

English translation:

I: Interviewer Z: Zeleke

I: What's your name?

Z: Mr. Zeleke.

I: For how many years have you been making *tej*¹?

Z: My experience?

I: Yes.

Z: Over forty years.

I: What is *tej*, for someone that doesn't know?

Z: For someone that doesn't know, well, they hear talk about *tej*. But for someone who really doesn't know, *tej* has a pretty appearance, an agreeable taste when you drink it, and a certain amount of alcohol. Depending on the way it is consumed and on the way it is made, if it is a bit dry, there are some people who can't handle it if they drink even a little bit. And then, people that are used to it feel fine even when they drink a lot of it. It is taken after a meal.

I: Now, about how *tej* is made, could you tell us a little bit about that?

Z: How it is made? First good honey is bought. After the good honey is bought, it's put into a pot or some sort of container and it is mixed with water. After it is mixed, when you see that it is neither too thick nor too thin, then you know that you've added the right amount of water and that it is at the right consistency. And then, the top of a barrel is covered with cloth and the mixture is strained by pouring it from one container to the other. The water – uh, the *birz*² goes into the barrel, and the particles remain on top of the cloth. After that, as the barrel is filling up, you take the flotsam– the flotsam is wax – you take the wax into a different container, and when the barrel is full, the cloth is removed. Having removed the cloth, you seal the barrel and wait. At the fastest, it will take four days or five days, depending on the weather and the heat or coldness of the room, to

¹ traditional Ethiopian beverage

² the combination of water and honey]

ferment. In the time that it takes to ferment, you buy *gesho*¹, you clean and wash it, put water in a pot over a fire and, when the water boils, you put the *gesho* in. When it starts to bubble, the *gesho* is removed and the water is spilled. After it cools, the *gesho* is put into a separate container with the *birz* so that the original barrel doesn't spill over. And after the second barrel ferments for a while, you pour its contents back into the first barrel until it is full. Then you wait for it to ferment, and it does.

When it starts to ripen, everything is transferred to the second barrel and the first barrel is thoroughly washed and cleaned. And after it stays in the second barrel for four or five days, it is transferred again to the first barrel and the second one is washed. At the bottom of the second barrel, there is *amboula*² and near the top, there is *gefeta*³. The *gefeta* is collected in a pan or jug. You do the same for the *amboula*. Now you take everything and strain it slowly from one container to the other. The *amboula* remains on the strainer and is separated from the rest. After it gets filtered like this, on the third or fourth time, you take the *gesho* out of the mixture. If the *tej* turns out to be a little dilute, you can add processed honey mixed with water. Then the *tej* is filtered and stored. This means that it is put in a new, clean container and stored somewhere until it is needed for some occasion, perhaps a wedding or a *mels*⁴. It is presented at whatever occasion and the people partake of it there, they drink it. This is how *tej* is made.

I: Great. And like I said earlier, on which occasions does one drink *tej* in Ethiopia?

Z: Well, especially now in January – it's January, right? – during the months of January and February, until the Lenten fast begins, it's the time for weddings. So there are a lot of weddings, and they drink it during that time. And then the Lenten fast begins. After the Lenten fast begins, there aren't any weddings held, but people still drink it on their own. But the time when it's made in bulk and everyone can enjoy it, even priests, for weddings or any occasion, is from January to February. And then, for Easter, after the fast is broken, it is served for that holiday as well. And during the summer, *tej* doesn't stop. The *tej* makers don't stop, they continue their work. Granted, the *tej* that they make at that time isn't very good but that's how it is.

About CultureTalk: CultureTalk is produced by the Five College Center for the Study of World Languages and housed on the LangMedia Website. The project provides students of language and culture with samples of people talking about their lives in the languages they use everyday. The participants in CultureTalk interviews and discussions are of many different ages and walks of life. They are free to express themselves as they wish. The ideas and opinions presented here are those of the participants. Inclusion in CultureTalk does not represent endorsement of these ideas or opinions by the Five College Center for the Study of World Languages, Five Colleges, Incorporated, or any of its member institutions: Amherst College, Hampshire College, Mount Holyoke College, Smith College and the University of Massachusetts at Amherst.

© 2003-2009 Five College Center for the Study of World Languages and Five Colleges, Incorporated

¹ a plant used to aid in fermentation process

² froth

³ residue

⁴ a party for newlyweds