

BOX 8.2 EAT LIKE AN EGYPTIAN: RECONSTRUCTING ANCIENT FOODWAYS

Have you ever wondered what people in the past ate? What their food tasted and smelled like?

If your answer is yes to one of these questions, you are not alone.

Seamus Blackley, one of the creators of the Xbox and a fan of Egyptology, wanted to know what it might be like to eat like an ancient Egyptian (Kroeger 2019). To help make this dream a reality, he connected with two scholars, Dr. Serena Love, an Egyptologist, and Richard Bowman, a Ph.D. student in microbiology. Love helped Blackley acquire Egyptian ceramic vessels that were used to make beer and bread that were held at Boston's Museum of Fine Arts and Harvard University's Peabody Museum (Brown 2019). Bowman infused the vessels with nutrients, which allowed him to eventually extract yeast that had been dormant in the vessels since Egyptians

used them to produce food containing yeast 4,500 years ago.

While the majority of this yeast was sent to a laboratory for further study, Blackley was able to keep a sample of his own for experimentation. Blackley used the yeast as a bread starter by mixing it with water and grains used during Egyptian times. The end product was a loaf of bread that emitted a caramel smell and tasted sweeter than what we today call sourdough bread.

For the next phase of their project, Blackley, Love, and Bowman plan on working with ceramicists specializing in Egyptian pottery to recreate the clay and vessel forms used to bake bread in the past. That will give them a real sense of what bread may have tasted like thousands of years ago when it was first cooked and consumed.