

BOKBIER IN THE NETHERLANDS: A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

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TRANSLATED BY DES DE MOOR

Translator's note

Dutch-brewed bokbier, released seasonally on an annual basis, is today one of the most recognised speciality beer styles in the Netherlands. More or less every one of the country's 170 or so breweries and beer firms offers an example during the autumn months, and the beer has arguably developed a character distinct from its original German model, with many smaller brewers making versions with ale yeasts rather than lager yeasts. However the present day health of the style is largely thanks to a deliberate campaign to revive interest in it, beginning in the late 1970s and later taken up by the Dutch beer consumers' organisation PINT (*Promotie Informatie Traditioneel Bier* - Promotion Information Traditional Beer), partly inspired by the Campaign for Real Ale (CAMRA) in the UK.

This article by Theo Flissebaalje, now chair of the Dutch beer education organisation StIBON as well as a regular contributor to PINT's magazine *PINT Nieuws*, takes an overview of the history of bokbier in the Netherlands in the period before the contemporary revival. An earlier version of the text was first published in two parts in 2005 in *PINT Nieuws* numbers 151 and 152. A revised version was later published online at www.pint.nl and is now available at www.beerinformation.nl/bokbier.html. The material appears here for the first time in English, in a translation approved by the original author.

Both the German-derived spelling *bockbier* and the Dutch spelling *bokbier* are encountered in written Dutch, both pronounced identically. I have used

'Bockbier' when talking about German-brewed beer, and 'bokbier' of Dutch beer, except in the case of quotes and brand names using the alternative spelling. The word *bok*, like its German cognate, means 'billy goat', though as mentioned in the text this might be coincidental to the etymology of the name.

Following Dutch usage, the term 'Holland' refers only to the two provinces of Noord (North) Holland and Zuid (South) Holland, while 'The Netherlands' means the whole nation state comprising 12 provinces. The term 'Dutch' is used to mean 'of the Netherlands', though the Dutch language is of course spoken elsewhere.

In describing fermentation methods, the author uses the terms *bovengistend* and *ondergistend* throughout, corresponding to English 'top fermented' and 'bottom fermented' respectively. Though the terms 'warm fermented' and 'cold fermented' are more technically accurate, I have opted for a closer translation of the original. The author points out that the English 'bottom fermented beer' also corresponds to the German *untergäriges Bier*, of which bokbier was originally an example. I have included translations of the names of breweries (when these are not derived from personal names) and organisations in brackets when these are first mentioned, though subsequently the Dutch name is used.

Introduction

Dutch bokbier has been brewed since 1868. Bokbier arrived in the Netherlands as a bottom fermented lager in the middle of the 19th century. At first it was imported

from Germany, alongside all the other bottom fermented *Beiersche* (Bavarian) beers then drunk in the country. New excise laws introduced in 1867 made it possible for Dutch brewers to brew these German beer styles profitably. New, modern breweries appeared and the scale of brewing began to increase. Amstel Bockbier became the first Dutch-brewed bokbier in 1883.

Bokbier was lagered for a good four months, and for a very long time February was the traditional bokbier month. Around 1920, the annual bokbier launch date was advanced to December and later put back still further into the autumn. In recent years the date has been set on or around 21 September.

Bottom fermented beer reaches the Netherlands

The unprecedented import of German beers had a considerable impact on the Dutch beer market in the middle of the 19th century. Traditional top fermented Dutch beers were the predominant style to face competition from Bavarian beers but the new imports also won sales at the expense of top fermented Belgian beers and strong British beers. Before Bavarian-style beers could be produced successfully in the Netherlands, important changes had to be made to the brewing equipment, requiring considerable capital investment. The foremost obstacle, however, was the excise law of 1822. It was nevertheless thanks to this obstacle that Bavarian brewing methods found their way into Dutch brewing. A number of favourable factors made this possible.

The situation in 1865 was as follows. Local duties had been abolished, the growth of railways was stimulating trade and use of steam power was spreading. Liberalism was in the ascendant, there was almost completely free trade, and poverty and deprivation among the working class were declining. These conditions made it profitable for foreign breweries to import beer into the Netherlands. Bottom fermented Bavarian beer was clean tasting and clear, while Dutch top fermented beers were cloudy. From 1856 it was possible to travel by direct train from Munich to Amsterdam. In that same year the Danube-Main Canal was completed, making it easier to transport beer by boat.

In 1860 beer was being transported over practically all of Europe via the international rail network. In 1850 the

Netherlands imported 1,280hl of beer from Germany. Five years later the figure was 6,160hl. In 1860 this quantity had doubled to 12,340hl. In 1865 German imports peaked at 14,800hl, after which quantities decreased through the rest of the 1860s and 1870s to 8,000-9,000hl a year. This decline was a result of developments in domestic production.

The first time Bavarian-style beer was brewed in a Dutch brewery under an official license was in Groningen on 11 February 1847. The Bierbrouwerij De Beyersche Kuip (The Bavarian Barrel Brewery), owned by J Hesselink and son and S T Koolman, advertised its beer made 'in the Bavarian style' in the *Groninger Courant* newspaper on 13 August 1847.¹ Nothing more was heard of this undertaking. Earlier, in 1845, S.M. Perk, a brewer in Den Haag, had brewed Bavarian beer, requesting an exemption from the excise law. It is also known that in 1857 the NV Bierbrouwerij de Posthoorn (The Post Horn Brewery Ltd.) in Leiden received an award because 'the beer's taste was not inferior to genuine Bavarian beer'.² Better known is the Koninklijke



Nederlandsche Beiersche Bierbrouwerij (Royal Dutch Bavarian Brewery) on the Weesperzijde in Amsterdam, which was licensed in 1865. This brewery had received special dispensation under the excise law from the Minister of Finance.

The excise law of 1867

Under the 1822 excise laws, the amount of duty payable on beer was determined by the contents of the mash tun. Brewers exploited this by extracting as many as six or seven runnings of wort, each for a separate fermentation, out of the same large initial quantity of malt using a traditional infusion mash. This was a lucrative practice but at the cost of beer quality, which did not compete with that of imported beer.

Bottom fermented beer, in contrast, was produced by the decoction mashing method, in which some of the contents of the mash tun is pumped out, boiled and pumped back into the mash, allowing phased increases of temperature. Due to this repeated pumping of about a third of the mash, the brewer lost much more in duty than with the old top fermentation methods, as the quantities pumped back in were regarded as additional contents for duty purposes. Even if the optimum mix of malt and water was used the duty still worked out 50% higher than with a comparable brew using the more usual traditional method.³

In 1867 the law was changed so that the brewery had the choice of paying duty either on the basis of the contents of the mash tun or on the quantity of malt added before brewing started. The classic German brewhouse with four copper vessels made its appearance. New breweries equipped with shining copper vessels presented a positive image to the public. The new dualistic legal arrangement disadvantaged small breweries as duty declarations were only allowed under the new method for a minimum quantity of 400 pounds (200kg) of malt per brew. The excise law of 1917 abolished the dual system, and the quantity and the gravity of the wort then became the criteria for calculating duty.

A not unimportant fact was the increase in duty on *jenever* gin in 1883, after which people began to drink more beer. The entire brewing industry was industrialised in the period between 1867 and 1890, not only in

the Netherlands but in the whole of Europe. The introduction in Europe of artificial refrigeration, essential for bottom fermented beers, was another very important factor. The refrigerator developed by Carl Linde in 1877 had played a decisive role in the breakthrough of bottom fermentation. This period laid the foundation for the emergence of the major Dutch breweries. From 1890 to 1916 the number of breweries in the Netherlands declined by 30%, while production increased by 39%, in particular through the growth of exports which rose between 1885 and 1916 by 130%.

According to the excise receipts of 1878 it seems that the same amount of duty was paid by both methods of measurement. Around 92% of the duties came from the five provinces of Brabant, Limburg, Noord (North) Holland, Zuid (South) Holland and Gelderland. The figures show that the cities of 's-Hertogenbosch, Wijchen and Haarlem brewed exclusively old-style top fermented beers. Amsterdam, Rotterdam and Dordrecht brewed respectively 83%, 97% and 90% bottom fermented beers.⁴

In 1869, Gerrit Adriaan Heineken noted during an international exhibition in the Paleis voor Volksvlucht in



Amsterdam that bottom fermented beer was more to the public taste than Heineken's top fermented beer. For this reason Heineken decided to switch over to brewing bottom fermented beer as quickly as possible.⁵ Top fermented beers offered a greater range of flavour, and small local breweries each brewed a distinctive style of beer that was highly appreciated by their local customers. But such beers were not always so appreciated by those unaccustomed to them. Bottom fermented beer, in comparison, had a longer shelf life, stood up better to being transported, and had a consistent quality. Above all, Pilsener was a clear, bright beer. The consumer knew what to expect from a glass of Münchener, Pilsener, Dortmunder or Bockbier. Though every brewer in the country aimed to create a distinctive brand of Bavarian beer, its adoption by large scale breweries led to a marked decline in the number of different beer styles. Also contributing to this was the arrival of a large number of German brewmasters in the Netherlands. A limited number of principal beer styles emerged - Pilsener, Münchener, Dortmunder and a handful of specialties like bokbier and stout.

The birth of bokbier

It is impossible to discuss bokbier without mentioning the old story of Ainpöck from Einbeck which explains the origin of the name. A 1931 version of this story runs as follows:

The best beer in North Germany has been brewed in Einbeck since the 15th century. Before speaking in his own defence at the Diet of Worms, Martin Luther fortified himself with two bottles of beer from Einbeck, given to him by 'Landsknechtshauptmann' Frundsberg. In those days, guests called out to the innkeeper: 'Mir Einbeck' (an Einbeck for me). The word 'Einbeck' became 'Ein Bock' (a bock), as people still say today when ordering a glass of Bockbier.⁶

Originally this Einbeck Bockbier was a top fermenting dark wheat beer. With the development of successful bottom fermented beers, Bockbier also came to be made by this method. From Germany Bockbier travelled in the footsteps of the other lager-style beers to the Netherlands. Dutch brewers began brewing their own bokbier around 1870-1880. The arrival of German brewers and brewing companies surely had a role to play here. Before refrigeration equipment came into



widespread use, 19th century brewers brewed only in the winter because the temperature in summer was too high for stable fermentation. Belgian lambic brewers in the Pajottenland still only brew in the cool winter months for this reason. Many breweries closed in the summer for a thorough cleaning. At the end of the summer the first brews could be made with malt from the harvest in July or August. New season hops were also used and the brewers did their best to make as good a beer as possible, to grow their markets for the approaching new brewing season. The first brew was extra strong and was distributed free among the various customers. This 'bokbier' was brewed only once a year, but could be kept for longer thanks to its higher alcoholic strength.⁷

Once refrigeration equipment enabled year round brewing, the original rationale for bokbier disappeared, though prior to 1940 the annual brew was retained as a tradition. The winter months were generally a slack time for beer consumption, so the annual launch of a dark, strong beer of around 16° Plato provided a stimulus for sales.

Amstel

It is difficult to determine today exactly when the first Dutch bokbier was brewed. The first printed labels appeared around 1870, initially from bottling firms,



with brewers beginning to use their own labels a little later. Books, newspapers and archives offer some evidence. Much is known about the Amstel brewery in Amsterdam, even though its complete archive was lost on the night of 25-26 July 1902 during a major fire that destroyed the company's floor malting.⁸ The first advertisement for the Beijersch Bierbrouwerij De Amstel (Amstel Bavarian Brewery) offering the beer appeared in the *Algemeen Handelsblad* newspaper on 9 January 1872, with an official launch date of 15 January 1872. This beer was named *winterbier*, but possibly it was in fact the very first Dutch cold fermented bokbier.

Thanks to Carl Linde, Amstel was working with refrigeration equipment from 1881. Its beer was fermented and lagered in oak vats: in 1884 there were 16 lagering cellars with wooden vats of 4,000l capacity. In 1924, Amstel replaced the oak fermentation vessels with aluminium fermenters. Strong beers like bokbier were lagered for at least four months. Amstel Bockbier was then made available only in January and February. In the 1920s, the lagering vats were replaced with tanks made from enamelled iron. By 1930 primary fermentation at Amstel was taking eight to 10 days and lagering around three months. Bottom fermented beer ferments

at a temperature of 5-10°C and should be lagered at around 0.5°C for a long time, from 12-16 weeks.⁹

At the export trade show at the Paleis voor Volksvlijt in Amsterdam in 1883, Amstel won the gold medal for Beiersch (Bavarian), Pilsener and Bockbier. At this time Amstel also brewed a Weizen, a Dortmunder and a Münchener. More distinctions for the Bockbier followed: awards in Amsterdam in 1883 and 1887, and in 1888 a Diploma of Honour in Brussels. So admired was the Amstel brand that on 1 May 1891 the labels were registered to prevent abuse - bottlers had been placing Amstel labels on bottles containing other beers.

Heineken

Gerrit Adriaan Heineken chose the Stadhouderskade in Amsterdam as the location for his new business and in 1866 received permission from the mayor and aldermen of Amsterdam to build a brewery there with steam power, a maltings, maturation and storage cellars and other installations. On Friday 17 May 1867, Heineken's mother had the honour of laying the foundation stone.¹⁰ At first the brewery used top fermentation but starting in 1870 Heineken switched over to bottom fermented beer,





resulting in extensions to the brewery and a general growth in scale. The new fermentation method required significant capital investment - for example to provide ice cellars for cooling. The brewing of both top and bottom fermented beer within a single brewhouse was too risky because of the high chance of infection that might sour the beer.

Messrs Baartz and Hoyer of the Oranjeboom (Orange Tree) brewery in Rotterdam also wanted to switch over to brewing the new beer. As the development of a Bavarian-style brewery was particularly capital intensive, Baartz sought contact with Heineken with a view to forming a partnership. This led to the founding of Heineken's Bierbrouwerij Maatschappij NV (HBM, Heineken's Beer Brewery Company) on 4 January 1873, with the aim both of expanding the Amsterdam brewery and of building a new brewery in Rotterdam. To avoid competition, the existing Oranjeboom brewery would continue to use top fermentation. The new brewery on the Crosswijkse Singel went into business in 1874. German head brewers were employed on both

sites: Wilhelm Feltmann in Rotterdam and Bernard Stuer in Amsterdam, the latter working with a team of around 40 men in 1873. Around half of them were skilled German craftsmen, often so-called *Wanderburschen* or journeymen travelling for work after finishing their apprenticeship, who simply arrived at the brewery at random and decided to stay. Dutch brewers benefitted from the knowledge handed over by their German colleagues. In the 20 years that Gerard Heineken led the company, output rose from around 17,000hl in 1873 to around 200,000hl in 1893. Of this, around a fifth was exported abroad.

Phoenix

The Amersfoortsche Beiersch-Bierbrouwerij (Bavarian Brewery of Amersfoort) was founded in 1873 specifically to brew bottom fermented beer. At the end of 1890 this brewery went bankrupt and closed but in 1891 was restarted as Phoenixbrouwerij Coets de Bosson. The *Staatscourant* of 6 February 1892 reproduced the labels



of Phoenix's five beers, among them a bokbier. On 10 February 1892 the brewery first shipped its stronger beers including the bokbier. Shortly afterwards it began making a name for itself using exceptionally attractive design and numerous innovations. In 1929, for example, it was using a poster designed by Nico de Koo depicting Phoenix Pullenbok (tankard bok) in a distinctive 450ml bottle sufficient for two glasses, an unusually large bottle size for the Dutch market.

The brewery described its bokbier as follows:

Phoenix Bokbier is brewed from the finest malt and with the most fragrant hops, according to an old recipe without the addition of any artificial colour or sweetener.

This text has a familiar sound to us today, demonstrating that copy writers haven't learned much over the years. The poster stated that bokbier was brewed only in limited quantities and would keep in the bottle for the whole winter: 'Stock up on supplies in good time, and you will have a glass of cellared bokbier at your disposal all winter long.' In 1935, Phoenix Bokbier was available until the end of January, and an advertisement from 1934 or 1936 claims that the beer in both large and small bottles would remain good for up to a year.

Other breweries

The first brewery in the province of Brabant that switched over to bottom fermented beer was De Drie Hoefijzers (The Three Horseshoes) in Breda in 1887. Ruttens Bierbrouwerij de Zwarter Ruiter (Black Knight brewery) in Maastricht brewed bottom fermented beer right from its foundation in 1871.¹¹ Brouwerij Leeuw (Lion brewery) began to use the new methods in 1886.

New bottom fermenting breweries were also set up in Utrecht, Almelo, Haarlem and Den Haag. In Amsterdam two more large-scale breweries were established, 't Haantje (The Little Cock) and Deli. Established breweries like Davo in Deventer and de Hoop (Hope) in Arnhem and later Van Vollenhoven in Amsterdam switched over to bottom fermented beer. Almost certainly each of these breweries brewed its own bokbier. However information on all these breweries' beers is sparse, and even where labels survive, they are not always easy to date accurately. Nonetheless the his-

tory of Dutch-brewed bokbier has its roots in this period with the breweries named above.

Dutch beer culture

In the middle ages, every city had a large number of small breweries. People drank large quantities of beer, an estimated 300-400l per head of population. Beer was a sensible alternative to the often heavily contaminated drinking water. Around 1500, the Dutch brewing industry reached a high point. Gouda, for example, then boasted 350 small breweries, 's-Hertogenbosch around 120. In 1514 there were three cities in the province of Holland that exported beer - Gouda with 126 breweries, Haarlem with 120 and Delft with 100.¹² Between 1620 and 1640 the province of Holland produced approximately 2,185,000hl of beer per year, more than during the revival of the industry around 1900.¹³

After 1650, beer consumption declined due to a number of factors. In the period 1650-1850 the number of breweries declined sharply. Around 1850 the trend changed, as new breweries appeared in response to growing consumption, with 559 breweries active in the Netherlands by 1870. However by then consumption per person was much less than before, at around 34l a head in the period 1874-80.¹⁴ Then came the shift in taste in favour of bottom fermented beer such as Pilsener, initially promoting further growth in consumption. In the years 1896-1900 consumption climbed to 42.1l, per head, but declined again after that.¹⁵ In the period 1906-19 it had reached 27l, much smaller in comparison to Belgium with 221l, Great Britain with 123l and Germany with 105l. By now the Netherlands could no longer claim to be a beer drinking country like its neighbours, as it had been for the preceding 400 years.

The government's Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek (Central Bureau of Statistics) produced figures covering the period from 1921 to 1950.¹⁶ According to these, in the period 1921-30 the population drank 25.8l of beer per head. In 1935 that figure fell to 15.3l and until World War II it remained around the 14-15l mark. In 1947, when ingredients sufficient for good beer were once more obtainable, the Dutch drank 16.9l, a quantity which in 1949-50 fell to only a little more than 10l. Such figures stand out strikingly against the enormous quantities still being consumed in neighbouring countries.

By now nearly all Dutch beer was bottom fermented, and bokbier had become the main traditional speciality, accounting for very approximately 1% of turnover.



Bond van Nederlandse Brouwerijen

During the 1920s and 1930s, the major Dutch breweries were nearly all members of the Bond van Nederlandse Brouwerijen (Federation of Dutch Breweries), the forerunner of the Centraal Brouwerij Kantoor (CBK, Central Brewery Office, today branded simply as Nederlandse Brouwers or Dutch Brewers), then based at Herengracht 281 in Amsterdam. On 3 October 1931 the Bond published comparative research into the alcohol percentage of bokbiers. The participating breweries - Hengelo, Oranjeboom, Heineken, Amstel, Van Vollenhoven, Sleutel (Key) and ZHB - provided their own figures and the Bond also took measurements. On 18 December 1931, by mutual agreement, the Bond authorised that an alcohol percentage of 6.5% by volume should be included on bokbier labels. In the 1920s the Bond also made its first agreements with the brewers on an annual December bokbier launch date.



Before World War I things were different, with some breweries trying to pre-empt competitors. In 1909 and 1910, for example, Haantjes Bokbier from Amsterdam was advertised in newspaper *Het Volk* as being available from 12 November 1909 and 11 November 1910. You can almost imagine this was the origin of the Dutch say-

ing *haantje de voorste* ('the first little cockerel' - a little like 'the early bird').

The NRC of 18 January 1911 carried an advertisement for Heineken's bokbier as available from 19 January. In the years before that, it had only been possible to sample Heineken's version up to the end of February. In 1913 the price of Heineken's bokbier was 15 cents per litre; in comparison, from 1904 the price of Pilsener and dark Bavarian beer was 13 cents per litre, later 14 cents. Oranjeboom advertised its bokbier in 1887 as available 'from 6 February', while Amstel Bock was up till then sold from 20 February.¹⁷ In 1930 the Bond van Nederlandse Brouwerijen designated Thursday 11 December as the launch date, according to Article RC VI 2 specifying that bokbier can be delivered on the second Thursday of December. It's possible this came about as a part of the government's Bierbesluit (Beer Decree) of 1926, in which the strength of bokbier was also defined, namely an original gravity of between 16° and 18° and 5.5% to 7% alcohol by volume.¹⁸ In any case, in 1922 the Bond agreed the launch date with the brewers.¹⁹



Nonetheless, the launch date subsequently varied frequently. In 1930 it was Thursday 11 December, in 1931 Thursday 10 December, in 1932 Thursday 8 December. That year the Bond placed a generic bokbier advertisement in around 50 Dutch newspapers, as well as issuing numerous communications and warnings to try to prevent the beer being launched too early. According to a letter dated 13 September 1933, there was a discussion that year about the date, with some members arguing that the second Thursday in December - 14 December - was too late, so the launch was put forward to 7 December. Breweries that weren't members of the Bond also adhered to that date.

In 1934 the delivery date was put forward further to Saturday 1 December as an experiment, with the aim of making the most of the period before Christmas when consumers had more money. On 10 November 1934 the Bond again ran a collective bokbier advertising campaign in around 100 newspapers, at a cost of 13,283.25 guilders.

Bokbier tradition falters

In 1935, when the launch date was set once again to 12 December, the survival of the bokbier tradition hung on a thread.²⁰ The reason why can be seen from the statistics. In 1939 the Contractscommissie (Contracts Commission) of the Bond van Nederlandse Brouwerijen produced an analysis of figures collected by the Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek for domestic sales volumes of 'beer made from wort of around 17.5° Balling,' principally bokbier (80%) and stout. This analysis took account of the sales of 18 large breweries in the years 1923-30, of 28 breweries between 1931-34, and 26 breweries between 1935-38. The figures showed that in 1923 around 30,700hl of bokbier was brewed; in 1924 22,300hl; in 1925 19,900hl. The figures stabilised themselves until 1931 at between 19,000-20,000hl, then declined to crisis point. In 1932 production was 13,000hl; in 1933 11,500hl; in 1934 10,500hl. Bokbier production reached its lowest level of 8,600hl in 1935, and from then the figures increased again from 9,900hl in 1936 to 10,300hl in 1937.

On 20 August 1935, with the situation so unfavourable economically, the Bond discussed the question of whether or not to brew bokbier at all that year. Each brewer was expected to give an answer between 3-10 September, in time for the brewing season (although by then the lagering time of bokbier was considerably reduced from its 19th century extent). In fact a positive answer from the brewers came much more quickly.

In 1936 the launch date was advanced to Tuesday 1 December, a departure from Article RC VI 2, which would have indicated 10 December. In 1936 and 1937, sales of bokbier were more favourable than those of strong beer in general. Most sales took place within the first two weeks of December. In 1933, according to the Contractcommissie, bokbier accounted for 1.2% of total beer sales; in 1937 they accounted for 0.9% of the total

sales of Bond members. That year the Bond chose 2 December as the launch date, also reaching agreement on the date with the then non-member breweries Phoenix, ZHB and De Drie Hoefijzers.

On 22 November 1939 the Bond van Nederlandse Brouwerijen announced that: 'There will be no bokbier before 30 November 1939. The price will be 40 guilders per hl. Earlier delivery is a violation.' The member breweries all kept to this date, alongside non-members Phoenix and Drie Hoefijzers, though some non-member breweries in the south of the country such as Dommelsch began selling their bokbier on 17 November.

Today the annual bokbier launch date is still set by the major breweries through their membership organisation Nederlandse Brouwers. Until 2005, the date was the first Monday of October, but has since been moved earlier to 21 September, the first day of astronomical autumn. Today, then, bokbier is principally known as an autumn seasonal, and sometimes referred to as 'herfst-bok' (autumn bok), though the smaller brewers, who aren't Nederlandse Brouwers members, are not obliged to abide by the date. The regulations governing bokbier have also changed. In April 1934, according to article 1 of the Bierbesluit, a strong beer was defined as a beer with an original gravity of above 16° and with roasted malt. On 1 June 1939, bokbier was specified by the Nederlandse Bond as a dark coloured beer type with an original gravity above 16° and with 6.5% alcohol by volume.

After World War II

Bokbier brewing ceased during World War II, and the style remained unavailable until 1950. And as before the war, the launch of the beer was celebrated as a special event with numerous festive activities, notably the revival of the Bokbieroptocht (Bokbier Parade) in Amsterdam.

On 1 December 1936 the first Bokbieroptocht had been organised by the Amsterdam's Rembrandt neighbourhood association. The three biggest breweries in the city participated. A procession of drays fully loaded with bokbier - Heineken and Amstel lorries and Van Vollenhoven's horse drawn drays - paraded from the

Feestelijke intocht van het bockbier

De komst van het bockbier is sinds verleden jaar een feestelijke gebeurtenis in Amsterdam geworden, welke de buurtvereniging Rembrandt in samenwerking met de drie groote brouwerijen in de hoofdstad en met N.I.A., de studenten-sociëteit van het A.S.C., de burgerij in de gelegenheid stelt in gepaste vroolijheid te vieren. Zoo trok ook thans een vroolijke, bonte optocht door de stad, die een meer luchthartig Zuid-Nederlandsch, dan een gedegen Noord-Hollandsch karakter had. Den kern van den stoet vormden de groote, met vaten volgeladen bierwagens, die het eerste bockbier aanvoerden. Voor het meerendeel waren het vrachtauto's, maar van Vollenhovens Brouwerij houdt nog steeds de traditie gaande van de bierwagens, getrokken door een span prachtige, zware, wel-doorvoede, glanzend geroskamde en in garcel met blinkend koperbeslag getuigde Brabantsche paarden. Hieromheen hadden zich het bereden escorte van de studenten opgesteld, een afdeling Brabantsche vendelzwaaiers, het groote muziekcors van de Postharmonie, verder de brouwers in Middeleeuwsche dracht, die schoon opgetuigde bokken met zich voerden.

Door het op til zijnde St. Nicolaasfeest was het toch al buitengewoon druk in de binnenstad en de Amsterdamsche burgerij bleek voor zoo'n schoonen cortège zeker niet minder waardeering te hebben dan in de Vlaamsche steden zijn deel geweest zou zijn.

Van het Mercatorplein trok de vroolijke stoet door de Jordaan, langs het Leidscheplein en door de Leidschestraat naar het Rembrandtplein, waar tijdens een ommeegang om het plantsoen het nieuwe bockbier met daverende hoera's begroet is. Van het Rembrandtplein ging het met volle muziek door de Utrecht-schestraat naar de Sarphatistraat, waar de studenten-sociëteit gelegen is en waar de studenten het bockbier, de schuimende glazen opheffend en ledigend, hebben ingewijd.

Mercatorplein via the Jordaan and the Leidseplein to the Rembrandtplein. In 1937, a film production company, Polygoon, was commissioned by the Bond van Nederlandse Brouwerijen to make a sound film about the Bokbieroptocht, which that year took place on 2 December, once again organised by the Rembrandt neighbourhood association. The Amsterdam parade was also filmed on 1 December 1938. To mark the occasion, the various pubs in the Rembrandt quarter revived the ancient tradition of inns putting out green wreaths to celebrate the arrival of new beer.

On 5 December 1950, the Comité Rembrandtquarter (Rembrandt Quarter Committee) of Amsterdam restored

the Bokbieroptocht to its former glory, organising the first such event since 1939. The time had arrived for a new slogan in the CBK's joint advertising: *De bok is weer best* (Bok is best again).

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