

## BOX 7.2 BEER!

Archaeologists tend to have a special relationship with beer. They study its origins, they talk about it, and they drink it.

**The Origins of Beer.** Although most archaeologists suggest that the domestication of plants occurred to increase plant productivity for its food value, there are some who believe the driving factor may have been to make beer. Besides the obvious good feelings brought on by beer, early beer making would have increased the nutritional value of wheat and barley and perhaps killed pathogens in water. Brewing beer may have begun more than 10,000 years ago and pre-dates wine and other spirits. The oldest potential evidence of making beer in North America comes from Greenland, where evidence suggests Vikings may have been growing barley for beer 1,000 years ago.

**Ancient Beers.** A biologist reportedly used yeast extracted from 45-million-year-old amber as the starter for a larger batch used to make beer for a brewery in California. Some archaeologists and breweries specialize in recreating beers from ancient

times. Beer residue dated to 9,000 years ago in China was used to develop a recipe for recreating that beer, and written recipes from ancient Sumeria and Egypt have been used to recreate beers from those civilizations. A leading candidate for the oldest bottled beer was discovered in a shipwreck in the early twenty-first century. It was about 200 years old, and was drunk by professional beer tasters, who described it as tasting very old.

**Beer as the Beverage of Choice.** Beer is the alcoholic beverage of choice among many archaeologists. Possible explanations for this include: beer-lovers self-select archaeology as a profession; beer is simple to take to remote field locations (e.g., no glasses, corkscrews, ice, or mix required); in many locations where archaeologists work it is safer to drink beer than water; and the low cost of beer suits those in the profession. While the association of archaeologists with beer was once prominent and almost celebrated in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, it is less so now for multiple reasons, including the social problems that are associated with alcohol.