

Maza Experiment - Successes? and Failures!

Post by “Don” of September 12, 2022 at 5:06 PM

Okay, I had the day off today so I decided to put my money literally where my mouth is and tried making some maza. I had a qualified success and a dismal failure, but Here's the play by play.

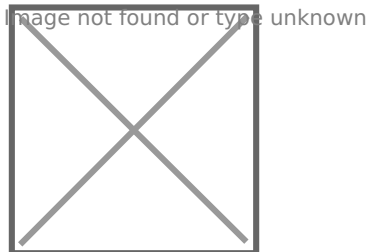
First, it was VERY hard to find barley flour. I finally tracked it down at an Indian grocery store in the area, so I bought two small bags (total \$5.00 - okay, so not a LOT of money where my mouth is).

I tried two recipes:

[Ancient Recipe: Maza \(Ancient Greek, ca. 2nd millennium BCE\)](#)

“My maza comes to me from my spear, from my spear comes my Ismarian wine, and I drink while leaning on my spear.” ~ the Greek warrior-poet Archilochus explains...
passtheflamingo.com

First, make your álphita. Pour 1 and 1/4 cups of barley flour into a skillet over medium-high heat. Stir it thoroughly with a wooden spoon until it gives off a toasted aroma and turns a rich brown color. Then, remove from the heat and add 1/2 a cup of water, 2 tablespoons of olive oil and a pinch of salt. Continue stirring until you have an even, thick dough.



[Eating ancient food with modern Romulans](#)

We break ancient Greek maza bread with four curators from the Royal Ontario Museum.
www.thestar.com

Maza

2 cups, 12 tbsp (680 mL) barley flour

2/3 cup (160 mL) water

3 tbsp (45 mL) honey

3 tbsp (45 mL) olive oil

In a large mixing bowl, coming barley flour, water, honey and olive oil by hand into a dough. Cover and rest in fridge for 15 minutes.

Preheat oven to 325F/160C. Brush a baking tray with olive oil. Form dough into golf ball-sized spheres. On a floured surface, roll out dough to about 1 cm thick. Bake on tray until crispy, about 10 to 15 minutes, turning halfway. Place on wire rack to cool.

I tried making them both but made a 1/2 batch of the 2nd one (from The Star).

Mistake #1:



I left the flour in the skillet *WAY too long*!! It had a *very* pleasant nutty odor early on in the skillet roasting process, but I couldn't see the color on the stove well. And, I believe I burned it. This is the color of the finished balls at the end of the process.



They tasted terrible and the texture didn't set up. Plus there was the cognitive dissonance of them looking like chocolate. They were NOT chocolate! They also weren't dry like they look in the Pass the Flamingo pictures because I think I added too much water - going unconsciously for a batter almost. They were like slightly congealed pudding and tasted of burnt flour. NOT pleasant! I even tried baking them, but they never set up, and tasted possibly worse! 🤢

VERDICT on the Pass the Flamingo recipe: I may try it again. Pan roast flour for less time. Use much less water! Wait until flour is completely cooled (I put some of the water in when the skillet was still hot!). And make an actual dough and bake it anyway even if the recipe doesn't call for it. If I could get that nutty smell into the finished product, it might be worth experimenting again.

The Star recipe:



I made 1/2 batch of the batter with the honey and olive oil. I did NOT roll them out thin like the recipe said to. Slight mistake there. I put my hand in the photo for size. Here's a finished one after baking more than 2x as long as the recipe calls for... because they were thicker.



Photo taken at an angle. It's about the size of a cookie.

VERDICT on The Star recipe: The taste was quite pleasant with the honey. The texture wasn't great. BUT I think *when* (yes, when) I do it again, I'm going to keep the idea of a tortilla (Thanks, [Joshua](#) !) in mind instead of a "loaf" of bread or "pita bread". Without the gluten, that's not going to happen. I will definitely make them larger and flatter, going for a crispy texture.

So, if I were to give my experiments a grade:

0/10 -



Pass the Flamingo (but most - if not all - of that is on me, need to follow the recipe + bake the final product)



5/10 - The Star (Has some potential and worth trying again with some tweaks - In fact, I ate another small one as I'm typing this. Yes, worth another try at some point... tortilla style 😊)

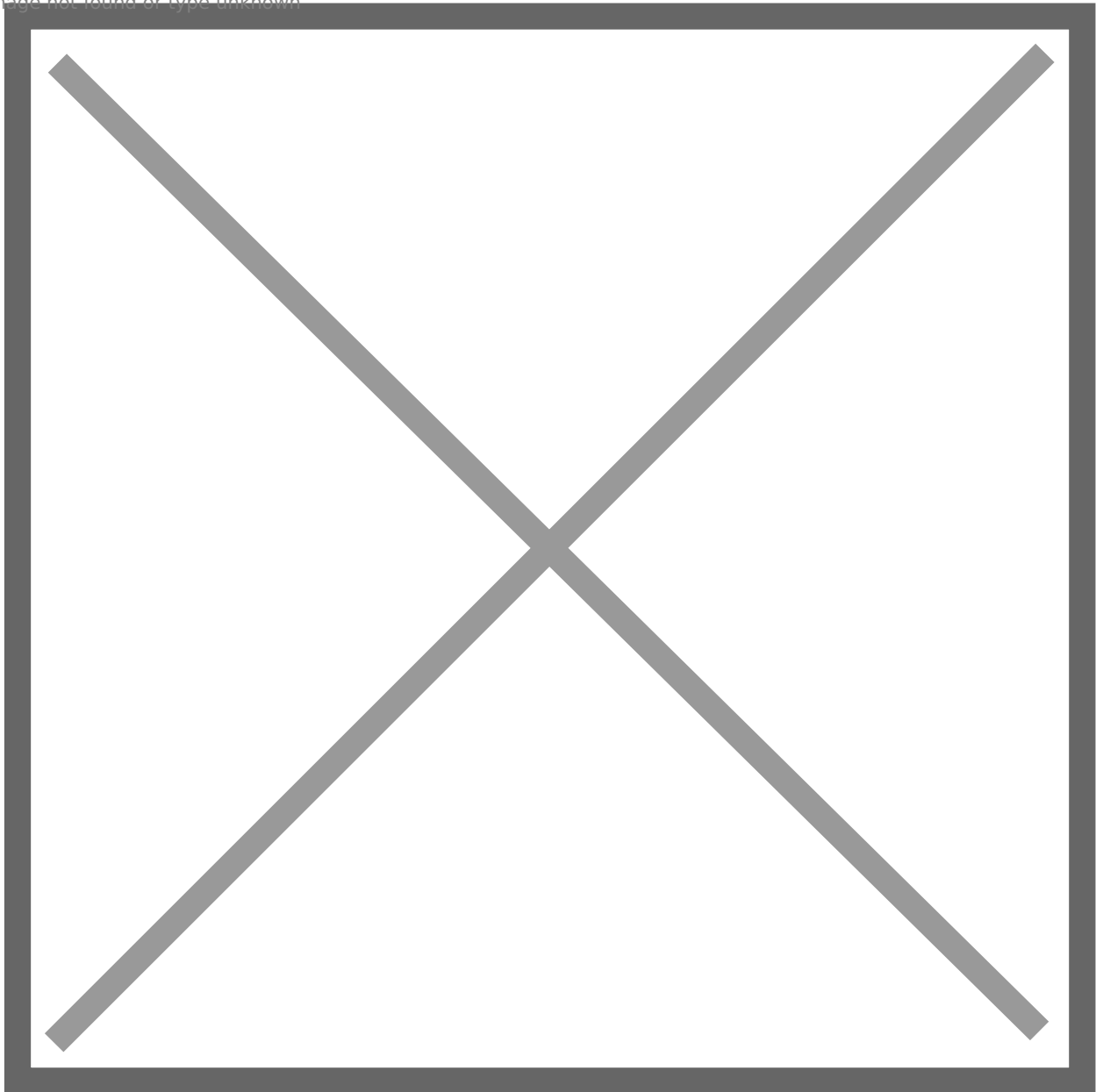
Post by “Cassius” of September 12, 2022 at 5:17 PM

Thank you for the detailed report!

Post by “Kalosyni” of September 12, 2022 at 7:26 PM

So great see your experiment [Don](#) -- and just found this -- tried to copy and paste recipe but wasn't able to for some reason. Be sure to scroll down past the covid introduction. Also it has some odd historical facts about ancient rituals which come before the recipe (which needs more research) -- so you have to scroll down the page quite a ways -- but the end result looks beautiful paired with cheese and figs.

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[Bread for the Gods: Pharmakos Barley Cakes with Cheese and Figs](#)

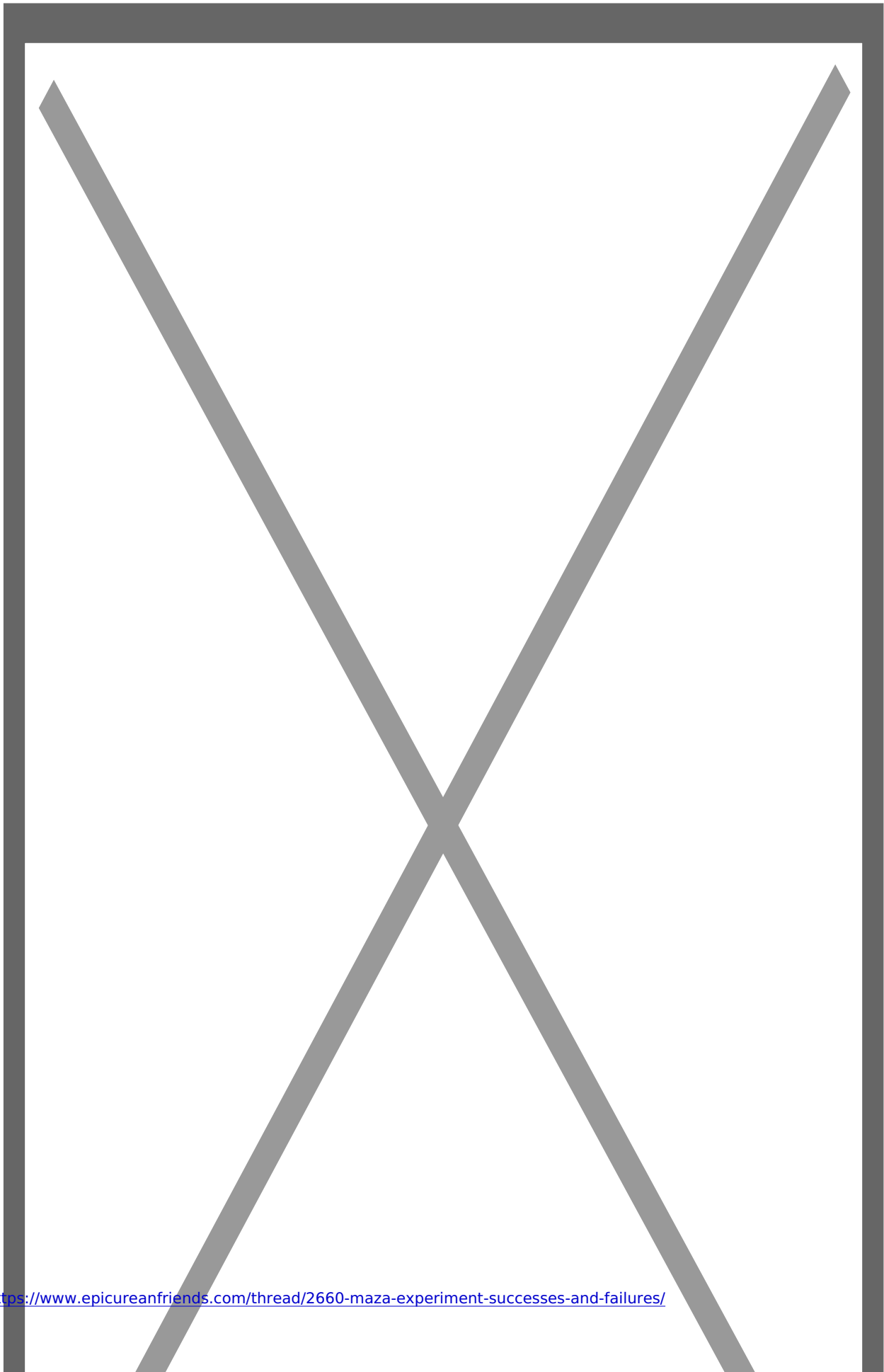
A pestilence is sweeping our land. The gods are pissed. It's time to take this situation into our own hands with an ancient Greek sacrifice. Be gone,...

tavolamediterranea.com

Post by “Kalosyni” of September 12, 2022 at 9:59 PM

This seems to say that the barley grains were roasted and then ground into flour:

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[Romans in Britain - Recipe for Maza \(Barley Cake\)](#)

Ancient recipe for Maza (Barley Cake)

www.romanobritain.org

Post by “Don” of September 12, 2022 at 10:03 PM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

This seems to say that the barley grains were roasted and then ground into flour:

https://www.romanobritain.org/2-ar1_food/ar1...barley_cake.php

That might work a little better but then it's getting the barley ground into flour which presents its own problems. The Pass the Flamingo says to roast the flour itself:

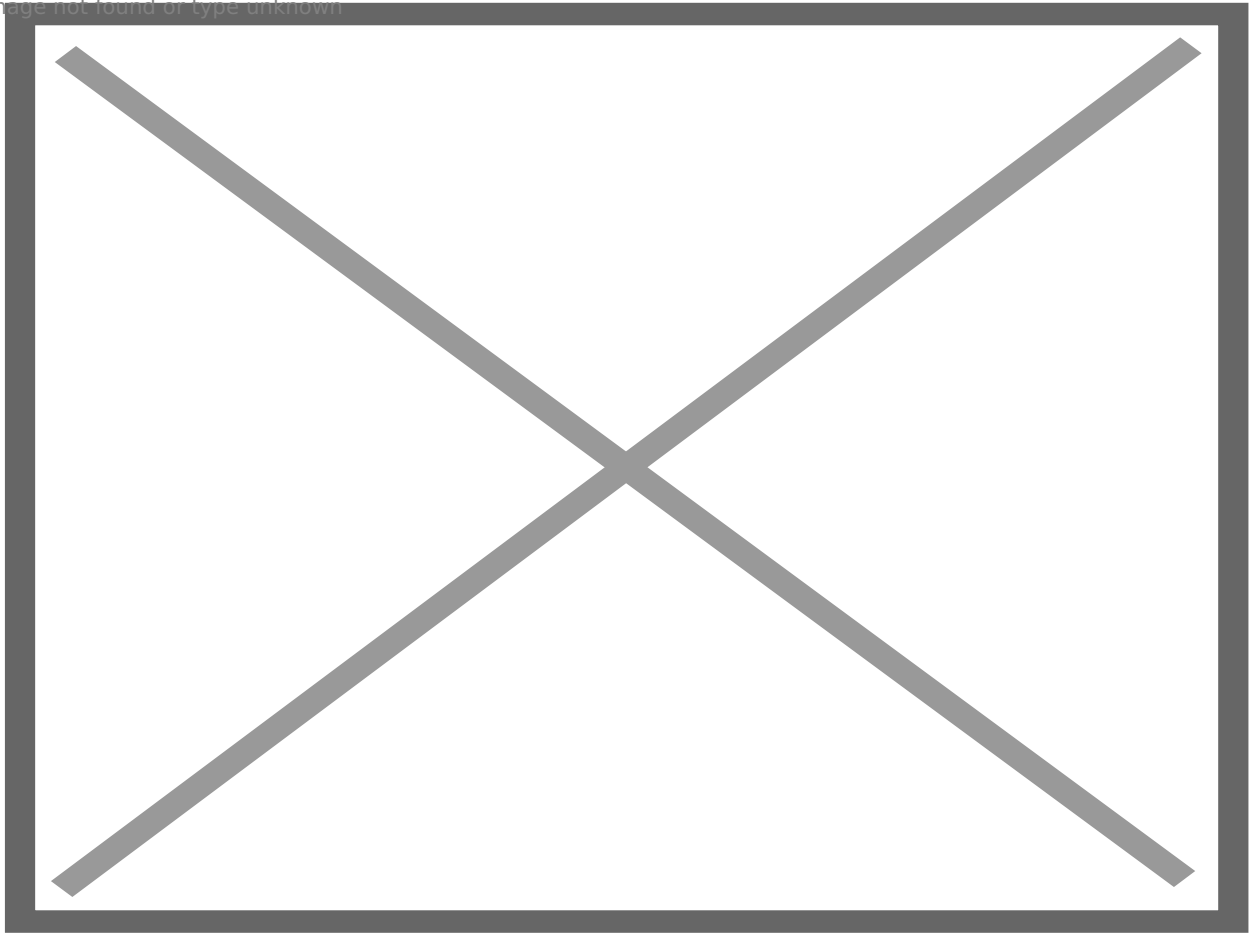
Quote

Maza begins as álphita: barley flour that has been toasted over a fire,

Post by “Don” of September 12, 2022 at 10:27 PM

I'm wondering if using a method like chapatis would work better:

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[Indian Chapati Bread](#)

This chapati recipe for soft, Indian flatbread is simple to make on the stovetop, delicious with spicy curries, and can be used as a sandwich wrap.

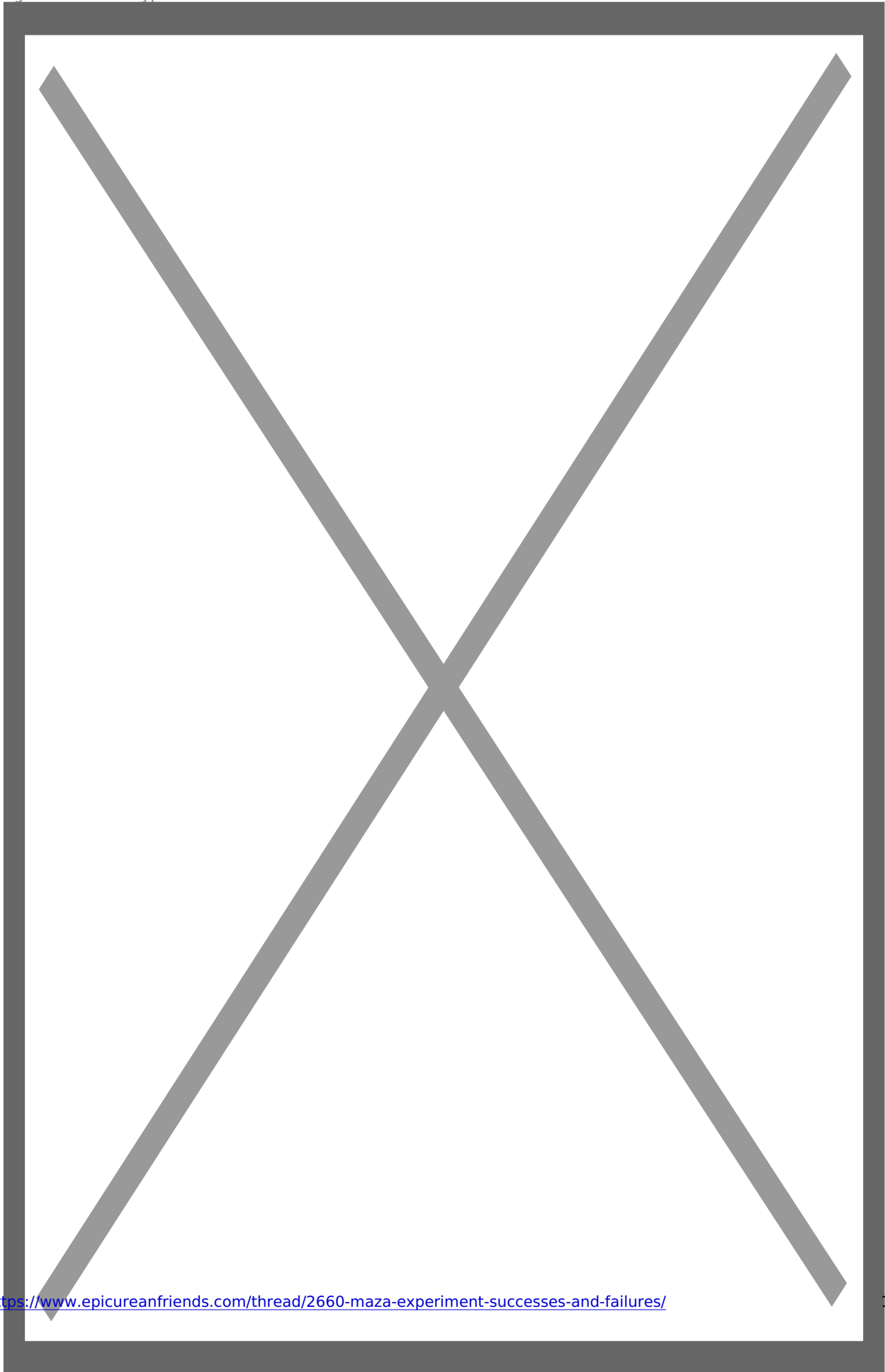
www.allrecipes.com

Post by “Kalosyni” of September 12, 2022 at 10:30 PM

Quote

Barley was more demanding than wheat. Barley preparations were nutritious but also rather hard to digest. This is why barley was toasted over a fire before it was ground into flour. Barley flour (**alfita**) was used to prepare a very basic type of bread, the **maza**, which is first mentioned by Hesiod (Works and Days):

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[Grain](#)

The gift of the goddess Demeter
cycladic.gr

About the grinding of grains:

"Grinding the grain was no easy task. First it was pounded with a pestle and mortar to remove the shell, then ground in a simple hand mill consisting of two circular stones, a lower stationary one (**quern**) and an upper rotating one (**muller**). Later hand mills have a central hole (**hopper**) for pouring the grain in the upper one. The flour was then sieved and used to make the dough, which was baked in wood-burning ovens.

Bread was made at home and was an important time-consuming and laborious chore for women. Large urban centers also had bakeries, where one could buy bread **maza** (a kind of barley bread), but this was a luxury..."

Post by "Joshua" of September 18, 2022 at 9:26 AM

Quote

Crisscrossing the sandy sandy shore were lines of barley flour, carefully poured out by workmen walking behind teams of surveyors who calculated angles and distances using tools unchanged since the days of the pyramid builders. The entire area now lay under a net of these white lines, attended to by countless small birds that did their best to eat them as fast as they were laid.

-The Rise and Fall of Alexandria, by Justin Pollard and Howard Reid

I've only just made the connection--this is a description of how Dinocrates and Alexander laid out the principle design of the city plan of Alexandria. They used barley flour because it fed the army and they had plenty of it, and because Egypt lacked the chalk that was so typical of Greece.