

A DENS OF DESPAIR OR MERRY MARGINS? TAVERNS AS A SPACE MEDIATING SOCIAL RELATIONS IN EARLY MODERN LESSER POLAND

“Where there is a tavern, there is a Sabbath Mountain,” wrote Jakub Haur, a seventeenth-century economist. In his set of precautions and advice for noble estate holders, he compared a tavern to a mythical hill where witches met with Satan. Like sorceresses feasting with demons, various vagrants, beggars, traveling seasonal workers, and local servants formed a suspicious company, sinning through reckless drinking, gambling, dancing, or fighting. The cause or facilitator of these bawdy deeds were spirits, such as the Polish *gorzałka* (Old Polish for vodka).

Taverns and beverage consumption played an increasingly significant role not only in the cultural imagination but also in the economy of the early modern Commonwealth. The rise in spirit consumption is usually linked in Polish historiography with the deterioration of local communities and the political nation, and is cited as one of the factors leading to the partitions of the Commonwealth. Some claims even suggest that the nobility, who owned a propination monopoly (i.e., the exclusive right to produce and sell alcohol, which peasants were obliged to buy in seigneurial drinking houses), deliberately and legally forced their serfs to consume a certain amount of alcohol. Despite the recognized significance of taverns, research has been limited to these notions, and the causal relationship between drinking culture and the deterioration of social relations and the economy is more assumed than properly explained and proven.

My project will fill this gap by analyzing administrative and economic materials from the period. The main objective of my research is to reconsider the role of taverns in the early modern manorial-corrée economy and within local rural communities. By combining the study of the economic, social, and cultural aspects of tavern functioning, it will be possible to provide an in-depth insight into village everyday life and its dynamics. However, Lesser Poland should not be considered an isolated region but placed in the context of broader transnational processes of the early modern period.

The hypothesis I am to check in the project is following: Despite the nobility's monopoly for alcohol production and sales, taverns were not merely an institution of oppression and exploitation, but a loophole in the ubiquitous power of the Church and nobility, in which a tavernkeeper mediated the relations between a lord and a villages community.

The primary goal of the project is to understand the social function and cultural role of taverns in early modern Lesser Poland. This will be achieved by comparing the results of analysis of various primary sources. I will use administrative data such as censuses to analyze tavernkeepers as a social group. I will turn to bills and estate inventories to estimate average consumption and revenue from taverns, as well as their geographical and social reach. I will exploit normative and narrative sources such as contracts, village legal regulations, court books, and criminal acts. This approach will allow for a comprehensive understanding by combining perspectives and views of different groups, and interpreting the theory and practice of tavern operations. Source material will be further interpreted in light of contemporary scientific frameworks through close and in-depth reading of the sources, and generalizations made possible by standardized and comparable material.