

Food and drink

THE FERTILE MUD deposited by the annual Nile flood allowed farmers to grow barley and emmer wheat, the mainstay of the Egyptian diet. Stored in granaries, these crops were turned into bread or beer. The flood plain was also suitable for the cultivation of vegetables such as onions, garlic, leeks, beans, lentils, and lettuce. There were also gourds, dates and figs, cucumbers and melons, but no citrus fruits. Egyptian bakers made cakes of many shapes and sizes, sweetened by dates or by honey gathered from conical pottery beehives. Grapes grown in the Nile delta or oases of the western desert were plucked for wine-making or drying into raisins.

The poorer people had less meat and poultry, and more fish. The spread at banquets was extremely varied—from ducks, geese, and oxen to oryx and gazelle. There were also pigs, sheep, and goats, which could be boiled or roasted.



BUTCHERS AT WORK
An ox was slaughtered by tying three of its feet together, pushing it on its side, and cutting its throat. The free leg was cut, and sometimes given as a religious offering.



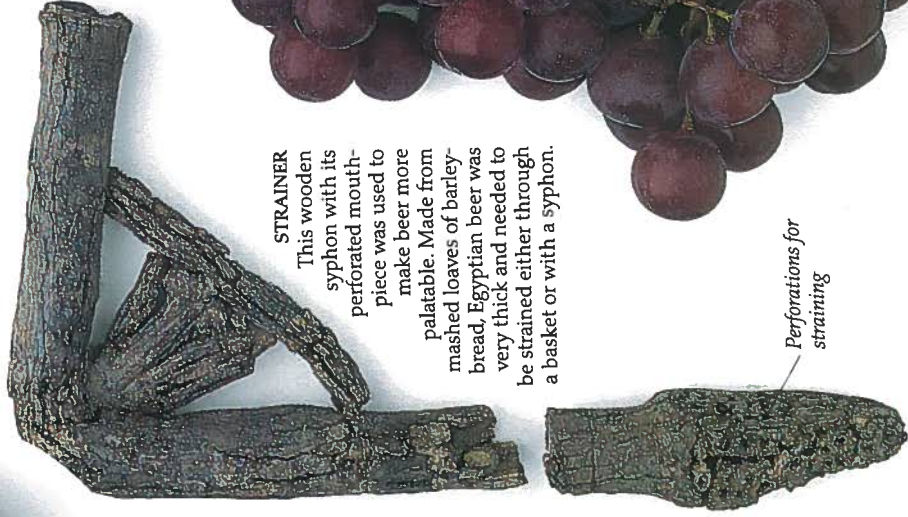
BREAD
More than 3,000 years old, this bread was baked from barley dough. Its texture is tough: flour often contained grit that got in during grinding. Studies of mummies have shown how coarse bread made Egyptians' teeth wear away.



A Syrian soldier serving the pharaoh Akhenaten is sitting drinking beer through a syphon



IN THE VINEYARD
Two men pluck bunches of grapes from the vines. This job was often given to foreign settlers or prisoners from the Middle East or Nubia. The grapes would then be taken to be crushed by treading.



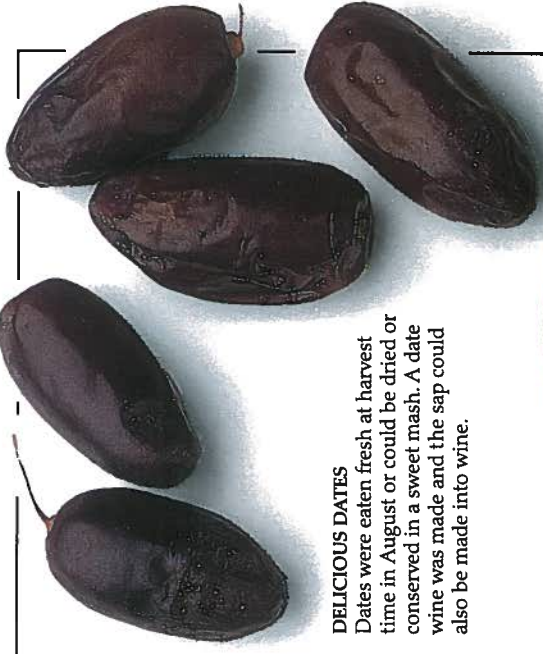
STRAINER
This wooden syphon with its perforated mouthpiece was used to make beer more palatable. Made from mashed leaves of barley-bread, Egyptian beer was very thick and needed to be strained either through a basket or with a syphon.

Perforations for straining

GRAPES
The Egyptians grew most of their grapes in the north, just as they do today. Both red and green grapes provided the fermented juice for wine. They also imported wine from Syria and Greece.

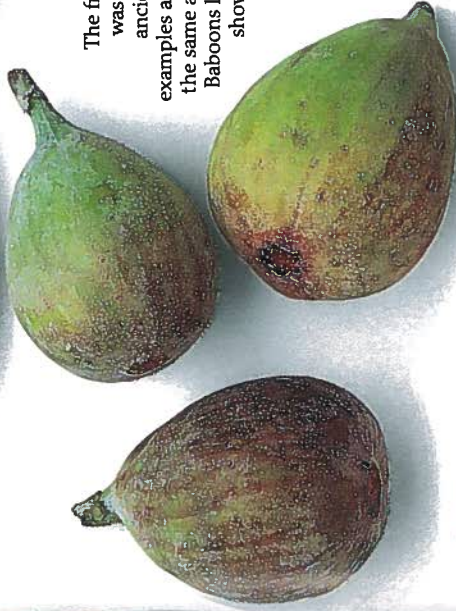


EGYPTIAN BANQUET
Scribes and nobles were able to enjoy a wide variety of meat, poultry, and fruit. This rich and colorful display of food and drink is from a party scene at a Theban banquet. Wine jars are fixed with their pointed bases in racks and garlanded with leaves. The courses included cakes, baskets of figs and bunches of grapes, the head of a calf, the heart and foreleg of an ox, a plucked goose, and a twist of onions.



DELICIOUS DATES
Dates were eaten fresh at harvest time in August or could be dried or conserved in a sweet mash. A date wine was made and the sap could also be made into wine.

BABOON WHO DOES NOT GIVE A FIG!
The fruit of the sycamore fig was held in high esteem in ancient Egypt. The modern examples are easily identifiable as the same as those on this sketch. Baboons loved figs and are often shown helping themselves from bowls or straight from the trees.



Modern fig



PALM-TREE FRUIT
These doum-palm fruit come from a 3,000-year-old tomb offering. The fruit have a gingery taste. The outer case of the nut is so tough it could be used as the top end of a drill.



POMEGRANATES
The pomegranate was introduced to Egypt from the Middle East and its fruit were soon popular. This dish contains pomegranates that were originally part of a tomb offering. The shape of the fruit was used as a model for jewelry and drinking cups. The skin may have been used to produce a yellowish dye.



Ancient fruit