they were suspected of having drunk too much (or indeed any) wine.⁷⁶ Plato similarly saw a need for regulating which sections of society had access to this dangerous substance.⁷⁷ He was particularly concerned about its potentially injurious effects upon youth. Of some concern was the access that the lower orders had to alcohol. Purcell comments on the growth of urban drinking establishments in Rome during the imperial period, but notes that it was 'in the very late Republic and Empire that low-class establishments selling wine attract the systematic attention of the authorities'.⁷⁸ Davidson address similar concerns in Greek culture about the growth of the phenomenon of the tavern (καπηλεῖον) within the context of Greek urban space.⁷⁹ He posits that such was the level of anxiety about such establishments that they had been banned in Athens.⁸⁰

⁷² Plut. *Quaest. Conviv.* V.10.684-885: 'Purity prohibits childbearing, laughter, wine and many other things worthy of zeal'.

⁷³ The *Thesmophoria* had its own dietary restrictions; see page 174.

⁷⁴ Ael. *VH.* 2.38.

⁷⁵ Ael. *VH.* 2.38.

⁷⁶ Plin. *HN* XIV.xiv.89-91.

⁷⁷ Pl. *Leg.* 2.666a3-b3. Also Belfiore (1986), 421-437.

⁷⁸ Purcell (1985), 15. Purcell does not make it clear that this attention is because of drunken behaviour or something else (congregation of the poor, excessive noise, fire hazard). However, as he goes on to refer to Ammianus Marcellinus' view of Rome as a seat of inebriated misbehaviour, we must assume that he means the former. His footnote (note 70) seems to indicate that there was some lawlessness, even during the early Empire, owing to wine prices and distribution.

⁷⁹ Davidson (1997a), 392-395. Davidson (1997b), 53-60.

⁸⁰ Davidson (1997a), 393. Davidson posits that such prohibition had as much to do with a fear on the part

Davidson makes a sharp distinction between mass and elite drinking practices within Greek culture. Wilkins, in contrast, sees the lines as rather more blurred. He perceives a broad spectrum of plausible contexts within which drinking could take place. The *symposium* should not necessarily be regarded as having been the exclusive preserve of the elite *stratum* of society:

‘It seems to me that it is a mistake to contrast the symposium, a generally private affair celebrated in the homes of members of the elites of the city states, with the festivals and other public and communal activities of the city community as a whole...the symposium appears to have been open to all, to have been celebrated on public and private occasions, and in civic contexts as well as private homes...The distribution and drinking of wine, like the distribution of meat, seems to have operated across the classes and through ritual and commercial outlets. Thus a poor citizen might expect to eat most meat at public festivals and to drink wine among peers and friends on more limited occasions than the rich. But the *kapeleion* or wine shop/grocer should not be seen as the poor man’s equivalent of the symposium. It was an additional, non-ritualised place for drinking’.⁸¹

If Wilkins’ analysis is correct, the separation of drinking practices between the wealthy elite and the less privileged sections of society (at least in the Greek context) was rather less marked than was once supposed. It seems that alcoholic aspirations could be

of oligarchic government of gatherings of the people as it was of drunkenness. As he notes: ‘An oligarchic regime may simply have shared the prejudices of Theopompus and Isocrates against the practice of drinking in bars, seeing a ban as a measure against decadence and vulgarity, but it is not hard to think of more practical considerations too. Any kind of gathering of the lower classes was threatening to a newly installed oligarchy’; 395.

⁸¹ Wilkins and Hill (2006), 177-8. See also Fisher (2000), 356-357.

downwardly as well as upwardly mobile. Suetonius refers to the young Nero, disguised with a cap or a wig, enjoying nocturnal rambles through the streets of Rome, drinking and carousing in taverns.⁸² It is plausible that aristocrats may have found the *milieu* of patrician revelry rather stifling and sterile, and perhaps would have enjoyed the occasional opportunity to ‘rough it’ in the disreputable company of freedmen and slaves.⁸³ Edwards offers an alternative explanation:

the emperor [Nero] might draw attention to his own transcendence of social rules by temporarily embracing a conspicuously low role. Nero could safely ignore social convention for there was no danger he would be confused with those who really were ‘low’...⁸⁴

Let us turn to the question of how the consumption of wine was regulated. Essentially, such control would either have come from internal self-regulation or external judicial sanctions. Let us turn first to the former. By ‘self-regulation’ is meant the manner in which individuals *or groups* could choose to manage their own drinking, without recourse to legal sanctions. For such a process to take place, there had to be a recognition that the ingestion of an excess of alcohol was an undesirable thing, and that it was the ultimate responsibility (even the duty) of oneself (or one’s peers) to regulate the amount that was consumed. In Greek sympotic culture, the task of exercising this control fell to the *symposiarch*. It is not certain how much of a dictatorial role this was, with amount, ratio of wine dilution and speed of drinking imposed upon the group by one individual. In the *Symposium*, Plato recounts a drinking party where the guests,

⁸² Suet. *Ner.* 26.

⁸³ These sorts of activities may have been a fairly commonplace occurrence amongst groups of aristocratic youths. See Eyben (1993), 107-112. In fact, Eyben suggests that Nero provided a role model for such activities.

⁸⁴ Edwards (1993), 193. This argument seems unconvincing. Nero’s nocturnal activities in the streets and taverns were carried out in disguise. The only people to know his true identity would have been his companions or bodyguards. Any other encounter would surely have resulted in the emperor being mistaken for someone who was “low”. If this were not the case, the activity would have been largely pointless. Eyben (1993), however, suggests Nero’s activities provided an impetus for other youths to behave in a similar way. Cass. Dio LXI.8; Tac. *Ann.* XIII.25.

physically and mentally enfeebled by the rigours of the previous night's carousing, reach a collective agreement to reduce their intake on the present occasion:

ταῦτα δὴ ἀκούσαντας συγχωρεῖν πάντας μὴ διὰ μέθης ποιήσασθαι
τὴν ἐν τῷ παρόντι συνουσίαν, ἀλλ' οὕτω πίνοντας πρὸς ἡδονήν.⁸⁵

The atmosphere is relaxed, although it retains its ritualised nature. Eryximachus seems to have usurped the authority of the host, Agathon, and suggests the dismissal of the flute girl and proclaims his willingness to propose a topic to discuss. On this particular occasion, consensus seems to have replaced the authority of the *symposiarch*. It remains a matter of conjecture as to whether such laxity was a common occurrence or whether this Platonic gathering was a relatively rare example of symposiastic self-determination. Plutarch has several observations to make upon the nature of the role.⁸⁶ One of his interlocutors, Crato, seeks to define the *symposiarch* as being of an exceptionally convivial nature (τόν δέ συμποτῶν συμποτικώτατον), and who is neither easily prey to intoxication, nor hesitant in enthusiastically participating in the drinking:

ἔστι δὲ τοιοῦτος ἄν μήτε τῷ μεθύειν εὐάλωτος ἢ μήτε πρὸς τὸ
πινεῖν ἀποθύμος.⁸⁷

He goes on to stress that it is absolutely vital that he who controls the drinking must be aware that each man may react to drink in a different way. He must be able to direct proceedings so that drunkenness does not descend too quickly and thus sour the

⁸⁵ Pl. *Symp.* 176e: 'Having heard this, they all agreed not to make drunkenness the reason for the present get-together, but to drink for pleasure'.

⁸⁶ Plut. *Quaest. Conviv.* I.4 *What sort of a man the symposiarch must be* (Ποῖον τινα δεῖ τὸν συμποσίαρχον εἶναι). Interestingly, again on this occasion of a literary *symposium*, although a *symposiarch* is appointed (Plutarch appoints himself), the guests are invited to set their own pace of drinking (κελεύω τοὺς μὲν ἄλλους ὡς βούλονται πινεῖν ἐν τῷ παρόντι); I.4,620B. This seems to belie Lissarrague's assertion that the dictates of the *symposiarch* required absolute obedience; Lissarrague (1990), 8.

⁸⁷ Plut. *Quaest. Conviv.* I.4,620C: 'He is such if he is neither easily overcome by drink nor disinclined to drink'.

occasion.⁸⁸ There existed a fragile boundary between a pleasant *soirée* and a drunken debauch.

Even within the context of an elite male assemblage, consisting of those with free access to wine and who were judged able to estimate how much they could safely imbibe, restraints were considered necessary to ensure that an abundance of wine did not produce anarchy, violence and overpowering sexual lust from the guests. If this sounds like an implausible scenario, one only has to read the accounts of inebriated symposiasts who, in their extreme state of intoxication, imagine themselves to be in a ship at sea.⁸⁹ Plutarch reasoned that symposiarchical management involved matching guests, arranging a mixture of games, songs and discussion, lubricated with just the right amount of wine, in order to produce an harmonious whole. The consumption of food prior to (and perhaps concomitant with) the drinking bout may have slowed the effects of the alcohol, but perhaps the most significant element of regulation during the *symposium* was the dilution of the wine with water. Undiluted wine was regarded as truly the mark of an uncivilised being.⁹⁰ Plutarch treats this briefly, attempting to establish the most useful ratio of water to wine dilution. The pithy discussion revolves around the maxim ἢ πέντε πινεῖν ἢ τρεῖς ἢ μή τέσσερα, established by the musicians of Dionysus.⁹¹ There are enumerated a number of possible permutations, with the ratio of three parts of water to one of wine being regarded as too ineffective, whilst two parts water to one of wine is too potent. The mixture that consisted of three parts of water to two of wine is perceived as being the ideal mean.⁹² Lissarrague conceives this quest for the correct mix of wine and water as being an allegory of

Greek morality, which idealises balance (but neither frustration nor

⁸⁸ Plut. *Quaest. conviv.* I.4,620E-621B.

⁸⁹ Pind. fr. 124a Snell; Timaeus 566F 149 in Ath. *Deip.* 37b-d. See Slater (1976), 161-70; Wilkins (2000), 224, 238-241.

⁹⁰ Wine dilution may not always have been inspired by this ideological stance. After all, there are sound economic reasons for the practice, not least in that it enabled those engaged in selling it to achieve a greater profit.

⁹¹ Plut. *Quaest. Conviv.* III.9,657B. See also Wilkins (2000), 216-218.

⁹² Plut. *Quaest. Conviv.* III.9,657C-D.

self-denial).⁹³

It is not certain as to whether such ratios were consistently (if ever) applied, or whether the reality of sympotic drinking was a good deal less formalised (and much messier). It may have been the case, as the two cited literary instances indicate, that the speed of drinking and strength of wine depended on the mood of the guests on a particular occasion. It is also possible that the ratio and speed changed over the course of a drinking bout.

The atmosphere of the Roman *convivium* seems to have been a less controlled affair, with a rather more nebulous concept of what was expected as far as drinking behaviour was concerned. There was less emphasis on the centrality of drinking control, with greater choice exercised by the individual in how much was consumed.⁹⁴ The two principal differences between the *convivium* and the *symposium* were that the former occasion permitted the presence of women as guests (not merely as servants or entertainment), and that it also integrated the activity of drinking with the meal. As Dunbabin notes, the difference is etched into the etymology:

The more idealised Roman view of dining is expressed by Cicero, when he makes the aged Cato commend the early Romans for choosing the term *convivium* (literally ‘living together’) to describe ‘the reclining of friends at a banquet, because it implies the conjunction of life’, in preference to the Greek terms ‘drinking together’ or ‘eating together’ (i.e. *symposion* or *syndeipnon*).⁹⁵

The result of this may have been that the quintessential Roman experience may have been inclined towards less drunkenness, owing to the mitigating factors of food and the presence of women (the former slowing the physical effects of alcohol, the latter perhaps moderating behaviour). Aelian remarks that it was unusual for women to be partial to wine:

⁹³ Lissarrague (1990), 10.

⁹⁴ Dunbabin (2003), 22.

⁹⁵ Dunbabin (2003), 13.

ἄτοπον μὲν γυνὴ φιλοπότις, καὶ πολυπότις ἔτι μᾶλλον.⁹⁶

It is not clear from this whether women drinkers were an unusual species because, in general, their sex did not like wine, but considering that there were so many cultural and legislative barriers placed in their way of consuming it, it would not be surprising if few of them managed to develop a taste for it. However, caution should be exercised when considering these tales of draconian measures against women who were suspected of having consumed wine, particularly in the Latin sources.⁹⁷ They may have formed part of the literary *topos* that sought to envisage early Roman society as unblemished by later alien ‘decadent’ practices. These stern morality tales refashion history with a hefty dose of misogyny, restoring distorted social hierarchies and eradicating foreign cultural contamination. These accounts seek to re-establish patriarchal power. Their credibility as evidence of social practice is thus severely compromised. However, they have much to say about questions of the negotiation of identity, in this case the blurring of gender boundaries and the threat of patriarchal power under assault.

There are many accounts of extreme drinking practices amongst the Roman elite. When Cicero castigated Marcus Antonius for vomiting, whilst hungover, as he conducted public business, it is noted that he had been drinking excessively at a wedding.⁹⁸ The elder Pliny reports a trend that occurred during the reign of Tiberius for both drinking upon an empty stomach, and drinking before the start of the meal:

Tiberio Claudio principe ante hos annos XL institutum ut ieiuni biberunt
potusque vini antecederet cibos.⁹⁹

This seems more an attempt at achieving early intoxication, rather than an example of a

⁹⁶ Ael. *VH* 2.41: ‘It is odd for a woman to be partial to drink, and still more so for her to be a big drinker’.

⁹⁷ Wilkins makes a connection between the limits placed upon female drinking and Roman sumptuary legislation relating to female expenditure on clothing and jewellery; Wilkins and Hill (2006), 179.

⁹⁸ Cic. *Phil.* II. 25.63.

⁹⁹ Plin. *HN* XIV.xxvii.143: ‘Forty years ago in the reign of Tiberius Claudius, they began to drink whilst fasting and to drink wine before the meal’.

pre-meal *aperitif*. It indicates that Roman drinking was not always implacably wedded to eating. Juvenal scathingly refers to a woman drinking on an empty stomach, to quench her thirst and stimulate her appetite:

de quo sextarius alter/ducitur ante cibum rabidam facturus orexim.¹⁰⁰

It may not always be helpful to define these activities in such static ways. Inevitably, external cultural influences, changing fashions and immigrant influx will produce transformations in behaviour. In some instances, Greek and Roman drinking practices were not so far apart. For instance, there did exist a form of drinking party (*comissatio*) within Roman culture, although it may have been a more marginalised phenomenon than its Greek counterpart.¹⁰¹ Roller attempts to make an etymological connection between symposiastic drinking and the Roman *comissatio* by seeing a possible derivation of the Latin term from κῶμος.¹⁰² In fact, he proceeds to define the *comissatio* as little more than an *al fresco* drunken debauch.¹⁰³ There are numerous references to excessive drinking in Latin poetry, and it is not always evident whether this was taking place within the context of the *convivium* or the *comissatio*. Martial's quaffing,¹⁰⁴ and Horace's boast that he could outdrink the Thracian bacchants,¹⁰⁵ may point to social occasions in which drinking, rather than eating, were the focus, or they may be instances of literary self-presentation, in which heroic toping becomes part of a strategy of self-aggrandisement. The 'sophisticated' Greek ideal has seemingly become debased as it becomes subsumed under Roman cultural hegemony. Perhaps the problem lies not so much in a divergence of attitudes, rather in the idealised way in which these forms have been presented in literature. Perhaps the carefully regulated *symposium* is just a literary fiction, representing an aspirational ideal, rather than a reality. It may be profitable, when considering Roman practice, to think about the way in which it would have been

¹⁰⁰ Juv. VI. 427-428: 'She quaffs two pints before dinner to stimulate her appetite'.

¹⁰¹ Dunbabin (2003), 21. She notes the emulation by the *comissatio* of the form of the *symposium*, with the *magister* or *arbiter bibendi* taking over the role of *symposiarch*. See also Faas (1994), 87-101.

¹⁰² Roller (2006), 186. See Pütz (2007).

¹⁰³ Roller (2006), 188.

¹⁰⁴ Mart. *Epig.* I, 27.

¹⁰⁵ Hor. *Carm.* II, vii.

altered by other cultural influences. It seems plausible that some sort of hybridisation may have occurred, resulting in a bastardised phenomenon, neither *symposium* nor *convivium*, but something else entirely.

It may prove of some use when considering these elite drinking practices to return to the previously discussed notion of ‘keying’.¹⁰⁶ This indicated the way in which rituals and settings connected with drinking serve to mark separate modes of behaviour, and to delineate the boundaries between work and leisure. It seems evident that this may assist us to comprehend the ritualised and hermetically sealed world of symposiastic drinking. Male peer bonding, and the loosening of inhibitions occurs within a tightly controlled context. Drunkenness was an eventual conclusion to the proceedings and through the *komos*, this would have spilled out into the public sphere, but for the most part, the activities were confined to the *andron*. The rules of the *symposium* took temporary precedence over cultural norms. Transient licence was allowed to the participants. The world of everyday ‘non-drinking’ life did not intersect with that of the *symposium*. This demarcation may also serve to explain such criticisms as Cicero aimed at Marcus Antonius, which revolved not so much around his excessive drinking, but his inability to keep it from impacting upon his public duties. The realms of *otium* and *negotium* have been intermingled by the antics of the drink-sodden Antonius, and it is apparent that Cicero believes this to be entirely inappropriate: patrician decorum has been compromised. Thus, it may be posited that within these elite cultures, excessive drinking, even drunkenness, was not necessarily condemned, but was subject to the severest criticism if it transgressed certain cultural rules that specified the physical and temporal occasions for such activities. Private and public spheres were sharply contrasted, and it seems that notions of decorum and debauchery were mutually exclusive. Sobriety in these private occasions was an inappropriate state of being, whilst drunkenness was unacceptable in the public realm of work and duty.

Throughout the ancient sources, there is often a marked distrust of life’s visceral pleasures, and the potential harm they could wreak, not merely upon public order, but upon the very fabric of aristocratic society itself. Athenian young men could guzzle fish and wine, and could lust after unsuitable youths. The cream of Roman aristocracy could whore, drench themselves in exotic scent and drink away their inheritance. All these

¹⁰⁶ See pages 201-202.

activities could be perceived as a cancer relentlessly eating away at society itself. Edwards notes that these concerns were usually self-referential; the descent of the lower orders into self-destruction was of far less importance. She also makes the crucial point that, in choosing to squander vast sums of money upon prostitutes, gambling and drinking, they helped to facilitate a minor form of undesirable social revolution, as:

by surrendering to the attractions of the life of pleasure, they [the prodigal] call into question the desirability of the life of virtue. But they also disrupt the social order by causing money to flow outside its proper channels'.¹⁰⁷

Thus far, the focus of this investigation has been the drinking activities of the elite. This, of course, is partly the result of the aristocratic authorship of many of the texts, and their tendency to be self-referential. It is interesting to note that such was the ambivalence of attitude towards alcohol that even the most well educated and the most economically and politically powerful needed to guard against its potency. And yet, it would be foolish to deny that a compelling reason for drinking alcohol is to experience some level of intoxication. Greek idealism may have seen wine as a subtle relaxant, lubricating the wheels of social interaction, but there is no denying that the ability of wine, taken in excess, to alter consciousness radically and break down inhibitions must have proved a powerful draw, at least to some. After all, the end result of the *symposium* was a state of intoxication. Wine was frequently viewed as a source of poetic stimulation, lifting the poet from the level of the mundane to that of the divine.¹⁰⁸ This was by no means a universal view, as Commager remarks in an article on the function of wine in the *Odes* of Horace:

As confidence in a definable source of poetic genius had faded, intoxication had become an increasingly acceptable substitute for inspiration, until it was finally institutionalised by the so-called “wine drinkers” (*oinopotai*). Horace did not combat their belief professionally, as did the “water drinkers” (*hydropotai*), who seem to have maintained that mounting the Muses’

¹⁰⁷ Edwards (1993), 180.

¹⁰⁸ Wilkins (2000), 218.

chariot was only a more august confession of being on the wagon'.¹⁰⁹

Even if wine was considered as a legitimate source of poetic impetus,

wine drinking is also the source of brawling and total lack of order and control, and thus detrimental to poetic *ars*'.¹¹⁰

As in the *symposium*, control of inebriation is vital, in this case for artistic creation (although perhaps it is worth noting that this was probably only relevant to literary production; intoxication does not seem particularly useful when attempting to paint or sculpt).

What of the alcohol consumption of the rest of the society? Wilkins has suggested that it is unhelpful to think of elite and mass drinking cultures as being polar opposites within Greek culture, and it seems likely that these forms allowed for frequent shifts of position within this spectrum. Aristocrats could wallow in taverns, whilst the general population could seek to emulate elite forms of sympotic behaviour. Wilkins' argument is considerably strengthened by the assumed familiarity of the audience with sympotic activities in Athenian comedy.¹¹¹ If such activity were a distant and unfamiliar preserve of a rarefied clique, surely any comic potential which could have been exploited from them would be wasted upon a diverse non-aristocratic crowd? Fisher highlights one potential argument against this position: the audience has gained its knowledge not from symposia themselves, but from repeated exposure to dramatic representations of these activities.¹¹² Davidson notes that the implementation of any rigid division between rich and poor drinking may have been a stratagem of the elite to prevent the 'contamination' of their culture by the lower orders. He refers to the damning of taverns by the pamphleteer Isocrates:

Isocrates allows us to set up an opposition between two kinds of drinking,

¹⁰⁹ Commager (1957), 76.

¹¹⁰ Smith (1984), 257.

¹¹¹ Wilkins (2000), 208.

¹¹² Fisher (2000), 348.

the *potoi* (symptotic drinking) of the most ‘respectable’ (*epieikes*) and the tavern drinking of those ‘worse in nature’. Clearly, elements of social prejudice are in operation in his distinction between coarse low-class buffoonery (*bomolochia*) and decency (*epieikeia*)...¹¹³

Public bars and taverns were an obvious *milieu* for proletarian drinking, but one should also consider the occasions of public feasting and festivals. Fisher believes that here

many ‘aristocratic’ symptotic and komastic elements came to be incorporated into the styles of these collective celebrations.¹¹⁴

Bars (*kapeloi*), in Athens at least, were particularly associated with public drinking:

Kapeloi sold a range of goods, but in particular wine; they sometimes also provided a bar. In comedy the provision of drink appears to have been the main function of the *kapelos*. The *kapelleion* is of particular interest because of its apparent ubiquity (several passages refer to the neighbourhood bar-it was not necessary to go to the agora for this service) and its association with women drinkers and poorer citizens’.¹¹⁵

A large number of similar establishments have been uncovered in Roman towns, such as Ostia and Pompeii.¹¹⁶

One may speculate as to whether the drinking habits of the masses were subject to the same systems of checks and balances that were characteristic of the elite. It seems doubtful that those that occupied the lower rungs of the socio-economic ladder would have shared the concerns of decorum and dignity of a Cicero or an Isocrates. It is also a debatable matter as to whether they would have chosen to separate the worlds of ‘drinking’ and ‘non-drinking’ in the same way that the elite did. There is an alternative

¹¹³ Davidson (1997b), 58.

¹¹⁴ Fisher (2000), 362.

¹¹⁵ Wilkins (2000), 167. Also see pages 217-219.

¹¹⁶ Davidson (1997b), 54.

cultural schism provoked by alcohol to that proposed by Gusfield (and Gusfield himself is aware of this). He points to work/leisure alienation as being a significant motivator of drinking behaviour (at least in modern American culture). However, as Mary Douglas notes in some introductory remarks to the volume, there is another division:

Gusfield points out that in the pre-industrial work pattern men worked in all-male teams, as construction workers still do. In that pattern, the dominant cleavage is between work and home, work being associated with males and home with females. In this case, drinking alcohol, strong drink at that, is not separated from work, and by that token, it does not belong in the home'.¹¹⁷

If this model could be applied to the drinking culture of the masses in antiquity, many of whom would surely have been engaged in some form of manual labour, then we may speculate that drinking was not separated from work, but from the domestic sphere. There is still a gender division, but otherwise this arrangement is the inverse of elite behaviour. The affluent drink domestically (although in Greece not with families) but not publicly, and the poor do the opposite. There appears to exist no opprobrium for the latter group about drinking in the public sphere. All come together for drinking at festivals. Modern health and safety concerns tend to emphasise the incompatibility of intoxication and the operation of industrial machinery, but qualms about the potential accidents that may arise from intoxication may not have arisen within an ancient context. It is certainly possible that the wine consumed by such manual labourers was so diluted that any intoxicatory effects may have been negligible.¹¹⁸ Given this lack of a sense of shame, and the absence of a meaningful ideology of work/leisure partition, the restrictions upon alcohol were unlikely to have been self-imposed (excepting a lack of fiscal resources).¹¹⁹ Curbs on drinking would most likely have come from external

¹¹⁷ Douglas (1987), 8.

¹¹⁸ It should also be borne in mind that in slave-owning economies, much manual labour would have been performed by slaves, whose access to wine would have been through their masters.

¹¹⁹ The whole notion of a 'work versus leisure' ideology is problematic in itself, and I accept that the ancients adopted no coherent line upon the matter. Work (and perhaps here it is best defined as 'manual labour') could be viewed as both ennobling and pleasing to the gods, or debasing and suitable only for pack animals and slaves. Such attitudes could, of course, shift over time, and, undoubtedly, greater

judicial procedures. It has already been noted that the sources have indicated some form of legal sanctions existed to prevent Roman women and children from drinking alcohol, and it seems likely that slave access to it would have been tightly controlled by slave owners.¹²⁰ Perhaps legislation existed merely to deal with the crimes that may have resulted from excessive drinking- vandalism, violence, adultery-rather than acting as a preventative measure.¹²¹ There may have been some attempt to curtail the production of wine. Suetonius refers to Domitian's edict that sought to reduce the amount of vines planted in Italy.¹²² However, it is clear that such legislation was not aimed at combating mass drunkenness, but was a response to a crisis in Italian agriculture. Those who would argue against restrictions imposed on wine drinking by the poor may point to an edict of Aurelian in the late third century AD that proposed to add wine to the foods distributed to the poor of Rome (which also included oil, bread and pork).¹²³

It seems doubtful that financial considerations were a predominant factor in limiting drinking. Price may have dissuaded the impecunious from procuring expensive vintages, but they could always have access to the cheapest drinks.¹²⁴ The wine may have been much less palatable, but price hikes or taxation would surely not have driven the less-discerning drinker to abstinence in the same way that an increase in the duty on tobacco does not always discourage people from smoking cigarettes. In fact, some argue that such measures serve only to create a 'black-market' for such products, and drive them beyond the control of the legislative machine. Often, the product ends up being

economic prosperity (and hence a greater number of slaves) would have altered attitudes. For a discussion of this in a Greek context, see Balme (1984), 140-52. For Edwards (1993), the tension lies not between work and leisure *per se* but with the virtues or vices that are perceived to result from these activities (173-206). It should be emphasised that these concerns very much emanated from the *elite* segment of the Graeco-Roman world.

¹²⁰ For example, Cato *Agr.* LVII for wine rations for slaves. For restrictions on female drinking, see pages 223-224.

¹²¹ It seems more likely that, like sumptuary legislation, any controls would have stemmed from a desire to stop gatherings of people who may have harboured dissident cultural or political views. Compare this with Davidson on Athenian bars; Davidson (1997a), 215-216.

¹²² Suet. *Dom.*7. See Purcell (1985),⁵ who disagrees and sees it as part of a Domitianic 'mood of austerity'.

¹²³ SHA *Aurel.* 48.1.

¹²⁴ Garnsey (1999), 118-9.

less safe, and the government is deprived of revenue. Similarly, sumptuary legislation may have stopped (or attempted to stop) wealthy Romans from drinking expensive wines, but it would have done little to stop them drinking *per se* (unless considerations of taste made them reluctant to sample the wares from the cheaper end of the market).

The control of alcohol intake was undoubtedly of vital importance to both Greek and Roman societies. Alcoholic drinks were one of the markers of cultural identity that served to reinforce hierarchical structures of power, and indicated terms of inclusion and exclusion. Wine drinking marked the civilised nations as being different and superior to the barbarians who swilled beer. Internally, the type of wine that was consumed separated the affluent from the poor. The manner in which it was imbibed could, in spite of Wilkins' reservations, act in a similar way. However, such were the ambivalent powers of alcohol that it could also make possible the dissolution of hierarchical boundaries: wine as the great social leveller. Alcohol is always a double-edged sword. Aristocrats could dabble in the pleasures of the masses, but even with their supposed moral superiority, risked loosing the genie of egalitarianism from the bottle, thereby contaminating themselves. Intoxication could result in aspirations to the divine, but also a descent into the realms of bestiality. It could liberate one's true identity, by loosening the shackles of self-awareness and customary morality, but it could also liquefy the self by casting it adrift from its cultural and moral foundations. Only rigorous control could ensure that the individual (and the state) did not freefall into anarchy. Much of what is available in the sources point to a concern with the effects of alcohol on the ruling elite, and a sentiment that regulation lay very much with the self. This anti-authoritarian stance is quite startling, and surprising in its scant regard for the behaviour of the majority.

Much of what we read about the restriction on alcohol in Graeco-Roman antiquity points to concerns about the correct division of society, but also an intense awareness of the fragility of the bonds that act as society's glue. Alcohol is an agent that may easily dissolve that glue, rupturing society. Its destructive and beneficial powers were accorded equal recognition by the ancients. Like a wild animal, straining at its tether, an admiration for its beauty was tempered by the knowledge of its destructive force should it ever break free from its confinement.