

Libations of the Regency Workshop and Tasting

by

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During the Regency ladies were discouraged from drinking strong spirits such as brandy, rum, or punches with strong spirits in them. Therefore, they generally drank, tea, lemonade, wine, champagne, claret-cup, orgeat, and ratafia (a liqueur flavored with either peach, apricot or cherry kernels or with the essence of bitter almonds that originated in Spain).

A claret-cup was made by mixing claret with soda, fruit juices, and sugar. It was usually served chilled. Carbonated mineral water was available in England from the 1790's.

Orgeat was distilled from barley or almonds and orange flower water.

Claret-cup, orgeat, tea, and lemonade were considered the most appropriate drinks for young ladies making their come out. They were served at Almack's and considered by most men as insipid.

The Tasting

Claret: During the Regency claret referred to any red wine from the Bordeaux region of France. In general a red Bordeaux is made from a blend of grape varieties, including, most importantly, Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot. It is smooth on the palette without a lot of tannins. So it's very easy to drink.

Sherry: Sherry is a fortified wine closely linked with the political fortunes of the Cádiz region of Spain located on the southern coast. It is one of the world's oldest wines, its considerable evolution has been marked by the influence of many of the world's greatest empires and civilizations: Phoenicians, Greeks, Romans, Moors, Spanish and British. Sherry comes in dry, medium-dry, and cream (a sweet sherry). During the Regency it was an aperitif enjoyed by ladies and gentlemen.

During the Napoleonic war sherry became harder to get, and port gained in popularity.

Port: Port is also a fortified wine. It is usually red and sweet that comes in a variety of different flavors including white. It is produced in the Douro Valley in northern Portugal. During the Regency port was typically an after dinner drink for gentlemen.

Madeira: Madeira was not originally fortified, however in the 17th century small amounts of rum were added as a preservative for shipping. Brandy began being used in the 18th century. It is produced in the Portuguese island of Madeira. The wine dates from 1455. It could be consumed at any time by ladies and gentlemen.

Armagnac: Armagnac is a French brandy, but unlike Cognac, what we normally consider as brandy, it is clear and it also classed as an *Eau de Vie* (water of life). It is produced in Gascony, located in southwest France. It is thought that Armagnac was produced about two hundred years before cognac was made using a process being brought over from Africa by the Moors who had used distillation for making perfumes.

Tea: Tea, of course was developed in China. It's history is extensive, and I'm only going to touch on it in this class. It is thought that tea came to Britain as a result of the East India Company bringing it home as gifts. It did not really catch on until Tea became popular in Britain, always a little suspicious of continental trends, had yet to become the nation of tea drinkers that it is today. Since 1600, the [British East India Company](#) had a monopoly on importing goods from outside Europe, and it is likely that sailors on these ships brought tea home as gifts. But the first dated reference to tea in this country is from an advert in a London newspaper, Mercurius Politicus in September 1658 that it was for sale at Sweeting's Rents in the City. It did not become popular until Charles II married Catherine of Braganza. She was a tea addict and established it at court. Portuguese princess and a tea addict. The tea she drank would have most likely been green tea. However during the early part of the 19th century it became clear that green tea was easy to adulterate and the switch was made to black tea. Tea was so important that many servants' contracts specified how much tea they were entitled to a day.

Brandy (Cognac): The brandy your Regency gentleman would have consumed comes from the Cognac region of France. It is a fortified wine of between 30-60% alcohol in strength. There are several grades of brandy from the region and only the best can be called cognac. There is a famous quote by Samuel Johnson: "No, Sir, claret is the liquor for boys; port, for men; but he who aspires to be a hero must drink brandy."

Rum Punch: Regency style Rum Punch was made with Rum, Arrack (a very strong rum), sugar, and lemons. It was not a drink for ladies.